



Consider that rather than trying to compete with the home office, organizations could benefit from embracing and building on it.

COMPETING WITH THE HOME OFFICE

Individuals and economists alike report increased productivity as the result of remote work from home, with many employees vocalizing that they want to remain in their home offices. Despite this, many corporate leaders are struggling with how to lure workers back to the office by combining mandatory attendance policies with perks like snacks and company-provided lunches, citing collaboration, innovation and networking as the need for in-office days. Many organizations have settled on the hybrid model, with anywhere from 1 to 3 suggested or mandated “in-office days,” but many express difficulty in getting staff back for even those few days, and that over time attendance has slowly slipped away.

Attempting to compete with someone’s home for comfort and focused space is a losing battle.

Prior to the pandemic, the trend for workplace design was to open the space with minimal private offices to get as much density as possible. The results were noisy open offices with people sitting at tables with headphones on if they need to concentrate. Now we see companies mandating a return to office to have staff sitting in these open settings stuck on zoom calls. The space doesn’t fit the work being done or give employees any edge over what they could get at home – if anything it’s less productive than if they had just stayed at home as they struggle to maintain focus and comfort in a sea of “sorry I was on mute.”

CREATING SPACES THAT SUPPORT CULTURE

We can easily observe that what is highly productive in a shared office space is communal, iterative, and reactive activities like training, large group collaboration, mentoring, exploration and innovation. These activities suffer when performed at a distance. Productivity is now the realm of the home, and community is the realm of the workplace. So rather than asking “how does the office support productivity,” forward thinking organizations are asking “how do we create a space that supports our culture and strengthens our community”?



How you do that is reducing the rigidity of the office and creating a more dynamic mix of space that people can’t replicate at home: small team rooms where three or four people can come together in-person and connect to a computer and bring in a colleague who’s remote; large, open spaces that can be used for all-hands meetings, trainings, and events; and other communal spaces that are flexible and can be converted for a variety of purposes. If you think about the average office-worker’s week, maybe they have a weekly meeting with a direct supervisor, a few small team calls with people from their office and other offices, a large all-hands office meeting, a few check ins with vendors, and several meetings with colleagues across the country or internationally, in addition to the heads down time they need to focus on tasks.

Obviously, those vendor calls, international meetings, and focus time could take place over the 2 to 3 days they are at home, but once they get to the office, they should be able to meet one on one with a supervisor, sit in on the all-hands meeting and find a quiet place to do a few hours work before meeting with two or three colleagues and calling in a fourth from another location. The optimal way to conduct those 1-2 days in the office is mobile, autonomous and adaptive to the task at hand.

FINDING THE RIGHT MIX

The workplace needs to become an offering of settings that enhance the 2 to 3 days of focused work people are doing at home through communal spaces that relinquish control, create choice, and empower the employees who use it to do what needs to be done in the most effective environment for the task. But that’s not as simple as just inserting a few informal areas with soft seating.



It’s about really dissecting how the work gets done in your organization and creating a mix of space that supports that work, so that when staff do come to the office they can move and work where it best suits the changes in their activity. It’s not one size fits all, it’s not prescriptive, and it’s not any one solution à la “replace all the open space with cubicles,” or “tear all the cubicles out.” It’s finding the right mix of spaces and sizes so that when people come into the office, the space they need is available and they can pick how best to work. It’s supporting health and wellness with robust access to daylight, environmentally sound material choices, connection to brand through the workplace environment, and robust air circulation and filtration, and most importantly: respect and autonomy for the user.

“How do we create a space that **supports our culture and strengthens our community?**”

A huge benefit of working from home is the empowerment people feel from having control of their space – adjusting the temperature, the lighting, the noise levels, selecting seating and moving and

standing when they prefer it. Restoring some of that choice and control, even with hybrid model, will go a long way to making people feel not just comfortable but effective in the space. You can only approach that with a robust mix of spaces to serve them. In the end, it is up to employers to evaluate how their people work and respond by creating an optimized workplace that creates real value for staff and empowers them to work most effectively. That value is what will bring them back to stimulate sharing, innovation, and growth – again and again.



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