

HAWORTH

Designing Workplaces Where Employees Thrive

2026 Global Employee
Experience Report



THE DATA IS IN:

Workplace Design Informs Organizational Success

Knowledge work has evolved over the past decade, and the spaces that support it need to keep pace or risk falling behind. Dispersed and unpredictable workforces, reliance on digital tools, and new distractions (e.g., video calls, voice-activated tech) create growing challenges for workplace designers and occupants alike. In response to this evolving landscape, we ask: How are people currently spending their time in the office, and how well do their spaces support them?

The answers are essential to inform well-designed workplaces that enable both people and organizations to thrive. Haworth has dedicated decades to studying a diverse array of work activities, driving the development of solutions optimized for office dwellers. Here, we build on this knowledge to understand the changing nature of office work.

This study examines the everyday actions of knowledge workers, the spaces they depend on, and how effectively their current environments support their work. By analyzing preferences for different work settings and the time spent performing various activities, as well as the distinct needs of assigned and unassigned workers, this research uncovers clear patterns in what employees value most.

Our findings reveal the importance of a high-quality workplace for workers' sense of belonging and productivity. There is a widespread desire for well-designed spaces that support individual, collaborative, and restorative activities, while acknowledging the impact of team culture on workplace engagement. Collectively, these insights provide a data-driven foundation for designing workspaces that fulfill functional requirements while enhancing belonging, productivity, and the overall work experience.

7 Key Insights

- 4** Independent Tasks Need Focus-Oriented Spaces to Match
- 8** Restorative Activities Are Foundational to Employee Success
- 10** Private Offices Remain Desirable Across Roles
- 12** The Office is Highly Favored Over Home for Most Activities, Except Restorative
- 16** Unassigned Workspaces Are Often Paired With Diminished Employee Experience
- 20** Team Culture Shapes How Much the Workplace Matters
- 24** Workplace Satisfaction and Supportive Workspaces Are Keys to Sustained Engagement
- 26** Conclusion



1 INSIGHT

Independent Tasks Required Focus-Oriented Spaces

Implication: Heads-down workspaces are paramount to productivity.

Knowledge workers spend 48% of a typical workday on individual work, which includes deep, creative, and routine tasks. The remainder of their time is divided between 30% group work and 22% social or restorative activities. This ratio aligns with the space breakdown in our previous Evolving Workplace Study. Facility experts noted that their organizations' spaces were typically allocated as 54% individual, 29% group, and 17% social/restorative. These results suggest that organizations are approximately matching the time spent to the space allocated.

48%

of a typical workday is spent on individual work.

Beyond time spent and space allocated, employees' individual work also ranks highest in perceived importance, followed by collaborative work.

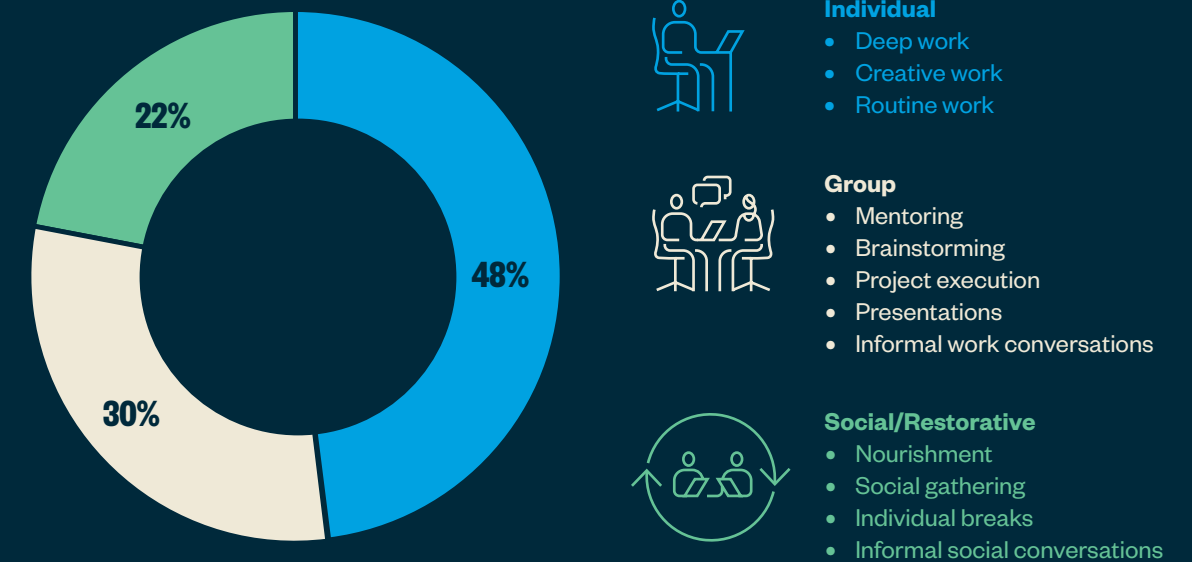
Top categories identified by employees:

- Deep work – individual (learning, problem solving, strategic planning, coding, data analysis, reviewing sensitive information)
- Project execution – group (project updates, choosing an idea, task delegation, project planning)
- Creative work – individual (design work, writing, brainstorming, connecting themes, applying strategy)
- Routine work – individual (sending emails, managing calendars, responding to requests, project planning, data entry)

In contrast, restorative behaviors like breaks, gatherings, and social conversations were deemed less important, but that does not mean they're less valuable. Among participants, 92% found informal social conversations to be at least slightly important. What this tells us: Spaces supporting individual tasks should be prioritized in a floorplan, but organizations must ensure they do not neglect other essential space types.

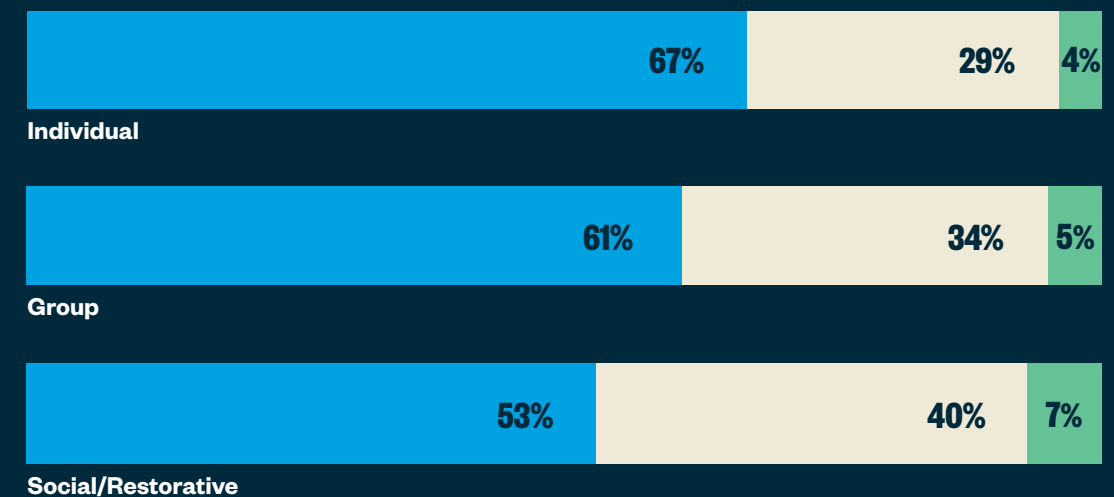
Time Spent Doing Activities

Individual Group Social/Restorative



Importance of Activities

Very Important Slightly Important Not Important





2 INSIGHT

Restorative Activities Are Foundational to Employee Success

Implication: Boost employee resiliency, connectedness, and creativity by providing dedicated spaces to recharge.

While restorative activities were deemed less important than individual and group activities in our study, they are still a vital part of how employees spend the day. It is essential to provide spaces to support restorative activities.

Restorative space design encourages creativity, balances focus, work, rest, and is vital to the in-between times when ideas form. For creativity and innovation to flourish, employers should protect employees' ability to focus and encourage restorative behaviors in the workplace.

As Tony Schwartz, President and CEO of The Energy Project, and author of *Be Excellent at Anything*, puts it,

“Renewal is not for slackers. Renewal is a way in which to increase your capacity to be more effective.”

Connection and interaction are enriched in comfortable, inviting spaces that do so much more than provide chairs for sitting and surfaces for typing. They provide employees with options, such as lounge areas and cafes that facilitate movement and offer inspiration, whether indoors or outdoors.

Other well-being initiatives center around taking time away from work, promoting breaks, and crafting environments that enhance cognitive, emotional, and physical well-being for a resilient and engaged workforce. Encourage breaks by:

- Adding informal seating to work areas to encourage casual interactions, enhancing a feeling of belonging
- Orienting desks toward windows or natural views, which restores cognitive resources
- Providing retreat spaces with visual and acoustic privacy

22%

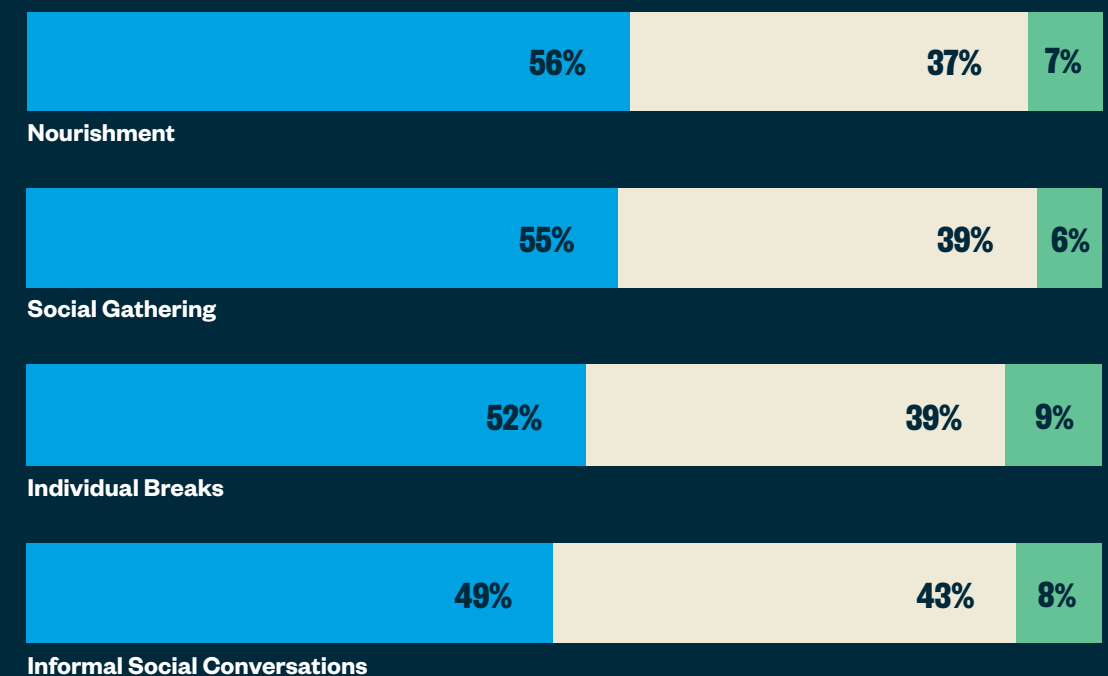
of a typical workday is spent on restorative activities.

Top Restorative Spaces



Importance of Restorative Activities

Very Important Slightly Important Not Important



3 INSIGHT

Private Offices Remain Desirable across Roles

Implication: Spaces that feel private but aren't necessarily dedicated offices are integral to successful individual-focused work.

Our findings reveal that workers report feeling more supported in private offices, while organizations view open offices as essential for connection and collaboration, both of which remain critical to success. Employees' desire for privacy can cause persistent friction for some organizations, especially those with limited space.

As noted by Gensler, traditional office hierarchy often suggests that one needs to “earn” a private office through career progression and status. However, our data shows that private-office use may now be more activity based than role based. Individual contributors reported frequently using private offices for focused work, though they still did so less often than leaders.

Though it is not always feasible to give every employee a private office, designers can apply the best elements of private offices to more open areas.

In previous research, *Why We Can't Focus at Work*, we found that visual and auditory distractions significantly reduce employees' performance, with declines 3% to 23%, depending on task complexity. These findings emphasize the importance of managing sightlines, sound, and speech intelligibility to maintain concentration.

This can look like intentionally reducing distractions and making work environments more legible through acoustic design, zoning, and clear workspace cues. Potential solutions include:

- Creating designated quiet zones
- Using sound-absorbing materials
- Adding furniture that shields sightlines
- Designing territories or focus zones that signal to others that heads-down work is happening

These interventions can help your organization offer the benefits of a private office, regardless of floorplate, and without significant investment.

The best part? These options don't require a full office redesign. As outlined in *Making Space to Focus at Work*, you can dramatically improve concentration in open environments by introducing better acoustic planning, defining zones more clearly, and reducing ambient clutter. The aforementioned research also emphasizes giving employees greater control and choice in how they manage their individual focus work. This can be accomplished by offering a variety of alternative settings, such as:

- Acoustic pods
- Reservable focus rooms
- Shielded benching with privacy elements
- Designated recharge spaces that support mental reset

Why We Can't Focus at Work further highlights the need for a variety of individual and group workspaces, noting that employees consistently struggle to complete focus work in today's open, collaboration-oriented environments, where visual and auditory distractions undermine individual concentration. By integrating choice, acoustic control, and thoughtfully defined work zones, companies can create highly supportive focus environments without relying solely on private offices.



4 INSIGHT

The Office is Highly Favored over Home for Most Activities, Except Restorative

Implication: Collaborative environments and in-office tools bring workers into the office.



Meetings often benefit from in-office presence; face-to-face interactions enhance both creativity and productivity when compared to remote engagement.

The subtleties of nonverbal cues are often easier to interpret in a shared space, while physical tools like whiteboards and other materials can help clarify intent.

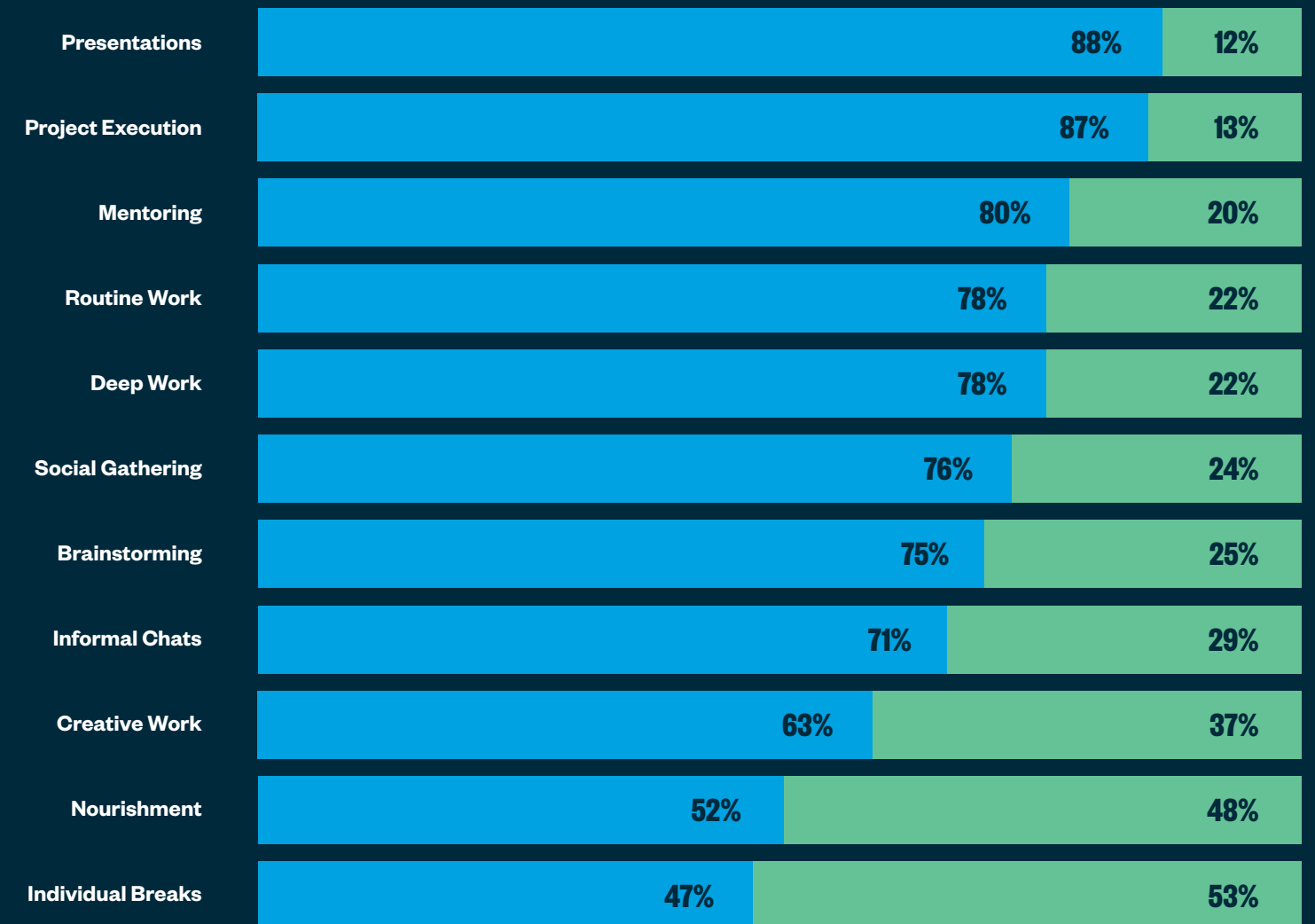
With the exception of restoration, our study shows that workers prefer to perform most work activities in the office. In previous research, such as *The Workplace Why*, findings show that working at home often better supports individual-focused work. This current study found a preference for performing most activities in the office across roles, regions, and other demographic characteristics. One possible connection is that our sample largely felt supported by their workspaces and supportive offices can draw people in more often. Still, restorative time is believed to be better at home because of greater comfort, privacy, and freedom. It is in this realm that offices struggle to compete with home environments. This finding presents an opportunity for companies to better support restorative activities in the office (see Insight 2 for ideas in this area).

Meetings, however, often benefit from in-office presence; face-to-face interactions enhance both creativity and productivity when compared to remote engagement. The subtleties of nonverbal cues are often easier to interpret in a shared space, while physical tools like whiteboards and other materials can help clarify intent.

Additionally, our findings indicate that the more senior the role, the more likely an employee is to prioritize in-office work. Although the data isn't conclusive, we can assume this may be because senior employees want to stay attuned to the organization and have more meetings, both of which support a preference for face-to-face connections. Senior leadership positions often offer greater access to in-office resources (private workspaces, better tools, etc.), which could also explain their preference for in-office work compared to other employees.

Home vs. Office Preferences

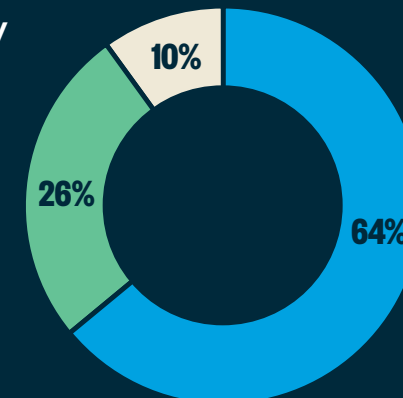
Office Home



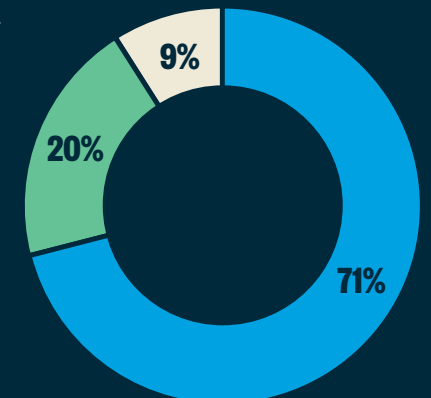
Which Meeting Format is More Effective?

Face-to-Face Virtual No Difference

Creativity



Productivity





5 INSIGHT

Unassigned Workspaces Are Often Paired with Diminished Employee Experience

Implication: Workspace variety strengthens employee satisfaction.

As hybrid work continues to reshape how organizations operate, the Evolving Workplace Study shows that unassigned workers slightly outnumber their assigned counterparts: 52% unassigned and 48% assigned. Adaptable footprints and shared seating offer cost savings for employers and flexibility for employees, but they can compromise workers' comfort, autonomy, and privacy. Our latest findings indicate that workers with unassigned seating report lower satisfaction with their overall work experience, lower productivity, and a reduced sense of belonging than those with assigned seating.

So, what can organizations do to improve an unassigned workspace?

Leesman's The Value of Variety shows that unassigned employee satisfaction largely depends on the variety and flexibility of the workspace. Unassigned workplaces with "good variety," as measured by the standardized Leesman workplace experience score (Lmi), achieved a 72.8 Lmi, while those with "poor variety" scored 63.1. "Good variety" was characterized by offering a range of workspaces that allowed employees to choose the space they needed depending on activity.

As noted in the 2025 Evolving Workplace Global Study, organizations with unassigned workspaces must assess their in-office activities (private meetings, collaborative sessions, heads-down focus work, etc.) and design a floorplan to support what matters most. Flexibility & Adaptability at Work emphasizes the importance of employee autonomy, allowing people to choose the space that best suits the present activity.

Someplace like home states that unassigned workers report less satisfaction with their overall work experience than assigned workers.



How can businesses provide a supportive variety of spaces—assigned or unassigned?



Create zones for different activities, work, and collaboration styles; use screens and dividers to control disruptions and noise.

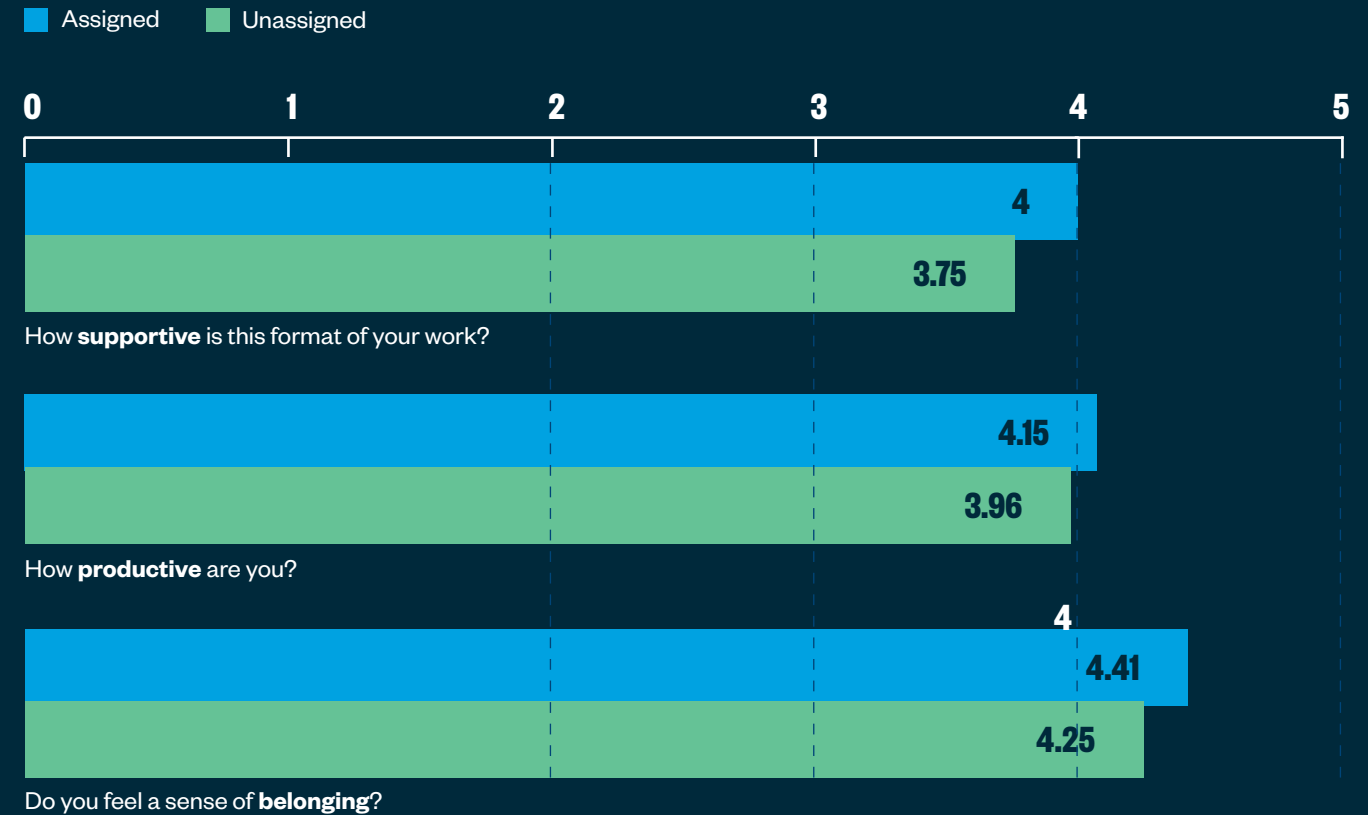


Add a balanced mix of quiet spaces in strategic locations to give people control over sound and interruptions.



Use reservation tools for shared environments. Letting employees book private or collaborative rooms ensures they can access the setting they need when they need it.

Assigned vs. Unassigned Workspace



Assigned or unassigned, The Value of Variety emphasizes: Employees benefit from intentional workspaces with a variety of functionalities and ambiance.

It indicated a moderate, positive linear relationship, meaning that if **support** or **belonging** went up in the workspace, the other did as well. This survey also found a correlation of .36 between **support** and **belonging** for unassigned work.

6 INSIGHT

Team Culture Shapes How Much the Workplace Matters

Implication: When workplace environments are functioning their best, employee culture can boost belonging and productivity.

Before we dive into our findings, it's important to clarify a few key concepts that will come up throughout this insight.

First, when we refer to organizational culture, we're not talking about perks, motivational posters, or lofty purpose statements. Culture is about the shared behaviors, decisions, and norms that shape how people work together, especially under pressure. Culture is how work gets done when no one is watching. It's also entirely normal and expected for organizations to have more than one culture at play.

To help make sense of organizational culture and its impact, we use the Competing Values Framework. This widely recognized, research-validated model highlights the relationship between culture type and organizational effectiveness, and will serve as a framework for our evaluation.

Across our survey results, organizations with more flexible cultures (Create and Collaborate) consistently reported that work activities and workplace quality were more important, their spaces were more supportive, and they experienced greater belonging and productivity than those in more rigid cultures.

The study suggests that the impact of the workplace is tied to each culture's relationship to the physical environment.

- Create and Collaborate cultures rely heavily on their workplaces to do their work well.
- Create cultures benefit from access to in-office tools, artifacts, and spaces that support experimentation and making.
- Collaborative cultures depend on environments that encourage social connection, visibility, and teamwork.

Control and Compete cultures, by contrast, place less emphasis on the workplace itself. Instead, their work is more driven by process, structure, speed, and precision, making them less dependent on physical space to support daily activities and less sensitive to variations in workplace quality.

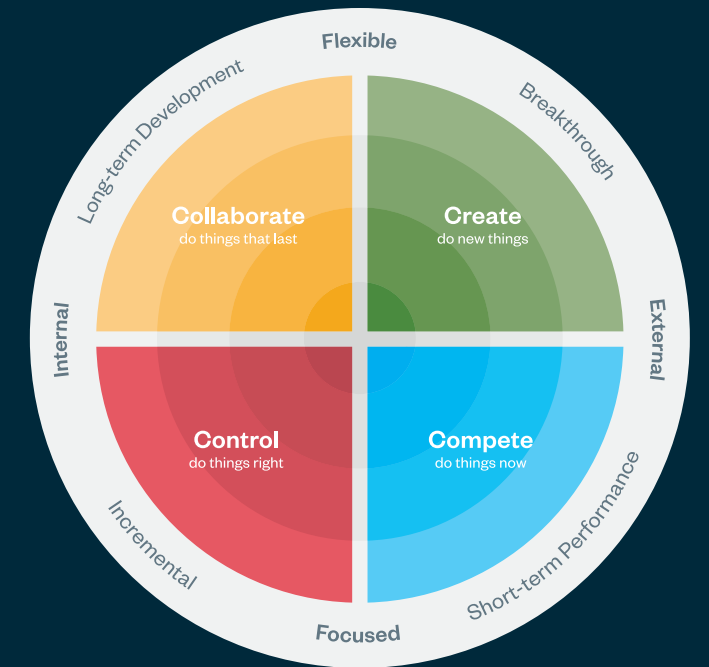
The 4 Culture Types of the Competing Values Framework Create a Foundation for Purposeful Design:

Collaborate: Internally focused and flexible, emphasizing teamwork, trust, and employee development.

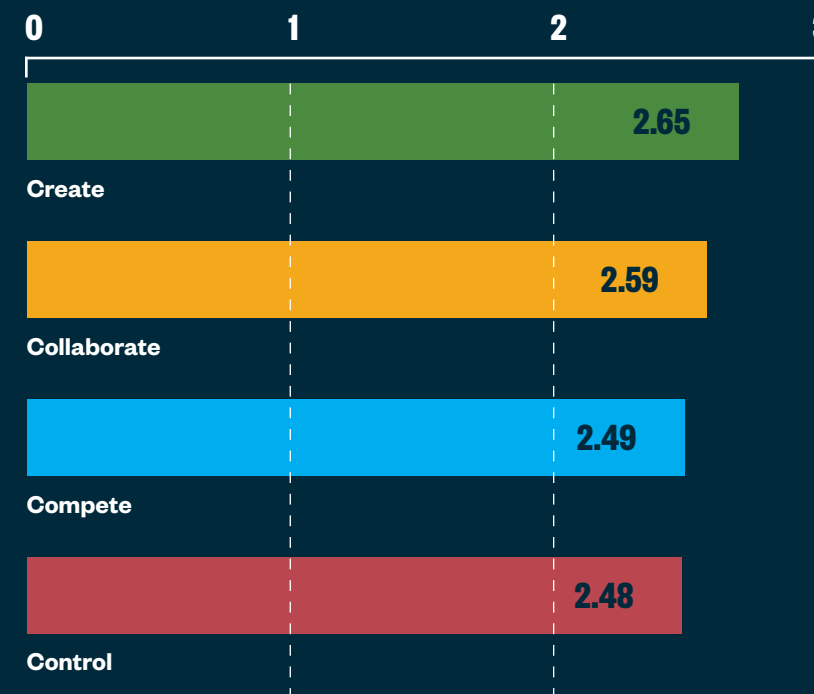
Compete: Externally focused and stability-oriented, driven by results, speed, and market leadership.

Control: Internally focused and stability-oriented, valuing efficiency, reliability, and clear processes.

Create: Externally focused and flexible, prioritizing innovation, experimentation, and agility.



Importance of Various Activities in Relation to Their Physical Environment





7 INSIGHT

Workplace Satisfaction and Supportive Workspaces Are Keys to Sustained Engagement

Implication: Invest in culture and employee belonging to boost talent preservation.

Unsurprisingly, workplace quality significantly affects employees' desire to remain with their organization.

What contributes to a supportive, high-quality workplace? Employee satisfaction rises when people feel connected, respected, and able to show up authentically at work.

With this improved sense of belonging comes increased productivity. Focusing on supportive workspaces leads to better connections with employees and a higher sense of cultural cohesiveness, resulting in more productive employees. This further motivates employees to stay with their employer.

71%

of employees report that the quality of a workplace has "a lot" or "a great deal" of impact on their desire to work for an organization.



"The people I work with treat me with respect."



"I feel like I belong at my company."

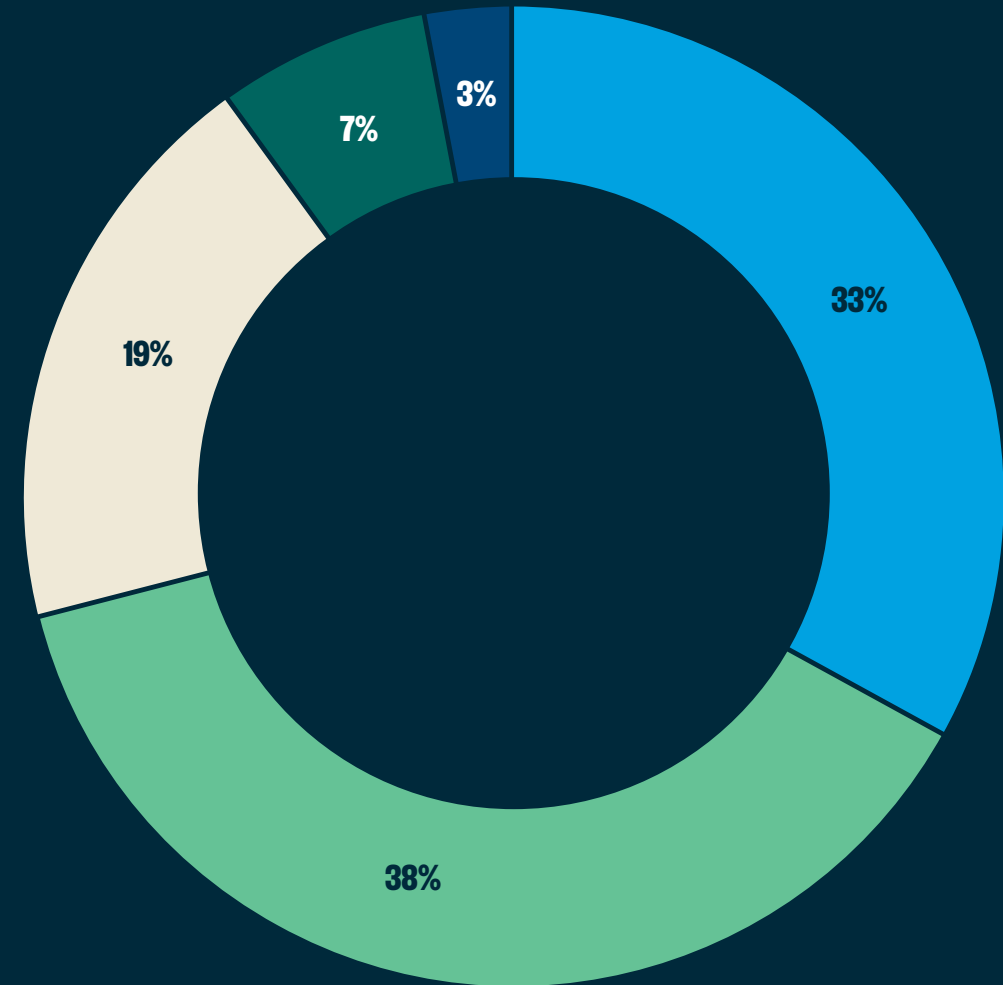


"I can be myself at work."



"My company cares about its employees."

How Much Does the Quality of Your Workplace Affect Your Desire to Work for Your Organization?



■ A great deal ■ A lot ■ A moderate amount ■ A little ■ Not at all

Organizational Success Hinges on Adaptability

Summary: Workspaces are key to employee comfort and performance.

The modern workplace is ever-changing, and organizations must adapt accordingly to keep pace. To most thoroughly understand the needs of our evolving landscape, we turn to those people who live, work, and dwell in these spaces every day.

In our previous global workplace study, we surveyed facility experts to understand their perceptions of their organization's spaces. In the current study, we sought to learn from office inhabitants themselves, providing a complete picture of workplace perceptions. By acknowledging the day-to-day experiences of workers in their spaces, we uncovered real challenges and successes shared across the globe.

Our findings singularly point toward the importance of space in supporting workers' satisfaction and performance.

Taken together, these insights reinforce the need to prioritize flexible, well-supported, and strategic workplaces. By doing so, organizations can evolve in step with their priorities and better meet the needs of the people within them.

Methodology & Participants

This study was an online survey conducted with a sample of 3,311 participants, recruited by Qualtrics in December 2025. Participants were knowledge workers from 11 countries and 20 industries. To qualify, participants needed to work in the office at least 3 days per week. Data analysis was conducted between December 2025 and January 2026.

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