The Role of Hybrid Commons in the Post-Pandemic Era: Redefining Interior Workspaces

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally redefined office interiors, driving a shift toward flexible, health-conscious, and sustainable design strategies. This study explores how post-pandemic workspaces have evolved to support hybrid work models by integrating modular layouts, biophilic elements, and user-centered spatial solutions. Through literature review and case analyses, the research reveals a growing emphasis on spatial adaptability, psychological comfort, and inclusive design. Lounges and informal seating areas now encourage spontaneous interaction, while minimalist workstations and semi-private zones support deep focus and individual productivity. These configurations enable smooth transitions between solitary, collaborative, and social activities within a single environment. Ultimately, the study highlights how interior design must prioritize resilience, autonomy, and well-being to remain responsive in an era of continuous change.

1. Introduction

The post-pandemic workplace is no longer just a site of productivity—it has evolved into a dynamic ecosystem that reflects flexibility, sustainability, and user well-being. As hybrid work arrangements become the norm, traditional office designs have proven insufficient for the diverse and rapidly changing needs of today's workforce. Organizations now seek interior environments that support not just tasks, but experiences spaces that foster collaboration, autonomy, and psychological safety.

Recent research reveals that the transition to hybrid models has forced businesses to rethink spatial organization and functionality, with employers increasingly emphasizing cultural cohesion, inclusivity, and accessibility in the design of modern workspaces (Baráth and Alshatti Schmidt, 2022). Rather than eliminating offices, the hybrid model has reshaped their role—transforming them into hubs for collaboration, creativity, and identity building.

Technological readiness and workplace trust have also emerged as key factors in enabling successful hybrid work cultures. Organizations are learning to adapt design strategies that balance flexibility with accountability and offer responsive solutions to spatial and digital needs (De Souza, 2022).

From a well-being perspective, ergonomic design, access to natural light, and clear zoning for different work modes have become essential. Research indicates that employee satisfaction and productivity are closely linked to physical interior attributes like space acoustics, layout openness, and visual privacy (Mandadi et al., 2022).

In addition, organizations are increasingly embracing systemic approaches to hybrid work design, where the social structure, technology, and space planning are all considered together. For example, Italian firms have implemented new roles like "Head of Agile Work" and introduced organizational models that align interior design with hybrid strategy (Klaser et al., 2023).

This study offers a comprehensive framework for interior office design aligned with the hybrid work model in the post-pandemic context, contributing to the literature in several key ways:

1.   The concept of "Hybrid Commons" introduces flexible and multifunctional spatial typologies that support hybrid work culture.

2.   The study proposes spatial strategies that enable fluid transitions between focused work, social interaction, and collaboration.

3.   Psychological comfort is emphasized as a core design criterion, promoting a user-centered and well-being-oriented approach.

4.   Sustainability is addressed through the integration of biophilic design, natural lighting, and reconfigurable furniture systems.

This article is structured as follows. The introduction outlines the context and motivation behind the study. Section 2 presents a comprehensive literature review focusing on flexibility, sustainability, and well-being in post-pandemic office design. Section 3 introduces the proposed design approach for hybrid office models, illustrating spatial strategies and user-centered configurations. Finally, Section 4 provides the conclusion, summarizing key findings and offering directions for future research and design practices.

2. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly transformed office environments, pushing interior designers to reimagine workspaces through a lens of flexibility, health, and sustainability. Several studies have emphasized the necessity of adaptive office design that supports hybrid work models, promotes employee well-being, and integrates sustainable practices. Hybrid work has prompted a shift toward modular layouts, touchless technologies, and biophilic elements to accommodate changing user needs. Pan et al. (2024) emphasize that hybrid office designs must prioritize environmental comfort, such as daylight access, airflow, and flexible seating preferences to boost well-being and productivity (Pan et al., 2024). Similarly, McGee et al. (2023) highlight how remote work shifted spatial preferences, with workers valuing natural light, neutral colors, and outdoor views in home-office setups, suggesting these traits be mirrored in future office designs (McGee et al., 2023). Tarigan et al. (2023) and Aksamija and Milosevic (2023) underscore the long-term shift toward hybrid work, calling for participatory design processes that reflect user needs while strengthening social connection and organizational identity (Tarigan et al., 2023; Aksamija and Milosevic, 2023). Post-pandemic interiors also integrate antimicrobial materials, sustainable systems, and ergonomic furniture. Nediari et al. (2021) discuss how physical distancing protocols have redefined spatial arrangements and hygiene-focused material choices in sustainable office design (Nediari et al., 2021). Similarly, Ajith et al. (2022) present a comprehensive framework for integrating eco-friendly materials and spatial flexibility to support well-being and reduce infection risk (Ajith et al., 2022). Raghavendran (2022) and Fauth and Pieper (2022) explore how interior design interventions—like daylight optimization, ergonomic configurations, and psychological comfort—enhance user experience, satisfaction, and productivity in the workplace (Raghavendran, 2022; Fauth and Pieper, 2022). Chafi et al. (2021) affirm that hybrid models offer flexibility but demand physical space redesigns to maintain social connectedness,

creativity, and performance (Chafi et al., 2021), while Erdman et al. (2024) document the success of inclusive, human-centered redesigns in supporting hybrid teams and enhancing employee belonging (Erdman et al., 2024). Recent studies highlight a growing focus on designing office spaces that support social well-being. Interviews with interior designers show that features like integrated breakout areas, visual openness, and a cosy atmosphere help foster informal interaction and a sense of belonging. This offers practical guidance for socially supportive workplace design (Colenberg et al., 2024). As hybrid working becomes more widespread, understanding how spatial and environmental design influences workspace use has gained importance. Recent studies using data-driven methods show that factors like spatial connectivity, visual openness, temperature, and daylight significantly affect seat occupancy and user preferences. These insights support evidence-based approaches to designing and managing flexible workspaces (Pan et al., 2025).

Current literature highlights the significance of biophilic design in supporting employee well-being in post-pandemic office settings. Through the use of natural materials, lighting, ventilation, and thoughtful spatial layout, this approach fosters healthier and more sustainable work environments, offering a valuable reference for future office design practices (Haristianti and Raja, 2025).

3. A Design Approach for the Hybrid Office Model

The transition to hybrid work and the shifting dynamics of post-pandemic work culture have necessitated a fundamental rethinking of interior office design, where flexibility, user well-being, and multifunctionality have become the central pillars of spatial planning. In response, contemporary workspaces increasingly adopt hybrid commons shared environments that fluidly support transitions between focused individual work, creative collaboration, and social interaction demonstrating how physical settings can be thoughtfully crafted to foster both personal productivity and collective engagement within a hybrid model.

The interior office design project clearly reflects the spatial transformation brought about by changing post-pandemic work dynamics. In Figure 1 and Figure 2, lounge-style seating areas enriched with soft textures and biophilic elements designed by Norm Architects invite users to engage in informal conversations and brief moments of relaxation, while digitally equipped individual workstations within the same spatial layout support focused productivity. The coexistence of zones designed for communication and concentration within a unified spatial framework not only enhances functional efficiency but also allows users to adapt the space according to their immediate needs.

Figure 1. Interactive Co-Working Space

Figure 2. Hybrid Office Space

Complementing this holistic approach, Figure 3 presents a semi-private workspace layout designed by Norm Architects specifically intended to minimize distractions and support deep concentration. The use of natural wood textures across the long work surface, combined with individualized ergonomic seating and digital monitors, fosters an environment conducive to task-oriented work. Notably, while physical dividers between desks are minimal, the spatial configuration and controlled use of natural light subtly reinforce a sense of personal space. The clean desktop arrangements, balanced color palette, and the visual connection to outdoor greenery collectively contribute to a calming and focused work atmosphere.

Figure 3. Minimalist Shared Desk Area for Focused Work

The interior layout presented in Figure 4 designed by Norm Architects exemplifies the evolution of office design in the post-pandemic era, both architecturally and functionally. The image is sourced from Norm Architects. This open-plan, multi-level office space offers a user-centered experience through the use of transparent partitions, biophilic elements, and geometric ceiling panels. The striking spiral staircase at the center not only provides physical connectivity between floors but also adds a sculptural aesthetic to the space.

This dynamic environment is designed to address both individual and social needs. Comfortable seating areas on the lower level create a suitable setting for spontaneous meetings and informal interactions, while the semi-private sections accessible via the upper floors are more conducive to deep focus. The wooden flooring and abundance of natural light enrich the interior, offering users a sense of warmth and enhancing their feeling of belonging.

This spatial configuration supports flexible use based on varying work styles. Users can seamlessly transition between short social breaks and tasks that require intense concentration

throughout the day. This reflects a strong embodiment of the principle of behavioral flexibility at the core of hybrid office planning.
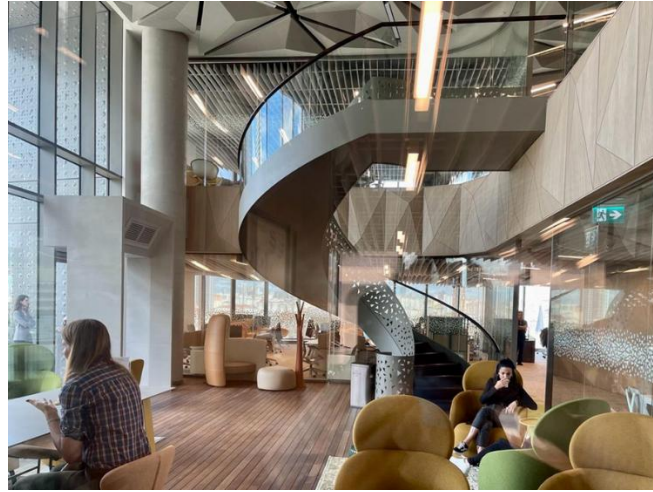

Figure 4. High-Interaction Office Space with Contemporary Architecture

Ultimately, this hybrid interior configuration extends beyond aesthetics and ergonomics, proposing a spatial strategy rooted in behavioral flexibility. It enables seamless transitions between modes of work collaborative, individual, and social while promoting adaptability, autonomy, and well-being. This reflects a critical design response to the uncertainty and fluidity of contemporary work culture, transforming the office into a dynamic and lived experience.

4. Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has irrevocably transformed the way we design and experience interior office environments. In the post-pandemic world, work as we once knew it no longer exists; keeping up with the evolving needs of workers has become increasingly complex. This study has shown that health, flexibility, and sustainability have become foundational pillars of interior office design, and hybrid work models now demand spaces that are both adaptable and human-centric.

At the heart of this shift lies the emergence of Hybrid Commons multifunctional hubs within the workplace that support both collaborative and individual activities. These environments are not just physical spaces but social ecosystems, designed to fulfill employees' functional needs while fostering community, inclusion, and personal well-being.

The research findings indicate that spatial adaptability is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Modular and reconfigurable furniture, varied work zones from lounges to semi-private stations, and sensory design elements such as natural light and tactile surfaces collectively empower users to self-select environments that align with their moment-to-moment needs. This behavioral flexibility directly contributes to productivity, focus, and emotional well-being, especially in hybrid contexts where spatial boundaries and work rhythms are more fluid. A key insight from the study is that psychological comfort including perceived control over space, access to privacy, and the presence of biophilic elements plays a vital role in the success of hybrid office environments. Compared to traditional workspaces, these new configurations acknowledge the emotional and cognitive dimensions of work, providing a holistic response to post-pandemic challenges.

Moreover, informal spaces such as hybrid cafés or breakout zones not only support social connection but also serve as strategic tools for organizational culture-building. Their integration into interior architecture reflects a paradigm shift from rigid task-based environments to

experience-oriented work settings. These spaces foster a sense of belonging and autonomy, particularly important for hybrid teams that interact both physically and digitally.

In addition, the study reinforces the importance of evidence-based design. As seen in the literature, factors such as daylight availability, spatial openness, and ergonomic layouts significantly influence occupancy patterns and user satisfaction. Aligning design strategies with these empirical insights enhances the long-term effectiveness of hybrid interiors.

In conclusion, interior design in the post-pandemic era must transcend its traditional role, offering proactive, resilience-oriented solutions that align with the fluid and boundaryless nature of modern work. By adopting an integrated approach merging technology, well-being, and spatial innovation designers can help create future-ready workplaces that adapt gracefully to change and support diverse user needs. Future research could explore the long-term psychological and behavioral impacts of hybrid commons on employee engagement through user experience evaluations. It may also be valuable to develop interdisciplinary methods to examine how spatial configurations influence collaboration across physical and digital channels. Furthermore, comparative studies could be conducted to understand how hybrid design strategies can be adapted to diverse cultural and climatic contexts while preserving core values such as flexibility, inclusion, and well-being.

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