



Generational Change: Change Management for the Ages

By Karen Beaman, Jeitosa Group International

Introduction

That the world is constantly changing – and at an ever-increasing pace – is now a widely accepted fact. That people experience change in disparate ways is also broadly acknowledged. Yet, what is not so commonly understood is that different generations understand, accept and embrace change in dissimilar ways. Views of change vary across the generations from the Veterans’ belief that change is something to “get over with” to the Boomers view of “creating it” to the Xer’s approach in “making it work for you” to the Millennial’s indulgence and “need for speed.” This article focuses on the topic of generational change with the goal of providing some helpful change management techniques for managing the impact of change across the four generations employed simultaneously in the workplace today.

Human Process of Change

The human process of change has been extensively written about over the years by psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, and management theorists. What has been less discussed in the literature is how the different generations in the workplace today experience and adapt to change. Figure 1 shows the typical human process of change. A change to the current state is publicly announced, and immediately a period of turmoil develops and productivity drops (as denoted by the red line in Figure 1). The depth and breadth of the change and how the change is managed influence the intensity and length of the turmoil period (as denoted by the green line in Figure 1), which is significantly shortened when a holistic change management methodology is followed.

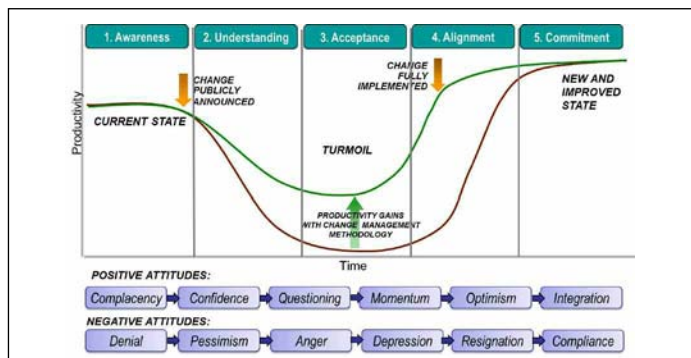


Figure 1. The Human Process of Change.

Obviously people experience change differently and proceed through the process of change in different ways and at different paces. Some people easily embrace new ideas and adapt quickly, others take a more cautious and exploratory approach and still others may reject or revolt against anything that changes their comfortable and stable environment. Whatever the reaction to change or the speed of acceptance, everyone goes through the same stages of change: 1) Awareness, 2) Understanding, 3) Acceptance, 4) Alignment, and 5) Commitment. Change management is the process of systematically managing these stages of change and applying methods and techniques to ease the transition and enhance the adoption of change.

Change Management Model

Recent Jeitosa research has shown that change management is one of the most often ignored aspects of an HR/Payroll technology effort. Jeitosa’s Global HR/Payroll Benchmarking Study found that just over a third (38%) of companies have a formal change management program in place, a quarter of companies (26%) have some loosely connected change related programs, and another third (36%) provide nothing more than basic training and communication to the people affected by a new initiative. Yet, change management guru, John Kotter, maintains that 70% of projects fail due to the lack of a systematic and comprehensive change management approach.

Change management is not a one-time activity, initiated at the start of the project and then checked off a list. As Figure 2 shows, change management is an on-going effort – one that has its own discrete stages that work in parallel with the systems deployment effort. The various phases of change that individuals experience are managed through the change management stages of: 1) Discovery, 2) Excitement, 3) Preparation, 4) Transition, and 5) Maturation. A solid change management methodology covers not only change management activities such as readiness assessment, stakeholder mapping, messages, methods, and media mapping, but also integrates a comprehensive communications plan, training plan, and on-going support plan in providing a holistic approach to the change effort.

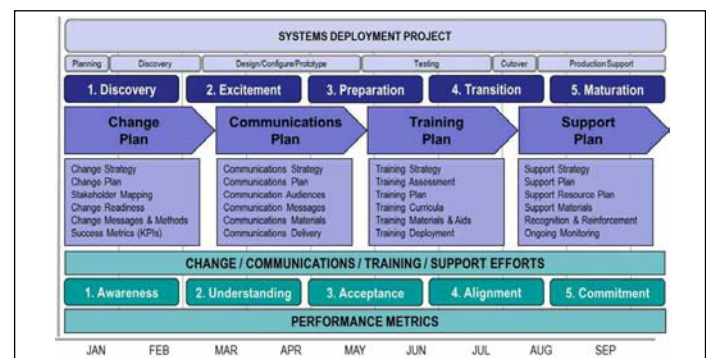


Figure 2. Holistic Change Management Model.

Multigenerational Workforce

Today's workplace consists of four generations working side-by-side, each with varying world outlooks, work ethics, personal, employer, and relationship styles, and different employment and compensation desires (see Figure 3). The Veterans (born between 1922 and 1945) are generally pragmatic, dedicated, and loyal to their organizations. The Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are optimistic, driven, and focused on their careers. Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980) are realistic and skeptical, reluctant to get too involved and seeking work-life balance. And the Millennials (born between 1981 and 2000) are ever hopeful, collaborative, and concerned with self-fulfillment.

	Veterans 1922-1945	Boomers 1946-1964	Gen X 1965-1980	Millennials 1981-2000
World Outlook	Pragmatic	Optimistic	Realistic / Skeptical	Hopeful
Work View	Obligation & Sacrifice	Exciting adventure	Difficult challenge	Means to an end
Work Ethic	Discipline & Hard work	Driven / Workaholic	Work / Life Balance	Self-Fulfillment
View of Authority	Respectful	Rebellious	Unimpressed	Polite
Personal Relationships	Sacrifice	Gratification	Reluctance	Inclusive
Leadership Style	Hierarchy	Consensus	Competence	Collaboration
Employer Relationship	Company Loyalty	Career Loyalty	Selective Loyalty	Community Loyalty
Compensation	My Job	My Achievements	My Skills	My Work
Employee Desires	Fair wage Stable employment Secure retirement	Competitive wage Meaningful work Comfortable retirement	Wealth Work-life balance Early retirement	Wealth accumulation Indulge interests Work in retirement

Figure 3. Today's Multigenerational Workplace.

Views on technology vary widely across the generations from the Veterans "fear of breaking something" to the Boomers view that technology is a "means to an end" to the Gen Xers embracing of technology as "a way of life," and finally to the Millennials who have become the world's first true "digital natives." I recently participated in a virtual conference with a cross-generational team where this couldn't have been more obvious. The Millennial jumped right in, easily clicking in the right places, exploring unknown areas, and eagerly chatting on the line with the rest of us about what he was finding. In stark contrast, the Boomer struggled to find the right buttons, awkwardly explaining that things "were different on his screen" (this was a SaaS-based product). Quietly competent, the Xer completed his tasks so effectively that the Boomer asked the Xer to help him with some of his assigned tasks because "it would be much easier."

When you think about it, the change management challenges in this situation are significant. The Boomer easily became frustrated, resisting and shirking some of his responsibilities. The competent Xer slowly became irritated at the Boomer trying to offload his work, while the Millennial merrily zipped ahead, leaving the rest of the team behind. Clearly we need to target different change techniques, tools, and support mechanisms to meet the needs of each generation during any new technology initiative.

Change Management for the Generations

The differing economic and political environments that the generations have grown up under have had a profound

impact on their view of the world and how they experience and adapt to change in their environment. Figure 4 highlights some of the key differences across the generations that are particularly salient for effectively managing the impact of change when deploying any significant new technology initiative that touches individuals across multiple generations. Each generation has different communication styles, both written and verbal, preferences for human interaction, desires for feedback and reviews, as well as motivators for rewards and recognition.

	Veterans 1922-1945	Boomers 1946-1964	Gen X 1965-1980	Millennials 1981-2000
View of Change	Get it over with	Create it	Make it work for you	Need for speed
Communication Style	Individual	Team player	Independent	Participatory
Verbal Communication	Face-to-face	Telephone	Direct/Immediate	Instant Messaging
Written Communication	Formal Memorandum	Email	SMS / Text	Social Networks
Communication Media	Rotary phones	Touch-tone phones	Cell / smart phones	VOIP / Internet phones
Contact Preference	Take a memo	Call me anytime	Call me only at work	Facebook me
Feedback & Reviews	No news is good news	Not appreciated	Reluctant to interrupt	Instantaneous
Rewards & Recognition	Job well done	Money & Title	Freedom	Meaningful work
Dealing with Money	Cash to put away	Spend now, pay later	Save, save, save	Earn to spend
Messages to Motivate	Respecting experience and authority	Feeling valued and making a difference	Forgetting the rules and going their own way	Working with other bright & creative people

Figure 4. Change and Communications for the Generations.

Multigenerational Approach to Change Management

With such vast differences in world views, work styles, and views of change, it is not surprising to realize that each generation responds differently to change management and communication techniques that the organization might employ in support of a new initiative. Figure 5 highlights some key approaches to managing each stage of change with respect to differences in generational style, made particularly obvious by the choice of the verb: Inform versus Discuss, Ensure versus Collaborate, Encourage versus Coach, Demonstrate versus Support, and so on.

	Veterans 1922-1945	Boomers 1946-1964	Gen X 1965-1980	Millennials 1981-2000
Stage 1: Awareness	INFORM the business need for the change, providing background and facts	DISCUSS the business need for the change allowing opportunity for questions	EXPLAIN the business need for change, providing background and facts	CONVEY the personal and business benefits of the change
Stage 2: Understanding	ENSURE resources and training are available to help people adapt to the change	CREATE shared meaning and convey common goals for the future after the change	PAINT a picture of the future and describe the business goals after the change	COLLABORATE through discussion forums and open dialogue about the change
Stage 3: Acceptance	REINFORCE the business need for the change and support	ENCOURAGE questions and respond objectively to challenges about the change	INVOLVE people in exploring the impact and business benefits of the change	COACH, mentor, and provide immediate and ongoing feedback for the change
Stage 4: Alignment	OUTLINE expected behavior, organization goals, business results, and rewards	BUILD support for behavior, organization goals, business results and rewards	CLARIFY expected behavior, organization goals, business results, and rewards	ILLUSTRATE expected behavior, organization goals, business results, and rewards
Stage 5: Commitment	DEMONSTRATE common responsibility and accountability for the change	FOSTER buy in, ownership, and accountability for the change	MODEL desired behaviors to gain responsibility and accountability for the change	SUPPORT ongoing dialogue to build responsibility and accountability for the change

Figure 5. Communication Techniques for Managing Change Across the Generations.

Summary

Change management is one of the most often overlooked aspects of an HR technology deployment project. Yet, without it, most projects fail to achieve their goals, either in terms of meeting expected time frames and budgets or due to a lack of adoption and hence failure to realize the business case. However, this needn't be so. With a simple, structured

methodology to support the stages of change and with specific techniques targeted to different individual and generational needs, change management is a process that can be managed as any other. And HR needs to take the lead in this effort, modeling the desired behaviors, becoming “change agents” for the organization, and helping each generation of workers understand, adapt and embrace change in its own unique way. In the words of Andy Warhol, “They say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.”

About the Author



Karen Beaman is the founder, chief executive, and global strategic advisor with Jeitosa Group International. She is an internationally recognized speaker and author, having published works in such areas as global human resources technology, global organizational design, global mindset, cultural diversity, and global leadership. In 2002, she received the Summit Award, IHRIM’s highest award honoring her lifetime achievements in the field of HR technology. She is fluent in English, German, and French. She can be reached at karen.beaman@jeitosa.com.

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