



5 Essential Strategies for Successfully Implementing Organizational Change in the Construction, Architecture, and Engineering Industries

Competitive business environments and limited financial resources have forced construction, architecture, and engineering organizations to look for ways to improve their project processes, such as by implementing value-based project delivery. Changing processes can be extremely challenging and requires focused change efforts. Because of the difficulty, many organizational change efforts are unsuccessful. Often, the main factor causing the failure is resistance among the organization's personnel. Fortunately, our research has provided insight on how to avoid the pitfalls of change efforts and what strategies increase the likelihood of successfully implementing organizational change in the construction, architecture, and engineering industries.

Training

In a study of eight large public and private organizations in North America, we found that when employees receive training regarding the change initiative, they are more likely to support the implementation of the change. Specifically, personnel who received extensive training on the purpose of the change as well as specific aspects of the change were the most accepting of the change. Those who received no training were the most likely to resist the change.

The training is most effective when provided before the start of the change process is initiated. The ideal training describes step by step how personnel will be expected to carry out the change. The information must be specific to each employee's role, thereby reducing uncertainty and the accompanying resistance to change. The training should also identify how the change will bring long-term benefits to the organization, thereby increasing employees' support of the change initiative.

Change Agents

However, providing formal training is not sufficient to guarantee a change effort will be successful. Organizations also need to select appropriate personnel to be change agents. In fact, in a study of sixteen organizations in the United States and Canada, those that didn't assign change agents experienced four times as much resistance to change.

Change agents should be involved in the daily activities required to achieve the project deliverables related to the change being implemented, thereby increasing accountability and support while also decreasing employee resistance to the change.

Involvement of Frontline Personnel

Employees' job levels also correlate with resistance to or acceptance of change. Executives and supervisors involved in planning and implementing the change were the most supportive of the change, whereas project managers, contracting officers, and other frontline workers were most resistant to change. This resistance might be reduced by involving frontline workers during the change planning, such as by soliciting their feedback on how to implement the change. Frontline workers who appear open to change could be assigned as change agents to rally their peers to support the change.

Realistic Expectations

For change efforts to be successful, organizations must also have realistic expectations. According to our research on sixteen organizations, when companies recognize that change implementation is a long-term program requiring regular employee education, the companies experience seven times less resistance to the change.

Project Size, Duration, and Scope

We found that project size, duration, and scope correlate with resistance to change. Because small, short construction projects prompted the least resistance (compared to projects that were longer, broader, or involved design/engineering or facility services work), they may provide the best opportunities for implementing change initiatives. Of course, other important factors to consider include a project's strategic value and the opportunities the project provides for organizational learning.

Conclusion

Although organizational change is often a crucial strategy for obtaining and maintaining competitive advantage, many companies in the construction, architecture, and engineering industries fail to successfully implement change initiatives. Overcoming employee resistance to change significantly increases the likelihood of achieving organizational change and is possible by implementing employee training, designating change agents, involving frontline personnel in change planning, setting realistic expectations, and selecting an appropriate project to implement the change in.

About Simplar

Through the combined knowledge and experience of the Simplar's team, we provide an array of organizational assessment and process improvement tools to address your organization's unique goals and challenges, delivering exactly what your business needs in order to be successful.