With any transformation, there is change. As architects and designers, we are involved with changes on many levels. We are hired to create new environments, new buildings, and new images. Every time we work with a company, we are changing something, whether it is simply suggesting new paint colors for the walls or designing a multi-level, multi-phased addition. However, even though our job entails not just making a workspace nicer, but making it better, there can still be anxiety and/or antipathy towards the change from our client’s employees.

The stakes are high for failure; we have learned to manage change appropriately to realize success for both our clients and for ourselves. We have learned that overcoming resistance to change and implementing it successfully requires providing a comfort zone to those who will be affected by the change, no matter what their level is in the organization. The results of our experience in successful Change Management, including the five simple rules listed below, can be adopted by your organization during the process of a remodel or renovation to gain employee/tenant buy-in and further improve the odds of project success.

Change Management Rule 1: Set the Strategy
People will invariably ask the question why: Why do we have to change? What’s in it for me? Employees need a reason to believe. Acceptance and buy in cannot happen without it. Set the tragedy and agree on the message. Helping employees/tenants understand the benefits of making a change – and the risks involved with not – can break down traditional barriers of resistance. Identify Leaders and Champions within the organization that will help promote positive, trusted communication. Fortunately, providing answers does not have to be a difficult exercise. Set simple criteria for employees/tenants to understand. Make the answers personal. Remember their sophistication level to the topic and try to address things at that level.

Change Management Rule 2: Communicate Effectively
Educate the masses. Identify and segment audience groups, determine the appropriate messages for each audience, and develop the most effective packaging, timing, and channel for the communications. Remember the Culture when it comes to deciding what methods to use for the communications. What works best for each audience? The messages need to relate to the different ways that people work. The best messages off a feedback loop back to the messengers to keep a pulse on what is being questioned, and the way that the change is being accepted.

Change Management Rule 3: Reinforce
Want to gain more buy in? Wherever possible, allow employees to have some measure of choice in the change that is about to happen. In a recent overhaul of their corporate headquarters, one large, national retailer did just that, using a “layered” approach to furniture selection. In the first layer, executives heard about the design-appropriate systems furniture choices that were available to the company. In the next layer, benefits of each of the available choices were discussed with department heads and champions. In the final layer, all employees were invited to visit, with their champions, a demonstration of the available systems furniture options. Employees were able to see, touch and even try the product. Furthermore, they were given evaluation forms to submit back in to the company’s internal facilities team. Through this
layering approach, the entire company was able to feel as though they had a hand in the renovation process.

**Change Management Rule 4: Reward**
The culture of an organization is one point that cannot be overlooked. The team working on a project must constantly remember to consider how employees *really* work and ensure that changes are in line with that culture. At the same time, changes to the culture itself cannot be made through the furniture or finishes; instead, they must be driven from the top down. For example, adding soft-seating areas when it is not seen as productive to sit in soft seats will be a waste. Instead, management has to encourage, vocalize, and reinforce that it is okay and even recommended for employees to have meetings or do work in the soft seating areas.

**Change Management Rule 5: Celebrate**
Things today are complicated. Even a simple office chair can have multiple levers and buttons to manipulate. If you want people to have equipment that feels good and works well for the space, you must take the time to explain its inner workings. Helping educate employees on all aspects of the required change, including new behaviors that will be required of them, how tools work, and more, can be the final piece in the puzzle for project success. The availability of information on the Internet and other tools make it easy to give your employees the data they need, but also to disseminate the training without incurring significant cost or effort.

**Reach for Positive Change**
It has been said that the amount of budget spend on facilities projects is usually far outspent by the dollars required to recruit and retain human capital. At the same time, facilities projects can have an enormous impact on the satisfaction level of employees. Those projects which do not follow one or all of the above-mentioned rules of engagement are not only more likely to fail but far more likely to create dissatisfaction and reduce productivity among the employee body: Exact opposite intentions of almost any facilities project. By spending a little more time and effort to actively engage employees, positive change can result!

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