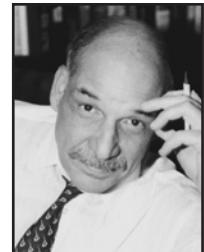## Member's Quarterly

Fall 2017 Edition

President's Message

Your Office of the Future

Welcome to your virtual workplace

Brian W. Pascal
President

How would you feel if you left your office on Friday afternoon after a long week and when you returned on Monday, there was no office left to come back to? This is happening in several large metropolitan areas where the price tag of downtown office space is driving companies not only out of the city core, but out of office space entirely.

According to reports from *The Wall Street Journal*, some major corporations are replacing what we know as traditional offices with something called "non-territorial" spaces. There are no assigned offices — just communal work tables and desks that are limited in number and only available by advance reservation. So if you didn't reserve office space on Friday, you won't have an office to go to on Monday.

It isn't just low-level companies that are operating in this manner. American Express is one of the bigger corporations leading the move away from downtown office space. Their stated preference is for employees to work from their homes or other remote locations using laptops, tablets and smart phones provided by the company. Pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline doesn't have any assigned offices either. They provide employees a storage locker in their building in New York City. They offer a small number of work stations that must be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis.

Maybe this is a good thing and truly the wave of the future, but I'm not completely sold on the idea of total virtual space when it comes to the workplace. In some ways, all we are doing then is forcing people to work from home or the neighbourhood Starbucks. This may be okay for some professions but it seems to me that we lose something very valuable when we limit the social and professional interaction of the collective workplace.

I also don't know how you can effectively manage what amounts to a team of freelancers who are running all over the place. It's not that I don't trust people, but I do know that without direction and supervision, things and projects can easily go off the rails. My gut feeling tells me that when so many things could go wrong, some almost certainly will.

So I'm not sold on the idea of none or limited office space. Then again, I was opposed to open office concepts without walls, ceilings or doors. Perhaps not having an office will be the norm in the future, as it certainly is for some now. I just don't think that all change is progress. What do you think? Your comments and suggestions are appreciated.

Brian Pascal is President of IPM [Institute of Professional Management].

34 YEARS