

## Where we work

Work is what you do, not where you go, says **Barry Jenkins**, Director At **Broome Jenkins**

The evolution of the modern office gave rise to an industry that involves countless manufacturers, service providers and specialists all concerned with creating efficient workplaces. Their primary focus has been the corporate client, creating purpose made environments for a permanent workforce. The office established routines and structure, as well as a physical expression of the company. This traditional framework has experienced many operational and hierarchy changes, including an acceptance of a more agile and nomadic style of work thereby changing the purpose, scale and style of the conventional workplace.

Evolution has been a constant feature of the workplace sector, with IT and mobile communications enabling new ways of working to flourish. A traditional workplace with rows of identical desks and miles of paper storage has become increasingly unnecessary, and the idea promoted by We Work of providing 'space as a service', challenges the very need for a company to be saddled with real estate. For those jobs that allow the flexibility to work anywhere, home working through lock-down has proved that work is something you do, and not necessarily somewhere you go. So today, work is about both the digital and physical space, and where the approach used to be about compliance and adopting rules, today the workplace relies on trust and flexibility.



After almost a year of being locked down, with 40% of the workforce across the EU27 and the UK working from home, the view is that WFH (working from home), has been a success. Different reports about the future of work have reached similar conclusions; that workers would prefer not to return to the office full time once restrictions are lifted. The majority favour a 'blended' style of work, being at home for a few days and elsewhere when necessary. The future of work is, therefore, likely to be multi

centred and thanks to being equipped with mobile technology, this new 'digital nomad' is able to choose where they work. This means that the industry that served the workplace exclusively is facing fundamental changes brought into sharp focus by the pandemic.

The most significant is that the contract market is moving more towards the retail market. Some manufacturers have always known this and found that their products work equally well in the home and the office. One great example of this is USM Haller. Designed in the 1960's it has design classic status and its intrinsic adaptability allows it to respond to both contract/office and retail/domestic applications. Through lockdown with an increased need to make a workspace at home, retailers such as IKEA and Wayfair have been successful in meeting the sudden demand because price, consumer awareness and distribution made them well placed to respond quickly to fresh demand. Others in 2020 have recognised the need to be more consumer facing, some developing dedicated products such as Frovi with their Drop Desk, ideal when space is at a premium. Another example is Boss Design Group who developed a new initiative with a consumer facing website: 'Boss at Home'. By showing a number of their existing products in domestic settings, they are demonstrating how their business is no longer only serving a contract specifier, but a retail consumer as well.

Opposite | Barry Jenkins

Below L-R | USM - Haller an adaptable design classic that suits domestic and corporate environments  
| Frovi - Drop Desk. Folding work table designed for the home on quick-ship programme

For a long time, the development of the office was about planning space to arrange people and equipment, generally lacking in autonomy. Gradually the design of the office developed the idea of 'landscapes' and found ways to make best use of space, furniture and technology with a gradual increase in flexibility. Taking the principles of 'placemaking' associated with master planning of a town or city, office design now encourages autonomy and considers activity, context, and meaning to create a 'sense of place' as defined by Edward Relph in his work of 1974 - 'Place and placelessness'. This is because the physical design of the office is still important and must reflect greater trust in support of blended working. With greater freedom and ability to work alone, the individual corporate employee is more like a consumer. The worker is better connected,

equipped and relatively self-reliant. Hotbox, manufacturers of portable personal storage are specialists in supporting agility and the nomadic worker. MD Jamie Rothwell comments, "we have seen the shift towards a nomadic style of work coming for some time. It has been our focus since the beginning and the increase in this trend led us to work with Broome Jenkins to develop our latest products - Shuttle and Folio"

Taking the form of the highly practical backpack, Shuttle was designed through a detailed focus of the different scenarios a digital nomad would encounter working across various settings. Shuttle is designed to make it easy to organise, stow and retrieve the contents without fuss in different settings at home, in transit and elsewhere.

Although many predictions have been made that the office is no longer required, we need to

think about the wider implications of this idea. City centres require the life that workplaces provide and the opportunity for other businesses to develop around them. We need to think about why home working has been successful and whether it is more successful for older workers secure in their careers with a spare room at home to contain work related activity? We need to think about making a return to the office safe and sustainable. And above all, we need to think about the benefits of contact and interaction.

The reason for this is that it is likely that the experience of working from home differs from one person to another, depending on the space available or whether work has been juggled with home-schooling. Although WFH appears to have widespread support, there are challenges in how successfully work life and homelife are integrated.



# Workspace



As far back as 1999, Jeremy Myerson and the Helen Hamlyn Centre conducted a study into home working called 'Boundaries'. It explored the challenges of managing the spatial conflict of working at home. The study identified varying degrees of success from a 'contained model' with spatial borders, through to a 'permeable model' where there was a planned integration of both. The final model was the 'overflowing work model' where home and work collided chaotically. Twenty-two years on, connectivity and IT may have improved, but the physical challenges are still very relevant.

However, various ideas about working from home as a corporate strategy have been circulating since the 1990's starting with the notion of SoHo (small office - home office). Flexible working was given a further boost in 2008 with the global financial crash. Made possible at the time by improved remote access, the benefits for the worker were often outweighed by the economic imperative to cut costs. Although the current move towards nomadic working seems to be supported by the workforce, remote working should not allow employers to duck an implicit duty of care to their employees. It may be true that productivity among those currently working from home has not fallen, but is this due to people working longer because they have more time to work, by not commuting? Clearly there needs to be a balance and space should still be made available for those who would find working from home difficult.

To address this, we may see the decentralisation of large corporate offices and new facilities that suit the blended style of work.





The idea of 'spoke and hub' is one model based on regional co-working spaces close to home or 'spokes' that connect into a central corporate office or 'hub'. Another is to rely on providers like We Work and Regis, giving employees membership so they can escape the spare bedroom and work in a space where the ambient buzz, surrounded by other people working, has been shown through studies to improve creativity and help concentration.

Now more than ever, people desire certainty. So, with growing concerns about the long-term effect of lock-down on mental health and the economy, it is reasonable for teams of specialists to try and provide a reliable vision of the future. However, it is also worth noting that we have seen how lockdown has accelerated the collapse of several leading high street retail brands. That is not because people no longer wish to shop, it is more a question of how and when they shop. In the same way that retail has moved from a physical to a digital environment, we need to think how to effectively manage the transition in other work settings through the same changes. The goal has to be that we create activity to revitalise our towns and stimulate meaningful employment. |

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Opposite | Rume2 in Chichester one of many regional new co-working ventures to start up improving the network of available space

Left | Hotbox - Shuttle

Below L-R | Boss Design Group - AC DC Height adjustable desk and Cosa task chair

| Boss Design Group - Deploy table

Bottom | Hotbox - Shuttle and folio

