Exploring interdependencies between perceived visions of change and adoption of Activity-based Flexible Offices

Maral Babapour Chafi
Division Design & Human Factors, Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden
maral@chalmers.se

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper was: (i) to identify office users' perception of the organisational motives and visions behind relocating to Activity-based Flexible Offices (A-FOs), and (ii) explore whether the users' perception of change visions may relate to adoption of A-FOs as office innovations and/or to underlying causes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the office solution.

Design/methodology/approach: A case study approach was chosen to enable the understanding of users' perception of change motives and its relationship with adoption of A-FOs and satisfaction or dissatisfaction with these office solutions. The case organisation was a Pharmaceutical company that had relocated a total of 160 employees to two floors of the same building. All of the employees were invited to partake in the study. The employees in floor A were relocated two years prior to the study, while the employees in floor B were relocated two months prior to the study. The data collection involved (i) semi-structured interviews with 22 employees and one process manager from the facility development group, (ii) collecting documentations regarding planning process, the solution, and earlier evaluations of the concept, and (iii) observations regarding actual use of the premises.

Findings: The documentations and the interview with the process manager revealed that the organisations' motives behind relocating to A-FOs was (i) to allow for organisational flexibility and facilitate collaboration, especially since they had a need for collocating different departments, (ii) cost-reductions by eliminating costs of moving groups and departments, and (iii) optimising use of spaces and resources. According to the majority of the interviewees (10/12) from floor A, the organisations' motives behind relocation were to improve and facilitate collaboration and as a result achieve a more effective way to deliver their products. Their perception of organisational motives behind relocation was in line with the actual intentions. Interviewees from floor A were satisfied with the premises and felt that the A-FO solution supported their activities. On the other hand, according to all of the interviewees from floor B (two months after relocation), the motive behind relocation was to reduce costs. Their perception of change motives deviated from actual intentions. They were dissatisfied with the A-FO concept and felt that it impeded their work. While all interviewees from the first group adopted the office solution, half of the interviewees from the second group rejected the desk-sharing concept and did not switch workstations as intended.

Practical implications: It is important to clearly communicate and motivate the reasons, motives and visions behind relocation to A-FOs during the implementation process. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the adoption and appropriation of A-FOs as office innovations, as this study showed that the employees who had used the A-FO for two years were more satisfied with the solution.

Originality/value: This study shows that (i) employees' perceptions of organisational motives behind relocation has relevance for satisfaction with A-FOs and compliance with desk-sharing

rules, and (ii) whether time for appropriation and adoption has relevance for satisfaction with A-FOs.

Keywords: Activity-based Working, Change motives, Adoption and Appropriation of Innovation

Disciplines presented in the paper: Work environment, Work Life Studies, User-centred design Adoption of Innovation, Implementation and design Process