

Blueprint for a Better Office

Research reveals four high-impact fixes

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A workplace can look great. But what really defines a good day is whether it helps people get work done. Most U.S. leaders (96%) say they're making changes — or plan to — in the next few years to improve their spaces and better support their teams. But new Steelcase research in nine countries reveals those efforts aren't landing where they matter most.

Employees identify four critical gaps holding the office back. Targeted improvements in these areas, even subtly at first, can make a meaningful difference right away.

The obligation office

Globally, the number one reason people say they go to the office isn't to do their best work — it's because they're required to.

The office needs to support what matters

One likely reason why: across the board, people are not happy with how their spaces support what they think is most important. Gaps are sizable and have a real impact.

Enhancing spaces to address four specific gaps — wellbeing, focus, screen time and privacy — significantly improves how people feel about the workplace.

1. ADDRESS WELLBEING: THE BIGGEST NEED

When asked what they most want improved in the office, employees overwhelmingly cite wellbeing as their #1 request. Data show the biggest boosts to wellbeing come from improving a range of spaces for focus, collaboration and connection.

2. FIX FOCUS

On average, people spend two-thirds of their day working alone, yet they are not happy with the spaces they have available for focus work.

Supporting focus work starts with offering people a wider range of options — even simple additions like nearby pods or partial enclosures can make a meaningful difference. For individual workstations, the features that matter most are visual and acoustic privacy, adjustable lighting and intuitive, easy-to-use furniture, according to Steelcase research.

Variety throughout the office also plays a major role, giving people different places to settle in depending on the type of focus they need (Are you answering email? Or developing a new point of view?).

3. MANAGE THE SCREEN EFFECT

Screens now dominate the workday, with people reporting 71% of their screen time is spent alone. And too much screen time leads to lower engagement.

As AI accelerates and reshapes work in ways we're only beginning to understand, these patterns signal a growing need to rethink how people connect, collaborate and find meaning in their day.

Spaces need to support screen-based work well, but also should encourage people to step away from screens with places for rejuvenation and human connection. This includes designing environments that restore attention and invite people to do what AI can't – be fully present with others.

4. ADD MORE PRIVACY

Privacy is key to addressing wellbeing, focus and screen time.

So what's the issue?

Employees point to a range of privacy needs beyond being able to just shut a door.

Privacy isn't one thing but a spectrum of needs. Workplaces that offer a range of solutions, from simple, easily added elements to more immersive settings, allow people to get the right level of privacy when they need it.

What People Need

Early signals point to a powerful lever most people don't have — access to a variety of spaces (three or more) that support different kinds of work. And those who do, report higher levels of:

- +14% Higher engagement
- +16% Stronger sense of community
- +13% Improved wellbeing

The message is clear. When workplaces support how people actually work in different ways throughout the day, people perform better and feel better. And that's what turns the office into a place people want to be.

Data Source:

Steelcase Global Employee Research December 2025