



MODERN WORKPLACE: TRENDS & PREDICTIONS

For quite a while, the time has been ripe for a new chapter in the manual for the optimal, modern workplace. Add to that the recent, unprecedented impact of the corona crisis and it is clear that we are entering the next decade with fully redesigned office environments.

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PREFACE

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The future workplace: desk jockeys have an advantage

The true desk jockeys amongst us are having a tough time. They have been forced to exchange their familiar, companionable office jungle for the solo, 'caged' existence of working from home. OK, this is a luxurious cage, equipped with every possible (technological) convenience, but still... How long this will last, only time will tell. But better times await us and one day those office doors will once again open wide to those enthusiasts. That said, we do anticipate that the environment behind those doors will have a completely different look and feel. And no, that won't be because our memory deceives us after being away for so long. Prior to the current crisis, the design of offices was already being rethought and, in the slipstream of Covid-19, that thinking is gaining momentum.

In this whitepaper, we will look back briefly, but will mainly look ahead to the trends shaping the future of the modern workplace. We will also list our ten specific predictions of the future. And there's no need to worry – in the future workplace those ambitious desk jockeys will once again have an advantage.



A BRIEF LOOK BACK: THIS IS WHAT OUR WORKPLACE LOOKED LIKE



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From neat rows to office landscaping and cube farms

Think back for a moment. What did the workplaces look like in an average office building? Not just during the pre-corona era, but even before flexible workspaces, open-plan offices and other contemporary developments appeared on the scene.

The principle had, in fact, been more or less the same for decades: since the beginning of the twentieth century, offices had been set up in the style of the then highly industrialised labour market (factory assembly lines). Typists and other office workers (clerks) sat in neat, perfectly straight rows behind and next to one another, to achieve 'maximum efficiency'. This was until the concept of office landscaping emerged in the 1960s, and offices were decorated more creatively and even colour was added. Everything was somewhat looser and freer, in line with the spirit of the times. Twenty years later, this utopian idea was outstripped by a new reality of overcrowded workplaces, where employees were quite literally caged: hello cube farms! Comprising a mini desk partitioned off behind three airproof screens every square metre.

For anyone who (fortunately) did not experience that impersonal, uninspired period, it wasn't successful. It is therefore not surprising that the new millennium heralded a new vision of the ideal workplace. We are all familiar with the outcome: the open-plan office. Large, open and, above all, informal spaces, full of strategically placed, readily accessible desks and flexible workspaces, where there is a place for everyone to sit and with invisible hierarchy. A dishwasher and multifunctional coffee machine take pride of place in a welcoming central galley and everyone brings their own laptop and GSM (and if required, noise-cancelling headphones) to the office. For employees, this is a major improvement compared to the cubicle concept and, for the employer, a cost-effective solution for the need to accommodate as many people as possible in as little space as possible¹.

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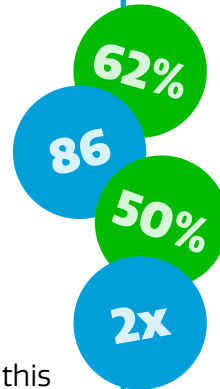
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But... let's establish a few facts

A great deal of scientific research has been conducted into the open-plan office. The general conclusion is that it is inefficient and causes stress, resulting in higher rates of sickness absence. A couple of facts^{2,3}:

- ✓ sickness absence increases by 62%
- ✓ productivity decreases by 86 minutes a day
- ✓ interruptions cause 50% more mistakes
- ✓ and it takes twice as long to complete a task.

On the basis of these facts alone, we can conclude that this contradicts the original idea that the open-plan office would save money. Because if less work is done and more mistakes made, and there is an increase in sickness absence, that will cost money.



Times change, as do people and their requirements

The open-plan office therefore gave rise to new issues, such as stress, too many distractions, with a negative impact on productivity and job satisfaction. At the same time, lightning-fast technological developments paved the way for new, flexible opportunities.

Furthermore, labour market transitions – automation and an increase in self-employed professionals and other temporary employment models – make it difficult for businesses to predict how many employees and therefore (expensive) office space they require in both the short and longer term. That calculation could be done quite easily a few years ago. Time for yet another new chapter in the manual for the optimal, modern workplace.

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Even before the corona outbreak, data provider Leesman conducted a worldwide survey amongst 600,000 office workers. This survey revealed that 40% of respondents felt that their work environment hindered their productivity. Mainly because they feel anonymous and therefore uncomfortable, as they don't have a place to call their own: they have to look for a desk every day, where they then arrange their possessions carried to and from home every single day, day in, day out. It also transpires that it takes office workers around 18 minutes to find a desk every day, which amounts to 66 lost hours a year⁵.

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According to the trade journal Vastgoedmarkt, investors Bouwinvest and ASR predict a reduction of 10% to 15% in the current square metres of office space in the Netherlands. It is also estimated that, post-corona, the majority of people will be present at the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays. A physical presence at the office will be especially important for receiving guests and for brainstorming sessions with colleagues. The American bank, Morgan Stanley, suspects that 'the unhealthy office' will vanish completely, which means that poor ventilation systems will, in any case, be a thing of the past⁴.

THE FUTURE: HEADING FOR AN OPTIMAL, MODERN WORKPLACE



Freedom and adaptiveness determine the future workplace

To shape the future in the best possible way, it is vital to learn from the past. The common thread is clear: changes happen very quickly. Even before a new 'future-proof' work environment is finished, the vision of the future on which that environment is designed is already outdated. Particularly now that momentum is accelerating and, because of corona, the future is more uncertain than ever.

That eyeopener has enabled us to identify an overarching trend, rather like an umbrella above a range of different sub-trends: freedom and adaptivity. The future workplace must both literally and figuratively offer space to all possible needs and developments, foreseen and unforeseen. So let's first take a closer look at a few sub-trends that are currently prevalent, before then speculating about a few informed predictions. In order to give a clear vision of the years ahead and (once it's possible) of how things will sit in terms of work. Although, 'sit'? With the rise in popularity of the standing desk, we should even question that.

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What do we do it for?

Before we dive in, we first need to understand why it is beneficial to adapt workplaces, aside from the practical argument. Because, of course, companies haven't done this just for the sake of doing it over the past century. Below are a number of advantages:

- ✓ A pleasant office environment makes employees happier and healthier and therefore up to 12% more productive.
- ✓ Approximately 10% of the wage costs are lost to sickness absence.
- ✓ Improving the air quality alone boosts employees' cognitive function.
- ✓ The presence of natural light in turn increases performance.
- ✓ Due to the absence of employees, meetings and flexible work schedules, often only half of the available desks are occupied during office hours.

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“ According to the Dutch multinational Unilever, for every dollar spent on ‘well-being investments’ for employees there is a return of 2.5 dollars in additional turnover¹ ”

No longer a rigid hierarchical structure, but a more relaxed approach

It is clear that we have learned a lot over the past century about what works and what doesn't when designing an office. Parallel to those insights was, and is, the way in which we view the establishment of working practices. Because that is also an ongoing process. Broadly speaking, we have moved from a rigid hierarchical structure to a more relaxed approach. Employees have increasingly been given more control about how, where and when they do their work, driven by personal responsibility, co-creation, streamlining and creative ability. It is therefore logical that this contemporary mindset is clearly reflected in the future workplace.

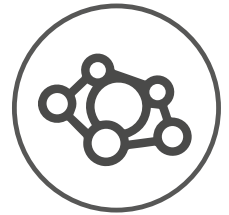
Let's first highlight some trends in working practices, before linking them to the office environment that we see and expect.

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Tribes

Derived from the principle of the tribes of former times. A company or organisation is the tribe (family/society/community) and all employees are members of and loyal to this tribe. Everyone has the same priority, i.e. the tribe's mission. 'Solo' teams don't exist, instead there are cross-multifunctional squads, in which different disciplines within the tribe contribute jointly to the core mission. Egos play second fiddle to the group as a whole and it no longer matters who does what, as long as it is done properly and on time. Members of a tribe therefore have a strong, mutual bond that goes far beyond simply 'getting the job done'. The Traveller is responsible for the core of the Tribe, or the leadership. The Traveller looks at what is happening outside the tribe, decides on the tribe's direction, growth, vision and/or mission and makes sure that all squads have the tools they need to contribute to this as well as possible. These working practices allow for synergy and cohesion^{6,7}.



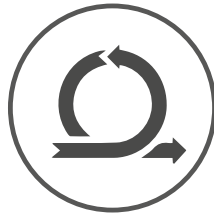
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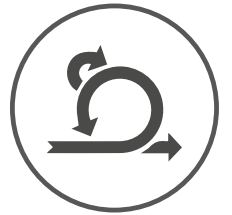
Agile

This literally means sprightly, lithe or flexible. Within a company or organisation, this means that work is carried out in a repetitive manner and a rhythm is established for customer interaction. That is because the customer is the focal point within the self-organising teams that form part of an agile environment. Smarter working always underpins the process. So, it's not about doing more work in less time, but about creating more value with less work. This offers space for agility, so that the organisation can better respond to the constantly changing world and, at the same time, offer direct and trusted value to customers on a large scale⁸.



Scrum

Part of agile is Scrum, which has come from the IT world. Officially, the term originates from rugby where, during a game, the team forms a scrum to decide on tactics. Nowadays, it is used more and more frequently in the corporate world. The multidisciplinary and self-directed team is at the core of Scrum, that carries out a certain project from A to Z. The team is led by a Scrum Master who, during the weekly stand-ups (max. fifteen minutes), asks each team member three questions: 'What have you done? What are you going to do? And what are the problems?' The cornerstones are purposefulness, working in 'sprints' (delivering a result each time in two to four weeks), close cooperation, knowledge exchange and accurately tracking progress⁹.



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The agile workplace of Unilever in New Jersey (photo: Garrett Rowland)

✓ Design thinking

Design thinking has the same principle as 'outside the box' thinking and aims to solve problems in a creative manner. It appeals to the imagination and enables companies or organisations to modernise and innovate based on (among other things) technologies, customer needs and customer wishes. Simply put, it is "just another way of thinking", where a customer's need (or problem) is the starting point. This is then viewed through the eyes of a designer: someone who always bears the end user in mind and therefore comes up with a design that anticipates the way in which something will be used. From a business perspective, it is therefore also very useful for tackling difficult problems: by understanding the human need, redefining the problem and generating many ideas during brainstorming sessions¹⁰.



Unilever's agile workplace in New Jersey:

To save space and facilitate mobility, freedom of choice and collaboration, Unilever had its New Jersey office converted into an Agile Workplace: a community of workspaces created by a clearly defined "kit of parts". The original space was tight, with 68 cubicle stations (the cubes mentioned above); that same area can now accommodate 120 employees in a dynamic manner and in an attractive modern environment¹¹.

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Gone are the times when everyone sat at his or her desk all day long

All of those innovative ways of working naturally require innovative spaces in which to (be able to) do that work. There is a much greater need for interaction, flexibility, inspiration, creativity and a good blend of individuality versus commonality. Gone are the times when everyone sat at his or her desk all day long. But what form will the future workplace take? A couple of examples:



ArchiTECHtuur

How cool is that? We thought up this term ourselves for the trend where high-quality architecture and technology merge together in an innovative way. Take the modern 22 Bishopsgate skyscraper in London, for example. Every day, a million data points are processed in this building, in part to optimise facilities such as air-conditioning in the open spaces. For reason of noise reduction, soundproof glass was used in the building. As modern-day design allows lifts and toilets to be positioned at the ends of buildings instead of in its core, floors can be fully utilised. And to encourage more interaction between different floors, the staircases have been designed as inviting meeting places.

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✓ Co-working spaces

Some companies are putting an end to the traditional rental of their 'own' building and are housing their people in so-called co-working spaces: buildings in which a range of smaller companies (often start-ups, but increasingly also larger organisations) occupy part of the space, and workers share facilities. In London and New York, workplaces of this type already make up 5% of the total office market.

✓ Diversity and craziness

Flexible desks, private rooms and informal hangouts. Spaces used as offices one day and as networking spaces the next. Table tennis tables or even 'climbing walls' throughout the building. So-called workplace ambassadors on each floor, responsible for the wellbeing of the staff on that floor. All examples of diversity and (fun) craziness that are found nowadays in office buildings.

Fun fact!

Until recently, companies would set aside around 3-4% of floorspace for such craziness; it is anticipated that this will at least double in the coming years¹.

✓ Huddle spaces

Yet another term from the world of sport: the huddle. Basically the same as a scrum, but for a different ball game, this time American football. A huddle is again about a strategic get-together and, henceforth, at the office we will be doing that in special huddle spaces. Usually intended for small groups, with a maximum of five people, and for specific purposes, such as videoconferencing or brainstorming. The most important aspect of these spaces is that they keep out noise and other distractions, allowing full focus. And a sense of inclusiveness to boot¹².

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TEN POSSIBLE GAME CHANGERS

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Thus far, a foretaste of contemporary office trends. We guess this has left you wanting more? That's why we are speculating about predicted trends that we can expect. We must, of course, also give thought to the impact of the corona crisis. As you have perhaps read in our past whitepaper, entitled '[From the new normal to the ideal normal!](#)', the question is whether we will return to the 'old normal' (in the workplace then) after the pandemic. More and more scientists, psychologists and other experts don't think so. We agree.

There are some things we'd miss like we would toothache: traffic jams, using public transport during rush hour (wedged in the aisle with your nose in somebody's armpit, urgh), back and forth five days a week, week in, week out. No, we no longer want that and we now know that it's no longer necessary. It is therefore a realistic scenario that, eventually, **hybrid working** will be more common. Sometimes at home, sometimes at the office (and even when at the office, in different places), or even from your country home. Who cares, provided that your work is good and finished on time, surely?

Wondering what ten possible game changers we foresee for the future workplace? Then read on.

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TEN POSSIBLE GAME CHANGERS

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1

Augmented reality workstations

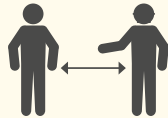
Facebook already has it: a mixed reality workspace allowing people to work better from home. Futuristic settings, in which you bring the office into your home (as it were), with floating virtual displays. Switch from the real world to a digital world with the click of a mouse. All of your colleagues will suddenly join you in your living room for a meeting.



2

The 6-feet-distance office

If COVID-19 is provisionally here to stay (albeit it in a weakened form because, just like with the flu, we will hopefully become more resistant to it), then offices may have to be set up as standard to allow social distancing of 6 feet. Complete with cough screens and disinfection columns. Not the most welcoming, but who knows?



3

Clean desk policy

This already exists of course, but there is even more of a focus on this because of the virus that is flitting around. We have read about a company in Japan where employees place a clean (disposable) placemat on their desk every day.



4

Back to the cubicles approach

Remember those cube farms, comprising a mini desk partitioned off behind three airproof screens every square metre? That idea wasn't abandoned for no reason, but according to some trend forecasters, needs must. We will probably not return fully to the cubicles approach, but open-plan offices are also no longer realistic. Also see point 2.



5

Signage

Like at airports, but at work. Think of signposts, lines on the floor, floor markings in lifts to show where someone must stand, or large circles around desks to ensure distancing. The options also include walking clockwise and one-way traffic.



6

Smart technology

Automatic doors, facial recognition, operating lifts, ordering coffee with your smartphone, artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR): all smart, new technologies that will have an impact on the workplace and the way in which we work (together).



7

Fresh air

We have already mentioned the benefit of fresh air, but corona has made this a necessity. If windows cannot be opened, high-end office climate control systems may provide a solution.



8

Co(rona)-working

Sometimes a trend simply doesn't stand a chance. This may also apply to the aforementioned trend of co-working spaces. Until now, this has provided a solution to the problem of expensive office space, versus flexible occupancy and, therefore, the flexible space boom. But that can easily be undermined if corona becomes a long-term issue.



9

Greetings

For the time-being, no hands are being shaken, perhaps never again. Never mind the air kisses (two or three, it no longer matters). In the future, how will we greet one another professionally? A fist or elbow bump is rather 'chummy'. Perhaps with hands held in a prayer-like post, like the Japanese do? Or simply a hand in the air forming a semi-circle?



10

Workplace becomes a meeting place

The increasing flexibility at work will result in the role of the office shifting to a meeting place for colleagues, where they exchange experiences and learn from one another. Technology optimally facilitates those meetings and ensures that everyone, regardless of their position and location, can get the most out of themselves and their collaboration with others.



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Is your organisation future-proof?

There is no question that technology will play an increasingly important role at work. Digitisation is therefore at the top of the list when designing or redefining workplaces. The market already offers countless opportunities to pave the way to flexible working for employees. In the future, the most successful companies will have collaboration platforms that will allow employees to communicate from any device, from anywhere and at any time. These tools will also ensure a positive, interactive knowledge-sharing experience, that can only improve collaboration. Is your organisation future-proof yet?

Hi, we are CTOUCH

CTOUCH helps organisations create a modern workplace in which people can collaborate more efficiently. We stimulate interactivity, productivity and involvement during meetings, workshops – and anywhere else too, for that matter. How? By implementing the endless possibilities of touch screens – for inspiration, for sharing knowledge, for so many things! That way, we provide you with support for any environment in which you would like to see or which requires more collaboration. We'll take care of that, and you'll be surprised at what we manage to achieve – guaranteed!

Feel free to reach out to us via:

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