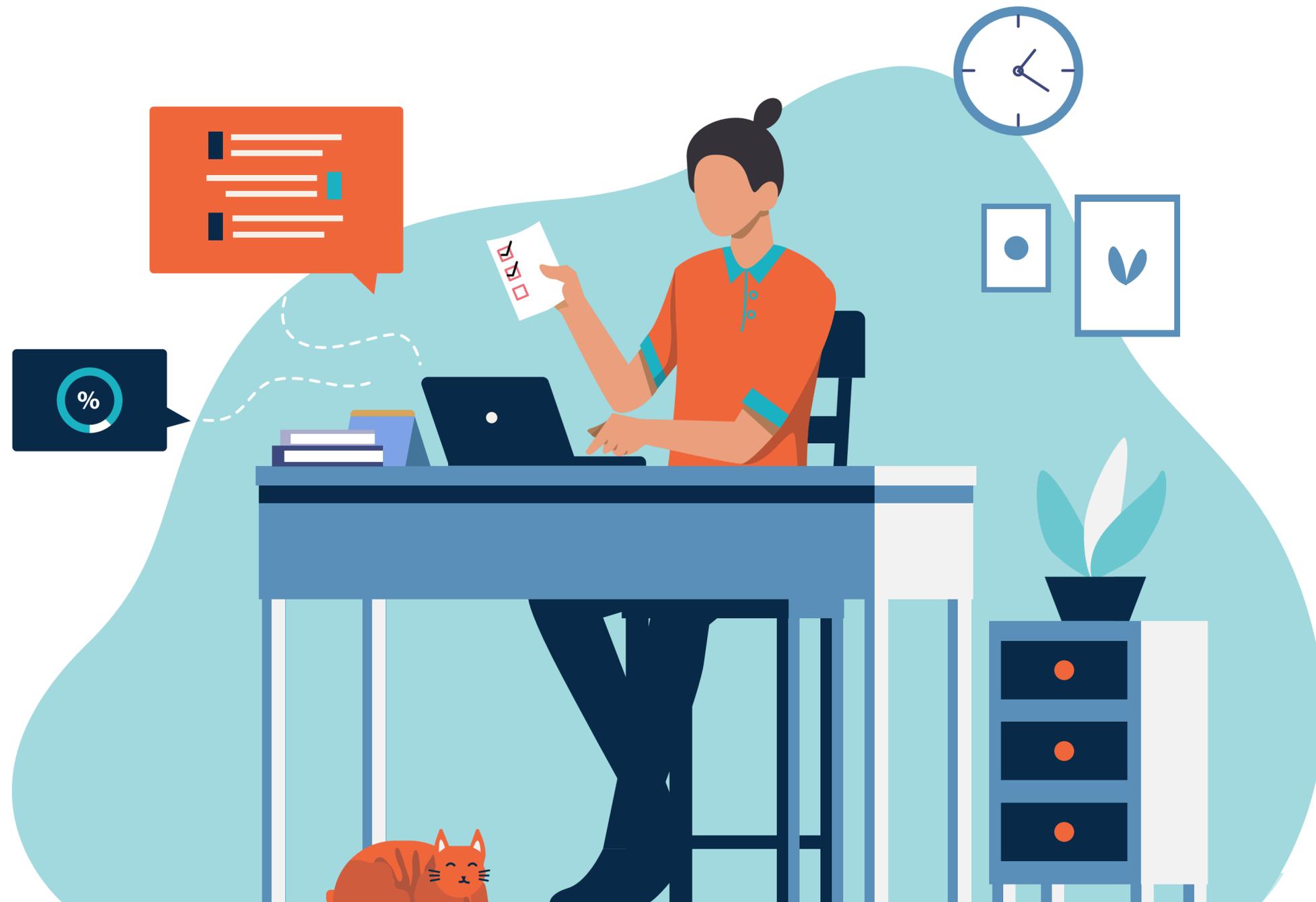


Where is Your Office Today?

New insights on employee behaviour and social networks

To find out more about the research project, access resources, or connect with the research team, visit futureworkplace.leeds.ac.uk



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About this research

Project team:

Dr Matthew Davis, Associate Professor in Organisational Psychology, Management Department, Leeds University Business School, M.Davis@Leeds.ac.uk, +44 (0) 113 343 6831

Dr Helen Hughes, Associate Professor in Organisational Psychology, Management Department, Leeds University Business School

Professor Simon J. Rees, Professor of Building Energy Systems, School of Civil Engineering, University of Leeds

Professor Chia-Huei Wu, Professor in Organisational Psychology, Management Department, Leeds University Business School

Dr Emma Gritt, Lecturer in Information Management, Management Department, Leeds University Business School

Dr Hannah Collis, Researcher in Organisational Psychology, Management Department, Leeds University Business School

Dr Linhao Fang, Lecturer in Management, Management Department, Leeds University Business School

Afshan Iqbal, Doctoral Researcher in Organisational Psychology, Management Department, Leeds University Business School



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS



Project Steering Group:

Dr Caroline Paradise, Ruth Hynes and Anthony Leslie, Atkins | **Helen da Costa**, Coreus | **Angela Barnicle**, Leeds City Council | **Rachel Beverley-Stevenson** and George Moxon, One Medical Group | **Professor Cath Noakes**, University of Leeds | **Mark Byrne**, Walker Morris LLP | **Sally Guyer** and **Professor Tim Cummins**, World Commerce and Contracting

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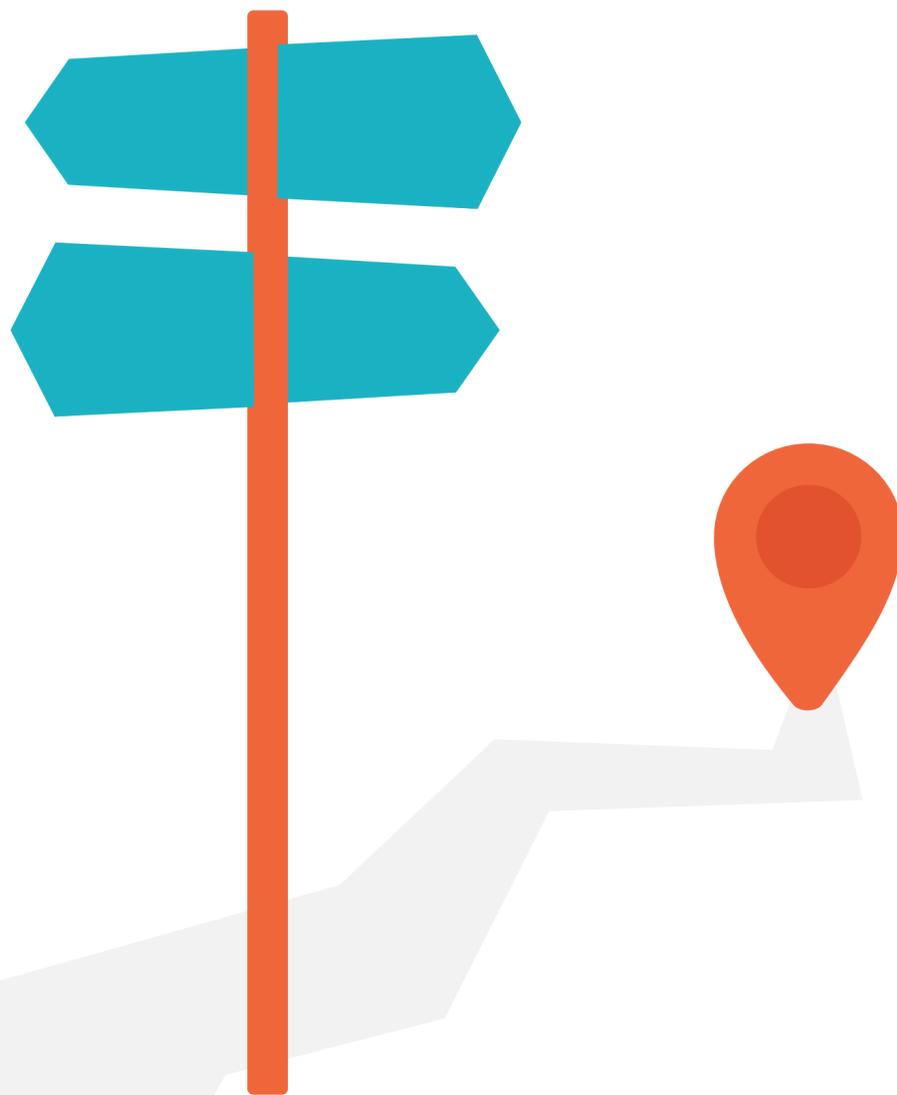
Published in October 2022





How to navigate this interactive guide

The menu of this interactive guide has an [Executive Summary](#), the [Methodology](#), two main sections, [Where we work](#) and [How we develop social networks](#), each divided into subsections and the [Conclusion](#).



- **Click the menu at the top of the page** to navigate to the section you want to read
- **Within each subsection, scroll down** or use the arrows on your keyboard to read the content
- You will be able to tell what subsection you are in because its **title in the menu will be highlighted**
- This interactive guide gives you **flexibility** to jump to the topics you are most interested in without having to read the content linearly



Executive summary

Our research examines how work and workplaces are changing to adapt to hybrid and flexible working. Collaborating with a range of organisations and stakeholders, we have gathered rich, in-depth data to generate insights with the aim to provide an evidence base to guide long-term decision making. In June 2022, we published a research-led guide to hybrid working. This new report provides a focused, data-driven evaluation of the impact of different work patterns and workplaces on employee behaviour and social networks. We explain what this means for organisations and the design of future workplaces.

Hybrid working is firmly entrenched

The majority of office workers are as keen on hybrid working as they were 12 months ago (it's 52% of UK office workers' ideal working pattern in our cross-industry snapshot) and it is unlikely that this will now shift. However, almost half of office workers (49%) say they are in a job that doesn't fit their ideal way of working. 39% would like to be working from the office less: these workers are also more likely to say that they want to change jobs and have lower job satisfaction. This suggests there are large groups of discontented workers, a risk for organisations. Organisations need to directly engage with staff to identify where there are misfits between policy and preferences, try to align these where possible, and be explicit about hybrid norms and expectations with new hires to improve fit going forward.



Office working is beneficial for hybrid workers

Organisations often find it difficult to explain why employees should spend time in the office. We looked at whether employees in a range of workplaces felt and behaved differently when they were in the office compared with when they were at home, using daily diary data.

When individuals worked from an office they reported higher job satisfaction and engagement, rated their performance better, helped colleagues more and experienced less work-family conflict, than when they worked from home or third spaces.

This is strong evidence of the benefits to individual workers when they work from the office and that the effort of travelling into the workplace is worthwhile. Therefore, for organisations, encouraging hybrid workers to spend a proportion of their time in the office is justified. Unfortunately, there is no clear answer to 'How many days should I come to the office?'. The number of days should be determined based on job role, business requirements and employee preferences, giving some choice and control to the individual (within reason!).

Offering flexibility pays dividends

Flexibility and control matter to workers, boosting performance and even helping to retain staff. In our snapshot study, we found that workers who have more control over where and when they work report higher levels of job satisfaction and work-life balance. Conversely, workers who have less control over when they work are more likely to say that they want to quit their job. Our diary analyses show that when employees could choose between workplaces (e.g. office or home) they had higher job satisfaction and wellbeing. But even better, when they had choice over where to work within a workspace, they reported a whole range of positives (higher job satisfaction, workspace satisfaction, performance, wellbeing, helping behaviours, did extra work tasks, lower exhaustion, work family conflict or counter-productive work behaviours). This shows the value of designing in more discretion for workers to decide how, when and where to get tasks done.



Workplaces shape social networks and interaction

We found strong evidence that organisational structure, workspaces and policies can shape an employee's social network. For example, employees who worked from the office more frequently were significantly better connected and more central within their group/team networks. This suggests that spending time in the office is advantageous to those who wish (or need) to be well connected, supporting information flow and informal collaboration. We also found some evidence which suggests that where employees sit within the office also influences their social network. Nonetheless, formal team membership is key to driving interaction and advice seeking in organisational networks (i.e., teams will coordinate internally out of necessity). Co-locating individuals from different teams is a simple strategy to encourage more interaction and knowledge sharing across the wider network – this goes against hybrid policies that are focused on only bringing distinct teams into the office together on different days.

Helping employees develop their social networks matters. Employees who report fewer interactions with others feel a lack of belonging to their organisation. If managers want to boost commitment and retain staff, then actively promoting interactions as they did during lockdowns may still be beneficial. We also found evidence that employees who have lots of people reporting to them are more likely to be thinking about quitting their job. This is a risk – these people are often key in relaying information or holding organisational knowledge: losing them will be disruptive.



Equality, diversity and inclusion

A focus on equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is key as we move towards formalising new working practices. Employee groups have different experiences when working in the office, and all need to be considered when planning any changes to both workspaces and policy.

Our diary data shows that younger workers and those at the end of their careers seem to stand to gain the most from office working, with a squeezed middle generation of workers (older Generation Y workers) scoring lowest on a range of outcomes when based in the office. It also showed that men may have more positive outcomes than women when working in the office, and employees from ethnic minorities or with a disability reported lower engagement and satisfaction when in the office.

Relatedly, in our analysis of network data, employees from ethnic minorities reported considerably fewer outgoing connections (they sought advice from fewer colleagues) and had significantly fewer incoming connections (colleagues came to them for advice less often). These findings raise important questions about the inclusion of employees from different groups within the workplace. Care needs to be taken to guard against differential outcomes.

Personality influences where you work

We also found differences in where people work based on employees' personalities. Our diary data showed that personality traits influence where employees choose to work from – both within the office workspace and when deciding between spending time at home or the office. Employees who reported higher extraversion scores chose to work from the office more frequently, and tended to sit in closer proximity to their managers. This means that extraverted employees are likely to be more visible and have higher physical presenteeism. Managers need to be aware of different personalities within their team and what this may mean.



New starters

Managers are often concerned about how to support new and early career employees in hybrid workplaces. This is a valid concern. Our network analysis showed new starters are typically less connected and located on the periphery of networks compared with more established colleagues. Amongst new starters, it seems that male or extraverted employees build larger networks more quickly. However, asking new starters to spend more time in the office may not be a good strategy. The total number of days in the office did not significantly influence the connectedness of new starters, instead ‘purposeful presence’ in the office is important i.e., working from the office when key colleagues are too.

The office is more than just a place to meet

We used over 10,000 diary observations to understand how employees use their workspaces. We found that the office is still predominantly used for solo work, with almost 60% of tasks reported to be individual-focused. Collaboration is an important activity, but a secondary one: 20% of tasks reported involved in-person interactions (e.g. formal or informal meetings and discussions). This underlines that future workplaces still need to provide spaces and support for completing individual and low concentration tasks. 11% of tasks reported from the office are video calls; 2.5% of tasks involve hybrid meetings. For most employees, hybrid meetings are not yet common, with only senior employees typically reporting these tasks often.

There is a huge hybrid training gap

We still need to train people! 74% of office workers we surveyed would like to receive training for hybrid working, yet only 8.5% had received any specific training for hybrid meetings (a key employee concern of hybrid working and [one we offer tips on](#)). This leaves a worrying training gap. Hybrid working is a distinct way of working and investment in training is crucial to provide the skills needed for employees to thrive in the new workplace.

The future workplace will be flexible and diverse

Our research demonstrates the office remains a key influence over how employees think, feel and interact at work, and spending time with colleagues in the office has positive effects for both employees and their organisations. However, there is clear evidence that employees desire and benefit from choice over where, when and how they work, so building in flexibility can help make the workplace not only more suitable for hybrid working, but more inclusive for all employees.

Currently, there are large numbers of workers who have preferences which misfit their current jobs, and those who are disadvantaged or less included in the workplace. This needs to change. **The future workplace can and should be a more inclusive environment.** It needs to accommodate the diversity in employee work preferences (hybrid, office and home workers), personality, personal characteristics and needs.

This requires redesigning of HR policies, job roles and ways of working as much as it does investment in the physical workspace and technologies to enable flexible working. This is a whole system design challenge: an opportunity to step back and question why things have been done the way they have, and to re-evaluate the goals of the organisation.

What needs to change to create a positive workplace that all employees want to spend time in, that creates meaningful interactions and which adds value for both employees and organisations? This report presents key insights, challenges and practical solutions for supporting hybrid working. Together with our [June 2022 report](#) it provides a set of approaches to tackle the design of future workplaces.





Methodology

Our research

This research project is designed to examine the changes to workplaces and ways of working spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic. We aim to understand the implications of the changes: learn lessons, share good practice, and provide guidance for organisations adopting hybrid working or adapting offices to support their future ways of working. We are taking a broad view of what is happening in practice to join the dots between management practices, employee perspectives, new technologies and workplaces being adapted.

This is the second of two reports sharing our key findings and suggestions for how to approach the challenge of adapting organisations to hybrid and more flexible ways of working. This report focuses on the impact that different work patterns and workplaces have on employees (wellbeing, job satisfaction, performance, interactions), and what this means for organisations and future workplaces. We share more findings from our analysis of employee diaries, surveys and social network analysis. We also report the latest from our snapshot of UK office workers to understand cross-industry changes in employee behaviour. We examine differences between groups of workers (e.g. new starters, different generations) under different work patterns (e.g. office vs home vs hybrid) and in different office workspaces (e.g. open plan vs social spaces vs private workspaces).

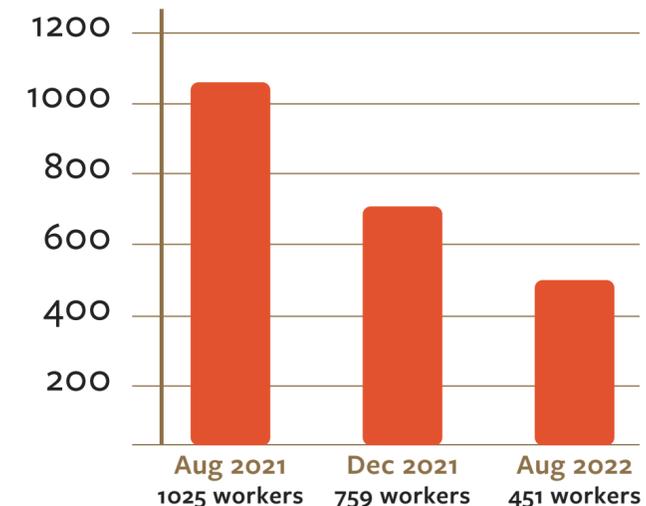
We present the research data to help managers take evidence-based decisions about their work policies and workplaces. We also provide practical guides to help both managers and employees understand how they can apply social network principles to support career development, productivity and knowledge sharing.

To conclude we reflect on the opportunities the future workplace presents, and offer ideas to navigate from implementing a viable hybrid working model, to creating the flexible workplace of the future.

Data and approach

i) Snapshot surveys

with a cross-industry group of UK office workers to understand how their experience of hybrid working had changed over time (see graph on the right).



ii) Employee diary study

to understand how employees use, behave and feel in different types of hybrid workplaces.

Oct-Dec 2021

6
organisations

346
employees

4471
observations

Apr-May 2022

8
organisations

471
employees

5786
observations

iv) Employee interviews

with individuals with different job roles, demographics, tenure, working patterns and preferences to understand their experience as they adapt to hybrid working and how they work and interact in different locations, types of spaces and hybrid arrangements.

iii) Social network analysis

with employees to capture social interaction patterns and to assess information flow, relationship formation and explore differences between employee groups across different office configurations, occupancies, and work arrangements.

Nov-Dec 2021

7 organisations

13 networks

867 employees

May-June 2022

6 organisations

11 networks

845 employees

2021: 91 interviews



2022: 41 follow-up interviews with staff from offices taking part in our social network study in August 2022





UK office worker snapshot

Where do people want to work?

Have people’s preferences for where they want to work changed as COVID-19 restrictions have been removed and the opportunity for full-time office working returned?

We have asked this question (and many others!) of the same group of office workers (see [‘Methodology’](#)) in our cross-sector surveys in August 2021 (as many organisations began to actively encourage more workers back to the office), December 2021 (before the Omicron variant prompted a return to home working) and in August 2022 (one year on from the push to return to the office). We found:

	AUGUST 2021	DECEMBER 2021	AUGUST 2022
% WHO WANT HYBRID WORK	48%	49% ▲	52% ▲
% WHO WANT FULL-TIME HOME WORKING	26%	28% ▲	22% ▼
% WHO WANT FULL-TIME OFFICE WORKING	26%	23% ▼	22% ▼

What does this mean?

The preference for hybrid working is firmly established. Our results show that those office workers who want to work in a hybrid pattern have remarkably settled views and it appears unlikely that this will shift. Hybrid working remains the ideal for most office workers, but we can’t assume this is what everyone wants. A consistent minority want a traditional full-time office role or full-time home working arrangement. Organisations should implement hybrid policies that support a range of working patterns, as we highlight in our first report. **See section ‘Designing a hybrid policy’ (page 35) in our [June 2022 report](#).**

Can they work where and when they want?

How well matched are workers’ preferences to their current jobs (i.e., are people able to work how they would like)?

51% of our office workers had the work arrangement that they desired. This is a slightly better match than one year ago (50% fit August 2021).

10% would prefer to work from the office more.

39% would prefer to work from the office less.

- Women and men had similar matches between current and ideal work patterns.
- People with children or caring responsibilities were as likely to match their current and ideal work patterns as other workers.
- The more additional time people said they spent in the office over their ideal, the more likely they were to want to change jobs and express lower satisfaction with their job, lower levels of wellbeing and work life balance.

28% would like access to a third space (e.g. a co-working space)

6% report using a third space regularly.

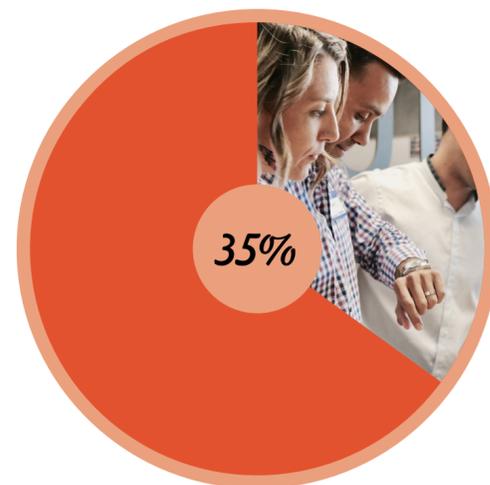
What does this mean?

It is positive that **51% of office workers report that they are currently working in a pattern that suits their preferences** and that gender and caring responsibilities did not affect this. However, despite the ‘great resignation’, there remains a sizable group of workers who are in roles that don’t fit their ideal way of working. Most significantly, **39% would like to be working from the office less**. This group matters as our findings show these workers are more likely to say they want to change jobs and that they are less satisfied with their jobs than colleagues whose work patterns were more in-line with their preferences. This suggests organisations may be carrying large groups of discontented workers – failing to provide the desired hybrid working pattern presents a risk of employee turnover and if not proactively managed, may prove disruptive.

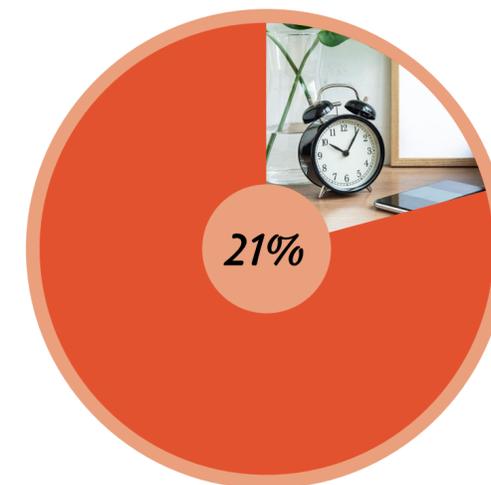


How flexible is the new workplace?

Our survey shows that hybrid workers are enjoying more flexibility than traditional office workers:



35% of full-time office workers reported having very little control over *when* they worked (i.e., little flexibility over when they started work or how many hours a day they worked)



Only 21% of hybrid workers reported having very little control over *when* they worked

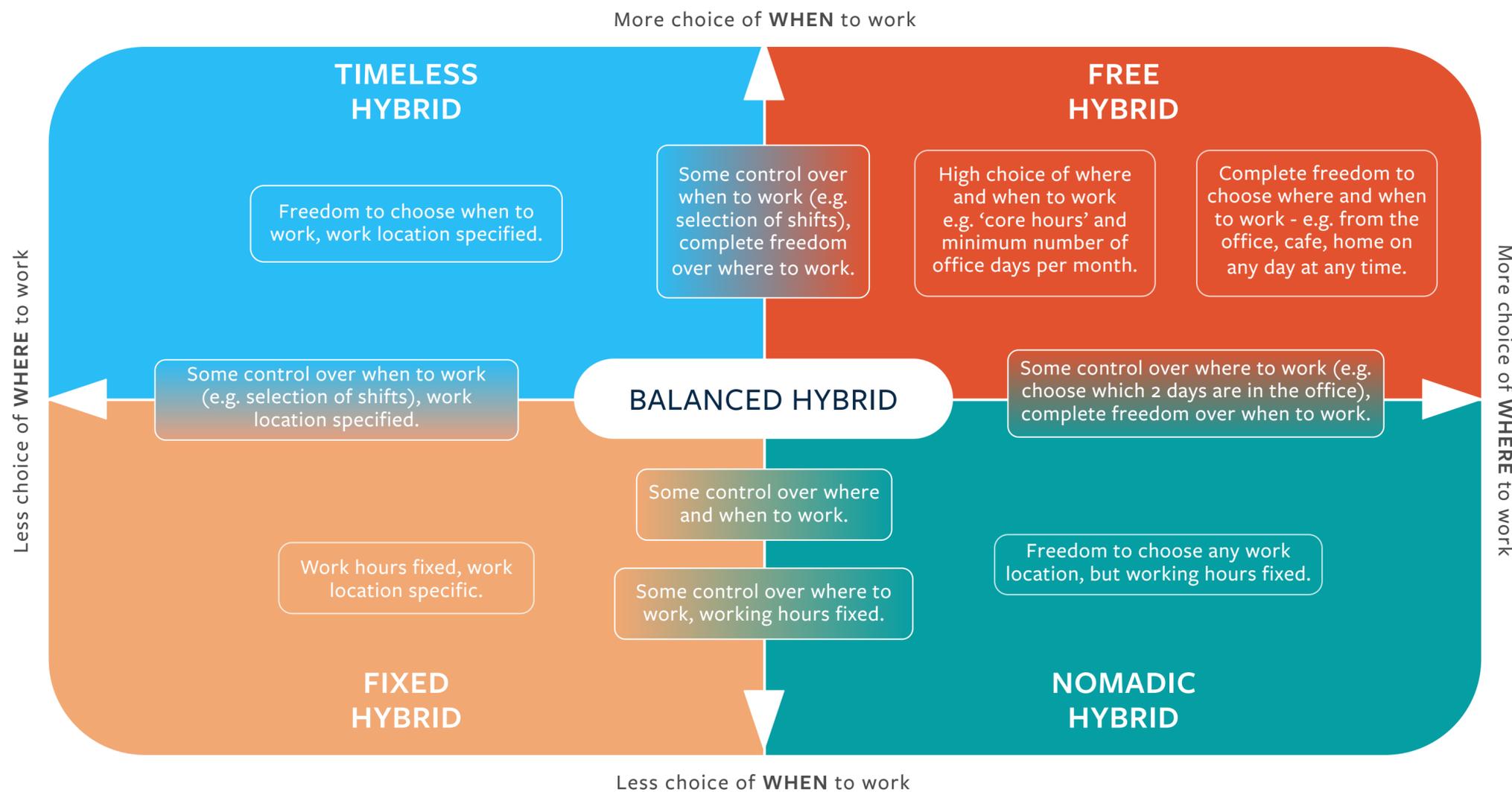


What does that mean?

These findings from across our UK office workers reinforce the additional choice and control that a hybrid way of working offers workers (for more on the benefits of this, see section on [employee choice and control](#)). However, the statistics also illustrate how different the experience of hybrid workers can be (see **figure 1**), with approximately 20% of hybrid workers reporting very little choice over when and where they work (fixed hybrid workers),

while other workers enjoy lots of freedom to choose when they work from home or an office and are able to pick and choose their hours (e.g. free hybrids). **Read more about why these differences matter and how to design in flexibility in our [June 2022 report](#) sections 'What is hybrid working?' (page 11) and 'Tensions when implementing hybrid working policies' (page 14).**

Figure 1: Description of hybrid work arrangements





Take action:

A misfit of work patterns and preferences is likely to increase dissatisfaction and employee turnover. This risk should be proactively managed:

Engage staff:



Ask employees how they would ideally like to work, identify where there are mismatches and develop a plan to address this. This could involve a gradual rebalancing of tasks between different job roles to design-in opportunities for more remote working, to facilitate job swaps, to identify other flexibility (e.g. condensed or flexible hours) that would satisfy the worker.



Be honest when employee preferences cannot be met and facilitate a broader discussion regarding career planning – the optimal solution for the individual may be a move elsewhere within the organisation or to a different organisation.



Be transparent to avoid false hopes, undermining of hybrid policy or resentment.



Be explicit about the norms and expectations regarding hybrid working for any new hires.

Encourage perspective taking:

Agreeing on hybrid working arrangements calls for mutual understanding and perspective-taking between both employees and managers. This involves making explicit the impact of individual work arrangements on other people.

See section 'Tensions when implementing hybrid working policies' - 'Me vs we' (page 16) in our [June 2022 report](#).



When employees' requests for a hybrid working arrangement cannot be fully met, managers will need to help employees to see their work from a broader perspective, such as how their work is linked to others' tasks within the workgroup or beyond, not only to understand the challenges but also opportunities for a different arrangement (individuals may not be able to work exactly as they like, but they may understand the constraints and come to terms with this). Employees do not always understand how their work is embedded in a broader context, which can be an important factor in affecting how hybrid working is arranged. So managers need to both listen to what employees want and guide (or even mentor) employees to see how hybrid working can be arranged alternatively to meet different demands.



Have people been trained for the new ways of working?

Our surveys show that there has been a huge shift towards hybrid and home working since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, organisations still do not seem to be training and equipping employees with the knowledge and skills to undertake new ways of working.



Only **8.5%** of our sample of UK office workers had received any training on how to conduct or be a part of a hybrid meeting.

Respondents who had experienced some form of training reported that it included using new software and its features, e.g.



“How to send invites so parties join the meeting room”

and meeting etiquette



“commanding attention, training others and ensuring proper effective use of systems and tools.”



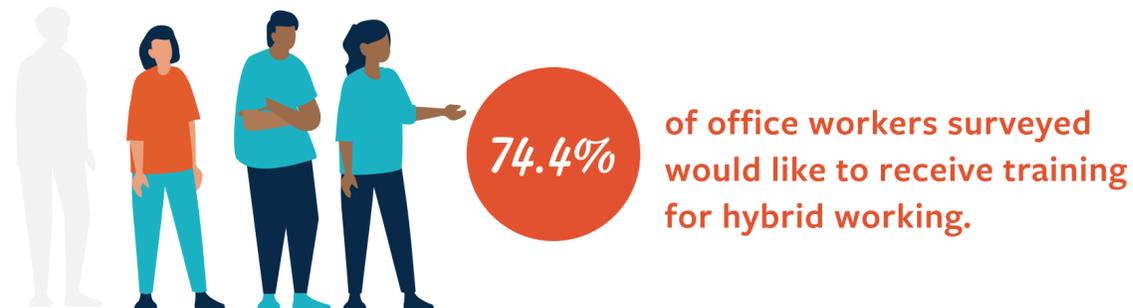
What does this mean?

This leaves a worrying training gap. Hybrid working requires employees to work effectively both remotely and with others in person. Hybrid workers must also engage in hybrid meetings, schedule and coordinate with others across different work patterns, manage uncertainties and work in less predictable ways.

This is a distinct way of working with additional challenges beyond full-time office or home working. Although people managed to navigate lockdown-driven home working and a phased return to the office, this does not guarantee **they are working as effectively as they could or getting the most from the new opportunities.**



What training do employees want?



They said it should cover topics including:

- 

Establishing social etiquette
“I sometimes struggle to find the right moment to share my opinion on hybrid meetings and end up losing the right moment to speak up and feeling a bit frustrated afterwards.”
- 

Being inclusive
“How to facilitate discussion and ensure everyone feels included.”
- 

Running effective meetings
“Best ways to host to ensure it’s effective for everyone.”
- 

Troubleshooting technical issues
“A guide on what to do if the volume in the meeting does not work rather than messaging others to find out how to resolve the issue whilst in the meeting.”
- 

How to set up in-room equipment
“How to use the technology in the dedicated meeting rooms.”

What else should the training cover?

In addition to the points above, it is clear that hybrid working also requires employees to be able to:

- Use technology and equipment to collaborate
- Plan time and tasks between locations
- Coordinate with others
- Manage time effectively
- Develop professional networks
- Seek and provide advice and feedback





UK Office worker snapshot

Have people been trained for the new ways of working?

Office working: is it beneficial?

Office spaces and tasks

Employee choice and control

Personality and hybrid working

Take action:

Invest in training! This is crucial to help provide the skills needed for employees to thrive and to make the most of hybrid working.

Do people only need training to make hybrid meetings more successful?

Employees consistently tell us that they want to be trained to run effective hybrid meetings. Creating a positive hybrid meeting experience is a classic socio-technical problem and training is only one part of this – the physical space, technologies and behaviours of participants all contribute to whether the meeting is a success. **See section 'A whole system approach to designing hybrid workplaces' (page 23) in our [June 2022 report](#).**

What does this mean?

Some organisations were already equipped with hybrid meeting facilities pre-pandemic, but many others created hybrid meeting spaces through ad-hoc repurposing of rooms with limited facilities and equipment. Organisations need to design fit-for-purpose hybrid meeting spaces, which means considering all meeting participants' experience and what technology will enable this. It's crucial to ensure participants will know how to make best use of these facilities.



Take action:

Invest in key hybrid meeting technologies and facilities:



- A **monitor** large enough for all in-office participants to view remote attendees and materials clearly.

- **Docking stations** to enable easy set-up and connection.



- **Video conferencing cameras and microphones** to optimise the experience for remote attendees. These may be fixed in place or portable to allow greater flexibility in terms of room configuration e.g. Meeting Owls and other 360-degree smart cameras. Cameras should also have voice detection, so the person speaking is in full view.



- **Whiteboard camera** so visual brainstorming and notes can be viewed by all attendees.

- **Speakers** to ensure everyone in the room can hear remote attendees.



- **Moveable furniture** to optimise the space depending on the purpose and size of the meeting. For example, a hybrid meeting with a few office attendees collaborating on a project will require a different layout than a team meeting with 10-15 attendees where the main purpose may be information sharing.



- **Integrated booking systems** which ensure the best room is selected for the purpose and size of the meeting.



Plan for success:

1

Provide access to training. Lack of training is still an issue for employees. Ensure all staff know how to set up technology for hybrid meetings and how to troubleshoot. This can be in the form of formal training and walkthroughs, by distributing short videos to watch, or providing information sheets within meeting rooms.

2

Ask what the purpose of the meeting is. While hybrid meetings can be convenient and more inclusive, some meetings may be better suited to face to face e.g. where problem solving or team building are the objective, or where new people are being introduced to the team or organisation. Others may be best as purely online, e.g. large company-wide meetings or where opinions need to be collected through the use of online chat functions.

3

Decide what level of participation is required. Depending on the purpose of the meeting there will be different expectations in terms of how many people need to actively participate. This will determine the type of room and facilities needed. Therefore consider whether all attendees are expected to participate (e.g. for collaboration or sharing ideas) or is only one person required to speak (e.g. daily briefing presentations for others to listen to)?

4

Check what facilities are available. It's important to have the right technology and space to ensure a more positive meeting experience for all attendees. Understanding what is available will ensure the meeting can achieve its objectives and all those required to participate can do so easily.

5

Consider the room layout and whether it can be adjusted. Where a monitor is wall-mounted, arranging furniture in a U-shape can provide everyone with a good view of the screen, and a 360-degree camera on a table in the middle will also enable all in the room to fully participate with those online.

6

Decide who is best placed to chair the meeting. An in-person meeting chair will also need to manage the online environment and vice versa. In some instances, it may be appropriate to have two meeting chairs, one to manage the online side, especially where the chat function or virtual whiteboards are utilised, and another to manage attendees in the room.





UK Office worker snapshot

Have people been trained for the new ways of working?

Office working: is it beneficial?

Office spaces and tasks

Employee choice and control

Personality and hybrid working

Office working: is it beneficial?

Are there benefits from working in an office or from home?

There are a wide range of preferences for home, office and hybrid working. Are employees' feelings about their jobs or organisations affected by the choice of where they work and how often they work from the home or the office?

What the snapshot tells us?

Our cross-sector UK office worker snapshot surveys show that where employees work does affect how they feel to some extent. People who report spending a greater proportion of their time working from the office were more likely to score their work-life balance and job satisfaction lower. However, hybrid working did not seem to have a markedly positive or negative effect compared with mainly home or office working.



What does this mean?

Our snapshot surveys only tell part of the story. The averages suggest that employees who work from home on a full-time basis typically experience greater work-life balance and job satisfaction than those who work in the office full-time, while those in a hybrid working pattern fell somewhere in the middle. However, do individual office workers think, feel and behave differently when they are working from the office or from home? Would people who choose to mainly work from home (and typically report high job satisfaction) be even more satisfied when working in an office?

What does the diary data tell us?

We have collected in-depth diary data to answer this question in the '[Methodology](#)' section. We asked groups of office workers from different organisations where they were working, what they were doing and how they felt, twice a day for two weeks. We did this once in autumn 2021 and again in spring 2022. We gathered over 10,000 individual diary reports from workers across a range of different offices, job roles and work patterns. We asked them questions while they were sat working at home, in the office or a third space, to tell us how they felt at that moment. This means that we capture more precise data about how different work locations effect people day-to-day. Because we asked the same people multiple times how they felt, we are able to use advanced statistics (Multi-Level Modelling) to test whether individual employees responded differently when they worked in the office than when they worked from home or a third space.

We found that when employees worked from an office they experienced:

- Higher job satisfaction.
- Higher self-rated performance.
- More helping behaviours towards colleagues.
- Higher engagement in their job tasks.
- Reduced work-family conflict (work demands conflicting with family commitments), than when they worked from home or third spaces.

What does this mean?

This provides strong evidence that there is a benefit for individual workers when they work from an office and that the effort of travelling into the office is worthwhile. This justifies organisations encouraging employees to spend a proportion of their time in the office: individuals respond positively and perform better.





UK Office worker snapshot

Have people been trained for the new ways of working?

Office working: is it beneficial?

Office spaces and tasks

Employee choice and control

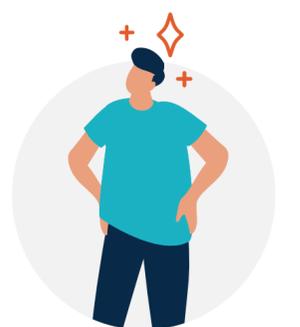
Personality and hybrid working

Are there differences between groups of workers?

Our diary data also shows that there are significant differences between groups of employees in how office working affects them:



Non-managers may gain more from office working. They report higher performance than managers when working in the office. This may be partly due to managers reporting that they spend more time helping colleagues when in the office (which may come at a cost to their individual performance).



Men reported higher levels of job satisfaction, performance, helping colleagues and engagement than **women** when working in the office.



Employees with a disability reported that they helped their colleagues more than employees without a disability when working in the office. However, they also reported lower job satisfaction and work engagement.



Workers identifying as from an ethnic minority reported being less engaged and having lower job satisfaction when they worked in the office compared with colleagues not from an ethnic minority.

What does this mean?

Organisations should carefully watch for differential outcomes. The observation that men score higher than female colleagues across so many areas when working in the office is particularly striking and requires further work to understand what may be influencing this difference (work-family conflict did not differ significantly between men and women, so it appears unlikely to be family demands).

Inclusivity and recognition of diversity is key as organisations formalise new working practices and build their culture. Since people disclosing a disability and those identifying as being part of an ethnic minority both have lower engagement and job satisfaction when working from the office, there is much more to be done to make the office a positive and beneficial place to be.

Take action:

Gather employee data and monitor changes to guard against differential outcomes as new ways of working are implemented. Recognise that men may benefit more from office working and invest time to understand how different groups' office experience may differ (e.g. are some employees interrupted more than others, does everyone have the opportunity to use the spaces most appropriate to their task?).

Question whether social activities or events planned to bring people together in the office are inclusive. Are minority groups or less connected workers being invited to activities? Are they being encouraged to make use of social and collaborative areas? Do they have a voice in decision making over the norms for hybrid working? Is the office culture welcoming and a positive experience for all –working to ensure it is will be positive for inclusion and retaining talent.





UK Office worker snapshot

Have people been trained for the new ways of working?

Office working: is it beneficial?

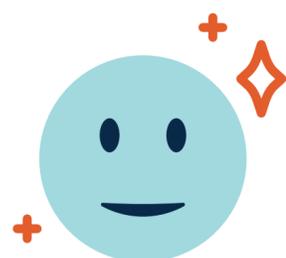
Office spaces and tasks

Employee choice and control

Personality and hybrid working

Are there generational differences?

A common assumption when discussing who stands to gain or lose most from office working is that it depends on how old you are. **We highlighted how important the office environment was in supporting early career or new starters' learning and induction in section 'Supporting early career or new starters' (page 51) in our [June 2022 report](#).** Our data provides evidence:



Winners:

- We found that the youngest workers, **Generation Z¹**, reported the highest performance out of all age groups when working in the office. This supports the view that the youngest workers stand to benefit the most in terms of learning how to perform their job from those around them.
- We also found that the next youngest group of workers, **Generation Y2²** who entered the workforce after the 2008 financial crisis, reported the **highest levels of job satisfaction** when office working.
- **Baby Boomers³** enjoyed the **greatest work engagement** of generations while office working.



Losers:

- **Generation Y1⁴** who entered the workforce pre-2008 (currently aged 32-41) reported **lower job satisfaction, lower performance and lower work engagement** than any other age group when working in the office.

¹ Gen Z born: 1996 - 2015

² Gen Y2 post financial crisis born: 1990 - 1995

³ Baby Boomers born: 1946 - 1964

⁴ Gen Y1 pre-financial crisis born: 1980 - 1990

What does this mean?

Our data shows that younger workers and those at the end of their careers seem to gain most from office working. The lower scores reported by the older Generation Y workers point to a squeezed middle – this could be related to this age group typically having childcare responsibilities or entering middle management. Alternatively, this generation may hold different expectations regarding the workplace and how they prefer to work.



Take action:

Engage with the Gen Y1 workers who seem to have the worst experience within the office. Are there steps you can take to improve their situation? Examples could be tailored career or skills development, or practical initiatives to reduce any friction when office working. Mid-career workers are key to providing feedback and guidance to younger workers, contributing to a positive experience for others and maintaining organisational culture. They are also the pipeline for future leaders. Engaging with them is beneficial to address current and future challenges.



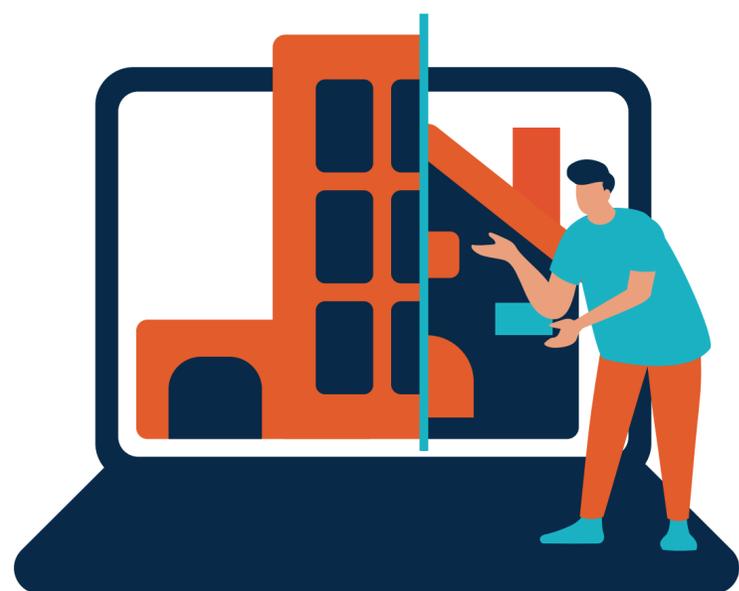
Is there a ‘sweet spot’ for how many days are worked from home or the office?

Unfortunately, from our diary data it is difficult to identify a clear ‘sweet spot’ for the most advantageous work pattern. Too many factors influence what works best. Our UK office worker snapshot survey does suggest that spending more time than you want in the office is detrimental, but the ideal number of days varies.

What does this mean?

We conclude that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach with this, and that a number of days in the office should instead be determined based on job role, business requirements and employee preferences, giving some of the choice and control (within reason!) to the individual. **See section ‘Tensions when implementing hybrid working policies’ (page 14) in our [June 2022 report](#).**

We offer advice as to how both employees and managers can balance some the demands of hybrid working - see how to [help employees to stay in control of hybrid working](#) and how to [engage staff](#).



Take action:

While there may not be a clear answer to ‘how many days should I come to the office?’, hybrid working does involve office working. Managers should be clear that this is both expected and beneficial.

Make a positive case about the value of time in the office. Clearly articulate the business purpose, but also state the positive experiences that workers typically have when in the office compared with at home: higher job satisfaction; higher self-rated performance; more helping behaviours towards colleagues; higher engagement; reduced work-family conflict.

Do not allow the discussion regarding office working to centre around the personal costs of time or travel, remind employees that spending time in the office does have personal as well as professional benefits.



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Office spaces and tasks

Do the spaces that you work from within the office matter?

As we highlighted in sections 'What does a hybrid workplace look like' (page 25) and 'Redesigning office workspaces' (page 39) in our [June 2022 report](#), many offices have been (re)designed to include a variety of different task spaces and areas to reflect the variety of tasks that workers undertake day-to-day. The assumption is that employees will choose the space most appropriate for the task that they are working on and that this will be better for both performance and the employee experience.

Using our diary study, we directly tested whether the specific task spaces employees worked from in the office made a difference. We identified five types of task spaces across the five organisations which took part in the diary study:



Open plan desks

In larger office spaces, low to no dividers between desks



Quiet desks

Individual desks with between-desk dividers, in dedicated quiet areas



Formal meeting rooms

Traditional meeting spaces with a large central table



Private offices

Individual or low occupancy office, closed walls / doors to separate from other office spaces



Social (non-traditional) spaces

Includes informal meeting spaces such as breakout zones, collaboration spaces and booths

Our statistical analysis showed that on average:

- Self-rated performance was lowest when employees worked from quiet desks.
- Self-rated performance was highest when employees worked in private offices.
- Employees reported more interruptions when they were working in private offices compared with other task spaces.
- Private offices were reported to be the most comfortable.
- Social (non-traditional) task spaces receiving the lowest comfort ratings.
- Social (non-traditional) task spaces provided the greatest access to feedback and task-related information from colleagues.

What does this mean?

Private offices are typically the preference/desire of most employees (see section 'What does hybrid working mean for employees?' (page 18) in our [June 2022 report](#)) and the diary study shows individuals find these spaces positive for performance. However, most workers undertake a variety of tasks and private offices or workspaces are unlikely to provide the optimum workspace for all activities (as underlined by the positive role of social and collaborative spaces for information sharing and feedback, key inputs to work outcomes).

The level of interruptions experienced (which can disrupt workflow, concentration and add to stress ⁵) was highest in private offices. This may seem counter-intuitive: it is likely that there are more interruptions when working at open-plan desks or in the social (non-traditional) task spaces, but these are expected, unlike those experienced when in a private office where employees expect a greater level of privacy. This may mean that interruptions are recognised much more when working in private offices.

⁵ Davis, M. C., Leach, D. J., & Clegg, C. W. (2011). The Physical Environment of the Office: Contemporary and Emerging Issues. In G. P. Hodgkinson & J. K. Ford (Eds.), *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (Vol. 26, pp. 193 - 235). Chichester, UK: Wiley; Wohlers, C., & Hertel, G. (2017). Choosing where to work at work—towards a theoretical model of benefits and risks of activity-based flexible offices. *Ergonomics*, 60(4), 467-486



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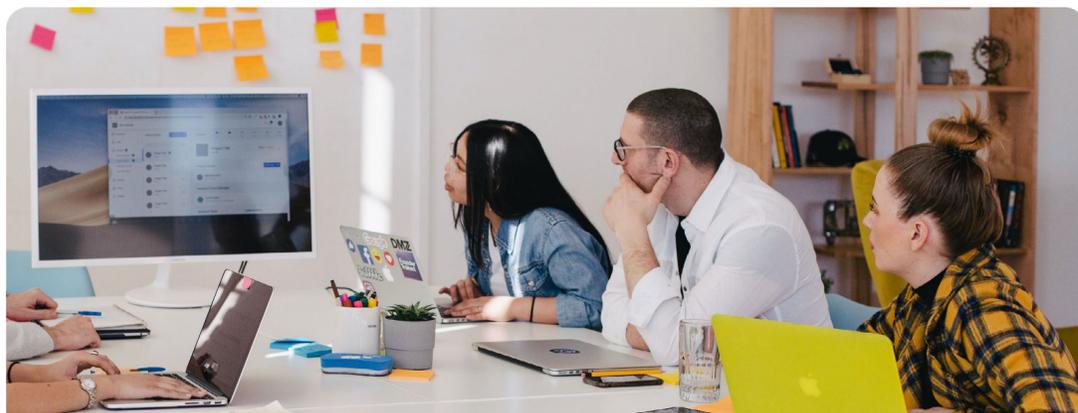
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It is concerning that **social spaces were lower-rated for comfort**. Since these spaces are designed for short-term working, when they are used for extended periods or for computer tasks they are not ergonomically suited to, they may be rated as less comfortable. This suggests a need to ensure:

- 1 Employees understand which tasks should/should not be undertaken in social/non-traditional task spaces.
- 2 There are sufficient adjustable workstations for traditional computer or paperwork.
- 3 Comfort is valued as strongly as aesthetic during design.



The positive role of social (non-traditional) task areas in supporting access to feedback and task-related information from colleagues justifies the investment in such spaces. Many of these spaces have been explicitly designed to facilitate communication and collaboration, and therefore this finding provides evidence that the spaces are being used effectively.

Has the office become mainly a place to meet and collaborate?

A popular assumption is that with the emergence of hybrid working, the office should become a hub for interpersonal tasks such as face-to-face meetings, collaboration and creative problem solving, with solo, administrative or virtual tasks to be completed at home. However, our diary data shows that:

JOB TASKS	PROPORTION OF ALL JOB TASKS REPORTED IN THE OFFICE	PROPORTION OF ALL JOB TASKS REPORTED AT HOME
INDIVIDUAL-FOCUSED TASKS	60% <small>ONE-THIRD WERE 'LOW CONCENTRATION TASKS' SUCH AS ADMIN</small>	61%
IN-PERSON INTERACTIONS	20%	UNDER 2%
VIDEO CALLS	11%	25%
HYBRID CALLS	2.5%	1.5%
WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS	5%	7%
TELEPHONE CALLS	1.6%	3%

What does this mean?

The results demonstrate that future workplaces still need to provide spaces and support for completing individual and low concentration tasks. The lack of real differences between where these tasks were completed (office or home) may suggest that:

- 1 Workers are unable to coordinate tasks or diaries to block individual tasks to home working days.
- 2 Many workers actively prefer to work on solo tasks within a traditional office environment.
- 3 Many workers are in roles which do not fit the popular stereotype of hybrid working (i.e., the majority of time is not spent in meetings and collaborative activities).



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The differences in the number of video calls and in-person meetings undertaken at home or the office support the idea that the office will remain the hub for in-person interaction and that the home provides the privacy to participate in video calls.

The very low proportion of reported tasks that involved a hybrid meeting (1.5% to 2.5% of all job tasks reported) signifies that despite much talk of hybrid meetings within the media, these types of meetings are actually not common for the vast majority of employees. This may change as supporting technologies are integrated within more offices to provide for hybrid meetings. When deciding on investment in hybrid meeting spaces, managers should question the likely desire for and uptake of these spaces and not base such decisions on their own meeting habits (which are likely to vary substantially from their employees!)

Take action:

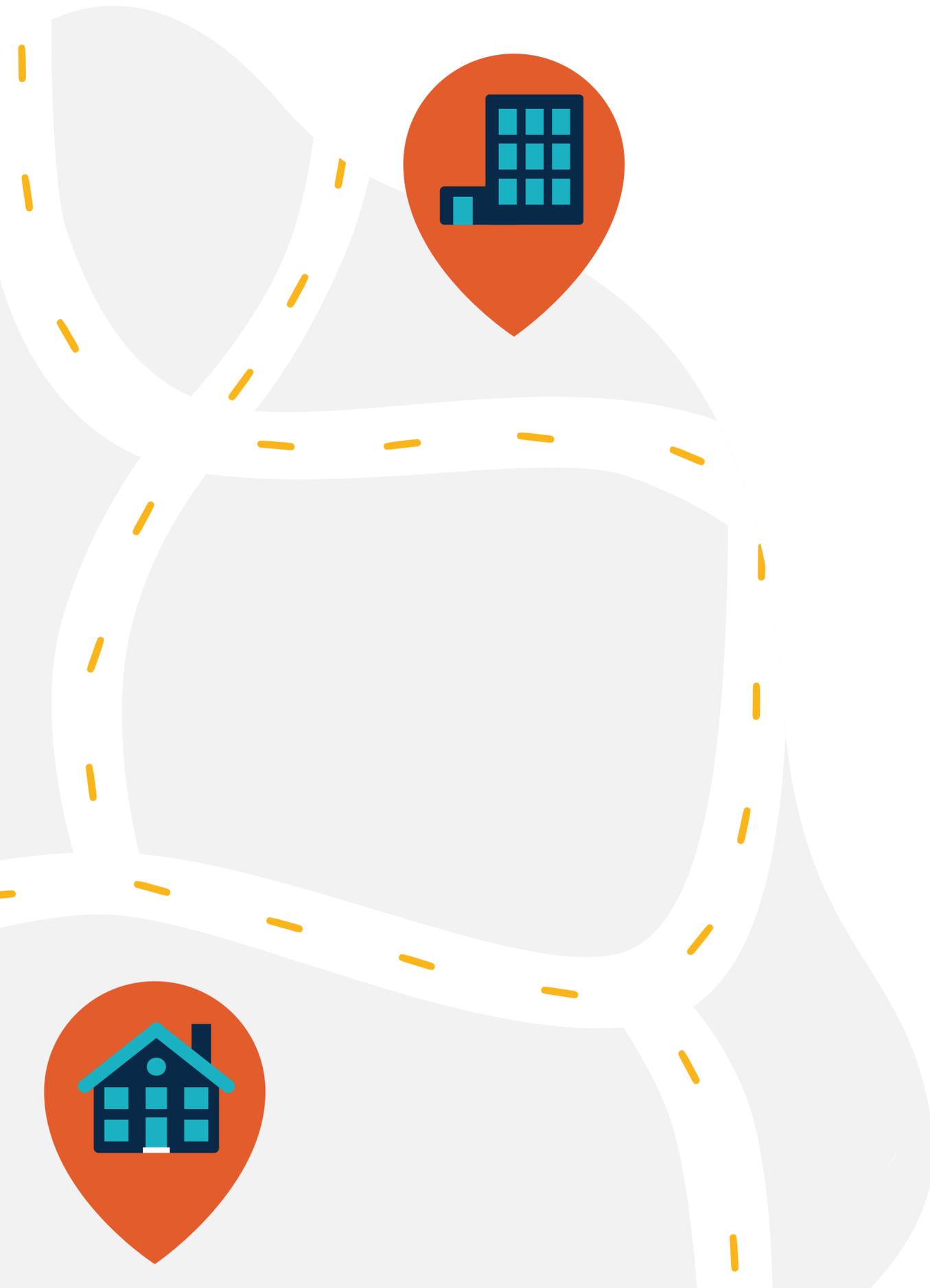
Minimise distractions, interruptions and privacy issues by ensuring that there are spaces appropriate for individual focused work, away from meeting or social areas, and provide separate video calling spaces. **See section 'Redesigning office workspaces' (page 39) in our [June 2022 report](#).**

There are quick win solutions. For example, **more furniture suppliers can provide acoustic 'pods' that screen off open-plan noise or reduce online meeting noise-leaks.** Similarly, private booths enclosed by sound absorbing material may provide both quietness and privacy. These small spaces are usually made available to individual workers for easy ad-hoc access.

Not all approaches to reducing noise and distraction require investment, for example some organisations have repurposed senior managers' private offices into flexible meeting rooms or quiet spaces. Others have used office zoning to move online meetings, telephone calls and informal in-person meetings away from open plan or individual task areas. Interaction zones can be screened off using furniture, planting or other barriers to reduce noise and visual distraction or physical distance used to reduce the effects.

Office norms can also help, for example expectations that people don't answer calls while working in a quiet zone or an open plan desk, or don't approach colleagues to ask questions when they're working in specific zones.





Employee choice and control

Does employee choice and control pay off?

Employees' choice and control over where, when and how they work varies across hybrid workers. This affects the experience of work. Providing employee choice and control may pay dividends for workers and organisations, according to our evidence.

Our snapshot survey of UK office workers shows:

- Workers who have more control over where (office, home or some other place) and when they work are more likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction and work-life balance.
- Workers who have less control over when they work are more likely to say that they want to leave their current job.

What does this mean?

This reinforces the idea that flexibility and control are at the heart of what workers really value about hybrid and home working. Flexibility may benefit the individual workers and be strategically important in retaining talent and reducing staff turnover.



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Take action:

Help employees to stay in control of hybrid working

With hybrid working the lines between work and home are increasingly blurred with 'work' now within touching distance within the home. This can make it difficult for employees to switch off and lead to overwork, burnout or feelings of conflict between work and home lives:

“Your computer is always there. It’s difficult to switch off. I’ll go in and check my emails periodically and see if there is anything I need to be aware of...”

“It’s very easy to keep going when you don’t have the driver of seeing everyone else in the office has gone home... whereas when you’re at home, it’s just easier to keep on going.”

Quotes from hybrid workers interviewed in August 2022

Practical ways to separate work and home

Encourage employees to create healthy work habits and establish distinct boundaries between their work and personal lives. Tried and tested techniques:

- Going for a walk in the morning before beginning the working day. This can help mimic the morning commute and changes the physical surroundings, making people’s brains think they are ‘going to work’.
- Take a walk outside at the end of the day – this helps people to decompress and feel as though they are ‘coming home from work’.
- Make a conscious effort to have regular breaks: give eyes a rest from the screen, stretch the legs, make an effort to eat a nutritious lunch, maybe even take a short walk at lunchtime.
- At the end of the day and over the weekend, close the door to the home office or tidy or hide away work things. If possible, do not enter the home office or workspace until the next working day. This mimics the routine of the office – out of sight, out of mind – to avoid a ‘spillover’ effect from work into the home and to help detach at the end of a working day/week.

Where employees cannot keep work contained in a home office:

- Shutdown the laptop and any other devices completely at the end of a working day, rather than leaving them on standby/locked screen, so no lights are flashing and to prevent the temptation to work longer than necessary. If possible, place the laptop in a drawer so it is out of sight.
- Switch work phones off completely or put them in airplane mode and in a drawer.
- Adjust smartphone settings so work apps are muted during non-work hours (e.g. no notifications from Teams/emails etc).
- Mute any group chats to detach from ‘work chatter’.





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Control over where to work

We analysed our diary data from office workers in a variety of organisations, roles and office types to measure the effect of different levels of control over where to work.

The data shows that employees who reported having greater control over where they worked from (for example the office, home or third spaces) also reported:

- Higher job satisfaction
- More positive wellbeing

Statistical analysis of our diary data shows that **when employees reported greater control over where they worked within the office or home, they had:**

- Higher job satisfaction and workspace satisfaction
- Higher self-rated job performance
- More helping behaviours and completed extra work tasks
- Fewer ‘counter-productive’ work behaviours (such as scrolling on a phone or distracting colleagues)
- More positive wellbeing, with lower levels of exhaustion
- Lower work-family conflict (where work spills over into family life) and lower family-work conflict (where family demands spill over into work)



What does this mean?

Providing employees with a meaningful choice between workplaces is beneficial for employees, but it is not as influential as choice within a workspace (e.g. where within the office, home or elsewhere to work). This underlines the need for a whole-system approach to the design of future workplaces so employees can exercise control over where they can work within the space, and can enjoy working effectively from it. This will be influenced by their role, mix of tasks, and the organisation’s management practices, technologies and culture – **see section ‘A whole system approach to designing hybrid workplaces’ (page 23) in our [June 2022 report](#).**

Control over how tasks are completed

Employees care about how they work as well as where and when they work. Analysis of the diary data shows that when employees reported that they had greater control over how job tasks are completed, they experienced:

- Higher job and workspace satisfaction
- Greater self-rated performance
- More helping behaviours
- Higher engagement
- More positive wellbeing, with lower levels of exhaustion
- Lower work-family conflict

What does this mean?

We have highlighted the potential for the level of choice and control to differ markedly between hybrid workers (e.g. fixed hybrid vs free hybrid). Many organisations and managers have struggled to provide equity within their hybrid working offerings, particularly when some job roles require the individual to be more office based than others. Our findings offer evidence as to the value of designing in more discretion for workers to decide how, when and where to get tasks done. Where it is harder to offer employees control or choice over their workspace or work pattern, giving employees greater freedoms over how tasks are completed may buffer negatives arising from feelings of inequity or ‘us and them’ between hybrid workers. **See section ‘Tensions when implementing hybrid working policies’ - ‘Us vs them’ (page 14) in our [June 2022 report](#).**

Take action:

We have known for many years that job autonomy is a key driver to boost employees’ job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and performance. Our findings suggest managers should be cautious of designing a hybrid working arrangement based on strict rules for employees to be in specific work locations or to use set spaces for each task.

Giving employees autonomy over the workspace engenders a sense of responsibility and ownership to do their job well. Invest time in deciding where the non-negotiables have to be (e.g. confidential tasks that must occur in particular workspaces, core hours that must be covered), then direct attention to defining where and how employees can exercise autonomy. Give them choice and clear boundaries. Set a review point to evaluate where this is causing operational difficulties or friction within teams and then revise the boundaries.



Personality and hybrid working

What is personality?

While many people refer to personality as a fixed and stable trait, personality can also be considered as a state which reflects the expression of personality in any moment in the form of behaviours, thoughts and attitudes. These states are thought to be shaped by the environment, the tasks or activity someone is undertaking, goals or feedback.

Therefore, traits reflect who someone typically is, while states refer to how someone acts and feels in the moment.

Within our diary study, we were able to capture both personality traits (at the start) and personality states (twice a day), to explore how personality shaped and was influenced by various workspaces, experiences and outcomes. We explored three key aspects of personality:



Conscientiousness

Consistently in the workplace, conscientiousness is positively linked to performance, motivation to complete tasks and greater work engagement. Many organisations aim to increase or promote conscientiousness where possible.



Agreeableness

Higher levels of agreeableness relate to getting along with others, reduced conflict and increased trust in others, with those higher in agreeableness also more likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction. Promoting or increasing agreeableness can facilitate a more harmonious workforce.



Extraversion

Relates to higher sociability, engagement with others and being outgoing. People lower on the extraversion scale are typically more reserved, quieter and show less interaction with others. Extraversion is closely related to wellbeing.

Does personality drive choices over where to work?

Do people with different personality traits make different choices over where they work? We tested this directly by analysing our diary data. When we controlled for personal characteristics (e.g. gender, age, tenure) we found that personality traits did affect behaviour:

Extraversion is key in predicting where people worked from

People who were higher in trait extraversion were more likely to:

- Use formal meeting rooms when in the office
- Sit in close proximity to their managers, but not colleagues
- Work from the office more than people who were more introverted

Conscientiousness is positive for employees and organisations

Conscientiousness was consistently related to work behaviours. Reporting higher trait conscientiousness was related to:

- Higher job satisfaction
- Higher self-rated performance scores
- More helping behaviours

Together conscientiousness and agreeableness may be protective

Higher levels of both trait conscientiousness and agreeableness were related to:

- Lower levels of daily exhaustion
- Lower levels of work-family conflict, the sense that work tasks are spilling over into home/family life





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What does this mean?

Our findings show that employees' personalities do influence the decisions they make over where to work – both within the office and when deciding between spending time at home or in the office. While many people have made assumptions about how personality may influence the uptake of hybrid working, until now there has been little data to inform decision making. These findings are something that managers and organisations need to pay particular attention to – personality traits are slow to develop and influence typical behaviour, they cannot just be changed to suit a new policy.

The tendency for more extraverted employees to choose to work from the office and to seek out their managers should be taken into account when considering performance and access to opportunities. It is likely that extraverted employees will be more visible and have higher physical presenteeism. Our findings also suggest that employees who are higher in trait conscientiousness and agreeableness may be more protected against exhaustion or work-family conflict than other people. The potential for employees to have differing abilities to cope with the challenges that new ways of working may pose should be considered by organisations – some employees may require more support, adaptations or training.

Take action:

Managers should guard against bias due to presenteeism and ensure that digital tools and active management techniques are used to ensure that all employees are included in activities and decision making, not just those who are most visible, e.g. extraverts. This reinforces the need to consider how the office environment and culture can be adapted to ensure a positive experience for employees higher in introversion – for example, investing in a range of task spaces that provide opportunities to retreat from colleagues when needed (e.g. private booths) or to manage social interaction (e.g. areas of quiet desks).

The key is to design environments that provide the social interaction and stimulation that all employees benefit from, but also provide opportunities to manage these interactions for those who prefer this.

Managers need to consider the personalities within teams and how this may shape preferences and the ability to cope with challenging situations or ways of working. A first step is to help employees develop self-awareness of their own personality traits and natural preferences (this is beneficial beyond improving hybrid working). One approach would be to encourage employees to take personality assessments on a regular basis (not just when they join the team) and access feedback and advice on what their profile may mean for how they work and interact with others. Personality traits are relatively fixed and therefore we have to help individuals to recognise their natural preferences, and where appropriate, find strategies to work around these when required so that they feel comfortable and can work effectively in a range of workplaces.





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Can where you work affect your day-to-day personality state?

We used our diary data to directly test whether the workplace itself, working near others and the level of control affect employees' day-to-day personality states. When we controlled for personal characteristics (e.g. gender, age, tenure) we found that personality states were affected by:

The physical workspace:

- Working from the office was related to significantly higher levels of the states of extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness, compared with working from home or third spaces.
- Having a greater sense of 'fit' between the workspace and job tasks being completed also boosted states of extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness, as did rating the workspace as comfortable.
- Experiencing more auditory distractions lowered state extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness.
- Experiencing more visual distractions reduced levels of state conscientiousness.

Working alongside others:

- Working in close physical proximity to colleagues boosted levels of state extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness, as did the experience of positive social interactions.
- Working in close proximity to their manager was related to higher levels of state extraversion.
- Experiencing interruptions had a significant, detrimental effect on levels of state conscientiousness and agreeableness.

Control over where and how to work:

- Having greater choice over workspace (for example, being able to choose where to sit) increased levels of state conscientiousness.
- A higher perception of control over how job tasks were completed was related to higher levels of state conscientiousness and agreeableness.
- Being able to choose where to work, between the office, home or a third space, saw decreases in state extraversion.

What does this mean?

Our findings provide evidence that working from an office and physically working alongside others can change employees' in-the-moment personality expression which can influence their work behaviours and attitudes during the day. When employees worked from the office they typically experienced higher levels of state extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness than when they worked from elsewhere. This lends support to the view that employees behave differently when in the office compared with working on their own from home and that bringing employees together in person has positive effects.

Our findings also reinforce the disruptive impact of distractions and interruptions. The findings suggest that distractions increase introverted behaviours, cause less engagement with and completion of job tasks, and are associated with increased conflict or frustration towards others.

We also see that employees with more choice over where to work (between the office, home or a third space) saw decreases in state extraversion. This is likely a result of those with increased choice preferring to work from home, where there are fewer opportunities to socialise and interact with others – i.e., choice allows individuals to seek out their preferred / most psychologically comfortable environment.





Social networks and hybrid working

Wherever they work from, employees rarely work in isolation. How frequently they meet or speak with their colleagues will likely vary, but even in the most independent of roles, most employees still need to work with colleagues, at least to some extent. How do hybrid and new ways of working impact these social interactions and the experience of work?

We have gathered data to map the patterns of social interaction that exist within teams or organisations. We have used this to explore whether and how social interactions are affected by working patterns and workplaces, how these social dynamics influence the experience of work and if there are differences between individuals and groups. This kind of network analysis is powerful because it enables us to look at the individual employee within the social fabric they are part of and to identify factors which shape the overall connectivity of the network.

Analysis of our data reveals two key findings:

1 Organisations can shape employee networks through their structure, policies and working practices.



2 Employees can shape their own networks, which are influenced by their personal characteristics and experiences.



Before we explain these findings in-depth, we share some context to help interpret them:

What is social network data?

Social network data provides a rich picture of the informal connections that exist within different parts of an organisation. Networks help us to understand who colleagues are connected with and why those connections exist. In the workplace people use their networks for different reasons, for example to access information, for authorisation and approval and for social support. We tend to return to people we find helpful or accessible, and we may avoid others, particularly if we believe the same advice can be sought more easily from someone else.

In some organisations informal networks map closely onto formalised structures, because processes or hierarchies guide behaviours. In other work settings, connections map less closely to established hierarchies. This is often found in environments where multiple people hold similar roles, where there are several options in the network to help get the advice that is needed, or where it is the job holder's role to choose people to work with (e.g. managers developing strategy, or project workers who are tasked with bringing others together). In most cases, advice networks represent a combination – people are generally expected to use formal structures for some types of advice (e.g. for work tasks), but can make choices about who they go to for other types of work information, support, or more general conversation.





What can network data be used for?

Understanding social networks can help organisations to:



Facilitate better team work



Help individuals self-manage their careers



Capture a current situation



Map and improve advice networks



Better understand their leaders



Use this benchmark to design interventions that are more likely to improve the connectivity of teams



Design more effective organisational structures that meet needs

Gathering information about social networks

Employees across a range of organisations and offices were invited to complete a network questionnaire in November/December 2021 and again in May/June 2022 (to allow us to take account of changes in office restrictions and occupancy). The questionnaire asked them to consider who they sought advice from in their workplace, how frequently and for what purpose. We examined 13 networks, from across seven organisations, ranging from smaller networks of fewer than 20 people, to larger networks of almost 200 employees. Over 70% of employees responded in each network. This approach resulted in rich, detailed, and multi-layered information about the advice networks across a range of organisations.

Important definitions

TERM	DEFINITION
Sociogram	A network diagram that illustrates the relationships between individuals within a group (e.g. figure 2)
Ties	The lines in a sociogram which indicate a connection or relationship to another node in a network. Arrowheads are used to indicate the direction of a connection, see figure 2.
Node	The dots/squares in a sociogram which represent individual employees within the network. For example, in figure 2 there are four nodes (labelled A, B, C, and D).
Outgoing ties	The relationships that are reported from an individual to others. These ties are represented by arrows away from a node; i.e., the number of people an individual reports going to for advice. Within figure 2, node A seeks advice from three people (nodes B, C, and D).
Incoming ties	Representing relationships towards an individual, as reported by others. These ties are represented by arrows which come towards a node, i.e. the number of people who reported seeking advice from that individual. Within figure 2, one person seeks advice from node A, while two people seek advice from node C.

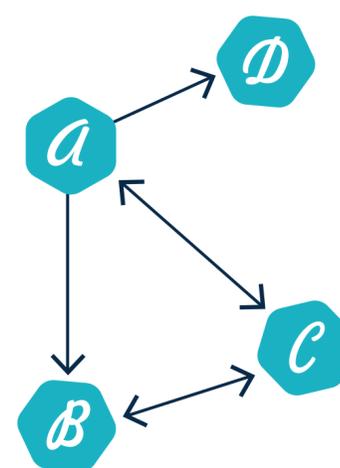


Figure 2: Example sociogram

There is no 'ideal' network and the situation is evolving

Social network data, whilst incredibly rich and insightful, are heavily nuanced and context-dependent: no two networks are identical and there is no universally 'perfect' network. For instance, it may be perfectly desirable that an individual seeks information from only two others in one organisational context, while being entirely undesirable in a different team or job role. The data is therefore complex and reflects the environment in which it was collected. Findings from our project suggest that the 'hybrid' work environment of June 2022 would likely be different again if we were to collect additional data in September 2022.



Organisations can shape employee networks

Does the team you belong to shape your network?

An employee's position in their network and their connectivity to others was heavily influenced by their team membership - i.e., which group, team or department they formally belonged to. The data showed strongly that team membership had a considerable influence on a typical employee's network within their organisation, shaping not only who they spoke to in order to complete their work tasks, but also shaping their personal and casual social connections.

Example

The sociogram in **figure 3** shows the power of team membership. The colour-coded nodes indicate the team that employees belong to. The sociogram illustrates that nodes of the same colour are mostly clustered together, showing how sub-teams in the network have greater levels of within-team communication, compared with between-team communication. Some nodes do span across team clusters, and this was often found to be a result of employees' job role. For instance, in this sociogram, the boundary-spanning nodes were generally part of the team who held responsibility for coordinating across teams - i.e., their job role gave them a need to interact more widely across the organisation.

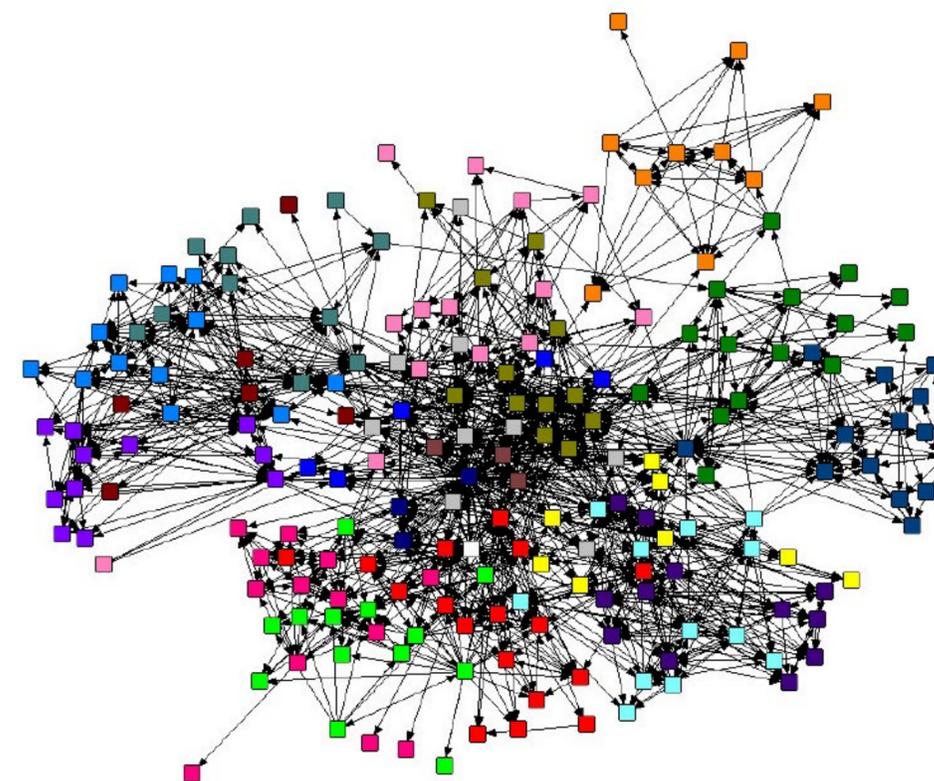


Figure 3: Sociogram of a large, public sector team demonstrating sub-groups within the network.

What does this mean?

This finding may not surprise those of us who have worked in teams, and indeed is likely to be desirable to those teams with high levels of interdependence. However, there are also instances where cross-team communication is desirable and where a lack of such behaviour represents a strategic risk. Certainly, this risk resonates with our qualitative findings elsewhere in the project. Several participating organisations have reported that during periods of enforced home-working, within-team communication has been maintained and even strengthened, but that there can be challenges in encouraging employees to broaden their networks in remote work environments, particularly if accessing others is perceived to be more difficult or time-consuming.



Does more time in the office shape your network?

In general, we found that employees who worked from the office more frequently were significantly better connected (they had higher ‘centrality’) within their networks. In other words, the more time that participants said they worked in the office, the more central they were within the organisation’s social network. We found this pattern in both December 2021 and June 2022. It was found even when we controlled for personal characteristics such as age, tenure and gender.

Example

The sociogram in **figure 4** captures a network from December 2021. We have re-sized the nodes to reflect the frequency of days in a week that employees reported working from the office. Larger nodes represent more days in the office, while the smallest nodes represent no days worked from the office. It is clear that there are a group of nodes who seek advice from each other frequently, while a number of nodes on the periphery of the network are much less connected. The key difference is that the nodes in the central group work from the office considerably more often than those who were disconnected. It is a stark demonstration of the impact of office-based working on network structure.

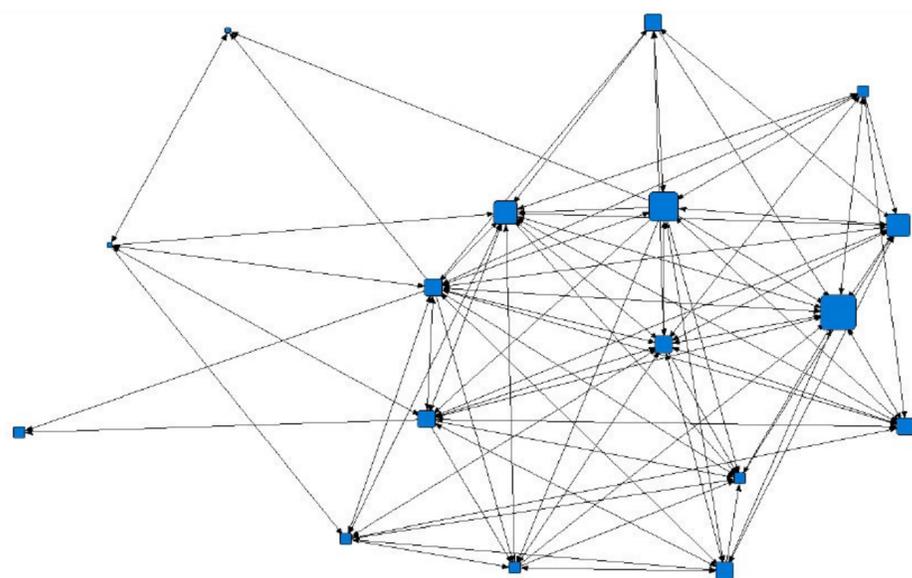


Figure 4: Sociogram of a smaller network from a private sector organisation, demonstrating the influence of days spent working from the office on network position.



What does this mean?

This pattern suggests that working from an office environment is advantageous to those who wish (or need) to be well connected in their networks, albeit with caveats and complications. The findings raise questions about the extent to which organisations should look to manage office attendance. They also raise important questions around inclusion and equality for those unable to attend the workplace for whatever reason. Managers should consider the potential for adverse impact when developing hybrid policy.



Does where you work in the office shape your network?

We found some evidence to suggest that where you sit when you work from the office can shape your social network. The way we examined this was by asking individuals to view a floorplan of their workspace and select the areas of the plan that they worked from. We then mapped these workspaces onto the network.

Example

In the sociogram in **figure 5** we have colour coded the nodes to show all those who worked in the largest open-plan workspace (nodes in yellow), with employees working in other areas of the office coded in black. Employees who worked together in the open plan workspace were all fairly closely connected:

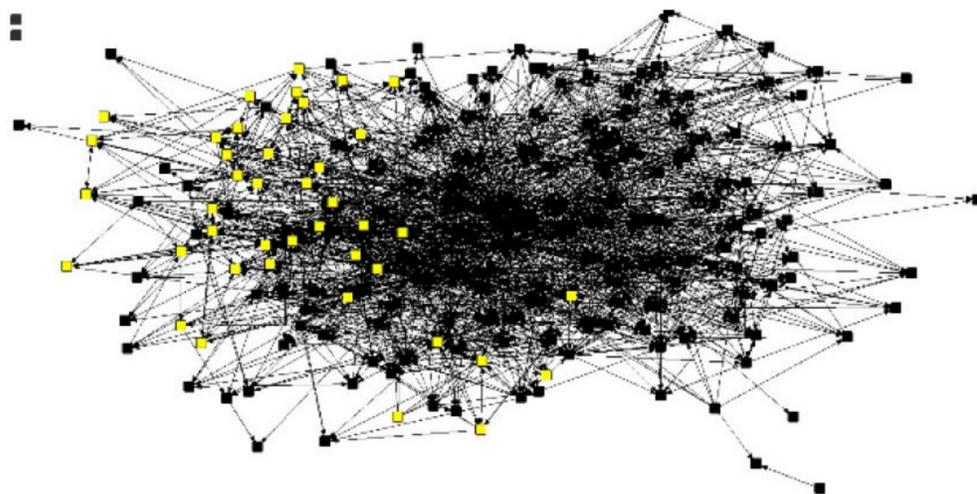


Figure 5: Sociogram of a large, private sector organisation, coded based on primary workspace when working from the office. Yellow nodes represent employees who reported working from a specific, open-plan workspace.

In comparison, the sociogram in **figure 6** is from the same organisation, but shows a different network of employees located on the other side of the office to the first. Workers in the largest area of open-plan desks are in yellow and are generally clustered together at the bottom of the sociogram, but there are also some more disconnected nodes (the yellow nodes closer to the top of the sociogram). When we collected this data, the employees were required to work from the office two days per week. It was entirely possible for people to occupy the same workspaces on different days, never meeting if they consistently work on different schedules, which is why we see these patterns. So it is important to consider not only where you work, but when you work.

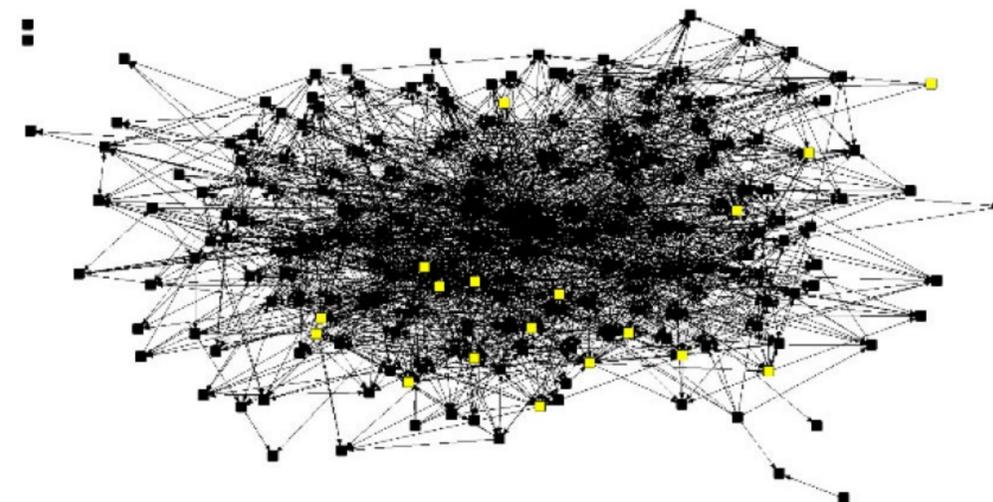


Figure 6: Sociogram of the same large, private sector organisation as above, with nodes now coded to reflect working from a different open plan workspace within the office.

What does this mean?

Collectively, these findings support the argument that where you sit in the office can shape your social network. Interestingly, teams often reported coordinating their ‘office’ days and desk bookings to ensure that they could sit together. While this may be desirable for organisations wishing to improve within-team communication, it may be less desirable for organisations needing to nurture collaboration across-teams. There is a tension here for managers to work through. Our previous findings showed teams’ membership drives much interaction, suggesting that teams will coordinate internally out of necessity/ organisational structure in any case. Co-locating individuals from different teams may be a simple strategy to encourage more interaction and knowledge sharing across the wider network.

The finding that workspace location can influence **advice behaviours** raises questions for organisations about the desirability of team ‘zones’ and booking systems. These strategies can have intended and perhaps unintended consequences. They are likely to nudge the advice behaviours of employees so managers should weigh the benefits of within vs cross team interaction.



These findings are strong evidence that employers can shape, nudge, facilitate or even restrict their employees’ social networks through the organisation of their work, workspace, processes and work practices.



Employees can shape their own networks

Does personality shape your network?

We consistently found that the number of outgoing ties an employee had was heavily influenced by their level of extraversion. People with higher levels of extraversion generally sought advice from a greater number of others. This was consistent at December 2021 and June 2022, showing that the association is independent of office restrictions and different working patterns.

People with higher levels of extraversion also generally had higher numbers of incoming ties (i.e. more people sought advice from them). However, this effect was only found in the June 2022 sample, suggesting that those who are more extraverted only receive more incoming ties when offices have higher occupancy levels.

In addition, for smaller networks (<100 nodes) we found that individuals who had higher numbers of connections also showed higher levels of ‘openness,’ a personality trait relating to a sense of exploration, creativity and general open-mindedness to new experiences.

What does this mean?

It shows that personality characteristics play an important role in determining an employee’s network. The consequences are unclear from this dataset, though it is known that managing a large personal network can be resource-intensive for individuals, so this might need to be considered by employers as they plan office arrangements and working patterns.

Do Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) factors shape networks?

We asked participants to provide demographic information (e.g. gender, caring responsibilities) so we could explore the impact of these characteristics on advice behaviours and look for any significant differences between the networks of different groups of people.



Ethnic minorities

Overall, individuals who reported that they belonged to an ethnic minority group reported considerably fewer outgoing connections (they sought advice from fewer colleagues) than those who did not report belonging to an ethnic minority group. We also found that they had significantly fewer incoming connections, meaning that colleagues did not seek advice from these employees as often as those who reported they did not belong to an ethnic minority group. This raises important questions about the inclusion of employees from ethnic minority groups. If such employees are less integrated within their wider organisational network, they risk being left out of organisational decision making, and feeling more isolated in work. Relatedly, within the June 2022 sample, we found that employees who reported belonging to an ethnic minority group reported lower levels of job satisfaction, and greater turnover intentions.



Gender

We found no gender differences. Males and females showed similar levels of incoming and outgoing ties, despite males reporting working from the office more than females.



Caring responsibilities

Individuals who reported having caring responsibilities also reported higher numbers of outgoing ties than those who did not, suggesting that this group is more connected within the network than those without caring responsibilities. This effect was found while controlling for other related factors, such as managerial status, highlighting that this group is not disadvantaged within organisational networks.



What does this mean?

These findings underline how some groups may be disadvantaged within the organisational networks we studied, both when working from home more and in current ways of hybrid working. Organisations should urgently seek to understand the reasons underpinning such advice behaviours, ensuring that all voices are heard and all employees included.



Do new starters have different networks?

A key finding across networks was that employees with longer tenure reported high numbers of outgoing ties. This underlines the finding that newcomers are typically less well connected, sitting on the outskirts of networks, and with fewer incoming and outgoing ties. This is perhaps to be expected, especially since most recent new starters joined teams and organisations during the pandemic, often working entirely remotely for the start of their new roles, or more recently being required to work from the office when others were not. It resonates with findings from other parts of this project - **see section 'Supporting early career or new starters' (page 51) in our [June 2022 report](#).**

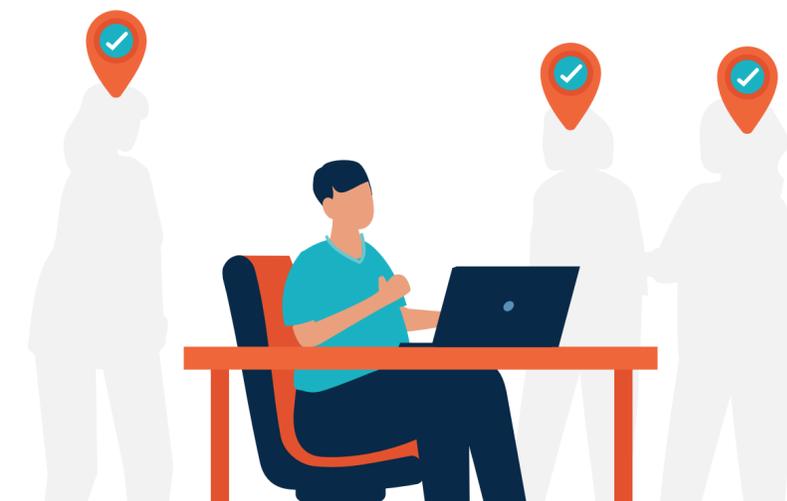
What helped new starters?

While new starters in most of the networks had fewer ties, this was not the case in three of the networks we studied. Why were these three networks different? We compared the job characteristics of new starters in these three unusual networks with the networks of the other new starters:

WORK CHARACTERISTICS IN NETWORKS WHERE NEW STARTERS REPORTED HIGHER NUMBERS OF INCOMING TIES	PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT BOOSTED THE NUMBER OF CONNECTIONS FOR NEW STARTERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIGHER JOB DEMANDS • HIGHER LEVELS OF JOB COMPLEXITY • GREATER CONTROL OVER THEIR JOBS • HIGHER LEVELS OF JOB INTERDEPENDENCE • WORKED FROM THE OFFICE MORE FREQUENTLY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEETING THEIR TEAMS IN PERSON MORE OFTEN • BEING A NEW STARTER WHO WAS TRANSITIONING FROM ELSEWHERE IN THE ORGANISATION • HAVING HIGHER LEVELS OF EXTRAVERSION • BEING MALE • HAVING CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

Did spending more time in the office help new starters?

The total number of days in the office was not a significant factor in influencing the connectedness of new starter; this was only the case for existing employees. While we found that new starters who had met their team in person were more connected than those who had not, overall, the data suggests that it is not overall presence in the office that increases connectivity but having **purposeful office attendance**: for new starters, this is working in the office when other key colleagues are.





Example

Within one of the larger networks we examined in June 2022, just under 40% of the network had joined in the last two years. The sociogram in **figure 7** is colour coded to reflect where newcomers sit. Within this network the red nodes (newest employees) can be seen sitting on the outskirts of the network, with the orange ones close by (6-12 months tenure). Green nodes (2 years tenure or more) on the other hand, are more dispersed throughout the network with some very central. The two most central green nodes are positioned because of their job roles: these individuals are responsible for business planning and information distribution to colleagues. This demonstrates that while newcomers often sit on the outskirts of the network, job role also influences centrality, and can heighten (or hinder) connectivity.

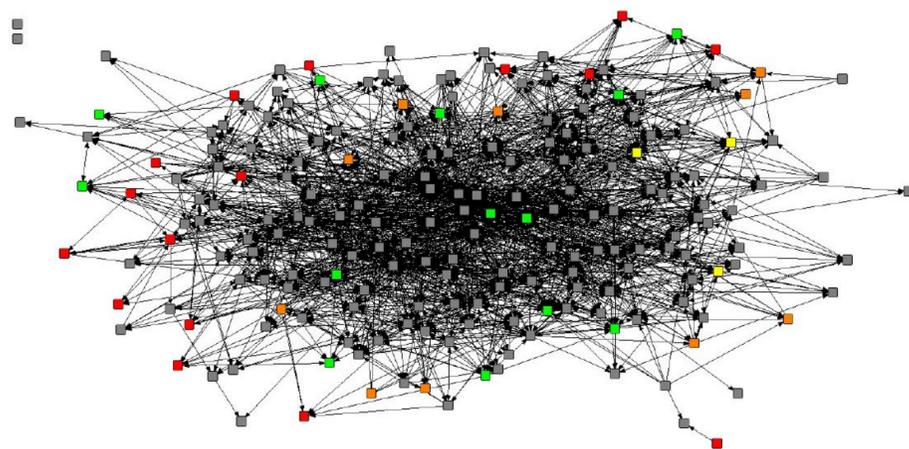


Figure 7: Sociogram of a large, private sector organisation, colour coded based on newcomer tenure. Red = < 6 months, orange = 6-12 months, yellow = 1 year, green = 2 years, grey = 3 years+.

Within one of the smaller teams we examined in June 2022, 50% of employees had joined within the last two years making them a relatively new network. This is also one of the teams in which newcomers saw a higher rate of incoming ties compared with those who had been in the organisation longer. The sociogram in **figure 8** is colour coded to reflect where newcomers sit. The newcomers in this network are spread throughout the structure, with several who had joined less than a year ago (orange nodes) already holding central positions with multiple incoming and outgoing ties. While this is likely to be influenced by job role, we often see within smaller teams and networks that newcomers can become quickly assimilated as there are fewer people to interact with and they can make a bigger impact, despite having a less central job role.

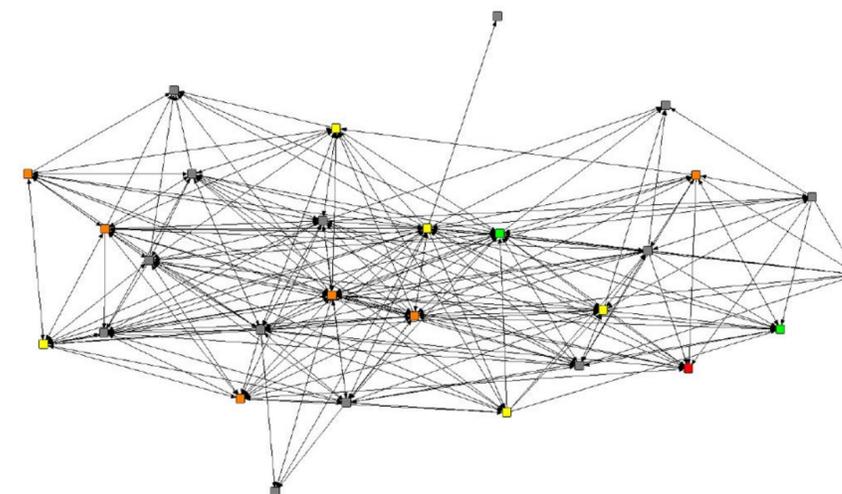


Figure 8: Sociogram of a smaller, private sector team, coded based on newcomer tenure (same coding as above).

What does this mean?

New starters are typically less well connected and located more on the periphery of networks than their longer-serving colleagues. This is not surprising and reflects the attention that many organisations already pay to try to reduce the isolation of new starters, e.g., through onboarding and helping new staff to meet colleagues and feel included within their team.

We identified differences that could advantage or disadvantage new starters. Organisations should pay close attention to these. In particular, employees in more complex or demanding roles, where they had more control or where the work requires more interaction with colleagues to get tasks done were more likely to be well connected. Managers can use this knowledge to identify those staff whose role means that they are less likely to be interacting more widely and to proactively help them to meet people across the organisation.

We also identified personal characteristics that may influence network position – this underscores the need to consider equality and inclusion. If male or extraverted employees build larger networks more quickly, then managers should engage with other groups of workers to understand what events or strategies would particularly aid their network building and integration as they settle into the organisation.

We showed that purposeful office attendance is important in helping new starters become established. That is, working from the office when other key colleagues are. This reinforces how the work experience is influenced by those around us and the need to encourage colleagues to consider the impact of their choices on others - **see section 'Tensions when implementing hybrid working policies' - 'Me vs we' (page 16) in our [June 2022 report](#).**



Is your network related to wanting to change jobs?

Network type and the level of connectivity within a network matters! We have highlighted why this may be the case for knowledge sharing, resilience and inclusion. However, we also found that the network helps to explain levels of organisational commitment and intention to leave the organisation (turnover intention).

Organisational commitment

Within the December 2021 networks we found that the number of outgoing connections a person reported predicted higher commitment to the organisation. In other words, those people who interacted with a greater number of colleagues typically felt more of a bond with their organisation. This is important as while organisational commitment is not consistently related to turnover intention, it does reflect how easy someone finds it to leave, meaning that if a new job came up without them looking for one, they may be more inclined to take it.



What does this mean?

These findings suggest that employees who interact with others less feel a lack of belonging to their organisation. This is worrying from an inclusion standpoint and justifies the attention that many organisations have paid to increasing socialisation, such as having regular check-ins with staff and dedicating time for teams or groups to interact virtually during the COVID-19 lockdowns. If managers wish to boost commitment and retain staff, then actively promoting interactions may be beneficial. This could be through broad-brush social activities within the office, structured team events or online events to help employees reach out across their immediate teams. Alternatively, encouraging job related or virtual interactions focused around job tasks to target the least connected will also be effective, e.g. regular project calls and check-ins with reportees.

We found evidence that those who have lots of people reporting into them are more likely to be thinking about quitting their job. This is a concern as these people are often key in relaying information or holding organisational knowledge: that is why so many people seek advice from them. However, if these key people are considering leaving the organisation, they may take a lot of the knowledge with them and may also share any discontent with their colleagues who come to them frequently, potentially resulting in an increase in turnover intentions with others. It is therefore important to ensure that no single person holds all the information or is relied upon by everyone else in the network: distribute tasks and responsibilities so less important decisions can be signed off by others, reducing the number of incoming ties and subsequently turnover intentions.

Viewing the organisation through the lens of its networks enables us to see bottlenecks, inefficiencies, and overloaded employees, as well as the intended and unintended consequences of policy and design decisions.



Turnover intention

Across the data as a whole, we found that when an individual had a greater percentage of the network reporting into them, they reported higher levels of turnover intention.





Using social network findings to improve business practice

Can organisations manage their informal networks?

Our findings indicate that for some types of advice seeking (e.g. authorisation) it is quite possible to design structures that facilitate and even generate networks. For instance, where an organisation wishes to more effectively manage transactional connections between employees or groups, they can do this to some extent through work design.



If, for example, an organisation wishes to establish a network, this could be achieved by creating interdependences between people through role design. Our participants reported overcoming physical boundaries and technological restrictions where a connection was essential to enable them to complete their work. Of course, such connections do not represent the **informal** networks within an organisation, but show how managers can, through role (re)design, encourage advice seeking and sharing behaviours for some types of advice.

However, there are limitations to taking this approach too literally, and it is recommended that such an approach is only implemented in accordance with the socio-technical change principles.⁶ This means involving employees themselves in the process to ensure it is **pulled** and owned by such users, and ensuring that the process is genuinely necessary, the risk being that where it is not, it will instead create bottlenecks, overload and inefficiency.

While some aspects of the network might be **managed** for certain types of advice behaviour, our findings suggest that this can also be achieved with a **lighter** approach. For instance, simply improving exposure to people can **nudge** individuals towards the building of relationships. In many cases of hybrid working, desk booking systems give choices to individuals. This can help them strengthen existing relationships within small teams but prevent them from considering people in wider teams, who may offer new perspectives or insights.

Our findings on the change of networks over time suggest it may be possible to encourage closer working relationships or consultation between individuals simply by creating opportunities for them to meet and get to know one another. This could be by assigning individuals to particular workspaces, teams, projects, locations; by altering seating arrangements or encouraging people to attend particular meetings. This is because our findings suggest that for certain types of advice, people choose to connect primarily to people they work alongside. Employees often reported that the origins of current, strong relationships were in the co-attendance of meetings, working together previously (even if their roles had never been interdependent), or because they simply sat close to one-another.

“There’s a special area for the centralised function, so that’s partly for us as a team to work together, but also for everybody else to know where we are [for their queries].”

⁶ Clegg, C. W. (2000) Sociotechnical principles for system design. *Applied ergonomics*, 31(5), 463-477); Davis, M. C., Challenger, R., Jayewardene, D. N., & Clegg, C. W. (2014). Advancing socio-technical systems thinking: A call for bravery. *Applied ergonomics*, 45(2), 171-180; Hughes, H. P., Clegg, C. W., Bolton, L. E., & Machon, L. C. (2017). Systems scenarios: a tool for facilitating the socio-technical design of work systems. *Ergonomics*, 60(10), 1319-1335.



“I sit next to the people I sat next to prior to the pandemic because we all quite like each other. And we’re at a similar level in our development in our careers because we all started at the same time. So it’s nice to be able to ask questions with people in person.”

However, personal characteristics were also key influencers when choosing an advisor, and **like-mindedness** as well as whether a person appeared knowledgeable or sufficiently **expert** were also key factors in choosing advisors. This suggests that people make personal and proactive choices about who they wish to seek advice from or share it with for some types of advice.

In these cases, they are unlikely to be **controlled** by the organisational design. However, the findings suggest such behaviours are **nudged** by work design choices such as where a person is located, or whether they are likely to be at the same meetings (be it virtual, or in-person).

An organisation might therefore encourage new advice behaviours by co-locating individuals who might be like-minded, or who would benefit from knowing more about each other’s work. Conversely, the organisation might decide that to deliver against a strategy (e.g. to improve knowledge management across a global group) it is beneficial to mix up groups.

This is likely to lead to immediate benefits (e.g. more efficient and effective working), and also longer-term benefits, as people broaden their organisational network and personal directory of contacts.

The findings also suggest that for some types of advice, such as gathering information or authorisation, individuals are willing to transcend physical barriers such as location, and will find ways to share and seek advice in order to complete their work tasks. In such cases knowing **who** they ought to seek advice from or share it with was a more influential factor in whether they sought/ shared advice appropriately.

While it is possible, nudging through organisational design appears to be less straightforward for connections that provide friendship, emotional support, or motivation, because people have clear preferences about who they wish to connect with and why. These choices can be quite personal, and we suggest that it is not desirable for an organisation to manage these choices entirely. Instead, organisations should take an individualised approach to networks, which enables people to monitor and understand their network and use this for self-development purposes.

This builds on the view that our social networks are an asset that each of us can use to help get the job done more effectively, and that individuals can and should be trusted to monitor, interpret and manage their own networks to make themselves more effective. It requires individuals to be given the tools and opportunity to monitor their own networks. This strategy might also enable participants who report network **‘overload’** to manage it more effectively. For instance, if a manager wishes to delegate relationships and finds that they are unintendedly a broker of a relationship, two managers with a mutual connection might wish to bring additional delegates with them, providing an introduction and network foundation, and then opting out of future conversations. In this way, an organisation can encourage the development of networks that reduce overload amongst senior employees, and ensure there is contingency, resilience and less vulnerability in cases where an individual leaves.





What does a 'good' network look like?

There is no single version of 'good'. The desirability of the network depends in part on the business strategy and the organisational culture. Figure 9 gives examples of how an overall organisation can be made up of different types of network. The circles represent each of the people in the network, and the lines represent where there is a connection between them.

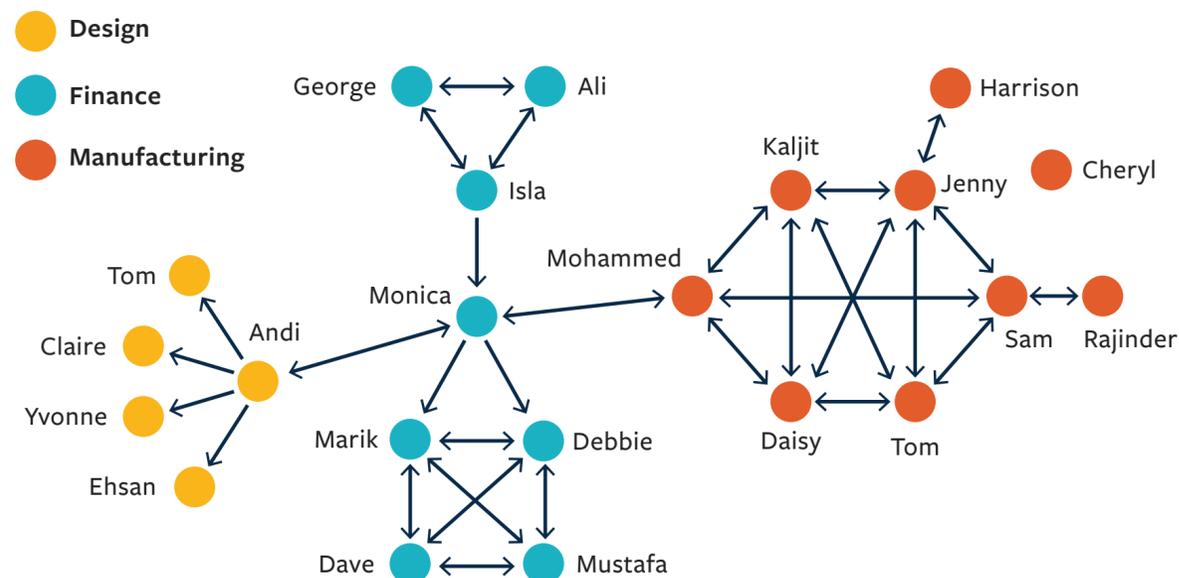


Figure 9: Example organisational social network

Interaction in the design team is centralised, as the team is dependent on a key 'broker', Andi. Andi is powerful because others are reliant on them to relay and retrieve messages from others. They can make introductions between people, but since the others do not know each other, except via Andi, they can also control the flow of information in the network. This is advantageous if a 'command and control' leadership style is desirable.



However, this **over-dependence** on Andi as a broker could also be a strategic risk. Without Andi, there are no communication channels to other team members nor other teams, so communication will be slower, if it occurs at all. Andi leaving the business or going on leave could render the network vulnerable. Andi is at risk of becoming a **'bottleneck'** and as such may also be vulnerable to overload and stress. This could be exacerbated by certain management choices, for instance, where Andi can appear even more accessible (e.g. if they are asked to sit in the middle of an open plan office).



The finance team connects the other teams. Without finance there are no connections between design and manufacturing. The finance team itself is characterised by **'cliques'** – that is, there are two clear (and separate) groups in the team who only interact within their respective in-group. The context is important, as a clique might represent two, naturally separate sub-teams working on separate projects. Sometimes cliques are found in exclusive friendship groups, because people naturally gravitate to people they like. In work, this often means gravitating to people we believe will favour us, or our ideas. In managerial or decision making networks, cliques can be problematic. If they do not represent diversity of opinions, characteristics, or expertise, this can lead to flawed decisions.

In the manufacturing team nearly everyone is equally well connected, so we can say the network is **'dense'**. This can reflect a democratic setting as power is evenly distributed amongst team members. In some contexts it may also mean that communication is less efficient, that people in authority are vulnerable to being undermined (because people can go around them), or that the network is vulnerable to cliques developing because people can make choices about who they interact with. Even though the manufacturing network is dense overall, three colleagues (Cheryl, Harrison and Rajinder) are not well connected. It might be worth trying to understanding more about these 'isolates' – does their role connect them to people outside the network, or are they being excluded for some reason (e.g. because they are the only colleague working from home)? The network position suggests they may be at a career or performance disadvantage.



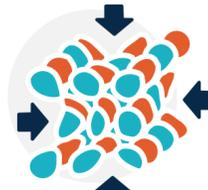
Guidance for employers

Interpreting the overall network

The desirability of network characteristics depends on what your organisation is looking to achieve. As you interpret network findings it can be useful to consider:



How dense is the network? Does this reflect your organisation's strategic needs?



How resilient is your network? Will the networks fall apart if key brokers leave or are absent? Are there cliques or isolated individuals? Are there things you can do to connect these individuals or teams?



Are your teams overly dependent on key brokers? Do you need to think about new processes or plans to protect the groups if these brokers leave the organisation or are absent?



Are your brokers overloaded? It can be useful to think about ways to protect key brokers (e.g. where they might sit when in the office, how accessible they are during the working day). Knowing why they are central in the network is important.



Can you capitalise on your brokers' networks to help get across key messages or help with culture change? Brokers can help share messages or attitudes more rapidly than others because of their reach and influence. Can you use the design of the workspace to connect peripheral individuals or teams to those in the centre of the network?



Consider why your brokers are central in the network. Are they brokers because of their role (e.g. because they are a manager or a secretary). Or are they brokers because they are particularly approachable or easily accessible (e.g. sat in the middle of an open plan office, or a 'good citizen' who always appears available to others)?



Are any sub-teams connected in the ways you would expect or like?



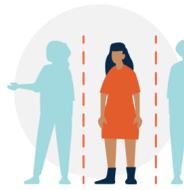
Are there cliques in the network? If so, are these cliques in the places you expect? Are management teams experiencing cliques? Are some teams connected to each other more than you would expect them to? For instance, if they are overly connected to management, this might give a team undue influence on strategic decisions.



Do working patterns or work spaces connect people? Are people sitting in the same spaces speaking to each other?



How integrated is the diversity in the network? Are people working part-time or with protected characteristics disadvantaged in the network (e.g. are they more peripheral or less well connected to influential others)?



Are some people isolated in the network (either overall, or for particular types of advice)?



Do the networks look the same for all types of advice? It can be useful to understand whether the key brokers change depending on the type of advice that is required. If people go to different people for social support and/or conversation than they do for getting their work done, this may represent a healthy culture that is less at risk should a key broker leave.



Do key brokers share the values and goals for the organisation? The attitudes and feelings of brokers can be contagious. This is great news if they share the vision for the future, but less good if they are keen to leave or are lobbying for a counter perspective to that desired by the organisation.



Tips for employers



1.

Measure your organisation's networks. This requires tools; free and low-cost tools are available which can be useful in helping you understand inefficiencies, bottlenecks and cliques.



6.

Look out for 'group-think'. Colleagues who communicate with each other frequently are likely to share or develop similar mindsets and world-views. We tend to return to people who we feel are likeminded to us, and who we 'prefer' over others. Ensure there are mechanisms for creating outside influence, and critical minds.



2.

Consider what 'good' means in your organisation.

The desirability of your network depends on what you are looking to achieve. Understand the context of your networks – does everyone really need to be connected? What is the best network formation for achieving your organisation's strategic goals?



7.

Pay attention to leadership networks. Leaders play a crucial role in the development of organisational networks, and have the ability to shape the networks of others, through their role in organisational design. Leaders therefore need to have diverse personal networks that include 'critical friends' with differing worldviews.



3.

Nudge or manage? Think carefully about whether you wish to manage or just nudge your organisation's networks. It is likely that there are many strengths in your existing networks, embrace them before you look to create change.



8.

Consider the resilience of your networks.

Your organisation's networks affect how work gets done in your business. Pay attention to how dependent you are on key individuals and consider ways to spread the load more evenly.



4.

Facilitate network reflection in your employees.

Consider incorporating network reflection in appraisal and personal development systems. You can do this by educating employees about the value of their networks (rather than managing their choice of advisor). In doing so, you can empower employees so they can take personal ownership of their network, and reduce managerial workload.



5.

Involve your key brokers.

Brokers can be valuable assets and present a strategic risk if they decide to leave or promote views out of sync with your mission. Identify your brokers and look for ways to use their value.



Guidance for employees

Thinking about your network

Network diagrams can be a useful tool for individual employees who wish to improve capacity, build their social capital and widen the reach of their work. The desirability of your personal network again depends on what you are looking to achieve within the context of your job role, and also your wider career plan. As you interpret your personal network data, consider:



How many connections do you have, and who are they to? You might have lots of individual connections, but few of those connections know each other. Or perhaps you have a densely connected personal network where your core contacts are well connected themselves. Think about how this affects your workload and whether there are ways to manage this more efficiently.



Are you a broker who is overloaded? It can be useful to think about ways to protect yourself if you are a key broker. For instance, think about where you sit when in the office, how accessible you are during the working day, and why you are so central in the network.



How resilient is your personal network? Will your personal network fall apart if key people leave or are absent from work? Do you need to think about new processes or contingencies to protect the groups if these brokers leave the organisation or are absent?



Can you capitalise on the networks of people you are connected to, to help you build social capital or share key messages? People with social capital can be champions of your work, and can help you to share messages or change attitudes more rapidly than others because of their reach and influence.



Do the networks look the same for all types of advice? Do you over-rely on particular people for multiple types of advice (e.g. as your 'go to' advisor) or do you approach different people for different types of problem? What does this mean for your work quality or perspective?



Is your working pattern or work location affecting your network? Think about whether your network would look this way if you were sitting in a different space or coming into the office on different days. If it would, then think about whether your current network would benefit from more active management.



Are you part of a clique or particularly isolated? There may be things you can do to better connect with other individuals or teams – e.g. working in different spaces, volunteering for different projects, attending different meetings.



Are your personal characteristics affecting your network? Are you on the outskirts of the network because you tend to work from home more, or because you cannot attend social events after work? Think about how your network is affected by your personal characteristics, and consider whether it is helpful to have a conversation about this with your employer.



Tips for employees



1. Use free tools to map your network. You can do this even if network mapping software is not available in your organisation.



2. Use your network as a reflective opportunity and exercise. Every six months or so it can be useful to map your network. Who are you connected to? Is your network evolving? Are you influenced by a small number of people? Are there people you should know who you don't?



3. Consider whether your work-pattern is affecting your network. Think about whether working from home or a particular work-home pattern is affecting your ability to meet and work alongside people from the wider organisation. Are you speaking constantly to the same people? Is this desirable for your work and/or career development?



4. Speak with your employer/manager if you are isolated or overwhelmed. Show your network diagrams and ask for support/introductions, so that you can actively manage your own network and improve your personal effectiveness.



5. Consider whether you are connected to the right people? If your network is too small and tight, you might be vulnerable to group-think. Challenge yourself to look for outside opinions. You might like your colleagues, but that might be because they share a similar worldview. This is particularly important if your work involves innovating.



6. Consider the resilience of your network. If key people leave, does that leave you or your work vulnerable? There may be ways that you can mitigate this, for instance by asking to attend different meetings, sitting at a different desk or location, or heading to the office on new days.



7. Think about whether you can reduce your network demands. If you are individually connected to lots of different people who themselves have small networks or do not know each other, you might find that managing your network is a resource intense operation. Can you connect to key brokers in order to increase the reach of your work, but reduce the number of individual connections that you personally have to manage?



8. Are your personal characteristics affecting your network? If you can see that your personal characteristics are disadvantaging you in the network, then speak to your manager about this. They may not have realised, but showing them your profile can help. You might be more peripheral because you are new to the workforce, because you are working from home more often, or because you cannot attend social events that others can attend. Equally, if you are benefitting from your personal characteristics in the network, think about how you can use this social power to connect and bring in those on the outside.



Conclusion

COVID-19 and enforced homeworking rapidly changed what it meant to “go to work” for many people. Our research has examined how work and workplaces have changed in response. We have shown that hybrid working is now firmly entrenched and is the preferred way to work for office workers - it is unlikely that this will now change. Nonetheless, there remain significant minorities who desire pure home working and fully office based working. As a result, work patterns are much more diverse within and between organisations. Currently, there are large numbers of workers who have preferences which misfit their current jobs, with negative implications for the workers and their employers.

Our research has shown that hybrid working can mean widely different things in practice. We identified five types of hybrid working: free hybrids, timeless hybrids, nomadic hybrids, fixed hybrids and balanced hybrids. Each form of hybrid working has implications for the type and amount of office space required.

Hybrid working presents challenges. We identified the risk that: employees feel there is an “us and them” – those able to work flexibly or more flexibly and those whose roles or managers prevent this, and; a tension between “me and we” – employees feel difficulty balancing personal preferences and needs against the needs of colleagues and the organisation.

Our research demonstrates the office remains a key influence over how employees think, feel and interact at work, and spending time with colleagues in the office has positive effects for both employees and their organisations. This confirms that the office remains central to the idea of work and that it is an anchor point for the future workplace. While office working is beneficial to employees and organisations, employees who work more than they would ideally like from the office are more likely to want to change jobs and are less satisfied with their job. Mandating high-levels of office working is unlikely to be a successful strategy – the purpose and business need should be clear. Employees desire and benefit from choice over where, when and how they work, so building in flexibility in hybrid working and the use of office spaces is time well spent.

Our research shows that an effective hybrid workplace is more than an HR policy or office design issue - it is a socio-technical problem - essentially affecting all aspects of “work”. Every decision over hybrid policy, technologies, workplace and work practices present trade-offs and the potential for unintended consequences. There is no “one-size fits all” that will suit all organisations or individual needs. While agile or activity-based workspaces are increasingly popular ways of supporting hybrid working, the success of such designs relies on supporting technologies and systems such as booking systems, hot-desking etc. Socio-technical systems tools, staff engagement and multi-disciplinary design teams are key ways to work through these decisions methodically and bring people along on the change journey. This is a whole system design challenge: an opportunity to step back and question why things have been done the way they have and to fundamentally rethink and improve what it means to ‘go to work’ – this is challenging, daunting and risky, but ultimately exciting and potentially transformative!





Recommendations:



Invest in training for managers and employees for effective hybrid working.



Support employees who feel a misfit between their ideal work patterns and the way they need to work – can you redesign tasks, roles or support a change in job to help improve fit?



Involve workers in the design of hybrid policies. This can help resolve tensions between groups, spot problems and make employees part of solutions to the challenges that hybrid working presents.



Encourage choice and enable control over where employees work – in the office and between home and office. Offering individual choice and allowing a better fit of space to task pays off in terms of employee outcomes.



Assert the positive impacts of spending time working from the office (build a positive story), while being conscious there are trade-offs for individuals, groups and organisations.



Guard against potential adverse impact. People may have differing experiences in the office depending on gender, ethnicity, disability and generation/career stage.



Utilise workplaces to shape social networks and interactions – consider how where you seat individuals and teams and hybrid policies (e.g., rotas) can be used to broaden networks and knowledge flow.



Promote ‘purposeful presence’ and positive social experiences – e.g., for new starters it matters who else is in the office, not just how often they are in the office.



Avoid making long-term assumptions about work patterns or how much future office space will be required. Hybrid working policies will evolve as they meet the reality of changing routines.



Take a whole system approach – designing the future workplace is a shared problem that needs expertise across the organisation to be tackled successfully.



Get in touch with Dr Matthew Davis m.davis@leeds.ac.uk to:

- Talk about ways that we could work with your business
- Learn more about our existing and upcoming research
- Get involved with our work

futureworkplace.leeds.ac.uk