

Going Beyond Telework

For the past decade many organizations have experimented with telework, some have even gone past the experimentation stage to broader usage. Unfortunately many telework programs have either accomplished very low levels of acceptance and penetration or have not been able to move past the pilot stage.

Early telework programs focused on reducing employee commuting time and helping employees balance work and family – a noble pursuit but one that few senior executives are either excited about or willing invest in further. These executives see telework as merely an employee benefit with little or no business benefit. Organizations that implemented telework programs driven strictly by employee benefits are usually stuck in neutral – their telework programs are not going anywhere and may in fact be in jeopardy.

The second generation of telework programs went past the employee benefit scenario and started to directly tie business expectations and business benefits to telework. These organizations have formal telework policies, guidelines and a focus on management by results. Second generation telework programs are usually perceived as being successful but on more careful analysis are often limited to certain areas of the organization and are usually only supported at a cursory level by senior management.

The next generation of telework programs is to shift the focus from simply telework to work transformation. This next generation recognizes the need to rethink the way we work, where we work, and the environment in which we work. Work transformation involves the integration of human resources, facilities management and information technology strategies to deliver improved bottom-line results while fostering a workplace that is more satisfying.

Where telework tended to focus on either human resources or information technology, work transformation integrates both of these and includes the element of office space into the equation. The human resources element includes a complete array of work options in addition to telework; legitimizing options such as job sharing, part-time and phased retirement for all employees. Now telework is merely one of a range of options available to help employees most effectively deliver on their business objectives while meeting their own personal requirements.

The space element of work transformation usually involves major changes to the way space is designed, assigned and used. Some of the new space strategies include sharing space, hoteling, team-oriented spaces, more casual meeting areas, quiet spaces, etc. These approaches tend to create more of a community feel to the office environment than the "Dilbert cubes" that so many organizations are using today. The true business benefits of programs such as telework come to the attention of senior management when teleworkers are sharing space and thereby reducing the amount of space required. Few people seem to realize that space is usually the 2nd highest cost component after employee salaries – a reduction in this major cost can directly impact the bottom-line.

The technology element of work transformation is based on the premise that information technology is enabling us to deliver on work transformation as opposed to driving it. In other words, the technology allows organizations more options but in and of itself it is not the primary driver. The technology allows us to work remotely, to consider the potential of working from multiple places (mobile workers), to effortlessly share space through formal hoteling systems and to support the use of distributed work centers that bring employees closer to home and in some cases closer to customers.

Work transformation requires the three key corporate service functions to work together – a simple idea but one that was rarely considered in the past. The key to success is to get human resources, facilities management and information technology to work together to consider how the organization can break out of its traditional definition of work and move forward to an environment that is more flexible, empowering, communicative and pleasing. The primary driving force of this integration must be to deliver business benefits to the organization. This means addressing the real business issues – the ones senior management are interested in and prepared to support.

The key steps to implementing a work transformation program are as follows:

- Develop an overall strategy;
- Assess the appropriateness for the organization;
- Develop a detailed business case using the type of business models typically used by senior management to make major decisions;
- Implement the concepts; and
- Re-evaluate, learn and enhance the work transformation program.

Work transformation is a continuous improvement program. You will never reach the final perfect solution but you will continue to learn and enhance your program to make your organization the best it can be. The business environment we operate in today is one of constant change. To be successful your organization must continue to change to maintain or improve your competitive positioning. Organizations that become complacent may not survive to compete in the future.

So don't be complacent with your telework program. Move beyond telework to the constantly evolving concept of work transformation. It will be a challenging journey but one worth the effort.

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Need More Information?

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