LEADING MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCES THROUGH TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

by

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Abstract

Leading multigenerational workforces through technological changes can pose unique challenges for a change manager. Leading change is never an easy task; leading a multigenerational staff through the change intensifies the challenges for the change leader to consider. However, if the change leader understands the generations, possible conflicts, motivators, and values of the generations, they will be able to use this knowledge and understanding to adjust change models to bet fit the staff involved in a particular change. This seminar paper discusses the importance of technology changes for organizational success; the four generations currently in the workforce today, including the life events that shaped the generation, comfort and experience with technology, as well as motivators to leverage during the change process; Lewin’s three step change process and Kotter’s eight stage change process; and a plan for successfully implementing a change plan for leading a multigenerational staff through a technology change.
# Table of Contents

I. Leading Multigenerational Workforces..............................................1  
II. Literature Review..............................................................................1  
   a. Importance of Technological Change........................................1  
   b. Multigenerational Workforce..................................................2  
      i. Generation Overview.....................................................7  
      ii. Silent Generation......................................................8  
         1. Values and Traits of the Silent Generation  
         2. Technological Experience of the Silent Generation  
      iii. Baby Boomers.............................................................9  
         1. Values and Traits of the Baby Boomer Generation  
         2. Technological Experience of the Baby Boomer Generation  
      iv. Generation X.............................................................10  
         1. Values and Traits of Generation X  
         2. Technological Experience of Generation X  
      v. Generation Y.............................................................12  
         1. Values and Traits of Generation Y  
         2. Technological Experience of Generation Y  
      vi. Generation C..............................................................14  
   c. Difference Between the Generations.........................................14  
      i. Popular Opinion............................................................14  
      ii. Communication Preference.............................................15  
      iii. Technology.....................................................................15  
      iv. Self-Esteem......................................................................16  
      v. Management.....................................................................16  
      vi. Resistance to Change.....................................................17  
   d. Known Ways to Approach Change..........................................18  
      i. Kotter’s Eight Stage Process............................................19  
      ii. Lewin’s Three Steps.......................................................20  
III. Recommended Model for Leading a Multigenerational Workforce...21  
   a. Kotter’s Eight Steps Applied to Multigenerational Workforce....22  
      i. Stage 1: Create a Sense of Urgency.................................22  
      ii. Stage 2: Form a Powerful Coalition...............................23  
      iii. Stage 3: Create a Vision of Change..............................24  
      iv. Stage 4: Communicate the Vision....................................25  
      v. Stage 5: Remove Obstacles............................................26  
      vi. Stage 6: Create Short Term Wins...................................27  
      vii. Stage 7: Build on the Change......................................28
viii. Stage 8: Anchor the Change...........................................29

IV. Implementing Multigenerational Change Leadership.......................29
   a. Generational Diversity Training........................................29
   b. Foster the Change Culture.............................................31
   c. Complete Kotter’s Eight Stages in Technology......................31
      i. Create a Sense of Urgency........................................32
      ii. Form a Powerful Coalition........................................33
      iii. Create a Vision of Change.........................................33
      iv. Communicate the Vision............................................34
      v. Remove Obstacles.....................................................35
      vi. Create Short Term Wins..........................................36
      vii. Build on the Change................................................36

V. Conclusion.............................................................................38

VI. References............................................................................40
Leading Multigenerational Workforces Through Technological Change

Leading change requires planning and understanding: the need for the change, the culture of the office or business, past failures and success, employee makeup, and a variety of other factors. While each of these factors is important for change leaders to understand and accommodate, this research will focus on an often-overlooked aspect of employee makeup: generational differences. Multigenerational workforces can have a significant impact on change leadership and must be considered throughout the process. Changes directly relating to technology have an impressive impact on the success of the business and can have significant challenges when multigenerational workforces are involved. Based on a thorough literature review, there appears to be very limited research on how to best lead these multigenerational workforces through technological changes.

Literature Review

Importance of Technological Change

Technological change is important to the overall health of a company. Companies need to continue to reduce overall costs, while improving quality and services (Kotter, 1996) and technology can often help aid in that goal. Continuing to change and advance with the most up to date technology helps a company stay competitive (Filipescu, Prashantham, Rialp, & Rialp, 2013; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008; Scott & McManus, 2010; Tyre & Orlikowski, 1993). While these changes are necessary, documentation of how to adapt, or lead changes, to new technologies appears to be limited (Tyre & Orlikowski, 1993). Technology changes are often implemented to improve business
process, streamline current processes and stay competitive (Filipescu, et al., 2013; Scott & McManus, 2010). While these changes are imperative to the overall success of the company, change can also be a leading factor in the decline of employee morale, even when the change is positive (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008), and therefore needs to be approached carefully.

During typical technological changes, the most change in process takes place directly after implementation of the new technology. After that point, employees are more likely to make the new technology fit their old process instead of finding new, streamlined ways to complete processes using the new technology. After the initial implementation, there are short bursts of adaptation of the new technology, but these are typically aimed at solving a specific problem and not updating an entire process (Tyre & Orlikowski, 1993). This increases the importance of acceptance of the change and continued training after implementation to ensure continued use of the new technology.

**Multigenerational Workforce**

Today’s workforce includes employees from four generations working together (Mullan, 2008; Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014). These individuals have different generational values and views, which can increase the amount of conflict in the workplace (Clochesy, 2008; Houlihan, 2007; Mullan, 2008). These disagreements or conflicts often stem from differences in generational values which affect work styles, work-life balance expectations, and responsibilities; and if not addressed these differences can impact the overall productivity of the employees and their ability to work as a team (Clochesy, 2008). However, despite the challenges a multigenerational
workforce creates, a generationally diverse workforce is vital to the continued growth and success of an organization (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014).

Generational differences have an impact on every aspect of today’s businesses (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Servert, & Gade, 2012), and impact change leadership, specifically when that change is technology based (Mullan, 2008). While it is challenging, successful companies need to be able to reach all the generations on their level in order to ensure continued success (Mullan, 2008; Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014). There are not guidelines to follow on how to lead multigenerational workforces, or how to lead teams through technology changes (Mullan, 2008; Tyre & Orlikowsi, 1993), but a change manager must be able to understand and address differences within the generations to apply to change models throughout the process. With change now being the constant businesses can rely on (Nastase, Giuclea, & Bold, 2012), change leaders and managers should learn how to approach individuals from different generations.

Change leaders must be prepared for the climate of the company or office the change is to be implemented in, as the employees involved have a large impact on the success or failure of the project (Kotter, 2007; Nastase et al., 2012). Being familiar with the generations involved and how the generational values and conflicts may interfere or assist with the change is vital to the success. It is estimated that two-thirds of organizational change projects fail during the process, which may be a low estimate (Mitchell, 2013) and the people involved have a direct impact on this.

When undergoing any change, a positive attitude among the employees can help lead to the success, and therefore creating a positive attitude must be a priority for a change manager. Understanding generational variables may help a project be successful,
as it is important for personnel to be involved throughout the change process (Nastase et al., 2012). Understanding what motivates people, or generations of people, can assist in creating a positive attitude towards the change. Motivators can be pay, working conditions, belonging, security, achievement, recognition, and a number of other factors (Hayes, 2010).

Prior to beginning any change implementation, the change leader must be able to select the appropriate model to move forward with said project (Mitchell, 2012). However, regardless of the model chosen, if there is not a positive change culture already in place, the change will face detrimental challenges. This culture of change cannot and should not be created during the change, but needs to already be in place in order for the change to be successful (Nastase et al., 2012).

There is not one correct way to address a multigenerational workforce, but the management style must have fluidity to address the values and motivators of each generation (Houlihan, 2007; Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014). In order to be successful, managers must be able to identify the four generations and which employees fall into which generations; draw on the strengths of each generation; adapt management style for each generation; and accept the values of each generation (Houlihan, 2007). However, in gaining an understanding of generational differences and values, a change leader cannot lose sight of the fact that employees may be part of a generational group, but above all, they are still individuals. Generational values and traits are stereotypes placed on the generations. Not all values, motivators, or other traits will fit each individual in the generation and the change leader needs to understand not only the generational makeup, but the employees on an individual basis.
By understanding the values of the generations, one will also gain an understanding of the motivators each generation will most likely find the most important. Motivating a multigenerational workforce is one of the largest challenges facing business (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014). Managers must be able to see the strengths within each generation and understand the experiences that shaped their values to best lead the multigenerational workforce (Houlihan, 2007).

In order to lead a multigenerational workforce through change, the change managers must be able to adjust their procedures to fit all audiences. With four generations working side by side in a large portion of workplaces, managers must have at least four different management styles and they must be cognizant of the need to not manage only under their own generational values, but incorporate the values of others (Houlihan, 2007). Even with all the understanding and planning in place, there will always be those within the organization who oppose change (Nastase et al., 2012); preparing for this opposition can increase the likelihood of success.

In order to effectively lead a multigenerational staff, change leaders must be able to understand the differences in the generations, as well as the experiences that shaped them (Houlihan, 2007). These experiences are what have created the differences in values between the generations that can create challenging situations and conflicts between employees from different generations. It is important to note that the challenges that can arise from multigenerational groups is not about age difference, but about the value system differences generations have and the conflict between whose values are the correct ones (Houlihan, 2007). Age is not the issue in these situations, values are.
The generations must be able to understand each other to work well together and managers can and should help facilitate this understanding and lead by example. In order for the generations to understand each other, they must be willing to admit to their mistakes and share their wisdom; the older generations must be willing to accept the role of mentor; the younger generation must be willing to accept the role of mentee; all generations must respect the differences between them (Wood, 2005). The older generations bring years of experience to the table, while the younger generations are bringing new ideas and greater technical skills (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014).

It is also important for the managers to fully embrace that each generation brings their own strengths to the workplace (Houlihan, 2007) and that leveraging these strengths can help create a positive work environment where the generations can learn from each other. The ideas and values of each generation are a combination of the cultural, social, economic, and political events of their formative years (Haserot, 2008). These values cannot be changed, but should be appreciated for what they can bring to a team.

Managers were not ready for this generational shift in the workforce. The change occurred very slowly and was not fully noticed until it began to affect the bottom line of businesses (Wood, 2005). The change occurred over all areas of business. The older generation could no longer be expected to retire at the age of 65 and the younger generations were moving through the lines of command quickly (Wood, 2005). This has resulted in multiple generations serving at all levels in business with a lack of understanding of each other causing conflicts between employees and managers. This is especially true when the managers are from younger generations than other employees, but this is becoming more common. Younger individuals are moving through the ranks
at faster rate, in some cases, than older individuals who have been with the company for more years.

In 2008, the United States’ workforce was 5% over the age of 65, 37% between 46 and 55, 33% between 30 and 45, and 25% under the age of 30 (Costanza et al., 2012). It is expected that by 2016 individuals aged 55-64 in the US workforce will increase by 36.5% and those 25-54 will only increase 2.4% (Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2013). There is no question that change managers will need to work with a multigenerational staff. How the manager chooses to work with the differences between generations can have a large impact on the cohesiveness of the group. To be successful in leading multigenerational workforces, managers must understand the differences and learn to utilize these differences in positive ways (Dixon, Mercado & Knowles, 2013).

There is evidence that age can have a negative impact on the ability of individuals to adapt to change and learn new skills (Niessen, Swarowsky, & Leiz, 2010). When one further learns about the values and experiences of generations, there does appear to be differences in how the generations may handle change and therefore differences in how the generations should be led through change. In order to gain more insight into the generations in the workforce, one must first understand how generations are formed and which generations are currently in the workforce.

**Generation overview.** The start and end dates of generations are not entirely agreed upon and may vary depending on the source and the country being discussed (Haserot, 2008). The generations discussed here will be those associated with the United States and currently in the workforce: Silents, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Generations are usually defined as starting with an increase in births and
end when this rate begins to decline (Costanza et al., 2012). Within these time frames, there are also historical events that are believed to have shaped the values and attitudes of the generations (Costanza et al., 2012; Dixon et al., 2013). These common life experiences create values within the generation and a bond between those within the generation (Dixon et al., 2013).

Silent Generation. The Silent Generation, also known as the Traditionalists, is the oldest generation currently in the workforce (Hart, 2006) and refers to individuals born in 1923-1942 (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). This generation was influenced by Civil Rights, Women’s Rights, and the Great Depression (Wood, 2005). Due to the number of social progresses made in their developmental years and the changes they witnessed, they tend to sit back and deal with what comes their way (Wood, 2005). This generation has witnessed a number of large changes in their lives and may be more accepting of changes in the workplace.

Values and traits of the Silent Generation. Traditionalists tend to be practical, disciplined, and respect authority (Hart, 2006). This generation is likely to only work for one or two employers during their lifetime, be comfortable with top down leadership styles (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011), and place importance on timelines and face to face communications (Hart, 2006). This generation may perceive Generation Y’s reliance on technology as laziness (Houlihan, 2007).

Change managers should reflect on this generation’s typical response: to sit back and deal with what comes their way. They are more concerned with the good of the company and want to see the company do well. They prefer frequent face to face conversations and place importance on timelines. It will also be important for change
managers to remember that this generation can see the reliance on technology as being lazy and can then plan ahead to combat this notion when leading technological changes. Change managers will need to take the time to explain how the change will be beneficial to the company and the bottom line and retirement accounts, not only as a way to save employee time.

*Technological experience of the Silent Generation.* In the years this generation was forming, technology advancements included the invention of penicillin and the atomic bomb. Technology was beginning to grow more rapidly, however the availability of products for individuals or families to use on a daily basis was still limited.

*Baby Boomers.* Individuals born between the years 1943-1964 are members of the Baby Boomer generation. This generation was influenced by events such as the Vietnam War, Civil Rights, and assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr. (Dixon et al., 2013). During this time frame a child was born every 7 seconds (Wood, 2005), creating the name Baby Boom.

*Values and traits of the Baby Boomers.* Due to the political climate of this generation, Baby Boomers are seen as lacking of respect for authority. Events such as Watergate can be attributed to this lack of respect for leaders (Dixon et al., 2013). Baby Boomers are willing to commit to an organization and see employment as long term, which is an important trait for managers to recognize. This generation can also be described as non-confrontational, resistant to change, and team players (Dixon et al., 2013).

Change leaders need to remember that this generation does not have an immediate respect for authority, the respect must be earned. This generation does, however, have
the respect to commit to an organization long-term, in order to benefit their families and their retirement, and are team players, which can also be beneficial in aiding the explanation of change.

This older generation is often seen by others as being less willing to change, more resistant to new technologies, and not as willing to learn new skills as the younger generations (Gellert & Schalk, 2012). Whether or not the resistance to change and the inability to learn new skills is true of Baby Boomers, it is the perception the younger generations have and something both generations will need to overcome to be successful.

*Technological experience of the Baby Boomers.* In the youth of this generation, technology included black and white televisions that required individuals to walk up and change the channel (Schoch, 2012). With a very limited number of channels compared to today, these individuals had narrow programing to choose from, and were saturated with news coverage of the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr, as well as man’s first steps on the moon (Schoch, 2012).

During the formative years for this generation, technology began to play a larger role in daily life. This generation saw the invention of the microwave and ATM’s, bringing technology home. This generation also was able to witness the growing technological knowledge with the space program, the launches of Sputnik I and Sputnik II, the first person in space, and the moon landing. With the technology changes Baby Boomers experienced in their lifetimes, change leaders can use examples from these past technological advances to encourage buy in to the project.

*Generation X.* This generation consists of children born between 1965 and 1981. This was the first generation to primarily raise themselves (Wood, 2005). Many of the
characteristics of Generation X are attributed to watching the economic downfalls of the 1970’s and 1980’s and being the first generation of latch-key children with both parents working outside of the home. They have also been shaped by entertainment, such as the birth of MTV, and worldwide epidemics (e.g., AIDS) (Dixon et al., 2013).

*Values and traits of Generation X.* Generation X watched the downfall of political leaders such as Bill Clinton and Richard Nixon (Schoch, 2012). With the technology available to them, they were able to watch these downfalls play out on national television and stay informed on these political topics. Due to these experiences, this generation is the least idealistic generation currently in the workplace (Schoch, 2012). These life experiences have made this generation expect instability and constant change, and therefore have a higher tolerance for professional risks and have creative solutions for problems (Dixon et al., 2013). This generation can also be described as individualistic and putting importance on relationships, education, and diversity. These are not lifetime employees, but use employment as opportunities to gain needed skills to move on (Dixon et al., 2013). They are also the generation known for their abilities to multi-task and prioritize (Kapoor, 2011).

Negatively, this generation is also known as slackers (Wood, 2005). This slacking image can be a real challenge when a Generation Xer is the manager of Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers may feel the individual does not have enough work experience to lead and therefore may not respect the person as the leader (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Generation X feels outnumbered by the Baby Boomers, rightfully so as there are approximately half the number of Generation Xers compared to Baby Boomers (Schoch, 2012).
Technological experience of Generation X. Generation X is not interested in working long hours or overtime, as they strive for a work life balance (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Generation X was the first generation to be exposed technology throughout their whole lives (Houlihan, 2007). This generation understands how technology can aid in the workday and therefore is more concerned with the amount of work they can get done in the workday than working extra hours to accomplish tasks (Houlihan, 2007). They have seen a lot of technology changes including the invention of email, pocket calculators, the rise and fall of floppy disks, the personal computer, camcorders, and the World Wide Web. This generation saw technology start to play a bigger role in everyday life, and learned how to adapt along the way.

When working with this generation, change leaders will want to remember Generation X’s desire for work life balance and encourage buy in to technology projects by showcasing the streamlined processing and decreased workload the project will create. Generation X may be more accepting of technology changes due to their lifetime experience with technology in day to day life.

Generation Y. The youngest generation currently in the workforce was shaped by events such as 9/11 and the numerous terrorist attacks and wars that ensued after that event (Dixon et al., 2013). Generation Y are the children of supportive, overprotective parents (Hart, 2006) and were born between 1982 and 2003. These children watched the events of 9/11 over and over on live TV during the live coverage of the terrorist’s attacks. They have grown up watching wars and natural disasters unfold live on TV. This generation is the most technological of the generations, as technology has been part of their lives since birth (Dixon et al., 2013).
Values and traits of Generation Y. This generation can be described as team oriented, honest, and having a need to be challenged (Dixon et al., 2013). There are negative perceptions of Generation Y, including an increase in violence against each other and having children in their teenage years (Wood, 2005).

Generation Y is known by a number of other names and the nicknames add a level of understanding about the generation. They may be known as Millennials or Echo Boomers because of the similarities to the Baby Boomers (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Another nickname for this generation is Thumbers as they can quickly thumb through their cell phone or other technology (Simons, 2010). This generation has a higher comfort level with technology than any other generation and adapts more quickly to new technologies (Simons, 2010). While Generation X grew up with technology, Generation Y has been immersed in technology for their entire lives (Houlihan, 2007).

Technological experience of Generation Y. With their increased knowledge and use the newest technologies to reach their professional aspirations, Generation Y employees able to use this knowledge to better achieve work-life balance (Houlihan, 2007). Their flexibility in using technology to achieve their goals also slants their viewpoint towards the older generations as being too rigid in their ways (Houlihan, 2007). Generation Y feels ownership of the world they live in, as well as the need to change it (Schoch, 2012).

When managing Generation Y, it is important to note they are more flexible when it comes to change, especially if that change is going to make things easier for them. This generation wants to get their work done correctly, but also quickly. If eight hours of work can be completed in four, there is no need to work the other four. This generation
can be a great resource in aiding with technological changes, as their comfort level with technology is higher than any other generation currently in the workforce.

**Generation C.** Generation C is not a typical generational group and is not defined by birth years. Generation C is known for fully embracing technology and technological updates and changes, regardless of traditional generational membership (Schoch, 2012). This group is not defined by an age, but by characteristics of being creative, using technology, viewing learning curves as challenges-not obstacles-and is full of individuals who will desire to be in positions of leadership and aiding with advancing technology (Schoch, 2012).

In leading any changes in technology, a change manager may benefit from looking for members of Generation C. These cross-generational individuals have an understanding and appreciation of technology that cross the standard generational lines. These individuals could be assets in creating the technology change.

**Differences Between the Generations**

**Popular generational opinion.** Typically, older generations are given a longer list of positive attributes while the younger generations are giving a longer list of negative attributes (Wood, 2005). As time has passed, generations have received other names due to the changes in perceptions over time. For example, the Baby Boomers have become known as the Fix-It Generation; while the younger generations of X and Y are the Lost Generations (Wood, 2005). What managers, and employees, must remember is that while each generation is shaped by the unique experiences of the times, they each have unique skills and views to bring to the table (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011).
Generations may have common values and skills based on the shared experiences of their developmental years, but they also have common biases regarding other generations. These biases must be considered when managing multigenerational staffs. These biases have evolved over time and often come down to what the other generations see as common sense (Wood, 2005).

**Communication preferences.** Communication can be uniquely challenging between generations, as different generations prefer different forms of communication (Mullan, 2008). The older generations (Silent Generation and Baby Boomers) prefer to meet face to face in a meeting setting, while the younger generations (Generations X and Y) are comfortable communicating via email, text messaging, or social media (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011; Mullan 2008). While Baby Boomers prefer the face to face meetings, Generations X and Y may think the Baby Boomers like to have too many meetings, taking time away from projects and deadlines (Haserot, 2008). Generations X and Y may also feel Baby Boomers over explain while Baby Boomers see Generations X and Y as being too abrupt in their communications (Haserot, 2008).

It is important to take all of these communication preferences and ideas into consideration when building a communication plan, to ensure the information is being delivered in the way that fits the needs of the employees’ comfort levels (Mullan, 2008). To best reach all employees and generations, it is recommended to have multiple communication path; to deliver the same message (Mullan, 2008).

**Technology.** An obvious gap between these generations pertains to technology (Simons, 2010). With the Boomers often being in leadership roles and Generation Y in the lower ranks, those who are in charge of maintaining information are generally less
technical than those who need to access said information on a daily basis (Simons, 2010). Generation Y has the most experience and highest comfort level with technology, but these are not the individuals who are in leadership roles (for the majority). Baby Boomers, who may be reaching the end of their careers in leadership roles have the most limited understanding and comfort level with technology. Change managers must have this in mind when working with a Baby Boomer leader in to help the leadership understand the impact of the change.

Generations X and Y are more comfortable with technology and technical changes than the older generations. Baby Boomers and Traditionalists did not grow up with technology in their day to day lives, and while they are capable of learning, they can be lacking some of the basic skill sets and confidence to do so (Schoch, 2012). The need for new technology can create a sense of crisis or urgency, which can help move the change forward (Spencer & Winn, 2004).

**Self-esteem.** The younger generations show an increased self-esteem, which is both positive and negative (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). The younger generations are more confident in their abilities, but this may also result in them being more sensitive to criticism (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). These younger generations are very ambitious and expect their employers to feed their need for new challenges and to be aware of the unique qualities they possess. For these younger generations, a job is not just a job. It is not just a means to make a salary and support a family; it should provide challenges and unique experiences (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).

**Management.** Managers must be able to change their management style to reflect the individual they are working with. Generational values are a place to start;
however, it is important the manager remembers to consider each person as an individual and not always part of a whole. Generations are looking for different behaviors in managers. Generation Y may want continued feedback and high praise to feel successful, while Baby Boomers may interpret a lack of feedback to mean they are doing their job correctly.

Managers today have the unique challenge of not only managing these varied generations, but in getting them to respect each other. This challenge can become even more difficult if said manager is from a younger generation than the employees, which can be the case when working with technology changes. Thus, it is imperative for the change manager to be able to relate to individuals from each generation. Managers must know how to communicate, how to motivate, and how to provide feedback to each generation, as well as how to recruit and retain these employees (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014).

While the focus here is the challenges a multigenerational workforce creates, it is important to reflect on the positives of this generational diversity. The older generation has years of knowledge and experience to pass along, while the younger generations are full of new ways to look at old problems. Open communication and knowledge transfer between the generations can lead to a more productive workplace (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014).

**Resistance to change.** There is a clear need for more research into the workplace implications of generational differences and change management (Costanza et al., 2012). There is a lack of substantial research supporting the negative stereotype of older generations being more resistant to change (Kunze et al., 2013). In order to be
successful, managers must take time before initiating change to know who the employees most likely to resist the changes are and to begin building trust and understanding with the employees to lessen the level of resistance (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). This can be accomplished in a large scale stakeholder brainstorm, where all the individuals that could be affected by the change are identified and assessed (Hayes, 2010). This process allows the change leader to not only identify those who will be affected, but then assess which of these individuals has influence over the organization or staff, as well as anticipate how they will react to the change (Hayes, 2010). This type of preparation can assist the change manager in knowing how to speak about the change to generations. For example, reaffirming to Baby Boomers that the change will not change their position within the company, but aid them in some way (Schoch, 2012), may help encourage them to support the change.

**Known Ways to Approach Change**

There are a number of theories and models available for change managers to use. The models available often provide a starting point, however, there is little available in terms of implementation models or discussions regarding the actual implementation of the change (Stragalas, 2010). The lack of change implementation discussion, coupled with the high volume of failed change efforts indicates a problem in change leadership documentation available (Stragalas, 2010). There is a lack of information regarding how to take the theories and models and actually use them to implement the change.

A large number of change projects dealing with introducing a new technology fail due to a lack of communication before and/or during the project. These failures in technological projects may also stem from not involving those employees who will be
most directly affected by the change early in the project (Levasseur, 2001). A change manager must be able to choose the right approach to be sure the change is successful. While there are various models for change managers to utilize, two of the most well known models will be discussed for the purposes of multigenerational change leadership. Kotter’s Eight Stage Process and Lewin’s Three Step Model are two well known models to consider.

**Kotter’s Eight Stage Process.** Kotter is known for his writings on leadership and his understanding of how organizational change happens and is seen as an authority on leadership and change (Lord, Dinh, & Hoffman, 2015; Spencer & Winn, 2005). Kotter has outlined an eight stage organizational change process that is easy to understand and useful in planning change and give change leaders clear guidance (Spencer & Winn, 2004; Stragala, 2010). Kotter’s model is frequently discussed in graduate management programs and has been validated numerous times as a successful change implementation model (Stragala, 2010).

Kotter’s Eight Stages (Kotter, 1996):

1. Create a Sense of Urgency
2. Form a Powerful Coalition
3. Create a vision of change
4. Communicate the vision
5. Remove Obstacles
6. Create Short Term Wins
7. Build on the Change
8. Anchor the Change

This model looks at organizational behavior from a macro level, providing the tools needed to successfully lead change (Stragala, 2010) and acknowledges issues regarding resistance to change and risk management within the organization (Scott & McManus,
However, Kotter’s eight stage process cannot be expected to apply to all types of changes and with its rigid form, it may need some modifications to be successful (Appelbaum, Habashy, Malo, & Shafiq, 2012).

**Lewin’s Three Step Model.** Lewin was a leading social scientist of his time, focusing on work with leadership styles, child-parent relations, conflicts in marriage, and other social science behaviors (Burnes, 2004). He also created a three step model for organizational change. This model is a powerful tool for organizational development solutions (Levasseur, 2001), however, it was not created to be used for organizational issues only and Lewin had planned for this three step model to only be used in conjunction with his other theories (Burnes & Cooke, 2013). Lewin’s model is comprised of three main steps, unfreezing, moving, and refreezing.

Lewin’s model examines at the reasons behind the change, is the motivation a crisis or other reason (Levasseur, 2001). As Lewin felt it was impossible to really understand an organization until one tried to change it (Geber, 2008), understanding the cause for the change was imperative. The model is about minimizing barriers to change, providing visionary leadership, and refreezing post project (Levasseur, 2001). However, Lewin’s model does not give explicit instructions on what a change leader needs to do to make change happen (Levasseur, 2001). This model has become unfashionable in recent years and suffered criticism regarding it being too simplistic, not taking into account issues such as power and politics within organizations (Burnes & Cooke, 2013).

There are four generations working side by side in today’s workforce, each with a unique set of values. Each generation has varied experiences and skills to share, but their varied backgrounds can also create conflict. Change managers can better utilize strengths
of individual employees if they invest the time to understand the employee makeup and generational values. Change managers can then leverage the knowledge regarding the employee base to help the technology initiative be successful.

Understanding the makeup of the employees can be very helpful during the change process. Change managers can have an overall idea of which employees may be the most resistant to change based on their generational values and the change in progress. This can help the change manager plan ahead for these obstacles, but the manager must also remember that not all members of the generation will fit into the generational stereotypes. Change managers will need to remember to also understand the employees on an individual level, but the overall generational understanding will assist.

To implement the change, the change leader will need to adjust the change model to the change itself, and the employee makeup involved. To have a successful change with a multigenerational workforce, the change leader must be able to mitigate any non support from individuals while encouraging buy in from individuals across all generations.

**Recommended Model for Multigenerational Workforce**

There are a variety of change models for change leaders to utilize when leading technology changes, however, Kotter’s Eight Stage Process offers a detailed process, while leaving room for leaders to adjust where needed. Kotter’s process is a flexible plan for change leaders to rely on when leading multigenerational staff through technological changes. This plan will be described first in a broad sense and then in a more detailed implementation plan incorporating multigenerational values and motivators for technology changes.
Kotter’s model for change gives enough direction for change managers to follow, while leaving enough room for variation to best adjust this model to the needs and generational diversity of the group involved in the change. Each stage in the process can be adjusted to fit the needs of the culture of the office or business, past failures and success, and employee makeup, as long as the change manager has taken into account the different values and motivators of the staff.

**Stage 1: Create a Sense of Urgency.** Kotter’s first stage lays the groundwork for employees to agree with and understand the need for change. This is a very important step as Kotter estimates a company needs at least 75% of the management level employees to be convinced of the need for change for it to be successful (Kotter, 2007; Stragalas, 2010).

The purpose of this first stage is to get the team involved to see the need for the proposed change. In working with a multigenerational staff, there will need to be a variety of motivators to get everyone on board. Creating a sense of community among team members in discovering the motivators or completing a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis may give the team the understanding they need to support the change.

When creating this sense of urgency in a multigenerational workforce, one must consider the motivators for each generation. A new technology may be interesting enough to create a sense of urgency in a Generation Y employee, but this will not encourage a Baby Boomer to get behind the project. Instead, there will have to be a number of motivators in play: how will the new technology better the company; your
retirement; your position within the company; your ability to do your job more quickly. Motivators for each generation must be considered when trying to create the sense of urgency needed to move change forward. Unsuccessfully creating the sense of urgency will have a negative impact on the change and can lead to project failures (Kotter, 2007). It is important to establish a great enough sense of urgency and to do so, one must realize how difficult it may be to encourage individuals to come out of their comfort zones (Kotter, 2007). There are a number of reasons the sense of urgency may not be created. Change managers may overestimate their own abilities to force the change, lack the patience to create the urgency, or increase the level of anxiety by mistake (Kotter, 1996).

**Stage 2: Form a Powerful Coalition.** A powerful coalition can be a group from 5 members to more than 20 members with a shared understanding and commitment to the change (Kotter, 2007). This coalition should be made up of a variety of individuals, varying not only in generations, but also in job titles, expertise areas and office reputations (Kotter, 2007; Stragalas, 2010), while being powerful in the terms of titles and reputations (Kotter, 1996). Without a mixture of leaders and managers, the coalition, and therefore the change, will not succeed. However, in order for the coalition to work, all members of the coalition must already buy in to the project (Kotter, 2007; Stragalas, 2010).

In building the coalition, the change leader will want to be looking for those individuals who may best fit in Generation C. Earlier, it was noted that this group is not defined by an age, but by characteristics of being creative, using technology, viewing learning curves as challenges-not obstacles and is individuals who will desire to be in
positions of leadership and aiding with advancing technology (Schoch, 2012). Including members from Generation C in the coalition will be beneficial to change leaders.

The coalition is responsible for leading and managing the change, but also for building trust and a stronger team throughout the project. As Kotter (1996) explains, the older generations will remember a time that team building was social family gatherings outside of work hours, for example the office Christmas party or golf outing. This process is no longer the best format for team building today, as it takes too much time and effort for families to commit. Today’s team building must be done faster and often not include family members, like an office retreat. Once the coalition has trust and teamwork, they have what they need to make the change happen with their leadership and management (Kotter, 1996).

**Stage 3: Create a Vision of Change.** Kotter’s third stage is to Create a Vision of Change. If stages one and two are completed with the differences in the generations taken into consideration, the vision of change should be able to reach all audiences. This stage is about values: the values of the people and the values of the change. This vision should be detailed to the level of everyone being able to visualize the change and the positive outcomes the change will have on the organization as a whole and on the individual level.

The vision of change should be easy to communicate and understood in five minutes or less, be appealing to members of all generations, and create interest in the audience to learn more and cannot be too complicated (Kotter, 2007). The vision should also be detailed enough to gain the interest and excitement of the employees, as well as something that can be seen as achievable (Kotter, 1996).
The change manager’s awareness of how the change will be perceived by the employees is vital to a successful change. Changes in technology have an impact on the day to day tasks of an individual and can cause significant changes to their daily work routine (Niessen, 2010). These changes are not simply an issue of learning a new technology, but learning a new way to complete individual tasks, and in many ways, a new way to get through the day. When individuals are unsure of their abilities to learn the new technology or lack the confidence in themselves to do so, the resistance to the change can be increased. It is important for the change manager to build the confidence level of employees and their abilities to not only learn the new technology, but excel at it (Niessen, 2010).

**Stage 4: Communicate the Vision.** Communicating the vision is stage four and can be one of the larger hurdles when working with multigenerational staff. The change needs to be communicated often, in different formats, at different times, and to different audiences. No one should be able to say they were not aware of the change or the anticipated outcomes. The coalition could be vital to the communication process as they can develop the communication plan to be sure all generations are being reached in their communication comfort area.

This type of communication plan will take time, but the time invested in a good multigenerational communication plan will be time better spent than the time needed to back track and fix issues (Haserot, 2008). These conversations can help to open Boomers up to new technologies and solutions (Simons, 2010), while Generations X and Y can help show how these new technologies can solve problems.
Communication should be done in a number of ways to be sure all staff members are aware of the change, the process, the reasons, and have heard these reasons in a way that best suits their value system. How many face to face meetings, email communications, tweets, or other communications are needed will vary based on the change at hand and the generations involved. A change manager should come up with a communication plan, outlining how the process will be communicated and present this to the staff both in person and via email.

Posting hard copies of the communication plan would also be beneficial for all staff members to feel they have been fully informed of how the process will come about. To have real buy in, an initial meeting regarding the communication plan should be a brainstorming event where all individuals get to give their opinions regarding how, when, and the frequency of communications. This encourages the staff to work as a team to come to an agreement of how the change process will be communicated.

**Stage 5: Remove Obstacles.** Kotter’s fifth stage is to remove obstacles. In this stage, the change manager needs to be sure they are fully aware of the progress made in the previous four stages. In order to understand the progress being made, the change manager may need to ask questions such as: Have the previous steps been successful?; Are there still generational groups with high resistance to the change?; Has anything in the process increased the levels of resistance or created more distance with a specific generation? The change manager needs to be ready to address any remaining challenges and revisit any areas that still need attention.

It is also in this stage those who are helping to deliver the change or those who have accepted the change can be rewarded. In order for this to be successful, the change
manager will again need to reflect back on the motivators for each generation, while also considering individual motivators. Rewarding those in each generation with something that motivates them will help to encourage the others in that generation to accept the change. This will help to motivate the staff as a whole and remove lingering barriers.

When communicating the reasons for the change, a change manager needs to remember the different value sets of the generations. Changes in technology can affect so many different aspects of the day to day business process and the different generations may not agree which aspects are the most important. Baby Boomers and Generation Y’s will be most interested in how this new technology will better help the entire organization, and therefore them (Schoch, 2012), while the Silent Generation may be interested in understanding the timeline first (Hart, 2006). Generation X will be more concerned with how will this new technology affect day to day tasks and the ability to be more productive at a faster rate. This generation is most concerned with their families and paying their bills, so if the change will help them and in turn help the organization, they are more likely to be on board (Schoch, 2012). Generation X needs to know that working hard for the company will directly affect their personal lives in a positive manner (Schoch, 2012) and their leader is competent to make the change (Hart, 2006). None of the generations will blindly follow change, they need to know why.

Stage 6: Create Short Term Wins. In order to maintain momentum and interest in the change, short term wins need to be celebrated. While it can be risky to celebrate an overall win too early, celebrating the small victories can help encourage continued support of the change. As a change manager working with a multigenerational staff, these celebrations need be varied to be sure the correct short term wins are being
celebrated to bring the generations together as one. It will be important to emphasize in the celebrations, not only that the short term win exists, but how this short term win correlates to the motivators of each generation and the vision. For instance, if the change is a positive change for the future of the company and the environment, Generation Y is likelier to be energized (Schoch, 2012).

**Stage 7: Build on the Change.** Once the team has started to see and celebrate the small successes, it is time to build on that change. It is important not to celebrate the success of the entire project too early, but celebrate the small successes, building one on the next. This format will help all involved to see how the project will affect the business or organization as a whole.

In order to best have this fit with a multigenerational workforce, the successes must be successes that will have a positive effect on all generational groups. This will be very helpful if the success itself is positive to one group and can indicate how that success will domino down to all different groups. For instance, if the short term win is going to save employees manual data entry time, they will have more availability to cross train in other areas, building their skill sets, giving back to the organization, and helping in other departments where individuals may feel overworked.

This is a great time to revitalize the change with the different generational groups. Looking at the small successes, encouraging more goal setting at the different levels and asking what individuals would like to see now. After there is clear indication of what success will look like, asking again for buy in and for more information about what will motivate continued support is beneficial.
Stage 8: Anchor the Change. The last and final step is anchoring the change. This step is about getting everyone on the same page regarding the success of the change and how, moving forward, this will continue to have a positive effect. This is a time to really celebrate key individuals in the process. It will be important to be sure the individuals being recognized for their success span the multiple generations at work. This will help to encourage continued team work and foster the culture of change.

A successful change manager will want to be sure the employees involved in the change receive the needed levels of training before, after, and during the change (Nastase, et al., 2012). Again, it is important to be sure this training is targeted at the multigenerational staff being directed. One training method will not be sufficient when possibly training members from four generations simultaneously. A change manager cannot have a one size fits all mentality in any aspect of the change process when leading a multigenerational staff, but this is very important in the training process. There may be generations and individuals whom need more training than others to build their confidence in learning the new system or product. The training process would be another excellent time for a change leader to rely on Generation C. A cross-generational group of individuals to lead the training may help all individuals feel more comfortable and more confident in their abilities.

Implementing Multigenerational Change Leadership

Generational Diversity Training

Having a mixture of generations in the workplace does bring a level of diversity, but generational diversity is often left out of the discussions regarding diversity training (Wood, 2005). Diversity training is seen as a value and benefit to many employers, but
by not addressing generational differences, an important area of diversity may be missed in these trainings. While generational diversity is often not included in many of the diversity discussions, these differences can impact every aspect of the workplace (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011). Background knowledge on the company in question and the level of diversity training that has occurred may provide information to the change manager which assists with understanding the current culture of the company and its willingness to accept change and work together.

Currently, some companies do make generational training a required piece of orientation (Hart, 2006) and as more companies see the need and benefit of this training, more are likely to begin including this valuable piece. Regardless of whether or not generational diversity training is occurring, there is an agreement that the generational differences have an impact on every aspect of today’s businesses (Costanza et al., 2012). Incorporating generational diversity into diversity training can help to overcome negativity between the generations (Wood, 2005) and therefore improve the overall environment of the office setting.

A change manager will look at the aspects of each generation involved in the change and make a plan with their values involved, while encouraging generations to see the positives in each other. For example, a change manager may encourage Baby Boomers to see the positives in Generation Y, including their ability to use new technology to connect with people on their level, conflict resolution, and comfort with diversity, and their ability to network (Haserot, 2008). Generations X and Y can also be encouraged to see the positives in the Baby Boomer generation, including their ability to see the big picture and their desire to give back to the whole (Haserot, 2008).
Foster Change

Change managers must be on the lookout for change, not only to drive the change, but to predict the upcoming changes (Nastase, 2012). In this way, managers can better prepare their employees for the changes to come and be sure to communicate the changes. How to communicate the upcoming changes, or the change process as it moves, is very important to consider when working with multigenerational staff. In order for the generations in the workplace to work cohesively, there needs to be open communication (Haserot, 2008). This is important for both coworkers and managers. In order to lead effectively, managers must understand how the employees of different generations prefer to be communicated with, the type and timing of feedback needed, and the types of questions they may have.

A committee consisting of key players can also help in this process. This committee may serve as a possible pool of individuals as members of the guiding coalition, but will not be the same group. It is important for the change manager to be sure the committee is not only balanced in job duties and titles, but also in generational representation. It is very important to include members from all generations in the discussions (Schoch, 2012). This committee can work together to flesh out the motivators, challenges, and areas of possible resistance the change will have. The representation from various generations will help to ensure all generations are heard and the change manager can be better prepared. It is always important to be prepared for possible problems in leading change, and conflicts between generations is a risk to monitor, depending on the overall impact of the change.

Complete Kotter’s Eight Stages In Technology Change
To implement Kotter’s Eight stages to lead a multigenerational staff through technology change elaborated on earlier, the change leader must reflect back on the generational makeup of the staff. The change manager must be looking for those who can help and/or hurt the change and seek out the correct individuals for assistance, while remembering that although generational values are useful to understand, each person must be treated as an individual and not just a part of the larger group. The change manager must also remember Kotter’s Eight Stages must all be completed, in the correct sequential order, for the change to be effective (Kotter, 1996). Completing each stage successfully is vital to the overall success of the change.

**Create a Sense of Urgency.** Changes that do not have a high enough sense of urgency always fail (Kotter, 1996). There are a number of reasons the sense of urgency may not be there, but it is the change manager’s job to create the urgency for enough of the individuals involved. In order to successfully complete this stage with a multigenerational staff, the change manager must remember to consider the motivators for each generation. What is going to create the sense of urgency in one generation may not be enough to create the urgency in another. In order for the change to be successful, the change manager must have staff on board from all areas and all generations.

The change manager does not need to present a different case to each generation to create the urgency, but be sure the case presented has motivators targeted at each. The reasons for the urgency must be targeted enough to get everyone motivated, but spread out enough to reach all generations and those individuals who do not fall into the generational stereotypes. For example, the urgency cannot just be budget related.
Instead, the urgency can be budget related, but the changes we will make will also help secure the future of this company while helping us to create a smaller carbon footprint.

**Form a Powerful Coalition.** The coalition needs to be powerful and diverse in order to be successful. This is an area where the change managers knowledge and understanding of the generations can be very useful. The coalition should have members from different generations, but these members need to be good leaders and managers, and believe in the change. With technology changes, a change manager may want to look individuals belonging to Generation C, but also those who are not as comfortable with technology. As previously discussed, Generation C is not a traditional generation, but a cross generational group with an understanding and appreciation of technology. These individuals could be very key members of the coalition.

The coalition needs to be made up of individuals who believe in the change, are good leaders, have management skills, and can build trust within the team. The coalition also needs to have trust and a strong team within itself, before it will be able to be successful in making the change happen (Kotter, 1996).

**Create a Vision of Change.** The vision should create a picture for others to see, not only what the future will look like with the suggested change, but also why they should want that future (Kotter, 1996). So the vision needs to not only include the end goal, but what getting there will do for everyone involved. Kotter (1996) states that a vision that is not clear or effective in getting stakeholders interested is worse than supplying no vision at all. Again, it will be important for the change manager to reflect back on the motivators used to create the sense of urgency. Incorporating the motivators that worked in creating the urgency will be helpful in getting all generations to see and
appreciate the vision of change. If the vision does not appeal to the majority, the change will not be successful (Kotter, 1996).

**Communicate the Vision.** After a clear, concise vision has been crafted to get employees excited about the change, the vision now needs to be communicated. Change managers can often make the mistake of under communicating the vision or sending mixed messages about the vision (Kotter, 1996). The vision needs to be communicated often, clearly, and through multiple forms of communication to reach all employees of all generations.

During the communication step, a change manager will want to consider the differences in how generations prefer to receive information. There are clear generational differences preferred information formats and a change manager will want to verify they are delivering the vision to all people in their preferred form of communication. Generation X and Y may find email communication sufficient, while Baby Boomers and Silents are going to want some face to face time to discuss.

While there are preferences for generations, each individual may have preferences outside of their generational stereotypes. A change manager may want to communicate with the entire staff via email and a hard copy memo, while inviting those with more questions or concerns to a question and answer session. To keep everyone up to date on the changes, a social media private platform may be useful for the younger generations, while continuing to hold regular face to face updates for those interested.

A change manager must remember to communicate the message often and clearly. Kotter (1996) suggests change managers to keep the message simple, create verbal
pictures, use multiple communication techniques, repeat the message often, and explain any inconsistency directly.

**Remove Obstacles.** Once the vision has been formed and communicated, there may still be obstacles in the way of change to be addressed. Obstacles may be in the form of formal structures, a real or perceived lack of needed skills, or outdated information systems (Kotter, 1996). In order to remove the obstacles, they must be addressed.

In leading technology changes, the obstacles of lack of needed skills and outdated information systems may be the most prevalent. For the older generations who have a lower comfort level with newer technologies, it will be important for the change manager to lay out the formal training plan early on in the process. This will aid in lessening any fears employees have of their ability to learn the new system. If they can see there is a plan in place for training and a known learning curve for all employees, the anxiety of learning something new quickly might diminish. In any new technology, there may be a need to align other information systems to work in tandem with the new technology.

According to Kotter (1996), an essential part of removing the obstacles is empowering the people involved to effect change. The change manager will need to communicate the vision, while aligning any structures or information systems to the vision, and provide the needed training. The change manager will need to consider that not all employees will require the same level of training and offer variations of the training schedule to those who may need more basic or advanced trainings. To encourage continued use of the new technology, ongoing training can also be offered after the completion of the project.
It will be important for the training process put into place to be evaluated for effectiveness. Hayes (2010) indicates that the most widely used training evaluation model is Kirkpatrick’s four-level approach. Kirkpatrick’s four-level approach consists of how the employees reacted to the training, what they learned during the training, their behavior after the training, and the results.

**Create Short Term Wins.** Maintaining interest and buy in to the change is the next major challenge a change manager faces. Major change takes time and individuals at all levels may begin to lose interest or faith in the project (Kotter, 1996). In order to maintain interest, short term wins must be publicly acknowledged. However, the short term wins must be visible and obvious wins that are clearly related to the change (Kotter, 1996). The short term wins must be wins no one can deny have occurred and are obviously a result of the work that has already been done in the change process.

Ideally, these short term wins will span a number of different areas, involving individuals from each of the generations to maintain interest from all groups. In order to do this, the wins that are acknowledged must be done so in a way to appeal to the generational motivators already discussed. The short term win may be an obvious money saver, for example, but the change manager will want to highlight the other factors involved in the win to leverage values from all generations. The change manager will also want to acknowledge the individuals most closely involved with the short term wins, hopefully spanning generations.

**Build on the Change.** With short term wins celebrated, the guiding coalition needs to build on the success and excitement to move the project forward (Kotter, 1996). The momentum built by the short term wins can help gain more acceptance toward the
project and continue to move toward the goal. It is important for the guiding coalition to not give into the urge to take a break from change after a short term win has been celebrated (Kotter, 1996). While the process is long, a break in the process can be very damaging to the sense of urgency created. A break in the process here may result in the need to rebuild the sense of urgency.

A change manager with multigenerational employees and technology change will want to be sure to keep the guiding coalition moving forward and continue to communicate with employees at this stage. Perhaps the short term wins have encouraged some previously resistant to the change-these individuals need to be brought into the process at this stage, to continue to urge them in the right direction (Kotter, 1996). The change manager, in these projects, will want to be on the lookout for new individuals from all generations who may now be more willing to assist.

**Anchor the Change.** The project has been successful, the new technology implemented, but the process has not been completed. With new technologies or new processes in place, it is common for employees to regress to the past way of doing things (Kotter, 1996). At this stage of change, a change manager may want to bring in employees from all departments and generations to help document the new processes. The documentation can include when and why the changes were made, as well as the implications of the new processes.

Along with written documentation, new processes and the success of these processes must be talked about in order for others to begin to accept them (Kotter, 1996). Any communication about the success of the change and the documentation of new processes or policies will need to be presented in various media to reach all generations.
and be sure no one feels left out of the conversation. This communication will need to demonstrate how the change has improved processes (Appelbaum, et al., 2012), as well as how the changes will have a positive affect on the organization and the individuals to attempt to reach all generations. Just as during the communicate the vision stage, one email is not enough to be sure all generations and all staff are included and aware and insufficient in communicating this stage. Without successfully anchoring the change, Kotter (as cited in Appelbaum et. al., 2012) indicates employees will return to the previous ways of completing tasks instead of fully embracing the change.

Conclusion

While there is significant evidence in support of apparent differences in values, traits, and motivators in generations, there is a lack of material on how best to manage multigenerational workforces or lead these groups through technology changes. Generational differences can create challenges in communication, self-esteem, learning curve for new technologies, and intrapersonal conflicts which may have a detrimental effect on the proposed change.

While the generational differences need to be considered in leading a multigenerational staff through technology changes and in choosing the best change model to use, a separate model of change leadership is not needed. With an understanding of the generations involved in the change, a change leader can adjust the selected change model to fit the needs of the staff. Kotter’s Eight Stage Process for Change is a model that gives change leaders enough direction to be successful, while leaving enough room for interpretation to mold this model to fit the employees.
Adjusting the stages to fit the employees is important through all stages, but is crucial during *creating a sense of urgency* and *communicating the change*.

The change leader will need to assess the change process and training programs to better understand if the modifications made to the change model were beneficial. This will also assist in evaluating the ongoing use of the technology and to ensure employees are using the new processes offered and not manipulating the new technology to fit older processes. There are also a number of long term plans organizations can implement to lessen the possible future conflicts between generations, including enhancing diversity training with components that address generational differences.

This seminar paper has identified a lack of research in the area of leading multigenerational staff through technological change, while also suggesting possible alterations to a well known change models to best fit this type of change. Based on an extensive literature review, there does not seem to be any evidence of technology changes slowing down, or becoming less important to the success of organizations, nor is there evidence of a shift in the workforce, eliminating multiple generations working together. With this knowledge, having a model for leading multigenerational workforces through technological changes is important to the future of change leadership and the success of organizations.
References


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