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Embracing Mobility: Using the digital workplace to reduce costs and improve workforce performance

by **Matthew Stegmeier**

More and more companies are embracing alternative workplace strategies as a solution to lingering organizational challenges that stem from continuing economic uncertainty. After the rounds of workforce reductions in the past few years, coupled with expanded job roles and the decision to leave some positions permanently vacant, many organizations have excess corporate real estate and a reduced staff trying to handle an ever-growing work load. By adopting a digital workplace, organizations can potentially reduce workplace costs and improve workforce performance. And the benefits don't stop there.

A mobile organization is better positioned to attract and retain top talent. As today's employees demand more work-life balance, the best and the brightest will naturally gravitate toward companies with cultures that acknowledge that their career is only part of their life. A well-respected electronics manufacturer found that candidates at college career fairs were interested in the organization, but when interviewees were brought in to tour their drab facilities, many decided to take jobs elsewhere. Since implementing a mobile work program, employee satisfaction within the organization has increased by 24 percent, and the company has been much more successful in securing its targeted candidates. A mobile organization is also more agile, and is capable of hiring the right person for the job—even if that employee lives across the country or the globe.

Other obvious benefits are of the green variety. The environmental impact of a digital workplace can be profound. Mobile workers use less gasoline, spend less time sitting in traffic jams, and in turn pump less smog into the air we breathe. Though we often focus on cars as polluters, inefficient buildings are another culprit; with a reduced real estate footprint, mobile organizations become more environmentally friendly. Adopting a digital workplace does not come without risks, however. Organizations must conduct thorough examinations of their structure and policies to determine how prepared they are for a drastic change in the dynamic of their workplace, and to evaluate what must be done before taking the plunge. A hastily implemented program is a recipe for failure.

One common thread in all successful alternative workplace

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initiatives is effective communication. Clear and concise communication throughout the entire change management process keeps everyone in the organization on the same page and can help mitigate some of the most common pitfalls of implementing an initiative.

Although effective communication is always important throughout the process, don't forget to keep in mind clear and consistent communication about the following:

- **Crafting a policy.** It is imperative that the policy effectively convey what is expected of employees in the digital workplace. All employees, including managers, should have a clear understanding of protocols.
- **Stakeholder planning sessions.** No matter what department takes ownership of the initiative, make sure HR, IT, facilities, communication and finance have no doubts about what is needed from them.
- **Writing and delivering change management communications.** Once roles and tasks have been assigned, notify the workforce early and often about all the exciting changes transpiring in the organization. Emails, face-to-face meetings with managers and direct reports, updates to the company's intranet portal, town hall meetings, and webinars are critical for securing employee buy-in and giving everyone a chance to be heard.
- **Training.** Whether you hold in-person workshops or live webinars, or opt for e-learning solutions or a combination of these, employees need thorough training on how to effectively work in the digital workplace. Non-mobile employees also need to be trained in how to best interact with off-site colleagues. Managers, especially, should undergo intensive training about how to supervise employees they can't always see.

Other issues to consider before turning your office into a digital workplace include the following:

- How prepared is your workforce to work remotely? There are assessment tests that can help gauge how capable each team member is of taking on the responsibilities of the digital workplace.
- Make sure you have strong IT support available to all workers, regardless of location.
- Determine and communicate your organization's stance on workers using their own devices for work. Company secrets can easily get out on the Internet if a non-encrypted device is stolen or if a user isn't connected to your VPN.
- Be prepared that not everyone will be supportive of the policy. Some workers' job functions require them to come into a physical office regularly. Other workers need constant supervision. Oftentimes middle managers will publicly support the initiative, while privately undermining it.
- Do you have the capability to plan and implement an alternative work initiative entirely in house? Your leadership team may be talented, but you must honestly assess whether your organization can afford to burden a department with the task of spearheading the initiative while carrying out its other duties.

By keeping in mind these considerations and remembering to impart clear information throughout the process, you can make the digital workplace a reality in your organization.



*Matthew Stegmeier is a consultant with **Stegmeier Consulting Group**, a globally recognized leader in workplace change management known for helping organizations effectively implement alternative workplace strategies. He is co-author of the forthcoming book, CAVE People in the Workplace: Managing Citizens Against Virtually Everything. Follow him on Twitter: [@MJStegs](#) or read more on SCG's blog: <http://www.stegmeierconsulting.com/blog>.*

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