



**Workplace 2020: New decade, new opportunities - by John Campbell and Ann Hoffman**

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Prior to the unprecedented impact of COVID-19, workplaces had already been experiencing a dramatic shift from the more traditional, leased space models, to flexible offices on demand. Modern workplaces have continued to provide greater agility in response to ever-changing business needs, and a competitive co-working space market. Now, the way we conduct work has been turned upside down by “Stay at Home” isolation orders. As we look ahead, our future at work will be inextricably linked to the impact of this global pandemic.

### Necessary Social Connections

As designers, we have understood the value of collision moments in the workplace, and promoted the importance of our proximity to each other for the exchange of new ideas and information. This applies to both the workplace as well as social settings in the office. It’s these moments—impromptu but intentional in their conception—that we miss by not being in a physical workspace.

Innovation is the lifeblood of corporate and institutional longevity. Creating the right workspaces to accelerate this process will become a key component of the corporate real estate and facilities management sectors. Offices that have been exploring and testing collaborative environments have synthesized this learning into better models of space for innovative work. Being able to offer those environments as an amenity to building services will add to the value of a lease product. Whether the innovation is a disruptive breakthrough or a line extension, often, it is the result of an idea that follows an obscure networked path before evolving into a viable new product or business model.

### Designing for the User Experience

The rise in the importance of happiness—the catalyst for innovation and creativity—will heighten the focus on the user experience. It’s the development of this user experience that will continue to drive people to the office and solidify company culture, creating a more human-focused workplace that people feel good about working in and belonging to. The solution will be a smarter, data-driven evolution of the much maligned open plan model. It is certainly not one-size-fits-all, as we have experienced over decades of failed models of configurations.

Going forward, employees will be tasked with taking an active role in the creation of their environments: contributing to the processes and needs as the design progresses. Different people and teams have varying needs and preferences. The key is creating workspaces that encourage certain behaviors and support tasks that are tied to business goals, innovation, work processes, and company culture. The enrichment of that experience is being demonstrated by a curated aesthetic that not only provides the setting for these activities, but also an alternative vibe to cater to personal preferences of surroundings. This includes providing the physical setting for a variety of tasks and emotions or levels of energy. Environmental graphics, varied furnishings and appointments such as

those we experience in our homes are used to portray a familiar and comforting environment for all types of tasks. Catering to focused, individual work; collaborative activities; large meetings; presentations; social interaction; and break areas for lunch, or simply a change in scenery where people are given a choice of which environment suits their task or required level of focus.

### Nature as a Necessity, Not a Trend

Our connection to nature, both visually and physically, will become a standard feature in all workplaces, through the integration of biophilic design. The exposure and glimpses of natural elements in a work environment will be increasingly important for employee health. Natural daylighting will continue to be a must-have element based on the multiple research studies proving its benefits to an individual's overall health, cognitive memory, alertness, and sleep quality. Plants and the introduction of more living green elements and natural materials like wood will continue to be a positive addition to the workplace as research demonstrates that people's "happy place" vision is deeply connected to nature, and the health benefits outweigh the maintenance concerns for these features. Users will demand access to outdoor spaces, roof terraces, and green roofs as an extension to their formal workplace; especially for those city workers who cherish exposure to green spaces. The selection of healthy and responsibly sourced materials will become mainstream as manufacturers move to comply with rigorous sustainable compliance standards and employees expect good planet stewardship from their company.

### Learning from the Past

COVID-19 has forced us to completely re-examine how we conduct our work and reassess what is valuable to our productivity and to our culture. Its impact has already been profound, and it has shown how resilient we are in adapting to unprecedented circumstances. It reminds us that our social interactions have value for our quality of life. It reminds us that as cerebral humans, we have to find the upside of what has been forced upon us—leaning into the examples that history tells us.

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