

The Smarter Way to Work:

Towards a brighter future

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i. Introduction: Towards a brighter future

Work smarter, not harder.

Those four words act as kind of collective philosophy for all stakeholders in an organisation. From chief executives at the top to entry level recruits at the bottom, there is consensus, a mutual desire to be part of an enterprise that is exciting, challenging and fun. Everyone shares that ambition because that's how work should be - it's a place where you belong, where your contributions have real value, where your time is being spent well and where you feel good about yourself.

While such environments will invariably foster a culture where people are, on occasion, happy to come in earlier or work later than usual, the ideal is to get to a point where all employees feel that this no longer matters; that they are able to get all their work done, hit their targets and contribute to their company's successes on their own terms. And, all without feeling burdened by various occupational demands that create a climate of unease, stress and hardship.

However, the truth of the matter is that we are not quite there yet. In its 2014 paper *Megatrends: Are We Working Harder Than Ever?*, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development concluded that, in part, work "has become a more intense and demanding experience".

It continued by saying that this was not "necessarily a bad thing", explaining that technology has been influential in not only making work more challenging, but more productive and, for employees, more lucrative (an increase in wages, for example, through greater production).

That positivity is tempered though, with the CIPD adding in its report that it is highly likely work will become more intense over the coming years, and, furthermore, even in more positive economic times, the pressure felt by most employees will not ease up. Work will continue to be demanding, more so than it now is in fact.

It said: "It is difficult to see many organisations taking conscious decisions to reduce workloads or adopt a more relaxed approach to deadlines unless this becomes a critical business issue (to the point of

having a negative impact on customer satisfaction or service delivery or damaging the reputation of the organisation)."

This need not be the case, and in this paper, we look at how a smarter way of working is possible through increased flexibility, greater collaboration and investment in new technologies.



ii. Section One: Flexible Working

In the summer of 2014, a watershed moment in the history of the work occurred - symbolic for some, transformative for others. The government brought into effect new rules that extended flexible working to all employees. Up until June 30th, that right, legally speaking, was only open available for carers and individuals who looked after children. Now 20 million employees could enjoy that flexibility.

Speaking at the time, the then deputy prime minister and leader of the Liberal Democrats Nick Clegg said that modern organisations are appreciative of the benefits attached to flexible working. Not only does it boost productivity, it also enhances staff morale and helps retain/attract talent.

He added: "Today is a crucial milestone in how we can help people balance their family life with work and caring responsibilities. And from next year, shared parental leave will allow mums and dads to be able to choose how they care for their newborn in those first precious months."

His colleague Jo Swinson, then business minister and still an MP - she lost her seat during the 2015 General Election - commented in an interview with the Independent on Sunday that rigid working practices were anomalous to the the spirit of the 21st century. The world had to get away from a "1950s mindset". Flexibility is the new norm.

"Modern businesses know that flexible working boosts productivity and staff morale, and helps them keep their top talent so that they can grow. It's about time we brought working practices bang up to date with the needs, and choices, of our modern families."

Nick Clegg, June 2014.

Flexible working is smarter working

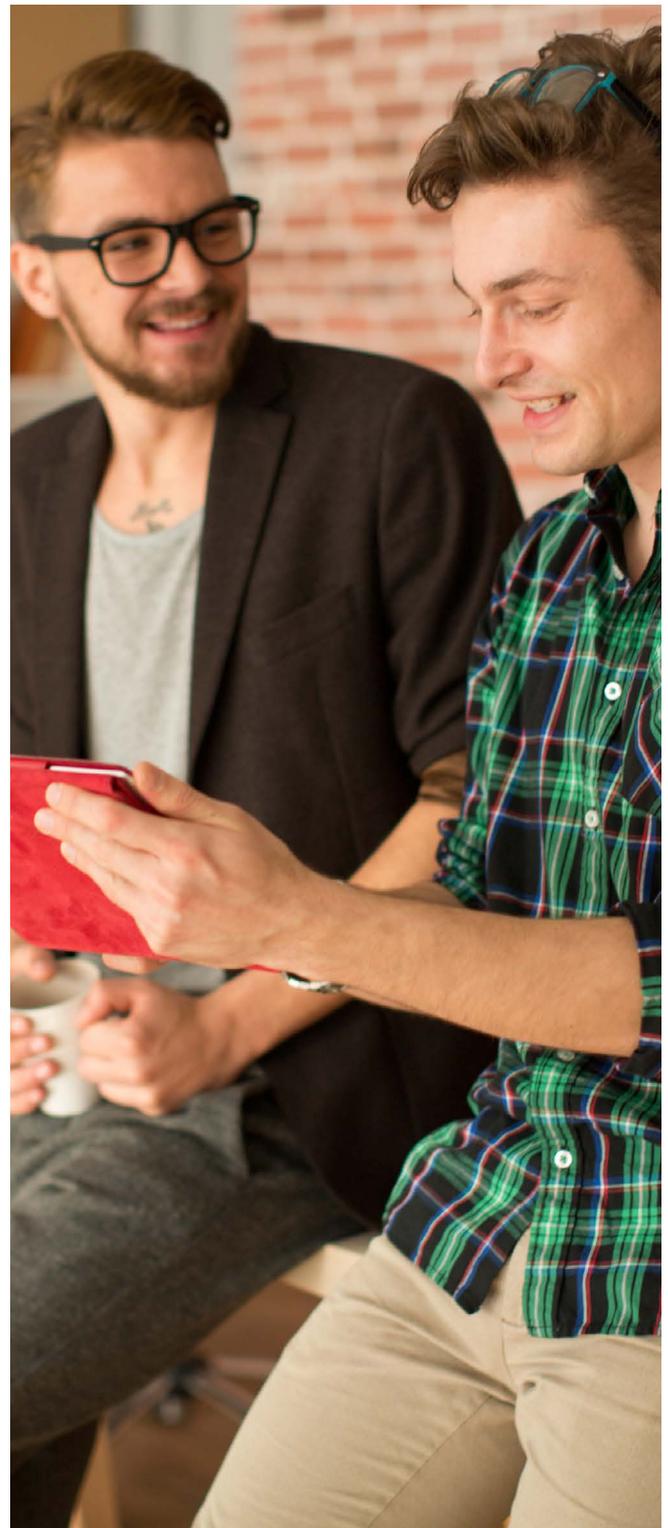
Smarter working cannot really exist without flexible working practices and organisations that have been reluctant to change - or asserted that this isn't for them - are no longer able to say as much for three main reasons.

One, it is increasingly difficult to deny a reasonable request for flexible working from an employee because, by and large, a lot of work can be done outside of an office. Workplaces are still important but not essential for day-in and day-out activities. Acas has produced some detailed guides on best practice for submitting and dealing with such requests in the workplace.

Two, there is a real mood among employees for flexible working practices to be standard practice. For example, in its 2014 report, HR: Getting Smart about Agile Working, the CIPD found that 35 per cent of respondents would like to change their working

arrangements. Most want a better balance between their personal and professional lives.

And three, it is counterproductive for enterprises to persist with either robust or fairly static working arrangements. Simply put, flexible working makes good business sense and opens up all sorts of possibilities that would not be achievable otherwise. And, as outlined above by Mr Clegg, the positive knock-on effects of going flexible are numerous and substantial - it'll be to the detriment of an organisation to ignore this.



“At the heart of smart working is the opportunity for all employees to enjoy a high level of flexibility with regards to where, when and for how long they work. This is the future.”

Without boundaries

Flexible working is, by its very nature, adaptable, changeable and customisable. This means that businesses can benefit from multiple choices when it comes to organising their workforce, allowing for any approach to run in concert with the size of their enterprise and what it is they do. It's all about harmony.

At the heart of any system is the opportunity for all workers - managers included - to enjoy a high level of flexibility with regards to where, when and for how long they work. At the extreme of the avant-garde, this can be particularly progressive, with the likes of Netflix and Virgin, for example, offering their workers unlimited annual leave.

Some might argue that this doesn't make good business sense, whereas others are keen to have an open mind. For example, in his most recent book, the Virgin Way, its founder Sir Richard Branson said that organisations need to move beyond the outdated idea that workers are required to work a set number of hours over a set number of days.

If they focus on their tasks and get them done - to a high quality - then a holiday quota becomes redundant. Businesses are getting their work done and everyone is happy. Fortune favours the bold, as the saying goes.

“It is always interesting to note how often the adjectives ‘smart’ and ‘simple’ describe the cleverest of innovations,” he continued in an excerpt published on his official blog.

“Well, this is surely one of the simplest and smartest initiatives I have heard of in a long time and I'm delighted to say that we have introduced this same (non) policy at our parent company in both the UK and the US, where vacation policies can be particularly draconian.”

Types of flexible working

There are, however, more practical alternatives that are, at least for now, more realistic for most small to medium and large organisations. We list some of the main ones on the next page.



Working from home

Employees are able to work most if not all their hours at home or anywhere else - such as a library or cafe - that is not their normal place of work. This is becoming increasingly popular for those looking for not just flexible working, but a flexible life.

Flextime

Workers are able to pick and choose when they start and finish work within agreed limits. For most organisations that adopt this approach, so-called core hours tend to be between 10am and 4pm. Historically popular.

Part-time work

Working hours that are less than the standard full-time hours, which is usually 35 hours or more a week. Work is organised over fewer days or as shifts over a typical working week (Mon-Fri).

Job sharing

Akin to part-time working in that the number of hours are less than the standard full-time hours. The distinction is that two, possibly more, individuals share the responsibilities of a role between them.

Compressed hours

An individual will still work his standard full-time hours but do so over a period of time that is shorter than it normally would be. This effectively results in fewer and longer days (12 hour shifts instead of eight, for example).

Annualised hours

Employees are required to clock in a certain number of hours over a 12-month period but have an element of freedom over how they organise their time. Again, there may be some requirement that they be present for agreed core hours.

The liberating nature of flexible working

In many ways, the evolution of the office and the generalised idea of how, when and where we should work has run contrary to what it should be. However, this is what hindsight affords us, the ability to look back with fresh eyes from a position whereby we are more informed - learning from our mistakes so to speak.

Arguably, from the start, everything should have been flexible because it is an approach that doesn't just 'feel right', it also has real relevance to enterprises and their respective workforces. Everyone has something to gain, be it, from an employee perspective, more time with their family, or for employers, an even greater sense of loyalty. Even the environment gets something out of it, benefiting from less carbon emissions for example. It really is a win-win situation.



iii. Section Two: Greater Collaboration

As of late, collaboration has become one of the big buzzwords floating around workplaces in most sectors and industries. The underlying sentiment is that we - as enterprises - must do more of it, do it better and do it smarter. This has occurred, in part, thanks to a shift in organisational culture and developments in technology. As with flexible working, it is apparent that if you're not collaborating in a creative and inventive way, you're going to have shortcomings.

This is an important distinction to make because although businesses acknowledge that much of their success depends on effective collaboration, both externally and internally, there has been little investment in the strategic application of this. It has been, by and large, an inevitable feature of multi-employee organisations - workers often need to engage with one another on various projects. It hasn't been leveraged to full effect though.

"If you're not collaborating in a creative and inventive way, you're going to have shortcomings."

Against a backdrop of increasing complexity and an intensification of competition, collaboration needs to be more than just a by-product of work. Collaboration has to be nurtured and amplified, and, in doing so, business leaders can modernise the way they work, create a vibrant atmosphere and transform their bottom line.

"Against a backdrop of increasing complexity and an intensification of competition, collaboration needs to be more than just a by-product of work. Collaboration has to be nurtured and amplified."

Connecting the dots

Smart collaboration has two key features - it is extremely simplified and underpinned by connectivity. This is a 'liberating' way to work and the antithesis of it, which is commonplace, sees organisations returning to complex, fragmented, hierarchical and siloed approaches. These are labour-intensive, costly and time-consuming, but, burdened by heavy workloads, it is often the case that nobody has time to look for solutions.

Yet, if they step outside for one moment and take stock of what it is they are doing, they can see that subtle changes and investments can have a discernable impact, as Cisco found in its 2013 Collaboration Work Practice Study.

"During the course of our study we found that employees definitely understand the value of collaboration - it provides diversity of thoughts, creates stronger relationships, and provides validation for business decisions. Our research found that through collaboration, employees have learned new skills, been more productive, and built networks of colleagues."

Once you make that connection, there is no looking back.

Being more collaborative

Collaboration used to be 'locked into the real world'. It was characterised by a predetermined location, time and agenda, with participants usually gathered in one or two rooms. The technology on offer was a paper flipchart and markers, and/or a whiteboard with its equivalent wipeable pens.

Fast-forward to today and collaboration is a lot more virtual, making it more than compatible with a flexible way of working. At any given point, an organisation can have employees working from the office, at home, on the move or in a cafe in a different country. They still need to engage with one another and while, in the past, they would all have had to assemble at a fixed point, thanks to

changing attitudes and the development of certain technologies, they now can do that remotely.

As Jeff Schick, general manager of Enterprise Social Solutions at IBM, noted in a piece for Forbes in 2014: "The goal is deceptively simple. Create a smarter workforce through collaboration. Use the rapid advancements in cloud, analytics and social technologies to connect in new ways. Build competitive agility into the organisation through the cloud so employees, partners, and customers can engage, collaborate and innovate."



Unified communications

Enter unified communications, one of the most exciting developments in how different forms of technology - software and hardware - and multiple types of communication can be combined to offer one seamless solution to how people work.

What unified communications allows is for employees to work smarter than ever before and to do so in a highly resourceful, engaged and enjoyable way. It is achieved through the adoption of a system that brings together all forms of communication - text, video, voice - so that wherever you are, whatever device you are on, you are always connected and able to collaborate.

Moreover, it also affords employees the opportunity to continue conversations and/or meetings on multiple devices, meaning you are able to be send a message via your smartphone and pick it up on your laptop and so on. And it's a highly visible and connected way of working that is inherently flexible - the fluidity of it ultimately means that work is wherever you are.



Better teamwork anywhere

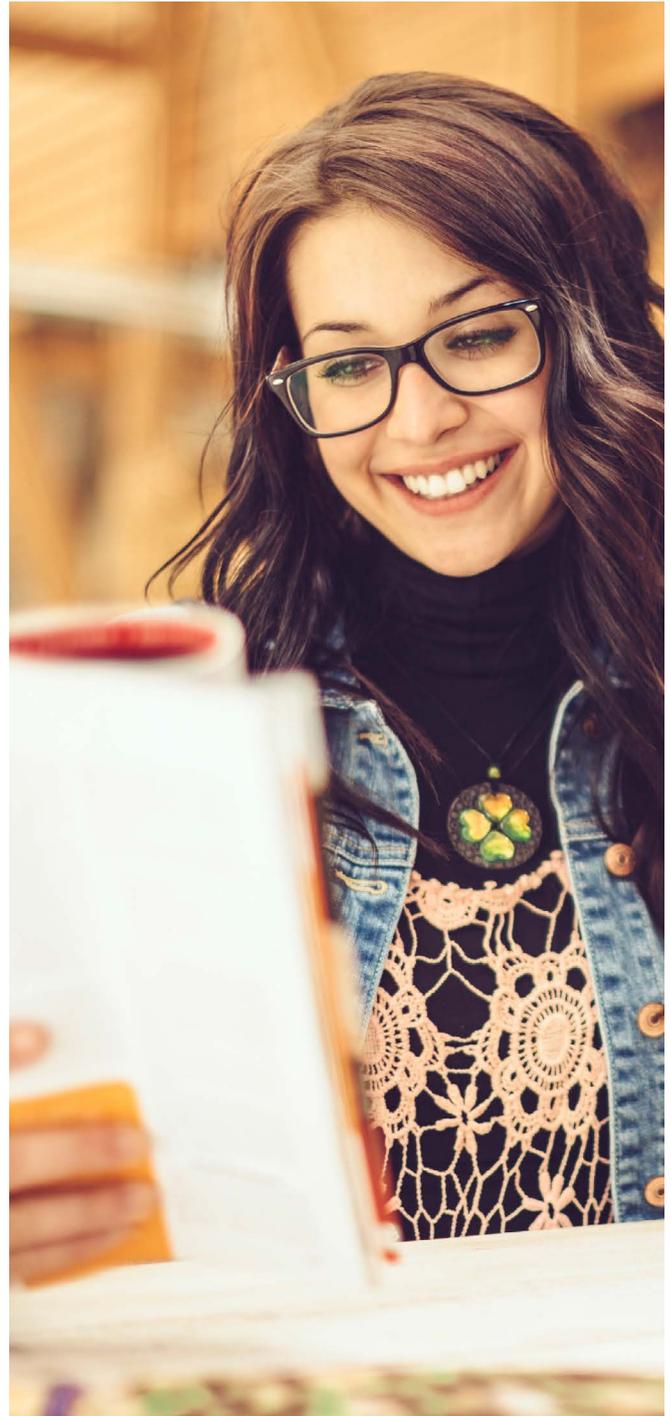
Collaboration has never been more important than it is today and, doubly, better. Gone are the days of single-desk, single task, single - i.e. individual - way of working, as well as the inflexible need for workers to be physically present. In its place is a more open sensibility.

“Gone are the days of single-desk, single task, single way of working.”

As is an evident theme in this paper, people and processes have, in light of this change, been freed from their unnecessary constraints and empowered to do their work in any manner that deliver results. We may well be more dispersed than ever

before, but we've never been closer and, in turn, smarter of delivering on our goals.

Resultingly, collaboration has been enriched by a shift in workplace culture and the adoption of tools and approaches that encourage employees to work more closely and regularly with all stakeholders, without the need to show up at a certain time and location. While at times that is welcome, it is becoming the exception as opposed to the rule. It's a global world after all.



“Any sufficiently advanced technology is equivalent to magic.”
Arthur C. Clarke

iv. Section Three: New Technologies

When you think of the 21st century, chances are you'll think of something digital - it's certainly the spirit of the age, impacting on all areas of life. Within the first decade of the new millennium, the pace of change, technologically speaking, seemed to have increased exponentially. Fifteen years later, the world is a remarkably different place.

Probes can land on moving comets; 3D printers are providing ordinary people with the ability to make more or less anything; and smartphones have become an all-purpose tool from which you can do just about anything (socialise, play video games, read a book, pay bills and so on).

As a result of the digital revolution, entire industries have been turned inside out, with long-established ideas unable to exist against a radically different backdrop. The music industry is a good example of how technology has disrupted the status quo, demanding its leaders to adapt and progress their operations to stay competitive, if not survive.



The impact on the world of work

For many organisations, the effects of the digital revolution have not been felt that acutely. While it has asked other enterprises serious questions about the way they do things, it hasn't demanded that all make far-reaching changes to their business models.

However, new technologies are slowly but surely changing this - they are creating the conditions in which if you don't 'get with the programme', it's not so much that it spells the end of your organisation, more that you get left behind.

You have to keep abreast of the latest happenings and reconcile your business to break new ground, expand and diversify revenue streams and be part of the pack that sets the barometer of best practice within your sector. This is smart working, or, as others like Accenture say, "intelligent":

“Intelligent processes create a virtuous cycle of constant improvement fed by continuous feedback,” the global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company stated in its paper *Fast and Furious: How Digital Technologies are Changing the Way we Work*.

*“Intelligent processes
create a virtuous cycle of
constant improvement fed by
continuous feedback.”*
Accenture, 2013

The paper example

Consider the typical organisation that is dependent on paper and non-electronic workflows. Everything seems to be working well to a common goal but without context, an audit of how efficient and effective your approach is, you can't really gauge the positives and the negatives.

Yet, an assessment will reveal some shockers. Sticking with the paper example, a standard office relying heavily on conventional workflows risks being inundated with paper - on desks, in meeting rooms and in filing cabinets. It's lethargic, repetitive and unsightly.

Financially, it's very simple - the more paper you have, the more you'll spend. Whether it's the cost of ink or the cost of time spent filing and finding documents, paper en masse is a lavish and unnecessary expenditure. It's not smart and it's highly unproductive.

- **A standard four-drawer cabinet takes up nine square feet of office space and holds on average 10,000 sheets of paper.**
- **An average office will double its paper storage with 39 months.**
- **Over 16 per cent of office space is taken up with paper documents.**
- **UK businesses waste over £20 billion a year using inefficient or outdated document management systems.**

- **The average office worker spends over 180 minutes a week looking for documents.**
- **The average office worker visits a printer/scanner over 60 times a week.**
- **The average office worker spends over 18 minutes looking for lost documents.**
- **Over 80 per cent of all documents retrieved are either photocopied, scanned or faxed before being refiled.**
- **Over 80 per cent of internal information requests result in paper being handled.**
- **3 per cent of an organisation's paper archive is misfiled, incorrectly catalogued or simply not retrievable.**
- **Large organisations lose one document every 12 seconds.**
- **You are 30 more times likely to lose a paper document than suffer a virus attack.**

On the other hand, in a paperless or paper-lite environment, where all documents have been digitised and relocated to a secure and accessible online space, where now empty filing cabinets have gone to a secondhand store and where desks have been decluttered, the benefits are almost immediate.

Employees can continue to work flexibly - they can access documents remotely - space taken up by paper can be better used - creative areas, breakout rooms - and all stakeholders feel better off (work is more rapid, requests more responsive and solutions more immediate). Technology not only makes that happen, it also, through 'rapid iteration', continues improving things. Positive change and development is ongoing.

Digital first

All of this underpins a digital first way of working. Making this your default is still not an obligation but, the more interconnected we become - with the maturation of the Internet of Things - the greater the shift from it being an option to it being a necessity.

There's logic to it. Already much of what is done today is digital, more so perhaps in people's personal lives. Movies are watched via the web, groceries are ordered on a smartphone, photographs are enjoyed on a tablet. Food is ordered through an app, local services engaged with on the web and ideas shared on social networks. This becomes default. In the world of work, this digital first approach is inevitable.

v. Conclusion: Three Steps to a smarter way of working

On their own, flexible working, greater collaboration and new technologies will deliver seismic changes to how organisations think about work. As a whole, they offer enterprises an opportunity to bring about groundbreaking developments that will fundamentally reshape their entire business model, which, in some cases, will reinvent their entire base of operation. The core product/service and ethos will still be intact, but modified, upgraded and refreshed.

Getting here will be difficult. While many organisations, such as Google, Facebook and Netflix - note that they are principally tech-focused - have fully embraced non-prescriptive, open and dynamic working practices, many enterprises, big and small, are still stuck in the past, too busy to take stock of the mechanisms propping up their businesses or still cautious about investing in something that will have a huge impact.

It'll certainly be chaotic, tumultuous and divisive, but that's inevitable and immediate. Once the dust settles, and everyone gets into the rhythm of a forward-thinking, agile and tech-savvy way of working, which gives them greater control over their work, it'll be like nothing they have experienced before. For employees, the power of how, where and when they work is devolved to them. For employers, this trust pays off in retention, innovation, more sustainable profits and a business model that responds to the ever changing world around them. That's smart thinking; that's smart working.

“Flexible working, greater collaboration and new technologies will deliver seismic changes to how organisations work. They offer enterprises an opportunity to bring about groundbreaking developments that will fundamentally reshape entire business model and reinvent their entire operation.”