

What do workers want from a post-Covid office? Survey insights...

If 2020 has proven anything, it's that people can be just as productive working from home as in the office. With more people looking to return to the workplace, research has shown how offices should adapt in order to accommodate them.



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Linda Trim, director at Giant Leap - one of South Africa's largest workplace design specialists, said the question is how to modify the physical office as a place for culture, connection, community-building, and innovation while still allowing for that flexibility.

"When we design for connection and communication, then people's individual experiences in the workplace becomes the most important measure of success," she said.

Based on our research, here are six strategies and considerations that will shape the future workplace:

1. The office should remain mostly open

Despite concerns about the pandemic, 71% of workers we surveyed would like to go back to an office that is mostly open. Through our research over the years, we have found that mostly-open environments with on-demand privacy — like phone rooms or focus rooms — are most desired by employees and return the highest effectiveness and satisfaction ratings.

2. Flexible seating and self-identifying neighbourhoods

If you're considering a shift to more unassigned seating, people's preferences can be complicated.

"In our survey we found that most people's preference leaned towards having an assigned desk — only 17% were willing to share. This is perhaps unsurprising given the current health crisis — but when you offer the opportunity to work in a more hybrid way, just over half of workers (51%) would be willing to trade their assigned desk for greater

flexibility to choose when and where they work," Trim noted.



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3. Most work spaces in the office should be video-conference enabled

Offices should, as standard, provide video conferencing that will help connect distributed teams. Most spaces will need to be enabled for video conferences, taking into account factors such as acoustics, degree of enclosure, background sightlines, technology, and more.

"There will be a need to overhaul the protocols and etiquette around how we use these spaces. With video conferencing potentially occurring not just in meeting rooms, but in semi-enclosed and open spaces as well, the office may feel buzzy than before," Trim said.

4. Shift from workstations to collaborative spaces

With fewer workers typically on-site in the future, the balance of spaces at the office will need to shift to meet worker's needs. Allocating fewer workstations to individuals frees up space that can be repurposed for a wider variety of collaborative spaces.

At the same time, companies and organisations can't eliminate workstations entirely.

"Our survey found space to focus on independent focus work is still the number three reason workers want to come into the office. To support equity for employees, some spaces for individual focus work should be included in offices going forward."

5. Create space for culture, mentoring, and connection

Awareness of what others are working on outside one's own team is particularly important to building and maintaining company culture in a more remote work environment.

"For example, through our research we learned that fewer than half of workers participated in coaching or mentoring sessions during the pandemic — but those who did were disproportionately in executive, senior leadership or managerial roles."

Over video calls, it's more difficult to see when team members are struggling and more difficult to discern how to best support them. Having a physical space to connect in-person and develop team and mentoring relationships is important not only to individual growth, but also to an organisation's long-term culture.

Ultimately, what we're seeing is an acceleration of a trend that we've identified in our workplace research over the last decade: people already working in a hybrid arrangement have reported the highest satisfaction with their work situation.

"Now, with the pandemic, many more workers have gained the experience of working from home — and our latest survey results show that people's office expectations are changing to match," Trim concluded.

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