

# HR as Architect of Change — Interview with John Benson

John Benson is an Executive VP for HR, Communications and IT at global construction and development firm, Skanska, based in the Washington, D.C., area. John works directly with Skanska's Infrastructure Development group where he is a part of the group's executive team.



John will be presenting at the [HR Specialist Summit](#) at the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas on September 7th.

**Jathan Janove:** John, you've used the term "Architect of Change." What do you mean?

**John Benson:** You could phrase it as "Architect," "Enabler," "Facilitator," "Advocate" or any number of descriptors. The key is the ability to manage change *through* change, and to adapt to change. This ability is becoming increasingly more important as we as individuals, and as organizations, contend with an ever-increasing digitalization, social media and demands on the business.

Generally speaking, in business, where there is risk, there is also opportunity. We all see the risk that comes with change, but I'm not so sure we see the opportunities that come with it. That is why I see such value in being the advocate or the architect of change. It really is about finding opportunities for our respective organizations, for accelerating the careers of our employees, and to find another differentiator in the market.

**Jathan:** What is the role of HR as you put it?

**John:** Here in the U.S., we are increasingly becoming a service- or knowledge-based workforce. That means change has more of an impact on people and organizational structure than a process or workflow. HR should thus be at the core of either accounting for or influencing change. Additionally, we in HR should be directly connected to the core of the business. Positively influencing the organization and ensuring the proper development of talent should be our new normal.

**Jathan:** What are the most common obstacles to change?

**John:** I think the most difficult obstacle to contend with is recent success. An organization that has recently posted exceptional results, paid out substantial performance bonuses and has a good, near-term pipeline of work could easily be the more difficult organization to convince a change is necessary. Recent financial success is potentially the strongest obstacle against change that is needed for future success.

**Jathan:** If you were to advise a CEO or COO to whom HR reports, what would your advice be?

**John:** We need to stop thinking of IT as IT, Finance as Finance, Communications as Communications, HR as HR, and so on. We need to view the work as interconnected services to the organization. In today's business world, managing change requires speed, and speed requires integration and interconnectivity. The focus for the CEO, COO and HR should be on the vibrancy of the organization, not one silo vs. another. Every initiative should be viewed as an enhancement to the organization. Every initiative has a financial impact. Every initiative needs a good communication plan. Every initiative has a people component. Every initiative today should have an IT

component. The world is becoming more integrated. So why keep our companies structured in a non-integrated way?