Communication in the Workplace

Results of the Survey on Communications at Work

conducted for NEC Philips Unified Solutions

August 2008

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September 2008

Effective business communications are essential for achieving optimum collaboration in an organisation. However, effective business communications are often dependent on the a wide range of factors including: communication skills amongst staff; a willingness to pick up the phone; an up-to-date contact list and simply being able to find the person you wish to talk to.

NEC Philips Unified Solutions undertook a piece of research to understand what, from this wide range of factors, are the key barriers preventing businesses achieving the optimum collaboration. In addition what do employees find annoying when communicating in their workplace, what needs to be addressed in order to make business communication less frustrating.

During the month of August a total of 700 online interviews were completed across Europe in:

- UK
- France
- Germany
- Belgium
- Netherlands
- Italy
- Spain

In addition the research targeted specific job functions where communication is key for their job role:

- Receptionist/Operator/Call Centre Agent
- Professional (e.g. Accountant, Lawyer, Consultant)
- Sales/Marketing
- Department Manager

Respondents were asked to consider what they see as being the main communication barrier preventing their business achieving optimum success. They were also asked to rate the workplace communication factors they find most annoying (from both a business and personal point of view).

Detailed below are the findings from the research presented at both a country specific and job function level.

The Top Three Communication Barriers Preventing Businesses Achieving Optimum Success
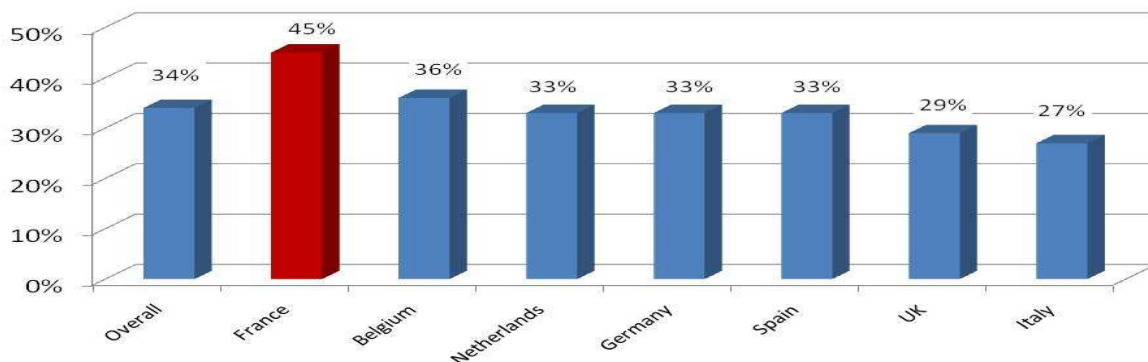
1. Lack of Communication Skills Amongst Staff

Overall, 34% stated that a lack of communication skills amongst staff was the main communication barrier preventing the business achieving optimum effectiveness/success.

The lack of communication skills amongst staff is more apparent in France where almost (45%) stated a lack of communication skills as the main barrier.

Q3 What are the main communication barriers preventing your business achieving optimum effectiveness /success?
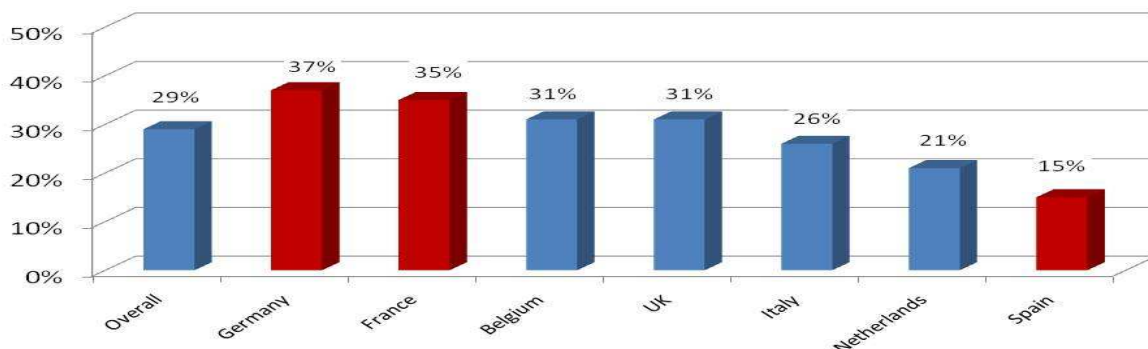Factor – Lack of communication skills amongst staff

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

This lack of communication skills amongst staff is also seen by respondents as letting the business down when it communicates with its customers (29%).

In fact over a third of respondents in Germany, France, Belgium and the UK said that a lack of communication skills let the business down. The percentage in Spain was significantly lower, where just 15% stated a lack of communication skills amongst staff as a factor letting the business down.

Q7 When it comes to communicating with your customers, what lets the business down?
Factor – Lack of communication skills amongst staff

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

The research also found that a lack of communication skills amongst staff is considered to be less of a problem by those in a Professional job function. Although interestingly, this job function is just as likely to consider it as being a factor that lets down the business down when it communicates with its customers.

Q3 What are the main communication barriers preventing your business achieving optimum effectiveness /success?

Q7 When it comes to communicating with your customers, what lets the business down?

Factor – Lack of communication skills amongst staff
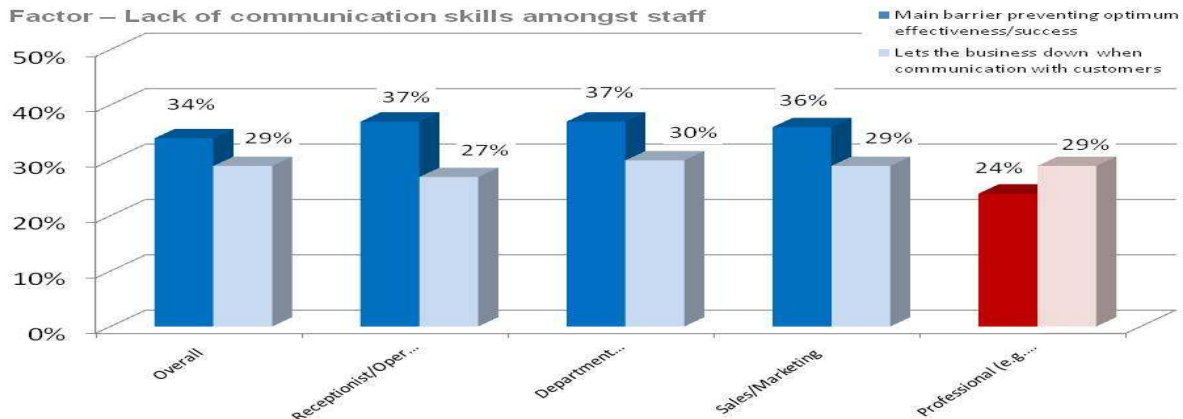
Base: 700 interviews (175 per job function)

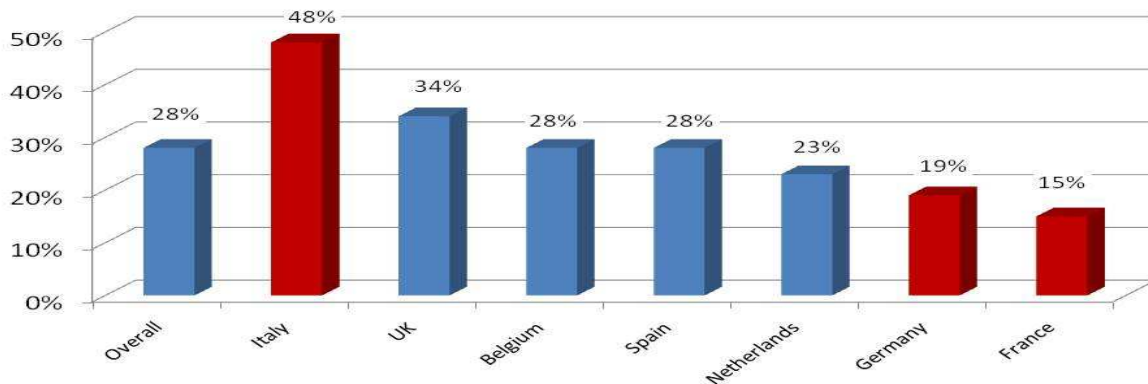## 2. Company culture/conservative attitude towards new methods/solutions

28% pointed to the company culture/conservative attitude towards new methods/solutions as the main communication barrier preventing the business achieving optimum effectiveness and success.

This barrier is more present amongst Italian respondents where 48% ranked it highest (compared to 28% in Europe overall), it appears to be less of an issue in France and Germany.

In Germany they are more likely to consider staff receiving too many emails a communication barrier as opposed to company culture (28% vs. 19%).

Q3 What are the main communication barriers preventing your business achieving optimum effectiveness /success?
Factor – Company culture/conservative attitude towards new methods/solutions

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

Amongst the job functions the research indicates that company culture and conservative attitudes are considered a barrier more frequently amongst Department Managers (37% compared to an overall average of 28%). It was considered a barrier by just 19% of Receptionists/Operators/Call Centre Agents.

Q3 What are the main communication barriers preventing your business achieving optimum effectiveness /success?
Factor – Company culture/conservative attitude towards new methods/solutions
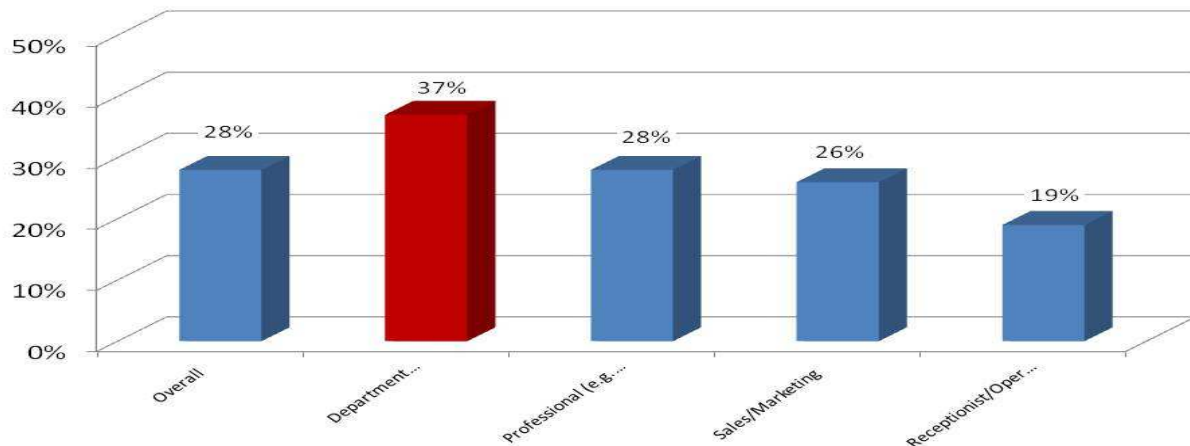
Base: 700 interviews (175 per job function)

3. Our company is located in various buildings/locations/countries

Overall 26% of respondents stated the company being located across various buildings/locations and countries was a communication barrier preventing optimum effectiveness/success. This is slightly higher in the Netherlands and Belgium but significantly lower in France, where they are more likely to consider their IT system as a communication barrier (25% vs. 16%).

Q3 What are the main communication barriers preventing your business achieving optimum effectiveness /success?
Factor – Our company is located in various buildings/locations/countries
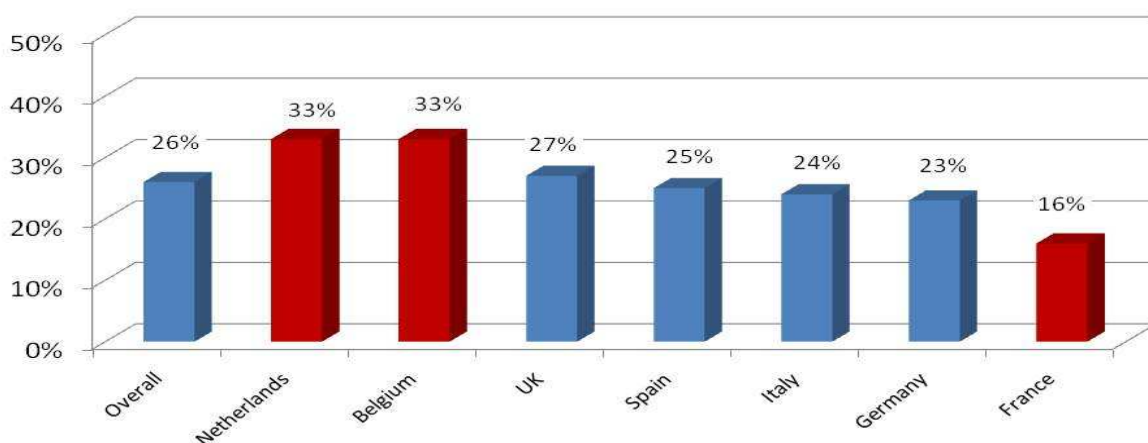

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

The company being located across various buildings/locations/countries is considered more of a barrier preventing optimum effectiveness/success for those in a Receptionist/Operator/Call Centre Agent job function, this is not surprising given they are the most likely to be using the telephone system, trying to find people and transferring calls.

Q3 What are the main communication barriers preventing your business achieving optimum effectiveness /success?
Factor – Our company is located in various buildings/locations/countries
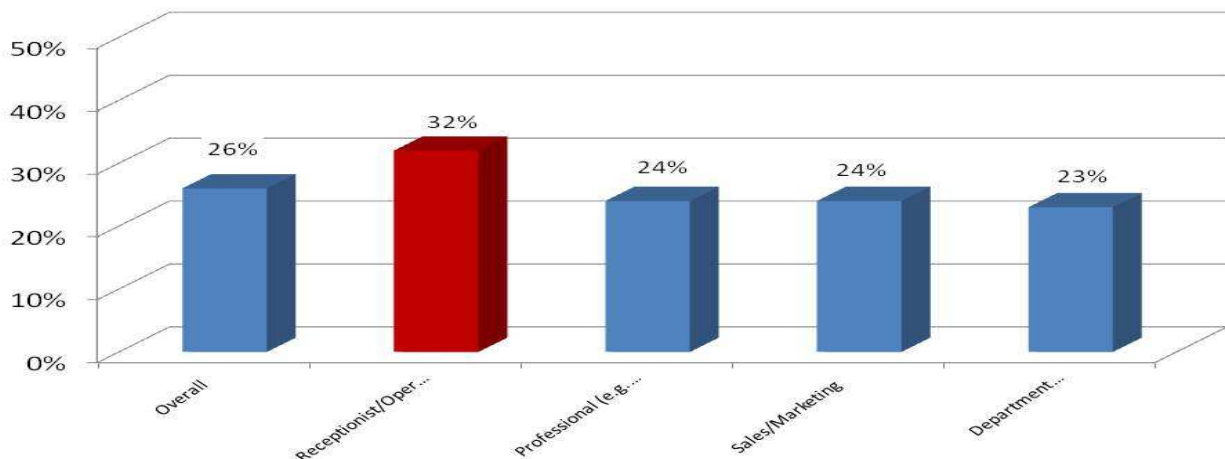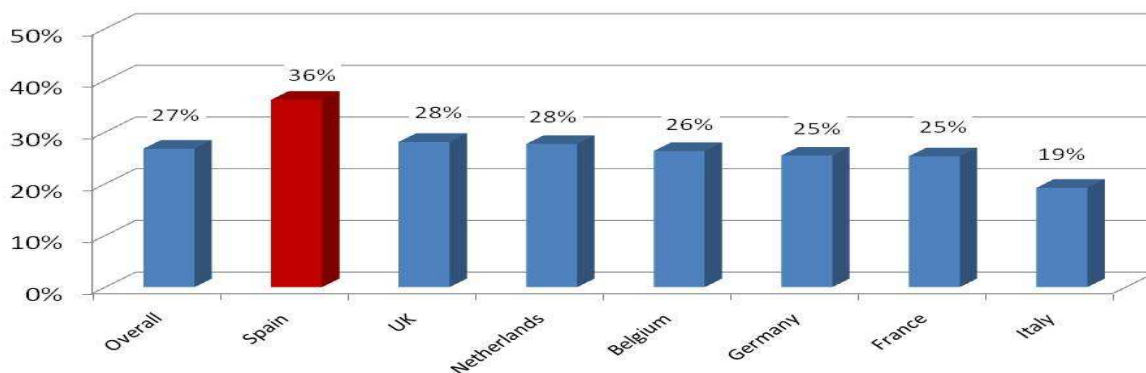

Base: 700 interviews (175 per job function)

The Top Three Business Annoyances in the Work place (from a business point of view)

1. Calls or messages not being answered/ignored

From a business point of view, the biggest communication annoyance respondents experience is calls or messages not being answered/ignored. Respondents in Spain are more likely to rate this as their biggest communication annoyance (36% compared to an average of 27%), where in Italy this is just 19%. In Italy a lack of technology within the business was a bigger annoyance than calls being missed/not answered (24% vs. 19%)

Q4 From a business point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
Factor – Calls or messages not being answered/ignored
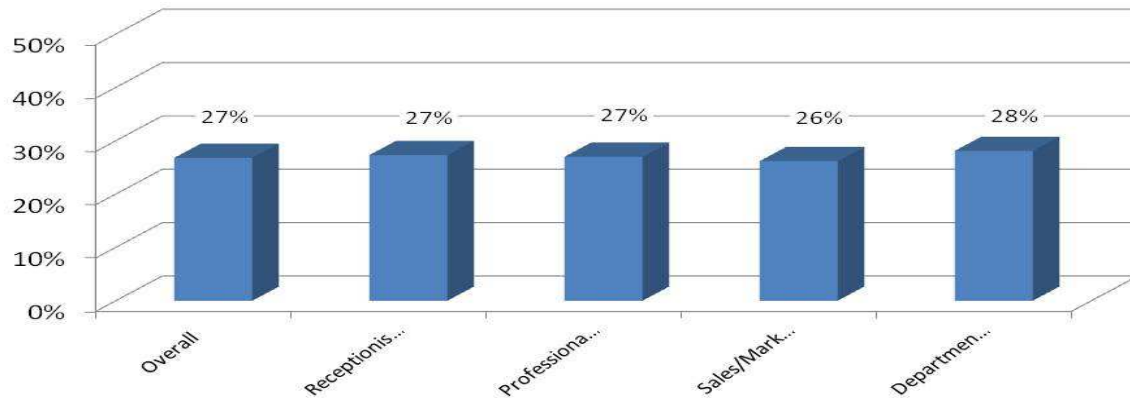

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

Calls or messages not being answered/ignored is the biggest business communication annoyance across all the job functions with no significant difference between them.

Q4 From a business point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
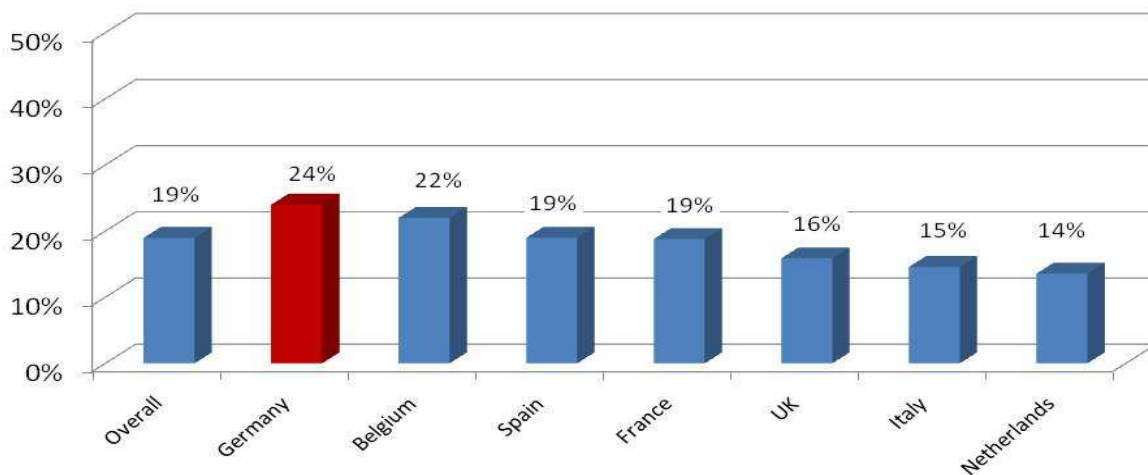Factor – Calls or messages not being answered/ignored

Base: 700 interviews (175 per job function)

2. **Calls being transferred to the wrong person**

19% stated calls being transferred to the wrong person as their biggest communication annoyance from a business point of view. This annoyance occurs more frequently in Germany (24% compared to the 19% average).

Q4 From a business point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
Factor – Calls being transferred to the wrong person
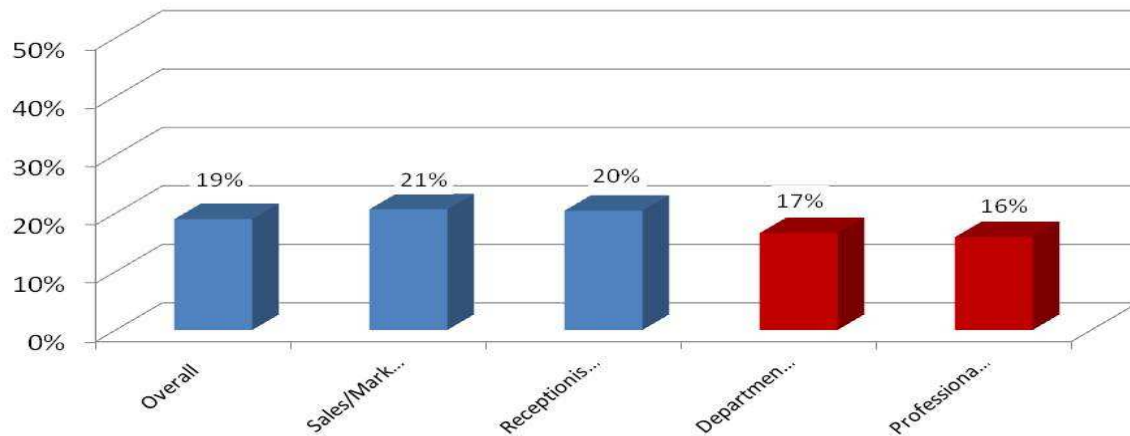

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

Calls being transferred to the wrong person appears to be less of an issue for Professionals and Department Managers.

Q4 From a business point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
Factor – Calls being transferred to the wrong person

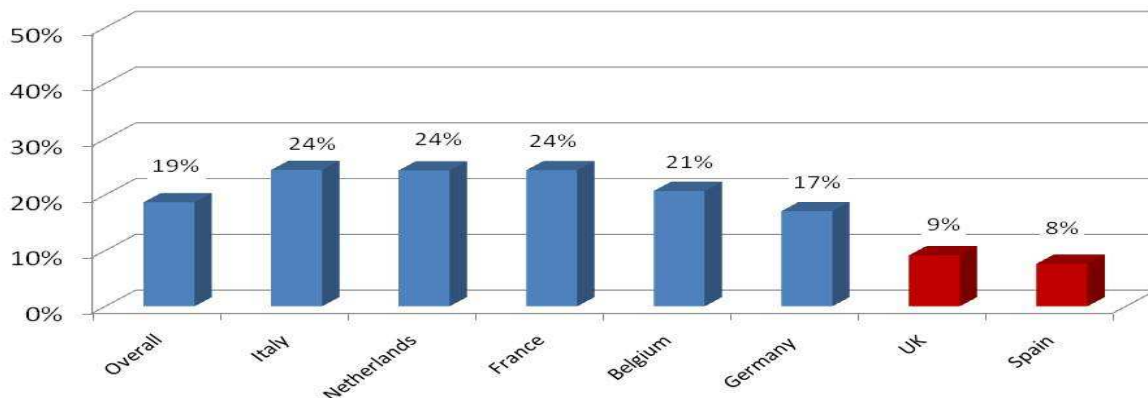Base: 700 interviews (175 per job function)

3. Lack of technology within the business

19% of respondents stated that lack of technology within the business was the biggest communication problem, this is significantly less of an issue in the UK and Spain.

In the UK being unable to contact people when you want to is more of an issue than lack of technology (28% vs. 9%) , where as in Spain it is poor internal contact detail lists (19% vs. 8%).

Q4 From a business point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
Factor – Lack of technology within the business

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

Across the job functions there are no significant differences in those rating lack of technology as their biggest communication annoyance: Receptionists/Operators/Call Centre Agents 17%; Professionals 17%; Sales/Marketing 20% and Department Managers 16%.

The Top Three Business Annoyances in the Work place (from a personal point of view)
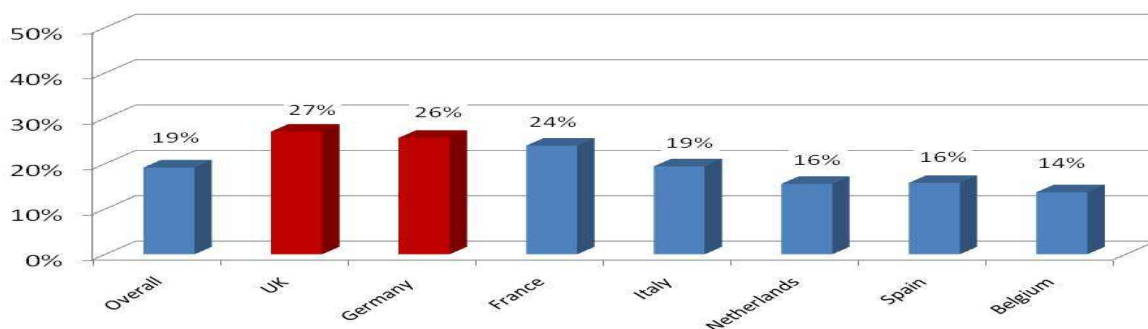
1. People being slow to respond to emails/messages

At an overall level, people being slow to respond to emails/messages is the biggest communication irritant respondents face (from a personal point of view).

In the Netherlands having to repeatedly leave voice mails/messages is a bigger factor (21% vs. 16%), where as in Spain a lack of understanding of the telephone/email system is considered more annoying (21% vs. 16%) than people being slow to respond to emails/messages. In Belgium people being slow to respond to emails/messages also receives a low score however, it is still considered the biggest communication issue (from a personal point of view).

Q5 And from a personal point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
Factor – People being slow to respond to emails/messages

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

Slow response is the biggest source of irritation across all the job functions, however it is more so amongst Professionals. Some might argue this is to be expected given that within their job function they will often rely on communications from others in order to complete tasks.

Q5 And from a personal point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
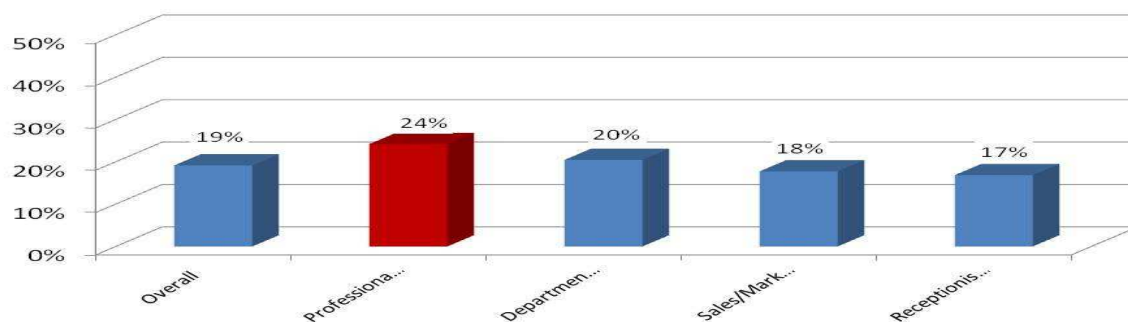Factor – People being slow to respond to emails/messages
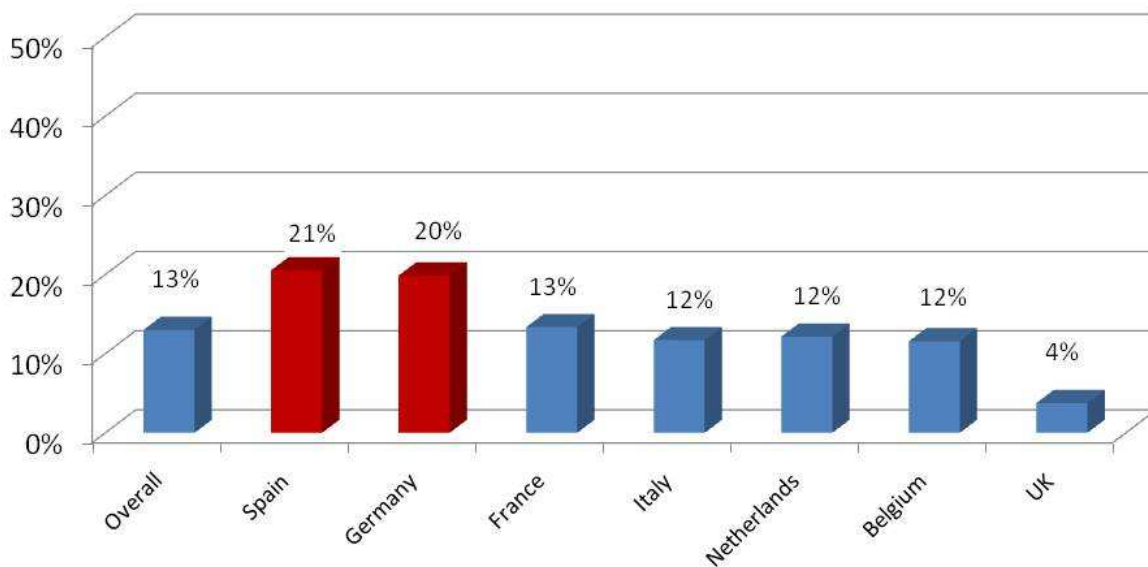

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

2. Lack of understanding of the telephone/email system

Overall, lack of understanding of the telephone/email system is the second biggest issue(from a personal point of view) and is more common in Germany and Spain. In the UK just 4% rated it as their biggest problem. This could possibly indicate that in the UK they have sufficient training or that they have a less sophisticated system. In the UK being cc'd into emails unnecessarily is a bigger annoyance (14% vs. 4%).

Q5 And from a personal point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
Factor – Lack of understanding of the telephone/email system

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

At a job function level there is no significant difference between them, with them all equally finding lack of understanding the telephone/email system annoying: Professionals 14%; Receptionists/Operators/Call Centre Agents 13%; Department Manager 12%; Sales/Marketing 11%.
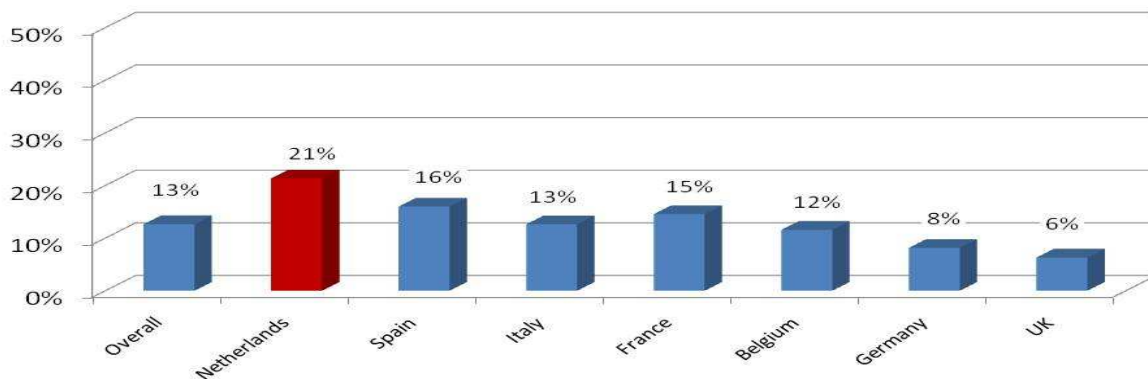
3. Having to repeatedly leave voice mails/messages

Having to repeatedly leave voice mails/messages is a communication issue for 13% of respondents (the 3rd biggest overall). This is a significantly bigger problem in the Netherlands (21% compared to the average of 13%).

In the UK having difficulty in contacting people is more of an annoyance than repeatedly leaving voice mails (10% vs. 6%).

Q5 And from a personal point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
Factor – Having to repeatedly leave voice mails/messages

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

People in Sales/Marketing are more likely to have a problem with repeatedly having to leave voice mails/messages. Professionals and Department Managers are less likely to have a problem with this.

Q5 And from a personal point of view, what are your biggest communication annoyances?
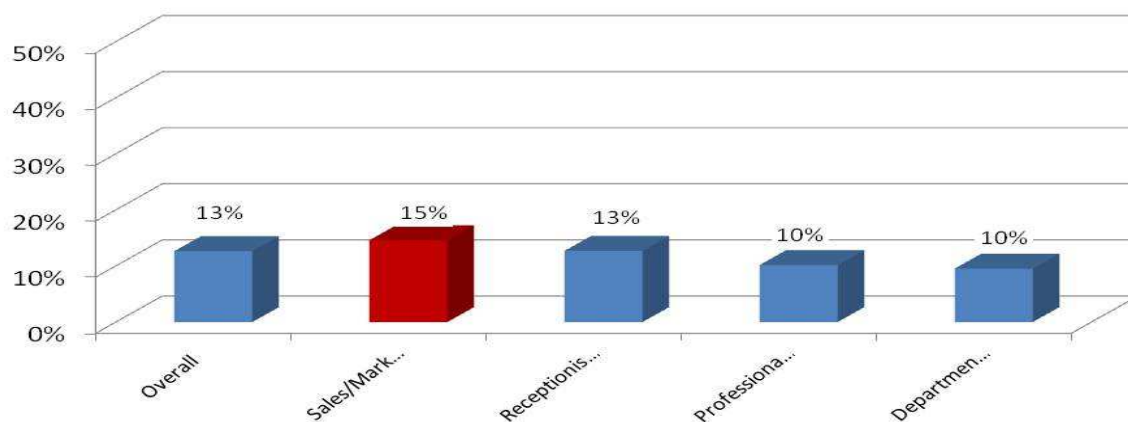Factor – Having to repeatedly leave voice mails/messages

Base: 700 interviews (175 per job function)

People at the centre of communications

The research indicates that people are at the centre of achieving effective communication and collaboration in the workplace.

Respondents considered the main barrier preventing their business achieving optimum effectiveness/ success is a lack of communication skills amongst staff. This lack of skills is at a level where a third of respondents believe it even lets the business down when it communicates with its customers.

People continue to be at the centre of business communications when looking at the biggest communication annoyances in the workplace. Respondents find people being slow to respond to emails/messages as their biggest annoyance (from a personal point of view) and from a business perspective, they become frustrated when people do not answer/ignore calls.

Technology itself is considered as being less of a barrier although it does have some impact. 26% stated that their company being located across various buildings/locations and countries as the main communication barrier preventing optimum effectiveness/success, one could argue that with sufficient technology in place this would not as big an issue.

However, few rated factors such as customers having more advanced communications than their company and the telephone system in place as communication barriers.

Q3 What are the main communication barriers preventing your business achieving optimum effectiveness /success?
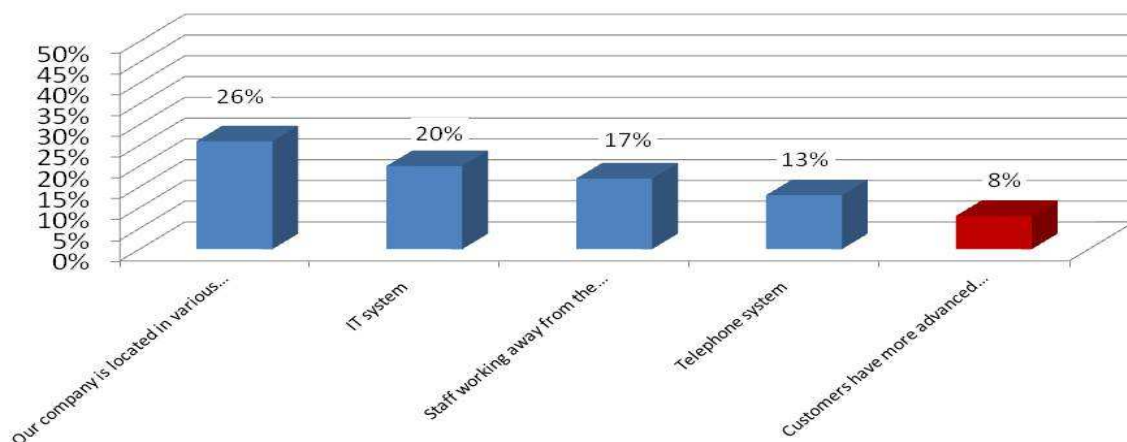
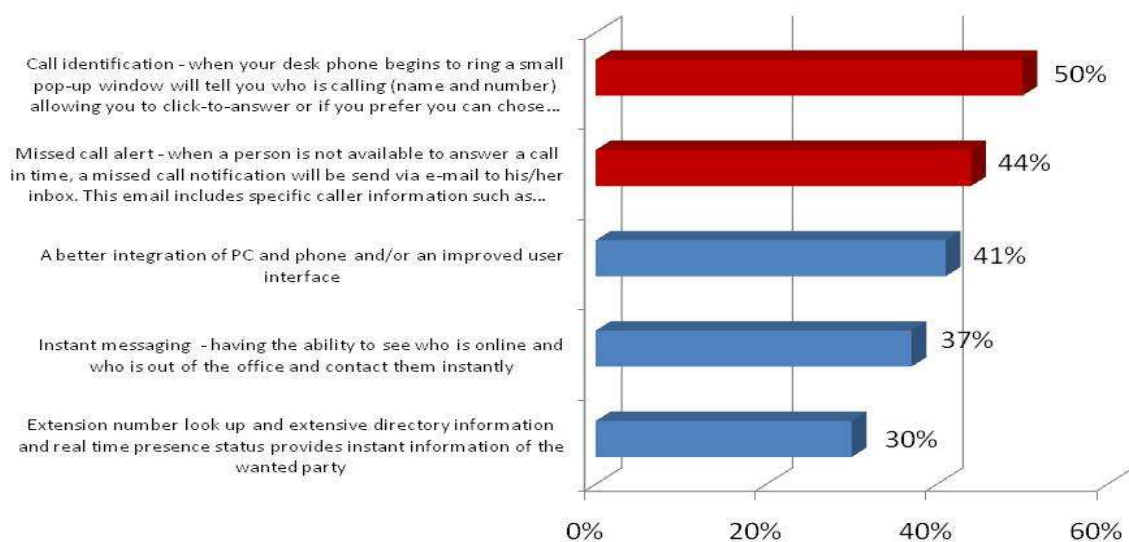Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

It is in fact a lack of technology that annoys people as opposed to technology itself, 19% of respondents stated a lack of technology within their business as their biggest communication problem.

This suggests that the introduction of the appropriate technology could improve people's communication skills and overcome the biggest communication frustrations people faced.

When questioned 28% felt the introduction of new technologies such as Instant Messenger would make people quicker to respond to communications (overcoming one of the biggest issues; slow response).

50% of respondents felt the introduction of a caller identification system whereby when your desk phone begins to ring a small pop-up window will tell you who is calling (name and number) allowing you to click-to-answer or if you prefer you can chose one of your other numbers (mobile phone, home phone) and have the call automatically diverted would improve communications within their business. In addition 44% felt a missed call alert function, where people would receive an email notifying them of a missed call, would also improve communications within the business.

Q9 Which of the following developments do you feel would improve communications within your business?

Development	Percentage
Call identification - when your desk phone begins to ring a small pop-up window will tell you who is calling (name and number) allowing you to click-to-answer or if you prefer you can chose...	50%
Missed call alert - when a person is not available to answer a call in time, a missed call notification will be send via e-mail to his/her inbox. This email includes specific caller information such as...	44%
A better integration of PC and phone and/or an improved user interface	41%
Instant messaging - having the ability to see who is online and who is out of the office and contact them instantly	37%
Extension number look up and extensive directory information and real time presence status provides instant information of the wanted party	30%

Base: 700 interviews (100 per country)

In summary, the research indicates that the key to ensuring successful and effective communication collaboration within a business is to ensure staff have the communication skills needed. Staff will be less frustrated by communication in the workplace if people responded to emails and messages quicker, if calls weren't ignored and transferred to the wrong person.

The introduction of technology could potentially assist in overcoming these frustrations and in fact a lack of technology in the business is a big annoyance itself.