

THE STORY OF FURTHER™

“It is always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look further than you can see.”

—Winston Churchill

Technology, the global economy, social norms, generational shifts: they are transforming industries at breakneck speed. A company expands, a workforce reorganizes, a department blossoms, divisions merge, business models perform an about-face. Companies need innovative yet practical solutions for workspaces that mitigate risk and fuel productivity. Solutions that answer the “right now” as efficiently as the “what if.” To help companies look ahead and plan for what’s next, we at Allsteel embarked on developing Further.

Our mission with Further was to enable companies to welcome change, not wrestle with its constraints and costs, by creating an agile open-plan solution that allows them to evolve their environment at their own pace.

In the simplest terms, we wanted Further to offer ultimate choice. The choice of orientations and applications, whether beam-supported or freestanding, with instant access to power and voice and data. The choice that allows users to change how and where they work, on the spot or over time, with ease and minimal risk. And the choice of reconfiguring effortlessly, within a small kit-of-parts.

Talking, listening, planning, working, creating.

The first step in the process was to initiate an ongoing conversation with hundreds of designers, workplace strategists, and clients across the country. What did they need? Where did they see the future taking them as individuals, as groups, as companies? What were their goals and their challenges? As ideas took shape, we shared our progress and asked for more input, galvanizing our thinking as well as our solutions.

The ongoing feedback became the guidepost for our design brief, the principles upon which we would create Further and fill needs in the Allsteel product offering while providing a unique solution for the industry. We learned that this collection needed:

- To be flexible and reconfigurable
- High function and high design to share equal weight
- Power and data capabilities that are clean, concealed, and panel-free
- An open, lighter scale yet durable aesthetic
- A range of tables, storage, and screens offering multiple options and practical applications
- To work efficiently and seamlessly with other Allsteel product lines

After better understanding the customer need, we called on IDa Design led by Principal Mitch Bakker. In tapping IDa Design, we chose leading industrial designers who fully understand the fragile ecosystem of planning and work. Not only is IDa well-versed in good design, they are also fluent in how that design can inspire people in the workplace. Geometric shapes and configurations are their background and expertise. What's more, they bring relevant innovation to every project they work on. "We have had a long, productive relationship with Allsteel. But this project demanded something entirely different. We really wanted to prove to ourselves, and to them, that we could break the mold," recalls Bakker.

The shape of things to come.

From the beginning, Further was a concept focused on the future state of the workplace. But we needed to bridge the needs of today with those we could anticipate for the future.

We asked ourselves if we could use shape to that end. The single-sided trapezoid worksurface is a very simple design and yet it became a very versatile element as we asked others to play and plan with it in real environments during research. We stepped away from traditional worksurface shapes and discovered the ultimate flexibility of the alternative angle. From there, exciting new possibilities seemed to multiply exponentially.

One of the freshest things to spring from the trapezoid worksurface was its flexible orientations. By putting people next to but not facing one another – as they would be in a traditional 120-degree, rectilinear, or desking solution – the trapezoid worksurface allows them the freedom to transition from collaborative to focused work, interacting one moment, and working privately the next.

Another challenge was to deliver concealed power to users. That led us to two more signature elements of Further: the hub and the beam. "The hub-and-beam concept is like the spinal cord in the human body: when it is aligned properly, you don't think about it. When it isn't aligned, it's all you think about," remarks Bakker. "We wanted people to remain unaware of the structure, and be productive without thinking about how anything is working."

The elemental design of the hub-and-beam structure allows rotational freedom without the need for additional parts; the beam coming off the hub every 30 degrees allows a wide range of layouts and grants individuals enormous levels of control. Using a single power entrance, the hub supports collaborative, focused, and benching spaces. Its innovative triangular shape accommodates both linear and organic configurations.

Jim Cahill, Vice President, Product Development and Engineering, Allsteel, also admires how Further's signature flexibility lends new relevance to the Allsteel portfolio at-large. "It gives us important capabilities that can enhance or combine with existing products to provide even more function. For instance, the hub directing power from the floor to beltline, or – by adding the beam – providing a linear string of locations to dock up to for power. That's a sweet spot for users."



A new take on the system.

The idea that Further can work alone or equally well with other Allsteel products has implications for customers, too, since they often have needs that transcend a single product. Further redefines the “system” that has been pivotal to furnishing workspaces for the past two decades. How? Further opens up opportunities and minimizes risk, all while making the most of a client’s investment.

“The elements that used to mean interdependent space division are now stripped down to their most essential, relevant aspects,” observes Jan Johnson, Vice President, Design and Workplace Resources, Allsteel. “The hub and beam do what we’ve always needed panels to do: provide distribution of power and a way to connect to the building supply in the first place. Because they are structural, they also support surfaces, screens, and storage, all with minimal design.”

Affirmation with Best of NeoCon.®

Attendees experienced the freedom and possibilities of Further the moment they entered the Allsteel Resource Center at NeoCon 2013. Seeing a small kit-of-parts artfully unfold into multiple configurations and adaptations brought Further’s innate flexibility to life. “People really witnessed the attributes of the product line: collaborative to focused work, no screens to low screens to high screens. People moved easily from beam-supported to freestanding, organic to linear arrangements, understanding the level of control available with Further while remaining connected to power and data,” remembers Bakker.

Winning gold in a heavily populated category was difficult, but to Bakker it was no mystery. “While user control and flexibility were ideas others were thinking about and addressing, no one did it as uniquely and pragmatically as we did. Further is clever but not overly designed, a very elemental system, all by design.”

Power delivery was a huge design obstacle. But the team’s vision led them to solutions that drove Further’s success. “Power and data distribution within the hub was clearly the most difficult. So many of what we initially thought were solutions actually pushed the system to becoming overbuilt and inflexible,” said Bakker. “So we took Further to exciting new places. Putting data cords on the outside to keep the hub lightweight and flexible as companies increasingly go wireless is an example of knowing that technology will change, and accommodating that change before it even happens.”

