

How to optimize workplace utilization

A guide to the tech tools and data that can help support efficient, sustainable and experience-driven workplaces

JLL SEE A BRIGHTER WAY

Workplace planning feels a bit like weather forecasting these days — ever-changing conditions make it difficult to predict what's coming next. Widespread adoption of hybrid work policies give employees more flexibility and balance, but fluctuating attendance levels and seat sharing policies introduce new challenges for corporate real estate (CRE) teams.

After all, how do you plan if you don't know how many people will be in the office tomorrow, much less two years from now?

Occupancy and utilization data can minimize uncertainty by creating a detailed picture of what is happening in your space. Armed with insights, you can make more educated decisions and forecast future needs — ultimately helping to reduce costs, enhance the employee experience and support enterprise sustainability goals.

This guide will help you navigate how to use technology to understand how your space is being used so you can drive stronger outcomes.



1

Understanding occupancy and utilization tracking technologies

Data is the foundation of thoughtful occupancy planning and management. Developing a technology strategy starts by identifying what data you need to be successful and then determining what tools you need to get it.

You may even find that your organization already has some of the right tools in place, and you simply need to gain access to the data from your IT, HR or security team.

Occupancy planners generally start with space data, such as floor plans and the space types within a building or portfolio. They then add HR and business unit data to understand who is assigned to each location, the needs of various teams and other details. Due to the shift to hybrid work, many organizations are now integrating utilization data into standard occupancy planning and management practices, starting with one or two data sources, such as security badges. They may add technologies to their toolkit as they begin to realize a return on early investments.

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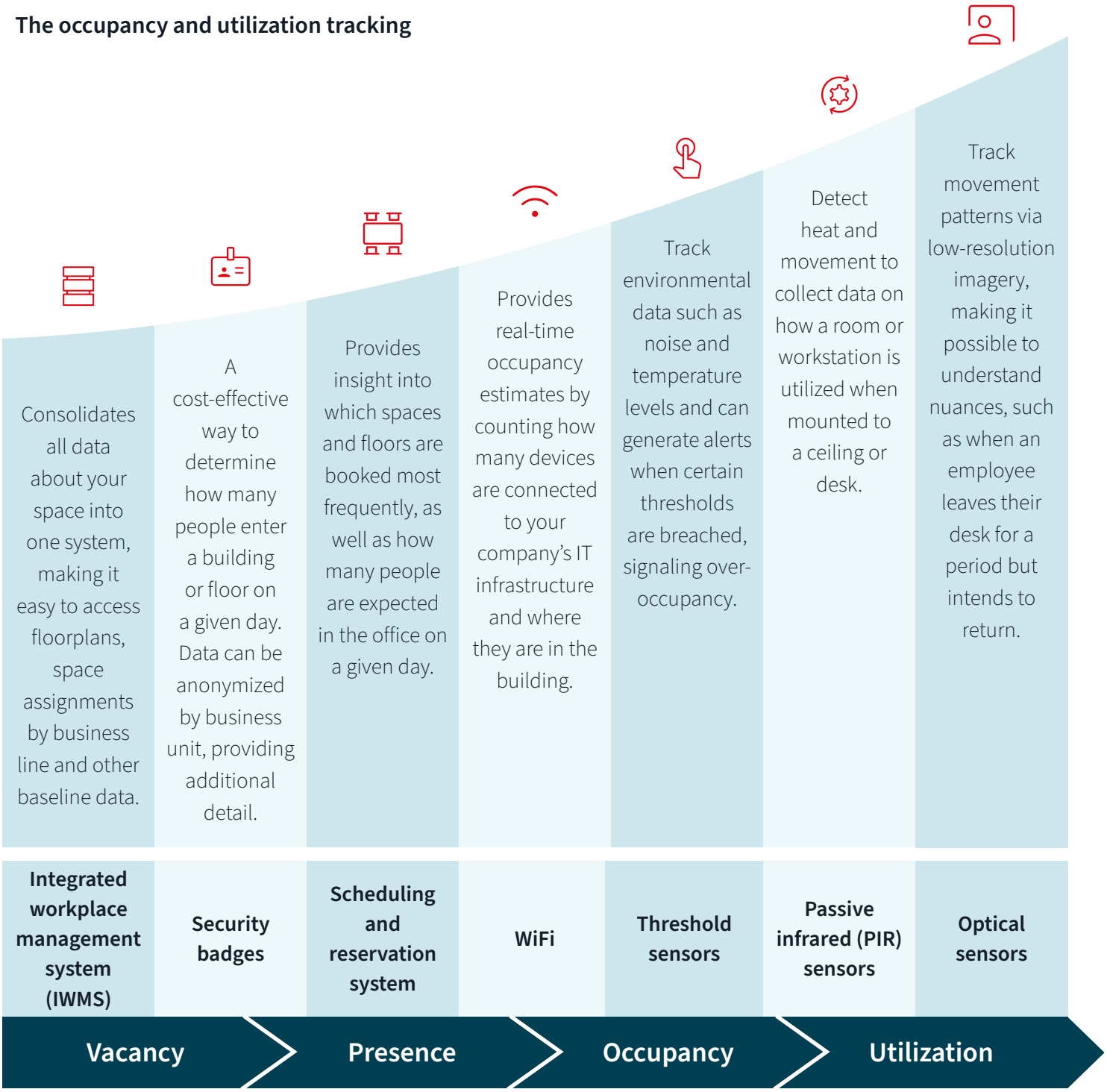
of respondents to JLL's 2024 Occupancy Planning Benchmarking Report use badge swipe data to track utilization.



The graphic below shows the tools used to gather these data types as an organization moves along the maturity curve of tracking vacancy to presence, occupancy and, ultimately, utilization.

In addition to tech tools, occupancy planners frequently use low-tech methods to gather more information. Conducting space walkthroughs, distributing surveys and meeting with business unit leaders is particularly useful for forecasting future needs since sensors and badge data can't predict that a business unit is preparing for a major expansion, for example:

The occupancy and utilization tracking



2

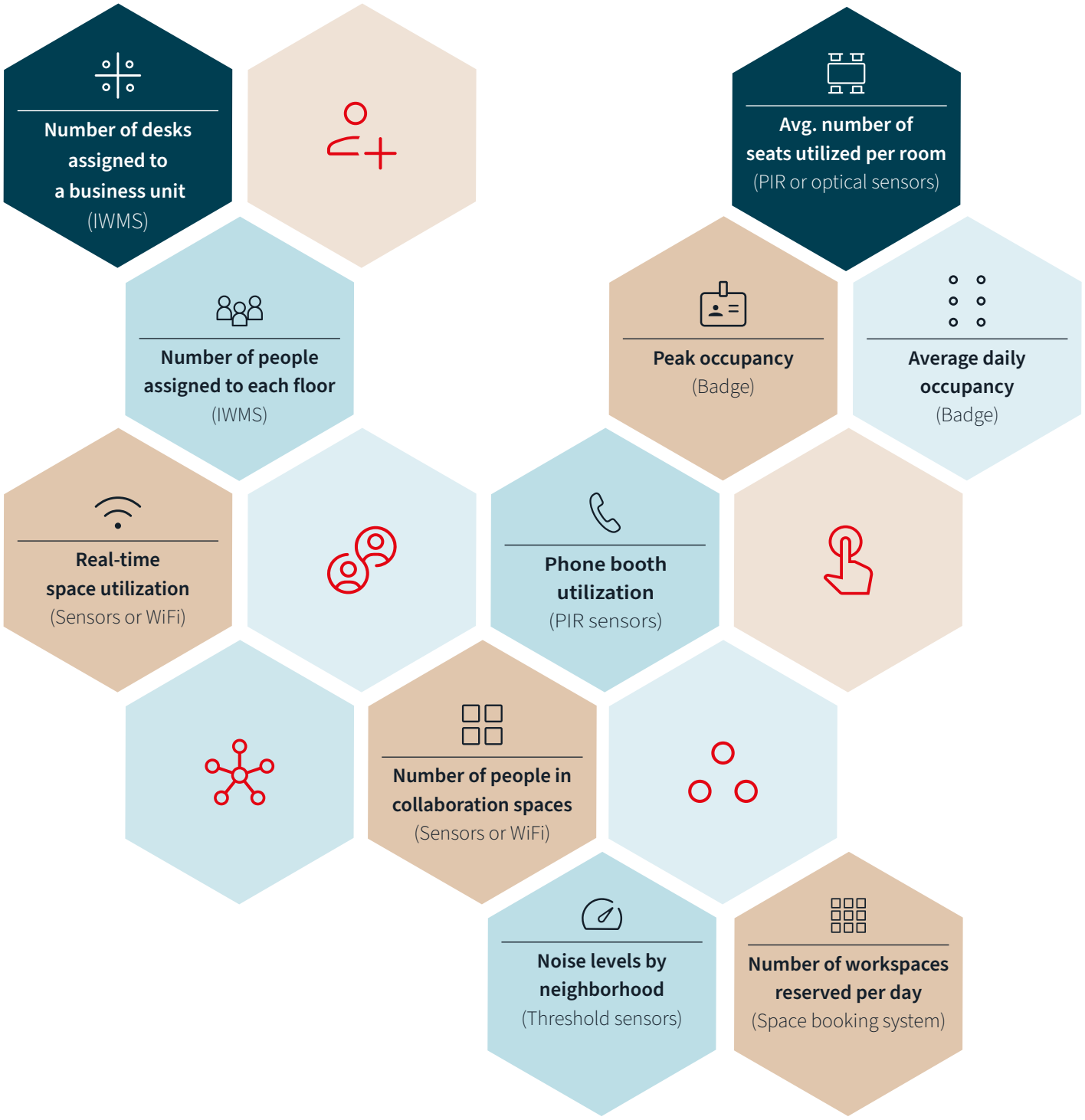
Piecing together the data mosaic

Tracking technologies will produce a steady stream of metrics about how spaces are occupied and utilized, but having the right tools in place is just step one. Individual data points will not give you a complete picture; you need to combine them to fully understand what is happening in your space.

Having a clear enterprise architecture and data strategy will help you piece together the data from various sources to glean useful insights and drive decision-making. The more granular the data sets you add to this mosaic, the clearer your picture becomes.

Assembling an occupancy and utilization data mosaic

When analyzed together, these sample data points can help understand how employees use your space today



3

Driving better Real Estate outcomes with data

Once you bring your occupancy and utilization data together, it is important to share it with anyone involved in managing your real estate operations and portfolio. For example, facilities management team members will also use the data to plan how a space is cleaned and operated.

Transparency and connectivity enable the full real estate team to make more informed decisions for day-to-day operations and long-term portfolio planning so you can reduce costs, enhance the employee experience and support sustainability.

The following six examples illustrate the many possibilities for using occupancy and utilization technologies to address the complex challenges CRE teams face today.


Reduce costs


Enhance employee experience


Support sustainability

Outcome supported: 

Can we reduce our space?

If your lease is coming up for renewal, you may be wondering if you still need all the space you currently occupy — or if you can shrink your footprint to reduce costs and energy usage. Answering this question will require looking at myriad data points, such as how your space is assigned today, average and peak occupancy, utilization of various spaces, and business forecasts.

Outcome supported: 

Are we using our space efficiently?

The more granular your data is, the more insights you gain into how employees use your space — and then you can make the necessary adjustments to meet their needs better. For example, your space booking software might indicate that a 10-person conference room is frequently reserved, but sensor data shows that only three or four people typically occupy the room during meetings. Dividing the room into two smaller meeting spaces could make more efficient use of the space and enable more employees to book the rooms they need.

Outcome supported: 

How do we help employees find the right workspace to meet their needs?

If you have shared workspaces where employees can choose where to sit, technology can help them select the best space for their needs when they enter the office. For example, the space booking system can identify a desk with a specific number of monitors, located near teammates. Or if an employee knows they will be spending their day on focused work, a system that shows real-time noise levels measured from sensors can help identify the quietest spaces.



Outcome supported:

Are people using the new touchdown spaces we implemented?

Many companies continue to experiment with new space types such as phone booths, touchdown spaces, quiet areas and more. Before spending resources to roll out new standards across a building, campus or portfolio, it can be helpful to design a pilot and use utilization tracking technology (e.g., sensors) to see how many people use the space.

Outcome supported:

Should we shut down floors or adjust services on low occupancy days?

When analysis suggests that attendance will be low on certain days, you may be able to shut down floors that would otherwise be underutilized, reducing energy usage and the resulting costs and greenhouse gas emissions. If your cleaning service contract enables you to reduce staffing on low-occupancy days, you may have an opportunity to trim costs and waste further.

Outcome supported:

How do we accurately forecast food and beverage needs?

When attendance fluctuates significantly from day to day, food service teams can find it difficult to know how much food to order from suppliers or prepare for meals. By pairing data from the space booking system with predictions based on historical trends (informed by badge, WiFi or sensor data), you can estimate how many people to expect in the office each day of the week. Then, the team can ensure they are appropriately staffed and avoid wasting or running out of food.

Reduce costs Enhance employee experience Support sustainability

4

Achieve your goals with occupancy planning

Every workplace is unique, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach to occupancy and utilization tracking. However, the following best practices can help set you up for success:

1

Start with goals

It's easy to get caught up comparing the features of various technology solutions, but it's important to take a step back and make sure your goals guide each decision. An experienced partner can help you define your key goals and determine the tools you need to help reach them.

2

Test and adjust

Workplaces continue to evolve, so stay agile and pivot your approach as things change. Rolling out new occupancy and utilization technologies as a pilot program is an excellent way to see what's working and adapt your tactics as needed.

3

Put people first

Implementing new occupancy and utilization tracking technologies inevitably raises questions. Some employees may have privacy concerns or need guidance on how to use a new space booking system, for example. A change management strategy can help smooth the transition and address any questions that arise.

A thoughtfully planned occupancy and utilization tracking program produces data-driven insights to drive better CRE decisions. When you understand how your space is being used, you can make the changes needed to reduce costs, enhance the employee experience and support sustainability goals.

JLL's Occupancy Planning and Management team helps leading organizations make the most of their present space and plan for the future. Visit jll.com to learn more about how we combine expertise, data and technology to create inspiring workplaces.

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We can support you with expert advice that reflects your business needs and priorities

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