

# 4 Ways the Office Will Likely Evolve Post-Pandemic

Proprietary Survey Findings Confirm Key Perceptions Regarding the Future of the Office



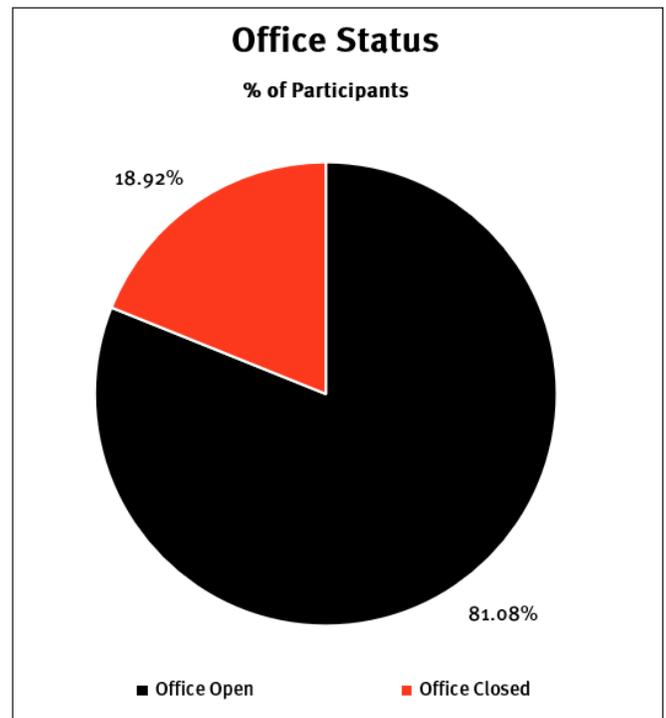
There have been many hypotheses about what the future of work, particularly the office itself, will look like post-pandemic. After numerous reports and recommendations from national publications and industry organizations, we set out to discover what our own customers and A+D partners were experiencing within our region (Kansas City, Wichita, Oklahoma City, and Tulsa metropolitan areas).

In April 2021, we developed and launched an online survey to help define current work situations, the pros and cons of those arrangements, employee wants and needs, key motivators, specific concerns regarding safety, future work arrangements, and more.

## Our Participants:

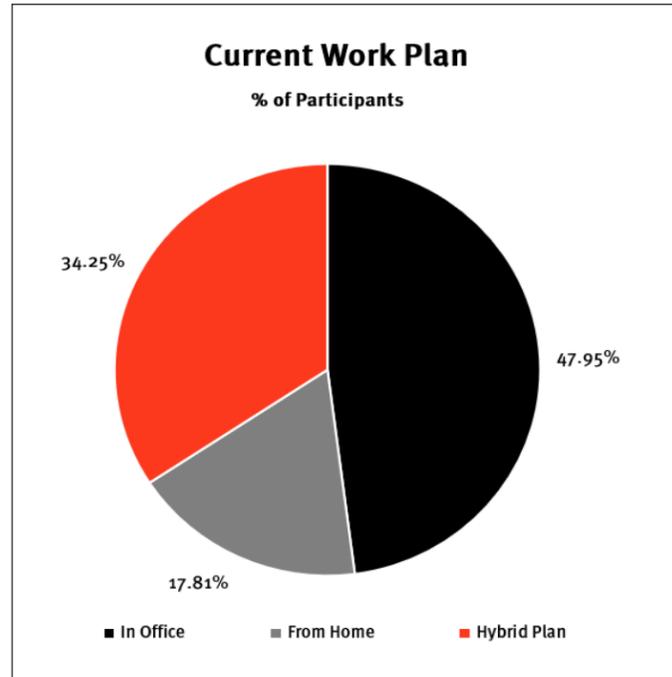
Overall, we had a good mix of survey participants representing various affiliations, locations, work tenure, and generational classifications (see charts on page 5). We also had a fairly even breakdown of responses from those in management (47%) and non-executive (53%) positions, which gave us a good variety of perspectives.

81% of all survey respondents indicated that their offices were currently open, with almost 48% of respondents working from said office and 34% following a hybrid plan. Almost 19% of respondents were working exclusively from home.



For those whose offices were not currently open, only 64% could verify when their offices would be reopening.

- 50% - Summer 2021
- 14% - Fall 2021
- 35% - No Date Determined



**Key Findings:**

**1. A more distributed workforce may be more likely in the future.**

The lockdown of 2020 forced people around the world to adapt quickly to maintain business operations, including finding new ways to connect with co-workers and adopting new technology. Some embraced the change and thrived, while others were not quite as successful due to personal constraints (lack of childcare, homeschooling, caring for elderly parents, etc.). Many of them longed to get back into the office. Others took advantage of the flexibility that hybrid work allowed them. Some were not affected, having already been in a remote position with their employer before COVID-19. In summary, the lockdown allowed many workers to figure out what style worked best—or not at all—for them.

It is not surprising, then, that half (50%) of our survey respondents would prefer the option of a hybrid plan (working 1-2 days from home) in the future.

This is followed by:

- 26% - Office Full-Time
- 21% - Hybrid (>2 Days from Home)
- 3% - Home Full-Time

Recently, many companies have begun to explore their options around offering the opportunity for a more distributed workplan. In our survey, when asked if their employer had mentioned whether flexible arrangements would be an option moving forward, 44% of all respondents confirmed that a hybrid plan had been communicated.

- 36% - No
- 20% - Not Sure

41% of those respondents stated that management would determine the plan regarding who would work where.

One thing is clear from these responses: that businesses should be making these decisions sooner, rather than later.

**2. Connecting with others, in person, is the key driver for returning to the office.**

When asked to rank the top reasons for returning to the office, regardless of their current work location, the ability to connect and collaborate with teammates was the overwhelming top response (86% for hybrid workers and 84% for remote workers). Other top-scoring factors included the need for a sense of belonging and purpose, relationship-building with peers, and the desire for face-to-face communications. CONNECTING WITH OTHERS is an innate, social requirement that the office helps fulfill. Therefore, employees must have access to it.

**3. We're working our way out of the pandemic, but safety isn't as big of a concern to employees as we thought.**

The majority of survey respondents (whose offices were open) indicated that their employers were following safety protocols, such as providing sanitizing stations, requiring masks, utilizing protective screens, physically distancing furnishings, adjusting visitor requirements, and more.

While safety is being taken seriously in the office, when we asked respondents to rank what conditions made them

most hesitant about returning to the office, employee safety ranked fifth out of the six options presented. This is likely because they already know that their employer is facilitating safety precautions.

On a scale of 1-5, please rank which conditions make you the most hesitant to return to the office? (Weighted score based on overall rank shown.)	
Remote Workers	Hybrid Workers
4.69 - Lack of freedom to manage own schedule/time	4.27 - Lack of freedom to manage own schedule/time
4.46 - More productive at home	4.09 - More productive at home
3.69 - Lack of private areas	3.77 - Lack of private areas
3.69 - Personal obligations (home-schooling, no childcare, caring for older parents, etc.)	3.41 - Personal obligations (home-schooling, no childcare, caring for older parents, etc.)
2.54 - Employee safety protocols/ Office set-up	3.32 - Employee safety protocols/ Office set-up

**4. Employees crave—no, demand—more flexibility.**

For the same question, the top two concerns (see ranked chart above) were a lack of freedom to manage their own schedule, as well as the belief that they were more productive working from home. Third ranked (and tied based on current work arrangement) was a lack of private areas for conference calls, online meetings, heads-down work, etc.

Paired with the desire for a more hybrid work schedule, these results support the need for more flexibility in the workplace in pursuit of a stronger work-life balance. This might include staggered days or hours in the office, allowing flex hours, and more.

**Office Design Takeaways:**

Based on our findings, we can ascertain that the following factors need to be taken into consideration when it comes to workplace design, post-pandemic.

**Office design needs to be centered around agility and flexibility.**

With a distributed work model, the need for dynamic workspaces is imperative. Design firms and furniture dealers will have to work closely with organizations to determine the best path that will allow them to optimize their real estate and remain nimble in case of future disruptive events. For example, one organization may decide to reduce or eliminate space dedicated to individual work in favor of adding more shared,

collaborative spaces for their remote workforce to utilize a couple of times each week. On the other hand, another company may decide to increase the square footage dedicated to individual workers to promote better spacing while creating pathways throughout the office to allow for more serendipitous encounters between colleagues. These are just a couple of the many possible scenarios that will shape office landscapes across a multitude of industries in the months to come.

The use of agile, mobile furniture pieces, like Herman Miller's new OE1 Workspace Collection, allows for the optimization of real estate and the ability to rapidly change the workplace for the future. In addition, the incorporation of modular, demountable walls transforms open areas to create usable space for meetings, focused work, and more—without requiring a construction team.

**Providing places to physically connect remote workers with those in the office is a must.**

In a world where online meetings are growing, in-person interactions are essential because they provide better engagement between all parties and help reduce “screen fatigue”. When meeting face-to-face, body language and eye contact are better detected and allow both parties to feel acknowledged and understood more easily, resulting in less anxiety and better camaraderie.

On the other side of the coin, with the likelihood of hybrid work escalating, creating private areas for conference and/or video calls is a key consideration. Small conference or focus rooms, as well as acoustical pods, allow users to facilitate connections with those outside the office, without disturbing their co-workers nearby.

**Focusing on health and wellness in the workplace will improve employee attraction and retention.**

While not specifically covered in our survey, we agree with industry experts that a focus on employee health and wellness needs to be prioritized in the workplace. This might include:

- bringing nature inside with biophilic design, fountains or water features, wood finishes, and natural textiles
- maximizing daylight penetration throughout the office to elevate the connection between employees and the outdoors

- incorporating residential design elements to create more comfortable, home-like work settings
- providing quiet corners, alcoves, or booths to allow employees to escape from their desks to make a call, de-stress or immerse themselves in a project
- utilizing ergonomic seating, as well as height-adjustable desks, to maintain posture and promote additional movement
- creating public spaces where employees can kick back, relax, and socialize with their co-workers.

spaces will be outfitted with unique types of settings that are appropriately tuned to the task at hand. As an added benefit, research has shown that empowering employees to work from different places can also increase engagement and productivity!

**In Summary:**

When we launched our survey, we weren't sure what to expect from the results or whether our geographical findings would vary from viewpoints in other areas. We were pleasantly surprised to learn that the perceptions and experiences of our participants practically mirrored those discussed nationally.

No matter your current work situation, we are ready to partner with you to provide high-quality solutions to meet your unique needs to bring your space to—or back to—life.



The options are endless and providing a design that complements these needs can result in happier, more productive employees. It can also attract potential hires and serve as a point of differentiation among your competitors.

• **There is no one-size-fits-all solution.**

Since organizations will respond to post-pandemic work in different ways, employers should not feel pressured to replicate or adopt another company's design standards. Your work model should be based on your company's values and culture.

According to Herman Miller, the workplace will change from a singular office space into a distributed work model where work will be accomplished from multiple locations. The office will eventually evolve into a dynamic network of facilities from which employees can choose to work from on any given day. With a hybrid work model, associates can choose from working at home, community offices, the headquarters office, or a combination of them. These new office

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**Survey Data Representation:**

