



Advisory



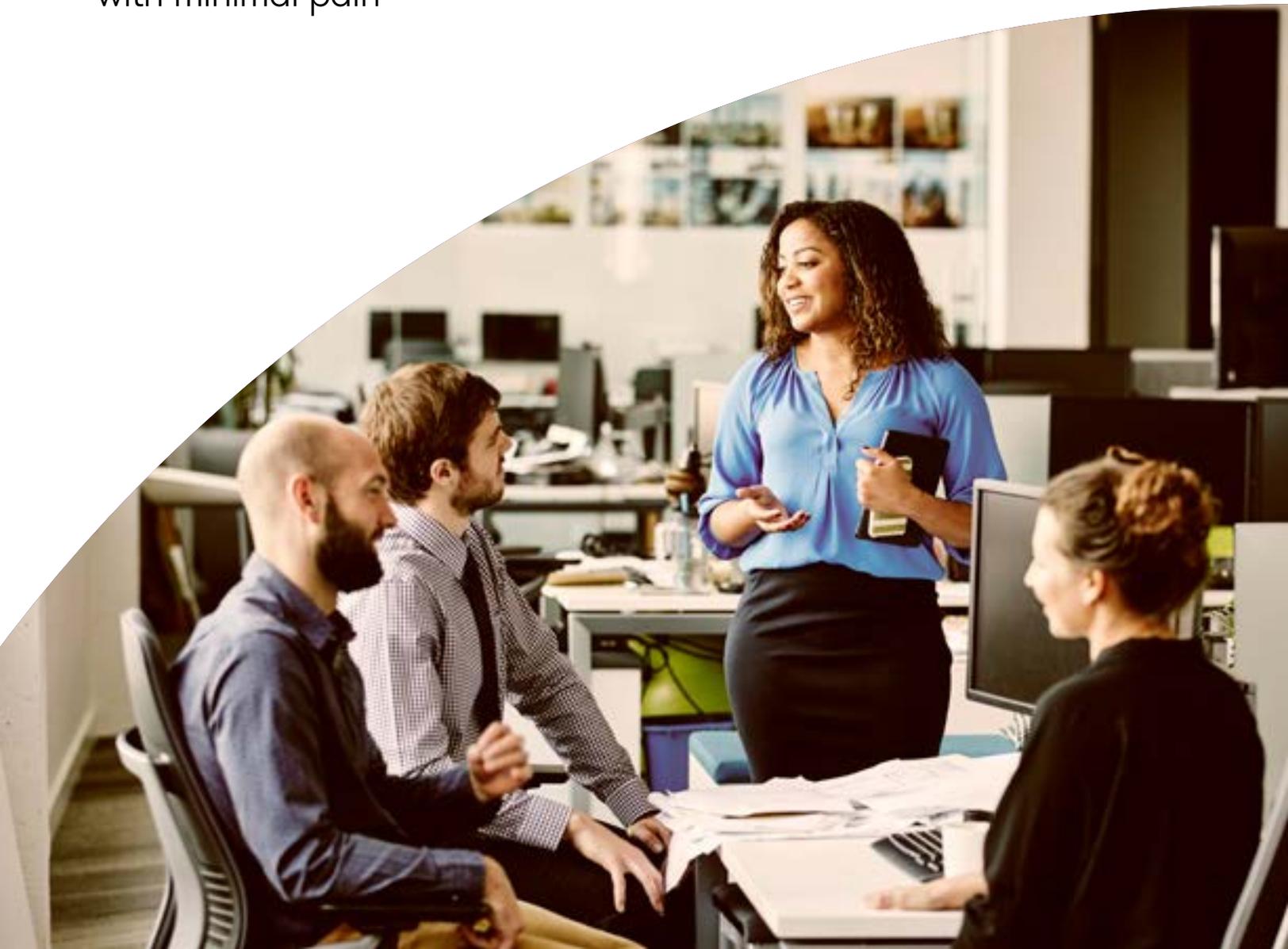
Strategy



Growth

# How to get employees to embrace new strategy

Successfully changing course while ensuring your strategies are well-executed, with minimal pain



To compete better or even survive, organizations need to master the art and science of change management. Unfortunately, most fall down here, resulting in poor execution, missed opportunities and blown budgets. Why do organizations sometimes fail at getting their people to embrace new strategy? Failure has many fathers and mothers. At the top of the list is weak and inconsistent leadership; a lack of alignment around strategy; ineffective performance measurement systems; and a poorly articulated “why do this” from the business and employee’s perspective. Fortunately, there are some best practices to improve the odds of success.

In general, it is vital to get leadership on the same strategy, resource and timing page as quickly as possible, including widespread buy-in of difficult strategic and investment choices. A lack of strategic congruence up front or on an ongoing basis may require a leadership change or strategic resetting.

Employee buy-in needs to come before execution, up at the strategy and planning level. If you don’t have buy-in at implementation, the change initiative will likely be compromised. During implementation, the leadership and next-level down managers should regularly reinforce the objectives/goals of the desired and agreed strategy, as well as reinforce the “why.”



During the implementation phase, it is vital that all managers “talk the change talk, and walk the change walk.” Finally, management need to make sure their employees (and supporting external partners) have the tools, resources and time to execute their strategy through their roles. There will likely be resistance, and often for understandable reasons, such as poor communications or conflicting day-to-day priorities. Resistance should be dealt quickly, transparently and directly with the individuals and teams involved.

Resistance at senior levels is more problematic, as it may be indicative of major strategic misalignments or significant in-fighting. In any event, all change initiatives should be tailored to the specific characteristics and circumstances of each organization. There are many ways to keep people from reverting back to the old way of doing things. We like to redesign the job, process or environment so that the employee has no choice but to change. One common way to make change stick is to adjust the performance measurement and compensation plans to reinforce the desired change. Finally, effective leadership is about ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of the employees, so a compelling vision for strategic change is de rigueur. Creating a sense of urgency, having a realistic change plan, plus a powerful “why” has been proven to foster long term painless change. To make this happen, organizations should heed these lessons:

- Connect inspiring and strategic leadership with effective, pragmatic and consistent management (during implementation).
- Ensure the change effort is sustained throughout the entire process, not just a flurry of hype and effort up front.
- Guarantee that the requisite management systems, such as budgeting, performance measurement and knowledge management, are supportive of the desired change.

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*This piece first appeared in OnBoard, Toronto Region Board of Trade’s quarterly magazine. Click [here](#) to read the issue.*

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