

HGA



SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY AND THE FUTURE OF WORKPLACE

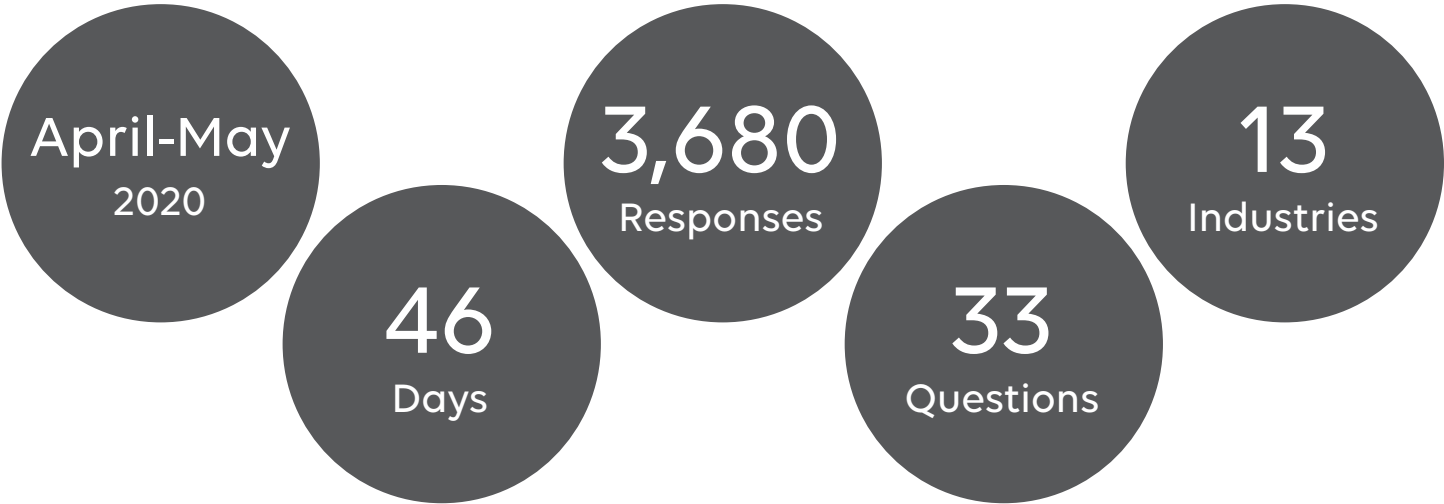
Insights from the
2020 Work from Home Survey

With people coast to coast working from home, HGA set out to discover how this sudden and dramatic social experiment is affecting employees and how it might redefine the workplace.

As designers, we approach our work from a place of empathy. Understanding that we all come to work differently based on a variety of factors, this research was fueled by our desire to learn how people are adapting in this new reality. Our goal was to go beyond understanding “what is” to explore “what if,” and begin to hypothesize “what will be.”

THE SURVEY

We surveyed employees in a variety of geographies and industries, including technology, architecture and engineering, professional services, telecom, transportation, and government. We heard back from over 3,600 employees—team members, managers, directors, and executives—across all generations.



WITH THIS RESEARCH, WE SOUGHT TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- How are people faring in this work from home (WFH) world?
- How could we use what we learn to think beyond the short-term, and begin to re-imagine workplace design through the lens of people’s new experiences, motivations, and behaviors?

FIVE CORE INSIGHTS

This research has allowed us to see what we do and how we do it from an entirely different vantage point. By following clues in the qualitative and quantitative data, we built a set of core insights to help us proactively shape the narrative about the evolution of workplace.

01 Authorship
LICENSE TO AUTHOR MY WORKDAY

02 Quality
REPLACING STRESS WITH DELIGHT

03 Fellowship
THE ESSENCE OF COLLABORATION

04 Membership
THE NEED FOR FACE TIME

05 Resilience
ADAPTING FOR THE FUTURE

Informed by these insights and our deep expertise in workplace strategy and design, we share considerations and resources to address short- and long-term change.

06 Insights to Action
FUTURE OF WORKPLACE



AUTHORSHIP

People appreciate controlling their own workday, and the trust required to do it. Losing this autonomy is one of their main concerns about returning to the office.

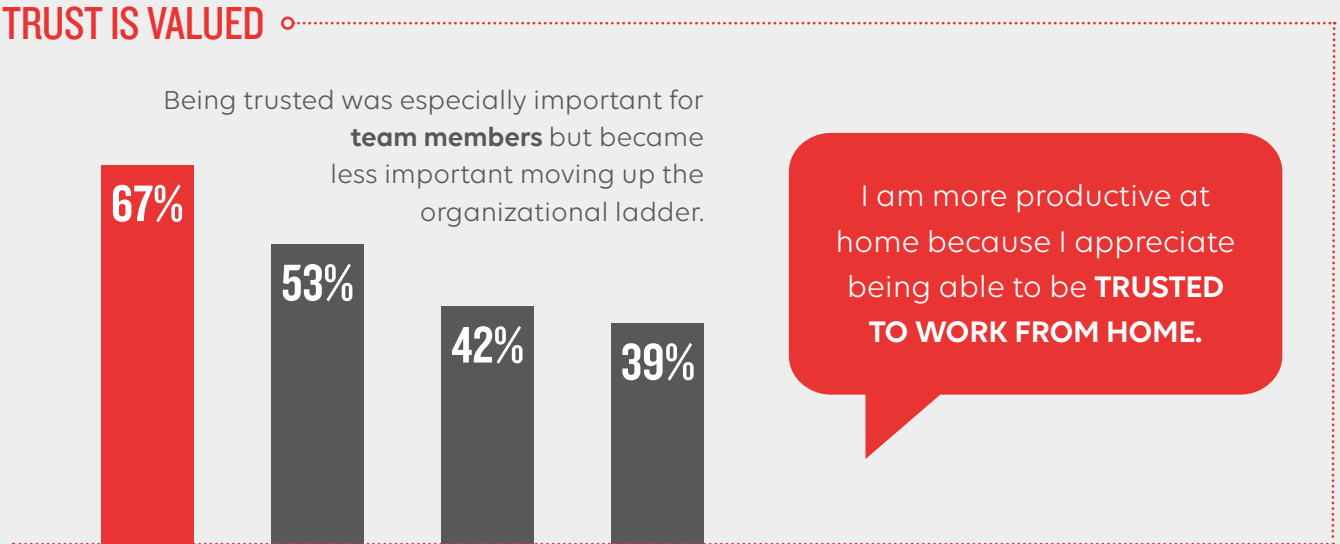
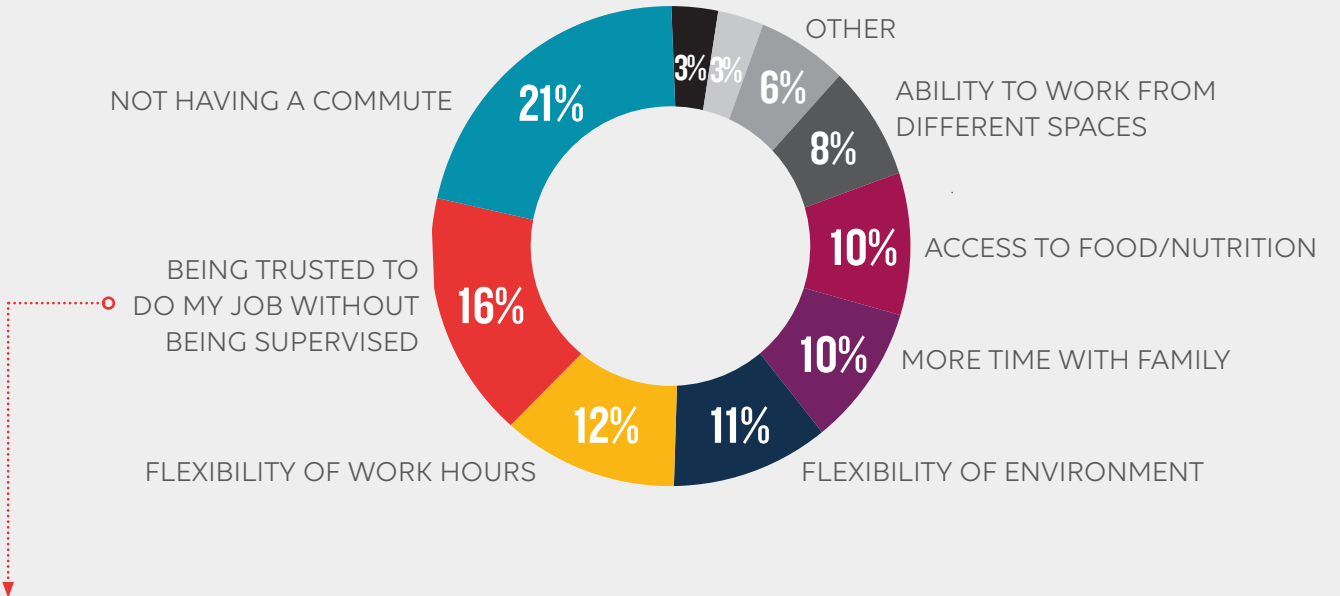
LICENSE TO AUTHOR MY WORKDAY

Fewer distractions, flexibility of work hours, and flexibility of the environment are the top three reasons for feeling more productive at home.

People are enjoying the flexibility and the productivity gained by working from home. Provided the opportunity to choose, those who work productively from home on certain or all tasks will most likely continue working remotely. For those who return to the workplace, we predict that the control people had of their environment at home will cause them to expect more choice over where and when they work at the office.

Being **TRUSTED TO GET MY WORK DONE** while being able to better myself mentally, physically, and financially has been the best thing that has happened to me.

WHAT I ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING FROM HOME



CONCERNS ABOUT RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE



JOY OF FOCUS WITHOUT DISRUPTION

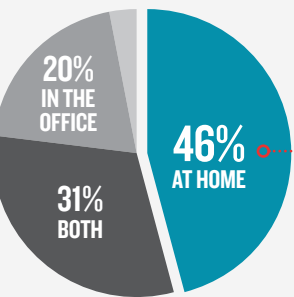
The top reason proponents of working from home report a boost in productivity and creativity? **Fewer unwanted distractions.**

Qualitative responses show people literally enjoy focusing on the task at hand when not disrupted by others stopping by and interrupting their flow. Of course, there are distractions at home too, but they are typically more welcome (children interrupting, dogs barking, etc.).

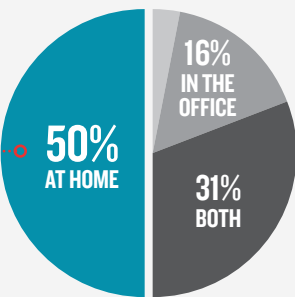
Nearly
3x
as many respondents said
their **CREATIVITY AND
PRODUCTIVITY IS HIGHER
AT HOME** than at the office.

WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST...?

PRODUCTIVE

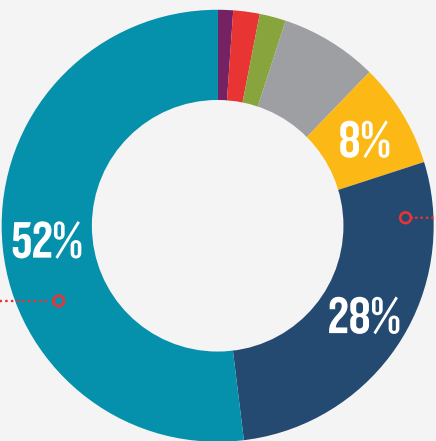
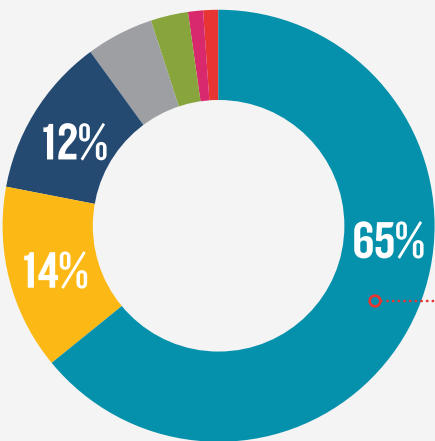


CREATIVE



WHAT IS THE
#1 REASON
WHY YOU FEEL
THAT WAY?

LESS
DISTRACTION



- LESS DISTRACTION
- FLEXIBILITY OF ENVIRONMENT
- FLEXIBILITY OF WORK HOURS
- BETTER FOOD/NUTRITION
- FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION
- MORE EFFECTIVE ACCESS TO COLLEAGUES
- BETTER TECHNOLOGY
- OTHER

NOTE:
FLEXIBILITY OF ENVIRONMENT
was the biggest driver of
Millennials feeling more
creative at home.

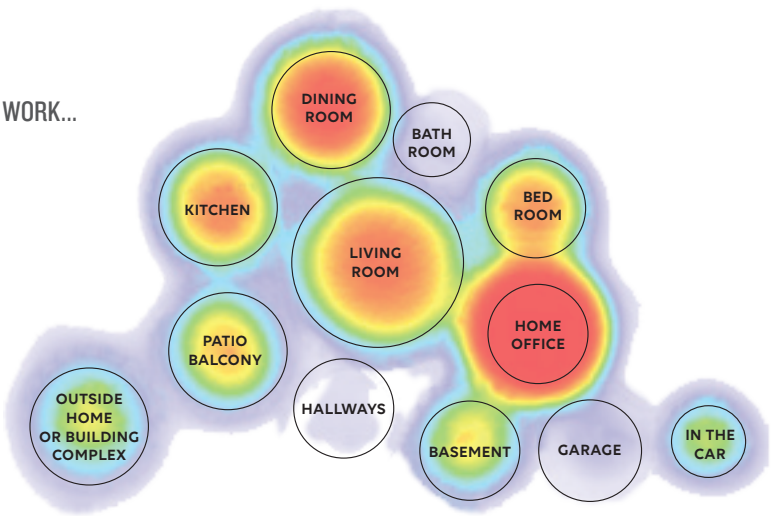
MY HOUSE, MY RULES

After fewer distractions, the next most important reason for increased productivity at home is **flexibility of work hours**; improved creativity was attributed to **flexibility of one's environment**.

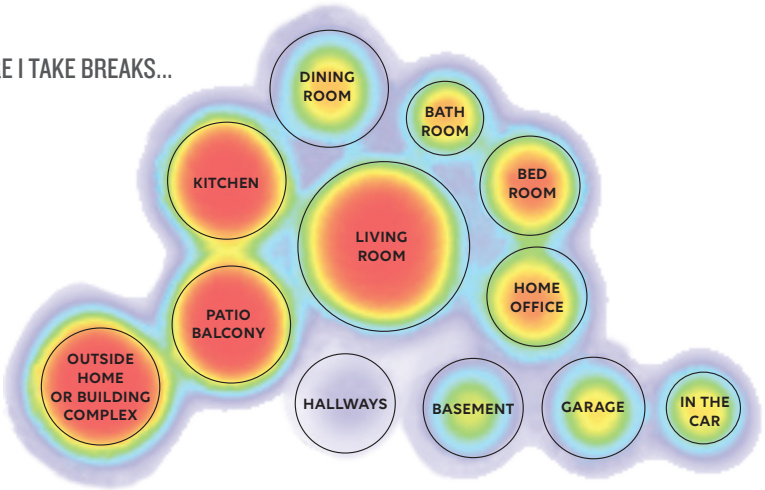
Self-reported spatial analysis of places where people take breaks, take meetings, or accomplish focused work shows the variety of spaces used for work at home—from the home office to the kitchen counter to the patio.

When it comes to comfort and control over sensory features of the work environment, home is a clear winner. Respondents report that the ability to adjust light and temperature levels, as well as access daylight and outdoor spaces, is much easier working from home.

WHERE I WORK...

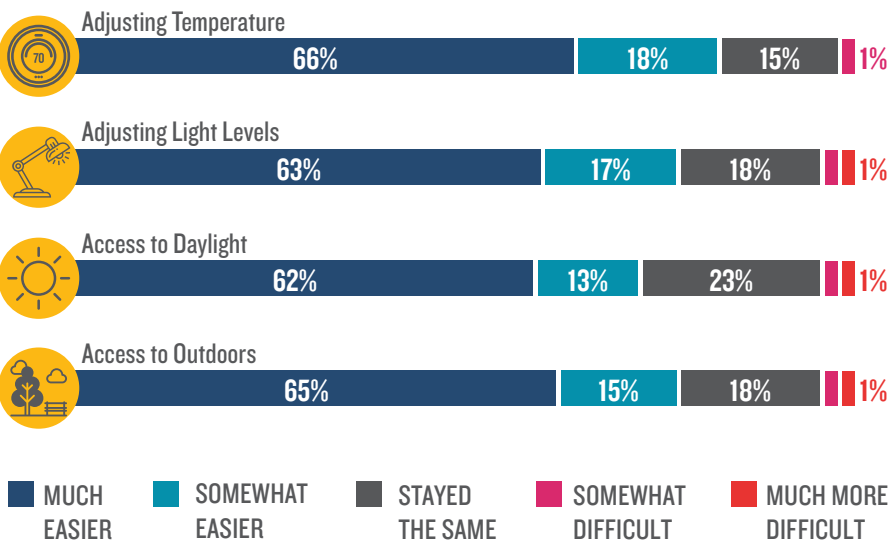


WHERE I TAKE BREAKS...



COMFORT AND CONTROL

How do these activities done while working from home compare to when you worked from your office?





2 QUALITY

Working from home has allowed people to take high-quality, restorative breaks. This control over one's own well-being is more important than ever.

REPLACING STRESS WITH DELIGHT

The commute to work was reported as the number one thing people don't miss about going to the workplace.

Qualitative analysis shows that the wasteful and stressful activity of commuting has been replaced by healthy and rejuvenating activities such as exercise, breakfast with family, getting more sleep, and getting more work done.



I have peace of mind being in a safe environment, and my **MENTAL STRESS IS REDUCED** due to lack of interruptions and stressful commute.



WHAT I DON'T MISS ABOUT MY WORKPLACE

LIGHT/TEMP LEVELS

19%

DISTRACTIONS

29%

COMMUTE

34%

REPLACED BY:



Family Time



Exercise



More Work



More Sleep

BREAKS: AN EPIPHANY

Qualitative analysis shows that people find breaks at home are far superior to breaks at work.

Checking on family members, relaxing on the bed, or getting in a quick exercise session are no longer relegated to before or after work; they can happen more often, and at any time.

DISTRIBUTION & FREQUENCY

VARIETY

Breaks at home include more than getting a cup of coffee, chatting with a colleague, or checking social media. They include healthy activities to recharge: getting outside, walking pets, exercising, cooking, eating, and spending time with family.

COMPLETE UNPLUGGING

Taking a break at home feels like completely unplugging while taking a break at work "still feels like part of work."

NO GUILT

Taking breaks when needed, without feeling observed or judged for not being at one's desk, is seen as a plus.



03 FELLOWSHIP

People appreciate the focus and control of working from home, but their primary motivation for returning to the office is being together.

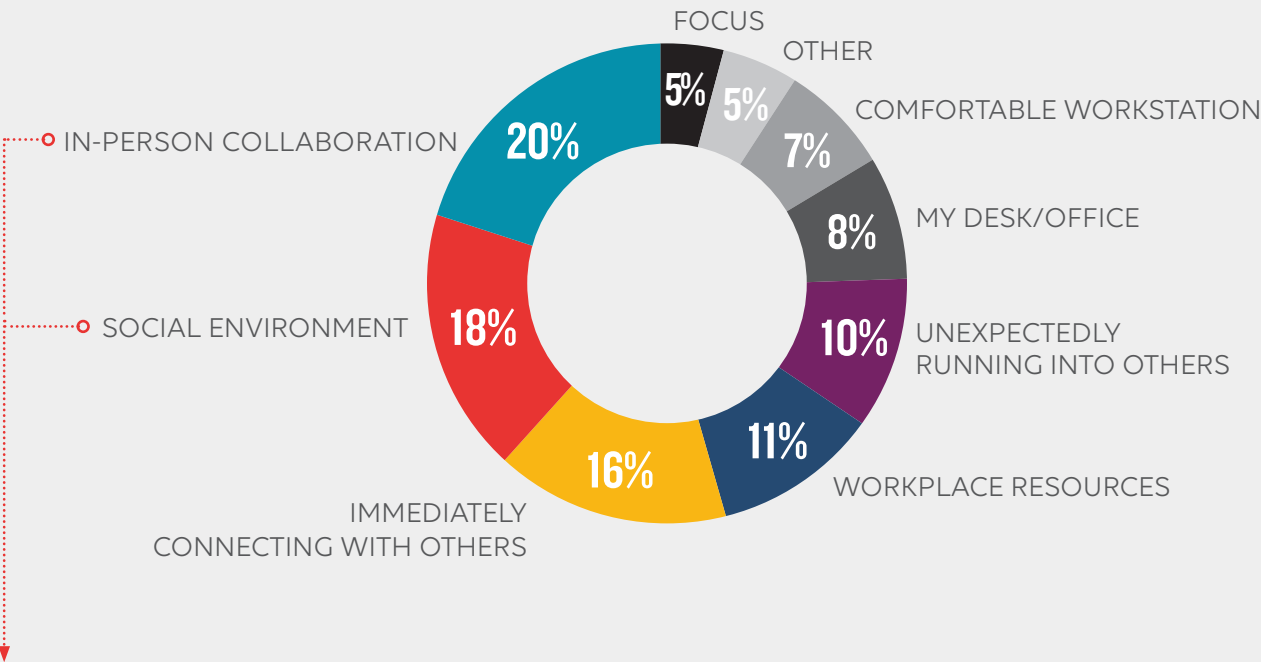
THE ESSENCE OF COLLABORATION

Survey participants report that the desire for being together is not merely emotional, but also operational. Ability to effectively engage in face-to-face collaboration, serendipitously run into colleagues, immediately access team members, and participate in workplace social rituals (company events, casual conversations, having lunch together, etc.) are top features people miss.

Consequently, maintaining social bonds with work friends, collaborating and connecting with team members, and accessing leadership has become more difficult.

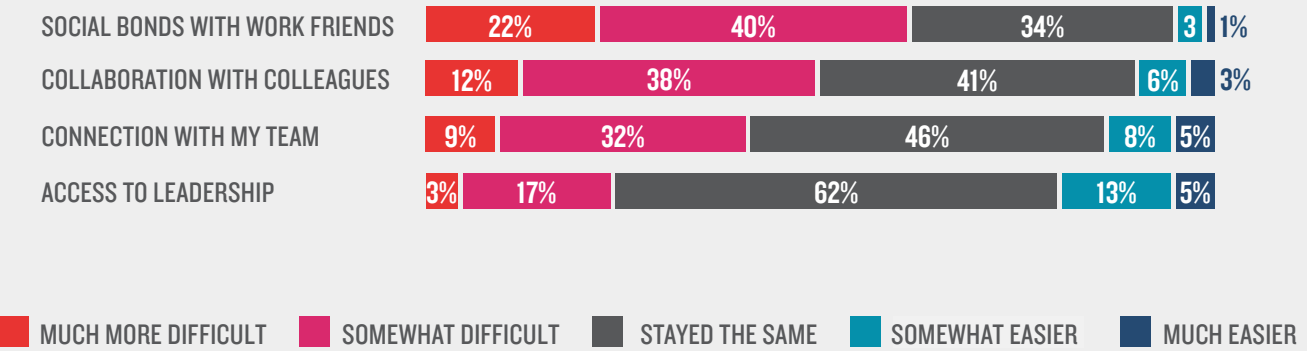
Being together allows for **MORE COLLABORATION**, and increases the ability to work toward common goals. I miss the face-to-face interaction in conversation.

WHAT I MISS MOST ABOUT MY WORKPLACE



RATING THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

How do these activities done while working from home compare to when you worked from your office?



ROWING THE BOAT TOGETHER

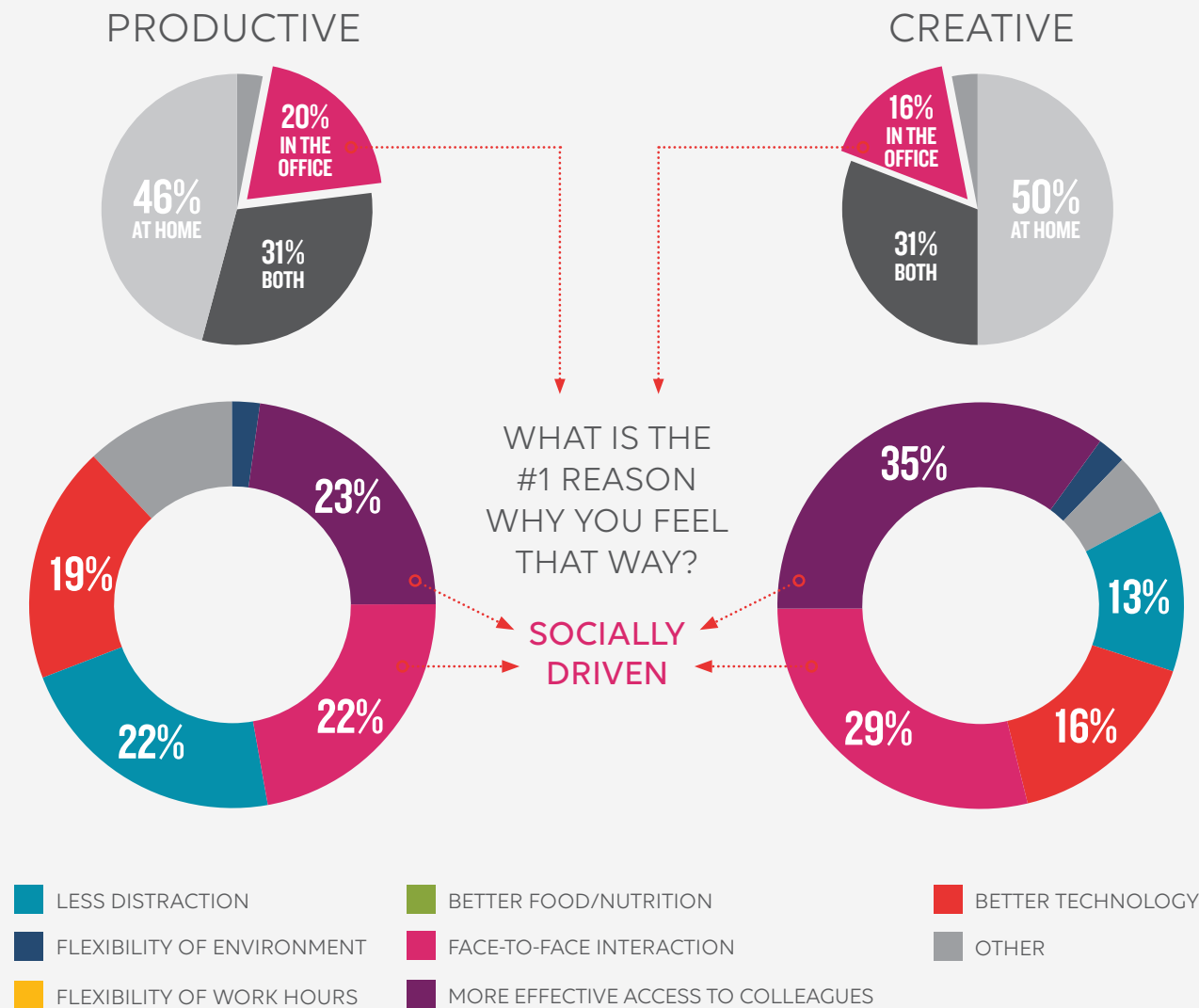


THE FUTURE WORKPLACE ISN'T ABOUT THIS.



PEOPLE COME TO THE WORKPLACE FOR THIS.

WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST...



MORE TECH-SAVVY DOESN'T MEAN LESS NEED FOR CONNECTION

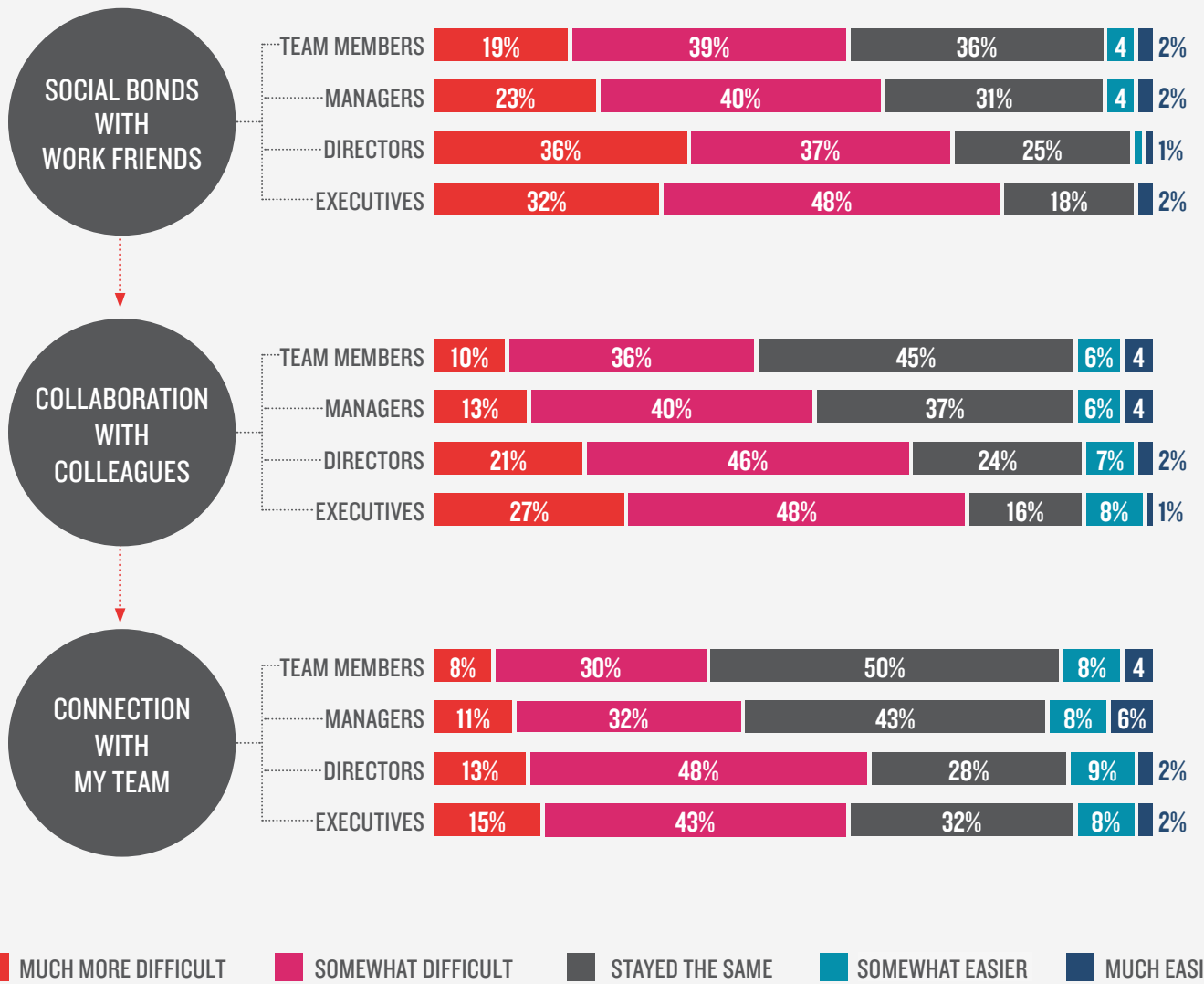
Even the most tech-savvy need connection. The survey analysis shows no relationship between the ability to use technology more effectively and social connectivity. People across all age groups and with varying levels of skill in using technology indicated that collaboration and sense of community happens more effectively in the workplace.

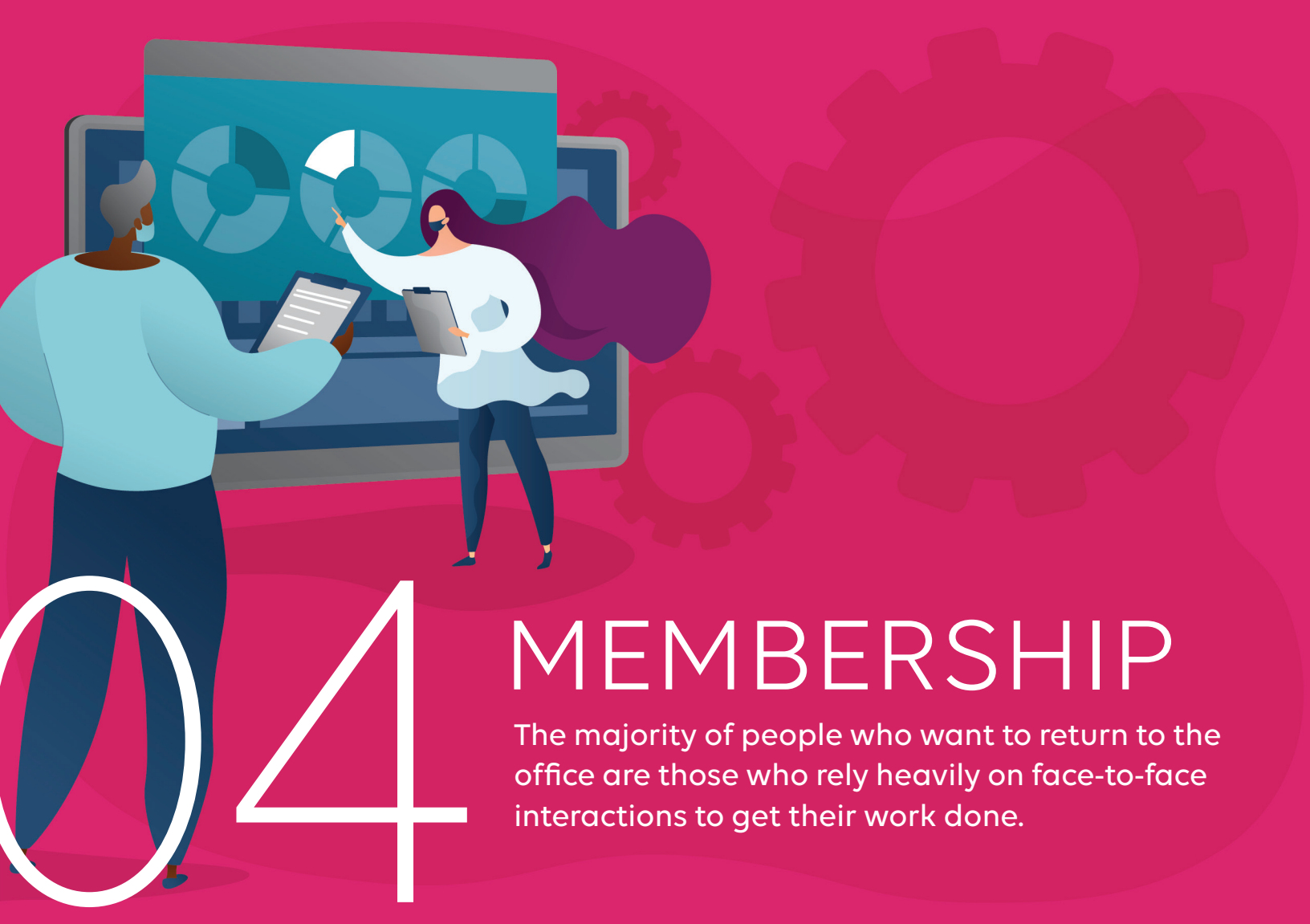
THE HIGHER UP YOU ARE, THE MORE CONNECTION YOU NEED

Our survey results suggest that people higher up in an organization report more difficulty staying engaged with the social life of the workplace. Managers more than team members, directors more than managers, and executives more than everybody else feel the need to be connected, and working from home hasn't done the job. This may not be the case long-term as people at all levels become more comfortable and learn how to stay connected while remote.

RATING THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT BY ROLE

How do these activities done while working from home compare to when you worked from your office?





4 MEMBERSHIP

The majority of people who want to return to the office are those who rely heavily on face-to-face interactions to get their work done.

THE NEED FOR FACE TIME

As shelter-in-place restrictions lift, employees who report higher levels of creativity and productivity in the office will be among the first user groups who will want to return when given the choice.

This population's main motivation for coming back is to restore connections with their team, benefit from face-to-face collaboration, and revive the sense of community in the workplace. However, this won't be successful if their team hasn't returned as well; being intentional about who is returning, and when, will be essential.

I miss discussing details or solutions while talking or drawing sketches, as well as actual **FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS TO DEVELOP IDEAS.**

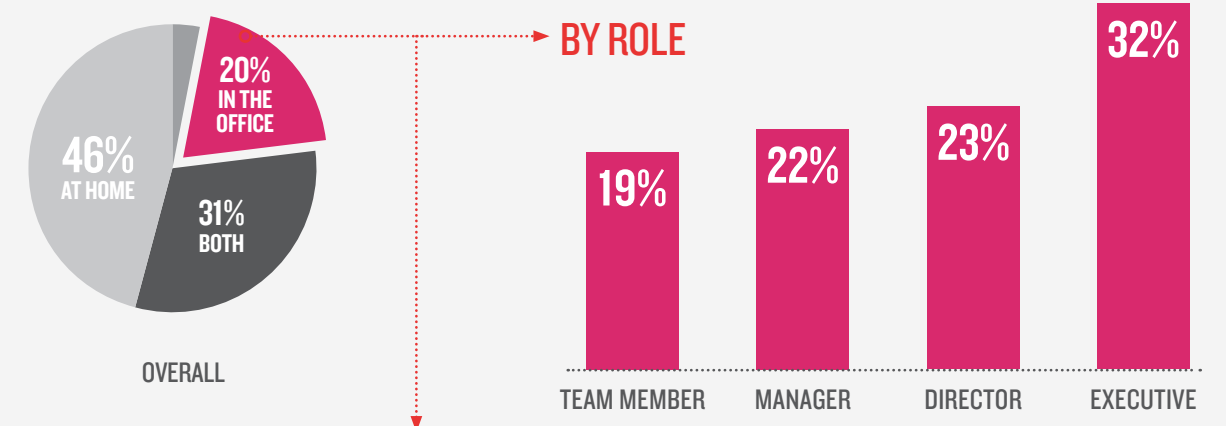
JOINING THE CLUB

As this first wave of employees settles on-site to rebuild their ties, they could potentially create a tightly knit team, allowing them to outperform their virtually connected counterparts and potentially marginalize those who are not on-site by attracting and retaining power, driving key decisions on projects, and even shaping the organization's culture. (This is particularly concerning if, as our data suggests, this first wave could include people at higher levels in the organization.)

Although 50% of employees are currently pro-working from home, they might rethink their position and rush to return as they see the 20% "early adopters" return to the office and establish these connections. The membership fee for joining the club—physical presence in the office—could supersede any concerns they have about their own health and safety, or the happiness they found working from home.

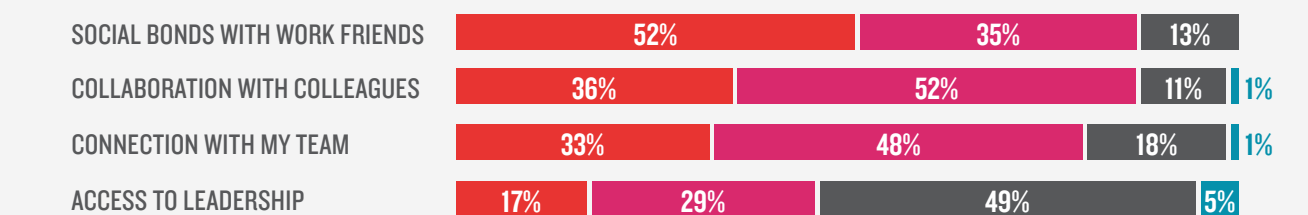
WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST PRODUCTIVE?

The 20% of people who feel more productive in the office struggle more with the social environment of work from home and will therefore likely be "early adopters".



RATING THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

How do these activities done while working from home compare to when you worked from your office?





05 RESILIENCE

People have adapted to working from home over time. This positive disruption has built a sense of personal resilience.

ADAPTING FOR THE FUTURE

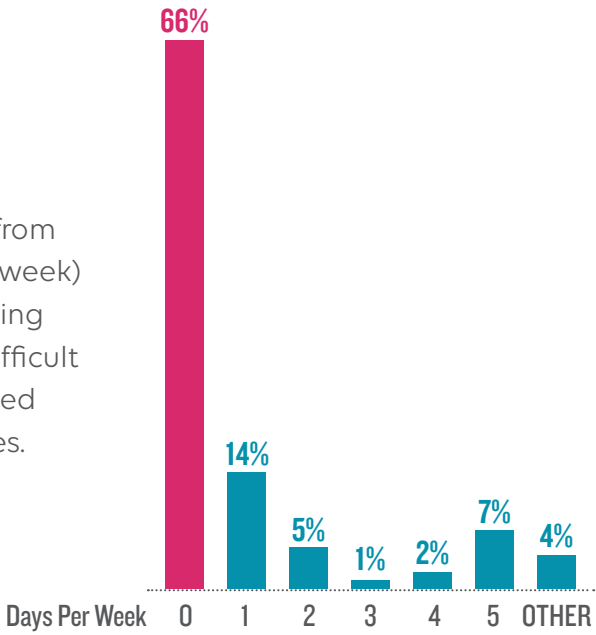
In the early of days working from home, people expressed struggle and skepticism. Concerns included dissolving work/home boundaries, evaluating team-members' accountability, receiving technology support, concentrating without interruption, and connecting with others. However, home quickly turned into many employees' favorite place to work. Those content with working from home benefited from three main types of resilience.

- **INFRASTRUCTURAL:** Technological support to mitigate the stress of accessing workplace resources.
- **CULTURAL:** Trust to meet goals and accomplish tasks without physical supervision.
- **INDIVIDUAL:** Establishing new routines and creating a dedicated work area at home.

Starting out everything was new and untried. There was a feeling that less would get done and meetings would be difficult. This quickly went away and now it is clear that **WE'RE ALL MORE PRODUCTIVE.**

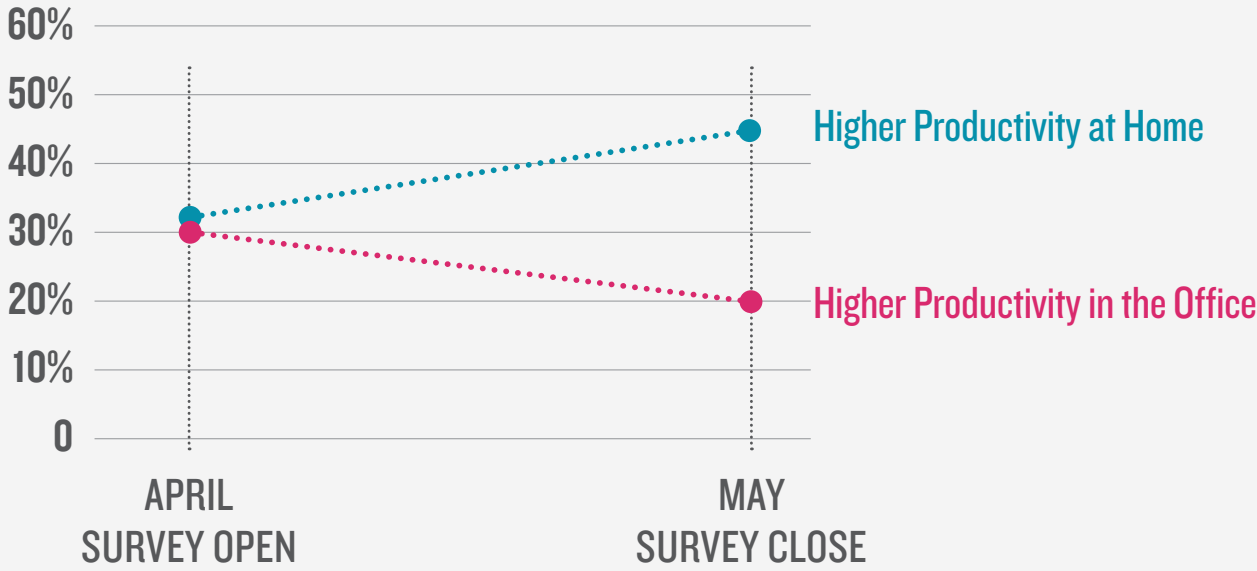
PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC, HOW MANY DAYS PER WEEK DID YOU WORK FROM HOME?

While most participants had little or no experience working from home prior to the pandemic (66% not at all, 14% one day per week) qualitative analysis showed a boost in appreciation for working remotely. Many participants reported that although it was difficult for them in the beginning, they were happy and often surprised they were able to adapt and eventually enjoy the advantages.



WHERE DO YOU FEEL MORE PRODUCTIVE: AT HOME OR IN THE OFFICE?

From the first week to the last week of the survey being open there was a significant difference among those who felt more productive at home over time.





Based on these insights, the future workplace needs to consider more than protocols for health and safety. People aren't likely to risk their personal well-being, comfort, or the flexibility of working from home to come to the office and sit in between panels and dividers. They will be coming back to the office to connect.

So, how might we create conditions for people to connect in a safe workplace environment?

PHYSICAL DESIGN

LICENSE TO AUTHOR THE WORKDAY

Flexibility of schedule and environment, as well as the ability to unplug when and how they want, are among the top features people appreciate about working from home, and conceivably their future workplace.

TRUE RESPITE AT THE OFFICE

The quality of breaks at home are far superior to what respondents called "guilty breaks" at the office. Consider spaces that encourage quality respite and opportunities to recharge.

SAVE SPACE FOR COLLABORATION

While limiting collaboration space may mitigate health concerns in the short-term, it could impact the quality of the work experience for many in the long-term. The quality and appeal of these spaces matter.

SAFE HUDDLE

Rather than incorporate permanent physical divisions with cubicles or offices for the health and safety of employees, reorganize individual workstations in communal configurations with proper distancing to facilitate face-to-face connection, and wellbeing.

HYBRID TEAMS

Working from home is not conducive to social connectivity, but it is also not going away. Explore solutions that afford key qualities of effective on-site collaboration: full-body presence, reading and expressing body language, and leaning in or standing up to brainstorm.

ONLY IN THE WORKPLACE

People are not eager to trade the comfort and safety of home, a nonexistent commute, new exercise routines, or more family time for traditional workplace offerings. Consider providing resources and experiences that can only be found in the workplace.



ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

A THIRD WAY

Resist the formation of one culture for those in the office and another for those who continue to work remotely, or even a hybrid that tries to replicate past ways of working. Instead consider creating a third way—an altogether new approach to work that prioritizes proactive and consistent communication, builds new social rituals, new modes and methods for collaboration, and new pathways for serendipitous connections.

ENGENDER TRUST

Employees are not going to unlearn the comfort and relative control gained while working from home. In addition to providing environments that support distinct activities—like heads-down focus, collaboration, and respite—consider policies and procedures that support flexibility and show trust in employees' ability to control their own workdays.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL

Workers have enjoyed the authenticity shown by the softening of personal boundaries with virtual meetings revealing people's homes, family members, pets, etc. Consider amplifying this sudden creation of a more empathetic culture by maintaining space for the personal within the professional environment.



SHORT-TERM STRATEGY

GUIDES AND TOOLS

Most organizations are in the midst of planning, or implementing their plans, for returning to the office in some form before the pandemic is resolved. The mechanics of mitigation are front of mind, for good reason. The following resources address some of these immediate concerns. (Click for links.)



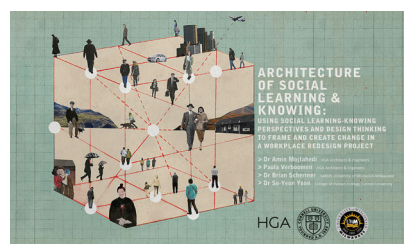
Redefining Workplace: a guide to return to the office safely, with thoughtful questions to think beyond the details about your unique needs as an organization.



A COVID-19 signage system to navigate the necessary shifts in behavior needed to keep ourselves and our colleagues well amidst a return to the workplace.



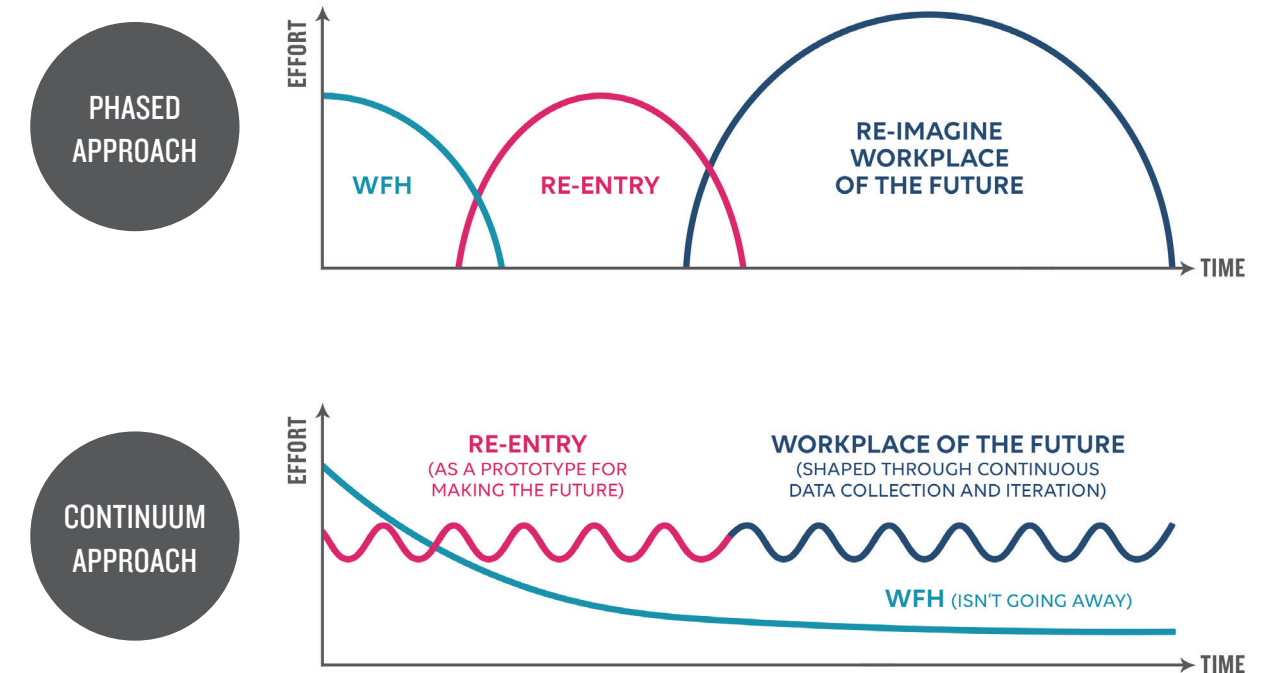
Our new podcast and articles from our workplace strategists and designers about navigating the multiple challenges and opportunities of our current environment.



Additional research: "The Architecture of Social Learning and Knowing," exploring workplace social interaction using sensor technology, was recognized with a 2018 Certificate of Research Excellence award from the Environmental Design Research Association.

LONG-TERM STRATEGY

MODEL FOR CHANGE



Working from home, re-entry, and designing the future workplace are not three distinct phases. Home will remain an integral part of many organizations' future work landscapes. Moreover, framing the re-entry itself as a prototype for shaping the future workplace allows us to see the process not as a highly taxing design exercise but as a natural evolution—a continuum that allows us to gradually scale, learn from, and iterate solutions.

Shaping the future workplace also requires organizational momentum and change. An employee-driven approach is empowering, and leverages the tacit knowledge and creative potential of employees to generate solutions that are tailored to specific organizational needs.

In an employee-driven model for change—much of which draws on the tenets of design thinking—we leverage data to uncover challenges, mobilize employees as changemakers, and develop new opportunities for transformation. We then use these factors to inform prototypes for change that are tested, improved based on what we learn, and scaled for the future.

[Read more about HGA's research-based approach to workplace strategy and design.](#)

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[Download the detailed survey results.](#)

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