

Prosci[®]

**Turning Resistance
into Opportunity**
for Organisational
Transformation Success



Understanding Resistance: **A Pathway to Change Success**

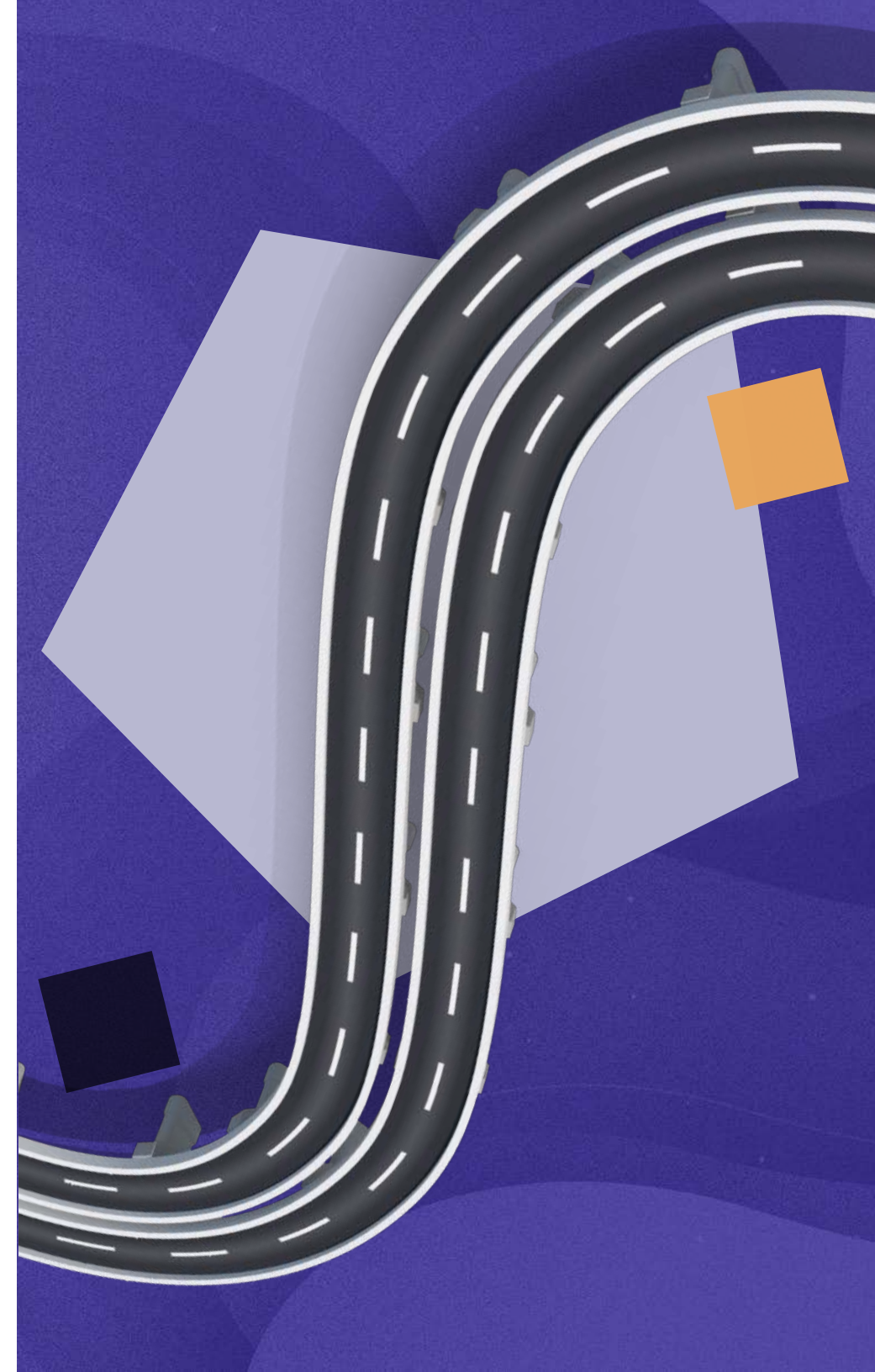
While employee adoption is essential for the high performance of any organisational transformation initiative, **resistance is a natural human reaction to change. But what if we reframed resistance as an opportunity, not an obstacle?**

Resistance isn't a sign of employee disengagement—quite the opposite. When people resist change, they're signalling their investment in the organisation's success. By understanding the root causes behind resistance, you gain critical insights that transform potential barriers into powerful catalysts for sustainable change.

In this eBook, you'll discover:

- **The anatomy of resistance:** why it happens, how it manifests and who typically demonstrates resistant behaviours.
- **Research-backed benefits of proactive resistance management** for achieving change objectives.
- **Proven strategies to prevent resistance** before it impacts enterprise-wide initiatives.
- **How to build change-readiness** to equip your organisation for repeatable change success.

These insights are drawn from Prosci's +30 years of research and hands-on experience supporting organisations across the globe to achieve the desired business outcomes – from technology adoption to digital transformation, to shifts in culture and mindset.





Why Do People Resist Organisational Transformation?

According to Prosci's research and many years of experience in the change management field, the four primary drivers of resistance are:

1. Lack of awareness

Contrary to popular belief, the top reason employees resist change is lack of awareness about why the change is happening. When people don't understand the reasons behind a change, they naturally question its value and purpose. This awareness gap creates immediate disconnection and resistance.

2. Job security

Fears about job loss or compensation changes are some of the most common drivers of resistance as they can generate employee anxiety about their future within the company.

3. Fear of the unknown

Uncertainty about outcomes and expectations is also a common cause of anxiety. People tend to prefer familiar routines, and disruptions to their comfort zones amplify resistance.

4. Leadership attitudes

When leaders or managers are disengaged or resistant, it sends mixed messages to employees. Poor role modelling, often driven by prior negative experiences or misaligned incentives, can cause employee resistance.

The good news is that **understanding these core reasons for resistance gives us clear paths to prevention**. Our research shows that a significant portion of resistance—over 40%—can be prevented through effective change management practices.

By addressing awareness gaps with clear communication about why change is needed, alleviating job security concerns, ensuring consistent leadership behaviour, reducing uncertainty, and aligning with organisational culture, you can dramatically reduce the resistance you'll encounter in your transformation initiatives. While all resistance cannot be eliminated, focusing on these key areas will help you build change-readiness and minimise preventable resistance.

Who is Most Likely to Resist?

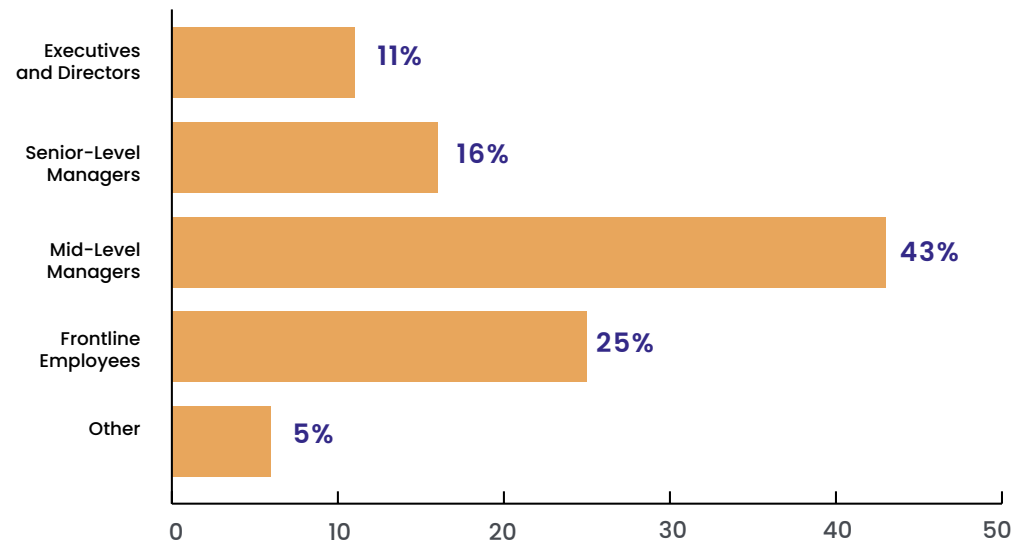
In Prosci's research, mid-level managers and front-line employees are identified as the most likely groups to resist change:

- **Mid-level managers** often **face pressure from both upper management and their direct reports**, leading to uncertainty about how to implement change effectively. They may struggle with balancing daily operations while supporting their teams through transition.

What's particularly challenging is that mid-level managers—the **group best positioned to manage resistance in others—are often the most resistant group themselves**. This creates a complex dynamic where those expected to champion change may be its biggest sceptics.

- **Front-line employees**, on the other hand, may **feel excluded** from decision-making processes and **lack awareness** of how changes will impact their day-to-day tasks.

Most Resistant Groups



Source: Prosci Research Hub © 2023 Prosci, Inc.



Prosci Asked: “What Types of Resistance Do You Experience?”

Disengaged 81%

quiet, indifference, apathy, low morale, ignoring communications

Negativity 79%

miscommunication, objections, complaining, sarcasm, rumours/gossip, focus on problems

Avoidance 75%

ignore the change, workarounds, revert to old behaviours, abdicate responsibilities

Emotional 73%

fear, loss, sadness, anger, anxiety, frustration, depression, focus on self

Work Impact 54%

reduced productivity/efficiency, noncompliance, absenteeism, mistakes, poor quality

Controlling 53%

asking lots of questions, influencing outcomes, defending current state, using status

Building Barriers 52%

excuses, counter-approaches, recruit dissenters, secrecy, breakdown in trust

Acting Out 42%

conflict, overbearing, arguments, passive-aggressive, sabotage, aggressive, celebrate failure

Identifying Resistance Signals: How People Express Concerns in the Workplace

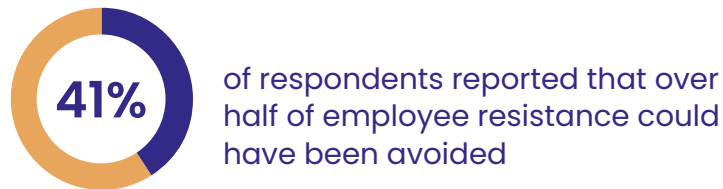
Resistance to change often **reflects underlying concerns** or **uncertainties** rather than outright opposition. It’s important to recognise typical behaviours, support employees, and guide them through the transition to achieve change success. Here are common examples:

- **Emotion** – Anxiety, frustration and uncertainty can show up as complaints, stress or reluctance to engage.
- **Disengagement** – A decrease in enthusiasm or participation may indicate employees are feeling overwhelmed or unsure of their role in the change.
- **Work impact** – Slower productivity or more frequent mistakes might result from employees feeling unprepared or unsupported.
- **Active challenges** – Some employees may express frustration by challenging decisions or resisting processes.
- **Negative attitudes** – Sceptical or critical attitudes often arise from a lack of clarity or trust in the process.
- **Avoidance Behaviours** – Procrastination or avoiding change-related responsibilities can stem from awareness gaps, comprehension issues, lack of support, or fear of failure.
- **Building barriers** – Those who create obstacles may be trying to protect their team or their routines.
- **Control seeking** – Employees who attempt to steer the process often want a sense of security in an uncertain situation.

Prosci research shows these resistance behaviours ranked by frequency, with disengagement, negativity and avoidance being the most common manifestations. When you notice these signals, consider them valuable feedback rather than obstacles. They reveal where your change strategy needs attention.

Don't Let it Spread Like Wildfire— Prevention Is the Key to Managing Resistance

Persistent, widespread resistance is not inevitable during change. Prosci research shows that **a significant portion of resistance can be prevented** through strategic engagement and proactive planning:



At Prosci, we promote two avenues for resistance management:

- **Resistance Prevention:** Anticipating and addressing potential resistance before it occurs
- **Resistance Response:** Addressing resistance effectively when it becomes persistent

Prevention requires less effort, is more cost-effective, and has a higher potential for success compared to responding to resistance after it becomes widespread. Think of it like healthcare—preventing illness through healthy habits versus treating disease after diagnosis.

Benefits of Prioritising Resistance Prevention:

- 1 SAVE TIME AND MONEY BY GETTING AHEAD OF POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND ISSUES
- 2 BUILD TRUST AND CREATE A HEALTHIER WORKPLACE BY ACKNOWLEDGING AND ADDRESSING CONCERNS EARLY ON THE CHANGE JOURNEY
- 3 IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND ALLOW YOUR RESOURCES TO FOCUS ON THE CHANGE ITSELF RATHER THAN DEALING WITH PERSISTENT RESISTANCE
- 4 LOWER RATE OF RESISTANCE AND INCREASED COMMITMENT TO THE CHANGE
- 5 ACCELERATE ADOPTION AND INCREASE SUCCESS RATES

Seven Strategies for Effectively Managing Resistance

Successfully managing resistance to change requires a proactive and thoughtful approach. Our proven strategies focus on **anticipating challenges, fostering engagement, and building trust** to create **smoother transitions to new ways of working**. By leveraging them, you can **ensure adoption** and, ultimately, **achieve the expected performance** from the transformation initiatives and projects. Here are seven essential tips:

1. Anticipate and prevent resistance

Identify potential resistance points early by assessing change-readiness and analysing past change initiatives. Use this information to **prepare targeted strategies** for addressing concerns before they escalate. Planning ensures you are ready to prevent and handle resistance proactively.

2. Engage and involve stakeholders

Involving affected people in the change process fosters a sense of ownership and commitment. Invite feedback, hold open discussions, and **make sure employees feel their voices are heard**. Active participation reduces feelings of exclusion and strengthens alignment with the organisation's goals.





3. Use a variety of resistance managers

It's not only up to the teams directly involved in planning and executing the change. **Leaders should champion the change as sponsors**, showing support for it and modelling desired behaviours. **People managers also play an important role** because employees prefer to get personal messages about change from their direct supervisors. People are more likely to support change if they see their managers and top-level leaders all demonstrating their own support.

4. Address the root causes of resistance with empathy

Even with effective resistance prevention tactics in place, some resistance behaviours may arise or persist. In these cases, it's important to **focus on addressing the root causes rather than simply containing symptoms**.

In addition to lack of awareness, resistance can stem from fear of personal impacts. Leaders should **focus on providing support, training and resources to help teams navigate the change and understand how it will affect their roles**. A two-way dialogue with employees fosters greater ownership and commitment to the change.

Resistance is dynamic and can evolve over time. Leaders should stay flexible and adjust their strategies in response to ongoing feedback, adapting the approach to the needs and concerns of different groups within the organisation.

5. Create cultural alignment

Aligning the change initiative with the organisation's culture and values helps ensure that the transition feels natural rather than disruptive. **Recognising and rewarding** employees who embrace change encourages others to follow suit.

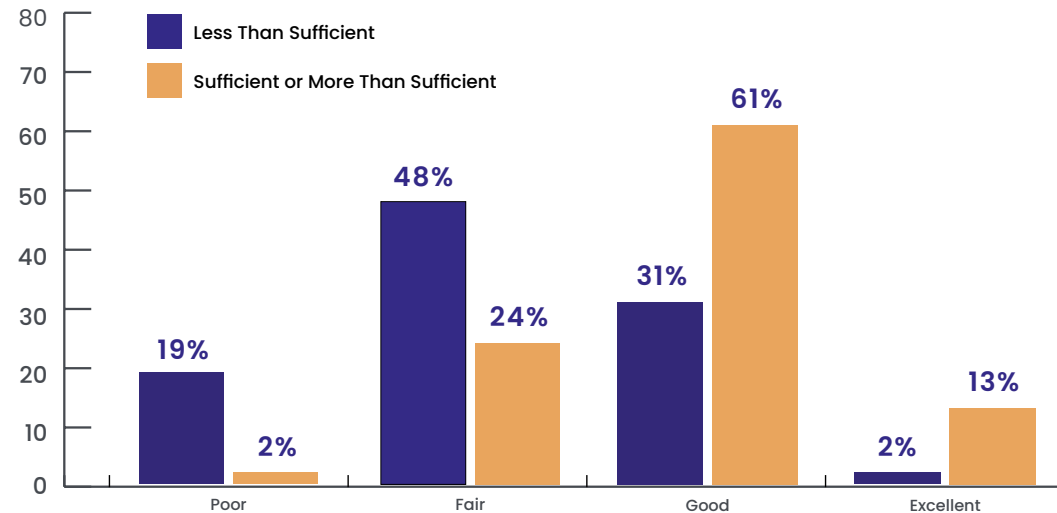
6. Communicate transparently

Clear, honest and consistent communication is key to addressing resistance. **Answer the “What’s in it for me?” (WIIFM) question** to help employees understand the personal and organisational benefits of the change. Be sure to **use preferred senders**, too—employees want to hear business-level messages from executives, not their direct supervisors or change managers.

7. Provide support and training

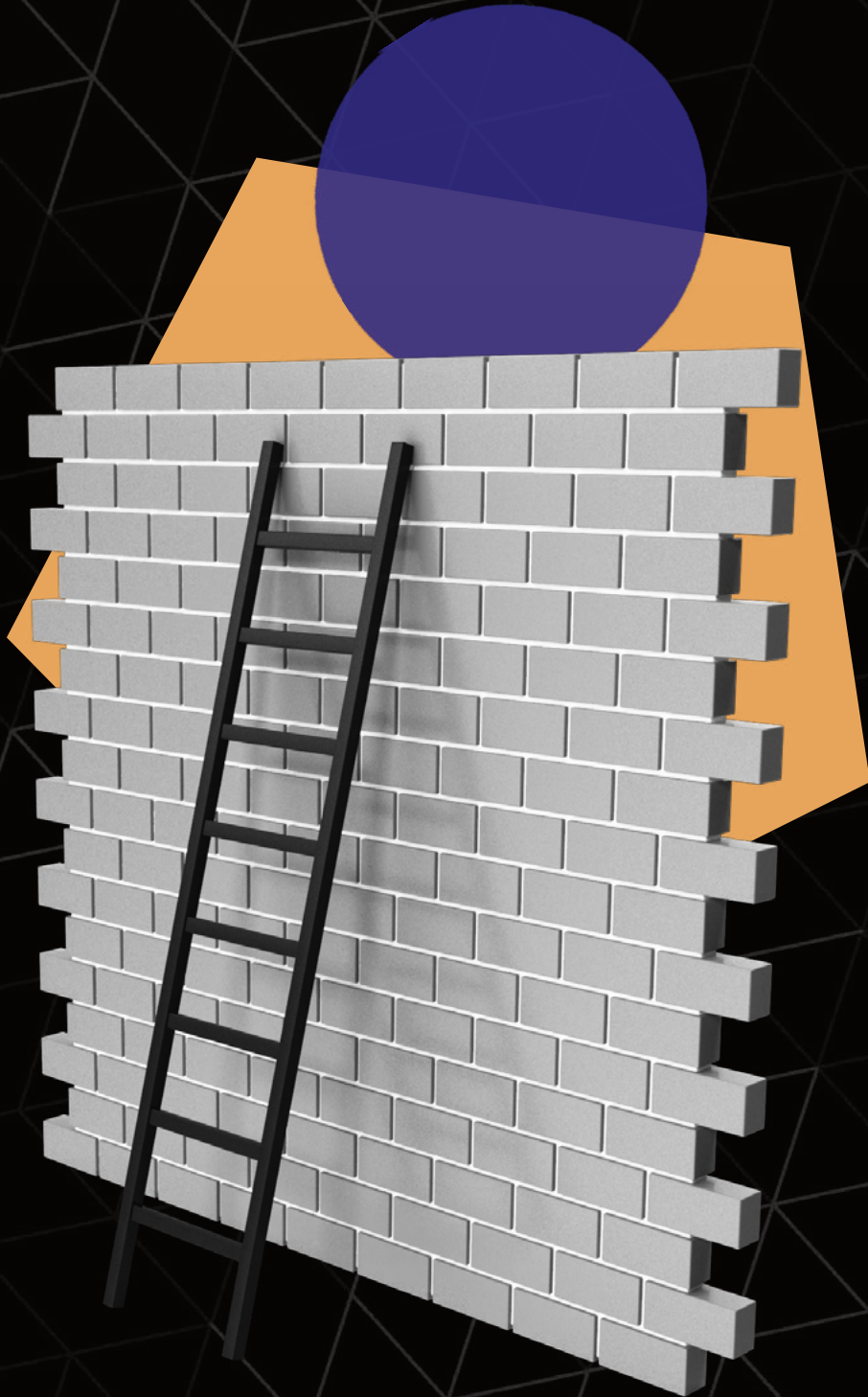
Equip employees with the skills, knowledge and resources they need to succeed in the new environment. Comprehensive training and ongoing support enhance confidence and capability, reducing resistance over time. **Having insufficient resources correlates with ineffective change management.**

Relationship between sufficient resources and change performance



Source: Prosci Research Hub © 2023 Prosci, Inc.





From Resistance to **Repeatable Change Success**

During complex changes, it's tempting to simply label people as "resistant." This oversimplification misses valuable feedback opportunities. **Effective resistance management means looking for gaps in your change approach** rather than focusing solely on reluctant individuals.

When you embrace resistance as valuable insight, you'll identify where to focus your efforts to succeed with change. Resistance isn't something to fight—**it's an opportunity to listen, understand, and address concerns.**

Change-readiness – having the right approach, tools and methodology in place to be prepared to deal with different aspects of change, including resistance, and getting to know how your teams and organisational culture respond to change will help you be prepared to deal with it **to realise change performance in future projects and initiatives.**

So How Do You Build Change-Readiness?

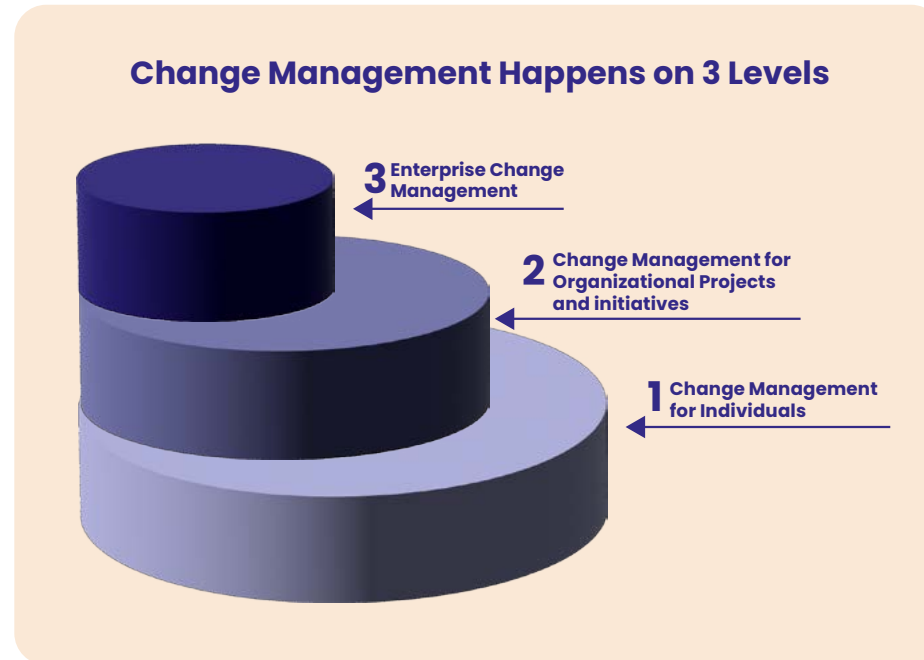
To boost change-readiness, organisations must build a culture that sees change as a path to growth and innovation. Integrating change management activities into your cultural framework enables you to handle today's changes skilfully and prepare for future challenges.

Organisational culture has a profound influence on an organisation's ability to receive and integrate change. **Successful cultures perceive change as a growth opportunity rather than a threat.**

Embedding change management into an organisation involves three practical levels, each with specific aspects of the change process:

- **Individual** – Supports one person in adopting new changes
- **Project** – Applies to specific initiatives to mitigate risks and secure outcomes
- **Enterprise** – Integrates change management into the fabric of the organisation, making it flexible and responsive to changes

Address each level to ensure a change strategy that will scale from a personal to an enterprise-wide impact. This multi-level approach creates organisational readiness that spans from individual adoption to cultural transformation.



Enterprise Change Management: the Holy Grail of Consistent Change Performance

Enterprise change management (ECM) is an important topic within organisational development. Research by Prosci shows that **company-wide changes cannot succeed** with change leaders **simply launching and implementing change efforts**. Instead, **there needs to be a well-planned approach to prepare, equip and support enterprises** through these changes.

Enterprise change management ensures **changes become a regular part of daily operations**. This guarantees you integrate changes into organisational operations and your employee mindset.

Lasting change needs everyone's participation—without it, any improvements may be short-term. For real progress, the whole company must unite behind the change for a better future.

ECM TRANSFORMS CHANGE MANAGEMENT FROM AN OCCASIONAL TACTICAL TOOL INTO A CORE ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY THAT ENSURES CONTINUED SUCCESS IN THE LONG RUN.

Prosci studies show that **effective change management leads to achieving goals, staying on schedule, and remaining within budget**—evidence that successful change amplifies advantages across an organisation.

7x more likely to succeed on their **must-win initiatives**.

4.6x more likely to stay on or ahead of **schedule**.

1.4x more likely to stay on or under **budget**.

Source: Prosci Research Hub ©2023

Choosing the Right Partner to Help You Build **Lasting Change Capabilities**

Successful companies change. Continually. And Prosci knows that to reap the rewards of change, you must reach and empower every employee before, during and after the change. That's why our tools and methodologies focus on the people side of change.

Whether you're expanding your change management skills or looking to build an enterprise change management capability, the Prosci team is committed to your change success.

WHAT MAKES PROSCI DIFFERENT?

Field-tested best practices

Access the industry's largest body of change management research, based on the experience and insights of thousands of change leaders over three decades.

Easy-to-use models & tools

Simple models and tools offer a common-sense approach, so you can immediately and intuitively apply your new change management practices.

Results that matter

Concrete benchmarks and clearly defined goalposts make it easy to measure the success of your change initiatives.

Lasting change competency

Learn how to implement your changes now. Keep learning through Prosci's webinars, tutorials and more. And adapt to new challenges along the way.

A Seasoned, committed partner

As the leading experts in change management, we can help you get the most from your organisational changes—operationally, culturally and financially.

Programmes around the globe

Prosci continues to expand globally, with offices throughout North America, South America, Europe, Australia/New Zealand and Asia, and partners in over 50 countries around the world.

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Contact us today to learn how we can support you in **your change journey.** www.prosci.com

