

EMPLOYEES' ACCEPTANCE OF VARYING ACTIVITY BASED WORKPLACE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Background: Innovative workplace designs require thought about how they are implemented and how employees accept them. Increased adoption of innovative workplaces such as Activity Based Working offices (ABW) is attributable to the multi-faceted strategies they can achieve. Existing studies identified that the ABW implementation process impacts employees' ABW acceptance. However, no recent in-depth studies examine employees' acceptance of the varying implementation strategies and the process adopted.

Aim: This paper explores the employees' and Change Champions' acceptance of the ABW Implementation process resultant of the adopted strategy.

Methods: The research adopted a qualitative, case study method with data for this paper collected through interviews, document analysis and focus groups with employees from three financial institutions.

Results: A Business-driven implementation strategy is superior to design a workplace meeting employees' needs which translated to less desire for employee engagement and involvement in the ABW Implementation process. More implementation process involvement does not translate to more positive acceptance if employees perceive that their input was not incorporated.

Implications: This study supports organizations' ABW implementation that achieves their organisational strategies, though it flags different employee groups may require more attention to designing for their activities. While focused specifically on ABWs the principles can apply to any innovative workplace concept.

Keywords: Activity Based Working offices, Workplace Implementation, Workplace Change Management, Flexible Workplaces, Future Workplace, Innovative Workplaces

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INTRODUCTION

Changes in workplace designs and their required management have featured in corporate real estate in recent years. Activity Based Working (ABW) was a prominent innovative workplace design in the period leading up to Covid 19. Since Covid's arrival workplace styles of interest have shifted to working from home (WFH) and hybrid workplaces which blend employee time working from home and in the office (Yang et al, 2021; Orel, 2022). Many questions remain about how these most recent workplace innovations will play out and their effects on workplace design and management.

A key question for any workplace innovation is how they are implemented and how employees accept them. There are at least two reasons why acceptance matters. The first is based in employee welfare, and the second is to realise the strategic and productivity benefits that the organisation implementing the workplace is hoping for.

Hybrid workplaces have temporal characteristics – time, typically days, spent in the office and working from home that are overlaid onto a physical workplace design and its management requirements. Some have seen COVID as a rationale to return to individual offices on the basis of infection control, though arguably this is misguided because air-conditioning systems circulate air between individual offices. Therefore, it seems likely that ABW will remain the baseline physical workplace design for the foreseeable future for several reasons. One is the capital investment already made in ABW by organisations. A second is that the mix of

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activities will change with meeting and socialisation activities becoming a key reason to attend the office while concentration work is done at home. A third reason is that the flexibility offered by ABW will become even more important in hybrid working to deal with significant fluctuations in workplace populations over the working week. An example of a recently completed, post-Covid workplace in Melbourne has fewer than 50 desks per 100 full time equivalent employees, but it has approximately one meeting space per 10 desks. In addition to meeting spaces' formal 'meeting' activity they, with ad-hoc workplaces like internal cafés and kitchens, offer surge capacity to deal with workplace population fluctuations.

So, activity-based workplaces look likely to remain a baseline physical workplace design, and for organisations that have not previously used them they remain innovations to be implemented, on top of the shift to hybrid working. The two core defining features of Activity Based Working offices (ABW) are: 1) Unassigned (non-territorial) individual worksettings; and 2) A range of worksettings for employees to switch worksetting that best supports their activity (switching behaviour) (for example, Häne & Windlinger, 2022, Veldhoen + Company, 2016; Wohlers & Hertel, 2017). These offer considerable flexibility as workplaces and for organisations and their employees that have not experienced them, they require significant changes from past ways of working meaning that they require implementation in the organisation and behavioural changes for employees.

ABW Implementation Processes have been noted as having positive and negative aspects (Been, Beijer, & den Hollander, 2015). Several studies attributed undesirable ABW outcomes to the Implementation Process such as:

- Lack of business objectives improvement (Blok, Groenesteijn, Schelvis, & Vink, 2012);
- Lack of behavioural changes (Blok et al., 2012; van Diermen & Beltman, 2016);
- Lack of guidelines and compliance with them (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2011; Rolfö et al., 2018); and
- Mismatch of ABW to activities employees conduct (Candido et al., 2021; Gorgievski, van der Voordt, van Herpen, & van Akkeren, 2010).

Overall this can be summarised as insufficient support and communications contributed to a lack of knowledge and inadequate ABW introduction that negatively affected employees' acceptance (Weerdenburg & Brunia, 2016).

Organizations implement ABW differently and employees experienced them differently, thus influencing their acceptance of the new workplace (Allen, Bell, Graham, Hardy, & Swaffer, 2004; Skogland, 2017). The Implementation Process is critical in determining that both the physical and functional features of the ABW (Rolfö, 2018) deals with the suitability between ABW and their employees' needs. Workplace change management processes address employee resistance and emotional reactions, and acceptance of the workplace and the guidelines (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2011; Ekstrand, 2016; Rolfö et al., 2018; Skogland, 2017).

Except for a few studies, like Marzban et al. (2022), most studies of ABW Implementation Process were not in-depth studies on the ABW Implementation Process and were fragmented across various studies. For instance, four recent studies that analysed a total of three organisations' ABW Implementation Process (Babapour, 2019a; Rolfo, Eliasson, & Eklund, 2017; Rolfö, 2018a; Rolfö, 2018b).

ABW workplace change management processes have also been identified as a most challenging research area which somewhat explains the lack of empirical research (Rasila, Jylhä, & Sundqvist, 2014). Given the influential role of the ABW Implementation Process in employees' acceptance of the workplace and the likelihood that ABWs differs in terms of workplace design, process and guidelines, there is a strong need for further investigation (Haapakangas et al., 2019).

The overall purpose of this paper is to address the following research gap:

There are limited in-depth studies on employees' acceptance of the varying ABW Implementation Processes and strategy, that affect the intended activities designed into the ABW (variety of worksettings and workplace guidelines) and employees' acceptance of them.

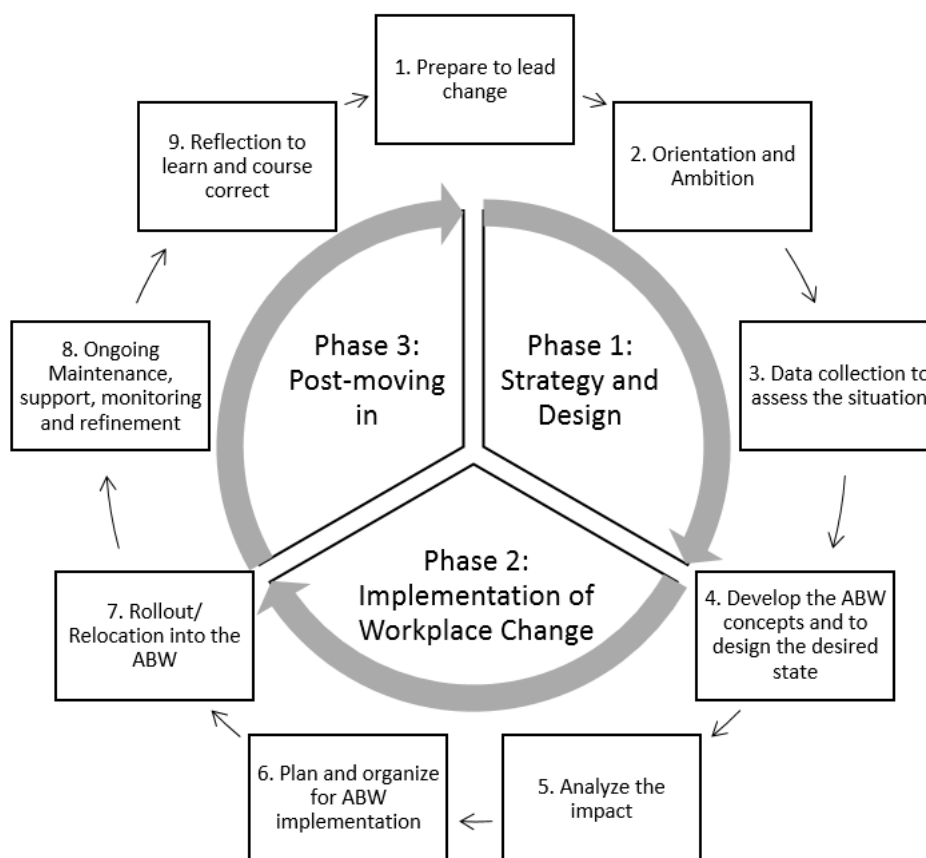
It does this by investigating employees' acceptance of the varying ABW workplace implementation strategies.

ABW IMPLEMENTATION THEORY

To gain a holistic view of the ABW Implementation Theory, existing ABW Implementation and some organisational change management literatures were reviewed to understand the existing recommended theories on ABW Implementation strategies and how to implement ABW offices. The majority of theories from these domains align because the ABW implementation literature is a workplace innovation that typically includes organisational change management in the process to manage and facilitate employees' ABW transition (Becker et al., 1994; Bell, 2006; Inalhan, 2009; Koetsveld & Kamperman, 2011).

A summary of the ABW implementation process is presented prior to discussing how the ABW strategies may lead to different ABW implementation steps being undertaken. Figure 1 summarises the recommended steps to be undertaken as part of the ABW Implementation process. This was then used as a frame of reference to investigate the ABW Implementation Process and employees' acceptance of them in this study. The Implementation Process for this research is taken to begin after the organisation has decided to adopt the ABW. Therefore, Step 1 denotes the first implementation step after that decision.

Figure 1: ABW Implementation Process steps



- Source: After Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson (2010) and Becker et al. (1994)

The three phases have different aims. Phase 1: Strategy and Design is a 'set up' phase aiming to set the foundation for a successful ABW through a positive climate that minimises employee resistance. Phase 2: Implementation of Workplace Change is to prepare the workplace for employees and prepare employees for the workplace, and Phase 3: Post-moving in is when the workplace has been actualised and additional measures are taken to maximise workplace acceptance for current and future workplaces (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). However, organisations tend to move too quickly through Phase 1, overspend on Phase 2 resulting in insufficient funds to deal with the changes that may be required in Phase 3. The ABW Implementation process and the differences between the two fields of literature (ABW Implementation and Organizational Change Management) is further detailed in Sim & Heywood (2019).

The ABW Implementation Process may differ depending on the strategies undertaken (Becker et al., 1994; Koetsveld & Kamperman, 2011), such as Process-oriented, Business-driven, Solution-oriented and Cost-

driven strategies, of which the latter two strategies are inferior, lead to lower acceptance, and should be avoided (Koetsveld & Kamperman, 2011). Business-driven projects are more user-centric aiming for a more effective work environment as opposed to Cost-driven projects that aimed to produce the same results without reducing effectiveness (Becker et al., 1994). Business-driven projects tend to complete all steps in the Implementation Process resulting in higher acceptance levels and long-run sustainability, unlike Cost-driven projects that may revert to traditional ways of working resulting in similar costs (Becker et al., 1994). Solution-oriented strategies replicates a basic, standardized workplace solution at cross multiple sites with minor modifications and omitted steps to assess the current situation and conduct a change in business practice, whereas, Process-oriented strategies have standardized principles guiding the implementations and the process to identify the most appropriate solution (Becker et al., 1994).

A majority of the existing ABW studies omit studying the ABW Implementation process in detail and fail to identify the ABW Implementation strategies undertaken as this is only possible through holistic comprehensive studies that are one of the most challenging research areas in ABW offices (Rasila et al., 2014). Therefore, there is a disconnect between whether employees' ABW acceptance is related to the ABW Implementation strategies and the way that the ABW has been implemented.

This leads to the Theoretical proposition for this study:

Business-driven implementation strategy is the superior implementation strategy that will result in more positive responses towards the ABW Implementation Process as it focuses more on employees' needs and the activities that should be supported by the designed ABW.

METHODOLOGY

This study undertook an in-depth multiple case-studies approach (Yin, 2009) by replicating the research design across three cases and conducting a cross-case analysis (Neuman, 2012). The case study methodology was the most appropriate method for this study because it is a naturalistic inquiry method researching "... a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context ..." (Yin, 2009, p. 18). This enabled the required in-depth study (Stark & Torrance, 2005) of the social phenomenon on how ABW are implemented and employees' acceptance of it (Yin, 2014). A mixed-methods qualitative approach was deployed and data triangulation used where possible to improve internal validity of the data (Cooper & Schindler, 2014; Yin, 2009). The multiple data collection methods used were: individual interviews, document analysis and focus group interviews. The data collection reported in this paper was from a wider doctoral study on organizational and employees' acceptance of ABW offices.

To particularly understand how the ABW was implemented which determined the strategy undertaken, 20 semi-structured interviews were held with management personnel involved in the ABW implementation, such as the strategy consultant, facilities manager, architect, project manager, workplace consultant and workplace change manager. These interview questions addressed the following themes: Overall workplace concept, ABW Implementation process (Overview and in-depth), Workplace Design and Workplace guidelines.

To supplement and verify the data gathered through the interviews, planning documents were gathered and analysed that also revealed the ABW physical and functional features. To gather data on employees' acceptance of the ABW Implementation process, 16 focus group interviews were conducted with employees with a minimum of 3 employees per group – at least 48 employees overall) of different mobility and location-flexibility profiles:

- Low mobility within the organisation and most tasks conducted are desk-based;
- Medium mobility within the organisation; and
- High mobility within and outside organisation in the same country (Greene & Myerson, 2011; Haynes, 2012).

The focus group interview covered the following themes: employees' work patterns, employees' workplace Neighbourhood, employees' involvement in the ABW Implementation Process, employees' concerns pre-relocation and how their concerns were addressed, the effect of employees' participation in the way they feel, think and use the ABW; and employees' preference for more or less employee engagement. The employees were invited by their managers to participate, and the interviews were held at the respective organisations' ABW offices in enclosed meeting rooms and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The individual and focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed via Content Analysis using nVivo 11. Content Analysis is defined as an analytical method and process of classifying, organising and reducing texts or content into categories conceptually or thematically to identify consistencies or inconsistencies that provide intellectual meaning (Julien, 2012; Neuman, 2012). The thematic Content Analysis enabled the researcher to explore predetermined (*a-priori* codes) themes such as the ABW Implementation Theory and also to explore themes that emerged from the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Willis, 2010), relying on an emerging coding framework (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Some relational analysis was conducted to explore potential relationships, such as employees' mobility profiles with their acceptance of the Implementation Process and the ABW (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Sproule, 2010).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This first section provides a summary on the organisational context of all three case study organisations (Table 1) prior to presenting the main findings on employees' acceptance of the varying ABW Implementation process and strategies.

The three financial institutions were selected because financial institutions were the largest and fastest ABW adopters in Australia (details included in Table 1). This provided leading practice example organisations and allowed for cross-case comparison to gain a deeper understanding of the variation of ABW Implementation strategies, process, and employees' acceptance of them.

Table 1: Background summary of case studies

	B1	B2	B3
Headquartered in Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Located in Australia	No, New Zealand	Yes	Yes
Headquarter building/ site	No	Yes	Yes
ABW concept and worksetting developed in Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Project strategic level	Level 2: Major building and business unit level project; Regional office	Level 1: Strategic FM project; Headquarter office	Level 1: Strategic FM project; Headquarter office
Scale (number of people)	Approx. 200	More than 1,000	Approx. 300-400
Completion date	2017	2013	2017
Year studied	2017-2018	2017	2018

The organisational contexts varied within all three Australian financial institutions studied despite their implementation of the same workplace concept – ABW offices. Both B2 and B3's sites were in Australia but B1's site was in New Zealand. The financial institutions are all headquartered in Australia and the initial intent was to only study domestic sites as the extensive study made overseas travelling unfeasible. However, due to B1's large Australian-wide organisational restructuring at the time of the study, a New Zealand site had to be studied instead. Prior to B1's roll-out of ABW in New Zealand, B1 had been developing a collection of ABW worksettings and ABW implementation process over the previous 2 years.

The workplace concept developed by each organisation met the earlier definition of an ABW office and all teams were allocated a 'neighbourhood' area. In B2, each team area had a large variety of worksettings within the team's neighbourhood, whereas, in B1 and B3, the collaborative areas were shared by all teams.

B2 and B3 were of a "Level 1: Strategic FM (facilities management) projects" since the projects were part of a major organisational and business change in the headquarters and B1 was a "Level 2: Major building and business unit level project" regional office (Kaya, Heywood, Arge, Brawn, & Alexander, 2004, p. 77). Even though B2 and B3 are both headquarter projects, the projects' scales were very different. B2 involved more than 1,000 people relocating into the project, whereas B1 and B3 involved relocating less than 400 employees. There is less than a 5-year gap from the implementation of the workplace to the data collection

of this research in 2017 to 2018. Prior to moving into the new workplace, B1 and B2's employees were located at several sites, whereas the employees in B3 were already co-locating a single site.

ABW Implementation strategies pursued and their effect on the ABW Implementation process

As per Becker *et al.* (1994) and Koetsveld and Kamperman (2011)'s definition of the four types of implementation strategies, both B2 and B3 pursued a Business-driven strategy as opposed to B1 which pursued a strategy that combined both Process-oriented and Solution-oriented strategies, a Process-Solution-oriented strategy in the workplace implementation. B1 resembled a Solution-oriented strategy as they had a set of pre-designed worksettings developed over past years and a Process-oriented strategy because they had a pre-determined ABW workplace change process for their ABW transformations (Becker *et al.*, 1994).

The different implementation strategies resulted in some differences between the implementation processes (Becker *et al.*, 1994; Koetsveld & Kamperman, 2011) that is further detailed in Sim & Heywood (2019). These differences are briefly summarised as they set up the theoretical proposition of how the employees and Change Champion of each organisation would have accepted the implementation process. Change Champion refers to individual employees selected by the manager of a team as representatives of their teams or department.

Firstly, the results revealed that conducting the steps in the chronological order identified in the literature is not as straightforward as the literature suggests. Secondly, some differences in the implementation processes are the amount of time invested and the extensiveness of how each step was conducted. Organisations pursuing a Business-driven strategy (B2 and B3) invested more time, conducted each step more extensively and involved their employees more to better identify and communicate the activities designed for than the organisation pursuing a Process-Solution-oriented implementation strategy (B1). The organisations pursuing a Business-driven strategy also followed the recommended implementation process in the literature more closely. However, B1 that pursued a Process-Solution-oriented strategy had more engagement with their Change Champions than the organisations pursuing a Business-driven strategy (B2 and B3) by involving them in the workplace design through participatory-design. This indicates that earlier engagement of Change Champions in B1 should result in superior acceptance of the ABW and its implementation process.

Change Champions acceptance of the ABW Implementation Process

Contrary to the ABW Implementation theory that Business-driven strategy implementations result in a higher level of employee engagement to better reflect employees' needs in the ABW design, the Change Champions in B1 (Process-Solution-oriented strategy) were more engaged than the Change Champions in B3 (Business-driven strategy). There was insufficient evidence gathered from B2 (Business-driven strategy) to form any generalisations about their Change Champion's responses, but they indicated no desire to be engaged and involved in the ABW design.

The current ABW Implementation theory proposed that more employee engagement should result in more positive acceptance. However, the Change Champions' responses in B1 were more negative than B3 even though the Change Champions in B1 were more engaged. The results indicate that engaging Change Champions without incorporating their input (B1) resulted in more negative responses than non-engagement (B3).

Change Champions responses

In B1 and B3, some Change Champions wanted more influence over the designed ABW and to be engaged, not just informed. Unlike B1 and B3, the two Change Champions in B2 had no desire to be involved in designing the supported activities.

Across the three case studies, some participants thought that the Change Manager prepared them reasonably in adapting to the change², that the workshops were helpful and informative on the functioning of the ABW³ and were good to explain the different milestones⁴. A few Change Champions in B1 and one change champion in B3 felt their input was limited. One Change Champion

² Participant 11 in B1; 33 in B3

³ Participants 14 and 44 in B1

⁴ Participant 41 in B2

in B3 expressed that there was no scope for the workplace change team to incorporate any of their feedback to change the quantity and size of the Meeting Rooms as the workplace design was already locked in by then⁵. That made the Change Champions feel that their role was only as a communication channel and to stay updated, as opposed to engaged⁶.

A few Change Champions in B1 discussed that they were told which worksettings they were going to receive⁷, the change team had a “my way or the highway” attitude as whatever the Change Champions put together in the workshop “was not going to happen anyway”⁸ and their suggestion to place name tags at the end of the desks to make it easier to find colleagues was never implemented⁹. The lack of incorporation of the Change Champions’ input made one Change Champion in B1 feel like they were not very involved, and they did not feel a sense of ownership over the workplace describing that it did not feel like “our space”¹⁰. One Change Champion thought that being a Change Champion was ‘a really hard ask’ as they did not know what they were getting themselves into when they were nominated as Change Champions¹¹. Three Change Champions thought that the workshops were like a ‘sales process’ in which there was a very heavy sale on why employees would love the ABW. They preferred the workshops to be geared towards admitting that ABW is more cost-efficient, more focused on what will and will not work for them and how the Change Champions could work together with the workplace change team to make ABW work for their team¹².

Employees’ acceptance of the ABW Implementation Process

Whilst the literature recommended involving all employees from Step 2 of the implementation process for higher take-up of supported activities and acceptance (Becker, 2004a; Maarleveld, 2008; Paton & McCalman, 2008; Rolfö, 2018; Tagliaro & Ciaramella, 2016b; Thomson, 2006), none of the three case study organisations involved all employees from Step 2. The organisations explained that involving all employees would be too costly (Thomson, 2006), time-consuming and the leaders were representatives of all the employees under them instead of representatives across hierarchy and departments (Been et al., 2015). The results supported the contention in the literature that more employee involvement resulted in more positive responses with regards to the implementation process and the activities supported. However, employee engagement may not be necessary, provided employees felt their needs were sufficiently met and represented. Employees who felt that their needs were not addressed often demanded more employee engagement.

Non-Business driven strategies resulted in less employee involvement and more negative acceptance

Comparing all three organisations, B1’s employees were the least involved and received the least direct communications in the ABW Implementation Process. This can be attributed to not pursuing a Business-driven implementation strategy. This led to a range of responses found with participants requiring more employee engagement to better design the supported activities especially in Anchor teams (illustrated below) and demand for more communications, running a pilot and reviewing the neighbourhood guidelines to better communicate the supported activities¹³. As B1 had no pilot (unlike B2 and B3), the participants expressed a need to view a physical version of the ABW as it was too challenging to conceptualise it¹⁴. There was a range of employee involvement including no involvement¹⁵ as Participant 31 discussed that the workplace

⁵Participant 21 in B3

⁶Participants 21 and 23 in B3

⁷Participants 14 and 31 in B1;

⁸Participant 44 in B1.

⁹Participants 31 and 33 in B1

¹⁰Participant 31 in B1

¹¹Participant 33 in B1

¹²Participant 31, 42 and 44 in B1. For example, participant 31 in B1: “... There was a really heavy sale on why we would love it ... I mean, come on, we’re adults, we’re all sensible people. We know that the main reason why it (ABW) was done (implemented) is because of the cost savings in terms of the number of desks. That’s a fact and we can see that and that is fine. It’s okay. I mean hey, we have to make money, we need to be cost-efficient – that’s okay.”

¹³Participants 12, 13, 31, 32 and 33 in B1

¹⁴Participants 31, 32, 34 and 46 in B1

¹⁵Participants 31, 32, 33 and 34 in B1

change team did not realise that there were approximately 30 business units within the five Neighbourhoods. The engagement and communications were left to the individual business units and some business unit leaders may not have forwarded on the relevant communications resulting in these participants receiving no communications about the supported activities and the necessary steps to undertake pre-relocation¹⁶.

The lack of addressing the low mobility group, Anchors' needs resulted in much discontent in B1 as the workplace change team made changes to the work area presented to them pre-moving in but did not inform them of the change. This forced the Anchors to change their work processes and workstyle that reduced their efficiency and information security. They felt that their workplace needs were neglected because they were a minority and lacked senior representation. One illustration is presented below.

Unanticipated changes in B1's Anchor area

Specific to B1, the Anchors' (low mobility team) responses were more negative than other employees (medium and high mobility team). On Move-in Day, the Anchor teams realised that the Property team did not fulfil what they agreed upon, made changes to their Neighbourhood without informing them and did not incorporate their input. This resulted in all Anchor teams sitting together for no good reason (as they did not work together), the number of desks in the same area doubled and were exposed to compliance risk (where a client's identity should not be revealed to another employee with the same client). The Anchors described their area as a 'disaster' as it was unsuitable to their activities and were quite upset with how their area turned out because they felt that their needs were not reflected in the worksettings designed and that they were neglected as the minority (10% of all employees). They thought that a lot of the work was done at senior management level but because the Anchor teams lacked senior representation, their needs were left out.

The participant described that it was "... probably the worst open plan environment I've ever worked in in 40 years of banking ..."¹⁷. This resulted in their conclusion that relocating everyone to a 'one-size-fits-all' ABW office was excessively cost-driven¹⁸. These resulted in the Anchors in B1 wanting to be engaged directly and for their input to be incorporated in better designing the worksettings in their work area.

Similar to B1, the Anchors in B3 were also discontented with their workplace primarily due to the design of their Desks but they were content with the level of involvement¹⁹. In B3, the Anchors noted that their desks were significantly smaller than the general desks and the cubicle barriers made them feel like a 'caged chicken' and "... the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) might come shut us down ..."²⁰. One participant described that some Anchors have obtained stickers from the Concierge stating their desks are specially reserved to prevent others from using their Desks to prevent displacing their team members²¹.

This indicates that the ABW Implementation Process must better consider the worksettings design and area occupied by the Anchors as they have different needs from non-Anchors due to the large amount of time they spend at their Desks and their activities.

Business-driven strategies resulted in more employee involvement and more positive acceptance

Compared to B1, most participants in B2 and B3 were content with their level of employee involvement to learn about the supported activities and to prepare themselves to relocate. The responses from participants in B3 were positive about the implementation process because they felt that it helped people who have not experienced a big workplace change, taught them about the opportunities within the ABW, and that there was no 'unknown' by the time they were supposed to move²². They described that the thorough process was informative, removed all concerns and some were excited to quickly finish the process and move-in. Some participants felt that even though they did not have a choice in anything including their involvement, they thought that their involvement was plenty, and the project team covered all personality types without

¹⁶Participant 33 in B1

¹⁷Participant 13 in B1

¹⁸Participants 12 and 13 in B1

¹⁹Participants 12, 42 and 43 in B3

²⁰Participants 42 and 43 in B3

²¹Participant 43 in B3

²²Participants 13, 33, 41 and 64 in B3

excluding anyone²³. Some responses from B2 and B3 were highly positive, such as the responses with regards to the Building Tour and the Amazing Race.

Building Tour and the Amazing Race

Even though the place was not fully completed, the participants in B3 thought that it was good²⁴, reaffirming to look at their future workplace²⁵ and that it was ‘cool’²⁶. Some participants’ descriptions in B2 were that it was “eye-opening and good” with “instances of awe”²⁷ as they learnt about the high-level building concept²⁸ and mindset shift about productivity attributable to the flexibility afforded in the ABW²⁹. Participants in B2 and B3 agreed that the tour was helpful to build knowledge on the physical and functional features of the ABW pre-moving in³⁰, the behavioural expectations³¹ and generated excitement³².

This indicates the building tour’s success in increasing knowledge of the supported activities within the ABW and generated positive responses.

In B2, some participants’ responses were highly positive³³ even though they barely received any briefing about the ABW, as they were only relocated into the ABW after most teams had relocated or they began a new role in a different team. The amount of briefing for the employees varied from no briefing to receiving some briefing from their team leader. Those who received no briefing did not seem to mind finding out about ABW themselves as they said it was easy³⁴. Participant 65 in B2 described that the ABW was “... really self-explanatory ... it is not rocket science ...” with their entire focus group agreeing with them. When asked whether their involvement influenced how they used the worksettings, one participant thought that it was the actual availability of these worksettings that affected their use of the worksettings instead of their involvement³⁵. This indicates that employees’ involvement may not be necessary when employees feel that the ABW addresses their workplace needs.

On the extreme end, some participants in B2 and B3 wanted to minimise time spent on their workplace involvement and the disruption to their schedules³⁶ with some participants in B3 thinking that the levels of employee involvement were excessive and wanted less involvement. The participants who thought that the workplace change management was excessive were often employees that were highly mobile employees in B3 that described it as time consuming and that the level of communications could have been reduced or made optional as some businesses or individuals needed it more than others³⁷. They thought the Change Readiness workshops should have been optional because only approximately 30% of the total staff were nervous and would have found these helpful, whereas, it was “over the top” for the remaining 70%³⁸.

CONCLUSION

This paper reports a study of implementation processes for innovative workplaces, in this paper’s case, ABWs. In examining the differences in employees’ responses to the ABW Implementation Process attributable to pursuing different implementation strategies. This study provided support for pursuing a

²³Participants 41, 42, 43 and 44 in B3

²⁴Participants 13, 51, 53, 61,62, 63 and 64 in B3.

²⁵Participant 13 in B3

²⁶Participants 51 and 53 in B3.

²⁷Participant 62 in B2.

²⁸Participant 52 in B2.

²⁹Participants 62, 63 and 64 in B2

³⁰Participant 24 in B3.

³¹Participants 51 and 52 in B2

³²Participant 63 in B2

³³Participant 62, 65 in B2; Participant 14 in B2: ““The change was as good as a holiday ...”; Participant 63 in B2: “This building by comparison ... something like I’ve never seen before.”

³⁴Participants 11, 13, 21, 22, 33, 34, 62, 63, 64 and 65 in B2

³⁵Participant 52 in B2

³⁶Participants 51, 52 and 53 in B2; Participants 11, 12, 13, 61, 62, 63 and 64 in B3

³⁷Participants 12, 32, 43, 52, 61, 62, 63 and 64 in B3. Participant 51 in B3: “... they overly communicated to us 10 times more than anywhere else... that’s probably why we got bombarded with constant communication.”

³⁸Participant 12 in B3

Business-driven implementation strategy. These resulted in more positive responses towards the ABW Implementation process and acceptance of the ABW. They followed the recommended implementation process in the literature more closely and conducted each step more extensively resulting in the workplace designed to better reflect employee needs. Contrary to the ABW Implementation Theory that all employees should be engaged from the start, not all employees desired to be engaged or involved from the start, if their needs were adequately represented and met in the ABW implementation (that are more likely in organisations that pursued the Business-driven strategy), such as in high mobility teams in which the employees wanted less involvement in some instances.

The organisation pursuing a Process-Solution-oriented strategy engaged their Change Champions more indicating that their Change Champion responses should be more positive, as per the ABW Implementation Theory. However, the Change Champion responses were more negative than the Change Champion that had no engagement (only involvement) because the Change Champions did not think that their input was incorporated into the designed ABW. Change Champions desired to be engaged but they wanted their input to be included. Exclusion resulted in more negative acceptance than non-engagement.

The results also demonstrated that ABW low mobility teams had different needs from other employees and desired for more employee engagement and involvement (pre- and post-moving in) than high mobility teams. This was especially so when they thought their needs were not adequately reflected in the designed ABW. This indicates that ABW is not a one-size-fits-all office as can often be assumed. Those employees with a the less varied activity profile and high paper-reliance teams may require different solutions related to their Desk design, technology, storage and redesigning their business processes. This is, though, entirely consistent with the idea of a workplace designed to support particular activities.

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