

# The most successful change management principles and initiatives

In today's constantly evolving business landscape, no company will last long without being adept at implementing change. Whether it's a massive organization-wide transformation or a simple tweak to an HR policy — all change efforts require a clear vision, constant communication, and buy-in from every department.

*For example, the COVID-19 pandemic made change necessary for thousands of companies nearly overnight.*

Physician's offices needed to focus more on virtual visits, restaurants had to rely more on delivery, and some companies completely changed what they do (such as distilleries making hand sanitizer). These organizations had to undergo significant transformational changes at the drop of a hat to survive.

**The companies that mastered the change management process were able to make it through the pandemic's peak. Some even came out stronger on the other side.**

In short, the effectiveness of your change management strategy will play a massive role in the overall success of your organization. That's why it takes a sound understanding of the guiding principles of change management — which are what we're going to cover today. Along the way, you'll learn how to develop a change management plan that you can implement at your institution.

## Why is change management important?

Leading change at any establishment is no simple task. You can't expect to roll out an organization-wide change and expect everyone to adapt to it perfectly.

Instead, effective change management takes a highly strategic approach — requiring buy-in from stakeholders, managers, and employees. In other words, everyone needs to be on the same page for it to work.

*But why is it important?*

**Change management is essential for any organization because it helps resolve the following issues:**

- **Lack of a vision.** Does your company lack a clear vision and alignment for new programs? Are your business leaders not sure why your performance is floundering? If so, you need to implement change management principles to get your organization back on the right track. That will align everyone on where change needs to happen the most.
- **Resistance to change.** If your organization can't revamp its operations because your employees are against it — they likely aren't sure why the changes are necessary. Proper change management involves clearly communicating changes to employees while addressing their concerns.

- **Lack of resources.** Do you want to implement change but never have the resources to do so? Then you need a change management model to develop a detailed plan for acquiring the resources you need. That includes planning out the required personnel and equipment to put the change into practice.
- **Lack of planning.** Rolling out a change takes rigorous forethought and impeccable design for it to go off without a hitch. It'll be difficult to find sustainable success if you aren't planning out your changes. That's why you need to familiarize yourself with proven change management principles.

A proper change management approach will resolve all these problems. You'll finally be able to undergo the organizational structure changes you need to stay competitive in your industry.

## The 5 core change management principles

Now that you know why change management is so essential, it's time to learn its guiding principles — as they will help you understand how to develop successful change programs for your organization without much resistance.

### #1: Identify key stakeholders and engage with them

The first step is to identify the key stakeholders in the change. These are the people who the change will end up affecting the most. Your stakeholders will probably include senior management, functional managers, and, most importantly, the frontline employees.

These are the people that will drive your change forward. They can also provide valuable insight into improving the process and resolving any potential issues.

*So how do you go about identifying your stakeholders?*

There are a few ways, including using a [stakeholder analysis template](#). It will help you discover who is the most important and most affected by your new change program. It works by breaking down each stakeholder's impact and influence over your new project. Not only is that great for identifying stakeholders, but it can also help you rank their level of importance. The last box on the template deals with how to engage with each stakeholder — such as monthly round table discussions or quarterly meetings.

During the process, do your best to discover their current pain points so you can address them with the change. Also, you can bring up enticing new opportunities to get them excited about the new initiatives.

### #2: Change starts at the top

Change can bring about stress, pressure, and uncertainty at all levels of the organization. That's why the team needs staunch leadership that provides support, direction, and encouragement. As such, the leaders must be the first to adopt the changes to motivate the rest of the company. Essentially, your leaders will become role models for your employees. They'll need to exhibit the behavior that you'll eventually expect from your staff.

At the same time, you'll need to designate 'change leaders' at every level of the organization. These are the individual team members who will spearhead the changes for the rest of their departments. That is the first step of a 'cascading' approach to change management. In other words, the change starts at the top and cascades down to the lower levels.

At the top, your primary goal is to establish a strong case for the change program. Your employees will likely be wary of any significant change to the status quo and may question if it's actually necessary. As such, you'll need

to craft a bulletproof case for why the changes are not only essential but will benefit everyone in the long term.

That will help you gradually break the barriers on the bottom levels of the organization so the change can 'cascade' down.

### **#3: The real change happens at the bottom**

While change undoubtedly starts at the top, real transformational change happens at the bottom. That means you won't see the results you're after unless the entire organization commits to the changes. That includes individual team members, line managers, and everyone else on the frontline.

It takes clear and constant communication and adequate staff training to make the changes stick and become part of the company culture.

That's where the change leaders will come into play. They must continuously support, train, and encourage the employees around them to adapt to the changes. You'll want to free these leaders up from their current assignments, so they can focus on driving change full-time.

It's imperative to embrace learning and encourage the sharing of knowledge at the bottom level. You should also take ownership of the change while encouraging top-down and bottom-up communication. That's a reliable way to combat any lingering resistance.

### **#4: Demonstrate faith while confronting reality**

One of the most crucial change management principles is confronting the reality of why the change is necessary while demonstrating faith in it. By facing reality, you're being completely transparent with your employees about the state of your organization.

*An example would be a company teetering on bankruptcy that needs a significant restructure to stay competitive.*

Instead of sugar-coating the situation to employees, the company decides to confront the brutal reality of the problem. The executive team lets everyone know that things are indeed dire and that massive changes are necessary.

It's not all doom and gloom, though, as the team also has an articulate vision to share. They propose a well-thought-out plan for transformational change that will save the company — complete with a roadmap and a timeline. They have steadfast faith in the plan and that everyone will ultimately prevail. It works, as it serves to motivate the employees to work hard in the short term to drive positive change.

That's the power of this principle, and it's worked for many organizations in the past. Honesty is always your friend, even when your reality isn't the best. Combining transparency with a detailed roadmap for success is a tried and true way to initiate change.

### **#5: Thoroughly address company culture**

Nearly every type of change will involve some type of alteration to your company's culture. Whether you're dealing with converging cultures due to a merger or slight tweaks to an existing process — you'll always need to address your company's cultural center.

That's because an organization's culture is vast and includes:

- Shared history
- Values and beliefs
- Attitudes and behaviors
- Procedures and policies
- Underlying assumptions

As you can see, company culture includes more than a simple mission statement. Culture is how people feel about their work, how they get things done, and what motivates them. That's why no change will work unless it explicitly addresses how it will affect culture.

You'll want to gain a solid grasp of your existing culture to develop a baseline for change. From there, you'll need to define a clear vision for the new culture. That will enable you to form metrics to measure the effectiveness of the cultural change.

## The key aspects of a change management plan

Now that you have a grasp of change management principles, it's time to learn how to make them all come together in an actionable strategy. That way, you can elicit a sense of urgency throughout your organization to bring about the changes as soon as possible.

### Create a change impact assessment

Any type of change to your operations will inevitably create disruptions. It's an unavoidable part of the change process that you'll need to take into account when devising a plan. You'll want to deliberate with your executive team about the benefits of the change vs. the disruptions it may cause.

*Will making the change ultimately hurt your organization? Or will you do more harm by maintaining the status quo?*

These are vital questions to ask when devising a change management plan.

To help with this process, you can conduct a change impact assessment. It's a formal way of evaluating the impact of a change on your organization.

### The assessment has three steps:

- **Processes.** How will this change affect the way employees do their work?
- **Systems.** Will this change require any changes to your technology infrastructure?
- **Organizational.** How does the change affect/benefit company culture?

Once you've addressed each aspect, you'll need to make an ultimate decision on whether it's worth making the change.

### **Get the organization ready for the change**

Now it's time to start preparing for rolling out the change program across the organization. You'll want to prepare for contingencies here — such as any resistance to the changes. If the change requires new training for employees, now is the time to set up training programs. You'll also want to map out the new way staff will tackle processes and any technological changes.

A great way to prepare your organization for change is to develop new branding materials. That will signal to everyone that changes are coming so they won't get caught by surprise.

### **Clearly communicate the plan for change**

Next, you'll want to address the plan to your employees directly. You'll want to lay out your compelling vision for why the changes are vital for the survival of your organization. That is where the 'confront reality but demonstrate faith' principle comes into play. Let everyone know that while change may be difficult, it will benefit everyone in the end.

Beyond that, you'll need to provide a clear roadmap for how the changes will occur. This map should include any changes to processes, technology, and culture that you discovered in your assessment.

### **Roll out the changes**

Now it's time to make it happen. To generate excitement, you can plan a fun launch party for the first day of the change program. Also, let your employees know about any 'quick wins.'

*What are those?*

A **quick win** is a clear benefit of making the changes that you see within a few days or weeks. They're great for boosting morale because they let everyone see that the changes are working and that the future is bright.

During the rollout, you'll want to maintain transparent communication with all employees. Encourage them to ask questions and embrace the new training.

### **Measure success and sustain the change**

After a few months of implementing the changes, check your metrics to see how it's going. Have you noticed improvements in your target areas? If not, where are you falling short?

### **If you don't see the results you want, you may need to make additional tweaks to the change.**

*For example, if a technology issue holds you back, it may be time to retool your infrastructure.*

If you see the improvements you wanted, you have an additional challenge — sustaining the change. It's normal for employees to want to return to the way things were, especially if their new tasks are more complex.

Sustained change takes effort from all parts, including from leadership. You'll need to continue the narrative of why the change was necessary and why it's working. Sharing the benefits will keep your employees and stakeholders motivated to continue the evolution.

## **Concluding thoughts: successful change management principles and initiatives**

Those are the principles and steps it takes to achieve organizational change management. In a nutshell, it's about convincing everyone that your vision for the future is far better than the status quo. Sometimes, change is also necessary for a business or organization to survive.

**As such, it's critical for any establishment to have a solid grasp of how to deal with change.**

It takes buy-in from the executive team and all levels of the organization. That's the only way a significant shift in company and culture can occur.