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Co-working spaces are the future of work but that could be a good thing

They can be noisy but co-working spaces also offer an environment where professionals can wait out the volatility of the job market

The growing phenomenon of co-working spaces – places where individuals can rent a desk of their own while sharing a range of other facilities with their co-tenants – is as indicative of the changing nature of work.

How big is the sector? Small Business Labs, an organisation that monitors it around the world, suggests that the number of people renting such spaces will grow globally from just under 1m in 2016 to nearly 4m in 2020.

According to research by user experience researchers Melissa Gregg and Thomas Lodato, co-working can be a positive choice for many freelancers. They argue that, in part, such workers are seeking “relief from the emotional demands of the corporate office”.

So is co-working a good thing in itself or simply a rational response to negative changes in traditional workplaces?

Isolation is one of the key problems that arises for freelancers and providing this sort of human contact – a community of fellow nomads – has become the secret sauce of the co-working industry, a large part of what makes it attractive.

Co-working spaces have become an attractive choice for landlords, real estate agents and other firms looking to fill floorspace as more traditional tenants, such as retailers, close down. US figures indicate co-working may account for as much as 2% of the office market by 2020.

Flexibility that empowers workers should be welcomed and co-working spaces may enable that sort of change. It could be the testing ground for an entirely reimagined notion of employment.

By Tim Dunlop, adapted from www.theguardian.com, April 2017