

Challenges of change

Three steps to effective change management

The modern workplace means different things to different people, but the one overarching constant is change. New buildings, new teams, new structures, new strategies, new priorities, new processes.

Managing change effectively means organisations need to have a clear, robust plan to implement the new vision smoothly and efficiently, without disrupting the business, its operations or its people.

Suki Reilly, MovePlan Global Chief Operating Officer, outlines three steps to help ensure a zero-downtime change management process.

There are as many different kinds of workplace as there are different kinds of businesses, so preparing for change is never a one-size-fits-all exercise.

For some organisations, their vision for the modern workplace might have 100% unassigned seating, with activity-based working, where staff move around depending on the task that they're doing.

Other companies might prefer assigned seating, but with personal desk storage and collaborative spaces. People may not have their own office, but they do have an assigned space.

It is also important to consider workplace elements, such as amenities, storage and technology - whether to provide staff with desk telephones or softphones, their AV needs, wired and wireless broadband access, desktop PCs or laptops.

So it's not only a question of how space is used. Any change in the modern workplace needs to include consideration across three discrete areas: people, place, technology. What does the space look like? How will the people work? And how will the technology enable that?

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Preparing for change

The first phase of a smooth and effective change programme is the preparation. More time and diligence spent at this stage will reap rewards down the line, while weak preparation will undermine the whole project.

Your plan must be robust enough to withstand the challenges and objections that every change programme inevitably attracts.

1. Define the vision and benefits

Effectively preparing for change means starting with a complete understanding of the vision of what you're trying to achieve, whether it be a complete workplace strategy or a specific project.

You have to understand how that vision aligns with the business strategy, because whatever you're doing, aligning the vision with your organisation's business goals plays a huge part in helping you engage and communicate.

If you understand why you're doing something and how that aligns with the business, it's much more meaningful to implement.

It is also important to fully understand the benefits of the change you're implementing in the context of your business strategy, and to identify the key and consistent messages to communicate effectively. This helps to ensure everyone involved has a clear idea of what is happening, why it is happening and what the benefits will be for the business as a whole, and for their own individual role.

A big pharma company, for example, might employ 20,000 people. If they are relocating from one of their sites to a new campus, they need to make sure that every one of those 20,000 people understands why the move is happening and what it means for them at an individual level. How the new workspace will help them to do their job better, for example, or how it aligns with the business goals. It's about being very deliberate in knowing what the vision is, how it aligns with the business strategy, and what the benefits of the vision are for the organisation and for employees.

The vision must be communicated effectively, so everyone involved has a clear idea of what is happening, why it is happening and what the benefits are.

The perceived benefits of change are different for everyone. For individuals, it might be about choice and flexibility in how and where they work. With relocations, most organisations will be moving to a better work environment, with more opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and team-mates. Those benefits need to be communicated effectively.

2. Assess the impact

It's vital to understand how the change will affect different areas of the business. Conduct a gap analysis of how different departments work today, and how you're looking for them to work in the future at the organisational level, the departmental level, and the individual level.

At an organisation level, it might be a change of culture. At the departmental level, it might be a change in working practices. At an individual level, it might be a change in the way they file and store, because they're going to have lockers and minimal storage.

The gap analysis will inform specific areas of focus for the change communications and engagement, and help to assess the level of impact on the organisation.

Managers might need retraining on how to manage, because they're used to a certain management style, and that's not going to be possible in the new way of working.

So it's vital to assess the impact at a department level, but also to understand how it will affect individuals. How does it impact staff commutes? How does it impact on them getting a coffee? Where are they going to eat? Do they have a gym? What are they getting from the change and what are they losing?

Assessing the impact and undertaking a comprehensive gap analysis of where staff are now, how they work now, and how they will need to work in the future, enables you to design a detailed roadmap of the journey to implementing – and communicating – the change.

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3. Develop the structure and strategy

Putting the structure and the strategy together allows you to confirm that you've understood each of the areas that need to change and know how you're going to deliver those changes.

At MovePlan, our highly experienced team uses the ADKAR change management methodology. The Prosci ADKAR® model is a five-step framework that helps deal with the people-aspect of change management. It was developed by Jeffery Hiatt, creator of the Prosci approach to managing organisational change.

We make sure that any strategy we develop with clients takes people through the five stages of ADKAR - awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement.

There are different actions and priorities at each stage. It's like building blocks.

You can't get to ability unless people are aware of it, desire it, and have knowledge of it. Then you give them the ability to work in the space. Once they're in, the workplace objectives should be continually reinforced.

At each stage, you must identify specific things that need to happen before you can move onto the next stage.

There's no point in suddenly trying to teach people how to use the new technology if you haven't made them aware of the change. Check that, when you look at your strategy as a whole, you've taken staff through those five stages - in order.

Having that structure is vital, but you also need to be flexible. One of the things about plans is that they rarely go to plan. So you need to be able to adapt to a changing situation. Businesses change, business goals change, and external factors change. Continually review your strategy to make sure it is still fit for purpose. If something isn't working, be alert to it and be nimble enough to adapt to the change in circumstances.

It might be necessary to take a detour or to change the goals of your project - and if you do have to change those goals, make sure it's a conscious and deliberate decision, not that you've just been blown off course.

MovePlan worked on a project where a delay of six months meant we had to totally refresh the original change

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programme. The vision had been established, the strategy mapped, a gap analysis undertaken. Everything was ready to go, only for the project to be put on hold for six months.

There are many reasons why a project could go on pause. In this case, the client changed their business strategy, which in turn affected the portfolio strategy, and that had an effect on what they were going to do with their buildings.

By the time we went back to the project, things had moved on and the change programme was no longer aligned with the business strategy, so we had to recognise that and modify the original plan accordingly.

Although it was exactly the same team with the same people, we needed to refresh the entire project. We had to do something different to re-energise it, but we also had to be very transparent about what we were doing.

We brought in colleagues from other MovePlan offices around the world to look at the plan with a fresh pair of eyes. This helped us be more effective when it came to refreshing, re-strategising and re-engaging everybody. And making sure that level of involvement is maintained at every stage is vital to the successful execution of any change project.

Taking the time to address these three key stages of preparation - defining the vision, assessing the impact and developing the strategy - at the very outset of any workplace change, builds a firm foundation for a successful transformation programme. There will still be the inevitable challenges along the way, but doing the groundwork before you start puts you in a much stronger position to deal with the challenges effectively and efficiently, without hindering the overall progress of the project.

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About MovePlan

MovePlan is a leading provider of change and move management services across the globe.

Founded in London in 1986, we have over 30 years' expertise in specialist change management and relocation services.

We are proud to be a female-owned and female-led business. MovePlan was set up by Group Chairman, Cathy Ridley, and 90% of our senior leadership team are female.

We are adept at working smoothly with internal and external stakeholders, securing project buy-in at all levels. Thanks to our unique MovePlan Toolkit© and in-house training academy, our team are highly skilled and certified in the same proven processes and tried and trusted methodologies.

The fact that over 70% of our work is through referrals and repeat business demonstrates the confidence clients have in the reliability, quality and consistency of our services.

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