

Research Paper

Looking Back to Move Forward:

Assessing the Impacts of Acas Workplace Projects

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2011
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November 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Improving employment relations in the workplace is critical to minimising workplace disputes and achieving improved workplace performance and productivity.

Acas workplace projects are one mechanism for improving employment relations in the workplace and thus organisational performance, and this is supported by the data discussed in this report.

This report summarises the data from the three most recent telephone surveys used to evaluate the impacts of Acas workplace projects which were completed between 1 February 2005 and 31 September 2008. The report analyses the survey responses of 302 of the management representatives and 160 of the employee representatives involved in these projects.

The primary purpose of this report is to give an overarching assessment of the context and impacts of workplace projects to inform the future of this service. The report starts with an overview of this Acas service over its life span before highlighting key findings from the data which have been collated over a three year period.

Workplace project participants were contacted between three and 15 months after the workplace projects to gain their views of the project and its legacy in terms of outcomes and lasting impacts of this Acas service. The telephone interviews lasted around 20 minutes in each case.

Reasons for using Acas

The survey evidence tells us that the most common reasons given by management representatives for using Acas for workplace projects were "Acas' advice being independent of management/ Trade Unions" (30 per cent), "past experience of using Acas" (26 per cent) and "Acas' good reputation" (18 per cent).

Employee representatives deciding to use Acas gave broadly similar reasons to management representatives with the same main responses of "Acas being independent of management/ Trade Unions" (28 per cent of respondents) and "past experience of using Acas" (20 per cent). The third most cited response for employees differed, however, and was "recommendations" from a colleague or external contact (16 per cent).

The implications of these results are that it is important for Acas to protect its impartiality/ independence and maintain its reputation for providing high quality services assuming that this will help to retain demand for this service. Data also indicates that a lot could be gained by promoting the expertise of Acas workplace advisers more widely to reach an increased range of organisations. For example, at a later point in the questionnaire, around eighty per cent of existing customers rated the Acas adviser's skills as "very good" in relation to "understanding the issues being faced at the workplace"; "developing a good relationship with the participants involved in the project"; and "encouraging discussions between participants"; but the "expertise" of Acas was only specifically cited as one of the driving forces behind using Acas workplace projects by around a fifth of representatives.

Looking at the survey evidence from all available sources, including internal Acas research on the non-use of services, Acas workplace projects could benefit from strategies to raise the profile of Acas' expertise in providing workplace project support to organisations, clearly explain to potential customers what the service involves, and raise awareness of the benefits of such a service by using findings from research sources such as this report. Such strategies should encourage more organisations to use Acas for workplace projects in the future. Acas can also build on the current reasons for using workplace projects; for example asking customers to forward on Acas e-newsletters which give details of the service to colleagues or business contacts could be effective, given that recommendations have been one of the key triggers for customers using workplace projects.

The impacts of workplace projects

A range of impacts were identified in the surveys and, although the changes achieved will depend on the specific problem addressed in a particular workplace project, these outcomes can generally be categorised into one or more of the following:

- Improved workplace policies, procedures and practices;
- Improvements in communication, consultation, negotiation, trust and day-to-day working relationships between managers, employees and their representatives;
- A greater understanding between management and employees, improvements in perceptions of general fairness at work, an increase in employee morale; and
- Improvements to measurable employment relations outcomes and impacts on wider aspects of organisational performance, such as lower absenteeism, higher productivity/ efficiency and higher quality of service/ output.

Introducing, reviewing or revising policies, procedures or practices

An important area of impact for workplace projects is via the introduction review or revision of policies, procedures or practices. As a result of the workplace project, 81 per cent of management representatives and 83 per cent of employee representatives said that policies, procedures or practices had been introduced, reviewed or revised.

Six in ten management representatives said that an area of practice relating to issues addressed in the workplace project had been revised following the project. Around half said that there had been a review of policies and procedures (54 per cent), a revision of policies and procedures (49 per cent) or an introduction of policies and procedures (47 per cent). Around a third (36 per cent) said there had been a development of a formal agreement for a consultative committee.

In addition, around half of management and employee representatives planned to introduce policies and procedures at the time of interview, rather than having already taken such action. This suggests that it can take time for desired changes in workplace policies and procedures identified as a result of workplace projects to be implemented, or that follow up support is required to translate intentions into actions. It will also reflect the contentious and/or challenging nature of the issues that many Acas workplace projects address.

Sustaining activities or initiatives resulting from the Acas project

Whilst the majority of respondents reported that activities or initiatives arising from their Acas workplace project had been sustained, management representatives were more likely to answer positively in this respect than employee representatives. One possible explanation for this could be that, at the time of the surveys, changes made by management had not yet made an impact in the workplace from an employee point of view. Two-thirds of management representatives (67 per cent) suggested that activities had been fully, or to a large extent, sustained, compared with just over a half (52 per cent) of employee representatives. However, the total percentage of representatives that indicated activities resulting from the Acas project had been sustained to *at least* some extent was similar in both groups (93 per cent of management representatives compared to 92 per cent of employee representatives).

Despite these positive findings with regard to sustaining activities and initiatives, there is a lesson from a 2008 research paper¹ on a closely related Acas service, "Workplace Training", which is also relevant to this discussion: this concluded that the impact of workplace training "can vary significantly between different workplaces, depending upon the individual establishment's capacity and will to make use of it". Applying the same reasoning to workplace projects, one area for service development might be for advisers to routinely offer some form of supplementary follow-up service to help clients to overcome organisational barriers to implementing the changes identified in the workplace projects.

Improving employment relations

Improving the relationship between management and employees is a specific objective for many Acas workplace projects but it is anticipated that, even where this is not a direct objective, a successful Acas workplace project is likely to have a positive impact on employment relations.

The range of improvements relating to employment relations identified in the surveys included: the building of trust; improvements in communications, consultation and negotiation processes; day-to-day working relationships; employee morale; and fairness for employees.

¹ Gifford J., Carta E. and Cox A. (2008) *Acas Workplace Training Impact Survey 2008*.

Communication, consultation and negotiation

- Six in ten of all management representatives and employee representatives reported that *communication and consultation* between management and employee representatives had got better as a result of the project;
- Two in ten (22 per cent) management representatives said that communication and consultation had got *much* better whilst around three in ten of employee representatives thought that communication (26 per cent) and consultation (31 per cent) had got *much* better; and
- Around four in ten (38 per cent) management representatives and half (56 per cent) of employee representatives said that *negotiations* had got better as a result of the projects, with the proportions of management and employee representatives stating that negotiations were much better as a result being 14 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

Day-to-day working relationships

- Eight in ten management and employee representatives agreed that the project helped them to understand the other party's stance and point of view better;
- Three-quarters of management representatives and eight in ten employee representatives agreed that the project helped participants to develop solutions to problem; and
- Seven in ten management representatives and three-quarters of employee representatives agreed that the project provided participants with new ways of working together.

Trust

The importance of mutual trust in maintaining good employment relations is well established. Acas advisers attempt to tackle tensions and misunderstandings between parties to build trust and therefore build relations. Just over half of management and employee representatives (52 per cent and 55 per cent respectively) thought that trust between management and employee representatives had got better as a result of the workplace project. This included eighteen per cent of management representatives and 13 per cent of employee representatives who said that trust had got much better. Increasing trust in the majority of projects is a very positive outcome given their sensitive nature.

Service Level Agreement

When asked to describe the overall relationship between management and employees at the time of the survey, 79 per cent of management representatives and 58 per cent of employee representatives have said that it was "good". By way of comparison 91 per cent of managers in the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey² rated the employment relations climate between managers and employees as "good". This fact that organisations that are the customers for workplace projects report poorer employment relations than the average is to be expected, since by definition they have employment relations issues that they are hoping to resolve.

² This included responses "good" and "very good" and was calculated from 11 workplaces with 10 or more employers (2,045 managers). Survey findings in Kersley, B., Alpin, C., Forth, J., Bryson, A., Bewley, H., Dix, G. and Oxenbridge S. (2006) *Inside the Workplace: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*.

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Acas and BIS includes a target of 70 per cent of workplace projects reporting an improvement in employment relations following Acas intervention. The SLA indicator related to workplace projects measures the proportion of employers reporting that they had seen at least one of the following improvements in relations between managers and the wider workforce, and that this was as a result of the Acas project:

- Communication;
- Day to day working relationships;
- Trust;
- Employee morale; or
- Fairness in treatment of employees

From 2005/6 to 2007/8, the performance against the SLA indicator rose from 76 per cent to 83 per cent and was above the target of 70 per cent in each of the three survey reporting periods.

Measurable performance indicators

Respondents' ability to accurately reply to questions on more tangible outcomes is dependent on whether organisations collected specific data on an ongoing basis thus allowing them to give an informed reply on the extent of improvement on measures before and after the workplace project.

The surveys have shown that many organisations do not have the data available to explore this issue. However, two in ten management representatives were able to report that the following had improved as a result of the workplace project: productivity or efficiency, absenteeism and the quality of the service/ output delivered by the workplace. A quarter also reported that meeting objectives or targets had got better.

Customer satisfaction and value for money

Overall satisfaction with Acas workplace projects has been consistently high over the period of all three evaluations. Overall, 92 per cent of management representatives interviewed and 93 per cent of employee representatives interviewed were either "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their workplace project, with two thirds (66 per cent) of management representatives and (66 per cent of) employee representatives being "very satisfied".

Almost all project participants interviewed (97 per cent of management representatives and 96 per cent of employee representatives) said that they would be either "very" or "fairly" likely to recommend the service to colleagues or other professional contacts.

Where organisations paid for the service, the view from the majority of respondents (80 per cent) was that it provided good value for money.

Contribution of Acas advisers

Management and employee representatives were very positive about the Acas advisers in the project. Advisers were highly rated for their understanding of the relevant issues; the way they had developed a good relationship with the participants; their impartiality; and their skill in encouraging discussions.

Almost all management and employee representatives (98 per cent and 96 per cent respectively) rated the Acas adviser as (either "very" or "fairly") good at understanding the issues faced by their workplace, the majority of whom rated the adviser as "very good" (77 per cent of management representatives and 78 per cent of employment representatives).

Ninety six per cent of management and 94 per cent of employee representatives rated the adviser as good at maintaining an impartial stance (the proportions choosing "very good" were 84 per cent and 90 per cent respectively).

The proportion of management and employee representatives rating the adviser as good at developing a good relationship with participants involved in the project was 93 per cent 96 per cent respectively (81 and 83 per cent respectively stated that the adviser was "very good" at this).

Lastly, 90 per cent and 94 per cent of management and employee representatives rated the adviser's skills in encouraging discussions between participants as good, with 77 per cent and 80 per cent respectively rating the adviser as "very good".

The future of workplace projects

This paper tells us that workplace projects are highly valued by their participants and organisations and have some very positive impacts on organisations and hence the wider economy. Less positively it reports that the numbers of workplace projects per annum have remained relatively low in recent years and, given the benefits of the service which are outlined in this report, this is perhaps a trend that Acas may want to address. In terms of increasing demand for, and reach of, workplace projects there could be benefits from strategies to raise the profile of Acas' expertise in providing this type of employment relations support to organisations and raise awareness of the benefits of such a service.

Throughout the difficult economic climate, Acas has aimed to operate more than ever as an enabler to economic growth. By providing tailored support to organisations to improve employment relations and ultimately productivity, Acas' workplace project service is a key part of its offering. In times of resource constraints, external employment relations support might be seen as a low priority for organisations. However, previous research, pilot studies³ and the recent McLeod Review on employee engagement (2008) make it clear that the issues which are tackled in workplace projects are critical to organisational success and sustainability, especially to survive in a competitive and uncertain climate.

³ Harris, L., Tuckman A., Watling D. and Downes B. (2011), *Unlocking Engagement: A Review of the 'Innovative Workplaces' Initiative*.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Acas “Workplace Projects” (also known as “Business Solutions” on the Acas website) are carried out in organisations throughout England, Wales and Scotland by experienced Acas advisers. The over-arching objective of Acas workplace projects is to improve employment relations within workplaces by involving employers and employee representatives in joint problem solving and joint working⁴.

The first stage is typically for Acas advisers to visit an organisation in order to diagnose workplace issues and identify the best methods for assisting the workplace. Advisors tailor support to address the challenges facing the particular workplace, working with management representatives, employee representatives and trade union representatives as appropriate.

As with all Acas services, workplace projects are evaluated to inform Acas staff in their work, to improve the service and to update external stakeholders on the impact and value of Acas’ work.

This research report aggregates the most recent survey data on the impacts of workplace projects (collected between April 2005 to February 2009) in order to: explore the key characteristics of Acas workplace projects; assess their outcomes and impacts; evaluate the extent to which the nature of workplace projects has progressed over time; and help decision makers to shape the future of this Acas service.

Earlier reports have presented data on all questions asked in an isolated year of evaluation⁵. This report differs in that it looks at a longer time frame and focuses solely on key variables which offer most insight into the contributions made by workplace projects to workplaces. Data from evaluation surveys from three reporting periods have been merged. The key findings over the three time periods are broadly consistent with the findings from each of the individual surveys, but this report illuminates some differing results over time; and by consolidating existing research allowing a greater robustness of overall results through a larger sample size.

This report firstly outlines a brief history of workplace projects, and looks at project volumes over time, before using survey evidence to look at the reasons why organisations use workplace projects, their impacts on workplaces and organisations and levels of customer satisfaction with this Acas service.

4 More details on Acas Workplace Projects/ Business Solutions can be found on the Acas website: <http://www.acas.org.uk/solutions>

5 Most recently there has been a published report on Acas workplace projects referenced in this report and qualitative case studies on workplace project which can both be found on the Acas website: <http://www.acas.org.uk/research>

1.2 Brief history of workplace projects

Acas has been undertaking in-depth advisory support work with organisations since its creation in 1975. This area of Acas activity has had different names over the years, such as “Advisory Projects”, “Advisory Mediation Projects (AMPS)”, “Workplace Projects” and, as of 2008, “Business Solutions”. To a degree, the name changes reflect the shift in focus of the approaches adopted. To avoid any confusion, the “Workplace Project” label will be the term used throughout this report as this is the name most used within Acas (Business Solutions being an attempt to describe the service to potential customers on the Acas website).

The early workplace projects primarily involved investigations or audits of an issue by an Acas adviser, using their experience and expertise to look at a particular problem in an organisation, exploring the issue (including surveying staff) and producing a report with recommendations for the organisation to adopt – including amending/writing company handbooks and procedures where appropriate.

During the 1980s, Acas advisers started to take more of a facilitator role, with the aim that the customer organisations would have more ownership of the workplace project and thus were more likely to act on the Acas recommendations (or through facilitation, reach their own solutions). For example, advisers facilitated working groups made up from a diagonal slice of staff within the organisation to solve problems and issues – with joint working and joint involvement being an essential part of this. Joint problem solving, together with the commitment from senior management at the organisations to implement working group recommendations, has become increasingly important to the success of the workplace projects⁶. This mirrors the progress which Acas as a whole has made over the years in encouraging a partnership between management, employees and employee representatives to find agreed ways of improving organisational effectiveness⁷. This type of approach also carried particular resonance with the roll out of the implementation of the March 2002 European Parliament’s Information and Consultation Directive⁸.

Although the role of Acas advisers in workplace projects has shifted to take on the role of a facilitator, it has been important for the advisers to remain employment relations experts, a role that they have had since Acas was formed.

6 Kessler, I., Purcell, J. (1994), Joint problem solving and the role of third parties: an evaluation of the ACAS advisory work.

7 Towers, B. and Brown, W. (2000), Employment Relations in Britain: 25 years of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

8 Dix, G. and Oxenbridge, S. (2004), Coming to the table: The role of Acas in collective disputes and improving workplace relationships.

Until Acas “Workplace Training⁹” was formally introduced as an Acas service, training was also conducted and recorded under the auspices of advisory projects – for example, where working groups were trained on joint problem solving techniques. That said there is occasionally still no clear distinction between pieces of work undertaken by Acas which are defined as “Workplace Projects” and those which come under the heading of “workplace training”, partly due to the fact that some projects may have a workplace training element, or may be preceded or followed by Acas training.

Workplace Projects in 2011

In 2011, workplace projects vary in scope and length from one-day relationship-building workshops attended by management and employee representatives, to joint working groups which meet over a period of months, to oversee the design and implementation of any number of organisational change initiatives. The average amount of Acas adviser time on delivering each project was four days in the most recent survey year, although this is thought to have decreased since the survey was conducted¹⁰, and these days are usually spread over a longer period of time to allow change to take place in between Acas visits.

Projects are tailored to the needs of each organisation. Where trade unions are recognised, union representatives usually take part. Similarly, members of staff associations or consultative bodies will usually participate where relevant.

Issues typically covered in workplace projects include:

- absence management;
- collective bargaining arrangements;
- communication, consultation and employee involvement;
- improving working relations;
- implementation of new pay systems;
- improvement to organisational performance;
- job evaluation; and
- managing all aspects of change

Advisers work jointly with managers and employee representatives, and all three parties engage in a range of roles over the course of the project’s duration. These focus on:

- diagnosing workplace problems;
- learning new behaviours and methods of working together jointly;
- reviewing and revising existing workplace policies, practices, or structures;
- developing new workplace policies, practices, or structures; and
- implementing new or revised workplace policies, practices or structures.

⁹ More details on Acas Workplace Training can be found on the Acas website: <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2031>

¹⁰ Acas management information recorded that 3.7 was the average number of Customer Delivery Days for workplace projects with end dates 1 October 2007 to 30 September 2008, and since then it was 3.7 again from 1 October 2008 to 30 September 2009. In the period since, 1 October 2009 to 30 September 2010, this average has dropped to 3.0 days.

Appendix B sets out the broad descriptions of the topics recorded as management information for the workplace projects over time; as well as other characteristics of workplace projects; and the organisations which have used the service. The data shows that the topics that have dominated in the period since the start of the survey evaluations to the date of this report have been:

- Conflict, Mediation and Change Management;
- Collective Bargaining and Trade Union Issues;
- Information and Consultation;
- Payment and Grading Arrangements; and
- Absence and Stress Management

In some circumstances the Acas adviser may decide that it is appropriate for work to be undertaken at public expense, thus waiving the fee, but in all other cases workplace project are now cost-recovered by charging the customer¹¹. The proportion of workplace projects which have been fee-waived has usually been between three in ten and four in ten, but for a more detailed breakdown of fee-waiving fluctuations over time see Appendix B.

A decision to waive the fee is only taken by Acas if the circumstances meet certain criteria. Such criteria would be if the workplace project directly flowed from a collective dispute (whether or not Acas has been involved in conciliation); or relationships between the employer and the collective workforce (or large areas of the workforce) are at or near dispute (which may be indicated by a significant number of issue-based complaints to the Employment Tribunal Service), and there is little potential for remedy/resolution of the informal dispute/near dispute without intervention or facilitation by Acas.

Some examples of fee-waiving situations would be:

- where an integral part of dispute resolution is an Acas brokered review to take place, such as an Acas project to aid the implementation of a new shift system agreed as a dispute resolution;
- circumstances where an employer is seeking to implement changes which go to the heart of the employment contract and which will be resisted by the workforce, for example redundancies;
- in a non-unionised organisation where Acas has been approached to assist with developing collective structures to deal with issues which are in themselves causing employment relations difficulties; or
- issues surrounding trade union recognition, whether voluntary or imposed, and its immediate aftermath.

¹¹ Until 2004, all workplace projects were fee-waived and were known as 'Advisory Projects' between 2001 and 2004.

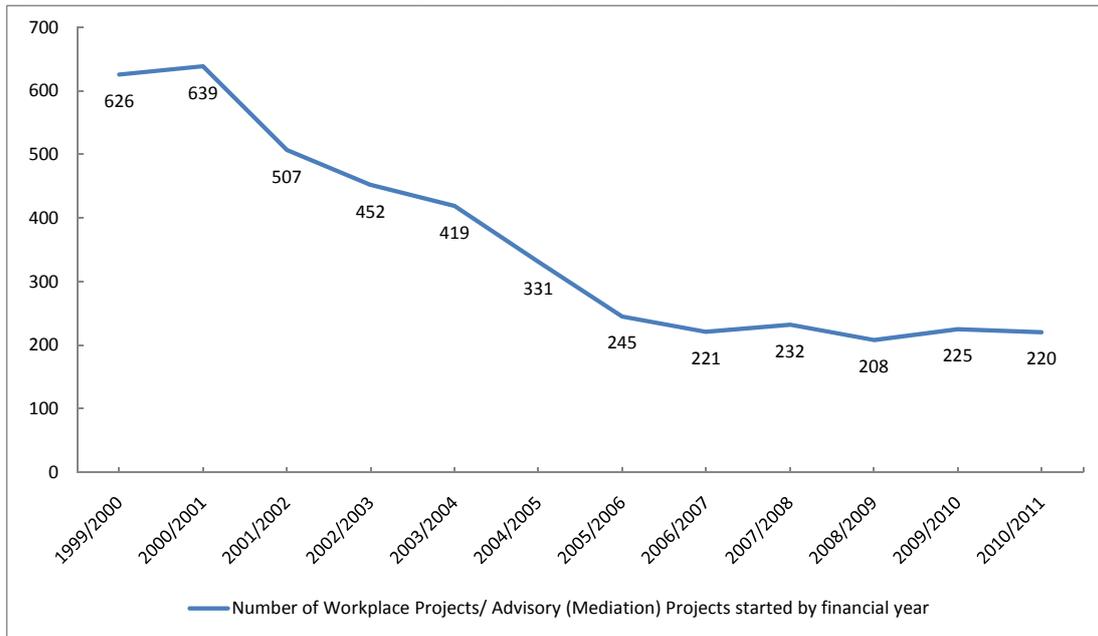
There is evidence which indicates that Acas workplace projects, including those where a fee is charged, have a wider value for the parties, and where parties pay, the value exceeds the cost. This is beyond the remit of this report, but is covered in full in a 2007 report: *A Review of the Economic Impact of Employment Relations Services Delivered by Acas*¹².

1.3 An analyse of workplace projects volumes over time

Looking back at all Acas annual reports since the turn of the century, the number of workplace projects delivered annually has fallen (Figure 1.1). The reasons for this are numerous and difficult to disentangle, but are likely to include such factors as the change in definitions of the service (for example whether or not training within organisations counts as “Workplace Projects”) and potentially Acas resource constraints - including the proportion of Acas advisers’ time dedicated to this particular service. It is also worth exploring whether the decline in unionisation has reduced the proportion of workplaces open to the “joint-problem solving” approach, which has been a key characteristics of workplace projects over this time period (Figure 1.2).

¹² Meadows, P. (2007) *A Review of the Economic Impact of Employment Relations Services Delivered by Acas*.

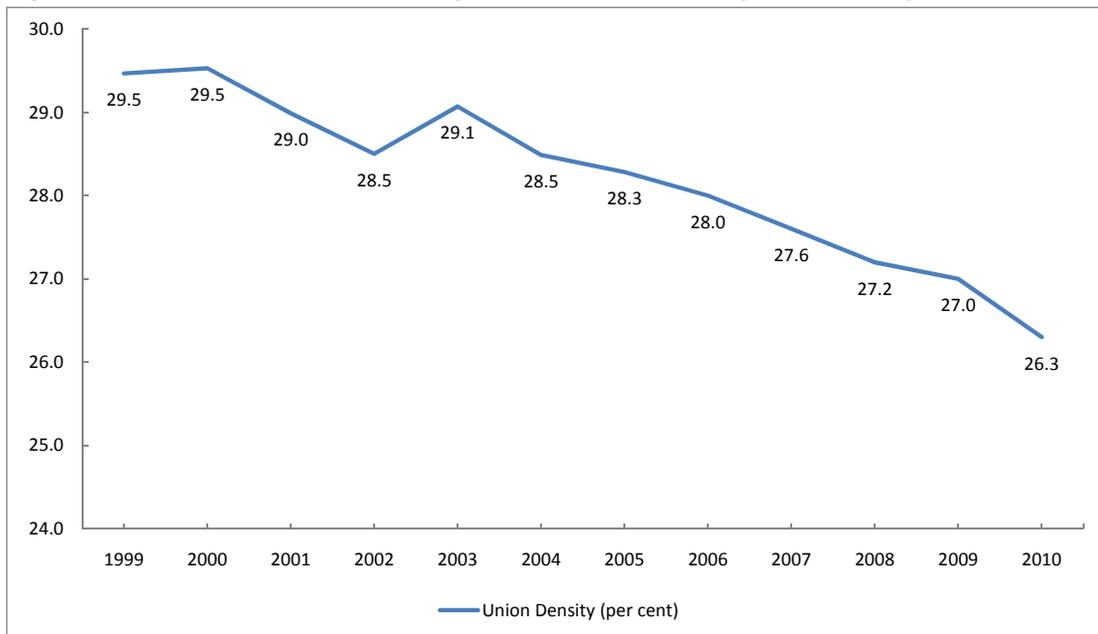
Figure 1.1: Number of workplace projects* started annually over time



* Known as "Advisory Mediation Projects" until 2000/2001; "Advisory Projects" from 2001/2002 until 2003/2004; and "Workplace Projects" or "Business Solutions" from 2004/2005 to 2010/2011

Source: Acas Annual Report and Accounts 1999/2000 to 2010/2011

Figure 1.2: Trade union density in Great Britain by calendar year*



*Labour Force Survey data released by calendar year instead of financial year (since 2006)

Source: Union Membership 2010, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

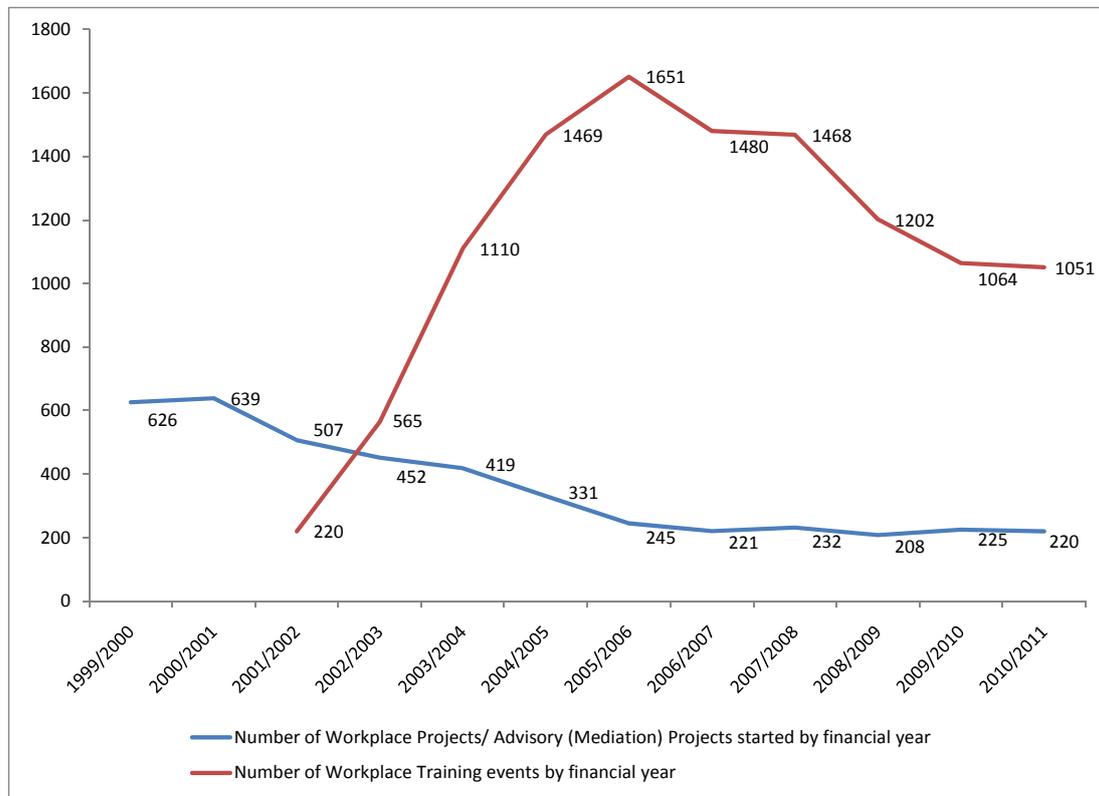
Firstly taking the possibility that the proportion (density) of people in employment (excluding self-employed) who are trade union members may have influenced the decline in workplace project numbers, Figure 1.1 shows us that union density has declined steadily over the same time period but Figure 1.2 shows us that the rate at which workplace projects has declined follows a different pattern. The decline in workplace projects has not been constant and has shown a bigger drop overall than the decline in union density, having declined from 626 in 1999 to 245 in 2005 and remaining at broadly the same level in each year since. This comparison does not mean that there is no relationship between the decline in unionisation and the number of workplace projects being commissioned - and a causal relationship rather than a correlation would have been very difficult to prove in any case - but the two respective rates of decline are not strikingly similar, with union density decreasing relatively constantly from 29.5 per cent to 26.3 per cent between 1999 to 2010.

The two factors which may be more likely to have contributed to fewer workplace projects being conducted are the change in the nature of the service and a decrease in Acas staff time dedicated to such projects.

As discussed in the preceding section, the nature of workplace projects has evolved over time, and over time there has been a clearer distinction between work defined as "Workplace Projects" and those which come under the heading of "Workplace Training". This means that more Acas work which could in the past have been classified as "Workplace Training" or "Workplace Projects" is now counted as "Workplace Training". A significant event related to the nature and definition of workplace projects has been the introduction of Acas charging customers in the majority of cases in order to cost-recover, and when charging commenced in 2004 the annual volumes initially decreased relatively sharply. However usage levels have stabilised since 2006/7.

The missing link in the above discussion is the level of Acas resources assigned to workplace projects. The number of different Acas advisers conducting workplace projects has gradually declined from around 60 advisers per year in 2001 to 45 advisers in 2011. Furthermore, this does not take into account changes in the proportion of advisers' time spent on workplace projects and this is affected by the extent to which other responsibilities such as conducting Acas training have increased over the same time period. Figure 1.3 illustrates the volumes of charged workplace training conducted since it was formally introduced in 2001/2 set against Figure 1.1, and shows that the sharp increase in workplace training from 2001/2 to 2005/6 was accompanied by a reduction, albeit at a slower rate, in the number of workplace projects per annum. Other than the re-classification of workplace training mentioned above, another explanation for this pattern is that it is easier for Acas advisers to attract customers to, and deliver, the shorter, cheaper workplace training service than the more involved and in-depth workplace projects service.

Figure 1.3: Number of workplace training* events compared with the number of workplace projects started annually over time



* In the early years of this service, some Workplace Training sessions were un-charged, but have not been shown for the ease of comparisons, as all Acas training is now charged. There were no recorded Workplace Training sessions before 2000/2001, although the service did exist and would have been categorised within "Advisory Mediation Projects"

Source: Acas Annual Report and Accounts 1999/2000 to 2010/2011

Previous qualitative and quantitative research conducted, and the following analysis in this report, tells us that workplace projects are highly valued by participants and organisations and an internal research project of non-users of Acas services suggests that there is a demand for workplace projects which exceeds the current supply. With less resources funded by the public purse, and the introduction of full-cost-recovery of the workplace projects which do not fulfil the criteria for being fee-waived, Acas needs to carefully balance its resources between its many services. This report can demonstrate the value of workplace projects over time and it can aid decisions on developing this service, including the appropriate level of resources to allocate to this service going forward.

1.4 This report

Acas evaluates all its services to ensure that they meet the needs of its customers. This enables continuous improvements of practice among Acas staff and provides evidence of the effectiveness of Acas work to external stakeholders and funders, such as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and HM Treasury.

One element of the evaluation of workplace projects has been telephone surveys with all eligible and willing customers. These have been used since 2004 when a review of the evaluation of workplace projects led to a design to combine the views of the lead managers and employee representatives and gain input from the Acas advisers themselves¹³. This report merges data from the telephone surveys of the three evaluations of workplace projects which have ended between 1 February 2005 and 30 September 2008. These telephone surveys were designed to measure the impacts of the workplace projects and to reflect the diversity of topics covered and to gather the views of project participants - lead management and employee/ trade union representatives.

The results in this report have been split into management and employee responses as this is a key respondent characteristic by which results can be analysed. This eliminates the need for weighting averages across the two parties which would otherwise be necessary in order to avoid a bias caused by a greater number of interviews being conducted with management than with employee representatives.

Across all three surveys analysed in this paper, 462 interviews were conducted with either the lead manager or lead employee representative from 351 workplace projects. Forty eight per cent (222 interviews) of interviews were "matched" – this is where the lead manager and lead employee representative from the same workplace project were both interviewed. On other projects, one or other party was not available for interview.

The findings in this report are based on responses to all three surveys, across 2005/6 to 2007/8, unless otherwise stated.

Further information on the research methodology, including the details of the response rates and questionnaires of the three surveys, can be found in Appendix A.

Further information has been included in Appendix B on the subjects/ topics of workplace projects; details on fee-waived and charged workplace projects; the size of workplaces involved in workplace projects; and the region and sector of the organisations involved in workplace projects.

13 Since 2004 the evaluation of workplace projects has included case studies of organisations, postal user feedback surveys, and analysis of management information as well as the telephone impact surveys on which this paper reports on. Prior to this, the service had been subject to ad hoc surveys (e.g. Kessler, I., Purcell, J. (1996), *Joint Problem Solving: Does it work? An evaluation of Acas in depth advisory mediation*).

1.5 Reporting conventions

Individual representatives rather than workplace projects were chosen as the unit of analysis for this report to maximise the number of data points that could be analysed and to enable the comparison of the views of employees/ trade union representatives with management representatives across the board¹⁴. Differences between the results of successive survey years have been highlighted in the text where they were either pronounced or where it is thought to be of interest to show the stability of the results across survey years.

The findings reported in this report are based mostly on the overall sample of matched and non-matched cases. In some cases, where the matched sub-sample¹⁵ data shows a difference from the overall sample or can provide further insights, the matched sample data is shown instead of the overall sample.

It should also be noted, when making comparisons over time, that the first of the three surveys on which this report is based surveyed participants in projects which ended over a 20 month period (February 2005-September 2006). Surveys two and three examined projects which ended over a 12 month period (these do not correspond to financial or calendar years). Another methodological difference was the timing of data collection: the last of the three surveys covered projects ending between four and 19 months previously (with an average of nine months), where as the first two surveys were rolling surveys conducted approximately six months after the end of each workplace project.

Any differences noted as “significant” in this report refer to statistical significance using statistical tests at the 95 per cent level of confidence.

Any percentages quoted in this report have been rounded to zero decimal places, and therefore the sum of percentages for responses to single-coded questions may not be exactly 100 per cent. “Total” percentages in all tables refers to the number of all respondents reporting an answer over all three survey periods divided between the total number of respondents over all three survey periods, and has not been weighted to ensure each survey period has exactly equal influence on the overall figure.

Symbols

A ‘-’ in a Table cell or chart denotes a percentage that is greater than 0 but less than 0.5.

A ‘#’ in a Table cell or chart denotes where data has not been included due to a sample size (n) of less than 30.

A ‘±’ in a Table cell or chart denotes a cell where data should be treated with caution, due to a low sample size (n) of between 30 and 50.

14 Broughton A., Pearmain D. and Cox A. (2010), *An Integrated Evaluation of Acas Workplace Projects* includes some analysis at workplace project level, using 60 workplaces where both employee and management representatives answered the survey.

15 The matched sub-sample only includes projects where an employee representative and a management representative from the same project both answered the survey independently.

2. REASONS FOR USING ACAS

Management and employee representatives were asked why they and others decided to use Acas when initially considering ways of dealing with the subject of their workplace project.

For the most recent survey of workplace projects (projects which ended in 2007/8), the most common reasons given by management representatives for using Acas were "Acas' advice being independent of management/ Trade Unions" (41 per cent), "good experience of Acas in the past" (34 per cent) and "Acas' good reputation" (23 per cent).

Comparing the 2007/8 answers to those of 2005/6 and 2006/7, the top four reasons have remained unchanged over this time period, but there have been some fluctuations when looking at interim results (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: The six most prevalent reasons given by management representatives for using Acas over time				
	2005/6 (%)	2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total (%)
Acas advice is independent of management/ Trade Union	31	16	41	30
Had used Acas before/Good experience of Acas in past*	12	32	34	26
Acas has a good reputation	21	10	23	18
Acas has relevant expertise in dealing with the particular issue/problem	25	9	20	18
Recommendation (of a colleague/ contact outside the organisation/ full-time union officer or contact outside the trade union)	7	16	11	11
Acas is acceptable to Trade Union(s)/ employee representatives	2	16	5	7
Base (n)	100	96	106	302
* In the 2005/6 and 2006/7 surveys the phrase "had used Acas before" was used whereas in 2007/8 the phrase "Good experience of Acas in the past" was used.				
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8				

Looking in more detail at the source of the recommendations of Acas to management representatives, this was most often "a colleague" (6 per cent across 2005/6 to 2007/8) followed by "a contact outside the organisation" (3 per cent across 2005/6 to 2007/8).

Employee representatives who gave reasons for deciding to use Acas had broadly similar reasons as management representatives over the 2005/6 to 2007/8 time period (Table 2.2).

The top two reasons cited in employee representatives' decision to use Acas' services over the period 2005/6 to 2007/8 were "Acas' independence" (28 per cent of respondents) and "good experience of using Acas¹⁶" (20 per cent). However, in 2007/8 recommendations had become the joint most common reason given (by 27 per cent). The majority of recommendations in 2007/8 were from colleagues (21 per cent) rather than other business contacts (as opposed to management representatives where only 6 per cent mentioned recommendations from colleagues).

Table 2.2: The six most prevalent reasons given by employee representatives for using Acas over time

	2005/6 (%)	2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total (%)
Acas advice is independent of management/ Trade Union	31	#	27	28
Had used Acas before/Good experience of Acas in past*	18	#	20	20
Recommendation (of a colleague/ contact outside the organisation/ full-time union officer or contact outside the trade union)	7	#	27	16
Acas has relevant expertise in dealing with the particular issue/problem	17	#	17	16
Acas has a good reputation	17	#	8	13
Acas is acceptable to Trade Union(s)/ employee representatives	1	#	4	4
Base (n)	71	14	75	160
* In the 2005/6 and 2006/7 surveys the phrase "had used Acas before" was used whereas in 2007/8 the phrase "Good experience of Acas in the past" was used.				
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8				

16 As the phrase 'had used Acas' was altered in 2007/8 to the phrase 'Good experience of Acas in the past', comparisons between years for this response should be made with caution.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has described why customers have chosen to use Acas workplace projects, and Acas' independence, Acas' reputation and positive past-experiences of the service have been the key reasons mentioned.

In terms of increasing the reach of, and demand for, workplace projects, the implications of the above results are two-fold.

Firstly, it is important for Acas to maintain its impartiality/ independence and maintain its good reputation for providing high quality services in order to appeal to organisations. A second implication of the results is that Acas might usefully take action to raise awareness of other benefits of working with its Advisers to reach an increased range of organisations. For example, although respondents highly praised the skills and expertise of Acas advisers (chapter 4), the expertise of Acas was only specifically cited as a driving force behind using Acas workplace projects by around a fifth of representatives in 2007/8.

A 2010 survey¹⁷ of employers who *do not* use Acas services was conducted for Acas' internal use and offers further insights. It found that among large organisations (over 250+ employees) that had not used the Acas' workplace project service¹⁸, the most frequently mentioned reason was that employers did not think they needed this type of support (45 per cent). A further 17 per cent of employers said that they provided this service in-house and 30 per cent said they used and were happy with other providers. Other reasons given were that they were unaware that Acas offered the service or did not know enough about the service.

Looking at the survey evidence from all available sources, Acas workplace projects could benefit from strategies to raise the profile of Acas' expertise in providing workplace project support to organisations, clearly explain to potential customers what the service involves, and raise awareness of the benefits of such a service by using findings from research sources such as this report. Such strategies should encourage more organisations to use Acas for workplace projects in the future. Acas can also build on the current reasons for using workplace projects; for example asking customers to forward on Acas e-newsletters which give details of the service to colleagues or business contacts could be effective, given that recommendations have been one of the key triggers for customers using workplace projects.

17 A telephone quota survey of 1,252 employers, representative of all Great Britain employers on key characteristics, was conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Acas to offer insight on the non-use of Acas services to inform Acas' communications and wider strategy.

18 As this particular survey was aimed at non-users of Acas, "Consultancy to help management and employees to work more effectively together" was used as a proxy measure for Acas' workplace project service. The term "consultancy" was considered to be one that would be most easily understood by employers who may be unfamiliar with Acas "Workplace Projects"/"Business Solutions".

3. IMPACTS OF WORKPLACE PROJECTS

In each of the three workplace project telephone surveys between 2005 and 2008, management and employee representatives were asked for their views on the impacts Acas workplace projects had on employment relations in their organisation and other aspects of organisational health and performance.

A range of potential impacts were explored in the surveys. The potential impacts can be categorised into “proximal”, “intermediate” and “distal” outcomes. The workplace project survey data analysed in this report have included measures in each of these three categories of outcome, the aim being to identify any causal links between workplace projects and improvements in organisational health.

Proximal measures are those directly associated with aspects of employment relations and include the development and/or operation of practices such as two-way communication and systems of consultation and employee involvement. *Intermediate* measures include employment relations-related outcomes such as labour turnover, absence, collective disputes, tribunal cases and more subjective assessments of employment relations. *Distal* outcomes include changes in productivity, employment levels and profitability that may be attributed to, and partly determined by, changes in employment relations but are often attributed to other factors inside and outside the organisation.

3.1 Proximal outcomes

3.1.1 Actions resulting from workplace projects

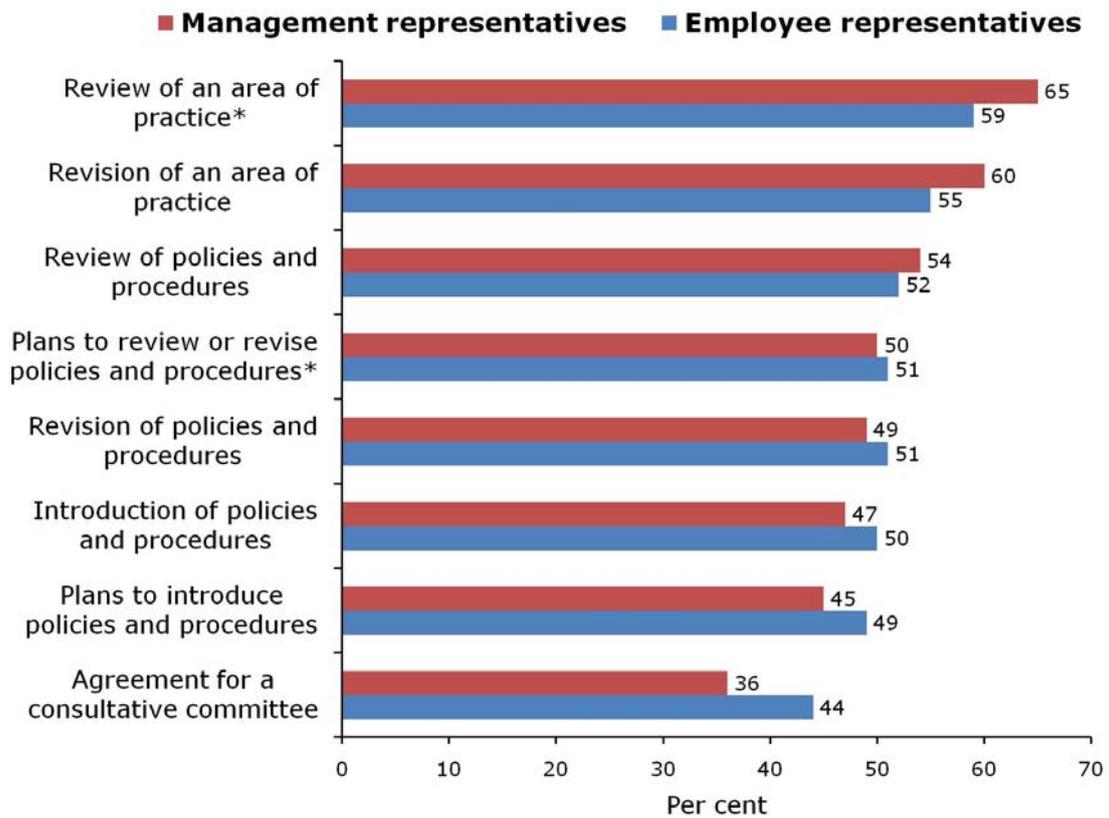
Management and employee representatives were asked which of a list of possible actions had been taken as a result of workplace projects. These included introducing, reviewing and revising policies, procedures and practices and setting up consultative committees (Figure 3.1). To clarify the distinction between policies, procedures and practices, where questions ask about how an area of practice has been revised, these are to capture changes in what is actually happening in the workplace. This contrasts with a change in an area of policy, which can be viewed as what is supposed to be happening in the workplace according to guidelines, or a change in the procedures which are used to implement such policies.

Looking at the cumulative data, six in ten management representatives said that, following the project, an area of practice relating to issues addressed in the workplace project had been revised. Around half said that there had been a review of policies and procedures (54 per cent), a revision of policies and procedures (49 per cent) or an introduction of policies and procedures (47 per cent). Around a third (36 per cent) said there had been a development of a formal agreement for a consultative committee. In 2006/7, two responses were added to the question in order to explore further areas of impact: "Review of an area of practice relating to issue addressed in Acas project" and "Plans in place to review or revise policies and procedures relating to issue addressed in Acas project" - 65 per cent and 50 per cent of management representatives chose these responses respectively.

As figure 3.1 shows, there were slight discrepancies in opinion between management and employee representatives about whether certain actions had taken place. In particular, a greater proportion (60 per cent) of management representatives than employee representatives (55 per cent) said that there had been a change in the practice relating to issues addressed in the workplace project. (The remaining discrepancies in opinion shown in figure 3.1 were not statistically significant.)

It is worth noting that for each action, around one in ten management representatives and between one in ten and two in ten employee representatives either answered that they did not know whether policies, procedures or practices had been introduced, reviewed or revised or that these were not applicable to the project (Tables 3.1 and 3.2). This means that although this data can be used as indicative, the precise proportions of projects which resulted in the different actions are difficult to ascertain.

Figure 3.1: Proportion of management and employee representatives citing various actions as resulting from the workplace project



Base (n) = 302* (management representatives) and 160* (employee representatives). *The responses for reviewing an area of practice and planning to review or revise policies were added in 2006/7, so have smaller bases of 202 and 89 respectively.

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8

Table 3.1: Proportion of management representatives citing various actions as resulting from the workplace project

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)	N/A (%)
Review of an area of practice relating to workplace project issues*	65	28	2	5
Revision of an area of practice relating to workplace project issues	60	32	4	5
Review of policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues	54	36	4	6
Plans in place to review or revise policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues*	50	44	0	6
Revision of policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues	49	39	5	7
Introduction of policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues	47	43	5	5
Plans to introduce policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues	45	45	4	6
Development of formal agreement for a consultative committee	36	46	9	9
Bases (n) = 302*				
*The responses for reviewing an area of practice and planning to review or revise policies were added in 2006/7, so have a smaller base of 202				
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8				

Table 3.2: Proportion of employee representatives citing various actions as resulting from the workplace project

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)	N/A (%)
Review of policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues	59	29	9	3
Review of an area of practice relating to workplace project issues*	55	28	7	10
Plans in place to review or revise policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues*	52	33	6	10
Revision of an area of practice relating to workplace project issues	51	31	11	6
Revision of policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues	51	37	6	6
Introduction of policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues	50	38	8	4
Plans to introduce policies and procedures relating to workplace project issues	49	39	7	5
Development of formal agreement for a consultative committee	44	34	13	9
Bases (n) = 160*				
*The responses for reviewing an area of practice and planning to review or revise policies were added in 2006/7, so have a smaller base of 89				
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8				

The fact that around half of management and employee representatives planned to introduce policies and procedures at the time of interview¹⁹ – rather than having already taken such action - suggests that it can take time for desired changes in workplace policies and procedures identified as a result of workplace projects to be implemented, or that follow up support may be required to translate intentions into actions. It may also reflect the contentious and/or challenging nature of the issues that many Acas workplace projects address.

3.1.2 Sustaining activities and initiatives

Respondents were asked to what extent they (or others in their workplace) have been able to sustain any activities or initiatives resulting from the Acas project, in the period since Acas' involvement. Again there was a slight disparity between the answers of management and employee representatives to this question. This variation could in part be due to the fact that the survey was unable to contact both management and employee representatives for every workplace project and differing subject areas of workplace projects lead to differing sustainability of their outcomes. To explore this further, the analysis in Table 3.3 below uses data from matched cases whereby an interview was conducted with management and employee representatives from the same project, and focuses on 2007/8 data only due to a change in the response list for this question from previous survey periods.

Table 3.3: Sustaining activities/ initiatives resulting from the Acas project by type of contact (matched representatives only)		
	Management representatives (%)	Employee representatives (%)
Fully	30	25
To a large extent	37	27
To some extent	27	40
Not at all	3	2
Don't know/Not relevant	3	7
Base (n) = 60		
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2007/8		

¹⁹ The average time lapse between the workplace project ending and the survey interview was nine months for 2007/8 data, and the average time lapse between the workplace project ending and the survey interview was six months for 2005/6 and 2006/7 data.

The exact extent to which employee and management representatives said activities or initiatives arising from the Acas project had been sustained was not completely aligned between the two groups (using the 60 “matched” workplace projects). Whilst the majority of representatives reported that activities or initiatives arising from their Acas workplace project had been sustained, management representatives were more likely to answer positively in this respect than employee representatives. Two-thirds of management representatives (67 per cent) suggested that activities had been fully, or to a large extent, sustained, compared with just over a half (52 per cent) of employee representatives. However, the total percentage of representatives that indicated activities resulting from the Acas project had been sustained to at least some extent was similar in both groups (93 per cent of management representatives compared to 92 per cent of employee representatives).

This analysis shows that employees agreed that initiatives and activities resulting from the Acas project had been sustained, but were less positive than management about the extent of this.

Despite the positive finding that activities and initiatives arising from workplace projects are almost always sustained at least to some extent, there is room for improvement. It is worth considering a comment from the 2008 research paper²⁰ on Acas workplace training. This stated that the impact of the training “can vary significantly between different workplaces, depending upon the individual establishment’s capacity and will to make use of it”. Applying the same reasoning to workplace projects, one area for service development might be for advisers to routinely offer some form of supplementary follow-up service to help clients to overcome organisational barriers to implementing the changes identified in the workplace projects.

20 | Gifford J., Carta E. and Cox A. (2008) *Acas Workplace Training Impact Survey 2008*.

3.2 Intermediate outcomes

Improving the relationship between management and employees is a specific objective for many Acas workplace projects and it is anticipated that, even where this is not a direct objective, a successful Acas workplace project is likely to have the positive intermediate outcome of improving employment relations²¹.

The range of improvements relating to employment relations identified in the surveys included: the building of trust; improvements in communications, consultation and negotiation processes; day to day working relationships; employee morale; and fairness for employees.

Respondents were firstly asked whether they felt that the following aspects of relations between managers and employee representatives were better, the same, or worse, as a result of the project (they could also indicate where these potential areas of impact were not relevant to the project):

- Communication;
- Consultation;
- Negotiations;
- Trust between management and employee representatives

The first three of these employment relations concepts can be seen as mechanisms to deliver employment relations outcomes whereas improved trust is one of the potential outcomes from such processes.

Employee communications and consultation in this context are about involving and developing people in an organisation. Whatever the size of an organisation, and regardless of whether it is unionised or non-unionised, employees will only be able to perform at their best if they know their duties, obligations and rights and have an opportunity of making their views known to management on issues that affect them. Communication can be defined here as providing employees systematically with information on matters of concern to them as employees; whilst consultation is defined here as consulting employees or their representatives on a regular basis so that the views of employees can be taken into account in making decisions which are likely to affect their interests. There are a variety of methods for both²². Through systematic communication and consultation, organisations can benefit from better decision-making, employee understanding, employee commitment and improved employment relations.

Negotiation in this context usually refers to collective bargaining by which the management and employee or trade union representatives seek to reach agreement on issues such as pay and terms and conditions of employment. A key difference from consultation is that the responsibility for decision making does not remain solely with management.

21 The most recent survey report, Broughton A., Pearmain D. and Cox A. (2010), *An Integrated Evaluation of Acas Workplace Projects*, also tells us that in the minority of workplace projects where objectives were not achieved in the 2007/8 survey, one of the main reasons for this cited by managers and employee representatives was some kind of breakdown in employment relations (including a lack of commitment from the other party or lack of co-operation from the other party).

22 Acas advisory booklet - *Employee communications and consultation*, August 2009 (<http://www.acas.org.uk>).

The results for the above outcomes were positive, with around six in ten of all management representatives and employee representatives interviewed across the three years saying that communication and consultation between management and employee representatives had got better as a result of the project. Two in ten (22 per cent) management representatives said that communication and consultation had got much better whilst around three in ten of employee representatives thought that communication (26 per cent) and consultation (31 per cent) had got much better (Table 3.4 and Table 3.5 offer further detail). Around four in ten (38 per cent) management representatives and over half (56 per cent) of employee representatives said that negotiations had got better as a result of the projects, with the proportions of management and employee representatives stating negotiations were much better as a result being 14 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

The importance of mutual trust in maintaining good employment relations is well established. It is one of the key explicit and implicit objectives of the Acas adviser to tackle any tensions, misconceptions and misunderstandings between parties in order to build trust as a means of building good relations. Just over half of management and employee representatives (52 per cent and 55 per cent respectively) thought that trust between management and employee representatives had got better as a result of the workplace project. This included eighteen per cent of management representatives and 13 per cent of employee representatives who said that trust had got much better. Increasing trust in the majority of organisations is a very positive outcome given the sensitive nature of many of the projects.

Table 3.4: Whether management representatives felt the following aspects of relations between management and employee/ union representatives were better or worse, as a result of the project

	Better* (%)	The same (%)	Worse* (%)	Too early to say (%)	Don't know (%)	Not relevant (%)
Communication	60	23	1	3	7	5
Consultation	57	25	1	3	9	6
Negotiations	38	32	1	4	13	12
Trust between management and employee representatives	52	28	2	5	9	6

Base (n) = 302

*The response "Better" is the sum of answers to "much better" and "a little better" and the response "Worse" is the sum of answers to "much worse" and "a little worse".

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8

Table 3.5: Whether employee representatives felt the following aspects of relations between management and employee/ union representatives were better or worse, as a result of the project

	Better* (%)	The same (%)	Worse* (%)	Too early to say (%)	Don't know (%)	Not relevant (%)
Communication	63	26	4	3	3	1
Consultation	61	26	5	3	4	1
Negotiations	56	28	5	3	6	3
Trust between management and employee representatives	55	29	8	3	5	1

Base (n) = 160

*The response "Better" is the sum of answers to "Much better" and "A little better" and the response "Worse" is the sum of answers to "Much worse" and "A little worse".

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8

Looking further at potential employment relations outcomes from projects, respondents were also asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed that the Acas project had:

- Helped participants to better understand each others' point of view
- Provided participants with new ways of working together
- Helped to build trust between participants of the project
- Helped participants to develop solutions to problems

Managers and employee representatives gave broadly similar responses to each of these (intermediate) outcomes (Table 3.6 and Table 3.7):

- Three-quarters agreed that the project helped to build trust between participants of the project;
- Eight in ten management and employee representatives agreed that the project helped them to understand the other party's stance and point of view better;
- Three-quarters of management representatives and eight in ten employee representatives agreed that the project helped participants to develop solutions to problem; and
- Seven in ten management representatives and three-quarters of employee representatives agreed that the project provided participants with new ways of working together.

Table 3.6: Proportion of management representatives agreeing or disagreeing that key intermediate outcomes resulted from the workplace project

	Agree* (%)	Disagree* (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Not relevant (%)
Helped participants to better understand each others' point of view	82	2	7	8
Helped to build trust between participants	75	4	11	8
Helped participants to develop solutions to problems	75	6	9	7
Provided participants with new ways of working together	69	5	12	12
Base (n) = 302				
*The responses "Agree" are the sum of answers to "Strongly agree" and "Agree" (2005/6) or "Tend to agree" (2006/7 onwards).				
* The responses "Disagree" are the sum of answers to "Strongly disagree" and "Disagree" (2005/6) or "Tend to disagree" (2006/7 onwards).				
Note: responses do not sum to 100 per cent either because the remaining respondents answered "Don't know", or due to rounding.				
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8				

Table 3.7: Proportion of employee representatives agreeing or disagreeing that key intermediate outcomes resulted from the workplace project

	Agree* (%)	Disagree* (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Not relevant (%)
Helped participants to better understand each others' point of view	82	3	9	4
Helped participants to develop solutions to problems	81	4	9	4
Provided participants with new ways of working together	76	8	9	6
Helped to build trust between participants	75	8	13	4
Base (n) = 160				
*The responses "Agree" are the sum of answers to "Strongly agree" and "Agree" (2005/6) or "Tend to agree" (2006/7 onwards).				
* The responses "Disagree" are the sum of answers to "Strongly disagree" and "Disagree" (2005/6) or "Tend to disagree" (2006/7 onwards).				
Note: responses do not sum to 100 per cent either because the remaining respondents answered "Don't know", or, where there were no answers of "Don't know", due to rounding.				
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8				

3.2.1 A general improvement in employment relations

Table 3.8 shows that when asked to describe the overall relationship between management and employees at the time of the survey, 79 per cent of management representatives and 58 per cent of employee representatives have said that it was good²³. Only 4 per cent of management representatives and 19 per cent of employee representatives rated it as poor.

By way of comparison 91 per cent of managers in the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey²⁴ rated the employment relations climate between managers and employees as "good". This fact that organisations that are the customers for workplace projects report poorer employment relations than the average is to be expected, since by definition they have employment relations issues that they are hoping to resolve.

	Management representatives			Employee representatives		
	2005/6 and 2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total (%)	2005/6 and 2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total (%)
Very good	13	20	15	8	9	9
Good/ Fairly good*	66	60	64	44	55	49
Neither good nor poor	14	14	14	25	19	22
Poor/ Fairly poor*	4	2	3	23	7	13
Very poor	2	0	1	5	7	6
Don't know	3	4	2	0	4	2
Bases (n)	196	106	302	85	75	160
*Two of the responses: "fairly good" and "fairly poor" were altered from the 2006/7 survey onwards from "good" and "poor" respectively, to standardise Acas research response lists, so comparisons over time should be made with caution.						
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8						

Respondents were asked an overarching question about whether the relationship between management and employees had improved, stayed the same or worsened since the time before the workplace project.

23 "Good" comprises answers to questions "very good" and "good" (good being changed to 'fairly good' in 2007/8, as set out in Table 3.8).

24 This included responses "good" and "very good" and was calculated from 11 workplaces with 10 or more employees (2,045 managers). Survey findings in Kersley, B., Alpin, C., Forth, J., Bryson, A., Bewley, H., Dix, G. and Oxenbridge S. (2006) *Inside the Workplace: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*.

One in ten (11 per cent) of both management representatives and employee representatives said that relationship between management and employees had improved a lot since the time before the workplace project. Three in ten management and employee representatives (31 per cent and 32 per cent respectively) thought that the relationship had improved a little since before the workplace project; whilst half (49 per cent) of management representatives and four in ten (43 per cent) employee representatives thought that the relationship between management and employees had remained the same.

A very small minority of two per cent of management representatives and four per cent of employees representatives thought that the relationship had got a lot worse and three per cent of management representatives and seven per cent of employees representatives thought that the relationship had got a little worse since the workplace project.

Table 3.9: Whether the relationship between management and employees had improved, stayed the same or worsened since the time before the workplace project.						
	Management representatives			Employee representatives		
	2005/6 and 2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total (%)	2005/6 and 2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total (%)
Improved a lot	9	15	11	12	9	11
Improved a little	32	27	31	33	31	32
Stayed the same	47	51	49	40	45	43
Got a little worse	5	1	3	9	7	7
Got a lot worse	3	0	2	6	4	4
Don't know	5	6	5	4	4	4
Bases (n)	196*	106	302	85*	75	160
*The 2005/6 and 2007/8 responses have been merged in this table to increase the robustness of analysis, due to the small cell size for employee representatives in 2006/7						
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8						

The results of Table 3.9 that, overall, whilst there were similar proportions of positive answers from management and employee representatives in terms of improvements in employment relations, employees representatives were slightly more likely to state that the relationship has become worse²⁵.

Although the proportion of negative responses was low, and although it may be unsurprising that management representatives were less likely to describe the relationship between management and employees negatively, this could be a finding that warrants exploring. Without further research we cannot know the reasons for this difference. However one possible reason for the relatively higher prevalence of employee representative with negative perceptions may be that employees have had an issue that was not completely solved following the project, whereas management may be less aware or concerned about any outstanding employee issues. Further explanations mentioned in the 2007/8 survey report are that issues may have been resolved that were of management rather than employee concern, or that changes made have been perceived to have adversely affected practices that were advantageous to employees²⁶.

3.2.2 Monitoring Acas' Performance: Service Level Agreement

As well as being asked about relationships between employee and management *representatives*, respondents were also asked whether they felt aspects of relations between *managers* and *employees* were better, the same, or worse, as a result of the Acas project.

One of the key performance indicators for the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Acas and BIS is that 70 per cent of workplace projects report an improvement in employment relations following Acas intervention. This helps Acas stakeholders to assess the value and effectiveness of Acas' services.

The SLA indicator related to workplace projects measures the proportion of respondents citing at that least one of the following aspects of relations between managers and the wider workforce (as opposed to just the employee representatives), has improved as a result of the Acas project:

- Communication
- Day to day working relationships
- Trust
- Employee morale
- Fairness in treatment of employees

The historical SLA indicator has been based on the answers of all management and employee representatives (un-weighted data) and have excluded all cases where the respondent answered "too early to say", "don't know" or "not relevant" to all five parts of the question, but included responses where they gave a rating on at least one part. Since 2005/6, performance against the SLA indicator has risen from 76 per cent to 83 per cent and has remained above the target of 70 per cent in each of the three survey reporting periods (Table 3.10).

²⁵ This was supported by matched data over the same period.

²⁶ Broughton A., Pearmain D. and Cox A. (2010), *An Integrated Evaluation of Acas Workplace Projects*.

Table 3.10: Proportion of employee and management representatives answering that at least one aspect of the relations between management and employee/ union representatives was better as a result of the project (un-weighted data)				
	2005/6 (%)	2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total (%)
Much or a little better	76	81	83	80
Base (n)* * "don't know"/ "Too early to say"/ "Not relevant" excluded from the base	159	99	131	389
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8				

For the future, there is an argument for the SLA measure to be calculated to give equal weight to the views of management and employee representatives. Historically, more management representatives have responded to the survey than employee representatives so the SLA figures to date are biased towards the views of management representatives. Such statistical weighting would only be possible, however, if the number of interviews achieved with employee and management representatives is greater than 50 respectively – which was not the case in the 2006/7 survey. If equal weighting is given to management and employee representatives using all of the historic data we have so far, the SLA figure would be 78 per cent instead of 80 per cent.

A further breakdown of the yearly SLA measures for management and employee representatives are set out in tables 3.11 and 3.12 respectively (unweighted). These indicate that improvements in performance against the SLA target are the result of increasing proportions of positive responses from management representatives. The views of employee representatives have remained stable, and so for the 2007/8 survey the proportion of employee representatives reporting an improvement in at least one of the employment relations indicators was 18 percentage points lower than the equivalent proportion of management respondents.

Table 3.11: Proportion of management representatives answering that at least one aspect of the relations between management and employee/ union representatives was better as a result of the project				
	2005/6 (%)	2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total (%)
Much or a little better	79	80	91	83
Base (n)* * "don't know"/ "Too early to say"/ "Not relevant" excluded from base	89	86	75	250
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8				

Table 3.12: Proportion of employee representatives answering that at least one aspect of the relations between management and employee/ union representatives was better as a result of the project				
	2005/6 (%)	2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total (%)
Much or a little better	73	#	73	74
Base (n)* * "don't know"/ "Too early to say"/ "Not relevant" excluded from base	70	13	56	139
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8				

Tables 3.13 and 3.14 give a further breakdown for each improvement in relations between managers and the wider workforce. The two tables are for management representatives and employee representatives respectively.

Table 3.13: Whether management representatives feel the following aspects of relations between managers and employees are better, the same, or worse, as a result of the Acas project						
	Better* (%)	The same (%)	Worse* (%)	Too early to say (%)	Don't know (%)	Not relevant (%)
Communication	56	23	1	4	3	13
Day to day working relationships between management and employees	43	33	1	5	4	15
Trust between management and employees	43	33	2	5	3	14
Employee morale	39	32	3	7	5	15
Fairness in treatment of employees	37	40	-	5	3	16
Base (n) = 302						
*The response "Better" is the sum of answers to "Much better" and "a little better" and the response "Worse" is the sum of answers to "Much worse" and "a little worse".						
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8						

Table 3.14: Whether employee representatives feel the following aspects of relations between managers and employees are better, the same, or worse, as a result of the Acas project

	Better* (%)	The same (%)	Worse* (%)	Too early to say (%)	Don't know (%)	Not relevant (%)
Communication	52	27	6	2	3	11
Day to day working relationships between management and employees	44	34	4	3	3	11
Fairness in treatment of employees	39	37	6	3	3	11
Employee morale	35	29	16	4	3	13
Trust between management and employees	32	38	11	3	4	13

Base (n) = 160

*The response "Better" is the sum of answers to "Much better" and "a little better" and the response "Worse" is the sum of answers to "Much worse" and "a little worse".

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8

Tables 3.13 and 3.14 show that over half of management representatives and employee representatives said that communication between managers and employees was better as a result of the workplace project. Four in ten of both management representatives and employee representatives reported that employee morale, fairness in treatment of employees and day-to-day working relationships were better as a result of the project. The only discrepancy between management representatives and employee representatives on this set of employment relations measures was the proportion stating that trust between management and employees had improved (43 per cent of managers and 32 per cent of employee representatives respectively), while 11 per cent of employee representatives said that trust had got worse, compared with 2 per cent of management.

As mentioned earlier in the report, given the sensitive nature of many of the projects and potentially fragile employment relationships²⁷, increasing trust in a significant number of organisations can be seen as a very positive finding. However, the discrepancy between the views of employees and management might warrant exploration.

²⁷ Employment relationships will be especially fragile if the workplace project is one which developed from an Acas collective conciliation (which would start the process of the organisation addressing issues such as low trust between employees and management).

3.3 Distal outcomes

Looking at distal workplace performance outcomes, positive responses were understandably less prevalent than for the employment relations outcomes which link more directly with workplace projects.

In seeking to measure these broader outcomes, the surveys included a question to ask if there had been improvements in the following²⁸:

- Quality of the service/ output delivered by workplace;
- Productivity or efficiency;
- Absenteeism²⁹; and
- Meeting objectives or targets

Respondents' ability to accurately reply (or reply at all) to these questions is always dependent on whether they or their organisations collect sufficient data to allow them to give an informed reply on the extent of change in key indicators after the workplace project, compared with the position before Acas became involved. Nonetheless, a quarter of management representatives were able to say that meeting objectives or targets had got better as a result of the workplace project; two in ten said that productivity or efficiency had got better; two in ten said that the quality of the service/ output delivered by the workplace had got better; and almost two in ten (17 per cent) said that absenteeism had got better (Table 3.15).

A further 33 per cent to 38 per cent of management representatives answered "don't know" or "not relevant" to whether each indicator had got better or worse, with a minority of five percent saying that it was too early to say. For each potential area of impact the most common answers (between 34 per cent and 43 per cent) were that performance had remained the same, with a very small proportion (one per cent or less with the exception of absenteeism for which the percentage was three per cent) stating the outcomes had got worse (Table 3.15).

When discussing such concrete and measurable impacts of workplace projects it is important note that not all impacts can be measured directly, depending on the focus of the particular project. In some projects, impacts on some measurable indicators such as reduced absence levels or improved efficiency were not expected and it may not be possible for some organisations to measure improvements directly, especially if they had not done so before the workplace project. The questions used were self reported so can be thought of as subjective, so not methodically as robust as pre and post direct measurement, yet the questions used were the most effective practical way of collecting such data at the time of the surveys.

28 Some of these measures may be overlapping – for example, improvements in absenteeism would be expected to contribute to lead to improvements in productivity.

29 Absenteeism is arguably an intermediate outcome. It is likely to have a stronger association with the occurrence of a workplace project than the other outcomes which have been identified as distal outcomes.

Table 3.15: The proportion of management representatives answering whether or not key distal outcomes had got better as a result of the workplace project

	Better* (%)	The same (%)	Worse* (%)	Too early to say (%)	Don't know (%)	Not relevant (%)
Meeting objectives or targets	25	34	1	5	16	20
Quality of the service/ output delivered by workplace	20	35	-	6	17	21
Productivity or efficiency	20	36	-	6	17	21
Absenteeism**	17	43	3	5	3	30

Base (n) = 302

**The response for Absenteeism was removed from this question in 2007/8, so this response has a smaller base of 196

*The response "Better" is the sum of answers to "Much better" and "a little better" and the response "Worse" is the sum of answers to "Much worse" and "a little worse".

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8

The employee representatives interviewed gave broadly similar answers to the management representatives, although they were slightly more likely to give positive or negative – rather than neutral - answers, as Table 3.16 shows.

Table 3.16: The proportion of employee representatives answering whether or not key distal outcomes had got better as a result of the workplace project

	Better* (%)	The same (%)	Worse* (%)	Too early to say (%)	Don't know (%)	Not relevant (%)
Meeting objectives or targets	31	34	2	4	22	8
Quality of the service or output delivered by this workplace	24	39	1	3	23	8
Productivity or efficiency	24	38	3	4	23	8
Absenteeism*	18	31	7	0	27	18

Base (n) = 160

**The response for Absenteeism was removed from this question in 2007/8, so this response has a smaller base of 85

*The response "Better" is the sum of answers to "Much better" and "a little better" and the response "Worse" is the sum of answers to "Much worse" and "a little worse".

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8

In the three surveys discussed in this report, an indication of additionality³⁰ has been attempted by asking questions in terms such as "*as a result of the Acas project, [did 'x' occur]?*". In future follow up surveys, as attempts to capture counterfactual evidence and economic impact methods advance, extra questions are likely to be added, which establishes the direct relationship between the outcome ('x') which has occurred and the Acas intervention. For example, "to what extent was 'x' due to the changes made to your organisation as a result of the project". This would aim to produce more robust estimates, albeit self-reported, of additionality. A true experimental design would not currently be feasible practically or ethically. However, future evaluations should consider supplementing the subjective measures with more objective pre-project and post-project measures, if at all viable.

³⁰ Additionality being the share of changes in performance which can be directly attributed to the Acas' support.

3.4 Economic impact

Although this chapter has discussed social and economic impacts arising from workplace projects, *quantifying* the economic impacts is beyond the scope of this report. A full economic impact assessment of all of Acas services is due in 2012/13 (to update the economic impact data published in 2007³¹).

In 2007 Acas published the first estimate of the economic value of its services. The 2007 report valued the overall impact of workplace projects at £71 million, which was £55 of net economic benefit for every £1 net spent on workplace projects. The two key contributors of economic impact were improved productivity (around £32 million) and improved quality of goods and services (£36 million). Lower absenteeism, fewer discipline cases and fewer grievances are together worth nearly £2.5 million. However, in the four years that have past, the methods for calculating economic impact have advanced and Acas plan to re-assess the economic impact five years on using the 2011/12 financial year.

To give the reader an idea of how financial benefits to the economy may accrue from this Acas service, a framework for assessing the economic impacts of this Acas service is set out below, based on a model used on a related Acas offering by Ecorys³². Economic impacts are assessed using this model in terms of net employment and created and safeguarded Gross Value Added (GVA), which is the total value added by the organisation to the goods and services it absorbs in the production process. This approach does not take into account all of the social impacts discussed in this report, or economic impacts which are unable to be quantified. Under this approach the key economic impacts that workplace projects would be expected to generate would be estimated by measuring the following:

- Improvements to workplace practices (resulting from the Acas support) with consequent financial benefits;
- Changes in GVA. Over the period following the implementation of improvements, organisation may see performance change - growth or decline in sales or turnover, or changes in the productivity of the workforce. These changes will be reflected in terms of changes in GVA driven by sales growth or changes in GVA driven by productivity growth;
- Additionality. This is the share of gross changes in performance outlined above which can be attributed to the Acas support provided through the workplace project. This would take into account how far participants would have taken up a similar alternative source of support, how far organisations would have implemented process improvement without support, and how far changes in organisation performance can be attributed to the changes made;

31 Meadows, P. (2007), *A Review of the Economic Impact of Employment Relations Services Delivered by Acas*.

32 This model was set out by Christopher Hale at Ecorys (www.ecorys.com) when assessing the economic impact of a related Acas initiative, the findings of which are reported in: Harris, L., Tuckman A., Watling D. and Downes B. *Unlocking Engagement: A Review of the 'Innovative Workplaces' Initiative*.

- Other factors that may need to be considered in establishing estimates of economic impacts in workplace projects in a given region are the (positive and negative) impacts (termed: Leakage, Displacement and Multiplier effects) on wider organisations and employees outside of an organisation being helped by Acas.
- Net additional economic impacts can then be estimated using the calculation:

Gross impact x Additionality x (1 – Leakage) x (1 – Displacement) x Multiplier Effects³³.

The above framework can only be used to full effect if information on each component of this formula has been collected, usually by using pre-existing survey questions specifically to ascertain the above elements. However, the above framework is not the only way to estimate economic impact, and the 2007 estimates were derived using the information available at the time to calculate estimates of economic impact and was built on different assumptions.

³³ The economic impact of workplace project on a national level would simply be calculated by Gross impact x Additionality, as the Leakage, Displacement and Multiplier affects do not apply at a national level in the long term.

Chapter Summary

A range of impacts were identified in the surveys and, although the key outcomes depend on the precise problem addressed in each workplace project, the outcomes can be categorised into one or more of the following:

- Improved workplace policies, procedures and practices;
- Improvements in communication, consultation, negotiation, trust and day-to-day working relationships between managers, employees and their representatives;
- A greater understanding between management and employees, improvements in perceptions of general fairness at work, an increase in employee morale; and
- Improvements to measurable employment relations outcomes and impacts on wider aspects of organisational performance, such as lower absenteeism, higher productivity/ efficiency and higher quality of service/ output.

Workplace projects made a considerable impact in either introducing, reviewing or revising policies, procedures or practices. Across all three surveys, 81 per cent of management representatives and 83 per cent of employee representatives³⁴ said that policies, procedures or practices had been introduced, reviewed or revised, as a result of the workplace project. Further, such activities have usually been sustained - 93 per cent of management representatives and 92 per cent of employee representatives said that activities/ initiatives resulting from the project had been sustained at least to some extent.

From 2005/6 to 2007/8, the SLA indicator has risen from 76 per cent to 83 per cent of participants reporting an improvement in employment relations following Acas intervention, and has remained above the target of 70 per cent in each of the three survey reporting periods.

Outcomes will of course, depend on the nature of the Acas intervention, and therefore it would be interesting to explore how the objectives of workplace projects influence the outcomes. This was not possible in this report due to the changes in question wording across the three surveys, and the small numbers involved in any one survey, but should be considered for further statistical analysis in the future.

³⁴ Answers of 'Don't know' and 'Not applicable' were included in the base, so the numbers saying yes to revising, reviewing or introducing a policy, procedure or practice across the surveys was 133 out of 160 and 245 out of 302 respectively.

4. SATISFACTION WITH WORKPLACE PROJECTS

4.1 Satisfaction levels

Satisfaction levels with Acas workplace projects have remained high across the period covered by this report.

There has also been a high degree of consistency between the satisfaction levels expressed by employee representatives and management representatives. Nine in ten (92 per cent) of the 302 management representatives interviewed and (93 per cent of) 160 employee representatives interviewed were either “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their Acas workplace project. Two thirds (66 per cent) of both management representatives and of employee representatives were “very satisfied” with the Acas workplace project.

The proportions who were “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” in the most recent (2007/8) survey were 95 per cent of management representatives and 96 per cent of employee representatives. Satisfaction levels over the three surveys have been statistically stable over time (Table 4.1 and Table 4.2).

Table 4.1: Satisfaction levels with the Acas workplace project given by management representatives over time

	2005/6 (%)	2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total
Very satisfied	64	64	69	66
Fairly satisfied	27	27	26	27
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	5	4	4	4
Fairly dissatisfied	2	2	0	1
Very dissatisfied	1	2	1	1
Don't know	1	1	0	1
Bases (n)	100	96	106	302

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8

Table 4.2: Satisfaction levels with the Acas workplace project given by employee representatives over time

	2005/6 (%)	2006/7 (%)	2007/8 (%)	Total
Very satisfied	70	#	61	66
Fairly satisfied	21	#	35	28
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	3	#	1	3
Fairly dissatisfied	1	#	0	1
Very dissatisfied	3	#	3	3
Don't know	1	#	0	1
Bases (n)	71	14	75	160

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8

4.2 Value for money

In all three survey years, management and employee representatives were asked whether Acas had charged for the service it provided. Although it should be remembered that not all workplace projects are surveyed, eight in ten (81 per cent) of management representatives reported that they had paid for the support provided by Acas, whilst six in ten (62 per cent) of employee representatives interviewed said that Acas was paid to conduct the project. It is worth noting that the workplace projects which are charged for are invariably paid for by the organisation so management representatives' answers on this question can be expected to be more accurate than those of employee representatives³⁵. For a more accurate reading of fee-waiving, Table 4.3 draws on Acas management information and shows that in 2007/8 the actual proportion of projects which were fee-waived was around three in ten. This figure was similar to that for the previous survey year: 27 per cent of projects in 2006/7 were fee-waived³⁶. However, since the time of the most recent survey, the proportion of fee-waived projects has since increased to 40 per cent (further detail can be found in Appendix B).

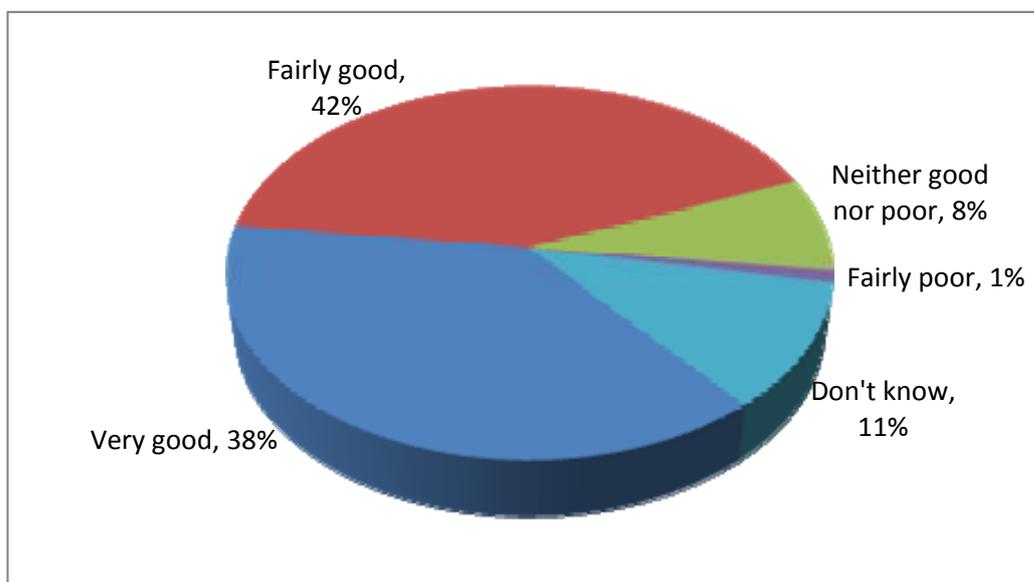
Table 4.3: Whether or not the workplace project was fee-waived, over time	
	2007/8 (%)
Charged	72
Fee-waived	28
Base (n)	202
Source: Acas Management Information	

In those cases where organisations paid for the workplace project, the majority of both management and employee representatives in each of the three surveys stated that the projects represented good value for money. In the most recent survey of 2007/8, 38 per cent of respondents thought that their experience represented "very good value for money", and a further 42 per cent thought that the project represented "fairly good value for money", a total of 80 per cent. Eleven per cent did not know whether the project was good value for money and eight per cent thought it was neither good nor poor value for money (figure 4.1).

³⁵ Acas management information on workplace projects also reports that approximately half of requests for Acas intervention come from management representatives, with the other half being joint requests from management and employment representatives.

³⁶ The picture is less clear in 2005/6, which was before the renewal of the Acas management system made the fee-waived data field compulsory, and although the proportion of fee-waived projects was similar at 31 per cent, the proportion of projects with missing data was 15 per cent.

Figure 4.1: Perceived value for money if Acas was paid to carry out the work (paying organisations)



Base (n) = 88 (2007/8 sample of paying organisations*).

*This included one respondent from each paying organisation to avoid double counting (management representatives if interviewed, and the remaining employee representatives).

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact survey 2007/8

Although the question which ascertains value for money has remained the same in the three surveys, it was not possible to merge the three surveys datasets for this question as the response list (the second best and second worst ratings on the scale) had been altered from the 2006/7 survey onwards: "good value for money" became "fairly good value for money" and "poor value for money" became "fairly poor value for money", to standardise Acas research response lists across services.

However, with the caution that the change in the rating scale may have influenced which rating was chosen, it can be said that the proportion of all management representatives³⁷ rating the project positively (at least "good/fairly good value for money") has remained similar from 2005/6 (81 per cent) to 2007/8 (80 per cent).

³⁷ There were not enough employee representatives to report value for money separately for this subgroup.

4.3 Recommending Workplace Projects

Management and employee representatives were asked about the likelihood of recommending Acas workplace projects to a colleague or other professional contact. Responses were very positive across the three surveys. In total, almost all (97 per cent of management representatives and 96 per cent of employee representatives) said that they would be either “very” or “fairly” likely to recommend the service to colleagues or other professional contacts (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Likelihood of representative recommending Acas workplace projects to a colleague or other professional contact		
	Management representatives (%)	Employee representatives (%)
Very likely	75	75
Fairly likely	22	21
Neither likely nor unlikely	2	1
Fairly unlikely	0	1
Very unlikely	0	2
Don't know	0	0
Bases (n)	302	160
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2005/6, 2006/7 and 2007/8		

Looking back to the data on why organisations use Acas, presented earlier in this report, employee representatives were slightly more likely³⁸ than management to give “recommendations” as a reason for using Acas for workplace projects (16 per cent compared with 11 per cent over all survey years). This implies that although employees and management equally intend to recommend workplace projects to a colleague, more employees do so in reality.

³⁸ This difference was significant at the 95 per cent confidence level in the most recent, 2007/8, survey year.

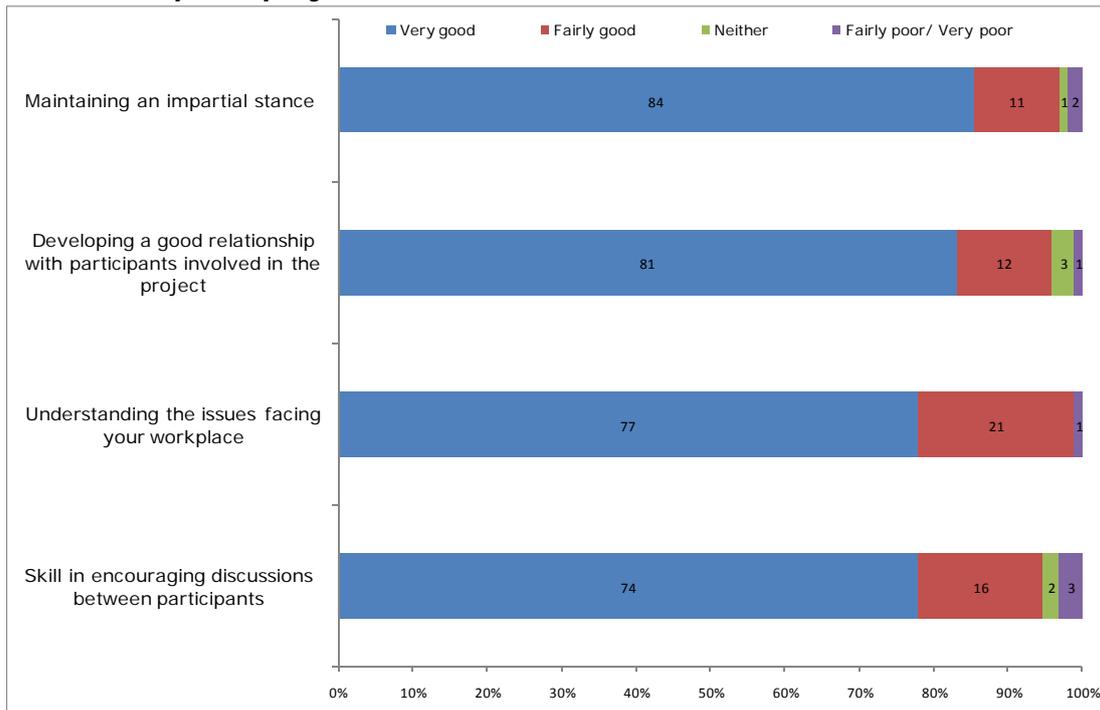
4.4 Ratings of Acas advisers

In the 2006/7 and 2007/8 surveys, management and employee representatives were asked how they would rate Acas advisers in terms of a range of skills, using a scale ranging from “very good” to “very poor”.

Acas advisers received very positive ratings from both management and employee representatives on their skills levels in the areas covered by the survey (shown in figure 4.2 and figure 4.3), which were:

- Understanding the issues being faced at the workplace;
- Developing a good relationship with the participants involved in the project;
- Maintaining an impartial stance; and
- Skill in encouraging discussions between participants

Figure 4.2: Proportion of management representatives giving each rating of the workplace project Acas adviser/s in 2006/7 and 2007/8



Base (n) = 202*

*This question was added in 2006/7, so has a base of 202.

**Answers of “Don’t know”/ “Not relevant”/“No answer” excluded from chart

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2006/7 and 2007/8

Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 show that almost all management and employee representatives (98 per cent and 96 per cent respectively) rated the Acas adviser as (either “very” or “fairly”) good at understanding the issues faced by their workplace, the majority of whom rated the adviser as “very good” (77 per cent of management representatives and 78 per cent of employee representatives).

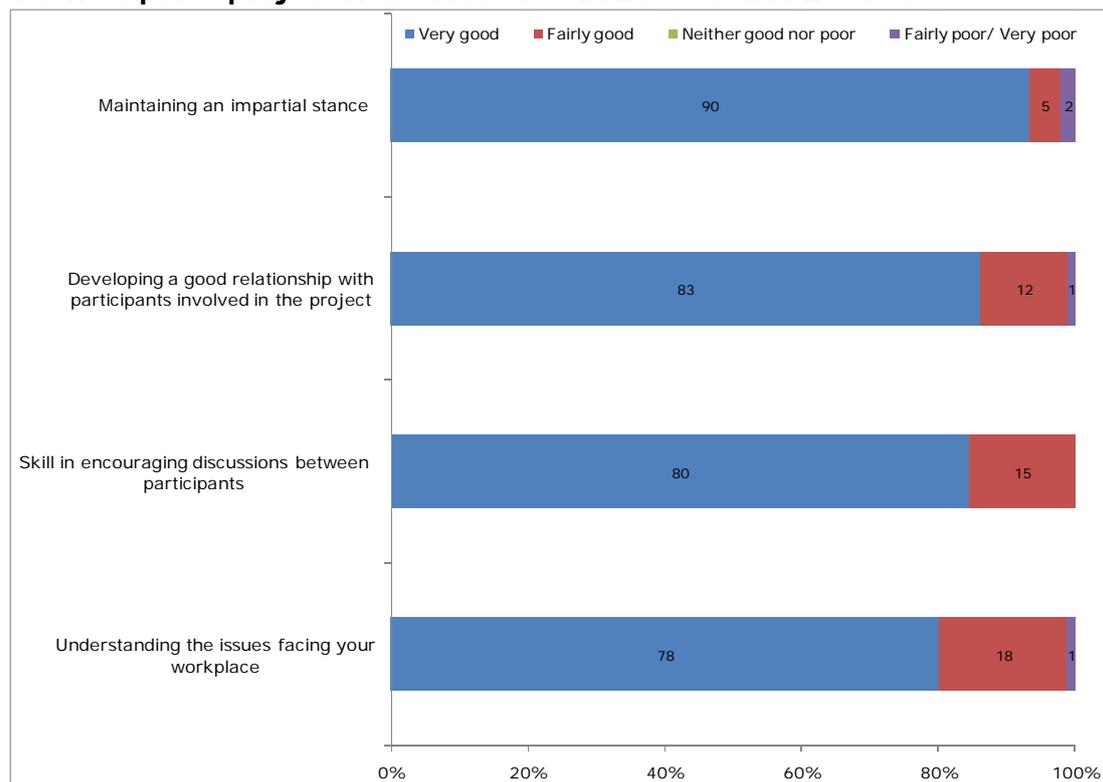
Ninety six per cent of management and 94 per cent of employee representatives rated the adviser as good at maintaining an impartial stance (the proportions choosing “very good” were 84 per cent and 90 per cent respectively).

The proportions of management and employee representatives rating the adviser as good at developing a good relationship with participants involved in the project were 93 per cent and 96 per cent respectively (81 and 83 per cent respectively stated “very good”).

Lastly, 90 per cent and 94 per cent of management and employee representatives rated the adviser’s skills in encouraging discussions between participants as good, with 77 per cent and 80 per cent respectively rating the adviser as “very good”.

A very small minority of all respondents rated the adviser as poor (between zero and two per cent depending on the skill) and a minority of between two and six per cent did not answer this question.

Figure 4.3: Proportion of employee representatives giving each rating of the workplace project Acas adviser/s in 2006/7 and 2007/8



Base (n) = 89*

*This question was added in 2006/7, so has a base of 89.

**Answers of “Don’t know”/ “Not relevant”/“No answer” excluded from chart

Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2006/7 and 2007/8

Chapter Summary

In summary, overall satisfaction with Acas workplace projects has been consistently high over the period of all three evaluations. Overall, 92 per cent of management representatives interviewed and 93 per cent of employee representatives interviewed were either “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their workplace project, with two thirds (66 per cent) of employee representatives and of management representatives being “very satisfied”.

Almost all project participants interviewed (97 per cent of management representatives and 96 per cent of employee representatives) said that they would be either “very” or “fairly” likely to recommend the service to colleagues or other professional contacts.

Management and employee representatives were very positive about the Acas advisers in the project – their understanding of the relevant issues; the way they had developed a good relationship with the participants; their impartiality; and their skill in encouraging discussions. Further, where organisations paid for the service, the view from the majority (80 per cent) of respondents was that it provided good value for money.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: THE FUTURE OF THE SERVICE AND ITS EVALUATIONS

The primary aims of this report were to assess the workplace project service to date, and to help Acas decide on the future course of action in respect of the service. A secondary aim was to inform the decision on the future evaluation strategy for this Acas service.

The future of workplace projects

This paper tells us that workplace projects are highly valued by their customers and have positive impacts on organisations and hence the economy. The high levels of both customer satisfaction and workplace impact of the projects have remained consistent over the three survey years. Less positively, the paper also reports that the numbers of workplace projects per annum have remained relatively low in recent years and, given the benefits of the service outlined in this report, this is a trend that Acas may want to address.

Some of the outcomes which users of the service were able to associate with workplace projects were:

- Improved workplace policies, procedures and practices;
- Improvements in communication, consultation, negotiation, trust and day-to-day working relationships between managers, employees and their representatives;
- A greater understanding between management and employees, improvements in perceptions of general fairness at work, an increase in employee morale; and
- Improvements to measurable employment relations outcomes and impacts on wider aspects of organisational performance, such as lower absenteeism, higher productivity/ efficiency and higher quality of service/ output.

Acas advisers were highly praised by survey participants for their understanding of the relevant issues; the way they had developed a good relationship with the participants; their impartiality; and their skill in encouraging discussions between participants. Further, where organisations paid for the service, the view from the majority of respondents was that it provided good value for money. Suggested improvements to the service were very few, but the data does indicate that there are a few possible improvements which could make workplace projects even more effective. The key one being that advisers could routinely offer some form of supplementary follow-up service to help clients to overcome organisational barriers to implementing the changes identified in the workplace projects. Another consideration for improving the service may be to identify (via research) which types of workplace projects have the most positive impacts (for example, shorter projects solving a specific issue compared with longer projects dealing with organisation change) and whether Acas should and can conduct more of these 'high-impact' workplace projects.

With such positive results in terms of satisfaction and outcomes, it is not easy to identify clear learning points with the way the projects themselves are delivered. The only negative comments mentioned in the most recent survey³⁹, refer to raised expectations and short-term pressures as a result of the process of undertaking the project. More specifically, these included an increase in workload as a result of dealing with a particular problem, occasionally frustration that projects had not provided a complete answer to the problem, and a failure to apply new or revised policies and agreed changes or maintain momentum. The latter could be addressed in part by the follow-up support mentioned above, and there may also be a lesson to take forward on managing expectations at the start of projects, though this was mentioned by very few participants.

In terms of increasing demand for, and reach of, workplace projects: strategies to raise the profile of Acas' expertise in providing employment relations support to organisations and raise awareness of the benefits of such a service are recommended. Previous internal Acas research of organisations that do not use the service tells us that the key reasons for not using workplace projects are a lack of awareness that Acas offered the service or not knowing enough about the service or its benefits. Increasing the number of workplace projects would also have a knock-on effect on other Acas services, as some recent work to be published in early 2012 which looks at the integration of Acas services shows that workplace projects are highly likely to be followed by use of another Acas service, predominantly collective conciliation, workplace training, or further Acas advice by telephone or face-to-face.

Future research on workplace projects

Alongside a debate within Acas on the future of the service (using this and related reports for insight and for the context of workplace projects), qualitative research amongst Acas advisers as well as Acas customers and other stakeholders may be useful, on how the workplace project service could be improved and adapted to the needs and issues of organisations in Britain in the years ahead.

Turning attention to the timing and methods of future evaluations, there has been a gap in collecting data on the impacts of workplace projects due to funding constraints, and so an "impact survey" is recommended for early 2012 to update current statistics. The method of interviewing both parties three to 15 months after the workplace project by telephone has achieved a relatively high response rate in 2008/9, however, the time lapse from project to survey along with a refreshed questionnaire could both be explored in a pilot study before the next workplace project survey.

³⁹ For further details on these learning points see the 2010 Acas report: Broughton A., Pearmain D. and Cox A. (2010), *An Integrated Evaluation of Acas Workplace Projects*.

Some new questions will be added in accordance with newer advanced methods of assessing economic impact. To collect more robust data on important but difficult to measure workplace performance variables such as productivity, new methods could be piloted in the future. For example, a possible approach to measuring the effect of workplace projects on key measures would be to ask a set of questions in advance of the project as a baseline and then repeat such questions in the post-project survey. This option has been explored in the past but not implemented due to the concerns about the burden on customers and Acas advisers. It might be appropriate to revisit these issues. Although still subjective to an extent, the aim would be to collect such data consistently and to obtain a robust measure of the counterfactual, as well as targeting the questions at the correct person within the workplace to provide the information. Questions which have been designed and used on other Acas services since 2010 go towards achieving a stronger measure of the counterfactual; but assessing the effect workplace projects have on the economic health of organisations, in particular, is an area of research where the methods can and should evolve.

Another area of interest is to collect data on fee-waived projects, to explore how these projects tend to differ from charged projects. Volumes of workplace project have remained relatively low, and this includes fee-waived projects which is perhaps counter-intuitive in the current financial climate. Previous research does not specifically address the differences between fee-waived and charged projects and the roles that these fulfil.

Research which can inform and improve the service for the future is required from the 2012 workplace projects survey, and perhaps some further research of those who have used the service only once would be beneficial to ascertain why such organisations have not become repeat customers.

As a closing thought, this report has demonstrated that workplace projects are highly valued by participants and have many positive impacts on organisations. The report also details how this Acas service has evolved over time and, by reviewing this information, can be used to aid the decisions for shaping this service in the future.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The three surveys:

Samples

The samples for the telephone surveys came from the Acas management information systems: "Events and Advisory Recording System" ("EARS") and its predecessor "Paradox". The information in the sample data included project completion dates, names and contact details of the key individuals to survey, and which regional Acas office provided the service. It also included names of the Advisers and the subject or title of the project. No sample selection procedure was required as the surveys were a census of the population of workplace projects on the Acas database, although efforts were made not to interview repeat customers. The three samples were selected independently of each other in three sequential time periods.

Project end dates and interview dates

The data in this report has been merged for those questions that have remained constant over the three surveys, from the three corresponding datasets covering projects with the following end dates:

- The 2005/6 dataset included: 100 management representatives and 71 employee representatives from workplace projects ending 1 February 2005 to 30 September 2006. In forty two organisations interviews were carried out with both a management representative and an employee representative involved in a single workplace project (matched cases). Interviews were conducted in waves between March 2006 and February 2007.
- The 2006/7 dataset included: 96 management representatives and 14 employee representatives from workplace projects ending 1 October 2006 to 30 September 2007. Interviews were carried out with both a management and employee representative from the same project (matched cases) in only nine projects. Interviews were conducted in waves between September 2007 and May 2008.
- The 2007/8 dataset included: 106 management representatives and 75 employee representatives from workplace projects ending 1 October 2007 to 30 September 2008. Among 181 respondents who completed the survey, around two-thirds of these (120) represented matched cases from sixty projects. Interviews were conducted between 7 January and 9 February 2009.

This means that the total number of interviews for surveyed projects ending 1 February 2005 to 31 September 2008 was 462 made up of 302 management representatives and 160 employee representatives (from 351 workplace projects).

The methodology of the three surveys has remained the same in essence: a telephone interview of around 20 minutes being sought with one lead manager and one employee representative involved in each project that fitted within the evaluation period concerned. Where representatives had left the organisation, attempts were made to find a suitable replacement who had been sufficiently involved in the project to be able to comment on it.

However, there was an alteration in the time lapse between the end of the workplace project and the interview for the 2007/8 survey due to practicalities and a review of the workplace project evaluation process. In 2005/6 and 2006/7 a rolling survey was conducted approximately six months after the end of each workplace project. This method was changed to an annual survey in 2007/8, covering projects that ended between four and 19 months (with an average of nine months), to make the evaluation less resource intensive, and to give more time for both managers and employee representatives to say whether the project had met its aims. The change in evaluation timetables had some drawbacks. Firstly, at three or four months after a project, some organisations may not yet have seen its full benefits accrue; and at 15 months or more, it may have been harder for respondents to answer questions accurately, due either to issues of recall, or because their employment relations agendas may have shifted to other concerns. It was also more likely that relevant interviewees were unavailable due to personnel changes than at six months after the workplace project.

Response rates

The interviews were conducted by the following independent research agencies, and achieved the following response rates:

- IFF Research managed the fieldwork for the 2005/6 survey. In total, 129 projects were surveyed from the 198 projects available. The project coverage rate was therefore 65 per cent and the overall response rate was 44 per cent for contacted individuals.
- IFF Research managed the fieldwork again for the 2006/7 survey. In all, 256 projects were contacted and this generating interviews from 101 workplace projects - a project coverage rate of 39 per cent. In terms of project participants, interviews with a total of 320 individuals were attempted, giving a response rate of 34 per cent.
- The fieldwork was managed by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) for the 2007/8 survey (IES used sub-contractor, Employment Research Ltd, to conduct the fieldwork). A total of 164 workplace projects were eligible for interviews, 121 were interviewed, and so the project coverage rate was 74 per cent. The response rate for individuals was 55 per cent.

The response rate for management contacts was better than for employee contacts for all surveys (an interview was attempted with one employee and one management representative for each eligible project). This is perhaps because management contacts are more likely to have commissioned the project and so may be more vested interested in evaluating the service, and management contacts are more likely to be office based, whereas employee contacts may be Trade Union officers or maybe employees harder to locate such as those on the "shop floor".

The most common reason for non-completion of the most recent (2007/8) survey was the absence of an appropriate respondent available to complete the survey, with around a fifth of the total sample indicating this. In a further 13 per cent of the sample, an appropriate person was not available during the fieldwork period, with a minority of the sample refusing to participate in the survey for other reasons.

For all survey years, a minority of workplace projects could not be contacted for the evaluation for ineligibility reasons such as: information from Acas advisers that the project was too sensitive to be included; data on contacts being incomplete or not traceable; some projects being run in close partnership with other organisations (i.e. the HSE), meaning that it would be hard to isolate Acas' role during an interview; or duplication either of the management or employee representatives with other projects in the same time period.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed in 2004 and piloted shortly afterwards to test its appropriateness. The main contributions to the design of the questionnaire before and after piloting came from Acas research staff in consultation with Acas policy and delivery staff and Professor David Guest of Kings College, London.

The questionnaires (Appendix C) have been kept as consistent as possible for data tracking purposes, and to allow for analysis on a more robust base size by combining data as this report does. As well as structured questions, the questionnaires have contained some open ended questions, where interviewers probe for fuller responses.

APPENDIX B: PROFILE OF WORKPLACE PROJECTS

This section highlights some of the key characteristics of the workplace projects⁴⁰. Most of the information has been collected by Acas advisers who enter details of all workplace projects carried out onto the Acas management information system known as the "Events and Advisory Recording System" ("EARS").

Analysis of each the impacts of workplace projects by subject of the workplace projects was not possible due to small sample sizes within sub-groups (subjects), but Table A1 below gives an indication of the subjects that workplace projects were categorised into in the most recent survey year.

Table A1: Subjects of workplace projects	
Subjects/topics	2007/8 (%)
Consultation and Negotiation	20
Stress Management	15
Information and Consultation	9
Collective Bargaining	6
Job evaluation	6
Equal Pay	5
Mediation by Acas Staff	5
Difficult Situations	4
Other	4
TU Recognition	4
Discipline and Grievance	3
Improve relationships between employees, management and reps	3
Mediation Training - Other	3
Equality and Diversity (General Overview)	2
Managing Attendance	2
Redundancy	2
Bullying and Harassment	2
Working Hours/Holidays	2
Written Statements/Contracts	2
Race Discrimination	1
Base (n)*management and employee representatives	181
Source: Acas Workplace Project impact surveys 2007/8	

Looking at more general descriptions of the topics of the workplace projects as per the definitions used in the Acas annual report, Tables A2, A3 and A4 show that, using this categorisation system, the two topics that have dominated in the past four years have been "Conflict, mediation and change management" and "Collective bargaining and trade union issues" - and this pattern is accentuated for fee-waived projects (which is not surprising given the eligibility criteria of fee-waived workplace projects).

⁴⁰ Data from the 2005/6 year has not been shown due to a change in the Acas Management Information system in April 2007, from a system called 'Paradox' to a system called EARS, as there was a difference in the way the two systems recorded events.

Annual report topic	2007/8 (%)	2008/9 (%)	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	Overall 2007-11 (%)
Conflict, mediation and change management	19	17	21	41	25
Collective bargaining and trade union issues	24	28	17	21	22
Information and consultation	9	11	19	8	12
Payment and grading arrangements	13	7	10	8	9
Absence and stress management	13	10	4	2	7
Other	5	6	3	4	5
Bullying and harassment	2	5	6	3	4
Redundancy	2	1	9	3	4
Discipline and grievance	3	4	5	1	3
Recruitment and employing people	4	4	2	2	3
Managing people	1	5	2	4	3
Equality, diversity and discrimination	4	0	2	2	2
Implementing flexible working arrangements	1	1	0	1	1
Employment law	0	1	0	0	0
Base (n) * all projects	232	208	225	221	886

*Annual report data refers to financial years 1 April to 31 March, as opposed to survey years.
Source: Acas Annual reports 2007/8, 2008/9, 2009/10 and 2010/11

Annual report topic	2007/8 (%)	2008/9 (%)	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	Overall 2007-11 (%)
Collective bargaining and trade union issues	32	63	29	41	40
Conflict, mediation and change management	18	13	16	35	21
Information and consultation	5	6	11	5	7
Redundancy	2	0	18	5	7
Bullying and harassment	2	2	3	3	3
Payment and grading arrangements	17	5	8	2	8
Discipline and grievance	5	3	3	1	3
Absence and stress management	8	2	0	1	2
Managing people	2	0	4	0	2
Equality, diversity and discrimination	5	0	3	1	2
Implementing flexible working arrangements	5	0	1	1	2
Other	2	5	0	3	2
Recruitment and employing people	0	0	3	1	1
Employment law	0	2	0	0	0
Base (n)	65	63	99	88	315

*Annual report data refers to financial years 1 April to 31 March, as opposed to survey years.
Source: Acas Annual reports 2007/8, 2008/9, 2009/10 and 2010/11

Annual report topic	2007/8 (%)	2008/9 (%)	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	Overall 2007-11 (%)
Conflict, mediation and change management	19	19	25	44	26
Information and consultation	10	12	25	11	14
Collective bargaining and trade union issues	20	12	8	8	13
Payment and grading arrangements	11	8	12	12	11
Absence and stress management	14	14	7	3	10
Other	7	7	5	5	6
Bullying and harassment	2	6	8	3	5
Discipline and grievance	3	4	6	2	4
Managing people	1	7	0	6	4
Recruitment and employing people	5	6	1	2	4
Equality, diversity and discrimination	4	0	1	3	2
Redundancy	2	1	2	2	2
Implementing flexible working arrangements	0	1	0	1	1
Employment law	1	1	0	0	1
Base (n)	167	145	126	133	571

*Annual report data refers to financial years 1 April to 31 March, as opposed to survey years.
Source: Acas Annual reports 2007/8, 2008/9, 2009/10 and 20010/11

The proportion of projects which were fee-waived increased from 28 per cent to 44 per cent in the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2010, although has since reduced to 40 per cent from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 (Table A5).

	2007/8 (%)	2008/9 (%)	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	Overall 2007-11 (%)
Charged workplace projects	72	70	56	60	64
Fee-waived workplace projects	28	30	44	40	36
Base (n) *all projects	232	208	225	221	886

*Annual report data refers to financial years 1 April to 31 March, as opposed to survey years.
Source: Acas Annual reports 2007/8, 2008/9, 2009/10 and 20010/11

Acas office	2007/8 (%)	2008/9 (%)	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	Overall 2007-11 (%)
Birmingham	9	4	6	9	7
Bristol	6	2	5	2	4
Bury St Edmunds	8	11	6	9	8
Cardiff	6	11	9	7	8
Glasgow	11	15	14	14	14
Leeds	19	12	12	15	14
Liverpool	8	4	8	8	7
London	10	13	10	7	10
Manchester	4	4	8	8	6
Newcastle	9	10	7	9	9
Nottingham	5	4	8	7	6
South East England	5	9	7	5	6
Base (n) *all projects	232	208	225	221	886

*Annual report data refers to financial years 1 April to 31 March, as opposed to survey years.
Source: Acas Annual reports 2007/8, 2008/9, 2009/10 and 20010/11

Please note there are caveats regarding this Acas management information, which has led to relatively high levels of missing data in some of the MI data categories which have thus not been shown (for example, data on organisational size) in this report. Advisers are required to mark a project as "complete" and submit all of the relevant project information once they judge that it to be finished, but there were occasions where advisers have not completed all of the information concerning a workplace project, which the organisation itself may not have provided (such as organisation size) or which was entered by Acas administrative/ non-advisory roles who may have less knowledge of the workplace project or organisation concerned.

	2007/8 (%)	2008/9 (%)	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	Overall 2007-11 (%)
(1) 1-4	8	11	6	9	8
(2) 5-9	1	2	3	2	2
(3) 10-49	13	10	16	16	14
(4) 50-99	9	8	14	7	10
(5) 100-249	19	24	20	19	20
(6) 250-499	16	13	12	9	12
(7) 500-999	16	17	11	16	15
(8) 1000 or more	19	16	18	22	19
Base (n) *all projects	232	208	225	221	886

*Annual report data refers to financial years 1 April to 31 March, as opposed to survey years.
Source: Acas Annual reports 2007/8, 2008/9, 2009/10 and 20010/11

The following data on the sectors of the workplaces which use workplace projects should be treated with caution, due to the high proportion (39 per cent from 2007-2011) of missing data. The data implies an even split between the number of workplace projects conducted in the private sector, and those conducted in the public/voluntary/non-profit sectors.

Table A8: Organisation sector of workplaces involved in workplace projects by workplace project start date

	2007/8 (%)	2008/9 (%)	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	Overall 2007-11 (%)
Private sector (plc/Other)	30	26	31	37	31
Public sector - Local Authority	13	9	8	5	9
Public sector - Other Government Department	9	7	6	8	8
Voluntary/non-profit making sector	4	6	9	8	7
Public sector - NHS Trust	5	6	5	4	5
Public sector - Public Corporation & Trading Fund	1	1	4	0	2
Missing data/ Don't Know	37	45	37	38	39
Base (n) *all projects	232	208	225	221	886

*Annual report data refers to financial years 1 April to 31 March, as opposed to survey years.

Source: Acas Annual reports 2007/8, 2008/9, 2009/10 and 2010/11

APPENDIX C: THE TELEPHONE QUESTIONNAIRE SCRIPT USED IN THE MOST RECENT SURVEY

Questionnaires were very similar in all three surveys, and the following is the most recent version of the questionnaire from the 2007/8 survey:

**PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL Impact Survey –
Workplace Projects**

Start Time:	
Company Name:	
Respondent:	
Job Title:	
Interviewer:	

A. INTRODUCTION

Contact information from Sample

Have management and employee contact	1
Have management only	2
Have employee only	3

- 1) Good morning/ good afternoon, my name is _____ from Employment Research Ltd, an independent research company. Please could I speak to [LEAD MANAGEMENT REP/ LEAD EMPLOYEE REP]

ADD IF NECESSARY: We are carrying out a research project for Acas as a follow up to a project on [INSERT DATA FROM DATABASE: 'MainTopic'] carried out by an Acas Adviser, [INSERT 'LeadAdviser'] conducted for your organisation about 6 months ago, to find out how useful it has been.

Continue	1	GO TO Q4
Respondent no longer works there	2	GO TO Q2 if management rep or Q3 if employee rep
Respondent not based at site (e.g. full time trade union rep)	3	ASK FOR HR DEPT TO CHECK CONTACT DETAILS of full-time officer or rep
Named contact still there but not lead management/ employee contact for this project	4	GO TO Q2 if management rep or Q3 if employee rep
Make appointment	5	MAKE APPOINTMENT
Project still ongoing	6	THANK AND CLOSE
Refusal – company policy	7	
Refusal – already been interviewed for Acas survey	8	
Refusal – no time	9	

Refusal – other (please record reason for refusal, to report to Acas)	10	
Not available in fieldwork period	11	MAKE APPOINTMENT FOR NEXT FW PERIOD
Show reassurances	12	

REASSURANCES:

If you would like to confirm that Employment Research is a bona fide Market Research company, you can call the Market Research society, free of charge, on 0500 39 69 99.

If you have any queries about the research, you can contact Geoff Pike at Employment Research on 01273 299719 or Fiona Neathey at Acas on 020 7210 3960

The survey will take about 20 minutes

IF MANAGEMENT REP NO LONGER WORKS THERE (Q1=2)

- 2) Please could I speak to the person who has replaced [MANAGEMENT REP]?

IF MANAGEMENT REP NO LONGER WORKS THERE (Q1=2) OR IF NAMED MANAGEMENT CONTACT NOT LEAD CONTACT FOR THIS PROJECT (Q1=4):

I would like to speak to someone who was involved in an Acas workplace project about [INSERT 'MainTopic'] which took place about 6 months ago, or has been involved in work following on from this. It is likely to be a member of senior management or a senior member of the HR department.

Continue	1	GO TO Q4
Respondent not based at site	2	ASK FOR HR DEPT TO CHECK CONTACT DETAILS of management rep
Make appointment	3	MAKE APPOINTMENT
Project still ongoing	4	THANK AND CLOSE
Refusal – company policy	5	
Refusal – already been interviewed for Acas survey	6	
Refusal – no time	7	
Refusal – other (please record reason for refusal, to report to Acas)	8	
Not available in fieldwork period	9	MAKE APPOINTMENT FOR NEXT FW PERIOD
Show reassurances	10	

IF EMPLOYEE REP NO LONGER WORKS THERE (Q1=2)

- 3) Please could I speak to the person who has replaced [EMPLOYEE REP] as the main representative of employees at this site?

IF EMPLOYEE REP NO LONGER WORKS THERE (Q1=2) OR

IF NAMED EMPLOYEE CONTACT NOT LEAD CONTACT FOR THIS PROJECT (Q1=4)

I would like to speak to someone who was involved in an Acas workplace project about [INSERT 'MainTopic'] which took place about 6 months ago, or has been involved in work following on from this. It is likely to be a representative of either a Trade Union, or of some other employee committee or group at the site

INTERVIEWER: IF UNSURE WHO THIS IS, ASK TO SPEAK TO THE HR MANAGER, OR LEAD MANAGEMENT REP [INSERT FIELD FROM SAMPLE], TO ASK WHO WOULD BE THE MOST APPROPRIATE INTERVIEWEE

Continue	1	GO TO Q4
Respondent not based at site (e.g. full time trade union rep)	2	ASK FOR HR DEPT TO CHECK CONTACT DETAILS of full-time officer or rep, or get contact details from Acas Adviser in advance
Make appointment	3	MAKE APPOINTMENT
Project still ongoing	4	THANK AND CLOSE
Refusal – company policy	5	
Refusal – already been interviewed for Acas survey	6	
Refusal – no time	7	
Refusal – other (please record reason for refusal, to report to Acas)	8	
Not available in fieldwork period	9	MAKE APPOINTMENT FOR NEXT FW PERIOD
Show reassurances	10	

- 4) Good morning/ good afternoon, my name is _____ from Employment Research Ltd, an independent research company. We are carrying out research for Acas as a follow up to a project on [INSERT DATA FROM DATABASE: 'MainTopic'] carried out by an Acas Adviser, [INSERT 'LeadAdviser'] conducted for [INSERT 'your organisation' OR/ IF FTO ['OrganisationName']] about 6 months ago about to find out how useful it has been.

FOR NAMED RESPONDENTS OR THOSE WHERE DETAILS PROVIDED BY ACAS INCORRECT (Q1=1 OR Q1=4)

I understand you were the main management/ employee contact

FOR REPLACEMENT RESPONDENTS (Q1=2)

I understand that [INSERT FROM SAMPLE 'EMPLOYER NAME'/ 'WORKFORCE NAME'] was the main [INSERT TEXT: management/ employee] representative for the project, but as they no longer work for the organisation, you have been suggested as someone who could answer some questions on the project instead.

The survey focuses on the longer term effect of Acas' involvement [INSERT TEXT: 'in your organisation'] OR IF FTO [INSERT 'OrganisationName'] through this project. Were you involved at the beginning or close to the beginning of this project and do you feel you are in a position to answer questions around the research objectives?

OK to continue	1	GO TO Q5 IF EMPLOYEE REP. MANAGEMENT REPS GO TO Q6
(REPLACEMENTS ONLY): Another person would be better able to answer	2	SHOW TEXT IF CODE 2: 'ASK FOR DETAILS OF WHO WOULD BE BETTER ABLE TO ANSWER, THEN TRANSFER AND REINTRODUCE'. interviewer: SEND INTERVIEWER BACK TO START OF Q4
Named contact still there but not main management/ employee contact for this project	3	GO BACK TO Q2 IF MANAGEMENT REP OR Q3 IF EMPLOYEE REP (ROUTE AS FOR Q1=4)
Make appointment	4	MAKE APPOINTMENT
Project still ongoing	5	THANK AND CLOSE
Refusal – company policy	6	
Refusal – already been interviewed for Acas survey	7	
Refusal – no time	8	
Refusal – have not been involved in project from the beginning	9	
Refusal – other (please record reason for refusal, to report to Acas)	10	
Show reassurances	11	

B. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

IF EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE

- 5) Just to clarify, are you...

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY

A trade union representative (eg shop steward or convenor)	1
A non-union employee representative	2
A full-time officer of a trade union (ie paid by the union to carry out duties on a full-time basis)	3
Other (Please specify)	4

- 6) Are you based at the same workplace as that in which this project took place?

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	X	

ASK ALL

- 7) According to Acas' records, the workplace project they conducted for [INSERT TEXT: your workplace]/ IF **FTO** (Q5=3) [INSERT 'OrganisationName'] finished on [INSERT 'ActualEndDate']. Is this roughly correct?

Yes	1	GO TO Q12
No	2	GO TO Q8
Don't know	X	GO TO Q12

IF NOT CORRECT (Q7=2)

- 8) In which month and year did the project finish?

January	1	
February	2	
March	3	
April	4	
May	5	
June	6	
July	7	
August	8	
September	9	
October	10	
November	11	
December	12	

- 9) Year:

2006	1	
2007	2	
2008	3	
2009	4	

IF ENDED NOVEMBER 2008 OR LATER

- 10) We would like to speak to those involved in workplace projects at least 3 months after the project has finished. Would it be OK to contact you again in about a year?

Yes	1	THANK AND CLOSE
No	2	CONTINUE

- 11) Would you be willing to take part if we did the interview now?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	THANK AND CLOSE

IF MANAGEMENT & IF EMPLOYEE CONTACT BLANK FROM SAMPLE

- 12) Before we continue, can I ask who the main employee contact was for this project?

ADD IF NECESSARY: As part of the research we are interviewing employee representatives as well as management representatives. We can arrange a time that is convenient with the employee rep and does not interfere with their work duties.

NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Allow D/K and REFUSED

Record name	
Record telephone number	
Record best time to contact	

C. OBJECTIVES & REASONS FOR USING ACAS

ASK ALL

- 13) I understand an Acas Adviser came in to help **[INSERT TEXT: your organisation]/ IF FTO (Q5=3) [INSERT 'OrganisationName']**. What was the main focus or area of the project?

DO NOT READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY

Communication	1
Consultation	2
Reviewing and/or improving relations between management and employee representatives	3
Reviewing and/or improving relations between management and employees generally	4
Payment systems	5
Trade union recognition	6
Discipline and grievance procedures	7
Pay grading arrangements/job evaluations	8
Managing change	9
Collective bargaining/negotiations	10
Employee turnover	11
Absenteeism/attendance management	12
Workforce reductions/redundancy	13
Changes to patterns of work (e.g. shift systems, working hours)	14
Equality or diversity issues	15
Stress	16
Other (please specify)	17
Don't know	X

- 14) Thinking about when you were first considering ways of dealing with **[INSERT MAIN SUBJECT FROM Q13]**, why did you and others **[INSERT TEXT: in your workplace]/ IF FTO (Q5=3) ['at [INSERT 'OrganisationName']']** decide to use Acas?

DO NOT READ OUT – CODE ALL THAT APPLY

Acas advice is independent of management/ Trade Union	1	
Acas is independent of government	2	
Acas is acceptable to managers	3	
Acas is acceptable to Trade Union(s)/ employee representatives	4	
Acas is acceptable to both parties	5	
Acas has relevant expertise in dealing with the particular issue/problem	6	

Acas approached us	7	
Acas offered value for money	8	
Acas is free	9	
Acas has a good reputation	10	
Had heard of Acas through Acas publicity	11	
Good experience of Acas in past – if so which service (specify, Acas to re-code)	12	
Did not know who else to use	13	
Recommendation of a colleague	14	
Recommendation of a contact outside the organisation	15	
(If respondent is union FTO: Q5=4) Recommendation of a contact outside the trade union	16	
Recommendation of a full-time union officer	17	
Not involved in decision – was not involved in project at the time	18	
Not involved in decision – decision made at Head Office	19	
Not involved in decision – Other (specify)	20	
Other (specify)	21	
Don't Know	X	

- 15) Did the project involve Acas providing training to you or others in the organisation?

Yes	1	GO TO Q16
No	2	GO TO Q17
Don't know	X	GO TO Q17

IF YES (Q16=1)

- 16) Was that before, during or after this project?

Before	1	
During	2	
After	3	
Don't know	X	

ASK ALL

- 17) At the start of the project, what were the agreed objectives?

CODE EACH DIFFERENT OBJECTIVE SEPERATELY

Objective one (specify)	1	
Objective two (specify)	2	
Objective three (specify)	3	
Objective four (specify)	4	
Objective five (specify)	5	

IF > 1 OBJECTIVE (Q17)

- 18) Of these, which was the main objective?

CODE ONE ONLY

Objective one	1	
Objective two	2	
Objective three	3	
Objective four	4	
Objective five	5	

ASK ALL

- 19) Were these objectives *formally* agreed with *both* management and employee representatives or not?

Yes, formally agreed by both management and employee representatives	1	
No, not formally agreed by both management and employee representatives	2	
Don't know	X	

- 20) Did the main objective change in any way as the project progressed?

Yes	1	GO TO Q21
No	2	GO TO Q23
(DO NOT READ OUT) Not relevant (e.g. 1 day workshop only)	3	GO TO Q23
Don't know	X	GO TO Q23

IF YES (Q21=1)

- 21) Please could you describe how this objective changed?

IF YES (Q21=1)

- 22) Were the revised objectives *formally* agreed with *both* management and employee representatives or not?

Yes, formally agreed by both management and employee representatives	1	
No, not formally agreed by both management and employee representatives	2	
Don't know	X	

- 23) Was improving the relationship between management and employees a main objective, a secondary objective, or not an objective?

CODE ONE ONLY

Main objective	1	
Secondary objective	2	

Not an objective	3	
Don't know	X	

D. EFFECTIVENESS OF ACAS & ACTION OF ORGANISATION

ASK ALL

- 24) Thinking about the way the Acas project was conducted, how would you rate the Acas Adviser in terms of the following?

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY FOR EACH STATEMENT

	Very good	Fairly good	Neither	Fairly poor	Very poor	Not relevant	(Don't know)
Understanding the issues facing your workplace	1	2	3	4	5	V	X
Developing a good relationship with participants involved in the project	1	2	3	4	5	V	X
Maintaining an impartial stance	1	2	3	4	5	V	X
Skill in encouraging discussions between participants	1	2	3	4	5	V	X

- 25) Which of the following actions, if any, have been taken as a result of the workplace project?

	Yes	No	Not applicable	Don't know
Development of a formal agreement for the operation of a consultative committee	1	2	V	X
Introduction of policies and procedures relating to issue addressed in the Acas project	1	2	V	X
Review of policies and procedures relating to issue addressed in Acas project	1	2	V	X
Revision of policies and procedures relating to issue addressed in Acas project	1	2	V	X
Review of an area of practice relating to issue addressed in Acas project	1	2	V	X
Revision of an area of practice relating to issue addressed in Acas project	1	2	V	X
Plans in place to introduce policies and procedures relating to issue addressed in Acas project	1	2	V	X
Plans in place to review or revise policies and procedures relating to issue addressed in Acas project	1	2	V	X

- 26) To what extent have you or others in the workplace been able to sustain any activities or initiatives resulting from the Acas project, in the period since Acas' involvement?

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY. IF NOT RELEVANT CODE DK

Fully	1	
To a large extent	2	
To some extent	3	

Not at all	4	
Don't know	X	

E. IMPACT & ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

ASK ALL

- 27) You said that the main objective of the Acas project was [INSERT MAIN OBJECTIVE FROM Q17 (IF 1 OBJECTIVE) OR Q18 (IF > 1 OBJECTIVE)]

To what extent do you feel that has been achieved?

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY

Fully	1	GO TO Q29
To a large extent	2	
To some extent	3	GO TO Q28
Not at all	4	
Don't know	X	GO TO Q29

IF Q27=3 OR 4

- 28) Why has this objective [not been achieved/ only partly been achieved]?

DO NOT READ OUT – CODE ALL MENTIONED

Advice was of a kind not calling for action	1	
The problem went away	2	
It is too early to say/ongoing process	3	
Intend to take action in the future	4	
Methods used during Acas project were not effective (specify)	5	
Acas did not spend enough time at our organisation	6	
Issues too difficult/complex to be resolved in way identified by the Acas project	7	
Acas didn't get to the heart of the problem	8	
External factors beyond our control prevented objectives being achieved	9	
Change in operation or circumstances of the workplace	10	
Change of key personnel	11	
Lack of commitment from management	12	
Lack of commitment from employee/trade union representatives	13	
Lack of co-operation between management and employee representatives	14	
Employees not interested in implementing solutions arising from Acas project	15	
Advice left me unsure what action to take	16	
Other (specify)	17	
Don't know	X	

ASK ALL

- 29) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Acas workplace project...?

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY FOR EACH STATEMENT

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Not relevant	(Don't know)
Helped participants to better understand each others' point of view	1	2	3	4	5	V	X
Provided participants with new ways of working together	1	2	3	4	5	V	X
Helped to build trust between participants	1	2	3	4	5	V	X
Helped participants to develop solutions to problems	1	2	3	4	5	V	X

- 30) Do you feel the following aspects of relations between **managers and employee representatives** are now better, the same, or worse, as a result of the Acas project?
Please say if these are not relevant to the Acas project.

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY FOR EACH STATEMENT

	Much better	A little better	Same	A little worse	Much worse	Too early to say	Not relevant	(Don't know)
Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	V	X
Consultation	1	2	3	4	5	6	V	X
Negotiations	1	2	3	4	5	6	V	X
Trust between management and employee representatives	1	2	3	4	5	6	V	X

- 31) And do you feel the following aspects of relations between managers and employees are now better, the same, or worse, as a result of the Acas project? Please say if these are not relevant to the Acas project.

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY FOR EACH STATEMENT

	Much Better	A little better	No impact	A little worse	Much worse	Too early to say	Don't know	Not relevant
Day to day working relationships between management and employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	V
Fairness in treatment of employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	V
Employee morale	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	V
Trust between management and employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	V
Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	V

- 32) How would you rate the current relationship between management and employees generally [INSERT TEXT: at this workplace] / **IF FTO** ['at [INSERT 'OrganisationName']']?

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY

Very good	1	
Fairly good	2	
Neither good nor poor	3	
Fairly poor	4	
Very poor	5	
Don't know	X	

- 33) Has this relationship improved, stayed the same or worsened since the time before the Acas project?

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY

Improved a lot	1	GO TO Q34
Improved a little	2	
Stayed the same	3	GO TO Q35
Got a little worse	4	
Got a lot worse	5	
Don't know	X	

IF IMPROVED A LOT OR A LITTLE (Q33= 1 or 2)

- 34) To what extent, if any, can this improvement be attributed to the Acas project?

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY

Fully	1	
To a large extent	2	
To some extent	3	
Not at all	4	
Don't know	X	

ASK ALL

- 35) Did the project have any positive impact on measurable performance indicators (e.g. absence; staff turnover; costs; staff satisfaction as monitored in staff surveys)?

Yes	1	GO TO Q36
No	2	GO TO Q37
Don't know	X	GO TO Q37

IF YES (Q35=1)

- 36) What were these impacts?

Impact one (specify)	1	
Impact two (specify)	2	

Impact three (specify)	3	
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- 37) Apart from those already discussed, did the project have any other positive impacts on the way [organisation] works?

Yes	1	GO TO Q38
No	2	GO TO Q39
Don't know	X	GO TO Q39

IF YES (Q36=1)

- 38) Briefly, what were these impacts?

Impact one (specify)	1	
Impact two (specify)	2	
Impact three (specify)	3	

ASK ALL

- 39) Did the project have any negative impacts on the organisation?

Yes	1	GO TO Q40
No	2	GO TO Q41
Don't know	X	GO TO Q41

IF YES (Q39=1)

- 40) Briefly, what were these impacts?

Impact one (specify)	1	
Impact two (specify)	2	
Impact three (specify)	3	

- 41) Do you feel the following are now better, the same or worse, as a result of the Acas project? Please say if these are not relevant to the Acas project.

READ OUT – CODE ONE FOR EACH STATEMENT

	Much better	A little better	No impact	A little worse	Much worse	Too early to say	(Not relevant)	(Don't know)
Quality of the service or output delivered by this workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	V	X
Productivity or efficiency	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	V
Meeting objectives or targets	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	V

F. SATISFACTION

- 42) Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the Acas workplace project exercise?

READ OUT – CODE ONE ONLY

Very satisfied	1	
Fairly satisfied	2	
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3	
Fairly dissatisfied	4	
Very dissatisfied	5	
Don't know	X	

- 43) Was Acas paid to carry out this project work?

Yes	1	GO TO Q44
No	2	GO TO Q45
Don't know	X	GO TO Q45

IF PROJECT CHARGED (Q43=1)

- 44) Thinking about value for money, would you say the Acas project represented

READ OUT - CODE ONE ONLY

Very good value for money	1	
Fairly good value for money	2	
Neither good nor poor value for money	3	
Fairly poor value for money	4	
Very poor value for money	5	
Too early to say	6	
Don't know	X	

ASK ALL

- 45) If a relevant situation arose how likely or unlikely would you be to recommend Acas workplace projects to a colleague or other professional contact?

READ OUT - CODE ONE ONLY

Very likely	1	
Fairly likely	2	
Neither likely nor unlikely	3	
Fairly unlikely	4	
Very unlikely	5	
Don't Know	X	

G. CLOSE

- 46) Is there anything else about the project that you would like to comment on?

INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF NONE, CODE NULL

- 47) And finally, would you be willing to assist in further research into the issues that we have been speaking about that ACAS may wish to conduct at a later date?

Yes	1	
No	2	

THANK AND CLOSE - Record respondent details for quality control

OPTIONAL READ OUT:

That concludes the interview, thank you very much for your time. Just to remind you, my name is XXX and I'm calling from Employment Research. If you have any queries please call Geoff Pike at Employment Research on 01273 299719; or the Market Research Society free phone number 0500 396999.

- 48) INTERVIEWER: Did you interview someone other than the named contact?

Yes	1	GO TO Q49
No	2	

- 49) INTERVIEWER: Please record reason for interviewing someone other than named contact.

Named contact no longer worked for organisation	1	
Named contact said they were not the lead management/ employee representative for this project	2	
Other reason (specify)	3	

APPENDIX D: REFERENCES

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