The Emergence of Community Workspaces:
The Pros and Cons of the Modern Office

Alanah Mitchell
Drake University

Subject Areas: Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior; Business and Society

Article Type: Viewpoint

Collaboration technologies have already changed the way that people work together. While traditional collaboration has taken place in a face-to-face context, the move to virtual collaboration allows for individuals and organizations to work together through the use of technology in order to save time and money, reach experts regardless of their location, and be competitive in the global market. Virtual collaboration technologies have changed the way that people work. It is no longer necessary for employees to be in a traditional office, as employees can be *anywhere* to get their work done. We have reached a point where today's collaboration technologies are not only changing *how* people work together, but they are now influencing *where* people are working with the emergence of community workspaces[i].

Community workspaces are communal or shared office space environments that allow individuals, teams, or organizations to reserve individual or team office space with access to Internet, printing, and even private phone booth spaces. These community workspace environments generally include cleaning services as well as beverage options (e.g., coffee, tea, and even beer). These co-working spaces can be rented out by the day or even with monthly passes, saving organizations the costs of renting, furnishing, and maintaining traditional office spaces.

The Users of Community Workspaces

Community workspaces cater to the needs of today's employees (including millennials), small business startups, and self-employed or independent contractors. Currently, millennials represent the largest population in the workforce (recently passing Gen X). Data suggest that this group of the workforce is twice as likely to participate in shared economy markets (e.g., ride-sharing and apartment rentals), which is another way of thinking about community workspaces.[ii] Moreover, it seems that millennials prefer the open and collaborative environment that is provided by a community workspace. Data from a recent study suggested that 72% of millennials would like to be their own boss, 74% want flexible work schedules, and 88% prefer a collaborative work culture.[iii] The community workspace allows for the flexible and collaborative environment millennials demand by offering individuals the ability to come and go as they please.

Collaborative workspaces also cater to small business start-ups and self-employed or independent contractors, which is an increasing large percentage of the workforce. In fact, the Intuit 2020 Report[iv] predicts that by 2020 approximately 60 million people (i.e., more than 40% of the American workforce) will be independent workers including freelancers, contractors, and temporary employees. This growing group of the population has even been dubbed the "free agent nation".[v] This classification of workers includes self-employed lawyers, consultants, and other types of employees who have been trained at top universities but choose to pursue

project-based careers independent of major organizations. Generally, thanks to the advanced collaboration technologies available, this group of the workforce has been known to work from home (i.e., telework or telecommute), but collaborative workspaces offer the sometimes necessary work environment for this growing population.

Community Workspace Options

Today, there are a number of community workspaces available for individuals, teams, or organizations to turn to. WeWork (https://www.wework.com/) is one well known example of a global community workspace provider, recently valued at $10 billion.[vi] WeWork offers community workspace options in approximately 30 different cities around the world. These spaces include access to individual and team workspaces as well as the amenities of Internet and printing and even gaming/arcades, fruit, and beverages. Pillar Technology Group (http://pillartechnology.com/) is another example that offers a number of U.S.-based "Forge" spaces, allowing individuals or teams the option to come work or hold meetings.[vii] Similar to WeWork, the Forge environments include open seating as well as amenities of beverages and even an in-house chef. Finally, Nextspace (http://nextspace.us/), primarily based in California, is another option that provides day passes for individuals to come and work in an open community workspace environment.

The Benefits of Community Workspaces

There are many benefits related to community workspaces. Due to the hundreds of available collaboration technologies that are available today, individuals don't need as many face-to-face meetings as they once did to get their work done. However, if a meeting is necessary, small business owners or independent contractors do not have to schedule a meeting at the local Starbucks or Panera in order to meet with team members or clients, when they can turn to a community workspace. As already mentioned, these co-working spaces can be rented out by the day or even with monthly passes, saving organizations, small businesses, or independent contractors the high costs of renting and maintaining traditional office spaces. Savings are achieved related to the traditional expenses of office furnishings (e.g., desks, tables, etc.) and telecommunication services (e.g., internet, fax, printers, etc.). Another benefit of community workspaces is that these workspaces can foster a sense of cooperation or communication to people who may be used to being very isolated in their work (i.e., a downside of telework). In fact, these community workspaces can provide a sense of community that individuals find from working around other people.[viii]

The Challenges of Community Workspaces

With the benefits, there are also challenges that need to be considered. While a collaborative, open space environment might be helpful to create a sense of community, it may not be conducive to all types of work related tasks. For example, tasks that require a private (or quiet) workspace would not be suited to community environment. Also, while a benefit of community workspaces includes the sense of community that comes with having people around, this benefit can also be challenging. The more community workspaces are utilized, the more disruptions and higher noise levels there will be with. Consequently, concentration, productivity, and creativity may suffer. Community workspaces may also not offer the required technology arrangement that some tasks might require. For example, software development coding is often done with large double monitors and not with the use of a small, portable, laptop that would be more common in a shared space. Finally, community workspaces may present users with a

feeling of dislocation from not having the same work environment everyday. Users of these work environments are not surrounded with a familiar environment and people and users may miss having their "stuff" around (e.g., pictures, coffee cup, office/cubicle directions).

Conclusion

In conclusion, community workspaces offer a wealth of opportunity for today's workforce. There are both benefits and challenges to working in this way. However, time and experience will tell how successful these new workspaces can be for community workspace users. Additionally, today's traditional organizations will want to pay attention to the success of these new, modern environments when thinking about the design and appeal of their offices.

---

[i] Jantsch, J. (2016, March 22). The Future of the Office is Community. *Inc.*

[ii] Altchek, Chris. (2015, May 27). 7 facts every business should know about millennials. *Fortune.*

[iii] Asghar, Rob. (2014, Jan 13). What Millennials Want In The Workplace (And Why You Should Start Giving It To Them). *Forbes.*

[iv] Intuit (2010, October). Intuit 2020 Report. http://http-download.intuit.com/http.intuit/CMO/intuit/futureofsmallbusiness/intuit_2020_report.pdf

[v] Greenstone, Jody & Miller, Matt (2012, May). The Rise of the Supertemp. *Harvard Business Review.*

[vi] Brown, Eliot. (2015, June 24) WeWork's Valuation Soars to $10 Billion. *The Wall Street Journal.*

[vii] Patane, Matthew (2016, April 8). Des Moines' newest tech space, The Forge, opens. *The Des Moines Register.*

[viii] Schrader, Brendon (2015, Aug 10). Here's Why The Freelancer Economy Is On The Rise. *Fast Company.*