

CORENET GLOBAL'S

THE LEADER

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 11

CORPORATE
REAL ESTATE
& WORKPLACE

The Ongoing Battle between Landlords and Tenants

(PAGE 14)

Ford Land's
Donna Inch
(PAGE 44)

Sybase's
U.K. Workplace
Transformation
(PAGE 18)

Space Matrix:
H. Bruce Russell
2010 Global
Innovator's
Award Winner

(PAGE 26)


CORENET
GLOBAL

Remote Project Management: Getting More Done with Less

BY PETER STEIN AND DEBBIE ANDERSTROM

Woody Allen famously said, “Eighty percent of success is showing up.” However, he was not a real estate or facilities project manager. As we enter the second decade of the new millennium, it is becoming increasingly clear that “showing up” is not only costly and environmentally unfriendly, but under many circumstances, it is altogether unnecessary for the completion of a successful project.

Just as it is very common today – in corporations of all sizes – to have your “boss” located in another time zone, it is becoming more common for real estate and facilities professionals to manage

projects across the state, the country or the globe. Companies headquartered in one city often have real estate transactions and projects that need to occur elsewhere. Geographically strategic sites such as sales offices, retail branches and distribution centers often dictate quite specifically where leases in one’s portfolio must reside. It is quite likely that real estate groups do not have adequate qualified staff in these locations, and even national service providers have limited office locations. The logistics of relocating or hiring staff on a temporary basis and the general cost of travel often make it prohibitive to have on-site management for a one-time remote project.

What is Remote Project Management?

Remote projects involve the same steps as any local project, starting with a real estate transaction and continuing through occupancy. The space alternatives need to be presented, the due diligence performed, the fit plans analyzed and the numbers crunched. A full design process may need to happen with the schematic design, design development and construction document phases occurring with landlord interactions and approvals. Decisions regarding technology (e.g., IT, A/V, security) and furniture are typically part of the mix, as well. Then there is the actual construction and finally, the move in.

Imagine managing the project – understanding the intimate details about the scope tradeoffs, schedule and budget and coordinating its team to operate effectively within those constraints – without ever setting foot in the same state of the facility. Sound crazy? Well, yeah, you’re probably right – at least for large projects. However, when we talk about project management being accomplished “remotely,” it does not necessarily mean totally electronically or virtually. There will very likely be some physical travel to the remote destination; the amount and duration will depend on the size of the project and scope of the work to be accomplished. The objective (as always) is to maximize efficiency and performance while minimizing costs, and this can be done through careful planning, deliberate communications and a dash of technology.

Small, turnkey projects with limited scope can often be totally accomplished without a site visit at all. A project manager from Fox manages about 10 build-outs (most averaging 4,000 to 8,000 square feet/372 to 743 square meters) at a time for a national client, without ever leaving his/her desk. Larger, more complex projects of more than, say 15,000 square feet (1,394 square meters), however, may require anywhere from one or two site visits to a regular (perhaps monthly) visit throughout the project’s duration. The goal for remote projects is always to minimize site visits while maintaining the universal project management goals of a high-quality, on-time and on-budget project.

Does this Apply to My Projects?

While the perception may exist that remote project management lends itself ideally to retail branches or sales offices, most projects can leverage remote management for a serious reduction in both travel and time costs. These common situations are ideal candidates:

- The upgrade or expansion of an existing, remote facility
- An existing lease termination and relocation to a new remote facility
- The acquisition of, or merger with, another company with real estate in



duplicate geographies, requiring a new facility or consolidation into one of the existing facilities

How Can This Happen if I’m not there?

Working remotely on projects is not a new concept. I (Deb Anderstrom) remember working as an interior designer back in the Dark Ages (i.e., the 1980s) on a large, complex hospital project in Pittsburgh, Pa., that included a new building and an extensive renovation of the existing facility. For four years, the project team, which included the architectural and interior design firms from Boston and the partner architectural firm in Pittsburgh, communicated via telephone and the U.S. Postal Service (yes, snail-mail; there wasn’t a computer or even a fax machine in sight!) This large project was indeed managed from a different state, along with a few site visits thrown in for good measure.

Communication was the primary key to the project’s success then, and lo and behold, it is the primary key now, as well. Luckily for everyone (except the U.S. Postal Service), the methods with which we are able to communicate have changed a bit since then.

Here Comes the Techno-Babble

I am sure multiple communication

methods immediately jumped into your head. Of course, there is email – quite a humongous advance over regular mail. But is it really the solution to everything? With inboxes clogging up faster and faster, email is getting less and less reliable. How many times have you heard, “Maybe it got caught in my spam filter?” And if the email does get through, what document version are you using? Is there more than one editor of the document? And what about additional software requirements for new, unknown document types?

Well, there is an abundance of new technologies that have been developed to support project communications – and they are tailored specifically for project teams that are not co-located. While the hurdle of ensuring technology adoption can be the subject for an entirely different article, once successfully managed, the benefits typically far outweigh the costs. Here are additional technologies that we have found increasingly useful for managing projects remotely:

- Conference calls: Of course!
- Texting: It’s not just for kids.
- Digital photographs: Yes, with email.
- Web meetings: My service or yours?
- Video conferencing: From free Skype to not-so-free TelePresence Systems
- Project websites: For customer end-user communications

QUICK TIPS

- *Always be to the point. Remember that a good percentage of emails these days are viewed on a tiny Blackberry screen; keep your messages simple and straightforward.*
- *Don't forget time zones. Respect the geographic location of other team members when scheduling conference calls.*
- *Build relationships. Take a few minutes at the start of a conference call to talk about the weather or ask how the weekend was. Small talk goes a long way to establishing rapport with the person on the other end of the phone who you may never meet face to face.*

- Google Docs/acrobat.com: Simple document sharing/collaboration
- Extranets: From the simple (e.g., box.net) to the feature-rich (e.g., SharePoint)

Leverage Your Assets

Now that you have embraced the concept of remote project management, understanding who is available to support your project – regardless of their location – and what value they can bring to the table is vital.

Look close to home (figuratively, not literally – remember, the project is remote) at your internal resources. If the project happens to involve work on an existing facility (or even a local move to a nearby facility), leverage onsite staff as part of the project team. This can include facilities, IT or HR staff or the office manager. They can often be your eyes and ears on the ground. Spelling out their roles and responsibilities at the outset of the project will enable them to become valuable remote on-site assets.

Make the landlord and/or building manager your friend. You are all in this together to accomplish the goal of a successful project. You may need to remind them of this fact on occasion, but making them an integral part of the team and asking their advice on issues can go a long way for you both.

If You Have To Be There, Make it Count!

For most large projects, one or more site visits will be required – the precise number depending heavily on factors such as actual project size, scope and complexity (e.g., retail, labs, data centers, corporate office space) and availability of local project team members (and digital cameras).

The project site in relationship to where you are located is, of course, a consideration. If the remote location is a reasonable drive or a short, inexpensive flight away, you will be inclined to visit the site more frequently. If, however, you are traveling across the country or overseas and lose a day of valuable work time each leg of the trip, you can probably be more productive by limiting those trips to only those that are essential.

If the project budget will support travel to the site, in most cases, getting on site earlier in the project rather than later is very beneficial. Whether you are on site or remote, developing a strong rapport with your team is a key component of any successful project. Furthermore, getting an initial first-hand impression and understanding of the site will help anchor early discussions. Being physically present for that initial kick-off meeting (if the bulk of the project team is local to the project site) can significantly shorten the time required to build rapport. While you're there, plan enough time to meet with the local building management, take pictures of the existing/new sites, field measure, take inventory, and do anything else you think could benefit you as the project progresses.

Remote project management is more than just an intellectual theory. Project managers at Fox have been executing remote projects for a number of years. Projects more than 100,000 square feet (9,290 square meters) and as far away as Puerto Rico have been remotely managed. For one client, we have successfully managed more than 100 interior fit-out projects ranging from small spaces with a handful of people to 25,000-sq.-ft. (2,323-sq.-m.)facili-

ties with more than 100 people. The number of these spaces we have visited in person can be counted on one hand. As technology improves, the effort and associated costs required to complete projects diminish. By establishing realistic expectations, objectives and procedures with the whole team at the start of the project, remote project management can truly be done with the same performance and customer satisfaction ratings that are achieved by projects managed in person – only for a whole lot less.

About the Authors



Peter Stein is vice president of Fox RPM Corp., a project management company. He is responsible for the firm-wide dissemination of project management best practices and investigates the role of technology in project management.



Deb Anderstrom is a project director at Fox RPM Corp. She has more than 25 years of experience managing significant design projects and critical project management initiatives.

For more information on this topic, please visit CoreNet Global's Knowledge Center Online.

Moving with Mobility: A Global Real Estate Strategy <http://www2.corenetglobal.org/dotCMS/kcoAsset?assetInode=9814402>

Business Redefined <http://www2.corenetglobal.org/dotCMS/kcoAsset?assetInode=9061647>