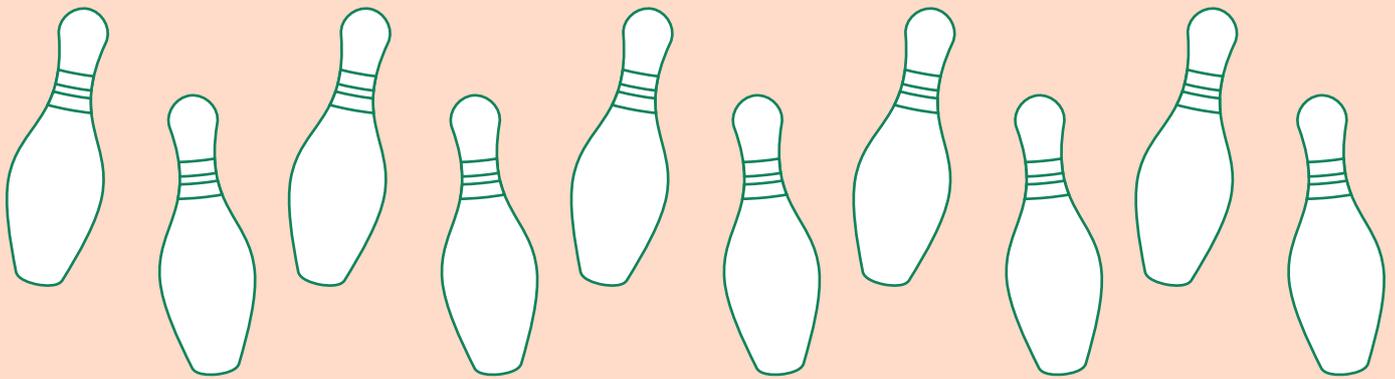


Q3 2021



Scoring a strike: ten ideas to target on return to the office

Scoring a strike: adding value to the office return

Welcome to your Q3 2021 Trend Report from WORKTECH Academy, which draws on the insights of ten experts in our network to propose ten big ideas for the new workplace

It may not feel much like progress as companies chop and change their plans to reopen their offices this autumn. But, little by little, the centrality of the physical workplace to the future of work is steadily gaining ground again after 18 months in which the 'death of the office' was a constant prediction during the pandemic.

Office design and workforce planning are back on the map. Evidence from around WORKTECH Academy's network suggests organisations aren't just thinking about what's next for the workplace, but getting down to the detailed planning and investment that will give the new office its form and meaning within a hybrid working world.

This Trend Report – our third of 2021 – draws on the insights of ten world-leading experts who have presented this year at a WORKTECH conference. Their special contributions are compiled here to create an operational blueprint for companies as they bring their people back to the office. The ten key ideas are grouped at three different scales – urban scale, organisation scale and building scale.

At the scale of the city, leading designer **Thomas Heatherwick** explains how companies striving for a more human-centric workplace should locate their businesses in urban districts with more depth and variety, greater 'emotional functionality' and stronger community values.

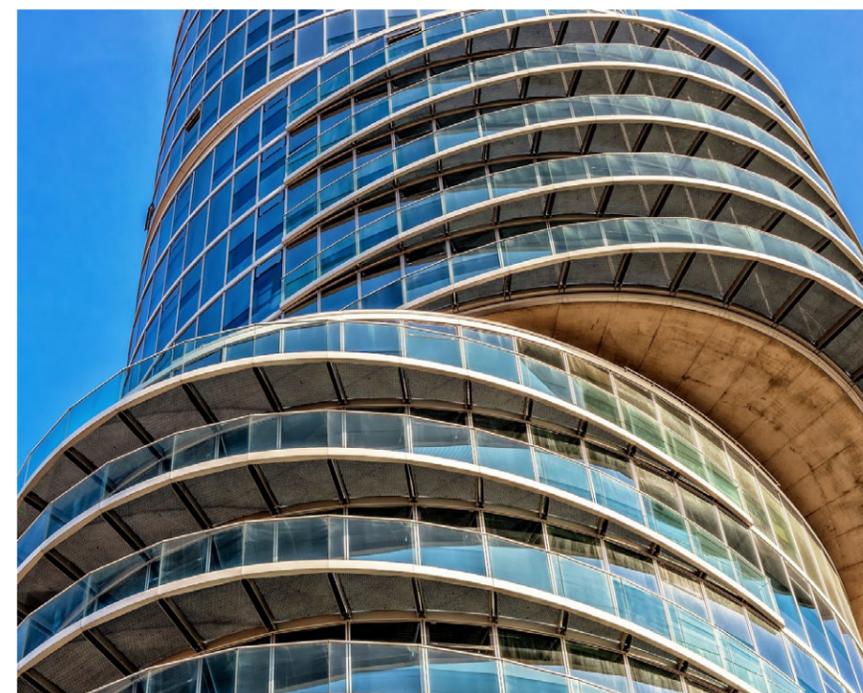
Google's senior director **Alexa Arena** picks up on the need to completely rethink the bland, boring

Central Business District – she advocates greater community engagement to create a new model called the 'Central Social District'. And public health expert **Peter Goldblatt** advocates that organisations should address health inequalities in the city through a mix of fairer work practices and sustainable design.

At the scale of organisational strategy, one of the world's most influential economists, **Jim O'Neill**, explains how flexible space providers are set to play a growing role in corporate real estate as employees demand more flexibility and a change in culture from large organisations. **Kristi Woolsey** of Boston Consulting Group argues that companies should give employees greater access to their own workplace data so they can make informed decisions about how they work.

Ben Wigert of Gallup warns of the dangers of employee burnout as firms return to the office and try to reset engagement levels. And American author and futurist-in-residence **Brian David Johnson** tells companies to stop trying to predict the future and instead plan the future that will most help their business.

At the scale of the office building, architect **Andy Young** of BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) proposes that office design in the new era will need to create spaces that are more comfortable and inspiring than working from home; before the pandemic, he says, working in an office was like 'taking an eight-hour long-haul flight'.



Kay Sargent, director of workplace at architects HOK, warns that companies widening their talent pool through hybrid working will need to consider more fully the needs of neurodiverse employees. And **Kerstin Sailer**, professor in the sociology of architecture at UCL's Bartlett School for Architecture, calls for office space to be viewed as 'an opportunity structure' which can either bring people together for innovation or keep them apart for privacy, concentration and social distancing.

This Trend Report adopts the visual metaphor of tenpin bowling for a reason: in returning to the office, organisations are required to hit a variety of targets – health, culture, strategy, data, design, inclusion, flexibility, engagement and so on – at the same time. It is a task that will require strength, focus and precision.

We look forward to your feedback on this report and to more opportunities to share ideas at this complex and demanding time for work and workplace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy Myerson'.

Professor Jeremy Myerson
Director, WORKTECH Academy

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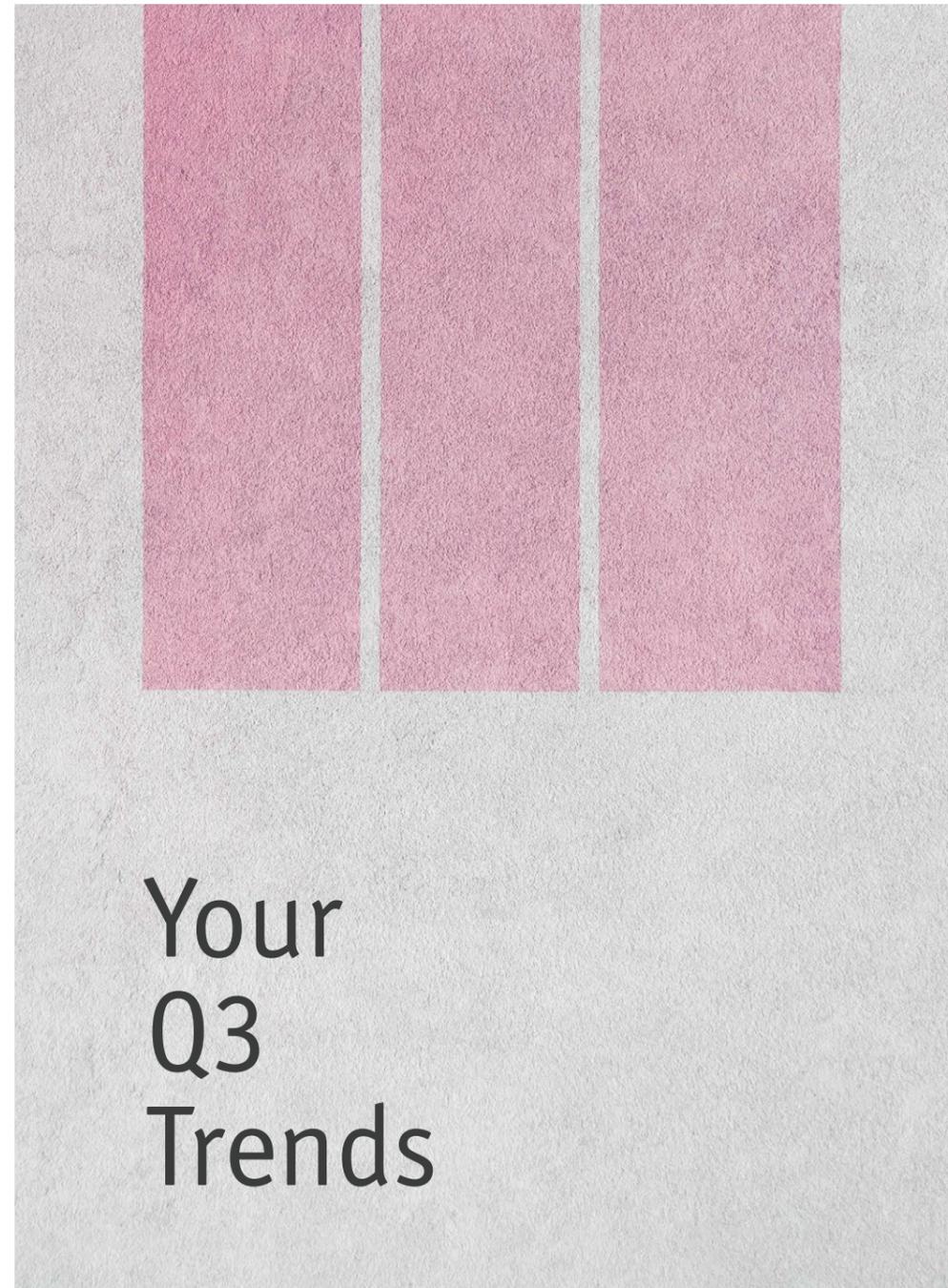
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Giving city districts depth and variety



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Central social district model takes shape



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How can companies boost wellbeing?

Giving city districts depth and variety

Companies striving for a human-centric workplace approach need to be located in urban districts with 'emotional functionality', says Thomas Heatherwick

Companies planning a more people-centred workplace in the wake of the pandemic should think carefully about the type of urban districts in which their offices are located, as employees are afforded more choice over where they want to work. According to internationally renowned designer Thomas Heatherwick of Studio Heatherwick, city precincts created with rigour around efficiencies need to be 'rehumanised' as places with greater 'emotional functionality' and stronger community values.

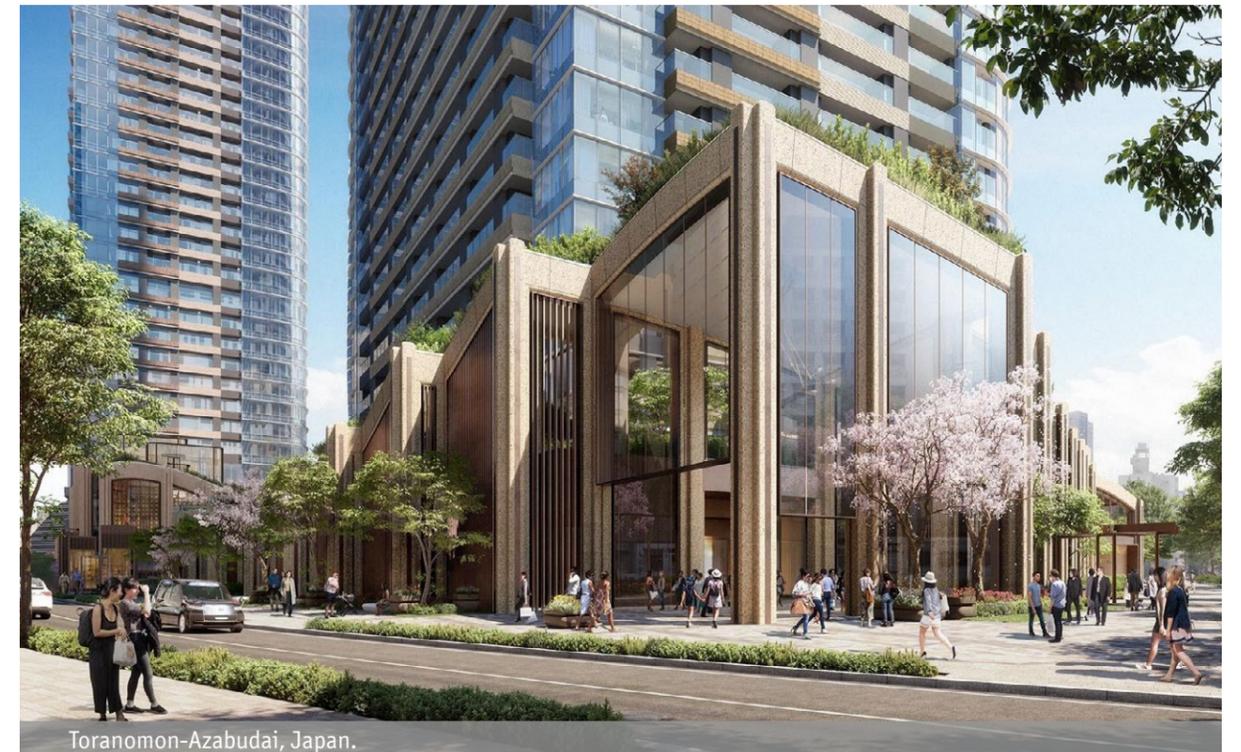
In an interview for WORKTECH Tokyo 2021, the designer behind some of the world's most pioneering structures explained that challenging rigid and previously unquestioned principles of urban planning was the only way to make business districts less boring and more engaging, with more depth and variety. A key element of the humanised urban district is the integration of office developments with civic and community space. Heatherwick calls for private developers and occupiers to collaborate with local communities and not simply 'follow the money'.

Thomas Heatherwick is one of Britain's most significant designers. Founder of the London-based design practice Heatherwick Studio, he has been involved in many landmark projects including the New Routemaster bus, the 2012 Olympic Cauldron and more recently the centrepiece of the Hudson Yard's redevelopment project in New York, the 'Vessel' – a honeycomb-like structure which rises 16 storeys tall. Heatherwick's wide range of design skillsets is a reaction to his frustration at encountering 'slice-up ghettos of thought' in design.

This shift requires designers, developers and communities to work in tandem to create creative and interesting spaces that people want to go to. Office developments that position themselves in these new urban districts will have the upper hand in talent recruitment and getting employees back into the office.

'We've had enough of wide, faceless blocks with boring glass lobbies, and pointless artworks above reception as a gesture towards culture'

– Thomas Heatherwick



Toranomon-Azabudai, Japan.

Upcoming urban districts

Toranomon-Azabudai, Japan - This multi-purpose development by Mori Building Co is based on the concept of creating a 'modern urban village'. It started development in 2019 and it aims to be a huge open space in the heart of Tokyo that will bring people together and build a new community. The project will weave offices, homes, a hotel, an international school, shops, restaurants and cultural facilities into the fabric of everyday life. Heatherwick Studio designed a public realm and numerous low-rise blocks which will sit alongside some of the tallest buildings in Japan. This visionary project also aims to create 'a city within a city'.

District 2020, Dubai - District 2020 will evolve from Expo 2020 Dubai - the next World Expo focusing on the future of how we live and relate to the world around us. District 2020 aims to be a smart and sustainable city which centres on the needs of its urban community by supporting the future of working and living through meaningful connections. Following the six months of the World Expo, District 2020 will re-purpose 80 per cent of the Expo's built environment into an integrated mixed-use community that will continue to attract businesses and people to work, live, visit and enjoy.

Water Street, Florida - Water Street is a 53-acre mixed-use project being developed in downtown Tampa, Florida. The development aims to bring together the essential elements of a vibrant community in one interconnected space. The space will provide an enhanced street-level experience for residents, workers and visitors alike. Green space pervades the public realm and the area is easily walkable and highly accessible. The development, which features towers by Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, will be completed by 2027.

Key Links

[The death and life of the central business district](#)

[Human-centred city design for post-pandemic world](#)

[Urban future with a purpose](#)

Central social district model takes shape

Organisations need to develop new engagement tactics to build workplaces that deliver the cultural needs of their employees, says Alexa Arena of Google

Companies planning a major new office development or campus in the post-pandemic era should factor an increase in the level of community feedback into their decision-making processes. That's the message from Alexa Arena, Senior Director at Google and the influential leader behind a successful planning application to build Google's new Downtown West campus in San Jose.

Speaking at the WORKTECH Global virtual conference 2021, Arena explained how the new mixed-use campus right in the heart of California's third largest city, which will cost US \$1.5 billion to construct and cover a 80-acres site, was patiently

shaped via more than 100 different community engagement events. Arena argued that community-led decision-making is not only more inclusive, but has a better chance of acceptance and support from people inside and outside the company.

Research conducted during the pandemic revealed that employees want the new workplace to act as a facilitator for social, cultural and learning activities. That means siting any new campus at the social heart of the city, rather than relocating to the city fringes far away from the cultural action. The Downtown West project is a mix of office, retail, social and cultural space, and serves as a 'central social district model'. Engagement and social interaction suffered significantly during Covid-19 lockdowns. A community-led approach to redesign acts as a catalyst to re-engage employees and give them a reason to return to the office.

Alexa Arena is Senior Director at Google and the director of Google's San Jose development plan. Alexa received her MBA from the Harvard Business School. She was recognised as one of The Most Influential Women in Business and Top 40 under 40 by the *San Francisco Business Times*. Before Google, she worked at Lendlease where she was responsible for leading and growing its development capabilities, identifying urban regeneration projects and overseeing development in the Western US.



Reaching out to local communities

Key tips for engaging with communities:

- Speak to local people and other stakeholders to understand local perspectives and needs
- Collaborate with existing groups and join their activities
- Communicate why your project is happening, how this will impact people and what you're going to do
- Use a combination of online and offline media and resources to ensure no-one is excluded
- Make sure your online activities are inclusive. For example, make presentations easy to read and use captions
- Create an environment that is welcoming and inspiring for people – try to bring some feeling of engagement in person by actively taking on their feedback
- If you can't meet people in person, 'show your face' on video calls or photos, so they know who's behind the project

Source: Sustrans, 2020

'We have to come together to solve the big problems, to continue to be the type of culture we need to be, to continue to mentor the next generation the way we need to...' – Alexa Arena

Key Links

[Re-engaging workers as they return to the office](#)

[Australia's top five community-led developments](#)

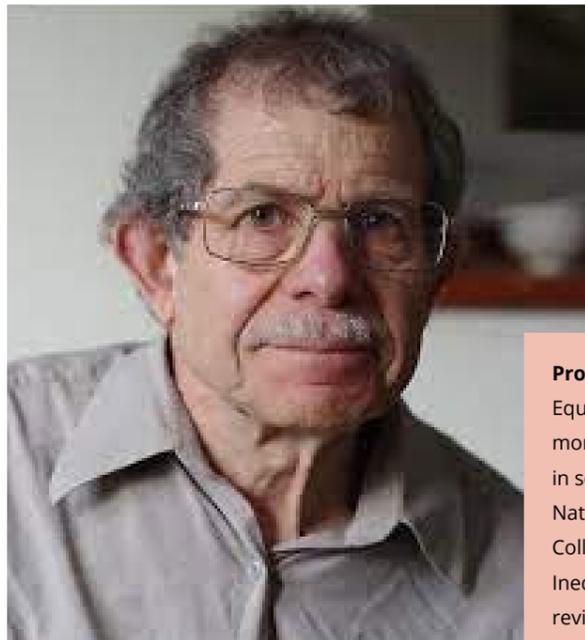
[Rebuilding community in a post-pandemic world](#)

How can companies boost wellbeing?

Business leaders should think beyond the walls of their organisation to address health inequalities in society, says Professor Peter Goldblatt

In the wake of the pandemic, business organisations have a responsibility not just to support their own workers' health and wellbeing but also to contribute to wider issues of public health, such as health inequalities. That is the view of Professor Peter Goldblatt, senior advisor to the Institute of Health Equity at University College London and a leading researcher in public health.

Goldblatt told WORKTECH's Wellbeing 2021 virtual conference that overall health in people of working age has stalled and that health inequalities have widened, with health among the poorest in society worsening. Companies, he said,



Professor Peter Goldblatt is a senior advisor to the Institute of Health Equity at UCL. His main activities are in the field of measurement and monitoring the social determinants of health. He previously worked in several UK Government Departments, most recently the Office for National Statistics (ONS). He was seconded from ONS to University College London (UCL) for the duration of the Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010 (the Marmot Review). Following this review he co-ordinated reviews of health inequalities for the World Health Organisation and the European Commission.

should think about three things if they want their businesses to flourish in a healthier society.

First, they should look at their employment practice from a 'holistic, whole-society perspective' so they can see the implications of certain policies on the company, on society and on the people they contract. Second, companies should recognise that there is a clear relationship between people's health and planetary health, and should try to adopt greener policies in the design of the workplace. Third, they should strive to create a 'friendly work environment through good management practices', and in particular focus on reducing stress among lower status and lower paid workers.

The Covid-19 crisis, Goldblatt explained, exposed the precariousness of work for many people and exacerbated inequalities. Government, local authorities and businesses need to focus on increasing the quality of employment, and not just the quantity of jobs, to support public health.



Employees link health and sustainability

A review by California-based Next Energy Technologies of more than 450 remote employees and more than 150 senior managers and C-suite decision-makers across several business sectors in the US found that:

- Employees want more of a voice in how new workspaces are managed after Covid-19
- People are drawing a stronger connection between health and sustainability in the work environment
- Employees are willing to change jobs if they don't get the sustainable office of the future
- More than half of employees feel their old office had a negative impact on their personal health
- 83 per cent of employees believe the

climate plays a direct role in their individual health

- Eight out of ten employees believe they should have an influence over their company's wellness environment, but 42 per cent of decision-makers say their employees hold no influence.

Source: 'The Case For Office Space: How Buildings Need to Change to Suit a Climate-Conscious, Covid-Wearry Workforce', Next Energy Technologies, 2021

Key Links

[Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On](#)

[Prioritise health in future hybrid work model, says RSA report](#)

[The big question: how to design health-promoting workplaces](#)

ORGANISATIONAL SCALE



Jim O'Neill

Why flexible space will be a prized asset



Kristi Woolsey

Why people analytics should get personal



Ben Wigert

Beware burnout on office return



Brian David Johnson

Creating a vision for your own future

Why flexible space will be a prized asset

The next-generation workforce will require a culture change from employers in order to work more flexibly, says leading economist Jim O’Neill

The next workforce generation will want to work in a more flexible way and this will create more opportunities for flexible space providers. That is the verdict of leading economist Jim O’Neill, who this year became the major investor in flexible space brand Second Home. O’Neill believes that, ‘in the spirit of never letting a crisis go to waste’, companies will adopt more flexible real-estate strategies in the wake of the global pandemic, accelerating a trend that has been gathering pace for years. Second Home has venues in London, Lisbon and Los Angeles.

Speaking as part of WORKTECH’s virtual Summer Festival 2021, O’Neill explained that ‘if you ignore what individual and societal norms and desires



are, then you do that at your peril’. He is confident that a long overdue shake-up in the world of work is now happening: ‘Finally, after decades of declining productivity, is the basis for an improvement in people’s productivity, because people can have more efficient lives.’

O’Neill’s long career in finance gave him first-hand experience of a world of constant travel and interminable face-to-face meetings. Now he believes company cultures will need to change to accommodate flexible working. As he says: ‘The competition for talent is likely to remain as competitive as it has always been.’ Many big banks, however, still appear determined to bring everyone back to the office and there is no overall corporate consensus on the way forward. O’Neill accepts that economic predictions are not always right, but argues: ‘Economics is a social science – very good at explaining or rationalising things that happen’.

Jim O’Neill is a leading British economist, a former Goldman Sachs chief economist and an ex-Treasury Minister in the UK Government. He coined the acronym BRICs to describe the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China. In 2015, he was created a Life Peer, Baron O’Neill of Gatley. O’Neill is the current chairman of the Council of Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs. In May 2021 he became the controlling shareholder of Second Home, the flexible office provider.



‘The structural trend for flexible working has just been given an almighty boost...’

– Lord Jim O’Neill

The Future of Flex

A new report on the future of the flexible workspace sector in the UK from architects Arney Fender Katsalidis (AFK) predicts that:

- **Flex offices may begin to match the hype.** Flexible space could take as much as a fifth of the total UK office market by 2023, given the right conditions; this growth scenario to 20 per cent exceeds previous forecasts suggesting expansion from 5 per cent to 12.5 per cent of the total market.
- **Large corporates will dominate future flex demand.** Contraction in freelancers and small start-up tenants is likely, offset by acceleration in adoption by large corporate occupiers looking to shrink overheads, diversify their real estate strategies, and to offer staff more choice.
- **Traditional landlords will muscle in on flex.** Large corporate occupiers are considered traditional landlord territory, so it is no surprise that landlords (and developers) are keen to engage in the market. Some have chosen to partner with a flex operator in some capacity, while others have launched their own brand of flex spaces to compete.

- **Flex will play a big part in the future of work.** Covid-19 has initiated a wide-ranging debate about the future of work, leading to widespread adoption of new working models, Flex space will be seen as part of a convenient, low-risk solution for businesses exploring different ways of working, particularly hybrid or hub-and-spoke models.
- **New accounting rules will aid the flex market.** IFRS 16, a new International Financial Reporting Standard for lease accounting, is likely to favour the UK’s flex market. It effectively allows businesses to ‘write off’ short-term leases (which most flex offices are acquired on) without declaring them, something not possible

Key Links

[Why flexible space is making a comeback](#)
[How has Covid-19 impacted coworking trends and the flexible office market, and what’s next?](#)

[Rebuilding community in a post-pandemic world](#)

Why people analytics should get personal

Employees need access to their own workplace data to make more informed decisions about their work habits, according to Kristi Woolsey of BCG

Productivity waxed and waned during the pandemic, a honeymoon period for work at home followed by a dip. As companies head back to the office this autumn, Kristi Woolsey, Associate Director at Boston Consulting Group, believes that the way to enhance employee performance is to achieve a blend between intelligent workplace infrastructure and human behaviour.

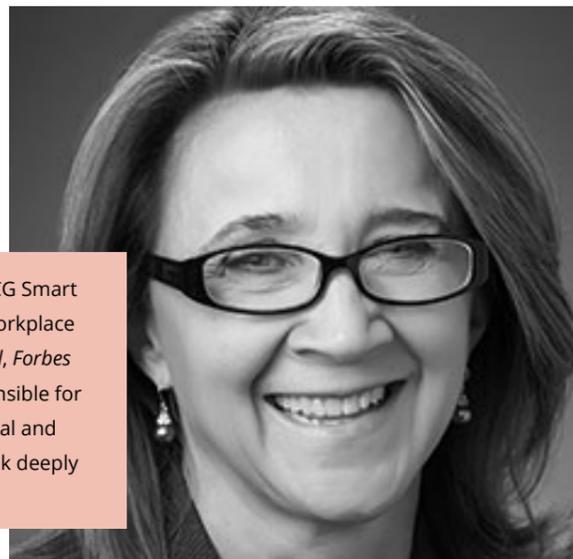
The pandemic accelerated a shift towards a world where digital and physical experiences increasingly work together to drive engagement and business value. Now, says Woolsey, who leads BCG's Smart Environments Group, intelligent workplaces must be used to unlock human potential.

Traditionally, data has been used primarily to measure building performance and occupant efficiency. Woolsey argues that this data should not be reserved for facilities managers – organisations should allow their employees to access their own personal data in order to 'manage their own cognitive capacity and wellness'. For example, if an individual is sat down for a long period of time, they may receive a gentle nudge that there is a café close by. In this

respect, the data delivers personalised contextual experiences to each individual.

As the post-pandemic workplace centres around human-centric experiences and personal choice, transparency between the organisation and employees is critical. People analytics has historically raised challenges around data privacy. Woolsey explains that studies have found that users want to know when their data is being collected and be able to see a clear exchange in value.

Just as organisations collect data on employees to improve efficiency of space and understand behaviours, employees need to feel they are getting value from the data they provide. The companies that yield the best productivity results from employees will be the ones that approach their data strategy with people and performance first and building management second.



Kristi Woolsey became the Associate Director and lead for BCG Smart Environments Group in 2020, having been Behavioural and Workplace Strategy Lead. Quoted in the *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes* and *Bloomberg*, she is at the forefront of her sector and responsible for enabling organisations to support their people through physical and digital space. She pulls together interdisciplinary teams to think deeply about the interaction between physical and virtual space.

Personalising productivity using data

Research has found that implementing technologies that offer hyper-personalisation in the workplace can help reduce time wasted completing tasks as well as improving the relationship between employers and their people.

Employee experience platforms, such as Microsoft's new Viva platform, can adapt according to the user and offer the same level of personalisation they would get through apps such as Facebook – with customised news feeds and recommendations.

Here are four ways data can be used to improve productivity:

1. Put the data in the same place – Collect and store data under one integrated platform. This makes it easier to examine the relationships between different metrics and help highlight where the gaps in productivity are.

2. Focus on output – The metric to measure productivity has traditionally been time, but this is shifting so that employees can measure their productivity through their output.

3. Use productivity-enhancing tools – Use data to identify the gaps in productivity. Data can identify the 'weak' links and efforts can be placed in areas with the greatest potential to boost productivity.

4. Leverage time analytics – Personal productivity can be enhanced through time analytics. Data can be used to help individuals understand how they split their time throughout the week. This data can be compiled over time to create a pattern which employees can examine and adapt to make their schedules more productive.

Source: [Jump-Start Productivity Using Data, Forbes](#)

'If we can allow individuals to access the data about their own behavioural patterns, then they can use it to manage their own cognitive capacity and wellness'

– Kristi Woolsey, Boston Consulting Group



Key Links

[Remote work: is it a threat to your culture?](#)

[Historical drop in employee engagement](#)

[Executives and employees at odds](#)

Beware burnout on office return

Companies are set to boost their culture with more in-person collaboration but should watch out for signs of burnout after the pandemic, says Ben Wigert of Gallup

As employees start to return to the office in larger numbers after the pandemic, companies should watch closely for signs of burnout in the workforce that will adversely affect engagement, wellbeing and productivity. That is the view of US psychologist and strategy leader Ben Wigert of Gallup, who says it is important to weave all three factors together into one picture of the organisation.

Gallup's tracking studies of employee engagement during the Covid-19 crisis saw engagement and wellbeing, which are typically reciprocal, diverge. Wellbeing slumped while engagement remained high in the early phases of the pandemic. Speaking at a WORKTECH virtual conference, Wigert outlined some common burnout themes among employees: competing and changing priorities; unyielding workload; lack of confidence in new processes and approaches; carrying a

mental emotional weight; and not getting to do what they do best.

In a hybrid working world, renewing access to the office brings advantages in terms of creativity, collaboration and culture. Wigert believes that it is easier to pick up the signals of how the company works in person. There are also challenges in coordinating remote workers, building trust, ensuring fairness in terms of equal opportunities and measuring productivity. Digital tools can provide solutions for these challenges, but Wigert warns against tech exhaustion and overuse of the tools, which can contribute to burnout: 'Technology needs to be the answer, not another burden.'



Ben Wigert PhD is the Director of Research and Strategy, Workplace Management at Gallup. He assesses human capital management needs and designs performance optimisation strategies for organisations across the world. Dr Wigert is an industrial-organisational psychologist and specialises in helping organisations improve their employee selection, training, development, engagement and performance management. He is the lead author of Re-Engineering Performance Management, Gallup's evidence-based perspective on how to evolve performance management practices.

The basics of burnout

Five root causes of burnout at work:

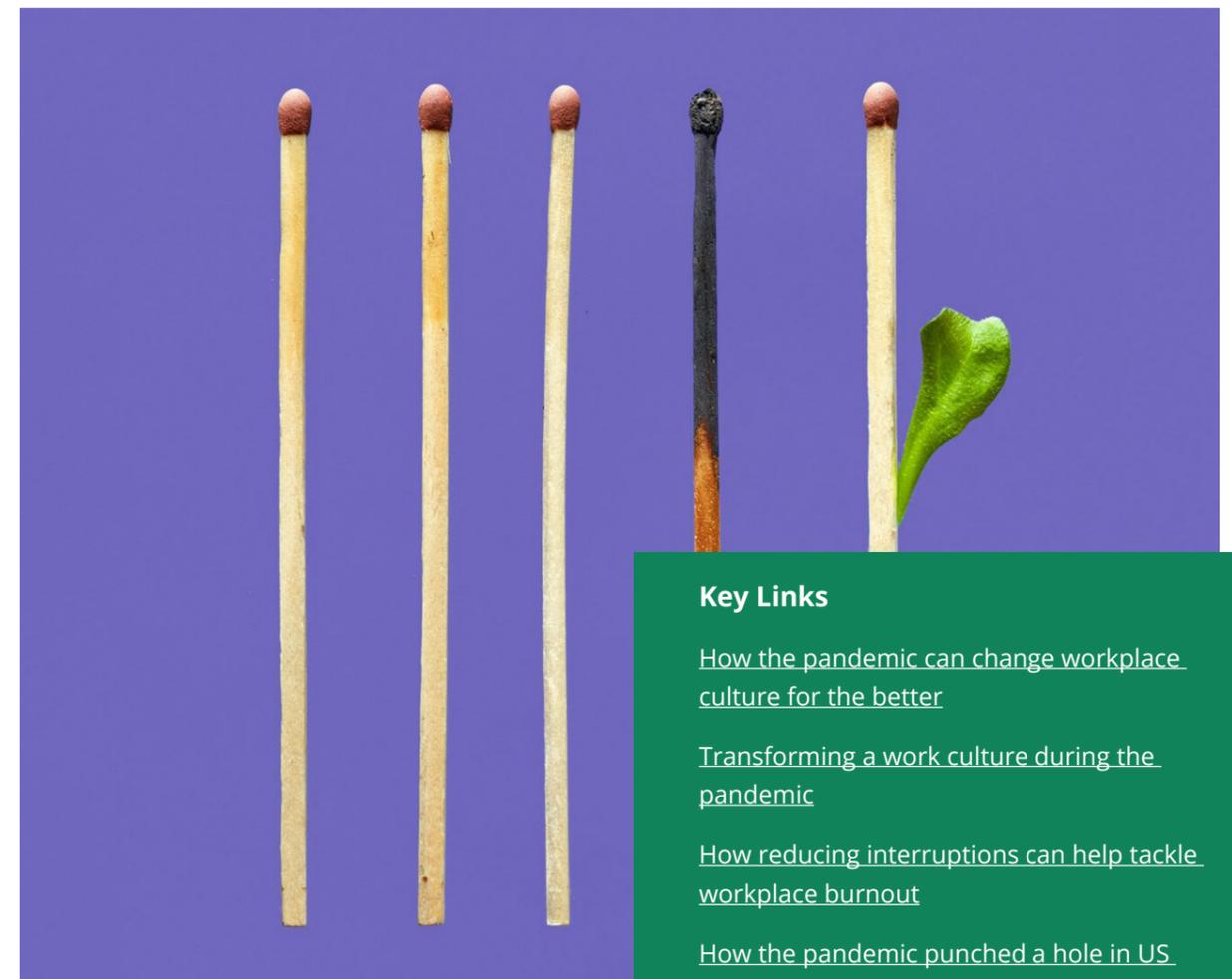
- Unfair treatment at work
- Unmanageable workload
- Unclear communication from managers
- Lack of manager support
- Unreasonable time pressure

Managers are crucial to preventing burnout and creating positive experiences: 70 per cent of workers are less likely to feel burnt out if supported by their manager, and 62 per cent are less likely if their manager is willing to listen to work-related problems.

Actions employees should take to address burnout:

- Ask an intentional question (e.g. what's going well?)
- Communicate more that you think you need to
- Revisit the employee resources that encourage wellbeing
- Model healthy behaviours

Source: Dr Ben Wigert, Gallup, speaking at WORKTECH Wellness virtual conference 2021



Key Links

- [How the pandemic can change workplace culture for the better](#)
- [Transforming a work culture during the pandemic](#)
- [How reducing interruptions can help tackle workplace burnout](#)
- [How the pandemic punched a hole in US employee engagement](#)

Creating a vision for your own future

Companies should stop trying to predict the future and instead ask themselves what they want out of the future, says futurist-in-residence Brian David Johnson

Companies should stop trying to predict the future and instead actively shape the type of future they want. This is the view of American author Brian David Johnson, who describes himself as 'a futurist who refuses to make predictions'. Speaking at WORKTECH's Summer Festival 2021, he insisted that the future is not a fixed place – instead it can be shaped and designed. Therefore, organisations should not just think about how to prepare for the future, but about how they might act to achieve a future that directly benefits their business.

By creating a vision for the future, companies will be able to understand what steps they need to take, what factors they must implement and what barriers they must overcome to achieve that future. Businesses need to listen to others to

help them understand the future they want, but there is only so far you can go. Mistakes will be made, but what is important is to pivot off those mistakes.

The first step, says Johnson, is simply to have an open conversation with your employees and clients. Then, companies must identify the tools needed to enact change. The views of people within the company that do not necessarily agree with the plans for change need to be considered, but should not be allowed to become blockages to innovation. Expert knowledge on the future of the workplace can help you shape your expectations, but organisations need to be active participants in planning their own future step by step.

As we come out of the global pandemic, Johnson suggests that decision-makers develop practical frameworks that enable them to track their progress towards the vision of the future that they have articulated from the outset. Now is clearly the right time for companies to press the re-set button on workplace strategy.



Brian David Johnson is a best-selling author and futurist in residence at Arizona State University's School for the Future of Innovation in Society, and a Futurist and Fellow at Frost & Sullivan. From 2009 to 2016, he was Intel Corporation's first-ever futurist. Johnson has more than 40 patents, and he has been published in many consumer and trade publications, including the *Wall Street Journal* and *Slate*, and he appears regularly on Bloomberg TV, PBS, Fox News, and the Discovery Channel. His books include *The Future You: Break Through the Fear and Build the Life You Want*.

'If you're not an active participant in your future and you're passive, never let somebody else make your future for you....'
– Brian David Johnson



Famous failed predictions

The Telephone: 'The so-called "telephone" has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us' – an internal memo from Western Union, 1876. 137 years later, the telephone has totally transformed how we communicate.

Inventions: 'Everything that could be invented has been invented' - Charles H. Duell of the US Patents and Brands Office, 1899. In 2020 alone, 596,175 Utility Patent Applications (Inventions) were submitted in the US.

Movies: 'We do not want now and we never shall want the human voice with our films' – film director DW Griffith, 1924. Hollywood had other ideas.

Computer viruses: 'The problem of viruses is temporary and will be solved in two years' – John McAfee, 1988. In the same year, Peter

Norton described them as an 'urban legend'. Now there are over 100,000 known computer viruses. In the US, 30 per cent of computers are infected with some form of malware.

The iPhone: 'There's no chance that the iPhone is going to get any significant market share. No chance.' - Steve Ballmer, then the CEO of Microsoft. Apple now makes US \$145 billion a year in revenue on iPhone sales alone and the smart phone market is worth an estimated US \$1.2 trillion.

Key Links

[Is it time to stop trying to predict an uncertain future of work?](#)

[Famous quotes that were totally erroneous](#)

[13 predictions about the future that were dead wrong](#)

BUILDING SCALE



Andy Young

Time to end office as long-haul flight



Kay Sargent

Designing for neurodiversity



Kerstin Sailer

The office as an encounter session

Time to end office as long-haul flight

Companies should redesign workspaces to be more empathetic and reflective of employee needs on health and climate, says Andy Young of architects BIG

Offices in the post-pandemic era will need to be designed to create spaces that are more comfortable and inspiring than working from home. That is the view of Andy Young, Technical Director at architects BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group). He told the WORKTECH Tokyo 2021 conference that 'working in an office is often similar to an eight-hour long-haul flight', with security, artificial lighting, blank walls, confined space and uncomfortable seating arrangements. Working from home is often more comfortable.

Young believes that workplace design will need to be reimaged to prove the value of the office. Without the physical proximity that the office



provides, he suggests, rates of innovation will decrease. Companies should therefore accept that the office will be about creating social interaction and proximity to people over anything else. Young explains: 'Employers and corporations need to make sure that young people actually turn up to work.' Therefore, companies should design spaces for comfort and inspiration to achieve a community feel that encourages workers to transition back to the office.

Organisations are now talking seriously about sustainability and demanding offices that reflect and respond to their employees' concerns on climate change. That means more air source heat pumps to heat buildings, and fewer diesel generators so that buildings produce less carbon emissions. Young argues this is all part of a bid to make the office feel more like home and attract the new generation of talent who are more than ever motivated by issues such as climate action and mental health.

Andy Young joined BIG in 2016 as Technical Director of the London office. He has over 25 years of experience in the design and construction of large-scale projects in the UK and the Middle East. In addition to the UK role, he provides technical assistance to the Copenhagen and New York offices. Since 2016 Andy has led some of BIG's most prominent projects including East Side Tower, an 80,000 sq. metre mixed-use tower in Berlin. Andy has also led the technical design of Google's new King's Cross headquarters and Citylife Milan plus worked on several large-scale projects in the Middle East.

Changing office design specifications

Air quality – This is a huge concern to employees post Covid-19. Companies are now designing offices to provide more fresh air per person.

Acoustics – The better the acoustics, the higher the baseline performance of employees. People will be more relaxed in acoustically friendly environments.

Light – Companies are introducing more interactive variation and features for lighting. Having more control of their environment will make workers feel more at home in the office.

Toilets – Variety of types and locations to ensure employees feel as comfortable at work as at home. Buildings should be designed in a way to allow regular cleaning of facilities.

Occupation density – This will vary enormously as people decide whether or not to work virtually on different days. Spaces will need to be designed to accommodate different occupancy levels.

Carbon profile – Employees are more aware than ever about climate change so there will be fewer back-up diesel generators – people will just be asked to work from home in the event of a power loss. There will also be less use of toxic and climate-tasking materials, and wider adoption of circular economy principles with no non-recyclables.

Source: Andy Young of BIG architects, speaking at WORKTECH Tokyo



'People will be drawn back to their offices in future simply because it will be a nicer experience than working at home...'

- Andy Young, Bjarke Ingels Group

Key Links

[Top-performing companies more likely to expand office space](#)

[Global CEOs eye expansion rather than cuts](#)

[Office revolution?](#)

[Workplace 3.0: The office of the future](#)

Designing for neurodiversity

Companies widening their talent pool through flexible working will need to consider the full spectrum of neurodiverse needs of their employees, says Kay Sargent

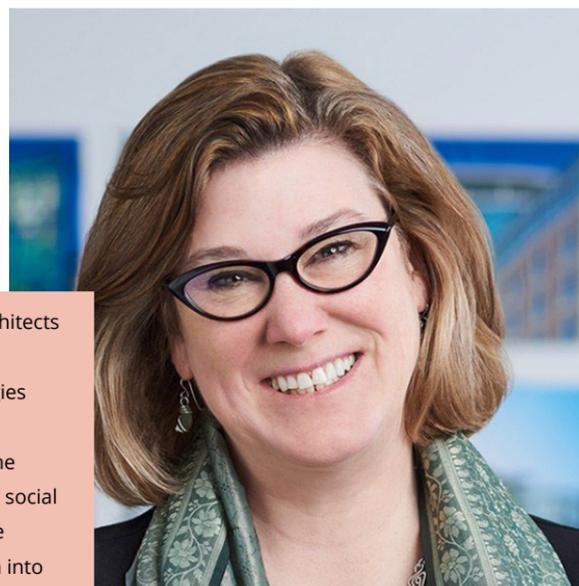
Companies need to up their game to address the environmental needs of neurodiverse talent. That is the view of Kay Sargent, director of workplace at design firm HOK. As a result of more flexible work policies, companies are now able to expand their talent pool and cast their net further afield when searching for the best talent. Hybrid working is removing the pre-Covid-19 constraint of employees needing to be within a commuting distance of the office. However, a more diverse workforce with more neurodiverse employees requires more inclusive workplace design.

Organisations have been emphasising the importance of diversity in the workplace for many years. But as Sargent recently told at a WORKTECH virtual conference: 'Diversity is about counting the people, but inclusion is about making the people count'. Diversity is a by-product of widening the talent pool, but inclusion means catering for all the different neurodiverse needs of every employee.

Sargent explained that one in seven people are considered neurodiverse – which means they think differently to others. Of this number, around

50 per cent do not know they are neurodiverse. The onus is therefore on the employer to understand how spaces effect people differently and then build a variety of settings which enable employees from different neurological backgrounds.

Sargent explains that organisations now need to create an ecosystem of spaces that give people options and choices that suit their specific needs. Different spaces should allow people to concentrate, contemplate, create, communicate and congregate. One of the ways Sargent suggests employers could make significant improvements is through the acoustic environment. This isn't about making workplaces quiet – it's about finding different spaces which cater for different levels of acoustical comfort.



Kay Sargent is a Senior Principal and Director of Workplace at architects HOK, and serves on the Board of Directors. She has worked with multiple Fortune 500 companies on their global real estate strategies and designed workplaces of the future. Kay has over 35 years of experience in the interiors industry. Her research interests combine complex buildings, workplace environments and space usage with social networks, organisational theory and organisational behaviour. She brings her enthusiasm for data and a rigorous academic approach into industry, thus advancing scientific thinking in workplace design.



What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity recognises the diversity of human cognition and include neurodivergent conditions such as Autism Spectrum Condition, ADHD, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia as part of that natural diversity.

BBC's Environmental Checklist:

To help with remodelling or building new offices, Sean Gilroy, head of neurodiversity and cognitive design at the BBC, and his colleague Leena Haque have created an environment checklist to guide the broadcaster's estate teams so that workspaces can help keep any and all staff happy and productive. The checklist includes:

Visual – Many neurodivergent people are sensitive to light levels, flickering lights, strong reflections and busy patterns. Lighting and reflections can also be difficult for those who are neurotypical.

Auditory – Some noises can cause difficulty and distress. Use noise cancelling headphones to help minimise the acoustic distraction.

Olfactory – Unexpected odours can be an issue for productivity in neurodiverse people.

Tactile – Touch is an important sensory experience. Organisations should consider the impact of the furnishing and fabrics.

View the full checklist [here](#).

Source: [BBC](#)

Key Links

[Different thinking: how to get the best out of employees with ADHD](#)

[A space for all to thrive](#)

[What does a neurodiverse workplace look like?](#)

[How do design a neurodiverse workforce – tips from experts](#)

The office as an encounter session

Spatial layout will be critical if we want the office to trigger new ideas and collaborations after the pandemic, says architect and academic Kerstin Sailer

Office space will need to be taken more seriously as 'an opportunity structure' in the post-pandemic era to encourage and accommodate social interactions amongst employees. That's the verdict of Kerstin Sailer, professor in the sociology of architecture at UCL's Bartlett School for Architecture. She believes that, as people spend less time in the office as part of a hybrid working model, it is important to adapt the office environment to maximise its effectiveness at creating innovation.

Speaking at WORKTECH's Workplace Innovation 2021 virtual conference, Sailer explained how the office contributes to innovation thanks to the physical spaces and unplanned encounters that it provides. Both are almost impossible to replicate when working from home. Sailer believes that 'weak ties' – the people you meet at the coffee shop or on the train platform – are important. However, such ties were lost during the pandemic. Working from home means you only engage with your dedicated team ('strong ties'), and no one from outside your circle – ideas can quickly

become stale. Therefore, says Sailer, 'we need to think about this when looking at digital and hybrid working'.

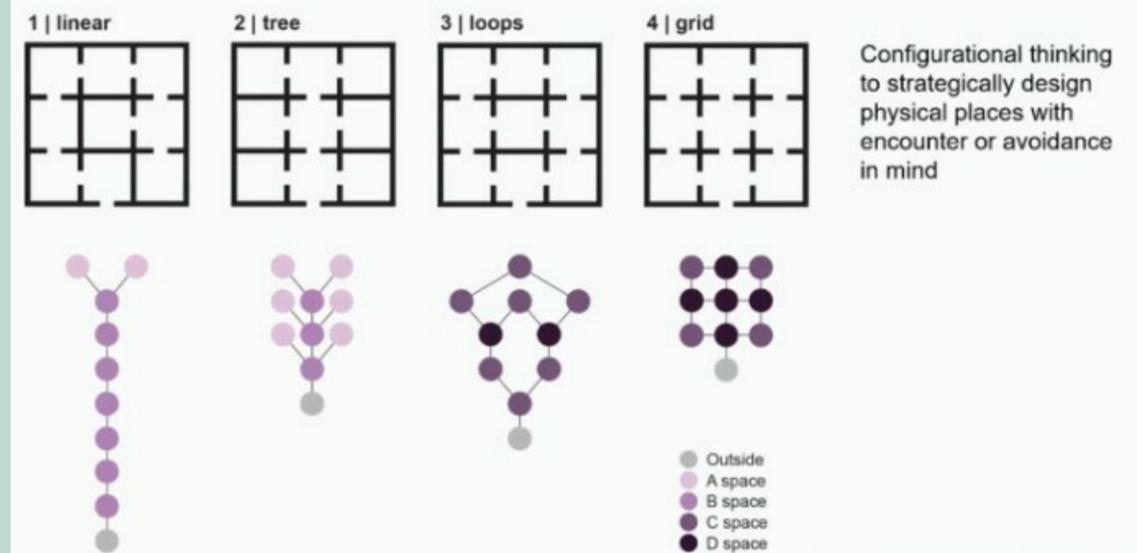
Space planning can deliberately bring people together or keep them apart, argues Sailer. 'If designed well, physical space can help us with identity, trust, community and a sense of belonging'. It is the idea of 'belonging' that companies must focus on as they bring people back to the office. Different spatial configurations can encourage encounters or avoidance (for distancing, privacy and concentration) – what matters is that office occupiers look afresh at how their offices are laid out.



Kerstin Sailer is Professor in the Sociology of Architecture at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, and co-founder of brainybirdz. She is a sociologist at heart, yet has trained in architecture in Germany, where she completed her Diploma in Architecture (Leibniz University of Hannover), as well as her PhD thesis 'The Space-Organisation Relationship' (Technical University of Dresden).

Space syntax: four different spatial configurations

The post-pandemic office



- 1. Linear structure** – spaces with only one way in, through movement. Provides more private and less noisy office environment.
- 2. Tree structure** – spaces you can walk through and also spaces with only one way in. Often seen as a traditional pre-pandemic office layout.
- 3. Loops structure** – mixture of walk-through spaces and spaces you don't have to return through. This system is best for post-Covid-19 return to the office.

Gives opportunities for encounter and avoidance.

- 4. Grid structure** – people can move about freely, fewer opportunities for private spaces, but forces interactions and provides the best opportunity for random encounters.

Source: Professor Kerstin Sailer, UCL. 'Celebrating The Unplanned: Why Innovation Requires Physical Space', WORKTECH Workplace Innovation virtual conference, 2021

'It's important to view office space as an "opportunity structure"....'

- Professor Kerstin Sailer

Key Links

[Chance encounters in workplace design](#)

[Workspaces that move people](#)

[How to create more collisions in your workplace](#)

On Our Radar

Here is a selection of external links from contributors to WORKTECH Academy's global network on subjects that are on our radar this quarter:



UK Workers on returning to the office

As the workforce starts to return to the office, *The Guardian* looks at how employees feel return to the office. Some welcome routine, while others are concerned about how it will work with everyone in at the same time.

[Read more](#)



The flexibility factor: who is going back to the office

The Financial Times has assessed the latest return-to-work plans at some of the world's biggest companies and found that tech companies are more flexible, while financial firms are more office-centric.

[Read more](#)



Singapore: model for ending the Covid-zero era

Singapore is the first among several countries in Asia to transition away from Covid zero – a policy that seeks no Covid-19 infections – towards a 'living with Covid' strategy. But the transition is not easy.

[Read more](#)



Why offices are embracing domestic design

The blurring of home/office as a work location has accelerated, according to *OnOffice Magazine*. As employees return to the office they will still expect the same level of comfort they experience at home.

[Read more](#)



How to build a transformational culture in the workplace

Employees are increasingly becoming activists for the culture they want to see in their organisations. The report by *Forbes* analyses the new book *Transformational Culture* by David Liddle, about how companies can get culture right.

[Read more](#)



Exploring workplace pilots through technology and design

Experts in workplace ManpowerGroup, Microsoft and Steelcase are exploring workplace pilots through analysing how experts are prototyping, measuring and learning through the lens of people, place and technology.

[Read more](#)



Promoting and achieving psychological comfort in the workplace

This article by a business psychology practitioner looks at the practical ways in which employers and employees can achieve psychological comfort in the workplace. From emotional integrity to challenging emotional rigidity.

[Read more](#)



New leadership techniques in the post-pandemic workplace era

The safety and wellbeing of employees has been the key priority for CEOs during the pandemic. Now, as organisations forecast further ahead this article from *Harvard Business Review* looks at their priorities for the long haul.

[Read more](#)



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