

The Fundamentals of Wellness and Wellbeing in Workplace Design



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We've all seen trends come and go in workplace design. Trends are fleeting and tend to assume a generalised culture across all organisations. The future of workplace design is no longer based on trends or what is fashionable.

Smart workplace designers are now working with evidence-based data to create spaces that are outcome-focused to promote the unique culture of any given organisation. A uniform approach is no longer appropriate.

Axiom's Senior Workplace Strategist, Annelie Xenofontos, says: "Before even thinking about design, we look at a business and understand the way it works. There could be quirky things that work for a particular organisation that are specific to their culture. It's different for each customer but we look for whatever is required to enhance the way they connect to one another, which more often than not involves technology, efficient and appropriate working spaces, good social spaces and lots of greenery."

The reinforcement of an organisation's brand is one of the main outcomes of workplace design – and the attraction and retention of staff is another – but the most salient and talked-about outcome of workplace design in the world today is the concept of wellness and wellbeing.



What do we mean by wellness and wellbeing?

Wellness and wellbeing are effectively two sides of the same coin. Wellness considers the physical self and the issues affecting it, while wellbeing concerns a person's psychological state, either subconsciously or consciously.

In order to have a healthy workplace culture, wellness and wellbeing need to be front of mind in workplace design. In other words, wellness and wellbeing are not just something to pay lip service to, but should be the motivations that power your workplace. Accordingly, they are the drivers that Axiom constantly refers back to when helping you navigate change.

So how do you promote wellness and wellbeing in the workplace?

In cultivating a climate of wellbeing and wellness, an organisation needs to address the seven principles below.

The rewards of a comprehensive wellness and wellbeing strategy by Axiom – considering all elements of a workplace – are not intangible but evidence-based outcomes that you will clearly see in productivity, reduced absenteeism and loyalty of your staff.

Read on and find out why Axiom promotes each of these principles to create a workplace that is driven by uncompromised, healthy principles.

The seven principles

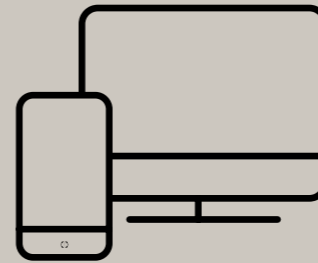
Click on the below icons to find out more.



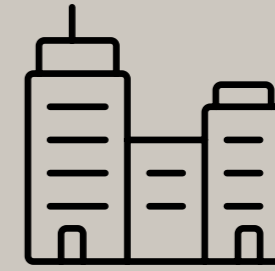
Agility of the work environment



Demands of a multi-generational workforce



Impacts of technology



Work environments



Light and air



Noise control and acoustics

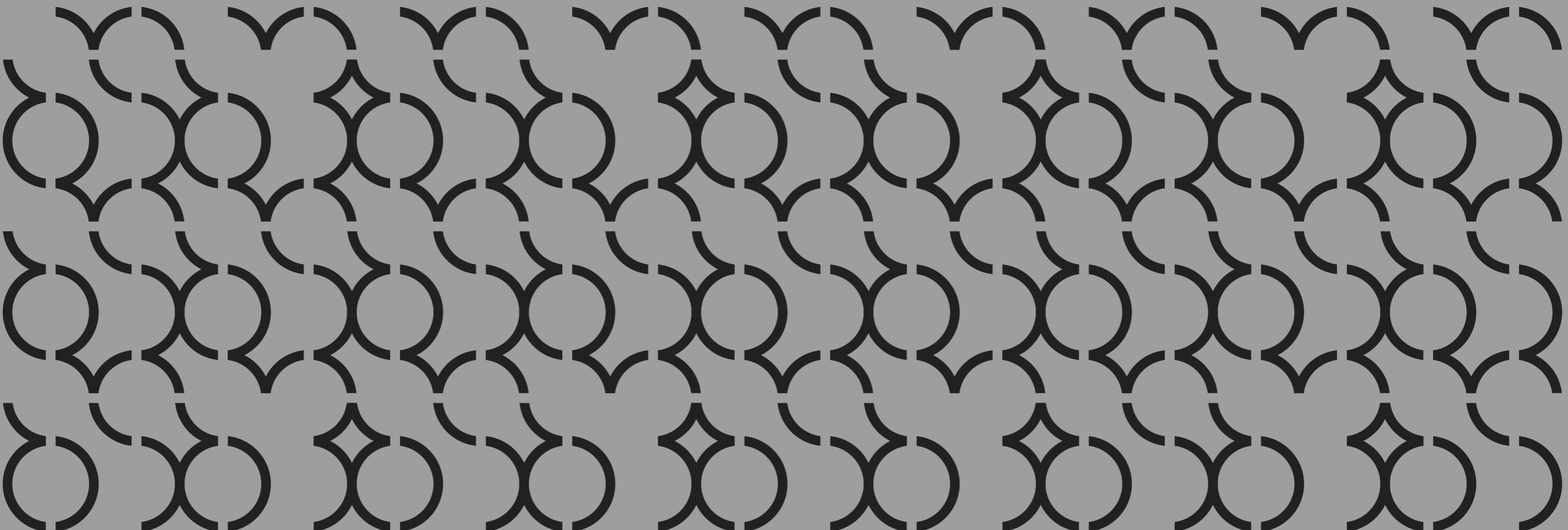


Biophilia and colour

Agility Of The Work Environment

“Work is an activity, not a place. It’s about bringing people, process and technology together in the most appropriate environment to fulfil a specific task.”

Shaun Baker, Creative Director, Envoplan





Happy people are healthy people, and this applies equally to the work environment as every other aspect of life.

Making your office a space where your employees want to be is the single more important factor behind wellness and wellbeing in your workplace design. According to the [World Green Building Council](#): “There is overwhelming evidence which demonstrates that design of an office impacts the health, wellbeing and productivity of its occupants.”

How do you make your workplace desirable?

You make it an agile work environment, which means accommodating a number of different work approaches and preferences for dealing with differing tasks at differing times by different people. The traditional ‘9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday’ model is a thing of the past.

Being agile does not necessarily mean working from home, although remote work options form part of this agility. [Yahoo’s former CEO, Marissa Meyer](#), says: “Speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home. Some of the best decisions and insights come from hallway and cafeteria discussions, meeting new people and impromptu team meetings.”

By making your work environment a creative and stimulating hub where your people can work at their best, your employees are more than likely to be drawn to your space rather than away from it.



Axiom Workplaces



The Fundamentals Of Wellness And Wellbeing In Workplace Design

The Axiom rationale

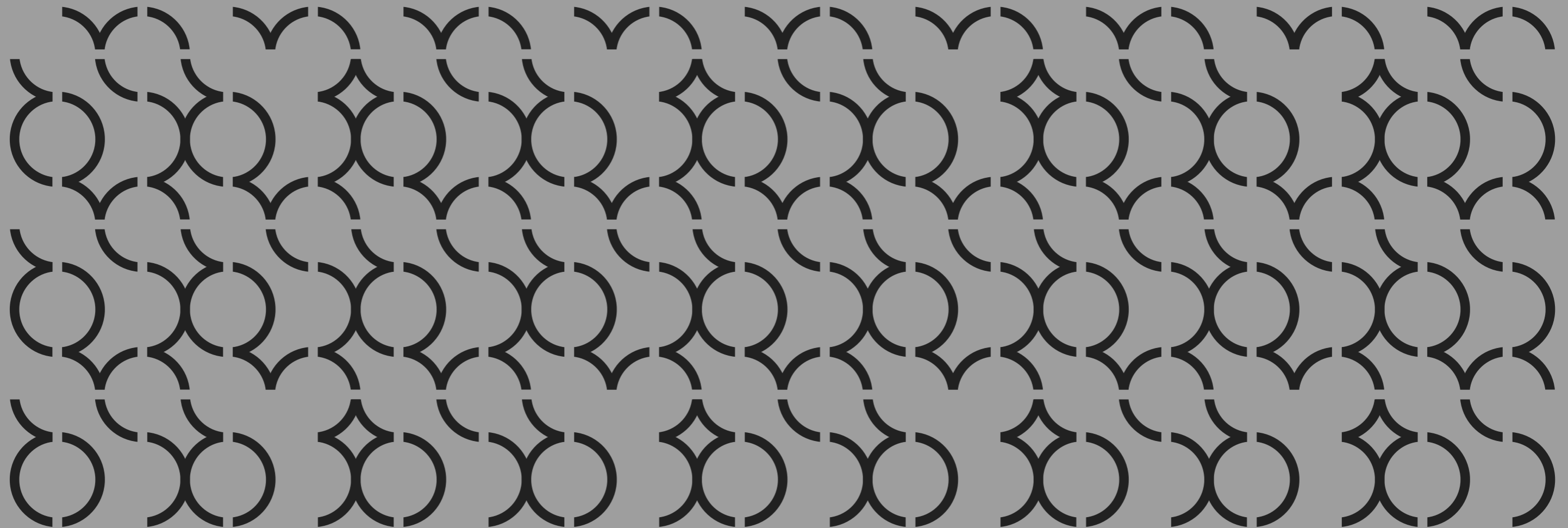
[Agile work is here to stay and it is changing workplace design](#). Companies need to be ready to embrace it, but that does not mean copying the example of another company and applying it to their own.

Axiom knows the questions to ask – and the appropriate solutions to apply – to honour the culture of your organisation and the direction in which you are heading. We create an agile working design blueprint for you that comes tailored to the distinct personality of your organisation, and yours alone.

Demands Of A Multi-Generational Workforce

“If you put a cheap kitchen in a breakfast area, for example, people using it will treat it as such. But if you give employees some input into it, they will generally take a lot more care over it. It’s a strange psychological effect.”

Shaun Baker, Creative Director, Envoplan





We've entered an era of generational diversity in the workforce. People are delaying retirement, working longer and, in some cases, opting out of retirement altogether.

What does this mean for your workplace?

Four different generations, four different mindsets

In any given work environment, you're likely to count among your team:

(i) Pre-Boomers (born prior to 1946)

Impacted significantly by the Great Depression and, therefore, likely to value hard work, thrift and investment in 'a rainy day'.

(ii) Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964)

Similar to the Pre-Boomers in their belief that hard work pays and living to work reaps long-term rewards. Baby Boomers subscribe to the concept of a job-for-life.

(iii) Generation X (born 1964 to 1980s)

Commenced their working life in a time of recession and economic rationalism. Gen X-ers are intent on accumulating skills that can offer flexibility and variability in the case of job loss.

(iv) Millennials (born late-1980s to 2000s)

Accustomed to choice and changing jobs at whim. Millennials work to live, and not the other way around.

If the competing demands of these different generations are not enough, you also need to factor in two distinct personality types that exist regardless of age or generation: introverts and extroverts.



Caring for both introverts and extroverts looks something like this:

How to care for introverts

1. Respect their need for privacy
2. Never embarrass them in public
3. Let them observe first in new situations
4. Give them time to think, don't demand instant answers
5. Don't interrupt them
6. Give them advance notice of expected changes to their lives
7. Give them 15 minute warnings to finish whatever they are doing
8. Reprimand them privately
9. Teach them new skills privately
10. Enable them to find one best friend that has similar interests & abilities
11. Don't push them to make lots of friends
12. Respect their introversion, don't try to remake them into extroverts

How to care for extroverts

1. Respect their independence
2. Compliment them in the company of others
3. Accept and encourage their enthusiasm
4. Allow them to explore and talk things out
5. Thoughtfully surprise them
6. Understand when they are busy
7. Let them dive right in
8. Offer them options
9. Make physical and verbal gestures of affection
10. Let them shine

Workplaces are usually designed for extroverts with an emphasis on interaction and collaboration, especially since extroverts are the group whose voice is most likely to be heard. However, often, introverts are the majority personality type in any typical office, which means catering to introverts might be even more relevant for your workspace.

For a wellness and wellbeing strategy to be successful, there needs to be collaboration between employer and employee, a recognition of different personality types and an understanding that 'he/she who yells loudest' should not be prioritised over others.

Getting buy-in on your strategy from all those involved is critical in itself to wellness and wellbeing. Everybody needs to be considered if your strategy is to work.



The Axiom rationale

The way your workplace is designed reflects your attitude towards your workforce. Valuing your people will show in the spaces you provide for them, and the little touches that accommodate the different ways in which they prefer to work.

A significant part of Axiom's discovery process regarding your business culture is an examination of your people.

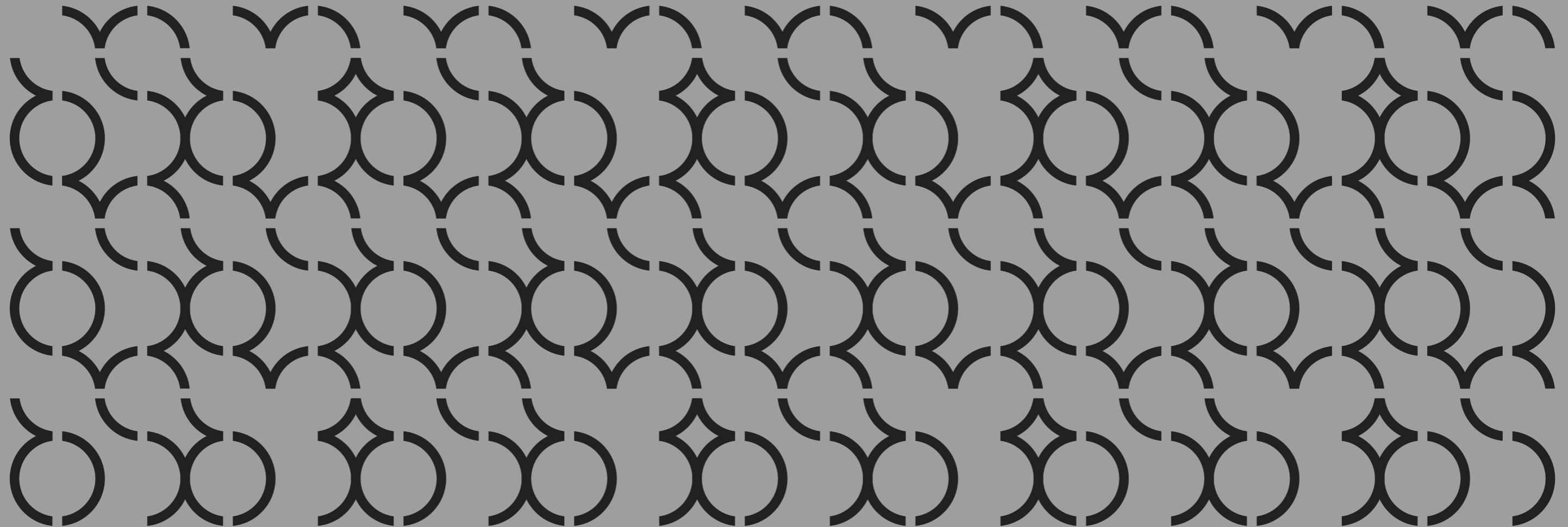
What is distinct about your workforce? What are their expectations and why have they chosen to work for you?

How can they be made happier in their work environment? [These are just some of the questions](#) we ask when identifying the characteristics of your workplace and designing a 'fit-for-people' transformation.

Impacts Of Technology

“By giving employees the right tools to do their job more effectively, you’re creating a positive workplace culture and empowering them to take control of the way they work.”

Annelie Xenofontos, Senior Workplace Strategist, Axiom





It cannot be ignored: technology has a significant role to play in your workplace design.

[McKinsey & Company](#) pinpoints Wi-Fi, instant connectivity and available bandwidth as being essential in creating workplace agility. They reported that improved communication and collaboration through social technologies could raise productivity by as much as 25 percent.

2016 was the first year that use of mobile apps surpassed that of Internet domain names, making mobile apps the dominant means of engaging with brands. The emergence of collaboration sites – such as Slack, Lync, Chatter, Dropbox and Skype – are leading to new work practices. Staff can now work together on documents at the same time in different parts of the world.

2017 was the first year that tablet sales outstripped those of laptops, suggesting that work options are becoming even more portable inside, as well as outside, the office. Employees are no longer restricted to sitting at the one personal workstation, instead operating right across the work environment (even standing, if they prefer) depending on the nature of any given task.

A word of warning

With the development of flexible office layouts in workplaces, there is a new wave of education that needs to occur around ergonomics and the proper use of technology.

As Envoplan's Creative Director, Shaun Baker, notes: "There are still laptops out there that generate 50 degrees of heat underneath them. If you've sat there for two hours with that on your lap, then you're going to have health issues. Similarly, if you have a sofa-based work space in an office, people need to be aware that working there for prolonged periods could cause back problems."

Education around agile use of technology should take place before bad habits that may impact an employee's wellness and wellbeing become ingrained.



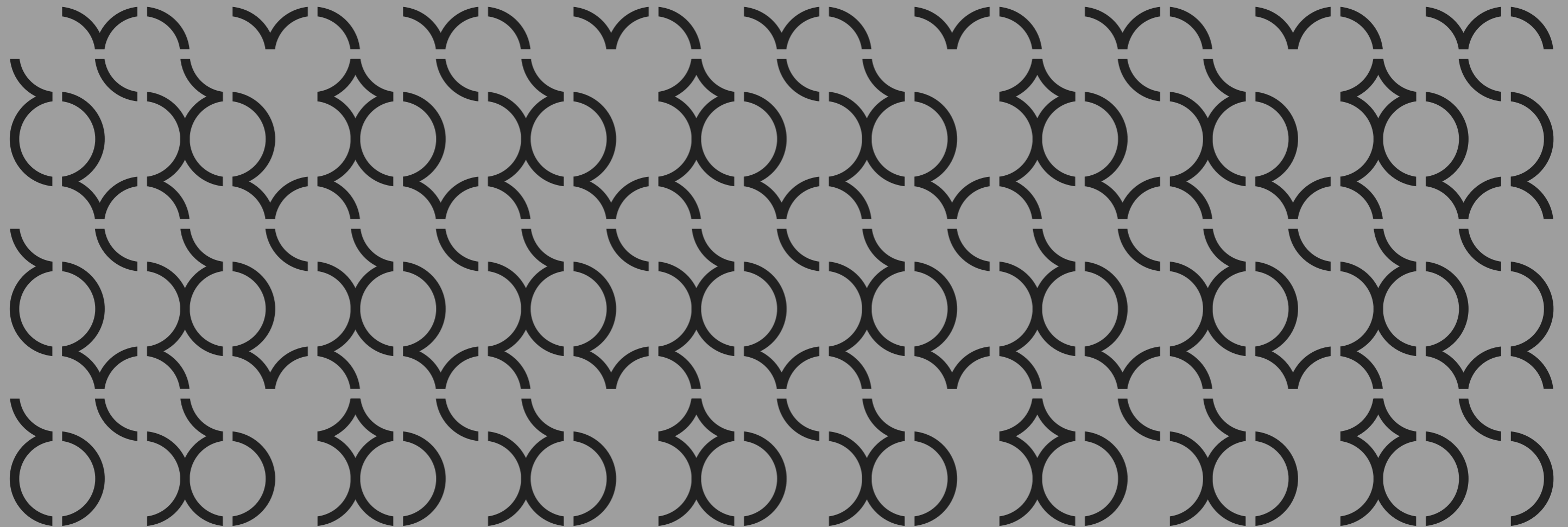
The Axiom rationale

Technology is not just an add-on in workplace design – it is part of the fabric. When navigating change for your work environment, Axiom looks at technology as an integral component that seamlessly melds into the bigger picture, and one that needs to evolve to meet your future growth and other requirements.

Work Environments

“There has been a danger with some organisations wanting to be like everyone else. They might have seen Google, Barclays Bank or Virgin do something unusual with their office space and yet their company culture might be totally different. Unless they change the way they do things in their business and change their behaviours then such a scheme will fail.”

Farrol Goldblatt, Director, TP Bennett





Future-focused workplaces that encourage wellness and wellbeing offer a number of different work zones, across which their employees can move at varying times of the day.

These work zones are commonly identified in the following manner:

Collaborative

Areas that encourage conversation, interaction and creative brainstorming (i.e. meeting zones or what would previously have been known as ‘the board room’).

Quiet

Areas that are more intimate and removed from the main thoroughfare of the workspace so their inhabitants can concentrate without distraction (i.e. enclosed office room/pod).

Social

Areas that are designed for ‘time out’ and relaxing, as defined from the work zones (i.e. lunch room).

Additionally, movement is a biological trigger that plays a key role in people being at our healthiest. [As soon as we sit, enzymes that help us break down fat drop by 90 percent.](#) Introducing clever furniture solutions into the work environment that encourage movement and flexible ways of working can go a long way to promoting wellness and wellbeing.

Axiom's Senior Workplace Strategist, Annelie Xenofontos, explains: “You can have full-time employees who are in the office eight hours a day but not always performing desk space functions. They might go to

a quiet room to write a report for two hours, and then they might go into a collaborative setting. There is a fluidity of work culture that you need to anticipate as an employer because it goes hand-in-hand with your people changing their behaviour.”

An example of this approach is [PwC's](#) office in London. PwC's agile design sees approximately half of the building given over to informal spaces that range from meeting rooms and coffee lounges to acoustic chairs where people can make phone calls without being overheard by colleagues or having to contend with background noise.

Creating different zones in your workplace for everyone to use is the ideal way to accommodate, not only fluctuating work demands, but also the plethora of personality types that may be populating your work environment at any point in time.



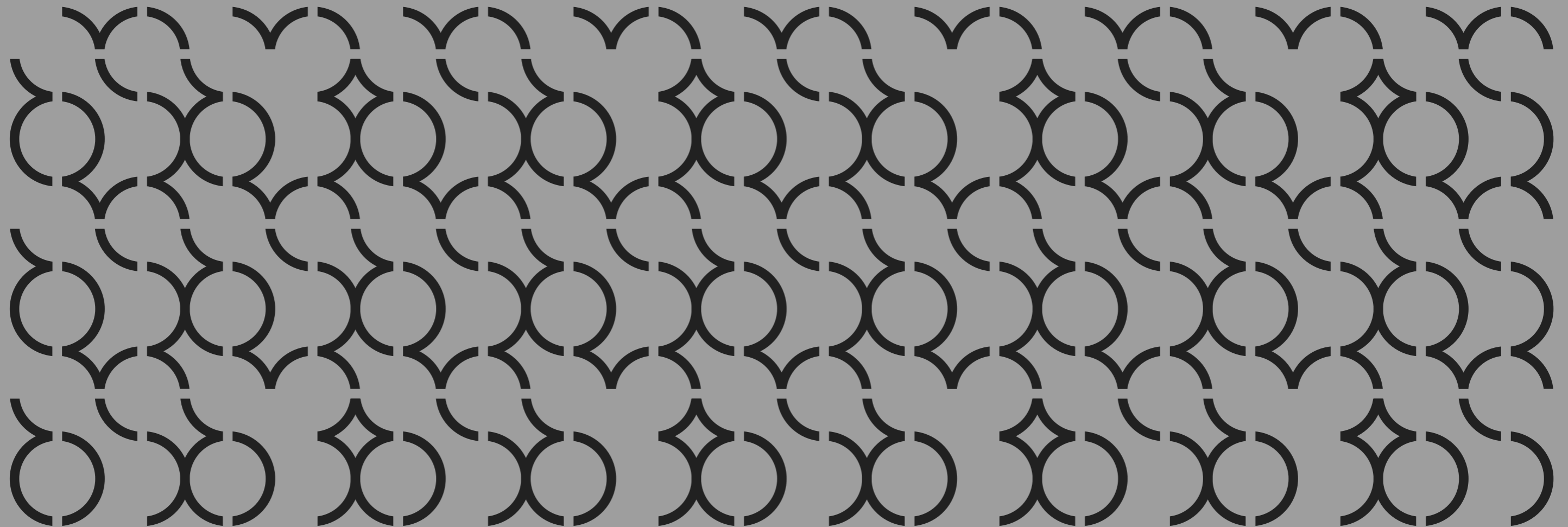
The Axiom rationale

Axiom prefers to get involved with you long before any talk of design aspects. Business cultures are rarely static and part of our responsibility is identifying where you are moving, sometimes even before you know it.

What do you want to achieve with a workplace transformation? Is it to gain efficiency? Is it to minimise expenditure? Is it just to make the place more enjoyable? Is it to elevate your profile? Is it to be closer to clients? Does the building need to look a certain way so people who visit get the right impression?

Our clients are often eager for us to start designing but there are many questions we need to ask before putting the design pen to paper. Only then can we chart the work zones, furniture and spaces and provide evidence of how our vision will work for you.

Light And Air





As many of us know, exposure to daylight helps regulate our bodies and reinforce natural sleep patterns. Therefore, it should not be surprising to learn that 82 percent of office workers believe there is a connection between morale and the amount of natural light in their work environment.

Additionally, studies are beginning to identify that what a person looks at each day (i.e. the view from their workspace) has a major impact on wellbeing and, ultimately, on performance.

But lighting, like so many aspects of wellness and wellbeing in the workplace, is not just a one-size-fits-all procedure, because the right level of lighting depends on a person's age and vision. For example, in general, people aged in their 20s have eyesight that is eight times better than those aged in their 60s.



The Rule of Twenty

Sometimes natural light is not enough and customised task lighting needs to be introduced to make a workplace more effective.

In facilitating optimal lighting for different people in the workplace – and enabling people to adjust their lighting according to preference and times of the day – the colour and quality of that lighting can also play a fundamental role. A simple tip to avoid eye strain is to look 20 metres away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes. [The blue-enriched lighting of smartphones and other screen devices has been documented as playing havoc with our circadian rhythms](#) but matters less if we've been exposed to brightness, such as sunlight, during the day.

Functioning hand-in-hand with lighting is air circulation, the importance of which cannot be underemphasised. Given the average person breathes 11,000 litres of air a day, it is no surprise the quality of that air directly correlates to the quality of our work. Feeling stuffy – or too warm or too cold – can take our attention away from work activities, and make us prone to headaches, restlessness and illness.

[Workplaces that pump appropriate levels of fresh air into the building across the course of the day have recorded an 18 percent increase in productivity.](#)



The Axiom rationale

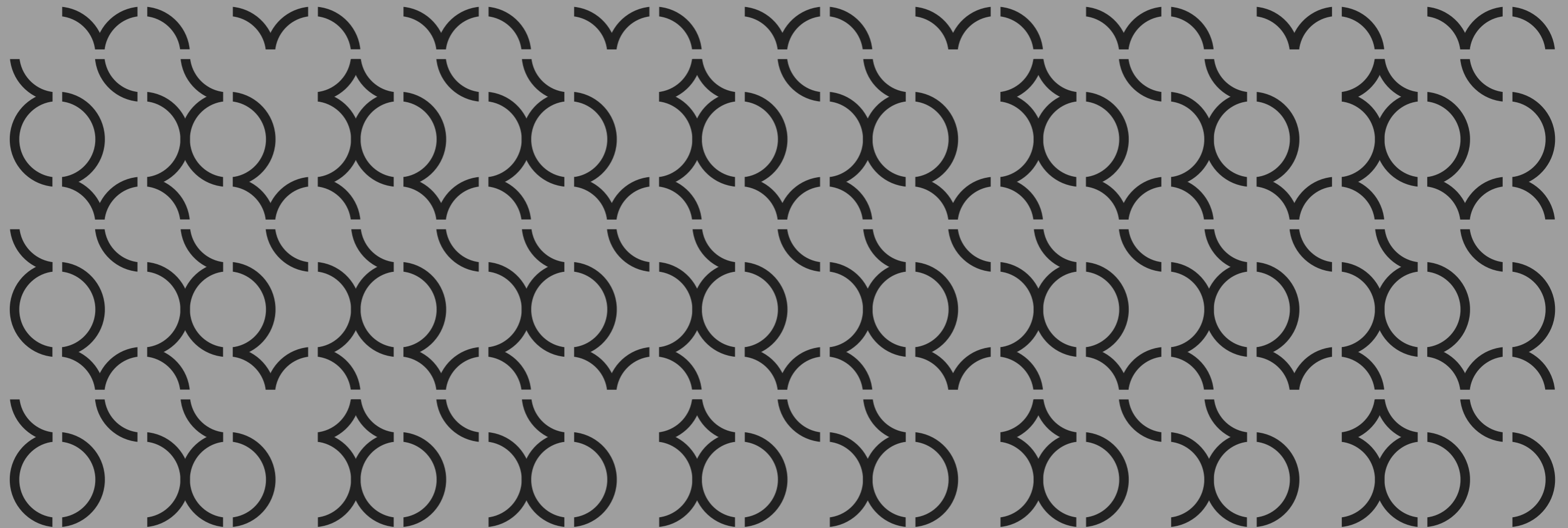
Natural light is the one element of a workspace that everyone wants but, sometimes, it cannot be highlighted due to limited access. However, Axiom works to emphasise natural light wherever possible and employs a number of 'tricks' to imitate natural light, even when it is not available.

Our challenge is to realise the maximum potential of every nook and cranny of a work environment, which means the highest possible quality of air and light is equitably distributed.

Noise Control And Acoustics

“The VAK [visual, auditory, kinesthetic] test can be useful in understanding what kinds of people you’re designing a space for. For example, I can’t work if there’s music on in the background, whereas for other people it helps them work.”

Georgie Burt, Director, GBSHealth



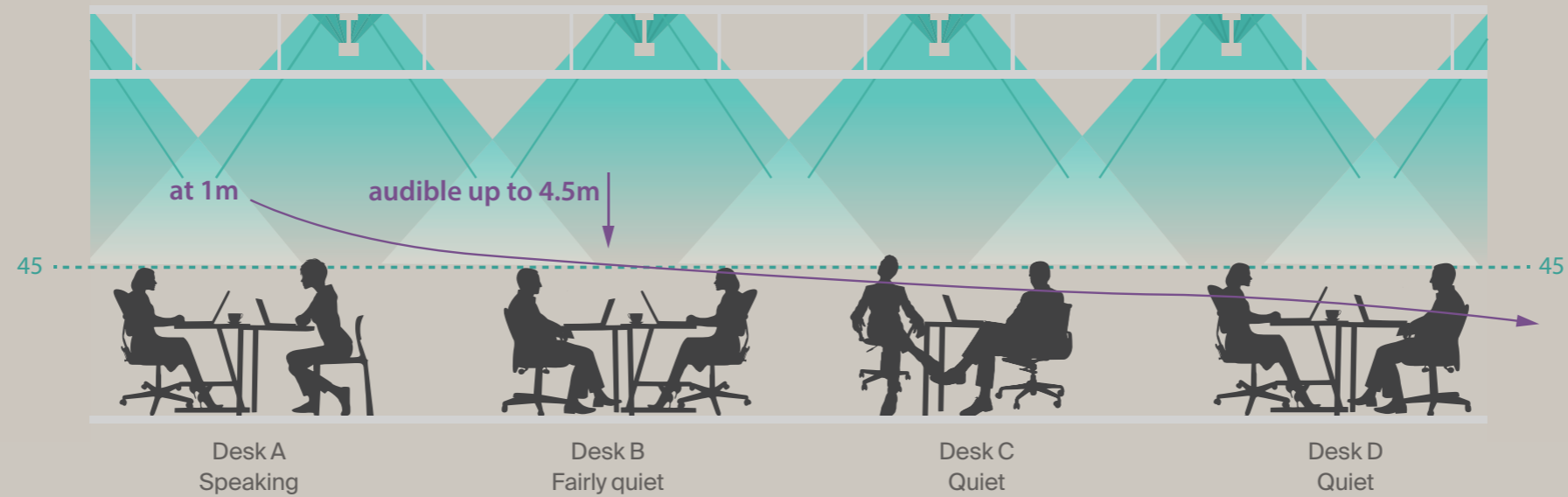


Noise from the conflicting functions of the same space is one of the most common complaints voiced in a work environment.

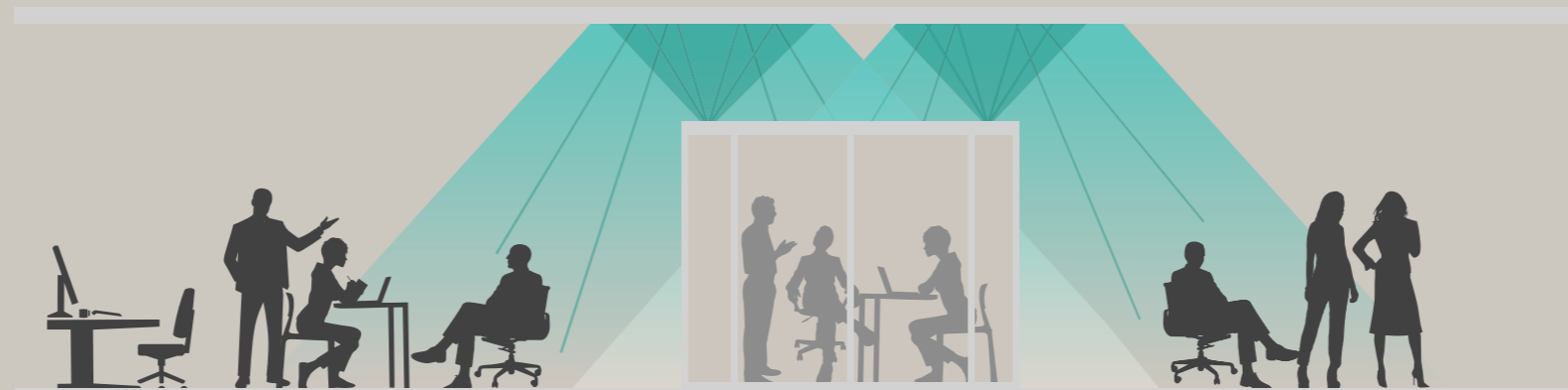
[An alarming 77 percent of UK employees find the acoustics of their workplace unpleasant and blame noisy open-plan environments.](#) Consequently, never forget – it's not just about collaboration, it's also about concentration.

There are a number of acoustic and noise control solutions that can help with sound masking open-plan areas.

Take a look at these sound masking diagrams



In the diagram above, sound masking raises the background noise level to 45dB (A), which makes conversations from Desk A difficult to hear more than 4.5 metres away.



In the diagram above, the system masks noise from leaking inside the office by raising the level of background noise outside the office. People outside are unable to understand private conversations taking place inside.



The Axiom rationale

Axiom has helped overcome the acoustic and noise transferral issues for some very exacting conditions, from ensuring confidentiality to assisting in comfort and productivity.

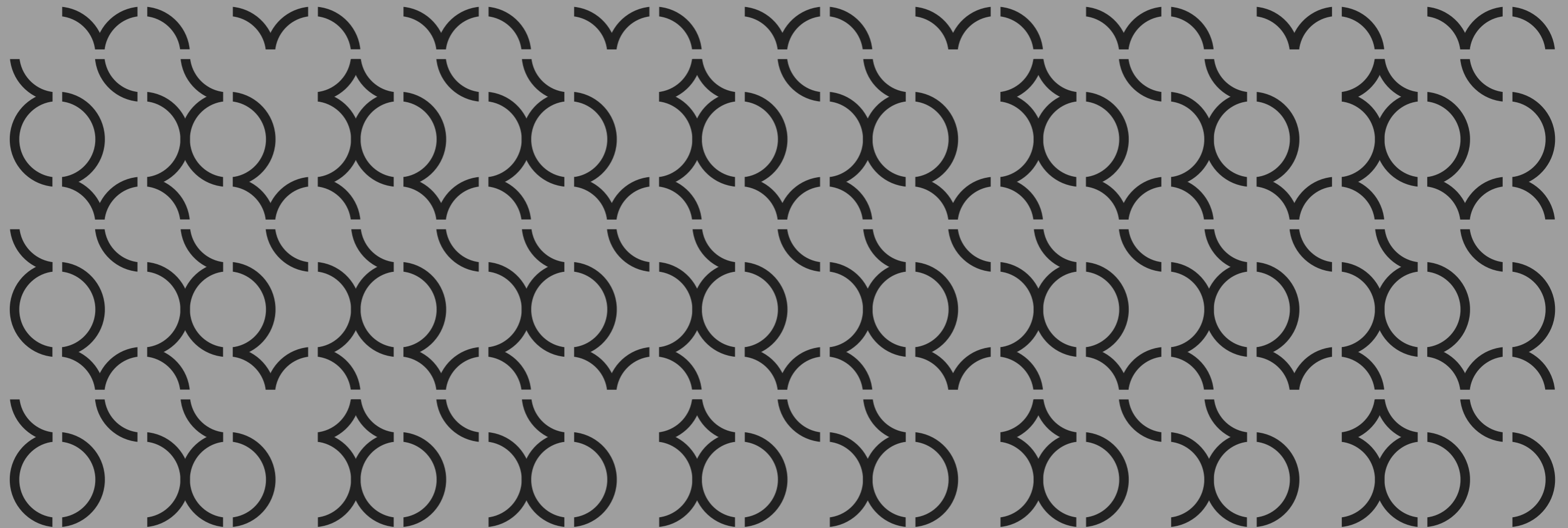
There are many considerations to be made regarding the way your people work. For example, do you have analysts, finance and legal teams that need absolute quiet? These teams are best kept away from the main corridors and placed strategically into corners.

Our challenge is to make every space habitable and the requirements of every team member accommodated regardless of their position in the office environment or hierarchy.

Biophilia And Colour

“Real plants make your office more sustainable by providing natural insulation, reducing air pollution and making your office a more pleasant place to work.”

Annelie Xenofontos, Senior Workplace Strategist, Axiom





The things that surround you in a work environment can have a significant influence on how you feel and, therefore, impact on the wellness and wellbeing of the people inhabiting that space.

Are you intent on only spending your budget on functional tools (such as computers and other technology/ equipment) that your employees specifically need in order to perform their jobs? If so, you may be doing your organisation a huge disservice.

[Over the last 20 years, scientific studies have produced convincing evidence that integrating nature into the workplace can have a positive effect on productivity by increasing individuals' energy and concentration levels.](#)

The innate tendency of humans to seek connection with nature (otherwise known as 'biophilia') means that introducing greenery into the work environment – in the form of vertical and overhead gardens, aquariums and fish tanks, living privacy dividers and other inventive uses of foliage – can help turn a space from something uninspiring into a highly creative work environment.

Similarly, the introduction of stimulating colour schemes into the workplace, including shades of green to imitate or accentuate foliage, can have positive outcomes in terms of wellness and wellbeing.





The Axiom rationale

Regardless of the colour scheme of your work environment and how it reflects your brand, greenery is a clever addition to any space, work or otherwise, in promoting wellness and wellbeing.

In the broader context, [working green is the new normal](#) and creating a workplace transformation for you that is sustainable and environmentally-friendly underpins everything that Axiom does.

Conclusion

“We always test our client’s thinking with radical designs – we design outside of what the client has asked for. We table our thoughts if we see something that should really be done and we can prove that it will work better. Ultimately, our client makes the decision but we see it as our responsibility, as experts, to present solutions that a client may never have thought possible.”

Annelie Xenofontos, Senior Workplace Strategist, Axiom

In painting the broad brushstrokes of wellness and wellbeing in workplace design, one point is more important than anything else: no organisation is the same. What may be the perfect model for wellness and wellbeing at one company may be a formula for disaster elsewhere.

In considering all the points listed in this guide, you should always evaluate and assess what is best for your unique workplace, and design a wellness and wellbeing model that meets your specific requirements.

Inspiration can be taken from some of [Australia’s best office designs](#) but never lose sight that your organisation is a one-of-a-kind workplace, and the environment you create should reflect that.

References

[Design Seminar: Feel-Good Design](#), design/curial

[Oktra – Wellness and the Agile Workplace](#), oktra

[Using light to reset the body clock can treat brain disorders](#), New Scientist

[Future of Work Report](#), JLL

So Where To Now?

Speak to us about how Axiom can improve the wellness and wellbeing in your workplace through our design methodology.

In the meantime, take a look at Our Insights for further information on workplace transformation.

Contact us

AXIOM

Thank you

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