

Is the future of the workplace hybrid?

It's been said before, but I guess we're going to say it again... sometimes it takes something as radical as a pandemic to really sort stuff out and understand what really works and what doesn't.

And the way we live and work has certainly been shaken up in the last 18 months – especially for the corporate world.

So now that we're 18 months into what is effectively an amazing global 'experiment' into the changing world of work, there's been much said about the 'new' hybrid model of working in the media and all the potential benefits it can bring to our working lives.

But the remote and hybrid models aren't really new to the entrepreneurial world are they? Whilst most corporates were still unquestioningly following that model of a Monday-Friday, 9-5 commute into a central city location, we Entrepreneurs recognised quite some time ago that there was little point in creating a fabulous business only to continue working in the same way we always had in the corporate world.

It would, therefore, be easy to think that there's nothing for the entrepreneurial world to learn from all of this, but we think that there is.

Firstly, you can't fail to notice that whilst some companies are embracing the hybrid model, some are resisting with all their might. They cite 'collaboration', 'communication', and 'business as usual' as reasons to get people back into

their offices sooner than later. But in doing so are ignoring (and indeed alienating and potentially losing) much of their workforce who have tasted a more flexible way of working, and don't want to go back to how things were. Not fully anyway.

Secondly, now that we're 18 months in, even the most hardened 'flexible working' campaigner is realising that working home-alone all the time just doesn't suit everyone. It's lonely. Not a word that is often used, or a feeling that is very cool to admit. But it's clear that many have come to realise that all but the most introvert of us does crave and need at least some form of interaction during their working day.

So whilst the central city office market might be taking a bit of a nosedive, the alternative 'third' spaces in the 'burbs' are really starting to thrive. And it's no longer the preserve of the digital nomad nursing a single 'all-day coffee'. Anywhere with spare capacity during the day such as pubs, hotels, community centres and gyms, are gearing up to take advantage of the de-centralisation of our working lives by offering day, weekly and monthly memberships for individuals and teams who are keen to meet face to face in locations outside of the cities.

And thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, our planet needs this respite from the craziness of uninspiring and perhaps now even selfish and thoughtless daily commutes into a central city location. We've given our world a bit of time and space to breathe, and it (and probably we) are feeling all the better for it.

So how do these 3 things translate into lessons for future working models?

Well...

If you value your employees (and we're very sure that you do) and want the best from them then listen to them and their individual needs – they won't all be the same, but you can work creatively with that to really explore the alternatives

Combine what they tell you with what you need as a business to create a model that encompasses all personalities and working styles – your business needs a broad range of talent to flourish and get the work done

Don't just think 'binary' office and/or home – there's so many other spaces that can be utilised as working space these days to facilitate collaboration and combat the creativity sapping feeling of home-alone

Your community needs you! Allow employees to both live and work locally, support local hospitality sectors with your custom during the working day,

and connect with your local community, and even potential markets

Your planet needs you! Cut the commute, get together when you need to, celebrate and socialise together when you need to. But don't do it for the sake of it. Be discerning

So... although 'hybrid' means the ability to work from home and/or 'the office' to most people, the only true way forward to sustain and inspire us is to think beyond the confines of these 2 spaces. What we need is a third way. A way for us all to work wherever and whenever we please.

Only then will we be truly 'hybrid', and in doing so allow our employees (and indeed ourselves as business owners) to create the kind of lives that we individually want and need to sustain us and the businesses we operate within.

Jill Farmer is cofounder of [Phlex](#), a marketplace on a mission to build better co-working communities. Based in Portsmouth, Phlex brings together co-workers with spaces - both traditional spaces and anywhere with spare capacity such as established businesses, pubs, community centres, and even your home or shed. Our intention is to be the 'go to' place for co-working in the UK for both the entrepreneurial and corporate markets, building a co-working community and providing the flexibility that the market craves.

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