

## Why 99?

With so many things to talk about, why did we choose 99? We were inspired by the “99% Invisible” podcast and the book, “The 99% Invisible City” by Roman Mars, which explores how great design is invisible, or not always obvious, and it motivated us to capture 99 things people may not know or notice but are essential to making hybrid work *work*.

Design. Insights. Research.  
Spring | Summer 2023

Work Better  
**WB**

# Beyond Hybrid

99 Things You  
Need to Know Now

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# 99 Things You Need to Know Now

You might wonder why we're talking about 'beyond' hybrid when so many companies are still trying to figure it out and make it work for them. Hybrid will continue to evolve, but some patterns are emerging that might surprise you. For example, most people globally — 70% — are working in the office, on average four days a week. But that average varies dramatically depending on where you live, what you do and who you work for (see Hybrid Realities pg. 6). We're all having different experiences and feelings about how hybrid is going. One thing is universal though: How we work has changed dramatically, regardless of where you work and on which days.

In the midst of all of this change we need to have empathy because people are really struggling. As we enter the fourth year of adapting to life with COVID, our research shows work life balance has dropped and people feel less connected to company culture. Productivity has also suffered and all of this is making them more likely to leave their jobs. Leaders are worried. Dropping productivity hits a nerve when organizations are under pressure to deliver results.

So let's talk about why it's happening. There are many variables when measuring productivity. We can, and should, debate it — but we can't ignore it. Because people want to feel good about their work and be productive too.

Organizations are hearing conflicting messages and have to try and figure out how to balance everything. It's complicated — but it's also an opportunity to experiment and engage people in the process of figuring out potential solutions. We call this experiment "hybrid" today because it still feels new and novel for some. But as we learn and adapt, soon it will just be called...work.

Let's move the conversation beyond who's doing hybrid and how often. In this issue we'll explore how work is changing, and how to make it better — we chose the top 99 insights and ideas we think you need to know now.



*Chris Congdon*

**Chris Congdon**  
Editor in Chief,  
Work Better Magazine

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**How Will the Metaverse Shake Things Up?**

As the technology for creating virtual worlds and immersive experiences continues to advance, it's likely that the metaverse will become an increasingly important part of our lives and work in the future. Steelcase recently joined Samsung, Coca-Cola, Mastercard and other industry leaders at Kantar's Foresight Co-Lab to explore potential challenges and opportunities. Kantar is the world's leading data, insights and consulting company. Among the highlights: more immersive training and education, enhanced customer visits and simulations and increased human interactions. Sounds intriguing? Stay tuned.



**Ghost Sighting**

Craving more human connection in this hybrid world? At the ISE conference in Barcelona, Steelcase and Logitech unveiled Project Ghost: a prototype designed to create a more lifelike one-to-one connection.

Still in its concept phase, the idea combines a comfortable, shielded space with immersive technology that creates a life-size projection of the remote participant and simulates eye contact, making it feel like you're meeting in person. With no need for laptops or devices, distractions are minimized — a game changer for leadership calls and more intimate discussions.



**Hygge Haven**



Filled with natural light, lush greenery, and warm wood finishes, Danish furniture maker Bolia's new headquarters in Aarhus, Denmark is a hygge haven. The redesigned showroom blends ancillary spaces with Steelcase workspaces. Bolia is a member of the Steelcase community of brands.

"It is about softening the fixed structures, letting brand values flourish and bringing the inspiration and comfort of our homes into every corner of our workspace," says Bolia CEO Lars Lyse Hansen. [www.bolia.com](http://www.bolia.com)

Visit our freshly updated spaces, featuring new hybrid collaboration solutions.



Find a location near you: [steelcase.com/contact-us](http://steelcase.com/contact-us)

**WorkLife Centers**

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**Can a Robot Take Your Job?**

AI is all over the news with the advent of ChatGPT and Bing's new chat function among many others. People are starting to worry these advances could eliminate their job. Kevin Roose, New York Times tech writer, author and host of the podcast "Hard Fork" offers some insights:

*"If AI can do your job more effectively and you're not bringing anything more than just your labor to your employer, it's much easier to replace you."*

*"People in any workplace can make their jobs safer and less prone to automation by making them more social. By establishing connections, by making sure that, when you are doing your work, you're not just typing into a box in a solitary way. You're building relationships and making people smile and helping them when they're in need."*

Hear more from Kevin about how to keep machines from taking your job: Work Better Podcast S1:E5 "Be More Human in the Age of AI"



**High-Performance Hybrid Spaces with Microsoft**

Our team in France joined forces with Microsoft to develop solutions for better hybrid collaboration experiences. Successful hybrid collaboration is intuitive and makes sure that everyone on both sides of the camera feels included and empowered to participate. The co-created solutions combine space and technology to help people easily share information and brainstorm with both in-person and virtual colleagues.

Learn more here

[steelcase.com/eu-en/microsoft-steelcase-hybrid](http://steelcase.com/eu-en/microsoft-steelcase-hybrid)



Our commitments:



Help Communities Thrive



Foster Inclusion



Act with Integrity



## Partnering for Good

Partnering with GOODEE, a Montreal-based marketplace of sustainable homewares and lifestyle products, brings conscious commerce to the office.

Founded by brothers Byron and Dexter Peart, GOODEE is celebrated for its platform centered around responsible brands and artisans producing timeless everyday objects. Its belief that conscious commerce has the power to transform the world is a perfect addition to the Steelcase community of brands which aims to let you create beautiful places that work, your way.

[www.goodeeworld.com](http://www.goodeeworld.com)

Better is possible.



### Women of Steel

In India, only 12% of the manufacturing workforce is made up of women. But at the Steelcase Pune plant, that number is 60% and growing through the team's work to break biases and remove barriers to opportunity for women. The Pune "Women of Steel" have recently inspired a satellite program in Dongguan, China. For International Women's Day this year, local events in Delhi, Tokyo, Sydney, Shanghai and Singapore celebrated the Women of Steel program, sharing the inspirational story with customers in the communities where we live and work.



### Supporting a Diverse Workforce

This February, Ashoka and Steelcase brought together corporate leaders, social entrepreneurs and migrant talent for a workshop focused on brainstorming new models to improve attracting, hiring and onboarding a more diverse talent pool, and transforming hiring practices to make them more inclusive.



Reduce Our Carbon Footprint



Design for Circularity



Choose + Use Materials Responsibly



## Reducing Waste in Product Packaging

A global design-thinking workshop, dubbed "Hack the Pack," is reducing the impact on the planet for a key Steelcase Learning product. Through sustainable improvements, the new Verb table packaging will eliminate the need for 73,000 pounds of foam per year. This also saves room on delivery trucks — allowing more products to fit in the same amount of space, reducing the carbon emissions per table.

### Mitigating the Effects of Climate Change

CDP is the world's leading environmental reporting platform, evaluating business and local governments. Steelcase was again recognized for having the best climate change score in the contract furniture industry. Each year CDP scores thousands of companies to measure and manage their risks and opportunities on things like climate change, water security and deforestation. The stringency of expectations raises each year in accordance with emerging environmental science, feedback from stakeholders and market needs. Despite the increasingly rigorous climate criteria, we're proud to have maintained a B score since 2020, by far the highest in the industry.



### Sharing Product Ingredients to Protect the Wellbeing of People

Declare is a 3rd party transparency platform, often referred to as the nutrition label for products, to help customers know what is in the items they buy. As the need for product transparency grows globally, Declare ingredient disclosures provide a clear and concise way to view chemistry information. Steelcase now has 12 products that have obtained a Declare Label, including some of our top sellers, with more on the way. All product certifications can be found in the Origin database, where 97% of Steelcase Americas products are listed. We also generate Environmental Product Declarations for our top selling products — transparent, objective reports that communicate a product's impact on the environment across its entire lifecycle.

We're working to design better futures for the wellbeing of people and the planet.



### Designing for Inclusion

Two new webinars featured design experts from our partners at SPORK!, Special Olympics Michigan and the Valuable 500. Real-time captioning and sign language were provided so all attendees could participate equitably.

Watch the inclusive design webinars: [steelcase.com/eu-en/inclusive-design-webinars](http://steelcase.com/eu-en/inclusive-design-webinars)



# Hybrid Realities

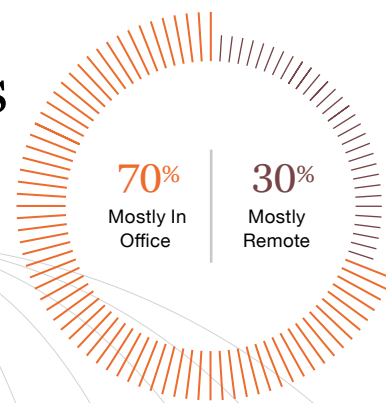
What the Research Says

Hybrid work is about more than who's in the office or not. Once we changed *where* people work it opened the door to reconsider the *how*: existing norms, processes, behaviors and beliefs. It will take time before people, organizations and societies settle into a new routine. But patterns have emerged that give us a glimpse to where things are now and where they might be going.

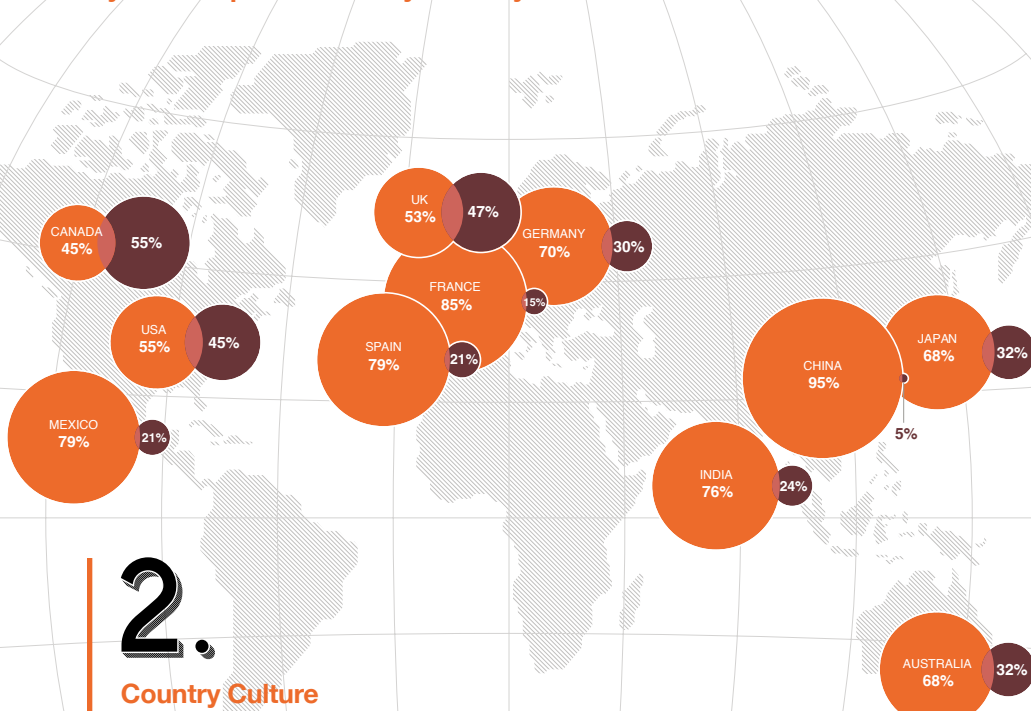
Source: All data referenced here unless otherwise noted is from a Steelcase Global Study, conducted in late 2022 with 6046 employees in 11 countries. All data reflects global averages.

## 1. Most people work most days in the office.

70% of employees globally are working 3 days or more in the office, on average.



### Hybrid Adoption Varies by Country



## 2. Country Culture

Is there a connection between country culture and the adoption of remote work? Countries with individualistic cultures — those that place great value on the needs of individual people — have higher levels of remote work. Collectivist cultures, like China, that value group harmony, are in the office almost exclusively.

## 3. Hybrid Work Variables

Patterns are emerging around who is adopting hybrid. Small to mid-sized companies in small to mid-sized cities tend to work in-office the most. Big companies in big cities, doing computer-based work, are adopting greater levels of hybrid or remote work.

**Company Size**  
% of employees working mostly in-office

|              |               |                 |             |
|--------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 75%          | 69%           | 60%             | 59%         |
| <b>Small</b> | <b>Medium</b> | <b>Large</b>    | <b>Mega</b> |
| 1 - 999      | 1,000 - 9,999 | 10,000 - 49,999 | 50,000+     |

**Industry**  
% of employees working mostly in office

**Highest**

- 87% Education
- 84% Utilities
- 82% Manufacturing (Industrial)
- 80% Manufacturing (Consumer)

**Lowest**

- 66% Insurance
- 66% Professional/ Business Services
- 64% Technology
- 58% Telecommunications



4. Leaders and Gen Z are more likely to be in the office

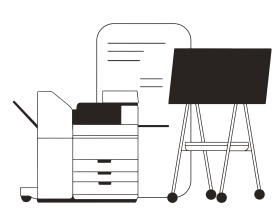
- Job Level**
- 68% Individual contributor
  - 77% Manager or above
- Generation**  
% of generations working mostly in office
- 77% Gen Z
  - 73% Millennials
  - 67% Gen X
  - 57% Boomers



5. People are struggling — work satisfaction metrics are dropping.

- Connection to Culture ↓
  - Work-life Balance ↓
  - Productivity ↓
  - Likelihood to Leave ↑
- In September 2022, European Union Labor Productivity dropped by 0.91% in comparison to September 2021, according to CEIC Data.

## 6. Factors That Influence People to Work In Office More Often



My job requires in-office resources



I have an assigned workstation



My commute time is less than 30 minutes



## 7. What People Want

We asked: Is there anything that would bring you to the office more? A third of people who work mostly in office say these things are important enough to bring them to the office even more.

- | Space Improvements             | Tech Improvements                    |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 More individual privacy      | 1 Better computers/tablets           |
| 2 Assigned workstation         | 2 Video conferencing tools           |
| 3 Larger individual space      | 3 Interactive collaboration displays |
| 4 Personal ergonomic furniture | 4 Reservation system                 |

People who work remotely the most are less motivated by changes to the office. But 41% said they'd come in more if they thought their career depended on it.

## The Takeaway

It's clear — hybrid work can look very different depending on where you live, what you do and who you work for. But it's reshaping the ways people work, regardless of how much we adopt it.

The data confirms what many felt: In the midst of so much turmoil and change, people are struggling, even when they have more flexible work arrangements than ever before. What can help?

People tell us they come to the office to collaborate and engage in social interactions. And yet the research says they also want the office to help them get their individual work done and provide privacy for focused work and better technology. Many say they'd work in the office more often if they had an assigned space,

yet organizations are shifting toward shared spaces to fully utilize their real estate. People feel more empowered than ever and want a voice in what their work experience should be.

Meanwhile, leaders feel the pressure to achieve results and boost innovation and profitability. Sales Force CEO Mark Benioff noted new employees in particular had lower productivity. "Are we not building tribal knowledge with new employees without an office culture?" he wondered. Whether it's office policies, corporate culture or other factors, leaders know they need to act.

**The question is: Where do we go from here?**

\*Tribal knowledge is unwritten information shared by a small group of individuals and unknown to the rest of the organization.

# Beyond Hybrid

Whether you're in the office one day or five, hybrid work is, arguably, the biggest change any of us will face. Not only because it ushers in a massive advance in technology, but because it creates the opportunity for us to actually do what we've been talking about for over a decade – make work more human.

## 8.

**People are making more purposeful decisions about when and why they go to the office and expect a fundamentally new experience at work.**

It's not so much about where you work, but how you work. People want a new level of agency over their work experience, and while leaders can mandate where it happens, the bigger opportunity lies in challenging assumptions and existing norms.

Workplaces need to adjust to this new reality. If they have the option, more people will make intentional decisions about why and when they go to the office. Leesman, an employee experience measurement firm, calls this "purposeful presence."

This means employees think about their reasons to go to the office — an important meeting, face time with the boss or to focus without the family

around — rather than just going automatically. And while being together is important, employees are saying the single biggest problem with the office today is the lack of privacy to do individual work.

Some organizations are exploring new workplace approaches, some are staying with existing strategies while others are waiting for more people to return to the office or for hybrid work patterns to stabilize before making changes. Regardless of where you fall on this spectrum, people's needs have changed, their work has changed and they need a fundamentally new experience at work.

## The Major Shifts in Work Norms

9.

**Over half of all meetings — 56% if not more — are spent on video.**

People need hybrid collaboration spaces where both in-person and remote participants can participate fully, and individual spaces for video meetings where they can hear and not disturb others (see pg. 16).

10.

**Pre-pandemic, 88% of people had assigned workstations. In the last year, there has been a 15% drop in assigned spaces.**

Leaders indicate the reduction will continue. This shift challenges the current norms about where people start their day, store their things and how they create a sense of belonging.

11.

**Employees are more empowered today.**

People have new expectations about how and when they engage in their work. Whether they took part in the 'Great Resignation,' 'Quiet Quitting' or the 'Great Relocation,' employees have a bigger voice about how and where work happens.

\*Steelcase Global Research 2021–2022

Steelcase LINC Munich.  
Hybrid neighborhoods in action.



Beyond Hybrid

# New Inspiration

Hybrid workplaces should draw inspiration from the neighborhoods we love and want to be in. Why? Because the best ones create a vibe and energy that solve for our basic human need to feel a sense of belonging. Great neighborhoods have a diverse range of private and public spaces, where it's critical our homes provide sanctuary amidst a bustling community. They are easily accessible — much like a “15-minute city” — where a person can meet many basic needs within a short walk. It's important they have “social infrastructure” — the places where people gather and build connections, according to sociologist and author Eric Klinenberg. Strong social infrastructure fosters contact, mutual support and collaboration and is just as essential as traditional infrastructure.



**Meg Bennett**  
Global Principal Designer  
Steelcase

## 12. How to Design a Hybrid Neighborhood

“A great work neighborhood has vitality and variety. Each one is unique but all help create equity, engagement and ease so people can do their best work. Neighborhoods are created following key design principles and with a mix of diverse types of spaces. Getting it right is both an art and science,” says Meg Bennett.

### Equity

**Create more equitable experiences.**  
Design spaces that support everyone, in-person or remote, and welcome people with diverse needs.

### Engagement

**Design for everyone's ability to engage and contribute.**  
Create experiences across a range of settings that help people do their best work, whether alone or together.

### Ease

**Make space and technology easy to use.**  
Design a variety of virtual and physical experiences that are easy to navigate and control. Create a seamless flow between different types of work and experiences.

## 13.

Neighborhoods can inspire new ways of designing the office because they have a vibe and energy that meet our basic human need to feel a sense of belonging.

## 14. Designing with these four key principles creates neighborhoods that respond to people's new needs.



**Me + We**  
Spaces need to be designed to support both individuals and groups and allow people to easily transition between both.



**Fixed-to-Fluid**  
Organizations, teams and people need more flexibility so spaces need to be created with less emphasis on fixed architecture and furnishings, and more focus on ways to easily adapt spaces and be more fluid.



**Open + Enclosed**  
There will be more collaboration in open spaces because of their inherent flexibility. Meanwhile, people want more control over their boundaries, and need more access to private and shielded spaces especially with the prevalence of video calls.



**Braiding Digital + Physical**  
This is ultimately what the hybrid workplace is all about. Technology and space need to be considered holistically because that's how work will happen.

## 15. The workplace needs four essential space types to support different kinds of work.

**Personal Spaces**  
A range of spaces balancing the needs of 'me' and 'we' gives people control over their privacy and comfort.

**Collaboration Spaces**  
Flexible settings, mobile tools and technology support in-person and distributed teams of all sizes.

**Social Spaces**  
An intentional and flexible mix of shared and individual experiences foster a sense of community and belonging.

**Learning Spaces**  
High-performing, adaptable spaces deliver integrated learning opportunities for in-person and distributed groups.

# Privacy: The Ultimate Perk

The overwhelming message about hybrid work is that people come to the office to collaborate. Yet, when asked what they need most, people say it's privacy for individual work.

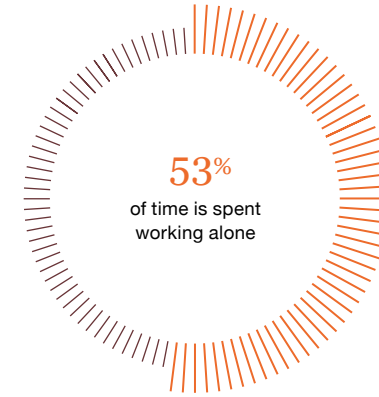
The data is mixed for a reason — people want both. They want to get the face-to-face interaction that's so difficult to replicate through screens and they really need to get their individual work done.

It's no wonder some organizations are shifting toward unassigned personal spaces or simply reducing the number of spaces, especially if employees aren't coming to the office regularly. But people say they still want personal spaces at their workplace, they just need to be better than the open-plan spaces they rallied against before the pandemic. People have customized their home offices since then and the workplace has to be as good or better.

# 16.

**People spend the largest portion of their day doing focus work.**

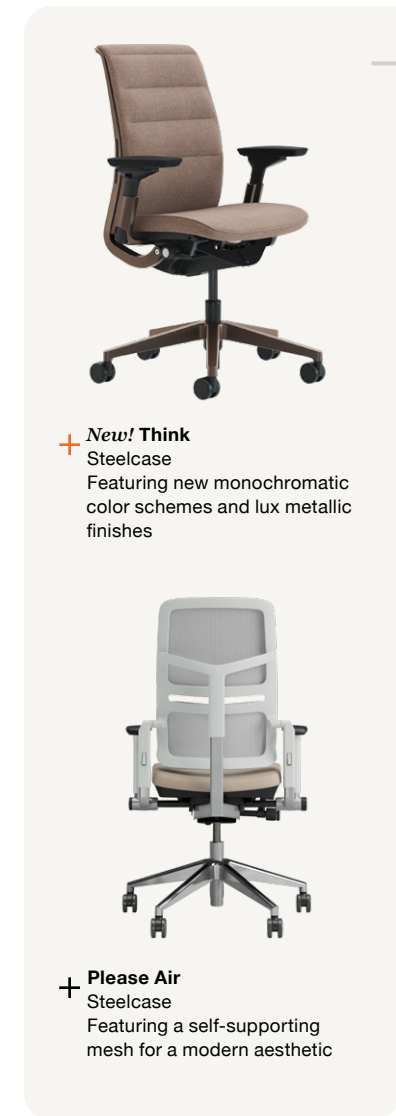
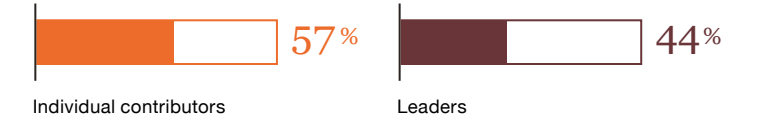
That's why it's more important than ever that offices offer spaces where workers can go to think, clear their heads and focus more deeply. It's a post-pandemic must-have that can pay big dividends in attracting people, keeping them happier, and keeping them longer.



# 17.

**Leaders have more access to privacy, yet spend less time working alone than individual contributors.**

**Time spent working alone**



Steelcase Work Tents provide an alternative solution for privacy.

# 18.

**When asked what office improvements would motivate people to come to the office more, the top answers were about individual spaces:**

- 1 More privacy
- 2 Assigned workspace
- 3 Larger workspace
- 4 Personal ergonomic furniture





+ On the QT  
Orangebox

# 19.

**An open office isn't always the best place to work — particularly now that many people take virtual calls throughout the day.**

- With so many audio and visual distractions, there aren't enough private spaces in most offices for people to focus, take a call or rejuvenate.
- Busy backgrounds and a lack of boundaries distract during video calls.
- Many spaces aren't remote-ready. Power, lighting and monitors make it easier to connect.
- Lack of informational privacy can prevent people from talking about or showing content on sensitive topics.

## Personal Spaces for Focus

When people have the ability to focus, they think and feel better. There's a number of ways to tackle office overwhelm and make it easier for people to find spaces where they can get work done.

20.

**Offer a variety of privacy options.**

Fully enclosed enclaves, pods, screens or shelves can provide diverse ways for people to seek out the right level of privacy for the type of work they're doing. Well-curated backgrounds can provide a professional look free of distraction for those on the other side of the meeting.

21.

**A range of seating is needed to support different types of work.**

For shared spaces, chairs should respond to bodies of all shapes and sizes and require few manual adjustments to get comfortable. People with assigned spaces will want a fully-adjustable chair they can dial in to their exact preferences, that keeps them comfortable longer.

22.

**Whether sharing or calling it your own, height-adjustable desks are worth it.**

More people can use the same space comfortably if shared, and those with assigned desks who may sit longer can change postures and keep moving.

23.

**Provide optimal lighting for different kinds of hybrid work.**

A task light that is designed for on-video experiences highlights people's faces and helps them control their appearance on camera and make up for ambient light. A table lamp with a shade that provides a soft glow also works well.

24.

**External monitors not only make it easier to toggle between tasks, but they can make it easier to share content on video.**

External cameras can be repositioned or refocused so people or content can be seen well.

25.

**Flexible power allows people to stay charged up wherever they choose to focus.**

While power is standard in most personal spaces, in many shared spaces it can be an afterthought or costly to install, which is where flexible power comes in.



Beyond Hybrid

## Humanizing Hybrid Collaboration

Hybrid meetings are now the most common kind of collaboration. Like any good neighborhood, the office needs places for people to come together — and now those spaces need to connect people who are in person and remote.

Technology should fade into the background so people can have more mindshare to solve problems and develop new ideas. While hybrid work may still be evolving, we know everyone, regardless of how often they're in the office, needs to interact with people in different locations. And leaders know hybrid collaboration spaces require improvement.

Most leaders (66%\*) are considering redesigning physical spaces for hybrid work. It's welcome news to employees who are unhappy with hybrid collaboration spaces they say are too small, uncomfortable, too noisy or lack privacy. And, sending everyone home doesn't solve the problem.

\*2021 Microsoft Work Trend Index

# 26.

**Most remote workers experience audio and video difficulties.\***



Struggle with video



Struggle with audio

\*Logitech



*“We’ve been trying to solve the problem of how to make video meetings more human.”*

Scott Wharton  
VP and General Manager  
Logitech

## Designing for Hybrid Collaboration

The earlier you bring design, facilities and IT together to consider how furniture, lights, video and audio will intersect, the more seamless the experience will be for in-person and remote participants.

27.

**Consider the room’s layout so everyone faces the camera.**

That may mean shifting orientation to the long wall instead of the short wall in a rectangular room. Seating in arcs or orienting everyone to face the camera helps improve communication, eye contact and focus. Tiered seating in larger spaces can help everyone’s face be seen on camera. Include plenty of personal tables for individual devices. In the open, consider seating with a high back or a built-in screen for added privacy. Furniture with pegs, hooks and storage keeps cords, personal belongings and equipment out of the way.

28.

**In enclosed spaces, center the camera in the room to ensure everyone at the table is in the field of view.**

Avoid excessive on-video motion and distraction by eliminating pathways around the space from the camera’s view. Privacy film can be applied to glass to hide what’s happening on the screen from passersby. In open spaces, position the camera to avoid views of aisles, corridors or adjacent co-workers. Conversations and movement will be distracting.

29.

**Focus on speech clarity and privacy, as well as limiting the spread of sound, atmospheric noise and echos.**

Fabric wall treatments, panels, carpet and softer seating can help absorb sound. Acoustic fabric panels opposite the technology in a room can help with sound absorption. Ensure audio settings are adjustable. In noisy areas, use microphones with noise suppression. Set speakers to default to low while still allowing for adjustments. Consider secondary microphones in settings where people are sitting far apart.

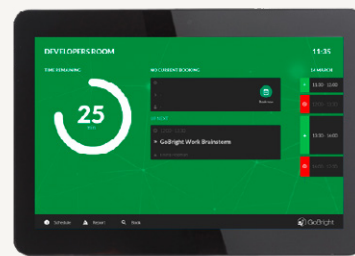
30.

**Provide multi-faceted lighting of the space, people and background.**

Multi-directional lighting is best to avoid harsh shadows. Lighter colored surfaces within the space promote light distribution. Dimmable options provide the ability to adjust based on the needs of the space. Diffused lighting is preferred over direct downlights. Avoid placing directional downlights directly over peoples’ heads, which can cause dark shadows on faces. Consider programmable light modes in spaces optimized for video meetings.



+ **New! SW\_1 Table with Power**  
Coalesse



+ **New! GoBright Room Booking**  
GoBright

## Braiding Tech + Space

In collaboration with our technology partners at Microsoft, Zoom, Logitech and Crestron, Steelcase has developed best practices for integrating tech and space to create better equity, engagement and ease.

31.

**Help people see what’s happening and stay engaged.**

Logitech’s Scribe camera for whiteboards and Microsoft Surface Hub digital whiteboard and built-in context camera help people see what’s happening and stay involved. Steelcase Flex Media Cart untethers technology and makes it moveable.

32.

**Create a more inclusive experience.**

Microsoft Teams Front Row layout and Logitech’s Grid View camera setting place remote participants in more natural sizes and locations on screen, and frame each in-room participant in their own personal window. Tables and chairs need to be positioned to maintain natural sight lines between those in the room, those who are remote and shared content.

33.

**Use intuitive furniture and technology together.**

Microsoft Teams or Zoom Rooms spaces enable one-touch join while AI-enabled cameras auto-track and auto-frame.

## Virtual Fatigue

Stanford University researchers discovered four reasons virtual meetings cause fatigue. What they learned can help companies improve hybrid collaboration spaces.

34.

**The amount of eye contact and face sizes in video chats is often unnatural.**

Especially in a one-on-one conversation, the size of someone’s face makes you feel like your personal space is being invaded which puts you at a hyper-alert state.

35.

**Seeing yourself constantly in video chats is fatiguing.**

You would never want to stare at a mirror all day. It’s stressful.

36.

**Movement is limited.**

Video can keep us stuck in the same spot. People perform better cognitively when they can move.

37.

**We have to work harder in video chats to interpret people’s non-verbal cues.**

When we can only see someone’s head and shoulders, it is harder to know why they are making a certain facial expression or gesture.

## THE TAKEAWAY

Better eye contact. The ability to move around. More natural conversations. Great hybrid collaboration experiences need to be designed for equity, engagement and ease. Ease is especially important: If the spaces and technology are hard to use, people will not take advantage of the resources available to them. People on both sides of the camera need to be able to see and hear one another and contribute to content. Whether you’re joining in-person or remote, you should be on a level playing field.





## Beyond Hybrid Social Spaces That Work

“We like efficiency in all kinds of ways,” says Eric Klinenberg, NYU professor and author. “But lingering really is important and too much efficiency can be a bad thing.”

Klinenberg says places that encourage us to pause help us make collisions that build human connections. He refers to that as social infrastructure which is made up of the physical places within a community where people gather, connect and build trust — something he argues is as necessary as roads and bridges — which ultimately contributes to creativity and a willingness to take risks. Those human connections are what cause one person to help another, or someone to step in when a colleague struggles, which builds resilience in teams and organizations.

The places where people start their workday in the office are an important part of social infrastructure. Both people who work in the office everyday and those who toggle between office and home need to feel welcomed. With fewer assigned desks, people’s

routines change. New workplace designs should invite people in, give them a destination, a way to comfortably transition into their workday — and solve the pragmatic question of where to put your stuff.

These spaces need to deliver the variety and vitality people are seeking. Nobody wants to walk into a place that feels empty. New Steelcase research asked employees about their reasons for coming into the office. While the top reasons are about completing tasks, employees also want to make connections.

Hear more from Eric Klinenberg about social infrastructure on the Work Better podcast, S1:E4, “Loneliness, Lingering + Libraries”

## 38.

People come to the office for a purpose. Top reasons are:

- 1 Collaboration
- 2 Focus work
- 3 Access to tools and technology
- 4 Sense of belonging
- 5 Feeling of shared purpose
- 6 Connect with leaders
- 7 Socialize and have fun

Steelcase Global Employee Research 2022

## 39.

Social spaces boost productivity.

The sense of inclusion, comfort and belonging in the form of social time is far from superficial. According to Dr. Tracy Brower, Steelcase vice president of workplace insights, it benefits people, teams and organizations in six important ways.

### Social Identity

For many, the way we contribute to society and community is through our work — and this contributes to identity. Coming together for a common goal is an aspect of how we understand ourselves.

### Social Norms

Culture is always evolving. When people connect, culture is strengthened as people are reminded of ‘how things get done around here.’ When people understand the unwritten rules of an organization through regular interactions with others, they feel more included in the fabric of the organization.

### Social Learning

65% of what employees learn comes from co-workers, 15% from managers (Source: Human Resource Development International). Whether it’s formal or informal, learning happens best when you are actively engaged with others.

### Social Growth

Teams with a collective understanding of a problem or shared empathy for a customer can achieve better results. This kind of growth happens together — through connecting and investing time, collaborating, communicating and coordinating.

### Social Fabric

When people are able to connect and build relationships, they increase levels of trust and compassion. This safety net of solid relationships gives people confidence to take risks and be creative.

### Social Capital

Social capital describes the web of connections across an organization through which we can learn, stretch, grow and cooperate. The opportunity to tap into your network to ask for advice and test ideas is rewarding for you and the company.



+ New! Angle Sofa  
Bolia



+ New!  
LessThanFive  
Lounge and  
Stool  
Coalesce



+ New! WorkValet Lockers  
Steelcase

Unassigned desks mean people need a place to start their day. This convenient and secure locker solution provides a new home base for people to keep their things.

## 40.

If you’re not sure how to start, run a pilot.

Trying a new space on a smaller scale and seeking feedback is a great way to evolve your hybrid workplace. Think about your entry. What do people first see when they walk in? Is it a space designed to encourage people to connect and linger? Reimagine underutilized spaces (cafes, town hall) as social spaces with a variety of settings for different kinds of work to encourage all day use. Use flexible furniture to avoid expensive architectural changes and allow new spaces to be quickly implemented with assets that can be redeployed.

## Harder Working Social Spaces

A hybrid work model, with fewer assigned spaces, puts pressure on social spaces to do more and support individual work.

# 41.

Hybrid workplaces need more high-performance elements such as interactive displays, moveable markerboards and seating that supports comfortable work postures. Social spaces are increasingly being designed to support personal devices with laptop tables, and more options for power. And designers are adding more focus sub-zones within social spaces to provide the privacy people need.

Hybrid models often mean organizations do not know how many people will be in the office on any given day. High-performance social spaces can serve as additional shared work spaces when occupancy is high.

By creating social spaces that are multi-modal — supporting multiple modes of work — people can use the same place to do different kinds of work, whether it's individual tasks, collaborating

with others, rejuvenating or spending social time together.

Great social spaces balance people's desire to connect with their need to hide away at times. People appreciate having a variety of privacy options including protection and shielding at their back. A range of postures support different ways of working— particularly for light focus, social connections and collaboration. Ample work surfaces and easy access to power are critical. Lighting and biophilic elements enhance the personality of the spaces.

"The mistake right now is to do nothing. What we know about increasing the use of shared spaces was true before the pandemic and it's even more true now," says Meg Bennett, Steelcase global principal designer. "Hybrid work demands more from shared spaces. There's no reason not to put what we know into action."



+ Steelcase Flex Active Frames  
Steelcase

+ Steelcase Series 2  
Steelcase

*"You have to make the space inviting. We want to pull people back to the office, not push."*

**Kent Taylor**  
IBM, Global Director of Workplace,  
Technology, Design & Integrated Solutions



+ Grid Sofa  
Established & Sons

## Create Beautiful Places That Work, Your Way

Explore the Steelcase Design Collection — our community of industry-leading furnishings brands with classic, modern and innovative works by renowned designers around the world.  
[steelcase.com/eu-en/design-collection](https://steelcase.com/eu-en/design-collection)



+ New! Foro Table  
Vicarbe



+ New! Visti Armchair  
Bolia

When performance principles are incorporated into the design of social spaces, individuals and teams are more productive and can collaborate, socialize and focus better, notes Bennett. They also experience psychological comfort — they feel good and want to use the spaces.

### 42. Privacy

Provide the appropriate levels and types of privacy needed for the work at hand, including visual, acoustic and territorial.

### 43. Posture

Support the body in a posture appropriate for the task, whether lounge, task, stool-height or standing.

### 44. Proximity

Think about the relationship of spaces relative to the type of work being done, easy access to tools and technology and how the settings promote equitable experiences.

### 45. Personality

Use color, materiality and furniture to express the unique brand and culture of an organization to attract and retain talent.



+ New! Funda Bold  
Vicarbe

# The Future of Work Is Learning

If machines can learn, what value do people bring in a time of rapid advances in AI? It's about developing uniquely human skills so you can do things computers can't, says New York Times tech journalist, podcaster and author Kevin Roose.

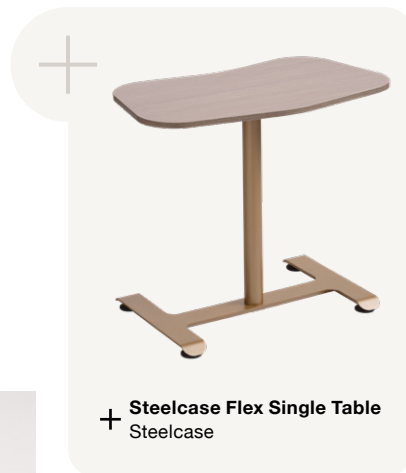


Learning is essential in today's workplace and we need to help people learn as a regular part of their jobs. But the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on workers' ability to learn and grow. Remote work made it more difficult for employees to engage in face-to-face training and professional development opportunities.

While there are plenty of high quality online training resources, employees also need to engage in informal learning and mentoring opportunities that happen through casual conversations and serendipitous interactions in the office. According to Future of Work Strategist Heather E. McGowan, "Long gone are the days when you could 'dine out' on the education you got in the early part of your life. With the twin forces of technology and globalization meeting the mega trend of expansive human longevity, our thesis is now reality. In the past we learned one time in order to work; now, we must work in order to learn continuously."

A recent survey by the Community of European Management Schools and International Companies alumni (mostly young professionals working in global organizations) reported working from home was harming their opportunities to learn from each other and more experienced colleagues. They said the inability to easily consult with more experienced colleagues for advice or observe how others deal with situations, prevented them from developing their own skills.

Hear more from Heather about why learning is the future of work: Work Better podcast S2: E2, "Learning Is the New Pension"



Steelcase Flex Single Table  
Steelcase

# 46.

## Learning impacts retention.

The ability for employees to learn and grow in their career plays a major role when it comes to retaining talent. Many companies are failing.

56% of employees and 68% of business decision makers say there are not enough growth opportunities in their company to make them want to stay long term.

55% say the best way to develop their skills is to change companies.

2022 Microsoft Trend Index

*"Learning is the new pension. It's how you create future value every day."*

Heather McGowan  
Future of Work Strategist

These insights guide the design of both informal and structured learning experiences:

47. **Learning happens everywhere.** Learning is not limited to training rooms. High-performing, adaptable spaces deliver learning opportunities for in-person and remote participants when they include mobile technology, analog tools and flexible furniture that fosters face-to-face interactions.

48. **Learning is a never-ending journey.** Rather than thinking of learning as episodic, like attending a conference or training session, it's more about nurturing a culture that encourages experimentation and has a tolerance for ambiguity and failure — an organization that's prepared to try things and learn from what went wrong without assigning blame. That's an attitude and culture that's open to taking risks, because they've calculated risk and recognized it's a learning opportunity.

# 49.

## Organizations need a learning mindset.

To scale innovation and growth, employees need to be continuously sharing and learning from each other. By bringing people together in collaborative and creative ways, the workplace can help people build strong networks and enable a learning mindset.

# 50.

## Gen Z is reshaping the workplace.

More than other generations, Gen Z is working in the office. They will represent almost a third of the global workforce by 2025<sup>1</sup> and will play a big role in shifting attitudes and perceptions.

## 51. Work-life balance and learning and development opportunities ranked highest in choosing an employer.

### Balance

'Quiet Quitting' doesn't mean a lack of engagement to them, it means creating boundaries between work and the rest of their lives.

### Pay

Low compensation was the number one cited reason for leaving their jobs in the last two years.<sup>2</sup>

### Connections

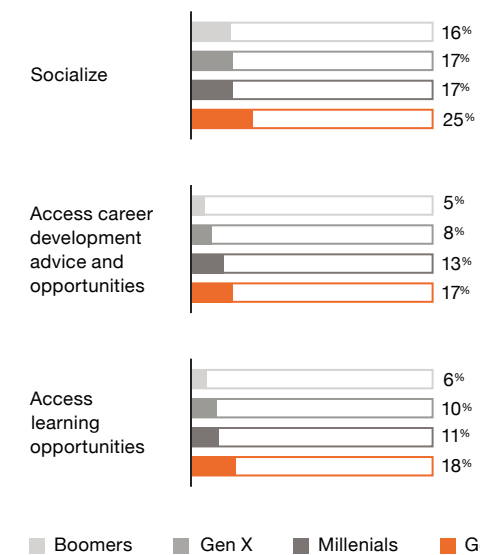
Top reasons to come to the office are about interactions.

### Values

Employer values that align with their own. Corporate sustainability initiatives will be critical to talent acquisition and retention in the future.<sup>3</sup>

## 52. Some things are more important to Gen Z when working in the office.

In addition to just getting work done, building relationships is a big reason they show up. Learning and career development are also important.



73% of Gen Z believes space is highly or extremely important to the effectiveness of the company they work for.

## 53. Individual spaces will make the biggest impact for Gen Z.

If you want to motivate Gen Z workers to come to the office even more, having an assigned desk ranks highest — which could be about feeling they belong, or simply a pragmatic need for a place where they can focus best. The top three things they want are:

- 1 Assigned Workspaces
- 2 Larger Individual Workspaces
- 3 More Privacy in Individual Workspaces

## 54. Gen Z is more likely to believe that the value of the workplace has increased over the pandemic.

54% compared with 42% of Millennials, 30% of Gen X, and 23% of Boomers

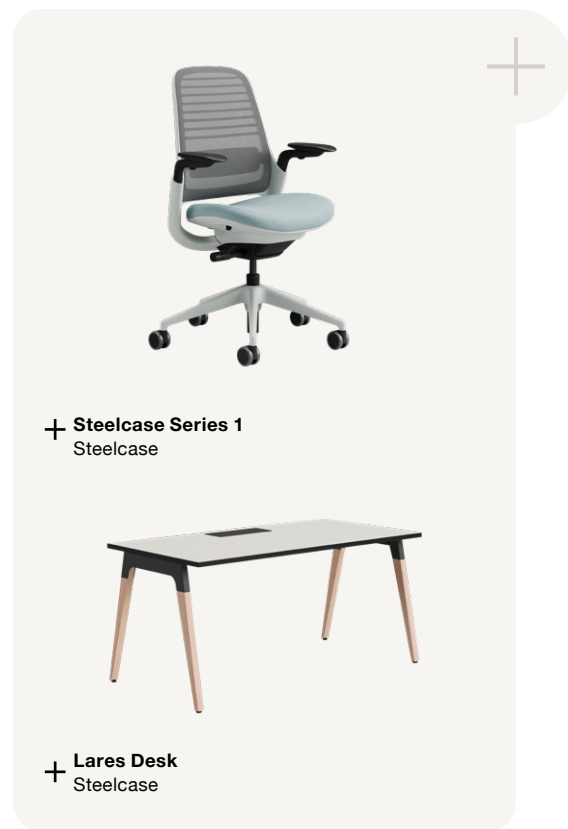
## THE TAKEAWAY

Gen Z values the office and expects it to support both the need to be together and to work alone. Improvements will motivate them to show up even more. But if they feel like their pay or opportunities are lacking they'll be the most likely to leave.

<sup>1</sup>Manpower Group 2023 Workforce Trends Report  
<sup>2</sup>2022 Deloitte survey among 23,220 Gen Z and Millennial workers (born between 1996-2010 and 1980-1995, respectively) across 46 countries globally  
<sup>3</sup>Steelcase Gen Z Research



+ Steelcase Flex Collection  
Steelcase



+ Steelcase Series 1  
Steelcase

+ Lares Desk  
Steelcase

### Small Business by the Numbers

400 million

small businesses worldwide<sup>1</sup>

30.1 million

small businesses in the EU<sup>1</sup>

98.9%

of all EU businesses are SMBs<sup>1</sup>

155 million

people employed by SMBs<sup>1</sup>

64%

of the EU workforce in SMBs<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Eurostat

# Small Business. Big Impact.

Small to mid-sized businesses (SMBs) are crucial to the economy as they make up a significant portion of the job market and contribute to economic growth, driving innovation and competition. How they work matters.

Interestingly, employees at SMBs are more likely to work in the office three or more days a week than those at larger companies (75% vs. 65%). They're also more likely to have an assigned desk. Only 9% of people at SMBs work at an unassigned desk. Yet, like their peers at larger businesses, these employees say the biggest reason they come into the office is collaboration and focus work and they would come more often for individual spaces that are more private, assigned and larger. These employees also cite spaces for wellbeing and flexible furniture as increasingly more important.

Like larger companies, SMBs need to create work neighborhoods that will support the different kinds of work their people do throughout the day. Their offices will need to provide a range of interconnected spaces that include: individual spaces assigned to one person or shared amongst the team; collaboration spaces for in-person and virtual interactions; places with appropriate privacy for individual work or rejuvenation; areas to gather, socialize and learn from teammates.

Businesses of all sizes need neighborhoods to help people feel connected to each other, their work and their company culture. They follow the same design principles and space types needed by large companies, scaled appropriately for their size.

55. Collaboration spaces adjacent to workstations promote connection and can double as a training space.

56. Acoustic pods adjacent to unassigned benching workstations give people a place to take a video call or focus.

57. Unassigned benching gives hybrid workers a place to call home.

58. Public social spaces at the entrance create a warm welcome for employees and guests to connect.

59. Flexible team space can be easily rearranged to accommodate work needs.

60. More private and quiet spaces include dedicated workstations and focus rooms at the back of the neighborhood.

61. A hybrid Duo Studio offers a range of solutions for different work modes and postures, to support creative work both individually and in pairs.

62. A centrally-located space for hybrid collaboration meetings allows people to easily connect virtually and in-person.



### About This Neighborhood

241 sqm

Accommodates 15 people (1:1 ratio) + additional 42 people in meeting/social spaces and enclaves/phone booths.

# Designing for the Twenty-First Century

Behind the scenes at the Steelcase seating design studio

Does the world need another chair? The first ones were believed to be created by ancient Egyptians and performed the same basic function over the centuries. Yet designers continued to apply science and art to creating chairs that were longer lasting, more comfortable or more beautiful. They sought new ways to meet the needs of people, whether sitting to eat, relax or, eventually, work.

Yes, the world needs evolved chairs, especially in the office, because the 21st century ushered in new ways of working and new expectations from people about the furniture they use to get their work done. The resources we have to make chairs are more scarce or have too big an impact on the planet to continue making them in the old ways. New technologies and materials have emerged, allowing the latest chair designs to achieve higher performance, greater comfort and more current aesthetics.

Designers from the Steelcase seating studio understand this deeply because they design chairs themselves, in-house, building on years of experimentation and studies of how the human body responds to design iterations. Bruce Smith

and Mark Spoelhof are long time members of the studio with more than 50 years of combined design experience. Smith was among the leading designers on Think, the world's first cradle-to-cradle chair and collaborated with Spoelhof on more recent introductions such as SILQ.

This approach means innovations can be extended to new seating creations – the LiveBack technology, which allows the backrest to mimic the natural movement of the spine, is used in all Steelcase high-performance task chair designs. And designs can be refined over time to responsibly use the highest performing materials and choose production methods with the smallest footprint. Steelcase Karman reflects the accumulated learnings from decades of chair designs.



*“We use shape, material and geometry to put motion into the chair shell. We design for compliance, which allows the chair to respond to the body sitting in it.”*

**Mark Spoelhof**  
Design Director, Global Seating



*“It’s like unfolding a shipping box. We can see exactly how it works,” says Spoelhof. “You can see how the chair shape responds and moves.”*



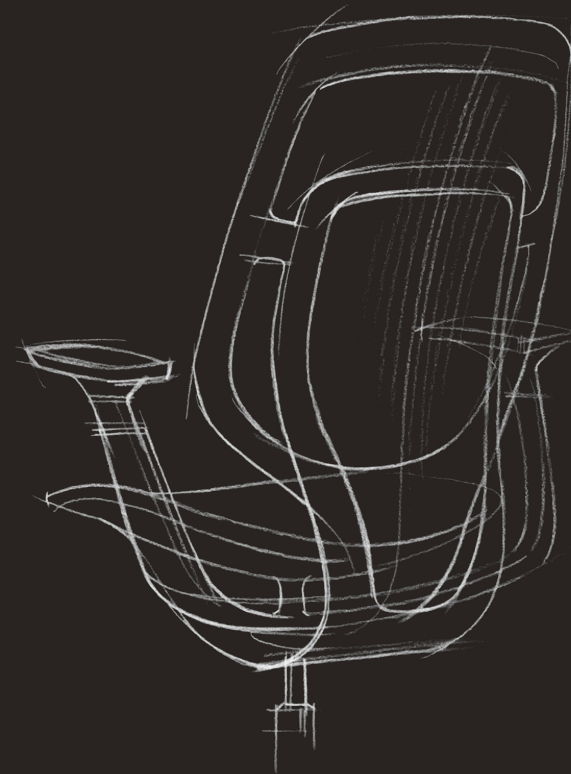
An early cardboard prototype of Steelcase Karman’s weight-activation mechanism.

“Steelcase Karman is the evolution of everything we know about seating. There’s DNA from every single one of our chairs built into it — it didn’t start from scratch.”

Mark Spoelhof



The design of Steelcase Karman (middle) was influenced by the weight-activation and arms of SILQ (left) and the streamlined back of Gesture (right).



Steelcase Karman’s code name during development was ‘Minima,’ reflecting the project team’s exploration of minimalism and the natural progression of technology advancements. Designed with the least amount of materials necessary, its aesthetic reflects the essential requirements of motion and materiality.

Spoelhof’s personal workspace displays ideas, objects and artifacts that influenced the design of Steelcase Karman, including insights from the dynamism of athletic performance wear.

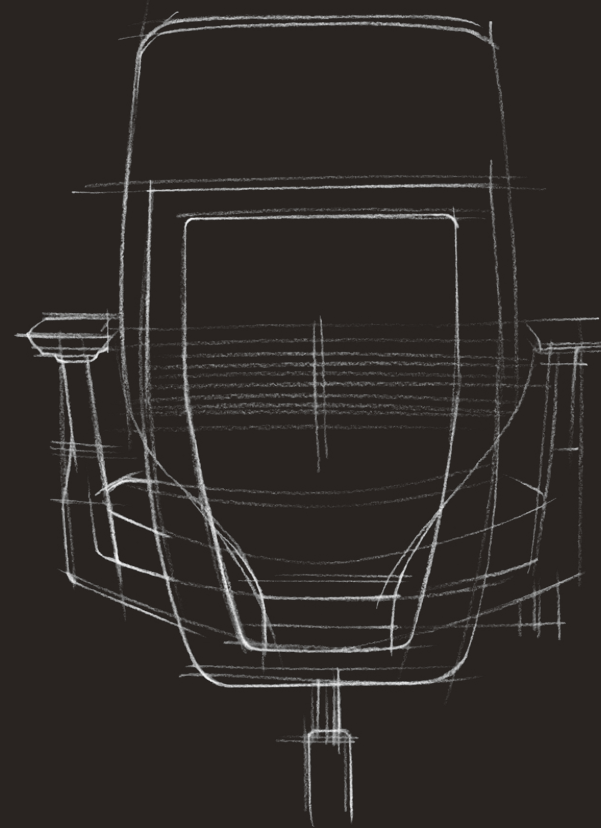


Engineers in the seating studio were mesmerized by a robot designed to mimic the movement of an insect. That biomimicry inspired the weight-activated mechanism first introduced in the Think chair, which led to SILQ’s design that responds to the movement of the human body. SILQ, in turn, influenced the design of Steelcase Karman.



“As designers we’re constantly looking to improve things in big and small ways. In that sense, we never stop designing.”

Bruce Smith  
Global Design Director



The antithesis of ‘fast-furniture,’ Gesture was built to last and celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. **Named Best Office Chair by “Wirecutter,”** its streamlined back and overall comfort inspired Steelcase Karman’s design direction.

Drawings of SILQ, Steelcase Karman and Gesture are artistic interpretations by illustrator Jody Williams.



## Designing for Sustainability

Steelcase is committed to reducing our carbon footprint, designing for a circular economy and choosing and using materials responsibly. These goals translated for seating will guide designers toward:

- Lighter weight designs that use less material overall
- Intelligent recycled and recyclable material use
- Designing for disassembly

Steelcase Karman weighs only 29 pounds, uses sustainable materials and the least number of components necessary, yet it’s incredibly strong. Using minimal resources is part of the strategy to design for a circular economy and reduce our carbon footprint in an effort to minimize the impact on the planet.

When designing, “I’m not asking one component to do one thing, I’m asking it to do three things,” says Spoelhof. “We’re pushing materiality, shape and geometry as far as we can push it. Why that’s great for sustainability is that we’re trying to use far less material to create the same affordances, so if I can create one chair for the same embodied energy as two traditional chairs, that’s a pretty good ratio.”



# Your Home Office

Homes are now part of the ecosystem of work: 75% of people have a dedicated workspace at home. People have learned how important a high-functioning home office is to their work and wellbeing.

Whether you use it one day or all week, a home office has become an essential space for both professional and personal use. While more people say they prefer working from home than the office, that number has dropped by 9% since 2021. A lot of things can influence a person's preference. But it's clear the pandemic home office setup — with spare bar stools doubling as office chairs — wasn't a long-term solution. People also learned some of the 'fast-furniture' options that looked great online didn't feel great after working in them all day. It's important to get the same level of comfort and support at home as you do in the office.

+ Think  
Steelcase

63.

Globally people work an average of 1.7 days a week from home. It varies by age, occupation, size of company and where you live.



Allison Mucha  
Interior Designer  
Steelcase

## Designing a Home Office That Works

To help you stay productive throughout the day, Steelcase Store designer, Allison Mucha, suggests focusing on your comfort and health first.

64.

### Identify the ideal space.

Working from home is likely the place you're doing a lot of focus work, so the place you choose matters. Start with a spot that is quiet, without visual distractions. Try to find a place with natural light. Connecting with nature does wonders for your mental health.

65.

### Choose the right chair.

People sit more at home than in the office. Look for a chair that lets you dial in a precise fit by adjusting the tension or amount of resistance you feel in your back as you recline to your personal preference. The chair should still allow you to stay connected to your work with your arms parallel to your desk and your eyes level with your screen as you recline. The right chair can keep you comfortable and supported, allowing you to focus longer.

66.

### Consider the essentials.

It sounds obvious, but many people wind up with desks at home that are too small or too big for their space. You need room on your desk for at least your laptop, keyboard, mouse and phone. Height-adjustable desks allow for healthy movement throughout the day — a smart solution for lasting comfort.

67.

### Don't forget performance tools.

You may not have thought about it, but tools like monitor arms can help you achieve greater comfort by putting your screen in the right position to help reduce eye and muscle strain. Laptop risers keep your device on a stable surface and at the right height whether you're seated or standing.

68.

### Find the best light.

Look for highly-adaptable task lighting designed for video meetings that provide just the right amount of light on your face. A table lamp can also provide soft illumination for virtual meetings.

69.

### Curate a good background.

Create a distraction-free backdrop for virtual meetings with a well-curated background. If your work zone is part of a living space, consider a screen or room divider to create both physical and mental separation between work and home.



+ Ottima Portico  
Steelcase

## A Greener Home Office

Much like ‘fast-fashion,’ the phenomenon of ‘fast-furniture’ is designed for shorter life cycles and is being thrown into landfills at an alarming rate. Consider your furniture choices at home, in addition to recycling and watching your energy use.

70.

**Look for furniture made to last.** Higher quality furnishings have a more useful life, and are less likely to end up in a landfill.

71.

**Choose pieces intentionally designed to limit waste.** These pieces not only use less materials and less resources to ship, but can have the added benefit of being lighter and easier to move within your home.

72.

**Look for certifications that tell you the material makeup of the furniture** to be sure they don’t negatively impact human health.

73.

**Think about who else may be using this space** during the course of a day. If you have pets or kids at home, consider how else the space can serve your home once the workday is done.



## Work Better. Play Better.

The gaming industry has exploded over the past decade — with millions taking part in everything from casual gaming at home to global competitions held in arenas. Amidst lockdowns during the pandemic, gaming became a great way to stay connected while staying safe. In fact, in 2021, the European video gaming market grew by 18%, reaching a whopping \$25 billion.\* An estimated 52% of the population in Europe plays video games, with the average playing time per week settling in at about 9 hours.\*\* This means home offices often double as gaming spaces and people are likely sitting longer than ever before.

As the gaming sector expands, Steelcase is dedicated to making sure your work from home setup helps you seamlessly transition to gaming. And, in summer 2023, our EMEA Retail team will be present at gaming events like Level Up in Salzburg, Austria and the World eSports Championship in Iasi, Romania.

Steelcase’s Gesture chair paired with Solo Sit-to-Stand desk can help you achieve the right ergonomic support so you can play your best game.

So which chair is the best for gaming? The answer: the one that fits you the best. Think of gaming as work or learning – the performance of the chair impacts the performance of the person sitting in it.

Find a chair that elevates your game. Visit [steelcase.com/eu-en/work-from-home/office-chairs](https://steelcase.com/eu-en/work-from-home/office-chairs)



\*Source: <https://www.globaldata.com/data-insights/technology-media-and-telecom/market-size-of-video-gaming-in-europe/>

\*\*Source: <https://www.isfe.eu/news/europes-video-games-industry-publishes-annual-key-facts-report-authoritative-data-and-engagements-from-2021/>

# Color. Works.

74.

Color is a key ingredient to creating an inviting office space — even a subtle change can make a big difference.

This artistic interpretation is composed with the entire color offering available on Steelcase products and demonstrates its extensive range, from light to dark and muted to vibrant.

75.

Color is powerful. It evokes strong emotions, feelings and memories. It can calm, excite and inspire – influencing our mood and affecting our emotional and physical wellbeing.

Our world is infused with different hues, tones and intensity that influence us. That's why color is vital to the human experience – and to place. People can walk into a space and immediately feel better – or worse.

Color also reflects culture and the shifts in society's response to the world around us. The color palette humans are drawn to is ever evolving and we are responding to forces that we can't articulate but can feel at a visceral level. In the places we work, color communicates in ways we might not be consciously aware of, but it influences how we feel. Ask yourself, do you feel good when you walk into your office? Does it signal feelings of warmth? Is it welcoming?

Workplace color palettes in the past often would signal, "We're all business here." They reflected an early infatuation with technology, but the aesthetic often felt cold and antiseptic. To combat this, many organizations responded by embracing bright primary colors and introducing slides and jungle gyms. While the intent was to infuse joy, the workplace was not always practical for getting work done nor a soothing environment for people in high-stress roles.

Today, hybrid work has blurred the lines between work and home. People want to experience the comforts of home when they are in the office. Recognizing this desire, designers are looking at how color can be used to create workplaces where people will feel good and where they want to be.

The process of creating relevant color choices for today's workplace starts with an exploration of

macro forces and societal shifts. Understanding how these forces and shifts are impacting culture, the ways people work and the workplace is important when looking at how color can be used to create places that support people and the work they do.

76.

Of all the forces influencing work, people's need for emotional and physical wellbeing accelerated during the pandemic. It is influencing workplace design and the colors that people are drawn to.

This is especially important as we recover from a global pandemic and are still living in a time of uncertainty and volatility. Stress, anxiety and the physical toll they take has impacted all of us. People are talking openly about mental health and employees have heightened expectations of their employers and how they will support their overall wellbeing.

Immersed in technology, people yearn for more humanity. They are seeking comfort, familiarity and a sense of sanctuary and are drawn to places that create a soothing, domestic sensibility. With these insights, designers can begin to envision colors that appeal to what people need and apply them in ways that humanize space to better support their cognitive, physical and emotional wellbeing.



**Kaitlyn Gillmor**  
Senior Industrial Designer  
Steelcase

**Vineta Chugh**  
Industrial Designer  
Steelcase

*"We can all understand, intuitively, that colors have emotions. People want and expect emotional comfort wherever they go, and that's the thing we're really reacting to."*

**Kaitlyn Gillmor**

*"Prior to the pandemic, your workplace and your home looked and felt different from a color perspective. Since the pandemic those spaces are blurred, so they need to provide a similar level of comfort."*

**Vineta Chugh**

Generation Z's top concerns of wellbeing, health and sustainability will have an overriding influence on workplace aesthetics for years to come.

77.

**Natural elements help balance pervasive technology.**

As technology and mobile devices permeate our lives, along with their techy aesthetic, the more we crave the balance that natural elements can bring.

78.

**Warmer neutrals evoke feelings of comfort.**

Neutral color is grounding, natural and timeless — and can be paired with vibrant and bold accents to create a unique and inspiring aesthetic. Bringing these colors into the workplace can help make it feel more secure, stable and supportive.

79.

**Home and office aesthetics intersect.**

People want a new aesthetic at home, in the office and at the cafe down the street — everywhere they go. The boundaries that used to define our spaces are fading. People want to balance performance with a domestic sensibility, helping them feel a sense of comfort at work as much as they do at home.

80.

**Biophilia matters even more.**

Colors, shapes and patterns that incorporate design principles around leaves, flowers, animals, trees and other outdoor elements can subliminally help people feel more grounded and a greater sense of wellbeing. This impacts the colors we're drawn to, but also the materials and finishes we prefer, such as those made of natural elements like wood, stone or even recycled materials.

Steelcase responded to recent shifts in culture and emerging color trends by creating new paint colors. The palettes shown demonstrate the range you can achieve as you look from light to dark — and environments that move from subtle to expressive. By expanding the range of available colors in our offering, designers and organizations can more easily express their brand and personality to bring new life to work.



Like a lavender field on a summer day, this palette creates a calming environment. A pop of color adds a burst of energy, and the variety of textures add depth and warmth to a space.



Like the vastness of a sunset, this palette feels expansive yet comforting. With a hint of light orange and multiple textures, it creates an atmosphere of luxury like a favorite indulgence.



Each of the palettes blends new and existing colors to help update current spaces and guide new design work.




  
 + **New! Eucalyptus Green**
  
 Steelcase

This palette began with imagining our favorite places in nature and weaving natural elements with man-made spaces. From the green hues in our favorite gardens to the desert landscape brought in by a rich terra red, this palette brings nature to product and wellbeing to humanity.



Steelcase has expanded its melamine solid colors to include eight new softer, toned-down decors reflective of the natural world.

The decors were inspired by grounding elements in our lives, especially in nature. Stones, earthenware, low tides, soft skies — these help us reconnect with ourselves and nature — elements that ground us in peaceful moments. It's a shift towards toned-down, soft colors that can layer with and support our current wood and solid decors.

[steelcase.com/eu-en/palettes](https://steelcase.com/eu-en/palettes)



# Active Learning. Active Minds.

Regardless of the grade level, subject matter or class size, today's best learning spaces are designed for participative, active and engaging learning experiences that help students function at their best — cognitively, physically and emotionally.

Active learning spaces are designed to support fluid transitions among multiple teaching and learning modes (including lecture, discussion, group work) and give students and instructors visual and physical access to each other. Highly flexible furnishings allow students and instructors to easily reconfigure the space to best support their activities.

Today, this is especially important given the setbacks so many students experienced during the pandemic. This broadened, whole-learner approach goes beyond academics and recognizes the importance of motivation, engagement and student wellbeing. Whether students are in the classroom or learning remotely, person-to-person connections and the ability to easily interact with teachers and peers is essential. A more effective use of technology also presents tremendous opportunities to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.



81.

**Active learning increases engagement and improves student outcomes.**

**In active learning spaces, students are more likely to:**

- Report an increased willingness to participate actively in class
- Accept new challenges and work beyond their comfort zone
- Feel a sense of community and belonging

[Learn more about this research](#)



82.

**Active learning spaces improve movement, communication, creativity, critical thinking and collaboration.**

Over the past few years, Steelcase has partnered with more than 80 diverse institutions serving thousands of students at all levels across North America to understand how teaching and learning is evolving — and how smarter, more active environments can help.

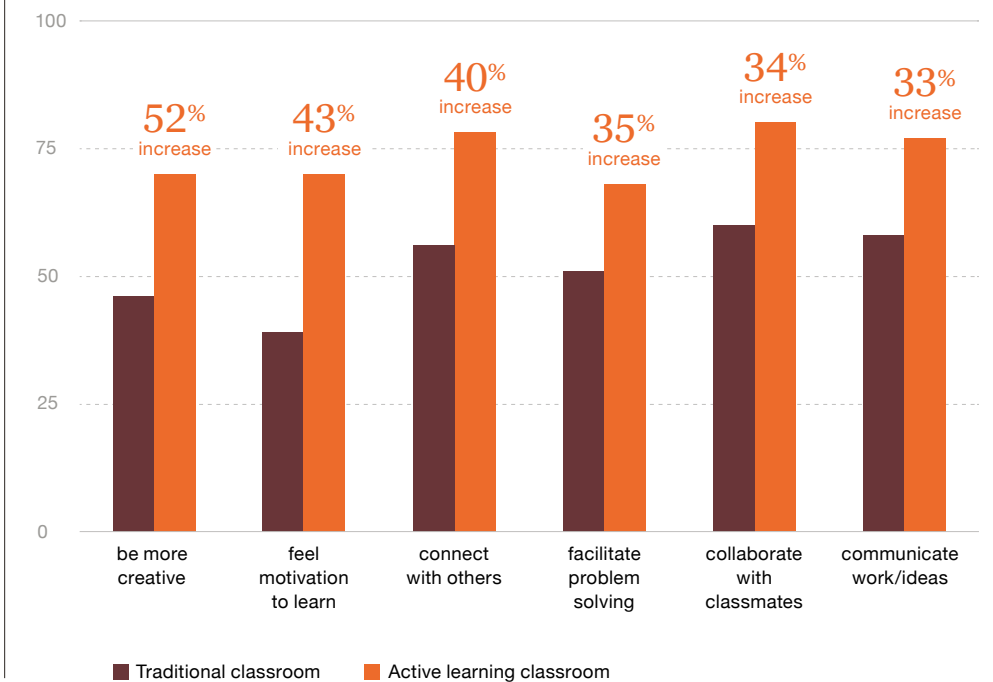
Students report notable gains in movement in the classroom, communication with peers and teachers, creative activities, critical thinking and collaborative learning. 79% of students reported that the experience in the environment designed for active learning was somewhat or much better than in a traditional classroom.

Instructors reported that the new space supports the type of teaching and learning that they want in their classroom and noticed improved student behaviors and mindsets. Instructors also favored the time they spent teaching in an active learning classroom when comparing the experience to that in a traditional classroom.

**79% of students prefer active learning spaces over traditional classrooms.**

**Active Learning Classrooms Improve Student Engagement**

Students agreed or strongly agreed these classrooms helped them:



# Hybrid Learning Is Here to Stay

Partnering with technology leaders, Steelcase is experimenting with new hybrid classroom experiences with integrated technology to identify ways to improve hybrid learning spaces.

83.

**Make technology and furniture moveable.**

Enable both remote and co-located participants to move around the room so remote students aren't always 'on stage' next to the lesson. Mobile furniture and mobile virtual displays support a more flexible environment. If the classroom is engaged in a group discussion, pull the virtual display up to the table instead of situating it at the front of the room. Make sure both remote and co-located participants have clean sight lines to people and content. Flexible furnishings and/or the use of mobile devices can let you move co-located or remote participants to give them the best view.

84.

**Arrange remote and local participants, and digital and analog content to ensure equal participation.**

Activate vertical wall space with writable or tackable tools making everything in the room a learning tool. Some software platforms and integrated technology systems support the use of multiple monitors that allow people and content to be displayed separately, which creates a more equitable experience for remote participants.

85.

**Design for the camera's viewing range (90, 120 degrees).**

Make sure people and content can be seen by remote participants. A robust video collaboration system, such as the Logitech Rally Bar Mini, allows teachers to move freely around the room, showcasing multiple types of content and material to students.

86.

**Use shared content creation tools.**

Provide equal access to digital and analog information and enable multiple modes of collaboration.



87.

## More than a game: Designing for esports.

Esports gives education leaders new, compelling ways to engage students. The phenomenon has skyrocketed during the past decade and shows no signs of letting up. It's more than a game. Embracing esports and sponsoring teams can attract competitive gamers looking for the opportunity to further flex and hone their skills while in school.



This esports gaming center brings teams together for competition, training, coaching, learning and social activities. The Battle Zone supports teams of five with ergonomic seating, a large worksurface, user-adjustable monitor arm, personal hooks for headsets, mobile caddies and desktop power. A large lounge setting in the adjacent Observation Zone allows guests to watch games on the monitors and through the glass.

### Benefits of esports

88.

Engages students who might not otherwise participate in extracurricular activities.

89.

Creates strong interpersonal connections that can make or break a student's experience at school.

90.

Offers a sense of community, camaraderie and belonging.

Learn more about esports: [steelcase.com/eu-en/designing-for-esports](https://steelcase.com/eu-en/designing-for-esports)



91.

### How popular is esports?

97%

of children play at least one hour of video games per day in the U.S.

3 billion

gamers worldwide

175+

universities in America offer esports scholarships




# Uncovering Barriers

Imagine an office space that puts you at ease and makes you feel valued, productive and engaged from entry to exit. Now consider someone very different from you — would they experience the space the same way? Would they feel accommodated or excluded, connected or discouraged?

More than ever before, organizations are connecting their diversity, equity and inclusion goals with the design of the workplace. Creating inclusive spaces, where employees feel a greater sense of belonging requires celebrating and building upon what is working well, while also critically examining who feels left out.

When we set out to create inclusive spaces, products and experiences, we intentionally co-create with people who have experienced exclusion, by reaching out to what Steelcase Culture and Diversity consultant Mary Brown calls the ‘unusual suspects.’ “Working alongside unusual suspects should make you question how space and culture impact someone’s life which differs from you,” says Brown. “It’s about seeking people, places and perspectives that challenge the status quo.”



**Kamara Sudberry**  
Leader  
Inclusive Design  
Steelcase

Kamara Sudberry leads the development and integration of inclusive design at Steelcase through the application of design principles and practices across the business. She leverages her background in the field of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) and passion for collaboration to create inclusive spatial experiences that are empowering and safe.

**Who is Kamara following?**

Kat Holmes  
[linkedin.com/in/katholmes](https://www.linkedin.com/in/katholmes)

Whitney Hill  
[linkedin.com/in/whitney-a-hill](https://www.linkedin.com/in/whitney-a-hill)

Annie Jean-Baptist  
[linkedin.com/in/anniejeanbaptiste](https://www.linkedin.com/in/anniejeanbaptiste)

Mary Brown  
[linkedin.com/in/marybrownleeax](https://www.linkedin.com/in/marybrownleeax)

## 92.

### Start with an inclusive design mindset.

While most leaders and designers agree they want to create inclusive spaces, many do not have a shared understanding of what that means or how to begin.

Inclusive design requires us to go beyond codes and compliance to see the role identity and bias play in decision making. Engaging the perspectives of people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, races, disabilities, ages, sizes and genders, or who identify as neurodivergent, adds value to any project. It’s less about reaching a perfect outcome and more about uncovering barriers with unheard voices to drive innovation.

### Signals of Inclusive Design

It can be difficult to pinpoint what makes a space great, but people instinctively identify shortcomings and potential barriers.

## 93.

### First Impressions

As you walk into a space, you are welcomed by signage, thresholds, furniture settings, sounds, smells, artifacts and artwork that set the tone and signals who belongs — and possibly who does not. The best way to attract a diverse, dynamic community of people is to ensure they feel seen, supported and accommodated as they enter. Does artwork reflect the community? Are there touch downs and accommodations for people with functional limitations? Does signage use symbols to help everyone navigate? How are hypo- and hyper-sensitivities impacted as people enter? These questions drive new possibilities.

## 94.

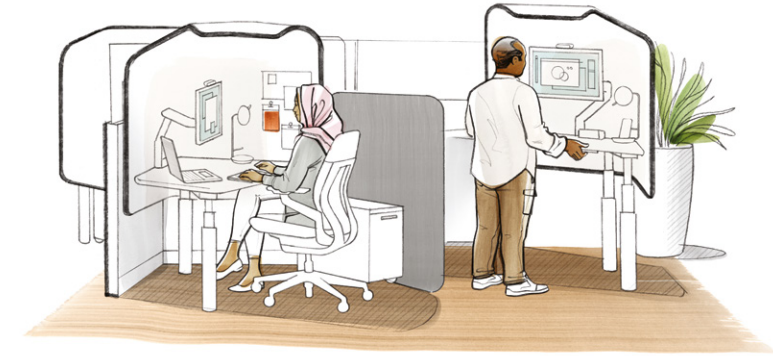
### Diversity of Settings

When people think of a traditional office space, they tend to imagine spaces with the same workstation repeated over and over. While this may create a sense of equality, it does not honor how people work differently and how our needs vary. Inclusive workplace neighborhoods feature a diversity of postures, boundaries and intentional adjacencies. Provide places for everyone to be productive, without sacrificing equity and forcing one-size-fits-all.

## 95.

### Range of Furniture + Technology Solutions

A range of solutions enables different groups of people to share the same space in different ways. Seating diversity that supports visual consistency, while offering choice in firmness and arm rests ensures everyone is comfortable. Diverse table shapes and heights — with space to approach — provides everyone with a seat at the table. Accessible writable surfaces that can move and adapt encourages community building, collaboration and wayfinding. Don’t



Illustrations by Jody Williams

forget about power that’s easy to access, without crawling or bending under furniture. These choices provide dignity and allow everyone to contribute.

## 96.

### Spatial Perception + Sensory Control

Control over your environment can be tough to find in the office, but it is possible. When designing for neurodiversity, we encourage user sensory control, which has proven to enhance the spatial experience for everyone. Have you identified areas for focus, or no technology? What about flexible sensory spaces that support rest and rejuvenation, or reservable hoteling stations where people can control visual privacy, lighting, noise and ventilation? If the answer is no, your space could do more to be inclusive.



### THE TAKEAWAY

While inclusive design offers many opportunities, we acknowledge that this work can be challenging — especially for strong advocates. “Even when you have a heart for inclusion and innovation, it can be incredibly taxing to be the go-to person for a perspective,” says Brown.

As we navigate our ever-changing world, inclusive design serves as an intervention to challenge exclusion, and build informed and impactful spaces to work, learn, heal and ultimately live better.



An inclusive workplace provides options so people can work differently. These focus spaces give people a range of solutions with different postures, privacy options and ways to control the environment.





Colleagues connect in a collaborative team space.

# Reinventing the Munich LINC

## Designing a Learning + Innovation Center in the Hybrid Era

The world of work has changed profoundly over the last three years. The new hybrid era, in which people have more agency than ever over where and how to work, led to a reduction of density in many office spaces across the globe – and Steelcase’s Munich Learning + Innovation Center (LINC) is no exception. In the six years since opening the LINC, Steelcase created a vibrant community of employees, partners and customers from across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. With a very diverse group of people working alongside each other, this international hub has served as a catalyst for change through rapid learning and creative work. But lately, fewer encounters and informal interaction led to a slow erosion of the feeling of community, remote work affected the mutual trust that is critical to innovation, and the intensification of video conferencing resulted in the emergence of new space needs.

“It was time to challenge our initial assumptions and rethink what a Learning + Innovation Center needs to do in the hybrid era,” says Carlos Gonzalez, Steelcase Learning team leader EMEA. “We needed different kinds of spaces to deepen our connections through vibrant, innovative work neighborhoods that address the new needs of hybrid work.”

97.

### Density and proximity create vibrancy

This project, known as “Leading with the LINC,” brought together a large, cross-functional team of designers, researchers, product specialists and HR leaders. Their first decision was to bring employees who had previously been distributed across three adjacent buildings into two buildings to increase density and proximity, which invigorates the space and strengthens people’s sense of belonging. The designers drew inspiration from urban planning to create an array of interconnected neighborhoods that will enable people to easily flow from one work mode to the next and to interact with each other throughout the day.

“The goals are clear,” outlines Jessie Storey, Steelcase design director EMEA. “We want to promote learning and innovation, rekindle the sense of community and enable an intuitive hybrid work experience for our employees and guests at the LINC. The best way of achieving this is to reduce our footprint and rethink the existing spaces.”

The neighborhoods throughout the LINC have been designed to support a more humanized employee experience by creating spaces that are more equitable, engaging and easy to use (See page 11 for more information on the Equity, Engagement and Ease Framework). They also leveraged four key principles to address people’s new needs: Me + We, Fixed-to-Fluid, Open + Enclosed and Braiding Physical + Digital (Read more about the Design Principles on page 11).

#### A learning and innovation mindset

Designers intentionally approached the project with a learning and innovation mindset. “In an innovation center like ours, learning is tightly connected to our ability to foster innovation,” explains Storey. “We thought very carefully about transitions and circulation paths to enable as many creative collisions as possible.” To encourage these creative collisions, the team created ‘shared attractors’ to give employees the freedom to work anywhere in the building, depending on their needs and activities. Spaces include places for focus work or rejuvenation (personal spaces), collaboration and social spaces, and both formal and informal learning spaces. People want to have control over where



The Munich LINC is a learning and innovation hub in the heart of Europe.

they work, and this gives them more choices. Use of spaces such as single-person rooms where people can take a video call and hyper-collaborative team neighborhoods which offer a lot of opportunities for cross-pollination, have seen a sharp increase. The new environment helps activate behaviors that foster interaction with other people and their work, which in turn contributes to innovative ideas.

#### Creating community

A key change is the reimagined first floor. This strategically-positioned space has been transformed into a community hub. “We dismantled three meeting rooms to open up the entire floor. The first floor is now a multipurpose co-working space where we can nurture the sense of togetherness,” says Steelcase EMEA Interior Design Director Noga Lasser. “It is also where we relocated our Environment, Social and Governance team, as a constant reminder of how important these values are for our community and our company.”



Colleagues brainstorm during a hybrid meeting.

+ Season Chair  
Vicarbe

## 98. Workplace flexibility is key in addressing occupancy fluctuation

The design team also needed to make the space more flexible to better address occupancy fluctuation for hybrid work. They devised a new way to approach owned and shared spaces: “We have fewer workstations than team members because they’re rarely all together in the office, but we created several ‘spillover spaces’ for peak days”, explains Lasser. “These assets are located at the junction of two team neighborhoods and shared by teams with similar work modes. Their work tools and furniture are specific to the needs of the teams for which they were created. For example, HR and finance engage in focus work at fully-equipped workstations and high-performance task seating, and the Global Accounts team collaborates informally with visiting guests at a communal table. To make sure this approach would work, we leveraged the desk-booking system of our partner GoBright and established protocols in collaboration with the teams.”

### Beyond hybrid

With so many different types of hybrid collaboration happening (See page 16 for more information about how to create great hybrid collaboration spaces), people need more than just one type of meeting space. A study by the Steelcase WorkSpace Futures research team provided insight into how people use meeting rooms and revealed a gap between intent and behavior. “We have transformed

our meeting rooms to create a more equitable experience for everyone and we will continue to learn and adjust,” says Lasser. “We’ve equipped enclosed one-person rooms with easy-to-use technology for a better hybrid experience and easier connections, and we have refitted medium-sized meeting rooms either for active and generative meetings or for content-sharing. We have been very intentional about the positioning of cameras and furniture so people sit at eye level and their faces are at the right height for natural eye contact.”

“This transformation offers us a lot of opportunities to innovate,” adds Storey. Steelcase recently partnered with Logitech to explore a concept called Project Ghost (See page 2), an extended-reality experience that blurs the lines between the physical and digital to create a more human, immersive connection. “We were very excited to install our first prototype at the LINC. And all this creative energy gives us ideas for future design explorations.”



+ Campers&Dens  
Orangebox

The Munich LINC supports a learning mindset.

## 99.

### Change is a never-ending process

The LINC evolution goes way beyond real estate and space planning considerations and encompasses all necessary steps to adapt to a rapidly-changing world of work. The result is an ongoing and iterative transformation process that reflects a learning and innovative mindset. “Change never stops, and the LINC is the perfect laboratory to continuously test new ideas, products and spaces,” says Storey. “We are confident this transformation will help us shape our future by creating spaces that help people work better.”

Visit us  
[steelcase.com/eu-en/visit-linc](https://steelcase.com/eu-en/visit-linc)



## Building Relationships at Work

Meet Amy Gallo, author of “Getting Along,” Harvard Business Review contributing editor and co-host of the HBR podcast Women At Work.



How has hybrid changed our relationships at work? Work Better Editor in Chief and podcast host Chris Congdon talked with Amy about conflict, communication and the benefit of feeling uncomfortable.



Hear Amy Gallo’s full interview in season 2 of our Work Better podcast which launches April 25 anywhere you get podcasts.



**CC: How is hybrid work changing the way we navigate our relationships?**

**AG:** Overall, there is a deterioration of a connection. Remote modes of communication (i.e. email, text, IM) are flatter, communicate less emotion, less nuance and that presents challenges. One of my biggest concerns is hybrid work gives us an excuse to not address conflict. That said, I have relationships with close team members that are strong despite working remotely during the pandemic. It depends on the nature of the relationship.

**CC: You are an advocate for healthy conflict at work. How can you make conflict constructive in a hybrid work model?**

**AG:** One of the things about having disagreements in a hybrid environment is you have to be much more intentional about clarifying your perspective and goal for the conversation. It can be tempting to say, “We’ll address that later.” But when we delay, interactions, relationships and, ultimately, projects we work on together suffer. We think video conferencing is a good replacement for in-person, and sometimes it is. But in a virtual environment, you lack context and can’t read body language or facial expressions well. You also stare at each other constantly — something that in person would seem aggressive. That doesn’t mean we should avoid these conversations. There’s discomfort that comes with interacting with other humans, but that’s how you learn and grow, how you create interesting work together and how you innovate.

**CC: You have identified eight archetypes of difficult people and you’ve said the worst is the Passive Aggressive. Why is that one so tricky?**

**AG:** The reason Passive Aggressive is the worst is because it can feel like shadowboxing — constant evasion. Someone may have a reason for behaving passively aggressively. They may hate conflict, don’t have power or fear rejection. To address this kind of person, document your conversations. Send an email saying, “Here’s what we discussed.” Clearly explain what will happen if they fail to follow up so they are aware of the consequences. And if all that fails, ask if there’s something else going on that’s causing them to dodge you.

**CC: How do we identify if we’re behaving like one of the difficult types of people?**

**AG:** Despite your intentions, you need to be able to sense the impact you have on people. Getting valuable feedback helps. Do you have people who you can go to and say, “I know there are ways I’m holding myself back. What do you think those are?” Test your hunches. Maybe ask: “I struggle to be direct. Do you think I’m coming

off as passive aggressive?” The more you get reflection from others, the more you can recognize these patterns.

**CC: Do our interpersonal dynamics play a role when it comes to wanting to go to or avoid the office?**

**AG:** I have certainly had remote workers tell me, “I’m so glad I don’t have to deal with this colleague.” There is (pre-pandemic) research that shows we focus more on the tasks rather than the relational side of work when we’re remote. On the flip side, research tells us positive relationships with coworkers are good for us. Good for teams, for work, for the organization. So, if we’re not forming relationships because these mediums are not as conducive to it, it’s likely going to hinder work.

**CC: What risks are we taking if we don’t find ways to keep building relationships in a hybrid or remote environment?**

**AG:** Remote work allows us to self-select into smaller and smaller communities, or echo chambers. I get to only interact with my two best work colleagues as opposed to all of these other people. By working from home, we choose who we have the Zoom coffee with and that is probably going to be the person who looks, thinks and acts like us.

### Last Words

The insistence so many people have on feeling comfortable, avoiding conflict or avoiding interacting with people who aren’t like them, does ourselves, our organizations and certainly society a disservice.

## Design Voices: How can designers help organizations foster happiness at work?



**Stefan Diez**  
Founder  
DIEZ OFFICE  
Munich, Germany

Every company should make an effort to create a good working context, a suitable and right place. The neighbourhood also plays a role in this: it is important whether there is a café or a playground nearby. Living and working — these are simply closely related and should also be considered together as far as design aspects are concerned.



**David Cordell**  
Practice Leader  
Associate Principal  
Perkins&Will  
Washington D.C., U.S.

Our clients frequently report seeing the professional career paths of their employees becoming increasingly non-traditional. People are staying in the workforce longer, and changing their occupational focus more often. Organizations and spaces that support continual learning through robust educational programs and designs that support on-the-job training and neurodiverse learning styles are increasingly desirable to people. Organizations that value the personal growth of their employees by facilitating professional development see greater engagement and satisfaction.

Illustrations by Jonny Ruzzo

# Inspiration

*"In 2022 the World Health Organization estimated 2.2 billion people live with some form of vision impairment — that's why designing for accessibility is so important. This inspires us to research, test and refine our approach to graphic design and how to best use color to make our stories more inclusive, accessible and enjoyable."*



**Erin Ellison**  
Global Creative Director  
Steelcase



# Work Better **WB** Magazine. Podcast. Online.

The podcast where we think about work and ways to make it better.

S2:E1  
Conflict, Communication + Discomfort with Amy Gallo

S2:E2  
Learning Is the New Pension with Heather McGowan

S2:E3  
How Your Brain Makes Friends with Robin Dunbar

S2:E4  
Be Happier at Work with Jenn Lim

S2:E5  
Pop, Tech + Culture with Marcus Collins

S2:E6  
Learning Is a Social Event with Anya Kamenetz

S2:E7  
Gen Z: Power + Possibility with Jean Twenge

S2:E8  
How to Go From Insight to Action with Laszlo Bock

Episodes publish weekly beginning April 25, 2023.



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