Feature

Changing Technologies ≠ Improved Business Performance Unless You Change the Way You Change

By Jeff Chan, Chan Management Consulting

So, you have "gone live" with your new HR technology initiative. Success! You are well on your way to meeting ambitious new business performance goals. A gold standard! But wait, the issues the new technology was intended to change are still "live" as well. What happened? Key project milestones were met; testing was completed and "go-live" happened on schedule; training was completed on time; and now…well…a lot of finger-pointing.

Producing a superior product or service is a result of the successful integration and alignment of many organizational elements, i.e., work processes, people skills and experiences, goals and strategy, organizational structure, job roles, responsibilities and accountabilities, metrics *and* enabling technologies. But when business results do not meet expectations, organizations often decide to change something, anything. Over the last 20-30 years, as HR technology has evolved in its ability to support and enable organizational and transactional processes, it is the thing that has become the primary target of change. Technology is an easy target because it is tangible – discrete – and a key interface for people and work processes. But, following traditional change management approaches that focus solely on changing a single organizational element – while ignoring all other elements that contribute to a business process – misleads project teams and leaders into following an ineffective path to improving business performance and results. Achieving ambitious project goals, where technology is concerned, requires you to *change the way you change*.

A failure to meet your technology change goals can typically be attributed to one or all of the following approaches:

1. The focus is solely on the "thing" and not the "ings."
2. The change is *pushed* by project teams rather than *pulled* by the organization.
3. Backs are slapped and congratulations prematurely offered when software goes live and user training is completed, not when all the other organizational elements that drive business performance are changed as well.
4. And then there is that whole global thing!

The Focus was solely on the "Thing" and not the "ings"

If you chose to improve employee productivity, you might decide the "thing" that needed to be changed was the organization's talent and performance management system. A great tool, but you can't improve the manag*ing* of employee performance by changing the data management element alone. The "ings," like managers' ability to define roles, select the right talent, lead, manage, and communicate within the process, set appropriate employee goals, and align rewards to the achievement of these goals – as well as the organization's ability to establish a culture that truly values and supports performance management – must be addressed as well. The technology/software is merely a tool to enable and support the process. You must shift your focus and change the way you change.

Change the Way You Change

- Start with the desired result in mind. What does success look like when the project is completed and business goals are met? What are all the elements that contribute to this end result?
- Ask yourself: What new skills will employees need to succeed in the new process? Do we have employees with those necessary skills? How will they be incented to use new processes and procedures? What new roles and responsibilities will be required? What are employees currently doing that they will have to stop and what are they not doing that they will have to start? The answers to these questions will provide you with a better understanding of everything that needs to change to create highly productive employees.
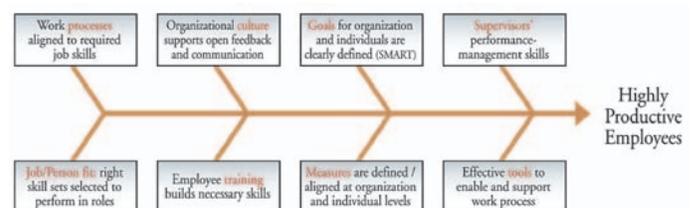
Oh, Wait…There's that Whole Global Thing

You are confident your change plan will work in Tacoma, Des Moines and Harrisburg. But, what about Gurgaon, Bern and Santiago – that's right, that whole global thing. Global considerations cannot be an afterthought, because for every element you identify in a domestic work process, global variations for the same elements can and will exist.

In implementing a new talent and performance management system, a global professional services firm discovered, after the fact, that while different countries had like roles, the job definitions for those roles could differ greatly. Additionally, how the performance for similar roles was measured and calibrated across geographies differed just as much. Where global change is concerned, one size won't always fit all.

Change the way you change globally: Once you have identified and defined all relevant work process elements, take the next step and identify all global variations.

The Change was *Pushed* by Project Teams rather than *Pulled* by the Organization
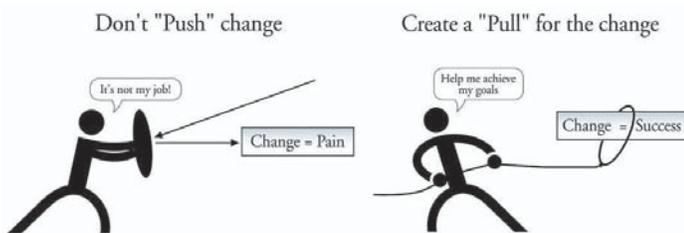
Very often, changes are "pushed" onto employees' already full plates by project teams with little explanation for why. Without an understanding of why change is needed and how it will help employees be more successful, employees may view the change as an obstacle to accomplishing "what they are really getting paid to do." There is no motivation or incentive to change, so if it doesn't happen, employees may take a "no-skin-off-our-noses" attitude. The change can be deprioritized and, worse yet, avoided.

A well-known chemical company wanted to improve the accuracy of its sales orders, so it implemented a new sales order data entry portal (the "thing") for the sales force to use directly. However, the sales force continued to rely on the customer service team to enter sales orders – "entering data isn't what we get paid to do!" Data accuracy was not improved, and despite the significant investment in new technology, business performance, e.g., accurate product fulfillment, customer satisfaction, did not improve either.

Conversely, we all know that when someone really "wants" something, a higher level of persistent energy will be applied to getting it. So when the chemical company relaunched the portal and gave the sales team new performance-based order-entry goals – as well as decreased the availability of the customer service team – the sales team eagerly adapted to the new process, data accuracy was significantly improved, and customer satisfaction increased proportionately.

Change the Way You Change

- Communicate the "whys" of the change first. Then communicate them again, and again.
- Focus communications on key influencers to establish buy-in and support for the change. Share a future state where quality is improved, processes are more cost effective, customer satisfaction is increased, or critical talent is retained.
- Tie the success of the change to individuals' and teams' success. Change performance goals and measures to incent individuals to embrace the change and create an organizational "pull" for the new way of doing business.

Oh, Wait…There's that Whole Global Thing

Take that same global professional services firm – you know, the one implementing the talent and performance management system. With its technology implementation plan in place, the organization assembled an implementation project team – complete with global representation. Well done! "Go forth and implement!" were the team's marching orders. Alas, no success. What the organization failed to consider was that even though the project team was global in makeup, the leadership of the countries/global regions these team members represented had not been sold on the merits of the project or its importance to their businesses prior to implementation beginning. In the absence of a strong global business case, country/global region leadership also feared this change would cause them to lose valuable talent. The "push" had come to shove. It was inevitable that each country/global region would deprioritize the effort in favor of its own local business imperatives. The only "pull" this project would get from country/global region leaders was the pull of local resources from the project necessary to make the initiative successful. Competing functional goals often derail domestic change initiatives. Competing "country goals" can derail global ones.

Change the Way You Change Globally

- "Slow down to speed up!" Take the time upfront to help country/global region leaders understand how proposed changes will positively affect the company's top-line business goals, aka, "its" business goals. Global change requires a global business case.
- A shared, top-line business goal should motivate country/global region leaders to demand the change and create the necessary global pull to facilitate adoption.

Backs were slapped and Congratulations prematurely offered…

Hold the applause. "Live" dates being met and user training completed on time do not translate to successful technological change. When project teams are allowed to move on to the next project while work processes still

support old ways of doing things, talent is misaligned to new roles, and rewards are still tied to doing things the same old way, effective change did not happen. To quote a famous TQM consultant with the Yankees, "It ain't over till it's over." Where technological change is concerned, it ain't over until the project team has aligned each element of a work process to new business performance goals and everyone in the organization is encouraged to keep their eyes on the same new ball.

Change the Way You Change

- Project team success should be based on new process performance levels or business performance – not just the completion of tasks.
- Project teams should model the new process (the "ings,") before implementing the tool (the "thing,") to understand every aspect of the required change.
- You should be able to map every organizational improvement project to an ultimate improvement in business performance. As the driver tree shows, improving the accuracy of order entry data – via change – leads to improved functional performance, this, in turn, improves the organization's financial performance.
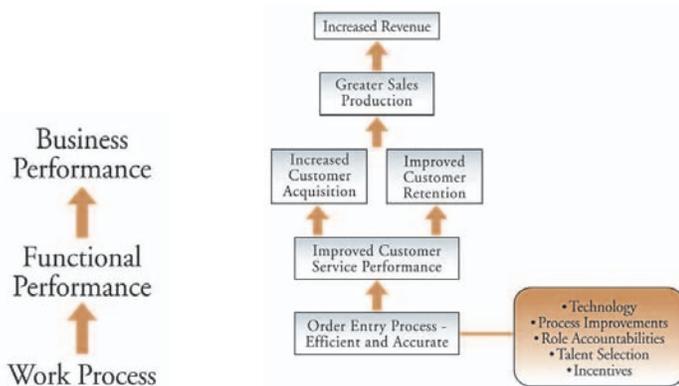
Oh, Wait…There's that Whole Global Thing

Making sure your implementation project team is well-rounded with global representation will not guarantee that everyone on the project team will have their eyes on the same global ball. Why? Because country/global region team members will undoubtedly be closely aligned to their home country/region – it's that whole home-is-where-the-heart-is-where-the-paycheck-comes-from mentality (the same dynamic can be seen during the early stages of any domestic, cross-functional assemblage). And unless you have secured the sponsorship of country/global region leaders as previously mentioned, team members from those locations might bring special local interests, different agendas, or even apathy to the project. None of these qualities have anything to do with the team succeeding in

its expected mission. In other words, had you slowed down at the beginning and garnered support, the project team would now be clipping along at full speed instead of derailed mid-way through the initiative due to differing geographical priorities, conflicting objectives, or in absentia participation.

Change the Way You Change Globally

- With country/global region leadership sponsorship secure, ensure that individual project team members are aligned to the success of the change project – not country- or global region-specific agendas.
- With visible support from country/global region leaders, (aka communications), project team members feel empowered to pursue project team priorities and know they will "shine" when and if the team's goal is accomplished.

Technological change is a significant investment. Many in an organization fully expect the sizable investment to deliver expected results, and then deliver some more. But, enabling tools, regardless of their cost, are but one element of any work process and cannot be the *be-all* and *end-all* of improved business performance. Effective change will not occur until: 1) you look more broadly at all the elements critical to the success of a given work process and align them to the new desired state; 2) you convince countries/global regions and individuals to demand the change so they can achieve regional/individual performance goals; 3) project teams drive toward improved business performance goals instead of go-live dates and location-specific agendas; and, 4) global implications are not an afterthought, but a forethought.

So, avoid the finger-pointing and realize the full value of your new technology.

Change the way you change.

About the Author

Jeff Chan is the president of Chan Management Consulting, a consulting firm specializing in change management and organizational development. Prior to starting Chan Management Consulting, Chan worked for BP Amoco, Hewitt Associates, Spiegel, Sears, and Innovene. He has over 20 years of experience working with executives and teams implementing strategic changes to improve organizational performance across a wide range of companies and industries. He has a master's degree in Labor and Industrial Relations with an emphasis in Organization Development from Michigan State University. He is an active speaker at conferences and seminars on the topics of organizational development and change management. He can be reached at *Jeff.Chan@Chanconsulting.com*.