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HA6103 Dissertation: Independent Research Project

Beyond Office Walls: How does the shift to a hybrid work model
influence spatial design strategies in the UK?

Touleen Elawi

K2223557

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Fig 1. Wolfe (2023) Hybrid Work Setup Blending Remote and Collaborative Office Environments

Abstract

This dissertation investigates how the shift to a hybrid work model post-COVID-19 influences spatial design strategies in the UK, focusing on the evolving dynamics of workplace environments. Prompted by the rapid adoption of remote and hybrid work during the pandemic, the research examines how spatial design can reconcile flexibility, productivity, and well-being to meet the needs of a multigenerational workforce in a post-pandemic context.

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining primary research through a survey of employees at Britannia Pharmaceuticals Ltd with case studies of Spotify's London office and Framery's smart pods. The survey provided insights into employees' experiences of hybrid work, revealing its impact on workplace culture, well-being, and work-life balance. The case studies highlighted innovative spatial strategies, including Spotify's integration of home-like design elements to enhance collaboration and Framery's use of advanced technology to support adaptable workspaces.

Key findings reveal that hybrid work has redefined workplace design, blending the comfort and autonomy of remote work with the functionality and collaboration of office environments. However, challenges such as overstimulation, hygiene concerns, and generational differences demand inclusive design strategies. This research underscores the transformative potential for hybrid work to inspire adaptive spatial design that bridges the gap between the home and office.

Keywords: Hybrid Work, Spatial Design, Post-pandemic, Flexibility, Well-being, COVID-19, Remote Work

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Introduction

“The pandemic has significantly changed how we work and the way we work” (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 1), shaping my personal experiences as a student and my aspirations as a future designer. The concept of going “Beyond office walls” signifies a profound shift in how we perceive and design the workplace, moving away from traditional and static office environments. My interest in workplace design emerged during my design practice, where I explored themes of adaptability, user experience, and workplace psychology. However, it was not until the COVID-19 pandemic that this interest became remarkably personal. Having experienced studying remotely and now adapting to a hybrid model, splitting time between online learning and in-person sessions, I want to understand its future implications, both as someone entering the workforce and as a designer who may one day shape such hybrid spaces. Through this research, I aim to explore how a hybrid work model can navigate the evolving dynamics of post-pandemic work by bridging the gaps between home and office, productivity and collaboration, and alienation and well-being. By critically analysing spatial design strategies, this dissertation aims to address the diverse needs and challenges inherent in these shifts. This topic is particularly important as it redefines workplace design in a post-pandemic context, challenging designers to create spaces that are both adaptable and innovative.

“In 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic abruptly halted office attendance, necessitating a fundamental revaluation of the workplace” (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 1). This unprecedented public health crisis led to prolonged lockdowns in major cities worldwide, accelerating a widespread adoption of remote work practices, the

repercussions of which are still unfolding (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 8).

Organisations are reconceptualising the office's role to prioritise collaboration, employee well-being, and adaptability to evolving work patterns as they adjust to the post-pandemic 'new normal.' The hybrid work model has since become an option, offering greater flexibility and enhancing autonomy among employees (Surya Gunanta Tarigan, Khalid Abdul Mannan and Uddin, 2023). Before the pandemic, few organisations had considered the possibility of employees working remotely (Surya Gunanta Tarigan, Khalid Abdul Mannan, and Uddin, 2023); therefore, hybrid working is not a novel concept, but the pandemic served as a catalyst for its rapid adoption. Hybrid work allows employees to structure their workweek across multiple environments, balancing time between the office, home, and "in-between" or "third" spaces, such as a cafe or coworking space (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 106). Technological advancements have facilitated this shift by enabling various working environments and further narrowing the gap between individuals' professional and personal lives (Gillen, 2019, p. 58).

This study explores how evolving employee needs and societal expectations in the post-pandemic era shape a hybrid work model, influencing spatial design strategies that balance flexibility, productivity, and collaboration. Through a critical analysis of Spotify's London Office and Framery's smart pods, the study evaluates innovative spatial design solutions tailored to hybrid working environments. Spotify's office was selected for its emphasis on integrating home-like comforts to foster collaboration and enhance employee well-being. Whereas Framery's smart pods exemplify the use of advanced technology to support focused complementary approaches, offering valuable insights into diverse workplace strategies. This research further explores

how spatial strategies can respond to the diverse needs of a multigenerational workforce, including Generation Z, Millennials, and Baby Boomers. Recognising the generational nuances of workplace expectations is critical to ensuring inclusivity; understanding who occupies the workspace and their varying priorities is a fundamental consideration for developing effective design strategies that align with evolving organisational goals.

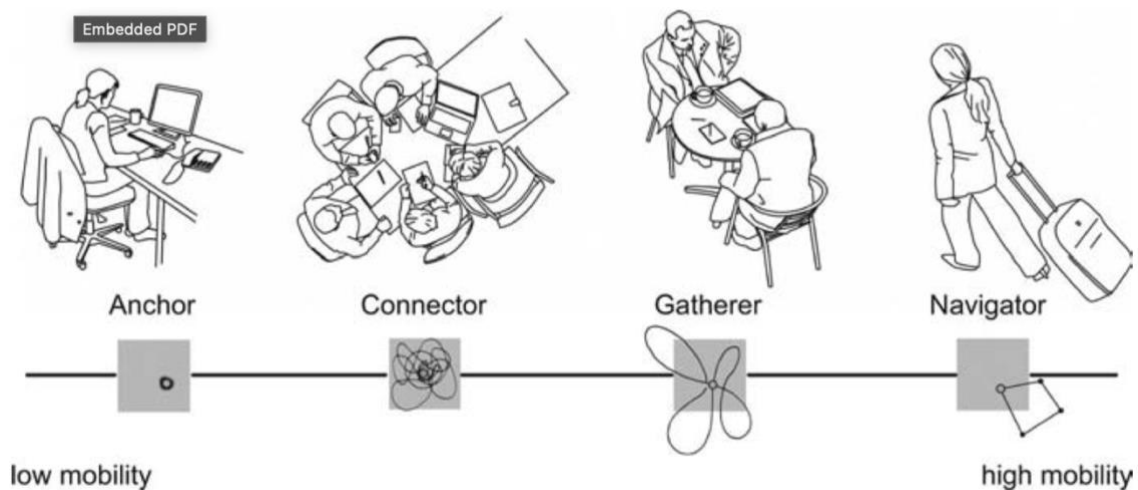


Fig 2. Greene and Myerson (2011) Four Typologies of Knowledge Workers

Understanding knowledge workers is crucial for this research, as their diverse roles and work patterns are essential to consider when developing spatial design strategies that support the flexibility, collaboration, and adaptability required in a hybrid work model. Drucker's theory of 'knowledge work,' introduced in 1962, proposed that work is transitioning from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based one, necessitating changes in office design (Saval, 2014, p. 185). This type of work emphasises theoretical competence and adaptability over rigid processes or routines

(Greene and Myerson, 2011). Knowledge workers are categorised into four typologies: anchors, who are conventional office-based professionals who maintain a steady presence, often dedicating most of their time to their desk; Connectors, who divide their time between personal workspace and other locations; gatherers, who focus on external networks and relationships, often dedicating a significant portion of their week to external activities; and navigators, who operate as guests within their own workplace, with low on-site presence and brief desk times (Greene and Myerson, 2011).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of how hybrid work is perceived and adapted within organisations, this research considered organisations, such as Britannia Pharmaceuticals Ltd, a company operating in a hybrid schedule of three days in-office and two days working from home. The study aimed to explore how employees navigated the hybrid work model, examining their experiences, challenges, and strategies for adaptation. A survey questionnaire was employed as the primary research method, targeting two hierarchical groups within the organisation: senior leadership and junior employees. By incorporating perspectives from both decision-makers and those directly impacted by hybrid work policies, the research captured a multi-dimensional perspective on hybrid work practices. The survey responses shed light on the design and lived experience of hybrid work policies, revealing their impact on key aspects like workplace culture, social interaction, resource provision, well-being, and work-life balance. These findings contribute to the evolving discourse on hybrid work, offering critical considerations for spatial design and workplace strategies in the post-pandemic period.

Chapter 1

Living Room to Boardroom: The Hybrid Workspaces Debate

As we progress towards greater flexibility in choosing how, where, and when to work, the spatial design of office environments becomes increasingly significant (Kursty Groves and Marlow, 2017, p. 109). The COVID-19 pandemic forced businesses across the UK to adopt remote work for extended periods (Knight Frank, n.d.); this unforeseen shift compelled businesses to reassess the value of their office environments and adapt them to accommodate the evolving needs of a post-pandemic workforce (Surya Gunanta Tarigan, Khalid Abdul Mannan and Uddin, 2023). In response to this shift, a hybrid working model emerged (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 103). This hybrid model emphasised enhanced autonomy for employees while also necessitating an integral redesign of workspaces to accommodate hybrid schedules; the redesigns provide an opportunity to evaluate the office's role in facilitating productivity and collaboration (Surya Gunanta Tarigan, Khalid Abdul Mannan and Uddin, 2023).

This chapter examines the hybrid work model that has emerged following COVID-19, highlighting its dual significance in enhancing and complicating the development of spatial design strategies in the UK.

Balancing Productivity and Collaboration in a Hybrid Work Model

Remote work has become a subject of ongoing debate, particularly regarding its impact on employee productivity compared to traditional office-based work (Arata, Masaki Sugiuchi and Shun Kawakubo, 2024). Research suggests that remote work has the potential to enhance productivity by minimising workplace distractions and enabling employees to focus more effectively on their individual tasks (The Oxford Group, 2023). Williamson and Colley (2022) support this, noting that nearly three in five employees found themselves more productive when working from home. One participant said, “Productivity is much higher when working from home, as our open-plan office is too noisy, with too many people, making it very difficult to concentrate.” While open-plan offices aim to promote collaboration, a process that involves working with others to produce and achieve a shared goal (Kursty Groves and Marlow, 2017, p. 130), they often restrict individual performance due to excessive noise and constant interruptions (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 185). Furthermore, the imbalance between individual productivity and collaboration in a hybrid work model underscores the need for innovative spatial design strategies.

Implementing activity-based working (ABW) has the potential to create adaptable workspaces that support both focused work and collaboration. Introduced by Dutch consultant Erik Veldhoen, ABW moves away from the traditional ‘one-desk-per-person’ approach, instead providing flexible workspaces tailored to support specific activities (Kursty Groves and Marlow, 2017, p. 29).



Fig 3. Marlow (2016) Collaborative Workspace with Vibrant LEGO Displays

The LEGO Group, founded by Ole Kirk Christiansen in 1932, was one of the first companies in the UK to strategically implement ABW principles; this approach has since gained widespread popularity in countries like Australia and the Netherlands (Kursty Groves and Marlow, 2017, p. 26-28). The LEGO Group London office features flexible seating and diverse work environments, including quiet zones that replicate the distraction-free settings of remote work and collaborative areas designed to foster teamwork and innovation (Kursty Groves and Marlow, 2017, p. 28-31). While ABW predates the emergence of a hybrid work model and has long facilitated task-oriented workspaces, its integration within hybrid schedules enables organisations to balance in-office and remote work arrangements, contributing to an improvement in overall productivity (Arata, Masaki Sugiuchi, and Shun Kawakubo, 2024). Key features of the LEGO's office design demonstrate this balance. For instance, the communal area (Fig 3) fosters informal meetings, encourages creative interaction, and enhances employee engagement. The use of LEGO sets further

enhances creativity while reinforcing the company's brand identity and values, with employees building LEGO models during meetings (Kursty Groves and Marlow, 2017, p. 28). Simultaneously, spaces designed for focused work, like the enclosed 'do-not-disturb' zones (Fig 4), replicate the privacy and concentration typically associated with remote work (Kursty Groves and Marlow, 2017, p. 31).

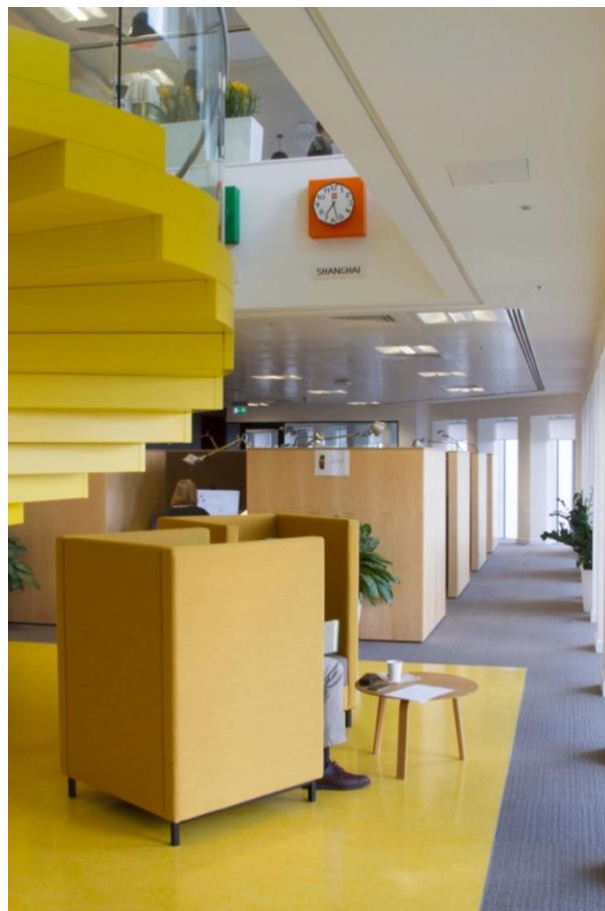


Fig 4. Marlow (2016) Quiet Workspace with Private Seating Areas

However, while remote work is frequently acknowledged for enhancing productivity, it has also revealed limitations that could reduce its overall effectiveness (Surya

Gunanta Tarigan, Khalid Abdul Mannan, and Uddin, 2023). One notable disadvantage of remote work is the rise in societal loneliness, especially during the pandemic when prolonged lockdowns limited social interactions (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 161). Traditionally, the workplace has been essential in facilitating the development of social connections and professional networks (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 161). While remote work offers the benefits of reduced distractions and fewer interruptions, which are essential for enhancing productivity, these same conditions frequently intensify feelings of loneliness and disconnection. Myerson and Ross (2022, p. 161) assert that there is an intrinsic link between workplace well-being and loneliness, and that experiencing increased loneliness when working remotely can negatively impact an individual's overall well-being. Additionally, Kursty Groves and Marlow (2017, p. 127) argue that meaningful engagement primarily relies on two key elements: interaction and collaboration. They assert that these elements play a crucial role in nurturing innovative ideas, which are rarely the result of individual efforts. According to Myerson and Ross (2022, p. 33) ideas tend to emerge during collaborative interactions as opposed to environments where employees feel isolated at their desks. Therefore, the absence of in-person collaboration in remote work can limit productivity and innovation. While ABW offers a chance to balance the distraction-free nature of remote work with the necessity for collaboration, it is not without its limitations. The transition from individually assigned desks to flexible workspaces as part of the ABW approach has raised concerns, including diminished privacy and a weakened sense of belonging; these issues suggest that ABW as a spatial design strategy might unknowingly reduce productivity (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 163).

Flexibility Redefined in The Pursuit of Economic Efficiency

The shift to a hybrid work model provides businesses with the potential to enhance economic efficiency through the reduction of costs associated with office space and overheads, as a smaller number of employees need to be present onsite (The Oxford Group, 2023). This shift aligns with the key principles of capitalism, an economic system that prioritises profit maximisation through cost reduction and resource optimisation (Sarwat and Ahmed Saber, 2015). Hill (2022) highlights that chief financial officers commend the shift to remote work for reducing one of the major fixed costs for businesses; implementing a partial work from home schedule can decrease in-office staff presence by up to 20%. This shift can lead to reduced operational costs and prompts a critical evaluation of workspace utilisation strategies. Instead of maintaining traditional layouts with designated desks for each employee, Myerson and Ross (2022, p. 107) emphasise that the separation of employees from designated desks enables the utilisation of spaces only when required, therefore, promoting an efficient system. For instance, employees can utilise work areas as needed, allowing different employees to access the same areas at different times. This approach increases occupancy rates from around 50% in a typical office layout to between 80-90%, significantly improving the cost efficiency of office space (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 107). The financial implications of these adjustments are profound; increasing occupancy rates and eliminating underutilised spaces can lead to a reduction in real estate costs by at least 30%. These savings are significant for organisations, as lowering overheads has an immediate effect on profitability (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p.107).



Fig 5. Marlow (2016) Hot Desking Area with Bold Graphics and Collaborative Design

However, the concept of shared workspace arrangements, often referred to as ‘hot-desking,’ a term originating from the Royal Navy where sailors ‘hot-bunked’ in a space and individuals were crowded into smaller boxes to save money, has faced considerable criticism concerning its design and implementation (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 107). This concept has been adopted by organisations such as LEGO as part of their activity-based working model, with hot-desking providing a clear example of how open-plan layouts with unassigned desks operate in practice (Fig 5), allowing employees to choose their workspace daily. While this approach seeks to improve occupancy rates and reduce fixed costs, it often results in work environments that come across as impersonal and overly focused on cost reduction (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 107). This could result in employees experiencing a diminished sense of ownership and stability linked to their designated workspaces. Moreover, the increasing use of flexible shared arrangements has led employees to

live in anticipation of the next layoff, resulting in a transformation of many workplaces into environments characterised by anxiety (Anne Helen Petersen and Warzel, 2022, p.18). Additionally, “This is the dark promise of flexibility,” claim Anne Helen Petersen and Warzel (2022, p. 18), the flexibility of allowing employees to work on their own schedule, with no labour protections. Furthermore, the lack of regulated work schedules blurs the boundary between professional and personal life, leading to an expectation of constant availability (Surya Gunanta Tarigan, Khalid Abdul Mannan and Uddin, 2023). Therefore, although individuals often portray flexibility as empowering for employees, it has significantly transformed workplaces into environments marked by instability and precarity (Anne Helen Petersen and Warzel, 2022, p. 19), leaving employees vulnerable to exploitation.

It is evident that the emergence of a hybrid work model has had dual impacts on spatial design strategies. While it promotes flexibility, efficiency, and collaboration, it also introduces challenges such as loneliness, instability, and a lack of personalisation. This suggests that addressing these tensions thoughtfully has the potential to make the hybrid model a catalyst for positive and innovative development in spatial design.

Chapter 2

The Home Within: Hybrid Spaces for a Changing Workforce

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to remote work; Myerson and Ross (2022, p. 204) noted that, during lockdown, 45 - 50% of employees expressed happiness with continuing to work from home, while the majority of others preferred a hybrid work schedule. Notably, only 5 - 7% wanted to return to the pre-lockdown workplace; these figures suggest a profound shift in workplace expectations, with many employees embracing the comfort of working from home.

This chapter examines how organisations have responded to the evolving hybrid work model, which has reshaped workplace culture and workforce dynamics. In adapting to these changes, many have integrated home-like elements into conventional office spaces. Through an in-depth analysis of case studies, this chapter highlights strategies and innovations that balance comfort and functionality, demonstrating how these approaches have redefined workplace design in the UK.

Spotify Office, London

Spotify's office design exemplifies an attentive transformation in response to the evolving dynamics of work environments following the adoption of remote work. Recognising the benefits of domestic environments, the design incorporates elements that foster a 'homely' atmosphere, enhancing well-being and fostering a sense of belonging among employees (Fairs, 2021).



Fig 6. Fairs (2021) Informal Meeting Area with Modular Seating for Collaborative Discussions

For instance, the lounge area (Fig 6), featuring vibrant modular seating and soft furnishings, exemplifies a strategic design that fosters informal interactions. Employees' relaxed postures and casual seating arrangements highlight the intent behind this communal space. Additionally, the act of some employees removing their shoes (Fig 6) underscores the comfort and flexibility embedded in the design,

reflecting a purposeful initiative to foster a homely and inclusive atmosphere within the workplace.

However, the emphasis on comfort raises questions regarding its broader impacts on hygiene, concerning the cleanliness and behaviour of employees (Wyatt, 2019).

Individuals using the communal spaces without footwear (Fig 6) may increase the risk of dirt transmission and odours, potentially leading to unsanitary surroundings and an increased health and safety risk within the organisation (Wyatt, 2019). Such practices could compromise environmental hygiene and the comfort of colleagues, potentially leading to discomfort when using the space; in a shared environment, it is crucial for all individuals to maintain personal hygiene standards, thereby promoting a healthier environment for everyone (Wyatt, 2019). From a broader perspective, employees seated comfortably with their shoes removed (Fig 6) could be perceived as unprofessional, particularly in the presence of clients or visitors. Wyatt (2019) highlights that maintaining a level of personal cleanliness serves as a measure of professionalism. Moreover, the casual behaviour of employees relaxing could potentially compromise the company's professional image by indicating an absence in formality and established standards.

Additionally, the modular seating (Fig 6) creates a sense of spatial dynamism, aimed at encouraging collaboration among employees. This approach aligns with Myerson and Ross's (2022, p. 63) assertion that engaging and stimulating environments foster a sense of belonging.

However, while such design strategies enhance collaboration, they can also pose challenges, particularly concerning overstimulation and workplace stress. For example, the spatial density depicted in the sunken lounge area (Fig 6), where multiple employees gather, may lead to feelings of crowding and dissatisfaction. Valipoor and Bosch (2021) suggest that high spatial density can negatively impact employees' stress levels, thereby impairing their ability to perform effectively. Furthermore, flexible arrangements (Fig 6) often result in disorganised spaces, which further exacerbate stress levels and hinder productivity (Valipoor and Bosch, 2021).

Workplace stress can also stem from environmental factors such as noise and inadequate lighting, both of which are significant contributors to overstimulation and decreased productivity (Valipoor and Bosch, 2021). Spotify's office design demonstrates a thoughtful approach to mitigating these challenges by addressing employees' sensory needs. Sonya Simmonds, Spotify's head of workplace design and build, emphasises the essential use of fabrics and soft furnishings to absorb sound, thereby improving acoustics and minimising distractions (Fairs, 2021). This corresponds with the benefits of remote work environments, outlined in chapter 1, where reduced distractions contributed to improved concentration. Spotify's office achieves comparable advantages by implementing a strategic approach to spatial design and material selection, effectively fostering a homely atmosphere within the workplace.

Moreover, Spotify addresses lighting related stress by strategically incorporating large windows (Figs 6 & 7); these windows are designed to maximise natural light and offer outdoor views, reflecting preferences commonly noted among remote

workers who prefer to work near a window (Fairs, 2021). Shifting focus to individual comfort, the inclusion of 'cosy little nooks' (Fig 7), as described by Simmonds, creates spaces intentionally designed to emulate the comforts of home, allowing employees to work quietly and comfortably (Fairs, 2021). The choice of furniture facilitates relaxation and supports independent work by enabling employees to personalise their work posture and level of engagement. This enhancement of physical and psychological comfort through a sense of control is underscored by Kursty Groves and Marlow (2017, p. 101), who argue that employee satisfaction and performance improve when employees perceive a degree of autonomy over their surroundings.



Fig 7. Fairs (2021) Informal Lounge Area Designed for Relaxation

However, while 'cosy little nooks' are aimed to provide comfort and personalisation, they are not universally effective due to the diverse workstyles and preferences of

employees. According to Bell (2016, p. 104), not everyone has a work style that allows frequent access to alternative flexible spaces. Furthermore, workers whose roles require a fixed workspace may struggle to navigate environments designed for mobility. Among knowledge workers, this is particularly relevant to anchors, who typically prefer stable, personalised environments where they can focus without the need to frequently relocate or contend with shared, flexible spaces (Greene and Myerson, 2011). For instance, the use of 'cosy little nooks' may inadvertently result in these workers finding their preferred spaces occupied, impacting their productivity. Alongside these home-like spaces, Spotify's office integrates a traditional workspace, featuring conventional desks and collaborative areas within an open-plan layout (Fairs, 2021). This balanced approach merges the comfort of domestic environments with the practicality of a modern office.

Framery Smart Pods

This discussion builds on the analysis of workplace evolution in response to COVID-19, now examining how the pandemic accelerated the adoption of a technology driven working model (Kudyba, 2020). Traditionally office spaces were characterised by their static and uniform nature (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 11); however, the unprecedented global transition to remote work, driven by mandatory COVID-19 restrictions, compelled businesses to adopt advanced digital technologies into daily operations (Nagel, 2020). This transition has changed workplaces into 'smart' environments, integrating systems that track occupancy and improve user experiences (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 11). These advancements illustrate the evolution of workplaces into responsive, technology enabled environments that address the expectations of a hybrid work model. Wormald (2024), argues that as employees have become used to the comfort and autonomy of remote work, workplace culture is unlikely to return to its pre-pandemic state. Consequently, office spaces, originally designed for a fully in-person workforce, must adapt to meet the evolving expectations of employees, particularly regarding comfort and flexibility.

One prominent response to this shift is the introduction of working pods and 'phone booths', which provide acoustic privacy and comfort akin to home workspaces while maintaining the structure of the workplace. Framery's smart working pods take this concept further by integrating intelligent features such as adaptable lighting, ventilation, and acoustics, as well as seamless integration with the digital office ecosystem, marking a significant step toward technologically advanced workplace solutions (Wormald, 2024). These features address the demands of the hybrid work

model, as organisations increasingly require soundproof and technologically advanced workplaces to facilitate successful virtual collaboration, especially given research projecting that by the end of 2021, 30% of the global workforce would work remotely several days per week (Tikka, 2021). Framery six (Fig 8), a smart working pod designed to accommodate up to 6 individuals, offering an enclosed space conducive to focused and collaborative meetings. The pod's ergonomic seating ensures comfort during extended meetings, while its advanced acoustic design, which achieves a speech level reduction of 30dB, ensures both privacy and noise mitigation within the wider workplace (Wormald, 2024). The transparent glass walls contribute to a sense of openness and visual connectivity, while maintaining the functional zoning, which seamlessly integrates into the open-plan office to balance both individual focus and group interaction.



Fig 8. Wormald (2024) Framery six, the smart room for up to 6 people



Fig 9. Wormald (2024) Framery One, the smart one-person office pod

Framery one (Fig 9), a smart pod designed for individual focused work, which stands in contrast to the collaborative focus of Framery six. Furthermore, Framery one emphasises individual productivity by offering a private ergonomic workspace that supports focused tasks. The adjustable electric desk, ergonomic seat, and dual footrests (Fig 9) are designed to enhance comfort by prioritising ergonomic working positions (Framery, 2024). The features of the transparent glass doors that enhances openness, effectively reduces the sense of isolation often associated with remote work. This design effectively integrates remote and in-office work, enabling employees to concentrate on tasks without distractions while maintaining a visual and social connection to their office environment. The smart pods enhance the hybrid work experience by facilitating real-time virtual collaboration with remote colleagues. Employees have the capability to engage in confidential video calls or team discussions within the privacy of the pod, leveraging the office's technological infrastructure (Wormald, 2024).

However, while Framery one (Fig 9) offers the advantages of privacy and an individual focused work environment, its compact and self-contained design can exacerbate feelings of claustrophobia for some employees, potentially increasing stress and anxiety, thereby negatively impacting overall well-being (Karle, 2022). Furthermore, although the pod is designed to support distraction-free tasks often associated with remote work, its restrictive spatial characteristics can cause discomfort for certain individuals, reducing their ability to perform effectively. Another critical issue relates to safety concerns. The integration of power, charging, and lighting systems within the pods, if not properly managed, poses potential hazards. In particular, the lack of compatibility with building sprinkler systems or the absence of dedicated fire suppression mechanisms could turn the pods into significant liabilities during a fire. These shortcomings not only endanger employees within the pods but also raise broader safety risks for the workplace (UL Solutions, 2019).



Fig 10. Pancy (2023) Workspace Featuring Private Meeting Pods and Open Seating Areas

In the wake of the pandemic, Berenberg, a prominent banking firm, recognised the increasing need to provide employees with greater choice and flexibility in their work environments (Workplace creations, 2022). To address this, they expanded their office space, prioritising the creation of an adaptive workplace. Collaborating with the design team at workplace creations, Berenberg incorporated Frammer pods into their design. These pod (Fig 10), demonstrate their utility in facilitating focused work through soundproof spaces complementing the open-plan nature of the office. The figure illustrates how the office integrates multi-functional spaces, such as the breakout space where colleagues are seen engaging, alongside the pods, which are actively being used by individuals for focused tasks (Pancy, 2023). Berenberg clearly underscores the practical application of pods within a real-world setting, balancing collaborative and individual work needs in a flexible, adaptable workplace design.

The evolution of a hybrid work model is transforming office design, shifting from conventional layouts to spaces that prioritise flexibility, comfort, and advanced technology. Case studies, such as Spotify's home-inspired office and Framery's innovative smart pods, illustrate how organisations are redefining their workspaces to align with evolving employee priorities, including autonomy, well-being, and collaboration. However, these advancements present several challenges, such as balancing professionalism with comfort, ensuring hygiene and safety, and accommodating diverse workstyles. Ultimately, the hybrid model is not merely reshaping physical environments; it is catalysing a fundamental transformation in workplace culture, redefining how organisations function and adapt to contemporary work demands.

Chapter 3

Designing for Generations:

The workforce has never been so diverse (Muniz, Jones and Murray, 2024); to understand how the hybrid work model emerging post-COVID-19 influences spatial design strategies, it is essential for organisations to acknowledge the multigenerational workforce they employ. Generational theory offers a framework for this analysis, highlighting those individuals born within the same period experience similar formative influences from social, political, and cultural factors, resulting in shared preferences and behaviours (Muniz, Jones and Murray, 2024).

As hybrid work reshapes traditional office norms, the varying expectations of generations like Gen Z, Millennials, and Baby Boomers require careful consideration. Each generation brings its own unique approach to work. This chapter explores the impact of these differences on hybrid environments and discusses how spatial design strategies can evolve to accommodate a multigenerational workforce, providing effective solutions for the evolving hybrid work model.

Generational Dynamics

Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2012, is the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital era, resulting in their significant proficiency with technology; making up a quarter of the global workforce, many of whom were hired and inducted during the pandemic, facilitating their rapid adaptation to a hybrid work model (Myerson and Ross, 2022, p. 180). Outlined in Chapter 1, the flexibility of hybrid work enhances autonomy by allowing individuals to choose where, how, and when they work, which aligns with Gen Z's priority of setting clear boundaries between personal and professional lives when seeking employment (Nick, 2021). However, the remote aspect of hybrid work increases the risk of loneliness among Gen Z, limiting opportunities for support from colleagues and management (Caroline et al., 2022). According to research (Chomałowska and Janiak-Rejno, 2022), excessive screen time further diminishes interactions among co-workers. Furthermore, insufficient supervision and guidance can hinder Gen Z's early career development, underscoring the necessity for spatial strategies that integrate mentorship hubs and collaborative zones. The analysis of Chapter 2 on Spotify illustrated how informal collaborative spaces and flexible layouts can diminish feelings of loneliness, thereby encouraging active interaction and learning, ensuring Gen Z's success and progression in hybrid environments.

According to Myerson and Ross (2022, p. 180), "Three out of four individuals in the workplace will be Millennials by 2025." Unlike Generation Z, Millennials born between 1980 and 1994 are more accustomed to traditional desktop setups, but evolving cultural norms such as shared parenting responsibilities make work-life

balance a priority (Rishi, Breslau and Miscovich, 2021). Furthermore, the hybrid model corresponds with these values, providing the flexibility needed to effectively balance professional and personal commitments. For instance, one partner might work from home while the other takes care of the children, leading to a focused work setting during meetings and facilitating concentration on work responsibilities. Moreover, spatial design strategies, such as Framery's smart working pods outlined in Chapter 2, fosters the distraction-free environments that Millennials appreciate at work, while the ergonomic seating within the pods improves comfort during in-office days, promoting productivity and well-being among Millennials.

Baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, make up 16% of the labour force, with their participation steadily decreasing as they approach retirement (Muniz, Jones & Murray, 2024). Known for their strong work ethic, Baby Boomers did not grow up in a world where technology was easily accessible, as Gen Z did, which has made the integration of such digital tools into their work processes more challenging (Elias, Smith and Barney, 2012). Furthermore, their preference for in-person interactions frequently conflicts with the autonomy associated with hybrid work. As discussed in Chapter 1, shared workspace arrangements, such as hot-desking within hybrid schedules, enhance an organization's economic efficiency. However, when these arrangements are implemented for Baby Boomers, who prioritise job stability, they can diminish their sense of security within the organisation. This is particularly significant, as Baby Boomers tend to be loyal to their organisations and expect reciprocal loyalty (Muniz, Jones & Murray, 2024). Therefore, incorporating personalised or semi-permanent workspaces, along with quiet zones for focused work, can effectively restore a sense of ownership and security for baby boomers.

Analysing the distinct preferences of Gen Z, Millennials, and Baby Boomers reveals that hybrid workplace design must consider the demographics of the workforce, considering the multigenerational characteristics of today's employees. By addressing these varied generational demands, organisations can foster inclusive environments that enhance engagement, productivity, and well-being, ensuring that the hybrid model effectively serves the workforce it aims to serve.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the significant influence of the hybrid work model on spatial design strategies in the context of the post-pandemic era. It highlights the essential transition in workplace design to balance flexibility, productivity, and collaboration. The research critically analysed case studies, including Spotify's London office and Framery's smart working pods, to illustrate how organisations in the UK have adapted to meet the evolving needs of a post-pandemic workforce.

The findings reveal that the development of spatial design has focused on achieving a balance between productivity and flexibility. A key objective has been to create spaces where employees can work comfortably and perform at their highest potential. It is evident that Spotify's office has accomplished this by the implementation of home-like elements, reflecting a growing emphasis on employee comfort and personalisation within the workplace, which is essential for inspiring individuals who have become accustomed to remote work as a result of the pandemic. Similarly, Framery's smart working pods, exemplified how the integration of technology and digital tools can effectively support individual, focused work while also facilitating virtual collaboration opportunities, demonstrating an innovative approach to hybrid workplace design. The examples underscore how hybrid workplace design in the UK is not merely a response to remote work trends, but rather a thoughtfully reimagined workplace design aimed to bridge the gap between home and the office environments.

Moreover, the generational diversity of today's workforce emerged as a critical factor, influencing spatial design strategies. Each generation, from Generation Z to Millennials and Baby Boomers, brings distinct expectations and preferences to the workplace. Therefore, addressing these diverse needs is vital for fostering engagement and productivity within the workplace. For example, activity-based working (ABW) offers flexibility and adaptability, yet its effectiveness depends on tailoring it to meet the varied expectations of different generations. Misalignment with the workforce needs, such as providing insufficient spaces for focused work or failing to promote collaboration effectively, risks overstimulation, loneliness, or dissatisfaction, particularly in hybrid environments where ABW is implemented.

The post-pandemic era has further emphasised the importance of developing work environments that prioritise employee well-being. While the hybrid model approach offers multiple advantages, such as increased autonomy, lower overhead costs, and enhanced flexibility, it also poses disadvantages, including weakened interpersonal relationships and the potential depersonalisation of work environments. When organisations are therefore managing a multigenerational workforce, it is essential for them to adjust to changing employee preferences; acknowledging and understanding the workforce's values, behaviours, and expectations are essential for the effective development and implementation of spatial design strategies in response to the hybrid work model that emerged following COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for accelerating changes in the spatial design of workplace environments, forcing organisations to reevaluate traditional workplace norms and embrace a hybrid work model. The transition to a hybrid work

model has prompted spatial innovations that emphasise adaptability, autonomy, employee comfort, and technological integration. Furthermore, moving forward, organisations within the UK will need to continue evolving their spatial design strategies to accommodate the changing expectations of their multigenerational workforce, ensuring that office environments remain inclusive, supportive, and future-focused. By acknowledging that every generation holds unique priorities and workstyles, organisations can create environments that are both practical and representative of the individuals who occupy them; meeting the needs of the workforce is crucial, as even the most advanced workplace lacks completeness without its people (Gillen, 2019, p. 13). This approach is key to achieving effective spatial strategies that support a hybrid work model while addressing the diverse needs of employees.

In conclusion, this dissertation has demonstrated how the shift to a hybrid work model post-COVID-19 has fundamentally reshaped spatial design strategies in the UK. Traditional, rigid office layouts have been replaced with environments that balance flexibility, productivity, and well-being. The hybrid work model is not a temporary adjustment; it is a transformative approach that, when executed thoughtfully, bridges the gap between home and office, ultimately meeting the diverse needs of a post-pandemic workforce.

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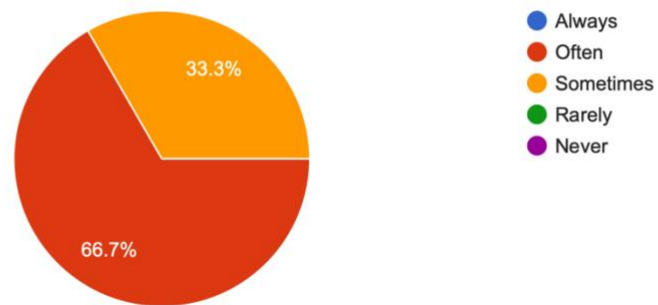
Appendix 1

Hybrid Work in Practice: Senior Leadership

Appendix 1.1

Workplace Culture: How often do you feel connected to your team in a hybrid work model?

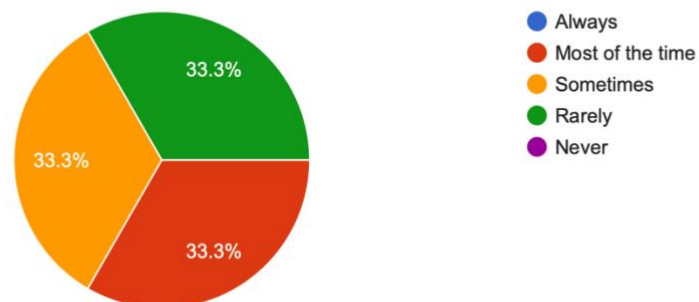
3 responses



Appendix 1.2

Workplace Culture: Do you feel equally engaged in team meetings held virtually versus in-person?

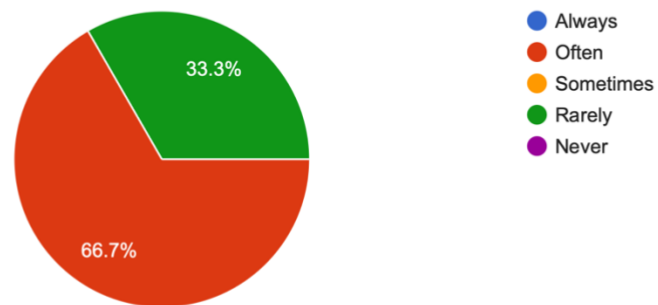
3 responses



Appendix 1.3

Social Interaction: Do you feel a sense of alienation or detachment from your team when working remotely?

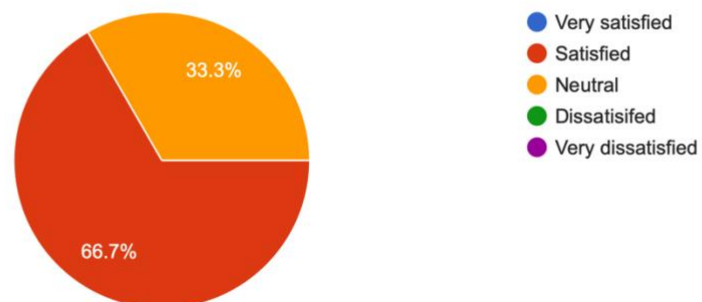
3 responses



Appendix 1.4

Social Interaction: How satisfied are you with the level of social interaction in a hybrid work model?

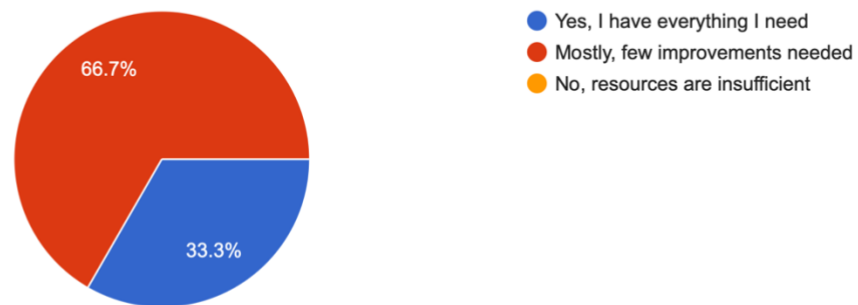
3 responses



Appendix 1.5

Provision and Resources: Do you feel you have adequate resources and support to work effectively both in the office and remotely?

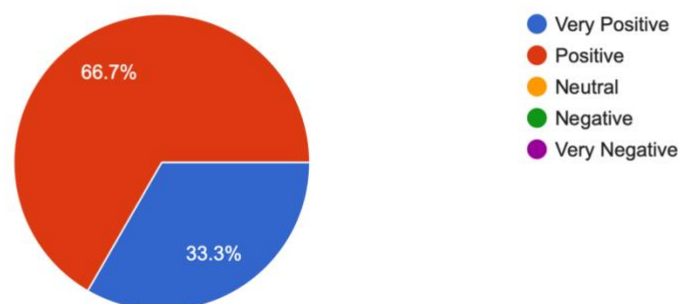
3 responses



Appendix 1.6

Wellbeing: How would you rate the impact of hybrid work on your overall wellbeing?

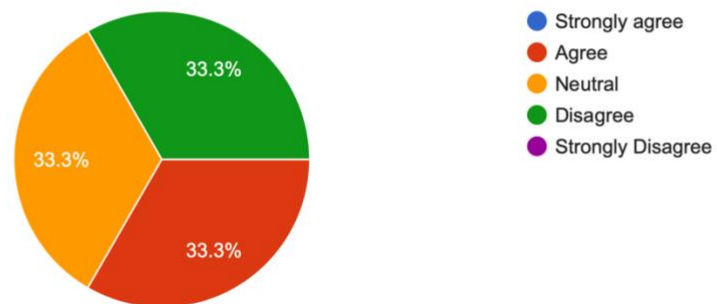
3 responses



Appendix 1.7

Wellbeing: Do you believe hybrid work has enhanced the productivity of your team?

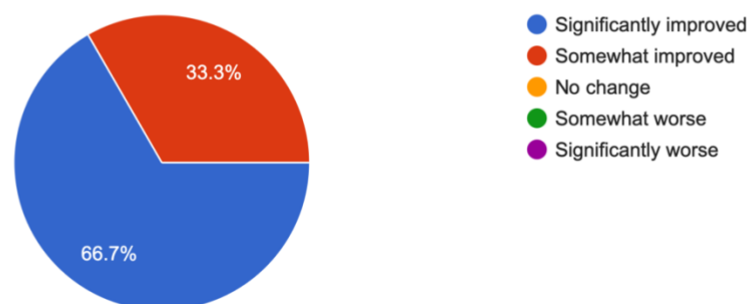
3 responses



Appendix 1.8

Work-life Balance: How would you describe the work-life balance in a hybrid work model compared to a full in-office model?

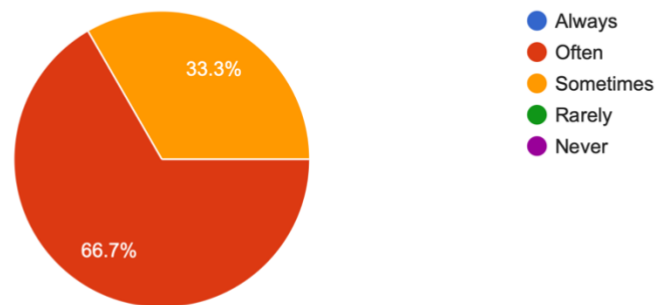
3 responses



Appendix 1.9

Work-life Balance: How often do you find yourself working beyond typical hours when working from home?

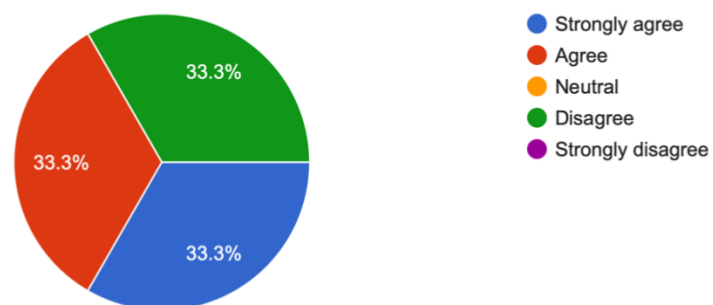
3 responses



Appendix 1.10

Work-life Balance: Do you believe the hybrid work model has been beneficial to your organisation in terms of productivity and morale?

3 responses

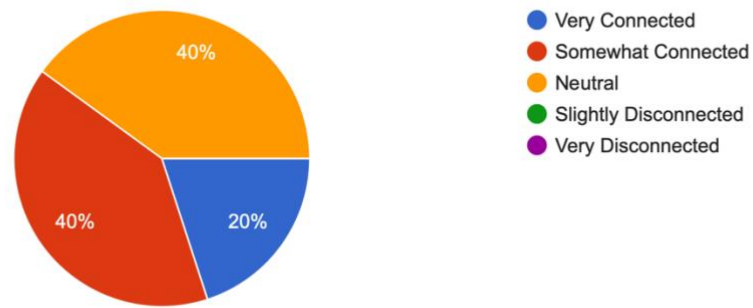


Appendix 2

Hybrid Work in Practice: Junior Employees

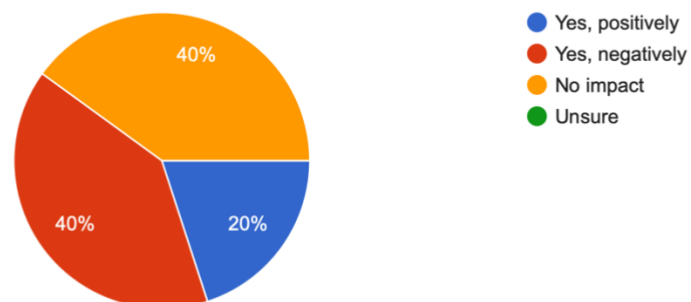
Appendix 2.1

Workplace Culture: How connected do you feel to your team on the days you work from home?
5 responses



Appendix 2.2

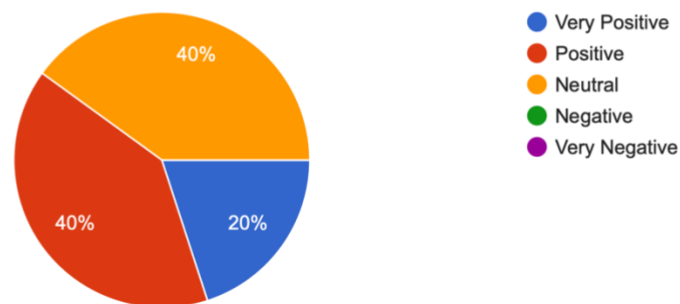
Workplace Culture: Do you believe that working from home has impacted your sense of belonging to the company?
5 responses



Appendix 2.3

Social Interaction: How would you rate your overall well-being while working in a hybrid model (considering both physical and mental health)?

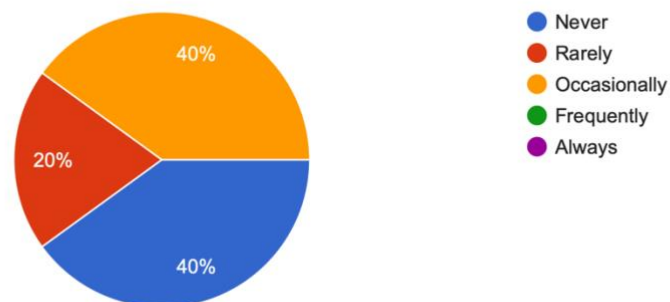
5 responses



Appendix 2.4

Social Interaction: Do you experience feelings of loneliness when working from home?

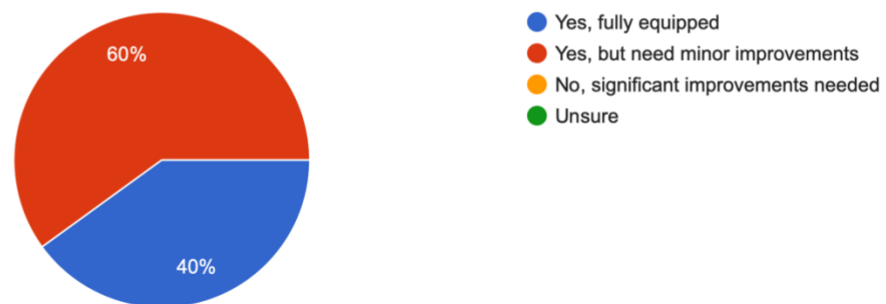
5 responses



Appendix 2.5

Provision and Resources: Do you have the necessary tools and technology to perform your job effectively when working remotely (e.g. software, hardware)

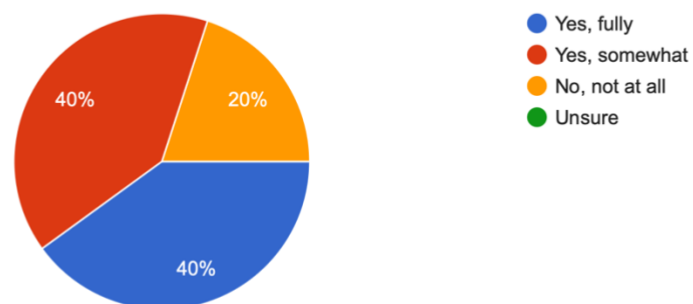
5 responses



Appendix 2.6

Provision and Resources: Does the current office layout accommodate the needs of hybrid workers (e.g. hot-desking, flexible workspaces, quiet areas)?

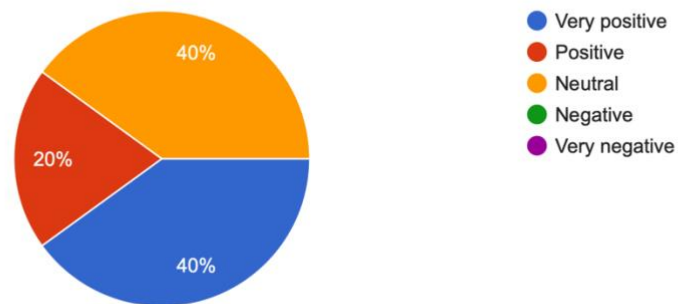
5 responses



Appendix 2.7

Wellbeing: How would you rate the impact of hybrid work on your overall well-being?

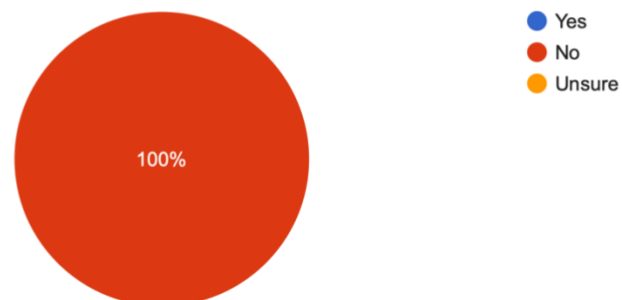
5 responses



Appendix 2.8

Wellbeing: Do you feel the need for more in-office days to improve your work performance and communication with your team?

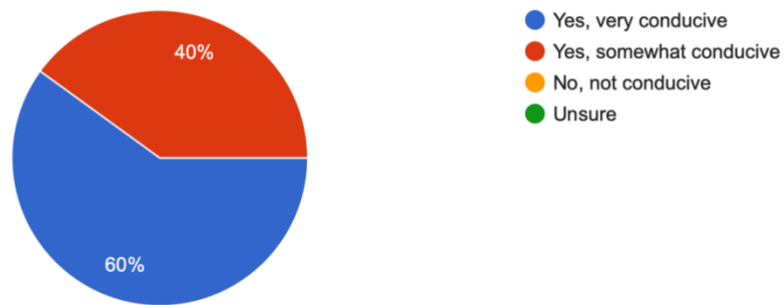
5 responses



Appendix 2.9

Work-life Balance: In your opinion, is the hybrid work model conducive to achieving work-life balance?

5 responses



Appendix 2.10

Work-life Balance: How often do you find yourself working beyond typical hours when working from home?

5 responses

