Leesman®

Workplace 2021:
Appraising future-readiness

Foreword

Home or office? What – or where – is the future of your workplace?

The pandemic has tested organisations and their traditional systems to the limit and with it, their attitude towards people and place. A debate that rarely took place at such a level is now a topic for chief executives of the world's largest businesses on media platforms around the world.

In February 2020 we took our tried and tested methodology for measuring employee workplace experience to create a new Leesman Index for home working. In a little under six weeks we had built, tested and were ready for clients to deploy in 40+ languages. Within six months, we were sat on 125,000+ employee responses. Almost a year later, that total has risen to 160,000+*. It is the largest independent study of its kind.

The headline results were immediately intriguing: home working was delivering an excellent and supportive experience for the majority of employees, and continues to do so.

Today, this leaves some organisations and their employees wondering if there is any value in returning to the office at all. Can home working be a long-term recipe for productivity and success for all, or should some employees return to the workplace? If so, what kind of workplaces would they be returning to? Will the pre-pandemic office manage to match the excellent experience that many have found at home, or does the post-pandemic workplace need to fundamentally function differently?

But the time for wondering is running out. The people and place debate has a new dimension: time.

48,413 employees also told us how they saw themselves distributing their time between home and office post in the future. 85% stated a preference for a blended workplace model which includes remote work for at least two days per week.

And with 'return to the office' looking more feasible within perhaps a matter of months, the clock is ticking for real estate teams. Because critically, we found that employees' intentions to return to the office greatly depend on both the quality of their home working experience and on the quality of the workplace they would be returning to. So, organisations must forget 'returning to normal', whether that's an old normal or a new normal. To be normal is to be typical, to be average. Employees will not willingly return to 'average' when they have experienced 'excellent' in their own homes.

The data we have collected – and continue to collect – for our clients allows them to prepare their workplace futures. That does not make their plans future-proof. But it does make them future-ready.

Tim Oldman
Founder & CEO

83%
of employees believe their home environment enables them to work productively

64%
of employees believe their office environment enables them to work productively

78%
of employees in Leesman+ offices say their environment enables them to work productively

Are you future-ready?

Are your post-pandemic workplaces ready to support your post-pandemic workforce?
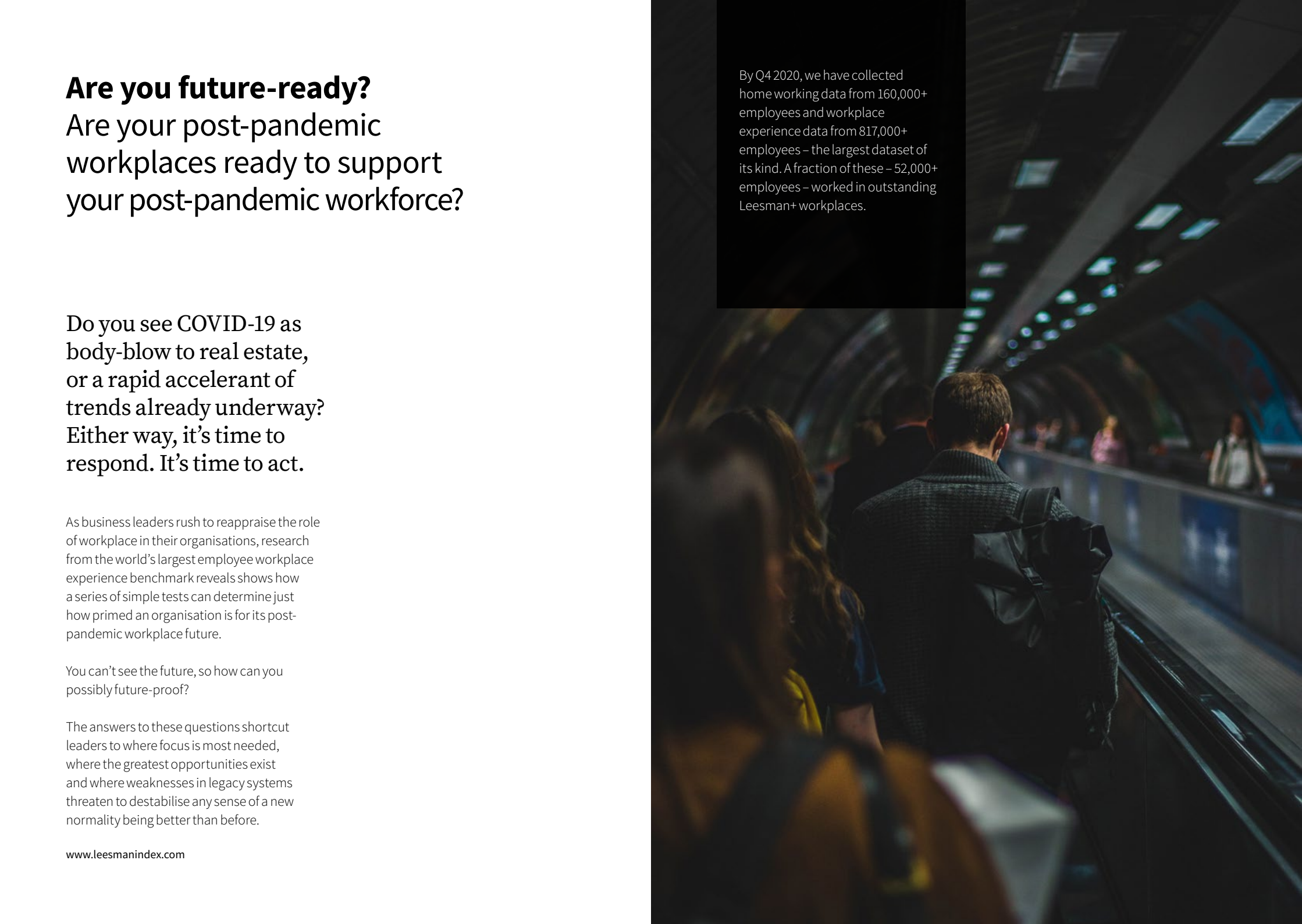
Do you see COVID-19 as body-blow to real estate, or a rapid accelerant of trends already underway? Either way, it's time to respond. It's time to act.

As business leaders rush to reappraise the role of workplace in their organisations, research from the world's largest employee workplace experience benchmark reveals shows how a series of simple tests can determine just how primed an organisation is for its post-pandemic workplace future.

You can't see the future, so how can you possibly future-proof?

The answers to these questions shortcut leaders to where focus is most needed, where the greatest opportunities exist and where weaknesses in legacy systems threaten to destabilise any sense of a new normality being better than before.

www.leesmanindex.com

By Q4 2020, we have collected home working data from 160,000+ employees and workplace experience data from 817,000+ employees – the largest dataset of its kind. A fraction of these – 52,000+ employees – worked in outstanding Leesman+ workplaces.
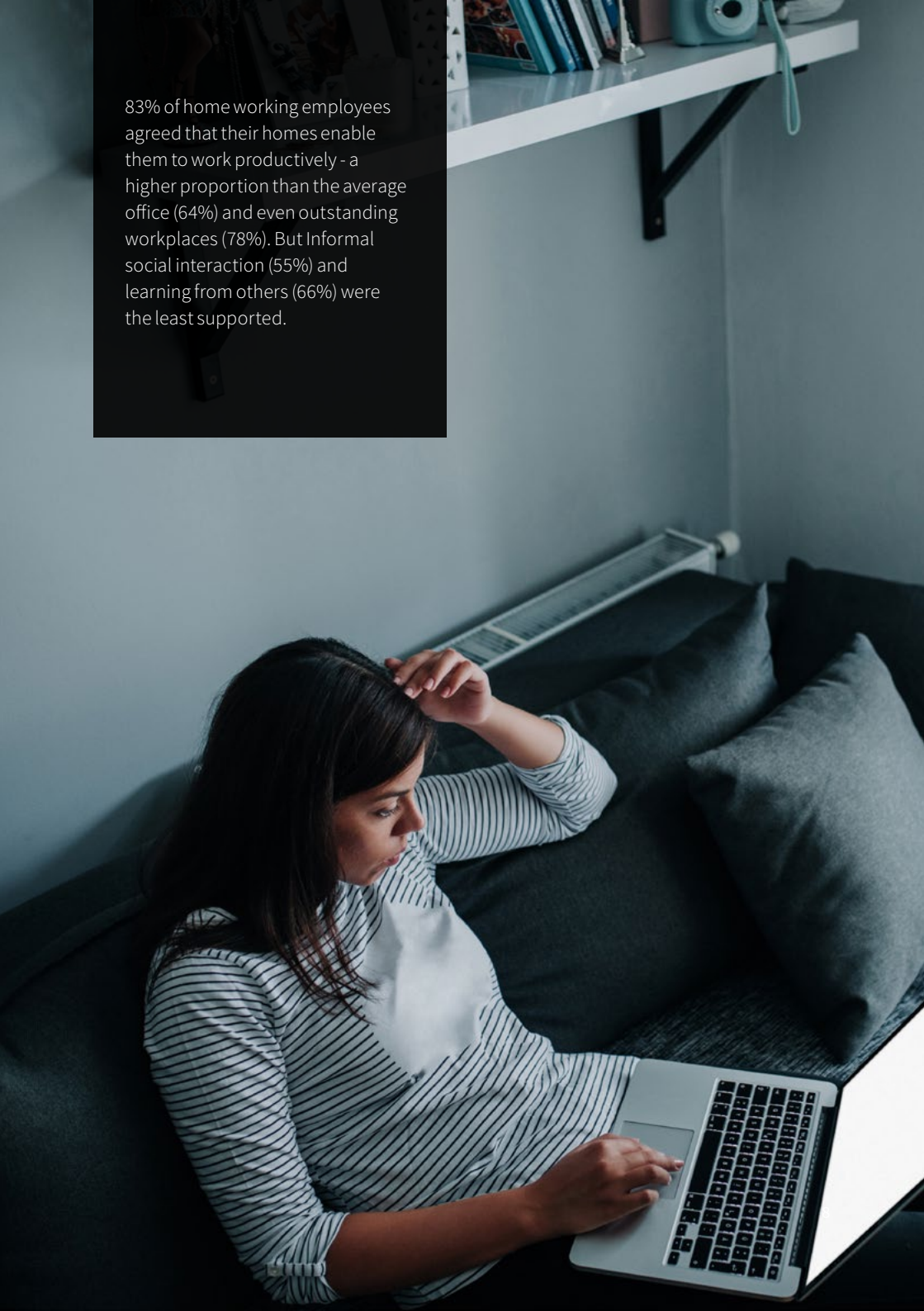
Pre-pandemic, 54% of global employees had little to no experience of working from home.

83% of home working employees agreed that their homes enable them to work productively - a higher proportion than the average office (64%) and even outstanding workplaces (78%). But Informal social interaction (55%) and learning from others (66%) were the least supported.

1

People – Are you putting employee purpose first?

Future-ready organisations know their workplace *why*. They're not simply grabbing the latest trending stat for 'preferred days in office' and masquerading it as a strategic plan. Instead, led by evidence, they have defined the role workplace plays in supporting their wider organisational and individual employee purpose. This goes beyond seeing workplace as accommodation, to being able to communicate the specific outcomes workplaces are there to support at a granular level.

Their debate and choices around post-pandemic home vs. office operating models stems from these definitions, putting people before place.

What's driving employee location preference

Our home working data indicates a strong correlation between an employee's home working experience and their desire to come back to the office. The employees who expressed a desire to return just once a week – or not at all – have the best home working experience, as measured by their H-Lmi score, while those who would prefer to work from their office at least four days per week expressed a poorer experience at home.
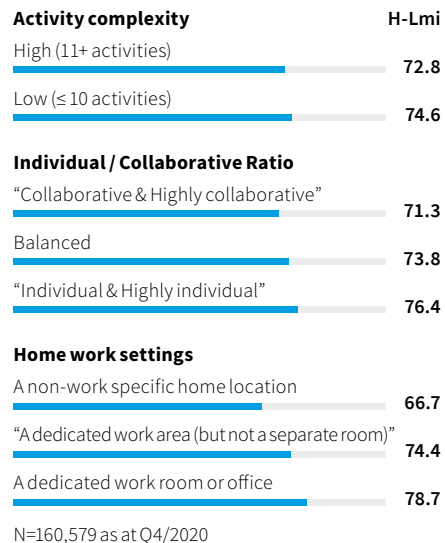
Figure 1.

How many days per week would you like to work in your main workplace post-COVID-19?

2-3 days | 48%

0-1 days | 37%

4-5 days | 15%

60   70   80

Home working experience (H-Lmi)

N=48,413 as at Q4/2020
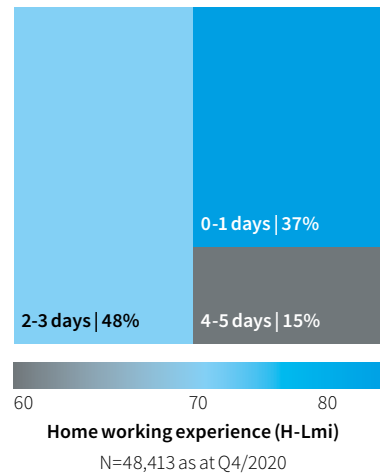
Why does home working work for some and not for others?

Our data pinpoints three key factors that can significantly alter the home working experience. Firstly, how complex an employee's role is – employees who undertake fewer different types of work activities have a better home working experience. Secondly, whether those work activities are more individual-focused or collaborative-focused. And thirdly, what kind of home work setting an employee is using.

Figure 2.

Key drivers of home working experience (H-Lmi)

Activity complexity	H-Lmi
High (11+ activities)	72.8
Low (≤ 10 activities)	74.6

Individual / Collaborative Ratio	
"Collaborative & Highly collaborative"	71.3
Balanced	73.8
"Individual & Highly individual"	76.4

Home work settings	
A non-work specific home location	66.7
"A dedicated work area (but not a separate room)"	74.4
A dedicated work room or office	78.7

N=160,579 as at Q4/2020

Ask yourself:

1. If your organisation has a clear corporate vision, can you articulate what this means operationally for each team?

2. Do you understand how this translates into specific functional workplace requirements within those employees' roles? Can you decode this to ascertain who needs corporate workplaces and who would be better staying remote?

3. Can you then accurately test how well these requirements will fare against the pros and cons for remote-first, hub and spoke, office-first, or a blended operating model?

4. Do you fully understand if the workspace provision employees have at home adequately supports them in their role? And do you have an action plan if they don't?

An alarming fact: The average space designed for living supports the average employee better than the average space designed for working.

2

Place – Go big or they will stay home.

Future-ready organisations understand it's not what a workplace looks like, but how it works, that matters more. The best workplaces are carefully crafted ecosystems tuned to the needs of their users.

These brilliant workplaces will draw willing employees back. Sub-optimal spaces will act to disenfranchise employees who built better at home.

The average home work environment scores higher (H-Lmi: 74.0) than the average office (Office benchmark Lmi: 63.7). In fact, home work environments scores very close to the average experience measured in Leesman+ outstanding workplaces (74.7).

The difference between exceptional and average offices

An outstanding workplace supports both the individual and collaborative dimensions of work and doesn't sacrifice one for the other. While the average home may out-perform offices for the acoustic privacy needed for individual work and conversations, homes fail to support activities that demand collaboration and interaction – even an average office supports these activities better. Leesman+ certified buildings – awarded to a fraction of our database – deliver the most consistent support across individual and collaborative work.

Figure 3.

Activities - Support

● Leesman+ ● Leesman Office Global ● Home working
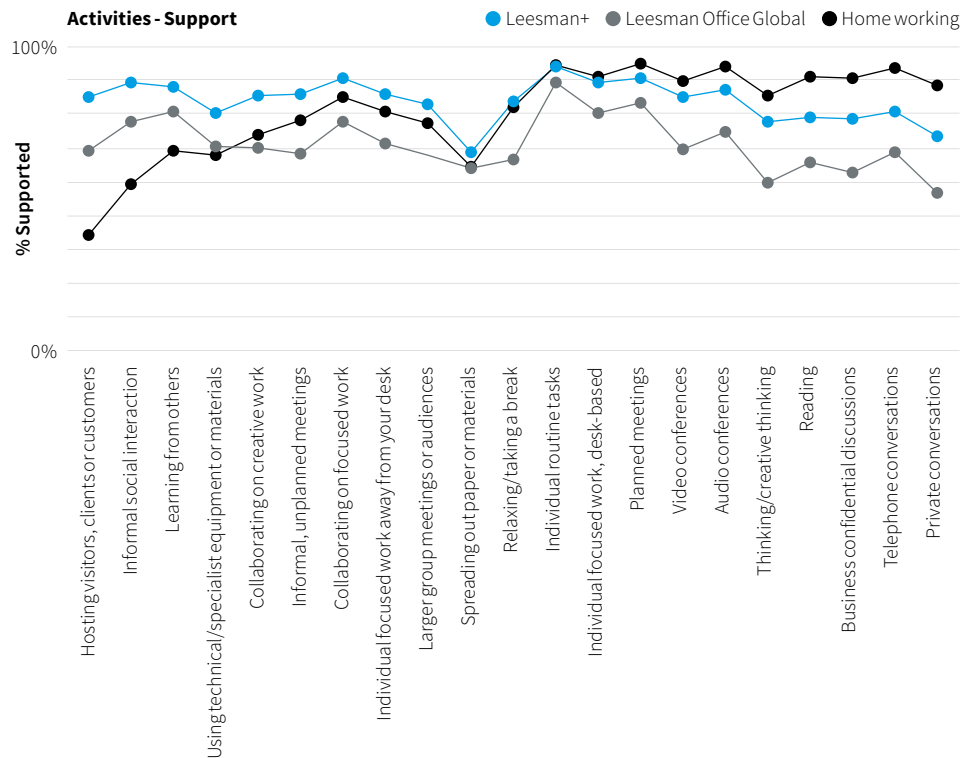
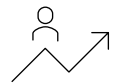Leesman Office Global N=817,598, Leesman Home working N=160,579, Leesman+ N=52,442, Data as at Q4/2020

Ask yourself:

1. How well did your pre-pandemic spaces support your employees? Were they great, nurturing places, or merely a building which kept people enclosed together?

2. Employees have a new benchmark for workplace effectiveness – their own homes. Do you know how the space you provide directly compares to those?

3. If your operating place of work model changes, do your central spaces need to adapt and respond to new user requirements?

4. Can your existing portfolio step up to the challenge of being better than the alternative? Or does it risk leaving employees with a poor experience at home and at the office, in a new workplace limbo?
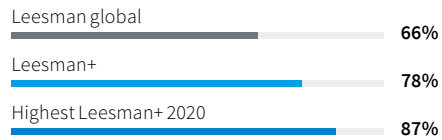
Team productivity and place

Personal sense of productivity is multi-modal. It is driven by a series of factors – some more influential than others - that collectively contribute to an overall experience. Compared to the average office, an outstanding workplace delivers a significantly better overall experience across all modes, enhancing both the individual and collective dimensions of productivity.
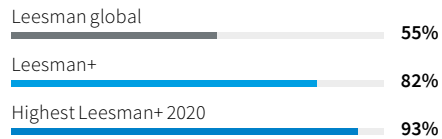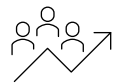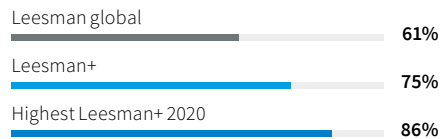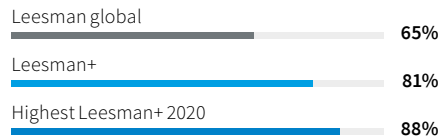
Figure 4.

Individual productivity

Leesman global	66%
Leesman+	78%
Highest Leesman+ 2020	87%

Collective productivity

Leesman global	65%
Leesman+	81%
Highest Leesman+ 2020	88%

Pride

Leesman global	55%
Leesman+	82%
Highest Leesman+ 2020	93%

Image

Leesman global	61%
Leesman+	85%
Highest Leesman+ 2020	95%

Sense of community

Leesman global	61%
Leesman+	75%
Highest Leesman+ 2020	86%
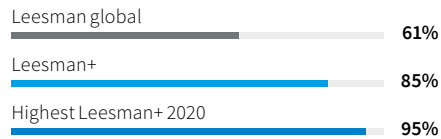
Enjoyable environment to work in

|	
Leesman global	61%
Leesman+	80%
Highest Leesman+ 2020	93%
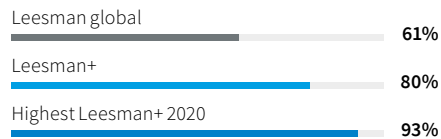
Leesman Office Global N=817,598, Leesman+ N=52,442, Data as at Q4/2020

2020 was an atypical year in the recent history of workplace, with much of the global workforce effectively forced to work remotely for most of the year. Yet, this year also saw seven workplaces achieve the coveted Leesman+ certification, only awarded to outstanding workplaces of Lmi 70 or above and that meet strict response rate criteria. To date, only 140 workplaces achieved the Leesman+ certification.

Arup Melbourne Workplace by HASSELL partnered with Arup. Photo credit - Earl Carte
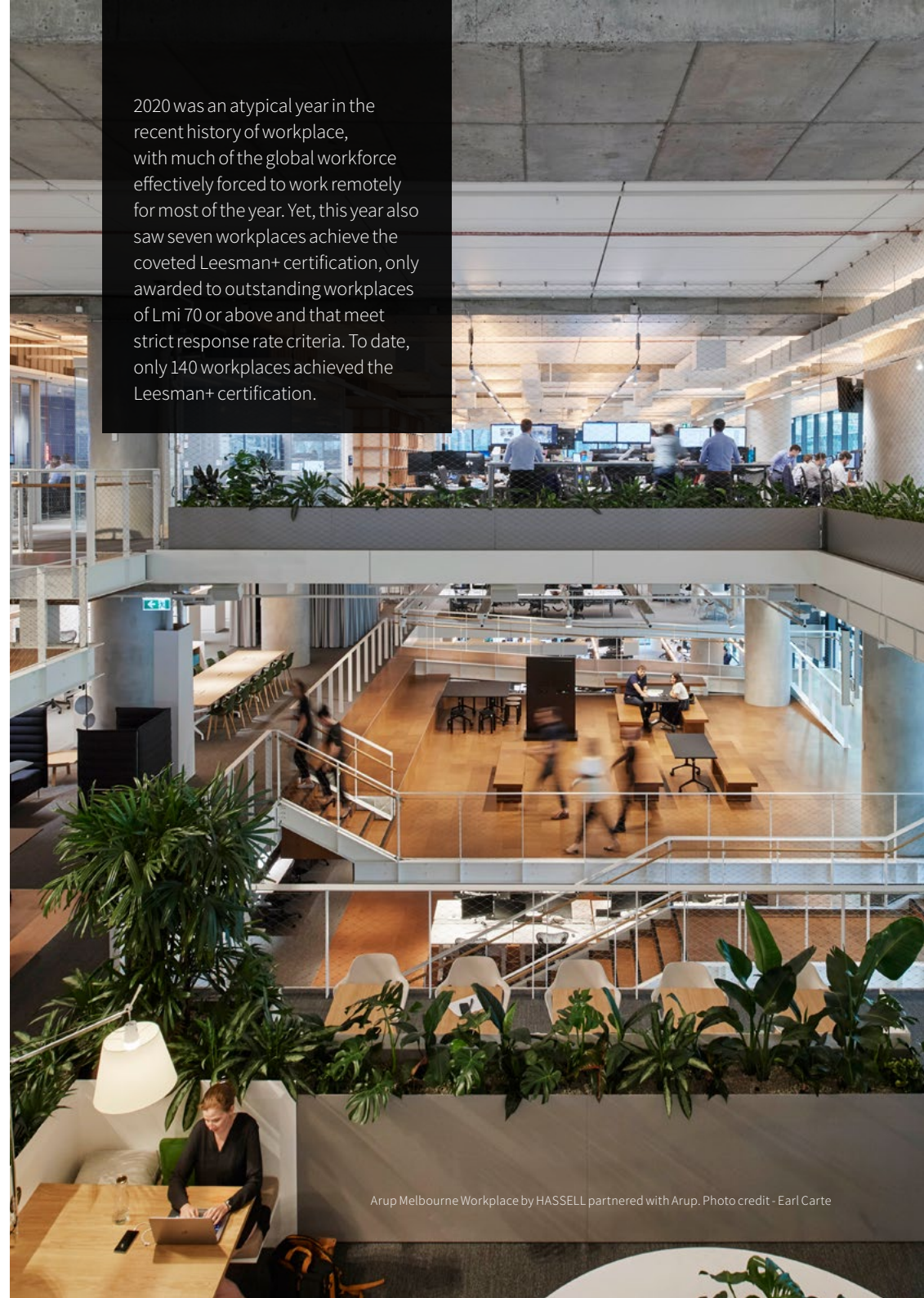
Employees have spent the best part of a full year working remotely, repurposing corners of their homes into highly effective work environments.

3

Time – Do it now, and with urgency.

They have seen the future of a digitally-connected workplace with new porous boundaries. Some are keen to return, some not. But you owe it to both to be ahead of the game. Future-ready organisations returning employees to offices must acknowledge the lessons learned and repurpose their workplaces for a new fluid, video-first workstyle now. Act on those lessons, don't dismiss them.

Exceptional workplaces support what all employees do regardless of how diverse their roles are. 70% of employees are satisfied with the variety of work settings available in Leesman+ workplaces, 34% more than in an average office.

The growth of video

Work patterns and behaviours have changed during the pandemic: the importance of video conferences increased by 13 percentage points in 2020 compared to 2019.

More interestingly the new, slicker video applications rapidly deployed by employers saw a 20 percentage points increase in agreement that video conferences were well supported. Organisations need to accept both the connectivity pressures this will place on their workplaces and the dramatic increase in the need for acoustically private space.

Figure 5.
Video conferencing

- % Importance
- % Support

- ● Leesman Office Global 2019
- ● Home working 2020
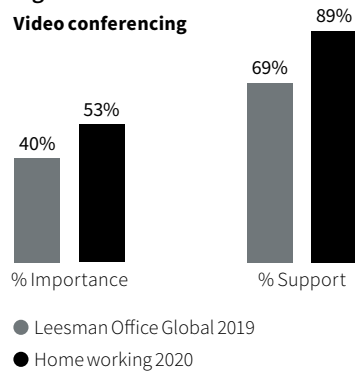
Leesman Office Global 2019 only N= 235,644.
Home N=160,579 as at Q4/2020

Figure 6.
Home work settings

Leesman
Office Global
2019

34%
41%
24%

Home
working
2020

27%
42%
31%
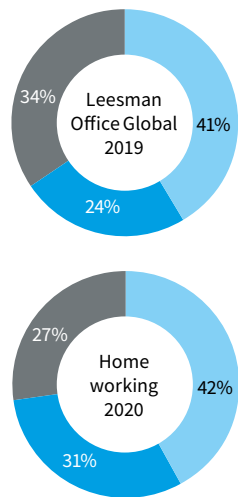
Leesman Office Global 2019 only N= 235,644.
Home N=160,579 as at Q4/2020

How employees have adapted at home

Compared to pre-pandemic data, the proportion of home working employees who use non-work specific settings has decreased, while the proportion who use dedicated work areas has increased.

This suggests that during the pandemic employees have actively repurposed areas of their homes, transforming them into places they could use for work on a more regular basis. They have shown how to configure highly effective workplaces and their expectation on you to have done the same ready for their return will be acute.

- ● A dedicated work room or office
- ● A dedicated work area (but not a separate room)
- ● A non-work specific home location (such as a dining table)

Ask yourself:

1. Employees have developed new work patterns and behaviours. Do you understand how this will change how different teams will use your corporate workplaces if they return and are you adapting your space now to support them when they do?

2. Are the workplaces employees are returning to ready for a new video-first workstyle, where those office-based can effectively collaborate in-moment with those working remotely?

3. Technology has kept us connected to work, but not to the social fabric of the organisation. Can the systems you have in place continue to keep employees connected, as they risk increased disconnection the longer they stay remote?

4. Do you have robust and engaging platforms in place that can support employees' new blended relationship in their tidal flow to and from their corporate workplace?

Checklist

It can be hard to answer the big questions in one fell swoop. So we've made it easier. We can help you assess each of the three high level tests of your future-readiness, using our 20-point audit checklist.

People:

1. You understand how the complexity of your employees' roles vary across the organisation (the range of different things they do as part of their role)?

2. This has allowed you to determine what proportion of your employees work in individual, collaborative or more blended roles.

3. You also established what proportion of your employees are working in specialist or technical roles that require access to technical equipment.

4. You understand the nature of the setting each employee has available to them to work at when working from home.

5. You have also checked that the hard and soft digital infrastructure is supporting the employee in that home setting.

6. You have assessed how your existing corporate workplaces support employee sense of connection to the organisation and to their colleagues.

7. You understand how well your existing workplaces support an employee's personal sense of wellbeing.

8. You have identified and now understand the causes for any employees who are struggling with any aspect of remote working.

Place:

1. You have measured the extent to which employees have changed work patterns and behaviours and considered how this will impact the spaces they need.

2. You have an understanding of how well your existing spaces support those activities for which acoustic privacy is a key feature.

3. You have assessed workplace layouts, densities and adjacencies and know how these impact different teams / employee groups in different ways.

4. You have assessed the ergonomic characteristics of all the spaces employees use for work, whether in the office, at home or elsewhere.

5. Where employees will work from home, you have plans in place to help them create ergonomically safe and supportive environments for themselves.

6. You have appraised the particular role of physical places in supporting collective / collaborative activities within the different teams within your organisation.

7. You have analysed whether the variety of different work settings provided in your workplace and the spaces meets with your teams needs.

Time:

1. Your organisation has clearly communicated its high-level post-pandemic workplace location strategy.

2. Where these plans allow employees some time / location choice, you have established how you will load balance their time in office and have systems in place to administer.

3. You have established what changes will be needed to the physical and digital workplace to align with this strategy and have communications plans to explain what this means for employees.

4. Plans are in motion so that the spaces employees return to are ready for their post-pandemic workstyle.

5. Where your plans for workplace changes cannot be implemented prior to employees' return, your communications clearly describe how soon they will be implemented and available.

The future won't wait.
It's happening.
Act now.

Use what you've learned from 2020. Use what we have learned. Understand that workstyles and behaviours have shifted.

Recognise that your employees have adapted at home – and they expect you to have done the same. Can you answer the questions the future is posing to you and your organisation?

Are you future-ready?

Leesman®

Our mission is to create better places to work.

Leesman is the world leader in measuring and analysing the experiences of employees in their places of work.

Our data and insight equips executives at all levels to make informed, forward-thinking decisions that allow them to mitigate risk, plan for the future, and benefit from great employee workplace experience.

Through a series of assessment tools, Leesman captures employee sentiments on how effectively the work environments they use support them. By rating organisations' ability to support employees in the home and in the office, performance can then be benchmarked against the world's largest database of its kind.

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