



Issues How to generate new business opportunities
Change Flexible working
Solution Mobile broadband

power to you



How will companies organise themselves in the future? We know that traditional notions of how and where we work are changing. The increase in home and mobile working points to a radically different model for tomorrow's business.

A revolution in the workplace

The office as we know it is in danger of becoming extinct. Cancelled meetings, endless commuting and the enormous expense of renting desk space that's idle for 16 hours a day have long been wasteful practices. It's only now that more and more people are starting to realise this.

But flexible working isn't just about flexibility in the location of work. It's about flexibility in hours and the balance of an employees' home and work commitments. For all businesses, this offers considerable benefits, not least of which are those relating to recruitment and access to skilled employees. This changes the face of the 'traditional' employee for companies too. As more emphasis will be put on an employee's area of expertise rather than the idea of a job for life.

The virtual workforce

Some companies already run parts of their workforce 'virtually' on a pay-as-you-go basis. Online collaboration tools tap into a network of people to help businesses find just the right talent, as they need it.

Elanca.com, a global recruitment company, allows you to find freelancers from a global pool of labour resources. You type in your requirement, be it design, editorial, accounting or legal, and set a budget for the job with a deadline for bids. Freelancers from all over the world can see this and bid on the job, providing

competitive rates or other unique selling points. This virtual workforce means you can increase staffing instantly in response to customer demands. What's more, permanent and freelance staff can collaborate easily using technologies like mobile broadband and email, regardless of location.

Large firms are beginning to see the benefits of virtual collaboration. Last year, one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, GlaxoSmithKline, made its research data on cancer open to all research houses¹. This was done to stimulate ideas and to save on drug development time, which commonly takes 10 years from concept to pharmacy shelf. This notion of co-creation with a larger talent pool is helping companies in a wide variety of industries to change their traditional working patterns.

¹ <http://www.gsk.com>

Flexible working increases productivity and employee retention alike.

Making the change

If your business can tap into just the people you need when you need them, is the concept of the “employee” itself on its way out? Will your business be able to adapt? And how can you best prepare yourself for the work-related changes just on the horizon?

One solution has earned the name “the Results-Oriented Work Environment” (ROWE)², where employees are left to work at home or in the office, in their own time, taking breaks as they need. But they have to deliver the goods on time, in the same way that a journalist cannot miss a deadline.

Letting go of the reins in this way is tough for some employers and employees who are used to working nine-to-five and then heading home. For your business, a gradual transition might work best. Allowing employees to work from home can seem like a scary prospect, so it's always worth making the change in small steps. For example, enable employees to work from home for one or two days a week and then gradually increase this if the trial proves successful.

Flexible or home working will not be right for every business, but if your business model can support it, the flexibility and freedom it can give your employees can be truly motivating. For one European retailer, the number of women returning to work after maternity leave increased from 74% to 97% after the introduction of flexible working. Being clear about the expected outputs from the start can really help to make any new working arrangement a real success.

² <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk>

New technologies open up new ways of working and new business opportunities. This freedom can change your business model entirely.

New technologies, new ways of working

New technology can help you take full advantage of new business opportunities. But this freedom is only possible because the latest generation of communications technology is finally reliable and cost effective enough to allow it. For example, it's now possible to integrate your office telephony system with your mobile communications to give you one number for your customers to contact you on, one voicemail for all your messages and considerable cost savings on all your voice and data services.

Forward-looking businesses are discovering something the 9-to-5 model has forgotten: where you get work done isn't nearly as important as how well and how quickly you get it done.

If that means having no set working hours, no office doors, and perhaps no office itself, so be it. While technology is driving many of the changes in the way that we work, other factors are providing incentives. The uncertain global economy, for instance, is inspiring many firms to look for new ways to cut expenses while increasing competitiveness.

All these trends may create challenges for your company, but also new opportunities. The rise of cloud computing (a move to hosted data and applications) means you won't need to invest in costly desktop software but rather use applications on a pay-as-you-go basis.

With the right technology in place, flexible working practices can allow your staff to be more productive and spend less time on mundane, administrative tasks, leaving more space for creative and strategic thinking.

Conduct business wherever and whenever you want. This kind of agility and performance can be a business differentiator

Real – and virtual – freedom

One of the clearest signs of work's evolution is the prevalence of laptops and mobiles, which are becoming more affordable and powerful. These devices are freeing people to conduct business from virtually anywhere, whether from home or from a hotel on the other side of the globe.

New technologies are now emerging to push the concept of the workplace into entirely new realms. Internet enabled phones, broadband Internet and video conferencing are helping businesses to hold face-to-face online meetings with employees, partners and customers at multiple locations.

Online collaboration tools enable people to instantly share documents and files from wherever they might be. And entire virtual environments such as Second Life are paving the way for new office training strategies and hands-on education.

Making the most of change

While adapting to such a structural change is no mean feat, it does promise wide-ranging benefits. More virtual work, for example, can cut down on commuting and office-space needs, which ultimately reduces energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

Less rigid workplace environments can also encourage creative thinking and promote greater employee satisfaction and retention. And more, and wider-ranging, collaboration – both within an organisation and among the business community at large – will help companies work smarter and more effectively.

By allowing remote working and flexible hours, businesses convey trust in their workforce. Nine times out of ten that trust will be rewarded with greater productivity and innovation.

Embracing technology changes throughout your workforce can only benefit the future of your business.

Tips for making the most from new ways of working

How your business can move toward adopting the latest work-enhancing technologies and making the most of them:

- Set clear goals. Introduce flexible working practices only if it makes sense for your business. You should set clear goals (e.g. 10% more productivity, greater innovation or attracting the right staff).
- Identify internal advocates of a given project. Imposing new practices and enforcing them through training programs can seem outdated and therefore be ineffective. Instead you could test new processes in small groups and create success stories that will help to strip away resistance. This way, the transition will start to gain momentum organically and help to facilitate a company-wide roll-out.
- Make it seamless for employees to connect, talk and bring proposals for innovation forward. There is plenty of technology out there that can do this.
- Evolve the culture. The barriers are mostly cultural and most employees don't consider themselves as innovators. If you actively embrace the change and show trust in your people to get the job done, this will flow across the business.

- Keep it simple. Small changes can have a profound effect on productivity and morale. Empower staff and give them the right tools to work wherever they are.
- Build trust. Most employees will want to embrace new ways of working. Your trust will be rewarded. Ideas for your communications
- Have a clear purpose. You need to provide technology that encourages internal conversation, and then enable those conversations to become catalysts for change.
- Reduce costs. Some new ways of working have an upfront cost but many don't. Balance the costs against the increases in productivity.
- Be flexible. Allow people to design how they work and communicate and give them access to the technology that lets them do it, wherever they are, at the office or with a customer.
- Customer focus. Look at how you work externally with customers and suppliers. Could a phone call be quicker than an email? Can you make your voice and mobile integrate so you're always available?

To find out how your business can gain from better communications, visit: www.vodafone.com and go to our business section or contact your account manager today.

