

Technology should never come at the cost of staff



Karen Skillings.

The implementation of new technology can be an exciting time for a business, but managers must ensure their staff are supported throughout the adoption process, writes KAREN SKILLINGS.

but they should also be thinking about the people-side factors as well, and how new technology is promoted and introduced to the workforce.

OUTCOMES SHOULD BE BALANCED

With a new wave of innovative technology just around the corner, business managers are making gargantuan efforts to reach decisions about smart technology, floor configurations and working styles.

One can't blame them for being enthusiastic about the potential. Who doesn't want a smarter and slicker building that's capable of better supporting your business, and delivering to the market faster and more efficiently than ever before?

Be aware, however, that things often go wrong when enthusiasm results in implementation being rushed or, worse, overlooked completely.

Furthermore, there is often untapped potential to increase the efficiency of the workplace by understanding the small changes that enhancing pre-existing technology can remedy now, proving a far better solution than rolling out something new.

THINK ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY YOU NEED

It's important that businesses add exciting new technology to a 'discovery list' in the strategy phase of a project to encourage executive teams to think about the benefits it could bring. Yet they also need to consider the following:

- What is the right technology for the business?
- What technology has the business got now that isn't being optimised?
- Who is inputting to the IT/technology 'wants' in the design brief?
- Will the building for which the technology is meant support its design brief?
- Does the budget allow for the cost of implementing new technology?
- How soon can changes be implemented once the technology's requirements are determined?

CONSIDER DESIGN AND CREATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

The opportunity to create a better and more technologically driven workplace is often combined with explorations into best practice, benchmarking exercises and finding out what the cool kids are doing, such as the use of smart apps.

That's fine, but businesses need to remember that changing technology means people expect more and different things from their workplace. The introduction of

There's been a lot of talk recently about the increasing amount of technology being incorporated into workplace projects, and how this technology will be the critical enabler of agile and other synthesised environments. This is all very nice, but often the benefit of delivering mobility systems and precinct connectivity is perceived to come at the cost of staff experience and productivity. It is not that businesses shouldn't be exploring or investing in emerging trends and technology solutions that support future working styles, but they should also not assume that this technology will be welcomed and quickly adopted, need little effort in implementation or prove intuitive for staff to learn.

No technology is a one-fit solution for all. With that in mind, not only should the business manager be making decisions based on the risk and/or reward ratio of a potential real estate and technology investment,

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new technologies into the workplace should be adaptable to both traditional workplace strategies and new ways of working, and be balanced between supporting future face-to-face and virtual interactions, and solving the problems that exist today.

CONSULT YOUR IT PROFESSIONALS

It is important that project teams understand that a business' data strategy should be leading customer experience and solutions. A project is not designed to exist within a bubble, yet I often receive feedback from IT professionals who say projects deliver things they are not yet ready to support.

IT departments want to see more consultation about future technology that supports flexible, low-cost, self-service practices before other staff hear about them. They want to participate in its implementation, support changes, work to include the

technology into the business data strategy that underpins the way a business runs and see how success will be delivered and measured. After all, not only will they be the ones left to support the technology, but they also share some of the responsibility in introducing such changes to staff.

PRIMARY FOCUS

When considering new technology, it's important not to overlook the fact that some staff, even some divisions, may be happily working within a decentralised operating model. This model enables them to run their own data management functions, meaning changes as a result of new technology could see a shift in more than just their accommodation. Moving staff to a more enterprise-wide alignment of data-related initiatives can prove challenging, and that's not a challenge most project teams will be able to handle.

There is no argument that new technology can create a more sustainable workplace, improve staff wellness etc. Nevertheless, loading up the shopping cart with too much new technology may unwittingly create a loss of connection with staff, as well as confusion over what the enterprise-wide goal may be.

SEEK INPUT FROM STAFF

New technology can't be delivered separately from the data strategy of a business. Failing to consider proper protocol means workplace projects can disconnect a business' people, places and technology just as easily as it can connect them.

The right message, and right pace, observes that:

- The customer experience and solution is fundamental to leading technology changes.
- The project team consults with the technology department, divisional heads and other SMEs to determine how the business operates from division to division.
- The project team understands the big picture, and takes any opportunity to introduce relevant new technology.
- The project encourages input from staff to determine where technology can help improve their work.

CONSIDER HOW YOU SELL TECH TO STAFF

Businesses often try to sell new technology as the best thing that could happen to staff. Let's face it though – technology is ultimately designed to benefit the business.

If the business doesn't coach staff through changes, and invest in helping them understand how technology can support their roles, staff may soon revert to their old way of doing things.

The Achilles heel of new technology integration is the most basic of all things – balanced delivery. There is no such thing as 'intuitive change' when it comes to technology in the workplace, so project teams shouldn't be expected to sell the idea to staff. They won't buy it. ●

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