Encouraging and Accommodating Innovation and Change by Emma Vigus, Director Professional Indemnity, Howden Group

I've recently been asked by a 'twenty something' colleague to review a website design. The website scrolled down, as many recently designed websites do. This is not a recent innovation; the approach has been used for several years. But…. it's not the design I'm used to. I'm more familiar with viewing content on one page and then clicking a menu to access more information and I can't quite
get my head around the other type of website.

I'm writing this just after my 42nd birthday and the realisation that I can't quickly and unblinkingly accept a 'new' design concept has highlighted that as we get older, accepting change becomes harder. This is hardly headline news.

However, in casting my mind back to the early 1980s and reflecting, it's clear that both baby boomers and generation X have dealt with lots of change, both personally and corporately. The first website launched in 1991, the first instant message was sent in 1993, the first item sold on eBay in 1995 and the first YouTube video was posted in 2005. Change isn't, of course, restricted to technology. The pace of political, economic and social change has also increased, albeit driven partly by technological innovation.

We might congratulate ourselves for dealing with all this change, but very few foresaw it. In the late 1990s, during a group interview for a retail graduate training programme, some very bright candidates were asked how they thought mobile phones would impact our lives by 2010. A friend was one of the candidates and reports that not one person came close to foreseeing the very significant affect that mobile phones would have.

Recent research carried out by JLL and unwork.com into how technology will impact the way we work predicts that by 2020, 80 per cent of the world's adult population will own a smartphone; by 2025, 50 per cent of internet traffic will come from internet of things sensors and by 2030, 30 per cent of corporate property portfolios will be comprised of flexible space.

Failing to understand or proactively respond to change poses a threat to all aspects of business, from profitability and competitiveness through to risk management and recruitment. The rapid demise of Kodak, who failed to grasp the impact of digital photography, illustrates that fact.

It is millennials, the senior management of the future, who will feel these changes most keenly within the working environment. Encouragingly, research suggests they are better equipped to respond to change than previous generations.
However, it is today's business leaders, the majority of which are 40 plus, that must take at least some responsibility for ensuring that companies are designed to both encourage and accommodate innovation and change. Failure to accept that responsibility will result in us handing over businesses to future generations that quite simply aren't fit for purpose.