



The IC Space

Case Study: Drowning in information

'Living and breathing a project you are working on can be a great help in delivering your aims – it can also be a great hindrance to effective communication', John Jessup of DWP Communication tells us.

'In your project bubble you can forget what life is like for everyone outside and end up alienating rather than engaging your target audience – a bit like the pub bore who knows everything about something, but nothing that actually interests you'.

At any time there are hundreds of change projects at various stages of development and delivery in DWP. They range from major Government welfare reforms to minor changes to computer systems used by a few hundred individuals. And all of them produce a range of products designed to 'communicate'.



Line managers across, what is primarily an operational delivery business, are expected to brief their teams about impending changes while also doing the 'day job' (of ensuring the right benefits are paid to the correct people and that more people are helped to move off benefits and into work).

John outlines how DWP have tried to understand why some change communications are less successful than others 'So, we have an audience of busy people, focused on their day job – as opposed to someone nursing a pint as the evening drifts by. We got them to take time out to tell us what kind of communications they want and how that compares with what they sometimes get'.

DWP found that what their people complain about receiving includes:

"A pack of 171 slides on an IT change which I was expected to share with my team. I trawled through them and about two were relevant."

"Repeatedly updated briefing packs being emailed to me – none of them clearly stating which sections were relevant to my job or what the updates were. It wastes so much time."

"PowerPoint slides and a DVD when we hold quick buzz meetings gathered around a flipchart. What am I supposed to do with them?"



Government
Communication
Service

The IC Space

And DWP also learnt more about what people actually want:

“Something short and simple. You should be able to explain the what, why, when and how of any change on a single sheet of paper. Just tell me where to look if I want more information.”

“Say up front why something is relevant to me. If it’s a detailed briefing, tell me which parts are relevant to me.”

“Use plain English not project jargon, and don’t use spin but be honest about how a change is likely to affect me and my team.”

John sums up what DWP have taken on board and taken to heart for their communications about change 'communications need to be 'clear, concise, credible and written for the audience rather than for the project or policy owner'

John Jessup,

Senior Communications Manager, DWP