

*The Intelligent Practice*  
A Practical Guide

# Managing change – how to build a practice fit for future growth

*Digitalisation is transforming industries worldwide. Accountants are transforming the services they offer, reassessing the price they can charge as well as how they communicate with their clients.*



Advisory services are the profit driver for future high growth firms. Research has shown that services focused on advisory services will bring practices more growth than those focussed on the compliance tasks. Leveraging automation and integration is how many practices will see true growth and drive efficiency as digitalisation continues to evolve.

This period of evolution gives practices the opportunity to review their current software with sharper scope. Practices who can adapt to change as well as embracing automated, integrated software to bolster their services and create new revenue streams will remain competitive.

In this whitepaper, Wolters Kluwer will show you just how to switch to an integrated suite and how it will catapult your practice into future high growth.

# Digitalisation is here – the time to prepare is now

Digitalisation is at the heart of any practice's efforts towards process optimisation to create time for growth. Wolters Kluwer have noticed a trend of practices with best-of-breed disparate software products, moving to an integrated software suite to drive process optimisation and efficiency.

The move to digitalisation is firmly in motion and remaining competitive is key. Moving to a centralised suite of products that drive efficiency and differentiates your practice from the competition will enable you to grow as the market changes.

Practices are reviewing mundane and manual processes that have previously been managed on Microsoft Excel, like workflow management. Automating these tasks with an integrated software suite will mean your practice is managing processes by exception, rather than by manual intervention at each step. Your software can be set to drive processes like data capture across the solutions automatically, rather than you needing to update spreadsheets or disparate products. You will then be alerted to any abnormalities, rather than managing the norm manually.

Overhauling your software and how your practice currently processes information may not seem a priority right now, it can seem daunting and will cause business interruption.

But with the benefits in mind, all that's needed is a step-by-step plan to get there.



# What are the next steps?

*At the outset of implementing a suite change programme, practices need to focus their attention on what return on investment (ROI) they expect to deliver.*

If your practice intends to make a full suite switch and kickstart a change programme, then spending time upfront planning the transition is key. Once you have your strategy in place it is important to choose the right software partner, have an appropriate communications plan internally and externally, and to train and inspire your staff to use your new digital tools.

## Tips on defining your goals:

- ✓ Identify which strategic issues you would like to address with your suite switch plan e.g. how to attract higher income clients or how to improve the profitability of your current client portfolio.
- ✓ Assess market opportunities and threats.
- ✓ Use a survey to understand your current customer satisfaction. Ask your clients what part of your service they would like you to improve.
- ✓ Use focus groups or one-to-ones with clients to understand how they envisage their needs to change and what services you can offer to accommodate these needs.
- ✓ Complete a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) chart to understand where the opportunities exist for your practice. Think creatively to turn threats into opportunities.
- ✓ Do some blue-sky thinking. Create a vision of where you would like your business to be in 10 years' time. Work backwards to define a clear plan on what steps you need to take and what goals you need to fulfil to achieve your vision.

## STEP 1:

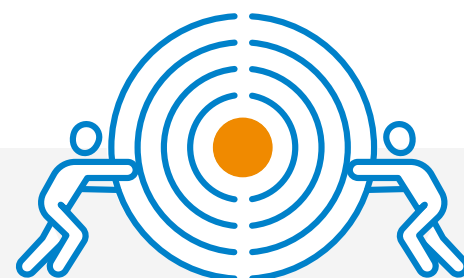
### Define your goals

At the outset, it's important to be clear on your objectives and how the desired result will benefit your practice. This means that you can measure the success of the programme at the end, against defined goals.

Spending time identifying any problems and potential areas for improvement will help you define SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound) goals. After defining your goals, spend some time creating a vision of how this will improve your practice and what the positive impact will be for your clients and staff.

Once your practice's goals are written, share them with your team. Work collaboratively with your senior team to understand how realistic they are, what hurdles you'll need to overcome and which goals will create the biggest business opportunities for your practice. Finesse and repeat.

When you have created a set of clear goals with senior leadership buy-in, allocate a realistic budget to enable the team to achieve them. Create a selection of key performance indicators (KPIs) per goal to enable your team to track the effectiveness of the change programme.



## STEP 2:

### Setting strategy and achieving buy-in

The next step is creating a strategy that delivers the desired business benefits on time and within budget. This is no mean feat – defining the right strategy can take time but is crucial to success.

These tips will help you define your strategy:

- Define your practice's core purpose
- Finesse your practice's unique advantage
- Establish an approach for how you will succeed
- Develop a plan with six or less objectives

Work with your senior team to create a robust strategy which considers other change programmes which may be running concurrently. Play to your practice's strength and ensure that your strategy fits with the vision for the business. Employees will be much less resistant to change if they can understand the journey and can connect with the vision.

Talk your senior team through your strategy as gaining their support is critical to the success of the software switch. It will be important to reiterate your objective for the change programme and your goals. For example, will the suite switch reduce costs, drive better client service – or both? If changing software provider is in response to regulatory, market or technological developments, then you must include this information to illustrate your decision-making process.

Crucially, create a transition and communication plan with leadership and senior team backing. To avoid unnecessary delays and bottlenecks, project sponsors and key stakeholders must be active participants, putting their weight behind the project and completing reviews as the programme progresses.



Now create a list of key processes and staff which will be affected by the change. This enables you to map-outlines of communication and subsequent engagement. It creates a roadmap with which everyone from the top down can be held to and refer to. Both partners and other team members will ask many questions about both the strategy and the impact on systems and processes. It's important that consistent answers are shared.

As you communicate your plan more widely throughout your organisation, you will likely receive some resistance. While this is inevitable, it should still be managed and considered with understanding. Can the process be revised and changed that makes quick and demonstrable improvement to the practice? This lean and nimble approach is an important part of the process of driving the wider business to support change.

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## STEP 3:

### Finding a new software suite fit for your practice

Any investment in a full software suite must dovetail with your strategic direction. As a starting point, create a team who will be involved in evaluating different software solutions, identifying areas that need development with your current software as well as assessing strategic options.

It is crucial to understand your current systems and processes – this will determine the level of investment required as well as the depth and type of change needed.

A 'process map' provides a visual and physical document enabling everyone to understand how current work is undertaken and consider how the restructured process or processes will look. This is an important opportunity to involve key team members in the project. They will best understand how things currently work and provide further insight as the new system and process is put in place. It will play a big part in defining the parameters of how the project can be undertaken successfully.

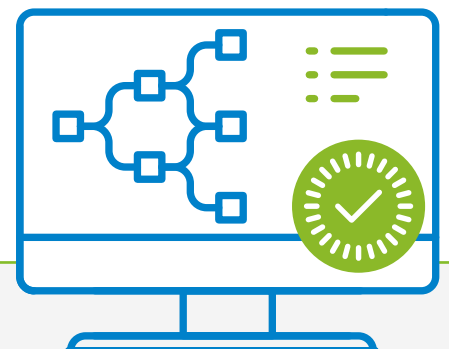
Using the right software suite is the foundation of any practice growth programme. It is important to choose your software based on factors such as the size of the practice, requirements of clients and the practice's specific area of expertise.

Your clients should also be briefed on the adopted technology. In this way your practice can gauge their expectations and refine your approach accordingly.

Ask some of your key clients how much they will value and how much they will pay for the additional services you'll be able to provide?

#### Here are some points of consideration:

- ✓ Review your current software and evaluate whether any inefficiencies are due the technology. Are all features and tools being used optimally for your practice?
- ✓ One process that your practice may need to follow is to put out a tender to old and new suppliers with a questionnaire covering all the points you want included.
- ✓ Consider the cost of the current software and new software as well as the time and costs saved by new gains.
- ✓ Identify what the critical success factors are in establishing this change.
- ✓ Draw up a list of must haves and a list of areas of where you might be willing to compromise.
- ✓ Decide what are the key products and integrations you will need to support your current processes.
- ✓ Consider if the new software supplier fills your needs from an ongoing support, digital training, face-to-face training, consultancy and knowledgebase point of view.



## STEP 4:

### Communicate often and well

According to research from leading leadership and development companies, large company-wide changes are more successful when senior leaders communicate continually. For most organisations, it's also the biggest regret after a change process; nearly half of business leaders wished they had spent more time creating and communicating a change story.

When change is communicated effectively, it also has far-reaching effects. In addition to having an effect on the success of a change programme, people are more committed to the organisation.

The key to communicating change successfully is to create a message that reduces uncertainty and creates understanding. A successful change message should manage expectations and reduce the gap between what people assume will happen and what is the strategic plan.

The three key ingredients to gaining support and preventing resistance are communicating:

- why the change is the best option
- why it will be successful
- and what the organisation's leadership are doing to support it.

Senior leaders need to prepare a narrative which gives employees a more complete picture of the journey the organisation is going on. Sharing the journey gives employees confidence of the benefits of the change programme, which will encourage them to work hard to ensure its success.

Furthermore, the best implementations Wolters Kluwer have seen are when key employees who know the software are involved and contribute to that story of change. While the decision is driven by the senior leaders, they are assisted by the team who know the software.

External communications are also vitally important. Prepare a narrative to share with your clients on how the software suite change will impact them.

#### Some information to address:

- How will it improve the service you currently offer your clients and what will the benefits be?
- What additional services will you be able to offer them as a result?
- Can you offer any add-on services? Help with bookkeeping, forecasting, business modelling GDPR for example?
- What reassurances can you give them that transition to any new technology will not impact on the services you offer? For example, can you run the old and the new software concurrently until the new software has been firmly bedded-in?
- What reassurances can you offer your clients on the safety on their data?
- Create a tailored growth plan for your high-income clients to demonstrate how you can help them grow their business and achieve their goals.

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## STEP 5:

### Delivering the plan

The goals have been set, the strategy written and the technology chosen. But many software change programmes fail at implementation stage – and for a variety of reasons. Project creep, where overambitious plans are set to fail from the start; or an inability to measure and track progress, are two common reasons for failure.

Appointing a project manager, who is solely responsible for implementation, can help improve how smoothly a suite change programme operates. A dedicated project manager will focus purely on delivering projects on time and within budget. However, this doesn't abdicate the need for support and advocacy within the practice's management and other departments.

The project manager should be answerable to a management representative, and a process for tracking progress must be implemented. Many practices will struggle to appoint a full-time project manager. Careful consideration should be taken as to who will lead the project and the support they receive.

Whether operating with a full-time project manager or not, big projects are best broken up into digestible and straightforward 'mini-projects'. This enables different team members to become involved in driving change – and helps with awareness of the change programme that it's being undertaken as well as buy-in.

Bring in professional help if your programme hits some roadblocks. Your software provider will be able to efficiently coach you through any problems which may be slowing your programme or hampering success.

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Departmental heads may want to ask team members for ideas about the best clients to help test the new technology and subsequent changes to workflow. This is another opportunity to involve team members and make them feel they are driving the practice forward.

These team members may also be best-suited to becoming 'champions' within the practice.

Champions are key advocates for helping drive successful implementation. They will have been extensively trained on the new system and understand the requirements of the project. They will be crucial to support to other team members after the go-live. Once live, it is critical that monitoring and feedback takes place, so that tweaks and revisions to processes can be made.





## STEP 6:

### Getting the most out of your integrated suite

Once your new software is live, test and measure how efficiently it operates to ensure that it meets your original goals. Gather feedback from champions.

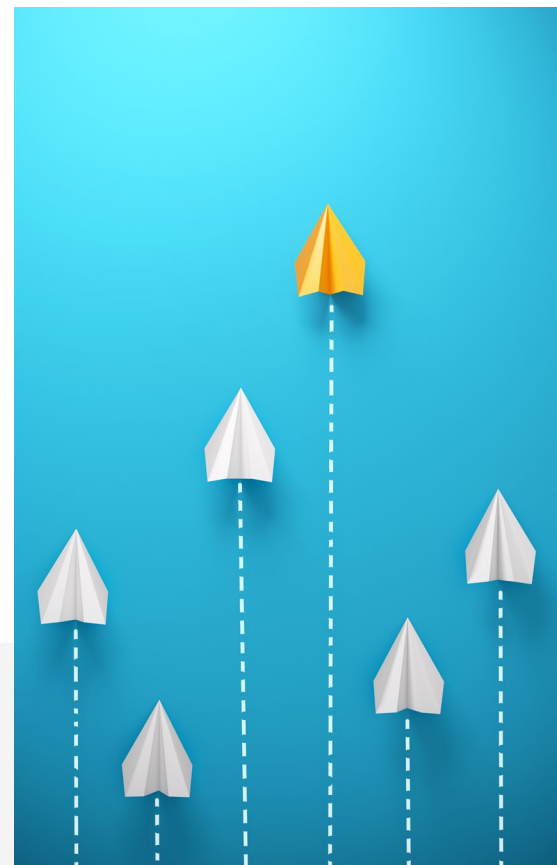
Those using the system are best-placed to comment on it and will appreciate that their feedback has been heard and acted upon where appropriate. Be mindful that champions will also be undertaking their usual job, so you'll need to consider how to support them during this period, for example with extra staffing or other staff assisting with their workload.

Champion representation will be required in the practice's IT team as well as in the departments where the applications and services are being used. Senior managers, the project manager, champions – and perhaps even HR – could collate feedback about the new system and processes. The collation of issues and feedback allows senior personnel the opportunity to rank them by importance and then to decide appropriate action.

Training should be iterative, undertaken often but not overbearing or too long. Bite-sized chunks, such as an hour, are normally enough to allow people to learn and then master two or three new items of functionality. Making the change simple and straightforward is important – along with continuing to explain the reasons why the change is taking place. The tracking of KPIs and metrics should be carefully adhered to.

Finding the right software partner will ensure that your team receives the right level of support reducing the impact on your business.

Be honest about your practice's needs. Implementing a full suite switch is not a small ask but it is an opportunity to lay the foundations for sustainable growth.



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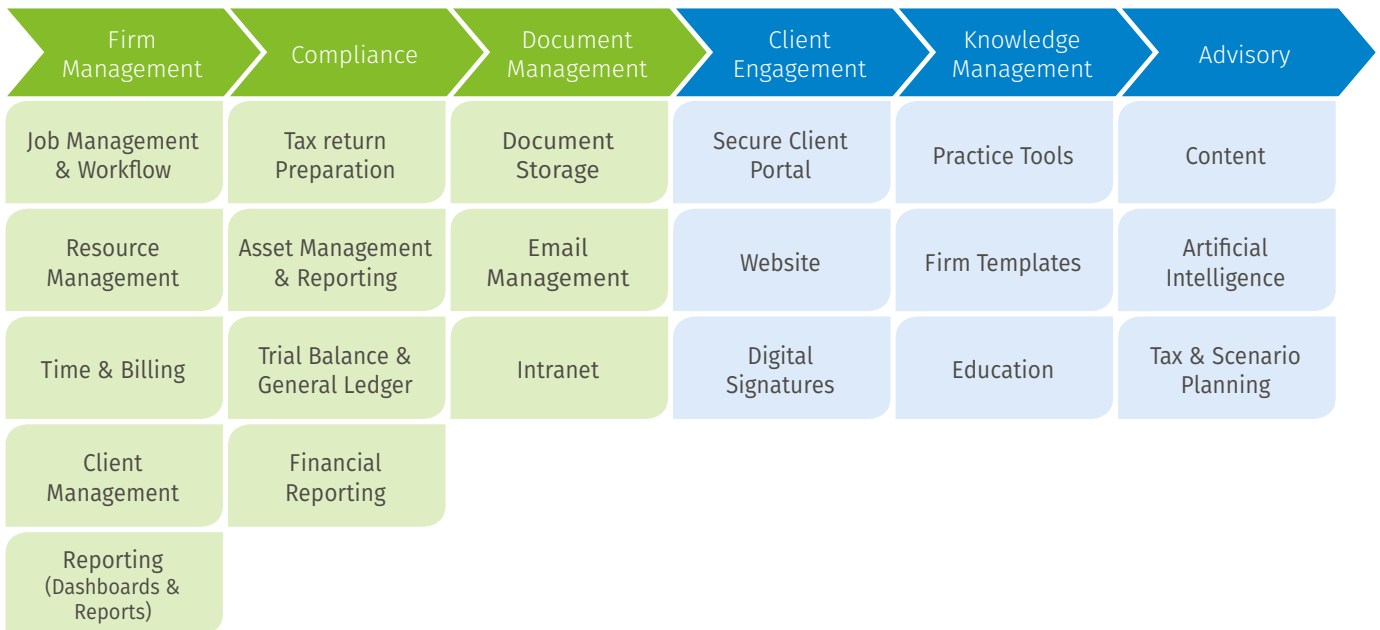
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## Here to help

Wolters Kluwer helps practices improve their efficiency, navigate change and adhere to the needs of regulators and customers alike. By combining our expert knowledge with our passion for developing future forward technology, we are global leaders at meeting the need of our customers.

Wolters Kluwer is constantly researching how to better meet the needs of customers as they face today's challenges. Using the research in our ANZ-wide survey, Wolters Kluwer aims to fully understand the market dynamics and drivers and deliver an offering based on key feedback.

Our product management and development teams are constantly hard at work to provide software and tools to accountants to enable them to enhance existing and offer new advisory solutions to their clients, as well as protect and generate new income streams. We are dedicated to finding collaborative solutions to add to our suite to help our customers future-proof their business for the change that lies ahead.

*If you are considering changing your software, we have a specialist team who will guide you every step of the way.*

### Consulting team to support your journey

Our highly experienced Consulting Team have assisted many accounting practices on their journey towards becoming an intelligent practice. It doesn't matter what systems and software packages your practice currently employs, our team will develop a customised implementation plan for your situation and guide you through each step of the way.

Find out more about Wolters Kluwer's solutions for The Intelligent Practice or request a demonstration at:

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