

Getting agility right

Where do you start when creating agility in your workplace? KAREN SKILLINGS reports.

The task for leadership and project teams working to unpack the mystery of an 'agile' workplace project can't be understated; understanding the agile approach can be confusing for them and for their staff. Not only do they need to define the agility, but they also need to learn the best way to remove barriers or roadblocks to these new ways of working.

Understanding the steps to take your fixed workplace to one supporting an agile and dynamic working environment includes knowing that several phases will occur sequentially, while others will run concurrently during your project.

Let's look at what's involved – we start with the lease strategy phase, followed by property procurement, then the change phase, design and fitout and, finally, relocation. In this article, we will touch on all but the relocation phase.

LEASE STRATEGY

To give some perspective of the major milestones to get to an agile workplace, we start with the all-important lease strategy phase, working with the leadership team to define the change required. Looking at all aspects of the business – organisation, technology, people and processes – is critical.

It's important that the looming lease expiry doesn't drive the decision-making; ideally, lease strategy discussions should occur at least six months prior to property procurement commencing and it would be optimal if your property specialist sits in on this engagement piece to understand the direction from the beginning.

The change strategist/manager should also have a seat at the table during this period. This person will work closely with the property team, the external property specialist who is managing the property procurement process and possibly other key members of the project team.

LEADERSHIP WORKSHOPS DEFINING THE CHANGE

In a workshop forum that can be facilitated by the change strategist/manager, the business can reveal viewpoints and aspirations on topics such as location, collaboration, technology, connection, privacy, flexibility, attraction, retention and shareholder profitability.

It's a crucial opportunity for the leadership team to consider and, most importantly, debate their appetites, impressions, current views and ambitions for their business.

As the facilitator, the change strategist/manager can direct the questions and collect the views of the group or individuals. Remember that the themes discussed will help both determine the right site selection and develop a preliminary design brief. This workshop may explore the following:

- *Vision and values* – including enhancing 'well-being at work', building brand and culture, optimising on real estate aspirations and attracting, developing and engaging people.
- *Interactions and potential interactions in the workplace* – including connection, visibility, supporting impromptu discussion/meetings, enhancing the transfer of knowledge in the workplace and transparency with clients and suppliers.
- *Barriers* – including organisational and physical security considerations, policies and other known barriers.
- *Operating efficiencies in the workplace* – including improved internal communications, health and wellness, collaboration and team spirit, and improved utilisation densities.
- *Talent pool: attracting, developing and engaging people* – including proximity to the CBD, work/life balance, a workplace that is interactive and up with the times.

USER REQUIREMENTS WORKSHOPS

Once the site selection is underway, or even when the site is selected, it's time to start assessing the user requirements.

The change strategist/manager and members of your project team now need to capture and define the workplace design objectives for your accommodation project. These must reflect and improve upon the baseline definition of the required scope that was uncovered with the leadership team.

The outcomes of your user requirements may include:

- agile workplace objectives (key measures and intent)
- space budget
- design guidance, and
- possible 'menu of settings' (the type of work settings most suitable to support the way your business needs to work).

COMMUNICATION – GET IT RIGHT, APPOINT YOUR STRATEGIC LEADS

At this point, although there may not be a formal announcement of a change in location, staff will know there is talk of agility in the workplace and changes afoot. Make sure that staff are communicated with quickly and accurately before the lease is signed – don't let them read about it in the press.

There are two major considerations that should be thought through before any announcement by the leadership team:

- get your message right and have the support mechanisms in place for the large amount of traffic from staff wanting to know what the change will mean for them, and
- have your strategic leads appointed and ensure their roles and responsibilities support the communication strategy for the new way of working.

Develop a high-level view of the change and communication strategy and the communication channels that will support it. It's important to document how you will work with the strategic leads, especially the frequency and ways you will deliver the briefings and the aligning of key events.

Introduce the advanced design concepts, posters and schematics to discuss at team meetings and the many stand-ups that will occur at this stage. It is important to get your staff excited and engaged. At this point, you may also be conducting informative site visits to the new building. Even though site visits may create a little disruption, it is not a bad thing to get your staff thinking about how they will be working in the months to come and giving them time to address some of the personal challenges such as childcare arrangements, transportation or working hours.

DELIVERING ON THE CHANGE STRATEGY – EASY AS ONE, TWO, THREE

Creating a new agile workplace includes a great deal of planning, communication and creativity to bring it to life for the leadership team, project team, strategic leads, change champions, managers and all the employees.

Get the definition of your level of agility defined and communicated early, even if the full details are not yet known. Your staff doesn't need to know everything now, they just need to be aware of two key things – that you have the change and communications plan underway and under control, and that the communication channels are open for them to ask questions. This is an optimal time to put

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FAQs and new building pages on your intranet. You need to communicate transparently, at the right frequency, time and in the right way – it's as easy as one, two, three (one: strategic communications, two: key events and three: timings).

The change strategist/manager can add a great deal of value here from a workplace strategy perspective and is essential to help mitigate the common mistakes that project teams make – communicating the change too late and not defining what an agile workplace means to their business.

It is unrealistic to think that you can develop all the workplace principles at once or know what 'a day in the life' of your workforce will look like at the beginning or even six months into your change program to agile, but it is essential that the workplace strategy piece (workshops) is sufficiently undertaken and

that the findings are such that you can adapt them into your new workplace principles.

Some of these principles are agile ways of working, health and wellness, technology enhancements (i.e. wireless to support the agility), building and facilities, pilot testing of new ways and relocation readiness.

But finally, it's very important not to sell agility in the workplace as an operating efficiency. Remember with a sensitive project, such as moving from a fixed to an agile workplace, it is far more favourable for your staff to hear the message of more choice, greater opportunities and working flexibility, rather than selling the message on floor space and real estate efficiencies.

The key communication is to inform your staff of choice and flexibility to suit their working needs on a day-to-day basis.

I hope this helps with your preliminary thinking about agility in your workplace and how you would go about it. The next article in this series will look at moving to agility in the workplace without moving premises. ●

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