

B2 First Reading Part 7 - Modern workspaces

A. Read the article and answer the questions. Four people describe their experiences of using a shared workspace. For questions 1–10, choose from the people A–D.

Which person... (You may choose each person more than once.)

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| 1. found that a place they had expected to suit concentrated work was less suitable than home? [] | 6. had to correct visitors' mistaken impression of their business? [] |
| 2. has gained paid work through a contact made in the building? [] | 7. was helped to explain an idea to a client by someone in a different profession? [] |
| 3. disliked losing the freedom to choose when to use the workspace? [] | 8. uses the presence of other workers to maintain productive habits? [] |
| 4. discovered that sharing was cheaper once all the expenses were considered? [] | 9. regularly moves between home and a shared building to suit different kinds of work? [] |
| 5. avoided objecting to interruptions because of how others might react? [] | 10. found the atmosphere calmer than they had imagined? [] |

Sharing a workspace

A Leah, graphic designer

Becoming self-employed after years in a busy design agency, I assumed that working from home would offer uninterrupted concentration. Instead, I developed a habit of postponing demanding assignments. Joining a shared workspace restored the structure I had lost. Nobody checks my progress, yet being surrounded by people absorbed in their work makes wasting time considerably less tempting. The level of background chatter is much as I anticipated. I generally wear headphones to discourage interruptions, although I make a point of joining conversations at lunchtime. Those informal exchanges have proved commercially valuable. A photographer who became familiar with my work recommended me to two clients, both of whom subsequently hired me. Membership remains more expensive than using my spare room, but the additional income has covered the difference. Flexible access means I am free to choose my hours, even though I prefer a predictable routine. In the end, I needed an environment where doing my work felt like a commitment.

B Omar, software developer

Members of my shared workspace must now reserve desks for fixed periods, following complaints about overcrowding. However reasonable the policy may be, I resent having to commit in advance instead of deciding spontaneously. That loss of flexibility is frustrating, but I would not return to my former office. Although renting it had guaranteed privacy, the isolation eventually outweighed that advantage. I moved into the shared building expecting companionship, only to discover that its greatest benefit was access to perspectives beyond software development. Background activity generally suits me, provided confidential conversations can take place in an enclosed room. When a customer couldn't see the point of my proposal, a theatre producer suggested using a familiar situation to put it across, rather than technical detail. She had no commercial interest in the project, but her contribution transformed the discussion. Conversations that challenge my thinking remain valuable, whether or not they generate additional business.

C Grace, translator

When my employer closed its local office, I chose a shared workspace over working entirely from home. Since membership is funded by my employer, financial considerations played no part in that decision. Friendships have developed, although neither side expects them to result in professional opportunities. Work, however, has been less straightforward. Having assumed that domestic distractions would affect my concentration, I expected the arrangement to improve my productivity. The opposite proved true whenever a translation required sustained attention. Colleagues would interrupt with apparently minor questions, and, rather than risk being regarded as unfriendly, I rarely explained that I needed to concentrate. I have consequently divided my working week according to the demands of each assignment. Routine tasks occupy the three mornings in the shared building, while complex translations are completed at my kitchen table. The arrangement bears little resemblance to what I originally planned, but combining the two locations has let me preserve social contact without sacrificing concentration.

D Ben, architect

Our architecture practice had outgrown its original premises, but the apparent expense of shared accommodation initially discouraged us. It was only after we had calculated the separate costs of equipment, internet access and meeting facilities that we recognised the financial advantage. With those services included in the membership, our overall monthly expenditure actually fell. I had also anticipated considerable noise, whereas most occupants proved remarkably considerate and quiet corners were readily available. The complication I had overlooked concerned our professional image. Clients coming to see us sometimes pictured a team of dozens rather than our small practice. We now tell them who actually works for us before they arrive. Having repairs and deliveries dealt with by somebody else is another practical advantage. If our team were to expand substantially, we would probably require independent premises. Meanwhile, sharing provides access to facilities which, if we rented an equivalent office ourselves, would be beyond our budget.

Answer key

1. C - expected distractions at home; opposite true
2. A - photographer sent two clients
3. B - fixed bookings; misses deciding that day
4. D - combined bills fell
5. C - didn't want to seem unfriendly
6. D - clients assumed larger company
7. B - theatre producer helped explain to client
8. A - others working stops procrastination
9. C - routine tasks there; demanding work home
10. D - expected noise; members considerate