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Think of your workplace as a...

Some thoughts from the Imagine a Place podcast

Through the course of many of my conversations with strategists and designers on the Imagine a Place podcast, a common phrase would surface. At some point in our dialog they would say, “Think of your workplace as a...,” as they worked to reframe the new purpose of our workplace today. This was their most simple and straightforward way to help us reimagine an old concept that was a century in the making. For the longest time, we thought of work as a destination. In fact, most of us refer to our journey to the office as, “going to work.” To gain a deeper understanding of what the workplace really does for us today, I’ve taken the time to gather a list of my favorite “Think of your workplace as a...” concepts. Enjoy!

Think of your workplace as a: “Toolkit”

Stuck in our homes, people finally began to recognize the value that the office brings to their work lives; but that value looks different for each person. For some, it’s the social interaction, for others, it might be access to a healthy and quiet work environment.

Thinking of your workplace as a toolkit helps us understand the importance of having a variety of settings where we can all use the tools we need to get the most out of our workday.



“We need a structural change on how we think about workplace. Think of it more like a toolkit. Imagine you’re a carpenter going through years of training, and when you are finally ready to start your work, they say ‘okay, here’s your hammer, go get it.’ You’d say, ‘Well, I really need a crowbar and a flathead screwdriver and a wrench.’ I think for far too long, the workplace has been our hammer.”

- David Galullo, CEO of Rapt Studio



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Think of your workplace as a: “Cultural Hub”

The purpose of the office is changing. The work from home experiment taught us that we really can work from anywhere. Of course, everyone's home situations are different, but this has opened the door to new possibilities. So, we have been forced to reevaluate why we need an office and what we are missing from our home office. The short answer: connectivity.

“I think that people have now realized that they can work anywhere, so the idea of the office being a headquarters for culture is redefining what the purpose of the office is really about. At home, you aren't in a branded environment that represents the company's values and you are missing that sense of community. So it becomes even more critical that we make the office a place that amplifies our culture and our sense of community.”

- Jackie Wheat, PDR

Think of your workplace as an: “Ideation Center”

In the book: *Where Good Ideas Come From* (Steven Johnson), we learn that good ideas are often the result of not one big hunch, but the collision of smaller hunches. Essentially we are all walking around with half of a great idea in our heads and the only way it becomes a breakthrough idea is when we begin sharing those hunches.

Our ability to exchange ideas and borrow hunches is the very core of what discovery is all about. With our home office time spent alone, it's critical that our shared workplaces are full of settings that can support creative group thinking.



“The reason humans have surpassed all the other species on this planet, is our ability to use social learning and discovery to grow together and work together. As cavemen, we figured out how to work together to take down the bigger animal. And now, today, we're building skyscrapers, and we were doing the most amazing things collectively. So, we are kidding ourselves if we forget all of that and think that we're going to sit at home and be just as innovative. That is such a critical reason people need a place to come together.”

- Regan Donoghue, NEWMARK KNIGHT FRANK



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Think of your workplace as a: “Learning Center”

The workplace is a hub of individuals from a variety of backgrounds, frames of thought, and insights. Inside the office, we are faced with opportunities for new ideas to collide, for hands-on learning, and for leading by example. Each of these leads to employees who can learn more, faster through experience, exposure, and example.

“The rate at which an organization learns may become the only sustainable source of competitive advantage.”

- Peter Drucker, Founder of Modern Management

“One of the major problems that working from home has created is the limited ability for us elders to mentor our younger colleagues. We learn so much from working in a diverse office landscape either directly or indirectly. We can guide our less-experienced workers over digital platforms, but the most important mentorship is gained through a whole array of other experiences which build confidence and knowledge. While us older and more experienced workers are happy to remain at home, enjoying the ability to concentrate in the privacy of our homes, the young are desperate to return to be part of the energy, enthusiasm, and sociability that an office provides, but more importantly to gain skills, knowledge, and experience.”

- Roger Webb, Founder of Webb Associates





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Think of your workplace as an: “Enabler”

Spaces will need to be centered around the needs of the individual, to foster intellectual, physical, and emotional well-being. The office will need a combination of settings to meet a variety of needs. We are all living in the same story, but our realities are different. So, we need to create spaces that enable us to free our minds to think creatively.

“One of the things that we’ve been seeing is that ‘work’ has really become is a cognitive state. We can work from anywhere, so work, in and of itself, is more of this element of being in the mindset to do work. That mindset can happen in a coffee shop, in your home, in an airplane or at a corporate location. So, when we think about workplace, we need to think beyond borders. Workplace really needs to be that great enabler that allows us to enter that cognitive state and perform our best.”

- Kelly Bacon, AECOM



Think of your workplace as: “The Workforce”

Many firms are ditching the term Workplace and replacing it with Workforce. It forces a shift in our thinking away from the traditional office planning metrics and towards a more human-centered mindset.

“Workplace design is too often driven by conversations around square foot per person and real estate costs. We need stop talking about workplace, and talk about workforce instead. Instead of starting with the space, let’s start the conversation with the people. If we start by asking - What do we need to really support our employees and our customers as we move into the future? - the workplace could look a lot different.”

- David Galullo, CEO of Rapt Studio



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Think of your workplace as a: “Business’ Home”

In “The Book of Human Emotions,” author Tiffany Wyatt Smith describes homefulness as a feeling of relief upon entering a space that makes you feel comfortable to be completely yourself. As we come back to the workplace, we will need to foster this sense of ownership and ease within our workplaces so that our employees can feel at home and therefore be themselves, think outside the box, and form lasting relationships that will continue to push each to be their best self.

“Instead of thinking about the office as just a place we go to work, in a lot of ways it should function as a home away from home to its employees. We all know the office is going to have to work hard at creating an environment that people want to come back to; an environment that supports them and encourages them to perform at their best level. People want to feel valued and they need to trust their organization to support those individual needs and desires.”

- Molly Prior, Director of Marketing for OFS

“As autonomy increases, so does our physical separation. Time spent together at work has a new meaning and is of heightened importance. The office must become a place of connection, a physical manifestation of what the business represents – a business’ home. When in our second homes, we must feel represented, culturally linked. It is the glue that keeps the business together. A place where we belong.”

- Antonio da Costa, Industrial Designer for Webb Associates

Now it's your turn. We've been given this chance to imagine what the workplace ought to be, not what it once was. Please fill in the blank and share it with me!