



## **ECLC Executive Brief**

# **Placement of Change Management CoEs in Organizations**

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**The Executive Council for Leading Change (ECLC) assembled a roundtable of seasoned executives to dig into the topic of Placement of Change Management CoEs in Organizations**

In today's dynamic corporate landscape, the effective management of change is crucial for organizations seeking to stay innovative, front of mind, and competitive. Establishing a change management Center of Excellence (CoE) within an organization can significantly bolster its ability to navigate and implement change successfully. This executive brief dives into the key considerations for placing a Change Management CoE within the organizational structure, strategies for emphasizing its effectiveness, and common challenges faced by senior executives who are leading change. By understanding and addressing these factors, organizations can enhance their capability to manage change and ensure its seamless integration across teams.

# Roundtable Participants

Date of Roundtable  
**July 17th, 2024.**

Led by **Brittany Gunter**  
Chapter Lead of ECLC



**Abigail Ward**  
Head of Change Management  
**Elevance Health**



**Alessandro Prieto**  
Senior Director, HR North America Lead  
**Analog Devices**



**Awais Farooq**  
SVP, Strategy & Transformation  
**Crawford & Company**



**CK Taneja**  
Senior Vice President  
Enterprise Resiliency  
**Northern Trust Corporation**



**Connie Klimko**  
Transformation Leader  
**Siemens Energy**



**Danielle Clifford**  
Head of Business Transformation,  
Strategy Execution Team  
**Farmers Insurance**



**Dustin Caldwell**  
Director Strategy & Transformation -  
Head of Change Management  
**UPS**



**Jeffrey Barth**  
Head of Digital Transformation  
Office and Strategic Program  
Management Office  
**Gap**



**Kassie Brown**  
Senior Change Leader, Security  
Business Operations  
**ServiceNow**



**Lauren Knudsen**  
Chief Transformation Officer  
**Broadcom**



**Laurie Ditch**  
Sr. Director, Organizational  
Strategy and Operations  
**iMerit**



**Ted Nevins**  
Senior Director, Communications  
**Travelers**

## Key Questions Answered

- ? **Where in your organization have you found the most effective placement** for a Change Management CoE, and why?
- ? **What approaches have you implemented** to ensure your Change Management CoE is fully integrated into the organization's overall strategy and operations?
- ? **What are the biggest challenges you've faced** in establishing or maintaining a Change Management CoE?
- ? **What best practices have you implemented** to overcome challenges and ensure the success of your CoE?

# The Placement of Existing Change Management CoEs

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**ECLC members were asked to define where their change management CoE is positioned in their current organization, resulting in a wide range of answers.**

Some had their own Transformation or Strategy Office while others were located as a function of a larger department, such as HR, Product, or Operations. Some had a centralized team that worked directly under them; others had a decentralized team, with units in key departments where large transformations usually occur. The range in the structure of current change management CoEs demonstrates the thought that there is no one size fits all approach to change leadership and that a company's culture and structure are a more likely predictor of the shape a CoE will form over time.

# 4 Considerations when Building or Growing a Change Management CoE

## Placement

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**Different benefits can be gleaned** when change management CoEs are placed within certain departments. When it is an arm to an HR department, change management CoEs often have more buy-in from senior leadership and can lead change more easily across an organization. However, under HR, change management CoEs run the risk of not having the right experts on their team, people who speak the language of the department that they are working with and who understands the ins & outs of that particular team. If needed changes are tied to one department over another, Jeffrey Barth pointed out that the logical home of change management CoEs should be where the right skill sets are found. As such, it might be more valuable to have change management CoEs within those departments or having a strong decentralized unit of employees within those departments that act as change ambassadors.

## Decentralized vs. Centralized

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It might be easier to bring all change leaders and advocates within one CoE, as employees that work directly for the CoE can dedicate a lot more time on the progress of ongoing change initiatives. Dustin Caldwell highlighted that it's often critical to have a **designated, central transformation office**, to draw enough attention and clout within large organizations. However, **this might not be possible in small to even lean, larger organizations**, as headcount must be justified and protected over time. If change CoEs are decentralized, excellent communication between the different units of the CoE becomes critically important, to coordinate efforts and work well in tandem.

## Metrics

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To demonstrate the vital operations of change management CoEs and to grow their resources over time, Connie Klimko highlighted the need to **determine KPIs or OKRs that best represent the progress of change initiatives**, in terms that the right departments and the right senior stakeholders will understand & value. This creates a flywheel effect where metrics create more accountability, more accountability creates better results, and better results are highlighted by the tracked metrics.

## Buy-in

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Certain companies are more sales-focused, product-focused, or marketing-focused than others. It's important to **consider which departments are more important within a company's culture** and see how a change management CoE can coexist within that department harmoniously (or working closely with it). It's also important to consider which business processes are more mission critical than others: Dustin Caldwell pointed out that optimizing the right business processes helps to create more organization-wide accountability around the adoption of changes and aids in increasing the resources of growing change management CoEs.

# 5 Successful Approaches for Highlighting the Effectiveness of Change Management CoEs

## Global to Regional

Large organizations often struggle with their **ability to make large-scale, global changes that can be implemented regionally**. To counter this, Jeffrey Barth explained how change management CoEs can improve local implementation by working directly with the teams in question and creating a templated approach to change. That is, an overarching, general plan on what the change will look like is created, with enough wiggle room left in the plan for smaller, localized iterations. This lets local employees fill in the blanks and feel ownership over new initiatives.

## Premortems

Before starting a change initiative, Dustin Caldwell pointed out the importance of **bringing in senior executives to ask them for their thoughts on important aspects of a change**, like determining the different ways a change initiative could fail. This helps in achieving more senior leadership buy-in, more visibility on important initiatives, and also makes them more invested in the outcome of the change. This buy-in, according to Kassie Brown, is key to showing that change management CoEs are there not to slow operations down but to implement important optimizations in key processes.

## Cross-Department Collaboration

CK Taneja brought up that each department runs their operations differently and so departments sometimes fear the intervention of change management CoEs within 'their affairs'. That's where it becomes important that change management CoEs **educate other departments about what their work truly entails** and stress that they are there to help support necessary changes & bolster successes across the organization. A good sign of cross-departmental collaboration, according to Alessandro Prieto, would be when change management CoEs are brought into new projects earlier or at the very beginning of another department's newest change initiative.

## Humanizing Change

Senior change leaders are often very aware that change leadership isn't simply about explaining new processes or procedures to a workforce; it's about **equipping humans to navigate these changes**. Connie Klimko explained that change management CoEs are there to share the gamut of change leadership best practices, making sure that the implementation of change initiatives doesn't forget the all too human aspect of adopting changes: resistance to change, fear of identity loss or job loss, etc.

## Dialing Back Change

With ever-emerging technological advances and market shifts, the pressure is on for companies to adapt and remain competitive in their respective industries. However, the departments within these companies need the right amount of time and bandwidth to fully adopt changes. Laurie Ditch pointed out that this is where change management CoEs can shine, by **equalizing changes amongst different teams and departments**. Change leaders can dial back new initiatives from overloaded teams and push forward with change-ready, beta groups. As such, centralized change management CoEs have better visibility into the workings of different departments and can more aptly reduce the risk of change fatigue.

# 3 Common Challenges Faced by CoEs and How to Overcome Them

## Doing over Documenting

With most corporations focusing on quantifying and driving results, it can be difficult for change management CoEs to **carve out enough time to properly document their processes**. Without proper documentation, time is wasted starting new but similar initiatives from scratch, forgetting important points that should have been considered, and repeating previous mistakes. Danielle Clifford expressed that, for change leadership teams to run effectively, they need enough time to document their processes and also teach other departments how to run change effectively.

## Crisis Management over Change Management

When new changes aren't brought to the attention of the change management CoE, they are often met with important challenges which then leads the change management CoEs being **brought in very late in the change process**. Alessandro Prieto pointed out that, while it might be possible to salvage the situation and make the change happen, this complexifies the work of change leaders and reduces the possibility of a successful outcome for all involved. That's where educating different departments on what change leaders can do is vital. Change leaders can assist in more than just organization-wide changes like mergers and acquisitions; they can assist in all sorts of departmental changes like the adoption of new softwares or processes.

## Slow to Change but Impatient

If attention spans and patience have decreased over time, this hasn't translated into corporate changes being adopted any faster. Dustin Caldwell pointed out that it's important for key stakeholders to understand that a change that takes a few months to implement can take a whole year to be fully adopted. Connie Klimko agreed, pointing out that organizations **must choose if they want to pay now (by doing the legwork) or pay later with interest (by risking the adoption of change initiatives)**. That's where educating important stakeholders on how change initiatives truly work is vital to making sure that everyone is on the same page.

# 5 Notable Quotes from the Roundtable

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With change initiatives, it's important to slow down to go faster. You need to align your key stakeholders, clarify and highlight your target pain points, and make the progress of your change initiative trackable.



**Laurie Ditch**  
Sr. Director, Organizational Strategy and Operations | **iMerit**

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Too often, corporate change is approached theoretically or from a project management lens. It's important to not forget the people aspect of change.



**Connie Klimko**  
Transformation Leader | **Siemens Energy**

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When implementing organization-wide changes regionally, it's better to have a templated, adaptable approach. That way, you aren't working from scratch but you aren't also wrongly assuming that one size fits all.



**Jeffrey Barth**  
Head of Digital Transformation Office and Strategic Program Management Office | **Gap**

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Change management shouldn't be crisis management. Change leaders need to be brought in early so that organizations can avoid the common issues that make change initiatives fail.



**Alessandro Prieto**  
Senior Director, HR North America Lead | **Analog Devices**

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Change initiatives are more successful if change happens within an organization organically. It needs to be part of the corporate strategy and with the same change management processes that work within that particular organization.



**Ted Nevins**  
Senior Director, Communications | **Travelers**

## Conclusion

The insights derived from this ECLC roundtable discussion underscore the significance of strategically positioning Change Management CoEs within organizations. From considering the placement within specific departments to balancing centralized and decentralized models, and securing executive buy-in, this executive brief provides important factors for establishing and building successful CoEs. By addressing common challenges and highlighting successful approaches, organizations and change management CoEs can better navigate the complexities of change, ensuring that transformation efforts are both impactful and sustainable.



# The Executive Council for Leading Change

The Executive Council for Leading Change (ECLC) is a global organization that brings executives together to redefine the landscape of organizational change and transformation. Our council's aim is to advance strategic leadership expertise in the realm of corporate change by connecting visionary leaders. It's a place where leaders responsible for significant change initiatives can collaborate, plan, and create practical solutions for intricate challenges in leading large organizations through major shifts.

**In a world where change is constant, we recognize its crucial role in driving business success.**

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**ECLC's mission is to create a community where leaders can excel in guiding their organizations through these dynamic times.**

## Interested in joining ECLC?

Learn the membership criteria and sign-up here



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