

# Co-working offices — the future of workplaces

Governments the world over must facilitate this mode of working which has many ecological and work-life benefits

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**W**ork From Home (WFH) was considered as an effective solution to curtail travel and reduce the carbon emissions from transportation. Our experience of cleaner air in Delhi during the Covid lockdown further strengthened this view point.

But this view may be true at the local level and not at a global level. In a ground-breaking research, Prof Margaret Bell and her team in UK proved that WFH in UK actually increased the energy usage required for heating homes.

Their study shows that people working from home on average use 75 per cent more energy — simply because one needs heating and gas, electricity at home, that's more than what one saves by not going into work by car. The energy requirement per person is far less when people are working in office, thanks to energy efficient heating systems at offices.

Although no similar study is available for India, a number of cases of high electricity bills have been reported in major cities after

unlock 1.0 in June 2020. Some consumers even complained of a 3-15 times hike in electricity bill.

The use of residential air-conditioning is increasing in cities, the energy requirement per person for cooling homes is going to be much higher than that in offices which use comparatively efficient centralised air-conditioning systems.

## Flip-side of WFH

WFH is preferred by both employers and employees for its benefits — freedom from commute, saving precious office space — but there are adverse effects too. Social scientists have associated WFH with harmful psychological effects due to lack of human interaction. We humans thrive in our ability to work together in big teams towards a common goal. WFH does not fit into our way of life which has evolved over thousands of years.

An optimal solution to curtail travel demand perhaps lies between the best of two worlds — co-working space.

A co-working space is a shared office space where anyone can hire a workstation for the duration of one's need. The workstations are



**Affordable** and convenient

equipped with wi-fi connection, power, IT facilities, fax machines, projector, flipcharts, printers, phones, scans, bookbinder, conference rooms, lounge, recreation rooms, library, water, coffee and snacks. The idea of a co-working space is to provide an affordable alternative workstation where one can work with seclusion and autonomy.

Co-working places are ideal for freelancers as well as regular employees if they are allowed to work from remote locations. Even smaller companies, start-ups prefer co-

working places as they are affordable, easily available and don't need long-term commitment for office space. These co-working places are already being set up in major cities across the world. In London, there are more than 150 co-working places.

It is estimated that the present 5 per cent share of the office space market that co-working spaces occupy is likely to swell up to 30 per cent by 2030. More co-working spaces would enable people to work from a workstation nearest to their residence.

It is time policy-makers make co-working places an essential part of development of residential space/societies. It may be made part of local building laws like other things (parking, open spaces, etc). As a policy, co-working places must be made available within cyclable distance (2-3 kms from every location in a city).

The availability of co-working places in smaller cities may also motivate people to migrate from big cities to smaller (less polluted) cities. In turn the congestion and consequent pollution level in big cities can be reduced.

Covid-19 has proved that work from remote location is feasible in many sectors and also beneficial. The growing trend of WFH will encourage employees as well as employers to choose workplaces that are near residential areas.

“Walk to Work” and “Work Near Home” have the potential to emerge as the new trend among corporates. Co-working spaces seem to be the future of workplaces if enabling infrastructure is available.

There's a need to envision this future today and start planning for tomorrow. The development of co-working places may be an integral part of the government's Smart City Mission. Co-working places can be included in the master plans for the city. Some part of road cess collected by government as part of petrol price may be utilised to incentivise development of the co-working places. The mixed land use with emphasis on co-working places may be the way forward for the sustainable development of a city.

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