

Embracing change

Why do so many organisations still struggle with implementing change? And what can your business do to make sure initiatives take root? Grant Sanders of law firm Stephen Rimmer LLP, offers tips on how to make sure your change programme succeeds.

As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus wrote in 401BC, *“Everything changes and nothing remains still. Change is the only constant in life.”*

Change is inevitable. In the economy, technology, society, culture, friends, family, even the weather! The better you are at embracing this fact, the easier it is to develop and evolve, both personally and professionally.

For some the idea of change is terrifying, because of a perceived risk perhaps, or because an apathetic ‘Why? We’ve always done it this way’ attitude prevails.

Past failures may also be on minds. When change has failed in the past people often grow cynical. Some of the longest-serving employees may have seen the most change and have become weary, wary or just plain resistant.

Resist or overlook the chance to change, however, and you may well miss out on something that could transform your business, professional or personal life. Remember: it is our responses to events, not event themselves, that determine the outcome.

“Some changes look negative on the surface but you will soon realise that space is being created in your life for something new to emerge.” Eckhart Tolle

As this illustration (*fig 1*) demonstrates, consumers and industries are now adopting innovations at a much faster pace. When you create a culture that encourages innovation you lead by example rather than having to play catch up. By anticipating important innovations ahead of your competition you can take advantage of market conditions and increase growth.

However, not everyone adopts innovations with equal enthusiasm. Take a look at the illustration below (*fig 2*). This is a useful way of identifying which category certain individuals belong to when you come to roll out new ideas. Identify your ‘early adopters’ and use them to communicate the benefits and bring along the ‘late majority’ and ‘laggards’.

“The world is changing very fast. Big will not beat small anymore. It will be the fast beating the slow” – Rupert Murdoch

So how do you make sure your ideas succeed?

Planning

Set clear goals to keep momentum and not stray off track.

Communication

Help colleagues understand what the journey will look like, why the change is necessary and make sure everyone is aware of what is happening at each stage. There are plenty of ways of doing this: townhall meetings, regular emails, telephone dial-ins.

Testing

You can't involve real users too often. Try to set up user testing as much as possible with clear lines for everyone involved to give their honest, candid feedback. Make sure you acknowledge and address the feedback on the next user test.

Choose the right people

Involve your 'early adopter' types – the ones that you know are most receptive to change. They can test ideas and are most likely to become advocates. The 'late majority' and 'laggards' will want to see that others are happy with the results before they commit.

Take small steps

Make regular marginal gains rather than try to change everything at once. This will help bring your people along with you.

Keep it flexible

Allow for changes within the project in case a particular change doesn't deliver the expected results. As you work through the changes you may find that other ideas present themselves.

Communication (so important we cover it twice)

Keep colleagues updated and provide ongoing support and the opportunity to feed back until the change has fully bedded in. Get the views of a range of stakeholders. You won't always be able to bring everyone along on the same journey but by allowing an open forum for feedback everyone's opinions can be heard and valued.

Finally, remember success is not linear. You may have to take a few steps back to truly move forward. Failure can be positive as long as you learn from it and don't repeat mistakes. With proper planning and testing failure can be inexpensive and not too time-consuming.

IN SHORT

- Change is inevitable. Identify your 'early adopters' who will embrace change positively as an opportunity, not a problem
- It is your response to events, not the events themselves that determines outcomes.
- Successful change projects require planning, communication, testing and flexibility

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"If you are known for being an innovative business it will improve your standing among your clients, potential clients and prospective employees."

How flexible is your business?

Glyn Morrice-Evans weighs up the pros and cons of flexible office space vs a traditional lease.

Today's business owners have plenty of options when it comes to choosing office space. For many this will be a traditional lease agreement. This gives the tenant full, continuous occupation and control of the property for the length of lease agreed, along with the obligation to pay rent and other outgoings such as insurance and rates, and responsibility for maintenance and repairs for the agreed term.

If the lease is for five years then the tenant's contractual commitment is for five years. If the rent is set at £25,000 a year, the tenant knows from the outset they must pay the landlord a gross rent over that period of £125,000 plus other liabilities.

Here are some alternatives.

Traditional serviced office

The traditional serviced office offers you a private work space in a variety of sizes. The space often comes with essential furniture, computers, telephones (probably connecting to a communal reception at extra cost). And as part of your contract you'll be able to select from a menu of support services.

The serviced office provider will typically want a monthly agreement, though longer terms are often entertained. Your space is usually ready-to-go which means you can be operational very quickly.

Co-workspace

Co-workspaces are usually open-plan communal offices with shared meeting rooms. This allows collaboration and networking with different but like-minded organisations who may have complementary skill sets.

Virtual office space

Some facilities offer start-ups a prestigious address without physical occupation. This gives a professional face to your business. Customer calls are answered in your own business name. Emails, documents and other correspondence are forwarded to a pre-agreed destination.

Accelerator workspace for start-ups

If you are starting up your own business, this enables you to share desks and work areas at agreed times, most likely using your own laptops, with lower costs and greater flexibility. There is usually a space or office that can be rented by the hour for specific meetings.

The various serviced office options are less ideal if you want a strong brand identity or culture reflected in your office space. While, as a business grows, a traditional lease gives you greater control over office space, meeting rooms, communal spaces and other facilities.

Likewise, if privacy is a significant factor or you need a large amount of administrative support, storage space, dedicated car parking or delivery requirements, a lease will almost certainly be the better option.

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“As a business grows, a traditional lease gives you greater control over office space, meeting rooms, communal spaces and other facilities.” Glyn Morrice-Evans

WiFi, 4G and access to technology have transformed the modern office says Elissa Thursfield

While all employees with more than 26 weeks service now have the statutory right to request flexible working, this does not translate as a right to have the request granted. However, more and more employers are seeing the value in permitting these requests, benefiting from reduced overheads, happier, more productive staff, access to a wider range of candidates as geography becomes less of a concern, lower staff turnover and the ability to control infrastructure expenditure.

For flexible arrangements to work though, there does need to be a mutual effort from employer and employee. Dependent on the type of arrangement it can involve significant trust on both sides and real HR challenges. Remote working, for example, is an increasingly popular request, requiring employers to trust people to do what they are supposed to do. If you assume that your employees are sat at home watching daytime television, it will be hard to avoid the temptation to remotely micromanage them!

Robust policies in relation to GDPR, employee monitoring, remote working and performance management are essential, although a good policy is only as good as the person implementing it.

It's also crucial to ensure that staff are well appraised of your policies and trained where appropriate. You'll need to take advice to ensure policies are applied properly, in accordance with the law and to mitigate risks.

IN SHORT

- There is a wide range of ways to retain flexibility for both business-owners and employees
- The type of workspace and the nature of the contract or lease will depend very much on the stage of development your business has reached.
- Remote working is now a very popular option with proven benefits for both employers and employees

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“For flexible arrangements to work there does need to be a mutual effort from employer and employee ... it can involve significant trust on both sides.” Elissa Thursfield

The oldest branch of the legal profession

Julian Alahakoon and Ingrid Hindle of Gamlins Law explain the role of a Notary, and why they remain important when conducting business overseas.

Notary Publics assist businesses and companies whose activities stretch abroad. They continue to be in demand, playing an integral and substantive role in facilitating international trade and commerce.

Notaries form the oldest branch of the legal profession. As most people were, historically, illiterate, traders and merchants needed someone to record agreements. And so the Pope – head of the single most literate group – appointed notaries, usually from the clergy.

Not surprisingly Notary Publics are highly trained in matters relating to Roman Law, which still forms the basis of many civil and codified law jurisdictions throughout the world.

Following the introduction of the Ecclesiastical Licences Act 1533, during the reign of Henry VIII and the English Reformation, the power to appoint notaries transferred to the Faculty Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Authentication of signatures

The role of Notary Publics is primarily concerned with the authentication and certification of signatures, authority and the capacity relating to documents for use abroad. Their seal and signature are recognised not only by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, various High Commissions and Embassies based in the UK but also by many countries throughout the world regardless of which legal system has been adopted.

When companies and businesses look to expand their activities abroad, they will often require the services of a Notary Public. It is not always practical for company officers to fly to foreign countries to sign business documents. Therefore a Notary Public is likely to be involved in facilitating a Director based in England and Wales when executing corporate Powers of Attorney. This enables overseas lawyers or agents to act on behalf of the said company.

Companies in England and Wales looking to undertake activities abroad will often require information about the company to be verified by a Notary Public in order to satisfy the legal requirements of another country. In doing so, a Notary Public acts as an interlocutor between a private international lawyer and a public official. That means their confirmation of details relating to companies is treated with the utmost regard by the recipient.

Notaries regularly authenticate company and business documents in transactions, providing certificates on the status of companies or verifying the identities of Directors. This is documentation that will very often be required in order to engage in contracts, banking matters, the creation of subsidiaries, and dealing with land or buildings abroad.

All of this means that Notary Publics play an integral and substantive role in facilitating international trade and commerce. Unless a lawyer has undergone further training to qualify as a Notary, they will only be qualified to deal with the laws of England and Wales, meaning they cannot provide this unique service.

Every Notary has their own official seal, usually engraved with a personal symbol that makes them entirely unique. Notarial acts impressed with this seal and signed by a Notary are

universally recognised, and any facts they contain are treated as the evidence of a responsible legal officer.

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“Every Notary has their own official seal, usually engraved with a personal symbol that makes them entirely unique. Their seal and signature are recognised by many countries throughout the world regardless of which legal system has been adopted.”

IN SHORT

- Notaries form the oldest branch of the legal profession.
- Notary Publics are uniquely qualified and universally recognised to assist English and Welsh companies with overseas activities.
- Roman Law, in which Notary Publics are highly trained, still forms the basis of many jurisdictions throughout the world.