



Do you want your digital workplace project to be a success?

Develop your user adoption plan in a timely manner!

Lack of change management is the biggest risk factor for IT projects

So you've recently implemented a new digital workplace, or you're planning to do so. That's great! But how do you convince your employees to embrace the new solution?

It sounds simple – just use the tools, right? But in daily practice, it's more difficult than that. Many IT managers also struggle to find an approach that works. They focus on rolling out the solution on time and within budget, which is of course understandable.

But they're often unprepared for the tough reality check that follows: despite an exciting launch, many employees are happy to go back to their old way of working, or to shadow IT. This may be understandable, but it's also lethal for any innovation project.



In this digital age, an organization's success is based on how well its people exchange knowledge and information. The future workplace already provides them with all the technology they need to bring cooperation to a higher level, both within and between departments. But that's only in theory. The success – and ROI – of digital workplaces is inextricably linked to user adoption.

When IT projects fail to deliver, this is rarely due to the technology, and mostly due to human behaviour. Poor or non-existent change management often lies at the root of this behaviour. This is no different for digital workplaces than it is for ERP or CRM projects, for example. A smart, pragmatic and, most importantly, timely **change management plan** can prevent a lot of distress.

This blog offers you practical tips and concrete steps that can help **IT managers** to significantly increase adoption rates amongst end users. We also explain why IT managers are in the best position to take control of user adoption.

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This is an excellent opportunity for IT managers to shine!

Digital workplace projects are about changing the way we work – sometimes radically. And although technology is obviously key, the people who actually use it are the most important aspect of these projects. Because no matter how you look at it, without dedicated users a great tool is nothing but an empty shell.

IT is expected to take care of the technology side; everyone agrees on that. But IT managers can also play a key role when it comes to user adoption, which is often overlooked.

These are some of the reasons why IT managers can – and indeed should – play a crucial role:

- **Reducing the gap between IT and the business**

Implementing a digital workplace is not an IT project, but an improvement project with strategic business objectives. IT is mainly an *enabler* in this context. Assessing the importance of user adoption correctly – and taking responsibility for it – shows that you are close to the business.
- **Expanding the budget for the digital workplace**

IT budgets usually leave little room for change management. But digital workplace projects are business projects, not IT projects. So it's only logical that part of the budget should come from the other stakeholders involved, such as HR and communication.
- **Thinking of yourself as the CIO of the future and building bridges**

The roll-out of a digital workplace tends to have many sponsors, from HR to communication. Someone has to be the *linchpin* or link between all these departments, and IT managers are in the best position to take up this role. But there's more. By reaching out to the other sponsors, you show that you are a visionary CIO, who can bridge the gap between different stakeholders in the organization.
- **Taking on a proactive and more strategic role**

People often think of IT as being stuck in a reactive comfort zone. Coming up with a smart and pragmatic change management plan in a timely manner means breaking out of this comfort zone and adopting a proactive stance. This also demonstrates your strategic value.

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A three-step cultural shift

Implementing change in an organization, even when it's desperately needed, is often met with resistance. Many people buy into the old saying: "better the devil you know than the devil you don't", and insist on sticking to their old way of working, even if this is far from ideal.

Change is hard. It means a loss of control, and it strips away our routines and habits, which is really challenging for us. Change also creates anxiety, as people ask themselves:

Will I be able to handle the change? Am I going to have to work harder? Will I end up getting fired?

Three questions lie at the heart of effective change management. Do employees want to work with the solution? Are they able to use it correctly? And will they actually use it? Every question has its own tips and best practices. We'll list a few for each of these steps.

Do employees want to work with the solution?

You will only get a positive answer to this question if you have set clear objectives in advance. Inspiring and motivating your employees is key here. And a good story is an excellent tool for this. Where does the organization want to go? And how will this new tool help? The answer to these questions will provide the cornerstones for a clear communication plan.

Tip 1: Launch a marketing campaign

Present your story as an attractive marketing campaign, with its own logo, slogan and original name. Keep in mind that people are at the heart of the project. Choose your slogan and project name based on what you want to achieve with the new tool. Feel free to get your inspiration from other organizations and their change management campaigns.

Tip 2: Stay ahead of the gossip

Digital workplace projects are not always well received: employees can be afraid of the learning curve and they may think that the tool will make their job more difficult, or even obsolete. That's why you need a solid story. Why are we doing this? What impact will the project make? How will it help us to work more efficiently in the future? By thinking about such questions in advance, you can debunk any unjustified criticism from the start.

Tip 3: Share your story through different channels

Once your story is clear, you can gradually share it across the business. The intranet, strategy meetings and receptions are great tools for this. A 'conflict of generations' is often mentioned as the main reason for the failure of change projects. Typically, there are three to five generations working within any organization, each with their own preferred communication channels. If you only share your story digitally, you are likely to miss out on part of your target group. It's much better to use a healthy mix of online and offline channels.

Tip 4: Lead by example

In addition to a good story, getting the management involved is essential to the success of this phase – and all future phases – of the change management project. Management don't only have to communicate the objectives and benefits in a clear manner, they also have to set a good example. So it's important that the senior management has a strong and visible position in the project.

'Setting a good example', however, is not solely the responsibility of the management. You also need to recruit ambassadors and 'power users' amongst the end users, as they will play a major role in the next phase.

Can your employees work with the solution?

This part involves setting up and rolling out an efficient training and education plan for the right target groups. The objective? To ensure that every employee feels like they can work with the new tool relatively easily.

Tip 5: Train the trainer

A tried and tested approach is the ‘train the trainer’ principle, where you choose a number of internal ambassadors or ‘power users’ who will master the tool first. They will then pass on their knowledge to their colleagues. Ambassadors or power users don’t only learn to use the tool themselves, but are also directly involved

in its roll-out. They test the solution and provide feedback in an iterative process. Based on this feedback, you can adjust the project where necessary. This ensures that the needs of the end users always come first.

Tip 6: A clear plan as a yardstick

Once the project has started, it’s important to keep all stakeholders informed about the planning. When will certain tools be rolled out? Which departments will be first in line? A specific deadline will ensure that everyone remains alert and that every user has a healthy sense of urgency.

Will employees actually use the solution?

Innovators and early adopters are your main assets for promoting use in the pilot phase. After that, it is a matter of gradually increasing confidence in the solution by providing continuous support and contact points, and by sharing results. Having an efficient service desk is crucial at this stage.

Tip 7: User training should start from daily activities

Many training courses start from the perspective of the tool itself – “SharePoint training”, “Office 365 training”, etc. A better approach is to use the day-to-day tasks of employees as your starting point – “How do I create new projects, and how do I follow up on them?”. This will immediately link the new solution to concrete efficiency benefits.

You should also tailor the training materials to the role of the specific user as much as possible, because not everyone will need the same features. By focusing on

what the tool can do for specific roles, you shorten the learning curve and increase the chance of a successful learning cycle.

Tip 8: Provide sufficient ‘dedicated’ resources

The introduction and roll-out of a new tool in your organization often requires a great deal of commitment from the parties involved. For certain stakeholders, such as the project manager and the ambassadors, it’s a part-time – or even full-time – job. Research shows that this is one of the most underestimated factors in change management, so it’s important that the management is aware of this.

A possible solution is to provide a (part-time) replacement, or to temporarily outsource some tasks. By providing sufficient time and space, you ensure that the quality of day-to-day work does not suffer during the project.

Change management: a never-ending story

Most issues usually arise shortly after the launch of a new tool, since end users still have to get used to the new way of working and haven't mastered all the details yet. The best approach to this is to collect all of their comments and suggestions, and explain that the feedback will be processed in the next phase. Many issues will no longer be relevant after the initial introduction period.

In this story, it's important to note that the project is not the sole responsibility of the IT department. The management first has to ensure that business takes precedence over technology. As the IT manager you have broad technical knowledge and are in close contact with end users, so you can advise your colleagues about which steps to take.

So again, IT managers play a key role in this context. They are at the crossroads of technology, which is constantly evolving, and the different generations of people, who are constantly entering and leaving the company. Both people and technology are constantly changing, but not at the same speed. Keeping as much of a balance as possible between these two aspects is one of the most important tasks of a visionary IT manager.

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Get started: a short exercise

We admit it. The tips in this blog post are often quite obvious. Change management seems to be a fairly simple matter, at least on paper. And yet... it rarely happens the way it should: rarely on time, rarely to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. So it's not that simple after all.

The following short exercise can help you to break a giant change project down into smaller pieces, and thus make it more manageable.

Rationalize >> Delegate >> Concretize

Rationalizing is about summarizing the essence of the project. What should the new digital workplace make possible, why is this happening, why is it happening now and for whom is it happening? By giving clear answers to these questions, you can set priorities and make it easier to define the required *must-have* and *nice-to-have* actions. As a matter of fact, the key drivers should fit on the back of beer mat.

Delegating involves mapping out who is – or should be – involved in the digital workplace project. Together you'll have to come up with one concise and interesting story: a story that can be understood by everyone, that fits perfectly with the company's vision and mission, and that doesn't beat about the bush. However, each individual stakeholder will also have to play a specific role in the user adoption process. Don't try to do everything yourself!

Concretizing involves drawing up a brief action plan and estimating as precisely as possible what the digital workplace project entails in terms of time, budget and other resources. Do not underestimate the workload for heavy internal profiles, and make sure you have a backup and a plan B. If necessary call in professional external help.

The last tip we would like to share with you is perhaps the easiest: start on time! Bringing stakeholders together, making them happy, creating a story, getting buy-in, adapting the story until it works and sharing it via different channels, and eventually turning it into a success... these are not rush jobs. By starting on time, you'll have the opportunity to look for people who are best qualified to take on a role in the process – both inside and outside of the company.

Contact us

Contact our specialist Digital Workplace for more information about our solution.



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