



## Management of Integrated Workplace Concepts at Multiple Locations

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# Management of Integrated Workplace Concepts at Multiple Locations

## Abstract

**Purpose:** The study aims to provide insight into how the implementation and management of an integrated workplace concept in multiple locations were affected by local management practices as well as other contextual and cultural aspects.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A multi-method case study was carried out as an evaluation of an on-going process to roll out a new branch office concept. The core method was semi-structured interviewing.

**Findings:** Findings from the case study indicate that, when an integrated workplace concept meets different local cultures and realities the concept transforms in different directions – ultimately affecting concept interconnectedness and standardisation. The findings further indicate that the concept's socio-material implications vary between locations and actors at different levels and with different work tasks.

**Research limitations/implications:** The case study was conducted in one organisation. Additional empirical research, investigating implementation and management of different concepts in different organisational contexts, is needed to provide more definite conclusions and develop guidelines for design, implementation and decision-making.

**Practical implications:** The findings highlight the importance of applying an iterative process approach in implementation and management of integrated workplace concepts. Such an approach is essential to find the correct balance between concept standardisation and local adaption, and to align the concept with changing organisational strategies.

**Originality/value:** Although much has been written on integrated workplace concepts, the role of culture and social negotiations in the implementation and operations phase is often neglected.

**Keywords:** Integrated workplace concepts, Concept management, Standardisation, Local context, Socio-material experience.

**Paper type:** Case Study

## 1 Introduction

Effecting organisational change is a challenge, as today's organisations tend to be open and dynamic, operating across spatial, cultural and institutional boundaries. As noted by Becker and Steele (1990), organisations may be described as 'living systems' – complex ecologies built up of social and physical systems. Interest in using organisational space to effect change has led to a range of integrated workplace strategies, where the intention is to create workplace concepts integrating physical, technological and work process aspects, as well as strategies and methods for their use, implementation and evaluation (Chilton and Baldry, 1997: 188).

However, organisations exist in specific contexts, where the workplace is related to contextual factors including: culture, labour regulations, market conditions etc. While such factors often are taken for granted in workplace design and implementation (Meel, 2000), recent studies indicate that they play a significant role in user experience with workplace concepts (Brown et al., 2010; Pepper, 2008; Gustafsson, 2002). The complex interaction between a workplace concept and its context often creates 'wicked problems' (Becker and Kelley, 2004).

At the same time, many large-scale workplace innovations and configuration changes are implemented without scientific testing or measurements (Brown, 2008). Although a range of theoretical models has been developed (e.g. De Paoli et al., 2013; Robertson, 1999; Mitchell-Ketzes, 2003), few studies have focused on how workplace concepts may create business value over time (De Paoli et al., 2013). Even less is known about how leadership and management practices can make such solutions work with respect to other organisational goals. This paper takes a holistic approach to these issues, using a case study to discuss the complexity of integrated workplace concepts, their implementation and management, with a focus on the issue of standardisation versus local adaptation.

## 2 Integrated Workplace Concepts

Robertson (1999) argues that for true strategic business value to be achieved, any workplace concept must be developed as an integrated triangular system of: 1) space, 2) work arrangements and processes, and 3) enabling technology. However, when a standardised, pre-defined workplace concept is implemented in different units, local situations and contextual influences (Plijter et al., 2014), as well as leadership style and organisational management strategies may impact on the balance between the three dimensions and mediate the intended effects (Blakstad and Andersen, 2013; Lupton and Haynes, 2000; De Paoli et al., 2013).

According to the perspective of space as 'lived' social experiences (Taylor and Spicer, 2007), perceptions of the same concept may also vary greatly, due to differences in work processes, local cultures and management styles, as well as user involvement and implementation strategy. This has been observed even when the users were from the same organisation and worked in similar office spaces (Blakstad and Andersen, 2013; Blakstad and Kjølle, 2013). Thus, a pre-defined, workplace concept may influence an organisation in ways quite contrary to those originally predicted (Becker and Kelley, 2004; Pepper, 2008).

For a workplace concept to function as a strategic asset, it has to be aligned with organisational strategies (Robertson, 1999; Robertson, 2000; Levin, 2005; Blakstad and Andersen, 2013; Mosbech, 2003), as well as with corporate values, philosophy and culture (Thompson, 2008), and implemented together with relevant organisational incentives and strategies (Lansdale et al., 2011). Accordingly, De Paoli et al. (2013) suggest that the triangular model often used in workplace development should include a fourth dimension: "organisation and management strategies" (figure 1).

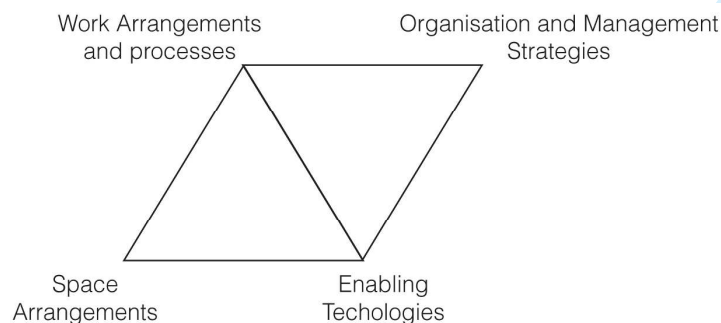


Figure 1: Illustration of the parallelogram model, based on a combination of the models by (De Paoli et al., 2013) and (Robertson, 1999).

Congruence among the different dimensions will result in a situation where they support and stabilise each other. Incongruence, on the other hand, is likely to result in counteracting

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3 situations (Robertson, 1999). In practice, change in this picture is not one-directional, but a  
4 rather multiplex and "messy" process (Law, 2004) often spanning across several locations and  
5 organisational levels and challenging to manage (Gustafsson, 2002). In the approaches by  
6 Robertson (1999) and De Paoli et al. (2013), the connections seem to be between related but  
7 independently existing parts.

8  
9 Following Orton and Weick (1990) it is also possible to think of the parts as dialectic  
10 or loosely coupled aspects of organisational reality. In this paper we take a socio-material  
11 perspective, suggesting just as others (e.g. Scott and Orlikowski, 2010) have argued regarding  
12 the relation between the technological and the social generally, that there is an inherent  
13 inseparability between the different aspects of a workplace. To increase goal achievement,  
14 this should be taken into account in design and implementation of integrated workplace  
15 concepts.

### 16 17 18 **3 Standardised Workplace Concepts and Contextual Adaption**

19  
20 When a predefined workplace concept is transposed to different contexts, a question that  
21 quickly arises is how best to balance standardisation and adjustment of the concept to 'fit'  
22 local realities and achieve the desired goals. In the design and management of organisational  
23 space, organisations often feel the need to control the functional and symbolic image of space  
24 "because any variation would spoil the purity of the overall theme" (Steele, 1973: 137). Top  
25 down driven space management processes may strengthen an organisation's hierarchical  
26 power structure. This could be desired, but may also affect employee wellbeing and  
27 environmental competence negatively – even stagnate or reverse organisational growth  
28 processes (Steele, 1973). Hence, Plijter et al. (2014) argue that; "By allowing local  
29 management or employees to determine specific parts of the working environment themselves,  
30 it is more likely that they feel comfortable, which is likely to increase satisfaction, productivity  
31 and loyalty to the company".

32  
33 Whether the workplace is under strict central control or to some extent adapted locally,  
34 the different aspects of the concept, as well as organisational strategies and local contexts,  
35 will inevitably develop and change, at times in different directions and with different change  
36 rates (Mosbech, 2003). Gustafsson (2002) found that the initial congruence in an integrated  
37 workplace concept changed as the concept was implemented across several units and the  
38 ownership and management structure related to the concept changed. At a more general level,  
39 Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) argue that when organisational concepts "travel" they also  
40 become "translated", as they are negotiated and used by actors with different interests and  
41 positions. More recent studies, such as Ansari et al. (2010) and Sandholtz (2012) also indicate  
42 that some level of adaption inevitably comes in during the implementation of a standard,  
43 either coupled or decoupled from the formal process.

44  
45 According to these perspectives, successful concepts will be those that anticipate and  
46 respond to complex and changing contexts (Mitchell-Ketzes, 2003). As argued by Becker and  
47 Steele, there is the need for a concept philosophy and "clear guidelines within which  
48 decentralized groups can quickly make decisions and respond to changing conditions"  
49 (Becker and Steele, 1990: 21-22). Such a framework should account for contextual variations,  
50 within pre-defined principles related to an integrated concept management. Since  
51 modifications to the concept are made and the context also may change, continuously  
52 connecting the concept to the organisation's long-term strategy is crucial (Levin, 2005;  
53 Gustafsson, 2002; Thompson, 2008; Mosbech, 2003).

#### 4 Standardised Workplace Concepts and Long-Term Management

The assumption in many top-down change processes is that plans and strategies – if designed well enough – will deliver the intended ends (Cummings and Worley, 2014; Kotter, 2012). This is also apparent in workplace design changes, which mainly are considered as rational and event-oriented, rather than emergent processes (Haynes and Price, 2004; Bradley, 2002). Bradley comments that: “The notion of carrying out a singular pilot project followed by a homogenous roll-out implementation program is highly suspect, unless applied to situations with very similar context and character” (Bradley, 2002: 155).

According to Balogun (2006), it is impossible to predict and fully manage change, as it is a generative social process rather than a pre-defined cause-effect chain. Managers must continuously balance ‘wicked’ problems and possible trade-offs (Elsbach and Pratt, 2007). Without integrated concept management, inconsistency and local variations might arise and possibly inhibit the desired ways of working (Plijter et al., 2014). To increase goal achievement, a multi-layered and reciprocal process with broad involvement is required (Bradley, 2002). According to Joroff et al. (2003), incremental adjustments based on understanding the implications of the different parts are essential, as this may allow for ‘new’ and better use of space. Thus, truly effective organisational design management is a never-ending process, spanning beyond the end of the initial project (Nadler et al., 1997; Mosbech, 2003; Gustafsson, 2002).

A successful integrated workplace concept must also include an organisational measurement system aligned with the new workplace strategy (De Paoli et al., 2013; Blakstad and Andersen, 2013). By continuous evaluation, the value created and the gaps between what is ‘desired’ and ‘actual’ may be identified, thereby providing insight as to where re-alignment and further interventions are needed. Systematic process evaluation may also be a tool for involving top management and other stakeholders (Bradley, 2002).

Mobilising management attention may, however, be challenging (Blakstad and Andersen, 2013). Stensaker et al. (2008) found that managers who had participated in the change process and thus had a deeper understanding of its implications, sometimes wrongly expected the next level to be able to ‘pick up’ and continue the change initiative immediately. While difficult to achieve, such continuity is crucial, as making the right adjustments at the right times may have greater impact than the original design (Brand, 1994).

A process approach may also offer opportunities for employees in terms of learning and growth (Steele, 1973). Inalhan and Finch (2012) found that employees were more willing to explore the workplace change and its meaning after than during the physical implementation phase. When change is managed as a time-limited project this learning opportunity may be lost. Implementation activities with a focus on trial-error processes may thus contribute to better organisational sense-making and further sense-giving, positively affecting the change initiative (Stensaker et al., 2008).

#### 5 A Case Study from the Norwegian Finance Sector

The perspectives and issues raised above will be discussed in relation to the implementation of a new branch office concept in a Norwegian finance corporation. The process started as an offspring of a redefinition of the organisational strategy, where the central management saw a need to bolster the new vision with an integrated workplace concept. The objective was to increase the group’s competitive advantage by developing the customer space into a professional and personal meeting place. The main goals were to better integrate three business divisions (private banking, business banking, and real estate agency), and to turn the branch into a multichannel office where staff acts as “guides” rather than traditional bank

officers. In other words, the concept was intended as a standard with far-reaching implications both as far as spatial design, technology, and work processes were concerned.

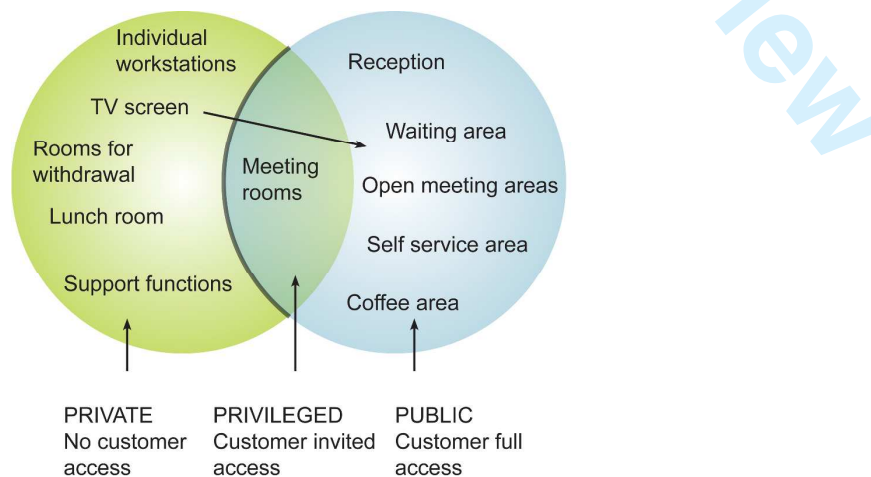
The study at hand was carried out in 2014, as an evaluation of the on-going process to roll out the concept. Data was collected from four branch offices, where three had fulfilled a transition to the new office concept. While one of them had been a concept office for three years, the time since the transition in the other two offices was two and one year, respectively. The first branch office was implemented as a pilot. The fourth office was in the process of restructuring and was included in the study to collect information on employee and manager perceptions of the concept prior to change and gain a better understanding of the stages of the implementation process.

The core method was semi-structured interviewing, carried out with 29 employees, and managers, who were purposely selected to include interviewees with different roles, work tasks and responsibilities. Observational studies, a user log, and analyses of secondary materials in form of concept presentations, internal evaluation reports, company statistics and organisational development surveys were also included. Additionally, follow-up interviews were conducted during and after presentation of the findings to the corporate management. Our focus is on cross-unit analysis. Unless otherwise stated, the reported findings cut across all units.

## 6 The Studied Workplace Concept

In the early development phase, a concept group responsible for strategic development of the concept was created. The group worked in close dialogue with the corporate management, as well as with the HR, Marketing and IT departments. After the initial development phase, a project team was given the responsibility for implementing the concept. The concept management group remained, but was less operational.

The workplace concept was based on the principle of activity-based working. Customer contact was assigned to a specific customer area, – the "lounge" – and individual and intradepartmental work activities were assigned to a separate back office. The concept was supported by mobile technology, especially in form of self-service machines and Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) (figure 2).



## 7 Implementation in Different Socio-Material Contexts

At the time of study, the workplace concept had been implemented in seven offices. The stated experience was that this had been done successfully, with a high degree of standardisation. Notwithstanding this impression, the concept did not work exactly as intended in any of the studied cases. Pre-existing buildings offered different opportunities and limitations. The offices were located in different districts, towns and townships, and varied with respect to size, history and image in the local community. Variations in local culture, organisational culture, staff composition and management styles also left different ‘footprints’ in how the concept was interpreted and practiced.

The physical and technological aspects were quite standardised. Minor adjustments had been made to tailor the concept to different localities, sometimes with and sometimes without dialogue with the project team. In one office, where the estate division consisted of a single broker with a very strong market position, a display of estate prospects was located in the customer area, – this at odds with the original concept. At the same location, the door between the customer and work zones was also kept open, while the policy elsewhere was to keep it locked. In the other offices, the staff had installed additional furniture and minor decorations, due to local needs and preferences. Still, the facilities appeared and functioned by and large in same or similar ways.

When it came to work processes a level of standardisation was also found, but there was a greater degree of variation and ‘local solutions’ (figure 3).

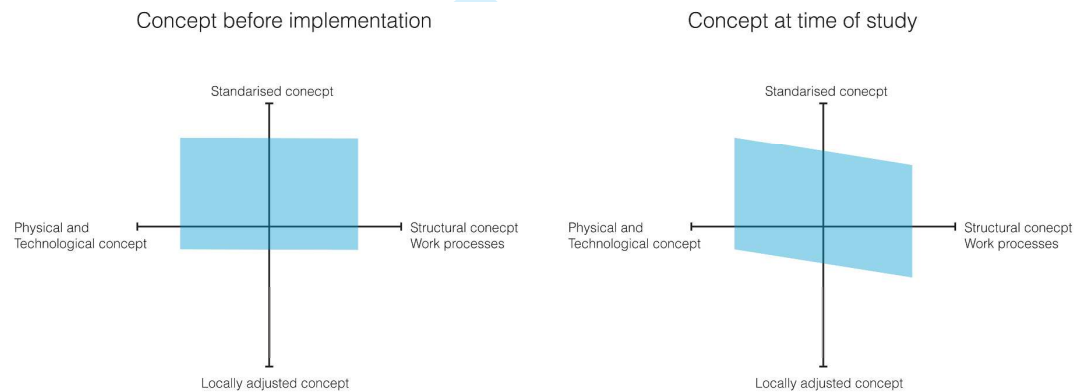


Figure 3: Standardisation of the workplace concept.

Elements closely connected with the new spatial and technical solutions were more similar across the studied offices, while elements more dependent on organisation culture and management and hence more loosely connected to the physical conditions tended to vary more. This supports Robertson's (1999) view that congruence between the aspects of an integrated workplace concept leads to reinforcement and facilitation of the desired practice.

This was especially evident in conduction of meetings. In contrast to the former solution, where most customer meetings were held in singular offices, the new workplace concept involved a range of different meeting facilities; regular meeting rooms, high-stand tables, lounge-style seating and semi open alcove-style meeting places. In line with the prescribed work processes, employees chose actively among these locations based on the nature of their meetings. Open and semi open locations were used for meetings such as contract signing and one-to-one discussions, as they would keep the meetings short and effective. More extensive and confidential meetings were handled according to standard

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3 procedure in the new meeting rooms, which, in the words of one employee, functioned like  
4 "sales theatres".

5 On the other hand, the new concept also involved so-called "whiteboard meetings",  
6 brief all-staff continuous improvement meetings at a dedicated area in the protected work  
7 zone. Though some version of these meetings was arranged in two of the studied offices, they  
8 had not been practiced continually in any of the offices. All employees did not attend the  
9 meetings, arguing that due to different roles and responsibilities it was not necessary for them  
10 to do so. While this aspect of the work processes was supported by the physical design, it was  
11 more dependent on management commitment, and as we have seen above managerial  
12 dimensions were less pronounced in the workplace concept.

13 In a similar vein, the new "guide as role" was fully implemented and supported by the  
14 layout, technology and interior resources in the customer zone. The parallel concept, "guide  
15 as mentality" had however not been adopted to the same extent. "Guide as mentality" referred  
16 to a shared customer focus, whereby also advisors and real estate brokers should assist  
17 frontline personnel in the customer area and prioritise customer experience before individual  
18 work.

19 "Guide as mentality" was supported by video communication between the zones,  
20 allowing employees in the back office to literally see when assistance in the customer zone  
21 was needed. However, the option to withdraw behind a locked door made it easy to 'hide'  
22 away from contributing as a 'guide'. Where the concept went across several floors, yet  
23 another barrier enabled employees to distance themselves from the customer area. At the  
24 same time "guide as mentality" was a distributed responsibility, and not an assigned role  
25 supported by performance indicators. It also partly went against the identity and values of the  
26 advisors and brokers, whose focus were on individual sales and profit. Thus, "guide as  
27 mentality" was more dependent on management commitment, strategy and culture change. As  
28 a result, perceptions of 'being a guide' and its importance also differed between offices.

29 There were also different views and experiences regarding the role and purpose of  
30 specific physical elements, such as the service counter. Two of the main goals with the new  
31 concept were to develop a more personal kind of service and to increase customer self-  
32 service. To achieve this, the "guides" were expected to meet and handle customers' requests  
33 on the floor, and to train customers in the use of self-service devices. However, in peak  
34 periods, customers were still mainly assisted from the counter. On this background, some  
35 perceived the counter as a barrier to goal achievement.

36 In practice, the function of the counter seemed to vary across situations, offices and  
37 categories of employees. In one office with high customer traffic, the counter was perceived  
38 as a positive and still needed element – structuring encounters, and making for faster service  
39 during peaks. In another office, with more predictable traffic and good communication with  
40 the back office, the service counter was seen as outdated. While some guides felt more  
41 relaxed behind the counter, experiencing it as a protective and order-creating device, many  
42 managers and some employees felt the counter was not really needed in a multichannel office.  
43 For them it was a barrier rather than an element supporting the overall concept and its ends.

44 There were similar findings when it came to cash registers, which gradually were to be  
45 phased out from the integrated branch offices. In one office, the cash register was not really  
46 needed any more, but in the other two it remained an important tool, to maintain a positive  
47 customer experience.

48 The service counter and cash register did not have just one effect, whose usefulness  
49 stakeholders debated. What these elements actually did and how this was experienced varied  
50 across offices and contexts. That is to say, the socio-material qualities of the elements were  
51 different. The degree of interconnectedness between the technical, spatial and social aspects  
52 of work was not fully recognised by the management and concept owners, who rather made



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3 general statements such as: "Employees get lazy behind the counter," and: "They do not know  
4 the consequences well enough", indicating that resistance to change was the main issue. That  
5 the socio-material realities were more complex underscores the need for conscious and  
6 continuous integrated concept management, involving representatives from different  
7 locations.  
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## 10 11 **8 Role and Influence of Local Management**

12 Management, and in particular change management, was important in the discourse around  
13 the new workplace concept. The concept involved considerable organisational challenges. It  
14 altered the premises for local managers by way of calling for more inter-divisional  
15 collaboration and coordination. It also added emphasis on continuous improvement, which  
16 could be seen to affect their authority basis as well as add to their responsibilities and duties.  
17

18 However, who should be responsible for executing the concept at the local level was  
19 not clearly defined. At the outset, none of the studied units had a formal office manager.  
20 Employees mainly answered to the local or nearest manager in their own division. Still, the  
21 local manager for the private banking division had most employees, and in practice he or she  
22 was running the office and held responsible for the main processes related to the workplace  
23 concept.<sup>1</sup> Limited authority over employees from other divisions as well as lack of  
24 incentives, sanctions and performance indicators limited the office managers' possibilities to  
25 get the concept to work as intended.  
26

27 The office managers handled this and related to the concept in different ways. In one  
28 case, the office manager participated actively as "guide". Proposals and initiatives from the  
29 employees were also strongly encouraged. In the two other offices, the office managers  
30 worked in the open-space area, and this was strongly appreciated by the employees. While  
31 more exposed to immediate reactions and social challenges, these managers appreciated the  
32 increased overview and contact with employees. Regarding concept implementation one was  
33 very "hands-on" and centred on practical issues. The other was more concerned about  
34 tailoring the concept to his particular branch office. Thus, different local management  
35 approaches influenced how the concept worked in practice. Simply put, the first case had an  
36 emphasis on participation and customer orientation, the second on good communication for  
37 smooth operations, and the third on experimentation and organisational development.  
38

39 As the intention was to implement a standard, "being true" to the concept was an  
40 important issue, for the concept management group as well as the central management. At the  
41 same time, the concept management group acknowledged and approved smaller adjustments  
42 during the implementations following the pilot. For example, the distance between the  
43 entrance and main customer reception area was increased, a queuing system was re-  
44 introduced for an office with high and strongly fluctuating traffic, and the real estate division  
45 was afforded some more space and visibility.  
46

47 Later, when all the studied branch offices got new office managers due to corporate  
48 restructuring, further modifications were introduced. To improve the flow between the  
49 different zones, one office developed a system where advisors had certain days 'on call' as  
50 guides and other days off. The second office established a new category of advisors working  
51 mainly from the customer zone, and the third office used qualified advisory personnel as  
52 guides, to reduce the workload on advisors.  
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57 <sup>1</sup> For simplicity, we use the term office managers with reference to the managers from the private banking  
58 department  
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3 Such adjustments were perceived positively by most employees. One commented  
4 that: "They came with a ready made template and it was not that easy just to put it right into  
5 practice. I actually think, tailoring and slightly adjusting it has been helpful". Phrased by  
6 another: "It does not work as intended, everyday life is not that way. You need to change  
7 things and work with it in order to get it to work". That there was room for adjustments also  
8 seemed to increase the sense of ownership among employees, as illustrated by the following  
9 statement: "I would call it our self-composed version of the concept".

10  
11 On the other hand, several interviewees from the pilot office saw it as an advantage  
12 that their previous manager stayed extremely true to the concept. This office manager had  
13 been involved in the concept management group and felt a strong ownership to the concept.  
14 Only smaller adjustments were made, after thorough trials and evaluation. Today, the pilot  
15 remains as the office most in line with the original concept. One employee said: "I think we  
16 were very lucky to be the first office to get the concept. It seems like everyone falls back to  
17 doing things the way they have done it before". However, negative comments were also  
18 made. One employee from the pilot office said: "It is not possible to make changes, as this is  
19 against the mind-set within the concept. I have had the impression that this is someone's  
20 baby".

21  
22 Also at other locations, critical comments were made regarding the scope for  
23 adjustments. One manager concluded: "Whether it is the concept that is flexible or we who  
24 break the boundaries, I don't know. But I feel that we stretch the boundaries". Members of  
25 the concept management group also noted that lack of clarity about the concept boundaries  
26 created uncertainty and a feeling of failure among some managers and employees. One  
27 employee commented that: "we don't seem to get it to work as intended". Several managers  
28 called for more experience-sharing between offices, arguing that this might contribute to a  
29 higher level of standardisation, avoiding of unnecessary trial-and-errors, and better concept  
30 development. While some in the concept management group still maintained that the concept  
31 should be executed according to the original description, others suggested it would be useful  
32 to determine more precisely which elements one should require strict adherence to, and where  
33 adaption should be allowed. Some also suggested that one should select only the most well-  
34 functioning aspects and implement them according to the needs and opportunities in different  
35 localities.  
36

37  
38 At the time of study, there was no clear understanding or agreement regarding these  
39 issues. The execution and local development of the concept seemed to be quite strongly  
40 influenced by the office managers' approaches.  
41  
42

### 43 8.1 Alignment with Organisational Strategies

44  
45 Local management approaches were influenced by the interplay between the representatives  
46 of the three business divisions on the local scene, as well as by the interaction with the project  
47 team and the central management. In the early development and implementation phase, the  
48 direct link to the corporate strategy and the participation of all divisions through the active  
49 concept management group ensured a strong sense of ownership.

50  
51 As time passed, at least three developments influenced the level of commitment. First,  
52 organisational restructuring led to staff changes, whereby some members of the concept  
53 management group and several local office managers were replaced. As they had not  
54 participated in its initial development, the new actors did not have the same process  
55 knowledge and relation to the concept as their predecessors. Other matters of strategic  
56 importance competed for management attention. The link between the concept management  
57 group and the project team, who were under pressure to fulfil an ambitious implementation  
58 scheme, got weaker, and this in turn, may have affected their relations to the line organisation.  
59

Secondly, there was an emerging feeling that the concept answered to the needs of the private banking division more than those of the other divisions. The real estate brokers were concerned about the profiling of their division and sceptical about activity-based working, claiming that their work tasks required more space and privacy. They also argued that banking and brokerage are "different cultures", hence integration is challenging and can only be useful to a certain extent. Likewise, the type and level of customer focus was debated. While customer satisfaction was important to all, some, especially from business banking, were concerned that it should not come at the expense of the core business focus.

Thirdly, there was limited documentation of the benefits of the workplace concept. The overall impression was positive. An internal evaluation also found positive impacts on customer relations, organisational efficiency, employee satisfaction and work flow. However, there was no clearly defined system to measure the impact of the concept systematically over time. Due to internal and external differences between the offices it was difficult to produce 'hard evidence' of improvements in productivity and financial gain.

These developments created uncertainty regarding the effects, with suspicions like "maybe it costs more than you get", and doubts about the future of the concept. This was most evident in the interviews with management and employees from the office that was in the starting phase of concept implementation. Here, several interviewees stated that they were positive, but somewhat sceptical about the benefits. There were also unclear signals from the business banking and real estate division managements, causing dilemmas for local employees. According to a member of the concept management group, there was a need for confirmation from the central management: "They need to stand up and say that this is what gives us our competitive advantage, let's do it!"

Thus, the concept was negotiated at different levels in the organisation, and the congruence between the dimensions in the parallelogram model discussed above seemed to have changed gradually over time, into a less balanced totality than the initial construction (figure 4).

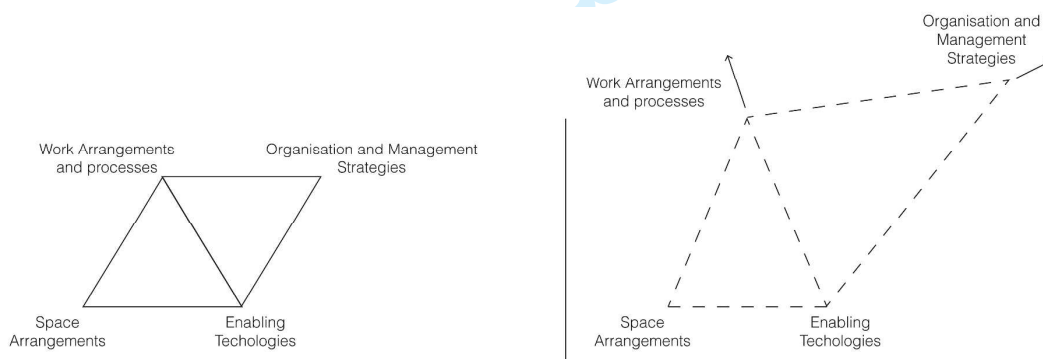


Figure 4. Changes in connections within the workplace concept.

## 9 Implications for Integrated Workplace Strategy

The case study illustrates that not only design, but also management of integrated workplace concepts needs to be handled at a strategic level as well as at a local level, as a continuous process in time. In the studied case, local variation and changing relations between the four dimensions of the integrated workplace concept was linked to the influence of various internal and external contextual factors, in line with findings from previous studies (Brown et al., 2010; Pepper, 2008; Gustafsson, 2002).

Variations in local population, market shares, and customer profiles seem to have informed local adaptations of technology and spatial arrangements, as well as work processes. Other contextual factors – such as variations in customer traffic, building structure and staff composition – also influenced the level congruence between the concept dimensions (Bradley, 2002). The impact of corporate restructuring and subsequent 'footprints' of individual local managers further illustrate how contextual factors internal to the organisation affected implementation and concept management – findings in line with De Paoli et al. (2013), Blakstad and Andersen (2013) and Lupton and Haynes (2000).

During the concept development phase, the branch offices were considered as fairly similar, and thus a homogenous roll-out program was seen as justified. During the implementation across various offices, however, the influence of contextual factors became more apparent. Contextual factors were also more actively addressed, both by the concept management group and at the local level. Arguably, there was an element of trial-and-error at several locations and organisation levels. This resulted in a better understanding of the concept implications and led to beneficial adjustments. To a considerable degree, the concept was responding to changing contexts – thus fulfilling the success criterion identified by Mitchell-Ketzes (2003).

On the other hand, several challenges remained, especially when it came to less formalised aspects of the interaction in the workplace. As noted above, the contextual factors influencing the concept also included corporate culture. This was especially apparent in real estate brokers' use of 'cultural differences' as an argument, but also in how identities and values among bank advisors' in some cases seemed to work against "guide as mentality". Importantly, culture also seemed to be of influence by way of signification linked to movement and use of different locations, which in turn lent different socio-material qualities to physical elements, such as the service counter and cash register, in different locations.

Arguably, 'wicked' problems arose and negotiations occurred as the new workplace concept 'travelled' (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996). This was especially apparent in the "positive scepticism" expressed by interviewees from the office preparing for implementation. Uncertainty as to whether the concept really added business value and about the anchoring of the concept in the central management also created dilemmas.

The case shows that, as the different dimensions within an integrated workplace concept have different change rates (Mosbech (2003), and as internal and external events may affect the congruence between them, the level of standardisation is likely to change as time passes. One important aspect, then, is striving for continuous alignment with the strategic objectives of the corporation. Relevant tools for this are appropriate forums and arenas for involvement, like the concept group and continuous improvement meetings in the studied case. Although they did not always function as intended, the continuous improvement meetings ensured a level of participation, also important for environmental learning (Steele, 1973). In the early stages of the implementation, interaction between the project team, concept management group and office managers facilitated broad involvement, as recommended by Bradley (2002), and also ensured concept alignment. However as time passed these links were weakened, in line with the observations previously made by Gustafsson (2002).

In this perspective, the allocation of roles and resources to manage and develop the concept continually over time is important. In the studied case, the office managers had to relate to the practical implications of the original design and at the same time relate to employee feedback, organisational strategies and various signals from the divisional and central managements. Thus, their role was challenging, but influential, in negotiating what the concept boundaries should be. These observations further suggest that local management is

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3 key to understanding how adjustment and continuous development of an integrated workplace  
4 concept may affect the organisation's ability to achieve the higher strategic ends.

5 Additionally, the case illustrates how the role of office managers is influential when it  
6 comes to engaging employees in trial-and-error activities, as well as in creating employee  
7 satisfaction with the concept, as suggested by Plijter et al. (2014). The study further highlights  
8 the pivotal role of the concept management group, as mediators and advisors to the local  
9 office management. Their role as anchorage and bridge may be especially important in early  
10 implementation and when a workplace concept is implemented across different locations.

11 To communicate the objectives and document goal-achievement, it is important to  
12 ensure that relevant criteria and indicators for measuring concept performance are in place. In  
13 the studied case lack of such tools, combined with the fact that work processes were not  
14 standardised to the expected level, were used by some internal stakeholders to undermine the  
15 concept.

16 In other words, the findings from the case study underscore Balogun's (2006) point,  
17 that change is a generative social process. They also support the argument by Becker and  
18 Steele (1990) and Plijter et al. (2014), that integrated workplace concepts should include  
19 frameworks and guidelines for continuous decision making. As organisational strategies  
20 change, the process of adaption, evaluation and redefinition of the workplace concept needs to  
21 be handled in an on-going dialogue. As suggested by Bradley (2002), continuous involvement  
22 of all relevant actors may be crucial to maintain concept ownership at different organisational  
23 levels over time. However, as pointed out by Blakstad and Kjølle (2013), this may be  
24 challenging as other organisational strategies may be considered more important. In this  
25 process the concept management group may however, have a pivotal role, relating the concept  
26 to changing corporate strategies.  
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## 31 **10 Conclusion**

32 For an integrated workplace concept to maintain its organisational status and be aligned with  
33 changing organisational strategies, it needs to be continuously re-designed, and the spatial and  
34 technological aspects, together with work processes and organizational aspects should be  
35 congruent or support each other. This requires an integrated workplace strategy with a process  
36 approach. Here, office managers as well as concept management group play crucial roles,  
37 both in terms of facilitating learning and participation, and in managing and developing the  
38 concept in the right direction.  
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40 Thus, the goal within a 'standardised workplace concept' should not necessarily or  
41 only be to standardise, but rather to achieve an iterative implementation and development  
42 approach – continuously evaluating, developing and aligning the concept to suit the purpose  
43 and realign with changing organisational strategies. With a perspective on the office concept  
44 as a socio-material entity rather than a purely instrumental design and management "tool",  
45 one may achieve a broader and more fruitful learning process during implementation, and get  
46 a more dynamic and adaptive concept in result.  
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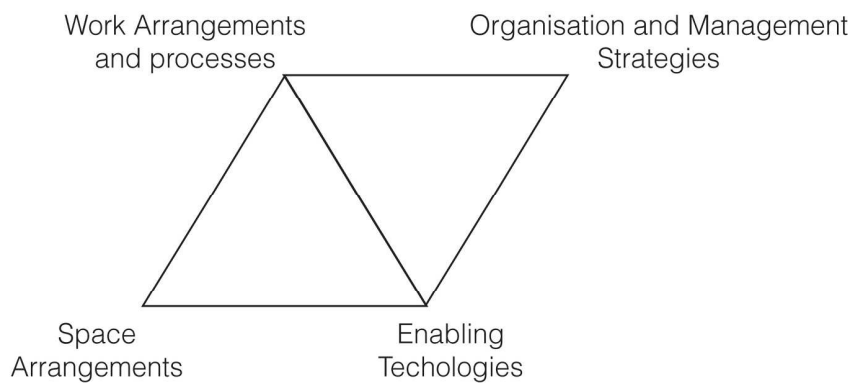
48 More research on the interconnectedness between spatial, technological, and work  
49 process aspects, and their relation to organisational and management strategies will be  
50 important to develop better models for the development, management and evaluation of  
51 integrated workplace strategies. How contextual aspects, both internal and external to the  
52 organisation, affect the concept and how these can be managed as a part of the integrated  
53 workplace strategy, are also interesting topics for further research.  
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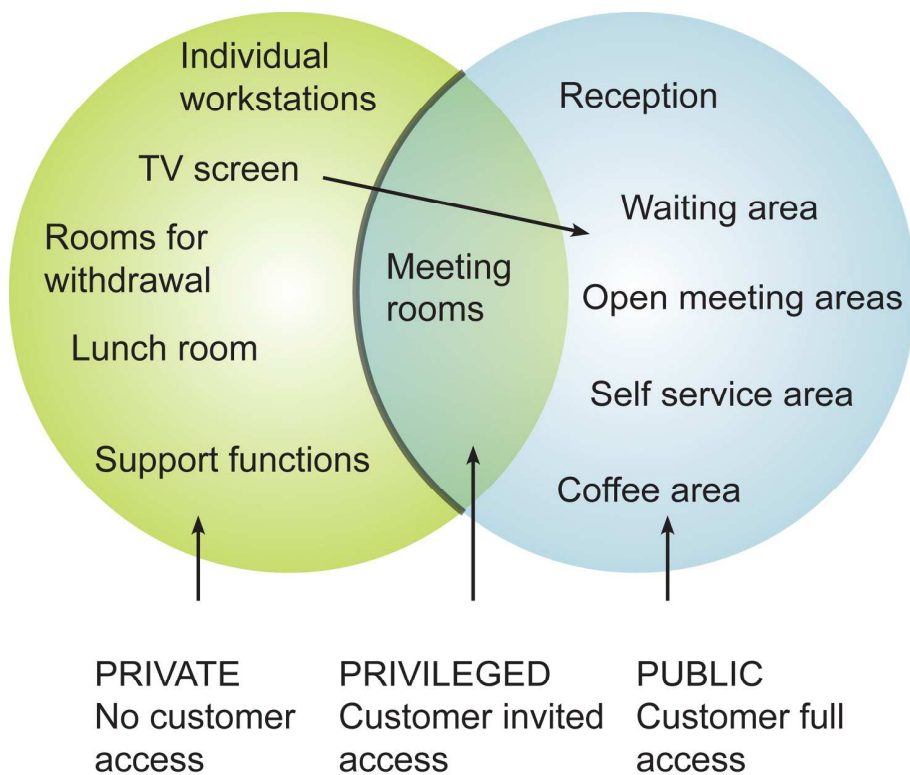
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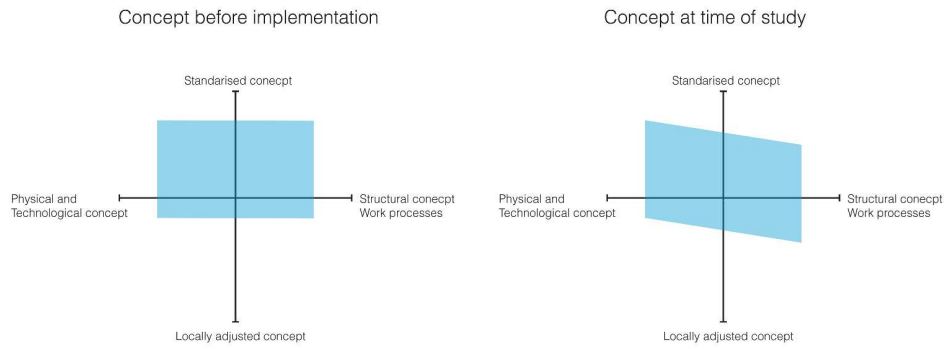


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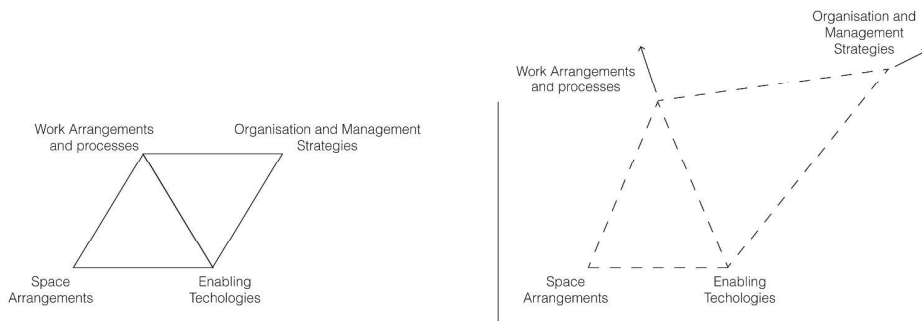
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