

New Ways of Working – Transforming the Way You Work

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The advent of the Digital Age and with it the rise of technology has had a hugely significant impact on the way we live our lives, from the way people shop, to the numerous ways that they consume information, to how we communicate. And this change is none more evident than in the workplace, where there has been a major shift in management and operations.

We are currently seeing one of the most diverse (in terms of age), workforces in living memory. Generation Z are joining the working world, which is already populated with Baby Boomers and Millennials, meaning that there are now multiple demands and countless ways of working. Management need to be flexible, and understand that not everyone on their staff works in the same way, or want the same things.

The New Ways of Working (NWoW) initiative is one of the hottest ways to boost flexibility and retention, largely by removing many of the barriers and management styles of the past.

Amongst those businesses affected are Local Authorities which still stand out as being one of the largest employers in many areas with some employing in excess of 31,000 staff (20,000 full time equivalents).

A number of these authorities have been taking a closer look at flexible working methods for a number of years, and already can boast some interesting developments.

For example:

- The opening of telecentres for their staff
- Some have agreed a collective agreement on home-based working
- Desk-sharing is increasingly on the agenda. Many authorities are committed to an office accommodation strategy based on a 3:4 ratio - or in other words, three desk places for every four people.

The main purpose of this change is to consolidate offices, enabling them to improve and 'right size' the estate, reduce costs and enable them to work more flexibly, with the overriding intention of the initiative being to increase the densities of workstations in the retained buildings. This allows staff assigned to these buildings to increase the space efficiency and overall utilisation.

This all appeared sensible and straight forward. However, in reality, the situation is more complex: For example, the vast majority of employees had worked in the same place and the same way for many years and with the majority being in small cellular offices occupied by anything from one to six staff.

Such moves towards flexible working were perceived by some staff as simply a euphemism for office closures and reorganisation which was clearly not the driver and these concerns led to the desire to promote the change by consensus. Some of this sensitivity

came from perceived difficulties generated by other similar projects and the imposition of hot-desking, which was not well received by the individuals involved and required time to dispel.

The NWoW initiative enables staff to work anywhere (including home or even their local coffee shop!) and at any time and with no prior pre-booking system, and no dedicated reception worker on hand. Staff simply introduce themselves when they arrive and are then given an appropriate system password to access the company network allowing access to all areas.

On conclusion of one such project an evaluation report confirmed that it had demonstrated substantial benefits:

"Use of Office Space: the use of the previously overcrowded Local Office dropped by 34% and with gains in productivity allowing the average office-based time to drop by 7 hours per week. Users also found that they could cope with their workload more easily leading to enhanced job satisfaction and with end users stating that they felt more positively motivated and less stressed as a result of having greater control over their lives. They had a sense of being trusted and therefore valued, meaning greater motivation to do a good job, meaning greater success for the organisation as a whole. And NWoW is at the very centre of this success.