How flexible workplace strategies can be made successful at the operational level

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Received (in revised form): 3rd July, 2011

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ABSTRACT

We are living in a continuously changing world; technology is changing rapidly, information has become more accessible and an office worker can work anywhere, at anytime. These developments require organisations to be highly flexible in the way they respond to economic, social and technological change, but also in the capacity and flexibility of their workplace. This paper strives to give insight into ‘how to make flexible workplace strategies work at an operational level’ by discussing the relationship between levels of ambition and implementation strategies. Activity-based working (ABW) is a flexible workplace concept, which recognises that, through the course of any day, people engage in many different activities and need different types of work settings and technology to accommodate those activities. Implementation success is driven by an integrated approach where ambitions and solutions for the physical, virtual and behavioural environment are considered in a coherent way. There are three different types of approach towards implementing ABW, which fit different levels of ambition. Knowing the ambition level makes it possible to choose the right implementation approach and helps to determine the role that the corporate real estate organisation can play. Two case studies are reflected upon to exemplify these different levels of ambition and implementation approaches.

Keywords: activity-based working, workstyle, workplace strategy, implementation approach, change management

INTRODUCTION

Ours is a beautiful world, but how capable are people, living and working in this world, of taking full advantage of it? Information technology (IT) is changing rapidly, but how clearly do people see the challenges of this ‘permanent revolution’?

The rate of change in society and in the economy has never been faster. Consumers
can find information more easily, they are more articulate and consequently more demanding. What is required these days is speed of action and flexibility while retaining the personal touch.

The internet also has spawned a new generation of workers accustomed to working wherever they happen to be or where they choose to be. These workers have become used to using the internet as a tool for communication in both their business and social lives.

The technological revolution — more specifically, the digital revolution — means that while a central, enclosed workplace (that is, a building) still plays an important role, it is equally the case that the ‘office worker’ can now often work anywhere. Moreover, this liberation from and of the workplace is not simply a feel-good experience for the previously regimented worker, it is also increasingly seen as bringing real benefits to the bottom line of organisations.

All these developments require organisations to be highly flexible, not only in the way they respond as an organisation to economic, social and technological changes, but also in the capacity of their physical environment to respond to those changes. In the last 25 years, many organisations have investigated opportunities to adopt flexible real estate strategies and more and less successful implementations have been seen. This paper will discuss how strategies can be made successful at the operational level and touches on the following questions for corporate real estate (CRE) executives to consider with regard to flexible workplace strategies:

- What is the context of flexible workplace strategies?
- What are the developments in flexible workplace strategies?
- What levels of ambition can be discerned?
- What implementation strategies can be discerned?
- What can be learned from recent implementations?
- What is the role of CRE?

This paper seeks to provide insight into the relationship between levels of ambition and implementation strategies or, in other words, ‘how to make flexible workplace strategies work at an operational level’. Recent case studies will follow the informational content. The paper also discusses the role that CRE managers can play in these transitions.

INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVITY-BASED WORKING AND WORKSTYLE

Until recently, every employee always had their own individual workplace. Now there is an opportunity to break with this convention. How? By making offices elastic and linking different spaces to different activities. Why? Because, generally speaking, all of those fixed workplaces are actually used for only 50 per cent of the time. This is a huge waste, not just in terms of square metres and sustainability, but also in operating costs. If only in financial terms, there are opportunities for substantial savings in breaking with the convention of individualised workspaces.

Already there has been the advent of ‘open plan’, which saw the abolition of cellular space to be replaced by open (non-territorial) space. This saw the death of the regimented office with its mix of strict rows of desks and enclosed offices, resulting in better communication and more effective work relationships — not to mention cost-savings in office fit-outs. The introduction of open plan began a process that has now largely done away with the spatial, temporal and psychological silos of the ‘industrial’ office. To reduce CRE costs, the introduction of ‘sharing’ in the form of hot-desking and hotelling was seen.

It was quickly realised, however, that this was not an ‘either/or’ proposition: either an
enclosed environment or a fully open one. What mattered was the activity taking place and so what was needed was a spatial organisation that facilitated specific activities. What was needed was activity-based working (ABW). Some, for example, needed enclosure for acoustic reasons — private meetings or the need to concentrate away from the hustle and bustle of an open-plan office. At the same time, it began to be realised that the workplace was ‘multi-cultural’ in the widest sense of the word — a mix of ages, genders, ethnicities and personalities, all bringing with them different workstyles and working best when given the opportunity to work in their own particular style.

ABW is a concept that recognises that, through the course of any day, people engage in many different activities and need different types of work setting and technology to accommodate these activities, both inside and outside the office.

**Workstyle**

The philosophy of ABW is to make work more effective and efficient, but also more enjoyable for both the organisation and the employee. This vision is achieved by focusing on the employee and giving them the freedom (within boundaries) to decide how to work, where to work, when to work, the tools to use and with whom to collaborate to get their work done — all focused on improving productivity and the best outcome for the client. ABW promotes knowledge-sharing, faster and better collaboration and personal accountability. Organisations that have adopted an ABW workstyle strive:

- to increase productivity;
- to increase autonomy and entrepreneurship within the organisation;
- to strengthen image and culture;
- to be more customer-orientated;
- to increase collaboration within and between teams;
- to increase employee satisfaction;
- to boost creativity; and
- to share knowledge and develop a learning organisation.

Workstyle projects are projects that always adopt an integrated approach, not just technology or office fit-out. Figure 1 illustrates that changes in all three environments lead to a coherent new way of working. The new office environment or ‘physical environment’ facilitates activities (such as reading, writing and collaborating). In a traditional office, people are located according to the department they work for, or their hierarchical position. In ‘the virtual environment’, technology aims to disconnect information from place and time and fully support all kinds of knowledge exchange. This allows workers to work and interact anywhere and anytime. Changes in the ‘behavioural environment’ include a more structured organisation of activities and working out of sight of one’s manager based on mutual trust and responsibility.

To elaborate a bit more on what workstyle is, the one-sentence definition used in this paper is: ‘workstyle is a recognisable and accepted system, which influences how people work with each other and with the provided workspace and tools’. Brief explanations of the five elements of this definition are provided below.

- **Recognisable and relevant to all employees.** A recognisable workstyle appeals to all employees. Recognisable means ‘fitting in
with one’s own mental frame of reference’ and ‘understandable’. Workstyle is part of day-to-day reality and relates to things like openness, trust, self-organisation and autonomy.

- **Accepted — Can everyone be involved?** The word ‘workstyle’ implies that people are able and willing to work in this new way. Top-down ideas are not enough, one has to work on acceptance. Acceptance is relevant and deserves attention, but it can also be a given, or obtained by a strategy of enticement.

- **A system in which everything is interconnected.** Workstyle is a system in which apparently very different streams have a place:
  - the behavioural stream, which involves the human side of the business;
  - the virtual stream, which involves information communication technology (ICT) and information management; and
  - the physical stream, which consists of the building and the interior design.

  Workstyle is therefore integrated and holistic in nature. Integrated means everything is included. Holistic means everything is considered in context.

- **Dealing with each other: culture, collaboration and leadership.** Workstyle is about the way in which people deal with each other. Written rules and agreements will always be embedded with unwritten rules, i.e. ‘the way we do things around here’. Workstyle is about corporate culture at the team and group level. A characteristic of this level of observation is that it is continuously dynamic. This dynamism has a much shorter cycle and is more tangible than the culture of the entire organisation. In ‘The Connected Leader’, Emmanuel Gobillot describes the core skill of leaders as being the ability to connect the formal organisation to the real organisation.¹ This ‘real organisation’ consists of the opinions, relationships and meanings of employees and groups of employees. The formal organisation is a necessary but inadequate precondition for an organisation to be successful. All the implementations of new ways of working are known to connect with this vision of leadership, with ‘fewer rules’, ‘more communication at the bottom’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘stimulating entrepreneurship’.

- **The importance of workspace and technology:** Changing the workspace (physical environment) and technology (virtual environment) stimulates and guarantees a change in workstyle (Tables 1a and 1b). Included in the physical environment is the creation of a variation in workstations suitable for the activities being performed (an ‘activity-based work environment’) and the creation of transparent office environments.

  The first objective of the virtual environment is to enable employees to work wherever and whenever they want, working independently from place and time using mobile telephony and universally available applications and content. This also involves content management systems, workflows and community sites and virtual collaboration by means of chat or video-conferencing.

**PROBLEM-SETTING**

So far, this paper has discussed the changing world, ABW, workstyle, the three environments involved and the behaviour and values that are consistent with this ABW workstyle. The question now to be answered is how these subjects are interrelated. The follow-up question is whether this relationship is expressed in the same way in all projects, and the answer to this second question is: ‘No, on the contrary!’

In the rest of this paper three types of project will be introduced; these are characterised by different types of question and different approaches. The idea is that it is sensible to view a project through this lens because this makes it possible to perform the right implementation activities.
The problem-setting for this paper is: ‘How to align the ambitions, interventions and implementation approach of projects?’ The core idea in this regard is ‘context changes behaviour’. Anyone who has sent their 4-year-old children to school knows this. They swap the context of home, mummy and childcare for school, classmates and teacher. The behaviour of each child changes. They become calmer or more lively, just get used to it or start to blossom. In projects, this relationship between context and behaviour is termed ‘the lever’. Change the context and behaviour changes with it.

Reflecting on the projects the authors have worked on in the past, they found it

**Table 1a: How changes in workspace and technology change the way people work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect of virtual and physical assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1b: Values and skills in a new way of working**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour and values</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What behaviour is consistent with new ways of working? What is the appropriate attitude? And what skills are required? The answer to these questions is organisation-specific. The common denominator in these answers is the value of new ways of working, which provides</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• space for individual autonomy;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a leadership style based on equality;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• emphasis on carrying out day-to-day work in social contexts consistent with an attitude of trust and mutual dependency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Most important skills in the new workstyle**

• self-organisation;
• consulting/communicating;
• flexibility;
• autonomy;
• delegating;
• coaching; and
• collaborating
useful to classify these projects based on the level of ambition and the implementation approach used to leverage a change in context. A project can be ranked on a scale from level 0 to level 2. Each level is characterised by a typical change in context, which leads to a typical change in behaviour. Table 2 introduces these three levels.

Now that the three levels of projects have been introduced briefly, the paper will focus on their differences. This will be done in three steps and visualised in levers. First, the questions, ambitions and goals that the projects aim to set in motion will be elaborated. Secondly, the interventions carried out within the projects will be discussed. Then, an indication of the appropriate implementation approach (the third step) will be provided.

**Questions, ambitions and goals**

Specific questions, ambitions and goals are appropriate for each level. At level 0, the question for example is: ‘How can we cut costs in the work environment as our current environment is so little used?’. For example, as depicted in Figure 2, the goal is to reduce operating costs by 25 per cent and the ambition is to achieve this objective within two years without compromising employee satisfaction.

At level 1, all kinds of questions are encountered. ‘How can we make optimum use of modern ICT in our work?’ ‘What interior design will help us complete our projects efficiently?’ ‘How can we streamline collaboration between the front office and the back office?’ The goals and ambitions can be characterised as improvements in the existing way of working, with better use of employees’ existing knowledge and creativity and less rigidly organised collaboration. In summary, technical adjustments to space and technology supported by training programmes will result in behaviour that will make an organisation more successful. Some of these questions are shown as an example in Figure 3.

Finally, level 2 can be recognised by questions and goals that transcend workstyle. For example, ‘How can we actually become more customer-oriented?’ or ‘How can we combine the two cultures into one after the merger?’ These are often complex questions. Several initiatives have already

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**Table 2: The three levels of projects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Change in context . . . . . . leads to change in behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0: Cost reduction</td>
<td>Optimising the work environment and IT, saving costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workers ask ‘what’s in it for me?’ and show calculating behaviour; the best result is no revolt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Integral ABW</td>
<td>Launch of ABW and related ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People working in a workstyle which increases trust, appeal, remote control, self-control and common goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Organisational development</td>
<td>Launch of ABW and related ICT and the implementation of the workstyle referred to in level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational development, cultural change, increased company pride. Steps towards unification after merger, more external (customer) orientation etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
focused on this issue in the past. The nature of the issue is actually unclear because all those involved have their own conception of the issue and each intervention changes the issue, making it a moving target. In Figure 4 these questions and goals are described as ‘development on tough organisational challenges’.

**Interventions**

It has been seen that each level has its own questions, goals and ambitions. Obviously, the change in context, the intervention as it were, is also different at each level. At level 0, the intervention typically consists of introducing a flexible work environment in which employees no longer have their own workstation. Working from home might also be encouraged. In Figure 5 this intervention is indicated by the big arrow on the left side of the lever.

Level 1 interventions consist of coherently designing, developing and introducing an ABW workstyle. This involves variation in workstations suitable for the organisation’s activities and the introduction of ICT tools that provide maximum support to allow employees to work independently of time and place. The behavioural stream focuses on the use of training and peer supervision in subjects like self-organisation, managing remotely and calling people to account for their behaviour. In Figure 6 this is summarised in the arrow on the left.

The level 2 intervention consists of the complete level 1 lever, shown on the left of the balance in Figure 7. The reasoning at level 2 is that introducing an integrated ABW workstyle, with all that that entails, creates a certain amount of movement and space in the organisation, which encourages people to address tough organisational challenges. At level 2, the ‘lever’ metaphor also reaches its sell-by date. In some projects, it begins with the workstyle and the ABW work environment and subsequently affects organisational challenges as greater initiative towards customers. In other projects, the process is exactly the reverse and the organisation begins, for example, by focusing on new organisational values, which then gives rise to the need for a new work environment and fewer rules and procedures.

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**Figure 4** Questions, ambitions and goals at level 2

**Figure 5** Interventions added to the lever at level 0

**Figure 6** Interventions added to the lever at level 1

**Figure 7** ABW added as an intervention to the lever at level 2, bringing it in balance
Implementation approach

The implementation approach also differs for each level. Level 0 requires clarity. What are the plans, what does this mean for the employees and what is expected? At this level, an interactive approach involving a lot of employees is inappropriate because the objective is purely in the interest of the organisation. Directive communication is appropriate in this instance and the new way of working is enforced as necessary. Project managers have to expect resistance and have to ask themselves in advance how they will deal with it: negotiate, ignore it etc. The best result that can be achieved in terms of the way of working is that the operation proceeds unhindered and productivity does not suffer as a result of the new work environment. This results-oriented approach, in which cause and effect can be clearly indicated, is characterised by the words ‘leads to’ in Figure 8.

With Level 0 projects, the CRE organisation is particularly focused on reducing costs and making the portfolio more flexible. Serious consideration is being given to establishing a benchmark with the rest of the industry. There is little communication between CRE and the business where practical plans concerning the introduction are the main subject of discussion.

Level 1 requires a thorough project-based approach with suitable interaction with the user. The options include both a top-down, expert-led rollout and a bottom-up search, together with variations on this approach. The most important consideration is to ensure that the desired result is established at a certain point in time and, from that moment on, people will work towards it. Suitable strategies in this case are ‘enticement’ and ‘joint design’ as well as a strict, project-based approach. The focus on the people in this way of working must not be confused with an approach in which everyone can do their own thing. This still involves an organisation-wide rollout of a new way of working in which an attempt is made to strike a balance between the interests of the organisation and the interests of the employees. This approach is indicated by the word ‘enables’ in Figure 9. This is still a results-oriented approach but with wider participation.

The CRE organisation plays a bigger part at this level and communicates extensively with the IT department. There is greater focus on the future and best practices in the industry are taken into account. There is also more communication and collaboration with the business to set the ambition jointly. At level 1, the timeline of the physical stream, the building and fit-out is usually leading. The CRE organisation therefore plays an important part in the progress and timing of the project as a whole.

Finally, level 2 requires a small-scale, less focused and highly participative approach. In this approach, employees — generally at the individual level or in small groups — are asked to think about their way of working. The approach is characterised by a high degree of freedom as well as a lack of clarity.
as to the result to be achieved. A new way of working is created ‘on the fly’ by maintaining a continuous dialogue. The role of the project organisation consists of asking questions, understanding developments and embracing spontaneous initiatives. Change at this level always goes hand in hand with a (profound) learning process for those involved. The question ‘how do I do my work better or faster?’ is not key. The question is about the work actually done and whether an individual’s capabilities can be utilised in a way that is consonant with their life. But this does not mean that a level 2 movement can exist only within small organisations. Indeed, a number of the authors’ large clients have achieved their ambitions and results at level 2. In these cases, a large part of the organisation is engaged in development; however, what this development exactly looks like, and what the results will be, are determined on a small scale. Figure 10 shows how both sides of the balance influence each other; movement on one side creates movement on the other side, which potentially works both ways, from the left to the right and vice versa.

At level 2 the CRE organisation is the initiator/facilitator of the change but the responsibility for business transition is being led by the business. CRE takes part in the ongoing dialogue between the business and the IT and human resources (HR) departments with regard to the significance and the impact of the future way of working.

These three levels of project form a model that is useful to explain the implementation of a flexible workplace strategy.

Two case studies will be discussed in light of the following questions:

- ‘How do I know what level of ambition I have to deal with?’
- ‘Can I combine ambition levels?’
- ‘Does my implementation approach match my ambitions?’
- ‘When can I consider my project to have been successful?’

The position is that the difference in levels is important because it helps to create the right expectations in the business environment and because it helps to adopt the right change approach. Before discussing the case studies, following is a preview of the conclusions of this paper in the form of three recommendations:

- Do not take on projects defined at level 0.
- Realise that (some of) the ambitions have often been defined as level 2, whereas most organisations, managers and project managers show an implementation approach consistent with level 1, so do not be disappointed if the results are at level 1.
- Work on level 2 ambitions in parallel with executing a level 1 project or use these ambitions to supplement the ABW project after the transition.

CASE STUDIES
Although the potential benefits of the ABW approach are significant, they do not come automatically. There is the need for clear guidance, perseverance and a consistent process to achieve these ambitions.

From ambition to implementation
Implementing an ABW workstyle is a process that begins with the formulation of the ambitions that an organisation is aiming for and ends with the evaluation of the project. A typical level 1, integral ABW project is approached as shown in Figure 11.
Explanation of the process model (Figure 11)
Steps 1 and 2 in this model provide an insight into the ambitions and goals that the organisation wishes to link to their new way of working and the design principles for conceptualising the physical, virtual and behavioural environments that will help to achieve these goals. Steps 4 and 5 take place after the new work environment is in use. The workstyle is implemented between steps 2 and 4. At this stage, there is a difference between the approaches for the different streams. For example, the physical and virtual streams are usually the subject of expert planning, whereas the behavioural stream, the core of the development of a new workstyle, is created through interaction with the users.

The process model illustrated
As previously mentioned, organisational ambitions are often formulated at level 2. ‘We want more entrepreneurship from our public servants.’ ‘Taking responsibility will improve customer service.’ But in practice transitions at level 1 are often found to be tough as well. For managers, ABW means letting go of line-of-sight management, embracing relational leadership and learning to manage output. This can turn out to be harder than expected. For staff, challenging their existing daily norms and routines in how they go about their work leads to profound questions. Calling each other to account for their behaviour is something that people can be trained to do, but is difficult to keep up in practice.

When these types of question crop up, a profound change programme is one of the prerequisites for success. This requires careful examination of team dynamics, determining an appropriate pace of change, supporting middle management in implementing the change and managing specific needs in parallel.

The question that now arises is how the programmatic level 1 change is combined with level 2 ambitions and questions. Let
us first take a look at the journey that two organisations took, what happened as a result, what can be learned from it and the role that CRE played. And let us be clear: levels 1 and 2 can and need to be carefully intertwined, not mixed. Level 0, however, needs to be avoided: when cost-cutting is the sole driver of change, the best result on the human side is people not revolting.

**Case study: Retail division of an investment bank**

A retail division of an investment bank (2,300 people) began the search for a new building early in 2007. CRE representatives took the initiative and started exploring new opportunities around the globe. It was always in their nature to aim to align the building with the goals and values of the organisation. Looking for new premises afforded the opportunity to thoroughly review how this division worked. As a CRE staff member commented, it ‘was the first time we had really had a chance to ask what, if we had a blank sheet of paper, would our building look like?’ The CRE team involved senior leaders of the business from the start. As an example, business leaders were taken on trips around the globe to look at best workplace practices. This particular retail division was seven years old and realised that it needed a cultural shift. It needed to step up and do things differently, ie change, to create a real retail culture based on long-term client relationships. It was one division, but consisted of different businesses. The major constraint was that it was very siloed. The division’s previous office building with 28 small floors was not just a constraint, but a barrier.

Furthermore, there was an understanding that it was time to embrace the new world of technology, to avoid duplication of documents and find quicker ways to disseminate information; however, the transition to ABW was not so much IT-driven as IT-dependent. The driving force was really: ‘What is the aspiration?’ and ‘What are the solutions out there, both today and particularly tomorrow, to support that aspiration?’ This division wanted its people to come together as teams working without any psychological or physical boundaries. It was recognised that collaboration was key for the culture and that great ideas emerge from people coming together. During the exploration and ambition phase, three words were agreed that would set them up for success:

- transparency;
- flexibility; and
- collaboration.

The change strategy adopted was to bring people from the different streams (physical, virtual and behavioural) together in the process. The programme organisation ran as a matrix and was a holistic approach to delivering an environment that embodied the key objectives. It meant that IT meetings were held with interior designers involved in technical discussions and engineers attended meetings about communications with users. Having people in the room who were not experts on the subject of the meeting was a real positive factor for the outcome and effectively brought the user into the room.

People were prepared for working in a new way via the following interventions:

- large-scale kick-off sessions (to create the awareness and desire);
- e-learning (to build on the awareness and to provide some key knowledge regarding ABW);
- ABW workshops for staff and separate ones for leaders (to give more knowledge and to train them to work in this new way); and lastly
- follow-up with practical technical training regarding some of the new technology.
The ABW workshops were designed to get people ready for the change and to help them understand:

- the feelings they were likely to experience during the change journey;
- how they could support each other psychologically through the change;
- the vision for the new way of working; and
- the practical need to know information.

The workshops also gave employees a chance to see and touch the new technology, see the new workspaces and, most importantly, have a voice.

During the rollout of the behavioural interventions the opportunity was continuously used to learn from the process by asking for feedback via the workshops as well as via online surveys to understand how everything was received, see what could be learned from it and tweak the further rollout. The key outcomes for the client were as follows:

- 92 per cent of respondents would not like to return to their old way of working;
- employee engagement in this particular division had increased by 10 per cent;
- 55 per cent of respondents said this new way of working had made them more effective in their performance (6 per cent of people indicated they were less effective);
- 72 per cent of respondents indicated that they liked the freedom to choose different types of workspace very much (5 per cent did not like this freedom);
- 53 per cent reduction in paper printing;
- 14 per cent reduction in occupancy cost over the next ten years;
- palpable sense of pride taken in the modern workplace as employees continue to bring friends and family for a tour of the building.

**Reflection by the consultant**

The client followed a change approach that was centrally led by the project and change team. There was a massive buy-in from the senior leadership team from the start, which helped in setting the ambition. Most of the executive leaders were also part of the steering committee, which ensured continuous involvement and the possibility to view every decision in the context of the agreed ambitions.

The challenge was that the client operated in a fast-paced and task-focused environment, which sometimes resulted in less attention being paid to the implementation of ABW. This was counterbalanced by the great opportunity being afforded by the head of change stream also being the executive coach, which helped to change the behaviour of the executive leaders and encouraged most of them to ‘walk the talk’. In general, the client expected to get concrete answers/solutions on how to implement ABW. On several occasions, the questions were redirected to the client to encourage them to find answers themselves. This was challenging but definitely assisted in creating ownership.

**Case study: Central organisation of a cooperative bank**

A number of external drivers caused this bank to develop and introduce an ABW workstyle. The requirements of the bank’s customers were changing and technology was having an increasing impact. Competition was increasing and there was a great need for highly trained employees. A new head office was being built and the new accommodation had to be, as far as possible, in line with these technological and social trends.

First, customers today have increasing expectations of service. They want 24-hour accessibility and want to be able to access the most up-to-date banking information at all times. In addition, they want more individual recommendations on complex products and transactions. Added to this are the options provided by technology such as customer relationship management (CRM) and the internet. Finally, over the next ten
years, employees increasingly will choose for themselves where they will do their work and when. Increasingly, they will arrange the information and resources they need when they actually need them. The dividing line between working in a work environment and working in a home environment is becoming increasingly blurred. Combined with the bank's need for more highly trained employees, the emotional and social bond with the organisation, as well as a business relationship, are becoming ever more important for employees. They will choose an organisation that they want to be part of because the organisation's values appeal to them.

Objective
These causes have resulted in an interactive process in which a large group of employees from the business is used to determine the bank's new workstyle. It has been formulated in terms of a number of principles:

- having fewer rules and more responsibilities for individual employees;
- working in a more aware/more enterprising way;
- working independently of time and place, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in the office and everywhere;
- being activity-based;
- collaborating with each other, external staff and customers;
- taking responsibility and exercising freedom of choice.

Change strategy or implementation approach
The bank's journey does not have one single destination but many. Change means causing movement and a strategy of enticement is being adopted. This change strategy is based on the positive image of humankind, which assumes that people are capable of assuming responsibility and taking decisions themselves. This is being achieved by:

- making employees aware of new ways of looking at things/their own shortcomings;
- motivating them to see/learn/do new things;
- creating suitable joint learning situations;
- assuming that employees have their own goals and wishes;
- allowing people’s own energy to emerge;
- seeing complexity;
- removing any blockages;
- using symbols and rituals.

The idea is that to achieve real change, you must be able to connect to a dream, a vision.

To summarise, enticement involves showing a perspective/image that people want to connect with and removing any obstacles to realising that perspective. People change if they can connect to something that is in the future.

The physical stream and therefore CRE have an indirect role in this change. The fact that a new building is planned makes the change journey logical and necessary. In practical terms, only the facilities department had a supporting role in this change.

The benefits for the cooperative bank, as far as can be established, prior to the move of 3,300 people to the new office, were as follows:

- the project added to its image of being the most attractive employer (three consecutive first-place positions in a survey by a student and young worker magazine);
- at least 10 per cent reduction in occupancy costs per employee (as a result of less floor area in the new office);
- start-up of a network community on ABW, which shows the leading position of the bank in the field of ABW and modern employership;
- one central office, closing down several sub-offices, and shorter lines in the business due to this centralisation;
- improved cooperation between the head office and the local branches.
Reflection by the consultant
The customer wanted to do the main work in the project because it was a long-running process (dictated by the construction work) and the customer realised that it was the type of process that it had to address itself. Expertise that boils down to ‘this is how you do it’ does not suit those who want to pull the strings themselves, but has the opposite effect. The client decided to disconnect the workstyle from the new tower being built (the physical stream). The development of the workstyle was therefore rather remote from the CRE department. The thinking behind this was that the workstyle is about the work/life balance, the environment and the customer. Because the intention was to change this workstyle, then of course different assets were required.

It was/is a gradual process and the authors sometimes think that gradual change would have taken place even without the change programme. In other words, what did the consultant ‘cause’ to happen and what happened of its own accord? What is evident is that people are working with more digital and mobile devices (taking laptops into meetings, using much less paper etc). They divide their time more freely although, in the authors’ opinion, it is still the case that people are sticking to the routine of going out to work. What people personally think is it is great that new ways of working introduce more options, without the strict need to change, in other words, no one is forced into anything.

REFLECTION ON THE CASE STUDIES
In this part of the paper, we apply the lens of differentiating Level 0, Level 1 and Level 2 projects to the case studies. For both case studies, this leads to five observations.

Retail division of investment bank
Observation 1
The initial ambitions and goals were level 1, focusing on how the base-building and its work environment together with new technology could lead to behaviour that would make the organisation more efficient. After the CRE team introduced the business to ABW, the ambitions were raised to level 2: cultural change within the organisation with more collaboration between siloed businesses. The pre-move interventions (workshops and training) started off at level 1. Post-move interventions, workshops on collaboration and empowerment moved towards level 2.

Observation 2
The new building and the new environment were seen as a great catalyst, allowing the customer to operate more efficiently and to break down the physical barriers to collaboration. This is a line of reasoning consistent with level 1. Although there was this clear wish to encourage more collaboration between the siloed businesses and to change the working culture, the initial change programme did not focus on breaking down the cultural barriers between the businesses. This is an example of level 2 ambitions with level 1 implementation.

Observation 3
The individual senior leadership coaching was aimed at deep change and is a level 2 intervention. The wider change programme (e-learning, workshops and technology training) was primarily intellectual training (knowing what had to change) and was rolled out centrally across the different businesses. As a result of the size of the programme (getting 2,300 people ready in 12 months), there was no real extensive dialogue with the different businesses about what they wanted to create. Both the size and the speed indicate a level 1 approach.

Observation 4
The move to the new building and the change to the ABW workstyle are regarded as having been very successful. Employee engagement has been significant and,
according to senior leaders, collaboration has increased. But the post-occupancy experience has also indicated continuing challenges like: ‘How do I supervise a team I cannot see?’, ‘How can a team be a team when they are not necessarily in the same place?’ and ‘Does the ABW concept really increase collaboration across the different businesses?’ Resolving these issues is part of the journey and has become part of a permanent process of change management. This is an example of level 2 questions arising after the level 1 implementation and the move to the new office.

Observation 5
Interestingly, when the CRE team tried to roll out ABW to other divisions within the group, it started off with interventions at level 1 (even level 0). As a result, team members have been unable to find another business that has been willing/able to set ambitions and goals at level 2.

The cooperative bank
Observation 1
The challenges that the bank faced were regarded as fundamental to its operation. The new workstyle was defined in terms of a number of principles and therefore left a lot of leeway for interpretation and sense-making, and the change strategy was a people-oriented search. In short, in terms of the levers, the questions, the goals and the change strategy were consistent at level 2. So, how did that turn out in the course of the process? The first two steps of the programme consisted of reviewing the external context, making sense of it and then defining the workstyle in the guiding principles. All the parties regarded this level 2 way of defining ambitions and goals as successful.

Observation 2
The programme team has since grown and it is working on the design of the physical, virtual and behavioural streams. The participatory approach or, in other words, discussing things together until a shared image has been achieved, continues to be applied in full. But this did not always work well, for example, with the rollout of a training programme for the use of the new content management system. With the benefit of hindsight, too much time was spent talking about it and a project manager was not appointed who, with expert knowledge, could have done this job efficiently and effectively. This is an example of a level 2 approach to a level 1 problem.

Observation 3
At this stage, the programme splits into two parts. First is the part in which the search continues, eg into the way forward to give shape to the change in the organisation. This will eventually result in the enticement approach described above. The second part is much more practical and is intended to result in programmes of requirements for the IT environment, a programme of requirements for the physical work environment and the required adjustments to terms of employment. The first part goes very well with the by now well-worn approach in which everything is discussed with a lot of people (level 2). The second more practical part is less dynamic. Eventually, the collective approach is effective and a result is achieved, but the approach is certainly not efficient. It is often very slow and takes a lot of effort, again due to the mismatching of a level 2 approach to level 1 parts of the programme.

Observation 4
The design phase is followed by implementation. The responsibility for the creation of the physical work environment, IT and HR adjustments is placed with the line organisation. The programme is remote from this. It works well because the line organisation has been properly organised to create the programmes of requirements. The programme
is mainly concerned with achieving the change in working in the organisation. The programme still uses a consultation approach but this has now become more efficient because the number of people in the programme has decreased with the decreasing amount of work. At this moment, levels 1 and 2 are effectively separated (see Table 3).

**Observation 5**
The idea is for teams and departments to define their own change project, take responsibility for it themselves and also provide a project manager themselves. This is a level 2 idea: a joint and simultaneous process that is quite specifically completed ‘on the shop floor’. What is striking is that all these separate efforts are simply regarded as a project with its details, activities and schedules. Now it has suddenly become a level 1 approach. This leads to the last question in this reflection: ‘Do these separate projects deliver a result that is in keeping with the original goals of the organisation or has the whole programme ended up as a level 1 improvement?’ Only time will tell.

To summarise, the programme has developed from a level 2 process to a mainly level 1 process. That was logical in this case and eventually produced results. On occasion, too long was spent on level 2 (on the above-mentioned training programme). Whether the change projects at the team and individual levels will result in deep change (level 2) is still an open question. The answer is probably in some cases but not in others, which again is very suitable for the open and unfocused nature of level 2.

**CONCLUSIONS**
While precedents elsewhere can be valuable guides and while ABW may have demonstrable benefits, at the end of the day every company is unique and requires its own ‘customised’ solutions. The idea of introducing a level 1 and a level 2 approach is that, for those aspects at level 1, best practices from other projects are highly valuable. For the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: General tips for the implementation approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1: Integral ABW</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Define the desired results in advance and aim for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to resolve dilemmas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delay in the project means that better planning is required</td>
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<tr>
<td>Try to set a clear goal for the project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make use of experience and best practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create support by involving employees generally</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take the time to prepare a plan for the whole organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irritation and unease in the organisation are signs that the plan does not fit together well</td>
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</table>
very company-specific level 2 questions, there is only one way: the company-specific way. In both case studies, the aim was to achieve the greatest amount of flexibility and choice in the way people worked. The change management process prior to occupancy emphasised this and insisted on the process being a journey of discovery rather than the imposition of either an explicit or covert set of prescriptions. This was more the case for the cooperative bank than for the retail division of the investment bank. A level 2 approach is a fruitful way of approaching ABW programmes; however, this should not be overdone. The cooperative bank case clearly shows that, on many occasions, a level 1 project approach is preferable.

Seen from a level 2 perspective, the most successful approach in helping to manage the change to ABW is more akin to coaching. What is important in the transitions is for businesses to own the answers and that can happen only if the people involved take responsibility for discovering those answers for themselves — not using answers discovered somewhere else. What has also emerged for all the people involved in the transitions to ABW is that the process is ongoing or, to put it another way, cultural change is never-ending and is a permanent process of evolution. From this point of view, the built environment facilitates, but does not dictate, the way people go about performing their roles in the business. So, in summary:

- Do not take on projects defined as level 0.
- Realise that (some of) the ambitions have been defined as level 2, whereas most organisations, managers and project managers adopt an implementation approach consistent with level 1, so do not be disappointed if the results are at level 1.

- Work on a level 2 objective in parallel with the level 1 project, or use these objectives to supplement the ABW project after the relocation.

Following these three rules avoids projects that will lead only to frustration (level 0) and allows balance between putting into place results-oriented project management (level 1) where it is necessary and a people-oriented way of working where hopes for true change are high (level 2). What do these conclusions mean for CRE? Clearly, it has been seen that the introduction of flexible workplace strategies requires a thoughtful change process and it is vital to set clear vision and goals with the business. In the past, many CRE organisations have adopted a level 0 approach to create flexibility in order to reduce CRE costs, which has created a credibility issue and most businesses are sceptical about the intentions of the CRE organisation. The case studies show that involvement and ownership on the business side are critical. On the other hand, CRE is a key provider with regard to the physical stream (buildings with a creative and flexible work environment) and often have a powerful voice regarding the adoption of new workplace technology. So the required shift in thinking for a CRE manager is approaching level 1; however, the role CRE can play in successful workplace strategies is in instigating change and involving key stakeholders like senior business leaders and HR. For CRE, there is a great opportunity to be at the forefront of this and to be the facilitator of level 2 organisational change.

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**Reference**