

WORKPLACE DESIGN TRENDS

2026 – 2027

A Buro Insights Report

Flexibility & Choice . Ergonomics . Cognitive Design . Community
Privacy & Focus . Human-Centred AI . Biophilic Design . Resimercial
Sustainability . Colour & Texture . Organic Forms . Adaptability

buro ergonomics at work® | mondo | Konfurb | KOPLUS

Good workplace design starts by paying attention.

To how people feel, think, move, and do their best work.

As employees call for flexibility, leaders invest in culture and connection, and artificial intelligence impacts how work happens, wellbeing and performance remain top priorities.

For more than 30 years, the Buro team has strived to help people work well and live better. Throughout that time, we've seen workplace design evolve from rows of desks and executive offices into dynamic environments.

This report brings together insights from workplace research, industry events, interviews with experts and Buro's own expertise to explore the trends shaping workspaces.

Together, these trends point towards workplaces that are responsive to the needs of the people using them.

Part One:
Workplace Strategy & Human Performance 1
Flexibility & Choice 3
Ergonomic Ecosystems 5
Cognitive Design & Neurodiversity 8
Community 11
Privacy & Focus 13
Human-Centred AI Workplaces 15

Part Two:
Workplace Design & Environment 17
Biophilic Design 19
Resimercial 20
Sustainability 21
Colour & Texture 23
Adapting Spaces 25
Organic Forms 27

Four Ideas Defining High-Performing Workplaces 29
Leadership Perspective 30
Designing What Comes Next 31

PART ONE

Workplace Strategy & Human Performance

Better workplace design starts with understanding how work is changing.

The past few years have changed what employees expect from work. Flexibility, wellbeing and greater choice now sit alongside new ways of working shaped by hybrid models, video conferencing and AI.

The most successful organisations are responding by designing workplaces around human needs rather than traditional workplace models.

In this section we explore the key ideas behind high-performing workplace environments.

IN THIS SECTION

Flexibility & Choice

Ergonomics & Movement

Cognitive Design & Neurodiversity

Community

Privacy & Focus

AI-Ready Workplaces

Flexibility & Choice

Flexibility isn't a workplace trend. It's an expectation.

Employees have become accustomed to choosing when, where and how they work. As a result, workplace design has evolved from fixed layouts and dedicated desks towards adaptable environments that empower employees.

Today's best workplaces offer a variety of settings tailored to different activities. People might move between shared neighbourhood workspaces, focus zones, collaborative areas and quiet booths depending on what they need to do.

Height adjustable desks, synchro mechanism chairs, mobile furniture and modular seating enable organisations to respond quickly to changing team structures and workplace behaviours.

Choice also supports performance. Research continues to show that employees who can choose the environments that best support their tasks feel more satisfied and focused at work.

What to consider

- Activity-based working environments
- Height adjustable workstations
- Synchro mechanism chairs
- Mobile storage solutions
- Shared team neighbourhoods
- Flexible project rooms
- Collaborative modular furniture
- Multi-purpose collaboration zones
- Bookable focus spaces



Members of our team using a variety of work settings within our Sydney office.

What we're seeing in our office

"One year on, our Auckland workspace has reinforced how much people value choice. They move between desks, booths and shared spaces depending on what they need."



Andy McRobbie,
General Manager Sales NZ

A range of work settings within our Auckland workplace, supporting choice throughout the day.

Ergonomic Ecosystems

Ergonomics no longer begins and ends at the desk.

When it comes to ergonomics, the question isn't simply how to create a comfortable workstation. It's how to support people physically whether they're at a desk, in a meeting, collaborating or taking a break.

For Occupational Physiotherapist Dave Hall, that starts with movement.

"Your desk chair should support movement, not encourage you into one position for hours at a time."

Even the best workstation isn't designed for eight hours of uninterrupted sitting. Regular movement and posture changes are just as important as ergonomic seating, height adjustable desks and well-positioned accessories.

Collaboration spaces can encourage more movement through standing-height tables, drafting chairs with footrests and mobile whiteboards that make it easier to shift posture while working.

Informal spaces are evolving too, with workplace cafés, social hubs and breakout areas doubling as places for focused work, mentoring and connection. Integrated power, laptop-friendly tables and supportive seating make them genuinely usable throughout the day.

The result is a broader approach to ergonomics, built around how people actually move through the day.



What to consider for an ergonomic ecosystem

- Movement breaks every 30 minutes
- Standing height collaboration tables
- Height adjustable drafting chairs
- Supportive breakout furniture with backrests
- Waterfall seat edges in lounge and café spaces
- Multiple seating heights across shared spaces
- Supportive café and social hub furniture
- Touchdown work points throughout the workplace
- Walking meetings and standing check-ins
- Diverse posture options: sit, perch, stand and move
- Workplace layouts designed to encourage movement
- Ergonomic support embedded across every workspace setting

What to consider for an ergonomic workstation

- Height adjustable workstations
- Buro Dynamic Intelligence™ seating
- Synchro mechanisms where the backrest and seat move together
- Adjustable lumbar support, armrests and seat depth
- Monitor positioning and screen ergonomics
- Sit-to-stand transitions
- Personalised workstation settings

The Buro Altri Height Adjustable Desk, paired with the Buro Force chair, featuring Buro Dynamic Intelligence™ seating technology, which encourages continuous posture variation rather than static sitting.



The Buro MyWorkSpace High Table

The Buro Polo Drafting Stools and the Buro MyWorkSpace High Training Table create a casual meeting space

Cognitive Design & Neurodiversity

Good workplace design now considers how people think.

As organisations navigate hybrid work, AI and constant digital distraction, attention has become one of the workplace's most valuable resources. Cognitive design looks at what helps people concentrate, think clearly and reset.

Neuroscientist Mark Williams believes workplace design should be guided by cognitive needs rather than traditional ideas about open-plan versus enclosed offices.

> "The failure mode isn't openness; it's uniformity. What is needed is an environment for every cognitive mode."

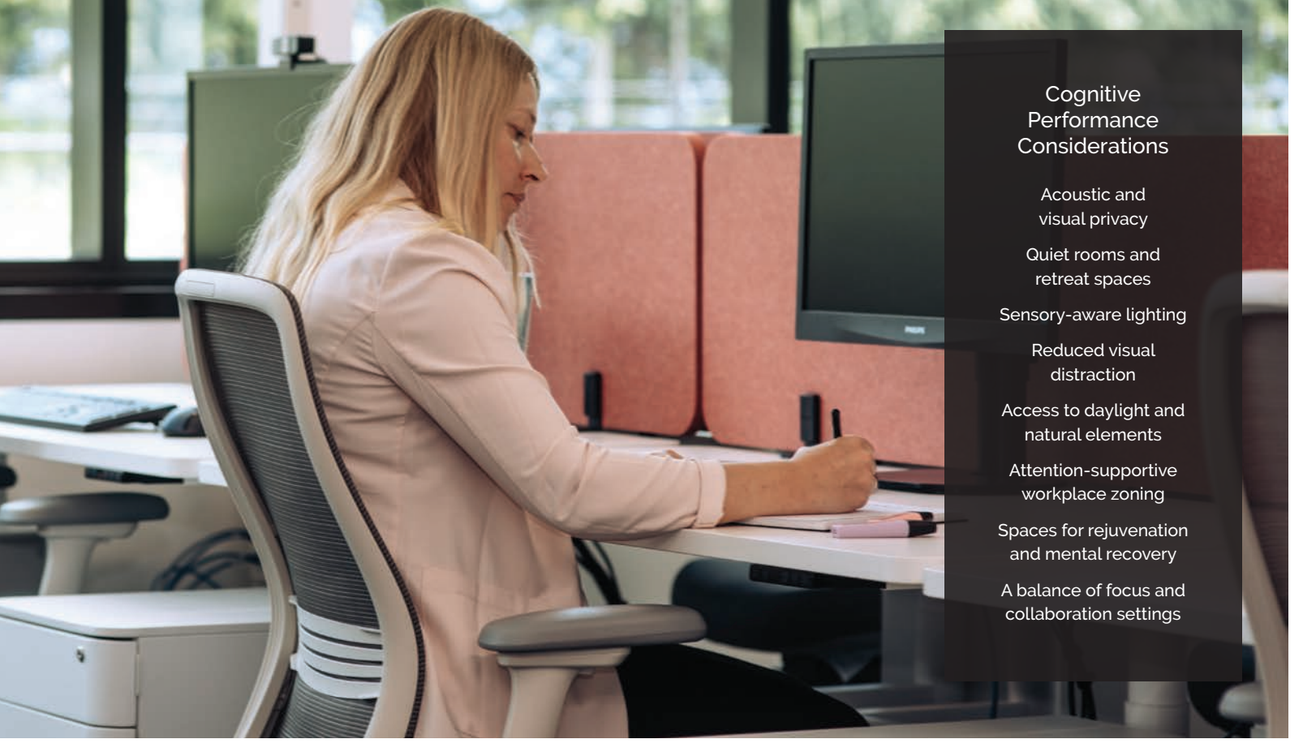
Different tasks need different conditions. Deep focus is easier without interruption, while collaborative work often benefits from more energy and interaction. Quieter settings can support reflection and recovery.

That's changing the mix of spaces workplaces provide. Focus rooms, acoustic booths, retreat spaces and sensory-aware environments give people greater control over the level of stimulation and interaction around them.

Neurodiversity adds another layer. People experience workplace environments differently, particularly when it comes to noise, visual stimulation and interruption. A single way of working won't suit everyone.

As Toni Dickson, Senior Design Consultant, Fuze Business Interiors explains, it's all about balance. "Acoustics, zoning and quiet spaces are the balance to open plan collaboration. They help workers feel like they can move throughout spaces with intent to match their work focus."

The goal is not one ideal environment, but enough choice for people to work in the way that suits them best.



Cognitive Performance Considerations

- Acoustic and visual privacy
- Quiet rooms and retreat spaces
- Sensory-aware lighting
- Reduced visual distraction
- Access to daylight and natural elements
- Attention-supportive workplace zoning
- Spaces for rejuvenation and mental recovery
- A balance of focus and collaboration settings

The Konfurb Luna chair and the Buro Syntra Back to Back Height Adjustable Desk

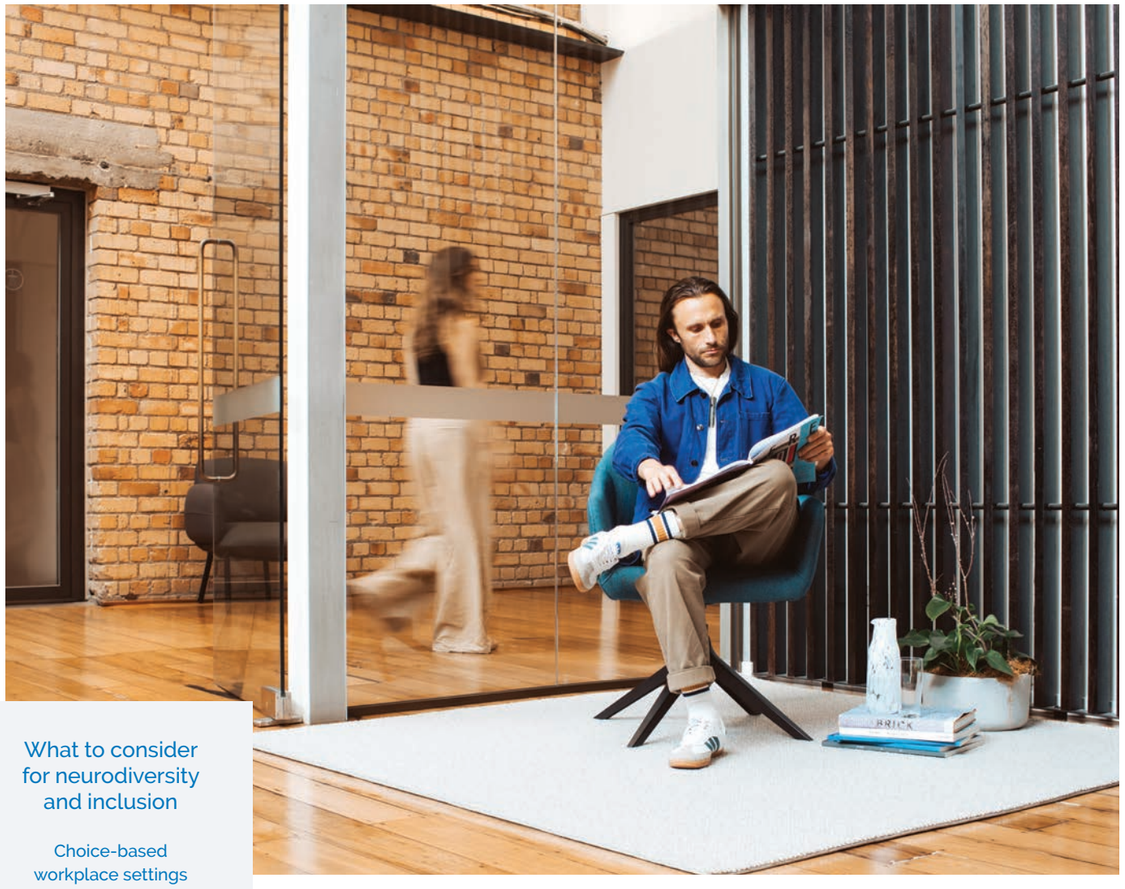


NEUROSCIENCE INSIGHT
with Mark Williams, Neuroscientist

"A person's day contains perhaps three to four hours of high-quality directed attention, not eight hours of uninterrupted cognition."

Q: What does this mean for workplace design?

"Space would be matched to task rather than to headcount. The open-plan-versus-offices argument is the wrong frame. What matters is whether someone doing three different kinds of work in a day can move between three appropriate settings. Enclosed quiet for focus, small rooms for two-person problem-solving, open areas for genuinely social work."



What to consider for neurodiversity and inclusion

- Choice-based workplace settings
- Flexible work neighbourhoods
- Alternative collaboration spaces for different communication styles
- Individual control over lighting, seating and workspace preferences
- Predictable wayfinding and intuitive layouts
- A choice of stimulating and low-stimulation environments
- Diverse settings for different ways of working and interacting
- Equitable access to both privacy and community
- Materials, textures and finishes considered for a range of sensory preferences

The Konfurb Saron chair creates a recovery space



The Konfurb Arco Series in a social space

Community

Connection is the glue that holds us together.

Technology gives us more ways to connect, but the relationships people build at work still play a major role in wellbeing, engagement and culture.

Erika Clarry, Organisational Psychology Researcher at Umbrella and Geneva Wellbeing, says connection remains one of the strongest reasons people choose to come together in person.

"Work remains one of the primary places where adults form friendships and social relationships, and these relationships play an important role in our wellbeing."

Research suggests face-to-face interaction can play an important role in collaboration and idea generation. Being physically together often encourages broader thinking, spontaneous conversations and the exchange of ideas that are more difficult to replicate online.

As organisations continue to focus on culture, retention and performance, workplace design is increasingly being used to support meaningful human interaction. Team neighbourhoods, workplace cafés, project rooms, social hubs and informal meeting spaces create opportunities for both planned and unplanned connection throughout the day.

These environments help turn everyday interaction into stronger working relationships and a greater sense of connection across the organisation.

What to consider

Social hubs that act as workplace destinations

Café-style gathering spaces with work-ready functionality

Neighbourhood work areas that keep teams connected

Informal mentoring and coaching spaces

Project rooms that support ongoing team collaboration

Communal tables that encourage chance encounters

Multi-purpose breakout zones for connection and learning

Internal hospitality-style environments

Spaces that support both planned and spontaneous interactions

NEUROSCIENCE INSIGHT
with Mark Williams, Neuroscientist

Q: What should employers prioritise to 'earn the commute'?

"The neuroscience argument is about what genuinely requires co-presence: trust formation, high-bandwidth repair of misunderstanding, and apprenticeship-style learning."

RESELLER OBSERVATION

In a survey of eight Buro reseller partners across Australia and New Zealand, six said building culture and connection as the main reason organisations are encouraging employees back into the office.

Privacy & Focus

Good design balances openness with privacy.

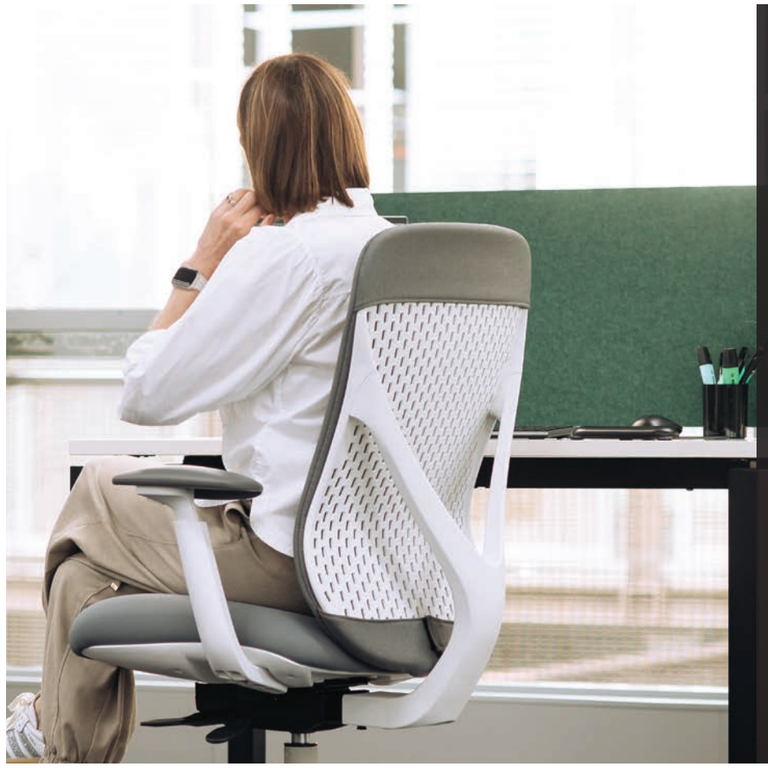
Privacy, sound transfer and distraction are often some of the biggest concerns during workplace design projects, says workplace design expert Toni Dickson. Organisations can be wary of moving from enclosed offices to more open environments, but those concerns often ease once people experience the benefits of greater visibility and connection.

What tends to matter most once people are actually using the space is whether they can find somewhere quiet when they need it. Good acoustic control and access to spaces for confidential conversations or focused work can make a big difference.

Recent research from *XY Sense* found meeting rooms, phone booths, pods and individual focus spaces were among the most heavily used workplace settings.

"Acoustic issues often only become obvious once people move in. That's where post-occupancy reviews can be useful, helping organisations see what's working, where the pressure points are and what needs adjusting," says Toni.

The aim isn't to choose between open and private spaces. It's to give people enough of both, so they can move between collaboration and focused work as needed.



What to consider

- Acoustic privacy booths
- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Individual focus workspaces
- Bookable quiet rooms
- Visual privacy screens
- Acoustic treatments and sound management
- Zoned workplace planning
- Small meeting rooms for 1-3 people
- Retreat spaces for concentrated work
- Spaces for mental recovery and reflection
- A balanced mix of open and enclosed environments

The Buro Axon chair

"Privacy is increasingly recognised as a performance tool, not a luxury."

Mark Williams, Neuroscientist



The Koplus Milli Stand Booth

Human-Centred AI Workplaces

As AI takes on routine tasks, human judgement matters more.



The Konfurb Loop chair, available in Australia in our project range

Human skills such as creativity, collaboration and critical thinking are becoming increasingly valuable.

As neuroscientist Mark Williams says, " AI shifts effort from production to verification, and verification is not the easier task, because judging whether fluent output is correct requires the expertise you'd have built by producing it." While information can now be generated almost instantly, in many cases making sure it's accurate and relevant takes more brainpower than generating it.

This shift is placing greater emphasis on critical thinking and decision-making. As the volume of information increases, employees need greater capacity to review ideas, challenge assumptions and apply knowledge effectively.

Research suggests that the more people trust AI outputs, the less critically they may assess them, making human oversight even more important.

But human-centred AI workplaces are not only about judgement. They also need to protect the human interaction that technology can't replace.

As employees spend more time working with digital tools, spaces for mentoring, learning, knowledge sharing and community become more important. They give people opportunities to exchange ideas, build relationships and learn from each other in ways technology can't replicate.



EXPERT INSIGHT
with Erika Clarry, Organisational Psychology Researcher at Umbrella and Geneva Wellbeing

"With all the constant change happening around us, organisations need to pay more attention to our basic psychological needs as humans: the need to belong, the need to feel capable and effective, and the need to have some autonomy and control over how we work."

What to consider for a human-centred AI workplace

Focus environments for deep thinking and evaluation

Small team collaboration spaces for discussion and decision-making

Project rooms for idea development

Learning and mentoring environments

Spaces that support critical thinking and knowledge sharing

Multi-purpose environments that adapt to changing work patterns

Spaces that balance technology with human interaction

PART TWO

Workplace Design & Environment

Workplace strategy sets the direction and design brings it to life.

As organisations focus on creating more engaging workspaces, the physical environment is evolving alongside workplace culture. Materials, colours, textures, furniture and spatial planning are all being used more intentionally to shape how people feel and perform.

The following trends highlight the design movements influencing commercial workplaces and the practical ways organisations are creating spaces that feel more human.

IN THIS SECTION

Biophilic Design

Resimercial

Sustainability

Colour & Texture

Adapting Spaces

Organic Forms

Biophilic Design

Nature remains one of the most powerful workplace wellbeing tools.

As employees spend more of the day working through screens, contact with nature can offer a valuable counterbalance.

Biophilic design brings nature into the workplace through elements such as greenery, daylight and natural materials. These features can help reduce stress and make spaces feel more restorative.

The strongest examples go beyond adding a few plants. Nature is woven through the wider workplace experience, helping indoor spaces feel calmer and more connected to the outdoors.

"Natural light helps reduce strain on the eyes, supports our internal body clock and helps people feel more energised throughout the day."

Toni Dickson, Senior Design Consultant, Fuze Business Interiors



The Konfurb Kivo

What to consider for biophilic design

- Access to natural daylight
- Internal planting and green walls
- Views to nature
- Outdoor breakout and meeting spaces
- Nature-inspired spatial planning
- Indoor air quality considerations
- Biophilic forms and furniture
- Seasonal and natural light awareness



The Konfurb Saron

What to consider for a resimercial space

- Hospitality-inspired breakout spaces
- Comfortable lounge and café settings
- Residential-scale furniture
- Informal meeting spaces
- Softened workplace aesthetics
- Work-ready social hubs
- Multiple seating styles and postures
- Spaces designed for connection and conversation
- Welcoming and approachable environments

Resimercial

The line between home, hospitality and workplace design continues to blur.

Designers are creating workplace environments that feel warmer and more inviting, while still meeting the practical demands of a commercial setting.

Soft textiles, tactile upholstery, layered materials and residential-inspired finishes are replacing harder surfaces and more traditional corporate aesthetics. The result is a more relaxed visual language that feels approachable rather than institutional.

Hospitality is a major influence too. Cafés, lounges and breakout zones are being designed with the same attention to comfort and atmosphere found in hotels and restaurants.

Importantly, these spaces still need to work hard. Integrated power, acoustic performance and commercial-grade materials ensure comfort does not come at the expense of durability.

The result is a workplace that feels less like an office and more like somewhere people genuinely want to spend time.

"Designers are increasingly asking: 'How do we want people to feel in this space?' and designing workplace environments accordingly."

Mary-Jane Copeland, Commercial Manager & Consultant, Warwick Fabrics NZ

Sustainability

Sustainability still matters, but budgets matter too.

Cost pressures and tighter project budgets are influencing purchasing decisions across the commercial furniture sector. Sustainability remains important, but it increasingly needs to stack up alongside long-term value.

That puts more focus on certifications, material transparency and proven performance. Standards such as AFRDI, GREENGUARD and FSC® are especially important in government, education and larger commercial projects where environmental requirements are built into procurement.

Sustainability is also becoming a stronger commercial differentiator. Research from Australia and New Zealand suggests high-performing sustainable office buildings can achieve stronger occupancy, rental premiums and higher asset values. As environmental performance matters more to occupiers and investors, it is becoming part of the value equation rather than simply a box to tick.

Durability and adaptability matter too. Furniture that can handle heavy commercial use, adapt as workplace needs change and stay in service for longer helps reduce waste and avoid unnecessary replacement. Over time, that can make a real difference to both environmental impact and overall value.

6.7%

Rental Premium

Research published in 2024 found New Zealand office buildings with both Green Star and NABERSNZ certification achieved an average 6.7% rental premium compared to non-certified buildings.[1]

12%

Higher Occupancy

Recent Australian office buildings with 5.5-6 Star NABERS ratings achieved occupancy levels of 88%, compared to 76% for 4 Star-rated buildings.[2]

What to consider for sustainability

- AFRDI accredited products
- GREENGUARD certified products
- FSC® certified materials
- Durable commercial-grade construction
- Product transparency and environmental credentials
- Adaptable furniture that supports changing workspace needs
- Repairable and replaceable components, where practical
- Long-term value over short-term replacement cycles
- Low-emission materials and finishes
- Product guarantees and lifecycle considerations



Sources: 1. JLL & New Zealand Green Building Council, 2024 nzgbc.org.nz/news-and-media/sustainable-offices-deliver-better-returns-new-report-finds.
2. CBRE NABERhood Watch Report, 2024 cbre.com.au/insights/reports/2024-naberhood-watch

Colour & Texture

More attention is being paid to how workplaces look and feel.

Instead of one visual language across the whole office, colour and texture are helping define different moods and settings.

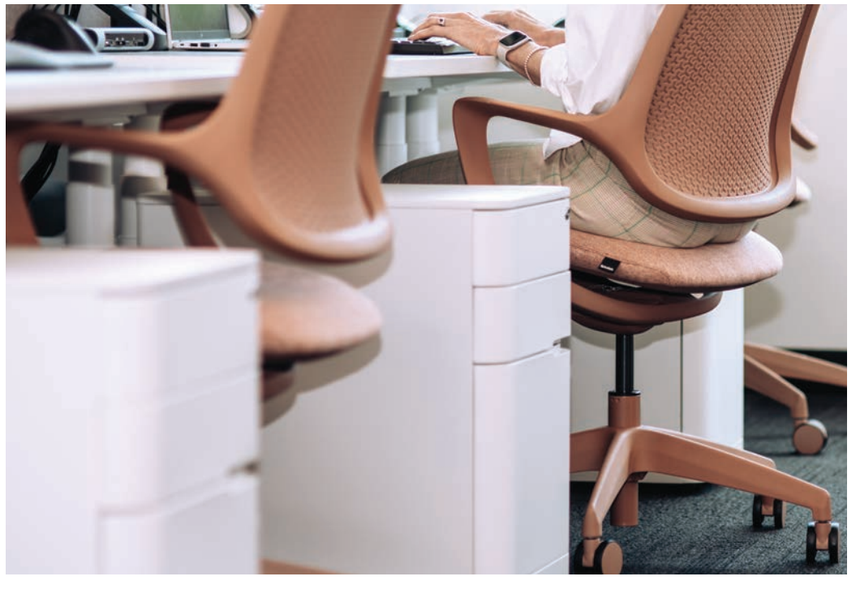
Colour is being used to shape different ways of working. Calmer hues, including soft greens, warm neutrals and muted blues, support focus and concentration, while richer accents such as ochre, terracotta and deep indigo bring energy and character to collaboration and social spaces.

Texture is playing an equally important role. Woven fabrics, natural fibres and tactile finishes are introducing depth and visual softness into commercial environments. These materials help balance harder workplace elements such as glass and metals, while creating spaces that feel more inviting.

Hospitality and residential design continue to influence commercial interiors, with organisations favouring spaces that feel layered and lived-in. The result is a move away from purely functional workplaces towards spaces with more personality and warmth.

"While colour often attracts immediate attention, texture and form tend to create a lasting sensory experience that gives a space character and authenticity."

Amit Gupta, Product Development Manager, Bremworth



The Konfurb Nara chair in clay colour.

Palette Direction

- Moss green
- Sage
- Sakura pink
- Clay
- Oatmeal
- Terracotta
- Desert sand
- Honey and ochre
- Deep indigo
- Warm timber tones
- Textural neutrals



The Buro Odyssey chair in Tan PU fabric.

What to consider with colour and texture

- Layered colour palettes
- Workspace zoning through colour
- Nature-inspired tones
- Warm neutrals and earthy accents
- Texture-rich upholstery
- Woven and tactile finishes
- Material-led workplace identity
- Contrasting materials and finishes



INDUSTRY INSIGHT
with Mary-Jane Copeland,
Commercial Manager / Consultant, Warwick Fabrics NZ

"Textures, fabrics and tactile finishes provide a more sensory experience and a welcome respite from digital overload. Being surrounded by materials that feel natural and tactile can help create environments that are more restorative and calming."

Q: What role does texture play in modern workplace design?

"Commercial workplace fabrics have become significantly more textural, bringing a residential feel into professional environments. Textural fabrics balance harder surfaces such as timber, stone, glass and metal, creating a softer visual effect while strengthening the connection to nature."

Adapting Spaces

Existing spaces are being made to work harder.

Furniture, acoustic solutions, workplace zoning and flexible layouts are helping organisations create new experiences within their existing footprint.

Meeting rooms are being repurposed as project spaces. Underutilised lounges are becoming informal work settings. Open-plan environments are being enhanced with privacy solutions, focus areas and collaborative neighbourhoods. Often, small workplace interventions can create meaningful improvements to employee experience without major structural change.

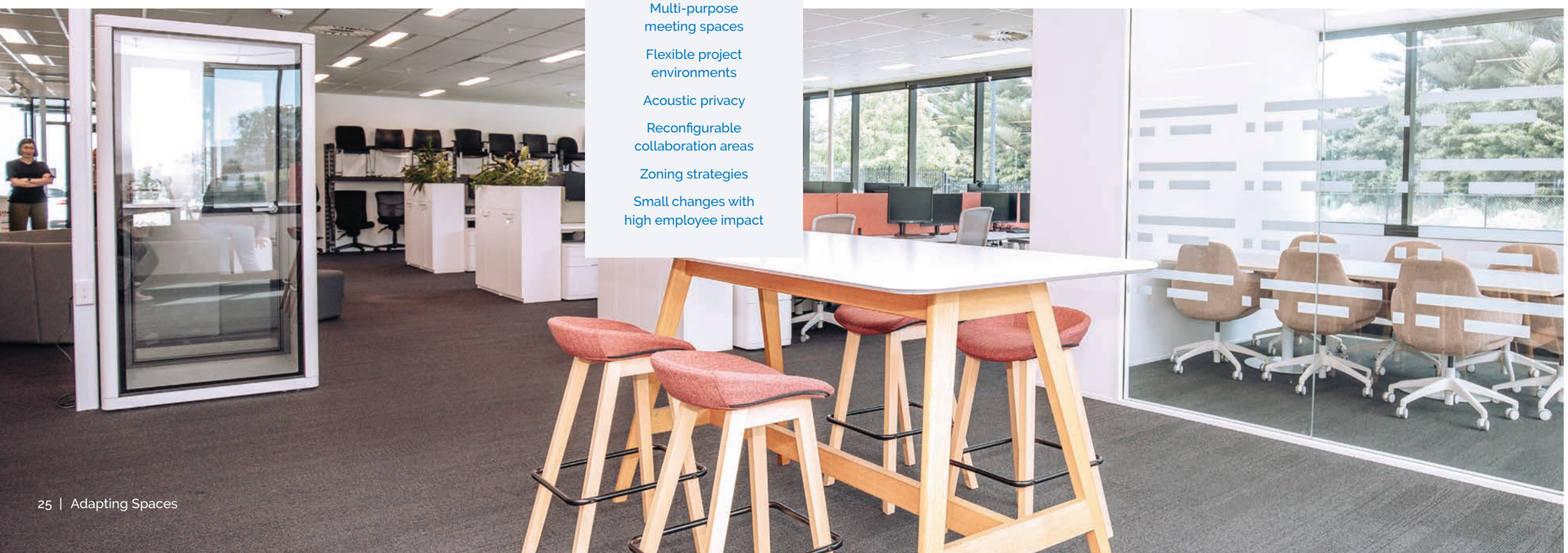
"I love that simple structural and cosmetic changes can transform a workplace and the experience of the people in it."

Toni Dickson, Senior Design Consultant, Fuze Business Interiors

What to consider when adapting a space

- Multi-purpose meeting spaces
- Flexible project environments
- Acoustic privacy
- Reconfigurable collaboration areas
- Zoning strategies
- Small changes with high employee impact





One year on: What we learned from our workplace

Workplace design doesn't end when the fit-out is complete. One year after redesigning our Auckland workplace, we surveyed our team to understand how the space was performing in practice.

Four themes stood out:

- People highly valued natural light, greenery and openness.
- Collaboration improved, but focus remains a critical consideration.
- People regularly choose different work settings depending on the task.
- The most successful spaces balance flexibility, functionality and employee needs.

Organic Forms

Workplace furniture is getting softer around the edges.

Rounded forms and curved profiles are showing up more often in seating, tables and shared spaces. They bring a more relaxed feel to the workplace and help soften the harder lines of traditional commercial interiors.

Instead of sharp, rigid forms, designers are taking cues from hospitality and using softer shapes to make spaces feel more welcoming and easier to move through.

Organic forms can also help define different settings within a workplace, from informal meeting areas to social spaces and quieter corners. The result is a less corporate feel, without losing the practicality a commercial environment still needs.

What to consider to soften a space

- Curved lounge and collaboration seating
- Rounded meeting and occasional tables
- Soft-edged workstation and breakout furniture
- Organic lounge configurations
- Sculptural furniture silhouettes
- Layered furniture groupings
- Softer transitions between workplace zones
- Residential-inspired detailing
- Approachable, less formal workplace aesthetics

The Konfurb Arco Series

Four Ideas Defining High-Performing Workplaces

Design for how people think

Workplaces have traditionally been organised around where people sit.

The next generation of workplaces will be designed around how people think, moving seamlessly between focus, collaboration, learning and recovery.

Human skills are more valuable

As AI accelerates routine work, uniquely human capabilities become more important.

Judgement. Creativity. Critical thinking. Connection.

The workplace has an important role to play in supporting all four.

Community earns the commute

The workplace is no longer the default location for work.

Its value increasingly comes from the experiences people cannot easily replicate elsewhere: mentoring, relationships, learning, culture and shared purpose.

Performance needs privacy

Collaboration matters, but so does uninterrupted focus.

The best workplaces give people access to both.

Designing Spaces Is Only Half The Job



Tim Howard,
Sales & Marketing Director, Buro ANZ
ACCO Brands NZ.

Tim has spent more than 25 years helping organisations across Australia and New Zealand create workplaces that support wellbeing and performance.

They say change is constant, and in the last 10 years the evolution of the workspace has embodied this. But as technology is increasingly embedded throughout the workspace to improve efficiencies, we are in danger of becoming increasingly disconnected.

Humans are social by nature. It's part of how we've evolved; we perform better as a team. However, the changing pace of commerce and the time pressure we're under mean we tend to overlook this. Rather than ask a colleague to review a piece of work, we ask AI to do it for us. Remember the buzzword "brainstorming" (yes, I'm showing my age), when we'd sit down together, bounce ideas around and learn from each other?

Don't get me wrong, I love the progress. It's exciting and, for the most part, it has had a positive impact on our lives. But for those responsible for building workplace environments that seamlessly integrate technology, we must continue to focus on our most basic needs: a multi-purpose space that makes it easy to move from individual focus to collaborative sessions. Easy to say, and thanks to modern design and manufacturing technologies, relatively easy to do — but there are still challenges.

We need to continually educate our teams about the productivity benefits of fully utilising a well-designed workspace. It's down to leaders to encourage their teams to use these spaces well. I often speak to interior designers who have completed an aspirational workspace fit-out, only to return to the site a few months later to see low occupancy, poor use of height adjustable desks, and little understanding of how to adjust an ergonomic chair.

The chairs may have been carefully selected, the desks correctly specified and the collaborative spaces thoughtfully designed, but none of these investments deliver their full potential if people aren't empowered to make the most of them.

Have we spent too much time designing the workplace and not enough time helping people get the most from it?

Designing What Comes Next

Across the trends explored in this report, one thing is clear: the best workplaces will be those that help people think well, move more, stay connected and do their best work.

As technology reshapes more of the working day, organisations need to pay even closer attention to the human experience.

That's the opportunity ahead. And it's one worth designing for.

A special thank you to our expert contributors for sharing the observations and insights that helped shape this report.

Dave Hall
Occupational Physiotherapist

Toni Dickson
Senior Design Consultant, Fuze Business Interiors

Erika Clarry
Organisational Psychology Researcher, Umbrella and Geneva Wellbeing

Mark Williams
Neuroscientist, Author and Keynote Speaker

Amit Gupta
Product Development Manager, Bremworth

Mary-Jane Copeland
Commercial Manager / Consultant, Warwick



buro ergonomics at work® | mondo | Konfurb | KOPLUS

acco BRANDS