Who's Who in the Circular Workplace

And What **You** Can Do to Build The Zero-Waste Office

The Second Annual Circular Workplace Report by

Green Standards

Among the Who's Who

Executive Summary

Circularity is a growing corporate priority, with 60% of Fortune 100 companies highlighting it in their sustainability reports. Reducing waste and reusing materials is becoming a key business strategy for companies aiming to be more environmentally responsible.

Collaboration is essential for circular success. Corporate real estate professionals, architects, facilities managers, and workplace strategists must work together to design flexible, efficient spaces that reduce waste and extend the life of resources.

Office interiors have a significant carbon impact. Frequent office refreshes mean that furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FFE) can contribute as much to a building's carbon footprint as the structure itself, according to a growing number of whole-building life cycle analyses. Including FFE in lifecycle assessments is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of emissions sources.

Design for adaptability and longevity. By creating modular, flexible workspaces and planning for end-of-life at the beginning, companies can reduce waste from constant office overhauls and make better use of their resources over time.

Circularity delivers real business benefits. It not only helps companies lower costs and meet sustainability goals but also aligns with the values of today's employees, making it a smart strategy for boosting both operational efficiency and workforce engagement.

Circular Workplace, n.

a.
A place of work that designs out waste, circulates furniture, fixtures, and equipment at their highest value, and regenerates the natural and built environment.

b.
A global coalition to raise awareness of the zero-waste office. Founded in 2023 by Green Standards, our membership includes hundreds of workplace professionals across ten industries and three continents.

c.
A way of working that exists, today, in real life! And the people in this report will tell you how they're making it happen.

The overlap between circularity and workplace

Q Is the circular economy even on the radar of major corporations?

A Yes! Green Standards reviewed sustainability reporting from every company on this year's Fortune 100. A full 60% of these reports mention circular initiatives. That's nearly as prevalent as ESG, the much-discussed acronym for Environmental, Social, and Governance, which appears in 86% of these reports. And given prevailing political trends, circularity is primed to be the main focus of sustainability efforts in coming years.

When you zoom in on the sustainability reports of the Fortune 10 – the largest companies in the U.S. by revenue and a list that includes tech giants Apple, Amazon, and Alphabet – it's even clearer that circularity is part of the business model, with 230 total mentions of circularity and circular practices as compared to 130 for ESG.

What does this mean? We believe it isn't just a case of one buzzword coming into vogue as another one reaches its expiration date. The initial appeal of ESG became its biggest weakness: It's come to mean everything to everyone. In contrast, circularity is a concept so simple that our great-grandparents did it without thinking: Waste not, want not. The key is connecting that ethos with decarbonization, cost-savings, community engagement, net-zero goals, and sustainability.

In the words of Gary Miciunas, a founder of the Circular Workplace movement: "The relationship of circularity to sustainability is that of means to ends. Circularity is the means to achieve sustainability goals."

> **60%**
> **of the Fortune 100 call out circularity in their sustainability reports**

> **The relationship of circularity to sustainability is that of means to ends. Circularity is the means to achieve sustainability goals.**
> **– Gary Miciunas**

Introduction

A circular workplace is a zero-waste office — but it's also something much bigger than that. It's a growing global movement to bring the principles of the circular economy into the spaces and places where the economy happens.

In the year since Green Standards published our first Circular Workplace report in 2023, the members of this coalition have spoken on panels, run workshops, conducted interviews, advised policy makers, and done the hard work to ensure the stuff in our offices stays in use and out of landfill. And the one thing we keep coming back to is this: Collaboration.

There is no such thing as a circular economy of one. Everyone in the modern workplace needs to know that circularity is a proven way to save money, resources, and carbon emissions. The **workplace strategist** needs insight into how the **furniture manufacturer** facilitates reuse and repair; the **facilities manager** requires information on how the **remanufacturer** can integrate into their operations; and the **corporate real estate professional** must identify an **architect** who considers end-of-use planning from the outset.

To enable a true circular workplace, it will take all these individuals working collaboratively with each other. No one company, team, or individual can do this alone.

That's why the theme of this year's report is **Who's Who in the Circular Workplace**. We're spotlighting each of these key roles with actionable advice from key players. And we're asking the best in the business to answer the really hard questions: How do we stop the common architectural practice of "whiteboxing" an office before new tenants move in? How might a designer prioritize reuse? How do we show the return on investment for circularity?

For us, circularity is not an academic model or an interesting theory; it's how the biggest companies on the planet support local non-profits, optimize their real estate portfolios, and meet their sustainability targets. They're doing it today. And in the pages that follow, they'll share their experiences and show how you, too, can be a driving force for the circular workplace.

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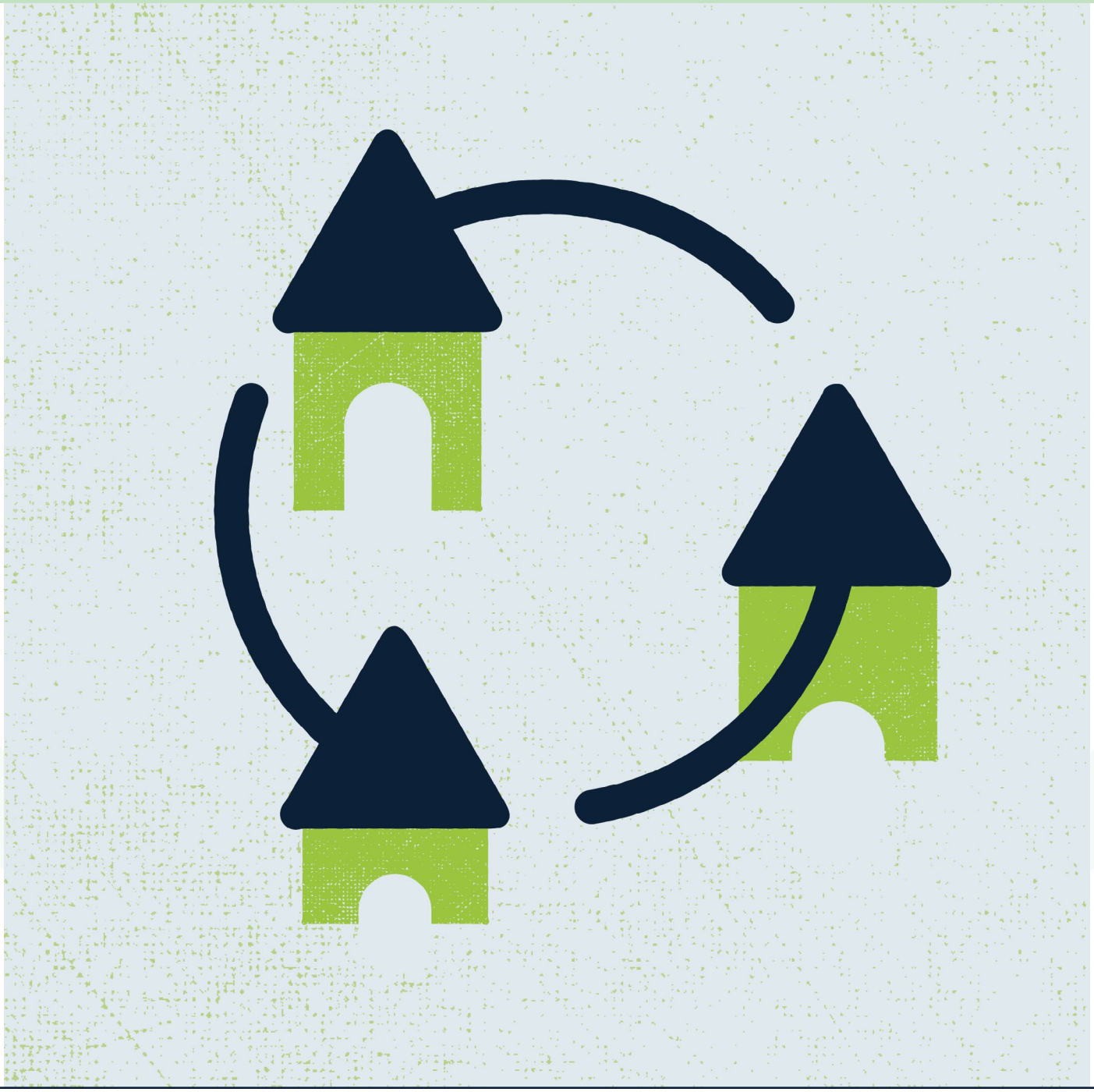
1 Roles and Responsibilities

Corporate Real Estate Executives

A corporate real estate professional steers the company's property strategy, handling acquisitions, leases, and sales to boost business outcomes. By strategically aligning properties with company goals – including sustainability initiatives and benchmarks – they keep costs in check and maximize portfolio value.



What Corporate Real Estate Executives Can Do

Incorporate reuse into long-term planning. When tenants change, how much of the space can stay the same?

Track disposition outcomes across the portfolio. Knowing where assets end up is critical to finding easy reuse wins.

Ensure those numbers end up in sustainability reporting. The more digital your business operations, the more your real estate footprint matters to your overall emissions.

Key Voices

"First and foremost, understand the importance of this subject matter. No longer is it just nice to consider sustainability, it's a corporate requirement. Don't be so rigid with your standards that you miss out on opportunities for synergy. Be more agile!" **– Johnny Alain, Director of Real Estate, North America, Stantec, Calgary.**

"With leases being signed and lapsing regularly, consider replacing any 'restoration clause' with salvage operations, perhaps available to other new tenants on another floor or building that may want inexpensive carpet tile, furniture, etc." **– Kjell Anderson, Director of Sustainable Design, LMN Architects, Seattle.**

"Designing for flexibility means more inclusive spaces as well as reduced need for refits as needs and desires change." **– Jodie Ng, former SVP Sustainability, Macquarie Group, New York City.**

"Clearly define your objectives; engage all stakeholders in planning; document everything."
– John Mackay, VP Operations , Aleto Inc., Washington, DC.

"Build a foundation of data requirements required from all stakeholders."
– Christine McHugh, Founder & CEO, White Strand Development, New York City.

"It seems that in many instances companies find themselves in truncated construction or deconstruction timelines and usable material goes into the dumpster as a result. If relationships were formed proactively with organizations such as Green Standards and Habitat ReStores and key conversations held before the one or two-day "just get rid of it" imperatives, much of this material could not only be kept out of the landfills but could also provide potential tax deductions, satisfy grant requirements, and provide much-needed revenue for nonprofit organizations." **– Kent Rice, Corporate Acquisitions Manager, Habitat For Humanity ReStores of Lancaster/Lebanon, Penn.**

Center of the Bullseye

How do we ensure shorter leases don't generate more waste?

Across the workplace landscape, one demand unites employees and employers: flexibility. According to CBRE's 2024 Americas Office Occupier Sentiment Survey, 80% of companies with over 10,000 employees are either considering or already adopting shorter lease terms. These companies are also integrating more flexible space options into their portfolios, preparing for future changes.

In addition to shorter leases, these companies are seeking green leases — agreements wherein landlords share energy and waste data and prioritize sustainability initiatives like recycling, composting, and electrification. Notably, 26% of occupiers say that the presence or absence of green lease clauses would influence their real estate decisions.

However, this push for flexibility poses a challenge: How do companies minimize waste while frequently changing offices? Most furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FFE) are designed to last over a decade, and their carbon footprint is substantial.

The solution lies in adopting a circular mindset from the outset. Kay Sargent, senior principal at HOK, emphasizes the importance of designing spaces that can evolve: "Design the spaces with change and the ability to adapt in mind. Identify core elements that don't change and elements that can be tweaked or refreshed to accommodate new users."

By focusing on adaptable design, companies can reduce waste while embracing the flexibility they need. The less that has to change, the more sustainable and efficient the workplace becomes.

2 Roles and Responsibilities

Architects

Architects specializing in circular design for corporate real estate create adaptable spaces that minimize environmental impact and maximize resource efficiency. They employ strategies like modular construction and recyclable materials to ensure buildings can be easily modified or deconstructed, extending their useful life and reducing waste in the long term.

What Architects Can Do

Create buildings that are adaptable to changing uses over time. Flexible floor plans, modular partitions, and adaptable infrastructure allow for easier renovations and prolong the building's useful life.

Repurpose existing structures instead of building new, incorporating existing assets and reducing the need to extract virgin materials.

Understand the full environmental impact of materials from extraction to disposal and prioritize materials and methods with low embodied carbon.

Collaborate with engineers, builders, and sustainability consultants to incorporate circular strategies throughout the project lifecycle, from design to decommissioning.

Plan for the eventual deconstruction of buildings, allowing materials and components to be recovered and reused instead of demolished and landfilled.

Key Voices

> "Working with existing products, be it furniture, finishes, or other building elements, can require a level of creativity and problem-solving that architects should have, but is a skill they rarely use and has become dormant. Revive this creativity and challenge yourself to design with reuse on your next project!" **– Andrew Ellsworth, CEO, Doors Unhinged, Pittsburgh.**

> "Understand what is in your space before beginning design. Assess what can be reused, refurbished, etc. for the project. Shop the second-hand market. Do not assume that reuse is more risk or more cost – do our due diligence to deliver the best project to our clients and reduce our collective impact on the environment." **– Benjamin Holsinger, Global Design Resilience Leader of Product Development, Gensler, Washington DC.**

> "When you consider materials for tenant improvement build outs, consider how they can be used after refreshes and with each new tenant. How can we reconfigure the space instead of demo and rebuild?" **– Eric Law, Co-Founder and CEO, Urban Machine, San Francisco.**

> "We are revamping our internal material database so our studios can easily find sustainable materials and furniture. It's about making it more accessible and user-friendly." **– Samantha Allen, Associate Director, Sustainability, M Moser Associates, London.**

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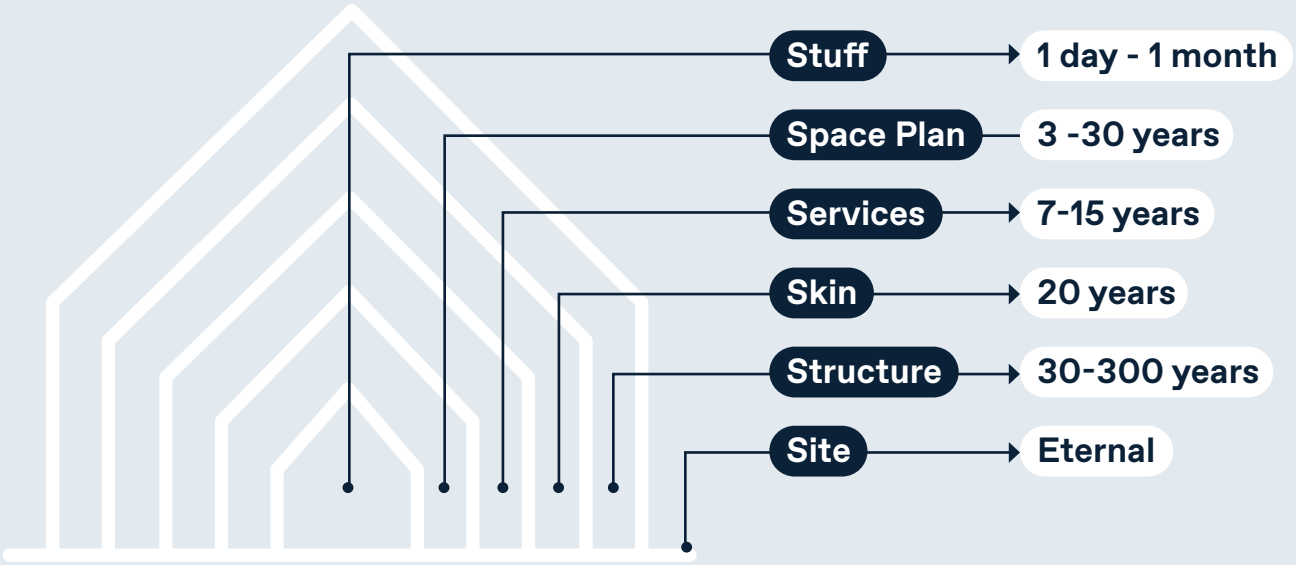
How do we make the Whole Building Life Cycle Assessment live up to its name?

The Whole Building Life Cycle Assessment (WBLCA) is a brilliant concept in theory. Given that the built environment accounts for roughly 40% of global emissions, it makes sense to adopt a universal metric to measure the carbon footprint of any building. That's the intention behind WBLCA. However, in practice, particularly in systems like LEED v3, these assessments often fall short by focusing solely on the building's structure and enclosure. They typically exclude crucial elements such as mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, and almost always neglect the furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FFE) within the building.

Stewart Brand's 1994 book *How Buildings Learn* illustrates this gap with the "Six S's" of a building — structure, skin, services, space plan, stuff, and site. The Whole Building Life Cycle Assessment tends to focus only on the structure and skin, overlooking the rapidly changing interiors that play a critical role in a building's overall carbon footprint.

Stewart Brand's 6 S's from *How Buildings Learn*



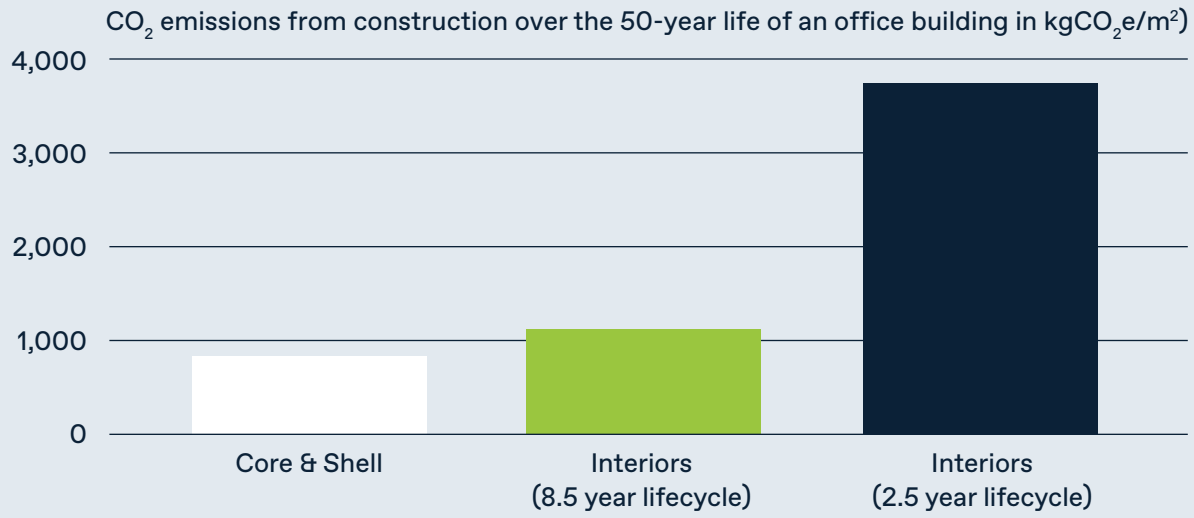
So why does this matter? While the concrete, steel, and glass used to construct a building contribute significantly to its embodied carbon, they are relatively stable over time. In contrast, the interiors — furniture, fixtures, and equipment — are constantly in flux, creating waste and emissions with every renovation or update. This continuous change has a massive, often unmeasured, environmental impact. As the saying goes, "what gets measured, gets managed." So if we're not measuring the embodied carbon emissions of interiors, who's managing their environmental footprint?

Jeffrey Frost, materials practice lead at Brightworks Sustainability, worked with Salesforce to measure the carbon impact of a two-floor office refresh. His finding was eye-opening: "Embodied emissions from furniture are equal to or greater than the construction materials used in a Class A tenant improvement."

Similarly, LMN Architects conducted a thorough lifecycle analysis during their own Seattle office refresh and found that "when measured over time, interiors' embodied carbon impact can be as significant, if not more, than the structure and envelope," as noted by Jenn Chen and Kjell Anderson in a 2019 report. They argue that to truly assess a building's carbon footprint, WBLCA must include interiors as part of the scope.

Architect Raefer Wallis, founder of the RESET standard, goes even further, stating bluntly that "It's time to stop dismissing the impact of interior fit-out. It's never been less than core & shell; it's simply been more difficult to calculate."

His data from 2022 couldn't be more clear:



In short, the carbon emissions from interiors are far too significant to ignore. It's time for assessments to cover the *whole* building, not just the bones.

3 Roles and Responsibilities

Workplace Strategists

A workplace strategist designs and optimizes office spaces to enhance productivity and employee wellbeing while minimizing waste. They analyze work patterns and company needs to implement flexible work solutions and ensure the space aligns with business goals.

What Workplace Strategists Can Do

Educate and influence others in the value chain, explaining the many benefits of strategic reuse.

Advocate for circularity champions within your organization and beyond.

Leverage existing products that can still be reused, like task seating or ancillary items, and strategize ways to reuse as a first option

Key Voices

> "For projects involving new construction or significant renovations, it's optimal to incorporate waste management systems on each floor. This approach should address various waste types, including trash, recyclables, compost, e-waste, and other specialized streams so they are managed efficiently and in accordance with local available waste collection services." **– Adam Meltzer, Sustainability Account Manager, Stok, Portland, Oregon.**

> "Expectation management is key. While circular office concepts come with certain limitations (e.g., product selection) benefits are tremendous. (i.e., cost savings)." **– Artus Assmann, Co-Founder and COO, Tonic Spaces, Berlin.**

> "Explore innovative ways to make the most of your existing resources. From rethinking space utilization to upgrading equipment for longer lifecycles, small changes can contribute significantly to a circular approach." **– Katerina Karasyova, Head of Partnerships, Freespace, Toronto.**

> "Find opportunities to listen to colleagues and ask them for ideas! Colleagues on the ground can often point out areas of waste that are unique to their role/perspective that aren't obvious. Then solutions can be identified, such as finding nonprofits to partner with or creating guidance and education." **– Monika Henn, Senior Sustainability Manager, AXA XL, New York City.**

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How do you reuse furniture, fixtures, and equipment when design specifications won't allow it?

This one's easy: Change the specs!

Of course, in the complicated dynamics of a modern office, that's a herculean task. But a sustainable approach can still be achieved by cleverly navigating these boundaries. The key lies in strategic planning and creativity.

First, workplace strategists should engage with key stakeholders early on to outline sustainability goals, making reuse part of the project's value proposition. By embedding reuse in the initial concept, clients are more likely to support solutions that align with both regulatory requirements and eco-friendly practices.

Second, understanding the nuances of specifications is essential. Many rules focus on safety, accessibility, and aesthetics, but they rarely rule out reusing high-quality materials outright. Designers can propose modifications, refinishing, or retrofitting to meet standards without starting from scratch. For example, existing furniture can be updated with new upholstery, or fixtures can be refurbished to look modern and meet current codes.

Collaboration is another vital tactic. Partnering with suppliers who specialize in sustainable refurbishing or modular designs can lead to innovative solutions that fit within the constraints of the regulations.

Finally, clear communication with stakeholders, including procurement teams and regulators, can help reframe the conversation around sustainability. When reuse is presented as not only a cost-saving measure but also a responsible choice aligned with environmental goals, it becomes an easier sell, even when facing stringent specifications. The key is in rethinking what's possible within the rules, rather than seeing them as insurmountable obstacles.

4 Roles and Responsibilities

Designers

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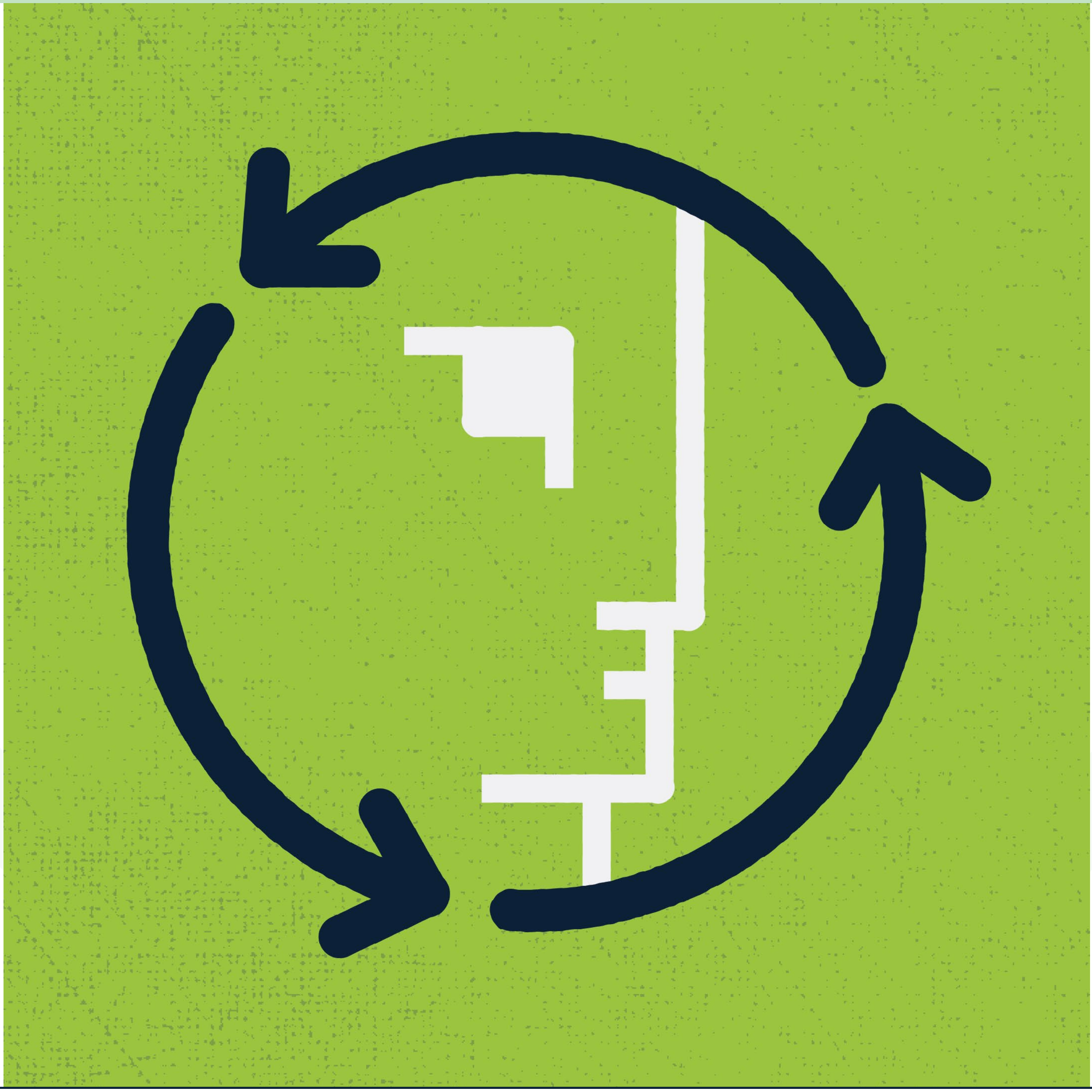


What Designers Can Do

Prioritize existing assets or reused assets, either through direct reuse or remanufacturing.

Leverage your influence over customer decisions to promote circular solutions, including reuse and end of life strategies to keep assets in use for longer.

Specify products made to be circular. That means recycled content, durability, ease of disassembly, and the ability to be reconfigured.

Key Voices

> "Start asking furniture manufacturers how easy their soft seating will be to reupholster; how many staples do they use?" **– Kriss Kokoefer, President, Reup by Kay Chesterfield, Oakland, Calif.**

> "Identify circularity as a guiding principle for the project from Day One and establish specific goals so the team designs with the goals in mind." **– Lauri Lampson, President and CEO, PDR, Houston.**

> "Evaluate and prioritize vendors actively seeking to include more circular practices within their design, products, and manufacturing processes." **– Amanda Epplin, designer and furniture guru, Kimiko Designs, Oklahoma City.**

> "Designers have incredible power to drive an uptick in the desirability of reclaimed materials. We need to show beautiful examples of projects made with reused things so our clients can see what is possible." **– Simona Fischer, Director of Sustainable Practice, MSR Design, Minneapolis.**

> "Starting from a 'clean slate' often inhibits the potential for innovative circular design. By working with what's already there, you can uncover unique opportunities to incorporate circular practices and create a more sustainable and efficient workplace." **– Lance Amato, Head of Customer Experience, CANOA, New York.**

> "**1.** Design for longevity: Choose adaptable, modular furniture that can be reconfigured, repaired, or updated easily. **2.** Use sustainable materials: Opt for products made from recycled, recyclable, or renewable materials to reduce environmental impact. **3.** Create flexible spaces: Design multipurpose areas that can be easily restructured to meet changing needs, reducing the demand for new furniture. " – **Sam Coggin, Company Director, Coggin Sustainable Office Solutions, Lancashire, UK**

Center of the Bullseye

How do we incorporate existing assets into long-term planning?

Incorporating existing assets like furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FF&E) into long-term design planning can feel daunting, but with a few specific strategies, you can make it work.

First, **conduct an asset audit.** This needn't be a comprehensive inventory, as we know those can take so much time and money that they become self-defeating. Start small and high-value: If you have a set of outdated office chairs, could they be reupholstered with updated fabrics? Maybe the frames are sturdy, but the cushions need refreshing. As industry insiders joke, most furniture uglies out before it wears out!

"If you don't know where to start, let's talk!" says Heidi Frasure, Head of Sustainability at Green Standards. "We can help you identify the assets worth tracking, and the ones that are best left to sustainable decommissioning to help save storage costs and optimize reuse potential."

Repurposing existing furniture like this can dramatically reduce costs while updating the look.

Another example is reworking conference room tables. Instead of ordering all-new tables, consider refinishing or resurfacing them. By changing the table's top to a more modern material or finish, you can align with the company's current aesthetic while avoiding a full replacement.

Modularity is your friend. If you're working in a corporate environment that frequently shifts team structures or project spaces, think about repurposing modular furniture. For instance, modular workstations can be reconfigured to create larger or smaller collaborative spaces without buying new furniture. This not only maximizes the lifecycle of existing assets but also enhances adaptability for future needs.

Rethink standard practices that inhibit reuse, like **whiteboxing**. If we completely clean out an office space before showing it to prospective occupants, it makes it all but impossible for them to keep the existing furniture.

"We need to work closely with landlords to change their standard operating procedures so that they tour prospective tenants through a space before demo/white boxing happens," says Benjamin Holsinger of Gensler. "We also need to talk with general contractors and demo contractors who are being hired by landlords to demo/white box a space – so that they can divert existing materials from landfill."

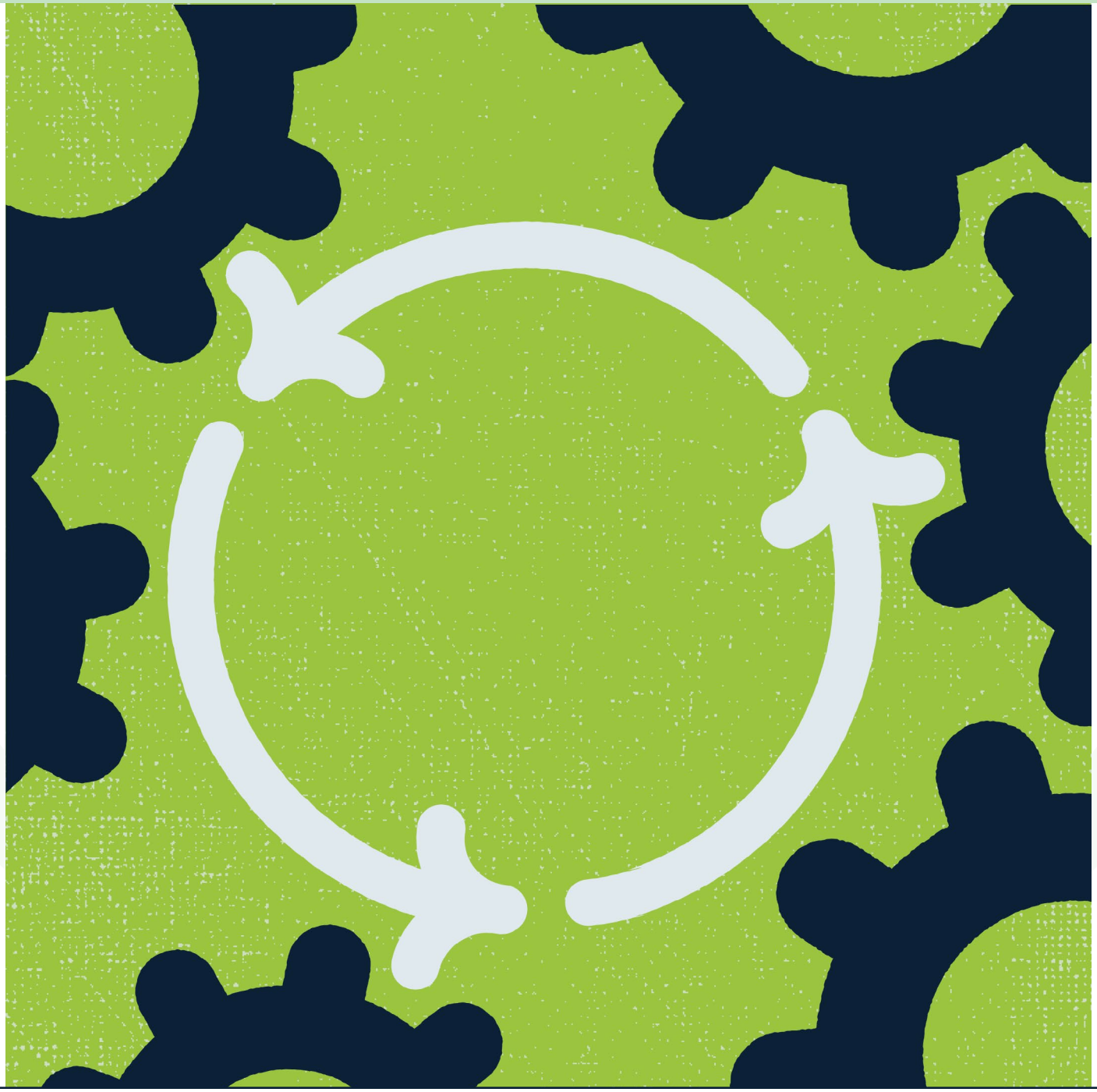
Lighting fixtures are another area where reuse is possible. Instead of replacing an entire lighting system, consider updating just the lampshades or using existing fixtures in new ways. A simple upgrade like adding energy-efficient bulbs or dimming capabilities can transform older fixtures without needing replacements. Highly visible projects like these are a great way to get a team excited, says Stephanie McLarty of Quantum Lifecycle.

Finally, link these efforts to sustainability goals. For example, promoting how **repurposing furniture** aligns with the company's carbon footprint reduction initiatives can help gain buy-in from stakeholders who prioritize environmental impact.

5 Roles and Responsibilities

Furniture Manufacturers

The modern office was created by furniture manufacturers, and they're in the midst of recreating it as a regenerative, circular space. Make no mistake: It's a huge challenge that requires rethinking design thinking, supply chains, and business models. But every major company knows that the future of their industry is circular.



What Furniture Manufacturers Can Do

Design products with end-of-use in mind, considering repairs and reuse. Design for disassembly is a starting point, but we need to get to design for reassembly.

Consider more reuse in components, using either recaptured parts or more recycled content.

Partner with service providers who can help capture products at end-of-life, and keep them in use for longer through donation, resale, or remanufacturing.

Key Voices

"The industry has a long history of collaboration and working towards common goals like the ANSI/BIFMAe3 sustainability standard, zero-waste goals, and most recently material chemistry transparency. The more we can come together as an industry and share learnings to solve complex problems, the more we can truly drive change." **– Katie Chapman, Senior Sustainability Engineer, Haworth, Holland, Mich.**

"To effectively integrate circularity into our sustainability efforts, we must adopt a holistic approach prioritizing collaboration and innovation. By leveraging cross-functional teams and advanced technologies, we aim to balance reduced carbon emissions, increased recycled content, recyclability, and our commitment to durability, responsible sourcing, ingredient transparency, and the ability for products to have multiple lifespans through remanufacturing. This ensures that circularity is a guiding principle in all our decisions." **– Eric Doyle, Senior Sustainability Consultant, Steelcase, Grand Rapids, Mich.**

"Furniture designers create chairs that last for 10-15 years and are shocked when we tell them we see them being resold after 2-3 years." **– Rebecca Nolan, Head of Reuse, Green Standards, Toronto.**

"At Teknion we are becoming aggressive on designing for the environment to include more circularity, less materiality and a focus on reuse by maximizing common product components." **– Tracy Backus, Director, Sustainable Programs, Teknion, Washington, DC.**

Center of the Bullseye

How do we move the needle for the entire industry?

In recent years, product development in the furniture industry has shifted towards sustainability and circularity. It is well known that 80% of a product's environmental footprint is determined in the design phase. The goal is to prioritize practical solutions that reduce environmental impact while keeping costs manageable.

One of the key strategies is to **reduce material usage**. By designing products that use fewer materials without compromising performance, companies can lower their carbon footprint. For example, comparing the weight of competing products gives an indication of material efficiency and, by extension, carbon impact. If a product performs equally well but weighs less, it's likely to have a smaller environmental footprint.

Another important focus is on **using recycled materials** and ensuring products are **easy to recycle**. Engineers are increasingly tasked with thinking beyond compliance and integrating circular design principles early in the development process. This includes avoiding unnecessary adhesives, using common fasteners, and providing clear disassembly instructions to make recycling simpler and more cost-effective. Designers can collaborate with end-of-life services providers like Green Standards to help provide key insights into what is truly happening with products and update designs accordingly. Designing for what's actually happening at end-of-life is crucial. For example, if labor is too intensive to disassemble a task chair for recycling, designing components with the same type of plastic requiring less disassembly will enable more recyclability. The continued collaboration between the sustainable decommissioning team at Green Standards and the designers at major manufacturers is exactly how circularity happens.

> **"The continued collaboration between the sustainable decommissioning team at Green Standards and the designers at major manufacturers is exactly how circularity happens."**

Designing for **disassembly** and **modularity** is essential. Products should be easy to take apart quickly without damaging the core materials to enable reuse, repair, or recycling, extending their lifecycle and reducing waste. Modular furniture systems, for example, can be reconfigured for different uses, allowing companies to adapt to changes more easily and providing more extended lifecycle value beyond the first use.

In addition to material and product design, **logistics and packaging** play a critical role in sustainability. Companies are encouraged to actively design packaging solutions that reduce waste and emissions impacts, rather than letting packaging evolve based on operational needs.

The industry has also seen a shift from large, specialized systems like panel furniture to more **flexible**, **customizable designs**. In the past, office furniture needed to accommodate specific systems such as power routing, but today's demand is for furniture that can be easily reconfigured as needs change. This flexibility is crucial for ensuring that products retain value over time.

However, a major challenge is that much of the industry's output is **hyper-specific** to individual clients, making resale and reuse difficult. Once these highly customized pieces

leave the factory, they often lose most of their value, especially in the contract furniture market. By contrast, well-made, less customized furniture — such as residential furniture — tends to retain resale value because it appeals to a broader audience.

To overcome this, companies need to build partnerships and infrastructure that support **circular business models**. This includes offering **take-back programs** where used furniture can be refurbished, repaired, or recycled. Manufacturers can partner with companies like Green Standards to enable profitable refurbishment or resale models, making a profit on the core materials more than once allows for more value to be captured on the same materials, leading to new business models and less waste and emissions. Additionally, the industry must develop **tracking systems**, such as product passports and usage meters, to monitor the lifecycle of furniture. Much like cars have VINs (vehicle identification numbers) and odometers to gauge their value, furniture could benefit from similar tracking tools to facilitate resale or reuse.

Ultimately, the path to circularity in the furniture industry hinges on creating products that last longer, are easy to repair, and can be reused efficiently. By focusing on **designing for reconfiguration**, minimizing waste, and building the infrastructure for a circular economy, the industry can significantly reduce its environmental footprint while delivering lasting value to consumers.

“The path to circularity in the furniture industry hinges on creating products that last longer, are easy to repair, and can be reused efficiently.”

6 Roles and Responsibilities

Facility Managers

A facility manager holds the keys to the castle, overseeing the maintenance and operations of buildings and grounds to ensure they run smoothly. They also coordinate with vendors and contractors to handle equipment, renovations, and upgrades efficiently. FMs keep things running, and that's why they're ideally positioned to make things run in circles.

What Facility Managers Can Do

Establish a network of service providers for repairs, refurbishment, and sustainable decommissioning to support office changes at an enterprise level.

Collaborate with your network to create a clear business case, including return on investment, case studies, or pilot programs.

Assess your existing inventory and plan for future needs during office transitions to align with circularity goals.

Enhance energy performance by retrofitting buildings, maintaining systems, and using renewable energy to reduce resource consumption and operational costs.

Educate teams like finance or corporate real estate on the benefits of circularity to gain broader support and understanding.

Key Voices

> "Circular FM involves more than managing facilities in use. It must encompass upstream design and downstream end markets such as decommissioning, deconstructing and disassembly for material recovery." **– Gary Miciunas, Principal, ChiefCircularityOfficer.com, Denver.**

> "Reuse and reconfiguration of commercial furniture has a 10-fold impact on reducing carbon footprint over all other building materials combined." **– Dianne Murata, Principal Designer and Owner, Kimiko Designs, Houston.**

> "Ever think about what happens to equipment removed by 3rd party contractors? Right, no one does. It will often end up in landfills or the worst types of recycling programs. Require proof of reuse or repurposing as part of the contract terms." **– Dean Stanberry, Immediate Past Chair, IFMA Global Board of Directors, Denver.**

> "Too often, decisions on furnishings are made at the last minute and rushed, leading to liquidation. By planning ahead, you can save hundreds of thousands of dollars with circular solutions for future workplace needs." **– Lance Amato, Head of Customer Experience, CANOA, New York City.**

> "Before considering recycling or disposal, assess all end-of-life technology for potential refurbishment. Partner with certified refurbishers (like Human-I-T) to extend the lifecycle of devices, which can then be redistributed or reused within the company." **– Tori Lowe, Manager of Business Development, Human-I-T, Long Beach, Calif.**

> "Instead of asking a designer 'What can we do with this space?", ask them "What can we save from this space?" That's what really good design can do. Reduce your embodied carbon by re-using your stuff." **– Jon Strassner, Strategic Advisor, Jon Strassner Consulting, Hartford.**

> "Use data. Whether in the public or private sector, your leadership likely wants to see data to back up your proposed initiatives. You might notice X is a problem, but when you can gather data to quantify how much X is a problem, your manager is more likely to get on board." **– Maddie Morgan, Circular Economy Program Manager, City of Austin, Austin.**

> "In a zero-waste office, minimizing what comes into the office can help minimize what must be reused or recycled later. Keeping good inventory can help eliminate unnecessary or excessive ordering. Setting up an office with zero single-use packaging needs will eliminate the need to deal with the packaging later. Architects or facilities managers can design the flow of materials so that recycling is easy and obvious. The Iron Mountain Real Estate team uses our internal Clean Start program to conduct a thorough walk-through of our facilities and provide insight and recommendations that support zero-waste and our organization's overarching sustainability goals." **– Erin Gately, Circular Economy Manager, Iron Mountain, Portland, Oregon.**

Center of the Bullseye

How do we claim circularity as a key part of the facilities manager portfolio?

We all know that facility managers are the people who get the work done. So if we want to make workplace circularity happen, we need to put them in charge.

Facility managers have a unique vantage point: they oversee the physical space, manage resources, and ensure smooth operations. This makes them essential drivers of circularity, from reducing waste to extending the lifecycle of furniture and equipment.

To quote from the International Facility Management Association's Circular FM report: "The facility management industry inherently embodies circular economy principles through its core activities of maintaining and repairing assets, thereby prolonging their life cycles and reducing waste."

It starts by **rethinking procurement**. Facility managers can prioritize sourcing furniture and fixtures that are modular, repairable, and recyclable. Partnering with suppliers who offer take-back programs ensures that when a product reaches the end of its useful life, it doesn't end up in a landfill but gets refurbished or repurposed.

In terms of design, facility managers can **champion flexible, long-lasting solutions**. By selecting modular systems that adapt to changing needs, they not only reduce the frequency of replacements but also minimize the waste generated by workplace updates. Circular design is about thinking long-term, and

no one is better positioned to lead this effort than those responsible for managing these assets day in and day out.

Advocate for **responsible end-of-life policies**. The landfill should be a last resort, and everyone needs to know that. No one acts on an afterthought, so it's up to FMs to make holistic thinking the company standard.

Education and engagement are also crucial. Facility managers can **raise awareness** among employees and leadership, demonstrating how circularity supports both sustainability and cost-efficiency. They are the link between vision and execution, capable of turning circular ideals into practical actions.

And of course, do it all like an FM: Methodically, meticulously, and in the real world. "Ensure you start the effort by reviewing your operations in a holistic way, where you fully account for all of your inputs and outputs," advises Bobby LaRon of CBRE. "Run a pilot program with clearly defined success parameters that you can replicate or scale once success has been proved with metrics."

At the heart of workplace circularity is the facility manager's ability to **act as a connector** — between suppliers, recyclers, and corporate sustainability goals. With their hands on the operational pulse, they are the key to making circularity a central part of how large organizations function. If we want lasting change, facility managers need to lead the way.

7 Roles and Responsibilities

Remanufacturers

No industry is better positioned in the circular workplace than remanufacturing. By restoring used furniture to a nearly new condition, this process can save money, eliminate waste, and dramatically decrease emissions. The key is planning ahead and demonstrating the financial, social, and environmental value.

What Remanufacturers Can Do

Partner with companies to provide take-back services for unused furniture, refurbishing items to extend their life and reduce waste while cutting disposal costs.

Educate and collaborate with facility managers to showcase the cost savings, environmental benefits, and customization potential of remanufactured furniture, making it a priority in workplace upgrades.

Provide third-party verified metrics on carbon savings and material reuse, helping companies meet sustainability targets and demonstrate environmental responsibility.

Key Voices

> "Advancing workplace circularity as a used furniture dealer, refurbisher, and recycler is essential for supporting the circular economy. Help customers understand the benefits of buying refurbished furniture. Build relationships with businesses, institutions, or individuals looking to dispose of used furniture. Ensure the refurbishment process enhances the quality and durability of furniture. This will increase its lifespan, making it a better long-term option for customers and reducing the need for new products." **– Sam Coggin, Company Director, Coggin Sustainable Office Solutions, Lancashire, UK.**

> "Corporate America needs to stop warehousing obsolete furniture! Storing unused furniture, at an average of $15 per square foot, results in further costs when it becomes outdated and must be disposed of in landfills — an environmental and economic disaster. By adopting a Circular Economic Remanufacturing solution, companies can avoid warehousing costs, gain value from obsolete furniture, and apply that value toward future needs. This approach saves money, supports sustainability, and provides furniture that is as good or better than new, making it a logical and eco-friendly choice." **– Doug Pilgrim, National Business Development Manager, Davies Office, Albany, New York City.**

> "We work hard to make each chair feel nearly new by fully tearing down, tuning up, and rebuilding it. We replace all essential components, like casters, gas cylinders, arm pads, seat foam, and fabric — everything you interact with daily. Plus, we back our chairs with a 12-year warranty, just like new ones. Add in the environmental sustainability benefits and significant cost savings compared to buying new, and it's an easy choice for customers." **– Steve Crandall, Owner, Crandall Office Furniture, Greenville, Mich.**

Center of the Bullseye

How do we encourage employees to accept remanufactured product over new?

To get employees and end users to embrace remanufactured furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FFE), the key is presenting it as the smart, sustainable, and high-quality choice for modern offices.

Start with the **sustainability** story. Employees today care deeply about environmental responsibility, and remanufactured FFE is a tangible way to support this. It reduces waste, cuts down on embodied carbon emissions, and keeps perfectly good furniture out of landfills. By showing employees exactly how choosing remanufactured items contributes to these goals — perhaps by sharing statistics on waste reduction or carbon savings — they'll feel good about opting for the greener alternative.

Next, address any **quality concerns** head-on. There's often a misconception that remanufactured means lower quality, but in reality, these pieces are restored to meet or even exceed the standards of new furniture. Highlight how remanufactured items go through rigorous processes to ensure they're clean, durable, reliable, and in top condition. Sharing examples or offering comparisons can help shift perceptions and build confidence in the product.

Another powerful benefit is **customization**. Unlike new, off-the-shelf options, remanufactured FFE can be tailored to the specific needs of the company. Whether it's adjusting the design, color, or functionality, this flexibility allows employees to contribute to the design of their workspace, creating a more personalized and engaging environment.

Lastly, emphasize the **cost savings**. When companies opt for remanufactured FFE, they often save significantly. These savings can then be reinvested into the workplace, improving areas that directly benefit employees. This practical advantage, combined with the environmental impact, makes remanufactured FFE an easy choice to champion.

By focusing on sustainability, quality, customization, and cost-efficiency, employees will not only accept remanufactured FFE—they'll begin to prefer it.

Or in the words of Joel Stein, owner of Whole Cubes in Chicago:

"If you are annoyed by promoting sustainability through workplace circularity while saving significantly on the best designs and innovations, you most certainly should not consider buying any refurbished office furniture."

" By focusing on sustainability, quality, customization, and cost-efficiency, employees will not only accept remanufactured FFE—they'll begin to prefer it."

8 Roles and Responsibilities

Circularity Champions

While the roles outlined above cover much of the modern workplace, champions both internal and external are vital to make circularity happen. To design out waste, promote reuse, and regenerate the natural and built environment, it is imperative to make the business case for a circular workplace.

What Circularity Champions Can Do

Bottom line up front! Make a financial case first by emphasizing the cost savings or new business opportunities that come with adopting circular practices. If there isn't a direct financial benefit, focus on indirect benefits like sales differentiators or the long-term cost of carbon or social benefits. The world's largest companies report almost $1 trillion at risk from physical climate impacts and $250 billion in potential losses from stranded assets. Climate risk is translating into financial risk in real time.

Align with corporate sustainability goals, such as reducing carbon footprints or achieving zero-waste targets. All major companies have them, but few are realistically on track to meet them – a recent PwC report found nearly every major sector except for technology is set to fall short. Net zero emissions by 2030 (or 2040, or 2050, but hopefully not beyond that!) are impossible without circularity.

Point to the market! Position circular practices as a way to enhance brand loyalty, attract talent, and build a positive corporate reputation. Circular business models are becoming a key differentiator.

Key Voices

> "Start with your values! Focus on doing more good, rather than less bad. A safe, healthy, shared workplace is the key." **– Vojtech Vosecky, The Circular Economist, Sweden.**

> "Circular strategies require mobilizing the entire ecosystem. You can't do it alone." **– Celeste Tell, CEO, Epicycled, Port Townsend, Wash.**

> "Sustainable outcomes embrace social, environmental, and economic pillars. However, when first approaching a CEO or upper management decision-makers about his/her support for implementing a circular model in the organization, I strongly suggest starting with the economic pillar because this is the language they are used to." **– Flavio Nisenbaum, Principal, LoopWise Consultancy, Houston**.

> "First, question everything. Use your imagination to ask why we do things that we do? Why is Construction & Demolition Waste so huge and why do so few people know or care? Why is the default on a work printer set to print all pages? Why is the distribution of money through large government agencies so cumbersome and difficult? All of these occur over time by layering on complexity and obscuring these processes from us." **– Larry Lamotte, CEO, ReCapturit, Wenatchee, Wash.**

> "Look at good practices from other cities and countries if circularity is new to you. Consider reuse of your old furniture." **– Britta Peters, Senior Advisor, HiiCCE Hamburg Institute for Innovation, Climate Protection and Circular Economy, Hamburg, Germany.**

> "Making the connection between the climate sector and circular zero waste economy is imperative." **– Rachel Wynes, Research and Project Coordinator, Circular Innovation Council, Kitchener, Canada.**

> "When it comes to information systems, there needs to be a balance of collecting the data that is needed to optimize operations and the actual utilization of that data. Many operational people get annoyed with onerous information gathering, so be judicious. And when it comes to the actual handling of the durable goods by operations, view the data as your best asset and utilize it to improve operations." **– Nic Esposito, Director of Policy and Engagement, Circular Philadelphia, Philadelphia.**

> "Prioritize suppliers that offer circular products and ensure the metadata and environmental product declarations (EPDs) make it into the models that guide procurement. Now, we're talking about the bones of a digital circular economy where you can use AI to search, find, and more importantly, aggregate your materials and products' data." **– August Nazareth, Global Director of Built Environment, Americas, BSI Group, New York City.**

Center of the Bullseye

How do we encourage every business, government, and organization to embrace workplace circularity?

Making the business case for a circular workplace means more than just talking about saving the planet — it's about proving that circularity is good for business, too. Circular practices aren't just a feel-good sustainability initiative; they offer financial, operational, and reputational advantages that can transform how companies operate.

The first point to drive home is that a circular workplace can be a major cost-saver. In the traditional model, companies buy new furniture and equipment, send old items to a landfill, and rinse and repeat. With a circular approach, this wasteful cycle is replaced by reuse, refurbishment, and remanufacturing. This means companies save money by reducing the need to constantly buy new furniture or equipment. For example, take-back programs allow companies to return old furniture to be refurbished, giving those items a new lease on life — often at a fraction of the cost of buying new. Original manufacturers can also benefit from new circular business models to create new revenue streams.

The secret to gaining corporate buy-in? Connect circularity to broader business goals. As Alessandra Pistoia of Microsoft wisely said, "Take time to understand what business priorities are important to your colleagues, then show how your project will help meet their objectives. When we proposed the Microsoft Circular Centers

program, we showed how reuse and recycling could be good for sustainability and also help improve data security." This strategy worked for Microsoft because they didn't just sell circularity as an eco-friendly initiative; they linked it to business priorities like security and efficiency. By showing how circular practices can meet multiple goals — like cost control, operational efficiency, and compliance — companies can gain the support they need to push circularity forward.

On top of the financial perks, circular workplaces help businesses meet their sustainability targets. With regulations tightening and consumers demanding more environmentally responsible practices, companies can't afford to ignore circularity. Reducing waste, lowering emissions, and cutting down on resource extraction aren't just good for the planet — they help companies reduce long-term financial risks, stay ahead of compliance regulations, and strengthen their brand as sustainability leaders. Plus, being a green trailblazer isn't just a nice bonus; it can make a company more attractive to customers and investors alike.

Let's not forget about employees. Today's workforce — especially younger generations — wants to work for companies that reflect their values, particularly around sustainability. In a competitive labor market, a circular workplace sends a clear message that the company is serious about doing its part for the environment. Involving employees in circular initiatives, whether it's participating in a local donation during a sustainable decommission, or having a say in the design of refurbished office spaces, circularity can boost engagement and foster a stronger connection to the company's mission.

And it all comes back to data. Tina Burry, circular economy manager at GM, explains that careful tracking of the automobile manufacturer's work to eliminate waste, circulate products and materials, and regenerate natural systems helps support that work. "By leveraging data to show how reuse, remanufacturing and recycling of materials not only supports our sustainability goals, but also reduces costs and supports our communities, it encourages adoption and expansion of these principles throughout our business operations and supply chain," Burry explained.

In short, a circular workplace makes business sense. It saves money, helps achieve sustainability targets, and connects directly to core business goals. When framed this way, circularity becomes not just the greener choice, but the smarter one too.

"Reducing waste, lowering emissions, and cutting down on resource extraction aren't just good for the planet—they help companies reduce long-term financial risks..."

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Inspired but overwhelmed? Here's how to start from scratch in your workplace

By Lisa Whited, author, workplace expert, and circularity champion

> **1.** Share what the circular economy is! Educate business leaders, managers, frontline people; cast a wide net and invite many. It is eye-opening to realize, at least in the US, how many people do not know what circularity is. Hold a lunch + learn (virtual, in-person, or hybrid) and share the principles of the circular economy with examples. Facilitate a conversation, answer questions, and ignite curiosity within the organization.

> **2.** Out of that initial conversation, look for a few people who are really interested in digging deeper and advancing circular economy within the organization. Look for a range of title levels (leader, manager, frontline) across departments and disciplines. Ask them to come together to create a Circular Economy Taskforce. This is separate from the company's "green team" or "sustainability group," if you have one

3. Have the group create a vision (use the headline exercise from my book *Work Better. Save The Planet: The Earth-First Workplace is Good for People, Great for Business* or another type of visioning exercise), write three goals with objectives and timelines and begin measuring progress. This program has to have executive support and sponsorship: Ensure the plan supports organizational vision and values. Make it a tangible, focused, initiative with a business case. Measure and track progress.

4. Use your voice and leadership skills to advance this idea. You are a courageous leader and there are other courageous leaders around you. The planet needs you to step up and to be the voice to make the change, and you can have tremendous impact within your own organization.

And finally: Where to go from here

By Heidi Frasure, head of sustainability at Green Standards

The circumference of the Circular Workplace coalition has doubled since our last report, which is both hugely inspiring and slightly daunting. As my friend Jon Smieja said at this year's Circularity conference in Chicago, there's never been so much interest in the circular economy – and never so much demand for it to live up to its promise.

At Green Standards, that's what we're all about: Making circular workplaces easier than the linear alternative. Achieving true circularity demands systemic change, requiring everyone mentioned in this report to collaborate more effectively toward a shared objective: Creating a zero-waste office. By aligning efforts, we can drive the transformation needed to reduce waste and maximize resource efficiency.

Green Standards is taking action to enable more connections and circular practices, but if you take anything from these pages, make it this: No one organization can do this alone. If you want to get involved, don't hesitate to get in touch. And if you want dive further into the ideas and perspectives reflected in this report, here are some great resources:

IFMA's Circular FM Guide – Matt Tucker provides a comprehensive report on circularity from a facility manager's perspective. Education is the first step to systemic workplace change.

Project Manager's Guide to Material Reuse in Commercial Buildings – Excellent review of practical steps, with a holistic focus that includes the carbon impact of furniture, fixtures and equipment.

Kimiko Green Playbooks – Can furniture reuse be fun? Dianne Murata and her team bring an unsinkable sense of humor to their important work designing zero-waste offices.

Better Buildings: Key Drivers for Constructing a Circular Built Environment in the U.S. – The Closed Loop Foundation offers smart case studies with a comprehensive focus on new deconstruction policies.

Running A Commercial Reuse Enterprise: A How-To – Andrew Ellsworth of Doors Unhinged presented this non-nonsense guide at this year's Build Reuse conference in Savannah, and it's a wonderful overview of how to maximize the economics of the circular economy.

And if you're inspired to think well beyond your office walls, great! Major policy changes are needed to truly establish circular workplaces as the default modern office. Smart and effective policy is crucial to promote sustainable production, consumption, and waste management practices. Here are a few policies we're excited about:

1. Mandatory Climate Reporting in California

While the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's rules on corporate climate reporting work their way through the courts, California is charging ahead. Between SB 253, the Climate Corporate Data Accountability Act, and SB 261, the Climate-Related Financial Risk Act, large corporations operating in the Golden State will need to better manage and report their indirect emissions throughout their value chains. These laws will establish new benchmarks for transparency and are likely to heighten focus on Scope 3 emissions, which are often overlooked but can represent over 80% of a company's total emissions footprint. More visibility into waste generated can drive better decision-making and circular-focussed action.

2. The California Green Building Standards Code

More kudos to California for being the first U.S. state to implement regulations on embodied carbon emissions as a required element of the building code. This policy encourages reuse and waste minimization during the construction process, potentially aiding in the repurposing of furniture, fixtures, and equipment. Additionally, it mandates Whole Building Lifecycle Assessments, which will enhance data collection and awareness regarding the effects of embodied carbon.

3. Comprehensive French Anti-Waste Laws

France's comprehensive 2020 anti-waste law, formally known as the Anti-Waste for a Circular Economy Law (AGEC), plays a significant role in promoting reuse and circular practices that support a circular workplace. There are over 50 measures that emphasize waste minimization through repairs, eco-design principles and prohibitions of certain types of waste. The provisions mandate better recycling, reuse practices and data tracking, which directly impacts how businesses approach waste during office changes and moves. Companies are encouraged to donate, sell, or reuse items. The law even mandates that 20% of public investments in office furniture be allocated to reused or eco-responsible options.

4. Disincentivizing Landfill

Alright, we know this one is an uphill battle, and the hill is as steep as your at-capacity local landfill. If landfills are the cheapest solution for waste, the economics of circularity will remain a challenge. Increasing tipping fees or imposing an environmental tax on landfill disposal can help set a more even playing field for waste management practices, and some countries are moving in this direction. The United Kingdom has recently increased landfill tax rates to encourage efforts to minimize landfilling and promote more circular options. Landfills have long-term environmental, social, and legacy costs that should be considered in the fee structure.

5. Deconstruction Ordinances

Deconstruction ordinances are becoming more abundant, often focusing on reuse and recapture of the core and shell materials of buildings. Boulder, Colorado, is one of only two cities in the U.S. that mandates deconstruction on any building slated for demolition, and the city leads the way on its own buildings. While we love that these ordinances are starting to shine a light on construction waste, we only wish that there would be a more comprehensive policy related to lifecycle demolition and construction waste, as we know now that can have an even greater waste footprint over the life of the building.

What did we miss?

Interested in helping these smart policies spread and to bring them to a juridiction near you? Drop me an email (hfrasure@greenstandards.com) and let's talk. Just like the loop of our economy for the foreseeable future, my LinkedIn DMs are open.

Who we are

Green Standards is a global sustainable decommissioning firm that captures value in workplace change. As an enterprise-level partner to the world's largest organizations, we efficiently and ethically redistribute furniture, fixtures, and equipment through charitable donation, resale, and recycling. To date, Green Standards has kept more than 125,000 tons out of landfill, maintaining a 98.6% landfill diversion rate across more than 2,000 projects. We have helped clients donate more than $40M worth of independently appraised furniture, fixtures, and equipment to non-profits and schools in their communities.

2,000+
Projects of all sizes

$40M+
In-kind donations

98.6%
Landfill diversion rate (by weight)

125,000+
Tons diverted from landfills

To date, Green Standards has completed projects in more than 40 countries.

Certified B Corporation
This company meets high standards of social and environmental impact.

Green Standards is a Certified B Corporation, which means we are committed to high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability. This report is part of our commitment to building an inclusive, equitable, and regenerative economic system.

Illustrations by Yarek Waszul

Green Standards