Hybrid Workplace Playbook

How to Transform Offices
for the Future of Work

August 2021

VERGE
SENSE

Table of Contents

VERGE SENSE

VERGE SENSE

For centuries, "the office" was the only place where employees could work productively, connect with other colleagues, brainstorm, collaborate, and escape the distractions of home. In the late 1990s top employers started investing heavily in workplace experience and corporate campuses were designed to encourage employees to stay working at the office longer.

In 2020, COVID-19 forced the world's office workers to suddenly work without an office — and many companies were unprepared.

Now, as companies reopen their workplaces post-pandemic, they are faced with the new challenge of ensuring employees can do both: work at the office and away from the office. At their desks and away from their desks. 9-5 five days a week and flexible hours.

Enter the new hybrid workplace.

74% **36%** **73%**

74% of companies returning to the office are adopting a hybrid work model.

36% of enterprises are investing in space redesigns.

73% of companies have invested in more than one virtual collaboration tool.

Source: VergeSense Innovations **2021 Workplace Impact Report**

Why Are Companies Choosing Hybrid Work?

The hybrid workplace model goes hand-in-hand with responsible leadership and trust. By empowering employees to choose the best place where they work most effectively, with the schedule that suits them best, employers are sending the message that they trust their employees to do their best work, not just when their managers are watching over their shoulders. Meanwhile, physical offices become bastions for in-person collaboration, team events, company celebrations, training sessions, and more.

Key Benefits of Hybrid Work in Numbers

- Employees spend almost **30% of their time on video-conferencing calls**

- **People who work away from their desks within the office are more effective** and report having a better work experience

- **Activity-based work settings** have continued to climb each year and reached more than a quarter (26%) of all office setups in 2019

The Workforce is Changing

55%

36%
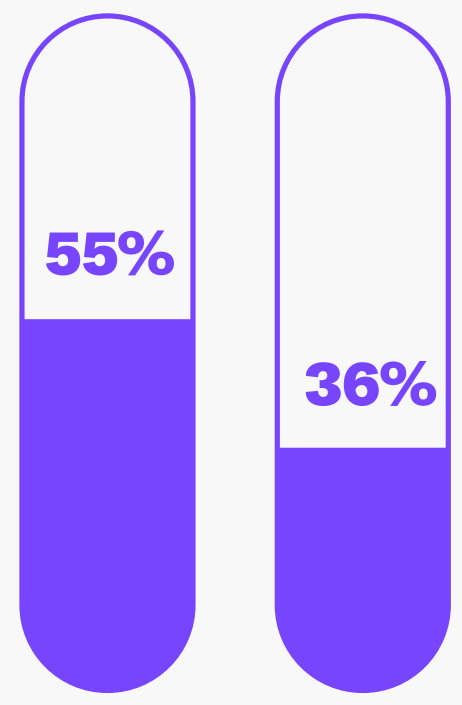
More than half (55%) of employees are high performers when given "radical flexibility" over being told where, when, and how they work.

Only 36% are high performers when working 9-5 five days a week.

Source: Gartner[1]

The Workplace is Changing

Real-Time Room Booking Systems

Collaboration Areas

Quiet Areas

Social Hubs

Hybrid Meeting Rooms

Group Learning Environments

Offering **flexible work experiences**, creating opportunities for collaboration, and using empathetic management **can increase employee performance by 54%**.

Source: Gartner[1]

How to Prepare for the New Hybrid Workplace

1 Adopt an employee-centric approach.

There is tremendous variety in what employees need from the workplace — and their needs may fluctuate day-to-day. Some prefer flexible hours and come into the office to collaborate. Some prefer structure and come into the office for a clear separation between work and home. Make sure you have a workplace analytics platform in place so that you can understand how employees are engaging with the workplace.

2 Rethink your real estate portfolio.

Companies are spending time looking at where employees want to live and where they work best. They are considering city infrastructure and economic cost of living. In 2020, there was a shift from cities[2], which are becoming cost-prohibitive in areas like San Francisco and New York, to more suburban and rural areas. Now, companies are opening satellite offices in these new hubs for employees with newfound flexibility at work, now being called "Zoom Towns."[3]

3 Invest in tools that empower a distributed workforce

Orgs are investing in a digital workplace. In order for companies to enable work-from-anywhere, corporations need to facilitate asynchronous work to create equity among distributed team members. Corporations that are training managers to better manage remote workers are seeing a more diverse talent pool.

4 Transform offices into purposeful places.

Employees have gotten used to working from home by now. People are craving social interactions, but they've also adopted new work from home habits like no commute, asynchronous work, and random workouts. Forward-thinking companies are redesigning office spaces to create an inclusive environment for all employees and designing each space with a specific purpose in mind.
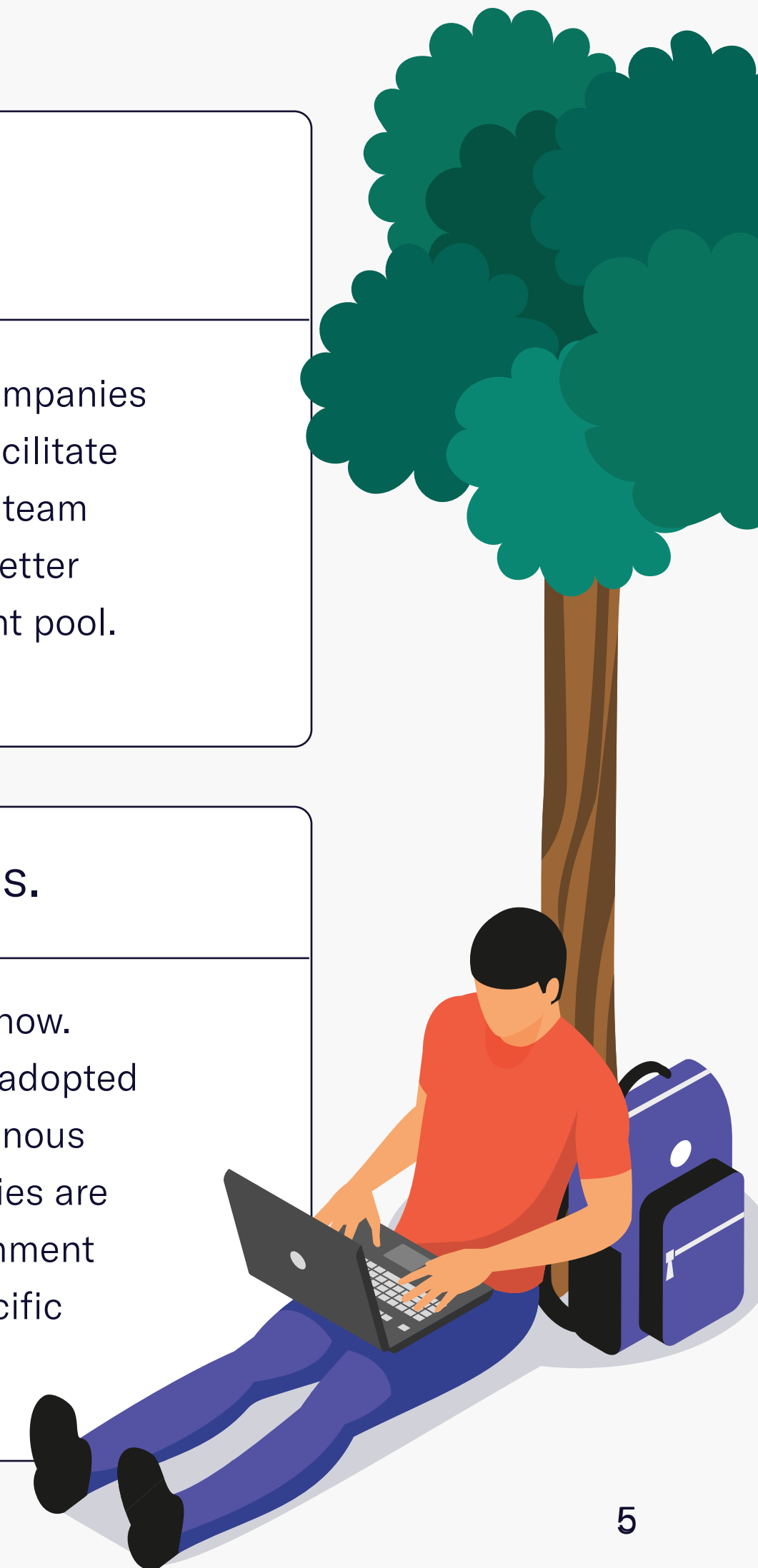
"If you design offices with intention and inclusion at heart, employees will visit more often, be more dedicated to the company's mission, and be more motivated to produce the best work of their lives.

- Nellie Hayat, Head of Workplace Transformation, VergeSense

In this guide, we'll explore the changing workplace environment, how to rethink office spaces for today's employees' needs, and how to use technology to optimize the hybrid work experience.

Destination Workplace Series

Join us in exploring the future of work in our **Destination Workplace series**. We interview leaders of dynamic organizations for impactful conversations as they navigate the changing workplace landscape.

Watch the series

Transitioning to a hybrid workplace is a big shift for many companies. It is key to regularly collect employee feedback and then incorporate that feedback into the process. Without taking the time to survey your employees on their preferred methods and means of work, you run the risk of creating hybrid work policies and structures that don't actually support your employees.

Four Stages of Hybrid Work Transformation

Phase 1: Preparing your employees for the return to office.
Timeline: 9-12 months

Change management is a key element of successful transitions, whether they are external changes or internal changes. As leaders, ask yourself how your employees might be feeling and implement decisions based on how they affect every member of your organization.

Communication is key. Be transparent and communicate any changes early. Solicit feedback from the entire organization while making decisions.

Tools

- Anonymous feedback tool
- Messaging tools
- Video communication tools
- Town hall software for larger scale video conferencing

Best Practices

- Relate to your employees' experiences and provide a space for anonymous feedback
- Get buy-in from your leadership team
- Explain how your organization will transition to a dynamic workplace
- Offer transparency and active communication during the transition

Phase 2: Exploring employee readiness and needs.
Timeline: 6-9 months

The second phase of a major organizational change to a more dynamic workplace is focused on employee readiness. First, find out what employees need. Then, strategically plan out an office design that meets these needs.

Allow ample time for real estate portfolio review, restructuring, and working with architects and building planners. Creating an office space that can scale and change is an investment that will last beyond the next work migration.

Tools

- Interactive feedback tool
- Survey platform
- Employee onboarding platform
- Video communication tools
- Design visualization software

Best Practices

- Conduct and analyze feedback and employee surveys
- Define your employee journey from onboarding to reviews to learning to team events
- Identify the best space allocations for your offices and evaluate real estate
- Adapt your real estate portfolio and office spaces for your employees' needs

Phase 3: Preparing and redesigning your office spaces.
Timeline: 3-5 months

When you go to redesign and prepare office spaces for employees with new expectations of a typical work day, implement tools that will provide real-time feedback and enable data-driven decisions on a leadership level. How often are employees using each workspace? How often do they utilize newer spaces like private workout rooms or shared collaboration spaces? Where can you invest more during the next budget review?

Tools

- Workplace Analytics Platform
- Intelligent workplace sensors
- Booking app for conference rooms, meeting rooms, and office areas

Best Practices

- Invest in a Workplace Analytics Platform
- Install intelligent sensors in the workplace
- Implement a booking app for work areas

Phase 4: Ongoing analysis of employee performance and space utilization.
Timeline: Ongoing

Once you've implemented ways to collect data, you can become a more efficient, data-driven organization. Leverage the systems you've set up to decide on real estate investments, devise training and management strategies, and learn how to best support your workforce.

Tools

- Workplace Analytics Platform

- Intelligent workplace sensors

- Booking app for conference rooms, meeting rooms, and office areas

Best Practices

- Use your workplace analytics data to monitor utilization of spaces

- Regularly enhance space design using data-driven insights

- Conduct regular employee check-ins to find out where you can optimize employee experience

Location Optimization: HQ + Satellite Offices

Take this major shift in the workplace to step back and rethink your real estate portfolio. Many organizations haven't had an opportunity to really examine the use of every square foot they pay for. There are so many areas that companies can repurpose to better serve the new needs of their workforce.

Many companies are choosing to keep a primary headquarters and grow several satellite offices in new geographic hubs where many employees live. Growing satellite offices is a strategic way to reduce commutes for employees, recruit from a larger and more diverse talent pool, and right size the corporate real estate portfolio.

Corporate Real Estate Trends in 2021

- Employers are shifting to decentralized workplaces, with more organizations adopting satellite offices and more regional diversity[4]

- Companies are repurposing office space for "human experience services" like fitness, beauty, healthy food, and other healthcare amenities[5]

- Companies can expect to see more daily fluctuation in office occupancy, prompting a need for more flexible, dynamic workplaces[6]

- Organizations are transforming spaces into collaborative or coworking areas for a flexible workforce[6]

New Roles Every Company Needs

During the pandemic, new roles emerged that help serve a more dynamic workforce. It's crucial to be methodic while implementing hybrid programs, and this means implementing organizational changes to support new policies and work environments.

Collaboration on an international scale and across various time zones creates new challenges. By adding leaders with a mission of supporting these transitions, companies are showing that they are committed to a culture change, not just following a passing trend.

Examples of roles that will be key to successful hybrid or dynamic organizations include:

Head of Equity
Companies like Twitter and Spotify have designated a member of their leadership team to ensure all employees have equal access to information and all work opportunities.

Head of Workplace Journeys
At organizations like Atlassian, a leadership team member analyzes how employees navigate the workplace journey and how it can be improved from onboarding to career growth.

Head of Distributed Work
Companies who have newly invested in flexible remote work policies like Cloudflare, Google, and Databricks are appointing executives to lead the charge on distributed work.

What is crucial for managers and leaders is realizing the massive opportunity in their diverse workforce and preventing proximity biases with thoughtful decisions. The global WFH experiment has shown that our workforce is diverse in needs and desires and it will be irresponsible to force one unique model onto them.

On Hiring a Head of Workplace Insights

Nellie Hayat

Head of Workplace Transformation, VergeSense

Talking the supportive talk and walking the fundamental change walk are two entirely different things. When you appoint a Head of Workplace Insights (or a Head of Workplace Transformation, like me), you are showing your organization that you're committed to the future of work.

On a business level, having someone responsible for using workplace analytics to drive organizational change, you earn back much more than improved efficiency that leads to more revenue. By reducing employee turnover and creating a workplace culture that is dedicated to its employees, you create an environment that encourages productivity and innovation.

Dos + Don'ts for Transitioning to a Dynamic Workplace

Dos

- Hire or appoint specific leadership roles that help enforce transformational changes
- Regularly collect employee feedback
- Incorporate a diverse group of employees in the decision-making process
- Design with an inclusive mindset, taking into account the various working styles, working hours, and preferences across employees
- Be transparent and communicate all changes or plans to all employees
- Keep up with workplace trends and be aware of what peers and competitors are offering

Don'ts

- Choose a plan that only caters to a vocal majority
- Collect survey responses and not use the feedback
- Make decisions without incorporating employees into the conversation
- Make decisions based on trends and not employee-specific needs

VERGE SENSE

When designing a workplace for a hybrid organization, consider how today's employees work. The pandemic has revealed the increasing need for collaboration and flexibility in the workplace, and as a result future workplace strategy needs to adapt to accommodate these new changes.

"There is a huge variation in what employees want. If we look at survey data, around 20% of employees never want to work from home…they tend to be young singles or empty nesters. 30% of people never want to come into work again, they live far away, or it's expensive to commute. And the remaining 50% want anything between one to four days a week. So given this huge variety, why not let people choose?

This is a revolution in the future of work."

- Nicholas Bloom, Economics Professor +
  Remote/Hybrid Work Researcher, Stanford University[7]

Hybrid Workplace Data

66% of leadership teams say they are considering an office space update to accommodate a hybrid workforce

Employees now expect to work outside of the office 2.7 days per week, up from 0.9 days prior to the COVID-19 pandemic[8]

According to PwC research, executives are investing in the following workplace changes[9] to support hybrid work:
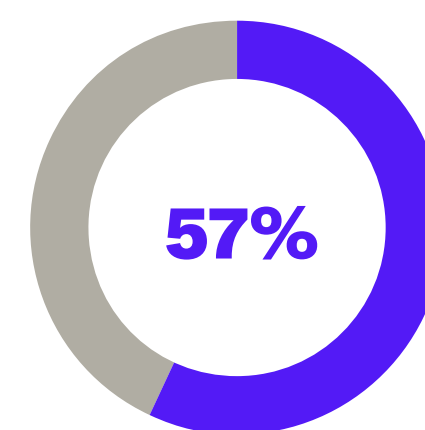
57%	50%	48%	45%
Conference rooms with enhanced connectivity	Workspace scheduling (hoteling) applications	Collaborative/ communal space in the office	Bookable, unassigned seating in the office
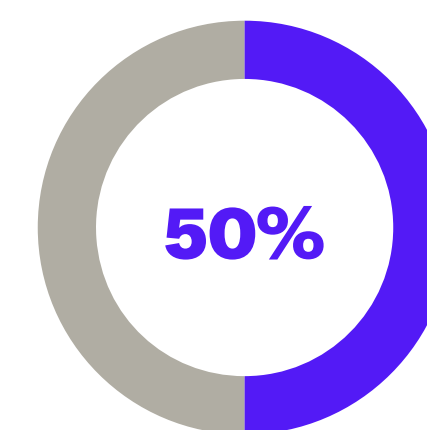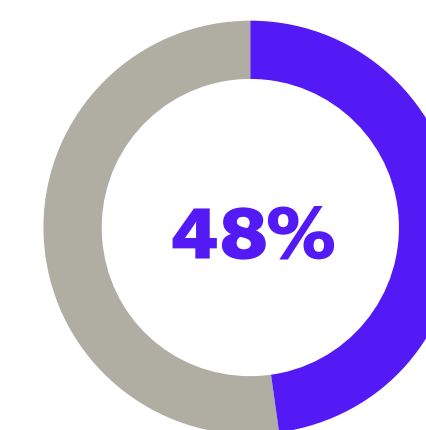
New Workplace Design

Workplace design is based on the humans inside them. Who is using the space, how, when, and why. The way that people work is changing, which is driving major updates to office infrastructure and design.

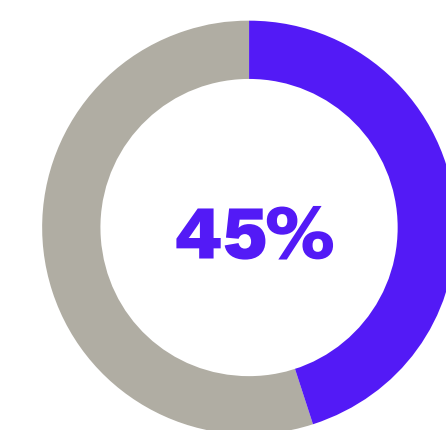Take a look at this image from HBR that explores the axis many organizations are encountering[10], some for the first time. The pandemic removed place constraints, and organizations are also seeing the effects of removing time constraints. Companies are seeing how the structure of the work environment can be a major motivator or hindrance if not thought about and designed carefully.
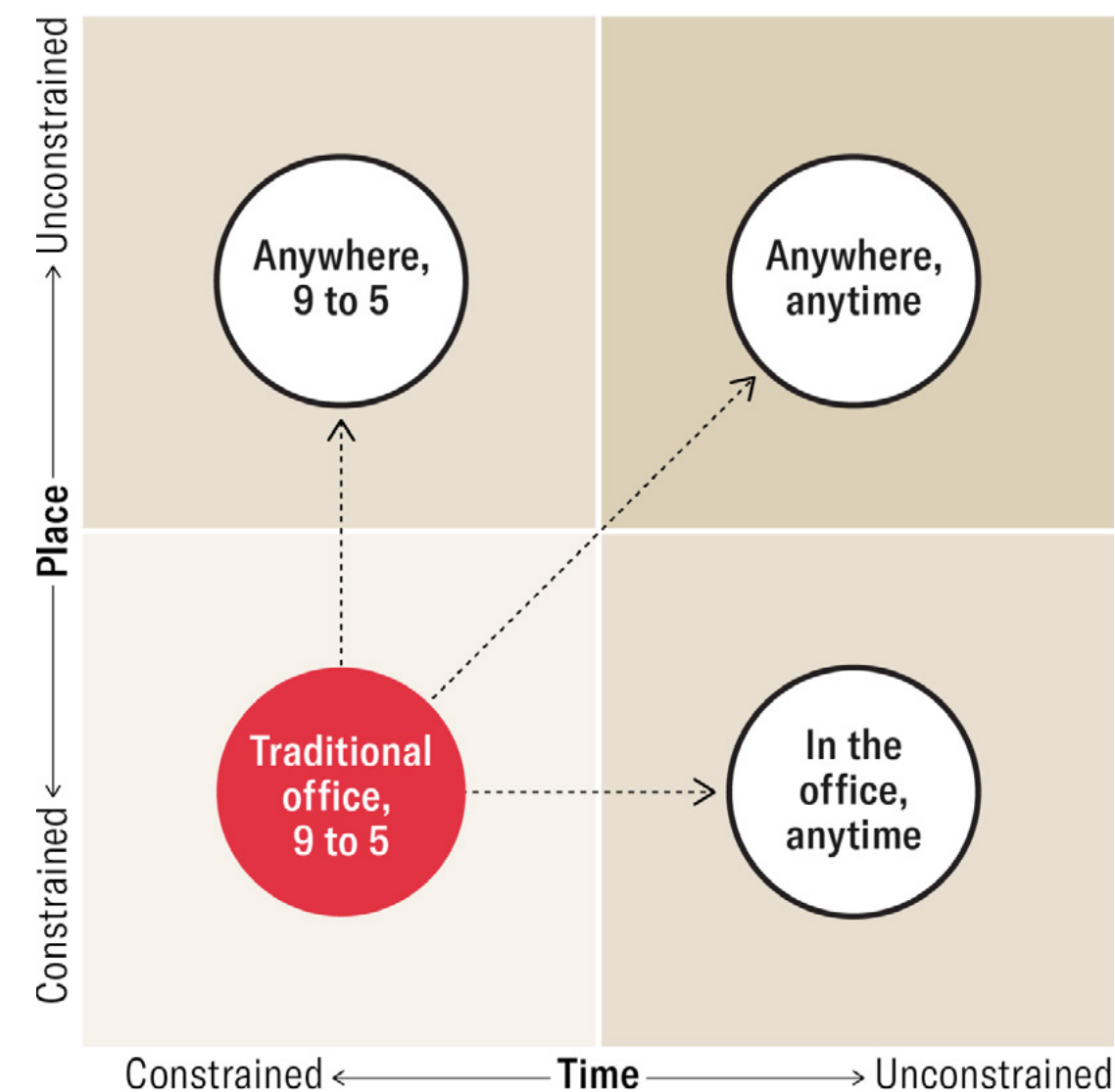
Organizational behavior and design experts Fayard, Weeks, + Khan explore the ways that forward-thinking organizations are designing hybrid workplaces to meet employee expectations using smart, tech-forward office design to create social hubs out of offices.[11]

Fayard, Weeks, + Khan's "Hybrid Office"[11] serves as a space for:

- Socialization, team building, face-to-face connection
- Learning, knowledge sharing
- Unstructured collaboration, informal meetings, impromptu conversations
- And hybrid office design should include:
  › A combination of collaborative space and individual, private spaces
  › Spaces that encourage different types of social interactions
  › Meeting places for conversations and impromptu meetups like a coffee area or lounge area with couches
  › Technology that helps organizations understand how the space is being used

Based on VergeSense's analysis of office use pre-pandemic and during office shutdown, **employees are coming into the office to collaborate more frequently**. At the same time, they still need rooms for personal conversations, breaks, or heads down time throughout the day.

Determining the right mix of collaborative spaces and individual space is going to be one of the most challenging workplace design questions leaders will need to tackle as their companies return to the office.

For example, in 2020, office space was **primarily allocated for individual work**. However, employees used **collaborative spaces 25% more** than individual spaces. If companies want to stay competitive, they need to focus on transforming offices into collaborative hubs.

Average Space Allocation to Individual Work vs. Collaborative Work in 2020

17%
Collaborative Work

83%
Individual Work

Average Utilization of Individual vs. Collaborative Work in 2020

Average Office Utilization

100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%

Wasted Real Estate

Wasted Real Estate

25% Higher Utilization

28%

35%

Individual Work

Collaborative Work
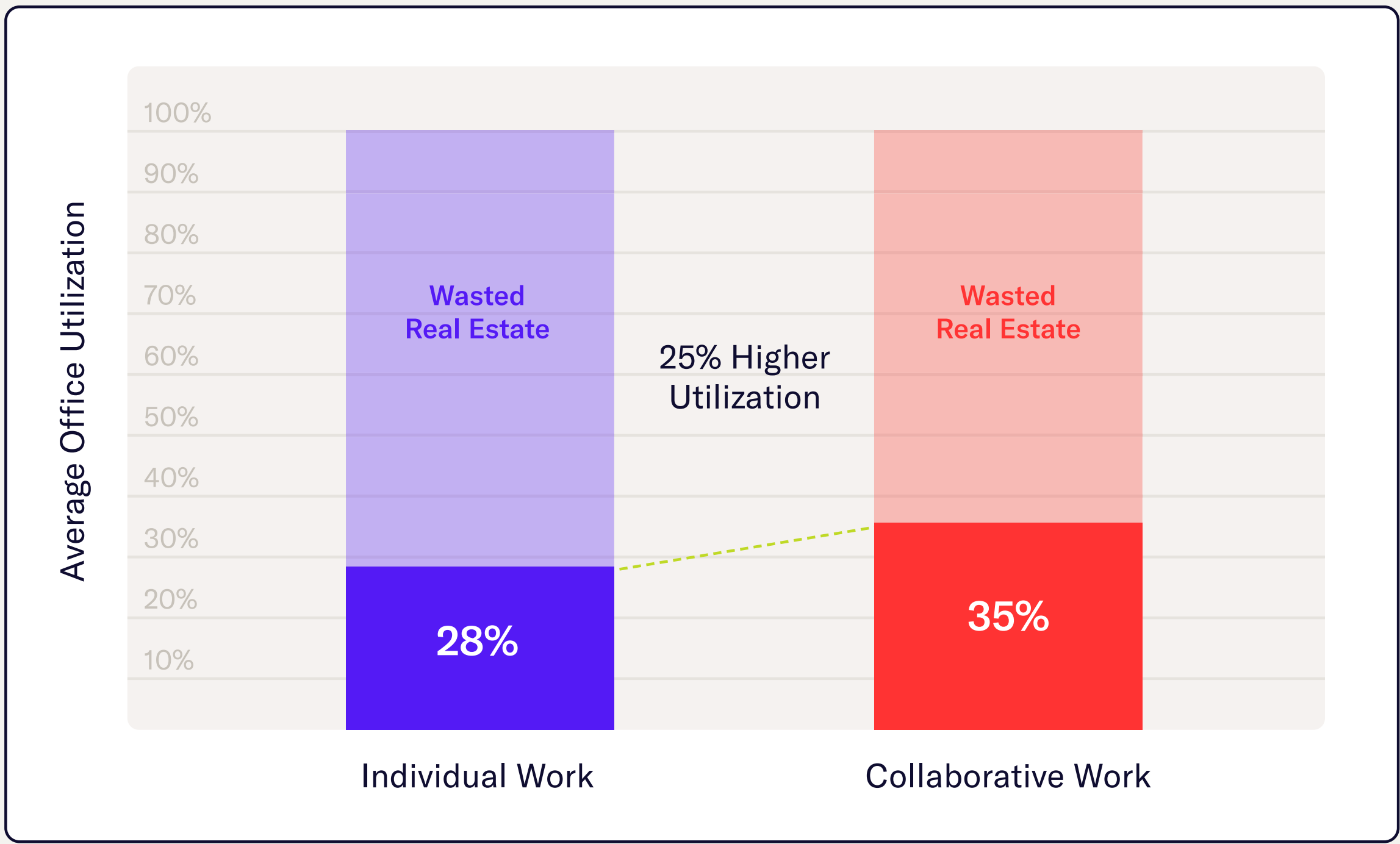
Strategies to Transform Offices + Improve Employee Engagement

1 Use real-time occupancy data to improve the workplace experience.

2 Identify and rethink unused or under-used spaces with data insights.

3 Audit and optimize your real estate portfolio using data on asset usage.

4 Create spaces in the workplace to help unlock creativity.

5 Use technology to identify available workspaces.

6 Improve teamwork and efficiency by automating releasing abandoned meeting room slots.

7 Discover areas for cost savings and improved employee experience with optimized operations.

8 Create a human-centered office environment by analyzing employee trends + behaviors.

9 Scale data collection efforts with efficient in-office sensors.

10 Gather intelligent occupancy data while maintaining employee privacy.
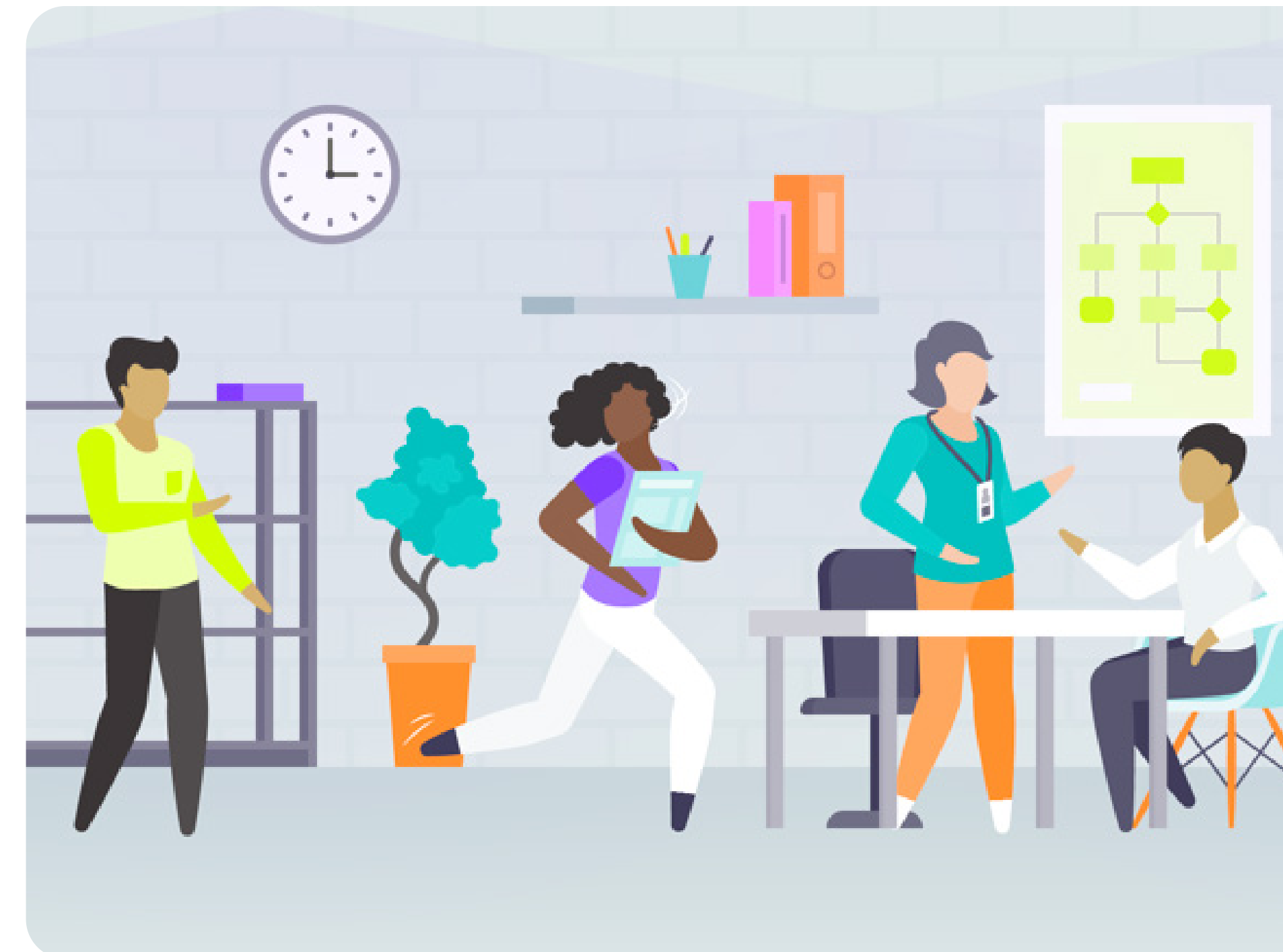
Best practices for transforming office spaces with workplace analytics **Read more →**

Case Study: Using Data to Create Dynamic Office Spaces

Jones Lang LaSalle Inc (JLL)

Global Corporate Real Estate Services Company

JLL is a public brokerage firm who provides commercial real estate services to enterprise organizations around the globe. Understanding that **companies who prioritize employee experience perform better than the S&P 500 by more than 120%**, JLL implemented workplace analytics to improve employee engagement and performance.

JLL used VergeSense workplace analytics solutions to:

- Transition four buildings, 10 floors, and over 150,000+ square feet of usable office space to dynamic, activity-based environments.

- Implement 638 sensors collecting real-time occupancy data.

- Gain a deeper understanding of the best possible uses for their workspaces to better serve their workforce.

How JLL Creates Dynamic Workplaces Using Data

Learn more about dynamic offices and how organizations are using workplace analytics data to save tens of millions annually and increase their usable office space.

Read more

Once you've designed the space for employees' flexible work needs, think about how your employees will use these spaces effectively. What will the hybrid experience in the office look like? By offering shared spaces but not having the technology in place for employees to sign up for a slot, you've set your employees up to stay at home, where they know their desk is reserved.

Creating a dynamic office environment requires a combination of careful planning, communication, space planning, technology, and design. But when done right, it can be a **competitive advantage for organizations** looking to attract and retain top talent.

Benefits of Prioritizing Workplace Transformation

- Companies with **highly engaged employees are 21% more profitable** than those with low engagement.

- **94% of employees** would like to be able to work from the office at least once a week.

Developing a Hybrid Office Experience

Establishing a workplace where employees feel comfortable taking advantage of the nap pod you create or the flexible policy you implemented is more than just creating the spaces or policies themselves and sending them out.

It's building a culture of individuals who prioritize work-life balance and who champion a mindset of working productively and collaboratively, independent of physical location.

It's creating equitable meeting environments where all voices are heard and the tech just works.

It's thinking about the office as an agile space that grows and changes, just like company strategies do.

Behavioral Change and Building Culture

- Requires intentionality (without office culture being location-based)

- Should be documented— write down your culture/mission, display it on the walls and on the company intranet

- Is built on policies that support flexible working

Equitable Team Meetings + Meeting Spaces

In the future of work, meetings are likely to be the breaking point of the hybrid model. There's a challenge to create an equitable experience when some members of the team are in person in the same room and some others are calling from their individual laptops. To create an equitable and inviting experience for all employees, think about meetings themselves and the spaces they are held in.
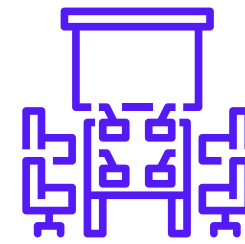
Meeting rooms need to leverage technology and be inclusive.
Meeting technology has come a long way, and so has the setup of meeting rooms themselves. Conference and huddle rooms designed for hybrid meetings and collaboration should be set up with round tables, including a wide audio range, and have built-in screens with digital whiteboards.
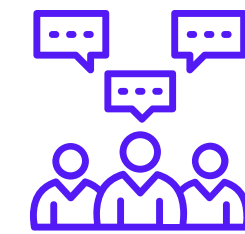
Meetings have new attendee etiquette.
To create equal opportunities for participation during meetings, all employees need to be intentional about communicating. Inside jokes, conversations before and after the meeting, and shared materials need to be distributed online where everyone can access them, or saved for another time.

Meetings are going asynchronous-first.
When transitioning to a hybrid work model, think about inclusivity at the forefront of every decision. To create equity among team members and be inclusive to all, make all documents and recordings available for meeting attendees in case someone is in another time zone, can't attend live, or if someone prefers reviewing and making decisions later, not in real-time.

Creating Agile Office Spaces

Beyond collaboration-focused meeting spaces, adapting traditional dedicated desk areas into agile office space supports hybrid working. To create usable office spaces that serve the modern workforce, consider:

1 Making every individual and shared space, like desks, huddle spaces, and conference rooms, bookable. This will help employees on different schedules use office space effectively.

2 Using intuitive mobile apps to allow employees to reserve workspaces ahead of time. Surprisingly, most organizations don't let their employees choose their own seating, with almost **80% of enterprises still assigning seating for some portion of their workforce**.

3 Frequently analyzing workspace usage and looking for actionable trends. Once you've gathered enough information, you can use this to guide real estate and office design decisions.

4 Offering access to coworking spaces or satellite offices. Provide all employees with access to an alternate work location, whether or not they live near HQ. Additionally, having global options available allows organizations to join the **82% of companies hiring outside of pre-COVID office locations**.

5 Redesigning office spaces. Dedicate areas specifically for socialising, quiet work and meditation, phone pods for private conversations, and encourage employees to take screen breaks and spend some time outdoors. **These changes will ensure that all space is used productively.**

Office space and function should be carefully analyzed monthly or quarterly to look for ways to optimize. For example, if you realize that only a few employees are taking advantage of quiet spaces, but the collaboration spaces are always overbooked, you can reallocate quiet space for a collaboration zone.

**Real-time data.
Curated insight.
Transformative action.**

Using workplace analytics software helps organizations keep track of office space usage. Here's how VergeSense's Workplace Analytics Solutions can help you gather actionable insights from your office space.

See the Platform

Using VergeSense to Optimize the Hybrid Workplace Experience

At VergeSense, our mission is to empower companies to learn more about the ways their employees work, and use those insights to improve the work experience for everyone. Our platform and sensors work together with existing tools to collect office usage data, using AI to get smarter over time.

65% of enterprises are investing in **workplace enablement solutions**.

**24%** are actively investing in **workplace analytics platforms**.

Using a Workplace Analytics Dashboard

The **VergeSense workplace analytics dashboard** displays real-time and aggregate workplace data and insights. The dashboard can include desk usage, room usage, meeting data, and more.

Workplace analytics can drive strategic business decisions, and:

- Turn underutilized office spaces into high-output workplaces
- Identify real estate that isn't being used
- Provide real-time occupancy data to enable on-demand seating

Read more about how companies like a global management consulting firm **increased space utilization by more than 10% with workplace occupancy insights**.
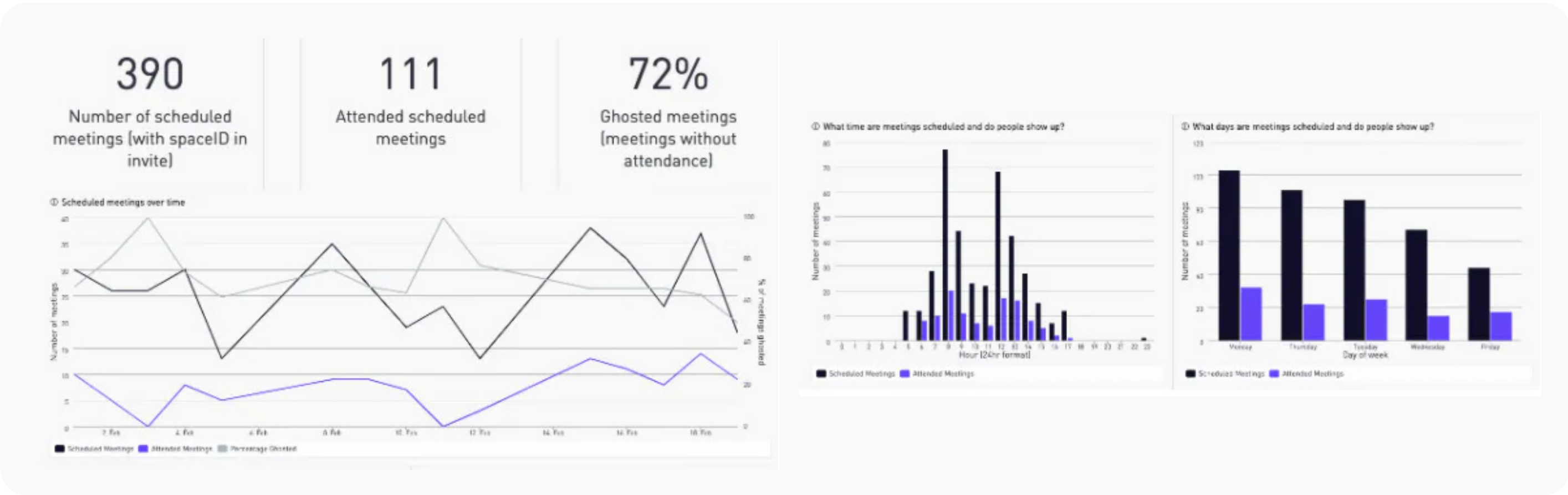
Optimizing Spaces in the Office

When optimizing office spaces, occupancy data can show how many people are using desks, meeting rooms, or entire floors. Software and integrations are getting smarter in the office, with the ability to sense when a conference room or desk has been booked and abandoned, then release the slot back so the room isn't left unused.

Meeting Room Analytics

Learn about **meeting room habits by integrating VergeSense's robust analytics** dashboard with meeting management tools like Robin, MS Outlook 365, and Google Calendar for even more detailed utilization metrics.
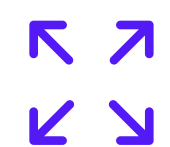
Use of Space

New research shows that **conference rooms are too big for today's needs**. Most meetings have only two to four people, but conference rooms are built for 7 or more people. With occupancy sensors and meeting software combined, you can learn the ideal space mix for room users.

Capacity Management

With the majority of companies (74%) **returning to the office choosing a hybrid model**, building occupancy is predicted to fluctuate on a daily basis. With the addition of Entryway sensors and Area sensors, along with analytics, people counting data can help to improve employee engagement. With safety as a key priority, accurate people counting can mean the difference between coming into the office on a given day or staying home.

Why Workplace Analytics Platforms Will Be the Most Impactful Investment of 2021 **Learn more →**

VergeSense sensors read a room like a human

If a coat is hanging on the back of a chair, is that desk in use? Yes — however other sensors would say no. VergeSense **Signs of Life™ algorithm** detects occupancy just like a human, providing the most accurate data across the industry. Employees looking for an available workstation are only shown spaces that are truly available. And real estate leaders have a better understanding of how the workplace is being used.
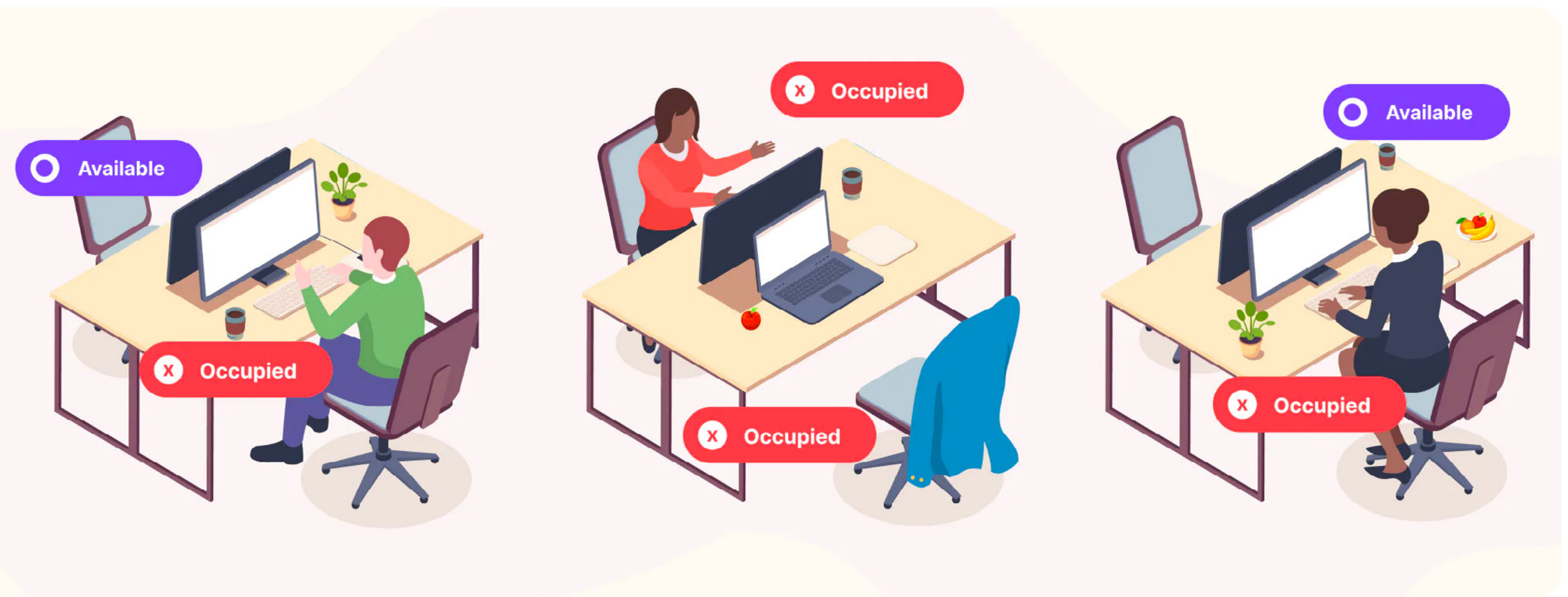
Integrating Smart Office Tech

With VergeSense's open API and comprehensive list of partners, enterprises can fuel workplace management from workspace reservation, to meeting analysis, to real estate portfolio analysis.

Real Estate Portfolio Management
Use occupancy data and analytics to make informed decisions about real estate locations.

Desk and Room Reservation
Integrate with room scheduling and space management tools to release reservations when attendees don't show up, understand meeting analytics, and optimize use of space.

Workplace Management
Make decisions about how to allocate space and how to manage the workplace for the changing daily needs of employees.

Explore VergeSense Integration Partners

Conclusion

With the majority of companies choosing to return to the office, companies need to carefully balance employee comfort, preferences, and productivity. They need to bring employees back to the office in the safest way possible while offering flexibility. Organizations focused on the future of work are embracing the new shift to hybrid and dynamic workplaces. With the right data and team input, companies can look at every square foot of the office with a new lens and create a more effective workplace for all employees.

VERGE
SENSE

About VergeSense

We build workplace analytics solutions that empower our customers to create intentional, data-driven office spaces. Our deep learning sensors capture the most accurate occupancy data on the market, and the algorithms that train our sensors get smarter over time. VergeSense software translates office data into actionable insights that make optimizing the office easier.

Learn more about our company + software solutions.

Book a demo

Sources

1. **https://www.workdesign.com/2021/02/we-space-the-destination-office-and-more-design-expectations-for-the-year-ahead**

2. **https://www.mymove.com/moving/covid-19/coronavirus-moving-trends**

3. **https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2020/09/08/909680016/zoom-towns-and-the-new-housing-market-for-the-2-americas**

4. **https://workplaceinsight.net/time-to-take-stock-about-the-future-of-the-workplace**

5. **https://www.workdesign.com/2020/10/how-do-cre-organizations-think-workspace-will-be-repurposed-post-covid-19**

6. **https://www.workdesign.com/2021/03/stretching-the-boundaries-why-your-portfolio-strategy-needs-more-elastic**

7. **https://hbr.org/podcast/2021/06/hybrid-work-is-here-to-stay-now-what**

8. **https://www.workdesign.com/2021/03/stretching-the-boundaries-why-your-portfolio-strategy-needs-more-elastic**

9. **https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-news/pages/hybrid-work-model-likely-to-be-new-norm-in-2021.aspx**

10. **https://hbr.org/2021/05/how-to-do-hybrid-right**

11. **https://hbr.org/2021/03/designing-the-hybrid-office**