



## 5 Ways to Enact Change in a Bureaucratic Culture

<http://www.openforum.com/articles/culture-beat-5-ways-to-enact-change-in-a-bureaucratic-culture>

Alexandra Levit

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For those of us who have, changes to the notoriously frustrating transportation infrastructure have been a long time coming, but how do you enact change in a government entity that seems like the very definition of bureaucracy?

Gayla Kraetsch Hartsough and her firm, [KH Consulting](#), recently worked with Los Angeles City Controller Wendy Greuel to review the city's transportation structures and recommend reforms. The ultimate goal was to reduce congestion by building highways, promoting alternative transportation, implementing traffic management technology and facilitating the use of bicycles.

Hartsough's team's approach involved thousands of people and included interviewing more than 30 Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) staff and external stakeholders and surveying 919 LADOT employees to identify trouble spots and required changes. Incredibly, 80 LADOT employees actually helped develop the 26 plans for the city's new transportation systems.

All types of businesses—small and large—can be bureaucratic, but is enacting change always an uphill battle you're sure to lose? Not necessarily. With the right philosophy and actions, you can greatly increase your chances of success. Take these five steps to start.

### **Be Aware of the Challenges**

Bureaucracies are predictable and accountable, but these traits also make them change-resistant. Leaders and employees in bureaucracies gravitate to this type of culture because that's where they feel comfortable, and change is viewed as a threat to the stability of the status quo.

“Motivating people to change in a bureaucracy is sometimes met with failure because inside the organization, there is an attitude of ‘this regime will eventually change and I’ll just wait it out,’” Hartsough says.

### **Tap an Objective Third-Party**

Bureaucratic environments are big on policies and procedures, and unfortunately, sometimes employees and even leaders forget to think for themselves. The question of why a rule is in place is met with “because we’ve always done it that way.” It may take a fresh perspective from the outside—for example, bringing in a consultant who specializes in this type of change with your type of organization—to encourage people to see that workable alternatives are possible.

## **Start at the Top**

Most effective change management starts at the top and is driven downward by the CEO and other members of the executive team, who wholeheartedly believe that reforms are essential. According to Hartsough, it helps to ensure that change management teams are interdisciplinary and cross-functional as well as high-ranking.

## **Go Multi-Generational**

In bureaucracies, the best change management teams represent what Hartsough terms a “diagonal slice of the organization.” They include senior executives who have a wealth of knowledge about what has been done in the past, what has worked and what to avoid. This group may also have naysayers, whose voices we must heed to keep things moving in the right direction.

“Additionally, newer employees will be willing to take on bold, audacious undertakings without fear of failure, and middle managers bring a realism to the initiative and balance out the senior naysayers and the eager new employees,” says Hartsough.

An effective multi-generational team will work within an environment that doesn’t intimidate and allows for ownership of the vision at all levels.

## **Don’t Expect an Overnight Miracle**

Finally, expect the process of change within a bureaucracy to be slower than you might like. Create a phased implementation so that the organization can digest change a little at a time. Expect that you will still encounter some resistance, and combat it gradually through constant and clear communication at all levels.

*How do you combat bureaucracy in your business?*

*Alexandra Levit is a former nationally syndicated business and workplace columnist for The Wall Street Journal and the author of Blind Spots: The 10 Business Myths You Can’t Afford to Believe on Your New Path to Success. Money Magazine’s Online Career Expert of the Year, she regularly speaks at organizations and conferences on issues facing modern employees.*