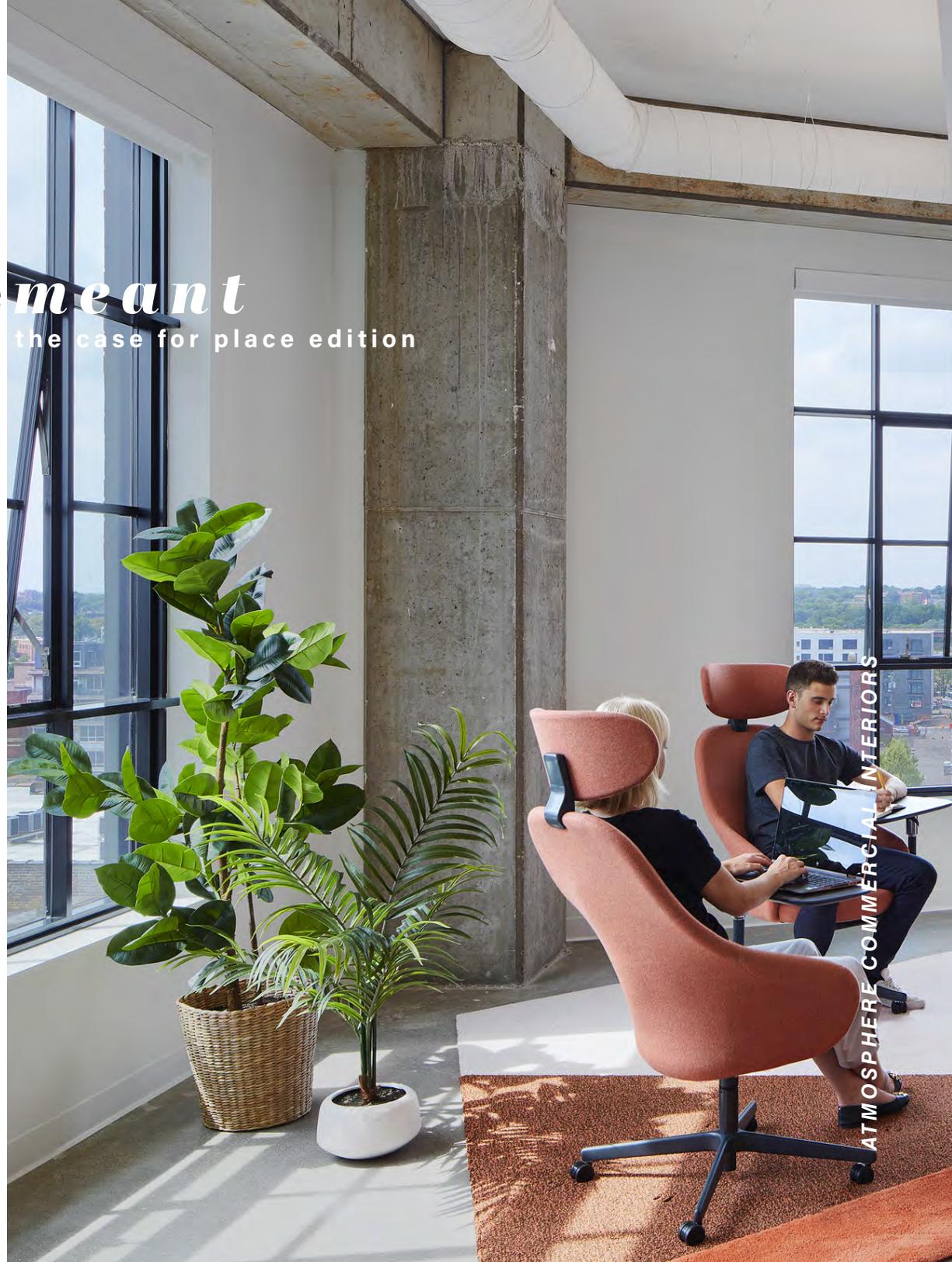


element

the case for place edition



ATMOSPHERE COMMERCIAL INTERIORS

HELLO

In this issue of *elemeant*, we share what we've learned as we've come back together in our own spaces, and what our clients and partners have shared with us as they face new realities. Over the last 6 months, we conducted dozens of roundtables with our top clients in each region and collected nearly 150 survey responses.

Two themes emerged:

First, *safety*. Concerns ranging from transmission and air- and traffic flow, to sanitization practices, and even ergonomic support at home dominated the headlines and our conversations this summer.

Next, *equitable and shared experiences*. How can we create environments and conditions that bring people together and support cognitive, physical and emotional well-being, even if part of the workforce is elsewhere, or working from home?

We believe space is more than just a place to inhabit and be productive. Spaces can be instrumental to advancing civil discourse, innovation, and supporting our social and emotional needs.

Now, more than ever, **place matters**. We're making a case to bring people back together to rally around each other for support. We're making a case for diverse perspectives and inspired moments that ignite our imaginations.

We continue our journey together with you, our clients and partners, navigating new boundaries and opportunities as we head into 2021.

Carlene Wilson, *President + CEO*





Fortune 500 Financial Services Organization
design by hga
photos by Corey Gaffer

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OFFICE

The impact of a global pandemic on offices and urban centers has turned our industry nearly upside down. The combination of disrupted supply chains, vacant commercial real estate, and safety measures—like physical distancing— have left many wondering what the value of office space is anymore.

And rightly so.

With billions invested in real estate and maintenance of the workplace, companies would be missing something if they weren't at least asking questions about its necessity.

Tracy Brower, Forbes

We advise our clients on the value of space and the impact it has on productivity, engagement and positive experiences. It's our business to know the value of a well-designed and furnished workplace and how to optimize the client's investment. So, we deeply appreciate the magnitude of the choices companies face as they navigate an uncertain economic future. Our own journey this year took us through a

work-from-home phase, and we quickly found that a strong technology strategy helped to enhance our business continuity capabilities. But while we kept in touch with each other and our clients using shared technology platforms, it became apparent that ***we needed human contact.***

Through multiple client roundtables, we heard concerns, questions, and innovative ideas as we worked to explore solutions together.

We need each other, and we understand ourselves based on our relationships with others. We are coworkers, colleagues and team members. Being together in the office feeds this need for togetherness whether we're working side-by-side creating a new idea at a white board, solving a thorny problem around a conference table or acknowledging a friend across the cafeteria.

Tracy Brower, Forbes

We also conducted a survey of our clients and partners in the design and real estate



communities and feel that this particular response neatly sums up a common perspective.

I am probably more productive at home, but I miss the synergy between colleagues.

Survey response, August 2020

Workers who were able to work from home, or remotely outside of an office, dug in and made the most of it. Cloud computing, virtual private networks, and software companies bore the surge of activity and kept organizations operating largely at full capacity.

For organizations whose team members were suddenly physically siloed, the impact to culture and creativity took a less noticeable hit. But like anything that needs constant nurturing, these essential building blocks for growth and success are central to the workplace-value conversation.

To that point, previous experiences with large-scale, mandatory WFH programs show that the real problems don't show up until after a year or so, as employee turnover begins to weaken the social networks that developed over years of in-person interaction.

As we reviewed our survey responses, there were clear answers to questions that we've all been wondering, resonating throughout.

What will draw workers back to the office?

We found multiple points of frustration in working from home that are more quickly solved in the office, such as a more stable environment and systems people can trust in, like internet connectivity. Realizing that these benefits were found within the office may not have been apparent pre-COVID-19, but with multiple family members and children at home during shutdowns, using shared internet connections suddenly became a real issue for many.

After reliable business tools and resources were addressed, the next universal need that we heard in our survey was clear— *human interaction*.

What does burnout look like? What does mental health look like? What does connectivity and community building look like? One of the things I feel is maybe we are burning some of the social capital we built up in this phase where we are all working remote. What's the measure for that?

Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft

We need to remain connected, in any way possible. And we are eager for the conditions in which we can experience serendipitous moments with each other, spontaneous upbeat conversations, and hear comforting background chatter.

The Next Normal

What we found early on during the shutdown, and what our clients are still experiencing now, is that a 100% remote workforce is not a sustainable answer as initiatives impacted by collaboration, creativity and team management suffer. Even a partially remote workforce solution requires careful administration.

Avoiding the pitfalls of remote working requires thinking carefully about leadership and management in a hybrid virtual world. Interactions between leaders and teams provide an essential locus for creating the social cohesion and the unified hybrid virtual culture that organizations need in the next normal.

McKinsey, Reimagining the Post-Pandemic Workforce

Creating a place that matters is in our DNA and we recognize the crucial significance that the office plays on culture, future business growth,

team collaboration and resilience. Because this is our business, we also have a constant pulse on trends and insights into research from Steelcase and other industry leaders.

Recent research shows strong information surrounding the need for place, including:

- **70% of employees are less productive at home than at work**
- **80% of Generation Z and Millennial employees feel less connected to their coworkers since transitioning to work from home**
- **Of people who work from home all or most of the time, only 5% say they'll stay at their company through their career**
- **88-90% want to work in an office again**

*Competing in the Post-COVID Era, Steelcase
15 Reasons Why the Office Matters, Steelcase
In the Era of Remote Work, We Still Need Offices, Fast Company*

As we look to the future and begin to build our business again, we need to work as efficiently as possible and for our Worklab to support our teams to best collaborate, innovate and drive business together.

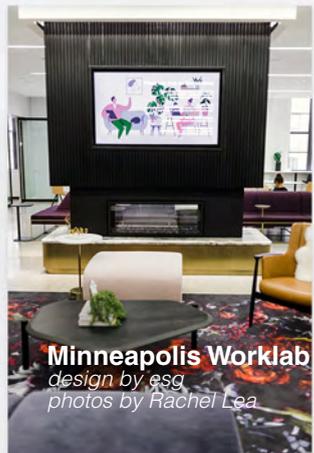
Space matters.

#FABWORKLAB

This spring, our Minneapolis and Phoenix Worklabs underwent beautiful refreshes that showcase strong partnerships, workplace solutions and innovative products. These changes support our belief in the *power of place* and fuel our passion in creating amazing, thoughtful spaces for our clients and design & real estate communities. They also set a foundation of support for our team members who champion innovation, curiosity, and challenge the status quo.

Experience our Worklabs yourself— *either in person or virtually*— by scheduling a tour today!

SAY HELLO





Phoenix Worklab

people want to feel a connection to the places where they work, where they can see themselves in a space, versus something that feels imposed upon them.

*james ludwig
vp of global design, steelcase*





The Nordic
design by Studio BV
photo by Corey Gafter



A THOUGHTFUL RETURN

Organizations have made accommodations to meet COVID-19 state and local mandates under ever-tightening economic conditions—and must balance these changes with an eye on their budgets and the health of their business and people.

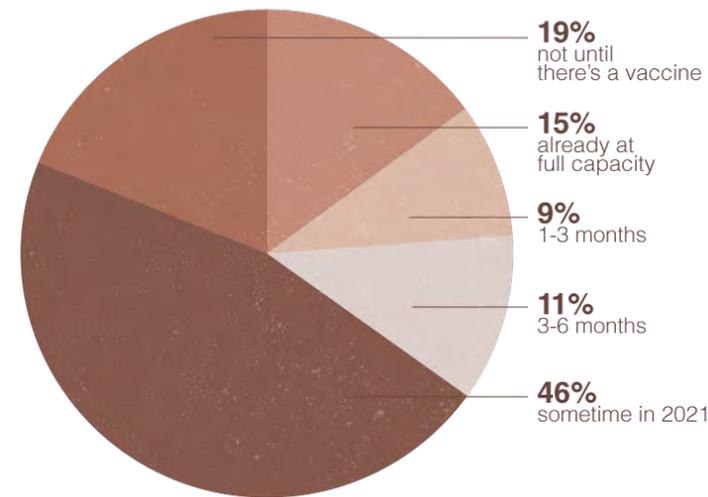
We have seen a spike in interest in work-from-home corporate programs, screens, and reconfiguration services. We consider much of the activity in recent months as exploratory work that helps our clients better understand their options, and envision a timeline that returns them to full occupancy. What we know now is that some organizations are recalculating what full occupancy means, what percentage of their workforce can continue to work from home, and what the ramifications of such a long-term change look like.

Adding into that calculation is an effective vaccine. The impact of the vaccine, according to Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, chief science officer at the World Health Organization, and Bill Gates, might restore “pre-pandemic health

levels,” no sooner than 2022, or two years from the present. *Matt Perez, Forbes*

Our survey responders reinforced our anecdotal evidence that a majority are either still working from home or working in an office that is partially occupied. A whopping 46% of respondents do not expect to reach full occupancy until 2021.

when do you expect your workplace to reach full capacity?



Almost 20% of respondents have not considered when to return, basing their comfort level on the availability of a vaccine.

What are the main concerns that are keeping people away from the workplace?

Exposure, of course, tops the list. The upside here is that our respondents seem aware of the health risks involved in shared spaces, as well as the challenges businesses face in creating safer environments.

Among preferences for steps businesses could take to improve comfort with office spaces, access to sanitization supplies, dedicated workspaces, and face masks top the list.

Limiting occupancy was more polarizing, then the next top options were nightly cleaning and furniture reconfiguration.

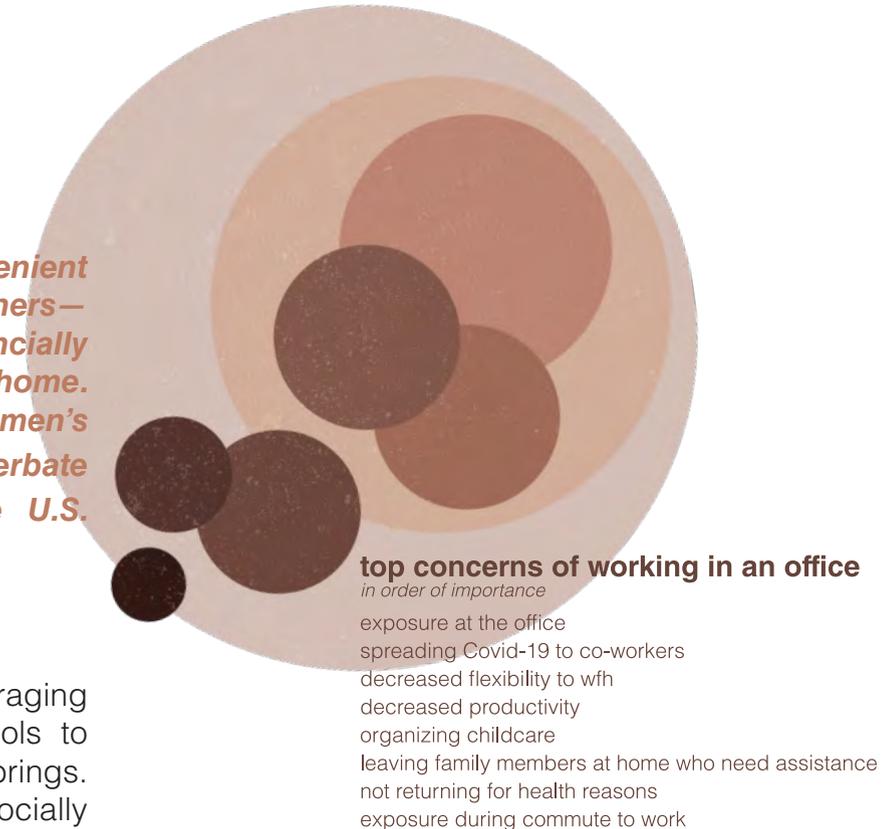
Childcare and the state of the education system continues to stymie working parents, teachers and childcare professionals as they navigate shifting schedules and shifting local guidelines. This concern didn't top the list in our survey, but the destabilization of childcare, in particular, could have widespread ramifications for the US economy.

“Without access to affordable and convenient childcare, many parents—mostly mothers—will find it increasingly untenable, financially and logistically, to work outside the home. It’s an eventuality that could cripple women’s advancement in the workplace, exacerbate inequality, and put a drag on the U.S. economic recovery.”
Time, September 8, 2020

The Battle to Repopulate Offices

Organizations are caught between encouraging people to return and adjusting protocols to mitigate the risks that in-person contact brings. And workers are stuck between feeling socially isolated working from home, and lacking the confidence in their employers that enough has been done to keep them safe in their office space.

A recent Wired article, *Bosses are doing weird things to get people back in the office*, cites tactics being used by global brands such as Bloomberg, Price Waterhouse Cooper, and Citigroup to coax people back. Perks like free beverages or food are nice, but they do not address worker safety concerns as much as support for commuting alternatives and a desk reservation system.



The larger challenge seems to be that “there’s a huge variety of motivations for people staying home, and these transcend safety and finances” and therefore organizations may end up providing “individualized” solutions.

Employers and employees seek the same outcome, to restore the magic of in-person interactions that feed social and emotional health, and organizational and economic prosperity. The journey toward that goal is likely to be a long and experimental period, filled with give and take from both sides.



PIVOTING

Facility managers, corporate architects and designers have been reacting with a myriad of design and product solutions to safely bring people back into the workspace, including redefining how space is laid out, more mindful technology integration to unite off-site and on-site workers, creative outdoor footprints, and exploring anti-microbial finishes— once only typically used in healthcare applications.

Based on our survey responses, almost every respondent has implemented a change to their space to increase safety and comfort levels. For instance, wearing masks and access to sanitization supplies appear to be wide-spread practices, and even state-mandated in some locations.

In many larger workspaces, limiting the population in an office is sometimes easier for employers to implement and can help to avoid costlier, permanent solutions such as additional furniture solutions or floorplan changes. Partial occupancy may be a factor of both employers limiting occupancy, and work-from-home support and capabilities.



What's Next?

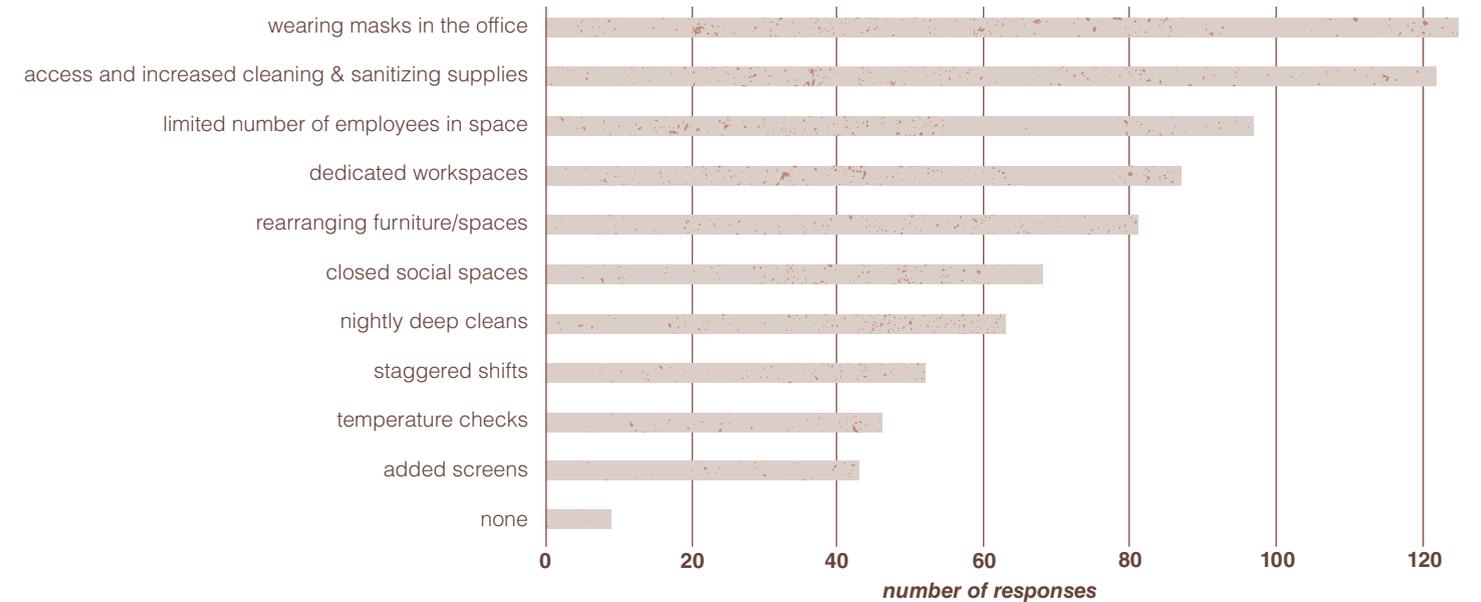
From a September 16, 2020 McKinsey briefing note, *COVID-19 and The Great Reset*, employers should look at their current budgeting and planning season as an opportunity to reset and emerge from the crisis stronger than before.

As we prepared to re-open our own Worklabs, our teams spent hours of planning, designing and executing new protocols and safety measures— tasks that we were thankfully able to complete in-house because of the breadth of experience in our team members! Through this work, we are able to continue to provide a nurturing and uplifting environment that strengthens social ties, well-being, and organizational purpose. Through digital, video or in-person visits, we are encouraging our space to be used as a place to bring people back together in a stronger, more intentional way than ever before.

Are you beginning your own return-to-the-office journey and aren't sure where to start? Reach out to us and a member of our Evolving Workplace team would be happy to share our findings with you!

LEARN MORE

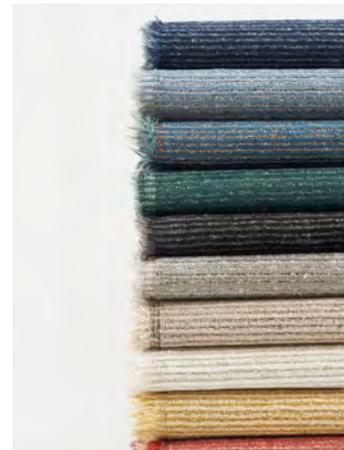
which of the following has your organization adopted (to lessen the risk of transmission)?





SWOONING

Turnstone Pivot screen | Turnstone Campfire lounges + pouf | Turnstone Bassline table



DesignTex x West Elm Corded upholstery | Turnstone Bivi desk in unexpected finishes | Nanimarquina Arzu rug | Moooi Tinkering pendant | Blu Dot Deep Thoughts chair



SWOONING

Steelcase Ology desk in new reclaimed gravel laminate, and Steelcase Soffio screen | Hightower Pronto sofa | Hon Astir collection

Coalesse Hans J. Wegner Wishbone chair, now available for a limited time in matte colors

CARBON NEUTRAL, CARBON NEGATIVE

In August, Steelcase announced their achievement of carbon neutrality throughout their operations and their goal of *becoming completely carbon negative (or climate positive) by 2030*. To execute their endeavor, Steelcase will work to reduce absolute emissions from their operations by 50% before the year 2030, cut indirect emissions from business travel and waste generated in operations, and engage with suppliers to set their own science-based targets by 2025.

Steelcase was also just named one of the most sustainably managed companies by the *Wall Street Journal*. The journal's methodology took a broad view of "sustainability, one which assesses a company's leadership and governance practices for their ability to create value for shareholders over the long term".

Less than 200 companies worldwide have set such lofty environmental goals. With over 100 years in business and a long history of protecting the environment, we are proud to partner with the best!

To learn more, head to [steelcase.com](https://www.steelcase.com)



ABOUT

Process matters. At Atmosphere Commercial Interiors, we are dedicated to partnering with you to connect the dots between your creative team's vision and living in a space that is authentic to you and your brand.

With Steelcase, a global leader in workplace products and research, and hundreds of additional vendor partners, we offer a comprehensive portfolio of products, technologies and services to ensure we provide you the right solutions, no matter where you are in your project timeline.



The Nordic
design by Studio BV
photo by Corey Gaffer



The Nordic
design by Studio BV
photo by Corey Gaffer

element is a trademark of atmosphere commercial interiors

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