



## People Matter (Even More So in the Cloud)

By Glenn Oclassen, Jr., Appirio

**M**any of the companies adopting cloud-based technologies have similar challenges and anticipated benefits. One of the benefits cited most often is the ability to get out of the business that on-premise solutions have put many companies in. This includes purchasing and maintaining hardware or designing and developing applications from scratch, which can reduce costs and lower complexity. However, the big switch away from running machines, and individual applications on those machines, is not the only reason companies look to the cloud.

During a conference this past fall, I surveyed a room of human resource professionals about why they would look to implement a cloud-based HR and financial platform. Responses weighed heavily in favor of transforming business processes, replacing outdated technology, and empowering employees and managers through things like self-service.

Although replacing current applications can change a business, the true impact from that new application is contingent on what employees actually do with it over time. All of the technology brought to bear by a business is simply a tool set for employees to drive enterprise success, and when technology is implemented incorrectly or used ineffectively, a tool is simply a piece of extraneous equipment and, thus, relatively useless to the company.

As mentioned earlier, cloud-based technologies have a lot to offer. They are also typically faster and less technically complicated to deploy compared to traditional on-premise systems, and they provide easier access to data

through things like open application programming interfaces (APIs) for integration and better mobile access for the user experience. However, none of this changes anything when it comes to employee or manager adoption. In the cloud, the pace of innovation is much greater than traditional on-premise systems. Application interfaces can change and new features can be introduced quarterly, instead of every few years. Given this rapid innovation cycle, encouraging initial success and ongoing use of cloud-based technologies is even more important, and requires the same diligence in planning and execution as the implementation of the application itself.

Cloud technology deployments in human capital management (HCM) share common barriers to success with cloud deployments across other parts of the business – and very few of these common barriers have to do with the technology itself. These common barriers to success are:

- **Stagnant processes** – Many IT decisions are made by IT people that have a clear idea of how they would like to replace a specific technology. Most often lacking from that strategy is a business transformation plan. What’s the use of a new technology if it doesn’t improve the business processes and help transform the way you do business?
- **Resistance to change** – Old habits die hard, and employees are particularly resistant to change when they have made a career out of perfecting a specific system. Years of clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and processes (often created as a specific business response to the previous system) make employees skeptical of a new system’s promises to make their jobs easier.
- **Executive sponsorship** – Senior decision-makers rely on information to get their jobs done. They can be resistant to sign off on changes to that delivery system, particularly when it will be reflected on their profit and loss column (see “resistance to change” above).
- **Lack of communication** – Employee adoption of any technology depends on communicating organizational value, requirements and incentives. Questions such as – “Why will this make my job easier? What do I need to do? If we’re committing to doing things differently, how will my role change?” – need to be answered as early and often as possible.

Now comes the fun part. What does success look like if you can overcome these challenges? How do you know what success looks like? It’s easy to say “getting users to adopt the system” is one desired result, but setting specific

adoption goals for depth, reach, sustainability, and advocacy will be what drives real results and these need to be outlined and agreed upon prior to the implementation. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Reach** – Successful reach is when most of the intended user groups use the technology for its intended purpose. Are you successfully mapping and delivering on the unique change for each user group and role, and are you successful in assisting the largest user populations to actually redeem the promised business value?
- **Depth** – Although many systems are easy to use, they don't all have a sticky factor from the moment you log in. Successful depth of use means getting employees to use the new system as frequently as intended. The definition of depth of use also differs by user role. What is the profile of a successful HR manager user, and the use of what portions of the application demonstrate this success? What features does the standard employee use, given the capabilities you want this employee to receive?
- **Sustainability** – Oftentimes with implementations, resources are drained when users rely on others to support them even after training. Sustainability success means that people continue to use the technology on their own. A good user adoption plan means the application user experience, process refinement, training, communication, and ongoing support approach all align toward the goal of self-sufficiency. The definition of self-sufficiency differs by user role, but basically it means “that the user population no longer needs you to hold its hand.”
- **Advocacy** – Although an enterprise technology system can be useful, they're not always a fan favorite. Advocacy success means that users rave about it. Frankly, this is the moment of truth – advocacy is correlated with the application helping the business be successful and getting stuff done, rather than being an impediment to the users doing their job well. You see this in e-mails from employees, and just observing empowered business users. Realign my benefits on my own? Check. Create new interactive communications portal goals and distribute to each of my employees via individual dashboards? Awesome! Advocacy is the result of the application reducing or removing points of friction in the business. People always love things that make their life easier.

These goals are good measures of application implementation success with your user population. However, successfully delivering on these goals requires an inte-

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grated set of tactics aligned to the user adoption strategy. Given cloud technologies, these tactics are not only aligned to the initial implementation, but also need to be in effect throughout the ongoing use of the cloud application. The innovation, improvements, and growth of the cloud application will keep marching forward, and the user adoption plan for the company's use of that cloud application needs to keep marching forward in response to that continued application innovation. An effective user adoption plan for cloud applications should also consider:

- **Consistent communication** – What is your communication plan relative to each user audience? What do they need to know about the time line, requirements, benefits of the change and key dates? Who are the appropriate messengers, and what are the appropriate mediums? (hint: not just e-mail)
- **Training** – Make sure that your training plan is about the benefits of the improved processes, rather than just about the technology itself. Focus your training to the requirements and goals of each user role, with the application being the method to deliver on the result (rather than the result itself).
- **Best practices** – Nobody has it all figured out. Leverage the best practices from your implementation partner and its customers. Make sure you also include your best practices as actual functional workflows within the application, because the best way to ensure adoption of the company's best practices is to bake them into the application as the only way to deliver on that practice. Train each user population about each appropriate best practice, the results they deliver, and how they are fulfilled within the application.
- **Content** – Don't skimp here. Think job aids, how-to videos, quick YouTube-like communications, and process documentation. Content is part of communication, it is part of training, and it acts as a self-support mechanism. Leverage federated search, wikis, and internal collaboration tools.
- **Community support** – Help the company by equipping users to help themselves. Seed the community of users with super users (for each role), advocates and executive champions. Just like training, support the

process improvement (and, thus, the use of the application in that process improvement), rather than exclusively focus on technical support. Remember that technical support is merely a subset of the support of the community of your users in the successful adoption and ongoing use of the application.

If you've already implemented a system and aren't seeing the levels of adoption you'd like, remember it's not too late. There are three simple steps to save an existing implementation by intervening to drive adoption:

1. Assess your current state – what is really going on here?
2. Define what successful adoption looks like relative to the goal, and then design a simple solution.
3. And, finally, implement that user adoption solution.

It's almost as simple as it sounds. Start by identifying a specific business process to be improved and the stakeholder groups. Then, assess your current state of adoption of that business process (hint – the technology is most often not the problem). Review what was provided to the business process stakeholders and interview group representatives on current gaps and needs. Map the gap in actual results to the original business process.

After the short assessment is completed – within a few days, instead of weeks – define both the desired result and a simple solution to deliver on that result. Given the results of the current state assessment, think about how to build and deploy a simple but multi-faceted action plan that directly addresses what you've identified as the barriers to user adoption of this process. Estimate associated costs and benefits to create a business case and clearly define an execution schedule. Some of the most common barriers to adoption are:

- Lack of clarity about the change – what it is, when it happens, and why it happens;
- Lack of understanding about the benefits of the process improvement – what's in it for you, and why you should care; and,
- Lack of skills in functionally implementing the change within the application – how it works, how it is done, and what does not have to be done anymore.

The final step to bringing back user adoption (what I call user adoption “redux”) is putting the new plan into action, to successfully deploy the plan to drive maximum user adoption. This may include some technology enhancements or workflow refinements, but most often it does not. Don't underestimate the power of communication and training – as the perception of a “failed implementation” is most often due to a user population's lack of understanding of its specific use case for the application.

It is important to remember why the company is implementing the new cloud application, whatever the purpose of that cloud application may be. Reduced to the simplest measure, the company wants to improve business results. The company invested a significant amount of money and time to making the change to the cloud application by aligning both an application subscription and an implementation partner to optimize the application for the business. The company also needs to successfully empower its employees to deliver those improved business results. The company correspondingly needs to invest an appropriate scope of time and resources to the right tools, partner, and enabling actions to execute the strategy and tactics to ensure that it successfully empowers its employees to redeem the value from its cloud application investment.

### About the Author



Glenn Oclassen, Jr. has spent his career helping some of the largest global brands with user adoption, training, and customer success. He leads the user adoption business at Appirio as the vice president of cloud adoption, where he enables marquee customers to drive successful customer adoption of applications, including Salesforce.com, GoogleApps, and Workday. He joined Appirio in 2010 with the acquisition of the company he co-founded, VelocityMG, by Appirio. Prior to founding VelocityMG, he was the director of education partner programs at Salesforce.com, where he built the Authorized Training Center channel and developed the business model and infrastructure for deploying global customer and partner certification. He can be reached at [goclassen@appirio.com](mailto:goclassen@appirio.com).

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