

Advanced notice

How do you get thousands of people to change the way they work? Workplace consultant **Andrew Mawson** shares tips from his company's recent work on some of Europe's largest flexible or advanced working projects

Asking several thousand people to change the way they work to take on advanced working is a big ask. But that's what some major organisations have been doing recently as they have adopted advanced working to improve their business performance.

Advanced working is all about recognising that people can (and do) work in myriad different places and times both in and out of the office. It's about re-setting workplace arrangements for a modern world where assets are used to their full and where people have the tools to allow them to be as efficient as they can be.

The benefits of advanced working are well documented and

include: reductions in space between 20-30 per cent; improved employee effectiveness; zero churn costs; minimal swing space requirement; work life balance; reduced travel; lower carbon footprint; improved team work; ease of setting up cross-functional teams; and improved relationships.

To introduce advanced working all you have to do is to work out the best new working arrangements for the organisation and the individual, make sure the space and technology infrastructure will support mobility in and out of the office and then take people with you on a 'thought journey' where every one of the several thousand people in the organisation have the chance to get comfortable with the changes. Simple right?

Although advanced working is a relatively straightforward idea, when people have fixed ideas about work and 'their workplace', and have grown up in a world where the higher you get in status terms, the more you get in facilities terms, it takes quite a lot of energy, influence and power to change behaviours and attitudes. Let's face it people have been doing the nine to five in the office and I have 'my desk' routine for well over a 100 years. It shouldn't come as a surprise that people need some help in coming to terms with what is for some a very significant change.



Let's say you are the head of FM or real estate for a large organisation and you have a desire to instil more modern workplace and ways of working. The first thing you need to do is find an opportunity. These usually come from the following scenarios:

- The acquisition of a new building or the refurbishment of additional premises
- The desire to rationalise space, sometimes as a result of a merger, takeover or 'downsizing'
- Running out of space due to business growth
- Desire to change the culture of the business

For some FMs it's much easier to do things the way they have always been done. The idea of trying to convince the board and several thousand people to change is, for some FMs, just too scary. But if you want to demonstrate that you are an innovative leader trying to contribute from your discipline and can put FM on the map in your organisation, then here is your chance.

You need a spark to light the bonfire. In order to get senior people interested so that they can release funds and time to investigate the subject fully, you need an outline business case that sets out in rough terms the scale of the opportunity and the benefits to the organisation. This must 'tune in' and relate to the current challenges the business unit faces if it is to be compelling. It must also give some indication of how long the payback will take. Although cost is an important feature in this business case, issues such as productivity, culture, environment and agility may sway some team members.

Find the enthusiasts with power

But of course even the best outline business case is hopeless without someone to sell it for you in the board room and argue the case when you've done your presentation, so you need to find someone at senior level for whom it makes sense and who will spend time to understand the subtleties and arguments and be an advocate for your cause.

As well as FM, the other key players in applying advanced working are in the IT and HR functions. They own a substantial part of the infrastructure needed to make advanced working happen. So try to build a coalition between the functions so that you can understand each others

strategies and priorities and work out how best to influence them. Do this early in your process, but don't stop if you find that they have other priorities. If you can come up with a shared strategy which you and they can share and present, you will be onto a winner

Secure leaders' commitment

Imagine that you are on the board and you have a unit of 5,000 people. Your unit has been asked to make the transition to advanced working by the head of FM as part of a relocation to a new building. You and your team are working long and hard already to deliver today's business. You have plenty on your plate already without embarking on a major culture change programme. Sometimes, while the cultural and operational benefits are on offer to the user unit, the financial benefit of reduced space costs fall to the central real estate and FM function. So you are going to need not only a compelling case to convince those with the purse strings to part with money to create the right infrastructure, you are also going to need to present a compelling case to the leaders of the unit to which you plan to introduce the concept. They will have different styles, experiences and interest in the subject. They will need to dedicate time and energy to getting their people to work differently, so you've got to tune in to the things they are interested in.

A visit paints a million words

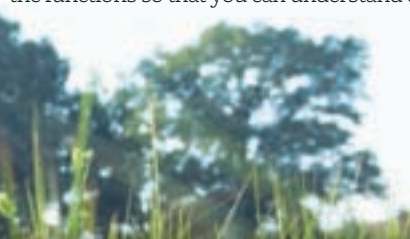
Not only will you have to find the benefits of advanced working that will make a difference to them and their units, you will also have to help the leaders to understand how it really works. You can talk to them until you are blue in the face, but nothing is better than arranging a visit to an organisation that has applied advanced working on a large scale. It helps to explain the subject, provides evidence that it works and give some re-assurance that it can be done.

Dispel misconceptions

Sadly, senior people have as many misconceptions about advanced working concepts as the rest of the population. The only difference is that they have more power and often their ideas and beliefs become enshrined in 'law'. Old fashioned ideas will prevail unless they are challenged and corrected, but who is brave enough to do that? Have you ever tried to challenge a senior business leader in a public forum... not a good idea. Much better to try to organise one-to-ones where you might be able to put the other view. As a consultant, slightly immune from the corporate power hierarchy and with external experience it's sometimes easier to enter into a challenging debate with a business leader. You might lose the account, but you won't lose your job.

Governance

The aggregation of power and the gaining of a shared understanding and agreement is critical if you are going to be able to implement advanced working across a large organisation. Consistency and fairness of treatment is vital if you are going to avoid tensions. If one unit is doing something different to another or if one manager is interpreting the protocols differently you can expect people to express indignation or to make similar interpretations. So setting up a steering group chaired by a senior leader and made up of powerful business leaders from the units to be involved is



WORKSTATION BOOKING SYSTEM

To book or not to book, that is the question

When you apply advanced working at scale our experience is that you need to consider using a workstation booking system so that many people book the space they need when they are in the office. Why, well because it helps to give people some re-assurance that they will have a desk about where they be

on a given day, it gives people a tool for networking and to enable them to find colleagues, but also because you need some better information about the use of space. So the issue of booking needs to be discussed early in the process along with a discussion on the regime's to be used including permissions, booking window, booking period, information flows and integration with other systems.

◀ the first step. Then similarly setting up a group from within each unit you plan to implement in and finally to recruit change agents who can work with you to deliver the help their colleagues to make sense of the change for themselves.

Pilots

It's unwise to apply advanced working for the first time in your organisation on a large scale without first having piloted the concept somewhere on a small scale. Why? Because until you do you will have little idea of the attitudinal and behavioural challenges ahead; you'll have little by way of experience and arguments to convince others to change; and because you will not have clarity about what you are offering and the 'components' that are needed to deliver.

It's inevitable, regardless of how many times as a consultant you have implemented advanced working, organisations need to learn for themselves the intricacies of implementing advanced working. In practice people want to see it working somewhere in the organisation before they'll trust you to apply it on a large scale. So pilots are a key component. Not only do they give you a chance to learn, modify and monitor, but it's only through piloting that you'll be in a position to develop what we call 'The kit of parts' in other words all the policies, protocols, systems, spaces components and change processes needed to make it happen smoothly. The devil, I'm afraid, is right down in the detail.

Get clear about the proposition

Advanced Working is often misunderstood or open to interpretation. Everyone has their own idea about what it is and what it isn't. One group will think it's all about working from home, another will think it's about hot desking, yet another will think it's about flexitime. The proposition should explain what advanced working means in practice; what is mandatory and optional; the rules and protocols and where they apply; and the supporting technology.

Get people on side

Getting the top leadership team on side is key to getting the right momentum. The way to do this is through visits, videos, one-to-ones to get consistency of understanding. Using a formal session to present and discuss the proposition creates a vehicle for dialogue which in turn aids understanding that leads on to commitment. The key however is finding the benefits that will convince the team to give you a yes vote and then nurture people on the top leadership team who will hold the torch for advanced working.

Project teams are generally made up of professionals who have knowledge about their specific areas of expertise and have delivered new buildings and refurbishments many times over. So they all come with their own very strong view of how offices should be designed and how things should be done.

With advanced working we have a whole set of new things for the project team to consider in relation to the capacity of the building, the sequencing of activities in relation to the change process, the design of space and the interlinking of each of the work streams to each other, the move management sequence and the consistent capture of information. But underpinning all that, the project team needs to understand why they might need to re-think the way they deliver projects, so some serious work needs to be



FM QUICK FACTS

Opportunities to apply advanced working come from scenarios such as:

- new building acquisition or refurbishment
- rationalising space due to growth, merger, takeover or downsizing
- forging change in the culture of a business

done at the front end on any new project to ensure that the project team get it, buy into the ideas and in turn re-consider how they need to deliver their contribution as a team.

Don't forget the people

If there are 5,000 people in scope for the project, we need to make sure that all 5,000 people have been engaged in a dialogue so they really understand what it's all about and can make sense of it and become comfortable to make the shift in behaviour needed. They have to re-learn the way to work.

To make this happen you need consistency of message, consistency of material and consistency of style and approach. We've found that the way to do this is through a network of influential, articulate change agents recruited by the steering groups and trained to be able to work out how advanced working will be applied to their group and to be effective in dealing with the engagement with their colleagues. The objective is to get 80 per cent of people ready for the change so that when they eventually start the advanced working people wonder what all the fuss was about.

It's not all over once doors open

When you move in to the new space or when you switch the booking system on is not the end of the change process but the beginning of the second phase. Sadly some people will not have been entirely engaged through the process and of course you will have new joiners who won't have had any exposure to the ideas and solutions. So the change process needs to keep going until the change has become a natural part of business as usual.

There's a need to be continual monitored through the early days to make sure sharing ratios (the relationship between the number of people in a team and the number of spaces they have been allocated) are effective and that people are conforming with protocols that have been agreed for work and use of space. So two years later you've managed to bring about an evolution in the space, technology and people from the old world to the new. Your influence has brought about a change for everyone in the organisation and it's all gone smoothly. What a great feeling, you've made a difference - isn't that what great FM is all about? **FM**

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