

(Y)OURSPACE

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INSIGHTS FOR AN OFFICE REIMAGINED

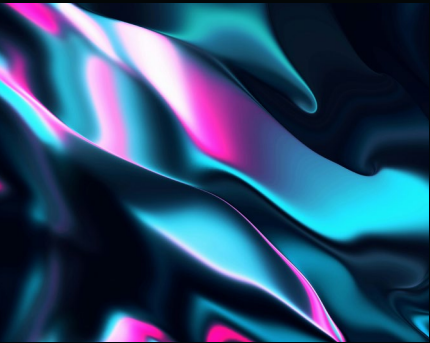
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Foreword

Welcome to the second edition of the (Y)OUR SPACE Anthology. If the first collection was about the office in flux, this one is about the bigger stage: how work itself is being rewritten.



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Across eight papers, originally published between May and July 2025, we see institutions rethinking careers, fintechs coming of age, tech giants rewiring infrastructure, and startup ecosystems jostling for position. The connective tissue is clear: companies are no longer simply adapting their workplaces but realigning their entire operating models.

Three themes stand out.

The first is **multiplicity**. The single job, single skill, single space era is over. The ECB’s 3-5-8 model pushes staff into new roles; employees experiment with shadow AI; firms design workplaces around learning. Work has become a patchwork, not a pipeline.

The second is **maturity**. Fintech has moved from rebellious adolescence to responsible adulthood. Talent strategies are shifting from expensive poaching to careful cultivation. Even the geography of innovation is maturing: less about being everywhere, more about concentrating where skills and specialisation run deep.

The third is **realignment**. Goeconomics is replacing globalisation, AI is moving from hype to hard graft, and tech titans are restructuring their people, power and platforms. This isn’t tinkering - it’s wholesale recalibration.

And yes, Musk turns up again, as he so often does. Perhaps that says less about him and more about us: our

enduring fascination with disruption, even when the disrupter himself has fallen out of favour (politically, at least).

If there’s a cultural touchstone for this Anthology, it may be the Best Picture at the 95th Academy Awards in 2023 - *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Careers, technologies, and geographies now feel like overlapping universes - messy, disjointed, and at times absurd - yet stitched together by a search for coherence. That’s the reality of work in 2025: everything, everywhere, all at once.

So this Anthology doesn’t predict what’s next. It captures what’s already shifting. If Edition One asked *what is the office becoming?*, Edition Two asks the broader question: *what are we becoming?* The answer is still unfolding - across every sector, every role, everywhere, all at once.



OFFICE INSIGHT 1¹

Elon Musk and the Rise of the Portfolio Worker: Charles Handy Would Be Amused

When Charles Handy Met Elon Musk (In Theory)

Back in the late 1980s, when floppy disks were still cool and the Berlin Wall was just about to fall, the late-great Irish management thinker Charles Handy predicted that the future of work would look very different. In his seminal book *The Age of Unreason*, Handy argued that traditional careers - those neat, linear journeys from intern to corner office - would give way to something much messier, more flexible, and more exciting: the portfolio career.

A portfolio worker, Handy explained, would be someone who cobbled together a professional life from different roles, projects, and interests - think consultant by day, novelist by night, and part-time beekeeper on weekends. Fast-forward to 2025, and it’s tempting to look at Elon Musk and declare: “Ladies and gentlemen, the portfolio worker has arrived.”

Only, as it turns out, even the most turbocharged portfolio worker can run out of road.



¹This paper was first produced and published on LinkedIn on the 23rd April 2025.

The Many Hats (and Helmets) of Musk

Elon Musk has built a career - and a persona - on doing what most mere mortals would consider impossible. At one point, he was simultaneously running Tesla, SpaceX, X (formerly known as Twitter), Neuralink, and The Boring Company. And then, in a plot twist that Charles Handy might have found equally fascinating and hilarious, Musk joined the Trump administration as head of the newly minted Department of Government Efficiency (yes, DOGE).

DOGE was Musk’s latest attempt to drag the slow-grinding wheels of bureaucracy into the age of rocket ships and memes. His remit: make government work like a startup. What’s the phrase? Move fast and break things. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, for starters, Tesla’s Q1 2025 earnings. They were, to use the technical term, not great. Net profits fell 71% to \$409 million, revenue slid 9% to \$19.3 billion (\$2 billion below expectations), and investors began quietly muttering things like “distracted,” “overstretched,” and “maybe lay off the Twitter fights.”

Cue Musk’s announcement: he’s scaling back his DOGE duties to one or two days a week to refocus on Tesla. In other words, he’s rebalancing his portfolio.

Handy’s Theory: Working Like an Investor

Naturally, Charles Handy didn’t have Elon Musk in mind when he came up with the idea of a portfolio worker, but the analogy fits eerily well. Handy argued that just as a financial investor diversifies assets to spread risk and seize opportunity, a worker could also diversify their career.

You might be a part-time teacher, freelance writer, mentor, and advisor to a startup, each role giving you different types of rewards -money, meaning, flexibility, or creative satisfaction. The idea was to treat your working life more like an

investment strategy than a job description.

Musk? He took that literally. Instead of dabbling in hobbies, he went all-in on multiple full-time CEO gigs, threw in some public infrastructure tunnelling for spice, and topped it off with political advisory. He didn’t just build a portfolio career but a portfolio universe.

When the Portfolio Gets Too Heavy

Here’s the catch, and it’s one that Handy hinted at: portfolio careers work best when they’re sustainable. For most people, that means balancing work with life, not letting one gig cannibalise another, and being honest about time and energy constraints.

Musk, who appears to operate on a different circadian rhythm than the rest of us, seemed immune to those rules – perhaps until now. Tesla’s wobble, investor jitters, and acknowledgement that he needs to “refocus” suggest that even the most ambitious portfolio needs the occasional audit.

The lesson? Diversification is good. Dilution is not.

What This Means for the Rest of Us

You don’t have to be a billionaire genius with an appetite for flamethrowers to live a portfolio life. In fact, millions already are. The gig economy, hybrid roles, and the rise of remote and flexible work have made portfolio work possible and often necessary.

A graphic designer might take on agency work, sell templates online, and teach a class once a week. A lawyer might consult for startups, sit on a nonprofit board, and write a Substack newsletter on the side. The key isn’t the number of roles - it’s the intentionality behind them.

Musk’s course correction is a timely reminder that even the most exciting work buffet can lead to burnout if

you keep piling on the options. And just as a savvy investor periodically rebalances their financial portfolio, smart portfolio workers need to reassess priorities, energy levels, and impact.

The Comic Relief (and a Serious Point)

There’s something inherently comedic about a man who runs a rocket company deciding he’s also the guy to fix government spreadsheets. But there’s also something admirable. Musk’s willingness to tackle big problems across vastly different sectors is the purest form of portfolio thinking: solving problems where they exist, not where tradition says you belong.

Still, even polymaths have to sleep - or at least delegate.

In his typically understated way, Handy might have simply said: “There is a difference between a portfolio and a pile.”

Zooming Out: The Cultural Shift Toward Multiplicity

What Musk’s story reveals - and what Handy foresaw - is a broader cultural shift in how we define success, identity, and career ambition. We no longer live in a world where status is solely conferred by title or tenure. Influence is increasingly measured by versatility, the ability to straddle different domains, and the skill to reinvent oneself continually.

Gen Z and Millennials, in particular, are embracing the portfolio mindset –not because they want to juggle endlessly, but because they seek meaning, autonomy, and agency over how they spend their time. Many reject the “one job, one identity” model in favour of a constellation of interests that evolve.

This trend is reshaping not just careers, but companies too. Employers are starting to recognise that retaining great people may require allowing them space to pursue side projects, passion initiatives, or

consulting work on the side. The portfolio mindset is no longer a fringe concept; it’s becoming embedded in the very structure of modern work.

Conclusion: Rebalancing the Future

Elon Musk stepping back from DOGE to refocus on Tesla isn’t just a business decision. It’s a case study in how the portfolio career, while

exhilarating, demands discipline. Charles Handy’s remarkable insights, penned nearly four decades ago, are more relevant than ever.

As work becomes less about job titles and more about value creation across contexts, the challenge for each of us is to construct a working life that’s coherent, fulfilling, and effective. For Musk, that might mean putting down the political pitchfork and picking up the Tesla roadmap. For the rest of

us, it could mean a thoughtful mix of projects that light us up without burning us out.

So next time you’re tempted to add one more thing to your calendar, channel your inner Charles Handy - and ask if you’re managing a portfolio or just hoarding chaos.





OFFICE INSIGHT 2²

A Role Today, A New One Tomorrow: The ECB's Bold Bet on Internal Mobility

While most eyes are on the European Central Bank for signs of interest rate cuts, it's quietly generating a different kind of interest – one focused not on inflation or monetary tightening but on the future of work itself. In the shadow of policy speculation, the ECB has rolled out a deceptively simple internal initiative known as “3-5-8” to ensure its 5,000-strong workforce stays adaptable, future-fit, and continually in motion. It is a plan less concerned with how employees spend their weeks and more with how they spend their careers – and it could reshape how large institutions think about talent, capability, and the physical spaces that support both.

Announced in late 2024 and now gaining traction in 2025, the ECB's 3-5-8 plan asks staff to think in phases. Employees are expected to grow into a role over three years, consolidate and contribute over the next two, and then begin planning for a move, culminating in a role change after no more than eight years in the same post. The policy is voluntary but strongly encouraged. Its aim? To foster broader institutional capability, reduce organisational inertia, and ensure staff stay learning, mobile, and



²This paper was first produced and published on LinkedIn on the 12th May 2025.

future-fit.

Though subtle, the model has far-reaching implications for public-sector bureaucracy and any organisation grappling with talent renewal, technological disruption, and the increasingly unstable geometry of modern work. And for corporate real estate professionals, it signals a shift from thinking in headcounts and attendance days to planning for transformation over time.

Rethinking Loyalty, Rebuilding Capability

The 3-5-8 structure is a deliberate challenge to the “job for life” mindset that has long characterised European institutions. While private-sector firms often rotate high-flyers through strategy, operations, and commercial roles, the ECB has traditionally been a place where institutional memory and domain specialism were held in high regard. The 3-5-8 plan gently nudges against that tradition without dismantling it altogether.

In this model, three years is deemed sufficient to learn the ropes and establish credibility. The following two years are for deepening expertise and impact. But after year five, stagnation looms. By encouraging employees to begin plotting their next move, the ECB is trying to make mobility a norm, not an exception.

It's also a hedge against obsolescence. As AI eats away at routine analytical and administrative tasks, roles that once promised two-decade careers may now offer a much shorter shelf life. The ECB is betting that internal redeployment, rather than redundancy, is the smarter long-term play.

Learning as Infrastructure

More than a mobility programme, 3-5-8 represents a new kind of organisational scaffolding that places structured learning and cross-functional development at the centre of institutional life. Employees are not just encouraged to switch roles

but are expected to retool themselves in the process. While some might pursue a technical specialisation, others will gain fluency in policy, regulation, digital tools, or people management. The assumption is that mobility itself is a form of capability.

This shift has real estate implications. If roles are expected to change every eight years, and if learning is to become a continuous, embedded feature of work, then the workplace must be designed for agility. Training suites, collaboration zones, and knowledge-sharing spaces will no longer be nice-to-haves – they will be foundational.

The quiet desk and the loud café are no longer enough. Offices must enable mentoring, formal learning, and on-the-job transitions. The workplace becomes not just a venue for output but a crucible for evolution.

The Broader Shift: From Tasks to Trajectories

The ECB's thinking reflects a more profound structural shift: the idea that work should be understood not in terms of static roles but evolving trajectories. This mindset is gaining ground across the public and private sectors. Skills-based hiring is supplanting CVs. Career paths are no longer ladders but lattices. In such a world, the real question becomes not “What do you do?” but “What are you becoming?”

In this respect, 3-5-8 can be seen as an institutional analogue to the upskilling and reskilling trend reshaping global labour markets. A 2023 McKinsey report estimated that 100 million workers in advanced economies may need to switch occupations by 2030. Meanwhile, the World Economic Forum has argued that “skills instability” is now one of the key risks to business continuity.

Where private firms have responded with reskilling platforms, internal gig marketplaces, and leadership accelerators, the ECB's model offers a slower but more durable alternative: a structured path to reinvention.

For real estate strategists, it signals a need to build not just for team configurations but for talent flows.

In Contrast: The Four-Day Week and the Space-Time Problem

The 3-5-8 policy is notably not a commentary on time spent in the office, nor is it concerned with compressed workweeks. It feels almost orthogonal to current debates around the four-day working week. While some countries trial shorter workweeks to boost productivity and wellbeing - often with promising results - the ECB is focused not on duration but on development.

But that doesn't make the comparison irrelevant. The four-day week and the 3-5-8 model grapple with a common anxiety: making time at work more meaningful. In one case, the answer is fewer hours. On the other hand, it offers richer experiences. In both, the goal is sustainable engagement.

From a workplace planning perspective, the tension is evident. How can physical space support deep, long-term development if teams are only present three days a week or less? How can a culture of capability be fostered in an increasingly fragmented, hybrid world?

There is no single answer. But the direction of travel is unmistakable. Offices must now serve dual mandates: to anchor culture and to accelerate transformation.

From Rotation to Resilience

The ECB is not the first institution to trial internal rotations. But it may be the first to do so with such formalised timing - and with such explicit ties to future readiness. The underlying logic is that mobility breeds resilience. Teams that rotate talent, share knowledge, and cultivate generalists and specialists are better positioned to absorb shocks and seize opportunities.

For employers, this represents a shift

from hoarding talent to circulating it. For employees, it means career narratives are shaped not by upward progression alone but by lateral discovery. And for corporate real estate professionals, it introduces a new layer of complexity: designing space not just for teams or functions but for learning, movement, integration, and renewal.

What does a workplace look like when every role is temporary? When every team is a waystation? Perhaps more fluid, less territorial. Perhaps more like a university than a factory. The shift from permanence to progression may ultimately be the most profound workplace change of all.

Beyond Recruitment: How Development Has Become the New Differentiator

The ECB’s 3-5-8 initiative does not stand in isolation. It forms part of a much broader rethinking of talent strategy now underway across global corporations. Increasingly, employers are pivoting from the costly cycle of talent acquisition toward a more sustainable model: building capability and capacity from within. Corporate universities, AI-enabled learning platforms, and structured mobility schemes are all part of this shift. The rationale is pragmatic. In a world where skills demands are changing faster than job titles, the ability to reskill and redeploy existing staff has become both an economic imperative and a strategic advantage. A 2024 LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report found that 89% of Learning & Development leaders see internal mobility as key to retaining talent, and companies rated highly on internal development are 2.5 times more likely to retain employees over the long term.

The benefits are already materialising. Firms like Amazon, Mastercard, and Deloitte have reported higher retention and engagement and improved business resilience as employees with future-facing skills move more fluidly into emerging roles. In sectors facing

acute talent shortages – from logistics to digital infrastructure – bespoke training academies and micro-credential programmes are now considered critical components of workforce strategy. The rise of these initiatives also has spatial consequences. Learning is no longer

confined to off-site courses or one-off sessions; it is embedded into the daily rhythms of work. Offices, once centres of execution, are becoming places of ongoing transformation – spaces where knowledge is exchanged, mentorship is visible, and growth is operationalised.



Recent Examples of Corporate Learning & Development Initiatives.

The shift toward capability-building is not theoretical – it’s playing out in boardrooms, learning centres, and reconfigured offices worldwide. The following examples illustrate how leading organisations are embedding learning, mobility, and internal development into the heart of their workforce strategies:

SALESFORCE	AMAZON
AI-Powered Career Connect Launched in 2024, Salesforce’s AI-enabled Career Connect platform offers personalised upskilling recommendations and internal job matches. Integrated into Slack, it helped drive 50% of internal hires in Q1 2025 and achieved 74% staff engagement during a 3-month pilot.	Building the Future from Within Amazon is investing \$1.2bn to upskill over 300,000 employees by the end of 2025. Programmes range from mechatronics apprenticeships to machine learning certifications, targeting roles most affected by automation and AI.
DELOITTE UNIVERSITY (DU)	BANK OF AMERICA – THE ACADEMY
Institutionalising Lifelong Learning Deloitte’s flagship learning centre continues to evolve. In 2024, DU added programmes on AI governance, sustainability strategy, and digital leadership – equipping senior managers for the next wave of change.	Culture, Capability, Consistency The Academy launched new digital platforms in 2024 to provide consistent onboarding and internal development. It is credited with significantly increasing first-year retention and improving cultural alignment in distributed teams.
BLACKSTONE – DATA CENTRE ACADEMY	KPMG LAKEHOUSE
Technical Upskilling at Scale Blackstone launched its Data Centre Academy in 2024 in response to a talent bottleneck. It provides practical, job-ready training for roles in digital infrastructure, especially in high-growth portfolio companies.	Hybrid Learning for a Distributed Workforce KPMG’s corporate university, Lakehouse, expanded its digital learning footprint post-COVID. By 2024, it offered hybrid executive education for global teams, blending on-site intensives with virtual labs and collaborative assignments.
JOHNSON & JOHNSON – AI LITERACY FOR ALL	PWC – NEW WORLD. NEW SKILLS
Training at Scale J&J launched a mandatory generative AI programme for more than 56,000 employees in 2025. Its broader learning and development strategy includes immersive simulations and leadership development tracks focused on digital fluency.	Skills Strategy on a Global Scale PwC committed \$3bn globally to support continuous upskilling in data, tech and AI. Their platform allows employees to self-assess, plan their development, and access accredited micro-credentials from partner institutions.
MASTERCARD – AI-DRIVEN TALENT MOBILITY	AT&T – FUTURE-READY WORKFORCE
Matching Skills to Projects Mastercard’s internal marketplace uses AI to match employees with stretch assignments and skill-building opportunities, improving internal mobility and reducing dependence on external hiring.	Closing the Skills Gap After identifying nearly half its workforce needed to reskill, AT&T invested \$135 million in personalised online learning platforms. Employees now use AI tools to map career paths aligned to strategic roles.
NATURGY CORPORATE UNIVERSITY	HUAWEI ICT ACADEMY
Future Skills for the Energy Transition Naturgy’s corporate university launched a ‘Tech Academy’ series in 2024, focusing on data analytics, green technologies, and agile operations – supporting the company’s long-term sustainability goals.	University-Corporate Collaboration Huawei’s global ICT Academy network spanned over 3,000 universities by the end of 2024, delivering AI, cybersecurity, and telecoms education to over 1.3 million students and entry-level professionals.

Implications for the CRE Community

As organisations like the ECB adopt structured talent mobility models and leading corporates invest heavily in upskilling and internal development, workplace strategy must evolve in kind. For corporate real estate professionals, this means moving beyond utilisation metrics and square-foot efficiency to support capability-building and cultural continuity. Key considerations include:

#1 Design for Embedded Learning

Incorporate spaces for continuous education – such as training rooms, digital learning booths, podcast studios, and peer-to-peer mentoring areas – into the core office environment. Learning should be as visible and accessible as collaboration.

#2 Plan for Mobility and Transition

In models like 3-5-8, employees are expected to change roles regularly. CRE must support smooth transitions with modular layouts, hot desks favouring rotational use, and shared spaces that foster rapid integration into new teams.

#3 Enable Skills Visibility and Internal Mobility

Partner with HR and IT to ensure space and technology align. AI-driven talent marketplaces and internal job-matching platforms require private zones for focused upskilling, areas for career coaching, and seamless digital infrastructure.

#4 Support Corporate Universities and Academies

As organisations develop their own learning institutions, CRE must assess whether these belong within HQ campuses, adjacent sites, or dedicated learning hubs. Consider

proximity, brand alignment, and integration with daily workflows.

#5 Make Culture Portable

Frequent role changes and hybrid work increase the risk of cultural dilution. Use design to reinforce shared values – through brand expressions, curated experiences, and rituals that help employees feel connected, regardless of tenure or team.

#6 Shift from Static Space and Capability Infrastructure

View the workplace not just as a cost centre but as an enabler of long-term workforce agility. Investment cases should reflect the value of growth – attracting, retaining, and evolving talent – rather than just occupancy or throughput.

#7 Future-proof Location Strategy

As learning becomes a daily rather than an episodic activity, and mobility becomes routine, reconsider the geographical distribution of space. Proximity to talent pools, universities, and digital infrastructure will matter more than proximity to legacy HQs.

Conclusion: A Structured Shift Toward Self-Renewal

In announcing its 3-5-8 model, the European Central Bank has done more than launch an HR initiative – it has signalled a quiet but significant evolution in how institutions think about talent, time and transformation. In asking its people to move roles after eight years, to grow through mobility rather than stay fixed, the ECB is codifying the idea that longevity without development is not resilience but risk.

Yet the ECB is not alone. Across sectors, organisations increasingly recognise that competitive advantage no longer lies in the ability to recruit talent on demand but in the ability

to cultivate it continuously. The rise of corporate universities, internal mobility platforms, and company-wide reskilling programmes speaks to a deeper recalibration – away from reactive hiring and toward proactive capability-building. This shift is not a trend. It is a structural redefinition of how work is managed, how organisations evolve, and how careers are shaped.

For corporate real estate leaders, the implications are profound. Suppose growth and learning are central to the employee experience (and expectation). In that case, the workplace must be reframed not as a backdrop to productivity but as a core component of institutional renewal. Space strategies will increasingly need to align with human capital strategies. That means designing for movement, enabling development, and reinforcing culture in environments where tenure is shorter, roles are fluid, and the purpose of place is transformation as much as output.

The ECB's 3-5-8 model may be tailored to the culture of central banking, but its underlying logic resonates far beyond. In a world where skills evolve faster than job titles and institutional memory is no longer enough, the ability to grow talent from within is becoming a core competency. What begins as a people strategy quickly becomes a spatial one. As learning and development move to the centre of organisational life, the physical workplace must evolve to match – less a fixed execution site, more a dynamic engine of renewal. For corporate real estate leaders, the challenge is to design not just for today's teams but for tomorrow's potential.

OFFICE INSIGHT 3³

Landing Gear Down, AI Onboard: The Realities of Corporate AI Adoption

Three months after (Y)OUR SPACE Talking Points #4 (*AI Odyssey*) examined the global pressures and strategic dilemmas facing corporate AI adoption, this latest edition returns to chart what has shifted and what hasn't. If February's article was about setting direction, May's is about navigating the growing complexity. Indeed, what has become clearer over the last 90 days is the scale of AI's promise and the fragmentation of its progress.

Forget the hype cycles and glossy keynote speeches. The most telling story about AI at work isn't found in Silicon Valley product launches - it's in the quiet, incremental changes witnessed in operational performance. From frontline logistics to back-office analytics, AI is starting to show signs of genuine traction, but not everywhere and not all at once.

Take British Airways. In the first quarter of this year, 86% of its flights left Heathrow on time – a fact publicly trumpeted by the firm's CEO. It's a statistic that doesn't just belong on an operations dashboard. Instead, it marks a turning point in AI maturity. Behind the scenes, BA is deploying predictive models



³This paper was first produced and published on LinkedIn on the 19th May 2025.

to optimise crew rotations, gate assignments, and maintenance scheduling. Quietly and efficiently, AI is landing real-world results.

And yet, this is the exception, not the norm. While headlines promote AI’s transformative potential, the truth is more fragmented. Corporate adoption remains patchy. Value delivery is inconsistent, and, perhaps most tellingly, many employees are now racing ahead of their employers to embrace AI on their terms.

The Corporate Curve: Ambitious, But Uneven

Recognition of the disruptive influence of AI is high, as illustrated by GlobalData’s Tech Sentiment Poll. The Q1 2025 poll found that 73% of respondents see AI as a significant or slight disruptor to their industry, with 49% believing that disruption is being felt today, compared to just 10% who see it as a longer-term influence (5-10-year horizon).

At face value, corporate adoption appears to be a robust response. A recent McKinsey survey suggests that 78% of global companies use AI in at least one function. But these topline numbers obscure a more hesitant

reality: only a small minority of firms have embedded AI deeply across the enterprise.

Proper integration - where AI tools are aligned with business-critical processes, talent strategies, and decision-making systems - remains elusive. Just 9% of firms report fully embedding AI into workflows. In practice, many organisations mistake access for adoption. Copilot licences are rolled out, but training is lacking. ChatGPT is trialled in one department, but without clear metrics or cross-functional buy-in.

Even in AI-forward industries like finance or logistics, deployments are typically narrow. Fraud detection. Document analysis. Chatbots. These are tactical improvements, not strategic transformation. The proliferation of small-scale pilots suggests that AI’s promise is being diluted by disjointed implementation.

Several systemic barriers persist:

#1 Financial Thresholds

Enterprise-grade AI deployments require significant capital deployment. British Airways AI adoption, for example, was part of a £100mn investment in its operational

resilience.

#2 Talent Scarcity

Global demand for AI-literate professionals outstrips supply, driving up costs and limiting internal capability.

#3 Legacy Tech Ecosystems

Fragmented data architectures and outdated workflows limit interoperability.

#4 Strategic Misalignment

Many firms deploy AI without clear definitions of success, leading to capability for capability’s sake.

#5 Regulatory Fragmentations

For global companies, AI adoption is complicated further by navigating contrasting regulatory regimes across geographies – EU caution, US permissiveness, and China’s centralised direction. This geographical variance creates uneven progress across jurisdictions, increasing governance complexity and slowing enterprise-wide integration.

For now, for many, AI sits more comfortably in innovation labs than board-approved transformation agendas.

The picture that emerges from this data is an accelerated but uneven response. Corporate leaders are investing, but few can point to enterprise-wide transformation. The adoption rate is forecast to change markedly over the next 2 years across all measures, but few are entirely on board for now. Meanwhile, personal usage among employees is surging - often beyond the scope of organisational governance or oversight. If this divergence continues, organisations risk fragmentation: islands of innovation without institutional alignment, not to mention exposure to operational and reputational risk.

Meanwhile, Employees Are Moving Faster

If AI adoption is slow at the top, it’s surging at the edge.

Recent surveys show that nearly 75% of knowledge workers already use generative AI to support tasks like content creation, analysis, summarisation, and ideation - often without explicit permission or training. This “shadow AI” phenomenon represents both a productivity revolution and a governance crisis.

Informal use is increasingly sophisticated. Marketing teams use AI to prototype campaigns. Analysts use it to draft reports. Salespeople refine proposals with chatbot suggestions. The result is faster, leaner workflows, but a growing divergence between employee habits and organisational controls.

This grassroots adoption reveals a clear appetite: employees are hungry for tools that reduce drudgery and enhance output. But it also reflects a trust gap. Many workers feel unsupported in their AI learning, relying on public tools rather than sanctioned ones. This risks compliance breaches and cultural disconnection - where the

organisation appears behind the curve of its own talent.

The risks extend beyond compliance. Shadow AI introduces significant security vulnerabilities – especially when sensitive corporate data is brought into unvetted external platforms. Organisations face exposure to IP leakage, data privacy breaches, and regulatory violations without central oversight.

The implication? AI strategy must be employee-centric. But bottom-up momentum must be matched by top-down investment and trust. Every successful example of AI transformation, such as those noted below, has been driven by strong senior sponsorship. Without executive backing, shadow innovation risks staying in the shadows.

When AI Is Built In, Not Bolted On

The best examples of AI in action share a common DNA: clear purpose, strong governance, and human-centred design.

#1 British Airways

Predictive scheduling tools feed directly into operational plans, improving punctuality.

#2 Deutsche Bahn

AI assistants resolve operational bottlenecks by answering internal queries and invoicing.

#3 Mastercard

Machine learning models filter billions of data points in real time to spot fraudulent activity.

#4 Qualtrics

Agentic AI loops customer feedback into live system updates, improving experience design.

These are not isolated use cases. They are embedded solutions that reshape how work gets done. Notably,

they avoid the trap of chasing automation for its own sake. Instead, AI augments human input, elevates judgment, and ensures consistency.

The shift is cultural as much as technological. Success depends on alignment between tech, people and process. It’s not just about new tools but new ways of working.

CRE and AI: From Operational Footprint to Strategic Insight

As AI reshapes business functions, it is also beginning to reshape the corporate real estate (CRE) agenda - both in how CRE teams operate and how they can add greater value to the business.

For CRE as a function, AI offers new levers of efficiency, forecasting, and automation. AI-driven portfolio analysis tools can simulate occupancy scenarios, forecast space requirements, and model energy consumption – all critical in a cost-sensitive and highly scrutinised environment. Lease abstraction tools, already used across the legal and property sectors, accelerate transaction cycles and improve compliance. AI-enabled building management systems optimise HVAC usage, lighting schedules, and maintenance needs, contributing to sustainability targets and bottom-line cost reduction.

More fundamentally, AI provides CRE leaders with faster, better insight. Predictive analytics can help identify underperforming sites or future hotspots for demand. NLP models can synthesise workplace survey feedback into actionable insight, while generative AI tools can streamline everything from board presentations to supplier evaluations.

However, while the potential is significant, CRE adoption faces familiar constraints. Integration into legacy systems remains challenging. Much of the available data - from occupancy to utilisation - is fragmented or lacks real-time reliability. Many CRE teams are

AI Adoption: Where Are We Now?

It’s worth distinguishing between surface-level adoption and strategic absorption to understand the current moment.

INDICATOR	CURRENT (2024/25)	FORECAST (2027)
Companies using AI in at least one function	78%	94%
Companies with fully integrated AI	9%	31%
Enterprises deploying GenAI at an operational scale	5%	26%
Knowledge workers using AI personally	~73%	~90%
Firms with mature AI governance frameworks	21%	62%

Sources: McKinsey Global Survey 2024, Microsoft Work Trend Index 2024, BCG AI Maturity Index, Gartner Forecasts.

under-resourced digitally, with limited access to AI-literate analysts or in-house data science capability.

Real estate strategies must respond as AI accelerates the shift to hybrid and distributed work. That means planning for greater flexibility, closer alignment with workforce analytics, and increased demand for environments that support high-value collaboration.

AI also sharpens the strategic role of the CRE function. With better data comes the opportunity to play a more central part in workforce planning, capital deployment, and business continuity. CRE teams that embrace this will evolve from space managers to scenario planners.

In short, AI isn't just helping CRE run more efficiently. It's challenging the function to rethink its value and reposition itself as a critical decision-making hub.

So What? Three Tensions to Watch

#1 Adoption ≠ Absorption

AI adoption is not a technology story. It's a transformation story. Tools must be matched with training, incentives, and redesign. Strategy, not software, is the real barrier.

#2 Personal Use is Outpacing Corporate Readiness

Employees are acting faster than their organisations. Shadow AI is now a leading edge of innovation and a significant compliance headache. Business leaders must close the gap between enthusiasm and enablement.

#3 Augmentation > Automation

The real opportunity of AI is not in replacing humans but in redefining their work. Augmented decision-making, real-time feedback, and human-AI collaboration are the frontier, not headcount reduction.

Where Next? Institutional Intelligence

The next wave of AI adoption won't hinge on model size, novelty, or branding. It will hinge on institutional intelligence: the ability of organisations to absorb, govern, and evolve with AI. That means:

#1 Strategic Alignment

AI must be linked to enterprise priorities, not left to experimental side teams.

#2 Human-centred Systems

Employees must be equipped to thrive alongside AI, from training to workflow redesign.

#3 Integrated Platforms

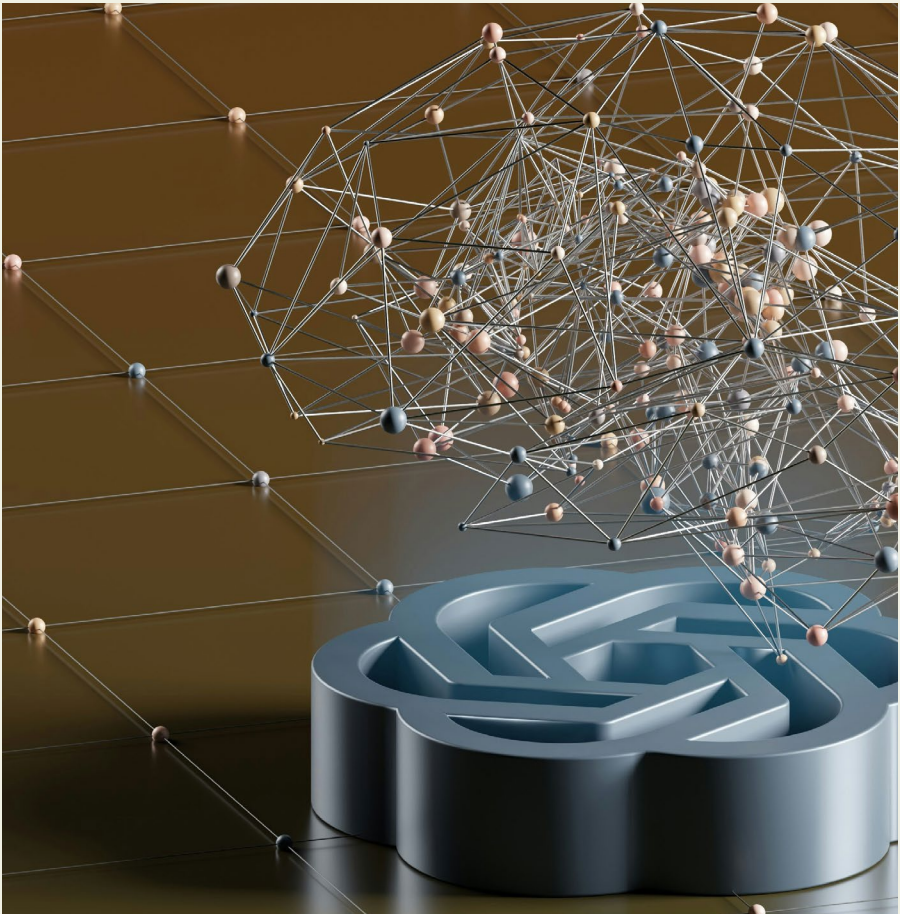
AI must move from standalone apps to infrastructure-level tools that shape everyday work.

#4 Governance Maturity

Ethics, compliance, and explainability must be baked in, not bolted on.

The global backdrop continues to shape these internal choices. Regulatory divergence - between Europe's emphasis on caution, America's deregulated acceleration, and China's state-led scale - remains a defining factor in adoption speed and strategy. Organisations navigating across jurisdictions must manage the complexity of implementation and geopolitical variability.

As a result, the organisations that win won't be those that deploy the most innovative model. Like the AI pioneers identified in our original *AI Odyssey* paper, they'll be the ones who treat AI not as a side project but as a core operating principle – piloting intentionally, adjusting altitude when needed, and navigating with clarity. The question is no longer whether firms will adopt AI but whether they will fly it with purpose or be carried by the prevailing winds.



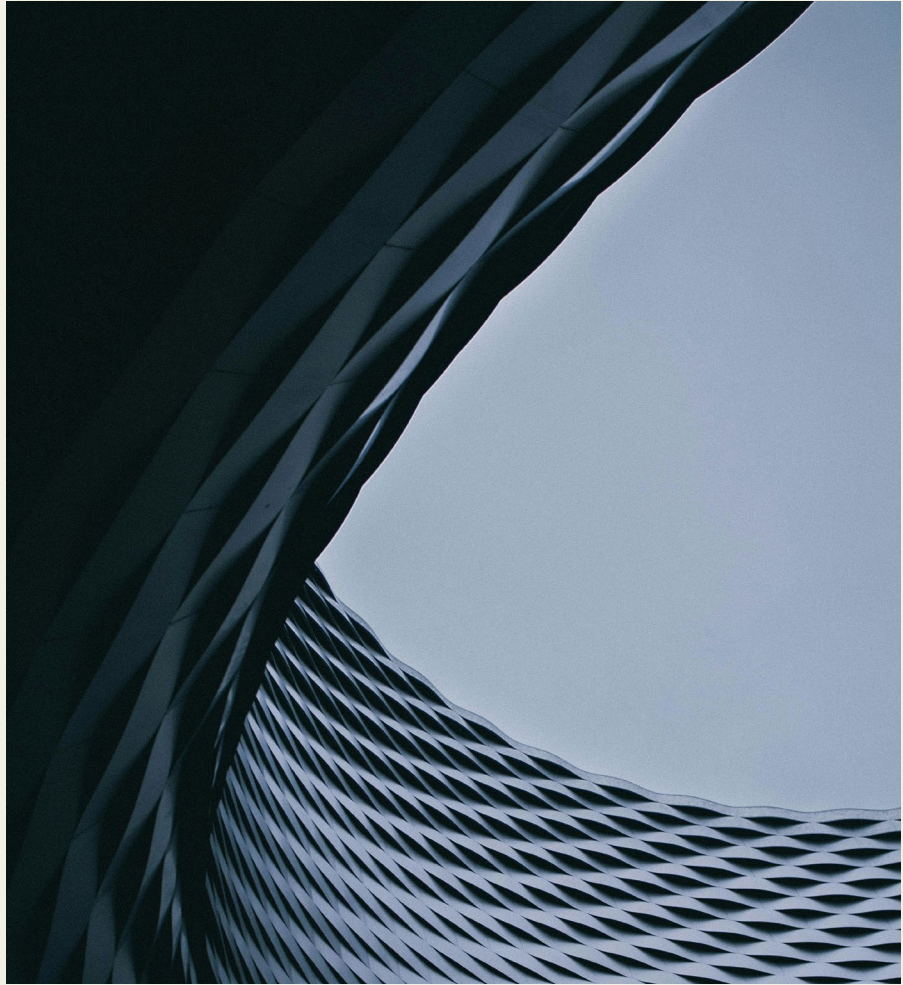
OFFICE INSIGHT 4⁴

Disorderly Conduct: Mapping the New Global Economic Order

From Davos keynotes to boardroom dashboards, one question now looms large: are we entering a new economic world order? The turbulence of the past five months—driven by escalating trade tensions, retaliatory tariffs, and creeping financial instability—has turned what once looked like temporary policy skirmishes into something deeper and more structural.

We are no longer navigating post-pandemic recovery.

A growing body of commentary suggests that what we are witnessing is not just a shift in global politics, but in the very operating logic of the global economy. As the Financial Times recently argued, this is the era of geoeconomics, not just geopolitics. The term, first formalised by strategist Edward Luttwak in the early 1990s, describes the strategic use of economic tools – tariffs, sanctions, subsidies, state-backed capital, and market access – as instruments of national power. In contrast to traditional geopolitics, which is about borders and alliances, geoeconomics is statecraft by other means: trade, finance, and industrial policy wielded for strategic advantage rather than



⁴This paper was first produced and published on LinkedIn on the 26th May 2025.

purely economic gain. It marks a return to statecraft via spreadsheets: economic policy not simply as a means of prosperity but as a tool of leverage.

This shift has been a long time in the making – gathering momentum through U.S.-China rivalry, supply chain shocks, and industrial policy revivals – but it has crystallised in 2025. Governments are asserting economic sovereignty. Multinationals are redrawing supply chains not purely for cost but for resilience and alignment, and corporate real estate – once a downstream consequence of business strategy – is becoming a frontline arena in which these forces play out.

We are charting new terrain: a fragmented, multi-speed global economy, increasingly shaped by self-interest, selective cooperation, and the recalibration of risk. This nineteenth (Y)OUR SPACE Talking Points article explores the shifting foundations of international commerce, contrasting perspectives from institutions and corporates, and outlines four plausible futures for the global economic order.

Fractured Foundations: What Just Happened?

The shocks of early 2025 were not just about tariffs. They were about trust. The sudden imposition of a 10% blanket tariff by the United States and additional reciprocal tariffs targeting strategic imports prompted retaliatory measures from China and the EU, disrupted trading patterns, roiled financial markets, and set off a cascade of corporate recalculations.

For many multinationals, particularly in manufacturing, consumer goods, and tech, the first 100 days of the year were defined by halted shipments, inflated input costs, and legal uncertainty. According to the IMF, the average global tariff rate has jumped from 2.7% in 2023 to 4.1% by April 2025. The WTO reports global merchandise trade volumes fell 1.2% year-on-year in Q1 2025.

As Citigroup CEO Jane Fraser recently

remarked, “We are witnessing a shift from cooperative globalisation to fragmented self-interest.”

Europe’s response has been notably cautious. The ECB has flagged global trade tensions and mounting debt as the biggest threats to Eurozone stability, warning of fiscal inflexibility and growing investor scepticism. In parallel, countries like India and Brazil have sought to position themselves as “non-aligned beneficiaries” of this reshuffling, welcoming diverted capital and production. UNCTAD reports FDI into these economies rose 17% in 2024, against a 4% decline into G7 markets.

The result? Strategic paralysis for some; opportunity-seeking for others.

Systemic Shifts: Three Emerging Themes

Beyond the initial shocks and tactical responses lies a more profound transformation. These aren’t just policy pivots or isolated disruptions – they are symptoms of a more profound reordering of how economic power is deployed, and how global business must respond. As organisations adjust to an environment of persistent volatility, several broad, structural shifts are emerging that will reshape everything from boardroom strategy to footprint design. These themes influence decisions today and define tomorrow’s strategic constraints and possibilities.

The first clear theme is a move from multilateralism to multipolarity. The institutions that once underpinned global trade – the WTO, IMF, and even informal G7 coordination - are being bypassed as countries forge new regional pacts and bilateral deals. The U.S.-China axis is no longer the only gravitational centre. India, ASEAN, the Gulf states and the EU are asserting themselves with new economic ambitions bolstered by demographic, technological, and energy advantages. The Atlantic Council reports that trust in traditional multilateral institutions has declined by more than 20% since

2020—highlighting a credibility gap that is increasingly being filled by regional networks.

The second shift is philosophical as much as operational: resilience is replacing efficiency. The McKinsey Global Supply Chain Pulse (April 2025) reveals that 81% of global supply chain executives have increased investment in redundancy, with 64% pursuing nearshoring. Firms are actively rethinking their geographic exposure, moving beyond just-in-time supply logic towards just-in-case flexibility. This strategic hedging is no longer limited to essential goods—it’s becoming standard across consumer electronics, automotive components, and pharmaceuticals.

Third, capital flows are no longer free agents. They’re strategic. According to the OECD, over 100 new industrial policy measures have been introduced globally since 2022, ranging from tax breaks for battery plants in Poland to semiconductor subsidies in South Korea. State-backed capital now accounts for 12% of global investment flows. In a world where geopolitics increasingly shapes economics, government incentives, diplomatic alignment, and national security concerns are redefining the “where” and “why” of global investment decisions.

The Scenarios: Four Pathways to 2030

Before diving into the specific details of each scenario, it is important to recognise that they represent diverging strategic pathways based on how current disruptions might evolve given different operating and policy conditions. Each scenario reflects a different configuration of trade relationships, regulatory environments, and business priorities. They are not forecasts but frameworks – tools for understanding how the global economic landscape might reorganise in the years ahead. Whether we see fragmentation or renewed coordination, digital acceleration or regional retrenchment, each scenario poses

distinct implications for corporate real estate planning, portfolio design, and business strategy.

Scenario #1 Fortress Economics

A world of hard borders and strategic self-reliance, where economic nationalism redraws the global map.

This scenario imagines a world of retrenchment. Tariffs become permanent policy tools, not tactical instruments. Bilateralism dominates. Global institutions are weakened beyond repair. Countries focus on securing critical industries within their borders, from semiconductors to rare earths, energy production to defence manufacturing. According to S&P Global, cross-border investment among the G7 dropped 11% in Q1 2025 alone— a data point which may decline further if economic nationalism becomes entrenched. In real estate terms, this would drive heightened demand for logistics assets close to production hubs, domestic manufacturing parks, and regional headquarters decentralised away from expensive global cities.

Scenario #2 Competitive Regionalism

Trade thrives within blocs but stalls across them, forcing businesses to go local on a global scale.

Rather than complete retrenchment, this scenario assumes the world reorganises into blocs. North America, Europe, Greater China, and South Asia form internally coherent trade regions marked by harmonised regulations, coordinated industrial policies, and interlinked supply chains. However, trade between blocs is constrained by tariffs, legal hurdles, or political tension. The Asian Development Bank reports that intra-Asian trade now accounts for 58% of total Asian flows, a record high. CRE leaders must support regionalisation strategies by reshaping portfolios to align with region-specific compliance, culture, and capability requirements. Bilingual legal teams, cross-border HR strategies, and regional

distribution models all become priority investments.

Scenario #3 Rewired Globalisation

Global trade persists, but it’s powered by data, digitisation, and distributed intelligence – not shipping containers.

In this future, globalisation doesn’t disappear—it evolves. Physical goods become a smaller part of the story. Instead, digital services, cloud infrastructure, and IP flows dominate. The IMF reports that cross-border digital trade grew 18% in 2024 and now represents 23% of global trade flows. Technology platforms replace shipping lanes. AI-led supply chain optimisation, digital twins, and decentralised production (such as 3D printing) redefine manufacturing logic. This world places a premium on data centres, cloud-capable office environments, and tech-savvy talent ecosystems. CRE portfolios shift towards networked locations rather than flagship towers.

Scenario #4 Managed Interdependence

The return of global cooperation – with guardrails – where trust, transparency, and regulation shape new norms.

After years of disruption, this scenario sees the world attempting to rebuild global coordination—albeit with more realistic guardrails. G20 nations recently agreed to a cross-border AI governance framework supported by 17 countries, and similar moves are underway in green finance and tech standards. Policy risk reduces but doesn’t vanish. ESG requirements intensify. Transparency becomes non-negotiable. Investment flows cautiously return to trusted jurisdictions. For real estate, this signals a resurgence of demand in regulatory-stable markets, particularly for ESG-compliant assets. Governance, reputation, and institutional trust become key location drivers.



Charting the Divergence:
A Scenario Comparison

To help visualise the divergent characteristics of the four outlined scenarios, the chart below maps each against five key indicators: tariff impact, FDI growth potential, supply chain disruption risk, digital trade growth, and regulatory/ESG stability. The data underscores the radically different risk-reward profiles at play. ‘Fortress Economics’ scores high on protectionism and disruption but low on growth potential. ‘Rewired Globalisation’ shows strong digital trade performance but depends heavily on robust digital infrastructure. ‘Managed Interdependence’ emerges as the most balanced scenario—moderate on disruption and regulation but offering higher trust and long-term planning confidence. These comparative insights are a reference point for decision-makers weighing strategic moves in an increasingly fractured landscape.

So What? Implications
for CRE and Corporate
Strategy

These scenarios are not theoretical for corporate real estate leaders—they are strategic lenses for decision-making in a world defined by flux. The traditional rulebook of stable trade, reliable capital flows, and universal market logic no longer applies. Instead, CRE leaders are asked to plan for a future where economic geography is fluid, alliances are shifting, and policy can change overnight.

This calls for a deliberate shift in posture – from reactive space management to proactive strategic engagement. Portfolios must become more modular, diversified, and future-proofed – able to flex to emerging regional risks, regulatory divergence, and operational contingencies. Scenario planning should be embedded into portfolio reviews and boardroom conversations, not left as a once-a-year risk exercise.

More than ever, CRE teams must engage cross-functionally – partnering with strategy, legal, HR, finance and operations – to map out how physical footprint intersects with supply chain realignment, workforce strategy, and capital allocation. This means modelling a wider set of variables: talent access, tax incentives, ESG compliance, political exposure and digital infrastructure readiness.

The imperative is not just agility – it is informed agility. CRE must help businesses move quickly but wisely in an environment short of perfect information. This means developing clear internal playbooks on how to scale up, consolidate, or pivot across markets based on different geopolitical and economic triggers.

Finally, CRE leaders must champion institutional intelligence. Build institutional muscle for complexity. Push for decision rights that recognise CRE’s role in shaping – not just supporting – enterprise value. The organisations that do this will

protect against disruption and unlock growth where others hesitate to tread.

Real Estate Strategy in a
Fractured World

The phrase “global economic order” once implied stability and convergence. In 2025, it means choices and consequences.

The global economy isn’t collapsing—it’s reorganising. And as with AI adoption, those who navigate intentionally will outperform those carried by the currents. For CRE leaders, this is not just a moment to react but also to reframe their value.

But that reframe demands courage. Corporate real estate leaders must step out of the role of passive

enabler and into the role of strategic challenger – asking where space is needed and why. In a world where political decisions can rewire global markets overnight, digital infrastructure is as critical as physical, and where capital flows follow alliances, not just efficiency, the ability to anticipate becomes more valuable than optimising.

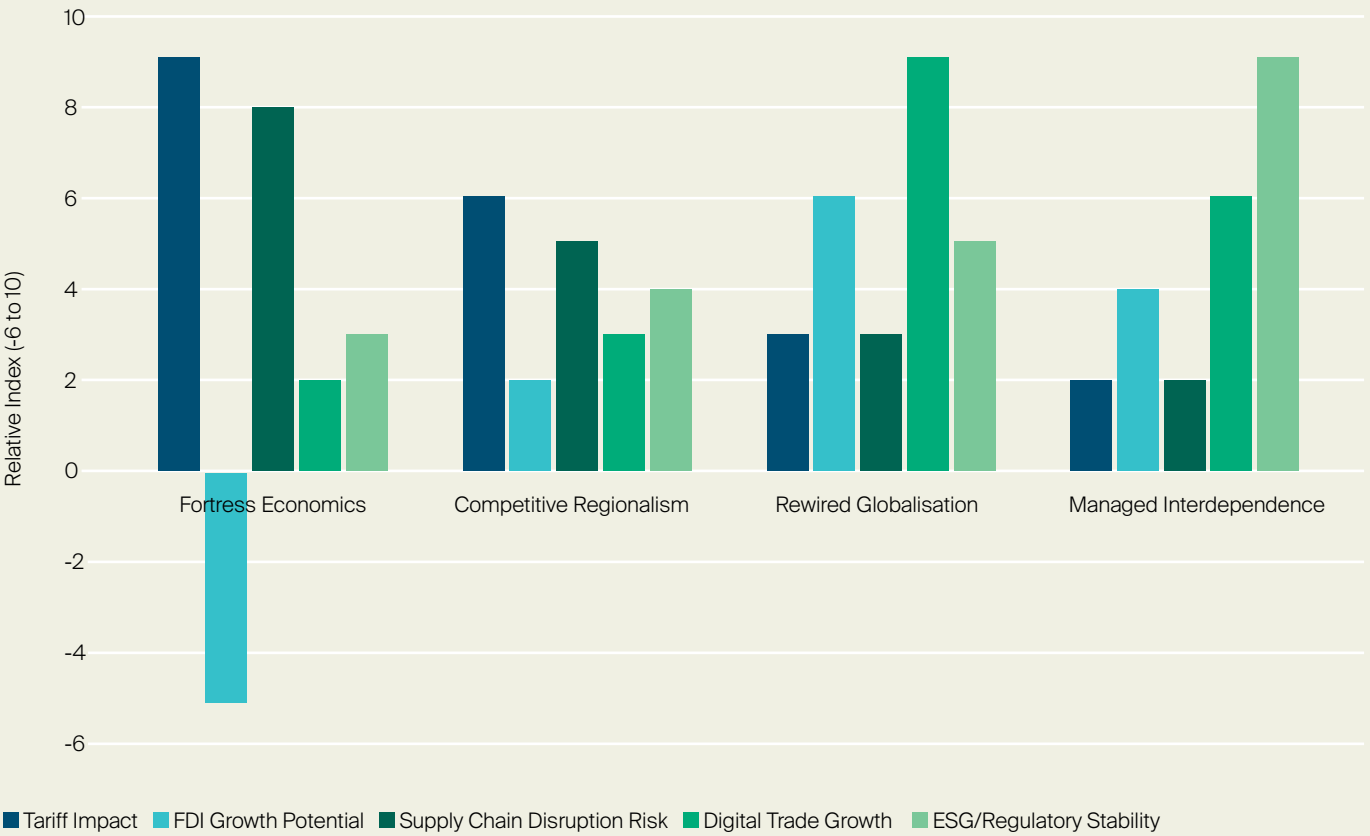
This is the moment for CRE teams to challenge inherited assumptions. To partner with finance, legal, HR and strategy – not just to execute but to shape. It is important to model not just the cost of space but also the cost of inaction. To demonstrate how real estate decisions can unlock – or constrain – resilience, agility and growth.

This moment is challenging – and

vital – because decisions must be made without perfect information. As geopolitical dynamics shift and institutional guardrails weaken, certainty will be elusive. Yet, waiting for clarity may be the riskiest option of all.

This is why scenario-based planning must sit at the heart of corporate real estate strategy. It allows organisations to act decisively, with strategic intent – even in the face of ambiguity. CRE teams must use scenarios not as static forecasts but as tools for testing risk exposure, stress-testing location strategies, and aligning with broader enterprise priorities. The goal is not to predict what comes next but to build a system that is agile enough to respond, redirect, and reimagine quickly.

Comparative Outlook Across Global Economic Scenarios





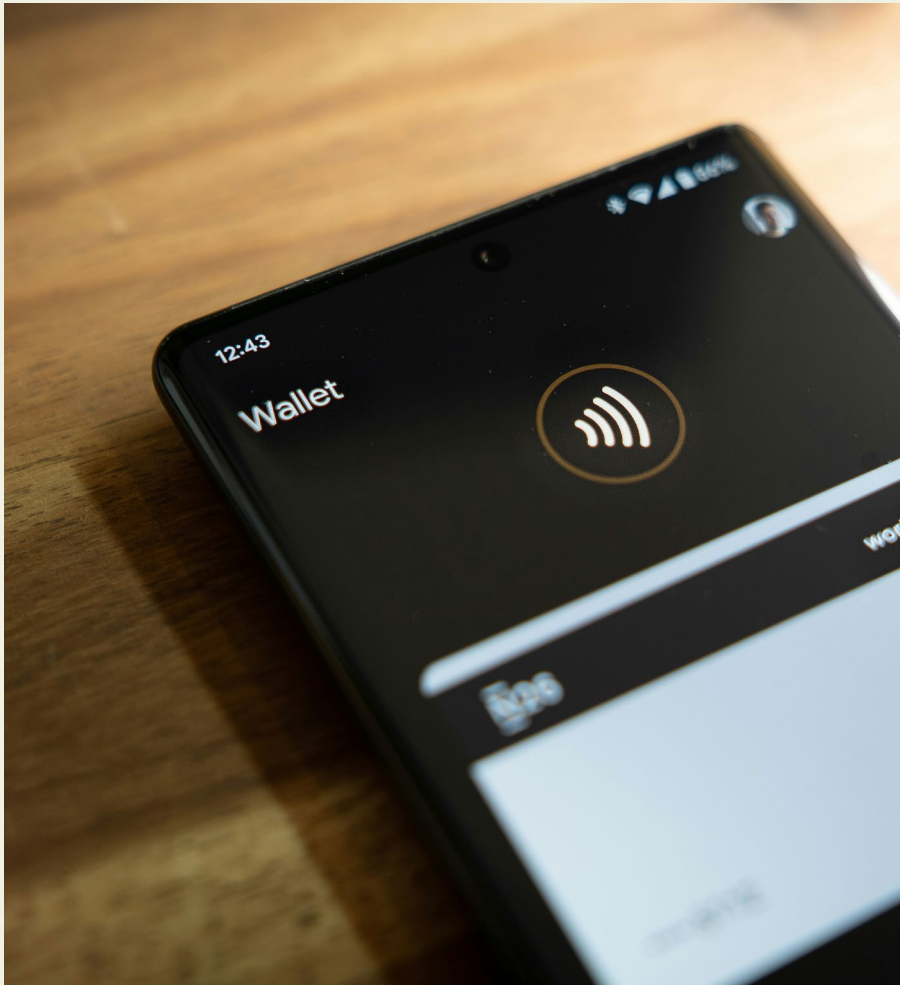
OFFICE INSIGHT 5⁵

From Adolescence to Adulthood: How Monzo's £1bn Moment Reveals the Growing Pains of Fintech

In 2015, Monzo launched with a bright coral debit card, a mobile-only interface, and a promise to reshape retail banking. Fast-forward to 2025: Monzo has crossed the symbolic threshold of £1 billion in annual revenue, posting a pre-tax profit of £60.5 million. It's a remarkable feat that carries a far deeper resonance.

This isn't just Monzo's coming-of-age story. It's a marker of fintech's graduation from rebellious adolescence to the responsibilities of adulthood. What began in a wave of bold startups seeking to nibble at the financial establishment has become a sector that must now prove its resilience, governance, and long-term value.

Yet behind this milestone lies a more complex narrative. As the *Financial Times* reports, many fintech companies are entering a period of reckoning, where lofty valuations are being challenged, exits deferred, and strategies reset amid higher interest rates and tougher funding conditions. If the 2010s were fintech's experimental decade, the mid-2020s are its proving ground.



⁵This paper was first produced and published on LinkedIn on the 9th June 2025.

The Rise of Fintech: From Disruption to Infrastructure

Fintech's evolution over the past decade is undeniable. What once targeted niche inefficiencies – transfers, microloans, savings – has become central to the financial services ecosystem, spanning banking, lending, insurance, crypto, payments, and wealth management. The numbers are telling. According to QED Investors, global fintech revenues grew 21% in 2024 – triple the growth rate seen across traditional financial services. This acceleration is particularly evident in Europe and Asia, where digital adoption, mobile-first ecosystems, and underserved markets have proved fertile ground for fintech expansion.

While there has been a slowdown in fintech incorporations in recent years due to macroeconomic uncertainty, the number of global fintech companies has more than doubled in the past decade. The sector's valuation has ballooned accordingly. The global fintech market was estimated to be around \$340bn in 2024, with projections nearing \$400bn this year. Although there has been a cooldown from the funding frenzy seen in 2021, fintech ranks as the fourth largest sector for venture capital investment in 2025, attracting a total of £16.2bn. A standout deal in the year to date was Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, which secured a record-breaking \$2bn investment from Abu Dhabi's MGX. The company was founded in 2017 and now employs over 9,000 people. Fintech has also emerged as one of the largest verticals in the unicorn club. As of 2025, there are approximately 242 fintech unicorns globally, accounting for 16% of all global unicorn companies.

Despite this, the road to maturity is long. Monzo took nine years to turn a profit. Klarna, the Swedish BNPL pioneer, needed nearly two decades and several strategic overhauls. This long gestation period reflects the capital intensity of building financial platforms and the need to achieve

critical mass in a sector where trust, compliance, and reputation are non-negotiable.

Challenges: Regulation, Security, and Profitability

For all its dynamism, the fintech sector operates under increasing scrutiny. Regulatory authorities worldwide have been intensifying oversight, particularly as fintechs move into traditionally regulated spaces like banking, lending, and asset management.

For example, Monzo is under investigation by the UK's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) over potential breaches related to anti-money laundering controls. While such scrutiny may once have been viewed as a threat to fintech growth, many firms now view regulatory engagement as a necessary rite of passage – a sign they have entered the big leagues.

Cybersecurity is another persistent challenge. The digital nature of fintech makes it inherently vulnerable to cyberattacks, data breaches, and system outages. As firms scale, the costs of maintaining robust, enterprise-grade security systems escalate, forcing companies to invest heavily in resilience and risk management.

Finally, there is the profitability question. The days of 'growth at all costs' are over. Klarna's long-awaited return to the black and Monzo's profit milestone reflect a sector-wide financial sustainability pivot. According to the *Financial Times*, many fintechs that once commanded eye-watering valuations now face internal reviews, down rounds, or delayed IPOs.

Becoming Mainstream: How Long Does it Take?

If there's one truth about fintech, it is that speed matters. Yet, paradoxically, achieving mainstream status takes time.

Monzo's nine-year journey from

founding to profitability is roughly consistent with other prominent fintechs' timelines. Revolut, founded in 2015, reports its first annual profit in 2021 – six years in. Klarna, launched in 2005, only reached stable profitability after over 15 years, buffeted by regulatory changes and competitive pressures. These timelines suggest that while consumer adoption may be swift, constructing durable, regulated, profitable institutions is anything but.

What's striking is that many of these companies spent most of their early years building scale and credibility rather than chasing immediate financial returns. Becoming a trusted name in finance, particularly in banking, requires more than an app and a slick user interface; it demands brand strength, regulatory compliance, and operational excellence. Fintechs are increasingly judged by their innovation and resilience, governance, and ability to navigate economic and political headwinds. That reality is reshaping what investors expect – and what founders must deliver.

The Global Picture: Who's Leading the Pack?

To understand fintech's global maturation, look at the organisations beyond the apps. Today's fintechs are not just digital tools. They are large, complex firms employing thousands and capable of competing with traditional incumbents. The sector is also highly concentrated, with 60% of all fintech revenue generated by less than 100 'scaled players' out of a total market of 37,000 entities. These scaled players earn over \$500 million annually, collectively accounting for about £231 billion in total revenue. These companies now represent critical financial infrastructure in their respective regions. But the playbook is shifting – from blitzscaling to balancing risks, regulation, and return.

LARGEST FINTECH COMPANIES BY HEADCOUNT (EUROPE AND ASIA)

COMPANY	HEADQUARTERS	EMPLOYEES	NOTABLE HIGHLIGHTS
Revolut	London, UK	~10,100	Valued at \$45bn, expanding from banking into crypto, investments, and travel.
Klarna	Stockholm, Sweden	~3,800	Leading BNPL provider, pivoting to profitability post-restructuring.
N26	Berlin, Germany	~1,500	Focused on digital banking; present across the EU with growth plans.
Ant Group	Hangzhou, China	~16,600	Parent of Alipay serves over 1.3 billion users in payments and lending.
Grab Holdings	Singapore	~6,000	Southeast Asia’s “super-app” spans payments, mobility, and logistics.
Gojek	Jakarta, Indonesia	~3,000	Indonesia-based; integrates payments, transport, and on-demand services.

The Road Ahead:
Consolidation, Innovation,
and Global Reach

As fintech companies continue their march into the mainstream, three trends stand out:

#1 Consolidation

Consolidation is accelerating. As competition heats up and capital becomes scarcer, fintechs are turning to mergers and acquisitions to scale and survive. Once rare, mega-mergers may soon be the norm. Firms are reassessing their strategies with subdued IPO markets and private valuations under pressure. Some are shelving public listings; others are eyeing tie-ups to avoid down rounds. Fintechs increasingly seek partners to secure licenses, enhance capabilities, and extend their geographical risk.

Real-world Example: In a landmark deal announced in April 2025, Global

Payments agreed to acquire Worldpay for \$24.25bn. This strategic move aims to streamline Global Payments’ operations, focusing exclusively on its core merchant commerce solutions and enhancing its global scale and service capabilities. The acquisition is expected to create a combined entity serving over 6 million customers, processing 94 billion transactions worth \$3.7 trillion across more than 175 countries. The deal also includes the divestiture of Global Payments’ Issuer Solutions business to Fidelity National Information Systems (FIS) for \$13.5bn, allowing both companies to concentrate on their respective strengths in the payments ecosystem.

#2 Innovation

Technological innovation remains a core differentiator. While mobile interfaces and digital wallets were once revolutionary, the frontier is now defined by embedded

finance, AI-powered credit scoring, decentralised finance (DeFi), and blockchain applications. AI is also used for customer service, fraud detection, compliance, and code generation. As AI becomes more commoditised, significant value will come from proprietary datasets. Fintech companies that can harness these technologies while delivering user trust will define the next growth phase. Fintech startups with an ‘AI-native’ approach are already drawing investor attention.

Real-world Example: China’s Ant Group has been a global leader in integrating cutting-edge technologies. Its recent roll-out of blockchain-powered supply chain finance tools showcases fintech’s pivot from consumer-facing innovation (like mobile wallets) to profound infrastructural change, using blockchain to track transactions and financing agreements between suppliers and buyers. Ant has reduced

fraud risks and lowered financing costs – reshaping how business credit is extended across China’s vast SME sector. This kind of innovation goes beyond sleek apps and into the hard wiring of financial systems.

#3 Global Expansion

Global expansion is reshaping fintech ambition. Having saturated their home markets, many fintechs are looking outward, targeting emerging markets in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Yet this internationalisation requires careful navigation of local regulatory regimes, cultural nuances, and infrastructure constraints. That represents a test of both agility and patience.

Real-world Example: Having

saturated European home markets, Revolut has aggressively expanded into Latin America, launching services in Brazil and preparing for entry into Mexico. This global push is about planting flags and tailoring services to local demand – adapting to Brazil’s wildly popular Pix instant payments system, for example. Entering new regions requires more than translating an app; it demands regulatory licensing, local partnerships, and deep market adaptation, testing the operational and cultural agility of even the most sophisticated fintech firms.

The Maturing Face of
Fintech

Monzo’s £1 billion revenue milestone is more than a corporate headline. It’s a bellwether for the fintech

sector’s coming of age. What began as a movement to disrupt bloated, outdated financial institutions has evolved into a permanent, maturing force within the global economic system.

Yet, for all the headlines about growth, valuations, and technological breakthroughs, fintech’s ultimate success will rest on its ability to do the hard things: manage risk, achieve sustainable profits, satisfy regulators, and win long-term consumer trust.

If history holds, becoming a truly mainstream player will take years, not quarters. However, as companies like Monzo, Revolut, Klarna, Ant Group, and Grab have shown, the fintech revolution is no longer on the horizon. It’s here, reshaping the landscape, and its next chapter is just beginning.





OFFICE INSIGHT 6⁶

Startup GPS: Navigating the New Geography of Innovation



JENNIFER TOWNSEND
Partner, Occupier Research
Knight Frank

The race to attract innovation is intensifying. Cities are competing hard, but the rules are changing. Innovation is becoming more specialised, artificial intelligence is influencing every sector, and rapid policy shifts can now make or break a location. For occupiers, this brings more opportunity, but also more complexity. Making the right decision calls for a revised playbook for location strategy rooted in forward alignment.

Ranking Startup Ecosystems: The Dominant, Ascendant and Emergent

For startups, the decision of where to locate is becoming more complex. As the **2025 Global Startup Ecosystem Report (GSER)** makes clear, the geography of innovation is being reshaped.

Silicon Valley sits atop the global leaderboard, drawing in \$90 billion in venture capital last year and hosting over 330 unicorns. It remains unmatched in its AI-native strength, housing 22 per cent of the world’s AI-focused startups.

But elsewhere in the top five, changes are happening. New York has overtaken London for second place. Boston has re-entered the top five, underpinned by its excellence in life sciences, AI, and the presence of globally renowned academic and



⁶This paper was first produced and published on LinkedIn on the 23rd June 2025.

GSER 2025 Top Ten Locations Split by Emerging and Established Markets



research institutions. Tel Aviv, ranked fourth, continues to outperform its size, driven by a potent mix of state backing, deep sectoral focus and a culture of entrepreneurial agility. Meanwhile, Beijing has surged into the top tier. Nearly two-thirds of startup investment in the city now goes into AI, making it the second largest recipient of AI venture funding globally over the past two years, at just under \$5 billion.

Yet the most interesting movements are found just below the surface. Paris has climbed two spots from last year to twelfth, fuelled by AI momentum, public-private sector alignment, academic and research strengths, and a supportive ecosystem. Madrid has broken into the top 40 for the first time. Philadelphia leapt 12 places to thirteenth, marking the steepest North American rise, supported by coordinated investment in life sciences, advanced manufacturing, and robotics.

In Asia, China’s cities, including Shenzhen, Hangzhou and Guangzhou, are asserting themselves as innovation centres. Bengaluru and Hong Kong have also made dramatic leaps, the latter entering the top 40 for the first time. The former has seen a surge in venture capital, deal

activity, and a growing skilled talent pool.

And in emerging ecosystems, the disruptors are arriving. Wuxi tops the GSER’s emerging ecosystem ranking, having seen a 67 per cent surge in exits over \$50 million. Thanks to improved funding, performance, and global reach, Istanbul jumped ten places from last year. Jakarta, Copenhagen, and North Carolina’s Research Triangle complete the top five, signalling that high-growth

potential is now distributed far beyond the traditional tech capitals. Riyadh has also made a notable leap, rising into the top 30 after significant exits, including a \$1.1 billion deal involving Rasan.co.

These shifts present new opportunities and greater complexity, as the expanding and changing array of viable innovation hubs makes choosing the correct location more strategic and challenging than ever.



Plotting Your Path

While rankings such as the GSER provide valuable insight into the shifting innovation landscape, occupiers need a more tailored approach. Robust location decision-making demands a calibrated framework that integrates a diverse set of current, historical, and future metrics aligned to specific organisational needs, including:

CATEGORY	EXAMPLE METRICS
Talent	Population and population growth, number of graduates, employee attrition rates, workforce diversity, availability of other skilled talent
Business climate	Ease of doing business, GDP and GDP growth rates, inflation rate, political stability, incentives, labour policies, innovation strategy
Infrastructure and real estate	Internet speed, reliability of electricity supply, transportation links, supply and availability of suitable real estate
Capital and success	Venture capital funding, grants and public funding, finance ecosystem, number of startups and exit rates
Innovation ecosystem	Strength of academia and research institutions, patents, scientific publication citations, number of companies, company births vs deaths
ESG	Carbon emissions per capita, UN sustainable development report score, money laundering risk index, quality of life, cost of living
Costs	Labour costs, rents, service charge, tax rates

Incorporating location quotient and per capita metrics into location analysis helps uncover high-performing smaller markets that may be overlooked in absolute rankings, revealing places that punch well above their weight.

This data-led approach should be reinforced through primary research, including site visits and direct engagement with stakeholders such as inward investment agencies, innovation partners, local recruitment specialists, and occupiers recently moving to the shortlisted locality or localities.

The New Startup Success Formula: Specialisation, Stability, and Skills

Beyond the traditional headline metrics, analysis of leading and fast-rising innovation hubs reveals three factors that are increasingly critical for startups and occupiers focused on innovation when shaping location strategies: proactive investment in talent pipelines, long-term stable policy frameworks focused on future growth and deep sector specialisation, particularly in AI.

#1 Proactive Investment in Talent Pipelines

Many startups evaluate locations based on the availability of talent today. However, there is also a need to ensure that a location generates the talent needed for tomorrow. This is especially true in frontier fields like AI, quantum computing, and advanced manufacturing, where skill requirements shift rapidly, and demand often outpaces supply.

Real-world Example: Singapore, long a model for human capital development, continues to expand its investment through national programmes like SkillsFuture and the

TechSkills Accelerator.

Example Metrics: Government-led upskilling and reskilling programmes, public investment in digital and technical training, availability of apprenticeship schemes in innovation-intensive sectors. Strong links between universities, innovation districts, and industry are needed to develop training programmes, visa strategies aligned to talent needs, and scholarships targeting the world’s best and brightest.

#2 Long-term Stable Policy Frameworks

In volatile times, policy is both a differentiator and a risk. A location’s attractiveness can surge or collapse, due to sudden shifts in innovation policy, particularly when political cycles or global events trigger regulatory overhauls, changes in investment incentives or new restrictions on talent mobility. Occupiers should seek locations with durable strategies that transcend election cycles.

Real-world Example: Vision 2030, a long-term strategy aimed at diversifying the Saudi economy, strongly emphasising digital transformation, entrepreneurship, and industrial innovation.

Example Metrics: National or regional documents that outline multi-year goals for science and technology that have cross-party consensus with defined budget allocations, consistent year-on-year public R&D investment as a percentage of GDP.

#3 Deep Sector Specialisation and AI Focus

Cities that cultivate deep, strategic expertise in specific high-growth sectors can now outperform more diffuse ecosystems. These locations can offer occupiers tailored support, talent, and infrastructure, which is often needed in the science and deep tech world. Given that AI is becoming foundational across all sectors and innovation domains, locating in regions with proven strengths in AI

capabilities, talent, and ecosystems will offer a growing competitive advantage for occupiers seeking to future-proof their operations.

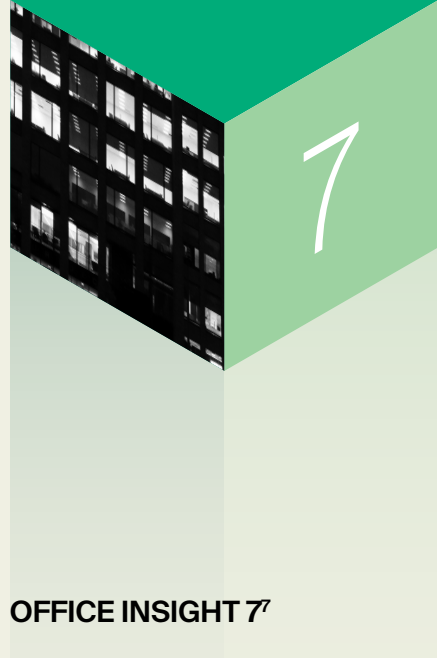
Real-world Example: Shanghai has articulated a formal roadmap to develop five priority sectors: healthcare, smart devices, energy, advanced materials, and aerospace.

Example Metrics: Funding by sector, employment and GVA by sector, patents, active companies by sector, presence of specialist institutions and academic focus, sector-led industrial strategy and national or local AI plan.

One Final Thought

The smartest founders and innovation-led occupiers are recalibrating their coordinates to navigate the changing geography of innovation. They are challenging established hubs to adapt to future forces, while also looking beyond legacy centres towards ecosystems with sharper elevation and clear direction. These are places that, in part, specialise in high-growth sectors including AI, legislate with long-term intent, and invest in developing the talent required for what comes next.





OFFICE INSIGHT 7⁷

Grow Your Own: Reinventing Corporate Talent Strategies

In today’s fiercely competitive landscape, talent is less a commodity to be bought and more a garden to be cultivated. Just as a master gardener prepares soil, plants diverse seeds, nurtures growth through every season, leading organisations are sowing, tending, and harvesting their talent pipelines to align skills with strategic objectives.

The imperative to upskill and reskill internal teams has emerged as business landscapes shift at breakneck speed. Firms that once relied on costly external hires now recognise that accelerating existing employees’ capabilities – whether in AI, data analytics, or digital operations – is key to matching evolving labour market dynamics.

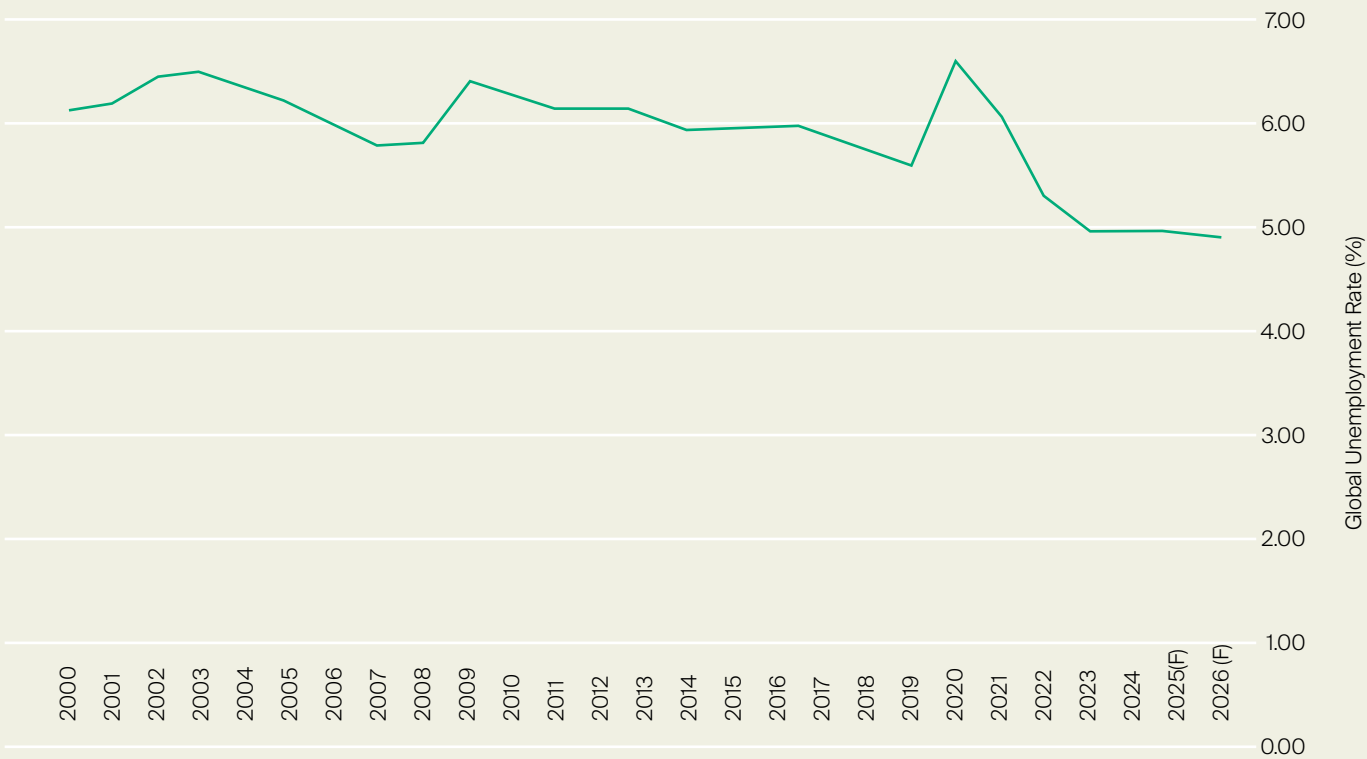
A well-designed garden needs more than fertile soil; it requires the correct layout and climate. In parallel, organisations must weave real estate strategy into their talent narrative – crafting innovation hubs, modular work zones, and learning cafes that foster collaboration, enable upskilling, and flex with rotating cohorts.

From pop-up labs to sensor-



⁷This paper was first produced and published on LinkedIn on the 30th June 2025.

Global Unemployment Rates in the 21st Century



Source: International Labour Organisation, Global Employment Trends Report

driven hot-desking, the physical environment has become as vital to growth as any learning curriculum. Moreover, as business models evolve at unprecedented speed, the imperative to upskill and reskill existing workforces has never been greater. Organisations must proactively align employee capabilities with changing strategic priorities to stay ahead of market shifts.

Planting the Seeds: Context and Imperative

In 2024, global unemployment fell to a 35-year low, yet the widening skills chasm in digital, data, and AI turned every strategic role into a coveted prize. At the same time, forecasters estimate that by the end of 2025, nearly 40 per cent of existing jobs will undergo AI-driven transformation, making organisational adaptability non-negotiable. The familiar strategy of ‘buying’ top performers – through headline-grabbing signing-on bonuses and aggressive headhunting

– has reached a point of diminishing returns, inflating acquisition costs by up to 30 per cent and delivering little enduring loyalty.

Against this backdrop, a more sustainable narrative has emerged: talent as a homegrown competitive edge. Leading firms are reinventing their talent playbooks – blending AI-driven learning experiences, rotational incubators, and transparent, data-backed career pathways – to cultivate the workforce they need from within. This paper explores that fundamental strategic shift across five interconnected stages: first, tracing the decline of the buy-in model and the rise of the build-your-own logic; second, illuminating the three pillars of internal development through rich Q2 2025 case studies; third, dissecting the organisational, cultural, and spatial transformations required to cement a build-your-own ethos; fourth, examining how external innovation ecosystems – corporate labs and university partnerships – amplify internal efforts; and, fifth,

dedicated on-campus learning centres that anchor skill cultivation for the long-term.

#1 From Buy-in to Build-out: A Strategic Reckoning

By mid-2025, high-cost talent raids revealed clear drawbacks. Meta’s \$100 million incentive pool to attract senior AI researchers produced a churn rate of 12 per cent after just one year, eroding team continuity and trust. At the same time, ‘Kirklandisation’ in Big Law – introducing salaried partners without equity stakes – backfired when misclassification lawsuits and partner resentments emerged. For many organisations, the steep price of external hires – from extended onboarding of six months to pricier relocation packages – stood in stark contrast to the untapped potential in their ranks.

Financial services underscored the shift. Private equity titans such as Apollo and KKR quietly advanced

deferred-start analyst fellowships in January 2025, securing top graduates before banks even opened applications. Participants entered equipped with bespoke training, early deal exposure, and a sense of belonging – a far cry from reactive poaching. These programmes slashed first-year turnover by nearly 50 per cent and deepened cultural cohesion.

Even nation-states recognised the imperative. In June 2025, European countries rolled out digital nomad visas with residency perks and tax breaks, while Kazakhstan launched a ‘Global Professional Pass’ to attract digital talent. These sovereign initiatives mirror corporate efforts: by enabling local upskilling and mobility, they reinforce that building domestic talent is more strategic than pursuing talent through open markets.

Together, these trends underscore a strategic inflexion: organisations that anchor growth in internal capability gain speed, cultural alignment, and cost efficiency – ingredients for sustained advantage in an era of relentless disruption.

#2 Three Pillars of the Grow-Your-Own Playbook

Immersive, AI-Driven Learning Journeys

In April 2025, Microsoft unveiled its AI Apprenticeship across Dublin, Bengaluru, and Redmond. Unlike traditional courses, apprentices embedded in live product teams received university credits, tackled real-world challenges, and collaborated with senior engineers. The programme’s rapid uptake – 1,300 applicants in its first fortnight – reflects a thirst for learning that blends rigour with relevance. Internal metrics showed a 50 per cent reduction in time-to-proficiency for Azure AI toolkits and a 20 per cent bump in cross-team project ownership.

AWS responded to scaling its re/Start initiative beyond entry-level roles: data engineering micro-tracks launched in partnership with

community colleges, while a pilot ‘Advanced Analytics Bootcamp’ trained 200 current employees in predictive modelling and machine learning pipelines. At IBM, the Quantum Computing Fellowship launched in May, combined adaptive-learning modules with hands-on lab rotations, fostering collaboration between quantum physicists and software architects that had previously operated in silos.

These AI-powered learning journeys leverage real-time diagnostics – personalised skill maps recommending next-step modules, peer study pods, and mentor attachments. By shifting learning from episodic to embedded, firms accelerate capability building and reinforce a culture that prizes curiosity and continuous improvement.

Purposeful Rotations and Talent Incubators

Google’s Washington, D.C. VR Innovation Fellowship (June 2025) exemplifies a rotational strategy. Participants are cycled through Policy, Ethics, and Product teams over three months, crafting immersive prototypes that informed everything from employee training to consumer experiences. By embedding cross-disciplinary teams, Google unlocked fresh insights into ethical frameworks for VR and accelerated the roadmap for commercial launches.

Procter & Gamble’s ‘Growth Strong’ programme – launched Q2 2025 – paired mid-career marketers with six-month stints in digital transformation, supply chain analytics, and international brand strategy. Graduates of the programme now play critical roles in new product development, with turnover among participants 40 per cent lower than peer cohorts.

Global logistics leader DHL piloted a two-track ‘Global Rotation Pathway’ that sent engineers between European distribution centres and Asia-Pacific operations. The back-and-forth learning standardised best practices and built transcontinental

networks that endure as on-demand expert forums, reducing time-to-resolve cross-regional operational challenges by 30 per cent.

These rotational frameworks serve as talent incubators, delivering deep dives into core functions while fostering agility, an essential trait as organisations navigate unpredictable market shifts.

Sustained Alumni Ecosystems

Departures need not signal severed ties. McKinsey launched an enriched alumni platform in Q1 2025, hosting virtual salons, micro-credential workshops, and pitch-fest competitions where former consultants advise on emerging client opportunities. In the first six months, 18 per cent of engaged alumni returned to advisory or full-time roles, onboarding 30 per cent faster and at a 20 per cent lower acquisition cost than external hires.

Goldman Sachs’ evolution of its talent-realignment programme into a lifelong ‘Career Continuity’ journey illustrates the shift. Departing analysts receive tailored coaching, peer-mentoring pairings, and priority invites to deal simulations; two years after the launch, the firm reabsorbed 15 per cent of alumni into high-growth QE, M&A, and fintech teams.

Singapore’s SkillsFuture framework seamlessly funds alumni certifications in areas like blockchain, AI ethics, and advanced analytics, ensuring that professionals contribute to a circulating talent pool even after separation and bridging the gap between public upskilling infrastructure and corporate pipelines.

By reframing alumni as ongoing partners rather than past employees, organisations build a perpetual talent reservoir, turning attrition into a cyclical source of fresh perspectives and domain expertise.

EXAMPLES OF GROW-YOUR-OWN TALENT STRATEGIES

COMPANY	INITIATIVE	LOCATION	STAGE
Meta	\$100M AI Researcher Sign-on Bonuses	Global	From Buy-in to Build-out
Kirkland & Ellis	Salaried-Partner Tier (“Kirklandisation”)	Global	From Buy-in to Build-out
Microsoft	AI Apprenticeship	Dublin, Bengaluru, Redmond	Immersive, AI-Driven Learning Journeys
McKinsey	Alumni Platform	Global	Sustained Alumni Ecosystems
Unilever	Future Workforce Council	Global	Embedding Growth: Enablers & Organisational Evolution
Starbucks	Career Path Dashboards & Certified Coaches	Global	Embedding Growth: Enablers & Organisational Evolution
Google	Google Garage Labs	London, Berlin	Innovation Ecosystems
Siemens	Learning Campus Relaunch	Munich	Innovation Ecosystems
General Electric (GE)	Crotonville AI & Digital Curricula	Bedford, NY	Corporate Learning Centres
Telefónica	5G Skill Accelerator	Madrid, Spain	Corporate Learning Centres

#3 Embedding Growth: Enablers and Organisational Evolution

Firms must reconfigure governance, culture and space to turn build-your-own from aspiration into reality. Innovative companies have established Agile Talent Councils – cross-disciplinary groups reporting to C-suite sponsors – with mandates to allocate learning budgets, validate rotation outcomes, and forecast critical skill shortages using predictive analytics. These councils maintain accountability and strategic focus by remapping roles around capabilities rather than rigid hierarchies. For instance, Unilever’s Future Workforce Council convenes

HR, R&D, and Operations leaders to steer its internship-to-fellowship pipeline.

At the same time, Cisco’s Talent Integration Council integrates insights from finance, IT and marketing to align reskilling programmes with product roadmaps. Similarly, HSBC’s Talent Innovation Board uses real-time skills heatmaps to prioritise upskilling initiatives across the global business.

Cultural transformation is equally pivotal. Leaders at Starbucks now serve as certified coaches: equipped with ‘Career Path’ dashboards, they hold monthly growth dialogues, using data-driven prompts to identify skill gaps, flag burnout risks, and

recommend mentor matches. This shifts managerial conversations from task ownership to developmental partnership.

#4 Innovation Ecosystems: Corporate Labs & Academic Partnerships

Beyond internal initiatives, leading organisations are amplifying their build-your-own capability through external ecosystems – corporate learning laboratories and strategic university partnerships that inject fresh ideas and scale development.

At Google, the Google Garage programme offers designated innovation spaces in major hubs like London and Berlin, where employees collaborate on moonshot projects alongside academic partners from Imperial College and TU Berlin. These labs blend corporate resources with university research, resulting in accelerated prototyping cycles and talent cross-pollination.

Siemens operates its Learning Campus in Munich – a sprawling facility that combines hands-on workshops, digital simulation studios and visiting professorships from TU Munich. Since its Q2 2025 relaunch, the campus has hosted over 500 Siemens employees for immersive modules in industrial digitalisation and IIoT, while also offering short courses to postgraduate students.

On the academic front, MIT’s Industrial Liaison Program connects firms like IBM and Bosch to researchers and graduate students sponsoring directed thesis projects and executive education tracks. In Q2 2025, MIT launched a ‘Corporate Fellows’ cohort, embedding 20 industry professionals in lab rotations across the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory.

Northeastern University’s renowned co-op model continues to feed talent pipelines for Fortune 500 companies. Its new AI & Data Science Co-op Programme, introduced in Spring 2025, places students in alumni-founded startups and corporate innovation units for six months,

ensuring both a supply of emerging talent and a testbed for corporate learning approaches.

These ecosystems extend the build-your-own narrative: organisations can access bleeding-edge insights and create pathways for continuous talent renewal by co-locating employees with academic researchers and students.

#5 Corporate Learning Centres: Garden Plots on Campus

Beyond external collaborations, many leading companies have established dedicated on-campus learning centres – immersive environments designed to cultivate talent, foster cross-pollination of ideas, and entrench a culture of growth.

General Electric’s Crotonville facility (Bedford, NY), founded in 1956, is widely regarded as the first corporate university. Its sprawling campus hosts leadership programmes, digital labs, and residential retreats. In Q2 2025, GE introduced an ‘AI & Digital Curricula’ track at Crotonville, blending immersive workshops with simulation-based learning and C-suite coaching. The AT&T University (Bedminster, NJ) offers 5G networks, cloud engineering and cybersecurity courses. The facility’s ‘Innovation Pavilion’ launched in Q1 2025, bringing together employees, partners, and academic researchers to co-develop next-gen connectivity solutions.

Elsewhere, Accenture operates over 30 Talent & Innovation Hubs worldwide, each blending technology showcases, design thinking sprints and living labs. In June 2025, the university introduced its ‘5G Skill Accelerator’, training network engineers in network slicing and edge computing, cutting deployment cycles by 25 per cent and accelerating roll-outs across European markets.

These corporate learning centres act as on-site gardens – deeply rooted in company culture, yet sufficiently porous to welcome external expertise and new growth. They anchor

continuous learning in physical spaces where employees can see, nurture, and harvest the skills crucial for tomorrow’s challenges.

Harvesting the Fruits: Strategic Takeaways

The shift from buying talent to building it internally represents more than a tactical tweak – it is a fundamental realignment of organisational priorities. In an era where external acquisition costs can spike by 30 per cent and retention remains uncertain, firms that invest in homegrown development reap dividends in speed, loyalty, and cultural cohesion. The latest marquee examples – from Microsoft’s AI apprenticeships to Google’s VR innovation rotations – demonstrate that immersive learning and purposeful mobility do more than fill skills gaps; they create a shared growth narrative.

Yet the true power of a build-your-own strategy lies in its interconnected pillars. AI-driven learning journeys accelerate proficiency and foster a mindset of continuous improvement; rotational incubators broaden perspectives and prepare employees for leadership complexities; alumni ecosystems transform departures into renewed sources of talent. Together, these elements form a virtuous cycle: as employees witness tangible investment in their growth, their engagement and adaptability surge, catalysing future rounds of upskilling and reskilling.

Realising this vision demands an organisational backbone that champions innovation. Agile Talent Councils must link learning investments to business outcomes, while leaders, retooled as coaches, must wield data-driven dashboards to guide and sustain development conversations. Simultaneously, workspaces must evolve from static offices to dynamic learning spaces: modular labs, pop-up innovation cafes, and sensor-driven hot desks that flex with rotating cohorts.

Ultimately, building talent gardens

within your organisation is both an art and a science. It requires strategic intent, rigorous measurement, and a commitment to nurturing human potential as a renewable asset. As market dynamics continue to accelerate, the organisations that master this integrated approach – aligning governance, culture and space – will survive disruption and thrive, turning their workforce into a resilient, self-sustaining source of competitive advantage.





OFFICE INSIGHT 8^a

Restructuring for the Next Wave: How the Tech Titans are Building the Planet’s AI, Data & Energy Backbone

In late June 2025, Amazon set a new bar for corporate investment with a £40 billion pledge to the United Kingdom – arguably its most significant country-specific commitment outside its home market. Over three years, the company will build four advanced fulfilment centres in Hull, Northampton, and two East Midlands locations, create thousands of jobs, and modernise more than 100 existing sites to turbocharge same-day and next-day Prime deliveries. Simultaneously, Amazon’s Shoreditch headquarters in East London will grow, with two new offices on Hewett Street and Curtain Road, reflecting its evolution from a logistics powerhouse to a full-fledged technology innovator.

This paper explores how the world’s leading technology companies are expanding their physical footprints and reorganising their operations to seize the next wave of growth. We examine how Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Apple, TikTok, Meta, NVIDIA, and Tesla have each restructured teams, struck landmark clean-energy deals, completed major acquisitions, and built new facilities



^aThis paper was first produced and published on LinkedIn on the 7th July 2025.

from London to Singapore to Texas – all to support faster services, greener operations, and the AI-driven future.

Amazon: From UK Fulfilment to Global Cloud Power

That UK announcement was only the opening salvo in Amazon’s global expansion campaign. In June 2025, AWS signed a landmark power purchase agreement (PPA) with Talen Energy to source up to 1,920MW of carbon-free nuclear electricity from Pennsylvania’s Susquehanna plant through to 2042 – one of the largest corporate nuclear take-off deals ever struck. Amazon has also partnered on Small Modular Reactor (SMR) projects with Energy Northwest, X-Energy in Washington State, and Dominion Energy in Virginia to bolster its renewable credentials further, targeting over 1,200MW of new nuclear capacity. These initiatives underpin Amazon’s ambition to match 100 per cent of its global electricity demand with renewable or carbon-free sources by 2040.

As Amazon invests heavily in infrastructure and clean power, it is simultaneously reshaping its workforce for the AI era. Under CEO Andy Jassy, the company has deployed AI-driven automation tools across its logistics network, eliminating legacy roles while creating new openings for robotics specialists and machine-learning engineers. Since 2022, Amazon has reduced its headcount by nearly 28,000 employees, including 14,000 managerial positions cut in early 2025, to reinvest in high-priority areas like AWS and robotics research. Much of this headcount reduction is related to operational streamlining following AI deployments.

Beyond the UK, Amazon’s ambitions stretch across six continents. In the United States, AWS is commissioning ‘Generation 3’ data halls in Virginia and Ohio, optimised for Graviton and Trainium chips. In Singapore, a new region promises sub-10 ms latency to Southeast Asian customers,

underpinned by an offshore wind PPA that locks in green-power rates through to 2035. In São Paulo, Amazon is converting an existing logistics campus into a hybrid fulfilment-compute hub, serving retail orders and core AI workloads. Across the Pacific, Amazon Japan has earmarked ¥500 billion (£2.9 billion) through to 2027 to expand fulfilment, robotics, and AWS capacity in Tokyo and Osaka, powered by solar PPAs on Kyushu and a 200MW SMR pilot with the Japan Atomic Energy Agency. In India, three mega-fulfilment parks in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra will pair with AWS ‘edge-zones’ to meet surging e-commerce and AI demand.

Simultaneously, Amazon has spun up new business units – such as its in-house robotics R&D arm and an AI-driven supply-chain optimisation team – while shuttering underperforming content divisions like parts of its Kindle operations. This dual strategy of aggressive expansion and targeted pruning ensures both capital and talent flow to the growth engines of the decade: cloud computing, automation, and next-gen logistics.

Google’s Data Temples, City Campuses, and M&A Drive

For Google, 2025 has been a year of constructing compute cathedrals and urban innovation hubs while reshaping its workforce and making blockbuster acquisitions. In the United Kingdom, Google committed \$1 billion to a 33-acre data centre at Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire, set to come online in 2026 and run entirely on renewables via local PPAs and offshore wind agreements. Globally, sister facilities are rising in Moncks Corner, South Carolina, a seawater-cooled campus in Hamina, Finland, and a new build in Osaka, Japan, each underpinned by local renewable PPAs.

At the same time, Google is completing its signature ‘landscaper’ at Kings Cross – an 11-story, 330m long headquarters designed by

Thomas Heatherwick to house 7,000 employees, including teams from DeepMind and Google Brain, beneath rooftop gardens and collaborative labs. The campus is Google’s first wholly-owned space outside the US. Similar urban campuses have sprouted in Tel Aviv, Sydney, and San Francisco, marking Google’s belief that co-locating creators and compute delivers outsized innovation gains.

To sharpen its AI and Cloud focus, Google trimmed roughly 200 roles from its Global Business Organisation in May and hundreds more from its Platforms & Devices unit (covering Android, Pixel, Chrome) in April, redirecting resources to AI and Cloud expansion. Behind the scenes, Google agreed to buy Wiz – a cloud-security startup – for \$32 billion in March, its largest acquisition ever and a direct bet on strengthening multicloud safety. Smaller bolt-on deals, such as acquiring Israeli monitoring specialist Keep in May and defence-AI contractor EpiSci in February, have further deepened Google’s AIOps and national security offerings.

Microsoft’s Hybrid Cloud, Copilot Push, and Workforce Realignment

Microsoft’s 2025 narrative weaves together a global cloud-infrastructure surge, the commercialisation of Copilot AI, and rigorous workforce streamlining. Building on a £2.5 billion investment in the UK and South Wales announced in late 2023, Microsoft in April unveiled plans to boost European data centre capacity by 40 per cent over two years, expanding across 16 countries and more than 200 facilities by 2027, with advanced cooling, low-latency interconnects, and green-energy partnerships. Branded as part of Microsoft’s ‘digital commitments’ to sovereignty and resilience, the initiative features European-only governance boards and bespoke renewable PPAs to reassure clients and regulators.

On the consumer-facing side, Microsoft has rolled out new Azure AI regions in Sao Paulo, Mumbai, Melbourne, Vienna and Cape Town. At the same time, edge-

zone partnerships in Rwanda and Chile bring compute closer to local innovators and industrial operators. To free up resources for its \$80 billion AI capex programme, Microsoft executed two major layoff rounds – cutting about 6,000 roles in May and a further 9,100 positions in July, including cuts in Xbox (650 jobs) and LinkedIn’s Barcelona ‘King’ studio (200 jobs) – and reorganised engineering teams around Copilot and AI R&D, elevating leaders from GitHub and OpenAI.

Apple’s Heritage HQ’s, AI Pivot, and Potential Preplexity Acquisition

Apple’s strategy marries iconic real estate with high-tech laboratories. Since 2019, the company has invested over £18 billion in the UK – transforming Battersea Power Station into a 500,000 sq ft, six-storey HQ powered by 100 per cent renewable energy; opening AI and silicon-engineering labs in Cambridge; and establishing new offices in St Albans and Swindon.



Globally, Apple announced ¥200 billion of spending in China’s Shenzhen and Liaoning provinces to build a consumer-experience centre, a joint AI hardware-software research institute with Tsinghua University, and a second campus in Shanghai – each aiming for LEED Platinum certification and 100 per cent renewable power. In Bangalore, Apple’s Indian engineering campus is tripling in size, adding tens of thousands of square metres for AI-accelerated silicon design and software development.

Amid these projects, Apple is weighing its largest acquisition ever: Perplexity AI, valued at \$14 billion, to supercharge Siri and develop an independent search offering – a sign that Apple is finally opening its wallet for external AI talent after years of in-house caution. Internally, teams have been realigned, trimming less-critical hardware groups and expanding the Apple Intelligence division to lead generative-AI feature integration

across iOS, macOS, and developer tools introduced at WWDC 2025.

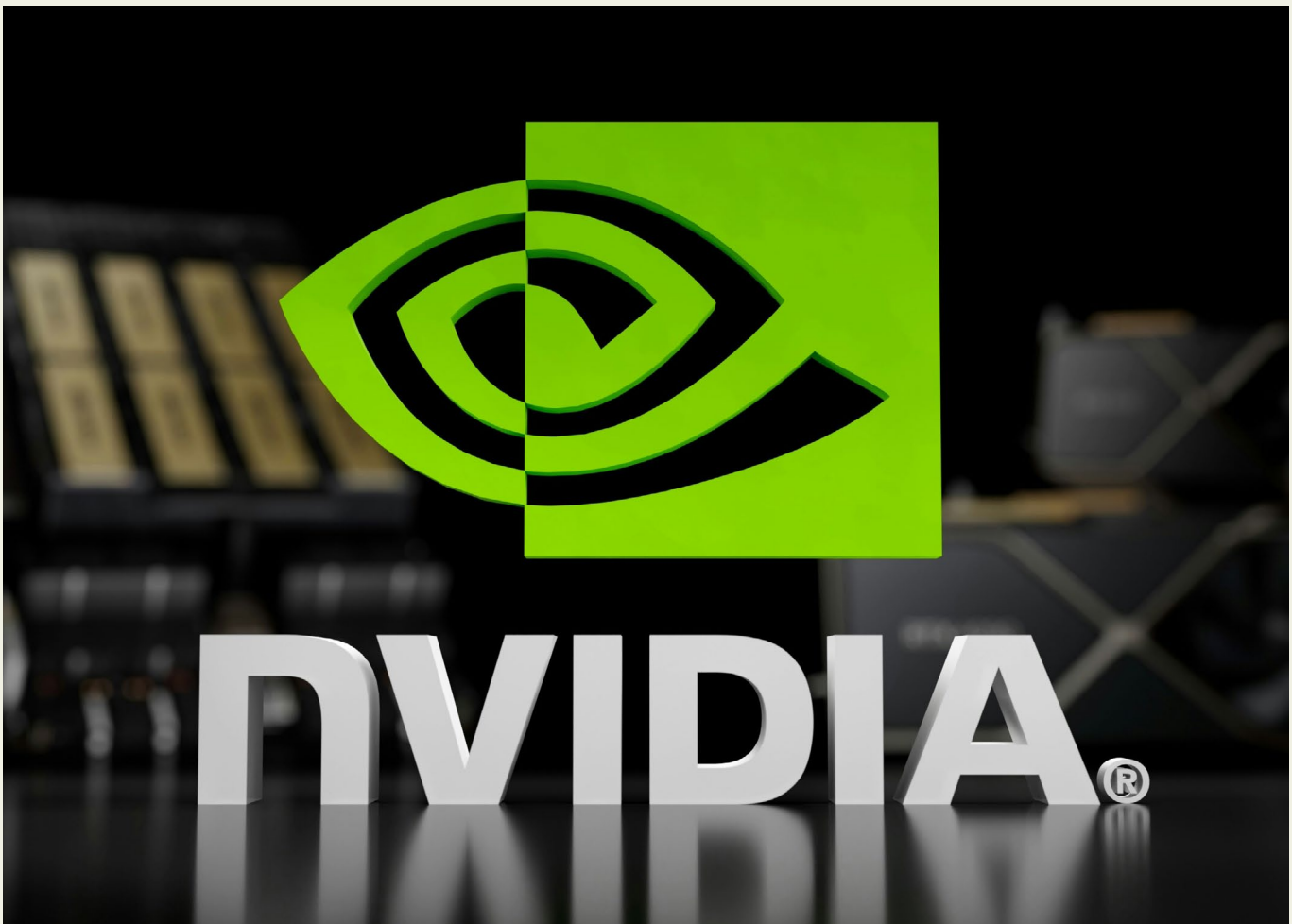
TikTok’s Creative Campuses and Meta’s Financial Engineering

Even social-media platforms recognise that digital communities need a local footprint. In June 2025, TikTok confirmed plans to expand its UK workforce to 3,000 people, adding over 500 jobs, and invest £140 million in a 135,000 sq ft HQ in London’s Barbican, due to open in early 2026. This follows its 2022 Farringdon HQ and brings total UK infrastructure spend to about £140 million, underscoring that global platforms require local footholds to navigate regulation, foster community ties, and attract regional talent.

Meta Platforms, meanwhile, is rewriting the playbook on capex by raising \$29 billion from private-credit firms – targeting \$3 billion in equity and \$26 billion in debt – to finance its AI-focused data centre expansion in the United States. This strategy enables rapid deployment of hyperscale facilities without loading up on public debt. Major prospects include a \$10 billion AI data centre in northeast Louisiana and a \$1 billion facility in central Wisconsin, each designed to host millions of AI processors by 2026. Meta also trimmed 5 per cent of its workforce in 2025 – targeting low performers as part of an efficiency drive – and restructured Reality Labs to sharpen its mixed-reality roadmap, even as it doubled down on its \$14.3 billion stake in Scale AI for data-labelling pipelines.

NVIDIA’s Global AI Fabric: Factories, Skills Centres, and Acquisitions

At GTC Paris in June 2025, NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang unveiled alliances across Europe to build ‘AI factories’ – sovereign clouds and GPU hubs – in France, Italy, Spain, Germany and the UK, alongside technology centres in Finland, Germany, Spain, Italy



and Great Britain dedicated to skills development and local innovation. A marquee project is Germany’s Industrial AI cloud, a 10,000-GPU facility powered by DGX B200 systems and CUDA-X libraries, tailor-made for heavy-duty simulation, engineering, and design workloads.

In North America, NVIDIA is onshoring AI manufacturing at unprecedented scale: commissioning over 1 million sq ft of factory space in Arizona and Texas to produce its latest Blackwell chips and turnkey AI supercomputers entirely on U.S. soil – an effort to bolster domestic supply-chain resilience and create hundreds of thousands of jobs. To feed its infrastructure machine, NVIDIA has made targeted acquisitions – closing on CentML, Lepton AI, and Gretel – to bolster efficiency and data-generation toolsets while maintaining annual attrition below 5 per cent and avoiding layoffs since 2008.

Tesla’s Gigafactories, Energy Pivot, and Market Pressures

Tesla entered H2 2025 under intensifying scrutiny. In Q2, it produced 410,244 vehicles – an uptick from its Q1 output - but delivered only 384,000 vehicles, marking a 13.5 per cent decline from Q2 2024. The gap between production and deliveries points to rising unsold inventory as consumer demand softens and competition heats up. The company also deployed 9.6GWh of stationary storage – one of its highest quarterly totals – even as storage growth showed early signs of plateauing after a record 31.4GWh in 2024.

On the factory front, Tesla is extending its Gigafactory network. A new 1 million sq ft megafactory near Katy, Texas, will produce Megapack energy systems and serve as an R&D hub for grid-storage solutions. Tesla’s first lithium-iron-phosphate

(LFP) cell factory is near completion in Nevada, promising up to 10GWh of capacity annually and reducing reliance on Asian suppliers. In China, a \$557 million deal with the Shanghai government funds the nation’s largest Megapack station. Yet to rein in costs, Tesla has cut 14% of its workforce since the start of 2024 and deferred the long-promised \$25,000 ‘affordable’ EV until 2026.

Thematic Pillars of a New Infrastructure Era

Stepping back and reviewing these various strategies, five themes emerge that capture the essence of how the tech titans are physically, financially, and organisationally positioning themselves to lead the next wave of AI and digital services.

#1 Compute Proximity Meets Talent Density

By co-locating data centres with R&D labs and offices – from London’s landscaper to Bangalore’s tech corridor – the tech titans minimise latency, accelerate development, and attract top engineering talent.

#2 Energy as a Strategic Asset

Securing long-term, low-carbon power through nuclear PPAs (Amazon-Susquehanna, SMRs), offshore wind contracts (Google), and green PPA programmes (Microsoft, Apple) has become as critical as acquiring land for facilities.

#3 Augmentation > Automation

The real opportunity of AI is not in replacing humans but in redefining their work. Augmented decision-making, real-time feedback, and human-AI collaboration are the frontier, not headcount reduction.

#4 Regulatory and Sovereign Engagement

European-only oversight boards, local data-sovereignty mandates,

community-trading pledges, and on-the-ground content-moderation hubs demonstrate how tech firms secure permits, build trust, and hedge against policy shifts.

#5 Integrated Ecosystems Over Isolated Assets

Whether it’s warehouses powered by nuclear electrons with AI-driven robotics, Copilot, or mega-campuses underpinned by private-credit financing, these interconnected flywheels create barriers that standalone assets cannot match.

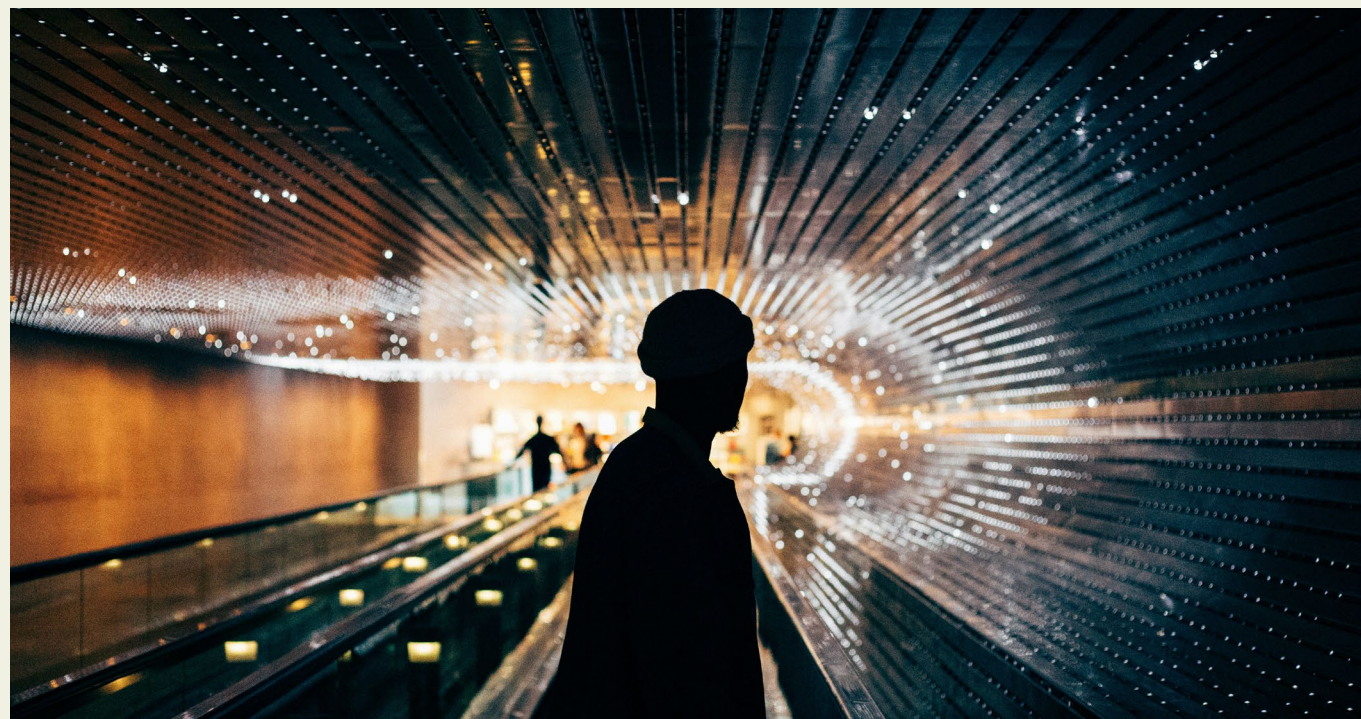
Restructuring for the Next Wave

Tech’s most prominent players are doing more than just rolling out new products – they’re physically and financially rewiring the world to power AI, data, and energy infrastructure at unprecedented scale. From Amazon’s nuclear-backed AWS regions and Google’s landscaper mega-campuses to Microsoft’s sovereign clouds, Apple’s Heritage HQs, NVIDIA’s AI factories, Tesla’s Gigafactories, TikTok’s creative labs, and Meta’s private-credit gambit, these companies are weaving a planet-spanning web of compute,

energy, finance, and talent.

Yet this rapid built-out carries systemic implications. Long-term PPAs and SMR projects reshape local energy markets, risking traditional utility models and challenging regulators to ensure fair access and resilience. The proliferation of data-sovereignty boards, edge networks, and autonomous-vehicle trials underscores the geopolitical stakes of digital infrastructure, where export controls, content mandates, and regulatory fragmentation can ripple through the services billions rely on.

Looking ahead, the next frontier will emphasise distributed architectures – edge micro-data halls in emerging markets, floating modular reactors on coastal grids, and portable AI labs embedded in smart-city initiatives – united by open interoperability standards and governed through multi-stakeholder frameworks. The companies that master not only the digital stack but the intricate interplay of real estate, energy, finance, regulation, and workforce transformation will define whether the global digital economy of tomorrow delivers inclusive, sustainable growth or deepens divides across regions and communities.



The Last Word: Resilience and Relevance as the New Baseline

Let’s be blunt: *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is not a strategy. It’s a symptom of drift. The future of work will not be won by those dabbling across parallel experiments but by those able to impose coherence - to turn multiplicity into momentum, disruption into design. In an age defined by volatility, the prize is clear: resilience and continued relevance.

That search runs through every essay in this Anthology. The ECB’s 3-5-8 plan is about more than mobility; it’s about institutional endurance in a world where skills expire faster than job titles. Fintech’s hard-fought graduation into adulthood is not simply about profit; it is about proving longevity in a sector famous for churn. Tech titans pouring billions into nuclear-backed infrastructure are not just expanding, they are hard-wiring durability into their growth. Startup ecosystems rising up the global league tables show that places, like firms, must constantly demonstrate their relevance to remain in the game. Even Musk’s repeated cameos underline the point: disruption without resilience collapses under its own weight.

The more profound truth is that resilience and relevance are not abstract ideals. They are operational necessities. A firm that cannot align its people

strategy with its workplace strategy quickly becomes fragile. An economy that cannot anchor innovation to trusted infrastructure soon falters. A sector that cannot mature beyond adolescence risks irrelevance. In short, the organisations that endure will be those that deliberately build durability into their models, not those that chase novelty for its own sake.

This is where corporate real estate comes in. CRE leaders are no longer simply custodians of space; they are custodians of survival. The choices they make - about where organisations root themselves, how workplaces flex to support continuous learning, and which ecosystems to tether to - are now inseparable from the choices that determine resilience. Space has become a form of risk management. Relevance is expressed in the ability to attract and retain talent, to host innovation, and to adapt portfolios to shifting geopolitics.

Every CRE decision now radiates far beyond the floorplate.

The conviction is this: fragmentation is fatal, alignment is survival. Multiplicity may be the condition of modern work, but resilience comes only when it is harnessed - when careers, geographies, and technologies are bound together with intent. Relevance follows the same logic. It cannot be acquired in the market; it must be cultivated and renewed.

So the last word is clear: resilience and relevance are no longer optional extras for business - or for the corporate real estate function itself. They are the baseline. Those who lead with conviction, stitching coherence into the chaos, will not only survive this period of turbulence - they will define the operating logic of work in the years ahead. The rest will be left chasing someone else’s design.

Related Research



We like questions, if you've got one about our research,
or would like some property advice, we would love to hear from you.

Research



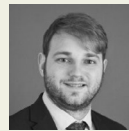
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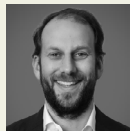
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