



‘Work loneliness’: The Impact of Flexible Working

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With Technology, Mobility is the most important factor of change in the workplace. Technological solutions for the workplace increased so dramatically that investment into new IT and ICT solutions become out of date in a matter of months and organisation have to face no or low return on investment, unless their technological choices have an impact on the performance of their staff and increase profit. A greater understanding of the complex interaction between individuals (employees and managers with all stakeholders) and the organisation within a working environment, which is today not constant, is required.

The 2004 Flexible Working Survey, which canvassed the views of management and staff within a wide range of companies over one year, has produced a series of statistics about the experience of flexible working at home, on the move and in the office and attitudes to current practices. The research analysed flexible working experiences in a range of key areas, including: use of space, working patterns, the workplace as a social space, technology impact, communication, management and organisation. This article will briefly summarise some of the major outcomes of the survey prepared by the Facilities Innovation team of the University of the West of England and Johnson Controls UK Consulting Group.

Workplaces in the UK:

The UK counts around 28million¹ people in employment. So if an estimated 50% of all employees work in offices (against 20% in 1911) and occupy in average 7 to 14m² (Actium Consult, 2004)² and the space allocated for a desk and its immediate surrounding area varies from around 4 m² to 15 m² (Total Office Costs Survey 2004), we can confidently say that in the UK there is an estimated 147million sqm of office space, all of different shape and form, in diverse geographical locations and offering a widely different environment. However, it remains difficult to paint an accurate portrait of all the workplaces in the UK. The 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey provides an analysis of 128,000 workplaces with 25 or more employees across Great Britain. This 1998 survey, based on the completed questionnaires obtained from more than 28,000 employees, revealed that **52% of workplaces have between 25 and 49 employees and only 3% more than 500 employees**. Overall, the survey revealed that 89% of workplaces in the UK have less than 200 employees.

¹ Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics, Published on 25 February 2004 at 9:30 am

² Actium Consult & Cass Business School (2004) The Total Office Cost Survey Summary, March 2004.



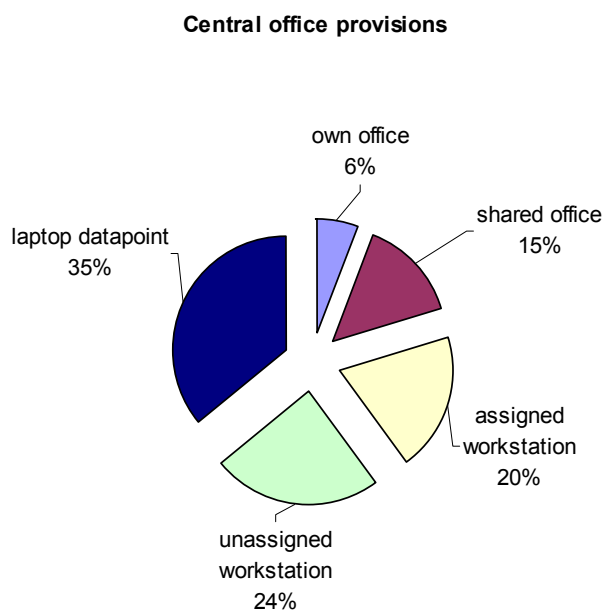
Facts on Space Utilisation:

- In any given workplace, on average **space is unused** or underused for 60% of the time³: which leaves **48million sqm of unused or underused space**
- Our study identified that 80% of employees agree that their **working environment could easily be improved** and nearly 88% agree/strongly agree that flexible working improves their productivity leaving **22.4million of unsatisfied employees**
- 41% still have a fixed workstation (own office, shared office or assigned workstation) at a central office location and spend 40% of their time on the move and away from their desk
- The average Cost of Occupancy in the UK is **£10,000 per workstation** per year (up to an average of £16,770 per workstation in the City).⁴ The DTZ rated London West End as the most expensive place in the World and London City ranked in fourth place⁵.
- **Space utilisation surveys are still being completed manually** which is time consuming and inefficient and unreliable

Changes in our organisations and the phenomenal growth of information in the FM sector forced us to modify our way of working and review our working environment, considering the social and economical factors that influence it. Many global organisations are responding to dynamic market forces both in terms of aggressive competition and the increasing drive towards corporate social responsibility by implementing New Ways of Working and innovative workplace solutions. Nowadays it is common to hear about organisations offering a wide range of alternative workplace solutions such as: Mobile working, Flexible working, Teleworking, Homeworking, Hot-desking, and Hoteling

The survey results:

Using a combination of detailed questionnaires with more than 340 participants and more than 120 individual interviews in the UK and Europe we have build up a detailed picture of how individuals



perceive the experience of working flexibly and managing them. This 2004 survey seek to address how individuals perceive their working environment and how a flexible working environment could impact on their productivity and creativity at work. The sample of respondents and depth of the analysis provided extremely valuable data to assess the current impact of flexible working, its pros and cons, its failure and more importantly its sustainability.

Only one out of nine of the respondents were unsatisfied about the provisions in their office. 41% of the respondents still have a fixed workstation (own office, shared office or assigned workstation) at their central office, and still practice flexible working. In 2003 more than 27% of the remote workers still had their own office, against more than 22% of home workers. Now, in 2004, only 11.6 of the remote workers still have their own office, against 7.7% of the home workers.

³ JCI Performance Survey

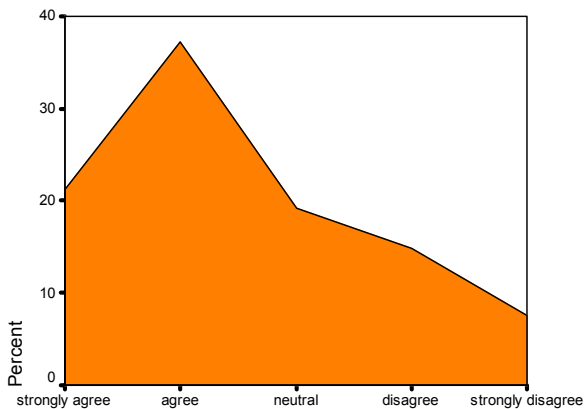
⁴ Total Cost Occupancy Survey 2004

⁵ www.dtz.com/WWW/DTZGlobal.nsf/docs/5UWBHZLBAK?opendocument&cat=News&lang=1



If nearly 73% of the respondents agree that their working environment is adequate to support their work, more than 50% agree/strongly agree that their working environment could easily be improved and nearly 60% agree/strongly agree that these provisions help them to feel fully connected to the organisation.

Flexible working helps me to feel fully connected to the organisation



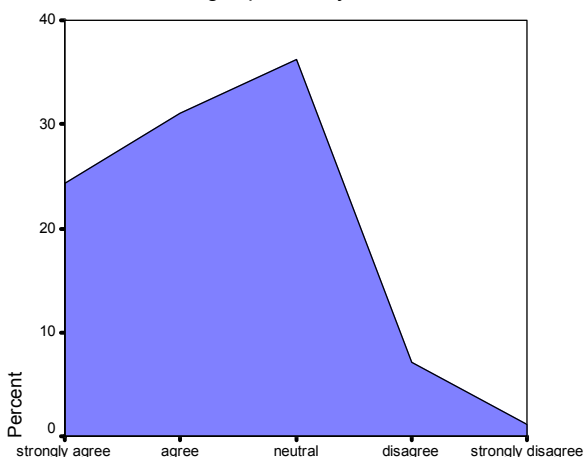
The holy grail for any organisation is to assess employees' productivity and increase it. However assessing productivity levels in an office environment is difficult if employees are not involved in repetitive tasks. Productivity is subjective and as our survey revealed depends on many factors: motivation, well-being, morale, job satisfaction, support. Therefore we do not have quantitative figures to offer on productivity increase linked to flexibility and mobility in the working environment. However 45% of our respondents strongly agree that flexible working has improved their productivity and a further 42% agree.

Overall the majority of managers are happy about the home working regime of their staff, but the majority of flexible workers remain neutral about how flexible working has improved their relationship with their managers. 69.4% of

the respondents agree or strongly agree that communication with their managers is fully effective (15.3% disagree) even if the majority of the respondents think that their manager is neither aware of what they are doing or how they work. Managers were asked the same question and a stunning 85% of them are not aware of the working environment of their flexible workers. This leaves 43.6% of the respondents feeling less visible to their managers as a result of flexible working.

Conclusion:

Flexible working improves my Customer interface



Research investigations undertaken during 2003 and 2004 have revealed that today facilities professionals recognise that there are four main drivers for change:

- The need to decrease the Total Cost of Occupancy by reducing the total number of workstations and offices, and offer a more diverse and flexible working environment
- Workplaces are changing and organisations need to respond to that change and to the increasing demand by employees for new ways of working. There has been a shift from a static working environment to a more dynamic and open space one

- An improved and sustained Work/Life Balance forms an essential ingredient in an employee's working life and as such the employing organisation has to listen to its employees and address their needs
- An ever-increasing customer focus requires employees to carry out their tasks in diverse locations which do not require a permanent desk but rather a more interactive workspace and diverse work settings



So what needs to be addressed in the light of these changes?

- **Mobility** of the workforce is increasing and the workforce is demanding new ways of working and agile workplaces and therefore a different type of support from their organisation
- The **virtual dimension** of networked organisations is still unknown and difficult to manage which add to the complexity of flexible working
- The **rise of technology and ICT** in the workplace cannot replace essential direct physical exchanges between employees. Communication remains the predominant interface between individuals spread across the network.
- **HR and IT need to work closely with facilities management** to address the failure of communication and provide facilities which are adaptable to change and respond to the demand
- **Cultural differences** across the globe cannot be ignored and organisations need to listen to their employees and provide a workplace which suits their needs

Within the next ten years we will witness the emergence of a new form of workplace, one which is **agile, distributed, networked** and **fully connected**, where individuals will completely benefit from its diverse workspaces, choose a space in relation to their needs and specifications, one which is adaptable and flexible, and one where communication is the main focus and fully supported by technology (e-workplace and e-workspace).

A Smart Workplace, where the employee is a digital nomad evolving in an agile and responsive workplace. FM is probably ready to embrace this new concept and many global organisations are already moving in this direction. However there are still out there a large proportion of so-called 'traditional' offices which are very far from embracing the basic concept of Mobile/Flexible Working and which will require much more time and commitment for transforming their ways of working.

Key Findings of the 2004 Flexible Working Survey

- 41% of the respondents still have a fixed work station (own office, shared office or assigned workstation) at their central office, and still practice flexible working.
- 25% of homeworkers still have an assigned workstation against 14% of mobile workers.
- Mobile workers spend nearly 40% of their time on the move and around 10% of their time working in their car.
- 87.1% agree/strongly agree that Flexible Working improves their productivity
- 84.7% agree/strongly agree that Flexible Working provides a better job satisfaction
- 32.3% reported that informal communication at home is worse to much worse to working in the office
- 84.95% of managers are not aware of the working environment of their flexible workers
- 90% of the homeworkers strongly agree or agree that homeworking is sustainable in the long term