

Coworking Spaces for Public Administration



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Abstract Coworking spaces are an emerging form of work within organizations; however, this work arrangement is rare in public administration. In this chapter, we analyze the potential of coworking spaces for public units (public coworking spaces, henceforth). We show how they can enhance the attractiveness of the public sector and foster collaboration among units and citizens. The chapter analyzes values for public coworking spaces and changes in the work environment and derives changed user needs. Among the benefits are greater flexibility, reduced commuting time, and user responsiveness. Public units can adapt their workplace strategy step by step. Starting the transformation within their own office, they can gradually open their workspace for other units. Finally, sharing their offices with other sectors, they can profit from reduced-boundary governance.

Keywords Coworking space · Public administration · Coworking

Public Management and the Transformation of Work

Coworking spaces are shared working environments that offer both tangible and intangible resources for individuals, freelancers, small- and medium-sized companies, and also large corporates (Fuzi 2015; Gauger and Pfnür 2019). One of their main success factors is collaboration among the workers for whom they provide an institutional setting with the possibility of a flexible work style.

While the private sector makes use of coworking spaces, the question arises as to why this work arrangement has not yet been considered by public administrations. For public management, this form of physical organization of work is still a new territory.

A massive transformation process triggered by a social and technological change affects all sectors of the economy. These societal changes and technological

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advancements affect work and employees' expectations from their employer. Information and communication technologies (ICT) fundamentally change society, economy, politics, and administration (Randma-Liiv and Drechsler 2017). For public administration, the greatest challenge is the aging of the workforce and the retention of employees due to low attractiveness of the public sector. Public employers are struggling to find employees with key qualifications and are becoming increasingly creative in the competition for new talent (Oberholz 2018; Perry et al. 2006). A recent study by the International City/County Management Association (2014) states that attracting the next generation of workers is the top management challenge. For more than a quarter of survey respondents, this challenge is more pressing than building community trust, communicating with elected officials, or engaging with department heads (Lawson 2017).

Furthermore, tasks in public management are also becoming more complex, more distributed, and more often performed in collaborative teams as societal problems become more wicked (Paarlberg and Lavigna 2010). Social aspects of work are becoming increasingly important such as "time for interaction, being creative and having private thinking time if the completion of a given task requires it" (Fuji et al. 2018, p. 1). Boudreau et al. (2017, p. 575) note that there "has been considerable interest in the policy arena in fostering collaborations" in recent years.

Only a few studies have investigated the implementation of coworking spaces in the public sector. Ganapati and Reddick (2018, p. 5) analyze the sharing economy in the public sector and note that "co-working in large government agencies result in more efficient utilization of the government offices and reduces the real estate required for the agencies." Stewart-Johnson and Cruz (2013) show the case of a federal agency that consolidated their office to achieve cost savings. Houghton et al. (2018) describe the trial of Australian government employees to work in coworking spaces and its impact on productivity, staff retention, and work-life balance and find that the alternative work venue was highly praised and appreciated. Intaratat (2018) outlines the effort of government agencies in Asia to establish coworking spaces or SMART hubs that serve the growing demand in the new knowledge economy and focus on the impact of digitalization of work. The Canadian government recently launched a pilot project where federal employees were given access to coworking spaces as a touchdown point between meetings or as a temporary workspace when they are teleworking. "These sites offer an inclusive community environment that will drive collaboration, innovation and productivity among users" (Public Services and Procurement Canada 2019, p. 1).

However, while these studies discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a specific case, literature still lacks public management requirements for new working environments. It is also of interest how the knowledge and experience of coworking spaces can be transferred to public administration. As Negoita (2018, p. 10) states, "public sector organizations still have specific circumstances that differentiate them from private firms." In fact, research that has addressed whether public administration has specific requirements that hinder it from adopting flexible work environments is scanty in extant literature. In particular, the question is how can coworking spaces encourage a challenging work environment in public administration? To

address this research question, this chapter examines how public coworking spaces have to be organized to meet the specific needs of public employees to address the values of the public sector.

The findings reveal that coworking spaces in public administration can be used through a dense network of public agencies in a city. They foster collaboration, innovation, and social interaction. Services like childcare, high accessibility, and a high service level are the specific needs of public employees.

New Needs and Performance Criteria in (New) Public Management

The growing influence of managerial ideas and practices, such as efficiency, effectiveness, and competition, has sparked interest in New Public Management (NPM), which has become the dominant approach in public administration in the 1980s (Bryson et al. 2014).

NPM focuses on output and results rather than sticking to the general rules of procedure. As a response to the challenges of a networked, multi-sector world, a new approach with values beyond efficiency and effectiveness has emerged (Bryson et al. 2014). This emerging approach, commonly referred to as Public Value Management (O’Flynn 2007) or New Public Governance (NPG), actively engages citizens and emphasizes collaborative problem-solving (Bozeman 2017). Hartley (2005) particularly emphasizes the collaborative innovation of multi-actors across organizations to create public value.

Collaborative arrangements are increasingly implemented at all levels of public organizations to counteract complex problems and overcome the limitations of single organizations (Ansell and Gash 2007; Mandell and Keast 2007). Many professional organizations and government agencies, such as the Canadian Privy Council Office, the Australian Public Service Commission (Houghton et al. 2018), the New Zealand State Services Commission, and the South African Department of Public Service and Administration, promote the practice of collaboration (Silvia 2018). Within the European Union (EU), the European commission and other EU research projects note the relevance of employee-led innovation (Kesselring et al. 2014).

An emerging body of literature shows the importance of values like innovation (Ansell and Torfing 2014; OECD 2010), cooperation (Lindsay et al. 2018), collaboration (Hall and Battaglio 2018; Steen and Schott 2018), and co-production (Bovaird 2007; Chen et al. 2019; Voorberg et al. 2015). Furthermore, growing expectations to act in a responsive way, interacting and co-producing with citizens, and engagement are among the shifts in public work, occasionally termed “adaptive” or “agile” governance (Ganapati and Reddick 2018). Table 1 gives an overview of the emerging performance criteria in public management in the last decades.

Collaborative working offers opportunities to build and manage relationships based on trust, communication, and commitment. In this context, collaboration is a

Table 1 Performance criteria in public management (own representation)

1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Efficiency	Efficiency	Efficiency	Efficiency	Efficiency	Efficiency
	Effectiveness	Effectiveness	Effectiveness	Effectiveness	Effectiveness
	Productivity	Productivity	Productivity	Productivity	Productivity
		Competition	Competition	Competition	Competition
		Flexibility	Flexibility	Flexibility	Flexibility
			Innovation	Innovation	Innovation
				Sustainability	Sustainability
				Collaborative governance	Collaborative governance
				Cooperation	Cooperation
					Engagement
					User responsiveness
					Non-territorial work
					Next-generation workplace

Table 2 Next-generation workplace strategic areas (Lawson 2017)

1. Recruiting and hiring	Leveraging social media; mobile recruiting; speed up hiring; enhancement of interviewing practices
2. Benefits	Flexible benefit packages; facilitating a better work–life integration with alternative work methods, including flexible schedules and telecommuting
3. Marketing	Promote the organization and the community
4. Culture and philosophy	Fostering better supervisor/employee relationships; integration of employee feedback; leveraging employee innovation
5. Employee development	Propose leadership development opportunities; help secure career growth opportunities outside of their regular duties
6. Physical environment	Support next-generation workforce with physical space that facilitates social connections and creative collisions; make space where all ideas are shared without fear

capability that allows agencies to adapt quickly to a changing environment (Castilho and Quandt 2017).

User responsiveness enables a fast and agile exchange with citizens and increases the adaptability and visibility of the public sector. Non-territorial work and next-generation workplaces are performance criteria to specifically address the increasing labor shortage in the public sector. The next-generation workplace in a wider sense includes how the use of new technologies shapes the workplace, how strategies are applied to deal with the change, and how the workplace design can be leveraged with regard to engagement, collaboration, and performance. Lawson (2017) identifies six strategic areas for the next-generation workplace (Table 2).

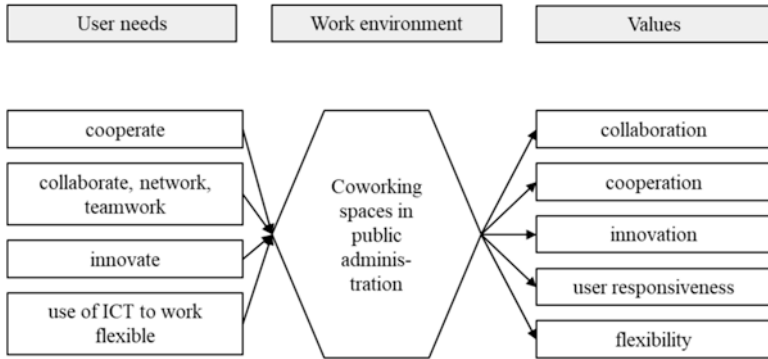


Fig. 1 Research conceptual framework

These six areas of the next-generation workplace can be seen as a potential road map for agencies to attract and retain employees and to cope with the structural workplace changes. The physical work environment can be regarded as a necessary enabler for the other strategic areas.

This paradigm shift in public management emphasizes the need for collaboration and innovation across organizations to create public value (Chen et al. 2019). On the other hand, the physical work environment affects work outcomes like satisfaction, productivity, and organizational performance (Ross et al. 2017).

Building on this outline, we assume that these values can be enhanced by the use of coworking environments to handle the challenging work environment (Fig. 1).

This section has outlined the central findings from the subject literature and has described the crucial features coworking spaces provide to enable opportunities for innovative and collaborative activities to emerge.

Empirical Case of Berlin

In the following section, we describe the case of Berlin’s public administration and their attitude toward coworking. In this case, data relating the general attitude toward work, working methods, and flexibility were collected by survey. The special needs for coworking spaces in public administration were discussed in focus group discussions with experts from the public sector.¹ A total of 179 survey responses was received and used for the analysis.

The context of this study, Berlin, offers a dense network of public agencies and hosts the most important institutions of the government with their ministries as well

¹Twenty-eight decision-makers from different public agencies were invited for 1 day. All participants had at least 5 years’ working experience in the public sector and came from different functional areas such as property management, environmental, regulatory, and educational departments.

as numerous embassies and state representations. Furthermore, as the capital of Germany, with a population of approximately 3.72 million and an area of 892 square kilometers, Berlin hosts regional, federal, and state administration (Amt für Statistik 2018). Berlin has a positive immigration rate, and the forecast population for 2030 is 3.83 million (Frei et al. 2018). Additionally, the demand for public employees will immensely increase in the coming years.

The work preferences of new work environments were retrieved in order to assess the attractiveness of coworking spaces. Thirty-two percent of respondents regarded their workspace as a place for productive working, 25% as a location for social interaction, 18% as a place to review work, and 12% as a place for creative work. For some, it was a location to deal with a necessary evil (7%), and 3% regarded their workplace as their second home. To estimate if public employees are open to a new working environment, collaborative behavior was analyzed. Nine percent of the respondents work “strongly autonomously,” 51% “slightly more autonomously,” 34% “slightly more collaboratively,” and 6% “strongly collaboratively.” Further, participants were asked when they preferred to work (Fig. 2). While 35% preferred a classical working model, e.g., working from nine to five, 65% preferred to work more flexibly. The adoption of a flexible approach can lead to a higher commitment of high-quality workers. The results thus correspond with the values proposed in our research framework. The analysis shows that there is no significant correlation between the degree of work autonomy that employees prefer and their working time preference.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of criteria that were regarded as relevant. Thirty-seven percent of respondents emphasized the importance of the work environment as a creative and modern space, whereas about one-fourth of respondents preferred a coworking space that reduces their commuting time. Finally, the authors asked participants for characteristics of a coworking space, if employees would hypothetically work in these work environments. Easy access and additional services, such as *free beverages, education concepts, sport courses, technical support, after-work events, and parcel services*, were cited by the participants.

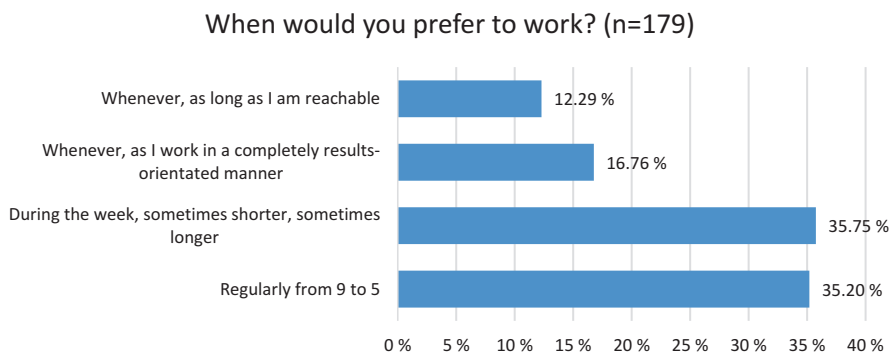


Fig. 2 Preferred working time

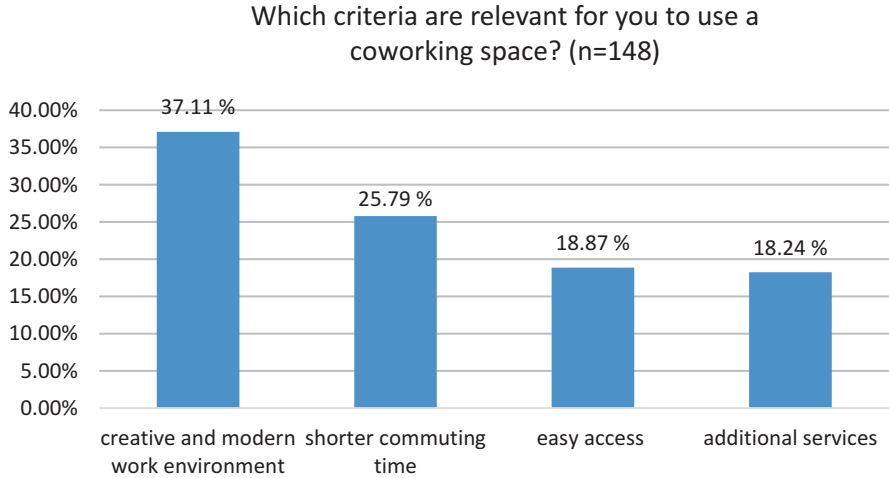


Fig. 3 Necessary criteria of a coworking space

Table 3 Current challenges and solutions in public administration workspaces

Challenge	Solutions
Lack of trust, existing traditional work culture	Result-oriented work, trust instead of control, less hierarchy, more cooperation, establish a new management culture
Create an atmosphere that promotes well-being	Spatial combination of leisure, work, and meeting zones; platform to book available workplaces; creative and innovative design
Need to stay close to citizens	Hubs as meeting points for citizens
	Openness: foyer with coffeehouse for public
Dysfunctions as a team	Coworking space with a strong focus on the community; coworking as a solution for the combination of work and leisure; provision of meeting rooms, break-out rooms, and leisure space; social interaction enforced through spatial design
Own office acting as a status symbol	Reduced hierarchies, no “corner offices;” open space areas
Lack of interaction and exchange	Knowledge spillovers due to spatial arrangements and collaboration with other units

Source: Research data

Findings from the Workshop Focus Groups

The workshop started by outlining challenges in the current administration work environment that could be met by coworking spaces. Table 3 lists the results of the focus group discussions after a coding and clustering process.

The next discussion point with the focus group was to ascertain how public coworking spaces should be designed and what values are of utmost importance for

Table 4 Success factors for a public coworking space addressing the values in public administration

Cluster	Success factor
1. Flexibility	Flexible use (24/7) and flexible furnishing
	Experimental and project workspaces as room-in-room concepts
2. Childcare	Childcare center
	Parent–child rooms
3. Access	Reduced commuting time
	Less employee fatigue
	Occasion-related choice of work location (short distances)
	Enforcing local communities
4. Collaboration and user responsiveness	Digital collaboration tools
	Collaborative work opportunities and retreat rooms
	Hub concept in outlying area to meet with citizens
	Shared spaces with external workers
	Sharing concept of employees, bundling of different administration units
	Application with check-in, room booking, team communication, and finding colleagues
	Integration of community
5. Infrastructure/services	Free basic supply (coffee and water)
	Bike- and car-sharing
	Concierge/space manager
	Cloud-based digital document management system and IT support
6. Well-being	High focus on well-being
	Healthy and sustainable workplace
	High ratio of meeting and informal places
	Various retreat and leisure rooms (can be used also after work)
	Ergonomic equipment

Source: Research data

public administration. The discussion resulted in six clusters that incorporate the most commonly mentioned aspects important to decision-makers. Table 4 lists the success factors of flexible work environments in public administration. Our findings also show factors that were not derived from previous studies.

Success Factors for a Public Coworking Space

First, flexibility is the highest ranked cluster (emphasized by every focus group). This is consistent with previous studies (Groen et al. 2018).

Second, our findings reveal a clear need for a family-friendly policy, which is related to the high proportion of female participants. There is an obvious demand

for having the possibility to bring a child to work, especially among part-time workers. Another important factor that emerges in this study is the need to design a public coworking space to reduce commuting time and empower local communities (third cluster). With an increasing number of coworking spaces in the city, commuting time decreases, and employees can freely choose to occasionally work in a nearby *hub*. We assume that the reduction of commuting time leads to a significant increase in well-being (Nie and Sousa-Poza 2018), which was highlighted in the sixth cluster.

The way collaborative structures can be observed in this setup is twofold. First, there is a need for “innovative, digital collaboration tools” (transcript, 2019). Second, collaboration both within teams and with external workers from the private sector should be encouraged as the participants demanded more “proximity to citizens” (transcript, 2019), which is encouraged by a “facilitating and inspiring layout of the workspace” (transcript, 2019). This need aligns with extant literature; for example, as Merkel (2015) points out, the physical design of a coworking space (open spaces, arrangement of tables to enable eye contact between coworkers, or actual location of social areas) has an important role in transforming the space into one that is collaborative. The focus group also emphasized the importance of infrastructure and additional services when designing coworking spaces (fifth cluster).

Flexibility, collaboration, and innovative workplaces were the main factors from all data sources (literature review, survey, and focus groups). The results from our survey analysis show that easy access and short commuting time were important. Our findings from the workshop also emphasized accessibility and reduced commuting time as a benefit as well as a focus on well-being. High-quality services and infrastructure were demanded from the survey participants and corroborated in the qualitative findings. In particular, our focus group findings have shown that child-care is an important service, which is demanded by public workers. Through triangulation from literature study and our qualitative findings, we derive the following coworking space framework, which includes new insights from our empirical research. Incorporating user needs from our framework, coworking spaces enable “collaborative governance” through the physical design of the work environment. Addressing the proposed values will impact on an attractive work environment (Fig. 4).

A Transition Path to Coworking

Based on the literature and the research findings, three strategies for public coworking spaces can be derived. First, coworking success factors can be applied to one’s own work environment. A high fit between the user needs and the physical work environment leads to a higher commitment and well-being of public workers and retains talent within the public workforce. Second, opening the office for other public units within a city promotes collaboration and co-creation with other public agencies. Furthermore commuting time can be reduced when workers can

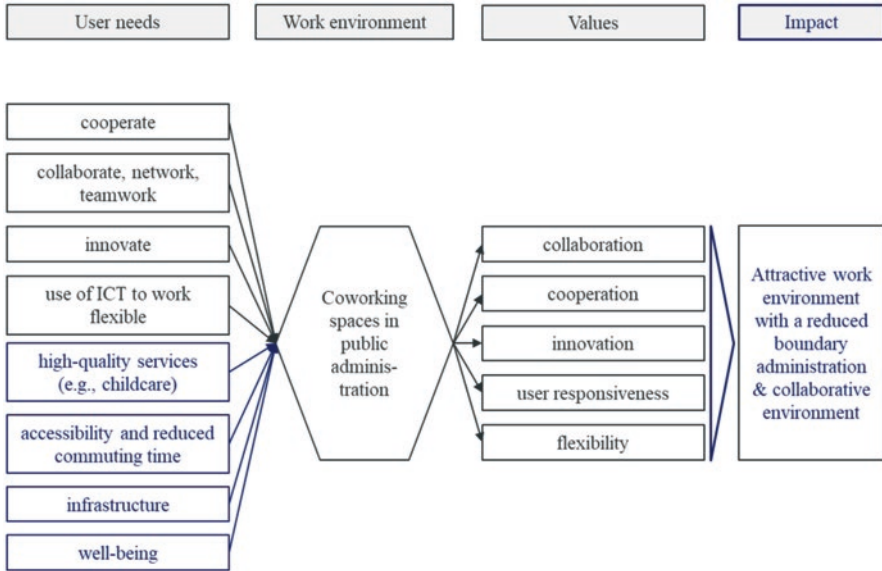


Fig. 4 Public coworking space framework as a response to the changing needs in public administration

(occasionally) make use of offices of other public units within a dense network in the city. Third, in the next expansion stage, offices could be opened for externals, citizens, and entrepreneurs to interact with the public and enhance user responsiveness. This is also achieved when external coworking spaces are used and act as a substitute for the office and work is fully conducted in these flexible work environments (Table 5).

Opportunities for Public Management

Public management can benefit from coworking in many ways. Over the past few decades, it became obvious that agencies benefit from working together and need to collaborate to look beyond traditional, organizational, and structural boundaries (Hall and Battaglio 2018). Public service is increasingly accomplished together. This reduced-boundary governance can be specifically promoted by coworking spaces. The spaces offer an institutional setting where public and private sectors coincide and not only collaborate on an ad hoc or one-off basis but are also able to form strategic partnerships and deliver high-quality services.

As the needs and performance criteria of New Public Governance approached those of the private economy, it is only a matter of time until the physical organization of work will also adapt to the principles of the private economy. Hence, it will become necessary for public management to re-organize its physical work

Table 5 Transition path to coworking environments

Transition path	1. Apply the coworking success factors to the own office	2. Coworking as a means to promote collaboration and co-creation with other public units	3. (a) Coworking as a means to promote user responsiveness and collaborative governance	3. (b) Coworking as a substitute for the office
Description	Design the physical environment with open spaces, infrastructure, and services to promote interaction and collaboration within public units	Open the workplace for other public units as a touchdown point or hub nearby. This fosters collaboration with other public units, reduces commuting time, and gives easy access to public workers	Coworking spaces are offered to other units and agencies and externals as a new way of interacting Close engagement with citizens	External coworking spaces are used as an alternative work environment
Example of use	Zamani and Gum (2019) show the fit between the physical environment and user needs impacting satisfaction and collaboration	Public Services and Procurement Canada (2019) shows the case of Canadian federal employees given access to coworking spaces as a touchdown point between meetings or as a temporary workspace	Pohl (2018) shows the case of a cooperative bank in Germany that owns a coworking space with an integrated branch bank. Employees work with other private workers and share their workspace	Houghton et al. (2018) show the case of Australian government employees working in coworking spaces to promote collaboration

Source: Own source based on Yang et al. (2019)

environment into shared workspaces and adopt the principles of the private economy in order to attract and retain young talent.

On the one hand, public administration offers an ideal prerequisite for coworking in its own premises due to its large number of distributed locations and administrations. During the first step, workplaces would be opened to other employees from the public administration; thus, employees would benefit from higher collaboration between units.

In the second step, premises would be also opened to the public. Public companies, such as banks and post offices, are already taking advantage of this. Affected by societal change and transformation processes, they have redesigned their business models and use too large premises for coworking as a new form of business. For banks, coworking spaces can be an attractive addition to the portfolio of services offered.

On the other hand, public employees could also use regular coworking spaces and benefit from the advantages of coworking even if only used occasionally. Houghton et al. (2018) state that when public workers were in the main office after spending some time at coworking spaces, their productivity was higher because

they were less fatigued and had improved moods. The use of different work locations and workstations stimulates new ideas. Solutions are born when workers change locations and workspaces frequently, collaborating with and being inspired by workers from other units. Performing self-reliant work in a coworking space leads to increased satisfaction and efficiency. Another benefit would most likely be the reduced travel time.

Though our findings show similarity with previous studies, new themes also emerged. Our findings indicate that Berlin public employees have a positive attitude toward work flexibility and appreciate working in new working environments. This positive attitude was found to be consistent across gender and age. While older respondents had a slight preference for working more autonomously, younger respondents were found to collaborate and often work in teams. Most of them perceived their office as a workplace of productivity and interaction, both of which can be facilitated by coworking spaces because these spaces cater to current needs with their spatial concepts. The focus groups showed a clear desire for more services, good accessibility to reduce commuting time, and high-quality workspaces. Furthermore, employees wanted flexibility, childcare, and proximity to citizens.

There are, of course, constraints. A flexible work environment cannot be used by all units and does not suit all types of workers. Nevertheless, we hope that the inspiration gleaned from this chapter will help shape future public and government discussions and influence workplace strategy decision-makers, human resources departments, and public real estate managers. In the next few years, the change toward new forms of work will continue to increase as will the demand for high-quality workers. More millennials will enter the workforce—a generation used to working flexibly and in multiple locations and collaborating with others.

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