A WHITE PAPER REVIEWING THE FUTURE OF MOBILE WORKERS AND THE INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIRED TO SUPPORT THEM.
INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this series we looked at the worker of today and tomorrow - how they work, where they work and some of the tools they use. This threw up obvious issues about how to support them and provide the infrastructure they need.

In this section we focus on the areas where knowledge work takes place. We are all familiar with the ubiquitous coffee shop culture but the shift is far more complex than that.

Knowledge workers need different things, they need time (and space) to think but they also need to come together for collaboration – in informal interchanges or more structured larger forums.

So, is there any such thing as the ideal workplace?
Office design began by reflecting the workflow in a business – taking its cue from factories for which the office was often a ‘bolt-on’. Fixed desks and then the much-mocked cubicle became the staple of most workplaces throughout the 20th Century – and offices became to all intents and purposes simply ‘paper factories’ where the currency was data and records as opposed to information and knowledge.

The end of the century saw the evolution of ‘hot desking’ as a familiar concept. But at that time, the technology wasn’t available to make it more than an internal ‘timeshare’ model whose primary benefit was to save space.

With more and more people working remotely – from home, from customers’ premises or ad hoc on the road, as freelancers, or for themselves – the role of the traditional office will change. Having been originally designed for isolated, desk-bound individual workers, the new era of smart working will see smart offices to cater for them.
Fixed desks will still remain in many places and with the focus of innovation on mobility, it is worth remembering that a large proportion of workforces still spend a majority of their time at a fixed base.

The Leitz survey, carried out across 4 major European markets (UK, Germany, France, Italy) showed that 40% of workers do all of their work in an office – but at the same time, of the others whose jobs involve mobile working, nearly a fifth spend more than half of their working life away from the office.

Many of those fixed desks are once again hosting hot desking thanks to improved communications systems, the gradual demise of desktop computing and the growth of mobile workers – as well as continual pressure on the cost of office space in most cities.

As Knight Frank reported in September 2014, “Premium pricing for real estate is found in those cities with the most high value knowledge workers, which consequently attract the world’s leading corporations”.

So when we’re in the office – as a permanent base, or simply passing by – how do we behave? Personal connectivity within the workplace will surely lead to better results. In the context of increased mobile, out of office working, this seems like a paradox, but there is emerging evidence that proximity and structures that encourage physical ‘accidental encounters’ benefit outputs – and this is equally true of mobile as fixed location workers.

Communal areas, zoning and places where people can simply get together informally are not simply designed to give people a less rigid environment. They are catalysts to a smarter approach to working – greater creativity and greater productivity – often stifled in formal meetings, following fixed agendas or influenced by hierarchy.
According to the research 67% of office workers feel that formal internal meetings are much less productive than the informal last minute and ‘corridor’ meetings that drive collaboration.

A 2014 study in the Harvard Business Review, ‘Workspaces that move people’ showed that offices designed to allow mingling between people from different functions raise levels of innovation. Samsung’s new US headquarters is designed to ‘spark not just collaboration but that innovation you see when people collide’.

The Leitz research panel would suggest that many companies have some room for improvement here – only 15% rate their offices as ‘Very good’ in providing flexible space for project teams and 16.5% as ‘Very good’ in offering informal areas for ad hoc meetings.

From the traditional office we are moving to a new working ecosystem – fixed base, mobile, hubs and home.

The original concept of the worker going to work is evolving to work coming to the worker.

From relatively low flexibility, geographically tied, to a freer, more flexible way of operating. Different people will adapt to this in different ways and personality, outlook and life stage are key determinants.

Whether offices will reach the extreme of this conceptual “experimental work landscape” (by Rietveld Architecture Art Affordances and Barbara Visser in the Netherlands), is open to debate.
Formerly the domain of creative industries, many cities are seeing the growth of hubs – communities of like-minded businesses coming together – Generators, Incubators etc. Just as with the accidental connections in single business office spaces, diversity leads to creativity.

Hub Raum in Berlin is one example – as well as an incubator program (seed-investment, etc.) they offer co-working space, workshops, mentoring to selected startups.

Startupbootcamp is a global network of industry-focused accelerators taking start-ups global by giving them direct access to an international network of the most relevant partners, investors and mentors in their sector.

With so many businesses in a state of dynamic change, commitment to a fixed office environment often doesn’t make commercial sense.
Serviced office spaces are showing rapid growth. A 2014 report by the City of London Corporation has shown that since 1995, the amount of serviced office space in the City of London has quadrupled to nearly 2 million sq ft, with an average tenure of 18 – 24 months.

**Office space in the City of London has quadrupled to nearly 2 million sq ft.**

Regus, one of the leaders in this area has grown in 25 years from a concept to 1,800 offices across 100 countries, providing serviced offices, virtual offices meeting rooms, and videoconferencing to clients on a short or long-term contract basis.

29% of our research sample work at a serviced office at least once a month and for the smart worker on the move, the next stage will be smaller pop-up workspaces at airports, stations, and motorway services, where individual or two person pods can be hired by the hour.
Working in the car currently is often uncomfortable – and if you’re driving, illegal. Driverless car technology will make the car a further extension of the office for smart workers on the move.

The navigation and driving will be done for you, freeing up valuable time for chauffeured work.

**Smartness will increasingly be built into the infrastructure of offices – from equipment to fixed materials.**

To that end, personal ergonomics for example will become increasingly important. This isn't simply about having comfortable chairs and supports to prevent Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI), but combining aesthetics and utility, making the workspace more pleasant and efficient.

The new $5bn Apple building designed by Norman Foster is a classic example of the new approach to office work.
In the past we only had fixed networks and only computerised devices were Internet connected. Now there are over 2 billion Internet-enabled devices in the world and this is set to grow nearly 10 fold by 2018.

Office equipment will be intelligent and capable of being personalised. So we will see heating and lighting remotely adjustable – app-controlled and able to detect the mood of the individual or the meeting or respond to voice or face recognition.

In the Leitz proprietary research, we asked how many have or would like lighting at their personal workspace where they can adjust the brightness or the mood and colour tone themselves; 41% and 33% respectively say they want it. So there is a real unmet need here.

Internet-enabled machines like copiers will increasingly communicate when they are running low on paper stocks, will be able to order more themselves and detect and even self-repair emergent problems. So the angry queue at the copier or the panic stricken call to the service engineer will be things of the past.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE FROM THE LIGHTING IN YOUR PERSONAL WORKSPACE?

41% ADJUSTABLE BRIGHTNESS

33% ADJUSTABLE MOOD/COLOUR TONE

33% STYLISH AND MODERN LOOK
In the future office, everything will be capable of being turned into a screen, from a wall, to a tabletop to a car windscreen. Furthermore, innovations like Windows HoloLens mean that images can exist as holograms overlaid onto surfaces – or even in the air.

We will see the advent of robotics to carry out simple tasks – from stapling to lunch deliveries. But the emphasis is on simple. Forget the ‘Turing Test’ of developing a machine with intelligence equivalent to a human being – no one has yet built a robot with the dexterity to work on a supermarket checkout.

With the much-discussed ‘Internet of Things’ our world of work and home will be truly intelligent and connected. In January 2015, Samsung announced that 90% of the products it sells will be Internet-enabled by 2017. “The Internet of Things is not about things, it is about people”, said Samsung Chief Executive Yoon Boo Keun.

The key question is when does the physical work space become smarter, more knowledgeable than the person working there?
As the modern workplace evolves from being purely desk focused to an holistic environment, as more and more people work remotely for all or part of the time, presence at the desk becomes a very poor measure of productivity.

Unilever has embraced agile working as a concept and has a declared strategy to judge performance on results rather than hours worked.

We’ve seen the differing expectations of different generations and lifestages in a previous section and this is still a determinant in how people believe their input should be evaluated. The Cisco Connected World Technology Report in 2011 showed that office workers in their 20’s believe that they should only be expected to be physically present in an office for specific meetings.

There are cultural issues bound up with new working practices. The companies that succeed will be those that put trust in their employees and give them the opportunity to make decisions. And that includes the ways in which they work – how and where.
From the traditional ‘time and motion’ approach where the stopwatch measured industrial productivity, smart working calls for different metrics, including how people interrelate, their creativity, and the quality of thinking they achieve.

Management will still want to measure results – including “Smartness Quotient” of the company (likely to become a metric in its own right, with European standards codified).

The more digitally connected we are, the more that companies will, in theory, be able to monitor the effectiveness of their people – whether full time or contractors. The risk is that the same ‘stopwatch’ mentality will apply, but with greater precision.

Controversy will surround how, in future, management monitor their workforces.

In theory it is perfectly possible to measure output by logging keystrokes. GPS enabled devices will enable companies to track their staff geographically. Are they really working at home, or walking the dog?

The Leitz research panel was encouraging on this point. When asked how much trust their company puts in them to manage their own time productively when they working remotely, 28% said ‘A great deal’ and a further 44% said ‘Quite a lot’.
For many people, the most important measure of their worth is not just salary or title (although these will always be status definers), but their reputation.

As people become more self-sufficient and self-oriented, they are more likely to change jobs in future, not just switching companies but switching careers. Then their personal reputation in the wider world of work will grow in significance.

Tom Peters wrote back in 1994, “Your power is almost directly proportional to the thickness of your Rolodex, and the time you spend maintaining it”.

The principles will remain the same, but the means are being, and will continue to be, transformed. In the past we have tended to have a small number of strong ties – people we see and interact with regularly.

Changing working structures and business orientated social media increasingly develop ‘weak ties’ – a concept first put forward by Mark Granovetter 40 years ago.

These benefit careers and the ability to do a job more effectively, by exposing more of us to wider varied contact networks. Although we may never see these people other than virtually, making the classic ‘good first impression’ remains an imperative.
Social media is still a challenge for many employers, who too often see its usage by their employees as a distraction – or a symptom of someone looking for a new job. The former is increasingly outmoded; the latter is simply something they will have to get used to – the connected landscape means that the smartest workers will always be in demand, updating their worth as they updated their CVs in the past.

More than ever, individual workers will become ‘brands’ – using work based social media to market themselves – inside and outside companies. Your skills, your values, your experience, your business social media prominence will all become essential signals of who you are; how well prepared you are for the world of smart working.

Mobile tools will make it easier for independents to find project work, team up with like-minded partners (e.g. social media and shared interests). The more connected and in touch companies are, the smarter they will be. Mobile workers will be more in touch with customers and the supply chain – in reality and virtually.

New apps, just as in the world of social media now, will contain proximity alerts – allowing smart workers to identify potential clients who are in their vicinity, responding to real time demands and meet them face-to-face.

Even the traditional head-hunter and recruitment agency role is likely to decline as individual ‘branded’ workers take command of their own destiny.
In the past, a set of skills, occasionally updated, could equip you for a lifetime career. Now the speed of change means that knowledge is always decaying – potentially out of date as soon as we have assimilated it.

To quote Tom Peters again, in ‘Welcome to the Age of Homework’ back in 1992 (a lifetime ago in modern business), “In an age of brains, those who don’t develop their full, above-the-shoulders potential, and then keep adding to it, are losing out”.

The old paradigm was that you employed people to do the job – and that on the whole jobs don’t change. Now not only are new skills constantly demanded, but there is a rapid and changing emergence of functions that simply didn’t exist just a few years ago, including data scientists, app developers, sustainability directors – even in-house yoga teachers.

Charles Handy’s visionary concept of over 20 years ago, ‘The portfolio worker’, is becoming a reality as we will increasingly discard and take on new roles and new information – which in turn give us more freedom and potential marketability as individuals.

This doesn’t mean we have to carry all the information we need around in our heads. Smart working doesn’t mean you have to know everything; simply to have access to knowledge and having the ability to know what to do with it.

To do this the smart worker will need products to ensure they can be ‘always on’.
Increasingly knowledge workers will be assessed by their ability to communicate their knowledge. Like the old adage amongst academics to “publish or die’ so today and tomorrows knowledge worker may well be asked to present or die.

You are judged, not just on your ability to draft reports and white papers but to create and deliver engaging presentations – not just PowerPoint decks, but the use of engaging infographics and filmic materials.

We asked our panel how important they felt the ability to present was for their business leaders of today and tomorrow. 62% felt it was ‘important’ but 31% felt it was ‘essential’, so anyone planning to be a business leader of tomorrow will need to be able to create and deliver world class presentations, often at the drop of a hat.

Smart presentations will require smarter tools. The old days of an expandable pointer to highlight a feature on a flipchart are long over. Multi-functional devices will emerge that are not simply wireless, but have other functionality built in – carrying the digital presentation with them, being a projector in their own right (or, like the Leitz Complete Pro Presentation Stylus Pen, an all in one presentation device with USB, pen, stylus, remote presentation clicker and laser pointer). Here technology could provide the cutting edge, differentiating between the ‘good’ and the ‘outstanding’.
There has always been a market for individual and tailored products. Mass customisation is a familiar term but this will be an area of future growth in the world of business. More agile systems, easy access to 3D printing will mean that style and functionality will be more easily individualised.

So we will be able to design and specify our own products to suit our needs and changing roles. It’s not just about colours – but layout, configuration, materials. You want a personal, customised Leitz stylus for left-handed use, with a blue laser and a pen with purple ink? No problem (well, no problem in 2020 – Leitz isn’t quite there yet)!

IT will become internally collaborative for smart mobile workers. As an example, Deutsche Bank run internal “Genius bars” for remote staff.

Smartness will be on tap as people at work will be able to more easily access ‘virtual experts’ or internal communities (think of the way that a huge amount of Apple’s technical help is effectively sub-contracted out to a community of users).

So we will see the structure of information transfer changing – less top down, more transverse, with accessibility on demand, allowing people to connect and collaborate, both internally and with customers and others in the supply chain.

Knowledge is power. Relevantly shared knowledge is more powerful still – because it raises the capability of everyone we work with – internally and externally.
CONCLUSIONS

With more and more people working remotely, the role of the traditional office will change. Having been originally designed for isolated, desk-bound individual workers, the new era of smart working will see smart offices and smart products to cater for them.

The workspace of tomorrow will need to cope with the flexibility of their occupants. At an extreme some have even declared the corporate office to be more like a club where ‘members’ drop in when they are in town to enjoy the facilities and meet up with like-minded people. These workspaces will transform into places that the smart worker wants to go to. Colourful, fun and flexible, the office of the future will boost creativity and productivity, becoming centres of ‘bleisure’, a blending of business and leisure.

Meetings are on the rise but more informal and ad hoc. Buildings and spaces will be adaptive with more ‘casual meeting places’ and mobile work may well mean mobile around the office as much as mobile around the world.

Office equipment will be intelligent and capable of being personalised – app-controlled and able to detect the mood of the individual or the meeting or respond to voice or face recognition (or, like the Leitz Style Lamp, a fully adjustable product, allowing you to control the mood and tone of lighting on your desk).

An offshoot of the increase in meetings will be the need for knowledge workers to present more and better with more tailored and innovative design. Everything will be capable of being a screen. Graphic and multi-media, immersive presentations will be the norm. Death by PowerPoint will no longer be tolerated.

To ensure out of sight isn’t out of mind, companies will develop new ways of monitoring the effectiveness of people. As more freelance and contract work takes place, this will be an increasing challenge.

Individuals will start to think of themselves as personal brands, needing to constantly keep themselves high profile in their chosen line of work. Business based social media – not just for self-promotion, but for the exchange of ideas and knowledge development, will be increasingly used and companies will need to adapt to this.
Leitz provides top quality products to help professionals organise their work in any environment.

Renowned industry-wide as an innovative brand with German heritage and quality standards, Leitz is leading the transition to the future of work and the mobile working generation.

Learn more at www.leitz.com