

3 in 5 people feel
lonely at work.
It doesn't have
to be this way.

We're designing loneliness out of the workplace.

Join us.



Meet the Loneliness Lab

We're a collective of people and organisations working together to design loneliness out of our cities. We believe the way we design the spaces where we live, work and play influences how connected or lonely we feel as a society.

Since 2018 we've been exploring how loneliness can be addressed through the built environment with our diverse network, which includes developers, academics, designers, community organisations and people with lived experience of loneliness. This progress report shares a snapshot of our initial findings on loneliness in the workplace.

This research took place before the COVID-19 outbreak. Now, in June 2020, we're working to help shape a post-COVID-19 workplace without loneliness.



£3.7bn

Loneliness costs UK employers £2.2 - £3.7bn a year.¹ This includes £20m absenteeism, £220m caring for those with loneliness, £665m poorer wellbeing and loss of productivity, and £1.62bn voluntary staff turnover.

1.02m

Office workers are estimated to feel chronically lonely.¹ This is as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.²

56% ↑

Workplace belonging leads to a 56% increase in job performance (50% reduction in turnover risk and a 75% decrease in employee sick days).³

SOURCES:

1. Co-op & New Economics Foundation, (2017) *The Cost of Loneliness to UK Employers*. London: New Economics Foundation.
2. 19th Surgeon General of the United States, Vivek Murthy, 2017.
3. BetterUp Labs, (2018). *The Value of Belonging at Work: New Frontiers for Inclusion*. US: BetterUp.



NEIL MARTIN

CEO of Lendlease Europe,
a founding partner of
the Loneliness Lab

“At Lendlease we see the importance of meaningful connection between people as fundamental to their and our organisation’s wellbeing. As co-founders of the Loneliness Lab we have gained invaluable insights that we can use to inform the design of our future workplaces. We aspire to design-out loneliness and build in connectedness in pursuit of our vision to create the best places, fit for the future.”

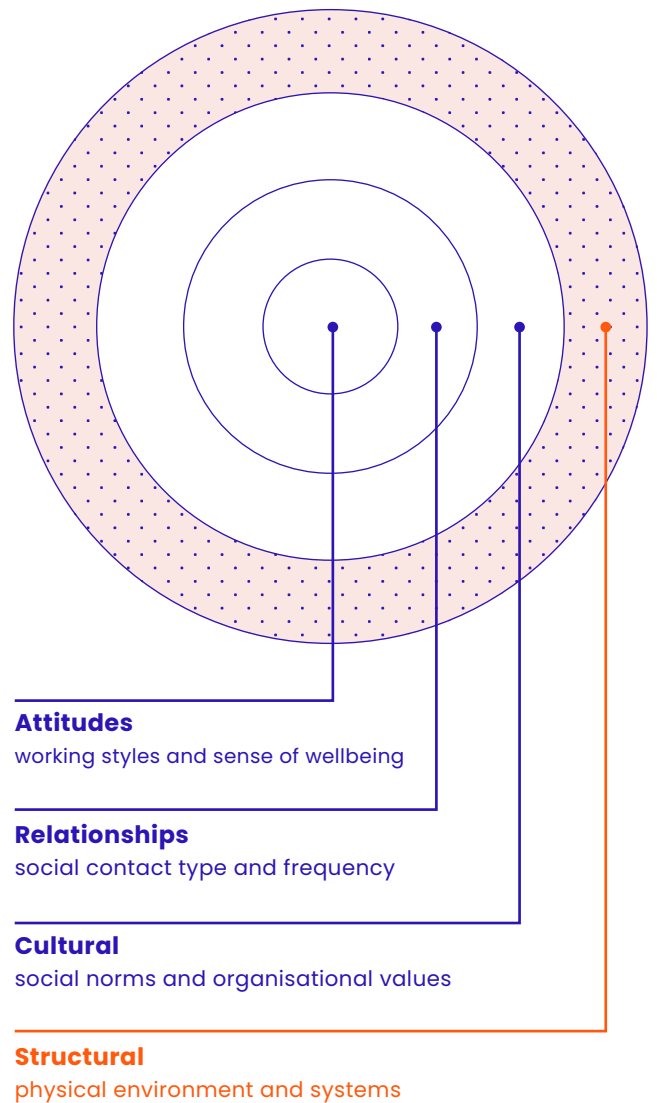
Why workplace loneliness matters

A staggering 42%¹ of people say they have no friends at work – yet this is the place where we spend a third of our lives.

Research shows that meaningful connections at work are vital for our wellbeing and that they boost productivity, collaboration and loyalty to an organisation.

While many factors contribute to loneliness at work, the Loneliness Lab is particularly interested in the structural drivers of loneliness, and specifically a previously overlooked aspect of workplace research, the physical environment.

Contributing factors are interconnected: physical design influences how we feel and behave in the office; while workplace culture also affects how we interact in a space.



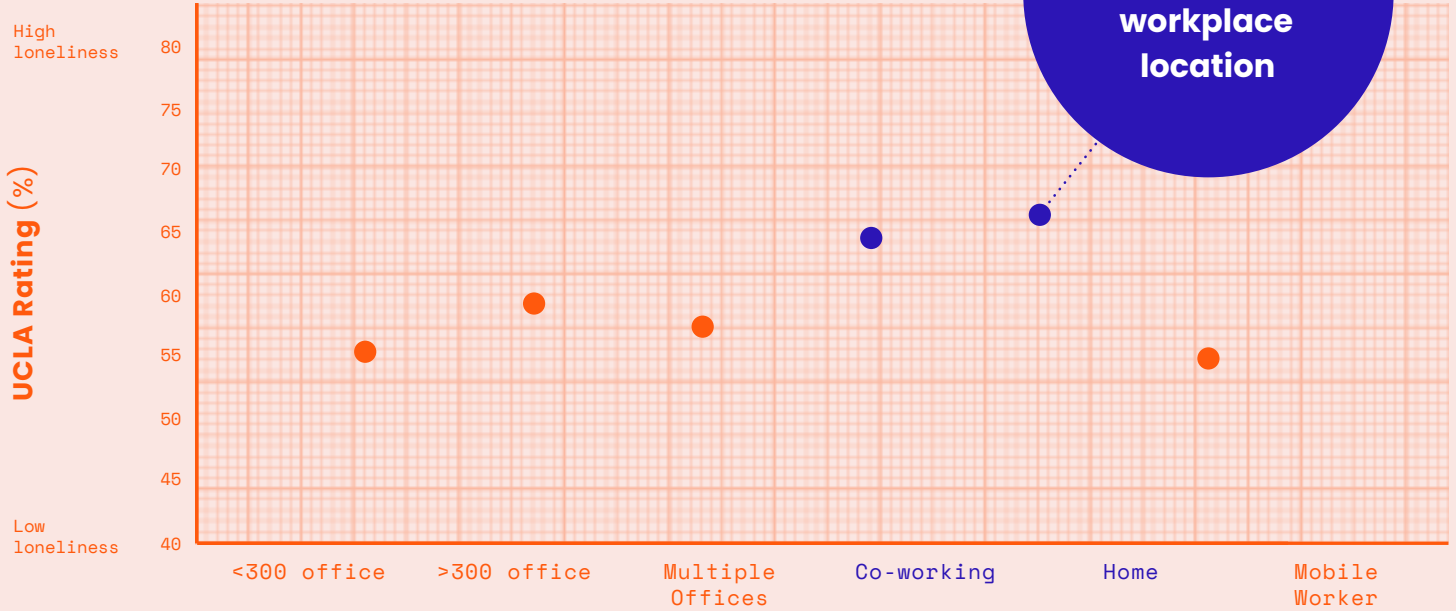
*“The workplace factors affecting loneliness include **organisational culture**, such as the core values and management awareness of loneliness; **work-life balance**, including workload and work hours; **workstyle**, such as remote working and agile working; and **physical environment**, of workplaces and other spaces, including the layout and facilities.”²*

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NIGEL OSELAND, ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGIST

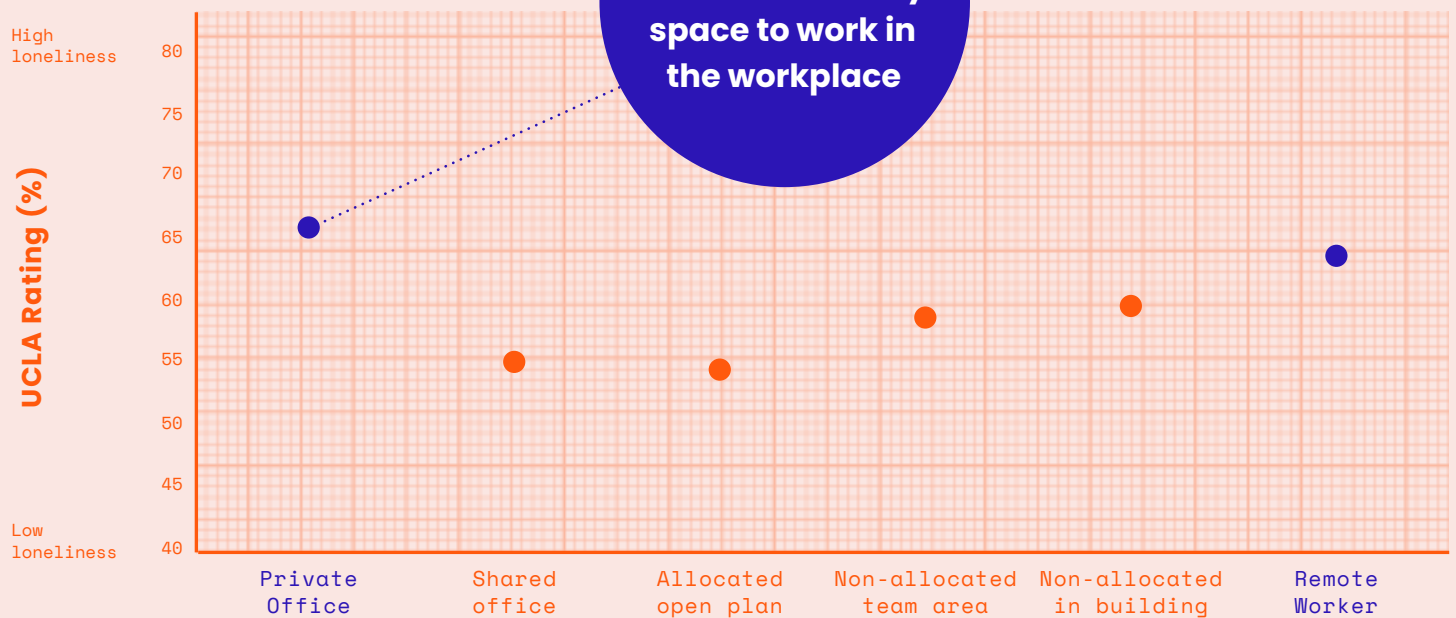
SOURCE:

1. Relate. (2014) *The Way We Are Now 2014*. London: Relate.
2. Nigel Oseland. (2019) *Workplace Connectedness. A review of loneliness and related research*. London: Workplace Unlimited.

LONELINESS BY OFFICE LOCATION



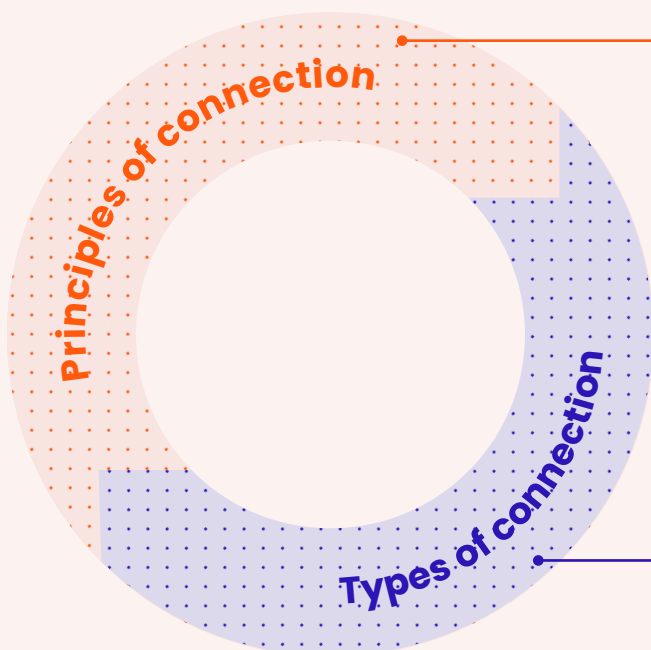
LONELINESS BY DESK TYPE



What leads to meaningful connection in the workplace?

Our initial research and early insights suggest our ability to connect with others at work increases when certain principles are present in the workplace.

When these relationships form, there can be different levels of connection at play. For example, we do not need everybody to be our 'best' friend as a number of 'weak ties' or everyday encounters are equally valuable.



A sense of agency

Knowing that we have agency – or permission – over space and relationships creates a feeling of belonging

Space to be human

Encouraging people to show up as themselves rather than a 'work' persona increases connection and mental wellbeing

Recognise diversity

Each individual has changing work styles and needs – it's possible to be lonely in a crowd and sometimes we need time alone to rebalance

Value friendship

It's important to place a value on interactions between colleagues beyond purely 'working relationships'

Weak ties

Having a network of familiar faces around us can boost wellbeing and feelings of safety

Work friendships

Bonds that transcend what you are working on

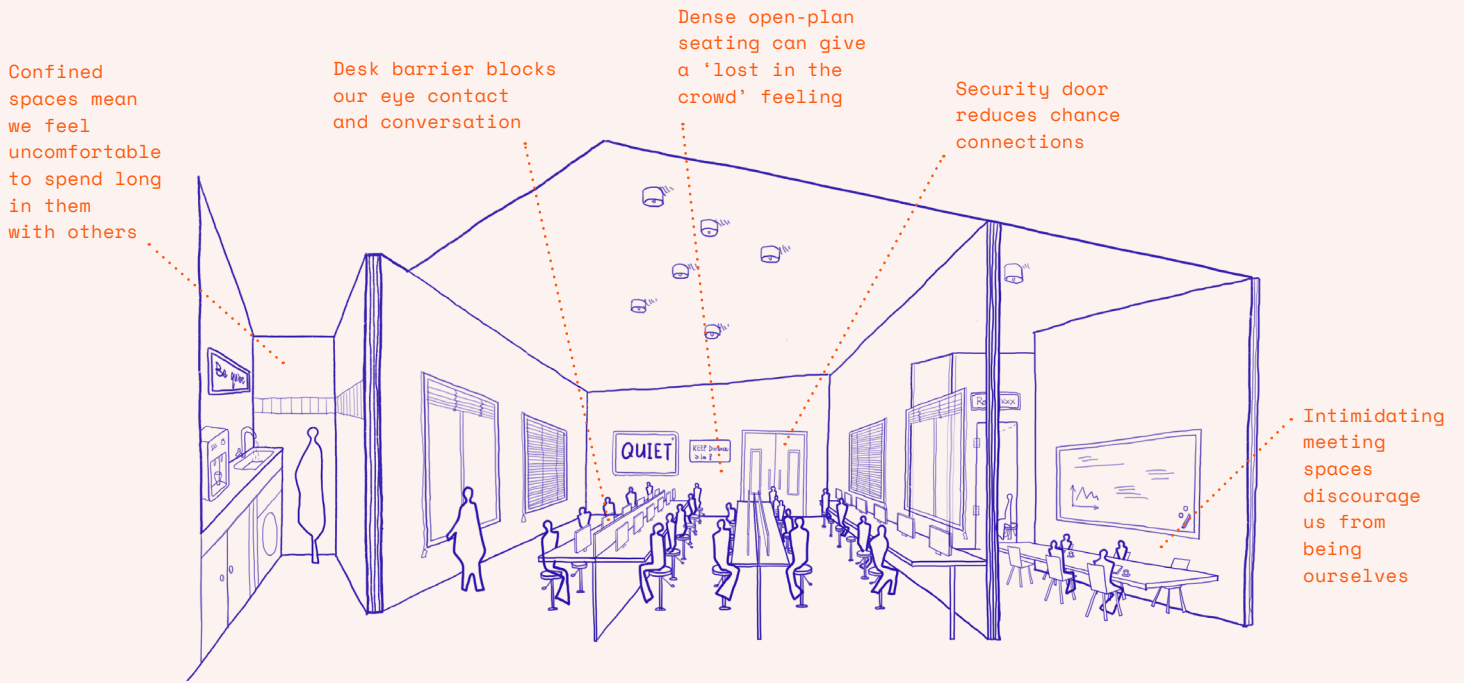
Trusted colleagues

Solid and dependable ties with co-workers where interaction is less formal

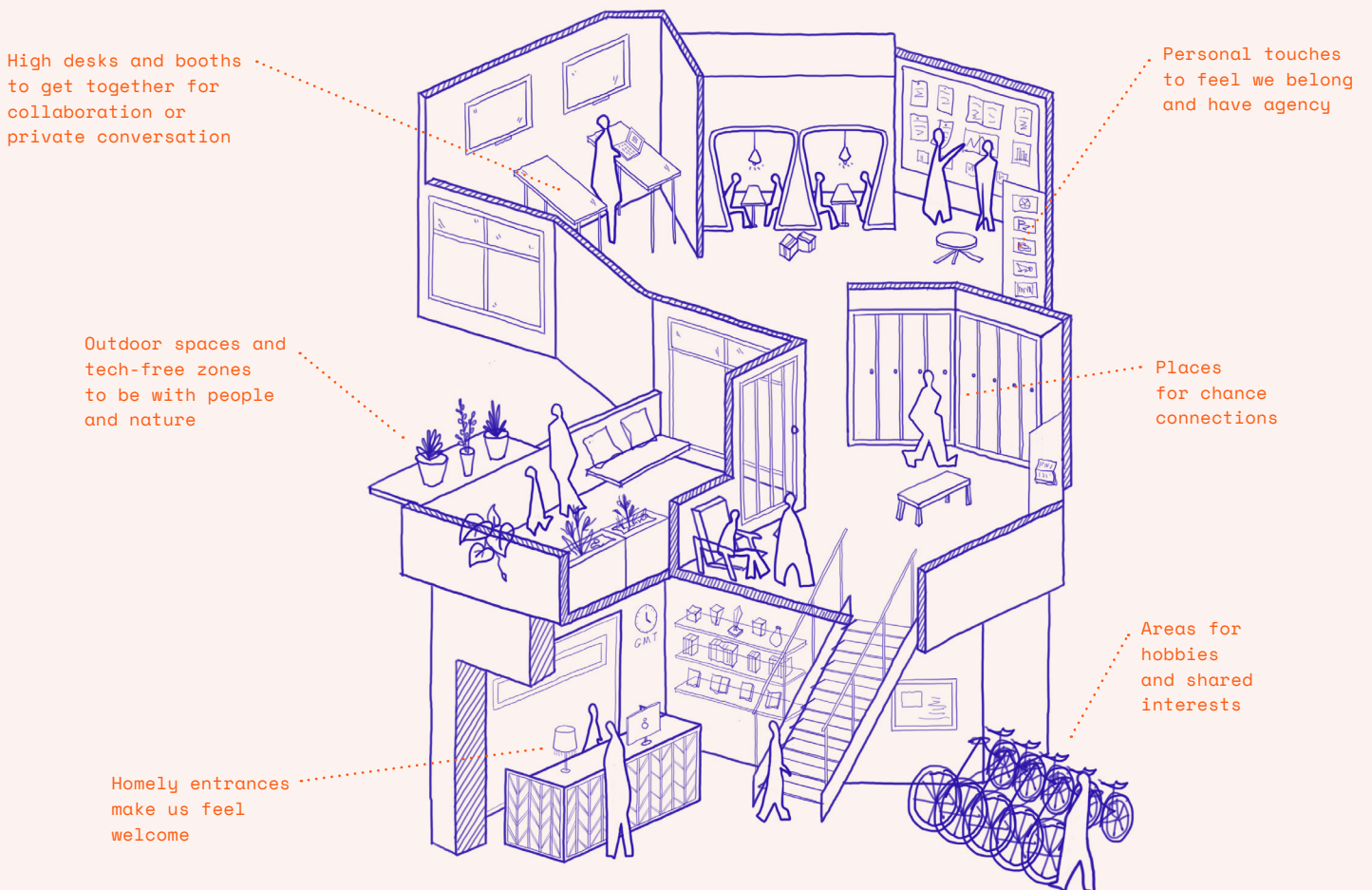
Sense of belonging

A feeling that you are an accepted and valued member of the team and organisation

What workplace design disconnects us?



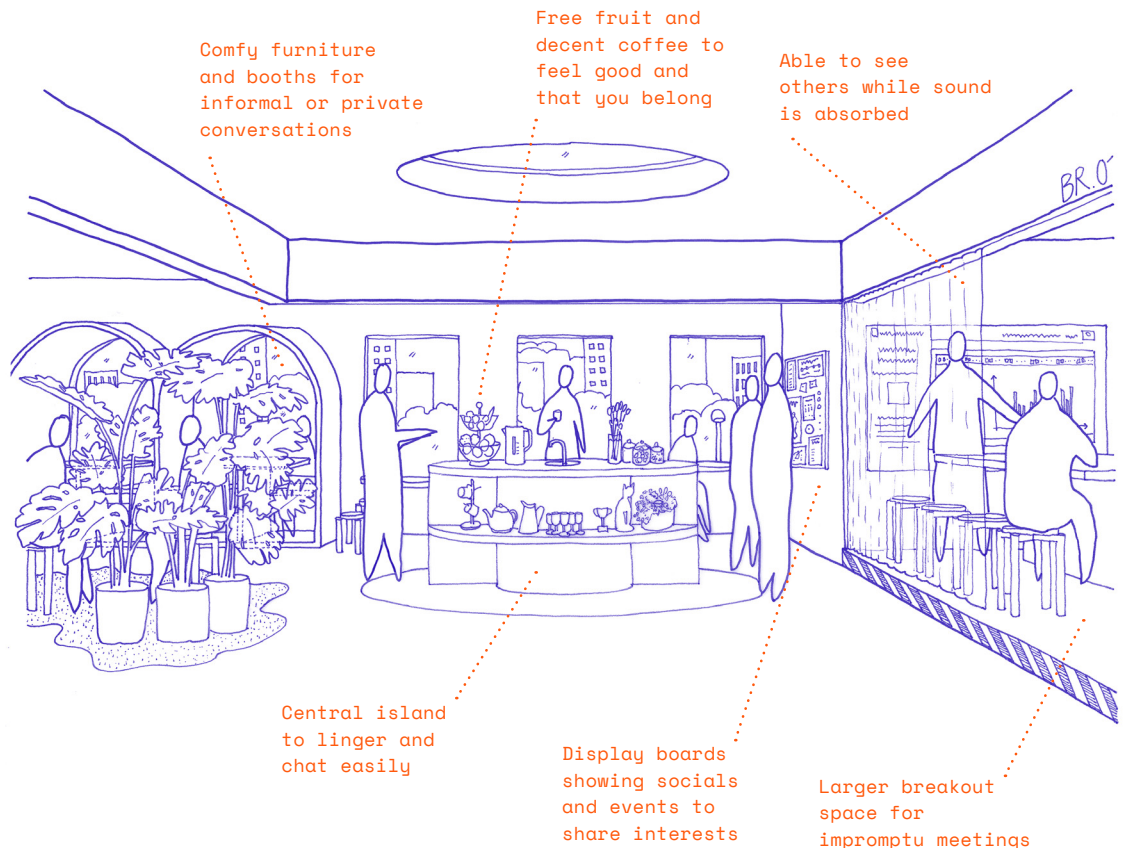
What workplace design connects us?



How can the design of our workspaces better support experiences that connect us?

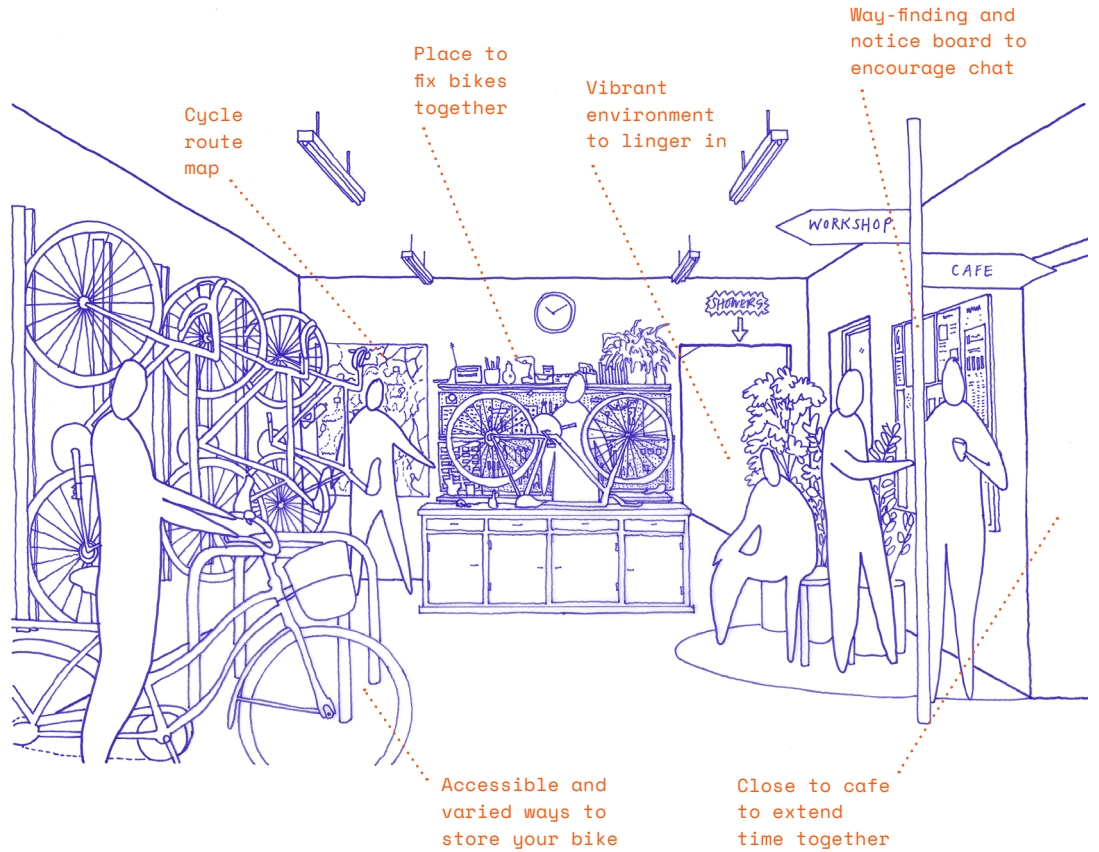
Making friends while you wait

Small shared activities such as making a cup of tea, printing a document or waiting for a lift offer the opportunity to meet someone new or talk to people you don't usually work with. The goal of breakout spaces is to turn those awkward silences into small shared moments.



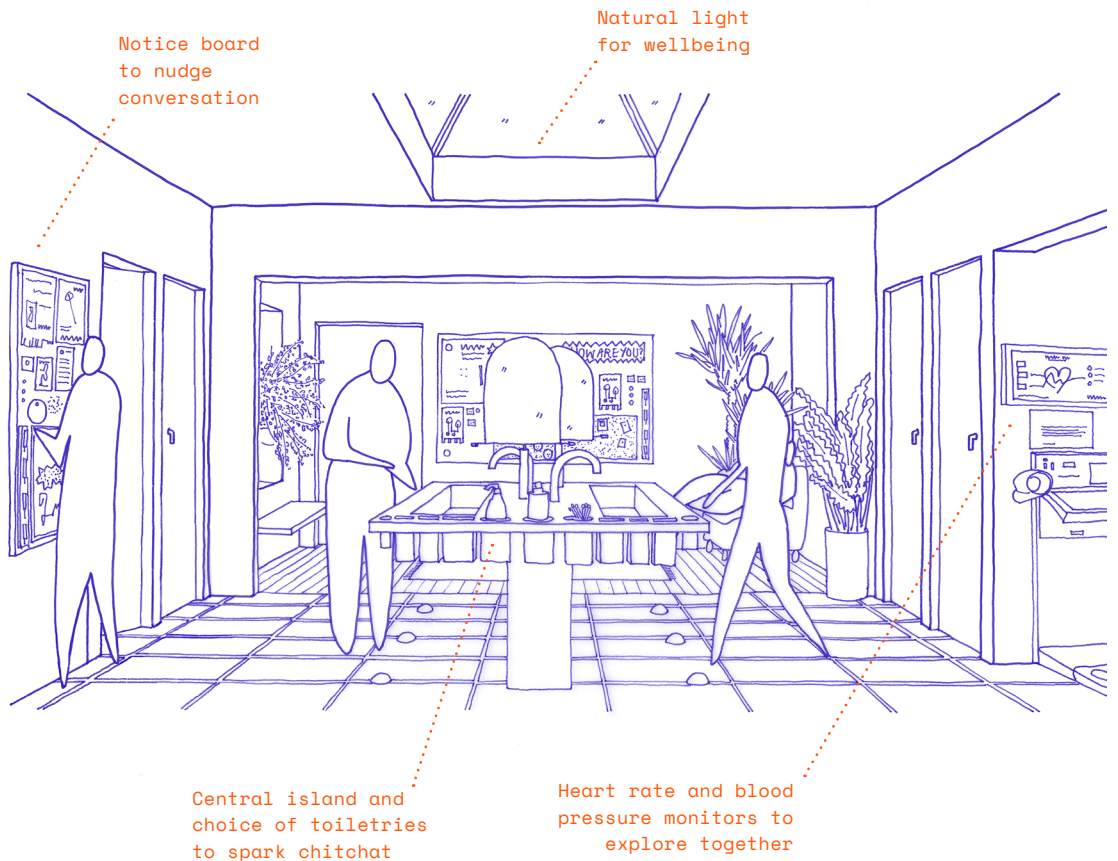
Sharing interests

Our research showed bike storage and end of trip facilities (such as showers and changing rooms) were high on the list of places that help people to connect meaningfully with others at work. Bumping into others with similar interests can help us to connect authentically and naturally.



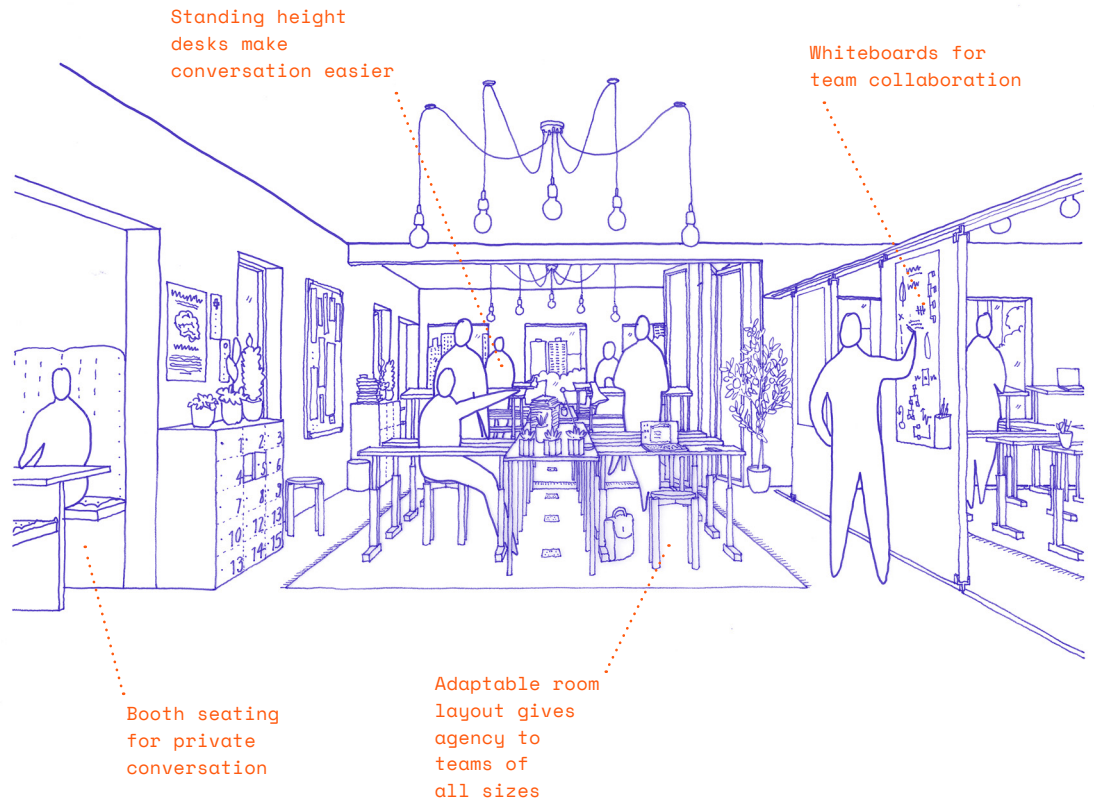
Chance connections

A necessary and very personal activity, it's important to provide choice to connect or to have time alone in toilets or change facilities. These are places where we can snap out of a workplace mindset, and so are good opportunities to connect with people on a human level. Notions of hierarchy are removed and waiting times can nudge casual conversation unrelated to work.



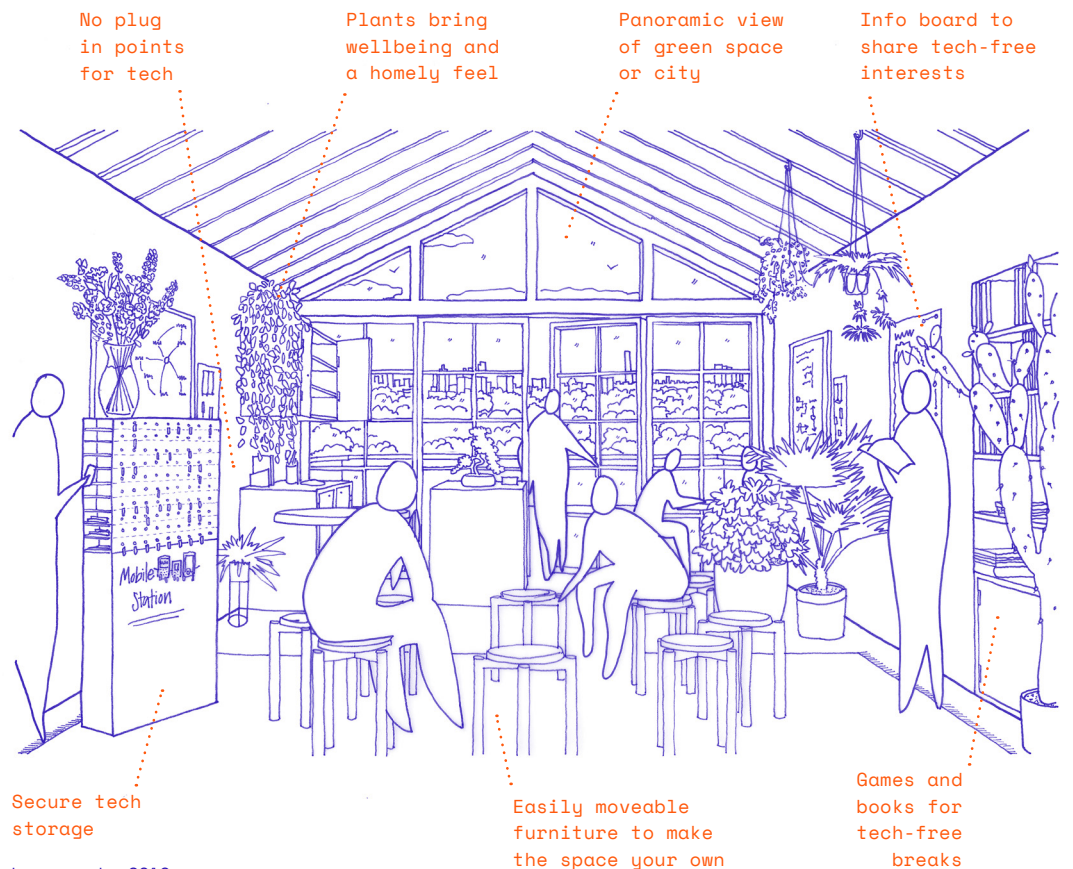
Building individual bonds

Strong individual bonds rely on one-on-one time. Our research showed that people need to feel comfortable in order to focus on and be mutually interested in each other. Non-bookable breakout rooms in project team spaces allow colleagues to drop into private conversation, and smaller communal settings offer intimate spaces to speak to others.



Feeling part of something

Digital technology has made great strides in reducing loneliness for homeworkers and those who are housebound. However, research shows it's easy to confuse our relationship with technology for real relationships, and our online friendship networks may lack trust and depth. Digital free zones enable more authentic and face-to-face connections without the distractions of the online world.



This is just a snippet of our work. Get in touch if you'd like to be a part of the ongoing conversation about loneliness in the workplace.

Join us

loneliness@collectively.org

The Loneliness Lab was co-founded by non-profit Collectively and international property infrastructure group Lendlease in 2018. Since then the Lab has grown into a diverse network of over 100 organisations and 300+ individuals.

This work has been led by a cross-organisational team made up of representatives from Lendlease, Buro Happold and British Red Cross in partnership with workplace expert Nigel Oseland. The report has been funded by International Quarter London, a progressive business development in Stratford, East London.

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GiaEquation
Hoare Lea
The Challenge
economy of hours
White Red Architects
Unispace
HOK
Framework
and many more



collectively

With thanks to our funding partner



With thanks to our research partners

BURO HAPPOLD



British RedCross

workplace unlimited

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