new ways of working

officeprinciples

Summary

Agile working is a new way of working which combines modern technological advances, shifting attitudes to the workplace and the changing demands on employees in the 21st century. In this article we consider precisely how agile working can increase staff productivity and benefit both employers and employees. We find that for employers, agile working contributes to a heightened sense of morale amongst staff which can then translate into increased customer satisfaction. For employees, agile working can transform how they feel about work and how they combine working and everyday needs, which leads to greater sense of both wellbeing and purpose at work.

What is Agile Working?

Agile working is the process of bringing together physical and digital technology, so that staff are able to work when, where and however they need to. Freeing staff from being tied to one physical workspace empowers employees to work as they feel best. This in turn boosts staff productivity, job satisfaction and encourages "Smart working", where better outcomes are the result of innovative ways of performing tasks.

Whether workers work at home, on the move or within the office is therefore up to them in an agile working environment. A modern office designed to facilitate agile working will consist of an open plan layout, low level furniture, flexible meeting areas, standing desks, breakout areas where staff can relax and discuss ideas, and informal meeting areas. All of these factors contribute to both a free flow of ideas and people throughout the working space.

Flexible working and agile working overlap in some respects. Flexible workers have the right to choose the hours they work, within reason, and can work from home at the discretion of their employer. However, enlightened employers are now arguing that work is an activity, not a place. Agile working is therefore more independent of location than flexible working. However, flexible working areas, standing desks and hot desking are all aspects of office design which reflect the agile working approach within an office environment.

Agile working also incorporates the idea that a good worker is a smart worker, namely someone who rather than performing the same tasks over and over again is able to work out new and innovative ways of doing things. Facilitating this is the idea that colleagues should be freer to work together, hence a more open and collaborative style of office design is becoming popular.

How Does Agile Working Benefit a Company?

There are many ways in which a company will benefit from agile working. Firstly, by ensuring office space is used in the most efficient way possible, an office can create space for more staff. At the same time, agile working is cost-effective, as overheads will be reduced if employees work from home. In fact, agile working can reduce property overheads by as much as 20%.

Agile working would make a company more attractive to many young, high calibre potential employees looking for a vibrant business who can retain a diverse workforce. It will also help to create a positive and productive working environment, thus reducing staff churn and ultimately retaining great team members.

Another advantage of agile working is of course the notable boost in self-esteem given to employees who are afforded greater autonomy over their working habits. This should see offices experiencing better rates of staff productivity and lower absenteeism rates.

In terms of branding, creating an agile working environment is the perfect opportunity to express your brand in a unique and creative way. The upshot of creating a more positive working environment is that efficient working will lead to bottom line profits, this increasing brand equity.

Reports suggest that agile working can also contribute to better continuity amongst the workforce, as staff who may previously have had to leave as a result of a change of circumstances are now able to instead continue their jobs on manageable hours. Happier employees should result in happier customer relations, as clients can pick up on how staff emotions which in turn reflect on the company as a whole.

Increased employee loyalty and customer satisfaction are perhaps the ultimate rewards for employers who introduce agile working into their companies.

How Does Agile Working Benefit Employees?

The benefits of agile working for employees are as manifold as they are for employers. Of course, the most obvious advantage for employees is that they are more able to fit in any other commitments around their work. In this way employees can make better use of their spare time. For people with children or who care for dependants this can be extremely useful. However, everyone can benefit from agile working. Giving employees choices and greater autonomy can only enhance attitudes towards working and the company overall. Feeling in control of one's workload is after all incredibly important to many people.

Other advantages of agile working for employees include having the choice of when to travel to work. For instance, by avoiding rush hour, employees take out the stress of the morning commute when coming to work. By being able to work remotely, employees may find themselves thinking about work in a whole new light, thus facilitating "Smart thinking" as mentioned earlier. Developing new and innovative working techniques are skills a person can both benefit from and retain for the remainder of their working lives.

Balancing work and life is an important task, but one which can be made much easier by the introduction of an agile working policy.

Conclusion

We have seen that agile working has many advantages, both for employers and employees. Increased productivity and an increased sense of well-being are the factors perhaps the most notable both for the company as a whole and for individual employees. By enabling agile working, a business could well see an increased turnover and a higher rate of customer and staff retention. Perhaps the message to take from these findings is that agile working could well work for companies in many sectors, both public and private. The question to examine for office designers is precisely what does an office designed for agile workers look like?

Flexible working areas, designed to enable workers to step away from their desks and work elsewhere are one way of allowing an office to facilitate an agile working policy. Utilising standing desks or instigating a hot-desking approach will help workers to feel like it is legitimate to work at other places rather than sitting at their desks. Informal meeting spaces will facilitate the type of smart working, impromptu business meetings between colleagues and clients which will drive a business forward. These are just some of the ways in which an office can be designed to be more agile worker friendly.

The question is what changes will you make in your office?