



Overview

We’ve created a report where workplace design, human behavior, and furniture meet.

We analyzed 200+ signals across culture, technology, environment, economy, and design to uncover five emerging shifts we believe designers should be watching. It’s intended to prompt new questions, informing both current project decisions and longer term implications for the industry.



Here’s What’s Different:

FORESIGHT

Designed to Stay Relevant

Built on a foundation of long-range drivers and cutting edge signals that give us strategic design opportunities for today and tomorrow.

EXPERIENCE

Human-Centered

The research centers on people first. Human behavior is treated as the fundamental change agent that workplaces should be designed around and for.

PERSPECTIVE

Integrated Approach

Findings are drawn from signals across politics, economy, society, technology, and the environment, then read across strategy, design, and behavior for a fuller picture of how work is changing.

STRATEGY

Actionable

Every insight comes with a “so what.” Findings become clear implications for strategy and design, so teams can move now without boxing themselves in later.

How We Organized It:

We sorted our trends into two categories. Design Forces are the broad, macro-level pushes shaping how work is evolving. Design Expressions are how those Design Forces are beginning to translate into practice.

TRENDS

Design Forces

Design Forces are the broad shifts reshaping how work happens, across people, strategy, and technology. They move at a systemic level and apply steady pressure over time, acting as the underlying drivers that everything else responds to.

TRENDS

Design Expressions

Design Expressions are how those Design Forces start to show up in the real world. They translate big, abstract shifts into concrete changes in spaces, products, and experiences, moving from idea into practice.

The Changing Workplace

The workplace was designed for a different era of work.

For decades, offices were built around visibility, consistency, and efficiency. Work happened in fixed places, within fixed schedules, and productivity was often measured by presence.

Today, that logic is changing.

Work has become more distributed, digital, and dynamic. AI is reshaping workflows. Employees are navigating growing complexity, blurred boundaries, and rising expectations around well-being, flexibility, and connection.

At the same time, the workplace is being asked to do more than support tasks alone. It must help people focus, recover, collaborate, build relationships, and adapt to constant change.

The building is no longer just a backdrop to work. It is becoming an active participant in how work is experienced.



Design Forces

The workplace is being asked to do something it was never originally designed for: support human well-being, strengthen relationships, adapt continuously, and create space for new forms of collaboration between people and technology.

None of these Design Forces operate independently, and none have a single spatial solution. Together, they point toward a workplace that is becoming more human-centered, responsive, and deeply connected to how people actually work, feel, and connect.

The most effective workplaces will not simply support work. They will continuously evolve alongside the people and behaviors within them.

Together, these Design Forces point toward a new set of workplace design priorities. The following considerations summarize how these shifts are beginning to influence the environments, experiences, and spatial strategies shaping the future of work.



Scan to explore the complete
Furnishing the Future report.

DESIGN FORCE 1

Human Sustainability

Data and science can make the workplace work for the body, not against it.

Well-being is becoming embedded throughout the workplace rather than isolated within dedicated amenities. By intentionally shaping spaces around emotional and cognitive needs, and increasingly using data to adapt in real time, designers can support focus, recovery, connection, and long-term resilience across the workday.

DESIGN FORCE 4

Work Unbundled

The office must earn each visit.

Workplace design is shifting toward supporting work as a fluid, intentional experience rather than a fixed daily routine. By creating environments that enable seamless transitions, varied work styles, and moments of focus or respite, designers can better align spaces with evolving work rhythms and digital demands.

DESIGN FORCE 2

Slow Connection

Connection does not happen by default.

Meaningful connection is increasingly being treated as a core workplace condition rather than an afterthought. By creating spaces that encourage interaction, comfort, and moments away from digital noise, designers can support stronger relationships, trust, and social well-being over time.

DESIGN FORCE 5

The New Colleague

The colleague you direct, not the tool you operate.

Human-AI collaboration is beginning to reshape how workplace environments support communication, decision-making, and shared work. By creating environments that enable collaboration between people and intelligent systems while reinforcing uniquely human skills, designers can balance technological capability with meaningful human experience.

DESIGN FORCE 3

Systemic Flexibility

Flexibility is becoming more proactive and embedded.

Adaptability is evolving from a one-time planning decision into an ongoing system, enabling environments to respond to shifting work patterns, team needs, and real-time data. By prioritizing modularity, multifunctionality, and a strong sense of place, designers can create flexible spaces that balance change with identity and user experience.



Design Expressions

The Design Forces explored throughout this report are beginning to take physical shape in the environments around us.

These Design Expressions highlight emerging workplace ideas, spatial strategies, and human-centered experiences influenced by the shifts redefining how people work, connect, and feel at work.



Scan to explore the spaces and projects that bring these ideas to life.



DESIGN EXPRESSION 1

Sound First Design

Design shaped by sound, rhythm, and atmosphere. Instead of simply controlling noise, spaces are shaped to support mood, focus, and emotional comfort.

DESIGN EXPRESSION 2

Exposing the Seams

Design that reveals process, material honesty, and human touch. Exposing the seams embraces visible process and material honesty, revealing how things are made rather than hiding construction details.

DESIGN EXPRESSION 3

Carving Out Peace in Public

Designing for ‘alone together’ is shaping more personal moments within shared spaces. As environments become more open and social, people are looking for ways to retreat without fully leaving the space. Designers are layering in moments where someone can step back without stepping out.

DESIGN EXPRESSION 4

Play Becomes Form

Moments designed for participation, not just use. Play is no longer just a decorative layer. It’s a way for people to connect, experiment, and feel a sense of agency within the spaces and products around them. As environments invite interaction, the line between designer and user begins to blur, allowing participation to shape the experience itself.

DESIGN EXPRESSION 5

Nothing is Neutral

Design choices that communicate values, identity, and intent. Every design communicates something, even when it appears neutral. Color, material, layout, and messaging all reflect values and intent, whether consciously chosen or not. These choices shape how culture is expressed and who feels represented, making neutrality not an absence of meaning, but a message in itself.



Resources

See Design Forces Come to Life in Chicago

Explore how the Design Forces shaping the future of work are translated into real environments, applications, and experiences within our Chicago showroom. From hospitality-inspired moments to spaces designed for focus, flexibility, and connection, see how emerging workplace ideas come to life through design.



View Our Research

Dive deeper into the research shaping our perspective on the future of work, including Creating Places to Belong and other insights focused on human experience, well-being, connection, and workplace behavior. Explore the signals and research helping organizations design environments that better support how people feel, connect, and perform.



Learn More About CEUs

Continue the conversation through CEUs exploring emerging trends and human-centered design across Workplace, Health, and Education environments. From well-being and connection to flexibility, care, and evolving ways of working and learning, discover insights designed to inspire new thinking and practical application.



DesignSuite: Where Ideas Take Form

Designed to meet projects at any stage, DesignSuite simplifies the path from concept to specification through collaboration, expertise, and a seamless, team-driven approach. As a curated, end-to-end program, it helps move ideas forward with clarity, momentum, and confidence from early inspiration through final execution.



