

# News You Can Use by Haidee E. Allerton

## Trend Watch

Offices are vanishing—or at least moved to where you might not expect.

Many companies are putting bosses' domains in the middle of the floor rather than in the big corner offices and giving the space along the windows to nonmanagement employees.

Though many workplaces still have cubicle forests, an increasing number of workers are complaining about hierarchical office layouts and the segregation. Slowly, cubicle walls are being replaced by picket fences, plantings, and such items as couches and bookcases.

More companies are also incorporating conversation areas into their office designs, with sofas, easy chairs, and floor cushions. Color is being used to distinguish one area from another and to set creative, calming moods. Plants are more prevalent.

Source *Trend Alert*, The Herman Group, herman.net

## Reality Check

In another disappearing act, only 30 percent of 145 *Fortune* 1000 U.S.-based companies have a chief executive office, according to a recent

poll by The Conference Board of New York.

"The office of the chief executive—the OCE, a small group of senior executives who help the CEO run the business—has been a management tool for at least a century," says Robert Kramer, a researcher at The Conference Board. "Its popularity has traditionally waxed and waned and is now at an ebb."

For companies that don't have a chief executive office, the reasons given are

- to speed decision making
- to replace the office with a broader management committee structure
- because the format became no longer necessary.

Successful team management seems to be supplanting the power of the top-level office. Says one CEO, "I'm suspicious of the OCE for three reasons. One, it can separate a CEO from important developments that he or she should have firsthand knowledge of. Two, it can complicate and delay decision making. Any time you bring together five or so articulate people to debate and decide a complex issue, it's hard to establish consensus. Better to act and be 80 percent right than delay and be 95 percent right. Three, an OCE increases the potential for divisive political

behavior at the apex of the corporation."

The study found that successful OCEs tend to have

- clear reasons for being
- high-quality CEO leadership
- a delineation of powers reserved for the CEO and those delegated to other members of the office
- member role definition and group team building.

To order the report, "The Office of the Chief Executive: Current Patterns and Challenges," call The Conference Board's customer service department at 212.339.0345.

## Power Shift

More than ever, corporate boardrooms are deluged with demands and are transferring more authority and responsibility to various committees.

"They're discovering they can not only do more, but also can do a better job of governance," says *Boardroom Insider* publisher Ralph D. Ward.

The key is to revamp board committees to concentrate their strengths on a particular area.

Committee shake-up ideas:

- Write strong charters.
- Select committee membership based on talent, not whose turn it is.



## News Flash

*Casting the net...*

**TrainingNet**, a network of more than 1,200 U.S.-based training

providers headquartered in Billerica, Massachusetts, has acquired **The Graduate Group**, owner of one of the United Kingdom's leading business-to-business training resources, **The National Training Index**. That puts TrainingNet into the global market.

Corporate customers of **The National Training Index** include British Airways, Ernst and Young, and America Online UK. NTI's clients also include some 2,000 training providers.

TrainingNet has also partnered with **Hotjobs** to provide its subscribers with TrainingNet services when they sign on.

TrainingNet's other new alliances include **MindLeaders**, **SkillSoft**, **PBS The Business and Technology Network**, and **National Technology University**. TrainingNet says that makes it the largest online marketplace for Web-based training and professional development courses.

See [trainingnet.com](http://trainingnet.com)

- Rethink the role of the board's committees from groups that meet once a year for nominations to a governance group that takes on board evaluation, education, and leadership.

More info [boardroominsider.com](http://boardroominsider.com)

**Stay Tuned**  
Heavy smoking has been ruled a disability in British Columbia.

## How To

Here are five steps to an effective distance-education strategy, from KRM Information Services of Eau Claire, Wisconsin; [krm.com](http://krm.com):

1. Begin strategizing now. No matter what your resources, goals, or timing, there's a distance-education strategy that's right for you.
2. Know your audience. Take inventory of their tech-

- nological resources and savvy, equipment, and know-how. Do they have Internet access? What speed? How much technical support will you need to provide?
3. Select the right media. It should increase value to participants: incorporate enough of a "wow" factor; be easy to use, reliable, and accessible; and best com-

- municate your content.
4. Decide for the bottom line. If you're tempted by the hottest technologies, take a hard look at the alternatives and break-even points.
5. Concentrate on best. Look to in-house resources or consider vendors, but assess what your organization is and isn't good at.

### E-Lert

Look for more e-learning courses to crop up at leading global business schools. PricewaterhouseCoopers just launched E-Business Learning Programmes, at the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

The programs feature interactive workshops, e-business thought leaders, and case studies. PWC has also established programs at the Melbourne Business School at the University of Melbourne in Australia and the London Business School at the University of London. Additional programs will be launched this fall at U. S., European, and Asian-Pacific universities.

“Our goal is to arm professionals with actionable insights that create an environment for their success in a market space that is filled with hype and clutter,” says PWC’s global e-business leader Chris Everett.

For more information, go to [pwcglobal.com](http://pwcglobal.com).

### E-Source

A revenue-sharing, private-label virtual campus has been created by VCampus Learning Center. The virtual campus can have your corporate logo and deliver hundreds of courses to your people. See [vcllearning.com/vcap](http://vcllearning.com/vcap) or call 800.300.9810.

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