

The conference-powered agile enterprise

“In the eyes of their customers, flexible working enabled by conferencing makes companies of any size much more responsive. It means that a global operation can be run from anywhere in the world using a follow-the-sun business model.”

Aaron McCormack
CEO
BT Conferencing

With a global commitment to flexible working, BT shows how conferencing can multiply the returns from its adoption

Best practice pedigree

The BT flexible working programme has an impeccable pedigree. By 2009, around 75,000 BT people had embraced some form of flexible working. Of that, 14,500 are permanent home workers, and 1,120 are outside the UK. Other flexible working options include, for example, job sharing, where two part time workers perform a full time role between them.

Conferencing and collaboration is the glue that keeps all those people working together. With unified communications facilities fully extended to their desktops, an independent report by the University of Bradford¹ shows that conferencing is an essential aspect of the job for 80 per cent of BT people. By definition, the vast majority of those will be flexible workers.

The report also showed that 34 per cent of conference participants actually do so from home, while 47 per cent of the survey said that conferencing has allowed them to work normally during transport disruption. That underlines the role of conferencing not only in the success of flexible working programmes, but also as a contingency measure against pandemics – or worse.

If further proof were needed, recent BT analysis has shown that its home workers take 20 per cent fewer sick days. Meanwhile estimates of greater productivity (compared to their office-based counterparts) vary between 15 and 30 per cent dependent upon role. Ninety-three per cent of regular home workers responding to the University of Bradford survey reported positive effects on their quality of life.

Key facts

- Around **80 per cent** of BT people have embraced flexible working including 14,500 permanent home workers of which 1,120 are outside the UK
- Less office space has yielded global savings of **£100 million** per annum, with one-off capital receipts from 4,000 building disposals of **£500 million**
- BT home workers take **20 per cent** fewer sick days, while their productivity is estimated at between 15 and 30 per cent greater than office-based counterparts
- Flexible working means **97 per cent** of women taking maternity leave return to BT, compared to a UK national average of **40 per cent**, saving BT over **£5 million**
- In 2008, conferencing eliminated **717,000** face-to-face BT meetings, removing the need for some 1.4 million return journeys, and saving **53,000** metric tons of CO₂

¹. May 2009: CONFERENCING AT BT – Results of a Survey on its Economic, Environmental, and Social Benefits

A BT Conferencing case study

Flexible working in BT

“We have to provide and support our products and services around-the-clock. There is little room for traditional nine-to-five working, because that just can’t meet the demands placed upon us as a business.”

Caroline Waters
Director of People and Policy
BT Group

Aaron McCormack, CEO of BT Conferencing, confirms: “Conferencing plays a significant role in those results by enabling meaningful interaction with colleagues in both a business and a social sense.”

Benefiting the environment, improving customer service

In an increasingly globalised marketplace – where customers, governments, and regulators expect enterprises to adopt and demonstrate a responsible attitude to the environment – extensive and expensive business travel has had its day.

The University of Bradford report calculates that conferencing eliminated 717,000 face-to-face BT meetings in 2008. In so doing, some 1.4 million return journeys – varying from around the corner to many thousands of miles – were avoided. As a direct result, BT saved 53,000 tonnes of CO₂ in 2008 (a net figure that takes account of the electricity used in the conferencing equipment itself).

Offices worldwide

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Against that background, and in the context of flexible working, conferencing is the killer application that overcomes barriers of time and geography. Aaron McCormack observes: “In the eyes of their customers, flexible working enabled by conferencing makes companies of any size much more responsive. It means that a global operation can be run from anywhere in the world using a follow-the-sun business model.”

For BT’s global customers this means that their issues are handled more immediately. Problems are dealt with as they are raised, not delayed until people return to the office. Conferencing and flexible working also allows BT people to be more project-based: virtual teams across disciplines and geographies can be pulled together quickly to solve problems; and disbanded equally quickly.

Caroline Waters, BT Group Director of People and Policy, notes: “We have to provide and support our products and services around-the-clock. There is little room for traditional nine-to-five working, because that just can’t meet the demands placed upon us as a business.”

Energising team working

Conferencing also allow teams of any size to collaborate and communicate irrespective of their time zone or location. This form of flexible working is not only crucial in terms of co-ordinating team activities but also in providing bottom line benefits and environmental dividends.

Moreover, conference-enabled job sharing pays big dividends for BT. For example, 97 per cent of women taking maternity leave return to BT, compared to a UK national average of just 40 per cent. Flexible working

is known to be a significant factor in that success. Public recognition of BT’s job sharing policy came with the Jobs for Mums award in 2009.

To facilitate such team-based flexible working, carefully designed BT buildings around the world are equipped with hot desks and touchdown areas, whilst the use of conferencing and collaboration tools helps maximise people’s effectiveness. For example, web conferencing solutions such as Live Meeting and WebEx enable BT people to work together on documents at the touch of a button, and with BT MeetMe audio conferences can be set up in minutes.

“BT Centre in the City of London was re-designated when we closed six other London buildings,” adds Caroline Waters. “Now, 1,600 workstations cater for the 8,000 or so BT people who choose to visit the building every day. Today, it acts as a resource for the entire company, rather than just an elite few.”

With Telepresence suites in 27 cities worldwide – including Beijing, London, Munich, and New York – up to 48 team members across all five continents can get together at the same time face-to-face in cyber space to plan and execute their tasks. In Asia Pacific alone, the seven Telepresence suites there show an average utilisation of 48 per cent, and have directly resulted in a 20 per cent reduction in business travel, with a nine-month payback on the investment.

The conferencing-enabled agility described above has helped BT to cut its global real estate by some 48 per cent, with commensurate reductions in energy consumption and carbon emissions. Less office space has yielded global savings of £100 million per annum, with 42 per cent of that coming from London alone. In the wake of that policy, one-off capital receipts from 4,000 building disposals were £500 million.

