

The rise of co-working -- Worksheet

A Before you read discussion

Do you, or do you know people who ...

- 1) work full-time?
- 2) work part-time?
- 3) share the work and responsibility for a job with a colleague?
- 4) work for fixed hours?
- 5) work for flexible hours?
- 6) always work in the same location?
- 7) has/have a personal own workstation?
- 8) use/uses any available workstation?
- 9) sometimes work/works at home?
- 10) When working at home, do you, or your friend, achieve more or less than at the office?
- 11) How good are you, or your friend, at self-management when working outside the central office?
- 12) How much does each workstation cost for an employer? (Building, furniture, technology, phone costs, heating, lighting, cleaning)
- 13) Are workstations usually used 24/7 or during office hours or week days?
- 14) How much is access to technology and contact with colleagues necessary for different types of work?

The questions above indicate a greater interest in the cost of office space, the environmental costs of commuting, more flexible attitudes to work patterns, job-share and team management.

Employers are *customers* buying the best expertise required for their business. In order to get the best workforce, they may need to have more flexible attitudes to traditional work patterns.

What do you think about these changes? Think from the employee's interest and the employer's interest.

B Comprehension

- 1) **Read the article quickly understanding as much as you can. Which of the following summaries is the best summary of the ideas in the text?**
 - a) The article describes the increase in co-working in which two employees share a single position in a business. The article focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of two individuals working part-time on the same job.
 - b) The article describes the increase in co-working and the use of cloud computing for collaborating on work and on-line, virtual meetings.
 - c) The article describes the increase in new businesses which rent out workstations and meeting rooms to freelance workers or fulltime employees who may be working for different employers.

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- 2) **Read paragraph 1 and 2. Are these statements TRUE or FALSE according to the article?**
- a) An increasing number of people are choosing to work in a co-working office rather than travelling to a central office or working at home. T/F
 - b) Some people feel isolated when working at home. T/F
 - c) When working in an office it is easy to be distracted by daytime TV. T/F
 - d) Some people claim to be working when they open their laptop in a coffee shop, but this is not real work.
 - e) There is no strict definition of co-working. T/F
- 3) **Read paragraph 3 and 4. Are these statements TRUE or FALSE according to the article?**
- a) The idea of co-working is hundreds of years old. T/F
 - b) Co-working facilities started to be opened about a year and half ago. T/F
 - c) Emergent Research has opened around 760 co-working facilities. T/F
 - d) Steve King thinks that there are now around 750 co-working facilities in the USA. T/F
 - e) Cloud computing has made co-working a possible option for many people. T/F
 - f) The increased use of female employees and freelancers has forced firms to offer more flexible work arrangements. T/F
 - g) Buying or renting central offices has become too expensive for some firms. T/F
 - h) Chefs and laboratory researchers are now using co-working facilities. T/F
- 4) **Read paragraph 5 and 6. Are these statements TRUE or FALSE according to the article?**
- a) Co-working facilities are offered by firms to exploit their unused office space. T/F
 - b) Some co-working facilities bring together people working for different employers but in related industries. T/F
 - c) The Hub, NextSpace and Regus offer managed office space which is used by co-workers who rent workstations. T/F
 - d) Some co-working facilities are located in airport business lounges. T/F
 - e) Chains offering co-working facilities developed because of the financial crisis. T/F
- 5) **Read the seventh paragraph. Are these statements TRUE or FALSE according to the article?**
- a) Traditional employers are suspicious of the benefits of co-working facilities. T/F
 - b) Co-working encourages collaboration and informality. T/F
 - c) A “jelly” is a social event at which people work together on projects. T/F
 - d) The “host” of a co-working facility encourages people to work together in organising social events at specific times. T/F
- 6) **Read the last two paragraphs. Are these statements TRUE or FALSE according to the article?**
- a) Co-working facilities which offer different styles of working environment may encourage more large companies to exploit the co-working approach. T/F
 - b) Macquarie, an Australian bank encourages collaborative working by offering free soup at lunchtimes. T/F
 - c) Sales staff working for Yell, the directories business, can use Regus office space. T/F
 - d) In big cities large shops have closed. Drew Jones has suggested that these should be converted to co-working facilities. T/F
 - e) The rise of co-working will lead to the death of traditional offices. T/F

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- f) Co-working facilities and collaborative work may make it more difficult for a firm to protect its secrets. T/F
- g) Co-working will continue to spread because it allows businesses to choose where they will work. T/F

C Names

1) Find the names from the text to complete the sentences below.

- a) is a biological research company.
- b) runs a website where people can find work spaces.
- c) is the co-author of a book about co-working.
- d) is based in California.
- e) offers dimly lit computer centres for black T-shirted hackers.
- f) has got striking new offices in Sydney.
- g) compares the facilities to city-centre airport business lounges.
- h) is a chain of coffee shops.
- i) thinks there are more than 700 office-based co-working facilities in the USA.
- j) is a new chain of co-working facilities.

D Vocabulary

1) Complete the sentences with words or phrases from the box.

sniffy	to spare	cottoned on	elastic	computing	plonked
suburbs	fuelled	cardholders	budding	slogging	beavering

- a) I hate to the office every morning.
- b) The accountants were in their interpretation of 'bribery'.
- c) The high cost of gasoline the development of compact cars in the USA.
- d) The technical college offers workshops for mechanics.
- e) Technologies like cloud allow several people to work on a document.
- f) Some offices are fully occupied but others have desks
- g) Luckily our competitors haven't to the new market preferences.
- h) I'm sorry the gym equipment can only be used by
- i) South Americans who enjoy local coffee are a bit about instant coffee.
- j) I can't afford to live in the city centre so I'm renting a house in the
- k) He came in and himself down in my favourite chair.
- l) In the accounts department you can hundreds of clerks away.

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E Language

- 1) Do you think the language of the text is formal or informal? Does the text use colloquial vocabulary and idiomatic phrases? (Give examples)
- 2) Do you think the text would be easier to understand if the style was different?

F Final discussion

- 1) As the article states *some job functions will always benefit from being in one location*. What kinds of job functions are these? With the spiralling costs of buying, renting and maintaining office space, do you think that co-working will spread in your country?

The rise of co-working

Setting the desk jockeys free

Another alternative to the office

Dec 31st 2011 | from the print edition

NINE hours of isolation or 30 minutes trapped by the office bore? The attentions of the boss or the distractions of daytime TV? The choice between slogging to the office and working from home can be pretty unappealing. For increasing numbers of people, the answer is “co-working”.

The concept of co-working is elastic but at its broadest means working alongside, and often collaborating with, people you wouldn't normally. Users book a space in a co-working office, plonk themselves down where they can and start beavering away. (Opening the laptop in a Starbucks is not quite the same thing: enough stick-in-the-muds go to coffee shops to drink coffee that it is not a proper working environment.)

The idea first surfaced a few years back, but according to Steve King of Emergent Research, a California-based outfit, it reached an inflection-point about 18 months ago. The absolute numbers are still small: Mr King reckons there are now around 760 office-based co-working facilities in America, up from 405 in 2010.

Their rise is fuelled by several things, including technologies such as cloud computing; more women and freelancers in the workforce, which means greater demand for flexible work arrangements; and economic pressure on firms' property costs. Nor is the trend confined to office workers. An organisation called BioCurious recently opened a community biology lab in California's Bay Area. Budding chefs share kitchens; communal workshops known as “maker spaces” are springing up too.

Some co-working spaces are dedicated facilities, others are set up within business incubators or company offices. Campbell McKellar, who runs a website called Loosecubes where people can find spaces to work, says that 65% of the 2,800 workplaces available are inside small, private companies with desks to spare. Creative and media businesses with a culture of bringing lots of people together to work on specific projects are heavily represented among both users and space providers.

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New co-working chains are emerging, with names like The Hub and NextSpace. More established firms have also cottoned on to the trend. Regus, a big provider of managed office space, has a product called Businessworld that offers cardholders flexible access to its facilities. Mark Dixon, Regus's boss, likens it to having airport business lounges in city centres, and says that products like this already account for 20% of the firm's revenue, up from almost nothing before the financial crisis.

Purists are sniffy about the likes of Regus. Generation Y-ers do not aspire to work in airport lounges: Loosecubes offers people a choice of working atmospheres that include the "hacker vibe" (black T-shirts and not much in the way of light, apparently). The benefits of collaboration are stressed. One strand of the co-working movement is the "jelly", an informal event, often held at specific times of the week, where people gather to work together. Co-working evangelists also emphasise the role of each facility's "host", a person who organises social events for users, introduces people to each other and spots opportunities for collaboration.

Still, there should be room for many different styles of co-working, particularly if it takes off among larger companies. Some big firms are trying to soup up innovation by getting people to co-work internally: the striking new Sydney offices of Macquarie, a bank, have no personal desks and emphasise collaborative working. Others have already started shedding their own properties: Yell, a directories business, is now using Regus memberships to give its salespeople in Britain access to office space when they want it. Drew Jones, co-author of a book on co-working, thinks that there is scope to turn empty retail space in the suburbs of big cities into large co-working facilities. Compared with city-centre offices, these would take less time for people to commute to and cost less for firms to buy or rent space in.

None of this signals the end of the conventional office. Corporate cultures move slowly, for one thing. Managers worry about how to deal with issues such as confidentiality. Some job functions will always benefit from being in one location. But co-working multiplies the options that people have when they ask themselves: "Where shall I work today?" For that reason alone, it will keep spreading.

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Teacher's Notes & Key

The colloquial style of the article and the frequent use of idiomatic phrases may mean that learners will require extra help in understanding the text. This style is unusual in *The Economist* which usually uses a more straightforward style.

A Open answers. Encourage descriptions of different experiences and consideration of different working patterns for the employee and the employer.

- B
- 1) Best summary c)
 - 2) aT, bT, cF, dT, eT
 - 3) aF, bT, cF, dT, eT, fT, gT, hT
 - 4) aT, bT, cT, dF, eF.
 - 5) aT, bT, cT, dF.
 - 6) aT, bF, cT, dT, eF, fT, gF.

C

- a) BioCurious is a biological research company.
- b) Campbell McKellar runs a website where people can find work spaces.
- c) Drew Jones is the co-author of a book about co-working.
- d) Emergent Research is based in California.
- e) Loosecubes offers dimly lit computer centres for black T-shirted hackers.
- f) Macquarie has got striking new offices in Sydney.
- g) Mark Dixon compares the facilities to city-centre airport business lounges.
- h) Starbucks is a chain of coffee shops.
- i) Steve King thinks there are more than 700 office-based co-working facilities in the USA.
- j) The Hub is a new chain of co-working facilities.

D

- a) I hate slogging to the office every morning.
- b) The accountants were elastic in their interpretation of 'bribery'.
- c) The high cost of gasoline fuelled the development of compact cars in the USA.
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E Open answers

F Open answers