

U.S. **WORKPLACE SURVEY** 2019

Very few people
say their ideal workplace
is “totally open.”
Quiet zones in offices
have significantly higher
impact than break rooms.
One in seven corporate
employees use coworking
during an average week.

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It's time for a new workplace narrative;
we need to move past a language of extremes.

We surveyed over 6,000 people working full-time across the United States to understand the key issues facing today's workers and workplaces.

The pervasive narratives around today's workplace environments are often based on the idea of extremes. Debates around the “open office” are a high-profile example—open offices are purportedly noisy, distracting, and destroying our ability to both focus and collaborate. But they may also make us more physically active and less stressed. These discussions, however, lack solid grounding because there is no consistent definition of the “open office,” and rarely is any environment totally open or totally closed.

Other hot-button issues demand greater scrutiny, too. The workplace is increasingly amenity rich, but are those amenities truly delivering value—and if so,

which ones? Coworking venues now abound, but what is the real impact, and how are they really being used by people working at large companies? In each case, deeper study often points to balance and nuance as the best starting points to create a better workplace.

What people really want from their workplace is a great experience. In this report, we investigate the modern workplace and identify factors and design strategies that optimize effectiveness, experience, and performance. Today's workplace is an ecosystem, and the best workplace experiences are built on variety, choice, and autonomy. Providing a great workplace experience also yields direct business performance benefits. ***Great workplaces create more engaged employees; and more engaged employees are the key to business productivity and profit.***

INTRODUCTION

Social and economic change underpin today’s workplace conversations.

Today’s workplace landscape is mired in change spurred by evolving business and social contexts. The U.S. unemployment rate is at its lowest point in nearly a half-century, putting organizations in heated competition for top talent. However, the predicted end of this extended boom cycle continues to make companies wary of large investments or long-term commitments. The world also continues to become more urban, driving up real estate prices and density in the prime city markets where companies are increasingly locating.

Since the release of our U.S. Workplace Survey 2016, Millennials have become the largest contingent of the U.S. workforce, and Generation Z’s integration has already begun. Younger workers tend to pursue

organizations that hold the same values as they do, provide a healthy work/life balance, and include the right amenities in the workplace. These shifts are driving organizations to increasingly compete on experience and purpose.

As the workplace accommodates five generations, its diversity is also growing in other ways. Women and people of color are entering the workforce at historic rates. Today, women outpace men in achieving bachelor’s degrees, and in many industries, outnumber men in middle and upper management positions. Diverse working communities engender diverse perspectives and desires. Workplaces that reflect the wide range of needs and expectations of today’s talent pool will come out ahead.



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HISTORICALLY LOW UNEMPLOYMENT

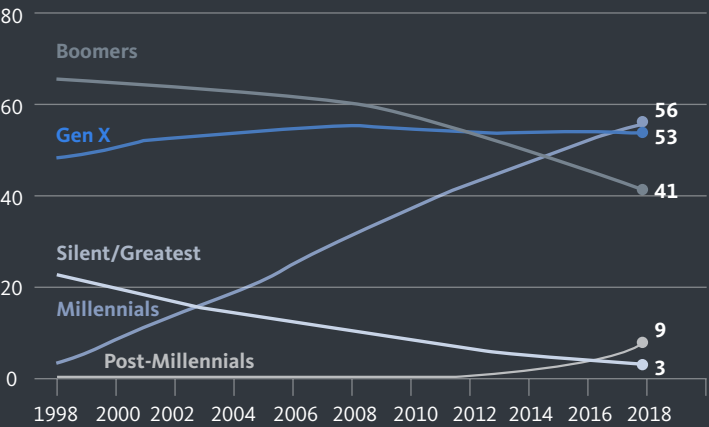
Percent unemployment by year



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (2019)

FIVE GENERATIONS AT WORK

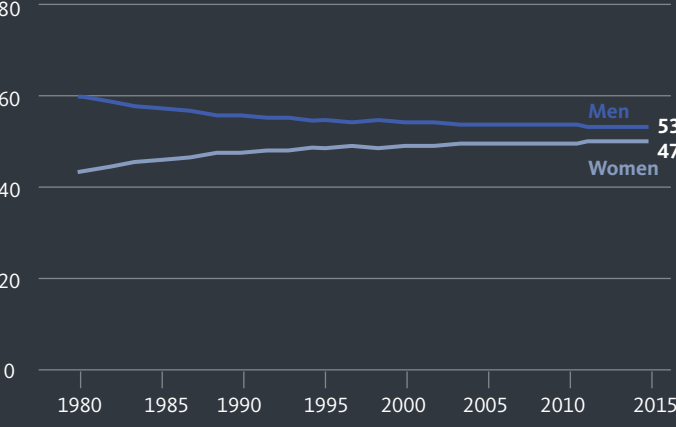
U.S. labor force, in millions



Source: Pew Research Center (2018)

GENDER DIVERSITY

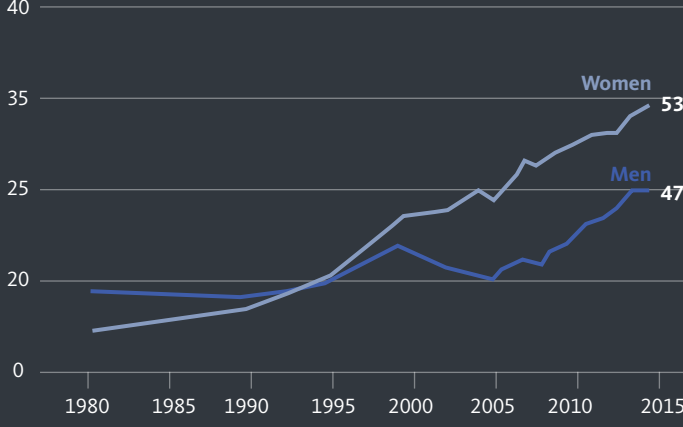
Percent of the workforce, women vs. men



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Women in the Labor Force (2016)

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Percent of Americans 25-29 years old with a bachelor's degree or higher



Source: Steven Johnson / The Atlantic (2017)

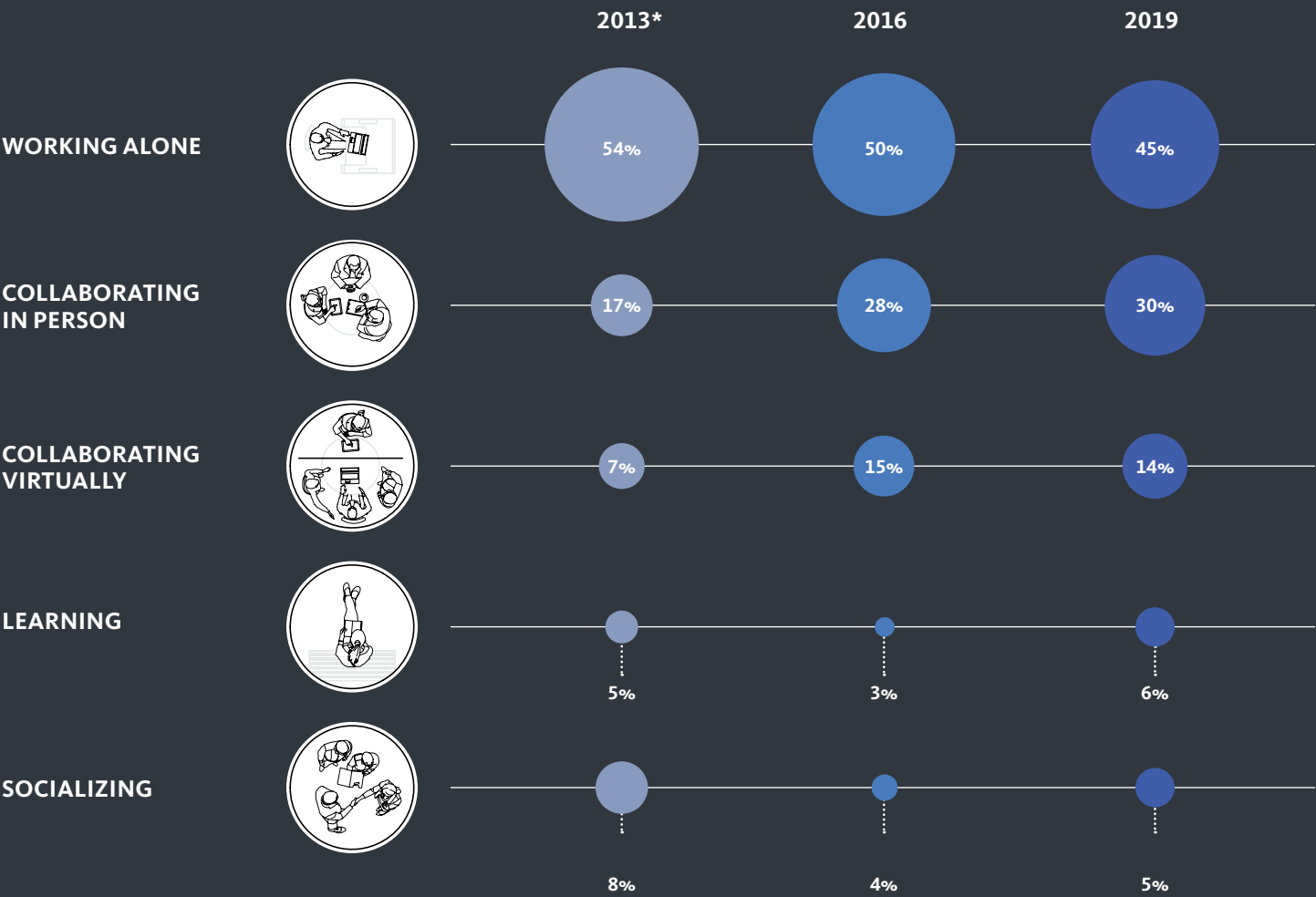
The U.S. Workplace is becoming more effective, and more collaborative.

The U.S. workplace has improved in recent years, with 2019 registering our highest effectiveness scores of any Workplace Survey over the past 15 years. While this may be partially attributable to an extended economic expansion, it is also connected to improvements in the physical and experiential nature of the workplace itself. A greater portion of people today report working in a balanced

workplace (44 percent)—a metric defined in our 2013 study to codify workplaces that successfully prioritize both individual and collaborative work, and which has proven to be highly correlated to effectiveness and performance. People today also report greater levels of choice and autonomy at work—45 percent of U.S. workers now report having choice in where they work within their office.

These improvements align with an observed shift toward high-performance behaviors. As knowledge and creative work have become more complex and interconnected, people today report spending less time working alone and more time collaborating, socializing, and learning. Our past research directly connects these non-focus behaviors with

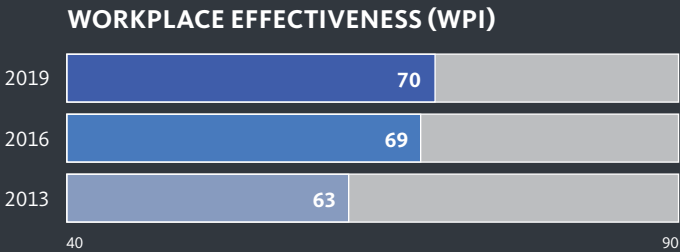
greater business performance and innovation. Perhaps even more important, U.S. workers are also starting to see these behaviors as more critical to their job performance, and are reporting that their workplace environments are more effective overall in supporting the full suite of activities that define modern work.



TIME SPENT BY WORK MODE

Percent of average week spent in each work mode, by year.

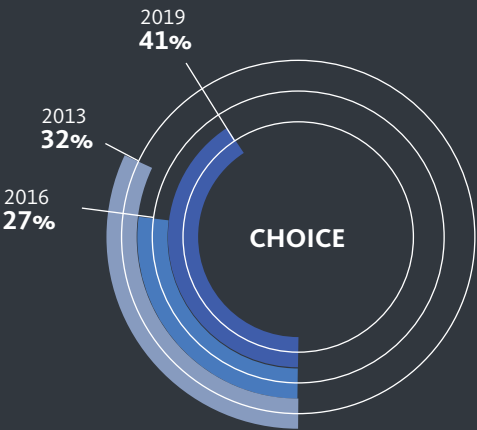
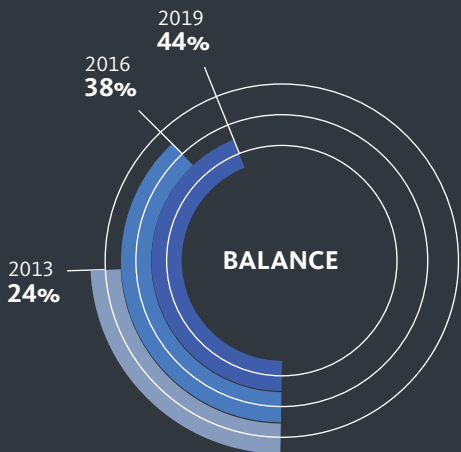
*Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents were given an "other" option in 2013.



2019 marks the highest workplace effectiveness score measured, driven by high levels of balance and choice at work.

WORKPLACE EFFECTIVENESS

Workplace effectiveness by year, as measured by Gensler's Workplace Performance Index (WPI) score. The WPI is a proprietary aggregate measure of workplace effectiveness.



BALANCE & CHOICE

Percent of respondents who work in a balanced workplace (top), and who report choice in where to work (bottom), by year.

An effective workplace is critical, but it's not enough.

The workplace is getting better, but significant room for improvement still exists. In this report, we frame progress and future goals within a dual narrative—a focus on both effectiveness and experience in the workplace. On its own, the effectiveness of an individual's workplace environment explains a significant portion of job commitment and satisfaction, purpose and meaning in their work, and the likelihood they will recommend their company to a peer—all direct measures of employee engagement and perception of their company.

Our **U.S. Workplace Survey 2019** expands our purview to codify and measure the entire employee experience. By analyzing effectiveness and experience together—as quantified by our proprietary Workplace Performance IndexSM (WPI) and Experience IndexSM (EXI) scores—we are able to explain a larger portion of employee engagement and performance.

While effectiveness and experience are distinct variables, they do work in concert—with the majority of people working either in a workplace that scores poorly on both or in one that scores well on both. The latter group—whose workplaces are optimizing effectiveness and experience in tandem—is consistently associated with our highest employee engagement and performance scores.

Approximately one in five workers are not so easily categorized, however—these workers report either having an effective workplace but not a great workplace experience, or report an ineffective workplace and a great experience. For these people, as well as those with below average scores on both metrics, there is a distinct missed opportunity for leveraging the workplace environment to optimize individual performance.

POOR EFFECTIVENESS + GREAT EXPERIENCE

8%

OF U.S. RESPONDENTS

These people are highly engaged, but struggle with ineffective workplaces. People working in the consumer goods, not-for-profit, and media industries are most likely to fall in this quadrant.

HIGH EFFECTIVENESS + GREAT EXPERIENCE

45%

OF U.S. RESPONDENTS

These people have the highest engagement scores in our sample. People working in the technology, finance, and management/advisory industries are most likely to fall in this quadrant.

POOR EFFECTIVENESS + POOR EXPERIENCE

39%

OF U.S. RESPONDENTS

These people consistently rank lowest on engagement and performance. People working in the government or defense industries are most likely to fall in this quadrant.

HIGH EFFECTIVENESS + POOR EXPERIENCE

8%

OF U.S. RESPONDENTS

These people have highly effective workplaces, but still struggle to have a great experience. People working in the legal industry are most likely to fall in this quadrant.

HOW THE WORKPLACE MEASURES UP

Respondent breakdown into those above and below average on experience (EXI) and effectiveness (WPI), and how the two scores interact.



To optimize performance, we must address effectiveness and experience in tandem. Currently, less than half of the American workforce is in a workplace that achieves both.

*Explanatory power of workplace effectiveness (WPI) and experience (EXI) as related to employee engagement metrics and business performance.

**Source: Gallup Q12 Meta-Analysis

KEY FINDING ONE

People are asking for more private space at work.

Only a fraction of people would prefer working in a totally open or a totally private environment; over two-thirds (77 percent) consider environments that fall between these extremes to be ideal. To capture this nuance, we measured “degrees of openness” with six variables, from “totally open” workplaces with no walls, to “totally private” workplaces in which all employees have individual offices. We asked each respondent to tell us which type of environment they currently have, and which they consider to be ideal. Responses to both questions fall largely in the middle, though on average, people seek greater levels of privacy than they currently have. Women’s preferences lean slightly more toward privacy; Millennial and Gen Z respondents lean more toward openness.

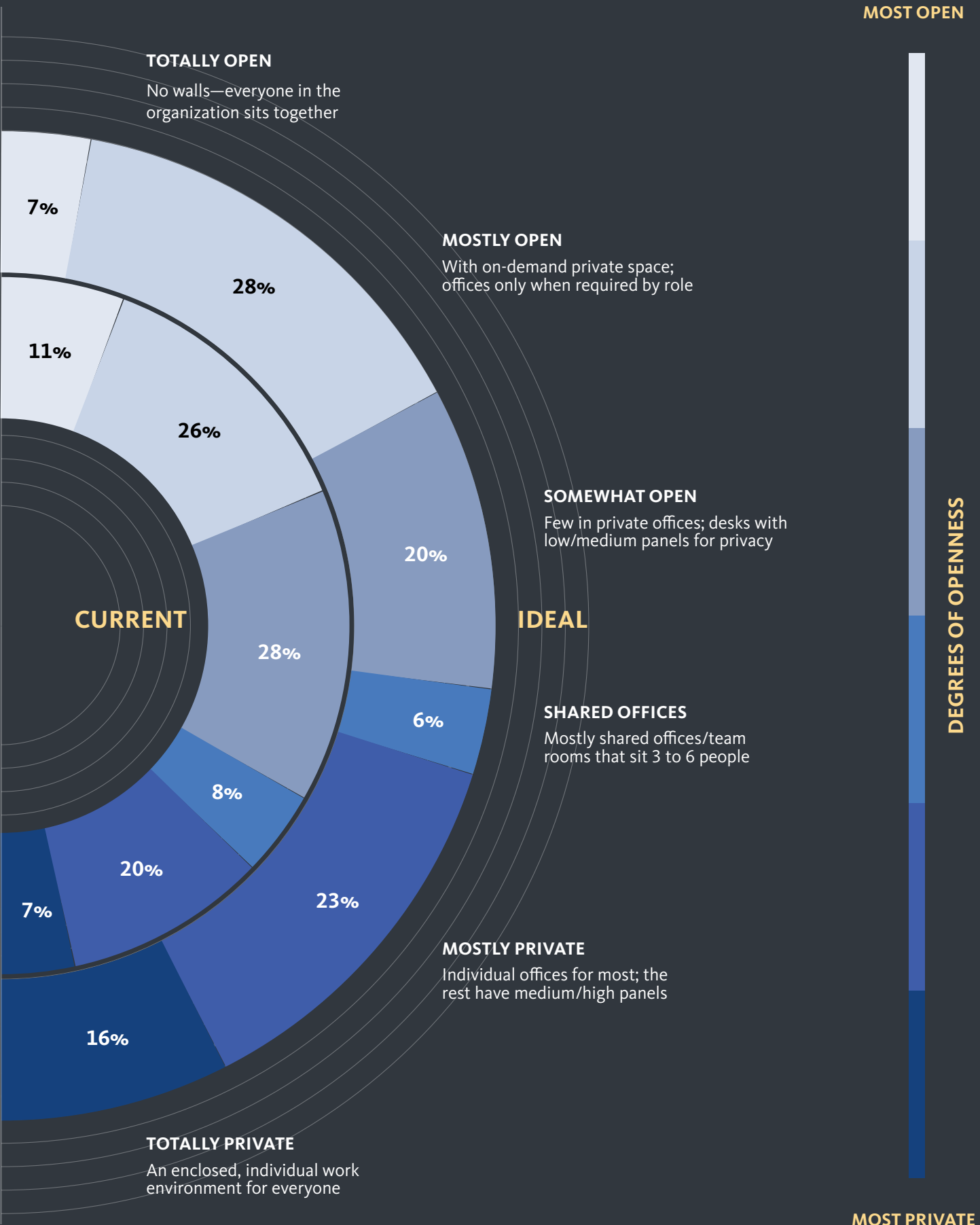
Which environments work best? **Environments that are mostly open environments but provide ample on-demand private space have both the highest effectiveness and the highest experience scores.** This largely aligns with people’s stated preferences: they prefer open environments with

ample on-demand private space to support individual, focused work, but very few say they would prefer a totally private environment. And when rating what constitutes the “best” workplaces overall—not just physically but in terms of the goals and work processes they support—**“team building and collaboration” is the highest-ranked aspect of a great workplace according to our respondents**—a finding consistent across generation and gender segmentations.

Although these desires may appear at odds with one another, the best workplaces treat these goals as equal—delivering a variety of spaces that accommodate privacy and focus alongside more open spaces that prioritize connection, collaboration, and innovation. And these greater degrees of openness align with behaviors connected to effectiveness, experience, and engagement. People working in more open spaces are more likely to report experimenting with new ways of working, taking time to reflect, having fun, and getting inspired.

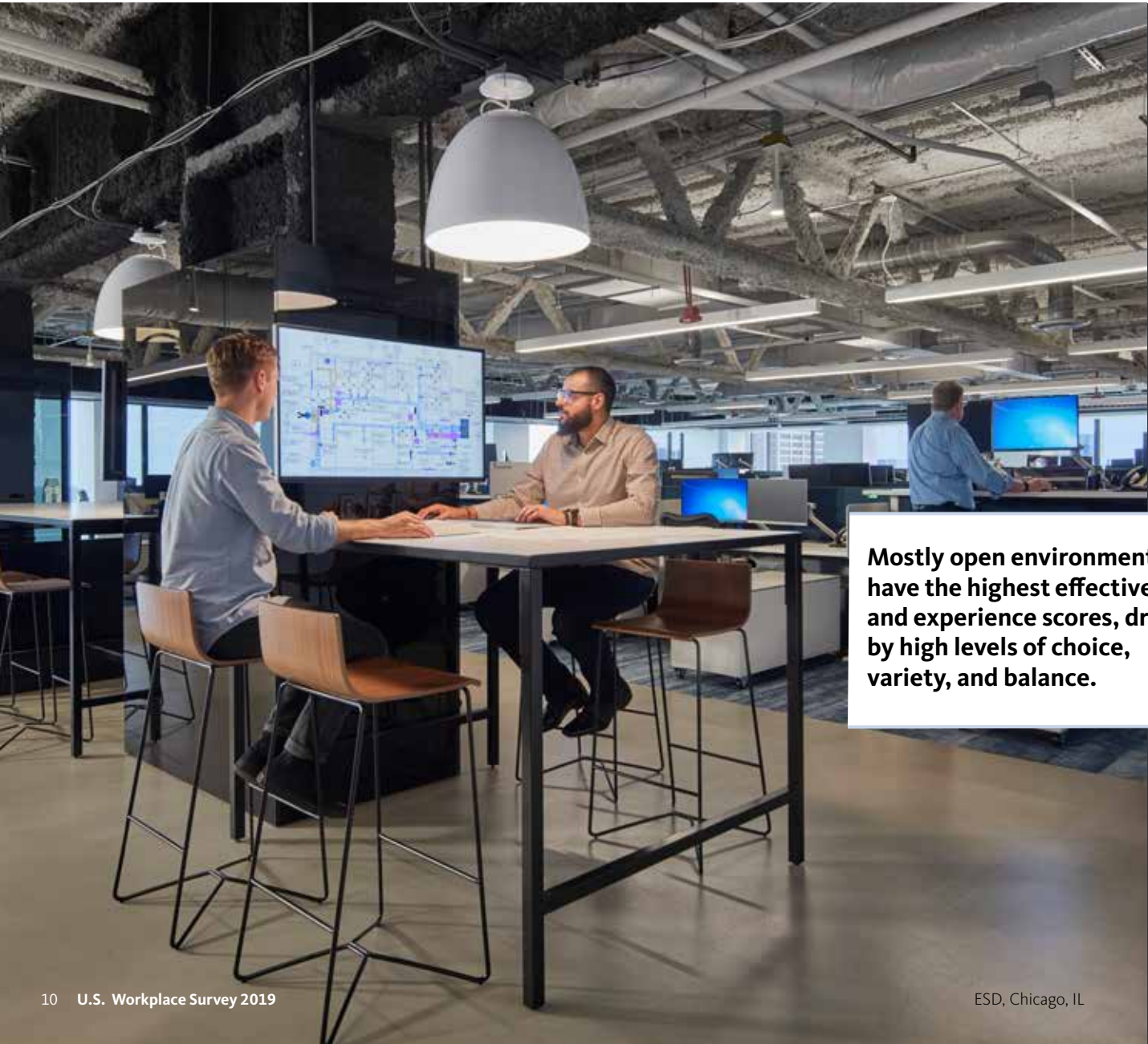
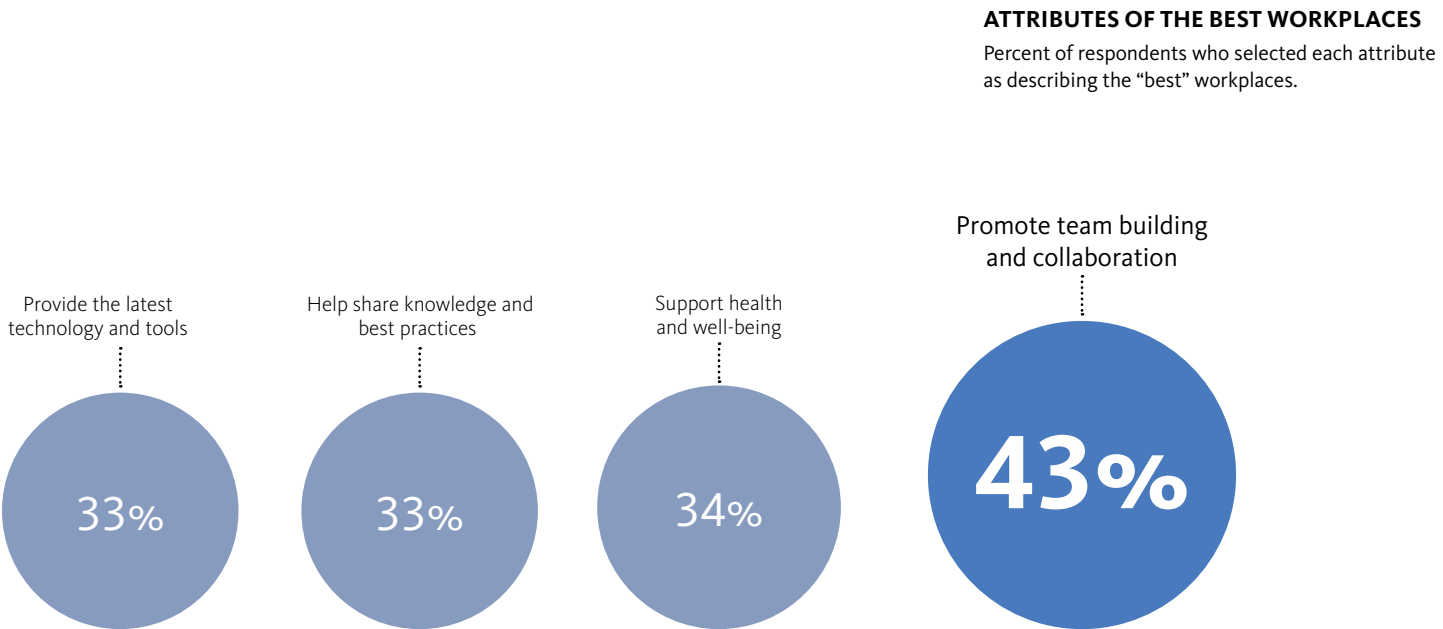
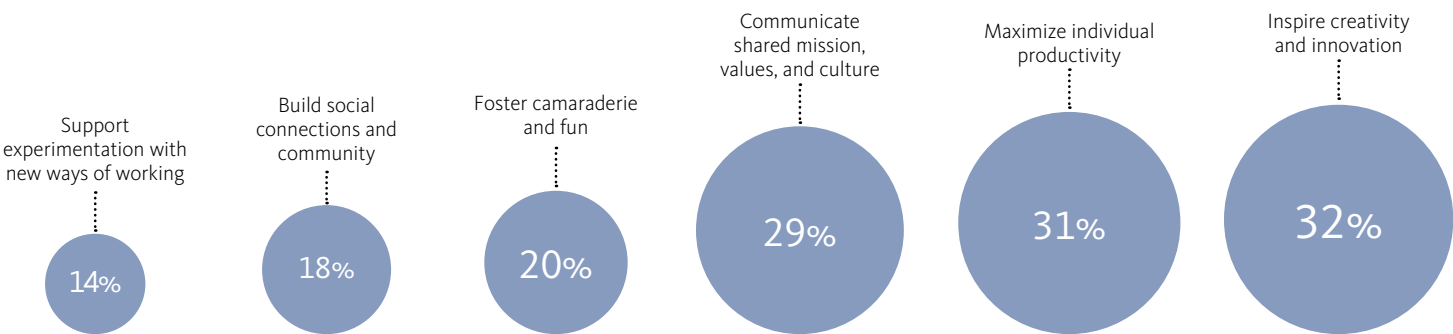
CURRENT & IDEAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

Percent of respondents who currently sit in each type of workplace environment, compared to what they say would be ideal.



KEY FINDING ONE

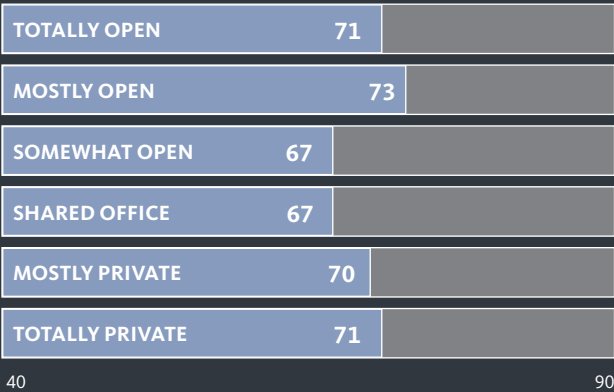
People also see **team building** as the most important aspect of great workplaces.



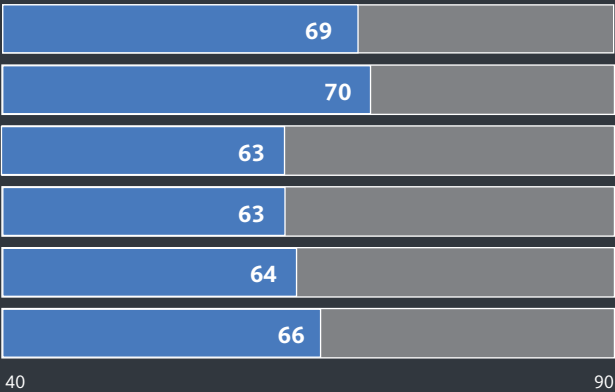
Mostly open environments have the highest effectiveness and experience scores, driven by high levels of choice, variety, and balance.

Mostly open environments deliver best on performance and experience

EFFECTIVENESS (WPI)



EXPERIENCE (EXI)



PERFORMANCE BY CURRENT WORKPLACE TYPE

Experience (EXI) and Effectiveness (WPI) scores for each workplace type, on a 100-point scale.

KEY FINDING TWO

Not all amenities are worth the investment.

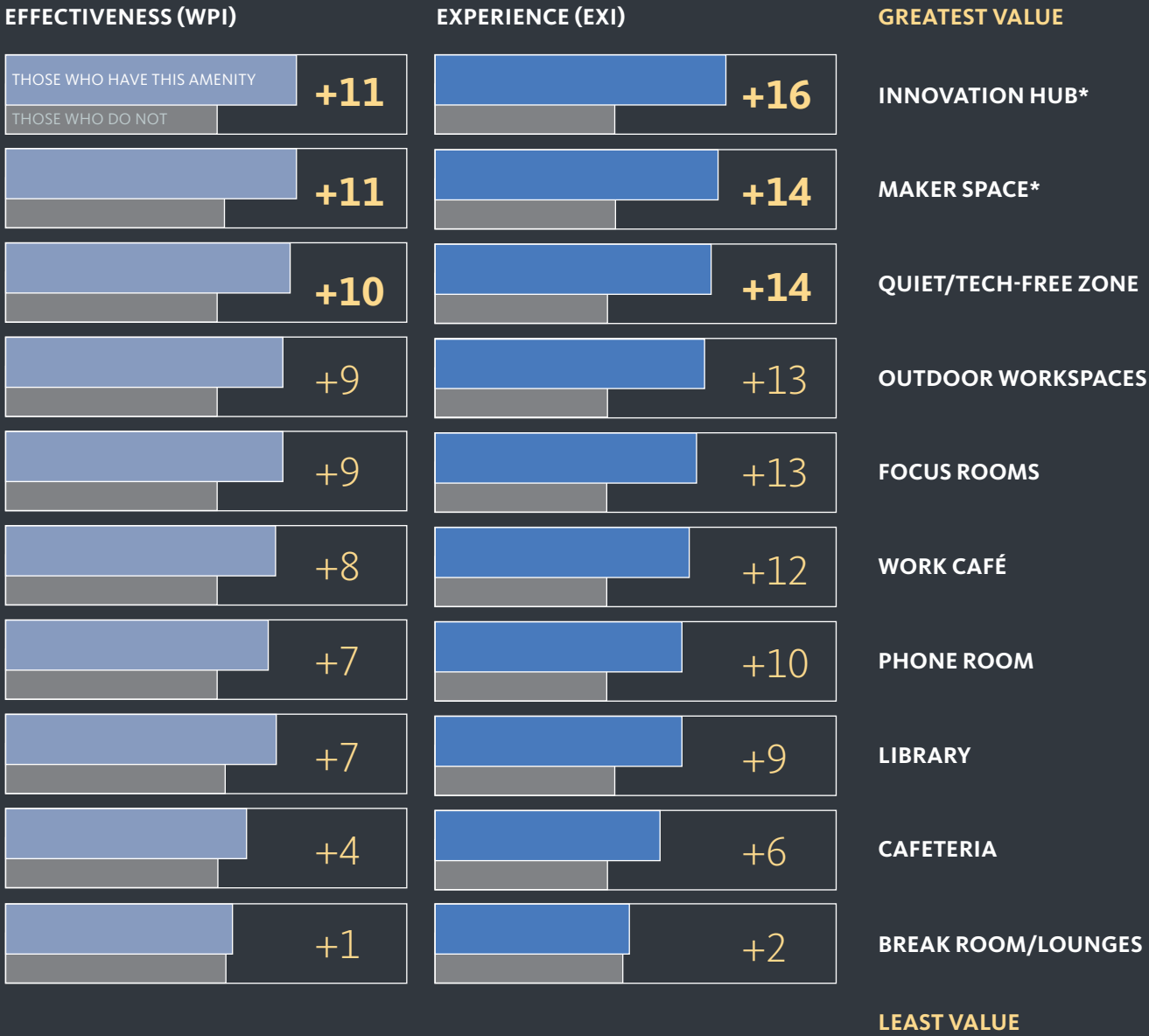
The workplace is becoming more choice-based and amenity-rich. But every workplace can't, and shouldn't, have every amenity. **To target the right investments, we must understand the impact of individual amenities and alternative workspaces on people's performance.** To measure this effect, we asked people which amenity and alternative workspaces are available in their office and compared access-related effectiveness and experience scores.

The amenities that deliver the greatest impact connect directly to people's most salient needs and preferences: spaces directly connected to innovation, making, and collaboration; and quiet places to perform focused or individual work. Amenities with a non-work focus, such as lounges and break rooms, deliver the smallest performance gains in our sample. Amenities that are versatile in their function—such as

outdoor workspaces and work cafés—fall toward the middle. The key takeaway: work-focused amenities that align with the direct needs and priorities of people's jobs have the most value; amenities aren't for escaping work, they're for optimizing it.

A work-focused amenity strategy is also a way to encourage people to work in a more mobile fashion—and those behaviors are associated with higher performance. **For high performers, everywhere is a work setting—both in and out of the office.** Employees who work away from their desks at least sometimes are more effective and report a better experience. An interesting relationship also exists between spending time outside the office entirely and great experience—it's curvilinear. That means there is a balance to strike—too little time, as well as too much time, working away from the office is associated with lower effectiveness and experience scores.

Target workplace investment on the amenities that deliver the highest impact. Those that directly support work-process have most value.



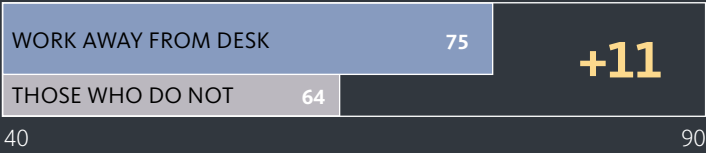
THE AMENITIES THAT DELIVER MOST ON EFFECTIVENESS AND EXPERIENCE
EXI and WPI score comparisons for each amenity, differences in scores between people who have the amenity in their workplace and those who do not.

*Innovation hub and maker spaces are most prominent in technology, media, management advisory, and finance firms.

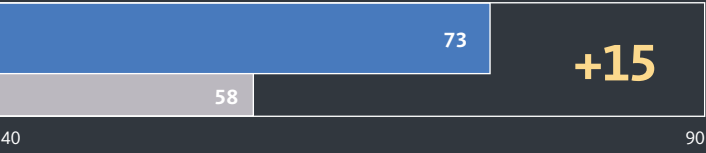
KEY FINDING TWO

The right amenities are a crucial ingredient in a choice-based workplace experience. Workspaces that provide variety and encourage in-office mobility have higher effectiveness and experience scores.

EFFECTIVENESS (WPI)



EXPERIENCE (EXI)

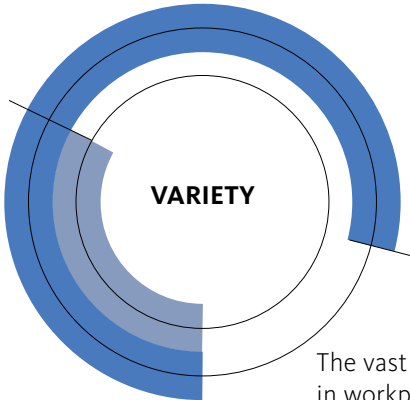


People who work away from their desks within the office frequently have higher effectiveness and experience scores.

IN OFFICE MOBILITY

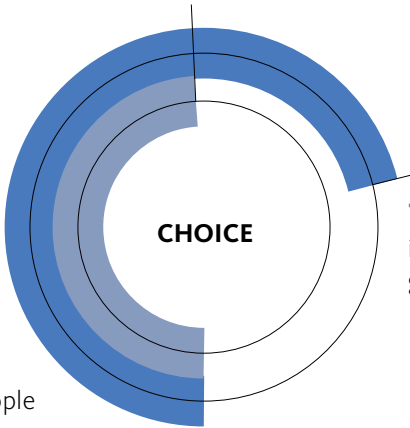
Experience (EXI) and Effectiveness (WPI) scores for employees who spend time working away from their desks.

Only 33% of respondents without a variety of work settings report a great workplace experience.



The vast majority, 79%, of people in workplaces with a variety of settings report a great experience.

Only 49% of people without choice in where to work report a great workplace experience.



71% of people with choice in where to work report a great workplace experience.

THE POWER OF VARIETY

Percent of respondents who report a great experience—those with a variety of work settings within the office versus those without.

THE POWER OF CHOICE

Percent of respondents who report a great experience—those with choice in where to work within the office versus those without.



KEY FINDING THREE

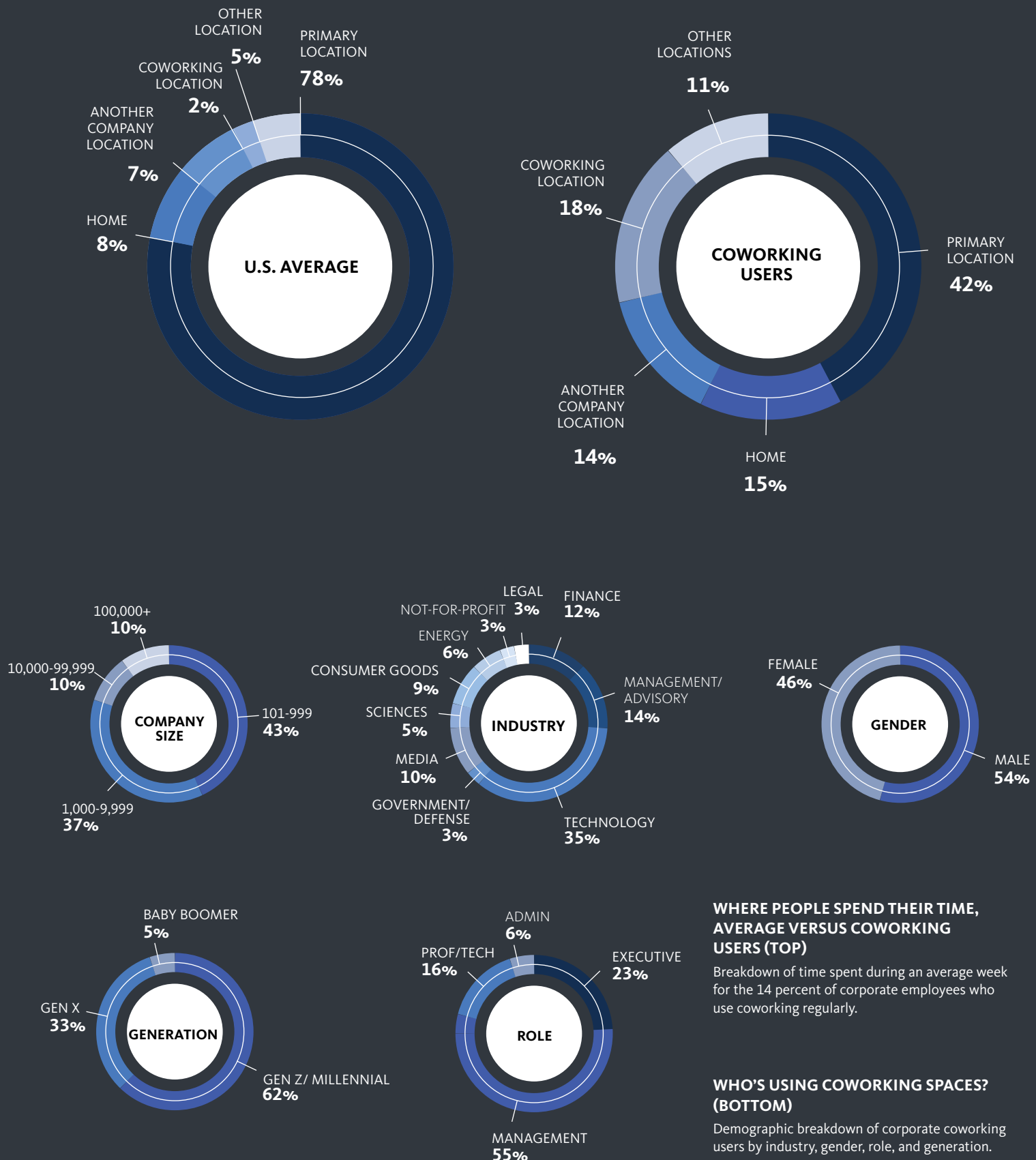
14% of employees at large companies use coworking spaces.

Coworking isn't a new phenomenon. At its inception, these spaces were designed for individuals or small groups that needed a place to work. In recent years, that dynamic has started to shift. There is a fast-rising contingent of "enterprise" users of coworking spaces, or people who utilize coworking space out of an agreement with their employer and a coworking company. **Fourteen percent of our respondents (over 800 people)—all of whom work for companies of 100 people or more—report using coworking space as part of their average workweek.** These users tend to be young and male. Most are in manager positions or above, and an outsized portion work in the technology industry.

For the majority of these users, **coworking appears to be part of their company's broader plan to facilitate autonomy and mobility instead of acting as their primary workspace—and our data suggests this is the right strategy.** Most of these respondents use a coworking space for less than one day per week, and spend more time in their company's own workplace than in a coworking space—42 percent of their

average week compared to 18 percent, respectively. This appears to be close to an optimal allocation of time for many: users who spend about a day a week in coworking spaces have the highest performance scores, with a significant dip when that time exceeds 20 percent of their average week. And we see a similar relationship with time spent in main office locations—too much, or too little, time spent in one's primary workspace is a drag on performance.

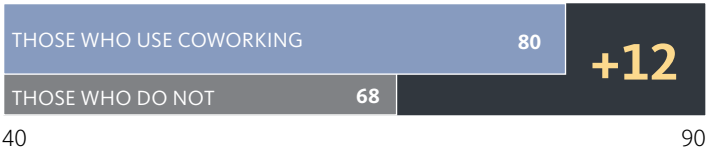
Why do people use coworking spaces? Collaboration and networking top the list, while focus acts as a detractor—the more time a person spends working alone, the less time they spend in coworking spaces on average. **In many ways, coworking spaces function as another high-value amenity—an alternative place to work and support activities not well supported by the desk.** Our data also suggests that coworking utilization may have a negative relationship with the quality of people's primary workspaces: people with better-designed collaborative areas spend less time working in coworking spaces.



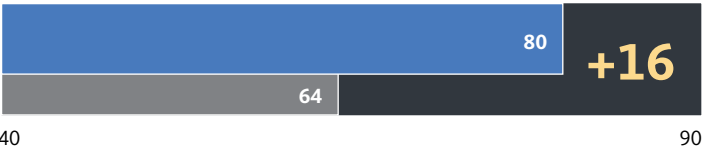
Access to coworking is associated with better effectiveness and experience. People are using these spaces primarily for collaboration and connection.



EFFECTIVENESS (WPI)



EXPERIENCE (EXI)

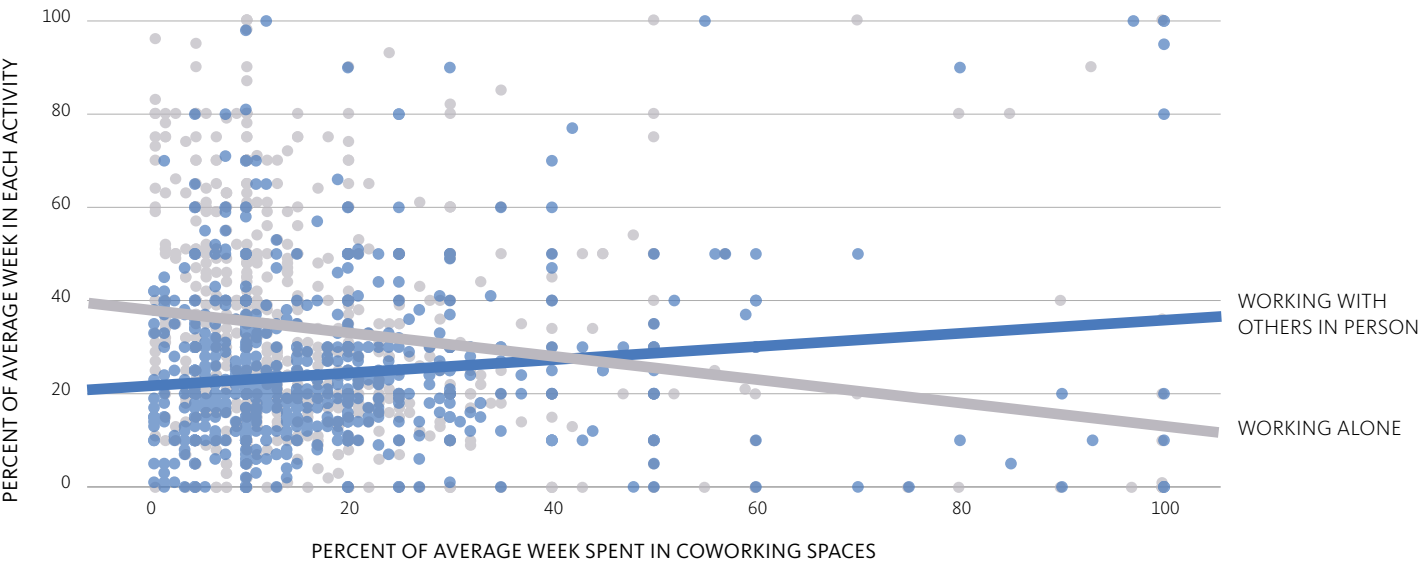


COWORKING AND PERFORMANCE

Experience (EXI) and Effectiveness (WPI) comparison for employees with access to coworking vs. those without.

Coworking performs similarly to a high-value amenity; those who have access have significantly higher effectiveness and experience scores.

Time spent in coworking spaces is positively correlated with time spent collaborating; the opposite is true for focused work.



COWORKING AND BEHAVIOR

Percent of time spent in coworking spaces as it relates to time spent working alone and working with others.

KEY FINDING THREE

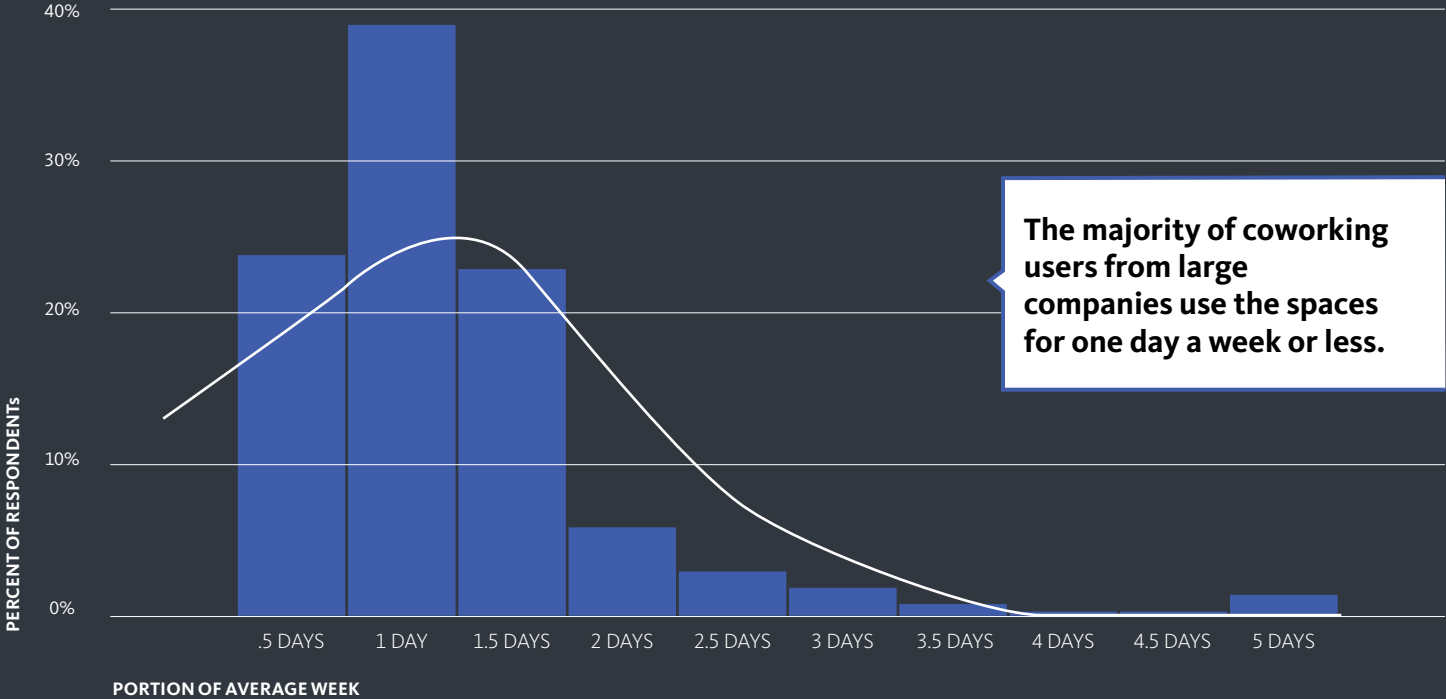
Coworking adds value as an alternative work setting, but only to a point. Spend over a day a week in coworking spaces, and they lose their luster.



ATLAS Workbase, Seattle, WA

ATLAS Workbase, Seattle, WA

Time spent in coworking spaces is associated with higher scores until it exceeds a day per week.

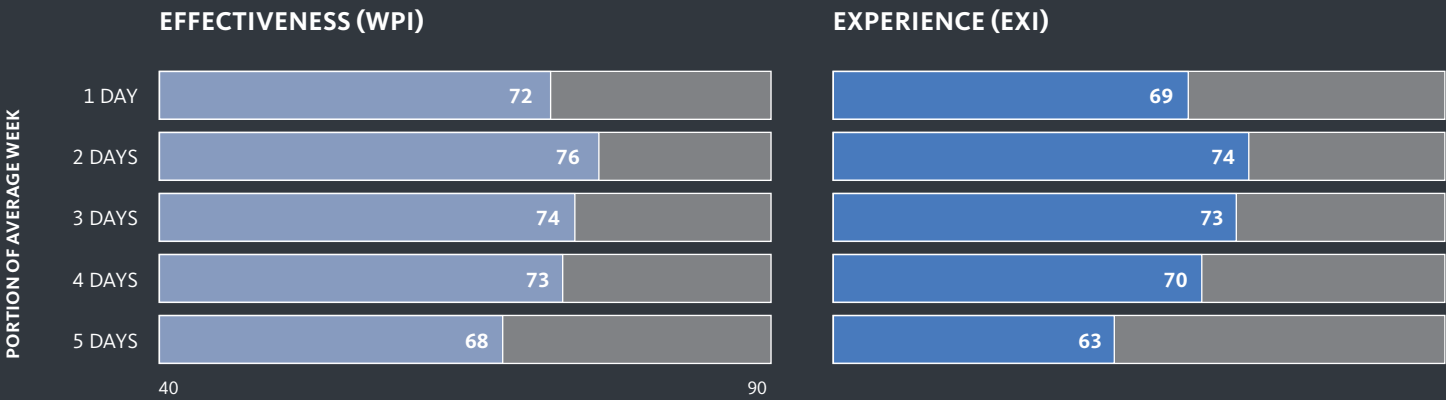


The majority of coworking users from large companies use the spaces for one day a week or less.

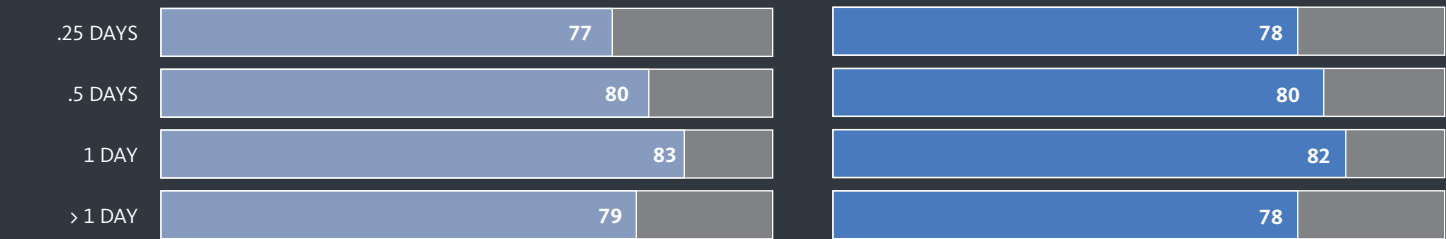
TIME SPENT IN COWORKING SPACES

Number of days spent in coworking spaces during an average week, by percent of respondents.

TIME IN MAIN OFFICE LOCATION (U.S. AVERAGE)



TIME IN COWORKING LOCATION (COWORKING USERS)



TIME SPENT AND PERFORMANCE

Experience (EXI) and Effectiveness (WPI) comparisons by the percent of time employees spend in their main office location (top) and coworking space (bottom) in an average week. Top represents all U.S. respondents; bottom represents just those who use coworking spaces.

Action steps to optimize people's performance:

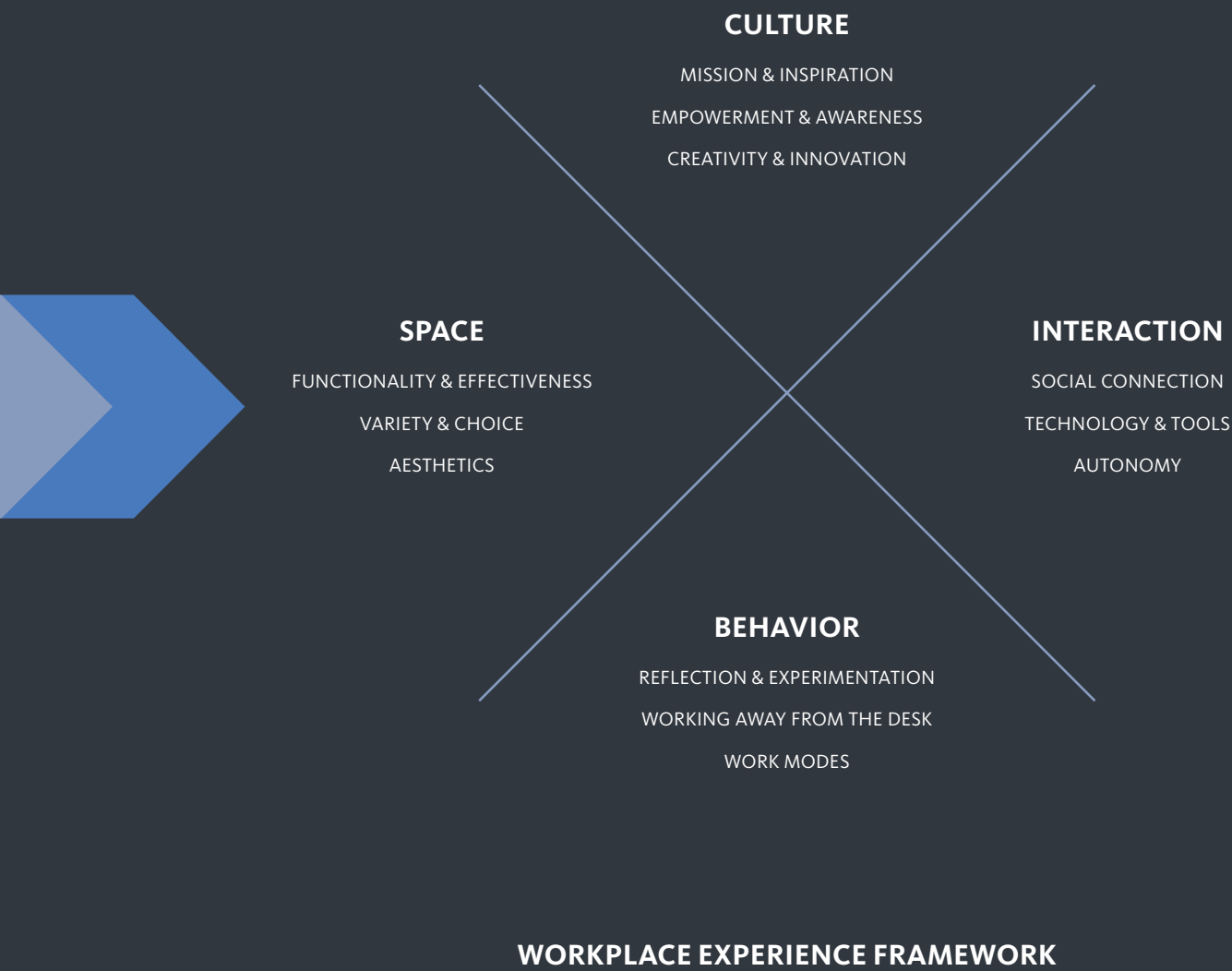
Open environments should be private, too. Greater degrees of openness are associated with high performance; but noise, privacy, and the ability to focus remain key determinants of workplace effectiveness. A choice-based strategy that provides a variety of spaces and different types of enclosure can reconcile these needs.

Amenities aren't about escaping work—they're about optimizing it. People are working from everywhere—and greater mobility is associated with greater performance and engagement. The best amenity strategies prioritize anywhere-working, creating hybrid settings that deliver both an amenity and a workspace: work cafés, quiet/focus zones, and innovation hubs, among others.

Coworking is a supplement, not a replacement, for a great workplace experience. Coworking does not yet contend as a primary work setting—but as a high-value amenity it delivers. Our data shows distinct benefits from giving people access to coworking spaces; but the effect diminishes for those spending significant amounts of time coworking, and most still spend more time in the primary offices.



Creating a great workplace experience requires aligning space, culture, interaction, and behavior.



A highly effective workplace is key to the best experience strategies; but focusing only on effectiveness can overlook broader cultural or behavioral opportunities to optimize engagement and performance. Expanding our focus to all aspects that yield a great employee experience means shifting the language we use to talk about the workplace—and concurrently expanding the metrics and goals for workplace design and strategy.

Our Workplace Experience Framework provides a lens through which to understand the full suite of factors that makes a great workplace experience. By understanding, and using design as a catalyst to improve culture, interaction, and behavior, helps us move beyond dichotomous discussions to work in the nuanced, complex reality of today's workplace—and truly deliver what people today want and need from the workplace.



9ⁱⁿ10 Over nine in ten people who have a great experience at work report getting inspired during an average week.

1.5x People who have a great experience at work also rate their workplaces to be significantly more welcoming.

1.75x People who have a great experience at work are significantly more likely to report experimenting with new ways of working.

4x People with a great experience are four times more likely to be in balanced environments—those that prioritize both focus and collaboration.

The U.S. workplace is on par, but not outperforming, its global peers.

The U.S. workplace has some of the highest effectiveness scores as measured by the WPI in any region we've studied recently. On other metrics, the workplace falls more toward the middle—people in the U.S. report less choice than those in the Middle East, Germany, and Asia.

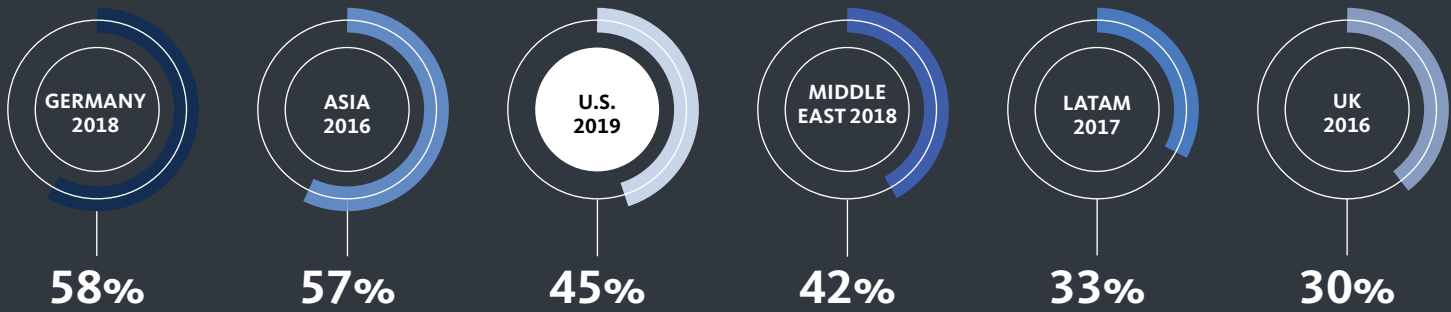
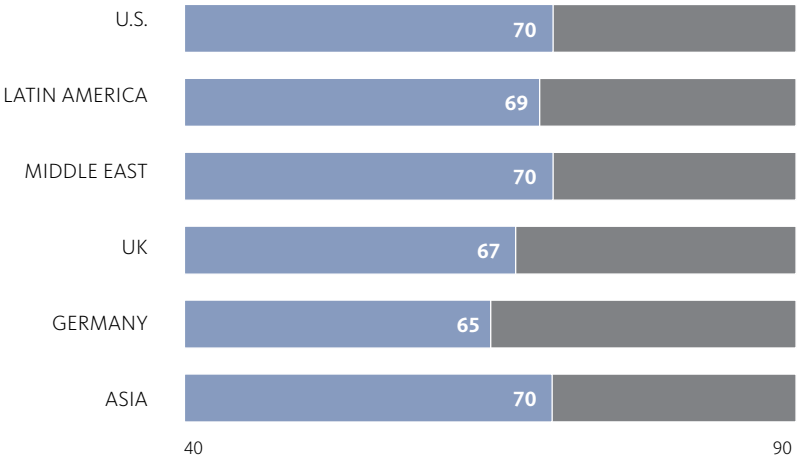
The physical nature of the workplace also varies substantially around the globe. While our “degrees of openness” variable is too new to compare across other global regions, we see wide variations in the

individual workspace in which most people sit in each country.

The U.S. is comparatively the most enclosed and the most open of any region we've studied: 35 percent of respondents sit in individual, private offices; 42 percent sit in some sort of “open” environment. Shared and group office environments are comparatively rare in the U.S.; Germany, the Middle East, and Latin America are much more likely to use these settings at a large scale.

EFFECTIVENESS (WPI)

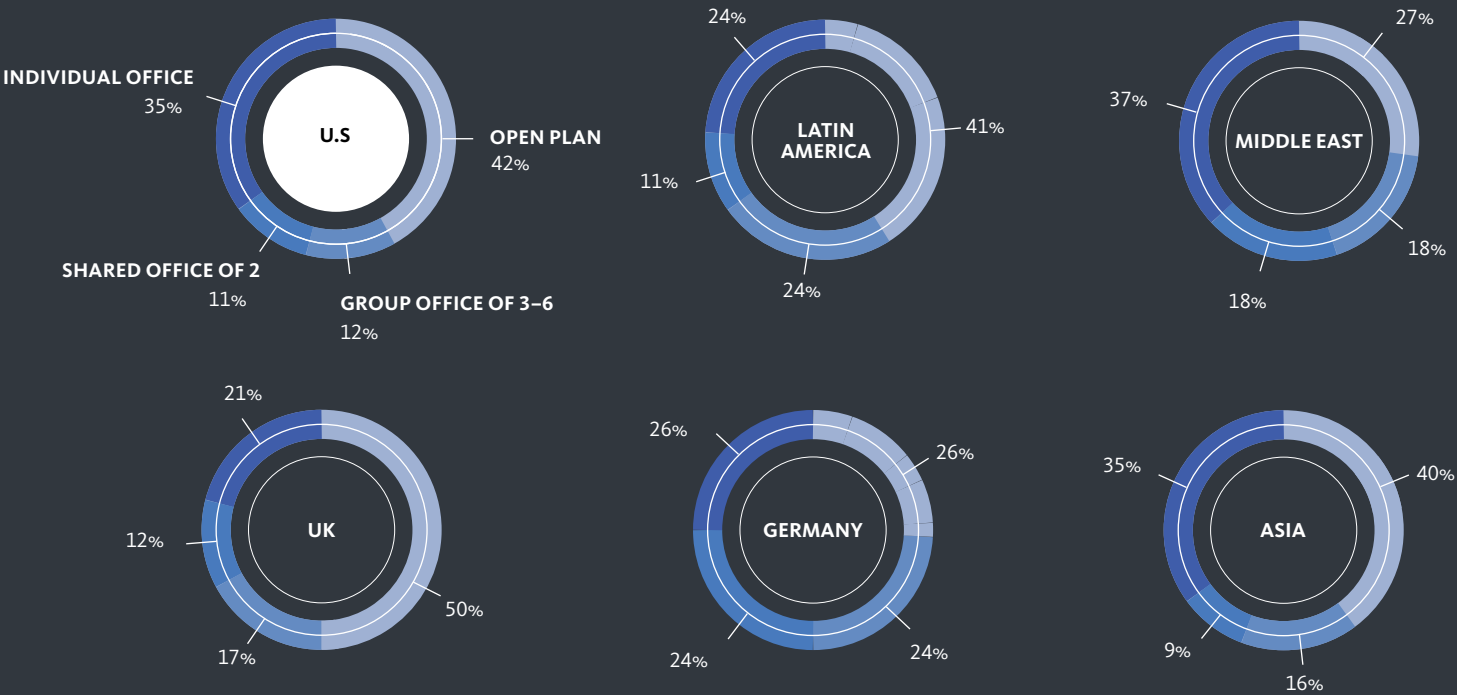
Effectiveness, as measured by the WPI score, by global region. Data is from most recent Workplace Survey in each country, conducted between 2016 and 2019.



U.S. WORKERS ARE ONLY AVERAGE ON CHOICE

Workers who report they have choice in where to work, by global region. Data is from most recent Workplace Survey in each country, conducted between 2016 and 2019.

People in the U.S. are less likely to work in shared environments than workers in other countries.



SHARED ENVIRONMENTS ARE UNCOMMON IN THE U.S.

Type of individual work setting employees have, by global region. Data is from most recent Workplace Survey in each country, conducted between 2016 and 2019.

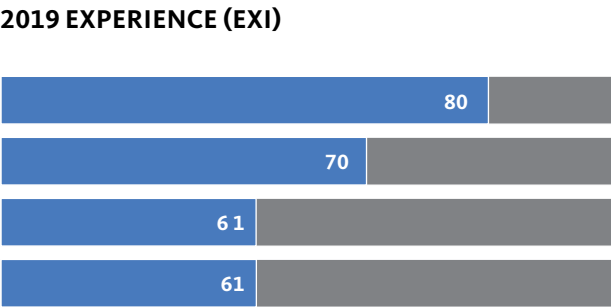
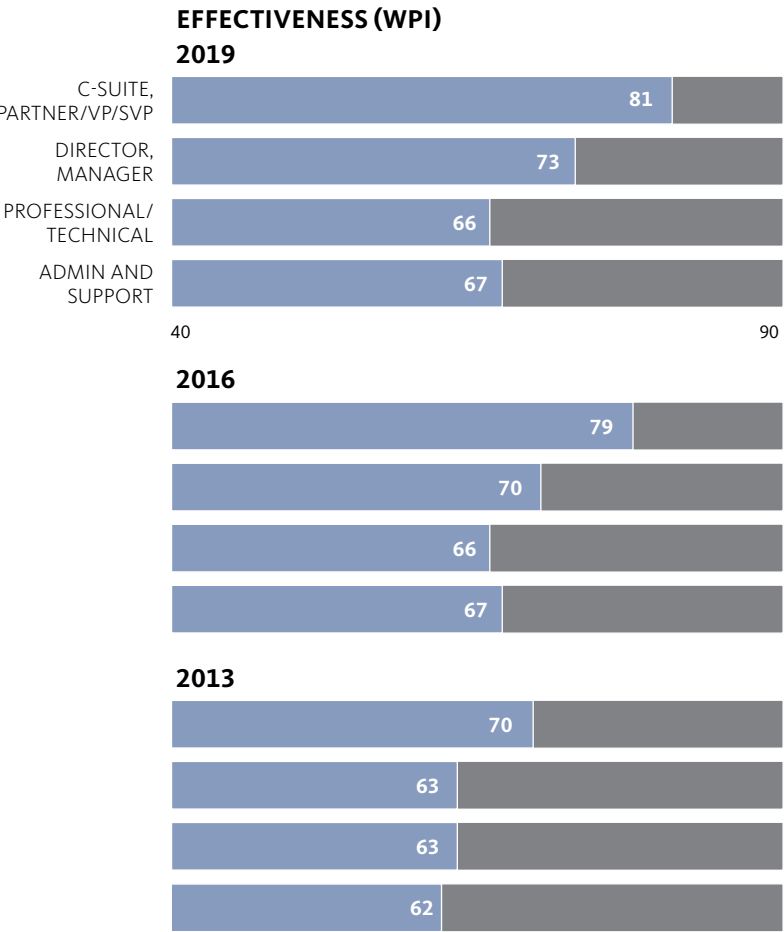
A great workplace experience shouldn't just be for leadership.

People in leadership positions have a significantly better experience at work—and the difference between their experience and those in other roles has been growing over time. Over the past six years scores have improved overall, but gains for managers and directors have far outpaced professional, technical, and administrative role scores.

We now see a consistent pattern in our data—Partner/VP/SVP respondents have the highest experience and effectiveness scores, followed by Director and Manager-level respondents. Professional, technical, and administrative workers have the lowest scores in our sample, with few

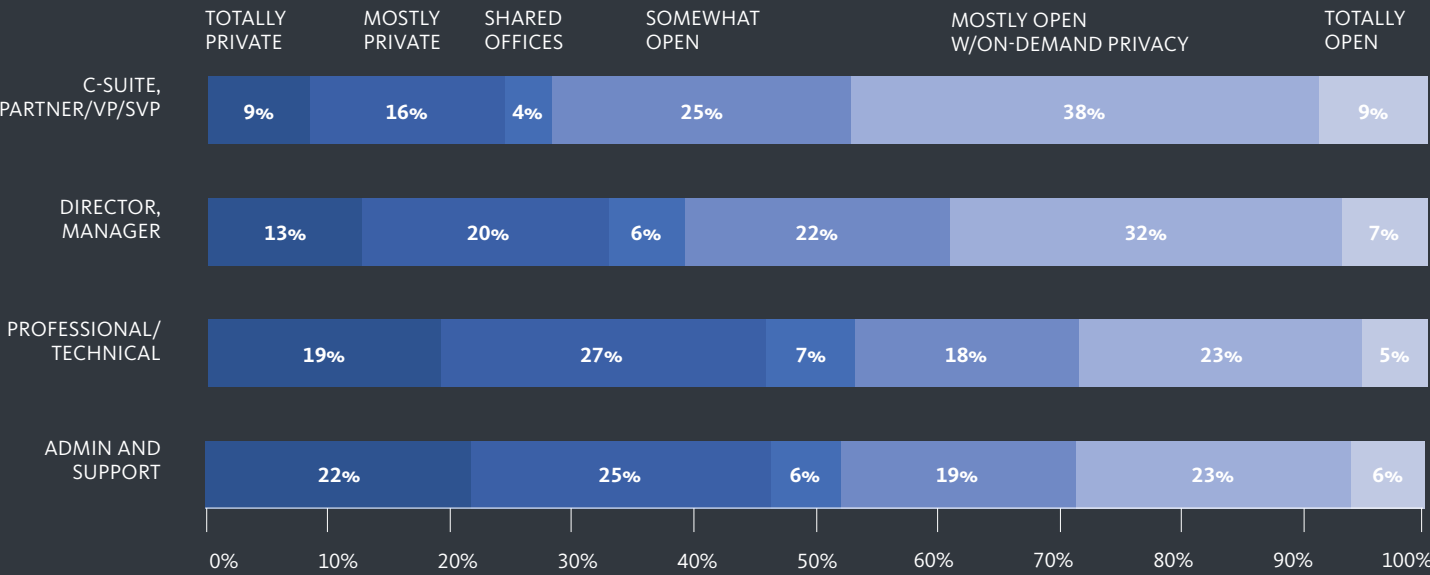
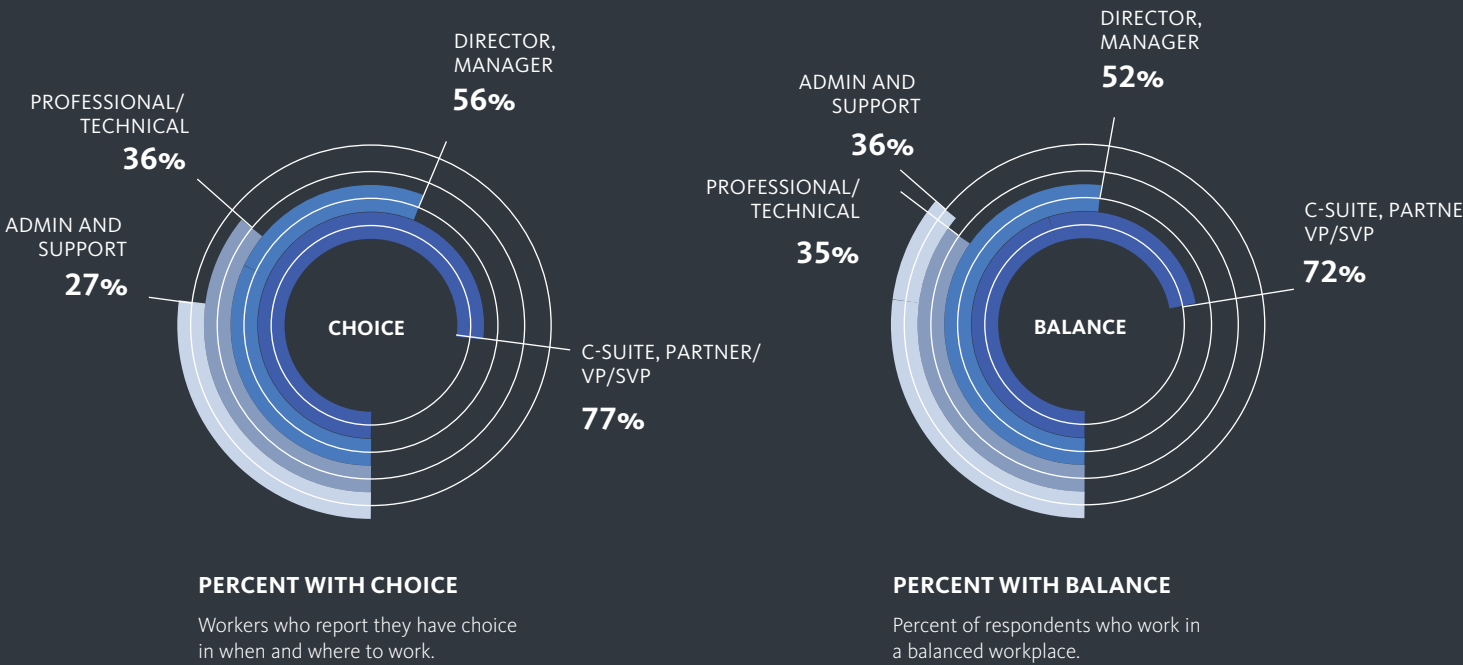
significant differences in workplace effectiveness or experience between these groups. Peoples' ideal workplace environments also show significant variation by role. The most senior roles tend to prefer more open environments, while those in administrative, professional, and technical roles seek more privacy.

One crucial place where the professional, technical, and administrative workplace experience does continue to differ is in the levels of choice people report: professional and technical workers have more choice in where to work than their administrative peers.



EFFECTIVENESS AND EXPERIENCE BY ROLE

Effectiveness, as measured by the WPI score, and experience by the EXI score, by organizational role. Comparisons by year for WPI scores from 2013 and 2016.



IDEAL WORK ENVIRONMENT BY ROLE

People's ideal work environment based on "degrees of openness," segmented by organizational role.

History

Gensler’s **U.S. Workplace Survey 2019** is the latest iteration of ongoing research on the workplace, which began in 2005. A subsequent survey in 2006 established the connections between workplace design, employee productivity, and business competitiveness. In 2008, our research established a framework for understanding knowledge work through the lens of the four “work modes”—focus, collaborate, learn, and socialize. We discovered that the effectiveness and support of all four work modes connect to employee engagement and company performance.

Gensler’s 2013 and 2016 U.S. Workplace Surveys continued these efforts, taking the pulse of the American workplace as it

relates to employee effectiveness, business performance, and innovation.

This report represents the integration of our historic workplace surveys with recent insights into the nature of experience, drawing from the 2017 **Gensler Experience Index**. These questions, in addition to existing workplace survey questions, allow for direct comparison with data collected through past research efforts as well as parallel surveys conducted around the globe in the UK, Middle East, Asia, Germany, and Latin America. This puts our findings in the context of fundamental work and life shifts over that time period.

Methods

This survey represents data collected via an online survey conducted among 6,000+ anonymous, panel-based respondents representing a broad cross section of demographics, including education, age, gender, and geographical location. Respondents do not work for Gensler and were recruited via a third-party panel provider.

Respondents were required to be full-time knowledge workers who work in an office some or all of the time, and work for companies with more than 100 employees within 10 designated industry segments. Survey questions included those from

Gensler’s WPI and EXI alongside additional questions that ask respondents to rate their workspaces and companies across a variety of factors, including innovation, motivation, choice, and technology, as well as individual patterns of behavior and preferences.

The Gensler Research Institute team employed inferential statistics techniques, such as multiple linear regression, bivariate correlation, and analysis of variance (ANOVA), as well as descriptive statistics, to derive these findings. For all inferential statistical tests, the Institute team utilized a p-value cut-off of 0.005.

2005

UK WORKPLACE SURVEY
Employees see a clear link between the physical work environment and personal productivity.

2006

U.S. WORKPLACE SURVEY
The link is confirmed between the physical work environment and productivity in the minds of workers.

2008

U.S. & UK WORKPLACE SURVEYS
Research integrates new questions focused on experience to measure effectiveness and experience in tandem.

2012

WPI META ANALYSIS
Analysis of client survey data reveals the outsized impact of focus effectiveness on overall workplace performance.

2013

U.S. WORKPLACE SURVEY
Focus, balance, and choice in the workplace emerge as key drivers of satisfaction, performance, and innovation.

2016

U.S. WORKPLACE SURVEY
Findings connect workplace design directly to organizational innovation and an “innovation ecosystem”

2016-2019

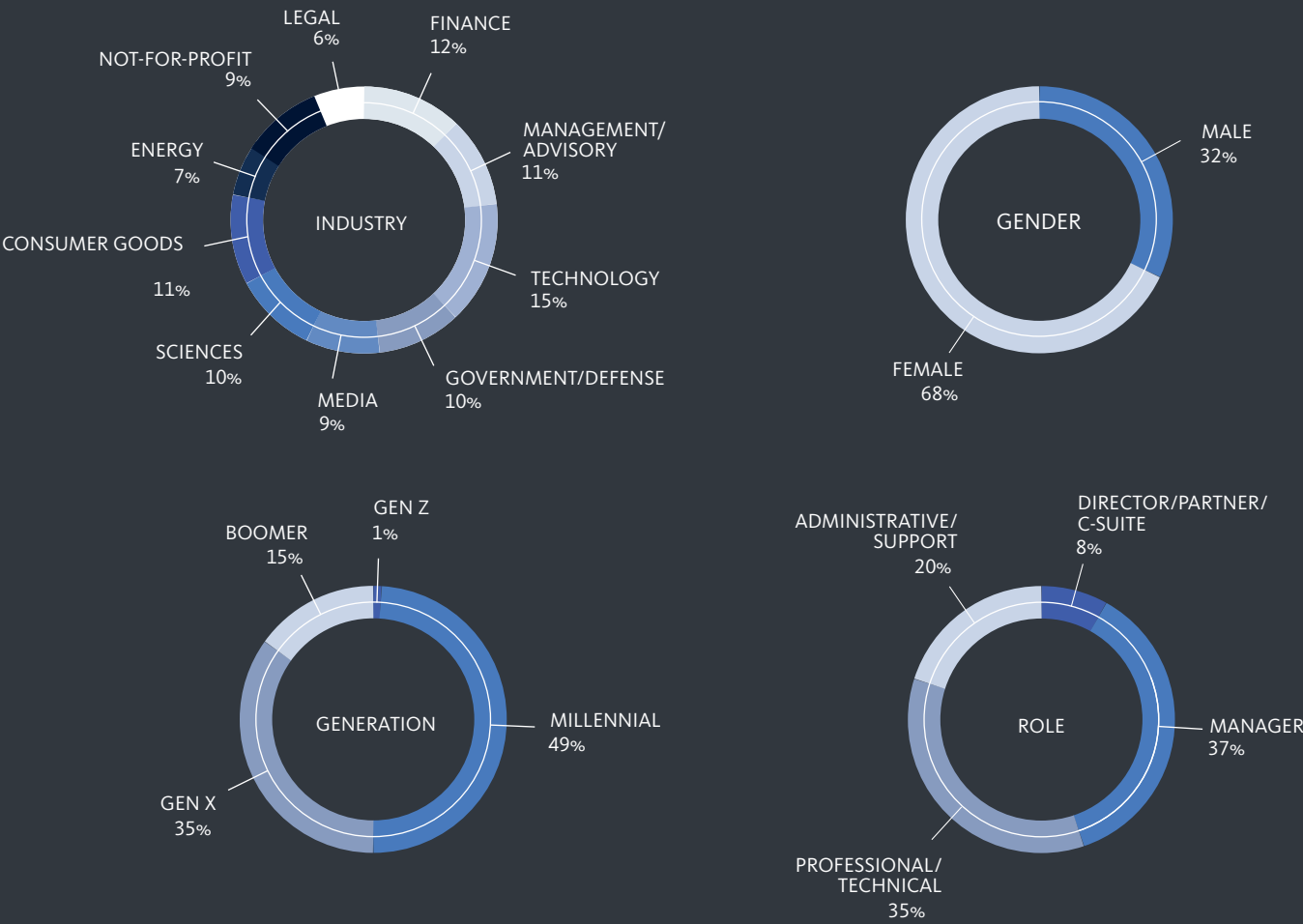
GLOBAL WORKPLACE SURVEYS
Surveys conducted in the UK, Asia, Latin America, and Germany build a global database of workplace respondents.

2017

GENSLER EXPERIENCE INDEX
Research into the qualities of experience identifies emotional and behavioral drivers of experience at work.

2019

U.S. WORKPLACE SURVEY
Research integrates new questions focused on experience to measure effectiveness and experience in tandem.



Applied Research Tools: The WPIxSM

Gensler's Workplace Performance Index (WPIx) is a proprietary, web-enabled survey tool designed to measure the performance of an individual workplace or client portfolio. The tool is used for both pre- and post-occupancy analysis to allow for comparisons and to document improvements in workplace effectiveness. At the beginning of a project, the WPIx is used to gather employee input on how they work, space effectiveness, and workplace experience factors to inform design decisions.

Post-occupancy, typically 3 to 6 months after move-in, employees are surveyed

to measure the success of the design solution. By using a core set of parallel questions, individual projects can then be directly benchmarked against the results of national surveys to put project work into a context of broader knowledge and trends in workplace design.

WPI surveys are conducted as a part of direct client engagements. The results of WPI surveys are collected in a separate database from Workplace Survey responses. The WPI database now has over 350,000 survey responses from employees of Gensler clients.

350,000

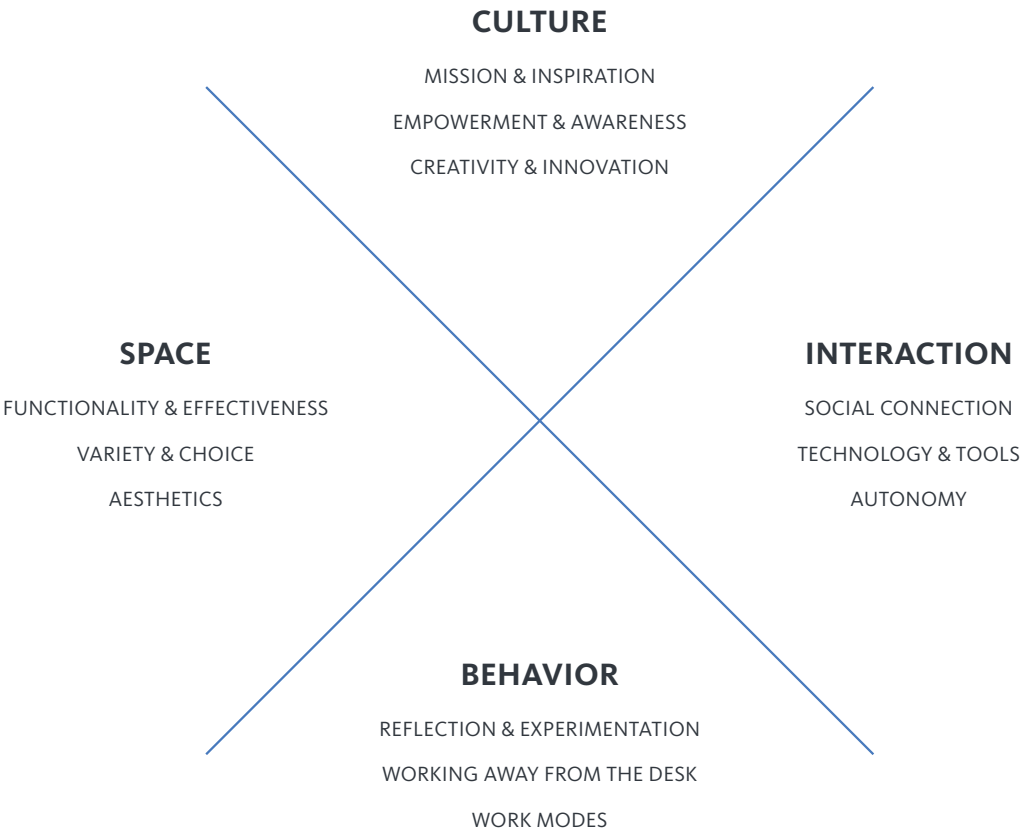
client respondents

50+ 11

countries

languages

WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK



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Open environments
should be private, too.
Amenities aren't about
escaping work—
they're about optimizing it.
Coworking is a supplement,
not a replacement, for a
great workplace experience.

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The Gensler Research Institute is a collaborative network of researchers focused on a common goal: to generate new knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of the connection between design, business, and the human experience. Through a

combination of global and local research grants, and external partnerships, we seek insights focused on solving the world's most pressing challenges. We are committed to unlocking new solutions and strategies that will define the future of design.