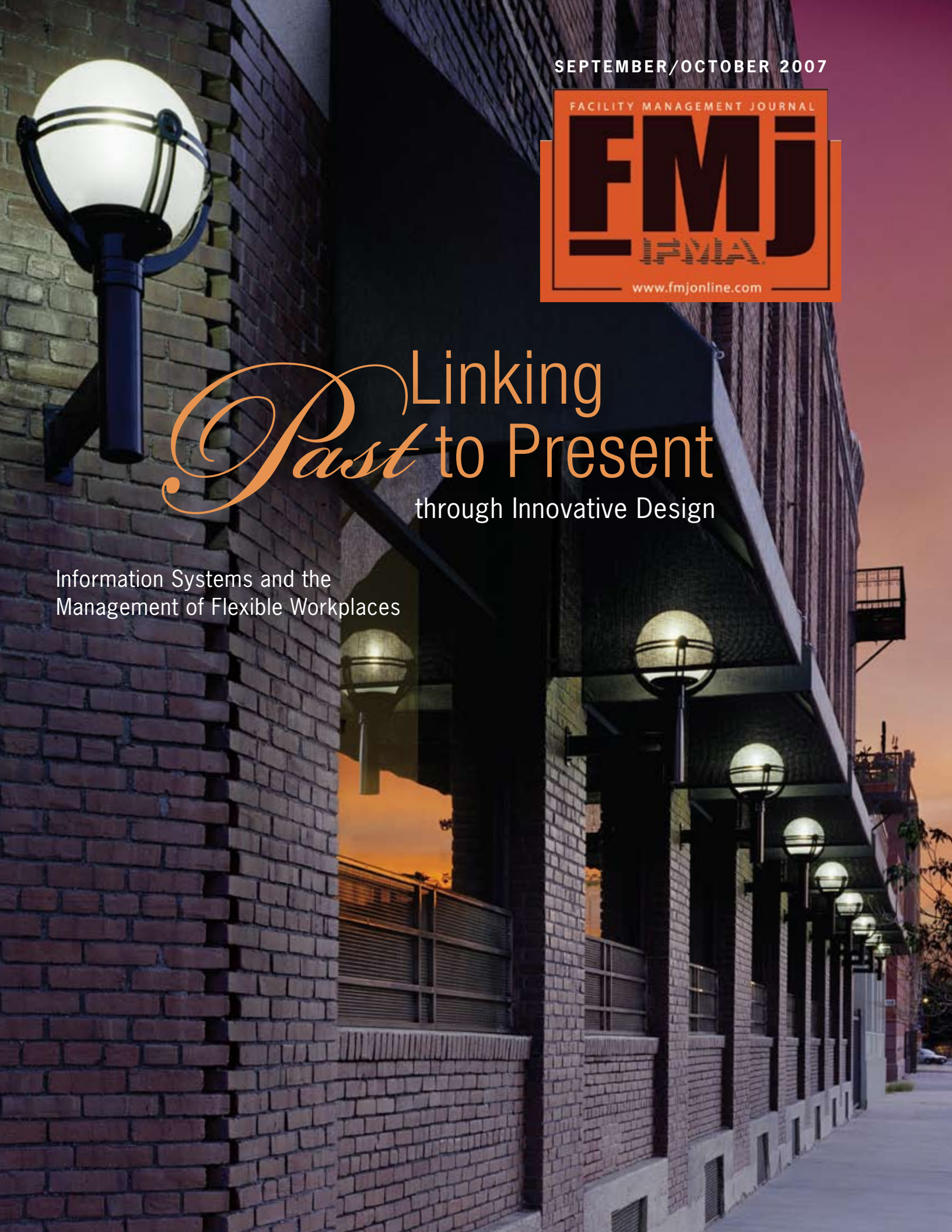


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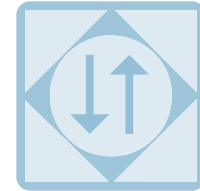


Past Linking to Present through Innovative Design

Information Systems and the
Management of Flexible Workplaces



Information Systems and the Management of Flexible Workplaces



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Many facilities management organizations have introduced flexible workplaces; the management of which is not as simple as it may first appear.

In the past, when all employees had their own dedicated workspace, management of the workplace was fairly straightforward. It was enough to simply know what areas were available for use, where an employee sat in order to deliver the mail, what department to assign costs to, and the availability and occupation plan for the allocation of space. Over the course of time, the majority of Integrated Workplace Management Solutions (IWMS) have come to be based on these basic concepts.

We are now all aware of the great advantages that can be achieved by adopting a more flexible approach to the workplace. In a more flexible model, a single workplace can be associated with more than one person and, conversely, one person can be associated with multiple workplaces. For the majority of larger organizations, the number of complete workplaces per person (workplaces with a defined amount of space

and facilities associated with an individual for the entire working day) invariably falls between one and one and a half. Meanwhile, the average employee only spends 60 percent of their time in their workplace. In reality, a lot of experimentation has been undertaken and in some cases a flexible workplace has been implemented.

Three workplace concepts

After the implementation of a flexible workplace, the logical next step is to develop a management system. When doing so, it quickly becomes apparent that the traditional model developed within the majority of standard IWMS in the past is not up to the task; although this is not a major problem on its own as, with some minor adjustments, the traditional model can be adapted to work with a flexible workplace model.

There are, in fact, many different ways of approaching the management of flexible workplaces. Currently we recognize three fundamentally different concepts, each with their own form of management: shared, hotel and unlinked.

1. Shared

One of the most common flexible workplace concepts is based on the simple sharing of the workplace (the “shared” concept). This approach can be put to good use in an organization with lots of part-time workers or in a situation where employees have more than one workplace, with various duties across numerous sites. In this model, workplaces are always linked directly to a person or persons, but there are more people per workplace. Each workplace can be identified with an individual, the proportion of their day they spend there and even at what times they are there.

In order to determine the current space utilization in an IWMS, it is necessary to extend the traditional model for workplaces and offer the possibility of “more and more” relationships between workers and their workplaces. In the shared concept, simple management tasks such as assignment and calculation of workplaces can be fully supported; planning for future utilization (such as seating plans and relocation) can be achieved with the simple introduction of a time factor.



2. Hotel

The “hotel” concept is based on booking a workplace at the time it is required. Although this is the least common concept in use at the moment, it is in fact the most suitable in terms of our approach to the free-market economy.

In this scenario, workplaces are only linked to an individual for a temporary period of time and then only for the duration of the individual’s use of the workplace—this requires a booking facility within the IWMS. It is vital that an individual is able to make the booking request themselves, preferably online, to avoid the need for a service desk. The booking system should include a range of optimization strategies for the management of resources; at the very least there should be limits set on the number of days in advance that a booking can be made to prevent block-booking. Every company knows its own peaks and troughs in terms of employee occupancy. For example, if every Thursday there is a regular

session planned for off-site personnel in the head office, it is pretty obvious that space will be scarce on that day. In the “hotel” concept, this would lead to overbooking of workplaces on the same day each week so it would be better to arrange the meetings for the off-site personnel to take place on different days each week. The IWMS can support this activity through service level agreements (SLAs) by calculating the cost-per-day (or part thereof) of a workplace to each department. In this way the sales department, for example, could make use of a workspace on Thursday for a fixed cost-per-hour, while other departments would need to pay double. On other days the costing structure could change.

If employees are not individually motivated to save general company resources, a more personal remuneration system could be employed based on individual workplace use.

3. Unlinked

With the “unlinked” concept, workplaces are no longer linked to an individual employee;

all employees working for the organization can walk in whenever they feel like and sit where they want to. Calculating the costs charged for a workplace can be carried out by a head-count per cost center but in practice, one finds that parts of the building are set aside for departments who manage their resources internally. In the following case study one can see a well-known example of the “unlinked” concept—where even the higher echelons of management do not have pre-defined workspaces.

The management of this form of flexible workplace seems to be straightforward, and could be well administered using the traditional model if all sorts of side-effects did not raise their ugly heads. With the unlinked concept, employees often have to have their own cupboard, locker or mobile pedestal for the items they cannot take home every day; special provision needs to be made for the delivery of internal mail and things become even more complicated when an organization supports telework-stations at the home of the employee.

Not only will the traditional model need adjustment but there may also be the need for custom program functionality.

The adoption of a specific workplace approach has an influence both on the set-up and functionality of any IWMS. It is important to take this into account when developing both the workplace concept and the IWMS.

Case study: Flexible working and IWMS in practice

The following describes a flexible workplace concept that broadly consists of both office-based workplaces and home workstations.

The company in question employs an unlinked approach where some workplaces are situated within common areas and others within areas that are assigned to specific departments.

Workplaces in common areas

In the common areas workspaces are, in principle, freely available to all employees. A variety of workplaces are available: individual workstations, team work areas, quiet rooms and meeting rooms. The first three types can be occupied without being booked and run on a "first-come-first-served" basis. Meeting rooms can be booked via the customer service desk or through the intranet. All areas are tied into the IWMS so that if there is a complaint, failure or maintenance request, it can be logged and work orders can be issued. The physical dimensions and locations for each area, along with its inventory, are set out in the AutoCAD drawings, which are in turn linked to the IWMS.

The costs associated with these common areas are linked to the square foot rate which is charged to each department, via the IWMS, for the space they have been specifically assigned. The cost of using the meeting rooms is passed onto the individual user, along with any related service or catering costs. All of the details for charging are exported on a monthly basis from the IWMS to the financial system.

Workplaces in department-specific areas

Areas assigned to specific departments are divided, once again, into workspaces for individual use, teamwork and private

meeting rooms. In principle, these workspaces are to be used by employees of the specific department, but in times of great demand, this may be overridden. With some exceptions (for example, a computer-aided design (CAD) draftsman requires a specific workstation) no departmental employee has their own workspace and the principle of "first-come-first-served" also applies. Even job-specific workplaces, as found in a call center, are not linked to specific individuals.

In terms of information technology, no individual has access to the hard-disk space on the workstation personal computer and nothing is installed locally that does not fall within the company standards. All of the non-standard office software is, as much as possible, made available through the intranet. This approach means that any individual can use any personal computer, though in reality notebook personal computers are used, as they allow employees to work freely from both home and the office. As with common areas, these areas are specified within the IWMS and assigned to a specific department or cost center so that costs can be allocated accordingly.

Standard personal set-up

Adopting an "unlinked" approach means individuals are not in any way attached to their office work area. Use is made of a "standard personal set-up" (SPS). This SPS consists of a range of individual-specific provisions, three of which require particular attention:

Postal pigeon-hole

- Most employees have a personal pigeon-hole for mail. Each pigeon hole has a code consisting of a wall code (made up of the building code, floor code and wing code) as well as a row and column code for the position in the wall. This entire code indicates the internal postal address of the person.

Telephone plug-in point

- A wireless telephone exchange is used, in which each employee has their own handset that can be reached through an extension number. The handsets have to be connected so there are plug-in points in the wall that, in some cases, have the individual's pigeon hole incorporated within it.

Locker

- Employees cannot leave their belongings in the workplace so each employee has a locker with a combination lock. The location of the lockers, pigeon-holes and telephone plug-in point are all represented schematically within a graphic interface in the IWMS to aid resource management.

Home workstations

An important part of this workplace concept is the home workstation. Each department can arrange the installation of a home workstation for their employees using pre-determined standards. The details of the home work-stations are laid out within the IWMS, with diagrams of their layouts available in an AutoCAD format. Workstations are charged back to the employees' department in installments over a pre-determined period, after which they become the property of the department.

As more organizations realign their business practices and consequently their workplace management techniques, careful consideration must be given to the needs of the current configuration and more importantly the future ones. With real estate being one of the largest assets of a corporation, being able to manage it effectively becomes critical. A successful implementation of an IWMS system is a partnership between facilities management, information technology, human resources, and the business centers. Understanding the needs and benefits of flexible workspaces is critical in the selection of an IWMS system. The chosen system must be able to be configured to accommodate the three workplace concepts described and any future trends that may arise. **FMJ**

About the Author:



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