


The Ultimate Guide to Co-Working

The days of the workers slogging it out in an office from nine till five is rapidly losing monopoly. In its place stands a much more flexible, worker-friendly and modern model of working known as co-working. Co-working has definitely become a buzzword in contemporary working practices but what exactly is it? What are the different types of this structure of working? What are the benefits?

Our ultimate guide to co-working will answer any questions, uncertainties and even doubts you may have about co-working.

A photograph of a modern office interior. In the foreground, a large, dark brown, rectangular planter holds a lush green tree. To the right, a glass-enclosed staircase with a wooden handrail leads to an upper level. The floor is a light-colored carpet with a red carpet runner. The ceiling features a series of blue, triangular light fixtures.

What is co-working?

Co-working is essentially a model of working that involves sharing a working environment, typically an office. But how does this differ to 'conventional' office working patterns you may ask? In the traditional office environment, employees are part of the same company and often the same team. With co-working, members sharing the space are usually not employed by the same organisation and are typically involved in independent activity.

Who uses co-working offices?

We'll explore who typically uses co-working spaces and how they benefit from them in greater depth later on in the guide. Generally speaking this style of working is attractive to entrepreneurs, work at home freelancers and professionals, creative types, and people who regularly travel, don't have a working 'base' and work in relative isolation.

Why bother co-working?

A good question! We all know the score - colleagues who we don't really get on with, an unappreciative boss, working in an unfulfilling role for a company that's going nowhere. Fed up with such adversity, more and more people are creating their own jobs, becoming self-employed and making it 'alone'. The states speak for themselves. According to the Office of National Statistics, between 2008 and 2012 the number of workers in the UK who are self-employed rose by 370,000.

Rather than working in complete isolation at home, or battling with distractions at the local coffee shop, co-working spaces provide the perfect world for the self-employed to work in a well-facilitated space and interact with others.

From an employer's perspective co-working spaces can also be attractive. Office overheads are reduced, staff morale is often improved, which subsequently develops productivity, ultimately leading to increased profitability.



Different types of co-working

While co-working essentially involves independent workers sharing a working space that is designed specifically to cater for people working autonomously, there are different types of co-working spaces. Choosing the right co-working place to cater for your specific needs will inevitably enhance your co-working experience.

The different co-working spaces essentially fall into three defined categories: The professional co-working place, the total office and start-up orientated incubators.

Professional co-working spaces

Professional co-working offices are typically used by freelancers, start-ups, entrepreneurs and small businesses. Members will get their own work station, they are able to interact with others and mingle in a relaxed, informal atmosphere with a good crowd or similarly-minded people.

Professional co-working spaces have all the facilities freelancers and professionals require to carry out a productive day's work. Fast Wi-Fi is available, in some locations desktop computers are accessible, and certain spaces have meeting rooms to rent out with facilities available to conduct presentations. Water coolers and tea and coffee facilities are also present to help freshen members up and give them a break.

These relaxed, trendy and convenient working spaces help provide a strong sense of community and spirit in what can be a fairly lonely and daunting world of independent working.



Total office

With 'on tap' secretaries to help manage your workload, luxury chairs, desks and other office furniture designed to make members feel like company execs, total offices 'move up a gear' in terms of facilities and the professionals who use them. Being considered the height of working luxury, these exquisite working spaces are typically used by businessmen and women who are on business somewhere for a few days and require a well-facilitated place to work. Total offices are ideal for accountants, lawyers and PR agents, professionals who require comfort or somewhere to make a good impression to clients.

This up-scaled approach to co-working typically comes with a higher price tag. As well as costing more to use total offices are neither as relaxed nor fun-orientated as professional co-working spaces.

Start-up orientated incubators

The popularity of start-up orientated incubators has also been gathering speed in the UK in recent years. According to the Entrepreneur Handbook:

"Business incubators aim to develop high-growth potential businesses and help them to thrive, supporting entrepreneurship at a local and national level."

These incubators are designed more specifically for startups who require an environment to network, make contacts and connect with other startups. They are also suited to small online businesses which are likely to meet similar businesses and individuals involved in the digital spectre.

Some incubations centres even offer member support, funding and training – crucial requirements to help drive startups forward and earn success.



The benefits of co-working - 7 things your boss wants to know about co-working

With co-working enjoying a significant resurgence in recent years, it stands to reason this style of working comes laden with benefits. But what exactly are the benefits?

Obliterate office overheads

With employees working from independent co-working offices, the company's office rent can be one expense knocked off monthly overheads.

Improved staff morale & increased creativity

No boss likes to see their workforce walking around the gloomy faces and talking of finding employment elsewhere. Providing workers with the flexibility and placing the trust in them that they will work responsibly remotely from co-working arenas, will help boost staff morale. Being surrounded by people bursting with creativity and innovation, such passion is likely to rub off on you, meaning creativity and innovation is aspired within a company.

Less days taken off in sickness

It has been suggested that remote working 'can reduce the need for staff to take sick days'. According to Dr Tony Williams, a consultant physician at the Benenden Healthcare Society, the average British adult takes 3.5 days off work a year due to sickness. Dr Williams insists companies could benefit by staff taking off less sick days by "coming up with alternative solutions and support mechanisms", such as remote working.

A potential global workforce without geographical boundaries

Finding the ideal candidate can be difficult if you're confined to those located in Outer Mongolia, for example. By enabling workers to work in remote office environments employers are not confined to geographical restraints. This effectively means employers have a global workforce at their disposal, enabling them to find and nurture the most talented of individuals in their niche.

Your boss will still be able to 'check in', communicate and monitor employee-progress

As co-working spaces have Wi-Fi, teleconferencing and cloud-computing facilities, it is not difficult for bosses to keep a watchful eye on employees. It requires little effort to make a Skype call, start Google Hangout or send a quick IM to ensure workers are on top of projects.

Cloud-based facilities enable projects, documents and other important data to be shared virtually meaning there is little risk of vital data being lost just because workers no longer share an office.



Benefits for the boss

Come on, surely even bosses are likely to prefer the flexibility of choosing an office location and working hours that are more convenient to them. If you have a fairly good working relationship with your boss, remind her or him that working in a co-working space down the road from their house will obliterate their lengthy commute, meaning they can take the kids to school and enjoy the freshness and vibrancy of working life in a co-working space.

Improved productivity

Without long and time-wasting commutes to work, working in a relaxed and inspiring environment, staff morale being at an all-time high and with creativity bouncing off the walls, it's safe to say co-working centres can lead to increased productivity.

Whether you're a freelancer working for yourself, a start-up entrepreneur or an employer allowing employees to use co-working spaces, this model of working can help improve productivity.

How do we know this? There is some compelling stats and evidence to prove it. For example, in our blog titled 'Does co-working and flexibility increase productivity' we cited data that shows by 2010 80% of worker's output depended on working with others.

You may be thinking, well why not simply work in company office for the proven benefits working with others brings?

Well we've all heard of office politics. As cited in a paper titled 'Office Politics; A Negative Dysfunctional Interpersonal Dynamics At The University of JOS, Nigeria', office politics is "synonymous with hypocrisy, secrecy, deal making, rumours, power brokers, self-interest, image building, self-promotion and cliques."

In short, co-working offices are not plagued by such negative office politics yet still reap the proven benefits of working with others. This self-directed, flexible style of working can increase self-confidence – as proven by a study by DeskMag -, craft better time management and stimulate motivation, crucial aspects in delivering improved productivity in virtually any working spectre.



Co-working for the small business.

Delivering social interaction and networking opportunities, co-working centres can provide the “cross pollination” and “synergy” small businesses require to realistically compete with market leaders.

Being under the same roof as other ambitious, innovative and creative small business owners can provide SMEs with the ammunition they aspire to spur company growth.

Not only does such environments offer a platform for small businesses to meet and ‘sell their wares’ to potential clients, but it can also help them find potential employees or contractors, vital tools that can mean the difference between boom or bust.



Co-working for the large corporate

Co-working might be synonymous with freelancers and small businesses but large companies are increasingly embarking on the co-working trend. Why? Because larger corporations are beginning to realise the benefits of providing employees with access to working environments that operate “outside of the corporate campus.” We cannot ignore the fact employees from large corporations such as Cisco and Plantonics are embracing co-working centres. Such organisations are recognising less company real estate means fewer overheads, less time spent commuting ultimately nurtures productivity, less commuting means less carbon and co-working spaces, unlike the humdrum office they worked in for goodness how long, provide an innovation premium.



Co-working for the freelancer

Freelancers typically work alone. Whilst some may enjoy the solitude and peace of working in their own space brings, others crave office interaction. It is the latter group of freelancers who are likely to benefit from co-working environments.

Having the opportunity to mingle and network, use facilities such as Wi-Fi and desktops, co-working offices can be the perfect place for freelancers to spend a productive and brighter working day.

By sharing ideas and giving or receiving advice, freelancers can enjoy a community spirit that can even result in them getting more work.

In short, co-working takes the isolation and loneliness that can often hamper a freelancer.

As Kotter International says, the most successful 5% of organisations maintain the agility to make strategic shifts in their business and take advantage of windows of opportunity. Co-working provides a window of opportunity for businesses of every size and the savviest are taking advantage.



We hope you enjoyed our co-working guide and answered any questions or uncertainties you may have had about this modern working phenomenon. Stay tuned for our second guide which will explore co-working spaces in Leeds.

This guide was brought to you by Carrwood Park. Get in touch to talk to us about our co-working space

Tel: 0113 385 4480

Oliver Corrigan, Director at Carrwood Park