

PROSCI STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

Shaping the Future

The Role of Change Management in Sustainability

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Strategic
Insights





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Sustainability

Shaping the Future

The Role of Change Management in Sustainability

Sustainability continues to gain momentum as a critical business imperative across organisations. Given investor and regulatory pressures, emerging global reporting standards, evolving market demands and opportunities, and a growing concern about environmental impacts, businesses must consider how sustainability fits into their operations for ongoing success.

This report explores sustainability and offers actionable Prosci insights for making sustainability initiatives achieve the successful outcomes organisations need.

Organisational Sustainability and ESG: An Overview

Generally, “sustainability” means enduring into the future and over the long term. In the context of organisations, however, it’s about the importance of ensuring that today’s businesses operate without jeopardising the opportunities and resources available for tomorrow’s generations.

Sustainability in organisations extends beyond environmental stewardship. It represents a commitment to operate in economically, socially and environmentally responsible ways, focusing on the triple bottom line of planet, people and prosperity. This holistic approach aligns closely with the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) framework, which collectively measures an organisation’s ethical impact and sustainability practices.

ESG Pillars and Common Examples

Environmental	Social	Governance
Carbon footprint	Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)	Ethical business practices
Climate change strategy	Human rights	Board composition
Waste reduction	Employee health and safety	Cybersecurity
Energy efficiency	Fair labour practices	Accounting transparency
Emergency preparedness	Community engagement	Risk management

Why Organisations Adopt Sustainability (ESG) Changes

Organisations today appreciate the need for greater sustainability and its meaningful impacts on their success. Specific reasons why organisations are committing to sustainable practices include:

- **Impact on reputation and brand value** – As stakeholders increasingly align with businesses that share their values, strong ESG performance can be a significant differentiator in competitive markets.
- **Regulatory and compliance requirements** – Governments and regulatory bodies worldwide are increasingly enacting laws and regulations. Larger global businesses or those that conduct business across multiple regions face greater obligations in terms of sustainability reporting, depending on where they operate.
- **Long-term financial performance** – Businesses that embed sustainability into their operations can benefit from cost reductions, revenue growth, and access to new markets and investment capital. Organisations also view ESG as a driver for innovation, contributing to better financial performance over time.
- **Customer and stakeholder expectations** – Customers, investors and other shareholders have started to demand and require a commitment to ESG practices. Businesses may feel pressure to meet the expectations of their current customers. Some organisations want to expand their customer base and adopt sustainable business practices to enter new markets.
- **Attracting talent that prioritises sustainability** – Organisations with strong ESG practices are more likely to attract and retain top talent, especially from younger generations who prioritise purpose-driven work and social responsibility.

These and other reasons are compelling organisations to define and adopt sustainability changes in many areas of their business.

Sustainability initiatives driving enterprise changes

Sustainability initiatives focus on reducing environmental impact, promoting social responsibility, and enhancing governance practices. Examples of successful change initiatives organisations are implementing today include:

- **Carbon emissions reduction** – Setting targets for net-zero emissions by transitioning to renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, and reducing waste.
- **Energy efficiency and associated cost-reduction efforts** – Exploring ways to consume less energy without compromising productivity by optimising processes and prioritising smart energy consumption.
- **Sustainable sourcing using renewable or recycled materials** – Adopting sustainable procurement practices, using renewable or recycled materials, and implementing enterprise-wide recycling programmes.
- **Biodiversity and water conservation** – Investing in conservation programmes, including responsibly managing water usage.
- **Fair and equitable labour practices** – Ensuring safe work environments, fair wages, inclusive environments and equitable opportunities for employees.



European Green Deal

The European Union's ambitious roadmap for becoming the world's first climate-neutral continent includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55%+ by 2030. The initiatives require European companies to adopt sustainable practices across industries, including energy, transportation and agriculture. Countries in the Netherlands, Germany and Scandinavia have also set impressive goals.

Transforming Sustainability From Vision to Organisational Reality

Unlike other types of change, sustainability changes are deeply intertwined with an organisation's values and purpose. **It's not about shifting processes—it's about aligning people with a commitment to a better future.**

Organisations committing to sustainability face complex, enterprise-wide change challenges when they lack the right approach. When done right, however, change management transforms sustainability from a concept into a living, breathing aspect of organisational culture and operations.

Effective change management offers a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams and organisations from the way things are today to a desired future state. In the context of sustainability, it involves first aligning the organisation's vision and goals with sustainable practices and then supporting people through the transition. This enables them to fully adopt the needed changes to mindset, culture, processes, and other aspects of their daily work.



Unlock Business Value Through Strategic Sustainability Change Management

Effective change management facilitates your efforts to integrate sustainability into organisations and achieve results. As you start to implement sustainability changes in your organisation, consider the benefits of following a structured change management approach, including:

- **Improved organisational efficiency and resilience**

Organisations can lower operational costs while increasing productivity by prioritising sustainable energy conservation, waste reduction, and supply chain efficiency. Sustainability initiatives also help organisations adapt to market changes, equipping them to handle disruptions and risks.

- **Enhanced employee engagement and retention**

Many employees seek purpose-driven work, and companies committed to ESG are more likely to retain them while fostering a sense of purpose and alignment with the organisation.

- **Alignment with corporate strategy**

A structured change management approach helps leaders develop a clear and compelling case for the sustainability programme. It ensures that the vision aligns with the company's overall strategy to drive a unified understanding of its importance.

- **Competitive advantage through innovation**

By investing in sustainable technologies, resource-efficient processes, or eco-friendly offerings, companies achieve differentiation in the marketplace while broadening their appeal to include environmentally conscious consumers.

Global Automation Leader Drives Sustainable Transformation With Prosci

Prosci empowered Vanderlande to embed sustainability across its global operations through structured change management. By implementing an ADKAR Blueprint, providing role-based training, and establishing measurement systems, the 9,000-employee organisation achieved remarkable results. Sustainability became integrated into daily conversations and decision-making, while focused change management activities ensured cohesive action toward environmental goals.

4%+

Reduction in carbon emissions in 2024

37%

Renewable energy use

78%

Strategic suppliers committed to Supplier Code of Conduct

Key Challenges Organisations Face With Sustainability Changes

Organisations implementing sustainability programmes face complex change-related challenges because they can significantly impact people and how they work, such as:

Translating high-level sustainability goals into tangible actions

Like all change initiatives, translating high-level goals into clear KPIs is crucial. Many organisations struggle to translate their sustainability initiatives because tangible business reasons may not always resemble typical KPIs or have a direct connection to business outcomes. It is also challenging to align sustainability with business objectives and integrate it into the organisation's fabric.

Lack of resources and expertise

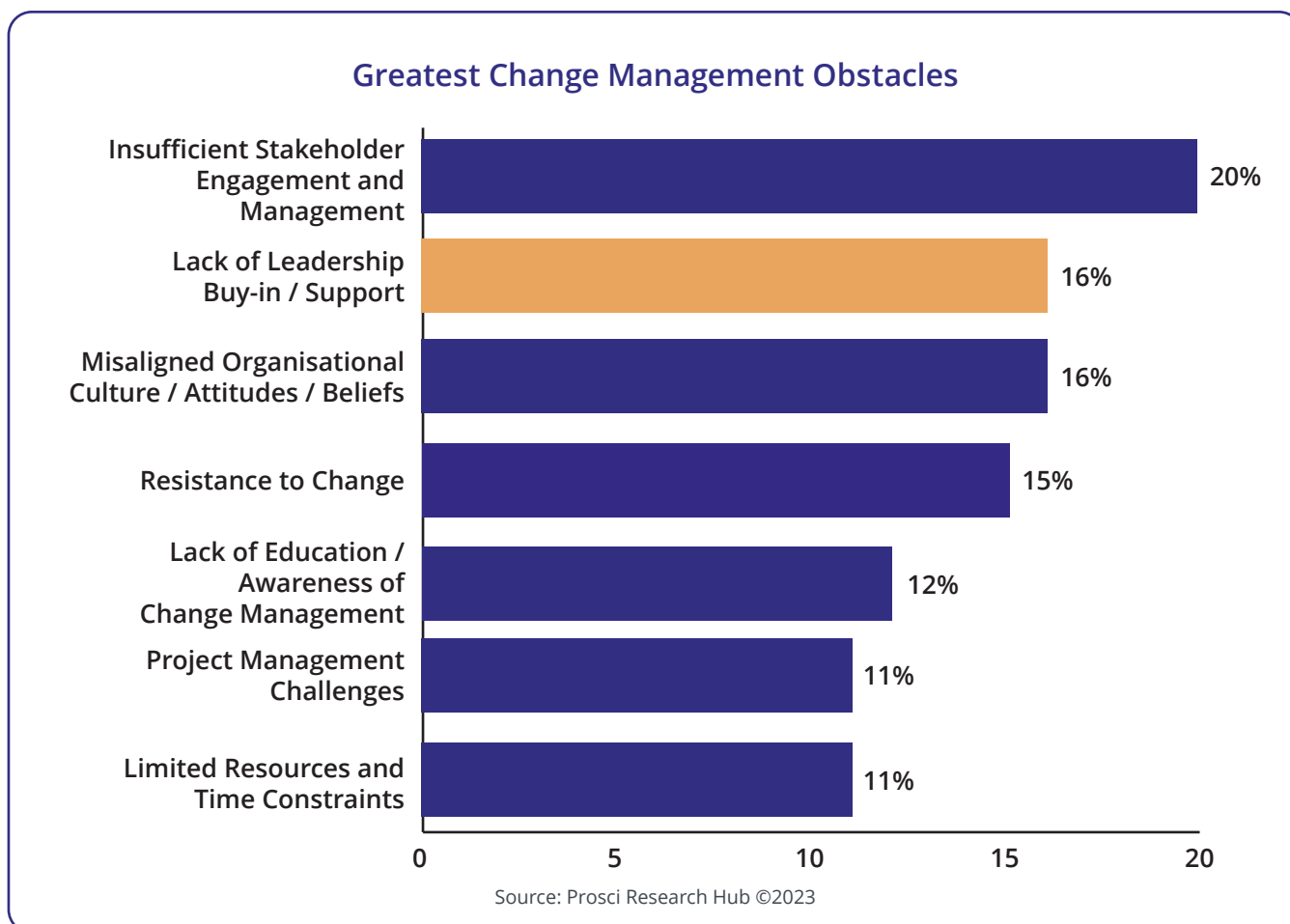
Implementing a sustainability programme is a significant change requiring proper resourcing and knowledge of change management. Budget constraints can hinder progress toward success, as successful sustainability change management requires practitioners, training, communication and other expenses. In addition, insufficient training and knowledge among employees can cause a sustainability programme to stall.



Resistance to change

Resistance to sustainability-oriented initiatives is a significant hurdle. Prosci's Best Practices in Change Management – 12th Edition research revealed that 16% of change professionals report a lack of leadership buy-in and support as one of their most significant obstacles to successful change, emphasising the importance of strong sponsorship and leadership.

Cultural resistance is another risk organisations face in managing sustainability changes. Employees may feel more inclined to support the change if it aligns with their values. Some may only commit to and support the change if they understand the business value of sustainability initiatives. Knowing how to address both perspectives with a compelling case for the programme is a must.



Maintaining momentum and engagement

Sustainability programmes are long-term investments that require ongoing prioritisation and support. The risk of losing momentum is even more significant when an executive sponsor or key influencer in the sustainability programme leaves the organisation. A robust change management framework ensures continuity and stability in leadership support.

Effective communication and awareness

Sustainability requires particular focus on building awareness of the reasons behind the change and desire to participate in the change across organisations. Our experience with these initiatives tells us that people struggle to understand why sustainability is important to business, as well as what's in it for them personally. But once they commit to sustainability, helping them build the knowledge and skills to adopt changes is straightforward.

Organisations need a compelling reason for their sustainability change management programmes to resonate and help people quickly get through awareness. This is even more critical for sustainability initiatives, as a strong case and buy-in from the executive sponsor are necessary before creating a sponsor coalition to support the initiative. Using logic, emotion, visuals and storytelling helps create a synthesised and memorable reason for the change.

Strategic Approaches to Drive Your Sustainability Transformation

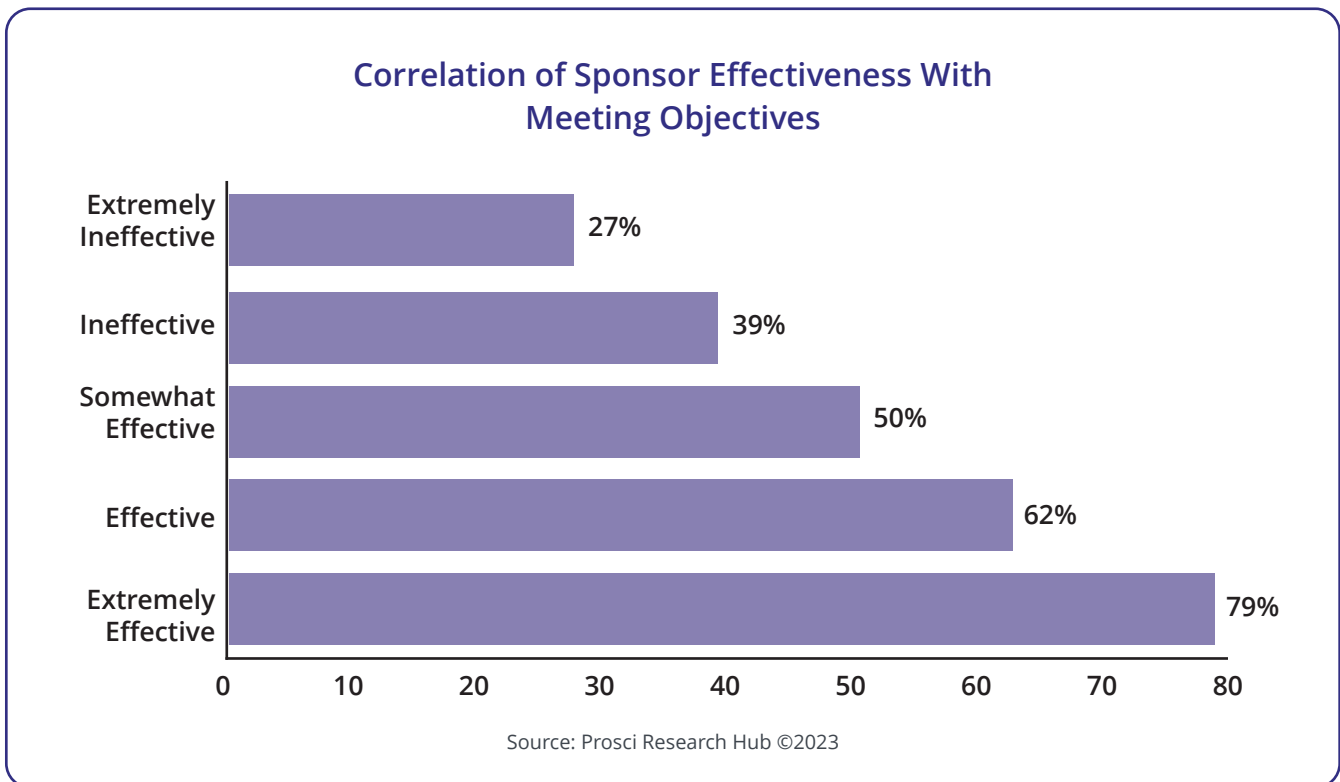
To address the unique challenges implementing sustainability initiatives presents, start by going where the energy is. In other words, build early momentum for sustainability by implementing your first projects in areas of your business where enthusiasm already exists and where success may be easier to attain. Then, you can leverage those early wins to demonstrate change management’s effectiveness more broadly.

Here are six more actionable strategies to deploy in your organisation:

1. Build strong sponsor coalitions

Strong sponsor coalitions are necessary for meaningful adoption of sustainability initiatives but can be more challenging to build. Success requires first getting buy-in and commitment from the executive sponsor, who should then build a strong coalition of peers. Helping executives and senior leaders understand the importance of change management, as well as how their role as executive sponsors moves sustainability efforts forward.

Prosci research shows that to be effective, sponsors must actively and visibly participate in change, build coalitions of sponsorship, and communicate directly with employees throughout the change. Employees who see their leaders at the forefront of change are more likely to be engaged. Building strong sponsor coalitions also helps ensure that the programme won’t lose momentum if the executive sponsor or another key driver of the initiative leaves the organisation.



CS Energy Achieves Sustainability Goals Through Effective Change

CS Energy is making significant strides toward a sustainable future through a comprehensive five-year plan to reduce its carbon footprint. The initiative encompasses renewable energy integration, advanced clean energy technologies, energy efficiency programmes, and exploration of green hydrogen and carbon capture solutions.

Partnering with Prosci proved decisive in CS Energy's success. Through targeted workshops and Advisory Services, Prosci equipped leadership with critical sponsorship and change management skills, helping the organisation navigate transformation while building internal resilience. This collaboration established a robust framework that enabled CS Energy to maintain momentum on sustainability initiatives while developing the expertise needed to manage ongoing change.

The company now plans to further develop its enterprise change management office through continued Prosci support, positioning CS Energy to fully realise its sustainability goals and contribute meaningfully to a greener energy landscape.



2. Develop clear and tangible business cases

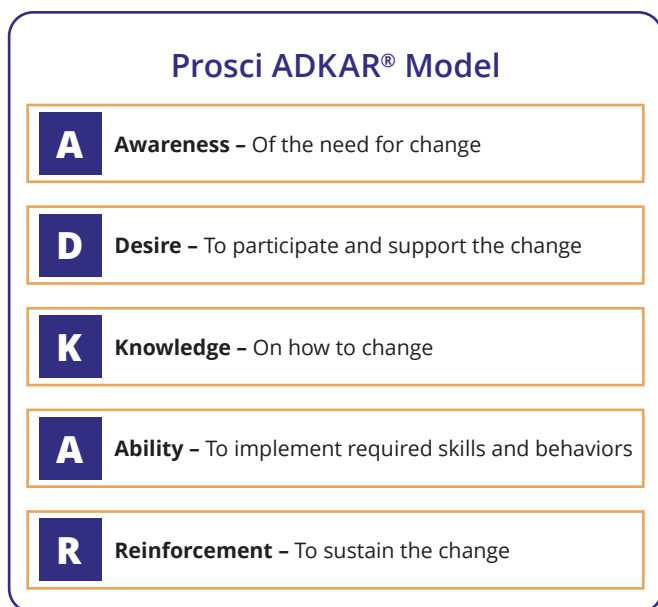
Organisations need a compelling business case for sustainability initiatives that clearly explains the benefits, tangibly defines success, and creates awareness across the organisation. A well-crafted business case can help shift sustainability from being viewed as a “nice-to-have” initiative that’s “important to the business” to a critical, value-generating component of the organisation’s overall strategy.

Developing KPIs specific to the sustainability effort and connecting them to the overarching business strategy can help employees understand the direct connection. Because the business case of a sustainability effort can take years to realise fully, highlighting short-term wins and the long-term benefits of the initiative help bring the business case to life.

3. Build Awareness and enhance communication strategies

Awareness, the first building block of the Prosci ADKAR® Model, is a key driver of successful sustainability change management initiatives. Equipping people leaders with skills to support their teams is particularly important and effective. These managers are close to their employees, who look to them for answers about personal impacts from the changes. Helping managers build skills to communicate effectively with their teams and liaise with leadership is a proven way to help drive awareness in an organisation.

To start building Awareness, develop a robust communications plan for the transition. An effective communication strategy is vital to any change initiative, but even more so with sustainability. Messages need to be targeted and tailored to different stakeholders. Effective communication plans reinforce key messages through multiple channels, such as newsletters, webinars and team meetings.



4. Address resistance

Resistance to change is inevitable in any transformation process, including sustainability initiatives. One of the most effective ways to mitigate resistance is to build desire to support and participate in the change, a key component of our ADKAR Model. Organisations can achieve this by anticipating resistance, identifying its root causes, and actively preventing it through targeted strategies to remove the barriers that hold people back.

It also helps to weave milestones from the sustainability initiative into KPIs and incentive programme. Connecting the sustainability programme's importance to the organisation's success is imperative.

5. Actively sustain outcomes

Reinforcement is critical to organisational change, especially sustainability projects requiring ongoing commitment to maintaining results. Too often, project teams implement a change, achieve a sustainability target, and move on quickly to their next project and goal. This is a common mistake. Organisations must actively work to maintain new behaviours through reinforcement planning and activities that keep people from returning to old behaviours or finding ways to work around sustainable approaches.

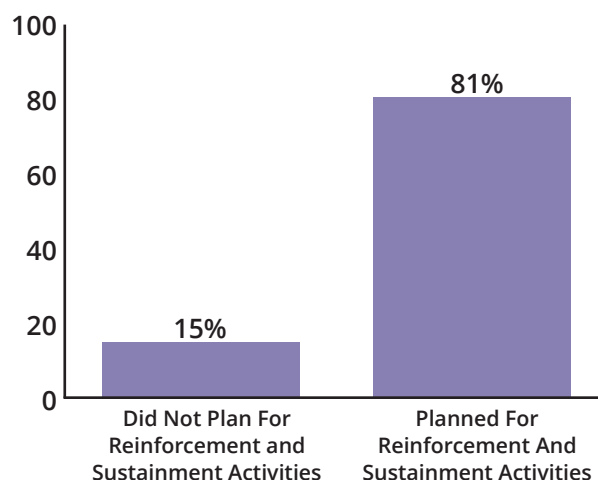
Data from Prosci's research on reinforcing and sustaining outcomes clearly shows that planning for reinforcement maintains success over time. Of the research participants who reported planning for reinforcement and sustainment activities on their projects, 81% met or exceeded project objectives. However, only 15% of participants who did not plan for these activities achieved the same level of success.

6. Provide adequate resources and training

An adequate budget is essential for training, communications, and hiring change practitioners to lead the effort, including in-house resources and contractors. Organisations that don't have in-house change management professionals hire experts to drive the sustainability initiative. Even better, hiring change management advisors to collaborate with teams enables organisations to develop key change management skills in teams, who can then lead future sustainability changes.

Employees affected by sustainability efforts also need focused support and training to adopt new mindsets, shift their behaviours, and implement the changes.

Impact of Planning for Reinforcement on Success



Source: Prosci Research Hub ©2023

TAFE NSW Drives Sustainability Through Strategic Change Management

TAFE NSW has launched ambitious sustainability initiatives targeting net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, 50% greenhouse emissions reduction by 2030, and 75% recycling rates by 2030. These efforts support their broader strategy to create a sustainable circular economy across all campuses and facilities.

Partnering with Prosci proved crucial to TAFE NSW's success. Through tailored training and development programmes, Prosci equipped leadership with essential change management capabilities, helping build a resilient team prepared to navigate complex sustainability initiatives effectively.

TAFE NSW plans to continue developing organisational change fitness through ongoing Prosci Advisory Services, ensuring long-term adaptability and success in meeting their sustainability goals.



Drive Sustainability Success With Change That Makes Your Organisation Stronger

Sustainability transformation demands more than good intentions—it requires structured change leadership that delivers measurable results. Our 25 years of global research of 10,000+ change professionals reveals that organisations using a structured methodology achieve their objectives 74% of the time.

Prosci research also demonstrates that **organisations with excellent change management are significantly more likely to achieve successful outcomes from change.**

7X

More likely to achieve project objectives

4.6X

More likely to stay on or ahead of schedule

1.4X

More likely to stay on budget on or under budget

Prosci's proven approach delivers the needed structure and results with proven approaches that address both the individual and organisational dimensions of change.

Support individual transitions

Sustainability requires people to think and work differently. Used by top organisations around the world, our ADKAR Model equips your leaders and teams with an easy-to-understand framework for guiding individuals through change:

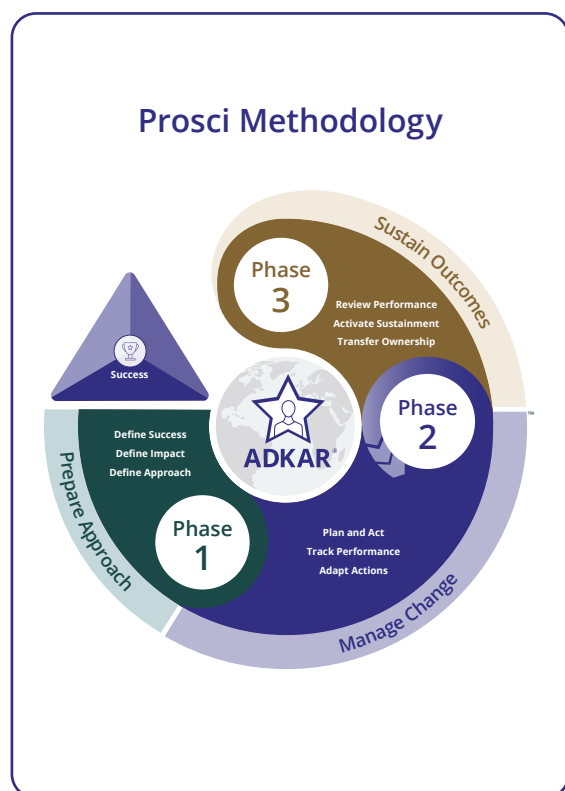
- **Awareness** of why sustainability matters to your business
- **Desire** to participate and support sustainable practices
- **Knowledge** of how to implement new processes
- **Ability** to demonstrate required skills and behaviours
- **Reinforcement** to sustain the changes for the long term

This people-centered approach transforms abstract sustainability goals into concrete actions that employees understand and embrace.

Ensure robust organisational change

The Prosci Change Triangle (PCT) Model addresses the critical intersection of leadership, project management, change management and success—four aspects that must work in harmony for sustainability initiatives to succeed:

- **Leadership/Sponsorship** – Executive advocacy that legitimises and prioritises sustainability
- **Project Management** – Technical implementation of sustainability solutions
- **Change Management** – People-side enablement ensuring adoption and usage
- **Success** – Clearly defined outcomes and metrics that demonstrate business value



Scale and drive change across enterprises

The Prosci 3-Phase Process delivers a strategic framework for enterprises implementing sustainability transformations, connecting individual adoption with organisational results.

- **Phase 1 – Prepare Approach** builds the critical foundation, aligning leadership, defining success metrics and establishing governance for sustainability initiatives.
- **Phase 2 – Manage Change** guides deployment of your change strategy through coordinated sponsor coalitions, equipped people managers, and targeted employee engagement—optimising results and returns on sustainability investments.
- **Phase 3 – Sustain Outcomes** supports lasting competitive advantage by embedding sustainable practices into organisational systems, policies and culture.

This flexible, scalable process transforms sustainability from boardroom vision to measurable business value, providing the structure organisations need to drive meaningful environmental and financial outcomes.

Build Your Sustainable Future With Change Done Right

Organisations that master Prosci's approach gain competitive advantage through improved efficiency, enhanced reputation, increased talent retention, and meaningful environmental impact. When you partner with Prosci, you get support and insights that go above and beyond. And, we equip you to address top challenges like misalignment with business goals, sustaining momentum, and ensuring employee engagement for the long term.

Don't just commit to sustainability—deliver it through Change Done Right.



Have questions?
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