

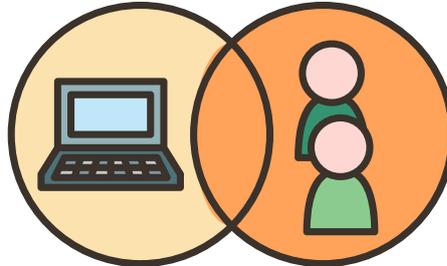
## Highlights

- 1 Designing the future of work
- 2 Experiencing a space: positives at the office
- 3 Experiencing a space: positives at home
- 4 Synthesizing the future of work

MAY, 2022

# Designing the future of work

## Key considerations for the hybrid workplace



As a society, we are entering a phase of hybrid work characterized by organizations trying to balance continuity, flexibility, safety and familiarity in the workplace. As the work 'place' is no longer defined by its physical space, it is imperative to test different permutations of the hybrid work model. Determining a viable long term strategy for the work cycle is in the interest of every organization navigating this transition. **In this edition of #research4outcomes, we highlight findings from our ethnographic research on the meanings and experiences that employees seek from their workplace. As organizations design the future of work, LagomWorks' insights can inform actions such that these emergent meanings are recognized, sustained and strengthened.**

The hybrid office is a liminal space, blurring the previously rigid separations between a traditional office and a technologically aided home work set-up. The nature of knowledge-sharing, socio-emotional connections, routine and productivity in the employee lifecycle have all undergone changes. **In order to be able to synthesize and design a sustainable hybrid work model, an empathetic understanding of the lived experiences of employees is needed.**

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# Experiencing a space: Positives at the office

## 1. Connection to the organization and its leaders

Spending time in an office allows for employees to see organizational culture and visions at play in real time. **It becomes possible to link statements of core company values with the actions that one sees in daily operations. Moreover, physical proximity to managers and leaders lends a sense of importance to the employee experience.** In line with intuition, our research found that the lived experiences of employees was significantly influenced by their managers and the teams they work with.



## 2. In-built social anchors

**Certain aspects of socializing came explicitly built into the pre-pandemic workplace**, through design elements such as pantry spaces, common collaboration areas and open floor plans. However, the experience of *communitas* also lies in chance encounters that occur in an office, generating an organic exchange of ideas and experiences. **The informal, unplanned social interactions in a workplace form a large part of how employees experience belongingness in their daily lives.**

## 3. Clearly demarcated boundaries

Offices are often segregated according to the operations that occur within it - individual work, group meetings, food consumption as well as leisure. **Our findings indicate that employees appreciate this separation, possibly because it allows for cognitively distinct tasks to be performed without a sense of overwhelm.** The presence of physical boundaries also helps calibrate the time spent on different operations.

#RESEARCH4  
OUTCOMES

VOLUME 5

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# Experiencing a space: Positives at the office

## 4. Feeling seen and cultivating a network

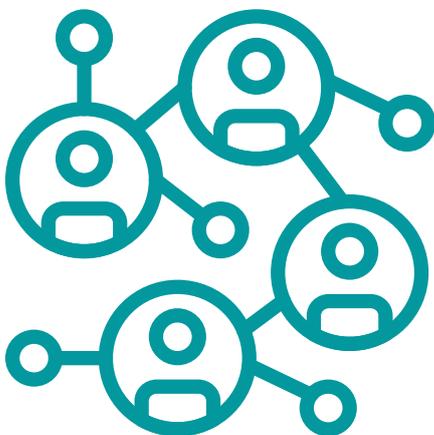
It is easier to demonstrate one's abilities and be appreciated for one's contributions when there is direct face-to-face interaction or collaboration taking place in a common space. **In a virtual environment, it is hard to remain conspicuous, as the interface can blur the boundaries between one's digital and physical selves.**



Cultivating a network is also made easier when one inhabits the same space as other people who could participate in knowledge sharing.

LW's findings also indicate that employees value an ecosystem within which they are given opportunities to learn and grow, building connections that can carry them forward in their career paths.

**Fostering such an ecosystem depends largely on having such connections within people's reach, and creating spaces where both visibility and interaction are a given.** The office is usually this point of intersection.



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# Experiencing a space: Positives at home

## 1. Comfort and time perception

If there is one thing that the pandemic brought to the fore, it is the need for safety and comfort during a period of uncertainty and danger. The home set-up allowed working professionals, especially those who are caregivers or have special needs, the comfort of being in a space of their choosing. **The management of responsibilities was thus cushioned by the presence and support of partners and family. Time saved by the reduction of a home-to-work commute is also a factor in people's satisfaction with the home set-up.** Feeling as though one has more time in the day can positively impact one's functioning with respect to tasks.

## 2. Flexibility and protection

**When at home, employees generally perceive themselves as having more freedom to organize their day according to their convenience.**



Furthermore, when given the choice to stay home, employees are also being given the opportunity to shield themselves from physical interactions with other people. With the main threat from the pandemic being a transmissible infection, the home also functions as a barrier of protection against this.

## 3. Evolving and strengthening identities

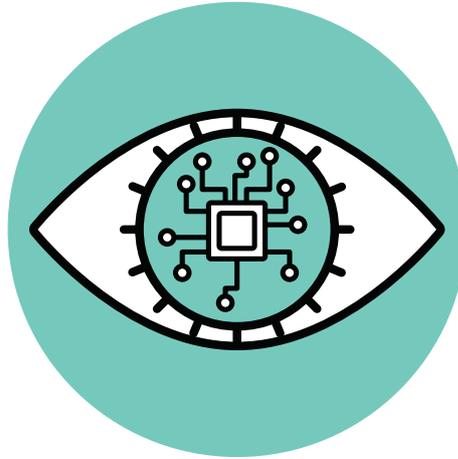
Working from home allowed employees a degree of personalization that offices often do not. **They had the space to design their own work set-ups and develop new rituals for themselves.** This was described as buying plants to liven up a room, or creating a morning coffee ritual. **Being confined to the home environment also gave employees the chance to pursue hobbies and passion projects outside of work, and spend time with themselves, strengthening their sense of self.** Attending to family obligations also became easier, allowing people to see themselves both in relation to their jobs and their personal lives.

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# Synthesizing the future of work



As an organization looking to synthesize the most meaningful aspects of the office and home experience to develop a holistic work system, the following are key considerations to keep in mind:

- While employees did appreciate the flexibility and comfort of their home experience, it also blurred the boundaries between work and home, leading to increased instances of burnout, and an inability to disconnect.
- Similarly, while the office as a space does offer clear boundaries and strong interactions, it also limits the extent to which employees can choose the mode of work that suits them best.
- It is imperative to keep in mind the person that the work experience is being designed for: the employee. **Understanding that the meanings they derive from work will vary based on their age, experience, location and gender is central to designing solutions for them.**

**Through our interdisciplinary research and design offering, OrgScapes, we enable organizations to practice better workplace listening; and understand how lived experiences in the everyday are shaping the meanings and future aspirations of their talent.**

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