

### CHANGE MANAGEMENT



# Culture at heart of change management

By Liz Bernier

For TSSA's  
change  
management  
strategy,  
it was  
first piece  
of the  
puzzle

**W**hen an organization is implementing strategic change, it's not enough to scribble down a change management framework and call it a day.

It has to be embedded in the culture — and it has to permeate all levels of the organization, according to Michael Beard, president and CEO of the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA), a not-for-profit firm that is accountable to the Ontario government.

Three years ago, TSSA — which has about 400 employees across the province — began the journey of implementing a change management strategy.

“We knew as an organization that, strategically, we would be implementing changes that would be taking the organization to different places than where it was and where it (had) come from,” said Beard. “So what we really needed was a solid understanding of what it would take to actually achieve that strategy... and we knew that we couldn't do that just by writing it on a piece of paper.”

It knew it would never be successful without a solid infusion of change management into the organization's culture — so that's exactly what TSSA set out to do.

Partnering with Orchange, a Toronto-based learning and consulting firm specializing in building change management capabilities, TSSA identified a key sponsor from within senior leadership, designed a change management strategy, and started the rollout from the top down.

#### **Initial challenges**

Among the first things Orchange did was calculate a change management (CM) score — a metric based on information from focus groups, interviews with key stakeholders, and observation.

“We basically made an assessment of where they were,” said Edmond Mellina, president of Orchange.

That initial assessment ranked TSSA at a lower starting point than anyone expected, said Beard.

“So what was needed was obviously a significant ramp-up, which we saw materialize in the next survey... it was a bit of a tough start for us, but I think by being committed and dedicated, it paid off.”

The assessment also identified some initial challenges TSSA faced in terms of managing change. One of those challenges was with the natural resistance to the people side of change that can be somewhat stronger in very technically oriented organizations, said Mellina.

“The folks working in the organization, they are engineers, inspectors — so it’s a highly technical organization. So coming in, we expected that these would probably be folks that will be challenged with the people side of change.”

As expected, many in the organization were very good with the technical side of things, but cultural change was the real challenge, said Beard.

### Breaking down silos

One of the key challenges TSSA faced was a silo mentality, said Beard.

“These silos materialize through the manifestation of management structure, et cetera,” he said. “What’s been very, very satisfying to see within our culture is a breaking down of those silos.”

Initially, there had been a very strong “us versus them” mindset, said Mellina — particularly from employees in the field (who are spread across Ontario) toward head office in Toronto.

“So the first us versus them mindset that we found was ‘us, the field’ and ‘them, head office,’” he said. “The other aspect of the us versus them mindset was ‘us, employees’ and front-line management, versus ‘them, management.’”

This kind of culture is a significant problem when it comes to change management because it does not promote the kind of partnership necessary to promote change, said Mellina.

“We need to turn this us versus them mindset into ‘us, all together, versus the

challenge of change,” he said.

Another challenge TSSA had to overcome was the “ghosts from the past” — past change initiatives that had not gone that smoothly.

“When we started to ask people, employees, leaders at different levels to tell us about past change initiatives, it was very emotional. And they had a lot of examples of changes that were not properly done from a change management standpoint... this had left a huge bitter taste in peoples’ mouths,” said Mellina. “So you start with a very big bed of resistance right away.”

### Building up the toolkit

Addressing this initial resistance took more than just a couple of training sessions, said Beard.

“The actual change itself... really needs some solid and measurable activities. You can put everybody in a room for a day, you can put lots of PowerPoints up, lots of fun exercises, and everyone goes back the next day, back to their old jobs, and it doesn’t change anything in the way that they work,” he said.

So Orchange suggested TSSA take an existing change project — in this case, the Field Support Service (FSS) initiative — and use it to apply and demonstrate the change management principles and tools, said Beard.

The FSS initiative meant centralizing some services, like dispatch, which many inspectors had originally managed independently, said Mellina.

“You can imagine the kind of resistance that they were getting from the field,” he said. “So what we did is, we put a very strong focus on this initiative... we rolled out an advanced action learning (program) for the project team in charge of the Field Support Services. And because we wanted to break down the us versus them mentality... we put change agents in the program.”

These change agents included inspectors from the field who were respected and influential among their peers.

As the learning program progressed, the employees really began to work as a team, said Beard.

“As folks are exposed to the various change management tools, a lot of it starts making sense to them because they and management are talking the same language, they have the same key words, they have

the same sort of vocabulary that completely synthesizes what we’re trying to do,” he said.

“We were demonstrating very clearly... there were practical benefits that were being derived from this.”

### Culture shift

At the heart of TSSA’s success was the shift that took place in the culture, said Beard.

“Culture is so much a part of change management. Change management is not a discipline learnt — it’s absolutely a cultural component in an organization,” he said.

“When you’re implementing change, very often mistakes can be made. The culture in the organization has to permit those mistakes to be made, it has to not punish people for making mistakes — otherwise they’re not going to try the things that they need to.”

Buy-in from the senior leadership team is the key to success, said Mellina — but change management can’t be limited to the C-suite or a centralized change management function.

“The only way you can succeed with change management and overcome these challenges is if effective change management becomes everyone’s responsibility,” he said.

“An organization becomes good at managing change when everybody is really working actively as partners in change. And we’ve seen that happening over the past three years when we’ve trained all the managers, all the leaders, the project teams, the change agents — we could see that now they are using the same tools, the same vocabulary, the same frame of reference.”

Another key consideration for TSSA was around making employees feel a sense of empowerment, said Beard.

“One of the things that culturally we wanted to change was the whole concept of empowering folks to do more. But putting the right little decisions in the right place, people obviously feel more empowered, it’s good for employee engagement, it’s good for (achieving) success — it’s good for everything,” he said.

For TSSA, there’s still work to be done — they’ve currently completed three of four stages in the change management capability building, said Mellina.

“We are getting better,” he said. “But you need to keep raising the bar — that is really the next chapter in the journey.”