



THE WORLD OF WORK IN 2025



25 Workplace Trends for 2025

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THE WORLD OF WORK IN 2025

What's in store for the year ahead? Welcome to WORKTECH Academy's survey of trends and ideas that will impact work and workplace

We head into 2025 at a time when momentum in the world of work is swinging back towards more in-office working, as employers tighten their policies amid tougher economic conditions.

But people are not simply returning to the same old offices that were there before. Five years after the global pandemic and the evolution of hybrid work, a new workplace is emerging in which policies and practices are being radically reshaped.

This WORKTECH Academy report presents 25 key trends for 2025, using the lens of people, place and technology to explore this changing dynamic

Our predictions for people in 2025 are focused on the development of hybrid and creative leaders, better management of human capital, more accessible mentoring, and closer attention to neurodiversity in the workplace.

Place-based directions include a 'vibrancy metric' for the workplace, the rise of relationship-based as opposed to activity-based working, the influence of experience design, the amenities of work resorts, and initiatives to improve the resilience of cities in the face of rapid climate change.

Technology trends look at ways to improve videoconferencing and create meaningful connections to combat loneliness at work. The 'digital everywhere' is explored alongside its mirror-image trend – the need for 'digital detox zones'.

However, the dominant disruptive trend of 2025 is the irresistible rise of AI. Our final three trends in this report are devoted to this theme, concluding with an extended essay by Philip Ross on the implications of AI.

Our thanks go to the Global Partners of WORKTECH Academy and to the many experts from around our global network for their insightful contributions to this publication. Stand by for some arresting developments in 2025.



UNDERSTANDING A NEW ERA

Frankie Jack, Managing Director of Unwork, reviews the trends discussed in WORKTECH Academy's report

As we look ahead to the world of work in 2025, we can see that the traditional office is undergoing a profound transformation. Emerging trends suggest a workplace that prioritises human connection, employee wellbeing, and a blend of technology and experience.

This shift is being driven by several forces, from the rise of hybrid work and the evolving needs of a tech-savvy generation to the growing importance of wellbeing as a performance metric. These trends point to a future where the office is more than just a place to work—it's an ecosystem designed to inspire, collaborate, and foster personal growth.

One critical development is the growing emphasis on workplace vibrancy. As hybrid work remains prevalent, employees are becoming increasingly selective about when and why they come into the office. To attract them back, companies must measure and cultivate a 'vibrant' office environment that strikes the right balance between collaboration and focus work. Offices rich in diverse work settings, where teams can collaborate, interact, and recharge, are set to outperform those offering a standard one-size-fits-all approach.

This trend aligns with the shift from activity-based to relationship-based work. As artificial intelligence (AI) automates routine tasks, human-centric skills—creativity, collaboration, and emotional intelligence—will become more important. Offices are evolving into spaces designed to strengthen interpersonal connections, not just facilitate tasks.

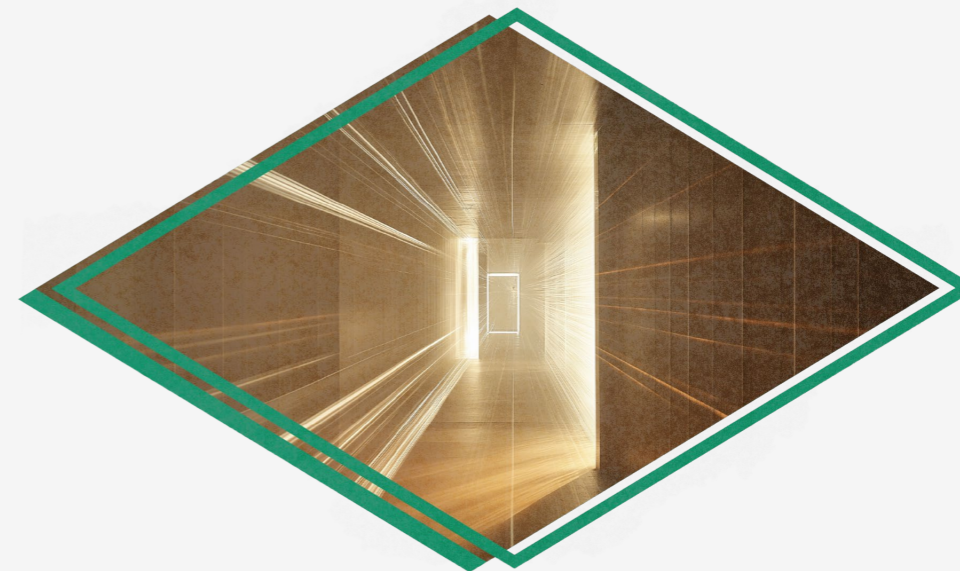
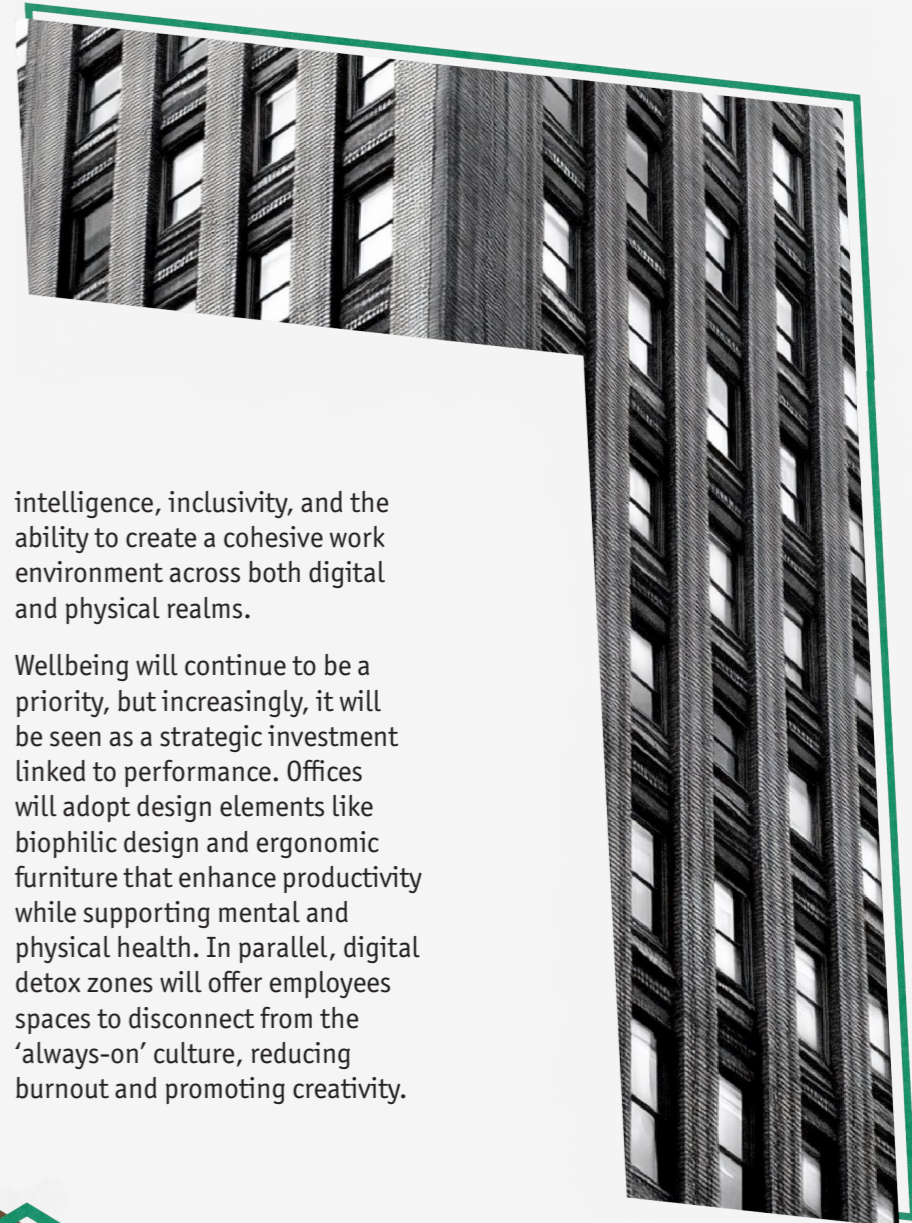
At the same time, amenity-rich workplaces are raising the bar for what employees expect from their physical office environment. High-end 'work resorts' offer amenities

like fitness centres, and curated workspaces, making the office more appealing than ever. These developments create a class divide between workplaces that provide enriching experiences and those that fail to innovate, sparking competition among employers to design spaces that employees want to work in.

While the physical workspace is becoming more dynamic, so too are expectations around leadership. Hybrid leaders must navigate a landscape where employee needs, organisational culture, and financial pressures collide. Successful leaders in 2025 will excel in emotional

intelligence, inclusivity, and the ability to create a cohesive work environment across both digital and physical realms.

Wellbeing will continue to be a priority, but increasingly, it will be seen as a strategic investment linked to performance. Offices will adopt design elements like biophilic design and ergonomic furniture that enhance productivity while supporting mental and physical health. In parallel, digital detox zones will offer employees spaces to disconnect from the 'always-on' culture, reducing burnout and promoting creativity.





'A vibrant workspace should have the buzz many employees miss during remote work'

No 1 VIBRANCY METRIC

Will workplace vibrancy become a new quality measure?

As employees become increasingly selective about office attendance, understanding and measuring what constitutes a 'vibrant' workspace could be crucial for organisations navigating the hybrid landscape.

Knowing where their office falls on a scale from 'pin-drop silent' to 'way too crowded' would help employees plan their days and facilitate in-person knowledge exchange, while also assisting organisations in balancing occupancy throughout the week. But how do we identify the sweet spot, and what should a 'vibrancy metric' encompass?

Occupancy data, utilisation patterns and noise levels are obvious starting points, as these factors significantly influence the work environment. A vibrant workspace should have the 'buzz' many employees miss during remote work, although this ideal likely exists within a specific range. However, numbers alone are not enough. Recent findings from Leesman highlight the importance of diverse work settings in supporting various tasks. Workplaces that offer a variety of

spaces consistently outperform those with basic settings across metrics like productivity and employee pride.

Employee feedback is another vital component of the vibrancy equation. What one employee considers vibrant, another might find 'too noisy', so personal perspectives must be considered to determine an ideal range. Finally, workplace vibrancy may depend on who is present and how well individuals connect. Integrating measures of team proximity could provide valuable insights for employers.

Looking ahead, an office vibrancy metric could redefine our perception of work environments, helping organisations to manage their space and enhance employee engagement. Could 2025 be the year such a metric hits the mainstream?

No 2

RELATIONSHIP-BASED WORK

A switch from activity-based to a relational workplace

We've long been familiar with activity-based working (ABW), which uses the study of activities in the workplace as a foundation for office design. But are we ready for relationship-based work, which puts the focus on designing to enhance human connections in the workplace – studying who people relate to rather than what they do?

As more organisations seek connection, collaboration and culture, the workplace in 2025 is set to prioritise relationship-based work – a term coined by global furniture design firm MillerKnoll. According to Ryan Anderson, VP Global Research and Planning at MillerKnoll, 'Just looking at activities as a basis for workplace design isn't enough.'

Anderson explains: 'Through our research and recent initiatives, it all points back to relational things. CEOs want better culture. Employees are looking for their closest colleagues to connect in ways that



'Offices will be reimaged as relationship hubs to strengthen bonds and spark innovation'

they can't on video, but they are also looking to reconnect with teams they've not seen for a while. People want better quality time with managers and leaders.'

Relationship-based work recasts the workplace as an environment where collaboration, trust and emotional intelligence coincide. MillerKnoll drew on elements of environmental psychology to devise its new model, examining place attachment, and strong and weak ties, to formulate a design approach that highlights the value of relationships – not just as a means of achieving business goals

but as a core aspect of workplace culture and employee satisfaction.

With AI automating routine and repetitive tasks, employees will increasingly focus on work that requires creativity, problem-solving and interpersonal skills. In this context, it makes sense to reimagine offices as relationship hubs, prioritising spaces designed for collaboration, mentoring, community-building and peer-to-peer interactions. Could 2025 be the year that designing for relationship-based work takes off?



No 3 CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

Clarity, creativity
and empathy will
reorient leaders

Frustration with outdated leadership models failing to keep pace with changing work patterns is nothing new. Back in 2019, the World Economic Forum announced that ‘something is broken here – the old leadership model does not work and is actually getting worse.’ But the complexities of hybrid working have really brought the limitations of old-style leaders out into the open in recent times. So much so that 2025 could be the year that alternative models start to break through.

When WORKTECH Academy teamed up with the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design at the Royal College of Art to explore new forms of creative leadership at our annual Innovation Day in autumn 2024, we discovered a wealth of new ideas. Adam Kingl, the author of *Sparking Success: Why Every Leader Should Have a Creative Mindset*, drew on the habits of highly successful leaders in the creative arts – from jazz musicians to TV scriptwriters and top chefs – to discuss the behaviours and conditions needed for creative leadership to thrive.

Rama Gheerawo, the author of *Creative Leadership: Born from Design*, presented a creative leadership framework that is based around the balance and interconnection of three fundamental pillars: empathy, clarity and creativity. As Gheerawo observed, ‘Too much empathy and you could be a pushover as a leader; too much clarity and you could be a tyrant; too much creativity and you become a bike without a chain, pedalling furiously but going nowhere.’

Our Innovation Day also explored barriers to a more creative approach to leadership, including bureaucratic processes, lack of time and money, and an entrenched organisational mindset – ‘this is not how we do it here’. But clearly there is plenty of scope for leaders to change their ways in 2025. Will business grasp the opportunities? A creative reset is long overdue.

No 4 WORK RESORTS

Amenity-rich
workplaces put
other offices in
the shade

2025 could see a class divide opening between those workplaces packed with stunning amenities – and those humdrum offices who give their employees nothing to get excited about. A yawning chasm between the haves and the have nots.

‘Goodie intense’ offices are often termed ‘work resorts’ and they’ve been on the rise in the US. Consider what they offer. When the *New York Times* reported on the Springline complex in Menlo Park, it described a signature scent, saltwater spas,

outdoor workspaces (it is in California after all), a ‘high-end’ golf simulator, and an ‘upscale’ Italian grocery store.

Another work resort, the Mart in Chicago, has 2.4 million square feet of office space which includes tenant lounges, a speakeasy, an upgraded fitness centre, meditation pods, an on-site registered dietician and an infrared sauna.

As Irina Anghel, who writes about work resorts for Bloomberg, has observed: ‘Think of office workers as tourists. Check them into a building that they can write home about, mix them with like-minded people and make them feel taken care of, and they’ll put up with the commute. At least that’s the idea

behind work resorts, or offices that are more like boutique hotels than glass-and-steel skyscrapers.’

Work resorts are a staging post on the journey from workplace as product to workplace as service, designed not just to accelerate the return to office but to make the rest of us feel envious. The question with all these amenities is how to find the time to do any work. See you in the spa, everyone?

‘Work resorts are
designed to make the
rest of us feel envious’





No 5 SHORT- CIRCUIT MENTORING

Employees will seek out leaders that are accessible

Organisations are now confronting the unintended consequence of hybrid work: the erosion of organic mentoring opportunities.

With fewer in-office interactions, the casual moments that once fostered mentoring such as impromptu conversations, shadowing leaders and informal feedback have diminished, leaving employees without the guidance they need to grow and develop. This mentorship gap has sparked a growing hunger among employees for more accessible leadership.

In 2025, access to leaders will offer a similar value to employees as traditional office amenities

and services. Employees are not just looking for a workspace – they are seeking opportunities to connect with mentors and learn from their leaders in meaningful ways.

However, hybrid work and ubiquitous technology has placed immense pressure on leaders to be constantly available – there is an ‘always-on’ dynamic that is unsustainable. To address this conundrum, organisations should recalibrate their approach to leadership and mentorship.

Leaders need to prioritise structured mentorship programs and create intentional touchpoints, both virtual and in-person, to foster development and connection. Innovative solutions, such as reverse mentoring programs and digital platforms that facilitate mentorship matching, can bridge the gap in hybrid settings.

This year is about course correction – making leadership more visible and accessible while balancing the pressures of hybrid work. Organisations that invest in mentoring and leadership development in 2025 will not only meet this demand but will also cultivate more engaged, resilient and empowered teams for the future.

‘Employees are seeking opportunities to connect with mentors’

No 6 THE ALPHA ERA

Generation Alpha will start to change things up at work

As Generation Alpha (born after 2010) heads towards the workforce, we can expect significant shifts in workplace dynamics and environments in 2025 to prepare for their arrival. This generation, born into a world of advanced technology and AI, will bring new behavioural patterns and expectations at a team and organisational level.

Gen Alpha’s daily lives are deeply integrated with advanced technologies, leading to rapid information access and increased efficiency. However, this may have knock-on effects leading to reduced patience in problem-solving and an over-reliance on technology, potentially impacting critical thinking skills and altering personal interactions and work patterns. This year, we will start to see how Gen Alpha’s familiarity with AI will change things up in the workplace.

The newest workforce generation also approaches learning differently. Mentorship is a critical part of Gen Alpha’s professional development, and learning environments will start to adapt to new learning styles which carefully manage the balance between in-person and remote interaction. AI education tools will also transform traditional learning environments in the workplace.

The entry of Gen Alpha into the workforce will necessitate changes in office design. This cohort has a strong preference for collaboration, so will there even be need for individual desks? Will Gen Alpha’s use of AI eliminate workspace as we currently know it? These are the critical questions that the workplace will face in 2025.

‘Gen Alpha’s familiarity with AI will change personal interactions and work patterns’



No 7 MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Leverage
technology to
address loneliness
at work

Loneliness at work is one of the scourges of the modern age – and it's not getting any better. According to the 2024 State of the Global Workplace report by Gallup, one in five employees worldwide currently feels lonely at work. Hybrid work models aren't helping in this regard, highlighting the growing importance of strong social connections in the workplace.

Despite the flexibility that hybrid work offers, many employees report feelings of loneliness both when working remotely and during office

visits. Interactions often remain transactional or rushed, leaving little room for the meaningful engagement that employees crave. Technology has been viewed as part of the problem, but in 2025 it can also be part of the solution.

To lay the groundwork for leveraging technology to achieve deeper, more impactful in-person interactions when teams gather, company leaders should recognise the importance of informal and casual social interactions that are vital for building a robust workplace culture. Many organisations currently lack these opportunities, which are essential for fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Leaders should also shift the narrative to emphasise meaningful connections by moving beyond viewing social interactions as optional or secondary, and by making meaningful connections a core part of the organisational culture. Companies should partner with experts in the design of people-centric technology systems that support deep human needs, authentic connections and genuine engagement.

Finally, leaders should invest in soft skills training that can empower employees to connect more effectively. Only by taking a strategic approach can workplace technology help to address the long-running loneliness epidemic. Expect meaningful connections to be high on the HR agenda in 2025.



No 8 MISSING DESKS

Mandates to
return miss the
mark without
desk space

There are many factors that have discouraged people from returning to the office, such as a long commute, caring responsibilities at home, or

unwillingness to pay for expensive sandwiches. But few could have predicted that in 2025, one of the biggest barriers to bringing people back to the workplace will be a lack of desks.

Apparently, businesses have cut their desk space so aggressively since the pandemic that they are now struggling to accommodate all the people they've mandated back to the office. According to a survey by Remit Consulting, a fifth of workers ranked a shortage of desks among their top three reasons for avoiding the office. Bloomberg reports that workers at Amazon sites in at least seven US cities, including Austin, Dallas and Phoenix, have been told their return-to-office dates have been postponed by as much as four months.

When British digital bank Starling, which has around 3,200 UK employees, called on hybrid staff to return to the office for a minimum of 10 days a month, ending a policy of ad hoc remote working, its plans were thrown into disarray by a shortage of desk space for returners.

All of this might be good news for furniture makers, but it doesn't instil confidence in current workplace strategy initiatives to predict desk space demand. Employees are regularly telling research surveys that they come to the office to get work done. Without desks, that's not so easy. Better use of data analysis should help facilities managers improve things in 2025.



No 9 THE HYBRID LEADER

Hybrid working needs hybrid leaders with special skills

Much of the debate around the return to office that made headlines in 2024 focused largely on the employee perspective, and rightly so. However, less attention has been

given to the added pressures faced by leaders navigating the evolving world of hybrid working; in fact, they are often vilified. So, what challenges does a hybrid leader face, and what qualities do they need in 2025?

Leaders navigate a complex landscape. Many are tied to expensive, long-term office leases that are costly to terminate, creating financial pressure to use these spaces effectively. This predicament often influences their stance on hybrid work policies as they seek to justify substantial property investments.

Additionally, hybrid leaders must cultivate a cohesive company culture while maintaining productivity and innovation, which traditionally required in-person collaboration. Yet, some employees – especially those with responsibilities outside work, like working parents – are reluctant to return to a mostly office-based pattern.

Thus, the success of hybrid work hinges on leadership’s ability to adapt, innovate, and create a flexible, inclusive work environment that benefits both the organisation and its employees. These responsibilities add to their already demanding roles, where they drive business growth and manage stakeholder expectations.

To thrive in this evolving landscape, the hybrid leader of 2025 must possess a unique set of qualities. Emotional intelligence will be critical, as will fostering trust through transparent communication. Additionally, being tech-savvy will be essential for leveraging digital tools that enhance team relationships and hybrid leaders must also champion inclusivity, equal opportunities and fair treatment for all employees. In the hybrid era, are we prepared to support and develop the hybrid leaders who will shape our future workplaces?

‘The hybrid leader of 2025 must possess a unique set of qualities’

No 10 TAMING THE TRAFFIC

Cutting down congestion opens door for hybrid work

The impact of traffic congestion is often overlooked in workplace strategy. But news from the Gulf suggests that we should consider the issue more seriously in 2025.

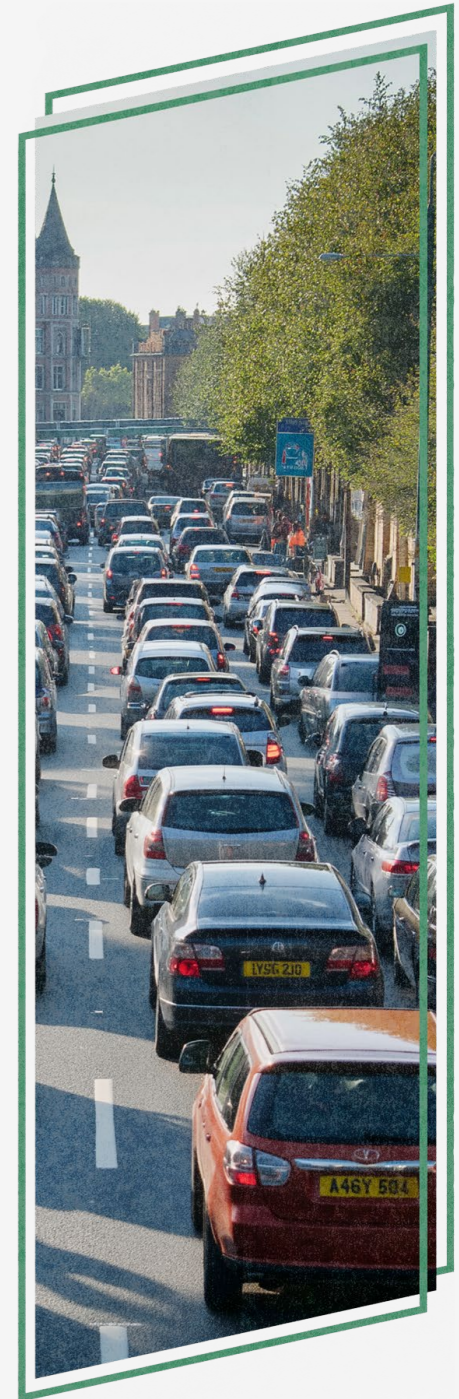
While the Gulf region was among the first to revert to full-time office work post Covid-19, recent developments suggest a re-evaluation of workplace policies. The UAE’s groundbreaking shift to 4.5 days a week for the public sector has led to a 40% reduction in traffic incidents in the city of Sharjah, for example, revealing a hidden benefit of flexible working.

Another UAE initiative to encourage staggered start times and remote work for five days a month to ease traffic congestion is a potential game changer. If adopted widely, this could reduce traffic congestion by 30%.

Such measures could soon become officially mandated in the UAE, forcing a currently hesitant private sector to implement such strategies.

This trend from the Gulf highlights how considerations around traffic congestion could be a catalyst in 2025 for widespread hybrid work adoption, not just in the Gulf region but internationally. Globally more than half of all commuting journeys are still made by private car, and in North America that figure is much higher – around 90%. The ability of flexible working to take cars off the road – cutting down on pollution, accidents, and unproductive time – is one of the most powerful arguments for adopting a hybrid model.

‘Traffic congestion could be a catalyst in 2025 for widespread hybrid work adoption’



No 11 THE DIGITAL EVERYWHERE

Technology beyond meeting rooms will help hybrid working

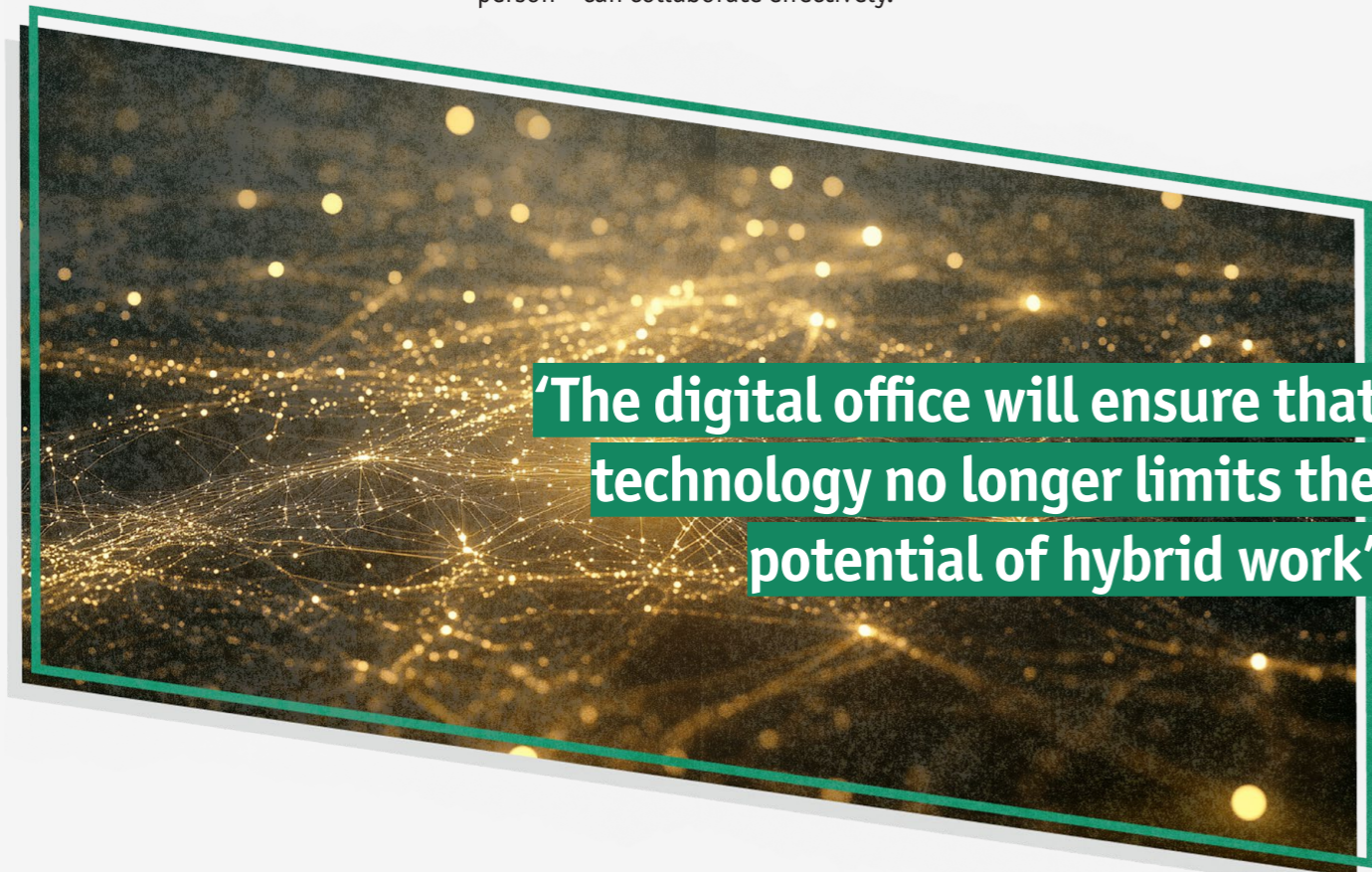
This year will see the next evolution of workplace design: a truly digital office that is fully enabled for hybrid work – not just in select areas like meeting rooms, but in every corner of the workplace. As flexible work continues to become integrated into workplace practice, organisations are realising that current technology has not fully caught up with the demands of the hybrid era. Virtual meetings have proven more efficient than their hybrid counterparts, highlighting the urgent need for workplaces to evolve.

The digital office of 2025 will aim to bridge this divide by seamlessly integrating advanced technologies into the entire physical environment, ensuring every employee – remote or in-person – can collaborate effectively.

This transformation will involve equipping all areas of the office with tools like spatial audio, AI-powered transcription and immersive virtual collaboration platforms.

Beyond meeting rooms, shared workspaces, breakout zones and even informal areas will feature technologies designed to support seamless hybrid interactions. These innovations will not only level the playing field between remote and on-site workers but also enhance productivity, engagement and the overall employee experience.

In 2025, organisations leading this digital everywhere trend will set the pace in making the workplace a true hub for innovation and connection in a hybrid world.



No 12 DIGITAL DETOX ZONES

Beating burnout will require a shift from 'always-on' technology

As the trend of 'The Digital Everywhere' takes hold in the office, the demand for spaces that allow employees to disconnect and recharge is set to grow. In 2025, the rise of intentional digital detox zones in workplaces could reshape how organisations support employee wellbeing and productivity. These areas will complement the pervasive presence of technology in the office, providing essential spaces for respite and reflection.

These calm, tech-free retreats offer employees an environment to reset, recharge and find balance. Grounded in biophilic design principles, digital detox zones integrate natural materials, greenery and sensory elements to create soothing, restorative spaces. Research underscores the profound benefits of connecting with nature, such as reduced stress and enhanced mental clarity.

For example, studies show that materials like wood can calm brain activity, while exposure to greenery fosters mindfulness and creativity. By incorporating elements such as indoor gardens, wellness sanctuaries and tactile, nature-inspired materials, organisations can design workplaces that prioritise mental health and inspire company innovation.

A recent LinkedIn poll conducted by design and build firm Area found that 85% of workers are seeking greater balance and 71% want spaces that enhance their

productivity. Digital detox zones offer a compelling path forward, according to Area. They promote focus and creativity while reducing burnout, aligning with broader organisational goals to enhance employee satisfaction and performance.

We've been here before with a space for a digital detox – it has a familiar ring. But amid the spatial innovations for 2025, it's set to make a permanent comeback. The sanctuary to disconnect at work could be here to stay.

'Tech-free sanctuaries can inspire, motivate and reduce burnout'



No 13

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Success of major projects inspires confidence

Large, complex, and expensive transport infrastructure projects that boost economic productivity and growth captured attention in 2024, giving policymakers, politicians and investors more confidence that such grand schemes can be successful – and creating a climate for further ambitious projects to get the green light this year.

The spectacular Elizabeth Line on London’s Tube network won the UK’s most prestigious architectural award, the 2024 RIBA Stirling Prize, a welcome but unusual recognition for such a massive project with a 62-mile network and 10 new stations.

The RIBA judges described it as ‘an extraordinarily complex architectural feat masked by an elegant simplicity’ and RIBA president and jury chair Muiwa Oki applauded ‘a flawless, efficient, beautifully choreographed solution to inner-city transport.’ The Elizabeth Line was designed by a

group of architects, engineers and designers including Grimshaw, Maynard, Equation and AtkinsRéalis.

The extension of Sydney’s Metro system, which opened in August 2024 with a new, enlarged Central Station designed by John McAslan + Partners and Woods Bagot, was also well received. Part of Australia’s largest ever transport infrastructure project, the station is predicted by *Wallpaper* magazine to ‘become a core part of Sydney’s identity’.

The return to office relies on faster, more reliable transport networks. Expect more action around big infrastructure in 2025.



‘Success creates a climate for further ambitious projects to get the green light this year’



No 14

AGEING HUMAN CAPITAL

Older workers in the frame for more attention

If 2024 was all about responding to the needs and preferences of the youngest cohorts in the workforce, 2025 could see the focus switch back to supporting the oldest. Keeping an ageing workforce economically active and off the

welfare bill is a preoccupation of many governments around the world facing low productivity combined with a labour shortage.

To see how this trend is shaping, where better to look than Japan? The country has long grappled with the challenges of a rapidly ageing population, as the old saying goes: ‘If you throw a stone in Tokyo, you’ll hit a senior’. According to the Xymax Real Estate Institute in Tokyo, the focus in Japan today is to look at workplace strategies from the perspective of ‘human capital management’, fostering environments that enhance employee wellbeing, productivity and innovation.

Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has been actively promoting this line, requiring companies

to disclose information on their human capital-related initiatives, strategies and post-implementation data. This policy aims to increase transparency and encourage companies to prioritise investments in their workforce, as the search for the ‘right’ hybrid work model remains an ongoing process in Japan.

The idea is that older workers will benefit from this broader approach to human capital management, as in the past they have been sidelined or marginalised or exited the Japanese workforce. Meanwhile in the US, according to *Fortune* magazine, ‘the new retirement is no retirement’. College educated baby boomers are keeping jobs well into their 60s and 70s because they ‘like going to work’. Expect more action globally on keeping ageing workers onside in 2025.

No 15 EXPERIENCE REDUX

An experience reset will depend on new data analysis

In 2024, the focus should have been on maximising the return on workplace experience. Instead, much of the attention remained fixed on a different kind of return: the return to the office. Once again, an opportunity to improve work was missed.

According to Ian Ellison, co-founder of the AI-powered workplace analytics platform Audiem, companies in

2025 should embrace a ‘workplace experience redux’ – revisiting, repurposing and reimagining workplace experience. By taking reflective steps backwards, the idea is that they will create the foundation for giant leaps forward.

Frank Duffy and his colleagues at DEGW wrote the original modern office design playbook in the 1980s; their groundbreaking ideas reshaped how buildings are seen as contributors to organisational success and helped establish facilities management as a recognised profession. Yet, years later, Duffy expressed regret during an interview for the British Library’s National Life Stories project for the inability to influence anything beyond its own boundaries. As he explained: ‘They saw themselves as

part of the supply chain. They didn’t see themselves as defenders of the users. It’s an ethical problem.’

This year will be about course correcting by prioritising user experience and addressing this ethical challenge head-on. Improving workplace experience starts with understanding what makes employees’ workdays better or worse, and why. Achieving this insight requires data. Collecting new data is often a challenge but, fortunately, organisations already hold untapped reservoirs of valuable data: helpdesk tickets, supplier performance feedback, social media activity, and even existing employee engagement surveys.

The key for 2025 will be to mine these overlooked data sources for actionable insights to enhance workplace experience.



‘Improving workplace experience starts with understanding what makes workdays better or worse’



No 16 PERFORMANCE OVER WELLNESS

Wellbeing will be more overtly connected to the bottom line

Five years on from the start of the global pandemic, there are some signs that business leaders are pivoting away from workplace wellbeing for its own sake to focus on the performance-related implications of design and other decisions instead.

This reorientation from wellness to productivity has been catalysed by several factors. Firms are under unprecedented pressure to boost commercial performance amid sluggish economic conditions, and they are increasingly wary of how effective past investment in wellbeing interventions have been in the workplace.

In this second aspect, they have perhaps been influenced by a well-publicised study from University of Oxford researcher William Fleming, based on a sample of 46,000 workers in 233 UK organisations.

This revealed that most corporate mental health interventions by employers have little or no positive effect on their staff.

It’s not that workplace wellbeing will fall off the map in 2025. It will remain a core concern for most organisations. However, physical and mental health will be more overtly connected to the bottom line. Performance will be everything. Ergonomic furniture, circadian lighting and biophilic design elements that promise improved productivity will be in demand. As a McKinsey report on quantifying the value of wellness programs explains, ‘it makes good business sense to invest in employee health and wellbeing’, not just to increase productivity at work but also to attract and retain talent.

No 17

TRANSACTIONAL TO TRANSFORMATIONAL

Developers and occupiers enter into a co-creative partnership

The workplace is no longer just a space to work — it's becoming a magnet for connection, inspiration and growth. In 2025, commercial developers are pivotal in turning these aspirations into reality. The traditional transactional relationship between developers and occupiers is evolving into a co-creative partnership where they collaborate to design experiences and destinations that draw people in and keep them engaged.

According to UnWork, this shift requires rethinking the role of the developer. No longer just providers of space, developers are now experience curators, using insights from occupiers to design spaces that are adaptable, innovative and human-centric. The exchange of data plays a critical role in this transformation, enabling developers to refine and improve workplaces continually based on real-time feedback.

Key design priorities for new developments include flexibility, sustainability and technology

integration. Buildings must adapt to ever-evolving workplace needs, with modular layouts and multi-functional spaces that support a variety of activities. In tandem, new developments should be built for sustainability leveraging biophilic design, advanced air quality systems, and sustainable materials to create healthier, more environmentally friendly spaces.

Technology also plays a critical role in new developments. Cutting-edge infrastructure, from smart building systems to AI-enabled tools, ensures workplaces are future-ready and able to support hybrid working models.

Developers now have the opportunity to create vibrant ecosystems rather than static buildings. These ecosystems foster collaboration, mentorship, creativity and community. By embracing this transformational approach, developers not only support occupiers in attracting employees back to the office but also deliver long-term value by creating spaces that enrich lives and drive workplace performance.

By collaborating with occupiers, developers are crafting environments that transcend the transactional, creating workplaces that inspire employees to choose the office not out of obligation but for its unparalleled value.



'The office of 2025 is not just a building, it is a living ecosystem for community and creativity'



No 18 SCIENCE LABS

Can the life science workplace look beyond function?

2025 looks set to be a big year for the life science workplace. But compared to other sectors, many science facilities still prioritise technical functionality over the broader workplace experience. According to architects BVN, that needs to change – the scientists and researchers who work there are

people first, not just PhDs in lab coats. As the very individuals who safeguard our health, fight diseases, and innovate for the future, they deserve work environments that inspire them to thrive, not just spaces that house their various experiments.

Labs are undeniably complex, with stringent requirements for safety, services and structure, calibration, and risk mitigation. But should that come at the cost of spaces that foster collaboration, creativity and wellbeing? Across other industries, architecture and design has embraced diverse settings that enhance both focus *and* interaction. Why hasn't this shift taken root more deeply in science workplaces?

Whatever the reason, the result is researchers are spending long days in isolated, overtly functional environments that limit both their personal and professional potential.

Perhaps it's time to question the ingrained patterns that shape these spaces. What if labs were reimagined not just as places for science to happen, says BVN, but as ecosystems where the people behind the science can truly flourish?

Truth is that research activity fluctuates. Some processes demand constant hands-on presence in the lab, but others involve downtime: waiting for machines, incubation, or analysis. This rhythm offers opportunities for a more dynamic, agile workspace model, where scientists can transition seamlessly between focused lab work, data analysis, teaching and collaboration. We see glimpses of this approach in some facilities, but it's far from universal. 2025 should be the year when the life science workplace sheds its function-first image.



No 19 COMMUNITY CO-CREATION

Corporate campuses become part of urban social infrastructure

What connections should an office have with its surrounding community? In 2025 we could see the relationship between work and place being redefined as large organisations like IKEA and LEGO collaborate with local authorities to co-create people-centred places for living and working.

This marks a shift from the isolated and aloof corporate campus to the integrated, multifunctional hub that fosters meaningful connections, both internally among employees and externally with neighbouring communities. More organisations are recognising that employees thrive in environments

where they feel connected to both their work and their surroundings.

By collaborating with local government and urban planners, companies are shaping places that go beyond the workplace walls, incorporating housing, green spaces, transport links and community hubs into their workplace strategy. At the heart of these initiatives are employees, their families and the wider community. The focus is on enhancing workplace experience while delivering lasting social impact.

A key aspect of this approach is that it extends beyond the immediate workforce. By integrating spaces for families, local businesses and community activities, organisations are upgrading social infrastructure and fostering a sense of belonging. There is a double benefit: employees feel connected to a larger purpose, while local communities experience tangible improvements in quality of life and economic opportunities. Ingka Group – the parent company of IKEA – has created multifunctional hubs along these lines, designed to enhance employee experience, build a strong culture and streamline operations.

As organisations increasingly prioritise sustainability and social impact, this trend demonstrates a commitment to building environments that benefit people and planet. Forward-thinking companies leading this community-building movement are setting a new standard for workplace design and corporate responsibility.

No 20 NEUROINCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Design sensory stimuli to address diverse needs

Work environments today need to be designed to be inclusive for all. But to be inclusive we need to embrace design principles that aid in accommodating various personality traits, work styles and neurotypes. In 2025, workplace design will evolve to embrace neuroinclusivity, addressing the diverse ways people process information and experience sensory stimuli.

With growing awareness of neurodiversity and special needs including ADHD, autism and dyslexia, organisations are recognising the need for environments that cater to their entire workforce. Research states that one in five people are considered neurodivergent, but fewer than half know it and figures may be under-estimating the scale of neurodiversity among workers.

Designing for the extreme benefits everyone, as sensory stimuli impact neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals alike. Inclusive design goes beyond accommodation, says



Kay Sargent of architects HOK; it creates environments that enhance focus, reduce stress and foster productivity for all employees. This forward-thinking approach reflects the diverse makeup of organisations while supporting business goals by improving employee engagement, satisfaction and performance.

Kay Sargent's new book, *Designing Neuroinclusive Workplaces*, which will be published in March 2025, provides a comprehensive guide to this critical trend. Drawing on more than eight years of research, the book shares findings from biometric assessments, workshops and satisfaction evaluation research.

It outlines practical strategies for designing workplaces that are welcoming and inclusive, covering topics such as defining neurotypes, environmental influences, and the business case for inclusivity.

As organisations strive to attract and retain talent, designing neuroinclusive workplaces will become a standard for fostering equity and wellbeing. In 2025, the most progressive companies will lead the way, using inclusive design and sensory processing techniques to build environments where all employees can thrive.

No 21 VIDEO HEGEMONY

How can remote participants regain control in meetings?

In the post-lockdown era, workplaces are packed with monitors for hybrid sessions. Even as more people have returned to most offices, the monitors have multiplied—sometimes in an effort to ensure equity for people working remotely. The hope is that their presence on a monitor will be as professionally powerful as being physically present would be.

However, well-meaning attempts to overcome proximity bias, or our inborn tendency to favour people who are physically as opposed to electronically present, are currently

falling short. Often monitors are placed in the ‘leader location’ in rooms. They’re located so that they can be seen from all angles in a space, often at the short end of a table or amidst a collection of seats with all chairs pointed in their direction, the same spot where someone organising a group’s efforts has traditionally sat, with the power to guide conversation as leaders have for millennia.

However, although best practices support having the heads projected on monitors be the same size as those onsite, the heads of remote participants are usually larger. This makes it harder for people onsite to interact naturally.

Research tells us that creating technologies that support work across geographical locations should pay equal attention to the possible disconnections that can exist locally between co-located workers. There’s also no shortage of advice on how to look good onscreen to improve ‘presence’ in hybrid meeting, from lighting your face properly to having the ‘right’ background.

Could 2025 see new initiatives to improve the experience of videoconferencing? It will certainly be a hot topic this year.



No 22 RESILIENT REAL ESTATE

Severe weather is changing the game for cities

The stark realities of climate change have shaped the narrative at the beginning of 2025, with wildfires ravaging California, snowstorms gripping the US East Coast and devastating floods across the UK. As hubs of economic activity and innovation, cities must lead the way in creating resilient environments that protect both people and infrastructure.

Buildings alone account for nearly 40% of global carbon emissions, but resilience extends far beyond individual structures. Cities must rethink their entire

urban ecosystems to withstand increasingly severe weather. This means adopting sustainable construction practices, integrating renewable energy systems, and prioritising infrastructure that mitigates risks like flooding, heatwaves and high winds. Cities must also harness smart technologies to monitor environmental conditions and optimise energy use, and foster adaptive reuse of materials.

As climate-related disasters grow more frequent, flexible urban policies will support resilience by encouraging a more localised approach to work and life, helping to reduce commuter traffic and carbon emissions. Mixed-use neighbourhoods — where people can live, work, and access amenities — can minimise dependency on energy-intensive transit systems. Additionally, city-wide adoption of circular economy principles can ensure resources are reused and waste is minimised.

Urban workplaces and large corporate infrastructure will also have a part to play. Resilient workplaces will incorporate features like durable, weather-resistant materials, passive cooling systems and flood management strategies. Design must go beyond aesthetics to address functionality under extreme conditions. Technologies such as automated lighting, temperature control and renewable energy integration will ensure buildings are energy-efficient and prepared for future challenges.

The decisions cities make today will determine their future viability but the organisations within them must also embrace resilience through forward-thinking design and policy in the face of climate uncertainty.

‘Urban workplaces and large corporate infrastructure will also play a part in resilience’



No 23 MANAGING AI RISKS

Applaud employee ingenuity but proceed with caution

How should company leaders respond to the surge in AI tools being used by employees in the workplace, with or without formal

approval? We know that AI has huge potential for increased efficiency and productivity (See No 25 The New Workplace) but we also know that it is employees who have built momentum in this area, not their bosses.

According to a survey by LinkedIn and Microsoft, 75% of employees are using AI in some capacity. And with many employees unwilling to wait for their employers to provide the tools, 78% of AI users are bringing in their own AI.

The answer, says Moveplan, an expert in change and move management, is to applaud your employees who are forging ahead with AI – but carefully manage the risks. While employees who

take it upon themselves to bring efficiencies into the organisation should be applauded, there needs to be more than an air of caution.

The prevalent use of AI could inadvertently open the company to risks. Misuse (leading to errors, bias, spread of misinformation), ethical issues (privacy, fairness and accountability) and legal and regulatory implications (AI is subject to data protection and copyright laws) are all areas of concern.

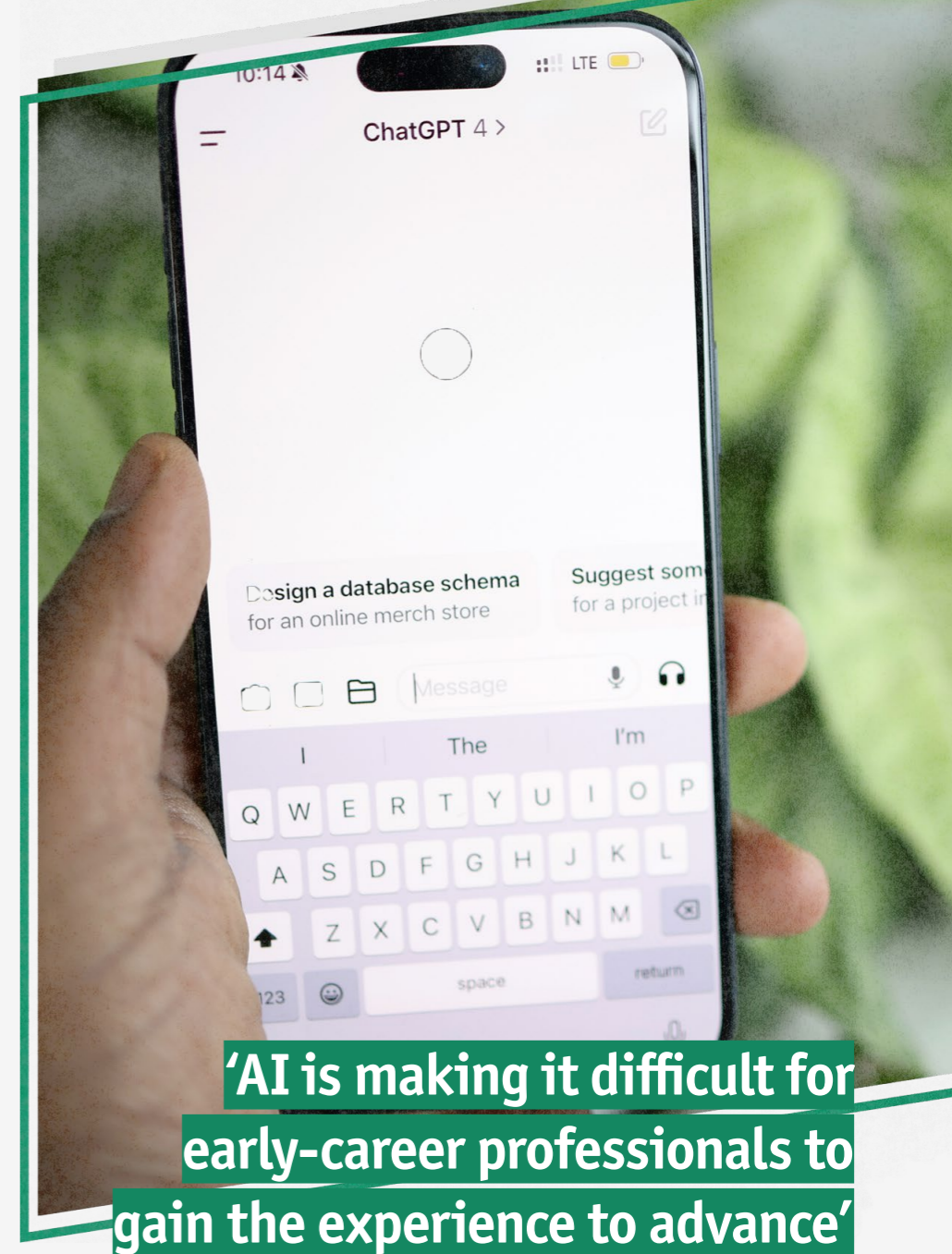
We should be embracing new technologies but within a carefully managed environment. In 2025, the challenge for leaders to harness the benefits of AI while minimising its risks will only get larger.

No 24 THE LOST GENERATION

AI polarisation is a threat to younger workers

The rise of AI is creating a growing polarisation in the workforce, redefining roles, salaries and career paths. According to Guzman de Yarza of JLL, a new elite class of ‘Super Executive Directors’ is emerging – these are leaders who leverage AI to achieve unprecedented productivity and effectiveness, commanding extraordinary salaries. Meanwhile, many workers face the looming threat of automation, redundancy and stagnation in low-compensation roles, creating a widening gap in workplace equity.

AI’s rapid adoption is transforming entry-level and routine tasks, traditionally the foundation for career progression. This shift is making it increasingly difficult for early-career professionals to gain the experience needed to advance. This is resulting in a ‘lost generation’ in which younger workers are caught between roles replaced by AI and leadership positions requiring skills they have not had the opportunity to develop.



‘AI is making it difficult for early-career professionals to gain the experience to advance’

To address this disparity, organisations are rethinking how they prepare their workforce for this new reality. Investment in upskilling and reskilling programs, particularly in areas such as AI fluency, emotional intelligence, and leadership, is becoming a key strategy to mitigate the risks of this burgeoning gap. Certifications and training in adaptive, human-centric skills are being prioritised to ensure employees can navigate an AI-enhanced world of work.

In 2025, the challenge will not just be adopting AI but ensuring it benefits the entire workforce. Forward-thinking organisations will focus on balancing technological advancements with workforce equity, bridging the skills gap, and creating opportunities for all employees to learn and progress in the age of AI.



No 25 THE NEW WORKPLAICE

AI will be the dominant disruptive trend of 2025

AI is set to have such a significant effect on the future of work that it will be seen as one of the great disruptors. Such is the potential to both enhance, augment and replace human endeavour that, as we head into 2025, we are only just beginning to understand its potential impact.

Debate about automation and the erosion of employment and with it the prospect of a large proportion of working populations not participating in the workforce bring discussions not of a four-day week but of universal basic income to keep revolution at bay. But in amongst the dystopian views of a world in which AI makes decisions for us, there is the more prosaic notion of enhanced productivity, data-driven decision making, creativity and new ways of working.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) mimics humans by creating text, code, images and much more as if a person had created the content. It owes its origins to the deep learning experiments that trained computers by exposing data, and the subsequent large language models (LLM) that were created. ChatGPT, where the GPT stands for generative pre-trained transformer, was a pioneering LLM from OpenAI. It moved the dial from recognition to generation.

AI agents or agentic systems are the predicted interface between 'man and machine'. Gen AI in business will begin to provide context and take actions on your behalf – probably through an API to another application. Satya Nadella, Microsoft's CEO, talks about an



'enterprise orchestration layer' and predicts a conversational interface for people to use 'agentic systems'.

But AI is not perfect. 'Hallucinations' (as they are technically known) also point to the implausible answers that LLMs can generate and many a student has been caught out as AI-generated homework produces impossible theories. In education, AI is driving new ways to learn. For example, students are studying foreign languages by having conversations with avatars or using Gen AI to co-create music. And so new ways to work will follow similar trajectories.

The key assumption is job replacement. As AI becomes trusted, roles such as call centre

agents will vanish, alongside many administrative roles from insurance claims to taking minutes in meetings. AI will deliver for business a range of outcomes including cost savings, through fewer humans, operational efficiencies and innovation.

It is here that the more interesting opportunities emerge, when AI augments what people can do rather than just replaces activity. Will AI be sequential, or will it co-create alongside humans? Will a composer be inspired by AI, or will it write a score? Will a lawyer still draft a contract, or will AI do the legwork and leave a few experts to sense check?

While Mechanical Turks created the AI world by tagging data, now AI will use huge data sets to

make sense of complexity. And as recognition migrates to generation migrates to contextualisation and correlation, AI becomes smarter than humans who can interpret but not define.

The interface between 'man and machine' is equally interesting. Today we use chatbots and prompts, but will these remain as text, or will haptics and voice take over as more natural interfaces? The notion of 'ask Siri' talks to the idea of speech. 'Chat' isn't chat for nothing.

Mass personalisation at scale is also with us. A great example of this new idea comes from Will.i.am, the musician and tech entrepreneur, who has launched AI platforms including Raidio, a new AI-powered radio station that responds to you,

personalises news and content, plays your favourite music, and suggests what you might want to hear. It's a conversational experience. It's unique to the individual. There is a risk of 'echo chambers' but also non-linear and non-consistent news and content.

AI has emerged from a huge data set that is the internet. With billions of published works scanned and defined, it will exhaust the web's content and become able to then generate its own material to absorb. These data sets are also being used by another new phenomenon – the digital twin.

Digital twins also use, in effect, LLMs to create a replica of the physical world. They will be a requisite for the AI agents which will use their uniform data sets to understand and make decisions for the real world. Amazon's digital twin, for example, can forecast demand for 400 million products up to two years in the future. By aggregating and correlating vast amounts of data, firms can model operations to predict the future.

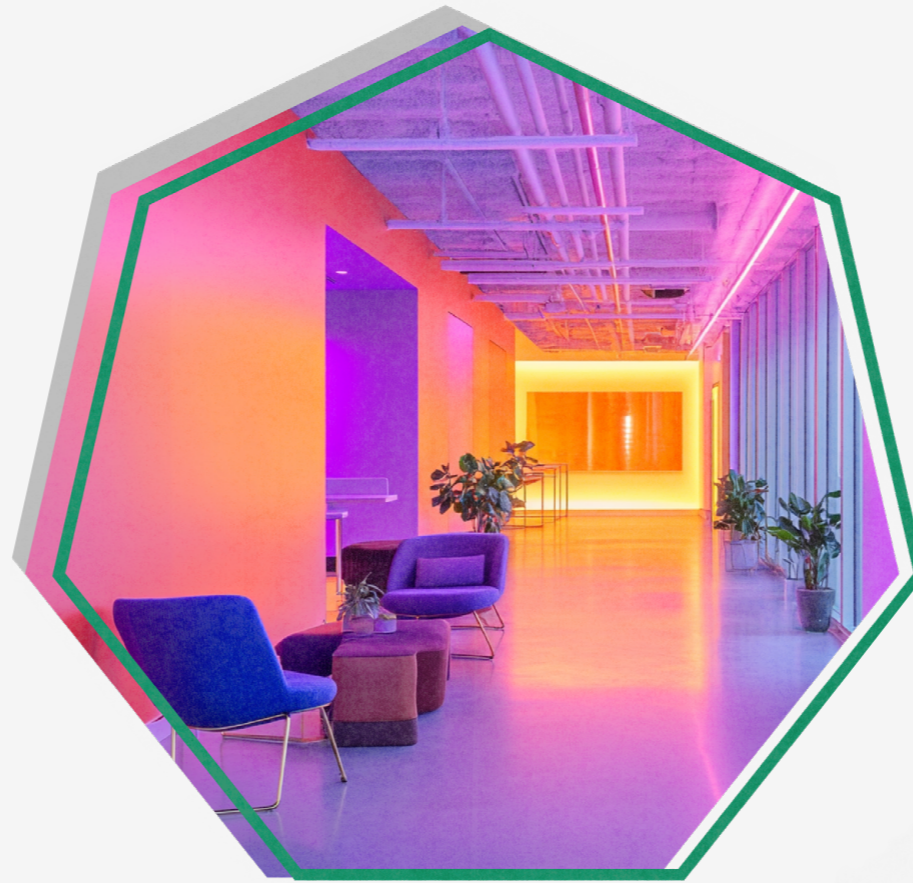
Digital twins will be used in healthcare to replicate a person's body, and in real estate to model the engineering and operation of a building. It provides a basis to copy and then interrogate, through modelling and data insights that drive new efficiencies. But the digital twin is not just about operations. It will begin to model our performance, scanning, listening and mining everything that a person produces, creates, says or does.

Meetings will never be the same. Smart name tags and smart speaker tags allows AI attribution for meeting summaries, captions and transcripts. They also allow meeting equity, as remote participants can see who is talking in the room. Will co-pilots capture everything? Will annotations on a white board be saved? Will conversations in meetings be available for replay? Will recall of key decisions remind us of the steps taken to reach an outcome?

Latent knowledge has long been recognised to have benefits for process. Now AI with both corporate and personal digital twins will allow remarkable insight based no longer on an individual's acumen and recall, but on collective human endeavour and the ability to mine the best talent and the best knowledge.

The emergence of AI, along with twins of different kinds, ushers in a new era for firms where data lakes will be the new differentiator and orchestration becomes the new management mantra. Agentic systems and their manifestation in the workplace will drive adoption of new ways of working, new enablers and tools as well as new ways to structure the firm, as we move from static to dynamic systems and approaches.

Philip Ross is CEO and Founder of UnWork, WORKTECH and Cordless Group



REFLECTIONS ON THE WORLD OF WORK IN 2025

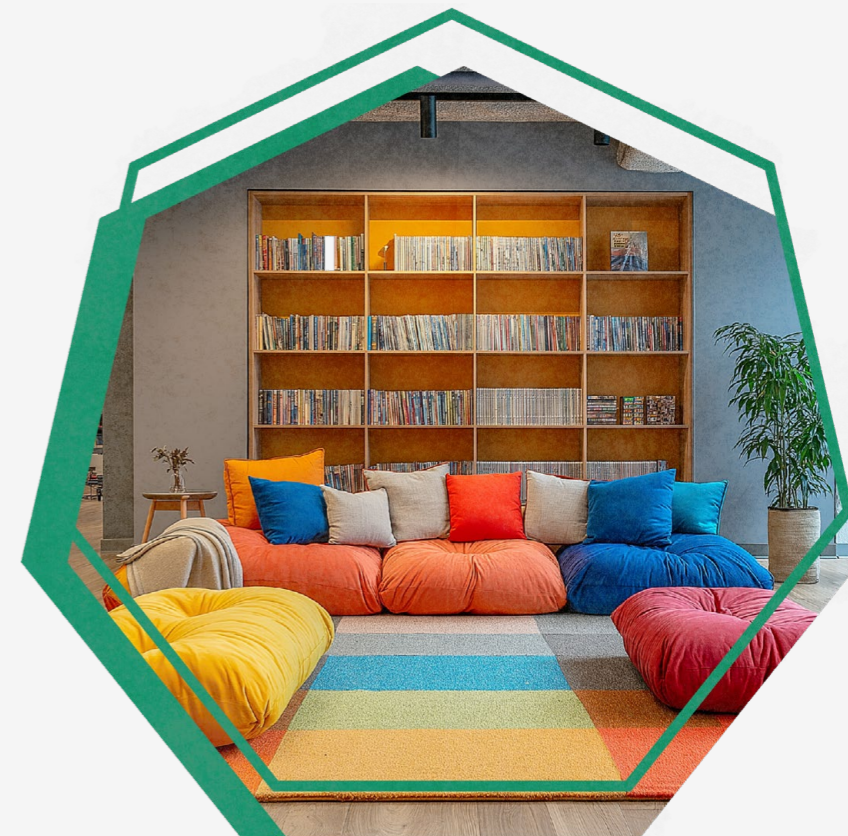
The workplace in 2025 is in state of tension

The workplace in 2025 is in state of tension. Dynamic innovations are pitched against stubborn challenges. The themes explored in this report highlight the ways in which evolving employee expectations can be at odds with what businesses feel they need to do to win through.

At a time when economic instability looms large and many corporates are shepherding their people back to the office, you'd be forgiven for thinking that employers have firmly restored the upper hand over employees. But the reality is far more nuanced.

While there is a strong momentum towards the office in 2025—highlighted in trends such as the Vibrancy Metric, Work Resorts and Relationship-based Work—there is also a sense that the workplace is not heading backwards. Employees today have more flexibility, choice and autonomy than before.

Five years on from the start of the pandemic, employers are setting aside their command-and-control authority over employees in favour of a more reciprocal exchange. They are investing in creating desirable work destinations that cater to the demands of workers – from enhanced mentorship programs to diverse, amenity-rich spaces. In exchange employees are being asked to come into the office more frequently to bolster culture, connections and growth.



Despite Meta's public declaration of scrapping diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) programs, an early bombshell in 2025, there remains a clear focus on DE&I and wellbeing initiatives manifesting in the workplace in more authentic ways. From digital detox zones to neuroinclusive design, the themes explored showcase a growing awareness of the diverse needs of employees. Yet, this awareness exists alongside a push for mandates, cost-efficiency, and output-driven decision-making.

This year, the emphasis will pivot from a focus on where we work to how we work, and even how we connect. Organisations will seek to foster human connection in a hybrid world, as suggested by the Meaningful Connections trend, and transcend the often sterile, transactional nature of many workplaces. To achieve this will

require bold and creative leaders to value connection as much as output.

The most forward-thinking organisations will be those that embrace the paradox of change—balancing technological innovation with human connection, economic efficiency with sustainability, and leadership mandates with employee choice and autonomy.

As we head into 2025, the challenge does not lie in identifying the abundant opportunities for work and the workplace but in acting upon them within a volatile economic and geopolitical landscape. As the trends in this report suggest, the organisations that thrive will be those that redefine success with alternative metrics such as the quality of the experiences they create. Interesting times ahead.

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