

innovation

HOW GREEN ARE YOUR TRANSACTIONS?

Jayant Dwivedy discusses a 'less paper office', if not a paper less office and the resultant cost benefits

Despite newer technologies knocking at our doors, we still feel comfortable using paper. The scale may be different but many organisations thrive on using paper, writing voluminous matter on paper, filling paper formats and printing / photocopying on paper. This is followed by sending paper documents across through couriers; and filing, storing and retrieving these paper documents!

It is a habit. We have been brought up using paper. However, in the interest of the environment, this habit is best broken. This article does not advocate a paper-less world or paper less office but discusses a greener office environment and the resultant cost benefits. So if not a paper less office can we discuss a "LESS PAPER OFFICE"? That by itself will be a green achievement for the current business leaders.

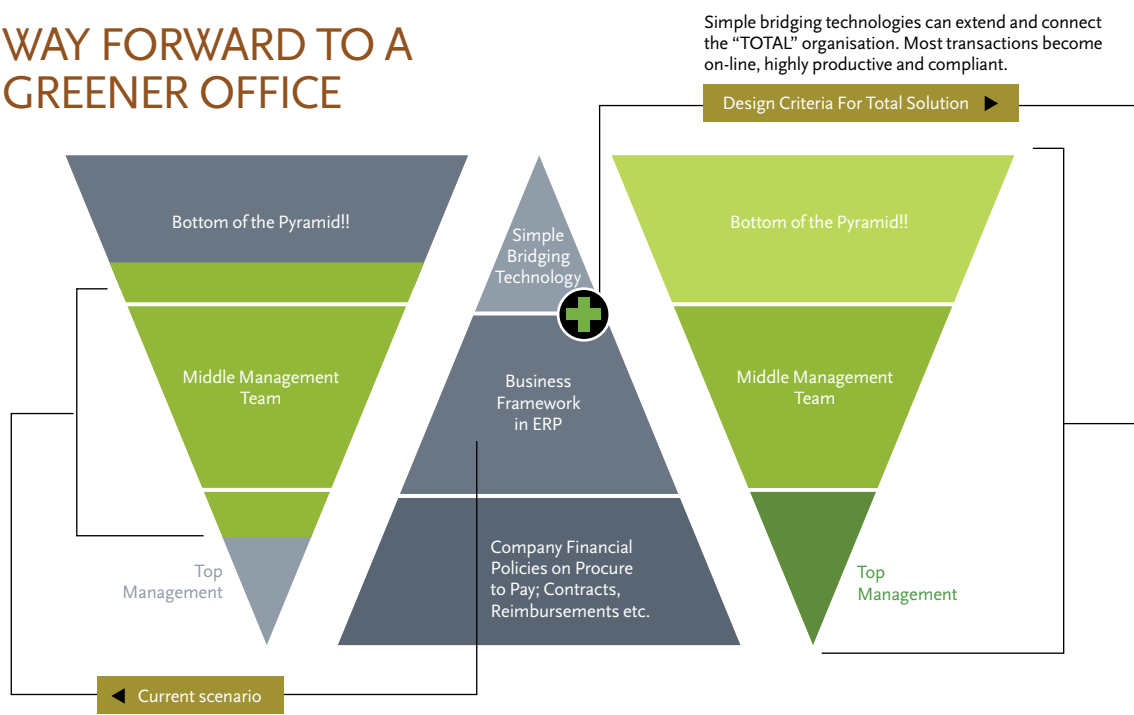
World consumption of paper has grown four hundred per cent in the last 40 years. Nearly 4 billion trees or 35% of the total trees cut around the world are used in paper industries. We cannot negate paper from our lives but as technology advances and people get more aware about the environment, things will start changing provided we use less paper and go digital whenever possible. A carefully selected combination of different simple technologies can deliver the desired results viz. online transactions using simple applications, high speed scanners and OCR (Optical Character Recognition devices) etc.



There are simple calculations available today that can enable an organisation to determine how "green" they are in terms of transactions? The use of paper (read cutting of trees) to do transactions, followed by the physical distribution of the printed copies or manually filled formats using different modes of transportation, severely impacts the environment. Cutting trees down or burning fuel, has a disastrous impact on the atmosphere.

To take a simpler example from our daily lives, a single standard newspaper adds 71g of carbon equivalent. The carbon impact of online delivery of a newspaper is 9.4g and can allow 10 hours of online reading to have the

WAY FORWARD TO A GREENER OFFICE



same carbon impact. This establishes the clear advantage of online transactions vis-à-vis manual transactions. As the size of the computational devices and processors become smaller and processing speed significantly increase, each table is serviced by speeds that were not available to a spacecraft launching centre a few decades back! The data transmission services and their reliability, advancement of the web and the availability of IT skilled manpower are beginning to make the life of the average business leader a lot simpler.

Availability of information at the right time at the right place is vital for decision making. The same is equally important for meeting regulatory requirements and corporate governance requirements. Online transactions that capture data continuously, online checks and control and also collation under appropriate heads become absolutely necessary. As an example not being able to categorise spend at the requisition stage and also not validating the same with respect to limits, business requirements, policies etc. can leave an organisation with voluminous data on spend that cannot be processed into information. This becomes a liability as neither the top management, finance or procurement can accurately map out budgets or forecast spends. Non availability of data leads to practices wherein “the experienced few” take the business calls and the entire process remains as an extension of historical “episodes”.

This may well work fine in a steady business but in a dynamic environment and with ever changing business strategies it does not take long to find out that manual means of moving and compiling data can be detrimental to the business. Can a business leader aspire to put in place a system that makes the organisation transparent, productive and green? Is there a straightforward way to achieve this?

In simple, how does a company plan to make the business green, transparent and productive? What follows are simple steps to get things right:

1. The project requires the sponsorship and backing of the top management. The process should start with fact collection meetings. Asking difficult questions and using a bit of external facilitation (to force the organisation to think outside the box) accelerates the process. “What is not automated?” should be the focus in these meetings.

Also, ‘partial automation’ creates delays. These spikes make the operation complex, people dependant and take the organisation away from being green.

Check for: Bottom of the pyramid not integrated; movement of papers and documents; late hours and week-end working; month-end peak loads etc.

2. The next step is the identification of areas that have big transactional load e.g. bill processing; ordering, employee reimbursements etc.

A quick check reveals where and how these transactions enter the financial system. How many operations are manual before the financial system gets the first entry? Who are the people who do these operations? Where are they located? How many people are involved in the whole process? What is the turn around time?

Check for: Availability of data on average turnaround time of the transactions; where are the documents stored and how are they moved around.

3. Follow this with, the identification of SIMPLE and COST EFFECTIVE technology solutions to overcome the situation. Determine the cost and timelines (budget 3-4 months of effort).

The pay back for these solutions is as quick as 6-9 months. The overall efficiency of the organisation improves; the bottom of the pyramid gets integrated for transactions and also become accountable. The operation transitions from what was seem-

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ingly complex to a GREENER AND COMPLIANT environment.

Check for: Available data on the last large computerisation effort in the organisation (if any) and the timelines;

4. Share information on the GREENER approach. It is appreciated by one and all and is a good strategy to effect change.

5. GREENER transactions necessarily lead to lower overall costs, higher productivity and greater compliance. Automation of transactions should not be mistaken as 'another ERP exercise'. Low cost automation of

transactions is nothing short of innovation. It should be an ongoing exercise from time to time (the technology experts need to ensure a TOTAL integration is achieved and the overall roadmap is well understood). However, in all such cases the technology bit takes a back seat by week 3 and the real essence (viz. smarter processes, lesser paper work, less tedious operations) remains. **CEO**



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