

# COMMUNICATING CHANGE IN POST SOVIET COUNTRIES

## **The Change**

Change is inevitable. This one small sentence explains the whole concept of change. It does not matter how well your business is set up. How good competitive advantages you have and how well you are fitting the existing environment. The world is full of changes: modern technologies, globalization process, increased demand, environmental problems, natural resources reduction and many, many other aspects. These changes are forcing organizations to be in shape and to cope up with the changing world. If the organization wants to keep its market position, or wants to develop further, or simply survive, the organization must “change”.

The management of change is one of the directions of management which is focused purely on a process of change. Change management is a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state. It is an organizational process aimed at empowering employees to accept and embrace changes in their current business environment [1].

The process of change may require change of mentality, approach, technology, attitude and behavior. It also concerns the structure and strategy as well as the change of all organization by setting up new directions, goals and targets. Of course the management of change includes all the four functions of management. In order to implement the change the manager should plan, organize, lead and control. But in order to execute these functions, the manager must communicate.

It is a well known fact that effective communication is vital for any organization to succeed in the changing and competitive environment. One can say that communication is actually one of the most important aspects of managerial work. You need to develop a plan by communicating (sending and receiving information), you must introduce the plan again by communication. You need to organize your staff, company, resources again by communication (either verbal or written). You need to lead. Can one lead silently? And you need to control/monitor, and this process also considers exchange of information or Communication.

In the modern world when globalization process is progressively developing, there are more and more companies working outside their home countries. They are trying to establish themselves in the countries with different mentality and philosophy, and are introducing their policies and traditions. At the same time, there are more

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and more companies in the developing countries which want to grow professionally on the basis of international policies, and therefore, changing their operation and management style to meet the requirement of the “international customers”.

Big producers/corporations are moving their productions to the country with the cheap labor force. Such “foreign” productions are motivated by increased direct costs in the European and other developed countries. However, not everyone understands that the “cheap labor” is a result of undeveloped economy, social and political aspects of a country. Another example of “moving to other countries” could be not only human, but also natural resources. For example, nowadays in the countries like Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, there are hundreds of big corporations, which have established themselves long ago, as these countries are rich of oil. Oil production boom has caused other companies (producers of equipment and services), also to start moving towards the Caspian region as the demand in this area for their products or services are increasing.

It must be understood, that the cheap labor force, cheap natural resources, attractive investment climate and etc. are the signs of badly developed economy, social policies and politics which are forcing the countries to attract international “know-how”, knowledge and experience in order to develop further.

Moreover, such “developing countries” are experiencing the lack of managerial and leadership knowledge. The society (with all respect to them) is used to a different, non democratic, and in certain cases, disgusting treatment.

Such exchange of mentalities and policies is good as it is helping the developing countries in finding their way to the world markets. It helps local society to learn new approaches and “different” ways of doing the things. However, there is another side as well. Import of different working style and mentality, represents a “Change”. So, the employees of the company have to deal with various aspects of change. Change – caused by reorganization, transformation or any other reforms which are required by changing environment, or Change, which is necessary to get international ( changed caused by competitors, laws and regulations, and other internal or ex-

ternal factors); and Change – caused by new expatriate taking over managerial position and introducing “the new rules” for the game.

Change is a process which requires a lot of dedication and effort. Considering this, it is not difficult to imagine, what problems are faced by the “foreign” managers in the developing countries and what transnational corporations are going through to establish themselves well in foreign environment.

The process of change is of the managerial scope. It requires a good plan, organization, leadership and control. One of the most important aspects in introducing and implementing the change is effective communication. It is a well known fact that the effective communication requires skills and knowledge, it is a separate science and discipline which requires specialists and professionals in this field. Even in well developed European and American countries, companies are facing the problems with communication. There is a constant training and learning process is ongoing, and scientists are working to study this subject more deeply.

## A Different Country

In order to bring example of the problem drawn in this article, one needs to refer to my article called “Efficiency of Modern Management and its problems” [2] in the journal “Economic”. Working over 12 years, and spending a lot of time in the management field with the top level managers, one starts to get the feel for the science. Even if one graduates hundreds of Universities, the practice and life is the best education you can get. This is a closed circle, you need the theory to implement the practice, and you need the practice to implement the theory. During my not so long carrier, I was lucky to participate in several companies turn-around, the important project implementations in the various fields and of course quite a lot of day to day work. One would say that there is nothing special in all mentioned. But, the difference was that I am Georgian, and was working in Georgia for the “foreigners”. The company I worked for got acquired by the international organization which had completely different vision of the business. The new management set up new goals to change from small local service company to an internationally recognized major super company. This process required a “Change”. Therefore, the decision was made to invite an expatriate to “run the business”. Before going into all the problems faced during the “transformation process” I would like to state few words about the country.

Republic of Georgia is located at the Black Sea shore, neighboring Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia. Georgia was one of the important members of the The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics informally the Soviet Union, which was created in 1922 and lasted until

1991, when officially the Soviet Union was dissolved [3].

During the Soviet Union period, all member countries were working as one production unit bringing the benefits to the “center”. One country was producing raw materials, another was processing it, the third one was producing the final product, and the center was taking care of distributions, sales and so on. Almost everything was planned and controlled by the “center”, and the member countries simply had to follow the instructions. As an example, Batumi Sewing Factory, which was owned by the state as many other industries, had no right to produce, design, sell or do anything without permission from Moscow during the 80-es. According to the one of the managers from that period, who was quite proud about that, he was receiving a direct call from Moscow with the instruction how much to produce and when to ship the readymade product.

Of course, there was management system and controls established, but they are quite far away from modern understanding of the management. The Soviet management style never considered development of market relation or any form of the management in the member countries. Since the 1930s and until its collapse in the late 1980s, the way the Soviet economy operated had remained essentially unchanged. The economy was formally directed by a central planning, carried out by “Gosplan” (State Planning Program) and organized into five-year plans. In practice, however, the plans were highly aggregated and provisional, subject to ad hoc intervention by superiors. All key economic decisions were taken by the political leadership. Allocated resources and plan targets were normally denominated in rubles rather than in physical goods. Credits were discouraged, but widespread. Final allocation of output was achieved through relatively decentralized, unplanned contracting. Although in theory prices were legally set from above, in practice the actual prices were often negotiated, and informal horizontal links were widespread [4,5].

Since the collapse, some of the countries which were in a better position due to huge and reach natural resources, have recovered relatively quickly and were not harmed so much by brake of the “chain”. But others, who didn’t had much of resources, or beneficial geopolitical location had to take a long and difficult way forward. The collapse left the factories without raw materials; there was no processing, and no market to sell. This caused a further deterioration of the management and development as corruption and data fiddling became common practice among bureaucracy to report satisfied targets and quotas thus entrenching the crisis.

It was obvious, that none of the countries was ready

for independent market relations. Absence of proper management, which is the key to the development of business, enterprises and thus the economy, was worsening the situation.

Another important issue, which was quite unique for the Soviet Union countries, was the staff employment and development. The Soviet government operated virtually all the schools in Russia. The underlying philosophy of Soviet schools was that the teacher's job was to transmit standardized materials to the students, and the student's job was to memorize those materials, all of which were put in the context of socialist ethics. That set of ethics stressed the primacy of the collective over the interests of the individual. Therefore, for both teachers and students, creativity and individualism were discouraged. The State had a plan and was keeping a track on human resources. Based on the needs of the state in the various fields (medicine, technical, social etc), government was deciding number of students and places at the universities [6]. After graduation, a student was assigned to a factory, state enterprise or even state administrative office to continue career. The enterprise or institutions had a set of criteria, the compliance with the criteria was the key to promotion and moving ahead on the career. In majority of cases, such criteria included political activity, promotion of socialist philosophy and etc.

Despite of such "controlled" system, it was working almost perfectly; almost everyone was guaranteed to have a job. The Soviet conception of human rights was different from the conceptions prevalent in the West. According to the Western legal theory, "it is the individual who is the beneficiary of human rights which are to be asserted against the government", whereas Soviet theory states that society as a whole is the beneficiary [7]. Within the Soviet Union, emphasis was placed on economic and social rights such as access to health care, adequate nutrition, education at all levels, and guaranteed employment. The government of the Soviet Union considered these to be the most important rights, without which political and civil rights were meaningless [8].

Considering all above mentioned, one can imagine the level of communication the people were used to. It was "orders", "rules", "punishment", it is rather difficult to find the appropriate words to describe how "tough" the managerial language was at that time.

## Wind of Change

Nowadays, Georgia is a developing country which has set its direction towards "West". The international relations are improving and it is even aiming to become a member of European Union.

Since the "Rose revolution" in 2003[9], Georgia started its development process. Attraction of interna-

tional investors, setting up international relations, developing of economy, fighting with poverty, bringing the country to European level became the key goals of the country. This was a big "change" for the whole country, "change" which needs to be managed, communicated and implemented. This change concerned everything and everyone: the country, society, humans, and lifestyle and of course the business. Since the 2004, the level of investment in the country showed a good trend. Only in Adjara, (one of the regions of Georgia), the amount of foreign investments was increasing every year, except the drop during the economy crisis and Russian-Georgian war in 2008 [10]. See table 1.

So, it is not difficult to imagine, how many foreign companies have entered the local market. Consequently, foreign investment represents foreign companies, foreign countries, with their mentality and approaches. So much of international representation of course requires a change, and as already mentioned, changes requires communication.

## "Generation U"

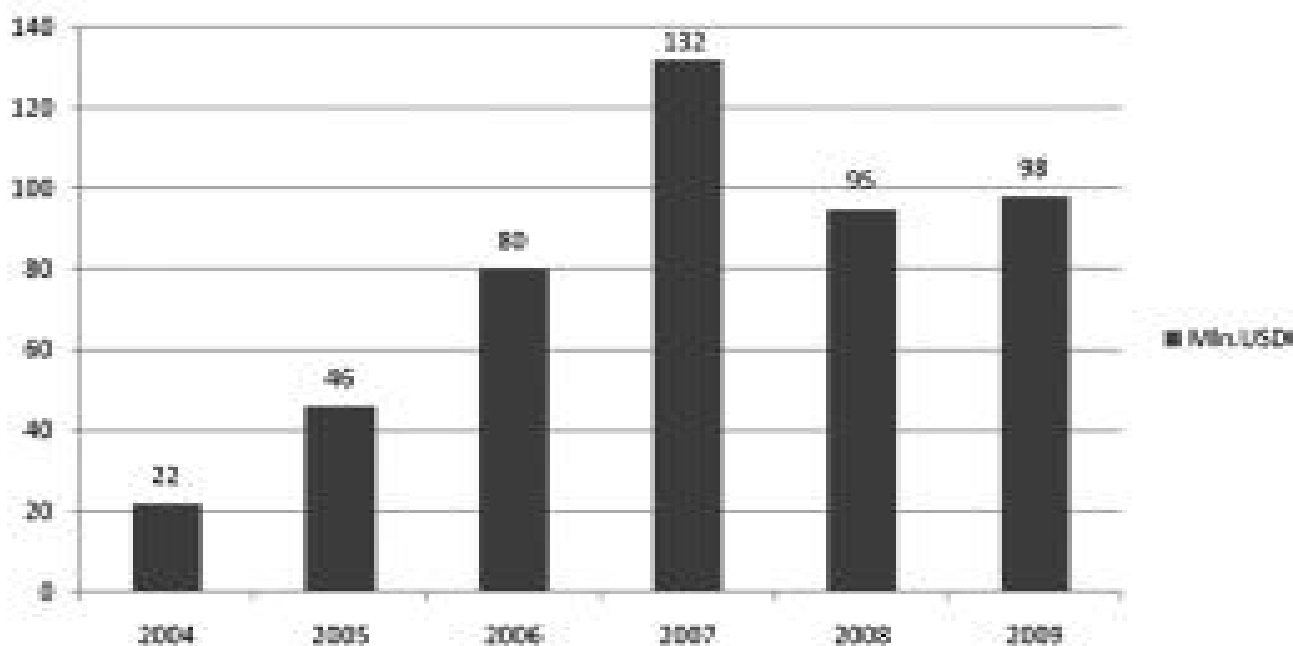
As already described there is a huge "gap" in the development. This "gap" corresponds to the "idling" period, which started at the end of 80th and continued until the 2004. If we exclude the "lucky guys", who had an opportunity to study abroad and get good education, and the ones who had the "past" experience or international exposure, we get the whole generation, which lacks proper education, business experience, entrepreneur skills, management and other general skills. I have called it "Generation U", based on the Generation X and Generation Y theory [11,12]. "Generation U" is represented now by the society aging from 28 – 50 years old. This age represents the main working staff as well as the business society which is struggling to survive in the changing world. The generation U needs an assistance to cope with the changes which are being introduced by the new direction of Georgia.

In order to verify that the problem of management really exists, the questioner was developed and sent to the companies (in Georgia) with the foreign capital and accordingly the western management style. The responders list included small and big companies working in the different field of business. American Chamber of Commerce in Georgia also gave its comments to this subject. In order to understand how global it is, the companies in other former Soviet Union countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan) were approached as well. The results of the questioner are presented in a below table, and represents the percentage of positive answers to the problem.

It is clearly seen, that 87 percent of the respondents are experiencing the management problem in the

Table 1. Foreign Investment in Adjara during 2004 – 2009 period. Source “AdjaraInvest”.

## Investment in Adjara



country they are operating. Moreover, 100% confirmed that the problem does exist in Georgia. Despite the fact that all respondents were top managers, and in the question which area needs an improvement they were allowed to mark several points, majority answered that the problem is in the management field and as can be seen from the statistics, majority believes that the problem is in the Middle and Top level management (which actually by age/education/experience proportion represents the “Generation U”).

In addition to all above, all 100% believe that the research on the subject “problem of importing the western management style to Georgia” is beneficial for the Georgia and the outside world which is planning to deal with this country.

### Conclusion

The poll shows that the problem of management in Georgia exists. It also shows that the problem mainly concerns the top and middle level management. It can also be understood, that the main problematic society group is the one which can be referred as “Generation U”. It is a known fact that any generation is mainly learning from the previous one. Therefore, by assisting “Generation U” is improving themselves, this will concern not only them, but all the generations to follow.

The only ways of the improvement is “the change”. In order to succeed one needs education in theory and practice, sharing the experience of international enterprises and European management style, and of course “change” of mentality. As mentioned above, no man-

gerial process can take place without communication, and therefore, its efficiency is crucial for success. If manager is able to communicate the change effectively enough, it is like obtaining a ticket to success.

Based on all above mentioned, and as a result of theoretical research and practical experience, certain tips and tricks were developed which should assist in communication process. These tips can also be used for enterprises which are planning to expand to a foreign country.

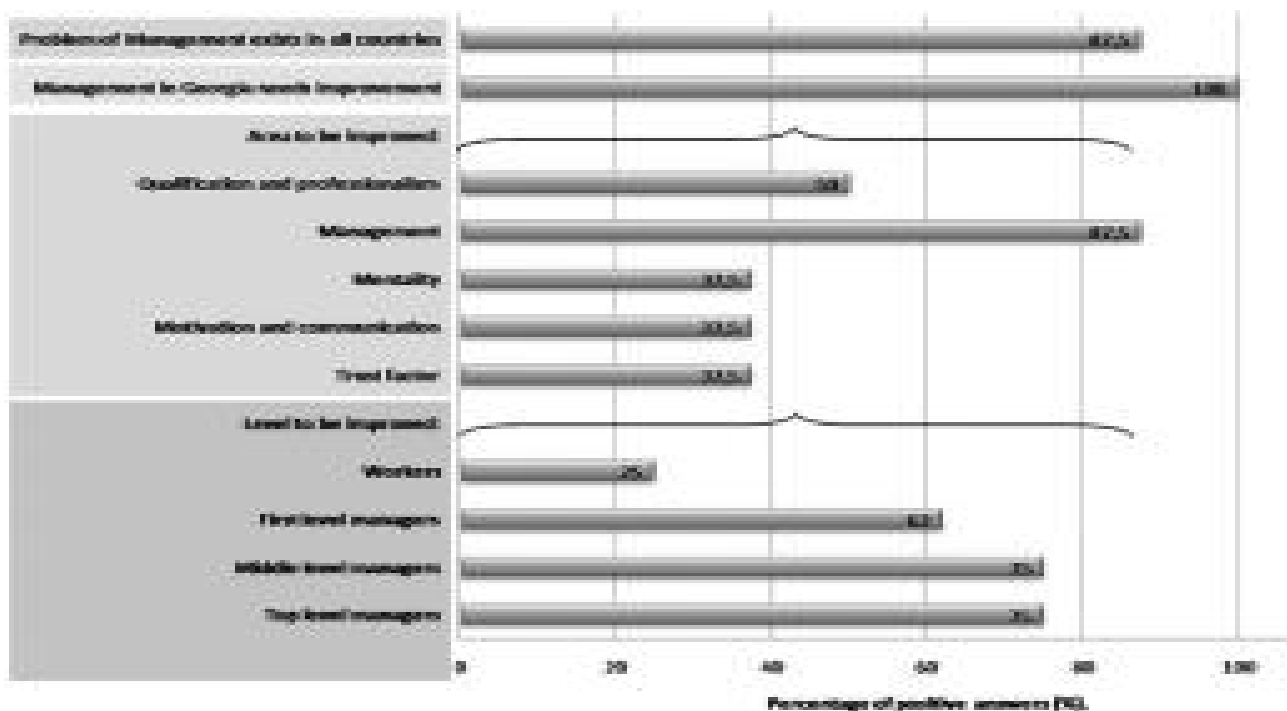
### • Who to Go?

When managing the business in a different country, first of all select the right people for doing this. The person shall have good interpersonal communication skills, being able to adapt to the changes. He should be respectful towards others, be positive and have a mental strength. Working in different environment is huge physiological pressure that not everybody can stand.

In the developing countries, the “status” means a lot. You will face a lot of obstacles during your managerial carrier and be sure that from the very beginning you will have nobody to support. Sometime, the “locals” create a coalitions, they will start discussing your positive and negative sides, and be sure, they will more focus on the “negative ones”.

Consider religion aspects. You may want to avoid sending female manager to the country where there is a gender misbalance, and woman is not treated like a human. Be sure that in such case, your manager will fail the first week.

**Evaluation Table**



- **Read about the country you are going to.**

Read as much as possible from the different sources. The more you know, the better equipped you are. Try to ask people around, who either have been in the country or who may have some contacts. You should have at least some knowledge regarding the country you are going to. Read a bit about history. With today internet technology you can get almost any information. Try to search, what international organizations are present in the country. It could be some foreign Chamber of Commerce, Economical partnerships and etc. This will help you to understand the level of foreign presence. It is also very pleasant for the “locals” when foreigner knows about their country.

- **Understand the local culture.**

When you finally arrive, start the process of introduction. Try to understand the local culture, and mentality. Every country differs from each other. But you should also note that the regions inside the country may differ from each other. Therefore, you should get a feel for the local culture as well. You may not be able to find this specificity in the books or on the web. Therefore, you must understand it from locals. This is happening on everyday basis. This does not mean you should walk the whole night out looking for some locals to chat. But to understand the real culture will help you to improve the process of communication.

You should get the list of official holidays and other important days (which may not be an official holidays). In certain countries, presence at the funereal is more

important than presence on the wedding or birthday. You should not start attending all events yourself, but at least you should show your respect and allow other colleagues. At least you may send you greeting by your colleague just to show your attention.

- **Learn few words in a local language.**

This is not a must, but very useful. It is a pleasure when the local gets a greeting from you in their own language. It shows your respect towards their language and history. It will help you to increase your prestige as well. I have seen many times, the difference between the greetings. When simple “Hello” was said in English, you get immediate reaction from the opponent. They are a bit confused; don’t know what to say and simply trying to just shake their head. But when the same “Hello” was said in a local language, you could see the smile on their faces, they appreciate your effort. And also, nevertheless, it always sounds a little bit “funny” the way the foreigner pronounces the local words.

In any case, when you learn the words, you should pronounce them correctly. The different languages are different, and changing of tone or accent or even one letter, could mean completely different thing. As an example in Georgian “gamarjoba” means “Hello”, but “gamarjveba” means victory. You would not like yourself if instead of Hello somebody is saying Victory.

- **Understand the religion**

When you know the religion you will have a better understanding on the people’s nature. You should never criticize or disrespect it. Of course you shall not start

attending the church if you don't to, but in certain countries, religion has a great influence over people. Also knowing religion will assist you during your communication. In some countries for example, there is a gender misbalance. The role of female is minimized and she has a position of a housewife. In some countries, if you get too close to the female during conversation (which in other country could be normal), it could be misunderstood. For instance, in Muslim countries, in certain regions, females are still covering their hair. You should know such things in order not to give "remarks" on this.

- **Get an ally**

You need someone to assist you, someone who can explain all the "special" things and issues. Someone, who can tell you the internal climate in the company, the mood and the rumours. Rumours shall not be disregarded as they always contain certain true information. You should never base your decision on them, but you should consider them while making your decision. Your ally should be local, and the one you can trust. He or She will help you out through the process. Never ask your ally to spy, as in many countries this is considered as the shame, and even if your ally will gladly do this, he or she may face problems. Always remember one thing, soon or later You will go home, and he/she will have to stay!!! Thus you should avoid your ally getting into troubles because of you. There is a saying, one man can never win a war. You must have an "insider". This insider should also help you in being fair, as you will know "a real story".

- **Get good Assistant/Interpreter**

When one is working in the country with a different language you are forced to use interpreter (unless you speak the local language). Never separate interpreter from assistant. It is very difficult for the person who does not know the subject to do the translation work. When you have interpreter, use him/her as an assistant. He/she, should be aware of all the processes going in the company in order to do better interpreting job. Before entering the meeting, spend few minutes with your assistant, go through the major points of the discussion. Give the names or figures or other essential and sensitive information, if you don't want to have misunderstanding. If there is any specific terminology explain its meaning. Use simple language and avoid scientific explanations, as not everyone could be familiar with the terminology.

- **Use simple and clear language.**

Don't try to look or sound smart. The more simple language you will use, the better your message will be understood. Always keep in mind the communication barriers, and multiply them by two when you use an

interpreter.

- **Involvement creates commitment.**

The more you involve staff in the organization life, the better they will understand. Start from the top level management. Get them involved. Make sure they understand. Together with them move forward and take another level. Involvement creates commitment.

- **Double check your message**

When you communicate, make sure that your message is understood. Keep in mind all the mental differences. When conversation is over, ask some directive questions to make sure, that your opponent did get the message right.

- **Don't rush. Aim, Prepare, Shoot.**

When you arrive to a new country, you want to start changing immediately. You may not like the structure; you may think that people are in the wrong positions. But don't rush. If you start changing the same day you arrive. People will think he is here not to help but to simply kill the business. Analyze first. Do SWOT analysis. Understand where strengths and weaknesses are. First of all this will help you to understand the situation better. There might be the reasons why this or that person is on his/her position. They are might be the reasons.

- **Earn the trust. Be fair.**

If you want to be successful earn your trust from employees, most important, from the level reporting to you. Give them support. Let them feel that they represent some value for the company. Appreciate their ideas if they are good, but never criticize directly if they are bad. If you will act fairly, you will earn the trust. People may like their boss, someone may dislike. But in any case they all should be able to agree, that despite all negatives side, yes, our boss is a fair person. Treat people with respect and they will treat you also. Be friendly, but not a "buddy". Be "strict" but not "rough". Show that you know more, but don't make them look stupid. This is very sensitive and important. They must respect you, but they should never hate.

- **Delegate. Trust, but check.**

Your managers should feel their responsibility. Never forget a human factor. In general, anyone likes to feel important that he is needed. Show them your trust. Delegate out, but keep an eye. When people are busy, they have less time to waste on thinking what it is all about. Set for each manager his "Role", "Goal" and "Responsibility". Appreciate and criticize. When your staff knows the direction they should move to. They will do so. But if they don't you will never achieve.

- **Encourage.**

People does not care, whether this "Big Foreign Company» will earn more money. What they are con-

cern about is what is their salary level and what can they benefit. So provide trainings, to improve their understanding. Improve their skills. Make formal and informal meetings. Encourage them to achieve more. When people are used to something, and they have never seen this done in a different way, it is difficult to convince them, that there are better ways of doing the things. You should encourage them.

- **Communicate.** Communication is the only way you can get your message through and you can get a feedback. Communicate formally and informally. Verbally and in writing. Use simple and understandable language. Don't try to sound smart. Be precise. Communicate as much as you can.

- **Create a team. Socialize.**

The best thing you can do to be successful is to create a strong team. Without them you will not be able to succeed. Socialize with them. Arrange informal meeting, or picnic, may be start to play tennis with them or create a soccer team. Do something together. But again, don't become "a friend". This may kill all your respect and trust. Simply let them feel that you are human with your interests and feelings.

- **Plan, Organize, Lead and Control.**

Do your transformation plan. Include trainings, conversations, set up timing and responsibility. You should know yourself what you want, before you start communicating this to others. Organize your staff accordingly. If it is necessary, make some "tough" decisions, but again be fair. In the local societies, people tend to create coalitions. They will protect each other from the Foreigner "alien". Lead them through the process. Never refuse to assist. Let them do it themselves but you should be there to guide. Sometimes take a blame on your shoulders. Follow the basic management principles.

- **Use the general principles and a logic sense.**

If you use logic sense, the principles and rules of communication and management, that are common all over the world, you will succeed. In General people needs are the same all over. They want to earn good salary, do less work, and enjoy life, be promoted and appreciated, have the securities and guarantees. Therefore, all the communication and managerial hints and tips will work in any country. **However, don't forget that People are different and despite the fact that their needs are the same, the way you approach may differ.**

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## ПЕРЕМЕНЫ В КОММУНИКАЦИИ В ПОСТ СОВЕТСКИХ СТРАНАХ

**კონსტანტინე მებრელიშვილი**

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Статья рассматривает проблематику коммуникации во время перемен в пост советских странах. Основной акцент сделан для иностранных менеджеров или компаний занимающихся деятельностью в странах бывшего СССР. Раскрываются вопросы глобализации и связанные с этим процессом перемены. Сложности управления переменами представлены на примере Грузии. С этой целью проведен анализ этапов и процессов влияющих на развитие независимой Грузии. После рассмотрения исторических факторов, статья описывает период «перемен» и влияние современных условий на общую ситуацию в стране. В статье введено новое определение «поколение У». Это поколение, которое оказалось под влиянием прошлого, и больше всего нуждается в переменных. Именно это поколение представляет на сегодняшний день основную рабочую и интеллектуальную массу страны с которой приходится работать иностранцам. Приведены практические примеры и рекомендации, которые позволят менеджерам легче преодолеть процесс перемен в иностранной стране.

## კომუნიკაციის ცვლილებები პოსტ საბჭოურ ქვეყნებში

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სტატია განიხილავს კომუნიკაციის პრობლემატიკას ცვლილებების დროს პოსტ საბჭოურ ქვეყნებში. ძირითადი აქცენტი გაკეთებულია უცხოელ მენეჯერებისათვის ან კომპანიებისათვის, რომლებიც მოღვაწეობენ ყოფილ საბჭოთა კავშირის ქვეყნებში. განხილულია გლობალიზაციის საკითხები და ამასთან დაკავშირებული ცვლილებათა პროცესები. ცვლილებების მართვის სირთულეები ნაჩვენებია საქართველოს მაგალითზე. ამისათვის ეტაპებისა და პროცესების ანალიზი, რომლებსაც გავლენა აქვს დამოუკიდებელ საქართველოს განვითარებაზე. ისტორიული ფაქტორების განხილვის შემდეგ, სტატიაში განიხილება ცვლილებების პერიოდი და თანამედროვე პირობების გავლენა ქვეყნის საერთო სიტუაციაზე. შემოღებულია ახალი ცნება “თაობა O”. ეს არის თაობა, რომელიც აღმოჩნდა წარსულის გავლენის ქვეშ და ყველაზე მეტად საჭიროებს ცვლილებებს. სწორედ ეს თაობა წარმოადგენს დრეისათვის ქვეყნის ძირითად მუშა ზალას და ინტელექტუალ მასას რომელთანაც უწევს მუშაობა უცხოელებს. მოყვანილია პრაქტიკული მაგალითები და რეკომენდაციები, რომლებიც საშუალებას მისცემს მენეჯერებს გადალახონ ცვლილებების პროცესი უცხოელ ქვეყანაში.