

# GLOBAL WORKPLACE CHALLENGES AND TRENDS 2025

## TRANSFORMING SPACE AND STRATEGY

This white paper by Rachel Houghton from Business Moves Group, developed for the Transforming Space and Strategy Roundtable, explores the forces redefining workplace strategy and highlights innovative solutions shaping the future of work.

## Executive Summary

The corporate workplace is at a critical inflection point. A convergence of globalisation, technological innovation, evolving workforce expectations, and rising ESG imperatives is reshaping how and where work happens. For major real estate occupiers, the challenge is no longer just about providing space — it is about creating ecosystems that drive productivity, culture, sustainability, and human connection.

This white paper explores the key global challenges, emerging trends, and service provider innovations that will define the future of work. It invites participants to engage deeply in strategic dialogue, preparing to shape resilient, future-ready workplaces.

## I. Key Global Challenges: Forces Reshaping the Workplace

In today's dynamic environment, organisations must navigate multiple, often competing demands. Five core challenges dominate the landscape:

1

### Adapting to Hybrid Work Models

Workplace flexibility is no longer optional. Companies like Microsoft are leading by example, advocating for up to 50% or 100% remote work depending on roles while reimagining campuses as hubs of collaboration and creativity.

Spotify are another example – standing firm against return-to-work policies and leading with a work from anywhere model. This led to a 15% reduced attrition rate, a six-day drop in its time to hire, and increased workplace diversity.

2

### Sustainability and ESG Commitments

As climate urgency intensifies, ESG strategy has become central. Unilever sets a high bar, aiming for net-zero emissions by 2039 and investing in green-certified real estate. Meanwhile, Sodexo's integration of sustainability into facilities management for BAE Systems demonstrates that real change happens not just in policies but in everyday operations.

However, there are some concerning trends. IWFM found that in the facilities management sector, there was a fall in the number of organisations prioritising key areas. For example, 52% stated carbon reduction as their top priority, a fall from last year's 60%. Organisations need to not lose momentum in the race for net-zero.

## 3

## Portfolio Optimisation and Cost Management

Remote work and economic uncertainty have forced a rethink of real estate portfolios. Prior to its 2022 takeover, Twitter's "remote-first" pivot enabled significant cost savings via subleasing.

CBRE helped Uber consolidate its Amsterdam headquarters' footprints while creating flexible spaces to empower an agile workforce with biodynamic lighting and spaces designed for leisure around work, including a library and yoga room.

## 4

## Technology Integration and Cybersecurity

The digital workplace must be secure, agile, and intelligent. HSBC's launch of cloud-first platforms and its Ayasdi partnership developed AI-driven cybersecurity tools, underscoring how vital digital transformation is. Iron Mountain's use of AI to enhance real estate decision-making for its agents. Previously, massive amounts of customer data were spread across multiple apps and databases, but AI is changing its accessibility and Iron Mountain's servicing speeds.

## 5

## Talent Attraction, Skills, and Workforce Wellbeing

Talent today demands flexibility, purpose, and wellness. Salesforce's "Success from Anywhere" model acknowledges that only 3% of employees want full-time office work. Ernst & Young's flexible spaces champion innovation by supporting a variety of work styles by integrating 170 third-party coworking locations for 900 employees at its Helsinki headquarters.

For colleagues who need to be present on-site, AstraZeneca has gone one step further with "The Hub" in Cambridge. Its space offers a day nursery, pre-school, shop, cafe area, garden, gym and health screening for all biomedical colleagues' at-home and family needs.

## II. Service Provider Innovations: Rising to Meet the Moment

As occupiers adapt, service providers are accelerating innovation:

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pioneers AI-driven dynamic occupancy management, transforming space efficiency.
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uses the PropTech innovation competition to find new talent
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champions procurement excellence and operational resilience in China.
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leads with ESG-aligned services.
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reimagines workplaces as ecosystems, stressing the importance of collaboration, well-being, and flexibility.


These innovations are not incremental — they represent a systemic shift towards more responsive, resilient workplace environments.


## III. Emerging Trends for 2025 and Beyond: Building for the Future


The future workplace will be defined by:

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ESG-first real estate strategies: Sustainability at the core, not the periphery.
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AI-enabled, data-driven workplace management: Turning real-time insights into action.
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Resilient, flexible hybrid workplace designs: Spaces that adapt as workstyles evolve.
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Talent-centric, well-being-focused environments: Human-first design principles.
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Procurement and service alignment: Strategic collaboration to drive value and innovation.

## IV. Return to Office Mandates: A Divergent Landscape

Organisations like Amazon, Disney, and IBM are pushing for a strong office presence, citing enhanced collaboration, mentorship, and cultural cohesion. Leaders such as JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon argue that face-to-face interactions are vital to sustained corporate success.

1

### Alternative Flexible Approaches

In contrast, companies like Airbnb, Atlassian, Spotify, and Nvidia embrace remote-first models, highlighting benefits such as talent attraction, increased productivity, and lower attrition. They position flexibility not as a concession but as a competitive advantage.

2

### The Employee Voice

In 2022, 73% of employees preferred hybrid or remote work, and nearly half would consider resigning over full RTO mandates.

More recently, 54% of workers surveyed believed that returning to the office would negatively impact their work-life balance, and 60% of remote workers reported an increased pressure to come back to the office full time.

Companies must weigh cultural aspirations against workforce realities — the future hinges on striking a balance.

3

### Strategic Insight

Flexibility is the new contract between employers and employees. Organisations that fail to adapt risk not just losing talent but losing relevance.

## V. Facilities and Workplace Services: Reimagining Operational Excellence

Facilities and workplace teams are the unseen architects of workplace evolution. Their innovations include:

- **Right-Sizing and Space Utilisation:** Data-driven space planning to avoid empty real estate.
- **Flexible Furniture and Moves:** Supporting fluidity through hot-desking and home-office integrations.
- **Upgraded Workplace Experience:** Hospitality-inspired design that entices, not enforces, return.
- **Technology for Remote Support:** Tools that create parity between remote and on-site workers.
- **Smart Service Scheduling:** Occupancy-based cleaning, HVAC, and energy management.
- **Transparent Communication:** Creating change narratives that build trust and drive adoption.

This operational revolution is as much about culture as it is about cost savings.

## VI. Conclusion: Leading Through Change

The workplace is no longer a fixed place — it is a dynamic experience. Organisations that thrive will be those who embrace flexibility, elevate employee well-being, embed ESG deeply into their DNA, and deploy technology smartly.

This roundtable represents more than a discussion — it is a launchpad. A chance to shape strategies that are not only resilient but regenerative. To lead not just through uncertainty, but into a vibrant, reimagined future.

## 1

## Key Discussion Points for the Roundtable:

- How can we design workplace strategies that are both human-centric and cost-efficient?
- In what ways can ESG be more deeply embedded into workplace decision-making?
- How do we future-proof service delivery models for a hybrid-first world?
- What innovations are essential to enhancing employee experience and productivity?

## 2

## Key Debate questions

- **Flexibility vs. Culture:**  
How can organisations balance the need for workplace flexibility with the desire to sustain strong corporate cultures?
- **ESG Prioritisation:**  
In what ways can ESG imperatives be embedded into real estate and workplace strategies to drive meaningful change?
- **Technology as an Enabler:**  
What emerging technologies hold the most promise for shaping a resilient, hybrid-first workplace?
- **Procurement as a Strategic Partner:**  
How can procurement functions better collaborate with FM and workplace services to enhance agility and innovation?
- **Winning the Talent War:**  
What workplace initiatives are proving most effective at attracting and retaining top talent in a competitive market?