Chapter VIII

What Can We Do For Corporate Nomads? IT and Facilities Management

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the impact of technology on facilities management. By focusing attention on the needs of the "corporate nomad," individuals who take advantage of technology and new forms of work organization to break out of the 9-5 mentality of corporate life, it suggests that even the virtual office requires a degree of facilities management. It argues that organizations will become increasingly aware of the need to better utilise expensive real estate in real time to ensure a synergy between organizational and individual needs.

INTRODUCTION

Does the establishment of electronic business (eBusiness) mark the beginning of a revolution? Tapscott (1995, p.1) describes its growth as part of the burgeoning of a digital economy where,

We are witnessing the early, turbulent days of a revolution as significant as any other in human history. A new medium of human communications is emerging, one that may prove to surpass all previous revolutions ... in its impact on our economic and social life. The computer is expanding from a tool for information management to a tool for communications ... In this digital economy, individuals and enterprises create wealth by applying knowledge,

networked human intelligence, and effort to manufacturing, agriculture, and services. In the digital frontier of this economy, the players, dynamics, rules, and requirements for survival and success are changing.

The impact of information technology (IT) on workplace design can also be viewed as a management fad which goes in and out of favour as tastes change. Like management trends in general, the newest incarnation of IT, eBusiness, has just about reached the stage of popular critique and many would argue that it is only a matter of time before it is seen as a populist notion or fad more associated with youth culture than organizational logic. However, the concept of workplace design has a much deeper history and has been a popular practice that has survived intact for over 50 years.

This chapter sets out to analyze the social and psychological impact of technology enhancements and organizational change on the nature of work and employment. It takes as its focus how workplace design can be used to combine the physical work environment, technology and the flexible workforce in a more employee-centred manner. It therefore raises issues associated with facilities management.

Although globalism and the e-explosion have placed significant attention on the concept of the nonphysical workplace, there has been little by way of research on the impact on facilities design for organizations. Systems of work which stress the significance of the Internet and the growing role of flexibility of work remain ill-defined and tend to focus attention on technology, knowledge management, and the need for "rethinking" the organization of the future. A focus on human-computer interaction which places emphasis on the link between person and machine without considering the physical workplace is futuristic at best and naïve in its conceptualization of the brave new world. Organizations going through the change process of the "e-age" will have to think radically about organizational form. However, a crucial mistake would be to deny the significance of the physical form through assertions of Internet supremacy. The management of IT needs to analyze the impact between organizational structures, teamwork, and inter/intra-organizational collaborations. People need places to work, and eBusiness, if it does anything, provides us with an opportunity to examine how workplace design can be used to reinvigorate the corporation, providing us with new models of doing business and enjoying work.

In this chapter a case study of workplace design with an eBusiness emphasis is used to explore the key issues in developing work organizations capable of managing flexible workforces. The emphasis is on what is termed the "corporate nomad," a form of flexible worker whose needs are to combine technology advancement, temporal distortions, and team working. This chapter therefore focuses on the key issues organizations will need to take into account during the introduction of more flexible forms of work driven by technological and eBusiness concerns.

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