The Thriving Workplace

Crafting a new narrative

Knoll

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2020 brought changes to the world that nobody could have envisioned even a year ago. The global Covid-19 pandemic upended daily life with lockdowns and a global recession looming large, the groundswell of activism around racial and social justice, and the continuing meltdown of the environment.

All of these crises have impacted the way we live and work. However, they also overturned often outdated policies for how and where we work and now present new opportunities for how organizations can redefine, reshape and improve workplace, and build truly flexible, hybrid office environments.

Although evolution is normal, companies have had to quickly adapt to new realities and many uncertainties. The abrupt closure of many offices and workplaces as a result of Covid-19 ushered in an acceleration of work trends, demonstrating to workers and their employers that many of their job responsibilities could be done from home. At the same time, although the transition to working from home has been relatively easy for many employees, numerous others say that their job responsibilities cannot be performed from home[1].

The coronavirus has changed the way many employees do their jobs—whether in person or from home. The challenge is to look beyond today and see what lies ahead. At Knoll, we see the office evolving to a new ecosystem of work, one that leverages the power of design and marries a people-centered approach with effective work processes and planning that together create a productive and agile working environment with a variety of spaces.

Even before the pandemic, Knoll had been exploring the importance of creating environments that help employees thrive and flourish. In June 2020, during Knoll Design Days, we spoke about how organizations could address relevant opportunities for change in workplace strategy and planning, pre-, during and post-Covid.

The shift that is happening today is work is no longer where we go; it's what we do.

At Knoll, we've learned that people don't want to merely survive post-pandemic. They want to thrive. In many ways, the disruptive changes we've experienced are accelerators and opportunities to build new holistic and resilient workspaces where supporting the whole person—the personal, the communal, the mental and the physical well-being—is now more important than ever.

Key Takeaways

The Covid-19 pandemic upended work and brought unprecedented changes to the world when seemingly at a moment's notice, daily life went into lockdown, and workers across the globe were sent home to work.

To deliver some answers and examine what the future of the office will look like in a post-Covid-19 world, Knoll conducted a series of studies in North America. Our research suggests we are on the brink of transformative change. The Thriving Workplace is an opportunity to build a new, more resilient environment that:

+ Powers the workplace ecosystem
+ Delivers a cultural hub
+ Embraces flexibility
+ Offers a variety of choice
+ Leverages technology
+ Encompasses holistic well-being

We can bring these insights as we return to the office. We understand better than ever our need for physical connections, whether they are social interactions with our colleagues and face-to-face collaborations on a daily basis or impromptu brainstorming sessions, as well as our need to have a place to think.

Covid-19 wasn't the demise of the office, but we are returning to a different place. If anything, organizations are now looking to create Thriving Workplaces that improve daily experiences through meaningful and thoughtful engagement. When you put all these things together, they represent a realignment of the fundamentals that we're talking about. This is an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine and reinvent the way we work and do business.

This new era of workplace takes this seismic shift into account. The Thriving Workplace is a multi-layered ecosystem comprised

An Evolution is Underway

Over the last decade, changing workstyles, coworking and the influence of startup culture reshaped the role of the workplace from a static building to a highly interactive experience[2]. Now we are entering a new era: workplace as an ecosystem.
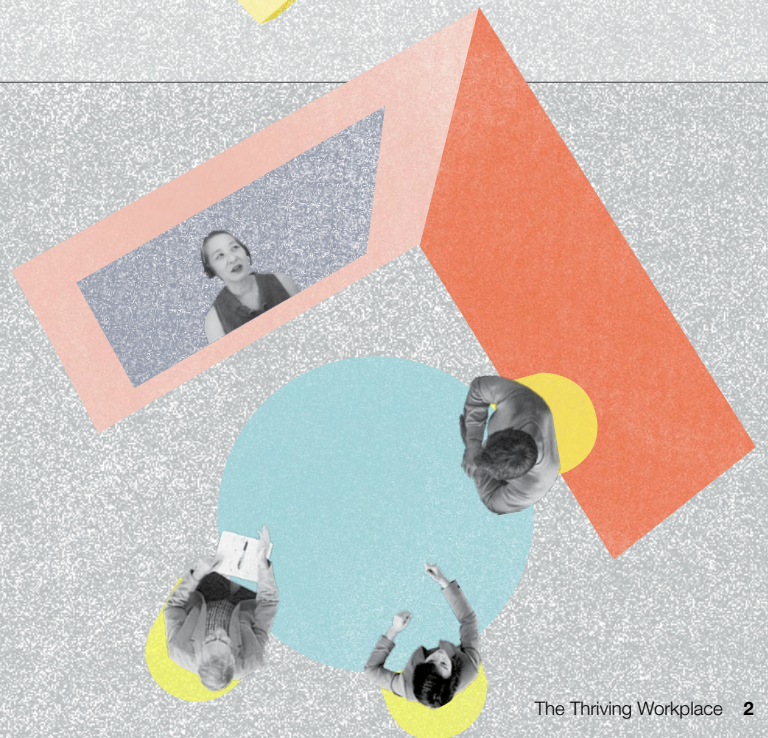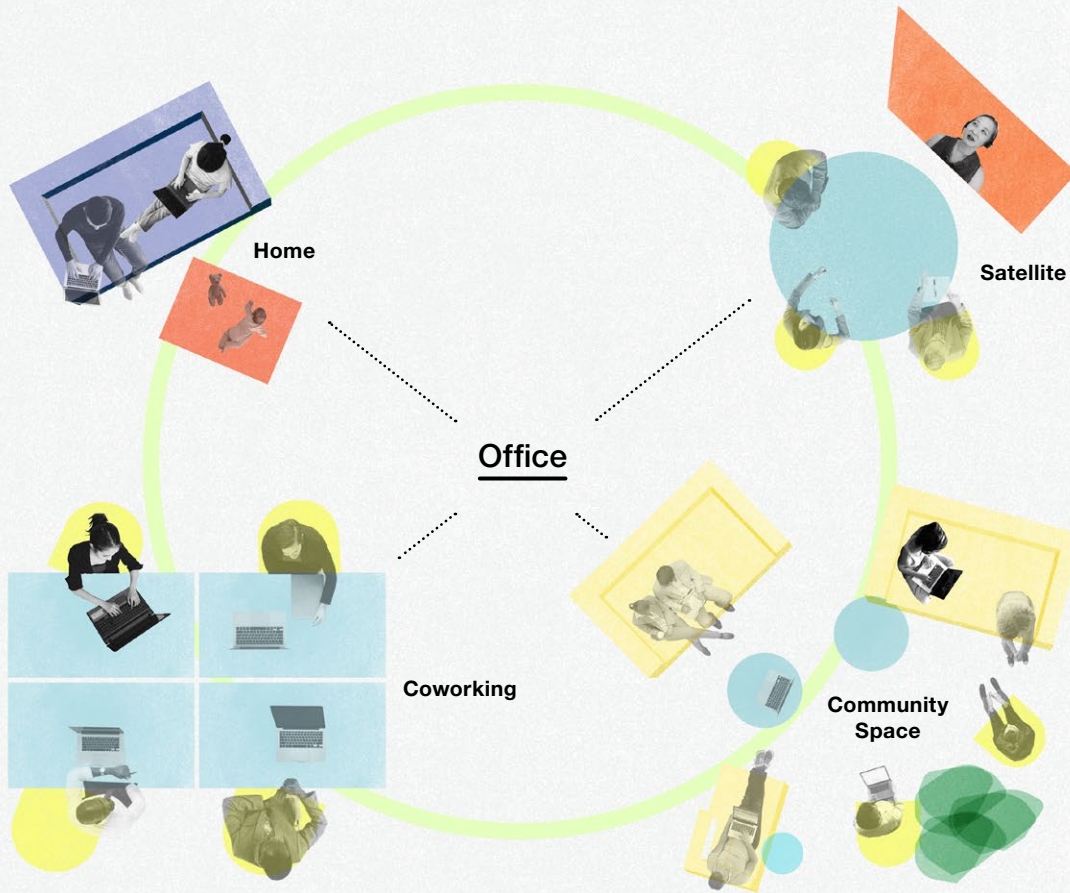
Office as a building

Workspace as an experience

Workplace as an ecosystem

Home

Office

Satellite

Coworking

Community Space

of hybrid work settings that support the human connection, forge culture and foster collaboration. It delivers highly adaptable environments that create opportunities to facilitate conversation, togetherness and a sense of belonging.

"I don't think we have the right to tell people where to work anymore."

WORKPLACE EXECUTIVE

It addresses the need for inherent flexibility within a space that allows expression and exploration in different directions, provides settings that offer ample space for individuals to move freely and features furnishings that invite interaction and a playfulness around them. Key to this is a shift from the large dense open floor plan to a Thriving Workplace that supports a variety of interactions through the use of smaller-scale holistic neighborhoods, which offer similar flexibility. They can be grouped together to form a larger space, like the workspace in a building, or they can be stand-alone locations, like a satellite office closer to where people live. These neighborhoods are further enriched by planning with space delineations, adaptable furniture and textures.

Methodology

To better understand the rapidly evolving nature of work brought by the events of 2020, the challenges organizations face today and how organizations are planning their workplace strategies, Knoll undertook many studies in North America:

+ Starting in March 2020, we hosted more than 20 panel discussions, speaking with more than 50 industry experts— academics; architects; designers; human resources professionals; commercial, education, government and healthcare leaders; real estate professionals; executives and wellness experts.

+ Since April 2020, we have held more than 30 roundtables, where we spoke at length with various workplace experts, interviewing more than 300 workplace leaders, real estate professionals, architects, designers and workplace strategists.

+ Finally, in December 2020, we conducted a separate online survey with 81 workplace executives across a diverse range of industries about their workplace practices pre- and post-Covid to gain a deeper understanding of how organizations intend to support work and plan space in the future.

The participants in these studies provided a rich context for how the nature of work is evolving and how we design workspaces. This paper, along with its companion, *The Case for a Thriving Workplace* research report, is the culmination of this research initiative. The concepts behind the Thriving Workplace represent the range of insights we've gained from our ongoing research into work, workplace and new ways to meet and collaborate. Supplemented with discoveries from our continuing client engagements, our findings present new ways of workplace planning and opportunities for organizations to reshape and improve the way we work.

Same Place / Same Time
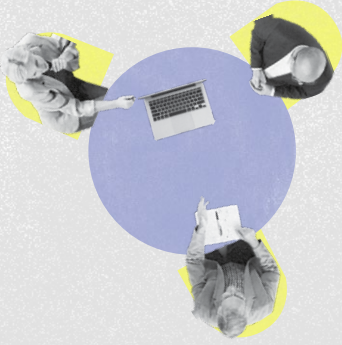
Different Place / Same Time

Hybrid Work

Same Place / Different Time

Different Place / Different Time

Insights

The Workplace Will Be More Than One Place

No one place or location can meet the needs of today's work. The Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 not only proved that it is possible to work from home but also made us realize it is perhaps even preferable for many workers to do their jobs from anywhere.

As employees return to the office, organizations can create thriving environments that allow everyone to flourish. These could be hub-and-spoke models that offer a range of work points and settings to meet an individual's needs, a home office, a coworking space or a combination. Although remote work is here to stay, for all the advantages distributed work creates (the freedom to live anywhere and the flexibility for better work/life balance), it also brings new challenges and opportunities for employers and employees.

The Office Matters

Despite the current escalation of remote work, one of our biggest insights from the hundreds of clients we spoke to is that workplace matters to them, their people and their organizations.

For many of the organizations we spoke with, connection and bringing people together in a physical gathering are of great importance, and a key driver of their efforts to return to the office.
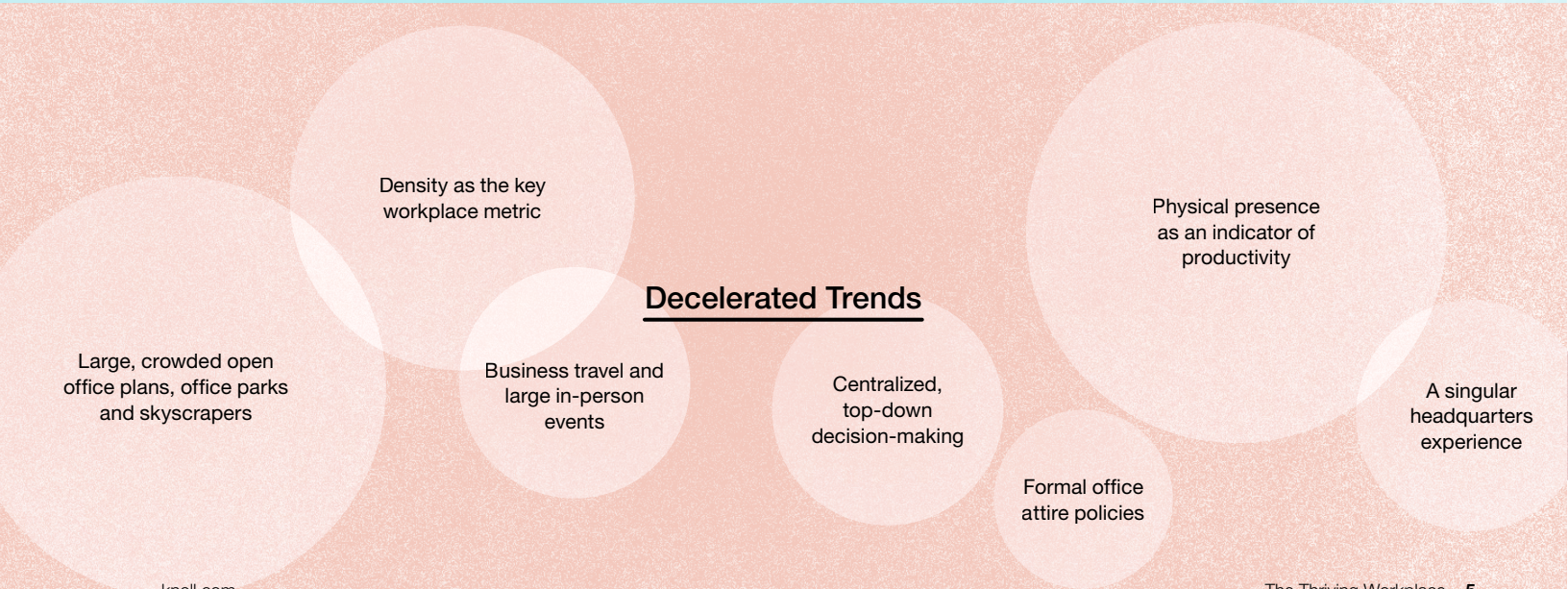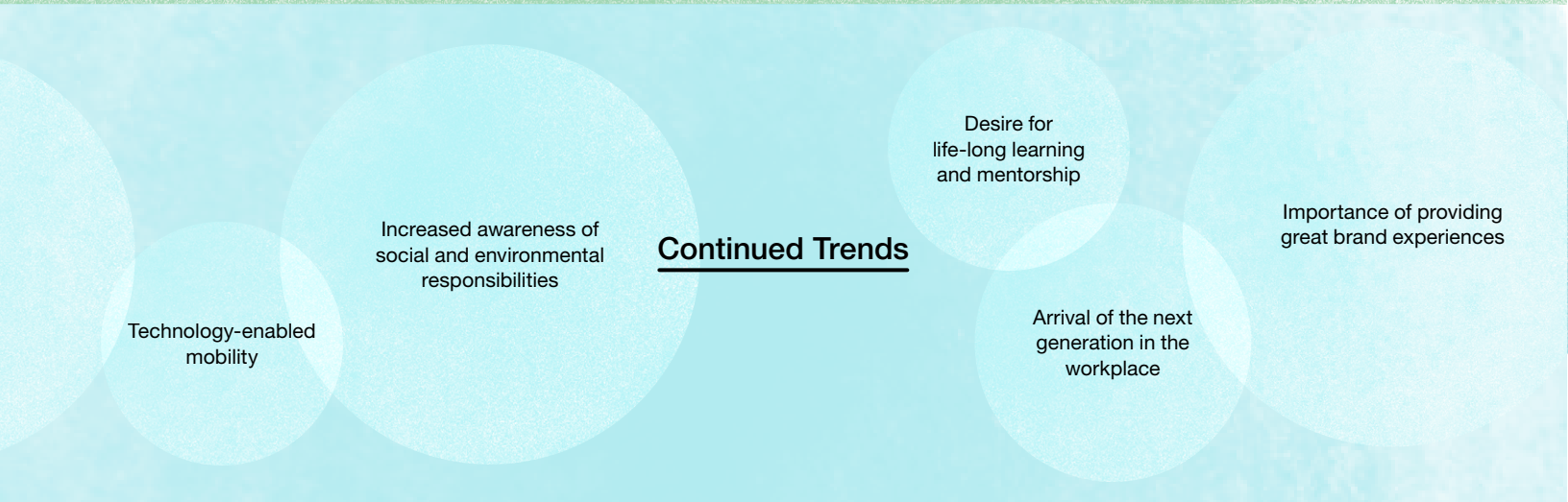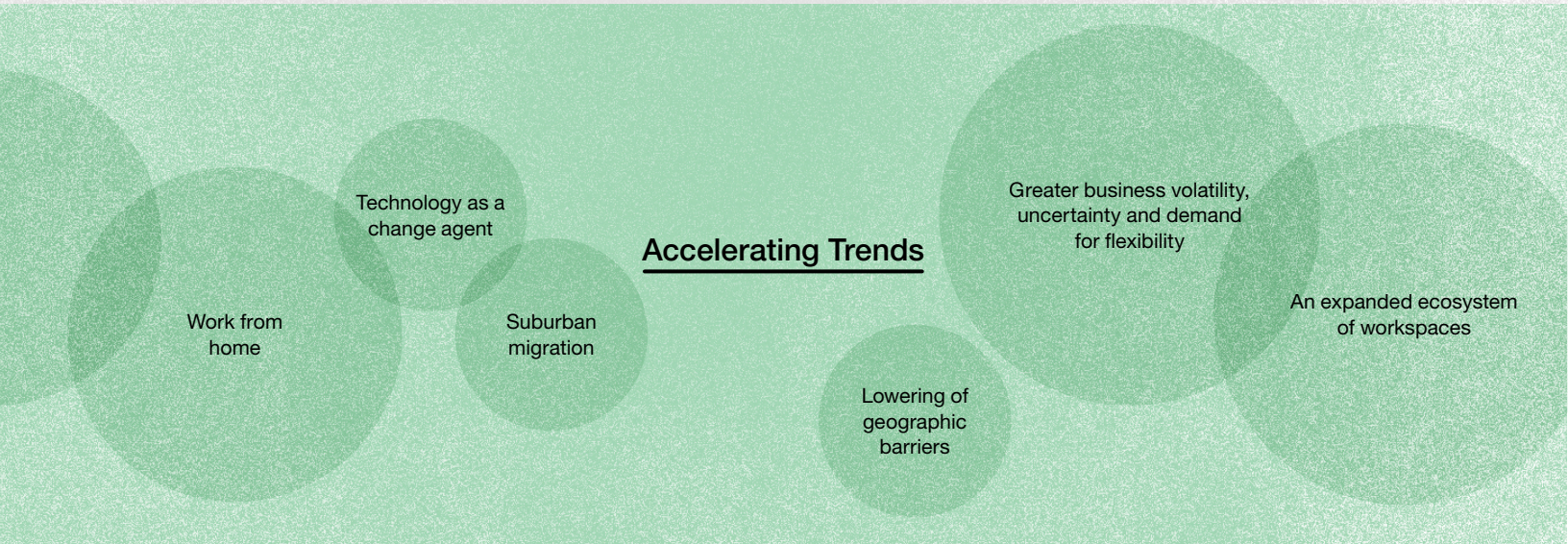
As businesses must accelerate their transformation to adapt to new realities, we'll see an increased need for rapid real-time data to empower nimble and impactful decision-making, and a focus on people-centered initiatives and processes that creates a workplace where everyone can work confidently and thrive. It's an evolving landscape that will shape a new, stronger foundation for how work gets done in the near future.

People thrive when they come together.

With the Thriving Workplace, people will also be returning to an office that expresses brand and culture. Employees want a workplace that provides purpose and connection, and companies have the opportunity to articulate their brand identity and work culture not only through their company values but also through the physical workspace—something that is critical to employee and customer engagement and provides a competitive edge. A workplace leader noted, "On our last pulse survey, 73% [of our global associates] said they were ready to come back now. We're such a culture company, and the living and the breathing of culture in space are just ingrained, and so people are missing it."

Covid-19 Has Driven a Shift in How We Work and Inspired a Reimagining of the Workplace

The landscape of work and our daily lives is constantly evolving. Here are some of the changes we observed that will impact the way we live and work:

Accelerating Trends

Technology as a change agent

Work from home

Suburban migration

Greater business volatility, uncertainty and demand for flexibility

An expanded ecosystem of workspaces

Lowering of geographic barriers

Continued Trends

Desire for life-long learning and mentorship

Increased awareness of social and environmental responsibilities

Importance of providing great brand experiences

Technology-enabled mobility

Arrival of the next generation in the workplace

Decelerated Trends

Density as the key workplace metric

Physical presence as an indicator of productivity

Large, crowded open office plans, office parks and skyscrapers

Business travel and large in-person events

Centralized, top-down decision-making

A singular headquarters experience

Formal office attire policies

Discovering the Thriving Workplace

Our research suggests we are on the brink of transformative change. The Thriving Workplace is an opportunity to build a new, more humanistic environment that powers the workplace ecosystem, delivers a cultural hub, embraces flexibility, offers a variety of choice, leverages technology and encompasses holistic well-being. These six elements define The Thriving Workplace.

1. Powers the workplace ecosystem

The Thriving Workplace is about choice and empowering employees to select where, when and how they work. It's about allowing them to choose the environment that supports them holistically—personally, communally, mentally and physically—for the work they need to do that day. The Thriving Workplace is more than simply the office; it is the heart of the organization. It powers a complex and expanded ecosystem that gives employees the flexibility to work from headquarters, a satellite office, home, a coworking space or even from a third space—like a café or on the road. It is the physical embodiment of the company culture and brand, as well as the place where staff members come together to connect with one another and with clients. It serves as the center of engagement, education and innovation.

With numerous scenarios to choose from, companies still need to provide guidance, support and effective communications to workers so they can make informed decisions about where they work, their workspace and even their work hours. A workplace leader noted, "Moving forward our model will be that everyone gets a desk. That desk may be in the office or at home." This sentiment echoes our survey finding that roughly one-third of companies predict employees will work remotely one or two days a week. About one-quarter feel that their workforce will work remotely three or four days a week. And about 14% report their workforce is going totally remote.

Given this trend toward an increasingly mobile workplace, it is not surprising that one-third of our survey participants are currently using coworking or other space-as-a-service workplaces, and more than one-third of current users predict they will increase their use of this type of space within the next two years. In addition, more than half of respondents not currently using coworking spaces are considering using them within the next two years.

2. Delivers a cultural hub

The workplace of today gives people a meaningful place to come together and facilitates connections with a sense of purpose, freedom and fulfillment at work. It brings people together— for brainstorming, problem-solving, learning, idea exchange and knowledge-sharing. Thus, the workplace needs to be planned to support the interaction of face-to-face work and the egalitarianism that fully remote workspaces deliver. Spaces that foster collaboration are the core of organizational culture. Today's workplace goes beyond accountability and efficiency—humans are social beings who long for connection. The Thriving Workspace is designed with visual cues that effectively bring teams together. Noting this opportunity, and the challenge of keeping teams engaged, one executive said, "I am less concerned with bringing

Space Allocation Projections

	CURRENT	FUTURE
Individual Space	67%	52%
Group Space	33%	48%

Organizations are planning on increasing their proportion of group spaces by about 45% while projecting a 22% decrease in the proportion of individual workspaces.

The UX of Collaborative Work

At its heart, a Thriving Workplace supports the ebb and flow of the user experience (UX) of collaborative work (i.e., the coming together and breaking apart) and synchronous and asynchronous learning and exchange. With more and more individual work being done at home, bringing people together and supporting connection will be core to the mission of the office, as nothing can replace face-to-face interaction. At the same time, because we are not all in the same place at the same time today, new versions of culture and collaboration will emerge, driven by a combination of leadership, technology and clarity.

Through our research, we have identified four archetypes of collaborative work as a shorthand way of capturing distinct work patterns and periods.

Organizations of all sizes and complexity will need to plan their workplaces to accommodate a shifting mixture of all four based on their unique business goals and culture.

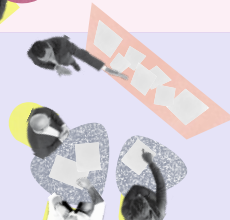**We refer to these four modes of collaborative work as BIGS.**

Build
Happens when small teams immerse deeply in their work to create or grow something.

Ideate
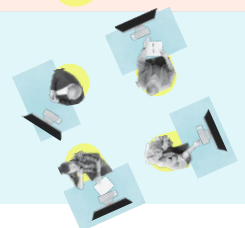Interactive group process of generating and exchanging new ideas and processes.

Gather
Occurs when teams come together for learning, group problem-solving, mentoring and knowledge-sharing.

Study
Set of concentrative behaviors for individuals to pause and reflect away from the larger group.

employees back in July but more concerned with what will keep them coming in October." Another added, "Our youngest workers are struggling the most. They feel less connected. They want to come to the office."

Our survey found that the home office is a great place to concentrate, just not a place to brainstorm or socialize.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the majority (almost half) of the companies surveyed report that their primary emphasis going forward will be to support interactive collaborative work (small teams creating ideas, scrum events, brainstorming); only 12% identified individual focus work as a priority. Spaces for mentoring (12%) and more traditional formal meetings (13%) are also significantly less important, as are socializing activities (14%).

Additionally, when asked to project their current and future proportion of individual to group spaces, organizations are planning on increasing their proportion of group spaces by about 45% (from 33% to 48%) while projecting a 22% decrease in the proportion of individual workspaces (from 67% to 52%).

3. Embraces flexibility

If the year 2020 taught us anything, it is that you cannot predict the future. However, organizations can prepare for it by being nimble and ready to adapt at a moment's notice. The same can be said for physical space. Today's workplaces need to be agile, resilient and easily adaptable over time. Adopting a furniture-as-architecture approach provides flexible space-planning solutions that allow employees to change their spaces to adapt to their needs and shape their own experiences.

Another tool for creating more flexibility in a highly uncertain future is a shift away from one "owned" desk per person to a model that better suits a more transient worker who may choose to work from home or elsewhere on any given day. Post-Covid, the average percentage of unassigned workspaces will more than double, and the percentage of assigned spaces will drop by a third. While this trend was happening before the pandemic, the scale of the post-Covid shift to unassigned spaces is remarkable. Pre-Covid, our participants report an average split of about 80% assigned to 20% unassigned workspaces. Over the next two years, they predict a change to an average of about 55% assigned to 45% unassigned. This is about a one-third decrease in the percentage of assigned spaces.

In concert with the trend toward a more unassigned environment, we found that the average sharing ratio predicted within the next two years will be 1:3.1 (workspaces to people). For a historical perspective, this is a 26% increase from 10 years ago when we found an average 1:2.30 sharing ratio[3].

Knoll research found that sharing ratios varied relative to an organization's business drivers. Companies that prioritize "people-focused" post-Covid business drivers (organizational culture and brand; workforce performance and engagement, well-being and stress reduction) predict a future average 1:3.0 sharing ratio. Those that highly value people-centric social cohesion and knowledge networks forecast by far the highest average sharing ratio of

Space Assignment Projections

CURRENT

Average assigned	**81%**
Average unassigned	**19%**

FUTURE

Average assigned	**55%**
Average unassigned	**45%**
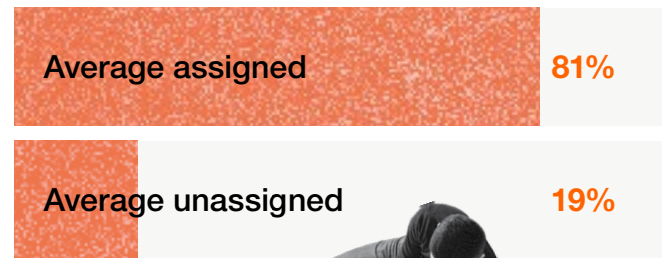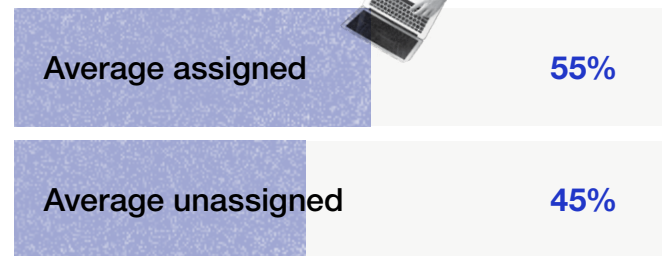
Within the next 18–24 months, the average percentage of unassigned workspaces will more than double—and the percentage of assigned spaces will drop by a third.

1:5.3. Organizations prioritizing flexibility and business continuity predict a 1:3.9 sharing ratio. Somewhat surprisingly, companies that prioritize reducing workspace capital costs predict one of the lowest average sharing ratios of 1:2.1. The only group that had a lower ratio (1:1.1) in our sample was companies that prioritize social and environmental issues.

Related to the increased sharing ratios, two-thirds of our participants predict "some to significant decrease" in the square footage of their managed workspace portfolio post-Covid.

Beyond the benefits to the organization, flexibility is an important benefit to workers, one that helps attract and retain top talent. It also contributes to employee wellness, increases worker engagement, reduces stress and improves employee satisfaction.

4. Offers a variety of choice

Every team and every individual are different. Companies need to create a free flow of space that gives employees latitude, with a landscape of choice of where and when to work. This can range from giving employees the ability to select the location that's right for their work to the freedom to reconfigure a space to taking the time to enabling employees to recharge and/or even establishing clear work/home boundaries.

Developing spaces that align with employees' needs and personality is key. For example, through proper space delineation and furniture selection, collaborative environments can be supplemented with more intimate spaces for teams who need time alone to create well-rounded thoughts, ideas and creations.

As our survey revealed, the next two years will see an acceleration of the existing trend away from individual workspaces. This shift will create an opportunity to provide a range of different space types.

Companies must rethink the large, open environments of the past decade for smaller, more humanistic spaces that allow people to select the space and atmosphere that is right for them.

In fact, when asked to assess anticipated changes in four different types of workspace over the next 18–24 months, two-thirds foresee "some to significant decrease" in the number of individual workspaces, while only about one-third feel the number of these workspaces will not change or see some increase. At the same time, as organizations look to create hubs for collaborative work, more than 60% of respondents predict an increase in the number of meeting spaces, and more than 50% foresee an increase in the number of social interaction spaces. Nearly 40% of participants predict an increase in the number of outdoor spaces.

5. Leverages technology for "phygital" collaboration
Advancing technology is the defining challenge of our time. Having the right technology and teaching your team how to use it properly are key to creating an effective flexible work environment. The Thriving Workplace acknowledges the importance of connection, but it is often a different type of connection. In the future, people will travel more to be with people to build deeper relationships and to create experiences rather than to work on tasks with people or attend rote meetings. Technology often is the tool to link them together.

A phygital space, which crosses the divide between the physical and digital, provides technologically advanced tools that facilitate connection and collaboration and makes room for analog experiences for all attendees—remote and in person—in spaces that promote participation, enable knowledge sharing, encourage collaboration and support the meeting's goal. At the same time, spaces for heads-down concentration are equally vital, providing a place to turn off technology and/or retreat from group-based work when necessary.

In the UX of collaborative work, digital is almost everywhere, with technology that provides seamless connectivity, convenient power access and simple and reliable devices to share content. It encompasses digital work tools such as collaborative whiteboards, sticky-notes walls, and virtual water coolers that ensure productive and engaging remote collaboration. In the office, mini-meetings can take place on the fly, but the needs of the remote person are always a consideration. The 'tech' thread needs to help everyone remain in touch and connected at all times no matter where they are located. New platforms—avatars, assisted reality, virtual reality

A Holistic Workplace Experience

The Thriving Workplace supports the whole person—the personal, the communal, the mental and the physical. Four people-centric characteristics embody that holistic experience and are expressed in the Thriving Workplace environment.

Togetherness

Environments that have a sense of belonging, providing opportunities for people to facilitate conversation, join together to solve problems, share content, be social and enjoy the benefits of learning from one another.

Restoration

Thoughtful settings that feed and restore people, away from hectic noise, with access to fresh air, near natural light, surrounded by nature and with products that ergonomically support their work.
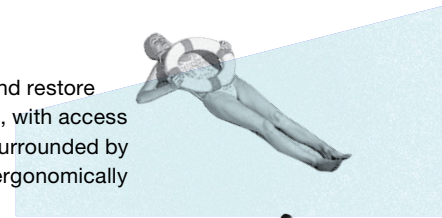
Equity

Planning optimized to support a broad range of diversity and inclusion, creating a more respectful place built on empathy and fairness across a breadth of physical and virtual engagements.
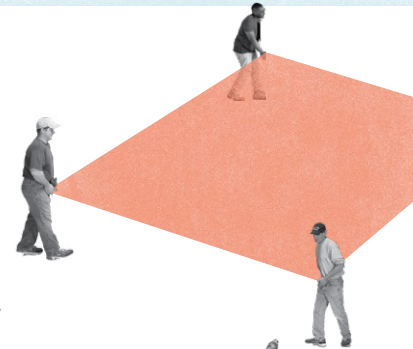
Latitude

Settings that offer ample space for individuals and teams to move freely through different interactions and activities over the course of time, and with furnishings that respond and adapt.

and more—will continue to emerge to bridge distance gaps and enable team-based work and casual conversations among a distributed workforce.

In a hybrid of physical and digital worlds, where synchronous and asynchronous work happens, the only real constraint is the time zone.

Beyond providing for a superior collaborative experience, technology is critical to supporting a workforce that is highly mobile and increasingly using unassigned space. More than 50% of the companies we surveyed are using room reservation apps, and almost 25% are using room occupancy hardware and room sensors to manage utilization of unassigned spaces and

CORE TEAM 1–10+ **NEIGHBORHOOD** UP TO ~40 **FLOOR** 40–150 **BUILDING** 150–500 **CAMPUS** 500+ **CITY** ~

meeting rooms. Of the few not currently using technology, 70% are considering implementing technology to support employees' ability to select and reserve spaces within the next year.

6. Encompasses holistic well-being
Companies are aware of the struggle the pandemic has caused their people. Working from home has caused severe stress for many employees, particularly parents of young children who must balance home-schooling with their workload. It has also exacerbated a growing epidemic of loneliness for employees of all ages, but has been especially hard on young workers[4]. Concerns about mental health have never been greater. At the same time, companies are addressing diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace to ensure organizational success.

People considerations dominate the direction of the future workplace. When participants were asked to select the two most important business drivers of their post-Covid workplace strategy, 60% chose issues related to "people" considerations: organizational culture and brand, workforce performance and engagement, well-being and stress reduction and employee social cohesion and knowledge networks.

Developing transparent, people-focused policies for promotion, retention and leadership demographics—and delivering on those promises—reflect an organization's equity, diversity and inclusion commitments.

Embracing a wide range of styles and voices of employees of different identity groups, and making cultural differences a resource for learning (such as having open discussions about how identity groups shape employees' experiences inside and outside the company) will no doubt improve organizational effectiveness.

This also means creating spaces for different needs and making sure that all employees are fully seen, heard, developed, engaged and rewarded.

Designing a Thriving Workplace Through a Scalable Planning Concept

As people return to the office, we're looking at how people interact with their environments, as well as how their environments impact what they do, through a new lens in 2021. The nature of work has fundamentally shifted, and as the boundary between living and working has completely blurred, so has the essential nature of the workplace. As we embrace a distributed work model that empowers employees with the choice to work from anywhere, the Thriving Workplace is about creating healthy, productive and holistic work environments in the office and all the other touchpoints in the workplace ecosystem.

Design at All Scales
Rather than a single large, dense, open floor plate, a Thriving Workplace supports scalable planning—a range of settings that can be sized up or down to support the users' needs and support a variety of interactions and activities across locations and sites.

> *"Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context—a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan."*
>
> ELIEL SAARINEN

We take our cues from great cities with dynamic urban plans that are metaphors for the workplace: cohesive, small-scale neighborhoods, active communities that cultivate personal connections, quiet places that offer refuge, all connected by sidewalks and streets that promote circulation.

What Awaits Teams: Dynamic Neighborhoods and Zones

As the hybrid workplace emerges, and organizations roll out a distributed work strategy, flexible, highly adaptable spaces are needed more than ever. What are some new spaces going to be like as you create your own unique neighborhoods and zones within a dynamic, Thriving Workplace? The possibilities are infinite.

Here are a few:

Co-Creation Workroom

Spread out, rearrange and throw ideas against the wall while seamlessly transitioning from group work to individual and smaller team activities, all within the same highly flexible and comfortable neighborhood.
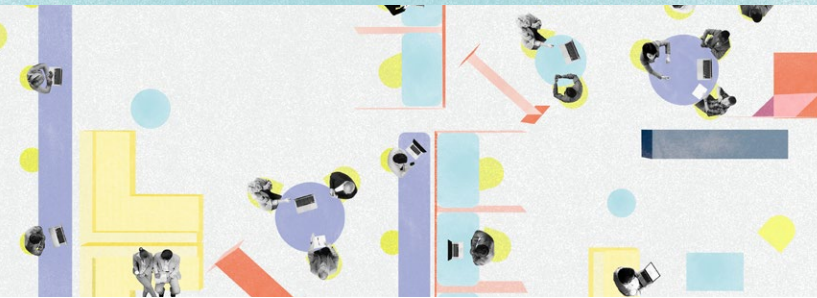
Project Studio

Begin with the end in mind by engaging in purposeful, goal-oriented activities in productive settings that can shift and evolve as projects progress and move through different phases of work.
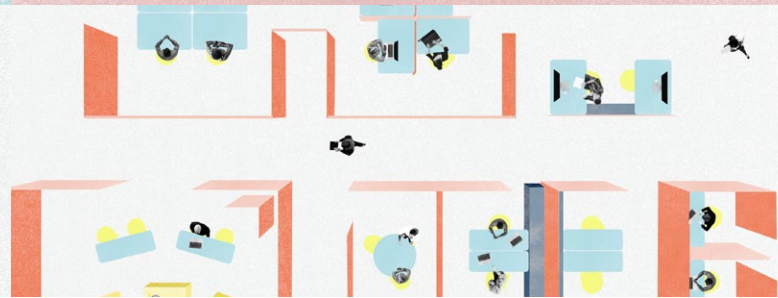
Visitor/Group Get-together

Convene with visitors or teammates to share, socialize, build community and culture in living room-style settings that easily segue to a range of meeting experiences whether in person or across video with remote participants.

Resident Retreat

Check in for some deep work–be it a few hours, a day, a week or more–in a neighborhood that not only delivers shelter for productive focus work but also inspires a sense of belonging, serenity and flow.
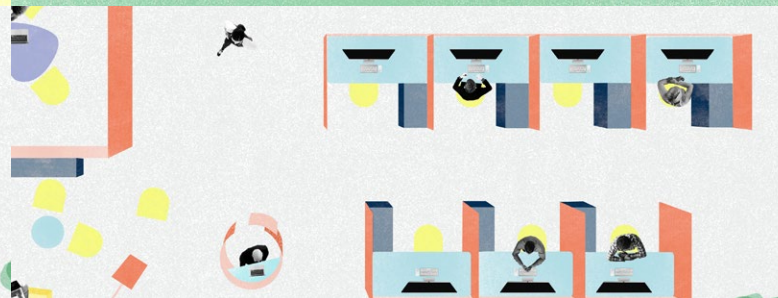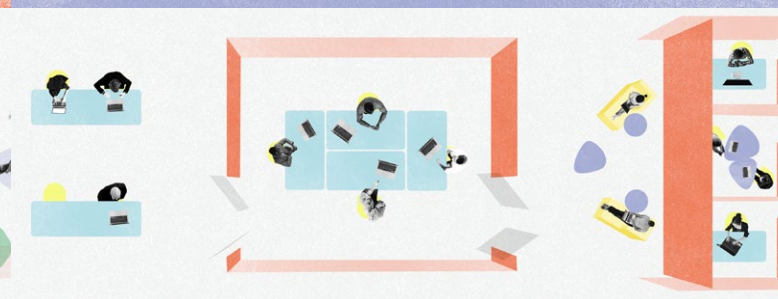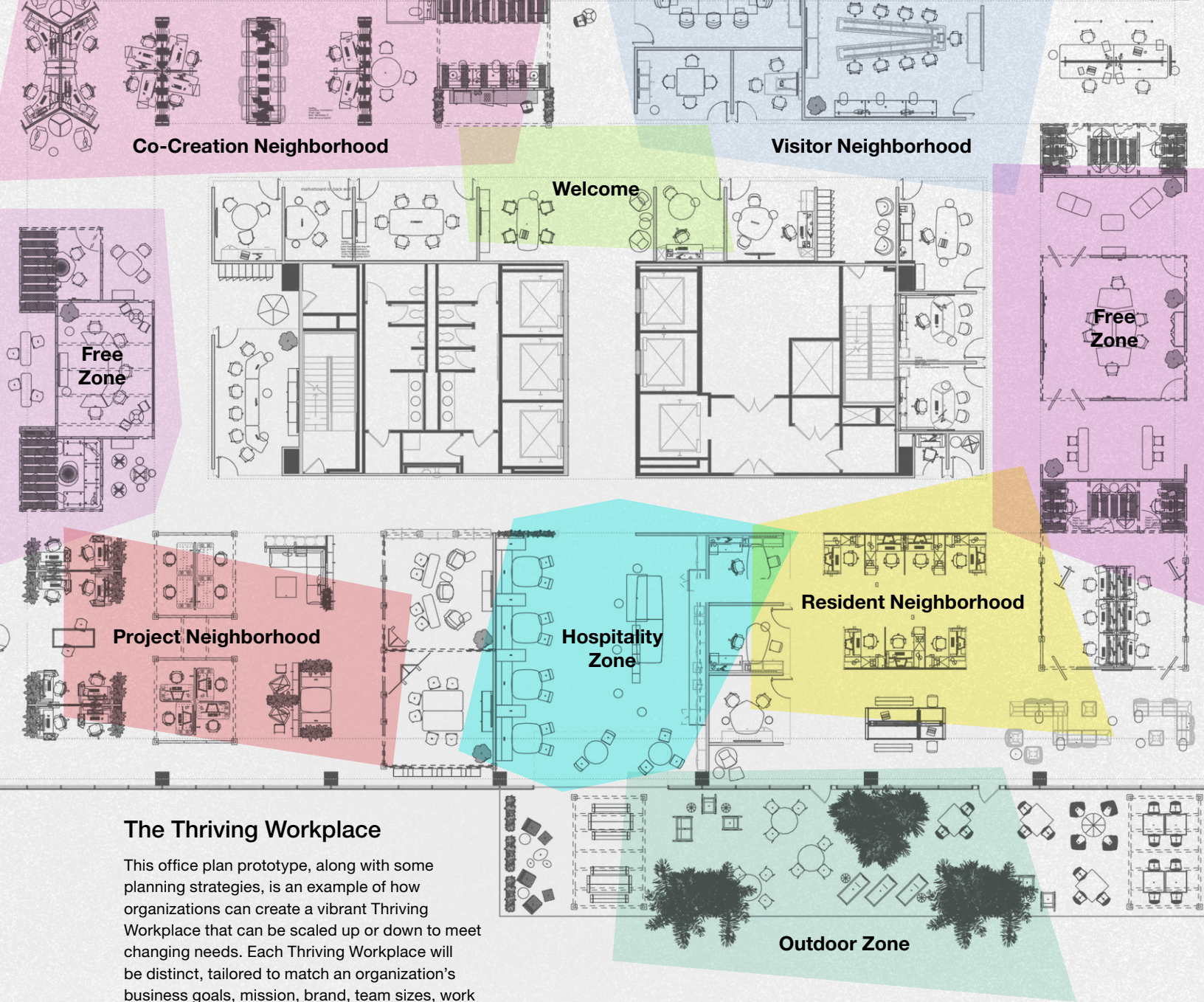
Sidewalk Café

Embrace the buzz. Leverage high-traffic spaces to bring people together in informal ways—supporting impromptu "bumping into each other" experiences. It's a hospitality setting that nurtures a sense of belonging, whether you're connecting with others or simply desire to work "alone, together."
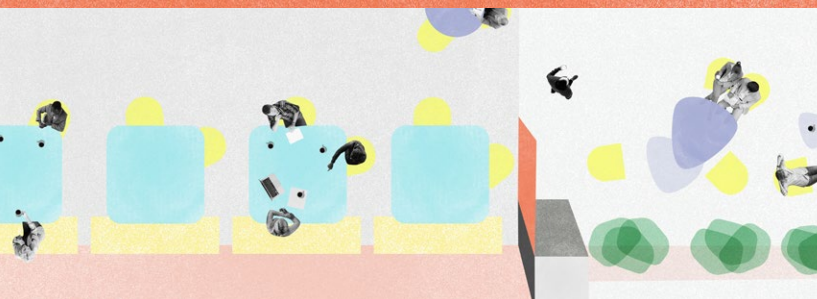
Central Agora

Come together for community building and connection. This free zone is centered on an open town square–style event space that allows people to exchange ideas, learn and get their social fix in a reconfigurable gathering area. When there's no event, it's another space to sit down and think.

Co-Creation Neighborhood

Visitor Neighborhood

Welcome

Free Zone

Free Zone

Project Neighborhood

Hospitality Zone

Resident Neighborhood

Outdoor Zone

The Thriving Workplace

This office plan prototype, along with some planning strategies, is an example of how organizations can create a vibrant Thriving Workplace that can be scaled up or down to meet changing needs. Each Thriving Workplace will be distinct, tailored to match an organization's business goals, mission, brand, team sizes, work modes and culture characteristics.

Consider the following:

Zones and paths to navigate

+ The size and relationship of major zones and neighborhoods, such as Welcome, Visitor, Hospitality, etc.

+ Circulation paths to connect adjoining zones and offer access to the outdoors

+ Location of landmarks, amenities and other prominent features to assist in wayfinding

Settings and furnishings that unite and adapt

+ Team sizes and dominant modes of collaboration (BIGS—Build, Ideate, Gather, Study)

+ The mix of spatial settings within each neighborhood, such as the mix of learning and sharing spaces to sanctuary and restorative spaces

+ Furnishings and their varied forms that can flex and evolve to create a range of space set-ups

Enclosures and technology that shape

+ The sorts of enclosures and separations to delineate spaces and offer a sense of surround

+ Items that give visual cues on space usage (e.g., a "quiet" room, visitor vs. employee area)

+ Intuitive technology and collaboration tools to connect people and enable collaboration across locations—remote and in person

Materials that enrich

+ Materials that provide sound dampening and acoustical privacy

+ Textures and biophilia to create visual interest and support well-being and tranquility throughout the space

The Thriving Workplace promises to be more alive and resilient than ever.

The new workplace has generous circulation paths allowing comfortable passage in two directions. Some floor plate space may be re-allocated to accommodate additional group spaces (meeting, social and outdoor), as planned individual spaces decline, and unassigned workspaces grow.

The key to a Thriving Workplace is an employee's ability to connect to their collaborative work community and company culture. As companies embrace the opportunity to support teams in new ways of togetherness and a culture of belonging, offices will need spaces for specific tasks like focused work and team brainstorming. It requires spaces for respite and recharge, such as a lounge to unwind in that compels you to come as you are and leave transformed. Spaces could either be grouped to form a larger space (building) or stand alone as a satellite location (close to where people live).

Smaller Humanistic Neighborhoods

Reconfiguring the capacity of expansive floor plates can be achieved through the use of smaller, more humanistic, scaled neighborhoods with moveable elements that create a variety of environments—and the equally important transition spaces between them.

Space delineation can create more intimate settings—"communities"—while addressing post-Covid issues of safety. Free-standing walls and/or fixed or free-standing screens can create additional levels of enclosure—whether for privacy or to separate work areas from corridors. They also provide options for

materiality, as organizations balance the need for cleanability, visual transparency and sound absorption.

This type of planning helps create spaces that bring people together, giving them a sense of shared purpose and identity to successfully collaborate and work together. Combining spaces built for throwing ideas against the wall for creative brainstorming sessions with areas that offer a break for more concentrative behaviors makes for an office environment that will draw in every worker, no matter their work style.

As the workplace is reimagined for the way we gather to do our best work, companies have endless opportunities to create their unique workplace.

What's Happening Now

Employees need the power to decide where, how and when they work. One size does not fit all. This is just the beginning. The following are examples of what we expect to continue to see.

Flexible Architecture

Increasingly, furniture is taking on a more architectural purpose, helping organizations plan distinct areas that define spaces within a space—from gathering areas to quiet retreats—while being malleable, movable and multi-purpose. Inherently scalable, free-standing furniture elements allow companies the ability to continuously adapt their space layout to meet evolving needs. Companies can drop in one wall or plan a series of fluid zones. each offering varying degrees of visual and acoustic privacy.

Not only can furnishings such as planters, bookshelves, power beams and mobile marker boards demarcate spaces, but upholstered walls and curtains can dampen noise, minimize distractions and soften a space.

Advanced Technology for Seamless Experiences

As we learn to embrace phygital meetings, the rapid evolution of technology means that staying connected to our colleagues and friends will be easier than ever. Companies are realizing that daily knowledge work doesn't necessarily require physical proximity with everyone. The widespread reliance on digital solutions by employees during the pandemic is paving the way for greater adoption of even more innovative technology. Whether as pop-up or permanent solutions, the next generation of sophisticated tech solutions and advanced digital tools—like virtual reality, augmented reality and predictive analytics—offer a more seamless user experience and improved collaboration. Leveraging technology to close the distance divide between remote coworkers can strengthen bonds, resulting in a powerful positive influence on happiness and satisfaction.

Personalized Amenities to Make Everyone Happier and Healthier

As companies find new solutions to draw workers in and support employees' mental and physical health, amenities are becoming business objectives instead of just an employee perk—one that goes beyond the traditional gym, endless buffet and wellness room. Look for on-site dentistry and healthcare, enhanced hospitality, spa-like sanctuary and restorative spaces to reconnect with nature, air purification and wellness treatments that inspire healthier living and foster resilience, reduce burnout and enhance creativity. Additionally, companies will provide services—from takeout food to laundry—to ease the day-to-day burdens of working professionals. Also coming soon: health coaches to help employees set health and wellness goals, spaces to rest in and disconnect from technology and decompression spaces for listening to music or meditating—all with the idea of supporting a better quality of life. Supporting this move to more amenities to make people happier and healthier, one workplace leader said, "[We] envision more amenities to support wellness." Another noted, "Increasing our health and safety program offerings will be key. We foresee that there will be a demand for more quiet spaces so that folks can take a break while on-site to decompress and have space to refresh. Psychological safety will be an important element at play. We're considering how to design space that provides solutions for unknown levels of psychological safety."

Only 6% of companies offer some type of childcare benefits post maternity or paternity leave[5]. As companies address the needs of working parents, parent/child rooms offer a private space for parents when needed—filled with toys and children's books— allowing them to work while caring for their child in private.

Office Gardens as Workplace

When we spend time outdoors, we are more productive, creative and happier. Thanks to technology-enabled mobility, public spaces—whether they are parks, plazas or indoor settings like hotel lobbies, cafés or airports—are becoming workspaces where people can congregate or concentrate. Reinforcing this concept, one respondent noted, "We are looking for offices with adjacency to outdoor amenities like patios and balconies."

Increasing greenery through planters and foliage (to reduce stress and anxiety) and ventilation, incorporating biophilic principles and expanding outdoor office space give employees more spaces to collaborate with higher levels of choice and balance. An indoor green space allows concentration to be restored by exposure to natural environments and provides a dedicated and calm workspace.

> ## "We anticipate more emerging green spaces and areas promoting health and wellness."
>
> REAL ESTATE LEADER

Office on Demand

The hub-and-spoke workspace—where companies keep a central headquarters (hub) for periodic team gatherings and strategy discussions in an urban area accompanied by a network of small satellite offices/coworking spaces or "spokes" throughout the suburbs or open a string of offices in emerging markets—is gaining traction. Smaller offices and coworking spaces can reduce operational costs while allowing the hybrid workforce the flexibility it demands, with an office that is closer to where they live, saving them commuting time. A more distributed workforce allows companies to hire people from a wider range of backgrounds and experiences without geographic limitations.

Additionally, whether by the hour or by the day, using hotel rooms—which are already equipped with infrastructure to accommodate business travelers and professionals—as workspaces provides new opportunities and relief for work. The workplace of "road warriors" before the pandemic, reinvented hourly-/day-use hotels rooms equipped with desks, ergonomic chairs and high-speed internet offer yet another space for people to plug in, concentrate or hold conference calls for a few hours, often within an easy commute from home.

Privacy Redefined

In the Thriving Workplace, look for private offices that double as meeting spaces to give employees another setting in which to work, meet and connect with those not in the office. Hoteling allows a single office or workstation to be used by multiple employees, each of whom is in the office only part of the week and thus, does not require a dedicated location. In addition, reducing the size of private offices allows organizations to maximize the number of offices they can fit into the floor plan. Many employees don't need the ownership of an office/workstation, just a place to get the job done. Lockers can address any storage needs, and technology can facilitate equitable room reservations.

The Workplace Evolves

As we said previously, Covid-19 didn't end the office as we know it, but it has forever transformed it. We're returning to a different place. And as we return to that new place, it's no surprise that our preconceived notions about the purpose and design of the workplace have evolved to create new experiences that offer more flexibility, adaptability and a variety of spaces where everyone can be productive and happy.

The Thriving Workplace is a more humanistic and resilient workplace. Where the physical and remote co-exist in the best of both worlds: providing structure, sociability, independence and flexibility.

The coronavirus disrupted our lives on every level—personally, mentally, emotionally and physically. The Thriving Workplace addresses that multi-faceted experience and redefines what dynamic work is and where work takes place. Within the new scenario that is workplace as an ecosystem, people work from any number of locations, supported by a human-centric company culture. Flexibility mixed with humanity is key to all of this, as companies and employees seek to optimize their work/life balance in a hybrid workplace.

Organizations change over time, and offices, in turn, need to be ready to adapt and evolve, too. Employees want the opportunity to collaborate, socialize and engage with each other in scalable, walkable neighborhood settings and town squares, much like great cities do. The new workplace thinking and accompanying space planning will enrich people's lives, generate long-term cost savings and contribute to an improved overall workplace culture. ◼

Endnotes

1   The Martec Group, Working Remotely During Covid-19, 2020.

2   Knoll, Immersive Planning from Research to Realization: An Experience-based Workplace, New York, 2016.

3   Knoll, The Metrics of Distributed Work: Financial and Performance Benefits of an Emerging Work Model White Paper, New York, 2011.

4   Cindy H. Liu, Emily Zhang, Ga Tin Fifi Wong, Sunah Hyun, Hyeouk "Chris" Hahm, Factors Associated with Depression, Anxiety, and PTSD Symptomatology During the COVID-19 pandemic: Clinical Implications for U.S. Young Adult Mental Health, 2020.

5   Clutch, Childcare Benefits Survey, 2020.

Additional Reading

The Case for a Thriving Workplace
A Forecast of the Post-Covid Workspace and Planning Approaches

Meeting Spaces to Support Hybrid Work
A Guide for Creating Effective "Phygital" Collaborative Spaces

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Through research, Knoll explores the connection between design and human behavior, health and performance and the quality of the user experience. We share and apply what we learn to inform product development and help our customers shape their physical environments.

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