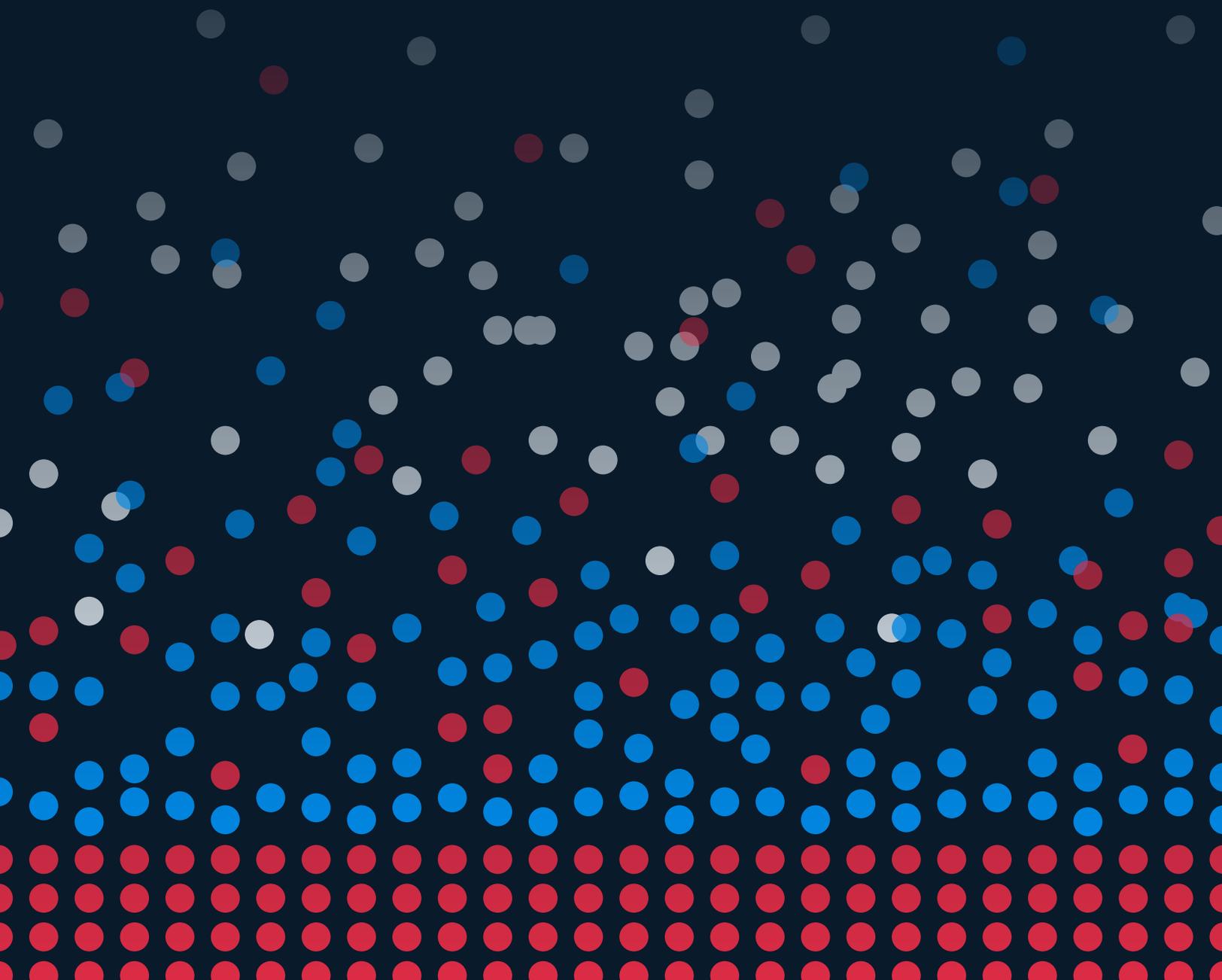# 2021 Workplace Landscape Report

Introduction/Overview

In early 2021, our team of data scientists started gathering data points about how different companies are using their offices. The intention was to understand better what the return-to-office looked like around the world. Were people coming back to the office? What was the average number of desks booked in a given month? How did these numbers reflect the broader public health crisis?

Fast forward to today, the average US office capacity is at 25% - the highest it's been since the pandemic started. With so many workers back in the office and the transition to the "new normal" of the workplace underway, we wanted to see just how much the office has – or hasn't – changed.

We surveyed more than 400 managers, directors, VPs, and executives working in human resources (HR), information technology (IT), and Facilities to discover:

- Has the management of the workplace shifted from one department to another?
- Have new roles emerged that are now responsible for workplace management?
- What new policies and technologies are put in place to optimize one of the most critical parts of workplace management - the employee experience?

With so many changes over the past 20 months, effectively managing the in-person and remote workplace has been challenging for organizations without the proper tools, technology, and talent to support a smooth employee experience.

We hope that this report will shed some light on how your peers manage the workplace and guide you in your future thinking. Even apart, we've continued to work together. Let's make the next era of the workplace better than ever.

Zach Dunn
*Co-founder and VP of Customer Experience*
Robin

Historical Retrospective on the Workplace Department

Given the seismic shifts in the workplace in the past two years, the most pressing question for businesses is perhaps the most basic: who's in charge?

Originally, facilities departments were the lone overseer of the workplace experience. That shifted in the early 2000s as businesses began to realize the far-reaching elements that create an exceptional employee experience.

Just before the pandemic, the majority of survey respondents indicated their workplace was managed either by a combination of HR, IT, and facilities teams (30%) or evenly split between facilities (23%) and IT (23%). While many offices remain managed by these teams, 37% reported that the pandemic caused a workplace management shakeup.

Does your company have a workplace department?

- 52.78% — Yes
- 41.65% — No
- 5.57% — We are thinking of creating one
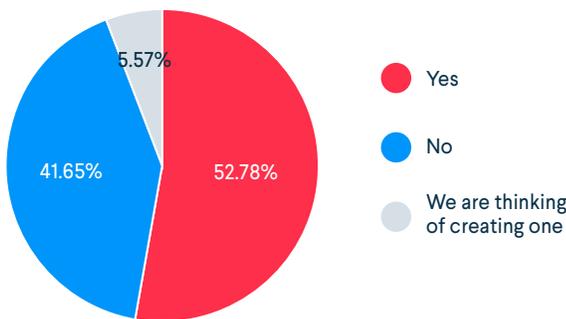
Historically, which department was responsible for workplace / office organization?

- 29.33% — All of the above
- 23.80% — Facilities
- 23.56% — IT
- 17.31% — HR
- 6.01% — Other
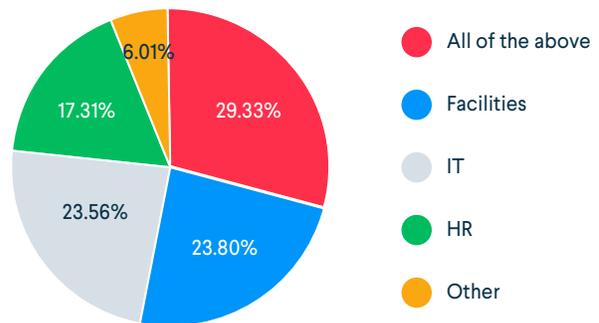
The Current State of the Workplace Department

Our survey found a near-split between those with a workplace department (52%) and those without (41%). This is a great start, but there's still room for improvement.

Many organizations are already falling into a siloed approach for their workplace department. Survey respondents indicated that facilities leaders took a significant step back and saw their duties, including office layouts and access management, filled by either IT (49%) or HR (39%) leaders. While it's reasonable to expect that IT would manage the office given that employees couldn't work from the office, it's interesting that businesses consolidated workplace responsibilities so quickly.

Respondents' perception of who leads their organizations' employee experience indicates who has the most influence within the workplace department. Half of those surveyed report that HR is the team primarily responsible for employee experience, with 27% reporting that it falls to IT.

Ranking in order of importance, which group is the most responsible for employee experience?
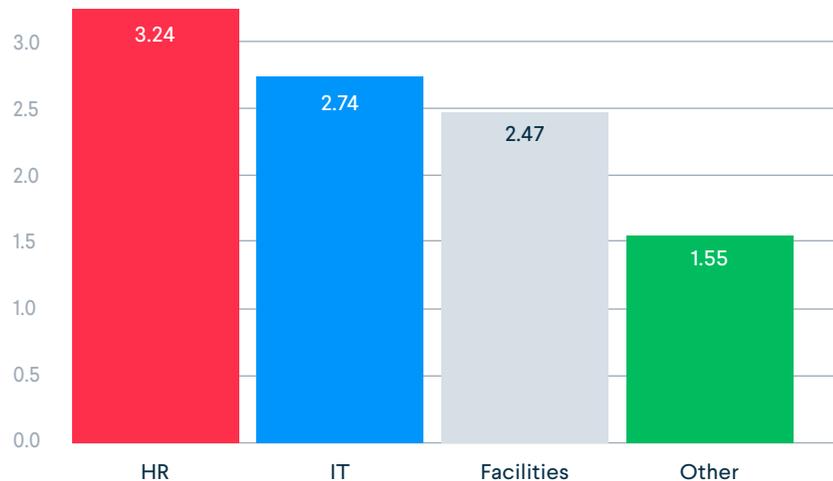
Companies are right to bring these key groups together to manage the workplace; they're remiss in not expanding that responsibility to encompass employee experience.

The past two years caused many businesses to realize the workplace wasn't solely a physical location. It's employees' connection to their employer. Given the dynamic nature of the employee experience, workplace departments must consist of a multi-disciplinary group whose sole focus is to ensure their organization's remote and office experience are aligned with employees' needs and preferences.

The Evolution of the Workplace Department is Happening in Real-Time

Even as we see organizations adapt to either establish or adapt their workplace department, new roles and responsibilities emerge. Many of those we surveyed (47%) see new roles emerging to support the hybrid workplace. These include:

- **Workplace Strategist (44%),**
- **Workplace Director (36%)**
- **Head of Employee Experience (37%).**

Interestingly, 30% of our respondents report that the role of Chief Experience Officer is emerging as companies begin to assign an executive to oversee the workplace department.

What new roles do you see emerging?
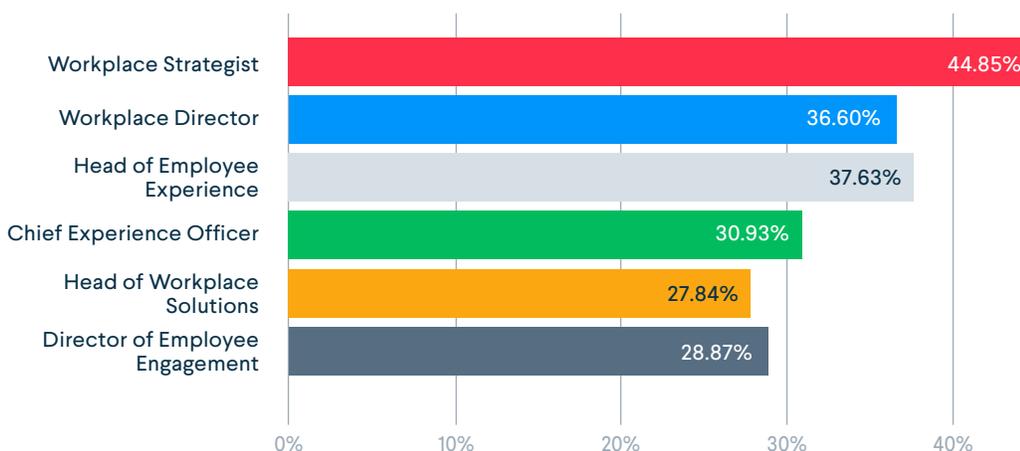
The Emergence of Workplace Analytics

Workplace management changes spurred other changes, with 35% reporting they had to change some if not all management KPIs. A workplace in flux and new ways of measuring success means these changes will impact not just what groups manage the workplace, but how.
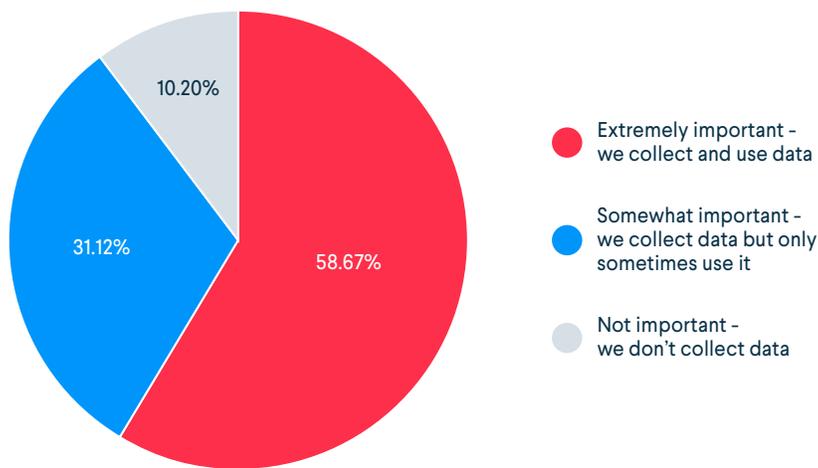
Workplace departments should prioritize these three areas when establishing and tracking their KPIs:

- **Real estate optimization:** The most apparent area workplace analytics can help workplace analytics will help you determine the amount of meeting spaces, desks, and office space needed to accommodate all employees comfortably.

- **Employee Health and Wellness:** Pre-covid, company perks like an in-office barista or gym memberships were enough to attract and retain employees. Since 2020, however, various factors have contributed to most people feeling the stress and pressure from their jobs more than ever before. Workplace departments can track things like the number of sick days among employees or office occupancy as indicators of employee burnout.

- **Employee retention:** Teams can identify churn trends to identify root causes of mass resignations or layoffs. For instance, workplace departments could decide on whether an environmental issue is at play or if adjustments to compensation packages are required to retain top talent.

Unsurprisingly, our survey found that the overwhelming majority (90%) believe data is extremely or somewhat important for driving employee experience. As to how they're ensuring a good employee experience, respondents ranked the tools they feel are the most important, with communication and collaboration software coming in as the most important, followed by Workplace Management Software.

How important is data in driving employee experience strategy?

10.20%

31.12%

58.67%

● Extremely important - we collect and use data

● Somewhat important - we collect data but only sometimes use it

● Not important - we don't collect data

Luckily, many organizations were prepared for a hybrid work scenario, with 51% reporting that their company already had a workplace management platform in place. However, the survey also discovered that only 16% of those without a workplace management platform before the pandemic hadn't invested in one yet. In a hybrid work environment where conventional KPIs and the "eye test" are no longer relevant or insightful, businesses that don't have a comprehensive view of their workplace will experience difficulties managing and engaging employees.

In Conclusion

When it comes to managing the workplace, the data is clear. Leadership must:

- Ensure close and frictionless collaboration between HR, IT, and facilities when it comes to managing the workplace

- Provide clear, effective, and on-time communication to employees when needed

- Make employee experience a critical KPI for each of these groups, and measure it consistently to monitor for trends

- Get the correct data into the hands of the groups responsible for workplace management. Note that some of the top data points pre-pandemic may not be obsolete.

- Invest in technologies that have the most significant impact on employee experience

- Create opportunities to bring employees together, face-to-face, when possible (and safe)

Methodology

This survey was conducted online using Survey Monkey among a national sample of 416 adults who identify as full-time employed individuals working in human resources (HR), information technology (IT), and facilities at the manager, director, VP, and executive level.