Summary
Building a flexible work environment supports the organization to achieve many different outcomes. Some of the key outcomes are:

- Avoidance or cost savings for real estate
- Attraction and retention of talent
- Reduction in environmental footprint
- Enabling a more innovative and collaborative environment
- Preparing the organization for resiliency and business continuity
- Supporting health and wellness of employees

Establishing a flexible work program positions the organization to look at transforming the way they currently deliver service and how they respond to their customers who expect increased service levels. You can help increase the probability of success of flexible work programs by prioritizing change management and having strong championship from sponsors.

Flexible Work
Flexible work consists of 3 components – workstyles, workspaces and work schedules. Understanding workstyles allows you to plan the workspaces to connect mobile workers to unassigned, or shared, spaces and anchored workers (those who sit at their desk most of the day) to assigned spaces. Leveraging flexible work schedules allows for a dispersed flow of employees through the day and the week. Combining all of this with amenities, including employees’ homes, coffee shops and other non-corporate gathering spaces allows the organization to provide higher quality work environments that serve the way people actually work.

Sponsorship
Flexible work programs are supported by the enabling services ("three legged stool") of Real Estate, Information Technology (IT) and Human Resources (HR).

From a Real Estate perspective, understanding and aligning with the real estate portfolio positions the organization to leverage a strategic and focused cost benefit realization. With this strategic alignment in place, accommodation planning can be optimized to ensure spaces are designed with the appropriate amenities to support a flexible workforce, such as unassigned workstations, collaboration space, quiet rooms, lockers, etc.

It is key to ensure the people and cultural issues are addressed so that employees and leaders feel comfortable, secure and supported. Improved health and wellness for employees is a significant benefit of flexible work programs through better work life balance as a result of flexible work schedules and "work from home" arrangements, less stress, more empowerment, reduced commute times and more physical activity in the workplace if it is designed for such. For some organizations, understanding and establishing buy-in from union representatives is critical to getting arrangements such as “work from home” in place. For others, it’s a matter of getting management and supervisor buy-in to allow employees to work from home for even one or two days per week. At the end of the day, focusing on
change management, which involves strong communication and relationship building at all levels, is key to ensuring the people leg of the three legged stool is strong.

Technology is the third leg of the stool. As we are increasingly reliant and driven by mobile technology, ensuring the organization has the infrastructure (e.g. Wi-Fi and remote access) in place to support the work environment is necessary. Providing employees with suitable individual and workspace technology positions employees to be able to work from anywhere while maintaining (or improving) productivity. One of the challenges is how to provide technology support for mobile employees, as they are not located at a fixed address. It is recommended to establish information and records management and information security best practices, as these can make it easier for mobile employees to access secure files and resources. Having these best practices in place can improve employee effectiveness, though there are not necessarily prerequisites to creating and working in a flexibly work environment.

The role of the sponsors is to champion the program and articulate the benefits. Accepting risks and testing out concepts and approaches is necessary, especially early in the development of the program. Walking the talk and demonstrating leadership in the new way of working is critical. If the sponsors can understand the concept of investing today for value tomorrow, the program will be positioned more successfully.

Case Study
At the City of Calgary, one of the “early adopters” (pilot) is a project with 311. 311 is a call centre that is citizen focused and allows customers to call in to ask questions or get actions initiated to respond to city business (e.g. filling pot holes, street lights out, pet licensing, etc).

The pilot is testing the technology and processes involved in having call agents work from home. Certainly this is a benefit to employees who have indicated how their health and wellness has improved with this option available to them. However, the pilot is also starting to position the organization to transform their business. It has not only enabled a different training and recruitment strategy to save money, but also positions the business to be more resilient and prepared for business continuity.

The 311 pilot is focused on the technology and people (agents and leaders) of the call centre group. The success of this new model will allow them to avoid increasing real estate as their business grows as well as avoiding the need for a backup centre, which is key to achieving overall program goals, including the avoidance of future real estate costs.

Change Management
Providing change management throughout the entire process is key to program success. Fostering an environment where leaders feel prepared to manage and trust employees in a virtual environment is essential. Implementing cultural change across all levels of stakeholders is important. Tactics such as a desk sharing initiative, which encourages employees to say boldly to the organization that they understand the concept of moving from protecting what is theirs to sharing what is “ours” (moving from ME to WE), have been highly successful. Creating awareness and building spaces that enable The
Corporation to feel and touch what flexible work means have also helped the Tomorrow’s Workplace program.

**Conclusion**

Setting up a flexible work program with an understanding of the three components – workstyles, workspaces and work schedules – and strong sponsorship, enabled by change management and communications, is a win-win for both the organization and its employees.