

# Science explains the booming popularity of co-working

The rapid rise of co-working the world over may just seem fashionable at the moment, but there are strong scientific reasons behind its rise in its popularity.



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“It’s not just a fad, it’s a robust global movement,” said Linda Trim, director at FutureSpace, a high-end work, ‘pro-working’ space joint venture between Investec Property and workplace specialists Giant Leap.

Said Trim: “There is a surprisingly strong psychological basis for the growing popularity of shared workspaces because of the two basic human needs co-working fulfills - flexibility and autonomy. And it does this without doing away with a meaningful community.”

Trim noted that a team from the University of Michigan Steven M Ross School of Business came to this conclusion after surveying workers from dozens of co-working spaces in the US.

“Interestingly, they also found that while beautifully designed spaces with all offices amenities were certainly important, they were less important than their social structures, where workers feel a sense of individual autonomy that’s still linked to a sense of collaboration.”

Most co-working spaces, for all their idiosyncrasies, tend to strike that careful balance between those crucial needs – in ways that neither solo working nor the traditional office experience usually provide.

Trim added that the research also showed that independence, adaptability, flexibility were also characteristics fundamental to human needs. “It isn’t surprising therefore that they have been linked to positive outcomes in the workplace too, from improved performance to higher rates of employee commitment and engagement.”

They also help explain why more companies are embracing flexible work schedules.

But the Michigan researchers found that while the sense of community and autonomy was very important, it went further than that - people were free to be themselves because they didn’t feel that they were competing with those around them as they were in a typical corporate set up. As a result, ideas were more freely shared.

Said Trim: While too much freedom can actually hurt productivity, grafting a community structure onto an already flexible one provides is probably the optimal degree of control.

“Typically, people join co-working spaces because they want to be part of a community while still doing their own thing.”

If more employers follow suit in the months and years ahead, they aren’t just jumping on a trendy bandwagon. “They’re also trying to tap into the science that helps explain what makes people work well – alone and together,” Trim concluded.

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