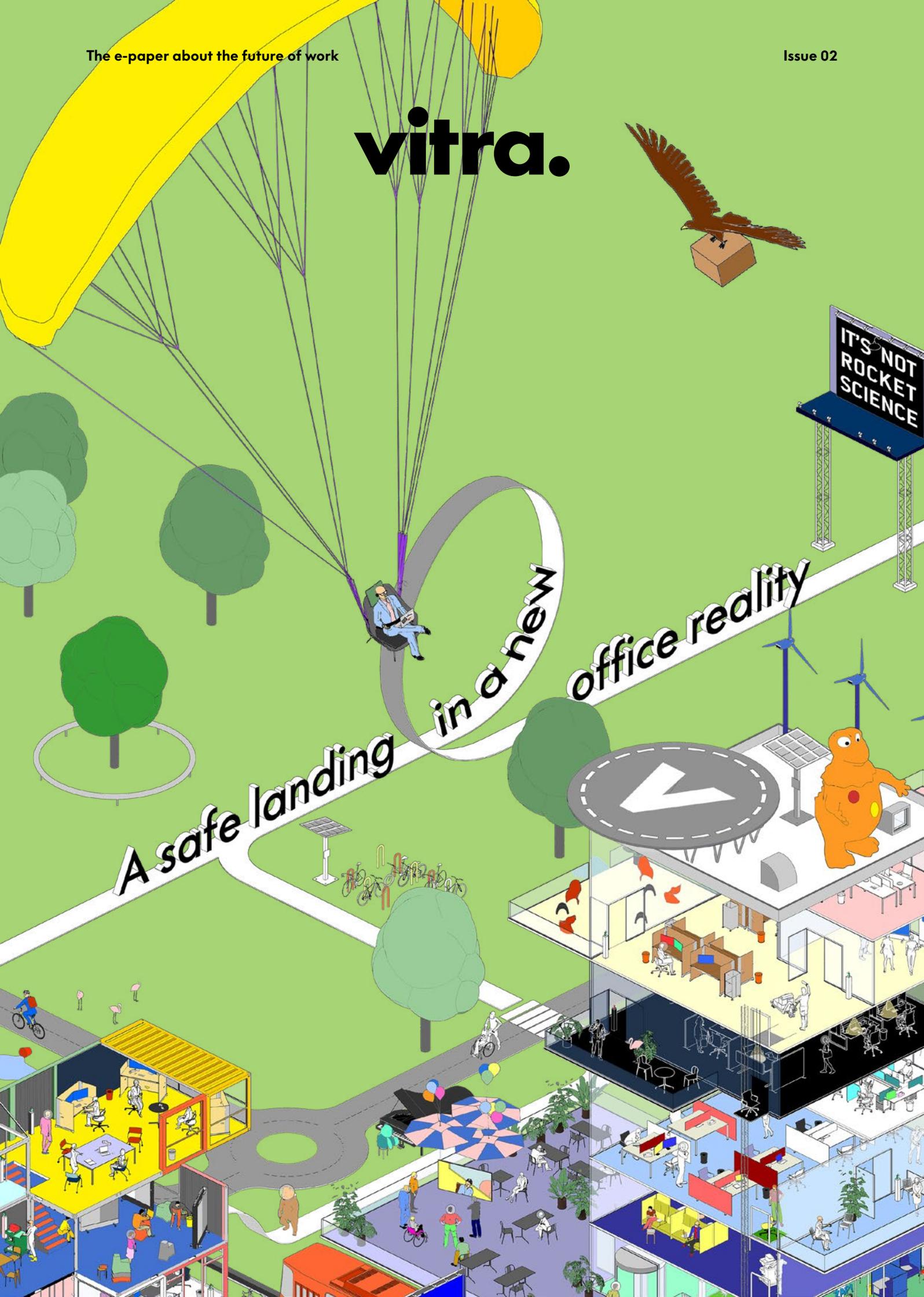


vitra.



A safe landing in a new office reality

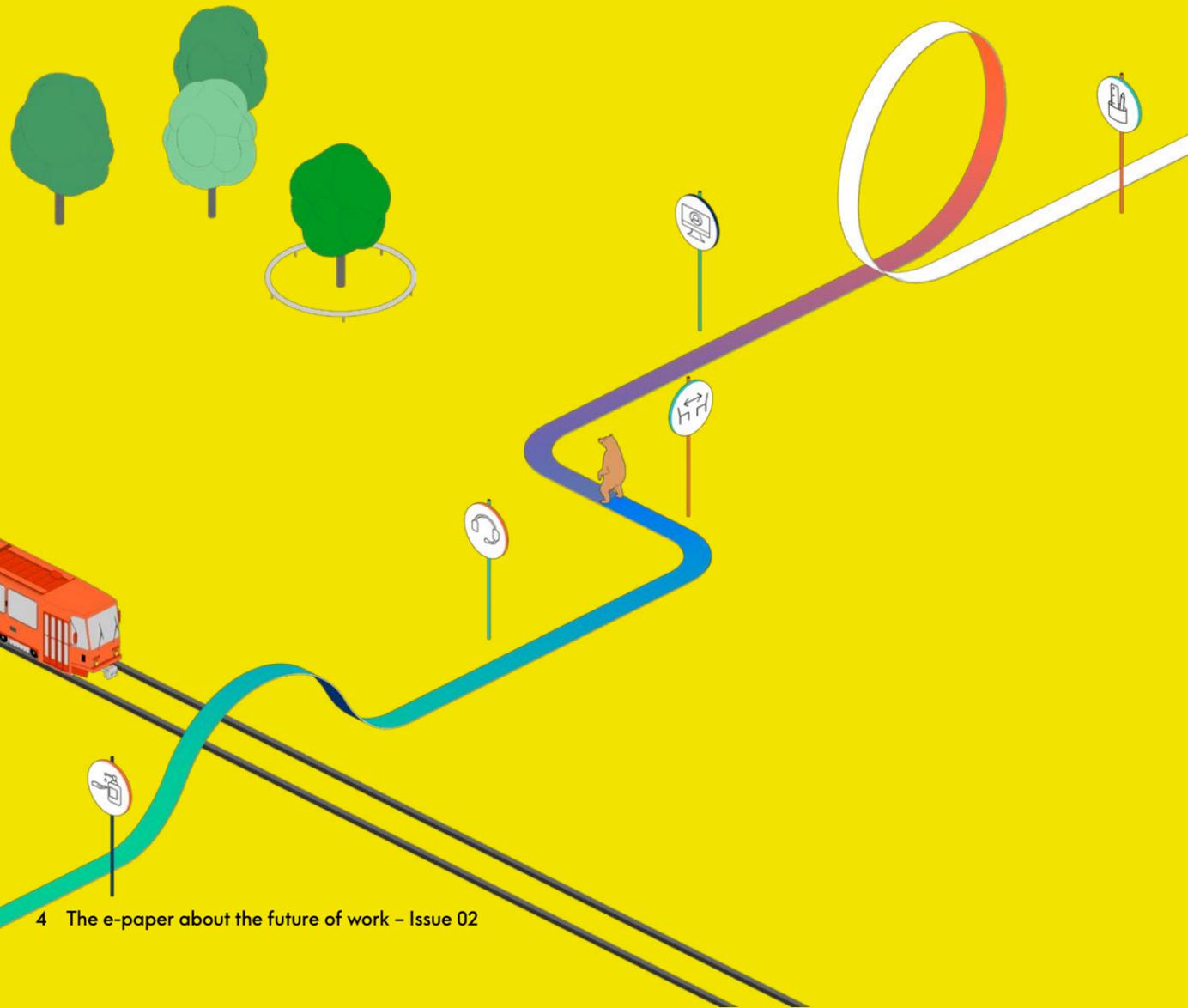
We can see a ray of light at the end of the tunnel. The number of people suffering from COVID-19 continues to decrease in Europe. Country by country, regulations are being relaxed, paving the way toward a new normality. Companies and designers are now working on solutions for a safe and productive return to the workplace. If there is one thing we have learned from this crisis, it is that our reality can change very quickly and seemingly out of nowhere. Even if the medium- to long-term development of COVID-19 and its impact on the workplace is still uncertain, we need to develop and test new solutions for the post-pandemic workspace just as quickly.

At Vitra we have always used our own workspaces as a field of experimentation and learning. In this current phase of reopening, the Vitra team on our campus in Weil am Rhein - where we're welcoming over 350,000 visitors every year - is implementing new spatial solutions and security measures to enable the safe return of our employees and visitors. In this paper, we will share some initial findings from our own reopening.

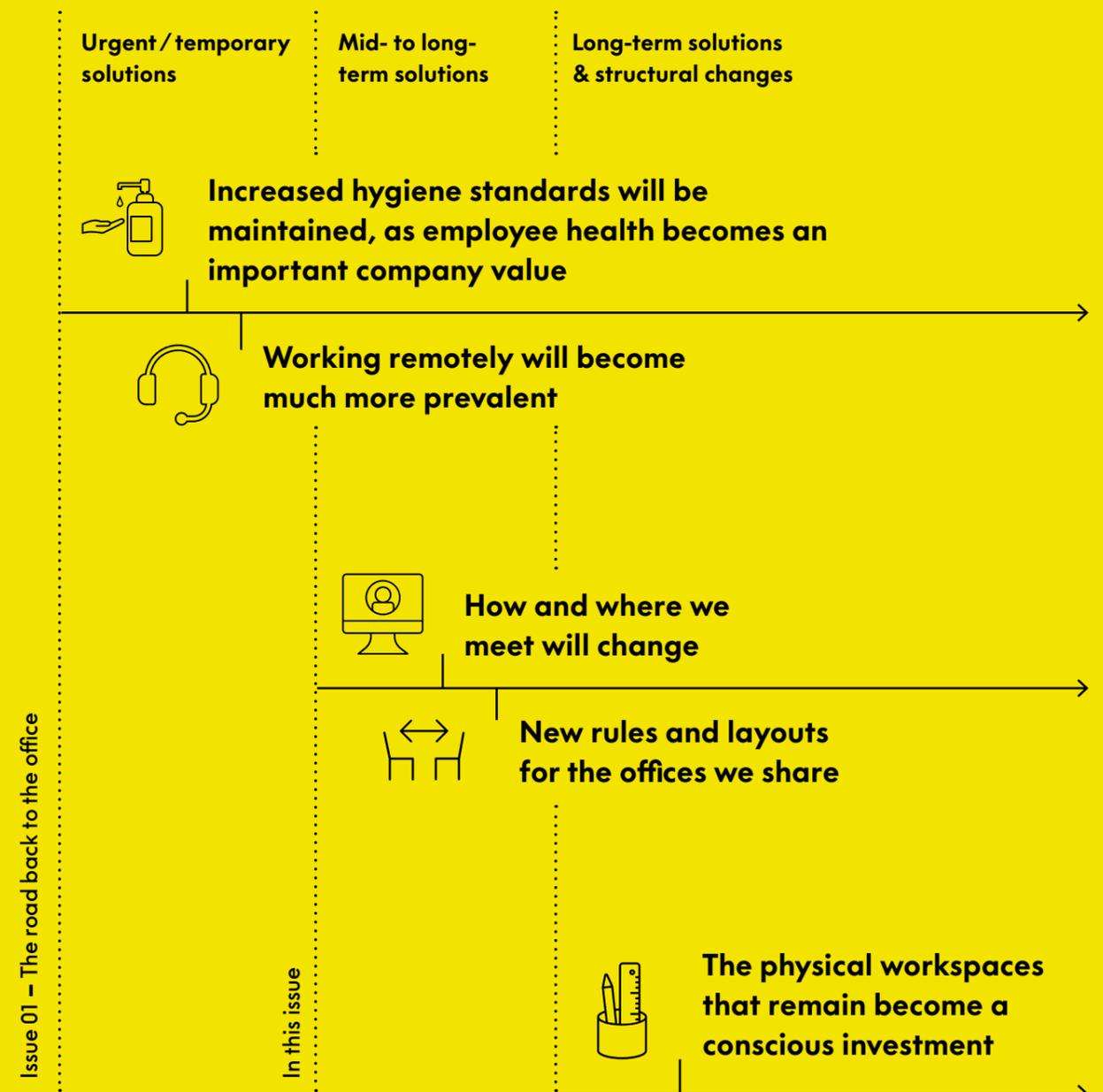
Nora Fehlbaum
CEO, Vitra

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- p 6** **How and where we meet will change**
- p 24** **New rules and layouts for the offices we share**
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Facing a new reality in the workspace



Five hypotheses



Issue 01 – The road back to the office

Discover ready-to-use spatial solutions and carefully conceived planning approaches to successfully pave your way back to the office.

www.vitra.com/backtotheoffice

How and where we meet will change

- p 8 Meeting in the age of physical distancing
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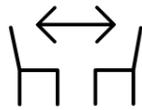


Meeting in the age of physical distancing

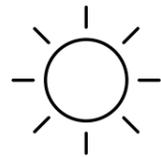
Among the first measures taken by most governments dealing with COVID-19 was a ban on large gatherings, conferences and events. As more severe policies were introduced, the number of people allowed to assemble in any form was highly restricted in most countries. If and how we meet, therefore, is likely to be impacted in the post-corona reality. The frequency of meetings will decline; we will all travel less. We will only meet in person when we really have to. Formal gatherings, such as board meetings and client consultations, may be more accepted than internal get-togethers. Companies may establish more restrictive travel and meeting guidelines, banning travel for internal meetings. In an effort to reduce travel, the duration of formal meetings may increase. As we meet less often, we want to make the most of personal interactions.

Fairs and congresses, which by nature require large crowds to gather in confined spaces, will be more sparsely attended and move much of their programming onto digital platforms. Meetings and conferences, although considered notoriously unproductive, are at the core of how most companies operate. Effective solutions will need to be found.

New spatial solutions will be needed to allow for personal and in-person exchanges without risking infection



Meeting rooms will have lower maximum capacity, reducing the number of seats to allow for more distance between attendees. The chairs themselves may become more expansive to fill the resulting empty space, while providing physical support and comfort during longer, more formal gatherings.



Informal meetings will take place in open-space environments, ideally standing up. These short touchpoints, like team huddles to plan the activities of the day every morning, will be done without chairs or tables, working with a wall or a flipchart. In temperate climates, outdoor meetings may become more popular.



Meeting rooms that are too small to enable physical distancing will be transformed for single-use activities such as focus work, phone calls or other virtual interactions.



We will miss the office if it dies

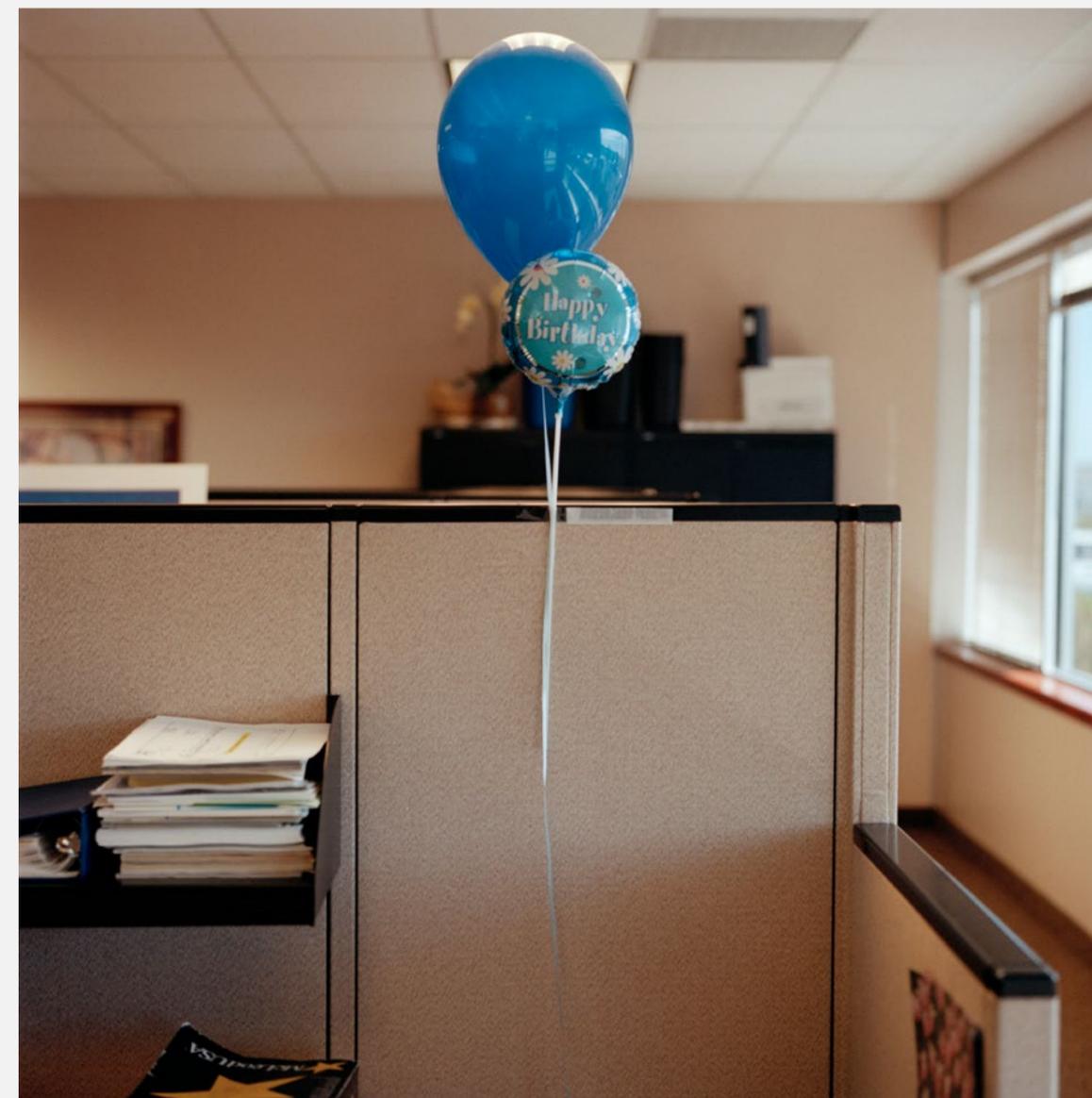
As an FT columnist, Lucy Kellaway skewered office culture — but, she argues, it is something to treasure

On my last day at the Financial Times in July 2017, the doorman who had greeted me every morning for the previous two decades enfolded me in a substantial embrace. Take care Luce, he said.

I had been dry-eyed during the farewell speeches but this undid me. I pushed through the revolving doors for the last time, stood on the street outside and wept. What hurt so unexpectedly was not leaving a profession and a set of colleagues. It was leaving a physical place of work with its familiar habits and familiar doorman — it was leaving an office. Offices, it seems, are now in mortal danger, rendered too expensive and too dangerous by Covid-19. For a quarter of a century, people have been confidently and wrongly predicting their demise — I remember Terence Conran telling me in the early 1990s that soon people would stop working in offices — but this time it may well be for real. If so, office workers everywhere should stand in the street and weep at what they are losing.

For 36 years I worked in an office, and for the last 25 I wrote about them. The office was a mainstay of my life. It not only provided me with a place of work and material for articles, but gave me routine, structure, amusement, purpose, many friends and a refuge in times of trouble. It was where I went to pass my days. The office was my rock. I am well aware of the

charges levelled at the office but am swayed by none of them. Offices are said to be inefficient, expensive temples to corporate vanity (which fell out of favour in 2008) and Petri dishes for pointless tasks. Workers commute to offices to use technology that they could use at home. The places are overcrowded, full of distractions, encourage presenteeism and, worst of all, infantilise workers with their bean bags and football tables. I used to be slightly sympathetic to the argument that in an office it is easy to waste a whole day in dull meetings. But now I don't even accept this: the thought of sitting around a real table with real people — and some decent biscuits — discussing solvency ratios (or anything at all) seems pretty attractive from where I sit now. My love for offices may be partly because I was introduced to them in the 1980s, at the end of the golden age — pre-technology, pre-uniformity, pre-health and safety. It was a time of cast-iron typewriters, smoking at your desk, heavy drinking at lunchtime, canteens selling spotted dick, tea ladies and cake trolleys. But what I really remember are characters such as the high-functioning alcoholic in the dealing room



An office in Colorado in 2007 © Peter Marlow/Magnum Photos

at JPMorgan who started each day by taking a nip out of his hip flask and then applying a coat of liquid shoe-shine to his already shiny brown shoes. There was the accomplished journalist at the Investors Chronicle who dressed like a tramp and would kip down for the night under his desk. Offices were full of shouting, brawling and bottom-pinching. It was sometimes nasty, mostly funny and never dull. Modern offices, by contrast, are usually dull: quiet, boozeless and impersonal with their ergonomic chairs, glass-

walled meeting rooms and half the people working from home. But, even so, we need the office as much as ever.

The most important thing — which should make the office less an employer's white elephant than its biggest bargain — is that it gives work its meaning. Most of what passes for work in offices is pretty meaningless, and the best way to kid yourself it matters is to do it alongside other people intent on doing the same.



An office in a Birmingham, England, industrial complex in 2006 © Peter Marlow/Magnum Photos

Even in interesting jobs like journalism, meaning comes largely from physical proximity to your colleagues. After six weeks of writing in her own bedroom, one friend reports: “I’m churning out the same old articles as before, only now I no longer give a crap”. Without an office, without a body of people beavering away at the same place and time, it is hard to know how a company could ever create any sort of culture or any fellow feeling — let alone anything resembling loyalty.

The office helps keep us sane. First, it imposes routine, without which most of us fall to pieces. The uptight schedule of most offices forces even the least organised person to establish habits. Even better, it creates a barrier between work and home. On arrival we escape the chaos (or monotony) of our hearths; better still, we escape from our usual selves. One of the beauties of the office is its artificiality — it demands a different way of behaving, a different wardrobe and even a different language.

Having two selves with two different outfits and two ways of being is infinitely preferable to having just one: when you get tired of your work self, return to your home self. Offices are also the funniest places in the world. The flipside of the idiocy of management is the hilarity and cynicism of workers. I remember the merriment when a past CEO sent us an over-the-top motivational New Year memo saying, “what fires me up is knowing that each of you comes to work every day ready to do something miraculous”. Gleefully, we sat around and tore this to shreds. A miracle per person, per day? Even Jesus Christ couldn’t manage that. When cynicism failed, there were always pranks. I remember being called one morning by an incandescent CEO about a critical article I’d just written on his company. I prevaricated, oblivious to the fact that the caller was not the CEO but a colleague ringing from the other side of our office — much to the amusement of everyone else. In time, I forgave him. In fact, I came to see it as so funny that I married him.

This was yet another function of the office: it was highly likely to furnish you with a spouse. People who had failed to find partners at university or through friends generally picked one up at work. It was all so easy: you would go out for a drink at the end of the day and then one thing would lead to another. The fact that the decline of the office and the rise of online dating have gone hand-in-hand isn’t particularly surprising.

Short of marriage, offices from the beginning of time have been great places for lust. As Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary on June 30 1662: “Up betimes, and to my office, where I found Griffen’s girl making it clean, but, God forgive me! what a mind I had to her, but did not meddle with her.” In 21st-century offices, where meddling is not only discouraged but illegal, invisible lusting is probably as big as ever. It gives interest to an otherwise dull day.

In addition to providing real husbands,

offices provide work husbands too. I had seven of these in the course of almost four decades and can confirm that the office spouse is one of the best relationships ever invented. They are the default option for a sandwich at lunch, someone who supports you in all matters, someone to gossip with. It’s like a real husband, only better because you don’t fight over whose turn it is to unload the dishwasher. There was a study done proving that people with office spouses were happier, more loyal and worked harder. Which is no surprise to anyone who’s ever had one.

A final benefit of the office occurred to me in the past six weeks: it is a great leveller. Yes, the boss tends to get the best view, but everyone is in the same office building with the same common spaces. Contrast that to the inequality working from home exposed in every Zoom conference: some people work from oak-beamed barns in the Home Counties, others from cramped cupboards.

There is one bad thing about the office that even most office-philes will admit: the commute is generally a downer. But now that I no longer go anywhere at all, I don’t remember why everyone made such a fuss about this. I spoke recently to one of my dearest friends from FT days who sounded in low spirits. I’m really missing the Northern line, he said.

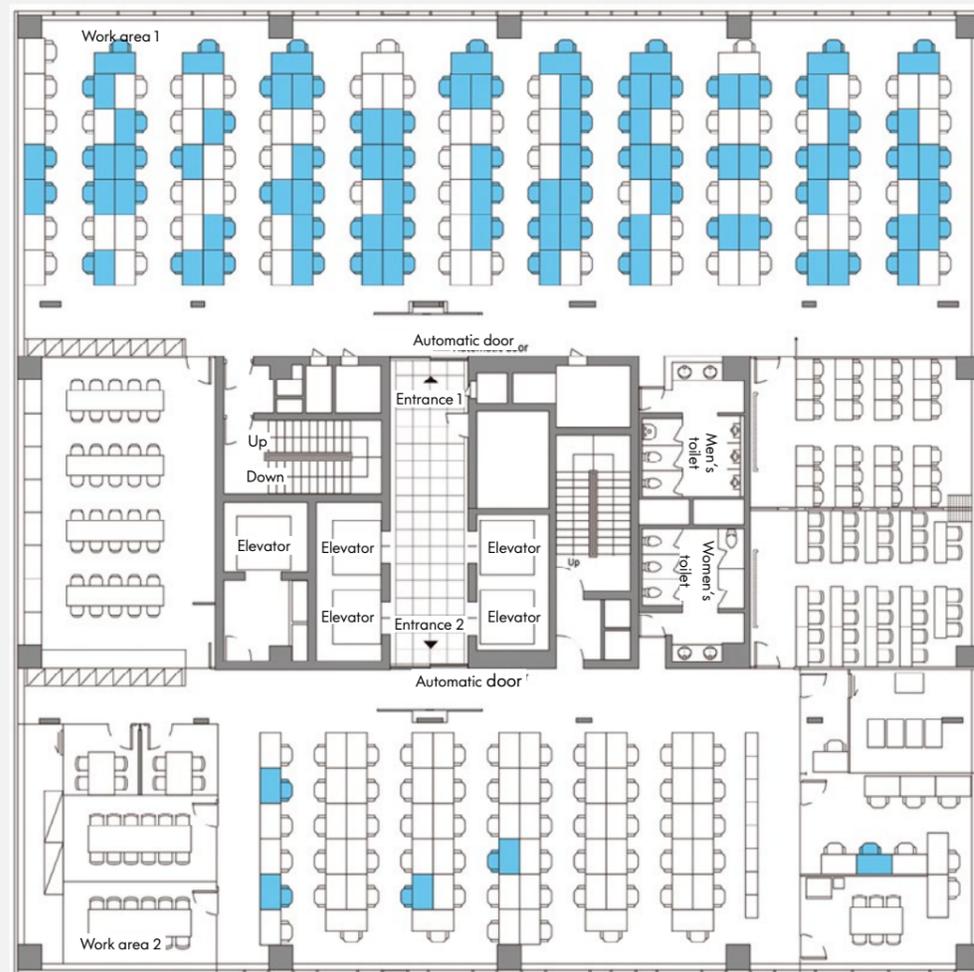
In my old life I was always irritated by the homily “No one ever said on their death bed: I wish I’d spent more time in the office.” I now understand why that jarred so badly. To wish for more office time is an entirely reasonable thing to say with your dying breath. I spent 35 rich and happy years in offices. I fear that my children won’t get that chance.



Source: Lucy Kellaway, 2020, ‘We will miss the office if it dies’, Financial Times / FT.com, 16 May. Used under licence from the Financial Times. All Rights Reserved.

Containing the infection rate in the workspace

Findings from the evolution of COVID-19 on the floor plan in a call centre in South Korea



Floor plan of the 11th floor of building X, site of a coronavirus disease outbreak, Seoul, South Korea, 2020. Blue coloring indicates the seating places of persons with confirmed cases.

After the first case of COVID-19 was discovered in South Korea on 20 January 2020, the number of people infected rose from hundreds to over 10, 000 within weeks. Most of the infections could be traced back to mass gatherings, religious activities, hospitals and workplaces. In March 2020, the South Korean health authorities noticed a call centre in Seoul that had a particularly high infection rate. Looking at the occupancy rate of the floor plan, a case study by the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows how easily the virus can spread in the workplace.

In March 2020, 97 of 811 employees in the call centre tested positive for the coronavirus. Of the sick employees, 94 worked on the 11th floor of the call centre and 79 in the same department. Despite multiple interactions of employees from different floors in the elevators, stairwells, lobbies and bathrooms, the spread was almost exclusively limited to the 11th floor with 97% of the total cases. According to the Korean health authorities, the concentration of cases of the disease in certain work areas suggests that the duration of physical contact is an important factor in the spread of the virus.

On 8 March 2020, an employee from the call centre tested positive for the coronavirus. The call centre is located in Seoul in a skyscraper that houses both companies and private residences. The patient worked on the 10th floor and, according to the report, never went to the 11th floor. The company followed the standard protocol used in South Korea after the case was reported: the call centre's offices were closed the next day and all employees were quarantined for 14 days. The government then tested all employees and

residents of the building. With over 1100 tests, 97 cases were discovered. Most of the cases were found in people working in the immediate proximity on the 11th floor of the building. Of 216 employees, 94 contracted the virus – which means that the virus spread with an attack rate of 43.5%. The layout of the 11th floor shows two large open work areas. In the smaller work area, 61 employees were seated at 11 rows of adjacent workstations. Four cases of illness were reported from this area (virus attack rate of 7.1%). In the larger work area, 137 employees shared 21 rows of desks. Here 79 confirmed cases were reported (virus attack rate of 57%).

The study concludes that there is a high risk of infection at the workplace through prolonged physical contact. However, targeted preventive strategies can reduce the spread of the cases in the workplace.

Source: Park SY, Kim YM, Yi S, Lee S, Na BJ, Kim CB, et al. Coronavirus disease outbreak in call center, South Korea. *Emerg Infect Dis.* 2020 Aug; 4 May 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid2608.201274>

Safe meeting Planning examples

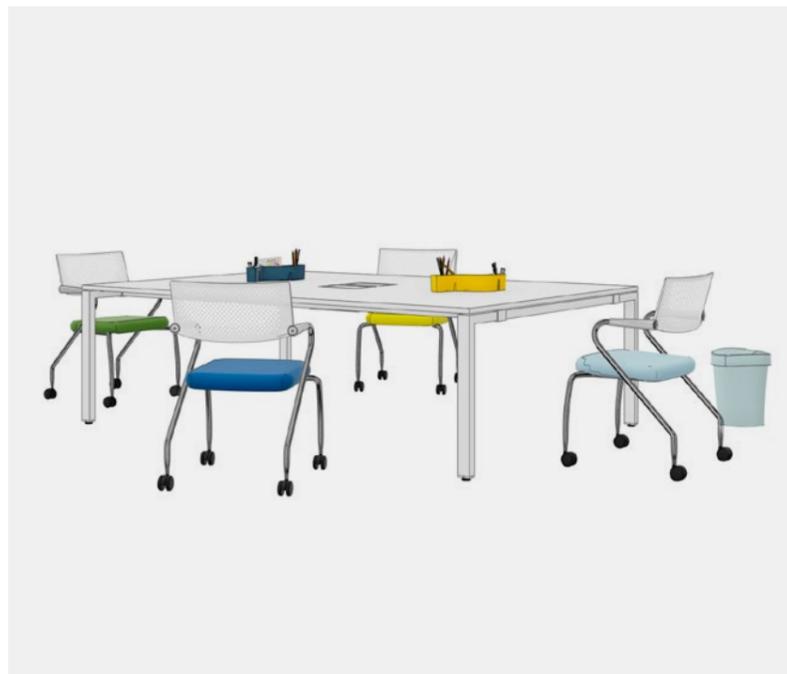
Safe meeting settings



Safe meeting setting 1

Tyde Meeting 320, AC 5 Swift (leather), Toolbox, Happy Bin

[Download planning example](#)



Safe meeting setting 2

WorKit Meet (240 x 160), Visaroll 2 (back in soft light, seat Plano), S-Tidy, Happy Bin

[Download planning example](#)

Safe meeting settings



Safe meeting setting 3

Alcove Highback Sofa (2-Seater, Work upholstery), NesTable, Elephant Stool, Toolbox, Herringbone Pillows

[Download planning example](#)

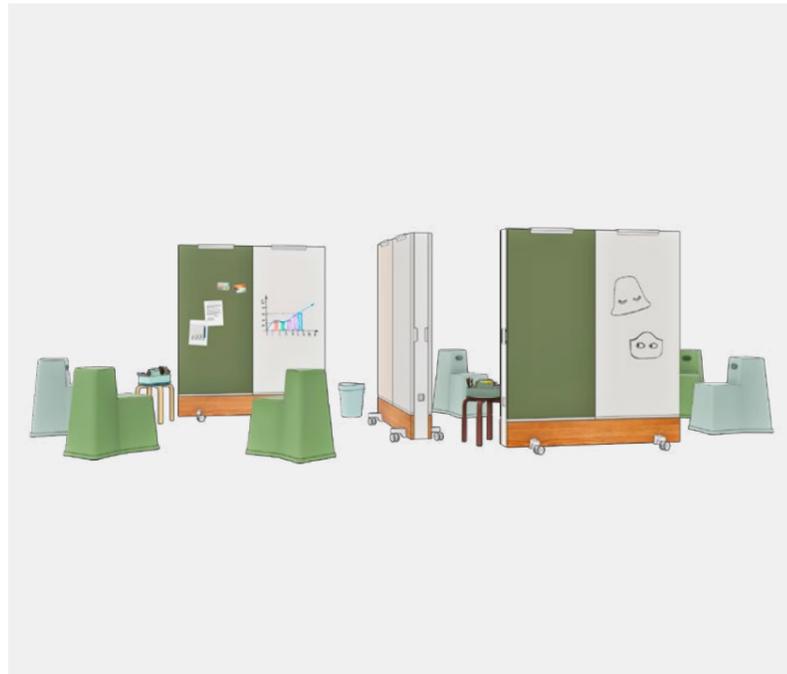


Safe meeting setting 4

Eames Segmented Table 360 x 130, Aluminium Chair EA 108 (Netweave), Toolbox, Happy Bin

[Download planning example](#)

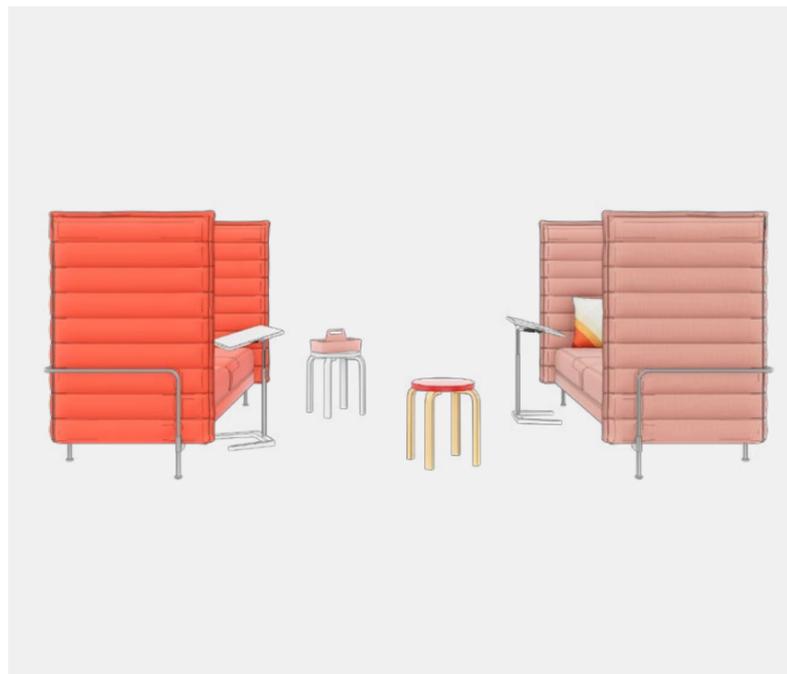
Microarchitecture & room-in-a-room settings



Room-in-a-room setting 1

Dancing Wall (with whiteboard and pinboard), Stool-Tool, Stool E60 (Artek), Toolbox, Happy Bin

[Download planning example](#)

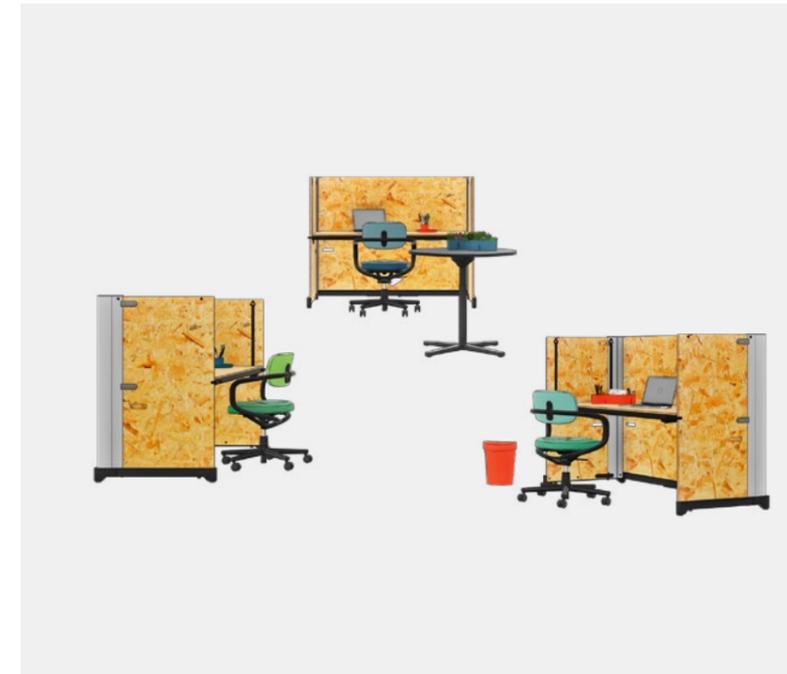


Room-in-a-room setting 2

Alcove Highback Sofa, NesTable, Stool E60 (Artek), Toolbox, Herringbone Pillows

[Download planning example](#)

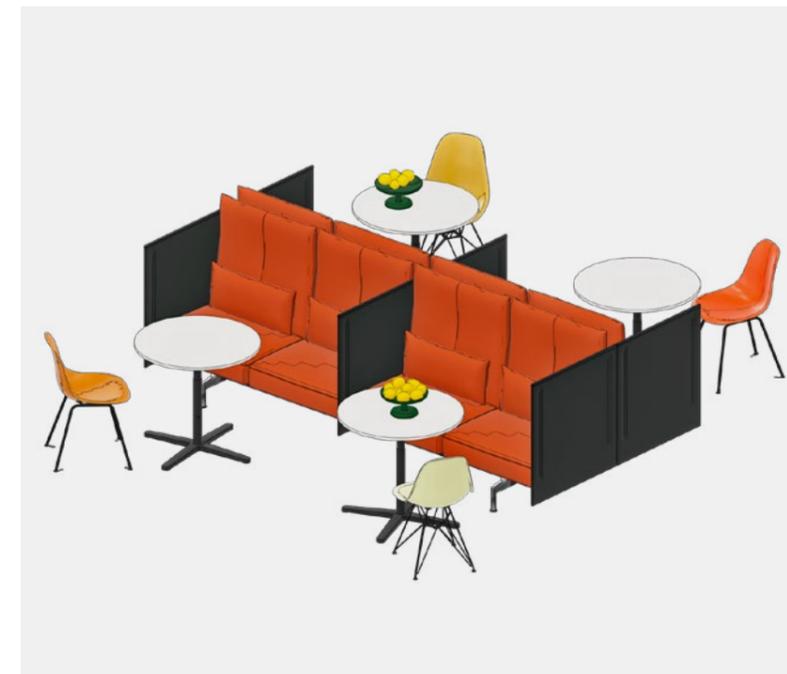
Microarchitecture & room-in-a-room settings



Room-in-a-room setting 3

Hack, Allstar, Happy Bin, Toolbox

[Download planning example](#)



Room-in-a-room setting 4

Soft Work, Eames Fiberglass Side Chair DSR and DSX, High Tray, Super Fold Table

[Download planning example](#)

New rules and layouts for the offices we share

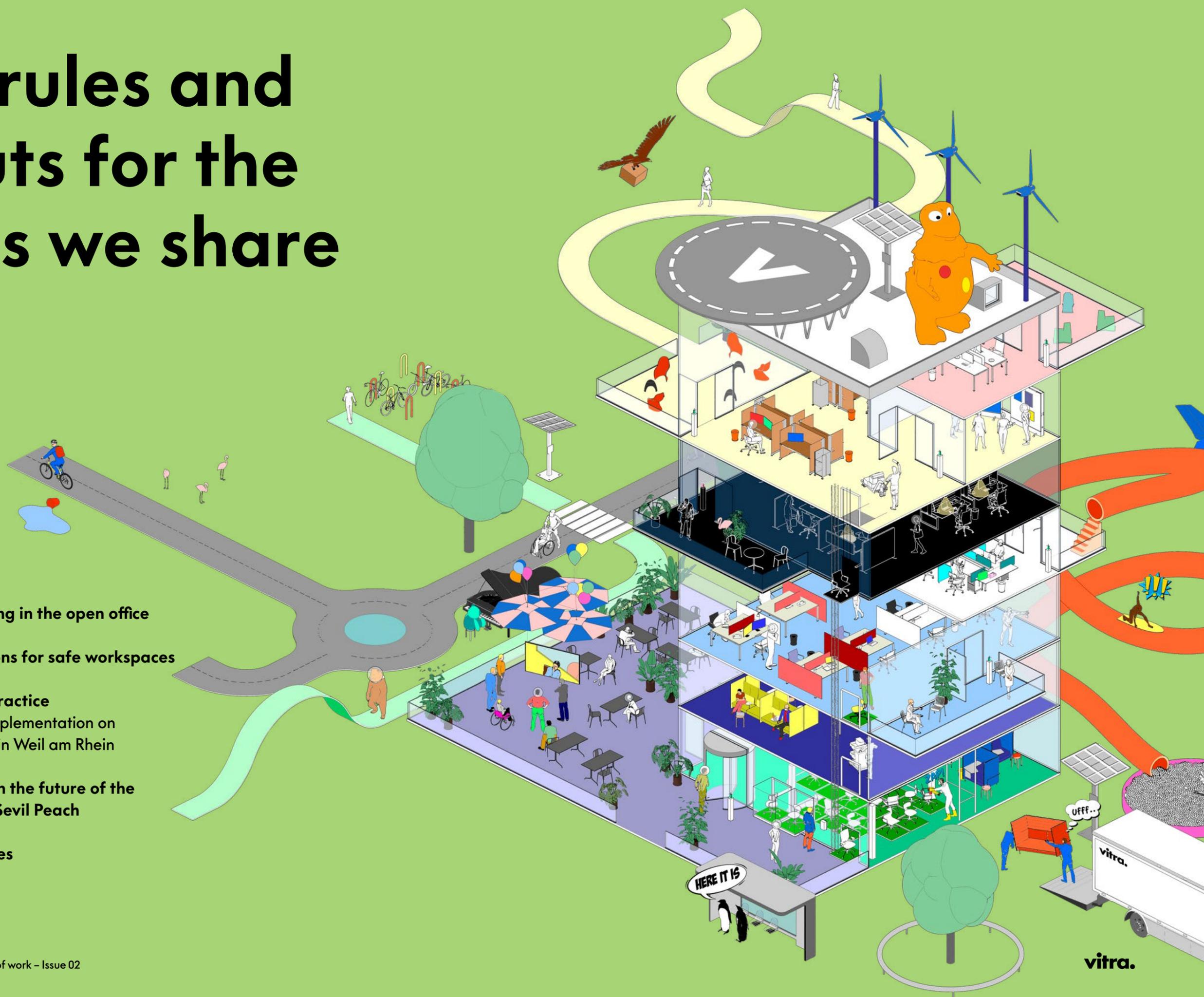
p 26 Physical distancing in the open office

p 32 Design implications for safe workspaces

p 34 From theory to practice
A 'corona-safe' implementation on
the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein

p 48 A conversation on the future of the
workspace with Sevil Peach

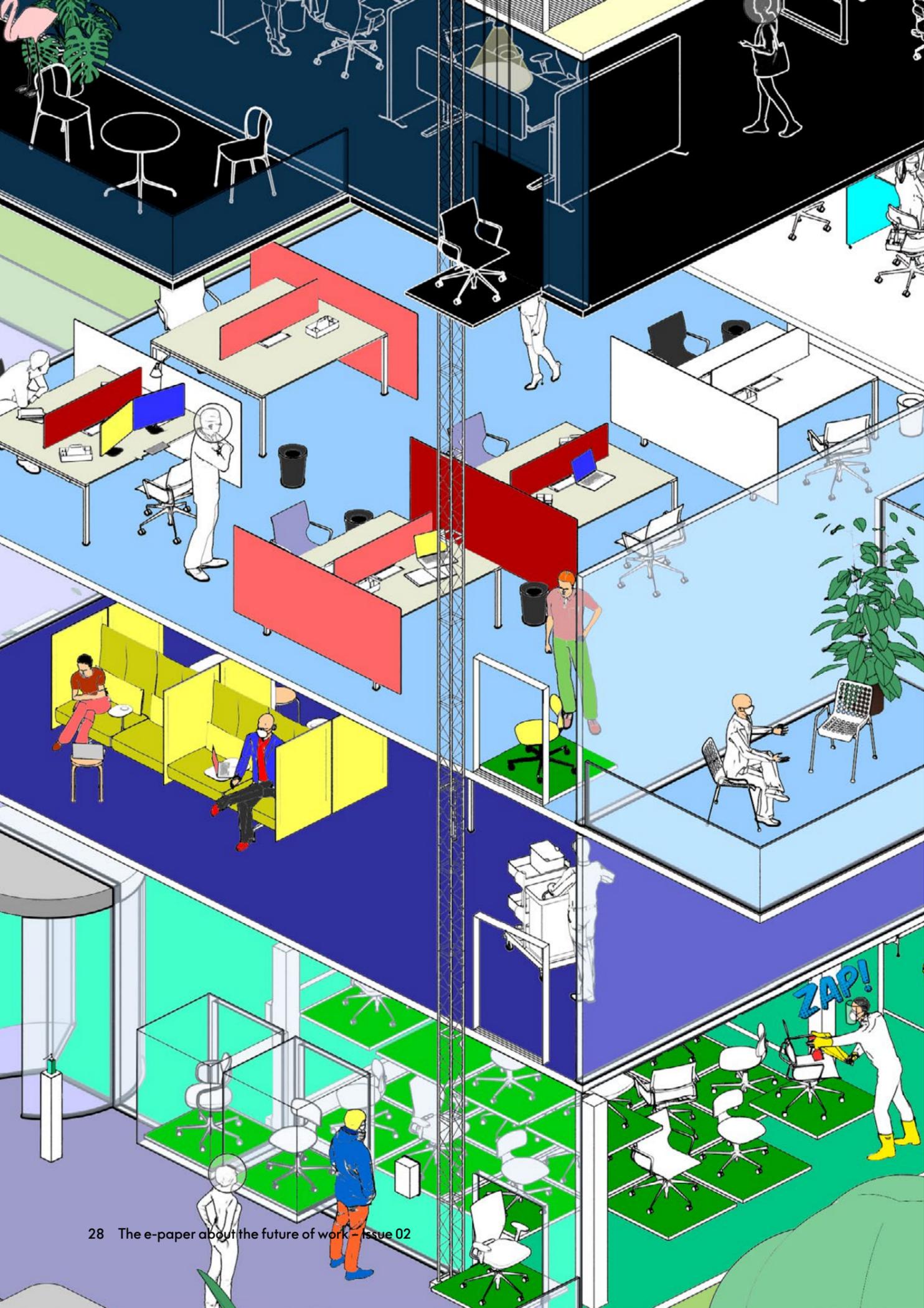
p 52 Planning examples



Physical distancing in the open office

For the last twenty years, starting with the 'New Office' created in collaboration with Sevil Peach on the Vitra Campus in 2000, Vitra has been a proponent of the open office and of shared workspaces in order to improve in quality and offer a broader variety of options. After COVID-19, both of these workspace concepts may need to be adapted, but not abandoned.

Crowded workspaces, working at benches in close proximity to others, or being reassigned to a different non-territorial workplace every day will be called into question when we return to our offices post-crisis. Some companies may consider going back to cubicles that prevent interaction with others – and therefore infection. This begs the question, however: why ask an employee to commute to work in order to hide behind a wall? In addition, cubicles – while possibly an answer for high-risk groups – are not space-efficient. Companies will have to allow for physical distancing in their offices but are probably unwilling to invest in expanding their office footprint. Rules, guidelines and recommendations are already being introduced by individual governments – for instance the [German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs](#) or the [Swiss Federal Office of Public Health](#) – that specify the floor space per person and physical distance between workers.



Possible measures to reduce workplace density

One answer to the issue of density is regular remote working. Working in shifts or waves outside the usual 9-to-5 routine could be another answer. Shift work would also solve density issues on public transport during rush hour periods. Desks could be shared by the same two people on different shifts with cleaning in between. Each employee has a personally assigned chair that is safely parked in a reserved space during the times they are away. A chair is only reassigned after deep cleaning. IT hardware that is touched by the user, such as keyboards and headsets, is never shared. Sharing with strangers may be less acceptable than among a trusted team that treats the office like their neighbourhood. Bathrooms, meeting rooms and other ancillary spaces may be more clearly assigned to teams. Coworking spaces will demonstrate their hygiene standards with visibly active cleaning crews, disinfectants, easily wipeable surfaces and the fresh clean look of their interiors.

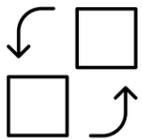
Set the stage for a safe and productive workspace



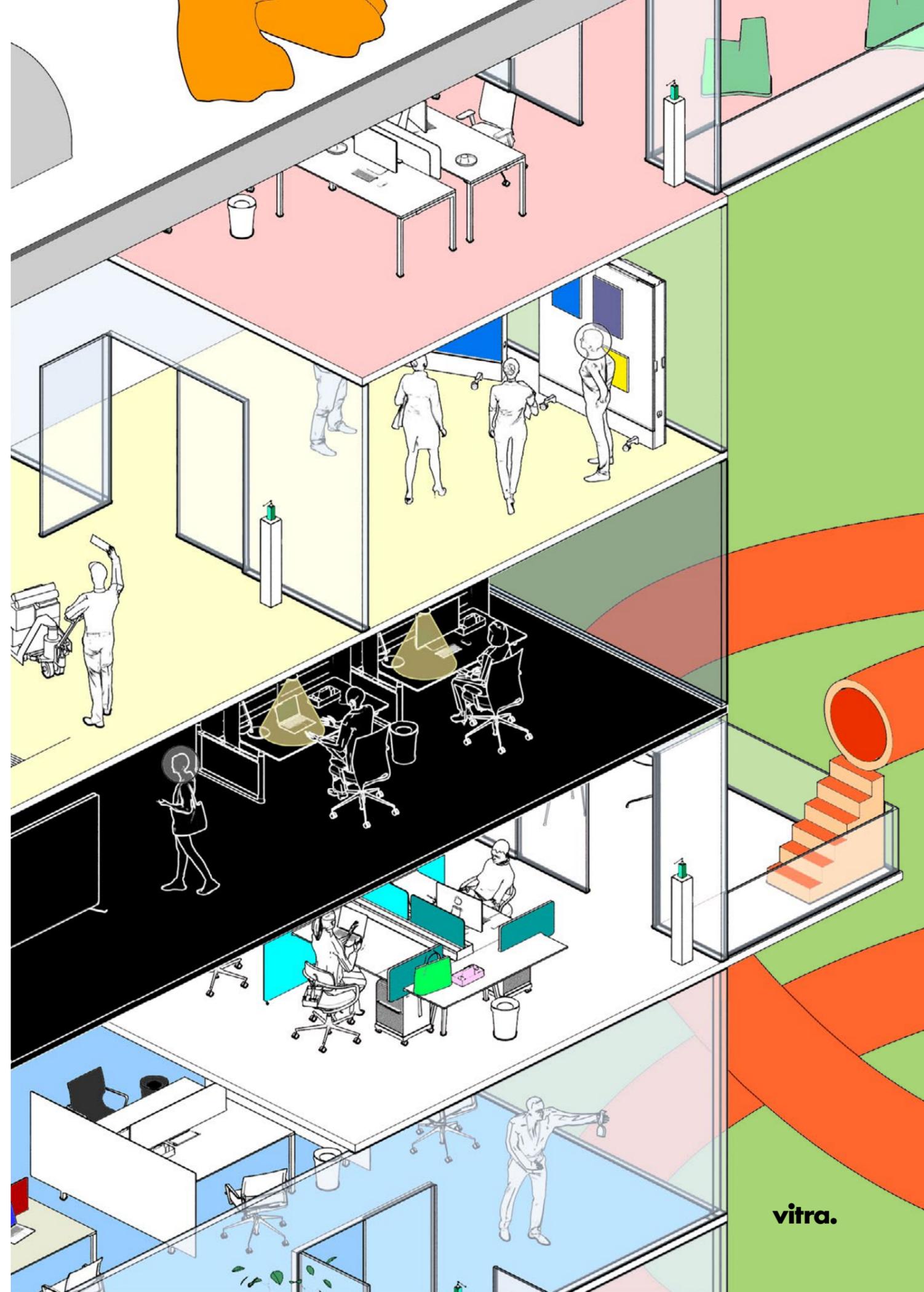
Rules and guidelines on the required floor space per person will be adapted for lower density, resulting in wider benches and the inclusion of more walls and partitions in the main workspace.



Employees who share desks are more likely to at least demand their own personal chair. Operators of coworking spaces are developing chair covers that are handed out free of charge to each visitor.



Unassigned, shared objects are optimised for physical distancing, e.g. by blocking every second seat in waiting areas, sofas or on benches or by mounting screens between seats and on tables / benches.



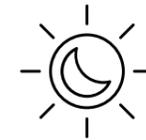
Design implications for safe workspaces



Organisation Which teams must be physically present on the company premises? How many employees and during which hours over the course of the week? Which teams can easily carry out their work from home?

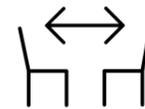


Remote working: offers a good opportunity to reduce the occupancy rate at the office location in the short to medium term.

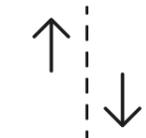


Working in shifts: another possibility for reducing the occupancy rate is the introduction of shift work. In this case, however, the work surfaces and workplaces must be cleaned and disinfected between shifts.

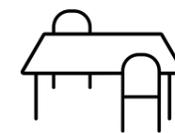
Space What solutions can be implemented in the office layout to provide a safe collaborative work environment for all employees?



2m / 6ft: implement a safe distance of 2m / 6ft between workstations.



Infrastructure: internal infrastructure and transit zones should be adapted to maintain sufficient distance between employees.



Alternate seating: an easily implemented solution that increases the spacing at tables shared by several employees.



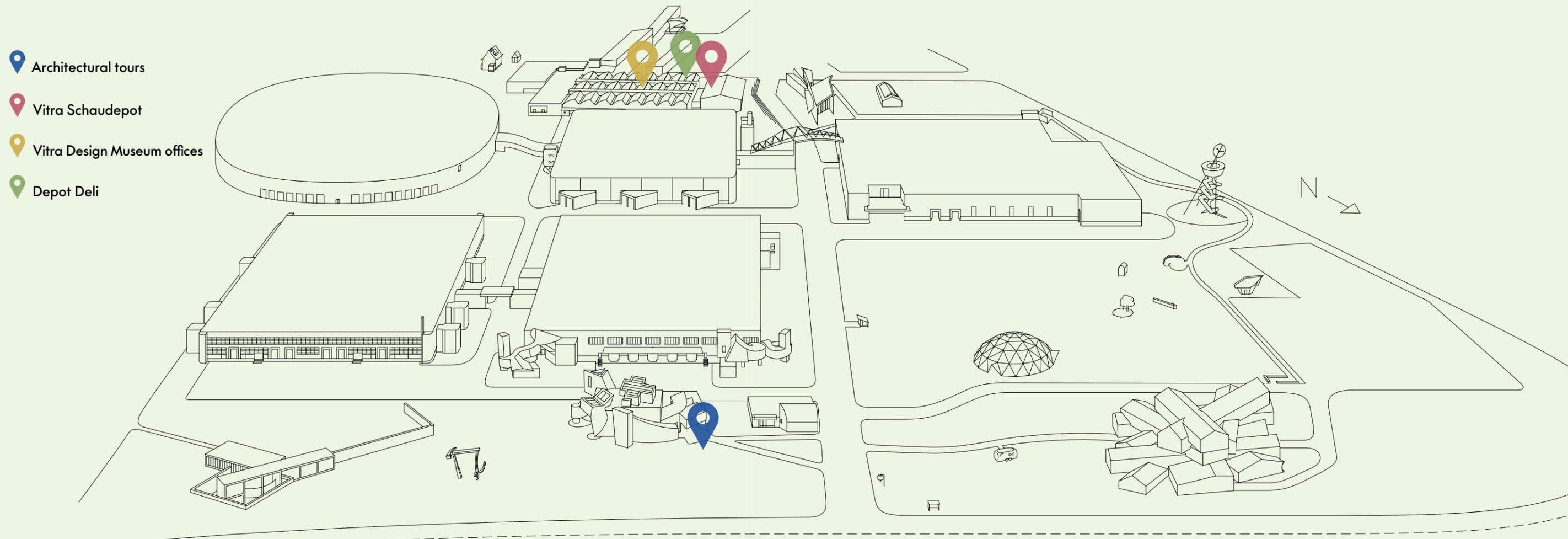
Screens & room dividers: where possible, use screens and room dividers to offer protection to individual employees.

From theory to practice

A 'corona-safe' layout implementation on the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein

We are all facing the challenge of safely transforming our work areas. Not only are we looking for fast, effective solutions that keep offices virus-free for employees, but we also need to rethink all areas where interactions take place - especially with the public. Reception areas, lobbies, cafés and restoration areas in particular need to be looked at closely.

The Vitra Campus and the Vitra Design Museum have been reopened to the public since 11 May 2020. A holistic security concept was developed for the public areas of the Vitra Campus with an internal task force and the company doctors, which informs visitors upon arrival about the safety guidelines on the Vitra Campus and implements the applicable security regulations with the teams on site. To ensure the safe return of the museum visitors, some of the Vitra Design Museum employees returned to their offices on that date as well. Here, changes to the floorplan had to be implemented quickly to enable a secure physical exchange between the staff in the meeting and communication zones and to implement distance-regulated workstations for safe and concentrated work.



Office space – Vitra Design Museum

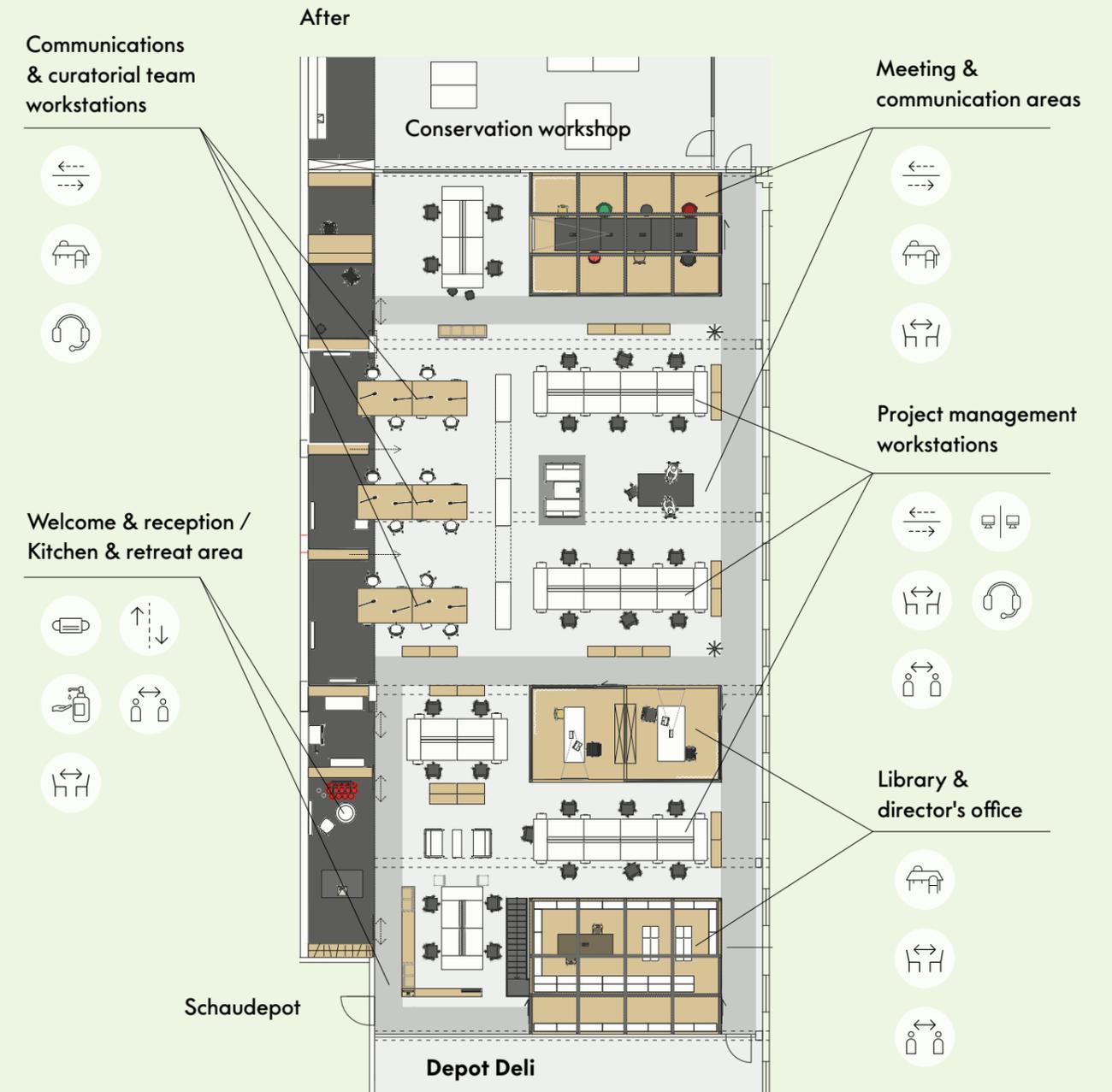
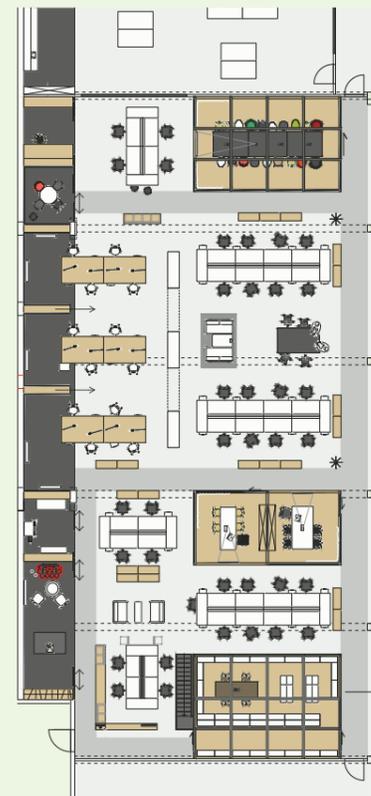


The Vitra Design Museum office combines different areas of responsibility – from collection administration and the conservation workshop in the Vitra Schaudapot, to travelling exhibitions, publications, curatorial tasks and visitor tours and events. As the employees in these different areas need to interact on a daily basis, multiple departments with different workflows are accommodated in an area of 730 sqm. During the lockdown phase in Germany, the majority of employees worked from home. The close communication between the teams was facilitated with digital tools.

With the reopening of the Vitra Campus, the physical presence of a part of the staff is required in the offices and museums. The team wears face masks in the offices and in public areas and follows the safety instructions of the health authorities. When implementing security measures in the office, the aim was to enact solutions to ensure the safety of employees and visitors. The transit zones in the office have been clearly defined. In the meeting and communication areas, the seating was reduced to ensure a distance of 2 metres between. The seating in the work areas was changed to a diagonal configuration and chairs were moved farther apart. With markings on the floor, task chairs were assigned fixed positions to ensure safe distances at all times.

The Vitra Design Museum office was designed to be a 'transparent' workplace. Visitors to the Vitra Campus can see into the offices from the neighbouring Depot Deli restaurant and, likewise, the workshop and all meeting rooms have glass walls that bring the inside out and the outside in. The office is also accessible to visitors on public tours.

Before



- Alternate seating
- Face masks
- Floor markings
- Hygiene & disinfection
- Reduced seating
- Remote working
- Screens / room dividers
- Transit zones
- 1.5m distance

Workstations – Communications & curatorial team



Workstations before



Workstations after

The curators at the Vitra Design Museum spend a large part of their working day circulating between the museum buildings on campus and the offices. They need spaces that allow them to easily navigate between their different tasks. To that end, their workspaces have been designed to allow free movement and interaction with neighbouring departments.



Alternate seating



Floor markings



Remote working

Workstations – Project management

The museum's project managers and specialists spend most of their day in the office and maintain close connections with colleagues by sitting at Joyn workstations.



Floor markings



Reduced seating



Remote working



Screens / room dividers



1.5m distance



Workstations before



Workstations after

Meeting & communication areas



Meeting room after



Meeting room before



Communication area before



Communication area after

The spatial concept of the shed-roof building defines a clearly structured layout of workstations interspersed with room-in-a-room settings. Secluded niches create a studio-like atmosphere that promotes both creative exchange and concentrated work. The office has an enclosed library area, several dedicated meeting rooms, a conservation workshop and a gallery.



Alternate seating



Floor markings



Reduced seating

Vitra Campus – Public areas

As the activities and opening hours on the Vitra Campus are successively expanded with the aim of gradually resuming normal operations, comprehensive safety and hygiene concepts have been implemented to protect both visitors and employees. Face masks are required to enter any building on the Vitra Campus. All reception areas, cash registers and shops have been equipped with protective shields. Between shifts, the seats of employees are cleaned and disinfected. Floor markings and additional information points help visitors find their way around the campus safely.

To ensure the safety of all visitors, guests are asked to exercise responsible behaviour when they arrive on the campus. The on-site staff informs guests about the available sanitary facilities. Visitors are instructed to wash their hands thoroughly, practise social distancing with a minimum of 1.5 metres between guests and are advised to stay at home if they are experiencing flu-like symptoms.

Vitra Schaudepot

Designed by the architectural firm Herzog & de Meuron, the Schaudepot presents part of the Vitra Design Museum collection, which encompasses some 7000 pieces of furniture, over 1000 lighting objects and numerous archives. The display space has been reopened to the public since 11 May 2020 after the implementation of a holistic hygiene and safety concept. Face masks must be worn in the Vitra Schaudepot, and only 30 guests are allowed to enter the space at any given time. All reception areas, cash registers and shops have been equipped with protective shields. Between shifts, the seats of employees are cleaned and disinfected. Floor markings and additional information points help visitors find their way around the campus safely.



Vitra Schaudepot

-  Face masks
-  Floor markings
-  Hygiene & disinfection
-  Limited admission
-  Protective shields
-  Transit zones
-  1.5m distance



Welcome and reception area



Furniture collection

Depot Deli

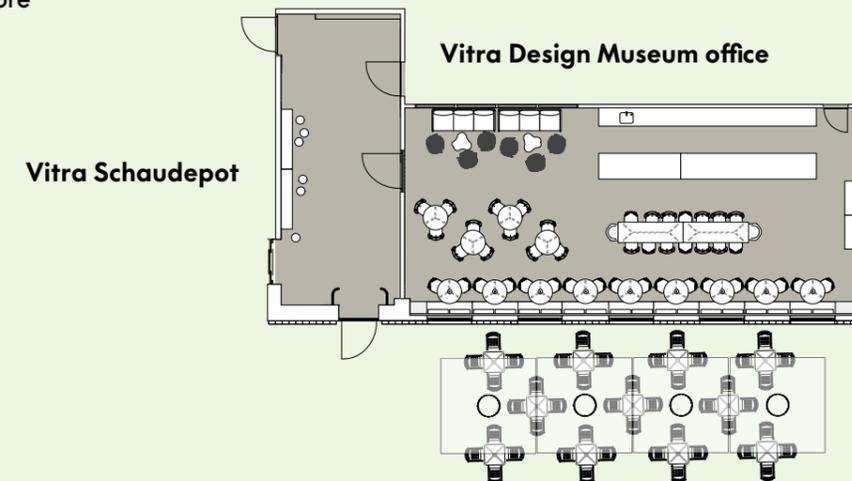
Located adjacent to the Vitra Schaudepot, the Depot Deli is a casual restaurant that offers a selection of snacks and beverages. Visitors to the Vitra Campus can enjoy them in the 130-sqm interior, on the 230-sqm outdoor terrace, or as a take-away option.



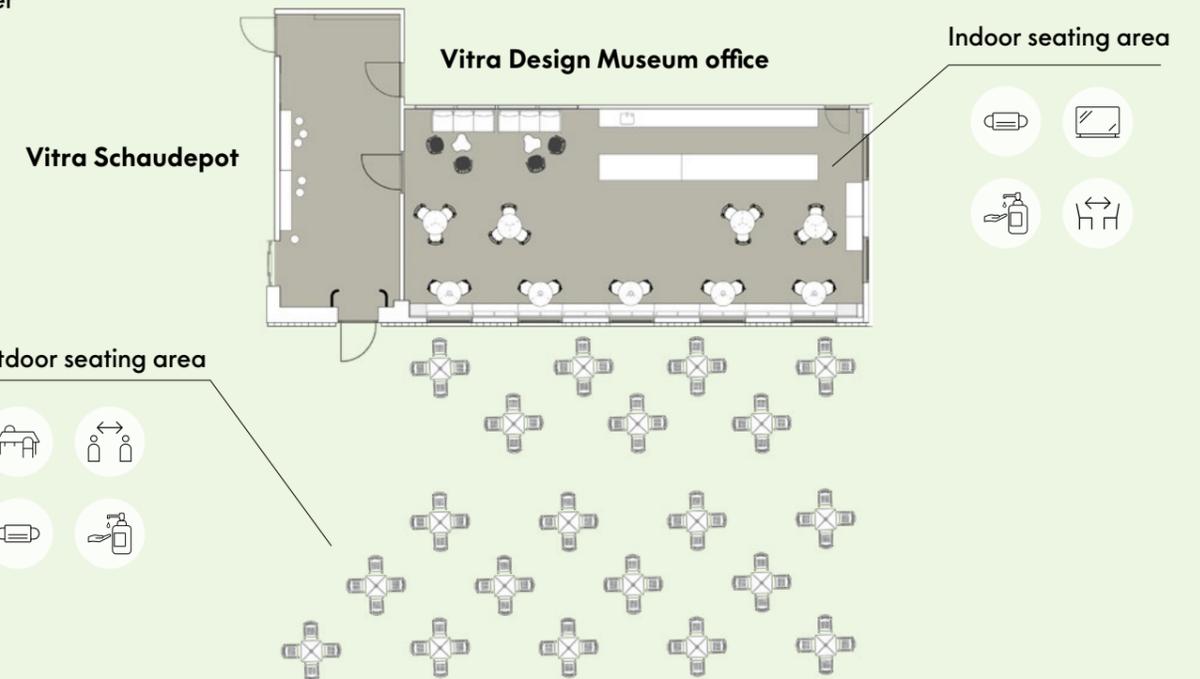
Depot Deli

Inside the Depot Deli, the seating density was reduced by removing communal tables and thinning out the lounge areas. Visitors can choose between tables with 3 or 4 chairs. The total number of indoor seats was reduced from 60 to 40. Weather permitting, it is recommended that guests use the terrace and outdoor areas. The distance between tables on the terrace has also been increased, yet it was still possible to retain all of the previous 80 outdoor seats. In both indoor and outdoor areas, the chairs and tables are cleaned and disinfected before new guests arrive.

Before



After



-  Alternate seating
-  Hygiene & disinfection
-  Protective shields
-  Face masks
-  Reduced seating
-  1.5m distance



Indoor seating before



Outdoor seating area before



Indoor seating area after



Outdoor seating area after

Architectural tours

Since 15 May 2020, guided architectural tours are again being offered on the Vitra Campus. The wearing of masks is compulsory for both visitors and tour guides. The number of participants has been reduced to 4 persons per tour to ensure a safe distance of 1.5 metres at all times.



 Face masks

 Limited admission

 1.5m distance

A conversation on the future of the workspace

with Sevil Peach

Sevil Peach was born in Turkey and studied interior architecture at Brighton University, England. She formed her London-based studio SevilPeach Architecture + Design with Gary Turnbull in 1994, after having worked for several leading architectural practices. In 2010 she collaborated on the 'Citizen Office' on the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein, and in 2015 she realised the 'Studio Office' at Vitra's headquarters in Birsfelden near Basel. In the following digital conversation, Sevil shares her insight that 'the office is here to remain, but possibly in a different format.'

Currently, many people across the world are working from home. You and your staff are among them – although as an internationally active designer, this is probably not entirely new to you. According to your experience and that of your clients, what are the benefits of this type of work, and what are the downsides?

SP Through our work prior to this crisis, we know that there has been a gradual development of the idea of part-time working from home as part of various initiatives to address employee work-life balance. Even then offices were typically only occupied to 60 or 70 percent of their capacity. So this situation is actually not

new. We also already had the ability and tools to work anywhere, anytime. In our case, we were very familiar with working remotely through managing international projects from our offices in London. But for certain types of meetings, we would still travel to meet our clients and collaborators face-to-face. So of course for us too, the current situation also brings challenges. We can't shake hands, we can't embrace, we can't come together as a team. For certain aspects of our work, telephone conversations, emails and online meetings are perfectly okay. But personal interaction is an incredibly important part of communication and for the development

and transmission of ideas and emotions. So the current situation teaches us all to distinguish which processes function well remotely, and which ones don't. Clearly, focused work has been the winner, whilst spontaneous interaction has been the loser. I hope this current situation will also teach us to be more precise in our communications, in order to avoid the constant e-mail ping-pong arising from misunderstandings.

Do you think people will continue to work from home even when the health threat eventually diminishes or subsides entirely? How will our work culture change?

SP Once the situation is clearer, more under control, and once we understand and become more experienced in operating within a potentially new framework, people may wish to continue to work from home for part of their time. I anticipate that one of the positive effects of the lockdown will be that we will have understood that working remotely can be effective in terms of output but, at the same time, how important it is to be with one's colleagues. We are often hearing from friends and colleagues that they are coping but how they really miss people. We have also now experienced that working remotely can be effective in terms of good use of one's time as well. In London, one could easily spend several hours a day travelling to and from work. So a conceivable situation might be that someone works two days from home, and comes to the office three days a week – or vice versa. As I have said in previous interviews, even before the corona crisis, the more we become free to work wherever we want, the more we need an office. We need it for a number of reasons. On a very pragmatic level, the office, whilst

it has obviously lost its monopoly as a centre of production, is the natural location to provide key infrastructure and organisational facilities that simply cannot be replicated at home. It is also a physical embodiment of the culture of an organi-



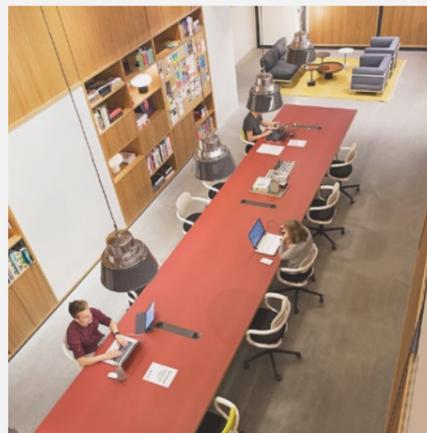
Citizen Office, Vitra Campus, Weil am Rhein

sation, as well as fulfilling a role as a social and collaborative hub. Humans thrive on face-to-face interaction. We also have an in-built reflex to place ourselves within associative constructs from which we draw support, be that family, a circle of friends, a team, an organisation or a nation. Bearing in mind that there might be exceptions, isolation, as a concept – for instance in a home office – even though it is nice to be able to shut yourself off from time to time, is not a natural long-term human situation. It does not relate to what people's needs are. The office is a place that provides the necessary interactions to encourage and foster innovation. It is where you can come together as a team, to meet our colleagues, to communicate, to collaborate, to share experiences, to learn from one another. For these reasons, I think, the office is here to remain, but possibly in a different format.

It will need to re-imagine itself. It needs to become the place you want to go to and for a particular purpose, not purely out of habit, but out of choice.

So what do you think it might look like? Will it be less about work and more about the company culture, and if so, how might this manifest?

SP I think the office, in the future, won't be just about work with a capital W. What I hope everyone will understand from this enforced experience is that 'work' is actually a matrix of actions and interaction. I hope everyone will also have experienced the validity and benefit of undertaking different tasks in different settings. In this lockdown scenario, those of us working at home are learning to organise our time and to schedule the tasks we need to undertake in a manner and in a sequence that suits us. In the course of the day we may start by responding to e-mails, then spend some



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time with the children, if it's sunny we may choose to make our telephone calls from the garden, having first put laundry in the machine, followed by further work, maybe some cooking, even a sneaky snooze.

In short, we are learning to effectively manage our time to multi-task and achieve a wide range of different goals each day. When we are able to return to our offices once it is safe to do so, it is likely that we will want to continue to enjoy this flexibility of how we organise and utilise our time and tasks.

Even before the lockdown, very few of us would sit down at our workplace at the beginning of our day and remain at it throughout the day. We constantly interact and move around to undertake varied tasks, which do not all require the same 'settings'.

I think in the future, the office will provide an even greater range of differing settings to support the tasks we need to undertake, creating more of a studio-like atmosphere, with a range of work settings, including teamwork, focused work, soft work, meetings, retreats and communication, all within a framework that supports well-being and safe social interaction. I certainly hope the days of regimented rows of desks disappearing into the horizon are over, to be replaced by a more pluralistic, people-centric and humane approach. One that defines the office as a series of 'readable' and human-scale places. I also think that the role of the office within each organisation will be challenged, particularly the idea of having 7000 people in one place every day. I am sure that many COOs and CFOs have realised just how much it costs to run an office now that these are unoccupied, and will be looking to identify what their essential roles are, as touched on above, and what can be achieved in other ways.

It was interesting to hear that before the lockdown came into effect, certain companies, in this instance in New York, were already in the process of setting up satellite hubs to avoid their employees



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needing to travel all the way into the centre of the city.

A positive effect of this could be that it leads to less traffic and reduces our collective carbon footprint, as well as providing a better work-life balance, given that burn-out is an increasingly serious concern for companies.

Lastly, a few practical questions. What is relevant in the short and in the long-term?

SP In the short term, to respond to social distancing requirements, which could be achieved by identifying who could remain working remotely and who most benefits by returning first to the office. This may mean the introduction of a schedule, where people spend part of their week in the office and partly working remotely, which will allow social distancing to naturally occur due to the reduction of numbers in the office at any one time. In the long term, it will be relevant to establish a working culture whereby the office remains a focal point, an innovation centre and a social hub.

Which mistakes should be avoided when adapting office environments to the current situation?

SP Initially, I would advise not to panic, COVID-19 is hopefully a temporary threat, rather than a constant one. So we need to

contemplate the longer term implications of the adaptations that are currently necessary to provide social distancing and respond to the health concerns of returning employees. I think we should try to avoid retrograde steps of retreating into 'defensive bubbles', thus conjuring the return to a cellular work culture.

When adapting the layout to accommodate for social distancing, which typologies are no longer needed in the 'new normal', and which ones will remain?

SP I think it is too early – and potentially detrimental – to talk about creating a 'new normal'. We all need to be aware that we are facing a developing situation. We should remain flexible, responding to it as we learn more about it. Apart from that, social distancing is another unexpected reality and is hopefully temporary. We need to assess and find creative solutions to keep employees safe without massive churn of existing typologies or products. All of the varied typologies that my team and I already have introduced as workplace solutions allow persons to choose where and how they work. So they naturally support social distancing. I never view workplaces as static but as evolving organisms, which can respond to ever-changing organisational needs of the companies and technological changes. Ultimately I think the role and size of the office as a concept will adapt and change to suit conditions.

Shared spaces

Planning examples

Hot-desking settings



Hot-desking setting 1

Tyde Cluster (with screen and distance holder), ID Air, Toolbox, Happy Bin

[Download planning example](#)



Hot-desking setting 2

WorKit (two 160 x 160 units, with front and side screen), Physix, Toolbox, Happy Bin

[Download planning example](#)

Hot-desking settings



Hot-desking setting 3

Joyn Platform (440 x 180, with front and lateral screen), Allstar, Follow Me, Toolbox, Happy Bin

[Download planning example](#)



Hot-desking setting 4

Soft Work (with high back, side panels and table), Stool E60 (Artek)

[Download planning example](#)

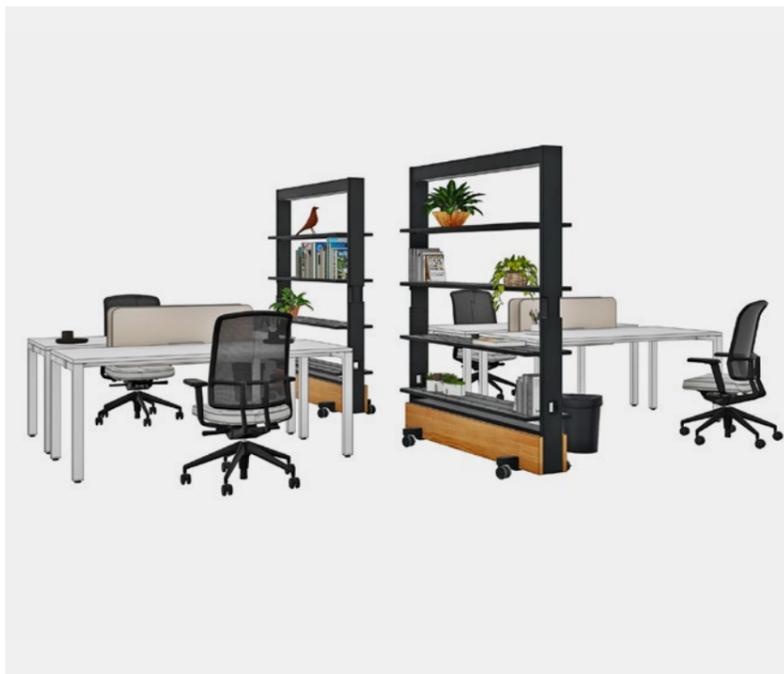
Productive workspace settings



Productive work setting 1

CDS single tables (with front screen and standing screen), ID Air, Happy Bin, O-Tidy, S-Tidy

[Download planning example](#)

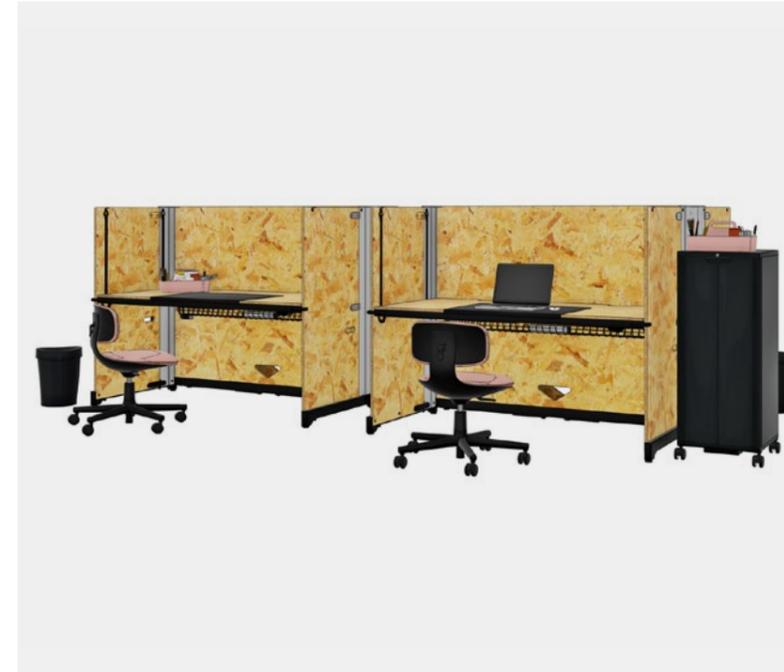


Productive work setting 2

WorKit single tables (160 x 80), Dancing Wall, AM Chair, O-Tidy, Happy Bin, Eames House Bird

[Download planning example](#)

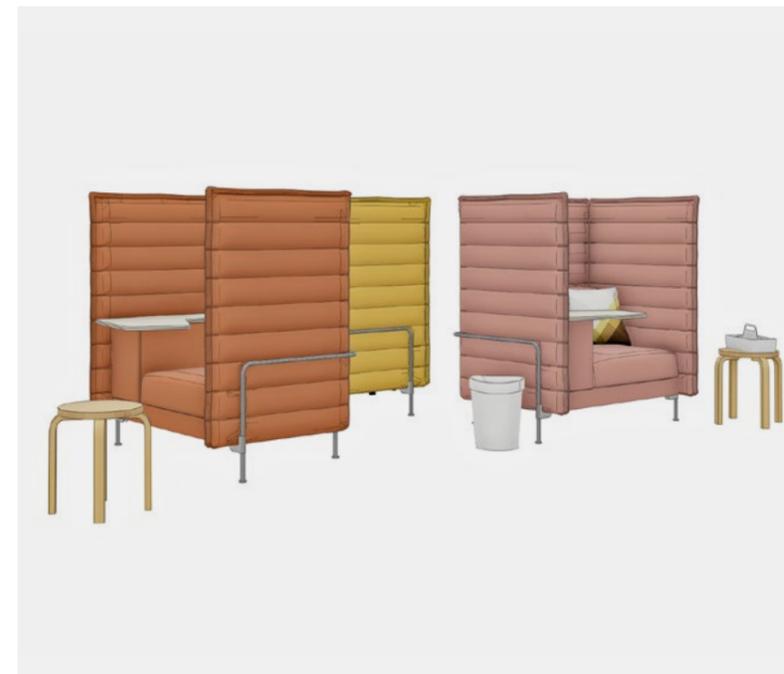
Productive workspace settings



Productive work setting 3

Hack, Rookie, Caddy, Toolbox, Happy Bin

[Download planning example](#)



Productive work setting 4

Alcove Highback Work, Stool E60 (Artek), Toolbox, Happy Bin, Herringbone Pillows

[Download planning example](#)

Issue 01 The road back to the office

Discover ready-to-use spatial solutions and carefully conceived planning approaches to successfully pave your way back to the office.

[Download the issue](#)



Let's start the conversation



We're here to help

Do you need support preparing for a successful return to your physical offices? Our teams are here to help you pave the way by developing safe workplaces and facilitating the 'next normal' with tailor-made solutions.

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