

Managing and Communicating Change in the Workplace

By Jennifer Y. Scott, APR

He lived over two thousand years ago, but Buddha was freakishly prophetic about life in corporate America when he reflected that “Everything changes, nothing remains without change.”

The world of work is constantly changing and evolving to embrace the challenges and opportunities of a technology-driven workforce. As an independent firm that specializes in change management and workplace consulting for local, regional and national companies, Touch Points has partnered with Fortune 500 corporations on a variety of projects involving significant system-wide changes in technology, workspace and work processes. In every instance, our team of change management and communications professionals looks forward to the deep-dive immersion into the corporation’s culture and internal systems.

Below is a brief description of the four phases that are necessary components of a solid and successful change management plan. Although each plan must be carefully customized to meet the specific strategic needs of the organization, Touch Points has included some key deliverables that are often integral elements of each phase.

Phase I: Assessment and Planning

Another famous sage from antiquity, Marcus Cicero, said, “Before beginning, plan carefully.” A successful change management initiative starts with research and meticulous planning that engages executives and senior managers in high-level aspects of the strategic change initiative from Day One. Their enthusiastic support, or lack of it, can make or break an otherwise award-winning plan. Change management specialists and workplace consultants must master the fine art of reaching out to gain support and consensus from the C-suite dwellers.

Once management is on board, an intense period of fact-finding and data collection takes place, including some or all of the following elements:

- Data benchmarking such as a pre-change survey to determine employees’ current attitudes about productivity and how they work most effectively
- Building models for governance and sponsorship
- Defining project requirements
- Establishing implementation teams
- Developing communication, education and training plans
- Creating materials to incorporate into the project plan

In your eagerness to launch into the more sexy and interactive phases to follow, don’t be tempted to short-change the important first phase of a change management plan. You wouldn’t build a house on a weak foundation; the company’s change plan also deserves a strong, solid base.

Phase II: Informing and Influencing

This phase is where communications experts can showcase their well-honed skill-set for communicating and persuading key audiences on the benefits of a new program. Employees at all levels of the corporation must be informed through a cascading communications plan reaching them at a number of high-impact touch points. A few examples include:

- Energetic “roadshows” where the new business environment is presented in detail to employees
- Informal sessions that offer opportunities for employees to ask questions and share concerns
- Meetings with key influencer audiences such as managers and team admins
- Development of an interactive web site or intranet with a section devoted to the change
- Emails with updated timetables, links to news on the web site and invitations to any team sessions

It’s almost impossible to over-communicate during a period of change. More is better, when it comes to sharing information.

Phase III: Educating

In most cases, your change management plan will incorporate a number of new initiatives designed to support the improved business environment. Some of these initiatives could involve a demanding physical move, an enhanced phone or messaging system, upgraded technology, or all of the above! Learning to master just one of these initiatives can send the stress-o-meter skyrocketing for many employees, so you’re facing a core meltdown if you attempt multiple change initiatives without hands-on education for the staff.

Some examples of key deliverables within this phase could include:

- On-site classes or e-learning opportunities that employees can access at their convenience
- Informational kiosks and displays stationed in high-traffic areas such as lobbies and lunchrooms
- Orientation sessions to share details and to set expectations

The desire to get down in the weeds and develop solutions rooted in communication and education is deeply embedded into the DNA of the Touch Points team, so take advantage of our passion for results.

Phase IV: Reinforcing and Measuring

The change plan was executed without a hitch, employees have embraced it and management has filled your inbox with messages of kudos and thanks. Are you finished? Change management pros already know the answer.

A 360-degree approach to the change management process includes a layered rollout of analysis and reporting to examine every element of the change initiative. Measurement can (and should) take many forms in order to encourage feedback throughout the organization. Some employees prefer a brief online survey, while others would rather share experiences over coffee in a casual setting with their team members.

Some successful deliverables that Touch Points has developed for this important phase include:

- Post- and pulse-measurement surveys to discover if employees are working more productively and effectively because of the change
- Informal face-to-face feedback sessions to capture questions and concerns that have bubbled up since the change was implemented
- Structured communications closeout reconciles the controls, procedures, modifications and final reporting of all communications related to the change management plan
- Measurement results report with executive summary and detailed analysis comparing desired-to-actual outcomes
- Lessons-learned report to illuminate the highs and hurdles along the change journey
- Success closeout report with recommendations to serve as launch pad for future change initiatives

Client Results

Workplace of the Future

For example, a massive three-year initiative to create a new workplace and new way of working for more than 6,000 employees of a national financial institution resulted in comprehensive training and communications programs that not only won national recognition but, most importantly, were endorsed as best practices methods by the company's key stakeholders. Ultimately the change helped bring all their employees to one campus and avoid the potential millions of dollars needed to build another building.

Introducing Mobility

Another complex change initiative was orchestrated in several locations for one of the nation's largest defense contractors. Touch Points interfaced with the executive management team to introduce mobility tools, practices and settings that brought transformational improvement to their business and positioned them for future growth in addition to helping them avoid millions of dollars in extended leases and contracts.

Technology Changes

A large financial services company was facing a phone system upgrade that could impact two campuses and every employee's phone. The Touch Points team helped them develop a successful 'wave' rollout strategy that surpassed industry standards for new VoIP systems. With up to 2,000 phones per wave, the Touch Points program allowed the company to execute the largest single cutovers in the industry in a record setting 5-month period. Previous efforts of similar scope limited cutover waves to only 250 people and took 18 to 24 months to complete. The Touch Points team helped the client receive a 95 percent satisfaction rate because of the training programs, the installation process and the clear communications.

In Conclusion

Change is inevitable—and manageable—if companies are to survive and thrive in today's competitive marketplace. Touch Points team members possess the unique skill-sets necessary to help their corporate clients navigate and communicate change strategically and effectively, resulting in a highly engaged, enthusiastic and productive workforce. We welcome the opportunity to share our proven track record in this specialized field and to collaborate on solutions that will help you and your company embrace the power of change.

Jennifer Y. Scott, APR, is president of Touch Points, a boutique agency in Richmond, Virginia, with expertise in change management and internal communications. She serves on the Communications Committee of CoreNet Global's Workplace Community and for the Mid-Atlantic Chapter.

Visit www.touchpointspr.com to learn more about this growing firm. Touch Points has developed a full-scope Workplace Change toolkit that includes suggested timetables for a multi-layered Change Management initiative, along with checklists, sample communications documents and much more. Contact Jennifer at (804) 994-1119 for more information about the Touch Points Workplace Change Toolkit.