



Finsec Response to Call Centre Merger Proposal

16 October 2009

Introduction

Finsec represents a majority of pre-management Westpac staff working in Phone Assist and Cards Call Centres, the areas that are affected by the re-structure proposal that was circulated by Westpac earlier this month. We have reviewed Westpac's proposal, and have consulted with our members to seek their views on it.

This consultation has brought forward a number of issues which are dealt with below. Please note that we believe that a number of these items require further discussion and consultation between Westpac and Finsec.

Rationale for merger

The information provided by Westpac only sets out very broad, un-detailed reasons for pursuing the merger such as "it's critical that we have the right operating model to deliver for our customers and the bank" and "Our next step is focused on delivering significant improvements to our customer experience and the empowerment of our staff".

Finsec believes that Westpac needs to provide further, more detailed information on the rationale for the merger of the two sites. While we do not prima-facie oppose cross-skilling, we are not convinced that the reasons provided for the merger necessarily match Westpac's stated goals. For example we note that the BNZ, whose call centres consistently receive the best customer satisfaction ratings in New Zealand, operates a separate cards platform.

Given the significant changes that the merger creates for staff, we believe that it is important that the full business rationale for the proposal is clearly and openly presented. As such we request that Westpac releases the business case for the merger, including details of any envisaged cost savings. This information will enable further meaningful analysis and consultation.

Training

Finsec members have expressed real alarm at the limited training period that is provided for in the proposal.

The allotted training period of one week to cross-skill is simply not enough. It will mean that staff will be put on the phones without the knowledge and confidence to successfully carry out their roles. It will result in poor service, more mistakes, and serious stress for staff.

We note that staff who have previously been trained in the Vision system used in Cards Call Centre have been provided with four weeks of training. It does not seem credible to Finsec that a four week training programme can be crammed into one

week and still deliver knowledgeable and confident staff. Staff with experience in the Vision system are particularly concerned about the impact on Phone Assist staff being put to work with in-adequate training because errors made in the Vision system can be very difficult to resolve. Staff who have experience working across both Vision and Hermes also identify that even when a basic level of proficiency has been achieved, that it is complex to operate both systems at the same time, and that this takes some getting used to before the user is truly confident.

This one week training period will of course not only have to cater for training in the different systems used by the two areas, but will also need to include education on cards and other products. Again, we strongly believe that one week is inadequate to do this.

We also note that the training proposal has few support mechanisms in place once staff are out of formal training. Staff will simply be placed on the phones with access to supervisors in the normal way. Staff know from experience that supervisors are not always available to provide quick assistance.

We are concerned that this short time-frame for training is more about having the new structure in place by a pre-determined date, rather than delivering the best outcome.

As an alternative to Westpac's initial one week training proposal we propose a more in-depth training proposal that should see staff emerge from the process better equipped and more confident in their roles:

- The training period be staggered to take smaller groups through training at any one time.
- The training period be extended out to three weeks in total.
- The initial two weeks of this period will be dedicated training on the systems, products, and procedures.
- The third week of this period will see staff "buddied up" with one phone assist staff member and one cards staff member working together through calls.

We request further discussion and consultation on this issue.

Position Descriptions and Role Evaluations

On the face of it, the merger of the two roles creates a new role that at the very least requires a greater breadth of knowledge. Certainly, it will require staff to have knowledge across an increased number of systems, and an increased array of products.

Whether this results in a higher role evaluation is something that can only be ascertained once a clear position description for the role is analysed. We acknowledge Westpac's e-mail of Tuesday 13 October which states that Westpac has reviewed the current PD and has determined that it does not need changing. Finsec has three issues with this approach:

- 1) It does not address the issues raised above about the greater breadth of knowledge required to do both roles.
- 2) We struggle with the concept that the two current roles do in reality operate under one Position Description. If so, why is significant cross training required to bring the two roles together?
- 3) Westpac seems to have pre-determined the outcome before consulting.

Establishing an accurate PD and a fair role evaluation are critical elements of any proposal to merge roles, and there are clear collective agreement requirements around the need to consult in this regard. We request a copy of the proposed PD, a copy of the current role evaluation line, and following a period that allows Finsec to consider these, a meeting with Westpac to discuss the issue further.

Shared Desking

Westpac's proposal includes shared desking for staff when the two areas are merged. While we understand that not all desks will be shared, an analysis of numbers suggests that on most days approximately twenty desks may need to be shared on each site. In the first instance we request clarification from Westpac about the scale of the issue.

Secondly, we request a dialogue about the issues created by shared desking. These issues include:

- Staff having a sense of ownership over the space they work in.
- The additional time that may be required for staff to adjust their work areas and the impact this has on their adherence target.
- Most importantly, the potentially serious health and safety issues created by the altering of ergonomically set work-stations. Call Centre staff are extremely vulnerable to gradual process conditions as a result of the repetitive physical tasks involved in their work, so correctly set up work-stations are critical.
- The fact that greater staff density on one level may mean that there are insufficient toilets on that level.

Staffing

Finsec seeks an explicit assurance from Westpac that the merger of the two sites will not result in reduced staff numbers. Staff in the existing call centres report that numbers have declined noticeably in recent years and that any further declines will result in real stress issues.

We also note the commitment made by Westpac at the time of CEA negotiations to endeavour to maintain current staffing numbers.

Annual Leave

Many staff are concerned that annual leave may become more difficult to utilise at a convenient time under the merged structure. Indeed many report that major restrictions are placed upon the taking of leave under the current structure. Finsec would like the opportunity to discuss how annual leave will be managed under the new structure.

Summary

In this response Finsec has made a number of recommendations and requests. These include:

Rationale for merger

- We request that Westpac releases the business case for the merger, including details of any envisaged cost savings

Training

- A revised training plan along the following lines:
 - The training period be staggered to take smaller groups through training at any one time.
 - The training period be extended out to three weeks in total.
 - The initial two weeks of this period will be dedicated training on the systems, products, and procedures.
 - The third week of this period will see staff "buddied up" with one phone assist staff member and one cards staff member working together through calls.

- Further discussion and consultation on this issue.

Position Descriptions and Role Evaluations

- We request a copy of the proposed PD and a copy of the current role evaluation line.
- After a period to allow Finsec to analyse these we request a meeting with Westpac to work through this issue.

Shared Desking

- Clarification on the scale of shared desking on each site.
- We seek a dialogue to work through a number of issues created by shared desking, in particular health and safety issues

Staffing

- We seek an assurance that the merger will not result in a reduction of staffing levels.

Annual Leave

- We seek further information and discussion about how annual leave will be managed under the proposed structure.

Next Steps

Taking the above into account, Finsec believes that further consultation is required before Westpac makes final decisions about this proposal. This consultation involves the provision of further information, and more dialogue about the issues that have been identified. To be clear, Finsec does not believe that the legal requirement to consult is satisfied by a written response from Westpac that simply acknowledges the issues that have been raised. We must also be clear that consultation with Finsec is not satisfied by simply inviting Finsec representatives to any meetings held with staff. Westpac is obliged to consult directly with Finsec as the lawful representative of staff.

We propose that in the first instance, Westpac provides Finsec with the information that has been requested, and that a meeting be set up between the parties one week after the provision of this information to engage in the dialogue that we believe is necessary. We specifically request that Westpac does not finalise its proposal and present it to staff before these steps have occurred.

Please liaise with Michael Wood at Finsec directly in response to these requests.