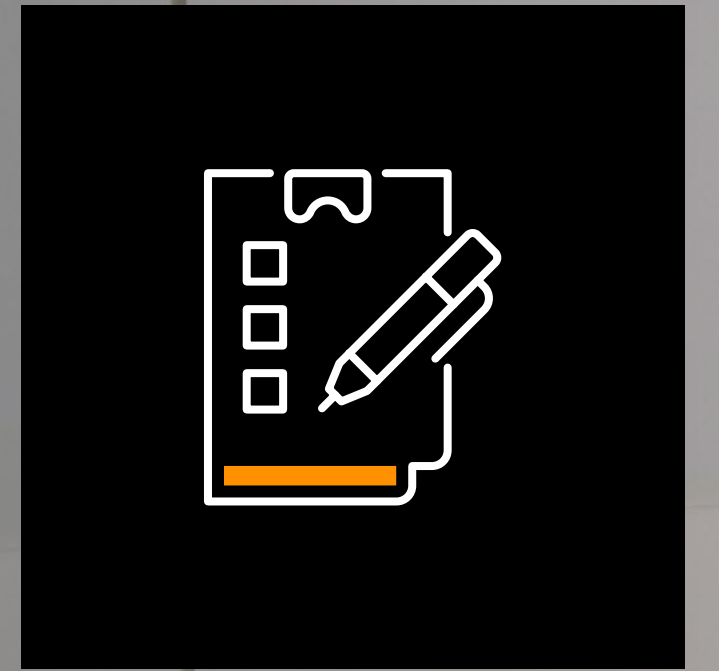


Morgan Lovell



Survey:
**How workplace
furniture can support
the post-Covid office
environment**

Many organisations are beginning to plan for the reoccupation of their workplaces, or are bringing pilot groups back to work. Morgan Lovell used OnePulse to poll more than 500 office workers in early July to find out which types of office layout and furniture they want to see in a post-Covid office.

The findings

The survey revealed a significant move towards 'owned' furniture and space. When thinking about what elements office workers would like to see in a post-Covid world, the dedicated desk comes out top, with 71% ranking it at the top of the preferred working environments. Also popular are traditional banks of desks separated to maintain a one-to-two metre distance and cubicle-style spaces. Despite this understandable need to 'own' space and be separate from colleagues, the cellular office polled quite low on the list, coming out 6th out of 7. Although people want to be separate from their colleagues, they're not ready to return to individual offices just yet. Least popular were café-style tables in a large open space.

Private cellular offices are popular with those aged over 55 – perhaps because they were a familiar fixture in offices earlier in their career and represent the ultimate in a safe environment – and least popular with 18-20 year-olds.

Given the option to suggest another type of office layout, many respondents simply said they'd prefer to continue to work from home.

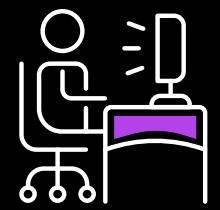
49% of the UK employed population are currently working from home.*

*Data from the Office for National Statistics

Preferred working environments in order of preference

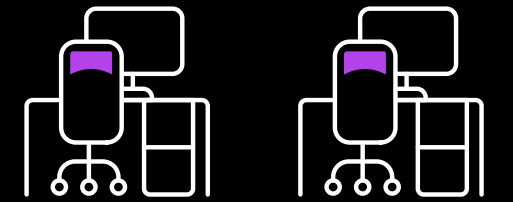
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71% ranked a dedicated desk that only you use



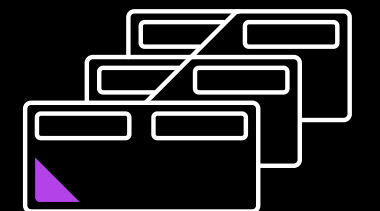
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66% ranked traditional banks of desks separated to maintain a 1-2 metre distance



3

54% ranked Cubicle-style offices to protect personal desk space with higher screens



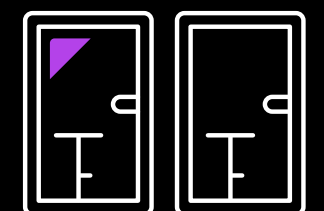
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47% ranked hot desking with an enhanced cleaning regime



5

43% ranked informal booths or pods which are partially enclosed



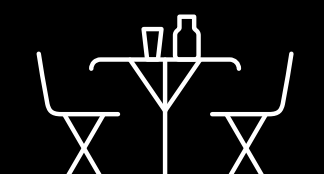
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41% ranked private cellular offices with full walls and a door which closes



7

27% ranked tables in café style areas in a large open space



The majority (54%) wanted furniture which can be easily moved or configured to allow people to distance themselves

At the same time, office workers want to see more flexible furniture, less soft seating and more widely available video conferencing technology in the post-Covid workplace.

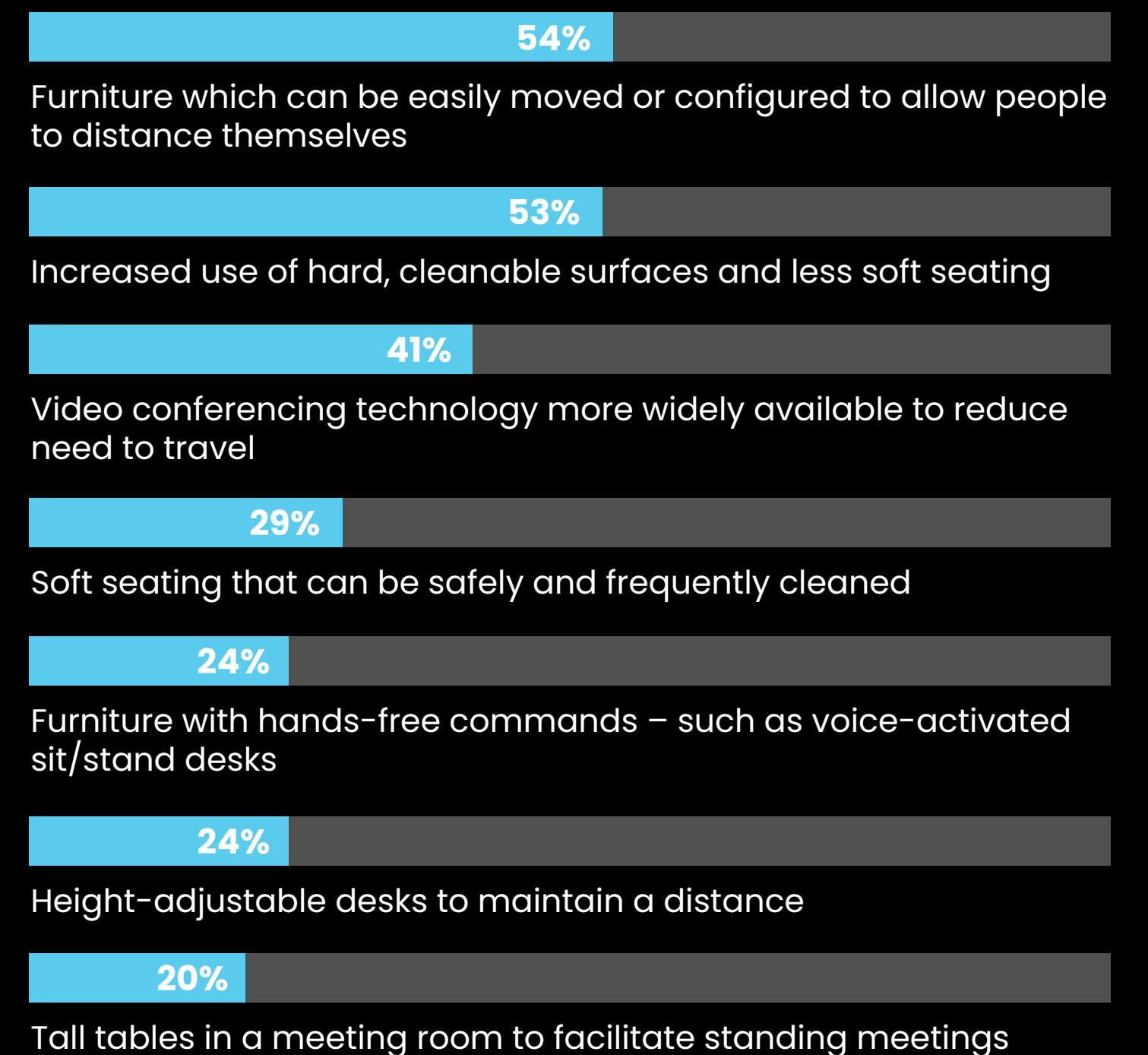
Furniture which can be easily moved or configured to allow people to distance themselves came out top, with 54% voting it as their number one option. This will enable workplaces to continually adapt as the threat of the virus changes. The increased use of hard, cleanable surfaces and less soft seating is also high on the list, with 53% voting for it. Scientific research has proved that the virus lingers longer on soft surfaces like fabrics which means office workers may be reluctant to use soft seating such as sofas, booths and beanbags. Video conferencing technology – which most office workers have used throughout lockdown – also polls high. Post-Covid workplaces will need to install

more video conferencing to reduce the need for colleagues to travel elsewhere and lessen the need for internal face-to-face meetings.

The least popular option was tall tables in meeting rooms to facilitate standing meetings – perhaps because people want to use video technology more to communicate.

The data revealed that women are less comfortable than men about the return to shared office environments – so it's unsurprising that women are far more keen on the widespread use of video conferencing technology – 37% of men said this is key, compared with 43% of women. Women also prefer more flexible furniture and the increased use of hard, cleanable surfaces while men like the idea of tall tables to facilitate standing meetings.

When it comes to furniture in the office; what would you like to see as part of the post-Covid office that will best enable your work and make you feel safe?



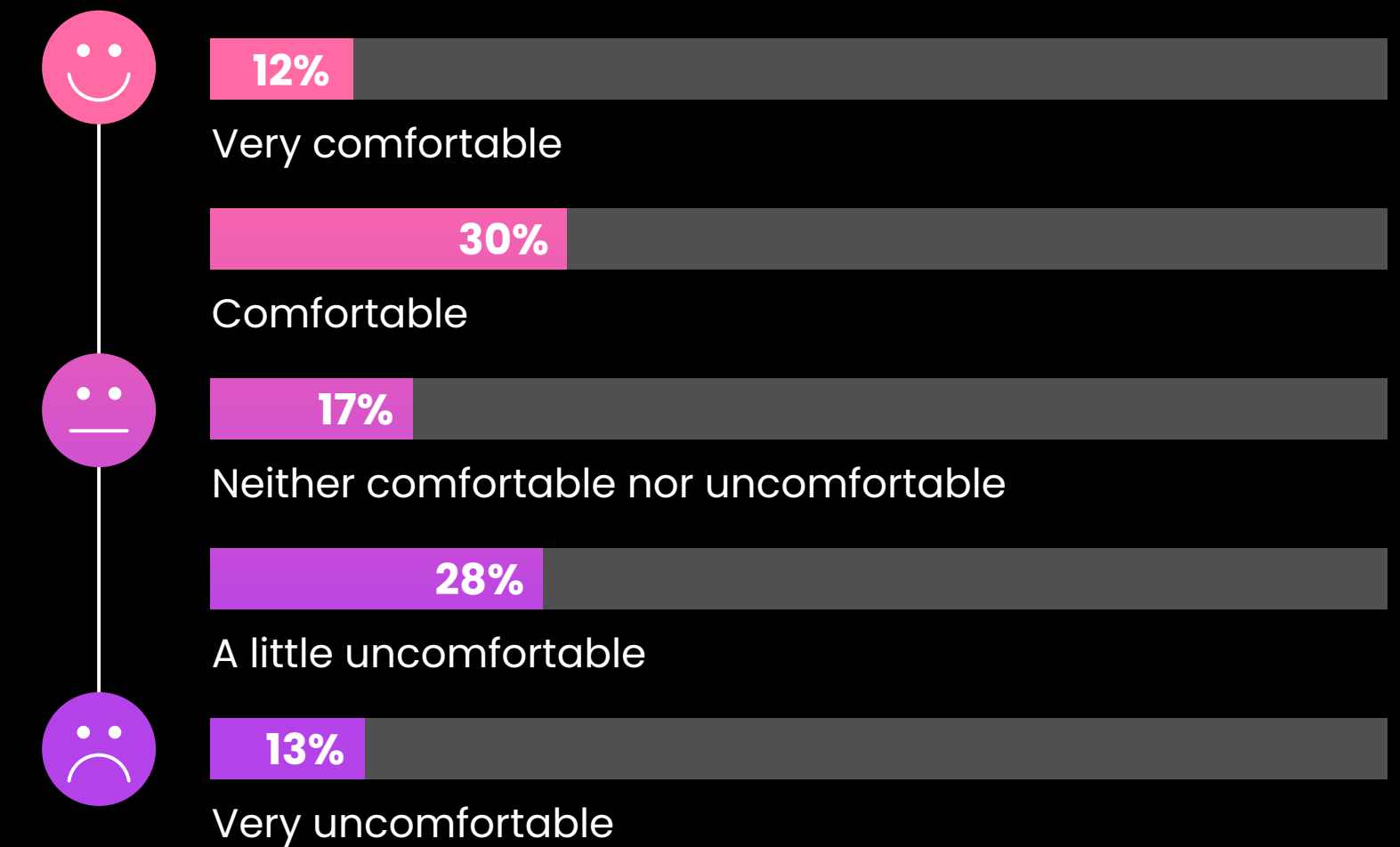
Overall the survey revealed a real split in opinion in how people felt about returning to work with 42% of respondents feeling comfortable or very comfortable about returning to work in a shared office environment and 41% feeling a little, or very, uncomfortable. Those in London are most worried about returning to the workplace with 49% saying they are a little, or very, uncomfortable – possibly because of the need to use busy public transport to get to work. Those in the East Midlands are the happiest about returning to work with 50% saying they are very comfortable or comfortable. Office workers in the West Midlands and North East are also comfortable about going back to a shared office.

Unsurprisingly given that Covid-19 disproportionately affects older people, younger respondents are far more relaxed about returning to a shared workplace than their older counterparts. More than 50% of 18-24 year olds are very comfortable or comfortable about returning to work in a shared office, whereas just 34% of those aged 45-54 feel the same.

Women are also more uncomfortable than men about the prospect of returning. Almost 50% of men say they are comfortable or very comfortable about returning to work in a shared space, compared to 37% of women.

Broadly speaking, there is some correlation between those who are nervous about the return to work and those who want to work in more private spaces.

How comfortable do you feel about the idea of working in a shared work environment; such as an open plan office?



Overall the survey revealed a real split in opinion in how people felt about returning to work

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The conclusion

Overall this research demonstrates that office workers do have concerns about the return to work and want to see considerable changes in the furniture in their post-Covid office environment. They want more ownership of their workspace, ideally a dedicated desk – but at the very least separation between banks of desks to create distance between them and their colleagues. They are less keen on the more domestic furniture such as soft seating, booths and café-style environments perceiving them as riskier. Technology, particularly video conferencing, which

office workers have become accustomed to during lockdown – will play a major role in the post-Covid workplace. But other technology to facilitate a touch-free environment, such as voice-activated sit-stand desks, is also important.

What's clear from this research is that people's views differ depending on where in the country they live and work, their age and gender. Organisations should listen carefully to their people's concerns as they plan their post-Covid workplace.

London

16 Noel Street,
London
W1F 8DA

T 020 7734 4466

Southern

Maxis 1, Western Road,
Bracknell Berkshire
RG12 1RT

T 01344 353 800

morganlovell.com

