

# Office workplace strategies for 2025 and beyond

## Getting the balance right

Looking ahead into 2025, many organisations continue to reassess their workplace strategies. From cellular offices to open-plan workspaces and hot desks, to meeting booths and leisure rooms, from mixed-use office space and shared workspaces to hybrid working arrangements, the evolving nature of work has driven employers to reimagine the workplace.

However, many organisations are still figuring out what the future will look like for their employee work arrangements and the configuration of their corporate offices.

Clients often ask us what trends we're seeing in offices, what other companies are doing, and which office workplace strategy we think would be best for them and their people.

The truth is that there is no single correct answer. Every enterprise needs to evaluate its culture, its business, and the needs of its people and organisation. From there, the pros and cons of different approaches must be considered.

We prepared this analysis to inform your thinking about the workplace in 2025 and beyond

## Return to office

During 2024, many global organisations such as Amazon, Disney, JP Morgan, Starbucks, X and McKinsey mandated a return to the office (RTO). The scope of the mandate to be in the office varies from full-time (Amazon, X) to a hybrid model with three or four days per week in-office (Disney, JPMorgan).

These companies cited reduced productivity, lower employee engagement and negative impacts on collaboration and company culture as reasons for amending or scrapping their work-from-home policies.

## The importance of culture

Each organisations has a unique culture. Instilling a strong culture and providing mentorship and opportunities for skills development is challenging in a remote working environment. Many employees feel lost, disempowered, and isolated when working from home. This can hinder their ability to make quick, informed decisions typically resulting from spontaneous interactions with colleagues. This lack of simple communication, particularly for younger employees, can significantly affect their career development. It may also impact the sense of cohesion between team members when employees are consistently working away from each other.

### Hybrid and flexible working models

**Hybrid:** A combination of working from home and in the office, typically with a minimum of two days in the office.

**Flexible:** Requires being in the office for at least four days per week but allows greater flexibility to deal with personal matters, such as going to watch a child play sport, or run an errand.

### **Return to office: Pros and cons**

- People connect, collaborate and create more effectively when they are together in the office.
- Learning, leading and mentoring are much easier when people are in the same space.
- Younger employees and new joiners learn faster and feel more included when working alongside colleagues in the office.
- Commuting can be time-consuming and stressful, reducing productivity and work-life balance.
- Working at an office increases costs for staff (transport) and employers (office expenses).
- Rigid office hours can limit employees' ability to manage personal responsibilities.
- Strict office policies can cause dissatisfaction, lower productivity and higher staff turnover.

The challenges around returning to the office highlight the importance of exploring hybrid or flexible work models that offer a better balance.

### **Hybrid and flexible working arrangements**

Many companies are embracing hybrid and flexible working arrangements, including notable examples such as Apple, Microsoft, Cisco, and Nike.

### **Hybrid and flexible working: Pros and cons**

- Flexible working arrangements can deliver improved work-life balance, greater employee satisfaction and higher productivity.
- Hybrid and flexible working makes attracting and retaining talent easier and increases employee engagement.
- Maintaining clear and effective communication and coordination can be difficult when team members are not all in the same location or are working different hours.
- Building and maintaining a strong team culture can be more difficult when employees are not always physically together, potentially leading to feelings of isolation among employees.
- Morale can be affected if some employees have more flexibility than others.
- Managing a hybrid workforce requires strong leadership and communication strategies, which can be challenging.

### **Best of both**

While CEOs cite the need for in-person collaboration, camaraderie and mentorship as reasons for returning to the office, studies show that many employees prefer flexible work. This approach has reduced worker burnout, boosted work-life balance and, in many cases, improved performance.

While there can be a mismatch between what employers want and what employees prefer, we have seen a steady shift from work-from-home to hybrid to flexible working arrangements among the approximately 250 organisations Burstone Group supports with office space.

We prioritise creating spaces where people want to be, enabling connection and collaboration.

### **Our approach**

We believe it is essential for employers to create an engaging office environment —a “vibe” and a sense of community that fosters thought, innovation, collaboration, and growth. Continuous investment in workplace design, furniture, and technology is crucial for attracting and retaining talent.

### **Let's discuss your needs**

Many businesses are at a crossroads in deciding how they are going to operate their offices in the near future. All of them are concerned about taking the wrong path and making a costly mistake. The impulse to do nothing different might be high, but that also has a cost.

Each client's requirements are unique. If you're grappling with configuring your business or offices, please contact us to discuss how we can help you help you to transform your office or workplace into a canvas for human experience.