

# What To Look For In A Workplace Design Partner



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So, the time has come for a workplace redesign. There are many things to look forward to: new technology, modern spaces that employees will love, and finishes your clients will envy!

When considering office refurbishment companies, however, it's easy to get enticed by flashy portfolios.

Interior design companies know this.

That's why many of them will quickly produce design concepts that, on the surface, seem very impressive and visually appealing.

What can happen, though, is once that stunning vision starts to become a reality, the cracks quickly appear, and you realise the design unfolding in front of you delivers little in terms of tangible benefits to your business.

If this sounds familiar, it's likely because the design firm you've picked hasn't taken the time to truly understand your business, its culture, and your future goals. Nor have they factored these into the design plan.

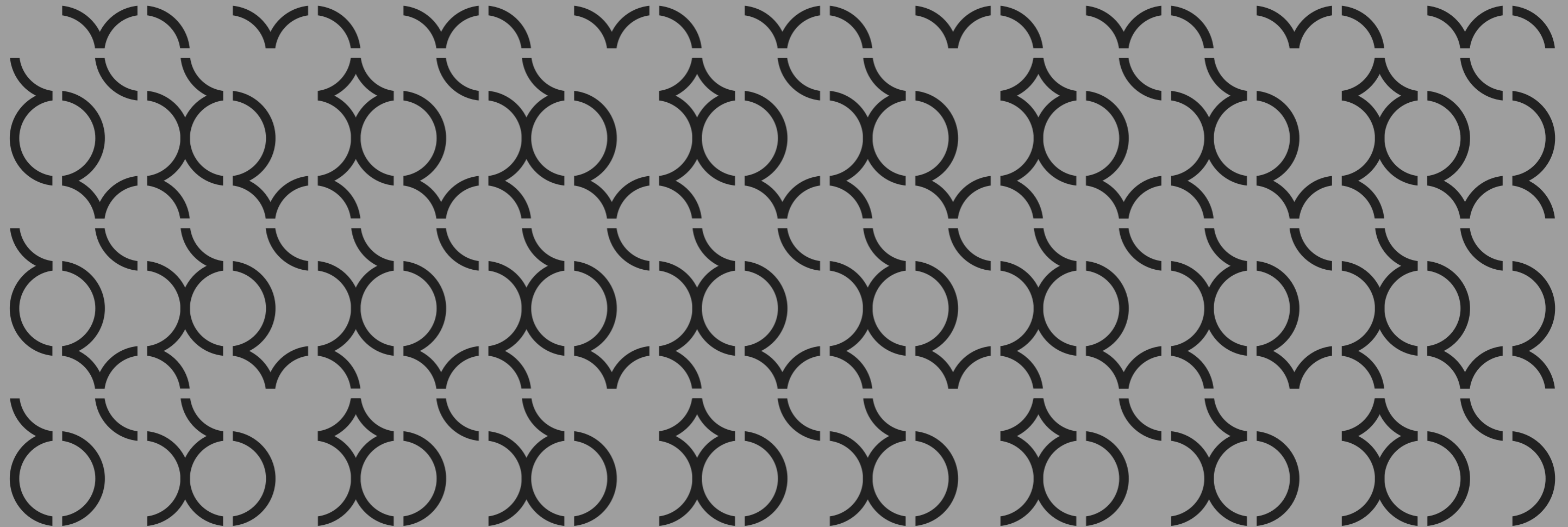
What you need is not simply an "interior design firm" or a "commercial fitout business". If you want to reap maximum ROI from your next office fitout, you need a workplace design partner with an evidence-based approach.



In this guide, we'll tell you:

- What a workplace design partner does,
- What sort of benefits they can bring to your next office fitout,
- What business goals you can achieve with the help of one, and
- How to find the best workplace design partner for your business.

What Is A Workplace Design Partner?





In the early stages of an office fitout, most refurbishment companies tend to be highly focused on the aesthetic properties of a project. They'll measure and photograph the space; take an inventory of existing furnishings; and discuss the merits of various colour palettes. But this approach is in fact a bit backwards.

While these steps might help to create a visually pleasing workplace design, they won't necessarily help your business achieve its goals in and of themselves.

The truth is, a business isn't defined by how it looks, but by the people who make that business what it is. Just as your business revolves around its employees, so too should your workplace design.

This is why a workplace design partner starts the design process from a people-centric perspective. The initial stages of the process, therefore, will likely revolve around collecting extensive evidence about your company culture, your employees, and your business goals.

So, if the tape measure comes out in the first meeting, consider that a red flag. Here are some questions a workplace design partner should be asking:

#### What is your workplace culture like?

Workplace culture can be a difficult thing to pin down, but it's important to have a solid idea of this before you plunge into the workplace design process. Ask yourself questions like:

- What do we value? A workplace redesign partner can help you create a space that reflects your company's values. For example, if teamwork is one of your core values, this could be nurtured by introducing more collaborative spaces or technologies.
- What qualities does our brand represent? Is your brand considered socially responsible for example? If so, you might want to opt for more sustainable materials in your redesign.
- What kind of personality types make up our workforce? For example, is it mostly introverts or extroverts, or a blend of both? Do your employees like to mix work and play, or do they prefer to keep their business and social lives separate? A workplace redesign partner can optimise the space for the personality types in your office.
- What generations make up our workforce? Is it mostly a younger or older demographic, or a combination? What do the different generations bring to the table? A workplace design partner can help you cater to a [multigenerational workforce](#) and bring the most out of each demographic.



#### **How do your employees like to work or collaborate?**

A workplace design that optimises the ways in which your employees work will result in long-term productivity gains and more satisfied employees.

That's why a good workplace design partner will take great pains to understand the habits and preferences of your workforce, and factor these into their concept.

Indeed, this should take precedence over other potential cost-cutting measures. For example, you might think moving to an open-plan layout is a no-brainer in terms of lowering operational costs – but if your employees don't perform well in such an environment, then the savings may become negligible.

#### **So how do your employees like to work?**

Do they thrive on creative brainstorming, or solitary contemplation – or perhaps a bit of both? Do they spend a lot of time on the phone, in meetings, or moving about the office? Do particular departments have very different requirements to the rest of the company?

A workplace design partner will also look closely at how your employees would like to work in the future. Is there anything about the current space that isn't working, or could be improved? Would they prefer more flexibility/quieter workspaces/more social areas? The more input the employees have into the workplace design, the smoother the transition is likelier to be.



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What To Look For In A Workplace Design Partner

### What are your business's goals?

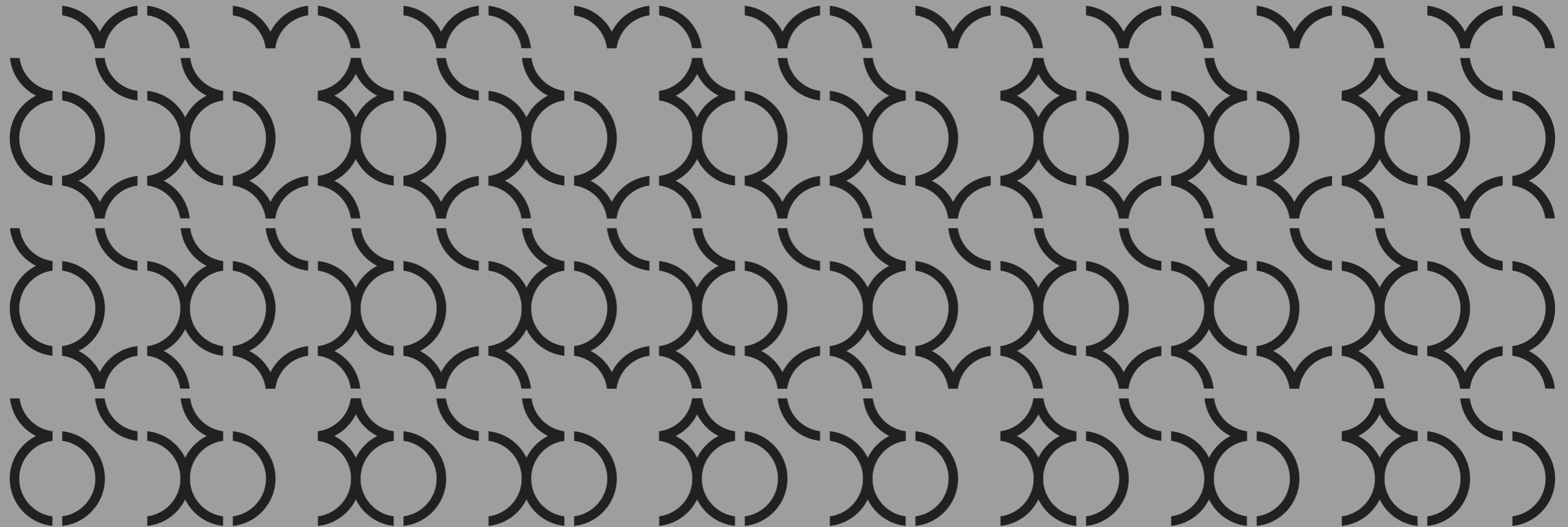
An effective office redesign can not only help your business today, but well into the future – if done correctly. That's why a workplace design partner will want to know about your company's aspirations. Where do you see yourselves in the next five to ten years?

For example, are there new technologies you might like to implement? Would you like your workplace culture to evolve in a certain direction? Are you expecting a significant amount of growth?

A workplace design partner can help ensure you get a fitout that your company can grow into for years to come.



## Benefits Of Working With A Workplace Design Partner





**'Partner'** is the key word here. When undertaking a workplace transformation, you ideally want someone who will work closely alongside you throughout the entire process, to deliver an end result that doesn't just look great, but delivers measurable ROI.

Here are a few benefits of working with a workplace design partner:

#### **Development of a workplace design strategy**

A good workplace design partner will work closely with you to develop a workplace design strategy that is built around key business objectives, against which all proposed solutions are measured.

Not only does this mean that you get a workplace design that will help you achieve your goals, it also means you have a strong framework to guide your decision-making, helping to smooth out the entire process from beginning to end.



### An evidence-based approach

A workplace design partner will carry out extensive research, analysing your current and future workplace and workflows, even conducting interviews with key staff members in order to pinpoint needs, habits and preferences.

This [evidence-based approach](#) means that you are not simply imposing a design onto your employees that they have to get used to. Rather, you get a design that works for your particular organisation, and takes into account its many nuances and preferences.

### Highly customised design

When you follow an evidence-based approach, it becomes less about what's "cool" and "in trend", and more about what solution is going to work best for you based on the given variables. The result is a highly customised design, which will provide you with a strong point of differentiation in the market.



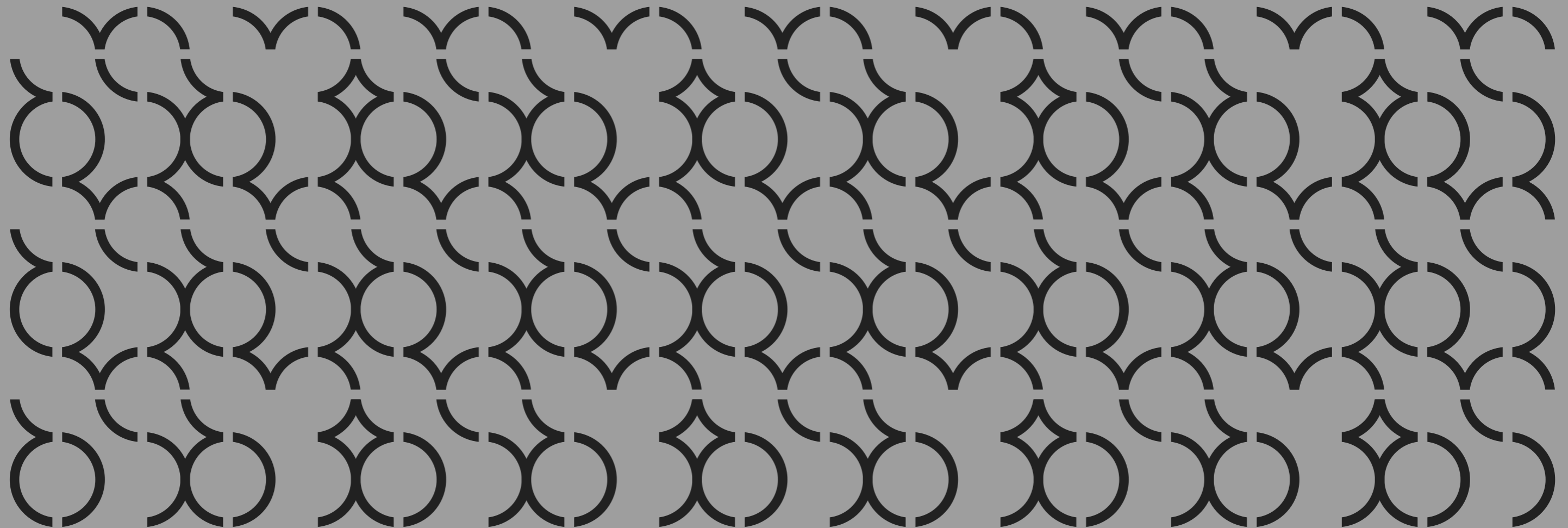
This is also important in terms of employee engagement. Making workplace culture and brand values embedded through the office design can help foster a strong sense of community and belonging.

### Better ROI

When you centre your workplace design around key business objectives, you stand a much better chance of achieving a high ROI, and reaping long-term benefits like improved productivity, better efficiency, and lower operational costs.

## Business Goals You Can Achieve With A Workplace Design Partner

According to a report by Deloitte, Australian companies that prioritise collaboration are five times more likely to experience a considerable increase in employment, twice as likely to be profitable and twice as likely to outgrow competitors.





As we've intimated, an office fitout is not simply a cosmetic exercise. When done correctly, your refurbishment should enhance your workplace culture, strengthen your brand values and drive key business goals.

Here are some business objectives you could potentially achieve with the help of a workplace design partner:

#### Improved productivity

Getting the most out of all your employees within a single office may seem like an impossible task; the Baby Boomers want private offices, while the millennials thrive on the frenetic energy of an open-plan workspace. The introverts want quiet booths where they can work undisturbed for extended periods of time, while the extroverts want more collaborative areas where they can throw around ideas and engage in lively debates. With such opposing needs, how can you be expected to please everyone?

Well, with a workplace design partner, you can. Not only can they suggest creative ways in which to accommodate everyone, but they can also provide ways for your employees to tear down barriers and find common ground, whether that's by providing comfortable breakout or communal areas, introducing communication tools, or implementing flexible workspaces that can be configured for both privacy and teamwork.



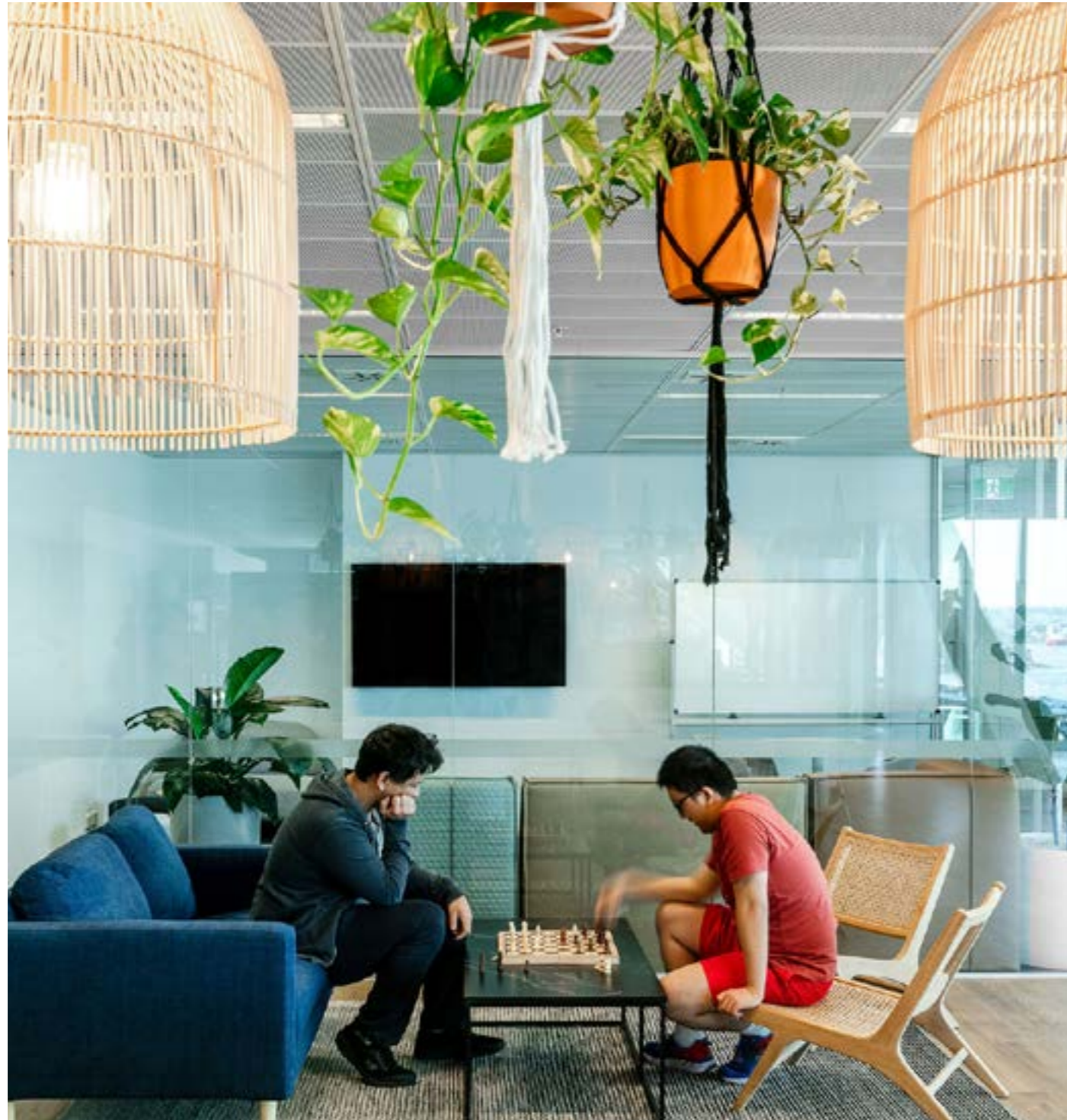
### Greater flexibility

As workers adopt more flexible ways of working (such as remote working or four-day weeks), workplaces need to follow suit. Indeed, flexibility is a predictor of employee satisfaction, with [one study](#) showing that employees who are given flexible work options have less burnout, are less stressed, and are happier at work. This makes flexibility a highly desirable attribute for employees, so those organisations that can provide this are well placed to [attract top talent](#).

Flexible design means creating spaces that can provide employees what they need at any given hour of the day, whether that's a cosy nook to do some quiet reading, a comfortable break area where they can grab a coffee with their colleagues or a standing meeting room for quick-fire discussions.

It may mean integrating flexibility into the design itself, using movable walls and furniture, so that a given space can be adapted as needed. Technology is also a highly important means of facilitating flexibility, with some companies frequently using tools like video conference rooms to help connect with remote workers.





### Improved health and wellness

Employees who are happy and healthy are less absent, more productive, and less likely to look for alternative employment – and this of course has a marked positive effect on a business's bottom line. That's why many forward-thinking organisations prioritise employees' health and wellbeing.

If you're one of these organisations, it's important to examine the environment in which your employees spend several hours a day. There are many aspects of your workplace design that could potentially contribute to the improvement of your employees' health and wellbeing, such as introducing sit-stand desks, or providing a space for exercise classes or bike racks to encourage more activity during the day.

Biophilic design (or design that helps connect us to nature) has also been shown to boost employee wellbeing, whether it's by introducing more plants to help improve indoor air quality or increasing exposure to natural light which has been shown to [improve workers' sleep](#).

One [Japanese firm](#) even provides its workers with hydroponic farms where they can grow their own fruits and vegetables. The possibilities are endless when you think about it – it all depends on what works for your firm.

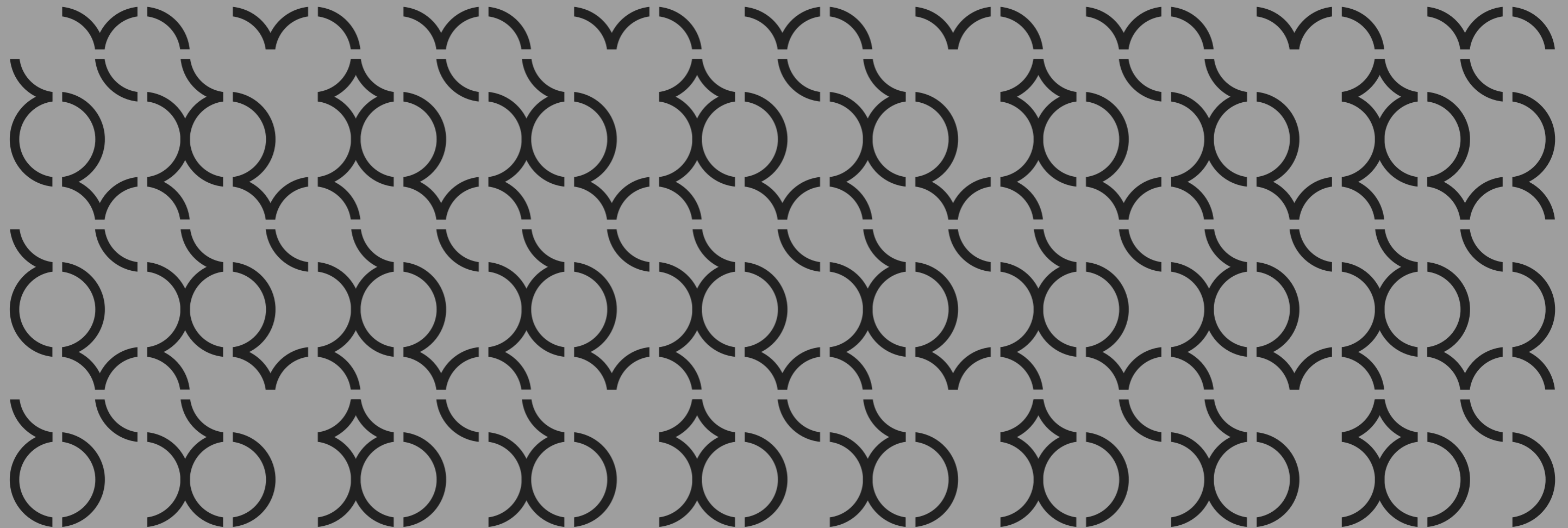
### Implementation of the latest technologies

Businesses who want to remain competitive have to stay on the forefront of technology, and effective workplace design can be the difference between implementing technology that becomes a seamless part of an organisation's workflow, or implementing technology that ends up being underutilised.

That's why, when considering a new workplace design, it's crucial to think about how the technology you currently use – and how the technology you'd like to use in the future – can be integrated into the design, so it becomes just as much a part of the furniture as the chairs or desks.

## What To Look For In A Workplace Design Partner

If you notice many similarities between designs, however, this may be a sign that the agency is imposing its own vision onto their client, rather than letting the evidence guide the concept.







Hopefully by now you're convinced about the merits of hiring a workplace design partner for your next office fitout. But how do you go about finding the right one?

When narrowing down your shortlist, here are a few key characteristics to look out for.

#### **Diverse experience**

A workplace design partner relies heavily on evidence of a business's culture and its employees' needs, habits and preferences in order to develop a highly customised design concept.

When you examine agencies' portfolios, therefore, look out for ones that have produced a wide range of concepts for a variety of clients. Each project should have its own distinct character that reflects the client's personality. If you notice many similarities between designs, however, this may be a sign that the agency is imposing its own vision onto their client, rather than letting the evidence guide the concept.

#### **Strong project management skills**

Creating a fantastic concept is one half of the equation – executing it flawlessly is the other. A good workplace design partner will help manage the entire project from start to finish, giving you a single point of accountability. They will also:

- be transparent throughout the process,
- look after your best interests when dealing with landlords and contractors, and
- prepare contingency plans for any identified risks.



### **Reliability**

A workplace design project is a huge undertaking for a business, and any delays or blown-out costs can be hugely detrimental to a company's bottom line. That's why it's important to find a workplace design partner who has proven they can deliver projects on time and on budget.

### **Outside-the-box thinking**

It can be easy for design firms in particular to get caught up in the latest fads – and, indeed, you should expect a workplace design partner to be up to date on current trends and the latest materials. But just because something is trendy doesn't necessarily mean it is going to be suitable for your business.

A good workplace design partner will prioritise the evidence and deliver creative, outside-the-box solutions that are specifically catered to your organisation, and designed to deliver on your key objectives.

### **Proven track record delivering key objectives**

Aside from simply delivering a project on time and under budget, a workplace design partner should be able to demonstrate how they helped their clients achieve key business objectives like those listed in the previous section.

It can also be useful to speak to former clients about whether their workplace design gave them the results they were looking for. Here are a few things you could ask about in order to see just how effective the design was in delivering ROI:

- Lower attrition: Has employee turnover dropped since the fitout?
- Lower absenteeism: Are less employees calling in sick or taking leave?
- Better productivity: Have workflows improved? Are employees collaborating more? Are employees producing more/better work because they have the flexibility to work the way they prefer?
- More satisfied employees: Have employees reported being happier at work?
- Recent growth: Has the company's ability to attract talent grown?



### Happy clients

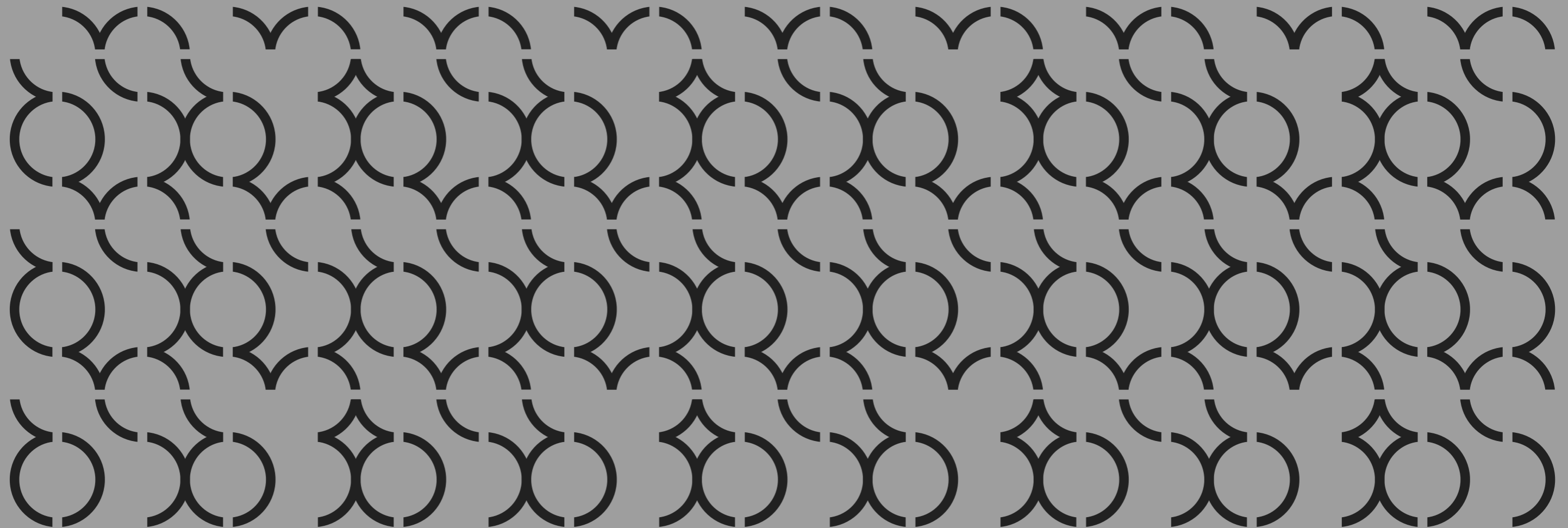
Testimonials from previous clients are one of the best ways of vetting a potential workplace design partner, so be sure to check out any case studies or examples of work on their website.

They should also have no qualms about providing you with references you can contact directly in order to ask about their experience.

**“Following the new fitout, ELMO HQ has realised more connectivity and community engagement than I had even hoped”.**

Monica Watt, General Manager, HR & Administration,  
ELMO Cloud HR & Payroll

# Questions To Ask A Potential Workplace Design Partner





**Once you've got a shortlist, it's important to vet your workplace design partner thoroughly to ensure they're the right fit for your business.**

To help you make the right decision, here are 8 questions you should ask your potential workplace design partner:

**How long have you been in business?**

It's a good idea to clarify upfront that the business is well-established. Not only does it make it more likely that they will have had experience with projects similar to yours, it also means they are more likely to be fiscally responsible (and therefore unlikely to suddenly go out of business and leave you in the lurch).

**Have you worked on similar projects in the past?**

This question speaks more specifically to how closely their experience matches with your project. If they have worked on similar projects, ask how recent those projects were, and talk through those projects in detail. Were there any delays? Did they come under budget? Have they checked in with those clients since the project to find out how they're settling into their new digs, and whether they have managed to achieve any business goals since the move?

**What is your process like?**

As we've mentioned, a workplace design partner will not put pen to paper without having conducted extensive research in order to deeply understand your business's culture, employees and goals. You want to ensure, therefore, that information gathering is a key part of the process, and that the firm will adopt an evidence-based approach and develop a workplace design strategy that addresses your key business objectives.

**What information do you need from us?**

The information gathering part of the process should cover as many aspects of the business as possible, including:

- existing workflows
- employee demographics, habits, needs and preferences
- workplace culture
- brand values

Your workplace design partner should ideally request some or all of the following:

- one-on-one interviews with key staff members
- web surveys to capture employees' ideas and opinions
- individual and company-wide reports
- walk-throughs



#### **How can you help me reach my business goals?**

It's prudent to have an idea of the main key objectives you'd like to try to target in your office fitout, and ask about these directly during the vetting process. While the final answer will largely depend on the evidence that is gathered, a good workplace design partner should at least be able to share a few suggestions of how to achieve that objective based on their previous experience.

Be sure to ask for specific examples of how they have helped previous clients achieve the same or similar objectives.

#### **How would you go about solving any problems encountered during the fitout?**

Inevitably, just about every fitout runs into problems. What sets apart the best workplace design partners is their ability to deal with problems quickly and efficiently, while causing you as little undue stress as possible.

A good way to test their problem-solving abilities is to pose a variety of scenarios to them, and ask how they would deal with them. It's also a good idea to ask what kind of issues they've encountered with other clients, and how they went about addressing them.



#### **What's your aftercare like?**

It's not unusual for a company to go through 'settling-in' pains after a move. Employees may have trouble adapting to new technology or systems, some of the furnishings may not quite function as originally planned, or some other unforeseen issue may have arisen. A good workplace design partner won't simply disappear after the move, but will be available to provide assistance as needed.

#### **Can you provide me with some references I could contact?**

A good workplace design partner will be happy to provide references from previous clients. As well as asking previous clients about how well the fitout delivered on key objectives, you should also ask about their experience working with the workplace design partner.

Were there any bumps along the road (as there often are during such projects)? If so, how were these dealt with? Were they honest and transparent throughout? Were they reliable? Were they detail-oriented? These are all indicators that a workplace design partner is professional and trustworthy.

You could even ask if it is possible to view recently completed projects in person, to get a first-hand perspective of what their work is like.

## Conclusion

By employing the services of an experienced workplace design partner, you can transform not just your space, but also your business for the better.

Taking the time to select the right one will ensure you reap maximum benefit – and ROI – from your next office fitout.

Want a workplace design partner to help you get more productivity, better collaboration and greater flexibility out of your next office? Put us to the test! Request a quote today.



# Thank you

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