

Foreword

In the Information Age, the
“office”
is no longer a building.

Instead, it is a
sophisticated
intercommunication system,
distributed across global digital networks.

In association with www.flexibility.co.uk

For many years, people have been employed flexibly – part-time, short-term, annualised hours, on contract, and so on. In fact, the UK is often said to have the most flexible labour market in Europe. Certainly the labour market reforms of the 1990s eliminated the traditional concept of a "job for life".

Yet, in spite of these reforms, the underlying nature of work seems to have changed very little. For most people, work still revolves around offices, desks, commuting and fixed hours. In effect, "going to work" is still associated with having to make a journey to an employer's place of business.

However, the "Information Age" is challenging these misconceptions – that work involves making a journey, and that it needs to take place at a fixed location.

New forms of flexible working are emerging as technology gets better and cheaper. We are becoming familiar with terms such as teleworking, hot-desking and virtual offices. Where once there were only flexible contracts and flexible working hours, there is now flexibility in location as well.

In the Information Age, the "office" is no longer a building. Instead, it is a sophisticated

intercommunication system, distributed across global digital networks. A growing proportion of work can be done anywhere – in an office (any office), at home, on the move – in fact wherever reliable access to the global digital networks can be found.

Today, it is often easier to move the work to the worker rather than vice versa. Furthermore, if it is properly implemented, flexible, location-independent and mobile working can substantially reduce costs, boost productivity and deliver a host of other benefits to employers, customers and staff.

So, has the era of flexible working arrived? Well, almost. The problem is that few employers are fully aware of its advantages and even fewer are prepared for the revolution in working practices, with its implications for the organisation, culture, facilities and management.

This Toshiba Guide is intended to help managers and other business people in large organisations to face up to these issues; to discover the opportunities; and to learn from our experience and research. Ultimately, it aims to help you understand and implement successful new ways of flexible working.

Prepared in conjunction with HOP Associates, pioneering consultants in the world of flexible working, the approach of the Toshiba Guide is "holistic". We have found that maximum advantage is gained where organisations aim for "total flexibility", rather than trying to compartmentalise flexible working practices. For example, flexitime produces better results when combined with flexible place options – and both are more effective when employers also tackle business processes and customer communications.

The chapters in the Guide fall into four sections:

- I. Understanding flexible working in the Information Age (chapters 1,2)
- II. The components of flexible working (chapters 3,4,5)
- III. Integrating the business benefits with wider objectives (chapters 6,7,8)
- IV. Implementing a flexible working project (chapter 9)

Our objective is to take the reader from an overview of flexible working right through to guidance for implementation. En route, we provide an analysis of the issues and prospects for change in each of the key areas of facilities, technology and human resources. And in keeping with our "holistic" approach, we show the possibilities for integrating organisational objectives with wider social and environmental objectives.

In the spirit of the times, this Toshiba Guide is complemented by the web site www.flexibility.co.uk. This contains further insights, as well as a practitioner forum and electronic versions of some of the tools referred to in the Guide.

