

# MAKING A MOVE

KAREN SKILLINGS explains how you can take the guesswork out of managing your next business relocation.

**F**acilities managers can take a critical role in their organisation's management of business relocations. While commercial lease agreements, design briefs and fitout plans are carefully reviewed and given the adequate resources to support requirements, business relocations often don't receive the same attention.

Aside from the organisational problems that a bad relocation can cause – a drop in staff morale, reputational damage or extensive costs – there are other penalties to be paid for insufficient or late planning of the relocation. All too often, not understanding the complexities of relocations is only acknowledged in hindsight. It's time to take a lack of process and planning off the 'Lessons Learned' register.

Any property consolidation or relocation should have several aspects and benefits, ideally expenditure, costs savings and other financial benefits to the company through productivity gains, as an example.

Although the business case and property procurement strategy argues the value of the relocation from the organisational perspective, most companies see the planning of the relocation as a distinct cost isolated in importance from the other business activities (fitout, change management) occurring over the same period.

Whatever the budget or constraints, the organisation will need to assess the key business functions and activities that the relocation will affect, including the human resources, information technology, change communication and technical requirements, and whether the organisation has the personnel with the specific knowledge or skill set to manage the relocation.

## So what are your choices?

### Nominate a staff member to oversee the job

This person may not have any relocation training, but they are willing to prove they are capable of such a project. They can be rightly anxious, however, about where to start and how. These are people who may struggle to manage the relocation as well as meet their other responsibilities; it's unlikely that they will be excused from those during this period.

Complaints surface swiftly when there is little evidence of planning and communications. The staff member may face

the imminent risk of losing the confidence of management and staff. The lesson here for companies is that too often they downplay the importance of the relocation from the outset, often placing an inexperienced person in charge of this complex job.

### Forming a relocation committee

Consider having a group of people involved in the project. Comparable to any other teams being formed during this time, the relocation team will provide guidance and direction across the human and technical aspects of the project. The team may include an IT expert, a telephony expert, a project director, a project administrator, a change manager, a communications manager, a safety rep and, of course, the relocation project manager. The list can go on and team sizes of up to 15 people are common.

The regular mistake that companies make here is assembling a group of people with relevant skills and expertise in their work stream, but with no clue how to start planning a business relocation. Relying on prior experiences from previous churns or rollouts may not be the best approach for the organisation's current needs. Also, as the team disbands at the end of the project, the organisation is left with no one with the distinct skills to run a relocation from start up to close out, without help from others.

### Outsource the relocation

Complete a comparable check of the marketplace to find a relocation management company to adequately reflect the scale of the move for which you should be preparing and ask them to manage all procurement, general bookings, communications and other move management obligations.

The company will work with a nominated staff member who will be the face-to-face contact for business functions and activities linked to the relocation, and to the staff undertaking any administrative or technical support activities.

The problem with this model is that a good amount of time and money has been invested to complete the project, but in the event of a future relocation churn or another project, you are no closer to being able to run this internally. The reality is further costs to do a job that you should have a

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staff member trained for by now. Whatever your choice, it will reflect on your budget and your business needs. It makes sense to have all the information you need from the start to make the right decision.

### **A move to the future**

There are significant advantages to upskilling your team to successfully manage a business relocation. Training your team will give your organisation the option of tackling a relocation where the brief can match the internal capabilities.

Otherwise, each time an accommodation change governs a move, you will need to factor in the worst case scenarios – inexperienced teams, high costs, lack of process or preparation – because you are not sure what it takes to get it right.

Educating your most valued asset – your employees – in relocations will benefit your organisation in both immediate and long-term strategic planning. At the barest minimum you'll see that a better trained team can equate to less downtime and less variation costs from removalists and other third parties. It may well also result in increased workforce engagement (although that may be difficult to quantify),

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which can be reflected by less noise, fewer complaints and more acceptance.

Ultimately, you are investing in maintaining essential service delivery for clients and staff, achieving the optimal relocation model for your organisation and having the right relocation training, tools and support. ●

*Karen Skillings has written several publications on business processes related to space planning and relocations. She is the principal of Skillings Audits.*