

## Clare Dowdy on co-working

# Doing well by doing good

*Could the success of X+Why's Whitechapel community of 'purpose-driven businesses' prove a benefit for all?*



If the office rental market is a pie, then co-working is a hefty slice of that pie. According to commercial property specialist Cushman & Wakefield's *Coworking 2018* report, central London saw a record 2.5m sq ft (232,250sq m) of lettings signed for flexible workspaces in 2017, more than 21% of all commercial office leases in the capital. Operators in that ever-bigger slice need to find ever more novel ways to attract their audience.

At X+Why in Whitechapel, which opened in March, "Our purpose is lofty," claims Nevin. "It's to change business for good." That doesn't mean he only wants charities: "If it was filled with NGOs we'd be missing a trick."

For the workspace's more conventionally commercial members, though, the idea is that this sense of purpose will rub off through X+Why's cultural programme and close contact with the more socially aware members. To that end, member companies sign a pledge that their business is a benefit to society.

The definition of 'benefit to society' would have to be stretched for my hotchpotch collective of journalists and PRs to gain admittance. In my own case, I could claim services to cushion cover design. However, like most



proper flexible workspaces, it's immaterial because at £500 a month, X+Why's desks in private offices are beyond our reach.

If such purposefulness doesn't float members' boats, then they'll be missing out on Squire & Partners' light-touch interiors. This being gritty-urban Whitechapel, Squire's director of interior design Maria Cheung has drawn on the local street market. Hence the stall-style metal frames and stripy canvas upholstery in some communal rooms.

Despite my own lack of purpose, Nevin is convinced that his shtick has legs. He's "very close to another couple of London sites". Could the expansion of the X+Why brand really make a difference to how businesses do business? □

↑ X+Why's light-touch interiors by Squire & Partners

← A wellness studio connects co-workers at X+Why in Whitechapel

How can co-working spaces play a part in contributing to society?  
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