

Coworking Spaces and Their Effects on Workers and Working Environments

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Abstract

This paper draws on a qualitative methodology, combining semi-structured interviews with thematic analysis, to examine the benefits and limitations of working conditions in coworking spaces. It also explores the hypothesis that such environments foster creativity and innovation, a claim often associated with the theory of open innovation and the context of open spaces, as are often found in coworking spaces. The findings reveal that collaboration is neither universally pursued nor spontaneously realized among coworkers. Rather, it appears to depend on the presence of a facilitator who actively promotes interaction and knowledge exchange. Physical conditions—such as noise, distractions, or spatial layout—can hinder productivity for some, while others adjust with ease. The study underscores the diversity of coworking experiences, particularly in non-metropolitan areas where empirical research remains limited, thereby making a significant contribution to the field. Beyond its theoretical insights into creativity and innovation, the research offers practical guidance for coworking space facilitators and community managers aiming to cultivate more collaborative and productive environments.

Keywords

Coworking, Open Space, Distance, Distraction, Working Conditions, Networking, Innovation

1. Introduction

In recent years, following the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, coworking spaces have shown signs of renewed growth and are emerging as a potentially significant component of the future of work. As telework becomes more entrenched and self-employed workers continue to seek professional environments, coworking spaces are increasingly relevant. Our research on coworking and the specific context

of third spaces for work began several years ago, driven by an interest in the characteristics of coworkers, the social and physical dimensions of these spaces, and the forms of work and collaboration they foster. As coworking spaces are integrated into evolving hybrid work models, it becomes crucial to examine what actually occurs within them to help define the future of work.

Coworking spaces, which first appeared in the 1990s and formally took shape in San Francisco in 2005, expanded rapidly to over 22,000 spaces by 2019 (Desk-Mag Institute, 2019). While the pandemic prompted a wave of closures, many spaces have since reopened or emerged anew, reflecting the sector's resilience (Ananian et al., 2024). Today, coworking spaces are proliferating globally—including in Asia and Africa. For instance, Regus (IWG) has doubled its footprint in Morocco, operating some 16 spaces. In these regions, coworking often caters to expatriates whose employers have a limited local presence, especially those frequently working remotely or traveling. With a Regus membership, business travelers can access over 3300 coworking sites worldwide.

Yet coworking also plays a vital local role. In industrialized countries such as Canada, France, and Germany—where our research is more focused—local workers are drawn to these spaces for their affordability, reduced commuting, and proximity to home (Tremblay, Scaillerez, & Le Nadant, 2022; Krauss & Tremblay, 2019; Tremblay & Krauss, 2024). These dual dynamics illustrate how coworking serves both global mobility and local professional needs (Tremblay & Scaillerez, 2020; Tremblay et al., 2022).

Our research centers on the actual practices of work within coworking spaces, the ways work is organized, and the perceived benefits and challenges. These evolving workspaces also raise broader questions about regional and urban development. With the widespread adoption of telework hollowing out many downtown cores, some real estate actors now view coworking spaces as a strategy for revitalizing city centers. Moreover, the pandemic has prompted a migration of workers to suburbs and rural areas, creating demand for coworking spaces as professional infrastructure in smaller municipalities. These spaces offer essential services—such as reliable internet, office equipment, and meeting rooms—that can help attract and retain remote workers in peripheral regions.

In the wake of the post-COVID shift toward remote work, many salaried employees are seeking greater autonomy and freedom from traditional hierarchical structures. Coworking spaces, offering flexibility within a hybrid work model, are increasingly seen as viable alternatives for part-time office use. These shifting expectations—from both employers and workers—necessitate a rethinking of work organization and workplace design. To better understand these developments, we undertook a comprehensive study of coworking spaces in Canada, aiming to capture their evolving role in shaping the future of work and cities.

This paper explores the opportunities and advantages that coworking spaces offer for fostering collaboration and supporting new work practices—contributing to the competitiveness and sustainability of self-employed workers, entrepreneurs, firms, and urban centers. Building on earlier research that emphasized

creativity, cooperation, and innovation as core goals of coworking (Krauss & Tremblay, 2019), our study revisits these themes with updated insights. While informed by earlier work (Tremblay & Vaineau, 2020), which focused more on territorial aspects, this study benefits from a significantly larger and more recent dataset, offering a richer and more representative view of coworking in the post-pandemic landscape. It offers fresh insights into the lived experiences of coworkers and the evolving role of coworking within the broader transformation of work. The paper also examines the hypothesis that these environments foster creativity and innovation—a proposition frequently linked to open innovation theory and to the open-plan spatial configurations that typically characterize coworking spaces.

2. Literature Review

Coworking spaces offer their users the possibility to work remotely from their usual workplaces or to avoid the risks of isolation associated with working from home (Oldenburg, 2000; Scaillerez & Tremblay, 2016a, 2017). However, for some individuals, the value of these spaces lies in the networking opportunities and potential business prospects that may arise from being in the same location as a diverse range of users, whose activities may be connected in ways that facilitate interaction and collaboration (Loechel & Legrenzi, 2013; Murray et al., 2010; Scaillerez & Tremblay, 2016a, 2016b).

Coworking spaces therefore allow independent entrepreneurs, self-employed workers, and other professionals to share a physical workspace that includes all the amenities typically found in an office, while also benefiting from pooled equipment and shared expenses in exchange for monthly rental fees (Scaillerez & Tremblay, 2016b). Beyond this, coworking spaces are also recognized for fostering knowledge exchange and collaboration that may lead to the emergence of creative and innovative projects (Capdevila, 2016; Fabbri & Charue-Duboc, 2016; Suire, 2013), often initiated by a group of users. However, this collaborative work culture is not found in all coworking spaces. Although it is frequently promoted as a core advantage of coworking, it has not been systematically confirmed (Krauss & Tremblay, 2019) and therefore deserved attention as there is still a knowledge gap on this issue.

Studies on coworking spaces often draw upon the theory of open innovation, which allows organizations or self-employed workers to engage with external collaborators or partners in the development of new ideas, products, or innovative services. This theory, along with our research, is grounded in works that explore the dynamics resulting from open innovation processes (Chesbrough, 2003; Chesbrough et al., 2006).

Open innovation is based on the idea that firms do not possess all the required expertise internally to innovate. Rather, external resources can play a significant role in fostering innovation within an organization. This theory is closely aligned with the work of Nonaka (1991), who also noted that companies do not always

have the best talents in-house and must therefore seek to leverage external expertise, competencies, including tacit knowledge as conceptualized by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). This does not mean that internal knowledge should be disregarded, but rather that companies should also seek to acquire intellectual property and ideas developed externally (Trott & Hartmann, 2009). Integrating into networks becomes essential to access this external knowledge, and coworking spaces may serve as effective platforms for such integration.

Trott and Hartmann (2009) argue that the idea of drawing on external knowledge is not entirely new, but has received less attention compared to the emphasis traditionally placed on internal talent as a source of creativity and innovation. The open innovation approach also recalls the theories of quality circles and Theory Z in Japanese (J-type) firms—contrasted with more hierarchical and less innovation-focused American (A-type) firms (Tremblay & Rolland, 2019). Regardless of the framework, both the open innovation theory and the innovation-oriented Japanese firm model emphasize the importance of knowledge exchange and networking in accessing new knowledge essential to innovation (Tremblay, 2014), or even simply in identifying new business ideas or opportunities, as may occur in coworking spaces where networks can be formed.

Several scholars have also pointed out that open innovation and open knowledge exchange can carry risks, such as the potential for information leakage. This makes it necessary to implement sound governance structures and management tools to ensure that internal information continues to circulate effectively, and that crucial knowledge does not leave the organization, even in an open environment. Indeed, in previous research, many authors indicate that some coworkers expressed concerns over losing the exclusivity of their knowledge or the potential leakage of proprietary information (see chapters in Krauss & Tremblay, 2019).

It is worth noting that open innovation theories have primarily focused on firms of a certain size that open up to external sources in search of talent. However, this approach can just as easily apply to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and even to self-employed workers, who can “open” their activities to external ideas, which are often more conducive to innovation due to the diversity of knowledge they bring (Tremblay, 2014).

Open innovation activities can thus contribute to the development or enhancement of a product or a line of thought by drawing on external sources, such as various actors involved in the process (Chesbrough, 2003; Laursen & Salter, 2006). Open innovation depends not only on the intervention of external resources but also on intermediaries (Chesbrough, 2006), whose primary role is to facilitate connections among different users in the pursuit of innovative processes. A coworking space can therefore be seen as an open space for innovation, provided that it fosters collaboration among its members—something that is not guaranteed. Yet, a collaborative environment is a crucial factor at the early stages of the innovation process for small businesses, as success or failure often hinges on their ability to acquire complementary external resources and knowledge to supplement their in-

ternal assets.

To achieve this, coworking spaces need the involvement of intermediaries—individuals or organizations who act as interfaces between parties throughout the innovation process (Howells, 2006; Tremblay & Krauss, 2024). Their role includes fostering trust between actors, for example by playing matchmaker and organizing encounters. It is reasonable to consider that coworking space facilitators or managers can take on this intermediary role, helping to establish connections among coworkers. These facilitators may thus support the circulation of knowledge and the initiation of collaboration within the coworking space (Leroux et al., 2014; Fabbri & Charue-Duboc, 2016). In this way, the coworking space becomes a venue where intermediation is made possible by a range of factors that nurture a culture of collaboration, thereby enabling contact-making that can lead to the desired outcomes—whether new business opportunities or product and service innovations. Having presented our research perspective and literature review, we now expose the research methodology.

3. Methodology

In this section, we present our research methodology, which includes a quantitative and a qualitative component, the latter on which we center here. We conducted interviews with individuals in several coworking spaces identified for this study. A total of 18 coworking spaces were contacted, and 17 agreed to participate in interviews. We wanted to have some regional diversity, including spaces in the metropolitan region, but also in more peripheral regions. No specific sectors were desired as most coworkings cover various sectors. As for size, we did not want to cover the large organizations such as Regus or WeWork, but wanted average size spaces, but also had a few with about a hundred coworkers. Coworking space managers defined the size of their space as follows: 8 spaces reported having more than 100 coworker members, 3 spaces had fewer than 10 members, and 6 spaces had between 20 and 50 members.

Ideally, we aimed to meet with two managers per coworking space, as well as a few members from each. The managers who agreed to participate suggested some members from their respective spaces. Some of these members readily agreed to take part, while others declined, often citing a lack of time. In total, 36 users (U) of coworking spaces were interviewed.

In two of the coworking spaces, the manager was unavailable for an interview; however, a member from each of those spaces agreed to be interviewed and represented the space to a certain extent. In one coworking network with nine branches, two managers were interviewed. In total, 52 individuals participated in the semi-structured interviews: 16 coworking space managers and 36 users.

In this report, participants are identified as either U (for coworking space user), followed by a number (e.g., U12), or G (for coworking space manager), followed by a number (e.g., G8). Gender identity is indicated in parentheses—“(she),” “(they),” or “(he).” Freelancers are identified as “self-employed”, while salaried

employees are indicated as “employee”.

Interview Guide

The interview guide included questions about the participants’ professional backgrounds, mobility practices, relationships with colleagues, their connection to the coworking space, how they use the space, their motivations for working there, perceived advantages and disadvantages, and their outlook on the future. For coworking space managers, additional questions were asked regarding the history and establishment of the space, its objectives, its characteristics, and its evolution.

Section 4 on internal and external interactions was subdivided into two parts. Section A pertains to understanding the space’s context, its purpose, and the social composition of its users. Section B focuses on the physical characteristics of the workplace (e.g., distance, dedicated desks or not) and coworker interactions. We also explored the perceived benefits and drawbacks of coworking.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face at the coworking spaces or virtually, depending on the individual’s circumstances. Interviews with users lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, while those with managers lasted 60 to 90 minutes. Site visits were also conducted as a complement to the interviews.

4. Qualitative Findings

This section presents our results from the qualitative data collection, based on the interviews, according to the themes mentioned above.

4.1. Profiles and Career Paths

When asked to describe their professional activity, 16 participants identified as coworking space “managers.” Amongst the users, six individuals identified as “entrepreneurs,” while three described themselves as “freelancers.” Six participants indicated they worked as “project managers,” two as “consultants,” and four as “advisors.” Other job titles mentioned (each by one respondent) included artist, coach, coordinator, evaluator, engineer (2), recruiter, intern, and videographer. This illustrates the wide variety of activities performed by coworkers, spreading across diverse sectors and organizations.

Also, 22 participants said they used the coworking space as employees of an organization, while six stated they were there as employers. There has been a noticeable increase in small businesses operating from coworking spaces in recent years, which helps explain the growing presence of employers. All other respondents were either self-employed and a few were students. One particular space was aimed at students, inviting them to work on their theses and having activities to reach this goal.

Regarding gender identity, 18 participants (35%) identified as men, 33 (63%) as women, and one person (2%) identified as a non-binary or other gender. The youngest participant was 24 years old, and the oldest was 66, with an average age of 39 at the time of the interviews.

In terms of relationship status, 15 participants (29%) reported being single, and 37 (71%) were in a relationship. Furthermore, 24 individuals (46%) had children, while 26 (50%) did not. Some participants noted that having other people in the household (e.g., a partner or children) influenced their decision to work outside the home in a coworking space, in order to be able to concentrate better.

Regarding educational background, six participants held a college-level diploma, 27 had a bachelor's degree, 13 held a master's, and three had completed a doctorate. Fields of study varied widely and included graphic design, engineering, pharmacy, marketing, and business administration. For most participants, academic pathways were non-linear. For example, one coworker initially studied architectural technology and later switched to engineering. Another participant started in nursing and later completed a short software development program at a University.

4.2. Choice of Coworking Space

An important theme was the context behind participants' decisions to work in a coworking space. Forty-six participants mentioned determining factors such as:

- A productive environment with minimal noise and distractions.
- A professional setting to meet clients.
- A space shared with professionals from similar fields.
- A pleasant and aesthetically appealing space conducive to work.
- Accessibility (e.g., proximity to home, ease of commute).
- Opportunities to socialize and participate in community events.
- Affordability in terms of cost.

In a few cases, the decision to work in a coworking space was made by the employer of the participant, particularly among employees of small firms.

4.3. Accessibility and Workspace Preferences

The notion of *accessibility* was mentioned 17 times by participants. The following are two illustrative quotes from users:

“I was looking for a coworking space. For me, parking was important. It's easier for my clients, and I'm close to the Panama terminal. I can meet people from Montreal. It's just a 5- to 10-minute walk to my office.”

—U13 (she), self-employed

“The main thing, when I was looking at different coworking spaces, was how close it was to where I live. Was there going to be a lot of traffic?”

—U2 (he), self-employed

The need for *concentration, quietness, and limited distractions* was mentioned 12 times. Several participants highlighted the challenges of working from home:

“I used to have a home office. But I can't do it at home. It's just not a work-friendly environment for me. I associate it with rest and leisure, not work.”

—U4 (he), employee

“Everyone at my company is remote. Me too, but I work remotely from a coworking space. I live 3 km away, and I bike here. I’m one of the few who didn’t enjoy working from home.”

—U7 (he), employee

The desire to *see people and reduce isolation* was also noted frequently, with 12 mentions:

“It was to get a change of scenery, to be in a more relaxed and friendly environment. To be able to meet other people... somewhere I knew I would interact with others. It’s the fun part—chatting with people I wouldn’t usually see.”

—U21 (she), self-employed

“When I’m alone at home, I tend to become even more isolated instead of coming out of my shell to see people. So for me, the ideal is to go to the Coworking.”

—U28 (nonbinary), self-employed

While *cost reduction* was cited less frequently (only five mentions), coworking was still appreciated for allowing the sharing of expenses (e.g., equipment):

“When I started out as a freelancer, I didn’t have the budget to invest in a fancy office. But I ended up staying for five years. Price matters less now—it’s really about the community.”

—U26 (she), self-employed

“Flexible terms, it’s not expensive, and I can go when I want.”

—U17 (he), self-employed

Other reasons mentioned include access to a gym (twice), a preference for comfort over working in cafés, the ability to leave documents securely, access to stable internet, and alignment with certain social values.

4.4. Workspace Selection within the Coworking Environment

We examined how coworkers choose their specific location within coworking spaces. Fourteen interviewees responded to this question directly. The most frequently cited preference (seven mentions) was for a position near windows—either facing or with their back to the window:

“My favorite spot is in front of the window, next to the wall heater. I started in winter, and it was always cold, so I stayed near the heater. Being by the window gives me light, but I still have my computer and focus, and I sit with my back to the window so I don’t get distracted looking outside.”

—U34 (she), self-employed

“I like my desk because it’s near the window. I have plants. I love the light. I really love natural light.”

—U18 (he), self-employed

Another theme (six mentions) was the desire for a position with a broader view of the space or along a wall rather than being in the center:

“I need to see people. So I could watch people walking by on the street, and I also had a view of the rest of the coworking space.”

—U16 (she), employee

“I feel a bit oppressed when I’m in the middle of everything.”

—U22 (she), employee

Other preferences included proximity to the coffee area, to specific individuals (either for collaboration or social connection), to the entrance/exit, and, conversely, the desire for a more discreet, private, or secluded corner.

4.5. Mobility Practices

This section explores both *physical mobility* and *virtual mobility*. The latter refers to the use of digital tools such as videoconferencing, phone calls, and other technologies to collaborate remotely.

4.5.1. Physical Mobility

When asked where their coworking space was located, respondents identified the following areas: 2 in Bas-du-Fleuve, 18 in Montreal, 8 in Quebec City, 3 in Brossard, 6 in Longueuil, 3 on Montreal’s South Shore, 4 in Rimouski, 3 in Rivière-du-Loup, and 3 in Sherbrooke. We thus had an important diversity in terms of metropolitan areas (Montreal and Québec, but also smaller cities such as Sherbrooke) and also more distant regions (Rivière-du-loup and Rimouski), by the St-Lawrence River.

As for their place of residence: 30 respondents lived in Montreal or the Greater Montreal Area, 3 in Rimouski, 8 in Quebec City, 2 in Sherbrooke, and one each in Rivière-du-Loup, Matane, and Lévis. Others lived in smaller towns throughout Québec.

Transportation modes to coworking spaces were varied: 20 used a car, 17 walked, 4 used public transit, and 6 cycled. Of these, 13 reported varying their mode of transport depending on season or circumstance. For example, one participant sometimes drives (3 minutes) or walks (20 minutes), while another alternates between driving (10 minutes) and public transit (25 minutes). One person cycles year-round—taking 45 minutes in summer and 60 in winter.

Commute durations varied from less than 5 minutes for 12 persons, to 10-15 minutes for another 11, and 20 minutes for another 8. Other mentioned as follows: 25 minutes: 2 persons; 30 minutes: 8 persons; 40 minutes: 1 person; 45 minutes: 4 persons. As we see, the majority have short commutes and people do mention they prefer to work close to their home. The average daily commute time, based on the primary mode of transportation, is approximately 20 minutes.

When asked whether they worked during their commute, 11 participants said yes, 16 said no, and others gave no clear answer. Regarding work during evenings or weekends, 15 persons said yes, and 9 said no.

Weekly coworking frequency varied: Very occasional (less than once a week): 2 persons; Once per week: 4 persons; Twice per week: 6 people; Two to three times

per week: 3 persons; Two to four times per week: 1 person; Three times per week: 4 persons; Three to four times per week: 5 persons; Four times per week: 4 persons; Five times per week: 14 persons; Six or more times per week: 5 persons. We see a good variety here also, but we see about half working most of the time in the coworking space. Some may meet clients outside the coworking or work from home at times.

The importance of proximity between home and coworking space was reiterated. Of the 17 mentions of accessibility, 12 specifically referred to proximity:

“Taking the bus to work... it was a bit too much. So yes, for me it’s important that it’s not too far away.”

—U26 (she), self-employed

“For me, it’s important to bike to work, so the distance can’t be too great. And I’m not willing to move because of that.”

—G11 (he), employee

4.5.2. Virtual Mobility Practices

All participants reported using technological tools in their coworking spaces. The tools cited included computers, smartphones, and videoconferencing platforms (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet). Technology use was daily for 100% of respondents, though the amount of time varied greatly. Some spent the entire day coding, while others used the space mainly for in-person meetings and only used technology about 5% of the time.

The type of work strongly influenced the use of virtual tools. For example, a recruiter (U9) spent 100% of their time on virtual interviews and research, while a coach (U1) only used the coworking space for in-person client meetings and conducted no virtual interactions there.

The design of the coworking space (e.g., open-plan layout) also impacted technology use. Many reported moving to enclosed rooms for videoconferencing or choosing to work from home on days with heavy virtual meeting schedules. Open-plan workers also mentioned relocating for concentration tasks (see [Cheyrrouze & Tremblay, 2024, 2025a, 2025b](#)).

“At my desk, I go there when I need to work with colleagues on a project. If I have Zoom meetings, I use another room—for privacy and not to disturb others. If I need to concentrate and there are people around, I’ll go to a different room.”

—U10 (she), employee

“I’ve noticed that I don’t concentrate as well at the office as I do at home.”

—U12 (he), employee

Finally, when asked whether they texted colleagues nearby instead of speaking face-to-face, none of the open-plan users said they did. This question was asked as some research indicated this was common, but we did not observe this. One participant reported texting a colleague working in a closed office.

4.6. Characteristics of the Space

This section will first present the characteristics of the space, mainly from the perspective of coworking space managers, and then the common uses and practices within the coworking space, primarily from the perspective of the coworkers. This has potential impacts on interactions between coworkers which is why it is of interest.

Coworking space managers were all very forthcoming when it came to describing the creation of their coworking space and the elements that characterize them. The creation of coworking spaces as such has been well documented in scientific studies to date (Krauss & Tremblay, 2019; Tremblay & Krauss, 2024; Capdevila, 2016). Here, the focus will be more on the specific characteristics of Quebec coworking spaces that were part of this qualitative study.

In the sample of 17 coworking spaces participating in the qualitative study, 4 were created with commercial real estate objectives, 4 with cooperative model objectives, 4 with the goal of supporting entrepreneurship, and 5 were created with an unspecified coworking model.

Several real estate developers, whose main mission is commercial leasing, have invested in the opportunity to offer coworking spaces—especially after the pandemic, when many office spaces were left vacant in large cities. In fact, the term “coworking” is used, but sometimes there are no longer (or never were) open-plan spaces, which were characteristic of coworking in the beginning. Here is an example of a quote illustrating this type of situation:

“There were a lot of little cubicles that we had locked with a key. That was always a pain to manage. It was more for freelancers who come and go, and that’s a lot of management for us. It was a waste of time... I spent more time renting those than a 5,000 square foot space.”

G2 (she) emp

In other cases, managers who originally created coworking spaces with open-plan layouts have renovated them to include more closed offices, as is the case here:

“I started out with pure coworking, with a co-op, and the real essence of coworking meant there weren’t even any closed offices in that concept, because the idea was that having your own office didn’t fit with the sharing concept. Later, I flirted with business centers, which is almost the opposite! I think we’re now less of a physical coworking space, but we still have the spirit of coworking. The community aspect, the events—those remain. But it’s more corporate. We’re less in the ‘granola’ side of coworking, more in the ‘corporate’ side.”

G3 (he) emp

Cultural background was asked about in general terms to coworking space managers, without requiring a precise count. They responded that, in the vast ma-

jority of cases, the coworkers are native French-speaking Quebecers, followed by French-speaking coworkers from France, and then Spanish-speaking coworkers. In only one coworking space was there a minority of English-speaking users, but it should be noted that we studied several spaces outside Montreal, where there are mainly French-speaking Quebecers.

4.7. Professional Uses and Practices in Spaces

This section presents how coworkers use coworking spaces. Do they have an assigned workspace? Do they always work in the same spot? If not, why do they move? These are some of the questions asked of participants in this qualitative study.

4.7.1. Choice of Usual Workspace

Regarding the actual workspace, 19% of participants (10 people) reported working in an individual closed office; 25% (13 people) worked in an open workspace within a closed room with others; 54% (28 people) worked in an open workspace in an open area; and finally, one person (2%) said their employer rented a conference room where they occasionally worked.

As for desk assignment, 54% of participants (28) reported having an assigned workspace, and 46% (24 participants) said they did not have an assigned workspace.

The following table presents the figures according to the two variables: type of workspace and desk assignment.

Assigned Desk	Individual Closed Office (10)	Open Workspace in Closed Room (13)	Open Workspace in Open Area (28)	Conference Room (1)
Yes	6 (60%)	11 (85%)	11 (39%)	0 (0%)
No	4 (40%)	2 (15%)	17 (61%)	1 (100%)

Beyond the traditional distinction between fixed and unassigned desks, other scenarios were identified by coworkers. For example, in a coworking space that is 100% open plan and where, in principle, workspaces are not assigned, coworkers still tend to follow certain habits, as shown in the following quotes from two different spaces:

“I would say it’s naturally assigned. I’ve noticed that most people... since it’s often the same people who come in on Fridays and Saturdays, most people usually take the same spot.”

U34 (she) self-employed

“Technically, on paper, you can take whatever desk you want, but there are always at least 1-2 people with their ‘designated’ desks—you know you can’t touch them. We were just talking about this yesterday: ‘I saved your desk for you.’ We tend to always sit in the same spot, but if a desk is taken, I don’t mind sitting elsewhere. It’s just that people associate me with that desk

because I'm one of the first to arrive. We're used to leaving each other our usual spots, but officially, we don't have assigned desks."

U22 (she) employee

Another case is a company with assigned desks in an open-plan space, but employees still have to reserve the one they want to use:

"We have four workstations reserved for our company. We have an availability calendar, and we reserve the four spots as we wish. So physically, we occupy a corner near the window. One of the islands near the window."

U33 (she) employee

Some people chose closed and assigned workspaces for confidentiality reasons, as shown in the following quote:

"More and more, the government asks us to have lockable offices to comply with Canada's natural resources laws and regulations."

U28 (they) self-employed

Another example is a person who has an assigned seat in an open workspace located in a closed room rented by their employer. Even though this person has an assigned desk, they prefer not to always work in the same spot:

"I'm all over the office. I like to change environments. I make friends and say, 'When you're not here, can I take your place?' Sometimes I work in other offices, in the kitchen, in the basement, sometimes closer to the windows, sometimes in my office..."

U10 (she) employee

The following quote illustrates a change induced by the employer in desk assignment:

"Before, we had a fixed desk in the open area. But now, recently, since we're only coming in two days a week, they decided to stop renting fixed desks. So we reserve a room for Monday morning. In the afternoon, if we have to stay, then we book a desk."

U11 (she) employee

4.7.2. Preferred Space

Participants were also asked about their preferred workspaces and how they use different zones. There is no single answer here, but rather a variety of responses depending on individual situations and preferences.

For example, when asked about their favorite spot in the coworking space, many participants mentioned their own workspace. There were 24 such citations. Here are two quotes from coworkers who expressed this:

"I really like my desk in the open area. Even when I had more focused work to do, I would use earplugs or music. I was by the window, so I was well set up."

U11 (she) emp

“Where I sit. I actually sit on big ball, so I have enough space to use it. And I also have a kind of balance board, which also helps... actually, that’s also why I chose a sit-stand desk.”

U27 (she) TA

Several coworkers also mentioned proximity to windows and natural light. There were 17 quotes on this topic. Many coworkers also said the beauty of the view influenced their choice of preferred spot, especially those with access to a river view—rare, but the case in one space. Here are some examples:

“I really like the little room here called Phoenix, I think. Because the view is beautiful! And the cafeteria too. It’s almost the same window, the view is beautiful.”

U14 (she) employee

“We have a view of Mont St-Bruno, of Mont St-Hilaire. It’s soothing.”

G4 (she) employee

“Sometimes I take my laptop and go sit by the river.”

U28 (they) self-employed

“It’s often the table at the back, near the entrance, where I position myself to look out at the river.”

U30 (she) employee

Some coworkers mentioned a “lounge” or couch area. There were 24 quotes about this. Here are two examples:

“The couch, in the transition area. You’re sitting comfortably, and you know you can talk while people walk by.”

U4 (he) employee

“My colleague and I often go to the little lounge couches behind the open area. It’s like a little cocoon.”

G4 (she) employee

The kitchen also came up regularly as a symbolic place in the coworking space. There were 16 quotes about this, including the following:

“The cafeteria, because there’s a coffee machine: three times a day; in the morning for coffee, once at lunch, and another time in the afternoon for another coffee or tea.”

U12 (he) employee

“The kitchen, because it’s a place where you run into lots of people. A place where there’s a lot of exchange, of communication. Lots of small talk, which is good for mental health.”

G13 (he) employee

Other spaces are unique to certain coworking locations. For example, one space has a “zen room” where people can nap, meditate, or enjoy silence. Another example is that some coworking spaces have access to a terrace—some with beautiful

views. These were occasionally mentioned as favorite spots within the coworking space.

4.7.3. Work Habits by Zone Type

Regarding habits associated with changing work locations, both coworkers and managers reported highly diverse practices, which appear to depend on individual personality, the nature of the work, and specific circumstances.

Many coworkers reported that they never change their workspace within the coworking environment. For example, one manager explained that she remains at her desk most of the time because she is well settled there. However, she does make a habit of doing brief rounds throughout the day, as she describes:

“For the most part, I stay at my desk. I got really used to having my 2 screens here. I do a round in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one at the end of the day. I’ll clean some things up, will say hi to people—so about 3 quick rounds—but for the most part I’m at my specific desk.”

G1, (she) manager

Another coworker who does not change location still alternates her posture:

“I don’t change places, but I do change position; since the table is high, I sometimes stand while working. I don’t use the stools, but I don’t move elsewhere.”

U20, (she), self-employed

Some individuals prefer to work in lounge areas with sofas for more informal tasks, such as planning, reflection, or conversations:

“Every once in a while I go sit on the sofa a bit. If I’m meeting with somebody and we need to discuss something, we’ll go on the sofas.”

G1, (she) employee

“Since the Agor was more relaxed and larger, it felt more suited for brainstorming or just stepping out of the context of ‘I’m at my desk.’ It was more for creativity or reflection.”

U15, (she) employee

Conversely, several participants expressed discomfort working outside their usual space, particularly in lounges or kitchens, as indicated here:

“sofas, no—I don’t like working on soft things.”

U25, (he), self-employed

“Some people use the sofas or cubicles, but I’m not drawn to work there.”

U26, (she), self-employed

“I don’t like working with a laptop on my lap—just not my style.”

U29, (he), self-employed

“I sometimes work from the kitchen, but there are usually a lot of people there.”

U10, (she), employee

Overall, the vast majority of coworkers report working primarily at their regular desk, with only brief periods spent elsewhere, such as in lounges, meeting rooms, or the kitchen. One quote summarizes this pattern:

“I’d say 85% of my work is done at my desk with my computer and monitor.”
G7, (she), manager

4.7.4. Physical Distance between Workspaces

Regarding the physical distance between workstations, the majority of respondents indicated that they work approximately 1 to 2 meters away from their nearest neighbor, and that this distance is generally satisfactory. However, we need to mention some potential drawbacks, including privacy concerns of some coworkers, especially in professions where personal or critical information is dealt with by the coworkers, which sometimes brings these persons to prefer a closed office to an open plan space. Some coworkers are also worried about possible knowledge leakages and appreciate a certain distance between the workspaces.

A small number of coworkers mentioned working at distances of less than 1 meter, which they found too close for comfort:

“Personally, I often need to spread out a bit, since I have a notebook that serves as my logbook. I admire minimalists, but that’s not me.”

U36, (she), self-employed

“It felt like my personal space was invaded, because I tend to spread out a bit, and she typed really loudly. It was a bit too close.”

U15, (she), employee

For those seated at a distance of 1 to 2 meters from others, concerns were sometimes raised about confidentiality:

“I don’t like to be within earshot of people. My type of product management is in financial services, so it’s not always appropriate to talk about financial matters aloud where others can hear.”

U2, (he), self-employed

“The space is small—you can hear everything. If two people are speaking at the same time, it becomes a bit difficult. But that’s rare.”

U14, (she), employee

Among coworkers seated 2 meters or more apart, all expressed satisfaction with the arrangement:

“Yes, the distance suits me, and most of the time I’m alone anyway.”

U7, (he), employee

The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have established the 2-meter distance as a new standard of comfort:

“I usually respect the 2-meter rule. Being closer doesn’t really bother me, but the pandemic changed how I perceive proximity!”

G9, (she), employee

“The 2 meters worked really well for me! I wouldn’t be more comfortable without it. Two meters is perfect!”

U29, (he), self-employed

A unique perspective came from a coworking space manager, who considered 1.5 meters to be the optimal distance for balancing individual focus and interpersonal interaction. To encourage this, she arranged the workstations at angles in an octagonal layout rather than in straight lines or face-to-face. When asked about the 1.5-meter spacing, she noted that this was the maximum length of the wooden boards used to construct the tables. She explained:

“I think it works well because it’s not too close—you can work in your own bubble but still see and talk to others and exchange.”

G14, (she), employee

Other studies have explored optimal distances and potential distractions when workspaces are too close (Cheyrouze & Tremblay, 2024, 2025a, 2025b).

4.8. Interactions Among Coworkers

Interpersonal relationships, exchanges, and interactions among workers are central to the coworking experience and are frequently cited as one of its main objectives (Krauss & Tremblay, 2019). In fact, this theme emerged most frequently in this category, with 195 citations. However, we need to mention that some coworkers fear a possible competition among members, especially if they work in the same field or offer the same service or product. This may impede interactions or more in-depth knowledge exchanges between coworkers.

This explains that interactions often range from simple greetings among strangers (especially in large coworking spaces with hundreds of members) to occasional friendships, and more rarely business partnerships or collaborations.

Examples include:

“I just say ‘hi, how are you,’ but it doesn’t go any further.”

U3, (she), employee

One coworker introduced the concept of “professional socializing”—relationships that fall somewhere between friendship and purely professional connections:

“I’ve built more friendly relationships, but not ones where I’d see people outside the office. They’re not really professional ties either, not in the context of my work.”

U4, (he), employee

While some participants did develop friendships, these remained limited. It seems that close personal ties are not easily formed in coworking environments, at least in the ones we studied:

“No, I haven’t made friends I see outside of work, because they’re younger than me. I’m more like a mother figure. One of them used to jokingly call me

‘auntie’ because he knew my cousin, who’s about 30.”

G2, (she), employee

“No, I don’t see people outside of work. They’re acquaintances, sometimes we run into each other at lunch.”

U8, (he), employee

As for business partnerships, these also appear to be limited. The majority of participants reported no opportunities arising from other members—at least not yet. Still, some coworkers reported giving or receiving contracts through the network. One participant described it as follows:

“Yes, we’ve had some collaborations, requests for proposals, things like that... and we’ve also awarded some. Often these are with people who have complementary expertise, so it just makes sense. For example, someone with a communication issue might go to a public relations expert. Once we hired a digital agency—we were lacking that skill at the time. It was actually my office neighbor. We tried a few things that didn’t pan out, more in the tourism sector, but they made sense. These are logical ‘matches.’ We’re complementary, and instead of looking externally, it’s better to look right here.”

U15, (she), employee

4.9. Knowledge Sharing

The concept of knowledge sharing was frequently cited, with 51 mentions by 31 different participants. In general, knowledge or idea sharing was described as a positive aspect by 22 respondents. Positive associations included the contribution of ideas, gaining perspective, and being exposed to expertise from different fields. This is also highlighted as one of the objectives of coworking spaces (Tremblay & Krauss, 2024) and sometimes open space offices (Alla, Roume, & Tremblay, 2024, 2025). However, five individuals reported that the coworking space had no impact on their knowledge and that working there had not contributed to their professional learning.

Some positive quotes about knowledge sharing include:

“Last week I met someone who works as a counselor, she’s from Mexico. We talked about a lot of things... she’s not a psychologist, but she works with people’s personalities. We talked about what she knows in that area, and what I’ve learned too because I really enjoy that. I’ve worked in human resources. She recommended some books I could get here. I found it really interesting. She’s someone I learned from.”

U9 (she), self-employed

“Sometimes we talk about situations with others who have different backgrounds. I remember once there was someone in public relations, around 60 years old, so he had a lot of life experience. Talking with him about certain things gave me new perspectives. It’s knowledge... sometimes something sticks and if it happens to me later, I’ll know what to do. And I’m always very

curious, exploring other fields. People say, ‘I help others redo their CVs,’ and someone else does public relations, another person does web marketing, so it’s a mix of people... one of my neighbors once was making flour out of insects!’”

U15 (she), self-employed

These quotes show exchanges of knowledge outside of the individual’s main area of professional expertise. However, many also reported acquiring technical knowledge or learning new tools to support their work:

“There’s another really nice person, ML. She helped me with that. It kind of helped me get up to speed with computers, because I was afraid of them before.”

U19 (she), self-employed

“Yes, it helps me find tools I need... I collaborated with SDE, which C recommended for my computer issues. If I’d been home alone, it would’ve been a lot more work... the activities at the space—classes, lectures, etc.—really helped. I better understand what LinkedIn/Facebook are for, etc.”

U28 (they), self-employed

Coworkers reported that knowledge sharing occurred both informally and formally. Informal exchanges happened around the coffee machine, during lunch breaks, or casual conversations. Formal knowledge sharing was organized by coworking space managers and included events such as lectures, “lunch and learns,” “trains” (lunches with someone explaining their project), and workshops. However, in one coworking space, the manager noted that free lectures, even with lunch included, were unsuccessful. She explained:

“We tried, but we’re not an incubator. We’re at a different stage. People aren’t in the incubation phase anymore. Yes, there are start-ups, but they’re further along. We tried once to host a free conference by a lawyer—she offered it herself—and we even paid for lunch. It was supposed to be about legal traps for small start-ups. No one signed up, so she didn’t come. Then we tried other talks, on accounting for example, but people already run their businesses. We did a survey last year to ask if there was a need for that, and people said: not really.”

G2 (she), employee

4.10. Creativity and Innovation

Creativity and innovation linked to the coworking space and peer exchanges were also frequently mentioned, with 66 references. Of these, 34 referenced positive aspects of creativity/innovation fostered by the coworking environment, while 15 indicated the space had a neutral effect on their creativity.

One recurring theme was the role of change—in setting, routine, or random encounters—as a trigger for creativity. For example:

“I think biologically, humans enjoy novelty. Just having more than one place where you can work adds variety, makes things less monotonous in the long run. In the short term, sure, I can be creative at home in silence. But in the long run, I need a change of scenery to be creative.”

U10 (she), employee

In terms of creativity, one recurring theme is the positive impact of changing one’s work environment. As one participant noted:

“In terms of creativity, what really helps is changing one’s workspace or location. Sometimes it’s more complicated to do. It should be something spontaneous too. You can rent a room or go to a café, but it’s great to have a space truly dedicated to us, where we can go.”

U23 (he), employee

Another commonly mentioned aspect was the aesthetic appeal of the workspace as a source of inspiration. Several participants highlighted this:

“I enjoy working from home, but I definitely get more inspiration here. Just the space alone is very inspiring

G1 (she), employee

“It improves the quality of my work in terms of creativity. For me, it’s really about what I see—light, windows, the beauty of the place. I have so much space here, as opposed to being in a small office with either a tiny window or no natural light. I would certainly feel less creative and less comfortable in my work environment.”

U17 (he), self-employed

“Yes, it definitely increases my creativity... the brightness, the view of the river, the colors, the decor, the windows, the minimalism. It’s inspiring.”

U28 (they), self-employed

The layout and physical arrangement of the space were also reported to foster creativity:

“I must admit that being physically present sometimes allows for slower, more expansive conversations. The space does affect how we interact. The way it was arranged made it easier to talk to one another because we were more accessible.”

U11 (she), employee

“I think so, yes, because there’s a whiteboard. I can draw or write out my ideas.”

U12 (he), employee

Spontaneous interactions with others were likewise described as stimulating creativity:

“Yes, I couldn’t say exactly what, but I do find it inspiring. What I find inspiring is this sort of... there’s something organic about it. People are there

to work, and naturally you end up talking to someone, and it fuels you. You wouldn't have reached out to that person otherwise, but they're just next to you. There's something there that makes it stimulating and that can generate novelty—working with different people, not always the same ones. It's not all structured or planned. Something emerges, something natural.”

U21 (she), self-employed

“It definitely generates a certain creativity. By talking with other entrepreneurs, we share ideas. I learned how to run a business on the go—I've made good decisions and bad ones, but overall it's been a positive experience.”

U31 (he), employee

4.11. Productivity

The theme of productivity was explored in interviews and mentioned 58 times. However, participants held divergent perceptions of what productivity entails, depending on individual definitions and the alternative work settings they had access to. While 26 participants noted being more productive in coworking spaces, 23 described their productivity as lower or unchanged compared to other environments.

Participants' definitions of productivity varied: Is productivity about completing a single task at a time? Is it about finding solutions more quickly? Does it relate to one's ability to concentrate or avoid distractions? Is being surrounded by others considered productive? These various interpretations emerged in participants' responses. Some examples include:

“More productive, yes, but only if we define productivity as advancing a single task and reaching a specific objective. I tend to think in a spontaneous, branching way. So sometimes I follow a path and then need to backtrack to pick up another one—especially in coding. Sometimes we have to go back to correct our logic. People may not see that as productive because it doesn't yield immediate results. But I see it as productive because by advancing far enough, we can anticipate outcomes at point C, go back to point A, reset the variables, and reach a better version of point C, which turns out to be the real result. It's more productive in the sense that it forces me to focus on one task and complete it—especially for writing, rather than multitasking.

U36 (she), self-employed

“I consider socializing to be productive. At home, if I have trouble focusing, I tend to drift. But at the coworking station, I can concentrate more easily.”

U29 (he), self-employed

“It's something I've been reflecting on with my team. What improves productivity is having quick access to colleagues—people who are just there with you. Lunch breaks and those informal moments are underestimated. My team often says, 'I lose time commuting, and I'm more distracted, so I'm less productive.' But when you're alone at home, you isolate yourself and try to solve problems on your own instead of asking questions that could help you

move forward. So it may feel less productive, but for me, it's just productive in a different way than working alone at home."

U33 (she), employee

"Yes, it has definitely improved my productivity. Just leaving the house makes me more productive. It also helps with motivation. In the coworking space, there are different types of people—employees, freelancers, etc.—and for me, as a freelancer, being surrounded by others has improved my productivity."

U26 (she), self-employed

"In my personal case, yes, absolutely. Working here increases my productivity. I'm much more efficient in a dedicated work environment than at home or elsewhere. At home, there are too many distractions—cleaning the kitchen, doing laundry. These things really interfere with my work efficiency."

G13 (he), employee

"Definitely more productive, because it's beautiful, it's bright. And it's never the same people. I never see the same group of people two days in a row, which leads to new and different interactions. It's not like working in a small business where you see the same colleagues every break."

G8 (she), employee

The physical characteristics of the space also emerged as important factors influencing productivity—specifically beauty, quietness, and access to technological tools. As participants stated:

"I think some aspects of this coworking space enhance productivity. Even though it's a very open and shared space, there's a shared commitment to maintaining a certain level of quiet, which really helps me! I need a certain level of silence to work well. Also, feeling like part of a team helps. Some things really progress when we're working together and can quickly exchange ideas—even though we have digital tools for that too. It's a pleasant space, very open and bright, which makes a big difference. When I was doing my master's, I had trouble staying at home—light, social contact, all that made a huge difference. I would go to cafés or libraries for that experience. So yes, I think it helps."

U32 (she), employee

"Yes... I can really focus, even though at first I thought being so close to nature, with birds singing, would distract me—but not at all. My working hours are far more productive. I'm able to disconnect completely. I just need to go for a short walk, clear my mind, and when I return, I'm really focused."

G9 (she), employee

4.12. Task Variation by Work Location

One recurring theme was that not all tasks are performed in the same way at coworking spaces as they are at home or in an employer's office. Several participants highlighted that specific tasks are better suited to certain environments. This refers

to what is often called activity-or task-based work. The following quotations illustrate this point:

“Productivity, yes and no: yes, if there aren’t too many people. If there are more people, it can be hard to be productive, but it still brings a lot to my work because I enjoy being around others. But sometimes it’s better to stay home, especially if I need to do a task where I don’t want to be interrupted.”

U23 (he), employee

“Yes and no. I’d say for functional tasks, no, because having people around makes you want to chat, socialize, take breaks, etc. But if it’s about going deeper in reflection or being exposed to other perspectives, then yes.”

U21 (she), self-employed

“Productivity, no! Because I have ADHD and I’ve assessed this—when I start a task, I’m fully immersed. But in a coworking space with more distractions, I get pulled out of that state easily and it takes longer to get back into it. At home, it might take a while to get going, but once I do, I go into a sprint. I choose not to look at my phone or turn off notifications, so I’m more productive at home.”

U15 (she), employee

“Productivity is relative because at the office, you can make more progress on company-related projects that require collaboration. Productivity for those types of projects is greater at the office than at home. But at home, I’m productive for tasks I can do individually—more productive on my personal projects.”

U12 (he), employee

4.13. Noise, Concentration, and Well-Being

Noise, concentration, and distraction emerged as closely interrelated themes in coworkers’ experiences, with 233 mentions—making this the most frequently discussed topic across interviews. These elements were not only linked to productivity but also to well-being, as they influenced participants’ mental clarity, stress levels, and emotional comfort in the workspace. While some coworkers found noise to be a source of disruption and anxiety, others valued a moderate level of background sound as part of a dynamic work atmosphere. These diverging perspectives underscore the subjective and contextual nature of how noise is experienced in coworking environments.

For many participants, silence was essential for focused work. Some explicitly chose their coworking space because it offered relief from the distractions of home or other noisier spaces:

“It’s important for me to connect here because there’s no noise, no distractions like at home with kids and everything.”

—U13 (she), self-employed

“To make calls or concentrate, I need to be alone and for there to be no noise

in my office. I'm lucky because there are a lot of empty rooms, but if it fills up... I'd probably spend less time in the office."

—U10 (she), employee

Others, however, appreciated a moderate level of ambient noise, which they found stimulating or comforting. For some, background noise served as a form of white noise that helped them stay engaged:

"Sometimes you can hear people's voices, but it's not disturbing to me. It never bothers me. I kind of like a bit of noise."

—U9 (she), employee

To manage distraction and maintain their mental focus and emotional balance, many coworkers described strategies for creating a "bubble"—a term used frequently in interviews. The most common tactic was wearing headphones, whether for listening to music, blocking out ambient sounds, or simply signaling a need for personal space (see also [Cheyrouze & Tremblay, 2024, 2025a, 2025b](#), for more on this):

"Everyone works with headphones almost all the time. People isolate themselves and work with their own music."

—U4 (he), employee

"Sometimes they weren't even playing anything—it was just to be in my bubble, psychologically."

—G7 (she), employee

By contrast, loud conversations—especially during phone or video calls—were reported as particularly stressful and disruptive to both focus and emotional well-being. In some cases, tension arose when certain users disregarded shared norms around noise:

"The only time I get irritated is when people are literally standing behind me, yapping away on their phones while I'm also on a call—and they're really loud."

—U2 (he), self-employed

"When they changed the telework policy and we had fewer days at home—just one—it was really hard for me. Everyone was at the office, chatting constantly. I found it very difficult."

—G11 (he), employee

"There was a colleague near the big tables holding meetings, for example. That's something we don't do. If you're having a virtual meeting, you project your voice—you should be in a meeting room."

—U32 (she), employee

In one case, a member who repeatedly spoke too loudly was asked to leave the coworking space after multiple complaints and an internal investigation—illustrating how central respect for acoustic boundaries is to the overall experience and comfort of members.

Beyond noise, other contextual elements—such as the layout of the workspace, availability of equipment, and personal routines—also shaped participants’ ability to concentrate and feel well. Several coworkers described preferring closed offices, arriving early, or structuring their workday around their most productive hours:

“During the week, I’m here at 7:15 a.m. to start work at 7:30, when no one else is around... In the morning, I’m efficient.”

—U5 (she), self-employed

“I think when I work in a closed space, I’m very, very focused and concentrated on my task and my computer. So during intense work periods, I absolutely need to NOT be in an open space!”

—U20 (she), self-employed

“I’d say my focused working capacity per day—where I can do deep work—is mostly in the morning... In the afternoon? Forget it.”

—U27 (she), self-employed

Taken together, these findings highlight the strong connection between noise management, concentration, and well-being in coworking settings. Coworkers require a certain degree of environmental control—whether through spatial choices, personal strategies, or organizational rules—to protect their ability to focus and sustain psychological balance. Coworking spaces that offer acoustic flexibility, clear behavioral norms, and a mix of open and quiet zones are better positioned to support the diverse needs of their members.

4.14. Confidentiality

The issue of information confidentiality in coworking spaces was explored with participants, as some may occasionally handle sensitive or confidential data, whether related to their projects or to individuals. For the vast majority of coworkers, however, confidentiality is not a major concern, given the nature of their work

“No. It’s not a concern. And when it gets busy here, there’s still a small office we call the ‘booth’ in the hallway, so if I have something private, I’ll go there.”

U7 (he), employee

“Of course, I do think about it sometimes, but I also adapt my schedule accordingly. There are certain things I can control, so if I’m dealing with more sensitive data, financial data, I’ll probably work early in the morning when people haven’t arrived yet. Or sometimes I’ll work on that kind of stuff over the weekend. Especially since I have a very large screen, a 34-inch curved one, so I can clearly see what I’m doing. But I also think people are aware that in a coworking space, everyone has their own job and that it’s possible some are working with sensitive data. I think there’s still a sense of respect, and it’s not a major concern—but yes, when I’m working with figures, I’m more careful.”

U27 (she), self-employed

“Ah no, not at all. If they read it, they read it... it’s going to be public anyway. If they judge me, well, they judge me. It’s a work in progress. And I don’t

look at very personal stuff anyway.”

U35 (she), self-employed

For those coworkers who are concerned with confidentiality, it is mainly due to the nature of their work and the type of information they handle:

“In a conference room, soundproofing—yes, absolutely—it’s important. Because I meet with clients, so it matters. There’s no issue there. I know there are offices in the back that are less well soundproofed. For dealing with clients, I think it’s essential to have a certain level of soundproofing.”

U1 (she), self-employed

“For example, I was in a session with someone who became very emotional and started speaking louder. I tried to manage their voice, but... I don’t know if people next door could hear. I get nervous about that because I know how to control the volume, but there’s a lot... That’s why I get nervous—I don’t know if others are listening. I just don’t know.”

U13 (she), self-employed

“More and more, the government requires us to have locked.... All of our clients are protected by confidentiality laws. A locked filing cabinet wouldn’t be enough. I don’t think it would happen, but if one weekend someone were to break into the cabinet and use client names for door-to-door fraud... Many fraudsters do that, stealing clients’ credit cards... And if it turns out it was my cabinet, it’s my responsibility, so I would have to pay.”

U28 (they), self-employed

For some users, confidentiality is a critical concern, as these quotes illustrate: “This is true in all coworking spaces I’ve been in: you can hear EVERYTHING. You hear the words. I’m going to bring it up with them. I don’t understand how a space that hosts cutting-edge tech startups doesn’t have any sound protection for ideas. For me, that’s completely... I mean, it’s part of the mission.”

U5 (she), self-employed

“Yes, I had concerns—it depends on the contract, but I position myself facing the hallway. I always use non-shared Wi-Fi.”

U24 (she), self-employed

Most coworking space managers have taken steps to address confidentiality concerns. In this context, confidentiality encompasses both acoustic privacy and data protection. Here are some illustrative quotes:

“There were some soundproofing issues in the offices, and we resolved them. I had an office we rented to a psychiatrist, and of course, it had to be like a bunker. So we redid everything for her. There were costs, of course, but we fully soundproofed it. We did it all before she moved in because we knew it was a condition of the lease.”

G2 (she), employee

“Yes, some people do have concerns about confidentiality. They ask us about

it. Sometimes we'll do a sound test so they feel confident no one can hear. But of course, you can't shout... and what's on screens is less of a concern, because people know they're in an open area. When you choose an open layout, that comes with the territory."

G4 (she), employee

"We had confidentiality concerns with the printer. Since we provide the printer and scanner, we had to install software so that documents are only printed after you enter your code."

G6 (he), employee

"Regarding confidentiality, we try to host a variety of tenants in different fields. For instance, if someone is doing web design, I won't rent to another web design firm next door."

G13 (he), employee

However, some managers are either unwilling or unable to fully meet confidentiality needs:

"It's clear that for professions where confidentiality is paramount, coworking is more challenging. You need isolation. A lawyer, for example—it's hard to imagine one in a coworking space, unless they're all from the same firm and have signed a contract."

G7 (she), employee

"I once told my partner, 'Oh, during the training, they talked about this... it's nice how people connect,' and he said, 'Is that really connection or a lack of confidentiality?' I hadn't seen it that way at all... Workers need to be aware that what they say might be overheard. It's everyone's responsibility—but in the heat of the moment, you might forget others are around."

G8 (she), employee

Some managers are planning future improvements regarding confidentiality, as described below:

"The only thing I foresee is the secure networks. We're currently commissioning an audit on our cybersecurity—completely across the board. From network access equipment to the apps we use in daily operations. The entire chain. When that big company came, they needed a secure network here. They installed their own network that employees accessed via VPN. Now how we'll handle employees' VPNs at home, I'm not sure yet—but I intend to have a hedge on this."

G3 (he), employee

"I would increase the amount of private space we have—for phone calls or privacy. I think that's what's lacking. We have meeting rooms and phone booths, but otherwise, it's open concept. I want people to feel like they can leave their belongings here at the end of the day and know nothing will get stolen. We're vigilant about knowing who is in the space at all times. We have everyone's info in case something happens. We have cameras. Because it's

their workplace, we want it to be secure.”

G1 (she), employee

4.15. Work Quality and the Conditions That Support It

The notion of work quality was explicitly explored with participants and mentioned 45 times. It was frequently linked to an individual’s ability to concentrate, access appropriate tools, and engage in meaningful interactions with peers. Overall, 24 participants reported that working in a coworking space improved the quality of their work. For many, improved focus and reduced distractions were central to this effect:

“The quality of my work is better because I can concentrate and be more productive. At home, it’s very easy to take a nap or get distracted by pets—the dog wants to go out, cats walk on the keyboard... I can go from start to finish on a task without interruption, which also reduces my careless errors.”

U27 (she), self-employed

Similarly, another person linked fewer mistakes and greater attentiveness to a better work environment:

“It’s easier to concentrate, which naturally improves quality. I definitely make fewer mistakes and I’m less inattentive.”

U29 (he), self-employed

For others, the social and cognitive stimulation provided by peer interactions played a decisive role. One person recounted how a brief discussion radically shifted the direction of her work:

“In seven minutes, I brought up a question to two others... they gave me points and questions that made me realize, ‘Wow, I hadn’t thought of that.’ I went for a walk, and it sparked a whole new direction for my project.”

U30 (she), employee

Another emphasized the inspiration that came from observing other coworkers’ projects, designs, and materials—elements often absent from remote work setups. Work quality was also tied to emotional well-being and psychological grounding. For one person, the coworking space contributed to stability in an otherwise precarious work context:

“Having this space gives me a sense of being grounded—it brings peace of mind and security. It’s like a second home.”

For U19 (she) self-employed

Environmental design also factored into perceptions of quality. Participants mentioned comfort, ergonomics, and spatial energy as influential:

“The space is more ergonomic than my dining room table. These things improve my performance, focus, and output quality.”

G13 (he), employee

Yet not all participants experienced an improvement. Thirteen said the coworking space made no difference to their work quality—although several acknowledged gains in productivity or efficiency:

“I’m very rigorous, so quality doesn’t change, but productivity does.”

U5 (she), self-employed

Two others reported consistent work quality across environments, while one described it as “equal quality, but for different reasons”—balancing occasional distractions with moments of collaboration and serendipity.

Only one participant stated that the coworking space reduced the quality of her work:

“At home, my work is better quality. It’s more peaceful and there are fewer distractions.”

—U10 (she), employee

These findings suggest that while coworking spaces do not universally enhance work quality, they often create conditions—through focus, interaction, and environmental comfort—that support it, particularly for tasks requiring concentration, creativity, or emotional stability.

4.16. The Role of the Community Manager

The interviews also explored perceptions of the community manager or facilitator—a role whose boundaries are often loosely defined but widely acknowledged as essential. Participants described this individual as the “go-to person” for practical issues (temperature, bookings, supplies) and, more importantly, as a social catalyst who nurtures interpersonal connections and organizes events.

The presence and personality of the community manager had a strong impact on user satisfaction. One coworker highlighted the importance of small, thoughtful gestures:

“He listens when we give feedback. Like with the blinds—we installed some and he said, ‘Thanks, give me the receipt, I’ll reimburse you,’ and then put them up in all the sunny offices. He’s proactive, always present.”

U8 (he), employee

Another noted that while she is naturally sociable, not all coworkers are. The community manager helped bridge that gap:

“That role—of ensuring a great user experience—helps create a sense of community and support... It contributes to good ambiance and client retention.”

U15 (she), employee

Participants often credited the community manager with transforming a collection of independent workers into a cohesive, vibrant community:

“We went through periods without a community manager, and morale really dropped. It’s essential... The community manager is the core—helping with networking and partnerships, knowing what we each do. Without them, it’s

really not the same.”

U26 (she), self-employed

The role was not only operational but also deeply relational. For one person, the connection was personal and meaningful:

“We had this instant connection—same energy, same values... She’s not there just to empty the dishwasher. Without her, the space wouldn’t be the same.”

U29 (he), self-employed

Events and personalized attention also contributed to a sense of belonging. One coworker emphasized how such touches shaped the atmosphere:

“Last week we had massages, conferences, a ‘funk-up’ night... I remember asking for a locker and she said my name immediately—that personal touch makes a difference.”

U4 (he), employee

However, not all participants had such positive experiences. In one coworking space, the absence or invisibility of this role created a sense of disconnect:

“I really don’t know the roles of the people here... Sometimes I see info on the screens, but...”

U23 (he), employee

Similarly, a person described a lack of visible leadership in organizing events and connecting members:

“They’ve planned some lunch events, but it needs someone to actually organize those... I think someone’s in charge, but I don’t know how to find the info.”

U22 (she), employee

These contrasting accounts underscore the central role of the community manager in shaping not only the practical function but also the emotional climate of the coworking space. When present, engaged, and accessible, the manager acts as a social anchor—enhancing collaboration, supporting member well-being, and reinforcing a sense of belonging.

5. Conclusion

This study refines and nuances existing theories of open innovation by illustrating how coworking spaces serve as both enabling environments and conditional arenas for creative and innovative outcomes. The theory of open innovation emphasizes porous organizational boundaries and the importance of external knowledge flows (Chesbrough, 2003). In this context, coworking spaces appear to provide fertile ground for these flows—particularly through spontaneous interactions, aesthetic stimulation, and intentional facilitation—though not uniformly across all participants.

Consistent with open innovation theory, many participants highlighted the catalytic role of peer exchanges and informal encounters in generating new ideas and fostering creativity. Spontaneous conversations were often described as “organic”, with novelty emerging from unplanned collaborations and serendipitous interactions—echoing the value placed on external inputs and decentralized knowledge sharing in open innovation frameworks. For instance, one self-employed participant noted how conversations with other entrepreneurs helped them learn to run a business “on the go”, reflecting the experiential and iterative aspects of innovation in practice.

In addition, the physical and sensory features of coworking spaces—natural light, inspiring views, open layouts—were repeatedly cited as enhancing creativity. These findings align with the broader literature on the role of the work environment in supporting cognitive flexibility and ideation, extending open innovation theory by emphasizing the embodied and environmental dimensions of innovation.

Another important contribution concerns the role of spatial mobility and novelty as drivers of creative renewal. Participants emphasized how changing one’s setting or routine can unlock creativity, which suggests that spatial and temporal flexibility—core to both coworking and hybrid work models—may support longer-term creative performance. This nuance adds depth to open innovation by pointing to not just organizational openness, but also individual spatial fluidity as a factor in creative outcomes.

However, the findings also highlight limits to the spontaneous emergence of innovation. Several participants noted that creativity does not necessarily arise naturally, even in shared environments. This points to the critical mediating role of community managers—actors who not only maintain logistics, but also actively foster collaboration, network-building, and community cohesion. Their presence often determined whether interactions remained superficial or became generative. In this sense, the coworking space’s potential to function as an open innovation ecosystem appears contingent upon facilitation and intentional curation, rather than being inherent to the space itself.

In sum, this research contributes to open innovation theory by underscoring that innovation in coworking spaces is not a guaranteed outcome of proximity or openness alone. Rather, it emerges through the dynamic interplay of environmental design, spatial mobility, informal interaction, and deliberate community-building. By grounding these insights in the lived experiences of coworkers, the study highlights both the affordances and constraints of coworking spaces as sites of everyday innovation.

The study underscores the diversity of coworking experiences, particularly in non-metropolitan areas where empirical research remains limited, thereby making a significant contribution to the field. Beyond its theoretical insights into creativity and innovation, the research offers practical guidance for coworking space facilitators and community managers aiming to cultivate more collaborative and

productive environments.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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