



COWORKING PLACES

HOW TO SUPPORT USERS' WORK-LIFE BALANCE

New working spaces, such as coworking places, offer new working ways often connected to remote working and flexi-time practices. They are supposed to address the demands of work-life balance better than traditional work in offices.

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WHAT ARE COWORKING SPACES AND WHO USES THEM?

Coworking spaces belong to new working spaces. They provide their users with shared workspaces, office utilities, amenities, and community, based on shared values of "collaboration, openness, accessibility and sustainability"¹.

Generally, coworking users may include a wide range of actors: teleworkers from large companies, small and medium enterprises or a range of independent workers, freelancers, contract staff, students and many others².

WHAT IS WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Work-life balance means resolving the conflict between various social roles a person takes on in work and private life or resolving the conflict between work and non-work activities. At a point of their working life, almost all workers will encounter situations where their work-life balance is not working.

¹ Bouncken, R. B., Laudien, S. M., Fredrich, V., & Görmar, L. (2018). Coopetition in coworking-spaces: value creation and appropriation tensions in an entrepreneurial space. *Review of Managerial Science*, 12(2), 385–410. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-017-0267-7>

² Mitev, N., de Vaujany, F.-X., Laniray, P., Bohas, A., & Fabbri, J. (2019). Co-working Spaces, Collaborative Practices and Entrepreneurship. In K. Riemer, S. Schellhammer, & M. Meinert (Eds.), *Collaboration in the Digital Age* (pp. 15–43). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94487-6_2

WHY WORK IN A COWORKING

- better work-life balance
- separating work and private life
- community of friendly people
- higher flexibility
- more freedom
- reduced stress
- commuting reduction
- cost reduction
- maintaining daily routine structure
- support of self-development
- higher creativity
- productive work atmosphere

OUR STUDY

Term: from March to May 2021

Methods: online questionnaires and interviews

Sample: 27 involved coworking spaces from the capitals: 11 from the Czech Republic, 10 from Hungary, and 6 from Slovakia

HOW CAN COWORKING SUPPORT WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Working from a coworking saves employees the need to commute to and from work daily and increases their autonomy. Additionally, it diminishes distractions from home life. Coworking spaces also help address feelings of isolation and loneliness that some workers experience when working at home. Moreover, they may allow users to access the space at hours that traditional offices may not offer, varying workspaces, and meeting other coworkers.

WHICH ELEMENTS SUPPORT THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF COWORKING USERS

Offered services, business hours, the coworking place's location, and equipment in a CS might be instrumental in balancing people's work and private life.

Services of coworking spaces

Services offered by coworking spaces to coworkers are often available either free of charge or for a reduced price. These services can be divided into five categories per the following description. The illustration shows frequently mentioned services. The larger the font, the more often a particular service was mentioned.



SOCIAL EVENTS

Social events are different kinds of cultural events (e.g. film clubs, balls, concerts, theatre performances), events for coworkers' children (e.g. Saint Nicholas, Children's Day), charity events, swap events, or informal meetings of the coworkers (after-work drinks, hobby courses, celebration of a wedding or a birth of a child). This category also includes other informal interactions such as a joint breakfast or a trip. These activities seem to be closely connected with the community building within a coworking space. A sense of community is a much-appreciated trait of coworking spaces, enabling the development of both professional and personal ties among coworkers.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Training and development activities include public events for the coworkers and surrounding community, coworking-spaces-wide events, and individual events aimed at professional or personal development or both. The individualised events (e.g. mentoring, solving a specific problem) might require payment. Some CSs also offer information campaigns that deal with training and development activities, such as keeping healthy, yoga lessons, and discussions with a psychologist.



SERVICES FOR MORE COMFORTABLE WORKING

Making work duties easier also seems important. In some cases, such services make job tasks only more convenient or spare some time (e.g. personal assistant). In other cases, they are vital for the coworkers to concentrate on their work, such as babysitting services. Regarding babysitting, a respondent from Hungary mentioned that they offer to babysit during all events. This service is provided in cooperation with a particular provider. A respondent from the Czech Republic added that babysitting can improve work-life balance when the coworkers have time to work without children and have time for their private life in the afternoon.

Some coworking spaces highlighted their casual environment with no strict rules where people feel more at home as an essential trait. It is different from working from home because the coworkers are not surrounded by home duties, can concentrate on work, and have face-to-face contact with other working people. Some services that coworking spaces offer seem to relate to this attribute. For example, the often-mentioned possibility to bring a pet in the coworking space, drinks provided for free or for a reduced price. A respondent from the Czech Republic believed that their cafe, a part of coworking space, can help coworkers improve work-life balance. Business partners or family members may visit working coworkers in such an environment.

PROVIDING INFORMATION



This category deals with providing information to coworkers. Interestingly, the information contains more than basic facts about what coworking spaces offer and when and how much it costs. It includes information about people or members of the community, such as who does what and why it could be helpful to cooperate with each other. For example, a respondent from the Czech Republic mentioned conducting joint breakfasts or lunches where the coworkers can present what they do. This way of providing information to coworkers has a clear overlap with social events.

Equipment for work-life balance

Independent coworking spaces offer a working environment with infrastructure, typically desks with telephones, internet access, printers, meeting rooms, or fully equipped laboratories for individual and corporate users³. Some types of equipment are helpful also for better work-life balance. The following illustration shows the most often mentioned items.



³ Bouncken, R. B. & Reuschl, A. J. (2018). Coworking-spaces: how a phenomenon of the sharing economy builds a novel trend for the workplace and for entrepreneurship. *Review of Managerial Science*, 12, 317–334. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-016-0215-y>

CASE STUDY

The chosen coworking place is located in Prague, Czech Republic, in a location that is neither at the periphery or with too much tourism. It was established in 2017 after a year of reconstruction of the space.

How it was established

Two friends, both interior designers, were looking for someplace where they could do their activities. In their minds, they wanted to create a space they would share with similar people. They would cooperate, discuss, share knowledge, develop mutually, and make new contacts and businesses. In 2016, they found a devastated restaurant suitable for their aims, which they decided to rebuild in line with their conception.

Members of the coworking place

According to the owner's opinion, current clients are primarily interior designers and architects who share a similar creative attitude to work and life. They consider design part of their living and do not distinguish strictly between work and private life. Almost all clients are women, especially mothers with children.

What is special

The coworking place has a big speciality. Its main part is a public café where everyone can enjoy a delicious coffee, home lemonade, or cakes. The coworking clients also use this place to meet with their own clients in a relaxed manner or meet with their families. Of course, the owner says it has a disadvantage because children can sometimes be noisy, but the benefits outweigh this.



How the coworking place influences clients' work-life balance

The most significant benefit for clients the owner sees is flexibility and freedom. The clients can adjust the work regime according to their needs. Even if the coworking place is closed, they can still arrange to come in.

The coworking offers work desks, a meeting room, an open space, special zones for phoning, and closed zones for undisturbed work. Besides café, a space for eating is also available. Clients can use a copy machine. Moreover, an expert library and a sample room with materials for interior design are at their disposal.

The coworking also offers some services, like consultations, development activities, and possibilities to meet professionals whose work and knowledge about this work are useful for interior designers' development. As they prefer blending work and private life, meeting family members and pets is possible in the coworking place.

SURVEY AMONG COWORKERS

Following the survey and interviews with the managers and owners of coworking spaces, the research team will target the coworkers next.

TAKE PART IN THE SURVEY AMONG COWORKERS YOURSELF



<https://forms.office.com/r/LppV3QgYfG>

The survey contains questions concerning benefits you perceive are connected to working in a coworking space, equipment, services, accessibility, or impact of COVID-19. Of course, there are also some questions regarding you as a coworker.

The survey will enable us to understand the benefits of coworking places from coworkers' points of view and increase awareness about coworkers and coworking spaces.

The survey is multinational. While the link takes you to the English version, Czech, Slovak, Portuguese, and Vietnamese translations are also available.

ABOUT OUR RESEARCH PROJECT

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORTS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC PROJECT LTC20047

"Regional development and public policy under creative economy: Mapping, knowledge sharing and management of New Working Spaces in the Czech Republic" is the official title of the project conducted by Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Faculty of Management and Economics from 2020 to 2023. It focuses on mapping new working spaces in the Czech Republic, on an analysis of knowledge sharing in these spaces, on their management concerning gender and social inclusion, on an estimation of their economic performance and the identification of instruments for public support in the context of creative economics, strategical and spatial planning in towns and regions.

More information can be found at Technology Agency of the Czech Republic [Starfos webpage](#).

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