

# Change Management—5 Practical Principles

By Meredith Thatcher and Shannon O'Brien

*Change management is a business process that focuses on transitioning people and organizations to a desired future state. Many in the workplace strategy and facility management field are challenged getting projects funded at all let alone additional support for the necessary associated change management. Business is changing - companies are recognizing the value and significance of the role of the physical workplace in enhancing corporate strategy.*

While change management approaches are easily described and outlined with the help of a simple web search, the challenge lies in determining which methodology best supports the case at hand.

Meredith's journey to find a practical approach for workplace change was based on her belief that change management is about improving the success of a project, not patting peoples' hands and saying, "Don't worry, you'll get used to it." It's about enabling organizations to adapt as quickly as possible while accelerating the return on investment.

Here are five practical principles for workplace change, based on research from multiple projects:

1. **Start at the top.** The most significant contributor to success is active, visible and authentic executive sponsorship.
2. **Articulate clearly.**
  - a. Key organizational messages must be authentic to avoid the perception of propaganda.
  - b. The vision of what 'business in the future' looks like must be explained by senior leadership in terms everyone understands.
  - c. A common definition of collaboration must be agreed upon. Current research shows more effective collaboration is a desire of many executives. They are looking for better ways to bring talent together to solve problems.
3. **No rules.** Establish clear principles for the project and eliminate or limit rules for the new workplace. Establishing clear principles and sticking to them when things get tough sends a strong positive message about the commitment to those principles.
4. **Variety wins.** Using a variety of tools and activities is the best way to ensure a successful change program.

5. **Cascading conversations.** People are more likely to trust what they hear from their immediate supervisor, who can provide context.
  - a. Once the senior leadership express a consistent vision, change is more likely to occur.
  - b. Ensure middle management send the right messages (rather than an internalized version of their own message) and support them in modelling the new work environment.
  - c. Focus on the supporters. Those individuals who embrace a neutral stance will move toward where management is paying attention.
  - d. Communicate early, often, honestly, openly and dynamically, incorporating both ‘push’ and ‘engage’ types of communication

**Case Study in Change Management Success**

On a bitter cold morning on January 3, 2013 at 7:00 a.m. smoke was detected in the lobby of MD Physician Services’ (MD) head office at 1870 Alta Vista Drive in Ottawa. An exterior pot light had shorted out and caused a small fire.

All employees in the building at the time (less than 30) were evacuated safely as the first responders arrived on site. The fire itself was quickly contained within 20 minutes, at which point efforts were shifted to ventilating the dense smoke that had permeated the entire six-story building.

Recognizing the massive opportunity with which they were now presented, the leadership team at MD began to evaluate not just the current and near future state of the facility and workforce, but they took the time to reflect on some basic questions. What gains were now evident as a result of this forced work-location and style change? What were the gaps and deficiencies in the building before the fire? What type of employee do we want to attract? How can our building support workers in new ways? How can people work differently in support of our business strategy?

Deciding to implement a new workplace strategy for the enterprise included a mix of about 55 per cent fixed (assigned workspace) and 45 per cent flex workers (unassigned workspace). The scale of change was incredible: move back into the building quickly, find immediate workable solutions for 500 displaced employees, create a new workplace environment, incorporate new collaborative technologies, and continue to maintain services to their regional offices. That called for quick and practical change management—there was no time to waste!

<b>Change Management: 5 Practical Principles</b>	<b>MD Change Management Approach</b>
Start at the Top	The project co-sponsors were both Executive Vice Presidents. Most of the executive team self-selected as ‘flex’ worker. They were visible, positive and involved from the start.
Articulate Clearly	Early visioning sessions with three levels of management was used to capture the true vision and meaning of the new workplace. Collaboration is critical to their success and they doubled the amount of closed meeting spaces.
No Rules	Principles of flexibility, collaboration and presence were established early, while reasoning was explained and referenced when challenges arose. By not imposing rules, the occupants were being allowed to create their own memes for the new workplace.

Change Management: 5 Practical Principles	MD Change Management Approach
Variety Wins	Change management activities included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive blogs</li> <li>• In-house social intranet leveraged to share information, monitor the ‘water cooler’ talk, and support effective use of new technologies</li> <li>• <i>Connect Head Office</i> events brought the organization together, engaged employees in evaluating project ideas and provided inspiration on the opportunity for all of them</li> <li>• Regular updates posted on the project website</li> <li>• Selection of users to perform ‘bum tests’ on casual, collaboration and formal seating</li> <li>• Orientation sessions for everyone—to understand why decisions were made, how space was created, reset the thinking from ‘my workstation’ to ‘our workplace’ and enable confidence using the new technologies</li> </ul>
Cascading Conversations	Successive layers of management were used to deliver the message and assist teams. Change agents were identified and encouraged to help others transition.

Most leaders recognize the importance of helping people transition, but often fall back on the technical aspects of the project, especially in challenging times. We’ll leave you with these thoughts: Tell the truth. Focus on the positive. Be straight and open with people. Walk the talk. Don’t set rules, rather set goals and measure results.

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