

Change Management: Readiness for Mobile Working

Shifting to a mobile work strategy? Consider these suggestions to increase acceptance.

 Read 6 mins

Whether your workplace is going through minor changes—refining your approaches—or major transformation with full-on shifts in the organization and the place, it will be important to manage change with plenty of strategic thinking, planning and engagement.

If you're incorporating new approaches to mobility—for example shifting from assigned desks to a free-address workplace strategy— you'll want to pay particular attention to the readiness of the organization for that shift. Chances are you may experience some questions—or even pushback—and you'll want to handle it head on.

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL RESISTANCE

First of all, many people won't know what to expect when you communicate you're moving to a mobility program. They may expect a loss of productivity with visions of wandering around the floor, building or campus in search of places to work or the colleagues with whom they need to interact. It's only natural they would feel some resistance.

Leaders can sometimes resist mobility approaches as well. Some leaders may have been accustomed to managing their teams through presence and ensuring people are in the office certain hours—concluding they are working when they are within sight. They may be unsure of how their teams will function and how the work will get done when they can't see their employees at all times.

DEFINING MOBILITY AND PROVIDING THE WHY

As you encounter resistance, it will be important to clarify what you mean by mobility because it can mean different things to different people or companies. Will everyone have an assigned station, but there will be additional places they can choose to work? Will teams have their own assigned spaces, but employees will flex where they sit within the team space on a day-to-day basis? Or will the strategy feature all unassigned spaces where people have the opportunity to sit wherever they would prefer across the campus? People will need to understand your approach.

People will also need to know why you're shifting to a mobile strategy. Many companies shift to mobility to optimize real estate or increase density. Today's offices are typically underutilized, so mobility is an approach to make better use of the space. If you've studied your space and have data to demonstrate low utilization and prove the need for change, this is ideal. Quantitative proof of the business case can be especially compelling.

Beyond density, many companies are also seeking to enhance employee wellbeing in which they support the physical, cognitive and emotional needs of employees by providing greater amounts of variety and choice in their space—giving people more control over where they work throughout the day. Any of these or other reasons for the change are valid—just be transparent with people about why the changes are coming.

[Learn more](#) about Change Management and our Applied Research and Consulting team.

GETTING PEOPLE ON BOARD

An effective work experience is holistic, encompassing culture, process, tools and space to achieve desired outcomes.

Likewise, mobility is related to all of these. You'll want to be sure people have all kinds of spaces to support their work process and diverse modes of work in which they can focus, collaborate, learn, socialize and rejuvenate. Capable technology and tools help ensure less friction throughout the day, especially when people are moving around the campus to accomplish their work. In addition, a culture that affords people permissions to work in multiple areas based on the work they must accomplish is also important to success.

As you're shifting to a work experience that includes mobility, here are some tips to help you increase people's acceptance to it.

- **Share the why and define terms.** As mentioned above, be sure to share the business reasons for the change and let people know what to expect—and what mobility will mean for your company.
- **Reinforce the value.** Help people understand the upsides of mobility— greater choices to be where their work is best-enabled, the increased opportunity to connect with people across the business and create community, and increased support for multiple postures (standing, sitting, lounging and more).
- **Expand their view.** When work station size is reduced or when assigned work stations are eliminated, remind people that the floor, building, or campus as a whole is their work area. Rather than a smaller area in which to work, let people know you've actually enlarged their workspace and expanded their options for where they work.
- **Align technology, policies and norms.** Be sure people have the tools and technology to support mobility. Wireless access and plenty of power availability are examples. Provide people with resources. If they're no longer keeping a stash of office supplies at their desks, ensure you have a resource area where they can find key necessities. In addition, be sure policies allow people to be away from their desks and social norms support flexibility and movement throughout the spaces. You might also consider the use of pilots to provide an experience of the new space and give people the opportunity to imagine how they'll get their work done in the new ways.
- **Train leaders.** Offer development for leaders so they can lead by objectives and outcomes rather than by presence. Of course, teams need time together to bond and develop efficiencies, so coach leaders in how to accomplish this kind of teamwork through technology, intentional face-to-face time,

or protocol development.

- **Empower people.** Provide people with information about how to use various areas of the floor, building or campus. Encourage them to explore and try different places for different work until they find the rhythm that works best for them. Consider training people in key technologies that will keep them accessible even when they're working in different places throughout the day. From IM to slack to apps that allow people to locate each other, technology can make it easy to connect no matter where team members are working.

Overall, work has become something we do, more than it is one certain place we go. While mobility isn't necessarily right for every company, it can be the exactly-right strategy for many organizations, providing for cost efficiency in the real estate strategy and a great work experience full of choice for employees.

Set your overall strategy for change management and increase the organization's readiness for change by dealing directly with concerns that may arise about mobility. Ensure people will know the value of the new approach and train them in how to be successful within the new workplace—and you'll see overall success for your change whether it's a simple refinement or a fullscale transformation.

WE CAN HELP

Change Management consulting is available from our Applied Research + Consulting (ARC) team, considering opportunities to plan, implement and sustain change. Our approach is holistic and user centered, ensuring engagement by connecting organizations to Steelcase's extensive workplace research.

Successful change management requires an intentional approach and an investment of time and energy. Our ARC team guides you through the process and helps ensure efficiency based on our extensive experience.