

IT & the Flexible Work Place: An Academia Opinion Piece

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Foreword

According to Gartner IT, decision makers should be focusing on initiatives that increase endpoint independence so now is the time to think about your mobile hardware and software strategy differently.

What does this mean? In essence the status quo of enterprise PCs and our working environments are being challenged to the core by the rise of mobile usage and the reliance on multiple devices and users. More and more employees are using alternative devices to view/edit and manage information even if not supported by their employers. BYOD is one of the much publicised mechanisms to deal with this new challenge but is not necessarily being adopted by everyone which means the mobile challenge still needs to be managed and controlled.

There is a case for companies to embrace the technology change and create "smart" working environments, keeping in mind that the workplace often extends beyond the traditional office environment. Using portable devices is essential to improving out of office productivity, keeping businesses ahead of their competitors and retaining their best staff due to improved employee satisfaction.

Challenges

Fully adopting a mobile and flexible workplace will not be without some challenges, ranging from organisational, technological or process-based. Identifying those risks and building a strategic plan that mitigates any exposure to issues is going to be vital for any business.

Some areas of concern that you will most likely come across are; Security, Device Management, Support and Employee Usage Policies.

Benefits

The challenges that businesses may face are largely technology based and can therefore be overcome by an array of solutions. With this in mind, we should focus on the business benefits. That may seem like issues are being swept under the carpet, but this opinion piece is aimed at the upsides!

Flexibility in the workplace means embracing the defragmented workplace by using hot-desking, shared meeting areas and working from home. Desk utilisation should be considered to identify how many desks need to be apportioned; typically desk space is only being effectively used 60% of the time anyway. By allowing staff to have more flexibility in the workplace, a company is making sure that they are well provisioned but ultimately will mean using laptops/tablets with docking stations and additional screens.

If we empower staff with mobile technology, it is widely accepted that productivity increases when outside of the traditional office space and time constraints. Therefore, through the use of mobile technology and flexible working spaces you can achieve the following; better workspaces, reduced office size/cost, more productivity from staff, happier workers due to improvements in the working environment and use of "cooler" tech which, believe it or not, is something of great value to staff and helps attract and retain the best employees.

Other benefits range from business agility, easier scaling of your IT and office space, reduction to business disruption as staff can work at any time and anywhere and reduction to the impact of single points of failure, such as transport problems, or internet/power issues. This of course helps the environment due to reducing unnecessary travel and lowering power consumption etc.



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Summary

The flexible workplace is an investment and needs the right technology. It is true to say that most companies wish to spend the least amount of money for the largest gain; however, some level of investment is required to increase agility within your business and therefore should be seen as a longer term investment. Choosing the right technology and the one that meets high levels of quality and security is paramount and demonstrates true cost benefits and return on investment (ROI).

Providing your staff with choices and utilising BYOD and YODAH schemes will allow employees to choose the most efficient environment for them depending on their individual requirements, roles and responsibilities. The cultural shift towards mobile devices is happening quickly as tablets and smartphones are being more widely adopted, however using your own device at home mitigates the need to roll out mobile devices to everyone when it is not wholly required.

Hot-desking and shared work spaces are not new concepts but encouraging a collaborative workspace where employees are able to access mobile technology will see improvements in morale and productivity for most companies.

Last thought on this is; whatever concerns you may have regarding adopting an IT strategy that improves flexibility in the workplace, you will find plenty of reference sites and successes for companies that have implemented rewarding projects, whilst lowering IT costs and demands within their business, quite possibly your closest rival...

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Definitions:

BYOD Bring Your Own Device

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