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The Intergenerational Workplace

By Savills Workplace Practice Group

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Generational diversity in the workplace

One of the many evolving complexities in today's corporate workplace is generational diversity. While definitions of groups differ slightly, we know a typical office may include members from as many as four to five generations in one setting. As companies face a pivotal moment in transitioning to a post-pandemic era, Savills recognized a timely opportunity to study generational preferences within the workplace. In late 2021, Savills' Workplace Practice Group created and distributed a survey to 943 people from Baby Boomers to Gen Z. We present the results of our survey in this report.

Our initial hypothesis assumed Gen Z would demonstrate clear and distinct preferences for working remotely and using a flexible workspace. The data gave us results far more complex than what we hypothesized. What we did find, however, was broad confirmation of principles and concepts that workplace strategists had been studying and championing for years pre-pandemic: the importance of flexibility and respect for the diverse needs of individuals in the workplace.





Why Employers Should Take Note

At the time of writing, monthly job quits remain high in knowledge sectors. Employers are pondering new ways to attract and retain talent. Corporations are choosing their next steps as the pandemic winds down, incorporating remote and hybrid models for the long term, or returning to traditional offices completely. The results of our survey show surprising consensus – and divergences – in how working through the pandemic impacted workplace preferences across age groups.

Workplaces thrive on the skills, wisdom, and talent of people across a range of ages. We believe companies that set aside assumptions and consider generational preferences, diverse or homogeneous, will build stronger, more agile, and durable workplace strategies as they navigate their return-to-office transitions in the months ahead.



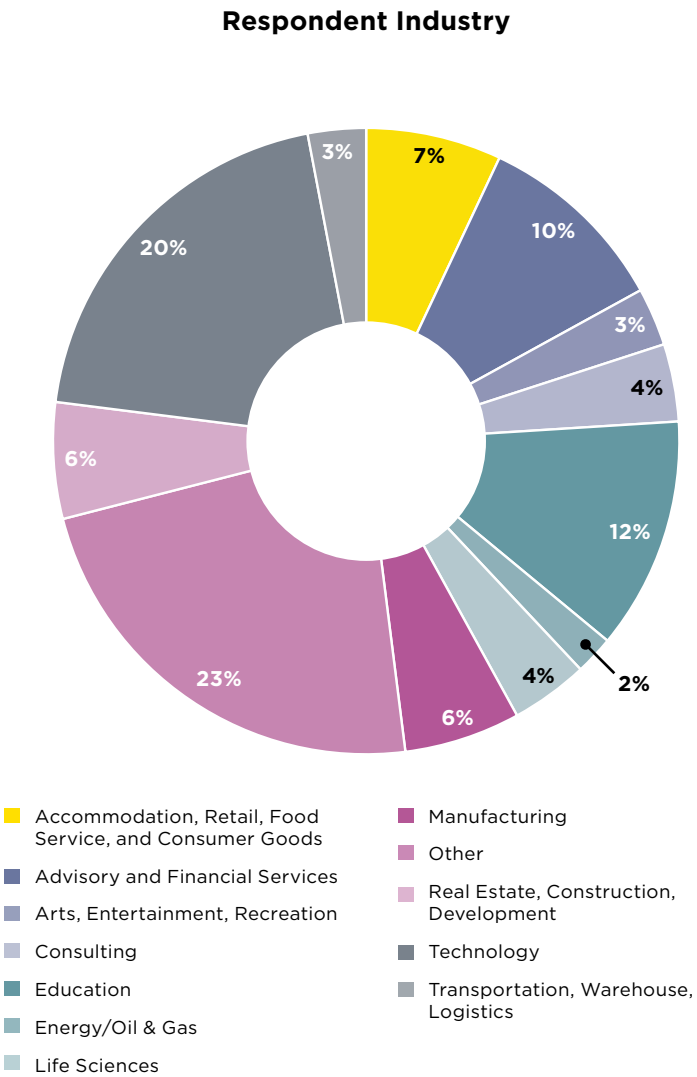
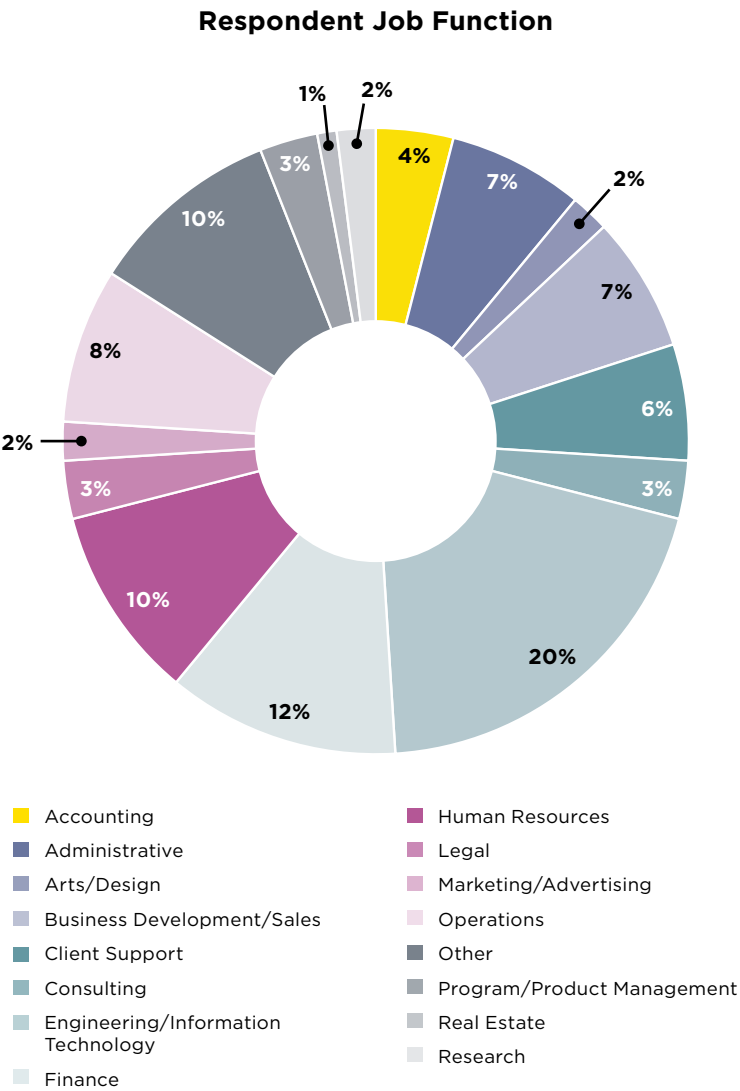
Methodology

Respondents
943

Generation Categories
Baby Boomer: 1946-1964
Gen X: 1965-1980
Millennial: 1981-1996
Gen Z: 1997-2012

Survey Questions
22

Geographical Coverage
49 States



Researchers' Note: Data was gathered and results organized by four generation categories. Neither takes into account possible variables such as stage of career. We acknowledge that age does not predict career position and that specific work roles will also affect workplace preferences.





The state of the office

After two years of largely working from home, which generations are more willing to come back to the office? Is the corporate office still relevant in an age of telecommuting? We asked respondents from each generation to share their preferences.

HIGHLIGHTS



At least 44% of all generations prefer an office environment for focus work and team interaction.



77% of Gen Z wants to return to the office either full-time or for a few days per week.



At least 67% of all generations expressed a preference for full-time office work or a hybrid arrangement.



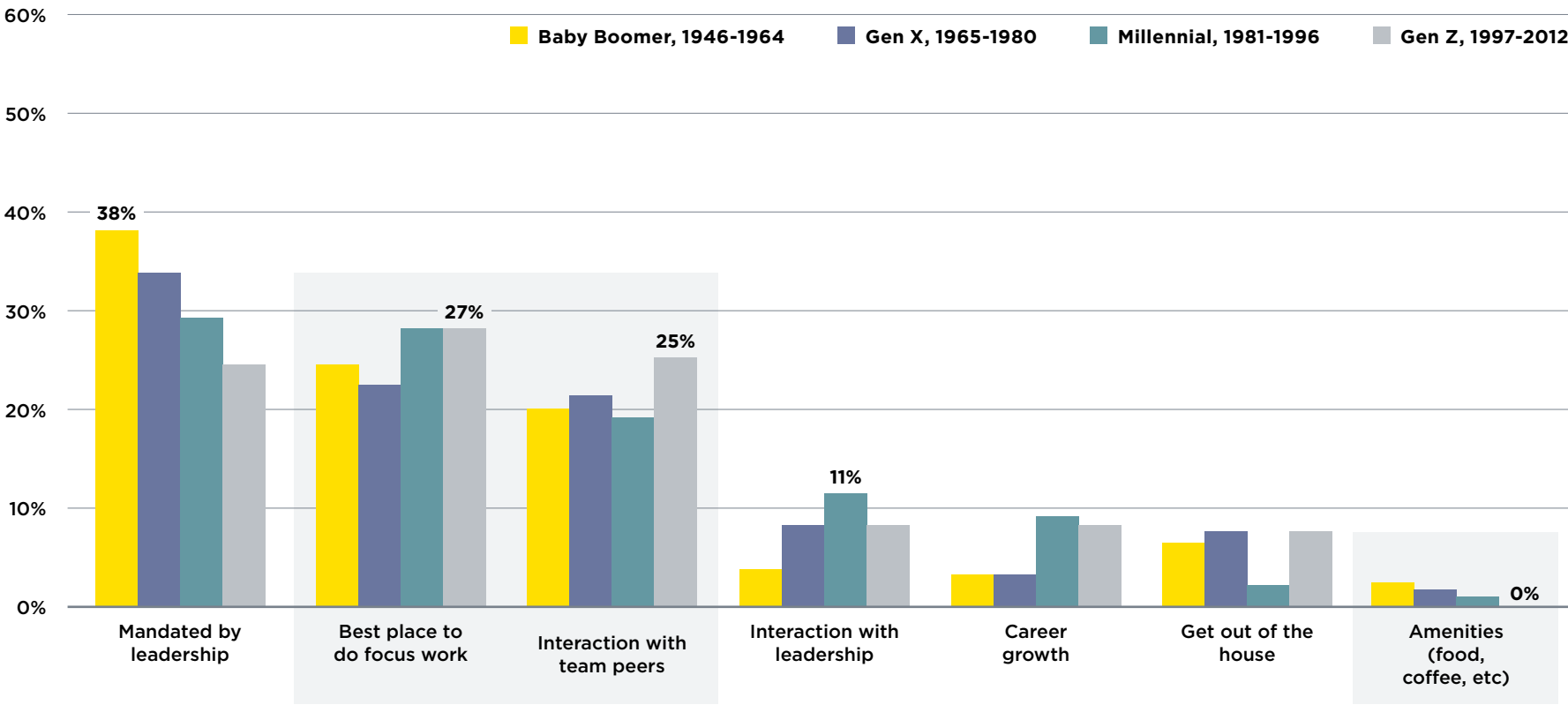
Nearly 30% of both Millennials and Gen Z said they would not accept a new job that requires going into the office five days per week, even with a 10% raise.

Focus and team interaction, not amenities, give the office its purpose for all generations.

We asked respondents to tell us their greatest motivating factors for coming into the office prior to the pandemic. After “mandated by management,” **focus work and interaction with peers received the most votes across generations.**

Amenities were the least popular reason to come into the office across all generations.

Prior to the pandemic, which best describes your biggest motivator for coming into the office?

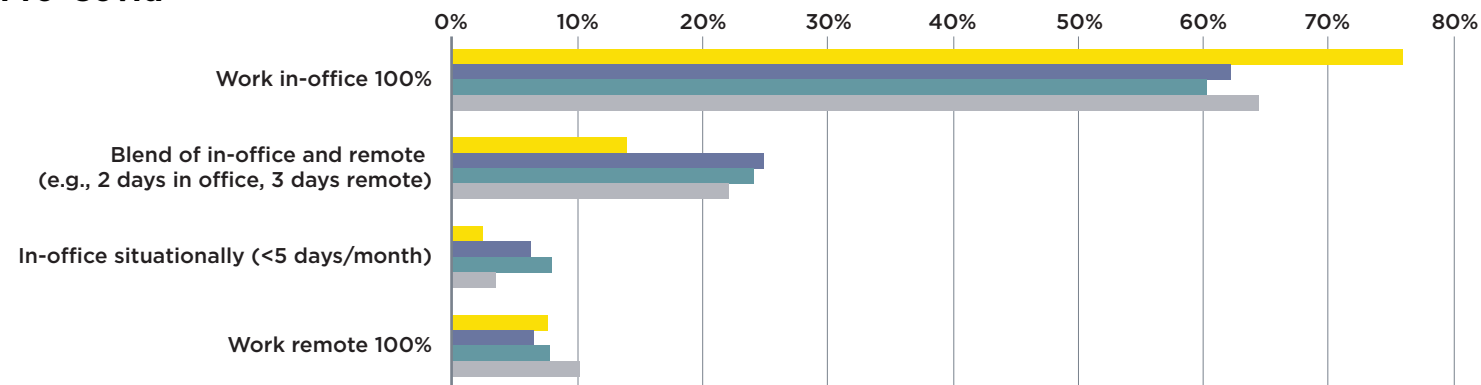


Gen Z shows the strongest preference for working in offices. Hybrid has universal appeal.

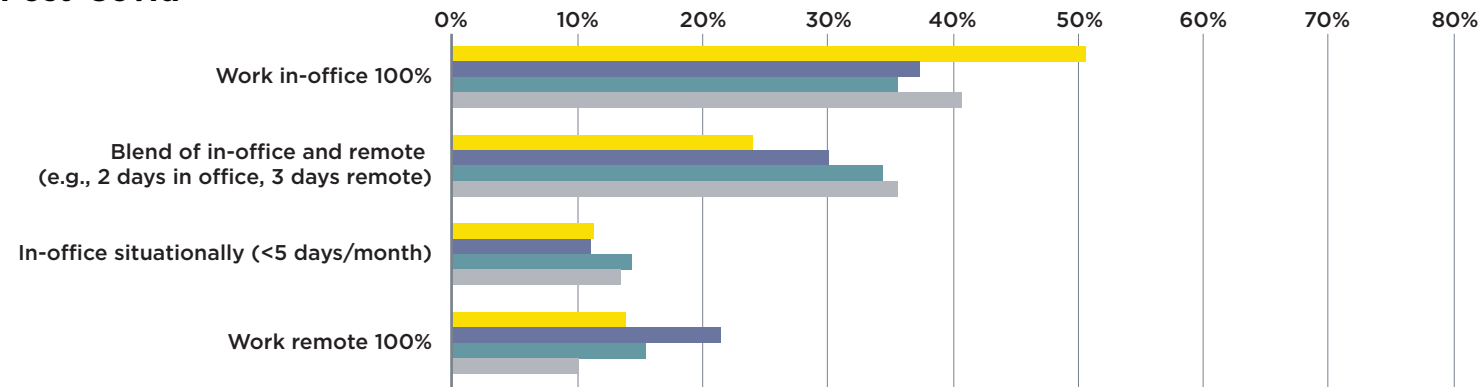
While results showed an overall decrease in desire to work from the office 100% of the time across all generations, **Gen Z emerged as the most likely generation to return to the office post-Covid in some capacity (either 100% of the time, for part of the week or a few days a month)**. Baby Boomers were the most likely to return to the office 100% of the time. Gen Z was also the least likely to work remote 100% of the time. This aligns with recent research showing younger workers disproportionately feeling disconnected or set back by lack of in-person interaction during the pandemic.

However, other results indicated that **post-Covid, hybrid will gain traction as a preferred way of working**. Results for post-Covid preferences show an overall increase in preference for hybrid environments compared to pre-Covid situations. Those currently working in hybrid work environments expect it to continue post-pandemic, across all generations.

Pre-Covid



Post-Covid



■ Baby Boomer, 1946-1964 ■ Gen X, 1965-1980 ■ Millennial, 1981-1996 ■ Gen Z, 1997-2012

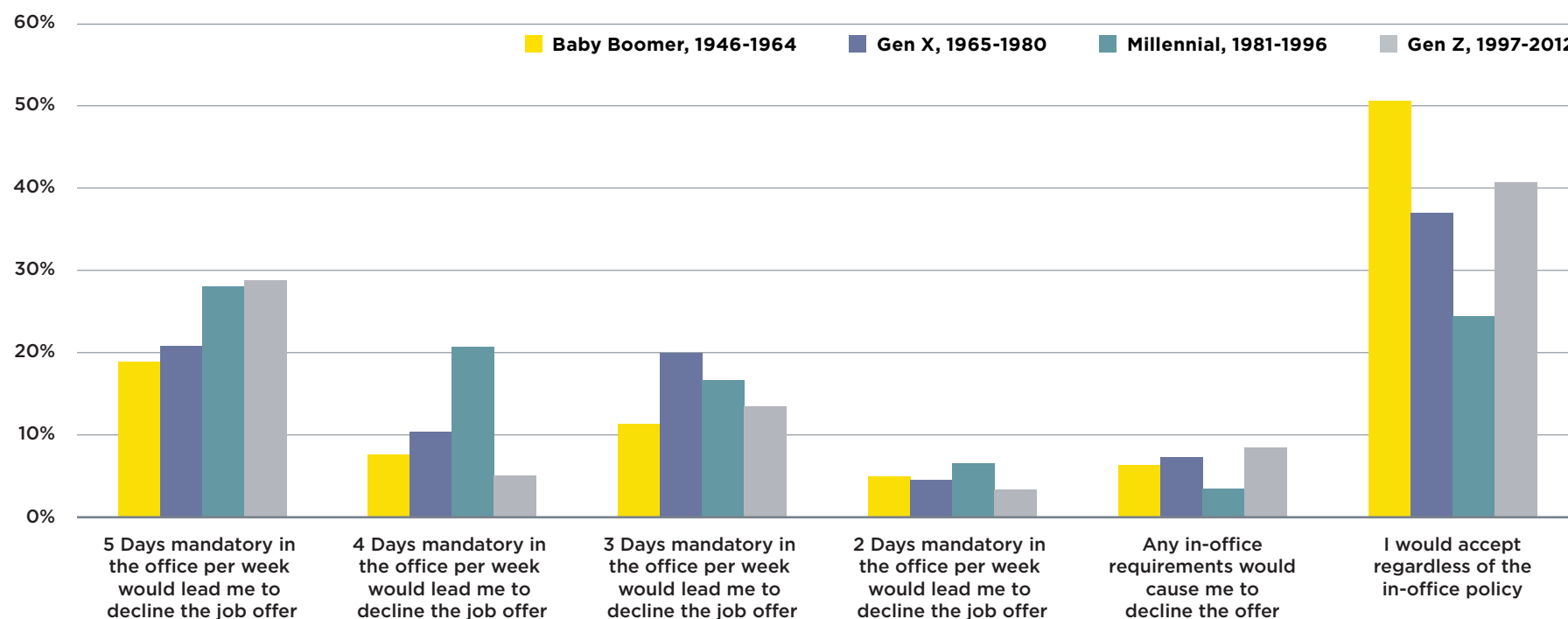
Five days a week in the office will no longer be universally accepted.

Nearly 30% of both Millennials and Gen Z said they would not accept a job, even with a 10% raise, that required going into the office five days/week.

Around 20% of Baby Boomers and Gen X said the same.

Millennials appeared to be most influenced by in-office requirements. They were the least likely of all generations, at 24%, to say they would accept a job regardless of in-office requirements, while between 37% and 51% of the other three generations said the same.

In a hypothetical situation, you are open to accepting a new job and you are offered a new role that pays 10% more than your current position at a reputable company nearby. What in-office policy would cause you to no longer accept the role?





Workplace design features

Office design and features have evolved significantly over the past 20 years, becoming dramatically more open, varied, and focused on amenities and wellness space. We were interested to know if sentiment across generations has kept up with those changes, or if different age groups would express different preferences. What we found was broad generational alignment on work settings and functions, with diverging preferences around amenities.

HIGHLIGHTS



All generations spend **at least 30% of their day collaborating**.



Baby Boomers spend **47% of their time doing focus work**, the highest of all generations.



Gen Z and Millennials chose to recharge in an **office space**, while Baby Boomers and Gen X prefer to **recharge outside of the office**.



All generations expressed a **strong preference for enclosed space** for most type of work.



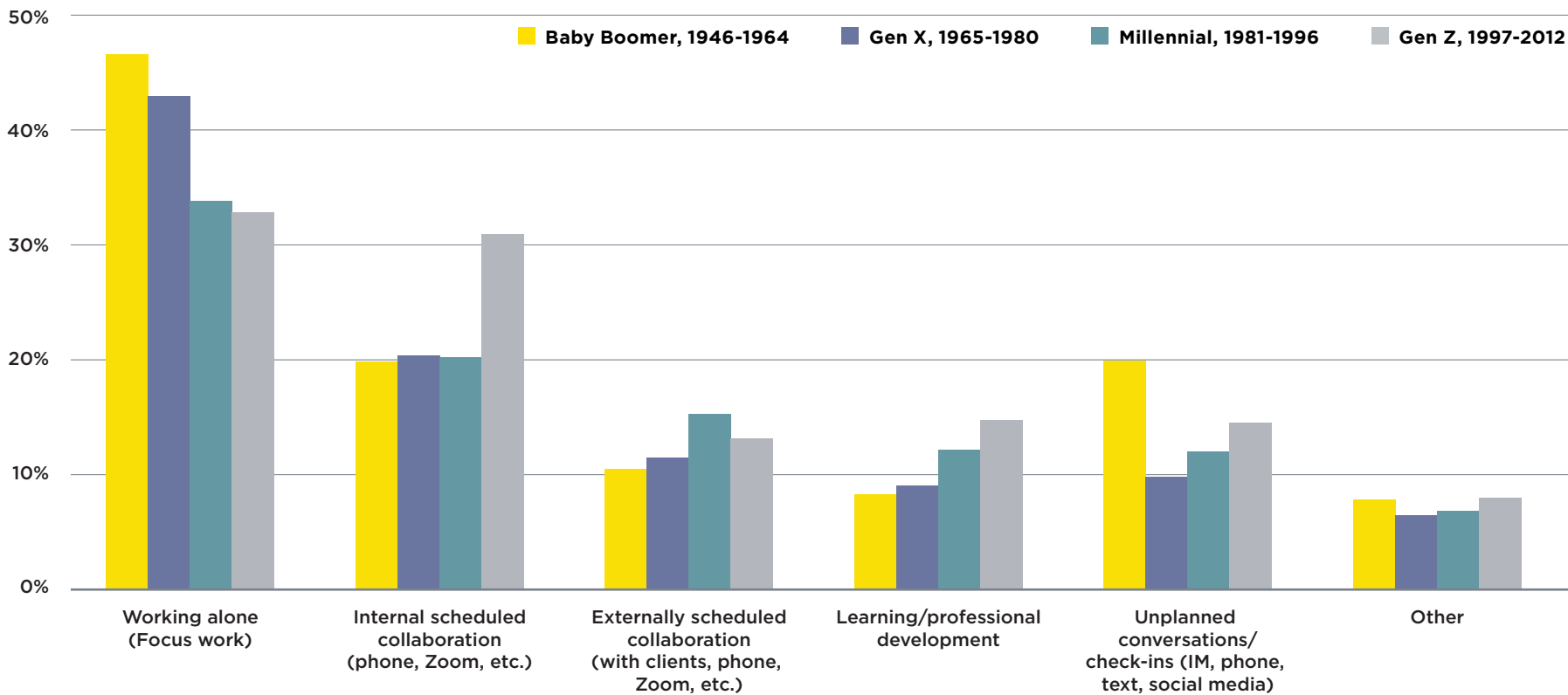
Baby Boomers and Gen X **prefer convenience-related amenities**; Millennials and Gen Z **prefer wellness and social amenities**.

Collaboration accounts for roughly one-third of people’s workday.

We asked respondents to describe their current balance of focus and collaboration time at work. Baby Boomers were the generation most likely to spend nearly half their day doing focus or individual work, with Gen X close behind. On the other end of the spectrum, Gen Z spends 10% more of their day in internal collaborative meetings than all other generations.

Overall, all generations spend more than 30% of their day collaborating, internally or externally with clients.

Currently, what does your typical day look like? (Please input a % of your total time - must add up to 100%)



Preferred Space Types

All generations prefer enclosed spaces for most types of work.

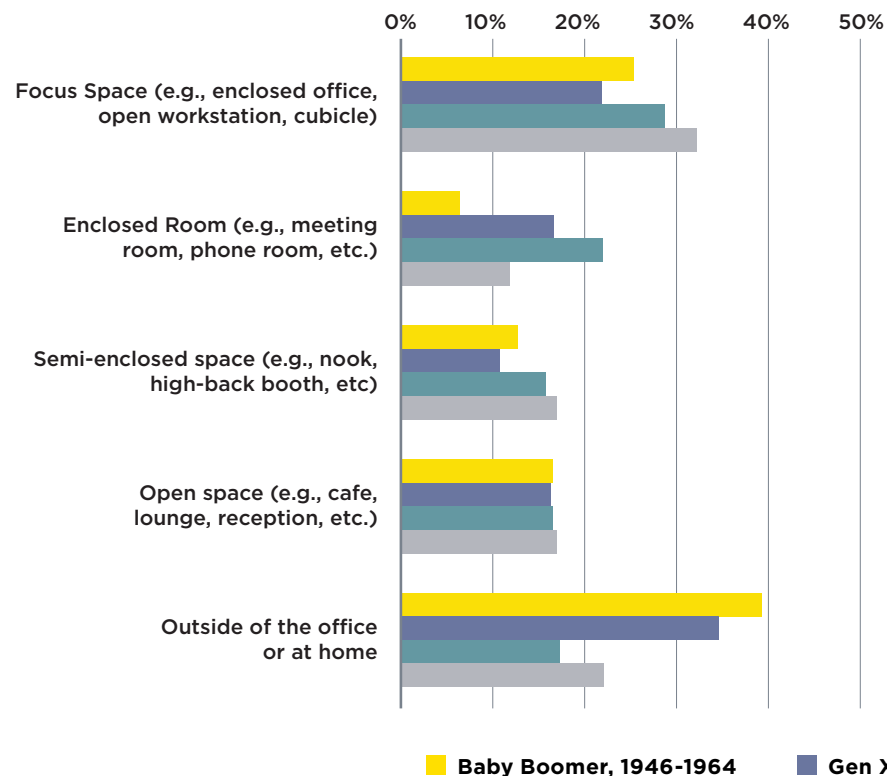
All generations expressed the strongest preference for enclosed spaces for most types of work.

For individual and focus work, scheduled in-person collaboration, video conferencing, and addressing challenging problems, spaces such as private offices, cubicles, or enclosed meeting rooms (e.g., huddle rooms, phone booths, etc.) won the highest preference.

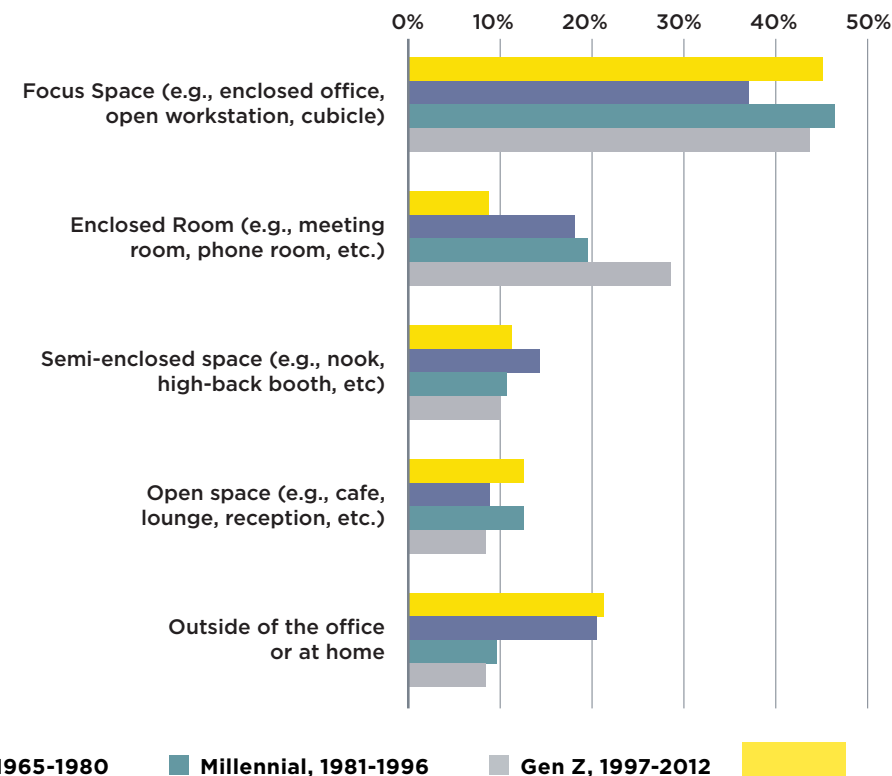
Respondents of all generations expressed the greatest favor for open spaces in situations of wanting to remain accessible to others or impromptu conversations. In the category of “when I need to recharge,” Boomers and Gen X are more inclined to leave the office, while Millennials and Gen Z are more likely to find a focus space.

When it is safe to return to the physical office, please indicate your ideal workspace for the following scenarios.

WHEN I NEED TO RECHARGE



FOCUS WORK



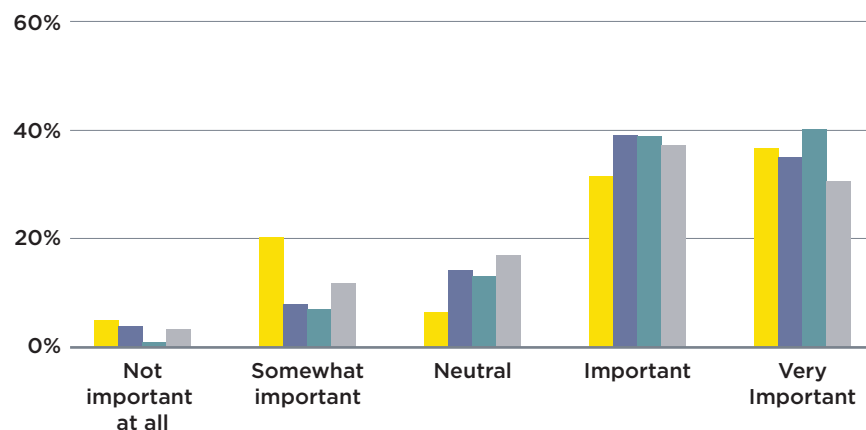
Comfort, privacy, and access to daylight are the most important workplace features across generations.

We asked respondents to identify the most important environmental features within the workplace. **Across all generations, the most practical features, such as acoustic and thermal comfort, ranked the highest.** Quiet/privacy, comfort and temperature, access to daylight, and access to relevant technology all achieved high percentages in favor, with Gen Z expressing the highest preference for privacy.

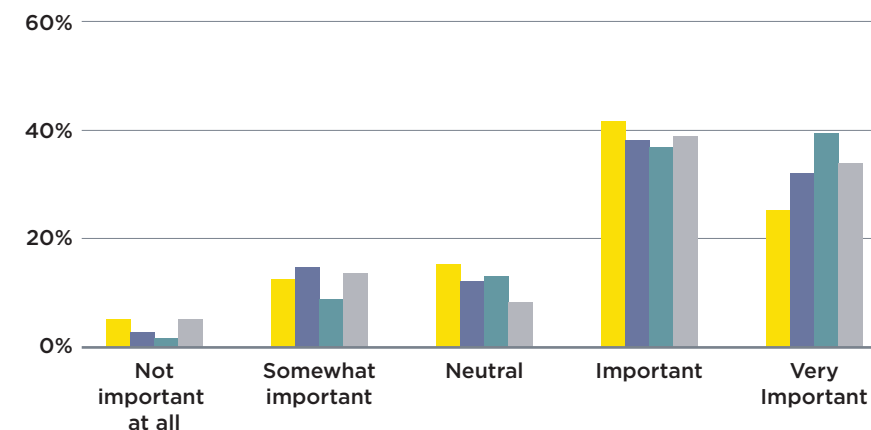
Millennials expressed the highest preferences for aesthetic features such as general décor and plants/greenery.

How important are the following features to you in the workplace?

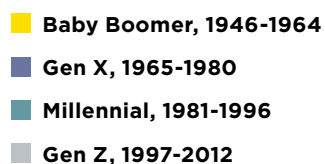
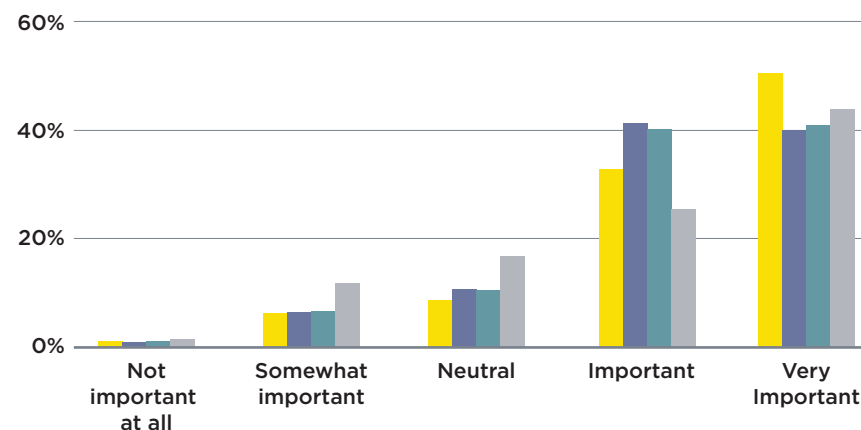
MINIMAL NOISE



COMFORT AND ERGONOMICS



WORK SPACE TECHNOLOGY



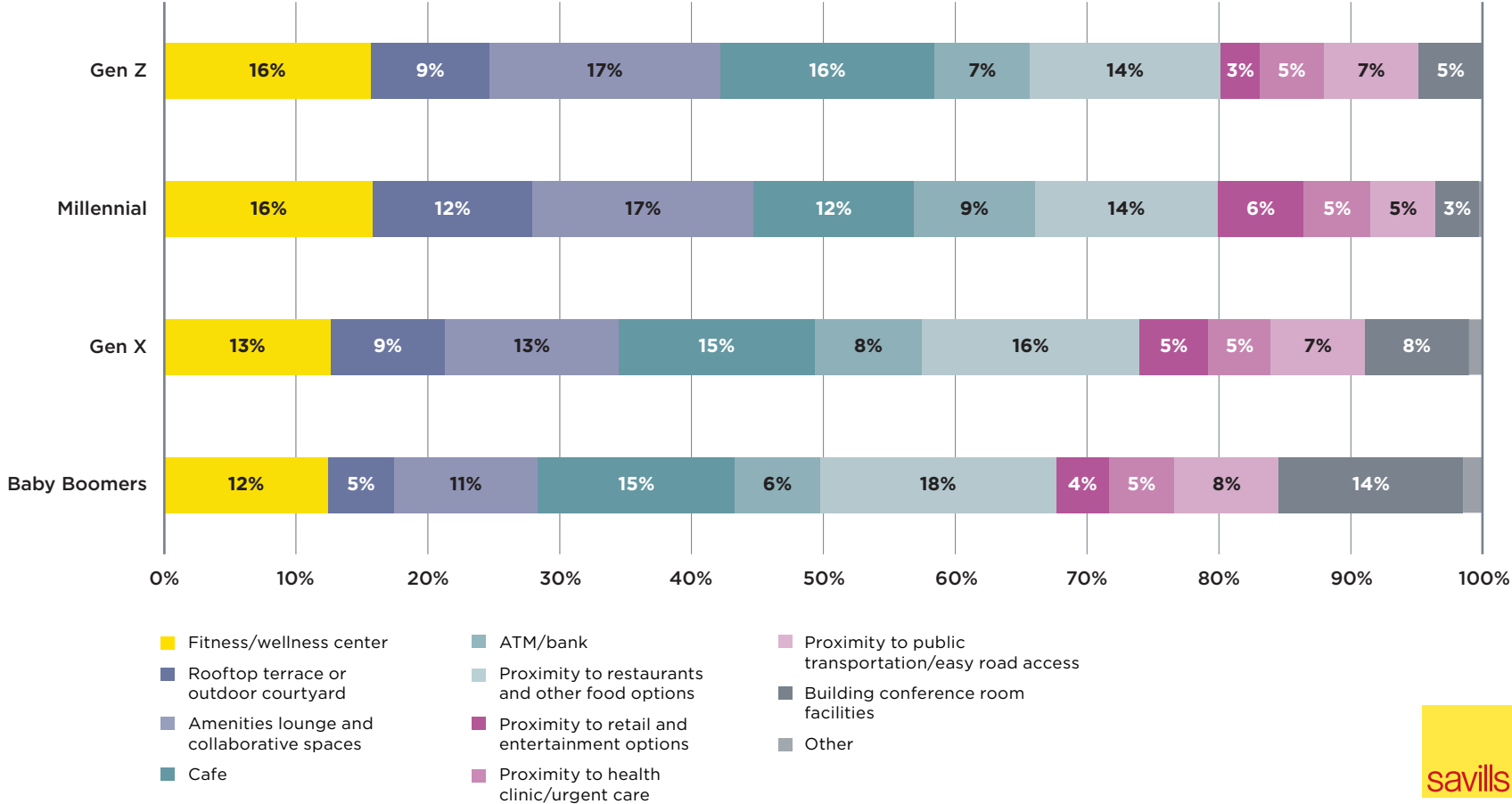
Baby Boomers and Gen X prefer convenience; Gen Z and Millennials prefer wellness and social space.

Office amenities are frequently promoted as an extra incentive for people to come into the office. We asked respondents to think about which features they find the most important. Here we found a generational split.

Baby Boomers expressed the strongest preferences for proximity to food, restaurants, cafes, conference spaces, and public transportation. Gen X was closely aligned with Baby Boomers in most categories.

While cafe proximity was important to Gen Z, **both Gen Z and Millennials showed stronger preferences for fitness and wellness facilities, amenity lounges, and collaborative space** as compared to the older generations.

Please choose up to 3 building amenities you find most important, even if they are not available in your current building.





Workplace policies & resources

In a time of fierce competition for talent, corporations are under pressure to increase the value of their offerings to attract and retain good employees. We wanted to understand what matters most to each generation beyond the features of the physical office. We uncovered a few core principles that all generations value roughly the same.

HIGHLIGHTS



At least 80% of respondents from each generation value a company that prioritizes work-life balance for employees.



Email was the most preferred work tool across all generations, followed by in-person communication.



A third or more of Baby Boomers and Gen X employees are not getting the level of mentorship they desire.

Work life balance is important, but compensation matters too.

At least 80% of respondents from each generation value a company that prioritizes work-life balance for employees.

Competitive compensation and benefits, along with a commitment to employees' health and well-being, also topped the list of values for the three older generations, showing to be slightly less popular, though still nearly as important to Gen Z.

"Cosmetic" factors such as amenities offering, "cool location", a modern office, and technology and innovation showed to be the most important to Millennials.

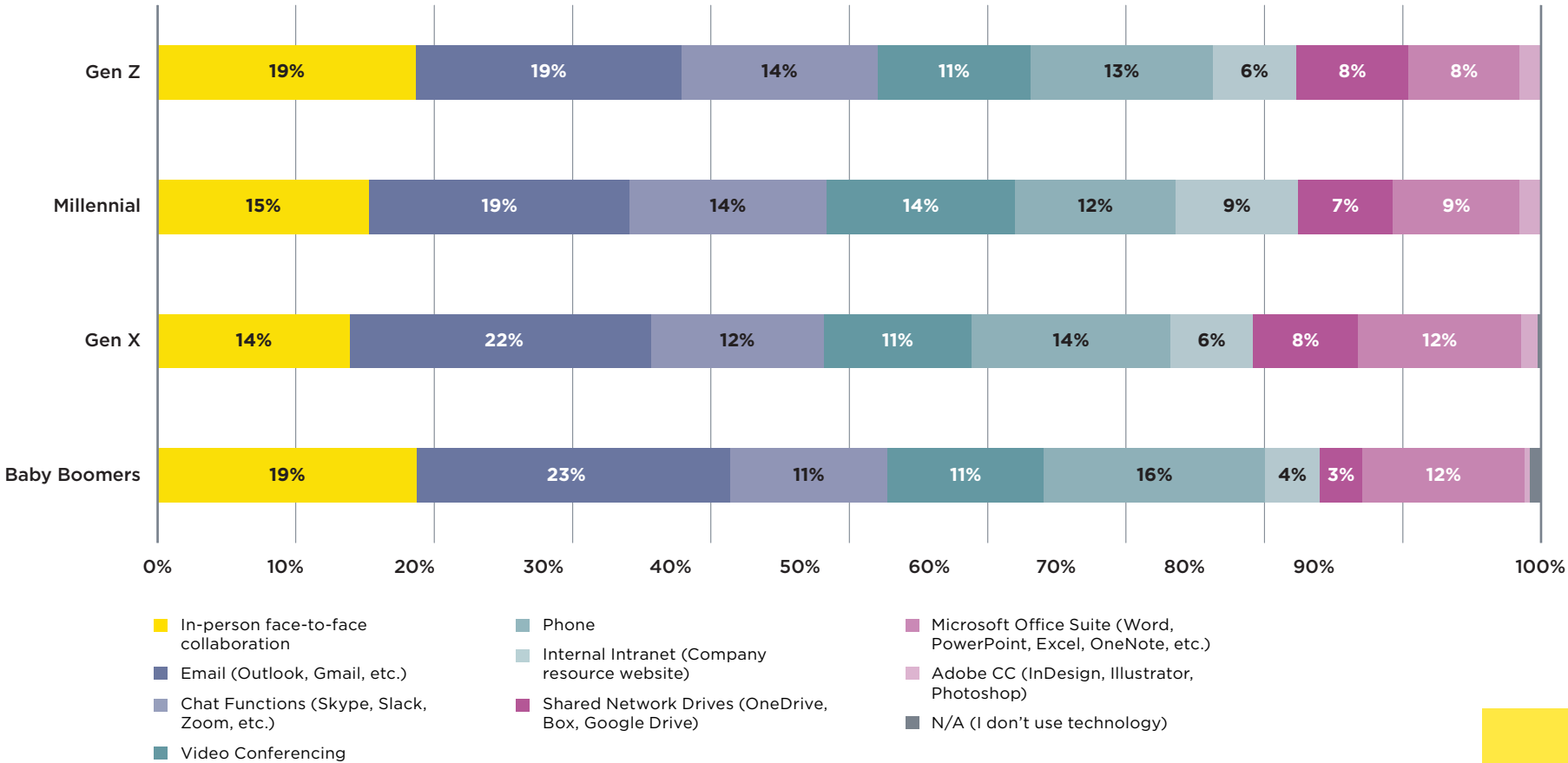
How important are the following values and offerings to you in an employer?



When it comes to productivity, “old-fashioned” tools still reign supreme.

Generational preferences around work tools were consistent. Despite the widespread use of a variety of electronic collaboration platforms, **each generation showed stronger preferences for either in-person or email communications.** The preference for in-person collaboration is notable considering our survey was issued during the pandemic when home working was predominant. Baby Boomers and Gen X reported finding email the most useful of all generations.

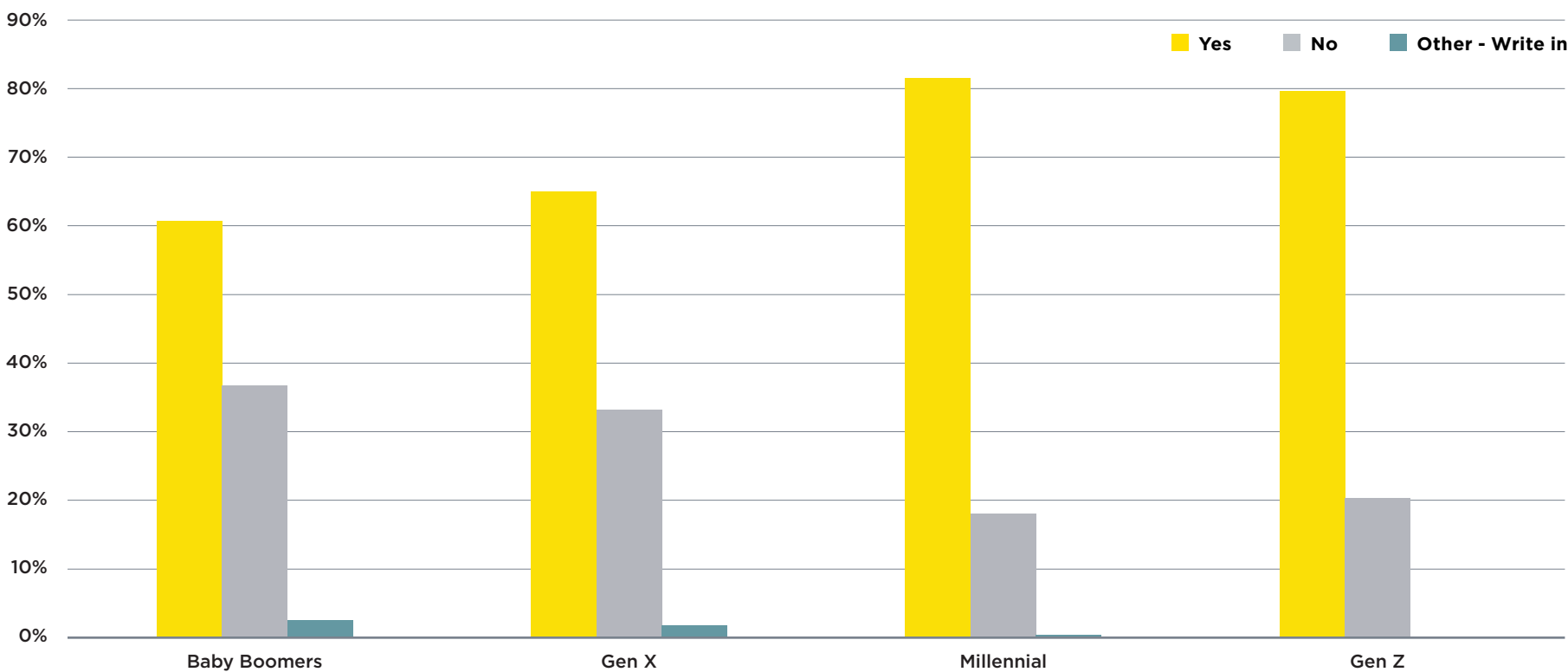
What tools do you find most useful for your work? (Choose up to 4)



Older generations are lacking the mentorship they desire.

When asked about mentorship, both Gen Z and Millennials overwhelmingly felt that they are getting the desired level of mentorship for the job. **Gen X and Baby Boomers were more likely to say they were not getting the desired level of mentorship.** This may indicate a strong bias toward mentoring younger employees within companies. While this intuitively makes sense, it may disregard the need for professional development and guidance at all ages.

Do you feel you are currently getting the level of mentorship you desire?





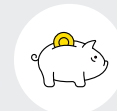
Lessons to learn

Working from home offered employees a different perspective on the 9-to-5 life. We asked all generations to indicate the advantages they experienced as a result of this change in environment. We believe many of the top-ranked aspects are translatable to the corporate office environment as companies move forward with return-to-office plans.

HIGHLIGHTS



Gen Z and Millennials enjoy flexibility in working hours as their top reason to work from home.



Gen X prefers home working for lack of commute and associated cost savings.

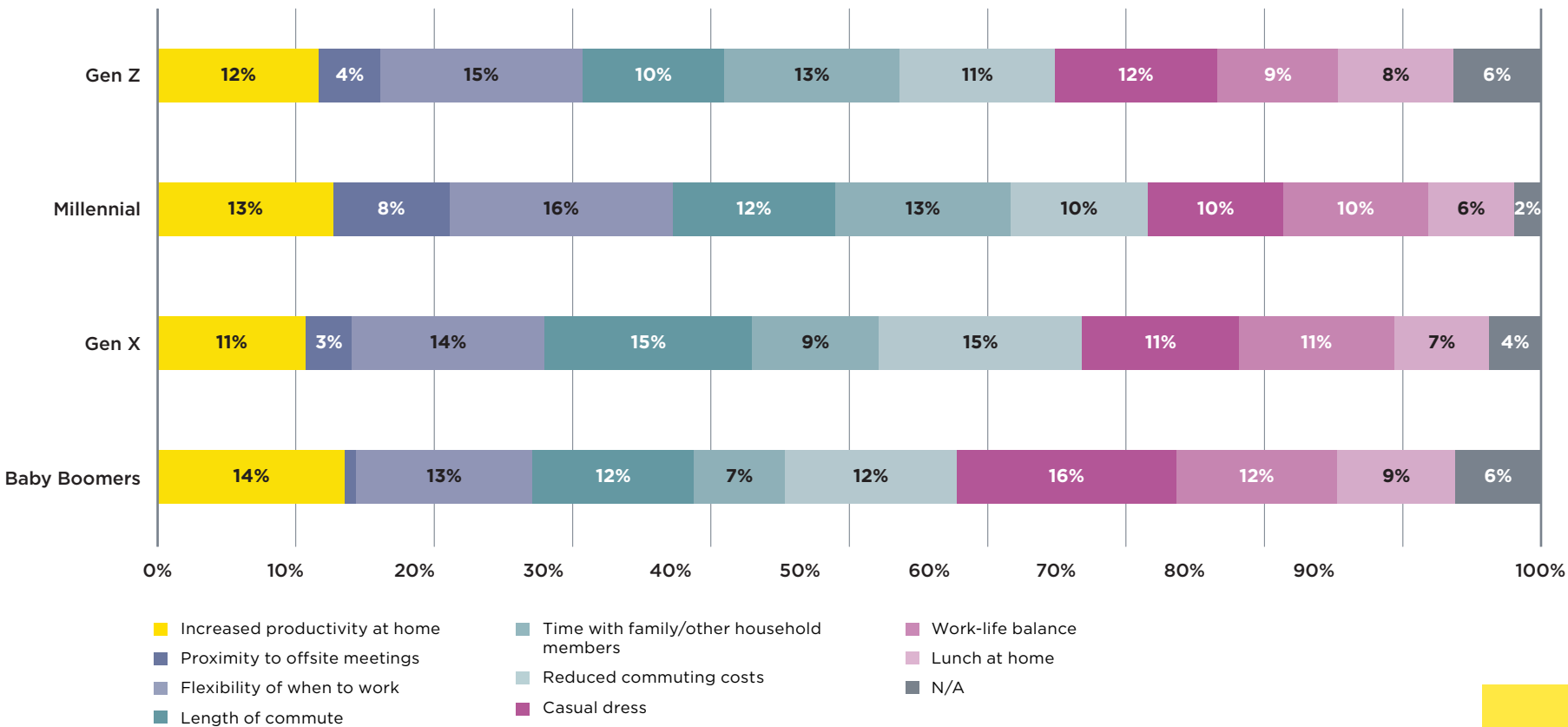


Baby Boomers prefer home working for casual dress.

Work/life balance, flexibility, and financial concerns drove preferences for working from home across most generations.

While employees indicated many benefits of working from home, issues around work/life balance and finances topped preferences across generations. **Gen X showed a strong preference for reduced commute time and cost** that comes with home working. **Millennials and Gen Z indicated flexibility in the schedule** as their top advantage of working from home, and **Baby Boomers found casual dress** to be the most liked aspect of working from home.

Please identify what you like most about working from home: Choose up to 5. Choose N/A if you don't work from home currently.



Conclusions

Employees are looking for real change after a period that sparked a wholesale re-evaluation of the status quo. They are moving where they are treated best, leading to a tight labor market and a renewed focus on making changes that cater to employee needs. As competition for talent stays hot, we recommend employers consider the following takeaways of this survey:

THE STATE OF THE OFFICE

Flexibility means different things to different people. Employers can respect generational diversity by surveying their workforce and adopting policies that best fit their specific work culture.

Offering flexible work policies will give each generation a route to achieving greater autonomy and personal preferences – whether it's for Gen Z, who prefers more time in the office and spends more time collaborating, or Baby Boomers, who indicated using the most heads-down work time. A flexible office that offers a range of options to support every work style, function, and schedule will provide a strong support structure for flexibility.

Most people do not want to work remotely five days a week.

Whether it's for focus work or interaction with colleagues, employees across generations still see the relevance of going into the office. On the flip side, few expressed wanting to go back to the office for five days a week. Working from home can provide a useful counterbalance to in-office work, but it is largely not preferred as a full-time option.



WORKPLACE DESIGN FEATURES

Despite the pervasiveness of open plan, enclosed space never really went out of style (with employees):

Respondents of all ages indicated that private, enclosed space is a primary reason to use a physical office location. Employers can nurture productivity and good morale with a variety of space types – making sure privacy is a prominent option in the floor plan, whether it's assigned or unassigned.

Generations are split on amenities, but not on the fundamentals:

All generations agreed on the importance of the basics in a good office: comfort, privacy, access to light, and the baseline tools to communicate and get their jobs done. Before employers invest in amenities or extras, they should make sure that the physical fundamentals of the workplace are strong and productivity-centered. Most importantly, they should talk to their employees to assess preferences and respond accordingly.

Conclusions

WORKPLACE POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Making a good living still matters, but all employees are craving balance:

Good pay and benefits are still a primary concern across generations, but respondents of all ages indicated they value an employer who prioritizes health, well-being and work/life balance. Work-from-home (WFH) policies need not be the sole route to achieving balance. Companies should survey its employees to find out exactly what they need.

It's not just Gen Z who needs mentorship.

A third or more of Baby Boomers and Gen X indicated they are not getting the mentorship they desire. Learning happens at all stages of a career. Employers must remember to offer professional development and mentorship opportunities that welcome all ages and career levels.

ADVANTAGES OF WORKING FROM HOME

Not everything that is good about WFH is exclusive to the home.

Employers can bring the “wins” of WFH into the office:

Many of the top-ranked aspects of working from home, such as flexible hours and casual dress, are translatable to the office environment. Employers should talk to their employees to learn about which WFH advantages resonated best and strategize how to make them a permanent fixture of office culture.





Contacts

Rebecca Humphrey

Head of North America
Workplace Practice Group
+1 845 642 2140
rhumphrey@savills.us

Alli Hochberg

Senior Workplace Strategist
+1 646 477 2566
ahochberg@savills.us

Tavar Blake

Associate Workplace Strategist
+1 212 326 1000
tblake@savills.us

savills.us

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