SMARTER WORKING
IN SOLIHULL

HOW TO WORK SMARTER AND DELIVER
BENEFITS ACROSS THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE

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HOW TO WORK SMARTER AND DELIVER BENEFITS ACROSS THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE

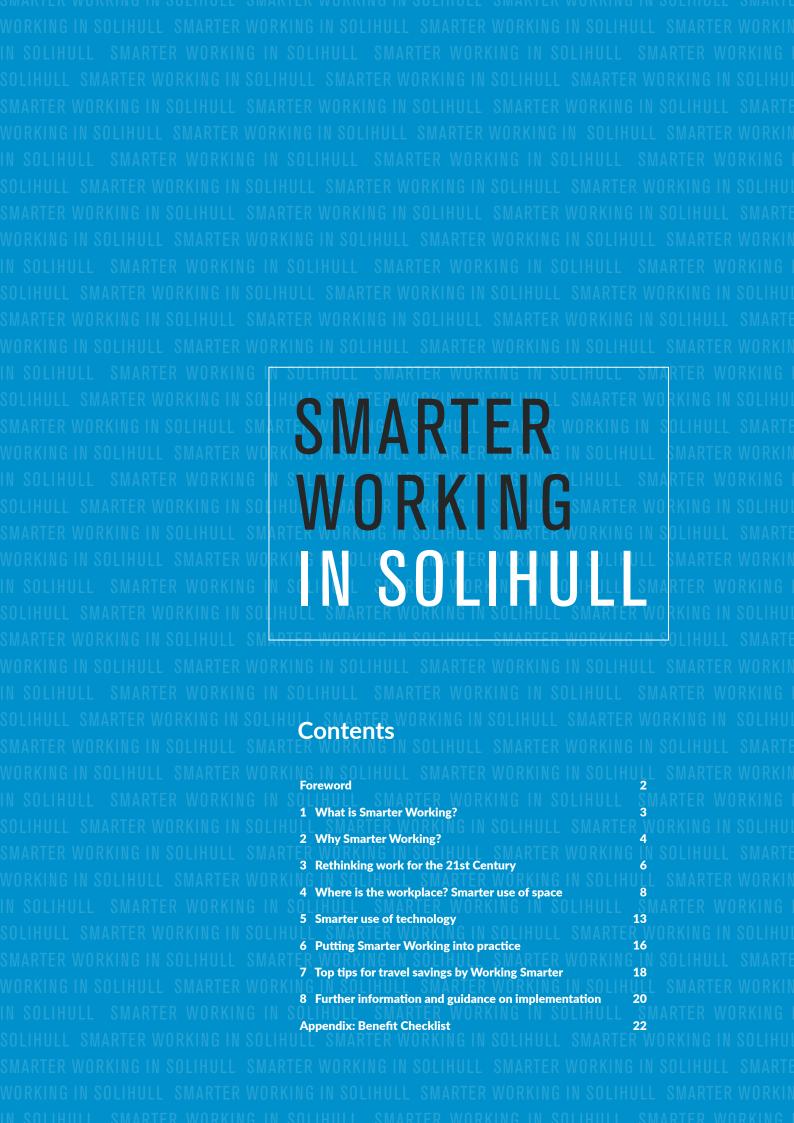# SMARTER WORKING IN SOLIHULL

Contents

Foreword

We live in challenging times, and perhaps more than ever there is a need for local businesses to be competitive. For non-profit organisations, too, it is essential to use their resources as wisely as possible.

In recent years we have seen both welcome growth in the region and increasing pressures on our infrastructure. In Solihull we know from the census, for example, that of the people who work in the Metropolitan Borough area 38% are resident here. The remainder commute in, mostly from neighbouring areas.

Similarly, Solihull residents commute across the West Midlands and beyond. This creates complex patterns of cross-commuting.

Going forward, we want to be able to prosper and grow, but at less environmental cost than at present. We also want to do all we can to relieve the pressure on our transport infrastructure and reduce the carbon footprint of work overall.

Smarter Working offers ways to do that and bring about a better work experience for people who live and work in our area.

This guide to Smarter Working will, we trust, motivate you to think about how you can achieve real business benefits while at the same time promote wider benefits for people and the environment.

1 What is Smarter Working?

Smarter Working is a business-focused approach to flexible working. It's all about being more efficient and effective in how work is organised and how services are delivered, as well as bringing benefits to working people, the environment and society.

Smarter Working brings together changes in working practices, new thinking about workspaces and creative uses of new technologies.

These are the key principles underpinning Smarter Working:

- Work takes place at the most effective times, and the most effective locations
- Flexibility becomes the norm rather than the exception
- Employees have more choice about where and when they work, subject to business considerations
- Management focuses on results, rather than on time or presence
- Work has less impact on the environment
- The costs of work are reduced by working in new ways
- Working practices enable employees to lead more balanced and healthy lives.

This is a major shift from traditional ways of working, where people are expected to always turn up to a specified workplace at specified times.

Moving work to people, rather than people to work

Back in the mid-20th century, there were strong reasons for centralising work in large offices and factories – economies of scale – and concentrating people and physical resources together.

In the 21st century, with digitisation, the Internet and the great increase in 'knowledge work' across most occupations, there's a decreasing need for this kind of centralisation. Work can be moved to people wherever they are, reducing the need for people to travel to work.

This offers significant benefits to both employers and employees and reduces the carbon footprint of work.

What's in a name?

We're calling it Smarter Working, but it's also known as Agile Working, Modern & Flexible Working, Worksmart, Workwise, Smart Working, Dynamic Working, Anytime Anywhere Working and a host of other names used internally by companies transforming the way they work. They all mean pretty much the same thing.

Despite the variety of brands that organisations use, there is cross-sector agreement about 'what good looks like' in the field. It's brought together in the British Standards publication *PAS 3000: Smart Working Code of Practice* (2015).

Central government organisations are required to adopt the Smarter Working practices in *PAS 3000* by 2022.
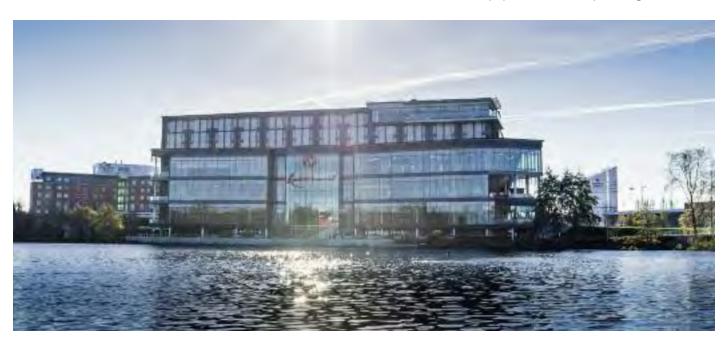
And many more private, public and not-for-profit organisations are adopting it because it makes good business sense.

Portable technologies such as laptops, tablets and smartphones enable us to work just as effectively away from the traditional workplace. The new collaboration technologies reduce the need always to have physical meetings.

This doesn't mean that we never meet each other and spend all our time working in isolation, far from it. But it does mean we can exercise much more choice about where and when work is done.

So, we work together in the same place *when it adds value* and work elsewhere *when that adds value* – both to our work and to our quality of life.

And a major theme of this guide is that we can reduce both our travel and our use of physical resources by working smarter.

2 Why Smarter Working?

Smarter Working brings positive impacts on the 'Triple Bottom Line' – benefits for the business, for people and for the environment.

The following table sets out the headline benefits that can be achieved by working smarter:

Business Benefits	People Benefits	Environmental Benefits
• Improved productivity • Better customer service • Greater focus on results • Improved collaboration • Reduced business travel costs • Improved innovation and adaptability • Improved processes for work • Reduced absence • Reduced real estate needs • Workplaces better designed for the activities you do • Improved recruitment and retention • Working time better aligned to operational needs	• Better work-life interface/balance • More choice and autonomy • Reduced stress, improved health and wellbeing • Better able to manage disability and long-term conditions • Reduced time and costs of commute travel • More capacity to manage caring responsibilities • Opportunities for more varied work • Overcoming disadvantage in the labour market • Greater job satisfaction	• Reduced transport energy for businesses and individuals • Reduced energy costs of workplaces • Reducing or eliminating paper • Reduced consumption of material products through digitisation • Reduced land-take and construction impacts for workplaces • Reduced congestion and pollution

How much one achieves these benefits depends on how comprehensively Smarter Working practices are introduced, and how much individuals are encouraged and supported in working in new ways.

How to achieve each of these benefits is covered in more detail in our Benefits Checklist, in the Appendix.

Business Benefits

Many of the business benefits come from doing more – or better – with a reduced input of cost and resources. For example, reducing both travel to meetings and the time spent in meetings (see section 5) can liberate large amounts of time in which people can be more productive.

Key to Smarter Working is having a *strong focus on achieving results, rather than on presence or the hours of work*. This helps to keep productivity and customer service at the forefront of everyone's mind, rather than just turning up to the workplace every day.

Smarter ways of working can also help to retain valued staff, for example after maternity leave or when people move out of the area for family reasons. And it can widen the net for recruiting the best people for the role, as people may not need to travel so often to the main workplace.

People Benefits

There is a great deal of evidence to show that working more flexibly helps people to balance their work commitments better with their other commitments and aspirations in life.

Central to this is having more choice. Numerous studies (e.g. CIPD, *Commuting and Flexible Working*, 2016) have shown how flexible working where employees have more control over where and when they work increases wellbeing, reduces stress and increases engagement.

And it's what people want to do. Surveys have consistently shown that employees greatly value flexibility and the autonomy that comes with it. Lack of flexibility is frequently cited as a reason for leaving a company. And more flexibility is what people are often looking for in a new employer.

Being able to reduce commuting travel and business travel by working remotely and using conferencing technologies also improves quality of life, including quality of working life.

Environmental Benefits

Most organisations want to reduce their carbon footprint. Doing so saves them money too.

Working smarter helps organisations reduce their carbon footprint by cutting out unproductive business travel, using built assets more intensively (i.e. people can be supported at less space per person), reducing running costs of buildings and reducing use of physical resources by going digital wherever possible.

The following sections of this guide set out ways to achieve and maximise these benefits.

How many days per year can you save from your commuting?

The average time workers spend commuting in the West Midlands is 54 minutes per day. This is up from 48 minutes per day in 2007.

That works out at around 215 hours per year – the equivalent of 9 x 24-hour days getting to and from work. Or 27 x 8-hour working days.

A study by the TUC found that people pay on average £148 a month on commuting, £1776 per year. This figure of course varies greatly from individual to individual, with studies finding the number of 'heroic' commutes of more than 2 hours each way on the rise. Wouldn't it be good to claw back a good portion of that time that we spend sitting in traffic? And save significant amounts of money too?

Each day per week working remotely saves 20% of commute time and cost. That could be done, for example, by:

• Working from home one day per week, on average
• Working a compressed working week – doing 5 days hours in 4 days

Those will save nearly £30 and nearly 4 hours per month, on average – that's £355 and two days of your life per year.

Alternatively, you can save a proportion of those costs by working at a workplace closer to home too.

Figures from Office for National Statistics and TUC

3 Rethinking work for the 21st Century

Our traditional patterns of working were shaped in the industrial age. They come from a time when there were real economies of scale and efficiencies in concentrating resources close together – materials, tools and people. Offices developed on a 'factory model' too, bringing people to workplaces where they had access to all their information – on paper – and where nearly all communication was necessarily face-to-face.

Owing to this need for centralisation and the nature of much industrial work (often noisy, dangerous, toxic and smelly), a sharp divide emerged between work and the rest of life.

In the 21st century, this is all changing. Today work can be decentralised over networks. Work can move to people as well as people moving to work.

WORK CAN MOVE TO PEOPLE AS WELL AS PEOPLE MOVING TO WORK

No longer is the work most people do noxious or dangerous. In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, more work tasks can be carried out from a wider range of places.

Even in sectors with a lot of 'hands-on' work like manufacturing, construction and retail, increasing numbers of people can do much of their work on a more flexible and mobile basis.

The workforce is changing too. In the mid-20th century the workforce was predominantly male. That has changed. The workforce is now much more diverse, though there is still a way to go to achieve equality and diversity. With people living longer, the workforce now contains four generations.

People's aspirations are changing too. We want more flexibility and choice about how we organise our daily schedules.

So it's time to rethink how we work.

The difference between Smarter Working and Flexible Working

Since 2014 all employees who have worked for a company for six months enjoy a 'right to request' flexible working (see box on page 9). This involves a contractual change to one's working pattern, e.g. to work part-time, term-time, compressed working week or work from home (for some or all of the time).

These kinds of alternative work patterns do have business benefits and impacts on travel. But they are often introduced as exceptions to a traditional and unchanged way of working for the majority of employees, so their impact can be limited.

Smarter Working adds to flexible working by embedding 'flexibility as normal'. Possibilities for flexibility and mobility apply to everyone, subject to the needs of the work. Instead of applying for a change of working pattern, employees are trusted to make appropriate decisions about where and when work activities are carried out.

SMART WORKING EMBEDS FLEXIBILITY AS NORMAL, RATHER THAN EXCEPTIONAL

Smarter Working depends on using technology (see section 5) to work in these new ways, and usually involves different ways of designing and using the workplace (see section 4).

Developing a mindset for innovation

Smarter Working is not about doing the same things only at different times and places. It involves a rethinking of processes, technologies, workplaces and behaviours to bring about the benefits we've outlined above.

Old assumptions of necessity should be challenged around traditional working places and times, e.g. the default position of working 9-5 at a specified workplace.

Managers and team members should think how changing times and places of work can improve effectiveness, reduce travel and resource use and drive down the cost of work.

Continuous challenge and improvement

Central to Smart Working is a constant quest to improve working practices and business processes as new opportunities emerge. A useful way to do this is through the CAN Test – to **Challenge Assumptions of Necessity** around traditional or habitual ways of working. It involves asking questions such as:

- Why are we doing *this* (at all)
- Why are we doing this *here*?
- Why are we doing it *in this way*?
- Why are we doing it *at this time* (rather than another time)?

Having identified practices and processes that could be done differently, the next questions to ask are whether using Smarter Working techniques there are ways of doing these things that are:

- Faster?
- More flexible?
- Lighter (i.e. less heavy on resources – time, energy, physical resources)?
- More in line with customer needs?
- More in line with employee aspirations?

People are encouraged to propose new ways of working that will deliver benefits. Focusing on practical questions in this way not only delivers benefits, but helps to embed Smarter Working behaviours and mindset.

Source: Lake, A. Smart Flexibility – Moving Smart & Flexible Working from Theory to Practice. Routledge 2015

CASE STUDY

Working smarter in the construction industry

Flexible and agile working are embedded at **Morgan Sindall Construction and Infrastructure**, a leading UK construction company with c.3,400 employees across a network of local offices operating in the commercial, defence, education, energy, healthcare, industrial, leisure, retail, transport and water markets.

The company has gained a reputation and won many awards for their approach to flexibility, which is a key element in supporting recruitment and diversity. And they have taken forward this ethos to modernise the technologies and workplaces they use.

With excellent IT and cloud-based technologies, people have access to data and systems wherever they work, and can collaborate online. It has become standard for employees to participate in remote meetings using mobile phones and laptops. There is no default expectation to turn up in person. This enables them to work from any company office, on site and from home.

Meetings at group level are also carried out by conferencing. And a more flexible approach to meetings is evolving, with people more likely to work directly with each other than convene a meeting.

Morgan Sindall's office in Solihull is set up for people to work on a desk-sharing basis, with breakout areas and quiet zones. No one has their own office. Many people who work in the Rugby office live in and around Birmingham, so they often choose to work in Solihull to save on commuting. With a variable number of people working there each day, the office is set up to cater for the flow of people and their different work activities.

Employees are also encouraged to travel by train when possible, where the technology helps them stay productive while travelling.

Construction sites are more challenging for agile working, as there is a need to manage delivery, installation and assembly within a limited time. But site offices have become much more paperless and have flexible meeting spaces. While working remotely is less of an option for many activities, employees on site can have greater choice at team level about their schedules, and when to be at a local office and when on site.
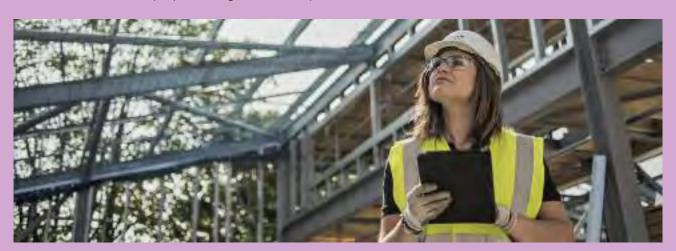
Promote a culture of trust and let it evolve

There is no formal programme for introducing flexibility and agile working – the approach has been to promote a culture of trust and to let it evolve. It is however supported by a flexible menu of support and training, using mentoring, coaching workshops and online learning.

The company is open to all forms of working flexibility and this is flagged up on all job adverts. And there are numerous initiatives to support working parents by enabling them to work more flexibly, both contractually and on an as-needed basis.

Flexibility and agility tie in with a major focus on health and wellbeing, including current initiatives around mental health wellness and encouraging people to be more active and to socialise more with people across the company.

According to Managing Director of Morgan Sindall Construction's Central region, Sean Bowles, *"In terms of productivity and wellbeing it's a no-brainer. We want employees to be happier and have a better work-life balance. And it also helps when we have a project which by nature has irregular hours. Being able to manage your own time and being able to reduce travel are big advantages".*

4 Where is the workplace? Smarter use of space

Smarter Working aims to create attractive and inspiring work environments to support new ways of working, so that both working in the workplace and away from it are straightforward and seamless.

At the same time organisations can achieve significant savings and efficiency gains, and create workplaces that are more adaptable to future change.

As desk-based tasks can increasingly be carried out from many other locations, there is less need in smarter offices for ranks of workstations. **Instead there is a mix of other 'activity-based' spaces which are shared, such as:**

- Flexible meeting spaces – smaller meeting rooms, one-to-one rooms or pods, breakout spaces and café areas
- Non-bookable quiet and concentrated working spaces
- Spaces for confidential work and calls
- "Touchdown" spaces – desks, tables and benches where people can work for short periods when visiting the office or between meetings
- Team tables
- Special project areas
- Resource areas
- Flexible and reconfigurable multi-purpose areas.

There are generally fewer desks, but more alternative spaces to work, depending on the task in hand. People often focus on desks when making the change to Smarter Working, but it's important to think in terms of the workspace as a whole.

As always, it's important to focus on the benefits when rethinking the workplace. Improved collaboration can be achieved by having more of the smaller breakout spaces, which take pressure off formal meeting rooms and help to promote quicker decision-making.

Collaboration in the smarter workplace should also be designed to include people working remotely wherever possible, joining on screen by technologies such as Skype for Business, WebEx or Jabber.

Making this work, however, depends on developing a new culture of flexible collaboration and effective meetings (see section 5).

All this adds up to a new landscape for work – both in the workplace and beyond.

Figure 1 sets out the emerging model of the workplace. The desk is now seen as just one of many activity-based spaces where people can work. Planning of the right balance of spaces is based on an analysis of how and where people work, and analysing how this can change under Smarter Working.

As well as the spaces in the main workplace, there can also be other employer-owned workspaces where – depending on size – the model of the main office is replicated. In addition there are third-party places, such as customer or partner premises and workhubs (see below), public places and employee-owned spaces where people can work.

These are all linked up together by technology. The ideal is that **employees can work seamlessly across all locations, choosing the best places and times according to the needs of the tasks in hand**.

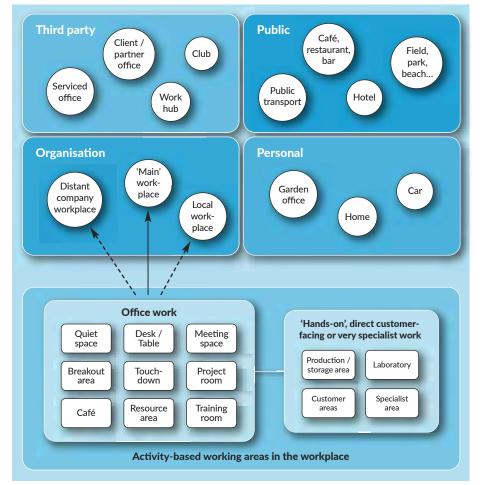A major factor for determining where and when to work is saving time and expense from unnecessary travelling.

Figure 1: Where shall we work? Choices in the workplace and beyond

Mobility in the office and beyond

In a smarter workplace, people will share space much more than having individually-owned territory.

But it's a good idea to have loosely designated (though non-exclusive) team zones, so that people who work together regularly can still do so.

During the course of a day, people can move between different spaces in the workplace, according to the different kinds of activities they do. For example, rather than having long calls or conversations in a desk area which disturbs other people working, they move to a breakout area or booth for calls. For short spells of focus work between meetings, they can use touchdown desks or a quiet focus space, rather than lay claim to a desk for the whole day which then remains mostly unused.

The same applies when working beyond the office. Rather than come into the office first and going out to see customers or visit sites from there, people can start off from home, carry out a visit, work from there or nearby, then go to the next appointment.
So they go to the office only when it adds value to the day, rather than have routine back-and forth journeys that eat up time, money and productivity.

Smarter Working and the Law on Flexible Working in the UK

Legislation which came into effect in June 2014 gives the 'right to request' flexible working to all employees after 26 weeks' service.

The law requires employees to make a case showing that the new work arrangements are workable and will not adversely affect business.

Employers are not obliged to grant a request, but must give sound business reasons if they refuse. Employees may appeal if they feel a request has been unreasonably refused. Guidance from ACAS sets out a code of conduct for applications and dealing with them.

Most large organisations now have policies to address the needs of the law. It is a useful first step, but it is not the same as having a comprehensive approach to Smarter Working. Smarter Working enables us to have a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to flexibility that addresses both business needs and employee aspirations, delivering a wider range of benefits.

4 Where is the workplace? Smarter use of space

'Spaceless growth'

Of course, not all employers want to reduce their office space. Instead, a key benefit of Smarter Working for businesses is that you can grow the business without having to grow the real estate or 'cram more desks in'.

Using the Smarter Working principles and adopting the smart approach to sharing space, it's possible to plan for 'spaceless growth'.

GROW THE BUSINESS WITHOUT GROWING THE REAL ESTATE

In this way, the existing workplace can be the base for an increasing number of people who spend time working remotely when out with clients or working from home.

Many organisations now recruit the expertise they need from a wider geographical area, without requiring people to move. This increases the available pool of talent and can enable services to be delivered in new areas. As people are not expected to turn up at the main workplace every day, this growth can be achieved without increasing the amount of real estate.

Around 70% of start-ups now start up at home. And more than half want to stay there as they grow. There are now some global companies, like WordPress, that have very little in the way of property despite employing people all around the world. And there are increasing numbers of completely virtual companies.

Remote working

With Smarter Working, remote working is not seen as something exceptional or problematic. It's part of the normal way of working. The remote location is considered as much part of the workplace as the base office (if there is one!).

So where do remote workers work? **The following are the main locations where people work remotely:**

- Other people's offices: clients, suppliers, business partners, shared offices, etc.
- Workhubs / co-working spaces
- Cafés, hotel lobbies and airport lounges
- Trains, planes, buses and cars
- Homes.

The ability to work anywhere is made possible by laptops, tablets and other smart devices with wireless internet connections and by smartphones.

The main issues are to do with security, confidentiality, safety and health.

Safety concerns relate both to personal security (e.g. not using portable equipment while driving or in unsafe locations) and data security. Prolonged use of laptop computers in inappropriate positions can lead to health problems.

These kinds of issues are sometimes raised as reasons for not working smarter. The key principle is the same as for homeworking: the employer's duty of care is the same wherever employees are working, whether in the employer's workplace, at home, on the move or in some other 'third place'.

This means that people need to be both properly equipped and trained to work in these other places, and a mechanism needs to be in place for periodic assessment of risk.

The aim has to be to enable rather than prohibit – that is to enable people to work safely wherever is the most effective and efficient location to get the work done.

It is important not to think that some special group of people are 'remote workers' while others are not. It is better for all people to think about activities that are suitable to be carried out remotely, and then work that way when it makes sense to do so.

Calculating the costs of office space

In traditional ways of working, each new recruit needs their own dedicated space. One person, one desk. Costs rise as headcount rises. According to Lambert Smith Hampton's Total Office Costs Survey* there are average costs of £7.2k per workstation across the UK outside London (based on c10m2 of net internal area per workstation). This covers not only rent and rates, but also running costs, technology, insurances etc.

For Solihull and other edge of Birmingham locations, this is calculated at £6.3k per workstation for new workspace, and £5.9k per workstation for older.

Space utilisation surveys typically find space is underused. In most organisations, you will rarely find everyone in the office all at the same time. Holidays, training days, sickness, being out and about doing one's work and attending meetings means that average workstation occupancy in an office rarely rises above 50%. Even peaks of attendance rarely take it above 60%, as not all teams have peaks at the same time.

By aligning provision of space with actual usage, there are savings to be made. Based on average costs, if an organisation of 100 people in the Solihull area reduced their space by 30% they could in principle save around £180k per year.

However, simply rationalising space will not deliver good results. The best way is to reinvest a proportion of that saving into a) better office design that supports smarter working, and b) improved technology to enable people to work more effectively from other places.

Making half of that headline saving while improving working life and effectiveness sounds like a wise business decision.

* Total Office Costs Survey, Lambert Smith Hampton 2019 www.lsh.co.uk/tocs

Good practice for working at home

When people are working more than occasionally from home, it is important that their home workplace environment is set up properly with a desk and appropriate chair, and suitable lighting.

If a member of staff is designated as a 'home-based' worker (i.e. working most of the time from home) then the organisation's policies may specify the required furnishing and set up of the home 'office' environment. For people who work less often from home, there should be guidelines for a good ergonomic set-up, need to have regular breaks, etc. Usually there is training in best practice and online risk assessment.

There are no specific H&S regulations for homeworking as such: all the provisions that apply in the workplace apply wherever an employee is working. In general, however, the evidence is that working from home does not carry substantial additional risk, and where it reduces travel it actually plays a part in reducing risk.

Even so, it is necessary for everyone to be aware of the regulations that need to be observed and how to optimise their remote work spaces ergonomically. There are issues of good practice that are mainly a question of common sense and taking ownership for one's way of working.

When working at home, people should be fully contactable and able to connect to all office systems and processes. The ideal scenario is one of seamless connection, with the computer integrated with the office network and the phone acting as if it were an extension within the office.

It is also important that home-based working has a 'professional face'. While it can help staff achieve a better work-life balance, it is important that home does not intrude into work, e.g. having domestic interruptions when on business calls.

The reverse also applies – employees need to feel in control of the home/work interface, and not feel pressured into allowing work to intrude into their personal time.

Flexible Offices, Workhubs and Coworking

The fastest growing sector in the commercial property market is in flexible officing, especially 'workhubs' and 'coworking space' (these two are pretty much the same thing).

Workhubs/coworking centres are premises set up to be used on a shared basis with multiple organisations sharing the space. These have proven to be popular with freelancers, microbusinesses and small businesses. Rather than

THE FASTEST GROWING SECTOR IN THE COMMERCIAL PROPERTY MARKET IS FLEXIBLE OFFICING

renting a dedicated serviced office, most people using these workplaces work in shared areas, with access to meeting rooms and specialist facilities as needed.

They are also popular with startups. Coworking spaces often offer support for business development as well as networking opportunities. Using premises as needed on this kind of flexible basis replaces the risk of taking on a large property overhead.

Some of these premises operate on a hybrid model, with a limited number of customers renting small offices or desks, while the rest operate on pure coworking basis.

Increasing numbers of larger private and public sector organisations are enabling employees to work at these flexible workspaces. This is often when they want to establish a presence in a new area, or recruit someone who lives far from the main office.

The government is doing it too. The Government Hubs Programme is consolidating real estate so that departments share property and create areas where people from any department can 'touch down' to work when needed.

Cutting storage and going primarily paperless

The traditional office is dominated by three kinds of space: desks, formal meeting rooms and storage. While desks and meeting rooms undergo changes to achieve a variety of activity-based spaces, the best thing to do with storage is to get rid of as much of it as possible.

Smarter Working involves moving as far as possible into an all-digital working environment. This is essential for people to be able to work flexibly and remotely and have access to all the data they need.

Creating, printing and storing paper (unless your work is in producing print media) needs to be avoided. Simply put, paper processes anchor people to the workplace. And people who are paper-dependent often limit the capacity of others to work smarter too.

4 Where is the workplace? Smarter use of space

Prime time for a smarter flexibility

Prime Accountants Group pride themselves on offering employees a flexible working environment to promote a healthy work-life balance. And the approach is reaping business benefits too.

Offices are open to staff between 6am and 8pm, meaning employees can complete their work anytime between these hours, instead of having to commit to the usual 9am to 5pm.

This can often enable parents to share the school run and means whilst one parent drops the children to school, the other can already be in work enabling them to finish early and be at the school gate when the bell rings.

By also allowing staff to work extra time and bank up to 5 hours in their "flexi bank", it also means that when routine medical appointments come up for themselves or their children and they need to leave work a few hours early or come in a few hours late, they can use the hours they have banked to take this time off and not use their holiday allowance.

This also enables people to align the times they work with peaks of workload when needed.

Prime understands that commitments outside work can sometimes be unavoidable. By enabling staff flexibility, it means that where days off were once taken, this is now not always necessary. Removing the requirement to take annual leave in such circumstances means that Prime staff are available and can respond to clients more efficiently.

Having multiple offices allows flexibility between working spaces. Hot desks are available at each office for staff to touch down at when working in that area. This is often convenient if a staff member has a meeting with a client in an alternative office, as this allows them to then continue working in the office for the remainder of the day.

Using cloud-based accountancy software and remote desktop means that staff who work on a mobile basis can access their systems and data wherever they need to and avoid having to travel back to their base office. By working smarter and reducing unnecessary travel, Prime has found that response times are better for clients.

www.primeaccountants.co.uk

Changes to non-office spaces

There is of course work that involves high levels of 'hands-on' or site-specific work. In these cases, other kinds of flexibility may apply more than remote working options, e.g. flexible hours or team self-rostering (as is commonly used in the health service and some areas of manufacturing).

However, it is also the case that there are major changes in the nature of work happening now with digitisation and the changes to manufacturing known as 'Industry 4.0'. This is all about the combination of automation, artificial intelligence, robotics and connected devices which is in the process of transforming industrial processes and ways of working.

One feature of this is that industrial activities contain a greater amount of knowledge work that can be carried out from a different location to where the machines are based. Supervision, diagnostics, upgrades to software, analysing data (etc) can often be carried out remotely as well as on site.

Did you know?

12.2% of people in employment in the West Midlands work from home or use home as a base for at least half of the time. This is lower than the national average of 14.2%.

The South West (18.1%) and South East (16.3%) are the regions with the most people working from home.

Source: ONS, Labour Force Survey, 2018.

Lab work in, for example, pharmaceuticals and engineering is changing too. Planning lab work and analysing results is often carried out from other places. Projects are often multi-site, with information shared online and meetings carried out virtually. So, both commuting travel and routine travel for projects can be reduced, again liberating time to be more productive.

5 Smarter use of technology

SMARTER
WORKING
IN SOLIHULL

Effective use of digital devices and communications is central to working smarter. Using these technologies, people can work more effectively both at the workplace and away from it too.

In this section, we look first at the technologies that make a difference and then what to use them for to maximise the range of benefits achievable.

What technologies support Smarter Working?

Smarter working is supported by a combination of portable devices, cloud and remote working technologies, unified communications and technology infrastructure in the workplace and beyond.

Technology	How the technology supports Smarter Working
Laptops rather than desktop computers	Support greater mobility of work both within and away from the office
Tablets or other handheld devices	Support mobility, and may be more appropriate for some tasks rather than laptops
Thin client technology	Allows users to log into their applications and data at any thin client terminal, or through a software application running on a laptop or other computer
Smartphones	For communications and access to email, internet and other applications on the move
Electronic document management and records systems	Replace paper processes and can be accessed from anywhere
Remote access technologies	Allow employees to access their corporate networks, including legacy applications, securely from home and on the move
Cloud applications	Enable people to work anywhere using the same systems and data
VOIP (voice over internet protocol) telephony	Enables people to use their computer as a telephone or can be routed to a smartphone, and can replace desk phones
Collaboration applications	Teamwork is enhanced by applications that combine voice and video communications, instant messaging, screen sharing, file transfer etc and can integrate with email, calendars, and room booking
Business social media	Applications that enable posting of information, discussions, forming of groups etc – important for distributed teamwork, knowledge-sharing and maintaining informal business contact
WiFi	In-workplace, public, mobile and home wireless connection – essential for being able to touchdown and work wherever needed
Broadband	Broadband infrastructure both wired and wireless (Wi-Fi, 4G, 5G) – underpins all communication and work activity over networks

It's not only about using technologies – it's about what you use them for

At the outset we outlined the key benefits from Smarter Working. So when deploying new technologies, it's vital to keep the benefits you are aiming for in mind.

This means also that people don't only learn the basics about how to use the technologies, but have a clear idea what to use them for. This involves a transformation journey, so that people are not trying to work in the old ways with new tools.

5 Smarter use of technology

Rethinking meetings

One area where the new technologies and new ways of working makes a difference is in rethinking meetings.

The traditional way is to have a formal meeting in an office meeting room. People often travel quite long distances to these meetings.

Using the new smarter technologies, you can move from a meetings culture to one of flexible collaboration. **Here's how:**

MOVE FROM A MEETINGS CULTURE TO ONE OF FLEXIBLE COLLABORATION

- Ensure the meeting has a purpose, not just a title. Cancel meetings that don't have a clear purpose.
- Challenge if everyone needs to be there, physically present. It's a good idea to have an option in all meeting invitations to join remotely, and only insist on physical presence when that adds significant value, e.g. in a more interactive type of learning event or working through a complex issue together
- Challenge if everyone needs to be there all the time. If your part of the meeting is only a few minutes out a two-hour session, arrange to be instant-messaged five minute before you're needed, and then walk to the meeting space or join remotely.
- Ensure people have all the information for the meeting beforehand, and then the meeting can focus on key issues and decisions.
- Have shorter meetings. Or just short and purposeful interactions in a breakout area (rather than formal meeting room) or online.
- Using mobile telephony or collaboration tools like Teams, Skype or Jabber it's easy to invite people to join in a call, turning a two-way interaction into an ad hoc meeting. No need to arrange further meetings because you need information or a decision from someone else.

All these kinds of techniques enable collaboration to be much more purposeful. And they also reduce the need to travel for routine meetings.

Going paperless – freeing people up to be mobile

In the previous section we looked at the need to reduce storage. And that depends on reducing paper. The 'paperless office' has been talked about for many years, and some people are sceptical it will ever arrive. But there are many advantages in setting a goal of being at least 'primarily paperless'.

This often requires a review of existing processes, in order to replace paper with electronic systems appropriate to the activities being carried out.

But it's also about changes to behaviours. Around 95% of the paper used and stored in offices is produced internally, and often for temporary purposes. This is expensive, inefficient and environmentally unsustainable.

The information is printed for uses such as editing, taking to meetings, sharing with colleagues, storing as a record of activity. But it already exists electronically, so is mostly wasteful duplication – we should work with the electronic versions whenever we can.

With applications such as Google Docs and Word, it is possible for people to work on documents together simultaneously, and online. Having a single version is the best option anyway, rather than emailing copies as attachments. Instead colleagues can be notified by a link (in an email or instant message) to the location of the document to review or work on.

This is important discipline for people who work remotely, so everyone has access to the same information, regardless of the location. Handing out 'the latest version' of a document on paper in a meeting is very bad practice. And it often creates problems for people trying to work smarter.

Technologies in the workplace

Within the workplace there needs to be good Wi-Fi so that employees can work in any of the activity-based spaces as well as at regular desks.

At desks or other work positions where they will work for longer periods of time, there needs to be a larger screen (or screens) they can connect to. A separate keyboard and mouse can support good ergonomics if a laptop or tablet riser is being used.

Meeting rooms should have screens that support both screensharing and videoconferencing, and audio that enables all parties to participate fully in meetings where people are joining remotely.

Smart screens enable participants to work interactively with screens and over distance, and the results can be captured and shared.

It's a good idea to include larger screens in breakout and informal meeting areas, so colleagues can connect to them to share what they are working on, and share with colleagues working remotely.

'Virtual mobility' – travelling without moving

These kinds of technologies support the new ways of working. An underlying principle is that of 'virtual mobility'. That is, many of the activities that previously required travel can now be carried out without actually travelling.

Of course, that doesn't mean that people never meet. What it does mean is that we have much greater control over when we travel for work – when doing so adds value by means of the enhanced personal contact and social interaction involved.

CASE STUDY

The virtual law firm – Woolley & Co

We tend to think of virtual companies as something very new and for high technology companies. However, **Woolley & Co**, specialists in family law, have been operating on a virtual basis for 23 years. Founder Andrew Woolley's aim at the time was to be the world's first virtual law firm, and this put them a couple of decades ahead of the field in what is traditionally quite a conservative sector.

Andrew's aim was to set up a company with the ethos of a traditional local law firm while using new technologies to work effectively as a team and work closely with clients. By design it would dispense with a culture of presenteeism, encourage employees to take more responsibility and serve customers where they are rather than expecting them to come into an office.

The company has 21 lawyers who work on a remote basis, and a small head office of 5 people, based in a serviced office at one of the Warwick University campuses. This has the advantage of being very cost-effective by removing real estate as a fixed cost, while supporting numerous other benefits.

One of the major advantages is in being able to recruit and retain the best specialists in the field, without being constrained by geography. This includes being able to recruit highly motivated people who might be being held back in their previous firm or who are looking for a better balance in their life.

While most of the lawyers are based in central England, their locations currently range from Norfolk to Wales and Cornwall, and this supports being able to support clients across the country. For a while, they had one lawyer working as an ex-pat from Egypt.

Lawyers are able to have local meetings, but they also have many meetings by Skype, not only within the company but also with clients and barristers. Increasingly they are finding landline calls are rarer, replaced by mobile and online voice calls.

Work managed by results, not presence

Woolley & Co lawyers have complete flexibility to organise their own work. No hours are set out, and everyone is treated as an adult capable of making their own choices about how to get work done. Work is measured by results, not presence, and is supported by a peer review process. The company also organises training, both on matters of legal practice and the softer skills needed.

Work is primarily paperless, and the practice management system is cloud-based. This is challenging when working with the court system, and the company is involved in the development of a pilot scheme for online filing with Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service.

The company is aware that full-time remote working risks being isolating, and uses Facebook Workplace as a collaborative tool to help overcome this. This promotes interaction with colleagues, both to support each other in their work and for social interaction.

After 23 years, the company is keen to continue to embrace new technologies and smarter ways of working and remain at the forefront of innovation in the sector.

www.family-lawfirm.co.uk

6 Putting Smarter Working into practice

Smarter Working is all about rethinking how we work together. With modern workplaces, new digital tools and new ways of working – sometimes referred to as changes to 'bricks, bytes and behaviours' – we can achieve the benefits outlined in Section 2. Benefits for the business, for people, and for the environment.

How do we make this happen?

It's important to work with colleagues to understand their current working patterns and business priorities. So we need to look at how we are working now to understand where, when and how we work and why.

Larger organisations will probably gather data on how premises are being used through a space utilisation audit, and survey employees about how their working patterns and their aspirations for greater flexibility and mobility.

Smaller organisations may not need to be so structured in their evidence gathering, but consulting with staff and helping them understand the possibilities for working smarter are essential.

Then it's a question of justifying any investment needed for new or redesigned workplaces and new technologies (as set out in Sections 4 and 5) on the basis of the benefits you're looking for.

After that, it's down to making the new ways of working work in practice.

Creating a culture of trust

Central to Smarter Working is that employees are empowered to make choices about how they carry out their work. Managers and team leaders have to learn to trust employees to make informed decisions. That can be quite a step change if managers and employees are used to a more 'command and control' style of working.

EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES TO MAKE CHOICES ABOUT HOW TO CARRY OUT THEIR WORK

The first of our Smarter Working principles was 'Work takes place at the most effective times, and the most effective locations'. It's not simply a matter of employee preference. It's about making a mature and informed decision about where work activities can be carried out.

This involves recognising constraints as well as opportunities. So working on a contract might mean that the right place to work is at a client's site. Working with highly confidential or sensitive information might constrain the range of places you could work at.

Employees also need to work with each other, so there need to be broad agreements about how teams will work together, so that everyone knows where their colleagues are and when they are available for calls and working collaboratively.

Managing by results, not presence

Management needs to focus on the results people achieve, rather than time spent at work or the hours logged, or watching over people in the office.

This is good practice in any case. But in reality, it can be a big step for managers to do this. **It requires:**

- Clarity about the output to be achieved and longer-term outcomes
- Routines for having work-in-progress available in systems or shared areas, so managers and colleagues can have access to it
- Clarity about reporting both progress and any issues e.g. delays, problems with resources, etc
- Employees taking greater 'ownership' and responsibility for their work.

A new approach to recruitment

To keep the momentum going for Smarter Working, it's necessary to make sure the organisation's people policies and processes have been 'smart-proofed'.

For example, when advertising new posts it can be routine to specify a job as full-time, standard hours and at a specific location. In a Smarter Working context, a new approach is needed.

This will involve not only a different approach to advertising posts, but also working with hiring managers and recruiters so they understand the new possibilities.

There is a wealth of under-employed talent out there amongst returnees looking to work on a more flexible basis. These could provide ideal candidates for the post.

And if looking for specialist skills, one can widen the potential talent pool by not limiting the search to the local area or people willing to relocate, if much of their work can be done remotely.

It is also sometimes routine to specify that employees above a certain grade must be able to drive. But this is something open to challenge in a Smarter Working context. And it opens the talent pool to people who have various kinds of mobility challenges.

Supporting employees' work-life balance

Numerous studies have shown a connection between having control over one's working life with good work-life balance, health and wellbeing.

Enabling employees to work in more flexible ways helps them to reduce stress and anxiety about work. A key area of stress in the working day is the commute journey, so eliminating this or allowing more control over when to travel helps to reduce stress.

This is one factor in promoting employee engagement and loyalty to the business.

Dealing with issues

The evidence from implementations of Smarter Working is that more problems are anticipated than actually arise, e.g. people may worry about isolation and fragmenting of teams. Usually these fears result from to over-estimating the amount of time that people will be out of the office and under-estimating the potential of modern communication tools for keeping teams in touch with each other.

Few want to return to the old ways of working once they get used to working smarter and have the tools and new work spaces to support it.

FEW WANT TO RETURN TO THE OLD WAYS ONCE THEY GET USED TO WORKING SMARTER

All the same, problems can occur as in any traditional workplace. It is the responsibility of teams to look out for each other, and in particular for managers and members of dispersed teams to spot problems and resolve them before they become major issues.

Another area of concern is the potential for over-working. Having the technologies for work to be accessible to you at all times shouldn't mean that you work all hours. But the temptation may be there to check outstanding tasks and communications in the evening and at weekends. The best way to prevent this is to work through expectations with the team and the importance of being able to switch off, and to incorporate these understandings into team agreements and company policy.

However, in reality, few people want to return to the old ways of working once they get used to working smarter and have the tools and new work spaces to support it.

7 Top tips for travel savings by Working Smarter

Through the course of this guide we've given examples of how Smarter Working and travel savings can go hand-in-hand.

Here are our top tips for making it happen:

- Support employees in making choices about the best place to work for different activities. It's in their interests to reduce personal travel.
- Promote online meetings, within the framework of 'Rethinking meetings' on page 14.
- Support employees to work not only from home but from third party sites such as client sites and coworking spaces, to cut down on travel time and remove the need for repeat trips to the office.
- Support employees who need to come into the workplace to travel at less congested times.
- If an individual or team has a mix of place-specific tasks and location-independent tasks, think about how to group these so that people can have whole days working remotely and cut out the commute.
- All time-based flexibilities have a spatial impact too: so working a compressed working week with the week's work done in 4 days, for example, cuts out 20% of an employee's commuting. A '9-day fortnight' reduces 10% of commute travel.
- Consider setting targets for reducing business travel through use of conferencing technologies, remote site monitoring, etc.
- Encourage your clients, partners and suppliers to work with you on a Smarter Working basis, by replacing routine meetings where either party travels to the other's premises with online meetings, and by sharing more information online.
- Senior managers should take the lead and role-model these behaviours.

Did you know?

Between 2002 and 2017 average household car mileage decreased by 15%, from 9,200 to 7,800 miles per year. Around 800 of the 1400 miles per year reduction is down to reductions in work-related mileage. The Department for Transport identifies the rise of homeworking as a significant factor in this trend. People on higher incomes have reduced their travel the most – and are also the group currently most likely to work remotely.

During the same period, there was a 32% rise in regular homeworking (working from home more than half the week).

The amount of peak-hour traffic on the road is still increasing, though, due to the increases in the population and the workforce overall. At the moment it seems Smarter Working is taking the edge off increases in traffic due to population increases. If more people adopt smarter working practices, this impact should be even greater.

Source: Department for Transport (2016), Commuting Trends in England 1988-2015

8 Further information and guidance on implementation

More detailed advice and guidance for Smarter Working can be found in the following publications:

ACAS, The Right to Request Flexible Working: An ACAS Guide

Andy Lake, *Smart Flexibility: Moving Smart and Flexible Working from Theory to Practice*, Routledge

British Standards/HM Government, *PAS 3000 2015: Smart Working Code of Practice*

CIPD, Employee Outlook: Commuting and Flexible Working

Flexibility.co.uk, *The Smart Working Handbook*, 2nd edition

Lambert Smith Hampton, Total Office Costs 2019. www.lsh.co.uk/tocs

Peter Thompson & Alison Maitland, *Future Work: Changing Organisational Culture for the New World of Work*, 2nd edition, Palgrave MacMillan

For further support from the Smarter Working Team at Solihull MBC, contact us at smarterworkingteam@solihull.gov.uk

Appendix: benefit checklist

The following three tables provide headline guidance about how to achieve the benefits listed in Section 2. They cover in turn business benefits, benefits for people, and benefits for the environment.

Business benefits include:

Benefit	How does that work?
Improved productivity	• Liberate time from traditional meetings to do something more productive • Work at most effective times and places for work activities • Streamline processes • Focus on results not presence • Reduce or even eliminate travel for routine meetings
Better customer service	• Create more interactions with customers through online collaboration • Reach new markets without the need to travel
Speed to decision	• New meeting and collaboration formats and focus on results make for faster and better decisions
Improved collaboration	• Make full use of the digital collaboration tools to work together • Smarter office design supports different kinds of informal and formal collaboration
Improved innovation and adaptability	• Use the CAN test (see page 6) and 'lean thinking' techniques to develop a continuous improvement approach to processes and working practices – this embeds innovation in everyday worklife • Design spaces to be reconfigurable so as to be able to create new teams, create new project areas (etc) according to business need in fast-moving markets
Improved processes for work	• Eliminate paper processes • Improve workflow, knowledge management and project management systems to better support remote collaborative working and managing by results • Adopt an 'enter once, use many times' approach to capturing and using data
Reduced travel costs	• Remote working to reduce commuting and business mileage • Virtual meetings to cut out unnecessary travel for business meetings
Reduced real estate needs	• Rationalise property in line with actual usage • Support more remote working as company grows, embracing 'spaceless growth' as a strategy • Operate as a (mostly) virtual company
Workplaces better designed for the activities you do	• Redesign workplaces for 'activity-based working'
Reduced absence	• Allow people to work part-days (from home), according to their self-assessment, when they feel unable to complete whole days or feel unable to cope with travel to work, rather than be absent for whole days • Allow people with disabilities/chronic conditions to manage their conditions better, have medical appointments (etc) by focusing on output rather than presence or hours
Improved recruitment	• Widen the pool of talent by removing barriers to recruiting from wider geographical area, and from more diverse communities
Improved retention	• Enable people to return from maternity/paternity leave working on a part-time and/or more flexible basis • Enable people who move for family reasons to continue working in the company, on a more remote working and flexible basis
Working time better aligned to operational needs	• Use options such as flexible hours, annualised hours, time accounts (etc) to meet customer preferences or peaks and troughs of demand • Support employees to work from home if they have to collaborate or provide service across different time zones

Benefits for people – employees, contractors, self-employed, freelancers, jobseekers – include:

Benefit	How does that work?
Better work-life interface/balance	• Enable a wide range of flexible and remote working possibilities, with a focus on results rather than time or place • Provide training in managing the work/life interface • Enable people to work round family/life commitments
Reducing commute travel	• Set up employees with remote-working technology and permissions • Ensure people working form home or local to their home are fully involved in relevant meetings and interactions (etc)
Reduced stress, improve health and wellbeing	• Allow employees more control over where, when and how work is done, focusing on the needs of the tasks involved • Use sit/stand or standing desks to break up long periods of sitting • Encourage mobility in the workplace, and taking breaks when working elsewhere • Have walking meetings • Ensure employees are socially involved both in the workplace and when working elsewhere
Opportunities for more varied work	• Make good use of technology to remove geographical constraints over opportunities for project work, promotion and career development
Overcoming disadvantage in the labour market	• Specify and advertise posts as being open to all kinds of flexible work patterns, and highlight how your Smarter Working culture supports diversity

Benefits to the environment include:

Benefit	How does that work?
Reduced travel	• Cutting commuting and business travel reduces pollution and energy consumption • Consider setting targets and monitoring progress
Reduced carbon footprint of workplaces	• Reducing office space reduces the carbon footprint of the business • Supporting more people in the same space reduces carbon footprint per capita • Use intelligent building technologies to manage environmental systems in line with occupancy through the day
Reducing or eliminating paper	• Remove personal printers in favour of shared multi-functional devices (60% reductions in paper consumption are typical from this one measure) • Review processes to move to all-electronic processes • Have paperless meetings • Use dual or multiple screens to remove the temptation to work from paper when using more than one application.

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