

Implementing Innovative Workplaces

Becker, F., Quinn, K. L., Rappaport, A. J., & Sims, W. R. (1994). <I>Implementing Innovative Workplaces: Organizational Implications of Different Strategies. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University International Workplace Studies Program. >

This extensive research project examined the processes underlying the successful implementation of nonterritorial workplace strategies in organizations in the United States, England and Europe. Through a series of cases studies, the research compared business-driven vs. cost-driven approaches, and the impact these had on employee satisfaction and effectiveness.

EXCERPT: Lessons Learned

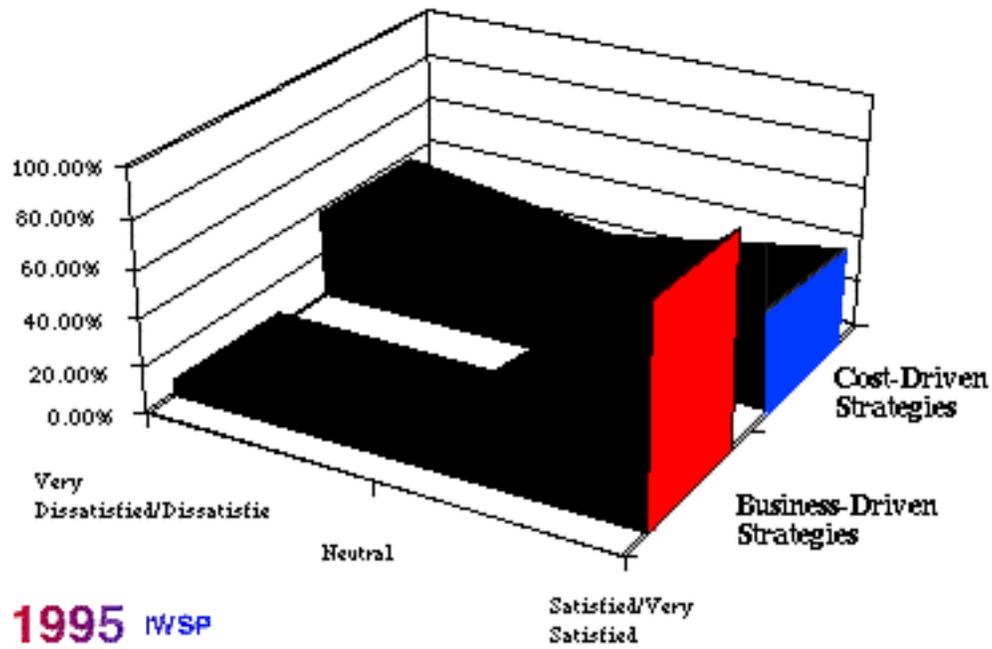
The findings from our case studies suggest that the following factors are critical:

- The presence or absence of a strong champion is very important to the success/failure of the project. In cases where there was at least one strong champion of the innovation working closely with the end users, user satisfaction and acceptance of the innovation was much greater. Situations where the champion worked in the new workplace were more likely to be business-driven and process-oriented than those which were led by persons assigned as part of their job to implement a new workplace strategy.
- Many issues that management may feel are barriers to implementing innovative ideas are perceived barriers. For example, storage, personalization, and privacy were all issues that managers focused on when trying to implement an alternative workplace. Satisfaction with these factors tended to decrease as a result of implementing alternative workplace settings involving non-territorial or open environments, but these issues were very low on users' lists of priorities. Users did not seem to be as sensitive to these issues as managers expected.
- Few companies had implemented an integrated workplace strategy; that is, one in which users have access to a wide array of settings, both inside and outside the "office" (dedicated project rooms, quiet rooms, and informal break areas in the office, home, client site, airports, hotels, etc.), supported by appropriate technology, business processes, and organizational culture. Eliminating ownership of a desk, office, or workstation without providing a richer, more varied set of work settings that truly supports the full range of work activities will generate resentment, dissatisfaction, and lower levels of performance.
- The organizational challenge that encourages organizations to implement innovations is very important. Organizations that take a business-oriented approach seem to have more success in implementing the innovations than those that take a cost- or real estate-oriented approach. A business orientation to the innovation gives managers and employees more incentive to implement the innovation, and more incentive to make changes in business practices (including management philosophies and practices, corporate culture, etc.).

The business-oriented approaches recognize that the workplace is a complex system in which all elements must work in harmony, rather than simply change how space is assigned.

- User involvement is very critical to the success of the project. It is costly and time-consuming, but it is necessary to ensure that the workplace strategy fits the employees' needs and requirements, that they understand the nature of the innovation to be implemented, and that they directly experience the benefits of implementing the innovation. The implementation process in the more business-oriented approaches becomes, in fact, a form of organizational development. It helps people think about the nature of the work they are doing, why they are doing what they do and the particular way in which they do it. It also helps them focus on identifying and inventing better ways of working.
- Significant cost savings occur in both business-driven and cost-driven approaches. However, in the business-driven approaches a portion of the savings associated with increasing the ratio of people to offices or workstations is reinvested in specific types of functional areas (e.g., dedicated project rooms, informal meeting areas, quiet rooms) that would not otherwise be feasible. Our data indicated that reinvesting a portion of the cost savings was likely to result in a far higher level of employee satisfaction and self-reported productivity than in the more purely cost-driven approaches.
- Using a pilot project as a laboratory from which a standardized solution can be developed and then applied "cookie cutter" fashion was associated, in our study, with significantly lower levels of employee satisfaction and productivity. One of the "gets" for those employees who "give" up their ownership of a personal workspace is the opportunity to help create a solution that is tailored to their group's particular work patterns and needs.
- Eliminating the reassessment and data collection phases of the process, or emphasizing these phases less strongly, will save money and time up front. It is likely, however, to require revisiting and modifying the original workplace solution to a greater extent than occurs when these phases of the implementation process are included from the beginning. In effect, organizations have the freedom to "pay now or pay later." There is no free ride when it comes to process.
- Related to the above point, employees asked to work in significantly different ways need time and help in developing effective work patterns. Champions who model the desired behavior are a very effective way of helping people learn new behavioral patterns; formal training and support is also important, especially in learning how to use new technologies.

Figure 5: Frequency Distribution for Satisfaction Ratings for Business- vs. Cost-Driven Strategies



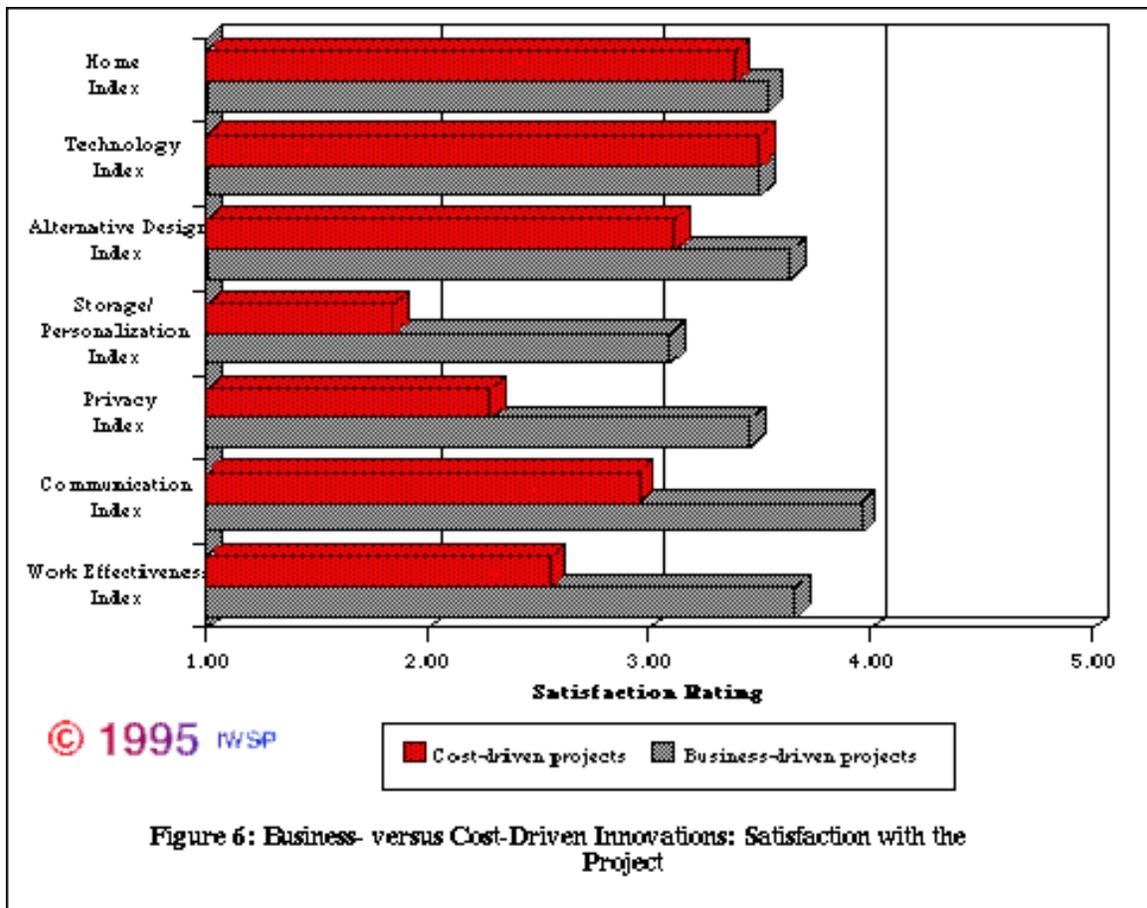


Table 6: Summary of the Implementation Process for Business- and Cost-Driven Strategies
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	Business-Based Strategies	Cost-Based Strategies
Meet Organizational Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on business-oriented challenges that significantly impacted how the organization conducted business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on reducing real estate or reducing space by altering space allocation policies
Reassess How/Where Work is Done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused more on reengineering the workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often eliminated this phase of the implementation process
Conduct Fundamental Changes in Business Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centered around the findings of the work reassessment phase • Often resulted in significant changes in management philosophy, work behaviors and attitudes, culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often eliminated this phase of implementation
Develop Alternative Workplace Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the result of earlier phases • Were developed to help support changes in business practice • "Does this strategy represent the most effective environment?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centered around cost rather than business • "Would employees still be able to work in this environment without significant reductions in effectiveness?"
Change Management to Support Organizational Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was a continuous process of helping the users make the transition from present state to desired state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often eliminated from the process

© 1995 RWSP **Table 9: Summary of the Implementation Process for Process- and Solution-Driven Strategies**

	Process-Driven Strategies	Solution-Driven Strategies
Meet Organizational Challenges	_____	_____
Reassess How/Where Work is Done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With each implementation, the process of reassessing how/where employees are working started from "scratch" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less focus on this phase of the process in later generations of the concept • Often used standards set in first implementation
Fundamental Changes in Business Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With each implementation, the changes that occurred in the business practice were often unique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less focus on this phase of the process in later generations of the concept • Often used standards set in first implementation
Develop Alternative Workplace Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solutions developed in this phase were unique to each implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace strategy remained constant throughout all generations—refinement of standard solution
Change Management to Support Organizational Change	_____	_____