

# The office of the future

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**Future of Work:** With the rise of AI and machine learning, many of us are rightly worrying about career stability. But what will the office of the future look like?



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CAPTION: *The office of the future: change in the workplace*

With the way we work changing with future technology, the future of office design is likely to alter too. Trends over the past 50 years have moved towards open-plan designs, with their perceived higher efficiency, but with remote jobs, freelance jobs and agency work becoming the norm, companies will need to promote changeable, agile design to harmonise with modern business practices.

The lines between home and work life are blurring. Old office space designs are already being set aside in favour of holistic, adaptable offices. Workspaces like WeWork, Vrumi and Soho Works encourage companies from freelancers, to corporates, to startups to collaborate in a shared space. The workplace of the future is perhaps already with us, but are there any other changes we're likely to see soon?

## **The physical office of the future**

### **COLLABORATION AND ETHICAL DESIGN**

Over the years office space has been moving away from rigid, separate cell office design, towards a more open-plan model. Whilst this is to some extent still the case, research shows that open-floor workplaces disrupt morale. Because of this, shared working platforms like WeWork, and modern offices combine open shared space with collaborative break out areas, and soundproofed pods for sole concentration. Office plans will have to be flexible so that they can easily adapt to trends.

It's not just the architectural space either. The visual design, furnishings, fixtures and fittings will change too. As we spend over 60% of our time at work, space will, and is becoming more welcoming and homelike. From movable screens, adjustable desks, to soft furnishings in breakout areas, design will need to combine flexibility with comfort and brightness. With more and more people working irregular hours, having home comforts close at hand will be a key strategy for creating a productive, happy workforce.

## **The virtual office of the future**

### **WILL TECHNOLOGY MAKE THE FUTURE OFFICE MORE VIRTUAL?**

The office space as we know it is changing. A virtual workplace is becoming more of a reality every day. With AI, AR and VR starting to have more of an influence in day-to-day life, this movement will increasingly migrate over to workspaces. Twenty years ago the idea of virtual reality meetings may have seemed like something from a bad sci-fi film, but today we have the technology to make this happen.

VR headsets are already beginning to be used by startups and progressive companies. Whilst their potential hasn't yet been fulfilled, once we've become more accustomed to using the technology, it will become an ever-present part of the office suite. In five years we could all be sat around the meeting room in headsets speaking to holograms from across the globe. One would imagine that this will drive work efficiency. Global decisions become much easier when we can correspond with our colleagues in person — however virtual that may be.

## **The remote office of the future**

### **WILL THE FUTURE OFFICE BE AN OFFICE AT ALL?**

The gig economy has become a bit of a buzz-phrase over the past few years — and for good reason. According to the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self Employed, between 2008 and 2016 the number of freelancers in the UK increased by 43% — with 2 million workers in the UK working freelance. Workers are spending less time sat in a conventional workspace. So what will the office look like when we're going to have less people working there?

The rise of remote workers has already led to the meteoric rise of communal workspaces. Companies like WeWork, as previously discussed, have grown massively due to the trend, and the growth is only likely to increase further with more people choosing to work freelance. The remote office won't just be MacBooks in coffee shops. It will be workers from a variety of backgrounds collaborating in a shared working environment where creativity and new ideas can blossom.

## **A more collaborative future for all**

### **WORKERS DRIVING CHANGE**

With so many workers migrating towards remote jobs and freelance jobs, the power balance within the office job is set to change. Employers will need to take into account the situation in which fewer workers will be tied to a single office. Many companies will choose to move operations to shared

workspaces in order to gain the flexibility needed for a forward-thinking organisation.

Beyond this change in power balance, design will need to incorporate the needs of flexible working arrangements. The 9-5 is already an anachronism, so office spaces will need to cater for those starting at 5am, and this finishing at 11pm too. Our shared workspace will have to become places that we actively want to spend time in — with soft furnishings, high-quality eating facilities, and places for collaborative entertainment. Places like this do already exist, but they are likely to become ever-more present.

Another aspect is that collaboration will break the boundaries of sectors. In one shared office space you could have an AI developer for a pharmaceutical company collaborating on a project with a digital marketer for a high-growth fintech startup. This can only be a positive for companies. We are working towards a future of high-growth collaborative work that will not only drive the future of office design, it will also drive huge change in every sector of work — from HR, to recruitment, to marine biology. We are moving towards a bright, more mobile future.

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