

Work Better

WB

Design. Insights. Research.
Spring 2025

Community at Work

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**Reinventing Five
Essential Spaces**
Before & After

**The Manager
Crunch**
New Research

**The Possibilities
of Privacy**
Employees' #1 Need

Steelcase

Work Better Magazine

Design. Insights. Research.
Spring 2025

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The Business Case for Community

Business leaders need results. Their organization’s success is measured by numbers – such as profitability, revenue growth and return on investment. To reach these numbers they need high-performing, deeply engaged teams — which is easier said than done.



Chris Congdon
Editor in Chief, Work Better Magazine

The number of engaged employees hit an 11-year low in the US of 30% in 2024, according to Gallup. While it’s better than the global average of 23%, it’s a dubious accomplishment when you still have two-thirds of your employees feeling disengaged. Because those employees are not only less productive, they are also more likely to struggle with a variety of wellbeing issues, like depression and anxiety, and languishing at work.

Organizations are facing unprecedented levels of change causing one disruption after another. Neuroscientist Harris Ayres calls this moment in time a “polycrisis,” a constellation of events fueling anxiety and uncertainty (Work Better Podcast S5:E5). Global conflicts, volatile markets and a rapidly shifting economic landscape keep us awake at night. Burnout, stress and lack of a healthy work-life balance weigh on people’s minds. As leaders, there are days when it feels like we’re in the eye of the storm, and a misstep could spin things out of control.

In the midst of so much change and disruption, should an organization focus on creating community at work? The answer is yes.

When people feel a sense of community they are more likely to be engaged, productive and have a higher level of wellbeing.

Community is the glue that holds people together during times of change or adversity.

Research conducted in cities that faced severe weather events found that areas with a strong sense of community were better able to work together and cope with crises. The neighborhoods that fared best had physical places where community members gathered and built relationships before a crisis hit.

This is why they were able to be more resilient. And why it makes sense to take lessons from high-performing cities and apply them to the office.

“In times of change and uncertainty, having a strong community at work can provide the stability and support we need to stay motivated and engaged,” says Jacqui Brassey, co-leader of Healthy Workforces and director of Research Science at the McKinsey Health Institute (Work Better Podcast S5:E9).

Community-Based Design is an approach to creating workplaces that can deliver the results people and organizations need. In this issue of Work Better we will show how to transform existing, underperforming office spaces by applying Community-Based Design principles. Steelcase designers take the same amount of real estate and turn it into highly effective, mixed-use spaces that support the changing ways people need to work today. It’s like HGTV meets Work Better.

We also explore how Community-Based Design can help create layers of privacy to meet the top frustration people have at work. Creating community doesn’t mean that people should be together all the time – in fact, great communities combine residential and rejuvenation spaces with public areas to ensure people have ways to be alone when they need it. We also take a look at Steelcase’s strategies for circular design. Because communities that can adapt are inherently more sustainable.

Business leaders are recognizing their workplace can be a strategic asset. Creating the infrastructure needed to build community at work is how organizations and their people can thrive during times of rapid change.

We can help.

The Manager Crunch

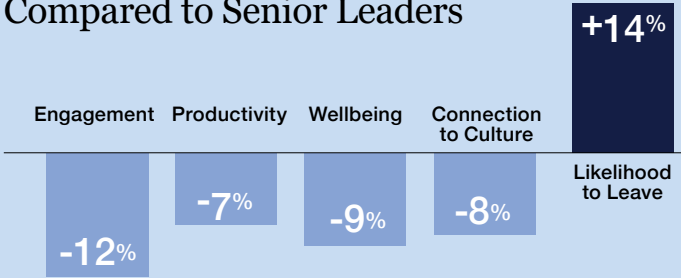
Everything.
Everywhere.
All at once.

Organizations are under pressure because of significant workplace challenges such as office attendance changes, investors’ demands for growth and productivity, the need to rapidly adopt new technology, and team members’ mental health needs. Senior leaders rely on middle managers to execute plans and navigate these challenges, and the rising expectations of the people they manage add to the strain. Overall, they’re doing more with less. According to a 2023 Gallup poll, 64% of middle managers have taken on additional responsibilities, with more than half saying they now lead restructured teams with less experience and fewer resources.

“Most managers love people and love doing their jobs – but we’re finding that the intensity is increasing,” says Gallup researcher Ben Wigert. “The job, in many ways, is getting too big, and we’re asking the world of managers right now.”



Managers Struggle More Compared to Senior Leaders



The Privacy Divide: Leaders and Managers Disagree on Priority

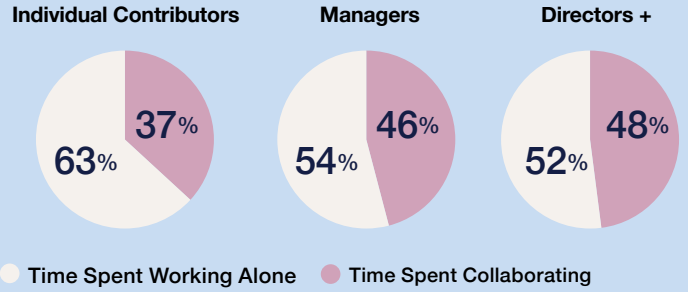
Leaders and managers agree privacy is essential, but there is a gap between what middle managers say they need and what leaders prioritize.

66% of managers say privacy is their most important need in the office, yet leaders rank it fourth on their list of things to improve after collaboration, wellbeing and focus.

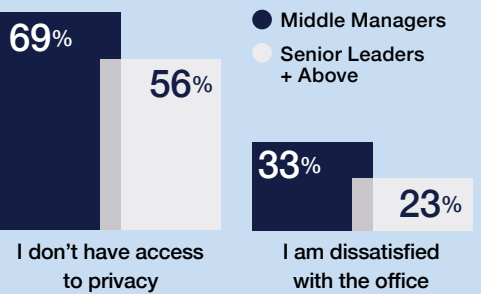


Similar Workload. Less Privacy.

Middle managers have just as many meetings as senior leaders – and more than the individual contributors who report to them. Yet, they’re less satisfied with their access to areas that allow them to focus and collaborate effectively.



Senior leaders are more likely to have private offices or more access to privacy, while middle managers often work with their teams in an open-plan environment.



The result: Senior leaders like the office far more because it supports their needs better than managers’.

Managers’ Missing Input

Managers recognize the expectation to perform at a higher level but believe they lack a voice in shaping their office to support their needs.

49% of managers say they are not, or likely wouldn’t be, considered in the layout of their office.

Organizations can use the workplace to boost managers’ performance and wellbeing. A diverse range of spaces within a team neighborhood creates a sense of community that builds trust and improves wellbeing (see page 14). Giving people access to different types of privacy to focus and meet throughout the day (see page 30) will help alleviate stress by removing the barriers for managers and their employees to do great work.

“Our research shows that certain things are more difficult to do when we’re apart. Having a work environment that supports connection, collaboration, creativity and culture is essential to unlock the potential of managers and their teams.”

Ben Wigert
Gallup

Full Circle

Designing for circularity: How small steps make a big impact.



Just as a leaf falls, disintegrates and nourishes its tree, designers today embrace circularity to create an everlasting continuum rather than a linear lifecycle that ends in waste.

“In nature, there is no waste; everything continues the circle. Humans are the only species that generate waste,” says Steelcase Vice President of Global Design, Michael Held, who also leads the company’s product design sustainability efforts. “We aspire to get to a state without waste.”

Approaching each new product design with a circular mindset includes designing, sourcing, making, shipping and considering what happens at the end of a product’s use.

“By focusing on circularity, we’re able to help our clients be more sustainable, but it also makes sense for business because designing for circularity ensures a steady flow of resources,” says Held. “As extracting new raw materials becomes more expensive due to dwindling resources and stricter regulations, recovering materials becomes more efficient and the preferable option.”

More organizations than ever are working to eliminate waste and develop products, processes and business models that align with this perspective. For instance, the number of organizations with significant environmental commitments exploded by more than 700% between 2020 and 2024.* Companies must make different choices and partner with other organizations on the same path to achieve these targets. Circularity is a key strategy to reduce carbon emissions.

“In our current economy, we take materials from the Earth, make products from them, and eventually throw them away as waste – the process is linear. In a circular economy, by contrast, we stop waste being produced in the first place.”

Ellen MacArthur Foundation

Start, by starting over

A circularity mindset is put into action at Steelcase as part of the company’s sustainable design process, which is now applied to every new product it creates. Designers draw upon decades of exploration and learning to design for circularity while retaining the same quality, durability and performance level.

“I’m a big believer in baby steps forward,” says Held. “You need a vision and a strategy, but the real difference is driven by hundreds and thousands of small improvements year-over-year.”

The first step in the Steelcase design process is to ensure the product can be taken apart more easily and efficiently. This process may mean designing pieces to fit together in straightforward ways or eliminating the need for special tools to disassemble products. Designing furniture

for easy disassembly allows for more agile and efficient repairs or remanufacturing.

Other key practices include marking parts to identify them and thoroughly documenting the product’s engineering to make repairs easier. Using single materials that are not permanently fastened to other materials also makes recycling easier. All of these things help create a circle that reduces waste.

“Creating products using the least energy in all facets takes significant design effort and innovation, which our teams are prioritizing.”

Michael Held
Steelcase Vice President of Global Design

A radical rethink

With a circular mindset in 2020, Steelcase material experts, designers and engineers challenged themselves to turn small steps into big leaps forward.

The most significant materiality change came from identifying a new polypropylene plastic sourced from landfill-bound refuse that could be used in seating and other products.

Steelcase partnered with a large plastics supplier that recycles versatile polypropylene plastics found in everyday household products, such as discarded containers. Plastics were thoroughly tested for contaminants like heavy metals and other toxins to ensure they were acceptable for recycling streams.

“That material is recycled, and then we reuse it in a product,” says Charlie Forslund, materials development principal for Steelcase. “This material can last and be used and reused in our products for decades, so it’s special to see something that at one point would have been one-and-done, but we put it in a durable product.”

These new materials allowed Steelcase designers and engineers to radically increase the amount of recycled content in its most popular task chairs – the initial products that have the most significant impact on customers’ sustainability goals. This was done without compromising durability, performance or certifications.

“Our customers are making it clear: They’re demanding more recycled content in the products they buy, and we’re right there with them,” says Steelcase Product Sustainability Marketing Manager Kaila Bryzgalski. “We redoubled our efforts to explore more options to reduce the embodied carbon in our products.”

Steelcase teams deconstructed each chair, using part-by-part reverse-engineering

to redesign them more sustainably. They also created new measurement and testing processes to capture sustainability metrics more accurately.

The result: Since the start of this project, the recycled content doubled on average in Steelcase Series® 1 and 2, Leap®, Amia®, Think®, Gesture® and Steelcase Karman™ chairs in the Americas.

Steelcase is working to scale these initiatives globally, and looking to other sustainable materials that can be applied to even more products. This includes building on efforts to manufacture with sustainably-sourced wood, metals made with renewable energy and more recycled content, and exploring lighter plastics and bio-based textiles.

“We started small by changing one part of one product years ago, leading to some initial learnings and understanding,” says Held. “Now, we have a lot more knowledge about the recycled contents in plastics, the supply chain and operations. This enables us to make an even bigger impact for our planet across many more parts and products.”



Our Path to Net Zero

Our path to net zero prioritizes transforming our entire business – our products, operations and transportation - what we make, how we make it, and the ways we deliver it. Our commitment to building a net-zero future cuts carbon emissions over 90% by 2050. We plan to achieve our net-zero goals by focusing on these significant areas of impact:

Reducing our carbon footprint
Designing for circularity
Choosing and using materials responsibly

Time for a change

The path to circularity is complex, but experience and systems can help businesses start – and sustain – a more circular economy. When it’s time for a change, Steelcase minimizes landfill waste through a broad range of end-of-use services meant to help customers identify the best ways to reuse, repair, remake and recycle furniture. New efforts to expand circularity services are being offered in different regions worldwide.

In the U.S., Circular by Steelcase: Remade allows for used or damaged chairs to be transformed to like-new condition, extending their life. Plus, these remade chairs come with a 12-year warranty, offering the same longevity as new Steelcase products. Additionally, Steelcase works with partners to sustainably decommission furniture and furnishings so they can be reused, donated or recycled. Under the Steelcase Limited Lifetime Warranty, covered parts are repaired or replaced free of charge if they fail under normal use. This guarantees they’ll last as long as possible.

“Our commitment to designing for circularity isn’t new,” says Held. “We launched the Think chair more than 20 years ago as a pioneer in sustainability. It can be taken apart in five minutes. But what is so exciting is that our approach now is about designing this way at scale, in everything we do, and helping our customers complete that circle when it’s time for a change.”

Helping the World Work Better

Read our net-zero transition plan at steelcase.com/people-planet/net-zero/



Introducing Jacqui Brassey

Director of Research Science at the McKinsey Health Institute, a non-profit within the McKinsey firm, committed to adding more years of higher-quality life for people around the world.

How do you identify burnout at work? Jacqui Brassey challenges our understanding by sharing how McKinsey's research, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum, defines holistic health and how our work environment significantly influences wellbeing & performance.

Work Better: How do you define holistic health and how does the workplace play a role?

Jacqui Brassey: Holistic health encompasses four main areas: mental, physical, spiritual and social health. The workplace significantly affects holistic health because positive work experiences are associated with better health overall. When we ask people about their health in those four areas, we ask in part if they have healthy, nurturing, genuine and supportive relationships. Work contributes to that.

WB: There's been a shift from focusing on physical health to mental and social health. Can you explain why?

JB: While physical health remains essential, mental and social health have become more emphasized, especially post-COVID. The interconnectedness of these health aspects is crucial. Organizations are now more aware of issues like loneliness, mental health and burnout and are focusing on creating supportive environments to address these challenges.

WB: Is there a difference between exhaustion & burnout?

JB: Burnout has four dimensions: exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairments and emotional impairment. Often, we only measure exhaustion, but true burnout includes all these components. It is crucial

to recognize when you feel energized and engaged versus tired and depleted and understand that there are mental and bodily symptoms. Stress isn't inherently bad; it's essential for performance and growth. But balancing deadlines with recovery helps maintain sustainable work habits.

WB: How can organizations address burnout effectively?

JB: Well-meaning organizations often focus on responsive measures like mental health support, which are important but not always sufficient. Preventative measures are crucial to avoid burnout. Workshops on psychological safety or inclusion may not address the root causes of burnout if they are not paired with efforts to alleviate work demands. Tailored solutions at the team level are often the most effective.

WB: How can the physical work environment impact holistic health?

JB: The impact of the work environment links to physical health and wellbeing as well as social wellbeing. Open office spaces and noise can often negatively impact some people's health. Simultaneously, offices with a lot of green, support for exercise and good daylight can have a massively positive impact on the work experience.

Last Words

JB: Everyone is different. What pushes one person over the edge in terms of burnout differs from someone else. It's essential to know when to speak up and how to find help. At the same time, organizations must understand what they can do to set their people up for success. It's the right thing to do and smart because it'll benefit performance and productivity in the long run.



Learn more

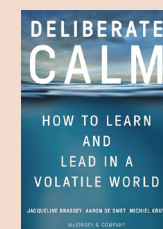
Thriving workplaces can help people and create economic value.



Hear more of our conversation with Jacqui in our Work Better podcast. Season 6 launches April 29 which you can find anywhere you get your podcasts.

Jacqui's Latest Book

Deliberate Calm: How to learn and lead in a volatile world



Applying Community-Based Design principles to common workplace problems creates spaces that work better.

Creating Community at Work



What's Inside

Why Community Matters

Reinventing Five Essential Spaces

Measuring Helps Communities Adapt

Why Community Matters

Humans thrive when they are part of a community. These connections are essential to our wellbeing and even our survival. In fact, the World Health Organization recently declared loneliness a “global public health concern,” launching a three-year international commission on social connection. It makes sense that our connection to others, or lack thereof, impacts our health. Since the beginning of time, people have relied on relationships with others for protection, support and joy.

While work and life today differ tremendously from when we hunted and gathered, community connections are still key to individual, team and organizational success. People who feel connected to others at work are more likely to be engaged, motivated and satisfied with their work. And Gallup reports that higher levels of engagement are connected to better business outcomes, including improved wellbeing, lower turnover, higher sales productivity (18%) and an increase in profitability (23%). Building relationships is clearly good for business.

Organizations can help by creating conditions that foster community. Communities are two things: places where we live and relationships we build.

Relationships and the places that nurture them build community. Community helps people and organizations thrive — even during times of rapid change. The NeuroLeadership Institute warns a ceaseless wave of change can lead to “change fatigue” with real consequences like lost productivity, disengagement and turnover. But there’s a promise of greener grass if we can adapt and embrace change. Better, more fulfilling work and an improved sense of wellbeing are on the horizon.

What is Community-Based Design?

Drawn from urban planning principles and decades of Steelcase research, Community-Based Design helps create thriving, resilient workplaces. It includes three distinct phases: understanding people’s needs, designing a range of spaces and experiences, and measuring the workplace.



“Everybody has a reason to encourage connection in the workplace. Creating relationships is not just good for individuals. It helps with job satisfaction, engagement, productivity and creativity.”

Connie Noonan Hadley

Founder, Institute for Life at Work; Contributor, Harvard Business Review, (Work Better Podcast S5:E1)

Forces Changing Work Today

Four macro shifts are influencing work and changing patterns of behavior in the workplace.

In some cases, the forces influencing work gradually increased over time. But in other instances, change snuck up on us.



Living on Screen

We spend more time collaborating on screen than in person. Many people (50%) stay at their desks and join meetings virtually instead of going to the meeting room. Why come into the workplace just to work alone? Our offices can do more to encourage people to come together.



AI Supercycle

AI is changing jobs and the skills people need. Opportunities for innovation and increased productivity are creating a “supercycle” — a period of economic growth driven by emerging technologies. Leaders are willing to invest in AI and most employees use it. But many leaders admit they have a limited understanding of AI today. So, how will AI impact the workplace?



Sustainability Mindset

The number of companies setting significant sustainability targets keeps rising. The workplace brings people together to accelerate learning and innovation. Organizations want to create workplaces that support their goals by choosing partners who understand how to create sustainable environments using products in settings designed to evolve as needs change.



Wellbeing Urgency

While mental health is not a new issue, it is more urgent with a rise in anxiety, depression and burnout, and there are new employee expectations that organizations will take action to support mental health. Researchers and designers know that the places people work can greatly impact how people feel throughout their day.

Many organizations aren’t sure how to adapt their workplace to help employees thrive during times of change and upheaval.

Leaders are looking for answers, and some are stuck — doing the same thing they have done in the past or simply doing nothing. This may explain why so many employees come to offices that look like they did five or 10 years ago which are often underutilized or underperforming. Some spaces are rarely used — or not used for their intended purpose; some lounge areas sit empty or large conference rooms are occupied by just one or two people. In other cases, people can’t find the space they need as they look for privacy or a video-enabled meeting room.

There’s a mismatch between the work being done and the places people have available to do that work. Finding the right solution is complicated by the changing patterns of office attendance. While some organizations are still settling into hybrid work patterns, others expect people to be in the office every day. But whether people connect in person daily or for part of the week, creating a better workplace where they can optimize their time together is essential.

Steelcase data analysis indicates some changes are being made to improve the office experience. Organizations are adding privacy elements such as screens or pods. They may be getting new chairs to say “welcome back” to employees coming to the office more often. But these beginnings are just scratching the surface of what people need. Many leaders and employees miss the vibrancy and energy a great community provides.



Lessons From Urban Planning

Workplaces share a common purpose with cities: when they serve the needs of people, both thrive. And both lose their vibrancy and appeal when they fail to keep people at the center of decisions made about their future. Lessons from successful urban planning principles can be applied to the workplace to help people and organizations be more resilient, perform better and flourish in the face of disruption.

One of the most influential modern thinkers about urban planning was Jane Jacobs, an activist in New York and Toronto in the mid-20th century. She fought against projects that called for the destruction of historic buildings and displacement of low-income families in favor of multi-lane highways and high-rise buildings. Those supposed “urban renewal” projects created places where no one wanted to live and were ultimately abandoned.

Jacobs argued the city is about people and should serve their interests. She believed in the wisdom of people to know what they need and that neighborhoods become better when urban planners include members of the community in shaping its future. Just as the city requires infrastructure for transportation or utilities,

it also needs social infrastructure: places for people to gather and interact regularly. It needs inviting residential spaces for privacy and solitude amidst the bustle. Jacobs supported mixed-use buildings, lively sidewalks and a mixture of parks, cafes and libraries as places that increase social interaction, which she observed led to people feeling more connected and accountable to one another. She felt cities should be dynamic, like ecosystems that adapt to changing conditions.

Jacobs’ work was seminal and influenced how urban planners think about creating resilient cities today. Their ideas can be translated to the workplace to help people and organizations prosper.

“Community at work isn’t just about socializing; it’s about building trust and support networks that help us thrive personally and professionally.”

Jacqui Brassey
Co-leader of Healthy Workforces and
Director of Research Science at the
McKinsey Health Institute



Core Principles

Density

Balance bringing people close enough to connect, but not be overcrowded.

Diversity

Blend different types of spaces and office layout patterns.

Short Blocks

Break up any long distances between spaces to encourage people to linger.

Lively Sidewalks

Create natural gathering spaces like cafes or small gardens to bring people into the open.

Mixed-use Spaces

Encourage energy and convenience when you blend different functions together in one area.

Community Involvement

Engage local expertise from people who “live” in the community.

Onboarding AI

Scary? Smart? Or scary smart? Promises of more productivity and creativity — mixed with anxiety over not wanting to be left behind — are fueling the adoption of artificial intelligence in the workplace. Learning to work with AI is already leading people to collaborate, analyze, seek out information and organize their day differently. These new behaviors will not just change how we work, but where we work as well.

Steelcase partners with leading tech companies, including Microsoft, Logitech, Zoom and VergeSense, to understand and create solutions for how the workplace needs to change to support AI-augmented work.



AI as Co-worker

It’s time to onboard your new AI colleague. Plan to use voice assistants more often, which means a greater need for privacy, acoustic boundaries and in-office sound masking. Adding generative AI to brainstorming and problem-solving sessions will lead to a need for larger digital displays and the integration of analog and digital tools like markerboards and content cameras. And don’t just add video to meeting rooms. Consider furniture design and layout in relationship to the camera, lighting, microphones and acoustics. Plus, immersive spaces with large screens can maximize virtual connections and work with arrays of content.

AI as Organizer

Microsoft Places is the new AI-powered app integrated into Outlook and Teams to act as your hybrid work organizer. For example, you can let co-workers know when you’ll be in the office or working remotely, when you’ve arrived or if plans change. You can book desks and it provides companies with occupancy and space use data.

At the same time, advancements in agentic AI, more proactive artificial intelligence, is enhancing platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom to provide real-time transcription and meeting action items. It lets people focus on discussions rather than note-taking.

AI as Director

Thanks to AI, rooms are getting smarter. Zoom’s Intelligent Director taps into multiple cameras and advanced AI to ensure people in medium-to-large meetings are visible to remote attendees, even as they move. And Logitech’s AI-enabled cameras recognize when someone new joins or speaks and reframes the camera to include them. Microphones pick up voices and drown out periphery noise. And one-touch join makes it simple to get a meeting going.

AI as Analyst

Sensor solutions can enhance AI assistants, enabling them to answer questions conversationally in real time and correlate data from multiple sources. VergeSense uses AI to combine entryway data, area sensors, Wi-Fi and space booking data to deliver a single source and analyze how the workplace is being used. Facilities professionals and designers are already tapping into this data to optimize and adapt the workplace.

Reinventing Five Essential Spaces

Reimagining underperforming spaces through the lens of Community-Based Design gives people access to more options and better experiences that meet their needs at work today. In the coming pages, we explore five common problems and how to transform these essential spaces — before and after.

Like a vibrant city, the Community-Based Design method recommends a range of spaces within mixed-use “districts” to create dynamic, inspiring workplaces. These districts offer people choice and control, support multiple types of work and promote wellbeing. This pragmatic approach to workplace design creates more desirable spaces that get used more often and are easier to adapt when it’s necessary to make a change.

Places + Relationships = Community

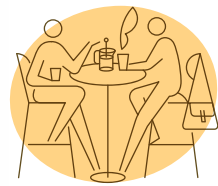
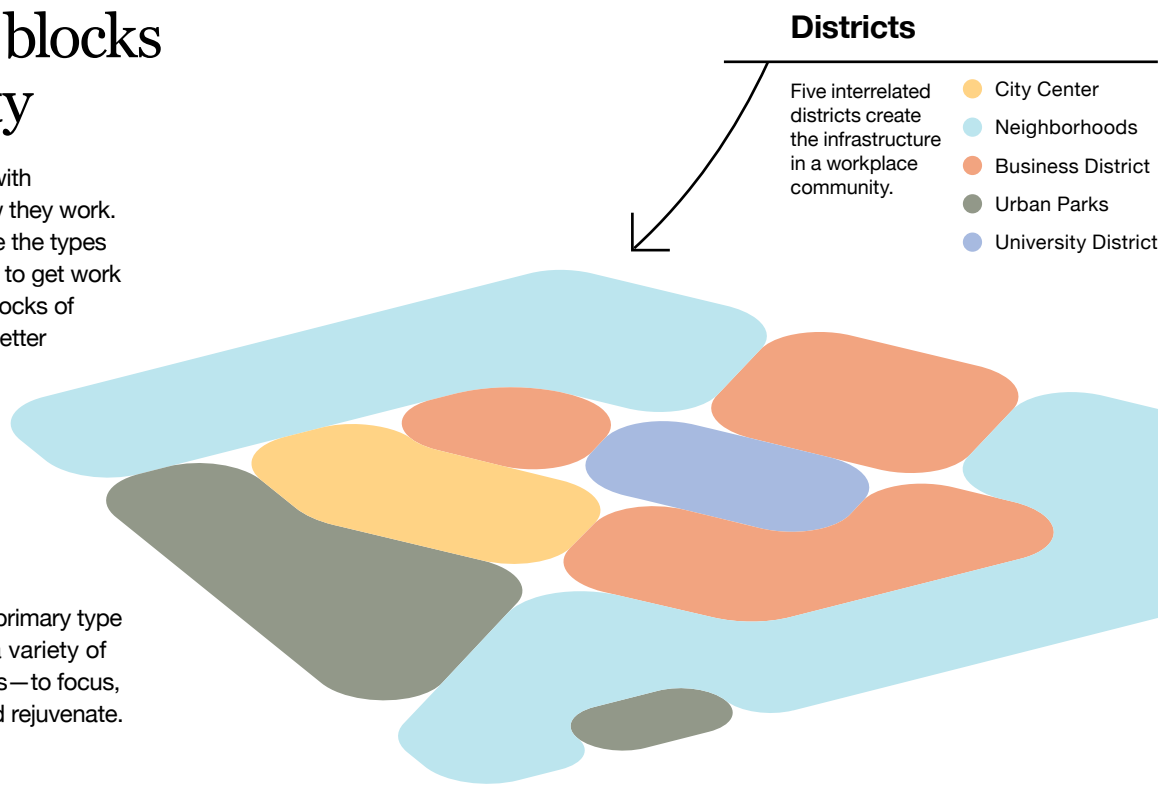
Organizations can help create the conditions that foster community. Communities are two things: places where we live and relationships we build.



The building blocks of community

Creating communities begins with understanding people and how they work. Those work activities determine the types of settings and spaces needed to get work done. These are the building blocks of community. Settings perform better when clustered together in mixed-use “districts” that offer a range of spaces to support related types of work. The five districts create the physical infrastructure of a thriving community.

While each district supports a primary type of work, it also gives people a variety of places to work in different ways—to focus, collaborate, socialize, learn and rejuvenate.



City Center

A social hub that is the heart of the community — a centralized connection point that draws people to help them build bonds and trust.



Neighborhoods

A home base for individuals and teams — a place where the heads-down work gets done and teams stay connected.



Business District

A diverse range of shared spaces where people come together to meet, share, brainstorm and collaborate — an environment that sparks creativity and innovation.



Urban Parks

Community destinations where people can find respite and rejuvenation — places to renew and care for their wellbeing.



University District

A communal area dedicated to individual and group learning that supports both structured and informal experiences — a place to foster a culture of lifelong learning.

Before & After: Five essential spaces

- The Underused Conference Room
- The Overexposed Bench
- The Low-performance Lounge
- The Inflexible Meeting Room
- The Typical Team Space

Learn More
→

The Underused Conference Room

Transform a single, large conference room into four spaces where people can collaborate, focus, learn, socialize and rejuvenate.

Before

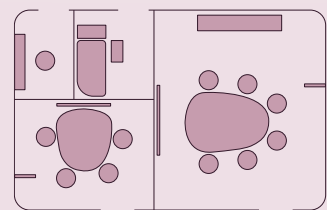
What's not working
A traditional, large conference room designed to seat 12 or more people is often unused or underutilized, yet it takes up significant square footage.

Footprint	500 sq. ft.
Rooms	1
Types of Work Supported	1

After

What to do
Adapt a single large room into four spaces that give people more ways to get different kinds of work done.

Footprint	500 sq. ft.
Rooms	4
Types of Work Supported	5



Teams need more spaces for small group meetings with greater flexibility and areas to connect before and after a work session.

A single wall-mounted screen at the far end of a long rectangular table makes it hard for everyone to see without craning their necks or leaning out away from the table.

This space is designed for one type of meeting which limits how often it's used.

Modular walls turn the single room that supported only one type of work into four different spaces that support a variety of experiences: collaboration, socialization, focus, learning and rejuvenation.

How it helps create community

Large board rooms cause more formality in how people interact and the scale feels intimidating. This new range of spaces provides social infrastructure that encourages people to interact more and to include co-workers with diverse needs and preferences. When designed together, furniture and technology create a more equitable, engaging, eye-to-eye experience where people feel like they belong, whether in the room or remote.

Different types of collaboration need different kinds of spaces. By providing a range of postures and analog and digital tools, these smaller spaces can be used differently based on how people need to work together.

Enclaves give people a place to prepare for a meeting or debrief afterward.

Creative sessions to generate ideas and solve problems can benefit from stool-height seating that encourages people to stand, move around the room, use markerboards or screens and actively collaborate.

People collaborate more often in groups of three to five. Adding video-enabled huddle rooms allows teams to include remote participants with a more equitable experience.

A curved table cues people where to sit which improves sight lines to people and content whether someone is in-person or remote.

The Overexposed Bench

Reorient desks and add a range of ways for people to control nearby distractions that make it hard to focus.

Before

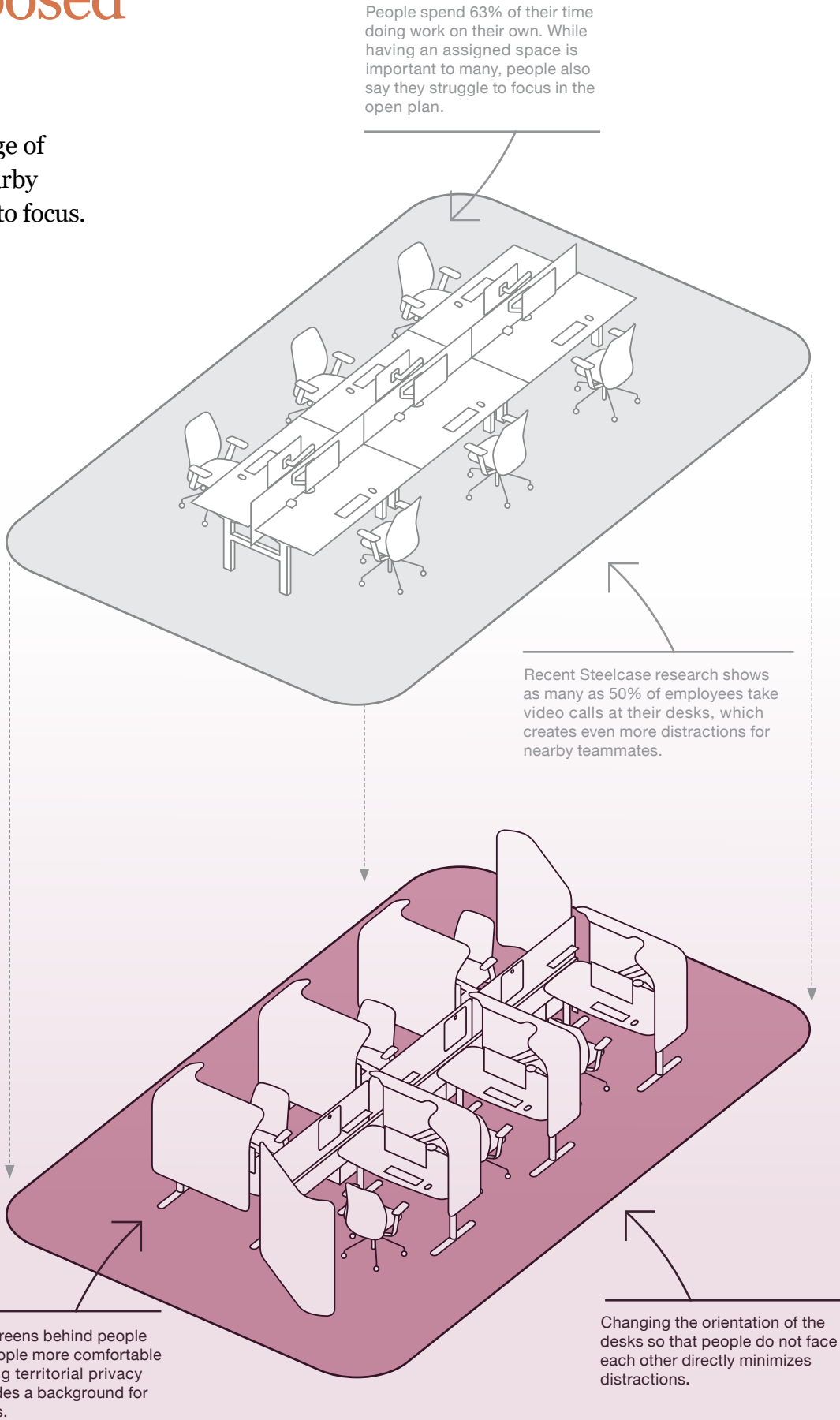
What's not working
Rows of benching, with people oriented to face one another, create visual distractions and provide little, if any, acoustic properties to mitigate noise.

Footprint 230 sq. ft.

After

What to do
Add a variety of solutions to give people additional levels of shielded privacy to mitigate visual distractions or create comfort with individual boundaries.

Footprint 230 sq. ft.



How it helps create community

Mixed-use team areas combine individual spaces where residents can focus and not feel overexposed with communal places to gather. This helps meet a fundamental need for privacy while the right density level creates a feeling of energy. Having neighbors in close proximity allows people to ask for help and support each other.

Greater access to privacy, acoustic boundaries and in-office sound masking will help prepare the workplace as advanced AI-voice assistants become more common.

People shift from individual to team work throughout their day. A nearby spot to share content makes it easy to switch between different activities.

Adding the center screen onto the workstations' spine gives people more privacy and provides access to helpful worktools, such as markerboards or storage elements.

Introduce nearby enclosed spaces to give people a convenient place to go when they need acoustic privacy.

Add higher, curved privacy screens to block visual distractions, and more clearly define an individual's space.

By creating shielded, individual spaces, organizations can more easily reconfigure the workstations or move them throughout the floor plan if there are changes on the team.



The Low-Performance Lounge

Beautiful spaces too often sit empty because they don't have what people need to get work done. Create desirable high-performing spaces by designing for privacy, posture, proximity and presence.

Before

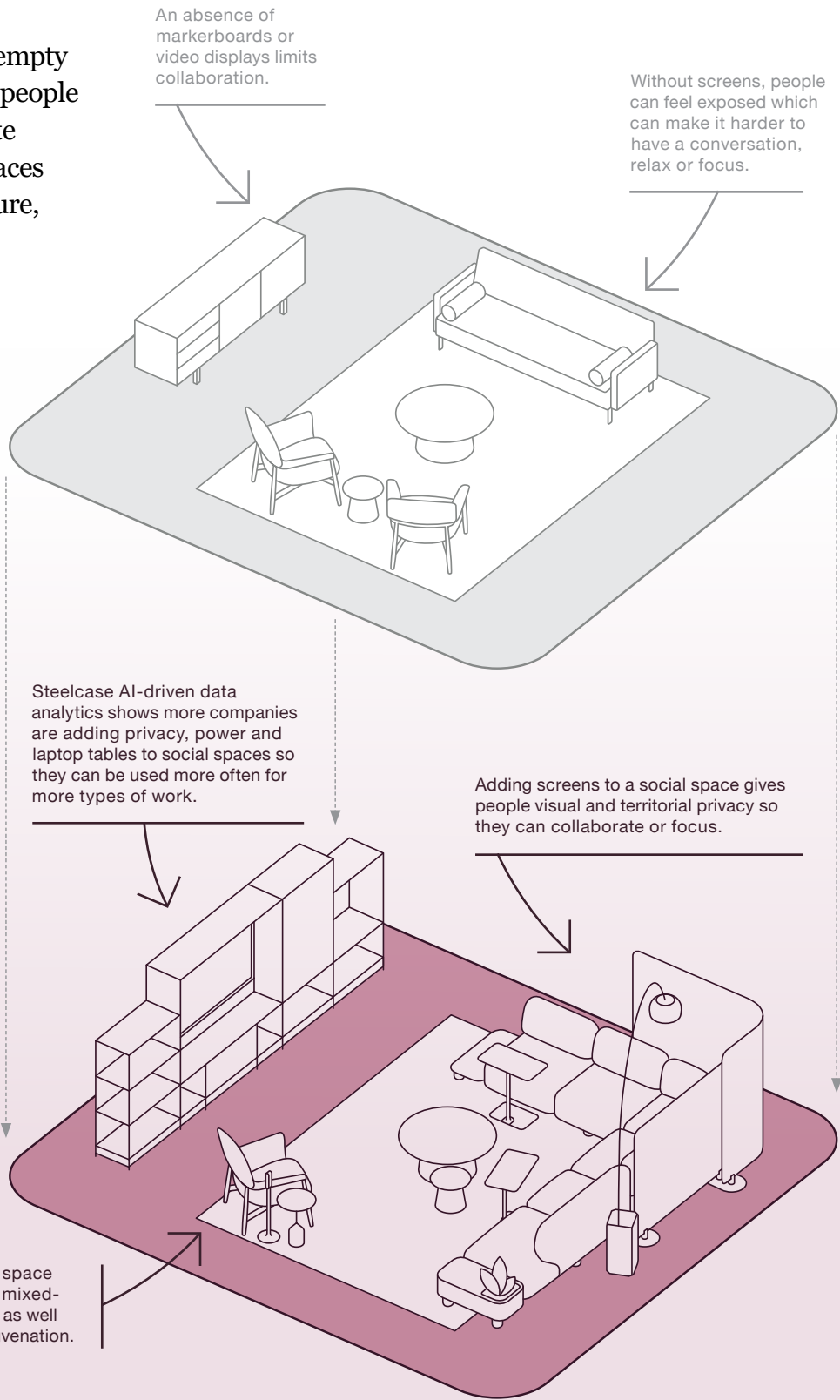
What's not working
Lounge spaces are often underutilized because furnishings lack key performance elements like privacy, power, laptop tables in close proximity to seating and the option for an upright posture.

Footprint 320 sq. ft.

After

What to do
Provide performance elements in social spaces so these settings can be used for more than conversations.

Footprint 320 sq. ft.



How it helps create community

Social spaces encourage people throughout the organization to have planned or impromptu meetings. Informal settings foster more authentic connections between people, create a sense of belonging and encourage engagement. People build trust which boosts collaboration and innovation.

Shelving that supports technology and a markerboard provides visual privacy to minimize distractions and lets people share content or brainstorm on the fly.

A lounge with an adjustable back lets people choose an upright posture or adjust seating depth depending on their preference.

Embedded power in the lounge ensures people can work as long as needed.



The Inflexible Meeting Room

Update team conference rooms to encourage creativity and innovation by keeping in-person and remote participants equally engaged.

Before

What's not working
Typical conference rooms can limit how teams collaborate and inhibit creative problem-solving.

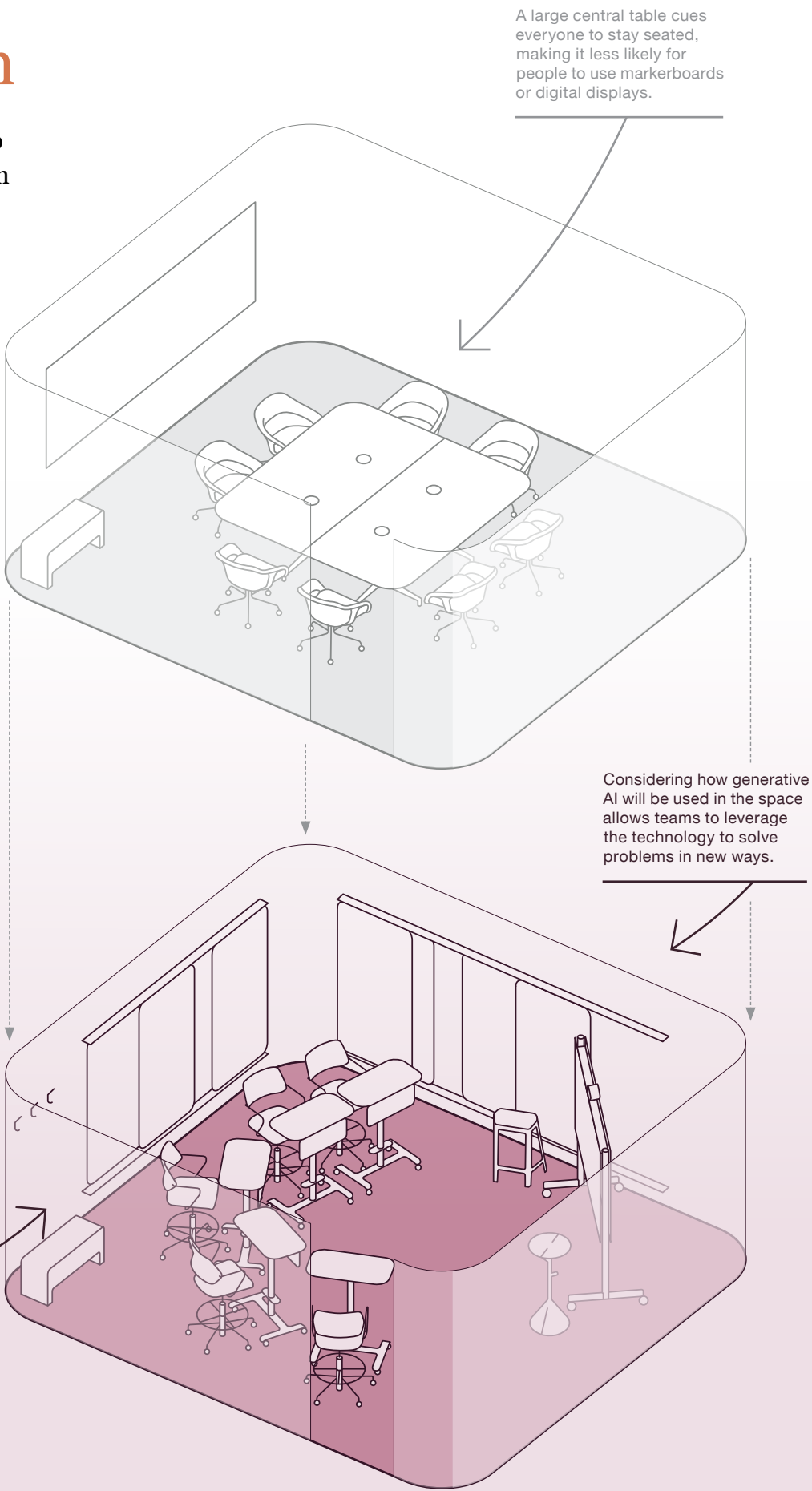
Footprint 315 sq. ft.

After

What to do
Mobile furniture, technology and light-weight markerboards make it easy for teams to adapt the space to their needs.

Footprint 315 sq. ft.

Steelcase AI-driven data analytics shows more organizations are adding performance elements such as markerboards, modular walls, flexible furniture and digital mounts to collaboration spaces. These performance elements have grown from 30% to over 45% in two years.



How it helps create community

Spaces that create equitable experiences between remote and in-room participants help everyone feel more engaged and that they matter. Encouraging movement supports physical wellbeing, and solving problems together helps build a shared sense of accomplishment and team cohesion.

Vertical surfaces for writing, drawing or pinning up content encourage teams to immerse themselves in their work. Keeping information persistent helps teams quickly get back into flow after a break.

Technology that encourages virtual and in-person participation, such as the Microsoft Surface Hub, lets people on both sides of the conversation engage with content.

Mobile single tables let teams reconfigure the space on demand. Teams that consistently use a collaboration space are more likely to take advantage of flexible furniture and digital tools.

Movement boosts creativity. Stool-height seating and places to perch give people a way to change postures and be ready to move when an idea strikes.

Modular walls like Everwall keep noise out or inside the space, preventing distractions. Fast wall installation makes it easier to reconfigure spaces using the same kit of reusable parts if the setting needs to adapt.



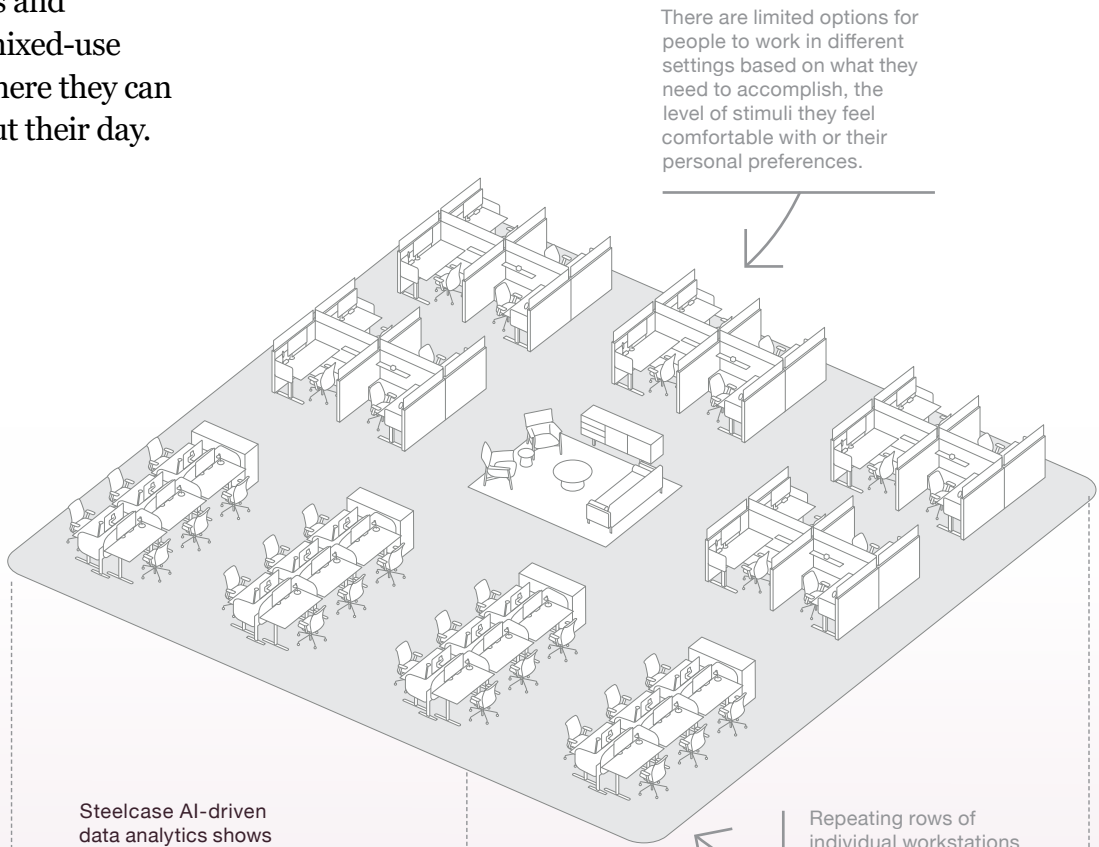
The Typical Team Space

Replace single-purpose areas and monotonous patterns with mixed-use spaces that let people find where they can do their best work throughout their day.

Before

What's not working
A neighborhood focused on uniformity doesn't consider the ebb and flow of work in which people must toggle between working alone or together.

Footprint 3660 sq. ft.

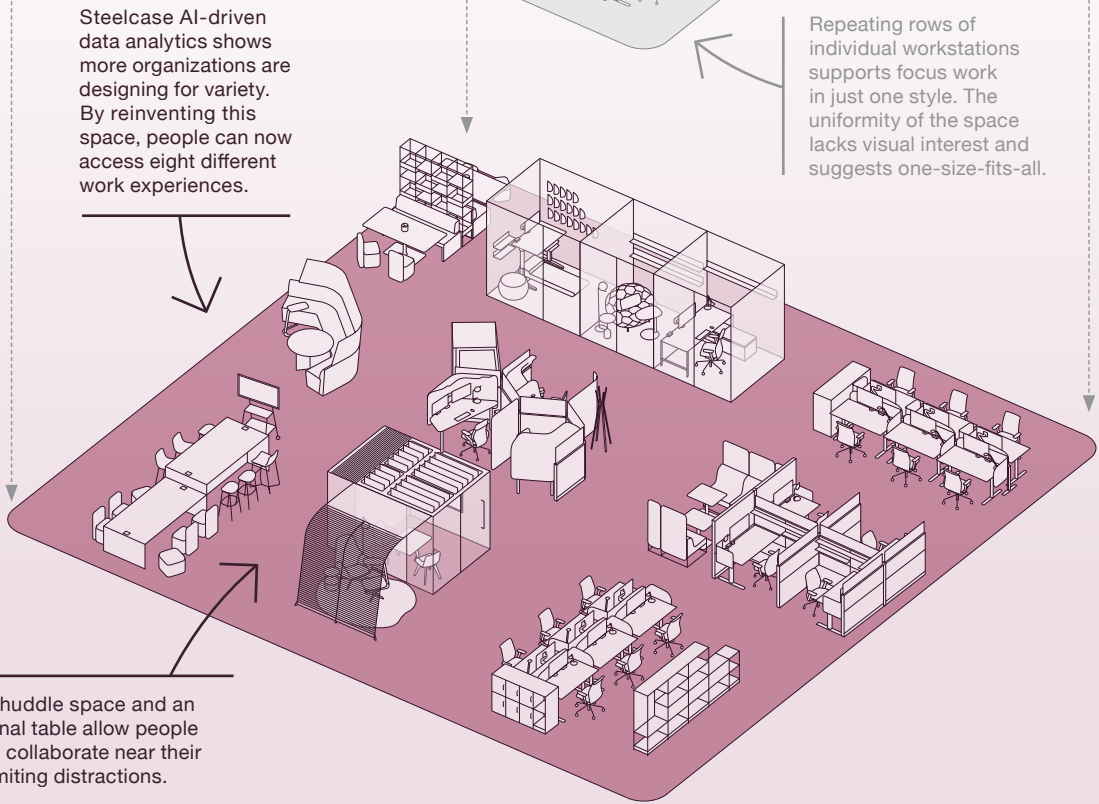


There are limited options for people to work in different settings based on what they need to accomplish, the level of stimuli they feel comfortable with or their personal preferences.

After

What to do
Create a range of experiences. Within their team neighborhood, give people variety and support throughout the day for different tasks.

Footprint 3660 sq. ft.



An enclosed huddle space and an open communal table allow people to gather and collaborate near their team while limiting distractions.

Repeating rows of individual workstations supports focus work in just one style. The uniformity of the space lacks visual interest and suggests one-size-fits-all.

How it helps create community

Team neighborhoods are where people build relationships, trust and a sense of shared responsibility. The variety of spaces encourages people to move around, interact when they want and retreat when they need to. When people have choices for how they work and their needs are being met, they feel more connected to each other and the organization.

Enclosed spaces near workstations give everyone in the neighborhood access to acoustic privacy when needed.



Allow teams to customize the space and add personal touches so their neighborhoods connect to their work and purpose.

Create a diverse range of open, enclosed and shielded spaces to give people places to work besides a desk.

Lockers give people a place to start their day and stash their stuff even if they don't have an assigned space.

Measuring Helps Communities Adapt

But are you measuring the right things?

Vibrant cities, bustling with activity, always seem to have something new happening – a historic building renovation, an urban farm, a new sports stadium. They change in big and small ways to meet people’s evolving needs. Jane Jacobs thought of cities as living ecosystems that constantly adapt, and Community-Based Design principles translate this concept into the workplace.

Measurement and community involvement are essential parts of the process, helping organizations track performance and pinpoint areas that may need updates as employee and team needs evolve.

Over the past few years, work has evolved significantly. These changes have raised a new set of questions and challenges: Are our spaces truly supporting the new way employees work today? Do people have the privacy, flexibility and functionality necessary to do their best work? Do they have places where they can focus, collaborate, socialize, learn and rejuvenate?

“Leaders understand the importance of the employee experience and how that impacts attraction, retention and satisfaction,” says Meg Bennett, Steelcase global design principal.

Bennett starts by deploying inclusive design principles and engages members of the workplace community at the beginning of the design process.

Analyzing workplace use

Ongoing measurement is a key tool to help workplaces continue to evolve. Quantitative data helps organizations understand key patterns of behavior. Steelcase partner VergeSense provides data analytics and real-time insights that measure space effectiveness. Occupancy and space utilization sensor technology helps transform underused spaces into areas that better support employee needs.

Understanding the employee experience

Equally important is measuring the workplace experience and people’s emotional and psychological responses to the space.

Occupancy and space utilization data provides insights into the effectiveness of a space. Organizations must also measure affectiveness — how the space makes people feel.

Does the workplace make employees feel valued, comfortable and connected? Does it inspire creativity or cause frustration?

Gensler’s 2024 Global Workplace Survey found that workplace experience trails

behind space effectiveness across countries and industries, “highlighting an opportunity to design for emotion as well as function,” and advises its clients on the importance of designing for both effectiveness and experience. Gensler, along with other leading architectural and design and real estate firms, offers deep measurement expertise and a range of offerings that can help.

Steelcase offers clients its Workplace Readiness Assessment, a survey evaluating the work experience and employee sentiment. It reveals how people use the office and how they feel about it. The survey includes questions about belonging, productivity, comfort, control and technology integration.

In addition to quantitative data, Bennett suggests collecting qualitative data from activities such as workshops, lived-experience focus groups, interviews and observation. This kind of data provides contextual understanding, and when combined with AI-generated utilization data, it allows organizations to continually fine-tune their environments to support the ways their people are working. The process of gathering qualitative data helps people feel part of the process and that their needs are being considered. It also identifies opportunities to pilot and test new solutions.

“If your goal is to boost a sense of belonging and build a strong community, ongoing measurement is an important tool that can help a workplace evolve as people’s work patterns and behaviors change.”

Meg Bennett
Steelcase Global Design Principal

Pilots: A low-risk approach to change

Testing new ideas on a smaller scale through pilots can help organizations refine their workplace strategies before committing to significant investments. A pilot program involves experimenting with new applications and settings, technologies or designs in select areas to gather data and feedback.

Benefits of pilots

Cost-effective testing

Pilots allow companies to test concepts without overhauling entire offices, reducing financial risk.

Data-driven decisions

They provide valuable insights into what works and what doesn’t, enabling better-informed decisions.

Community engagement

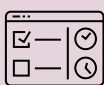
Pilots should involve direct employee input from the people and teams using the space. This is a key tenet of Community-Based Design and fosters a sense of inclusion and ownership.

Measurement tools

Various tools are available to help organizations gather quantitative and qualitative data to assess employee sentiment and help identify opportunities to pilot and test.



Occupancy Sensor Data
Analyzes space usage trends



Space Booking Data
Provides insights into which spaces are most needed by employees and why



Badge Swipe Data
Pinpoints employee entry and exit patterns, allowing for optimized space utilization



Amenity Usage Data
Provides insights into how and when employees utilize amenities, enabling better space planning and resource allocation



Employee Sentiment Surveys
Qualitative data from employee feedback and ratings



Wi-Fi Analytics Data
Provides insights into employee movement, space utilization and occupancy patterns

Community-Based Design Works Better

Community is the glue that holds people together during times of change and adversity. When people feel a sense of community, they are far more likely to be engaged and productive, have higher levels of wellbeing and achieve better results. The workplace is a strategic asset organizations can use as the infrastructure for building community. But today it doesn’t always meet the changing ways people are working.

Getting started is not difficult. You can begin one space at a time or choose to apply Community-Based Design principles to create one or two districts.

The forces changing work today are impacting organizations of all sizes. Community-Based Design can be scaled up or down to support new patterns of behavior in the workplace. It creates flexible and adaptable spaces that provide more value over time. The important thing is to take the first step.

Learn More

Contact your local Steelcase representative or authorized dealer to learn more about Community-Based Design and how to get started.

Visit steelcase.com/spaces

How to Create Community Through Inclusive Design

“As a mother of someone with a disability, I’ve always advocated on behalf of my daughter Claudia,” says Jen VanSkiver, chief officer of strategic growth for Special Olympics Michigan (SOMI). “But when she was invited into the conversation during our inclusive design session for our new Inclusion Center, she shared needs and ideas I had never considered. I realized I’d been doing her a disservice by trying to speak for her.”

Inclusive design considers the full range of human diversity, including people’s abilities, language, culture, gender and age. At its core is the belief that people with different lived experiences should be included in the design process — to design with them and not just for them. This helps everyone feel valued, empowered and psychologically safe.

Community-Based Design, the Steelcase approach to creating vibrant workplaces embraces the same core belief. Including people in the design process leads to a stronger sense of belonging, trust and engagement, which results in greater

productivity. Inclusive design brings together a wide range of people with varied lived experiences to inform Community-Based Design — creating workplaces where everyone can thrive.

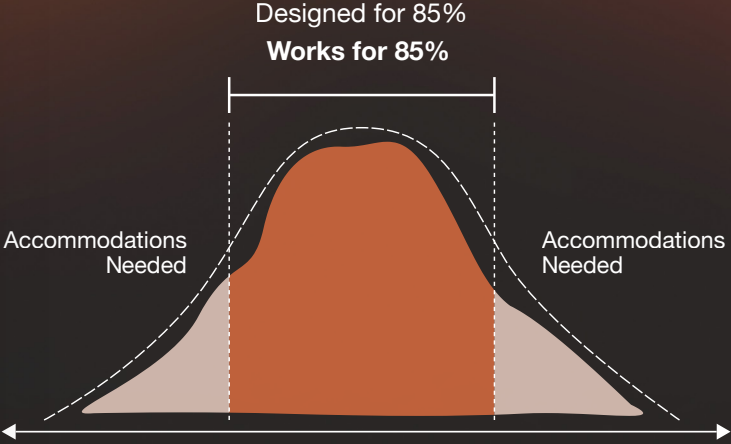
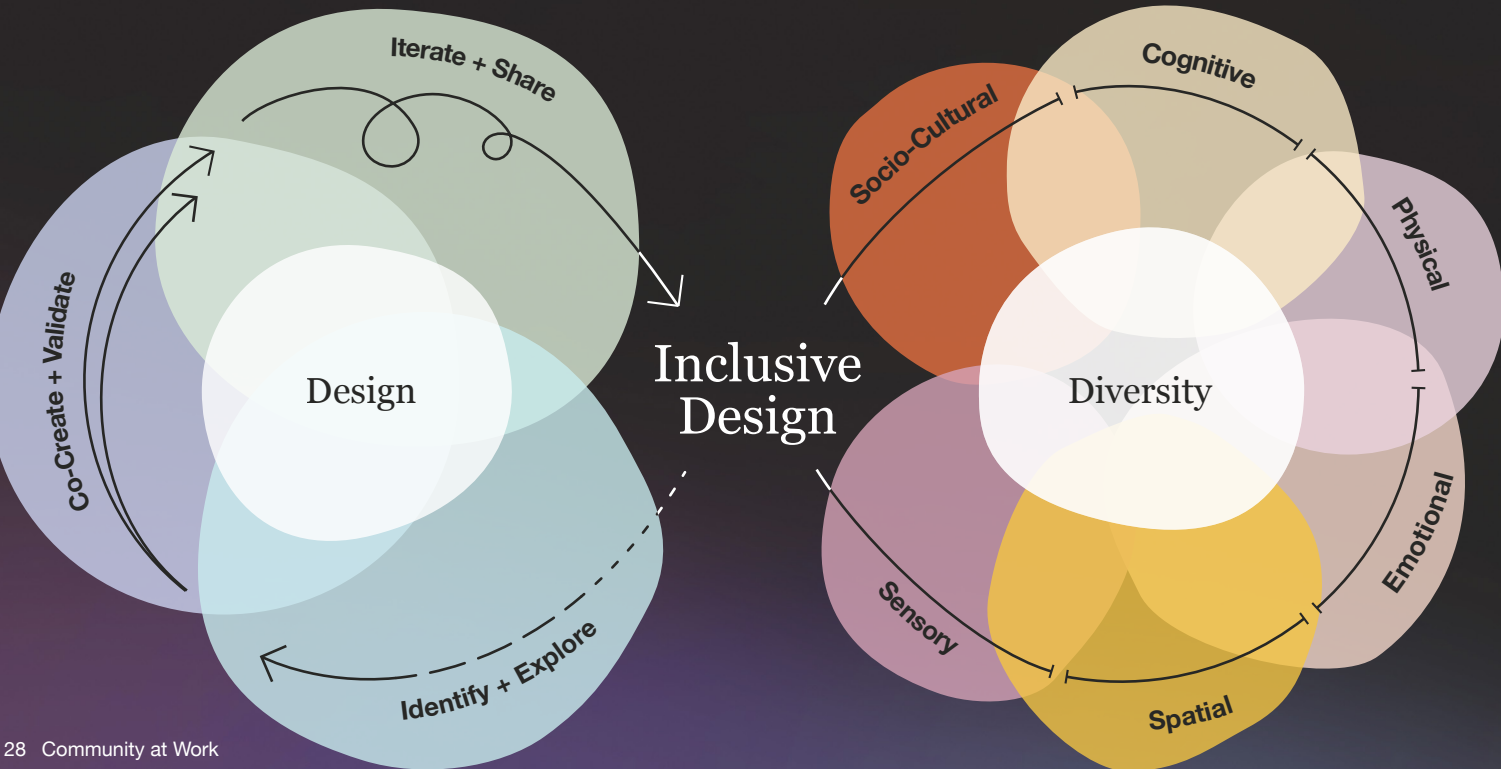
Design with and for community

Some design practices focus on the averages within an employee population, with others articulating people’s needs. At best, that results in an average workplace experience. Considering the full range of people’s needs and encouraging them to express their perspectives creates a win-win experience. For example, automatic doors create a more accessible room for people who use a wheelchair but also make entry more manageable for everyone, whether they have a temporary disability or are simply carrying a stack of books.

“The ability for people to articulate their feelings can be a barrier. So we tend to do a lot of interpreting for them,” says VanSkiver. “But when we invite people who are traditionally excluded into an environment to feel it and live in it – they communicate in a way we haven’t seen before.”

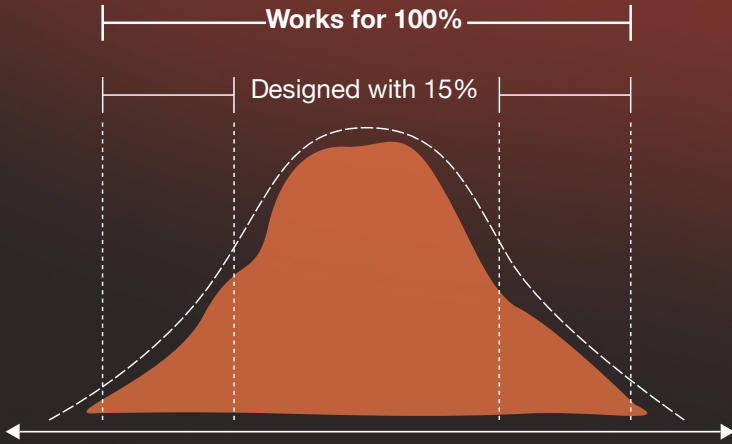
“Designing to create an inclusive community brings the power of design alongside diversity – the full spectrum of human beings, conditions and experiences,” says Kamara Sudberry, global inclusive design leader at Steelcase. “By bringing people who will use the space into the process, you can co-create with them, not just design for them.”

Inclusive design is a continuous loop, recognizing and inviting people with a diversity of perspectives into the process informed by sensory, spatial, emotional, physical, cognitive and socio-cultural factors. Together, the community and designers identify needs, co-create solutions, validate and iterate as those needs evolve.



Traditional Design

Design for the average employee



Inclusive Design

Design with traditionally excluded perspectives, scale to many

Great communities are inclusive by design

Community-Based Design allows workplaces to adapt as people’s and organizations’ needs change. Similarly, the continuous loop of inclusive design is a journey where designers and people with a broad range of perspectives continue to learn from one another, recognizing that perspectives can be influenced by race, socio-economic status, disability, size, sexual orientation, age, parental status, language, and many other identities.

Consider how the employee population continues to change. People live longer — one in six worldwide will be 60+ by 2030 (WHO).

30% of U.S. professionals have a disability — with higher rates among millennials

44% of millennials report a mental health condition (Center for Talent Innovation)

And the number of people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder has increased by 175% over the past decade (JAMA). A growing understanding of these experiences allows designers to create spaces in tune with people who need more control over their environment.

Key tenets of Community-Based Design build on the practice of inclusive design to give all employees more choice and control so they can do their best work.

Community engagement
The “Understand” phase of Community-Based Design starts with engaging a diverse group of employees and leaders to deeply understand how people work.

Social infrastructure
Just as cities need physical infrastructure for transportation or utilities, they also need social infrastructure – places that shape how people interact – to build community.

Resilient design
Flexible workplaces ensure organizations can respond to new needs and allow people to thrive as work changes.

Mixed-use spaces
Create areas or “districts” that focus on a primary mode of work, such as collaboration or socialization (see page 15), and support diverse ways of working nearby. For example, a “City Center” designed for social activities also supports focus and collaboration.

Holistic measurement
Creating a way to receive ongoing feedback from the people living and working in the space supports a resilient community that adapts over time.

“The benefit of embedding an inclusive design practice into Community-Based Design is that it creates a natural feedback loop to ensure the workplace will evolve as people and their work do.”

Kamara Sudberry
Steelcase Global Inclusive Design Leader

Learn more about our inclusive design practice:
steelcase.com/spaces/inclusive-design/

The Possibilities of Privacy

How to Meet Employees’ #1 Need

Privacy is the top thing people say they need at work and spaces to support wellbeing are a close second, according to Steelcase research. The two issues are connected – lack of privacy contributes to wellbeing issues as people struggle to keep up with demands at work, stay focused and engaged, collaborate effectively, and cope with increasing stress and anxiety. It’s not a new problem, but it’s become more urgent.

Lack of privacy options for individual contributors and managers is a shortfall at many workplaces, and it’s been an ongoing complaint since open-plan offices became popular. In 2014, Steelcase dubbed it “The Privacy Crisis” and identified the toll it was taking on employee engagement. In the years leading up to the pandemic, news stories reported on how much people hated open offices where they felt overexposed and overwhelmed by noise and distractions. Then the pandemic hit and people suddenly found themselves working from home, where they got a taste of what it was like to have more control over their physical environment. Even if kids and dirty laundry were calling, people felt they had more autonomy.

A growing problem

As people returned to offices, the privacy problem became more acute. In some cases, workplaces hadn’t changed significantly, or at all. In other cases, people were asked to give up assigned desks in favor of more collaboration spaces, and the number of private spaces shrunk. It’s been 11 years since Steelcase first published research about privacy, and work patterns have changed even more. Among the most significant changes are the increase in the number of meetings and the surge of video calls.

When they’re in the office, 50% of people stay at their desks to join video calls, not only because they are booked back-to-

back but also because there’s often no place nearby that offers a higher level of privacy. But, individual workspaces rarely meet people’s privacy needs throughout their workflows. They struggle to focus when doing individual work, effectively collaborate without disturbing others, or simply find respite during the day.

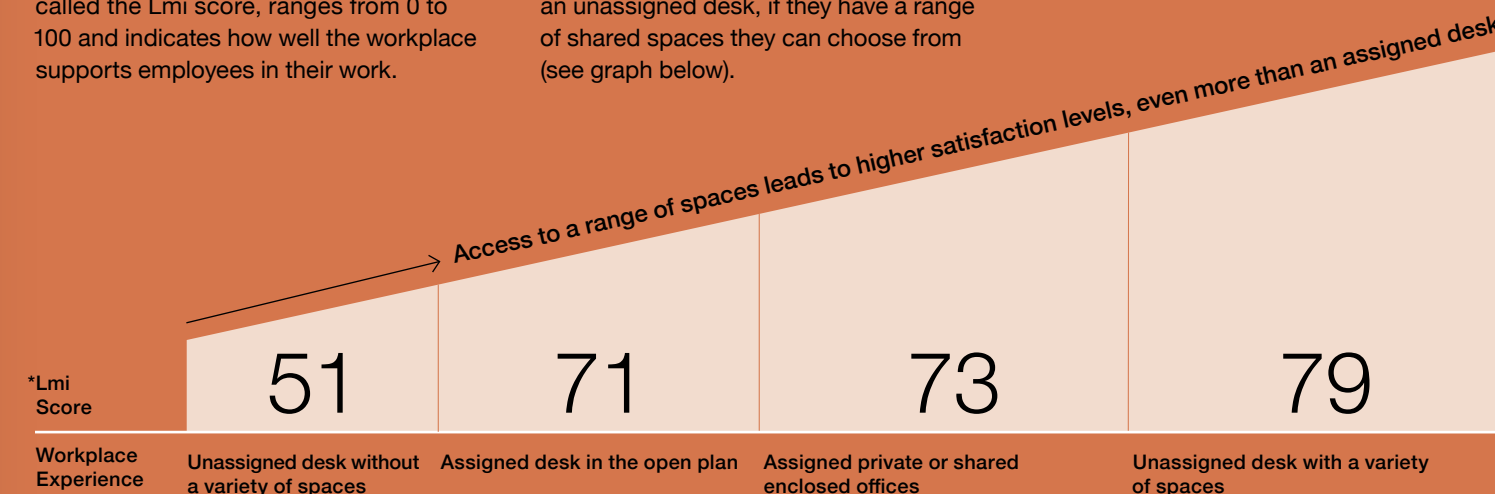
As distractions have increased, the need for privacy has grown. But this doesn’t mean that organizations should go back to preopen-plan norms and give everyone private offices — in fact, this won’t meet people’s needs today.

Employees want variety

Access to a variety of different space types helps people most, according to research from Leesman, a workplace experience consultancy firm. The Leesman Index, also called the Lmi score, ranges from 0 to 100 and indicates how well the workplace supports employees in their work.

People with assigned private offices are slightly more satisfied than those with assigned desks in the open plan. But, people are significantly happier, even with an unassigned desk, if they have a range of shared spaces they can choose from (see graph below).

* Leesman Employee Experience Index Score
The Leesman Index assesses employees’ experience within their workplace, indicating how well the office design supports work activities and their sense of pride, productivity and community at work.



Privacy takes many shapes

Privacy isn’t a one-size-fits-all issue. For most people, the kind of privacy they need ebbs and flows throughout the day as they toggle between different activities. Working individually, people need to focus without distraction, have sensitive conversations without being overheard, participate in a video call without disturbing others, and find a calm place to recharge without leaving the office. Teams need access to places for confidential strategy sessions and spaces to brainstorm and problem-solve without being interrupted or interrupting others.

These activities require different types of privacy. Addressing these diverse needs requires a holistic solution that goes beyond individual workstations or traditional conference rooms and enclaves. People need access to a range of spaces that provide varying levels of privacy throughout the work environment that cater to both individual and team requirements. But it doesn’t have to be daunting or complicated.

A common frustration in many offices is the lack of available private spaces,

especially in workplaces that rely solely on traditional enclosed rooms. However, privacy doesn’t have to be limited to closed-door spaces.

By incorporating a range of spaces with varying layers of privacy throughout the workplace, organizations can more affordably and more easily meet various needs and preferences that are also more accessible, ensuring people have the right level of privacy for different kinds of work they do throughout their day:

Acoustical Privacy

The ability to work undisturbed by noise or to create noise without disrupting others.

Visual Privacy

Ensuring you’re not visible to others and can avoid distractions caused by what you see.

Territorial Privacy

The freedom to claim and control a space as your own.

Informational Privacy

The ability to protect the confidentiality of both conversations and analog or digital content.

Exploring diverse approaches to personal and team privacy

Private spaces can be fully enclosed, shielded, or even in the open to support solo work and team efforts.

In addition to enclosed spaces such as enclaves, pods, meeting and huddle rooms, open spaces can provide varying levels of privacy by adding screens, shelving or other boundary elements and soundscaping to support visual, acoustic, territorial and informational privacy.

Need to bring in remote team members or work on a confidential project? Enclosed meeting spaces provide acoustic and informational privacy teams need to brainstorm and work distraction-free.



Design elements such as screens, shelving and strategically oriented workstations shield employees from distractions in the open plan without isolating workers.



Need to work solo or just get away for a while? These focus nooks create an intimate space within a public room. High screens keep the thinking in and distractions out.



The addition of elements such as Steelcase Flex Active Frames and Acoustic Boundary create visual and territorial privacy in the open for teams to work uninterrupted.

The use of cloaking technology, an architectural film for glass walls, can obscure digital screens to outside views. Design elements such as acoustic panels, strategically oriented workstations, and high-backed seating can shield employees from distractions. These features blend privacy into open spaces without isolating workers. Enclosed spaces must be thoughtfully distributed across the floorplan to ensure they're accessible when and where needed most.

Everyone needs privacy, but personal preferences, the space around them, and cultural norms play a significant role in designing the right environments. The ability to control stimuli, especially for those who identify as neurodiverse and need to control sensory experiences better, is also critical. Different settings let people pick the best spot based on what they're doing, their mood and personality, making privacy feel more personal.



Lounge spaces near workstations make it easy to connect with colleagues for an impromptu meeting or to rejuvenate. Screens create a visual boundary and keep distractions out.

Many Ways to Create Privacy

Privacy is essential in today’s work, whether you’re working alone or with a team. And there are many creative ways to achieve it — it’s not just about enclosed rooms, though those are important too. Here are some ideas for creating a range of spaces in close proximity to one another where people can control their privacy and comfort and easily connect with their peers.

Focus + Respite Spaces

Enclosed rooms provide a high level of visual and acoustic privacy to support focus work and rejuvenation.



Individual Workstations

Flexible screens and boundary elements such as WorkValet create visual and territorial privacy and provide a home base for people where they can focus on daily activities and get work done.



Focus Nook

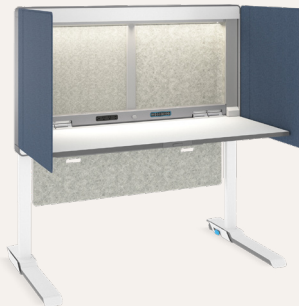
This high-performance nook is a place to step away to concentrate with reduced distractions. The shielding protects screen content and provides visual privacy.



Focus + Respite Spaces

Libraries are becoming popular solutions as a dedicated, quiet destination for individuals to escape a buzzing workplace.

+ More Ideas for Privacy



Amobi Focus Desk, AMQ
Magnetic side panels offer additional visual privacy.



KwickScreen
Instantly create privacy between spaces with this portable screen.



Steelcase Flex Active Frames
As a boundary solution, Active Frames provide clearly identifiable territory between teams, providing privacy and shelter from busy corridors.

Small Meeting Rooms

Architectural walls provide the acoustic privacy often required for hybrid meetings.

The addition of meeting pods and shielded areas where people can meet in the open plan gives people options to choose the best place to work, based on their personal preferences and the work they're doing.



+ Ocular Sightline Table, Steelcase

+ Everwall Architectural Walls, Steelcase

Layers of Privacy

Campers & Dens creates environments that support focus, collaboration and connection, providing varying levels of privacy to meet people's different needs throughout the day.

Open Team Space

Steelcase Flex Boundary provides an acoustical and visual buffer for team meetings in the open.



+ Campers & Dens, Orangebox

+ Away From the Desk, Orangebox



Air³ Acoustic Pod, + Orangebox

+ Aspect High Back Sofa System, Orangebox



+ On the QT, Orangebox

Pods

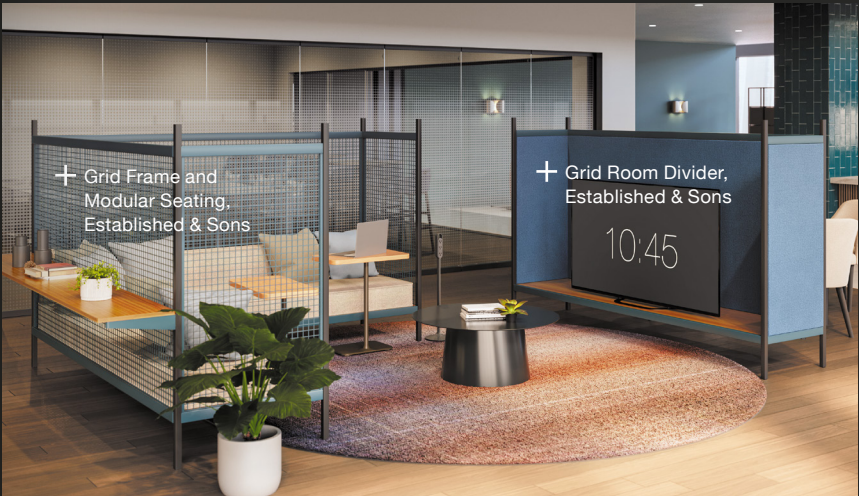
Locate pods adjacent to work areas to make it easy for people to transition when they need to get on a video call, make a phone call or simply think for a while.



+ Steelcase Flex Acoustic Boundary + Markerboards



Sticks Dividers, Extremis
Create visual privacy between spaces, indoors or outdoors.

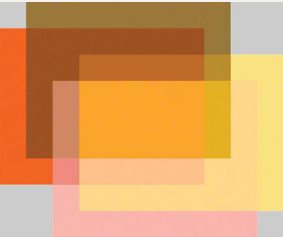


+ Grid Frame and Modular Seating, Established & Sons

+ Grid Room Divider, Established & Sons

Informal Meeting Space

Furniture elements provide territorial and visual privacy for one-on-one conversations, informal meetings, presentations or social interactions.



Moooi Rugs
Create a territorial boundary around your work area.

Designing for Community

Key solutions create the places where people and organizations build community.

Dynamic communities nurture motivated, engaged and resilient teams, which is essential for thriving amidst change. Crafting a vibrant workplace community means designing spaces that invite connection and collaboration while offering sanctuaries for solitude and centering.



Campers & Dens
Orangebox

Create destinations in the office with Campers & Dens by defining spaces with varying levels of privacy to support focus, collaboration and connection while elevating circulation paths throughout a floor plan.



Brody WorkLounge
Steelcase Learning



Ocular™ Coupe Tower
Steelcase

Collaboration-ready and versatile, the Ocular Coupe Tower makes connecting with teammates effortless in the open plan or small huddle spaces.



Everwall™
Steelcase



Perxa Chair
Vicarbe

Radia Chair
Steelcase Health



Steelcase Karman™
Steelcase



Noha Chair
Vicarbe



Migration Pro
Steelcase



Personality Plus
AMQ

Now in eight new Air Mesh back colors, available across all AMQ seating.



WorkValet™
Steelcase

A collection of modern, curved upholstered furniture pieces in various colors (red, green, brown, orange) and shapes, arranged on a light gray background. The pieces include lounge chairs, sofas, and ottomans, all featuring smooth, flowing lines and a plush texture.

Free Your Form

Introducing the modern nature of seating. From Pritzker Prize-winning architect Jean Nouvel and the Coalesse Design Group, elemental forms reminiscent of pebbles combine freely to take any shape in a space — furniture that flows naturally.

Jean Nouvel creates buildings and furnishings that are intimately in harmony with their surroundings — modern expressions of nature and culture. These pieces are engineered to balance complexity and simplicity, suspending the body within continuous curves for maximum comfort.

New!

Jean Nouvel Seating Collection

Coalesse

The collection includes a modern, fully upholstered lounge chair, sofa, ottoman and traditional French tête-à-tête.

*“The simpler an object looks,
the harder it is to make, the more
emotion it offers, and the better
it stands the test of time.”*

Architect Jean Nouvel



Hosu Lounge
Coalesse



Melt Chandelier
Tom Dixon



Menagerie of Extinct Animals
Moooi Carpets



Horse Lamp
Moooi



West Elm Work Belle
West Elm

New HQ Makes Privacy a Priority

Lord Abbett, a private asset management firm, has unveiled a new headquarters in Jersey City atop the Goldman Sachs tower on the Hudson River. The new office spans five floors and is as much a statement about its future as it is about its values and commitment to in-person engagement.

“Our goal was to create an environment that enhances not just productivity but our culture and employee wellbeing,” says real estate and workplace services head Filippo Soave. The office features a range of inspiring spaces: open-plan workstations, private offices, quiet focus rooms, and a two-story open space called The Exchange featuring social and collaboration spaces designed for gatherings and collaboration.

“It’s a space for bringing the firm together, equipped with amenities like a barista and areas for social interaction,” says Soave.

“The goal was to provide flexibility and choice, allowing employees to select the environment that best suits their tasks, preferences and work habits,” explains Design Principal Melissa Strickland, managing director of architecture and design firm HLW’s New Jersey office.

Everyone has a dedicated workstation that prioritizes ergonomics and flexibility. Steelcase authorized dealer Dancker and HLW created workstations with height-adjustable desks and integrated technology for seamless connectivity tailored to employees’ unique needs. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with 75-80% of employees returning to the office daily. “It’s a place where we can grow, innovate and continue to attract top talent,” says Soave.

“The best validation of this investment is that people want to be here. They’re engaged, they’re collaborating, and they’re making this space their own.”

Filippo Soave
Lord Abbett

Steelcase Community of Brands



Gathering to Game & Learn

Step inside the Esports Competition Hub at Michigan State University and you’ll discover a bustling space filled with students from various backgrounds who all share one thing in common: a love for video games.

Previously an empty classroom, the hub is the practice and competition venue for Michigan State University’s (MSU) three varsity esports teams and hosts the MSU Esports Club Association, one of the largest student organizations on campus with 2,000 members.

“We’re committed to esports as more than just competition. One of the biggest goals we were trying to accomplish was to create a place for students to connect,” says Christopher Bilski, director of esports at MSU. The gaming hub has quickly become a haven for digital athletes and students, offering support and a sense of belonging.

Students also explore careers in broadcast media, design, photography and marketing here. “It’s not just about their four years here. It’s about the next 40 years of their lives. We’re excited about what this space helps to provide to students, whether from a community, competitive or career perspective,” says Bilski.

The space was designed with a variety of seating options for varsity esports athletes and student gamers to play, do homework and broadcast competitions. Ergonomic task chairs, roomy work surfaces and easy-to-adjust monitors create comfortable battle stations for esports athletes to practice and compete.

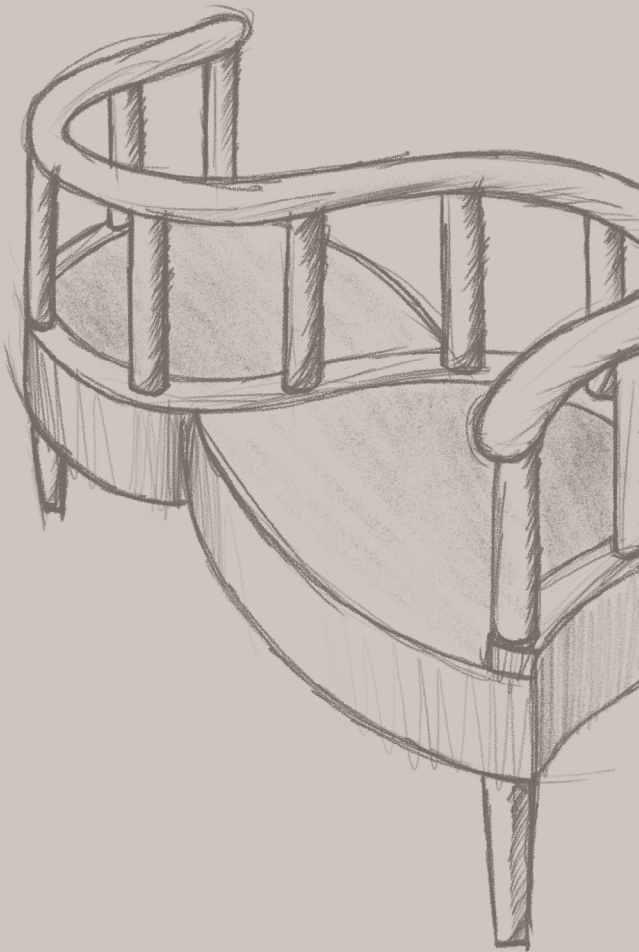
“Esports has given me a support system. I found a community that not only loves activities that I like but also is willing to uplift the creative aspects that I love in esports.”

Kiley Slevin
MSU Student



tête-à-tête
/tādeˈtāt/
Head-to-head; a private conversation between two people.

Comfort meets company in the tête-à-tête lounge. Inspired by a Victorian-era conversation bench, this reimagined modern version by Ateliers Jean Nouvel and Coalesse intuitively brings people together — allowing the freedom to sit towards or away from each other yet maintain closeness.



Inspiration



About the Cover

This original conceptual artwork explores how community is two things: places and relationships. It invites the viewer into the workplace as the sense of community builds and unfolds around them.

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