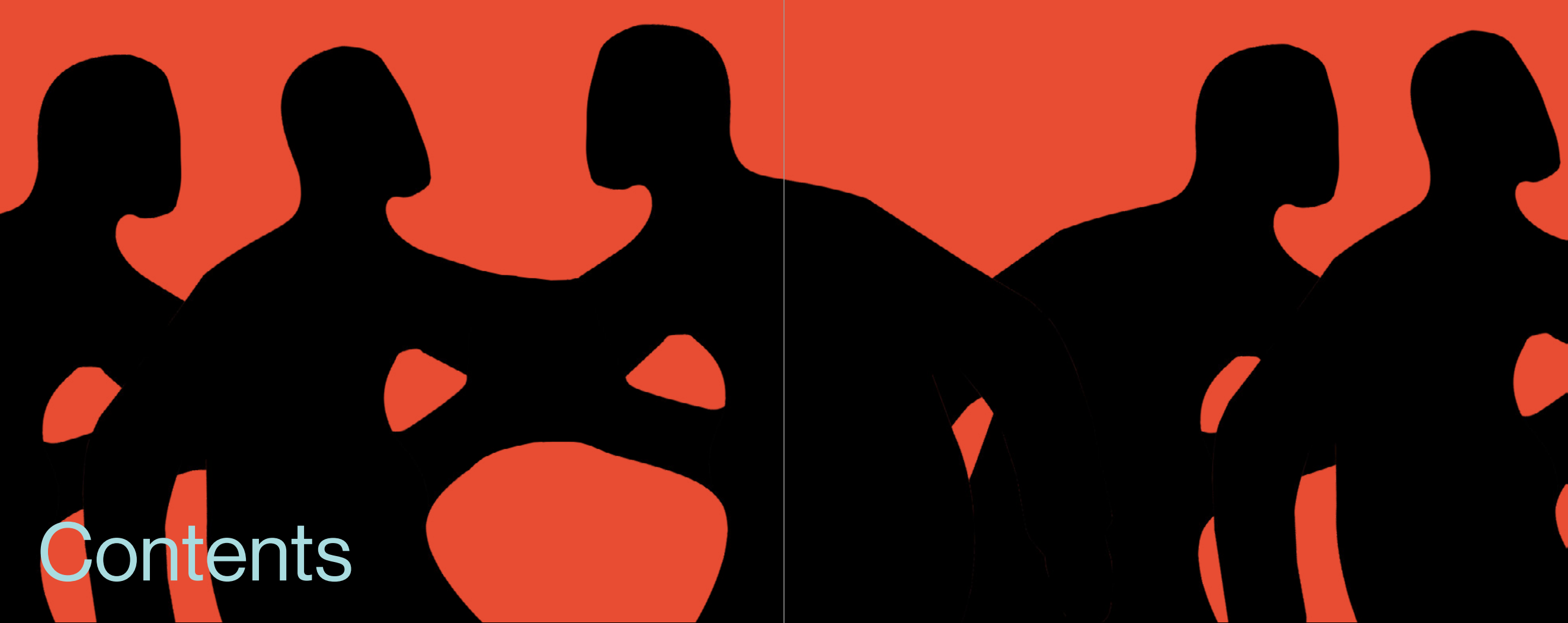


The Occupier



SOCIAL VALUE
OF THE OFFICE

The background of the top half of the page features silhouettes of several people sitting around a table, engaged in a meeting. The silhouettes are black, and the table and chairs are represented by red shapes. The overall background is a solid red color.

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The Return-to-Office Reset: A Reality Check for 2025

Shaun Dawson, Head of Insights, Devono

At the start of 2025, Devono's Insights team predicted that it would be the year businesses "hit the reset button" on remote work. Office attendance was climbing, leaders were getting tougher, and hybrid working policies needed recalibrating. Now, nine months on, the reset is real, but it's proving far more uneven, and at times contentious, than many will have expected.

The Gap Between Aspiration and Reality

Average UK office occupancy has hit its highest level since the pandemic. Data from Remit Consulting reports that weekly office occupancy reached close to 40% in the summer, a huge leap from the 14% we saw in 2021. That sounds like progress, yet delving deeper the story is less linear.

Nearly half of UK businesses now expect staff to be on-site at all times, according to the British Chambers of Commerce, up from just 27% two years ago. In practice though, enforcement is messy. One in ten companies that tightened attendance rules last year have already seen resignations. Push too hard, and you risk hemorrhaging talent.

Sectoral variation is stark. Manufacturers and consumer-facing businesses are more likely to demand full-time presence, while professional services and tech firms continue to operate structured hybrid. Even in the City of London, firms mandating four or five days have faced backlash. For many, three days in the office has become the pragmatic middle ground: enough for culture and collaboration, without fuelling a retention crisis.

The Generational Balancing Act

Back at the start of 2025, we suggested that generational preferences would be central to the reset. That's been borne out, with nuance. Gen Z workers are in the office more than any other group, averaging just over three days a week. They value in-person mentoring, networking, and simply escaping the home setting. Yet they are also vocal about the need for flexibility. Older generations, meanwhile, often prize hybrid working to balance caring responsibilities or avoid long commutes.

Business leaders face the challenge of bringing these groups together. Offices can't just be places to sit at a desk; they must be spaces for learning, collaboration, and culture. That means managers need to use office days deliberately: planning workshops, providing opportunities for shadowing, and facilitating social moments that make the commute worthwhile. Otherwise, time in the office risks being spent on Zoom calls - hardly the reset anyone asked for.



Real Estate Realities

Many firms are now confronting the consequences of pandemic-era downsizing. CBRE's latest survey shows one in five occupiers are looking to expand again, often because they over-contracted or underestimated the pace with which they would return to the office. In London, the volume of available prime quality office space is increasingly being squeezed as demand increases, with an undersupply of high-quality stock a mounting concern in certain areas.

Carrot, stick or both?

The big question for 2026 is how to balance incentives and enforcement. Some employers are luring staff back with perks: gyms, nail bars, rooftop yoga, even on-site nurseries. Others are tracking pass swipes and WiFi logins, with non-compliance hitting bonuses. Both strategies carry risk. Incentives without substance become gimmicks, and monitoring without trust breeds resentment.

This is forcing businesses to get creative. Some banks are turning to co-working hubs to absorb overflow. Others are reconfiguring layouts, ripping out rows of desks in favour of social space, pods and collaboration zones. The reset isn't only cultural; it's spatial. And if we're honest, it's expensive. In response, businesses need agility in their workplace strategies: flexible leases, scalable footprints, and data to match firms' requirements.

The office should be magnetic, not coercive. Employees don't need bribes or punishments if they genuinely see the value in being there. That value is not just in their productivity; instead it is the social value of the office that needs to sing and be factored into requirements for improving current spaces or rank high on the list for a new space search.

The Way Forward

So, what should we take from this messy reset?

- **Explain the why.** If people understand the business need, whether culture, client outcomes, or innovation, they're more likely to come with you.
- **Design for magnetism.** Make the office worth the commute through quality, functionality, and experience.
- **Stay agile.** Don't lock into rigid policies or inflexible footprints.
- **Protect wellbeing.** Mandates can't come at the expense of trust or mental health.

The reset isn't about dragging people back to 2019. It's about defining the role of the office in 2025 and beyond: as a place where people want to connect, collaborate, and grow. Done right, this is an opportunity to rebuild culture and performance. Done wrong, it risks becoming a revolt.



Social Value in The Workplace: Why Leaders Can't Afford To Ignore It

Mark James, Research Analyst, Devono



In today's business landscape, value is no longer measured by profit alone. Customers, employees, and investors are all scrutinising organisations through a wider lens, expecting them to demonstrate responsibility towards

people, communities, and the planet. This is where social value comes in. More than a buzzword, it is fast becoming a differentiator in winning clients, attracting top talent, and meeting regulatory requirements.

What is Social Value?

Social value refers to the benefit that a business's operations have beyond its core function. This broadly encompasses the way that a business positively influences three areas: its own people, the wider community, and the environment.

For business leaders, the office is one of the most tangible and influential tools to deliver this value. Far from being a cost centre, the workplace can, and should, be a strategic asset for social value creation.

The Worker: Health & Wellbeing

Much has been made of how providing a balance between the home and the office can be beneficial for worker wellbeing, with particular attention being given to how an office offers workers the opportunity to socialise with colleagues while also providing a change of environment to the home.

However, it is not enough to simply provide an office for workers to use for part of their week. In order to truly deliver on social value, employers must offer an office that provides a healthy environment. All spaces are not created equal in this case, with the worst spaces on the market often lacking natural light and air flow.

Forward-looking leaders prioritise Grade A and prime secondhand spaces equipped with technology that monitors air quality, lighting, and comfort. Investing here isn't a perk; it's a tangible way to create social value while boosting workforce performance and satisfaction.

The Community: Supporting the Local Economy

Offices play a critical role in sustaining the communities around them. Regular footfall supports retailers, cafes, and service providers, which in turn strengthens local economic ecosystems. Post-pandemic shifts to remote work have

revealed just how dependent local businesses are on office activity.

By committing to an office in a central location, retaining a regular office presence and encouraging workers to engage with the local amenities offering either formally via organised socials or informally through providing vouchers, businesses will generate social value by making a positive contribution to their local community.

The Environment: A Sustainability Asset

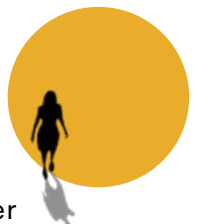
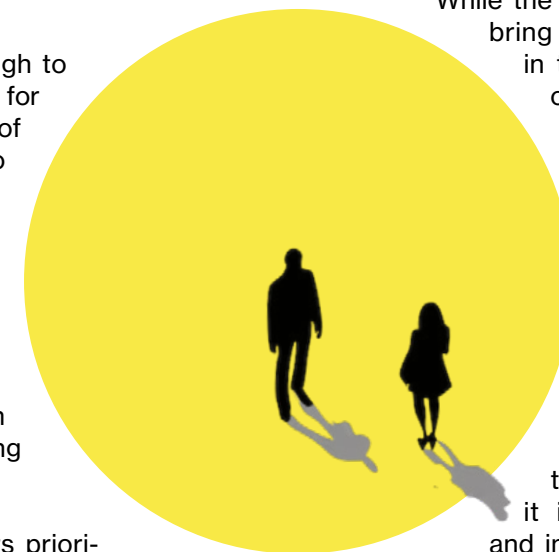
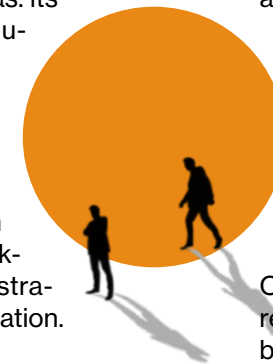
Offices also offer significant opportunities to reduce environmental impact. Beyond meeting basic EPC or regulatory requirements, forward-thinking companies select spaces that actively lower carbon emissions. Automated lighting and HVAC systems, energy-efficient design, and green infrastructure such as living walls or terraces can all reduce environmental footprints while reinforcing a company's commitment to sustainability.

While the pressure is on landlords to bring the worst quality spaces in the market up to standard, occupiers can look beyond simply meeting the bare minimum sustainability requirements and more towards using the office for social value creation.

The Office: A Vehicle for Change

For forward-looking businesses, the office is more than just square footage, it is a vehicle for influence and impact. The way a company designs, locates, and operates its workplace can directly shape employee health, community vibrancy, and environmental outcomes.

As ESG reporting, government procurement frameworks, and stakeholder expectations evolve, social value is no longer optional - it's becoming a license to operate. Leaders who actively embed social value into their workplace strategy will not only future-proof their organisations but also gain a competitive edge in attracting clients, partners, and talent.

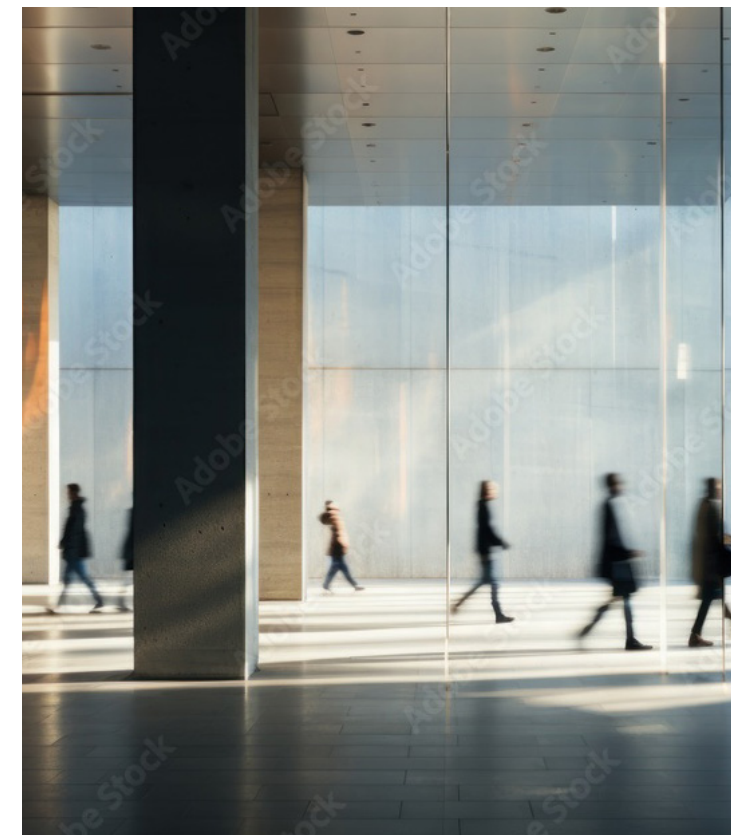


How Social Value Turns Commercial Occupiers into Community Partners

Guy Battle, CEO, Social Value Portal

As investors, landlords, and the public shift their focus towards sustainability and social outcomes, commercial occupiers are facing a new question: not just “Where are we based?”, but “What difference are we making here?”

In this article, I explore how Social Value can help you answer that question – and unlock a more impactful, sustainable, and commercially effective workplace strategy.



What is Social Value, and why should it matter to occupiers?

At its heart, Social Value is about using your business levers (your people, space, supply chain) to generate outcomes that improve lives and support communities.

But it's not just about ‘doing the right thing’ – there's a clear business case:

- **Landlords and local authorities** favour tenants that can help them meet their own Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) targets.
- **Employees** are drawn to value-led workplaces. A 2022 UK survey by EY Lane4 found that 3/4 of Gen Z workers would leave their jobs for more purposeful ones.
- **Investors** are trending toward impact investment. In a recent webinar, Eoin Leonard, CEO and Founder of Catalyst, told us “In the past these things were seen as “nice-to-have”, but now we're seeing that they have real financial implications in terms of valuations.”
- **Communities** have lost trust in the real estate system. Social Value Portal research shows that only 16% of respondents trust developers and planning – occupiers that rebuild trust will gain a powerful edge in terms of retention and local recruitment.

Measuring Social Value: Introducing the TOM System™

One of the most common questions we hear is: "How do we measure Social Value?"

That's where the Social Value TOM System™ comes in. It provides a consistent, credible framework for planning, delivering and reporting Social Value, built around three core components:

- **Themes:** The broad areas you want to prioritise
- **Outcomes:** The change your business wants to create
- **Measures:** The actions it will take and measure

Commercial occupiers use the TOM System to align Social Value delivery with core business priorities, while capturing contributions from across departments and reporting impact credibly and consistently.



Six Steps for Commercial Occupiers to Embed Social Value

To make a success of Social Value, occupiers need a structured, place-based approach.

Here are six steps to help you get started:

1. **Understand local priorities:** Conduct a [Local Needs Analysis](#) to identify key issues in your community.
2. **Create a place-based Social Value strategy:** Build a strategy that connects local needs with your organisation's unique capabilities. Consider people, supply chains, environmental footprint, and partnerships as a starting point.
3. **Choose your measurement framework:** Adopt a measurement framework, such as the TOM System, to structure and measure your efforts consistently.
4. **Build your capacity and coordinate internally:** Social Value isn't the job of a single team. Build knowledge and bring together all your teams to align delivery and avoid fragmentation and duplication.
5. **Track and report in one place:** Ensure you have a single source of truth to monitor progress, manage data, and report, like [Social Value Portal](#).
6. **Collaborate for greater impact:** Partner with landlords, local authorities, and neighbouring occupiers to amplify your efforts.

Together, these steps can help occupiers shift from a passive presence to valued members of the community, with all the business benefits this entails.

Social Value Portal: www.socialvalueportal.com

Social Value Portal is a UK-based B-Corp and social enterprise dedicated to helping organisations measure, manage, report and maximise the real social, economic and environmental value they deliver. Through their TOM system, tools and expert insight, they bring rigour and transparency to social value, enabling both public and private sector bodies to embed impact into procurement, operations and supply chains, ensuring efforts don't just look good on paper, but make a genuine difference in communities.

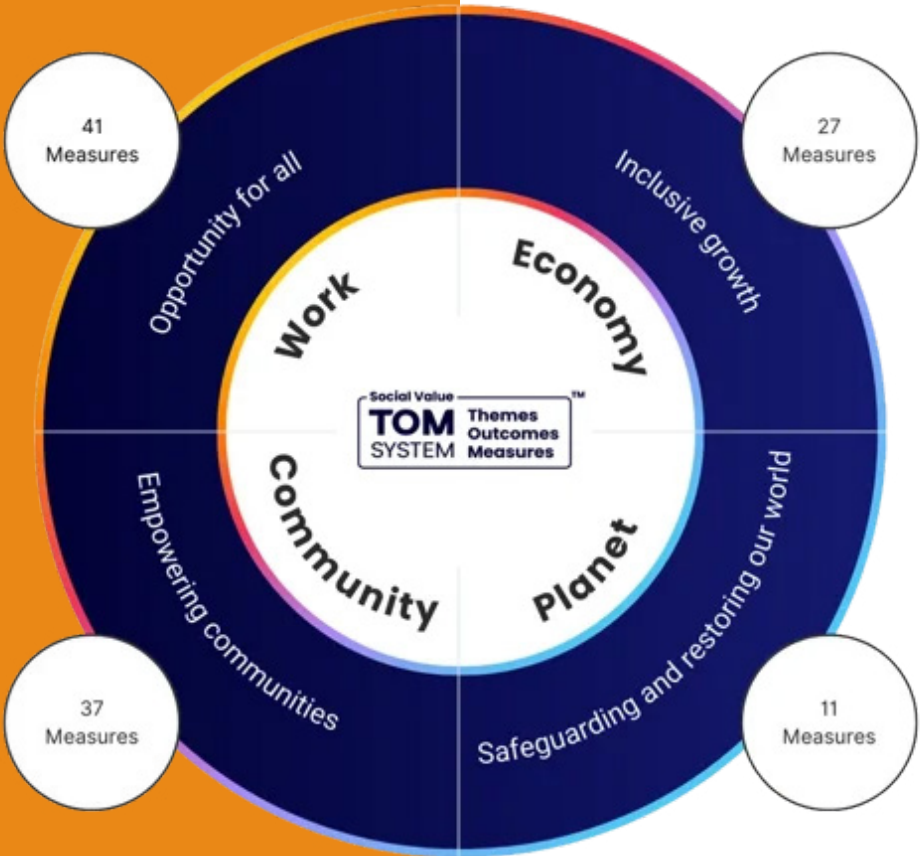
What Good Looks Like: Delivering Social Value in Practice

Some of the most powerful ways to deliver Social Value are embedded in what you already do. Think about how you hire, who you contract with, and how you use your space.

Examples might include:

- Recruiting and training local people, especially from underrepresented groups.
- Procuring from local small businesses or social enterprises.
- Designing workspaces for accessibility, inclusion, and wellbeing.
- Supporting employees to volunteer, mentor or donate time and skills.
- Sharing space with community groups, charities, or social projects.
- Reducing emissions and waste.
- Contributing schools and university curriculums.

You don't need to do everything. Focus on what's relevant to local needs and aligned with your business's strengths.



Beyond Mandates:

Making the Office Matter Again

Sally Pritchett, Co-Founder & CEO, Something Big

The office is more than a soulless room full of empty desks. Although for some organisations, struggling to nail their return to office approach, you might be forgiven for thinking that. Instead, the office can be a hub of culture, collaboration and human connection leading teams through complex change with perfect synchronicity. If that sounds like a fantasy, read on to find out how.

Something **Big**





Mandate Misstep

There's no doubt that office culture has been turbulent in the wake of the pandemic and forced lockdowns. After a period seeking a 'new norm', life for many organisations settled into a culture of silo working with teams enjoying the benefits of their own homes over office-based work and turning offices into vast echoey rows of empty desks.

The obvious solution, for some organisations, was to issue the mandated return to the office policy. A misstep that disappointed both employees, who had structured their lives, (childcare, pets, car ownership and finances) around less commuting as well as leaders who instead of seeing the culture and productivity boost they expected saw a reduction in discretionary effort, talent retention and took a dent to their culture.

The problem though, wasn't the office itself. Like many critical historical moments, hindsight clearly shows the story was right but badly told. It's true, the office is not dead, and most organisations do still benefit from office-based work. Mandating the return and day counting though was not the way to communicate the change.

As a communications expert with a couple of decades of employee comms and workplace culture experience behind me, here's how I would have done it differently.

Get set up for success

For the best culture results, the foundational work is vital. Tune into what employees are feeling, acknowledge their challenges and work together to overcome them. From pet care to commute times and school drop offs, the key is to engage in dialogue over monologue. Converting top-down, tone deaf communication into purposeful conversation gives a better result in the long run. Make intentional concessions that demonstrate you've heard, from making offices pet-friendly to enabling flexible start times.

“Tune into what employees are feeling, acknowledge their challenges and work together to overcome them.”

Maintaining trust is also critical to fostering a positive workplace culture. But it's fragile and under pressure with trust in leadership at an all-time low. The Dutch proverb 'Trust comes in on foot and leaves on horseback' is a great reminder that the trust that was built through the pandemic was so quickly lost with a single back-to-the-office mandate, seemingly valuing a culture of presenteeism over productivity.

“Trust comes in on foot and leaves on horseback.”

Organisations now need to rebuild that trust by demonstrating they're not anti WFH, in fact they acknowledge the benefits that solo working brings in focus, flexibility and wellbeing. Whilst balancing this with the opportunities that the office also brings. This is not about framing the office as a place people must go but creating an environment that enables and encourages collaboration and purposeful coworking.





The real reason we need offices

What many RTO mandates overlooked was the deeper story of what organisations and teams were truly missing.

When people come together, work moves faster and with greater nuance. Proximity fuels not only productivity, but also belonging, momentum, and a shared rhythm. For younger or newer employees, in-person moments provide invisible lessons they don't even realise they're missing at home. For leaders, they create vital pulse points, opportunities to sense what's really happening within their teams.

In the rush to reverse the work-from-home slide, many organisations couldn't quite articulate what was lost, only feeling something wasn't right.

Here's what I believe organisations are really missing:

- **Proximity leadership & role modelling:** Leaders who work closely with their teams boost satisfaction and productivity. Being visible in the office allows them to model behaviours and values, like innovation and inclusion, that employees can mirror.
- **Faster, synchronised decision-making:** In-person meetings cut through long approval cycles and decision paralysis, enabling more nuanced conversations, quicker problem-solving, and spontaneous collaboration.
- **Belonging and informal connection:** Offices foster shared experiences and casual interactions, like coffee chats, that combat workplace loneliness and strengthen relationships.
- **Learning through osmosis:** Less experienced staff gain invaluable, unstructured learning by observing colleagues and navigating workplace dynamics. In-person presence bridges generational gaps and reduces friction.
- **Momentum in complex, changing environments:** With most firms in transformation, change fatigue is rising. Closer working strengthens relationships, collaboration, and resilience, helping teams adapt together.

Positioning the office with purpose

Offices aren't for doing emails or trekking long commutes simply to sit in virtual meetings with colleagues working from home. They're for doing what matters.

“Offices aren't for doing emails... they are for doing what matters.”

To create a culture that values togetherness, organisations need to be clearer about what activities benefit most from in-person presence.

Lockdowns may have shown us what was possible virtually, but we also know that some conversations aren't about efficiency and require more nuance.

“Inspire your team to come in, rather than force them back.”

To inspire teams into the office, it's important to emphasize the importance of psychological safety. When we want employees to speak up, solve trickier problems, innovate, share honest feedback, push themselves beyond their comfort zones or simply learn new skills. From onboarding to check-ins, conflict resolution and coaching to ideation and innovation – there are times when in-person wins. These are the moments that make offices worth the commute, the soft stuff that drive the hardest results. But these moments need to be designed not just forced into the diary with in-office day counting.

The real opportunity now lies not in returning to an outdated model of the office but to redesign how we use office space to support the moments that matter most. The office, at its best, is a platform for relationships, resilience and rhythm. But that's only a reality if we shift the narrative from mandated presence to meaningful presence.



Something Big <https://somethingbig.co.uk/>

Supporting organisations harness the power of communication to build fairer, healthier and happier workplaces.

Aligning ——— on the ——— workplace

w h y

A significant improvement in employee workplace experience has taken place post-pandemic.

Dr Peggie Rothe, Chief Insights & Research Officer, Leesman



Leesman®

Workplace Experience is Improving

Defining the Purpose of the Office

Across all workplaces that Leesman measured in 2019, the average Leesman Index workplace experience score (Lmi) was 64.3. In 2024, the average Lmi was more than five points higher, at 69.5.

“In 2024, the average office experience score was 69.5 – but the home experience still scored 79.5”

This is remarkable, considering that Lmi 70.0 is where we draw the line between just average and excellent experience.

Yet despite this, the overall experience of working from home continues to surpass that of working in the office. The average home experience score (H-Lmi) in 2024 was 79.5, exactly 10 points higher than the Lmi.

The priority for many organisations is now closing – or at least decreasing – that gap. As one respondent to Leesman’s 2025 Corporate Real Estate (CRE) leaders poll said, they want to ensure working at the office can be “as nice as working remotely”.

While differences between home and office remain considerable, both settings offer distinct advantages, for employees and employers. This is why it is essential that organisations are clear about what the purpose of the office is, or the ‘workplace why’.

“The office must have a clear ‘why’”

It allows organisations to influence expectations of what the office should deliver, as well as establishing explicit reasons for employees to come in. It also ensures visits to the office are

intentional, meaningful and never wasted.

But what does the ‘workplace why’ look like for most organisations? To understand this, we asked CRE leaders why their organisations maintain office space.

The responses varied. The most common reason, as cited by 70% of respondents, was ‘to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange’. Hybrid working has reshaped the dynamics of meetings and collaborations. Yet despite the post-pandemic transition

to more online engagements and get-togethers, meetings and collaborations remain the pivotal reason for many office visits.

“73% say their office supports idea sharing”

However, while people come to the office for specific collaboration tasks, once there they will also often engage in more spontaneous chats and knowledge exchanges beyond formal meetings. Leesman’s post-pandemic workplace experience data (from 539,155 respondents during 2022-2024) shows that 52% of employees see ‘Informal, unplanned meetings’ as an important activity in their role, while 73% confirm that their office environment supports them in sharing ideas and knowledge among colleagues. This shows the importance of physical office spaces in creating an engaging environment that encourages knowledge-sharing and teamwork.

Fostering Belonging and Organisational Pride

The Productivity Misalignment

The second most selected purpose for maintaining an office, as chosen by 43% of respondents to the CRE poll, was ‘to promote employee connection to their organisation and a sense of pride’. In hybrid working, maintaining that connection is vital; a lack of regular interaction with a company’s culture and with colleagues can leave employees feeling detached from their organisation’s values and mission. So for CRE leaders, having an office that fosters community and a sense of pride is important for enhancing that connection.

The third most cited reason was ‘to drive innovation and creativity’; selected by 37% of participants. Creativity and innovation not only require focused work, but the formal and informal exchanges of ideas, spontaneous conversations, collaboration and even socialising. The availability of supportive spaces and a dynamic environment that caters to this is crucial.

But while CRE leaders are clear about the purpose of the office, what about their staff? Do the reasons given by senior leaders align with their employees’ needs?

Our post-pandemic workplace experience data shows ‘Individual focused work (desk-based)’ remains the activity that is important to most (89%) employees, followed by ‘Planned meetings’ (74%) and ‘Collaborating on focused work’ (58%).

*“By acknowledging
and addressing
misalignment through
data, the office-home
gap can begin to close”*

Indeed, ‘Individual focused work’ has consistently topped our list in terms of importance since Leesman first started assessing workplaces. It also has a strong link to a sense of productivity for most knowledge workers.

Yet only 27% of CRE leaders cited ‘enabling productivity’ as a ‘workplace why’. Instead, offices are seen primarily as hubs for collaboration and meet-ups – implying, directly or otherwise, that ‘Individual focused work’ and productivity might be better done and supported elsewhere.

This is a significant misalignment between how leaders and employees view the office. In some cases, that may not be an issue, just as long as it is clearly communicated that the office is best suited to engaging with others, and remote working to more focused, individual tasks.

Balancing Collaboration and Focus

But not all employees have the right setting to work effectively from home. And for those who do, splitting workdays into either collaborative or individual activities is challenging. So even offices that exist primarily to support collaboration should still be facilitating individual work.

So, how to improve employee experience if this is one of your priorities?

The answer will ultimately depend on your organisation’s objectives and the specific needs of your staff, because a clear, well-established ‘workplace why’ resonates with both organisational objectives and employee needs.

Too often, the employer’s and employee’s ‘workplace why’ simply does not align. Only by acknowledging and addressing that misalignment through data-driven decisions will the gap between the office and home employee experience start to narrow.

Leesman: <https://www.leesmanindex.com/>

Leesman is the global independent assessor for workplace experience. Through our independent workplace experience assessment, Leesman captures employee sentiments on how effective their work environments are at supporting them. For each work environment surveyed, a Leesman Index work-

place experience score (Lmi), with a 0-100 rating is calculated. By rating organisations’ ability to support employees in the home and in the office, performance can then be benchmarked against the largest database of its kind with over 1.5 million responses and 200 million datapoints.





Designing Workplaces with Purpose, People and Story

Spotlight on **DTHREE STUDIO**

At Dthree Studio, every workplace project is more than a design challenge - it's a chance to create environments that balance business goals, human needs, and brand identity. Behind that process is a team of experts who bring different perspectives to the table but share a common vision: making offices work harder, smarter, and more meaningfully for the people who use them.

We sat down with three members of the team - Alex Hodson, Head of Design, Charley Goymour, Project Director, and Nacho Limpo, Senior Creative, to explore how they approach workplace design in today's shifting world of hybrid working, evolving client priorities, and growing focus on social value.

Translating Purpose into Space:
Alex Hodson, Head of Design

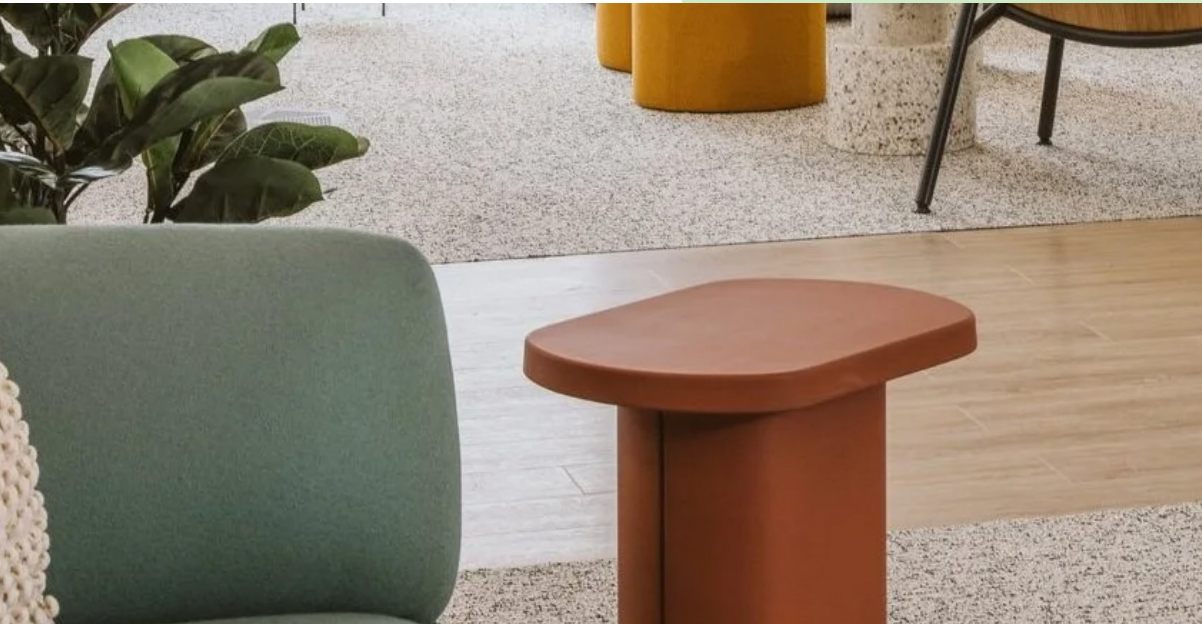
For Alex, workplace design starts with a simple principle: design innovation should never come at the cost of function.

“Balancing business objectives with design innovation varies from client to client,” she explains. “What is innovative to one client may not be to another. For us, it’s about understanding the client, their business, and what they want to achieve from the space.”

Social value, too, is central to Alex’s design thinking. To her, it means creating spaces that people want to spend time in. That means designing for different working styles, prioritising sustainability, and creating environments that meet both social and environmental needs.

When it comes to drawing people back to the office, Alex believes it’s less about gimmicks and more about connection:

“The most impactful spaces encourage coming together - chance encounters, chats over coffee, quick collaborative catch-ups. Hybrid working may have changed our approach, but it’s also shown us the value of designing flexible spaces that can shift between uses throughout the day.”



Dthree Studio: Design and Build - Trustpilot



Designing with Heart: Nacho Limpo, Senior Creative

Where Alex grounds design in purpose, Nacho brings the storytelling layer that makes workplaces personal and emotionally resonant.

“The key to designing meaningful spaces is bringing together the client’s vision, the brand’s identity and the design concept,” he explains. “Collaboration with both the design team and brand stakeholders is essential to make sure every choice is connected to the brand’s values and mission.”

For Nacho, the smallest details often carry the most weight in making people feel they belong. It isn’t about flashy features, but about careful observation - understanding the rituals, rhythms, and personalities of a workplace and reflecting those in the design.

“Sometimes it’s about big tables for collaboration, sometimes quiet zones for focus and neurodiversity,” he says. “Listening is key. When a workplace feels adaptable, genuine, and quietly personal, people naturally feel at home.”

Orchestrating the Process: Charley Goymour, Project Director

If Alex is focused on purpose and Nacho on storytelling, Charley ensures those ideas survive the journey from concept to completion. His role is about weaving together people, budgets, and timeframes, and he believes communication is the make-or-break factor.

“The successes, or short-comings, on design and build projects hinge on communication,” he says. “Sometimes timeframes are established twice in the same day, and that requires everyone to stay nimble and informed.”

One of the questions he hears most from clients is whether to stay in their current office or move. The decision often hinges on whether existing spaces can be reimaged to enhance engagement, build culture, and guarantee flexibility. When the answer is yes, Charley and his team help clients see how their current offices can work harder for them.

But for Charley, success isn't just about delivering on time or on budget. It's about witnessing the energy shift when people first experience their new workplace:

“One project that stands out is Trustpilot. Seeing staff walk into their new office, hearing the excitement in their voices, it's deeply gratifying. That's when you know the design is really working.”



Designing For What Matters

Together, Alex, Nacho, and Charley represent three different but complementary perspectives within Dthree Studio: purpose-led design, brand-centred storytelling, and process-driven delivery. What unites them is a commitment to creating workplaces that are not only functional and beautiful but also socially valuable, emotionally intelligent, and true to the businesses they serve.

In today's world of hybrid working and shifting employee expectations, the office has become more than just a place to work - it's a place to connect, learn, and belong. And for the Dthree team, that means every project is an opportunity to design spaces that don't just meet a brief but inspire the people who use them every day.

Dthree Studio: <https://www.dthreestudio.co.uk/>

Contact

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Project Director

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Purpose:
Flexibility with

Shaping Workspaces That Adapt to People

Not the Other Way Around



Andy James, Head of Flexible Offices at Devono

At Devono, flexibility isn't just a buzzword, it's a philosophy, shaping how businesses think about the workplace. For **Andy James, Head of Flexible Offices** here at **Devono**, it's about more than space. It's about people, culture, and creating environments that evolve with the changing demands of modern work.

We discussed with Andy how flexible offices have shifted from a niche offering to a central part of business strategy, what trends are shaping the market, and why flexibility is less about cost-cutting and more about building workplaces that people genuinely want to be in.





Redefining the Role of Flexibility

For Andy, the shift is clear: “Flexible workspaces are no longer a temporary solution, they’ve become a core part of modern business strategy.”

Once seen as a backup option, flexible offices are now driving how organisations approach hybrid work. The goal is no longer just about providing desks but creating environments where people can connect, collaborate, and thrive.

“The most forward-thinking companies are redefining the office as a destination,” Andy says. “It’s about creating somewhere employees want to go, not have to.”

Designing Around People and Culture

At the heart of Andy’s approach is a commitment to understanding how a business truly works.

“We begin by gaining a deep understanding of the business - its culture, objectives, and the way its people work on a daily basis,” he explains. From there, the team matches requirements with options in the market and tailored solutions that blend collaborative areas,

quiet zones, and tech-enabled adaptability.

For Andy, it’s about striking the balance between reflecting brand identity and enhancing operational efficiency. The outcome is a workplace that not only looks right but feels right.

From Start-Ups to Corporates

Flexible offices were once dominated by start-ups and SMEs, but the landscape has changed.

“Large corporates and financial institutions are now embracing flexible space as part of their portfolio strategy,” Andy observes. “This shift shows that flexibility is no longer just a tool for agility. It’s a strategic asset for building resilience, engaging employees, and reducing long-term risk.”

Flexibility and Social Value

Flexible spaces are also enabling businesses to make a bigger social impact. Many are located in well-connected, central areas and designed with inclusivity, sustainability, and well-being in mind.

“Choosing flexible offices is a clear way for businesses

to align workplace strategy with their social value objectives,” Andy explains. It’s not only about meeting operational needs but also about demonstrating commitment to communities and employees alike.

Overcoming Barriers

Despite the benefits, some leaders remain hesitant to commit, worrying about costs or cultural fit. Andy acknowledges those concerns but sees them differently.

“Flexibility isn’t a one-size-fits-all solution. We assist clients in modelling costs and evaluating cultural fit before making decisions,” he says. Often, flexible space actually reduces long-term expenses by avoiding over-commitment while strengthening culture through thoughtful design and branding.

Enhancing, Not Diluting, Culture

Far from undermining culture, Andy believes flexibility can strengthen it.

“Flexibility should enhance, not dilute, a company’s culture,” he explains. By creating spaces that foster spontaneous interactions, encourage shared experiences, and weave brand identity into the environment,

businesses can help employees feel more connected regardless of how often they’re in the office.

What’s Next for Flexible Offices

Looking ahead, Andy sees several key trends shaping the future: hybrid hubs, wellness-focused spaces, and technology-driven workplaces.

“To stay ahead, businesses should embrace modular design and agile workplace strategies that can adapt quickly as work patterns evolve,” he advises.

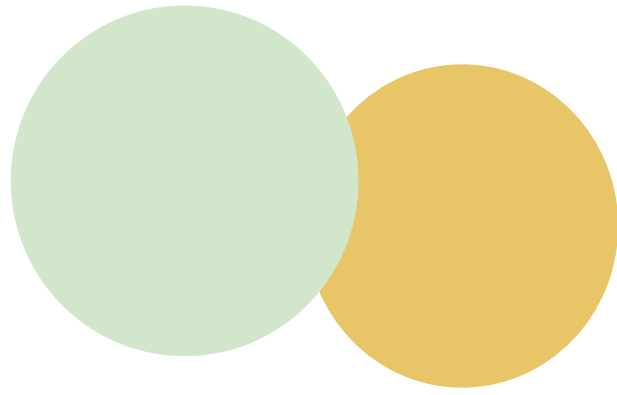
For Andy and the team, the message is simple: flexible offices aren’t just about space, they’re about shaping the future of work. By placing people and purpose at the centre, Devono is helping businesses create work environments that aren’t just functional, but inspiring.



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Where Work Meets Lifestyle



The Next Generation Office

Alex Clark, Group Commercial Director, Fora

As more companies bring their employees back to the office for larger chunks of the working week, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the workplace landscape is settling back into a steady, predictable rhythm. But office trends and worker expectations are now more dynamic than ever, leaving no room for a complacency in the sector.

At Fora, we continually update our vision

of how the office of the future will look, to ensure our buildings evolve with business behaviours and the needs of tomorrow's workforce. Not every trend can be foreseen, but it is already clear that the modern workplace must be a multi-functional affair, serving as a collaboration hub, a productivity catalyst, and increasingly, a lifestyle destination that employees actively want to experience each day.



FORA

From Cubicles to Communities

For the good of our collective sanity, workspaces have come a long way from the sterile and claustrophobic world of desk cubicles, while spontaneous conversations are no longer restricted to the vicinity of a water cooler. The long-standing movement towards more social workplaces has accelerated since the pandemic and is now a high priority for the modern employee.

According to studies cited by Forbes, collaboration tops employees' list of reasons to work from an office, with 46% of people highlighting this advantage. Communication follows at 34%, with meetings at 32%. These numbers show the importance of well-designed spaces that bring teams together. As a design priority, Fora buildings offer large, light-filled meeting rooms equipped with best-in-class video conferencing tech, so collaboration is seamless between the people in the room and those working remotely.

Just as important in our buildings are the open lounge spaces, kitchen areas, roof terraces and cafés, where members can build connection beyond scheduled meetings. These spaces are designed for serendipity as much as function. Not only do our members find themselves spending more 'informal time' with colleagues (often when the best ideas emerge), but they bump into people from other organisations who may share the same building. We often say that the person having lunch next to you could end up changing your career.

Focus Time

Of course, the most successful offices don't ignore a key benefit of remote work: the ability to concentrate. The studies cited by Forbes reveal that 55% of remote workers cite concentration as their main advantage when working from home, which naturally has implications for office design.

Fora has responded to these needs by creating dedicated focus environments within our spaces. Sound-proof phone booths and private work pods allow members to dive deep into complex tasks without distraction. These quiet zones have a dual purpose: enabling the focused work that drives productivity, while demonstrating to workers that the office can deliver the best aspects of both remote and in-person work.

Going Beyond Productivity

However, our buildings recognise that creating the perfect workplace isn't solely about maximising productivity, it's about enhancing lifestyle too. Remote work has taught employees to value flexibility and personal well-being – lessons that smart employers are incorporating into their office strategies.

State-of-the-art fitness facilities – integrated into office buildings, like our Restore gyms – reflect this understanding. When employees can access hundreds of fitness classes each month without leaving their workplace, the office becomes a lifestyle enhancer rather than a disruptor. Meanwhile, our meditation spaces, wellness rooms, and relaxation areas acknowledge that mental well-being is as crucial as physical health for happiness and performance.

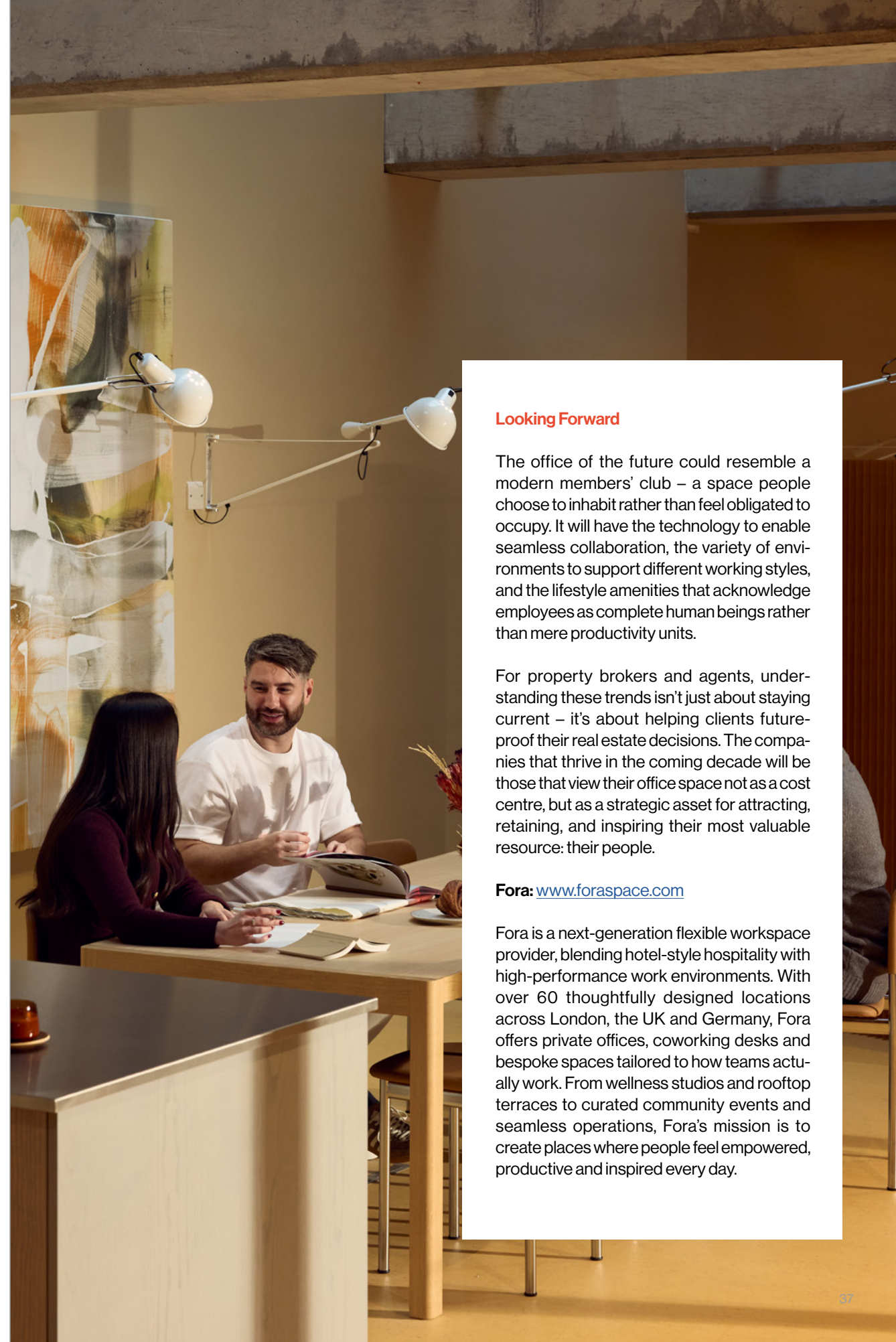
The convenience factor cannot be overlooked either. Our spaces increasingly feature services that solve everyday problems like healthy food options and childcare facilities. These amenities save time and help companies demonstrate that they value their employees' complete lives, not just their working hours.

The Stakes Are High

The urgency of getting workplace strategy right was underscored by some striking statistics earlier this year. The Office for National Statistics reported that 58% of people in the UK would plainly refuse to comply with a full-time return-to-office mandate. This growing resistance – strongest among women and parents – isn't about laziness or lack of commitment. Employees have simply experienced alternative ways of working and are now unwilling to return to subpar office experiences that don't support their lifestyles. It's an understandable and justifiable stance.

For property professionals, this presents both challenge and opportunity. Buildings that fail to meet evolving expectations will struggle with vacancy rates and tenant retention. Conversely, spaces that successfully blend the social benefits of office life with the lifestyle advantages of flexible work arrangements will command premium rents and waiting lists.

Research by McKinsey indicates that companies with engaged employees see 23% higher profitability, 18% higher productivity, and 12% better customer outcomes. The office environment plays a crucial role in driving this engagement.



Looking Forward

The office of the future could resemble a modern members' club – a space people choose to inhabit rather than feel obligated to occupy. It will have the technology to enable seamless collaboration, the variety of environments to support different working styles, and the lifestyle amenities that acknowledge employees as complete human beings rather than mere productivity units.

For property brokers and agents, understanding these trends isn't just about staying current – it's about helping clients future-proof their real estate decisions. The companies that thrive in the coming decade will be those that view their office space not as a cost centre, but as a strategic asset for attracting, retaining, and inspiring their most valuable resource: their people.

Fora: www.foraspace.com

Fora is a next-generation flexible workspace provider, blending hotel-style hospitality with high-performance work environments. With over 60 thoughtfully designed locations across London, the UK and Germany, Fora offers private offices, coworking desks and bespoke spaces tailored to how teams actually work. From wellness studios and rooftop terraces to curated community events and seamless operations, Fora's mission is to create places where people feel empowered, productive and inspired every day.



BEYOND THE DESK: How Koba is Building Sustainable, Wellbeing-Centred Workspaces

An interview with Ed Harbison, Head of Commercial, Koba



Founding Purpose & Philosophy

Q: Ed, can you share the story of how Koba was founded and what values brought the team together to build a sustainable workspace provider?

Koba was the brainchild of founder Paul Nellist, with a singular focus on delivering best-in-class workspace with health, wellbeing and sustainability at its core. Built from the ground up, Koba was curated with years of expertise in the flex industry and a manifesto to drive meaningful change.

James Thorne joined as Finance Director, Tom Beard as Head of Delivery and myself as Head of Commercial. Paul, Tom and I had previously launched Hana (now Industrious) in the UK, opening 4 locations between 2019 and 2020

Q: Your offering is described as evidence-based, radically transparent, and circular. How do these guiding principles shape day-to-day decisions and customer experiences?

The Koba 8-stage manifesto ensures that our approach to sustainability is delivered with tangible impact for our residents

We have assembled a range of mission-aligned partners, and most recently partnered with Play it Green (B Corp) to bring climate impact into the core of our workspace experience. At Koba, every company that takes space is automatically enrolled into the Climate Workforce subscription – which results in planting trees, mangroves or sea kelp across the globe.

We share detailed data with all residents on energy usage and air quality, and this level of transparency is unique in the industry.



Circular Economy & Sustainable Design

Q: Koba has made circularity a cornerstone of its model. Can you walk us through how your approach to remanufactured, UK-sourced furniture works, and why it matters?

Through our partnership with Cast Interiors, we prioritise remanufactured and refurbished furniture sourced in the UK. This reduces carbon, supports local industry, and ensures that our workspaces are not just designed beautifully but also responsibly.

We're proud to have launched the world's first publicly published Material Passport for a flexible workspace, setting a new standard for sustainable fit-outs. Our flagship at 100 Barbirolli Square in Manchester was developed with both Cast Interiors and powered by Madaster UK. It earned the accolade of the world's first WELL certified coworking workspace.

The passport captures data on 93% of the materials used in the fit-out -including their origin, embodied carbon, and end-of-life potential. This means we have complete transparency on what's in the space, where it came from, and where it can go next. It's a vital step toward reducing waste and enabling reuse, and it sets the standard for every Koba location going forward, including our latest opening at The Rowe in London.



“Occupiers join Koba’s Climate Workforce from day one.”

Q: Partnerships are pivotal within your model. What makes them effective?

Working with partners like Cast gives us two major advantages: a full-service offering and speed to market. We can draw on their design, procurement, project management, and delivery expertise - while also tapping into their supply chain.

This means we can deliver spaces much faster than traditional procurement routes, which is a real benefit to our landlord partners. But equally important, it ensures we're creating spaces that are aligned with our ESG goals and deliver measurable value to our occupiers.



koba*

Koba is a pioneering flexible workspace provider, recognised as the world's first WELL Coworking Rated operator. With a focus on sustainability, well-being, and high-quality design, Koba creates offices that support both people and the planet.

Koba: <https://kobaspace.com/>

Q: Beyond carbon footprint and space utilisation, which stories best capture Koba's social value and impact on wellbeing?

One area we're particularly proud of is our circular approach to furniture and fit-out materials. Both Senator and Interface, our partners, operate take-back schemes, which ensure that products at the end of their life don't end up in landfill. Instead, they're repurposed or recycled - cutting embodied carbon while also giving residents confidence that their workplace is contributing positively to the planet.

Q: Looking ahead, what innovations or new initiatives are you planning as Koba expands?

We launched in Manchester in late 2024, and our second location, The Rowe on Whitechapel High Street in London - opened in October 2025. As we scale, we're focused on building even stronger local connections.

We always endeavour to have a positive impact on local communities and for our own team too. In Manchester, for instance, our team took part in canal clean-ups, and we've introduced "wellness hours," giving staff protected time each week to recharge - whether that's a gym class, restorative time, or simply a longer lunch.

Our goal is to replicate that approach wherever we go: delivering circular, transparent, and wellbeing-centred workspaces that create real value for both occupiers and the local community.



“Workspaces should deliver measurable value for people, communities, and the planet.”

Managed to *Thrive*

Made

How Offices Can Deliver

An interview with Alice Guidetti, Associate, Made



Early in my career, remote work felt liberating. No commute. More flexibility. Coffee shop vibes. But over time, I started noticing what was missing: the buzz of energy around a team, the spontaneous learning moments, the simple sense of belonging.

That's why I'm passionate about the social value of offices. Offices aren't obsolete, they are evolving. At **Made**, we're building managed office spaces that focus on people, community, and wellbeing, not just desks and leases.

Why Offices Still Matter

Even in a hybrid world, physical offices give us something digital can't:

- Connection and culture. Informal chats, brainstorming, mentorship - they happen naturally in shared spaces.
- Wellbeing. Leaving home for work brings routine, focus, and separation between life and work.
- Community impact. Workplaces can support the local community from employment to activating communal spaces.

Offices that amplify these benefits become more than a place to work, they become places people want to be.

What We're Building at Made

At Made, our approach to managed offices is all about putting people first. We create spaces that are fully fitted, beautifully designed, and ready from day one - but the real difference is in how they support the social side of work.

Spaces That Encourage Interaction

Our spaces are designed to do more than house desks. The idea is simple: give people choice in how they work, and the office becomes a place they want to be.

Flexibility Without the Headache

Traditional leases can be stressful - long commitments, hidden costs, and a lack of agility when your business changes. Our managed solution removes that stress. Clients get cost certainty and the freedom to scale. That flexibility helps teams focus less on logistics and more on growing their culture.



Reducing Friction for Teams

One thing I love about our model is how much time it frees up. By handling everything, fit-out, facilities, management - we take away the distractions that usually drain energy, time and money. That means teams can walk in and get straight to work, rather than juggling contractors and service providers.

Of course, delivering social value goes hand in hand with tackling bigger challenges:

- Accessibility. We want these kinds of spaces to be accessible not just to big corporates, but to smaller teams and ambitious start-ups too.
- Sustainability. Buildings have a footprint. That's why developments have excellent credentials such as BREEAM, are so important to us, they prove that you can combine social and environmental value.
- Hybrid realities. Offices must adapt to teams who won't always be in five days a week. That means designing flexible, multipurpose environments that remain vibrant even with fluctuating occupancy.

Why This Matters to Me

As someone in my 20s, I often hear my peers ask whether the office is still relevant. My answer is yes, but not in the way it used to be. It's not about clocking in and out; it's about creating spaces that people genuinely benefit from.

That's the vision we're building at Made: offices that people enjoy working in, spaces that help teams thrive, and buildings that support the communities around them.

The Takeaway

The office isn't just real estate, it's social infrastructure. It's where culture is built, relationships are strengthened, and creativity flourishes. At Made, our managed solution is designed to maximise that social value, while removing the old headaches of property management.

For me, it's exciting to be part of a team shaping what the workplace of the future looks like. Because if we get it right, the office won't be something people have to return to - it'll be somewhere they actively want to be.

To find out more about **MADE** and Managed Offices, head to our [website](#).



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Advising for Impact: *Guiding Businesses* Through the New Office Era

**Jack Knivett, Director,
Occupier Advisory Team, Devono**

At **Devono**, every occupier advisory project is more than a leasing transaction, it's an opportunity to help businesses navigate the complexities of the modern office. Helping clients on this journey is **Jack Knivett**, whose experience in London's commercial real estate market has equipped him to guide clients through hybrid working, portfolio optimisation, and workplace strategy with insight and precision.

“Every occupier project is more than a transaction, it’s about guiding businesses through change.”

Guiding Businesses Through Change

For Jack, advising clients starts with understanding both their current needs and future ambitions.

“We guide clients through data-driven assessments, looking at the portfolio in terms of both today and the changes that might need to be accommodated in the future,” he explains. “We discuss accounting for bulge days within the workspace and assisting with office

design and solutions within the demise or indeed the building. Each sector has a different approach to the return to the office, which allows us to tailor the assessments with specific anecdotal evidence.”

By combining practical metrics with anecdotal insight, Jack ensures that each workspace solution balances operational efficiency with employee experience.

Designing for Hybrid Work

Hybrid models are a defining challenge of today's office landscape. This has necessitated looking beyond just desk counts: it requires a consideration of commuting patterns, collaboration requirements, and how the space will actually be used.

“We like to understand when the bulge days are in the hybrid weekly cycle, as well as the commuting patterns of employees,” Jack says. “Moreover, we like to discuss how the company wants to use the space, looking at the quantity of amenity/collaboration space

compared to workspace.”

This has often been manifested as promoting flexible use for certain areas, with amenity space that can also be used for townhalls or zones that can be used as touchdown space on bulge days and meeting space on other days.

As such, while Jack and the team look at the maximum headcount, when it comes to the search the priority is to find agreeable space within a building that allows adaptability as needs shift.



Real-World Impact

Jack's guidance has helped clients achieve measurable outcomes. For a tech firm, his advice resulted in the reduction of overall desk capacity by 20% while creating high-quality collaborative zones. This served to increase employee satisfaction with the client reporting that the speed of decision-making improved due to the more frequent in-person interaction.

Another example is a not-for-profit organisation that had grown its headcount by 20% yet through Jack's advice was able maintain its existing foot-

print. By re-gearing the lease and leveraging landlord contributions, Jack helped deliver a flexible workspace solution that supported a three/two hybrid model without expanding square footage.

Creating Spaces That Work for People

Beyond efficiency, Jack believes it is key to provide an environment that fosters interaction, well-being, and innovation.

"We design spaces to encourage spontaneous interaction, provide wellness amenities, and are adaptable

to different work styles," he explains. "The floor plate is key in being able to provide zones of working, which means employees can cross paths and interact during the working day."

For Jack, the aim is to create energising, human-centred workplaces that go beyond functionality to support employees' needs and engagement.

Sustainability and Strategic Thinking

Jack has previously instructed clients on how they can achieve a more sustainable office environment, providing advice around everything from energy-efficient fit-outs to circular furniture strategies and socially responsible leasing options. As he says, "Sustainability is a major part of social value, so it's essential to embed these principles from day one."

Yet, Jack notes that the primary driver today is often employee experience. "I would argue that sustainability has become less of a consideration within real

estate strategy as it is expected to be provided by a modern landlord. Instead, the major consideration is best working practices for employees. The focus has turned to creating a best-in-class workspace that fosters employee experience and productivity".employees' needs and engagement.

Looking Ahead

At Devono, our approach to occupier advisory combines technical expertise, strategic foresight, and a deep understanding of how people interact with space. In an era of hybrid working and rapidly evolving office requirements, the guid-

ance that Jack and the rest of the team provide help to businesses to not only adapt, but thrive, ensuring that the office remains a place of connection, collaboration and belonging.



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Devono (Occupier Advisory):

<https://devono.com/occupier-advisory/>



About Devono

Devono is the UK's leading occupier-only advisory firm. We specialise in advising businesses of all sizes and sectors, on commercial real estate solutions that best support their wider business objectives.

A significant part of our role is helping our clients to understand and define their occupational requirements. We take into account key factors including talent challenges, headcount forecasts, operational priorities and

cost considerations, to help craft a brief that is not only fit for purpose today but will also deliver a sustainable occupational footprint moving forward.

Our ultimate goal as an organisation is to navigate real estate opportunities in such a way as to positively influence a company's culture, productivity and financial performance.

Our Services



Office Agency



Service Charge Consultancy



Workplace Consultancy



Design & Build



Dilapidations & Building Surveys



Occupier Disposal



Rent Reviews



Flexible Office Agency



Managed Offices

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