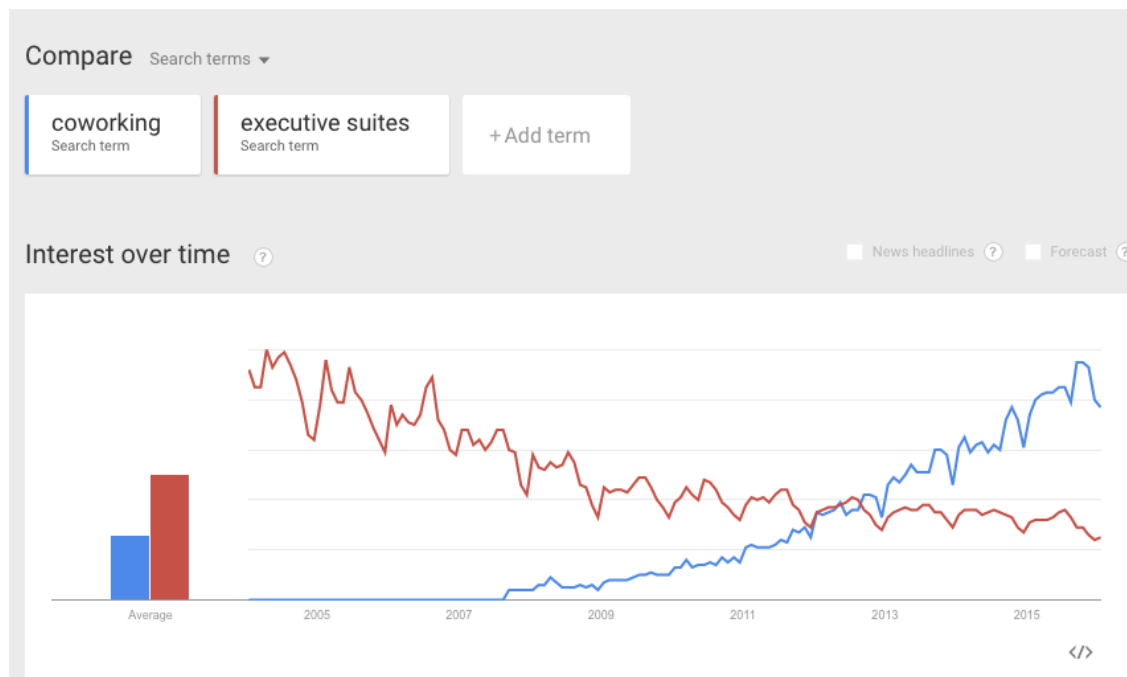


Coworking Versus Executive Suites: Crossed Trends Hint At Deeper Changes

Like the traveler returning from extended journeys we arrive back at the origin, seeing it in new ways.

We Live In Interesting Times

A recent conversation about commercial real estate led me to wonder about what it means for coworking, compared to other options for independent workers. The obvious comparison is with the traditional business centers often referred to as executive suites. I queried [Google Trends](#), comparing the terms *coworking* and *executive suites*. The search result produced the surprisingly dramatic crossed trend lines in the image below.



It's a spectacular looking graph, is it not? It set me wondering what it all means? And if there is a real significance to executive suites trending downward as a term while the more recent term coworking has come into use with greater frequency. I think that there is a real connection, and there are at least three underlying trends that are the cause of it.

Three Trends Changing Occupancy Needs Now

Change is so pervasive now; everyone needs to think like a startup, always ready to pivot to a different model at a moment's notice, if the current one looks even slightly disappointing. Leaders continually track options and have contingencies if they

decide to bail. It's a mindset that values curiosity and questioning, but also a reluctance to commit to resources or investment beyond the absolute minimum; you keep the balance sheet light when the oncoming horizon looks like a cliff.

The Shift To Sharing With Licenses

Licensing is gaining popularity as an alternative to office space leasing. Your landlord allows you to enter and occupy the space, without tying you down with a lease contract. You can leave more quickly, but you don't necessarily have exclusive access. Traditional leasing ties you into fixed terms, usually five or ten years, that's adequate for settled organizations in stable markets, where the future looks the same as the present and the past. When you need to move to a larger space on short notice you have to find some way to exit your lease obligation. Subleasing to another occupant is the traditional escape, but you're looking over your shoulder as lessor and tied to multiple landlords if you're the lessee.

The startup mobile application company [Liquid Space](#) matches available workspace with the people who need it. They created a [new licensing framework](#) to match the spaces available with the people who want to use them. The Co-merge Workplace in San Diego and other [coworking](#) spaces operate their memberships as licenses, making it easy to have the space to work without a commitment that might restrict your future options. You can find Co-merge on Liquid Space.

Executive suites are for occupying coworking is for sharing.

A New Wave Of Holistic Thinking And Gentrification Lead To Sharing

The abandoned buildings of older inner urban areas have long been a cliché that alludes to obsolete business models and overwhelming foreign competition. Cities grow organically over time, nucleating on geographic features like rivers, crossroads or natural harbors. Growth radiates outward from these central points. Regeneration follows as another wave, years later.

The time it takes to bring neglected urban spaces around to possibility again means thinking has changed about land use. Like the traveler returning from extended journeys, we arrive back at the origin, seeing it in new ways. Developers and planners now look on locations for [regeneration](#) as sites for whole communities.

Urban villages that mix residential, services and commercial space deliver better alignment with the values of the sharing economy. Rehabilitating old buildings that have character and historical significance and repurposing them for modern use also helps to promote sustainability. It saves the cost of creating and transporting new materials. Extending building lifecycles and repurposing them as part of integrated communities is the highest possible use. Integrated, culturally enriched and sustainable communities appeal to millennial values. The gentrification that follows brings a new generation of residents, with a desire to work locally and collaboratively.

The long slow wave of occupation passes, the trough follows, and then the new wave of life and community.

New Ways Of Working

Traditional modes of work with lifetime employment are long gone, it seems. In every recession since the beginning of the millennium, the layoffs have been brutal. Although new jobs have arrived, the sense of certainty has given way to nervous awareness of the constant need to seek contingencies. The freelance or gig economy has come about through a growing sneaky suspicion, if not a complete understanding, of one hidden truth: *we are, in reality, all self-employed.*

Again with the flexible workplace!

I had intended to finish elsewhere when I started writing this post. Having arrived, I find that it has been an exploration of different things than I first thought. The discovery that I stumbled on is that the boundaries that dominated the twentieth century have been erased: Leases are giving way to licensing, urban renewal happens in a time of greater sharing, and the relationships between companies and workers are blurring.

I think that the reason that the graph shows crossing trends is that the weight of words themselves are changing. Coworking implies collaborative sharing. Even if you own a building that you operate as executive suites, you may find that promoting openness and collaboration will make your offices a place for coworking. Given the rising values of sustainability and sharing, the need for workplace flexibility and the gig economy is it any wonder that coworking expands the meaning and replaces executive suites as a search term?

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Google Trends search results here:

<http://www.google.com/trends/explore#q=coworking%2C%20executive%20suite&cmpt=q&tz=Etc%2FGMT%2B8>

The screenshot for the post is in my Dropbox folder here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/de2naj9k2bmk7vt/Screenshot%202016-01-06%2014.29.38.png?dl=0>

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Meta Description: Flexible occupation agreements, flexible working and urban renewal are three trends that are driving the changes to the face of urban spaces.