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# Creating spaces in which hybrid teams perform best.



WOODHOUSE

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**How do we encourage employees back into workspaces and provide them with the best opportunities to be creative, collaborative and productive?**

We previously explored the concept of leaders acting as ‘Ringmasters’ in the workplace, creating an energy which strengthens connections and relationships. In our latest webinar, we turned to design aspects that aid Ringmasters to achieve these goals and looked at the preferred space typologies that support hybrid working models.

## Webinar presenters



**Richard Coope:** Programme Lead, Future Ready Workplace – Brightful

A specialist in culture, brand and digital problem solving, Richard shared his experiences and insights of embedding successful hybrid workplaces. Richard has worked with major brands, including Dr. Martens, CocaCola, Vodafone, GSK, Pepsico and more.



**Alison Girdiefski:** Workplace Project Manager

Alison creates flexible people-centric workspaces, specialising in combining aspirations for new ways of working with overall business objectives that include mental health and wellbeing goals. She has worked with brands such as Shell, L’Oreal and Moonpig.



**Kailee Lane:** Design Lead, Woodhouse Workspace

Kailee is passionate about designing spaces that strengthen connections and relationships in the workplace. She has led office designs for clients including CAE, ABPI, Dr Marten’s and Petplan.

## The changes brought about by hybrid working

The advance towards hybrid working has brought many benefits and opportunities to both individuals and organisations. But it can also be disruptive to effective interaction and healthy team cohesion. This has led to a lot of thought around increased focus on ‘activity-based working’ – creating inviting workspaces that enable your people to operate and interact in multiple different ways that are superior to permanently working remotely. Whether people are wanting to concentrate, collaborate, look for inspiration or join a talk, the idea is to create flexible working environments to allow any of those types of working to take place in the most positive and stimulating way possible.

## Putting people at the heart

It is fundamental for success that the people who will be using the workspace are involved in its design. Through workshops and surveys, their wishes can be built into the design concept.

“If you haven't engaged with your staff, they will walk into your newly designed space and immediately point out all the things that have been overlooked for them to work effectively. Without obtaining their insights from the outset, you cannot build a workplace that is fit for purpose, and you need to have that rich data source before you can start working on design.”

Just as importantly, if you engage people in the design process, they will be invested in its success and help the change management process to run smoothly. By doing this, your team will feel that their workspace is just that: their space.



## Building a true sense of belonging

Richard Coope helpfully clarified that what motivates people to commute into the office is giving them what they cannot get at home, which is beneficial enrichment from human interaction and connection.

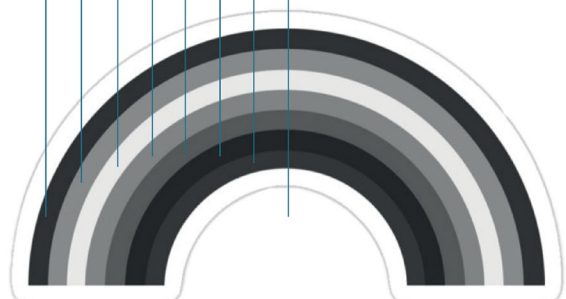
We all have a yearning to belong, and that can be to more than one thing at the same time. Our deepest sense of belonging is typically to our families, then friends and pets. But someone might also be a passionate supporter of Manchester United, or a fan of a particular musician or comedian, and enjoy belonging to groups of people who share those feelings.

At work, you should also have an intense spirit of belonging with your team – the people you work most closely with; those with whom you can have a bit of banter and engage with at a personal level. Above and beyond that, you will often have another layer of belonging to a wider department. Through these layers, you are hopefully connected directly with your company's leadership and

can see the vision that they're striving for and how that determines the business strategy. You might also have a sense of connecting to other communities in your workplace.

It is through creating a sense of belonging and personal connection that people are typically motivated to come into the office, rather than work in isolation at home.

**The wider company** (uniting the multiple layers of belonging)  
**The brand** (i.e. vision, values, brand ethos)  
**My community** (i.e. other related activities)  
**My department** (i.e. my VP, area I work for)  
**My line manager** (i.e. the person with direct influence)  
**My team** (i.e. the ones I work closest with)  
**My tribe** (i.e. my sports team, social interests)  
**Me** (i.e. my family / my friends)





## **Flexibility is essential**

By giving your team the capability to collaborate, innovate, focus, communicate and socialise, they will push themselves further and feel the urge to try new things and discover more about their own working styles. The space they work in should be designed with the flexibility to allow this to happen – it is part of what creates the energy and excitement in these spaces.

Technology is one of the biggest facilitators of successful spaces, especially when considering flexibility. Adding in seamless, easy-to-use technology, which is in tune with the intended use of the space, instantly elevates that area by enabling stimulating activities that people want to be part of.

Furniture is also a key aspect when considering space typology. It is important to give your whole space the ability to flex and evolve into your future needs. Keeping solid physical barriers to a minimum will provide that breathing room, as will furniture that can be reconfigured, moved and repurposed easily. It not only keeps the space interesting for its users, but also gives them the freedom to keep coming back to these space types and reinvesting their energy into them.

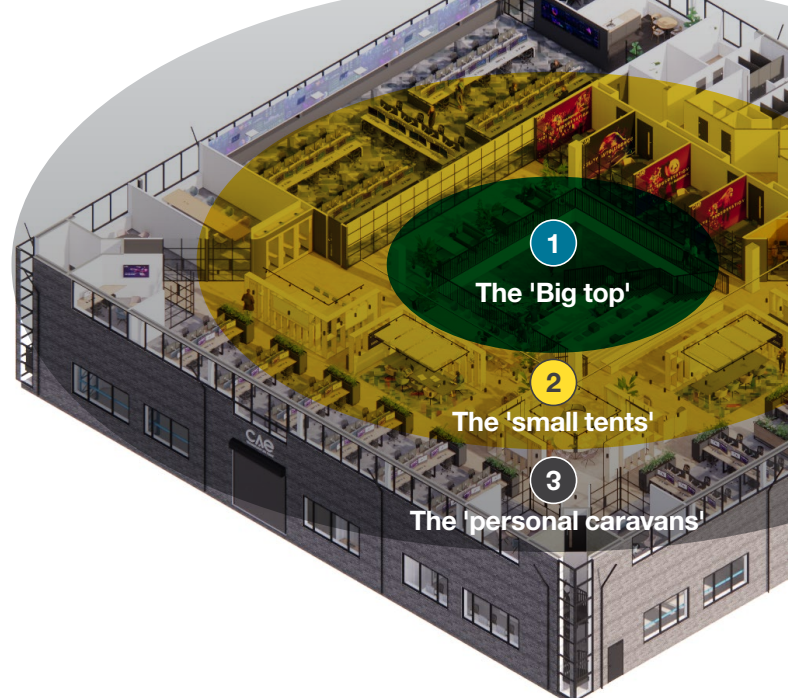


The latest BBC idents feature spaces serving different purposes to different members of the community at different times. This village hall is used as a creche in the morning, for orchestra and singing practice in the afternoon, then for a council meeting in the evening. The space adapts to those different communities of culture and belonging.

## Concentric circles

There is no 'one size fits all' that will work for all businesses – one team's collaboration space could easily be another team's nightmare – so it is crucial to choose the space types that work for each business, department, and team, and also be very mindful of the activities that are intended to take place within them.

One approach that Woodhouse often uses for creating an appropriate mix of space typologies is that of concentric circles. In our ringmaster and circus analogy, we think of those circles like the spheres of activity within the circus, with the big top in the centre, the smaller tents surrounding it, and then the personal caravans of the troupe all round the perimeter.



“The centre circle is a key area for the ringmasters of your business, a space that can really set the tone for the culture of your workspace and facilitate activities that draw people together. It's a cultural hub, a heart space. How you frame it, and how you design it will really make or break that space.”

The next circle out is about the touchdown and collaboration spaces. These are where people come together to work in a more work-related capacity to create or problem solve. It's where a lot of the magic happens, where everyone can pitch in and collaborate. It facilitates those moments where someone might overhear an unfinished idea and use that key ingredient to bring something important to life.

The outer circle comprises the focus spaces: the working zones, meeting rooms, telephone pods, and the additional quiet spaces that support wellness, faith observance, etc. These are space types that give people the focus time that they need for their work and to recharge their energy.

## Some important points about the concentric circle model:

- 1** Activity-tailored design. The design of a wellness room will be very different from the design of a social hub! The differences are often as much about sound as sight. If a focus area is open to the noise from an adjacent collaboration area, neither of those spaces will work.
- 2** Visibility matters. It's important to correlate the visibility of any space to its intended use. Spaces intended to draw people together (such as the middle and centre circles) need to be visible to serve their intended purpose of drawing persons to join in with what's happening there. By contrast, focus spaces and private areas, such as a wellness room, need minimal visibility.
- 3** Use of tasteful lighting can serve to create an appealing ambience distinctive to an area, as can the use of creative planting schemes. This subtle differentiation between spaces can create varied appeal to all areas and ensure that they all get used.

## Adding energy is the aim

Adding energy to all space types – not just for the big showstopper events but also the more everyday ones, such as a team huddle – is very important. It's about making something extraordinary out of the ordinary. The aim is to create a bespoke space that naturally fosters energy and inspiration and stimulates people to be the best they can be each day. These space types are the reason people will want to come to your office because they simply cannot get that energy from anywhere else.

## Behaviours are as important as environments

It's great to invest in creating an inspiring workspace, but how do you get the behaviours to make the most of that investment? Aligning the behaviours and culture to the space you have created is often the real challenge.

But this doesn't fit with a world where capacity issues don't allow allocating one desk per person and not everyone can be accommodated in the office at the same time, even if they wanted to.

This is where technology has a role to play. There are already a host of desk booking apps where people can book their desks in advance. As with any aspect of office design, they can lead to unexpected, negative behaviours that need to be guarded against.



“We've seen an interesting rise of something I call 'beach towelling'. Just like somebody who puts their towel down as a marker by the pool or beach to claim the best spot, some people book their desk, but then don't actually turn up. It gives the impression – from the app stats – that they're in attendance, but all they're really achieving is blocking the use of that desk by other people.”

“Some companies are going through what I call 'the adolescent years', where employees might be asking for all sorts of things to draw them back into the office. There are people who won't come into the office unless there is a dog creche, or a state-of-the-art gym, or if there isn't quite the best quality almond milk in the coffee machine! Management and leaders are now realising that you don't need to placate those demands all the time. Yes, you need to create attractive work settings that allow for flexibility working, but it's still a place of work.”

Some businesses have been exploring the idea of 'All in Mondays', where they have their big team meetings on a Monday morning, and everyone comes in. They prioritise the early stages of the week for office attendance. However, this idea has itself sometimes needed to be modified when analysis showed people would rather work from home on Mondays and Fridays, leading to 'All in Tuesdays' being favoured.



Set against our need for belonging, we are also creatures of habit. When we work from home, we're in a quiet environment, we can have a cup of tea or take the dog for a walk at lunchtime. It's actually quite cosy! And when we work in the office, traditional ways of working are also quite sticky. People quite like having their own desk in the same place by the same team – they like that continuity.

## Mind the (generation) gap

Another common issue is generational. It is said:

**“If you want to have a job, you can achieve that working from home; if you want to have a career, you've got to be up close and personal with people in the workspace.”**

The result is often that junior staff – naturally eager to advance their careers – are keen to be in the workspace, but the middle management people –

already well established on the corporate ladder – are more reluctant to come in. It is about getting the balance right. CEOs and leadership teams typically love seeing a vibrant, buzzy office, but it is up to them to set the example and the appropriate work mode strategy.

**“Coffee is a great connector. It costs about three pounds now for a decent cup of coffee off-site so, if you can't do anything else, at least install a good quality bean to cup coffee machine in your site.”**

## Be ready for anything

The nature of work is changing so fast that it is hard to guess what the future of work is going to look like in even three or four years' time. But if we understand what drives our interactions with our colleagues we can then start designing workspaces with agility and flexibility at their core, workspaces that can anticipate multiple usages at different times.

And they must inspire and attract: we're not just designing offices now – we're creating workspaces as 'destinations' or 'magnetic hubs'.



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## Talk to us about optimising your workspace for hybrid

We create workspaces that draw people together. Workspaces where staff want to come to collaborate, create and have fun doing it! We'd love to help you create the perfect workspace for your business.

[woodhouseworkspace.com](http://woodhouseworkspace.com)  
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