

# Work. Place. Blurred.

EVERYTHING WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT THE  
CONNECTION BETWEEN WORK AND PLACE

HUGO

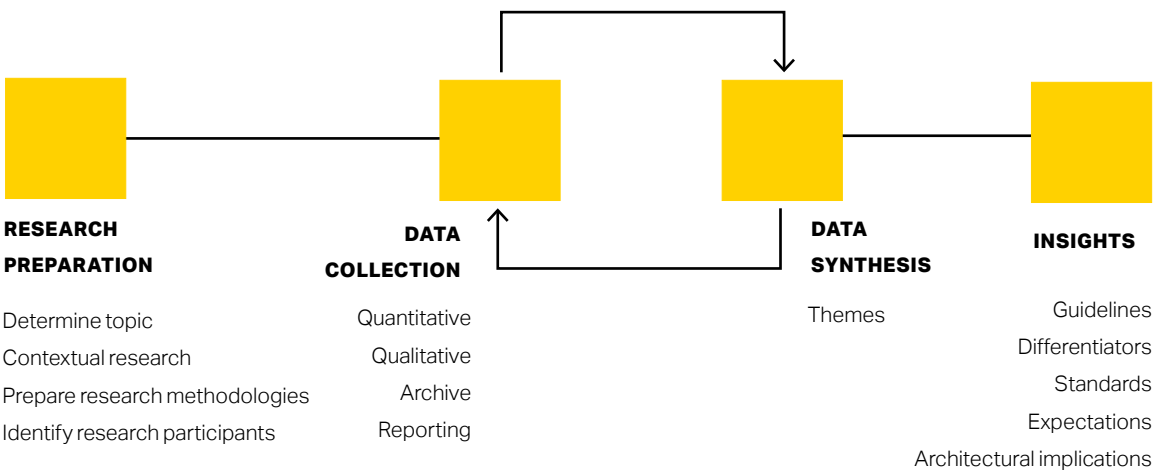


# Executive Summary

In September 2020, Corgan’s workplace strategists completed a qualitative research study to better understand the work from home (WFH) experience forced upon so many due to COVID-19 and how it compares to working from the office. Sometimes referred to as “thick data,” qualitative research studies try to communicate what’s meaningful in people’s lives. It doesn’t just capture facts, but the context of those facts, in order to gain a deeper understanding of people’s needs. In this case, Corgan’s research team set out to understand what it’s been like to work remotely over the past six months and how this experiment could inform future office design.

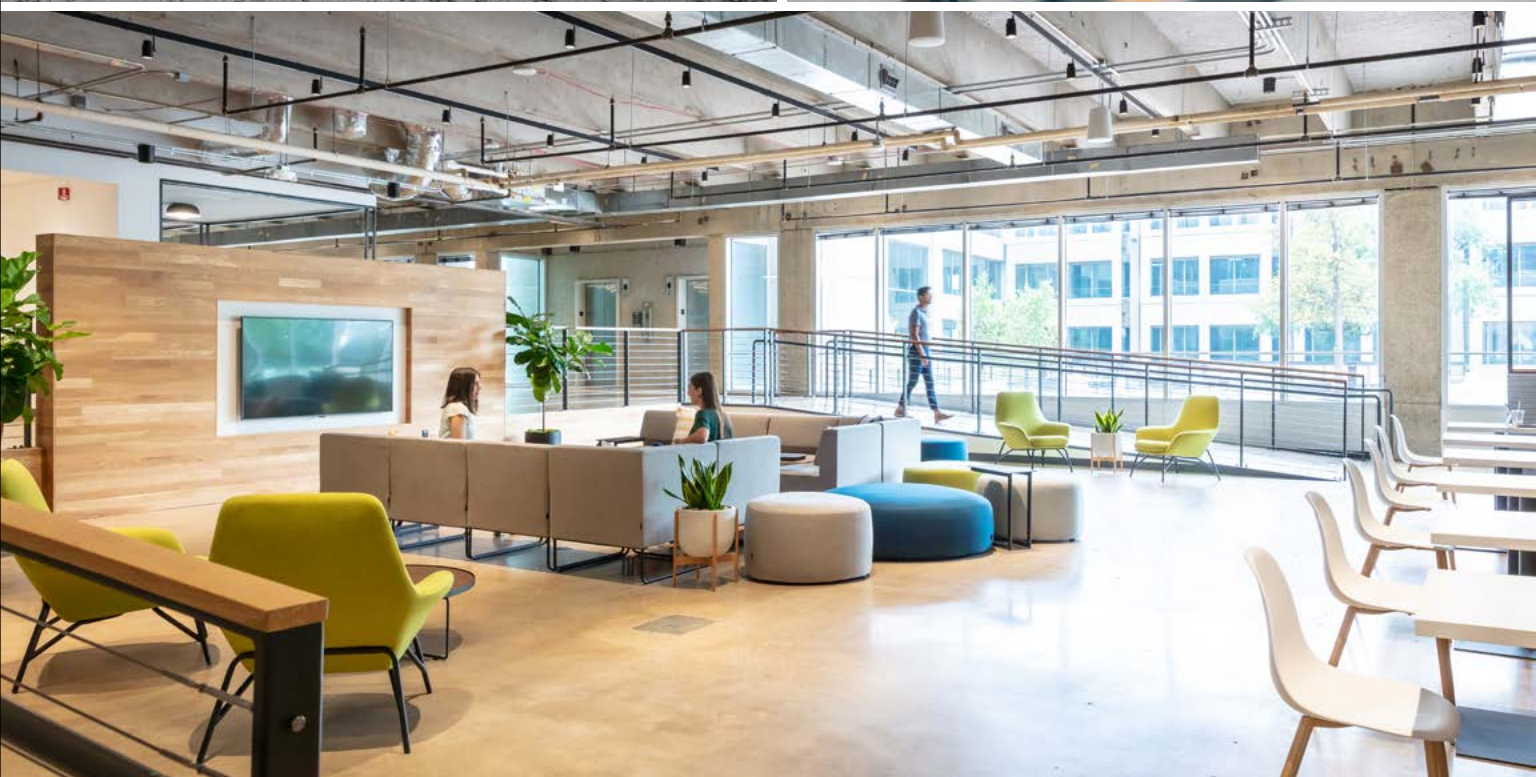
Using design research methodologies, the team conducted a total of 50 in-depth interviews with workers across the United States. These workers were broken down into two main audiences — those who are working from home exclusively (Remote Workers) and those who are splitting their time between home and office (Hybrid Workers). The study also compared managerial perspectives with individual contributors across both Remote Worker and Hybrid Worker audiences.

During each interview session, participants were asked to discuss productivity related to certain tasks, attitudes towards work-life balance, engagement with co-workers, and their outlook towards career advancement opportunities within the context of their work environment. With almost 20 hours of recorded anecdotal data, Corgan’s research team was able to identify insights and emerging opportunities which are documented throughout this report.











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Insights

# 01

CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH







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What we're  
looking at

# Contextual Research

From the first office cubicle, to the introduction of email and smart phone technology — the office has always required agility.

The way we work is increasingly complex. As we integrate modern technology with modern business, where and how we work will continue to evolve.

Remote work has been growing in popularity for decades. Prior to COVID-19, it was estimated that 25% of the U.S. workforce had experienced working from home at some point in their career.<sup>1</sup> However, as cities across the country enforced lockdown measures, millions of Americans suddenly transitioned to remote work settings seemingly overnight. According to a recent study by Stanford, “Forty-two percent of U.S. workers are now working from home full time, accounting for more than two-thirds of economic activity.”<sup>2</sup>

In a recent study from the Federal Reserve, they estimated that “the share of working days spent at home is expected to increase fourfold from

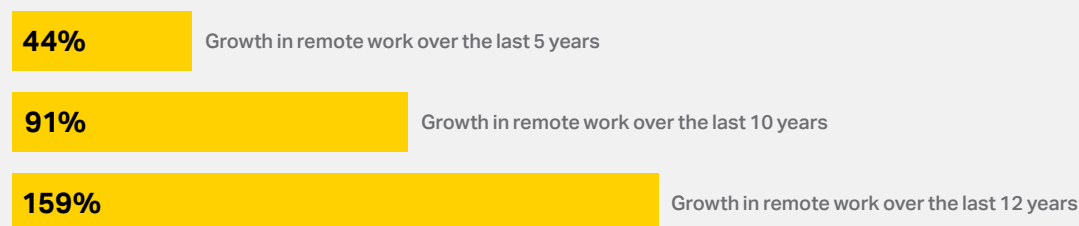
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“Offices, and the ways we use them, have continued to evolve. In the 1960’s full-service office lunchrooms were replaced by self-service kitchenettes. Around the same time tightly packed rows of desks — a layout borrowed from factory floors — began to give way to the flexible “privacy” of cubicles, a shift that continued over the coming decades. And breakthrough technologies — such as telephones, personal computers, and email — have expanded where, when, and how we work.”<sup>3</sup>

pre-COVID levels, from 5 percent to 20 percent.”<sup>4</sup> However, this sudden transition towards a remote work environment warrants a comprehensive analysis if we want to understand the role of an office in an increasingly mobile world.

## Trends in Remote Work Growth



Source: Analysis of U.S. Census and Bureau of Labor Statistics data by Global Workplace Analytics and FlexJobs<sup>5</sup>



### The Cubicle

## 1960's

The need for office space grows quickly and companies demand furniture that is cheaper and flexible. Herman Miller designs the Action Office as a new office solution.



### Personal Computers

## 1980's

The personal computer made information processing portable and more accessible. This device not only changes the way we do our work, it increases the rate at which we can work.



### The Smart Phone

## 2000's

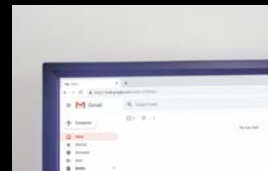
Steve Jobs announces the iPhone, in a vision to revolutionize the way we not only communicate with our co-workers, but with billions of people around the world.



### Telecommuting

## 1970's

The concept of telecommuting was proposed in the early 1970's by Jack Nilles, a former NASA engineer. He offered it as an alternative to resource-draining transportation amid the oil crisis of that era.



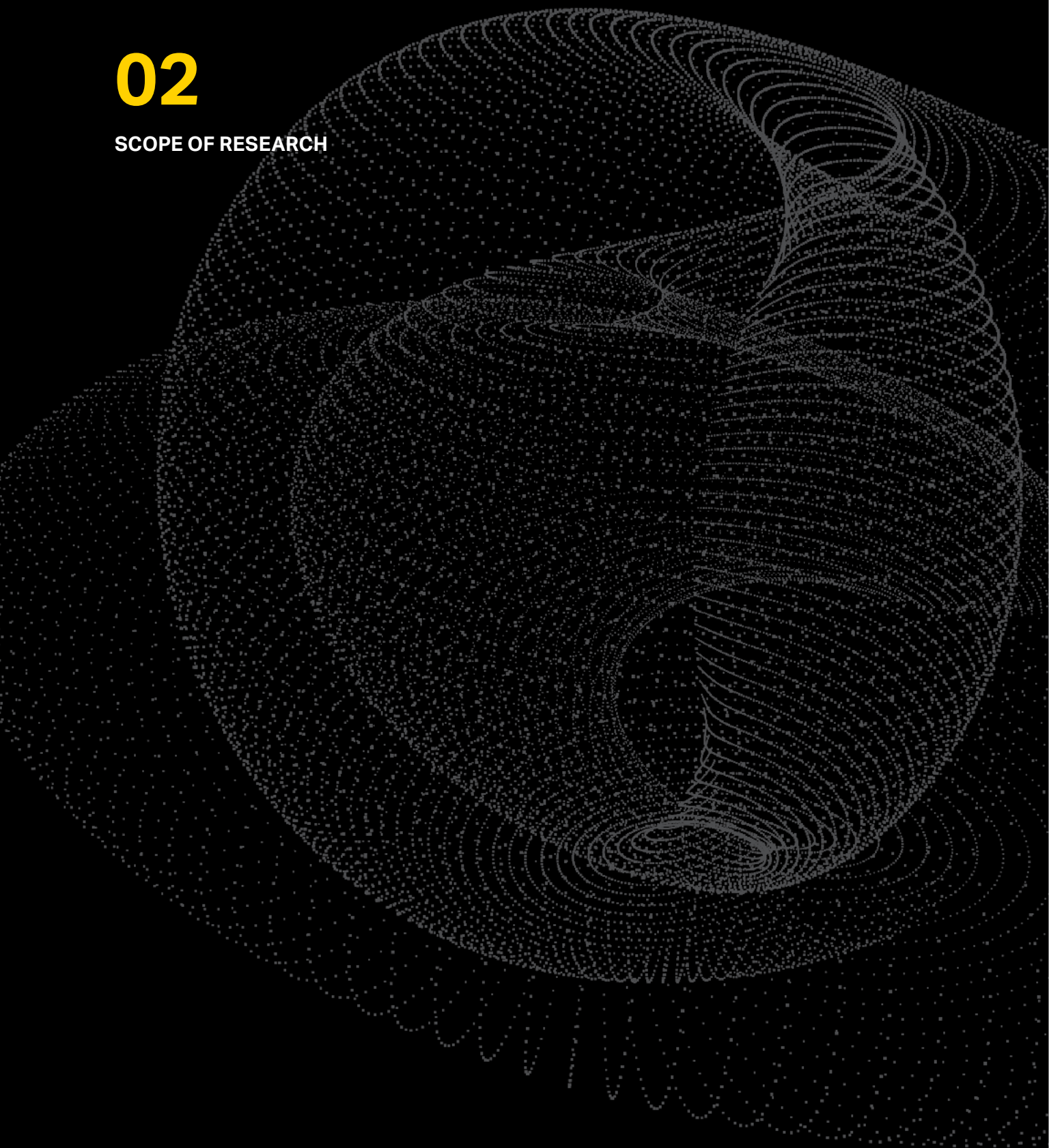
### Email Communication

## 1990's

While researchers at MIT determined we could send messages from one personal computer to another, it wasn't until the mid-1990's that we could access free email communication. The ability to email introduces rapid communication methods, allowing employees to share information almost instantaneously.

# 02

## SCOPE OF RESEARCH







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Who did  
we talk to?

”

“When we’re in the office, we’re able to celebrate birthdays, do lunch-and-learns, see each other every day, and build comradery. This helps us work as a team and have that culture.”

**HYBRID WORKER**

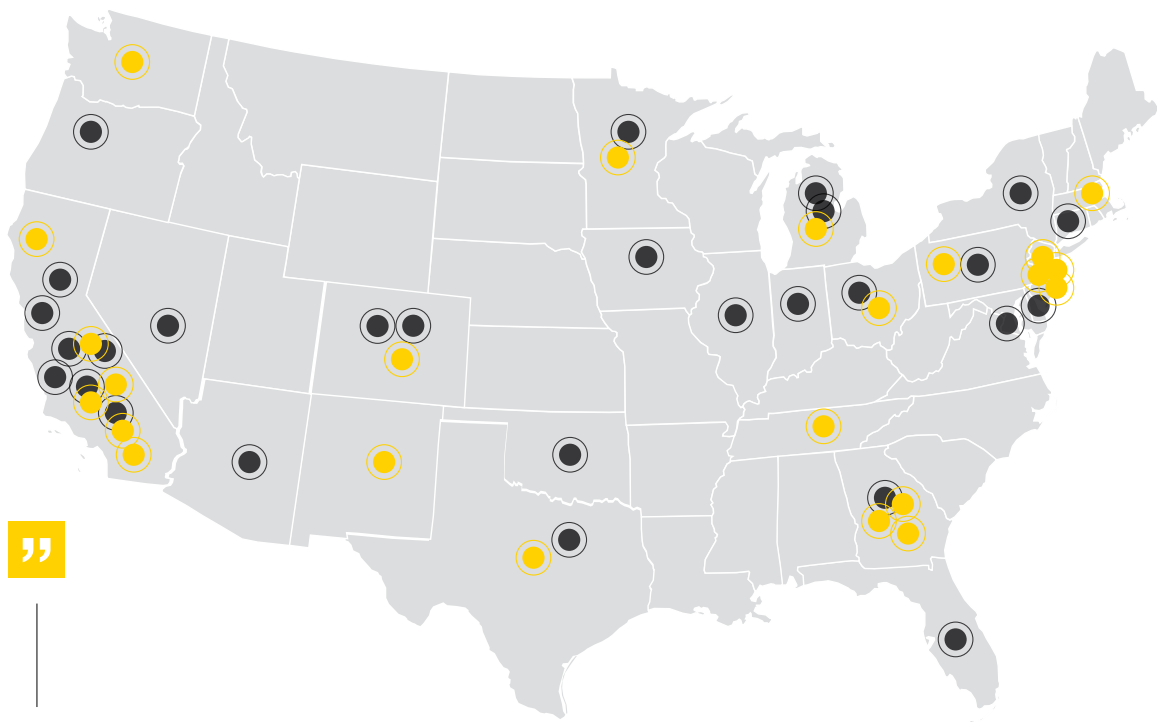






# We received in-depth feedback from 50 workers across the country.

With 20+ hours of recorded anecdotal data, Corgan's research team has gained a better understanding of what working from home has *really* been like.



"I think when you see your coworkers in the office it reinforces a sense of team, bonding, unity, and shared goals. The goals of your work are easier to understand and you can share the atmosphere and culture."

**HYBRID WORKER**

● Remote Workers  
● Hybrid Workers





# 25

## REMOTE WORKERS

Those who are working from home exclusively

# 25

## HYBRID WORKERS

Those who are splitting their time between home and office



## Industry Roles and Backgrounds

Media and Communication

Broadcast Media/Publishing

Business Support and Logistics

Entertainment and, Leisure and Travel

Financial Services

Health Care and Pharmaceuticals

Government, Legal, and Public Safety

Manufacturing

Real Estate

Retail and Consumer Durables

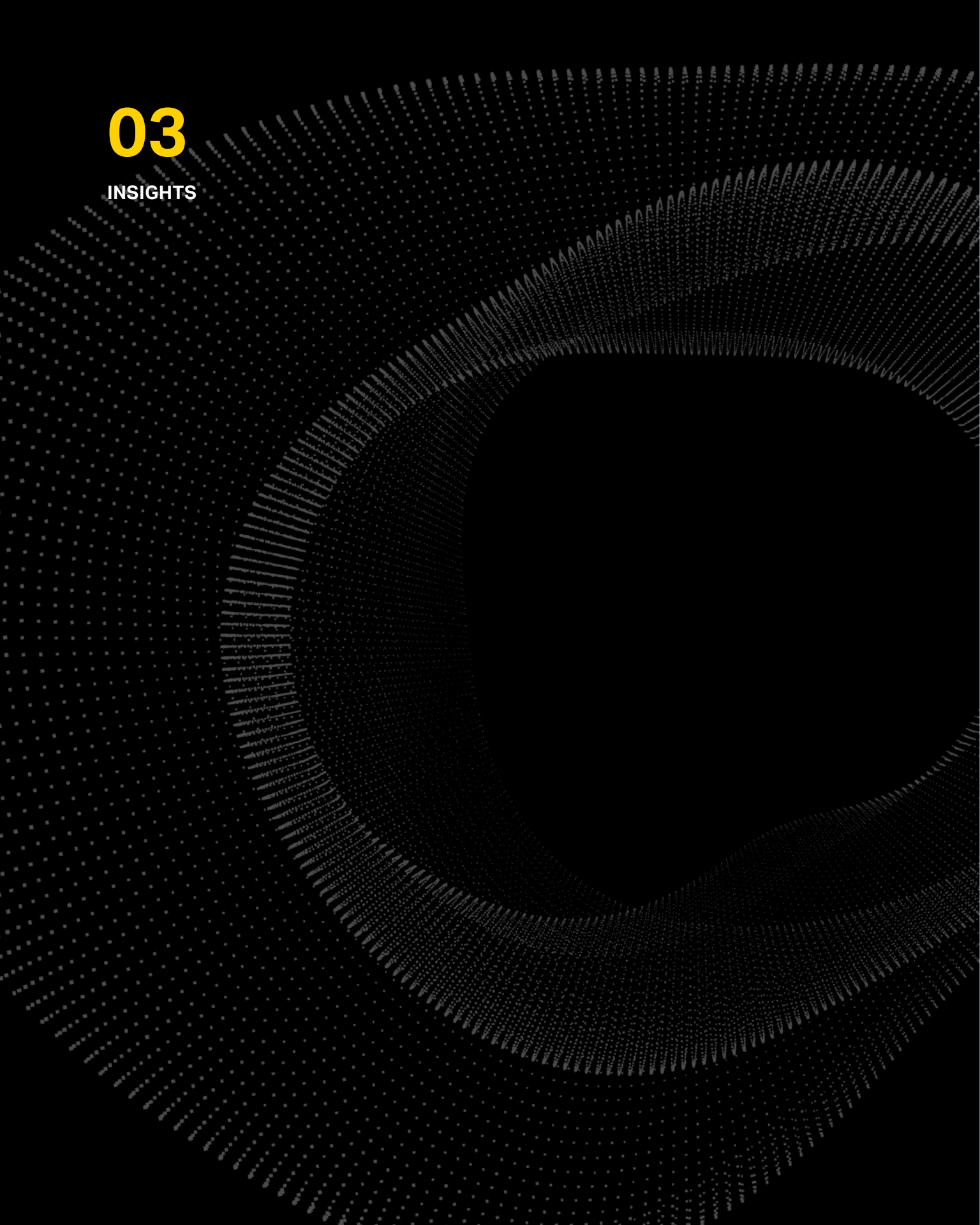
Sales and Business Development

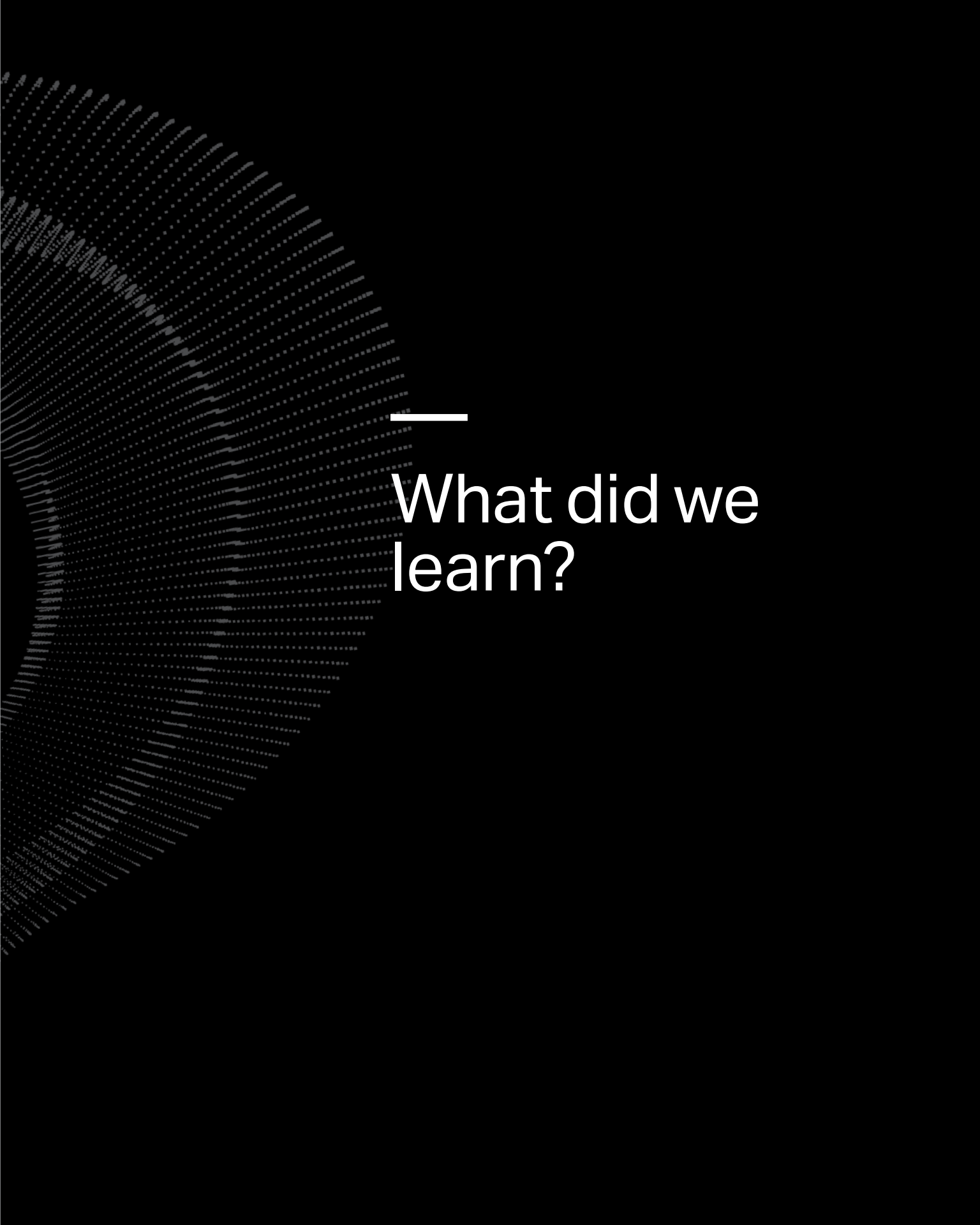
Technology and Software Development

Utilities, Energy, and Extraction

# 03

## INSIGHTS





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What did we  
learn?

# Wake up, roll out, sign on

Throughout this research study, participants often reported waking up 10-15 minutes before their first morning meeting, only leaving enough time to brush their teeth and get dressed. While this may provide employees with more sleep and increased flexibility, it also begs the question: how might these remote work routines impact our performance and overall quality of life?

When you live and work in the same place, your daily routines can be significantly impacted. You are no longer required to get ready hours before your start time. Your lunch doesn't need to be prepared before you go to work. And that 45-minute commute to the office? You can sit and enjoy your coffee instead.

However, while remote working environments may provide more flexible schedules, they can also inhibit our ability to develop routine structure by blurring the psychological boundaries of home and work.

Existing research shows that human beings thrive in environments that support regular routine and healthy habit formation. These routines “offer a way to promote health and wellness through structure and organization” and can reduce stress levels, improve your quality of sleep and overall general health.<sup>6</sup>

As we navigate a world of remote working opportunities, it's important for organizations to develop expectations around working from home that promote routine and cognitive preparedness throughout the workday.

Companies need to find new ways to support their employees' mental health and routine development in remote work settings.





”

I literally wake up a minute before I have to dial into my daily 10 AM meeting.

**REMOTE WORKER**

”

I used to run in the mornings and have coffee before getting ready for work. Now I sleep in, work out in the evenings and wake up right before work.

**REMOTE WORKER**

”

Working from home is not breeding healthy habits for me.

**HYBRID WORKER**

## How long does it take to *wake up*?

We've all done it — woken up only to realize we've slept through our alarm that morning. But the grogginess you may be feeling isn't just a side effect of waking up too late. Your brain needs some time to acclimate after waking up. *Sleep inertia* is the term used to refer to the temporary time of sleepiness, disorientation, and impaired cognitive performance experienced upon awakening.

**This transitional state between sleep and wake is marked by impaired performance, reduced vigilance, and a desire to return to sleep.<sup>7</sup>**

Studies have observed that cerebral blood flow velocity in the brain is lower than pre-sleep levels for up to half an hour after waking. The prefrontal cortical regions, which are responsible for executive functions, take the longest to return to baseline levels. Sleep researcher, Raphael Vallat, Ph.D., said in an interview with Inverse, "When we wake up from sleep, our brain does not immediately switch from a sleep state to a fully awakened state but rather goes through this transition period called sleep inertia that can last up to 30 minutes. During this period, the brain progressively switches from sleep to normal wakefulness, and so does our mental and cognitive performance."<sup>8</sup> As we consider remote work options, how can we create balanced expectations around cognitive and mental health when working from home?

### CASE STUDY



# Working from home is like living in the office

When work and home activities take place in the same location, physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries between work and home can become extremely blurred. Throughout this research study, participants expressed difficulty establishing not only physical boundaries, but mental boundaries between home and office life as well.

During these interview sessions, many individuals reported feeling a certain level of ambiguity and confusion with regards to when they should work versus when they should enjoy the comforts of home. **This was often expressed along a spectrum of competing values, with some individuals having a difficult time “shutting down” at the end of the workday, and others participating in non-work-related activities during business hours.** Many participants also described a certain level of pressure to always be productive — even after work hours.

It should be noted that some of these reported sentiments and work environments are compounded by the immediate crisis of COVID-19, which has resulted in limited childcare, higher than average levels of social isolation, and a general disruption of normal routine.

Research has found that teleworkers often work longer hours. This is due in part to the presence of work-related materials in the home that may prompt employees to continue working rather than spend time on personal or family pursuits.<sup>9</sup>

”

It's no longer working from home.  
It's living at work.

REMOTE WORKER



Data shows that workdays are still averaging 10-20% longer than before.<sup>10</sup>



”

“I think there’s a potential burn out factor to keep at the tops of our minds.”

**HYBRID WORKER**

”

I didn’t used to check my email after 5 PM, but now if an email comes in at 10 PM I’m more than likely to read it and respond since my work laptop is just 5 feet from my bed...

**REMOTE WORKER**

# Home office setups

In rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote workers have created workarounds to accommodate their new way of working and unexpected flexibility. These illustrations represent a sample of home office setups observed during the research study.

A survey from the American Chiropractic Association, 92 percent of chiropractors (out of 213 respondents) said that patients report more neck pain, back pain, or other musculoskeletal issues since the stay-at-home guidance began.<sup>11</sup>





HYBRID WORKER



REMOTE WORKER

# Setting boundaries

A limited but growing body of research is examining the strategies that employees use to manage boundaries between work and home. **Boundaries are mental constructions of borders between activities**, such as work and personal life, and employees vary in the extent to which they prefer to keep these activities separate (segmentation) or have them overlap (integration).

Four main categories for boundary setting have been proposed by Kreiner et al.: physical, behavioral, time-based, and communicative tactics. Remote work presents a unique challenge to boundary management because many of the traditional physical and time-based boundaries associated with office environments are absent.<sup>12</sup>

- Physical Boundaries
- Time-based Boundaries
- Behavioral Boundaries
- Communicative Boundaries

## PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

The most common strategy for establishing boundaries is through the designation of areas for work-related activities. This often looks like creating a specific work area that someone can “arrive” and “depart” from.

## TIME-BASED BOUNDARIES

Remote workers often report working beyond their contracted hours. Time-based strategies encourage individuals to create boundaries between working time and home time. Strategies might include commitments to other people (children coming home from school) or planning to meet others at a certain time.

## BEHAVIORAL BOUNDARIES

These behavioral strategies often mimic routines that can be observed in an office setting, such as: shutting down one’s laptop, silencing a work phone after work hours, and other actions that remove the temptation to engage in work-related activities.

## COMMUNICATIVE BOUNDARIES

When home and work life converge into one shared space, communication strategies can help remote workers manage boundaries. This includes setting expectations with spouses and children about noise level and detailing schedule availability ahead of time.





# The optics of equity and visibility

As we examine the future of hybrid work, it's important to consider its long-term impact on career advancement and economic development opportunities. In an office setting, our physical presence often communicates a certain level of reliability and commitment to do work on-site. But what happens to your future job prospects and perceived trustworthiness when you conduct your work from behind a virtual screen?

## **EQUITY**

Throughout this research study, certain remote workers reported a heightened level of work-life intimacy and concern with how this could impact their social status at work. No one was expecting their boss to see the inside of their home when they first started their job, and this could lead to increased levels of anxiety.

Additional research (outside of this study) also documents the ways in which remote work introduces substantial challenges for equity and inclusion on a broader systemic level. A recent study from the University of Chicago found that 37 percent of jobs in the United States can be performed entirely at home, with significant variation across cities and industries. These jobs, however, typically pay more than jobs that cannot be done at home and account for 46 percent of all U.S. wages.<sup>13</sup> Stanford economist, Nicholas Bloom, says that inequality could “increase because those who can't WFH right now are not continuing to get paid, develop their skills, and advance their careers.”<sup>13</sup>

Remote work opportunities are also related to access to reliable technology. Only 65 percent

of Americans report having fast enough internet capacity to support workable video calls. The remaining 35 percent have such poor internet at home – or no internet – that it prevents effective telecommuting.<sup>14</sup>

## **VISIBILITY**

Throughout this research study, participants also expressed concern over remote work's impact on professional development, ongoing relationships with mentors, and whether or not they'd gain access to the same opportunities if they were no longer in the office.

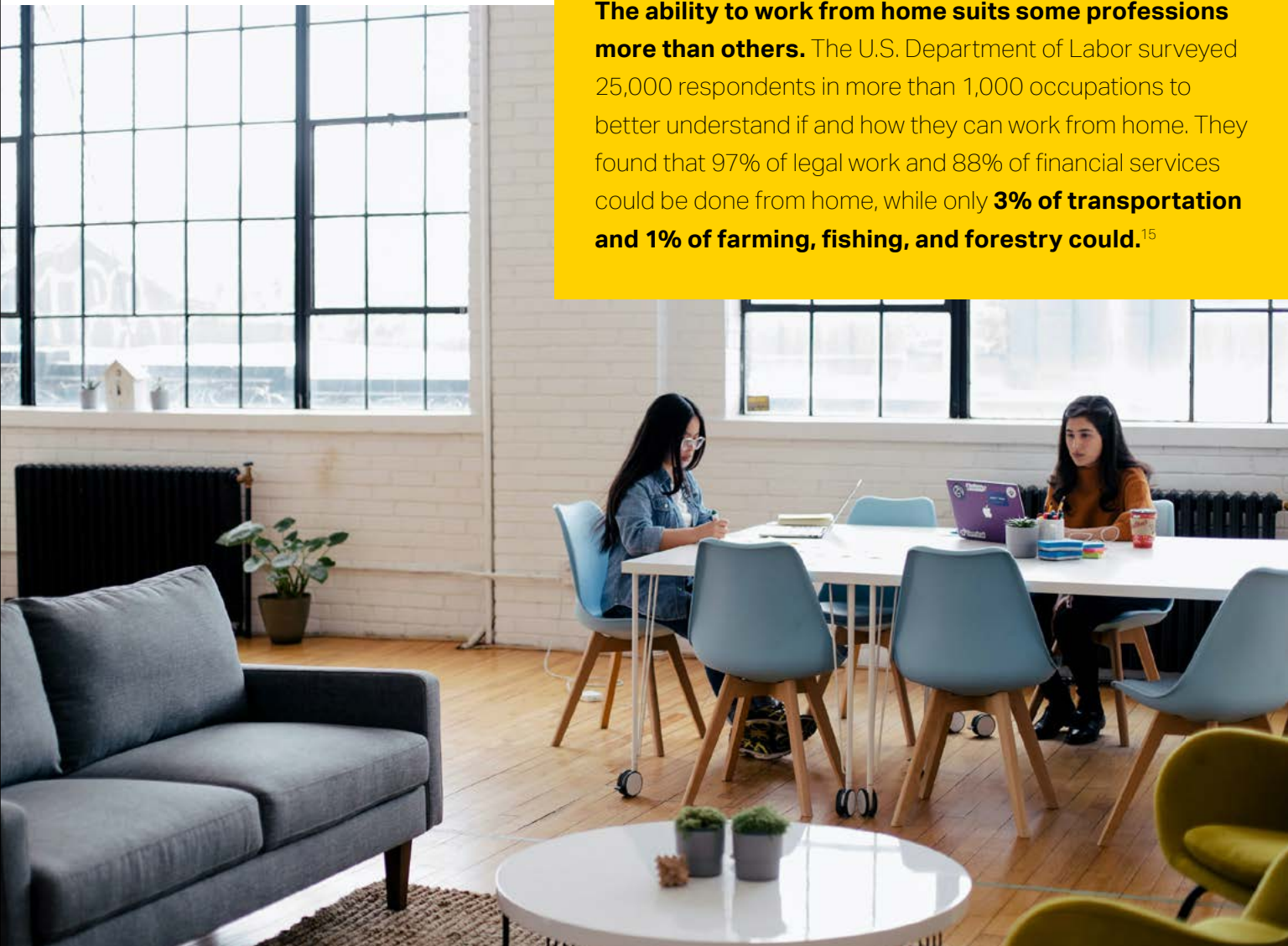
In a remote office setting, it's much harder for managers to observe interpersonal interactions across their teams when they are suddenly taking place behind computer screens and only in scheduled settings. Individuals reported feeling the need to “prove” their trustworthiness and ability in a remote work setting, which can feel exhausting and is subject to micro-management practices. Managers also expressed anxiety over whether or not they can fully support their teams in a remote setting.

## Equity and Inclusion from the Home Office

Employees who are traditionally underrepresented in professional settings, “regularly grapple with how to counteract negative racial stereotypes that undermine their professional images in the office.”<sup>16</sup> Studies even show that Black employees who obscure their racial identities are perceived as “more professional and are more likely to be hired than those who do not modify their self-presentation.”<sup>17</sup> As underrepresented workers construct “delicate, self-protective boundaries between their personal and professional lives,” the

WFH setting often “requires people to (virtually) invite coworkers, clients, physicians, students, and professors into their homes, which undermines their ability to exercise agency and control over how they present their identities. **Video-conferencing has transformed formerly safe, private spaces for authentic cultural expression into focal points of the public gaze.**”<sup>16</sup> This virtual setting means that workers are sharing “social class” and “cultural signals” with an audience that usually meets in a neutral space. This blurring of personal space can increase exposure to assumption, bias, and judgement in the workplace.

**The ability to work from home suits some professions more than others.** The U.S. Department of Labor surveyed 25,000 respondents in more than 1,000 occupations to better understand if and how they can work from home. They found that 97% of legal work and 88% of financial services could be done from home, while only **3% of transportation and 1% of farming, fishing, and forestry could.**<sup>15</sup>

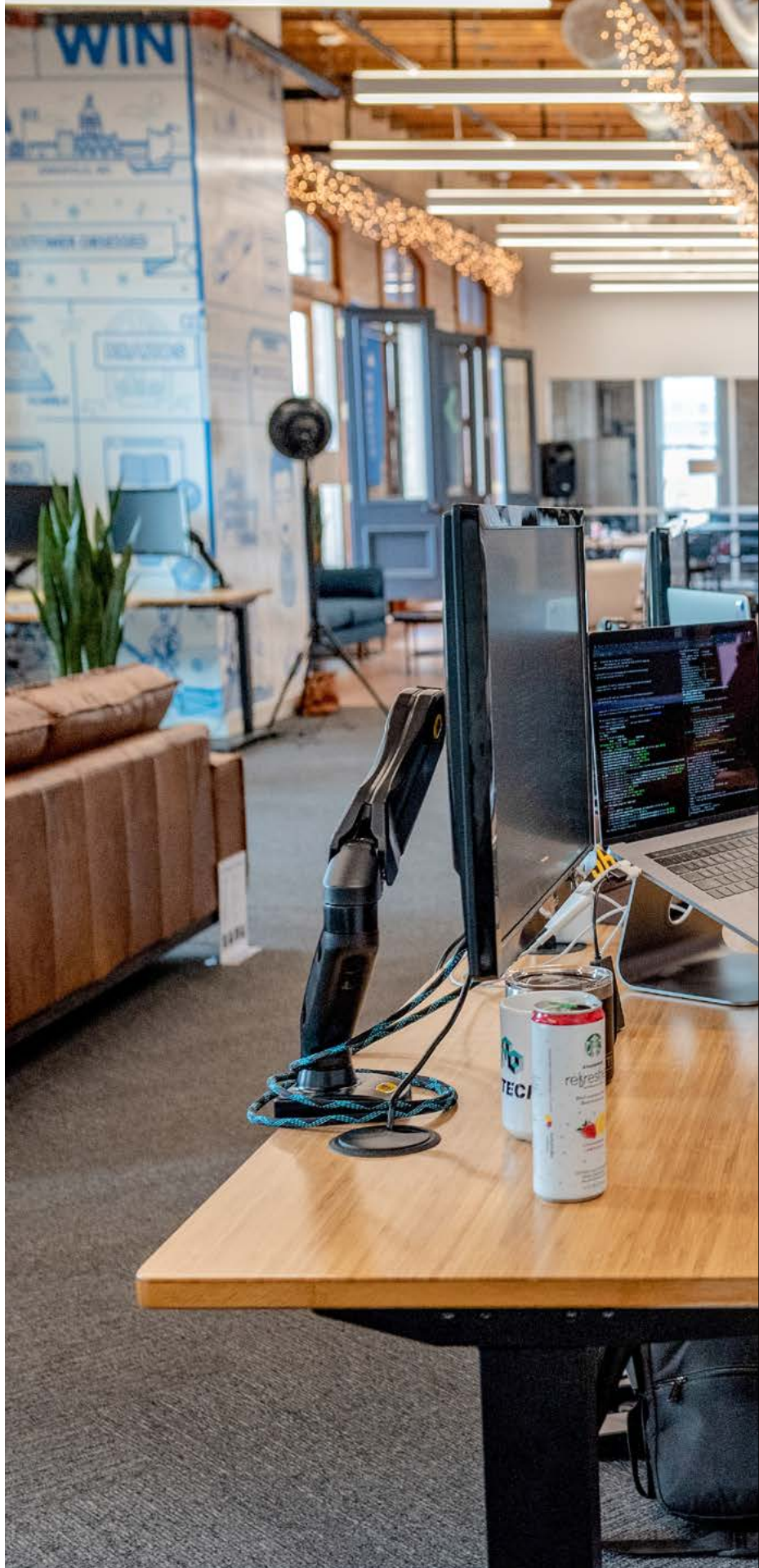




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I am not learning from other people. I am independently learning which has its pros and cons.

**REMOTE WORKER**







"In the office, they see me work hard so they (team members) work hard. But when I WFH, I don't see anything and they don't either."

**HYBRID WORKER**

# Innovation is a *place*

As far as we know it, a recipe for innovation does not exist. Even the most advanced organizations meet roadblocks when it comes to trying out new things. That's because innovation is not a solitary light bulb moment, but rather, a complex system that "requires a set of crosscutting practices and processes to structure, organize, and encourage it."<sup>18</sup>

One of the structures that supports innovation is the expansion of knowledge through rapid information exchange. These exchanges can be planned out in advanced (via brainstorming sessions and workshops), but they can also happen unexpectedly during what some have referred to as, "Hallway Moments." **The university quad setting is a historical example of spaces that are created to encourage the serendipitous nature of exchanging and sharing ideas.** These casual encounters can spark inspiration and surface unrealized connections that were previously missed.

Innovation researcher, Steven Johnson, writes that innovation thrives in large networks of people. When human beings began to organize themselves into towns and cities, they formed new networks which exposed them to new ideas and discoveries. **Before we congregated as large groups, a great idea by one person could fizzle and die if they had no network to share it with.**<sup>19</sup>

## GREAT IDEAS NEED A CROWD

During our research interviews, participants expressed a certain level of difficulty when it came to conducting activities related to innovation, such as: pitching new ideas or projects, brainstorming, receiving constructive or rapid feedback and generating a certain level of "symbiotic energy" amongst teammates. This is the result of not being

able to observe non-verbal communication and feeling rushed to complete tasks for the sake of efficiency and productivity or meeting the confines of a meeting time.

"Innovation thrives in collaborative networks where opportunities for serendipitous connections exist. And great discoveries often evolve as slow hunches, maturing and connecting to other ideas over time."

– Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From*<sup>19</sup>

”

It's more challenging to pitch ideas and be pitched to without seeing facial expressions and body language.

REMOTE WORKER





”

It's hard to quantify these random connections: a trip to the coffee shop, a chat around the watercooler where you share details about what you're doing and receive fresh perspective. These interactions can't be quantified.

**REMOTE WORKER**

”

It becomes really mechanical instead of open conversation.

**REMOTE WORKER**

”

I don't have the ability to quickly ask for help which makes things take longer than if I were in the office.

**HYBRID WORKER**

# The office isn't just about productivity, it's about coming together

When we talk about remote work, we often hear about productivity. Productivity is a way for companies to manage their output and set expectations for the workforce. An individual's productivity usually hinges on "mental energy and a sense of internal and external motivation."<sup>20</sup> It also emerges naturally "from work that they find inherently valuable or meaningful."<sup>20</sup>

Productivity, however, isn't the only thing that makes us *productive*. There are an assortment of interpersonal relationships and cultural values that can inspire employees to connect with the greater mission and vision of an organization. They are also important for our social development.

Throughout these research sessions, participants expressed how remote work platforms, like email and chat threads, make communication feel extremely "formal" which limits how they relate to one another and build working relationships. A remote work environment doesn't facilitate an impromptu five-minute conversation in the breakroom or a 20-minute walk to grab coffee the same way an office might.

**These relationships that we cultivate at work, often referred to as Peripheral Ties in that they reside outside of our primary network of friends and family, are important for human development.** They also help us feel more connected to the work we're doing. These peripheral relationships, "link individuals to larger social structures and provide

opportunities for cultural models, novel stimulation, identity exploration, and social support."<sup>21</sup> They are also proven to enhance general quality of life and they allow people to flourish.<sup>22</sup>

Even as hybrid work increases, we will want to ask ourselves: how can the office facilitate the development of a healthy workplace culture through shared values and relationship management?

## Productivity ≠ Quality of Work

A majority of research participants classified their *productivity* and *quality of work* as two different factors. Their productivity was often related to speed or "time spent working," while quality of work was associated with the general caliber of work.





”

I think when you're able to see each other face to face it helps build trust.

**HYBRID WORKER**

”

Being in the office is great for staying connected and feeling like you're a part of something.

**HYBRID WORKER**

”

It's easier to see the big picture when you're in the office.

**REMOTE WORKER**

# Not all tasks are created equal

In addition to understanding what people are feeling when they work from home, we were also curious to find out *how* people are working from home. This included things like the types of resources needed in order to work from home effectively and the types of tasks they preferred to complete from home versus in the office (and vice versa).

What became abundantly clear is that the office and home settings are not mutually exclusive. There are certain tasks that require limited collaboration and high-intensity focus, while there are other tasks that encourage collaboration and rapid feedback which are more suited for in-person office environments.

Additionally, there were also a variety of resources that people need in order to complete their work. A number of participants reported that they need

to use certain on-site resources like high-security software platforms or large pieces of equipment or machinery, and these cannot be transferred over to their home office.

As we envision an office that meets the needs of a future workforce, it's important to consider the types of tasks that people conduct most regularly and how that might determine the type of spaces they need to work in.

Tasks People Prefer to Complete at Home	Tasks People Prefer to Complete at Office
High-intensity Focus Work (Individual Contributions)	Group Collaboration
Repetitive Tasks	Brainstorming and Generative Tasks
Email	Rapid Feedback and Communication
Reporting and Documentation	Launching a New Project
Existing Project Work	Larger Meetings (More than 5 People)
Smaller Meetings (Less than 5 People)	Anything that Requires Hands-on Equipment
Individual Phone Calls	Managing Confidential Content
	Onboarding and New Hire Training
	Fostering Relationships



”

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Anything that requires  
human interaction is hard  
to complete from home.

**HYBRID WORKER**

”

|  
I like to be left alone  
in my bubble.

**REMOTE WORKER**

”

|  
Being able to handle my  
documentation in a private  
space is great.

**REMOTE WORKER**

# The seesaw of resources

An overwhelming majority of remote workers reported a high level of satisfaction with the elimination of transportation and commute time to work. Some remote workers said this allowed them to get a head start on their workday, while others said this reduction in commute time inversely opened their schedule, allowing them to spend more time with family. In this case, time is viewed as a resource and it increases (or becomes more efficient) when working remote.

Remote workers also said they enjoyed being able to “control their own environment” in their at-home workspace. This included things like temperature, lighting, and location within residence. However, a portion of these remote workers also said they were incurring their own resource costs at home — from upgraded internet, to higher than average utility bills, remote work requires a certain level of individual investment.

What does this seesawing of resources look like from a company’s perspective? Many research participants reported the use of an employer stipend to upgrade home office equipment.

”

I can work later without getting home later.

**REMOTE WORKER**

”

At home, I can set my environment how I want it.

**REMOTE WORKER**





”

I've seen an increase in my utility bills. I'm using more A/C and technology for longer periods of time.

**REMOTE WORKER**

”

When I first started WFH, I had to upgrade my internet from basic to a premium level.

**REMOTE WORKER**

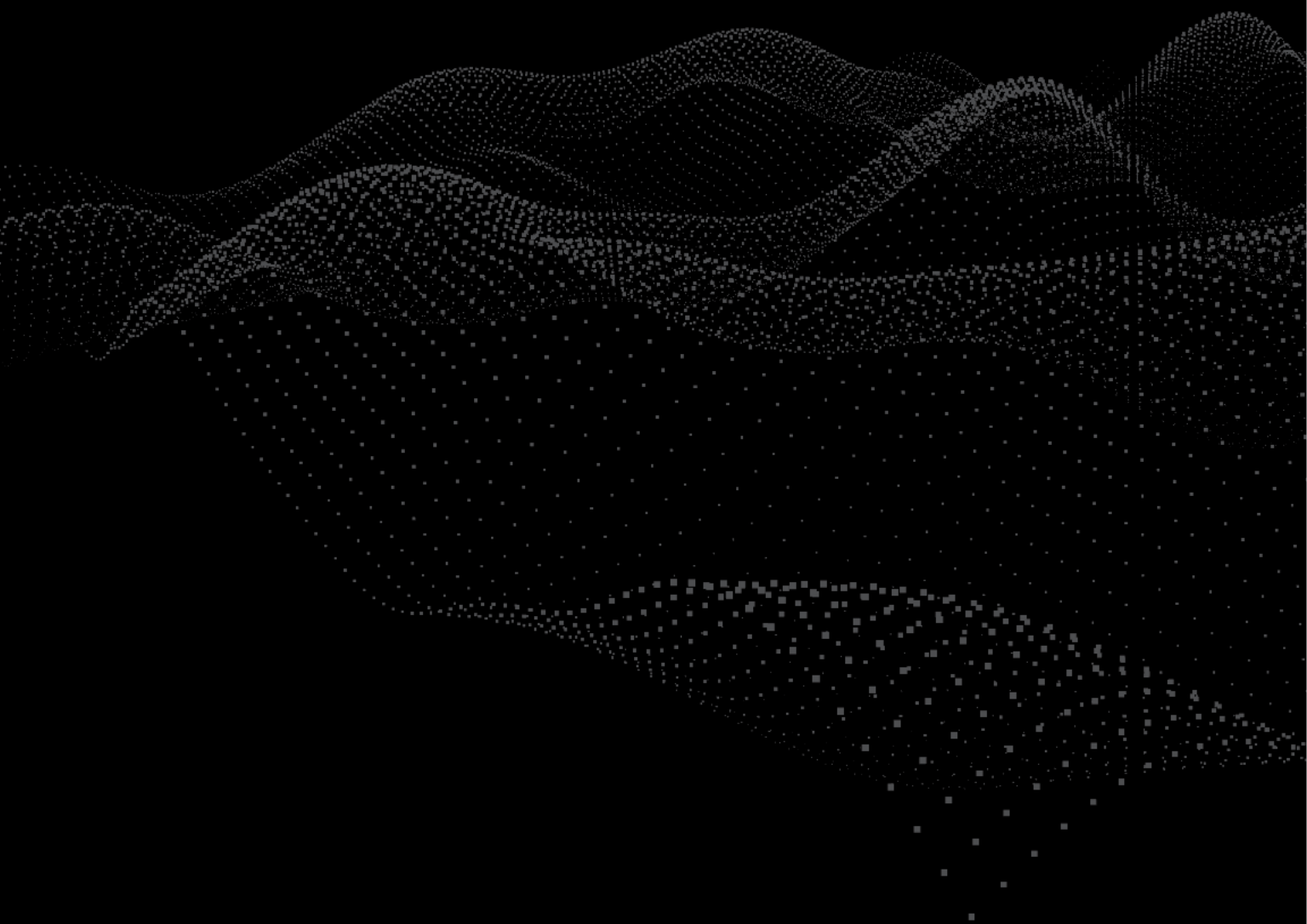
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I'm working on making my office space. It's worth it to make the investment now.

**REMOTE WORKER**

# 04

## CONCLUSION





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# Final thoughts







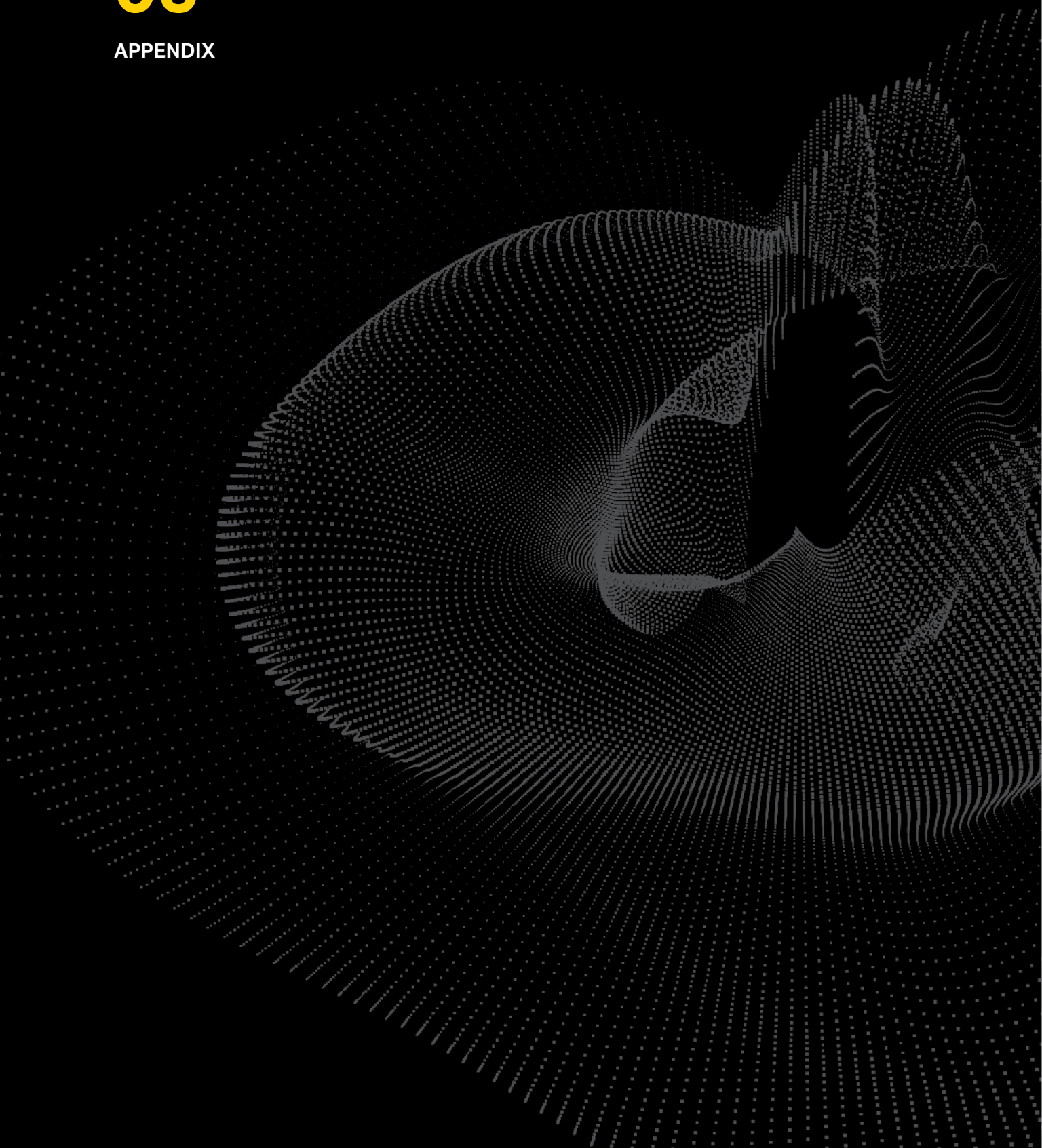
## **Work isn't just a place; its a mindset.**

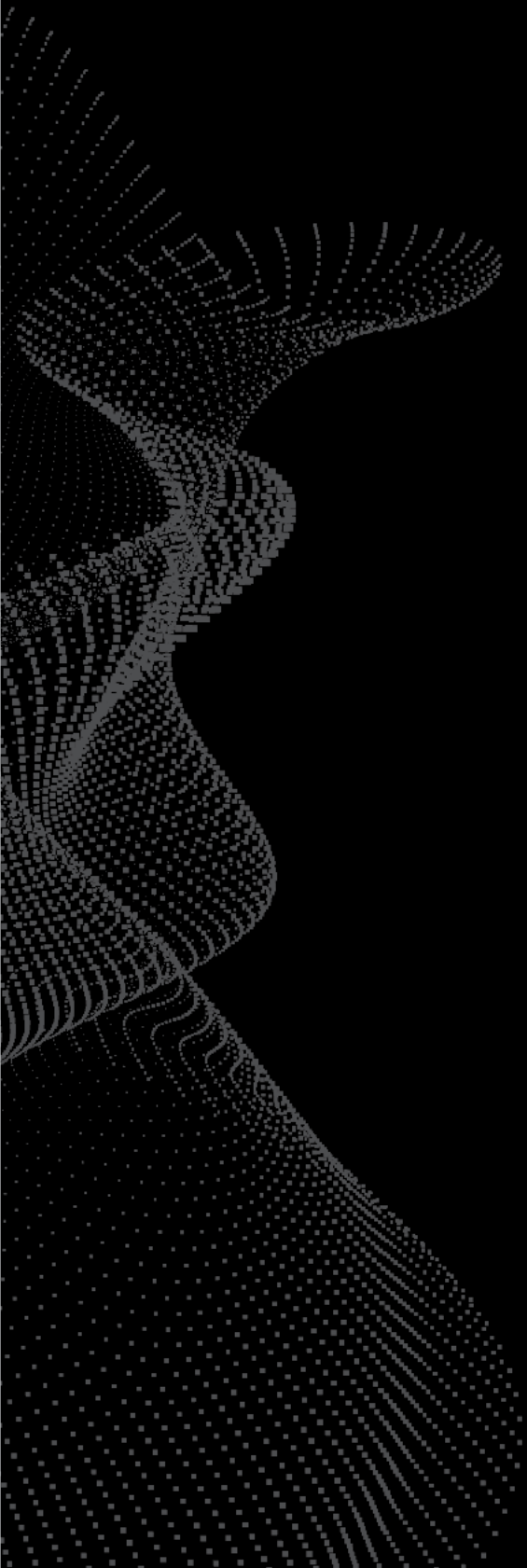
Throughout this research study we encountered a variety of personal perspectives and experiences. We learned that the office doesn't just have to be a place we go to do work. It can be a place that facilitates the generation of ideas, relationship-building, and a broadening of perspective. While we examine the role of hybrid work models, this research provides a contextual understanding for people's needs and how they envision the future of work.

As the office continues to evolve, we look forward to developing solutions and identifying new opportunities that are data-driven and rooted in human insight.

# 05

## APPENDIX





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# Source material

# Appendix

## Section 01 – Contextual Research

1. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/306695/workers-discovering-affinity-remote-work.aspx>
2. <https://news.stanford.edu/2020/06/29/snapshot-new-working-home-economy/>
3. <https://hbr.org/2020/07/a-brief-history-of-the-modern-office>
4. <https://www.frbatlanta.org/blogs/macroblog/2020/05/28/firms-expect-working-from-home-to-triple>
5. <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/>

## Section 02 – Insights

### **Insight No. 1 – Wake up, roll out, sign on**

6. <https://www.nm.org/healthbeat/healthy-tips/health-benefits-of-having-a-routine>
7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6710480/#:~:text=Sleep%20inertia%20is%20the%20term,cognitive%20performance%20experienced%20upon%20awakening.>
8. <https://www.inverse.com/article/50128-how-long-does-it-take-to-wake-up-the-brain>

### **Insight No. 2 – Working from home is like living in the office**

9. [https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8217/753bbfcbded34621b3aa9a80ad99d37e9d7f.pdf?\\_ga=2.215372823.1634335648.1599685128-705526637.1599685128](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8217/753bbfcbded34621b3aa9a80ad99d37e9d7f.pdf?_ga=2.215372823.1634335648.1599685128-705526637.1599685128)
10. <https://hbr.org/2020/07/the-implications-of-working-without-an-office%22%20/>
11. [https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/04/well/live/ergonomics-work-from-home-injuries.html?surface=home-living-vi&fellback=false&req\\_id=498308700&algo=identity&imp\\_id=616105822&action=click&module=Smarter%20Living&pgtype=Homepage](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/04/well/live/ergonomics-work-from-home-injuries.html?surface=home-living-vi&fellback=false&req_id=498308700&algo=identity&imp_id=616105822&action=click&module=Smarter%20Living&pgtype=Homepage)
12. [https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8217/753bbfcbded34621b3aa9a80ad99d37e9d7f.pdf?\\_ga=2.215372823.1634335648.1599685128-705526637.1599685128](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8217/753bbfcbded34621b3aa9a80ad99d37e9d7f.pdf?_ga=2.215372823.1634335648.1599685128-705526637.1599685128)



### **Insight No. 3 – The optics of equity and visibility**

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