

# DESIGNING THE POST-COVID OFFICE

As many of us gradually begin to trickle back into offices, organisations are having to consider what actions to take to make our workplaces safe. Bridge actions such as increased cleaning protocols, an abundance of hand sanitiser, the abolition of hot desking and social distancing signage are good first steps, but there is a bigger opportunity here too: to reinvent the office of the future.

## OFFICE LOCATIONS

With an increase in remote working, many large organisations are pivoting to a “hub and spoke” office model. This involves having one large HQ “hub” in a city centre, with a number of smaller, local offices to act as “spokes” for the more regular needs of a distributed workforce.

## RECEPTION AREAS

Ideally, receptionists should be protected by glass or plastic protective screens. Desks can be set lower to discourage visitors from placing their hands on it, and visitor passes should be single-use or digital, allowing for contactless entry and exit.

## ACCESSIBILITY

The need to restructure office spaces creates a clear opportunity to make workspaces accessible for all. New requirements and technologies for the post-COVID office, such as wider walkways and touchless doorways, are already developments which can hugely benefit employees with disabilities. Organisations should make sure that signage is clear and, where possible, tactile for those with limited vision; pay attention to the height of reception desks, sinks and hand-driers to accommodate those with wheelchairs or other mobility devices; and ensure all chemicals used for cleaning are safe and appropriate to use near those with chemical sensitivities.

## GENERAL SPACE

The once-trendy open plan office gets a new lease of life in the post-COVID era. Office occupation has become denser over the last ten years, with desks becoming smaller and more tightly packed. This will need to change with social distancing, particularly the trend of hot desking. Organisations might consider implementing a one-way system to avoid as much contact as possible and space should be configured to allow for as much natural air flow as possible.

## MEETING ROOMS

A blend of new tech and social distancing will make the new meeting room viable. There should be limitations on how many people are allowed in at any one time to prevent overcrowding, with tables and chairs set up to reflect this. There should be easy access to fresh air or an air purification system. Mixed reality may become normal, with meeting and conference rooms equipped with large screens for video conferencing, gesture-controlled digital boards for collaboration and even augmented reality to incorporate remote team members.

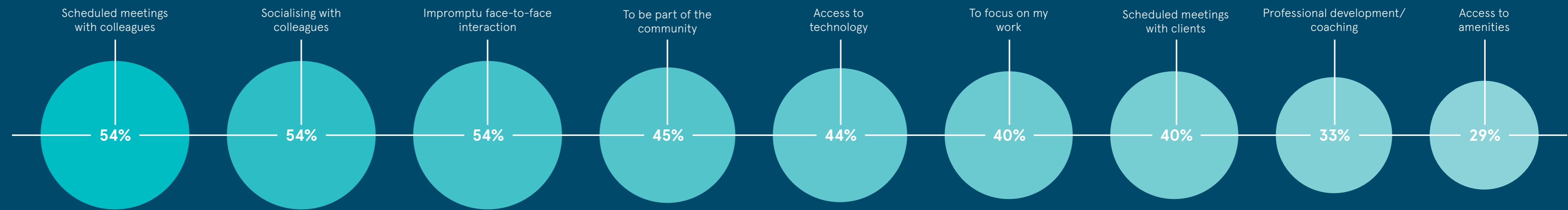
## FACILITIES/APPLIANCES

The water cooler moment gets a makeover too in the post-COVID office. It's out with the coffee machine and in with employees bringing their own crockery and cutlery, wherever possible. Kitchen areas should be kept uncluttered, to allow for frequent cleaning, and made touchless if suitable - from taps to lights. Businesses may even consider getting rid of cupboard doors to minimise common areas of contact.

Gensler 2020 / British Council for Offices 2020

## WHAT DO WORKERS MISS MOST ABOUT THEIR OFFICE?

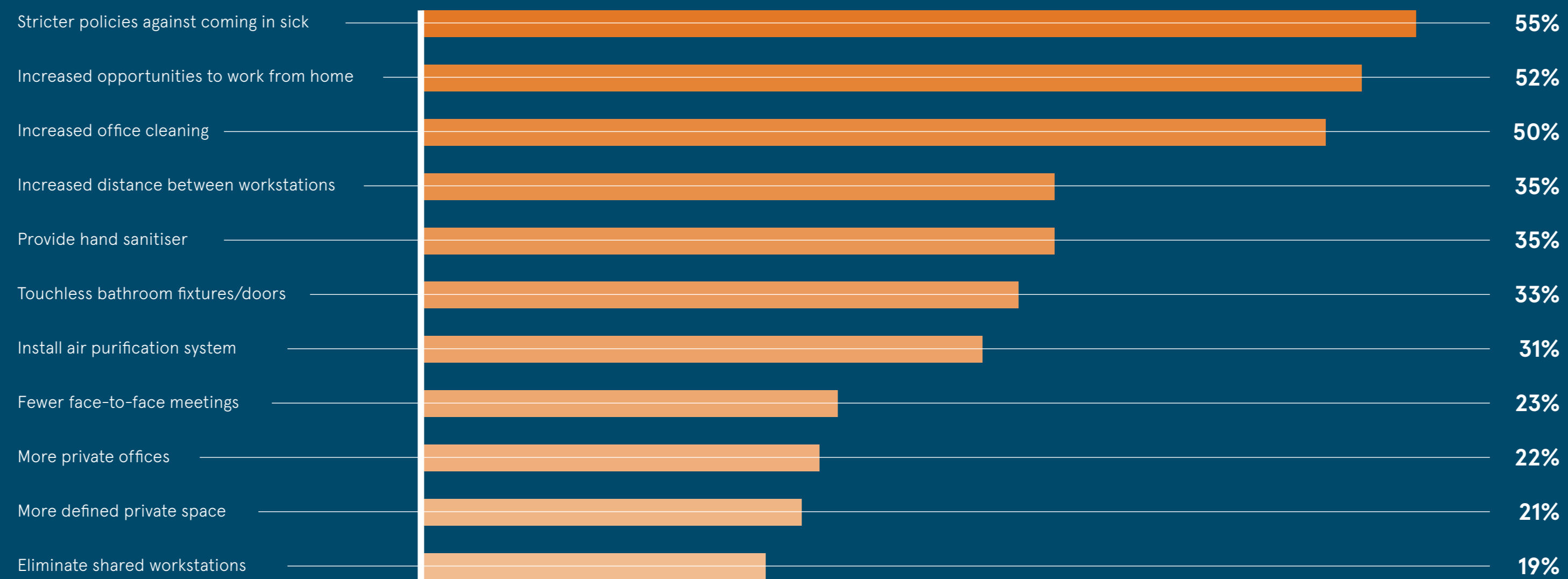
The people. Connecting and collaborating ranked among the most important reasons for coming into the office



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## WHAT EMPLOYEES NEED TO BE COMFORTABLE IN THE OFFICE

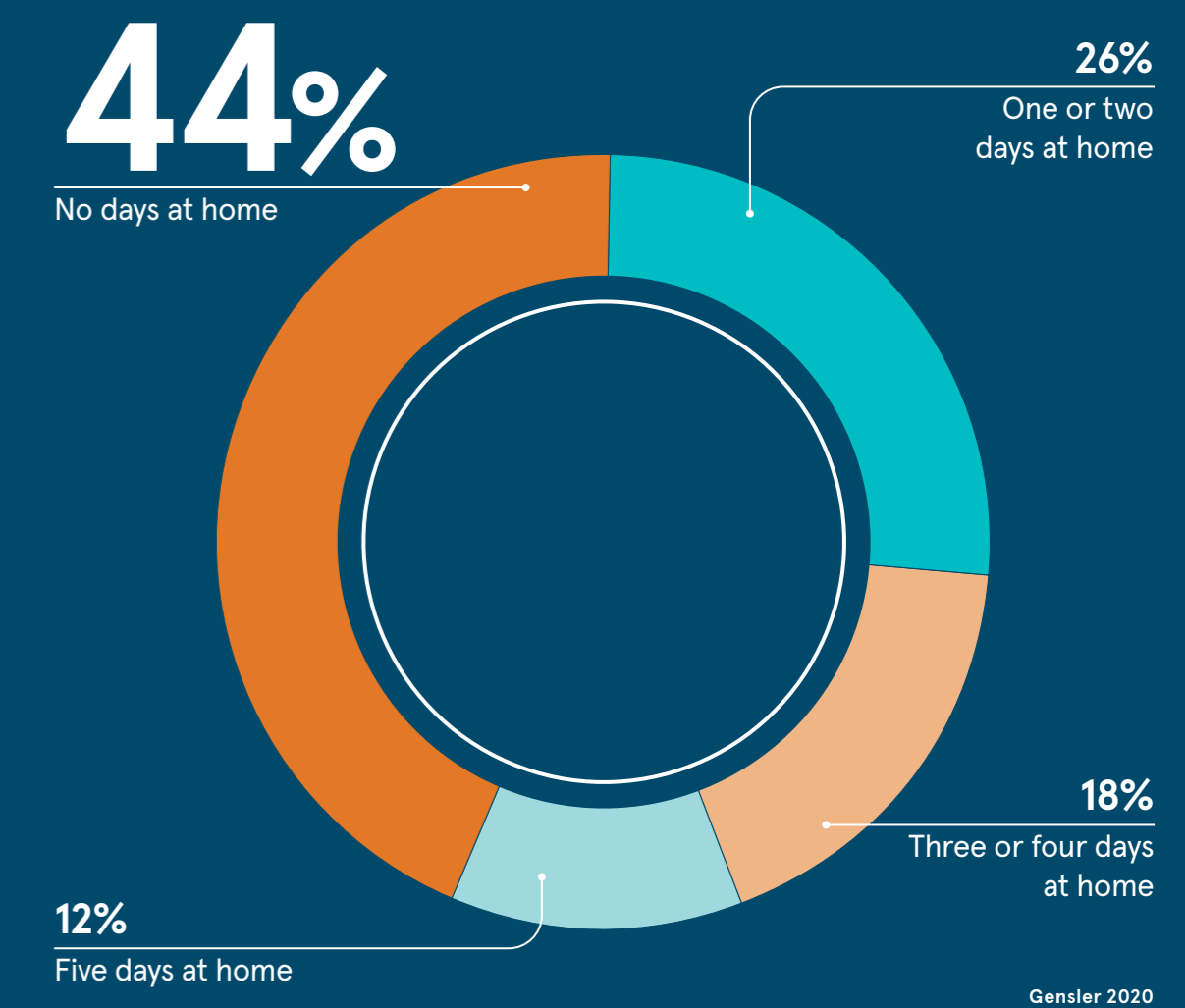
Workplaces will need to evolve to ease worker anxiety around the potential for falling ill



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## WORKERS ARE KEEN TO RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE

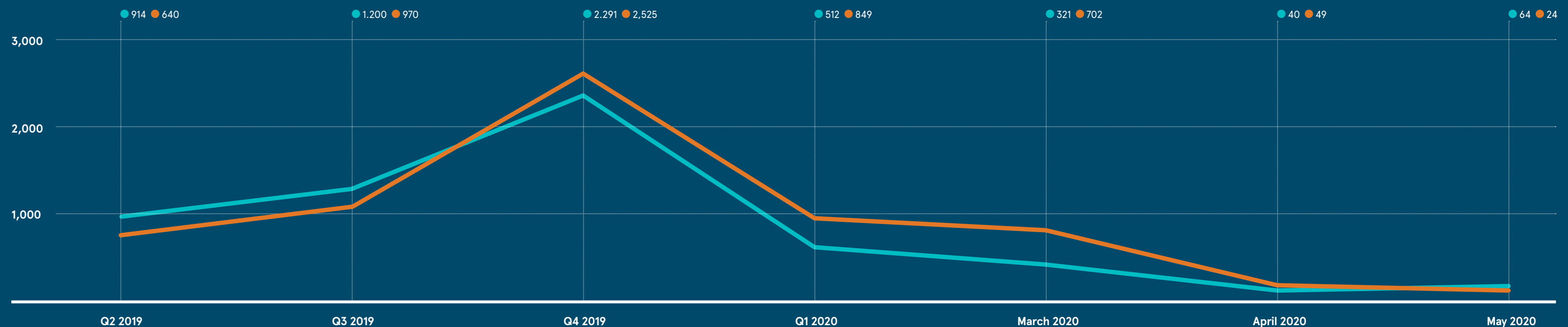
70 per cent of US employees want to spend the majority of their week in the office, but they want more space for social distancing and extra assurances of their safety first



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## HAS COVID CHANGED THE COMMERCIAL PROPERTY MARKET FOREVER?

Quarterly investment in London office real estate understandably dropped in March 2020, but with many businesses opting for smaller local offices, it remains to be seen whether this will recover (figures in £ million)



CBRE Group 2020