

ACADEMIC RESEARCH POSTER : FLEXIBILITY AND SPACE OPTIMIZATION IN WORKPLACE DESIGN POST-PANDEMIC ERA

INTRODUCTION

Before March 2020, the majority of businesses and employees did not believe that working remotely could be done effectively. However, work environment concepts like virtual workplaces were developed and tested before the pandemic. Firms such as IBM and others attempted various things with remote work. The employees needed help with international timing and commuting from place to place in many industries. The perspective on the fate of work changed due to the coronavirus. The future of the workplace, where many people will choose remote employment, must be examined by organizations to comprehend how technological innovation has altered the world. (Vierling, 2020)

During the pandemic, we moved from location-based (working in the office) to location-agnostic (working anywhere). These space and time dimensions are illustrated in Figure 1.

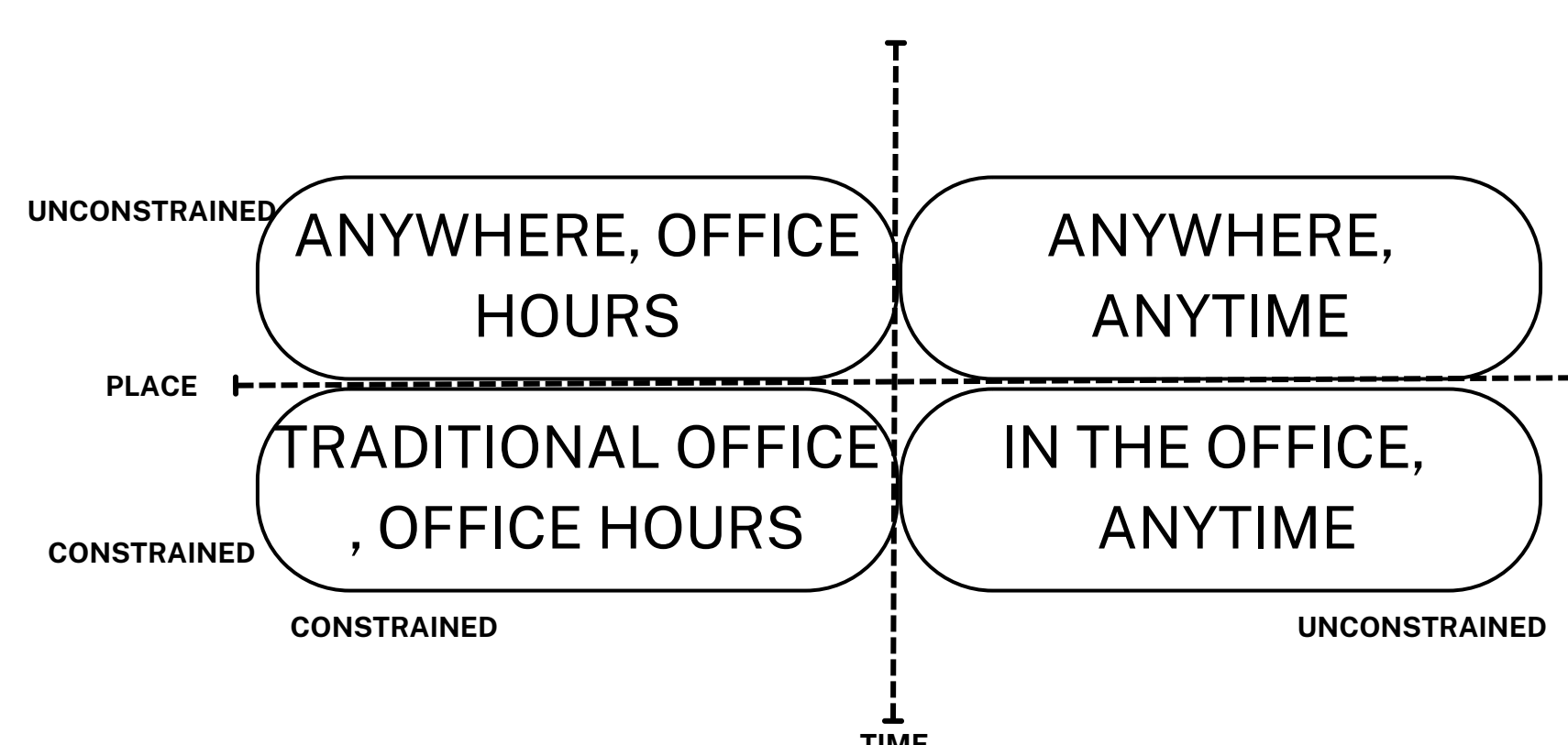


Figure 1 Work arrangements in space and time (applied from Gratton, 2021).

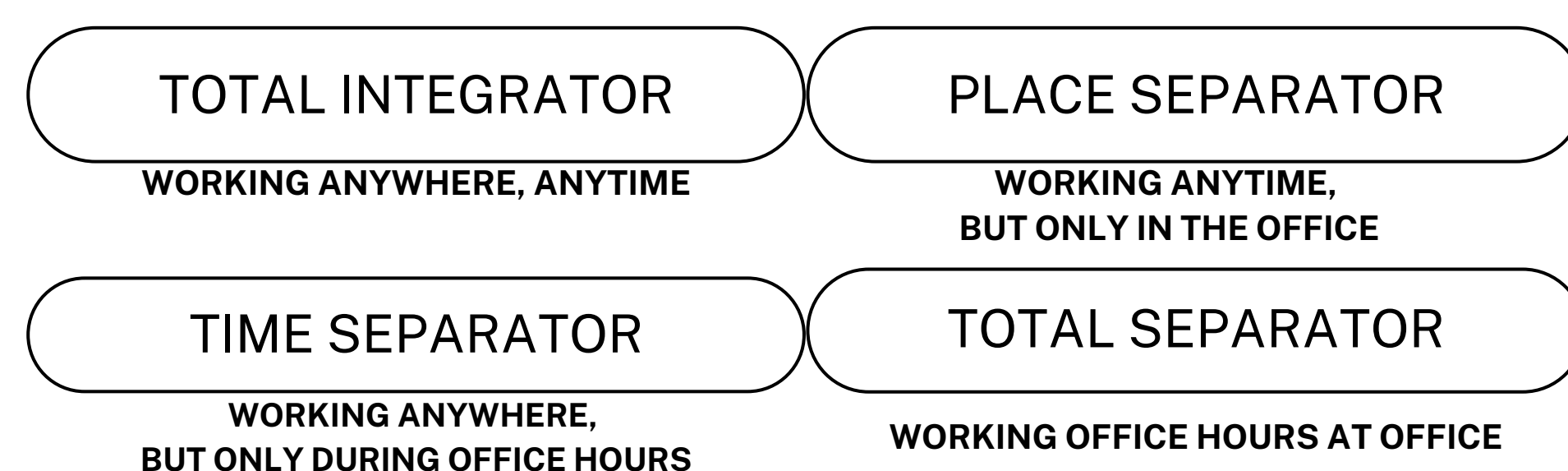


Figure 2 Four strategies for dealing with digitally set work-life (applied from Falkman, 2020).

Pre-Covid-19, most organizations offered minimal flexibility on both fronts. Traditional user profiles are also represented in this limited context. This places the employee in the bottom left quadrant, and the employee is in the office at the given time. Some companies have started challenging the lower right quadrant by allowing more flexible working hours. Traditional user profiles are also represented in this limited context. Some companies are experimenting in the upper left quadrant, primarily by increasing the flexibility of where they work from home. However, few companies have moved squarely into the upper right quadrant, the model for using the hybrid anytime, anywhere model. (Gratton, 2021.) As described at the individual level by Falkman (2020), flexible working arrangements combine both time and place. She proposes four core strategies for addressing personal work and life in a digitally influenced WorkLife. They are (1) Total Integrator, (2) Location Separator, (3) Time Separator, and (4) Total Separator, which are shown in Figure 2.



figure 3 Cisco global workforce survey, Oct 2020

AIM

The study aims to explore space optimization in a corporate workplace in the post-pandemic era to bring new insights to the upcoming workplace design.

OBJECTIVE

- To understand current activity trends and to study occupancy patterns.
- To explore various flexible furniture and interior elements for space optimization.
- To identify the effects of the working model on various industries and how they are adapting to post-pandemic change.

METHODS

The primary research method in this study is qualitative, using survey questionnaires to understand the current occupancy and working patterns in hybrid workplaces. The framework of the methodology has been outlined, and a case study will be used to show its application. The simplified steps of the methodology (Figure 4) are as follows.

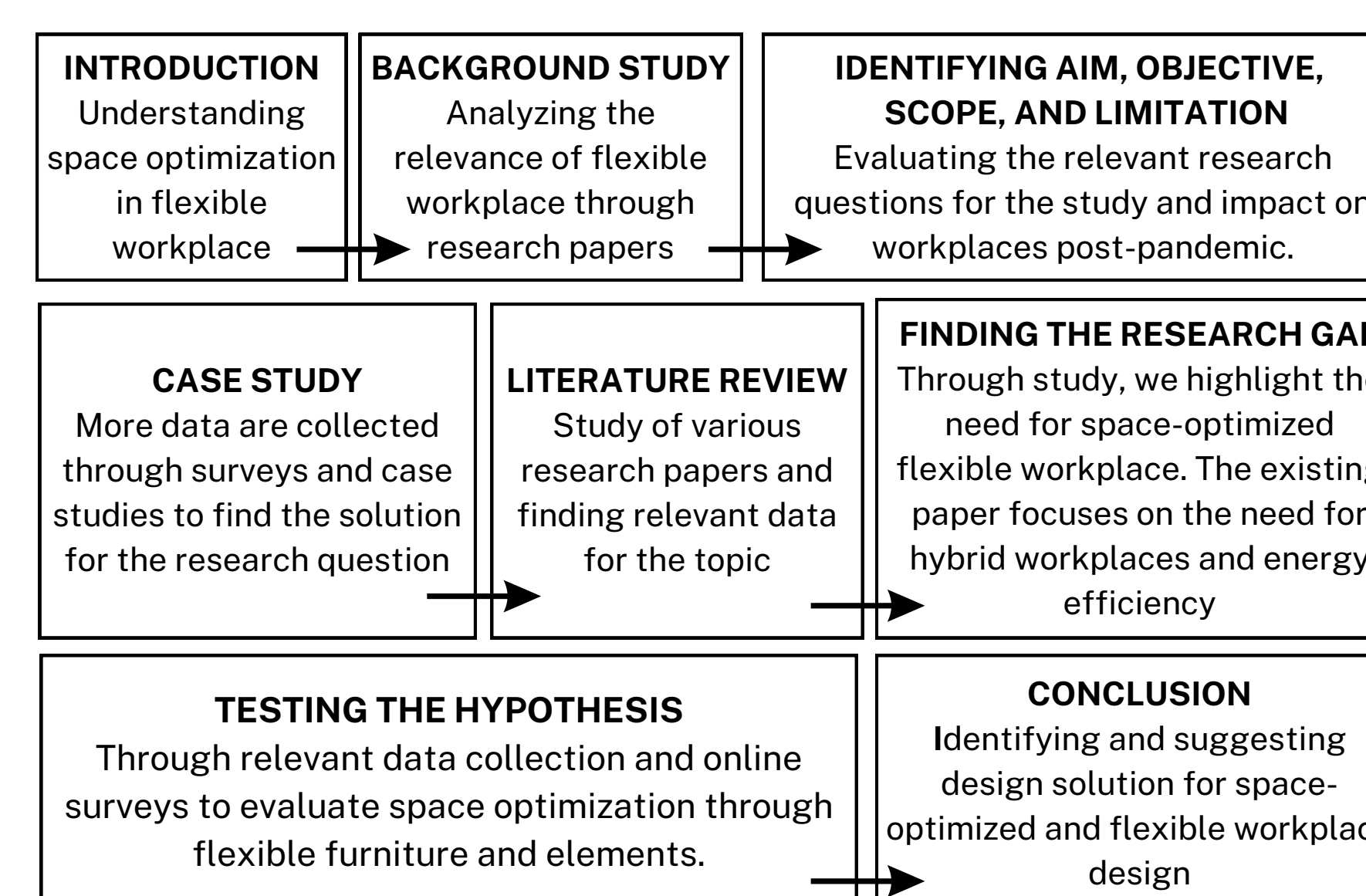
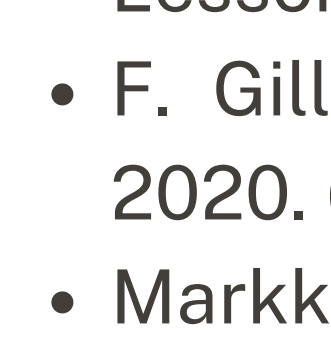
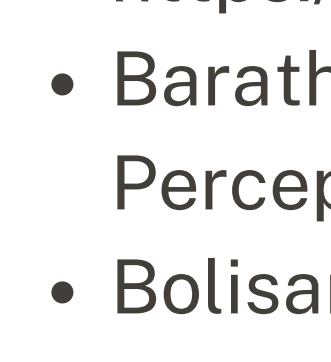
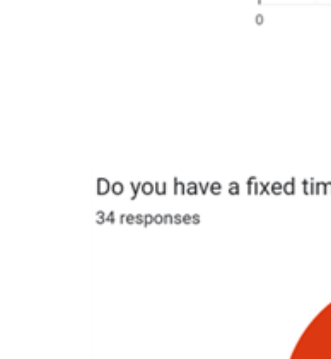
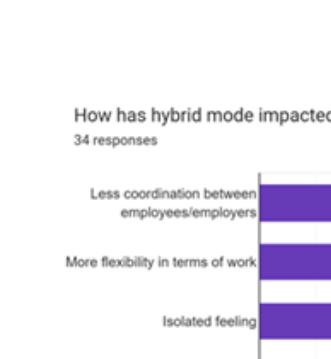
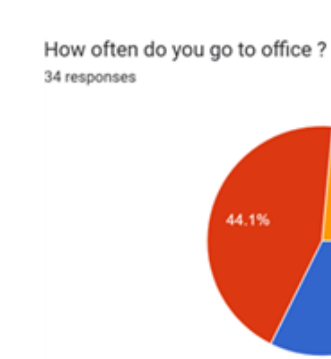


FIGURE 4

ANALYSIS

- From Fig 5. 44.1% out of 34 respondents only go to the office 2-3 days a week
- From Fig 8. Only 20.6% of 34 respondents have shifted to more compacted space, even though most have been working from home most days.
- From fig 7. It is understood that most prefer hybrid/flexible mode working due to flexible timing/remote working patterns.
- From the survey, it is understood that out of 34 respondents, only a few people have assigned desks or cubicles. Others work in mostly collaborative spaces or meeting rooms.



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FINDINGS

- Understanding occupancy trends and current activity trend
 - To improve workplaces in the future, a comprehensive understanding of workplace design decisions and processes is essential. Through survey it indicates that the occupancy pattern in offices is reducing as the employees only come to the office weekly twice or thrice, the need for the optimization of space is required.
- Exploring various industries affected by post-pandemic and how they are shifting to a flexible working model
 - Mainly industries like telecommunication, banking, and IT are adopting the flexible working model. The IT industry offers more flexibility in terms of work through survey results. Through case studies, we studied how flexible office building functions and how flexible design solutions can be implemented in future design. The result from the survey also indicated that in India, even after the organizations are working in Hybrid, they have not shifted to more compacted space.
- Spatial configuration in workplace design through flexible Furniture
 - Spatial Optimization can be achieved by incorporating flexible furniture in workplace design.
 - Flexible furniture like movable acoustic screens, loose acoustic furniture, and modular wall partitions such as VIA by Steelcase can be implemented for meeting rooms and collab areas.
 - Tent pods can be installed for areas like focus zones/respice area, which serves both acoustic and privacy functions.
 - An adaptable workspace system can be introduced in workplace design, where one piece of furniture allows users to create workstations, collab areas, focus zones, and lounge settings in one platform.
 - Unlike traditional workspaces, incorporating loose furniture rather than system furniture will help utilize each area/space.

CONCLUSION

As the world slowly shifts towards a flexible working model, office design must adapt to the following change. This study aimed to explore space optimization and flexibility in workplaces after COVID-19. Understanding workplace design processes and putting a collaborative design-generated workplace design were the two concurrent knowledge interests of this project. Although the research produced information that was unique to the organization, the methodological framework creates options for the collection of design data for both design and research.