

Work Better  
**WB**

Special Edition  
Fall 2024

# Community-Based Design

What it is.  
Why you need it.  
How to do it.



**Steelcase**

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## Special Edition

Fall 2024

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## Uncharted Territory

**Four Macro Shifts  
Changing Work Now**

**By Chris Congdon**  
Editor in Chief, Work Better magazine

Talking with business leaders about the state of work and the workplace today often feels like a therapy session. No one wants to talk about “hybrid work” or “return to office” — but everyone does. Leaders worry that too much remote work can negatively impact performance and culture, and they want to strike the right balance. They need to hit growth and profitability targets, and wonder if people are really doing their best work when they’re away from the office. Only 25% of leaders are satisfied with office attendance. In the last year, there has been a 92% increase in how many leaders are requiring people to work in-office.

Meanwhile both leaders and employees struggle with overall wellbeing, engagement and feeling part of the company culture — although it’s harder for employees who don’t have the same level of control over their work experience as leaders do. Everyone is thinking about AI and how it will impact work.

It’s a tough time to be a leader. *We’re in uncharted territory — how, when, where and why we work has changed more dramatically in the past five years than it has in generations.* The drivers of change (see page 2) are interconnected and complex; it can be hard to make sense of it all. But change is also filled with opportunities and possibilities.

Leaders tell us they need a workplace to support their business strategies, which aim to embrace and adapt to change. The right workplace can attract talent, build culture and help people feel and do their best. They need a workplace that is resilient, able to adapt quickly when needed and helps people be more resilient too. Their current offices often reflect old assumptions — but what can make it better?

Answer: a workplace designed like a community that also creates a feeling of community.

The same principles that built the best cities around the world can also be applied to the workplace. Those cities are all different, but all have things in common. There’s a diversity of people and also diverse places — streets aren’t created with cookie-cutter repetition of the same types of buildings. There’s variety and interest. There’s infrastructure designed so people can easily move from one place

to the next, and services are conveniently clustered. There are public places, like parks, shops and cafés where people gather. And places with privacy, like homes or parks, tucked along the streets that give people respite from the bustle of activity.

The patterns of urban design that make cities feel vibrant and livable can give offices the same kind of energy. Space can shape our behavior and help us engage with our surroundings — and with other people. In vibrant communities, people don’t feel isolated and lonely. They feel like they belong.

*In the coming pages, we’ll look at four major shifts to deeply understand how they’re changing the ways people work. And we’ll explore why designing workplaces like a community can help people and organizations thrive.*

Work has  
changed more  
dramatically  
in the past  
five years  
than it has in  
generations.



# Four Macro Shifts *Changing Work Now*

Four overarching, macro-level shifts are fundamentally changing work and will continue to alter the landscape for years to come.



Some of these shifts have been building for years, while others seem to have happened all at once. It's the magnitude of the change, along with the pace, that is uncharted territory. By understanding how these shifts change behavior, we can create more resilient workplaces that build community and help people perform and feel better.

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## Living on Screen

Screen-based interactions have overtaken in-person communications. Even within the office people are more likely to join meetings on screen at their desk than walk to a conference room. No wonder people feel lonely and less engaged. This shift has significantly changed how we use our offices and build relationships at work.

**p. 4**

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## Sustainability Mindset

The number of organizations committed to sustainability targets has doubled in the past year. Everyone now needs to share responsibility for these goals. The workplace needs to bring people together to learn, upskill, align on priorities and spur innovation. It also needs to be designed sustainably – with partners who understand how to design spaces for flexibility and resilience.

**p. 14**

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## AI Supercycle

Employees are rapidly adopting AI, fueled by optimism and fear. Leaders know they need to leverage it more. Opportunities for innovation and increased productivity are creating a “supercycle” – a period of economic growth driven by emerging technologies. Now is the time to design AI-ready workplaces to take advantage of this supercycle.

**p. 8**

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## Wellbeing Urgency

Mental health is a global epidemic – more top of mind for employers in some ways than physical health. The rapid increase in anxiety, depression, burnout and loneliness, especially among younger generations, is impacting what people need to do their best work. While job stress can contribute, work and the workplace can be part of the solution.

**p. 18**

# Living on Screen



## If you look at your calendar compared to five years ago, what differences do you notice?

For most of us, there are a lot more meetings and a lot more — if not the majority — involve video. How many of your one-to-one interactions are on a screen versus over a cup of coffee?

For many of us, we're spending far more time in screen-based interactions and less in person. It's arguably the biggest change impacting work and will have far-reaching repercussions on human behavior and the workplace. This shift from in-person to screen-based interaction has upended work behaviors and norms, which, in turn, impacts organizational culture. The ramifications for employee wellbeing and job performance are very real.

**Contributors:**  
Rebecca Charbauski, Senior Editor, Work Better magazine; Chris Congdon, Editor in Chief, Work Better magazine; Amy Willard, WorkSpace Futures Researcher

## How big is this change?

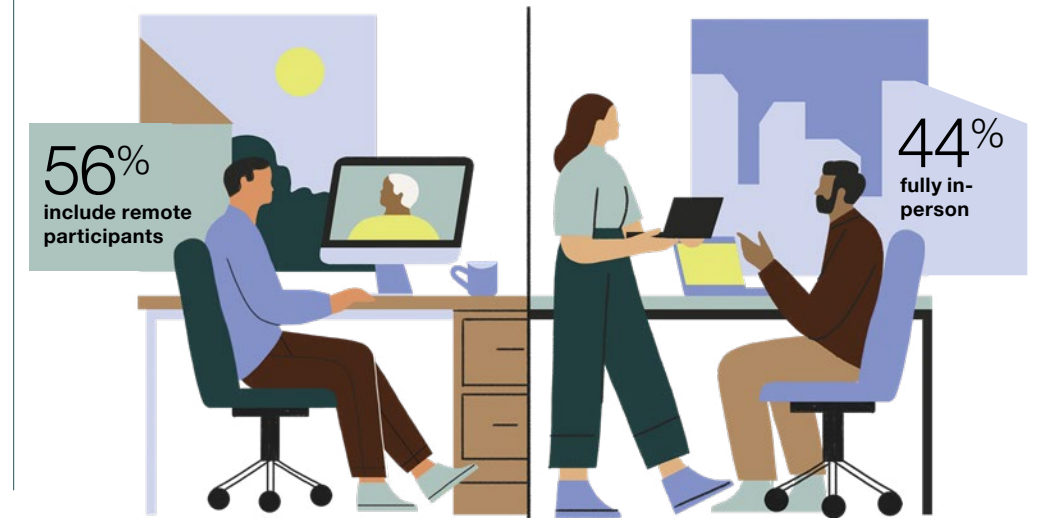
People now spend more time in virtual collaboration sessions than fully face-to-face interactions, according to Steelcase WorkSpace Futures research.

The shift toward screen-based interactions seemed to happen gradually — then all at once. It gained momentum in the 2010s, fueled by the rapid adoption of video-enabled smartphones and more widely accessible video conferencing technology. As platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom became popular, people could join meetings from anywhere. But it was the pandemic that drove rapid adoption and new norms — within four years work behaviors were altered in substantial and long-lasting ways.

Collaboration platforms enabled remote and hybrid work, which led to an existential crisis for the office. Many workplaces became eerily quiet as organizations experimented or struggled with return-to-office and hybrid work policies. While leaders are starting to require more consistent in-office work, they're also seeing attendance patterns solidifying in ways that can make the office feel alive on some days and empty on others.

The mainstreaming of hybrid work has changed how, when and where people are working. People have more flexibility to cope with the demands of work and personal lives. But they are juggling more meetings over a longer period of time and in greater isolation.

## More meetings are on screen than in person



## Most people stay at their desk and join meetings virtually instead of going to the meeting room.

New behaviors have emerged caused by the increase of screen-based interactions. The biggest change is where people participate in meetings — many staying isolated at their desks or competing for private enclaves.



## People are choosing convenience over connection.

Easy-to-use, more equitable collaboration spaces, room booking systems and a little time buffer between meetings can encourage people to come together. But right now, people say the top reason they're not leaving their desk is, essentially, it's easier to stay put.

### Top reasons why people take video calls at their desk

- 1 Easier to connect without moving from my individual space
- 2 Better and more equitable experience for all participants
- 3 Lack of time to move between meetings
- 4 Room is not booked in advance

## The number of meetings has increased overall.

Microsoft researchers uncovered a new work pattern they dubbed “the triple-peak day” in which workers are not only most active at peaks before and after lunch, but also before bedtime.

42% more chats are sent in the evening now by the average Microsoft Teams user

## New work patterns need new spaces

This emerging behavior where people take video calls from their desk may save time, but it can also be problematic for performance and employee wellbeing. Microsoft researchers found that people are on email in at least 30% of remote meetings. Other data suggests it happens almost non-stop – indicating that people aren't fully engaged or paying attention in virtual meetings. And people taking video calls at their desk can be disruptive to nearby co-workers.

The majority of people say they prefer to be in the office for collaboration (co-creation, idea generation) and meetings (information sharing, decision making) according to Steelcase research. But if they're not leaving their desks to do group work in-person, they, and the organization, are missing out on the benefits of people coming together. Research shows less-frequent social contact can lead to anxiety, depression and loneliness (see [Wellbeing Urgency, page 18](#)).

### Employees want a better experience at work

Our research found the top things employees around the world want are in response to the dramatic increase in screen-based work:

- ✓ Privacy
- ✓ Spaces that support their wellbeing
- ✓ Spaces that enable virtual collaboration
- ✓ Access to enough power

Promising data analyzed from Steelcase sales patterns finds that organizations are stepping up privacy solutions in the office and increasing access to power in social and collaborative spaces. But employees say there aren't enough spaces that support effective virtual collaboration – rooms that have been created with easy-to-use technology, designed for optimal experiences for both in-room and remote participants.

The shift toward screen-based interactions is a key factor for designers to consider as they look at how the office needs to change. It's no small challenge to create a sense of energy, collegiality and productivity in workplaces when people are not consistently present or living on a screen.



## Screens are shrinking our attention spans

How long can you pay attention? Most people won't make it to the end of this article. Our ability to pay attention dropped more than 30% in the last two decades – down to 47 seconds. A decade ago people ranked conversations as the worst office noise offender. Now open-office virtual meetings are exacerbating the problem.

The Institute for Sustained Attention founder, D. Graham Burnett, calls it the “fracking of our brains.” Loud voices, fun ringtones and smart watches are all vying for mindshare. Two-thirds of people say noise makes it hard to focus at work, according to Steelcase global research. Even working from home fails to guarantee focus. Kids, pets and chores pull at us.

### “Switch Cost”

Our lack of attention hurts our work performance and our health. Gloria Mark, Ph.D., has studied our shrinking attention spans for decades. Her research shows a direct correlation between attention-switching and stress. People wearing heart monitors showed a rise in blood pressure when they multitasked. Multiple studies report multitasking leads to errors. And performance slows as a result of a “switch cost.” When your attention shifts, it takes more time to reorient yourself to the original activity and continue your work.

### Deep Work

There are different types of attention. Deep work is the ability to immerse yourself in a complex task completely and requires a difficult-to-achieve concentration level. Deep work is worth pursuing because it promotes a sense of flow and meaning, and it's critical to mastering difficult topics more quickly, according to Cal Newport, author of “Deep Work.” It also takes practice and purposeful environments devoid of distractions.

### Designing for Distractions

Finding, capturing and designing for attention involves thinking about every part of the work experience. Some organizations institute quiet hours or meeting-free days. AI supports focus by blocking time on calendars and muting notifications. And some people find success in the Pomodoro Technique – a time management method where you set a timer for 25 minutes, focus on your work and then take a five-minute break.

Our environments play a critical role in how we are affected by the stimuli around us, including what we hear and see.

Boundaries, barriers and even plants can block visual distractions and free people from feeling overexposed. The ability to claim a space and control it gives people territorial privacy and a sense of psychological safety. It's natural to feel threatened when someone approaches from behind. Feeling safe allows us to relax and focus longer.

Designing for acoustics is especially challenging because the solution isn't as simple as stifling all sound. “Total silence isn't always the goal. It makes it uncomfortable for people to talk,” says Bren Walker, collaborating partner, Kirkegaard. “We both hear and feel sound waves which is why a lack of noise sucks the energy or buzz from a space. A little reverberation gives you some of yourself back that's not disruptive, it's lively.”

Walker recommends defining which spaces need which acoustic characteristics. Think about who is using the space and how you want them to feel when they enter it. Create a variety of spaces that let people find what works for them. Consider how to design what people hear and how they hear it.



- ✓ **Architecture has the largest impact on acoustics.** High ceilings bounce sound down which feels like an echo. Two parallel walls cause sound to bounce between them. Consider how to adjust architecture (slant a wall or lower a ceiling) to improve acoustics or take advantage of existing spaces with good acoustic properties.
- ✓ **Boundaries can help dampen noise** in areas where people work near colleagues and need to focus.
- ✓ **Materiality can add acoustic performance.** Consider how fabrics that absorb or mute sound can be used on walls, floors, ceilings, mobile screens and other furniture.
- ✓ **Adjacencies are everything.** Plan for what is nearby when you design social, private and deep focus spaces to prevent problems.
- ✓ **Soundscapes bring the benefits of natural sound indoors.** Adding sound to the workplace can create healthier buildings. For example, soundscape provider Moodsonic uses technology and science to curate natural sounds inside. Background soundscapes can mask distractions and contribute to concentration, privacy and comfort.
- ✓ **A variety of sensory zones** – calm or lively – lets people with different preferences and sensitivities find their best space. People can intuitively understand the purpose of the space when what they hear is aligned with how the space is being used.

# AI Supercycle



Ready or not (*and many organizations are not*), AI is here.

A vast majority of employees are already using it at work to save time, focus and be more creative. Most leaders are paying attention, but worry they are not ready for the dizzying speed at which we're integrating machines into our work lives. The question is — how can organizations start now to create an AI-ready workplace?

*“These tools have created a bottom-up, user-led revolution rather than a strategy driven by corporate policies.”*

**Mirvac and WORKTECH Academy** in The AI-Powered Workplace.

The rapid changes in how people work with AI are creating both anticipation and anxiety. A recent survey by Upwork, an online platform that connect freelancers with clients looking for services, found nearly 80% of employees using generative AI say it's added to their workload. Editing, reviewing, moderating and learning takes time. We're in the early onboarding phase of our new AI teammates, which takes energy and patience in the short term, but the benefits are expected to multiply in the long term. In fact, most businesses (64%) anticipate AI will increase productivity and 60% of educators are already using it in their classrooms to boost learning outcomes.\*

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## Redefining roles

In response to the rise of AI tools, many organizations have started adapting existing roles or designing new ones.

Right now, AI is like a toddler trying to learn about the world. AI engines have limited streams of information to work with and they need ethically-sourced (accurate, non-proprietary) data. These machines are trying to understand what humans want and determine if they get things right. They need people to ask the right questions, input accurate information, edit responses and validate answers. These needs are changing how companies hire, reskill and upskill employees, according to Microsoft's 2024 Work Trend Index. There's been a 323% increase in the hiring of technical AI talent in the past eight years and a 28% year-to-year growth in "Head of AI" leadership roles.

*“There’s a truckload of uses for AI now that don’t create risk. Organizations need to enable their workforce today to take advantage of advances as they arrive.”*

**Sean Gallagher**  
Founder, Humanova

60%

of leaders worry their organization lacks a plan and vision to implement AI

Microsoft 2024 Work Trend Index

66%

of leaders would not hire someone without AI skills

Microsoft 2024 Work Trend Index

## AI Impact

75%

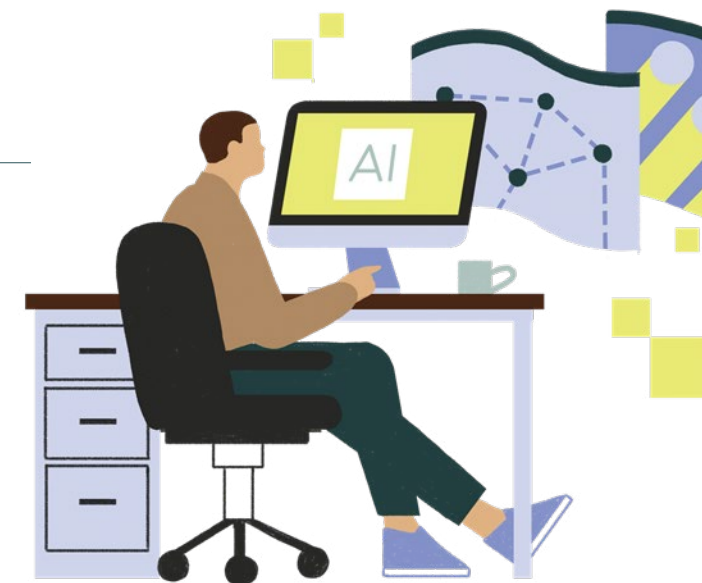
of global knowledge workers use AI, nearly doubling in six months

Microsoft 2024 Work Trend Index

97 Million

jobs will be created by AI by next year

World Economic Forum

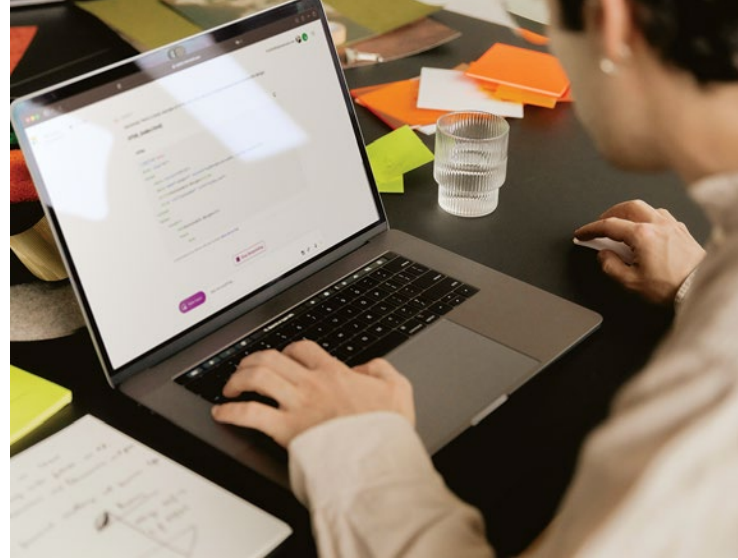


## New AI-driven behaviors

AI promises the opportunity for organizations to enhance accessibility, boost creativity and create more dynamic workplaces. This supercycle is moving so fast it may be tempting to watch and wait. “We know AI is already changing work and, as a result, new kinds of spaces will be needed to support how people are working differently,” says Keith Bujak, Steelcase WorkSpace Futures principal researcher. “Designing an AI-ready workplace is an opportunity to put people in the best position to take advantage of this supercycle.” This starts by understanding changing workplace behaviors at a tactical and strategic level.

### Tactical ways to get your space ready

- ✓ **Using voice activation** — People will likely be talking to their devices more often to activate AI workplace assistants, making acoustics an even bigger issue. Mitigating noise, isolating voices and designing for various levels of privacy will grow in importance.
- ✓ **Making space for AI assistants** — AI assistants live in both software and hardware. Microsoft Copilot, for example, is integrated into Microsoft 365 to help analyze data, design slideshows, write reports and more. Logitech’s Sight camera identifies and focuses on whomever is speaking. AI assistants, in some cases, will need to live in a physical space to take in and deliver information.
- ✓ **Displaying AI-generated content** — Right now AI is fighting for real estate, often isolated to a chatbot. As teams become more comfortable with different forms of generative AI, they will need more digital displays to share and engage with content.



### Strategic ways to get your space ready

- ✓ **Amplifying collaboration** — In some disciplines, AI is augmenting heads-down, rote work. New jobs are being created such as prompt engineers, machine learning engineers or code reviewers. These teams need to work together to ask the right questions, develop guidelines, review responses for accuracy and usefulness, and provide feedback so AI can learn. This will dial up the need for collaboration spaces that encourage shared decision-making and transparency.
- ✓ **Expanding upskilling** — There’s a wide spectrum of AI adoption, according to Microsoft: power users, explorers, novices and skeptics. Helping employees increase their skills requires organizations to develop a culture of learning enabled by training and peer-to-peer learning spaces. “Spiking demand and labor scarcity forced many employers to consider nontraditional candidates with potential and train them,” according to McKinsey Global Institute.
- ✓ **Designing for flexibility** — With technology advancements moving so quickly, workplace flexibility is critical. Designs that offer a broad range of spaces are easier to adapt than ones that rely on standard solutions throughout a floorplan. Modular walls and enclosed pods add flexibility because they can be moved from one spot to another. Mobile furniture and tools empower teams and individuals to move things themselves so the space works the way they need it to.

#### Automated and AI Tools at Work

##### Workflow Automation

Simplifies repetitive business processes to save time and money (e.g. *Salesforce Workflow*)

##### Digital Assistant

Responds to user requests, sometimes taking action on the user’s behalf (e.g. *Apple Siri, Amazon Alexa*)

##### Generative AI

Creates original content such as images or text based on user prompts (e.g. *OpenAI ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot*)

# Designing an AI-Ready Workplace

As AI evolves and is incorporated into our work it will influence how we interact with our environments.

AI is already lending itself to a more adaptive experience for designers, real estate and facilities teams. Data can inform early space concepts, putting professionals in the driver’s seat to edit and elevate early drafts. AI can also accelerate the feedback loop between how people are using a space and how design can adapt to support new ways of working.

Steelcase designers are considering how the use of AI by people and teams will impact space design, by looking at the different kinds of owned and shared spaces individuals and teams need. The number of each type of space is determined by the organization’s needs.



## Data-Driven Design

Over the last three years, Steelcase and our dealer community have developed an AI-driven data analytics practice to inform and accelerate workplace design for our customers and design professionals.

Data-Driven Design analyzes information gleaned from customer orders and has identified five million applications to study. These applications are aggregated to find new patterns in the ways organizations are updating their spaces. The data allow us to identify and share workplace trends as they emerge.

### What we're learning:

Companies are starting to make changes to address new employee needs.

150%

increase in boundary elements and screens to give people more territorial privacy. Companies are adding a range of privacy solutions.

47%

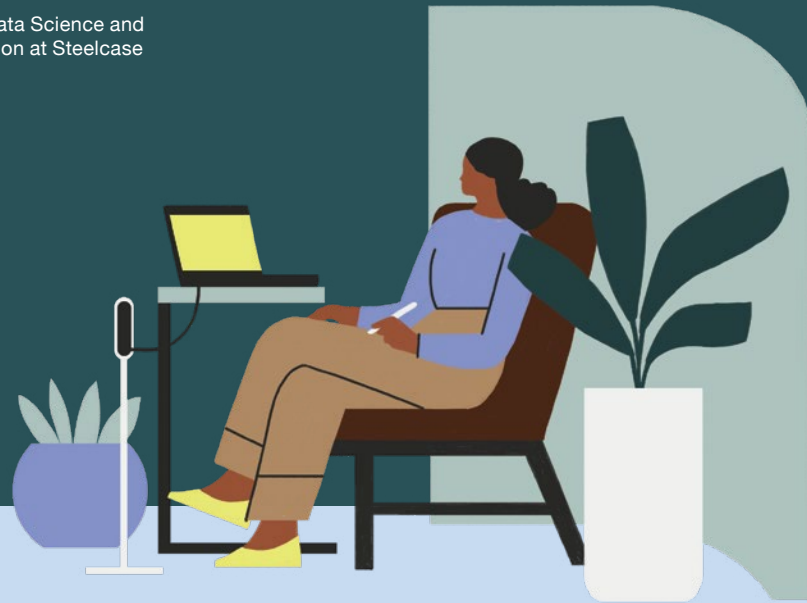
increase in adding power to social spaces. More laptop tables and privacy elements are also being added. With more performance, these settings can be used for focus work and collaboration.

25%

increase in the use of flexible furniture in collaboration spaces. Teams can adjust their spaces as new AI technologies find their way into the workplace.

*“Through the power of AI and data science, we're able to convert vast amounts of workplace data into unique insights that our customers can use to make informed design decisions. Our goal is to help them create spaces that are relevant today and adaptable to the future of work.”*

**Jorge Lozano**  
Manager for Data Science and Digital Innovation at Steelcase



### Creating Immersive Spaces

Steelcase researchers and designers are exploring new types of spaces that can improve all types of collaboration, including when people work with AI. An Immersive Multipurpose Room (IMR)

prototype is being used and evaluated by a range of Steelcase teams. The large-scale (floor-to-ceiling screen), immersive, rich environment is designed with a high degree of flexibility. Researchers are observing how immersive spaces provide people with a more realistic

experience (e.g. a virtual walk-through of an operations facility). The immersive space also supports generating and manipulating digital information and large-scale data visualization. Research indicates immersive spaces will be an important part of an AI-ready workplace.



## Introducing Dr. Eric Klinenberg

**Author + Professor of Social Science and Director of the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University**

Eric Klinenberg argues parks and libraries are as important to a city's ability to thrive as roads and bridges. This concept of “social infrastructure” stems from research he did into a deadly Chicago heat wave. The parallels between what cities and workplaces need are undeniable.

### Work Better: What did your research show about why two Chicago neighborhoods had vastly different outcomes during that deadly weather crisis?

**Eric Klinenberg:** The 1995 Chicago heat wave killed over 700 people. I mapped out who died and where, noticing that poor, segregated neighborhoods were most affected. However, as I wrote in *Palaces for the People*, I found that some adjacent neighborhoods with similar demographics had vastly different death rates. For example, Englewood had a death rate 10 times higher than neighboring Auburn Gresham. Englewood was depleted with abandoned homes and few community resources, while Auburn Gresham had a robust social infrastructure with parks, libraries and community services. This highlighted the critical role of social infrastructure in community resilience during crises.

### WB: Why can social infrastructure make such a significant difference — even determining who lives and dies?

**EK:** The infrastructure here is social infrastructure. It's as essential as water, power or communication infrastructure. Investing in social infrastructure creates environments that foster social life. In neighborhoods like Auburn Gresham, good social infrastructure draws people out of their homes into communal spaces, promoting interaction and mutual support. Without it, people are more likely to stay isolated.

### WB: What can the office learn from your findings on social infrastructure?

**EK:** I think one of the really interesting things that happened in the pandemic is we learned we can be productive when we're at home or working remotely. But if you push that too far, you can't have a shared office culture or work life. You don't make the connections to have good collaboration or creativity that you have when you have a healthy office environment built around good social infrastructure — so it's completely relevant for the office.

### WB: Why is physical closeness so important to the idea of social infrastructure?

**EK:** If we were required to return to another years-long lockdown, I think relying solely on screens would be unbearable. I think you would feel like tearing your hair out. Our pandemic experience highlighted the insufficiency of virtual interactions and the essential need for physical presence. Being together in person is crucial for building relationships, providing support and experiencing joy together. While technology is a helpful supplement, it cannot replace face-to-face interactions.

### WB: You say we need to embrace the concept of lingering. What do you mean?

**EK:** For many socially active people, their home is a launching pad, and the community is like a living room. People choose to live in an area to be close to important amenities and social opportunities. Real estate developers cater to young professionals by offering smaller private spaces with generous shared amenities, like coffee bars and exercise areas. This trend extends to lots of places, including workplaces — where shared spaces foster social interactions. It's about building a way of living — building places that encourage lingering and gathering, which is essential for building community and relationships. When it comes to social life, efficiency is really our enemy.

### Last Words

Ideally, the office is a compelling and exciting place where we can go to generate new ideas, recharge and build relationships. And when you work in a good office, you feel all those things and enjoy going there. When you don't work in a good office, you'd rather be at home on your private screen. So now, when remote work is a viable option, I think it's important for every organization to think about how to make “place” work for their people.

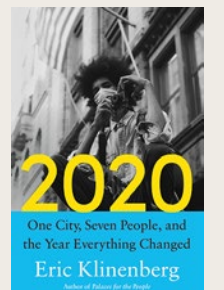
# Conversations



Hear more of our conversation with Eric Klinenberg in our *Work Better* podcast. Season 5 launches October 29<sup>th</sup> anywhere you get your podcasts.

### Eric Klinenberg's Latest Book

2020: One City, Seven People, and the Year Everything Changed



Courtesy of Knopf



# Sustainability Mindset



Net zero. Circular economy. Embodied carbon. For some employees, these terms are just part of the job.

For others, it's a new way of working as a rapidly growing number of companies set ambitious sustainability targets — and they will need everyone engaged to make them happen. It means new job skills and a mindset shift.

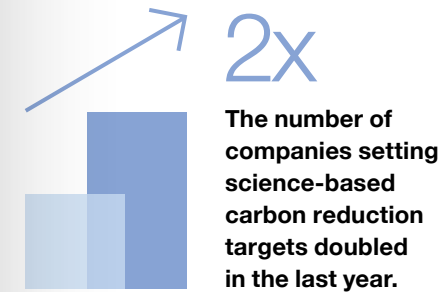
These added responsibilities for sustainability goals require big changes in work processes and culture. The workplace can help by being designed to reflect sustainability choices and bring a wide range of people together to tackle new, complex challenges.

In the last year, the number of companies setting science-based carbon reduction targets jumped 102%, now representing nearly 40% of the global economy, according to the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi). These strategic choices are creating new jobs and will require some new skills for existing ones. Leaders are finding they need to expand learning and engage all functions across the organization to reach these goals. They are focused on building a culture that taps into sustainability teams' expertise and involves everyone to accelerate collective action. Leaders also understand they need to work with partners who can help them design a sustainable, flexible and resilient work environment.

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Signals suggest organizations will continue placing greater emphasis on sustainability ahead.

## A Sharp Rise in Sustainability Goals



Companies setting science-based carbon reduction targets now represent nearly 40% of the global economy (SBTi).

## What are science based targets?

The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) tracks companies making climate commitments. SBTi works with organizations around the world, including Steelcase, to identify how much and how quickly they need to reduce carbon emissions to prevent the worst effects of climate change.

Of all validated science-based carbon reduction targets, Europe has the most with Asia second and North America third (the remaining 6% is distributed among other parts of the world, Source: SBTi).



New rules and regulations such as the EU's 2024 anti-greenwashing law are just one reason more companies there are focused on sustainability issues.

## New Skills Needed

+300 million jobs

"Green collar" (sustainability-related) roles are expected to add 300 million jobs by 2050

Deloitte 2022



According to LinkedIn, the role of sustainability manager is the fastest growing job in the UK and Germany. It ranks third in Spain. And three of the top 10 fastest-growing jobs in the US are sustainability-related.

## Engaging All Employees in Sustainability Goals

"People have always wanted to do the right thing, they just didn't know how. We've created a pathway where we can see progress. We break a large goal into small steps which helps people wrap their minds around how to get there. This pathway is about progress, not pledges. For companies like us that make products, we want everyone, not just the sustainability team, to influence our targets. We refer to this strategic pillar as pervasive sustainability."

**Logitech's Sustainability Pathway**  
Prakash Arunkundrum, Logitech COO

"We put sustainable actions and circularity at the center of what we do. Our recent partnership with Steelcase to remake 900 of our chairs for a workplace design project demonstrates our will and ambition. This new kind of circular service will benefit our group and can also lead other companies to decrease their carbon footprint."

**CapGemini's Power of Community**  
Guillaume Ancel, Real Estate Senior Manager

## Cultivating a culture of sustainability

Leaders are discovering they must build a culture that taps into sustainability teams' expertise and involves everyone to meet ambitious climate goals. Companies are wading into new territory — for example, designing new circular business models. Leaders need to hire for new roles, amp up learning and engage existing employees at a deeper level. Leaders will expect their workplace to reflect these values, help people come together to build new capabilities and spur critical innovation.



### ✓ The workplace should reflect an organization's sustainability choices.

It is the most visible artifact of an organization's culture. When the office reflects a company's sustainability commitments, employees can see values on display. Leaders should seek out partners who deeply understand these commitments and have similar ambitious environmental goals, such as a net-zero commitment. These partnerships can deliver sustainable products and solutions created to reduce carbon emissions by using more sustainable materials, designing for end-of-use and building in flexibility so spaces can adapt.

### ✓ Reaching a net-zero future will require a learning culture.

There's not a clear, repeatable roadmap every organization can use. In fact, net-zero strategies rely on future innovations in technology, infrastructure and materials science that don't exist yet. New uses for sustainable materials and advancements in carbon capture technology are just a few reasons there is a need for constant learning. Understanding the science and creating innovative solutions requires upskilling or reskilling for both leaders and employees. It's a culture shift for some organizations that will need to embed life-long learning into the fabric of work. Creating places for group and individual learning is essential to make this shift.

### ✓ Leaders must set a clear vision to drive collective action toward shared sustainability goals.

Product development needs to understand sustainability targets. But so do people working in human resources who may have to hire for new skills and procurement who vet suppliers. Clarity around sustainability ensures everyone moves in the same direction.

Transparency lets leaders, teams and individuals navigate new sustainability choices and priorities, and take action toward a shared vision for the future. When strategies and goals are aligned and prioritized at the highest level, leaders across the company can bring people together to figure out new ways to tackle these goals. Creating leadership spaces that are visible and accessible to employees, where leaders can display key goals and choices the organization has made, can encourage the adoption of new behaviors and priorities.

### ✓ Encourage shared ownership and distributed decision-making by helping people identify where they can take action and innovate.

Each team engages in its own meaningful way and everything is interconnected. Operations may find ways to reduce waste while finance teams set budgets for carbon reduction efforts. People will engage more deeply when given choice and control over aspects of their work, and when new goals are connected to opportunities for growth and development.

### ✓ Teams working on sustainability goals shift from working in silos to engaging cross-functionally.

The development of cross-functional networks promotes information sharing and helps employees develop the skills they need to engage — like big-picture thinking and creative problem-solving. Individuals and teams should be encouraged to bring outside voices in at different stages of their work. The workplace can be designed with shared collaboration and informal social spaces that encourage people to connect with others outside of their own teams. The workplace can also help build transparency between teams by providing places where information can be more persistent by posting content on markerboards, digital displays, etc.



Change is hard — especially when it comes alongside many other big changes all at once. It will be important for leaders to bring people together to celebrate what's working and provide feedback along the journey. Complex issues like sustainability cannot be solved by any one person, team or organization. Designing the workplace to foster community can help people learn faster from one another and feel a sense of shared accountability to make progress on these ambitious goals and make a difference in the world.

# Wellbeing Urgency

Talk to an HR professional and they'll tell you that one of the biggest things they're worried about is *employee mental health*.

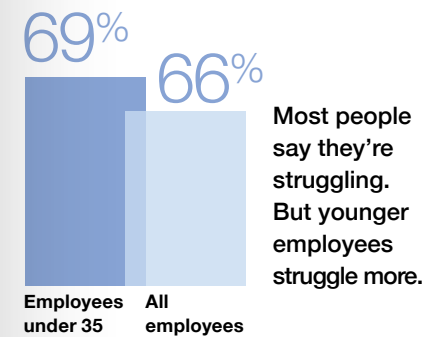


**Contributors:**  
 Stav Kontis, Features Editor,  
 Work Better magazine;  
 Melanie Redman, WorkSpace  
 Futures Principal Researcher

Headlines and book titles say it all: “The Lonely Society,” “Employee Mental Health is a Global Issue,” and for future workers “The Anxious Generation.” Stress, anxiety, depression and difficulty concentrating are top issues for employers around the world, according to a study by WorkPlace Options, a global provider of employee solutions.

Hybrid work and the flexibility it offers were supposed to bring more balance to people’s lives, but that doesn’t seem to have happened. People’s satisfaction with their work-life balance dropped over the past three years, while productivity remained consistent, according to Steelcase global research.

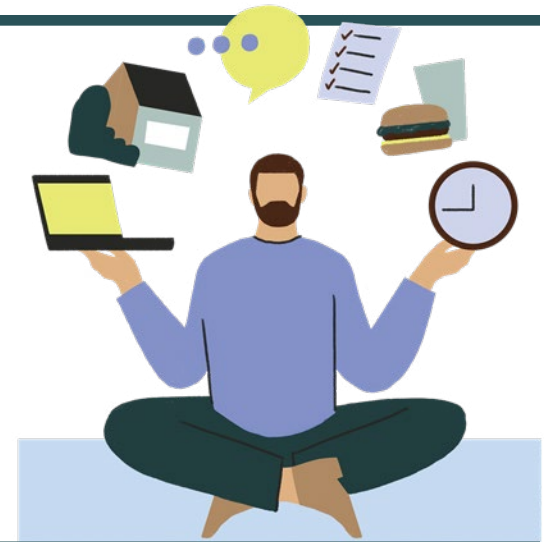
## Most employees are not thriving



Gallup's 2024 State of the Global Workplace reported 66% of employees said they were not thriving in their lives in 2023 and for workers under 35 years old that number rose to 69%. Anxiety is much higher among Generation Z workers who will represent a third of the total workforce by 2030. This will become an increasingly serious issue for organizations who need to mentor and develop this cohort of employees.

## Finding balance

People are recognizing they need to focus more on their wellbeing and now rank it as second in importance, only behind their families, according to a Steelcase global study. Perhaps surprisingly, work came fourth in the ranking. This disparity in sentiment is creating an inherent source of tension as leaders seek to find a balance that's equitable for people and the organization.



## What's going on?

Most of us would think people should be feeling better, as the pandemic is increasingly in the rear view mirror. Yet there are multiple factors, both personal and professional, and some at a societal and global scale, that contribute to mental health challenges. One is the rate of change at work is accelerating faster than people's ability to keep up. Sociologist and author Brené Brown calls it “living beyond human scale.”

**68%** of people struggle with the pace and volume of work  
**46%** of employees feel burned out

Microsoft finds 68% of people struggle with the pace and volume of work and 46% feel burned out according to their 2024 Work Trend Index. The speed of change impacts managers as well as employees, leaving both groups feeling stressed and disconnected. According to Gallup, managers cite increasing job responsibilities, restructuring and budget cuts among the causes leading to a stressed-out workforce.

Hybrid work has contributed to the changing rhythm and pace of our days. The sheer volume of meetings and workload can contribute to burnout. In an effort to get things done, some people skimp on taking time for respite. This can lead to work feeling more transactional, with limited time for creativity, innovation and building strong relationships.

Our days are increasingly filled with video calls rather than face-to-face interactions (see [Living on Screen, page 4](#)). When interactions happen through technology without more human connection, it can leave us feeling disconnected. When people come to the office but their colleagues don't, they can't make the social connections needed to feel a sense of belonging or a shared purpose. They can end up feeling unsupported and isolated, with no sense of community.

*“Navigating uncertainty while caring for our minds, bodies and souls is not a new challenge. But the velocity of change and the disembodied nature of tech may make it very different.”*

**Brené Brown**  
 Living Beyond Human Scale  
 Podcast Series

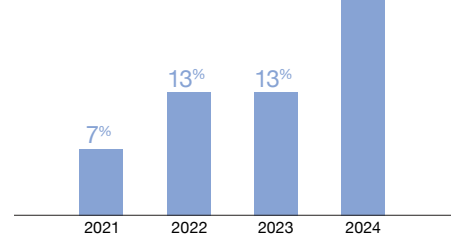
## A better workplace experience

In the article “Move the needle: Wellness at work,” McKinsey Senior Partner Liz Hilton Segel shares why wellbeing should be a focus for business leaders: “Businesses should treat wellbeing as a tangible skill, a critical business input, and a measurable outcome. Wellbeing not only makes for happier, more productive employees, but it’s tied to innovation and organizational success. Employers have the opportunity to move the needle on burnout, to help workers struggling with mental health and wellbeing challenges, and to create the healthiest environments for employees.”

Many organizations have recognized just how important the issue has become. According to a 2024 Steelcase study of global leaders, 38% said employee wellbeing is a priority on which they are placing greater emphasis over the next two years, second only to improving collaboration. The study also reveals a significant increase in the importance of supporting rejuvenation in the next 12 months.

Leaders typically are more likely to spend time rejuvenating, so it’s important to make sure individual contributors have access to, and permission to use rejuvenation spaces. These types of spaces are important for everyone, but particularly important for those who identify as neurodiverse and need to better control sensory experiences.

**Support for rejuvenation at work has tripled in three years**

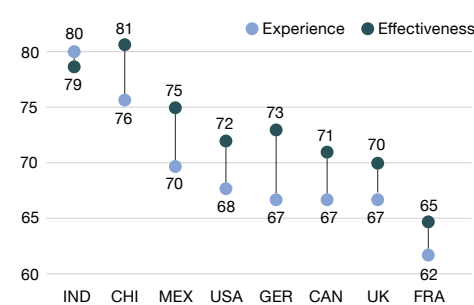


HR leaders are addressing this complex issue through comprehensive employee assistance programs, stress management and mindfulness initiatives, and flexible work options. It’s equally important to nurture a workplace culture that openly discusses mental health and reduces stigma. This helps build a supportive and inclusive environment where employees can thrive. The physical workplace can also help by creating an infrastructure to support and reinforce wellbeing – and even bring joy to your day (see [Work Better Magazine, Spring 2024: Joy at Work](#)) with spaces designed to delight and de-stress. The addition of beautiful objects and natural elements can create a more calming and welcoming feeling to spaces and balance harder-working elements.

### Design for effectiveness & experience

Gensler’s Global Workplace Survey 2024 advises their clients to seek a balance between designing for effectiveness and better employee experiences. They suggest measuring experience – how people feel about the space – in addition to effectiveness and note there’s “an opportunity to design for emotions as well as function.”

**In most countries, workplace experience lags behind space effectiveness**



Used with permission from Gensler Global Workplace Survey 2024.

## A people-first approach

As people continue to adjust to new hybrid schedules where they are expected to be in the office more frequently, and may be feeling a loss of some autonomy, employers can help by removing as many barriers as possible by creating a broad range of spaces and experiences. When people come into the office they need to know their needs and preferences have been addressed and that they’ll be able to find the right types of spaces to do their best work. (see [Inclusive Design in Action on the next page](#)).

### Privacy and spaces to support wellbeing are the top two things people want and expect most from their workplace (2023 Steelcase study).

- ✓ Privacy is often overlooked by employers who prioritize collaboration spaces for hybrid workers.
- ✓ People also need spaces that support them as humans – lactation rooms, private places for people with physical or mental health needs, and quiet rooms for reflection or respite. The office should feel welcoming and safe – designed for everyone to feel like they belong and that their needs have been considered.
- ✓ By incorporating these more human spaces into the workplace, organizations show they value their employees as whole individuals, not just workers. This approach promotes authenticity, builds trust and enhances overall satisfaction, enabling employees to be fully engaged and excel in their work. It’s a win-win.

## Inclusive Design in Action

Every person is unique, with a range of needs, preferences and abilities. The practice of inclusive design considers the full range of human experiences, including people’s ability, language, culture, gender and age. An essential tenet is to include people in the design process who have different lived experiences and listen to their needs – to design with them, and not just for them. This approach to design leads to greater accessibility and helps everyone feel a sense of belonging and know they are valued, empowered and psychologically safe.

The Steelcase Global Talent team recently moved into a new centrally-located space on the company’s Grand Rapids campus, designed to be more accessible and welcoming to employees. Their old space, which was tucked away from busy footpaths and accessible only by team members, had been primarily designed to safeguard confidentiality. The team wanted the new space to help them focus on employee relationships and inclusion.

*“The goal was to find strength in our diversity, bring people to the center of our culture to become trusted partners to our employees. This required us to work in more agile ways and design a space not only for the diversity we have, but for the diversity we hope to foster.”*



**Donna Flynn**  
Chief People Officer,  
Steelcase

A key part of “designing with, not for” was the creation of an Inclusive Design Advisory Group. Throughout the process key decisions were reviewed by this advisory group to ensure the space and experiences addressed the needs of all people, and anyone who may become a Steelcase employee. The majority of the Advisory Group members identified with one or more of the Well Institute’s\* dimensions (disabled, 1st generation immigrant, neurodivergent, racially and/or ethnically underrepresented or underinvested groups, LGBTQ+, primary caregiver and women + girls), and were involved throughout the process to review the design.

Activities included internal and external workshops, accessibility reviews with community partners, prototyping applications and technology, surveys and roundtable discussions. More than 1000 data points were collected from the 100+ residents and non-residents who participated.

“Throughout this process, we worked to uncover barriers and mitigate mismatches,” says Kamara Sudberry, leader, inclusive design. “For many people, the workplace can feel like a mismatch with their capabilities and needs. We looked at everything through a diversity, equity and inclusion lens to ensure our approach considered physical, cognitive and cultural differences.”

Understanding competing priorities helped the team identify pinch-points, like how the space balances the needs for confidentiality and privacy with collaboration and social connection. “By using the inclusive design process, we were able to make informed decisions that kept the wellbeing of our people top of mind without increasing the budget or delaying timelines,” says Sudberry.

\*The Well Institute is an organization dedicated to promoting wellness and health through research, education and community engagement initiatives. The Well dimensions are a framework encompassing various aspects of wellbeing to promote a holistic approach to wellness.





# Community- Based Design

What it is.  
Why you need it.  
How to do it.

We're living through some of the most significant changes in work that people have experienced in generations. And they're changing how we collaborate and use our offices. Generative AI is advancing so quickly it's hard to keep up. Sustainability goals have become critical and companies are responding rapidly, changing practices and creating shared ownership for achieving their goals. Employers are prioritizing mental health, feeling the urgency of its impact even more than physical health. Some of these changes started gradually and then accelerated. Others seemed to spring up all at once. It can feel like a whirlwind that leaves both leaders and employees breathless.

In the midst of so much change, leaders are realizing their workplaces need to do something fundamentally different than in the past. It's hard to know what to do or when to do it. Employees want something better, but better can feel illusive and hard to define.

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**The answer  
may be found  
in community.**

# Communities are two things: places where we live and relationships we build. Community-Based Design serves both.

## Why you need it.

We need community more than ever. “Communities enhance our daily lives — we spend so much of our time living on our screens, yet people report they are drowning in information and lacking in true human engagement,” says Steelcase WorkSpace Futures Research Principal Patricia Kammer. “In an era of proliferating technologies, where time and place are being compromised. As a result greater consideration for environments and experiences that enhance relationships, build trust and foster a deep sense of community will be an imperative for organizations.”

It’s difficult to shift our mindset about offices because we’ve basically done the same thing for over a century. Office design has mostly been about getting things done quickly and efficiently — set up to speed the flow of work. Even the open-office plans that emerged in the mid-20th century, and the rows of tightly packed benches that followed, missed the mark because they followed a “one-size-fits-all” approach that didn’t meet the complex needs of modern organizations or people who wanted to be treated like human beings. But when so much is changing, it’s human nature to cling to what we know and understand. Today, leading organizations are recognizing the need for a more human-centered approach. But how do we get there?

## Tips from Jane

Jane Jacobs, a visionary urban activist of the twentieth century, championed a community-based approach for city development.

She fought against the urban planning power brokers of the day who wanted to divide neighborhoods. She advocated for mixed-use development that added diverse types of spaces and brought neighbors closer together — the further apart people are physically, the further apart they are socially, she argued. Her seminal book, “The Death and Life of Great American Cities,” described converging paths that help people connect and enriched spaces that make it enjoyable to be there. “Dull, inert cities,” she wrote, “contain the seeds of their own destruction and little else. But lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration.”

Malcolm Gladwell also wrote about Jacob’s work and the importance of building a sense of community within the communities where we live. But he went further, suggesting organizations should model workplaces after vibrant cities. “The parallels between neighborhoods and offices are striking,” he wrote. “Who, after all, has a direct interest in creating diverse, vital spaces that foster creativity and serendipity? Employers do.”

In Bowling Alone, author Robert Putnam told us how people are growing apart. His research found we have become increasingly disconnected: We don’t always live in the same community as our family, join clubs or know our neighbors as much anymore. Work is one of the few places where diverse groups of people come together to solve common problems, he noted.

## What it is.

Today, Community-Based Design is a way of thinking about the workplace, grounded in lessons from urban planning that build great places to live (see Tips From Jane above). It’s also a planning methodology that engages people within the community



Gladwell’s story Designs for Working appeared in the New Yorker in December 2000. It reported on a new approach to workplace design developed by Steelcase, which was based on the same principles used to create thriving communities. This approach is even more relevant today.

to better support the way they need to work today and foster their wellbeing. Community-Based Design shapes behaviors; it brings people together through shared experiences, building connection, trust, a sense of purpose and commitment to one another. The result is a vibrant workplace that can easily respond and adapt to changing conditions. This helps build resilience so people can be more engaged and the organization can thrive.

“Community-Based Design is a more human-centered approach that emphasizes inclusion in the process and understanding how people really work,” says Meg Bennett, Steelcase global design principal. “Great cities are a source of inspiration for how to design workplaces that build a sense of community.”

## Urban Planning Meets the Office

Jane Jacobs offered simple, yet insightful, ideas for how to create vibrant cities and neighborhoods that can easily translate to the office:

**Density:** The further apart people are physically, the further apart they are socially. Seek the right balance of bringing people close enough to connect but not feel crowded.

**Diversity:** Blend different types of spaces and different patterns when laying out an office. A cookie-cutter approach can lead to places that are uninspiring and monotonous.

**Short Blocks:** Shorter stretches between spaces are visually more interesting. If you have a longer distance between spaces, create ways to break it up and encourage people to pause or interact along the way.

**Lively Sidewalks:** Create natural gathering spaces like cafés, benches or small gardens that bring people out in the open for relaxation and relationship building.

**Mixed-use:** Cities are more lively when there’s a blend of different functions coming together in one area. Residential, retail, commercial and public spaces, like parks, blended together generate more activity. There’s more energy and it’s more convenient.

**Community Involvement:** Local expertise from the people who live in the community is more valuable than outside “experts.”

Drawing from the diverse places within great cities, Community-Based Design translates those ideas into the workplace: Like a bustling city center that draws people together. Team neighborhoods where people live and work everyday. Business districts where you can generate new ideas and solve problems. Universities and libraries where people learn. And parks or plazas where people go to relax and find respite. All of these places meet multiple needs: they compliment each other, give people choices about where they can do their best work, and support all the different things they do throughout the day.

“People need to feel like they have control over where, when and how they connect with others,” says Libby Sander, professor of organizational behavior at Bond University in Queensland, Australia. Her research confirmed a link between lack of control over the work environment and physical stress markers like heart rate. Providing a diverse range of spaces like those found in thriving cities gives people more control, which reduces stress, notes Sander.

Community-Based Design was developed by Steelcase global researchers and designers beginning over two decades ago, drawing on the work of thought leaders like Jacobs and others who study the impact of place on human behavior. Originally conceived in the 2000s, it pushed back against the prevailing linear planning of cubicles and introduced the idea of diverse spaces arranged in patterns to spark more interaction. This approach and methodology evolved as work, technology and expectations changed. Now it addresses the rapid changes brought on by new patterns of behavior in the workplace: living on screen, the AI supercycle, building a culture to support increasing sustainability goals, and the urgent need to support mental health and wellbeing at work.

“Community-Based Design is more than a metaphor. It’s grounded in research,” explains Bennett. “When we identify patterns of behavior, we can design spaces to support how individuals and teams actually work. We can integrate points of connection, create choices for individual work, and use design to nudge people toward new behaviors that help them feel and work better.”

Bennett notes that this approach is different from ways of planning that focus on hierarchy, efficiency and standardization. “It goes beyond designing a workplace that is efficient and effective. It’s about designing for experiences that foster connection and engagement — how the space affects people. And it considers the unique needs of wellbeing — the mental, physical and emotional health of individuals and teams. That’s how you build community at work.”

*“The parallels between neighborhoods and offices are striking. Who, after all, has a direct interest in creating diverse, vital spaces that foster creativity and serendipity? Employers do.”*

Malcolm Gladwell

Designs for Working, The New Yorker, December 2000

## How to do it.

Community-Based Design uses a three-phase approach to create resilient workplaces that adapt to change:

**Understand:** It begins with engaging members of the community — a diverse group of employees and leaders — to gain a deep understanding of how people actually work. Like the inclusive design principle, “design with, not for,” it involves people with a variety of lived experiences to create a work environment that accommodates a range of abilities, preferences and work experiences. Because organizations have different perspectives about how and when the office is used, it is also important to understand patterns of attendance and mobility.

**Design:** A core principle is to create diverse types of mixed-use spaces that support all the ways people need to work. It incorporates five different areas, or “districts,” inspired by elements within thriving cities. Understanding how often people are in the office, the type of work they do and how they prefer to work will influence choices within each of these areas, including the amount of assigned or shared workstations, the ratio of individual to collaboration spaces, technology requirements and more.

**Measure:** Regular measurement helps the workplace evolve and adapt to change. While measuring efficiency and effectiveness is important, it’s also helpful to check on the affectiveness of a workplace — how it makes people feel. When people feel connection and belonging it leads to a strong sense of community.

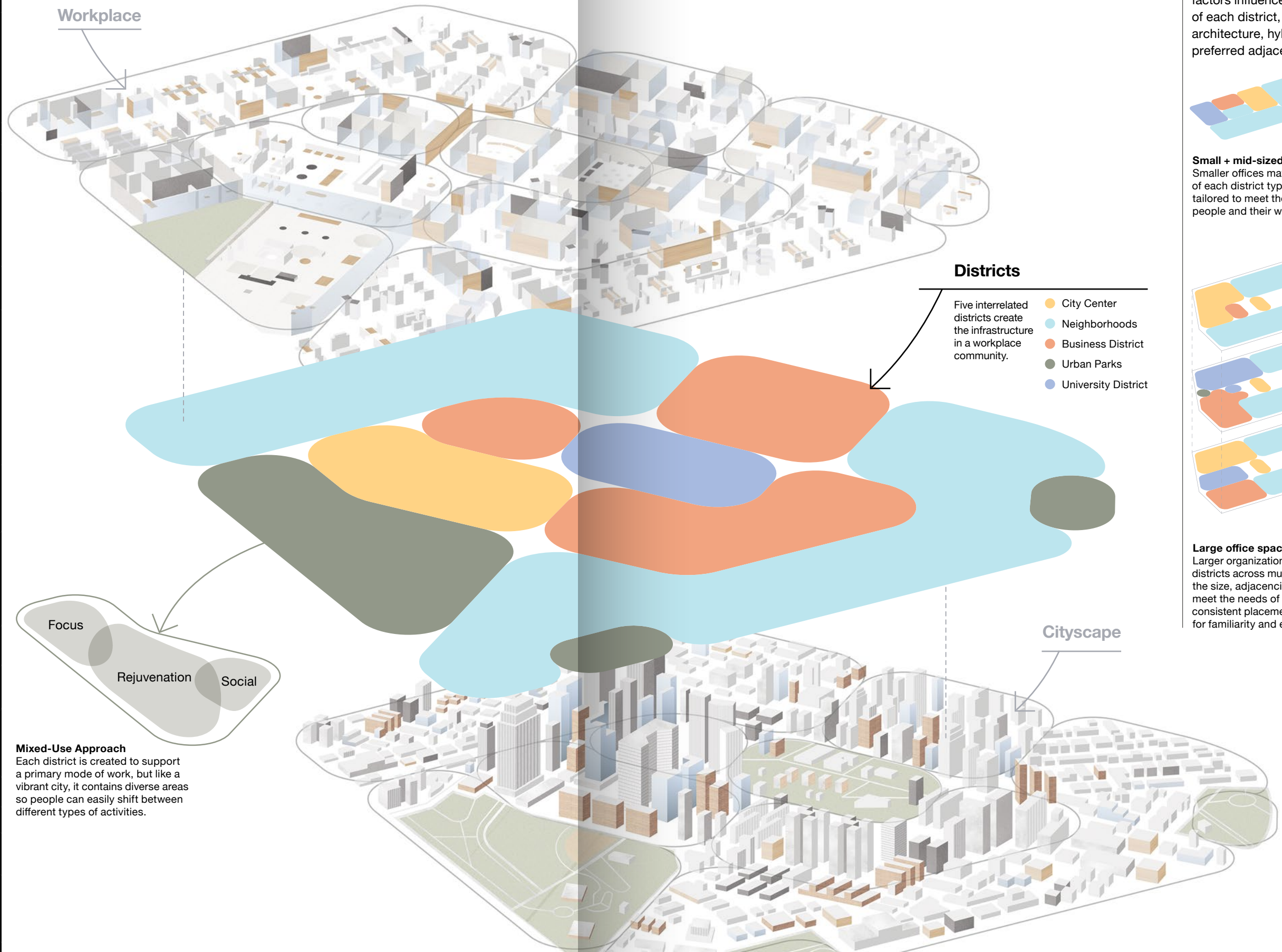
# Building Community at Work

Vibrant cities offer diverse types of spaces that meet people's needs. Inspired by this core tenet, our Community-Based Design methodology is built on five distinct but interrelated and mixed-use districts that can support multiple types of work. Together, these spaces create the physical infrastructure for an inspiring workplace experience: city centers, team neighborhoods, business districts, urban parks and university districts.

Cities include residential areas for people to live and public places, like parks, to gather, relax and linger. Similarly, each district in the office has a specific purpose and can support multiple work modes — focus, collaboration, socialization, learning and rejuvenation. *“These not only create the foundation of community, this concept simplifies the design process by clarifying the types of spaces required and their purpose,”* explains Bennett.

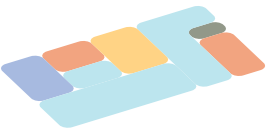
These different districts also create what Eric Klinenberg, author and professor of sociology at New York University calls social infrastructure: the places that shape the way people interact (see page 13). Social infrastructure encourages people to interact more often, which builds stronger relationships, promotes mutual support and increases collaboration.

## Workplace Districts Inspired by Urban Planning

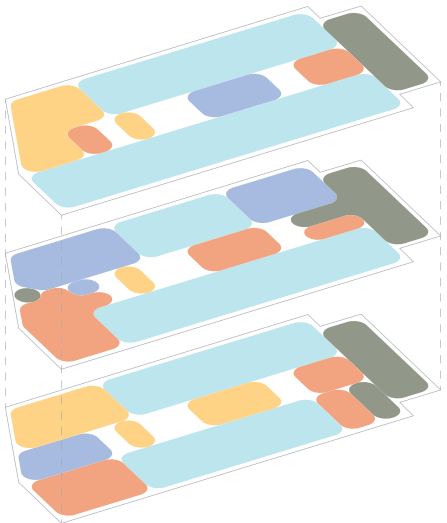


### A Flexible Approach

Vibrant workplaces include all five districts and each is unique based on the organization's needs. Various factors influence the shape and size of each district, such as building architecture, hybrid work policy, preferred adjacencies and culture.



**Small + mid-sized office spaces**  
Smaller offices may only have one of each district type, specifically tailored to meet the needs of the people and their workflow.



**Large office spaces**  
Larger organizations may distribute the districts across multiple floors, varying the size, adjacencies and quantity to meet the needs of the teams. Consider consistent placement of certain elements for familiarity and ease of wayfinding.



# City Center

A social hub that is the heart of the community — a centralized connection point that draws people in to help them build bonds and trust.

Work today has lost a lot of the human connection we all crave. We spend more time on our screens than face-to-face with our peers and that's impacting our wellbeing and our work. The city center can ignite in-person interactions, creating a natural gathering place and promoting social connection. Designed as a central gathering place it serves as a hub for employees to connect and collaborate. It acts as an anchor for the organization: a spatial expression of the company's brand and mission to create shared experiences and values. Ideally, city centers should be located at natural crossroads within the workplace among other shared spaces, to optimize use and convenience. This mixed-use space is where shared amenities and services, such as cafés, tech support and resource centers, can also be found.



The City Center is highly adaptable with fixed elements on the perimeter and flexible settings in the middle. It creates a mixed-use space where people can do different types of work. It can support both individual work and small group collaboration, as well as larger gatherings.

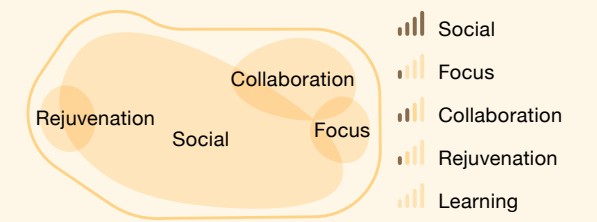
This space is centrally located and brings people together, creating energy and a great vibe. It sets the tone for the rest of the workplace.

The café serves as social infrastructure: it pulls people together and encourages interaction. Gathering over food is important for nurturing relationships.



## How Mixed-use Districts Work

Work Modes Supported



Integrated technology in the center of the space provides an area to share company news and information.

Screens create a more private experience for conversations or focus work within a bustling environment.

Spaces for privacy are essential within social areas so people can easily shift between individual work and collaboration.

Various settings provide a range of postures and options for people to gather or do individual work away from their desk.





# Neighborhoods

A home base for individuals and teams — a place where the heads down work gets done and teams stay connected.

A neighborhood is a team or department's home base. It's where they can be with their people, feel a sense of ownership and express their identity and purpose. Neighborhoods also create the predictability people need to help them plan their day and reduce stress.

A lot of the work people do happens in their neighborhood. The space supports both individual and group work, as well as social connection, collaboration and respite. It provides various levels of privacy and ownership for individual focus or group work and gives teams the flexibility they need to make the space work for their processes. This hard-working environment includes a range of personal spaces where people can control their privacy and comfort, and team spaces where they can easily and quickly connect with their peers one-on-one or in small groups, and share work in process.

Workplaces are made up of several neighborhoods, each uniquely designed to support the specific needs of the team living in it. Whether people work primarily in the office most days or are in the office less frequently will influence how neighborhoods are designed. For example, if most people are in the office most days, neighborhoods may include more owned workstations outfitted with the tools and technology people need to support their work. If people are coming into the office less frequently, a better solution may be shared workstations with more room for individual choice and collaboration, or social spaces to build community.

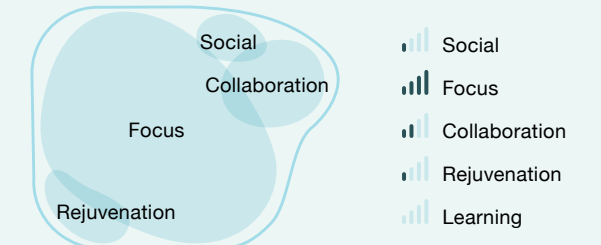


In a city, a neighborhood is where we live and build close relationships with our neighbors. It includes a diverse range of spaces designed to give people privacy, as well as places to gather. Similarly, workplace neighborhoods are where teams do most of their work and develop a sense of belonging.

Neighborhoods include workstations with varying levels of privacy where people can do individual work, as well as social and collaboration areas where they can collaborate or catch up over a cup of coffee.

## How Mixed-use Districts Work

Work Modes Supported



This area provides workstation options with varying levels of privacy for people to choose from.

Nearby pods give people another layer of privacy for phone calls or video meetings, without leaving the area.

Enclosed individual spaces can be used by anyone and support a range of needs: focus work, video calls and respite.

Lockers are essential when workers have unassigned desks, so people have a place to store their belongings.

Unassigned workstations give people a place to work alone, while keeping team members close for impromptu collaboration.

Meeting spaces with integrated technology create an equitable experience for people on both sides of the camera. Located near workstations, it helps people easily switch between focus and group work.

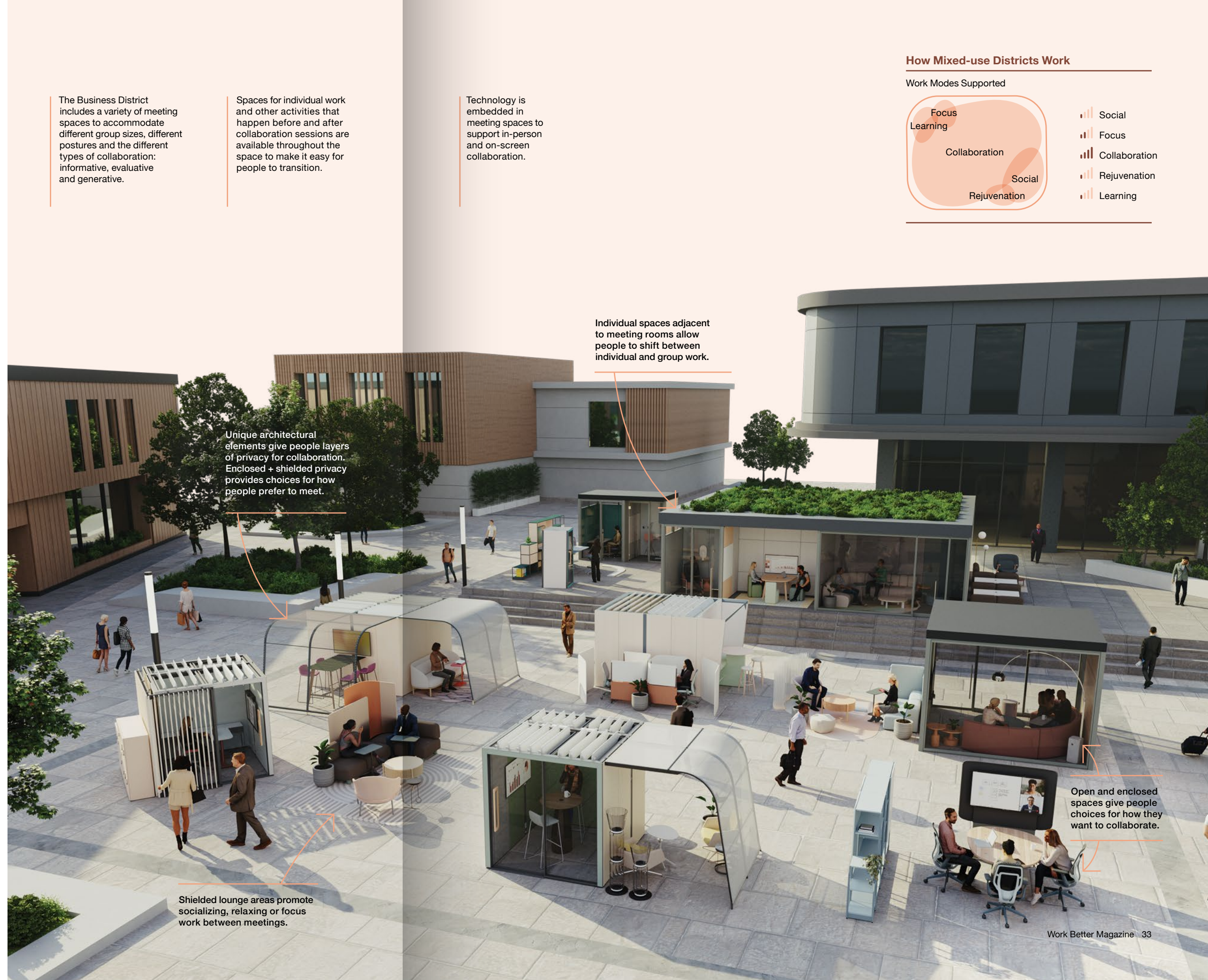




# Business District

A diverse range of shared spaces where people come together to meet, share, brainstorm and collaborate — an environment that sparks creativity and innovation.

Collaboration and creativity are dependent on human interaction, exploration and experimentation. And today, collaboration often happens with both in-person and remote participants, making it more challenging to create effective collaboration spaces. In this business district people have access to a variety of shared spaces designed to support mixed presence, and various team sizes and types of collaboration. Flexible settings and integrated technology make it easier for those physically in the room, as well as virtual participants, to connect equitably and be fully engaged. Adjacent quiet or focus spaces, like pods, allow people to easily switch between group and individual work — critical for effective collaboration and activities that happen before, during and after meetings.



The Business District includes a variety of meeting spaces to accommodate different group sizes, different postures and the different types of collaboration: informative, evaluative and generative.

Spaces for individual work and other activities that happen before and after collaboration sessions are available throughout the space to make it easy for people to transition.

Technology is embedded in meeting spaces to support in-person and on-screen collaboration.

Unique architectural elements give people layers of privacy for collaboration. Enclosed + shielded privacy provides choices for how people prefer to meet.

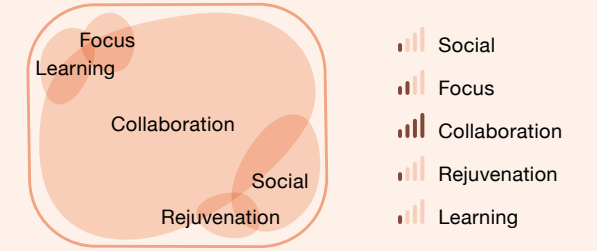
Individual spaces adjacent to meeting rooms allow people to shift between individual and group work.

Shielded lounge areas promote socializing, relaxing or focus work between meetings.

Open and enclosed spaces give people choices for how they want to collaborate.

## How Mixed-use Districts Work

Work Modes Supported





# Urban Parks

Community destinations for people to find refuge and respite — a place to renew and care for their wellbeing.

Because work can be intense, people need places where they can escape, take a break and re-energize. Urban parks provide a shared place for people to disconnect, reset, find inspiration or connect with nature. Settings include individual quiet spaces, where people can control external stimuli, provide places for rest and rejuvenation, help people re-center and think more deeply without distractions. This is especially important when designing for human diversity and neuroinclusion. But not everyone prefers to “get away” alone. For those who prefer to recharge with others, an urban park can also include indoor and outdoor social settings where people can connect.



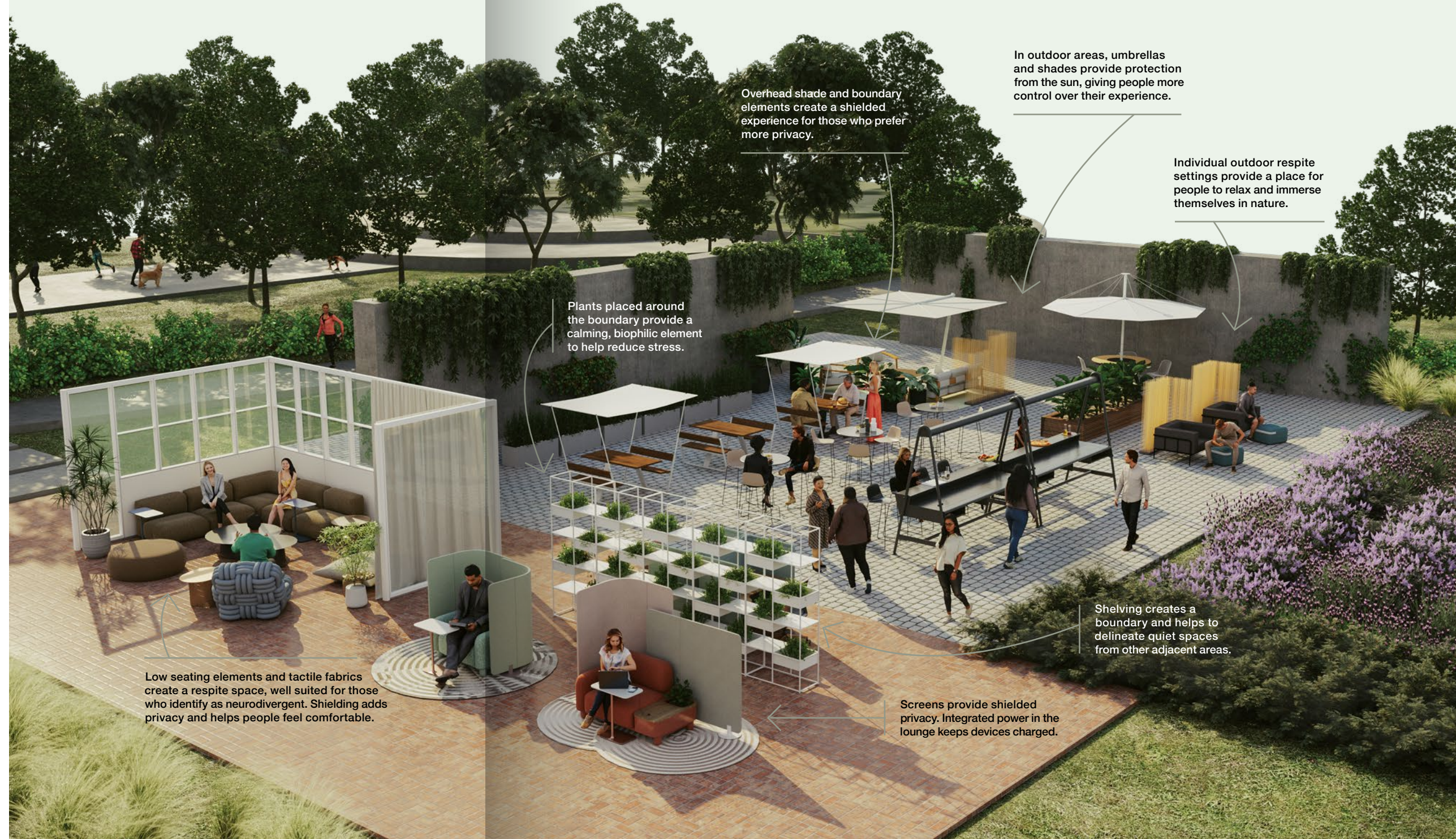
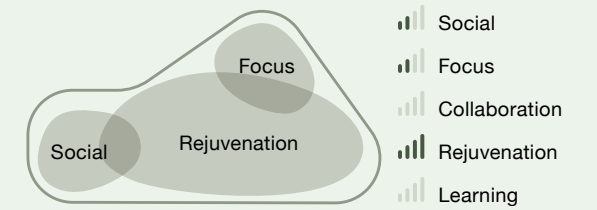
Whether indoor or outdoor, areas for respite should accommodate both individual and group preferences, offering solitude for those who prefer to recharge alone and communal areas for those who thrive on social interaction.

Individual spaces allow for quiet reflection and personal relaxation.

A range of social settings encourage connection, conversation and shared relaxation.

## How Mixed-use Districts Work

Work Modes Supported



Overhead shade and boundary elements create a shielded experience for those who prefer more privacy.

In outdoor areas, umbrellas and shades provide protection from the sun, giving people more control over their experience.

Individual outdoor respite settings provide a place for people to relax and immerse themselves in nature.

Plants placed around the boundary provide a calming, biophilic element to help reduce stress.

Low seating elements and tactile fabrics create a respite space, well suited for those who identify as neurodivergent. Shielding adds privacy and helps people feel comfortable.

Shelving creates a boundary and helps to delineate quiet spaces from other adjacent areas.

Screens provide shielded privacy. Integrated power in the lounge keeps devices charged.



# University District

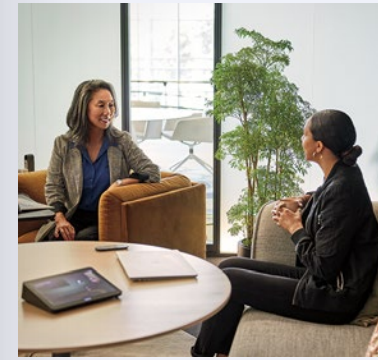
Communal area dedicated to individual and group learning that supports both structured and informal experiences — places to foster a culture of lifelong learning.

We know learning happens everywhere. But with technology changing so quickly and business needs shifting, organizations need to prioritize learning and development to help their teams grow and adapt. Upskilling and continuous learning is especially critical to fuel innovation. Spaces within the university district should enable both in-person and remote participants to come together to learn, share and teach. It also needs to support people keeping up with work activities during learning sessions. These high-performing modular spaces support a range of learning experiences for formal learning and training. Large training rooms are connected by a common space where people can sit together one-on-one and informal knowledge sharing can happen. Small enclaves can support focus work, mentoring and online learning.



In this University District, two large classrooms support formal learning and training. A shared common space between them gives people a place to take a break, check emails or gather as a group before or after training sessions.

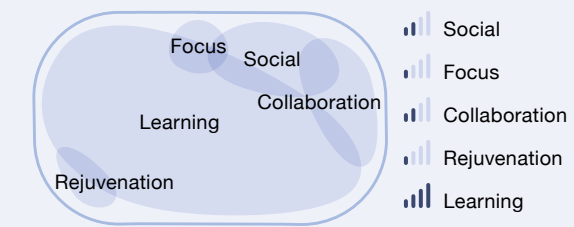
Both classrooms below provide a variety of choices to support different seating postures. Flexible furniture, mobile and fixed markerboards encourage movement.



The classroom on the bottom left can be easily reconfigured to support various size group training sessions, allowing the space to quickly change from one large training space into two smaller spaces.

## How Mixed-use Districts Work

Work Modes Supported



## Community-Based Design: The Way to Work Better

Urban planners understand that great communities are designed with diverse spaces that cater to various aspects of life. Similarly, in the workplace the five districts can create a diverse and inspiring experience where people will feel connected and engaged. The mix and proportion of each district will vary by organization, depending on its hybrid work policy, goals and culture. Because they are mixed-use and flexible, these diverse spaces promote movement, create energy and give people more choices about where and how to work.

Vibrant communities help people and organizations thrive. Jane Jacobs warned cities become “dull and inert” when they’re not designed to truly meet the needs of the people who live there — essentially becoming ghost towns. “But lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration,” she stated.

Organizations risk creating “dull, inert” workplaces if they don’t consider lessons from urban planning. Community-Based Design offers solutions to create dynamic, inspiring workplaces that respond to change — and build a thriving community at work.

For more information about Community-Based Design, contact your local Steelcase representative or authorized dealer.



Nearby enclaves provide a private, distraction-free space for people and enable individual learning.

A large common area gives people a place to connect after a learning session.

Integrated technology allows remote team members to join the class.

# Community at Work

Solutions that bring  
the workplace to life

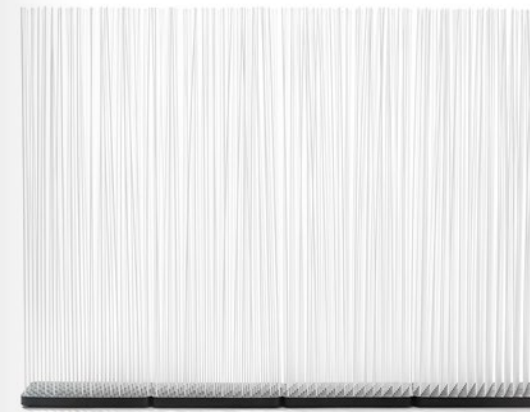


**WorkValet™**  
Steelcase

WorkValet introduces new product enhancements, completing the statement of line and product offering. WorkValet can now be specified with a raised leg base, open shelf, drawer and planter enhancing the aesthetic appeal and functionality.

*“Having a sense of beauty  
in a space is not optional  
if you want your space  
to enhance and bring  
out the best in people.”*

**Libby Sander, Ph.D.**  
MBA Dir. and Asst. Prof. of Organizational  
Behavior at Bond University



**Biophilic Sticks**  
Extremis



*New!*

**Mini Geen-A Table Lamp**  
Kartell



*New!*

**Mama Bear Chair CH78**  
Carl Hansen & Son



*New!*

**Pillar Side Table**  
Bolia



*New!*

**Think®**  
Steelcase

Think Quilted Back is now available in leather, vinyl, and leather alternative materials.



Orangebox Campers & Dens creates environments that have spaces for focus, collaboration and connection. Pairing the freestanding Campers with a variety of accessories defines spaces with varying levels of privacy to support different work modes while elevating circulation paths throughout a floorplan.

Campers  
& dens.  
by Orangebox



*New!*

**Piro Dining Table**  
Bolia



*New!*

**Thierry Tables**  
Kartell



*New!*

**Empath®**  
Steelcase Health

New enhancements include the ability to accommodate sit-to-stand transfer aids and additional locations for drainage bag hangers to fit more clinical needs.



*New!*

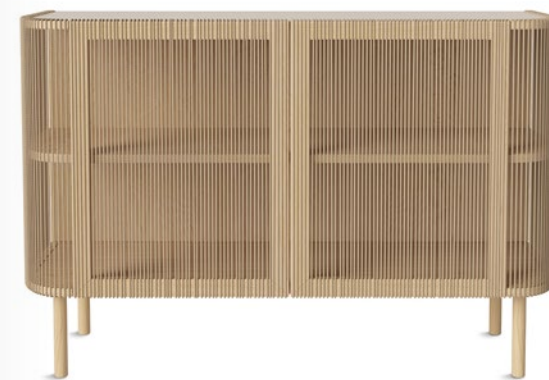
**Migration™ Desking Collection**  
Steelcase

The newly-expanded Migration collection of height-adjustable desks offers boundless possibilities to create a desk uniquely tailored to your budget, aesthetic and performance needs.



*New!*

**Hiray Collection**  
Kartell



*New!*

**Cord Sideboard**  
Bolia



**Embold Seating**  
Steelcase Health



*New!*

**West Elm Work Fulton Guest Chair**  
West Elm



*New!*

**Perxa Chair**  
Vicarbe



**Bindu®**  
Coalesse



*New!*

**Latch Coffee Table**  
Bolia



**Verb® Flip-Top**  
Steelcase Learning

## Steelcase Surface Materials

New surface material colors draw inspiration from the comforts of home and our connection to nature.



*New!*

### Stand In

Steelcase

There are new color options available on Stand In, a water-based polyurethane that does not contain PVC, PFAS, heavy metals or flame retardants. Its coated, grain-design offers a high-performance alternative to leather and is suitable for health and learning environments.



*New!*

### Foundation

Steelcase

Foundation is now available with new color options as well. Foundation is a vinyl that does not contain PFAS, flame retardants or phthalates. It also has a coated, grain-design which offers a high-performance alternative to leather and is suitable for health and learning environments.

# Inspiration

Jane Jacobs championed the idea of cities as living ecosystems, advocating that a community-based approach to city planning and mixed-use neighborhoods are a way to bring out the vibrancy of communities and enrich the lives of those who live there.

*“There is no logic that can be superimposed on the city; people make it, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans.”*

Jane Jacobs  
(1916-2006)



## Steelcase Community of Brands







## About the Cover

This original art blends reality and imagination to represent how lessons from vibrant cities can help create places that work better. Trees and streetscapes merge with spaces for focus or collaboration. People can move easily through boulevards and bustling sidewalks. The composition is intentionally incomplete to encourage the viewer to envision their own community at work. Steelcase art directors, graphic designers and digital artists collaborated on this piece.

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