

## What workspaces are the best for freelance workers?

Written by The Conversation

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*The gig economy is offering Australians jobs, but it comes at a cost. These are often temporary positions, where workers are independent and have to take on more risks.*

*In our series [Working Well in the Gig Economy](#) we ask experts how workers can cope in this new environment.*

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People who work in the gig economy can work from everywhere. But not all places are compatible with the contingent nature of their work, recommended health and safety guidelines or fulfil their needs when it comes to the social nature of work.

[Temporary self-employment is not new](#) , but online platforms like [Upwork](#) and [Freelancer](#) are enabling an estimated [55 million freelancers in the United States \(35% of their workforce\)](#) to connect with those that require their skills. A [2014 study](#) estimates 3.7 million (30% of workers) contribute A\$51 billion to the Australian economy each year.

The sheer amount of freelancers and their significant contribution to the economy, make it important to consider what makes a good place for gig workers to do their gigs. While workspaces used by freelancers might have similar components (for example chairs and desks) as those used by full-time employees, historical differences make freelancers' workplaces different from the office.

It's important to remember that the office is an invention. Contemporary corporate workplaces are the result of conditions that have not only given us the office building, but [shaped civilisations](#) .

For example in the US, the office evolved from a variety of circumstances including increased trade produced by the railroad. People could [no longer do their business in their heads](#) and

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businesses progressively needed more space for [managers](#)

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Further management inventions, such as [hierarchy and bureaucracy](#), shaped organisational structures. Other developments like a [reduction of the cost of steel](#) and the invention of the elevator shaped the physical structure of tall buildings in prime locations in New York City and Chicago.

In Australia, one of the first multinational corporations, the [East India Company](#), contributed to the development of the early office building. In the early 1800s, the first Postal Act of 1825 enabled the New South Wales governor to fix postage rates and appoint postmasters outside of Sydney. This led to some of the first offices of [Australia Post](#)

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The [technological, economic and social circumstances](#) fostering freelancing are in many ways different, [if not at odds](#), with the context that created the office. However [work is a social activity](#) and [professional isolation can negatively impact job performance](#) and create [adverse psychological conditions](#)

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Another popular option for gig workers is the coffee shop. These have provided a social outlet and [have hosted activities similar to today's work activities &ndash;reading, writing and exchange of information - since the 17th century](#). However, [these places](#) are [not sites for gainful or productive work](#)

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## If not a traditional office or coffee shop, then what?

Coworking spaces are [shared workplaces utilised by professionals, mostly freelancers, who](#)

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[miss the interactions \(and amenities\) of the office](#) but do not want to commit to long and complicated lease terms. These spaces allow freelancers [to rent space in a casual fashion and in short terms](#), even by the hour.

Coworking also allow freelancers to work among others, even if not with them, in other words to “[work alone together](#)”. [What started in 2005 in San Francisco](#) by a software developer who wanted “[the freedom and independence of working for myself along with the structure and community of working with others](#)”, is now [a multi-billion dollar industry](#).

Some spaces cater to specific professions, from [fashion designers](#) and [writers](#) to [lawyers](#). Other spaces play host to [every profession under the sun](#).

Some coworking offerings are based on the [access economy](#), taking advantage of underutilised resources and making them accessible. For example, [Spacious](#) is looking into the more than [2,000 restaurants which are closed before 6pm in New York](#) and aiming to open them for coworking during business hours.

[Hoffice](#), an emerging model from Sweden, invites people to work from a more common “[durin g-the-day underused resource: our homes](#)”. In Australia, a bank is opening its lobby for clients to cowork.

Which codes or health and safety requirements apply when a restaurant, or home, is also being used as a workplace? [As legislation evolves to protect the right of freelancers](#), design must strive to provide them with safe and good working environments.

[Several studies from social and physical sciences](#) on topics as varied as [the influence of](#)

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[ceiling heights in creativity](#)

or

[the effects of smelling peppermint in typewriting speed and accuracy](#)

, suggest that qualities of the environment can affect work.

[Quantitative](#)

and

[qualitative](#)

studies also highlight the role of physical proximity between people in supporting interactions and transferring knowledge.

Even [experiments with divers](#) suggest that information is better recalled in the same environment that it was learnt (surface or under the sea). Working from a constant, purposely designed space to work with or among others might not only help to provide the necessary contextual cues to remind freelancers what they need to do, but the environment to do it better.

As the gig economy evolves, distinct places for gig workers are likely to change the skyline created by the railroad and busy managers. The advantages of freelancing such as casual and portable work should not come at the expense of a precarious work life without access to ergonomic, social and purposely designed spaces that take into consideration the uncertain nature of their work.

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*Kyla Lodewijk, Provisional Psychologist and Allied Health Consultant, also contributed to this article.*

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