



## **Your Place or Mine?**

I popped into a coffee shop last week and I couldn't believe the amount of business being conducted there. The plethora of serious conversations, Powerpoint handouts and pen & paper combos left me wondering – don't these people have offices to go to? Perhaps the business community is overdoing the use of the cafe as a communication forum...

When we are planning an important one-on-one communication we will give plenty of thought to what we are going to say (and hopefully who we are meeting with and the outcome we are seeking). However, we may not give as much thought to the location. And yet the physical environment can be a vital success factor.

Consider a scenario where you believe it would be valuable to provide feedback to a colleague on their role in a recently completed project. Which of the following would be a suitable venue? At their desk? In an office (yours or theirs)? A meeting room? Over coffee (internal or external)? Over lunch (cafe or restaurant)? At the pub, after work? The answer, of course, is "it depends". Every one of these locations could be the right choice – for the right circumstances. Equally, every one of these could be disastrous if it is not congruent with the scenario and your message.

How would you decide? I suggest that you could take into account:

- The style and preferences of the other person (and then yours)
- The purpose of the feedback and the desired outcome
- The current state of the relationship with your colleague
- The perception that might be created by your choice of location
- The culture and protocols of your organisation

When thinking about the venue you might also think about the physical set-up. The seating arrangements can set a subtle yet significant tone: standing or sitting; side-by-side or opposite; close or distant; with or without a desk. If there are more than two chairs it is even more interesting. Do you let the other person choose or do you indicate your preference? For example, there may be a seat which subtly indicates the leadership of the meeting.

By selecting the right environment you can reinforce your message and strengthen your relationship. The key point is to have flexibility in your planning and to think about it from the other person's perspective.