



WORK FROM ANYWHERE?

PART ONE OF A MULTI-PART
PERKINS EASTMAN SERIES
ON THE FUTURE OF WORK

**PERKINS —
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DESIGN RESEARCH

About the Series

New and accelerated shifts due to the pandemic have affected every aspect of life including how and where we work. Some of these shifts include the untethering of work, wellness-centric migration, integration of technology, and higher demands for equity. The full and long-term impact of these shifts is yet to be fully understood as they continue to evolve. Nonetheless, Perkins Eastman's Workplace leaders, in collaboration with the Design Research team, and contributions from experts in complementary practice areas, explored the roots of these shifts and imagined possible future scenarios in a multi-part series.

In this first installment, we explore the ability to work anywhere; its origins, pitfalls, and liberating potentials.



A photograph of a modern office interior. In the foreground, a large, dark wood conference table is partially visible, with several people seated around it. A woman stands at the head of the table, holding a small object. The office has large windows that look out onto a city street with a historic building. The ceiling has recessed linear lighting. The floor is covered in a grey carpet.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Although working remotely outside the office is often viewed as a luxury offered only to a few, increasing climate and health disruptions are likely to make working from anywhere a necessity as opposed to a luxury.
2. Expanding the notion of a workplace from one location to a workplace landscape-comprised of multiple locations, i.e., headquarter offices, augmented spaces, homes, fourth places, and digital spaces- provides employees with choice and companies with the agility to remain operational.
3. Working remotely from any location is not a one-size-fits-all solution and can have both negative and positive impacts on people and planet.
4. Through a process of reflection, empathy, customization, and iteration, companies can invest in understanding their workforce and assessing the impact of their decisions on the environment to find the right balance of spaces, policies, and benefits for the betterment of people, planet, and profit.

WORKING FROM HOME: NOVELTY OR ANTIQUITY?

Although teleworking is often considered a modern invention, working from home was dominant historically for most people (e.g., tradesmen, farmers, and blacksmiths). During the industrial revolution, however, separation appeared between work and home as people started going to work in places such as factories. Most tasks at the time dictated that individuals be tethered to a physical location be it a farm, factory, or shop.

With the rise of knowledge workers in a post-industrial era, more tasks emerged that were cognitive based, as opposed to manual. Going to work changed from going to factories to going to office buildings. Although a percentage of these cognitive based tasks could be completed anywhere, people continued to work mainly from a physical office space. Even after teleworking and work-from-home were introduced in the 1980s,¹ only a modest 20% of people worked outside the office before the start of the 2019 pandemic.²

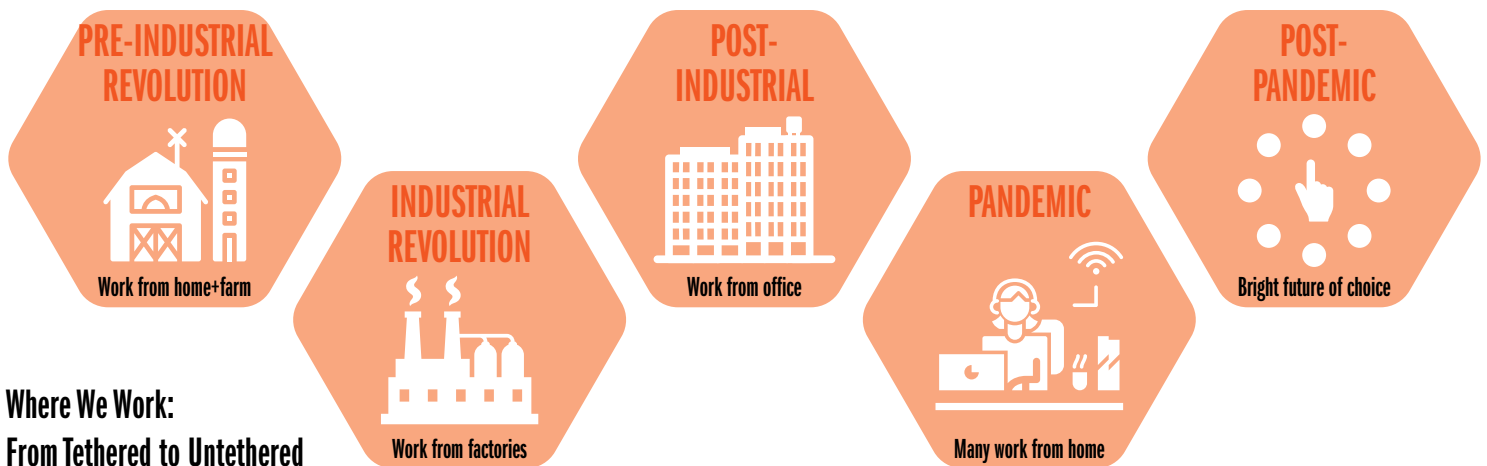
One of the main barriers to teleworking was psychological, with managers unable to break free of what is known as a Taylorism mindset. This concept asserts that efficiency occurred under managements' watch,³ an approach that arguably does not allow for many choices or employee autonomy when selecting where to work.

Then came the pandemic in 2019, upsetting this notion of watchfulness considerably due to vast numbers of individuals forced out of their offices and into their homes. Companies invested immensely in technologies that allowed work to continue, and in many cases found a productive workforce⁴ despite the lack of a manager's in-person presence.

This brought work trends for many people full circle—from working at home in ancient times, to going to work at factories/offices, and back to working from home in the 21st century.



“ We had a system that had been in place for hundreds of years where employees went to a specific place at a specific time every working day to be supervised by a more experienced manager. Overnight, we took that system and we just threw it out the window.”⁵ ~Malcolm Gladwell



**Where We Work:
From Tethered to Untethered**

FROM WORKING AT THE OFFICE/HOME TO WORKING ANYWHERE: LUXURY OR NECESSITY?

The COVID-19 pandemic was likely the first, and only, devastating event of this magnitude that many people experienced in their lifetimes. Nonetheless, it probably won't be the last major disaster we endure. Be it natural or manmade, a multitude of foreseeable circumstances might force people into, or out of, physical locations, be they climate change, health threats, or wars.

Similar to a pandemic, climate change impacts people on a global scale. As far back as the Neo-Assyrian Empire changes in the climate have contributed to people's survival.⁶ Today, human-induced climate change is causing an alarming rate of raging fires, sweeping floods, rising sea levels, scorching heat, scarcity of water, and climate refugees. Many of the world's heavily populated cities, favored often by businesses, are highly vulnerable to natural disasters⁷ and are likely to feel the brunt of climate change.

For example, increasing erratic weather patterns like the one New York experienced in 2020 could become

more common. All across the state flocks of people scavenged for Wi-Fi and power at hotels, convenience stores, and coffee shop parking lots, after a natural disaster uprooted trees and access to power and internet.⁸ As these patterns continue, or worse, increase, as predicted by the latest UN report on climate change,⁹ working remotely at unconventional places, may become a necessity, not merely a luxury chosen by the few.

With companies facing vast unknowns, and changing information on the climate and societal issues, it is essential they build in the agility required to pivot based on fluctuations and new findings. Resiliency and flexibility are key to initiating efficient disaster planning. Based on factors such as people's migration patterns, needs, localities, and a firm's work/business opportunities, workspaces may need to expand, contract, move, or decentralize, while technology seamlessly and reliably integrates and supports work processes.



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AN EXPANDED WORKPLACE LANDSCAPE

Whether out of luxury or necessity, offering remote work possibilities gives employees a sense of control and autonomy, which can contribute to improved mental-health and performance, respectively.¹⁰ It also provides employers with a wider pool to hire from and a higher rate of talent attraction and retention.

It is very difficult at present to imagine companies opting not to offer flexible work arrangements after the pandemic, particularly to those whose tasks can be completed effectively outside the office,¹¹ without risking the loss of a percentage of their employees.^{12,13}

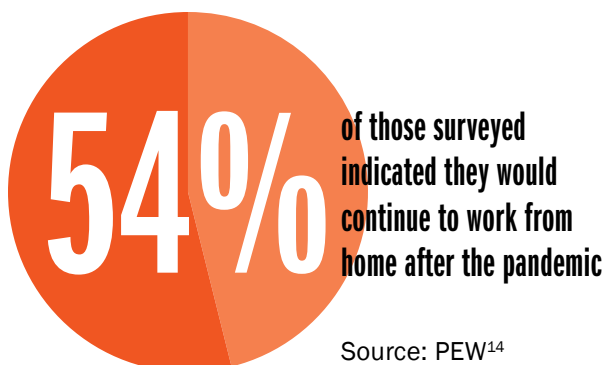
With this expanded sense of freedom, three approaches to where people will work are likely to continue: returning to the office, oscillating through a hybrid approach, or embracing a full work-from-home experience.

According to a 2020 PEW survey, about 71% of surveyed Americans worked from home during the pandemic while only 54% indicated they would want to continue to do so.¹⁴ This may be because the benefits and drawbacks of both working from home and at the office have crystalized in people's minds. Many may dread returning to distracting offices (due to limited privacy and acoustical separation), while simultaneously realizing working from home had detrimentally impacted

their well-being (e.g., isolation, distraction, lack of work-life separation, and "Zoom fatigue").¹⁵

Thus, a singular workspace (i.e., office or home) may not be the ideal solution for many people moving forward, instead companies may need to consider a combination of various spaces and policies applied across different geographic locations. Such a "blended working"¹⁶ arrangement allows employee's control over when and where they work, whether onsite (office) or offsite.

This approach would lead to the expansion of the office from one space or building(s) to a constellation of spaces: a workplace landscape. A combination of two or more of the following five workspaces could allow the desired level of flexibility: a headquarters office, home offices, fourth places (i.e., places that combine work and leisure such as cafés, hotel lounges, libraries, community centers, etc.), augmented places (that link, enhance, and expand on HQ, home, and fourth places), and digital spaces.

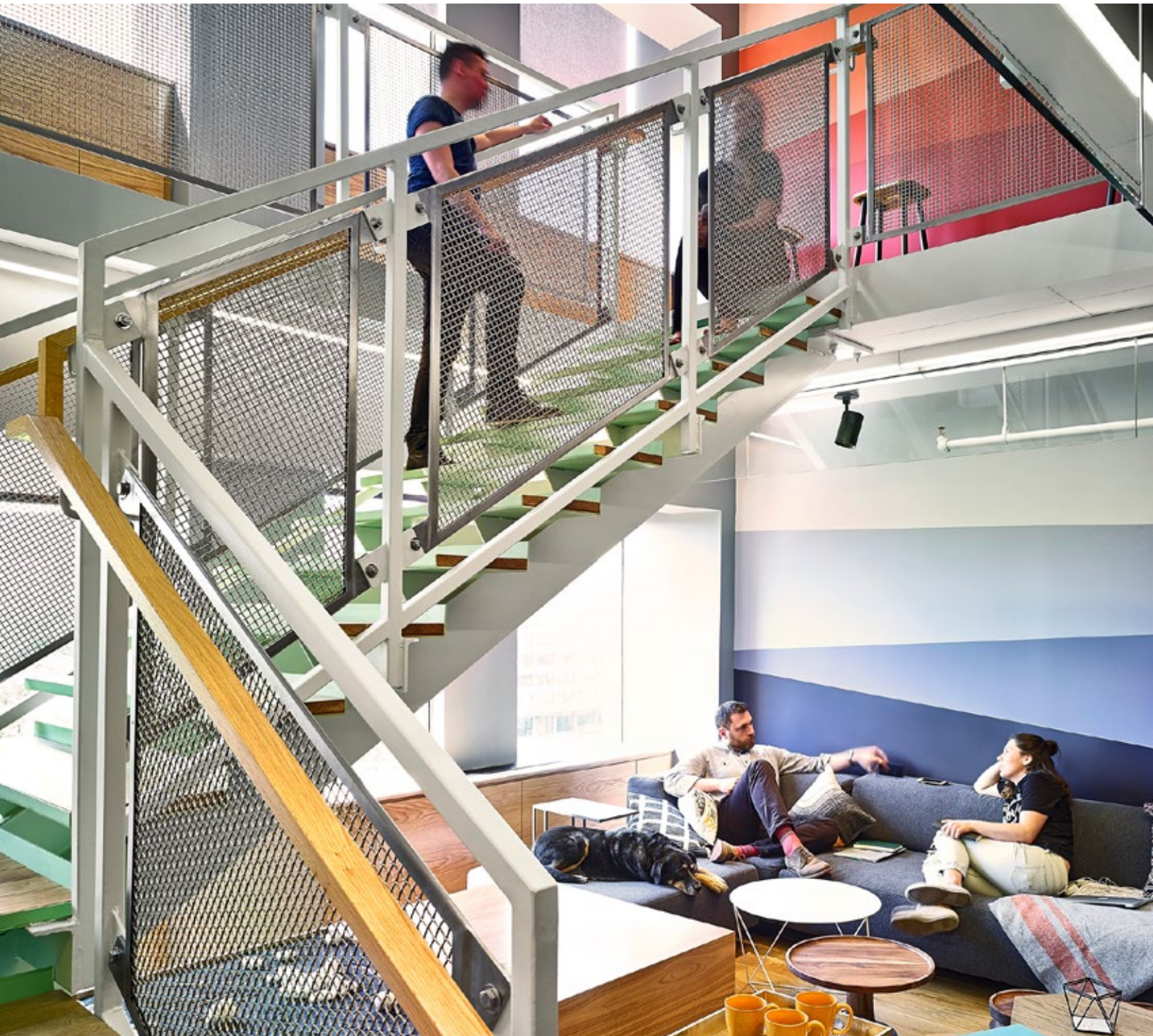


Source: PEW¹⁴



WE WORK WE LIVE

“A singular workspace may not be the ideal solution for many people moving forward, instead companies may need to consider... the expansion of the office from one space or building to a constellation of spaces: a workplace landscape.”



WORKPLACE LANDSCAPE

HEADQUARTERS



OFFERINGS

- Host clients and visitors
- Collaboration and innovation
- Team meetings/work
- Social/collegial connections
- Connection to company culture

LOCATION

- Near client and business opportunities
- Will most likely continue to be in major cities and urban areas.
- May become smaller in footprint.

SPACES

- A variety of space types at ratios that match worker needs.
- Supports collaboration, and social connections.
- Spaces designed to communicate brand and culture.
- On-site amenities tailored to the workforce needs, e.g. daycare to help moms/parents return to the office, collaboration lounges to spark creativity.
- Robust video conferencing, telepresence, and blended physical/virtual collaboration tools.



HOME



OFFERINGS

- Focused, heads-down work
- Managing work/life demands

LOCATION

- As far or as close to the office as preferred by each person in response to their circumstances, and needs.

SPACES

- Company provided equipment (or reimbursement) and tech support including: lighting and webcam set-up for ultimate video conference experience.
- Developers may offer more home-office spaces or flexible communal spaces in apartment buildings for both individual work and a thriving social/neighborly life.

AUGMENTED PLACESⁱ



OFFERINGS

- Focused, heads-down work
- Work/life separation
- Social/collegial connections
- Connection to company culture
- Collaboration and innovationⁱⁱ

LOCATION

- Smaller dispersed offices in major cities or even suburban neighborhoods, i.e., near residential pockets (ideally with high percentage of a company's employees, and walking/biking accessible).
- Direct access to, or part of, transportation hubs like airports, train stations.
- Near important destinations, e.g., daycares, eldercare, schools, parks, etc.

SPACES

- A variety of space types in ratios that match the needs of workers to support collaboration, heads down focused work (quiet zones) for individuals with distracting home environments, and social connections.
- Spaces designed to communicate brand and culture to increase people's sense of belonging and commitment to the firm.
- Access to job-specific tools or equipment.



Each of the five workspaces below will vary in the tasks they support, their locations, and spaces they offer. The illustration below imagines the future of the workplace landscape for an untethered and mobile workforce.



OFFERINGS

- Collaboration and innovation
- Team/client meetings
- Social/collegial connections

LOCATION

- Anywhere and everywhere with an internet connection

SPACES

- Can range from one-dimensional, i.e., experienced and accessed through a computer screen, to the fully immersive, e.g., virtual reality goggles transport a person into a virtual environment like a virtual meeting room, or café to meet and socialize with colleagues miles away.

DIGITAL SPACES



POLICY EXAMPLE ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

- A shift to result-focused management where it matters less when/where/how employees work, as long as goals are met.
- A focus on building manager-employee trust, and increasing clear communication both in-person and virtually.
- Roll-out different policies to support various workstyle and lifestyle needs (e.g. policies for working from home/office, flexible hours, etc.)

BENEFIT EXAMPLE ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

- Knowing employees prefer benefits tailored to their individual needs,¹⁷ more employers will offer that, e.g. student loan pay off for recent graduates, flexible work hours for parents/caregivers, housing allowance versus transportation allowance, etc.

4TH PLACES



OFFERINGS

- Focused, heads-down work
- Collaboration and innovation
- Team/client meetings
- Social/collegial connections

LOCATION

- A network of spaces located in convenient, accessible, and distributed locations, e.g. near HQ, hubs, homes, client offices, transit hubs, etc. This can support active suburban work/life balance, as well as local economies, e.g., a parent can drop off a child at a karate class and sit at an adjacent local café to work.

SPACES

- A network of existing or new pop-up spaces that are secure, and Wi-Fi ready enable employees to plug-into their networks and work in unique environments, whether alone or with colleagues (e.g., local cafés, hotels, shops, social lounges, parks, public transport hubs, airports, outdoor spaces, mobile rentable pop-up spaces, converted store-fronts, etc.).



i Size and location of augmented places will vary based on data-driven analysis by each company (e.g., staff commuter routes, commute times, heat maps of staff zip codes, etc.) and may change over time as more people relocated or settle in new geographies.

ii Augmented Places may not be ideal in all situations, but can work when a company incentivizes teams that need to work collaboratively, innovatively, and long-term to co-locate near one for continued access to each other, leadership, and resources.

WORK FROM ANYWHERE: THE RESPONSIBLE DECISION?

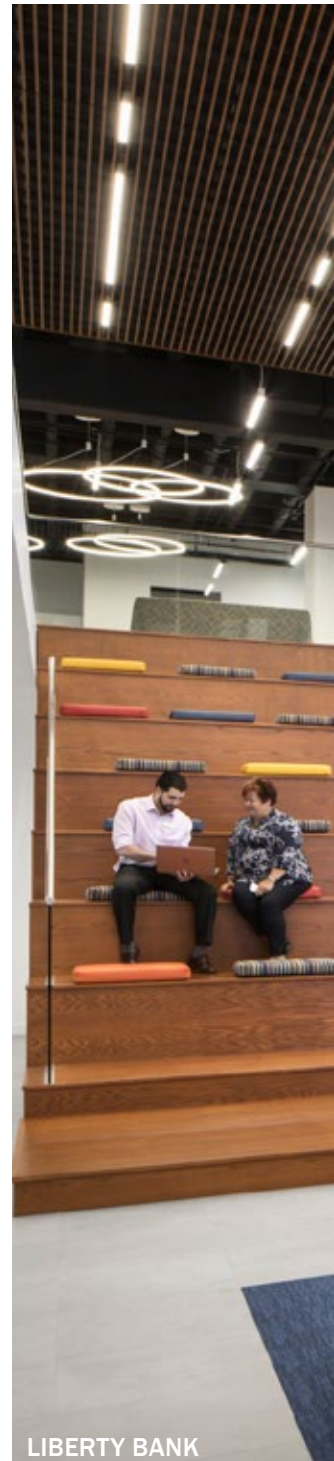
Working from anywhere is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Employers need to consider its holistic impact on their particular workforce as well as the greater natural environment. In thinking about people, it is important to note that choice can be paradoxical. Some studies¹⁸ show providing choice in when and where to work, as opposed to traditional work arraignments, will likely increase a company's attractiveness for employees who have a strong autonomy orientation, but not necessarily those who have a personal need for structure. Additionally, increasing the need for decisions by adding untailored choices regarding where to work (geographically, or within a space, i.e., desk, lounge) could contribute to an existing sense of decision fatigue.¹⁹ Importantly, not everyone will want to work remotely whether out of concern for their well-being²⁰ or a desire to progress through in-person serendipitous learning and mentorship. In some instances, employees' work activities are incompatible with remote work as they either require presence in a physical location, interaction with others, or access to machinery and equipment.²¹

A second consideration is the environmental impact of remote working. This is essential because the majority of the workforce (Millennials and Gen Z) are highly concerned with climate change,²² which translates to them choosing to

work at environmentally conscious companies.²³ It's also important at this point because some large companies, such as Facebook²⁴ and Twitter,²⁵ signal they plan to exponentially expand their remote work policies. This can have significant environmental repercussion as the impact of long-term and expanded remote work on the environment appears to be complex and context specific.^{26,27}

It is essential remote work policies are applied thoughtfully to avoid a situation whereby working remotely exasperates environmental stress and displacement instead of alleviating them. How then can companies and individuals take advantage of the freedom to work from anywhere while avoiding some of its pitfalls?

Companies need to invest in understanding their employees, their expectations, individuality, tasks, needs, geographies, and circumstances in order to offer the right combination of tailored work location choices, policies, and benefits. They can also consult new tools and environmental calculators to help determine if remote work would be their best contribution to the environment.²⁸ Along with investing in workforce education and empowerment, companies can enable people to be environmentally conscious, be it at the office or elsewhere.



LIBERTY BANK

“Working from anywhere is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Employers need to consider its holistic impact on their particular workforce and greater natural environment.”



IN PURSUIT OF AN EQUILIBRIUM

Over the past couple of years, the pendulum swung from the majority of knowledge workers commuting to an office, to the majority working from home during the pandemic. After the pandemic, however, companies and employees will likely swing back and forth between the two extremes until an equilibrium is reached. Providing a landscape of workplaces frees people from limited options, i.e., office or home.

Through collaborating with and consulting workplace researchers, strategists, and designers, companies can better understand their workforce, and consequently propose the policies, benefits, and places that can adapt to their employee's needs.

Choosing the right combination of spaces to create each company's landscape will require soul searching, planning, and will differ based on factors such as:

- Industry profiles
- Geographic location
- Work activities
- Size
- Employee composition

Finding the delicate balance of spaces and policies will require reflection, empathy, customization, and iteration by leaders, in conjunction with staff, HR, and consultants.

With many people having experienced work-from-home; an antiquated yet sought-after perk of the 21st century and finding they have a constellation of places to choose from, what will people do with this new found freedom, where will they go, and what impact will that have?

Upcoming series installments will explore the question above, and much more.

“Finding the delicate balance of spaces and policies will require reflection, empathy, customization, and iteration by leaders, in conjunction with staff, HR, and consultants.”



Up Next...

Where we work, how we get to work, and our company policies all impact our well-being. Free of the constraints of commuting and working continuously from a specific location, a segment of workers are prioritizing their well-being and living a balanced lifestyle. This has and will continue to impact the benefits employers offer, along with policies, and the design of workplaces. In our upcoming issue, we will explore what we already know about, and what the future might hold for, work and well-being.

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