

Morgan Lovell



Survey:

The social workplace

March 2022



The social workplace

The hybrid reality

The final Covid restrictions have been lifted in England and there is an expectation that the return to the office can now take place without concerns of another imminent lockdown. As such, more people are returning to the office and for plenty of workers it's a hybrid working pattern. Organisations will adopt varying approaches, from mandating a full-time return to the office to allowing fully remote work. The sweet spot for many employees seems to be 2 – 3 days a week in the office.

Morgan Lovell was keen to understand the benefits of office working compared to home working, from the employee perspective. We used OnePulse to poll 500 workers in March 2022 to find out which aspects of the office they enjoy the most and how they intend to use their workplace moving forward. This survey follows similar ones from June and December 2020, allowing us to analyse changing trends, perceptions and attitudes over the course of the last two years.

The office is a social hub

In 2022, social, collaborative and creative spaces are proving popular. Our research suggests these areas are being used the most. Much has been written about the risk to employee wellbeing when working remotely, particularly with reports of people feeling isolated and lonely throughout the pandemic. This helps to explain why workers are seemingly drawn to these social spaces.

Interestingly, quiet spaces was the third most popular answer. This acts as a reminder that not everyone has a dedicated office at home, and may be working alongside partners, housemates or children. Office planners that provide a mix of concentrative and collaborative zones will help ensure that there are suitable spaces for all types of work.

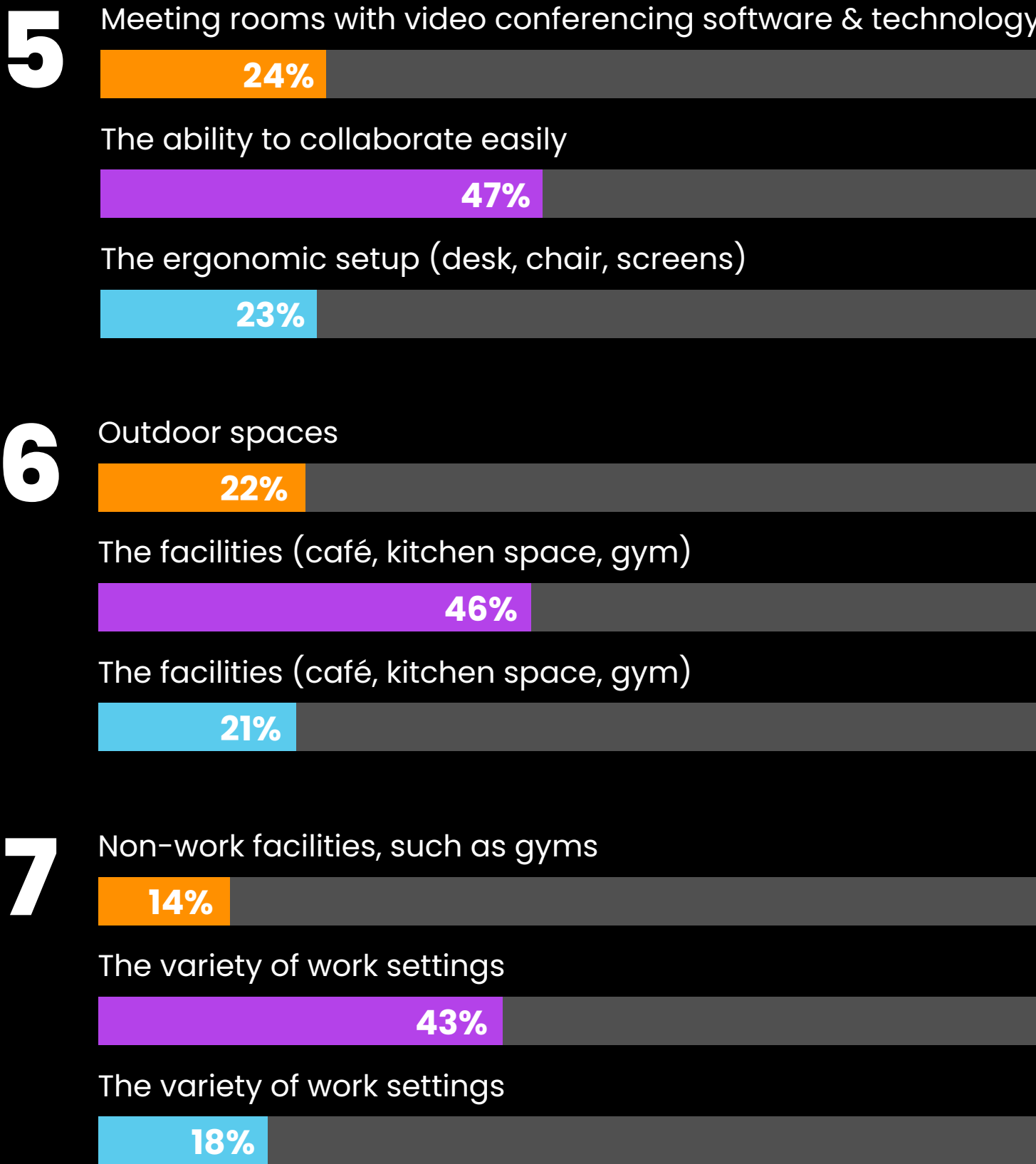
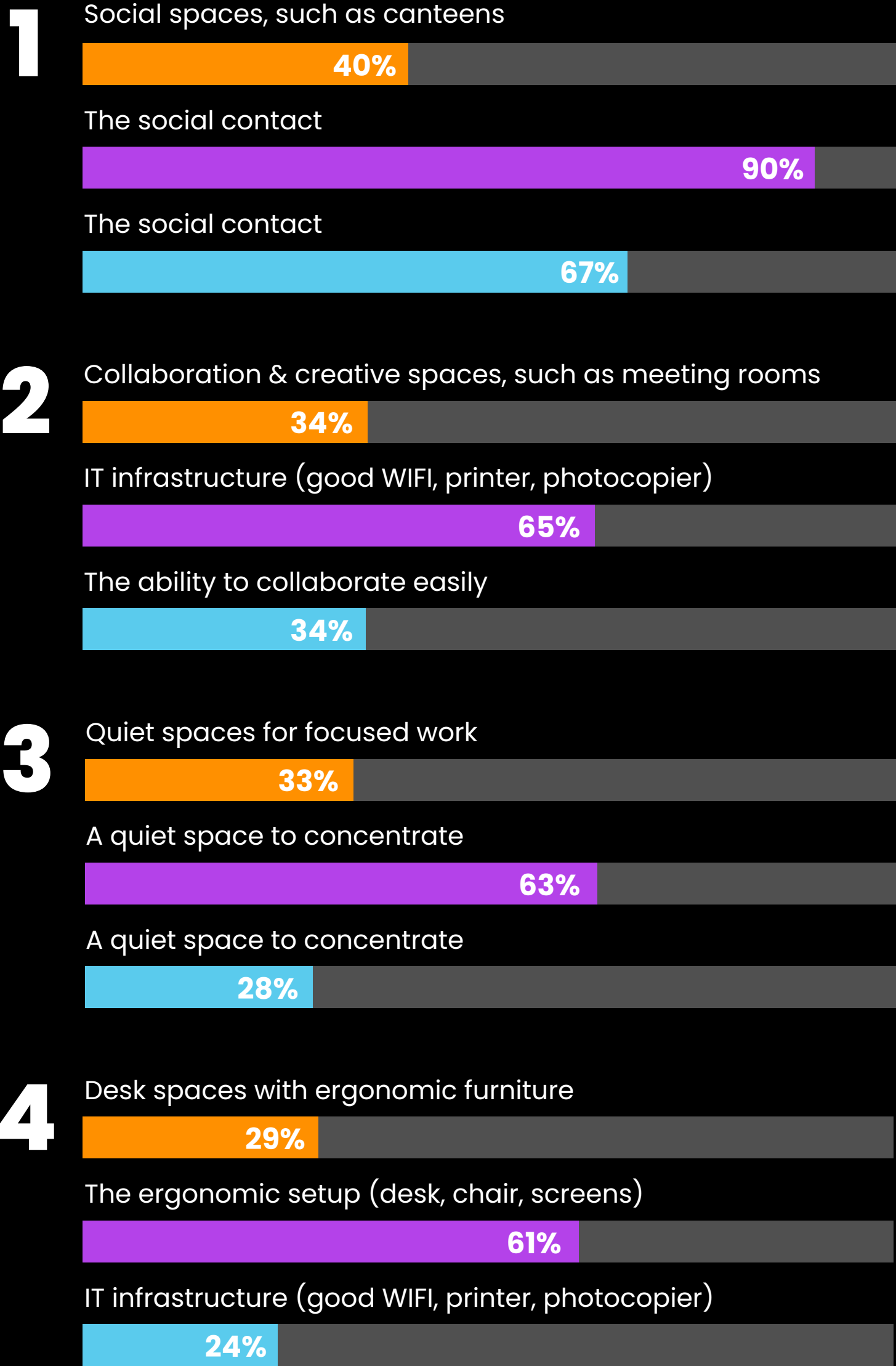


In previous surveys, we asked workers what they missed most about the office? These surveys were conducted in 2020 when the majority of employees were working from home. We tweaked the question for the March 2022 survey since some workers have already returned. This time we chose to ask those that are working in an office, what spaces they are using.

What spaces are you using vs what did you miss most about the office?

KEY

- MARCH 2022**
What spaces are you using when you go to the office?
- DECEMBER 2020**
What do you miss most about the office?
- JUNE 2020**
What do you miss most about the office?





Social spaces and contact have been the top answer in every survey which reinforces the value for businesses to create offices that facilitate social interaction, creativity and collaboration. However, collaborative tasks must not be overbaked at the expense of concentrative activities, because all three surveys highlight the importance of quiet spaces too.

The age group that placed the most importance on social spaces was 18 – 24-year-olds. For young generations in the workforce, socialising and making new friends is a huge part of starting a new job. A buzzing office could well play an important role in helping a business to attract the top graduate talent.

The 45 – 54 age bracket placed a greater importance on quiet spaces than any other age group. This suggests that more senior employees have to perform more individual tasks within their roles and require the space to focus, whereas entry-level employees need to spend more time learning from others.

In June 2020, survey participants did not particularly miss an ergonomic set up with only 23% selecting it. However, by December, after many months of working from home, 61% cited that it had become much more important. Two years on and there is even more demand for ergonomic comfort: it ranked as the fourth most popular answer.

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It's always good to talk

As well as finding out what spaces are being used the most, we wanted to dig deeper to find out what workers enjoy about physically being with other people. We asked respondents who said they missed the social contact of the office the same question in the December 2020 survey.

Workers were asked to rank the options and, remarkably, the order is unchanged from December 2020 to now. We should point out that the order of options was shuffled for each respondent, so this result genuinely suggests that what people enjoy about the office hasn't changed.

The top response matches up with what people are using the office for – socialising and chatting with colleagues. Informal learning is also a top answer, likely as this is almost impossible to replicate remotely.

What do you enjoy about working in the same physical space as other people?

Significantly, there's no change in rank order from December 2020 to March 2022.

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|---|--|
| 1 | The social aspects of having people to talk to while I work |
| 2 | The ability to pick people's brains in an informal way |
| 3 | The opportunity to collaborate on projects easily |
| 4 | The 'energy' of the team in a workplace environment |
| 5 | The ability to have impromptu 'bump and meet' opportunities |
| 6 | The chance to eat lunch and go for coffee with colleagues |
| 7 | The feeling of being part of a greater whole – a culture / sense of corporate identity |
| 8 | The ability to learn and be mentored in-person |

The value in a social workplace

We asked workers about their best ever job as we thought this would generate a more heartfelt response than simply asking what they consider to be important. Reflecting on previous experiences can provide valuable insight. We provided a list of options and asked respondents to select as many or as few as appropriate.

The only option that was selected by more than 50% of workers was 'genuine friendships with colleagues'. This again highlights the importance of the workplace in providing social spaces and opportunities. 40% of workers associated their best jobs with a fun, happy and productive office. This ties in with the social aspect, but also stresses that an office needs to be a place that facilitates productive work, whether that's individual tasks or group projects.

What were the factors behind your best ever job?





In contrast, regular social events at work was ranked as the least important factor. This could be because social events tend to take place out of work hours. Or perhaps it suggests that when people want to socialise in the office, they want to do so in an informal way throughout the day, rather than feel bound by a scheduled social event.

The age group that placed the most importance on shared values with the organisation was 18 – 24. This decreased through the ages with older generations ranking it less important. This backs up the belief that younger generations are more attracted to an employer with a shared purpose. The workplace can be a great tool for communicating values in order to boost a sense of belonging, through branding and design.

One in three (36%) respondents said that a management team that listened to and acted on employee feedback was a key part of their greatest ever job. This was particularly the case for 25–34-year-olds, with 44% in agreement.

The ability to build and develop genuine friendships came out top. Interestingly, though, there is a gender divide. 57% of women selected this option, compared to 46% of men. Regionally, there are variations too. 71% of workers in Greater London chose genuine friendships as a reason, compared to the national average of 52%. The north east of England was at the other end of the scale, at 37%.

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The importance of social capital

Although the office is still a place of work, it must be a social space. It represents the intangible value of social networks, team cohesion and relationships. If social capital is low, the higher the risk to employee loyalty and people leaving your organisation for greener pastures. Social capital may sound like a gimmick, particularly to the employees who you are trying to convince. A far more intuitive way to present it is through the 'Three Cs':

- **1. Community** – When an organisation is connected by more than just a company name, shares values, and embraces a common culture that manifests in the workplace.
- **2. Collaboration** – The main driver behind collective decision-making and one of the most significant influences in modern-day office design.
- **3. Camaraderie** – As more than just an outcome of social interaction, it allows employees to achieve things together and create better business outcomes.



All three of our surveys reinforce the importance of social capital in the workplace, such as the importance of friendships with colleagues and social spaces to interact with them. In the December 2020 survey, workers said that:

- Informal areas like flexible break-out spaces were their preferred environment for collaborating with colleagues
- More relaxation areas for socialising would be part of their plans if they could redesign the office
- If they could work flexibly, they would primarily use the office for team projects and meeting up and socialising with colleagues

Our latest survey suggests that even as employees have started to return to the office, their priorities and preferences have not changed.

Engaging with employees to understand what they want, making appropriate workplace changes and keeping the lines of communication open throughout will all help support a successful return to the office programme.



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