

Productivity Insights

Focus

35%

Scattered meetings

The average manager spends 35% of their time in meetings that

200

Multitasking rabbit holes

The average employee receives up to 200 notifications a day.

28%

Email daily checks

The average employee spends 28% of their work day on checking their email multiple times per hour.

The evolution of PwC Business Support

2. The insights

The Business Support department: our journey

Business Support: a wonderful field that is always evolving and where management and executive assistants are invaluable. They are the ultimate connectors, fostering collaborations and facilitating the smooth functioning of an organisation. In a time when collaboration is more important than ever, they are the super connectors that ensure an organisation works. PwC provides business services in the areas of Assurance, Tax & Legal and Advisory. The goal is for these services to contribute to building trust in society and solving important problems.

Within PwC, the Business Support department is responsible for secretarial and organisational work and for coordinating tasks for senior managers, partners, and directors (hereinafter referred to as: stakeholders). The aim is to actively support and manage the stakeholders with our assistants taking a proactive approach and taking on as much work as possible. PwC shares a vision in which we harness the full potential of assistants. We are convinced that this is a field that will not disappear but will keep evolving. That is why we decided to make a drastic change in 2011: from a decentralised standalone secretarial support to a centralised Business Support that is continuously evolving and responding to changes within and outside PwC.

This whitepaper consists of three parts. The first part tells the complete story of the history, centralisation approach, and transition process of Business Support. The second part explains the insights gained, and the third part our new vision for the future. Today, we offer proactive and customer-focused support that is independent of location and time, anticipating PwC's priorities. For our stakeholders and assistants, we have suitable and varied service packages. In the first whitepaper, we described what our Business Support looked like before centralisation and what the reasons were for centralising and building our new service. We took you through the centralisation approach and the transition process.

In this second part, it is time to share our impactful results that we achieved during this beautiful but challenging journey as a Business Support department. The centralisation and new service provision provides benefits in the area of learning and development through our continuous development of talent and services. In addition, we also achieved financial gains. The natural turnover and the implementation of the new service model and the development of digital tools resulted in cost savings and efficiency measures. Another important effect: with our current Business Support, we contribute to happy and engaged employees.



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Figure 1: The Business Support journey through the years.



1. The insights

1.1 We continually create more added value through continuous development and services

It is now 2023: Business Support with its new service has existed for a number of years and is an expert and pioneer in the assistant field. With Vision 2020, we offer services with a focus on adding value. In essence, the concretisation of Vision 2020 was a multidimensional process, where strategic planning, collaboration and practical implementation seamlessly merged. From this process, the following key points have emerged.



Customised support

We understand that no two employees are the same and that there are generational differences in the workplace, but also differences in work habits, as well as the various tasks of stakeholders. Vision 2020 recognised this by adapting support to individual needs, both for stakeholders and assistants.



Standardisation

Standardising processes brings uniformity and clarity. This approach reduced complexity and promoted collaboration and efficiency within our group of assistants.



Expertise and efficiency

With the competence framework, in which we deploy all our assistants based on their expertise, we ensure expertise and efficiency. This leads to a higher quality and a higher level of productivity.



Business Support as a change accelerator

The Business Support department acts as a change accelerator: because we manage our assistants centrally whilst they are spread throughout PwC, they are ideally suited to act as ambassadors for the changes that PwC implements. Think of the deployment of new systems and technologies. This leads to both individual growth and growth for all of PwC.

1.2 The benefits in terms of learning and development and human resources

Vision 2020 created a wide range of growth opportunities for assistants, from customer to personal assistant, to specialised roles as expert assistant. PwC offers various career paths that we base on competencies. In addition to all the above key points, the centralisation and our new service also has benefits in the field of learning and development and human resources. Katja van Oudenaarde-Franken was the HR manager Business Support during the rollout period. The successful centralisation and our new service led to a powerful department that knows exactly what it is doing and that is constantly evolving and aware of impending changes.

Equal opportunities for everyone

Katja: “This would never have been possible if we still had a decentralised management. The great advantage in the field of learning and development is that Vision 2020 ensures unity in service and opportunities, with which we offer all our assistants the same opportunities in the field of learning and development, but with an eye for individual wishes. This ensures better retention of employees. In addition, we can respond well to trends and developments in the field. We look at what can be interesting for our employees and offer training for this, such as building relationships, personal branding and project management.”

“Vision 2020 ensures more involvement and job satisfaction among our employees.”

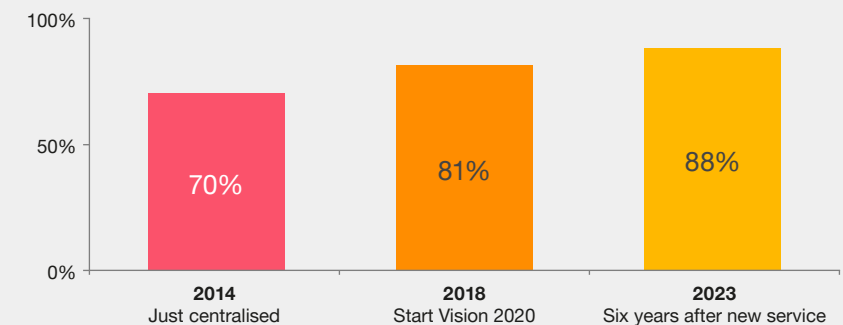


Katja van Oudenaarde – Franken

Internal mobility and employee engagement

“And with better retention of employees, we immediately come to a major advantage in the field of human resources. Before the centralisation and Vision 2020, there was no internal mobility. This meant that, if an employee no longer felt involved, dismissal followed instead of changing department or function. But since the new service, we look at what someone wants, what a development objective is and what new challenge fits with that. That was really a big step: from no internal mobility to 75% internal mobility since Vision 2020. These developments are also visible within the recruitment and onboarding process. We know exactly what each department or stakeholder needs and offer a uniform onboarding process. Vision 2020 creates more involvement and job satisfaction among employees. This is evident from the Global People Survey, an employee satisfaction survey within PwC where we test how employees think about a variety of issues. The higher the score, the higher the involvement. The survey shows that employees are happy, feel taken seriously and that we offer them perspective. With this, we contribute to job satisfaction.”

Figuur 6: Results from the Global People Survey on employee engagement



1.3 The story of PwC assistant Guus Klappers

That job satisfaction increased for most employees due to the new service, Guus Klappers, executive assistant at PwC, can confirm. Of the 250 assistants within PwC, there are only four men, including Guus. And we are very happy with him! In 1992, he started his career at PwC as a text processing employee. Guus has experienced and contributed to every step of the journey that Business Support has made. “The centralisation and the new service through Vision 2020 took some getting used to, but it brought me so much. I now look much more positively at change and am happier in my work,” says Guus.



Guus Klappers

How did you experience the centralisation and transition of Vision 2020?

Guus: “In the beginning, with the centralisation in 2013, I felt a lot of uncertainty. Centralisation of course meant a big change. Questions like ‘What will my new responsibilities look like? And where will I end up?’ occupied my mind, and also those of my colleagues. I soon noticed that the centralisation turned out to be an incredibly good step to standardise the arbitrary treatment of working conditions and tasks. It brought a new level of equality. But we were not there yet: with Vision 2020 there was another big change that we had to get used to. However, once it started running, I realised how valuable it was. The emphasis on competencies and the adapted service model gave me a sense of professional recognition. The management now has full attention for development and coaching. Vision 2020 brought the realisation that they take my profession as an executive assistant seriously and that there is room for growth.”



“My biggest personal success is that I now look positively at change.”

What were the main changes you noticed?

“Before the centralisation, we worked as secretaries on separate ‘secretary islands’. Now, we work as assistants in a department throughout the company, between the stakeholders and other employees. This creates much more connection and, as an assistant, you can focus on being the connecting factor on the work floor. We currently also work in a hybrid manner, which changed our interaction. The emphasis is now more on collaboration and sharing knowledge, regardless of where you are physically. But one of the biggest changes for me is the depth in my work today. Through Vision 2020, I have a very clear picture of my responsibilities. Management looks at where I as a person fit best and what tasks are involved. Ever since Vision 2020, I am not only busy making appointments, but I actively think about planning and strategy. I can now focus much more on substantive aspects.”



What is your biggest success story through the journey that Business Support made?

“First of all, my job satisfaction has increased significantly. I feel heard and seen, I can do what I love to do, and PwC invests in me. This enables me to take steps that were previously impossible, such as thinking about interesting projects. I am currently involved in the introduction of a new technological tool for assistants to edit documents in an easy and efficient way. This was developed by the department where I provide my services as an assistant, and so I can perform a nice bridging function. Hybrid working also contributes to my job satisfaction; it improves my work-life balance. My biggest personal success is the fact that I now look positively at change. The evolution within PwC taught me to embrace change and see it as an opportunity for personal and professional growth.”

1.4 Partner Jacobina Brinkman's vision on the evolution of Business Support

At the time we were implementing Vision 2020, Jacobina Brinkman was partner of the Assurance department at PwC in Amsterdam. This department was the first department where the rollout of the new service took place. And Jacobina is enthusiastic about this new service. “With this, I believe we are setting an example for change. We offer our assistants many opportunities and the service for stakeholders is now fitting,” Jacobina indicates.



Jacobina Brinkman

No easy step

“The transition to this new approach was not an easy step. The everyday things we did, we suddenly started doing differently. Although I strongly believed in the new approach, it brought a lot of change. I know it is a challenge to involve people in such changes, but I also realised it was necessary. The work is no longer the same as it had been a few years ago. We had to think carefully about what the best support is and what the needs of the stakeholders are. The fact that assistants and stakeholders were matched based on competencies and personalities I found very valuable. This ensures that the right person is in the right place. From a managerial role, it is important to know that you are getting the support you need. I need an assistant who points out practical matters and works in a structured way, which gives me peace in my daily work life.”

Many benefits

“The centralisation has brought benefits for both the organisation and the service to customers. We now think more carefully about how we can structure our work and have implemented standardised processes. Assistants now work better together and there is a clear system in which they register all important information, which is visible to all of them.

So, if my assistant is temporarily out of action, I do not have to worry for a moment and can assume that another assistant will take over. I also notice that assistants are now better informed about new things that are happening. They follow training courses. This not only benefits them, but also me. My assistant often teaches me something new!”

Virtual assistant

“What I am most excited about is the fact that we are now better prepared for the future. We can continuously evaluate whether we are providing the right support and have the structure to adjust. It gives me confidence that we can flexibly respond to changing roles and needs. The new service works very well for me. Currently, my support needs are different than a few years ago, and I need someone who is very flexible and can quickly step in. A management assistant has now been matched to me who works virtually, so completely remotely. I work in Amsterdam, she two hundred kilometres away in Groningen. How often I see her in real life per year can be counted on one hand. But this works very well for her and for me in my current role.”



2. De effecten op financieel gebied

2.1 The financial impact

The new service and vision also brought about financial changes. Maurice Verwer, Director of Business Support, is one of the key figures during the implementation of Vision 2020. Maurice shares his insights on how this strategic shift transformed PwC and led to financial changes.

Maurice started his journey within PwC in March 2013 as Director of Facility Management. When he had the opportunity to also become Director of Business Support in 2015, he did not hesitate. The centralisation had just been completed and it was time to look ahead. Together with the management team, Maurice laid the foundation for what is now Vision 2020. How did the new service bring about financial changes? We spoke to Maurice about it.



Maurice Verwer

How were you involved in Vision 2020?

Maurice: “As Director of Business Support, I was closely involved in Vision 2020 and its rollout since 2017. We wanted to move away from a model of only secondment and focus on service provision. This vision was one that I fully supported.”

What was the financial impact of the new service on PwC?

“Business Support mainly consists of personnel-related costs, as we primarily provide assistants. Both centralisation and Vision 2020 had a financial impact. Centralisation stopped the uncontrolled growth of assistants, while Vision 2020 even led to stricter standards. Through efficiency measures, we reduced the average FTE (full-time equivalent) of support per stakeholder. Before centralisation, there were 300 assistants working within Business Support. Currently, we have about 250, and the organisation we support has become much larger. By working more efficiently, we reduced our number of assistants through natural attrition.

An example of an efficiency measure is the implementation of new service delivery models, such as the expert team. This is a centralised team of assistants who handle tasks that are often repetitive but require a certain expertise, such as visa applications and editing texts. We have also developed smart digital tools in recent years to further increase efficiency. The time freed up by these tools is used to expand our service provision and add extra value.”

“Both the centralisation and Vision 2020 had financial impact”

What do you see as the future of Business Support?

“The next five years will be largely determined by technology. Technological developments will have a huge impact on the role of assistants. In addition to building our own tools, for example, Microsoft will also come out with smarter administrative tools, and the rise of Artificial Intelligence will play a major role. Business Support already plays a key role as a change agent within PwC, such as in the implementation of Microsoft 365. I expect that the role of assistants as experts to facilitate changes will only become bigger in the future. They will guide the entire company in new challenges and opportunities.”



3. The future of Business Support

3.1 The road to 2030

After the successful centralisation and implementation of our new service Vision 2020, we never stopped moving. Once the new service was in place, we thought we would take some time to catch our breath and reflect on the changes we have made in recent years. However, our employees rightly asked what our new vision for the future would be. This enthusiasm and willingness of our teams to change demonstrate our belief that standing still means moving backward. The new vision 'The Road to 2030' is now ready.

In this new vision for the future, technology plays an immense role. The contribution of Artificial Intelligence, for example, is becoming increasingly important. We briefly mentioned it, but we are working hard to develop our own internal tools: the digital assistant suite.



This will make the work of assistants easier and more enriching. It allows us to create space for the unique human skills of assistants that cannot be replaced by technology. 'The Road to 2030', a new vision that calls for a new whitepaper. To be continued...

We hope that this whitepaper has been a source of knowledge, information, and inspiration for everyone striving for continuous growth. With these shared insights, we look forward to a future full of opportunities. We will take our experiences, successes, and lessons with us as we embark on the next phase of our journey.

On behalf of PwC



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At PwC, our purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems. We're a network of firms in 151 countries with nearly 364,000 people who are committed to delivering quality in assurance, advisory and tax services. At PwC in the Netherlands over 5,700 people work together. Find out more and tell us what matters to you by visiting us at www.pwc.nl.

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