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CoreNet Global and Microsoft take closer look at alternative strategies

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The forecast for the workplace of the future points towards less fixed office space and more "open" space with the adoption of alternative workplace strategies to support mobile and geographically dispersed workers. Yet the largest challenge remains lack of support from senior management, according to a recent survey of CoreNet Global Orlando Summit registrants.

Microsoft collaborated with CoreNet Global on a survey to examine the successes, challenges and drivers of alternative workplace strategies (AWS). Those surveyed are registrants to the Orlando Global Summit with 72% representing large scale, global operations.

This survey of international workplace and corporate real estate executives (CRE) concluded that 77% of respondents see AWS programs growing over the next three years. AWS programs are already starting to enter the mainstream, as new companies join the early adopters in piloting and rolling out alternative workplace programs. 86% of respondents report having an AWS initiative in place. Of those, 40% have had programs for five or more years, with another 30% starting in the last two years. The number of employees participating in alternative and flexible work programs varies. In one out of five companies, more than 30% of total worldwide employees are involved, while in over half of the companies less than 10% of employees are. Almost half the employees participating have gone completely mobile and given up an assigned office. As this number grows, they physical footprint of companies will continue to shrink, as well as costs and their carbon footprint.

"We're seeing the two main reasons corporations are implementing existing AWS are about people - first the ability to attract and retain talent and provide a better work-life balance by enabling employees the flexibility to work remotely. Second, improving productivity and collaboration. Cost, whether right sizing the portfolio or overall cost cutting, were also important, but less than the people issues, which was surprising since the survey was fielded prior to the banking and stock crisis in October," said Katherine Randolph, director, Unified Communications for Microsoft. "Corporate real estate is leading their companies' Alternative Workplace initiatives 45% of the time. But they're building a partnership with IT to ensure that the physical and the virtual environments work together." Three-quarters of respondents say they're actively working with IT.

Communications technologies are vital to supporting mobile workers who may be moving around inside a corporate campus, working from the road or home. Email is of course ubiquitous, having surpassed the phone as the primary form of business communication. Web conferencing is used by 85% of respondents companies, and instant messaging, Voice over IP and video conferencing are all being used by two thirds of companies.

The decision to standardize AWS programs is being implemented regionally by corporations with

52% of respondents saying that regions can choose to adopt or not to adopt. Only 11% said that a global policy replicated identically in each region currently exists. The other 37% of respondents note a global framework in place allowing for each region to determine implementation.

While North American and European operations are further along in development of AWS programs, all other global regions have ample room for growth and adoption. Top regions that are actively rolling out, are in the process of piloting, deploying or have completed the rollout include:

- * North America - 83%

- * Europe - 51%

- * Other Asia/Pacific Rim - 33%

- * India - 31%

So clearly momentum is growing around the world, despite the challenges. 45% of respondents cite the biggest challenge as say lack sufficient support from senior management, followed by lack of middle management support (37%).

"What CoreNet Global members are saying is that our corporations want to retain the best talent and to do that we are seeing more flexibility in the definition of workplace and work style," said Dr. Prentice Knight, CEO of CoreNet Global. Knight added that, "while the office is still widely regarded as a hub for collaboration and social connectivity, new technologies are becoming more readily available to keep the mobile and global workforce connected. While these innovations continue to be introduced, corporate transformations take time to roll out on a global level."

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