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Change Management – Working Flexibly

by Barry Tuckwood



In February I discussed the comfort zone; this month I would like to expand on one aspect of that.

Do you have a desk? Do you need it? Many of us do not need to work from a fixed place, yet we stick to the routine of turning up regularly at the same office, at the same time, to do work which we could just as easily do from almost anywhere.

A careful examination of the amount of time that you and your colleagues actually spend at your desks may be very revealing. How much time is the office actually fully occupied? How much time do you spend in meetings in other places both on site and off site?

So what is the office for? Why do you need a desk? Could you lead a nomadic life, using whichever desk happens to be available?

What support facilities would you need, and how could they be provided? A mobile phone? Some kind of email service? A laptop? Access to your organisation's information systems? And of course it all has to work and be secure.

Could you handle that sort of working arrangement, where you turn up in the office when you need to rather than every day; where you use any desk that happens to be available rather than a

specific desk; where you use the internet for access to organisation information?

Many organisations have recognised the real benefits of using technology to support greater staff flexibility. Here are some examples of the real benefits to the organisation:

- Less commuting time
- Reduced desk space requirements
- Consistent use of current data rather than historic information held unnecessarily on individual systems
- Less hard copy space required
- Better use of office space for meetings
- Greater loyalty from staff
- Better availability of staff

So why is it difficult to obtain the benefits?

Firstly there is the psychological problem. a loss of space is seen as a loss of status. People like to feel 'at home' in the office, and any change to them having a genuine desk space is seen as a loss of their own place. They no longer have a home. If, as is usual in offices, people come to see them they are now more difficult to find. Additional effort is required. And it is no help at all for them to say that they are now at location E3 on floor 7; these lack any form of personal identity.

Secondly there is the potential lack of status in the eyes of the visitor. A major

client or supplier comes to meet you and you do not even have a desk, still less an office. What credibility does that suggest?

You need to manage these expectations. Clients, suppliers and colleagues all have to buy in to the potential for working outside the office that technology enables. Meeting in the relaxed and informal surroundings of coffee bars, an arrangement which is entirely possible within major organisations such as British Airways, BT, and the Royal Bank of Scotland is also possible for the public sector.

It may take time to become attuned to these possibilities so that you can work within them. People have to be comfortable with the actual arrangements for nomadic work – and the work itself has to be suited to it.

*Barry Tuckwood is the Programme Manager for Valuebill, one of the National Projects. [www.newham.gov.uk/valuebill](http://www.newham.gov.uk/valuebill); [barry@tuckwood.co.uk](mailto:barry@tuckwood.co.uk) [www.tuckwood.com](http://www.tuckwood.com)*

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