



AuraTM

AURA GLOBAL TREND REPORT Future Workspaces

2022/2023

Contents

Introduction	3
Trend 1: The new role of IT	4-5
Trend 2: People-centric organisations	6-7
Trend 3: The post-COVID bounce-back	8-9
Trend 4: Creating culture with a dispersed workforce	10-13
Trend 5: Data-driven decision making	14-15

Introduction

The world as we know it has experienced a seismic shift in the past two years, particularly when it comes to work.

We’ve seen (and many of us have been part of) the biggest work-from-home experiment ever conducted; we have found new ways of ensuring business continuity, pivoted to new channels and new markets, and made about a decade’s worth of technology uptake progress within a matter of just a few months.

We’re now poised to capture the discrete gains made during this turbulent time – after all, with chaos comes the chance for innovation and reinvention. We have a golden opportunity to create a positive step-change. Much thought has been given to what the new way of working will look like for each organisation, and there are as many different incarnations as there are boardrooms across the country – which will be reimagined again over time, to match evolving needs and objectives.

Aura has been at the forefront of workspace reimagining since before the pandemic broke, and so has been well-placed to lead clients through the maelstrom of uncertainty, matching solutions to business need flexibly to ensure agility, resilience and sustainability in the most challenging of economic climates.



This paper outlines the five strongest global trends affecting the workspace as we shift from pandemic lockdown to whatever comes next.

We hope you find our insights interesting, informative and thought-provoking.

Trend 1:

The new role of IT

Whereas once the IT department simply facilitated the digital work being done in an organisation, these days the whole function is instrumental to any kind of organisational change.

Thanks to technology, work and the spaces in which it is done have been completely reimagined using latest cutting-edge technology, the CTO and CIO's seats at the boardroom table have never been more important.

Tech investment is certainly one of the drivers when it comes to competitive advantage, and companies are recognising this in their budgeting. According to [Gartner's 2022 CIO and Technology Executive Survey](#), CIOs expect IT budgets to grow 3.6% over the next year, which represents the fastest year-over-year growth rate in more than a decade. Automation, cloud, and as-a-service technology models are changing the way some business functions work, both reducing costs and creating added value in terms of increased sustainability and productivity, better security, and reduced human error, even creating additional revenue streams.

"Today's workforce demands a rich, seamless, integrated experience, and that's something only the IT function can deliver," explains Alpesh Unalkat, CEO at Aura. "A large proportion of people have been used to working from home for almost two years, so expectations of convenience and comfort have been raised." The onus is clearly on firms to provide tech-enabled workspaces which enable people to perform as well, if not better (for certain types of activity, such as creative collaboration, or learning), as they can from their own home.

“When everything becomes digital, technology becomes the core business and the CTO becomes as key as the CEO.”

Moises Nascimento, CTO, Banco Itaú*

*"The CTO Revelation: redefining responsibility, accelerating discovery" IBM, 2021



"IT has become a central function, because the new workspace has a layering of technologies that enable people to do their work wherever, in a frictionless way," explains Aura's Chief Operating Officer, Sajan Shivshanker. "When workers are at home, they expect to be able to access files and documents easily, just as they would at an HQ or regional hub. If they come into the office, there needs to be as much ease as possible, and clear benefits of being on-site too. Clever technology can remove niggles and time-consuming admin involved in on-site working, for example face-recognition software can offer a hands-free way of entering the building and signing in, while automatic temperature checks can take place in the same moment. There's also no longer a struggle to find a desk (it can be booked on a mobile app before you arrive), or look for specific cables – with today's office technology you can simply turn up, plug in, and get on with it."

The emphasis on continual tech investment is unlikely to recede; it's too integral to work, the workforce, and their workspaces. Not only will future generations of stakeholders only become more tech-savvy and demand the best and most up-to-date solutions in the workspace (being as all subsequent generations of customers and workers will be digital natives), but there is an increasing understanding that continual upgrading and improvement is a necessity for optimal business performance. It's not just a case of one-off purchases upgrading the technical estate, organisations need their tech investment to perform consistently well to support their objectives – workspace technology as a service (WTaaS) is designed with exactly this in mind, and looks set to become a very popular choice in terms of technology investment.

“In today's competitive climate there can be no room for technology investment that doesn't deliver excellent returns – which, given the rate at which both tech itself and the world are evolving, is difficult to avoid, as the cycle of obsolescence is shortened. WTaaS enables organisations to flexibly match business need over time, ensuring optimal utilization, all without an up-front cost.”

Stephen Todd, Chief Revenue Officer, Aura

Trend 2:

People-centric organisations

If there's a silver lining to come out of the pandemic's great 'work from home' experiment, it's that a shift has taken place in the way we view and treat our work colleagues.

We all felt a little more like we could relate to each other as human beings, having had a peek into each other's private worlds via Zoom or Teams meetings – including cats walking across keyboards, children gate-crashing to demand snacks, and the inevitable front-door-dash if a parcel was being delivered just at the wrong moment.

There was a shift in people's attitudes to work, too – whether it was because of the impending threat created by COVID, or getting used to the benefits of working from home, employees who didn't feel their employer was giving them what they needed voted with their feet, which became known as 'The Great Resignation'. The upshot of this is that some employers are now finding it less easy to secure and retain the top talent in their industry.

However, organisations are responding by putting their people's wellbeing front and centre of their business strategies. "Wellbeing was rising on the organizational agenda even before the COVID-19 pandemic," said Jen Fisher, Deloitte US chief wellbeing officer, in a [blog on the company's website](#). "In fact, wellbeing was the top-ranked trend for importance in our 2020 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends study, with 80% of our nearly 9,000 survey respondents identifying it as important or very important to their organization's success." It seems clear that businesses with this outlook stand to be more resilient and competitive in even the most challenging of economic climates.



“ Almost a third (29%) of workers are considering moving to a new job this year. ”

[Slack's State of Work Report, February 2022](#)

“People are at the heart of what any organisation does,” says Alpesh Unalkat, CEO at Aura. “If you miss the opportunity to harness individual motivation and talent, then the organisation simply won't achieve its full potential. Each piece of technology that makes an employee's life easier is a nudge closer to overall success in whatever objective has been identified. Remove the friction from the working day through the use of noise cancelling spaces, smart lockers, easy to use AV and print, and touchless products, and you will find that people are in a much better place to drive forward with productivity, innovation and performance.”

It's not just about putting employees first – to protect an organisation's brain trust, improve productivity and profitability, and of course do the right thing – but being customer-centric also pays dividends.

“ For years, executives have experimented with different metrics, such as employee satisfaction or engagement, to understand their employees. In 2022, organisations will add in new measures that assess their mental, physical, and financial health. ”

[‘11 trends that will shape work in 2022 and beyond’](#), by B. Kropp and E.R. McRae, Harvard Business Review, January 2022

Trend 3:

The post-COVID bounce-back

After more than two years of mostly remote working, many people are champing at the bit to be back in the office.

Perhaps they miss those ‘watercooler moments’ with colleagues, are looking forward to a working day without family-related interruptions, or possibly they’re keen to recapture the energy and productivity of working collaboratively in person. Either way, the physical office is going to be a key focus for many companies in 2022, even though its size, look and functionality may well be quite different to pre-pandemic norms.

One of the aspects that many workers are craving is the in-person interaction with their teams. It’s considered one of the ways in which we find fulfilment in our work: a [2018 survey by WeWork and Ipsos](#) found that nearly 70% of those who describe themselves as satisfied with their job indicated that they collaborated with people outside their office at least once or twice a week, while more than half of all happy employees collaborated with five or more people at their office on any given day.

“Ten years ago the impact of the pandemic on our economy would have been much worse; we simply wouldn’t have been able to weather the storm in the same way because we wouldn’t have had the technology. Tech is playing a key part in the bounce-back, and both innovation and adoption have accelerated beyond what anybody could have imagined a few years ago.”

Alpesh Unalkat, CEO at Aura

This pull factor gives people a reason to pick up their commute again, even if just for one or two days a week – but what organisations need to ensure is that this benefit of



in-person attendance at a place of work isn’t eclipsed by any drawbacks. “The home office experience has typically raised expectations. There’s nothing more frustrating than making the effort to travel into the office only to find you have less functionality when you get there,” explains Tom Scott, Chief Technology Officer at Aura. “There’s also no point adding a commute to your day, then simply sitting at your hot desk working on Teams in the same way you would at home. The physical workspace must support the way that people want to work together, collaborating and sharing ideas, as well as the way people want to learn and grow. It’s also important that it creates spaces for accidental meetings, cross-function socialising, and other informal interactions.”

“People miss people the most. There’s a credible value to real life in-person contact.”

Liz Burow, Vice President of Workplace Strategy, WeWork

Many organisations are looking to redesign their office locations to better suit hybrid working patterns, and in many cases to consolidate their square footage in order to reduce real estate costs – with the majority choosing the hybrid working model, there’s no need for the whole staff to have dedicated desks.

A notable number of companies are also reimagining their spaces with the specific objective of tempting workers back to the office – hotel-style interiors, yoga classes, gym facilities, and free food are just some of the perks being built in alongside a variety of different bookable workspaces to suit all kinds of collaboration and deep-focus needs. After the comforts of home, and the autonomy that comes with that, office spaces are having to raise their game in order to boost occupancy rates – taking inspiration from the hospitality industry helps to create spaces that people really want to come to.

“The informal air that an office environment brings is often integral to business growth, as well as the personal growth of employees. What could start as an informal chat can easily find its way to a developed, intelligent idea, which now doesn’t happen with such ease. Zoom calls and team meetings with rigid agendas don’t mimic this natural brilliance that can often happen in person.”

Octavius Black, co-founder and CEO, MindGym

Trend 4:

Creating culture with a dispersed workforce

Many companies have opted for a form of hybrid working, which can make culture and belonging a challenge.

Workspace technology can help bridge the gap, although fresh thinking is required to reimagine how culture works with a dispersed workforce (answer: more deliberately).

The platforms and processes employed when working from home must be the same when working from an office location. This not only ensures a frictionless and consistent experience for the hybrid worker, but ensures better equity across the workforce. For example, internal communications tools such as apps should be used to push information out to different groups of workers at the same time, while hybrid meetings can be made more human – and therefore more effective – by using video conferencing facilities which show every participant in the same format, whether they are in the room or remote.

Internal communications departments have also never been busier or more business critical. They are instrumental to embedding the new hybrid working model across the organisation, supporting the evolution of inter-company relationships and culture, as well as encouraging employee engagement, which is key to both performance and retention. There should be as much emphasis on inviting feedback and opinion as there is on broadcasting company news and policy, as well as creating opportunities for colleagues to get to know one another.



“Employees that work hybrid or remotely have fewer friends at work and thus weaker social and emotional connections with their co-workers. These weaker connections make it easier for employees to quit their job by reducing the social pressure that can encourage employees to stay longer.”

‘11 trends that will shape work in 2022 and beyond’, by B. Kropp and E.R. McRae., Harvard Business Review, January 2022

Defining the office as a centre of training and collaboration is another way to engage employees generate positive relationships within and across teams. Hybrid working policies have upended traditional notions of culture, so a conscious effort to reimagine the ‘why’ of attending the office is required. Going in for the sake of going in is no longer the norm, it’s a case of incentivizing people to visit the office for a specific purpose – one that cannot be undertaken remotely – and pull together towards a specific outcome, whether that’s to collaborate within their teams, or build relationships across them.

“The office experience needs to be more immersive and appealing than ever before, to foster connections, and to build culture,” explains Alpesh Unalkat, CEO at Aura. “Tech-enabled environments are more human and engaging than ever before, for example, we are looking into a solution for a client which is effectively a permanent ‘window’ between their London and New York offices, where it’s possible to just walk up to the screen and talk to a colleague halfway across the world. But there’s a richness to in-person interactions that can’t be replicated, so designing offices to tempt people back on site for certain types of work, collaboration, relationship-building, and on-the-job learning both formal and by osmosis, is a way of creating a balanced, effective hybrid model.”

“ *When we think about culture, we think about a common set of behaviours, plus the underlying mindsets that shape how people work and interact day to day. What we see in the data is compelling: companies with healthy cultures have three times greater total returns to shareholders.* ”

Brooke Weddle, 'Culture in the hybrid workplace',
Mckinsey.com, June 2021

A recent article in the [Harvard Business Review](#) even predicted that, while more than 90% of employers are planning hybrid working, it may well be that “numerous high-profile companies that change course and demand that employees return, full time, to the office.” One of the reasons given was a perceived loss of organisational culture.

This process must play out organically, however. Organisations which mandate a hard return to the office risk increasing staff turnover, and could in fact discover that the challenges they felt were due to remote working were actually due to other factors.

“Things will never go back to how they were pre-COVID,” says Tom Scott, Chief Technology Officer at Aura. “But I think we will eventually get closer than people currently think will be the case. There’s so much benefit in building in-person relationships, those informal interactions can be more valuable than people think, and it’s the best way to start working across siloes to innovate and drive progress.”

“ *45% of executives felt the most important action they are taking or will take to transform work is building an organisational culture that celebrates growth, adaptability and resilience.* ”

The 2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends survey



Trend 5:

Data-driven decision making

The introduction of more technology in day-to-day work offers something that previous generations of business leaders simply haven't had: access to quantitative data.

This wealth of granular information is indispensable when it comes to making decisions about workspaces, both in terms of technology and in terms of real estate, and used in tandem with qualitative research it's possible to make optimal decisions about the reimagining of workspaces as we come out of the pandemic and into a new era.

“83% of respondents plan to incorporate — or have already incorporated — utilisation methodologies in their space planning.”

[CBRE, Global Occupancy Insights 2021-2022](#)

“We can now tell at a glance how much time people are spending online, using their email, collaborating with others, or having meetings, whether they're remote or in the office,” says Sajan Shivshanker, Aura's Chief Operating Officer. “Using this information in conjunction with workspace utilisation data, we can not only find out how workspaces impact on the work that is done, and the wellbeing of the workers, but we can start to articulate what the next iteration of workspace technology and design must look like.”

This iterative approach to post-COVID working models and workspace design is something that loomed large in the 2021 panel discussion organised by the University of Leeds Workplace Behavioural Research Centre – as part of their [‘Adapting Offices for the Future of Work’](#) research (funded by the UKRI Economic and Social Research Council). With as many versions of hybrid working policies as there are organisational types and cultures, there was consensus over the fact that the post-COVID work environment would be fluid and constantly evolving. Policies must keep pace with both employee attitudes and technology development, and be constantly measured and reviewed to inform how workspaces are tweaked to optimally fulfil business objectives.

“Agility is key. How people work will change over time, so behavioural data is central to making sure that needs can be tracked accurately. Are people being as productive? Can they book rooms, desks and parking without trouble if they need to? Is the balance of differently sized meeting rooms correct, or are there too many larger spaces, which are frequently being booked by small groups?”

Tom Scott, Chief Technology Officer at Aura

With so much information available, the knack is to drill down into the data required to inform very specific decisions about space and technology utilisation. Different functions within the business will need different information: FMs might want to know about desk and room utilisation to inform an efficient cleaning schedule, while the IT department will make decisions about tech expenditure based on who is using what and how. The C-suite will be looking to make decisions about company policies and real estate based on employee activity. Employees themselves find the data gathered by the ‘smart office’ useful in making decisions on a more personal level: can they book a meeting room for their planned collaboration with colleagues, and are there any parking spaces available?

The Aura solution

Aura is the only workspace specialist in the market to provide a complete end-to-end, integrated service, ensuring maximum benefit in the outcomes delivered, with minimum hassle. We take care of the entire workspace transformation project to enable all stakeholders, from the executive board right down to the organisation's newest juniors, to focus on their own roles and deliverables, throughout the change process. Our holistic approach means that all our consultation is done with execution in mind – we know we will be the ones who need to deliver on our promises.



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REIMAGINING WORKSPACE
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