

mass migration

working with the client to make a move a culture
shift not a 'lift and shift'

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Sparknow

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This case study was first written by Victoria Ward, Neil Nokes and Stephanie Colton and approved by Tony Wilson, then head of BBC Property Projects, in November 2003. It has been adapted and updated in September 2014 by Victoria, with Pia McKerron and Fiona Hlscocks, who were both in the team at the time. Tony Wilson is now at Equals, and he has contributed too.

prologue

A culture shift, not a ‘lift and shift’.

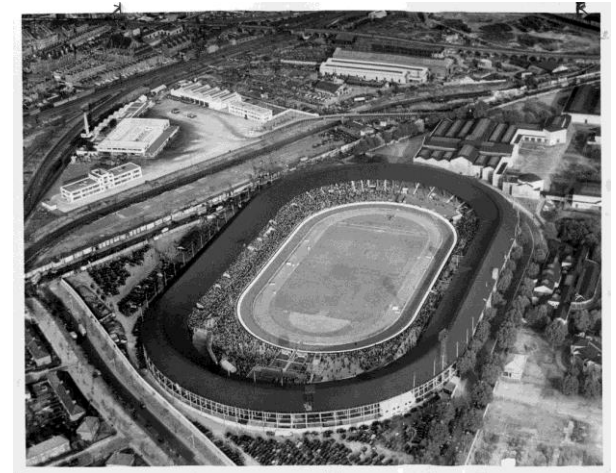
Whilst we fret ceaselessly about facilities issues such office square footage allotted to various ranks we all but ignore miss the key strategic issue - the parameters of intermingling.

Tom Peters | Liberation Management

The British Broadcasting Corporation (‘the BBC’) needed to rationalise its portfolio of properties in London and embarked on a major relocation programme. Part of this involved moving about 2,000 people from numerous locations, mostly in central London, to a new head office single site location in White City, West London. Each of these locations had their own particular culture creating a sense of a collection of warring fiefdoms. A goal of the move was to break down these barriers and create a more unified sense of identity.

The property team at the BBC (‘Property’) knew this was likely to be a difficult move. As well as being unhappy about moving from central London, there was suspicion of the management backing for a move to open plan working: rumour had it that, whatever people really wanted, the concept of open plan working was to be applied throughout the new building for all staff, irrespective of seniority or discipline. Worse, the move to shared spaces signalled that the movers would need to embrace new ways of working. Right from the outset, emotions were running high so there was likely to be scepticism about any kind of consultation. All the same, Property felt this too important a move to do a ‘lift and shift’, so they decided on a bold approach.

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White City stadium c. 1950 - the 1908 Olympic stadium became a dog track for which many still had fond memories.

Property decided they would consult as many of the movers as possible as to what they would like from their new space, with the explicit commitment that these needs and hopes would be embedded into the shaping of their new home. Property also hoped that this level of early engagement would prompt movers to see that the move was a combination of physical space, and of the psychology and changed habits which people were willing to bring with them to make the new space work. They were convinced that they needed to get people to understand this was a very real opportunity to create an environment that would improve the way people worked as individuals, within their teams and as a whole, organisation or “One BBC”.

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what were we asked to do?

Over a ten-week period we were to draw out the movers' needs and wishes and translate these into a timely brief which married ambition with concrete requirements.

Property commissioned Sparknow, as they put it to us, to act as “honest brokers” between the movers and those parties or “implementation teams”¹ who would create the finished product.

We were to be on the side of the movers when it came to making sure the implementation teams were really taking on board their wishes. At the same time, we were to nudge the movers into making the most ambitious changes in their work practices that we could.

We were also to facilitate the creation of a community amongst the nominated Move Champions which would outlast our presence, and create a core dynamic which would help in the management of the transition, which should continue to be a balance of provocation and support.

This was a pretty risky position, both for Property to commission and for Sparknow to assume. The risk was increased by shortness of time, and by the wariness of some of the suppliers of the move as to how our role as provocateurs and advocates might impact on them.

We agreed at the outset to try and mitigate some of this risk by de-branding Sparknow, and putting the Sparknow work under the banner of ‘White City Project Team’ in a bid to create more of a sense of communal ambition.

¹ The “implementation teams”, previously named “work streams” included Furniture, New Ways of Working, Technology, Facilities Management and Move, Space Planning, Built Environment, Human Resources and Information Management.

how did we go about it?

Each “intervention” or action was designed to build upon the last so that the whole represented a cohesive body of work.

a network of Move Champions

Move Champions to represent each of the 12 migrating divisions had already been nominated. We decided strengthen this embryonic ‘Community of Practice’¹ and grow it into a self-sustaining change network. Each individual Move Champion would be serviced by a Sparknow relationship manager (based on investment banking principles), and the overall programme would be intended to create relations of trust and confidence between them so that they organised themselves into the community which would help effect an, at times, uncomfortable transition. We kicked off with an event which brought the Move Champions together for the first time and made clear the roles and responsibilities inherent in the project - we knew from experience that people often forget to ground relationships and roles at the beginning of a project like this and a powerful beginning would pave the way for long term momentum.

The event was designed to generate ‘serious’ outputs but done with lots of creative juices in flow too. After all, creativity is what the BBC is about and we all felt the movers deserved plenty of imagination as well as lots of rigour.

Together, we looked at what was unique and what was similar about the way each division worked, what were the enablers and barriers to a successful relocation and ideal qualities to a work environment.

¹ A ‘Community of Practice’ or ‘CoP’ is a supported network of people with shared goals and interests - often from functionally and geographically diverse places - brought together to tackle an organisational issue. By building an informal ‘Community of Practice’ you also build new space and networks in which tacit knowledge is exchanged and new connections are forged. The benefits of creating a non-hierarchical space like this are often sustained long into the future.



Best Move Champion from history or fiction? Mary Poppins, Moses, Machiavelli all got a look in

brief encounters

Using a brief entitled 'Never mind the width, feel the quality' the Sparknow interviewing team were tasked with holding a mirror up to movers, asking¹ them to reflect on their current space and working practices and to think about what they might like to change. Using an appreciative style, the desire was to capture as many voices as possible and uncover rich seams of personal meaning, information, views and ideas which could then be knitted together later into a bigger, more startling cultural picture - to increase the likelihood that the final brief would resonate with the migrating staff and achieve the cultural change ambitions of breaking down the barriers between the 'warring fiefdoms'.

There was also parallel survey work which sought more quantitative data and which we could contrast with the face-to-face conversations where people had room to express fear, anxiety, vulnerability, enthusiasm.

decision forums

Space workshops were deliberately renamed as decision forums during the design process, to make sure that they were not just another workshop.

While we were gathering the evidence from brief encounters, Sparknow relationship managers also arranged induction meetings and worked with the Move Champions to set up "mood boards" in team spaces to invite wider participation. The resulting collages of words and images were photographed and used as provocation and stimulation devices for the planned Decision Forum events.

Representatives from each division were invited by their respective Move Champions to attend their own Decision Forum events facilitated by Sparknow. Over a three week period, some 132 attendees at 12 forums used narrative and visualisation exercises to explore identity, values and working practices with input from the key themes from interview analysis, and to conclude by making

¹ 'if you could have someone else's workspace, whose would it be and why?'

'where do you hide?'

'is tidiness an issue?'

'what reaction would you want visitors to your work space to have?'

'How would your ideal space feel?'

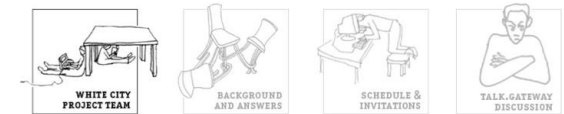
concrete decisions regarding the design of their future workspace. All the assets were digitally recorded, printed and laminated and sent back to the Move Champions (in most cases) for their mood boards, again encouraging wider communication and ownership. The outputs from all these events would also form part of the brief content and align those delivering the move and those on the receiving end of it around goals that were cultural as well as practical.

a move communications campaign

Running concurrently throughout this diagnostic process and event series was a communications campaign which was conceived as a series of posters and site specific installations designed to provoke people to think differently about their workspace and to steer them towards a website intended to act as a central communications hub for the project. The website included a friendly FAQ and straightforward guidance which built into a repository of information for all the movers.

the final brief: a dynamic interface

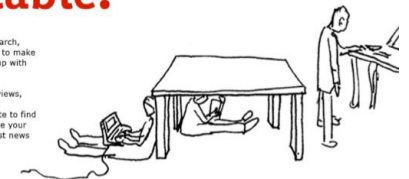
All of the assets, information and narrative outcomes from these processes were then condensed into a brief template(s). Sparknow and the Move Champions worked together to create the best possible statement of each divisions aspirations, decisions and requirements. The brief template was used as a framework to enable consistent writing and to ensure that each divisional brief could be put next to one another, dissembled and rearranged to suit the implementation teams. The finished briefs acted as portfolio carriers, owned by the Move Champions and their respective divisions, and became a repository for all the elements around the move process up to and after the actual move in dates.



Make yourself comfortable.

The White City Project is a month of research, discussion and experimentation designed to make sure that everyone in White City 2 ends up with the best possible working life.

The project will include workshops, interviews, wandering story gatherers and an online questionnaire. Keep an eye on this website to find out what's going on and how to make sure your opinions are taken into account. The latest news will always be on the updates page.



The move communications campaign materials and website were devised by Will Ross of www.spanner.org, with illustrations by Babette Waagenvoort who we'd also worked with on a story guide.

The communications campaign combined physical presence, whimsical imagery, and led towards a digital space where questions and answers could be evolved in a frank and open way. Looking back later, we agreed that the politics and timing were such that we couldn't quite see through it's potential, despite its undoubted value, but we'd certainly do it again.

The brief template was really hard to evolve and get right. It was conceived of as a way to negotiate a really shared understanding between movers and Move Champions as to what they wanted to say, and then between implementation teams and Move Champions as to what implementation teams needed to do. That is to say, the template was intended as a kind of interface which would be the glue between three key communities - movers, implementation teams supplying the move, and the White City Project Team.

Victoria Ward being interviewed by Stephanie Colton as part of Sparknow lessons learned process

Very important to us, as a principle, was to seek to retain the rawness of the thinking, rather than polish it wrongly. We left gaps where there were gaps. We highlighted uncertainties where these existed. We tried to assemble all the raw materials and re-present them in such a way that the designers could get under the skin of the fears, needs and ambitions of a particular community and then respond to this in the design process. Where the visualisation exercises and narratives in the decision forums had been rich experiences, we sought to recreate this as a kind of walk-through scenario of the space which would help the designers get a picture into their heads of what stage individual divisions were at.

We also intended to use the negotiation of the brief, through the template, to become a dynamic three way process between us, the Move Champions and their Divisions, and the implementation teams.

¹ Included in the final brief, division by division

- * what you said about the move to white city ii
- * how people are feeling about the move
- * frequently asked questions
- * favourite spaces
- * background information including current spaces and working practices
- * visions and ambitions
- * technology scenarios
- * work scenarios
- * space scenarios
- * overall ambience
- * individual and team work styles
- * shared and social spaces
- * storage, display and filing
- * special needs and concerns
- * building, location and vicinity

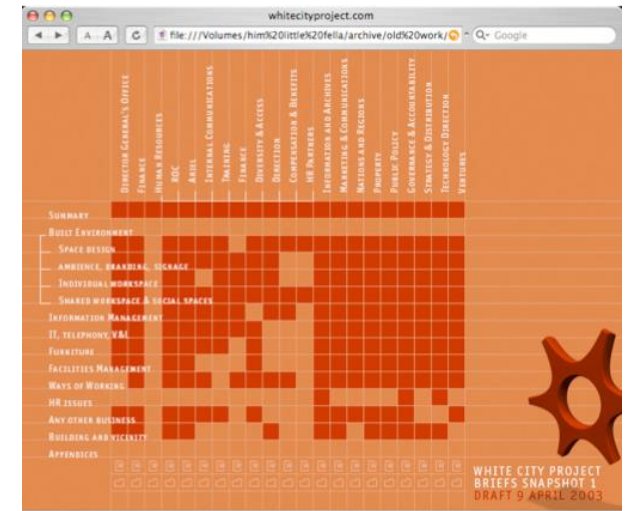
leaving

We then began the handover process to remove ourselves from the project and to hand over ownership of these portfolios to the Move Champions for them to share with the implementation teams.

The handover process was formally concluded at a Final Event attended by all the Move Champions, implementation team representatives and the BBC project team, facilitated by Sparknow. The event was also used to celebrate the achievements and work that had been created to date and to build upon the successful community of practice that was the Move Champions so that it included at least one representative from each of the implementation teams.

Finally all the briefs were put onto a CD-ROM, organized in a transparent matrix format so as to be readable horizontally and vertically which was then presented to all the implementation teams and the BBC project team. We intended this to have some immediate impact, perhaps drawing people across Divisions to see what others had said and pick up ideas or open conversations as well as achieve the original ambition of bringing together the move requirements in one place.

We also intended it to act as some kind of reference point for later reviews either by Property or by individual areas: ‘for better or for worse this is what we said at the time. How does what we have actually done differ from what we said we’d do?’



The interface from the CD-Rom

impact

Tony Wilson looks back, ten years on.

The exercise very much reflected the more general mood in the BBC at the time. In many ways Greg Dyke was a liberating DG and created a very positive culture where we felt empowered to take risks, of the kind outlined here, which I believe was crucial to our success. We were also at a time when there was a general democratisation of the workplace going on, not just at the BBC but more widely too.

This was reflected in the strong willingness on the part of senior management to hand over a degree of control to users, who had much more of a say in how their space should function, look and feel. The project team embraced this whole heartedly and, with Sparknow's help, was able to engage with staff in such a way that they felt part of what was being created at White City. They could see direct evidence of their input and involvement in the final look and feel of the various spaces. A big impact was the sheer number of people touched by the process either directly or virtually in a very short time period. People were very pleased to be asked for their input, which was a new experience for them.

Between us I think we developed an extremely creative process, an excellent fit for a very creative organisation going through huge cultural change. It was fresh, challenging, creative and fun. There is always a balance to be struck between financial imperatives and other objectives but principles we developed and lessons we learned are very readily transferable.



Media City

The whole Sparknow process was very useful. It really made us look at what we needed and what we desired, discuss, as a group, what we want from the new building, how to make changes to the way we work.

Move Champion

Overall, I would say one of the key contributions was that Sparknow significantly helped to reduce the fear factor about the move. Their gentle consultative approach made the users feel they were in control, not being controlled by the migration project machinery.

Implementation team leader