

It's official: scientists prove why accountants are boring

By Celia Hall

THE caricature of accountants as boring has been given a scientific basis by researchers who say the language they use and the environment in which they work are, frankly, grey.

The study from the City University of Hong Kong said that the "dull and uninspired, jargon-heavy language", including such words and phrases as "holdover" and "provisional tax liability", is partly responsible for their dusty image.

John Flowerdew, of the university's department of English and communication, analysed the language and communication of tax accounts in a major company.

"They sat together as a group with their desks facing each other while the tax manager had her office apart from the tax accountants," he writes in the journal *Writing in English for Specific Purposes*.

"On that particularly rainy day the accountants started their morning by checking e-mail and quietly eating their breakfast at their desk.

"For the first hour that the observer was there, the accountants worked quietly at their desks seemingly unaware of each other, busy computing through tax computation schedules, fidgeting with calculators and putting data into their computers.

"The manager appeared in

SEEING THE FUNNY SIDE

What do you call an accountant seen talking to someone?
Popular

What's an extrovert accountant?
One who looks at your shoes while he's talking to you, instead of his own

What's an accountant's idea of trashing his hotel room?
Refusing to fill out the guest comment card

What does an accountant use for birth control?
His personality

the second hour, did not address the group but spoke to one tax accountant about a client's provisional tax liability. She then raised another issue with the accountant at the next desk and left for her office.

"There were continuous nods of acceptance and very few words from the tax accountant. The room once again was filled only with the noise of clicking keys on the computer keyboard or the calculator."

The accountants used letters and faxes rather than e-mail, saying that they were more formal and appropriate to the business in hand.

The study said the words accountants used defined them, as well as serving the needs of the community in which they worked.

Morten Hussman, a senior media manager at the accountants Ernst & Young, said there may be some truth in the findings. But in defence of tax accountants, he said that their work tended to be extremely complicated.

"Tax accountants are quite aware that they use too much jargon," Mr Hussman said.

"We train our senior tax accountants who talk to the media, and these days most senior tax blokes are good at explaining things in lay terms."

The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales provided a robust defence of its members.

A spokesman said: "The area of tax accountancy is anything but dull. Our members get to work in all sectors of the economy, including small businesses and the media and entertainment industries.

"Many of our members lead varied and interesting lives, taking part in activities such as trekking around the Alps for charity and being involved in local community projects, such as working in deprived areas.

"Graduates are attracted to the accountancy profession as a launch pad to a career in business, and a huge number of entrepreneurs start off as chartered accountants. For example, the latest recipient of the ICAEW's Outstanding Achievement Award is Karan Bilamoria, founder and Chief Executive of Cobra Beers."