

**Change communication : the impact on satisfaction with alternative workplace strategies**

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# **Change communication: The impact on satisfaction with alternative workplace strategies**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The issues arising from changes to working environments can be hard for facilities management staff to engage with. There is very often an approach that "it just has to be done" and this results in a lack of engagement and communication between the facilities management staff and the end users (Donald, 1994; La Framboise et al 2002; Price and Fortune, 2008). In particular La Framboise and her colleagues identified effective communication, or the lack of it, as a key determinant of perceived success in a review of all Canadian Federal Government property initiatives. There is existing literature in relation to importance of communication in general change management (Heathfield, 2008) and on how the lack of a communication strategy can impact on the satisfaction and engagement of staff in the long term. Little however is written about this from a facilities management perspective. The research reported below focused on the effective use of communication, rather than the value of any savings made or the impact of an alternative workplace strategy (AWS) on those people affected. This paper is therefore a detailed analysis of the communication used during an office move situation. The question was undertaken how effective communication (or the lack of it) had impacted on staff satisfaction within a new working environment.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

The context was a 'blue chip' organisation (FinanceCo) which had identified a need to reduce overheads and in particular facilities expenditure as a response to the current economic climate. The FinanceCo property and facilities management had to make changes with a sense of urgency and they entered into project mode immediately with very little focus on the strategic communication needs.

The FinanceCo property and facilities management (PFM) team for the UK were challenged by executive management to develop a strategy for the reduction of organisational property overheads. As part of the strategy there was a decision to reduce property expense with the reduction in size of the property portfolio creating an impact on office space and the employees. FinanceCo is made up of mostly static workers whose work consists of customer interaction by telephone or email and co-worker interaction by face-to-face, telephone or email. Prior to the implementation of the new strategy, with a few exceptions, properties were occupied on the basis of everyone having their own desk. Previous internal studies (undertaken by FinanceCo) had shown that occupation levels averaged at 80%; but at times could be as low as 40% because not all users are permanently at their desks. Unused space was considered to be a waste of resources (Rogers and Simms, 2006), so flexibility of space was important. PFM concluded that to accommodate everyone into a reduced property portfolio the existing workplace strategies and space utilisation needed to be challenged and revised. In the terms distinguished by Becker et al. (1994) this was a classic cost driven workplace initiative.

FinanceCo carried out an alternative workplace trial in March 2008, based on sharing desks in team zones, rather than individuals having their own desks. Desks were allocated

at the ratio of 5 desks per 6 full time employees (FTE), with an additional small number of shared touchdown points. After the initial trial there was anecdotal evidence that employees felt a significant amount of resentment and viewed the change as penny pinching. At no stage was a review undertaken to ascertain whether the pilot was successful or not and there was also no evaluation of the communication used to inform staff of the change.

Further to the pilot, in November 2008 FinanceCo requested external consultants to undertake an occupancy review of another site. The report advised that as little as 50% of space was being used and proposed a number of measures for the increased utilisation of space. At no stage in this study were staff canvassed on how they used their space or how much of it they actually needed. The suggestions put forward by the November 2008 study proposed an alternative workplace strategy based on zoning similar to that of the pilot. The solution was presented to the board by PFM and it was accepted and sponsored at CEO level, which meant that this project would form an integral part of FinanceCo's strategy to change the accommodation by 2010.

Two months prior to the change taking place PFM held workshops for directors and heads of departments that were to be involved. The rationale for the change was explained along with significant detail as to how it would function. The workshop participants were then asked to disseminate this information to their teams. Although this was the predominant route for communication, unfortunately some end users became aware of the alternative workplace strategy via other means, such as office rumour.

For such a considerable piece of work, sufficient time and resources would ideally have been required to not only develop and implement the solution, but also to communicate it. Unfortunately the timescales for delivery were driven by lease end dates; which meant that although considerable time and effort had been put into the design of the office space and how it would be used more efficiently, the communication of how this change would be implemented and its affect on employees was not undertaken. The research reported in this paper focuses on the communication used in the change programme and its impact on the relative satisfaction of the respondents. This change had the effect of cultural transformation, moving from having your own desk to sharing space. Undertaking an evaluation on the way in which this change was communicated provides useful evidence for future organisational change initiatives.

### 3 THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Laframboise et al (2002) discussed the four stages of change process including **discovery** - what is happening - a critical phase in the communication plan; **denial** - it won't actually happen; **resistance** - a time of employee concern, a time when employees need personal communication to understand how this affects them personally; and finally **acceptance**, by which stage the communications plan should have eased the change process, and employees should be feeling fully communicated with and in full understanding of how the proposed change affects them. Laframboise et al (2002) also recognised the need to not only allow the opportunity for staff to feedback, but also to evidence how their contributions have been valued. In FinanceCo's change programme due to limited time

restraints, no such communications plan existed and there had only been a small amount of staff consultation.

### **3.1 Communication Theory**

Communication is a two way process, for example information can be transmitted, but communication has to be shared (Quirke, 1995). Information is one dimensional i.e. newsletters or intranet messages (Van Vuuren and Elving, 2008); it lacks the participation of communication (Nutt, 1999) that when used appropriately creates a mutual understanding between parties (Elving, 2005). Holm (2006) suggests that communication is the process by which individuals share meaning through a transactional process between two or more parties. In FinanceCo's change programme communication was sent by various parties to multiple receivers thus creating the potential for conflicting messages.

### **3.2 Change Management Theory**

Culture allows an organisation to cope with, or validate, external adaptation or internal integration (Schein, 1985). Therefore the introduction of a new workspace initiative impacted on FinanceCo's culture. Knorr (1993) indicates that culture can act as a barrier to restrain change, especially when the organisation is internally occupied or limits enterprise (Kotter, 1997). Schein (1985) proposes that as culture causes resistance to change it must first be changed, whereas Kotter (1997) concludes that these cultural change efforts will lead to failure.

An organisation suffers from a 'paradox of culture' (Lakomski, 2001) as it is constantly balancing the forces for change with the need for stability; this stalemate becomes broken when the force for change is greater than the resistance to it, causing a shift in the organisation's equilibrium (Lewin, 1951). By 'unfreezing' the existing behaviours and patterns, 'moving' them to the desired state and then 'refreezing' them it allows an organisation to successfully implement a change. In this instance it was the implementation of a new workspace initiative that forced the unfreezing of the existing FinanceCo working culture.

The change to the way the space was used created an amount of uncertainty and fear (Senior, 2006) within employees. There has been significant resistance to change as the way in which people operate is being fundamentally shifted in a direction the existing culture is uncomfortable with. Mawson (2009) describes this as ungluing the 'attitude glue' – achieved by removing people's 'psychological safety net' (Schein, 1987). By revising the traditional working method (ie everyone having their own desk) FinanceCo employees were opened up to the latent and unanticipated consequences such a change may bring (Nevis, 1987). This feeling is very common in change programmes, where the initial shock is followed by denial and anger (Hopson and Adams, 1976). It is not until recognition of the inevitability of the change and the reasons for it are accepted, that the individual will be liberated from their past. This is the process of moving, where the new culture will evolve to a point where it accepts the new vision.

When dealing with cultural change it is important to ensure there is a suitable balance between change and stability (Trice and Beyer, 1993), otherwise the level of resistance will restrict change. The best time for cultural change is when favourable circumstances exist, such as poor company performance or competitive markets (Trice and Beyer, 1993).

For FinanceCo change would have been even harder to implement if the credit crunch and other market factors were less punishing.

### **3.3 Communication in Change Management**

Communication, or the provision of information, is one of the most important aspects of change in the workplace (Lewis and Siebold, 1998 as cited in Allen et al, 2007). Quirke (1995) takes this further by implying that communication has *the* role in managing change. Some organisations do not realise that without effective employee communication change is impossible (Barrett, 2002). Unfortunately there isn't a universal approach to effective organisational change communication; it depends on the size, culture, style, stability and available resources (Daly et al, 2003). To be effective, communication should be regular, timely, honest, clear, interactive and easy to understand with the opportunity for two way communication otherwise the change programme may fail (Smith, 2006).

Meaningful communication informs and educates employees at all levels and motivates them to support the strategy (Barrett, 2002). This is important as positive attitudes to change are vital in successful change programmes (Kotter, 1996), as resistance to change is one of the biggest barriers to overcome. Meaningful communication requires a degree of 'cognitive organisational reorientation' (Van Vuuren and Elving, 2008) i.e. comprehension and appreciation of the proposed change. For the alternative workplace strategy to succeed FinanceCo employees needed to understand the benefits of the new workplace initiative and their part in it.

Burnes (1992) as cited in Kitchen and Daly (2002) states that communication is a way of avoiding uncertainty that change can promote. This is important as high levels of uncertainty will negatively affect readiness for change (Elving, 2005). Resistance to change occurs when there is a lack of information or perceived benefits. People like to be in control of their destiny and outside change is a threat to this control, hence it is resisted (Proctor and Doukakis, 2003).

Elving (2005) proposes a communications model that displays the impact of communication on uncertainty and readiness for change (Fig 1.). When the communication is meaningful and describes the reason for the change there is greater readiness, whereas if the information is vague it is more likely to create uncertainty. This is why personally relevant information is better than general information (Klein, 1996) when communicating for change.

During the change process the communication needs of those affected by the change is required to adapt. Taking the Lewin (1951) change acceptance model, it is possible to plot these needs at the various stages of unfreezing, movement and refreezing (Fig 1).. This proposed model of communication was not used in the implementation of the workplace strategy.

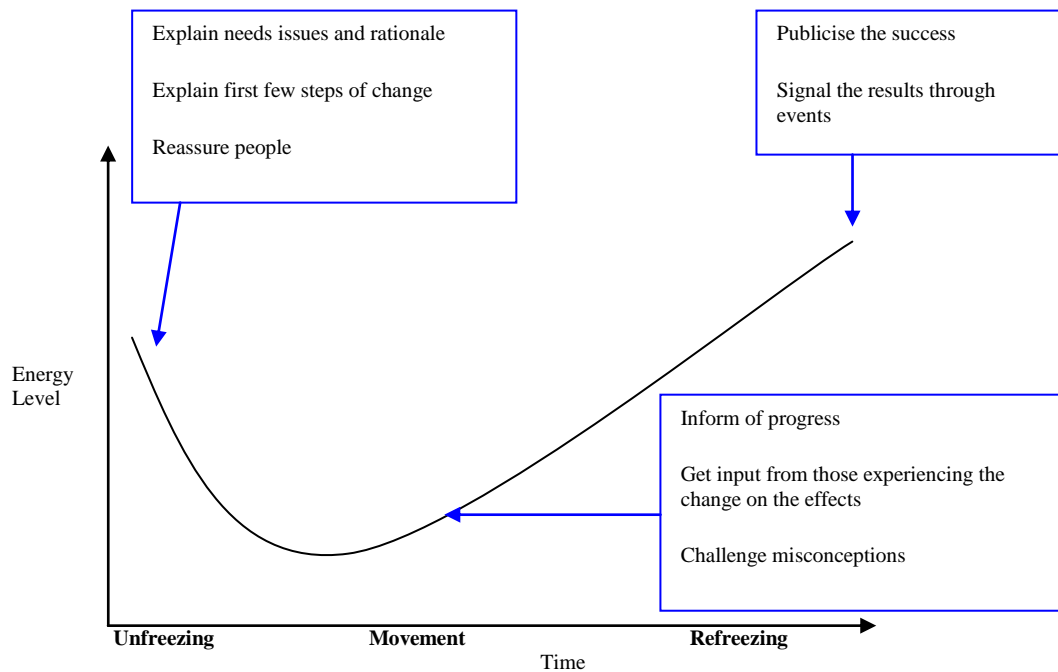


Fig 1: Communication needs during the three stages of Lewin's (1951) change acceptance model with extracts from Klein (1996) and Goodman et al (1996)

Some organisations do not apply the same energy in communications as they would the financial and operational aspects of change (Barrett, 2002). This is unfortunate as failure to engage with employees affected by change leads to a reduced chance of success (Ratcliffe, 2009). Employees can only be effective in the organisation if they are fully informed (Kitchen and Daly, 2002), particularly on the objectives of the change (Young and Post, 1993).

Messages regarding change are frequently communicated from senior level to employees by a cascade through what Klein (1996) calls 'line hierarchy'. There are advantages in this process, as messages from those in power carry greater significance (Young and Post, 1993), but this method is not without its flaws. When information is channelled down the hierarchical pyramid the context often becomes lost so the people further down the organisation make less sense of what they receive (Quirke, 1995). The information received tends to become more about the how the change will happen rather than the why it is happening. Where studied this would appear to be true for facilities management teams and their delivery of changes to the working environment (La Framboise et al, 2002).

Information is a commodity to be brokered and a resource to be guarded. Often this information is (at middle management level) withheld, changed, manipulated or delivered too late (Witherspoon and Wohlert, 1996). Quirke (1995) describes this as a 'refractive layer', whereas Waller and Polonsky (1998) depict these individuals as 'influencers' because their views manipulate the communication. The influencers create 'noise' in the communications process that distorts the intended message (Shannon and Weaver, 1949).

As Quirke (1995, 2000) suggests communication is vital to ensure the individual is aware of how the change impacts and affects them. There is a need to be open to two-way communication, not just explaining how the new change will work in practice but also in

listening to feedback and being open to challenges. The research aimed to explore retrospectively the communication delivered to staff and the impact of the communication on their overall satisfaction levels.

### 3.4 Alternative Workplace Strategies and Space Utilisation

FinanceCo incurred significant property costs from its offices, yet they are frequently under utilised – much like many large office-based organisations (Fawcett and Chadwick, 2007). Generally facilities management (FM) departments have been responsible for reducing real estate costs within organisations – a process that usually occurs through cramming more people into a space than using it more efficiently (Robertson, 2000). However, organisations need to move away from the one desk per person paradigm. As Melvin (1992) argues: new thinking demands different physical space; but it's not a simple case of getting rid of the existing properties and starting again (Chilton and Baldry, 1997). Robertson (2000) suggests that work transformation is required – the way work is carried out and the environment in which it occurs should be challenged. In FinanceCo's case the transformation is driven by cost therefore limiting the potential options. Becker at al (1994) recognised that any changes to work space that were cost driven as opposed to business enhancement driven usually resulted in reduced satisfaction levels.

Alternative Workplace Strategies (AWS) describe changes to workplace design, on-site working strategies and off-site working strategies (Gilleard and Rees, 1998). Typical examples of these (in respective order) are: flexible working schedules (i.e. using the office for more hours in the day than 9 to 5), hot desking<sup>1</sup>, and telecommuting (a mix of home and office based working). Implementation of AWS could save an organisation thirty percent of its office costs (Mawson, 2009). There are three main resources that require consideration in any AWS – people, technology and space (Robertson, 2000). These resources are interdependent so if the way office space is used changes, there may be effects on both the people and technology.

Ratcliffe (2009) suggests that although cost savings are a genuine consequence of a workplace strategy they should not be the motivation for implementing it. In FinanceCo's case cost reduction was the primary driver. The use of alternative space arrangements does not come without its problems, as increased space utilisation brings with it a number of workspace issues (Chilton and Baldry, 2007) i.e. space for filing. It is important to consider the employee in all this, as the working environment can affect morale (Online Recruitment, 2006), job satisfaction (Carlopio, 1996) and attitudes (Lee, 2006). The implementation of an AWS will affect cultural norms and the working environment (Chilton and Baldry, 2007) which could reduce the both morale and satisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Hot desking relates to the practice of providing a pool of equipped desks which are occupied as required instead of giving employees their own desk. Definition adapted from <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/hot-desking.html>

## **4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

FinanceCo frequently undertakes surveys of its employees to obtain feedback on satisfaction, the quality of leadership, provision of services, views on procedures etc. The format of these surveys is usually an online self-administered questionnaire. Typically employees are made aware in advance via the intranet and/or email communication prior to being sent a hyperlink to undertake the survey.

The research followed the online questionnaire route as employees were used to, and comfortable with, this technique. The survey population was contacted by email several weeks prior to the questionnaire being initiated to notify them of the forthcoming study. A distribution list taken from the PFM moves team was used for this purpose - as they had the names of all the employees that moved. The survey was sent out as an explanatory email with a link to the online survey.

### **4.1 Method of Research**

Collection and analysis of data was predominantly quantitative with some qualitative methods to aid the interpretation of the freeform text responses. Although not entirely 'mixed methods'; this alternative approach has been taken to obtain an increased knowledge of the subject (Carr, 1994). The hypothesis for this research was that a lack of a communication strategy led to reduced staff satisfaction with the organisation overall and therefore negatively impacted on the implementation of the alternative workplace strategy.

### **4.2 Questionnaire design**

The questionnaire was built using Select Survey consisting of twenty one potential questions. The questions asked were conditional, so a particular response might skip several subsequent questions if they were not relevant. Questions 1 to 15 looked at communication (methods used, frequency, volume, content) whereas questions 16 to 21 were demographic by their nature. Eighteen of the twenty one questions were quantitative – collecting categorical data in either dichotomous or ordinal formats (Saunders et al, 2007) using tools such as the Likert scale. The responses to these force-choice questions (de Vaus, 2002) formed the basis of the explanatory research (Saunders et al, 2007). Respondents were asked to rate how satisfied they were with the clarity of the communication, that the impact was clearly communicated, and with the amount and frequency of the communication (rated on a likert scale with 1= very satisfied to 5 = very dissatisfied). Respondents were also asked whether their satisfaction with FinanceCo had been improved following the implementation (with 1 = much better to 5= much worse). The remaining three questions were open ended, providing the respondent with the opportunity to express their views openly in their own way (Dillman, 2000 as cited in Saunders et al, 2004).

### **4.3 Survey Population**

Three locations affected by the space utilisation strategy were chosen. This provided a cross sectional approach (Oppenheim, 1996) in order to remove bias, to take into account differing locations and levels of accommodation. A large survey sample size of



approximately 85% of all the people moving in November/December 2008 was used. The survey was submitted to 1600 FinanceCo staff (including the PFM staff) in March 2009 and 521 replies were received - a response rate of 32%.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis**

Coding (turning the freeform text into categorical data) was employed to comprehend the responses to the freeform text questions. The qualitative data was analysed using: initial coding, focused coding and thematic coding (Hahn, 2008). The quantitative data was analysed through SPSS and correlations were noted in the following results.

#### **5. Survey Results**

The questions asked within the survey were focused on understanding whether there was any correlation between the satisfaction of the alternative workplace strategy and the level of communication received. The correlation between results can be viewed in Table 1. The table shows the correlation between the different variables and the significance levels. As identified in the correlation table there were strong links (significant at 0.01) between how satisfied staff were working for FinanceCo post implementation and the clarity, amount and frequency of the communication received and that feedback was taken seriously. **TAKE IN CORRELATION TABLE 1 here**

Table 1: Correlation figures

		Hot desking communicated	By Who	Method of comms	Happy with method	Reason for hot desking communicated	Impact of hot desking communicated	Opportunity to give feedback	If yes, are you happy feedback taken seriously	Satisfied with amount of hot desk info supplied	satisfied with frequency of info	Satisfaction Levels working for FinanceCo after change
Hot desking communicated	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.	.	.	.	.	.241**	.180	.	.	.053
By Who	Correlation Coefficient	.	1.000	-.166**	.245**	.155**	.117*	.033	.099	.122	.168**	.009
Method of comms	Correlation Coefficient	.	-.166**	1.000	.091	.019	-.005	-.090	.020	.083	.138**	.157**
Happy with method	Correlation Coefficient	.	.245**	0.97	1.000	.369**	.394**	.112*	.199*	.452**	.460**	.195**
Reason for hot desking communicated	Correlation Coefficient	.	.155**	.019	.369**	1.000	.747**	.147**	.235*	.596**	.546**	.354**
Impact of hot desking communicated	Correlation Coefficient	.	.117*	-.005	.394**	.747**	1.000	.125*	.383**	.615**	.564**	.355**
Opportunity to give feedback	Correlation Coefficient	.241**	.033	-0.90*	.112*	.147**	.125*	1.000	.	.187**	.192**	.100*
If yes, are you happy feedback taken seriously	Correlation Coefficient	.180	.099	.020	.199*	.235*	.383**	.	1.000	.344**	.319**	.559**
Satisfied with amount of hot desk info supplied	Correlation Coefficient	.	.122*	0.83	.452**	.596**	.615**	.187**	.344**	1.000	.828**	.408**
Satisfied with frequency of info	Correlation Coefficient	.	.168**	.138**	.460**	.546**	.192**	.319**	.828**	.036	1.000	.354**
Satisfaction levels working for FinanceCo after change	Correlation Coefficient	.053	.009	.157**	.195**	.354**	.355**	.100*	.559**	.408**	.354**	1.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

## 5.1 Communication Methods

A number of approaches were used to communicate the alternative workplace strategy. However, 89 of the 521 (17%) survey respondents did not receive any communication before the workplace strategy was implemented in their office. Verbal communication tended to predominate, but this did not follow the accepted communication norm in FinanceCo, where initiatives or news that had a material impact on its employees was initially advised by a verbal briefing and then followed by an article or message from the Chief Executive on the intranet. In this instance there was no intranet follow up. Young and Post (1993) reported that communication carries more weight when it comes from someone in authority because the status of the messenger gives credibility to the message (Klein, 1996) but at no point did the Chief Executive send out any communication in relation to the change.

The results showed that there was no ‘best’ method for communicating the concept to all employees. The results also produced a variation in preferred methods based on the location and culture of individuals. For example, IT professionals supporting the business preferred email contact and people that interacted with customers by telephone all day every day preferred verbal communication.

From the data it would appear that ‘who’ delivers the alternative workplace strategy communication (i.e. how the survey participants found out about it) is linked to the acceptance of the communication vehicle as an adequate means to deliver it.

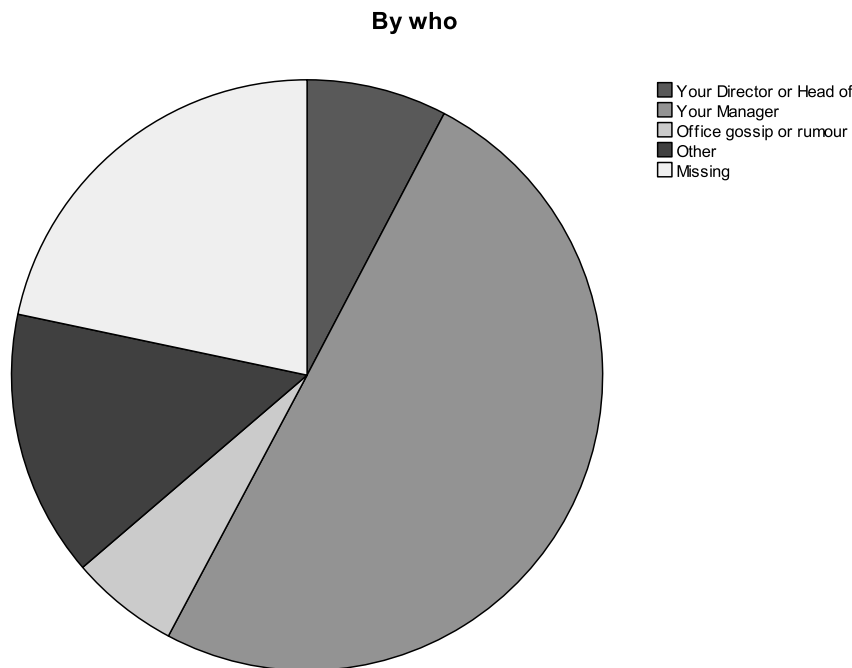


Figure No. 2 identified those respondents that were happy with the method used and how this was communicated. It identified that the predominant method used was through their managers.

Anecdotal evidence from the freeform text showed that respondents would rather there was a “mixture of communications vehicles” used, that was “cascaded from top down” and was “delivered to all staff”, reinforcing a single message rather than a distorted version of facts.

## 5.2 Feedback

In relation to the opportunity to feedback on the suitability of the alternative workspace strategy only 115 of the 521 (22%) respondents felt they were able to offer feedback once the message had been transmitted. Of the 115 respondents who were able to give feedback only 15 (13%) were happy that their opinion was taken seriously. Part of the reason for the low feedback opportunity was the communication methods used and that there was a sense of ‘fait accompli’ from employees due to the lack of initial consultation, thus making the sense of feedback almost pointless. As shown in Figures 3 and 4, staff felt there was very little opportunity to feedback.

Figure 3:

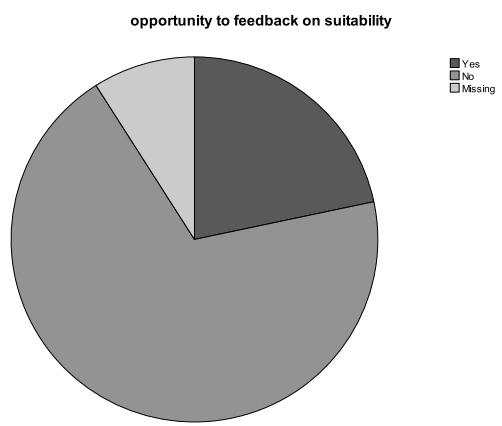
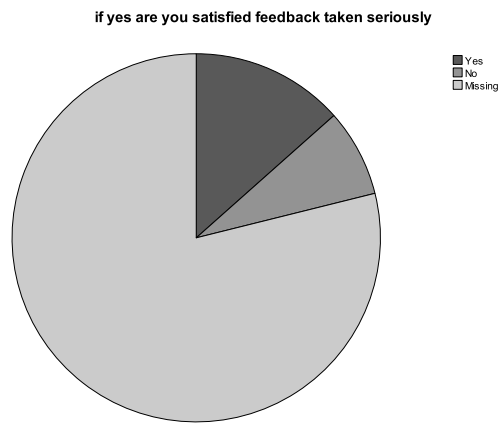


Figure 4:



## 5.3 Satisfaction with method used

The success of any change effort relies on how the message was communicated to the targets of the change (Witherspoon and Wohlert, 1996). From the data analysis it would appear that the success of the communication strategy (in terms of participant satisfaction) depended on the right people presenting the message in the right way. Research by Allen et al (2007) found that employees who indicated they received quality communication of the change demonstrated a more positive attitude towards it.

It is also important to acknowledge that the provision of information may not be sufficient to reduce employee uncertainty (Allen et al, 2007). It is important that feedback i.e. two way information flow exists rather than just dictatorial statements being made. It is important that management listens and takes time to communicate (Smith, 2006).

This observation is supported by the comparison of the satisfaction with communication about the reason for, and the impact of, the change, together with satisfaction with the amount

and frequency communication. When the 'correct' communication method (a method that suited the individual) was used there was a greater level of satisfaction with the message in terms of content and extent compared to when the 'wrong' method was used. Nelissen and van Selm (2008) concluded that responses to organisational change were influenced by management's communication of the reasons for and the consequences of the change. This concept also emerged from the data, where satisfaction with the way the impact and reason for the change had been communicated was more significant than the frequency or amount. Personally relevant information was better than general information (Klein, 1996); thus explaining why reason and impact was more important to the survey respondents. The correlation between the satisfaction with FinanceCo following the change and the levels of communication received proved to be significant, see Table 1.

#### **5.4 Communicating impact and reason for change**

The freeform text questions asked respondents to qualify the answers given in relation to reason and impact.

*“The whole communication process from “pjm” was very poor. There should have been consultation about its implementation, instead it was a 'tell' session and the needs of the business were not listened to or taken on board.”*

(Anonymous response)

The statement above typifies the feelings of the respondents who were three times more likely to refer to receiving 'bad' communication as opposed to the communication being 'good'. The coding organised responses into groups who found the communication:

- Good - *“I am satisfied that the impact of hotdesking (sic) on my area was clearly communicated to me before it was implemented and understand the reasons.”*
- Bad - *“There was no explanation only the presentation of a fait accompli (sic) ”*
- Irrelevant - *“You can communicate things fine, but if it doesn't work, it doesn't work!”*

There appears to be a significant variation in the quality of the communication. In instances of 'bad' communication the end user was either ignored, or the degree of detail was lacking or the information arrived too late. There were also those respondents who advised that the concept was flawed making communication irrelevant. However, if there had been two way communication and not one way information their view might have been different.

#### **5.5 Effects of amount and frequency of communication on satisfaction**

The qualitative feedback to the answers given to the amount and frequency was coded using the same principles as above.

The responses fell into four themes:

- Effective Communication – *“We were kept up to date with what was happening.”*

- Ineffective Communication – *“Local management communicated what they had been given as soon as they were given it, but the information they supplied was infrequent and of poor quality.”*
- Information Quality Poor – *“The initial communication left more questions than answers, and the answers when they arrived were not consistent; many of the answers provided directly contradicted previous information disseminated.”*
- Concept Flawed - *“At the end of the day, you can give me all the in-depth detail how you are going to kill me as many times as you want, but I am still not going to like it, am I?”*

As well as the qualitative data responses, the correlation between the amount and frequency of communication, as evidenced in Table 1, significantly impacted on the levels of satisfaction with the new workplace strategy.

### 5.6 Suggested methods for improving communication

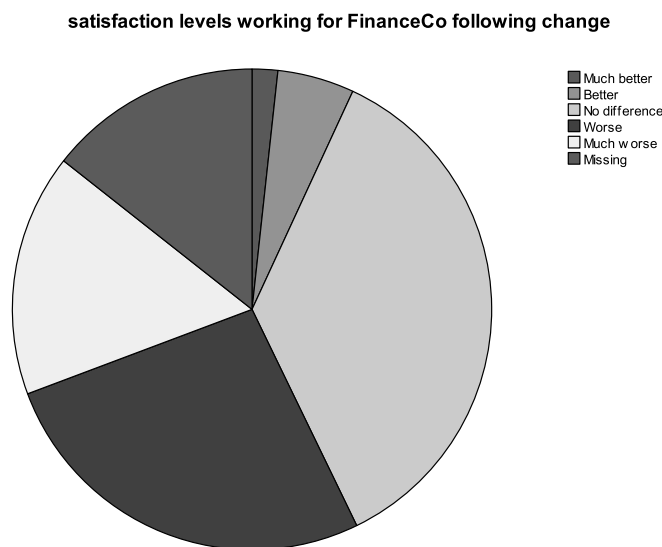
Participants were given the opportunity to propose how the communication of the alternative workplace strategy could have been improved. Other than responses that maintain the inadequacies of the strategy, the answers focused on four main themes:

1. Communication should fully inform the end user.
2. The way the message is communicated is important.
3. Provide the opportunity for feedback to take place and listen to it.
4. Information should be provided in enough time.

### 5.7 Satisfaction

As identified in Figure 5 below, using the valid percent figure, the survey indicated that 50% of the respondent's satisfaction levels were ‘worse’ or ‘much worse’, with only 8% seeing any improvement.

Figure 5:



As identified in Table 1, there is a high correlation between the communication and the levels of satisfaction with the organisation post implementation. Prior to the research there was an assumption that occupants that retained their desk (265 (51%) of the total respondents) would be more satisfied than those that had been moved into hot desking zones – simply because the effect on them was less. However, they were only marginally more satisfied – displaying a fair degree of dissatisfaction.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The purpose of this research was to test the hypothesis that the lack of a communication strategy led to reduced staff satisfaction with the organisation overall and therefore negatively impacted on the implementation of the alternative workplace strategy.

The research highlights that there was a lack of consultation to understand the respondent's requirements, or business needs, prior to implementation. From responses it was clear that the alternative workplace strategy is not a 'one size fits all' solution. Many comments alluded to a flawed concept because it simply did not work for them. There are two potential outcomes from this feedback:

- The alternative workplace strategy does not work
- The way the strategy was communicated was inadequate and therefore gives the perception of being flawed.

Given that there was no universal disapproval of the concept (half the respondents were no less satisfied) it would be inappropriate to say that the workplace strategy does not work. Instead what was apparent was that its implementation, even though it was founded on previous reports or trials, was imposed without sufficient consultation. The data consistently indicates that there was insufficient opportunity to feedback criticism to those with influence, or when it was the response was 'it's going to happen regardless – just accept it'. This would reinforce the findings from La Framboise et al (2002) research that recognised the importance to have a robust communication plan in place.

The data obtained from this research would conclude with the hypothesis of the research; had the respondents had enough information via a range of communication mediums, which arrived in adequate time to allow them to understand the reason and impact of the change, together with the opportunity to participate in meaningful consultation and feedback, then the satisfaction levels of working with FinanceCo would have been approved. Feedback must be taken seriously and adhered to.

In summary, sufficient time should be given to implementing any change, which should have a communications strategy at its heart. The full picture of why the change is occurring and what impact it will have for each individual should be painted using multiple means of communication in order to ensure everyone involved is aware and they receive the message without distortion. Once the change programme has begun, evidence from the study suggests that staff need to be continually informed of progress and given the opportunity to ask questions in order to understand the change. When the change has finished, an evaluation of the project and the communication strategy should be undertaken ensuring that any recommendations from the evaluation are taken forward to the next change initiative.

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