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PEOPLE ARE NOT RESISTANT TO CHANGE

How people-first communication and engagement make your technology deployment a success

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New technologies promise enormous benefits to your organisation. However, as experienced IT professionals know, new technologies often meet resistance.

This eBook argues that the key to successful change is not so much about the technology itself, rather, it's about the way that it is communicated, and how employees are engaged. Drawing on FITTS' experience working with medium and large businesses, this guide provides practical tips for business change management using what we call a 'people-first' approach.
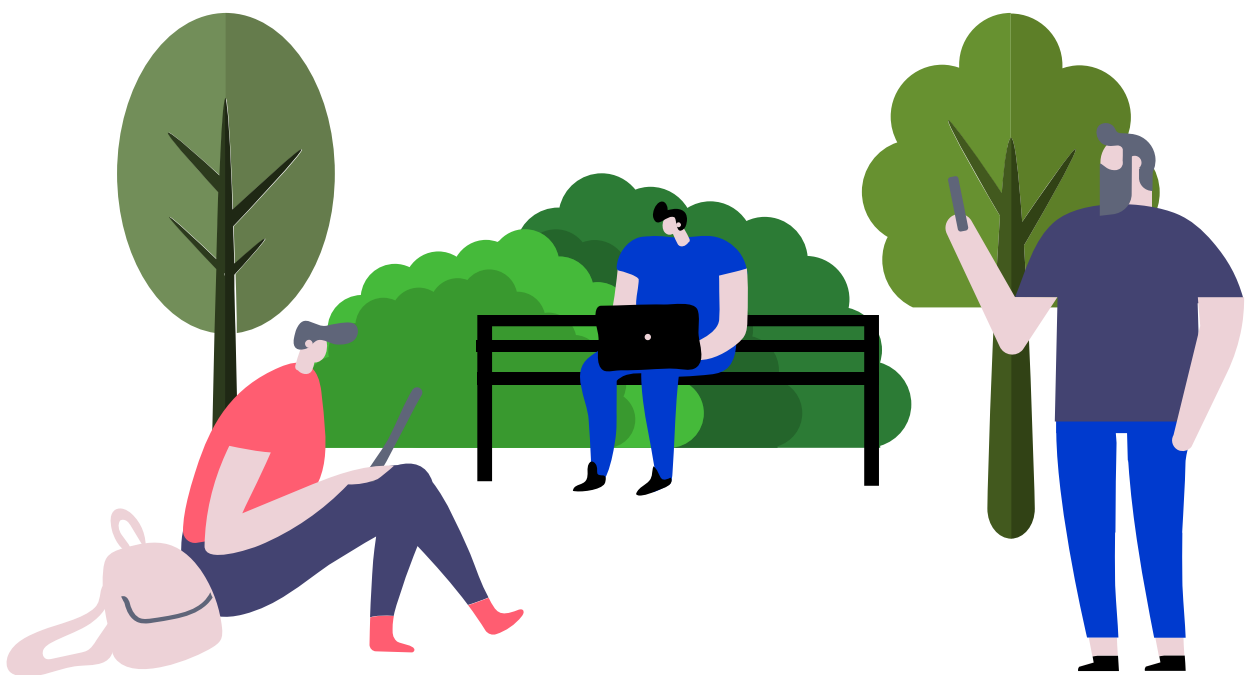
PEOPLE ARE NOT RESISTANT TO CHANGE

A common preconception in enterprise IT is that people are afraid of change. If you have ever attempted to deploy a new software programme but met stiff resistance at every turn, the notion may ring true. What's more, when reports indicate that less than a third of new business technology deployments succeed, it can feel discouraging to embark on a new technology journey.

Nevertheless, it is a myth that people are inherently resistant to change in business technology. As the dramatic rise in remote working during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown showed, millions of people were able to adapt to an entirely new way of working in a matter of days. Furthermore, countless organisations of all sizes have successfully deployed new digital technologies in recent years with great success. How would this be possible if people really were change-resistant?

Most employees are reasonable and understand that new technology and processes are designed to make them more productive, efficient or secure, and they welcome tools that do this. What is true, however, is that people are resistant when change is poorly communicated, and they do not feel part of the process. If they feel change is being imposed on them for no good reason, rejection and sometimes even flat refusal, is a natural response, and when this comes from decision makers higher up in a business, it becomes even more difficult to navigate. In this eBook we explore why people may appear resistant to technological change. We then show how communication and engagement techniques are the key to making technology deployments a success.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BUSINESS IT CHANGE

When your IT department announces a new way of working, what happens in the minds of your colleagues? The psychology of change is complex, yet it is valuable to understand some of the key processes involved:

1 Pre-change: Unconscious competence
Employees have used the existing technology for many years and are happy with it. They don't have to 'think' about what to do.

2 Post-change: Conscious incompetence
A new technology is deployed, and employees become aware that they are no longer competent. This affects their self-esteem and causes frustration.

A Newly competent
If change is managed well, employees will rapidly adopt the new technology and soon feel happy as they are conscious of their growing competence with the new tech.

B Revert to old technology
Alternatively, when change is managed poorly employees feel frustrated and may revert to old behaviours

For a deeper dive into the psychology of business change, read my recent blog on the similarities between the Kubler-Ross grief cycle and IT change.

TRADITIONAL IT CHANGE IS LETTING BUSINESSES DOWN

*"Dear user,
Please turn your computers off on Thursday evening - we will be installing a new operating system over the Bank Holiday weekend.
Regards,
IT department".*

The above email is a caricature, yet it represents the 'traditional' way that technology change has been managed in a business setting. While many IT departments are much better at managing change than in this simplified example, few IT staff are trained as change management specialists; their remit is, rightly, to manage business technology.

Nevertheless, the traditional top-down approach leaves a lot to be desired:

- **It is opaque:** Users receive no explanation as to why change is happening.
- **Change is imposed:** By failing to engage people in the change from the outset, people feel it is imposed against their will.
- **It is inefficient:** If workers do not use the technology, or take months to learn how to, the organisation will lose countless hours of productivity.

A PEOPLE FIRST APPROACH MAKES CHANGE SMOOTHER

The traditional approach to business change emphasises technology first: is new tech faster, more powerful or more secure? These are all valid requirements, yet those benefits can only be accessed if the technology is utilised. FITTS focuses on what we call people-centric change to sell the benefits of the change and ensure people see what's in it for them.

When we talk about people-centric IT we mean that business technology should be designed to fit around the people who use it – rather than users having to adapt their working styles to the technology. The goal is to introduce new tools and services in a way that is appropriate to and makes sense for the end user.

- It is about finding what people's pain points are with existing technology, and showing them how the new tools help them
- It involves communicating in a way which resonates with people's personal and professional concerns
- It is about engaging and empowering people, so they have a sense of ownership over technology – rather than it being out of their hands

WHAT DOES PEOPLE-CENTRIC TECHNOLOGY CHANGE LOOK LIKE?

If your organisation is planning on introducing new business technology, taking the time to plan your change management strategy in a way that is people-centric, will pay dividends. You will encounter far less resistance to change, employees will adopt new technology faster, and you will enjoy all the efficiencies and productivity gains that modern business technology promises.

When FITTS works with customers on any technology deployment project, we incorporate the eight following people-centric change management techniques in the process:

1

Establish the status quo with focus groups

Begin by understanding how the organisation really uses business technology. By conducting focus groups, you elicit a true picture of how staff use the tech in their daily lives. Focus groups also highlight any frustrations with existing products and services.

2

Specify the end date

In collaboration with users, identify what you want to ultimately achieve by deploying new tech. By bringing in colleagues from across the business, the chances of engagement are much higher.

3

Demand feedback

Business technology change projects take months or even years. It is therefore vital to continually request feedback about the direction of travel. Constant communication ensures that the project does not go in the wrong direction.

4

Be a guide on the jounrey

As a change management leader, it is vital that you provide leadership, guiding your colleagues throughout the journey. By being a visible, approachable leader, employees will feel confident in the change.

5

Select appropriate modes of communication

Everyone responds to new technology in different ways. It is therefore essential to select the most appropriate mode of communication to explain its purpose and value. For example, some people respond to messages around time saving, others are more motivated by cost-cutting.

6

Choose and train 'change champions'

Select 'change champions' in different departments who are enthusiastic about new technology and are motivated to promote its use within their teams. Since change managers cannot communicate with every single employee, these 'champions' play a vital role in promoting change. What is more, communication from a peer is often far more engaging than from someone outside an individual's team or organisation.

7

Build excitement and launch

Once your IT team has completed the technical side of a technology change, it is essential to generate excitement and enthusiasm about the launch of the new tool or platform. Distribute posters, send out countdown emails, run exciting launch days and encourage competitions to boost adoption.

8

Monitor and assess

Once a platform is deployed, it is equally important to continue monitoring usage and ensure that the change in behaviour has become permanent. Reinforcement at this stage is crucial to ensure that adoption continues to rise. This is where change champions prove invaluable.

CASE STUDY

Since 2018 FITTS has been engaged by a multinational leader in sustainable technologies. The firm had migrated to Microsoft 365 but initially only implemented the most 'basic' security standards. The firm holds considerable intellectual property and was therefore highly motivated to protect its IP and customer data.

After meeting with the company's legal team and speaking to a wide variety of users, FITTS helped the organisation deploy several enhanced security measures including:

- Confidentiality labelling and control on all documents and emails
- Enhanced mobile device management, including employees' personal laptops and smartphones

While these changes represented a major security improvement, it met stiff resistance from many employees who found the extra security checks onerous. Unlike many new technology changes which make people's lives easier, this project represented a 'hard sell' for the company's workers. FITTS therefore designed a change management strategy as part of the rollout:

- **Pilot studies**
  We conducted two pilots of the new security measures with two teams at the organisation. This provided valuable learning on what was and wasn't acceptable to users.

- **Sophisticated communications**
  Knowing that the new measures might initially meet resistance, we developed a communications plan to get people 'on board'. The messaging focused on experiences of scamming and phishing in people's personal lives outside of work, which resonated with many. We then published posters and ran internal email campaigns which reminded users that if hackers gained entry to the company's systems, they would be able to access personal information including salary data and bank details.

By personalising our change management and communication to the specific challenges at the business, the new security measures were rapidly and successfully adopted.

REAP THE REWARDS OF NEW BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY

New generations of business technology are providing organisations of all sizes with incredible features and facilitating better, more efficient ways of working. Nevertheless, simply introducing new technology does not guarantee that people will use it.

Drawing on our experience working with countless organisations to change their processes, this eBook has argued that with effective communication and engagement strategies, change is entirely possible for any business.

Do you have a plan for change management in your business technology change projects? FITTS is delighted to offer an entirely free half-day change workshop for businesses thinking of migrating to the latest Microsoft technologies. To learn more about the change workshop, contact us today.

About the Author

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Hannah has been practicing change for a decade in many different guises and has been instrumental in the digital transformation of large private and public sector organisations alike. Hannah has worked with household names such as Whitbread, UBS and Johnson Matthey, along with being one of the first Change Managers to work in Cyber Security at UK Parliament. Hannah also lead change in technology and digital as Costa was acquired by Coca-Cola in a multi-billion-pound deal in 2018.

About FITTS

FITTS vision is to support people and businesses that thrive and evolve supported by the smartest possible technology. As an accredited Microsoft Gold Partner, FITTS has partnered with progressive businesses large and small, across EMEA to achieve their full potential through smart tech platforms that prioritise people and optimise for success.

To learn more about FITTS visit: http://fitts.io

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