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Annual Review

DEGW



The role of the physical workplace in the networked organisations of the future isn't to warehouse knowledge workers, but to consolidate and communicate an organisation's values.



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Flexibility

A shocking number of my peers don't go to the office very much anymore. These pioneers of tomorrow's 'workplace' aren't all software developers or freelancers, though. They are the rank-and-file of educated thirty-something corporate professionals working their way through middle management. Whether they're in New York, London, Dubai or Singapore the story is much the same. For us, the daily grind is a weird and still-evolving hybrid of constantly connected, yet self-supervised collaborative work in places of our choosing, punctuated by intense face-to-face gatherings with colleagues and clients.

You might say that we are living through the workplace equivalent of the Big Bang. Much of the glue that held the 20th century office together is being dissolved by the cheap connectivity of digital networks. The push is fueled by a new urgency to reduce corporate real estate expenses. On the pull side, while most human resource managers today are puzzling over hopeless stereotypes or about the expectations of young workers, the truth is that workers of all ages are finding diverse and compelling reasons for more flexible work arrangements.

But what many forecasters seem to miss is that, like the Big Bang, this transformation isn't only about destroying existing structures. The very networks that are undermining the water cooler are laying the seeds of need for future forms of space that will allow virtual affinities to blossom in the real world. That's why cafes, airline lounges and even

public parks with Wi-Fi access are some of today's most dynamic, ad hoc spaces for collaborative knowledge work.

DEGW's work over the last year circumscribes the way design practice is evolving, and gathering bits of this post-network organisational debris into new centres of gravity. What comes out clearly is that the role of the physical workplace in the networked organisations of the future isn't to warehouse knowledge workers, but to consolidate and communicate an organisation's values – be it commitment to environmental sustainability, a culture of bottom-up innovation, or the social benefits of personal health.

In this world, workplace design is not going to be about idealised solutions, because the pace of organisational change set by what is happening to online collaboration isn't slowing down. Instead, the challenge will be putting in place processes that make physical space flexible enough to accommodate a rapid evolution of collaborative needs. DEGW's painstaking methods for gaining deep insight into these intersections will provide a basis for growth and excellence in practice for many years to come.

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