

## **Five Trends that are Dramatically Changing the Workplace**

The rate of change of work and the workplace is shifting into a much higher gear. Today, work is conducted across an increasingly broad range of settings, geographies, and time frames, propelled by five major trends that offer a context for organizational strategies:

### **Five Major Trends**

1. The continuing distribution of organizations. Ultimately, workers, work and workplaces serve the needs of the organizations, and they will reflect the continuing spatial and organizational distribution of these organizations with more distributed work styles and workplaces.
2. The availability of enabling technologies and social collaboration tools. Technologies for collaborating with co-workers wherever they are will continue to become cheaper, easier-to-use and ubiquitous. They are already being combined and synthesized into platforms which feature a wide range of tools to collaborate asynchronously and synchronously, cheaply and ubiquitously.
3. The coming shortage of knowledge workers. There will be a shortage of younger knowledge workers in the coming years as the Baby Boomer generation retires and younger workers take their place. Organizations will have to compete for workers who are more comfortable with and seek flexible work, including alternative workplaces.
4. The demand for more work flexibility. Workers will demand more work flexibility—the ability to decide how they should define and tackle specific problems and tasks, and when and where work is done.
5. Pressure for more sustainable organizations and work styles. Perhaps the 800-pound gorilla is the push for organizations to drastically reduce their carbon footprint, whether through regulations or market-driven incentives and disincentives. Organizations will have to examine all major sources of greenhouse gas emissions to comply, including tapping the potential of how, where and when we work: group locations, building efficiencies, commute patterns, and air travel practices.

### **Five Implications for Work and the Workplace**

These trends, in turn, are producing five major implications for organizations:

1. The continued distribution of workplaces. Centralized offices will evolve, providing a greater variety of work settings to support collaboration and diversity of needs. Simultaneously, workers will increasingly work in other distributed workplaces: at satellite offices, supplier and customer locations, off-shore locations and home.
2. The challenge of keeping workers engaged and connected. As workers are more physically dispersed, it becomes more difficult for them to engage with one another. To encourage socialization, planners need to link conscious workplace strategies with social technologies, and work policies.

3. The difficulty of changing culture. The hardest part of changing the workplace is not the physical environment or technology, it's changing the people. The key to success is to give employees a voice in the planning process, and allow them the choice of when, where, and how they work.
4. Adopting new workplace practices. With workers increasingly scattered
5. geographically, work practices need to adapt. Because it is no longer possible to communicate casually with a distributed work team, leaders need to formalize good work practices for the team.
6. The emergence of other alternative workplaces. Workplaces and work styles are not static, but continually evolve. New trends are percolating at the grass roots level that may influence larger organizations over the coming years.

New ways of working and workplaces are no longer just the trials of the innovators and early adapters. They are quickly becoming mainstream and rudimentary for most companies. Get ready to embrace these new approaches or you may find that most other organizations "got it" and moved on.