

**BETTER
THAN HOME:**

THE 2023
WORKPLACE
& HOW TO
CULTIVATE IT
THROUGH
STRATEGY
& DESIGN.

schiaavello

“
It’s not a
movement
but a demand.”
[Cassie Hansen, Architecture Media]

2022 marked the return – or more aptly: the re-evaluation – of many pre-pandemic norms. For many professionals, this included the return of the in-person conference. Yet, in an unintentional life-imitating-art sequence of events, Architecture Media’s Design Speak’s Work Place / Work Life program remained virtual: leveraging the audience reach and global perspective only the digital world can provide. This new-found freedom to disregard what was done before and assess, case-by-case, the structure and environment which serves your goals best speaks to the current state of workplace design and the insights shared in these industry-leading discussions.

Responding to questions such as the role of the city in the post-pandemic office; the role of design in workplace culture and wellness; and how working from home is reshaping the workplace, design leaders and forward-thinking corporations reveal new employee needs and how to meet them – through the acceleration of existing trends and the imagining of entirely new concepts. This paper will share the key insights and tangible solutions from the three-day, nine-speaker conference and panel discussions.

What employees want from their workplace:

Location & accessibility

Social connection

Experience

Nature

Culture & identity

Amenity & hospitality

Freedom & flexibility

Technology

Impactful design solutions should first interrogate the true problems at hand. The myriad of conceptual and practical answers to the complex question of 'what the future workplace must consider' all relate back to these eight key drivers for employee's engagement with the workplace.

At the crux of each, they target one primary goal: make the office better than home. An easy feat, no?

Addressing these needs holistically can span from urban planning redesign to the optimisation of buildings, tenancies to individual workpoints. From the macro to the micro, here's how each work together to facilitate tomorrow's innovative, healthy and culture-first workplace:

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We think of building, organisation and city as separate, but dismissing this concept will help us all thrive.

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[Bill Downer, BVN]

How + Why at a city-wide level

But, do we even need cities?

The Global Creativity Index correlates cities with higher urbanisation to higher creativity. Citing Singapore, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and even Australia as world leaders in creativity with a largely urbanised population.

Furthermore, higher urbanisation means lower gasoline consumption. The denser the city the lesser the use of cars and, in turn, the greater environmental benefits. Urging even founders at ride-share company, Lyft, to proclaim "it's time to redesign our city around people and not cars."

In 2020, we experienced a population flight not seen before in our lifetime. New York City lost 5% – almost half a million – of residents to suburban and exurban retreats, inspiring the media to hail “NYC is dead forever” met with a series of disrupting images similar to those seen in dystopian fantasies.

Though not in our lifetime, this abandonment of cities has in fact come before.

In the late 19th century, disease through population growth and unsanitary practices led people in London to flee, but re-thinking city planning and a solution that aimed to bring the natural world into city hubs – today known as River Thames – reinvigorated the city and drew back the masses.

Philip Vivian, Director at Bates Smart, contends that the reinvigoration of our cities must be addressed at a societal level, with infrastructure, public space and private amenity interplaying to create a prosperous future office.

In Bates Smarts work with the City of Sydney on Sydney 2050, they suggest “to sustainably increase density there needs to be a fully integrated transport system in place,” proposing a supertall development in the city to fund such a sustainable transport system. This proposal is complemented by their Vision for Circular Quay, which proposes the removal of the Cahill Expressway presenting the opportunity to transform Circulate Quay into a grand urban room and put an end to the area's infrastructure domination.



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The transport infrastructure complemented by revitalised public open space provides two-thirds of the location puzzle, tackling head-on the dreaded commute – a well established motivator for remote work, echoed in Hassell’s Workplace Futures research and the re-focus of open space and nature, arguably the most undervalued draw card in workplace revitalisation.

This approach flips the popular phrase “earning the commute” on its head – abolishing it entirely.

For business-leaders, this means an increased consideration of what surrounds a tenancy, or ‘follow the infrastructure’ as Philip suggests. Both Bill Downer, Principal at BVN and Adele Winteridge, Founder and Design Director at Foolsap Studio discuss the ‘whole-life proposition’ – thinking of a building, organisation and city as one that amalgamates to form part of your organisation’s employment offering. BVN’s Elastic Work drills further, highlighting the ecosystemic need for architecture and urban planning to strive to find a better balance between ecology, infrastructure and society.

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It's easier to attract people to that place to be.

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[BVN]

How + Why

at a building-wide level

Throughout presentations emerged a common thread of architectural features holding paramount influence in creating the ideal commercial building: a democratised ground floor, a thriving hospitality offering, open spiral staircases, natural world elements, sustainable design and a sharing-economy approach to amenities and space.

Continuing from the societal-level push for a blurring between public space and private amenity, these features were explored:

> Bill Downer from BVN explained how “opening the lower levels of the building to create stronger connection to the street and public spaces breathes generosity into the building and activates the neighbourhood”. In some cases, this involved the entire ground floor becoming a buzzing hospitality offering. In others, multi-level pillar treatments outlining the building provide public seating metres away from private dining to create one united, enlivened precinct.

> Bates Smarts research contends incorporating outdoor terraces, biodiversity, naturally ventilated gardens, free flowing air and

greenery extends the work / life opportunities of the commercial space and directly benefits the health and wellbeing of its inhabitants.

> Exposure to daylight – an area of expertise and decades of research of leading Denmark architectural firm, Henning Larsen – delivers various benefits: regulation of human biorhythm, reduced energy consumption, decreased operational costs, increased market value, comfort and strategic design prowess.

Smaller organisations are encouraged to seek leasing agreements in buildings that deliver these features, outsourcing vital employee motivators and leveraging surrounding occupants to develop a greater sense of atmosphere and vitality.

Larger organisations, by contrast, such as Seek's exceptional headquarters in Melbourne's inner eastern suburb of Cremone, are able to incorporate these building-wide strategies into a single occupancy. Brigid Carey, Head of Workplace Strategy at Seek details the priority on air quality undertaken in the organisation's new residency, explaining not only the ventilation but the acoustic benefits to “bringing the outdoors in.”



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Seek, as well as ANZ's Open House designed by Foolscape Studio, applied many of the predominant architectural features to their building designs. Harnessing the power of a multipurpose ground floor; both buildings see this sought-after space shift from event zone to boardroom and beyond, enhanced by exceptional commercial kitchen facilities and quick access to local hospitality. The transformational floors, powered by operable walls and large sliding panels, demonstrate organisational fluidity, future-proofing and the prioritisation of employees, customers and the broader community.

But don't forget:

Research, science and strategy, while essential, do not replace the intrinsic need to create beauty, intrigue and emotion in modern commercial spaces. This key consideration raised by Viggo Harems from Henning Larsen is described by the firm as "merging the poetic and the practical."



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The shift comes from thinking about real estate as a static resource to a building as a service.

” [BVN]

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Make the office a magnet, not a mandate.

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[Hassell]

How + Why at a workplace design level

If the future building is a self-sufficient mini-metropolis then the future workplace is a culture-rich, community-minded egalitarian home. The shift to a more residential look and feel, opting for softer interiors and more welcoming spaces in commercial zones is not particularly new, however the push has been accelerated through the fundamental goal of making the office

better than home. The transition to a more progressive workplace was documented in two examples, one design-led and one centred on strategy: Foolscape Studio's interior design concept for ANZ's Level 10 redesign – their 'Ivory Tower' reborn as 'Open House' – and Henning Larsen's overarching approach to the workplace.

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Foolscape Studio for ANZ's redesign

Dark	→	Light
Hard	→	Soft
Heavy	→	Light
Flat	→	Textured
Opaque	→	Transparent
Enclosed	→	Open

Henning Larsen Workplace Approach

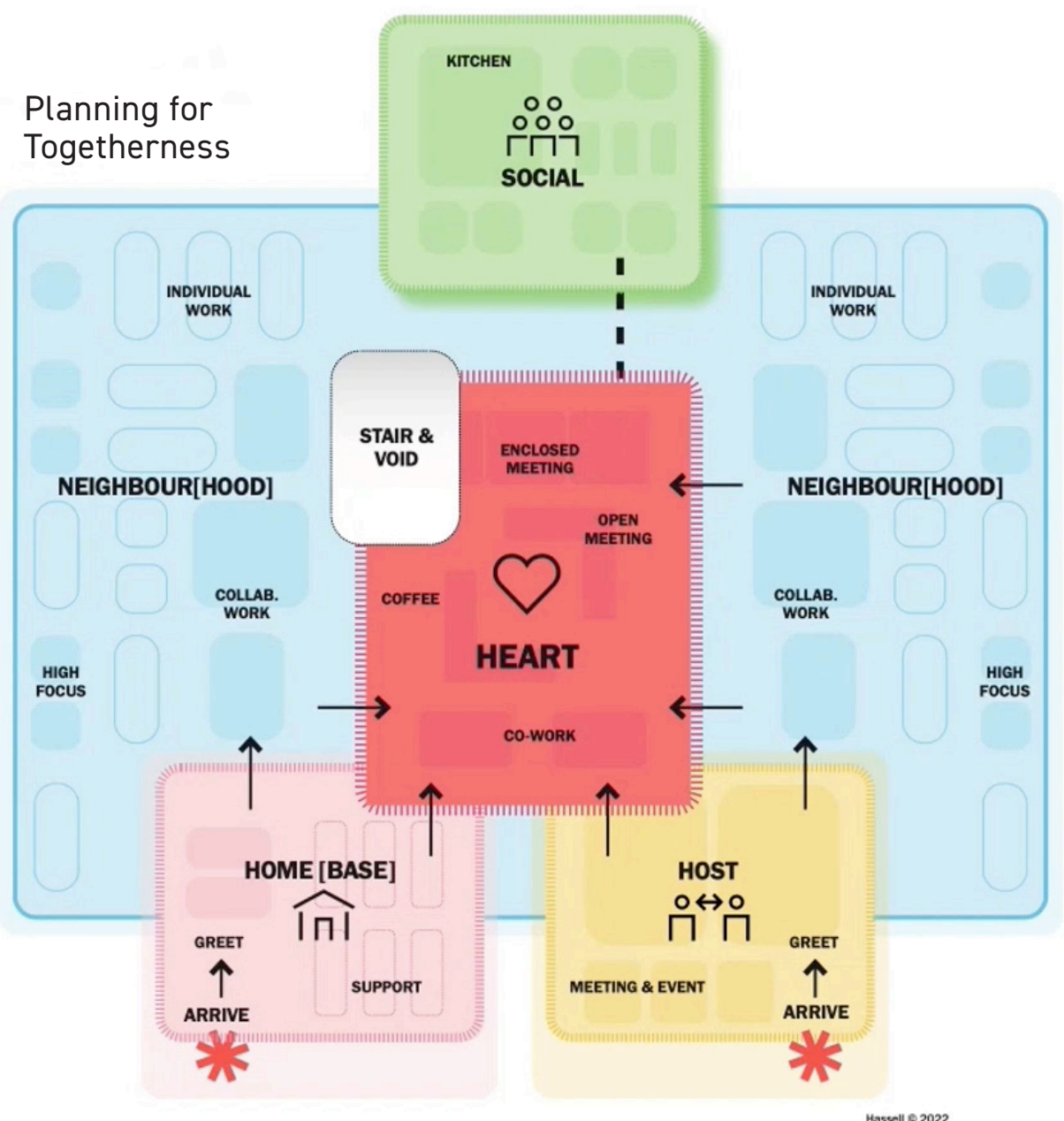
Big, Structured	→	Small, Dynamic
Owned, Controlled	→	Shared, Collaborative
Closed, Stable, Rigid	→	Open, Agile, Flexible
CSR	→	Sustainability
Risk Averse = No Mistakes	→	Mistakes = Learning
Scaling	→	Emerging
Product	→	Experience

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The ‘heart’ of the workplace

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[Hassell]



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This shift towards softness and openness – in both aesthetics and approach – is so predominant it has infiltrated workplace design language. With Hassell, Foolsap Studio, and Mirvac all making reference to a workplace floor plan that centres around an accessible, central social and collaborative hub that is repeatedly touted as the ‘heart’ of the modern office space.

This dedicated space plays a multitude of roles. Sometimes a serendipitous conversation can lead to a creative solution or a learning opportunity, directly benefiting business objectives. More commonly, and arguably even more impactfully, it provides the “subtle togetherness” that is felt by sharing a space.

Just as ground floor design is manipulated to foster connection to the broader community, the centralised social and collaborative space in a workplace fosters connection to the company and one another.

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Work socialisation is nuanced, from scheduled meetings to unforced, organic conversations and a sense of being a part of one.

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[Franziska Heuschkel, Co-Founder, Space and Pepper]

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These interpersonal encounters and this intangible 'sense' speaks to two key non-physical employee drives of the future workplace: experience and identity.

> Experience, likened to 'software' by Hassell, is proposed by the design firm as one of the four key elements of the holistic workplace – separate to but interdependent on: place (hardware), technology (digitalware) and culture (humanware).

> Identity, the cultivation of pride, belonging and culture according to Henning Larson, is a shared set of company ideas, values and identifiers that must exist between members but can be fostered by the environment.

When developing Seek HQ, Brigid Carey was acutely aware of the relationship between environment, identity and culture. She insisted that the external consultants engaged for the workplace redesign deeply understood the intricacies of Seek, its culture, teams, goals and purpose – to help people live more fulfilling and productive working lives – as well as the journey the internal team had taken to arrive at this point in the workplace.

This way these experts in architecture, design and engineering could apply their extensive subject area knowledge and critically apply it to determine what was best for Seek and their position as an employee of choice. As the power-dynamic shift from employer to candidate continues to challenge many industries, it is critical business leaders see the workplace as a part of their employment offering and a reflection of their values – that's why Seek dismisses the traditional hierarchical practice of allocating the prime real estate to those most senior, and instead giving the best views in the house to their people to share.

How at the workplace optimisation level

This focus on the physical workplace is not to omit the reality of the future of work: it's hybrid. While research by both CBRE and Hassell shows Australia lags behind the rest of the world in its adoption of remote work – contradicting international trends by displaying a greater 'in-office' workforce – the most clear finding is not about which way your policy leans but rather that employees are given the choice.

Hassell's survey of 2500 traditional office workers (who now work in various locations) debunked one of the greatest debates of remote work, citing no difference in relative productivity. However, the policy did impact a key concern for business: employees are 4-10% more likely to quit if no freedom or choice is granted.

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There's no relative difference in reported productivity between remote workers and those in the office.

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[Hassell]

We've established society's need for urbanisation and organisations' priority for shared zones but what individual employees need varies, not just between people, but through the different stages of a person's life.

A hybrid model – respecting employees' desire for choice – is the only solution.

This aligns with another counterintuitive statistic to emerge from the conference: according to CBRE's international research demand for leasing agreements remains healthy, while fit-out costs sharply increase. Leaving businesses in quite the conundrum: they need to provide more in a space that is being used less, with CAPEX budgets already stretched with supply chain and inflation pressures.

The solution? Workspace optimisation accessed through utilisation of technology, data and an increased understanding of the particular needs of your unique workforce.

In some cases, optimisation can take the form of updating solutions and technology to reflect new needs. As indicated by CBRE's research, 49% of workplaces report an increased need for video conferencing and 37% for occupancy training. Conversely, large meeting rooms and the average size of workstations are both requiring reduction according to 23% and 22% of respondents, respectfully.

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Embrace your unique new normal

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[Hassell]

However, leaders urge companies to be as bespoke as possible. Leading Australian property developer, Mirvac, have been optimising their own workplace, with pilot program: **The Adaptive Workplace**, “a highly flexible, dynamic work environment that responds in real time to the specific task, people or team using it. Embedded with a kit of parts and design components that allow it to oscillate between a variety of settings based on a changing workforce.”

To implement, in line with Henning Larson's key recommendation of analysing data pre and post occupancy, they leveraged all the data sources they could, declaring “real estate metrics no longer hold value in a hybrid world, so what other insights can be used?” – Elly Dalziel, Manager Strategy and Customer at Mirvac.

Collecting data from booking systems, Outlook, surveys, user feedback, observation and building security, Mirvac's initial insights include:

1. **Embed flexibility early**_ long termism, cost and sustainability benefits
2. **Not one size fits all**_ diversity and choice, customisation
3. **Multi-pronged approach**_ what is the purpose of the office? Comms and engagement
4. **Push the boundaries**_ challenge old behaviours, safe to fail if flexible.
5. **Data > insights > action**_ value in multiple data sets, tangible success metrics
6. **Strategic partnerships**_ mutually beneficial outcomes, non-traditional procurement
7. **Team time**_ hybrid workforce solutions, team days drive attendance

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Is hybrid really the one word we should use to describe this experience? By definition this means mixing and remixing the ingredients, but instead of mixing, we should think about the recipe.

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[Franziska Heuschkel, Co-Founder, Space and Pepper]

Space and Pepper's research on the future workplace took on a different approach: looking to the tech-world to optimise the existing workplace according to user experience rather than facilities.

Franziska suggests in addition to building togetherness and creativity, providing a touch of novelty – reducing repetitiveness and sparking joy – through simple gestures, like swapping pizza day to sushi afternoon, and annual office refreshes, that don't require a change in furniture but an employee-led switch of styling and positioning to keep things intriguing.

At Schiavello, we believe the culmination of all these strategies: societal, architectural, design-led and operational will work together to build the workplace of tomorrow, and look forward to being at the forefront of how it takes shape.

