

**This case study illustrates the problems of cultural change after the take-over of DEC, especially concerning the introduction of mobile telework and desk sharing for field service representatives.**

## **1. Company name and function**

COMPAQ (SCHWEIZ) AG

The Compaq Computer Corporation was founded in Houston, Texas, in 1982. Today it is one of the largest suppliers of computer systems, with around 82,000 employees worldwide. The product portfolio comprises hardware, software and services. With the take-over of Tandem Computers in 1997 and Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) in 1998 Compaq is now also the leader in the areas of high-end computing, storage solutions, IT services and high level user-friendly applications. Compaq (Schweiz) AG is the Swiss subsidiary with its head office in Dübendorf/Zurich and 8 regional offices and agencies. In 1999 the company employed a total workforce of around 1,200 at its head office and branches and has the second highest turnover in the Swiss market.

## **2. Short description of the initiative**

The concept of telework and desk sharing had already started at DEC 4 years ago. The main motive was originally the conviction that a “modern organisation” should also have “modern workplaces” and should utilise its own products for this. Thus, indirectly, positive effects on the company image were also anticipated. A first pilot project was started with 10 people. Sales representatives were chosen for the first target group. These employees were to be independent of a fixed workplace. Instead of personal desks, functional office areas, which were especially designed for the needs of the mobile sales force and were to offer an optimal infrastructure, were made available.

The pilot project has now finished; the new workforms have become part of everyday life. Around 3 years ago, the model was officially and finally introduced. Today around 100 field service representatives carry out mobile telework and desk sharing from the “business centre” at the head office in Dübendorf/Zurich. In addition, there are other mobile employees in the back office and in the secretariat, as well as service technicians and project leaders. So, in total, there are around 200 mobile workers, which correspond to around one

sixth of their total workforce in Switzerland. The number is growing. However, a progression to the so-called home office is not planned; the loss of interpersonal contact and the lack of a social network for isolated home workers (in particular for women) are regarded as being too undesirable.

### **3. Innovative aspects of the project**

The open plan office was divided into a so-called “relaxation zone”, a “client zone”, and a “quiet zone”. The first, a type of bar, offers opportunity for informal information exchange and social contact. It has, however, sockets to allow connection of notebooks to the net. The second is reserved for client meetings. Finally, in the quiet zone, activities are carried out that require concentrated, uninterrupted work, such as the development of concepts, the preparation of quotations or business plans. In the entrance area, each mobile worker has a locker for his paperwork and personal belongings as well as a cordless phone, which replaces his mobile phone during his stay and makes him directly available for internal calls.

Today, those responsible notice that employees have become more agile and flexible and are less fixated on traditional workforms. The project achieved an improved and more comprehensive utilisation of both the ICT infrastructure and the capacities of their own products. Furthermore, employees communicate more than before; the available meeting rooms are well used. The open plan distribution of workstations over the office space gave the employees freedom of movement. The new workform seems to be better suited to the company and its culture. Whereas before an average of 20 m<sup>2</sup> gross space was available per employee, today this is only half as much, thus a saving of around 50% of office space with its associated costs could be made.

However, before introduction, concerns regarding the changes materialised. Suddenly people’s own personal favourite desk no longer existed. Noticeable differences between the cultures of the two merged companies – with regard to ICT infrastructure, employees’ attitudes and workforms – became apparent. The idea of the mobile worker originated from DEC. However, previously Compaq workers had had their individual workspace, their own desk, with family photographs and other personal belongings on it. They were allocated new workstations with new furniture only 3 weeks before the move to Dübendorf. They showed resistance. In the beginning workshops were even boycotted. This was probably due to the fact that the new workform came from the company that had been bought over. However, this is no longer a burning issue. Some Compaq workers currently still use their own individually ar-

ranged desks and continue to do so. So far this is being tolerated – at least as long as the current staff number does not increase and sufficient office space remains available.

In the merger phase it proved difficult, in spite of desk sharing, to convey a feeling of belonging to those employees concerned. The need for personal work surroundings had been somewhat underestimated and should have been further considered before the introduction of the new work model. In general the induction of new employees proved to be inadequate. In future, new employees will be better informed than so far and will be more prepared for the new workforms – a task which has obviously carried too little importance in the past.