



changing places

As a society, we have changed. Moving away from the “just do as your told” mentality, we are being empowered to challenge expectations and take responsibility for our own actions. Generations are now shaking off the shackles of tradition and craving to break free of convention.

Whilst organisations are forced to focus on the areas to limit spending during this slow economy, employees are also



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looking to shake up the way they work. Also known as ‘workshifting’, the ability to work where and when we want to, has become an increasingly popular option for not only the organisations, but for the workers too. In fact, workshifting has now become part of the expectations of nearly all white-collar employees.

In the recent *Cisco Connected World Report*, 66 per cent of those polled said they would take a lower-paying position if they could access the information they need to do their jobs outside the office, indicating that the desire to get mobile is high. Some also said that the ability to work anywhere would affect their company loyalty, choice of jobs, and morale.

Technology has opened the door to change. The way we socialise, the way we search for information, the way we study, and the way we work. The internet, social media, video conferencing, mobile phones, and wifi have all enabled the Australian workforce to work on the go.

If Australian business is to move with the desires of their staff and enable the office dynamic to change, then embracing new technology is essential. Whilst we

all know about the advanced capabilities of wireless internet, other technological advancements are changing the way we interface.

As more people leave the desk at the office behind, what will this mean for the way Australia does business?

Changing the office for the home, and swapping the meeting room for the cafe, is leading organisations to take a fresh look at their facilities and how they are used. At a time when the world has been struggling to find its feet whilst the words “Global Financial Crisis” are still on the tip of everyone’s tongues, organisations are being forced to consider whether they are paying unnecessary rent and overheads.

Video conferencing abilities are continuously improving with technologies like TelePresence. High definition cameras are used in conjunction with high-speed internet to create real time video interaction regardless of location. Virtual offices provide meeting rooms if the need for face-to-face meeting arise, removing the necessity for constant office facilities.

And taking it to the next level, a team

from Arizona University has created a software that allows almost real-time 3D holographic representation of a video being captured. As this gets better and better, 'face to face' meetings can become a virtual reality.

With an endless potential within adopting highly flexible working habits within their staff, managers now have to ask themselves a range of questions. In this flexible working environment, how do I effectively manage our employees so they get the most out of themselves? What training and support do I need to provide that will allow them to take full advantage of these new technologies and methodologies?

However, whilst we wait for these advancements to make their way into the mainstream, the internet is not only shaking up the way we do business, but the way we interact and live. This is no more obvious than in the current boom in internet shopping.

Online shopping is a potent threat to the current retail model in Australia. Whilst the traditional retailers panic, new competitors are making high profits from the internet. Whilst Australia currently lags behind the United States and the UK in the proportion of revenue coming from online sales, a new report from PriceWaterhouseCoopers forecasts online shopping will grow at least twice as fast as the total retail market over the next four years. This year alone it is expected to grow at 13 per cent.

So if Australian business can sell their wares from the comfort of their own home, what will happen to the shopping centres of today? Will another use for the buildings need to be found? And will this influence other facilities such as warehouses and industrial organisations, not just front of house retail?

From Sydney and Melbourne, to Brisbane and Perth, all city CBDs have seen office vacancies drop in 2011

which means there is still a demand for office space. According to the Property Council of Australia 's latest Office Market Report, vacancies in the CBD markets declined from 8.7 per cent to 8.4 per cent. However, vacancies for offices outside the CBD have been declining faster as organisations turn to fringe areas due to significantly lower rent.

If buildings don't respond to this new, contemporary way of working and learning, do they risk becoming obsolete? Changing from the conventional office, university or warehouse can unlock more efficient ways to do things and eliminate the need for space.

In order to keep up with this trend, we may have to adapt existing stock to perform new functions. In Europe, many office buildings have been converted to apartments – giving working from home a new meaning!

It's just not traditional 'office' business that has had to adapt to the changing way



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we work. Universities are going online to meet the changing demand of adaptable learning. As students request flexible studying and the option to study where they want, and not just on campus, countless degrees are offered online and via correspondence. In Australia, over \$2.5 billion was spent on online education and Open University reported a 36 per cent increase in enrolments from the previous year, a total of 131,000 enrolments.

Challenging the belief that certain functions can only be carried out in certain places, challenging the assumptions on logistics and space, and fighting the principles behind common working practices, can open Australian organisations up to the opportunity to reinvent.

Instead of paying prime real estate to store boxes, organisations can reinvest the money in its people. The productivity

benefits can be high as individuals take responsibility for themselves and are not constrained by nine to five, Monday to Friday traditions. It also opens up work, study, socialising, shopping and even health services to a wider spectrum of people.

Although we may still require the physical contact and face to face communication in order to 'get the job done', adapting to this different form of management can generate a greater value for an organisation. Organisations need to ask themselves: If we stick with the conventional use for buildings, and management practices with our people, do we risk becoming obsolete?

It's a new era of working, studying and living. Can organisations and the buildings they occupy find the flexibility to survive?

The age of telecommuting

The motto for telecommuters: "work is something you do, not something you travel to".

Telecommuting is the word given to a work arrangement in which employees enjoy flexibility in working location and hours. Utilising technology enables telecommuters to work from a variety of locations, and broadens the employment possibilities of previously marginalised groups such as work at home parents, the disabled, and

those living in remote areas.

For organisations, the benefits of the telecommuting of their staff includes access to an expansive talent pool, reducing the spread of illness, reduces their carbon footprint and energy usage, improves the organisation's business across multiple time zones, and reduces turnover and absenteeism.

By 2015, more than 100 million people around the world are expected to telecommute to work.