From Mandate to Magnet:

The Race to Reimagine Workplaces and Workspaces for a Hybrid Future

Global Edition

Contents

Executive Summary

Employees are positive about returning to the office – but they want it to look and function very differently from the past. While most organizations are now encouraging their employees to come back to their physical workplaces, they also recognize the benefits of hybrid working. Globally, most employers expect this arrangement to become the embedded norm within the next two years.

Both employers and employees say this shift to hybrid work is being driven by a range of factors including maintaining team communication (56%), optimizing productivity (61%) and preserving workplace culture (60%). Some regional differences exist, with employers in Asia Pacific (APAC) the most likely to see positive benefits from hybrid working arrangements.

Contrary to the popular belief that most workers are reluctant to return to the office, our survey of both employers and employees shows that they are actually highly receptive and eager to return. In fact, four out of five employers globally are now mandating at least a partial return to the office, and almost three-quarters of employees (72%) are positive about going back.

However, there is a disconnect between what employees now expect from the office experience to support hybrid work and what is currently being provided. Our study finds that more than half of employees feel their office is not ready or only somewhat ready to support in-person working and enable them to do their best work. Employees want to use their office workspaces for collaboration, ideation, and socialization, but currently organizations worldwide are generally falling short in providing this.

The critical areas where improvements need to be made are in office layouts and the provision of technology and infrastructure to best support hybrid working. The top challenges cited by employers and employees globally include:

1. network connectivity,
2. difficulty collaborating with remote team members,
3. inadequate equipment or tools.

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While less than half of global employers (48%) believe their collaboration tools are generally working well, more than half of global employees echo this sentiment (59%).

Both employees and employers place priority on technology infrastructure and collaborative spaces for office design. However, employees believe these elements are already performing better than others, within current office configurations.

The top three areas where employees say things are not working well, employers should put more consideration into as they think about office redesigns, namely:

1. layout and seating arrangements,
2. sustainability and eco-friendly features,
3. health and wellness amenities.

Nearly two-thirds of employees want better technology and infrastructure that can accommodate different types of work and activities. This is also what most employers are aiming to provide in their future office designs.

Positively, our study indicates that rather than being viewed as a risk, organizations are seeing the growth of hybrid working as an opportunity to create more enriching and productive workplaces that improve employee engagement and satisfaction while enhancing corporate performance.

However, with clear knowledge and capability gaps around what smarter offices of the future and new technologies can provide, it will also be critical for organizations to provide sufficient training and support to ensure that employees are not left behind on this journey – and that the different needs of older generations are balanced with those of their younger co-workers.

Big Bets for Hybrid Work Trends in 2024 include:

· Updated meeting spaces
· Deploying hybrid work technology and infrastructure
· Modernizing office layouts and seating in line with
  collaborative working requirements
· Building sustainable and eco-friendly features

We hope this report will provide useful insights and information for leadership teams looking to optimize their organization's approach to hybrid work and reimagine their offices to meet the needs of their employees.
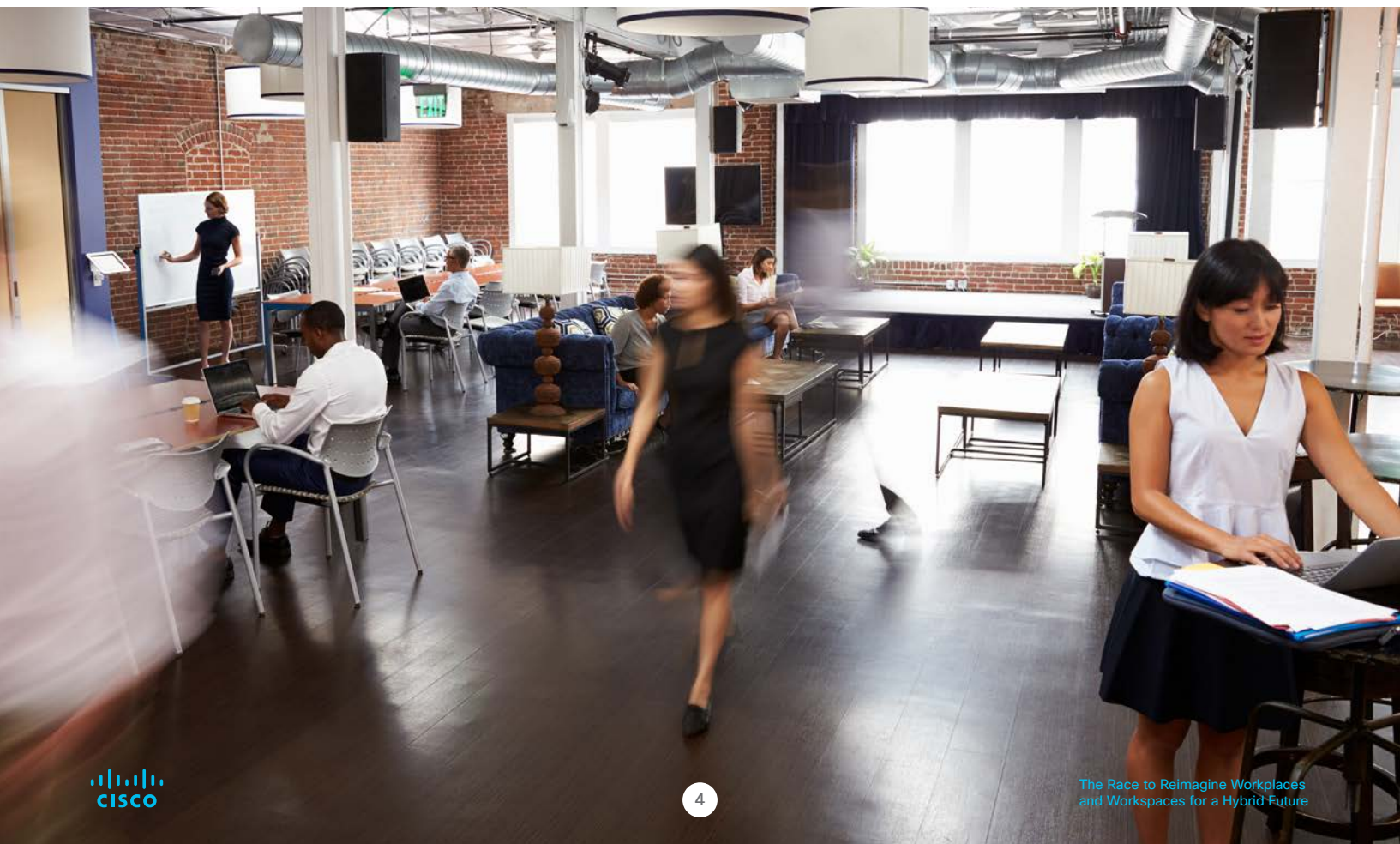
Introduction

This report is based on an online survey of 14,050 full-time employees and 3,800 employers, undertaken in December 2023 and January 2024. Respondents are from **19 different markets**, grouped into three different regions: **the Americas** (Brazil, Canada, Mexico, USA), **Asia Pacific** (Australia, Hong Kong, India, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand) and **Europe** (France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom). Data was also collected from the United Arab Emirates in the Middle East and is included in the global data analysis, but is not included in the breakdown of the regional results.

The research focused on uncovering insights regarding how employees and employers view hybrid work arrangements (a mix of working from the office and working remotely) and how they are using their workspaces to support these. It reveals the significant benefits and opportunities that hybrid working arrangements have brought to both employees and employers, while simultaneously highlighting that as employees embrace a hybrid work style, their expectations of what the office is used for is changing. The results show that more work needs to be done to reimagine workplaces and workspaces to cater to the evolving expectations so that employees and employers can fully realize benefits of hybrid working arrangements.Furthermore, employers must address the key differences in how people from four

Generations

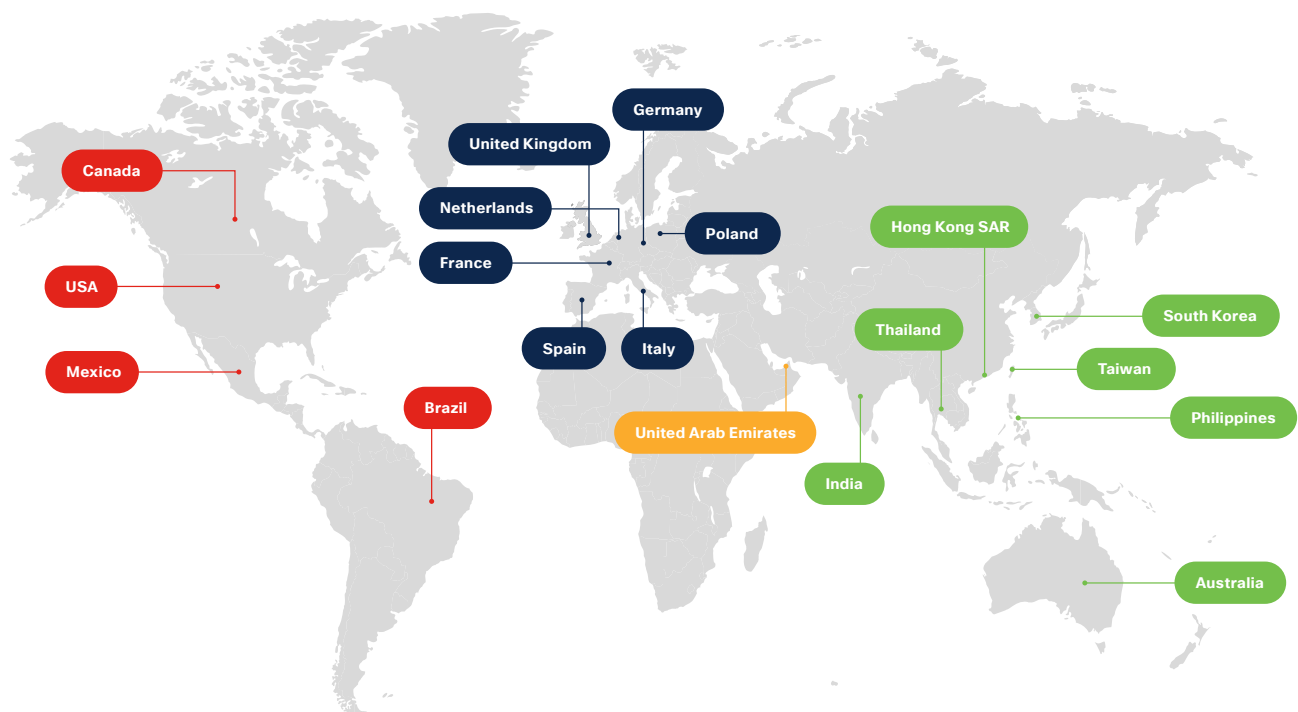**Baby Boomers**
Born 1964 or earlier

Gen X
Born 1965–1980

Millennials
Born 1981–1996

Gen Z
Born in 1997 or later

generations in the workforce (**Baby Boomers**, **Gen X**, **Millennials**, and **Gen Z**) have responded to hybrid working tools and technologies.

The research also explores and ultimately debunks some common misconceptions about employee sentiments regarding returning to the office. Important differences in the views of employers and employees from different regions are highlighted throughout this global report. Respondents work for companies of a range of sizes: small (10-499 employees); medium (500-1,000 employees) and large (1,000+ employees). They also represent a wide range of industries: Business Services; Construction, Education; Engineering, Design and Architecture; Financial Services; Healthcare; Manufacturing; Media and Communications; Natural Resources; Personal Care and Services; Real Estate; Restaurant Services; Retail; Technology Services; Transportation; and Travel Services.

Canada

USA

Mexico

Brazil

Germany

United Kingdom

Netherlands

Poland

France

Spain

Italy

United Arab Emirates

Hong Kong SAR

Thailand

South Korea

Taiwan

Philippines

India

Australia

The Return to the Office is Real, and Employees Welcome It

Remote and hybrid working suddenly became 'the new normal' following the global pandemic, with many organizations quickly realizing the benefits of this new way of working.

Globally, two out of three employers agree that hybrid working has had a positive impact on their employees' wellbeing (65%) and productivity (66%), while also unlocking cost savings (65%) for their organizations. A smaller majority of employers globally also felt that hybrid working had a beneficial impact on team communications (56%), diversity and inclusion (54%) and workplace culture (51%).

In all areas, European employers are the least inclined and APAC employers the most inclined, to report such positive impacts of hybrid working, with the views of employers' in the Americas region falling in the middle. This is especially the case in terms of perceived productivity impacts, which were indicated by 58% of European employers compared with 63% in the Americas and 72% in APAC.

Globally, employers tend to have somewhat more confidence in the positive impacts of hybrid working compared to their employees.

Hybrid working is now normalized. Over four in five (82%) organizations around the world have at least 10% of their workforce on hybrid working arrangements, with one third of all organizations (33%) having a majority hybrid workforce.

For those on hybrid working arrangements, employees most commonly attend the office three to four days per week (34%), according to employers. Employers in Europe (26%) are less likely than those in APAC (38%) or the Americas (35%) to have most employees in the office five days per week.

There is a projected global increase in hybrid working arrangements, with over three quarters (78%) of employers expecting its widespread adoption within two years. American employers are the most likely (26%) and European employers the least likely (18%) to expect this outcome.

Respondents believing hybrid working arrangements have positively impacted their organization

● Employers ● Employees

	Total	The Americas	APAC	Europe
Productivity	66% 56%	63% 52%	72% 61%	59% 47%
Cost savings	65% 61%	64% 59%	68% 65%	59% 55%
Employee wellbeing	65% 59%	66% 60%	66% 61%	63% 53%
Team communication	56% 45%	52% 38%	63% 52%	45% 34%
Diversity and inclusion	54% 49%	49% 42%	62% 57%	44% 36%
Workplace culture	51% 44%	48% 37%	58% 51%	40% 33%

Employers forecasting that the average employee will be a hybrid worker within two years

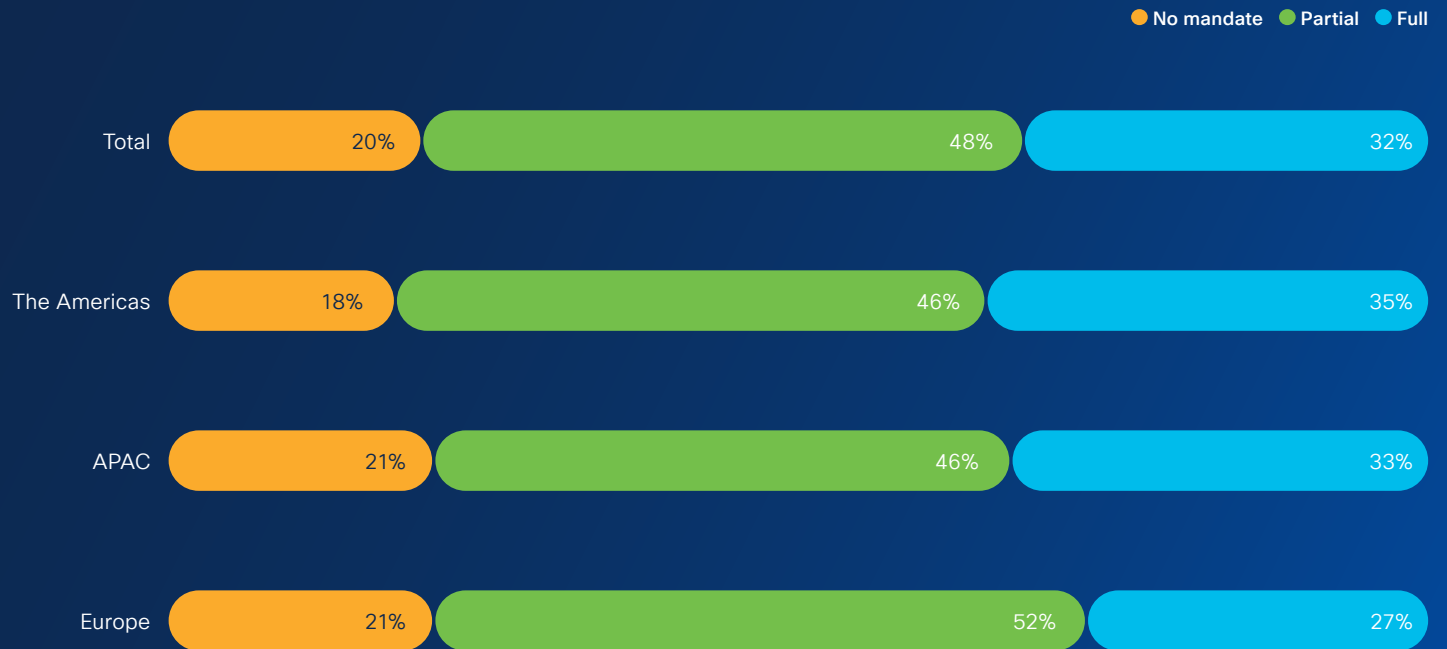| Total	78%
The Americas	75%
APAC	77%
Europe	83%

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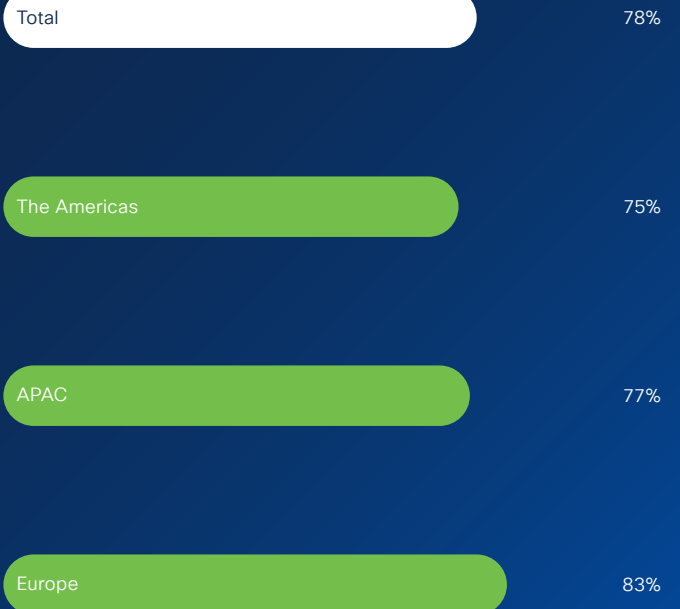
Perhaps unsurprisingly as a result of the increasing in hybrid working, employers indicate that 40% of office interactions now involve remote participants, with collaboration technology playing a pivotal role in shaping the future workplace. This technology is recognized by employers for its capacity to bolster employee engagement and satisfaction, by enabling flexible collaboration.

The strongest factors that have influenced these mandated returns by employers globally are optimizing productivity (61%), preserving workplace culture (60%), maintaining team communication (56%), and responding to leadership pressure (56%).

Companies mandating a return to the office

● No mandate ● Partial ● Full

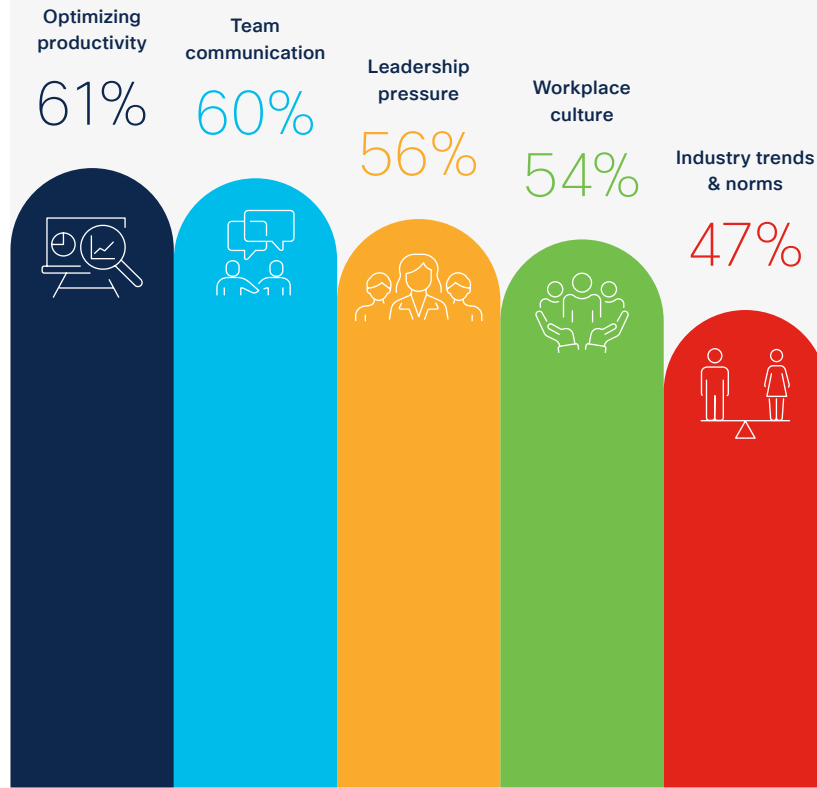|	No mandate	Partial	Full
Total	20%	48%	32%
The Americas	18%	46%	35%
APAC	21%	46%	33%
Europe	21%	52%	27%

Counter to popular belief, these mandates have been welcomed by the vast majority of employees. Nearly three quarters (71%) of employers say that employees have positively received the company's mandate to go back to the office – whether it has been a full or partial mandate. A similar proportion of employees (72%) corroborate this saying they feel positive about their organization's mandate, with Baby Boomers (82%) most likely to feel this way.

Among the 29% of employers with some employees who have not embraced a return to office mandate, the issues they have experienced the most are decreased morale and engagement (51%), decreased productivity (47%), and increased difficulty with attracting new talent (38%). Out of this group, only one in four (26%) say that any staff have left as a direct result of their mandate.

For those employers who mandated an office return, the issue of attracting new talent is more commonly cited by employers in APAC (49%) compared to the Americas (35%), and Europe (28%).

Top five factors influencing mandates to return to the office

Optimizing productivity	Team communication	Leadership pressure	Workplace culture	Industry trends & norms
61%	60%	56%	54%	47%

Employees saying they positively received organization's mandate to return to the office

Total	72%
The Americas	73%
APAC	71%
Europe	74%

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When looking at the reasons for the high levels of positivity around returning to the office, the most commonly cited reasons globally for both employers personally and employees are interacting and socializing with others (74%), collaborating with others (71%), ideating and brainstorming (53%), and developing a sense of belonging (46%)

Personal flexibility and comfort and seeing office attendance as unnecessary are the strongest drivers for employees to work from home by a significant margin.

There is a fairly even split in relation to different types of hybrid working preferences. The largest proportion of employers globally prefer a mix of working from home and from the office (36%) or mainly being in the office (also 36%). Only 25% of employers prefer working mainly from home.

Employers saying that employees have left due to return to office mandates

Total	26%
The Americas	29%
APAC	28%
Europe	21%

Drivers for employees to return to the office

	Total	The Americas	APAC	Europe
Develop a sense of belonging	47%	45%	48%	46%
Collaborate with team members and learn	75%	73%	77%	71%
Ideate and brainstorm with colleagues	59%	56%	63%	53%
Interact and socialize with colleagues	69%	67%	68%	74%
Combat the feelings of isolation while working from home/remotely	28%	29%	26%	32%
Others	3%	5%	2%	4%

Employee preference for working arrangements

	Total	The Americas	APAC	Europe
I prefer working from home and find it the most productive option	19%	25%	17%	18%
I prefer working in the office and find it the most productive option	40%	35%	42%	41%
I prefer a mix of both working from home and the office, depending on the task	34%	32%	35%	31%
I don't have a preference and am equally productive regardless of the location	7%	8%	6%	11%

Interestingly, employees are even more interested than employers in working primarily from the office (40%), followed by a mix of working from home and the office (34%). Only 19% prefer working mainly from home. The remaining 7% of employees don't have a preference and feel they are equally productive in any location.

The Americas is the only region where employers report feeling more productive in-office (37%) than when hybrid working (32%). Across all three regions, most employees actually feel more productive in-office than they do hybrid working, with over half (56%) of employees reporting that working in the office positively impacts their ability to collaborate with team members and learn from each other.

The oldest generation within the workforce, Baby Boomers, are most likely to favor working mostly from the office and the youngest generation, Gen Z, are the most likely to favor working mostly from home. Millennials (Gen Y) are the most likely to favor hybrid working arrangements.

Workplaces and Workspaces Not Ready for the New Way of Working

With both employers and employees looking to achieve the perfect hybrid working arrangement, our study reveals that less than half of employers (47%) and employees (42%) globally say their office spaces are very well prepared to support evolving hybrid working needs.

Europe-based employers (32%) and employees (37%) believe that their office spaces are the least well prepared to support evolving hybrid working needs.

This lack of preparedness is being driven by the fact that employees feel that most parts of their current office set up are not designed in a way that promotes in-office productivity, especially in light of the changing expectations around office use.

Respondents believing office is 'very well prepared'

	Employers	Employees
Total	47%	42%
The Americas	51%	47%
APAC	54%	42%
Europe	32%	37%

Despite 'collaborating with colleagues' being one of the key reasons employees want to go to the office, 85% of employers say that most of their organization's office space is allocated to personal working spaces, and three in four employers are looking to redesign their office space in the next couple of years.

Even where organizations have the provision of flexible working spaces to support in-office working, there is consensus that these areas are currently not highly effective in enhancing in-office productivity. While the numbers vary slightly, both employers and employees have similar opinions about this.

Respondents saying different kinds of workspaces are ineffective or only moderately effective

● Employees ● Employers

Small meeting rooms

67%
61%

Large meeting rooms

64%
58%

Huddle spaces

63%
57%

Individual workstations

57%
49%

Half of employers (49%) and employees (51%) say that individual workstations are either ineffective, or moderately effective at best, at enhancing in-office productivity.

57% of employers and 58% of employees say large meeting rooms are either ineffective, or moderately effective, at enhancing in-office productivity.

For small meeting rooms, 49% of employers and 67% of employees feel the same. Over half of employers (57%) and employees (54%) say huddle spaces are either ineffective, or moderately effective at best in enhancing in-office productivity.

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As employers look to redesign their office space to meet evolving expectations, they must tackle another challenge – that of making it attractive and effective for a multi-generational workforce. This study has highlighted differences in how employees across generations perceive the effectiveness of dedicated areas.

Amongst the employers who say their meeting rooms are ineffective in enhancing in-office productivity, the main reasons given for this are lack of video and audio endpoints in rooms (46%), the low quality of the audio-visual experience (41%), lack of video and audio endpoints to make it inclusive (31%), and a lack of consistency in the experience of remote vs in office participants (32%). On average, just under half of meeting rooms across organizations have video and audio capabilities (48%).

## Reasons why meeting spaces are ineffective for employees

Insufficient video and audio endpoints across meeting rooms	46%
Low quality audio-visual experience	41%
Lack of consistency in the experience of remote vs in office participants	32%
Lack of video and audio endpoints to make it inclusive	31%
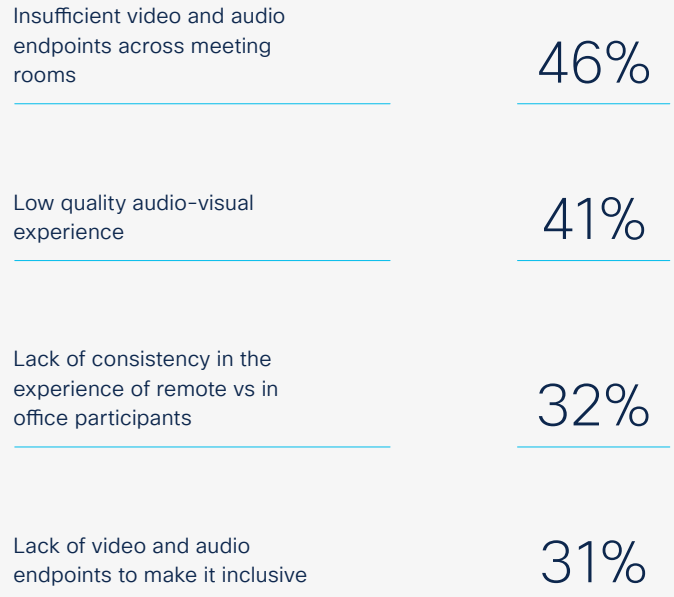
Respondents believing that tools do not integrate seamlessly

	Employers	Employees
Total	79%	87%
The Americas	81%	86%
APAC	72%	86%
Europe	88%	90%

Further to this, there is a general feeling that currently available collaboration tools do not integrate with each other seamlessly, with at least eight out of 10 employers (80%) and employees (87%) highlighting this in the survey. In fact, even among the youngest of the employees, Gen Z, who are thought to be digital natives, only 15% feel that these tools integrate seamlessly, highlighting the urgency to address this issue.

Employers believing their organization is providing a well-managed hybrid working experience for employees

Total	50%
The Americas	52%
APAC	52%
Europe	45%
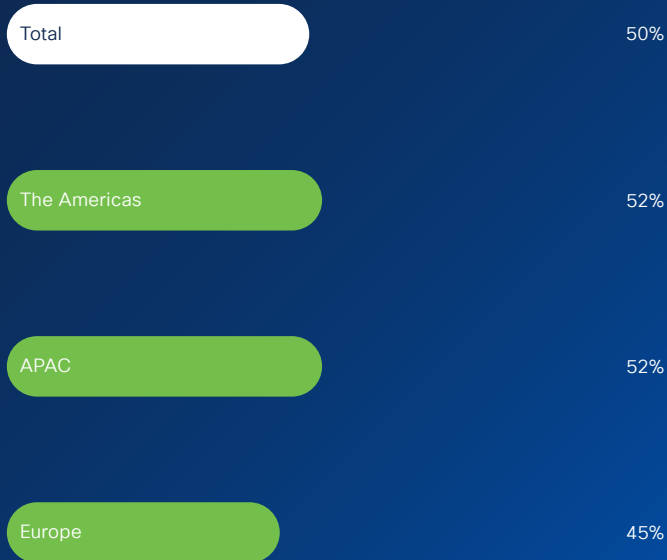
When it comes to employees working remotely, in-office, and in between environments – for example while commuting – only half (50%) of employers believe they are ensuring a well-managed experience. A further 27% say they are partially achieving this with issues with working from home as the greatest challenge.

Globally, both employers and employees say the top challenges they face relating to technology and workplace set up when working remotely are internet connectivity (27%), followed by difficulty collaborating with remote team members (23%), and inadequate equipment or tools (16%).

Our research finds that work needs to be done even outside of the office, as nearly half (48%) of global employers say their current collaboration tools are ineffective, or at best moderately effective, in enhancing home-based work productivity. Employees echo this sentiment even more strongly, with 59% reporting current collaboration tools as ineffective, or at best moderately effective.

The Race to Reimagine Workplaces and Workspaces for a Hybrid Future

The Race to Reimagine

As a result of the move to spend more time in the office and perhaps growing awareness of the mismatched expectations of what the office of today should offer, most organizations are taking action to reimagine and redesign their workspaces.

Post pandemic, more than eight out of 10 global employers (81%) say their organization has either completed an office redesign or is planning or underway with one. Nearly three quarters of employers are planning to redesign their office space within the next 12 months (41%), to do so in the next one to two years (31%).

These redesigns are taking place in the context of employees wanting to use the office for different kinds of tasks than before. The top-rated function globally as indicated by both employers and employees for offices of the future to facilitate is 'flexibility and adaptability to tailor a more individualized work experience'. This is consistent across all three regions.

Progress and plans for office redesign

	Redesign completed	Redesign underway	Redesign planned
Total	27%	18%	36%
The Americas	24%	17%	35%
APAC	34%	17%	38%
Europe	18%	20%	34%

Drivers for office redesign

	Technological advancements	Changing employee expectations	Better enabling hybrid work
Total	51%	46%	43%
The Americas	50%	41%	33%
APAC	59%	55%	53%
Europe	38%	35%	36%

Both employers and employees rank enablement for local collaboration and teamwork as most important for offices of the future to facilitate, and better integration and connectivity between work and home life as the second most highly rated function. For employees, features to foster innovation and creativity shares the second equal position.

By extension of this, the biggest drivers for employers globally to transform workplaces are to cater to new technological advancements, to better enable hybrid work, and adapt to changing employee expectations around what they come to the office for. As a result, regular enhancements to workplace layouts (60%) and technology features (55%) are the top items employers have allocated budgets for in relation to workplace design.

Perspectives on performance of different aspects of the office and their priority for redesign

	Employers rating as top three aspect looking to redesign	Employees rating as top three aspect for redesign	Employees rating current performance as 'very well'
Collaboration and meeting spaces	63%	55%	20%
Technology and infrastructure	65%	63%	29%
Layout and seating	55%	55%	20%
Sustainability and eco-friendly features	45%	38%	18%
Health and wellness amenities	40%	47%	21%
Privacy and security features	32%	43%	28%

According to global employees, office design elements related to technology and collaboration spaces are rated as the most important factors, perceived to outperform other existing design features such as layout, seating arrangements, sustainability, health amenities, and privacy/security features. Although employees also place heightened importance on technology and collaborative spaces, they report that these features are already functioning more effectively than others within current office configurations. This indicates a disconnect between the priorities of employers and employees regarding where to allocate resources for office redesign.

With over half (58%) believing their current office spaces do not perform very well in supporting evolving hybrid work needs, the necessity of this work is evident.

When it comes to collaboration technology, globally both employers and employees have similar priorities for what they would like transformed in their office.

Our study finds that sustainability sits further down the pecking order as a priority for organizations across the region in their workspace arrangements. Only 33% of employers and 28% of employees say that sustainability is a top priority in redesigning and reimagining their workspaces and that they have comprehensive plans in place to integrate eco-friendly practices and technologies. Perhaps resulting from the lack of consideration in this area and slower progress in measurement of environmental impact, office footprints also appear to be increasing.

In the APAC region, both employers and employees are placing a greater emphasis on prioritizing sustainability compared to other regions. However, there's a notable disparity within APAC, with 44% of employers considering it a top priority, while only 31% of employees share the same view. Conversely, in Europe and the Americas, there's generally a consensus among both employers and employees regarding the level of priority that sustainability considerations should have.

Nearly half (45%) of employers in the region say they have increased the proportion of their office space in relation to headcount; with over half of those employers (51%) doing so by an average increase of 30% or more.

Just under 10% of employers say they have decreased the proportion of their office space in relation to headcount; and 45% have maintained the same ratio.

From these results, we can clearly see that employee experience remains front and center for office redesign considerations. With an overwhelming 93% of employers and 89% of employees across the world believing there is a positive correlation between workspace design and employee satisfaction, this trend does not look likely to abate any time soon.

Priorities for transformation of collaboration technology

	Employers want transformed	Employees want transformed
Enhanced remote access	52%	54%
Whiteboards or interactive displays	53%	47%
Hybrid meeting rooms	53%	44%
Upgraded individual working spaces	49%	50%
Wellness spaces	39%	45%
Enhanced digital collaboration channels	30%	31%

Bridging Education Gaps and Bringing Employees on the Journey

While over three quarters (78%) of employers say they are providing the right technology to ensure a seamless transition from the home to the office, significantly fewer are providing an array of necessary practical supports.

The most common support provided include flexible work arrangements to reduce the need for constant transitions (58%), comprehensive training and support for technology usage (57%), and network infrastructure both at home and in the office (57%). Advanced network monitoring and troubleshooting tools are provided by just 28%.

83% of global employers say they provide technology support to assist employees with hybrid working. This number varies across the regions; 71% of UAE employers provide technology support for hybrid working employees, lower than any of the three regions: APAC (87%), the Americas (82%), and Europe (75%).

In terms of enabling technology and tools, most employers are providing video conferencing platforms (59%), instant messaging and team chats (56%) and cloud-based document sharing (54%). All three regions reporting similar rates of usage for these tools.

Just under half of employers are providing project management and collaboration tools (49%), and interactive virtual meeting rooms (48%). Employers in Europe and the Americas are providing these tools less frequently than in APAC, where over half of employers are providing these tools. Regardless, these numbers do not indicate mainstream adoption.

With an eye on the future, nearly a third (30%) of employers are provide office footprint monitoring and a similar number (32%) have smart meeting room assistants.

While most employers are clearly making progress in deploying a wide range of collaborative technologies and tools to support hybrid working, significant work remains to simplify the experience to better enable employees to more fully utilize these tools and technologies.

Providing the tools alone is not sufficient, as in general most employees who can access enabling technologies don't feel highly equipped to use them, making simplicity even more important as a central focus for implementation. The majority of employees (60%) report either a lack of access to or proficiency in these technologies.

For instance, six out of 10 employees (60%) lack access to or proficiency in instant messaging and team chat. Around three-quarters lack access to or proficiency in project management or collaboration tools (73%) and virtual meeting rooms with interactive features (76%). A similar number (72%) report issues with cloud- based document sharing and 69% with video-conferencing platforms.

Employees who either do not have access to the technology or at best moderately equipped to use it

Office footprint monitoring

80%

Smart meeting room assistant

80%

Virtual meeting rooms

76%

Project management and collaboration tools

73%

Cloud-based document sharing

72%

Video conferencing

69%

Instant messaging

60%
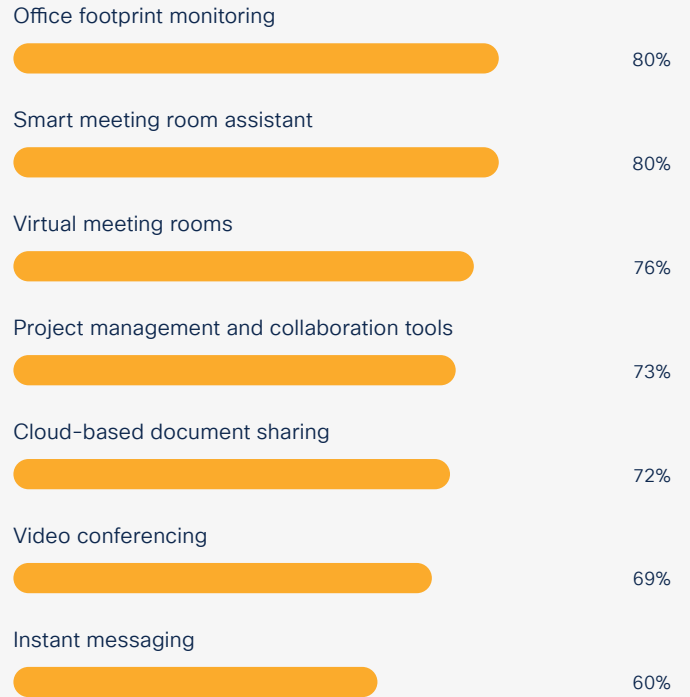
Even higher proportions lack access and proficiency in the use of office footprint monitoring and smart meeting room assistants (80% for both). In all regions only a minority of employees currently have both access to and proficiency in using any of these tools.

Therefore, to optimize productivity in hybrid working environments, the provision of collaboration tools and technology needs to be backed up by appropriate training and support to use them.

Recommendations for Companies

Smart companies interested in future-proofing their working infrastructure should be placing the following Big Bets for Hybrid Work Trends in 2024:

① Updated meeting spaces: The office of the future needs to have collaboration spaces that facilitate the needs of a hybrid workforce by having meeting spaces connected with the right technology.

② Deploying hybrid work technology and network infrastructure: With hybrid employees needing to work from the office, home, and everywhere in between, resolving connectivity issues and ensuring interoperability is crucial to create a seamless and stress-free working and collaboration experience with employees.

③ Modernizing office layouts and seating in line with collaborative working requirements: Employees want to return to the office, but not the way it used to be! Workers crave collaboration in the office, so savvy companies need to ramp up the ratio of collaborative meeting spaces vs personal spaces.

④ Building-in sustainable and eco-friendly features: Four out of five (80%) of employers and three quarters (76%) of employees say that sustainability is important in redesigning and reimagining their workspaces. Employers are striving to meet organizational and mandated sustainability goals, and to meet their employees' expectations of more eco-friendly environments.

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