THE FUTURE OF WORK

It took a global pandemic to spark a real shift in how and where we work, creating widespread acceptance of distributed and flexible work, and challenging past assumptions about the role of the office, productivity, and performance. Let’s explore how organizations can better understand and align with current trends to design a greater office for the future.

The new role of the physical office

A post-pandemic global survey conducted by Future Forum Pulse (MillerKnoll founding partner) found that workers who have full schedule flexibility are reporting 29% higher productivity and 53% greater ability to focus than workers with no ability to shift their schedule. A whopping 80% of employees surveyed want flexibility in **where** they work and 94% want flexibility in **when** they work. Being on the other side of things, there are lessons to be harnessed.

Although workers generally stayed productive, other aspects of the work experience suffered. The personal connection, collaboration and interaction that the office enabled are not as easily transferable to the home or elsewhere.

Current trends in data are proving flexible work arrangements are increasingly preferred, supporting the notion that employees are most productive when they are able to choose when and where to work. According to the FFP survey, including close to 11 000 workers, 65% of all workers say they would prefer dividing their time between working in-office and remotely (hybrid schedule). When asked what motivates them to come into the office, 74% of those surveyed said to ‘collaborate, build fellowship, and facilitate in-person meetings’. Contrastingly, 16% are seeking out a quiet space to focus on getting work done.

Many organizations are now considering how to best speak to the requirements of hybrid workers, creating better and more relevant spaces to support the experiences, interactions and personal connections of their employees. In other words, we have gone from an activity-based workplace, to one where we emphasize relationships and experiences. In doing so, it is useful to think about which needs and spaces an organization should cover and provide.

Community first

Community is at the heart of any workplace, making room for and strengthening relations across the organization. These spaces should serve to nurture and support the community, offering spaces that encourage interaction and help a diverse range of people connect.

Every space needs a social crossroads. Be it a canteen with tables with room for many and comfortable chairs, a lobby or reception with softly inviting lounge furniture—it is a casual focal point around which we gather for conversation, creative exchange and unexpected meetings. It is a place where people can work alone or together, or even use it as a touchdown space in of the Highbacks between meetings.

Groups at work

As collaboration becomes a crucial part of the workday, spaces for groups to meet, connect and share information are an increasingly vital part of the office.

Consider different spaces that speak to the wide-ranging needs of the workforce. A conference room offers a formal and consistent setting for information sharing without distraction with comfortable seating for long sessions, while workshop and meeting spaces are more casual and flexible settings with lighter chairs and tables on castors that allows the users create the space they need and seamlessly transition from individual to group work and smaller team activities.

Individual in focus

These days, many workers come into the office looking for a quiet space to focus and get work done, as well as staying connected to coworkers and being part of a greater whole when concentrating on a task. This fosters a need for privacy, quiet, and enclosed comfort that allows us to concentrate on the task ahead.

These spaces can be semi-closed with multiple Highbacks, enabling shelter for focused work without visual distraction, while enclosed focus rooms with single chairs and tables allow for immersive work in peace and quiet. A larger study hall-like setting at the Linear System Series invites people to be alone together while engaging in deep, productive work.

An ever-relevant addition to the contemporary workplace is spaces for rest and relaxation, embodying values of self-care and reflection in the office. These could be spaces that allow us to withdraw for a minute, catch a breath between meetings or make informal phone calls in one of the lounge chairs.