

# Top 10 Workplace Trends Impacting HR & Facilities

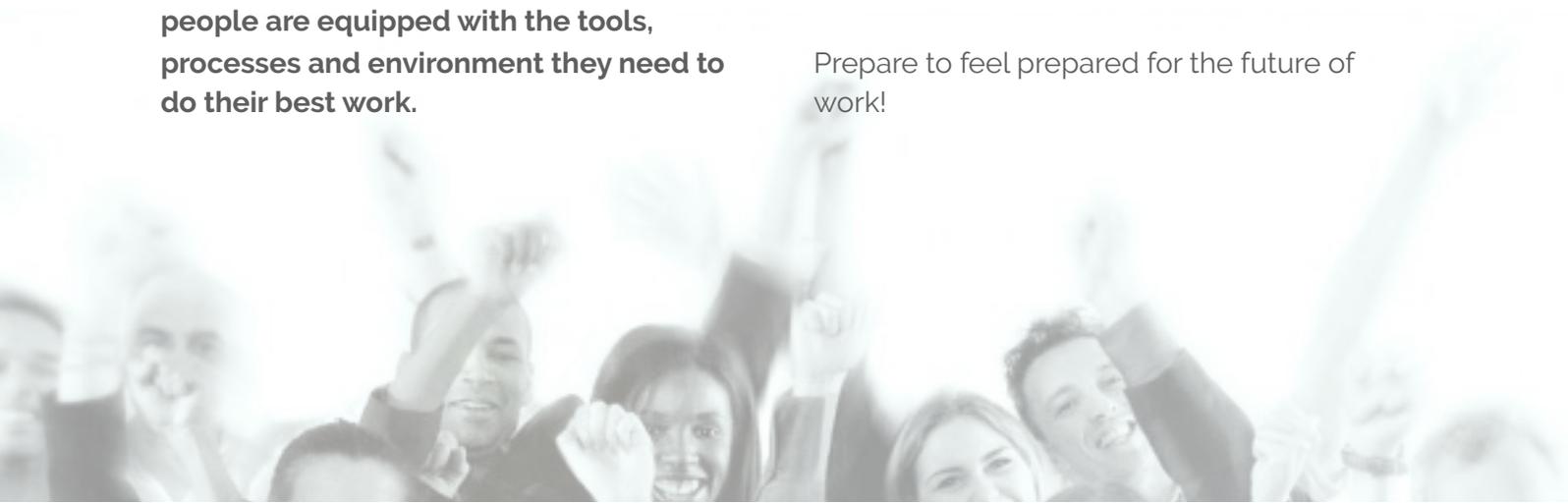
In 2019 and Beyond...

**We're entering a new era of continuous workplace transformation. Every CEO has their eye on the workplace trends that are disrupting business as usual. There's one thing these CEOs have in common: they're placing employee experience firmly at the top of their agenda. They understand that failure is not an option. It's essential that we take tangible steps towards creating a sustainable workplace of the future. A workplace where innovation and creativity can thrive. A workplace that will help us attract and retain the talent we need to achieve our goals. A workplace where our people are equipped with the tools, processes and environment they need to do their best work.**

As our heads spin with all the hyped-up capabilities being promised by AI, robotics, the internet of things and more... the question playing on every leader's mind is this: what exactly should I be paying attention to?

To help you figure out how to look beyond the hype and worm's eye view of emerging tech, here are some top trends underway that are likely to be impacting your organization right now. These workplace trends for 2019 are impacting not just Facilities and HR, but every business area.

Prepare to feel prepared for the future of work!



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## **Workplace trend #1 - Facilities management is moving out of the back office and into the boardroom; and collaborating closely with HR.**

As organizations create smart offices and adopt agile working practices, the role of Facilities is undergoing a major shift.

In the past, 'Facilities' conjured up images of health and safety procedures, office maintenance, cleaning and security. These elements of running an efficient, compliant workplace are still important, but a whole host of new responsibilities are falling on FMs as we welcome in a new era of Facilities Management. You might say Facilities Management is fast becoming Facilities Leadership.

"Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things." - Peter Drucker

Today's Facilities leader is more strategic than ever before, wielding enormous power to influence the productivity of our workforce and improve the employee experience.

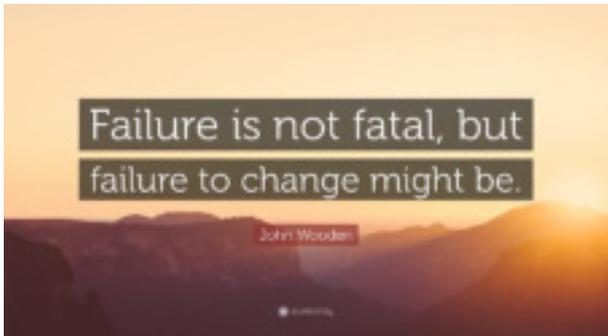
As we learn more about the way our working environment influences employee engagement and sows the seeds of collaboration, we discover it's vital to set a vision for Facilities that closely aligns with your organization's wider people strategy.

Facilities, for this reason, will be working more closely than ever with HR. A whopping 80% of global HR leaders foresee a greater HR ownership of the physical workspace, according to [research](#) by Unispace. This shift is driven by a greater need for cross-functional collaboration amongst teams and the need to accommodate headcount growth. The same study found that 68% of global HR leaders expect to be involved from the start of a workspace change project.



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Facilities Managers are no longer just doing the doing, but doing the thinking, behind workplace transformation.



## **Workplace trend #2 - HR and facilities managers are becoming employee experience (EX) designers.**

Our expectations around the value that Facilities can deliver are rising. Just as consumers expect better products, better service and a seamless (if not remarkable) customer experience from brands... people we hire expect an employee experience

with bells on. Jacob Morgan, author of [The Employee Experience Advantage](#), analyzed over 250 diverse organizations and discovered that companies who invest in employee experience are four times more profitable than those who don't, so it's little wonder we're considering it a source of competitive advantage.

HR and Facilities are stepping up to create an engaging employee experience that's worth telling your friends about. Suddenly HR and Facilities folks are becoming employee experience (EX) designers, borrowing skillsets and methodologies from app designers.

User experience design has come on leaps and bounds over the past decade. Consumers expect seamless, easy experiences when they use a product or access a service. Any bumps in the road and customers bail out and drop off. That's why UX designers have come up with a host of processes and tools to optimize the customer journey.



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Experience designers begin by researching their users to understand their goals and desires. Using these insights, they identify personas and explore scenarios that these personas find themselves in day-to-day. They then create an information architecture, to make it easy for users to navigate to the right place and achieve their goals. Finally they sketch and prototype a solution, before unleashing it on users to test what happens in the real world.

This agile 'test and learn' approach is a fundamental aspect of experience design.

Luckily, we don't need to reinvent any wheels when it comes to designing the workplace of the future. UX design, marketing, customer service and other externally-facing business areas have invested a fortune in understanding how to deliver engaging journeys and pull people through funnel stages by creating a compelling experience. Now we need to apply these customer lessons, processes and tools internally.

We need to identify and optimize every single employee touchpoint, online and offline, to create an engaging, energizing experience that helps us get, keep and grow talent.

All these demands are falling on Facilities and HR, under the pressure of tight budgets.

We aren't the first to face these challenges and constraints. Bootstrapped tech startups are particularly masterful when it comes to optimizing customer experience. They take a scientific approach, formulating hypotheses about who their customers are, what matters to them and how to deliver what they need. Then they rigorously test

these assumptions to validate or disprove them. There's a lot we can learn from lean startup methodologies.

Meanwhile, we can see organizations investing not just in their consumer-facing brand, but their employer brand. Apple, as always, is an extreme example: they're designing flagship offices that reflect their brand and provide an exceptional experience for employees, visitors and even online voyeurs. Apple Park, as a statement about the company's vision and values, is no less profound than their flagship retail stores.



*Apple Park, 1 Apple Park Way, Cupertino, California*

Apple's new \$5 billion campus runs entirely on renewable energy generated by solar panels and an 'on-site low carbon central plant'. Most employees will sit around large 18-foot round tables in open plan areas to improve collaboration. The beautifully landscaped campus boasts 7,000 trees, a 100,000 square foot fitness centre, 300,000 square foot R&D facilities, two miles of walking and running paths, an orchard, a meadow, a pond and 1,000 bikes.

Flagship offices rivalling flagship stores aren't the only parallel we're seeing between employee engagement and customer engagement. Retailers these days understand that there's more than one way

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for customers to interact with their brand. They've shifted from a small number of channels, to an 'omni-channel' approach, that integrates all the different methods of shopping available to consumers, from in-store, phone and email, to online and in-app. Lo and behold, employee experience is swiftly adopting an 'omni-channel' approach. Today's worker expects to use all the methods of working that are available these days. In other words, they want to work how, when, where and with whom they choose.

Just as marketers have faced increasing complexity in an omni-channel world, Facilities and HR now are beginning to face a similar challenge.

That's why Facilities and HR need to focus on up-skilling, in order to provide the experience that 21st century workers expect. For instance Facilities experts who are armed with design thinking skills are likely to thrive.

Creating a learning organization that commits time and resource to continuous

up-skilling is the only way to adapt to a fast-changing environment.

"It's not the strongest nor the most intelligent species that survives, it is the one that is most adaptable to change."

- Charles Darwin

### ***Workplace trend #3 - The open talent economy continues to thrive, as many organizations find that access to talent trumps ownership of talent.***

Startups like Uber and Airbnb have disrupted entire industries, changing the way we think about earning money from our resources, whether that be our time, skills, vehicles, or homes.

These disruptive forces are shaping a thriving gig economy. An economy that looks beyond the 9-5 job-for-life, to a more flexible, on-demand, work-from-anywhere approach to life.



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The numbers reveal the sheer extent of this shift. A [study](#) by Edelman Intelligence, commissioned by Upwork and Freelancers Union, surveyed 6,000 workers to analyze the size of the growing freelance economy and the major role freelancers play in the future of work. They found that over a third of today's US workforce is made up of freelancers. [Some experts](#) believe the gig economy will double by 2021. Already, half of millennials are currently freelancing, adopting a lifestyle that promises greater freedom at the expense of security. There's also a fair chance you're employing some of them.



The gig economy presents an enormous opportunity for organizations to access a global pool of talent, without the overhead of employees. Freelancers can jump in and out of projects, giving new levels of flexibility to organizations who might struggle to find the right people or have limited budget.

Yet this brave new world of temporary workers brings its own challenges. Freelancers are struggling with the psychological impact of remote working isolation and the stress of making rent without knowing where their next gig is coming from. It's little wonder that co-working spaces are booming, as people seek a sense of structure and community.

Organizations often aren't geared up for giving freelancers everything they need to do their best work - whether it be secure access to project files on-the-move, or desk space and equipment if they pop into the office.

New working practices are needed to help employees find the best freelance talent; and give them guidance throughout a project to ensure success. Recruiting and managing freelancers is unlikely to fall to HR, but to the people responsible for and working on specific projects. Again, the pressure is on to continuously up-skill in order to cope with the changing world of work.

Then there's the question of how engagement is impacted by looser networks of people getting things done. Will collaboration improve, or suffer? What about relationships?

Billings from freelancing sites like [Upwork](#), [Freelancer](#) and [Guru](#) grew 200% between 2016 and 2017. An interesting development is the increasing technical complexity of the tasks that these freelancers are taking on, from blockchain architecture and robotics, to ethical hacking and deep learning.

Meanwhile virtual assistants have become commonplace, with companies like [Time Etc.](#), [Worldwide101](#) and [MyTasker](#) helping individuals and companies increase their productivity. Tim Ferriss famously championed the use of VAs in his 2007 book [The Four Hour Workweek](#), promising to help individuals 'escape the 9-5, live anywhere and join the new rich' by outsourcing tasks to free up their time.

In reality, outsourcing your life, or your job, is no mean feat. There's no shortage of

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freelancers, just a shortage of great freelancers - the same challenge faced by all recruiters. Then there's the question of your company policy and whether it encourages or precludes the use of on-demand freelancers. You might remember the story of Bob, a software developer who made the news in 2013 by successfully outsourcing his entire job, freeing him up to watch cat videos on YouTube. Needless to say, Bob got fired. Should he have been promoted? Or put in charge of up-skilling his colleagues to help them utilise freelance talent (assuming they'd put their free time to better use than cat videos)?

The most innovative companies will find ways to leverage all the world's talent at their disposal, by striking a balance between employed and freelance workers. The utopia is that contract terms become irrelevant, as the focus falls clearly on finding the right people at the right time, regardless of how they choose to work. This is an essential dimension of the shift towards agile working practices.

Encouraging employees to outsource aspects of their job can free them up to focus on more cognitive, higher value tasks. Using virtual assistants to complete repetitive, time-consuming admin tasks, for instance, could bridge the gap as we try to implement AI solutions to automate more of our workloads.

What's more, there's an opportunity to taking a freelance-style approach internally within your organization. What if employees could search one-another's profiles and post projects, like an internal Upwork? Could this kind of platform bring greater agility to a full-time-employee workforce?

Facilities and HR leaders are racking their brains to come up with ways to improve agility and collaboration. The open talent economy presents both challenges and solutions. Just as open source software is less about a company owning a product and more about sharing the load of co-creating a product; open talent approaches are less about companies owning talent and more about sharing the load of co-creating on company projects.

A network of flexible, on-demand talent could herald in a new era where people are rewarded for delivering results, rather than clocking up time. A strict working hours policy can increase presenteeism. Yet on the flipside, freelancers are often stripped of the luxury of paid 'slack' time to chat with colleagues and spark new ideas; and time to learn new skills. All this relationship-building and self-education comes at a freelancer's own expense, in their 'spare' time.

It seems we're heading towards a high-autonomy Results Only Work Environment (ROWE). It's up to Facilities and HR to make sure that autonomous, results-based employees are given the space, time and resources they need to not only deliver results, but also improve themselves and their relationships.

### ***Workplace trend #4 - Wearables in the workplace are becoming ubiquitous, giving rise to privacy concerns.***

According to ABI Research, about 202 million wearable devices were given out by companies in 2016. This means about a third of companies are currently giving their

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people wearables. The figure is expected to reach 500 million by 2021.

Wearables are one example of internet of things devices in the workplace. Sensors on these devices can track where people go, their activities, hours worked and how much time they spend at their desks or in meetings.

What's more, they can monitor heart rate, sleep patterns, how much water you drink and other aspects of wellness.

As organizations focus more heavily on health and wellness, an important part of the employee experience, wearables are likely to become more popular.

Yet if we're tracking how many hours people are working, their movements around the office (and beyond) and potentially who stresses out whom during an interaction, you can see where debates around ethics and privacy arise.

It's essential that employers give their people clear guidelines about the collection and processing of personal data, so each individual understands exactly how it's being used and can choose to opt out.

***Workplace trend #5 - Design thinking is being applied internally to shape a more productive workplace and deliver a remarkable employee experience.***

Design thinking is a creative process used by designers to solve problems. It's particularly useful for 'wicked problems': those that are ill-defined or tricky, where the problem itself is often as unclear as the solution.

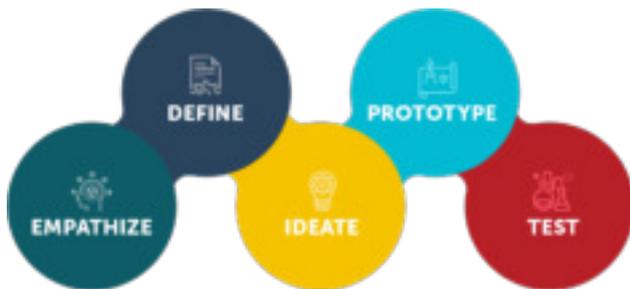
Design thinkers question assumptions, collaborate and build prototypes as early as possible to test ideas and get feedback. It's



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a practical, hands-on, action-orientated approach.

The old adage that organizations need to put people first can be turned into reality when design thinking is applied to the workplace.



The most successful leaders constantly question how they can enable their teams to do their best work, which often comes down to removing barriers that stand in their way.

Design thinking processes enable leaders to uncover ways to create the ideal conditions for their people, serving as a catalyst for culture change.

It's little wonder that one of the most in-demand leadership traits today is emotional intelligence (EQ). EQ is considered more important than IQ, because empathy enables leaders to deeply explore and understand the needs and desires of individuals: both customers and team members. This understanding is a vital part of the design thinking process. Leaders who work closely with their people to explore problems, refine concepts and play with prototypes, can add tremendous value to their organizations.

Facilities and HR will benefit significantly from adopting a design thinking approach, as they're faced with evermore complex

challenges in engaging and supporting a more agile, flexible workforce.

### ***Workplace trend #6 -***

**Organizations are adopting agile working practices to give employees more freedom, in a bid to improve creativity, innovation and engagement.**

The challenge is on for leaders to create lightweight, sustainable workplaces that adapt to fast-changing needs. Traditionally we've grown used to big office buildings set up for a fixed use, perhaps with cubicles, individual offices or an open plan layout.

The workplace of the future can't be so unwieldy. The penny has well and truly dropped that we need to cater for a wider range of preferences and encourage collaboration between diverse groups of people. That means flexible spaces that mix up different layouts. In other words, Activity Based Working (AWB): workplace design that optimizes the spaces for various tasks that employees are working on.

Providing a variety of spaces and services to employees on-demand, from anywhere, is becoming the new normal. Our people expect to be able to book meeting rooms, desks, equipment, catering and more, wherever they are, 24/7.

Agile working extends beyond the space itself, into the realms of workplace culture. It's about giving people freedom to choose where and when they work. It's a philosophy that focuses on results and giving individuals the flexibility they need to achieve them however they see fit.

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In an agile working environment you'll typically find ABW. For instance you might have a video conferencing room equipped with all the latest kit, a brainstorming area with beanbags and whiteboards, a cafe for informal meetings, a boardroom for formal meetings and some private offices or booths where people can make calls in peace. You can also cater for personal preferences, like standing desks.

The agile working philosophy hinges on allowing people greater autonomy than ever before. Dan Pink famously showed us that **autonomy** is one of three things that motivates humans, more so than money. The other two are **mastery** and **purpose**. Flexible working, where employees can choose to come in late and work late, or otherwise mix up their hours, is one way to increase autonomy. Working remotely is another, whether in public cafes, members' clubs, shared office spaces, or at home.

It's no coincidence that organizations are focusing heavily on **mastery** too: up-skilling, learning-by-doing, creating learning cultures... and **purpose**: clarity of vision, values, beliefs, the power of 'why' that Simon Sinek describes so eloquently...

The search is on for the optimum means of motivating our people to do the best work of their lives. All this while faced with a sharp rise in mental health problems that's costing the global economy \$1 trillion.

Autonomous, agile cultures rely on trust, so recruiting the right people and supporting

"Great companies don't hire skilled people and motivate them, they hire already motivated people and inspire them."  
- Simon Sinek

them with the tools and training they need to thrive is essential.

Agile working is a big pull for top talent and improves retention, as smart people expect more freedom than ever before. Get it right and you can create a highly engaged workforce, while reducing real estate costs and operating more sustainably. Studies show that organizations can bring down the need for office space by up to 30% by adopting agile working practices.

To make agile working succeed, organizations need to make sure the employee experience is seamless. Wherever and whenever people choose to work, they need secure access to files and the ability to book the spaces and things they need via the cloud.

In the main, it's not a technology challenge that work is facing today. It's a human, psychology challenge. The technology exists and is relatively straightforward to implement. Humans, on the other hand, are far trickier and slower to change. This kind of culture shift isn't such a big deal for startups and SMBs, but it's a tall order for larger organizations transitioning from a traditional set-up. Facilities and HR play an important part in steering the oil tanker.

Agile working is often confused with Activity Based Working (ABW). Agile working in the practice of increasing autonomy by enabling employees to work how, where and when they choose; whereas activity based working refers to the provision of different spaces in the workplace to enable this.

In an ABW environment, people don't have a fixed desk. Rather they hot-desk, choosing a desk each morning when they arrive at

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work, depending on what suits them that particular day. Some prefer office hoteling, where desks, rooms and other facilities can be booked in advance.

By applying design thinking, you can work out which activity based areas employees need, then come up with creative solutions to test out, such as some spaces that encourage deep, uninterrupted focus and others than encourage planned serendipity, where ideas are sparked and relationships formed through chance meetings.

An important consideration when designing a more agile workplace is understanding which platforms people should be able to book resources from, e.g. Outlook, touch screens, desk panels, meeting room displays and mobile apps (hint: it's an omni-channel world, so the answer is 'all of them'). Then there's the question of how you'll track data like utilization and no-shows (hint: ask us!).

**Workplace trend #7 - The use of chatbots will continue to surge as we replace static interfaces (e.g. web pages) with conversational**

## **interfaces; and strive to free up humans to perform less repetitive tasks**

Chatbots are the most common application of AI in the workplace right now, enabling employees and customers to have text-based conversations.

Chatbots are becoming the norm for providing customer support, answering prospects' pre-sales questions and performing market research. More recently they're being applied internally within organizations, to search data, answer HR questions and lots more. For example Overstock uses an HR chatbot called Mila. When employees are sick, they tell Mila. She'll say, 'I'm sorry to hear that,' exchange some details and send a message to the appropriate manager.

Any task that involves repeatedly answering the same questions or performing repetitive actions like sending a message or making a booking, lends itself perfectly to using a chatbot instead of a human. Research by BI Intelligence shows they're expected to save over \$79 million dollars in salary



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expenditures each year. People can get a bit freaked out by this kind of stat, worrying that the machines will take our jobs. In reality, more jobs will be created than destroyed, in the same way that personal computers gave birth to a whole host of new career paths.

Some chatbots use deep learning to improve over time. In the meantime these 'infant' bots are often error-prone and likely to chuck out catch-all responses like 'Sorry, I don't know how to respond to that yet,' if you go the tiniest bit off-piste.

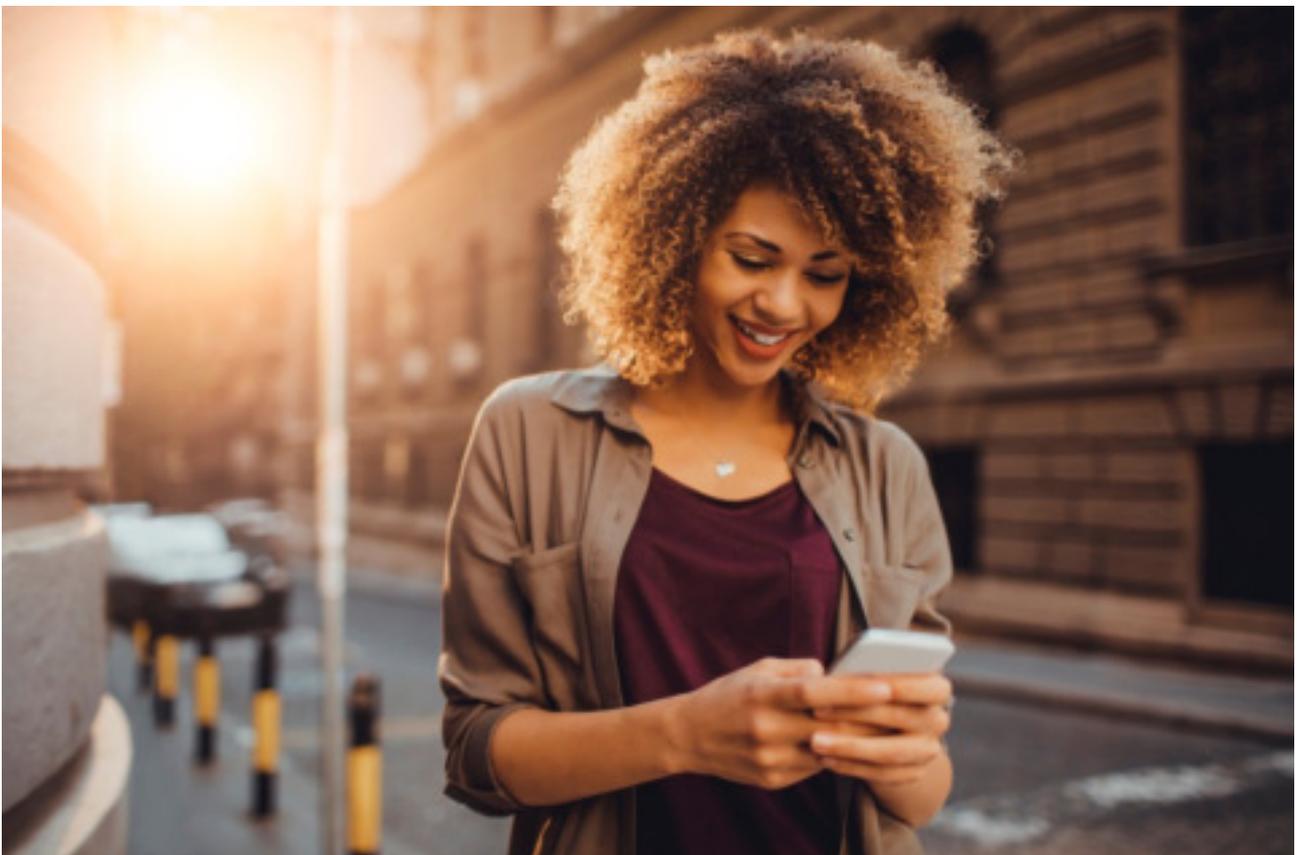
Others use scripted conversations, presenting the user with a narrower range of options. As deep learning improves, it'll become increasingly difficult to know you're chatting to a bot as opposed to a human.

The rise of chatbots is part of a wider shift towards technology becoming more human.

Whereas apps and websites have us clicking and tapping away to find the information we need, chatbots mimic a human interaction. The popularity of instant messaging through the likes of Facebook Messenger means chatbots offer a very natural, well-understood means of communicating with customers and employees.

Chatbots are part of another significant trend: the shift towards automation. As organizations are under ever-increasing pressure to do more with less, automating tasks that machines can perform more effectively than humans brings gob-smacking value.

But not to worry about mass unemployment: there are still lots of things that we humans do way better than machines...



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...for now...

But you might prefer to let your kids worry about that, depending on your age as you read this :)

**Workplace trend #8 - Some organizations will buck the agile and remote working trend, opting to increase face-to-face contact.**

In March 2017 IBM stopped their remote working policy and decided to bring their people back into the office, after internal research found that some of their teams are more effective and have better job satisfaction working in a co-located, agile environment.

Psychologist Susan Pinker wrote a whole book about the benefits of face-to-face contact, [The Village Effect](#). One of the studies she cites showed that just 15 minutes chatting and socializing with coworkers improved performance by 20%.

Surprisingly enough, a [global study](#) by Future Workplace and Randstad US, found that Gen Z and Millennials prefer face-to-face conversations over using technology; and 41% of Gen Zs said corporate offices are their preferred workplace.

Then there are productivity gains to be considered. [According to some researchers](#), a face-to-face request is 34 times more successful than email.

Another point to consider when weighing up face-to-face vs remote working is whether people have the opportunity to make friends at work without actually seeing one-another in the flesh. A [survey](#) by employee recognition company O.C. Tanner showed the importance of having friends at work. They found that 75% of employees who have a best friend at work are satisfied with their jobs, compared to 54% who don't.

Yet IBM's bold move still goes against most external research. Global Workplace Analytics looked at findings from over 4,000



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studies, concluding that when it comes to remote working, the number of upsides is double that of downsides. Employees who can work remotely are happier, more productive and are less likely to leave.

This demonstrates just how important it is to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to crafting your ideal workplace.

As people's expectations about what work should deliver for them rise, a flexible approach makes sense. Some workers will want to work at a head office, others will want to work remotely. The challenge lies in identifying who we need and how we can enable those people to do their best work.

So if you're in HR or Facilities, time to get your design thinking caps on and explore what's right for your organization.

***Workplace trend #9 -***  
**Organizations continue to adapt Internet of Things (IoT) technologies to workplaces and turn offices into smart buildings.**

A smart office uses technology to make the physical work environment intelligent, so it adapts to individual employees' needs. According to Gartner, 31% of organizations have already launched internet-of-things solutions.

Smart offices use sensors and

automation to control things like lighting and heating, to save energy bills and improve sustainability. These 'things', in an internet-of-things world, only come on when they're needed and are switched off when they're not. For instance moisture sensors could detect whether the irrigation system outside needs to automatically turn on to water the grass on a hot, dry day.

Smart devices can detect whether a room is being used and whether a video conference is underway - turning on equipment, opening and closing blinds, or ordering coffee as necessary.

This heralds a new era of Facilities Management, where facilities managers are no longer considered 'maintenance' people, but strategic players whose role is to support the wider company goals. They'll be challenged by the need to create a workplace that enables people to work more efficiently than ever before.

In that sense it's vital that Facilities' upskilling plans include a new awareness of IoT technologies and how they can create a



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more sustainable, user-friendly, optimized workplace.

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." - Alvin Toffler.

### **Workplace trend #10 - Organizations are recognizing the impact of employee burnout and are taking steps to reduce it.**

People are working longer hours than ever before - on average 47 hours per week, according to [Gallup](#). Staying connected to work out-of-hours, often via email, is making it more difficult to switch off.

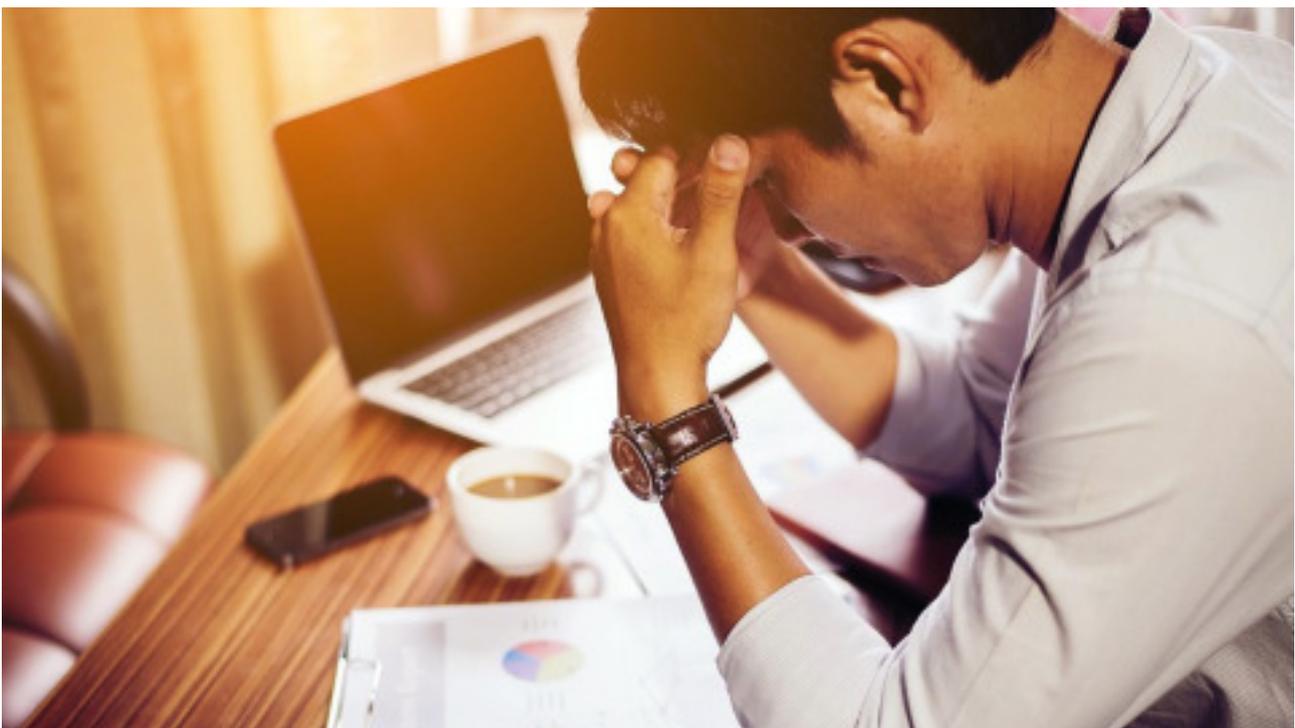
Kronos and Future Workplace ran a study that revealed burnout is the biggest threat to building an engaged workforce. 46% of HR leaders said it's responsible for 20-50% of annual employee turnover.

Researchers say burnout has three components:

- **Exhaustion** - leading to poor concentration, illness, sleep problems and getting upset more easily
- **Cynicism** - lacking engagement at work and feeling alienated from your colleagues
- **Inefficacy** - lack of belief in your ability to be effective at work, leading to poorer productivity

'Burnout results when the balance of deadlines, demands, working hours, and other stressors outstrips rewards, recognition, and relaxation,' says Alexandra Michel from the Association for Psychological Science.

[Research](#) from a team of psychological scientists at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden shows that burnout can cause premature thinning of the brain's frontal cortex and increase the risk of coronary heart disease.



The French government is taking this problem seriously. They've introduced legislation that gives workers 'the right to disconnect', in order to counteract today's 'always-on' work culture.

A 2017 [study](#) found that up to 300,000 Brits lose their jobs each year due to mental illness, while 15% have symptoms of existing mental health conditions. The estimated losses to the UK economy range from £74-£99 billion each year.

Most business areas have the potential to play a role in reducing the risk of employee burnout. For instance Facilities can remove stressors that waste time and cause frustration, by making it easy for people to access the spaces, equipment and services they need, wherever they are. Workspace design can also influence wellbeing. For instance open plan offices can increase

stress, so steps can be taken to provide more private areas if people need some time to concentrate without interruption or distraction. Meanwhile leaders across the board need to accept more responsibility than ever for protecting their teams against burnout, while taking care of their own wellbeing.

Wearable and other IoT devices will increasingly monitor various signals that indicate the potential for burnout, for example spotting when people are working for too many hours without breaks.

## Want to learn more about the future of work?

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Smartway2 is a SaaS platform that enables businesses to help their people, places and technology work better together.

The platform provides a powerful rules-based engine, combined with leading room and desk signage, to improve employees' interaction with their company facilities.

In addition, the solution delivers extensive workplace analytics that drive better space utilization.

Smartway2 enables users to book desks, meeting rooms, catering, equipment and other resources on-the-move; a capability that is vital to any organization that's striving to create a more agile workplace.

