

Change is the new constant.

How can your organisation survive and thrive in this environment?

The world we live in is changing at an unprecedented pace. Getting the best from people at every level when there is constant change is one of the keys to achieving a sustainable progress and development. Government leaders and businesses have recognised the need to rapidly transform in order to better serve their constituents including digitising, optimising supply chains, creating new public-private partnerships or private sector investment structures, and restructuring for better cross-organisational collaboration.

These critical changes can be very challenging for employees and stakeholders. Research shows that many complex change initiatives fail because they do not put people at the heart of the plan or because they do not create an explicit change management approach. While each situation is unique and may require different actions, PwC has identified seven trends for successful and sustainable change management.

Trend 1: Centre strategies on people

Organisations that put their people at the heart of change are more likely to deliver successful outcomes. With any organisational change, solid strategies, processes or advanced technology alone will not deliver results. Instead, it takes people to accept, adopt, drive and sustain change to realise tangible impact. Organisations that are still battling with understanding the value of people, often see projects fail not because the change was not a good one, but because people were not adequately considered at the outset. Ways in which organisations can employ a people-centric change approach include:

1. Creating a personal and empowering experience for people.
2. Anchoring the change in the organisational strategy and desired outcomes.
3. Balancing the focus on strategy and execution to prioritise what matters.
4. Involving people and leveraging data to tailor “best-fit” change interventions.
5. Enabling adaptation as you go.
6. Reinforcing the use of contemporary change tools and digital applications.
7. Engaging change champions who are properly trained and passionate to deliver successful and sustainable change.

Trend 2: Nudge along the change journey

Emerging neuroscience finds that the brain processes change as pain. Think about when an office is reconfigured or even a living space, it is uncomfortable. This is how your employees and stakeholders feel when going through a change.

To ease this ‘all at once shock,’ behavioural economics demonstrates, change management programmes can seek to “nudge” people along the change continuum making subtle changes until the destination is reached.

These “nudges” are incorporated into mainstream products and services globally and can be applied to organisational change management initiatives.

Behavioural economics teaches us a few things about human behavior that must be considered as part of your change plan:

1. People are often more pain avoidant than they are open to pleasurable gains. In other words, humans dislike losses more than they like gain.
2. Human beings often avoid change because of the habits they form over time. People will generally prefer to have things remain the same unless there is a strong incentive to do things differently.
3. The choices humans make are often not as deliberate as one would like to think. Human beings can be prodded or “nudged” to make specific decisions or undertake specific activities.

Trend 3: Practice continuous adaptation

Gone are the days of including a checklist of to-do’s in a rigid order that must be ticked to signify completion with little flexibility. Instead organisations are moving to adopt innovative and agile management approaches based on prototyping, testing and rapid refinement. These principles work equally well in a rapidly evolving change management environment.

Effective change managers must be agile, able to think and act quickly in response to the environment in which the changes are taking place. There is one key component in every change management cycle that differentiates cosmetic change and true change; this is sustainability. If change managers are unable to find sufficient ways to maintain changes within the environment, there will be an increased probability that people will either become disengaged, or depending on the project, abandon the change implemented all together.

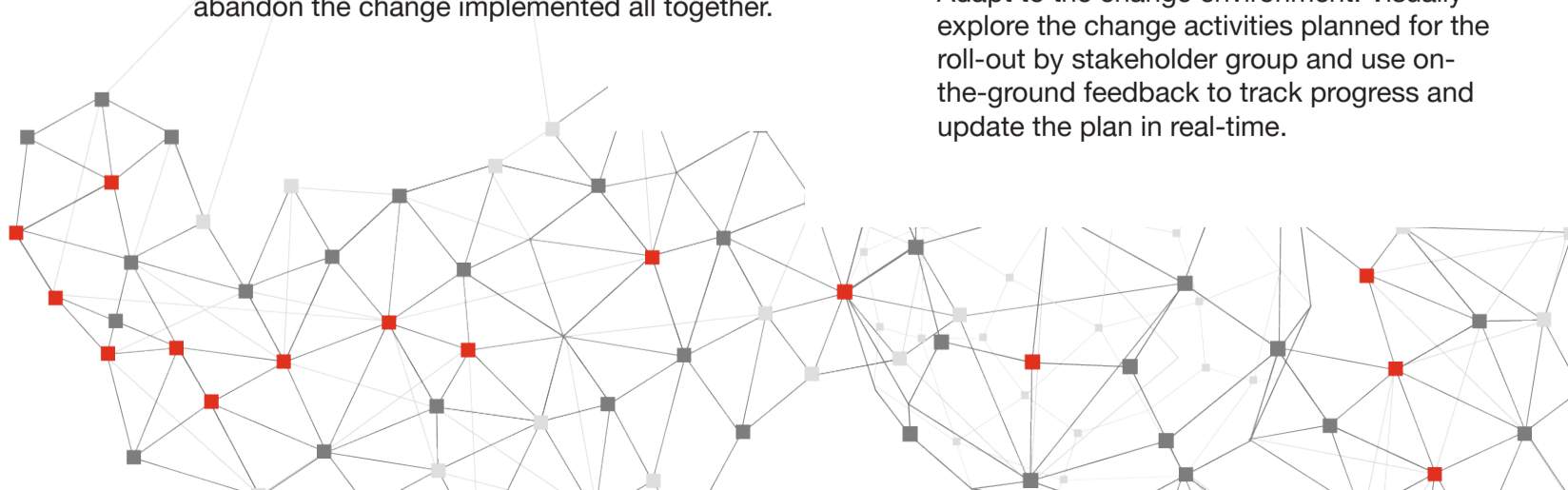
One way to mitigate this is to create a culture of organisational learning. The rate of failed programmes outnumber successful ones because many organisations have failed to acknowledge or respond when a change management intervention has failed. In a continuous learning and adaptive environment, potential failure could have been recognised early and a new approach deployed, increasing the chance of success and adoption.

Trend 4: Get digital

For far too long change management has been considered a soft, nebulous subject. With the help of digital tools, this is changing. Practitioners are increasingly expected to use more sophisticated approaches to analyse organisational change initiatives and data gathered or produced as part of these initiatives, to inform implementation, understand adoption and track progress.

Digital change management tools bring data-driven rigour to change management initiatives, allowing leadership and change management practitioners to observe trends and act in thoughtful, data-driven ways. Across many governments, these tools are becoming commonplace and are aligned to the existing digital strategy. These tools serve to:

- Boost employee engagement: Execute a change strategy tailored to the uniqueness of each stakeholder group in the organisation.
- Create data driven transparency: Explore project data from impact assessments, readiness ratings, adoption curves, and change activities for each stakeholder group, all in one system.
- Increase speed to insight: Replace manual spreadsheets with automated digital workflows and enable teams to deliver insights and next steps on the change strategy sooner in the project.
- Adapt to the change environment: Visually explore the change activities planned for the roll-out by stakeholder group and use on-the-ground feedback to track progress and update the plan in real-time.





Trend 5: Communicate on your stakeholders' terms

The demographic makeup of the workforce is changing. Globally, millennials (individuals born between 1981–1996) will make up the majority of the workforce in the next five years. These workers are demanding new ways of working, forcing organisations to adapt.

One of the biggest changes these workers are demanding of organisations is how information is exchanged. The standard notice board, memos and emails are not enough to reach or motivate tech-savvy millennials in the workplace. Instead organisations are adapting their communications channels to utilise more interactive means to increase change awareness and the desire to be a part of it.

While this demographic shift is occurring, many individuals are still uncomfortable with technology and either refuse to use it or are slow to engage. Organisational change management initiatives need to address each of these competing needs. Cross-generational mentoring techniques can be considered to help bridge this divide.

Organisations also need to identify the channels which are being used by their stakeholders and employees and meet them with communications online or off-line. Organisations can evolve their change management strategies and interventions to lessen the focus on using communications tools which are convenient for the enterprise and instead communicate in ways which are already utilised by employees and stakeholders alike.

Trend 6: Expect resistance

Organisations like to think everyone is supportive of change or that they will eventually 'get there.' The reality is levels of adoption and support for change is fluid. At any given time, stakeholders can be moving through the spectrum of acceptance from active resistance to passive resistance to neutral to champion. This level of adoption can change on a regular basis for stakeholders. The end goal is to move everyone to either neutral or champion and lessening the impact of those who are actively resisting the change.

Instead of hoping stakeholders will eventually get to the desired level of adoption, change managers and organisational leaders should actively plan for pockets of resistance and develop a plan to target those stakeholders. These plans should include identification of the pockets of resistance, how long it is anticipated they will be resistant, what benefits of the change are most enticing to them, how should communications be targeted and if other stakeholders should be engaged to reach these groups.

Resistance is inevitable. However, proactive planning coupled with addressing it head-on can increase the rate at which resistant stakeholders are moved through the adoption continuum.

Trend 7: Tell your story

Change communications have traditionally focused on telling people what they need to know, for when, and what actions to take before a certain consequence occurs and the person is left doing something the old way. While these tactical communication measures have a place in change management, there is increasingly room for the use of narration and storytelling to bring people along on the journey and help visualise the future holistically. This is particularly salient where there is a strong cultural preference for oral communication. Storytelling assists to bring the change to life and allows employees and stakeholders to see themselves as a character in the story with a role.

Employees and stakeholders are demanding transparency and the desire to understand the full picture and narrative of where the organisation is going, why it is going that direction and collectively how it will get there. Piecemeal information is a way of the past.

To accelerate adoption, change management communications and interventions need to create and communicate a vision that jumps off the page and comes to life for those involved in the change. This will not only assist with lessening resistance, but it will give context for the change and inspire action. People are much more likely to take an inconvenient action as part of a change initiative, if they can envision tangible benefits in the long run.

Want to know more? Let's talk.

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