

SOUL spaces

The Workplace in 2025:

How Companies Are Bringing Teams Back to the Office—With and Without Mandates



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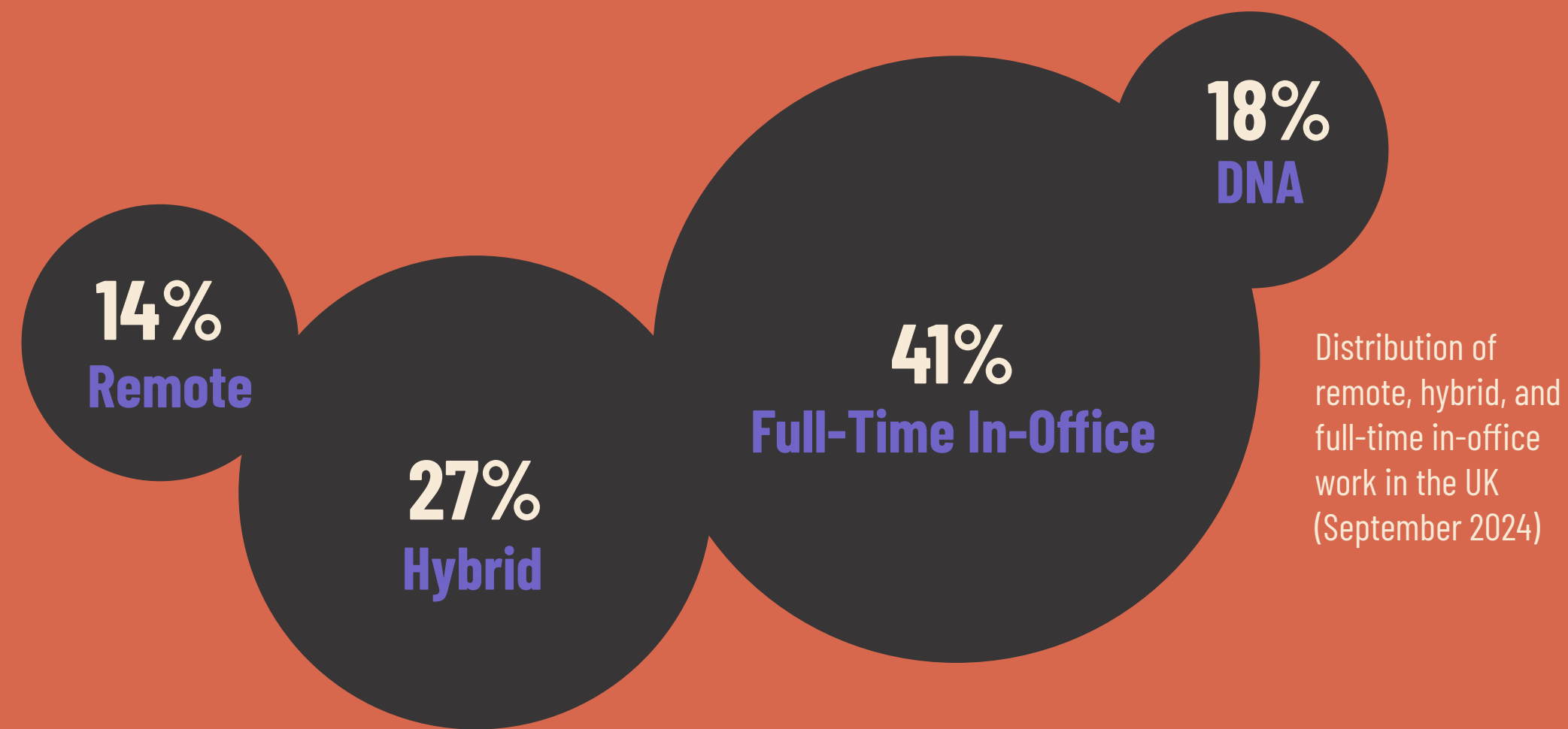
The Office Comeback Story

As companies face the challenge of bringing teams back to the office, mandates have fallen out of favour. Instead, businesses are focusing on creating compelling reasons for employees to return voluntarily.

We explore the strategies companies are using to make the office a place where employees want to be—not because they have to, but because they choose to. We'll share insights from leading CEOs and business leaders, backed by statistics and real-world case studies.



Balancing In-Office and Remote Work



Hybrid work has moved from an emergency response to a long-term business strategy. Post-pandemic, many employees are no longer interested in a 5-day office week. They've experienced flexibility, and they want to keep it. According to a [WE Forum report](#), **73% of employees now prefer remote work options**, but that doesn't mean they're ready to abandon in-office working altogether.

At the core of the hybrid model is the idea that employees want choice—choice over where and how they work. For many companies, this means rethinking office policies to blend flexibility with the undeniable benefits of in-person collaboration. While remote work is great for focus, the office still holds a unique space for community and innovation.

Why the Office Still Matters

Even with remote work's rise, companies are recognising the vital role of in-person interaction. According to a [recent JLL survey](#), **72% of employees say the office is still the best place for collaboration**. The challenge is reframing the office as a creative hub, not just a workspace.

The office is evolving; it's no longer somewhere we *have* to be, but a place we *want* to be. It's where big ideas happen, where colleagues connect, and where culture thrives. Instead of focusing on traditional office setups, forward-thinking companies are working to reshape their environments to better align with the flexibility their employees crave. This is where office design and culture become key.



Micah Evans, Business Unit Director at [Randstad UK](#)

"Since moving to hybrid/flexible hours, where our team members can choose to start and finish at different times to fulfill personal responsibilities (e.g., for parents needing to drop off or pick up children), staff morale has improved. This flexibility provides almost the best of both worlds, allowing employees to enjoy the benefits of working remotely while also being together in the office, promoting social interaction and well-being."



The Role of Flexibility in the New Workplace Dynamic

Businesses that offer flexibility—whether in schedules, office attendance, or work environments—are more likely to retain top talent. In fact, research from Gallup shows that **54% of employees would leave their current job for more flexible work arrangements.**

Flexibility is no longer just a perk; it's a must. The companies winning the return-to-office challenge are those that don't rely on rigid schedules but create adaptable, hybrid environments that cater to diverse work styles. For example, many companies are offering "core hours" when everyone is in the office, with the rest of the day left flexible.

SOUL^{spaces} Joe Gillam, Founder at Soul Spaces

"Although we operate on a hybrid basis, we do have a mandate in place. Generally, we expect our team in the office at least three days a week, with Monday and Thursday being key. Delivery and sales teams are usually in four days, while marketing is in three. We trust our employees to do what's needed based on their roles. We believe physical human connection improves performance and development, which drives this decision. We're flexible where possible, aiming to provide a balanced environment with plenty of choice and no pressure to conform."

Why Employees Are Hesitant to Return (And What Might Change Their Minds)

Commutes, Childcare, and Convenience

For many, the prospect of commuting again is daunting. Studies show that **43% of employees cite commuting as a primary reason they prefer remote work**. Add to that the complexity of childcare and other home responsibilities, and the office can feel like an obstacle.

Getting people back into the office requires making the journey worth it. For those with long commutes, inflexible hours, or family responsibilities, remote work offers a level of convenience that traditional office life never could. Addressing these challenges directly—whether through flexible start times or stipends for travel—can make all the difference.



Work-Life Balance and Mental Well-Being

The shift to remote work allowed employees to recalibrate their work-life balance, and many are reluctant to give that up. According to a [Psychology Today article](#), **66% of employees report improved mental well-being thanks to the added personal time afforded by hybrid work models.**

Mental health has become a top priority for employees. The companies that recognise this—by offering wellness programs, quiet zones in the office, and the ability to work from home part of the week—are seeing better returns on office attendance. Offices that cater to both productivity and well-being are more likely to attract people back.

Addressing Office Fatigue

For many employees, the office represents outdated, rigid systems that limit creativity and autonomy. A [2023 survey by PwC](#) found that **41% of workers believe the traditional office fails to support their best work.**

Office fatigue is real. Employees want modern, adaptable spaces that cater to their work needs, whether it's collaborative zones for brainstorming or quiet pods for focused tasks. Refreshing the office experience by integrating flexible, people-first design can reignite the appeal of working on-site.



The Strategies That Are Actually Working

Introducing Collaboration-Only Days

Some companies have implemented dedicated in-office days solely for collaboration and brainstorming, eliminating individual tasks like emails or solo work. This has increased office attendance as it gives employees a clear purpose for coming in.

When employees know that office days are specifically designed for teamwork and creativity, rather than just another day at their desk, they're more likely to show up. Collaboration-only days—where meetings, brainstorming sessions, and cross-team projects are prioritised—make office time valuable and productive.



Designing an Office Employees Love

Offices need to evolve into inspiring environments that foster creativity. Offices should no longer be uniform; companies that redesign their spaces to reflect their brand values and support varied work styles are seeing greater attendance.

Forget cubicles. The office of the future is about open, adaptable spaces designed around the needs of employees. From biophilic elements to flexible workstations, the design should reflect a company's culture and the creative needs of its teams. At Soul Spaces, *we help businesses create workspaces where people want to be, not have to be.*

Rebuilding a Sense of Community

A major motivator for returning to the office is the sense of community. Employees have missed the social aspects of work—after all, video calls can't replicate the energy of in-person collaboration.

The pandemic has left many feeling isolated, and the return to the office offers a chance to rebuild community. From regular team events to shared workspaces that encourage casual conversation, companies are fostering environments that go beyond just work—they're creating spaces where culture and connection thrive.



Soul Spaces x Kisaco Research - Office Refurb



Soul Spaces x Faculty AI - Office Design & Build



Soul Spaces x Attensi- Office Design & Build

“WE LEAD BY EXAMPLE

so even people in leadership roles are expected to be in the office driving culture and a sales buzz.

A few people in the leadership team have more flexible working policies but we always ensure that there is leadership coverage in the office at all times.

At the same time we realise that sometime you need to be flexible and deal with things on a case by case basis within teams, typically if you are turning up everyday and working hard then you are treated like an adult and flexibility is given.”

Hannah Sutton
Head of Operations
[Nexus Search](#)

nexus

“WE’VE SET UP AN OFFICE COMMITTEE

(partly because we don’t have an office manager).

These people are there to bring forward ideas for events, improvements or just generally have a feeling of what’s bringing people in/stopping people coming in (as well as all the boring H&S/admin type stuff)

People also organise after work sports – we subsidise the cost of booking a football pitch every other week for example. People are encouraged to bring these things forward and we just sign off on the financials where we can so it’s super self organised.”

Beth Hippisley
People & Culture Executive
[Dr. Doctor](#)
DrDoctor

“WE UPGRADED BOTH OUR OFFICES

Post-Covid to cater for the variety of settings required.

Both offices have sit stand desks, the latest technology, private areas for collaboration and external meetings, along with zoom pods for video conferencing. We are running regular events etc. within the offices to make sure it’s worth people coming in.

Although asking the team to come in four days a week was a challenge to balance, we’ve seen no significant issues. I genuinely believe our team enjoys each other’s company and values working for an organisation with a clear direction and purpose.”

Stef Brennan
Managing Director
[Hunters](#)

Building a Workplace People Want to Return To

Fostering a People-First Culture

Culture is everything when it comes to drawing employees back. [PwC research](#) shows that **84% of employees are more likely to return to the office if they feel it fosters a strong sense of community and inclusion.**

A people-first culture is one that values the individual as much as the output. The most successful businesses are prioritising inclusive practices, investing in employee growth, and creating spaces that reflect their team's values.

Non-Monetary Incentives and Employee Perks

Beyond salaries, employees are attracted to perks that enhance their work experience—wellness programs, flexible hours, or creative spaces can make all the difference.

Incentives don't have to break the bank. Simple things like catered lunches, meditation spaces, or even relaxed dress codes can contribute to a more enjoyable office environment. It's about making the workplace feel less like a duty and more like a benefit.



Embedding Wellness into the Workplace

Companies integrating wellness directly into their office spaces are seeing better attendance. Whether through mindfulness zones, fitness facilities, or mental health programs, supporting well-being is key.

Employees who feel their well-being is prioritised are far more likely to engage with the office. This could mean offering yoga classes, mental health days, or quiet zones designed for relaxation and reflection. A space that supports wellness isn't just nice to have—it's essential.

DEWYNTERS Anne Ewart, Managing Director at [Dewynters](#)

“After Soul Spaces finished the fit out of the Dewynters London Office—one of the key things we’ve noticed is how calm it now feels in there! And interestingly we are organically seeing a much greater take-up of people coming into the office now—as I always suspected a better working environment does encourage greater levels of attendance.”

SAVVY Ellie Cree, Deputy Managing Director at [Savvy](#)

“We are in the office 5 days and always have been but we have (recently) moved office and offer flex and more perks such as regular social events/team-building activities, flexible hours or staggered shifts, professional development programs and wellness programs.”



Overcoming the Challenges of Hybrid Work

Managing Team Dynamics Across Remote and In-Office Teams

One of the biggest challenges in hybrid work is ensuring fairness between remote and in-office workers. Employees who are in the office may have more face time with leadership, while remote workers risk feeling overlooked.

Navigating team dynamics in a hybrid model requires thoughtful leadership. It's crucial to ensure remote workers feel as connected and valued as their in-office counterparts. Companies that excel in this space are finding ways to level the playing field, using strategies like rotating leadership meetings, increasing asynchronous communication, and creating virtual watercooler moments. Striking the right balance between inclusion and flexibility is key.



Addressing Burnout and Work-Life Integration

Remote work has blurred the lines between personal and professional lives, and many employees struggle with burnout. According to [a report by Microsoft](#), **39% of workers feel more exhausted now than before the pandemic due to increased workload and constant connectivity.**

Burnout is a growing issue in hybrid work environments, with employees finding it difficult to unplug. Employers can counteract this by encouraging healthy work-life integration, offering mental health resources, and promoting clear boundaries for remote work hours. When employees feel supported in balancing their lives, they're more likely to be productive and engaged, both at home and in the office.

Maintaining Company Culture in a Hybrid World

Company culture is more difficult to maintain when employees are spread across different locations. However, businesses are finding creative ways to keep their culture alive through regular check-ins, virtual events, and shared experiences, regardless of where employees work.

A thriving company culture doesn't have to be tied to a physical space. It's about shared values, vision, and connection. Whether through virtual team-building exercises, company-wide retreats, or regular informal catch-ups, companies are finding ways to strengthen their culture across hybrid environments. Those that succeed in creating a strong, inclusive culture are more likely to see their employees return to the office with enthusiasm.



James Goodman, UK & ROI people director at [Tesco](#)

Tesco is calling its corporate staff back into the office, as it ups its in-office days from two to three per week in an aim to build “high-performing teams with a collaborative culture.”

“Since launching our approach to hybrid working in 2022, we’ve learned a lot about the benefits that a hybrid model brings, with greater flexibility, improvements for wellbeing and efficiency gains that help us all have a better work/life balance.

We’ve reviewed our policy so that we can maximise the best bits of hybrid working, while also making sure we’re able to build and support high-performing teams with a collaborative culture.”

The Role of Leadership in Shaping the Future of Work

Leading with Empathy and Flexibility

Leaders play a crucial role in determining how their teams experience the workplace, whether that's through flexible policies or an empathetic approach to personal challenges. A Gartner study shows that 53% of employees feel their organisation's leadership isn't empathetic enough about their hybrid work needs.

Empathy and flexibility have become the core qualities of successful leaders in the hybrid era. Leaders who listen to their employees' concerns and adjust policies to accommodate diverse needs are building stronger, more motivated teams. It's no longer about enforcing top-down rules but about co-creating a work environment that works for everyone. Leaders who embrace this approach will be the ones who attract and retain top talent.



The Shift from Command-and-Control to Trust-Based Leadership

The old command-and-control model of leadership doesn't work in a hybrid world. Now, leaders must trust their employees to manage their time and tasks, focusing on results rather than micromanaging the process.

The most successful hybrid work environments are led by trust-based leadership, where employees have the autonomy to manage their work without being constantly monitored. This shift has empowered teams, leading to higher engagement and productivity. When leaders trust their employees to get the job done, no matter where they are, it fosters a culture of accountability and independence.

Creating a Vision for the Future Office

Leadership is about vision, and today's leaders need to think beyond just policies—they need to envision the future of their workplaces. Whether that's through reimagined office spaces, forward-thinking work cultures, or cutting-edge technology, it's up to leaders to guide their organizations into the future.

The office of the future won't look like the one we left behind. Leaders today are tasked with shaping an environment that embraces flexibility, innovation, and well-being. This involves investing in people-first office designs, supporting hybrid models, and championing digital transformation. The future office will be a reflection of the values and vision leaders set for their teams.



“Two years ago, the world was turned upside down. Our offices closed and we found ourselves working from our bedrooms, basements, and home offices. Despite everything, we had the most productive two-year period in our history. While it's been an incredible two years for Airbnb, I know it's been hard on many of you.

To recap, here's our design for living and working anywhere:

You can work from home or the office

You can move anywhere in the country you work in and your compensation won't change

You have the flexibility to travel and work around the world

We'll meet up regularly for gatherings

We'll continue to work in a highly coordinated way “

The Office as a Choice, Not a Mandate

Recap: The Power of Flexibility and Empathy

In a world where employees have experienced the freedom and flexibility of remote work, the office must evolve. Companies are rethinking not just the physical workspace, but how work itself is structured—prioritising flexibility, culture, and well-being.

The most successful companies are the ones that embrace flexibility, trust their employees, and create environments that inspire creativity and collaboration. The office is no longer a place of mandates but one of choice—a place where employees want to be. The path forward is clear: adapt or be left behind.

Looking Forward: A New Era of Work

The future of work is dynamic, flexible, and centered around the employee experience. The companies that thrive in this new landscape are those that see the office not as a requirement, but as a powerful tool for innovation, collaboration, and culture-building.

As we look ahead, it's clear that the return to the office will not be driven by mandates but by creating environments that meet employees' needs. Companies that focus on flexibility, culture, and well-being will not only see more employees choosing to return but will also position themselves as leaders in this new era of work.



About SOUL spaces

Finding you space to become more. Building where you belong.

We are a team of ambitious and talented individuals who have come together with a belief that the workplace journey should be different to the industry norm. More passion, less rules and full of SOUL.

We design workspaces that put people and the planet first, and as tenant heroes, we secure the best office deals to help your team thrive.

We believe in high quality at a fair price. We run our business sustainably and sensibly, ensuring our clients get our full energy and focus for the duration of their project.

Our commitment to sustainability extends beyond our services. We believe in giving back and taking responsibility for the world around us.

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