
White paper

**Building a business case for mobile working in Housing
Repairs**

Building a business case for mobile working

A large number of organisations are going to spend time this year creating a business case to support a request for investment in some form of technology relating to mobile working.

Whilst on the surface it seems reasonably straight-forward, there is in fact a very real difference between these plans and the experiences of businesses who have already made the journey.

The route of the problem is that, very often, organisations have identified a product as a solution to a particular problem, typical examples would include;

- Operatives are wasting time each day travelling to and from the depot for paperwork, investing in PDAs / mobile data systems will increase available hours for work
- The workforce is inherently un-trustworthy, a tracking system will enable us to stop people 'disappearing'
- We know our staff could be more productive, scheduling technology will help us improve

Talk to organisations that have made dramatic gains through mobile working however and the experience is always the same – it is possible to make piecemeal improvements through these technologies, but the dramatic wins only come when a full business transformation process is undertaken.

In terms of mobile working, four key components to this process are identified;

- Mobile data system
- Dynamic scheduling
- Supply chain
- Culture change

If we produce a business case for tracking or mobile data on the basis that it will improve productivity, we will invariably try to make the case look as convincing as possible by claiming all the potential benefits of moving to a super productive workforce. When these benefits don't materialise, and they won't, it is very hard to claim the same improvements again for the additional investment needed, in this case for scheduling and change management support.

Taking experience from the organisations that have delivered truly successful projects, the scale of improvement can be dramatic.

When quantifying benefits, try not to claim benefits from individual gains, there is a big danger of double counting and the end picture is less clear. For example, don't quantify the 30 minute saving from operatives travelling straight to their first job. If you do this, it will be difficult to separate this from the productivity figures you get from benchmark organisations. The gain will come from the sum of all the individual improvements and no organisation will be able to honestly tell you that a particular gain came from any single change.

The following table is based on average results from over 30 Housing Organisations, but is only intended to be illustrative;

	Before	After	Saving (equivalent FTEs)
Number or repairs per year	30,000	30,000	
Responsive operatives	36	25	11
Supervisors	3	1	2
Inspectors	2	0	2
Planners	0	2	-2
Admin support	3	1	2
Data entry (illustrative figure)	3	0	3
Total organisation	47	29	18
Total cost to business per resource	£30,000	£30,000	£540,000
Reduction in ad-hoc sub contract spend			£200,000
Total direct savings – year one			£740,000

Appointment wait times will fall from 20 days to 4 or 5 days, staff morale will be raised, first time fix rates will increase, no-access visits reduce and customer satisfaction indicators all head over 90%.

An organisation of this size might spend £60,000 on projects for each of the four areas, giving a total investment of around £240,000, with a project buffer of 20% and rounding up, we might put forward a request for a £300,000 investment.

The project does not need to run for years, get targeted help from people with direct experience who know where you want to go, for example supply chain experts who can help you profile you van stocks, or an experienced change management consultant. If you have got a good project manager internally, free them up and use them, otherwise get an experienced project manager in on a consultancy basis.

Identify all the areas needing to be addressed by the project – remuneration policies, working hours, management structures and obviously new IT systems to name but a few. Determine if these can be resourced internally and if so what extra support will be needed to free those people for the project. Otherwise identify expert support and make sure all these costs are included.

With a comprehensive view of the costs involved in undertaking a complete business transformation, you can confidently claim the full scale of benefits and savings that you have identified. As mentioned above, the best way to do this is to get relevant benchmark information from organisations that have been through a similar process / implemented similar solutions, and then to compare the top level numbers to your own. If you are carrying out 30,000 repairs a year

with 36 people and the average benchmark is 25, you can look to re-deploy 11 people onto other work.

A large number of organisations have now completed this journey, with varying degrees of success. Build a picture of where the business will be based on available best practice advice and from talking to similar organisations. Develop a cost model taking account of all the help you will need across every area of the business – you may well resource everything internally, but make sure all areas are covered. Spend money making the change not thinking about the change; the technologies are all proven and on the shelf, there is good, experienced advice available and the benefits will dwarf even your most conservative estimates of costs.