

Tomorrow's Office

Insight Report, 2025



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01 Introduction



Offices have become more than just places of productivity – they shape our routines, influence our wellbeing and provide the framework for collaboration, creativity and culture.

With hybrid models on the rise, evolving employee expectations, and a growing focus on holistic health for people and the planet, the workplace is being redefined not just in form but in function and meaning.

This white paper, enabled by Knauf, explores Tomorrow's Office: future-facing visions of the workplace designed to empower people and adapt to a changing world without adversely affecting our planet.

Based on conversations with experts in workplace design, strategy and real estate, it offers ideas and inspiration for how offices can be more inclusive, flexible, wellbeing-driven and tech-enabled – and how they can evolve alongside us.

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02 Office Evolutions



The office used to be the default destination for getting work done — a centralised spot where people needed to be because they were tethered to its tools.

But as digital technology and mobile connectivity evolved, work slowly started to free itself from a fixed location.

Then came the Covid-19 pandemic, which fast-tracked this transformation. Suddenly, the office wasn't a necessity but a choice — prompting companies to rethink what a workplace really needs to be in a more flexible, autonomous world.

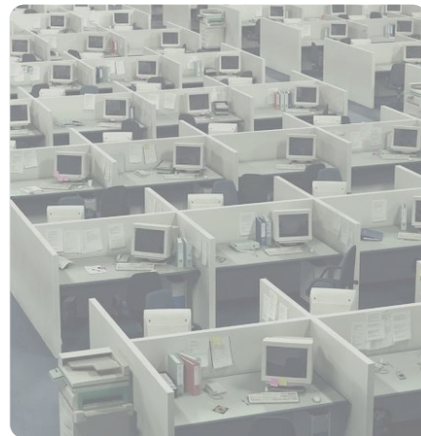




19th century
Clerical factories



Early 20th century
Bureaucratic monuments



Late 20th century
Cubicle farms



Early 21st century
Open floors



Offices took their cue from factory floors: big, open rooms packed with rows of desks where clerks cranked through repetitive tasks. Supervision was direct, hierarchies were obvious and efficiency ruled over comfort or creativity.

Corporate towers became power symbols. Think grand executive floors, corner offices and strict hierarchies. Inspired by scientific principles, layouts were rigid, standardised and all about output – not spatial experience.

Robert Propst's Action Office promised freedom, but the dream turned into fields of beige cubicles. The aim was privacy in open plans yet the result was often isolating. PCs and email reshaped workflows, while executives stayed tucked away in their suites.

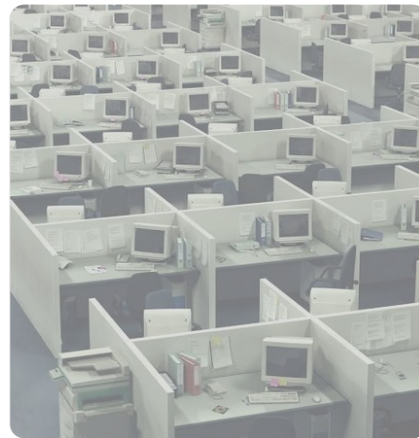
The walls came down – literally. Open-plan offices took over, pushing collaboration and flexibility. Laptops, WiFi and mobile tech unshackled workers from desks, while lounges and breakout zones encouraged casual collisions and new ways of working.



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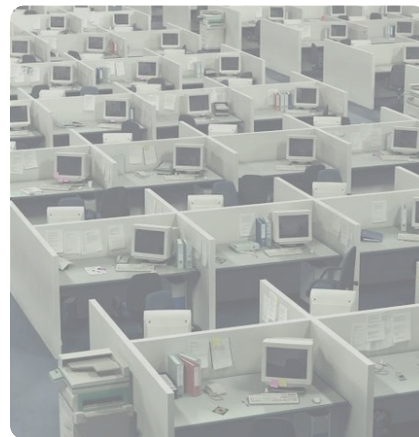
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'Business needs are constantly changing and office space needs to adapt quickly.'

03 Today's Drivers of Change



The office is more than just a place to work – it's where many of us spend roughly a third of our lives. It shapes how we think, connect and collaborate – and even how we define ourselves.

As expectations, values and technology evolve, so too does the role of the office. The following five key drivers are transforming how we design, use and relate to our workspaces.

01

Disruptive Tech

AI is set to reshape the workplace — not by replacing work, but by shifting our focus from doing to deciding. Fewer routine tasks, more curation and strategy. Smart sensors and data tools could guide office design, tracking movement and optimising layouts. Augmented reality may also enable more flexible, immersive spaces and real-time design planning.

02

Generational Shifts

03

Sustainability Demands

04

Diversity and Inclusion

'The work of the future is going to be more about curating solutions than actually creating them.'

01

Disruptive Tech

02

Generational Shifts

Today's workforce isn't just clocking in and out — they're looking for purpose, balance and communities that reflect their values. There are many generations represented, each with their own distinct expectations and demands — from seamless technology, mental health as well as autonomy and flexibility. Workspaces must evolve to meet these diverse needs in order to stay relevant.

03

Sustainability Demands

04

Diversity and Inclusion

01

Disruptive Tech

02

Generational Shifts

03

Sustainability Demands

Sustainability is now a business imperative. Tighter regulations and rising expectations are pushing companies to walk the talk. Stricter government policies that define how buildings should be designed, operated, maintained and upgraded are becoming the norm — and those who lag behind risk not just reputation but real financial impact. Environmental responsibility is now both ethical and economical.

04

Diversity and Inclusion

01

Disruptive Tech

02

Generational Shifts

03

Sustainability Demands

04

Diversity and Inclusion

The modern office is being reimagined through the lens of diversity and inclusion,, focusing on accessibility, representation and belonging. Inclusive design goes beyond wheelchair ramps and gender-neutral bathrooms — it means creating spaces that support people with visual impairments, cognitive disabilities and other diverse needs. The rise of AI raises concerns, potentially widening the gap instead of closing it.

'If you want to create and enable tomorrow's office spaces, you must constantly understand human needs.'

04 Future Visions



Navigating the changing landscape of work offers an opportunity to rethink not only what the office is but what it could be.

The following five visions represent a response to today's evolving needs, dreams and wishes — focusing on the importance of creating spaces that promote collaboration, enhance wellbeing, allow adaptations, prioritise circularity and seamlessly integrate technology.

01

The Adaptive
Office

02

The Hybrid
Office

03

The Healthy
Office

04

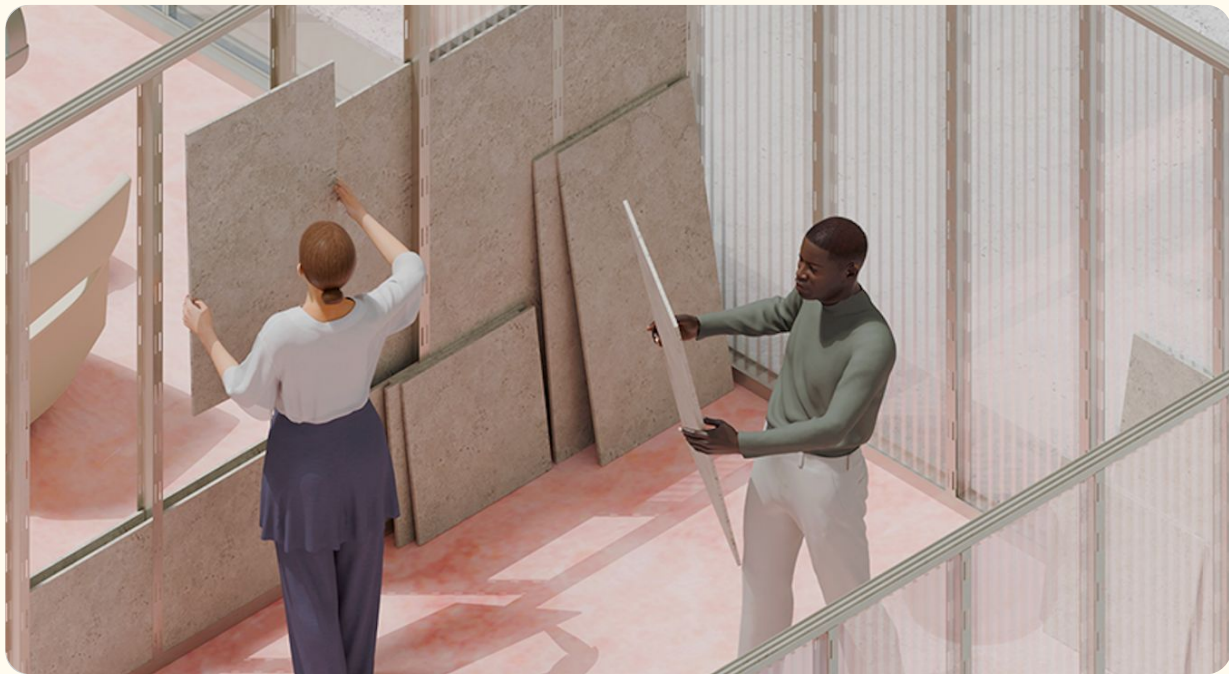
The Planet-
Conscious Office

05

The Social
Office

01

The Adaptive Office



01

The Adaptive Office

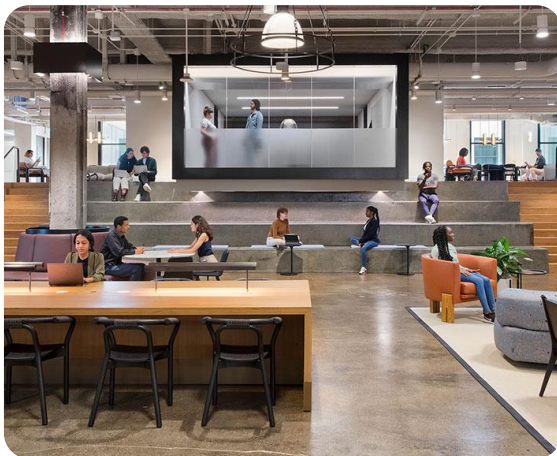
Today's workplace must be flexible enough to respond to constantly shifting needs – fluctuating staff numbers due to hybrid work, changes in company structure or growth and contraction. Adaptability is key to ensuring offices stay relevant, functional and sustainable in the long run.



© Vitra

Multi-level flexibility

Workplaces can adapt to change by integrating flexibility at every level – from mobile furniture and movable walls to agile real-estate strategies. This layered approach enables quick reconfiguration of spaces, supports evolving team sizes and allows companies to scale their footprint efficiently, promoting sustainability and responsiveness.



© Gensler/Connie Zhou

Spatial variety

Offices are evolving to include a multitude of spaces, such as cafeterias, event areas and quiet zones for focused work. This variety lets employees choose the best setting for their current task, whether they need to collaborate or work alone.



© Gensler

Mixed-use buildings

To keep office space attractive and fully occupied, mixed-use buildings are on the rise. Shared amenities like gyms, rooftop gardens, cafés, rentable meeting rooms and co-working areas not only add value but also create environments that draw in a wide range of people and businesses. This helps foster diverse communities, ensuring spaces remain vibrant and relevant rather than empty or underused.

'The biggest challenge in commercial real estate today is dealing with constant change while minimising the waste of resources.'

Key Takeaways

01

Tomorrow's offices will function like toolkits, allowing spaces to transform based on activities and occupancy.

02

Cost-efficient and environmentally friendly adaptations will be crucial for sustainable office spaces.

03

Mixed-use buildings that can host a variety of tenants will help create vibrant, diverse communities.

Challenges

Questions

01

Acoustics: Maintaining privacy and minimising distractions in flexible spaces can be a challenge, especially in open-plan offices.

Can algorithms or technology be used to predict and optimise office layouts, adjusting to the evolving needs of teams and organisations?

02

HVAC and technology: The complexity of modern systems, such as HVAC, lighting and sprinklers, combined with regulatory requirements, can make changes to office layouts expensive and/or difficult to implement.

How can spaces be as adaptable as possible when mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) systems are not?

03

Employee behaviour: Humans are creatures of habit and may be territorial. And if spaces and furniture are too complex to adjust, they're less likely to be used as intended.

04

Co-working viability: Making co-working financially viable as a supplement to traditional office space is still a major challenge.

02

The Hybrid Office



02

The Hybrid Office

Hybrid work – giving employees the freedom to split their time between the office, home and other third spaces – has been shown to boost wellbeing. For businesses, trading in pricey city-centre offices for smaller regional hubs and co-working spaces can save money and cut carbon emissions.

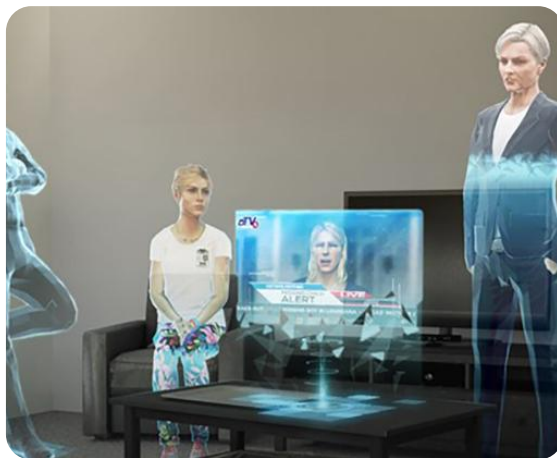
But with (sometimes drastically) fluctuating daily numbers, offices can quickly become underutilised or overextended, and there's the challenge of ensuring remote workers remain connected and engaged.



© Vitra

Shape-shifting spaces

With fluctuating attendance – quiet Mondays and Fridays, packed midweeks – workplaces must create a welcoming, energising atmosphere regardless of occupancy. Smart zoning strategies, like opening or closing sections or sharing space with external co-working communities, help maintain energy and avoid a 'dead office' feel. Adaptable furniture and movable walls allow spaces to be right-sized as needed.



© Hololens

Phygital equalisers

Hybrid work requires thoughtful planning to ensure all employees have equal access to resources and opportunities. To maintain high productivity, companies must create spaces and systems for seamless collaboration. Some are adopting policies where if one person joins a meeting online, everyone does, making meetings more efficient and fair. This shift will also affect how meetings are structured in physical spaces.



© Gensler/Connie Zhou

Hyperconnected hubs

Technology has become the backbone of how we work. With hybrid teams now the norm, the workplace needs smart tools that make it easy to connect, wherever you are. Seamless collaboration between remote and in-person staff calls for integrated systems that blur the line between physical and digital spaces, creating a smooth, intuitive experience for all.

'The virtual and the physical worlds will eventually be interconnected. We're already seeing this to some extent with hybrid meetings.'

Key Takeaways

01

Designing office spaces that remain inviting and energising, whether empty or full, ensures a dynamic environment at all times.

02

Hybrid work thrives when **rituals and systems ensure equal access and collaboration,** with meeting norms evolving to level the playing field for all.

03

Smart, integrated technology is key to bridging physical and digital workspaces, making hybrid collaboration seamless and intuitive.

Challenges

Questions

01

Office Reactivation: Trying to lure employees back to workspaces through mandatory policies often backfires, as forced return-to-office strategies can lead to dissatisfaction.

How can technology be used as part of a spatial solution to create a truly level playing field for all employees, regardless of where they work?

02

Cultural alignment: Maintaining a cohesive company culture is difficult with distributed teams and varying regional expectations of what the office represents.

How can a shared-space strategy support, rather than dilute, a company's identity?

03

Global disparity: Hybrid work means different things across geographies, with local perks and social norms influencing how people value the office.

04

Equity and inclusion: Balancing the needs of remote and in-office workers is challenging, especially when it comes to ensuring equal access to opportunities, visibility and resources.

03

The Healthy Office



03

The Healthy Office

Wellbeing isn't a perk – it's a priority. As workforces are becoming more conscious of their wellbeing, the office space of tomorrow has to step up. With so much of the day spent indoors, especially during peak daylight hours, employees need workspaces that support both body and mind.

Achieving this requires elements such as human-centric lighting, healthy air quality and flexible, feel-good design that adapts to different needs. It's not just about corporate goodwill; research shows that happier, healthier employees are also more productive.



© CBRE/Stijn Poelstra

Vitality spaces

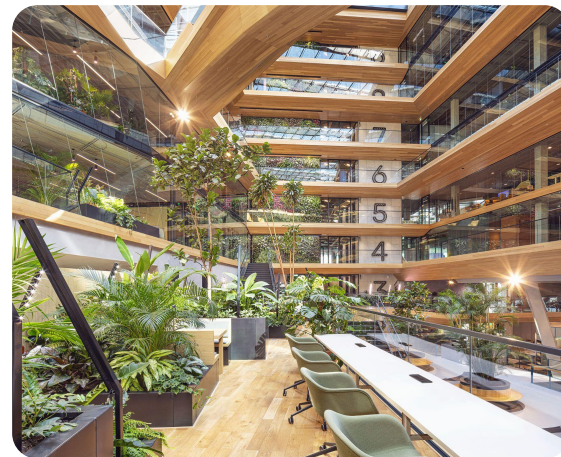
Rather than just ticking the wellness boxes – ergonomic workstations, natural light and fresh air are the baseline – workplaces should go further, nourishing people and nudging them to move, pause and recharge throughout the day. Think strategically placed stairs, lounge-like break zones, café corners (with healthy food options) and easy access to the outdoors.



© Unispace

Inclusive environments

To truly support everyone – including the neurodiverse – spaces need to be flexible, intuitive and personal, not just designed for the 'average' user. Allowing autonomy in personal setups gives everyone the chance to customise for their own comfort, while offering a variety of spaces for both focus and collaboration supports different working styles.



© HofmanDujardin/Booking.com

Biophilic retreats

Beyond aesthetics, bringing nature into the workplace is a proven way to reduce stress and support creativity. The integration of greenery, natural light and organic materials like wood can help create environments that feel calm, welcoming and human. These elements don't just elevate the look and feel of a space – they foster a deeper connection with nature, supporting both mental and physical wellbeing in the process.

'The office has evolved from something purely functional to something meaningful. Now, if we're investing in a new space, it needs to truly benefit the people who use it.'

Key Takeaways

01

Workplaces should actively **encourage healthy eating, movement and rest** – not just meet basic wellness standards.

02

Designing for inclusivity means creating **diverse spaces that cater to diverse needs and working styles**.

03

Nature-infused design reduces stress and boosts creativity, turning offices into calming, human-centric environments.

Challenges

Questions

01

Foresight: Many companies still see wellbeing initiatives as an added cost, not an investment.

Will sentient spaces that respond to individual needs be the next step in technology-enabled wellbeing enhancement?

02

Measurement: It's difficult to quantify the ROI of wellbeing improvements, making it hard to justify budget allocation.

Could partnering with local businesses that offer wellbeing amenities provide a solution for buildings without them?

03

Space limitations: Retrofitting existing spaces to support wellness features – like biophilia or quiet zones – can be logistically and financially challenging.

04

Cultural resistance: Employees and managers may undervalue or underuse wellness-oriented spaces if the culture doesn't support breaks, movement or flexibility.

04

The Planet-Conscious Office

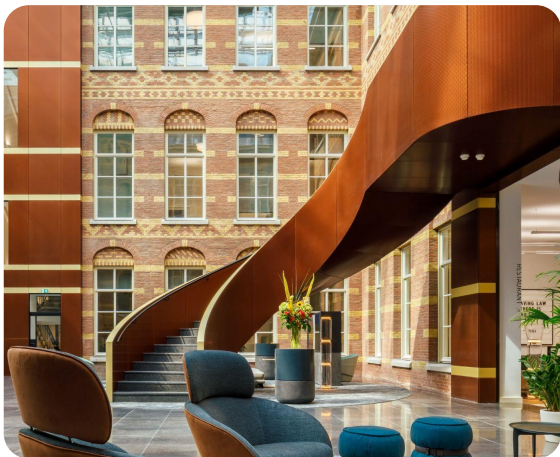


04

The Planet-Conscious Office

As sustainability shifts from a goal to a given – and employees increasingly seek out organisations that align with their values – office design must embrace a broader planet-conscious approach. This means considering the full environmental impact – from material sourcing to space adaptability.

Changing needs and requirements demand flexible, durable, reusable space fit-outs that can evolve over time and be reassembled across spaces and places, rather than being discarded. For companies aligning ESG goals with business strategy, planet-conscious design is not just ethical – it's a smart investment in resilience and long-term value.



© Fokkema & Partners

Enduring designs

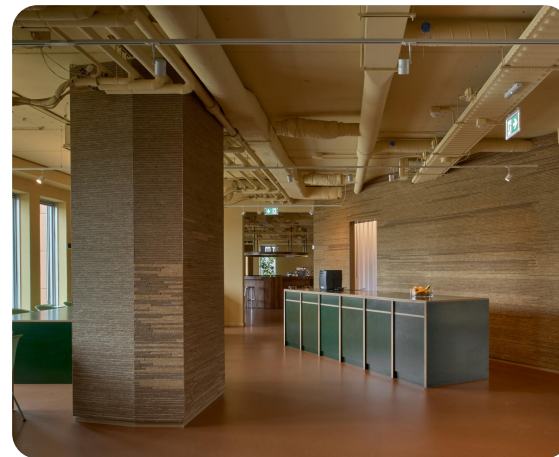
It starts with what already exists. The adaptive reuse of buildings can drastically reduce embodied carbon. From there, enduring design takes over: using high-quality, durable materials that can be repurposed instead of replaced, and creating adaptable layouts that evolve as the workplace does. By focusing on longevity over fast trends, these spaces remain efficient, relevant and low impact for years to come.



© CBRE/Stijn Poelstra

Flexible systems

Flexible elements – from partitioning systems to modular furniture and even rentable components – allow office spaces to adapt without major overhauls. This reduces demolition and refurbishment waste, supports agile ways of working and helps keep long-term costs in check.



© Beyond Space/Max Hart Nibbrig

Circular strategies

Circular design strategies, such as reusing materials through refurbishment or multiple-life applications, reduce reliance on new resources and extend the life of interiors. Additionally, incorporating new materials that are inherently circular – such as those made from renewable resources, biodegradable elements, or those designed for easy disassembly and recycling – further supports planet-conscious goals.

'As workspace designers, we have two clients: the planet and the people we design for. Both need to be cared for equally.'

Key Takeaways

01

Design for longevity by avoiding trends, using durable materials and creating adaptable layouts.

02

Build in flexibility to adapt spaces easily, reduce waste and support agile working.

03

Adopt circular design strategies by reusing materials and choosing renewable, biodegradable or easily recyclable materials.

Challenges

Questions

01

Exceeding compliance: Many companies still treat sustainability efforts as a minimum requirement, not a strategic investment for long-term value.

How can businesses scale sustainable practices without sacrificing flexibility or cost efficiency?

02

Upfront costs: Higher initial investments in sustainable solutions are often seen as a barrier, despite long-term savings on energy and operations.

Can emerging tech play a role in accelerating the transition to circular office systems and spaces?

03

Financial viability: The financial viability of rental or service-based models remains uncertain, hindering the broader adoption of circular systems.

04

Circular system integration: Implementing modular and circular systems requires a shift in mindset, which can be difficult for companies accustomed to linear models.

05

The Social Office



05

The Social Office

In the era of hybrid work, where people often feel disconnected from one other, the office must evolve beyond just a functional space – it should become a place that fosters and nurtures physical encounters and connections. It's no longer just a place to work; it's a cultural and social hub that drives collaboration, innovation and a sense of belonging.

By encouraging spontaneous interactions and creating inclusive environments, the new office thrives on human-centric design and is activated by meaningful programming, ensuring that it's a place people genuinely want to be.



© Gensler/Ryan Gobuty

Places of belonging

The office is essential for building relationships, mentorship and a sense of belonging, and should be designed to reinforce culture and create a shared sense of purpose. Companies need to create spaces that encourage rituals – such as shared dining, which brings people together through the universal language of food – social bonding and emotional connections to both colleagues and the employer.



© Vitra

Innovation catalysers

Since most innovation happens when people are in the same room, offices need to be spaces that actively spark creativity and spontaneous idea-sharing. Horizontal layouts and visible stairwells encourage movement and serendipitous encounters, while cultural programming and community managers help to create a vibrant atmosphere that fuels connection and creativity.



© Studio Modijefski/Maarten Willemstein

Accessible ecosystems

The modern office should function as an open, accessible hub that welcomes a diverse range of people and activities. By integrating functions such as fitness, wellness, cultural programming and community events, the office becomes more than a place to work – it becomes a space that supports wellbeing and fosters connection.

'An office isn't about the location or square metres; it's about the number of ideas generated per square metre – made possible by a space designed for creativity.'

Key Takeaways

01

The office is key for **building relationships, mentorship and a shared sense of purpose.**

02

Offices should be designed to **foster spontaneous encounters** that spark creativity and idea-sharing.

03

Modern offices can become open, inclusive hubs by **offering wellness, cultural and community programming.**

Challenges

Questions

01

Exclusivity: Many traditional office buildings are isolated and exclusive, reinforcing social inequality and missing the chance for more inclusive, connected spaces.

Could giving community managers a larger role incentivise employees to come to the office and create a more cohesive, engaged community?

02

Outdated infrastructure: Ingrained systems and regulations can hold back the creation of flexible, mixed-use environments that blend seamlessly with their surroundings.

Could offices learn more from hospitality, treating employees as guests to improve their overall office experience and foster stronger connections?

03

Desk-focused design: Too many office layouts still put desk space first, neglecting the need for areas that spark innovation and foster collaboration.

04

Blanket plans: Social strategies need to be tailored to local cultures and individual needs, as generic approaches often miss the mark.



The Office of the Future

Tomorrow's Office will need to be everything to everybody – a seemingly excessive role that shouldn't consume excessive resources. How can it get there?

By being able to flex in both the short and long term, providing the best use of space for any number of people at any given time.

It should move beyond rigid, desk-centric designs to become a tech-enhanced, hospitality-driven experience that promotes connection, creativity and wellbeing, and remains relevant for today and tomorrow.

'Rather than something finished or static, the office of the future is a componentised system that evolves through updates at different intervals over time.'

05 Credits



This white paper is based on interviews with the following strategists, architects, designers, asset and workplace managers:



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