

Introduction

A tidal wave of change is afoot in the workplace, precipitated by technological advancements that have both tethered and liberated the worker. On the one hand, workers are now free to roam outside company headquarters, or even from companies themselves. On the other hand, they are perpetually bound to screens for everything from information to communication, relentlessly on the hunt for Wi-Fi signals and greater broadband. Companies ranging from startups to Fortune 100 firms and individuals alike are wrestling with this contrast between independence and collaboration, freedom and compromise, creative license and productive discipline, as the realities of the Internet Age meet the opportunities of the Creative and Information Economies.

This evolutionary jolt, what urbanist Richard Florida refers to as the third “Great Reset,”¹ also is being played out in the realm of commercial real estate, as evidenced by the surge in U.S. coworking centers, which have grown from just one in 2005 to 781 in 2013.² These extremely flexible new workplaces can be grouped into three overlapping categories. This report provides an overview of the evolution of two types of innovative workplaces, innovation centers and accelerators. It then focuses on the coworking center — the type of innovative workplace that has grown most rapidly in recent years, both in popularity and in influence. The report focuses on how coworking centers are formed and financed, what types of facilities and support services they offer, and who uses them. It concludes with five case profiles of coworking centers and an assessment of the significance of the coworking trend.

Figure 1
Innovative Workplaces Timeline

Innovation Workplace	Inception Year	Purpose
Incubator	1959	Rent empty space by stimulating commerce through grouping together small businesses. Later incarnations added business assistance and financing opportunities.
Innovation Center	1999	Provide office space and services to young companies, initially to tech startups. Focus on commercialization of innovation and entrepreneurship (i.e., prototyping and taking the product to market).
Accelerator	2005	Programming-based workplaces designed to help startup companies grow more rapidly by providing them with technical and educational assistance, mentoring, networking opportunities and workspace.
Coworking Center	2006	A membership-based, interdisciplinary workplace for independent workers and startup companies, providing community, business services, collaboration opportunities and a place to focus on work as well as to participate in social and educational events.