



Reimagining Workplace Change

A national clothing retailer was renovating its 400,000 square-foot headquarters when the company quickly realized that it needed more than a physical space transformation. It also needed to foster a workplace culture conveying energy, creativity, and innovation. With 3,500 employees and their difficulty coping with change, that would be no small task.

Originally designed in the early 1990s, the HQ campus was outdated and didn't support modern workplace activities or real estate standards. However, updating the facility without causing a significant dip in employee productivity was a significant challenge. The company's Vice President of Real Estate best summed up the issue at hand by asking, "Can Haworth help us embrace a new way of working, provide a way for all of our employees to be part of the process, have a real say in the furniture solution, and help us embrace this change?"

"Always remember that you are building not just a business, but a community."

—Client Founder

First Steps

First, Haworth set out to determine what a "new way of working" would be for our client. Looking to the quote from the company's founder for inspiration, Haworth began listening to everyone's needs to redesign the work process to support the most critical issues:

- Employee workstyles
- Client culture
- Client business vision

Embracing the client's history and listening to issues was important, but equally important was challenging the client to see the differences between the workplace of today and the workplace of the 90s. Realizing those differences allowed for a quick understanding of the client's culture and became the foundation for new strategies.

Haworth and the project team could see that employees were hesitant and did not understand how changes would impact them. Fortunately, our client embraced a change management plan that involved open-forum discussions, town hall meetings, internal web communications, videos, and testing workplace product solutions. The resulting feedback ultimately refined the furniture solution to properly support our client's culture.

Not just listening, but letting the employees know their opinions were heard was key to moving toward a new workplace. It was critical that our client empowered everyone on the team to balance each decision with the company's business vision. How could our client tell all employees that it heard their unique concerns and that the new furniture solution would support how they worked?

“We wanted to use all the great resources we had at our disposal (through Haworth), but needed direction as to what and how to move forward and how to communicate the information. I felt strongly that we had to find a way for all employees to have a say in their future and to help eliminate any concerns that employees had about the new workplace.”

—Client Vice President of Real Estate

The Employee Customer Experience Center

Haworth’s Workplace Strategists worked with the client’s project team and internal graphics team to design an Experience Center—a furniture mockup unlike any other. We wanted employees to see their future environment and give direct feedback about the proposed solution through online surveys.

More than 3,500 employees were invited to the Experience Center over a five-day period. All employees were personally welcomed to the Experience Center by the client’s project team, who explained how these changes affected each employee and the client. They were invited to experience the new mock workplace, including all colors and finishes; new lighting options; and renderings of future amenity spaces. Multiple full-sized furniture vignettes showed each department their own proposed solution. Hands-on testing was encouraged for notable items such as height-adjustable tables and storage options.

Through this interaction, employees saw how different furniture configurations supported different work styles; sat in the new ergonomic seating (Haworth Fern); and tried the open collaboration solutions.



This Experience Center also featured an “Issue Wall,” which presented the main topics discovered through town hall meetings and emails to the project team. The wall proved a fun way to remember the issues, allowed employees to understand that they were heard during this process, and assured them that the issues were being addressed. Quotes from the client’s founder about change and how the business had to evolve were also notably visible to reinforce the need for change.



Each employee was asked to provide input via quick online surveys. The information collected became the starting point for refining the furniture design while validating the amenities that met employees’ expectations.

“I believe this was the best interaction we could have done. It allowed employees to experience the space, with updated carpet, lighting, and furniture. We saw people sitting at the workstations and envisioning how they would use the space, where they would put their personal items, habits they would need to alter, etc.”

—Client Change Communications Lead

End Results

Based on the survey responses received from the Experience Center, an overwhelming majority of employees were positive-to-neutral about the proposed space changes. This helps to confirm that employees were seeing the changes as a good thing. By involving employees in changes, asking for their feedback, listening, and keeping them informed, our client was able to help mitigate any resulting apprehension, uncertainty, and stress within their workforce.

Survey Responses

91% of employees were positive/neutral about the changes.

Employees were most excited about:

- 76% Sit-to-Stand Desks
- 73% New Seating
- 60% Improved Wireless Technology
- 56% Access to Natural Daylight/Views
- 48% Amenity Spaces

Only 9% were concerned with the new solution. Adjustments were made for these people to solve for their unique and special workstyles.

Change is often one of the most undervalued aspects of a project. In fact, disruption is considered the norm on many project schedules. However, time spent dealing with change takes employees away from day-to-day business operations and can be very costly. Research has shown that implementing a change program helps employees return to a productive state much faster.¹ Our client understood that the key to success is not only productivity, but also making its teams of people the best they can be. It was vital to include everyone as a part of the transformation.

Reference

1. Nauheimer, H. "Taking stock. A survey on the practice and future of change management." *Organizational Development* 24, no. 2 (2005): 81-83.



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Brad is an architect who specializes in high-performance workplace strategies. He is a key link in leading global clients through research data interpretation and analysis, to help shape and give form to viable strategies and design solutions. He provides transformational change and works with clients to translate their organizations' cultures and business visions into overall space concept strategies, and to align project teams toward a common vision.

Haworth Workplace Strategists connect links between workspace design and human behavior, health, performance, and the quality of the user experience. We share and apply what we learn to inform product development and help our customers shape their work environments. To learn more about this topic or other research resources that Haworth provides, visit www.haworth.com.