

Meeting of minds

At any one time, a fifth of booked meeting rooms are not being used. We look at how one organisation has addressed the problem to free up valuable meeting space and achieve remarkable cost savings

There's an old saying from Peter Drucker, the guru of management gurus, that what gets measured gets managed.

According to Paul Statham, Managing Director of workplace management and technology specialist Condeco, it is a truism for many facets of the facilities management role and not least in the way that we measure and use the space within our buildings. 'Knowing what is actually happening within the workplace is the first, and I would say most essential, step in being able to make intelligent choices about how that space can be used and developed to better serve the organisation and the people who work for it', he says.

To illustrate his point Paul cites a recent survey from Condeco that shows that at any one time around 20 per cent of meeting rooms booked out are not being used. 'There can be any number of reasons for this, illness, cancellations, forgetfulness,' he says. 'Sometimes the person who has booked the room may even have left the company.'

But whatever the reason, the end result can be two major issues. Firstly, there is a disruption to other people's days. How often do you hear people complain about meeting rooms all being booked out when, if you actually walk down a corridor past the rooms, a number of them

are empty? No-shows mean that what the system says and what is actually happening are two different things. Secondly, an average meeting room in London costs around £25,000 a year according to Actium Consult. That is an expensive resource, so when a fifth of it is being underutilised, it quickly becomes a serious business issue.'

One firm that has identified the issue in its own property portfolio is one of the world's largest financial institutions. No-shows had become a particular problem at its European headquarters in London, with staff routinely complaining that there were rarely any meeting rooms free even though over 200 rooms were available at the location. The problem had been compounded by people booking costly external meeting space because they believed that no space was available within the building.

The Core Issue

The firm identified three possible solutions: Increase the number of rooms available in the building, make more external meeting space available or find ways to make better use of the existing space. Based on its own evidence, the facilities management team decided that this was largely a problem of efficiency. They concluded that no-shows were making it appear that there was no

space available when there clearly was. The solution was to address this core issue, not increase the numbers of rooms.

Meeting the Challenge

The bank had been working with Condeco for some years and they soon become an obvious choice for the firm as it began looking for ways of managing the problem of no-shows. Working closely together, Condeco and the bank developed a solution that managed to deal with the issue head on.

At the heart of the solution was an upgrade of the Condeco Touch static digital meeting room screens mounted outside each room that display all details of who has booked the room, for how long and so on. The interactive screens already allowed people to extend the duration of meetings and make additional bookings.

The innovation was to incorporate something known as autobump technology into the software. This meant that users had to confirm the start and end of each meeting by pressing a single button on the screen. If they didn't confirm the start of the meeting in this way, the software assumes that it is a no-show after 15 minutes have elapsed and the room is recorded as available on the system and an email sent to the named host to inform them that the meeting has been cancelled. Similarly by pressing the end button when the

room is vacated, it becomes available for other users.

In addition, the associated reporting systems meant that it was possible to develop detailed information about the way rooms were being used, identify those individuals most responsible for no-shows and then establish why that was the case, recharge for hospitality and make more intelligent decisions about the way to use the space now and develop it in the future.

Remarkable Results

'The results have been remarkable,' claims Paul Statham. 'The technology has focussed attention on this both as a facilities and management issue. Our customer knows exactly what is



happening within their building and users understand the benefits of the new approach, not least because it is now far easier to find and book

vacant meeting space. Everybody is aware of their responsibilities and the benefits the system brings. The results have been so exceptional we've now branded the system as Condeco Touch and are actively marketing it to other clients.'

The installation of Condeco Touch incorporated over 200 meeting rooms and during its first month of operation alone, a total of 5000 meetings room hours were released for use by other people. 'Not only did the system help to register and manage no-shows, it actually reduced their overall number as people

became more aware of the system,' explains Paul.

The bank has even been able to evaluate the benefits in figures. It has improved meeting room availability by a staggering 17 per cent, the equivalent of an extra 31 meeting rooms per month. Based on an average annual cost of around £25,000 per meeting room in a London office, this gives them a return on investment within six months and ongoing yearly cost saving of some £750,000, a figure which doesn't even include the cost of renting external meeting space.

The customer has stated he is extremely pleased with the results and commented. 'We set out at the beginning to make sure our space is used to its fullest, and we are delighted with the operational and financial result', he said. 'Not only

have we reduced no-shows and saved money by using our overall meeting space better, but we are providing our staff with more choice and availability of meeting rooms at our office.'

A Genuine Success Story

The Condeco Touch system is now in the process of being rolled out across the bank's office portfolio with over 400 already installed in the UK alone. 'It's a genuine business success story,' claims Paul Statham. 'Facilities managers are constantly striving to demonstrate best practice and a return on investment and this offers a perfect example of what is possible. It also demonstrates how FM can not only save money for the organisation, but also address important management issues and help everybody get more out of the workplace.'

About Condeco

Condeco Limited is an enterprise software company dedicated to the development of workplace management software, services and business intelligence solutions. Its award-winning Condeco Workspace Management software suite provides large enterprises, SMEs and public sector organisations with the ability to maximise the potential of their real estate, reduce costs, improve efficiency and encourage a greener workplace.

Condeco offers a recognised and unique global workspace

management solution that combines meeting room management, visitor management, desk booking integrated digital signage and business intelligence solutions within a single application.

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