

## Chapter 2

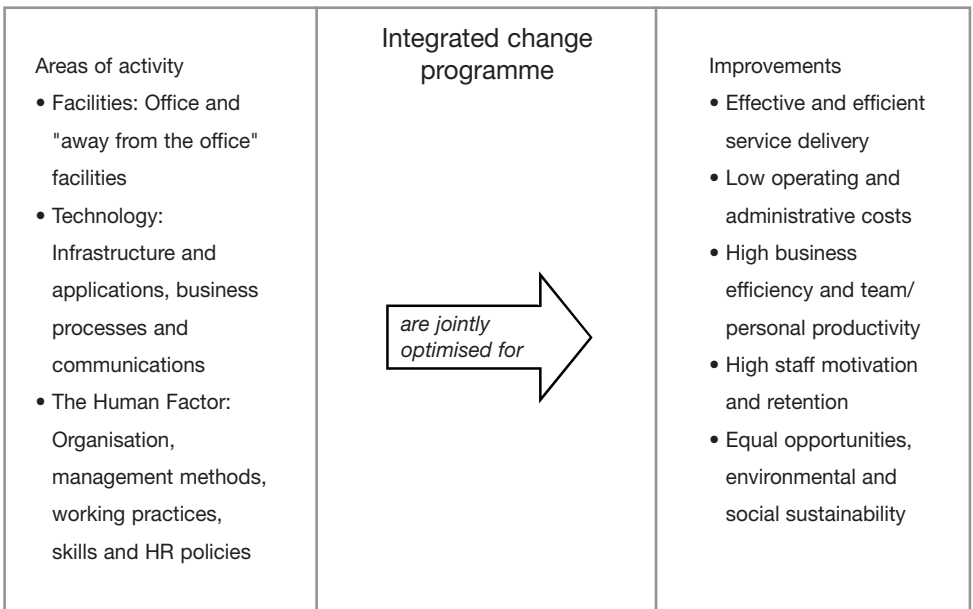
# A strategy for working in the information age

To most employers, in both the private and public sectors, better business performance will be the main driver for change. In essence, this means improving efficiency and effectiveness:

- Improving efficiency implies doing more for less – a combination of increasing output and reducing costs
- Improving effectiveness implies doing a better or more relevant job

New ways of working can have a significant impact in both of these dimensions.

This chapter discusses the key areas of performance improvement and is intended to provide a strategic framework for managers setting out on a programme.



### Strategic framework

By bringing together technology, processes, working practices, facilities, cultural innovations and developments around an integrated and focused programme, most organisations can deliver a number of measurable benefits. This is illustrated in the chart on the previous page.

The following sections expand on this concept. In practice, what it means is that those responsible for facilities, technology, business processes and human resources need to work together to a common agenda. This agenda can include, not only business benefits but environmental and social benefits as well.



### Facilities for work

Many office-based organisations seem to suffer from a common paradox – apparently inadequate office space and facilities, yet low building utilisation. The main reason for this is that offices are designed as if every employee were always there, rather than being tailored to match actual working practices.

Today, office facilities extend beyond the corporate office environment. They are to be found wherever work is being undertaken for the organisation. Using new technologies, it is becoming easier to widen the concept of facilities management towards the needs of employees, wherever they are. Essentially, the aim is to achieve "facilities flexibility", which is necessary to support flexible working. But this can only be arrived at if technology, processes, management and human resource issues are addressed at the same time.

Property and facility cost savings, or new cost avoidance, are often important drivers for achieving this and are critical to building the business case in order to move forward.

### Corporate offices

Offices will not disappear but their function will evolve.

The new approach to providing central office facilities involves:

- Emphasis on getting the work done, rather than providing personal facilities
- More shared and fewer private facilities and support services
- Greater space and staff flexibility, for example temporary co-location of project teams
- Paperwork elimination or reduction through process streamlining and electronic communications
- New work settings to enhance communications and productivity, such as in-work cafés, soft seating, flexible meeting rooms, study areas, retreats, training and development resource centres
- Touchdown facilities for regional and other staff without personal desks or services

The necessary redesign of premises is not purely a facilities issue. It involves technology and process improvements, and a high degree of staff consultation and involvement, leading to the development of new work styles and the policies to support them.

### **The office at home**

As suggested in chapter 1, working at home covers a wide range of arrangements, both formal and informal. At one extreme, is the executive or professional who occasionally works at home – often out of "normal" working hours. At the other extreme, are people who

work full-time from a home office. In between, are home-based mobile employees and those who split their time flexibly between home and the office.

Developing a strategy for employees working from home requires a clear understanding of working practices and travel behaviour. The aim has to be to increase work effectiveness and reduce non-productive travelling time. Working at home, other than on an occasional basis, requires a range of issues to be carefully considered. These include technology (telephony and IT), insurance, furniture, health and safety, taxation, integration with colleagues and effective supervision.

### **Offices on the move**

As with home working, there are different types of mobile employees, with varying requirements. Some jobs are inherently field-based, with the majority of time spent with clients or on the road. Others are more intermittent, as with executives who spend a lot of time travelling or consultants who work for a variety of clients.

These mobile employees will use their portable PCs and phones in trains, on planes, at airports, in cafés and in other locations. Most will also spend some time at an office or home base, undertaking administrative work or networking with colleagues.

Developing a strategy requires a good appreciation of mobile employees' working practices, travel behaviour and locational requirements. Again, the aim has to be to increase work effectiveness and reduce non-productive travelling time, extending the office to wherever they are.

### Other facilities

While many flexible, mobile and location-independent employees are adept at "camping out" in a variety of locations, including hotel lobbies, motorway service stations and airport lounges, new types of working environments are emerging.

- "Touchdown" centres are being set up in organisations with distributed operations, allowing mobile or visiting staff to use a desk, PC and phone on a temporary basis.
- Business centres are being used to provide flexible serviced office space to organisations whose needs may be only temporary, or who wish to outsource facility provision and management to a third party. Some of these are now catering for flexible workers who need "facilities on demand".

WiFi will probably become the ubiquitous standard, as it ties into networks regardless of location within a physical site. A mobile worker, on visiting a customer site may be given limited

access to their network via a "Guest" log-on. This will allow secure access to the Internet, thence to the office and e-mail. The customer site provides a



service to the guest worker. In an engineer's case, this may speed access to device drivers and up-to-date fix information. For a salesperson this will allow current pricing and availability to be readily available.

Once again, to develop a strategy, it is imperative for organisations to understand where employees can work most effectively, and to create the facilities and infrastructure to enable them to do so.

Facilities such as touchdown centres or business centres will also require the development of policies and protocols covering issues such as health and safety, equipment and information security, booking of facilities, communication with colleagues and supervision.

### Many needs, many solutions

In specifying new facilities, there is sometimes a tendency to assume that "one size fits all", whether applied to office, home or mobile workers. Such an approach often leads to nobody being satisfied. Clearly, different types of work need different solutions. Also, many people have requirements that change during the working day: formal meetings, communicating by phone, concentrated study and relaxed discussion, for example. Facilities development must reflect the differing tasks, needs and work styles, appropriate to each individual organisation.

Facilities and office redesign issues are examined in greater detail in chapter 3.

### Technology and processes

The underlying infrastructure of technology and processes must be sound if more flexible working methods are to succeed.

Those responsible for technology and processes need to be aware that in the future, staff need to have the ability to work anywhere. Otherwise, they may specify solutions that will only work in the office. The costs of getting it right at the outset are low, but the costs of putting it right later can be prohibitive.

### Technology infrastructure

The technologies for new ways of working are based around networked computer and phone systems, and could include some or all of the following:

- A standard and location-independent IT and telephony "desktop" that allows users to work anywhere
- Full integration of remote employees (home, on-site and mobile) into corporate systems and processes
- Information stored electronically and on servers, rather than on paper and personal workstations
- A single, well-integrated messaging system (e-mail, voice mail, etc.)
- Support for desktop video conferencing and group working
- Support for paperless working and knowledge management
- Applications delivered to the desktop using intranet technology

Most large and medium-sized employers have already made substantial investments in their electronic data and voice infrastructures. However, for many, these investments have generally failed to deliver the expected payback. The solution is often not to invest in more technology, but to use technology wisely to transform the ways in which work is done.

Strategic priorities are crucial in this regard. An IT department may devise an IT and telecomms roll-out which, in pure technical terms, may be entirely logical. But does it address the business objectives of the organisation? And, in practice, does it block the introduction of more effective working practices? Plans for infrastructure development must be integrated with strategy for introducing new ways of working.

### **Business processes and working practices**

Transforming working practices cannot be separated from the improvement of business processes. Process improvement – or transformation/redesign/re-engineering – should bring together a number of business concepts that conventionally, have been pursued independently:

- Process innovation – not being bound by traditional ways of doing things
- Organisation for success – restructuring the organisation around outputs rather than control
- Streamlining and automation – removing unnecessary activities, eliminating paper and making the most of technology
- Full integration of business processes with corporate IT systems

Most organisations have invested in and developed their mainstream business processes and systems, including finance, assets and

payroll. In many cases, this was as a result of the "Millennium threat", which has obviously now passed. Many have probably paid less attention to "re-engineering" internal processes and working practices.

Particular areas for attention can often include:

- Communications and information sharing, both internally and with business partners
- Paperwork reduction – it is surprising how much paper still finds its way into modern office environments
- Integration and support of staff who work away from the office, such as sales and maintenance staff
- Reduction in business travel, especially to internal meetings

The introduction of new ways of working without a thorough audit and improvement of business processes will fail to maximise the potential benefits. Transferring archaic processes on-line or duplicating processes to serve remotely based staff will build-in inefficiencies at the outset.

The goal should be to integrate new working practices in an online environment linking staff, suppliers and customers to facilitate ease of communication and effective service delivery.

Technology and process issues are examined in depth in chapter 4.

## Organisation and people

New ways of working need to be introduced alongside organisational and cultural developments in order to deliver their full range of benefits.

### Organisation and culture

Surveys have repeatedly demonstrated that the main obstacle to introducing innovative working practices is organisational culture. Typically, organisations have traditional "ways of doing things" and an internal "sense of self", and these underpin decisions and policies. The prevailing culture may be embedded in systems and hierarchies, but it is often also embedded in mentalities. Even organisations that may be highly innovative in some respects, for example in product development, may experience intense rearguard action when it comes to reforming internal processes and work styles.



As a result, developing the strategy may also involve a programme of cultural change and awareness raising.

Typically, issues which need to be addressed, include:

- Supervision and trust – how to manage employees who are physically present less often, and how to assess staff by outputs rather than by hours spent on the premises
- Moving information out of private domains (the manager's pending tray) into areas accessible by all relevant staff
- Reviewing the impact of status on processes and facilities

The application of networked information technology can also support the development of a learning culture. In turn, this can support the effective and efficient use of technology. A big issue, however, is that many organisations invest heavily in facilities, IT and processes, then wonder why they have spent so much for so little in the way of benefit.

## People

Organisations depend on people. It is through people, at all levels, that success can be delivered.

With a strategy for flexible working, it is essential to involve staff from the outset.

This not only helps dispel mistrust but contributes firstly, to raising awareness about the possibilities and, secondly, to a greater likelihood of success when it comes to policy formation and detail of implementation. Often, it is people on the front line who have the most realistic assessment of what works and what does not. You'll hear how dreadful the present information system is from those who actually operate it, rather than from the team who are trying to give all systems a web interface.

Many personnel issues are also raised by the introduction of new ways of working, from contractual and training issues, to concerns about changing work environments.

The ways in which flexible working can enhance recruitment and retention of staff should be included in the strategy. Many potentially excellent employees are effectively excluded

from the workplace by a combination of factors that make it difficult for them to commute to a "regular job". These include those with caring responsibilities for children or elderly relatives, disabled people and those who have moved away, for example, because of their spouse's job.

In fact, many people struggle to balance their work and home lives, and a little more flexibility in this regard could benefit many people, whilst at the same time, increasing efficiency and flexibility. To many employees, the working environment, conditions and culture are just as important as pay in their selection of employer.

This is not just an equal opportunities issue. With skill shortages reported in many sectors, widening the net of people who can be employed makes good business sense.

Organisational and cultural issues and the critical "human factor" are examined in depth in chapter 5.

## Responsible working

A strategy for new ways of working should also integrate the concept of “responsible working” – that is seeing how the pursuit of business excellence can also achieve social and environmental benefits. Such an approach may:

- Achieve benefits for staff in their working conditions, boosting morale and company loyalty
- Increase the organisation's attractiveness as an employer
- Address regulatory requirements, such as planning conditions imposed by a local authority to reduce staff travel via a company travel plan
- Enhance the image and reputation of the organisation, which may have a marketing pay-back

## Environmental responsibility

New ways of working can contribute directly to an employer's environmental policies in the following ways:

- Internal and external paper reduction, through electronic communications
- Business-related transport reduction (commuting and in-work) through local working, home-based working, electronic access to files, etc.
- Per-employee energy reduction, through better space utilisation

Public sector organisations, especially local authorities with transport responsibilities, have a double interest in the environmental benefits, as they are charged with implementing government policies regarding green transport planning and Local Agenda 21. Setting an example in these areas to other employers is vital.

## Social responsibility

Good employers must also consider issues of social sustainability. As well as supporting equal opportunities, new ways of working can help sustain local economies by locating work in areas of employment need, for example rural communities and post-industrial towns.



Locating work in such areas may have financial advantages due to lower property and labour costs, and availability of grants and other incentives from government for relocation.

Equal opportunities and social responsibility are examined in depth in chapter 6, environmental considerations in chapter 7 and regeneration in chapter 8.

### Bringing it together: successful implementation

There have already been several attempts in the public and private sectors to benefit from new ways of working along the lines outlined in this section.

Those who have been most successful have taken a radical and integrated approach, proving that the key is bringing together property/facilities, technology/processes and organisation/people teams around a shared agenda of simultaneous efficiency and service improvement.

The following chart illustrates the breadth of approach and some of the issues and tasks typically involved.

