

Why place still matters in the digital age:

Third place working in easy reach of home




Work your way

 Report by
ZZA Responsive User Environments

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Executive summary

1. Contemporary technology enables people to work in a wide variety of places apart from traditional offices. People now undertake work activity in a variety of venues such as trains, planes, coffee shops, hotels and at home.
2. Partly because of this, traditional offices tend to be under-occupied, and a view has developed in corporate real estate circles that to improve the efficiency of the corporate workplace, its focus should be as a place of 'exchange', which prioritises provision for people to meet, while work that they undertake on a solo or individual basis should occur wherever else they happen to be.
3. This report covers research to examine the assumption that it is equally productive for people to work anywhere. It is based on empirical evidence from a large scale online survey and a suite of systematic face to face interviews on the issues pertaining to where people choose to work, and why they do so.
4. The large-scale survey confirms that third place working is a new norm, and the data from both inquiries sheds light on the current significance of physical place to people who work in this way.
5. To isolate people with choice of work setting, the interviews focused primarily on people working in 'third places' – neither traditional offices nor home. The participants were individuals working in business centres, coffee shops and library settings in New York / New Jersey, Greater London, Paris Region, Hong Kong and Mumbai.
6. A research hypothesis was that many people in large cities work more effectively if they work outside their homes, but that regular travel to their organisation's own offices can challenge productive working and sustainable living, because homes are dispersed across metropolitan areas, while corporate offices are increasingly concentrated in select locations. The interviews therefore enlisted people working in third places away from city centres, or at transport interchanges, to learn about working in third places in easy access to home, and the benefits this may afford.
7. The research establishes that for many people, working in a third place now represents most of their work activity. Their frequent and regular work in a defined place outside of home shows that physical place remains central to their work lives, even in this digital era.
8. The data shows that people work in third places to help them be productive. This is driven by both practical constraints at home and psychological factors. Of these, a mindset that is conducive to work is a dominant factor. Users report that third place working promotes this.
9. The interviewees report benefitting from the peace of mind that derives from their ability to meet family, personal and work commitments by working away from, but in easy reach of, home. This involves numerous benefits that help ease the interface between work and family life, and that help safeguard work-life balance.
10. The research endorses the proposition that work settings close to home support productive working and sustainable living, and reduce stress. As organisations cannot have offices that correspond with the degree of residential dispersal in large cities and metropolitan areas, spatially distributed third places are pivotal in releasing these benefits.
11. The research identifies specific further ways that third places can enhance work life, in addition to the wide spatial distribution of work settings. These involve the reduced hassle associated with the fact that third places do not require users to be responsible for operation of the setting, and the available quality of third place settings and the services they provide.
12. The research identifies the relevance of third places at all stages of the business life cycle, particularly to small entities such as field teams, start-ups, offshoots in new geographies, or organisations that are in transition – downsizing or expanding.
13. The interviewee testimonies show that people use the autonomy available today to find a set-up that works for them. Given the extent of contemporary choice in respect of where they work and for whom they invest their energies, the cumulative benefits identified by the research are relevant to organisations that seek competitive advantage in attracting, motivating and sustaining able people. This places a premium on narrowing the distance between residential and work settings. For organisations relying on or seeking to capture talent, use of professional third places is a relevant strategy.
14. The report identifies the varied profiles of third place users, and provides a toolkit to guide prospective users in analysing requirements and respective third place settings to inform strategies and optimise alignment.
15. Given the more demanding requirements of business users, the report includes a degree of specific attention to the potential of business centres to meet them.
16. To support building a business case for third place working, the concluding chapter collates the many benefits that the research identifies at both the individual and corporate levels.
17. Additional details regarding the interviewee base and names of organisations participating in the interviews are provided in the Appendix.

1. Why research third places?

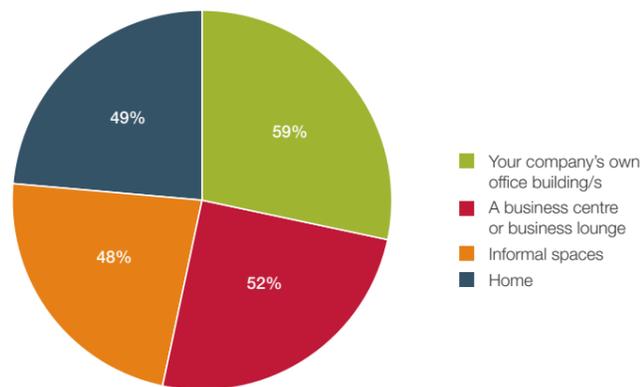
Technology and the break with fixed place

The dissemination of technology has revolutionised contemporary working. We can access, document, analyse and communicate information from a wide and ever-expanding range of places. This affords enormous potential choice in where we work. With available technology and management attitudes that facilitate agile working, a great proportion of work can now be done where people happen to be.

Even though these two conditions are not always in place, people now work in a wide variety of venues other than formal places of employment or home – at clients' premises, on trains and planes, in coffee shops, business centres, libraries and clubs. Whether more formal – like business centres – or more informal – like coffee shops – as places where people work these are alternatives to offices and home. These intermediate settings are called 'third places' – neither traditional offices nor people's homes.

A large-scale 2011 survey¹ – issued to over one million business owners and senior managers – incorporated a number of questions by ZZA to inform the research reported here. Almost half of the 17,800 respondents, from over 60 countries – all contacted without prior knowledge of their working practices – report using third place settings for any or all of their work time. Of these, marginally more report working in business centres or lounges than those in informal settings.

Workplace settings used by participants for any or all of the time
(large-scale Global Business Survey)



Conclusion:
Third place working is commonplace
These results confirm that third place working is indeed extensive. It highlights the relevance of researching this by focusing directly on people who work in this way. The topic is the substance of this report.

Questions for the digital age

This research reported here covers timely questions regarding how people work and prefer to work, when they can choose between operating in 'virtual' modus and working in a defined physical place. It involves fundamental issues for social theory and for business:

- With available technology, and employment approach based on outcomes rather than 'presenteeism', have people dispensed with physical place as an irrelevant and unnecessarily constraining element of work life?
- Or does physical place – in parallel with, and supported by, technology – still play a central role in influencing work modes and promoting productivity?
- Has the 'non-place urban realm' anticipated by futurists like Mel Webber back in the 1960s materialised as the prevailing norm?

These questions matter, because the contemporary cultural landscape offers options. We can no longer assume that traditional modes are the most productive because they prevailed in the past. Nor should we assume, even if this is convenient to those in charge of corporate real estate, that the place to undertake solo work – work that individuals do without reference to others – is anywhere outside the office, including home. The new mantra that collective places of work are only there for collaborative activity – for face-to-face 'exchange' – needs to be challenged with an understanding of how people work effectively.

Planning and providing workspace on the presumption people can now work 'anywhere', risks suboptimisation. Productive strategies require up-to-date evidence on the preferences and realities of working today, and the associated benefits to capture.

The scale of global cities: third places away from city centres

If physical place rather than full reliance on virtuality remains pivotal to productive work, the scale of global cities poses a challenge. Economic agglomeration concentrates activity in city centres and surrounding nodes, but large proportions of the population live in suburbs and peripheral towns. Businesses cannot own offices everywhere; the imperatives of efficient consolidation do not allow this. At the same time, people's family responsibilities and available energy conflict with the demands and uncertainties of long commutes. People's need for convenient access to workplaces in easy reach of home, calls for work settings to be dispersed. The requirements of individuals and organisations are in apparent tension.

Based on previous research, ZZA formulated the proposition that well-planned and equipped workplace hubs close to residential areas offer the required solution. Spatially distributed settings, located in close access to homes, can provide professional workplaces where people can undertake solo or teamwork, as well as meeting their family and personal commitments.

This proposition was advanced in the 2010 report 'Liveable lives'. But third places dispersed across large metropolitan areas exist. This current research references them and their users to expand and test important questions:

- Can dispersed work settings in global cities benefit both workers and organisations?
- Of the range of places where people now work apart from traditional offices and home, how do different types of third place serve different users?
- What can we learn from systematic, authentic accounts of people working in varied third places about promoting productive working and sustainable living?

¹ Global Business Survey, February 2011, Marketing UK, Regus

Empirical evidence to answer the questions

Supplemented by the large-scale survey questions, this report is based primarily on a suite of systematic, qualitative, face-to-face interviews about third place working, undertaken for the study.

Whom we interviewed

To identify the characteristics of different third places, we interviewed people working in business centre, coffee shop and library settings – 86 third place users in all.

Where they were based

To test the proposition that people in large cities look to reduce the distance between where they live and work, and benefit from this relative proximity, the research focused on third places situated around major cities and close to major transport hubs:

-  New York / New Jersey metropolitan area – Manhattan and out to Princeton, New Jersey and Rye in Westchester
-  Greater London – the highly connected vicinities of London Bridge and Kings Cross rail stations, and outward to Chiswick in West London, Chelmsford, Essex to the east, and Watford, Hertfordshire to the north
-  Paris – Neuilly, and out to Val d'Europe in Marne la Vallée
-  Mumbai, Bandra East
-  Hong Kong, Central.

What they do

People who work in third places include students and individuals undertaking private study, through solo business operators, and employees or affiliates of business organisations – both large and small.

The interviewees represent leading-edge types of business that are entirely predicated on today's digital potential. Examples are:

Satisfly: a new media service to airlines, matching up people for neighbouring seats during a flight, using data from online social networking websites.

Collect+: a parcel delivery service, enabling customers to pick up or drop off parcels at a local convenience store, rather than having to wait for deliveries at home or go to postal depots.

Neopark: Offering web and smart-phone-based data to advise customers of available space in car-parks.

Networked nature of contemporary business

The research reflects the spatially networked nature of contemporary business.

- The companies of more than 36%² of the people interviewed in third places have offices in locations elsewhere in the country where the interview was held.
- More than 47%³ of the companies have an office presence in another country or countries.

The research generated a rich ethnography of why people work in these places and the benefits it affords. It shows how well-supported third place working can make for a productive re-engineering or reshaping of work and personal life. It also shows how different settings align with different situations and the tasks in hand.

Case-study:

Regus New Jersey, Princeton

"I get more done here in a four-hour day than I did when I worked in Manhattan. The eight-hour day is a forced idea. You get used to it as a commuter, but it's definitely something that you get forced into because that's how work is structured – it becomes routine. But the flexibility I have now that I work close by is so much better – I'm more productive.

In our organisation I argued for being my own boss as a way to make me more productive. The board had all done the commute thing, so they understood. It also helped that it would be a lot cheaper – because the rent and having fewer employees out here, and saving on commute costs. It's worked!

The hardest thing for me now that I work out in Princeton was getting into a routine – I had all this extra time! Before I used to get up at 4:30 am, exercise, head to Manhattan all day, and then go home. I've completely reorganised my life and schedule since working here. The flow of the business used to be more of a five-day schedule, with a lot of visitors. Now there're less visitors, and that's better too, because before, 90% of the time, them visiting us was a distraction and the 10% who we wanted to meet we'd seek out anyway. I try to spend Monday to Wednesday here, at the business centre, and then Thursday and Friday on the road visiting people. The time that I've gained was my commute time – now I go to the gym and sleep more."

Alternative ways to read this report

Chapter 2 provides an overview of third place working. Chapter 3 describes how third places support individuals in working productively. Chapter 4 reports how third places close to residential areas release the benefits users describe. Chapter 5 identifies benefits associated with the distinctive nature of third places. Chapter 6 focuses at the organisational level, highlighting corporate advantages of using third places as workspace for an organisation's people. Chapter 7 presents the role of appropriately located third places in harnessing talent in global cities and enabling business benefits. Chapter 8 helps shape the case for third place working and gives guidance on third place selection. The appendix describes the research and sample base in greater detail.

The report can be read at multiple levels – readers can select from text, headings, graphics and narrative quotations according to their interest and available time. However, to appreciate the motivations and experiences that third place working, and third place working close to home, the interviewees' authentic quotations are uniquely instructive.

² 67 interviewees (78%) answered this question, for the remaining 19 (22%) the question was N / A.

³ 64 interviewees (74.5%) answered this question, for the remaining 22 (25.5%) the question was N / A.

2. Third place working: a new norm



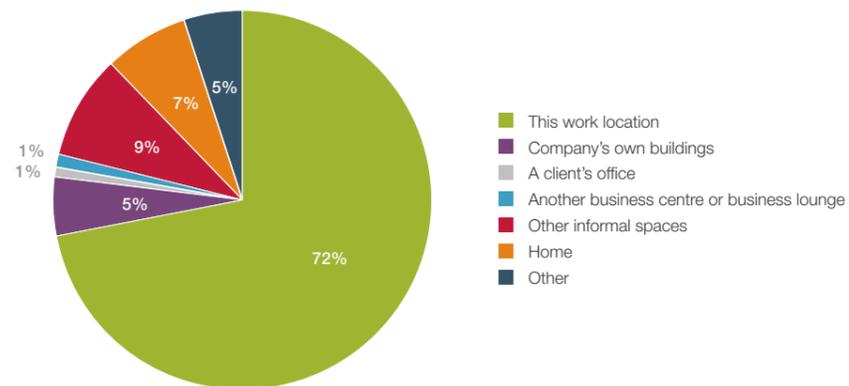
Chapter 1 established that large numbers of people work in third places for any or all of the time. How significant is this? Do they work in third places only briefly and occasionally, or does it comprise a more substantial or perhaps major part of their work lives? This chapter focuses on the 'where', 'when' and 'how often' of third place working.

Third places as people's most common work venue

Where third space users work most often

A high majority of the interviewees – nearly three-quarters – report the business centre, library or coffee shop where they were interviewed as their most frequent place of work.

Most frequent place of work

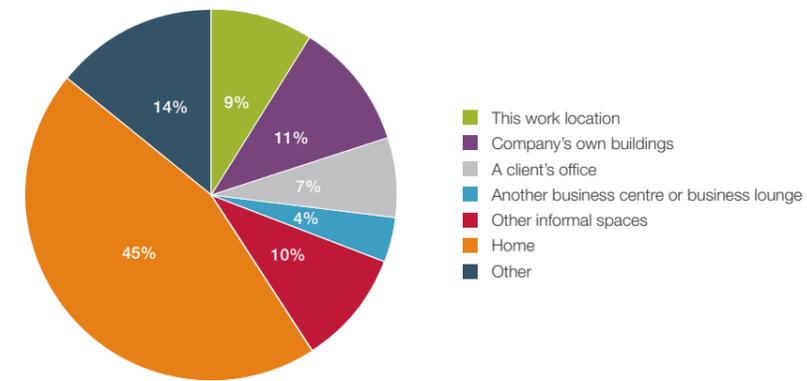


Second most frequent work venue

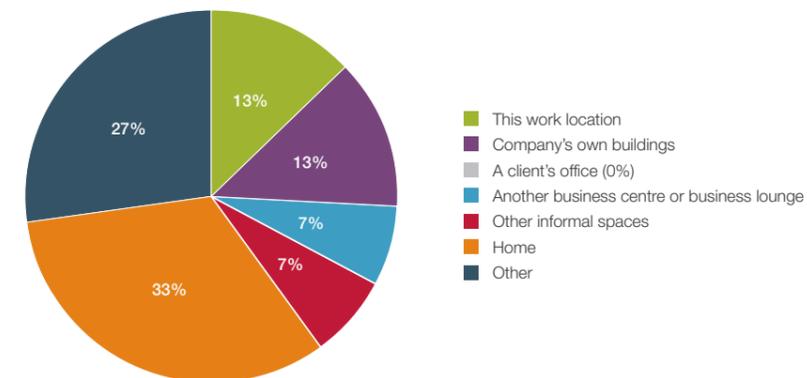
Home is second for almost half the sample (45%). No other setting comes close to home as the second most frequent place where the interviewees work.

And companies' own buildings – the traditional 'first place' for working, rank joint third in frequency of where the interviewees work. In part this is because some users of business centres have loose ties with corporate offices in their organisations, and because many people working in libraries and coffee shops, and some people working in business centres, have no connections with company office space (though this does not apply to them all).

Second most frequent place of work



Other work venues



Frequent and regular use

Many people work in the same third space setting on a frequent and regular basis. This varies across the range of third place types; business centres are used more frequently than coffee shops and library settings.

Frequent means frequent

Despite the flexibility associated with third place working, half the interviewees report working in the same venue for four to five days per week.

"I've got the internet and a docking station at home, and there's no disturbance from family members – I've got the space there. But part of me misses an office atmosphere, so I come here Monday to Friday, when I'm in Mumbai."

 **Business centre – Mumbai, Bandra East**

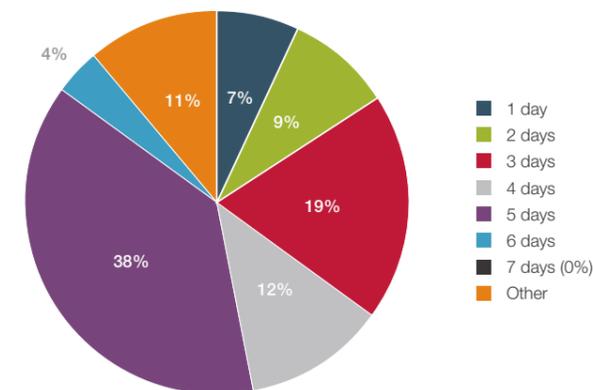
"On the weekdays I come here so I can achieve a lot and have a break at the weekend. Here is where I work and home is for rest."

 **Library – London, Kings Cross**

"I work six days a week in a café, studying for 12 to 14 hours a day. It's convenient for me to come here. It's open late and also good for going out after working to have fun in the city."

 **Coffee shop – New York, Manhattan**

Typical number of days based in this work setting



"Everyday, I work either here or a different business centre in this network, depending on where I'm meeting people."

 **Business centre – London, London Bridge**

Where else people work

However, like people who are based in traditional offices, but who go to meetings and conferences, third place users can work in a given place for just part of the day, and then move elsewhere as required or as it suits. 'Other' work places include being 'out and about' (for salesmen), in production environments (like studios) and in university libraries (for students), at client's homes (for financial services advisers). Or it may involve the same type of third place, but venues situated in different locations.

Third place user profiles

Anyone, of any status and in any sector, can use third places as a work setting. Typical users include the following

People undertaking business activities on a solo basis or in small entities

People undertaking private study

People in the start-up, early development or downsize phases of a commercial enterprise

People representing a firm on a predominantly agile basis – whether the company has fixed space in the same country, abroad or nowhere at all

Anchor effect

Once a business founder or principal selects a third place setting, their team can become linked to the same venue. Even if the anchor uses it infrequently, the pull on colleagues can be like a conventional office.

"My boss walks to this centre but I drive for ages to get here. I must work here, it's the mentality. I work independently of my boss and there're just the two of us but we've never discussed me working near my home. There's a business centre near my house, but I think she expects me to work here because she doesn't want to be alone, even though she knows what it's like because she used to travel the distance in the opposite direction."

 **Business centre user – Paris, Pont de Neuilly**

Conclusion: Third place working is a contemporary norm

While third place working may still be unfamiliar to some, the research shows it is now significant and normative. For many people, working in a third place forms the rump of their work activity and time, and substantially more prevalent than working at home. Their work in a defined physical place – frequently and regularly – shows that they have not dispensed with physical place as an irrelevant and unnecessary aspect of work life.

3. Unlocking people's productivity



Chapter 2 established that – for those who work in third places at least – physical place remains a relevant dimension of work life. For those who work in these settings this is largely a choice. Why do they choose this? Do these places influence how they work and promote their productivity? And if they are free not to work in a traditional office setting, why are they not working at home? Is this because of practical constraints, or is it also a choice? What benefits does third place working bring? This chapter addresses the ‘whys’.

Third places: user benefits

Our previous research suggested numerous benefits from working in third places, particularly third places close to home.

Benefits of working in third place settings

- Convenient location
- Reduced travel time
- A business-like / professional environment
- Feels motivating / stimulating
- Available support and facilities as you require
- Guaranteed space to work
- Confidential work setting
- More flexibility in work hours and location
- A change of scene / somewhere to work separate from home or elsewhere
- Reduced distraction
- Sense of community / less isolation
- Scope to network / meet people
- Better work–life balance
- A ‘greener’ / more sustainable lifestyle

The interviewees in the current study widely endorse these benefits as reflecting their experience, and proposed several others in addition.

The analysis identifies three high-level reasons – apart from convenient access – why people choose to work in the given third place where they were interviewed. Across the range of third places, key drivers are:

- Facilitating productive work
- Safeguarding work–life balance
- Easing work–family interface

Conducive mindset

A mental state aligned to working

Why does anyone who could elect to work at home, who has the technology, space and licence to do so, choose to work elsewhere? The data explains this apparent anomaly, based not just on practical constraints at home but also reasons that are ‘in the head’.

A frequent driver for third place working is its motivational influence: a more productive mindset. This energising effect is reported across geographies, and equally by people working in business centre, coffee shop and library settings.

“It’s more productive working here than on the go; it’s a more structured environment and there’re less distractions. Here you’re in work mode, outside you’re in a leisurely mode, so it’s not as productive.”

Business centre – Essex, Chelmsford

Getting started

Productive working depends on mobilisation. Users report difficulty in initiating work activity at home.

“Some people find it hard to work at home because they need to cross the line between work and their daily life. If I worked from home, I’d probably sit in my pyjamas with the TV on in the background; it wouldn’t be good.”

Business centre – Essex, Chelmsford

Leveraging off other people working

One of the most frequently cited benefits is being galvanised by a sense of common purpose people around, working too.

This challenges the convenient corporate real estate belief that people undertaking solo work can do it equally effectively at home. Numerous interviewees speak of their need to do their own work surrounded by others who are also working, and some convene with friends in a third place for the mutual encouragement to keep working, though their respective work content has no overlap at all.

“I’m more productive working here. You feed off each other, it’s good for productivity.”

Business centre – Hertfordshire, Watford

“I can work with my friend here, it’s very isolating doing a PhD, especially as I’m not near my university, so I try to find friends who are doing PhDs, and especially now that I’m nearly finished – it encourages me to get the work done on time. My friend is doing a totally different topic to me.”

Library – London, Kings Cross

"I have a dog at home who bugs me to go out and play for half an hour. The dog is worse than the kids! The kids have their own space that they go to, but the dog wants me to play."

 **Business centre – New Jersey, Princeton**

Free from distractions

Working at home involves distractions that sidetrack people from their work intentions – domestic tasks, snacking, family members, neighbours and pets.

"I prefer to work from here. If I worked at home I'd end up doing other stuff. I know there're things to do at home, I see that there's gardening to do, or the washing. There's nothing to take my mind off work here."

 **Business centre – London, London Bridge**

Complete freedom to focus, as the work requires

Home presents a continual struggle to ignore competitive claims on people's attention; they report only being able to focus fully on work when they are away from home.

"I don't work at home, because of discipline and work ethic – I only work at home in the evening to finish up work. I work here even if I'm not seeing clients or using the library's databases."

 **Library – London, Kings Cross**

Change of scene

Physical place forms a large part of the driver for third place working. One of the strongest advantages people report is change of scene. This is about promoting the right mindset.

Case-study:

 **Hong Kong, Central**

"Time goes very quickly here – it's important to keep in the mindset. I like to keep moving. It's very situational – the main factor is being able to walk to the ferry, continue what I'm doing, and have everything within 15 minutes' walk – here, the other business centre, etc. In the absence of meetings, I prefer to be at home in the morning and work here in the afternoon.

When you get off the ferry you're in that mindset. There's a benefit from movement, I like to be on the move so I gain a change in scenery. Where I live it's very quiet and in Hong Kong it's not, so the change gives me the drive for working."

Safeguarding work–life balance

Different settings; different roles

People use spatial separation to support different roles. They attach different 'selves' to different zones and places.

Many people work in a third place to protect their work–life balance. It's about home as the place to relax, where they can draw a line under work and let go. Across the geographies and the third place settings, people report having to establish a physical separation between home and work to achieve this.

Significantly, this point is made by all age groups, with the youngest age bands (below 20, and 20–30) as forceful as the oldest in voicing its importance. The data challenges a supposition that younger people – grown up with virtuality and multitasking – are more flexible than 'digital migrants' in their approach to physical place. Most young people interviewed expressed a need to separate home and where they work, with 63% reporting 'change of scene' to be a benefit of working in third places.

Compartmentation: would never stop working if worked from home

Spatial separation to support mental separation! It's also a strategy to secure 'downtime'. Media discourse is very lively on the threat of ubiquitous technology to people's personal time. With permanent access to technology, physical location is often the only relevant marker to define a limit to work. The irony is that with technology's scope to work 'wherever you are', people are using physical place to define where work is off-limits.

"Working in the office allows a separation and enables me to relax and compartmentalise my life. It makes more sense for me to come here than to drift into family stuff and drift into work. That's what used to happen before – it was harder to separate the two. The challenge when you work at home is ensuring that you don't work too much."

 **Business centre – Essex, Chelmsford**

"The danger when you work from home is that you think you've got good work–life balance, but work seeps into home time. If you leave a workplace, you're done. It's a physical break – you leave and then you're home."

 **Business centre – Hertfordshire, Watford**

Separating 'own' and contracted work

Technology also facilitates being able to work on varied accounts and to different masters; much contemporary work is done on a portfolio basis. The research reflects this, with numbers of interviewees working for employers as well as themselves. Whether their own work is developing business opportunities, fulfilling contracts that are up and running, or pursuing study, doing it in a third place helps them keep it distinct.

"I also work on my own projects as well as my contracted work. I'm an author as well as a copywriter. So I have different environments to work in. It's nice to have that separation between my personal projects and those I'm contracted to do – it's a marker of my own time and it switches your mindset."

 **Business centre – London, London Bridge**

Easing work–family interface

Given the realities of life for those with family responsibilities, juggling work and domestic involvements involves inevitable strains that people seek to alleviate. Physical proximity between work and home is valued for the peace of mind it affords, by allowing them to move between their respective commitments in shorter time frames, reducing the risk of delay through travel contingencies. Third places have a specific role in this, enabling people to work closer to home, their children's school, other family members and pets that require attention, than working in their company's office would often permit. And the peace of mind that this brings promotes productive working.

"The bus picks up my child in the morning and she goes to after school club, and either I or my husband pick her up. But if there's an emergency, I want to be close, and I don't have a long commute to here, so it makes that possible."

 Business centre – New Jersey, Princeton

"I feel more comfortable working nearer to the school that my daughter is at. When she first started school, I worked in Central London and felt uncomfortable not being able to access her immediately if there was a need – I would have to factor in 45 minutes to get there. It's slightly different now, because she's at a school that offers after-care, but my potential to be late isn't as great now because this centre is so much nearer."

 Business centre – London, Chiswick

"My wife is disabled so I need to be nearby. I have to work somewhere that's easily commutable everyday."

 Business centre – London, London Bridge

"There are physical walls at home, but my family don't respect them. The kids come home from school and if I'm working at home they come down and talk to me. It's hard, when I'm physically there, for my daughter not to be physically with me – she'd want to sit next to me. Or if I know it's just downstairs, I would go and do some work. Now that I work at this center, I can concentrate my work time and then when I'm home I'm mom."

 Business centre – New Jersey, Princeton

Close proximity to school and day care

Working in a convenient location to meet routine commitments makes life more sustainable. And the further benefit of being in easy reach 'in case something happens' is a notable strong theme voiced by third space users. It is almost universal in the reasons that interviewees at the US business centres give for working in their chosen settings.

Diversity is more than just parents with young children

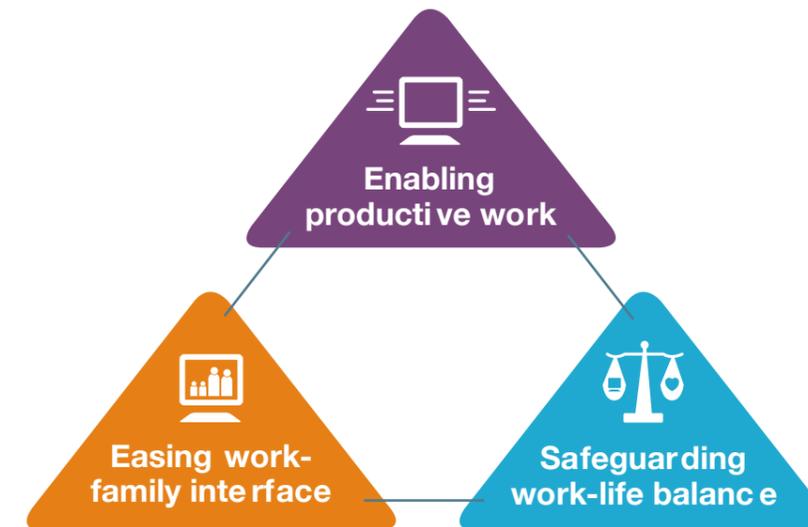
The work–family issues that people need to accommodate do not just involve young children. Wider family responsibilities also feature – to partners, parents, even siblings' children. Recognising these requirements is relevant to corporate strategies for diversity.

Protecting family life; protecting work

A key driver in compartmentalising work and home is ring-fencing family life. The challenges are keeping work out of family and safeguarding work from intrusion by family. Physical separation helps to achieve this.

Third place benefits

Productive and sustainable: the building blocks



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Conclusion: Working away from home enhances productivity, facilitates family involvement and secures downtime

The data confirms the research proposition that place still matters in the digital age. People use different physical zones to support different mind zones. The interviewees use places other than home to help them be productive. This is driven by practical constraints at home, e.g. shortage of space or technology limitations, as well as psychological factors. And it is mindset that dominates; the inability to start work and keep working productively at home drives people to work in third places, alongside their need to define a space where they feel entitled not to work. Productivity is also enhanced by peace of mind from being able to meet family commitments as well as work, and to be in easy reach from work in the event of family contingencies.

Less distance: more sustainable, more productive



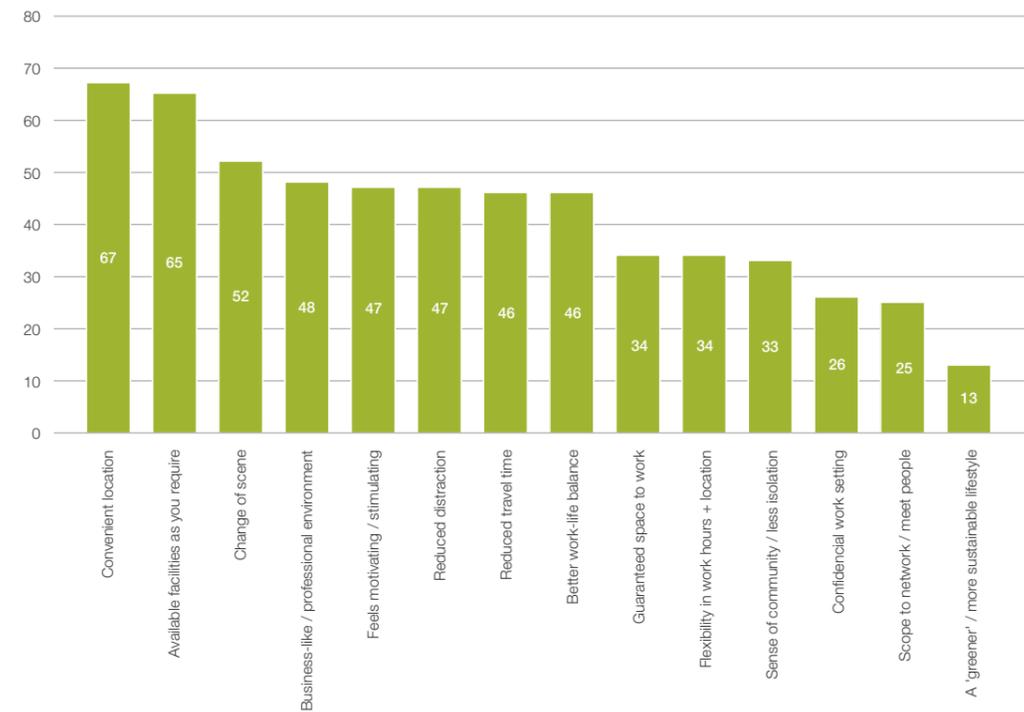
Chapter 3 established significant benefits of working in third places. This chapter focuses on location, addressing potential benefits of third places that are located close to residential areas. In big cities, this means third places like those we have researched – at transport hubs and away from the city centre.

Does a separate place to that which is close to home conserve energy and free time to allocate productively? Can less distance make for a better work life? Can it improve the interface between work and personal life? Can it reduce stress?

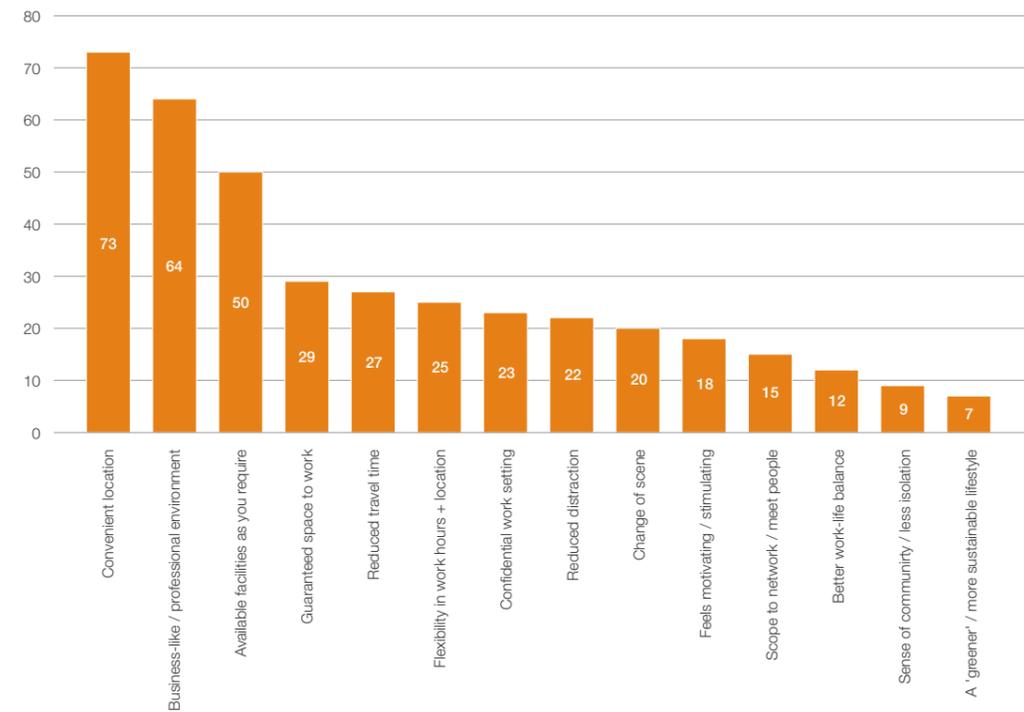
Convenient location is key

The researchers asked people to identify – without rank ordering – benefits that apply to their use of the setting where they were interviewed. Our hypothesis was that a third place location in easy reach of home is the primary benefit. The data confirms this proposition, with convenient location the most widely cited benefit of third place working.

Benefits from third place working (all interviewees)



Benefits from third place working (Large-scale Global Business Survey)



Working close to home

For the interviewees in this research, convenient location means working in easy reach of home. They report numerous benefits that flow from this.

“My workplace is now 10 minutes from home. It’s improved my life significantly, I have the flexibility to go home if I need to and I can stay late if I need to. My wife works in Manhattan so it’s good to have the proximity to home, it gives ease of mind. People who have to commute to the city are envious of my situation.”

 **Business centre – New York, Rye**

“It’s close to home and the kids’ school, and it’s flexible – I can get access here anytime, for example, at the weekend.”

 **Business centre – New Jersey, Princeton**

Responsive to work and family

A work venue close to, but away from, home is the critical factor enabling productive work and sustainable living. Indeed, many interviewees have selected the third place where they mostly work because its location benefits both work and family life. As many people do not live close to their employers’ offices, use of a third place facilitates ease of access between home and work.

Improved commute

Working close to home simply makes for an easier life, saving on travel time and dovetailing more easily with home.

“I do a lot of hours. If I was working in Paris I would have to add 20 hours per week commuting time, plus if my wife needs anything, here I’m just five or ten minutes away.”

 **Business centre – Paris, Marne La Vallée**

Working on the outskirts

In large metropolitan areas people live away from the centre for affordability. Others live there out of lifestyle preference. The two reasons may overlap. For people who live on the city’s outer edge, working close to home means working away from the city centre.

Avoiding city centre as a routine

For some, just engaging with the city centre feels like a struggle. Working in the suburbs or outer edge reduces stress and generates capacity.

“It’s good being on the outskirts and not having to go into Central London. It helps me to de-stress; when I get to work I’m in a state to start working efficiently and effectively. And when I get home, I’m more relaxed.”

 **Business centre – Essex, Chelmsford**

Avoiding public transport

Everywhere, but notably in certain geographic regions, people are nervous about using public transport. Working in a third place on the outskirts avoids that dependency.

“This centre is only 40 km from Paris, but it would take three hours to get to Paris by car in the morning. And I’m not comfortable taking the train because people don’t have the manners, the trains are too crowded, there’re strikes, and I am concerned about personal safety.”

 **Business centre – Paris, Marne La Vallée**

Travelling against the commuter flow

Third place working on the urban periphery is unlikely to eliminate travel, but avoids commuting to the city centre.

A greener lifestyle

Few interviewees – irrespective of age or geography – report environmental concern as influencing their choice of work setting, but reducing their environmental impact through a shorter commute does matter to some. For others, working on the outer edge means greener living – a lower density, more open environment and easier travel – promoting quality of life.

“I have a lot more time, and I’m not tired working here. I can do a lot of things, like playing tennis, that were impossible when I worked in central Paris because travelling there takes one hour, and you’re standing up on the train and have to wait for trains – so you’re always tired. Here it’s different – it takes five minutes to get home, so I can cycle and do sport every evening, and sometimes cycle to the centre.”

 **Business centre – Paris, Marne La Vallée**

Bridgehead to the city centre for work or social activity

Third places away from the centre are valued as a staging post between home and the city core. This has dual advantages for work and personal life.

“For me work–life balance is more important than anything else. I’ve done 13- or 14-hour days before and there was no work–life balance. In this location, my children are close by and there’s the train link to London.”

 **Business centre – Hertfordshire, Watford**

Less pressure; more control

Peace of mind equates to the relative absence of pressure and more control. People who have switched working from an office in the city centre to a third place on the outskirts close to where they live describe the 'before and after' comparison, testifying to the improvements they now enjoy.

Case-study:

 Business centre – New Jersey, Princeton

"When I worked for a different company in New York City, it was about the same commute time as working here, but it felt different. I'm driving now and I feel more in control. There's more flexibility, I'm not dependent on public transport. You get a different commuting feel, there's no hustle and bustle. It's gentler here, I gain from the peaceful setting and having control over the commute and the route. I can run errands on the way home now, and I'm not locked into the train schedule or bus route.

In New York everyone moves fast, so you move fast. I'd been working in the city for 20 years. This is a piece of cake by comparison: it's much more pleasant, it's just the traffic and the weather now, but there's no pushing from people. Because of the flexibility in my commute now, I can also do much more. It gives more of a continuous seam of things I can do on the way here or home – stop and pick things up, do errands, and so on."

Case-study:

 Business centre – New York, Rye

"It allows for a work-life balance – I don't spend two hours on the train to commute, so I can either do what I want with the time, or work more. There's less stress, I can go home and then come back – after dinner for example. I used to commute to the city and this is a very big difference. The value is beyond financial – it's just nicer not to have the commute."

Case-study:

 Business centre – London, Chiswick

"Now I have a short commute to this centre with no traffic jams. The result is that I have an hour to an hour and half more time every night at home, and this extra private time is wonderful! I work a lot here, compared to my previous office, plus I have more time to run after work. I run every night now, I didn't exercise so much before."

"Travelling is stressful, I don't travel as far getting here, so it's less stressful. And knowing at the back of my mind that I'm in close proximity to home, work and my daughter's school now is perfect. It helps me to enjoy the job."

 Business centre – London, Chiswick

And it is not just the time factor and the commute itself. A shorter distance between home and work is less stressful in itself.

Leveraging the benefits

Productive and sustainable: working close to home



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Conclusion: Work settings close to people's home zone

People aspire to work in easy reach of family responsibilities, and to be buffered from family when they focus on work. The research endorses the proposition that work settings close to home support productive working and sustainable living. This is the fulcrum to realising the productivity and work-life balance that users report for third place working, and for easing the interface between work and family, and reducing stress.

The realities of economics and personal circumstances mean that people live widely dispersed across metropolitan areas, whereas organisations cannot have offices close to all. This is a primary value of third places – accessible work settings across large cities, irrespective of company office location. This means scope for people to work away from home, but close to their home zone, releasing time and mental capacity, affording control, supporting concentration and enhancing quality of life.

More than location: distinctive third place benefits



Chapter 4 established that third places are a practical solution to the challenge of spatial dispersal in global cities. As a way of making work settings outside home widely accessible, this is significant and valuable. This chapter looks at further potential properties and benefits that may be associated with these settings by virtue of their nature as third places. Do they offer other distinctive advantages in addition?

Working close to home

"I don't need to worry about security and maintenance here. It was very frustrating previously when I had an office. For example, if the security alarm failed there, I had to do everything to sort it out, or if the fire alarm went off I'd have to go in, check it, report it, and so on. I can just forget about everything like that when I work here. This place is good for my mental health!"

 **Business centre – London, Chiswick**

"We chose this centre because it offers an all-in service – they offload the more mundane things from us, like making sure that there's milk in the fridge. We can just focus on the work, we don't have to fight with cleaners or deal with post. All of the stuff that's not relevant to running our business, they sort."

 **Business centre – Hertfordshire, Watford**

Infrastructure without responsibility

Third places are managed venues. Coffee shops, libraries and business centres are run by operators whose job is that – to run these facilities. This enables users to dedicate themselves to work. People who work in settings that offer a full range of support – from office reception to stocking the photocopier – report benefitting from reduced stress and expanded capacity to focus on core business. Being able to pass the baton, free from the practical burdens of running and maintaining a workplace, translates into added productivity.

Taming the chaos of work on the move

People like sales and technical staff whose work is defined by visits to client sites, and others whose work is 'on the move', can struggle to feel settled. They value working in comfortable space where they can reset their rhythm, document transactions and plan next steps. Working in a professional setting saves time and restores capacity. A key benefit is operating with the confidence that you are entitled to be in a place to work, without the risk of being ejected.

Case-study:

 **Regus London, London Bridge**

"As a salesman I need to get on the computer, for keeping records, making appointments, etc. There is the company office in Kent, but my patch is in London. Prior to working at this centre, I used to work in places like Starbucks. It was very noisy, you couldn't always get a table, you couldn't always get the internet, and I couldn't make a sales call. There're loads of coffee places around that I could go to work in, but each time you have to buy a coffee it costs £1.70, and even then the place isn't quiet, and the biggest problem is getting an internet connection. So I used to find big office buildings and just perch in the reception area to use the internet there. It's like knowing where in town there's a good WC. But I always felt edgy about not having a right to be there, and dreaded the embarrassment of being told to leave."

At my previous company we had meetings in a business centre and I'd heard of business lounges, which we would use for informal one-to-one meetings. I found out that a card to use them only costs £245 for a year. That's the price of a cup of coffee a day! My new company didn't need any talking into it, they were surprised that it was so cheap. It's ridiculously cheap for what you get! Now I have use of business centres, I don't need to use those other places."

Enhanced work life

Sense of community

While most interviewees do not become highly engaged with other people in third places where they work, they welcome the sense of community from personnel and other users there. This enlivens their day and reduces isolation, particularly for people working on their own, in small teams, or with colleagues who are often out and about. Third place communities can generate commercial opportunities, with users benefitting from sales or on-the-spot procurement. The operator may promote business networking.

"It's a better feel having people around. Even if they're doing completely different things, you just feel that others around here are working. We're all here for a purpose, we're all pulling in that direction – as opposed to no one being there."

 **Business centre – New Jersey, Princeton**

"It makes you feel like you're part of something, like you're not alone. You feel like you're in a social setting even though you're not actually interacting."

 **Coffee shop – New York, Manhattan**

"This centre is in beautiful, pleasant surroundings, it's quiet and it's spacious. It helps you to clear your mind at lunch, or you can step outside. There's not the stress of New York City, for example."

 Business centre – New York, Rye

Being in a fine environment

Use of a third place can offer a more attractive work environment than individuals, small organisations, field or outpost teams could otherwise access independently. Interviewees report this as fostering their enjoyment of work and improving productivity.

"There're specialist databases here that I can't access at home. It's very convenient for investigations and there's excellent free wifi – it's why I'm here."

 Library – London, Kings Cross

The right facilities when they're needed

Having facilities available for situations when they are needed contributes to effective performance. The benefits are practical and also psychological: the interviewees report feeling more confident in presenting themselves when they can access facilities like meeting rooms for use on demand.

"The staff here go out of their way to help me. It makes you feel like you're not alone. Even if you're a solo operator, there're other people that you can depend on. If I'm late for a client then they cover for me. If I can't get to an appointment, for example, they'll say 'she's stuck in traffic'. It works. You need to feel that someone's covering your back"

 Business centre – New York, Rye

Proactive professional support

In places like business centres that offer strong on-site support, users value being 'backed up' by the centre team.

"Sometimes I have a problem when I'm away and the staff here help me. I feel less worried because of the support I get here – for example, last time I was in Bangkok I received something in Paris that needed to be sent on. The centre staff sorted it out for me – it was very nice. I feel good here, because of the security and everything. It's also the image when visitors are received by the reception team. And when a customer calls and the front desk answers, it's better. It's like we're a big company, even though we're small – it's more professional."

 Business centre – Paris, Marne La Vallée

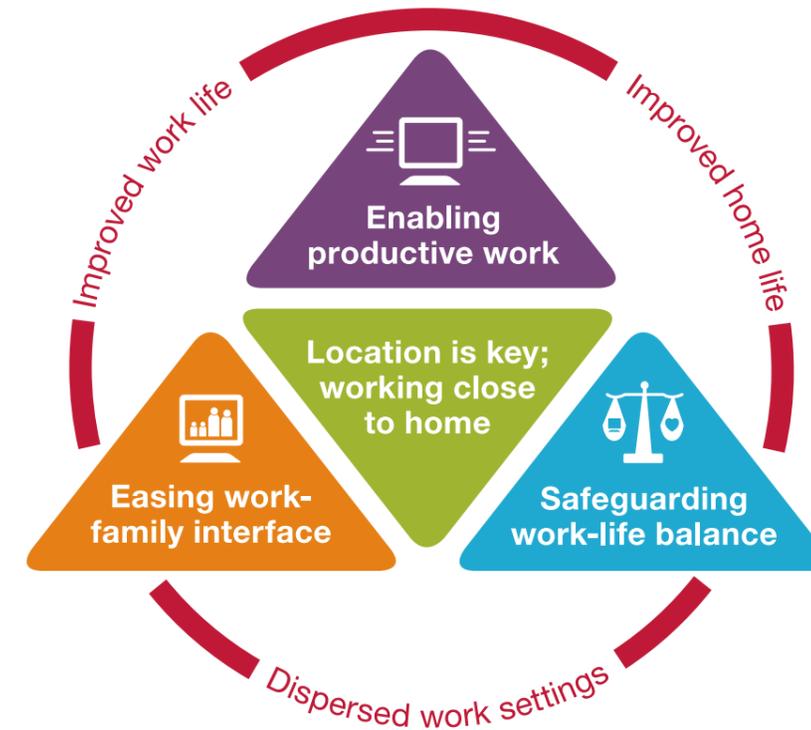
Promoting productivity: exploiting talent

21st century choice

Today's dynamic technological, economic and social conditions create opportunities for individuals and pose new challenges for organisations. The world of work is defined by choice: what people can do, where they do it, and for whom. Attracting and harnessing talent is a central challenge for business. Third place working that enhances the quality of work life supports this agenda.

Distinctive third place benefits

Cumulative advantages



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Conclusion: Enhanced work life

The research identifies a cluster of benefits associated with third places that reduce hassle and enhance the quality of users' work life. These qualitative improvements are distinctive to the nature of third places. While they apply across the range of settings, depending on the user profile, certain types of third places may offer more benefits. Libraries may be more relevant for those needing to consult specialist databases, and business centres offering a fuller range of support in a professional environment more relevant to business users. Given the scope for personal choice in contemporary working, use of settings that support and enrich work can confer competitive advantage to organisations in attracting, motivating and sustaining talented people.

Corporate focus: commercial and operational advantages



Productivity depends on individuals; organisations build value from productive contributors. The mental capacity to concentrate on core content, communicate effectively with colleagues and project with confidence to clients is fundamental to successful performance. Chapter 5 established that third places can promote these productive states and also make work more enjoyable. But organisations are more than collections of individuals; they have corporate requirements in addition. What might third places offer organisations at the corporate level? Answering this question involves an inevitable focus on business centres: while individuals work across the range of third place settings, business centres are of particular relevance to business users and organisations.

Field teams, branch operations and organisations in transition

Access to workspace that is 'ready to use' and professionally managed by a third party takes the responsibility and burden off people focusing on a start-up. This works similarly for businesses that are transitioning in scale – whether expanding or contracting. And for organisations that are developing outposts in other geographies, or with field staff who are on the move or at client sites, having convenient professional places where workers can go and teams can convene is a valued aid to productivity.

Raft of benefits

The interviewees report a catalogue of benefits that use of business centres delivers to their enterprises – across organisations of different size and stages of development. These include the characteristic easy in / easy out terms, in place of conventional rigid lease conditions, and flexibility to expand or contract on site, alleviating concerns that often weigh down on businesses and their principals.

"There's no worry about long-term capital investment. We don't have to worry about the lease, furniture, etc. – it was easy to come in and the cost is uniform."

 Business centre – New Jersey, Princeton

Cost-effective workspace

Contained package

"This is a key reason for a start-up as you don't want to sort things like couriers, etc. It saves a lot of time for a new company – you just walk in with a laptop, and when you grow you can go and get your own office."

 Business centre – Mumbai, Bandra East

Flexible leases / flexibility as requirements change

"It gives us flexibility if the team grows or shrinks."

 Business centre – London, London Bridge

Facilities on demand

"Having them on an on-demand basis increases our facilities. It would be crazy to pay rent for them if we only need them a couple of times a month."

 Business centre – London, London Bridge

Varied settings depending on the work in hand

"You can move around, it's all at your disposal. For example, if I wanted to write a document or put together a large quote I could go and sit in a comfy chair to do it. Or there're meeting rooms. It's there if I want it."

 Business centre – London, London Bridge

Transferred responsibility for building operations

"It's hassle free, everything is taken care of. I just show up to my office – it's clean and the bills are all taken care of."

 Business centre – Hong Kong, Central

Support from the business centre personnel

"The services from the business centre to assist us add and help. If there's only one of us here, they'll answer the phone and help us with faxing, scanning, parcels, etc. It's like having an extra member of staff."

 Business centre – Essex, Chelmsford

A network beyond one's colleagues

"Being alone, I like the fact that I come here and say hi to people."

 Business centre – New York, Rye

"It's in a fantastic location – the place and the image makes it somewhere we can bring people to."

Prestigious address

 Business centre – London, London Bridge

"My last job was at Deutsche Bank so I was used to a particular standard of environment, and I didn't want to downgrade. Plus this is central and convenient for travelling anywhere in Mumbai. And it's an address that clients relate to and know where to come."

High-quality workspace – stronger image than a small stand-alone office

 Business centre – Mumbai, Bandra East

"It's also to do with the quality of the look and feel here. The professional environment and high quality space in this centre ups everyone's game."

Stepping up to the image

 Business centre – New Jersey, Princeton

"Home can be productive, but the industry we're in is very social and you have to interact with colleagues and clients. You spark off each other a lot and that wouldn't work if we were not together. But we're just a small group; so we couldn't have our own big office and none of us would want colleagues coming to work at our home."

Enabling teamwork

 Business centre – London, London Bridge

"I had to have a professional workspace: even though I didn't hire anyone for the first six months, I couldn't have a colleague work from my home."

More professional than a home office

 Business centre user – Hertfordshire, Watford

Punching above one's weight

A frequently cited benefit that small businesses report from using business centres is the boost that this gives to their marketplace projection. Business centres afford access to better quality space than a small entity can typically access independently. Apart from its own people stepping up to the standard and working more productively, the scale, image, facilities and building quality of well-appointed centres enhance the way small businesses present to their external audiences.

"Being in a bigger building projects a sense of scale. Clients don't know that we just use a tiny bit. People are incredibly impressed by it. It's the sense of scale that you can align yourself with internally, and how you project yourself to clients."

 Business centre – London, London Bridge

Conclusion: Third places provide support at the corporate level, especially for entities with small or itinerant teams, and those in transition

The research identifies numerous ways that use of third places supports businesses at the corporate level, and at particular stages of the business life cycle. For organisations, the third place settings that meet the range of requirements are typically business centres. These offer businesses valuable flexibility. It is also cost-effective, affording access to relevant facilities on a 'just-in-time' basis, thereby avoiding the burden of resourcing and servicing when they are not required. For field teams, branch operations and organisations in transition, business centres offer a more professional footing and more assurance of confidentiality than other types of third place. They are also preferable to home – even when individual members of the organisation have a home office, or a home office might be an option. This concerns professional image, privacy at home, and the comfort zone for all parties, given that an employer's, colleague's or supplier's home is not a neutral place.

Harnessing talent in global cities: meeting personal and business needs



The previous chapters established that third place use is now a norm, and that third places – both in themselves, and in the scope they offer for many people to work close to home – offer benefits at the individual and corporate levels.

Distilling the analysis and the user narratives, what high-level strategic messages does the research offer?

The pivot is location

With physical place so central to the advantages of third place working, the pivot is convenient location. It is about a place that generates capacity to work and unlocks the range of benefits that third place users describe – working away from home, without wasting time on travel, and better scope to meet personal and domestic commitments.

The user endorsements of convenient location are loud and clear. They highlight unarguable benefits of third place settings close to residential areas. For the vast numbers of people who live on the outer edges of global city regions – because they cannot afford to live in the centre or have chosen to live in another type of environment, the correlate is third place settings in outer locations. These are good for work and workers, good for clients, good for time budgets, and good for family and social life.

Good for personal life

A work setting close to home

Most interviewees report freedom to choose where they work in terms of family and personal commitments. What they opt for is away – but not too far – from home. They value a place distinct from home, but close to their ‘home zone’. This promotes productive work and sustainable living.

“I want to be near home for family obligations and contingencies, I take the children to school – it’s my fatherly role. One day I take my daughter, the next day my wife does, and I pick her up at 6:00 pm. But working at home is difficult when there’s a family – my children are 11 years and 8 months old.”

 Business centre – Paris,
Pont de Neuilly

Good for business

Third places as team spaces: easy reach for colleagues

Productivity relies on individuals, but much of contemporary value creation derives from teamwork.

Third places as team spaces

While third place working is associated with individuals’ agility, many people convene in third place venues in order to work collaboratively, face-to-face. The research identifies numerous reasons why face-to-face teaming is effective.

“We can all travel in on a direct link to here, so it was also about the convenience of transport. The building is nice, the rent is right, the facilities are good and we’ve got trade links here.”

 Business centre – London,
London Bridge

“I can work at home when I’m translating, but it’s important to be here to have the exchange with other people. It’s better being with my colleagues – we can interact together in a multilingual way.”

 Business centre – Paris,
Marne La Vallée

Good transport links

But company towns are past and historic; people convene to work together from multiple directions. For individuals to access third places, and for teams to meet, good transport connections are important.

“The centre is in a fast developing business hub. It’s well connected to the airport and the rest of Mumbai, and there’re good trains nearby.”

 Business centre – Mumbai,
Bandra East

“This centre is close to the Hong Kong Airport Express station, so I can still be here until up to 1 hour and 25 minutes before a flight.”

 Business centre – Hong Kong,
Central

Client engagement

And business is more than solo and teamwork. It’s about markets and customers and relationships. Eyeball contact helps.

“This is close to our largest client. We have face-to-face contact with them two or three times a week and the client can just pop in here from their office up the road.”

 Business centre – Hertfordshire,
Watford

“Using this centre I’m right on my patch. It’s very important for me – people might call and need to see me quickly.”

 Business centre – London,
London Bridge

Between home and city: 'both / and'

Life is rarely either / or. People live spread out across metropolitan areas, but the marketplace power of major cities requires them at times to be 'in'. Despite technology's great scope for virtual contact, face-to-face communication is still central to deal-making and sustained business relationships. A critical point to recognise is that 'sometimes' or even 'often' does not mean 'always'. Working in locations that mediate the distance between home and the city facilitates working both out of the centre as well as in.

Case-study:

Regus centre – New York, Rye

"I worked in New York for many years, but when my child was born we chose to move out of the city, and I didn't want to commute for four hours a day. I needed a place to work that was not home but was also convenient to reach the city. There needed to be a train line – because of inter-state road travel my wife would prefer it if I didn't have to drive: there's an accident every day. My company said I could select workspace anywhere. I needed a workplace that was not at home and convenient to get to the city. So I picked a centre that was equal distance from New York and Connecticut.

This centre meets the bill – I can walk here from the train station. Sometimes I come here, then get the train to New York, and from there get the train straight home. I often have to go in to New York at the drop of a hat – so much happens, and suddenly I might have to go out for dinner. I can walk to the station and be there in an hour. I couldn't do that travelling in from home. If I didn't have to get in to New York so quickly and frequently I may have built up a home office, but if I worked at home it would be too hard to get into the city."

Suits dispersed activity

For many people engaged in 21st century work, there is no 'always'. The closest to 'always' is 'always on the move'. Third place working is the paradigmatic solution to itinerant activity – locally, regionally and internationally, given the wide access it offers for settings for work.

"I go to the company's own office, the client or a business centre when I need to. For example, today I'm supposed to be in EC1 but I've got a lot of quotes to do, so I may go there later, and I could then go to the network's business centre in Holborn. The London Bridge and King William Street centres are both a similar distance from the station, so I can work at one of them later. As a business lounge user, I can use any centre in the network nationwide."

 Business centre – London, London Bridge

"If I'm flying I'll work on the plane, and when I reach my destination I work in other business centres in the group, like I've done in Singapore."

 Business centre – Hong Kong, Central

"We can use any other centre in the network, here or abroad. I use others on a monthly basis – Munich, Paris, Mayfair, LA, etc. It's productive, I don't have to worry about getting the internet or knowing where I can work from."

 Business centre – Hertfordshire, Watford

Conclusion: Flexibility and choice; meeting individual and corporate needs

Not everyone works in an organisation, but there is now widespread choice regarding how and where people invest their energies. For many people today, these choices centre on both being productive and 'having a life'. People look for a set-up that works for them. This means shrinking the distance between where they work and live. As large city regions are characterised by residential dispersal, the challenge for business is provision of workspace close to where people live. For organisations looking to capture available talent, third places are a way to do this. Usefully, they offer a range of other business benefits in addition.

Optimising third place working: guiding choice



The research has established consistent common needs across the profile of third place users: a contrast from home – but working in easy reach; stimulus from other people working; support for work–life balance. These needs are widely expressed by people working in library, coffee shop and business centre settings. But requirements as well as resources vary across these profiles. This chapter provides a framework to optimise the selection of appropriate settings.

Alternative third places: horses for courses

Needs and resources: more stringent requirements for business use

Though some people will do business anywhere feasible, and most will make or take a call or send an email wherever there's a signal, business users have more demanding requirements than other third space users, including a greater requirement for confidentiality and a stronger focus on image. To maximise their capacity for productive work, they must ensure access to available workspace in the right location when they need it. But they also have a differential resource base. Business users have a wider choice of third places than individuals doing limited freelance business or private study. The playing field is not level. Given the options, the research is clear in showing that business centres are business interviewees' first choice of work setting – by a long margin.

"We've abandoned working in coffee shops because these business centres are so convenient, and the information we discuss is sensitive."

 **Business centre user – Hong Kong, Central**

"My workspace here is the most productive, because it's quiet and I'm left alone. I do computer stuff so the most important thing is fast internet connection."

 **Business centre user – New York, Rye**

"I've worked Pret A Manger style before, but for me I like a quiet professional area, but I also like people walking around and a bit of chat. If you're in a solo office it can be very quiet, and Pret-style working is too distracting. These business lounges are ideal."

 **Business centre user – London, London Bridge**

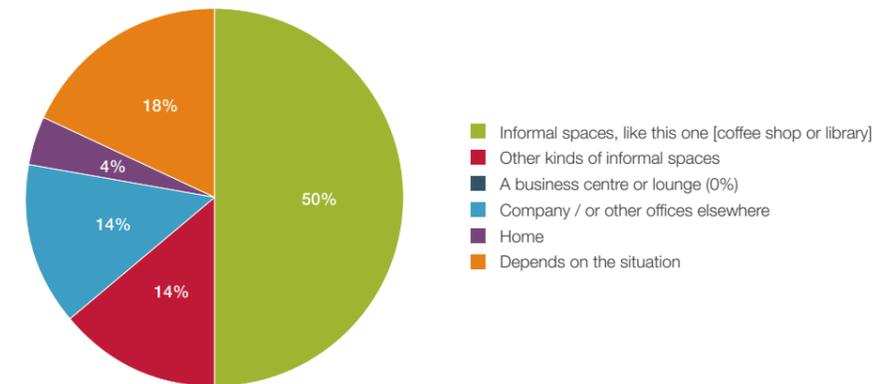
"This location gives me peace of mind and a professional work-life. I'm completely dedicated to work when I'm here, but if there's a problem I can get home in five minutes. It's good to have the equilibrium."

 **Business centre user – Paris, Pont de Neuilly**

Optimal venue for productive work

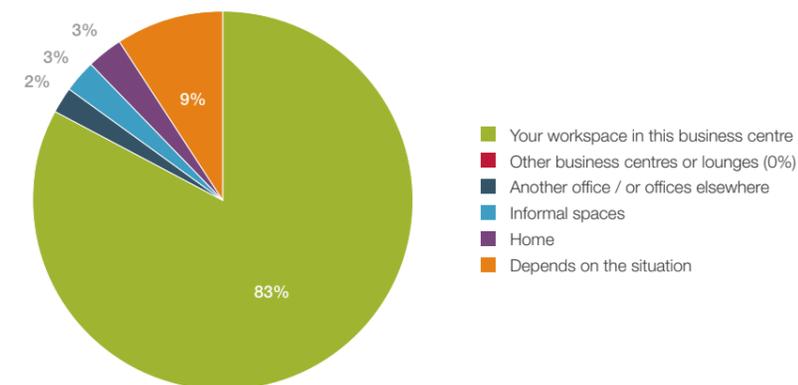
Comparing a range of third places to work as well as home, half the interviewees working in coffee shop and library settings reported the type of venue where they were interviewed as most conducive to productive work.

Setting most conducive for productive work (interviewees working in informal settings)



But a far greater proportion of the interviewees in business centres reported this setting as conducive to productive work – 83%. This shows that people using business centres benefit from better alignment between their work setting and their needs than those using the other third place settings.

Setting most conducive for productive work (interviewees working in business centres)



Productive work: optimal work setting

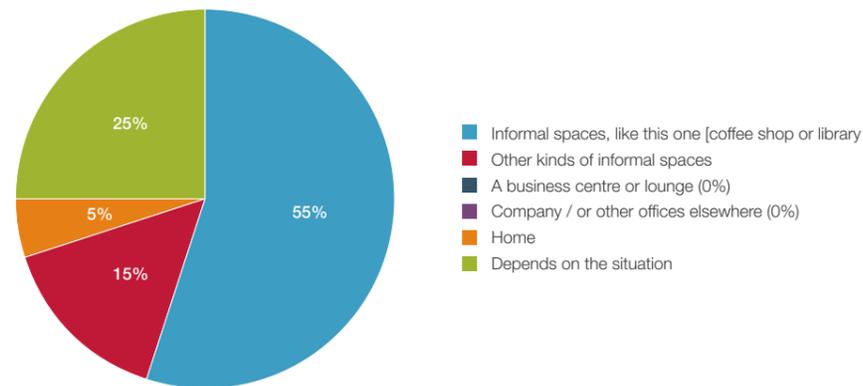
50% of interviewees in library / coffee shop settings report these as most conducive

83% of interviewees in business centres / lounges report these as most conducive

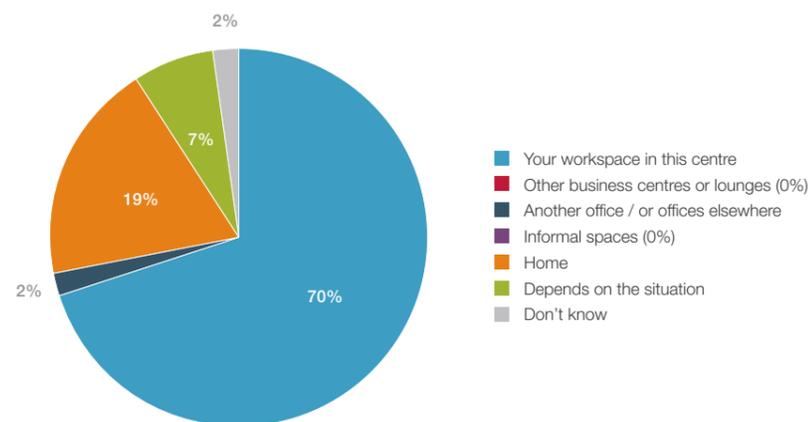
Optimal venue for work-life balance

In terms of support for work-life balance, there is closer convergence between the user profiles. Nevertheless, business centre users still report closer alignment with their needs.

Setting that best supports work-life balance (interviewees working in informal settings)



Setting that best supports work-life balance (interviewees working in business centres)



Work-life balance: optimal work setting

55% of interviewees in library / coffee shop settings report these as most conducive

70% of interviewees in business centres / lounges report these as most conducive

Appropriate third places: toolkit to optimise alignment

A third place to suit: key determinants

Third place users have different needs and resource capabilities. What factors can guide the selection of the most productive setting for individuals and teams?

The research identifies type of work activity as central to appropriate alignment. The following toolkit supports analysis of requirements to inform appropriate third place selection.

Step one: a third place versus home

Employment status: employed / self-employed / self-managed / not employed

Available space and equipment / freedom from interruptions at home

Need to project professional image to customers / colleagues / self

Discipline / ability to work productively at home / on one's own – to get started and continue

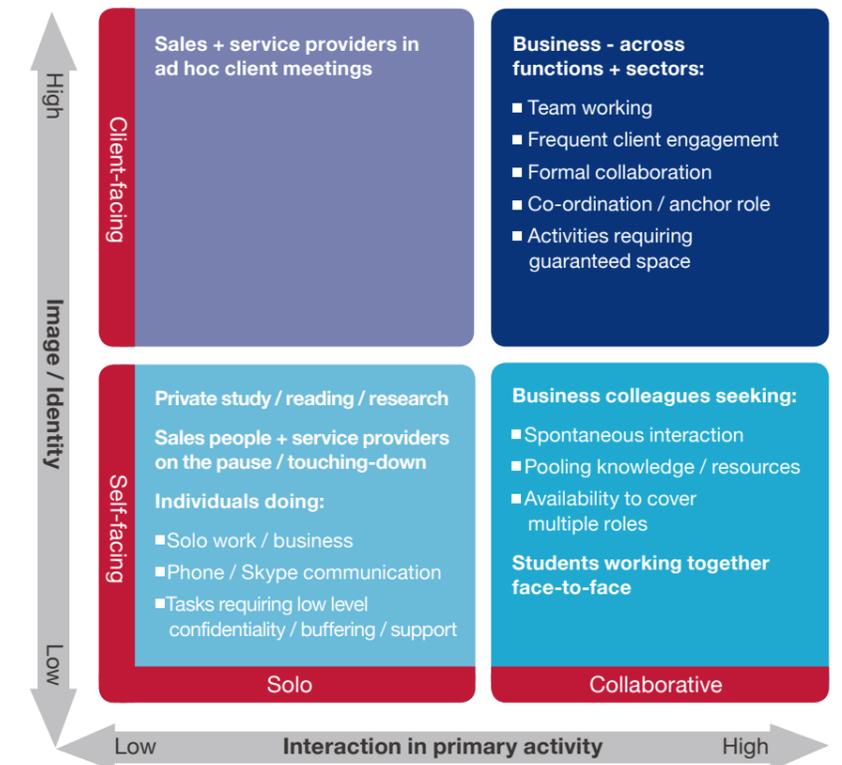
Step two: defining work activity

- Related to study versus business?
- Supported by an organisation versus self-funded?
- Susceptible to image and perceptions of clients and prospects?
- Requiring guaranteed space versus time to wait for space / leeway to move elsewhere?
- Dependent on consistent internet connectivity versus tolerance of downtime?
- Needing confidentiality from overlooking by others?
- Requiring acoustic cushioning / privacy?
- Requiring ergonomic comfort for prolonged working?

The answers to these questions will inform the selection of an optimal third place setting.

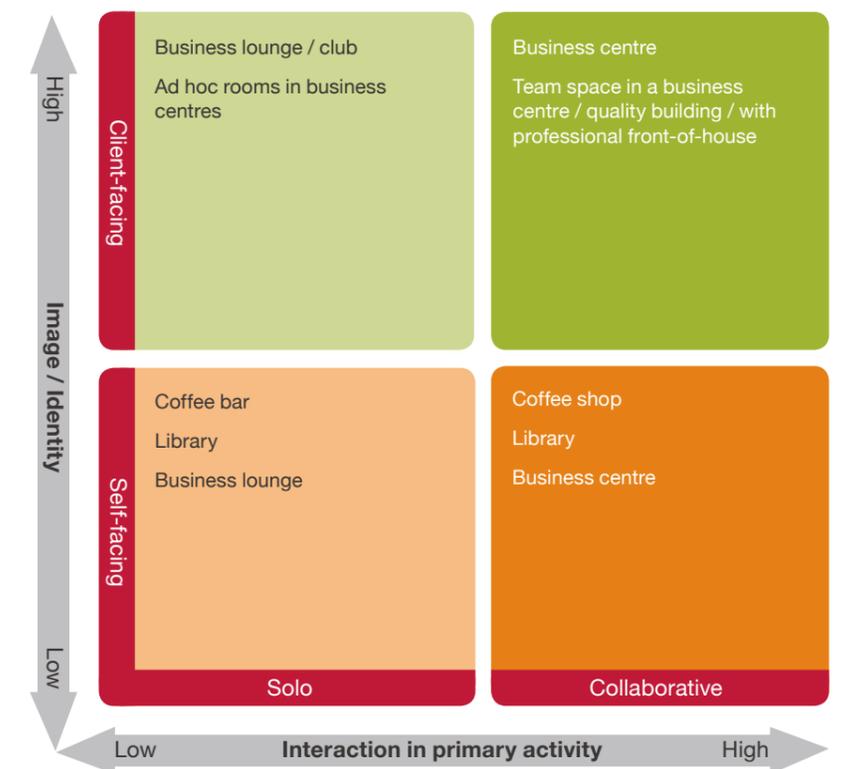
Step three: profiling work activity

Different activities are suited to different third places. The key characteristics of alternative third place settings are represented here.



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Step four: profiling third place settings



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Matching users to third places

Key discriminators

What the role and activities require?

What can be funded?

Alignment to third place settings varies; key discriminators are users' role / activities and status / resources. These are significant in influencing needs, access and choice of work setting.

Other factors relevant to selection relate to identity, culture and stylistic mode – of third place users, their peers and their audiences.

Identity, status, culture and engagement

How we engage with colleagues

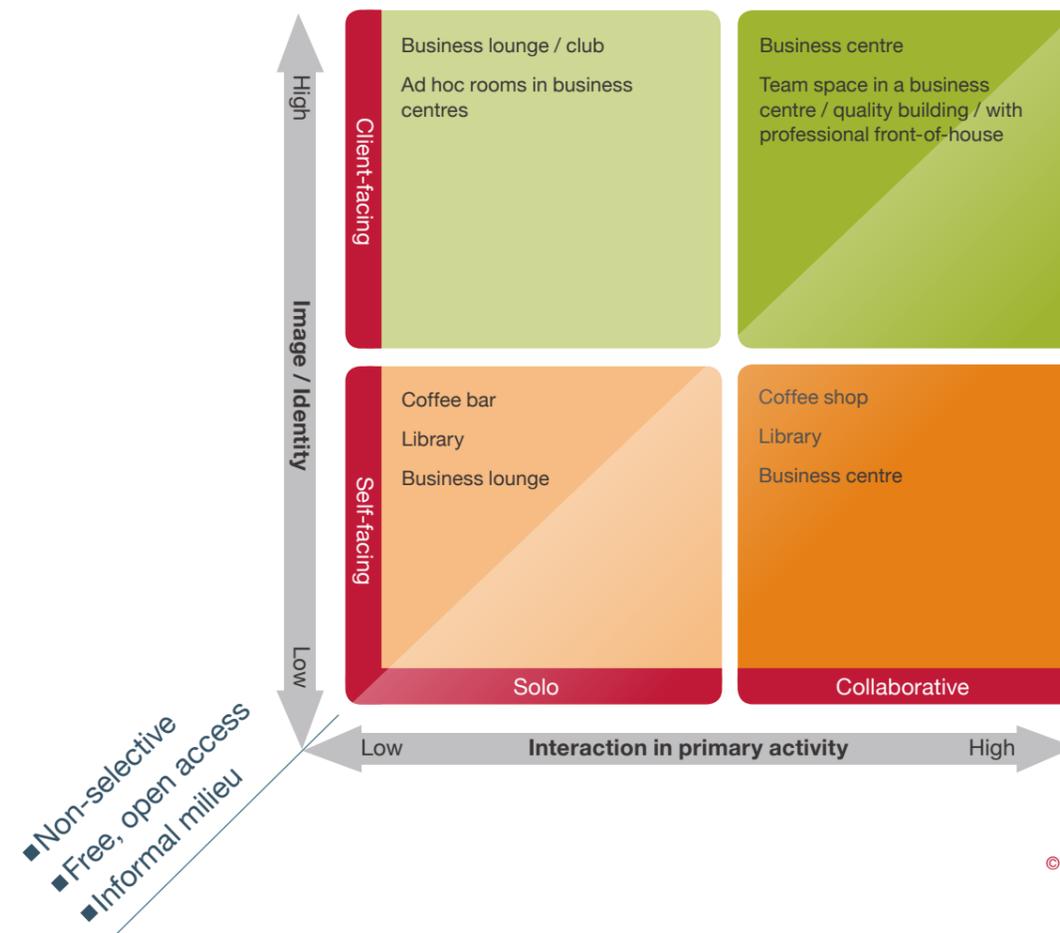
How we engage with clients

How we engage with 'the world'

How we engage with ourselves

Business people have greater choice, with their distinctive access to the high-quality, dedicated workspace and professional front-of-house facilities offered by business centres. The research evidences business users as substantially satisfied with this provision.

Step five: matching users to third places



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Strategic choices: the value of flexibility

Critical path

Once the preferred type of third place has been selected, the next decision concerns location. The research suggests two points that can be in tension:

- Working close to home
- Working in a third place where your manager / colleagues also work.

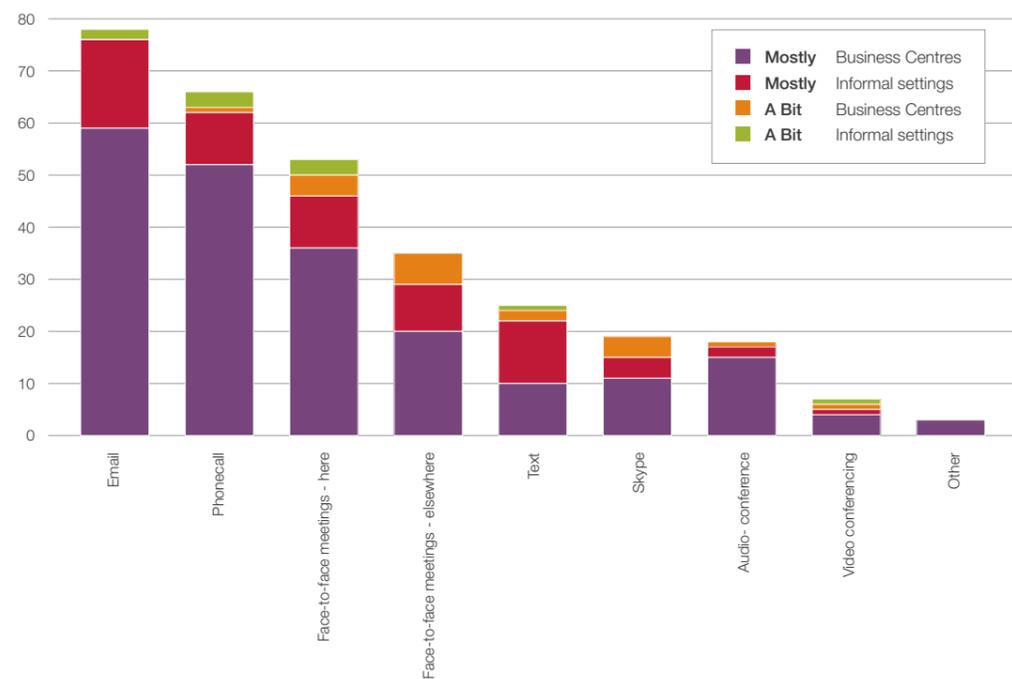
The findings give a strong steer to the value of flexible approaches to where employees and team members work. When the determinant is where the business owners or principal lives, a third place risks becoming the employees' traditional office. If they are obliged or expected to work frequently in a setting far from where they live, they lose the valuable benefits of a third place close to home. The key is to be flexible – providing for physical face-to-face working at times, and supporting use of different locations when that is more effective.

Communicating with colleagues elsewhere

Might use of different third places erode organisational cohesion? The research refutes any concern that a flexible approach to colleagues working in varied third places risks 'out of sight, out of mind'. Many people who work in business centres are part of organisations with offices in other geographies. Interviewees report that frequenting a work setting away from the rest of their organisation does not detract from their bonds with colleagues further afield.

On the contrary, the research shows that working in places like business centres capitalises on a blend of face-to-face and virtual communication. Third places are relevant precisely because of contemporary scope for remote communication, as well as offering the benefits of face-to-face. Both these modes are used and valued. The research highlights peoples' wish for face-to-face communication with colleagues and other people who use the same third place. At the same time, communication with colleagues who are working elsewhere is primarily by remote and virtual means, with email and phone contact with colleagues currently in the lead. The interviewees suggest that this works – a high majority (83.5%⁴) feel a sense of community with their colleagues who work elsewhere, whether in the same country or abroad.

Methods of communication used by interviewees



While videoconferencing technologies are reported as lowest in current use, this has a higher incidence among business centre users than with those who work in informal third places. The likelihood that the use of presence technologies will increase with cost reduction and greater ubiquity is suggested by the interviewees' greater use of Skype – a presence technology that is at the more accessible end of the range, as well as being more established as a mode with younger users.

⁴ NB. 49 interviewees (57%) answered this question, for the remaining 37 (43%) the question was N / A or not answered.

Feeling 'at home': mood and culture to suit

A common factor across the third place user profiles is a preference for working away from home. However, the interviewees generally feel 'at home' in their third place settings – both the more professional and more informal settings – in terms of feeling comfortable about working there. This is about cultural alignment.

At this stage on the critical path – once the type of third place and the optimal location have been established – stylistic preference come into play. Now the choice is about a venue that people like and relate to, because the quality and personality of the space 'speaks' to them, and they perceive other users there as being 'people like me or us'. Based on these criteria, one third space rather than another will be seen to offer a like-minded sense of community.

"All of the people coming here are professionals – it's important to be with professionals – you learn new things and your friends here are professionals, it's not a mix-match."

 Business centre user – Mumbai, Bandra East

A network of third places: the cost and what is included

The first decision about type of third place is essentially a decision about a buffered, professional setting versus a freely accessed informal place. This is about both needs and available resources to meet them. It is about using a business centre versus working in an informal setting as the mainstay.

The specific selection of any setting will encompass many variables – image, facilities, service and terms. In comparing the attributes and costs of alternative options, it is important to consider the full scope of any third place offer, and to factor in any parallel scope to use additional centres that operators may offer in their networks. This point is central to optimising support for contemporary working: in any organisation, all members and associates are highly unlikely ever to live in the same locality. In selecting any given third place, therefore, it is relevant to consider not just the given venue, but the network of other centres – regionally, nationally and internationally – that may come with it.

Conclusion: The value of professional third places close to home

The report has established that defined physical place – supported by contemporary technology – remains central to productive working and sustainable living in the contemporary digital age. It confirms that dispersed work settings in global cities benefit both workers and organisations, and that while people value the ability to connect from anywhere, the ability to work in easy reach of home has special relevance. But despite the needs they share in common – notably a preference to work in a distinct setting away from home and in a convenient location – the requirements of different user profiles vary. The research shows business users as having more demanding requirements than other people who frequent third places, and that business centres are better equipped than more informal settings to meet these needs.

Building the case for third place working



In the contemporary knowledge world, people are essential to successful enterprise. The research has identified multiple ways that third place working can support productive, sustainable working. This chapter collates the benefits to help readers build a case for third place working.

Checklist of benefits

The following checklist draws from the analysis, providing a summary of benefits that the research has shown from third place working.

Third place support for people productivity

The right mindset

- A mental state aligned to working
- Getting mobilised – transcending the daily barrier to getting started
- Stimulation – leveraging off other people working
- Free from distractions
- Not tempted by domestic tasks
- Not side-tracked by family and neighbours
- Not drawn by pets
- Less snacking
- Freedom to focus, as the work requires
- A change of scene – as a stimulus and support for work activity
- A spatial marker between home and work

Safeguarding work–life balance

- Different settings to signify different roles – work and family / personal
- Separating personal and contracted work
- Compartmentalisation to set limits – would never stop working if worked from home

Easing work–family interface

- Close proximity to day care and school – easy access for routine and in emergencies
- The diversity agenda – facilitating wider care responsibilities to parents, spouses, wider family and pets
- Reduced strain in accommodating work, family and personal commitments
- Protecting family life and protecting work

Reduced hassle

- Freedom from responsibility for workplace infrastructure
- Sense of community with other third place users
- Guaranteed access to a work setting
- Less stress – health and wellbeing

Enhanced work life

- Taming the chaos of work on the move
- A standard of work setting otherwise beyond reach
- The right facilities when they are needed
- Professional support from third place personnel
- Enhanced confidence
- Enjoyment of work – enhanced productivity

Easy access from home

- Responsive scheduling to work and family
- Improved commute – less travel / more control
- Avoiding routine engagement with city centre
- Avoiding unpredictability and pressure of public transport
- Easier commuting: against the commuter flow
- A greener lifestyle – less travel
- Working on the urban periphery: a greener environment
- Bridgehead to the city centre – for work and social activity

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Individual productivity is good for organisations, but there are also distinct corporate benefits of third place working. The following checklist summarises ways that third place use can help address the typical challenges and issues faced by organisations.

Third place support for business productivity

Facilitating individual contributors' productivity

Work settings in convenient reach of people's homes, more widely dispersed than affordable or practical, using only an organisation's own space

More professional than a home-office

Cost-effective workspace

Flexible as requirements change

Reduced risk – flexible leases

Reduced overhead – facilities on demand

Improved infrastructure – variety of settings depending on the work in hand

Reduced contingencies – comprehensive / contained package

Reduced worry / increased focus – transferred responsibility for building operations

Enhanced capacity – support from business centre personnel

Focus on core agenda – lessened risk for start-ups

Bigger impact / punching above one's weight – higher quality workspace than typical with a small stand-alone office

Positive projection to clients and prospects – stronger image and prestigious address

Positive impact on principals and the team – stepping up to the image / standard

Convenient liaison point – enabling teamwork with colleagues

Beyond the team – a network beyond a small entity's own colleagues

Conclusion: Learning from third place users

These checklists, respectively focused at the individual and business levels, provide an aide-memoire to strategic planning. They offer the content for building a business case to support distributed working. Backed by the report's user testimonies, this will help those considering a systematic approach for third place working to formulate effective strategies.

Appendix: Who informed the picture

The research draws from two datasets:

- A series of 86 structured, qualitative interviews with individuals working in business centres, coffee shops and library settings, with most of the business centres located on the periphery of large metropolitan areas. The sample included representatives of businesses, students and individuals working on a freelance basis. The research outputs comprise narrative and quantitative data.
- Online responses to a subset of our questions on third space working included in a Global Business Survey to 17,800 respondents in 60 countries.

Thanks are extended to the following organisations that kindly contributed individuals' time and perspectives to the interviews:

AB Accessoires	Media.in.touch
AIT-FIA	Monster Energy Drinks
Amazon (Satellite office)	Multi-chem
Antalis McNaughton	Neopark
Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority	Norgren
Arthur Lawrence	Okotelecom
Better Living	One to One Office Solutions
Bharti Airtel	Perf Recruitment
Bluequant	Questar Capital
Chartis Insurance	Redwood Professionals – Recruitment Consulting
Citrus Holidays	Reisswolf
Colombo Importing U.S. Inc.	Requestec
Concept City Ltd.	Ricardia
Corun New Energy Europe	Rotorics
Design Etiquette	Satisfly
Drop + Collect Ltd. / Collect+ d4 Multimedia	Semler Brossy Consulting Group
ElasticHosts Ltd.	Sharmila Sinha MD, MPH
ESE Study Abroad	ShipServ
ESI logisitcs and transport	Skyplan Group
FMB Asset Management	Streetconnect
Focus Family Mediation	Tanita
Hatch creative	The Katie Price Foundation
IMCD Group BV	The Steve Sinnott Foundation
Indian Country Today Media Network	The JM Foundation & Millbank Foundation for Rehabilitation
Insights	TMA Chartered Surveyors LLP
(ISC)2	Trion
JHWS Consulting Ltd.	Trust 100 LLC
Lamassu Holding Company	United Value Services
Law Offices of Suzanne E Mayer LLC	Vertex Pharmaceuticals
LECA RH	

Geographic spread

The data has wide global coverage. It encompasses views of contributors from the following terrain:

Interviews:

UK, London, Chiswick	USA, New York City
UK, London, London Bridge	USA, New York, Rye
UK, London, Kings Cross	France, Paris, Marne La Vallée
UK, Essex, Chelmsford	France, Paris, Pont de Neuilly
UK, Hertfordshire, Watford	Hong Kong, Central
USA, New Jersey, Princeton	India, Mumbai, Bandra East

Online questions:

Algeria	Greece	Monaco	Russia
Argentina	Guatemala	Morocco	Saudi
Austria	Hong Kong	New Zealand	Senegal
Bahrain	Hungary	Nigeria	Singapore
Brazil	Indonesia	Norway	Slovakia
Bulgaria	Ireland	Oman	South Korea
Chile	Israel	Pakistan	Sweden
Columbia	Italy	Panama	Switzerland
Costa Rica	Jordan	Paraguay	Thailand
Cyprus	Kenya	Peru	Tunisia
Czech	Lebanon	Philippines	Turkey
Egypt	Lithuania	Poland	UAE
El Salvador	Malaysia	Portugal	Ukraine
Estonia	Malta	Qatar	Venezuela
Finland	Mauritius	Romania	Vietnam

The interview data reflects the mobility of people working in large international cities; our research in the five global cities involved individuals of the following 20 nationalities:

French	South African	Indian	Nigerian
Japanese	English	US	Portuguese
Scottish	Canadian	Italian	Saudi Arabian
Spanish	Welsh	Hong Kong / Chinese	
Polish	Turkish	Taiwan	
Lebanese	Irish		

Business sector

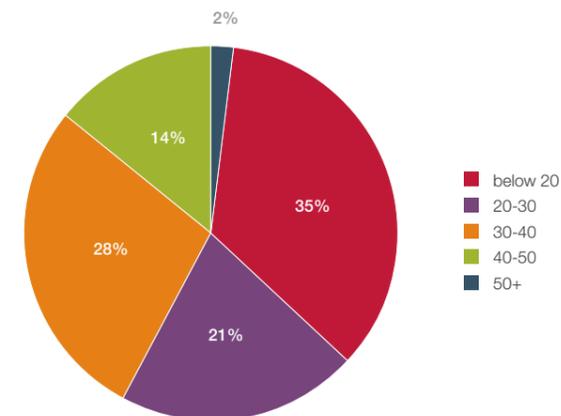
Like the online data, the interview data also represents a wide range of activity. Interviewees' business sectors include:

- Manufacturing / Production / Automotive
- Banking / Insurance / Finance
- Consultancy / Services / Legal / Accountancy
- Retail / Catering / Hospitality / Leisure / Recreation
- Communications / IT / Internet / Telecommunications
- Pharma / Healthcare / Medicine
- Media / Marketing / PR / Publishing / Design
- Not for profit
- Logistics + distribution
- Utilities + construction

Generational influence

Increasingly ubiquitous technology dissolves the necessity of a tie to a fixed place for many types of activity. Relating to this potential may be second nature to people who have grown up in the digital age – more so than to older cohorts. Helpfully, the interviewees sample involves a cross-section of age bands, with a balance between digital natives and those who may be digital migrants.

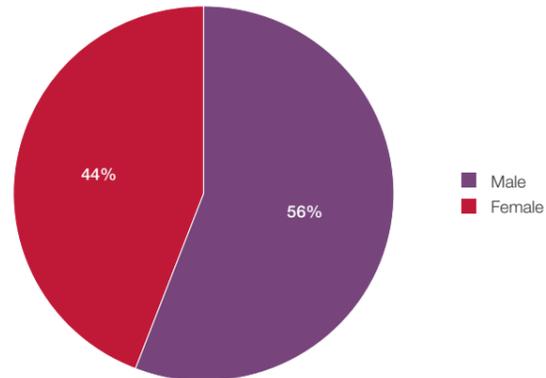
Interviewee age



Gender

Despite increasing equality in gender norms, personal circumstances can still have differential impact on men and on women. This is especially relevant in individuals' juggle of work and family commitments. Helpfully too in this respect, the gender representation in our data is fairly equal.

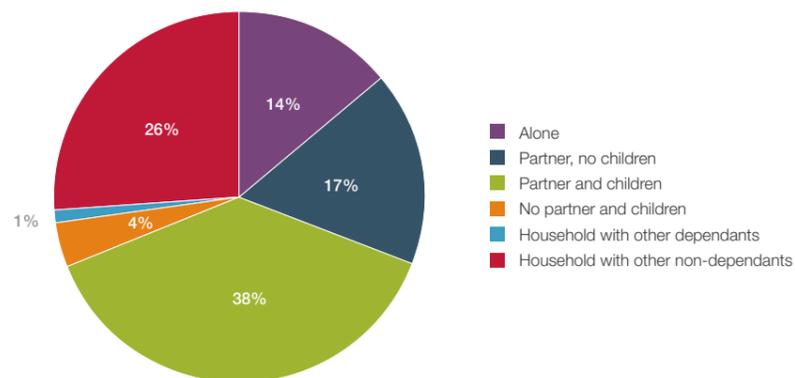
Interviewee gender



Household context

In terms of the responsibilities and pressures faced by people in managing work and family, household context is a proxy for having domestic commitments. The data represents the issues faced by workers with pulls to family: over 43% live in a household with dependants.

Interviewee household type



About the author

Ziona Strelitz

As a Social Anthropologist, Town Planner and Designer, Ziona has forged a distinctive career as a Workplace Strategist, specialising in research and advisory work to inform efficient and sustainable property solutions that address the 'people proposition'. Ziona founded ZZA Responsive User Environments as a channel to provide this niche expertise. She is Visiting Professor at University of Reading, serves on various government panels, has extensive experience as a judge of workplace and town planning awards, and is a frequent presenter at international events. Her book, 'Buildings that feel good' (RIBA 2008), analyses buildings that meet user needs. Her 2010 report, 'Liveable lives: Addressing dysfunction in 21st century work', is also published by Regus.



ZZA Responsive User Environments

ZZA is a research and advisory practice focused on effective development and building use. Based on social science and built environment disciplines, ZZA links cultural, social and design perspectives to shape responsive property strategies. ZZA informs leading occupiers and developers with systematic research on people's experience of locations, buildings, work modes and lifestyles. The practice uses its rich user data and extensive knowledge of property solutions to steer new value propositions www.zza.co.uk

About Regus

Regus is the world's largest provider of workplace solutions, offering the widest range of products and services that allow individuals and companies to work however, wherever, and whenever they need to. Regus operates over 1100 Business centres across 500 cities in 85 countries. Products and services include fully furnished, equipped and staffed offices, world-class business support services, meeting conference and training facilities and the largest network of public video-conference rooms, all serving over 200,000 clients daily.

Regus also supports the growing trend of mobile and home working. Supporting workers at home and on the road, with services such as Virtual Office and Virtual PA, providing dedicated business addresses as their business base as well as mail and call-handling services. Regus also operates business centres in airports and other commercial hubs, to serve clients wherever they find themselves working.

Companies of all sizes use Regus solutions to reduce costs and remove the burden of property ownership and management and to create a workplace to suit however they want to work.

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Notes

