Exercise 1: The 'Where's Paul' Application

Widget Consulting is an IT consulting company based in the city centre. They have a small support team of three people covering finance and HR, a sales team and twenty-five IT Consultants. These consultants and the sales team spend a considerable amount of time on site with their clients. They are also permitted to work from home if they agree this in advance with their project manager.

The problem is, they are all very bad indeed at updating their calendars and at letting the Support Team members know where they are. The Support Team send out an email every morning at 10.30 listing everyone who is:

- Off sick
- On Leave
- Working from home
- On site
- On a business trip abroad

To create this list they have to email and text and phone most people who are clearly not in the office to find out where they are. This is important because the company has a legal obligation to know where all employees are during working hours. The Support Team also manage reception, and need to direct inquiries from staff and clients who are looking to speak with members of the sales or consulting team. This is where the problem gets its name.

Paul is the Managing Director and heads up the sales team, many people need to speak to Paul in the course of a normal working day, but he is as elusive as the Scarlet Pimpernel. He may be in one of the meeting rooms, tapping away on his laptop, or he may be in London at a sales pitch – he never, ever updates his calendar and often decides to go to meet clients when he gets up that morning. No one ever knows where he is or what he's doing.

Your Brief

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to conceive of an iPhone application that will solve the 'Where's Paul' problem for Widget Consulting. All of the consultants and Sales people have a company phone, which is an iPhone 6, so one application on one platform can solve the problem, if you design the right application.

What the staff say

Kate (Receptionist): It's really frustrating, trying to find where everyone is each day. It's like they wake up and roll some dice to decide how and where they will spend their working day. I know they are busy, and things change fast for them, but it wouldn't kill them to send me a text to say if their plans change and what they're up to.

The rules are dead simple: if you're working from home, you need to arrange that with your project manager in advance, though some decide they are working from home on the day. If you're going on holiday you need to give a couple of weeks notice to your PM, and if you're sick, you or someone else needs to notify us before 10.00 am. If I don't hear from people I have to ring them, and if I can't get an answer I have to go to their personnel file and start calling their family contact numbers, which causes a lot of worry to whomever I call. There has to be a simpler way to manage this.

Peter (Consultant): I hear what Kate's saying, but letting reception know where I am is usually the least of my worries. If I have a deadline and go to the office, I'll likely be bombarded with calls and questions from colleagues and won't get my work done, so I often decide to work from at short notice. I know I should arrange it with my PM, but she's more worried about me meeting the deadline than about HR rules.

This behaviour does cause a problem, though. If I need to chat to one of the sales team, or another colleague, I have no way of knowing where they are if they aren't at their desk, which is usually the case. Reception send a mail around every morning, but I don't read it, it's usually too vague and not updated during the day. I end up asking colleagues "Where's Paul" or whoever it is I am looking for, then try phoning or texting them. It'd be good to have some kind of status board, and be able to ping people to get them to contact me, or say they can't if that's the case.