



**vari.**<sup>®</sup>

**Flexible  
Workspace  
Design Ideas**

*Redefining Office Design*



# Flexible Workspace Design Ideas

The pandemic, the Great Resignation, and the economy are changing the way people think about office design. Hybrid work models are on the rise as companies transition away from remote work. As many businesses bring people back to the office, they are rethinking the purpose of their space. They want to create a place people actually want to work. Today's modern office design needs to be flexible and adaptable. It should help promote physical and mental well-being. Offices also need to be a place for community and collaboration.

# Designing For Change

For over a decade, Vari® has been a leader in workspace solutions. Our mission is to make workplaces around the world happier, healthier, and more productive. That started with creating the VariDesk®, which made any desk a standing desk. Today, we help companies across a wide range of industries to create workspaces that elevate people.

Since 2020, our in-house Workspace Design Team has created over 6,000 unique designs for clients trying to adapt their offices to the “new way to work.” Through this process, we have identified three core concepts for future office design.

1

## Flexibility First

Hybrid models can provide flexibility on when and where people work, but the office design needs to adapt to this new way of working.

2

## Well-being & Comfort

People desire a workplace that caters to their overall well-being with a new level of comfort and support.

3

## Collaboration is Key

Collaborative spaces that inspire creativity and connection are more valuable than ever in helping organizations elevate their culture.

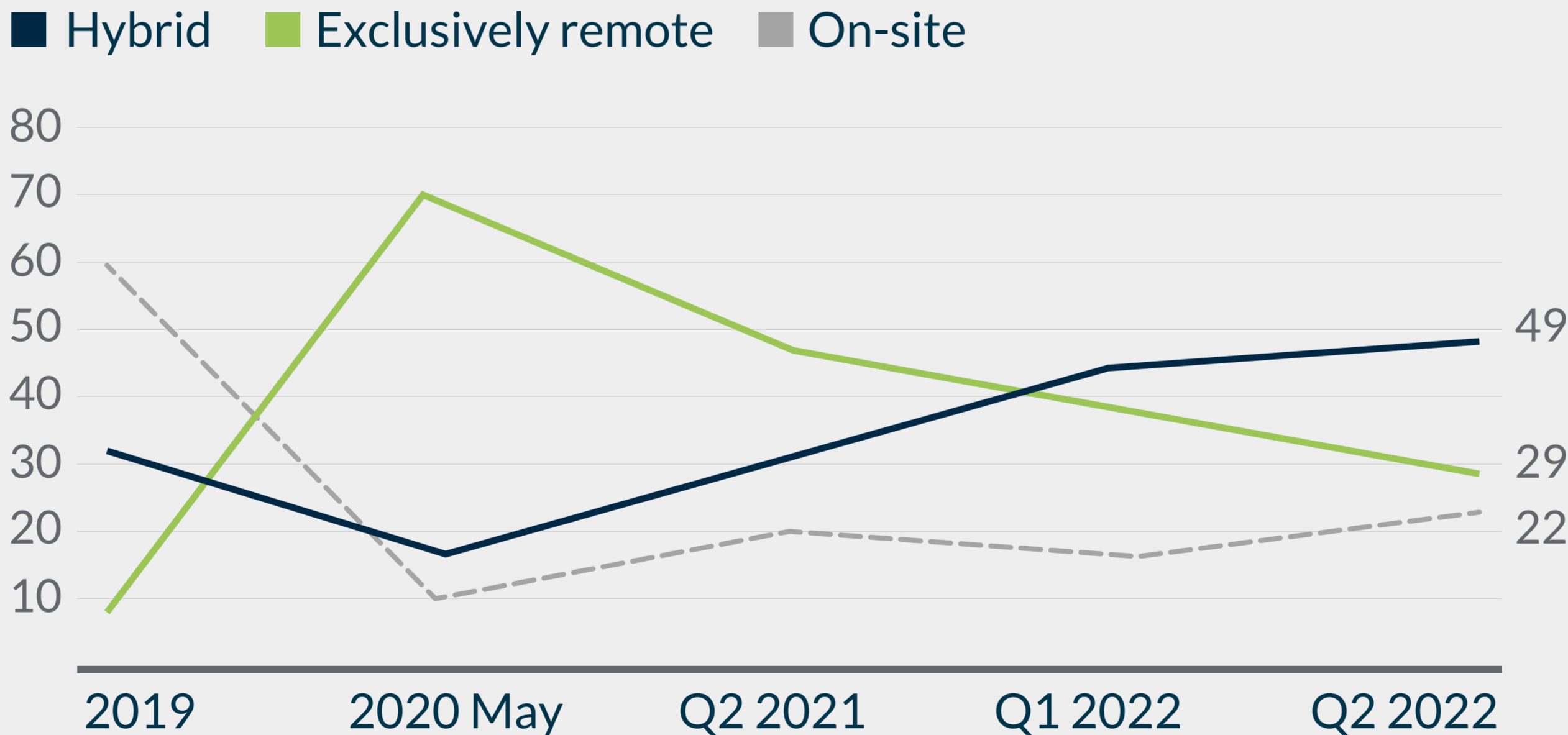
# Concept 1: Flexibility First

According to a national survey by Gallup<sup>1</sup>, 5 in 10 people report working hybrid (part of their week at home and part on-site). And while the number of exclusively-remote employees has fallen since its peak in 2020, the number of employees working fully on-site has remained relatively flat since Q2 of 2021.

This shows that more companies are adopting a hybrid approach. In that same survey, 9 in 10 employees report they prefer some degree of long-term remote flexibility going forward. This means the employee desire for hybrid work arrangements isn't going away anytime soon.

## U.S. Employee Work Locations:

How many remote-capable employees are currently working hybrid or fully remote?



In working with companies across the business spectrum, we recognize that a hybrid model is about more than just the location of your team on a given day. We've seen more companies make efforts to rethink their traditional office spaces. Just like employees had to make design changes in their homes to allow for remote work, such as adding a dedicated workspace, companies must also make design changes to their offices to accommodate hybrid work. Simply put, office designs need to cater to the office's new role. With a clear distinction of value, employees will be motivated to come in and use the space for its re-envisioned purpose.



In a Harvard Business Review article<sup>2</sup>, Andrea Vanecko, a principal at NBBJ, who partners with clients such as Google, WarnerBros, and LinkedIn to rethink office design, suggests designing a space that “caters to various modes of working, including the kind of heads-down individual work that happens at a desk, flexible seating for when people need a break from their desks, collaborative spaces that encourage focused team interaction, and lounges for socializing. This combination of experiences encourages worker agency while still providing structure.”

We agree and have used this approach to help thousands of companies. At Vari<sup>®</sup>, our workspace designers incorporate adaptability using a range of spaces to create office designs that can support different types of work and configurations. There are many ways to implement this, especially regarding office interiors. There are two kinds of spaces on the rise, and here's how to tell if they are right for you.

## Try Hot Desking or Hoteling

Hot desking is an office design in which employees do not have a designated desk but can use any available workstation. This can save on space, as employees only need one desk for every several workers, and can reduce the number of dedicated desks that sit empty on days when people work remotely. Hoteling is similar to hot desking, but rather than using any available desk on a first-come, first-served basis, there is a system for employees to reserve desks or workstations in advance.

There are some challenges with hot desking and hoteling in that both models can be seen as impersonal and may not be suitable for all types of work. With hoteling comes the need for a system to reserve a workspace, which can start as simple as an online spreadsheet for people to sign up for days and times, and go up to professional software to manage reservations and provide helpful data about your space utilization.

### **Design Considerations:**

*Are you only in the office a few days each week?*

*Do you have employees in the field or traveling often?*

*Is only a portion of your space needed for hot desks?*



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## Add Focus Spaces

For years people have argued that noise and distractions can impact productivity in the office, especially in open-plan designs. But if these challenges are not new, then why are they important now? It's simple. With today's hybrid model, employees have more choices. Even before the pandemic, a survey by Poly<sup>3</sup> showed that nearly 3 in 4 people would work in the office more – and be more productive – if employers would do more to reduce workplace distractions.

Many companies we work with are exploring how they can create more 'think' areas for quiet, focused work within their existing spaces. Giving teams areas where they can concentrate and get deep-focus work done in the office as they do at home is one way to make coming into the office more enticing.

One way to provide space for focus is to repurpose an existing office or small meeting room. Like the desk hoteling concept, the focus rooms can be booked when people need some time for undisturbed work. For those who don't have existing spaces, a solution like our modular QuickFlex Walls® can create offices and rooms. With no drywall or construction costs, you can add private offices and focus spaces to your floor plan as easily as adding desks.

### **Design Considerations:**

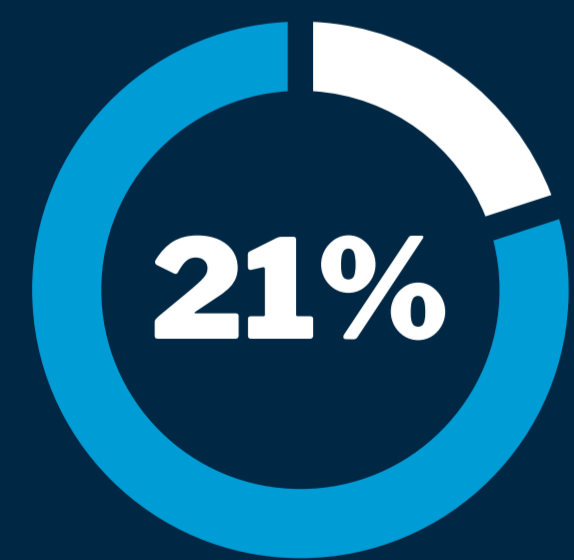
*Do you use music in public areas to help set a tone or energy for a space?*

*Does your team need a space or privacy booth for phone calls or video conferences?*

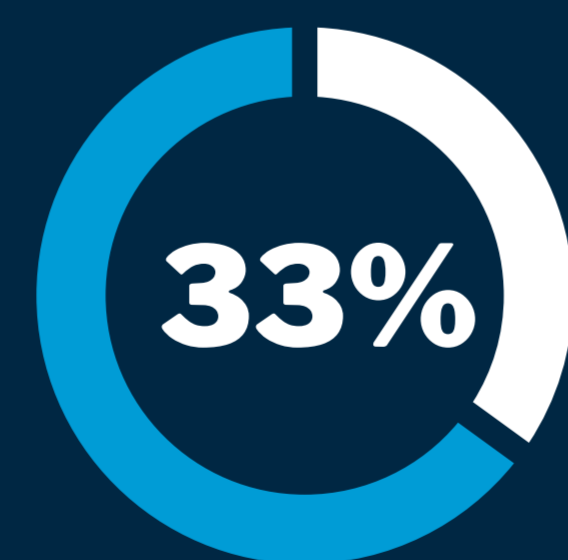
*Have you considered sound-dampening materials in your space?*

## Concept 2: Well-Being and Comfort

While well-being in the workplace has been a focus for companies before 2020, the last three years have redefined what that means. Employees are reporting higher anxiety and lower overall well-being. In fact, in Gallup's State of the Global Workplace: 2022 Report<sup>4</sup>, only 21% of employees are engaged at work and 33% surveyed say they thrive in their overall well-being. More surprising is that employees are feeling even more stressed than they did in 2020 during the height of the pandemic.



21% of employees are engaged at work



33% of employees are thriving in their overall well-being





Well-being at work is no longer just about having a wellness program and providing a gym membership. Now more than ever, well-being needs to be factored into office design at multiple levels. In working with both design firms and directly with clients, we've seen how workspaces can impact employees' physical and mental health. For some, returning to the office means returning to a sedentary lifestyle of sitting for eight hours a day. It was Dr. James Levine of the Mayo Clinic who coined the term "sitting disease" to describe the laundry list of ailments that scientific research has associated with excessive sitting<sup>5</sup>. Incorporating movement into the workday is a key factor in supporting employee well-being and comfort.



## Create Active Workspaces

Even before the pandemic, many companies incorporated adjustable-height, standing desks into their design to help people move more throughout the day. In addition to helping reduce back pain, promoting a healthy posture, and helping burn more calories, standing desks have become popular with employees. In fact, in a Vari® customer survey<sup>6</sup>, 57% of respondents said having a standing desk at work makes them want to go into the office more. And with the cost of standing desks being less than traditional office furniture, it's a no-brainer as to why companies are adding this option more frequently. Additionally, you can add more movement through your office design by centralizing trash and recycling bins to encourage people to stand up and walk over to throw something away.

### **Design Considerations:**

*Does your company budget for wellness activities or investments already?*

*Have you sent out an employee survey to gauge interest in standing desks?*

*Do you already have fixed-height desks and want to add the ability to stand?*

## Make it Comfortable

The trend of “resimercial” office design, which was popular before the pandemic, blends the comfort of residential design elements with commercial quality. You can expect this trend to continue as people return to the office. As Jeff Knoll of Ted Moudis Associates explains, “Over the last two years, we’ve grown accustomed to the comforts of home. As we continue the increasing shift to in-person work environments, adaptation is a must to help support the transition back to the office.”

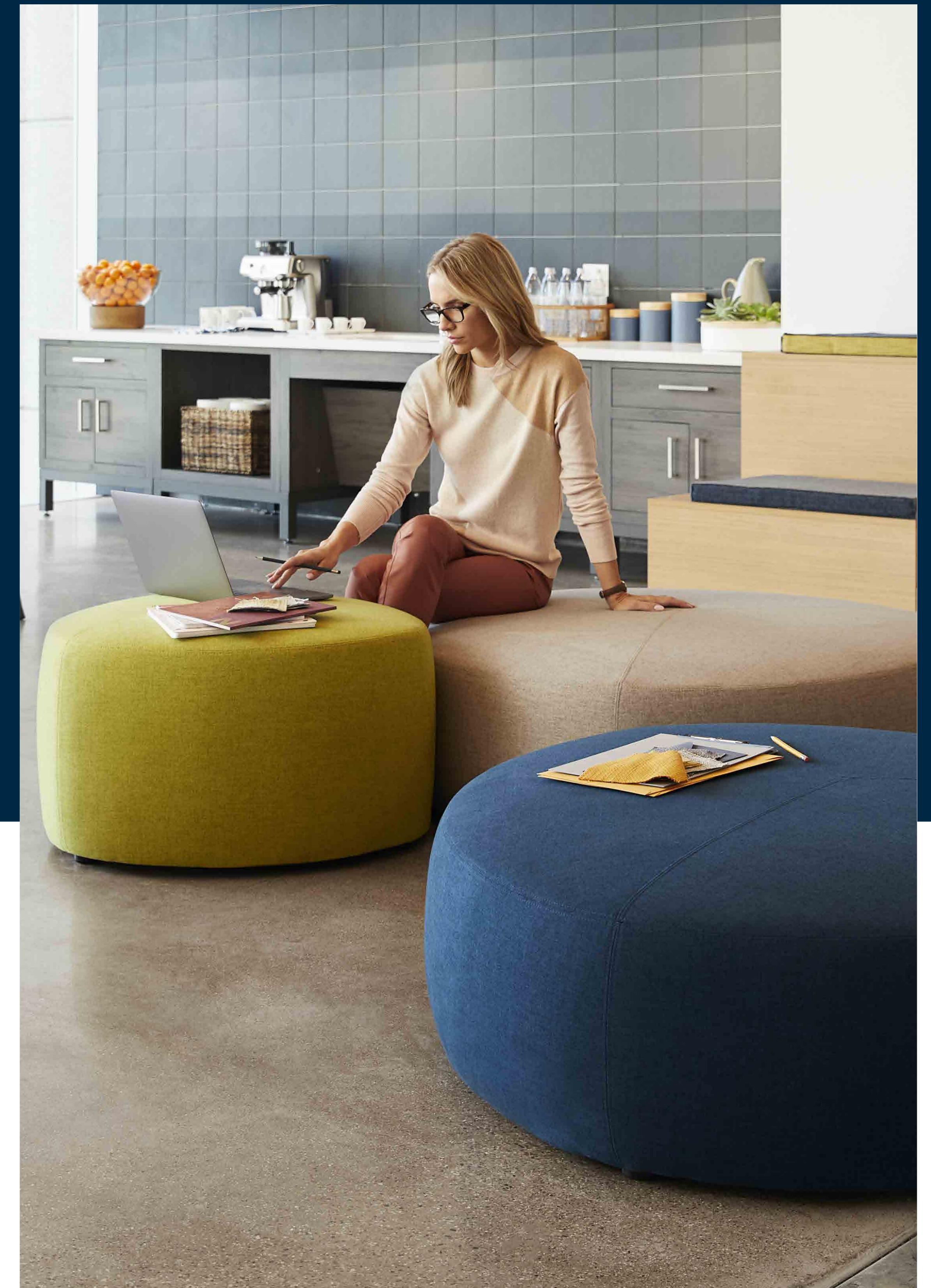
This means creating “work lounges” or spaces with couches and comfortable soft seating as neighborhoods where people can work and dwell. We also recommend adding quiet places for recharging, such as “wellness” or “zen” rooms for a mental break where people can get a respite from their busy day.

### ***Design Considerations:***

*Is your office design the same for each department or organized for that team’s function?*

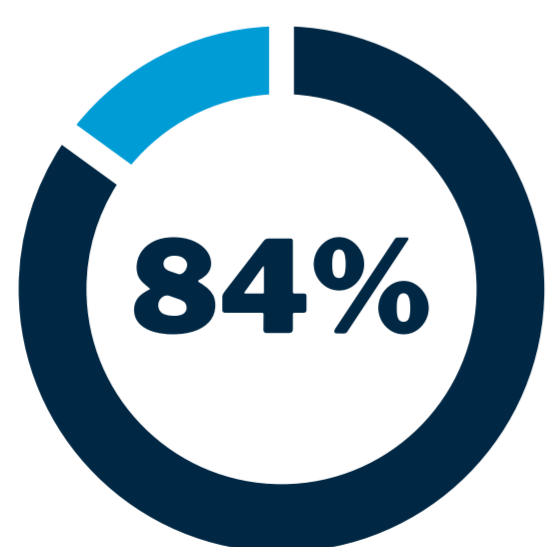
*Can you make your shared spaces more productive for work by including options for charging devices?*

*Have you asked or observed where your employees go on their breaks or to socialize?*

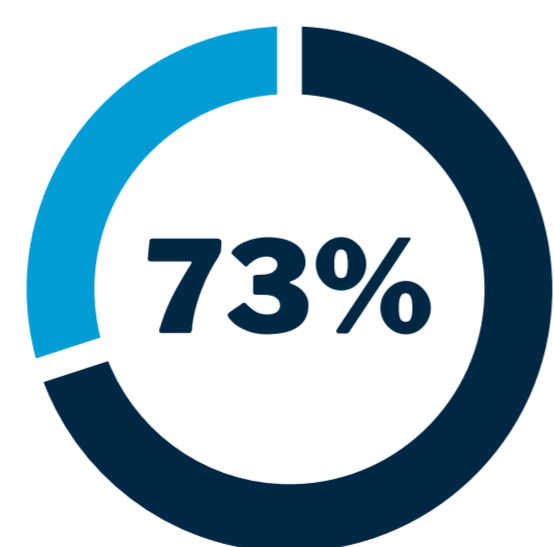


# Concept 3: Collaboration is Key

According to research by Microsoft<sup>7</sup>, 84% of employees said that they were more motivated to go into the office if they could socialize with their co-workers. In that same report, 73% of employees also said they would go to the office more frequently if their direct team members were there. Hybrid work has made in-office time more valuable for teams. For many companies, this is changing the way they use their time in the office. We have seen organizations shift their design approach to better allow for collaboration when teams are together.



84% of employees are motivated to go into the office if they can socialize with their co-workers



73% of employees are motivated to go into the office if their direct team members are there



Since 2020, we have seen a rise in companies redesigning portions of their offices to meet their changing needs. Some are adding casual meeting spaces for people to collaborate, while others are making existing spaces more functional with additions like mobile whiteboards for brainstorming ideas. Conference rooms and other spaces that encourage interaction –such as training spaces– are also in demand.

It's evident that people want to connect with their peers in the office, so prioritizing shared spaces within any design makes sense.

## Create Collaboration Spaces

One design approach we encourage is to create “neighborhoods” with informal meeting areas adjacent to dedicated workspaces, such as rows of bench desks. The proximity makes it easy to walk over and meet with someone. Soft seating, such as couches and chairs, can make the space good for spontaneous conversations. Adding tables can make the space more productive and provide an alternative to booking a conference room, which can be in high demand depending on your office size.

For agile teams with daily status meetings, standing-height tables can make for an efficient place to meet. Depending on your overall office design, these casual collaboration spaces can be divided into areas with modular walls or partitions to reduce sound and minimize distractions.



### **Design Considerations:**

*How are your break areas and amenity spaces being used today?*

*Are your teams easily able to use your shared space for an impromptu meeting?*

*When your team collaborates, do they need a screen to share, space to spread out work, or comfortable seating to sit and talk?*

## Plan Multipurpose Places

One question often asked early in the design phase is if a space can be used for multiple purposes. Designing adaptable spaces that can be used differently gives you the ability to utilize your office however you need to. One type of space that has been underused in the last few years is training spaces. With teams working remotely, training and new hire onboarding went online.



This left large rooms empty and useless. But with planning, these spaces can be used differently in the future. We often show clients how their space could be utilized differently so they can see how their training room can be changed to accommodate events or reconfigured into flexible spaces as needed.

At Vari®, we believe that everyone deserves a happier, healthier, more productive workspace. Our team of workspace designers is happy to share more ideas on making your workspace work for you. Simply contact us for a complimentary design consultation.

It was Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, who is quoted as saying "change is the only constant in life." That holds true of office design as well. Few could have predicted the changes in how, when, and where people work. The way people think about the workplace has forever changed. We are seeing that as people return to the office, they are doing so with more focus and attention on how their environment helps them accomplish their jobs. There is no doubt that your workspace matters. When thoughtfully designed, it can help attract and retain talent and be the hub for your company's culture.





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