

Navigating change

10 best practices for shifting to a skills-based organization



Change management isn't a new concept, but it's more complex and more important than ever.

Rapid digitization, massive workforce shifts during the pandemic, and now new advancements in AI prove that Intel co-founder [Gordon Moore](#) (and the author of Moore's Law) was right when he said that at any given point in time, "change has never been this fast and will never be this slow ever again."

In a recent [global survey of CEOs by PwC](#), 40% said they don't believe their organizations will exist in 10 years if they stay on their current path. Change is not only inevitable, but absolutely necessary if your organization is to survive and thrive.

At the axis of this change is the labor market, where the needs of both employees and employers are quickly evolving, making it particularly difficult to navigate. As new jobs emerge that never existed before, it's [skills](#) rather than just experience or education that will determine successful hiring and retention.

It's time to shift thinking from change management – a top-down process meant to usher your organization through one big change – to change agility, a continuous, employee-driven, constantly evolving approach to real-time resilience.

To help you navigate significant and continuous workforce changes, Eightfold AI and The Josh Bersin Company hosted a [webinar](#) centered on 10 lessons on change agility. This is not a one-time process of change management, but an ongoing ability to respond to, adapt to, and successfully navigate change. Here are the key takeaways from that session.



The business resilience maturity model

Before we present the 10 lessons, we have to give some context as to why change agility is essential in an environment where entire industries are transforming and refocusing at a faster pace than ever before.

Not so long ago industries had clearly defined lines. For example, all consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies exclusively operated within that realm. Today, CPG companies are becoming retail companies, but those are hardly the only ones. Walmart is going into health care. Traditional banking is emerging into fintech. Every automaker is now an EV maker. And so on.

Fortunately, almost everyone is prioritizing effective transformation. In our webinar, 39% of survey respondents asserted that talent transformation was a critical C-suite priority, while an additional 40% said it is a high priority across leadership and HR.

How important is change and transformation to your company?



Source: Webinar | Navigating change: Best practices for shifting to a skills-based organization (July 13, 2023). Base of 121

But everyone varies widely in their readiness to execute on that belief. A few months into the pandemic, The Josh Bersin Company studied 1,400 organizations around the globe. The study asked higher-level questions that included reinventing remote work, redesigning performance management, and fostering transformation.

The results yielded a maturity model for what we call “business resilience,” or how people in the organization have built their “transformation muscle” enough to impact their culture. The four levels of business resilience maturity include:

- 1 **Hope for the best.** These companies tried to keep operations running and focused on financial survival, often choosing mass layoffs to cut costs quickly (18% of companies surveyed).
- 2 **Care for the people.** These companies focused on keeping workers healthy and supporting their wellbeing (46% of companies surveyed).
- 3 **Drive agility and culture.** These companies focused on the mission, educating and supporting employees and their families to move fast, develop cross-functional solutions, and stay resilient and productive (15% of companies surveyed).
- 4 **Transform and reinvent.** These companies reinvented hiring, job design, performance management, and compensation so they could transform to a new business or operating model (21% of companies surveyed).

The business resilience maturity model



Source: The Josh Bersin Company

Business resilience matters because highly resilient organizations had much better outcomes. Level-four organizations are 4.5 times more likely to effectively respond to change and 3.9 times more likely to be financially high-performing.

When your business is resilient and change-agile, you don't just hire people for today – you help them prepare for tomorrow.



10 lessons of change agility

Change management has to stop being a sibling of program management or project management – it has to be a design discipline that puts people first and builds capabilities to respond to and anticipate change.

When you think about change, you can't see it as a discrete activity or a project, but as something that's iterative and ongoing.

How can your business achieve this? The Josh Bersin Company wrote a change in agility playbook, [The Big Reset: Change Agility](#). Here are the 10 lessons from that research.

1 Every interaction is a change interaction

Every interaction you have with users or with leaders in your company is a change interaction. Don't save it for last, when you're already done designing everything or rolling out a new approach.

For example, Starbucks employed this lesson when they redesigned the entire frontline hiring process. They brought along hiring managers and candidates in system selection and design to get their input early on.

2 Effective change starts with listening to employees

When people think about change management, they tend to think about telling employees that something is happening, or thinking about the best way to communicate it.

But before we talk, it's important to listen. Listening to employees really takes you from a place of knowing it all to learning it all. Learn the concerns of your employees and listen all the time.

3 Start a mission-first movement, not a marketing campaign

Effective change processes reinforce the company mission and culture. When you tell people not just the "what" of the change, but also the "why," and tie it into what the organization is here to do, everything changes.

For example, the LEGO Group designed leadership programs with employees at the center with the company mission as the framework. Basically LEGO said, "What are we here to do? We're here to play." The company wanted to energize everybody to think and be more like kids, and integrate that mindset around fun and play into their experiences at work.



4 Foster human-centered leadership to inspire change and transformation

In any change process, even when bottom-up and employee-centric, leadership is critically important. Often in traditional change management, leaders have talking points to tell their employees what they need to do.

Leaders can have a much bigger impact if they don't just talk but also model the change. Have your leadership walking the walk, not just talking the talk.

5 Set the tone with transparent, fit-for-purpose communication

When you communicate, think about not just what you communicate, but also how you communicate – the medium must fit your audience and message. Take the aforementioned Starbucks example. When you think about candidates in stores, ask yourself how they prefer to communicate – it's likely text, not email.

Think about how you communicate, what medium you use, and what format you use, and your audience. Coordinate your messaging plans around that.

6 Design thinking builds change adoption into the solutions

The key to change adoption is building the right solutions. Design thinking is an approach that guarantees to make this a reality. It's about involving employees from the start, testing, and iterating for the right solution.

For example, Deutsche Telekom, has been using design thinking for a decade and now uses it for every HR program, not just tech projects, even for designing the best executive compensation. They started with one pilot project and now have 600.



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Microchanges result in macrotransformation

A big principle of design thinking is not making one big change, but doing many little iterations and microchanges. Big changes can be overwhelming, but when you break it down for everyone, it appears doable and gets much easier.

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Nudge technology puts behavior change into the flow of work

The technology for change management is often project-management solutions, tracking pieces of the process, including communication, training, and stakeholder management. That's all great, but you should also think about how you can nudge people along and make the right thing easy to do.

PwC was cultivating human-centered and inclusive leadership behaviors. The organization used technology that looked at their managers' behaviors and how they communicated with team members. It then offered suggestions as they were going into team meetings, for example, "Whenever you meet with this person, you don't let them talk very much. Maybe you can ask some more questions and help them open up." Nudging means you're not just training people, but telling them in the moment, "Here's what you should do."

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Reward and recognize new changed behaviors

Highlight, model, and tell stories to show people what good looks like. In a skills-based organization, it might be hard to highlight how specific skills are deployed, but you can do things like showcase managers whose teams are adapting well and adopting change. Change is hard, but it's much easier when people see from their peers what it looks like and why it matters.

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HR capabilities to foster change agility are critical

HR capability for change management and communication is critical. At The Josh Bersin Academy, it's the most required and most requested HR capability from the thousands of HR people supported there. But only one in five practitioners is really good at that.

There are many opportunities to foster those skills. And, when correlated with organizational growth, change management and communication is the second most impactful capability, right after developing leaders and managers.

Change management and communications drive organizational growth

High growth companies score higher in these areas

Individual HR capability	High growth companies	Low growth companies	Impact	Impact relative to all capabilities
Developing leaders and managers	3.4	2.3	Extremely high	151%
Change management and communications	3.4	2.4	Extremely high	119%
Applying the principles of organizational design	3.1	2.2	Extremely high	115%
Coaching individuals for performance	3.9	2.8	Very high	93%
Operating as a senior HR business partner	3.2	2.4	Very high	91%
Understanding global culture issues	3.1	2.4	Very high	67%
Terminating senior executives	2.9	2.2	Very high	67%
Working with C-level executives	3.3	2.6	High	60%
Gaining senior leadership buy-in for DEI efforts	2.9	2.2	High	60%
Implementing strategy for contingent and gig workers	2.3	1.8	Significant	54%
Supporting the employee mental, emotional, and family needs	3.2	2.5	Significant	41%
Leading the HR function (as CHRO or VP)	1.9	1.5	Significant	40%
Consulting with business leaders on workforce data	3.2	2.5	Significant	36%
Implementing targeted employee communications	3.6	2.9	Significant	31%
Designing the HR operating model	2.4	2.1	Less significant	17%

Source: The Josh Bersin Company

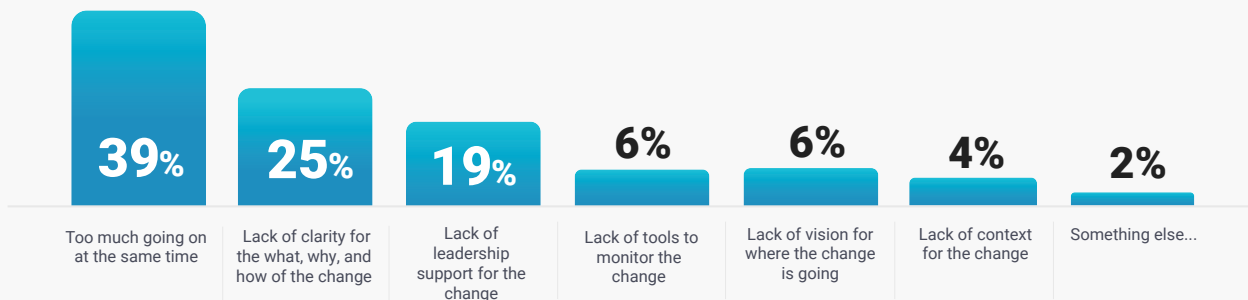
What change agility looks like in action

These 10 lessons of change agility need to be applied in real environments with inevitable obstacles to change.

When we surveyed our webinar participants of HR leaders, they said that the biggest obstacle to change adoption is that too much is always happening at the same time — something nearly everyone can understand. The second most common obstacle was a lack of clarity for the what, why, and how of the change.

So how do you operationalize change agility, and how do you help people on the ground make it happen?

What's the biggest obstacle to change?



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Successfully implementing change requires understanding the impact on your stakeholders, the pain points behind the change, and what's necessary to enable it. Then the training must tackle your people's questions, so it needs to be extremely simple and clear.

The most important piece is constantly monitoring adoption of the new practice or tool, and responding to what you find. Don't just prepare for a launch and walk away — you won't be successful. You need to understand what's happening with adoption, and where you need to focus efforts.

Nobody should work alone in that effort. Your technology vendor should be a partner in your organization's transformation. As you're considering options, it's important to get a commitment around what kind of support your stakeholders will receive to ensure that they're comfortable and understand exactly how they should be using the new tool, solution, or platform.



For example, we support customer stakeholders with robust dashboards that monitor adoption, usage, and calibration – tracking whether people are using the intelligence in recruiting activities, and if not, what do they need to use it more effectively?

At Eightfold we can see if our employees are completing their profiles or setting up career goals using the intelligence the tool provides. Are they looking at internal jobs? Are they signing up for learning? Are they planning their careers? These are all things that can be monitored and tell you how your tools are being used.

Listening to employees and learning about their professional development doesn't always need to be a survey – you can also see their needs by watching the actions they take. This kind of listening can identify model users as easily as it can find gaps in usage or understanding. It also helps organizations learn from early adopters or superusers and take those learnings back to everyone to impact even greater change. This helps the organization in modeling, rewarding, and recognizing the right behaviors.

The most important work is never done

Change has always been and will always be hard, but putting the right leaders, practices, and processes in place, coupled with the right technology, can foster change agility and business resilience in times of rapid transformation.

There's no secret recipe, but it's critical to put people first and really think about what you're changing, who you're changing for, and why this is a good thing. Start with employees who need to eventually execute on the change.

It's also important to remember that this is a process that takes time: Test with a pilot group, record results, adjust, and keep at it. It's significant work that's never really done. Always think of talent planning as a work in progress.

Ready for change?

Eightfold's [Talent Intelligence Platform](#) uses deep-learning AI and one of the world's largest global talent data sets to provide unrivaled insights into your workforce and the industry at large. Recruit talent efficiently, exceed diversity goals, retain top performers, and upskill and reskill your workforce with a single solution for all your talent needs.

Discover how we can assist you in building a future-focused workforce built for purpose today.

Get a personalized demo

About the authors



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Andrea Shiah is the Head of Talent Strategy and Transformation at Eightfold AI, where she is an adviser to talent leaders helping them understand how AI and a skills-based approach to talent strategy enables their priorities and prepares them for the change needed to remain competitive. Prior to Eightfold, Andrea had a 25-year career at American Express, where she was key in the strategy behind implementation and global adoption of Eightfold. At American Express, she also held roles including: launching new industries, acting as product leader for American Express flagship Platinum and Centurion Cards, Head of Global Payroll and Head of Global Talent Acquisition.

About Eightfold AI

Eightfold AI's market-leading Talent Intelligence Platform™ helps organizations retain top performers, upskill and reskill their workforce, recruit talent efficiently, and reach diversity goals. Eightfold's patented deep learning artificial intelligence platform is available in more than 155 countries and 24 languages, enabling cutting-edge enterprises to transform their talent into a competitive advantage. For more information, visit www.eightfold.ai.

About The Josh Bersin Company

The Josh Bersin Company provides a wide range of research and advisory services to help HR leaders and professionals tackle the ever-evolving challenges and needs of today's workforce. We cover all topics in HR, talent, and L&D. The Josh Bersin Academy—built on our research and powered by Nomadic Learning—helps HR practitioners grow key foundational skills. Our corporate membership program provides HR teams and senior leaders with the skills, strategies, and insights to build cutting-edge HR and people strategies through a combination of research, assessments, professional development, exclusive events, and community. In 2022, The Josh Bersin Company introduced the Global Workforce Intelligence (GWI) Project to guide market-leading businesses and their leaders through the challenges of industry convergence while remaining future-focused. For more details, contact at info@bersinpartners.com.