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Operational Readiness Can't Wait: How to Prepare Your Workforce

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Looking beyond the technology

Warehouse automation and software solutions have become essential to staying competitive. With evolving customer expectations, tight labor markets and growing throughput demands, automation helps supply chains increase speed, accuracy and efficiency while controlling costs. In fact, because of these significant impacts, the global warehouse automation market is projected to grow at a 15.9% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) through 2034.[1]

But technology alone isn't a silver bullet. The true success of an automation project often comes down to one critical factor that is commonly overlooked: employee adoption. Implementing new systems isn't just about integrating advanced technology. Successful implementations ensure that the people affected by the changes understand, accept and embrace them.

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[1] https://www.gminsights.com/industry-analysis/warehouse-automation-market

In this Insight, we explore why many organizations fall short in change management and share strategies for creating a transformation plan that drives operational excellence, a positive work environment and a strong return on investment (ROI).

What is change management?

Change is constant for today's supply chain leaders. Consumer expectations shift overnight, global events cause disruptions and new technologies continuously redefine what's possible. Even though expected, change is rarely easy.

Humans are wired to resist change. We're comfortable with familiar routines, which is why a structured approach to change management is so important.

Change management is the strategic process of guiding people through transitions, aligning strategy, communication, training and leadership to minimize disruption and maximize adoption. Its purpose is to reduce fear of the unknown by providing clarity, purpose and a plan.

When workers experience change, they often move through stages of excitement, skepticism, frustration and acceptance. Effective change management helps navigate those emotions by ensuring every team member feels informed, supported and a part of the journey.

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Why so many organizations get it wrong

Despite the best intentions, many automation projects fall short of their potential because of common change management gaps.

1. Chasing the wrong finish line
Too often, companies treat "go-live" as their finish line. Implementation is clearly a major milestone, but it's not the end goal. Real success is measured by adoption, when employees fully embrace and utilize the technology correctly as part of daily operations. Your go-live date is just one stage in a much larger automation journey. From strategy and design to implementation, training and continuous improvement, each phase plays a critical role in achieving lasting results.

The most successful organizations approach automation as an ongoing evolution, where learning, optimization and change management drive long-term performance gains.

2. Taking a task-based approach instead of a people-first approach
When projects focus solely on the technical rollout, they miss the human side of transformation. The emphasis is often placed on getting systems live, completing workflows and crossing off tasks, without ensuring that the people who will use the technology are engaged, trained and confident.

Leaders should focus on how automation benefits their teams, such as its reduction in repetitive, physically demanding work, improving safety and freeing employees to contribute at a higher level with more engaging, value-added responsibilities. When teams understand why the change is happening and how it makes their jobs better, they are far more likely to embrace new ways of working.

One study found that 72% of failed transformations were due to inadequate management support for the changes and employee resistance.[2] A people-first approach ensures the workforce evolves alongside technology with the support they need.

3. Treating change management as an afterthought
Change management should not be a reactive measure. To reduce employee resistance, it needs to be built in from the very beginning. With today's shrinking labor pools and competitive pressures, organizations can't afford a slow adoption curve. Delays in reaching the desired levels of performance can impact customer satisfaction, put growth at risk and impact your bottom line.

By taking a proactive approach, you can assess your team's capabilities and identify gaps to ensure everyone is prepared to succeed. Focus on developing in-house experts who are future-ready and embracing change. It's important to have a unified path forward before changes take place.

[2] https://daniellock.com/change-management-statistics/

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Best practices for successful change management and adoption

The organizations that achieve sustained success are those that embed change management into every stage of the automation journey. The key to a successful implementation is ensuring operational readiness to navigate transformational change.

At FORTNA, we help you identify gaps that could slow progress and develop a performance-based culture, with leaders trained and proficient to achieve and sustain results. The following best practices highlight how our experts help build alignment, foster adoption and drive measurable results across your operations.

1. Define a clear strategy
From the very beginning, leaders should define what success looks like by establishing a vision for automation that aligns with business goals and employee well-being. This ensures everyone understands why changes are happening and how they contribute to broader objectives.

That vision should be translated into actionable goals that connect outcomes to key performance indicators (KPIs), workforce impacts and process improvements. Consider how new systems will affect daily workflows, decision making and performance expectations across roles.

A proactive, well-defined strategy anticipates challenges before they arise. It sets the foundation not just for successful go-live but for sustainable performance and continuous improvement long after implementation. Research shows that organizations using structured change management and training programs achieve 50% faster time-to-value versus those that do not.[3]

2. Engage stakeholders early and often
Engaging stakeholders early helps build understanding, ownership and trust across all levels of the organization. By involving employees in the planning process, leaders can surface valuable insights, address concerns before they become barriers and create a shared sense of purpose around the transformation.

It's important to get alignment to collectively understand the opportunities and obstacles to create a united path forward.

- **Leadership alignment:** Several departments, including Operations, HR and IT, must work together to align objectives, timing, training and communication strategies. When departments collaborate and speak with one voice, employees receive consistent messages about the new changes and how they will improve both business performance and day-to-day work.

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[3] https://iaeme.com/MasterAdmin/Journal_uploads/IJITMIS/VOLUME_16_ISSUE_1/IJITMIS_16_01_088.pdf

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- **Visible leadership:** Managers should actively champion change on the floor, demonstrating commitment and reinforcing priorities through their actions. Their presence signals that the transformation is a shared journey, not a top-down mandate.

- **Change champions:** Appointing change champions within the workforce can also make a powerful difference. These influential team members model adoption, share success stories and provide peer-to-peer encouragement that helps normalize new ways of working.

When employees see leadership commitment and feel that their voices are valued, resistance gives way to engagement. Trust grows, momentum builds and adoption accelerates, turning automation from a technology project into a true organizational transformation.

3. Communicate clearly and consistently

Communication is the backbone of successful change management. Clear, transparent communication helps employees understand how changes will directly impact them. Leaders should consistently explain three elements:

- **What is changing:** Outline specific systems, processes or roles affected by automation. Focus on what employees will experience in their work.

- **Why it's happening:** Connect the change to the broader strategy.

- **How it benefits employees and the organization:** Reinforce how automation reduces repetitive tasks, minimizes physical strain and creates opportunities for more meaningful, value-added work.

Transparency builds trust. Be upfront with expectations, training timelines and potential challenges so teams feel informed and prepared. Maintain consistency in messaging across departments to prevent confusion and establish open communication channels for feedback.

4. Invest in comprehensive training
Training is one of the most critical and underestimated elements of change management. Even the most advanced automation technology can only deliver value if the people using it feel equipped, confident and supported.

Provide hands-on instructions tailored to each role, ensuring employees understand how to effectively use the technology and how it benefits their work. Tailored training ensures that warehouse operators, supervisors, maintenance teams and managers each understand the specific ways automation will enhance their responsibilities and improve performance.

Ongoing development and easy access to resources build confidence, reduce errors and strengthen engagement. As processes evolve and new capabilities are introduced, continuous learning opportunities help sustain adoption and keep skills sharp. Comprehensive training empowers teams to unlock the full potential of automation, driving measurable impacts.

5. Measure, monitor and adapt
Automation brings new visibility into performance through real-time data analytics. Use data to measure progress, track adoption and make continuous improvements. Regular feedback loops help identify challenges early and fine-tune processes.

Establish clear KPIs across teams. In addition to tracking how the changes are improving throughput and accuracy, include indicators of workforce alignment, such as system utilization rates. These metrics reveal how well employees are adapting to new tools and processes, helping leaders identify where additional support or communication may be needed.

Use insights from your software system data and employee feedback to fine-tune workflows, update training and optimize performance. Organizations that continuously measure, learn and adapt turn automation into a dynamic capability that evolves with their business needs.

6. Celebrate and recognize success

Recognition goes a long way in sustaining momentum. As teams work through the challenges of implementing and adopting new automation systems, acknowledging their progress and achievements keeps momentum high and reinforces the value of the transformation.

Celebrate milestones, highlight team wins and showcase how new systems are making a difference. Incorporate these into company meetings or internal communications to show how individual and collective efforts are moving the organization forward. It builds morale, reinforces commitment and creates proof points for future initiatives.

Storytelling is especially impactful. Share real examples of how automation improves workflows, increases safety and creates more engaging, value-added work. When employees can see and relate to those stories, it transforms abstract metrics into meaningful proof that the change is making a difference.

Recognition also helps build advocacy for future initiatives. When employees feel appreciated and proud of their contributions, they become champions for continued improvement and innovation. That enthusiasm and buy-in can ripple through the organization, making each new phase of automation easier to implement and more successful.

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Sustaining change for resilient distribution operations

Remember, change management doesn't stop at implementation. It's the foundation for long-term success. Sustaining transformation requires consistent reinforcement, continuous learning and a culture that embraces innovation. Facilities that provide accessible training, clear communication and on-demand support see faster adoption, higher performance and a stronger ROI.

By empowering employees to understand, use and maintain automation technologies, organizations create a more resilient workforce that can adapt quickly. Fortunately, you don't have to navigate this on your own. Strong partnerships play a crucial role in approaching and sustaining change.

At FORTNA, we don't just hand over the keys at implementation. We collaborate closely with our customers to go beyond design and deployment, helping them plan for the human side of transformation. Through structured change management, tailored training and continuous improvement strategies, we ensure that technology and people evolve together to create smarter, more resilient distribution operations for years to come.

The most successful operations recognize that automation is only as powerful as the change management strategies that support it. Taking a proactive, people-first approach to change management sets your facility up to execute and meet future requirements as your business grows.

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FORTNA CAN HELP

Our team partners with organizations at every stage of the journey. We combine deep operational expertise with proven change management methodologies to help teams embrace new ways of working, sustain momentum and achieve measurable results.

Contact us today at **www.FORTNA.com**