

Purposeful Presence

How and why employees return



The landscape has changed dramatically, but the dust hasn't yet fully settled.

Movement is still ongoing.

Foreword

It's time to remap
the landscape

We are coming to a place that may start to look like a 'new normal'. However, we must accept that the 'global ways of working' experiment is still ongoing and, longitudinally, it's perhaps 2-3 years before we will all understand the true impact on employees, organisations and societies.

There can be no argument that the work landscape is new and different, so you must remap it. You have to understand the terrain – your new workplace experience baseline – in order to chart your way forward.

Knowing why your employees choose their work locations is vital in understanding your terrain. Our data is starting to show that a purpose-driven approach is heavily influencing this choice.

The concept of 'Purposeful Presence' will start to appear in every corner of the Hybrid Working debate. Knowing what it means and understanding how it changes the way employees engage in your workplaces will be critical.

It's about 'Hotelification' being more than just raiding the hospitality industry for front of house staff. It's about a 'cost of living' now being seen as a 'cost of working'. It's about neighbourhoods at home and at work, the power of connection over collaboration and how in an 'age of experience', you must magnetise not mandate.



Defining Purposeful Presence and the challenge it faces



Around 80% of employees are working in a hybrid way

Purposeful Presence is a simple proposition: for employees who are offered a reasonable level of choice and autonomy for when they use an office, those trips will increasingly be with a particular purpose in mind. This purpose driven return to office is clear in our data already, as employees come to associate the office with supporting certain tasks more effectively than their homes. Once these forces are recognised, employers can use them to better support employees.

That said, Purposeful Presence also offers employers a formidable challenge: employees ‘investing’ in their time in-office, will increasingly have heightened expectations for how well those workplaces support that narrower range of tasks.

The challenge — The home vs. the Office

Leesman data collected since the start of the global pandemic has allowed us to longitudinally examine the adoption of hybrid working.

Figure 1 clearly shows that across a sample of 93,000+ respondents, location choice has settled into a stable pattern. The most adopted working approach (and the only approach on the increase) is ‘Hybrid + Home’. This is where a respondent has indicated that they are working in a hybrid way (spending at least 5 percent of their time in more than one location) that includes an element of home working. The other working approaches are declining or remain consistently low.

This is the first critical factor in the adoption of Purposeful Presence. Very few employees are wholly office based or wholly home based – around 80% of employees are working in a hybrid way that includes the use of their homes and offices. These employees face a simple challenge: what to do where?

Fig. 1 — Hybrid, home, workplace – working by time

Leesman Office and/or Leesman Home Working, N = 93,565, Q3 2021 – Q2 2022



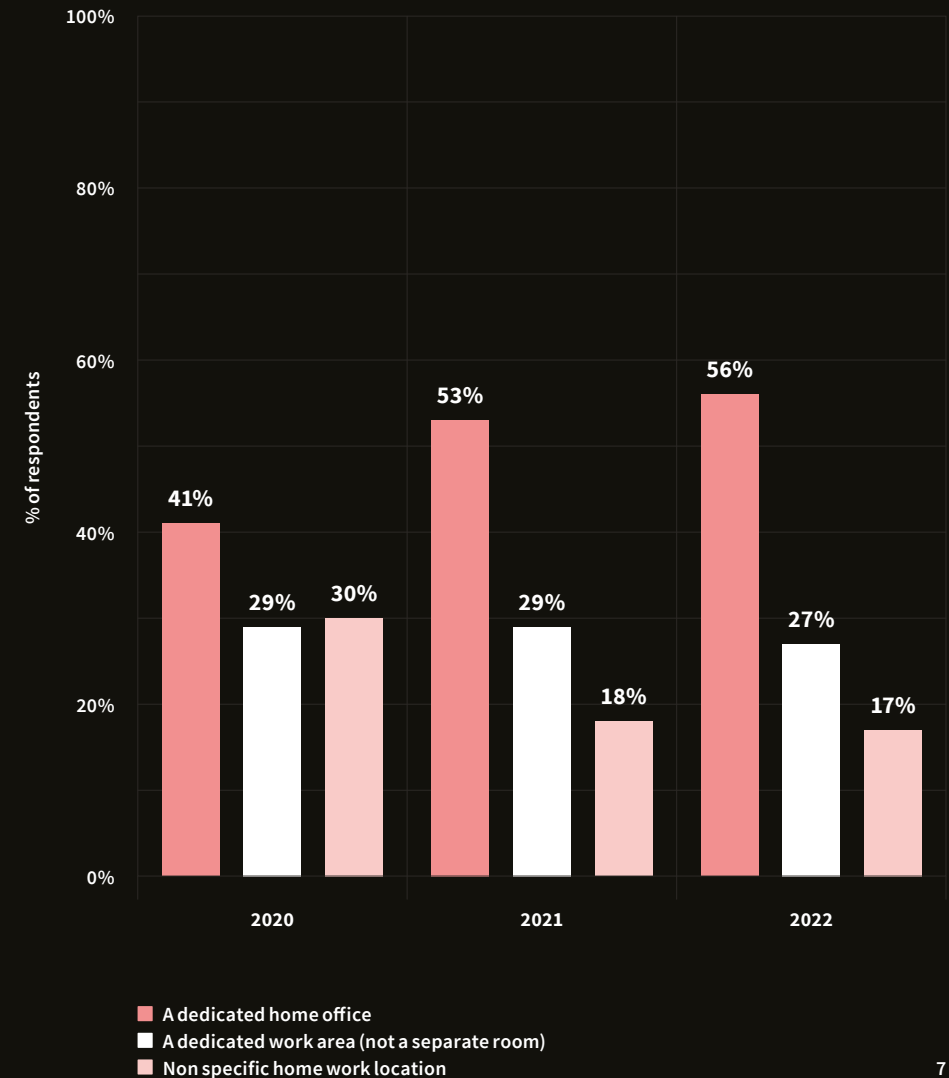
Defining

For many, this choice is not an easy one, especially when previous Leesman research has shown the home working environment better supports the majority of working activities for most respondents. Indeed, the average home supports the average employee better than the average office. But there are activities that the office does better. And employees will more willingly succumb to the desire for some organisations to see more people back working together, if the office can show how much better it can be at supporting these activities than their employees' homes.

There is also another force at play: the proportion of respondents with 'A dedicated work room or office' in their homes has been steadily increasing since 2020, which the data suggests, will very likely increase the proportion of respondents having a positive home working experience. Simply put, respondents are investing time and money into creating bespoke home working environments and are sacrificing space in their homes to do so. Suffice to say, the magnetic force around the home working environment is getting stronger for a greater proportion of respondents.

Fig. 2 — A dedicated work room or area typically used when working from home

Leesman Office and/or Leesman Home Working, 2022 N = 22,943 (Q1-Q2); 2021 N = 106,577(Q1-Q4); 2020 N = 154,101 (Q1-Q4)



The three stages of Purposeful Presence

Purposeful Presence in the office consists of three cyclical stages:

Stage 1

Conscious decision making

To leave your bespoke home working environment and come to the office involves conscious decision-making.

Stage 2

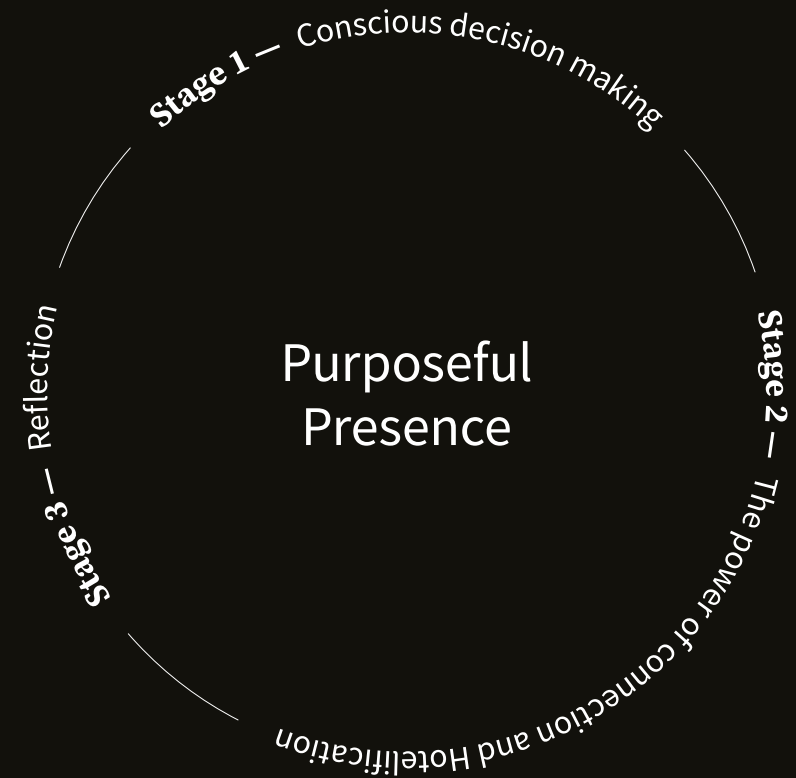
The power of connection and Hotelification

To understand how employees interact with their workplaces, organisations need to know what forces are at play in pulling them between the office and home.

Stage 3

Reflection

Every interaction an employee has with their workplace will define and guide their thought process when next faced with the decision to journey to the office or not.



Stage 1

Conscious decision making – what is it and who has it?



75% working in a hybrid way felt like they had freedom over where they work

Where an employee is afforded location choice, even if within certain guidelines, it is our belief that they will make those decisions based on the availability of workplace features that they require to support specific parts of their role.

Conscious decision making cannot be achieved if an organisation mandates the work settings that its employees use.

This is mandated presence not purposeful presence.

In Spring 2022, Leesman’s advisory panel of [Global Real Estate Leaders](#) responded to a poll that questioned specific aspects of their real estate and workplace strategies.

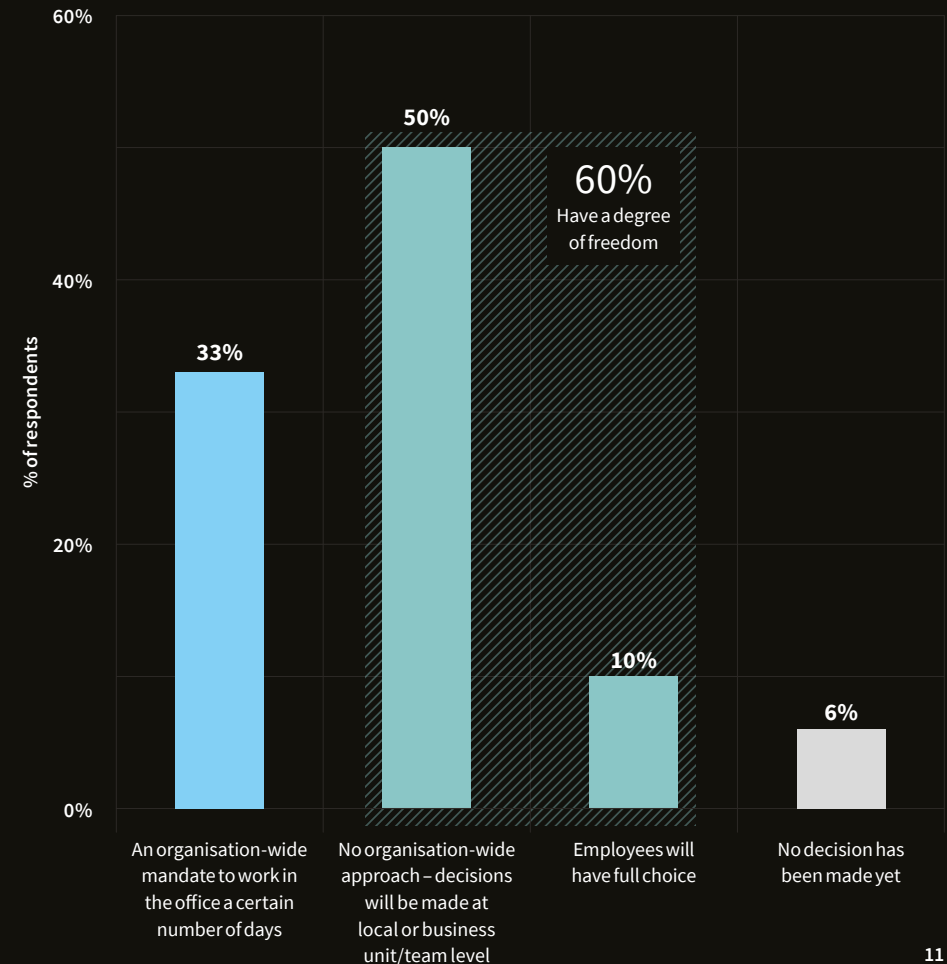
Across 125 responses, 33 percent of respondents indicated that ‘There will be an organisation-wide mandate to work in the office a certain number of days’. This approach does not easily facilitate employees feeling empowered to choose locations best suited to particular activities. Instead of gently drawing employees out their bespoke home working environments, there is a danger that this stronger mandate disenfranchises employees, especially if the workplace is not as good as their own homes at supporting what they are employed to do. Fortunately, 60% of respondents indicated that employees would have a degree of freedom.

Data from Leesman’s Wellbeing module (Q3 2021 – Q2 2022, N = 20,527) provides insight on whether employees felt they had ‘freedom over where they do the work related to their job’ and how that impacts their interaction with their workplaces. Analysis of this data showed 75 percent of respondents that were working in a hybrid way, felt like they had freedom over where they work.

Fig. 3 — Who will decide how often employees work in the office, post COVID?

N = 125 Real Estate Leaders

Corporate Real Estate Leaders Poll 2022 Responses



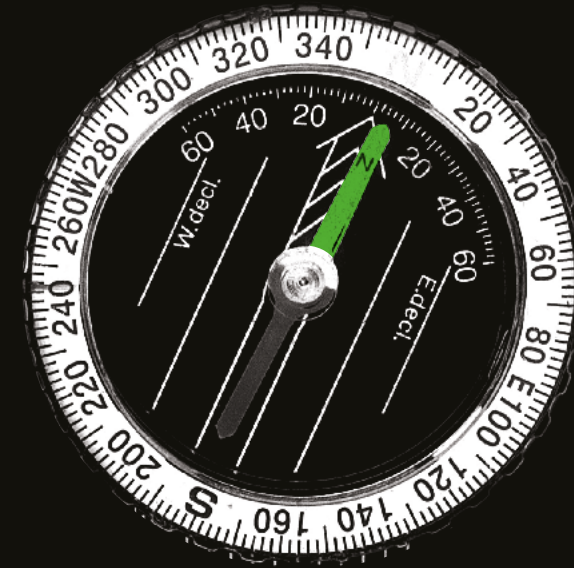
Stage 1



57% wholly office-based employees agreed to being free to choose where they worked

Interestingly, 57 percent of employees who reported being wholly office-based also agreed to being free to choose where they work. This 'office only' figure is pertinent as it serves as a reminder that not everyone working in an 'office only' way has been mandated to do so. It is easy to jump to a conclusion that anyone working in the office full time must be being forced to do so. With over half of the respondents working in an 'office only' way agreeing that they have the freedom to choose where they work, this is not the case. These employees may well be showcasing the ultimate power of Purposeful Presence. Or do they represent the respondents who have a poor home working experience?

Whether a respondent works in a hybrid way or in an 'office only' way, the majority agreed that they have freedom over where they do the work related to their job.



Stage 1

In Figure 4 we can compare respondents who indicated they had freedom, versus those that indicated they did not have freedom, and how well their organisation's workplace supported the 21 working activities. Figure 4 acts as a striking advocacy of conscious decision making as it showcases that those who have freedom expressed that they are significantly better supported across all 21 activities.

To some extent, it is reasonable to attribute this finding to the fact that an organisation which facilitates conscious decision making is more likely to have a more supportive workplace.

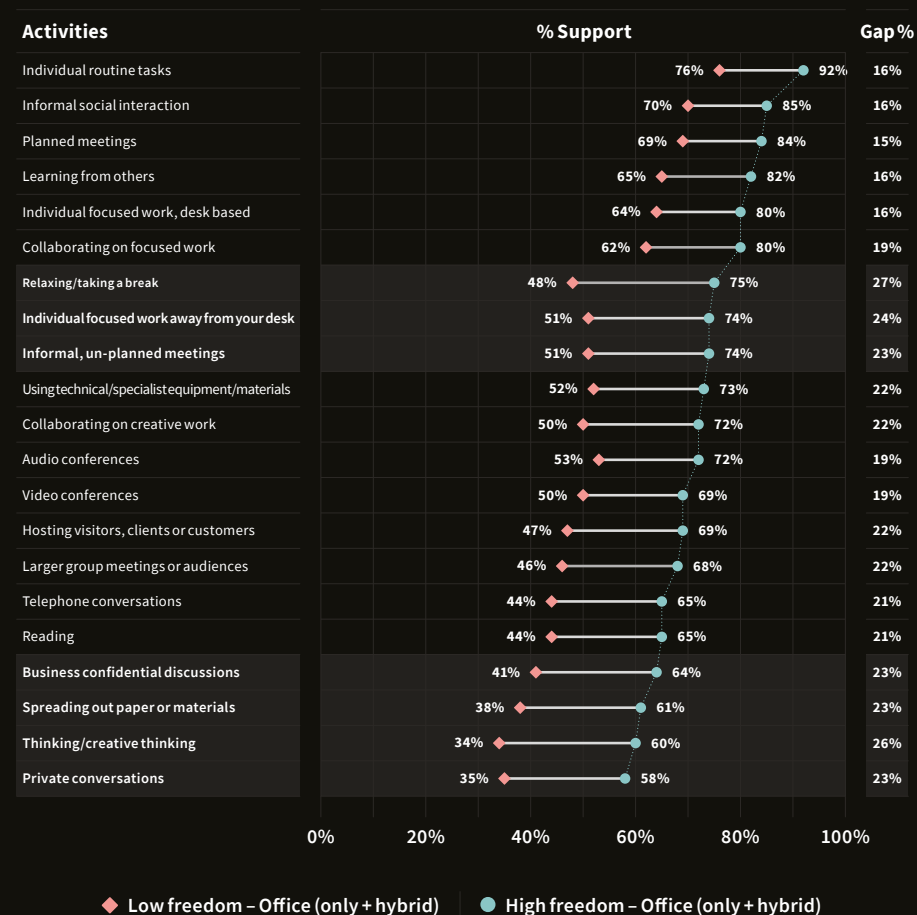
To investigate further, we reviewed several different client case studies. Interestingly they showed that organisations had a high degree of variation between employees who felt they had low freedom and employees with high freedom. Further research is needed in this area – to understand why in these cases, respondents rating the same workplaces within the same organisation, reported such different levels of autonomy.

But significantly, it does further evidence that employees who feel they have choices and who exercise them, perceive that their office is better supporting their working activities.

Fig. 4 — Office work activities – high freedom vs. low freedom

I have the freedom over where I do the work related to my job – Yes and No

Leesman Wellbeing Module,
N = 20,527, Q3 2021 – Q2 2022



Stage 2

The power of connection and Hotelification



Standardised Leesman work activities are better supported at home

To understand how employees with freedom interact with their workplaces, organisations need to understand what forces are at play in pulling them between the office and home.

Respondents indicated that 16 of the 21 standardised Leesman work activities are better supported at home, demonstrating that the effectiveness of most workplaces is mediocre at best and that the appeal towards the home working environment is therefore great. However, there are a handful of activities that respondents have indicated are better supported in the office.

Three particular activities consistently stand out:

- Hosting visitors, clients or customers
- Informal social interaction
- Learning from others

In outstanding workplaces that have achieved a Leesman+ certification, this list extends significantly with the following activities better supported in the office:

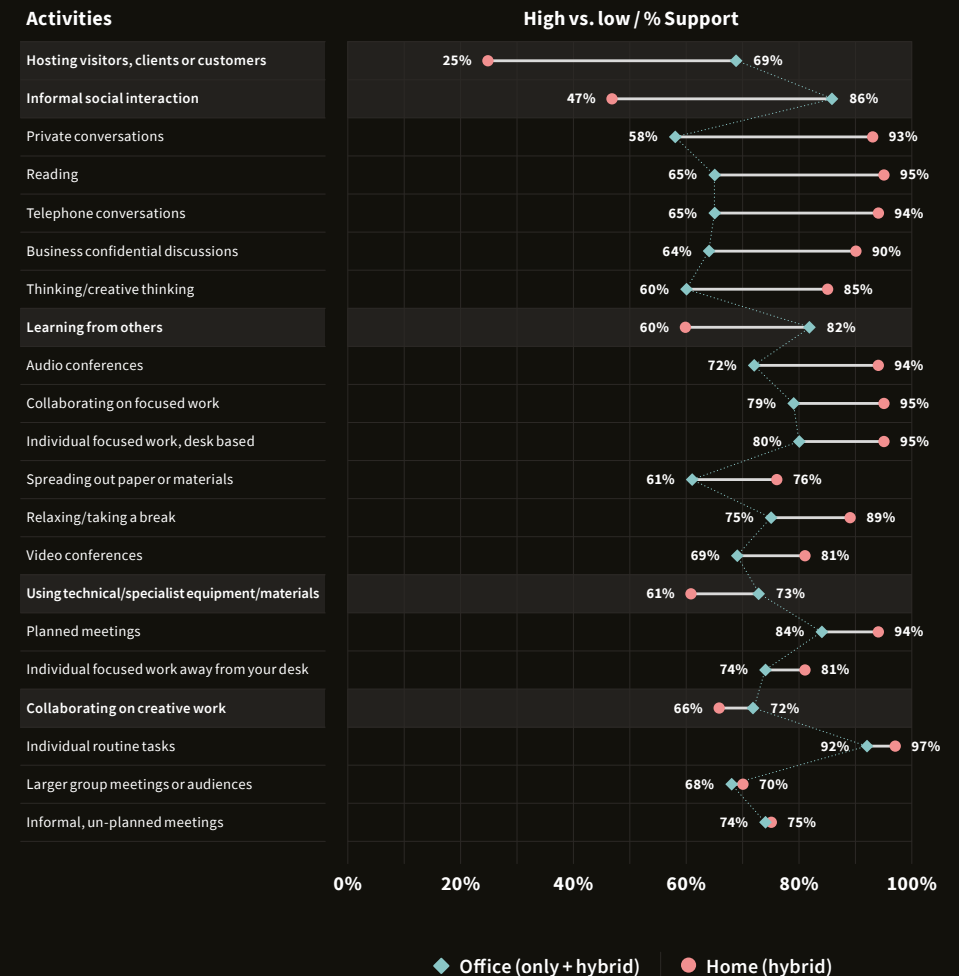
- Using technical/specialist equipment or materials
- Collaborating on creative work
- Informal, un-planned meetings
- Collaborating on focused work
- Individual focused work away from your desk
- Larger group meetings or audiences
- Spreading out paper or materials
- Relaxing/taking a break

This points to a new 'first base' purpose of workplaces, with eight out of eleven activities being ones that employees do with others.

Fig. 5 — Work activities – office vs. home

I have the freedom over where I do the work related to my job – Yes

Leesman Wellbeing Module, N = 20,527, Q3 2021 – Q2 2022



Stage 2



An office that is designed purely around collaboration is less likely to magnetise employees back

Whilst the consensus amongst workplace professionals is that the main purpose of the future office is to be a hub of collaboration, consider the subtly alternative proposition:

Future workplaces should be hubs of connection.

Data collected earlier in the pandemic certainly showed that collaborative and particularly creative and collaborative events were less well supported when working remotely from each other. More recent data shows a shift, with respondents starting to report that collaboration is supported at home as well as, if not better than in the office.

As such, an office that is designed purely around collaboration is less likely to magnetise employees back.

Instead, an office that is designed around connection, that supports the connective activities first, stands a significantly greater chance.



Stage 2



Workplace features, if done exceptionally, may well draw employees out of their homes

Hotelification

The hotelification of the office is widely debated by workplace professionals but too often limits itself to debate around aesthetics and service delivery. Leesman have long held a different perspective that is much more about how employees engage with the offices.

Leesman believe that hotelification is a behavioural shift, not an aesthetic one.

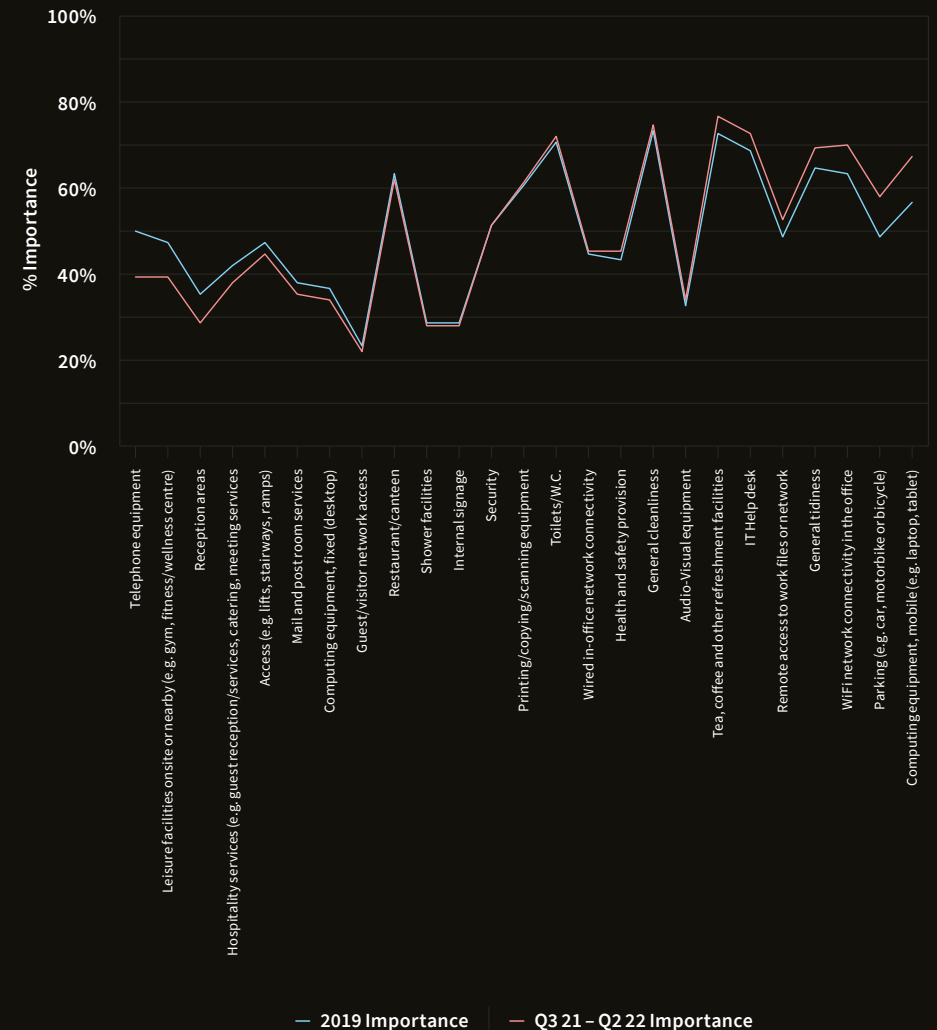
As a metaphor it helps explain why an employee might incur the cost – time and money – of leaving their comfortable and bespoke home working environments to commute to a workplace when their homes are, in general, doing a good job of supporting their work.

There are some workplace features that if done exceptionally, may draw employees out of their homes. We have analysed those that had an increase in importance to the greatest extent (ordered by largest increase in importance):

- Computing equipment, mobile (e.g. laptop, tablet)
- Parking (e.g. car, motorbike or bicycle)
- Quiet rooms for working alone or in pairs
- WiFi network connectivity in the office
- Desk
- General tidiness
- Chair
- Remote access to work files or network
- IT Help desk
- Desk/room booking system

Fig. 6 — Service feature importance – 2019 vs. Q3 21 – Q2 22

— 2019, N = 253,644
— Q3 2021 – Q2 2022, N = 52,958



Stage 2

So, although these features have gone from the employees' peripheral to their central focus, hotelification is more about the value proposition presented by a trip to the office.

Of course, averages mask highs and lows. There are some great workplaces that have maintained their magnetic pull. Employees want to be back in these spaces because they brilliantly support them in their roles. Not five days a week, but enough that their value in organisational performance terms is clear. But there are also low performing workspaces. These are littered with features that the employee has better provided for themselves at home.

These spaces are liabilities for employee and employer. These spaces serve little organisational purpose.

This is the crux of the concept of hotelification. It is not about office receptions suddenly looking like hotel lobbies or raiding the hospitality industry to fill vacancies in your FM teams. It is about understanding that hotel experience is benchmarked by the visitor against the experience they have at home and how much they paid for that experience.

Employees are now doing the same. Because another monumental shift has happened through the pandemic.

Employees who pre-pandemic saw the costs of commuting to work as a 'cost of living' have reclassified that expense. They now see it as a cost of working.



Employees want to be back in spaces that brilliantly support them in their roles

The cost to attend work. Most have shown that they can fulfil the majority of their responsibilities without incurring the costs of visiting your workplace. And most organisations have done a poor job of explaining what value there is in them being back together in one corporate space.

This is the hotelification effect. If a night's sleep in a hotel is worse than the one you would have in your own bed and the shower is a dribble, or the kitchen staff are emptying the empty bottles from the hotel bar into dumpsters under your window at 4am, you question why you bothered to stay there. Employees are doing the same. If the WiFi is weaker in the office than at home, if the milks in the fridge aren't what they like, if the bathrooms are grubby, the meeting rooms untidy and the video conference cameras and mics inadequate for the size of the room, why come? Why pay to commute to a space that is not as good as their own homes at supporting what they are employed to do?

This is where 'Purposeful Presence' comes into play. Visits to the office become way more intentional, considered and planned around particular work activities – those that are not as well supported at home. Employees will be present there for a particular purpose.

Stage 3 Reflection



It's important
to recognise that
Purposeful Presence
is cyclical in nature

Whilst Leesman believe that Purposeful Presence is key to future workplace strategy, it is important to recognise that it's cyclical in nature. To this extent it could be a virtuous circle that builds loyalty to a workplace, or it could be a vicious circle that drives employees away through poorly supporting the things they return there to do.

Purposeful Presence is not something that is achieved once and then remains. Every interaction an employee has with their workplace will define and guide their thought process when next faced with the decision to attend the office or not.

In the same way that disinterested concierge staff, an unclean bathroom and a poor turn down service would discourage you from using that hotel again, a poor workplace experience will negatively impact the likelihood of an employee's willing presence there. Subsequently, the Reflection stage of Purposeful Presence is just as important as Stages 1 and 2. If, on reflection, an employee doesn't deem the 'cost of working' worth the experience they got, they are less likely to willingly return.

If organisations empower employees to consciously decide where they do the work related to their job and offer an office that supports the connective working activities and relevant workplace features, then employees are likely to have an office experience worthwhile the expenses associated with being there. This being the case, employees will positively reflect on their time in the office, in turn making the next conscious decision to attend a simpler one.



Summary

Key takeaways

Employees who willingly return to workplaces do so for specific reasons

They are there because the space supports certain activities better than their homes. They are also looking for connection – the enjoyment of being with others. But they also need it to be a worthwhile experience. They want it to support the things they go there to do that their homes cannot do as well, and it is becoming much clearer which work activities these are.

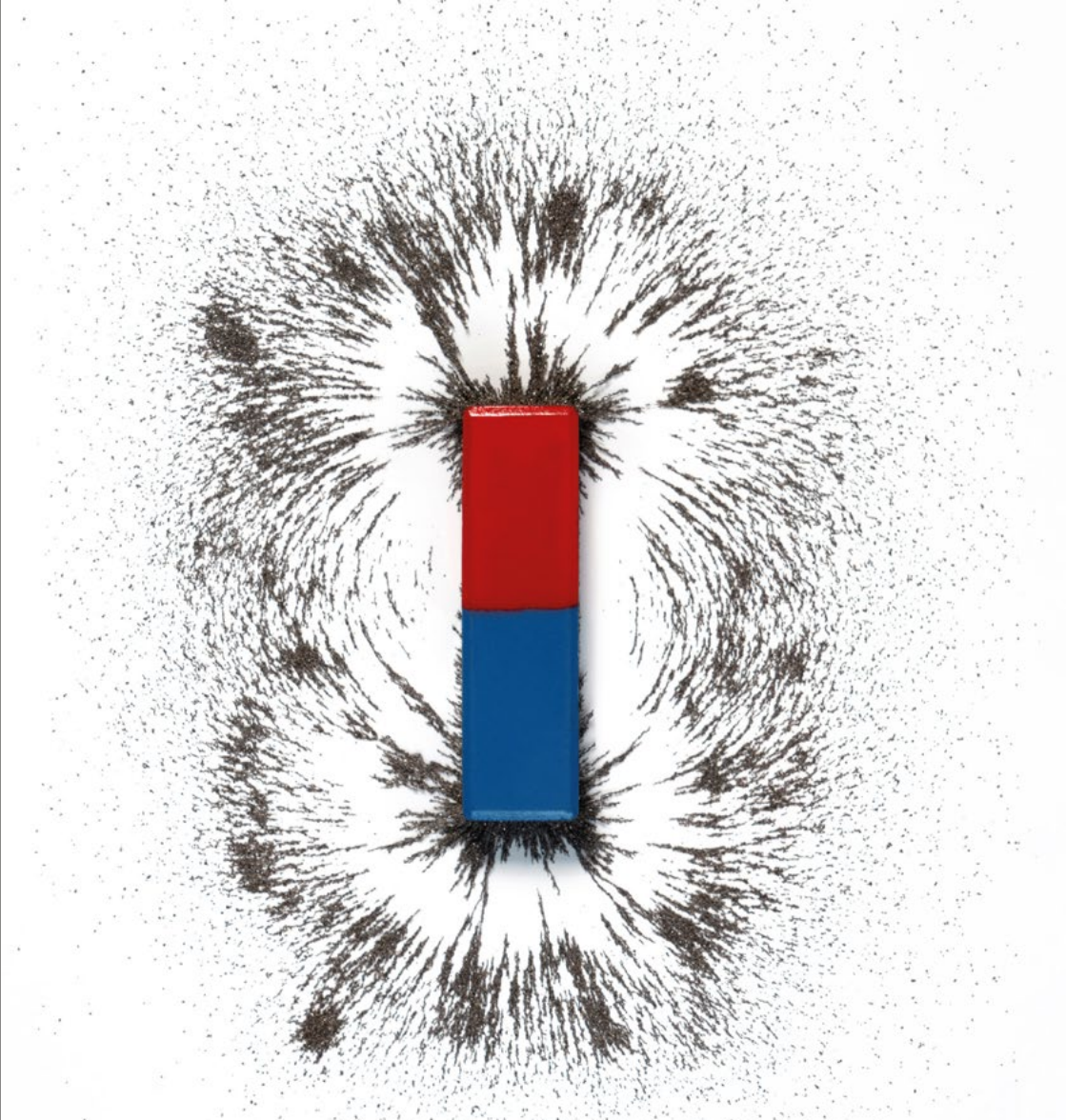
This is where ‘Purposeful Presence’ becomes a force in building future workplace programmes

Visits to the office become way more intentional, considered, and planned around those particular activities. Employees will be present there for a particular purpose. They will likely have had to spend more time planning that visit than they would have ever considered necessary before.

They will want to know the facilities they need are available. They will want to know their colleagues they want to be around will be present. Two days in the office starts to bring with it the same logistical burden as a long weekend away in a hotel with multiple friends also planning to stay in the same hotel over the same weekend.

Indexing takes on a new role

Organisations wishing to proactively support their employees’ intentional use of their space will need to find ways of going beyond simply knowing what those employees do, to deeply understanding where those employees can do their best work. Successfully indexing of hybrid or location independent work will show where investments will deliver maximum return, will show how much less real estate the organisation will need, and ultimately will build a closer relationship between employer and employee and between the employees themselves.



In a period where neighbours at home have rallied around each other to create stronger communities, it is time to think about how the office can be used to magnetise employees back and build stronger communities.

Our mission is to make workplaces better. Since 2010 we have equipped organisations globally with the data and insights necessary to build environments that deliver outstanding employee experience.

Talk to our experts about how we can arm you with the data that will help inform your future hybrid work strategies.



An aerial photograph capturing a volcanic eruption in a stark, snowy landscape. A large, dark, jagged flow of molten lava is seen on the right side of the frame, glowing with intense orange and red light. The lava flow is surrounded by a large number of people, some standing in small groups and others walking, observing the event. The ground is covered in snow, with footprints visible. In the background, several snow-covered mountains rise against a clear, light blue sky. The overall scene is a dramatic contrast between the cold, white environment and the hot, fiery lava.

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