

The Enticing Workplace: Attracting People Back to the Office

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Summary

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic forced most office-based employees to work from home and, since “gaining permission” to work from home, many staff now prefer to work remotely rather than commute to the office. The office staff are literally voting with their feet – it seems that the office cannot easily compete with the option and personal benefits of working from home.

The purpose of this research was to explore what employees (workplace experts and others) believe would attract them back to the office, and to understand the underlying (real) concerns of workers about returning to the office. Furthermore, the study aimed to investigate the employee benefits and advantages of working from home compared to the office.

Following initial qualitative interviews, an online questionnaire survey was designed and launched. The respondents rated 51 possible influences to indicate whether they were better supported working from home or in the office. A sample of 490 valid responses was created by a mix of direct email invitations and through sharing across social media platforms. The respondents were a mix of workplace experts and employees in general. They were not freelancers and, more importantly, had worked both at home and in their employer’s offices.

Preference for office or home

Preference between home and office depends on the type of work being undertaken. A higher proportion of respondents consider their home to be better for conducting confidential calls or meetings, for work requiring concentration, and for feeling productive overall. In contrast, very few respondents consider the home to be better for teamwork and collaboration, managing or mentoring a team, improving knowledge through interactions or eavesdropping, or socialising with colleagues. The majority consider these activities to be better supported in the office. There is also a clear preference for the office for holding meetings and, to a lesser extent, making key business decisions and enhancing creativity and innovation. In broad terms, the home better supports focussed work and the office those activities facilitating team work and development. While the home is clearly experienced to be a better setting for concentration, confidentiality and personal productivity, the office needs to support these activities better in order to attract people back.

Regarding facilities and environmental conditions, a higher proportion of the respondents reported that their home is preferred for the indoor environmental conditions. This is most likely because they have more control over the environmental conditions in their home. Nevertheless, the office having a poorer perceived environment than the home is a disappointment, if not a surprise: a poor outcome for the workplace industry, which requires fixing. The two influences that are most frequently considered better supported at home, and by an overwhelming majority of respondents, are privacy and control over noise. Densely planned large open-plan environments tend to decrease privacy and increase noise, and are not attractive to most office workers.

The office appears to compete most poorly with working from home in the area of personal benefits. Most of the respondents deem their home to better support most of this type of influence. This applies particularly to “personal pressures”, such as travel costs and time, work-life balance, access to childcare, managing a health condition or disability, and taking

advantage of the weather conditions (avoiding poor and enjoying nice weather). While it is difficult to overcome such benefits of working from home, organisations could consider assistance with travel costs (such as subsidised rail tickets), access to nearby crèches, and flexibility over work hours and control over workload.

In contrast, the office appears to better support reducing isolation and loneliness (an increasing health issue on the UK), and achieving delineation between work and home life. For some, the office also offers a more consistent daily routine. Office design and management can help to enhance socialising and teamwork to help reduce loneliness.

The office also fares better for supporting a sense of purpose (with the exception of reducing impact on the environment). The majority of respondents believe the office better supports connection and reward, particularly connecting with colleagues, aligning with the company culture, experiencing leadership and motivation, and reducing the “fear of missing out” (FOMO). Increasing a sense of purpose and belonging, through strong leadership, motivation, connection and culture, should attract people back the office. Workplace design and the relevant facilities can help foster the organisational culture, but ultimately it comes from the leadership team. Regular events (like “lunch and learn” or socials), clubs and classes, or wellness facilities all help to make the office a more attractive destination.

Respondents were also asked to select the three factors that most attract them to the office and that most discourage them from returning to the office. Teamwork, socialising and connection are the most prominent reasons for favouring the office. In contrast, travel cost and time, work requiring concentration, and control over noise and distraction are the main influences discouraging working in the office. The challenge to architects and designers is to create workplaces that better support and encourage socialising and teamwork but simultaneously offer more privacy along with minimising noise and distraction.

Preference by respondent characteristics

Preferences between home and office depended on some characteristics of the home, the office and the respondents themselves. A higher proportion of respondents who had been working at home for less than one year prefer to work in the office. New recruits might want to spend more time with colleagues and their managers for mentoring, gaining knowledge and career progression. Alternatively, there could be an effect of the time when they joined their organisation: those new to working from home might have poorer equipment, technology or ergonomic set-up than those established during or before the COVID-19 pandemic. Certainly respondents working at their kitchen table are more likely to prefer working in the office. Conversely, those with a home office feel their home better supports them, especially in terms of ergonomics and storage, but also for a sense of purpose and reward.

The survey also revealed that a higher proportion of the respondents working for a small and medium sized enterprise (SME) prefer working in the office, especially regarding a sense of purpose. Compared to respondents working in the public sector, those working in an SME consider that the office better supports teamwork, meetings, culture, belonging, leadership, FOMO and career development. It is possible that SMEs engender a more entrepreneurial, motivational, loyal and flourishing culture compared to some public sector workplaces.

A higher proportion of respondents working in office-based teams prefer the office, relative to those working alone or in distributed teams. Again, this was more evident for supporting teamwork, meetings, reward and career progression. The proportion of respondents working in office-based teams was similar in the public sector and SMEs, so it is unlikely to be the cause of the difference in preferences between SMEs and public sector.

A higher proportion of respondents who have assigned or allocated desks prefer working in the office compared to those with unassigned desks. Consistent with this, those with a private office were the most likely to prefer working in the office. Those who did not use a desk as such but worked elsewhere (a focus pod/room, meeting room or breakout space) were least likely to prefer working in the office. This finding creates a particular challenge for the workplace industry. If more employees are working from home, then an organisation might decide to implement unassigned desks (shared seating, hot-desking) to increase the desk utilisation and reduce any unused space. The survey indicates that this strategy could discourage even more occupants from returning to the office, thus further reducing the utilisation. While it is not sustainable to have desks unused for most of the week, it is important that any transition to unassigned desking is managed well, and the implementation made for clearly genuine reasons.

Unlike many reports in the popular press, the survey did not reveal any statistically significant differences in preferences between age groups or generations. Generational differences may be confounded by other factors, such as job tenure, career stage or home circumstances. For example, the survey did show that a higher portion of single parents (or other lone adults living with dependants) prefer the office.

Respondents were asked to rate how introvert or extrovert they considered themselves. Extroverts are more likely to prefer working in the office, compared to introverts. This is in line with other research that shows extroverts are easily distracted at home and prefer the company of their work colleagues to working alone. In particular, extroverts believe the office better supports creativity, teamwork and meetings, and leadership/management.

Overall, it is clear that employees with different personalities and backgrounds have different preferences and different reasons for returning to the office, and different contexts in which they are most productive. It is important to recognise this when determining what would attract them to the office and what would discourage them.

One of the research objectives was to compare the views of those working in the workplace industry to the views of others, to gauge whether professional advice reflects occupant views. There are only minor differences in how the office supports various aspects of working. A higher portion of workplace professionals believe the office better supports a sense of purpose and belonging, along with culture, leadership, reward and creativity. These are important influences but not necessarily strong enough alone to attract people back to the office and not the ones discouraging a return.

Respondents were asked to rate whether, considering all 51 influences, they considered the better place to work was mostly their home or mostly the office. Approximately one-half considered their home better and approximately one-third said the office. According to this survey sample, the office requires some improvement to entice people back.

Key influences

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to predict the overall preference rating (home versus office), using the responses to the 51 influences. The individual influences predicted the overall rating with a correlation of 0.79 (63% variance) which is quite good. The desk area, space, layout and density explained the highest percentage of the variance (37%). As found in other recent research, over-densification of workspaces can lead to increased noise and distraction, reduced privacy and issues with other environmental conditions thus discouraging people from returning to the office. Work requiring concentration was also a key predictor (12% of the variance) and three other influences contributed some predictive power: "Sense of achievement and reaching personal goals", "Teamwork and collaborating closely with colleagues" and "Reduced risk to health and safety, e.g. infection, allergy, accidents".

Each of these five influences is correlated with several other influences, forming clusters of influences; these were identified by factor analysis of all 51 influences. The influences in each factor can be seen as being represented in the regression analysis by the individual influence that is most highly correlated with overall preference, but they are also important in their own right. The eight factors that best summarised all the influences were (1) Organisational belonging, (2) Work interactions, (3) Health and wellbeing, (4) Concentration, (5) Workstation control, (6) Environmental control, (7) Workload management and (8) Personal time management. An organisation should find it easier and more practical to think in terms of these eight factors, rather than 51 items, when developing a workplace strategy and attracting people either back to the office or to remaining home-based. A limited qualitative analysis of respondents' comments added some depth to how the various factors play out in practice.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The COVID-19 pandemic forced most office-based employees to work from home and, since “gaining permission” to work from home, many staff now prefer to work remotely rather than commute to the office. Recent research, such as that by the British Council for Offices (Oseland *et al*, 2022)¹, and media headlines, report that a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (TW&T) work pattern has become the new office working week. This is driven partly by habits developed during the pandemic but also the four-day week concept, transport disruptions, higher cost of transport, increased living expenses, advances in remote technology and greater awareness of risk of infection.

Some organisations are encouraging, even dictating, that their workforce return to the office, but the response from employees has been slower than employers had hoped. The office staff are literally voting with their feet – it seems that the office cannot easily compete with the personal benefits of working from home. Consequently, many offices are under-utilised with a high proportion of desks sitting empty for most of the week despite the space being heated, cooled, lit, serviced and maintained. Occupation for the middle three out of seven days (referred to as TW&T) is equivalent to 43% utilisation, and with an 8-hour workday equates to just 14% utilisation. Considering the current environmental crisis and Net Zero Carbon targets, this is clearly not a long-term sustainable outcome.

Public sector and corporate occupiers are unsure of how to increase the utilisation of their office space. While some are forcing full-time back in the office, others are opting for set days in the office, termed hybrid working, combined with unallocated desks (desk-sharing or hot-desking). For example, if employees are expected in the office only three days per week, and if their time in is spread across the working week, then desk-sharing enables the number of desks, and ultimately the space required, to be reduced by up to 40%. Thus, space can be released for other uses or purpose and, going forward, less space is required by the organisation. However, anecdotal feedback from some organisations indicates that unallocated desking is not a favourable option for many employees, and consequently may put them off returning to the office, in turn lowering utilisation rates further.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore:

- what workplace experts and employees believe would attract them back to the office, in terms of influences such as work purpose, workplace design, facilities and management,
- the underlying concerns of workers with returning to offices,
- employee benefits and advantages of working from home compared to the office,
- organisational, individual and professional concerns and issues with desk-sharing.

2 Research approach

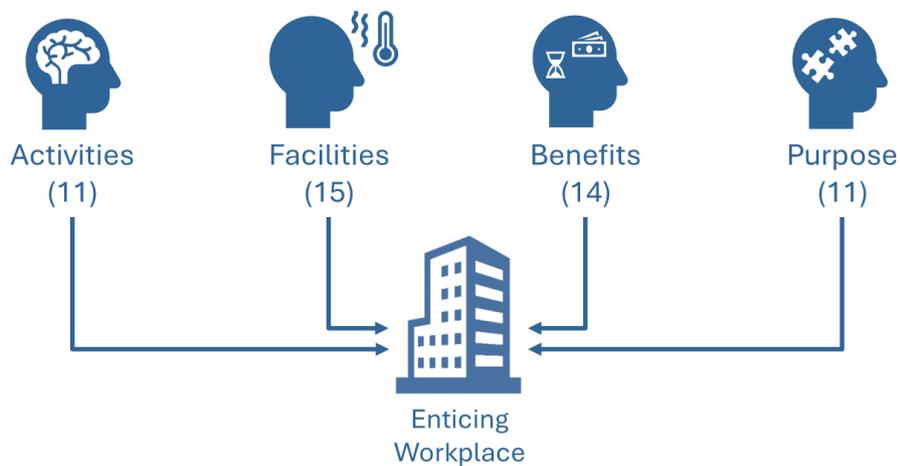
2.1 Data collation

The study used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, primarily interviews followed by an on-line survey. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five practitioners within the workplace industry. The interviews were used to explore the topics that the survey should address. The interview insights were combined with the authors' existing knowledge (based on consultancy experience, past surveys and testing of survey questions) to create a new on-line survey. The survey mostly included rating scales but also an open-ended question. The survey data were captured using Survey Monkey and analysed using the Statistics Package for Social Scientists (SPSS).

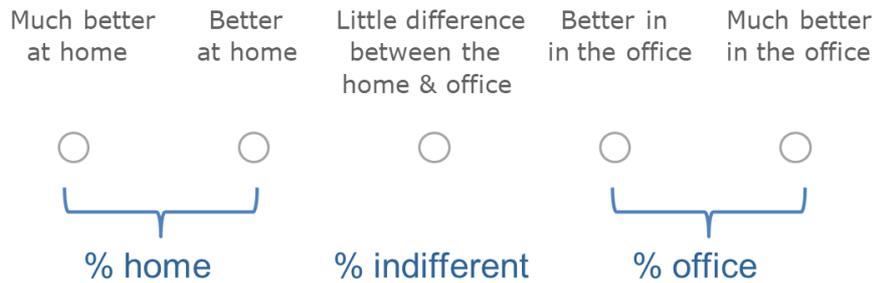
2.2 Survey questions

The central portion of the questionnaire enquired about preferences between working at home and working in the office. The respondents rated 51 potential influences on preferred work location. The descriptions of the influences are abbreviated in this report; the complete questionnaire in Appendix A gives the full descriptions. The influences were presented in four sections, based on the authors' conclusions on logical grouping:

- work activities (11 items),
- facilities and environmental conditions (15 items),
- personal benefits (14 items),
- sense of purpose, such as career, progress and connection (11 items).



While the four sections were presented in the same order, the order of the questions within each section was randomised. Each of the 51 core questions was answered using a five-point scale: "Much better at home" (1), "Better at home" (2), "Little difference between home and office" (3), "Better in the office" (4) or "Much better in the office" (5). Respondents were also given the option of "Don't know or not applicable", which was treated as missing data. For ease of presentation, the responses were grouped and converted to the percentage of respondents answering: "Better at home", "Indifferent" or "Better in the office" (see the diagram below).



In each of the four sections, respondents were asked to select the two influences that most *attract* them to work in the office and the two that most *discourage* them from working in the office. For data presentation, the two influences in each category were given equal weight, and the tallies were combined. Across the four sections, this produced a list of eight influences for each respondent. The respondent was then shown these eight again, and asked to identify the three that most *attract* them to work in the office and the three that most *discourage* them from working in the office.

In addition, respondents rated their overall preference between home and office, using a continuous scale from “mostly home” (0) to “mostly office” (100). They could also add comments about their preference for working from home versus in the office, what is important to them, and why.

The questionnaire also asked respondents for background information, to help contextualise their preference responses, including:

- the type of employing organisation, e.g. freelancer, public sector body, large corporate;
- their amount of experience working from home and in the organisation’s offices;
- their desk location in the office and at home, including whether they have a private office and either an allocated desk or hot-desk;
- the percentage of work time in each work location;
- the country in which respondent works;
- their job role, including “workplace professional” (architect, interior designer, PM, QS, CRE, FM, engineer, furniture, consultant) and other categories;
- whether they tend to work alone or with a team;
- their household composition, such as living alone, with a partner or children;
- year of birth, grouped to represent generations.

There was initially some consideration of including a set of questions to determine personality types. However, to keep the questionnaire to under 15 minutes, the respondents were simply asked to self-rate their personality on a sliding scale from “Highly introverted” (0), through “Ambivert” to “Highly extroverted” (100).

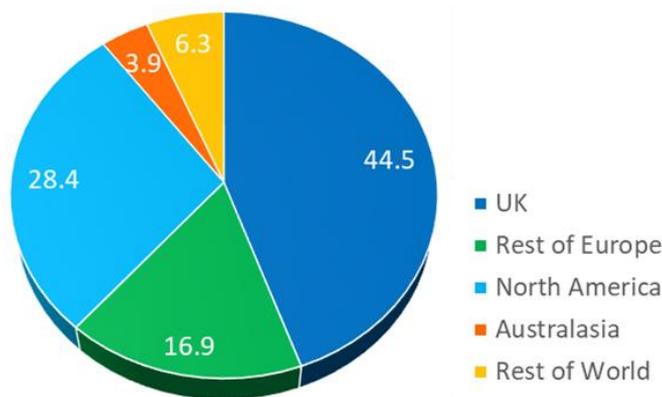
2.3 Survey sampling

Sampling was broad and inclusive rather than representative. The focus was on the UK and rest of Europe but other regions were also covered because of the sampling strategy. Respondents were invited by two main routes:

- direct electronic mail-out by Workplace Trends to a database of approximately 3,200 practitioners, of which 2,900 are UK based,
- social media platforms, including the Workplace Trends LinkedIn group with 14,000 (worldwide) members.

The distinction between workplace experts and employees in general is a key part of the survey approach. It was considered that workplace experts might have different views to those not in the industry. This would mean that any bias of theirs could affect current and future workplace strategies, potentially leading to solutions that are less favourable with the general work population.

When a person accessed the questionnaire, initial filtering questions excluded anyone who either was a) a freelancer/sole-trader, b) had never worked in their employer’s offices or c) had never worked from home. At the time of analysis, some 649 people had responded to the survey, mostly via social media invitations. However, as the diagram above shows, only 490 met the three sample criteria.



Almost two-thirds (61%) of the sample are located in Europe, with almost one-half (45%) in the UK. Over one-quarter (28%) are based in North America.

The private sector made up most of the sample: 41% work for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), 37% large corporates, 12% public sector and not-for-profit, and the remaining 10% work in the education sector.

Approximately one-half (54%) of the sample are workplace professionals and 18% consider themselves as leadership or senior management.

3 Preferences and influences for whole sample

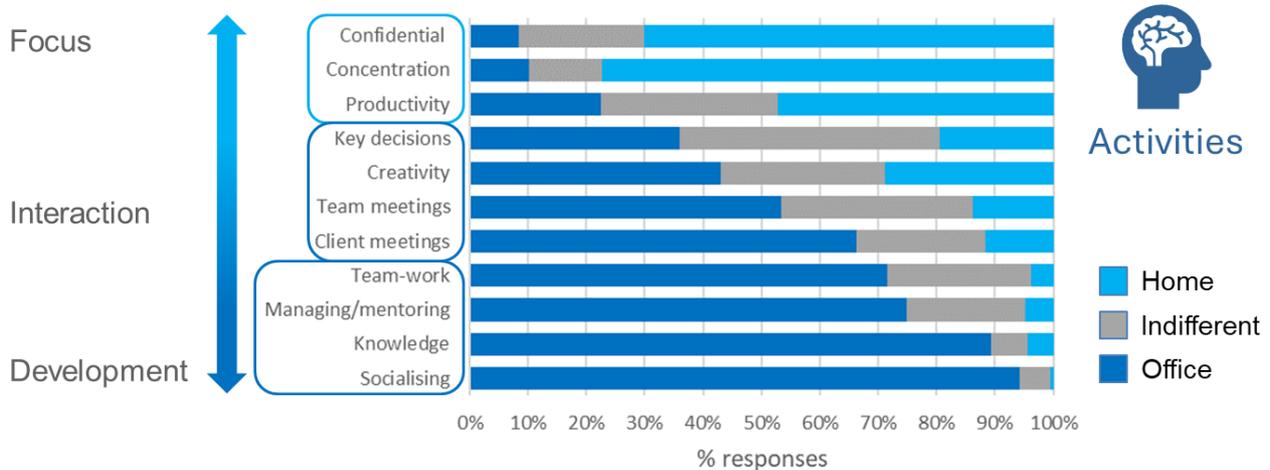
Within each of the four sections of influences, there was substantial variation in the extent to which they favoured working at home or working in the office. This was consistent between the ratings of individual influences (degree of preference) and the selection of the main influences that attract or discourage them from working in the office (how much that preference matters).

The following charts illustrate the variation in preference. Note that the order in which the influences are listed in each chart follows the percentages representing the respondents' preference for working in the office. As noted above, the descriptions of influences are abbreviated; refer to Appendix A for the full descriptions.

3.1 Work activities

The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who believe that the 11 different work activities are better supported when working from home or in the office. In broad terms, the home better supports focussed work and the office those activities facilitating teamwork and development. This finding is quite similar to that reported in previous studies.

For each of the following work activities, do you personally find it is better supported in the office or at home?



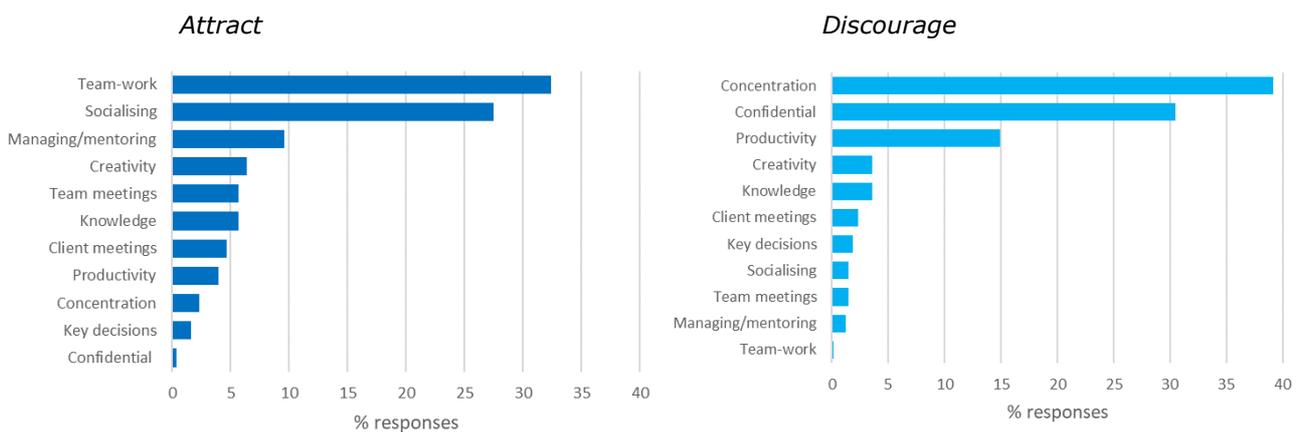
A far higher proportion of respondents consider their home better for conducting confidential calls or meetings, for work requiring concentration, and for feeling productive overall. The office clearly needs to support these activities better in order to entice people back. The preference for confidential work might be a surprise, given that organisations are often cautious about allowing confidential material off site. However, this could well be about the simple desire to have conversations or read material without being overheard or overlooked, rather than anything to do with the inherent sensitivity of the material being worked on. Responses to "Feeling productive overall" (productivity) likely refer to short-term output and personal deliverables, i.e. getting things done without distraction, rather than long-term performance of the team or organisation.

In contrast, very few respondents consider the home to be better for supporting teamwork and collaboration, managing or mentoring a team, improving knowledge through interactions or

eavesdropping, or socialising with colleagues. The majority consider these activities to be better supported in the office. There is also a clear preference for the office for holding meetings and, to a lesser extent, for making key business decisions and enhancing creativity and innovation. The preference for working in the office increases with the degree to which direct interaction with other people is required. The effectiveness of online interaction is likely to be a factor here, for example, moderating the routine need for in-person meetings. Regarding creativity, the responses probably reflect a need for both individual thinking and interactive development.

The charts below show the activities that most attract and discourage the respondents from working in the office. As above, teamwork and socialising with colleagues are key attractors and office design can further facilitate those activities to encourage people to use the office more frequently. In contrast, poor historic and long-term issues with support of concentration and confidentiality need to be finally resolved, rather than continuously ignored by the workplace design industry.

Which activities most attract you to working in the office and which ones most discourage you from working in the office?

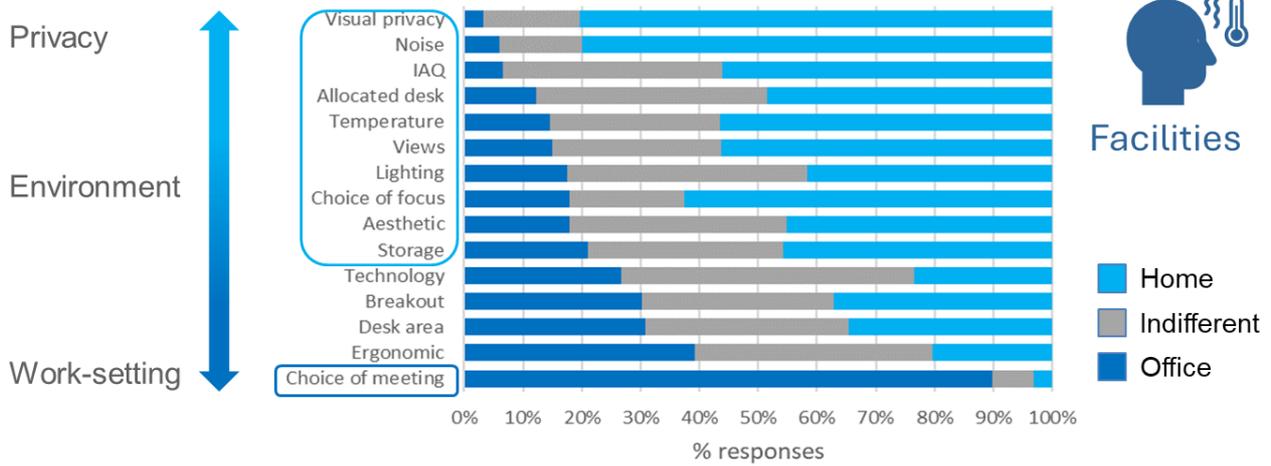


3.2 Facilities and environmental conditions

Regarding facilities and environmental conditions, a higher proportion of respondents report that their home is preferred for all indoor environmental conditions. This is most likely because individuals have more control over the environmental condition in their home. This emphasises the well-known limitations on a communal work area being able to provide the conditions that individuals find most comfortable and supportive of their work. Nevertheless, the office having a poorer perceived environment than the home is a disappointment, if not a surprise – a poor outcome for the workplace industry, which requires fixing.

The influences that are most frequently considered to be better supported at home, and by an overwhelming majority of respondents, are visual privacy and control over noise, together with having spaces for focused work. There is a clear link here to the preference for work activities requiring confidentiality or concentration. Densely planned large open-plan environments most probably decrease privacy and increase noise, and are not attractive to most office workers.

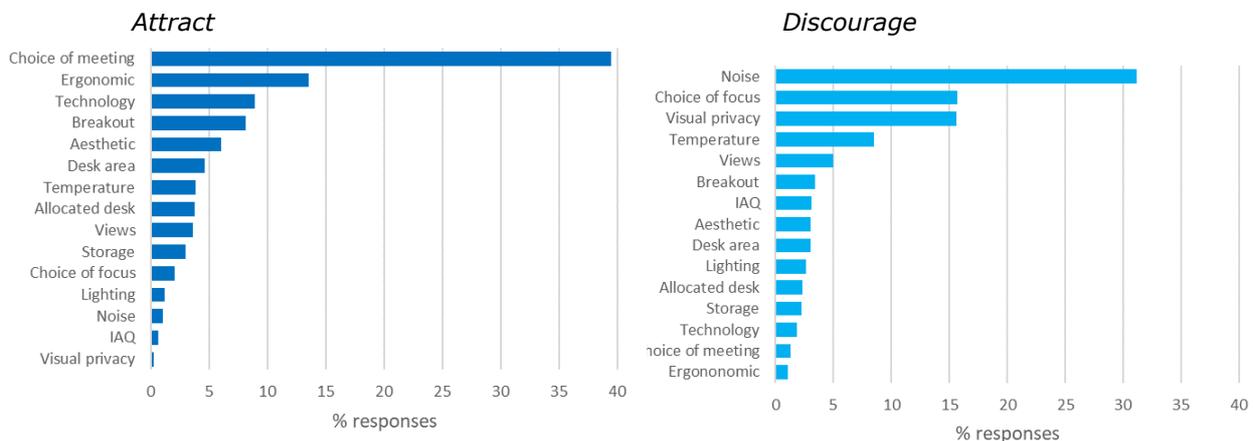
For each of the following facilities and environmental conditions, do you personally find it is better in the office or at home?



The only influence with a clear preference for the office is the choice of meetings spaces to meet colleagues. This is unsurprising, given that most people would have little choice of meeting spaces at home, even if they held face-to-face meetings there. However, the preference for the home or office in providing "Space for breaks from work" (breakout) is more balanced. Preferences are also more balanced for workstation characteristics, like technology, layout and ergonomics. While these could be better provided in the office, it appears this is not always achieved, possibly because many office-based workers now have a better set-up at home since being provided with furniture and equipment during the COVID pandemic.

The charts below show the facilities and environmental conditions that most attract and discourage respondents from working in the office. As above, choice of meeting spaces is considered a key aspect of the office (and ergonomics to a lesser extent). In contrast, noise, limited choice of focus space and lack of visual privacy are the main factors discouraging working in the office. As well as designing offices to encourage interaction (e.g. clear lines of sight and few partitions), the office must offer more visual and acoustic privacy (e.g. breaking up the space with screens, open bookshelves, planting and booths/pods for focussed work).

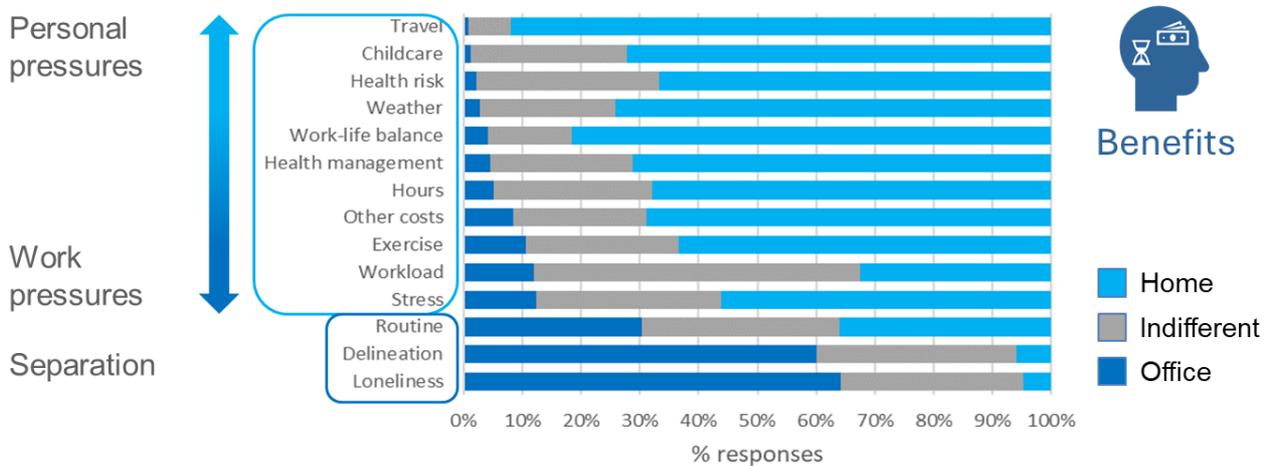
Which facilities and environmental conditions most attract you to working in the office and which ones most discourage you from working in the office?



3.3 Benefits and convenience

The office appears to compete most poorly with working from home when considering the “personal benefits” group of influences. The chart below clearly shows that most of the respondents deem their home to better support most personal benefits, especially those related to personal pressures, such as travel time, hassle and costs, work-life balance, access to childcare, managing a health condition or reducing risk to health, and taking advantage of the weather conditions (avoiding poor weather and enjoying nice weather). While it is difficult to overcome all these benefits related to working from home, organisations could consider assistance with travel costs (such as subsidised rail tickets), access to nearby crèches, flexibility over work hours and subsidised meals or leisure facilities.

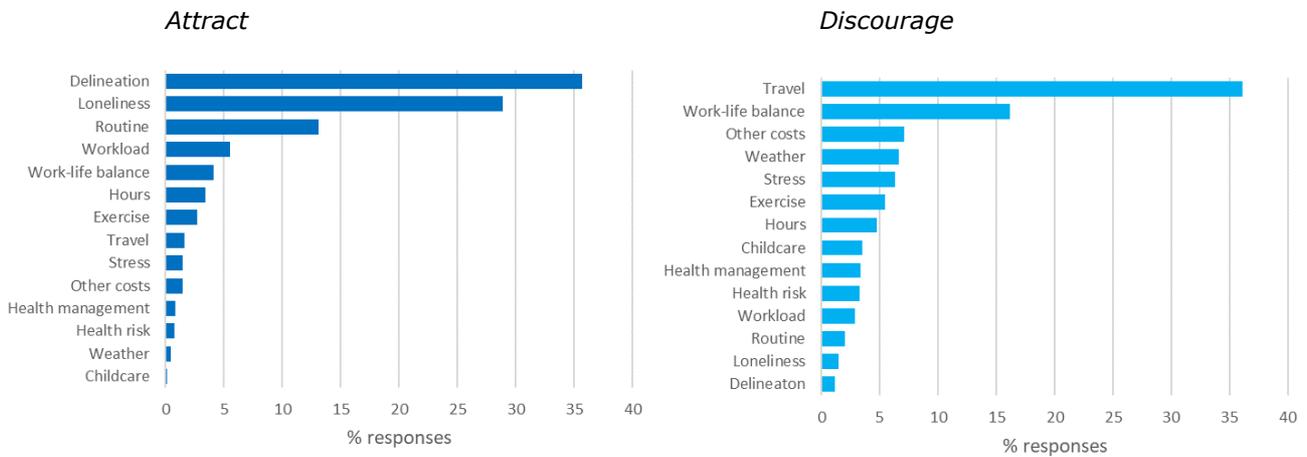
For each of the following benefits, do you personally find it is better in the office or at home?



Preference for the office increases gradually towards influences that might be considered work pressures and away from those that might be considered personal pressures. However, only two influences clearly favour working in the office: “Reduced feeling of isolation and loneliness” and “Clearer distinction or separation between work and home” (delineation). These do not fit neatly on the work/personal pressure scale but are perhaps different perspectives of what could be termed “separation”. Office design and management can help enhance socialising and teamwork to help reduce loneliness (an increasing health issue on the UK). There is a balanced response on having a consistent daily routine, probably reflecting people’s different requirement for (or ways of managing) a routine – which is better offered by the office for some.

The following charts emphasise that reducing loneliness and offering delineation between the office and home life are key reasons for working in the office, whereas travel time, cost and hassle is the core reason for preferring to work at home. Whilst childcare and managing a health condition is not highly ranked overall, it is important to note that they are more highly ranked by the respondents with children or a health condition.

Which personal benefits most attract you to working in the office and which ones most discourage you from working in the office?

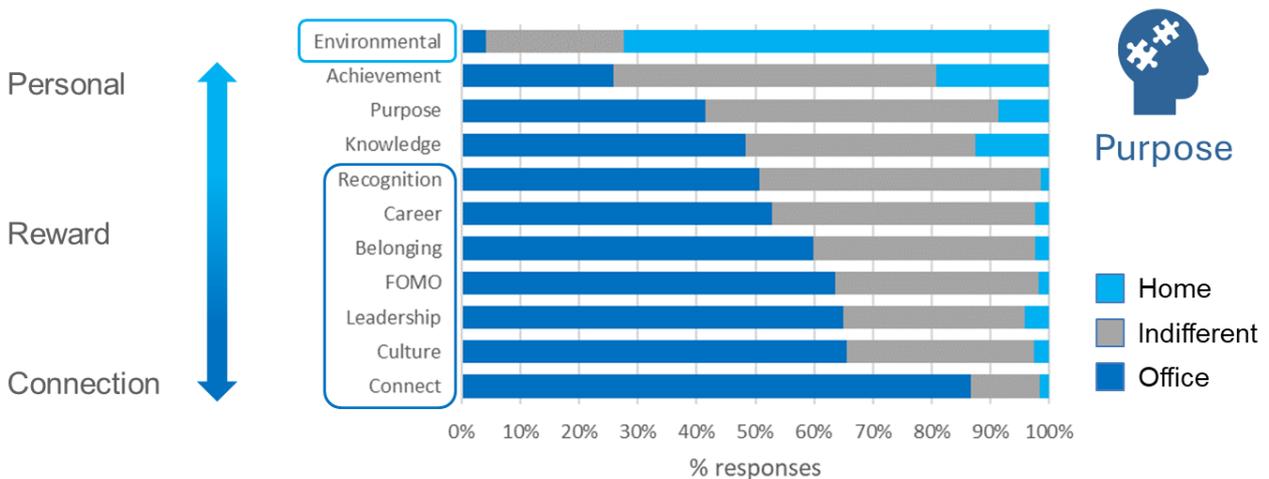


3.4 Sense of purpose

The office fares better for supporting sense of purpose, with the exception of reducing the impact on the environment. The majority of respondents believe the office better supports connection and reward, particularly connecting with colleagues, aligning with the company culture, experiencing leadership and motivation, and “reduced fear of missing out” (FOMO).

Increasing a sense of purpose and belonging, through strong leadership, motivation, connection and culture, should attract people back the office. Workplace design and the relevant facilities can help foster the organisational culture, but ultimately it comes from the leadership team. Regular events (like “lunch and learns” or socials), clubs and classes, or wellness facilities, all help to make the office a more attractive destination.

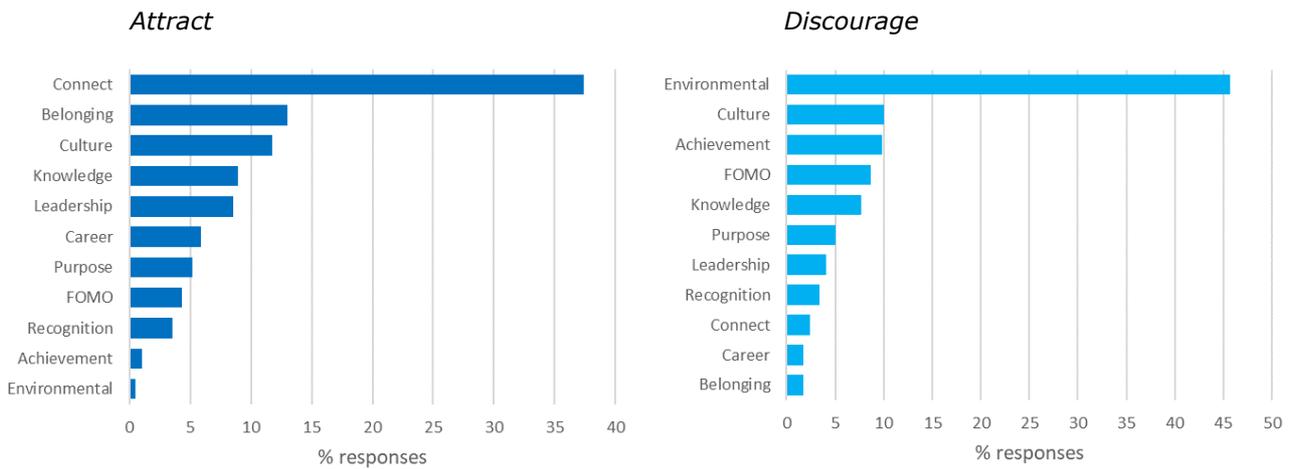
For each of the following factors, do you personally find it better in the office or at home?



Only reduced environmental impact favours working from home and it is quite different to the other influences in this section. This may be because reduced travel reduces personal carbon footprint, but there also needs to be consideration of extra energy use at home, e.g. for heating

and lighting during the day. Organisations should conduct a thorough analysis to determine the true environmental impact of running their office versus their staff working from home. Environmental concern might also be considered a personal factor but not in the same way as the other more work-related ones.

Which factors most attract you to working in the office and which ones most discourage you from working in the office?



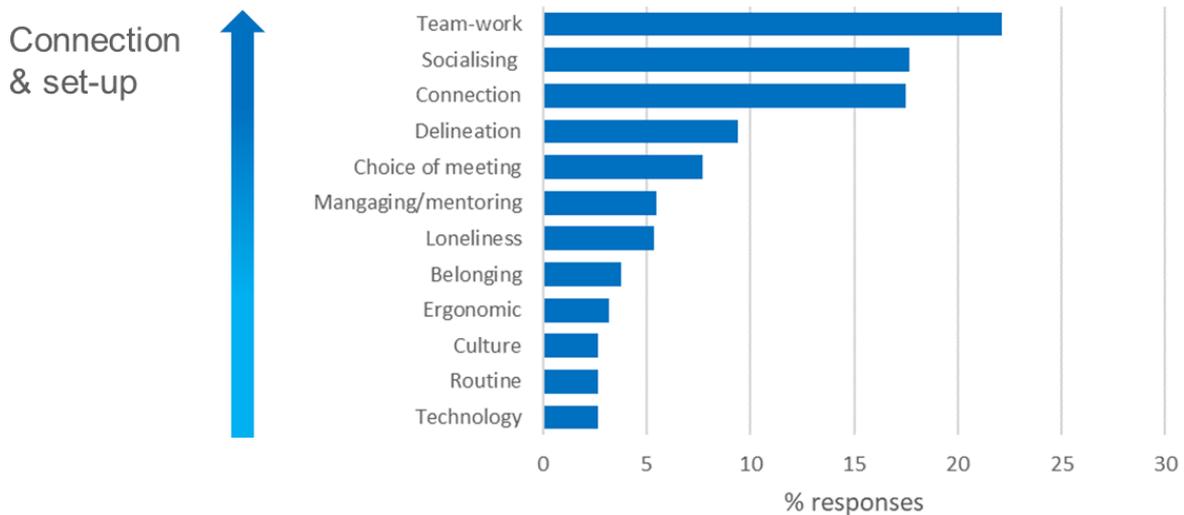
The charts above confirm that connecting with colleagues is key to attracting people back to the office, followed by “A sense of belonging and/or loyalty to the organisation” and “Aligning with the organisational culture”. Interestingly, some respondents see “Aligning with the organisational culture” as a reason not to work in the office; the most obvious reason for this would be that they view the culture itself as unattractive. So culture is a key consideration for attracting people back to the office. There are similar mixed views for “Learning and acquiring new knowledge” and “Experiencing leadership, motivation and inspiration”.

4 Most attracting and discouraging influences

In addition to the selected eight influences that most attract or discourage working in the office, respondents were asked to select their overall top three attractors and discouragers. The influences selected clarify the observations already made.

To attract people to the office, the most important influences involve interaction with colleagues (teamwork, socialising and connection), including having the spaces in which to interact. Then delineation between work and home, and avoiding loneliness, are considered key factors. The list of main attractors is completed by organisational influences (culture and belonging), having a routine, and workstation quality (ergonomics and technology).

Based on the 8 factors you have already selected, overall which three most attract you to work in the office?



Based on the 8 factors you have already selected, overall which three most discourage you from working in the office?

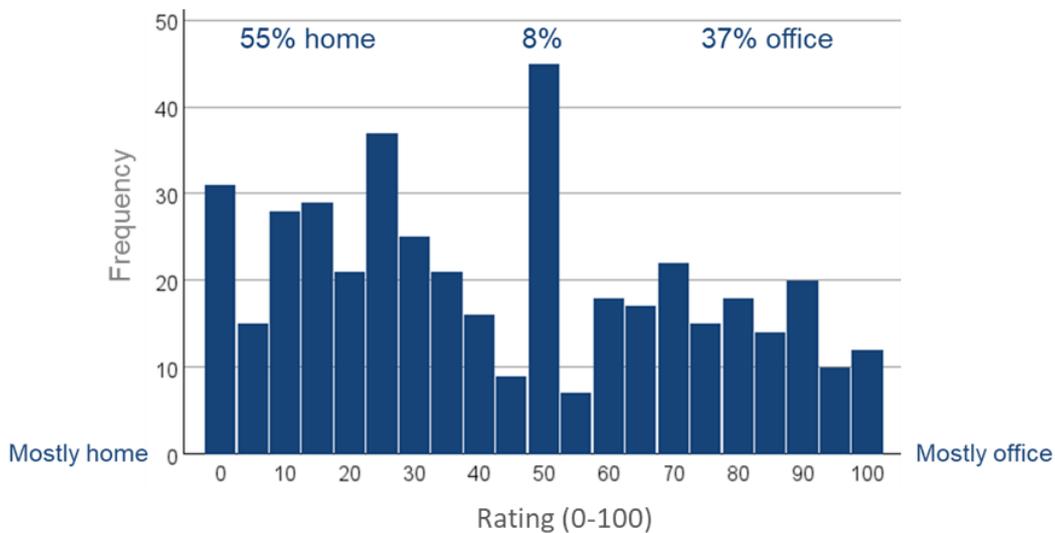


The influences that most discourage people from working in the office are travel cost and time, work requiring concentration, control over noise and confidentiality. Visual privacy and space for focused work are also included, but further down the list. The challenge to architects and designers is to create workplaces that better support and encourage socialising and teamwork but simultaneously offer more privacy along with minimising noise and distraction.

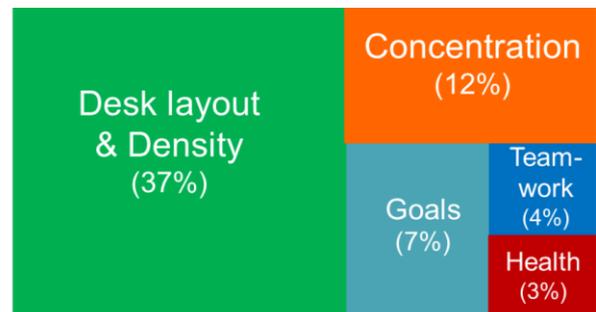
Mid-table is work-life balance, productivity and environmental concerns. As mentioned, productivity is most likely related to producing deliverables without distractions and with greater flexibility over when work is done. Work-life balance is most likely due to managing time and possibly linked to the core discourager of travel time. The list is completed by temperature control, avoiding stress, and the opportunity for exercise. The latter two are also related to work-life balance and time management.

5 Overall preference

Overall preference was based on responses to the question “Considering all the previous factors, do you personally find your home or the office the better place to work?” Respondents moved a marker on a sliding scale from “Mostly home” (0) to “Mostly office” (100), with the mid-point labelled “Little difference”. The question resulted in a tri-modal distribution with approximately one-half of respondents considering their home better, one-third preferring the office and the remainder indifferent. So, according to the survey sample the office requires some improvement to entice people back.



The meaning of overall preference would depend, to some degree, on how it arises from preference based on individual influences. We therefore entered the 51 influences into a multiple regression analysis to predict overall preference. Five influences added to the predictive power of the final regression equation, with a correlation (r) of 0.79 so altogether accounting for 63% (r²) of the variance in overall preference, which is quite good. The five influences, in order, are:



1. “The desk area, space, layout and density” (r=0.61, r²=36.9%),
2. “Work requiring concentration, like analysis, coding or reading” (r=0.34, r²=11.8%),
3. “Sense of achievement and reaching personal goals” (r=0.26, r²=6.8%),
4. “Teamwork and collaborating closely with colleagues” (r=0.20, r²=4.1%),
5. “Reduced risk to health and safety, e.g. infection, allergy, accidents” (r=0.18, r²=3.1%).

The desk area, space, layout and density explained the largest percentage of the variance. As found in other recent research, over-densification of workspaces can lead to increased noise and distraction, reduced privacy and issues with other environmental conditions thus discouraging people from returning to the office. Work requiring concentration was also a key predictor.

Each of these five influences is correlated with several other influences, forming clusters of influences (see Section 7). The influences in each cluster can be seen as being represented by the individual influence that is most highly correlated with overall influence, but also important in their own right. For example, “The desk area, space, layout and density” sits in a cluster with “An allocated desk for your sole use”, “Physical storage – files, books, personal possessions, etc.”, “Quality technology – wi-fi, mobile signal and equipment”, “Aesthetic design – décor, colour, materials, art, plants, etc.”, “An ergonomic workstation – chair, desk, space, screen, etc.” and “Lighting - electric, daylight, glare”.

As the overall preference rating was on a continuous scale, ANOVAs were used to test whether any of the respondent background variables (characteristics) affected preference for working in the office or from home; see the table below. Overall preference is affected by approximately half of the characteristics included in the questionnaire. The experience of working at home, home desk location, type of organisation, team base, percentage of time spent working in the office, and whether the respondent has an allocated desk all appear to be key factors in the preference for working from home or in the office. Personality had a smaller but statistically significant effect. However, the time the respondents had been working in their organisation’s office, their desk location, generation, family circumstances and profession had no statistically significant effect on overall preference.

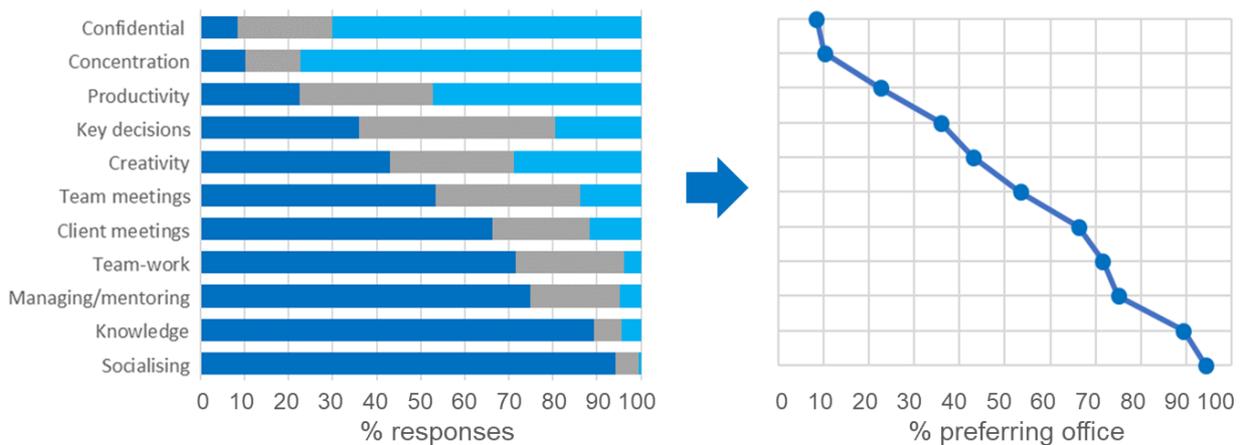
Q	Background variable	Lowest \bar{x}	Highest \bar{x}	df	F	p
3	Time working at home	>3 years = 37.0	<1 year = 62.2	2,427	15.3	<0.001
6	Home desk location	Private office = 37.9	Kitchen table = 50.8	3,422	5.0	<0.001
1	Organisation	Public sector = 36.2	SME = 51.6	3,426	9.0	<0.001
34	Team base	Alone = 34.8	Office-based = 54.0	3,421	8.2	<0.001
2	Time working in office	<1 year = 39.6	>3 years = 44.3	2,427	0.5	n.s.
7	Percentage time in office	<50% = 30.8	50%+ = 61.5	1,427	155.1	<0.001
5	Allocated desk	Unallocated = 34.0	Assigned = 51.7	1,425	33.2	<0.001
4	Office desk location	Elsewhere = 34.6	Private office = 50.4	3,424	2.1	n.s.
37	Generation	Baby boomer = 41.7	Gen X = 44.2	2,419	0.2	n.s.
36	Family circumstances	Partner = 40.1	Alone = 47.8	3,418	1.4	n.s.
35	Personality	Introvert = 36.7	Extrovert = 49.4	2,380	4.7	<0.01
33	Profession	Other = 41.5	Workplace = 44.8	1,428	1.3	n.s.

\bar{x} = mean (average) rating, higher indicates preference for office

n.s. = not significant (p>0.05)

6 Preferences related to work and worker characteristics

The previous section looked at the effect of characteristics of the home, office and the respondents themselves on overall preference between home and office. This section reports on how preference related to individual influences varies with those same characteristics. The differences in preferences between the sub-groups of each characteristic for each of the 51 influences were computed. The lines plotted in each of the following charts represents the percentage of respondents in each sub-group preferring the office – the diagram below shows the relationships between those lines and the previous bar charts. For each chart, the 20 largest differences between the characteristics are displayed and the largest statistically significant differences, based on Chi-square Tests, are highlighted.

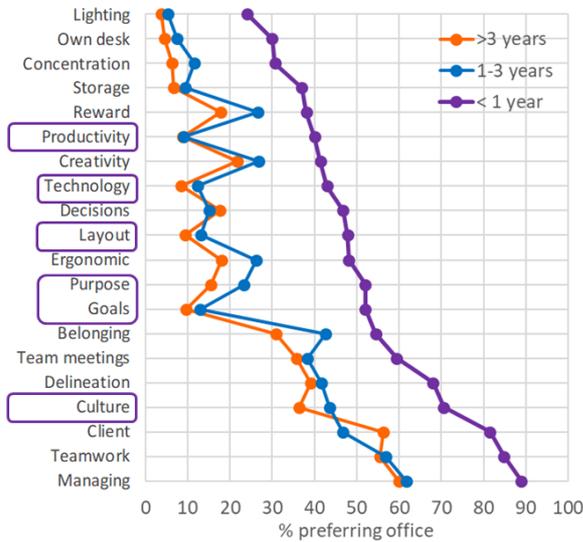


6.1 Experience of working from home

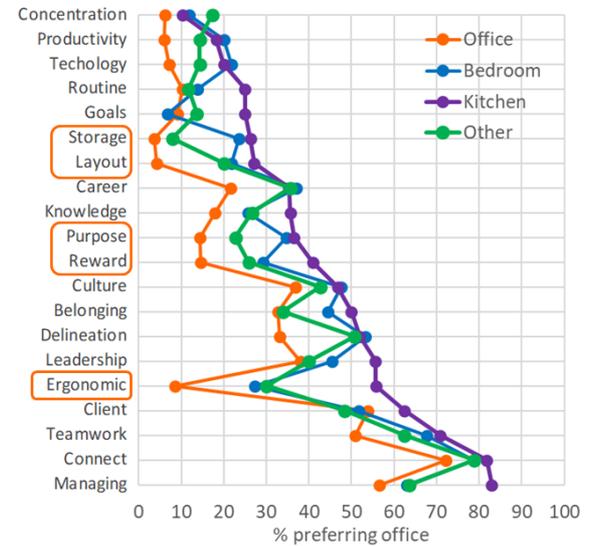
A higher proportion of respondents who had been working at home for less than one year prefer to work in the office (chart on the left overleaf). This may be linked to the time they joined their organisation, with new recruits wanting to be seen in the office and spend more time with colleagues and their managers for mentoring, knowledge, forming relationships and career progression. Alternatively, it could be because any practical adjustments are made within a year. Those new to working from home may have poorer equipment, technology or ergonomic set-up than those established during or before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The chart on the right highlights that there is a difference between having a space that can be dedicated to home working versus having a space that is shared with other purposes or household members. In particular, a higher proportion of those respondents working at their kitchen table are more likely to prefer working in the office. Conversely, those with a home-based office feel their home better supports them, especially in terms of ergonomics and storage, but also for a sense of purpose and reward.

How much experience do you have working from your home?



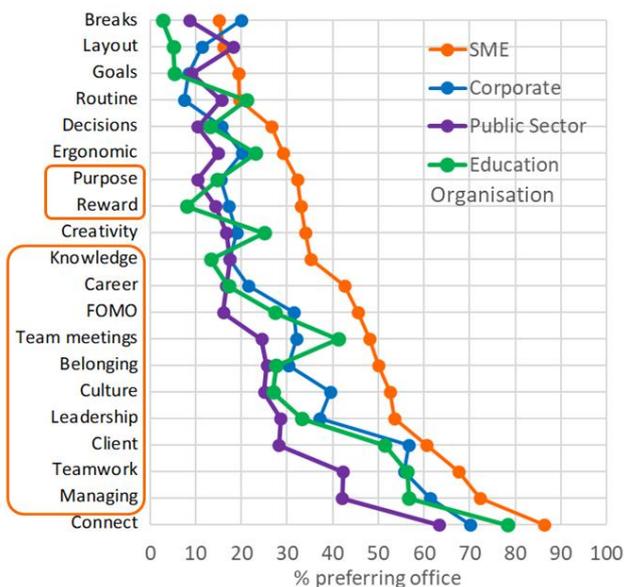
When working at home, where do you usually sit (most of the time)?



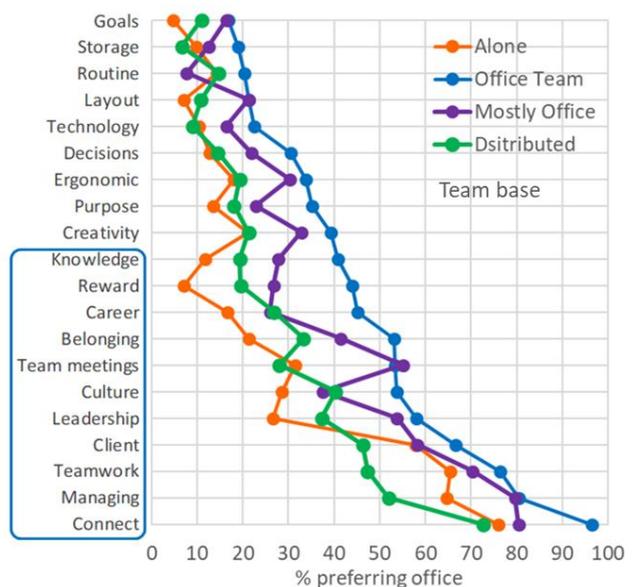
6.2 Organisation and team

The left chart below clearly shows that a higher proportion of the respondents working for an SME prefer working in the office, especially regarding the workplace factors related to a sense of purpose. Compared to respondents working in the public sector, those working in an SME consider the office to better support teamwork meetings, culture, belonging, leadership, FOMO and career development. The results most likely reflect the relative importance of corporate belonging and human interaction for work. Furthermore, it is possible that SMEs engender a more entrepreneurial, motivational, loyal and flourishing culture compared to some public sector workplaces.

How would you describe the organisation you work for?



Do you tend to work alone or with a team?



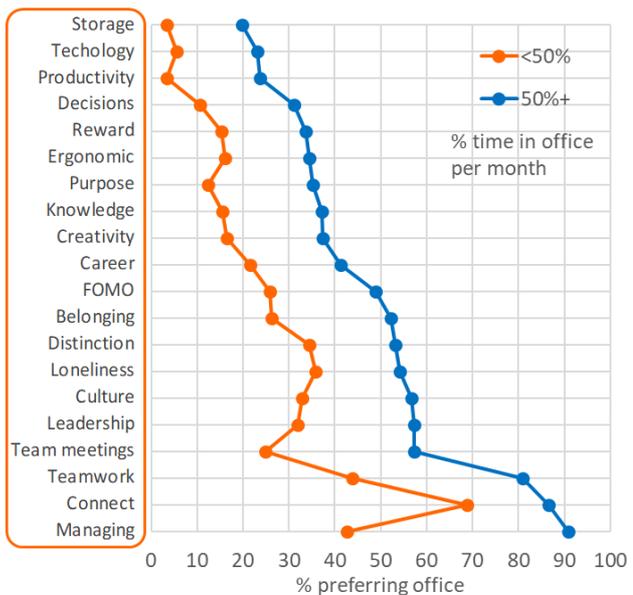
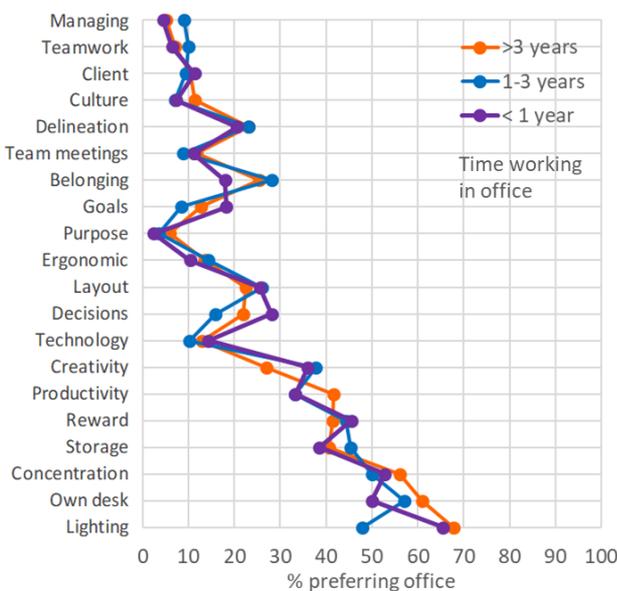
The survey also found that a higher proportion of respondents working in office-based teams prefer the office, relative to those working alone or in distributed teams (right chart above). Again, this was more evident for supporting teamwork, meetings, reward and career progression. The result is somewhat self-fulfilling: if there is a compelling need to work alongside team mates then people are more likely to go to the office. The proportion of respondents working in office-based teams was similar in the public sector and in SMEs, so it is unlikely to be the cause of the difference in preferences between SMEs and public sector.

6.3 Time working in the office

As with the ANOVA of overall preference, the time that the respondents had spent working in their current organisation’s offices produced no statistically significant differences for any of the 51 influences (left chart below).

How much experience do you have working from your organisation’s office?

Estimate the percentage time per month you typically spend in the office. (split into above or below 50%)



The respondents were asked to estimate the percentage time they spend per month working in their organisation’s office, at client/partner sites, in co-working spaces, working from home, working elsewhere, or travelling on business. The data were split into those working in the office for 50% or more of their time or for less than 50% of the time. Not surprisingly, and as seen with overall preference, a higher portion of those spending more time in the office prefer working in the office to the home for most influences. However, this is likely to be reverse causation – people who prefer the office spending more time there, rather than time in the office causing a preference for being there.

6.4 Office desk space

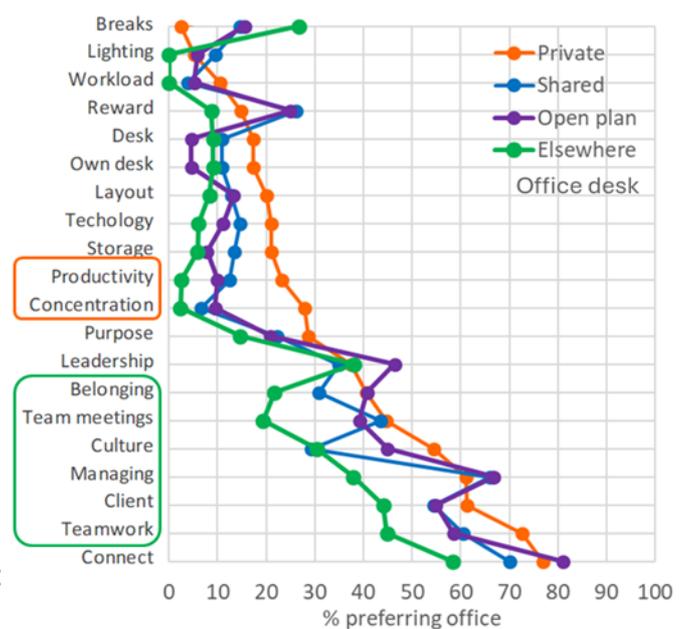
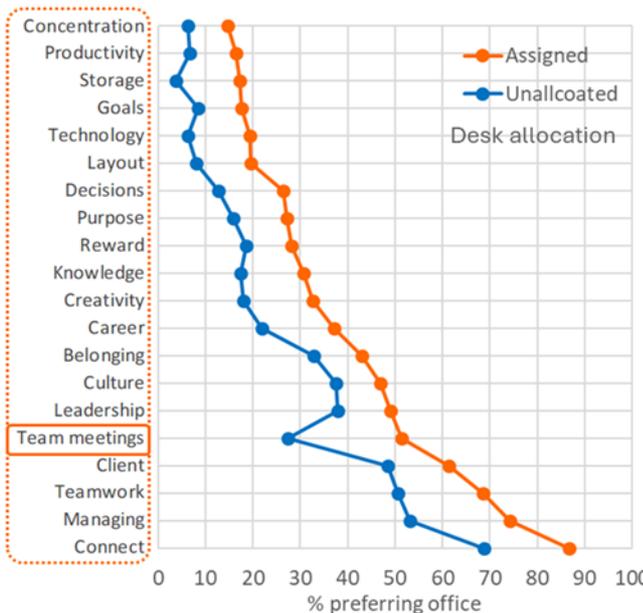
A higher proportion of respondents who have assigned or allocated desks prefer working in the office compared to those with unassigned desks (left chart below). This applies to most of the 51 influences as well as overall preference. The right chart below shows that those with a private office are the most likely to prefer working in the office, particularly in relation to

productivity and concentration. Those who did not use a desk as such but worked elsewhere (a focus pod/room, meeting room or breakout space) are least likely to prefer working in the office, perceiving that it least supports interactions, culture and a sense of belonging. These effects of individual influences did not result in any statistically significant difference in overall preference between the different desk locations in the respondent’s main office.

Having an allocated desk seems to be more important than the location of the desk. This finding creates a particular challenge for the workplace industry. If more employees are working from home, then an organisation might decide to implement unassigned desks (shared seating, hot-desking) to increase the desk utilisation and reduce any unused space. The survey indicates that this strategy could discourage even more occupants from returning to the office, thus further reducing the utilisation. While it is not sustainable to have desks unused for most of the week, it is important that any transition to unassigned desking is managed well, and the implementation made for clearly genuine reasons.

Is the desk where you usually sit in the office assigned to you?

When working in the office, where do you usually sit?



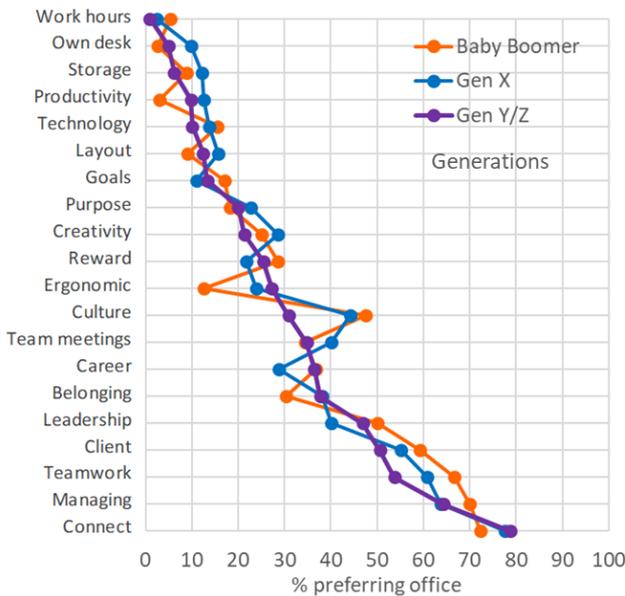
6.5 Generations and family

Respondents were asked for their year of birth, and it was converted to one of five commonly defined generations: pre-1945 (Silent generation), 1945-60 (Baby Boomer), 1961-80 (Generation X), 1981-95 (Generation Y) and post-1995 (Generation Z). Unlike many reports in the popular press, this survey did not reveal any statistically significant differences between age groups or generations in overall preference or related to any of the 51 influences (left chart below).

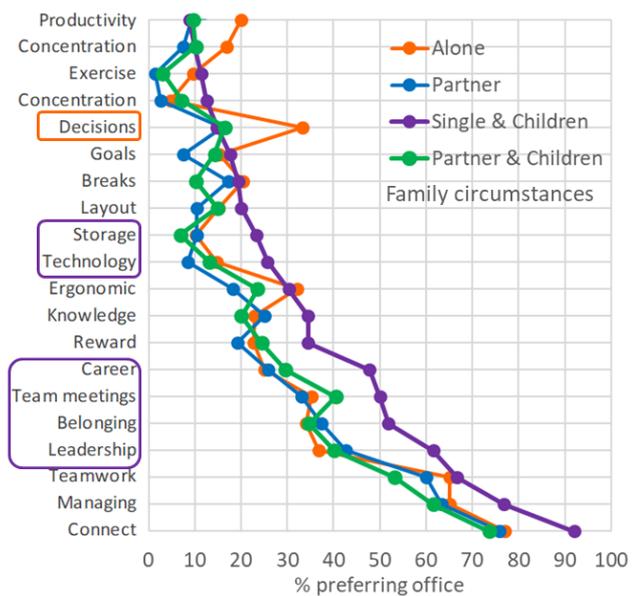
Generational differences may be confounded by other more relevant factors, such as tenure, career stage, home situation or family circumstances. While the survey did not unearth any differences in office or home preference overall, it did show that a higher portion of single parents (or other lone adults living with dependants) are most likely to prefer the office to their

home in relation to influences like a sense of belonging and career development. While it might be expected that single parents would prefer the flexibility of working from home, anecdotal evidence (raised in panel discussions) indicates that single parents may prefer the office as it offers escape or a break from home responsibilities. There might also be issues with finding working space at home as a family grows.

When were you born?
(date of birth converted to generation)



Which of the following best describes your home/family circumstances?



The survey also found that those living alone prefer the office regarding “Making key business decisions” compared to the other groups. It is unclear why making business decisions is considered a key reason to work in the office specifically for the 15% of the survey sample living alone. Perhaps key decisions are discussed face-to-face with others in the household, such that those living alone feel more need to discuss decisions with their colleagues.

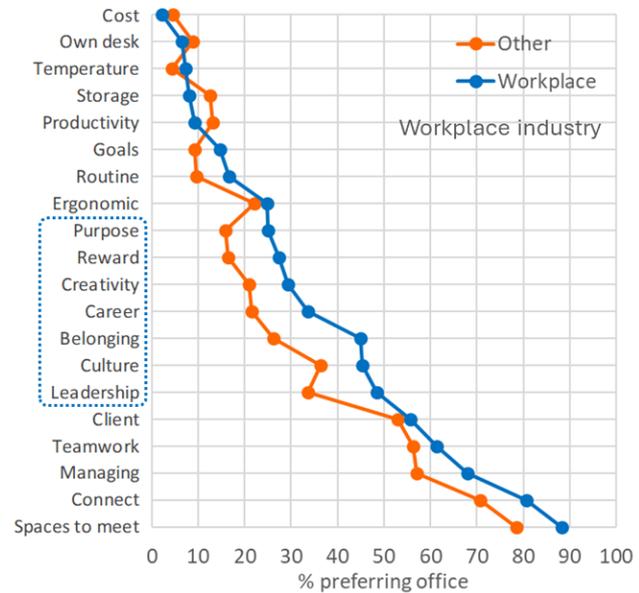
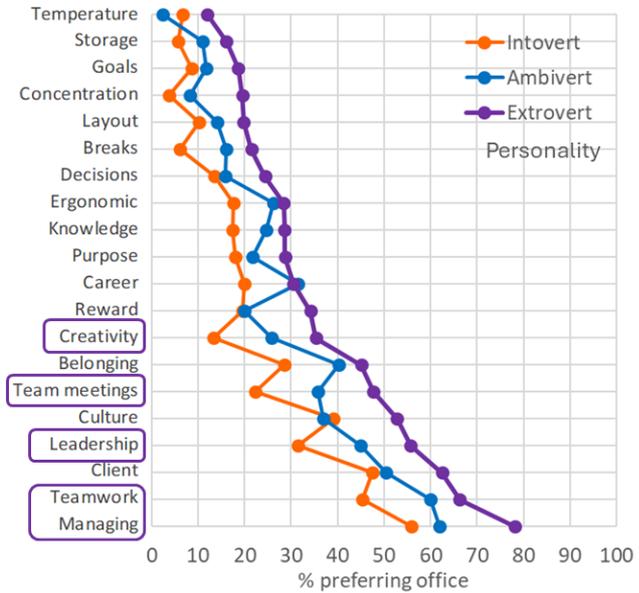
6.6 Personality and profession

Respondents were asked to rate how introverted or extroverted they considered themselves. The ANOVA of overall preference revealed that extroverts are more likely to prefer working in the office whereas introverts prefer their home. This could be partly a direct effect of personality on the value placed on social interaction, and partly a consequence of the type of work undertaken by people according to their personality. This finding is in line with other research that shows extroverts are easily distracted at home and prefer the company of their work colleagues to working alone. Specifically, extroverts believe the office better supports creativity, teamwork, team meetings, and leadership/management (see left chart overleaf).

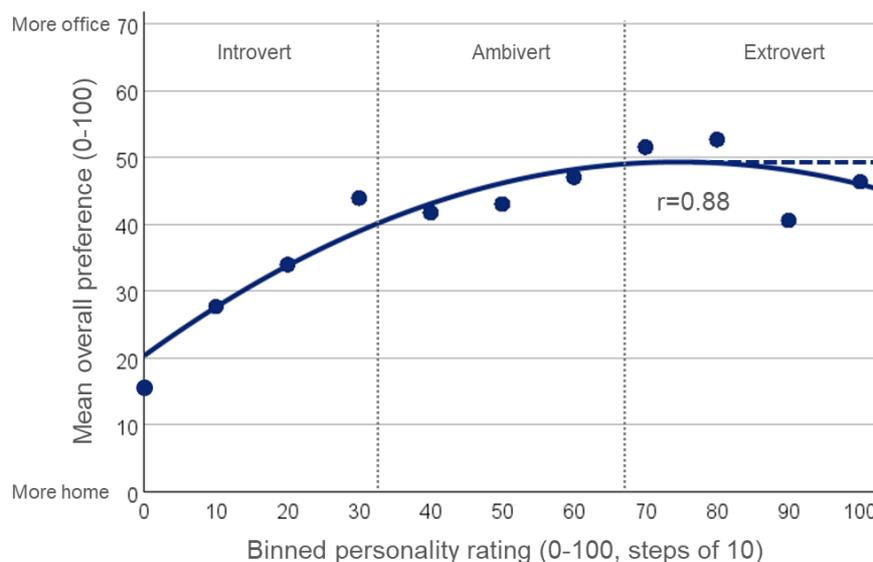
It is important to recognise that employees with different personalities and backgrounds will have different preferences and different reasons for returning to the office, and different contexts in which they are most productive. It is important to recognise this when determining what would attract them to the office and what would discourage them.

Do you consider yourself to be introverted or extroverted?

Which of the following best describes your role? (split into workplace professional and other)



As the overall preference and self-rating of introversion-extroversion were made on continuous (0-100) scales, their correlation could be calculated and plotted, as per the chart below. The raw data was quite scattered but the average overall preference rating for clusters of every 10 points on the personality scale shows a clear non-linear (quadratic) relationship ($r=0.88$, $r^2=78\%$). There is less difference between ambiverts and extroverts, but as found with the ANOVAs those more introverted have a higher overall preference for working from home. They can work without superfluous interactions (perceived distractions) from colleagues, and managers, and perhaps have more control over their work time and workflow.



One of the research objectives was to compare the views of those working in the workplace industry to the views of others, to gauge whether professional advice reflects occupant views. The ANOVAs revealed no statistically significant difference in overall preference between those

working in the workplace industry and those in other roles. However, the right chart above shows that there are a few differences in how workplace professionals consider the office supports various aspects of working (the number of respondents did not allow for reliable finer distinctions to be analysed). A higher proportion believe the office better supports a sense of purpose and belonging, along with culture, leadership, reward and creativity. These are important influences but not necessarily strong enough alone to attract people back to the office and not the ones discouraging a return. If any possible bias is implied here, it is important that workplace professionals give appropriate weight to all the relevant influences on employee preferences.

7 Grouped influences

Analysis of the 51 influences has given useful insight into the effect and importance of each of them. In practical terms, it may be difficult to develop a workplace strategy based on 51 different influences. Factor Analysis is a statistical method that uses the correlations between a large group of variables to create a smaller number of latent variables known as factors. Therefore, a Factor Analysis, specifically a Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation, was carried out to reduce the influences to a smaller number of underlying factors.

The variables entered into the Factor Analysis are the individual influences represented in the survey. The analysis reduced the 51 individual influences to 12 factors. The factor loadings (weightings) of each influence for each factor are shown in the table overleaf. These represent the strength of the relationship between each influence and the factor as a whole.

The factors appear to be logical and coherent, but factors further down the list have fewer influences associated with them and some influences are included in other factors. For simplicity and practicality, Factors 9-12 are not discussed further. They are principally individual influences: having a view out of the office (Factor 9), enhancing creativity and innovation (Factor 10), having a consistent daily routine (Factor 12) or a pair of influences – key business decisions and confidential work (Factor 11). So these factors add little to what can be seen from the individual influences.

The top eight factors are labelled as follows, based on factor loadings of 0.4 or more:

1. organisational belonging,
2. work interactions,
3. health and wellbeing,
4. concentration,
5. workstation control,
6. environmental control,
7. workload management,
8. personal time management.

An organisation should find it easier and more practical to think in terms of the eight factors, rather than 51 items, when developing a workplace strategy and attracting people either back to the office or to remaining home-based. A more detailed description of each of the key eight factors is provided below.

Unexpectedly, the influence “Reduced travel/commute time, hassle & cost” is not a leading influence in any of the 12 factors but this does not mean it is unimportant – in fact the respondents tell us directly that it is very important. Nevertheless, its importance appears to be distributed among across Factors 2, 3, 4 and 12.

Question		Factors											
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Q9A	Concentration	0.11	-0.01	0.18	0.86	0.17	0.08	-0.11	0.03	0.03	-0.03	0.10	-0.02
Q9B	Knowledge	0.46	0.49	-0.30	0.04	0.15	0.16	-0.05	0.01	-0.24	0.04	0.00	-0.02
Q9C	Teamwork	0.31	0.62	0.10	-0.02	0.23	0.00	-0.09	0.12	-0.08	0.27	0.07	-0.01
Q9D	Creativity	0.20	0.20	0.09	0.06	-0.06	0.18	-0.01	-0.03	0.00	0.73	0.11	-0.02
Q9E	Confidential	0.11	0.12	0.18	0.26	0.25	0.12	-0.13	0.05	-0.04	0.05	0.71	-0.19
Q9F	Team meetings	0.19	0.47	0.10	0.07	0.28	-0.10	0.38	0.16	0.03	0.12	0.28	-0.16
Q9G	Socialising	0.34	0.69	-0.10	0.00	0.18	0.15	-0.15	-0.02	0.01	0.09	-0.10	-0.05
Q9H	Client	0.33	0.70	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.01	-0.12	-0.20	-0.13	0.07	0.18	0.15
Q9I	Managing	0.31	0.73	0.16	0.26	0.12	-0.11	-0.10	0.13	0.17	0.14	0.14	-0.08
Q9J	Decisions	0.38	0.21	0.06	-0.04	0.02	0.02	-0.05	-0.05	0.00	0.17	0.70	0.30
Q9K	Productivity	0.22	0.08	0.23	0.47	0.19	-0.02	0.42	0.07	0.14	0.33	0.13	0.14
Q14A	Ergonomic	0.31	0.24	0.24	0.15	0.50	0.28	-0.17	0.04	0.13	-0.13	-0.16	0.03
Q14B	Own desk	0.07	0.06	0.04	0.16	0.81	0.17	0.01	0.19	-0.03	-0.09	0.11	-0.03
Q14C	Desk space	0.28	0.14	0.21	0.23	0.52	0.35	0.26	0.10	0.11	-0.09	0.08	-0.01
Q14D	Meeting spaces	0.16	0.68	-0.18	0.00	0.04	0.27	-0.12	-0.09	0.22	-0.17	0.12	0.15
Q14E	Focus spaces	0.26	-0.05	0.20	0.38	0.37	0.48	0.30	0.11	-0.04	0.10	-0.04	0.12
Q14F	Storage	-0.04	0.16	0.22	0.10	0.77	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.19	0.09
Q14G	Breaks	0.15	0.17	0.23	-0.01	0.12	0.68	0.24	0.09	0.19	0.18	0.04	-0.05
Q14H	Techology	0.26	0.25	0.24	0.11	0.54	0.13	-0.10	0.18	0.11	0.21	0.11	0.24
Q14I	Aesthetic	0.14	0.03	0.12	0.12	0.53	0.23	0.10	-0.05	0.37	0.29	-0.17	-0.10
Q14J	Noise	0.01	0.16	0.10	0.83	0.19	0.12	-0.14	0.14	-0.03	0.22	0.02	0.05
Q14K	Privacy	0.10	-0.01	0.13	0.39	0.19	0.51	0.12	0.37	-0.01	0.14	0.04	-0.32
Q14L	IAQ	0.09	0.03	0.26	0.24	0.30	0.53	0.05	0.08	0.35	0.23	-0.23	0.02
Q14M	Temperature	0.16	0.11	0.15	0.11	0.21	0.75	-0.01	0.06	0.06	0.00	0.15	0.19
Q14N	Lighting	0.16	0.31	0.32	0.22	0.47	0.08	0.14	-0.06	0.39	0.07	-0.06	0.07
Q14O	Views	0.20	0.00	0.02	-0.04	0.21	0.23	0.16	0.07	0.75	-0.02	-0.01	0.07
Q19A	Travel	0.18	-0.37	0.38	0.39	0.10	-0.07	-0.05	0.18	-0.01	0.01	0.07	0.41
Q19B	Cost	0.04	0.28	0.39	0.64	0.07	0.11	-0.17	0.14	-0.15	-0.22	-0.01	0.20
Q19C	Health risk	0.03	0.04	0.83	0.11	0.26	0.13	0.08	-0.01	0.07	0.11	0.14	0.04
Q19D	Manage health	-0.04	0.06	0.70	0.08	0.26	0.18	0.15	0.27	0.02	0.25	0.08	-0.05
Q19E	Work-life balance	0.07	-0.08	0.57	0.25	0.18	0.15	0.36	0.08	-0.41	0.04	-0.18	0.08
Q19F	Distinction	0.32	0.40	0.04	0.07	-0.08	0.14	0.61	-0.01	0.15	-0.11	0.10	0.01
Q19G	Routine	0.21	0.16	0.08	0.25	0.22	0.26	0.36	0.17	0.09	0.02	-0.02	0.53
Q19H	Exercise	0.15	0.10	0.46	0.11	0.09	0.25	-0.01	0.56	-0.15	0.03	0.02	-0.08
Q19I	Work hours	0.10	-0.07	0.28	0.24	0.19	0.35	0.20	0.55	-0.24	0.14	0.10	0.17
Q19J	Workload	-0.11	0.07	0.15	0.23	0.08	0.25	0.60	0.40	0.03	0.02	0.08	0.19
Q19K	Stress	0.28	-0.05	0.39	0.34	0.08	0.09	0.44	0.07	0.03	0.27	0.13	0.14
Q19L	Lonely	0.35	0.35	0.05	-0.17	0.12	0.37	0.48	0.03	0.21	0.03	-0.02	-0.07
Q19M	Weather	0.14	-0.08	0.71	0.37	0.06	0.17	-0.02	0.11	0.09	-0.15	0.05	0.04
Q19N	Children	-0.04	-0.04	0.08	0.10	0.10	-0.01	0.10	0.86	0.15	-0.07	-0.05	0.07
Q24A	Belong	0.70	0.20	0.24	0.02	0.16	0.02	0.22	0.01	0.02	0.16	-0.10	-0.02
Q24B	Culture	0.67	0.34	0.27	0.06	0.04	-0.08	0.06	-0.05	0.05	0.15	-0.07	0.09
Q24C	Career	0.76	0.30	0.01	0.05	0.06	0.05	-0.04	-0.11	0.06	0.06	0.21	0.25
Q24D	Reward	0.75	0.11	0.02	0.06	0.16	0.21	-0.09	-0.05	-0.08	0.05	0.19	-0.18
Q24E	Connect	0.60	0.43	-0.06	0.06	0.07	0.20	0.08	0.17	0.05	0.23	0.01	0.23
Q24F	Knowledge	0.53	0.14	-0.15	0.02	0.22	0.07	0.10	0.01	-0.01	0.42	0.28	0.31
Q24G	Leadership	0.65	0.20	0.02	0.13	-0.12	0.20	-0.09	0.18	0.12	-0.06	0.13	0.24
Q24H	Achievement	0.46	0.01	0.27	0.29	0.05	0.16	0.22	0.12	-0.07	0.05	0.14	0.20
Q24I	FOMO	0.72	0.21	0.04	-0.02	0.02	0.15	-0.06	0.03	0.30	-0.02	0.03	-0.13
Q24J	Environmental	0.19	-0.13	0.49	0.42	0.16	0.15	0.02	0.32	0.20	-0.18	0.01	-0.06
Q24K	Purpose	0.69	0.10	0.02	0.27	0.25	0.02	0.38	0.08	0.10	-0.03	0.04	-0.13

0.3
0.4
0.5
0.6+

Factor 1 – Organisational belonging

Factor 1 represents connection with the employing organisation. The dominant aspect is the personal benefit of the connection, in general terms (career development and progression, recognition and reward, not “missing out”, sense of purpose, sense of achievement and reaching personal goals) and more specific benefits (connecting with people, learning and acquiring new knowledge, improving knowledge through informal encounters). The other key aspect is benefit from the organisation’s perspective: sense of belonging and/or loyalty, aligning with the organisational culture. The influence “Experiencing leadership, motivation, stimulation & inspiration” perhaps falls between the two aspects.

Question	Load	Influence
Q24 C	0.76	Career development and progression
Q24 D	0.75	Being recognised and rewarded
Q24 I	0.72	Reduced fear of missing out
Q24 A	0.70	Sense of belonging and/or loyalty to the organisation
Q24 K	0.69	Overall sense of purpose
Q24 B	0.67	Aligning with the organisational culture
Q24 G	0.65	Experiencing leadership, motivation, stimulation & inspiration
Q24 E	0.60	Connecting with colleagues and partners
Q24 F	0.53	Learning and acquiring new knowledge
Q24 H	0.46	Sense of achievement and reaching personal goals
Q9 B	0.46	Improving knowledge, through informal encounters or eavesdropping

Factor 1 will tend to lead to a preference for working in the office. This would contribute, for example, to that preference being stronger in SMEs and among newer staff.

Factor 2 – Work interactions

Factor 2 represents the various interactions that a member of staff might have as part of working life. These include formal meetings (in groups or one-to-one), personal development activities, teamwork more generally, making connections, informal encounters and socialising with colleagues. It includes the choice of spaces available for meetings. The influence “Clearer distinction or separation between work and home” is also in this factor but it is more important in Factor 7. Here, it may be about maintaining different interactions at work and at home.

Question	Load	Influence
Q9 I	0.73	Managing, mentoring and training a team (or team-mates)
Q9 H	0.70	Hosting client meetings and presentations
Q9 G	0.69	Socialising with colleagues
Q14 D	0.68	Choice of spaces to meet colleagues and clients
Q9 C	0.62	Team-work and collaborating closely with colleagues
Q9 B	0.49	Improving knowledge, through informal encounters or eavesdropping
Q9 F	0.47	Holding team meetings
Q24 E	0.43	Connecting with colleagues and partners
Q19 F	0.40	Clearer distinction or separation between work and home

Factor 2 will tend to lead to a preference for working in the office. This would contribute, for example, to that preference being stronger in SMEs and among newer staff.

Factor 3 – Health and wellbeing

Factor 3 represents general risk to health and safety, managing health conditions or disabilities, opportunity for physical exercise and broader benefits to wellbeing – work-life balance and enjoying the weather. It also includes the influence “Reduced environmental impact, e.g. carbon footprint” – possibly in relation to its inherent benefit to health and wellbeing.

Question	Load	Influence
Q19 C	0.83	Reduced risk to health and safety, e.g. infection, allergy, accidents
Q19 M	0.71	Avoiding poor weather or enjoying nice weather
Q19 D	0.70	Managing a health condition or disability
Q19 E	0.57	Improved work-life balance, e.g. more time for family, household chores
Q24 J	0.49	Reduced environmental impact, e.g. carbon footprint
Q19 H	0.46	Better support for exercise –gym, changing, showers, cycle store, etc.

Factor 3 will tend to lead to a preference for working from home but this would depend on the circumstances of the particular individual – themselves and their working environment.

Factor 4 – Concentration

Factor 4 represents primarily the ability to work without distraction, hence also a feeling of being productive. However, this is combined with concern about resources – personal and environmental. The connection between the two could be complex or by chance, but one possibility is that concern about resources is a distraction from productive work.

Question	Load	Influence
Q9 A	0.86	Work requiring concentration, like analysis, coding, reading or reports
Q14 J	0.83	Control over noise/distraction
Q19 B	0.64	Managing costs such as food, drink, energy and office consumables
Q9 K	0.47	Feeling productive overall
Q24 J	0.42	Reduced environmental impact, e.g. carbon footprint

For the majority, Factor 4 will tend to lead to a preference for working from home, especially if working alone and/or there is a dedicated space at home but not in the office. If the home environment is not conducive to concentration, e.g. there are young children to be cared for, the reverse would tend to be true.

Factor 5 – Workstation control

Factor 5 represents the control that an employee has over the workstation, predominantly whether there is allocated space and storage. This is related to the opportunity for personal set-up and the quality of the workstation itself.

For the majority, Factor 5 will tend to lead to a preference for working from home, especially if there is a dedicated space at home but not in the office. This could be offset if the workstation itself is of higher quality in the office.

Question	Load	Influence
Q14 B	0.81	An allocated desk for your sole use
Q14 F	0.77	Physical storage – files, books, personal possessions, etc.
Q14 H	0.54	Quality technology – wi-fi, mobile signal and equipment
Q14 I	0.53	Aesthetic design – décor, colour, materials, art, plants, etc.
Q14 C	0.52	The desk area, space, layout and density
Q14 A	0.50	An ergonomic workstation – chair, desk, space, screen, etc.
Q14 N	0.47	Lighting - electric, daylight, glare

Factor 6 – Environmental control

Factor 6 represents control over the environment while working, in two ways: control over the environment at the person’s usual workstation, and the ability to go to different spaces.

Question	Load	Influence
Q14 M	0.75	Temperature control
Q14 G	0.68	Space for breaks from work – coffee/tea, socialising, etc.
Q14 L	0.53	Indoor air quality, fresh air supply, odours
Q14 K	0.51	Visual privacy
Q14 E	0.48	Choice of spaces for focus and concentration

The effect of Factor 6 on preferences between home and office could vary greatly in relation to how respondents perceive the individual influences, their needs and what facilities they have at home and in the office. In general, the opportunity for personal control should be greater at home.

Factor 7 – Workload management

Factor 7 represents a person’s ability to manage workload and working life, together with the inherent stresses and challenges.

Question	Load	Influence
Q19 F	0.61	Clearer distinction or separation between work and home
Q19 J	0.60	Control over workload and deliverables
Q19 L	0.48	Reduced feelings of loneliness or isolation
Q19 K	0.44	Reduced stress or anxiety, and feeling less tired
Q9 F	0.42	Holding team meetings

The effect of Factor 7 on preferences between home and office could vary greatly in relation to how a person perceives the individual influences, their own needs and personality. For example, one person’s isolation and loneliness are another person’s peaceful solitude. Some people want to keep work and home completely separate; others may seek a more integrated life.

Factor 8 – Personal time management

Factor 8 represents a person's ability to manage time, particularly the time and activities that are not dedicated to work.

Question	Load	Influence
Q19 N	0.86	Better access to childcare, e.g. crèche
Q19 H	0.56	Better support for exercise –gym, changing, showers, cycle store, etc.
Q19 I	0.55	Flexibility over waking hours and work times
Q19 J	0.40	Control over workload and deliverables

The effect of Factor 8 on preferences between home and office would depend on personal circumstances (e.g. need for childcare or desire to exercise) and available provisions (e.g. at, or close to, work and home).

8 Qualitative analysis

The respondents were provided the opportunity add free-text comments at the end of the survey. They were asked "Tell us more about your preference to work from home versus in the office – what's important to you, and why? Please provide specific examples where possible, explaining the impact". A total of 298 of the 490 respondents made comments. The research design had not specifically included qualitative analysis of these comments but there was sufficient content for it to be considered potentially useful. We therefore undertook two kinds of qualitative analysis. This section reports a conventional content analysis, examining comments manually for insight to support the quantitative analysis. In addition, an independent AI-based sentiment analysis was conducted by Audiem² and included in Appendix B.

The preference for working location was seen to depend on many factors, as grouped below.

Type of work

The type of work to be done, generally or on a particular day, affects preference for working in the office or at home. As expected, concentrated individual work and online meetings (usually better at home, and avoiding travel time and cost) are contrasted with team gatherings and client meetings (usually better in the office). However, this is moderated in various ways.

- Low likelihood or predictability of being in the office at the same time as other people who the respondent wants to interact with. This is most relevant if the team is distributed, especially if distributed across time zones.
- The perceived value of interactions in the office, in the absence of direct progress in completing tasks. The value of building relationships, understanding of others and corporate belonging is not generally reflected in billable time, so it depends on personal views and management attitudes.
- Ability to maintain motivation and focus. For some people, home is where they can concentrate on a task and complete it efficiently. This can include taking a break (even having a nap) to "recharge". In contrast, some people need others working around them to avoid distraction, procrastination and loss of focus.
- Therefore personality: the intrinsic value of solitude, interactions and relationships varies from person to person. A stand-out example is whether *ad hoc* interactions are seen as beneficial (e.g. maintaining connections, checking on progress, quickly solving simple problems) or not (e.g. forced socialisation or an interruption to work).

Quality of indoor environment and equipment

The relative availability and quality of equipment and indoor environmental quality affect preference (as expected) but combined with various other elements.

- Ergonomically designed furniture and equipment is good but of limited value if there is not an allocated desk.
- Acoustic (not only visual) privacy, e.g. colleagues not overhearing calls or private conversations.
- The behaviour of colleagues, for example being noisy (e.g. on Teams calls), playing radios, calling across the room, or office gossip. Moderated by availability of escape spaces and rooms for making calls.

- A desire to impress clients with the quality of the office.
- The location of the office. For example, some office locations make it difficult and/or expensive to travel, park, eat or do anything of interest during lunch breaks or before/after work. Other locations are just seen as not very nice. This is balanced by the home location but that is something the employee is more likely to have had some choice about.
- Access to a co-working space local to home.

Time and cost

The time and cost, especially travel, associated with going to the office affects preferences.

- Journey time and cost affect preference for the office or home (as expected) but, more subtly, the flexibility. There could be a commute that falls below a threshold of time, cost and advance planning, thus allowing last-minute decisions or, for example, short trips to the office for a particular meeting.
- To balance the time taken to get to the office, some people require a specific reason to go to the office on a particular day, e.g. a meeting, a need to use specific equipment or having an on-site role. Others just need a change of scenery or to “get out of the house”.
- The cost of office clothes is also a consideration, balanced for some people by their clothes giving a feeling of being professional and “at work”.

On-the-job learning

Preference for working in the office or at home is also affected by the need for mentoring, seeking knowledge and career development.

- It takes time to learn how to be effective when working from home.
- Younger or newer staff would benefit more from being in the office. Older or more experienced staff are better able to work from home (and face less risk to career from doing so) but younger or newer staff should benefit from them being in the office as managers or mentors.
- There is a possible conflict between the benefit to self and benefit to others. This was revealed in two ways: a) some resentment of managers having more time working at home and b) some managers/leaders recognising their responsibility to spend to time in the office to support and motivate others.

Personal circumstances

The employee’s personal circumstances (generally or on a particular day) affect their preferences for working from home or in the office.

- Being at home could interfere with what others in the household are doing (including working from home) and/or others in the household might diminish the respondent’s ability to work.
- Health relates to both ongoing issues and the ability to take time at home when well enough to work but not well enough to travel or to avoid spreading infection.
- Caring for children or other dependants does not fully cover family-related issues: it is perhaps more about spending time with children and partners, enjoying and supporting relationships (including in practical ways, such as taking children to and from school).

- Caring for pets (dogs in particular) is also a factor.
- Also, more rarely spoken needs include to break wind or to express milk!

Choice

A final key point is that it is not the balance as such that is most important, but more the freedom to choose. This relates to the flexibility, variety and sense of control that it gives, to make decisions based on various factors (as above). An employee is often better placed than the employer to make such judgments. The freedom, in turn, relates to how the employer values working from home, the implied trust in the employee and positive motivation that it gives. This all raises the question of how employers can offer flexibility in ways that benefit everyone, rather than fixing the working arrangements unnecessarily tightly.

9 Workplace implications

A recap of the recommendations for attracting people back the office, based on the survey results, is as follows, and illustrated overleaf.

- Create an attractive working environment by reducing the desk density, offering some control of environmental conditions with good natural light and views out. High desk density is symptomatic of many issues with the modern office that discourage working there.
- Most importantly, reduce distraction and noise, and provide both visual and acoustic privacy. For example, break up large open plan areas with screens, bookshelves, plants, pods, etc. See Oseland's "landscaped office" for more ideas³.
- Provide spaces for focus and concentration, for example nearby rooms, pods and booths. Not all employees have suitable space at home and those coming to the office to connect will also need quiet space occasionally.
- Also provide spaces for interaction, collaboration, teamwork, socialising and connecting. These are key reasons for coming to the office rather than staying at home. While on-line meetings (Teams/Zoom) are an improvement on teleconference calls, they tend to be planned and so do not offer impromptu interactions or socialising. They also miss much non-verbal communication.
- Offer more options for travel (costs/time), work hours, wellness/exercise and childcare. In addition to flexible travel times, consider help with subsidised travel or loans for rail tickets. Also consider on-site wellness facilities or subsidised membership of nearby gyms, spas or clubs, etc. Likewise, consider access to crèches and subsidised lunches. Such subsidies alone will not ensure a return to the office, but they are one contributing factor.
- Emphasise and enhance the reasons to visit the office (connection, culture, belonging) through events, key meetings, social gatherings and leadership. Organise regular team catch-ups, both work and social. For example, ask new members of staff to make a short presentation on their experience and introduce them to their new colleagues across the organisation. Activities and events (e.g. charity coffee mornings, bake-offs, hobbies clubs, on-site fitness classes) all provide one of maybe several reasons to come to the office, thus making the trip more worthwhile.
- Ensure a motivating culture through leadership, encouragement, loyalty and work ethic. While this is not primarily a workplace design issue, well-designed workplaces can embody the corporate culture.
- Consider the employee's differences and personal circumstances, especially those with family or healthcare issues, or just starting out on their career. Discover what will attract different groups of people, such as different personality types, back to the office and design for their requirements.
- Implement unassigned desking only with caution and provide allocated desks to those who genuinely need them – generally or on specific days. This should not be based merely on seniority. Monitor utilisation and manage desk numbers to ensure that staff have a desk when choosing to work in the office.



10 Acknowledgements

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11 References

- ¹ Oseland, N.A. *et al* (2022) *The Future of UK Office Densities*. London: BCO.
- ² <https://www.audiem.io/>
- ³ Oseland, N.A. (2022) *Beyond the Workplace Zoo: Humanising the Office*. Oxon: Routledge.

Appendix A. On-line survey

APPEALING WORKPLACE INTRODUCTION

This questionnaire concerns your opinion on the relative attractiveness of working in the office and working from home. It explores your views on the advantages and disadvantages of working in these spaces, to inform the workplace industry on how to improve working environments.

The responses will be used as part of a research project conducted by Workplace Unlimited in partnership with MillerKnoll and Workplace Trends. All responses will be anonymised and the data grouped for presentation. Individual responses will be saved securely and not passed on.

To thank you for completion, you may enter a prize draw for an Aeron chair and free entry to the Workplace Trends conference. You will also receive a 10% discount voucher for Workplace Trends, an invitation to a free seminar and a copy of the research report.

The survey takes 12-15 minutes to complete. If you take a break and return then the survey will continue where you left off.

First, we need a few details about your work situation.

* 1. How would you describe the organisation you work for?

- Sole trader, self-employed, independent consultant or freelancer, etc.
- Small and medium sized enterprise (SME)
- Large corporate
- Other (please describe)
- Public sector body
- Educational institution

* 2. How much experience do you have working from one of your current organisation's offices?

- More than 3 years
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 months to 1 year
- Less than 3 months
- I have never worked from my organisation's office

* 3. How much experience do you have working from your home?

- More than 3 years
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 months to 1 year
- Less than 3 months
- I have never worked from home

PLEASE NOTE in the remainder of this survey, the **OFFICE** refers to any of your current organisation's office premises and **HOME** refers to your primary home working environment, regardless of whether it is a dedicated room, bedroom or kitchen table etc.

WORK PATTERNS

To set the scene, we need to know a little bit more about when and where you work.

4. When working in the office, where do you usually sit (most of the time)?

- Private office
- Shared office/room
- Open plan desk
- Other (please state where)
- Focus pod or room
- Meeting room
- Breakout space

5. Is the desk where you usually sit in the office assigned to you?

- Assigned/allocated desk
- Unassigned/unallocated desk (hot desk)

6. When working at home, where do you usually sit (most of the time)?

- Private office, study or dedicated room
- Bedroom desk
- Kitchen or dining room table
- Other (please state where)
- Desk in another room
- Garden office/cabin
- Your garden

7. Please estimate the percentage of work time per month that you typically spend in the following locations. Enter numbers 0 to 100 in each cell, and enter 0 rather than leave blank.

Working in one of your organisation's offices	<input type="text"/>
Working at client or partner sites	<input type="text"/>
Working in a co-working space or similar	<input type="text"/>
Working from home	<input type="text"/>
Working elsewhere such as a café, library or hotel	<input type="text"/>
Travelling on business	<input type="text"/>

8. Which country is your primary workplace located in? Use the pull-down menu.

WORKPLACE ACTIVITIES

This section relates to your work activities when working in the office and the home.

9. For each of the following work activities, do you personally find it is better supported in the office or at home?

Select one response per activity.

	Much better at home	Better at home	Little difference between home and office	Better in the office	Much better in the office	DONT KNOW or not applicable
Socialising with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Holding team meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Holding confidential calls or meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creativity and innovation, including ideas, research, design and new products	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team-work and collaborating closely with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Managing, mentoring and training a team (or team-mates)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improving knowledge, through informal encounters or eavesdropping	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hosting client meetings and presentations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making key business decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work requiring concentration, like analysis, coding, reading or reports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling productive overall	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10, 11, 12, 13. Which of the above work activities most **attract** you to working in the office and which ones most **discourage** you from working in the office?

Use the pull-down menu to select the top two activities in each case.

10. Activity that most **attracts** you to working in the office:

11. Activity that secondly most **attracts** you to working in the office:

12. Activity that most **discourages** you from working in the office:

13. Activity that secondly most **discourages** you from working in the office:

WORKPLACE FACILITIES

This section relates to the facilities and environmental conditions in your home and the office.

14. For each of the following facilities and environmental conditions, do you personally find it is better in the office or at home?
Select one response per facility.

	Much better at home	Better at home	Little difference between home and office	Better in the office	Much better in the office	DON'T KNOW or not applicable
Space for breaks from work - coffee/tea, socialising etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Indoor air quality, fresh air supply, odours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An ergonomic workstation - chair, desk, space, screen etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality technology - wi-fi, mobile signal and equipment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visual privacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The desk area, space, layout and density	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lighting - electric, daylight, glare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Control over noise/distraction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Choice of spaces for focus and concentration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aesthetic design - décor, colour, materials, art, plants etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Temperature control	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Views outside	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical storage - files, books, personal possessions etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Choice of spaces to to meet colleagues and clients	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An allocated desk for your sole use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15, 16, 17, 18.

Which of the above facilities and environmental conditions most **attracts** you to working in the office and which ones most **discourage** you from working in the office?

Use the pull-down menu to select the top two facilities/environmental conditions in each case.

15. Facility or environmental condition that most **attracts** you to working in the office:

16. Facility or environmental condition that secondly most **attracts** you to working in the office:

17. Facility or environmental condition that most **discourages** you from working in the office:

18. Facility or environmental condition that secondly most **discourages** you from working in the office:

WORKPLACE BENEFITS AND CONVENIENCE

This section relates to the benefits of working in your home or the office.

19. For each of the following benefits, do you personally find it is better in the office or at home?

Select one response per benefit.

	Much better at home	Better at home	Little difference between home and office	Better in the office	Much better in the office	DON'T KNOW or not applicable
Reduced risk to health and safety e.g. infection, allergy, accidents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A more consistent daily routine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexibility over waking hours and work times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduced feelings of loneliness or isolation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduced travel/commute time, hassle and cost	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Better support for exercise - nearby gym, changing room, showers, cycle store etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clearer distinction or separation between work and home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Managing a health condition or disability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Control over workload and deliverables	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Better access to childcare e.g. crèche	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improved work-life balance, such as more time for family, caring for dependents and household chores	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Avoiding poor weather or enjoying nice weather	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Managing costs such as food, drink, energy and office consumables	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduced stress or anxiety, and feeling less tired	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20, 21, 22, 23. Which of the benefits most **attracts** you to working in the office and which ones most **discourage** you from working in the office?

Use the pull-down menu to select the top two benefits in each case.

20. Benefit that most **attracts** you to working in the office:

21. Benefit that secondly most **attracts** you to working in the office:

22. Benefit that most **discourages** you from working in the office:

23. Benefit that secondly most **discourages** you from working in the office:

WORKPLACE PURPOSE

This final section is about how working in your home versus the office relates to your sense of purpose.

24. For each of the following factors, do you personally find it better in the office or at home?

Select one response per factor.

	Much better at home	Better at home	Little difference between home and office	Better in the office	Much better in the office	DON'T KNOW or not applicable
Reduced fear of missing out	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduced environmental impact e.g. carbon footprint	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being recognised and rewarded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sense of belonging and/or loyalty to the organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall sense of purpose	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sense of achievement and reaching personal goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning and acquiring new knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career development and progression	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aligning with the organisational culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experiencing leadership, motivation, stimulation and inspiration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connecting with colleagues and partners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25, 26, 27, 28. Which of the above factors most **attracts** you to work in the office and which ones most **discourage** you from working in the office? Use the pull-down menu to select the top two factors in each case.

25. Factor that most **attracts** you to working in the office:

26. Factor that secondly most **attracts** you to working in the office:

27. Factor that most **discourages** you from working in the office:

28. Factor that secondly most **discourages** you from working in the office:

SURVEY COMPLETED

Thank you for completing the survey.

38. If you would like to enter the prize draw for an Aeron chair or free entry to the Workplace Trends Conference in London, then please enter your email address. Also enter you details if you would like to receive a 10% discount voucher for Workplace Trends, an invitation to a free seminar and a copy of the research report.

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Appendix B. AI-based sentiment analysis

Audiem's² AI platform for sentiment analysis was used to summarise the comments. The respondents' combined comments contained 25,840 words, equivalent to around 52 pages of standard text. The analysis identified 298 viewpoints with 1,252 talking points, condensed into three key perspectives.

Perspective 1 – Attracting people back to the office

The respondents have an increased awareness of the different work-settings on offer. The provision and pros and cons of each work-setting must be carefully considered to attract people back to the office. Talking points include:

- collegiate/social elements,
- stimulation and creativity,
- variety and encounters,
- learning and mentoring,
- variety of quality settings.

Examples of related comments include the following.

"I walk a lot more in the office, climb stairs, talk and socialise much more, I have a more complete life".

"I like to get things done and find it increasingly difficult to concentrate in an office when other people are on Teams calls - it's terribly distracting. I have become accustomed to working in near perfect conditions at home".

"Seeing different people just on my way to work keeps my mind active and curious. There is a lack of curiosity in being in my same office at home every day. I count on that curiosity to be the spark of my creativity".

"I spent 25 years working in, designing, building and managing office space. I have watched occupancy levels in office space decrease to the point that companies need 50% or less space than they have. This started 10 years ago- and no one really realised it until Covid. There is a massive need for technology to catch up in the office. Companies have massively underfunded office technology to support a frictionless workplace. And they wonder why no one wants to come in".

Perspective 2 – Real concerns

The comments verify that what benefits one person does not necessarily benefit someone else (or the planet). To entice people back to the office, individual preferences and personal circumstances must be considered, rather than treating everyone as having the same preferences. Talking points include:

- "ghost ships" and isolation,
- outdated office layouts,
- work-setting ergonomics,

-
- segmenting home and work life,
 - career progression, being seen,
 - momentum and motivation.

Related comments include the following.

“It’s a question of Me versus We versus Earth” and “When it comes to networking and career progressions, it helps to be seen and so frequent journeys to the office are important (albeit less efficient)”.

“‘Choice’ rather than ‘force’ encourages me to get out the house and go to an office. What primarily motivates me is when I know people I need to connect with will be there”.

“Regardless of whether you are in the office at least 50% or more of your meetings will be using virtual meeting technology because not everyone will be there. So that then begs the question – why come to the office? Or even if I am there, why walk to another building to meet with people in person when I can join from my desk? The office will continue to exist, but it needs a massive repurposing”.

Perspective 3 – Personal benefits

The comments highlighted the recognised personal benefits and expressed honesty around how working from home better supported wellbeing, mental health, introversion and wider life commitments. Talking points include:

- voice of the introverted,
- engaging distributed teams,
- mental health management,
- physical health benefits,
- personal circumstances,
- saving money and time.

Example comments are the following.

“I can also avoid observing distressing examples of toxic leaders and poor managers by working at home which all together means I am physically, mentally and financially much happier working from home”.

“A more groovy office would be nice but it’s not going to overcome the time/money disincentives to travel”.

“When I work from home I can wear what I want. I don't get distracted by idiots and have more control over my concentration levels”.