

# What Drives the Intention of Filipino Freelancers to Cowork? Assessing the Physical and Social Elements of Coworking Spaces

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## **Abstract**

The study makes use of the servicescape framework of Balakrishnan et al. (2016) to examine the relationship between the physical and social elements of a coworking space and the intention of customers to use it.

Specifically, the study aims to determine if 1) physical elements such as ambiance, space/layout, facility aesthetics, functionality, and cleanliness, and 2) social elements such as interaction among members, the interaction between members and community manager, professional development activities, and coworking culture practices, have a significant influence on Filipino freelancers in Metro Manila in their intention to use a coworking space.

The intention to use a coworking space was measured using a questionnaire adopted from Balakrishnan et al.'s (2016) coworkingscape framework. Responses were measured on a 5 point Likert scale, and then subjected to statistical analysis using SmartPLS 3.0.

The results of the study show that the relationship of each physical element of a coworking space (ambiance, space/layout, facility aesthetics, functionality, and cleanliness) and each social element of a coworking space (interaction among members, the interaction between members and community manager, professional development activities, and coworking culture practices) on the intention to use a coworking space were statistically significant. The results provide evidence that for Filipino freelancers, the physical and social elements of a coworking space are both important considerations in the intention to use it.

Moreover, consistent with the findings of earlier research, the social elements of a coworking space are considered more important than the physical elements, which suggest that more than a physical space to work, freelancers seek a social context where their need for interaction and collaboration is fulfilled, support can be gathered from other coworkers, and activities can help in professional development. The results of this study add to the few existing literature on coworking spaces in the Philippines.

**Key Words:** coworking; coworking spaces; coworkingspace; freelancers; collaboration

## Introduction

### Coworking Spaces

Over the past years, there have been three major changes in the way people work. First, laptop computers and emails have created a growth of entrepreneurs and flexible independent workers. Second, working anywhere and anytime has been made possible by the introduction of mobile technology and global teamwork. Now, a new change has come - the boom of coworking spaces that offer the benefit of flexibility and social interactions (Gandini, 2015). As its name suggests, coworking spaces foster collaboration among its users. It is an emerging type of workspace that features a physical design of an open floor, arrangement of tables that enable coworkers to interact, complemented social areas such as kitchen, meeting rooms, and leisure areas (Merkel, 2015).

Coworking is becoming more common in the Philippines, especially in the focal business areas of Metro Manila. Coworking in the Philippines is a trend popularized by tech-savvy millennials who comprise the bulk of the metropolitan sector (Business Mirror, 2020). It is projected that Metro Manila's coworking space sector in CBDs will grow at least 10% per annum over the next three years due to the following reasons - 1) the continued rise of micro, small, and medium enterprises, 2) the influx of multinational corporations, and 3) for freelancers and startups looking for plug-and-play offices (Colliers International, 2019). In an article by Forbes (2018), the Philippines ranked sixth in the top 10 fastest growing freelancers market in the world with a 36% growth. This is beneficial for coworking spaces as it means more freelancers will need coworking spaces where they can not only work, but also network to increase their client roster and services provided.

### Social Isolation Amidst COVID-19

Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees who were accustomed to working in traditional office spaces now have to adjust drastically to telecommuting or work from home arrangements (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Additionally, those who used to enjoy remote working conditions are now limited to only working within the confines of their homes. This has led to challenges in separating work and personal life (Chawla et al., 2020).

Employees moving to remote work arrangements are likely to experience significant socio-psychological, physical, and technological consequences. According to Raffaele and Connell (2016), social isolation can cause psychological strain and reduce productivity. The reason why people pay for coworking services is to find a remedy for professional isolation through experiencing social relationships in the form of a like-minded community (Bilandzic & Foth, 2013). The term community itself evokes a sense of social practice. Shared lunches and social events are just some of the community activities designed by coworking spaces to cultivate trust between coworkers.

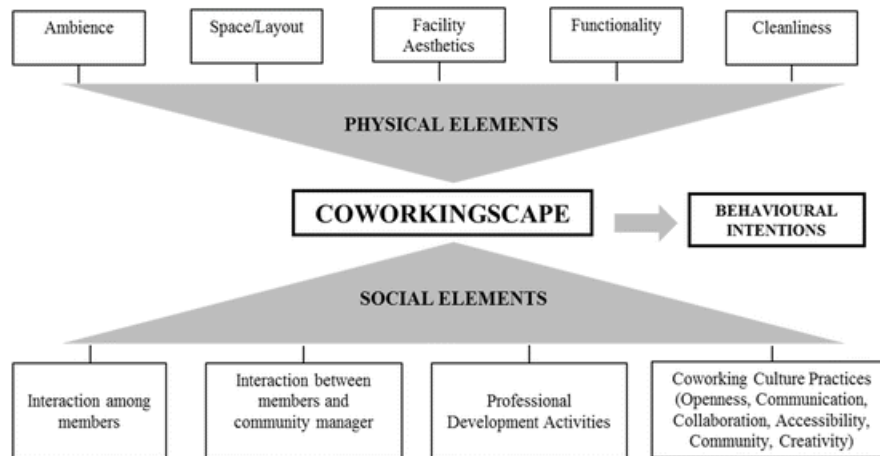
For married employees with children, on top of this transition, the closure of schools and child-care services has increased the strain on their perceived work-life balance (Giurge & Bohns, 2020). On the other hand, in drastically altered working conditions, single and childless employees face a great risk of loneliness, a perceived lack of purpose, and feelings of social exclusion and

isolation (Achor et al., 2018). Kopp (2020) and Robinson (2020) have suggested that these feelings have become more salient with the current quarantine protocols, which include social and physical distancing to curb the spread of the pandemic, thereby affecting their mental health and well-being and overall employee productivity.

## Framework of the Study

**Figure 1**

*Insights from Coworking Spaces as Unique Service Organizations: The Role of Physical and Social Elements, Balakrishnan et al., 2016*



The theoretical framework used in this research is obtained from a book series by Bamini Balakrishnan, Sivakumaran Muthaly, and Mark Leenders about the importance of physical and social elements in coworking spaces. This study puts forward the elements that will influence the behavioral intention of the customers in a coworking space. Coworking space is one of the growing industries where customers pay to consume the environment and the ideas that are cultivated therein. They are the type of businesses that offer a physical and social environment for consumption. These coworking spaces aim to create a productive physical and social environment. The authors proposed an enriched framework specific to the coworking industry and labeled it as 'Coworkingscape.'

## Research Problem

Using the servicescape framework of Balakrishnan et al. (2016), the study aims to determine if

- 1) physical elements such as ambience, space/layout, facility aesthetics, functionality, and cleanliness, and
- 2) social elements such as interaction among members, the interaction between members and community managers, professional development activities, and coworking culture

practices, have a significant influence on Filipino freelancers in Metro Manila in their intention to use a coworking space.

## Review of Related Literature

### Physical Elements of Coworking

By its definition, “coworking space” refers to a physical workspace shared by working professionals practicing coworking (Uda, 2013). According to Brown (2017), ambiance can be referred to as a workspace atmosphere or a cornerstone for collaborative activities. Janneck et al. (2018) found that respondents regarded background noise, poor lighting conditions, and unpleasant room climate as disturbing factors when using mobile workspaces. Furthermore, the noise in space may overburden coworkers (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte & Issac, 2016).

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H1.** There is a positive significant relationship between the ambiance of a coworking space and the intention to use it.

Orel and Almeida (2019) observed that the visual and spatial characteristics such as the layout of the space positively influence coworking space users. Due to their open physical space, coworking spaces appeal to people who do not want to be constrained in their office cubicles or those who want to escape the inconveniences of working in alternative public venues. Thus, coworking spaces aim to recreate a physical space that enables to maximize the productivity of its users by combining physical and social elements (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). Surprisingly, while coworkers reported the physical proximity of coworking spaces enabled networking opportunities, there were some concerns on the lack of privacy (Servaty et al., 2018). Furthermore, Parrino (2015) proposed that knowledge exchange may not necessarily occur as a result of sharing space and being in physical proximity.

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H2.** There is a positive significant relationship between the space/layout of a coworking space and the intention to use it.

Another physical element is facility aesthetics. Grazian (2019) suggests that coworking spaces market their workspaces to prospective members using aesthetics, philosophy, and style.

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H3.** There is a positive significant relationship between the facility aesthetics of a coworking space and the intention to use it.

Correspondingly, Fassi et al. (2018) state that carefully tailored workspaces and the functionality of furniture can be shared in a way that is co-used by different members throughout

the day. In return, this will foster a close-knit relationship between users and establish habitual behavior that ideally leads to collaboration. Coworking spaces provide efficient workplace attributes such as shared wi-fi, IT security, and consistently available space (Garett et al., 2017).

Servaty et al. (2018) found that some coworkers suggested improvements to ergonomic furniture, better artificial lighting, better kitchen and heating facilities, temperature level, as well as quieter areas, especially while they were on confidential phone calls. This supports expert observations that ergonomic chairs, a bright interior design, and optimal noise levels are considered important in the concept development of coworking spaces (Servaty et al., 2018).

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H4.** There is a positive significant relationship between the functionality of a coworking space and the intention to use it.

According to Siu et al. (2012), cleanliness is considered as an important element in the design of the ideal coworking space. Although cleanliness is typically seen as the responsibility of the coworking operators, in some coworking spaces, members were at liberty to assist with the cleanliness of their workplace as part of their commitment to space.

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H5.** There is a positive significant relationship between the cleanliness of a coworking space and the intention to use it.

### **Social Elements of Coworking**

Spinuzzi (2012) suggests that individuals work together to seek a formal workplace with amenities that help with their work, to seek a community where they can avoid the sense of isolation of working alone, and benefit from knowledge exchange and collaborations.

Coworking spaces are not just physical workplaces, they also include social elements that enhance collaboration and community building (Parrino, 2013). In a study conducted by Assenza (2015), coworking is defined not only as physical space but also as a social context, and a conceptual space within which production, creation of new ventures, and social interaction occur. Moreover, coworking spaces give their members the opportunity to be part of a community and develop friendships with other members as well to overcome social isolation that is common among freelancers (Garrett et al., 2017). In addition, coworking space provides an avenue for meeting other "like-minded" workers. It opens an opportunity for social support such as coworker contact, networking, and collaboration (Boboc et al., 2014).

Coworking aims to establish a social atmosphere in which social interaction and collaboration are prevailing (Moriset, 2014). Social interaction is the process by which people act and react to those around them in the community offered by the coworking space. Capdevilla (2015) states that knowledge exchange and the sense of community are the main differentiators of coworking spaces from sharing offices. In addition, (Capdevila, 2015) cited that coworking spaces

play a vital role in micro-scale innovations between freelancers and firms brought about by the social interactions in coworking spaces that foster trust, tacit knowledge exchange, and collaborations among collocated firms, individuals, and other essential members.

Likewise, Bouncken and Kraus (2016) highlight the core of coworking spaces as dedicated spaces with infrastructure that encourage professional and social interactions leading to knowledge exchange, creativity, and innovation. Bouncken et al. (2016) suggest that knowledge exchanges, creativity, and work satisfaction that arises from using coworking spaces can ultimately lead to increased innovation and entrepreneurship.

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H6.** There is a positive significant relationship between the interactions among members of a coworking space and the intention to use it.

Community Managers curate the interpersonal interactions and interconnect regular users in supportive networks. They aim to establish collective social action amongst coworking space members (Blagoev et al., 2019). Moreover, Community Managers play an important role in coworking space development and positioning in the market as they accelerate the rate of formal or informal social interactions and knitting collaborative relationships between the members (Bouncken et al., 2018; Gauger et al., 2020; Gregg & Lodato, 2018). According to Spinuzzi (2012), a coworking space is seen as a workplace with an emphasis on interaction with other members as well as community managers.

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H7.** There is a positive significant relationship between the interactions among members and community managers of a coworking space and the intention to use it.

The social interactions in coworking spaces and among traditional office spaces were compared and, in both types, the experience of social support was positively related to the satisfaction in work performance – hitting objectives and quality of work (Gerdenitsch et al., 2016). Gerdenitsch et al. (2016) state that social interactions typically in the form of work-related social support can increase a member's self-efficacy and positively improve the work performance of the individual. Hence, social support such as receiving critical feedback on projects or ideas from fellow coworking members is considered one of the main benefits of coworking.

Coworking also acts as a support system particularly for those who are at the early stages of their careers (Lloyd, 2004). It offers professional development support in the form of opportunities for socialization, peer-support/mentoring, professional networking, idea/knowledge sharing, and collaboration (Clifton et al., 2016).

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H8.** There is a positive significant relationship between the professional development activities of a coworking space and the intention to use it.

Furthermore, values-based cultural practices distinguish coworking spaces from traditional offices. These values are openness, communication, collaboration, accessibility, community, and creativity (Olma, 2012). Katrini (2018) defines the sharing culture as an exchange of “resources, time, services, knowledge, and information within a region to achieve a more sustainable, resourceful, and socially engaging lifestyle.” Moriset (2013) illustrated that daily communal activities in the coworking spaces, as well as events held here, increased the possibility of meaningful encounters among coworkers. Gandini (2016) also suggests that social spaces within coworking spaces such as cafeterias and lounges allow coworkers to network with one another.

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H9.** There is a positive significant relationship between the cultural practices of a coworking space and the intention to use it.

The most cited motivations for coworking were for socialization (sense of community, networking, and preventing social isolation), knowledge exchange, the flexibility of time and infrastructure, as well as efficiency in terms of creativity, productivity, and motivation (Spinuzzi, 2012; Servaty et al., 2018).

Therefore, the researchers hypothesize the following:

**H10.** The effects of the social elements of a coworking space will be greater than its physical elements on the intention to use it.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The research follows a descriptive and correlational quantitative cross-sectional survey research design. The researchers chose quantitative research to measure the significance of each variable on the intention to use coworking spaces. Moreover, quantitative research is more structured and easier to interpret given the available software.

### **Research Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to gather freelancers as the survey participants using Google Forms distributed to online Facebook groups for Filipino freelancers, coworking spaces, and start-up's.

A total of 220 respondents answered the online survey. All 220 have read and understood the consent form, and agreed to participate in the research study.

A cumulative of 45% of the respondents belonged to the age range of 25-29 years old, 37.3% belonged to the age range 20-24 years old, 12.5% belonged to the age range 30-34 years old, and 4.5% belonged to the age range 35-39 years old. Out of the 220 respondents, 60% of them are female while 38.2% are male. 17.3% of respondents reside in Quezon City, 14.5% are from Makati, 14.1% are from Manila, and 8.2% are from Taguig.

Moreover, 80% of the respondents answered that they have a bachelor's degree while 12.7% have a master's degree. When asked about their employment status, 82.3% of the respondents are employed full-time. For the monthly income of the respondents, 31.4% earn Php 20,001-30,000 monthly, 23.2% earn Php 30,001-40,000, and 11.4% earn Php 40,001-50,000.

To further understand the cognitive factors that drive consumer behaviors. The respondents were asked where they usually work aside from their primary workplace of occupation. 92.7% of them are working in the comfort of their home, 43.2% of them work at a cafe or coffee shop, 10.9% work at the library, 6.4% of them work at restaurants/pubs, and 5% work at business centers.

Moreover, 47.7% of the respondents said that they are somewhat satisfied with their alternative workplace. However, there are challenges that they face with their alternative workplace. 51.8% of the respondents said that one of the key challenges that they face is the noise/distractions. This resulted in a lack of productivity to finish their work reported by 29.5% of respondents. For 48.2% of the respondents, another major concern is the poor internet connection, while 30.5% reported a poor physical workspace. Furthermore, 26.4% cited social isolation or no human interaction as a challenge.

### **Research Instrument**

A questionnaire was adopted using the original items from Balakrishnan et al.'s 2016 study, for the identified social and physical elements of a coworkingscape. Responses were measured on a 5 point Likert scale, 1 which stands for '*Strongly Disagree*' up to 5 which stands for '*Strongly Agree*'. The first part of the questionnaire asked for demographic information. The second part then asked for the physical and social elements of a coworkingscape.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The survey was distributed online via Google Forms and also shared to different Facebook groups such as "Startup PH," "Startup PH: Community Builders," "Millennial Startup PH Community," "Philippine Tech Startups," "Filipino Online Freelancers," "Freelancing Philippines," "Freelancer PH," "Philippine Digital Nomads," and "coworkingspacesPH," to gather responses on the influential factors with emphasis on physical and social elements affecting the choice of coworking spaces among working professionals.

### **Analytical Methods**

IBM SPSS Statistics 20 was used to test Cronbach's alpha for scale reliability and consistency. According to Peterson (1994), an adequate Cronbach alpha value is at least 0.70, while at least 0.60 is still acceptable in social psychology research (Robinson, Shaver & Wrightsman, 1991). The questionnaire was pre-tested with 30 respondents and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.705, which indicates good inter-reliability as seen in Table 2. Under SmartPLS 3.0, bootstrapping was used to extrapolate the samples from 220 to 1000 and to determine P-values.



## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**

*Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.705	0.671	9

**Table 2**

*Path coefficients*

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values
PE1 -> INT	0.157	0.154	0.015	10.674	0
PE2 -> INT	0.15	0.147	0.016	9.552	0
PE3 -> INT	0.168	0.166	0.013	13.148	0
PE4 -> INT	0.128	0.127	0.02	6.43	0
PE5 -> INT	0.073	0.069	0.027	2.751	0.006
SE1 -> INT	0.212	0.212	0.016	13.317	0
SE2 -> INT	0.222	0.222	0.015	15.21	0
SE3 -> INT	0.209	0.21	0.015	13.967	0
SE4 -> INT	0.206	0.205	0.013	15.263	0

Among the physical elements of a coworking space, the relationship of facility aesthetics (PE3) with intention had the highest value (Mean = 0.166, Table 2). This was followed by the relationship of the space/layout (PE2) and intention (Mean = 0.147, Table 2). The relationship of cleanliness (PE5) with intention was the lowest (Mean = 0.069, Table 2). Nonetheless, the relationship of each physical element with intention had statistically significant values (P-value = 0 for ambiance, space/layout, facility aesthetics, and functionality; Table 2). The relationship of cleanliness with intention was also statistically significant (P-value = 0.06). Therefore, the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 are all accepted.

Among the social elements of a coworking space, the relationship of the interactions among coworkers and community managers (SE2) with intention had the highest value (Mean = 0.222, Table 2). This was followed by the relationship between the interactions among members of a coworking space (SE1) and intention (Mean = 0.212, Table 2). The relationship of coworking culture practices (SE4) with intention was the lowest (Mean = 0.205, Table 2), however, this is still higher than the strongest predictor among physical elements. The relationship of each social element with intention had statistically significant values (P-value = 0; Table 2). Therefore, the hypotheses H6, H7, H8, and H9 are all accepted.

Moreover, the means across the social elements is higher than the means of the physical elements, hence H10 is also accepted.

**Table 3**

*Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected*

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Bias	2.50%	97.50%
PE1 -> INT	0.157	0.154	-0.002	0.124	0.181
PE2 -> INT	0.15	0.147	-0.002	0.116	0.174
PE3 -> INT	0.168	0.166	-0.002	0.144	0.191
PE4 -> INT	0.128	0.127	-0.001	0.086	0.162
PE5 -> INT	0.073	0.069	-0.004	0.017	0.119
SE1 -> INT	0.212	0.212	0	0.184	0.246
SE2 -> INT	0.222	0.222	0	0.198	0.256
SE3 -> INT	0.209	0.21	0	0.186	0.246
SE4 -> INT	0.206	0.205	0	0.182	0.234

### Discussion and Recommendations

The P-values for each physical and social element of coworking spaces were statistically significant, which provides evidence that for Filipino freelancers, the physical and social elements of a coworking space are important considerations in their intention to use it.

Moreover, consistent with the findings of earlier research, the social elements of a coworking space are considered more important than the physical elements, which suggest that

more than a physical space to work, freelancers seek a social context where their need for interaction and collaboration is fulfilled, support can be gathered from other coworkers, and activities can help in professional development. As mentioned by Boboc et al. (2014), a coworking space not only provides a physical workspace, but also opens an opportunity for social support such as coworker contact, networking, and collaboration. Also, as Bilandzic and Foth (2013) suggest, people pay for coworking services not solely for its physical workspace benefits, but also for the social relationships in the form of connections and like-minded communities that coworking spaces bring. In addition, in the study of Bouncken and Kraus (2016), they highlighted that the core of coworking spaces is to encourage their members to engage in social interactions. The study adds to the existing literature with the context of coworking spaces in the Philippines explored.

In relation to the study of Blagoev et al. (2019) that coworking managers curate interpersonal interactions and establish collective social action amongst coworking space members, managers and owners of coworking spaces can be guided with the results of this study for concept development of existing or new coworking spaces, as well as to further improve coworkers' productivity, satisfaction, and retention.

Future researchers may consider replicating the study in Cebu, another central business district in the Philippines where there has been a boom in coworking spaces owing to the rise of BPOs in the region. The results can be used to check for regional differences.

Moreover, integrating health aspects to future research will prove beneficial, especially now that mental health issues such as social isolation are prevailing due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Studying how millennial Filipino coworkers seek social collaboration amidst social distancing would make an interesting case.

Furthermore, Seo et al. (2017) identified in their study entitled "Priorities of Coworking Space Operation Based on Comparison of the Hosts and Users' Perspectives" that price shows great importance to both the hosts and users of coworking spaces. With this, future studies can explore examining price as an additional variable in the coworkingscape framework developed by Balakrishnan et al. (2016).

Additionally, the study's results may model the behavior of females. Future studies can use an equal number of males and females so that gender bias can be eliminated. Some studies show that gender differences can affect actual behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

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