



Hybrid Working Community



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- Tessa Bouwman
Marketing Director Ahrend

The working environment as we know it is evolving at tremendous speed. Working from home is becoming increasingly common. The central base has taken on a new, or different, function. And organisations are starting to ask themselves: what does the 'work environment of the future' actually look like? Last year, faced with the huge scale of the Coronavirus pandemic, developments in our working environments accelerated at an even higher rate.

From trends to the future

We have identified several trends. The ability to meet and collaborate is vital to many organisations. A sense of connectedness contributes to the employees' well-being. The central base plays an important connecting role. For that reason, more organisations are making a conscious decision to offer their employees a healthy and comfortable working environment. As well as providing the space to meet and collaborate, a vitalising workplace should offer plenty of room for concentration and focus. Or the space to make video calls without disturbing anyone. Essentially, the layout should support the diversity of the tasks and activities.

Looking to the future, we expect to see a further increase in the use of diverse working environments, appropriate to the task in hand. The trend towards more hybrid forms of working is set to continue at an accelerating rate. This has been confirmed in recent talks with international clients and knowledge partners, and by several studies. Our vision encompasses a transition to the so-called Hybrid Working Community, in which employees make their individual work journeys.

In this vision paper we share our latest insights and the trends we have identified, offer specific solution pathways for a future-proof working environment and explain how Ahrend can assist you as an organisation through this transition. Stay tuned to our website: we will continue to share our latest insights and engage you in the conversation.

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The working environment reconsidered

The working environment as we know it is evolving at tremendous speed. Whereas we used to spend large parts of the day in the office, now we can work almost anywhere, thanks in part to new technologies. Provided, that is, we take care of the basics, such as providing a vitalising workspace. The home workspace is gaining importance. As a result, we meet in the office less often than we used to. This means that belongingness between co-workers and employee connectedness with the organisation as a whole are in need of even greater attention.

What are the implications for your organisation and the current working environment? To that there is no ready-made answer; every organisation is unique. It is to be expected that we won't be spending the majority of our working day at a single, central location. But that the working environment will develop into a Hybrid Working Community: a working environment that offers multiple spaces for every individual employee to follow his or her personal 'work journey'.

Read more here about our vision for the work journey in the Hybrid Working Community. We explain which elements are important and what we can do to assist you, the organisation, through the transformation.



01

The latest developments in the Work Journey

Individual needs begin to occupy the centre stage

The work journey as such is not new; for some time now companies have embraced activity based working. During the day, work was not a single destination, but a peregrination where employees choose one spot for peace and quiet and another for collaboration and brainstorming. What we do see, however, is a number of shifts in the current working environment: employees are working more frequently from home. The office of the future carries greater weight as a central meeting place that stimulates connectedness between employees and belongingness with the organisation as a whole. Around the meeting place, a pod of flexible working locations appears.

This gives employees even more space(s) to follow their personal and most appropriate work journey. They have much greater control over their personal comfort and effectiveness. Through comfort and individual choice, employees unite to achieve the best results for the organisation.



More frequent home working

Frequent home working has become the new reality for many organisations and the people they employ. The home workspace is an integral part of the working environment. Frequent home working changes the experience of working: at home you have (greater) control over your personal comfort. Ideally, the home workspace would be equipped to allow employees to work as healthily and with as much pleasure as they do in the office while retaining a sense, at their remote location, of being part of the organisation as a whole. The community to which they (want to) belong.

“The Hybrid Working Community offers employees all the space they need to perform at their best.”

The office as a social hub

More than ever before the office is becoming a community place, a social attraction. It is the beating heart of your organisation: the place where your employees come to see each other and their clients, discuss matters, have meetings, collaborate and receive coaching and training. You enjoy at least the same level of comfort as you have at home; preferably more, thanks to the diversity of the workspaces and the amount of personal space. It is where you celebrate your successes and where communal events take place. The corporate identity is visible and tangible all around. At this central location, you show your employees and your clients what kind of organisation you are; what you stand for together.

In the office, we see the emphasis shift towards more frequent video calls and remote consultations from the office. There is also a growing need for quiet and peaceful spaces to work in. There will be a shift from large, open working environments to smaller, open environments with more specific spaces for different activities located around them. On one hand, floor areas are likely to reduce as people spend more time working from home or elsewhere. On the other, comfort and the need to accommodate specific activities will require more space. How that filters through to the central location will differ from one organisation to another.





Flexible pod of external work locations

Around the central 'community place' we see the emergence of a flexible pod of external locations. Consider, for example, besides the home workspace, a number of work hubs close to the employee's home. Mini-offices that reflect the look and feel of the organisation. In addition to these there are work hubs which are entirely independent of the company brand: well-equipped external spaces or workspaces available for hire.

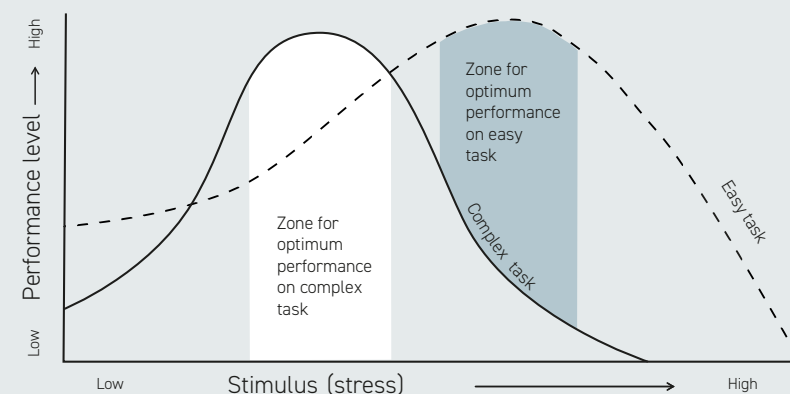
Finally, we have other external working locations: from the restaurant or outdoor location to the car or train, from which work can be done and calls can be made en route.

Employees plan a personal Work Journey

The future working environment paves the way for a journey through the diversity of physical workspaces. The working day is not a destination, but a peregrination. The way employees plan their journey and their destination is largely dependent on their activities and objectives. On their unique work journey, they seek out the spaces that best support their goals. This can vary from person to person, task to task and moment to moment. The question is: in which location – or locations – can I best achieve my aims and where will I spend my next few working hours? At home perhaps? A space in the central location? An external work location? Finding an optimal balance between performance and stress is an important aspect of the space or area an employee will choose.

Group of diverse working environments

Attractive employers set themselves apart by means of the flexibility with which employees can plan the work journey. By providing a group of diverse working environments. We call this entirety of diverse working environments, available to employees throughout the day, the Hybrid Working Community.



Source: J.F. Wohlwill (1974) Stress model

Optimal performance area

A vital part of everyone's work journey is striking a balance between performance and stress. A diversity of spaces offers freedom of choice, and therefore personal comfort for your employees. Depending on the task, they choose a space or area that allows them to perform at their best. Not only does this reduce absenteeism, but it increases employee wellness and effectiveness.



02

The Hybrid Working Community

Give employees the space(s) they need to perform at their best

New technologies allow us to work where and when we want to. At the same time, we recognise that a complex set of tasks cannot be carried out at the same work station. Every task, every role, every person is unique – and how and where the individual employee performs best should be tailored. In a Hybrid Working Community you give your employees the space(s) they need to perform at their best.

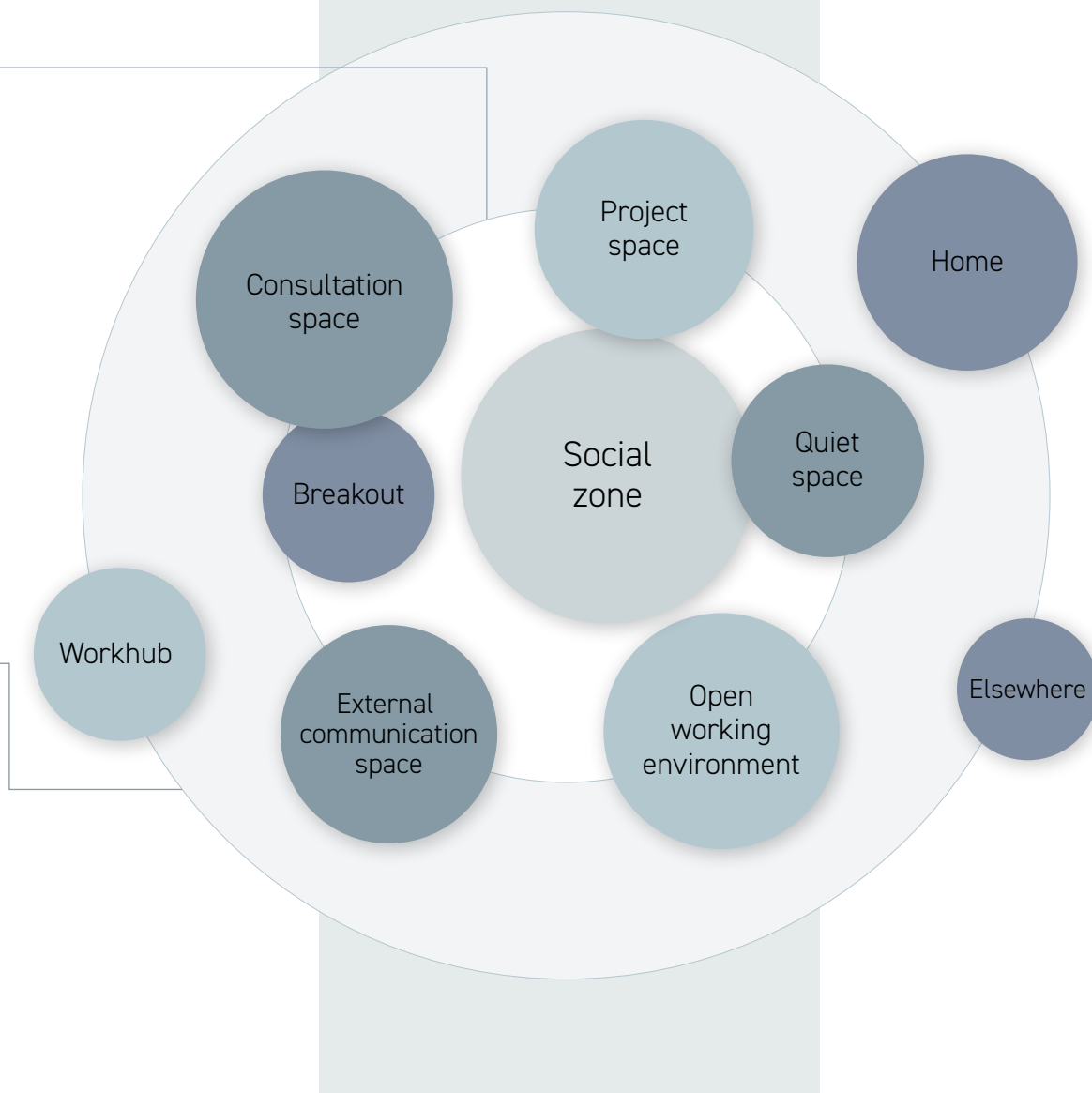
Central location

The uniting factor

One important aspect of the workplace experience is and always will be the central community place. The place where you get to meet your colleagues and clients: a uniting factor which cannot be completely fulfilled by the virtual world and video calling. This central location offers employees the space(s) they need for activity-related work: they get to meet each other in a social zone, and in the open working environment they get to work and learn from each other. There are also separate spaces for formal consultations, working on projects, concentrating on work (quiet zone), virtual contact with the outside world (individual communication zone) and impromptu, unplanned interaction (breakout zone).

Professional, flexible pod

Around the central location employees can choose from a diversity of external locations: from the home workspace to a work hub or other working location such as a restaurant, an outdoor space or a form of public transport. In many cases, the home workspace will have to go through a process of further professionalisation, to allow employees to work responsibly and in comfort from home. Obviously, this would also apply to the work hub or any other external location.





Vitalising working environments are key

Wherever people are working in the Hybrid Working Community, vitalising and inspirational working environments are key. Vitalising workspaces create belongingness, promote employee wellbeing, increase productivity and facilitate diversity. The four basics for an organisation's success.

- › Create belongingness
- › Promote wellbeing
- › Increase productivity
- › Facilitate diversity

“We believe that vitalising workspaces attract talent, increase employee experience and are therefore key to the success of organisations.”

Creating belongingness

A good working environment is a place where employees are happy to be, and one that gives them a sense of belonging. Connection and the feeling of belongingness are even more important in the Hybrid Working Community, given the diversity of locations to which employees have access on the work journey. Whether at home or in a work hub, you want employees to feel that they belong to the business culture and the group. The details make all the difference: from branding on a laptop to having the same type of chair at home as at work. Recognisable and familiar.



Promoting wellbeing

A vitalising workspace focuses attention on the personal development of employees, which in turn improves their happiness at work. Employees are given all the space they need – literally and figuratively – to keep learning and get the best from themselves. They are aided in this by safe and ergonomic workspaces, a comfortable climate, plenty of greenery and natural light. Thought will even have been given to sustainability and the environment. This applies as much to the external locations of the Hybrid Working Community as it does to the central core.



Increase productivity

In the Hybrid Working Community, employees make a conscious choice for the spaces they want to work in. Effective partitioning of space, appropriate furniture, the right acoustics, a pleasant look and feel, good technology and equipment – all aspects of the working environment that allow them to work comfortably, energetically and effectively. This in turn leads to higher productivity.

Facilitate diversity

We believe in flexible working environments that facilitate diversity, and by that we mean diversity of people and diversity of work forms. There is no 'one size fits all'. Employees have their own unique backgrounds and personal preferences about where and how they work. Whether consulting, collaborating or brainstorming, working individually or concentrating on their work - they seek out the spaces that best support their aims.





03

What does this mean for your working environment?

The variety of spaces available in the Hybrid Working Community

To be a successful organisation, it is important to view every workspace or working environment in the Hybrid Working Community through the lens of vitalisation. How you see it varies from one organisation to another and depends on your core values, as well as the work and the work processes. In other words, there is no standard formula; customisation is key. Delivering custom solutions is second nature to us – for more on this see chapter 4. In the pages that follow we examine the basics of the different areas in the Hybrid Working Community.



Central zone Social zone

The social zone is where you build your community. The atmosphere and interior reflect your organisation's identity. You give your guests a warm welcome and make a good first impression. Employees who have been working at home or at external locations for a day or two are happy to come back to the hub. In the social zone they get to meet their colleagues, talk to each other live and exchange ideas in a more informal way. They have all the space they need for impromptu, unplanned interaction; the outdoor space is also a major part of this.



Meetings can be held in multiple places and ways: physically and virtually, or a combination of both. The demand for flexible meeting spaces is rising. And computer technologies such as Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality are developing fast. From one organisation to another there are differences in the number of consultation areas needed and how they should be set out and furnished. Management-level meetings in a large organisation have a more formal feel than less formal, internal consultations. The common denominator is the provision of an inspirational interior to encourage pleasant consultation and reflect your organisation's DNA. This delivers a recognisable, professional setting.

Flexible zone
**Consultation
space**





Flexible zone
**Breakout
zone**

In the margins of formal consultations, we know that spontaneous, unplanned interactions are at least as important to your employees' wellbeing, happiness and productivity. Create a comfortable place to which they can withdraw for a short period of time, either in small groups or alone.

These are known as breakout zones. Places where employees can discuss a meeting in advance, or after the event, without having to return to their workspaces in the open casual meeting environment. They are just the place to assess a meeting's outcome. A chance for the more introverted characters, who may get fewer opportunities to speak in a formal setting, to express their opinions.

And a place where you can work individually without having to find a quiet area. The demand for this type of area will rise, because it inspires relaxation, rapid brainstorming sessions and creative interaction. And that raises productivity.



Flexible zone
**Project
area**

If employees spend extended periods on a project, it can be pleasant to share a space, and it can prove effective. Team members find it easier to keep track of the deadlines and latest developments. A project space can be earmarked for long-term use by employees involved in any number of projects who like to gather and share know-how and inspiration (a studio for example). The greatest possible flexibility in terms of layout and furnishing is particularly important for these spaces. They work well for different people and different work forms, or facilitate diversity, in other words.





Flexible zone
**Quiet
area**

Home is proving to be the best place for concentrated work. Whereas the office is the place for spontaneous social encounters. To encourage employees to visit the office regularly it is important to offer a variety of spaces in the central location where they can concentrate (stimulus-free zones). These can vary from closed-off quiet places in the margins of an open working environment to a 'library environment' in which silence is the rule. In the latter case, fewer additional acoustic measures will be needed.



Semi-concentrated work, routine work, informal information sharing and learning from each other: all are possible in an open learning environment. It is a pleasant space to work in, and it gives employees a sense of pride in the company they work for. We anticipate a reduction in the size of an organisation's open working environment. Firstly, because employees will more often work elsewhere; and secondly because they will (be more inclined to) use specific areas for specific activities, such as concentration, breakout and project spaces.

Flexible zone
**Open
working
environment**





Flexible zone
**Individual
communication
space**

To replace business travel we will see more frequent virtual contact from the office. We have all seen how well it works from home. At the central office location, you will want to assist your employees with this by laying on isolated workspaces and lounges with business-class facilities and technologies, such as Teams and Zoom. On one hand, the new business class offers privacy, and on the other it protects co-workers from noisy distractions. Everyone can go about their business efficiently.



The ideal home workspace is different for every employee. Some employees spend the day concentrating at their desks and working alone. Others merely touch down for a while to take care of the paperwork. One has set up a separate work room, the other works in the kitchen, the living room or bedroom. In other words, the home workspace is all about personal choice. Here too, it is safe to say that everyone is unique and works best in their own particular way.

Depending on their roles, employees in the Hybrid Working Community have the freedom to choose the most comfortable space to work in. Younger employees will tend to gravitate to the central working environment, to learn the ropes from their colleagues, whereas others will prefer to work from home. At home too, it is important to have a good ergonomic workspace equipped with all the relevant technologies.

Flexible zone Home Workspace





Flexible zone Work hub

Do you want to make it easy for employees to meet at a distance, collaborate and experience a small-scale working community? In that case, set up a work hub: a small establishment somewhere in the employees' neighbourhood. A mini-office of this sort can save a lot of travel time. By imbuing this hub with the company brand and atmosphere, you will maintain your employees' sense of belongingness to the organisation. The work hub should have representative spaces in which employees can consult with others, physically and virtually.



Flexible zone Elsewhere

It is getting easier for employees to work as, where and when it suits them, thanks to current technologies and flexible working hours. By allowing them on-demand access to external spaces or workspaces (unbranded work hubs), you give them the chance to save travel time.

In theory, employees can work out of coffee shops, but they can also take an important call in the car, finalise the paperwork on the train or consult a client while strolling through the park. Allowing them space on their work journey is part and parcel of being a good employer and has a positive effect on their productivity.





04

Workplace consultancy

What does your Hybrid Working Community look like?

Transitioning to a Hybrid Working Community, where your employees come into their own and make their own choices, is likely to raise a few questions. What works for us? What does our ideal working environment look like? The answers rest on expertise and custom-made solutions. We will gladly consider your organisation's challenges and work with you to find the right solutions. To this end, we draw on years of experience in vitalising working environments. We can add our expertise in ergonomics, acoustics, privacy, design and climate (the Well standard and Biophilic design). There are three steps in the process, to be taken together.

How it works

Step 1: Exploration

Identification of wishes and ambitions

We look at your organisation's identity, culture and work processes and distil them into a specific vision for the interior. We help you identify your aims, ambitions and needs. To do that, we perform an interactive analysis involving a representative sample of users. We employ several methods in the process, such as workshops, interviews and occupancy rate metrics. And so together we lay the foundations from which we begin to design the perfect vitalising work environment for your organisation.



Step 2: Design

A new working environment: from big picture to details

After the initial exploration we zoom in on the work done in the organisation and look at how these activities should complement each other in the Hybrid Working Community. This provides the content for our concept design: we come up with the big picture for the working environment, from the central core to the flexible pod. In the process we consider factors such as the acoustics, workspace density and zoning; factors with a strong influence on employee comfort and performance. Together we arrive at the final design in which our aim is always to provide ample choice in terms of spaces and workplace types.



Step 3: Realisation

Efficient implementation and faultless delivery

Embarking together on a refurbishment project is never without its challenges – from project organisation and logistics to temporary storage of the new furniture. For that reason, we give you a permanent point of contact: one of our project managers is assigned to relieve your organisation of all concerns. The project manager orchestrates the refurbishment process, takes charge of the suppliers and project partners, manages the deadlines and assures faultless delivery. The entire process is managed through open dialogue.

Questions or advice?

Our experts will gladly look at your workplace options with you. Get in touch with your account manager or call +31 (0)88 006 0000.

We are here to help!

For more information see www.ahrend.com

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Vitalising Workspaces