

# HOT-DESKING: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR FACILITIES MANAGERS?



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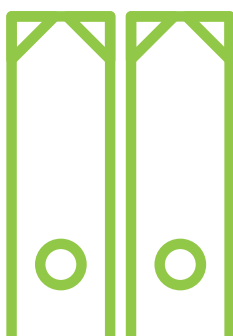




## HOT-DESKING: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR FACILITIES MANAGERS?

'First of all, you take away my office and sit me amongst my junior staff in an open office. Now, you want to take away my desk?' Many employees may be hostile to losing their desk, but for facilities managers it allows for improved productivity and reduced running costs. After all, how can we possibly live with an asset that is only 60% in use at any one time? With more people on the move, a huge office full of empty chairs seems pointless.

Those in the business reengineering team see hot-desking as an opportunity for achieving a truly flexible organisation. A chance to throw everything up in the air and see how it comes to rest - every single day. But for many employees, hot-desking might be seen as a direct challenge to their status. 'How else will people know that I've arrived and I'm going places? I need an expanding office to show exactly that!'





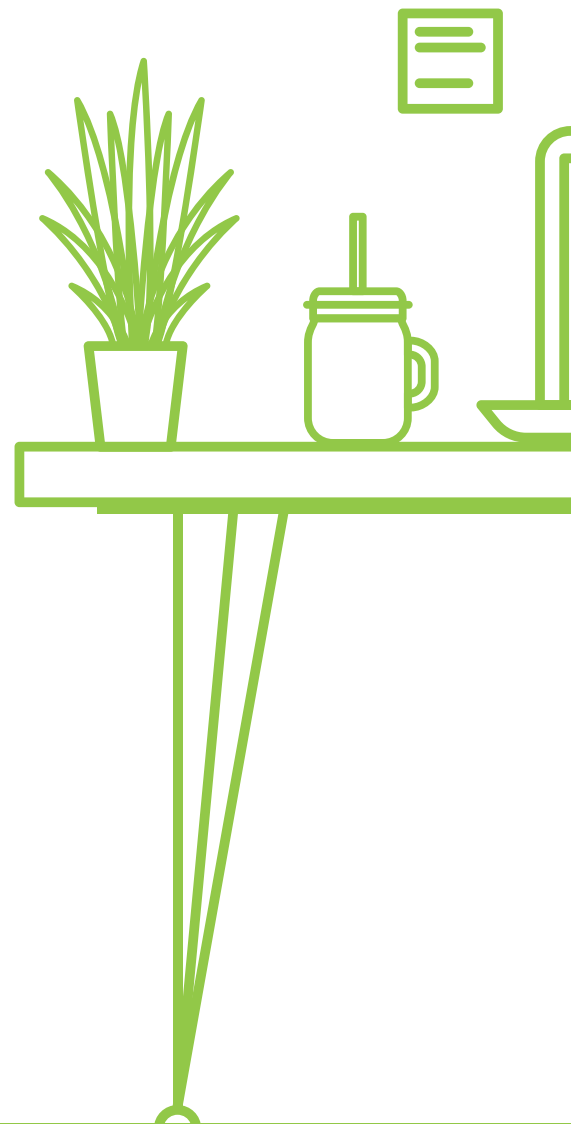
Employees may be unwilling to share their desk space. 'I have my own IT set up and I don't want to spend an extra twenty minutes every day reconfiguring the seat height and telephony' or 'I don't want to part with my personal belongings and my family photos'. Some may also worry about the 'housekeeping' habits of their nearest neighbour. After all, your neighbour's keyboard might well be yours tomorrow. You only wish that they had stayed another day at home recovering from the flu...

The business argument for hot-desking is compelling. In fact for many organisations, it has become a cornerstone in their corporate culture. But for the facilities manager, hot-desking can sometimes seem like a poisoned chalice. If you get it right, nobody seems to pat you on the back. If you get it wrong, powerful people can make your life difficult. In fact, the facilities manager always sits - not in the hot desk - but in the hot seat.

When it comes to implementing a new way of working, we always think about the 'design challenge' and getting it right first time. There are, however, other 'hidden' challenges: ones that require attention at the outset and long after the plans have been drawn up. This White Paper presents four such challenges that may be neglected when introducing hot-desking:

- Connecting;
- Rightsizing;
- Retrofitting; and
- Engaging.

How each of these challenges influence the success of a hot-desking program will be examined, and recommendations for how best to approach each of them are provided. We will also examine why modern organisations are looking for something entirely different from the workplace. Ultimately, we see why the skills of a facilities manager have become irreplaceable as organisations try to mobilise the workforce.

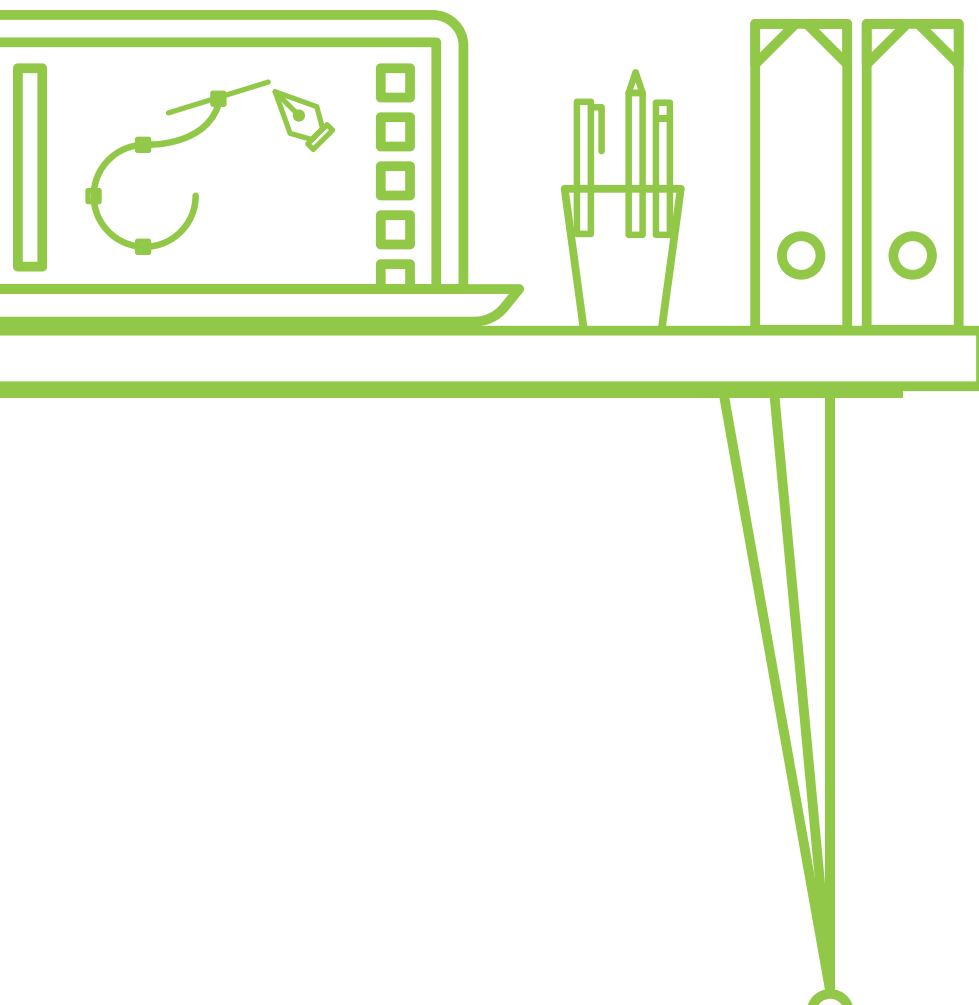


## SOLVING A PUZZLE?

Not a day goes by without even more advice emerging on 'change management'. Do facilities managers really have the time to read this stuff? After all, isn't hot-desking just one of those things that we just have to get on with? Modern-day hot-desking is so very different from the early attempts at this new way of working. When initially introduced, there were still many snags to overcome. Early adopters remember how it used to be: hulking around heavy bits of kit, scrambling around under the table to find a cable and desperately seeking an available spot. One might say that the idea was ahead of its time - and ahead of the technology.

Today, the hot-desking experience can be so very different. The arrival of Wi-Fi; reconfigurable desktops - and even localised lighting and comfort control - have all taken some of the hassle out of hot-desking.

Whilst the technical hurdles of hot-desking may have been overcome, the more difficult organisational and human issues are an ongoing challenge. Before hot-desking, space planning felt rather like doing a jigsaw puzzle. The facilities manager located each piece according to how it fit with its nearest neighbour. Eventually you would end up with a tidy interlocking picture.



*How very different things are today!  
It can start to feel more like a game of Kerplunk (c) - a game of nerves in which every player (IT, human resources and FM) takes a turn at removing a stick - hoping that all the marbles stay on top. It seems that every marble that falls through is counted against you. But facilities managers don't need to lose their marbles. Hot-desking is a game of cooperation rather than rivalry.*

## HOT-DESKING AS A BUSINESS TOOL

*The phrase hot-desking comes from 'hot racking' (sometimes called hot bunking or hot bedding) - the naval practice whereby sailors on different shifts share the same bunk. The bunk was often warm from the previous occupant of the bed: hence the phrase 'hot'. Like modern-day hot-desking, the practice was born out of necessity. After all, space was a premium resource (and of course, a larger vessel makes a larger target). Much the same could be said today about office space. The cost of office space in a major city like London increasingly draws the attention of an organisation's finance officer. As a result, property has undergone 'intensification'. We now look for ways to make more effective use of buildings, both in terms of space and time. At the heart of this is the concept of hot-desking.*

Organisations today adopt hot-desking as a core business tool. It's not just about saving property costs, it changes the way they function. The modern facilities management team now has to understand how workplace changes make a difference to organisational productivity. Effectiveness has now joined hands with efficiency. In the consultation, design, implementation, monitoring and measurement of new ways of working (NWOW) the facilities manager is called upon to listen, advise, execute and justify changes.

Hot-desking provides a way to organise the office environment so that different office users can make use of the same workspace at different points in time. In other words, the 'desk' becomes a shared resource rather than something that is owned by an individual. From a facilities management perspective this makes perfect sense. After all, recent developments in work styles have made the traditional office look very extravagant. People can work at different times and in many different places to suit their needs. The 9-to-5 workstyle has been replaced by the 'work anywhere, anytime' alternative workplace (AW).

Technology has liberated people from a single work environment, enabling them to seek out workplaces that best meet their immediate needs. They might choose to work from home and avoid the daily commute.

They may choose to work at a client's office or in a more open informal setting such as a coffee shop. But without a change to the traditional dedicated office environment, the office as we know it soon starts to feel desolate. Not only does this blurt out to the world that space is being wasted, perhaps more worryingly, the office environment loses its energy and buzz.

## HOT-DESKING ENABLES ACTIVITY-BASED WORKING (ABW)

Hot-desking can be a liberating experience. Not only do people have the choice to work outside of the office; they also have the ability to work anywhere within the office. This internal mobilisation has encouraged space planners to think about different work settings.



After all, the traditional dedicated workspace does not seem to fit with modern day working. Quoting the VP of Samsung Semiconductor, Scott Birnbaum, "The most creative ideas aren't going to come while sitting at your monitor". Why not provide settings that meet the requirements of each task?

Whether you are trying to work on your own, collaborate, socialise, or take part in more formal meetings, a different setting can be found to suit each activity. This concept is known as 'activity-based working'. It rejuvenates the role of the office. Instead of seeing hot-desking simply as a means to reduce the demand for real estate, it is seen as a way of freeing up the system.

People are encouraged to become mobile within the office and crucially to 'interact'. In essence, the workplace environment becomes not simply a burden on the profit and loss account: it becomes a key communication tool.

Some pioneering activity-based working (ABW) initiatives have been created in purpose-built campus type facilities on the periphery of major city centres. Examples include the Gogaburn owned by the Royal Bank of Scotland in Edinburgh; and the BP International Centre for Business & Technology (ICBT) building in Sunbury-on-Thames. Increasingly, organisations based in high-rise city centre office buildings are also now successfully applying the concept.



## HOT-DESKING - THE FOUR HIDDEN CHALLENGES

*'I really can't understand it? We've introduced an amazing new work environment and people don't seem to appreciate it. Still worse, they are voting with their feet - working elsewhere'. This is a familiar refrain from facilities managers. Months of careful design and the drip feed of exciting news to office users has produced an 'experiment gone wrong'.*

But perhaps if we take a step back it is possible to see some of the things we missed. After all, it was all too easy to be 'blown away' by the designers' blueprint that offered so many possibilities for new ways of working.

Dealing with hot-desking can be a bit like navigating an iceberg. What you see above the water is a meagre 1/7th of its entire size. It's all too easy to miss the rest of the iceberg that lies unnoticed below the waterline. What sits above is the thing that catches your attention - which is usually the design solution. We spend a lot of time finessing the design; and with good reason. Get it right, and it could transform the organisation. But in this White Paper, we ask you to look beneath the waterline: to recognise other risk factors that could scupper all your good work.



Figure 1 shows the 'iceberg model' of hot-desking implementation. Above the waterline is the highly visible 'design solution'. This of course can carry some risk, but unlike the other risk factors it attracts lots of scrutiny. There is a firm cost attached to the design solution. There is also a lot of excitement and expectation from managers and office users alike. What type of task lighting should be used?

What other types of space will accompany the hot-desks? Will I have somewhere to store my personal possessions? What will the landscape of the open plan office look like? But looking at a hot-desking solution from a drawing or 3-D animation is unlikely to tell the whole story.

The facilities manager needs to look beneath the surface. This means understanding both the downside risk (i.e. the possibility of things going wrong) and just as importantly the upside risks (i.e. the possibility of things turning out above and beyond expectations).

### **The hidden challenges below the waterline include:**

- Connecting;
- Rightsizing;
- Retrofitting; and
- Engaging.

Simply being aware of these four challenges is an important step. It is vital to be vigilant and to continually review your hot-desking practices



Figure 1: The iceberg model

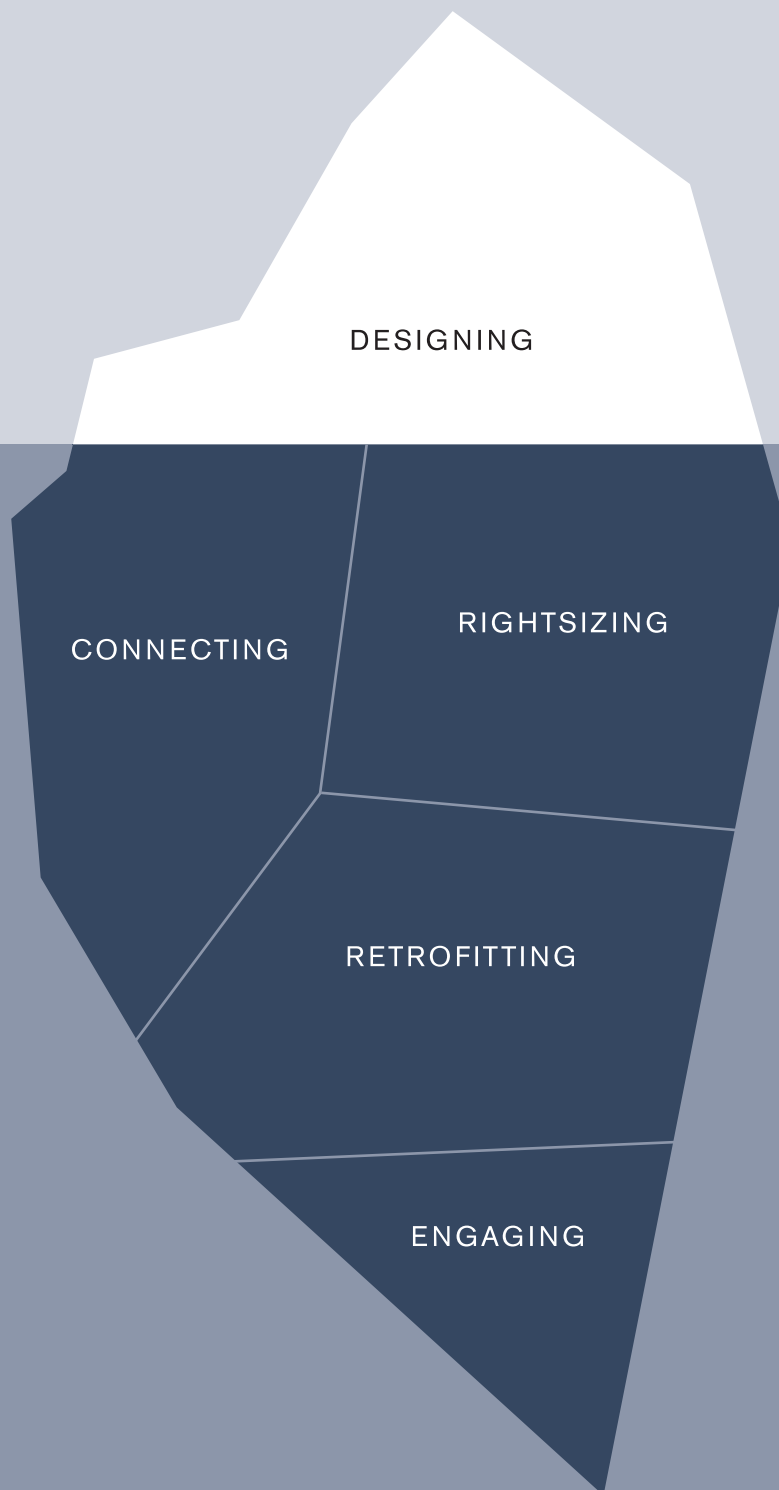
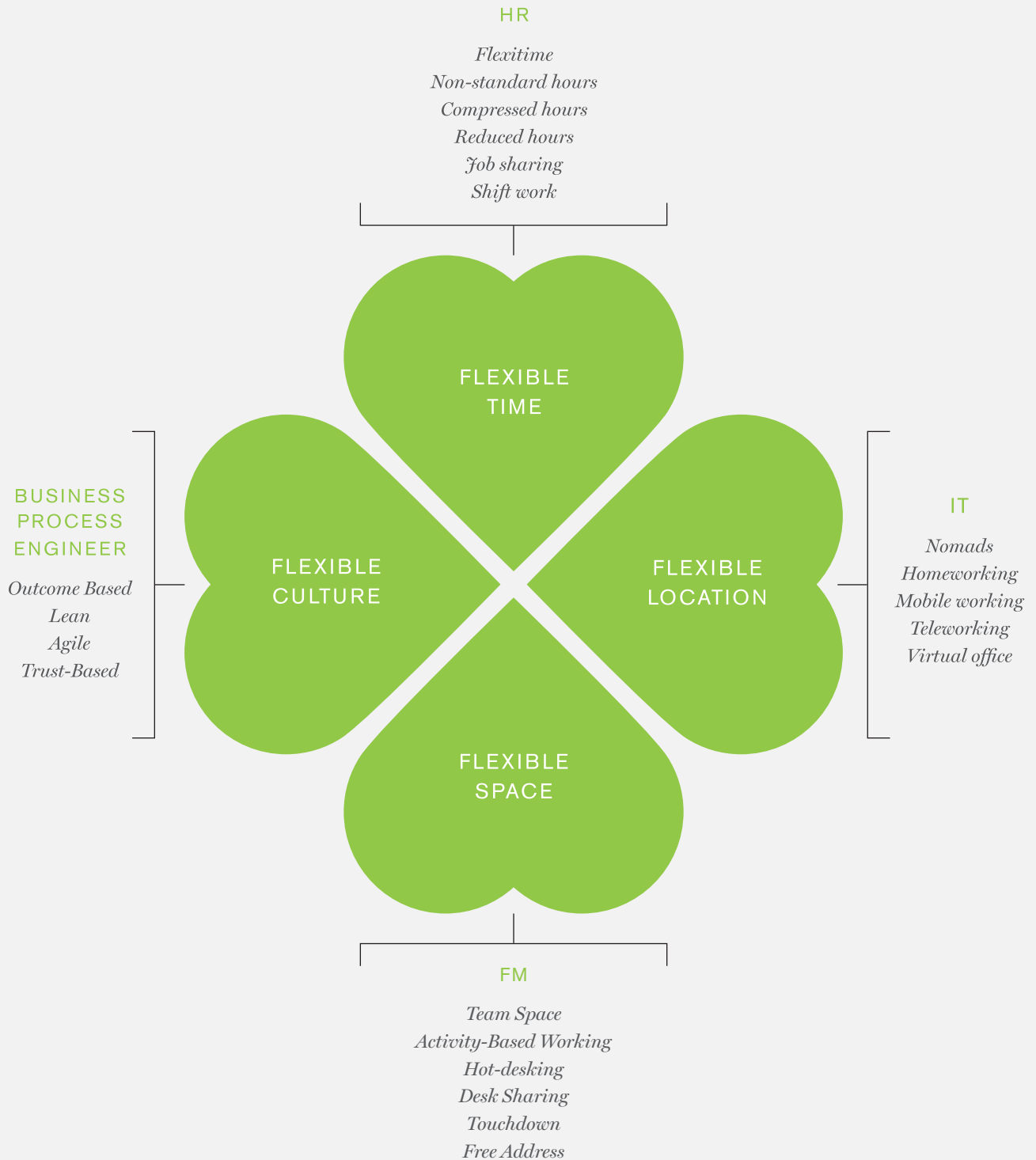


Figure 2: The four leafed clover diagram: hot-desking as an enabler



## HIDDEN CHALLENGE #1: CONNECTING

*'There are some threads that once pulled unravel the whole sweater.' Hot-desking is one such thread. 'Connecting' is essential if we are to pursue alternative workplace strategies. Put another way, how does the hot-desking thread connect with all aspects of an organisation's 'way of doing things'? HR will be pushing for a flexible workstyle; IT will be trying to facilitate a 'work anywhere' capability; and the Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) unit may want to rollout new processes - enabled by a mobilised workforce.*

In Figure 2 a 'four leafed clover' diagram is used to show the four different facets of flexible working. Flexible working can be thought of in terms of:

- 1) Flexible space - looks at how the physical office space is used
- 2) Flexible time - deals with individual's work-life balance and the opportunities for non-standard working patterns
- 3) Flexible location - enables working anywhere through the use of IT

4) Flexible culture - allows an organisation to embrace a different approach to work based on sharing; an open culture and high levels of interaction.

What type of flexible working is envisaged in your organisation? Well, that may depend upon who you are talking to. Mention the phrase 'flexible working' to the IT team and they think of nomadic working, virtual offices and e-working. Use the same phrase with the HR team and they think of parental rights, career breaks and flexitime. If you mention the idea to business managers they think of agile working, lean working and collaborative teams. It can sometimes be a world away from the facilities manager's concerns around desk sharing and activity-based working. In reality, flexible working is all of these.

Not only is the language of flexible working different between HR, IT, FM and the business process re-engineering (BPR) team, the objectives and constraints of each group can also be significantly different. These differences can often go unnoticed, with the different teams singing from 'different song sheets' as shown in the table below.

*Organisational units and their different workplace performance measures.*

<i>Organisational Unit</i>		<i>Performance Measured</i>
Facilities Management	Space	• Occupancy • Churn
Human Resources	Time	• Recruitment • Well-being • Appeal • Compliance
Information Technology	Location	• Security • Resilience • Interoperability
Business Process Re-engineering (BPR)	Process /Culture	• Productivity • Interaction • Attention • Creativity



### *Bringing the four organisational units together involves:*

- Ensuring you are talking the same language. Don't assume HR; BPR or IT see flexible working through the same lens.
- Keeping the dialogue going between departments. Connecting means staying connected.
- Embracing a 'joined up' approach to flexible working. Changes in any of the four areas will have a knock-on effect on other aspects. For example, the ability of the HR department to promote home-working will impact on the demand for space in the office.
- Connecting involves much more than coordination (the transfer of data). Having face-to-face conversations as a multifaceted team (including HR, IT and BPR) will help in aligning ambitions and in defining measures of success. This means being ready to ask 'Why?', 'How?' and 'When?'
- Rather than designing for the 'now', creating an agile space means making provision for an uncertain future. The joint team should be thinking about organisational forecasting (i.e. changes in workforce); workstyle forecasting (i.e. changes in culture and process) as well as technological forecasting (i.e. capability and security).





# HIDDEN CHALLENGE

## #2: RIGHTSIZING

*Space planning used to be straightforward. When presented with a floor plan, the facilities manager could confidently assign people to different parts of the building. How things have changed! It's no longer about undertaking an intricate jigsaw puzzle. Instead, it's about occupancy patterns: knowing how building users behave over time. In this world of peaks and troughs, rightsizing has become the greatest challenge for the facilities manager.*

Rightsizing is about understanding how well a building is used over time. It allows us to assess how intensively the workstations, meeting rooms, touchdown spaces and other types of activity setting are used. We could examine the occupancy levels in a hot-desking environment based on the Percentage Utilisation ratio.

### **Percentage utilisation**

*= (Total number of desks occupied at any one hour across the working week)  
/ (Total Number of desks x Hours observed) x 100*

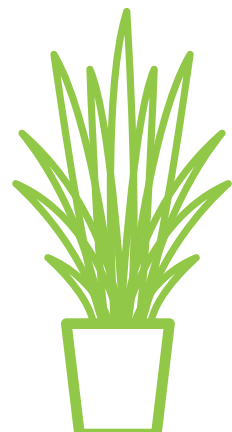
(From the British Council of Offices Guide to Post-occupancy Evaluation, 2007)

The utilisation figure can then be used to establish the 'desk-share' ratio. This tells us the number of desks that would be required to meet a target utilisation figure. This target is usually set at around 80% to allow some slack in the system. The desk count for the analysis would normally take place over a 1 to 2 week period. When recording the occupancy of workplaces there are three states that might be encountered: 1) occupied, with someone present at the workstation; 2) unoccupied with no sign of use and; 3) temporarily occupied with signs of usage (e.g. jacket on the back of a chair).

But don't be misled into thinking that rightsizing is an exact science. It requires an understanding of probability. The desk-share ratio only reveals the average level of occupancy. But in practice the peaks and troughs can be of greater interest. Demand for space is often highest at around 11 am in the morning, and when the CEO flies in from abroad everyone wants to be seen at their desk... The facilities manager therefore needs to design in order to accommodate daily and weekly variations.

Space planners are increasingly using simulation tools to help in rightsizing the workplace. These tools borrow an approach known as 'yield management' from the hotel industry. Using workstyle data, the simulation tools are able to forecast not only the average but also the peak occupancy levels. Even if you don't have such tools to hand, you can at least record the peak levels (including lowest occupancy levels) during a week's observation.

Can you achieve a Percentage Utilisation of 60% or 80% or even 95%? Ideally, the less slack (contingency) required, the better use of space. But flattening the peaks and troughs is not something the facilities management team can do alone. It depends crucially on the workstyle of the organisation. Organisations with (1) knowledge workers with diverse work styles (2) internal and external mobility and (3) management behaviours that encourage performance rather than presenteeism - are more likely to help in achieving higher utilisation rates. A close liaison with the HR team (e.g. awareness of flexible working opportunities) will help in understanding what is possible within your organisation.





# HIDDEN CHALLENGE

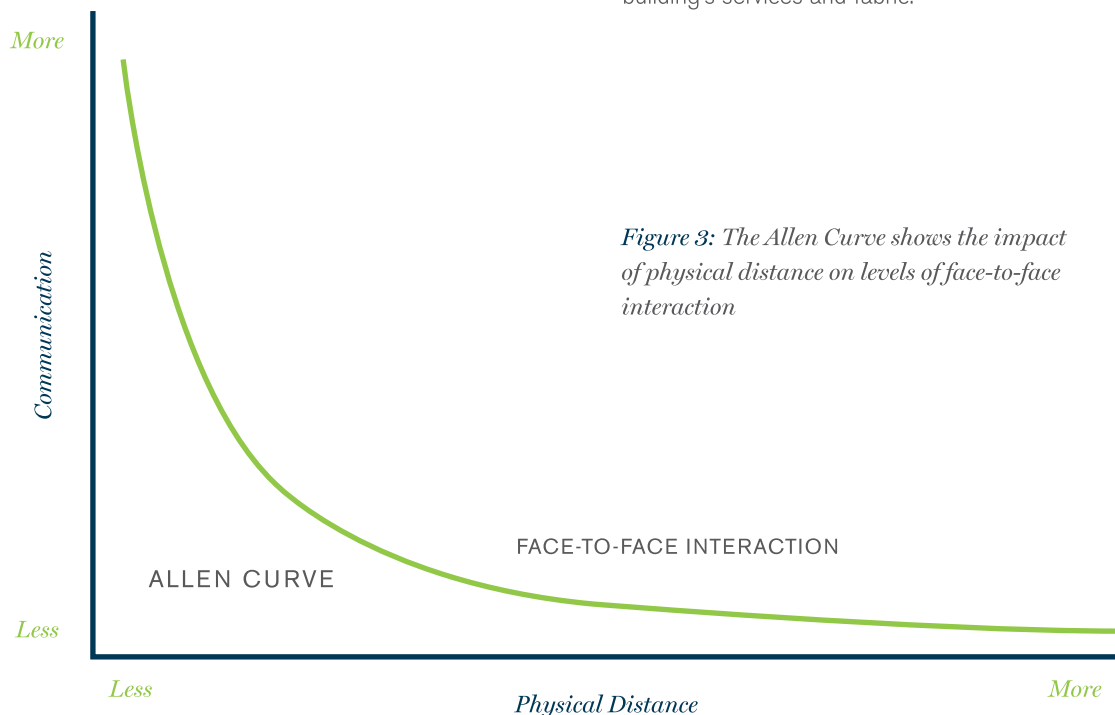
## #3: RETROFITTING

*We rarely have the opportunity to work from scratch when introducing an agile working environment. Any existing building will present obstacles. Unlike the early initiatives of activity-based working that were campus-based on the periphery of cities, many organisations have to ‘retrofit’ this novel approach in existing city centre buildings. Activity-based working (ABW) is being successfully retrofitted in high-rise office buildings in London and other commercial centres around the UK. But this has only been achieved through careful consideration of the constraints of the buildings that they inherit. This might be described as the ‘retrofitting challenge’ that facilities managers should be mindful of.*

**1.** Separation by floors. What happens when we separate teams across different floors? The answer can be found in the ‘Allen Curve’ (from the 1977 book *Managing the Flow of Technology* by Thomas J Allen) shown in Figure 3.

His research found that we are four times more likely to communicate regularly with someone sitting 2 metres away than with someone 20 metres away. This finding has been confirmed time and time again. In fact, we almost never communicate with colleagues that are on separate floors or in different buildings. You would have thought that modern day connectivity would have overcome this barrier since we can now reach anybody simply by connecting online. This appears not to be the case. Recent research by Ben Waber at the MIT Media Lab in the US showed that engineers who shared a physical office were 20% more likely to stay in touch digitally compared to work colleagues located elsewhere.

**2.** Intensification and capacity. As we move from dedicated space to flexible space, the building itself has to work harder. The new heating and cooling demands may make it necessary to resize the building’s HVAC capacity. Cleaning costs and rates of wear also increase in line with the higher occupancy level. One way of measuring this intensification is to look at the building’s occupancy level (average and peak levels). This provides an insight into the load imposed on the building’s services and fabric.



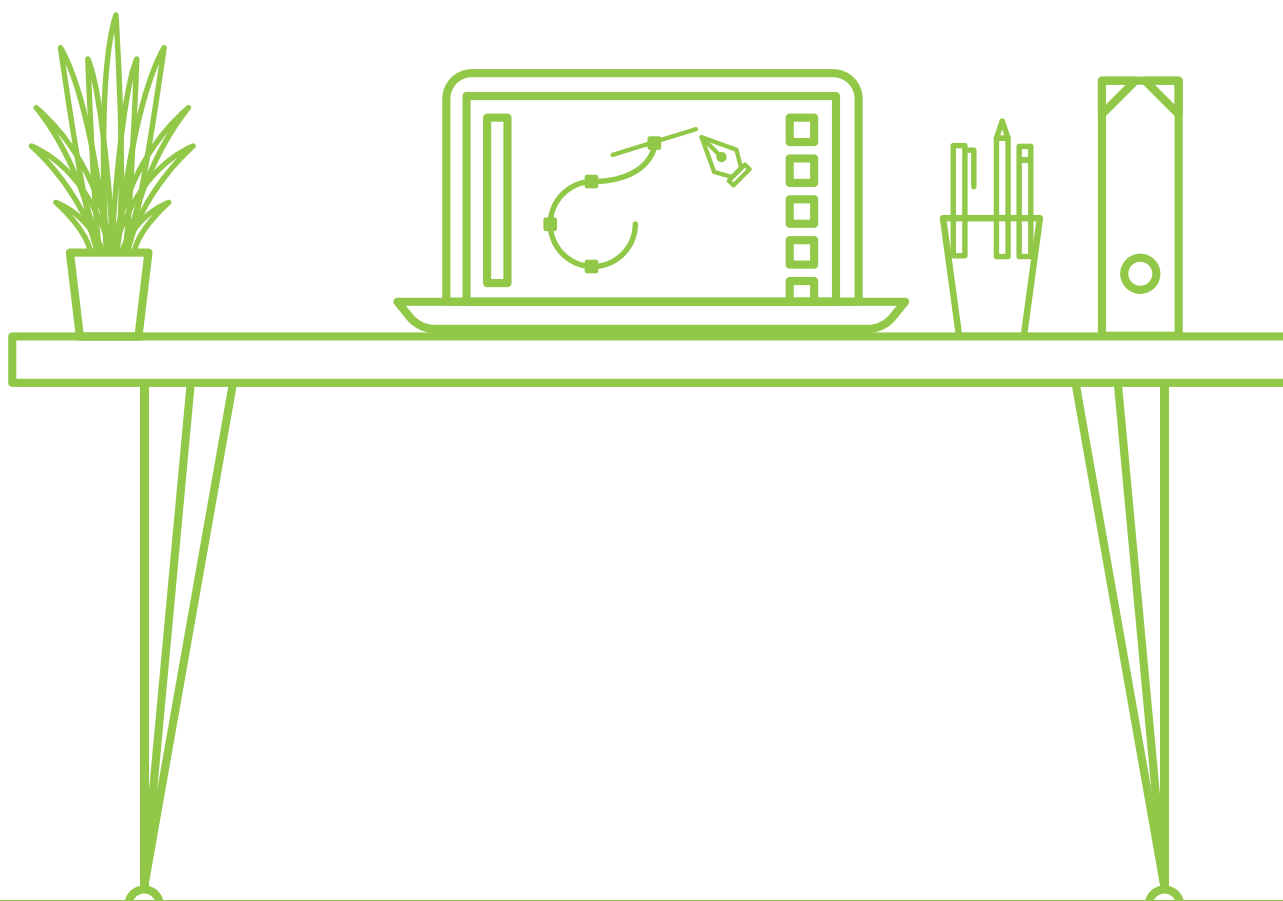
*Figure 3: The Allen Curve shows the impact of physical distance on levels of face-to-face interaction*



**3.** Meeting the telecoms requirements. Activity-based working requires careful Wi-Fi planning. Having a large number of simultaneous users and devices in a given area can affect connectivity. Capacity rather than coverage is often the key consideration. This means predicting how many users will be using the Wi-Fi infrastructure at a given time. Setting up a Wi-Fi network in a complex office environment requires Wi-Fi deployment expertise. When retrofitting in a busy city centre location, issues of neighbourhood interference and security may also become important.

**4.** Space planning constraints. Existing buildings have fixed points including columns and fixed physical spaces such as reception areas. For the space planner, this inevitably limits what they can do in terms of locating assets (e.g reception areas and meeting rooms). This is very different from a bespoke campus building where the location of columns and stairwells can be designed around the new design concept.

**5.** Catching the eye. Line-of-sight is important in flexible working environments. After all, we generally only take an interest in the things that we can see. Visibility gives the 'nudge' that makes people get up and change setting. Encouraging people to interact using attractive meeting areas is a key element of activity-based working. Attractive cafe settings and enticing leisure activities can all provide the necessary pull. But in a traditional office tower floor plan, providing a line-of-sight to these attractions can be challenging. The use of a central staircase can promote intermingling and encourage people to actively share the space.



# HIDDEN CHALLENGE

## #4: ENGAGING

*Finally, we come to the ultimate challenge - engagement with users - or overcoming resistance. Are they going to buy the idea of hot-desking? Are they going to be one of the resisters or one of the advocates? Like many other change management activities in an organisation, fear of the unknown looms large in the minds of employees. Some of the anxieties that crop up time and again include:*

- Loss of individuality - my personality is being swept away with my fun magnets!
- Loss of identity - I'll no longer know where I fit within the organisation (perhaps nowhere?)
- Loss of status - do I really have to sit alongside my juniors?
- Loss of team spirit - how do I rally my troops if I don't know where they are?
- Loss of freedom - now I'm out in the open, I have to be visible to the managers and that will involve working longer hours

Conventional 'change management' literature always claims that people's anxieties are based on an irrational fear of the unknown. In reality, many of the worries expressed by people reveal hidden 'assets' that need to be valued. For example; the group cohesion that has allowed one team to excel in its work; or the 'nesting' that makes an employee feel a sense of belonging. As an organisation moves from a traditional office environment to a hot-desking environment, these fragile assets need to be handled with care.

**Alongside these anxieties, there are also practical issues that people may want reassurance about:**

- Will there be sufficient desks available?
- Will there be sufficient team storage space?
- How long will it take for me to setup my workspace and login in the morning?
- How long will it take to pack up my things in the evening?

- Can I trust my neighbours to stick to the hot-desking protocol?
- Will I always be catching other people's cold or flu from the keyboard?

How do you capture these concerns - remembering of course that many employees' ideas and suggestions might help in making a more workable hot-desking solution. Some of the most vocal 'resisters' can in fact become key allies. Several methods can be used to encourage user acceptance. These might include:

- Focus groups to sound out ideas and concerns (and sometimes to exert some peer pressure)
- Consistent use of corporate communication channels
- Identifying role models (often a senior member of the organisation) who can be seen to embrace the new work style
- Introducing new ways of working 'bit by bit'. One department might be chosen first because it has fewer resisters and a more receptive culture. Other departments are then likely to see how the initial adopters benefit and do likewise
- Demonstrate how other similar organisations have successfully adopted hot-desking
- Engage with a variety of different stakeholders within the organisation (managers, administrators, remote workers).

## HOT-DESKING: IT'S NOT PLUG AND PLAY

Contrary to popular opinion, hot-desking is not 'plug and play'. It involves a 'social contract' with office users and a learning process. As well as a commitment to a clear desk policy, office users also need to consider:

- storage of personal items in lockers;
- making desks available when they're not being used;
- not taking daily ownership of a preferred desk;

- eating lunch in the cafeteria rather than on desks;
- keeping confidential documents out of sight; and
- maintaining a hygiene standard.

People's behaviour does not change overnight. The drift back to old habits can lead to re-colonisation of preferred work areas. Left unchecked, the phenomena of 'professional personalisation' can occur, whereby individuals slowly start to introduce a personal library of artefacts in a bid to secure their favourite seat. There will inevitably be people that are opposed to the new way of working. A minority may consciously choose to ignore the rules - carrying on in their own way. Whatever the motivation, the overall effect is to squeeze the remaining space available for others. So let's explore some of the measures available to the facilities manager that will help to 'nudge' office users in the right direction.

## PRACTICAL MEASURES

Some of the practical measures that successful implementers of hot-desking are using include:

- **Touchdown spaces.** Rightsizing can be difficult for organisations that have a fluctuating occupancy pattern. When the demand exceeds the available space, touchdown spaces provide a solution. A touchdown space enables someone to quickly respond to an email, a call, or a text message and then move to their chosen space when it becomes available.
- **Team storage spaces.** Unlike the individual locker space, the team storage space provides access to all. It prevents files accumulating in individual lockers. This hoarding tendency always leads to duplication and the creation of knowledge silos. The shared libraries also discourage 'professional personalisation' in work areas (e.g. reference material).
- **Beautiful surroundings.** It may not allow individuals to make their own personal stamp on the working environment, but it goes a long way to nurturing a shared environment that people learn to care for. The inclusion of pictures, planting, water features can all reflect the values and ambience sought by the particular team.
- **Ergonomic workplaces:** A common complaint from new adopters of hot-desking is that it takes time to adjust their workplace to their own physical dimensions.

The use of adjustable desking and seating makes it possible to accommodate all shapes and sizes without too much readjustment.

- **Interoperable.** A big word but an invaluable concept. Office users want to spend as little time as possible connecting to the network. For some organisations, the IT requirements of individuals can be quite varied. Attempts to create a 'universal' workstation might be difficult. Whilst this might be seen as an IT problem, the facilities manager will be concerned if the desk sharing area is not truly interchangeable.

- **'Special cases'.** A number of office users may feel that their job type does not fit with hot-desking. Those that are in the office full-time may feel that a fixed desk is the only solution. This may not be the case. By carefully examining the range of tasks an individual has to undertake, it should be possible to identify a suitable setting for each task. If, for example, a manager needs privacy to discuss confidential matters, a private office may be required on an 'as need' basis. The advent of 'activity-based working' provides the opportunity for office users to actively search out work environments suited to the task at hand.

- **Qualified flexible spaces.** Group identity is an important asset in any organisation. Hot-desking should not prevent groups from coming together. But rather than marking out zones to create cliques, many organisations are encouraging the formation of zoned areas with 'fuzzy edges'. This means that group identity is retained without excluding others.

Each of these measures can make hot-desking a responsive solution in a fast changing environment. If we can get a clearer understanding of what is driving these changes, facilities managers will be in a better position to adapt. In the final section we try to 'pin down' exactly what is making 'interaction' so important in the modern work environment.





## WHAT NEXT?

*In the last two decades, facilities management has witnessed two major waves of change. The first of these waves has swept us away from an exclusively commercial property perspective to one focused on human capital. More than ever we understand that the design of our buildings can affect the performance of individuals. In this first wave, our working environment was designed to bring out the skills, knowledge and experience of individuals within the organisation. Space planning and hot-desking were not just about trimming real estate costs. We needed to furnish people with a comfortable environment that worked for them.*

The second wave that is upon us involves a rewriting of the rules. In this new economy the best connected organisation wins! 'Human capital' is not the only game in town: organisations now seek 'social capital'. It's not just about the individual knowledge worker: it's about the connection between individuals.

In the modern knowledge economy, context has become everything. Knowledge workers are involved in interpreting; combining; making sense of; and creating knowledge. In order to achieve this, they need to be connected across borders. This means hooking up with other employees, suppliers, regulators, partners and customers. As a result, the office building has become a pivotal 'communication tool' - line of sight, circulation and proximity are instrumental in making connections happen.

# SO, WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOT-DESKING IN ALL OF THIS?

*The modern office environment relies on the concept of hot-desking. Done well, hot-desking provides a way to liberate people from a desk-bound environment. Done badly, it can disrupt group cohesion and allow hard earned social capital to drift out of an organisation. Now, more than ever, the hot-desking equation has to be right. Facilities managers have been entrusted with a 'delicate flower' - social capital. Tackling the hidden challenges (connectedness; rightsizing; retrofitting and user acceptance) can help in caring for this delicate resource.*



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