

Facilities Management from A to Z



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C hurn

Churn is the term used by facilities professionals to describe the continuous cycle of moves and changes within the workspace. The churn rate is normally expressed as a percentage of the number total occupants that have been moved during the year. For example, a churn rate of 40% in a building housing 1,000 people means that there were 400 individual workstation moves or changes during the year. It does not necessarily mean that 40% of the occupants were moved as some people may have been moved more than once.

The level of churn is often a reflection of the nature of the organisation. A stable, mature business involved in long term projects may have very low churn levels. In a highly dynamic organisation the rate of churn will often exceed 100%. The effective management of the churn can therefore be of great importance to the effective running of the organisation. Poorly managed churn can become a bottleneck within the business slowing down the pace of change and preventing positive progress.

Churn costs can be enormous. In a traditional air conditioned building with high levels of cellular offices and multiple work station standards even the most simple one person move can have dramatic consequences. Reconfiguring desk and storage layouts, shifting partitions, rebalancing air handling units, relocating power, data and voice cabling all come at a price. The timing of the work also affects the cost as the additional expense of out of hours working is balanced against the impact of business interruption where works are carried out in normal hours.

The facility manager faced with a high churn bill has two strategic choices which are to reduce the number of moves taking place or to attack the cost of each individual move. Introducing control processes to restrict the number of moves taking place can help but may have a negative impact on the effectiveness of the people concerned. Redesigning the layout of the workspace to reduce the need for moves may be more effective but can be equally costly.

A review of workstation standards and workplace infrastructure is central to a cost reduction exercise. Fewer walls, shared storage and centralised services can all reduce the level of work and therefore cost involved. Common space, furniture and IT standards can supplement this. If every workstation is the same then all that needs to be moved is the person themselves.

The implementation of what are known as new ways of working can be significant in reducing the impact of churn. Hot desking, hotelling, free address, home working and similar initiatives all facilitate a more flexible approach to the use of the workplace which removes a good deal of the demand for internal moves and changes. These projects can be expensive to implement but usually repay the investment in a very short period by lessening the demand for space and reducing the cost of churn.

Development of robust churn management processes and their consistent application is an important facilities function. The maintenance of accurate records and communication protocols to ensure effective collaboration with IT, HR and other support functions is vital. Many organisations have multiple databases recording the locations and details of their people. These must be integrated or at least harmonised to avoid confusion and reduce the administrative impact of churn.

For further reading on workplace design try "Office Space Planning: Designs for Tomorrow's Workplace" by Alexei Marmot and Joanna Eley published by Mc-Graw Hill or "The 21st Century Office" by Jeremy Myerson and Philip Ross published by Laurence King