

Work Better

# WB

Design. Insights. Research.  
Spring 2024

# Joy at Work

Yes, it's possible.

Steelcase

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### Joy at Work

Designing workplaces that help people feel good starts with a focus on their overall wellbeing.

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### Design. Insights. Research. Spring 2024

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# Is Finding Joy at Work Possible?



Researchers Sarah Johnson (far right) and Melanie Redman (middle) review survey research with Work Better Editor In Chief Chris Congdon

*The cap on my tea kettle spout says “Whistle While You Work.” Some mornings I’m too busy to notice it as I rush out the door. And I don’t think about the chipper tune Snow White sings in the 1937 Disney movie as she’s cleaning. Yet the song’s composers had a point.*

Sometimes we can find a little spark of joy in our most mundane tasks if we just approach it with the right mindset — even when we’re cleaning up other people’s messes.

But sometimes the situation calls for more than a happy tune to whistle.

Our most recent global research with employees from all kinds of organizations around the world confirms what many of us feel: People are struggling. Leaders are looking for increases in productivity and innovation. And while workers report their productivity is holding steady, their work-life balance has continued to drop over the past three years. Nearly half say they don’t have the health and energy they need, nor do they find their work interesting or engaging and they are concerned about their mental health (see pg. 2).

With that backdrop, finding joy at work may sound difficult to achieve. But it is possible.

It starts with understanding that creating joy isn’t about making everyone happy every minute of the day — it’s about helping people feel like they matter as human beings and that they and their work have value. Organizations can make a difference by focusing on what people actually need to feel well at work. In fact, simply asking and taking people’s needs into consideration boosts wellbeing.

Leading organizations already pursue a variety of actions and policies to support their employees. They can redesign jobs to give more people more autonomy and control over their work, and help people connect what they do to a larger purpose. Place matters too. Because the reality is that a

physical change in space is a visible and tangible way to shape behavior and communicate to employees that they’re valued. The workplace has an impact on different aspects of wellbeing that we don’t always realize — our bodies, minds and emotions. Our research found that doing an office update actually influences engagement levels.

In this issue, we offer a broad range of ideas and insights for organizations about how to create workplaces that spark joy by addressing essential employee needs. We offer our latest global employee research and ideas from Steelcase designers around the world about how space can promote various dimensions of wellbeing. We explore new spaces that help people manage when real life intersects with work, whether they need to rest, pray or pump. We look at ways space can better support people doing the hard work of high-stakes business transformation or fast-paced manufacturing. And we share some solutions and spaces that just make us happy.

Our goal is to help the world work better — and that includes infusing a little more joy at work.

**Chris Congdon**  
Editor in Chief, Work Better Magazine

# The Wellbeing Dilemma

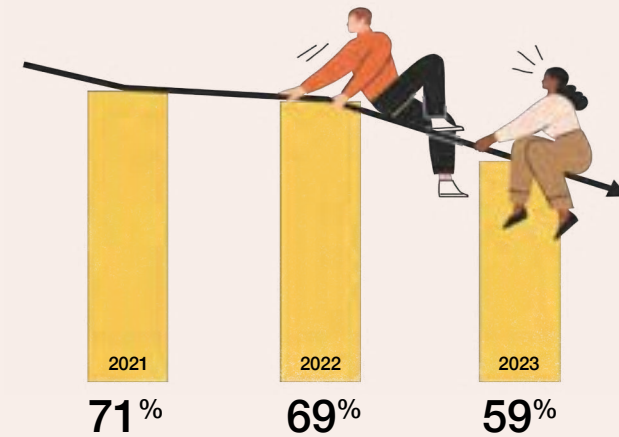
It's a priority, but employees still struggle

Recent findings from Steelcase global research suggest that employees around the world are experiencing a bumpy path after the pandemic. These patterns emerged as dramatic shifts in work upended long-term norms. Leaders rank employee wellbeing as their top priority, but people aren't feeling it — at least not yet. The latest data is clear: Leaders can help change the trajectory by understanding where employees are struggling and making meaningful changes that will actually help improve their wellbeing.

## Work-Life Balance Dropping

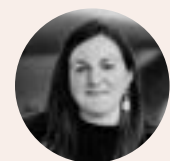
Employees say their productivity is consistent, but satisfaction with their work-life balance has dropped significantly over the last three years.

Percentage of global employees moderately to highly satisfied with their work-life balance:



## About the Research

Steelcase WorkSpace Futures team conducted this study with employees in 11 countries around the world, from a broad range of industries and company sizes. This study is part of an ongoing research series fielded 15 times since 2020, with over 68,925 employees and leaders. This work reflects our commitment to deeply and accurately understanding what people and organizations need.



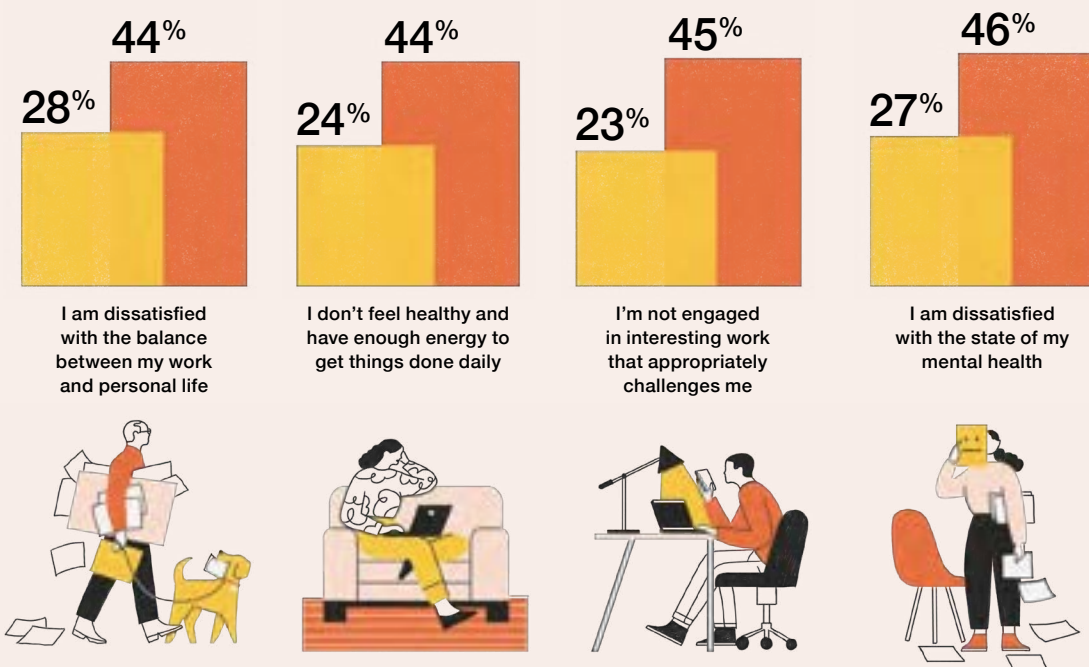
Sarah Johnson  
Senior Researcher



Melanie Redman  
Principal Researcher

## The Employee - Leader Gap

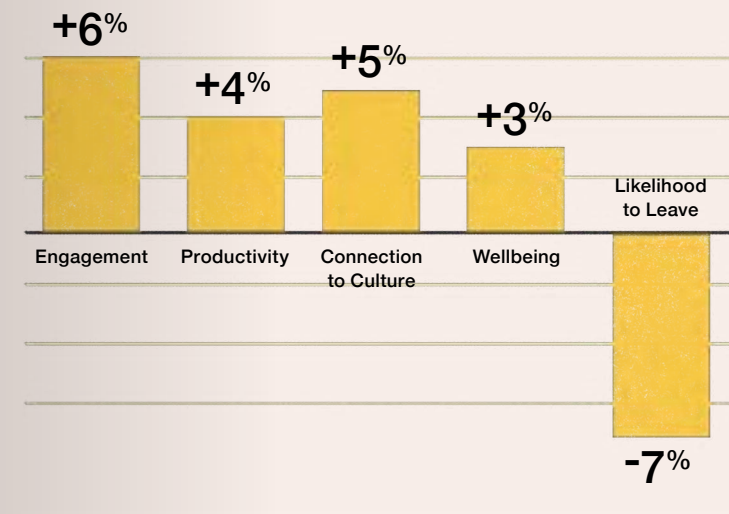
There's a sizable gap between leaders' level of wellbeing at work and how employees are feeling. In fact, employees rate their work-life balance far worse than leaders do. Their energy levels are lower and nearly half are worried about their mental health, compared to less than a third of leaders. Leaders can't assume that if they're feeling good about work their employees are having the same experience.



## Leaders: Showing Up Matters

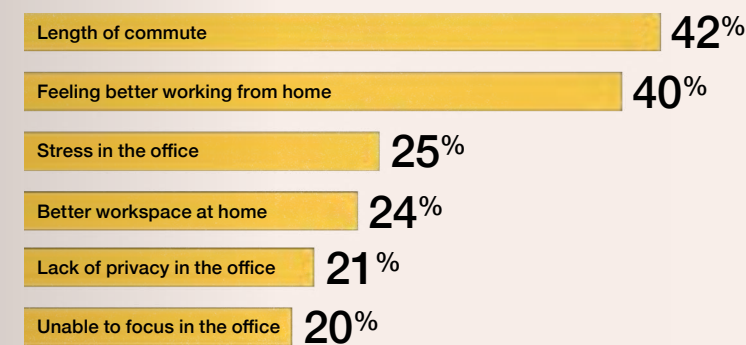
Leaders impact performance simply by being present in the office: There's a clear correlation between how much employees see leaders and how satisfied they are with their workplace experience. When leaders set an example of being fully present at work, it sets the right tone for everyone else.

When leaders are in-person and visible in the office more often, these things get better:



## The Office Can Do Better

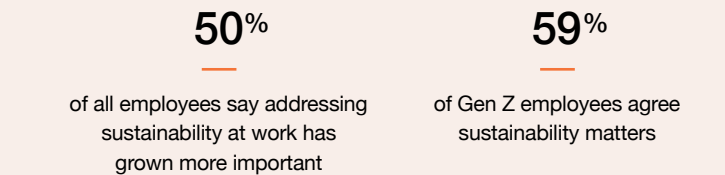
While commute time is difficult to impact, there are plenty of other ways organizations can support people's wellbeing and ability to get work done in the office. Employees say there are things that get in the way of working in the office more often.



## What Employees Want Most

Employees spend most of their time doing individual work so the trend toward unassigned desks and more collaboration spaces must be balanced: with spaces to support their biggest needs: more privacy and wellbeing.

- 1 Privacy
- 2 Spaces that support wellbeing
- 3 Spaces that support virtual collaboration
- 4 Access to enough power
- 5 Flexible furniture to meet my needs



## My Needs Matter

Employees who feel their needs are taken into consideration in workplace design have substantially higher wellbeing scores — up 22%. Just asking people is a small step that can make a big difference.

*“There are other factors that have a significant impact, but feeling like your needs are considered in the design process has the strongest positive correlation to higher wellbeing scores at work.”*

Sarah Johnson  
Senior Researcher



Our commitments:



**Help Communities Thrive**



**Foster Inclusion**



**Act With Integrity**

## Keeping Hope Alive

A recently redesigned area in the Steelcase Global Business Center in Grand Rapids, Mich., is the new workplace for a group of individuals with traumatic brain injuries who are part of an employment program designed to build job skills.

Hope Network is a non-profit and long-term Steelcase partner that offers a wide range of community services, such as workforce development. The new space was reimagined to better support the needs of these workers and includes furniture that allows for posture changes and greater focus. Their work is to label Steelcase hard surface material samples, including paint, plastic and laminates, but their mission reflects Hope Network's guiding phrase, 'Comebacks Happen Here.'



Grand Rapids, Michigan



Cluj, Romania

### Igniting Opportunities

Camp Ignite has hosted more than 380 teens from under-resourced rural communities in Romania, for a five-day camp hosted by Steelcase (in partnership with World Vision) designed to empower youth. Alumni from these camps can now continue their self discovery through two new Steelcase-sponsored programs: Ignite Explorers (a three-week internship program) and Ignite Amplify (a three-month mentorship program that pairs Explorer graduates with Steelcase employees). These programs expose participants to development opportunities and supports the diversity, equity and inclusion commitments at Steelcase. The program attracts new talent and improves employees' development potential.

### Global Design Challenge Takes on Climate Change

How to build a movement for climate action in our communities was the topic of the inaugural Better Is Possible Design Challenge, hosted by the Steelcase Better Futures Community. The one-day, immersive workshop tapped into the collective creativity of our global community, which included Steelcase employees, community partners and dealers in 11 cities worldwide. Participants used design thinking as a framework to explore the problem from different angles, identify unique needs and brainstorm potential solutions. "This design sprint was an opportunity for us to come together and collaborate to find possible solutions for this pressing issue to create a better future," says Social Innovation Manager Mana Taheri.



Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

*Better is possible.*

Doing our best work for the places we all share starts with designing better futures for the wellbeing of people and the planet.



**Reduce Our Carbon Footprint**



**Design for Circularity**



**Choose + Use Materials Responsibly**



Rosenheim, Germany

## Making the Grade

Steelcase has earned an A- from CDP (formerly Carbon Disclosure Project) for its 2023 Climate Change Disclosure — the first and only organization in its industry to achieve this leadership-level score. And in recognition of its ongoing work with suppliers to reduce carbon emissions, Steelcase scored an A on CDP's Supplier Engagement Leaderboard for the fourth year in a row. CDP is a not-for-profit organization that runs the global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states and regions to manage their environmental impacts.

Steelcase investments in renewable energy such as on-site solar power for manufacturing facilities is one way the company is reducing carbon emissions.

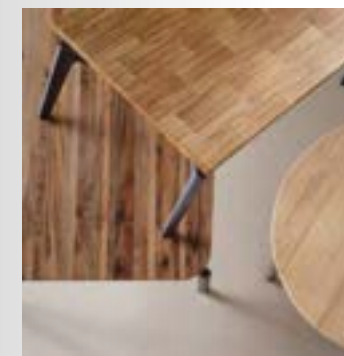


### Doing More Through Collective Action

Steelcase has introduced the Carbon Reduction Leader recognition, acknowledging suppliers who commit to science-based emissions reductions. Among the 31 recipients this year is Ultrafabrics, a maker of high-tech sustainable performance textiles. Their efforts are focused on reducing carbon emissions, materials innovation, circularity and safer chemistry.

### Finding New Purpose

Steelcase teams around the world are looking for new ways to reduce waste going to landfills. The Grand Rapids Wood Plant is giving new purpose to discarded melamine pieces by using them to build shipping pallets — annually, this project will prevent nearly 600,000 pounds of particle board from going to landfills. In Singapore, local organizations are making pencil trays, keychains and side tables with offcut fabric and other excess materials. And in the Sarrebourg, France facility a cross-functional team is converting fabric waste into new raw materials.



### Recycled Tops

Through a new collaboration with ChopValue, recycled chopsticks are used to make tabletops for Bassline tables.



Kentwood, Michigan

### How We're Reducing Our Carbon Footprint

We have more ambitious climate goals at a greater global scale than anyone in our industry.

Read about how we're rapidly reducing emissions from our operations: [steelcase.com/people-planet](https://steelcase.com/people-planet)

# High-Stakes Business Transformation



**Better collaboration spaces help teams deliver results faster**



Top Right: Steelcase Privacy Wall, Steelcase Mackinac Height-Adjustable Desk, West Elm Sterling Chair, Steelcase B-Free Table with Worksurface, Coalesse Montara650 Bar Stool. Middle: Steelcase Ocular Coupe5 Table. Bottom: Steelcase Ocular Arc7 Table, Steelcase Karman Chair

Solving high-stakes problems is complex — in many cases literally transforming how business happens. The work is different from just a few years ago, not only because teams have to make decisions more quickly and deliver results fast, but they're often highly distributed and include external partners.

Business transformation initiatives are accelerating a shift in how teams collaborate, especially as AI promises to upend business models. "Leading companies are moving from 'wait and see' to 'it's time to move,'" says Nina Desrocher, partner, IBM Consulting. "Cross-functional teams need to work together - closely and intentionally — for the highest business transformation returns.

Companies undertaking business transformation make major investments, in their own employees' time and engaging consultants, so any delay comes at a cost. Large hybrid teams explore options, make quick decisions and deploy solutions at a rapid pace. If their technology is cumbersome, spaces are hard to navigate or the two aren't well integrated, it's not only frustrating, but wastes time and money.

## Easy-to-use collaboration spaces

When every hour counts, spaces should enable people's work, not act as a barrier. Steelcase designers have been working with leading IT partners like Microsoft, Logitech, Crestron and Zoom for years to create better spaces for distributed work. Their collaboration has produced a new, prototype team neighborhood at the Steelcase Global Business Center in Grand Rapids, Mich. that braids the physical and digital. Smart technology combines with specially-designed furniture to create a high-performing space for Steelcase employees working alongside IBM and other partners, including PwC and KPMG, on a series of major business transformation projects.

"We worked with leading organizations on complex projects like this all over the world. It makes such a difference when how we work and how the spaces we use are considered as part of the program," says Desrocher. "When we're onsite, we're more effective in how we use time. Those offsite can engage and participate better, so that nobody is left out or behind."

Steve Miller, Steelcase CIO, says the space has become a draw, bringing people into the office to do work better than they could at home.

"Everything is designed very deliberately. People are spending less time battling technology and are finding real satisfaction making progress together," says Miller.

To create the hybrid neighborhood supporting high-performing teams, designers drew on experiences and places people already find easy to use. Moments of delight in the office come in lots of forms: Ease of use, like being able to join a meeting with one button, is especially important when partners need to come and go frequently.

## Designing better spaces for business transformation

Steelcase designers, in collaboration with technology leaders from Microsoft, Logitech and Crestron, found these six insights were essential when designing team neighborhoods for business transformation — or any collaboration today. While business transformation projects don't last forever, ongoing measurement and feedback feeds continuous improvement to support teams as technology and project needs change over time.

- 1 Design space, furniture + tech together**  
Know what technology you're using and design the space to maximize eye-to-eye and eye-to-content connections. Also, consider the location and types of microphones in use. A meeting with bad audio is a bad meeting.
- 2 Create a fluid set of spaces**  
Ensure people can move from individual to teamwork and back again while staying in flow. It should be easy to disconnect, move to the best place for their next task and reconnect.
- 3 Promote impromptu exchanges**  
Provide huddle rooms for two-to-three people with integrated displays and markerboards for quickly sharing information.
- 4 Display persistent information**  
Give each team a place for lightweight and mobile information boards. When it's time to brainstorm or problem solve, just bring the boards with you.
- 5 Encourage co-location**  
Unassigned, bookable spaces create the flexibility needed for visiting partners or cross-functional team members to co-locate, swap ideas and build a more dynamic and inclusive environment.
- 6 Foster larger formal + informal gatherings**  
An open meeting area and a nearby social cafe space can host larger gatherings. Both areas are versatile and can flex based on how many people are in the office.

## Must-Have Products for Business Transformation

**+ Steelcase Roam Collection**  
Microsoft + Steelcase co-developed with Microsoft, this mobile stand lets teams use the new portrait-mode orientation with the Surface Hub 3 to collaborate anywhere, in any way.



**+ Steelcase Flex Active Frames**  
Steelcase Create a hub for hybrid collaboration in the open with a media tower that supports technology and video conferencing tools.



**+ Ocular™ Coupe5**  
Steelcase Unique table shapes cue people where to sit for optimal sightlines for those in the room and remote. And tables are designed to route, house and mount technology needed for video meetings.

**Visit [steelcase.com](https://www.steelcase.com) for more new product offerings**

# The New Power of Privacy

## Why more access to privacy is critical in today's workplace

Hybrid work is taxing our brains in new ways. We're making all sorts of decisions we didn't have to prior to the proliferation of hybrid work. Should I book a space for a meeting? Do I have work that requires focus time? If I'm in meetings are the participants in-office, remote or both? Is it okay to take a video call in the open?

These new questions connect to what people want most now in the workplace, according to Steelcase research. Employees in 11 countries ranked privacy first on their list, with spaces for wellbeing a close second. No surprise, say researchers. Access to privacy and finding places in the office that help us think and feel better are woven tightly together.

## New motivations

To better understand the new demands and motivations surrounding hybrid work, Steelcase researchers in Europe and Asia conducted interviews, diary studies and surveys with hundreds of employees. Their findings are relevant around the world.

"What's new is just how many meetings add distractions in the workplace. People tell us they don't have enough options for privacy, especially as some workplaces shift toward more shared individual spaces," says Andrada Iosif, Steelcase WorkSpace Futures researcher.

## Three privacy factors

Consciously or subconsciously, three factors influence people to seek out more privacy.

### What's around me?

People evaluate the types of spaces available. How much privacy their personal workspace provides. How many people are nearby and what company culture suggests about taking meetings in an open space.

### What am I doing?

Employees consider how much they need to focus on any given task. How confidential is the work? Can I be interrupted? How long is the meeting? What technology do I need? Is the conversation personal?

### How do I feel?

Preferences, self-awareness and mood also influence people. Some days people need a breather or to get "off stage" when situated in a space where others can see and hear. Other people get energized being near colleagues.

Designers say people need a range of privacy solutions everyone can access to give people more control over the stimulation around them, based on the cognitive demands of what they're doing. Options should include spaces with acoustic, visual and territorial privacy.

Privacy is both personal and contributes to productivity. It enables focus, connection with others and rejuvenation. By giving everyone — no matter their role — access to different private spaces, the workplace can help people and support the work they need to do throughout each day.



*"Privacy gives people time to self-reflect and process information and ideas, or thoughts and feelings. Giving people control over the type of privacy they need, lets them create boundaries to help manage their mental wellbeing, especially on high-stress days."*



**Andrada Iosif**  
Steelcase WorkSpace  
Futures Researcher

### High control and demand

People seek greater levels of privacy when they have highly confidential work, need to focus deeply or need some respite — things that require more mental acuity or more control over everyday workplace distractions. In these kinds of moments, employees are most likely to reserve a space that gives them more acoustic and visual privacy.

*Left: Steelcase GroundLab, Steelcase Karman*

### Moderate control and demand

There's a middle ground, too. People may be willing to be seen, but not heard, or vice versa. Or they may want to stay accessible to their teams, but signal that they are working on something that requires heads-down time. Semi-enclosed spaces are a good option for this kind of work, giving people a place that limits distractions, yet lets them be near teammates.

*Left: Orangebox Desk Single Seat unit & Screen*

### Less control and demand

People are more likely to choose an individual space in the open when their work requires less focus or lower cognitive command, like a call they are listening to or sending emails.

*Below: CarbonNeutral® Steelcase Series 1 Air, Steelcase Alexis Collection, Shortcut*



### About the Research

Steelcase WorkSpace Futures teams in APAC & EMEA conducted interviews and diary studies of knowledge workers and a survey focused on small group meetings in fall 2023 in India, Singapore, China, UK, France and Germany.



# A Healing Touch

How Designtex uses neuroaesthetics to create joyful materials

Designing for health environments that foster calmness, safety and assurance while supporting maintenance, hygiene and disinfection is always a challenge. Designtex, a Steelcase brand, sees this challenge as an opportunity to blend form and function using the principles of neuroaesthetics — the study of how the brain is affected by elements like colors, shapes and patterns — to develop fabrics that evoke happiness, joy and delight while being durable in health spaces and beyond.

## Visceral Vibes

Certain patterns and colors stimulate positive emotional states. Our senses — especially vision — take in cues about the environment and immediately formulate a mental response. Scientists say this happens on a subconscious level because we evolved fast visual processing and interpretation for our survival. Humans are known to prefer certain shapes, especially curvilinear and radial patterns, and researchers believe this is because it's easier for our brains to visually process shapes often found in nature.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the ease of visually identifying these patterns creates a sense of calm and can lower stress.

Colors have effects on us, as well. Cool colors, like blue, correlate with feelings of calm and contentment.<sup>2</sup> Warm colors — like orange, pink and yellow — have a strong association with the feeling of joy. For example, more than 75% of subjects in one study on color and emotion linked yellow with joy,<sup>3</sup> and researchers think that's because of our positive associations with sunshine.<sup>4</sup> Any unexpected pop of bright, energetic color can serve as a positive distraction and lead to what author Ingrid Fetell Lee describes

as “a force multiplier for [the] aesthetics of joy, like a concentrated tincture spreading rapidly through a glass of water.” These positive distractions can act as a moment of respite in stressful environments.

Designtex Executive Design Director Sara Balderi is using the principles of neuroaesthetics to design textiles that contain more playful patterns, curvilinear shapes, and energetic colors — materials engineered for around-the-clock use and cleaning required of healthcare and other demanding environments.

“Neuroaesthetics has given us a basis for developing patterns and colors that tune in our innate sensory connections with positive emotions,” Balderi says. “Form, plus function, plus feeling is a guiding principle for this work.”

Designtex works with Steelcase Health to incorporate these new design principles into textiles used in patient and clinician spaces to help bring a new level of warmth and vibrancy to spaces that are otherwise overly institutional.

“Healthcare-appropriate textiles that are both beautiful and durable can play an important role in how these therapeutic, yet hardworking spaces look and feel to all users: patients, care partners, clinicians and staff,” says Beth Bronson, Steelcase Health applications design manager.

<sup>1</sup>*Mind in Architecture: Neuroscience, Embodiment, and the Future of Design*

<sup>2</sup>*Psychological Science Journal: Universal patterns in color-emotion associations are further shaped by linguistic and geographic proximity.*

<sup>3</sup>*College Student Journal: Relationship between color and emotion: a study of college students.*

<sup>4</sup>*Journal of Environmental Psychology: The sun is no fun without rain: Physical environments affect how we feel about yellow across 55 countries.*

Below: Designtex Pentimento



Patricia Koszyl  
Steelcase Interior Design Lead  
Munich

## Material Connection

Many of the things designers are learning about surface materials for the healthcare industry can be applied to other high-touch places like offices and learning environments. Patricia Koszyl, interior design lead in Munich says colors, textures and materiality are trending toward the more natural, sustainable and authentic — with the qualities of home.

*“Customers today are not just looking for functionality — they crave experiences that foster emotional connections between people and their surroundings. This desire for connection fuels opportunities to express personality and values.”*

# Joy

While putting “joy” and “work” in the same sentence may seem contradictory, it’s actually more achievable than you may think.

That’s because joy is an emotion and reflects how we feel in the moment, says Ingrid Fetell Lee, author of *Joyful*. She argues that joy is actually attainable because little things, incremental changes, can spark joy. A fuzzy pillow, a fun lamp, a comfortable chair, a friendly smile — or when the technology in the room actually works — can bring moments of delight. When we experience joy, it’s a signal of thriving. It lets us know we’re on the right track toward overall wellbeing. And while designing joyful spaces can’t make up for toxic work behaviors, organizations can be intentional to create the culture, policies and places that cultivate joy.

Designers — who know that physical spaces can shape our behaviors and perspectives — are also exploring the promise and possibility of what a workplace can do to leave us feeling more energized at the end of each day. They’re asking themselves: What is the most effective way to design spaces that not only help us be productive, but actually spark moments of joy?

# at

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# Work

YES, IT'S POSSIBLE

# Rethinking Wellbeing

## It’s the foundation of joy

Designing workplaces that nurture people and foster moments of delight and joy requires an intentional effort to truly understand what leads to wellbeing. Gyms and healthy food at work are great benefits and part of the equation, but wellbeing runs deeper than that. New research out of the Wellbeing Research Centre indicates interventions in the work experience itself can make the biggest difference.

“Contrary to popular belief, joy is not fluffy,” says Tracy Brower, PhD, author of *The Secrets to Happiness at Work* and Steelcase vice president of Workplace Insights. “Joy can ebb and flow, but a general sense of wellbeing, satisfaction and fulfillment matter — a lot. In fact, these will be key ingredients for organizations to succeed in the future of work.”

There is compelling evidence that joy pays dividends. Kansas State University researchers found happier employees make better decisions and have improved job performance. Greater physical and emotional wellbeing led to reduced costs, sick time and turnover. People who are more engaged and dedicated at work have a more joyful home life, and research in India showed optimism is positively related to job performance and satisfaction.

Steelcase researchers explored various aspects of wellbeing to better understand how physical places can shape behaviors and signal that organizations care about creating the conditions for people to feel better. Different people have different needs based on a wide range of factors.

Six dimensions make up someone’s physical, cognitive and emotional wellbeing — **meaning, authenticity, belonging, optimism, mindfulness and vitality.**

All of these dimensions need to be integrated into the physical workplace and work experience to lead to moments of joy and employee wellbeing.



Above: Coalesse Circa Sofa, Coalesse Bob Coffee Table, Bolia Mera Side Table, Tom Dixon Fat Lounge Chair, Moooi Carpets Liquid Layers Pebble Round Rug, West Elm Work Nolan Side Table, Extremis Sticks Divider, Blu Dot Thataway Sofa, m.a.d. furniture Urban Shelf, Bolia Cosh Armchair  
Photo credit: Jason O’Rear

## Find Meaning

Construct and discover purpose in our lives, starting from within and connecting us to something bigger

As people seek greater connection to who they are and how they spend their lives, the search for purpose becomes more important. People feel more satisfied at work when they know their efforts make a difference to something larger than themselves. When people find meaning in their work, they’re more likely to be engaged. Purpose can come from working on big issues like climate change. But we also find purpose in smaller ways, like understanding how our work ties to the organization’s goals. We want to know that what we do every day makes an impact.

Our workplaces can help people feel a greater sense of purpose by giving them more exposure to new ideas and ways to connect to the wider organization and the community in which they work.

### Places That Help

Shared spaces and walkways intentionally create places where leaders and employees interact both formally and informally to spur spontaneous connections.



## Nurture Optimism

Cultivate a positive mindset, rooted in perseverance, hope and growth

Hope is associated with wellbeing, but employees today are dealing with crisis fatigue. Work-life balance is low while employee stress continues to climb. When organizations help people develop resilience and react to day-to-day challenges in a more positive, constructive way, people are better able to manage stress, be more open-minded and inclusive, and have better workplace connections and results.

The design of the workplace can support people in ways that help them have a positive mindset and greater resilience by demonstrating how employee voices are considered within the organization and embracing failure as part of learning and development.

### Places That Help

Design moments of delight — a window anyone can access, a lounge big enough to kick up your feet, natural materials that warm up a space. Thoughtful details remind people they are considered and cared for.



Above: Coalesse Hosu Lounge Chair, FLOS Tab Floor Lamp

## Cultivate Belonging

Build a feeling of community and be accepted and valued for who you are

There's an opportunity for the office to play a larger role in connecting people of diverse backgrounds in meaningful ways. A sense of belonging leads to trust, empathy, generosity and engagement which is important since our lives outside of work are becoming more insular. Loneliness is a global epidemic (nearly one in four adults in the world report feeling lonely\*). Hybrid work supports flexibility but can be a barrier for people seeking connections.

Making sure people feel included in genuine ways helps them connect to the organization and their colleagues. The types of spaces people have access to make a big difference. For example, compare an office where only executives have access to private spaces to one where anyone can find a place for solitude.

\*Global Meta-Gallup Survey 2023

Below: Viccarbe Cambio Table, Viccarbe Aleta Lounge Chair, Viccarbe Burin Table, Viccarbe Maarten Stool, FLOS Almendra Pendant Light



Below: Social Collection

### Places That Help

Shared common areas and spaces with shelving or displays encourage people to share work and life passions which supports equity and belonging.

Below: Social Collection



## Embrace Authenticity

Create, find and express one's true nature or self

Being open and welcoming to other perspectives, appearances, languages and cultures creates stronger teams and organizations. Yet, in ways it's harder than ever to be real. AI makes identifying what's true more difficult. Underrepresented groups are less likely to return to the office, in part because they are not comfortable being their authentic selves.

Embracing who we really are requires acceptance of ourselves and others. It leads to less burnout, stress and higher engagement, and opens the door to authentic connections. The workplace can help by giving people more agency over their work and encouraging expression.

### Places That Help

Flexible policies and spaces (like workspaces with adjustable privacy wraps, moveable desks and canopy lighting) encourage people to customize how they work.



Above: Steelcase Karman, Steelcase Migration SE Pro



# Promote Mindfulness

Be aware and open to the present moment, ourselves, others and our world

Focusing our minds on the present moment helps us regain a sense of calm and perspective. Digital disruptions are contributing to shorter attention spans and higher stress. People are more aware of their mental health and focused on proactively improving it. Practiced over time, mindfulness strengthens our ability to concentrate and learn, and helps manage stress. This lets us pay more attention to others, build empathy and strengthen connections.

Acknowledge the practice of mindfulness as an important part of many employees' toolkits to remain centered. While this can include a space for meditation or yoga, it can also mean providing places where people can get away from distractions to immerse themselves in a project, let their minds wander to make new connections or even take a nap.

**Places That Help**  
 Encourage refuge and renewal with calm retreat spaces and on-demand access to privacy. When people are tuned into their own emotions, they can be better prepared to express themselves and listen to others.

Below: Coalesse Lagunitas Lounge Seating, Coalesse Personal Table



Above: CarbonNeutral® Steelcase Series 1 Air, Steelcase Alexis Collection

# Foster Vitality

Be healthy and active, in mind, body and spirit

Our physical, mental and emotional health are deeply connected. When people are healthier overall, they are better prepared to bring their best to work and life. Most people are looking for ways to stay energized so that even when they feel tired, it's in a good way.

Access to healthy food, exercise and adequate rest will set the stage for people to perform better at work, but healthful practices should be woven into the workplace and not seen as something people are solely responsible for outside of work.

**Places That Help**  
 Promote regular movement throughout the day with spaces that encourage a variety of postures — perching, sitting, lounging — rather than joining virtually from the desk.

# Designing for Joy

THE EDIT

The contrasts I see in the Asia-Pacific region inspire how I think about designing for a collaboration space that sparks creativity.



Lloyd Thomas  
Singapore

The Asia-Pacific region is diverse and vibrant — filled with juxtapositions that I love to pull into my designs. I travel often and am struck by the contrasts in developing and developed countries that make up our area of the world — places like Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand.

## Ways I Stay Inspired

**Creative sparks:** Playing piano, oil painting, attending the philharmonic orchestra

**Ways to relax:** Yoga helps me clear my mind when I'm stressed.

**Favorite fuel:** I don't drink coffee, but can't live without matcha while I work.

As a student of art and architecture, Lloyd finds inspiration in both the contemporary and classic buildings all around him in the Asia Pacific region.



## Creating spaces to delight and de-stress

We asked a group of our designers from diverse regions to give us their edit on a more joyful workplace. The Steelcase Global Interior Design Practice includes close to 200 professionals who partner with architects and designers to apply research and insights to solutions and workplace experiences that solve problems. Several designers curated go-to solutions for a brighter day at work.

## My Go-To Solutions



**Steelcase Flex Perch Stool**  
Steelcase

Stools cater to expanding and contracting room sizes (letting people pull up and perch), and encourage that mind-body connection for more active engagement.

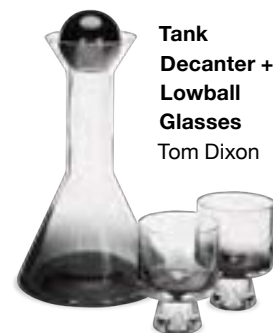
### Design tip

I like to give people a variety of seating to pick from which lets them control how they use the space. Counter-height stools paired with table-height chairs helps people shift between casual connections and active collaboration.

## In the Meadow Bumblebee Rug

Moooli Carpets

A vibrant rug and drinkware bring a welcoming feeling into the space to balance harder-working elements.



**Tank Decanter + Lowball Glasses**  
Tom Dixon

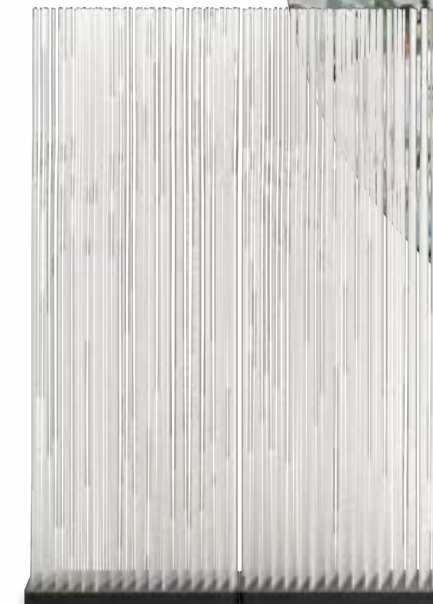
## My Go-To Solutions

**Memento Moooli Medley Dawn Round Rug**  
Moooli Carpets

This rug incorporates wool texture and the animal, floral and cloud-like motifs promote biophilic visuals. It's soft and natural, helping to anchor the space



**Sticks Divider**  
Extremis



**Story Side Table**  
Bolia



**Council Lounge**  
Blu Dot



### Design tip

I'm always looking for the not-so-obvious ways to bring nature in. Use natural materials like wool and wood, and add furniture with organic shapes. Pick a natural color palette and diffused lighting. Plants always help, but don't shy away from nature-infused patterns too.

When I design respite spaces, I'm drawn to the powerful ability nature has to share our experiences.



Amanda Guerrier  
Florida and the Caribbean region

Whether it's a home renovation or a birthday party for one of my two girls, I am a do-it-yourselfer. When I'm not designing, I love to bake and decorate cupcakes. My masters research focused on biophilic design and its influence on wellbeing, so I'm always thinking about how to bring more of nature inside where we spend 90% of our time.

## Ways I Stay Inspired

**Favorite home project:** Renovating the main bathroom in our 1928 bungalow — tile, beadboard and lighting — I did it all and love it.

**Good reads:** Joyful by Ingrid Fetell Lee, A Pattern Language by Christopher Alexander, Murray Silverstein and Sara Ishikawa

**Sweet tooth:** Lots of chocolate. It naturally brings me joy.

The office is one of the few places left where we develop relationships with strangers. We want to design social spaces that encourage people to linger and be themselves.



**Mihai-Vlad Stefan**  
Cluj, Romania

Cluj is on the leading edge of trends in this part of the continent. We're one of the biggest university-centric cities in Romania. Raw talent is constantly coming into the city, keeping things fresh and challenging me to keep up. I'm very aware of not wanting to get stuck in a comfort zone. I'm always observing and keeping an eye on upcoming trends. I like seeing new ways for things to work and fail. It's a way to stay uncomfortable and continue to grow.

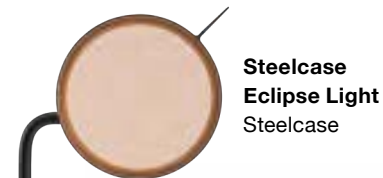
### Ways I Stay Inspired

**Must-have:** Music. The moment music stops, my brain freezes. An electro beat, something instrumental helps me focus.

**Mindfulness practice:** I run a lot. I alter my route all the time so that I don't get too comfortable. As a busy dad of two, running helps me physically and mentally.

**Look up:** Stargazing in my backyard keeps me humble and helps me when I get stuck on a problem. It's a perfect way to reflect and then try a new approach.

### My Go-To Solutions



**Steelcase Eclipse Light**  
Steelcase



**Hosu Lounge Chair**  
Coalesse

I love this chair because it lets whoever is using it decide how they want to sit. Spread out and relax or sit up and focus.

#### Design tip

One way to help people feel like they belong is to let them hack their space and allow them to choose their preferred posture, privacy levels and their view. Look for ways to let people adjust the furniture to fit how they want to work.



**Shape Table**  
Vicarbe

The round form of this table brings an organic and modern element into a space.

**Liquid Layers Flint Rock**  
Moooli Carpets



Learning happens everywhere. When we learn, we're connecting to a bigger purpose and have more optimism about our possibilities and potential. Learning spaces should give people the ability to share ideas with a group as well as work through concepts on their own.



**María Fernanda Madla Martínez**  
Monterrey, Mexico

Located in northeast Mexico, Monterrey is a city with a lot of energy. Many of Mexico's largest companies trace their roots to Monterrey. At the same time, amazing universities attract young people, enriching the culture in this lively area. I tap into that innovation and energy in my designs by creating possibilities through a range of spaces and solutions.

### Ways I Stay Inspired

**Focus trick:** Listening to The Piano Guys

**Overcoming creative blocks:** Playing around with materiality and the look and feel of a space is like a game. My brain relaxes and I get back into flow.

**Favorite decor:** Maximalist decor lets us express our personality. Spaces should look lived in and tell a story.

Maria paints in her free time. The softness of watercolors inspires her designs and the patience her hobby requires helps her practice mindfulness.



### My Go-To Solutions



**Elbrook Table Collection**  
Steelcase Learning

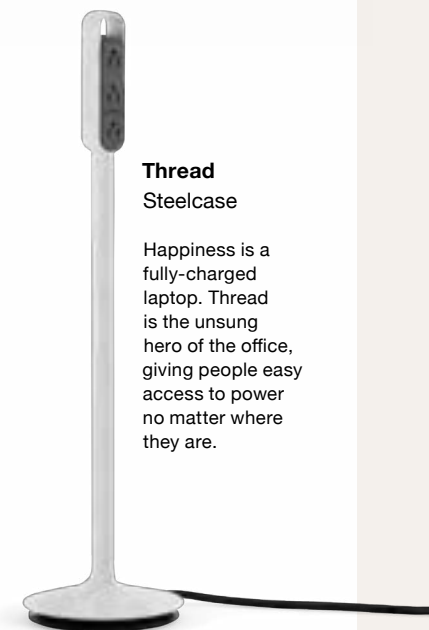
The inset legs and skateboard wheels on this table make it easy for people to move around.



**Steelcase Flex Markerboards + Team Cart**  
Steelcase

#### Design tip

Bring your ideas anywhere they need to go or position your notes to be seen more easily on camera with lightweight and mobile markerboards.



**Thread**  
Steelcase

Happiness is a fully-charged laptop. Thread is the unsung hero of the office, giving people easy access to power no matter where they are.

# Making Space for Well Beings

What do you think about when your alarm goes off in the morning? Everyone carries unique wants and worries. But we all have one thing in common — our humanity — and all of its reality — comes to work with us.

Some leaders encourage people to “bring their whole selves to work,” yet many people don’t feel they can.\* They worry about negative perceptions and potential biases if others see their vulnerabilities. But better workplace design can help alleviate these fears and put people at ease. It can not only signal a culture of acceptance but communicates that the organization actually cares about employees as human beings.

When people have to cover up or downplay parts of their lives and identities, it can be a distraction that takes a toll on how they feel and how they work — negatively impacting their wellbeing, commitment to the organization and job performance.\* There is a growing acknowledgment of the need to support mental health more fully, although many companies focus their wellbeing resources and benefits only on physical health

outcomes. Aside from gyms or meditation rooms, a holistic approach to employee wellbeing and acceptance doesn’t always feel tangible or integrated into the everyday work experience.

Creating a variety of spaces to support employees’ wellbeing in ways that recognize their real life communicates an inclusive and caring culture and also lifts a significant cognitive burden to let people focus more fully on why they are in the office — to do great work and build strong relationships.

Steelcase designers worked with a diverse group of employees who shared their personal experiences at work to create a range of spaces that support their very human needs.

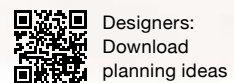
\*Deloitte: Uncovering Culture Report 2023



## Restorative Room

Control the color and light levels in this room for anyone who needs to step away to get more control over the stimulation around them. The tactile lounge acts like a big hug. A side table stores blankets with a nearby tray for fidget spinners. Felt wall tiles help absorb sound and a water feature brings nature in.

*“I’m on the autism spectrum and, while I really like my co-workers, I get overwhelmed if there’s too much interaction. Some noises really startle me.”*



Designers:  
Download  
planning ideas



## Wellness Room

This reservable space with natural light includes a sleeper sofa, laptop table and adjacent bathroom for people who manage their health and need to follow care plans. A built-in sink and storage accommodates medical supplies, personal items, and supports some medical exams.

*“When I was diagnosed with cancer I wanted to keep working, partly as a distraction, and partly because I didn’t want to be written off. The treatments left me wiped out and nauseous — I needed a place to lie down or just have a bathroom to myself.”*



#### Lactation Room

Accessible lactation rooms include lockers, a fridge, sink and microwave for sanitation. Ample surfaces and power for a laptop, pumping equipment and food let people multitask. Furniture supports an upright posture, frosted glass and curtains add privacy while back-painted glass encourages people to leave a message to create community.

*“I’m excited to get back to work after maternity leave, but I’m also tired and anxious. How will I manage nursing and pumping without feeling awkward in the office?”*

#### Reflection Room

This minimalist sanctuary is tailored for diverse spiritual rituals, meditation or quiet reflection. It features separate storage for prayer rugs and meditation mats, wall coverings with acoustic absorption properties, dimmable lighting and exterior shoe storage. Enclosed wash facilities built away from the direction of prayer allow for purification rites and shelving provides storage for religious items.

*“I’ve wanted to pray at work. But I don’t want people wondering why I’m using the bathroom sink to wash before prayer.”*



## Well Played

Gaming at work can conjure up images of laziness, isolation or distractions. But now some organizations are taking cues from universities and leveraging gaming to make work more productive, engaging and just plain fun.

“We often try to power through the day to get more work done, which might not be as effective as taking short breaks for an engaging activity, such as video games, that can help people recharge,” says Michael Rupp, co-author of the Human Factors study on video games at work.

Creating gaming spaces and groups pulls people into the workplace — giving them a reason to show up for much needed connection, even before or after work. A gaming community at Steelcase grew to nearly 200 global colleagues who play online games and Esports, as well as board games, trivia and puzzles, connecting people virtually and in-person.

#### Encouraging a little play at work helps to:

Create community: “You can’t make people be friends. The best you can do is provide the environment in which they do it,” says Robin Dunbar, author of Friends. Friendships at work improve talent retention, and boost trust, engagement, creativity and collaboration.

Allow for authenticity: “Games let us bring who we really are into the workplace,” says Charlie Hunt who along with Pasha Oudsema lead the Gaming Core Team at Steelcase. Hunt says the gaming community helps people feel seen by letting them express their passions.

Give our brains a break: “When work feels stressful, this space lets that weight lift. I see friends and I feel okay to take a mental break,” says Oudsema. Rupp agrees: a short game break helps people reduce cognitive fatigue.

Build diverse teams: When it comes to games, identities like age, role or department don’t determine who can play. People come together based on finding joy, creating connections and networks that otherwise would not exist.

Develop key skills: Today’s gaming skills connect closely to what’s needed for success in the office. In-person and distributed teammates collaborate, communicate, make quick decisions and solve problems — sounds a lot like most days at work, right?

#### A few ideas to help start your gaming community.

##### Find your gaming hub

Good ergonomic chairs, tiered seating and tables, and a comfy lounge give people lots of places to connect and game online or in person.

##### Start with one game night

Don’t pressure yourself to build a community all at once.

##### Have the right intention

Encourage teams and employee resource groups to schedule a game break to build community through play.

##### Offer puzzles and pixels

Survey employees to discover which digital and analog games generate the most interest.

##### Connect via chat

A robust digital chat leads to a vibrant gaming community in person.

A comfortable lounge with a high back provides privacy while stools and a nearby table encourage connections.





Above: Viccarbe Trestle Table

### Inspiring people to slow down

The Goodee philosophy of “less, but better” is grounded in the belief that simplicity and intentionality can lead to a kinder, smarter and more beautiful world. They responsibly source a wide variety of home and work essentials from partners whose values align with their own.

*“We want to inspire people to slow down and question how each item they bring into their home or work environment adds value to their lives.”*

**Byron Peart**  
Co-founder and Designer



Above: Goodee PET Lamps

Below: AMQ Activ Pro 2.0 Height-Adjustable Desk



## Combining Purpose + Design

Startup, sustainable online retailer and member of the Steelcase community of brands in Canada, Goodee finally moved into their new offices after a pandemic delay. The wait forced them to work virtually far longer than they wanted.

Founded in 2019, the Black-owned, Certified B Corp\* certified e-commerce platform was beginning to gain momentum when the pandemic hit. “As a young startup, the inability to work together was extremely challenging for us,” says owner and designer Byron Peart, who co-founded Goodee with twin brother and designer Dexter Peart (pictured left).

“You can’t do good work, you can’t be your fullest self if you don’t feel like you belong and are part of something,” explains Peart. “Where you work is a reflection of your company and it’s where people can feel a sense of belonging. We designed our new office to reflect our culture and values and help people feel connected to the company and to each other. We don’t think of it as just an office, we naturally think of it as our home, as well.”



### Connecting place with purpose

The company’s dedication to preserving traditional crafts is celebrated throughout the space. The office is filled with many of the products Goodee curates, helping to keep the people and communities behind its products top of mind to its employees, brand partners and suppliers. “By surrounding ourselves with our own products we are continually reminding our community of our purpose,” explains Peart.

Its purpose is also reflected by their choice of location — a restored wool-spinning factory in Montreal’s historic Complexe Dompark building which is managed by a B Corp certified company. “This building is driven by the same values of who we are and there is the added advantage that we get to work alongside other B Corps,” says Peart. “I can’t tell you how valuable and inspiring it is for us to come here everyday and be surrounded by this community of like-minded people.”

\*Certified B Corporations are businesses that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. As of August 2023, there were 7,351 certified B Corporations across 161 industries in 92 countries.

# Embracing the Human Factor

## Creating people-centered industrial spaces

The industrial sector is booming globally, fueled primarily by the expansion of e-commerce and nearshoring initiatives, where companies are relocating production closer to their customers to minimize supply chain disruptions. Competition for skilled talent is intense, as thousands of new manufacturing, distribution and warehousing facilities are popping up. But with turnover rates as high as 60%, organizations are struggling.

### The Nearshoring Phenomena

ABB's 2022 survey of US and European business leaders revealed that 74% of European and 70% of U.S. businesses are planning to bring operations closer to their markets to build supply chain resilience. Countries with relatively low labor costs and geographical proximity to the US and Europe, such as Mexico, Turkey and Morocco, are seeing growth in the industrial sector.

Industrial spaces are primarily designed with a focus on efficiency, safety and profitability.

They are hard working, but often uninspiring, dark and noisy, and do not provide people with pleasant places where they can take a break, meet with their leader and other colleagues, make a private phone call or find a moment of respite. But, as a recent Gallup poll shows, employees who feel their company cares about their wellbeing are less likely to search for a new job. The opportunity for leaders is to rethink their manufacturing or warehouse spaces to demonstrate a focus on employee wellbeing.

### Companies taking action

Employees at Bosch's facility in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, can feel the difference since the global automotive company renovated

its manufacturing facility to better support its employees. "As we grew we knew we would need to make changes to our facility," says Stephan Fischer, Bosch vice president of manufacturing. "The work environments had room for improvement — there was a physical separation between manufacturing people and office people, especially with managers, and it was not good for them or the company. We needed to give everyone access to different types of spaces to do their work and for their wellbeing."

Changes included the addition of large windows to improve visibility and transparency between people in the office and factory to build trust and culture. To create a more inclusive and inspiring work environment, Bosch redesigned the outdoor area, added small meeting rooms, enclosed booths and a designated computer area. Original art pieces are featured throughout the building to reflect the company's values.

### Designing better experiences

Similar changes are happening at PepsiCo. "There's a huge focus on the frontline right now. We are designing our supply chain sites in line with our office locations," says PepsiCo Global Workplace Strategy & Design Lead Kristina Alfonso. "We want to make sure that we are creating spaces where people would want to come to work. It's important to provide nice working areas, break rooms, lockers, changerooms, mother's rooms and bathrooms. These spaces are important to our associates."

Steelcase is also rethinking its industrial spaces. "One of the biggest changes we've made is to co-locate our cross-functional teams with production in our plants," says Robert Hendriksen, director, U.S. manufacturing. "By bringing quality and engineering people closer to where the work is performed they can better serve the operators. We're also being more transparent by sharing performance information. It feels more like a partnership — everyone feels valued and that's building trust."

Steelcase found gaming spaces that employees can use during breaks and before and after work (see Well Played, pg. 25) can help build comradery, create a stronger culture and help people decompress. The company is also providing massage services, access to onsite health professionals and other wellbeing resources. The Steelcase plant in Reynosa, Mexico added sunrooms with access to natural light, enclosed booths, break spaces and small meeting rooms. At its plant in Pune, India, an on-site daycare recently opened and mother's rooms were added to support working parents.

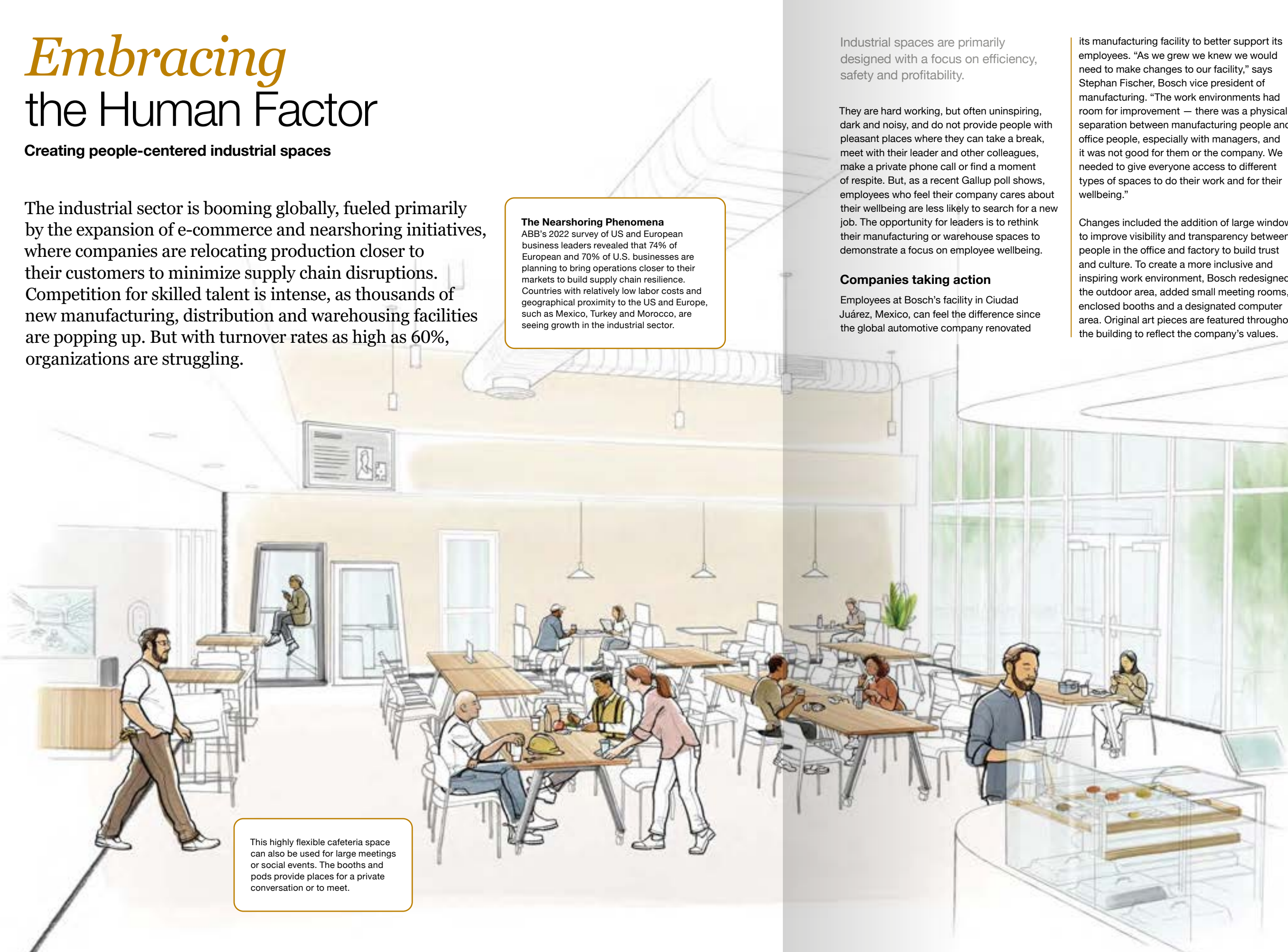
### Spaces for me + we

Steelcase designers suggest including the following spaces to help people feel and work better:

**Multi-functional social spaces** designed with pleasant aesthetics but durable materials to bring people together, eat a meal, take a break and rejuvenate, as well as support large group meetings, training and gaming. Technology and analog tools help keep employees informed.

**Private and focus spaces** (enclosed or open areas with shielding) conveniently located, where they can connect with leaders, have a private conversation, check email, take an on-line training course or a personal phone call.

**Outdoor spaces** that provide adequate shade and furniture where people can eat, relax or just get some fresh air and rejuvenate. This is



This highly flexible cafeteria space can also be used for large meetings or social events. The booths and pods provide places for a private conversation or to meet.



especially important for people who work in buildings without much access to natural light. Walking paths and areas for sporting activities are great ways to encourage movement and exercise.

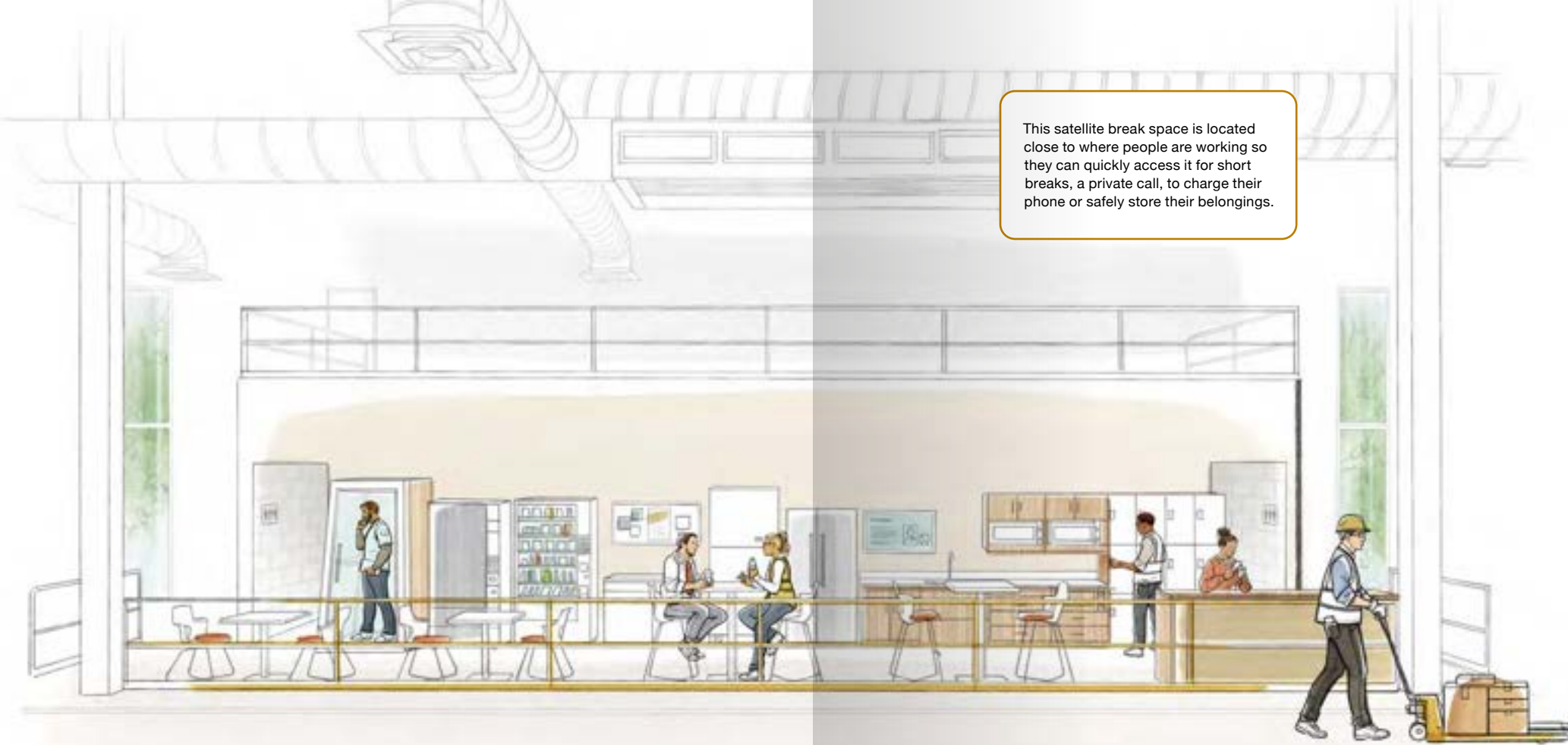
**Wellbeing hubs**, which include a variety of smaller naturally calming spaces, can be used for multiple needs: a short nap, to pray or be alone, get a massage or to give nursing parents a clean, private place to pump.

**Satellite break spaces** closer to people's work areas for shorter breaks and a place to safely store their belongings, grab a snack, charge their phone or catch up with colleagues.

**Collaboration spaces** for daily stand-up and status meetings or to problem solve. Equip space with technology to bring in remote team members and include analog tools, such as whiteboards, to make important information visible.

These diverse kinds of spaces are starting to emerge (see *Making Space For Well Beings*, pg. 22) and they're making a difference to both people who work there and to the organization. "We really surprised our people with our new space," says Fischer. "They see it as a reward for their hard work. It's making a great first impression with new workers and it has also led us to more economical success."

Daily stand-ups and other meetings can be held in this enclosed collaboration space, located adjacent to the production area. Technology allows remote participants to join and whiteboards make work visible.



Designers:  
Download  
planning ideas

- Design Tips**
- Furniture**
- Consider aesthetics as well as durability
  - Provide access to power in break areas and social spaces
  - Locate enclosed booths near work areas
  - Locate lockers near work areas
  - Design for flexibility
- Lighting**
- Provide access to natural light
  - Swap fluorescent lights with warmer lighting in social spaces
- Color, Biophilia + Materiality**
- Warm up spaces with biophilic elements and color on furniture and walls
  - Consider darker colors for spaces that easily get dirty or dusty
  - Choose easily wipeable and cleanable materials and finishes for furniture and non-slip flooring

## Help Spread Joy at Work

Keep the conversation going about how to find, create and design moments of joy at work. Subscribe to the Work Better podcast — where we think about work and ways to make it better — anywhere you listen and share an episode with a friend.

S4:E1  
**Sparking Joy at Work** with Ingrid Fetell Lee

S4:E2  
**Is Our Attitude About Work Broken?** with Barry Schwartz

S4:E3  
**Creating a Brain Healthy Workplace** with Upali Nanda

S4:E4  
**The Science of “Aha!” Moments** with Alex Soojung-Kim Pang

S4:E5  
**Why You Need More Women on Teams** with Anita Woolley

S4:E6  
**Embracing How Different Our Brains Are** with Elena Sabinson

S4:E7  
**Breaking Our Obsession with Generations** with Mauro Guillén

S4:E8  
**Seriously, We Need More Humor at Work** with Jennifer Aaker + Naomi Bagdonas

Episodes publish weekly beginning April 23, 2024.

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LISTEN ANYWHERE

# Joy Unboxed

Products That Will Make Your Day

It may come as no surprise that when we're surrounded by things we love, we feel more inspired, more motivated, and more energized — we're happier.

As Ingrid Fetell Lee, author of Joyful, says, "The workplace was designed for the mind. It was designed to be a rational place with no distractions, where you came and got work done and that was the space. Now we understand that a lot of our productivity has to do with how we feel physically and our emotions. All of those things are connected."

Steelcase and our community of brands bring together an expansive range of solutions to "unbox" joy unique to each of us. In offering a range of options that invite boundless possibilities, these solutions infuse the office with pockets of delight that collectively contribute to a more positive, productive and, well, happier environment.



*New!*

**Coalesse Ensemble Lounge System**  
Coalesse

Designed for gathering that really works. An ingenious back with continuous adjustable postures comes together with endless configurations of color, material and companion screens — giving you intuitive performance, infinite expression and universal, fluid modularity.



*New!*

**Dovetail by Designtex**  
Steelcase



**Table Power Enhancements**  
Vicarbe

Power is now available as a standard option in the Americas on the popular Burin, Foro and Trestle tables.



*New!*

**Bento Sofa**  
m.a.d



*New!*

**Noha Seating**  
Vicarbe



*New!*

**Steelcase Karman™ High Back**  
Steelcase



*New!*

**Mediterranean Essence**  
Vicarbe



**AllowMe**  
Orangebox

## Steelcase Community of Brands

DESIGNTEX

coalesse

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LEARNING

AMQ

vicarbe

Smith System

zoom

Steelcase

Microsoft

W  
WENDBERO

Bolia.com

TAIGA

Commune

m.a.d.

logitech

Polyvision

grado

segis

HALCON



*New!*

**Social Collection**

m.a.d. furniture design x Steelcase

We're reimagining communal spaces with this exclusive collection from m.a.d. The fun natural hues and organic soft detail makes this a joyful addition to any space.



**Ace**  
Vicarbe



**Dragonfly**  
Segis



**Petal**  
m.a.d furniture design



**Capri Chair**  
m.a.d furniture design



**Sling outdoor chair**  
m.a.d furniture design



**Piper Forest Sofa**  
m.a.d furniture design



**Camel**  
Segis



**Collar Lounge chair**  
Wendelbo

# Creating the new Gathering Place

Gathering is one of the great reasons to be at work — but how well do gathering places actually work for the people who use them? What kind of design innovations would help make the experience of working together feel more natural, more delightful?

As one of the industry's original ancillary design brands, Coalesse has always studied these questions to create enduring modern furnishings for all the places where people connect and work. Building on years of research and studio experimentation, the Coalesse Design Group set out to examine where people want to be when doing social, informal work. Designers Markus Marschall and Florian Schulz envisioned a novel seating landscape that brings serious performance together with the emotive draw of beautiful, well-crafted furniture.

Markus and Florian joined us from the Coalesse Studio in Munich to discuss creating Coalesse Ensemble — the new gathering place.

**Work Better: How did the design process for Coalesse Ensemble begin? Was there a key insight that set you on a path?**

**Markus Marschall:** We received Steelcase research that told us what people wanted of their time in the office, which included to meet friends, socialize, do some creative work...to gather. That got us thinking about what would make it easier to enjoy that experience with comfort and high performance at the same time.

**Florian Schulz:** Along with research we bring people in and keep their needs at the center of everything. Design decisions are often emotional — what will make you love a piece — but at the same time we ground our work in data.

**MM:** So, we asked, what new behaviors happen when you take a meeting room down to a lounge level? You'd get the feeling of conversations

happening in your own home, but with a seat that is more supportive, a bit higher than a casual sofa. And also a bit firmer. That allows you to be in a lounge position for several hours of working, without slouching or sinking.

**WB: How did landscape and nature become a specific part of the design concept?**

**FS:** We always consider biophilia and wondered if a lounge setting could be like a river winding through a space, or rolling hills. That led to rounded shapes that can meander, both in length and height. From the beginning this was about removing sharp edges and angles and creating a natural escape or oasis with the furniture.

**MM:** We wanted to break up all the strict lines, grids and straight surfaces in workspaces in a more organic or irregular way. And just like nature that's never the same, you can use these pieces in endless, unique ways.

**FS:** This notion of landscape gave us the scenery of a 360-degree view front and back, high and low, which helps create the rhythms of a more informal space. Softer geography replaces stiff geometry.

**MM:** We just kept making everything rounder and rounder — we wanted the furniture to feel unrestrained and happy.

**WB: How do the design details deliver on this idea of gathering that works?**

**MM:** It all starts with posture. We wanted to perfect a performance back that isn't limited to one or two positions and make the adjustment super intuitive to locate and use, with a very simple strap, nothing hard or mechanical.

**FS:** Same with the upholstery. It's very comfortable, but not as soft or deep as a residential lounge, so that you don't fall into it. And then the screens can be added anywhere, in any combination, to add privacy.



**WB: How does Coalesse Ensemble come together in different kinds of spaces?**

**FS:** It's so incredibly modular. There's no standard configuration. Designers and companies can add to Coalesse Ensemble over time because everything fits universally. You can build a winding lounge but just as easily a booth or a nest and rebuild with any of the elements as needs change.

**MM:** There's infinite expression, based on how many and which pieces you combine, nearly unlimited ways to apply color and highlight material. The round forms are easier to pair with other products and collections.

**FS:** We wanted to give designers an inspiring kit of parts that would allow them to create endless configurations. You can swap out the knit sleeves of the screens to refresh a space and reorganize the modules.

**WB: Ensemble means together. What does that imply for you?**

**MM:** It's about how these pieces naturally create places where we love to drop in and be together, that also really work for us.

**FS:** Coalesse Ensemble is about building relationships, and that's what we're here to do.



Every feature in Coalesse Ensemble has been engineered to support the body simply and effortlessly. A performance back with a deceptively simple pull strap create continuous adjustable postures, ensuring the most optimal, comfortable interactions between furniture and body.

# Connecting to Culture

How ANSR in India uses the workplace to bring distributed teams closer together

What is the purpose of the office? This question has been a hot topic of conversation over the past few years in the media, and among business leaders who are continuing to make significant investments in space to reimagine how it can better support people who are now working so differently.

Among the challenges is the rise in distributed work and the impact it is having on companies' cultures. "Global organizations need to help employees understand the business and the culture they are part of," says ANSR CEO and Founder Lalit Ahuja. "To succeed, it's critical they make their company's brand and culture tangible for global distributed teams."

For the past 17 years Ahuja has been helping global organizations digitally transform their businesses by setting up global innovation centers in talent-rich locations, such as India. ANSR (pronounced answer) simplifies the process of setting up and operating distributed

Below: Steelcase Karman Chair, Coalesse Portrero415 Conference Table



Above: Mango Lounge Chair, Floema Table, Lilin Sofa - Wendelbo (available in Asia-Pacific)

global teams by providing talent management services, operations support and real estate solutions. It has opened more than 100 locations for companies such as Target, Wells Fargo, PepsiCo, FedEx, Lowes, 3M and Delta Airlines, which were all undergoing business transformation and seeking to develop their own in-house IT talent.

## Making it real

According to Ahuja, for companies like these, the workplace is even more important today because it has to make up for so much now that work is so distributed. "No matter where employees are located, they need to identify as part of that company and that requires bringing their culture to their office environment. You can't be Target or Delta Airlines if your employees don't feel connected to your culture. Making this connection is the most important role of the workplace, today," explains Ahuja.

"The workplace has to make the business of a company real to an employee so they can be influenced by what the company does and get a sense of pride by bringing the company's culture and values, its products and services, and its customers to life in the work environment."

ANSR recently opened their new Experience Centre in Bangalore where organizations can experiment and prototype different ways to use space to enable culture. Ahuja likens it to a home improvement store where people can self discover what they want their offices to feel like.

## Inspiring people

People come to the office to collaborate, to learn, to build relationships and to celebrate, so the right kinds of spaces and amenities are key, says Ahuja. Spaces such as cafes with healthy food options, lounges, training rooms, meeting rooms, wellness spaces, such as mother's rooms or medical centers where you can get minor medical care, and gyms are becoming increasingly important.

"We have found a direct correlation between engagement, retention, productivity and how inspiring people find the office," says Ahuja. "Workplaces need to be immersive and experiential. Companies need to put in an extra effort to design workspaces that will inspire people. We encourage our clients not to cut corners, to be generous with space, with amenities and with materials."



## Introducing Dr. Upali Nanda

Global Practice Director, Research and Partner at HKS Architects

Society as a whole seems to have gotten better at prioritizing mental health. But Dr. Upali Nanda argues we can do better. Just like going to a gym for physical health, we need to do more to be proactive about brain health.

### Work Better: Why are you focusing on brain healthy workplaces?

**Upali Nanda:** Brain health allows a person to realize their full potential throughout their life. The World Health Organization defines brain health as the state of brain functioning across cognitive, sensory, social-emotional, behavioral and motor domains. As a society, we put a lot of emphasis on physical health and fitness to prevent disease. The concept of brain health gets us to cognitive fitness to stave off mental health disorders, chronic stress, acute depression and dementia.

### WB: Tell us about the brain healthy workplaces pilot you're running in Atlanta.

**UN:** We are working with the Center for Brain Health. Our approach is that your brain needs to be trained just like your body. Not only does it need the right places for the right activities, but we need training in how and when to use them. Through different strategies, employees can improve their focus and prioritize important tasks. Then, we ask them to use the environments that best support their tasks.



Hear more of our conversation with Upali in our Work Better podcast. Season 4 launches April 23 anywhere you get your podcasts.

### WB: You say people can learn how to break workstation addiction. What does that mean?

**UP:** Our work is distributed. We spend nearly half our day on focus work and half collaborating. But we spend 70% of our time at one workstation. Why? Our places are trying to do too much and it's creating cognitive chaos. You don't do one kind of work throughout the day, so why are you always going to one place that's not the most conducive?

### WB: How do you help people change their behavior at work?

**UP:** We are really trying to get our employees to think about designing their time before they decide on a place. What do you want to achieve? What do you want to walk away with? And then go there, instead of thinking that you can stay in one place and all those experiences will come to you.

### WB: You describe brain healthy workplaces as enriched environments. What does that look like?

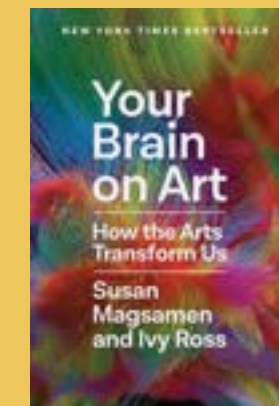
**UN:** An enriched environment provides motor, sensory, social and cognitive stimulation to give the brain something to engage with. Each time, these stimulations create new connections. Your brain can literally change physiologically. In a workplace, you need to focus, socially connect, collaborate, ideate and rest. An enriched environment includes movement and stimulation for the senses to meet these elements.

## Last Words

We've done ourselves a disservice in talking about wellbeing in terms of yoga mats and respite. It's become a very narrow definition. There's a broader definition to flourish to our maximum potential. To do that, you have to invest in your brain.

### What Upali's Reading Now

Welcome to Your World by Sarah Williams Goldhagen  
Your Brain on Art by Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross



# World of Learning

Spaces intentionally designed to engage minds, create connection, foster wellbeing and activate the environment can create the conditions for students to thrive within — and beyond — the classroom. Educators and learners all around the world are experiencing the benefits.

## Colegio Japonés Paraguayo

When you first walk into Colegio Japonés Paraguayo in Asunción, Paraguay, one of the first things you'll notice is something not always found in many schools around the world — throngs of students excitedly greeting guests on their own.

"A lot of people are wowed by that," says Patricia Toyotoshi, the director of Colegio Japonés Paraguayo. "It speaks to the discipline and respect we instill in our students."

Colegio Japonés Paraguayo was originally established by Toyotoshi's father to provide a quality education to the local Japanese population in Paraguay but now mostly serves native Paraguayan families. It's not just an immersion in Japanese culture — visitors will also find students designing and making with 3D printers, or in an adjacent space, children creating simpler, smarter systems in the realm of mechatronics. Down the hall, students engineer robots, and use computing and AI to enhance supply chain systems. In another classroom, children can be seen creating culinary delights or sewing new fashions, while young people work nearby to shoot, edit and create film productions.

When Toyotoshi took over leadership of the school from her relatives several years ago, the curriculum was traditional. She laments the time when teachers instructed from the front of a classroom, where students sat in uniform rows of stationary desks. She believes the school's true innovative potential wasn't fully unlocked until the recent construction of its new 'creative building' — an expansion to the campus that features areas designed specifically for the wide range of disciplines the school offers.

"The building gave us the last component we needed to really bring out the true talents of our students," Toyotoshi says. "They are becoming what the world wants for work now — students



Colegio Japonés Paraguayo | Above: Smith System Planner Studio Tables, Smith System Cascade Storage, Steelcase Node Stool

who can think and produce something by working collaboratively."

She likes to share the story of how a group of students from Colegio Japonés Paraguayo recently won a national aerospace and astrodynamics competition, crediting the school's new flexible space for launching them to success. "For me, seeing these kids — how they worked together — this is what we've wanted for such a long time."

"Our mission is to help these students become the future citizens that we want for our country — that's our vision. We truly believe in the value of an excellent education, and it's why we're here. It's why we're investing," Toyotoshi says.

*"Learning is about what makes you happy and fulfilled as a person. Everybody has a talent. Everybody has skill. You just have to find it — and you can be somebody with that."*

**Patricia Toyotoshi**  
Director



Duke Kunshan University | Above: Coalesse Bob Seating, Orangebox Away from the Desk Lounge

## Duke Kunshan University

Leaders of Duke Kunshan University faced a unique but 'good-to-have' problem — as a fledgling institution, they were growing rapidly and needed to expand to keep up with admission.

The liberal arts school, founded only a decade ago as a U.S.-China partnership between Duke University and Wuhan University, offers an array of innovative academic programs for students from around the world. Their challenge was creating a modern, state-of-the-art facility rooted in local culture, yet flexible and accessible enough to promote creativity and drive innovative thinking with a global community.

"Our vision is to be a small university, rooted in the community of Kunshan, but that fosters international encounters between students, faculty and staff. We're very much part of this community in Kunshan, but extended all over the world," says Scott MacEachern, PhD vice chancellor of academic affairs, Duke Kunshan University.

To accommodate its growing student body and staff, the school needed new dorms, classrooms and labs to support a full complement of more than 2,000 undergrads, 1,000 graduate students and hundreds of faculty and staff. To supercharge the potential for learning experiences, a library, social spaces, collaboration spaces and meeting spaces were also added to present a wide-ranging ecosystem of choice and control that accommodates various group sizes, privacy needs and postures.

The entire idea, says MacEachern, is for the environment to be inspiring, flexible, sustainable and inclusive.

*"Our spaces allow people to be comfortable, happier and healthier when doing their work. Not just minute by minute, but over long periods of time."*

**Scott MacEachern, PhD**  
Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

## University of Glasgow

Reaching above the ancient edifices of Scotland's largest city like the fictional 'Hogwarts' of Harry Potter fame, the University of Glasgow is one of the most storied centers of learning in the western world. Founded in 1451, the school now attracts 29,000 students from more than 140 countries. While steeped in tradition and hundreds of years of academic excellence, the university is focusing on creating an education center of the future — where innovation now echoes through its historic halls.

University of Glasgow



Over the last decade, realizing that profound shifts were underway driven by new technologies and rising expectations for more collaborative and active ways of learning, the University of Glasgow has significantly invested in its infrastructure to expand its world-class campus.

As a leader in world-changing research, a keystone to the university's expansion is the new state-of-the-art Mazumdar-Shaw Advanced Research Centre (ARC). Home to 600 researchers and PhD students, the ARC is described as 'the new pulse' of the research community at the University of Glasgow. The building is intentionally designed to encourage interdisciplinary work across research teams and unlock their true potential. This is accomplished through space design that better compliments what the day-in-the-life of a researcher might look like. To understand this, the university worked with Steelcase to host a series of workshops, listening to the needs and expectations of those who would use the building. What resulted was a design that fosters a culture of organic cross-collaboration among teams — encouraging them to work more closely and be less siloed.

The space design itself focuses on the proximity of different needs — a neighborhood of spaces that puts people in close contact with each other. This creates the opportunity for informal interactions, directing researchers' time and energy toward collaboration. The space makes it easier for people to choose where they want to work depending on their role.

*"Create space where you can think with and meet other scholars and explore the art of the possible — that's the philosophy behind the building."*

**NEIL BOWERING**  
Director of Professional Services

# New Inclusion Center Welcomes Everyone

From softly-lit, sheltered nooks, to an accessible cafe — a lot is being discovered about how physical space can transform the way people feel at the new Special Olympics of Michigan's Unified Sports and Inclusion Center (SOMI). A first-of-its-kind facility, the building is not only home to the Special Olympics of Michigan but nine other non-profit organizations as well, devoted to serving people with a wide range of disabilities.

Non-profit leaders and their clients participated in inclusive design workshops hosted by Steelcase and Custer, its local dealer, to bring their voices into the design process earlier. Insights from those workshops directly influenced the design decisions.



## Community Cafe

A grounding spot for teams to gather or individuals to find rest and relaxation over food and drinks, this space is heavily influenced by feedback from design workshops. The initial design was too bright and felt too institutional, and some people advised against higher, pub-style tables because of a lack of accessibility. As a result, designers softened the lighting and high tables were replaced with ones that ensure everyone can enjoy the space. Additional round tables and brighter lighting enhance face-to-face communication in another area of the cafe.

Left: Steelcase Simple Tables and Chairs, AMQ 3F Hanging Panels + Rail



## Getaway Space

Designers heard spaces like this one are important because they offer a haven when people become overwhelmed. SOMI administrators have affirmed these observations, and shared that they've noticed a number of people seeking refuge in the Steelcase Pod Tent after feeling overstimulated at celebrations being held in nearby rooms. The adjacent cafe-style booth area invites inclusive collaboration. It was designed with low, wide and firm seats and high backs for support and to reduce distractions. The low table allows for those who use wheelchairs to pull up and take part in the conversation.

Left: Steelcase Pod Tent, Steelcase Campfire Lounge, Moooi Celestial Rug, Coalesse Lagunitas Lounge + Table, Blu Dot Turn Tall Side Table + Low Side Table

## Greeting Area

Designers heard from people with sensory sensitivities and other disabilities that entryway and primary waiting spaces can feel overwhelming. With that in mind, SOMI's primary greeting area was set behind a wall to provide shelter from the main entrance. A low profile carpet provides a visual and tactical space boundary. There are no barriers for people who utilize a wheelchair, or other mobility aids. Seating is low, firm and designed to allow people to transition from wheelchairs with ease. Sofas are arranged so everyone can face each other to facilitate better communication. A high-back screen on one side provides a backdrop for sign language communication and additional privacy.

Right: Orangebox Away from the Desk Lounge

*"It just feels like home. It's made for everybody, no matter who you are."*

**Jessica Stranz**  
SOMI employee





Steelcase Miami Pop-Up Space

## Be Our Guest

Discover new solutions for hybrid work that build community and spark joy in one of our three new spaces: Miami, Dallas and Singapore.

The pop-up space in Miami's vibrant Wynwood neighborhood, known for its colorful murals, will be open until December 2024. The all-new WorkLife Centers in Dallas and Singapore feature flexible hybrid work neighborhoods that support people's wellbeing at work. Contact your Steelcase representative to plan a visit to one of these or any location worldwide.



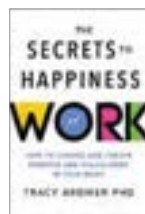
### The Comfort Games

Steelcase partnered with Intel Extreme Masters, one of the longest running E-sports tournaments in the world to create gaming stations designed for competitors' comfort and need to move. Held in Sydney, Australia, the event featured a Steelcase Gaming Center with high-performance ergonomic seating and height-adjustable desks, which prevented sore legs or strained necks, helping gamers stay focused on the competition.

### What We're Reading



**You Belong Here**  
The Power of Being Seen, Heard, and Valued on Your Own Terms by Kim Dabbs, Steelcase Vice President, ESG + Social Innovation



**The Secrets to Happiness at Work**  
How to Choose and Create Purpose and Fulfillment in Your Work by Tracy Brower, PhD, Sociologist and Steelcase Vice President, Workplace Insights



**Joy at Work**  
Organizing Your Professional Life by Marie Kondo and Scott Sonenshein



### A Better Telehealth Experience

Attendees at the 2023 Healthcare Design Conference & Expo got an exclusive look at Project Ghost, a conceptual prototype designed to create a more life-like, one-to-one telehealth experience. The comfortable and shielded space uses immersive technology that makes it feel like you're meeting in person. Developed by Steelcase and Logitech to improve the hybrid collaboration experience in the workplace, the concept has also been adapted for virtual care.

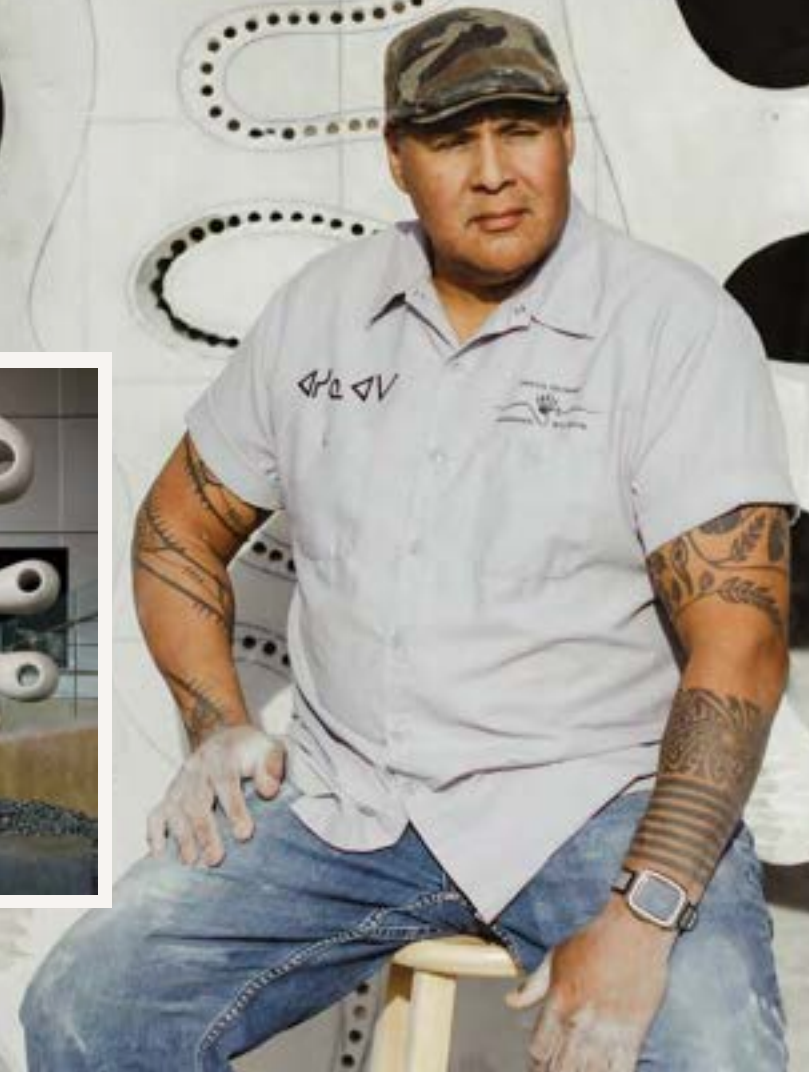
Telehealth services for mental health and substance use disorders are growing faster than other outpatient care use. "Telehealth is essentially just as effective as face-to-face psychotherapy — and retention rates are higher," says David Mohr, PhD, director of the Center for Behavioral Intervention Technologies at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

Inspired by the headdresses of artist Jason Quigno's Anishinaabe people, he carved this sculpture to symbolize humanity's interconnectedness — two separate pieces, born of a singular element.

*"In my culture, it is important that you infuse 'good feeling' into everything you create."*

**Jason Quigno**  
Artist, Asinaabe Studios

Quigno's creation at the Steelcase Learning + Innovation Center in his native Grand Rapids, Michigan honors his culture's 'seven grandfathers' of humility, bravery, honesty, wisdom, truth, respect and love. Steelcase is committed to investing in the work of diverse artists from underrepresented communities — and featuring art that helps people feel seen, heard and valued.





## About the Cover

This original photograph of the Steelcase WorkLife Center in Los Angeles is overlaid with a prism effect that represents the possibility of experiencing joy at work. The prism reflects color and light that shifts and moves, expressing the deeply personal sense of optimism and thriving possible when people come together in a space infused with purpose and energy.

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