



Unlocking value through relocation projects

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By Sarah Cole, Managing Director of Universal Commercial Relocation Ltd

Increasingly, companies planning a relocation are not simply viewing the exercise as a physical move of the workplace, but an opportunity to undertake an organisational project that can be a catalyst for positive and high impact business change.

As identified in the findings of the Commercial Moving Group/BIFM 2015 Survey on "Moves and changes in an evolving workplace" the key driver for relocating at present in the market is to effect change in many aspects of the organisation. In sourcing a new building, the decision makers are taking a people centric not building centric approach;- the space should suit the workforce, not the other way round. The new workplace should have an agile design, affording staff more flexibility in their work routine while enabling the organisation to be leaner and work smarter with their space. A more agile and dynamic workplace is better suited to the working practices increasingly embraced due to the disruptive change brought about by technology, and enhances business continuity.

When looking at new layout, employers are seeking to move away from the traditional make up to establish more break out areas and touch down spaces in the interests of staff engagement, collaboration and dynamism. This physical shift to a more fluid approach is also reflected in a move towards less structured, man managed and hierarchical team structures and to a more autonomous model of self managed teams with strong leadership.

When considering the design of the space, organisations are seeking to ensure the appearance and layout of the workplace will enhance staff's work experience and productivity. With the 2015 Quora Report identifying that "half of the UK's services sector employees are being hampered by inadequate workplace management and design", improvement in this aspect of the business will have a positive impact on output.

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A growing body of research is reinforcing the realisation that an improved workplace experience will lead to a positive impact on staff health and wellbeing. It will enhance staff's emotional engagement with their employer as stakeholders in the business and contribute to improved workforce retention and productivity rates.

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Moving office offers the business an opportunity to source a new space that promotes a more sustainable

infrastructure, leading to cost savings and an improved environmental profile. Once again, sustainability is being viewed as a chance to also create a better environment for the people within it. For example, can new cost effective and environmentally efficient systems of lighting and ventilation be deployed which improve working conditions?

This approach is reflected in such initiatives as the WELL building standard which identifies initiatives that enhance the wellbeing of the building's occupants.

All of these initiatives should not only save an organisation money and create a better workplace for its staff, but greatly enhance the brand and reputation of the business. In a highly competitive market, a new workplace environment promoting the brand through a dynamic building and innovative practices is highly effective. It directly feeds into the image of the business to the outside world, and will be a powerful tool in attracting the best talent.

A relocation project can generate great cost efficiencies if successfully planned, bought into and delivered. In the short term, reduced space through agile working and an energy efficient infrastructure will immediately unlock savings. There are however also long term cost efficiencies to be made by engendering a happier and more productive workforce, building a more dynamic and cohesive workplace with improved working practices and a positive and prevailing culture.

So how does an organisation positively transform through relocating? Planning is paramount. Strategic planning needs to be undertaken on a cross organisational basis with the FM team at the heart of it. It cannot be effectively delivered simply in the hands of HR and procurement. A business needs to undertake extensive data collection to understand the current position in space utilisation, staff working practices, employee satisfaction and productivity and sustainability to assess areas of change and gauge what needs to be achieved.

A road map should be drawn up and the various service partners supporting the organisation in realising the project should take a fully collaborative position as the client drives through effective change management. Your relocation service partner should have experience in similar transformation projects so the client can draw on specialist expertise and experience. When appointing service partners, consider not simply the cost but the value of the move proposal being offered by the specialists. Closely scrutinise the quality assurance profile of the relocation company- do they have the British Standard 8522 in Commercial Moving? Are they offering to be a partner, not simply a supplier, who will minimise risk and be proactive in helping the business realise its goals in the most cost effective and seamless way?

Effective communication and engagement with staff is critical to the success of the project. The message needs to convey the reasons for the change, and highlight the positive benefits that will be brought about by the move. If the workforce appreciate that the mission of the project is to improve worker experience and create a more positive environment, staff will feel informed, included, valued and accordingly take a constructive approach to the move.

The relocation is just the start of the transition. It is important that qualitative and quantitative metrics are regularly reviewed to assess the return on investment, and demonstrate the added value to the organisation. This will support future financing of further initiatives to support ongoing improvement within the organisation- a "win win" scenario for the Board, the workforce and its stakeholders.