

Executive Summary

The previous case studies **Office Rationalisation** and **Employee Engagement** have described the office move, the desire for culture change and how staff were encouraged to provide feedback and suggestions.

West Dunbartonshire Council have the branding of **workplace of the future** to encapsulate their vision of flexible and agile working. They recognise this vision goes beyond physical manifestations of new buildings, new technologies and new procedures (although these were important) – it requires a new culture and changes to the way staff and managers work together. They have started this transition to their desired workplace by implementing new workstyles and digital working methods and are already reaping the benefits of decreased absence, reduced printing, reduced travel expenses and an improvement in the work-life balance of their staff.

Background

The office rationalisation project was the driver for starting some of the cultural change at the same time with staff.

This case study provides detail on how the council set about implementing their vision of their workplace of the future through three sub-projects:

1. Changing to new workstyles;
2. Changing the flexi-time system;
3. Changing to a collaborative culture.

Drivers

The drivers for these projects came from two sources:

1. **Economic** – the council aimed to reduce costs by reducing building capacity and maintenance and also identifying internal processes and procedures that could be made more efficient.
2. **Staff Requests** – comfortable with the feedback mechanisms available within the staff forum groups; staff were confident enough to request a change to the flexi-time system.

Results

There was a phenomenal decrease in absence, printing fell by 30% in the first year and travel expenses reduced by 25% as staff were using many more digital working methods. They didn't need to travel between offices as much as they could work in the new office all day if attending a meeting and work-life balance was 10% higher than staff survey results.

- **SIGNIFICANT DECREASE IN ABSENCE**
- **30% DECREASE IN PRINTING COSTS**
- **25% REDUCTION IN TRAVEL EXPENSES**
- **10% IMPROVEMENT IN WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Implementation

Changing to New Workstyles

A key element of the office rationalisation project was to ensure an appropriate amount of space in the new office and an appropriate number of desks were available for use; there was no automatic assumption of a desk for every person – there needed to be careful calculation of requirements. To assist with this, new workstyles were considered which would help in calculations of desk and space requirements, staff were allocated to the workstyles of:

- **Fixed** worker if they spent 80% of their time at a desk;
- **Flexible** workers would spend 50% at a desk with the remainder in meetings or out visiting users;
- **Mobile** workers were 80% out of the office with 20% at a desk.

Now every new role automatically has a workstyle assigned to it and it is part of workforce management and recruitment meaning reporting on data is very easy. The council also improved in their ability to challenge workstyle allocations using the available data; they can show the changing landscape of the council workforce from very fixed traditional roles to staff getting much more comfortable in working in different ways.

They can monitor increases in percentage of staff home working and the increase in codes being issued to allow people to use the new space and demonstrate the shift in people becoming more flexible at working in different environments.

Changing the Flexi-Time System

One of the suggestions from the (office rationalisation) pilot group staff forum was around looking at the use of flexi time. Initially a flexi pilot was created with 90 staff across all services and this was used to monitor some key statistics in that environment over a six-month period; core flexi time was removed so people could work any time between 7am and 7pm; at this point they would still clock in - just within the new hours. Before the pilot was started, frequently asked questions were published on the intranet to ensure staff not only understood but were well supported in what the council were trying to do. The group of staff was monitored closely with surveys, focus groups and staff and manager sessions which produced an abundance of data.

When analysing the data at the end of the project, some managers who had been more reticent at the beginning had seen the flexibility this had brought to their services. It was an all-round win for staff, managers and trade unions (who had been involved in all discussions around the pilot). Due to this success, the pilot was extended and the council looked to move it out to other parts of the organisation; in a wider review of potential savings it was seen that the physical management and administration support of the previous flexi system was an area which could be removed.

Therefore, the council moved quickly into the new flexi time system first analysing where the break in the current contract was (which was at the end of that year) so they could move quickly into running staff sessions through November and December on the changes. They were able to give information to the staff gathered from the pilot and could talk to them about how little was actually going to change – they were the same services, needing the same delivery – they were simply removing restrictions from staff and trusting them to deliver their services in the best manner for them.

**“CHANGING FLEXI TIME
WAS AN ALL ROUND WIN
FOR STAFF, MANAGERS
AND TRADE UNIONS”**

**ALISON MCBRIDE
OD & CHANGE MANAGER**

Managers had full ownership and were empowered to organise their resources to deliver the best for their customers; **it was about working flexibly instead of working a flexi-system**; this means staff can leave work during the day for an appointment and make up the hours and can make future plans to accommodate their personal needs.

Policies were reviewed alongside discussions on the new flexi system. Bereavement policy, disability, special leave and carers leave – everything was there to provide people with support and justifications for those times they needed to be away from work. It boiled down to empowering people to work flexibly and trusting them to work their contracted hours.

Alongside other data gathered from pre-move, post-move and the performance reviews, organisational development gathered specific data on absence levels, travel expenses, printing (pre and post-move) and the work life balance of the staff involved.

Changing to a Collaborative Culture

One of the benefits of working in a much more open plan office with more collaboration is people start to see behaviours in other teams. This became very apparent with the changes to workstyles and flexi-time.

Staff could see the work patterns of other people and were able to start challenging some assumptions. Perhaps in the past there were some roles that were absolutely fixed and it was felt that staff couldn't take advantage of home working or couldn't work at another location – now, staff themselves began to challenge these historical viewpoints. This has been a real benefit in terms of people seeing how others work and feeling comfortable enough to challenge their own position.

They are also sitting beside different staff; a previous issue was adjacencies – who did you work with a lot and made sure you sat beside. The benefits of this cross-team culture has been really useful – it's reduced emails and it's allowed conversations on how we can do things better. Even small shifts of recognising that you don't need to have the same desk every day have proven beneficial – challenging aspects of “work is something you do, not somewhere you go.”

There will always be people that need to be convinced, but every time a change is made it's beneficial to the culture of the organisation. It builds upon trust and allows people to challenge the council and has resulted in (some of) these challenges being implemented into new policies as with the new flexi-time policy.

Biggest Challenges

Some managers took a while to get used to the new flexi system as it did slightly change their previous team and management dynamic; yet through perseverance (and the occasional challenge from organisational development) all managers now see the benefits of this system to their teams, service users and their staff behaviours.

Initially, there were some anxieties around reducing teams fixed desk allocations and during the first move, people would initially say they had more fixed workers as they were anxious about getting enough desks for their staff. Again, perseverance and a consistent message enabled the council to work through these concerns and it was quickly (and visibly) evident that the new system was working.

“WE TRUST PEOPLE TO DO THEIR JOBS AND WE EMPOWER THEM TO COME IN AND WORK IN THE MANNER BEST FOR THEM, THEIR TEAM AND THEIR SERVICE; WE’LL REMOVE ANY CONSTRAINTS FROM OUR STAFF TO ENABLE THIS TO HAPPEN”

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Colleague feedback also helped as some colleagues were able to reassure each other that they always had the desks they needed and the calculations were accurate. It is always more powerful when colleagues spread these messages themselves.

Recommendations/Lessons Learned

A culture of flexibility, trust and empowerment does wonders for staff motivation and morale.

Participant Details

1. Alison McBride – Organisational Development & Change Manager at West Dunbartonshire Council

Supporting Documentation

This case study is the third in a series of four linked case studies from West Dunbartonshire Council; the case studies should, ideally, be read in this order:

1. [WDC Office Rationalisation](#)
2. [WDC Employee Engagement](#)
3. WDC Workplace of the Future
4. [WDC Change, Appraisals, Learning and Development Interventions](#)

Watch a more detailed [video](#) describing this move to flexible and agile working.