An introduction to workplace

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1. Introduction

In 2018 the British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) became the Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management (IWFM). The inclusion of 'workplace' was about creating a more inclusive and business-relevant profession. Workplace makes an explicit link between facilities management (FM) and business performance.

However, a name change alone will not automatically lead to a better understanding of what workplace is, why it's important or what it means for FM. To expect as much would be unrealistic. The reality is that a better understanding of workplace, and its relevance to FM, will only come about through ongoing education, professional development and a positive attitude to learning.

This, the first in a series of guidance notes on workplace, is part of our aim at IWFM to develop understanding of workplace amongst you, our members, and beyond. Along the way we also explore questions that are frequently asked about workplace and include some practical tools. Our aim is to help you reconsider and better understand workplace – especially in your own organisation – so you become more informed and confident about how your workplace can be improved.

If you would like to provide feedback on this Guidance Note or have ideas for other workplace information, guidance or research please email **research@iwfm.org.uk**

2. What is workplace?

In FM, as in other professions, there are certain terms that are aren't commonly used elsewhere, but are understood in the same way by a majority of people in that profession. For instance, if we say 'hard FM' or 'soft FM', most readers will know what we're talking about. Such shared language and common understanding is one of the defining characteristics of a profession.

Workplace has always been part of the language of FM. Most of us use the term in our day-to-day work – and it's regularly used in business and the media – but there's no shared understanding amongst FMs of what workplace is.

We know this from all the FM conversations we've had and heard over the years. If we invited fifty people to explain 'workplace', we'd probably get a dozen different explanations!"

ACTIVITY
Pause for a moment: how would you describe workplace if someone asked you to explain it to them? Note it down – we'll revisit this in a moment…

The lack of shared understanding of workplace has practical 'real world' implications. If we say 'workplace' and mean one thing, but you (or your colleagues or customers) think of another thing, that can be very confusing. We can end up talking at cross-purposes. How we view workplace also influences whether we see workplace as important or relevant to the work we're doing as FMs.
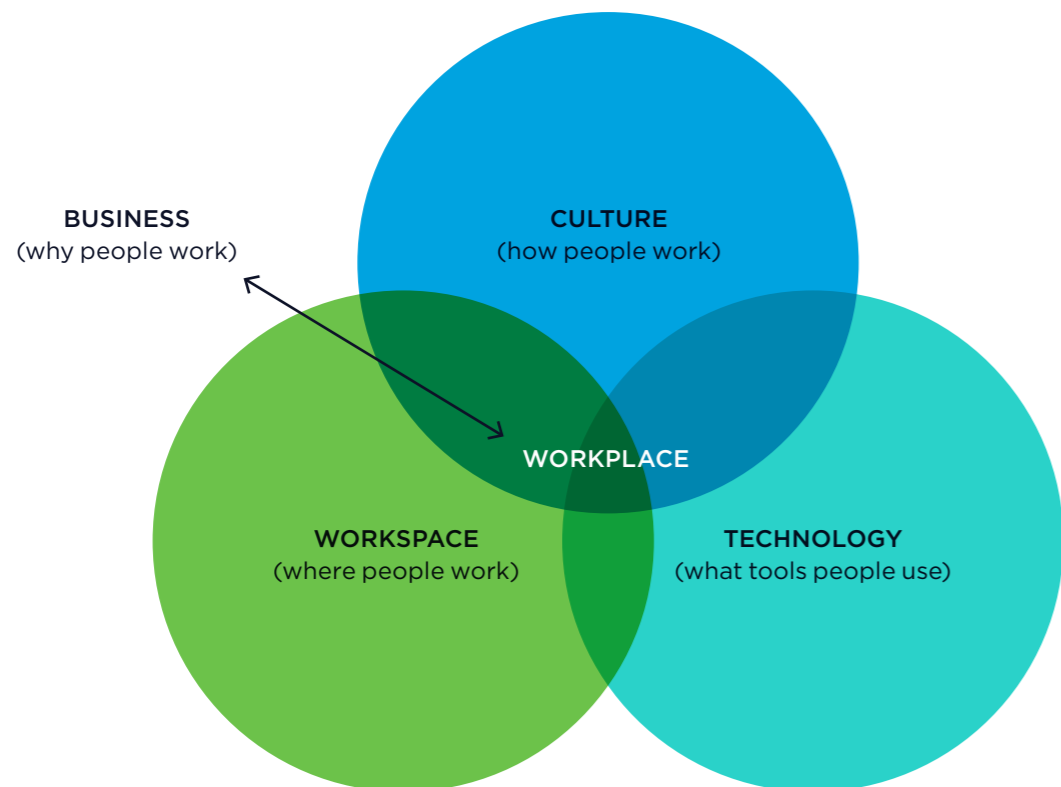
If, for instance, I see workplace as being solely about an organisation's cultural or social environment, then I might not see the relevance of workplace to the work I'm doing to maintain and operate the organisation's buildings. I might see workplace as something that falls under the remit of HR or the organisation's senior leadership team.

In this guidance note we want to provide you with a model of workplace that is both simple but also practically useful, because it allows you to better understand the workplace(s) you encounter in your work. The model can be illustrated using our workplace Venn diagram. Here, workplace is comprised of three components: culture, workspace and technology.

Key point
We see workplace as the social places where people use the tools available to them to get their work done. A great workplace provides an opportunity for people to do amazing things.

BUSINESS
(why people work)

CULTURE
(how people work)

WORKPLACE

WORKSPACE
(where people work)

TECHNOLOGY
(what tools people use)

ACTIVITY
Now, go back to the description of workplace you wrote down earlier. How does it compare to this model? Did your description focus on one particular area of the workplace Venn?

The workplace Venn diagram is helpful because it highlights, through the overlapping circles, how the three different components of workplace are dependent on and influenced by each other. For instance, a company may have a 'flexible' working culture and a 'flexible' workspace containing a variety of different work settings, but if its people don't have the technology needed to work flexibly, they will struggle to do so effectively.

Examples like this underline the importance of viewing the different elements of workplace together. Yet this isn't how most organisations approach workplace – traditionally the three elements of workplace have tended to be managed independently of each other, without an appreciation of how they can impact each other.

ACTIVITY

Stop and think about how workplace is managed in your organisation. Who is responsible for each part of the Venn diagram? How much do they talk to each other about what they are doing?

ISN'T WORKPLACE JUST ANOTHER WORD FOR 'OFFICE'?

It's easy to fall into the trap of seeing workplace as just being about offices. Granted, many people do work in offices and so lots of media attention gets focused here too. However, many IWFM members also manage and support other types of workplaces too, including, for example, hospitals, factories, supermarkets, universities and schools. Just look at your local town or city skyline – workplaces are as diverse as the different buildings you can see.

So, workplace is most definitely not just about offices and we don't see workplace as a substitute word for office. Each of the workplaces referred to above will feel very different from one another because of differences in things people are doing, the technology they use and the spaces they work in. But the workplace Venn diagram still applies and can therefore be used to help understand and improve all types of workplaces.

IS WORKPLACE THE SAME AS WORKSPACE?

The terms 'workplace' and 'workspace' are frequently used interchangeably in facilities management. When pushed to explain the difference between the two, 'workplace' is often used to refer to the overall building where people go to work, like an office or factory. 'Workspace' is often used for the specific location in the building where people do their work, like a desk or workbench.

Thinking about workplace in terms of physical space is understandable, given that facilities management developed around managing and maintaining buildings. However, as we illustrated above using the workplace Venn diagram, it overlooks the fact that physical space is just one component of workplace – albeit an important one.

One way to think about the relationship between space and place is to think about what people bring to buildings. A building without people in it is just an empty space, whereas once that space is occupied by people it becomes a place. It feels different with people in it, because place is social. If you took the workers out of an office building and replaced them with school kids, then that building would become a very different kind of place!

Appreciating the difference between workplace and workspace is important because it helps us appreciate the important contribution that FMs can make to workplace, an issue we explore below.
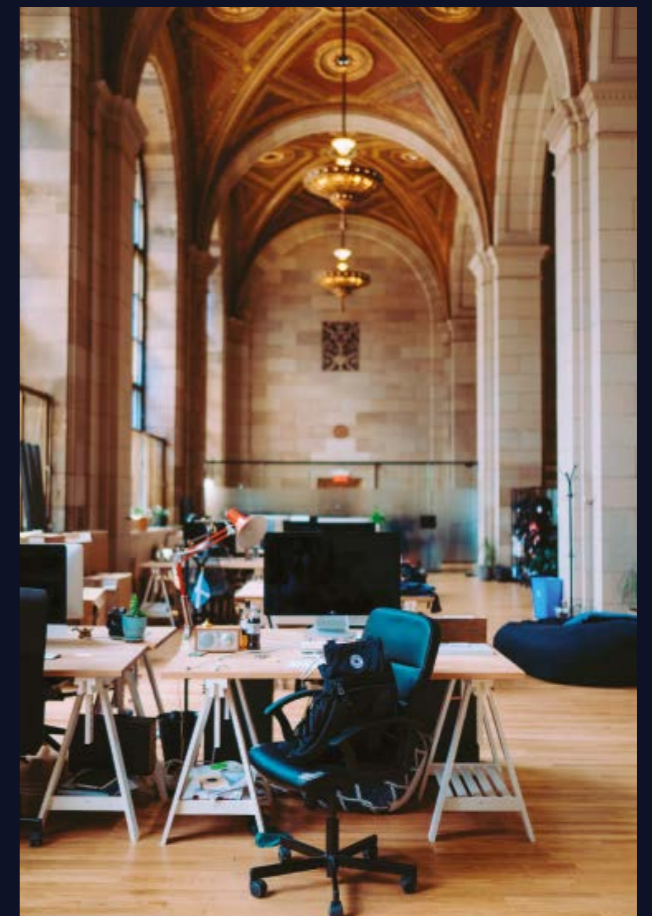
3. Why should you care about workplace?

Workplaces are important at both an individual and organisational level.

At an individual level, workplaces affect the way people function, by influencing whether or not they can do their jobs effectively. If an organisation's culture, technology or workspace are not fit for purpose, then it's unlikely that its people will be able to perform at their best. And having people not performing at their best seems nonsensical if one considers how much organisations spend on employing the right people.

Workplaces also affect how people feel about their work and employer. For example, a great workplace may result in people feeling valued by their employer, whereas a poor workplace may lead to people feel overlooked or neglected. The impact that workplace can have on how people feel is one of the reasons why workplace is such an emotive issue.

ACTIVITY
Think for a moment about your own workplace: In what ways does it help or hinder you? Which of the three components (culture, technology or workspace) have a positive or negative impact on the way you work?

How does it make your feel? Which of the three components (culture, technology or workspace) have a positive or negative impact on how you feel?

Key point
Spotting the ways that different parts of a workplace influence people – positively or negatively – is an important starting point to understanding how a workplace can be improved.

Workplaces have an impact at an organisational level through the effect they have on employees. For instance, if an organisation's workplace means its employees can't work effectively, then this is going to have an impact on the organisation's performance overall. Similarly, if people don't feel valued because of their workplace, then they may look to find an employer who does value them.

But workplaces also send messages to people outside of the organisation: clients and customers, competitors, investors, and prospective employees. They offer clues about what that organisation sees as important, and whether it walks its talk, so to speak. For instance does the organisation value creativity and innovation? Does it value its people? Is it traditional or modern? Is it open and welcoming or private and discrete?

There's no avoiding the fact that our workplaces send messages, a bit like the way the clothes we wear create first impressions about ourselves. Workplace therefore needs to be recognised as a critical way that organisations communicate with the wider world.

HOW DO WORKPLACE AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT WORK TOGETHER?

Workplace is not the same as facilities management, but facilities management makes a vitally important contribution to workplace by ensuring that people have the right workspace(s) – and their associated services – that enable them to perform effectively. We've known for years that workspaces have a huge impact on how people feel and perform, but we're only just starting to acknowledge how significant this impact is.

Facilities management can therefore be seen as one of the key contributors (along with for example HR, IT, change and project managers and leadership teams) to providing, managing and leading workplaces. However, the most effective workplaces are where these contributors work together, rather than in silos. After all, great workplaces are very much more than the sum of their parts.

Workplace has become an increasingly important issue for organisations who need to attract and retain the right talent. Technology companies are the obvious and often cited example, but companies in a wide range of sectors are engaged in the same battle for skills – particularly digital skills. For many of these companies, now more than ever, workplace is a key differentiator – the thing that will make them stand out from the crowd.

ACTIVITY

Think about your own workplace again: What message(s) do you think your workplace sends to the wider world?

WHY WORKPLACE ISN'T JUST ANOTHER FAD

Workplace can seem like a fad, particularly if you pay attention to some of the debates that take place on social media. Hardly a day goes by without an article doing the rounds about why workplace is important and why organisations should take it more seriously. Often these articles focus on technology companies and the investments they are making in their workplaces, which can seem divorced from the everyday reality of most organisations. Such articles also tend to be written by people who have a vested interest in workplace: workspace providers, IT companies, management consultants and the like.

However, if you really want to understand why workplace matters – and why it's not just another business fad – take a look at the employee review website Glassdoor. Glassdoor allows users to anonymously submit reviews of the organisations they've worked for and say whether or not they would recommend the organisation to a friend. When looking at the things people say about organisations, the important role that workplace plays in colouring peoples' perceptions (for better or worse) is obvious.

ANONYMOUS WORKPLACE COMMENTS FROM GLASSDOOR

"Great working environment – it's very modern and comfortable"

"I have a great work-life balance – I can work flexibly when I need to"

"Poor technology – it's difficult to get things done here"

"I'm expected to be at my desk everyday – it's hard to find the space to think"

"Working here makes me feel down – the office is old and depressing"

4. What does workplace mean for FM?

The link between FM and workplace is actually as old as FM itself, even if that doesn't always seem the case nowadays. Indeed, some of the earliest definitions of FM included references to 'workplace'.

Research into the history and evolution of facilities management suggests that FM was used "... during the late 1970s to describe the developing field of study into the design and management of workplaces and their impact on the business organisations that occupied them[1]."

Over the years FM has become a peripheral (or non-core) activity in many organisations, which means that the contribution FM makes isn't as recognised or valued as it should be. FMs can therefore be left feeling undervalued, misunderstood and frustrated

> **ACTIVITY**
> Pause and think about how FM is seen within your (or your client) organisation(s). Is its contribution recognised and valued? How would you describe the contribution you make?

Footnote
[1] Nor, N., Mohammed, A. and Alias, B. (2014) Facility management history and evolution. International Journal of Facility Management, 5(1)

So how will workplace change this?

Well the reality is that the word itself won't. Only you can change how you are valued and perceived by others, through your actions and the language you use. Workplace isn't a silver bullet and including 'workplace' in your job title won't automatically raise your status within your organisation. However, you can use workplace as a platform for achieving these goals.

One thing that workplace certainly does enable is different conversations. Try sitting down with a senior leader in your organisation (or with a client) and talk them through the workplace Venn diagram and what

it means. Rather than being divorced from the core-business (as FM is on most organisational charts), FM's contribution to workplace is square and centre. There's an explicit link between the work you do and your organisation's purpose and performance.

However, to have such conversations may mean that you need to develop a better understanding of the organisation. If workplace is an opportunity to explain how you could make a difference, then you do need to have a genuine understanding of what your organisation's goals are, what the people in that organisation are striving to achieve and how well their workplace supports this.

> **ACTIVITY**
> Reflect on the organisation(s) you work for. How much do you really know about what the organisation does and what its goals are? How well do you understand what people in the organisation actually do and how workplace enables or hinders this? What do you need to do to learn more?

5. What should I do next?

Workplace can also be a vehicle for you to collaborate with other organisational functions, and as a tool to get an 'in' to core business and workplace development discussions. Once understood collectively, workplace provides a common language and frame of reference for people from different professional disciplines, but more importantly it also provides a reason to have those conversations, because we know that workplaces that aren't managed in a joined-up way don't work as effectively.

WON'T I BE TREADING ON THE TOES OF OTHER DEPARTMENTS?

Embracing workplace isn't necessarily about taking on new responsibilities or assuming control over workplace, although more and more enlightened organisations will no doubt see the value in a 'Chief Workplace Officer' to oversee and co-ordinate the components. More importantly, it's about adopting a more collaborative and business-focused mindset, in which your actions are in alignment with other workplace functions and the organisation's strategic goals. In essence, workplace is about working together!

In many respects, FM is well placed to embrace workplace. FMs typically have their ear to the ground and know what's going on in their organisations. The nature of their role means that they tend to interact with all parts of an organisation. By building upon these inherent strengths you can become a 'super-connector', joining the dots between different parts of the workplace jigsaw.

To begin taking advantage of the opportunities that workplace presents we recommend that you

1 Give this guidance note to colleagues (including clients and senior managers) who you think might be interested in it. And then make sure to have a follow-up conversation about it and what workplace means for the organisation.

2 Talk to colleagues in other workplace functions Find out about what they're doing and how they view workplace. You might find it helpful to print out a copy of the workplace Venn diagram to use when you're having these conversations.

3 Use the workplace equalizer to assess your own workplace or one of your client's workplaces. If you're struggling to complete the equalizer, this probably suggests that you've got gaps in your knowledge that you need to fill by having conversations with the appropriate people.

4 Complete our workplace health check for your own organisation or a client organisation. This will give you a high-level indication of where your organisation stands in terms of its approach to workplace and the areas for improvement.

Activity
Using the workplace equalizer

The workplace equalizer is a simple but powerful tool to better understand a workplace and to identify how it can be improved. We call it the workplace equalizer because it reminds us of those graphic equalizers that music stereos used to have, with their little sliding levers. It essentially takes the workplace Venn and turns it into a simple assessment tool. The tool invites you to consider any given organisation's culture, workspace and technology between two end parameters.

You can think about an organisation's workplace overall or use it to compare different departments, buildings, floors – whatever helps your needs. You could also use it to consider different organisations side by side, to start identifying and potentially unlocking differences in their workplaces.

We're not suggesting you use the workplace equalizer to try and claim any absolute truth. Its real value is in the conversations and lightbulb moments that you can trigger with it. You might end up with 'hunches' that need further investigation or fact-checking to see if you were right – which is all part of FM developing a more evidence-based approach to workplace.

Culture exists on a continuum between traditional (embodying principles such as presenteeism, hierarchy, status and maybe presenteeism) and progressive (embodying principles such as trust, choice, flexibility and empowerment).
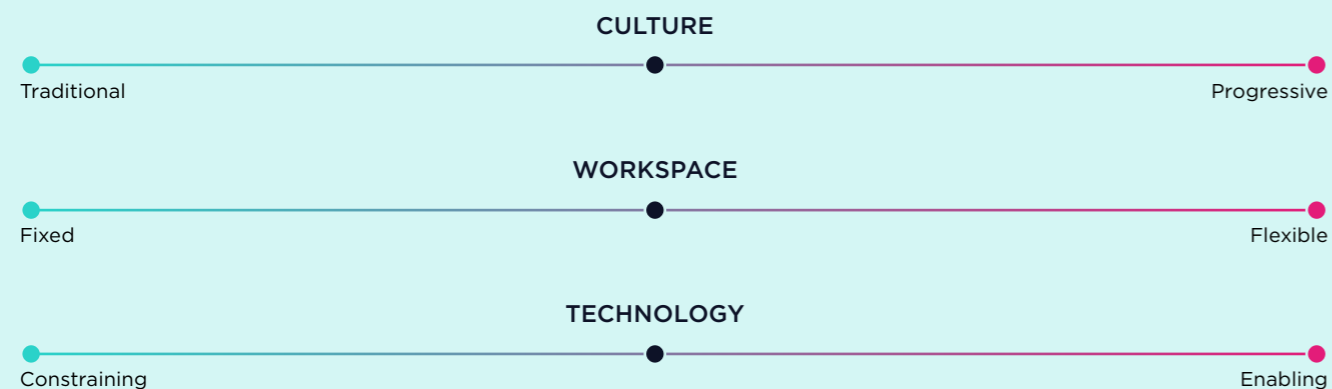
Workspace exists on a continuum between fixed (very limited choice of work settings and limited sharing) and flexible (a wider choice of work settings and a greater degree of sharing and/or mobility).

Technology exists on a continuum between constraining (poor functionality and often limited choice) and enabling (technology that reflects and supports different user needs).

Use this tool to appraise your own workplace. Consider the following questions:

- Where would you mark up your workplace on each part of the equaliser?
- Are the labels appropriate and, if not, what should they be?
- How well aligned are the different aspects of the workplace? Are there any obvious inconsistencies?
- Does it look like the workplace helps or hinders what your organisation is trying to be and trying to achieve?

How might your workplace need to change and who are the key people beyond FM you need to talk to about this?

CULTURE

Traditional ————————————————————— Progressive

WORKSPACE

Fixed ————————————————————— Flexible

TECHNOLOGY

Constraining ————————————————————— Enabling

✎ Activity
Give yourself a workplace health check

Another way to unlock more powerful conversations about your organisation's approach to workplace is to use our Workplace Maturity Matrix to give yourself a workplace health check.

Just like going to the doctors is sometimes the right thing to do (even though we typically don't want to) taking the time to think about how you, your organisation and your leadership team approach workplace will help to:

- appreciate how you currently understand workplace and its potential value
- identify specific development areas to unlock your workplace advantage more effectively
- have more focused conversations about actions you need to take
- target your limited resources on the right areas

In this tool, maturity is about how you might describe your organisation's overall workplace competence – we've taken inspiration from the stages of learning to drive, as everyone remembers how it felt and the practice needed to move from being a complete novice to a proficient driver. Mindset is a quick way to describe your general attitude to workplace. Remember, sometimes honest truths can be uncomfortable!

Workplace maturity/mindset	Level 1 novice/unaware	Level 2 learner/fragmented	Level 3 proficient/embedded	Level 4 advanced/enlightened
Concept awareness	We don't really know what workplace is, or frankly what all the fuss is about	We are aware of workplace but can't confidently define it, and tend to confuse it with workspace	Teams responsible for workplace understand it well, but can struggle to engage with the wider business	Teams responsible for workplace act as ambassadors to the wider business, making the case for its relevance
Departmental responsibility	We have no formally defined functions or teams responsible for each element of workplace	We have formally defined workplace functions but they typically work in silos, so our workplace thinking is disconnected	We have formally defined workplace functions who are able to work together, but it takes effort and isn't the norm	Our workplace functions are aligned, understand their inter-dependencies, and work effortlessly together
Information quality	We don't have any useful workplace data to base our decisions on	We are aware of basic forms of workplace data and tend to commission 'off the shelf' assistance (e.g. for utilisation and workplace surveys)	We understand the breadth of workplace data available to us, but may need help to analyse, interpret and take action from them	We are able to design and undertake evidence-based workplace projects flexibly to suit different contexts
Change capability	We don't see workplace change as an important consideration – our staff need to just sit where we tell them	We know (often from bitter experience) how emotive workplace change can be, but we don't have the skills to do it well	We have learnt from our experiences that coordinated and considerate change management is critical to workplace success	We embrace a change leadership mindset – specific workplace initiatives are just elements of our constant business evolution
Senior leadership position	Our senior leadership team have no interest in workplace as a business enabler	Some of our leadership team appreciate workplace, but decisions still lack robust consideration	Workplace is part of our leadership team's consideration but can get lost behind other business priorities	Workplace is always high on our senior leadership team's agenda as an important business lever
Overall business value	**Workplace isn't seen as relevant to our business or its success**	**Workplace is seen as relevant, but we can't convincingly explain why**	**We can demonstrate how workplace is relevant to our business strategy**	**We can demonstrate how workplace is key to our competitive advantage**

Study the table above and circle the description that feels about right for each different workplace element, from 'concept awareness' down to 'overall business value'. You might have some variance between levels, but it's unlikely you'll for example be level 1 in some but level 3 or 4 in others – although if you do, you've potentially got some serious things to consider...

Once you've done this, take stock of the overall picture and consider the following questions:

• What does the Matrix tell you about your organisation's workplace health?
• Does it look like workplace helps or hinders what your organisation is trying to achieve?
• Are there any obvious areas for workplace knowledge or skills development?
• Who are the key people beyond FM who you need to talk to about this?

LEARNING MORE ABOUT WORKPLACE

There are a number of ways you can learn more about workplace through IWFM.

In 2018 we published a number of insight reports on the topic, which can be found at https://www.iwfm.org.uk/insight

During the second half of 2019 we will be publishing more guidance notes in this series, on topics including workplace data workspace design and workplace change.

There is additional reading at the Ricoh site: https://insights.ricoh.co.uk/ where you can find more about empowering people, optimising the workplace, streamlining processes and simplifying technology.

We have also partnered with workplace specialists 3edges to provide a suite of CPD courses on workplace. The courses can be attended individually or delivered for groups 'in-company' and include:

• Essentials of Workplace Leadership
• Making Better Workplace Decisions Using Data
• Creating Better Workspaces
• Selling Your Workplace Vision
• Leading Successful Workplace Change

Multi-course discounts are available. To find out more about our courses or to book a place, visit https://www.iwfm.org.uk/professional-development/academy

The Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management (IWFM) is the body for workplace and facilities professionals.

We exist to promote excellence among a worldwide community of over 17,000 and to demonstrate the value and contribution of workplace and facilities management more widely.

Our Mission: We empower professionals to upskill and reach their potential for a rewarding, impactful career. We do this by advancing professional standards, offering guidance and training, developing new insights and sharing best practice.

Our Vision: As the pioneering workplace and facilities management body, our vision is to drive change for the future. To be the trusted voice of a specialist profession recognised, beyond the built environment, for its ability to enable people to transform organisations and their performance.

The IWFM was established in 2018. It builds on the proud heritage of 25 years as the British Institute of Facilities Management.

To find out more, please visit
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This guide has been produced as part of a partnership between IWFM and Ricoh.

About Ricoh
Ricoh is empowering digital workplaces using innovative technologies and services enabling individuals to work smarter. For more than 80 years, Ricoh has been driving innovation and is a leading provider of document management solutions, IT services, communication services, commercial and industrial printing, digital cameras, and industrial systems.

Headquartered in Tokyo, Ricoh Group operates in approximately 200 countries and regions. In the financial year ended March 2019, Ricoh Group had worldwide sales of 2,013 billion yen (approx. 18.1 billion USD).

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