Thought Leadership

BARKERS COMMERCIAL CONSULTANCY

Change management in procurement: Best practices for successful procurement transformation

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Successful procurement transformation is rarely defined by the technology an organisation chooses alone. It is defined by how effectively people adapt to new ways of working.

Whether you're introducing a new procure-to-pay (P2P) platform or modernising procurement processes, lasting change depends on securing stakeholder support and embedding new ways of working across the organisation from the beginning.

This is why change management in procurement is such a critical part of any transformation programme. Organisations that invest in structured change management are more likely to achieve sustainable improvements because new ways of working become embedded across the organisation instead of being introduced in isolation.

This is particularly important when implementing enterprise procurement platforms such as Coupa, where user adoption, process alignment and effective stakeholder engagement are critical to achieving long-term value.

Why change management matters in procurement

Procurement rarely operates in isolation. Any change to procurement processes is likely to affect finance, operational teams and senior decision-makers. New systems often change how information is shared, how approvals are managed and how suppliers are engaged.

Without a structured approach to procurement change management, even well-planned transformation programmes can lose momentum. Employees may be uncertain about new processes or reluctant to move away from familiar ways of working. Inconsistent adoption across departments can also reduce the value of technology investments and make it difficult to achieve the intended outcomes.

A structured approach helps organisations prepare for these challenges before they affect delivery. It provides a clear framework for communication and stakeholder engagement. Training can then be tailored to help employees adopt new processes while maintaining business continuity.

Start by understanding the current procurement function

Every successful transformation begins with a clear understanding of the current position.

Before introducing new technology or redesigning procurement processes, organisations should assess how procurement operates today. Existing governance arrangements, procurement processes and supplier management practices all influence how effectively change can be introduced. It's equally important to understand where existing challenges exist and which improvements will deliver the greatest commercial value.

Taking the time to establish this baseline allows organisations to prioritise investment and build a transformation programme around genuine business needs rather than assumptions.

Many organisations begin this stage through procurement strategy consulting, which helps them align procurement transformation with wider organisational objectives before implementation begins.

Create a shared vision for transformation

People are far more likely to support change when they understand why it is happening. A clear vision should explain what the organisation is trying to achieve and how procurement transformation will support wider business priorities. It should also set realistic expectations about the changes employees will experience throughout the programme.

Successful transformation programmes avoid presenting change as a technology project. Instead, they demonstrate how improved procurement processes can simplify day-to-day activities and create better outcomes across the organisation.

When leaders consistently communicate this vision, employees are more likely to understand their role in delivering successful change.

Engage stakeholders from the outset

Stakeholder engagement should begin long before new systems are introduced. Different parts of the organisation will experience procurement transformation in different ways. Procurement professionals may require new processes, while finance teams could see changes to approvals or invoice management. Operational teams may need to adopt different purchasing procedures, and senior leaders will expect greater visibility of procurement performance.

Understanding these different perspectives allows communication to be tailored to individual audiences rather than relying on a single message for everyone.

Early engagement also provides valuable opportunities to gather feedback. Addressing concerns during the planning stage often prevents resistance later in the programme and helps create a stronger sense of ownership across the organisation.

Build a network of change champions

Large transformation programmes benefit from support beyond the core project team. Change champions help reinforce key messages within their own departments and provide practical support to colleagues as new ways of working are introduced. Because they are trusted members of the organisation, they can often identify concerns much earlier than project teams.

Their role is not simply to promote the project. They help explain why change is happening, encourage colleagues to engage with new processes and provide valuable feedback that supports continuous improvement throughout the programme.

When supported effectively, change champions become an important link between project teams and the wider organisation.

Keep communication consistent throughout the programme

Communication should continue from the earliest planning stages through to long after implementation has been completed. Employees need regular updates that explain what is changing and how those changes will affect their day-to-day responsibilities. Consistent communication also helps maintain confidence when programmes evolve or implementation timelines change.

Most importantly, communication should focus on the practical benefits of transformation. Explaining how new processes improve efficiency or reduce unnecessary administration is often more effective than focusing solely on technical features or system functionality. Open communication also creates opportunities for employees to ask questions and raise concerns before small issues become larger barriers to adoption.

Deliver training that builds confidence

Training plays a central role in procurement change management because confidence often determines whether new systems are adopted successfully. Different employees will require different levels of support depending on their responsibilities and previous experience. Practical training that reflects real procurement scenarios, workflows and purchasing activities is generally more effective than generic demonstrations because employees can immediately relate new processes to their everyday work.

Learning should also continue after implementation. Follow-up support and refresher sessions help reinforce good practice. Accessible guidance also gives employees confidence to continue using new systems as intended.

Support adoption beyond implementation

Procurement transformation does not end when a system goes live. The period immediately after implementation often determines whether new ways of working become embedded across the organisation. Employees may require additional guidance as they become familiar with new processes, while project teams should continue monitoring how effectively systems are being used.

Modern digital procurement platforms provide valuable insight into user adoption and process performance. Reviewing this information allows organisations to identify where further support may be required and where additional improvements could deliver greater value.

Viewing adoption as an ongoing process rather than a single milestone helps organisations realise the full benefits of procurement transformation.

Measure progress and adapt over time

Successful transformation programmes continue to evolve after implementation. Regular reviews help organisations understand whether procurement processes are delivering the expected outcomes and whether employees are fully adopting new ways of working. Stakeholder feedback also provides valuable insight into how processes can be refined as organisational priorities change.

Continuous improvement should be viewed as part of procurement transformation rather than a separate initiative. Organisations that regularly evaluate performance are better placed to respond to future challenges while continuing to strengthen procurement capability.

Creating lasting procurement change

Effective change management in procurement is about creating lasting behavioural change rather than delivering a successful technology implementation.

Organisations that invest in effective communication are more likely to achieve sustainable improvements. Combined with meaningful stakeholder engagement and practical training, employees gain a much clearer understanding of both the purpose of the transformation and their role within it. Over time, this creates stronger procurement functions that are better equipped to support wider organisational objectives.

About the author

Matthew Hardaker has over 20 years of experience in procurement across financial services, transport, logistics, and management consultancy. Over the last five years, he has worked with over 40 clients to deliver various procurement, digital, and cost transformation programs. He joined Barkers in September 2021 and leads the Barkers Digital practice, guiding clients through digital transformation and technology-enabled procurement programs.

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