Degrees of Change

Steps for managing the workplace transition effectively

Doing more with less, adopting a next-gen workplace, integrating new work practices—these things all require change. In our work with a range of clients, we've honed a number of techniques that can help create successful workplace transitions.

These practices can be useful in a wide variety of situations—whether a company is moving from an enclosed to open office layout, transitioning to remote work, or adapting to new policies. Many of these have been reinforced by user feedback following change engagements.

1 START NOW

Start practicing now. Do not put off any change that you could start working on now. Understand the amount of change that will be required and work toward gradual but steady improvements.

2 CREATE LEADERS

Find your advocates for change and those who hold influence in your audience. These are your critical resources and should be leveraged in addition to formal organizational leadership. Word travels in unanticipated ways, so have your elevator pitch ready to go when asked 'how is it going?'

3 KNOW YOUR GOAL

Like selling a product, you need to know who you are selling to and what you are selling. It needs to be positioned relative to local value. Know what you have got, from a customer, audience, occupant, and spatial perspective. Align messages with your overall business and show how this change will support the bigger picture. Refer to these often.

4 COMMUNICATE

Use every available medium to communicate messages about the change. Consider new media and enlist someone to use it if necessary. Traditional modes of communication are not necessarily the trusted channels for all employees. Discover where team members go for info; find out where the 'virtual water cooler' is and how to use it.

5 KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Match your change strategy both to the overall culture of the organization and that of the particular group or individuals who are experiencing change. Work to discover what is valued in their culture and how people expect to be introduced to a new idea. A ground-up approach is best for some other organizations, while others prefer top-down.

6 ENABLE OWNERSHIP

Autonomy is reinforced through individualization, so provide opportunities for self-assessment or individualized training. Panel discussions with staff that have already gone through similar change are repeatedly among the highest rated change communication tools, highlighting the importance of hearing from a trusted colleague rather than an outsider.

7 PILOT RESPONSIBLY

Pilots can be used in many ways. They can be used to train future users/occupants, gather feedback on communications, or try out the new environment—but doing all at once can be problematic. Determine the intent of your pilot efforts. Then conduct testing and communications appropriately.

8 LISTEN

Listen early and often. Ask questions about apprehensions. People need their concerns to be sincerely acknowledged. Then they can be ready to proceed. Remain connected as groups begin to change. Provide public recognition for change agents and early adopters. Through recognition, early adopters are enabled to coach others and further reinforce change.

9 COLLECT DATA

Have a detailed understanding of the current and future state: what will be different, what will be the same, and what people can expect. Consider both challenges and long term benefits, and monitor progress with metrics. Clients have told us that 'change' that anticipated the ways that they were already working made work easier rather than harder.

10 USE DESIGN

The power of a beautiful or attractive solution should not be underestimated. Whether it is the information used to present the change or a future environment itself, appearance matters. If people are attracted to and excited by the look of an environment, they will want to be part of it. If they like the look and feel of a new software implementation, they will be more inclined to adopt it.

11 MAKE IT REAL

The highest rated activity is often the walk-through of the office environment still under construction. This can be complicated—organizing hard hats, signing releases, transportation, etc.—and timing is key. But, this is well worth the effort. Leverage the experience by encouraging sharing of video/photos.

12 ENJOY

Change can be stressful. People are much more agile and resilient when they are having a good time. Wherever possible, make aspects of the change pleasurable and socially engaging. Find ways to have fun.