

## Whatever works

Indian workspaces are undergoing an irreversible change. Even sarkari offices have caught the bug

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Photograph: Images Bazaar

Until just before it was closed down for good in 2013, the 163-year-old Indian telegram service was a valid government communication tool. The last of the electronic dots and dashes converted to a paper message made its journey on a warm July morning to the home of **Rahul Gandhi**. The iconic, often dreaded telegraph office was no more, outsmarted by technology and unable to adapt to change—perhaps a bit like its last recipient.

Less than a year later, the Government moved to one of its first paperless departments—the Project Monitoring Group (PMG), devised to fast-track big investment projects, went online, prompted by the new dispensation's insistence on accelerated clearances and aggressive growth. The Indian workspace has been changing irreversibly for a while now and the government is finally playing catch-up with a nation in a hurry. While companies and institutions are steadily moving towards a future in which investing in the employee tops the list and flexibility is key, the sarkari office is attempting to shrug off its image of being the very symbol of inefficiency to being accountable, interactive and clutter-free.

Going paperless is only the beginning—the Digital India plan promises to change the very way the Government works (see box). Even in areas long considered sensitive, the paperless concept has kicked off within the Government. In 2014, the defence ministry, for example, created a portal to give all requisite permissions for defence exports to private companies—doing away not only with potential middlemen but also making the

process time-bound, monitored and effective.



The biggest change expected in 2015 is a realistic lateral entry programme that infuses new talent and work culture into government departments. The Modi Government's choice of former McKinsey India chairman Adil Zainulbhai to head the Quality Council of India (QCI) is the beginning, and the trend this year will be lateral entry at the functional level-from empowered consultants

whom policymakers will trust to traditional bureaucratic posts.

Meanwhile, the workspace in the Indian private sector is moving at a pace almost matching global trends. Besides using technology in every possible aspect-from data security to capturing time spent and monitoring work ethics-the focus is on employees. "The biggest trend is 'flexi-working', where organisations increasingly endorse the concept of people working at any place, and at any time. The virtual workspace concept is here, where an organisation comes up with a range of options for its employees to deliver work," says Nanda Majumdar, director (HR and practice development), Nishith Desai Associates.

"Sustainability and work-life balance will be the key. Social media technology is liberating people and work can be done from any place, any time. Many companies are going into the concept of a hot desk-no fixed work stations for employees, who are encouraged to work from home at times. Some places have a policy that insist on working from home once a week," Majumdar adds.

A study by global consultancy PwC shows that by 2022, workplaces in India, like the rest of the world, will move largely to a virtual office, manned by specialised employees often hired on project basis. The study predicts that the predominant culture of work, where profitability is the driving goal and market leadership the ambition, will also shrink.

PwC feels the future of the Indian workspace fits into three worlds (see box) where Blue, which represents the world in which corporate is the king, will be the smallest at 30.5 per cent, with only 10 per cent of all employees wishing to work for such an organisation. The largest number of future companies will however work in the Orange world, where specialisation and flexibility of delivering work is key and a workplace is often virtual.

The workplace most loved by employees of the future will however be the Green world, comprising firms based on ethics and social values where employees will deliver loyalty because they identify with the culture of the organisation. There is little doubt that the three types of workplaces will coexist in India soon-what the employee will have is a true freedom of choice.