# PLACEmaking

## Smart Working -

## Preparing people and places

## for the digital future

**Adopting Smart Working and modern working practices means more than just shrinking the office estate and investing in digital services**

Under continuous pressure to make on-going and significant cost savings and at the same time improve service delivery and outputs, the UK's public sector must reduce its real estate portfolio with specific focus on the office estate. But with rapid and continuous change in the way that we work and trends emerging that signals reduced dependency on traditional office buildings, the challenge is what to hold on to, what to shed and where to invest precious resources so that the remaining estate is more than just 'fit for purpose'. To stay relevant, leaders must be ready to tackle head-on the challenges of continuous innovation by embracing new – and smart, or smarter ways of working. Smart Working is an accepted term used to refer to the adoption of modern working practices made possible by advances in mobile technologies, new contractual arrangements, more effective workplace environments and improved support service provision. When these are combined, we are enabled to have more choice of where and when to work.

Many enterprises have experienced cycles of property related tightening and loosening of budgets before and with the public sector regarded as being cautious of change generally, the answer in the past might have been to simply 'do nothing'; hang on to the estate, hunker down and achieve the desired savings by reducing running costs and delaying all but essential repairs until 'Business as Usual' returns and money becomes available again. That approach was always risky but is even more so now that priorities have changed and in turn budgets redirected significantly towards investment in technology with property reduction regarded as an attractive source of both capital and revenue savings.

The challenge for leadership teams is not to assume that what is familiar from the past is what is needed for the future. Before assuming that heads of property will know what the future office estate should look like, business leaders need to be clear of their brief. They may need external expertise and help, but they must articulate what kinds of modern workplaces will best enable their organisation to achieve the step-change needed in ways of working and deliver digital services. The brief needs to define what kinds of workspaces, facilities and assets are needed, how they are to be used, operated and serviced and how these changes will contribute to service delivery improvements. With a clear brief in hand, property professionals can appraise multiple options and present back well-informed recommendations. To reduce overhead costs and improve performance, leadership teams must actively nurture an organisation wide culture that accepts and expects continuous change and commits to sharing responsibility for the delivery of their business improvement objectives. Engaging with existing stakeholders is important but so is staying focused on the future and ensuring there is a collective and sustainable change infrastructure in place that will maintain commitment to achieving the desired outcomes.

**What's behind this change?**

Working practices have changed. In the public sector this has been largely driven by the government's demand for cost savings and commitment to modernising government via the Cabinet Office led 'digital by default strategy'. It is also fuelled by wider cultural redefinitions of what 'work' is which in turn questions the purpose of the office. The benefits of mobile computing, wireless connectivity and remote access to digitally created and stored information enables many to work beyond physical walls and shrug off traditional grade-based office environments and out of date working practices.

Customer expectations have changed too. Having been persuaded to accept online and telephone based methods of engaging with public bodies especially those providing front line services, customers are not unreasonably expecting operational improvements matching the same level of response they get from other online providers. This significant shift away from face

to face and physical form filling has demanded a step change in how the public sector operates and the types of skills it needs to attract and retain. In place of former administration posts, it now needs more tacit skills such as problem solving, judgment, listening, data analysis and relationship building. It needs to breakdown hierarchies and isolated team structures based on defined professional areas of interest and collaborate across teams and agencies, focused on innovation, interaction and collaboration. Attempting to achieve all of that in out of date open plan offices dominated by rows of desks, cellular offices for management grades and the odd meeting room is both impossible and misguided.

Younger generations are baffled by their senior colleagues' acceptance of what they consider are outdated practices, poor quality working environments, significantly worse technology than they have at home and support services that only provide scripted responses from might be better referred to as 'the no help desk' solution, not what they regard as any form of constructive help or assistance. They have no patience with or loyalty to organisations that refuse to modernise and adapt to changes in ways of working and changes of social expectations. A poor quality working environment, inferior technology and indifferent management attitudes to their well-being are frequently reported as reasons why younger people resign shortly after starting a new job. Attracting the highly skilled and highly trained to work in such an environment is difficult enough but retaining them for anything more than a short stay is unlikely unless organisations wake-up and shake-up. This can conflict with older generations views and as they are generally in more senior and influential positions, their views often dominate how the workplace operates. They rarely ask the newest recruits how they think the workplace could be improved and when being updated how it should be designed, equipped and operated. As a result what is often commissioned is more relevant to the past than the present and rarely prepared for the future. With four generations of staff working alongside

each other in the workplace, leaders need to ensure they understand the cross generational differences of values and expectations if they are to navigate their way to achieving their cost-cutting targets, attracting and retaining a skilled and dynamic workforce capable and motivated to meet changing customer demands.

**What are these generational differences?**
We are all influenced by the social, economic and political influences of when we were born and educated and the experiences we have had from when we first entered the world of work through to the present. Inevitably each generation has a different perspective on work related aspects of their lives, reflecting their own experiences and attitudes. There is common terminology used to define the four generations in the workplace today: veterans, baby boomers, generation X and generation Y. With the origins of these labels being from the US, with post world war 2 colloquial meanings not used here in Europe, no-one appears to actually enjoy being labelled as any of the above. But the original purpose of profiling people in order to appreciate the nuances of difference between generations is useful. If we consider the core characteristic influences on the way each generation is inclined to respond to significant change and there is nothing more emotive than changing their workplace, we can understand better how each generation will tend to react. Clearly these generational profiles are generic and only one aspect of a programme of change management, but it is useful here to illustrate how different a response can be triggered from each generational group when presented with the same prospect of change.

We're now in a position where all four generations are working side by side and within each generational cluster there are distinct differences in expectations of what Smart Working and choice really means. Are we sure we understand the challenges that each cluster has to address and resolve if the productivity advances of

**PLACE**making

Smart Working are to be fully realised? With better understanding of what influences their response to the prospect of Smart Working and its associated practices, we can reduce the common anxieties that often result from fear of the unknown and subsequently reduce the default approach of imposing inflexible and constraining working practices on others.

PLACEmaking have developed a multi generational profiling tool that people can use to discover for themselves their engagement preferences and communications style. People identify with popular music icons relevant to their generation rather than abstract labels and add details to their own timeline that maps their experience of the workplace and major events that together have informed and influenced their personal views. With better awareness and more open discussion, team members start to appreciate more about their colleagues and managers are able to anticipate how and why different members of their team respond in very different ways to the prospect of change. Scaled up this tool can monitor participation and outcomes, nudging individuals to maintain engagement through their selected medium or activity and report progress enabling change teams to target energies and investment. Armed with more knowledge, everyone is more aware of their personal preferences and can self select how to draw on information, guidance and support that is relevant to them and presented in a way that is discreet, appropriate and proportionate. This is the basis for self navigated change and the kind of new approach needed if individuals are to take personal responsibility for accepting and expecting on-going change.

We have focused here on the four generations who are co-workers in our workplaces today. But what about the next generation, the generation not yet entering the workplace. How have their expectations been influenced by observing how their families and friends regard work and how will they expect their own working experiences to differ from older generations. In our next publication we will be reporting on outcomes from a research programme we have commissioned that will be focused on the next generations expectations, the types of workplaces they envisage and how we can ensure all generations are fully prepared for that next step of change.

## What sorts of workplace solutions are needed?

Now we are equipped with mobile technology and telephony we have greater choice on when and where to work. This applies to mobility within a building as well as mobility beyond the office building. Personal ownership of small quantities of space is substituted by providing unlimited access to better quality space and highly serviced facilities available on an ad-hoc or planned use basis. We can select work setting that suit our task, opting for alternative settings as our needs change; formal presentation suites or informal project rooms for interacting with colleagues or quiet contemplation and temporary seclusion pods away from everyone. When we do get together with others we want that time investment to be meaningful and so the places where we gather need to be attractive to us, otherwise we can simply go somewhere else. We need to be convinced that time spent with others will have purpose and be rewarding: that there is a clear reason to be together, a clear objective and we want to think for ourselves how best we participate - in person or possibly using audio or video connection. When we do invest in time meeting others face to face, we want facilities to be available that are rich in quality and variety. We want spaces that inspire us to innovate, problem solve and envisage better ways to achieve shared objectives that are of value. We want spaces that we can pull and push around and arrange in whatever way we think will best meet our needs and tasks. We have limited time to waste so we want to ensure space is available when we need it: we expect it to be include intuitively functioning technology and the materials and equipment needed are on hand and complete. In other words we want a fully serviced solution.

This is a complete workplace related change and challenges how we've previously provided, used and serviced the workplace. It requires a complete rethink across all aspect of workplace solutions:

**People** – we are all influenced by our experiences and the social, economic and political context of when we were born and first entered the workplace.  No size ever did fit all but now we need to ensure that everyone has a personalised change experience so that we are all prepared to expect and accept on-going workplace related change and take responsibility to understand how it benefits us as individuals as well as our employing organisation.

**Place** - as we have more choice on when and where to work, the 'Place' becomes ever more important, not less. The assumption that everyone will be largely working from home is an error – we like human contact on the whole and so working in isolation is not the automatic solution. Instead we want to exploit mobility and select places to work in that are inspirational. We want to improve our health and wellbeing and reduce the time sitting at desks aimlessly looking for inspiration into a computer monitor.

**Platforms** – we need to exploit technology and not be exploited by it or those that provide and service it "on our behalf". We need solutions that meet our business needs and reject poor quality, poorly presented and poorly serviced technical solutions, downgraded to match entry level service support budgets and light years from the functional quality of our own purchased tablets and phones that we carry around in our bags or have at home.

**Providers** – we need to repurpose support services. Facilities Management needs to lift its focus above cost reduction driven cleaning and maintenance and grasp the opportunity to be workplace facilitators of reduced quantity and better quality workplace solutions: ensuring the serviced office is designed and maintained to hotel standards, elegant in presentation and function. It's not a solution that is a 'free-for-all', but one that is carefully choreographed and hosted ensuring that a smooth economic and efficient use of space, facilities and assets sits at the heart of the operation.
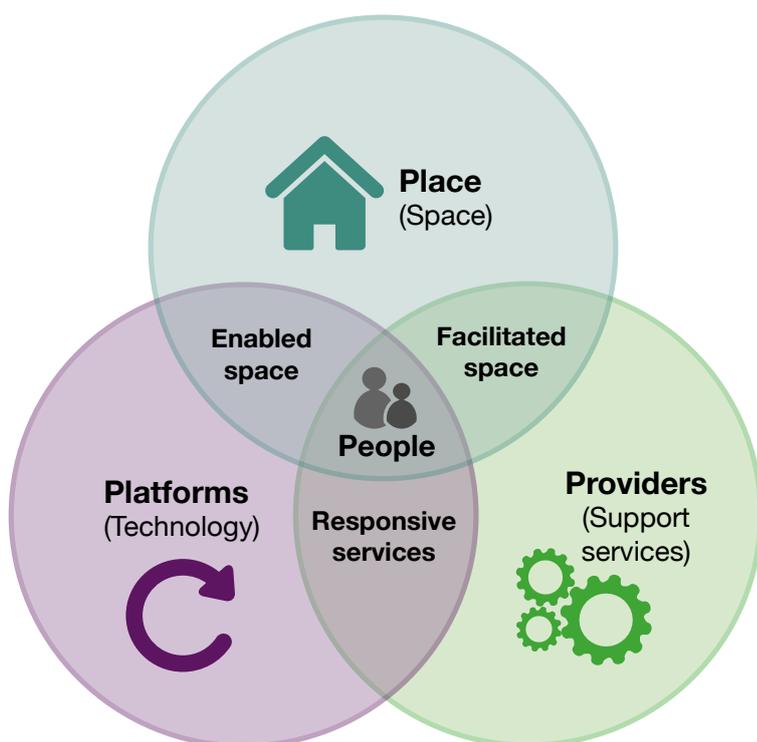


©PLACEmaking 2017

PLACEmaking

**So what are the ingredients of a successful workplace?**

Whilst accepting that there are real savings to be achieved by reducing the number of office buildings generally, the office is still important. Whilst working from home offers occasional benefits, for many the honeymoon of no commuting soon wear's off and the reality of remote loneliness and lack of social stimulation drives many to regard the office as more than just a building. If we have the ability to design an amazing office, what would be in a checklist of ingredients that make it attractive enough to seduce us from warm high street coffee chains where we can happily function with our mobile devices and cloud server access.

**Author**
**Alison White,**
**Co-founder PLACEmaking**
Alison has been at the centre of knowledge on the changing demands on the working environment for over 20 years, and leads teams of multi skilled consultants to deliver end-to-end and leading edge workplace solutions in both the private and public sectors.

www.PLACEmaking.co.uk
www.twitter.com/PLACEmaking_uk
www.facebook.com/PLACEmaking.co.uk

**PLACEmaking's top 10 ingredients for a successful and modern workplace**

1. Is modern and attractive and reinforces a culture of shared aspirations and objectives

2. A place that values learning, enriches knowledge and skills development

3. A place that includes facilities and assets that directly enhances individual and team performance, reinforcing self worth and valuing collaboration

4. A place that connects people, facilitating and enabling them to focus on delivering the organisations shared commitments and aims

5. An environment that welcomes creativity, innovation, interaction and collaboration

6. A place with character, designed with an eclectic mixture of diverse style and wide range of work settings: from quiet and contemplative though to buzzing and stimulating

7. Enabled with relevant technology – functionally intuitive, user led simplicity that's thoughtfully provided, managed and maintained by people who don't use 'techno-speak'

8. A place that is serviced and managed to meet its 'customer's' needs, not constrained by low value contractual convenience

9. A place that doesn't impose a corporate brand nor allocates space by hierarchy or seniority

10. A place that is confident enough in its values that it encourages curiosity, exeprimentation and participation.

# PLACEmaking

## We're here to help you

## successfully implement

## Smart Working

Our toolbox is ready to guide you, and turn your vision into fully realised benefits

**Our Services**

- Transformational workplace change, communications and engagement
- Digital and technology advisory

- Programme and project management
- Interior architecture and design
- Strategic asset management

Civil Service TW3 Awards

TW3 Awards 2017
**WINNER**
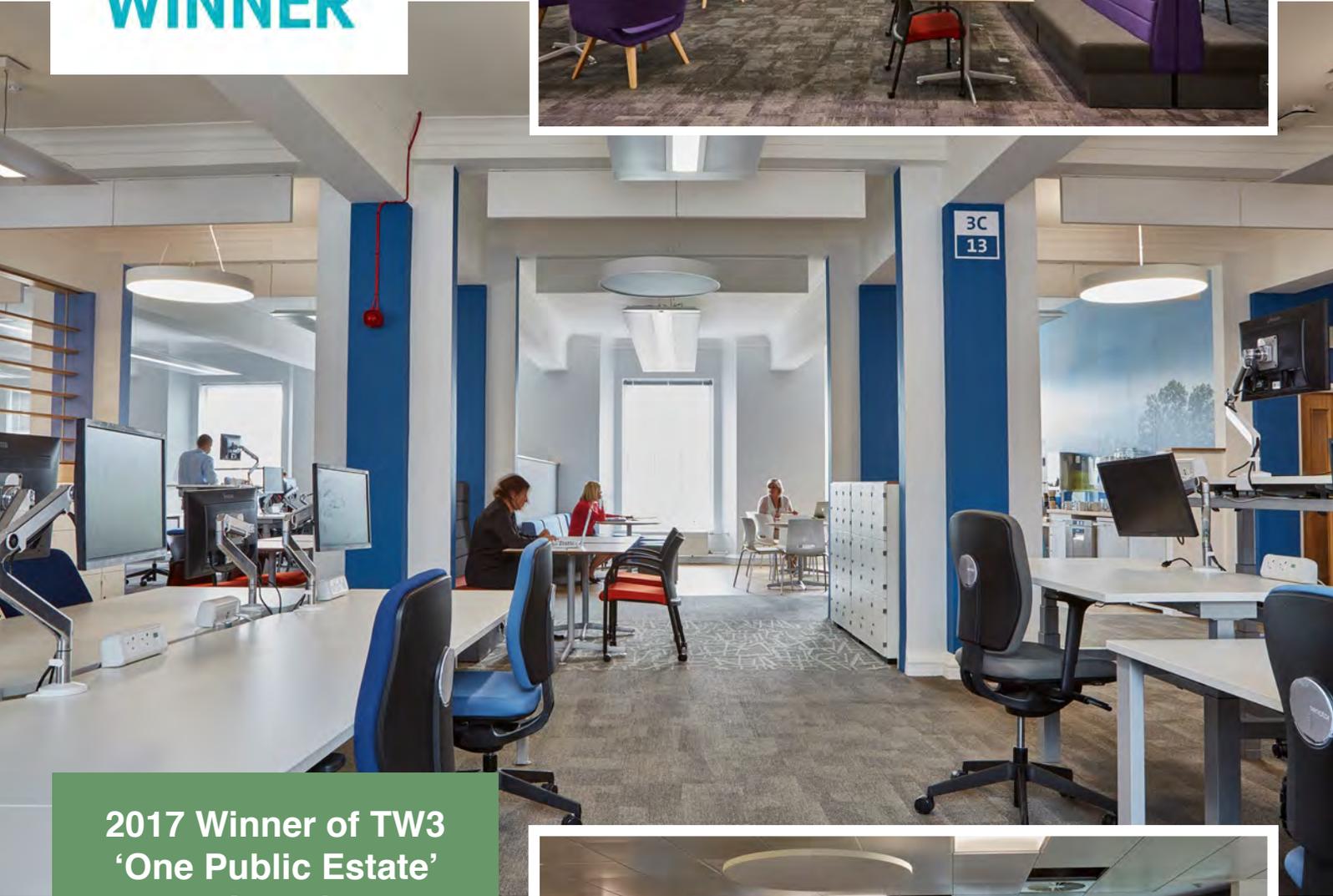
**2017 Winner of TW3
'One Public Estate'
Award
Bristol City Council,
City Hall**

**"An exemplar of
Smart Working in local
government..."
TW3 Judges**

www.placemaking.co.uk @PLACEmaking_UK