

Intelligent Workplace Experiences

How real estate, IT, and HR teams can create
a future-proofed workplace in the age of AI

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AI is rewriting everything we know about the workplace. This new world leverages office real estate as a smart, sensor-rich, identity-aware, AI-accelerated environment – where every square foot is measured, every employee experience is personalized, every kilowatt is accounted for, and every building system shares one fabric. The office stops being a fixed cost and becomes a continuously measurable asset.

Today's workplace must evolve to become an active work participant. Becoming an intelligent ecosystem that senses, reasons, and acts. This paper explains the changes facing today's workforce and the workplace, and how Cisco helps your real estate, IT, and HR teams work together to design, build, secure and operate an intelligent workplace experience.



How the workplace is changing

The workplace problem is no longer about empty buildings. It is about portfolios that cannot be measured, employees who do not see a reason to come in, sustainability targets that arrive without evidence, and a stack of workplace technologies from a dozen vendors that no one can defend as one posture. The shift underway is from real estate to real-time — from square feet as a cost line to signal as an asset class.

The economic backdrop is unforgiving. US office vacancy sits at a historic 20%¹, with downtown San Francisco above 36%² and Manhattan above 22%³. European office investment has fallen by half since the peak⁴. APJ markets are diverging — Tokyo and Sydney recovering, Hong Kong and parts of mainland China still under pressure⁵. And while broad-market occupancy across the top US metros has only just reached 56% on Kastle's back-to-work barometer, Class A+ buildings are running at 78.8% — the clearest evidence yet that demand is concentrating in the highest-quality stock⁶.

Inside that softness, Class A+ buildings — the top 5–10% of every market — are leasing at premium rents and near-full occupancy⁷. The flight to quality is real. The market is voting for a different kind of building.

The leaders in every industry are making the same move: turn the workplace into a data platform. Measure it. Right-size it. Make it the place employees choose. Prove the sustainability. Leverage AI to help workers in whatever space they are in to what they do best – collaborate and create. And then consolidate the many systems running the building onto one fabric. That is the Intelligent Workplace Experience — and it is already in market, already defensible, and already generating measurable return.

Class A+ buildings are leasing at near-full occupancy.

Defining the Intelligent Workplace Experience

In one sentence: an Intelligent Workplace Experience is a workplace run as an information system, where every space, device, sensor, identity, and AI agent operates on one secure network and one governed data fabric, producing measurable outcomes in real estate efficiency, energy performance, employee experience, and IT/OT security from a single architecture instead of ten stitched-together programs. This is how you future proof your workplace, where technology for people and places operates as one unified signal.

In concrete terms, it is the workplace where the shift from square feet to signal is complete. With an AI-ready secure network as the foundation—capable of handling agentic traffic and advanced IT/OT policy—its additional value lies in translating that network capability into tangible spatial realities. For architects, designers, and real estate strategists, this telemetry provides the continuous evidence needed to confidently move walls, shift neighborhood traffic flows, and specify the right furniture, rather than just feeding data to an IT operations center. Collaboration devices are the sensory system, producing distance-zero meeting experiences and continuous workplace telemetry from the same hardware. Cisco Spaces and Splunk become the data and intelligence fabric, turning that signal into insight for CRE, IT, and HR teams simultaneously. Together these three layers deliver the four outcomes — Create Adaptive Spaces, Drive Energy Efficiency, Earn the Commute, and Consolidate the Workplace Stack — each measurable, each owned by a distinct stakeholder, all four delivered from one architecture.

This is how you future proof your workplace, where technology for people and places operates as one unified signal.



The four outcomes of an Intelligent Workplace Experience

An Intelligent Workplace Experience lands in four measurable outcomes. Each is observable in the portfolio within twelve months, each is defensible at the board, and each is delivered today on one architecture.

Together they are the framework every CRE+IT executive team should be planning against — and the criteria every workplace technology investment should be evaluated against.



Create adaptive spaces



Drive energy efficiency



Earn every commute



Consolidate the workplace stack



Create adaptive spaces

Make every real estate optimization decision with real usage data, not anecdotes. Twelve months of objective occupancy, movement, and collaboration telemetry turns every lease renewal, floor redesign, and capex conversation into an evidence-based one. Most enterprises discover 15–30% of their footprint is structurally underused the first time they do this exercise⁸ — which translates directly into reduced lease cost, deferred capex, and a board-defensible portfolio narrative. The win is not just smaller; it is smarter — the right space, in the right shape, in the right location, supporting the work that actually happens there.

Use cases

1. Portfolio heat-mapping and right-sizing

Every floor, room, and desk is continuously instrumented — by day, by hour, by team, by season. Floor plates get redesigned around how teams actually cluster — discovered from real movement, badge, Wi-Fi, and collaboration data — instead of around the org chart drawn five years ago. CRE walks into every lease renewal and capex conversation with evidence rather than opinion, and the board gets a portfolio narrative supported by the same data the CFO models against.

2. Frictionless booking with no-show auto-reclaim

Rooms and desks held but unused for the first ten minutes are automatically returned to the available-inventory pool, surfaced to nearby employees, and reflected in real-time wayfinding. Phantom reservations stop inflating the supply line, effective capacity at peak grows 10–20%⁹, and employees stop hunting for empty space the system thinks is booked.

3. Use data for dynamic service operations

Building services such as cleaning, cafeteria, or maintenance can be dynamically scheduled based on actual usage rather than fixed routines. AI-powered platforms can process vast streams of sensor and usage data, identifying patterns and automating responses that would be impossible to manage manually. This insight alone can be a massive cost saver.



Drive energy efficiency

Move from sustainability pledges to sustainability proof. When lighting, HVAC, and plug load respond to real occupancy and environmental telemetry — not schedules drawn a decade ago — 20–40% energy reductions are routine¹⁰, with every kilowatt audit-ready. ESG reporting stops being a narrative exercise and becomes a data feed. And because the same telemetry that proves the savings also surfaces the next opportunity, the curve compounds year over year rather than plateauing after the first retrofit.

Use cases

20%–40%

energy reduction
with no degradation
to the employee
experience.

4. Occupancy-driven HVAC and lighting

Building systems track real presence down to the zone, the floor, and the room. HVAC and lighting respond to actual demand instead of fixed schedules, delivering 20–40% energy reduction with no degradation to the employee experience and no human in the loop.

5. Plug-load intelligence on every port

Power-over-Ethernet (PoE) meters every connected device on the network and reports its draw in real time. Shadow IT, vampire load, dormant displays, and phantom draw become visible and recoverable — typically another 5–10% of building load¹¹ that no one was previously measuring.

6. Audit-ready ESG evidence

Every sustainability metric — energy, water, air quality, occupancy efficiency, embodied carbon — is sourced from the same fabric the finance team trusts. Disclosures stop being a narrative exercise and start being a continuous data feed, defensible to auditors, regulators, and the board on the same evidence basis as the income statement.



Earn every commute

Make the office a place employees choose, not one they are told to use. Frictionless entry, intelligent wayfinding, thermal and acoustic comfort, neurodiverse-ready spaces, and meetings where the remote participant is equally present. Utilization climbs because the office is better than the alternative, not because HR sends a memo. And the same instrumentation that personalizes the experience also surfaces what is and isn't working, so the office gets better in a tight feedback loop instead of being redesigned every five years.

Crucially, this technology must serve as a high-performance, invisible enabler rather than a command center. Earning the commute is fundamentally about the visceral experience of the room—the acoustics, the natural light, and the overall energy. Because these sensors run over existing Power over Ethernet (PoE) with no new cabling, they eliminate visual clutter while still delivering powerful spatial intelligence.

Use cases

7. Distance-zero meeting experiences

Cinematic framing, directional AI audio, real-time noise removal, live transcription and translation, and an AI assistant that drafts the follow-up. Hybrid parity stops being an aspiration. The remote employee is no longer a second-class citizen, and the office becomes the place where the best meetings actually happen.

8. Neuroinclusive and wellness-by-design spaces

Lighting, acoustics, air quality, and stimulation are tuned by space type — quiet zones, sensory-considered rooms, focus pods, posture-aware desks. The full diversity of the workforce, including the roughly 15–20% who identify as neurodivergent¹², gets a workplace they can actually do their best work in.

9. Continuous comfort and frictionless wayfinding

Air quality, CO₂, temperature, humidity, and acoustics are measured continuously from the same Cisco devices/sensors that already serve the floor — surfaced to employees on their phones and used to adjust zones in real time. Mobile credentials, no-touch entry, real-time space availability, in-app navigation to the right room and the right team neighborhood — no ticket, no reception queue, no laps around the floor hunting for an open room. The link between the building and human productivity stops being theoretical and starts being measurable, with comfort indices that can be reported to HR, occupancy planners, and ESG auditors from a single data fabric.



Consolidate the workplace stack

Collapse the ten systems running the building — network, collaboration, identity, security, access control, HVAC, lighting, sensors, AV, analytics — onto one fabric with one operating model and one defended posture. CRE and IT stop paying for ten contracts, integrating ten APIs, and explaining ten incidents. One network. One view. One bill. And because security and observability ride the same fabric as the workplace systems, the convergence does not weaken the posture; it strengthens it. Now, technology becomes the better way to design and construct for this new intelligent workplace.

Use cases

10. Converged IT/OT on one fabric with unified identity

HVAC, elevators, BMS, cameras, badge readers, EV chargers, and every Webex device share one network, one zero-trust identity model, and one security posture. All is built on the segmentation and policy IT depends on for cybersecure operations.

11. Unified workplace observability

Organizations can utilize dynamic data visualization solutions, like Cisco AI Canvas, to get persona specific insights about the workplace. One generative UI tool for each role to get insight into the room, the floor, and the portfolio — spanning network, collaboration, environmental, identity, and security telemetry. The team that runs the workplace, the team that runs the network, and the team that runs the SOC look at the same data and resolve incidents from the same console.

12. Real-time asset tracking and chain-of-custody

Every tagged asset — laptop, AV device, medical cart, mobile IoT — is continuously located, attributed to the right owner, and recorded with a complete audit trail. Loss falls, audits accelerate, and chain-of-custody becomes automatic instead of a quarterly spreadsheet exercise.



Why Cisco — the only vendor who delivers all four

Every outcome above depends on the same thing: a unified data fabric spanning network, identity, security, collaboration, and building telemetry.

While Cisco is uniquely positioned to deliver every layer of this stack natively, this architecture is designed to act as an open but unified ecosystem rather than a rigid mandate. By gracefully integrating with the complex building management systems (BMS) and legacy platforms that CRE executives and lead architects already manage, Cisco helps streamline current operations first.

From there, it provides a clear, consolidated path forward, where the architecture compounds across three layers; an AI-ready secure network as the foundation, collaboration technology as the experience and sensor layer, and Cisco Spaces and Splunk as the intelligence and data fabric. All seen and managed in real-time with Cisco Cloud Control. Each makes the next more valuable. Together they are why the Intelligent Workplace Experience is achievable today — using this integrated technology as a better way to design and construct from a cost, operations and security perspective.



The foundation — an AI-ready secure network

Everything else rides on the network. AgenticOps turns operations into an autonomous teammate: a single AI-driven control plane across campus, branch, and wireless, operators describing outcomes in plain language, and the same team supporting 10x the estate without growing headcount¹³. Security is fused into the network, not bolted on — distributed AI-native enforcement at silicon speed, zero-trust identity extended to every person, device, and AI agent, AI-specific guardrails for prompts and models, OT-native visibility for building systems, and one analytics plane for the SOC. And the infrastructure was rebuilt for what AI traffic actually looks like — Wi-Fi 7, multi-gig + PoE as the workplace power bus, AI-native data-center fabrics for the inference estate, and Private 5G extending the managed fabric outdoors. One fabric; one posture; designed for the agentic workforce as a first-class tenant.

This agentic shift creates new security and networking demands. Securing agentic workflows requires more than disconnected point solutions. It calls for a unified approach that brings together network intelligence, identity context, and real-time security controls to deliver visibility, policy consistency, and protection across AI-driven interactions.

Cisco helps organizations make this transition with an integrated, AI-ready architecture designed to reduce operational seams and strengthen security across users, devices, applications, and agents.



The intelligent room — Cisco collaboration technology

Cisco is the only collaboration vendor whose video devices are simultaneously the workplace experience, the workplace sensor, and the workplace edge-compute node. Every Webex endpoint is a meeting instrument, an environmental and occupancy sensor, an edge AI engine, and a managed node on the Cisco fabric — one device, four jobs. Distance-zero meeting experiences make hybrid parity real: cinematic framing, directional AI audio, live transcription and translation, and an AI Assistant that drafts the follow-up. AVoIP runs audio, video, and signage over the same standard IP network, so adding a room is a software act, not a construction act. Seamless ultrasonic and Bluetooth pairing puts BYOD sharing at sub-two-second friction — no HDMI, no dongle, no IT ticket. And because the devices live on the Cisco network, PoE powers them on a single cable, Webex traffic gets automatic QoS, identity and posture are enforced before the call starts, and every sensor stream flows directly into Cisco Spaces without ever leaving the Cisco trust boundary.

The intelligence and data fabric - Cisco Cloud Control, Spaces, and Splunk

Cisco Spaces turns every access point, switch port, Webex device, environmental sensor, IP camera, and connected building system into a unified stream of workplace intelligence — with no new cabling, no rip-and-replace, and no second network. Real-time and historical occupancy heat-maps, anonymous people counting from the Wi-Fi fabric, environmental intelligence feeding HVAC and lighting, wayfinding and booking exposed through Spaces APIs into whatever tenant-experience app is already in use, a digital twin of the portfolio, and an AI insights layer that turns raw signal into automated recommendations.



And then Splunk is what turns the Cisco workplace fabric from just telemetry data into cross-correlated workplace intelligence. Splunk is the only schema-on-read analytics platform whose owner also owns the source telemetry — network, Wi-Fi presence, identity, Webex device sensors, IoT, and converged OT and BMS signals. That combination unlocks the cross-domain questions point solutions cannot answer: “why did energy spike in zone 4 yesterday?” (HVAC × occupancy × outside temperature), “is conference room 304 actually underused?” (calendar × Webex sensor × badge × Wi-Fi), or “is this badge anomaly real?” (entry × network × camera).

And because Splunk’s AI Assistant accepts natural language, the people who actually need the answers — facilities managers, sustainability leads, CRE planners, HR teams — can query the workplace fabric directly, without writing a query or filing a ticket. The CRE team can ask “show me floors where utilization fell below 30% last quarter”. The SOC can ask “which buildings saw badge anomalies correlated with abnormal Wi-Fi traffic last week” from the same console.

And Cisco Cloud Control brings it all together. It transforms workplace operations by delivering a cohesive, AI-powered, and scalable platform that improves time-to-insight, reduces operational risk, and enhances collaboration across teams and domains as it seamlessly blends physical and digital telemetry. By combining the indoor location intelligence of Cisco Spaces with the enterprise observability of Splunk, organizations gain a single way to run, secure, and optimize the modern workplace. One fabric, one pane, one source of truth — across CRE, IT, sustainability, facilities, and security.

These three layers of an AI-ready secure network foundation, room intelligence with collaboration devices and software, and the intelligence and data fabric are changing everything about workplace operations. Separately, each layer is best-in-class. Together, they are one architecture, one data fabric, one vendor, one contract, and one posture — and the only credible path from today’s workplace problem to the Intelligent Workplace Experience. Together, they are one architecture, one data fabric, one vendor, one contract, and one posture — and the only credible path from today’s workplace problem to the Intelligent Workplace Experience.



Transforming global offices into collaborative, efficient, and sustainable environments



“We set out to completely transform our offices into places where people want to work and be proud to bring customers. So, we asked Cisco to help us build, learn and grow. Along the way, we’ve tried new things and are applying that learning to the workplace solutions we provide to our customers. We’ve reduced an estate of 900 buildings at about 440 locations into 77 buildings at 30 different locations. And we’ve unleashed the power of data to create super-cool experiences for our employees and customers.”

“Every day in our buildings we have about 800,000 Wi-Fi on-boardings, every single one of them is monitored by Cisco Catalyst. And by monitoring that Wi-Fi and other data sources like Cisco Spaces, we can make real-time decisions. That includes saving power and reducing our Scope 3 emissions.”



“As a telco, we are huge consumers of energy, and we’re very serious about doing our bit to reduce that. For example, exiting older buildings with high energy demand, as well as other improvements have saved a total of approximately 8GWh of electricity and 15 GWh of gas — the equivalent of around 7000 ton of CO2.”

Bannon continues: “A brilliant user experience is key to building trust and, as a service business, trust is supremely important... “What we wanted was a persona-based design rather than a set of custom configurations. The Cisco approach establishes finely grained access control, linked to an identity, with a security wrap. We are using Cisco to create a near digital twin for each employee. It means we’re able to constantly health check the network, so when users come into the building it’s fully fit and ready to go...”

“This is a journey without an end,” Bannon says. “The finish line keeps moving forward. We’re in lockstep with Cisco on that journey. We want to continue to grow and innovate together.”

— Colin Bannon, CTO, BT Group

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At the heart of Tripadvisor's workplace transformation was a commitment to data-driven decision-making. Rather than designing spaces based on assumptions, Tripadvisor leveraged real-time data to better understand employee behavior, space utilization, and operational efficiency. This approach ensured that every decision—whether related to real estate, facilities, sustainability, or IT infrastructure—was aligned with both employee needs and business goals.

By aligning their real estate strategy with state-of-the-art technology, Tripadvisor created a workplace environment that supports collaboration, scalability, and innovation.

"It started with a pilot in Singapore, which turned a 16,000 square foot office into an 8,000 square foot smart office."

— Matthew Gabree, VP of Real Estate & Workplace

That Singapore office became the cornerstone solution and glue which holds the wider environment together. Over 380 Cisco Collaboration Devices, which often double as sensors, feed data into Cisco Spaces producing rich insights year-round into space utilization, room occupancy, and employee traffic patterns. Tripadvisor can identify underused areas and adapt layouts to maximize their effectiveness. This circular ecosystem continues to inform better decision making, workplace design, and ultimately battle-tested Tripadvisor's strategy to consolidate its real estate portfolio by half. With positive feedback and engagement results from the Singapore pilot, the Oxford ARC office was designed.

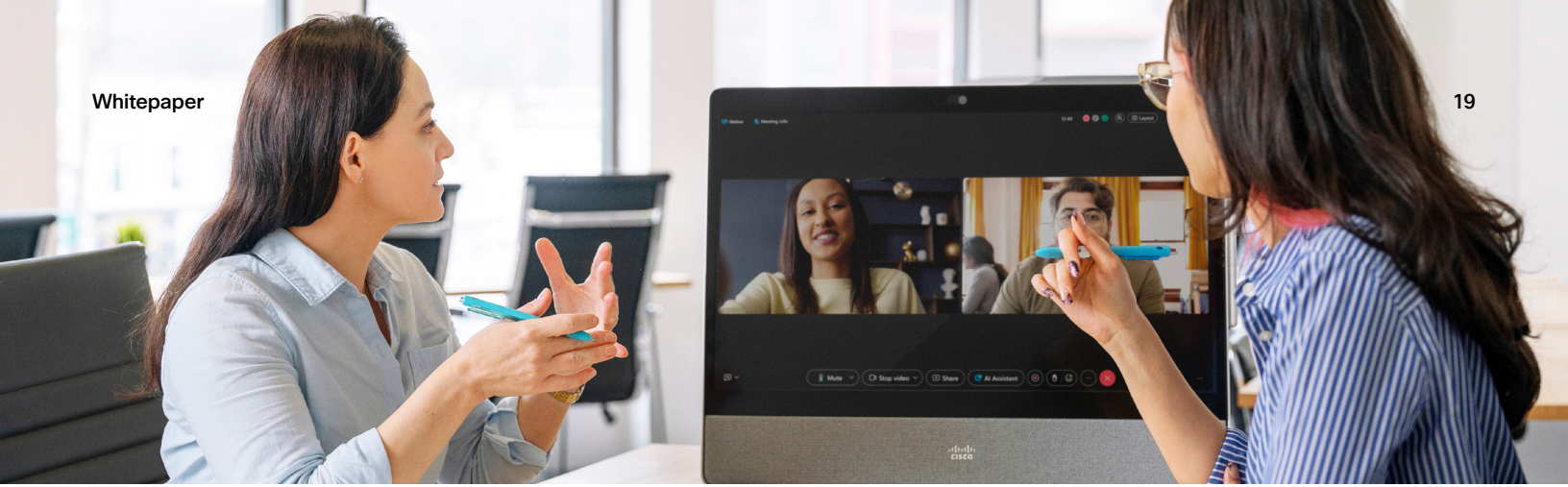
This data-driven approach was equally central to Tripadvisor's sustainability initiatives. Building on the success of Singapore, Cisco Spaces was integrated with Oxford's building management systems, and combined with Cisco sensor technology, automated lighting management, temperature control, and real-time CO2 monitoring. Even Webex video devices, though primarily used for telephony, drive other use cases such as occupancy and IAQ sensing. These insights have supported a significant reduction in energy costs.



The integration of Webex, Cisco Endpoints, and Cisco Spaces, produced great efficiencies across the board; from automated systems for lighting, temperature, and CO2 monitoring to complete oversight of its endpoint management, streamlined telephony capabilities, and collaborative options across its global offices. Benham noted Cisco's collaborative role in the project: "We've got a fantastic team at Cisco that are second to none... We could not have done this without them."

"The Cisco hardware and thought process takes minutes to set up a room. That's a game changer... we've managed to save a well over a 6-figure sum within four years of the decision to move devices, management, and telephony over to Cisco."

— Chris Benhem, Director of IT Global Services



Redefine your workplace experience

The Intelligent Workplace Experience is not a product category. It is a strategic stance. The organizations that adopt it early will turn their workplace from a line item into a competitive advantage — attracting talent, defending margin, accelerating AI adoption, and compounding trust with auditors, regulators, and boards.

As the agentic workplace quickly approaches, the way we think about how to design office spaces has to fundamentally change. Workplaces of tomorrow will require a greater capacity for energy and computation at the edge of building, technology and AV systems. The ability for these systems to orchestrate securely and reliably requires a 4th utility (technology and data) that can leverage both the IT and OT stacks. As more and more sensing is being built into the edge, and real estate is quickly embracing how to leverage their IT and AV equipment for this, workplaces will become more context aware of use by knowledge workers, and the requirements of the future-proofed workplace. This includes the need for a unified layer of data that is structured, connected, real time and provides insights and automation to drive future use cases.

Cisco built the foundation that makes this possible decades ago — network by network, meeting room by meeting room, identity by identity, sensor by sensor. What is new is that, for the first time, the entire stack can be activated at once, governed as one posture, and experienced as one outcome.

The old workplace was a building with people inside it. The new workplace is a data fabric with experiences on top. Cisco is the company that weaves together the technology for people and places into one — one secure network, one collaboration layer, one governed data fabric, one architecture — for every type of workplace.

¹ U.S. office vacancy: CBRE U.S. Office Figures, Q1 2026 — overall national vacancy 18.2% (historic high). <https://www.cbre.com/insights/figures/q1-2026-us-office-market-report>

² Downtown San Francisco: CBRE San Francisco Office Figures, Q1 2026 — overall vacancy 30.4%; Cushman & Wakefield SF Office MarketBeat Q1 2026 reported 31.1% downtown. <https://www.cbre.com/insights/figures/san-francisco-office-figures-q1-2026>

³ Manhattan: JLL Manhattan Office Insight Q1 2026 + Allwork.space “Manhattan Office Rents Hit Record High” (Jan 2026) — overall vacancy ~22%, with Trophy availability down 22% YoY and direct Trophy rents \$265–\$320+/sf.

⁴ European office investment: industry estimate based on Knight Frank, JLL, and Savills EMEA Capital Markets reports 2024–2026. Investment volumes off ~50% from the 2018–2019 cyclical peak.

⁵ APJ regional split: JLL Asia Pacific Office Market Dynamics Q4 2025 / Q1 2026 — Tokyo prime rents +18.2% YoY (Q1 2026); Sydney recovering on flight-to-quality; Hong Kong and Tier-2 China under continued pressure. <https://realestateasia.com/commercial-office/news/tokyo-prime-office-rents-surge-record-182-in-q1-2026>

⁶ Kastle Systems Back-to-Work Barometer (Dec 2025): broad-market weekly average occupancy reached 56.3% across the 10-city index — the post-pandemic high — while Class A+ buildings recorded 78.8%, the clearest evidence yet that occupancy is concentrating in the highest-quality stock. <https://www.kastle.com/safety-wellness/getting-america-back-to-work/>

⁷ Class A+/Trophy definition: CBRE and JLL define Trophy as the top ~5–10% of each market by rent, amenities, and asset quality. Kastle Q4 2025 reported A+ Class at 78.8% occupancy vs ~50–55% market-wide.

⁸ Underutilization: JLL 2025 Occupancy Planning Benchmark Report — global average office utilization 54% (vs ~61% pre-pandemic), implying ~30–46% structurally underused. Independent research (Density, Occuspace, Hubstar 2025) puts the underutilization range at 30–40% for typical hybrid portfolios. The 15–30% range cited here is conservative within that band.

⁹ Effective capacity uplift: Cisco internal estimate based on customer outcomes from Cisco Spaces deployments where no-show auto-reclaim is enabled. Range varies by booking culture; not lifted from any single published report.

¹⁰ Energy reduction range: U.S. Department of Energy Building Technologies Office and ASHRAE field studies — occupancy-driven HVAC and lighting controls typically yield 20–40% HVAC energy reduction in commercial offices. Confirmed by JLL Sustainability and Cushman & Wakefield decarbonization studies.

¹¹ Plug-load savings: U.S. EPA ENERGY STAR — plug and process loads (PPL) typically represent 25–50% of total office electricity, with 5–15% recoverable through monitoring and active management.

¹² Neurodivergence prevalence: Deloitte “Neurodiversity at Work” (2022) and CIPD UK research — 15–20% of the working-age population is neurodivergent (covering autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome, and related conditions).

¹³ AgenticOps 10× claim: Cisco product positioning for the Cisco AI-Defense + AgenticOps portfolio. Customer-validated outcomes vary by environment; treat as Cisco internal benchmark.



For more information

Please visit cisco.com/site/us/en/about/why-cisco/future-proofed-workplaces

