

The future of everything

Barely a week goes by without a report claiming that millions of jobs will become obsolete in the coming years, taken over by machines. Every time you speak to anyone even vaguely interested in technology you know it won't be long before the 'internet of things' is brought up. With this in mind FMJ asks what industry experts think the workplace of twenty years will look like, and what role CAFM will play

Many people argue that the world is now changing faster than ever. A child born in the middle ages would look around on his deathbed and see more or less exactly the same surroundings as he had all those years before. Now for a child born in 2014, things will be virtually unrecognisable by the time they meet their maker. This is true of the workplace as much as anything else.

"Ten years ago 'work' was viewed as the place where people went, rather than the job carried out, or the output achieved," explains the CEO of Service Works Group Gary Watkins. "But, thanks to emerging new technologies, together with cultural and economic changes, people now increasingly work flexibly by time and location in a way that fits their own needs, as well as the organisation's working requirements. In

the future, there will still be offices but, as a result of increased traffic congestion, with improved technology and infrastructure supporting more effective home working, the workplace will become a central service point providing a temporary base for interaction."

One man who seems to be positively salivating through his daydreams about the future is Compton Darlington, business

development director at FSI. "It's an endless source of amusement for those of us interested in technology to speculate on what advances our imagination is capable of dreaming up," he says. "Thankfully as the pace and complexity of everyday technology provides some clarity about what is possible we believe we can have a better shot at what the future may look like.

"We have to distinguish however between the short term gimmicky trends and the more fundamental game changing developments that have a more profound effect on our everyday lives.

MANY INTO ONE

"What is indisputable however is the blurring of the lines between personal and workplace technology. It wasn't so very long ago when a camera, video film, Calculator, alarm clock, diary, music player, newspaper, email, active map, latest weather etc. required a myriad of devices and publications. Now all of this is in the palm of your hand in the form of your smartphone, some of them an essential part of working life."

THE WORKFORCE

Imran Akram is director of fm24, Macro's own helpdesk and CAFM service and he feels that, though things are clearly going to keep changing, there is no threat to human being's presence in the workplace. "Certainly in FM, resource efficiencies can be implemented by making use of CAFM which in turn can be integrated to other systems. The flow of information can be automated with triggers programmed to route the communication to the desired destination whether that is an SMS, email or report. However, human input will always be required, no matter how minimal that is."

The make up of the workforce and the way it interacts will definitely be different though. Watkins insists, "You may also be using your own technology devices at work, and communicating with colleagues you are never likely to meet, or even virtual colleagues, increasingly working across multiple countries and time zones. If current trends continue, workforces look likely to become far more dispersed, working with greater efficiency for shorter periods of time. The age of staff in the workplace will become more extreme; staff will retire later and young bright technologically astute graduates will have greater negotiating power."

But how will CAFM and other computer systems evolve to meet the changing needs of the workplace? "CAFM will evolve to be the front end of multiple systems," Akram predicts. "This means that the operating FM and/or client will be able to refer to a

single system in order to obtain high level information for all aspects of the facility. Such dashboards in the CAFM will display operational, financial, utility consumption, procurement and sustainability data."

Experts from MacLaren Software have already made their predictions for how CAFM will evolve this year. "Demand for CAFM Explorer from customers moving away from spreadsheet based systems or amalgamating several systems into one was incredibly high in 2014," says Claire Visser, VP of facilities and infrastructure. "In 2015, I believe we will see even more demand from companies and facilities departments striving to make the most of technology to increase management efficiencies and cut costs."

FLEXIBILITY

Her colleague Paul Cross, implementation services manager, feels that much of the demand will be for flexible services. "I think we are likely to see a big increase in demand for mobile - CAFM will need to be out in the field rather than taking an office based approach. More people on location reacting in real time will lead to better processes and cost savings.

"To answer this increase in demand we are expecting CAFM Web and CAFM Engineer to be popular requests in 2015. CAFM Web has been designed to provide users (from helpdesk operators to suppliers and tradespeople) with an intuitive web based interface. CAFM Engineer further extends this functionality by giving tradespeople and suppliers access to their work orders via a web-enabled mobile device."

Service Work's Watkins has his own views on such developments. "A good software system is scalable, configurable, and easily adapted to meet evolving business needs and, along with advancing technologies, continuous improvements in FM software technology are enabling new functionality to evolve in-line with current user needs, and to respond to future facilities and built environment requirements.

"Mobile working is perhaps the most extreme and most emergent form of flexible working, with the corresponding technology to support the trend transforming the workplace. Armed with powerful, lightweight ever smaller digital devices, and ubiquitous connectivity, workers are freed not just from the office but from the need to be in touch so regularly. A growth of consumer portable devices, from tablets to smartphones, is spearheading the trend for Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) and this trend will continue to grow, along with the rise in mobile FM software apps. The rapid revolution of mobile technology will continue to have a dramatic impact on daily



“Technology is a tool to be used to solve a particular problem, it’s not a solution in itself.”

FM operations. Facilities managers already support, not just those in a fixed workplace, but those working across multiple locations, and mobile technology is a key enabler in the way in which we can communicate, so that everyone can work flexibly and remotely, approaching work in a new, more fluid manner.

“Moving to a truly mobile solution will enable FMs to enjoy greater flexibility while on the move, which will result in improved business performance through increased scheduling efficiencies, streamlined task logging, and improved productivity and accuracy. Mobile devices will make possible online collaboration with industry experts and increased upskilling, thereby improving job rectification times and first-time fix rates, as well as supporting QR code functionality to scan and access asset data or service history for more optimised asset management. Mobile technology is an important adjunct to the QR code for tracking and managing asset data and location mapping with GPS and GIS applications, and most mobile devices have in-built GPS systems for both short and long-term facilities planning and management.

THE CLOUD

“And the future is also in the cloud for FM software systems as cloud and mobile technologies complement each other. Pervasive cloud technology means that a facilities manager is able to log or report on a job anywhere, and people on the move can be alerted to issues and review details on a mobile device. Eliminating the need to download and install applications, cloud computing will provide even greater efficiency as all processing and storage is maintained remotely by

the cloud server, providing an effective solution for organisations struggling with inadequate IT infrastructure or support. Many believe that cloud computing will increase facilities management software use dramatically, particularly for smaller organisations where there is a need for software but the capital expenditure can’t be justified. Driven by cloud technology the Software as a Service (SaaS) model is seeing increasingly rapid adoption. This provides a highly agile solution which allows businesses to outsource the management of their FM software and benefit from rapid implementation without capital outlay. The browser-based nature of the cloud also makes it simpler for companies to move people around. An entirely cloud-based setup using Wi-Fi means, other than the furniture, nothing has to change.

“We will continue to see an ongoing trend for a reduction in workplace space per person, thanks largely to agile working, the rise in open plan offices, the creation of more space for collaborative working, and developments in communications technology which allow people to work anywhere. This means that people rely less on the space provided by the organisation, and more on the technology itself. At the same time there is much more awareness among occupiers of the relationship between space efficiency and cost of occupation and a desire to reduce energy use, both as a cost to the business and to improve sustainability. FM software will support a strategic approach to space management creating numerous workplace advantages such as improved space efficiency, reductions in vacant space, better management of office expansion and down-sizing, improved staff productivity, improved communication

and compliance.

“Also with sustainability likely to remain a key concern for businesses of the future, FM software offers the agility to support smart building management. It will enable the workplace to become more joined up and automated, whilst reducing energy consumption.

“FM technology can make a positive impact in the future, shaping and supporting the changes that will have dramatic impacts on the workplace as we know it and, whether you’re an in-house FM team or a service provider, you must deliver the most appropriate up-to-date software solutions and working practices or you will risk getting left behind.”

CONNECTIONS

Compton Darlington thinks that:

“The next quantum leap is in the nature of how joined up our various technologies can be.

“One of our employees recently suffered a burglary at home, where a tablet device was among a number of items stolen.

“The less than tech savvy burglars however were unaware that the selfie pictures they were taking with the stolen tablet were being displayed on other devices with the same account, still in the possession of the victim.

“Turning up your central heating whilst you’re out using your smartphone, controlling your lights while miles away from home, keeping an eye on what your pet is up to when no one’s at home, again viewed from your smartphone where ever you happen to be.

“If we take all of these advancements and try to speculate what it means for the working landscape in 15-20 years time, you could perhaps make a justifiable guess at wholesale job losses as technology replaces us.

“However the tendency when these predictions are made is to forget that technology is a tool to be used to solve a particular problem, it’s not a solution in itself.

“A one size fits all set it and forget it answer to the many challenges we face is impossible to achieve, when those challenges are ever changing. Even with the advent of self learning AI (artificial intelligence) we are only creating solutions to problems we can envisage. Human common sense must be applied to these tools to ensure the many unplanned variables that can occur are actually being addressed.

“So yes without doubt machines will continue to have an impact on the working landscape but there will always be a tendency to exaggerate the scale and actual impact of this.” **FMJ**