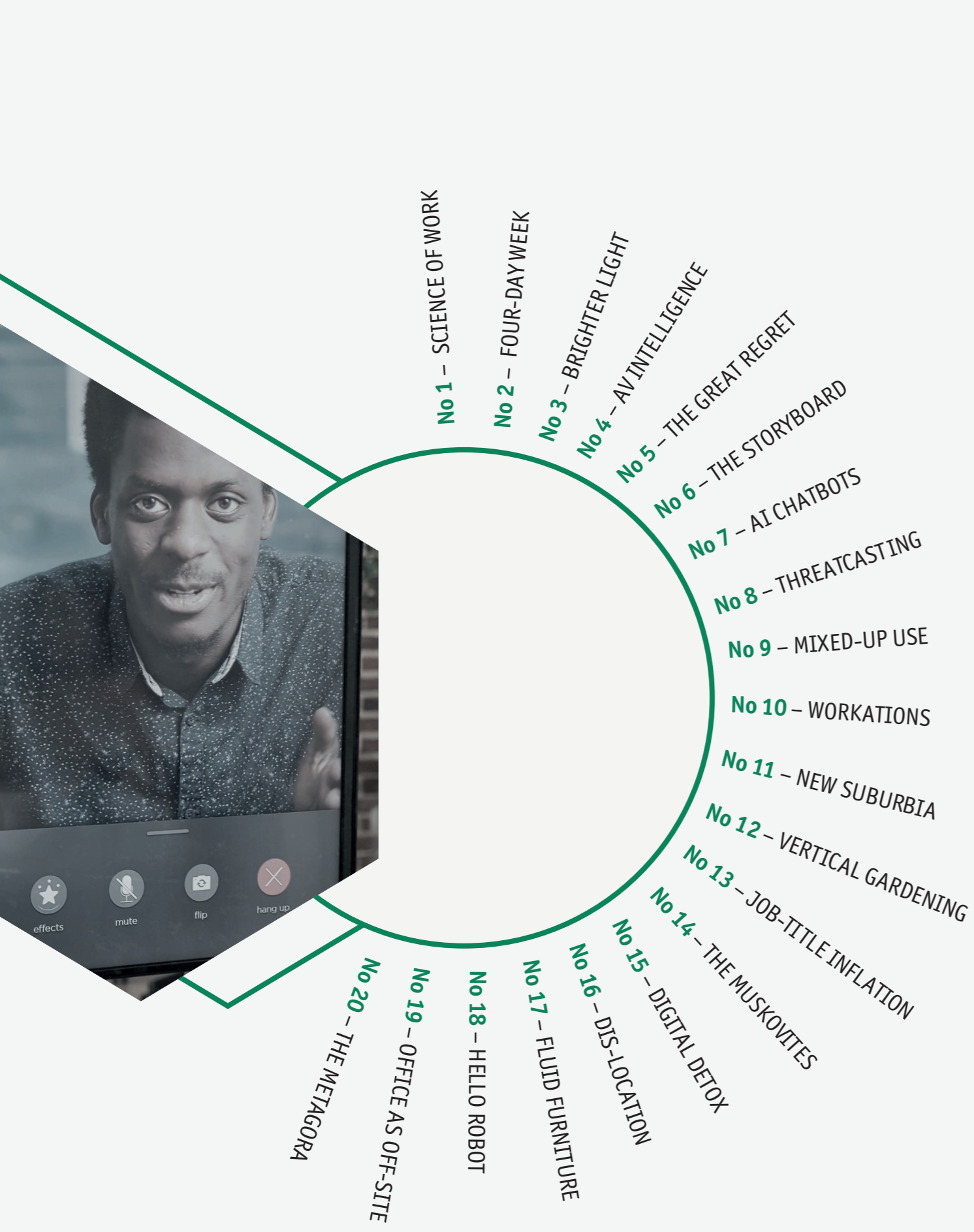


# The World of Work in 2023



**20 key themes for  
the year ahead**



# The World of Work in 2023

## Welcome to WORKTECH Academy's survey of 20 trends and ideas in work and workplace that are set to have an impact this year

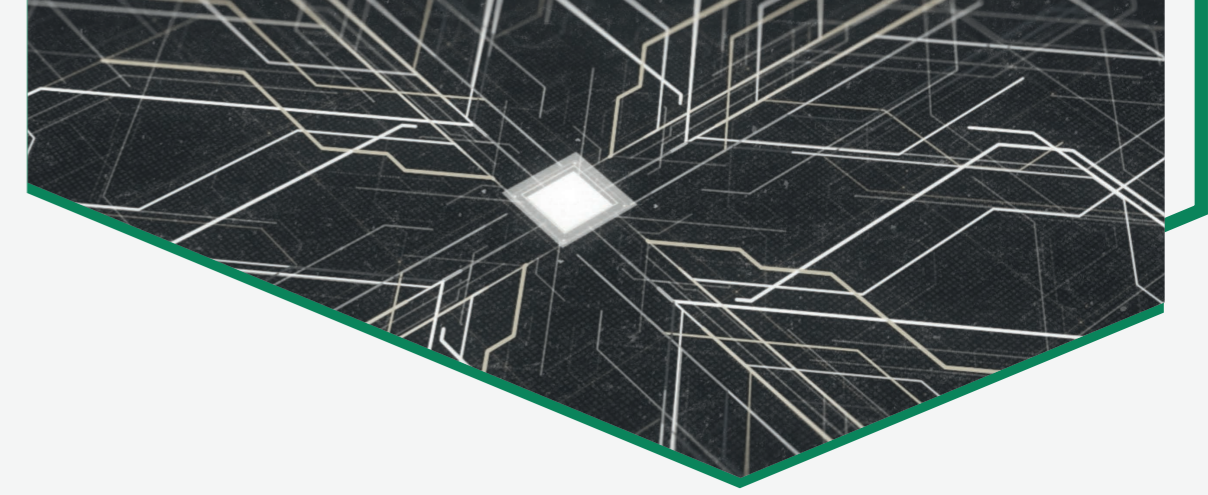
After the tumultuous events of 2022, what will be happening in the world of work and workplace over the next 12 months? This WORKTECH Academy report explores 20 key ideas for 2023. In doing so, it marks the 20th anniversary of the WORKTECH event series, which was established in London in 2003 with an inaugural conference at the British Library.

Ever since WORKTECH first emerged 20 years ago as a platform for a lively and informed exchange of ideas, our philosophy with our WORKTECH Events series and Academy network has been to look at the future of work through an integrated perspective of people, place and technology.

This report maintains that ethos: the ideas and trends presented here focus on a mix of HR issues (from the four-day week to workations and job-title inflation), place-making factors (from the office as off-site to vertical gardening and mixed-up use) and new technologies (from AI chatbots to robots and audio-visual innovations).

Our thanks go to the Global Partners of WORKTECH Academy and to experts from around our global network for their contributions to this publication. Some of the 20 ideas we discuss are established, some are emergent, some remain experimental. Together, they paint a picture of volatility and change. After the white-knuckle ride of 2022, buckle up because here we go again.

Professor Jeremy Myerson  
Director, WORKTECH Academy





## No 1

# SCIENCE OF WORK

## A precision workplace will use data to make all the key decisions

2023 could be the year that data-led decision-making in the workplace really breaks through, leading to a more scientific approach that we might term the 'Science of Work'. Data analysis and measurement, or telemetry, has been on the rise for some time. But what will swing the balance this year is the changing attitude of company leaders towards their own facilities.

Many senior managers dismissed office buildings in the past as dumb containers, a cost rather an investment. That's because these buildings yielded little actionable data that could be useful to the business or its people. Now those at the top of companies increasingly recognise that we're on the brink of a much smarter workplace capable of providing constant data flows that can inform evidence-based decision-making on everything, from HR policies and wellbeing to organisational structure and office redesign.

The 'Science of Work', a term popularised by Philip Ross, founder and CEO of consulting firm UnWork,

will see more organisations this year embrace the data analytics, spatial intelligence and sociometric technologies that can give insights into performance and behaviour in the workplace.

Sensors and cameras, which are both proliferating in offices, will capture every move. Facial recognition will help to understand engagement. Dashboards showing real-time data on occupancy level and environmental conditions will allow managers to 'fine tune' their resources. The use of workplace apps will be central to a growing ecosystem of workplace data. Understanding energy use and carbon capture will support greener

buildings and more sustainable work patterns. And this will all take place against the expansion of artificial intelligence and machine learning which will increasingly shape everything we do in the workplace – helping to reduce food waste, for example.

Another way to describe this trend is the 'precision workplace' of real-time real estate that cuts costs and optimises resources while improving experience. Are we ready for this level of precision? It looks to be on its way this year.

## No 2

# FOUR-DAY WEEK

## Working shorter and smarter is on the horizon again

The idea of a four-day working week is not new, but it has been given unprecedented impetus since the pandemic as people have prioritised the need for a better work-life balance with less time spent commuting and more time spent with their families. 2023 could see a popular model more widely adopted.

Research suggests that the four-day week can offer increased employee satisfaction and wellbeing whilst not compromising on company productivity. And with Friday office occupancy rates so low, what's the harm in trimming the working day and increasing family and recuperation time with a three-day weekend?

Growing support for the four-day week is building off the back of a six-month pilot organised last year in the UK by the Autonomy think tank, the 4 Day Week Campaign, and researchers at Cambridge University, Boston College and Oxford University. This saw 3,300 workers at 70 companies make the switch with no loss of pay.

This ground-breaking exercise, reputed to be the largest in the world, produced some spectacular results: 86 per cent of businesses that participated would be keen to continue the scheme on a permanent basis. And although the four-day week is not without its challenges, workers have also expressed a strong desire for this type of set-up. Research by Qualtrics suggests that 92 per cent of workers would want their employers to adopt the model.

Fears that a four-day week will automatically curb performance and cause revenues to slump are beginning to melt away the more evidence that companies gather on the real impact. A Microsoft pilot in a Japanese subsidiary reported a 40 per cent productivity boost. Could 2023 be the year a shorter week finally breaks through?





**'Brighter light doesn't just depend on technology – architects can play their part too'**

## No 3

# BRIGHTER LIGHT

**Here's one way to relieve the gloom hanging over offices**

There may be dark shadows over the economy this year, but brighter light could be on its way into workplaces as part of getting people to return to the office. According to lighting expert Dr Shelley James from Age of Light Innovations, many office workers receive only a small fraction of the lux levels they require to work effectively. If light was a diet, then many employees would be on starvation rations.

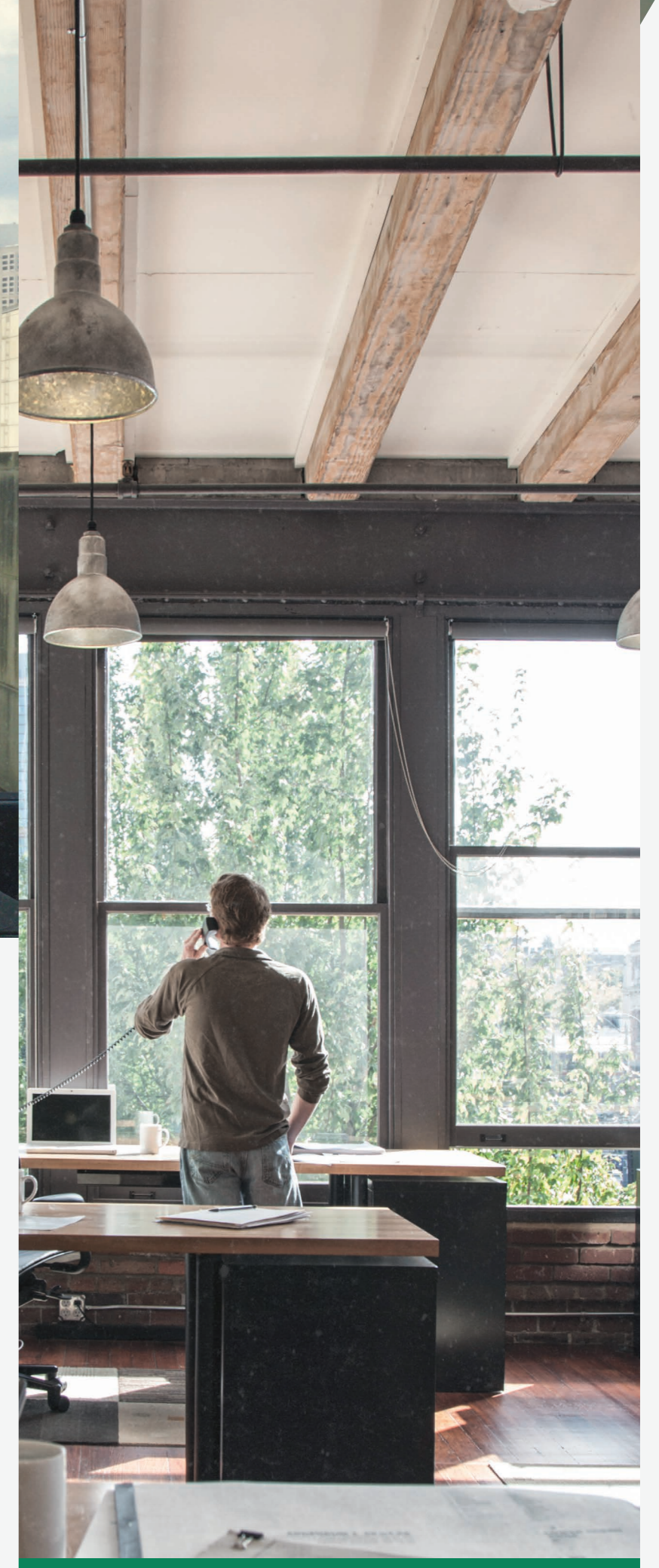
Our brains and bodies are designed to respond to natural light, so our sleep, emotions and our wellbeing are all greatly affected by a lack of natural lighting. James compares bright lighting to 'a cup of coffee

for the brain' for its activating effect, and she likens many offices to greenhouses trying to grow lettuces in the dark.

The average person sitting in an office should receive closer to 1,000 lux of light to feel good, rather than the bare minimum of 500 lux. But it's not just the brightness of light that's important. Seeing light through a window with a view can double the positive effect. And there is growing emphasis on dynamic lighting that changes over the course of the day in line with natural circadian rhythms – either automatically or via local controls such as an employee's workplace app.

Shelley James believes that we are now on the verge of a more active light environment in offices as opposed to the generic, low illumination settings of the recent past. In a lighting equivalent of the sit-stand desk, workers will be able to customise light to their needs and make themselves more comfortable physically and psychologically.

But brighter light doesn't just depend on technology – architects can play their part too by maximising natural light through the shading and orientation of their buildings in the landscape, and be resisting deep floorplates that leave workers marooned far away from the rejuvenating effect of a window view.





## No 4

### AV INTELLIGENCE

#### New-era video conferencing set to break out of the meeting room box

Audio-visual technology for the workplace was already in overdrive as companies put a premium on finding novel solutions to the demands of hybrid working. Now stand by for the impact of Artificial Intelligence on AV. In 2023, this could really open up new possibilities and drive momentum in the field.

According to tech expert Nigel Miller of Cordless Consultants, more video options will become available with less basic screens and frames for meetings, providing more intelligent and natural video conference layouts. AI combined with facial recognition can now help cameras extend the focus of a meeting to capture not just who is speaking, but also the reactions of those who are not. It can help make decisions on who to focus on if more than one person is speaking and automatically adjust the camera shot accordingly.

In terms of audio, the capacity of AI to determine between different types of sound will now more effectively cut out background and unwanted noise.

A combination of machine learning and algorithms will determine between the main voice speaking and other sounds such as paper rustling, or a noisy colleague on the other side of the room. Use of multiple microphones can be provided in a meeting area which, when combined with intelligent signal processing, will automatically adapt to the meeting being held.

The impact of AI on AV is clear: it has the potential to extend the capacity of video conferencing beyond the traditional meeting room to open plan and social areas in the office that have been more challenging to cover. Everyone knows that the social exchanges before and after meetings are often more valuable

than the formal meeting itself – this is the aspect that remote meeting participants often miss out on. A more sophisticated AV set-up, utilising the capabilities of AI, will contribute to digital equality in the hybrid workplace in 2023.

### 'The use of AI in audio-visual solutions has the potential to improve digital equality'

## No 5

### THE GREAT REGRET

#### Millions chucked in their jobs but now feel resignation remorse

The 'Great Resignation' was a massive shock to the economic system. Employees emboldened by the new powers of autonomy and freedom granted by the pandemic told their employees where to stick their jobs in unprecedented numbers. In one year alone (2021), there were 47 million resignations in the US.

But as we head into 2023 and economic winds blow colder, many people who quit are now questioning whether they made the right decision. The 'Great Resignation' is turning into the 'Great Regret'. According to *Forbes*, one in five of those who left their job is experiencing some kind of 'resignation remorse'. This is likely to increase as economic insecurity makes employees reconsider their priorities.

But why are workers experiencing such intense regret? One reason might be that they had raised expectations for their careers during the pandemic, with things like working from home, time off for their mental health, increased work-life balance and more control over their work leading them to expect more from their employee. They felt the grass might be greener elsewhere but often this hasn't worked out, with people leaving jobs and simply swapping roles with others who left their position to seek the same things.

Companies have also wised up to what potential employees want to hear, advertising their great company culture and empathy towards employees. When these oversold jobs don't live up to the hype, the reality of the new position can be a disappointment to people who have moved with the hope of a new type of employee-employer relationship.

A cost-of-living crisis is pushing people further to regret their career decisions, a factor unlikely to abate in 2023. The current spate of firings and hiring freezes in the technology industry is only adding to a general sense of job insecurity, making people yearn for greater stability. The Great Regret is set to continue throughout 2023. Those who feel they jumped too early would do well to heed the refrain of French singer Edith Piaf: 'Je ne regrette rien'.



## No 6

# THE STORYBOARD



## The experience world of Walt Disney enters the workplace

The importance of employee experience in the shaping the future of work received unprecedented attention last year. Awareness is now at an all-time high. So, will 2023 be the year that companies turn acknowledgement of the role of experience into real action? Will employers start paying more attention to the storyboard than the space plan?

Experience masterplanner Adam Scott, founder and creative director of FreeState, believes we're on the brink of something big and exciting.

The storyboard was invented in the 1930s by Walt Disney Studios as a tool to visually map out the storyline in an animated film. A sequence of sketches captured the movement of characters interacting within an environment and the technique became widely used by film and TV makers.

Nearly a century later, says Scott, who is the co-author of *The Experience Book*, the technique of storyboarding is set to be reinvented to map out better experiences for workers in offices as well as customers and citizens in hospitality and public spaces. Architects and designers are familiar with masterplanning various aspects of the work environment within the envelope of a workplace strategy. But are they ready to masterplan experience and visually analyse user journeys within the organisation?

As employees continue to drag their feet over returning to the office, the need to up the ante by identifying pain points, eradicating poor experiences and creating better ones will only grow over the coming year. Large firms will be keen to cultivate a more vibrant culture so that people are tempted back to the workplace.

The use of sensors and other technologies to plot occupancy patterns inside office buildings will help to inform the development of storyboards that map out stage-by-stage what the experience is like for any individual. There may be no cave of wonders or fairy princess at the end of the rainbow, but in some ways the Disneyfication of the workplace has begun.

**'As employees drag their feet over returning to the office, the demand to eradicate poor experiences will grow'**



## No 7

# AI CHATBOTS

## ChatGPT shows the way in replicating human interaction

Chatbots are not a totally new phenomena, as anyone who has tried contacting a customer service team in the last five years will tell you. But the sophistication and ability of these bots to answer more complicated requests and even replicate human interaction has been increasing exponentially in recent times, leading us to predict a significant rise in these AI-powered chatbots being utilised by businesses in the coming year.

The clearest example of a sophisticated AI-chatbot was released to the public for the first time by technology company OpenAI right at the end of 2022. ChatGPT is an AI bot which uses natural language processing to formulate responses to questions asked of it by the general public.

Whilst ChatGPT is still in the process of learning, its ability to write code, engage with people, ask follow-up questions to create clarity, and even write copy and formulate business ideas when prompted, has made this chatbot the centre of attention for the foreseeable future. ChatGPT can even refuse to answer questions it considers inappropriate, reducing worries about how chatbots can manage unusual and unsuitable requests.

All of these attributes make chatbots like ChatGPT a prime tool to manage customer service requests and be the face, or voice, of a company when you access their website. They can offer support for and engagement with customers whilst freeing up human employees to focus on other aspects of their roles.

There's still some work to be done. There are concerns that AI chatbots replicate human interaction a bit too authentically and could be used under false pretences. They are not yet perfect and can sometimes give confusing responses if they have not encountered a question before. What is undeniable, however, is that ChatGPT has opened a window on the future with its level of sophistication. This technology is one to watch for the coming year.

## No 8

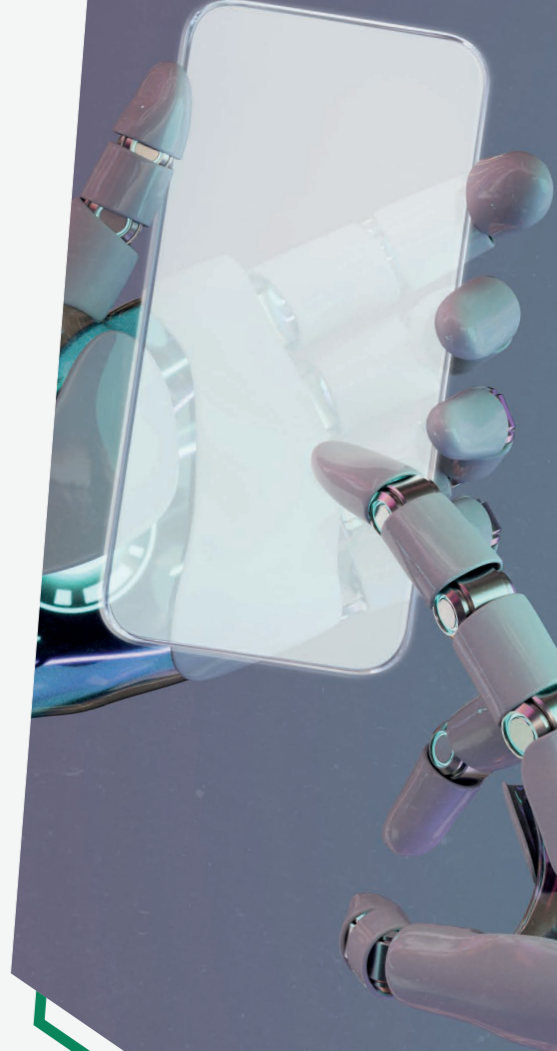
# THREATCASTING

## Believe that you can't forecast future risks? Think again

Given the political, economic and social upheavals of 2022, it's easy to understand why companies are looking to get their business strategy back on the right track, build resilience and head off the many threats that stand in their way. All of which explains the rise of interest in threatcasting as a science fiction-inspired discipline to help predict and control the future.

Created by Professor Brian David Johnson at Arizona State University's Threatcasting Lab, the concept is an offshoot of future casting and scenario planning. It emerged when Johnson was attempting to understand how innovative technologies, such as new AI models, could create potential risks and impact the lives of people in the future.

Since Johnson's work started, businesses such as Mastercard and Bank of America, and even the US military, have turned to threatcasting to build resilience within their organisations. The approach allows companies the



chance to imagine future scenarios and identify risks that they might have otherwise failed to recognise; it can help predict risks as far as ten years into the future, meaning that it is a significant tool when it comes to forward planning.

As large companies face a growing number of cyber-attacks, they are taking their security and their exposure to threats more seriously than ever before. Threatcasting enables them to understand their own vulnerabilities and to solve problems before their profitability suffers.

While threatcasting isn't a crystal ball for looking at the future, it can nevertheless be a useful tool to help mitigate risks. And, working with Cisco's Hyperinnovation Living Labs (CHILL), Johnson has even turned his gaze to the threats facing work and workplace.

## No 9 MIXED-UP USE

### Shaking up city development with novelty, delight and surprise

One of the biggest effects of the global pandemic is that, in many cities, single use places such as the central business district or business park are now starting to look like abandoned factories from a bygone



era as office workers choose to work elsewhere for much of the week. To breathe new life into these 'ghost' districts, mixed-use development looks like a well-rehearsed idea whose time has finally arrived. But are we ready for 'mixed-up use'?

This is a concept now surfacing in Australia and, on first glance at least, it adopts the conventional mixed-use approach of combining office, hotel, retail, entertainment or residential, perhaps based around a major transport hub. But dig deeper and there is an additional layer that is based on creating novelty and surprise.

James Calder, global director of strategy at ERA-Co, who coined the term 'mixed-up use', describes this as 'a finer grain, with anomalies that delight and surprise, yet don't fit normal commercial real estate investment rules, such as tiny cafes hidden in back lanes, pockets of retail in cafes, high-quality

restaurants embedded into office buildings and more semi-public meeting spaces'.

Mixed-up use depends on curation to bring communities of all types together for events that might have seemed incongruous in office districts a decade ago, says Calder. The idea is to rotate work, retail and entertainment in non-dedicated spaces, allowing for a refreshing social experience.

Mixed-up spaces and gatherings meet a human need with a level of delight and serendipity that repositions office as attractors rather than dull containers for work. New strategies like this are badly needed. According to data from the Property Council of Australia, central business districts in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Canberra struggled with low occupancy rates last year. Could 2023 be the year of mixed-up use?

## No 10 WORKATIONS

### A change of scenery could help to generate new ideas

After the lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, we're jumping back on planes again for business and leisure. We're keen to travel even if these impulses literally fly in the face of the need to address the climate emergency. Meanwhile companies are putting in place protocols and policies that allow people greater flexibility in where and how they work.

It's a heady brew that's leading to a new trend set to grow in 2023: the 'workation', which allows employees to sandwich their summer holidays between a period of working in another country. It takes the 'work from anywhere' approach to the next level and conjures up images of the laptop nestling next to a pina colada on the beach under the swaying palm trees.

Workations are not without their challenges. According to Katherine Harvey, global consultancy director at UnWork, they have implications for tax (if too long is spent abroad), team cohesion and the density of offices over the summer.

However, with the summer period being a time with fewer client meetings or face-to-face

requirements, organisations are offering it as a perk to colleagues and new recruits who want more flexibility and a longer period unwinding. Law firms in particular are looking at allowing their employees to enjoy the month of August as a 'work from anywhere' time.

And let's not forget the potential benefit that a 'change of scenery' can bring to the generation of new ideas that will boost company innovation. Exposure to different cultures can help to create valuable new organisational perspectives. Perhaps that's the real reason workations will be gladly granted this year and not just grudgingly tolerated.

## No 11 NEW SUBURBIA

### Unloved and often derided, suburban areas are due a revival

City centres suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic and many central business districts are still sluggish in recovering from an enforced absence of office workers. But there could be a bright future for the suburbs in 2023 as part of a hybrid future of work.

Designers have traditionally paid less creative attention to suburban



areas, those unloved and often derided 'metroland' districts where people actually live around the edge of cities. But according to Gerry Tierney, Director of the Mobility Lab at architects Perkins+Will, that could change this year. Tierney told the Healthy City Design international congress in autumn 2022 that 'Instead of looking at working from home in zero-sum terms, we need to take a holistic account of our cities and suburbs to create a balanced, sustainable and equitable live-work environment.'

Tierney noted that just over half of all American households live in the suburbs according to the US Census Bureau's 2017 housing survey. He sketched out a scenario for the development of tech-enabled suburban workspaces within a short walk or bike ride from home to replace the spare bedroom as a key setting for hybrid and remote work. Decades of land use and zoning dogma would be swept



away with adaptive or ‘blurred’ neighbourhoods, he said, removing the dislocation between home and work and breathing new life into the ‘dead’ suburbs.

Tierney predicts a more vibrant day and night culture outside the urban core. Already residential rents are up in the American suburbs while declining in the largest US cities. His argument is that ‘working from home is not sustainable but a 15-minute suburb is’.

Haven’t we been here before? Of course we have. Think of the Garden City movement in the UK. Indeed, historical context is important to any discussion of a suburban renaissance today. Writing recently in the *Financial Times*, British historian Dominic Sandbrook described suburbia as ‘the kind of landscape urban intellectuals have always mocked as twee and inauthentic. But when a place has existed for more than a century, it seems a bit dense to question its

authenticity. And suburbs wouldn’t exist unless ordinary people liked them.’

Suburbia is no longer a dirty word in the world of workplace strategy. In 2023, it looks set to move from the margins to the mainstream.

## No 12

# VERTICAL GARDENING

## Green shoots of office revival in growing your own vegetables

If you thought biophilia was big in the workplace in 2022, the green shoots of sustainable innovation are set to grow even further this year. Sustainable office spaces not only benefit the planet, but can also attract environmentally conscious employees, including those Generation Z entrants prized by employers.

Amongst the sustainable trends now surfacing in workspace, look out especially for vertical farming solutions that turn unused corners of the office into green and pleasant salad bars. Companies like German-based start-up Farmie are providing employers with the hardware needed for vertical farming so that office-based communities can produce their own vegetables and promote healthy and sustainable eating.

Simply plugged into an electrical outlet, vertical farming units allow people to grow their own salads, herbs, microgreens and more with minimal time and effort, and without any prior knowledge of gardening.

Research from Density suggests that, on average, nearly 40 per cent of all corporate office space in the U.S. remains unused or vacant. The amount of energy wasted on these unused spaces equates to around 22 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. The argument for investing in vertical farming is centred around co-opting under-utilised spaces, saving money on catering, and creating a fun, relaxing biophilic atmosphere for employees to enjoy.

When both the cost of living and awareness of the climate crisis are sky-high, a vertical farm in the office could be a saving grace for companies in the competition for talent.

Images: courtesy of Farmie



**‘The argument for vertical farming is centred around co-opting under-utilised spaces’**



## No 13

### JOB-TITLE INFLATION

#### The Head of Team Anywhere will see you now

As companies adapt to the hybrid model and start learning from hospitality and retail about how to curate the type of experiences that will bring people back to the office, new job titles with an unfamiliar ring are springing up inside organisations. Business leaders have new titles: Chief Experience Officer (or CXO), Head of Team Anywhere,

Chief Heart Officer, Director of Storytelling and Head of Dynamic Work were all examples we noted in 2022.

In a working world where receptionists are renamed lobby ambassadors and facility managers suddenly become brand ambassadors, we can expect grand-sounding nomenclature to continue to spread like wildfire this year.

*The Economist* dismisses this phenomenon as 'the scourge of job title inflation', arguing that 'once inflation takes hold, it can be hard to suppress. If the lobby ambassador is on holiday, you will soon be seen by the lobby chargé d'affaires. Instead of undertakers, directors of last impressions'.

Granted, inflated titles can quickly lose their value or put certain people off applying for certain jobs. Puffed-up role names can cause resentment

among colleagues, or, worse, ridicule. When recent graduates are unthinkingly named assistant or associate vice-president, that immediately causes problems for real VPs with real experience further up the food chain.

Despite all this, job-title inflation does have some benefits. A fancy title might add to your appeal on the job market once you decide to move on, or make some clients more willing to accept your invitation to a meeting. Whatever new title you are given, remember that your employer's Chief Naming Strategist or VP of Organisational Nomenclature will have enjoyed the task of dreaming it up.

## No 14

### THE MUSKOVITES

#### The back-to-office brigade will wield a big stick

The Muskovites are a band of high-profile company CEOs, white and male and mainly based in the U.S., who are determined to bring everyone back to the office on a full-time basis. They take their name from Elon Musk, who famously told his Tesla workforce: 'Everyone is required to spend a minimum of 40 hours in the office per week. Moreover, the office must be where your actual colleagues are located, not some remote pseudo office. If you don't show up, we will assume you have resigned.'

Musk's uncompromising stance is shared by the likes of David Solomon of Goldman Sachs ('remote work is an aberration'), Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase ('work from home is a poor fit for our culture') and Sir James Dyson ('remote work is undermining the competitiveness of business'). Muskovite attitudes have hardened in a tougher global economic climate, leading to increasingly open threats to staff to show up to the office or risk getting fired.

At least some Muscovites are investing in high quality new offices to back up their 'resolute returner' stance. Dimon is building a spectacular new JPMorgan Chase global headquarters at 270 Park Avenue, New York. Dyson has brilliantly refurbished the St James Power Station in Singapore to create a cutting-edge innovation centre for his technology company.

Such investments may have something to do with the tough line the Muskovites are taking on the return to office, but employee sentiment appears to be moving in the opposite direction. Tracking studies suggest people want to retain much of the flexibility they experienced during the pandemic.

Pitted against the Muskovites are the Metabytes, a group of companies who are more conciliatory about giving employees choice in how they work and more relaxed about remote working. Meta is among them, so is Spotify. These firms provide an alternative employment option to the big stick wielded by the Muscovites. Let's see who wins a battle royale between two opposing corporate philosophies in 2023.

## No 15

### DIGITAL DETOX

#### Escaping from technology will boost our bodies and brains

The more the working world is dominated by digital technology, the more we crave the opportunity to escape from it every now and then. It's hard not to be exhausted by the amount of time we spend looking at a screen, which is why carving out technology-free zones inside the workplace for employees to get away from their laptops, tablets and smartphones will be a growing trend in 2023.

With increased stress and burnout among employees as they grapple with the complexities of hybrid working, companies are looking at different ways to enable a 'digital detox'. This could be the provision of a device-free space in the office for relaxation and reflection, with soft sofas, natural finishes and low-tech whiteboards. Or it could simply mean setting out a time during the week when everyone is encouraged to step away from their computer for a break with colleagues.

The digital detox should not be confined to the office. Screen time is now out of control among home

workers according to the latest Microsoft research. These folk need some company protocols to help drag them away from their screens, such as an edict on not responding to emails or hosting video calls out of designated office hours.

Quality of sleep will be a growing factor in making us more productive at work in 2023. Tech addiction ruins our sleep patterns; a digital detox will improve them, providing the time and space for people to relax, reset and boost depleted cognitive capacity. Can we afford not to make the digital detox a priority in office design and HR strategy this year?



## No 16

### DIS- LOCATION

#### Why adapting to hybrid is akin to the trauma of dislocating a limb

'Dis-location' is a term that describes the feelings of fracture, distraction and disruption that many people feel as they start to work 'all over the place' in a hybrid model.

It was coined by Tim Greenhalgh, the former Chief Creative Officer of Landor & Fitch, the largest specialist brand and design group in the world.

Greenhalgh, who has launched his own brand agency called Like a Moth, compares the switch to hybrid working with the painful trauma of dislocating a limb. It is uncomfortable and disconcerting. Performance is affected. There needs to be an intense period of readjustment.

However, the trauma can be mended by taking a more creative approach to the idea of location. As Greenhalgh explains: 'Offices previously built for visibility and monitoring activity will need to pivot towards a culture and experience driven by engagement and shared experiences: new rituals, new behaviours and new journeys.'

Many experts in the field now share Greenhalgh's view that it is not

enough to simply redesign the physical office for hybrid – a more fundamental reimagining of the workplace is required instead to create a real sense of destination. The office will have to rethink in a consumer-led way just as shopping malls and high streets have been forced to adapt in the era of e-commerce.

'Dis-location' often means we're never quite sure where we're supposed to be or whether team members will be present if we go into the office – it is a concept that plays to the idea that fixing hybrid work is much harder than many of its most vocal advocates will admit. We've already seen a clutch of high-profile companies such as Yelp and PayPal admit that the scheduling complexities of hybrid are too difficult and announce that they're becoming remote-first organisations instead. Expect more 'dis-location' in 2023.

## No 17

### FLUID FURNITURE

#### Forget rigid benches – pieces will be mobile and multi-functional

Furniture companies have moved fast to respond to changing office needs in the wake of the pandemic as space has been redesigned to reflect the new realities of flexible

working. In 2023, they'll be stepping up the pace even further as furniture and furnishings are required to balance a range of requirements – from collaboration, communication and social activities to individual concentration and hybrid meetings.

Switching between such diverse functions within a single collection of furniture requires a versatile kit of parts that is both physically adaptable and visually coherent, according to British furniture expert John Sacks. That's why we're unlikely to see large, rigid bench configurations in workspace, which were prominent in the recent past. Instead, watch out for easy mobility, modularity, multi-functionality and visual compatibility. This is 'fluid furniture' for a more fluid workforce.

Sacks explains: 'If the objective is to make effective multi-functional use of large areas by individuals and gatherings, small and large, and quickly and easily switched between many different functions, certain characteristics are helpful. What causes problems is anything with permanence or effective immobility.'



'Robots in the workplace don't need lighting or air-conditioning'

## No 18

### HELLO ROBOT

#### Robot sentries, cleaners and meeting aids will enter office life

Furniture that is constantly being moved around by users and never stays still long enough to be indexed would once have been thought of as a facility manager's nightmare. Now it is set to be part of the new normal. There will also be some overlap between furniture pieces for office and home, as people crave the type of comfort and human scale in the office that they enjoyed locked down in their own apartment.

One issue really focusing minds in furniture R&D is office acoustics. The big furniture trade shows in 2022 addressed ways to manage high noise levels created by hybrid collaboration such as constant phone and video calls. Baffles, cladding, screens, pods, booths and other enclosures filled display stands. We can expect more innovation of this type in 2023, including furniture made from sound-absorbing material, some of it recycled.

Whilst robots have been part of every prediction about the future we've seen for the last 50 years, 2023 is looking like this could be the year that robots go mainstream in the workplace. From robots that can custom-build your salad in the office restaurant to delivery bots roaming about the campus and automatons

charging your electric car, robotic invention has really been on the rise in recent years.

But now that these robots have hit the market and people have had time to get used to them, it's likely that the next stage of development will see them integrated affordably into office life. But what kind of robots can we expect to take their place alongside human colleagues in the world of work?

Here are some examples. Double 3 is designed to help with hybrid working: it is a self-driving video-conferencing robot that can be used to help increase digital equality in the workplace by allowing someone who is dialling into the office remotely to move around the office and interact with colleagues via the robot's screen.

Rookie is another example: designed as part of Naver Labs' new head

office, this robot can deliver coffees, lunch or parcels throughout the company's head office, travelling in purpose-built robot elevators in order to navigate the large space. That's the thing about robots in the workplace: they don't need lighting or air-conditioning (or a pay rise) – they can inhabit an environment fit only for machines.

We can expect solutions such as these to be embraced by companies looking to develop state-of-the-art office spaces which cater for the needs of their employees. Robots can greet people on entry to buildings or clean offices or patrol empty spaces at night as sentries who never need a cigarette break. Just as there are opportunities to increase security and simplify office maintenance, so there are serious implications to consider around the impact of workplace automation. One thing is certain: there will be a robot colleague coming to a desk near you soon.

Salesforce's new Trailblazer Ranch



## No 19

### OFFICE AS OFF-SITE

#### Your company awayday? A visit to the office

Gone are the days when you would sit continuously in the office and long for an off-site company meeting to get a fresh perspective. Now employers are getting on board with the idea that they want their staff to wish they were enjoying a visit to the office while they are working mainly from home.

This switch-up is leading to a bizarre inversion in which the office itself becomes the off-site experience – a stimulating location for team building – and not the mundane and routine place from which you want to escape.

To make the office as interesting and as attractive as a country house hotel or a quad bike racetrack, however, there needs to be a new way of thinking about the workplace.

It needs to become more exciting, more invigorating and more responsive to new ways of working. Think of your holiday destination of choice. It is unlikely to involve rows of glass boxes for meetings or an ocean of desks.

Some firms are advancing the concept of the 'office as off-site' by stepping outside the city and providing facilities in such a way as to offer staff the chance for a break without actually stopping work. These workplaces encapsulate the feeling of a ranch, a hotel or a resort whilst providing a practical and enjoyable place to connect with colleagues.

Salesforce's new Trailblazer Ranch in the redwood forests of Scotts Valley, California, is a clear example of this trend. The software giant has designed this space for Salesforce employees to come and explore the outdoors, getting away from San Francisco to connect with their teams and with nature. The idea is that staff will come here for a few days to decompress and develop stronger connections with the company.

The office as offsite is all about building a more vibrant company culture in the hybrid world. More companies are set to follow Salesforce's lead and go 'happy valley' in 2023.

## 'The concept combines elements of the metaverse with the ancient Greek marketplace'

## No 20

### THE METAGORA

#### Immersion in virtual reality needs a real-life counterweight

There will be no getting away from the metaverse as a growing influence on the future of work this year. After its breakthrough year in 2022, the advocates of virtual spaces accessed by VR headsets anticipate further rapid progress in 2023.

Already there are large firms that are onboarding and inducting new graduate recruits entirely via an immersive virtual reality sphere. And the metaverse is now being widely touted as a solution to creating more meeting equality between remote and in-office participants.

But not everyone is enamoured of a work environment that is an entirely virtual construct inhabited by avatars. Many experts argue



that company culture and learning will suffer unless there is more of a balance between the digital and the physical worlds. That's the challenge that employers face in 2023 – to grab the benefits that come with the latest virtual technologies while simultaneously hanging onto those authentic, face-to-face aspects of the real workplace that people enjoy so much.

Is this balance even possible? Companies are currently piloting different hybrid strategies but finding it difficult to integrate the metaverse with old-fashioned real estate. One concept that caught our eye was devised by a team of professionals studying on an executive education course

jointly run by the Royal College of Art and WORKTECH Academy.

This team proposed the 'Metagora' as a platform to strengthen work communities by twinning the virtual and physical domains, with new rituals and behaviours created in a common space for organisational citizenship. As the name suggests, the concept combines elements of the metaverse with the ancient Greek marketplace – the agora – a civic and commercial space where business was conducted. Ambitious and intriguing, this is an idea that deserves attention in 2023 as firms eye up a 'flight to quality' - to workspace that is smarter, smaller, greener and doing more with less.

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## WORKTECH™ ACADEMY

### About

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 80 organisations.

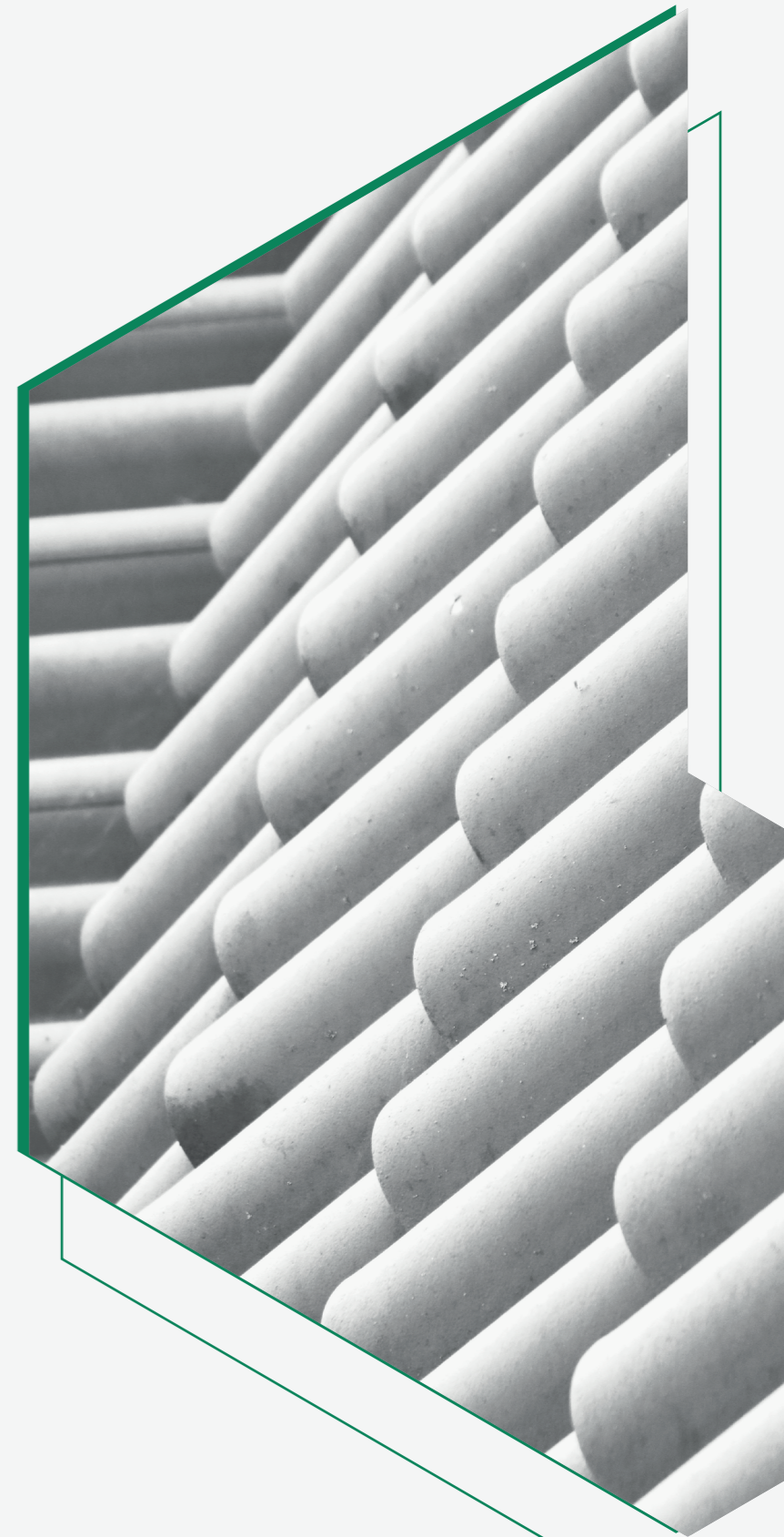
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