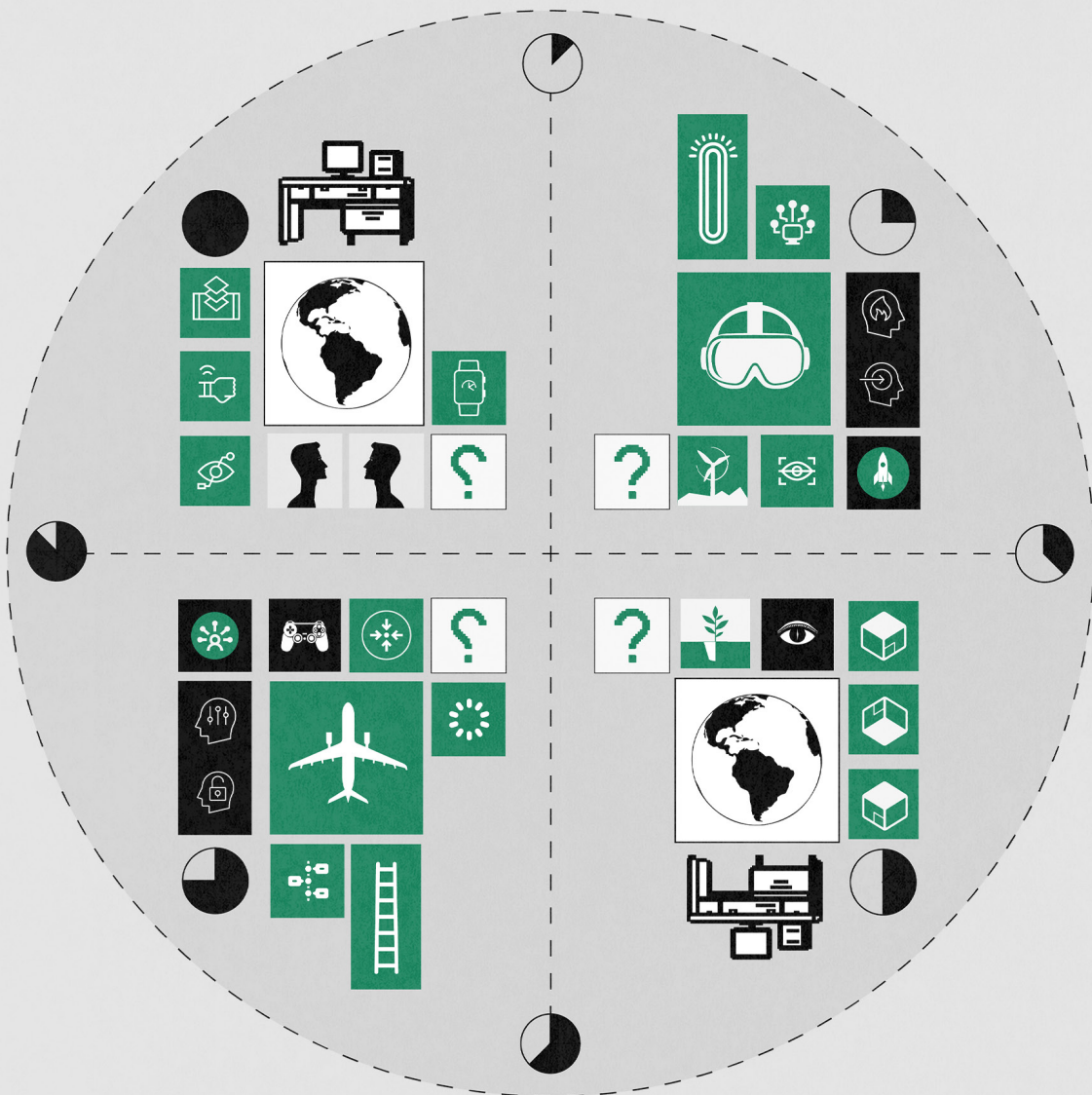


# THE WORLD OF WORK IN 2024



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# THE WORLD OF WORK IN 2024

Welcome to  
**WORKTECH**  
Academy's survey  
of emerging trends  
and ideas that  
are set to have an  
impact on work and  
workplace this year

We watched and waited for things to settle down in 2023, for a more permanent pattern of work to take hold. But it never happened: the year turned out to be as fluid, uncertain and unpredictable as ever as more companies embraced hybrid working but quickly discovered how tricky the model can be to orchestrate.

So, what's in store for 2024? This WORKTECH Academy report presents 20 key trends to look out for in the year ahead, using the lens of people, place and technology to frame emerging concepts.

Our predictions for people include employers taking a less skin-deep approach to wellness, a less confrontational approach to flexible working and a less ad hoc approach to experience.

Place-based directions include a 'flight to character' rather than quality, with scentscapes, biomorphism, recycled furniture and Instagrammable interiors part of the mix.

Technology trends focus on the role of AI in both managing and

designing smart buildings, as well as ways to 'fix the commute' rather than earn it.

Our thanks go to the Global Partners of WORKTECH Academy and to experts from around our global network for their contributions to this publication. 2023 fizzed with new ideas and experiments, policy retreats and torn-up templates. Prepare for another year of the unexpected.

Professor Jeremy Myerson  
Director, WORKTECH Academy



The Hayesbery, Goodman's new corporate HQ in Sydney, located in a converted hat factory

# No 1

## FLIGHT TO CHARACTER

### Quality or premium space might not be enough

As the office real estate industry has reeled from the impact of companies coldly reassessing their space in the aftermath of the pandemic, one of the few consolations on the horizon has been evidence of a 'flight to quality' that has generated high

demand for Class A offices in prime locations with strong ESG and sustainability criteria.


In 2024, however, it may be that 'quality' or 'premium' space is no longer enough to entice people back to the office. According to Amanda Stanaway, global head of user strategy at consulting firm ERA-co, a yearning to find meaning, purpose and authenticity in the places people inhabit will lead instead to a 'flight to character'. Organisations will link storytelling, history and purpose to create 'difference' rather than perfection for the users of their work environments.

What might this 'flight to character' look and feel like? Instead of renting homogenous space in anonymous commercial towers, organisations will seek out locations and buildings that deliver technical performance but are also loaded with character. Key to this approach will be crafting

a rich, layered space with varying attributes, whether that be different volumes and spatial arrangements or historical reference points.

A flight to character can transform B or C grade property assets into exemplary workplaces. ERA-co points to its work on two projects in Sydney as showcasing this approach: first, with M&C Saatchi to reinvent a 100-year-heritage listed space into a characterful hub for a diverse set of advertising companies; and second, with property developer Goodman to convert an old hat factory into a light filled, green campus with an industrial heritage.

Both schemes are forerunners demonstrating a willingness to create spaces with character authentically linked to their place, history and purpose. Could 2024 be the year that a 'flight to character' takes off?



## 'Smell is becoming part of the brand strategy as workers trickle back to the office'

undertaken because 'the mission behind the experience centres is to give the credit card giant a physical footprint for its brand.'

Mastercard's marketing team wanted to create a space that engaged all of a customer's senses, observing that 'smell is increasingly becoming part of the brand strategy for companies, as brands jostle for precious slivers of market share and especially as workers and clients begin to trickle back into office spaces.'

Could it be that how a workplace smells is now something that companies need to think about in the same way they select furniture or specify lighting? Look out for scented space in 2024.

## No 2

### SCENTED SPACE

### Offices will seek branded olfactory options

Will the office come up smelling of roses in 2024? We predict that the oft-neglected olfactory aspect of workplace design will be at the fore this year and that scentscapes will get the attention they have long deserved.

Research has consistently shown that whatever we smell has a significant influence on how

we think and behave. Scientific experiments have revealed, for example, that the smell of lavender is relaxing while increasing the likelihood that we'll trust others. The scent of rosemary can boost memory performance. Similarly, lemon can enhance professional performance and the smell of oranges can reduce anxiety.

A recent article in *The New York Times* ('When You Think About Your Credit Card, Does a Fragrance Come to Mind?') indicates that scenting is getting a lot of positive attention right now, particularly as new scenting options decrease the likelihood of allergic reactions. Its author shares that 'corporations are now mimicking fashion designers and hiring development firms to create a signature scent that clients won't forget'.

The article focuses on the selection of a scent for Mastercard's experience centres, a project



## No 3

# SMARTER BUILDINGS

## Integrating AI into building systems is a game-changer

Where does the smart building go next? In 2024, we could be about to find out. We can expect to see more companies embedding artificial intelligence into their building management systems. This could enable such systems to learn from the behaviour of occupants and reach a whole new level of efficiency.

When combined with sensors and other data-collection infrastructure, AI can predict future scenarios and usage, and this information can then be used to help inform decision-making by building management and operations, thus improving sustainability, reducing costs and simplifying processes.

Such an AI-driven approach even has its own moniker – the ‘iBuilding’, as coined by researcher Will Serrano of The Bartlett, University College London, in a paper for a computing journal in 2022. Serrano talks about buildings ‘becoming more intelligent in the way they monitor the usage of their assets, functionality and space’.

Speeding up the decision-making process means that companies can be more responsive to change and

be more agile within a complex environment. They can also integrate different data sets and better understand how patterns of usage correlate with each other, leading to the creation of a deeper level of insight into building occupancy and behaviour.

The role of AI in building management systems might well be the final piece in the jigsaw to create what office design and fitout specialist Area describes as a key trend for 2024 - ‘immersive, intelligent and personalised workplaces’ in which smart technology is a key driver of transformation and not an afterthought.

According to Area, we can expect immersive mixed reality, metaverse, digital twin and gamification technologies to sit alongside those that can personalise future workspaces to an individual’s preferences in terms of lighting,

temperature, acoustics and ergonomics.

Taking the smart building to this next level, however, will depend on giving a shock to the building management system that only AI can provide. Perhaps the iBuilding is not so far away after all.



## No 4

# TIME FOR TIMBER

## Wooden buildings are set to bring psychological benefits

2024 could be the year when developers and designers finally see the wood for the trees on using timber in office buildings.

The momentum has been building for some time. Not only has Walmart's new HQ in Arkansas been heralded as the largest mass timber project in the US to date, but in December 2023, the tallest hybrid-timber tower in the world was unveiled in Perth, Australia. Named the C6 and designed by architectural firm Fraser & Partners, this residential structure stands 189.1 metres high and is made of 42 per cent mass timber.

Academic research findings have long extolled the virtues of visible wood grain, which has been proven to raise wellbeing, reduce stress levels and aid performance at work. Now mass timber construction is coming into its own in workplaces and on college campuses.

It is defined by a global supplier of the material in British Columbia, Naturally-Wood, as 'using state-of-the-art technology to glue, nail, or dowel wood products together in layers. The results are large structural panels, posts, and beams. These exceptionally strong and versatile products are known as



**'Mass timber construction is opening new design possibilities'**

mass timber. . .an environmentally friendly substitute for carbon-intensive materials and building systems.'

Naturally-Wood further argues that 'faced with climate change and the need for low carbon solutions, mass timber is opening new design possibilities from long-spanning roof structures to tall timber towers.' Another advocate, Think Wood, suggests that 'mass timber construction is capturing the imaginations of leading building and design professionals, who continue to evolve and advance its potential.'

It's not just the structural properties of timber that are now attracting attention – the psychological and environmental effects of its use are positive too. Wood can be good for our minds as well as for the planet. Expect more wooden components in workplaces that are built or remodeled in 2024.

# No 5

## THE WELLNESS GLOSS

### Employees will expect a deeper approach to health

Will the wellness gloss come off corporate culture in 2024? Evidence suggests that a reset for health and wellbeing initiatives in the workplace could be overdue. Despite a rise in focus and investment in this area since the COVID-19 pandemic, there is now a growing movement to bring less of a superficial gloss to wellness and adopt a deeper approach.

In 2024, we predict that more employees will start turning away from quick fixes and looking towards more science-based solutions. Being allowed to bring dogs into work, listen to a motivational speaker or attend a corporate seminar on mental health won't cut it anymore – employees will look for more far-reaching initiatives that improve their health and wellbeing.

Quick fixes have started to show their cracks. In the 2023 Work in America report from the American Psychological Association, 55 per cent of employees surveyed felt that their employer thinks the workplace is a lot healthier and safer psychologically than it really is. This suggests a disconnect between the



lived experience of employees and how managers perceived any impact their investment in wellbeing might have.

What might a deeper approach to health and work look like? There are many aspects to this. Chicago-based Sally Augustin of Research Design Connections suggested a renewed focus on such fundamental models as self-determination theory (SDT), which identifies three core motivations at work – to feel capable, in control and connected to others. Swedish psychologist Sofia Viotti told us that just as people get given a computer to facilitate their work, so they should also receive specific tools to manage their mental health in the workplace.

Chinmayee Ananth, a director of global design firm Adrianse who is based in India, meanwhile explained that while the drive to design wellness-compliant workspace is now very strong, too many initiatives are transactional and programmatic. In her view, an integrated approach to health and work requires that the various systems that comprise the workplace – technological, natural, material, cultural, human and spatial – be aligned within a more holistic framework.

However this story unfolds, the wellness gloss looks set to lose some of its shine in 2024.



## No 6

# IN-BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE

## Street furniture has a role to play in reviving city centres

Professional scrutiny of the façades of commercial buildings and of outdoor green space in cities reached a peak in 2023. But what about the in-between architecture of our streets that is a rarely acknowledged but critical element of our urban infrastructure?

One could argue that the street furniture of phone kiosks, benches, drinking fountains, advertisement hoardings, bus shelters, security bollards, streetlamps and fibre-optic cable boxes have provided many of the most interesting and noteworthy characteristics of our cities. The streetscape of Paris is very different to that of New York or London, for example.

In 2024, we could well be paying more attention to this unique and underappreciated aspect of urban culture, at least if Edwin Heathcote, architecture critic of the *Financial Times*, has his way. Heathcote, a keynote speaker at the WORKTECH London 2023 conference, has written a book

called *On the Street: In Between Architecture*. This comprises a set of essays which raises some important questions about the role of street furniture in the lives of commuters and office workers.

For people to return to the office and reinvigorate city centres, there needs to be a supportive and technologically responsive streetscape that enables, for example, increased use of e-bikes and scooters by providing more parking and charging infrastructure. Access to drinking fountains could make the commute using foot or pedal power more appealing. Public furniture could enhance social interaction in shared city spaces.

City authorities currently hold the main levers of in-between architecture rather more than private developers and corporations



in central districts. But as the urban lines blur between public and private space in mixed-use developments, we could all benefit from thinking afresh about the elements that make a more enjoyable, practical and joyful streetscape.

## No 7

# THE ORANGE ECONOMY

## The creative industries will buck the trend while others falter

While some business sectors face a struggle in 2024, there will be one exception to this rule. This is the creative economy, also known as the 'orange economy', a term coined by British writer John Howkins.

Right at the core of the orange economy are the creative industries, including design, advertising, architecture, arts, publishing, software, research and development. The orange economy is driven by the intellectual value that derives from turning people's creativity into marketable goods or services.

The orange economy is becoming widely recognised for its potential to create employment. Since the pandemic, creative industries in the UK have enjoyed higher-than-average growth.

One in five jobs in London can now be found in the creative sector, making the orange economy a potential bright spot for different types of office real estate including coworking and innovation districts while other business sectors shrink their space.

Research suggests that as many as 1.2 million additional workers will be needed in the UK's creative industries by 2030 – the primary drivers being IT, music and TV. However, this growth can only be sustained with proper UK Government support. London's ecosystem of work will increasingly rely on a thriving cultural and creative economy – and will demand workspace that is more informal and collaborative.

Spain's major cities are also alert to the potential of the orange economy. At the autumn 2023 WORKTECH Madrid conference, we learnt that the escalation of the creative industries can act as a catalyst for urban change. Expect growing focus on the creative economy in 2024.

## No 8

# CALLING A TRUCE

## Business bosses and employees to avoid conflict over flexibility



One of the main characteristics of 2023 was a growing schism between company bosses and employees over the future of flexible work.

Last summer, a global survey from the WFH Consortium revealed a widening gap in 34 countries between demands by business leaders for a full-on return to the office and employee expectations to work at least some of the week from home. This schism was viewed as alarming.

In 2024, however, we predict there could be a truce between returner managers and reluctant workers over how much time should be spent in the office. While Tesla CEO Elon Musk's vocal disdain for the 'laptop class living in la-la land' has garnered headlines, many other large companies have quietly got on with the task of adapting to hybrid

working patterns and learning how to manage a more remote workforce.

If a truce is on the cards, what might be its terms? A lot depends on the economic outlook. If business conditions stay tough and the job market tightens further, employers might push aggressively for more attendance in the office via mandates, monitoring and surveillance, as they already have the upper hand.

But if the US avoids recession and global business forecasts brighten, then there is likely to be a more pragmatic reckoning in which employees retain at least some of the flexibility from the pandemic era. In this 'Goldilocks' scenario, employees might spend two to three days a week in the office – nobody gets exactly what they want, but everyone gets something.

A key factor in peace breaking out will be the introduction of new legislation which protects the right to work flexibly. In the UK, for example, the Flexible Working Bill is expected to pass into law in spring 2024, meaning employees can request flexible working arrangements from day one of their new jobs. How will we know the truce is taking effect? Key signs to look out for include companies paying an 'in-person premium' – a higher salary for staff who are willing to show up in person – or hiring a 'chief hybrid officer', who can manage the new hybrid work environment properly from the C-suite.



## No 9

### BRING ON

### BIOMORPHISM

## Biophilic design brings us closer to nature. Could we go deeper?

The use of biophilic workplace design to connect people to a natural environment was again a significant trend in 2023. But could we go further in 2024 and transition from biophilia to biomorphism? Advocates for a biomorphic approach to design believe this shift will add elements of surprise and interest for employees, as well as offering greater psychological comfort and meeting sustainability targets.

Neri Oxman is a former associate professor at MIT Media Lab and

the designer behind research organisation Oxman. She argues that standard architecture currently doesn't go deep enough in connecting to the natural world and calls for 'design to empower a future of complete synergy between nature and humanity'.

Her approach is based on a system-centric approach to design which explores interrelations across natural, biological and digital domains. It is a step beyond biophilic design, to a place of biomorphism where the design of spaces and objects reflects more deeply the patterns and forms found in nature.

In her work, Neri Oxman utilises natural material, inspired by structures which are found in nature, to create biomorphic designs which push the boundaries. For example, Aguahoja is an architectural pavilion designed using shrimp shells, apple skins and fallen leaves and constructed by robots, bringing modern technology and new materials together to create a structure which, in shape, reflects a dragonfly's wing.

For office spaces, this trend towards embracing the biomorphic suggests that designers and architects will go beyond the use of natural wood and local planting to create a more profound connection with nature. What it offers is a deep-seated sense of comfort through the mimicking of natural forms and a more thoughtful approach to reducing carbon. It's not a straightforward switch, but expect some movement from a biophilic to a biomorphic approach to workplace design to begin this year.

**'Biomorphism offers is a deep-seated sense of comfort through the mimicking of natural forms'**

# No 10

## THE BIG SLEEP

### Exhaustion due to poor sleep will hit the wellbeing agenda

Addressing poor sleeping habits in the workforce and their impact on company performance is not a new issue. But, in 2024, sleep health will be front and centre of the wellbeing agenda for many company leaders, especially those managing the HR aspects of the business.

The phrase 'I am tired' has reached its most googled point since Google trends data began in 2004.

The side effects of lack of sleep are substantial and wide-ranging. From a lack of focus to an increased vulnerability to stress, sleep loss is a problem that requires serious attention. Looking longer term, a consistent lack of sleep leaves

employees vulnerable to more serious mental health conditions that can further reduce productivity at work.

In 2024, it will therefore be important for companies to foster an environment that values sleep health – but this will require a fundamental shift in thinking, away from the glorification of overworking and towards recognising and actively promoting the benefits of a good night's sleep.

Lack of sleep not only has a human cost for the employee, but also an enormous financial one for the organisation. One estimate suggests that reductions in productivity and motivation, combined with healthcare costs, could cost employers as much as nearly US \$2,000 annually per employee.

If worker tiredness and exhaustion was already a concern in 2023, stand by for this to increase as firms push hard for more people to return to the office, with long commuting times cutting significantly into a night's sleep. Policies that value regular breaks and positive discussions of sleep health are essential, but they will require a shift in mindset.



# No 11

## E-GAMING AS AMENITY

### Gamers will bring their tech into the workplace



**'Savvy organisational leaders realise that these gaming rooms could be a key cultural touchstone'**

As companies scramble to up their game on providing amenities for employees, what's going to be the hot new trend in 2024? According to Ryan Anderson, Vice President of Global Research and Insights at MillerKnoll, we should prepare for an influx of e-gaming rooms in the workplace.

Anderson points to the immense growth in recreational gaming in recent years as paving the way for this trend to enter the corporate work environment. There are now an estimated 189 million gamers in the US, and a rapid growth in Twitch and YouTube streamers using in-

home gaming rooms to convey their personal brands. This in activity sets the scene for e-gaming to cross over into the next big thing in workplace amenity.

High on the agenda are esports gaming rooms. Given that many organisations already have a long track record of incorporating games with table football or ping pong, it follows that the transition into incorporating more tech in the form of e-gaming is the next step.

The team at MillerKnoll have begun to see this trend in practice. Having installed a therapeutic youth

gaming room at Mott Hospital at the University of Michigan, they've also noted many instances of video games being played at work to relieve workplace-related stress.

Anderson comments: 'It's only a matter of time before more employees begin adding their own gaming consoles and chairs, or before savvy organisational leaders realise that these rooms could be a key cultural touchstone for connection and a highlight on recruiting visits for new employees.'



yoga and meditation. But what Hartley proposed was a bigger frame for mindfulness – she talked about the ‘spatial self’ connecting to the wider surroundings. In this scenario, the inner city becomes ‘our own inner city’.

Architects and planners will continue to push for healthier cities in 2024 on a practical level, by opening up more green spaces, cycle lanes and urban waterways for example. But having a higher level of psychological commitment that connects to how we really feel about cities could make a difference. Will we see a more considerate form of urbanism take hold this year?

## No 12

### CONSIDERATE URBANISM

#### Healthier cities will need a new form of urban mindfulness

Making our cities healthier will be a key theme in 2024, as so many of our urban centres continue to be a tough and alienating experience for people – noisy, frenetic and polluted. British urban planner and designer Liane Hartley believes this is because they’ve been built as the antithesis of nature, and so lack the healthier and more meaningful connections that nature gives us.

Hartley has a remedy for this, which she terms ‘considerate urbanism’. This model has many facets, such

as moving from a car-based to a care-based system, paying more attention to the lived experience of citizens, and addressing health and social inequalities. Hartley won an award for her presentation on considerate urbanism at the autumn 2023 Healthy City Design international congress, in which WORKTECH Academy is a partner.

Her most eye-catching idea was to advocate for city dwellers and commuters to practice a form of urban mindfulness. We are familiar with being mindful in the workplace and this is now an established part of a wellbeing package alongside

## No 13

### AI IN DESIGN

#### Uptake of AI tools that support designers will skyrocket



2023 saw the release of ChatGPT and the first use of generative AI tools to author the design of an office building. Hickok Cole architecture studio used ChatGPT and Midjourney to create a mixed-use building with a combination of office, retail, residential, hotel and library space. The technology made mistakes but apparently learnt from them quickly, a bit like a smart junior designer taking instruction from a senior partner.

What can we expect from 2024 in terms of AI-driven design tools?

Uptake will continue to skyrocket. Text-to-image tools will come to the fore as companies utilise these tools as part of idea generation and innovation. AI will also be used to help tackle recurring technical issues in building design, such as mechanical, electrical and plumbing system faults, and come up with new ways of meeting design standards.

Other AI tools designed to optimise energy efficiency within buildings or explore design at the urban scale are also hitting the market, offering architects new perspectives on their designs and helping them consider new criteria.

One thing we won't see as standard in 2024 are offices that are exclusively designed by generative AI. Architects won't be out of a job any time soon. The technology still makes too many basic design errors to go it alone without expert human supervision and judgement. Nevertheless, the development of AI tools to support designers is a significant shift, and one that will increasingly shape and influence workplace design this year.



**'Expect some lingering attachment to the office interior that lights up our social media feeds'**

## No 14

### **THE ENVY OFFICE**

**Does this work  
interior look good  
on Instagram?**

As some big employers become increasingly frantic about encouraging people to return to the workplace, a new sort of office is being directly discussed. This is the 'envy office', a term coined by Goldberg and Kode in a November 2023 article in *The New York Times* ('The Envy Office: Can Instagrammable Design Lure Young Workers Back?')

An envy office is defined as 'what happens when companies try to combine the comforts of a living room and the glamour of a vacation.'

These spaces—often characterised by colourful walls, upholstered furniture and carefully curated coffee table books—lure workers in with plenty of opportunities to fill their social feeds with photos taken at the workplace.'

As more than half of workers say they get a sense of identity from their jobs according to consistent findings in Gallup polling, it's perhaps no surprise that young people should want to put on their social media profiles the very thing that is so central to their sense of self.

As Goldberg and Kode point out, there can be a gap between what people are getting in their envy offices and what they really need to do their jobs well. But in an envy office, at least the interior views look good on Instagram.

This trend may have a limited life. As it becomes clearer that envy offices may not be compatible with at least some company goals, they are likely to go the way of other short-lived workplace fads. But in 2024, expect at least some lingering attachment to the office interior that lights up our social media feeds.

## No 15

# CORPORATE COWORKING

## New membership amenities to woo big business users

Coworking is back and booming in the new era of flexible work. But its customer profile is changing from a traditional reliance on freelancers, start-ups and entrepreneurs, and in 2024, coworking venues will look to get a bigger slice of the corporate office space market.

When WORKTECH Academy studied the coworking sector with workplace management software company Zapfloor, we discovered a trend towards increasing the number of private and team offices inside venues to compete for corporate business.

Coworking spaces are taking significant steps to fill gaps in their amenity offering – such as adding childcare facilities, state-of-the-art gym membership or massage therapy – to reflect the standards that corporate workers have come to expect from their employers.

They are making membership more flexible, allowing coworkers to bring in more clients to use the space as well as creating an international network of coworking venues that give globetrotting corporate employees a base in major capitals. Cutting-edge technology is being introduced to support a more seamless visitor experience, matching best-in-class corporate provision.

These changes in what coworking can offer suggest that the sector will step up its challenge this year as an alternative property power base for corporate firms to consider. And it cuts both ways: corporate real-estate teams will study coworking spaces to better understand what factors are driving their popularity with users.





# No 16

## FIXING THE COMMUTE

### ‘Earn the commute’ is set to change to ‘fix the commute’

‘Earn the commute’ was a common refrain ringing in the ears of employers during 2023. As a full-scale return to the office was met with reluctance by many workers, research suggested that the time, cost and stress of the daily commute was a major barrier to bringing people back.

In 2024, that refrain might change to ‘fix the commute’ as companies come around to doing something about one of the biggest obstacles to the office return. But what precisely might they do?

Many employers have already erected digital dashboards in the workplace to give their staff real-time traffic and public transport information. They’ve invested in cycle parks, bike repair shops, and electric charging points for e-bikes and scooters. They’ve provided more shower facilities for runners and cyclists. They’ve even lobbied city authorities to upgrade bus routes.

All helpful innovations, we’re sure, but hardly transformative. So, what’s next? When WORKTECH Academy teamed up with infrastructure firm AECOM and the Intelligent Mobility Design

Centre at the Royal College of Art to create future scenarios for smart commuting, we discovered an emerging world of urban mobility solutions and technologies just waiting to be adopted.

From autonomous commuter pods designed around wellness and biophilia to EVTOL (electric vertical take-off and landing) flying machines, intuitive loops and zipline scooters, there was plenty of potential to explore.

Four words captured what the future commute should be about: augmented – making

best use of AI and automation; balanced – enabling employees to combine work and life tasks while commuting; adaptable, so that all ages and abilities are included; and holistic – creating a seamless journey that leaves the commuter refreshed rather than exhausted at the point of transition into the workplace.

Will 2024 be the year that some serious design attention is finally paid to making commuting less of a burden?



## No 17

# CIRCULAR FURNITURE

## There will be renewed efforts to keep desks out of landfill

There has been a big push on large firms getting to grips with the circular economy and working to recycle their surplus furniture as they repurpose their offices for hybrid working. In 2024 we can expect more companies to follow their lead, not only recycling their furniture but also utilising second-hand furniture as they look to cut costs in the flexible work era.

The drive for employees to rightsize their workspace can be seen as a positive in terms of sustainability – they should only take up the space they need and not have large swathes of empty office space. However, it does beg the question: what happens to the old furniture that companies no longer need in their new, rightsized office?



The good news is that, according to a report by Green Standards, a global firm specialising in the decommissioning of corporate spaces, more corporate firms are getting on board with the circular economy. Green Standards has worked with more than 25 per cent of Fortune 100 companies over the past 15 years to keep office assets such as furniture from being scrapped. As a result, more than 110,000 tons of office furniture have been diverted from entering landfill.

In 2024, circular design practices will become more standard, more major occupiers will engage with its principles, and furniture suppliers themselves will embrace circularity to show their sustainability

credentials. As Green Standards says in its 'State of the Circular Workplace 2023' report, 'a circular workplace is a zero-waste office'.

## No 18

# BRAKE ON BURNOUT

## Are you really burnt out or just bored?

Burnout was on the rise globally in 2023. According to one survey, more than 42 per cent of employees reported feeling the effects of burnout. This is nearly half of the workforce, an alarming figure that surely requires some qualification.

Increasingly, the question is being asked whether 'burnout' is really the right term to use to describe people who might simply feeling tired, stressed, anxious or just plain bored – or some combination of all of them. Behavioural scientist and workplace expert Dr Alexandra Dobra-Kiel of Behave suggests that 'the combination of pressures affecting employees can explain why there is a growing misdiagnosis of burnout'.

In 2024, it will be essential that companies work to separate burnout from other work stresses and create a more positive culture of engagement. The challenge they face is that growing flexibility in working practices is being fingered as a culprit for employees feeling burnt out.

Hybrid working comes with a blurring of boundaries: employees can feel, wrongly or rightly, that they are always expected to be available, and that there is no clear end to the working day. This blurred line can lead to increased levels of employee stress and fatigue – all contributing factors to burnout. As companies continue to adapt to the hybrid model this year, they must

guard against advertently pushing their people towards a burnout-like state, with the subsequent over-reporting of the syndrome that results.

Burnout also has a big knock-on effect for organisations. As disengaged employees are increasingly likely to quit their jobs, companies are faced with new hiring and training costs. In 2024, more proactive company policies to prevent burnout and more accurate assessments of what people are really experiencing will be required.



# No 19

## THE 15-MINUTE CITY

### Time to send the conspiracy theorists into retreat

Many experts predict that we'll be seeing more workplaces integrated into compact '15-minute cities' that provide all the essential services that citizens require within a relatively short walk or cycle from their home, whether that be shops, education, healthcare, culture or access to work.

The 15-minute model, which originated with the French-Columbian scientist Carlos Moreno at the Sorbonne and was taken up by Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo along with a host of other cities across the globe, has much to offer as urban centres seek to cut pollution and improve health. Interest in the concept is high.

However, a planning model designed to create more sustainable and human-centred urban neighbourhoods got caught up in the UK's 'culture wars' in 2023, related to the rights of motorists versus reaching net-zero. Libertarians repositioned the 15-minute city as a shadowy threat to personal freedom with the aim of curtailing individual movement.

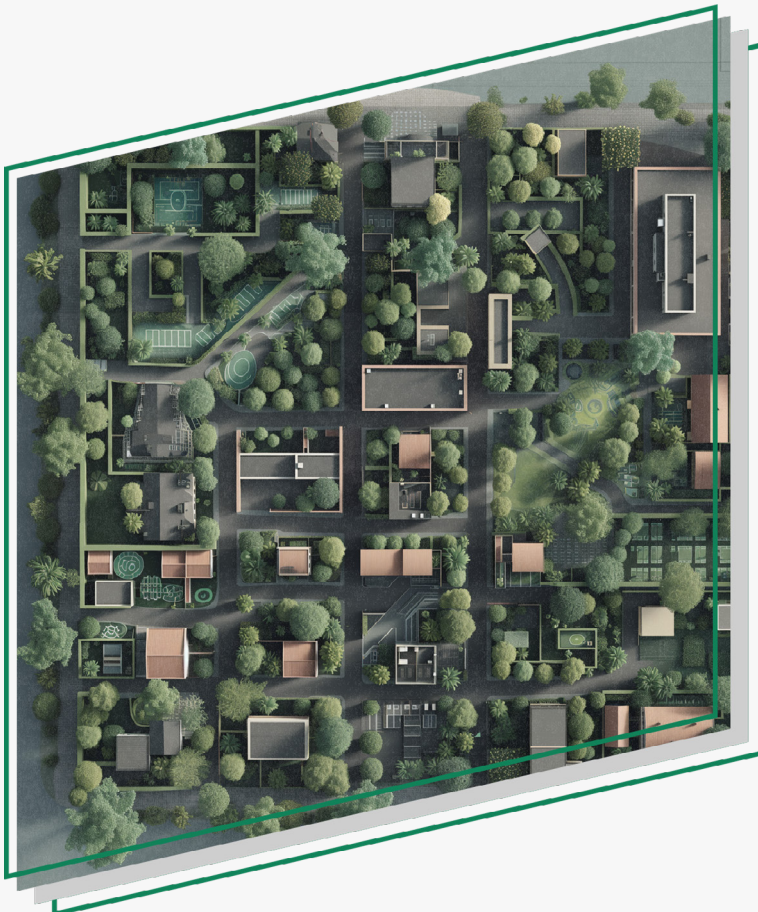
The good news is that this bizarre brush with conspiracy theorists has not deterred advocates for the 15-minute model. Internationally, support remains robust, but it's



clear that reducing the concept to a series of traffic calming measures is unhelpful. The 15-minute city is more complex than even its most ardent supporters sometimes give it credit for.

Survey research of more than 5,000 people by architectural firm Hassell demonstrates that the concept means different things to different people. Definitions ranged from 'a compact place' for compact communities (11 per cent) and an amenity-rich 'place with multiple functions' (38 per cent) to 'a place that is walkable' with sustainable access (60 per cent).

Hassell's study usefully ventured its own definition of the 15-minute neighbourhood as 'made by bringing people closer together in walkable, amenity-rich environments'. Perhaps we'll finally see the conspiracy theorists in retreat in 2024.





metrics will come under threat from new ways to evaluate and measure the workplace. These metrics will be more experiential and human-centric, aimed at understanding what is really working to pull people back to the workplace.

In tandem with this, there will be growing investment in 'experience makers' inside larger companies to support the employees experience throughout the day – from ensuring the tech is working to rearranging spaces to support different collaboration modes to making sure the right catering is available.

Many experience makers will be recruited from the hospitality sector to ensure that customer service is at the heart of what they do.

Investing in experience can take many forms. Some are discussed

in this report, from fixing the commute and focusing on extreme biophilia to smart technologies, scentscapes and e-gaming consoles. Katherine Harvey of Unwork adds a new ingredient to the experience mix: working terraces, which have become one of the most popular factors for new office searches.

Terraces where employees can meet and work in the warmer months are the latest highly desirable amenity. Thought to be a hangover from COVID-19 lockdowns, they provide a facility to work in the open, getting some sunshine and fresh air whilst catching up with colleagues or clearing emails is a big attraction to office tenants and staff. Decent outdoor wi-fi, and lots of great planting are a must. A beehive or two are optional.

## No 20

# RETURN ON EXPERIENCE

## Experience makers will be worth the investment

We conclude our review of key trends for 2024 with one of the biggest emerging themes of the new workplace – experience. We predict that this year there will be less talk of ROI (Return on Investment) and more focus on ROE (Return on Experience).

According to Katherine Harvey, Global Consultancy Director at Unwork, familiar space-centric office



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# WORKTECH™ ACADEMY

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WORKTECH Academy is the world's leading membership club and intelligence platform exploring the future of work. WORKTECH Academy looks at the world of work and workplace through five key streams: people, place, technology, design and culture. WORKTECH Academy shares the latest insights, research, case studies and expert interviews with a global community of more than 90 organisations. WORKTECH Academy also facilitates both workshops and roundtables for organisations exploring the future of work.

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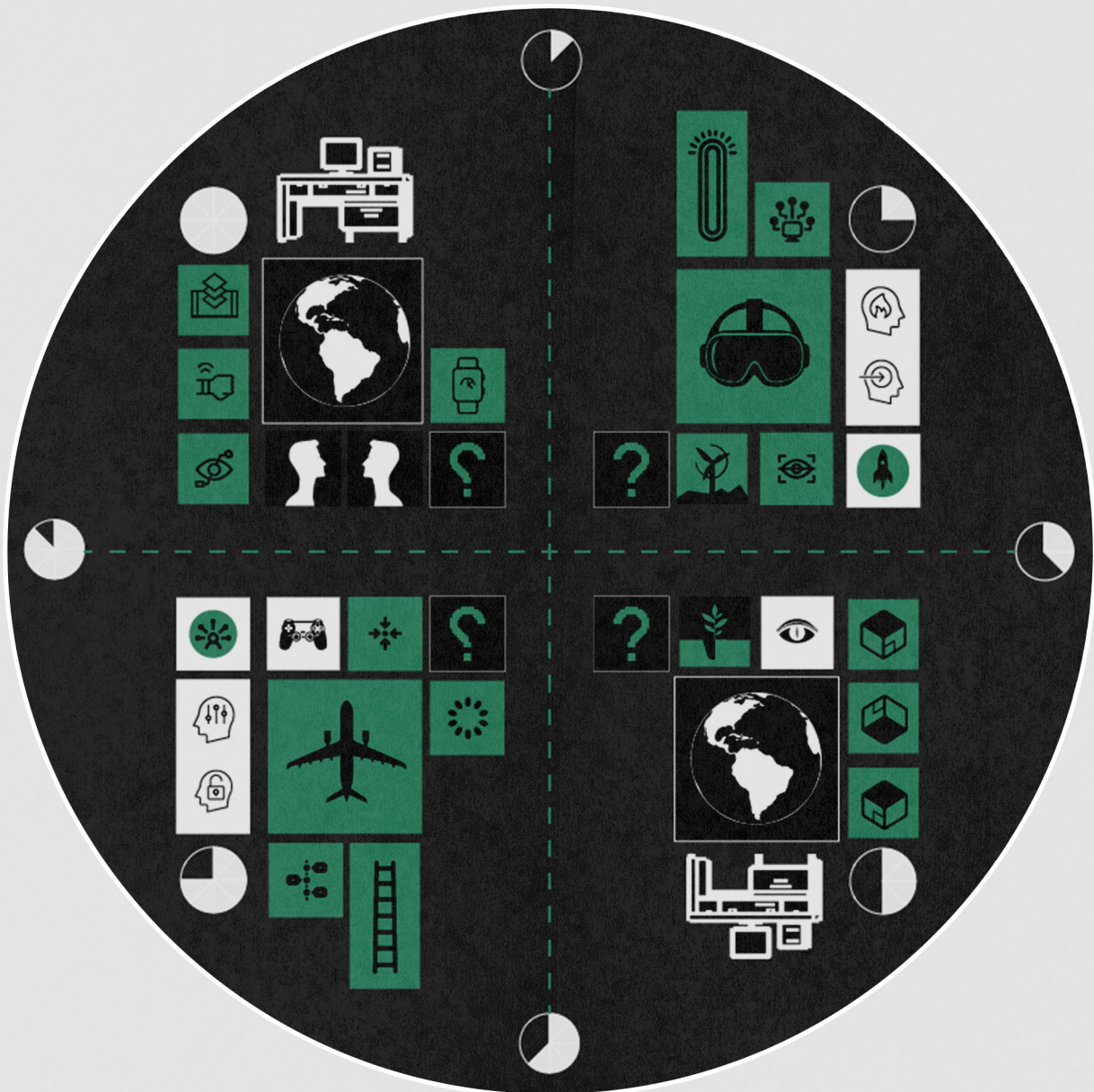
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