

UNISPACE WHITE PAPER

Form following function: Is the design industry creating offices that work for everyone?

Focus:

Focused work tasks that require concentration and minimal disruption —if interaction is required it is initiated by the individual.



Collaborate:

Group activities where you work with others to achieve common goals.

Socialise:

Social activities that improve personal wellbeing and connectivity with colleagues.

Learn:

Structured and unstructured learning.

Form following function:

Is the design industry creating offices that work for everyone?

Our office occupier research from over a hundred companies across different continents highlights a common theme—noise and distraction are preventing workers from focusing on achieving everyday tasks. But with open plan design now commonplace, how can the challenge of finding space to concentrate be overcome?

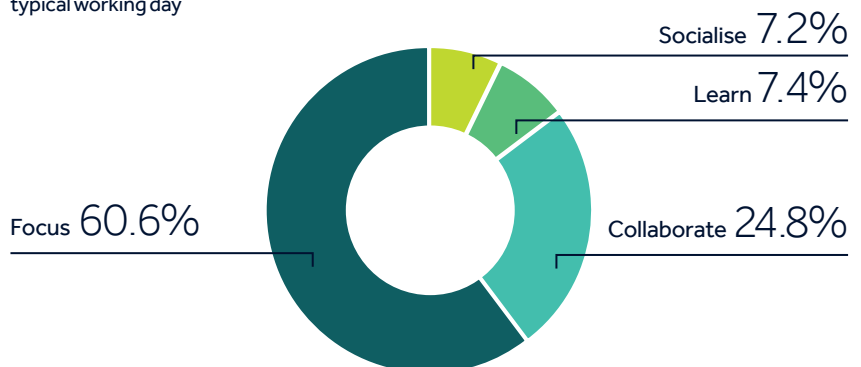
Modern workplace design has over-prioritised collaboration at the cost of concentration according to findings from our SpaceData research. The global surveys run between 2012 and 2017 of more than 130 companies and 11,000 workers clearly show that the majority of the working day is spent on tasks requiring focus rather than interaction with colleagues.

Despite a wider business drive towards teamwork and interaction, survey respondents state that they still require individual areas, i.e. offices, dedicated focus rooms and quiet spaces in addition to open plan areas to be able to effectively accomplish working tasks.

Daily activities requiring focus take up more than twice those that demand collaboration. Open plan offices are now the dominant type of workplace with 30.9% of the total number, with cubicle style environments a distinct second choice at 17.2% and private offices at 12.9%. What, therefore, can be done to overcome the issues that arise with open plan configuration while still delivering designs that align with the space demands of clients and the floorplates available in the market?

Despite the potential issues that arise from open plan configuration, workplace designers are still delivering this type of space far more regularly than any other form.

Split of tasks during typical working day



“Our research shows that the vast majority of our time at work is based on the need to ‘focus’—more than 60% of the working day.”

Simon Pole,
Global Director, Design

The trend may seem counterintuitive, however most organisations believe that even though they will take a hit on individual productivity by providing an open environment, they will more than make up for it in collaboration and team productivity. This is wedded to the perception that collaboration leads to innovation - but this is only part of the equation for a successful workplace.

Simon Pole, Unispace Global Director, Design, explains: “Our research shows that the majority of our time at work is based on the need to ‘focus’—in fact, more than 60% of the working day. Only a quarter of the day is devoted to collaboration.”

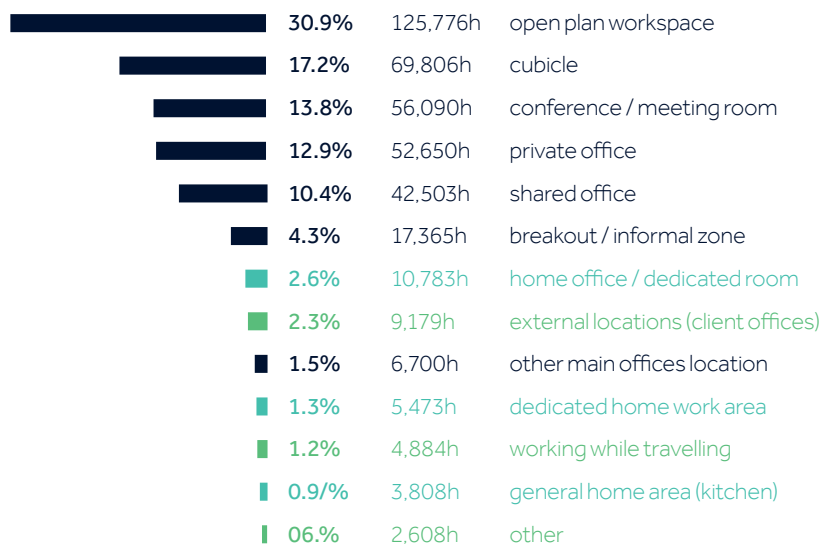
The workplace has changed radically in the last few years, but may have given too much emphasis to bringing workers together for meetings at the cost of elements of their role. Collaboration is obviously a central

tenet of many modern spaces and in this environment, creating a fusion of ideas and socialisation is key, but for a majority of everyday business tasks workers need space for focus, calm and solitude.

Survey participants indicated that even routine tasks which require concentration (such as filing), creative work and training / learning take up more time during their day (10.3%) than collaborative tasks such as group meetings, presentations and audio conferences. By comparison, small group meetings only require 8.3% of our working day.

Despite the top issue leading workers to distraction being noise at 15.1%, interestingly our research also shows that a substantial majority of workers are in open plan workspace, more than double the amount of those in cubicles or private offices.

Survey respondents complete their work in the following locations during a typical week



Key

- main office locations
- home locations
- other locations

“The top issues for workers that lead to distraction are caused by noise or interruption when they are trying to concentrate.”

Natasha Bonugli,
Regional Principal, Design.

Designers need to think differently

Research by Queensland University’s Vinesh Oommen stated that in 90% of studies about working in open plan offices, results are negative due to elevated levels of stress and conflict, loss of privacy, low work productivity and job satisfaction.¹

Over the last 12 months, the issue of noise has become worse according to our research, with more workers complaining than the previous time, last year. We define focus-based work as individual tasks requiring concentration and minimal disruption, while collaboration is defined as group activities where colleagues work together to achieve common goals.

Our findings show that the time devoted to individual task-focused work is 32.3% of the working day; other focused work activities make up 8.8% and telephone conversations at 8.4%.

Natasha Bonugli, Unispace Regional Principal, Design says: “Designers have to question why the sector is devoting so much space to collaboration when most of the working day is given over to tasks that require focus and concentration.”

Space is at a premium in big cities, with office rents higher than ever. Businesses cannot waste office space and must maximise the productivity of their employees to gain the most from leasing prime real estate.

CBRE’s most recent Global Occupier Survey flagged collaboration as the prime driver of workplace strategy from heads of real estate around the world. Many recent workspace trends have given focus to the attributes of collaboration among workers and its productivity benefits. This may indicate a conflict between perceived business drivers, and the way people really work.

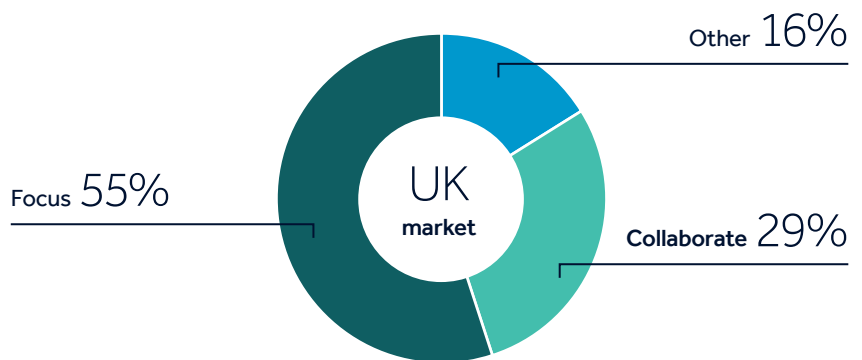
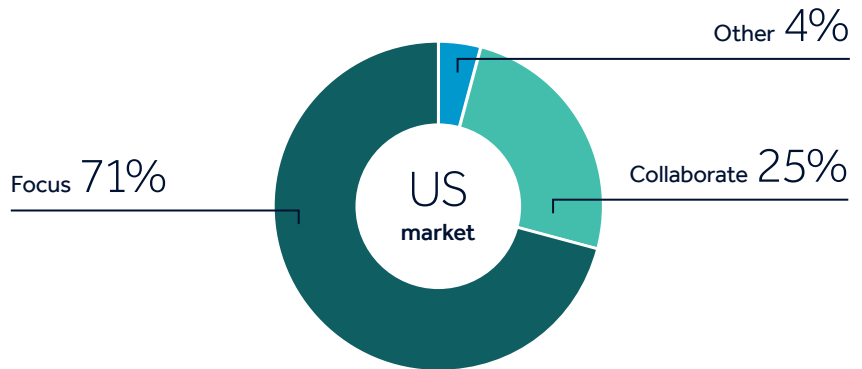
Survey respondents feel that the following aspects of their workplaces lead to inefficiencies during a typical week



Key ● main office locations ● home locations

¹ Oommen, VG, Knowles, M & Zhao, I 2008, 'Should health service managers embrace open plan work environments? A review' *Asia Pacific Journal of Health Management*, 3(2), pp. 37-43.

Focus activities US/UK market comparison



“As workplace strategists, we must question the decision to promote collaborative space over focus-orientated areas as, ultimately, what type of space is going to drive productivity and return on investment?” asks Albert De Plazaola, Unispace Global Principal, Strategy.

In professional services firms, focus activities made up 71% of the working day in the US and 58% in the UK. For technology firms, as much as 55% of time was given over to focus-led tasks. Collaboration made up between 25% to 29% in both sectors.

“Our recent work across Europe has shown us that, while there is a lot of attention paid to collaboration

at industry events and promoting interaction is a key part of the day, the real issue for workers is getting enough space to concentrate and, quite simply, get their jobs done,” Natasha adds.

“Open, collaborative work environments promised us increased employee performance, higher levels of productivity, happier employees and happier CFOs—as these environments were typically more efficient,” explains Albert. “However, the evidence supporting any significant productivity increases correlated with a more open environment is inconclusive, leaving us with workplaces where distractions are the biggest inhibitor of productivity.”

"We must question promoting collaborative space over focus-orientated areas as, ultimately, what type of space is going to drive productivity and return on investment?"

Albert De Plazaola, Global Principal, Strategy

“The challenge lies in ensuring we are creating workspaces which not only promote concentration, but also support the focus needs of different work personas.”

Albert De Plazaola
Global Principal, Strategy.

Mapping personas to space requirements

Increased noise, lack of privacy and lack of quiet areas consistently show up as the top three employee complaints in open environments. This is particularly problematic as most employees’ self-report that they engage in focus work more than any other work mode.

“Strategists and designers have mastered collaborative spaces, branding them as creativity hubs or innovation labs, yet when offering areas for focus, we’ve given employees a phone booth and some headphones,” Albert continues.

“The challenge lies in ensuring we are creating workspaces which not only promote concentration, but also support the focus needs of different work personas. People work in different ways based on their roles; some are flexible, some are highly mobile, others are more desk orientated. Each requires a varied work mode: an environment supportive of their specific tasks and the time in which they have to achieve them.”

At Unispace, we have developed persona profiles to map the spectrum of work habits. These personas help us understand space requirements for focus, collaboration, or formal and informal drop-in areas for the successful fulfilment of roles.

Having collated data from over a hundred companies around the world, we have identified workplace personalities including the Butterfly, Anchor, Independent, Seeker, Teamer and Traveller. While they are far from exhaustive, they give a strong indication of the divergent ways workers now use the workplace. They each use the workplace in

different ways, and therefore place diverse demands on the way it should be designed to dictate staff productivity or otherwise.

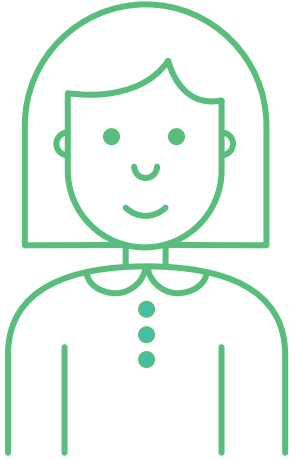
For example, the Anchor—who might be an analyst or administrator—undertakes tasks requiring focus and formality, therefore may need a consistent desk or bench space but also conference rooms, and an activity hub to connect with their colleagues.

The Butterfly needs mobility and the ability to collaborate in informal space, so might require informal drop-in space and café areas to allow them to do their work. This would often be a marketing role or HR.

No modern workplace is complete without a Seeker, often an engineer, web developer or IT professional, who needs the ability to focus and concentrate in isolation. They may need to socialise in the café but most meetings are conducted over Skype so formal space requirements are minimal, and most of the day is spent at their desk.

Using personas to understand how employees use their workplace yields a more balanced approach to allocating space. The method underscores the need to provide employees with choices that ensure the workplace adapts to the diverse needs of both individuals and teams.

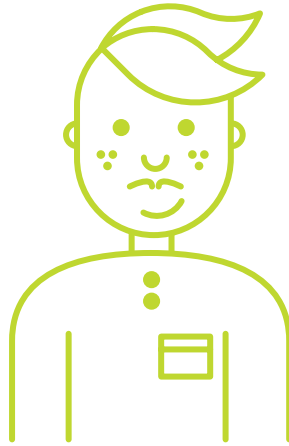
Dynamic working personas: which one are you?



Independent

Highly mobile concentrative

Spends time out of office and undertaking solo / focus work.
Role: R&D



Teamer

Resident collaborative

Spends time predominantly at desk, or connecting with others.
Role: Designer



Anchor

Resident concentrative

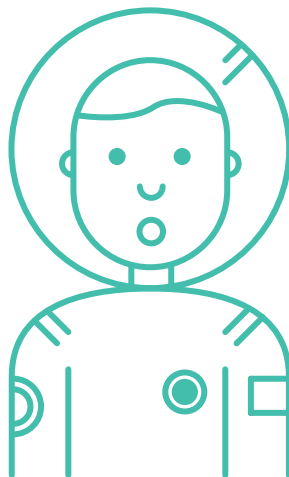
Spends time at desk or undertaking solo / focus work.
Role: Admin / Analyst



Seeker

Internally mobile concentrative

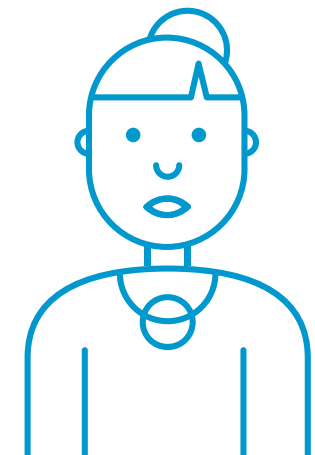
Spends time at desk, meeting with team or solo / focus work.
Role: Engineer / Developer / IT



Traveller

Highly mobile collaborative

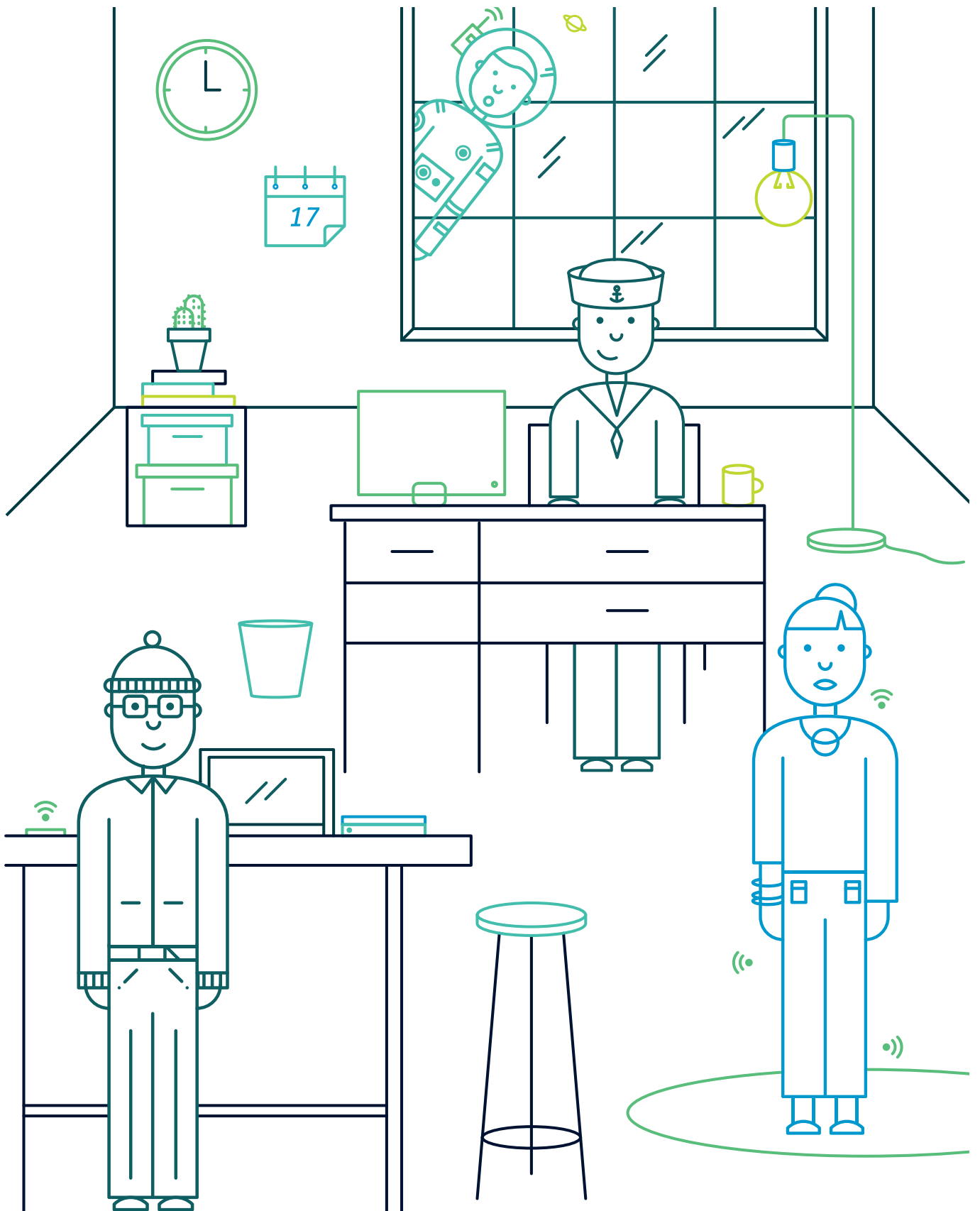
Spends time out of office or collaborating with team.
Role: Sales / Executive



Butterfly

Highly mobile concentrative

Spends some time out of office, agile as well as solo / focus work.
Role: Marketing / HR



Function over fashion

“Staying up to date with the latest trends in workplace is critical for understanding the evolution and future of our work environments,” says Albert. “But think critically around how and if the latest design trends and fashions can elevate the experience of your employees.”

For example, progressive workplace designs for social media or tech companies may not be appropriate or culturally suitable for professional services firms. Similarly, napping pods and zen lounges may do wonders for overworked software engineers, but would miss the mark entirely if placed in the office of a conservative management consulting or law firm.

“The key to integrating new thinking into the modern workplace is to carefully and creatively consider how the application of trends and new innovations will enhance your business goals,” continues Albert. “By doing so, practitioners can be bold and visionary, and in parallel, watch the business thrive.”

The workplace has seen radical shifts in a compressed period of time reflecting the changing roles of office workers, however this evolutionary curve is only going to become steeper with the introduction of more artificial

intelligence into the workplace, the growing role of smart buildings and the Internet of Things.

The integration of performance data will allow space to be tailored to specific tasks, while technology will enable more workers to find the part of the office, or even a completely separate location, that fits their requirements.

For designers, this ultimately gives us an even greater palette of ideas and technology to work with, backed up by greater access to real time data. We will see the definition of workplace broaden as we develop a greater understanding of the right type of space for the task in hand.

Ensuring our environments are collaborative as much as they enable workers to concentrate is crucial in the creation of balanced and healthy workplaces for all employees: places that are inclusive for everyone, no matter their work style.

Think Create Make