



**The  
Wellbeing  
Project**

# **BUILDING A CHANGE-READY WORKFORCE**

**PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR PEOPLE TEAMS**

# The Wellbeing Project

Putting healthy performance at the heart of how the world does business

In an ever-evolving working landscape, The Wellbeing Project has been promoting healthy, high-performing cultures for over 17 years. Our expert team of business psychologists bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table. With a deep understanding of human behaviour and organisational dynamics, we are committed to delivering evidence-based solutions that yield tangible and sustainable results. We work at all levels, which means:

- Strengthening leadership teams to drive business performance.
- Equipping managers to build psychologically safe and enabling team environments.
- Empowering individuals to take ownership of their performance.

We understand that each organisation is unique, which is why we take a personalised approach to meet the specific needs and challenges faced by our clients.

To speak to our team of experts, get in touch. We can help make your vision for healthy performance a reality.

[Get in touch](#)

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# Introduction

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In less than 200 years, the business landscape has radically transformed.

The Industrial Revolution brought significant progress in technology and shifts in labour practices. Through the 20th century, the pace of change accelerated with advancements in communication, transportation, and information technology. In the 21st Century, the rise of the internet, social media, and digital platforms transformed how businesses operate and interact with customers and stakeholders. Now, the rise of AI risks disrupting pretty much every aspect of the business landscape.

We have arrived at a point where, according to [Harvard Business Review](#), change is perpetual, pervasive, and exponential.

Change is perpetual because it's occurring all the time. It's pervasive because it unfolds in multiple areas of life all at once. It's exponential because it's accelerating at an increasingly rapid rate.

To thrive in this environment, organisations need to embed change readiness into their DNA.

The challenge is that humans don't like change. We are inherently wired for stability and certainty. Faced with too much change, we are at risk of stress, anxiety and cognitive overload - all of which leads us to resist change rather than embrace it.

In this guide, we explore practical strategies for building a change-ready workforce. We dig deep into the psychology of change and the pivotal role HR and L&D teams play in supporting each stage of transition.

Our hope is that you are inspired to foster an environment where people don't just survive change, but thrive through change.

# UNDERSTANDING CHANGE



# Understanding Change

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In any change process, there are two things going on - the change itself and the psychological process. We need to distinguish between the two.

## CHANGE

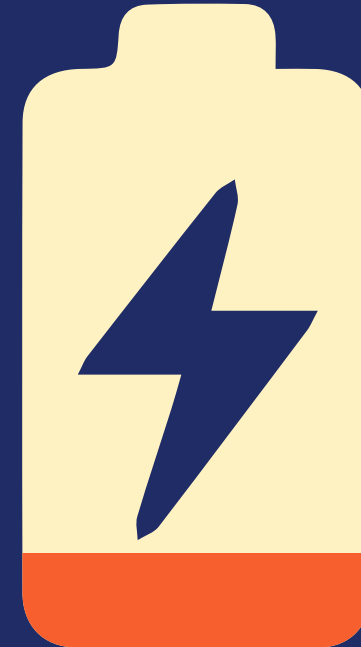
An external event or situation that takes place.

Examples: new business strategy, change in leadership, introduction of new technology, or a restructure.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS

The transition that people go through as they adapt to the change.

Often, organisations tackle the operations of change without addressing the underlying psychological process of transition. For change to be successful, both need to happen.



Employees who are experiencing change-related stress perform 5% lower.

(Gartner, 2019).



73% of employees  
undergoing change  
report moderate to  
high stress levels.

(Gartner, 2019)

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHANGE





# The Psychology of Change

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Business consultant, William Bridges, worked extensively to understand the psychology of change. He wanted to uncover how change impacts people at the emotional and psychological level.

Through his research, he identified three stages of transition.

1. Endings
2. The neutral zone
3. New beginnings

In the next section, we will break down each stage of change and explore the associated emotions and behaviours. By understanding these different stages, you will be better equipped to provide the right support at the right time.



43% of employees said if leaders did more to understand change resistance, it would invite more support and collaboration.

(Oak Engage, 2023).

# Stage One: Endings

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Any transition starts with an ending. This is paradoxical in nature but true.

At this first stage, people are identifying what they are losing. This could be familiar ways of working, relationships, a location, or even a role.

In terms of their emotions, they may feel:

- Sad about what they're losing
- Anxious about the unknown
- Angry towards those implementing the change
- Hopeful about what's to come

In terms of behaviour, people might withdraw or express resistance. Some might seek support or engage in self-care.

This stage is characterised by mixed emotions as individuals confront the reality of change and prepare for what's ahead.

## ENDINGS

### Emotions

- Sad
- Anxious
- Angry
- Hopeful

### Behaviours

- Withdraw
- Blame
- Seek support
- Self-care

# Stage Two: Neutral Zone

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At this stage, the old is gone but the new isn't fully in place. This interim phase is known as the Neutral Zone.

People are still working out how they fit in with the new change and may feel:

- Confused
- Uncertain
- Curious
- Optimistic

You may see people experimenting with different approaches or seeking support to navigate the transition.

## NEUTRAL ZONE

### Emotions

- Confused
- Uncertain
- Curious
- Optimistic

### Behaviours

- Struggle
- Experiment
- Seek support

# Stage Three: New Beginnings

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If the change has been managed well enough in the first two stages, you'll see a release of energy as people engage with new ways of working.

They'll be feeling reoriented, confident and positive. People will most likely understand how they can contribute effectively. You may see people taking initiative, collaborating, and moving forward.

## NEW BEGINNINGS

### Emotions

- Oriented
- Confident
- Positive

### Behaviours

- Taking initiative
- Collaborate
- Move forward

# Summary of the Bridges Model

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## ENDINGS

### Emotions

- Sad
- Anxious
- Angry
- Hopeful

### Behaviours

- Withdraw
- Blame
- Seek support
- Self-care

## NEUTRAL ZONE

- Confused
- Uncertain
- Curious
- Optimistic

- Struggle
- Experiment
- Seek support

## NEW BEGINNINGS

- Oriented
- Confident
- Positive

- Taking initiative
- Collaborate
- Move forward

# STRATEGIES TO MANAGE CHANGE



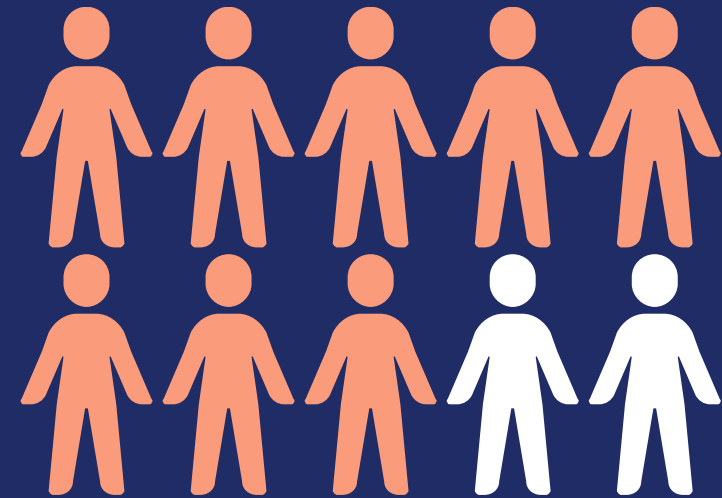
# The Role of People Professionals

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We have now explored the psychological journey through change. So, let's cover how you can support employees through each stage of change.

You have a critical role to play when it comes to successful change. You are at the forefront of managing the human aspects of change.

This next section will focus on practical support strategies. You don't need to do everything on your own. You're there to advise, role model and put the training in place.



83% of employees who experienced change fatigue said their employer did not provide enough tools or resources to help them adapt.

([Capterra, 2022](#))

# Stage One: Endings

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During this phase, people are in touch with what they are losing. So, the priority is to build trust.

Ensure clear and transparent communication from the outset. Communicate the reasons behind the change and its potential impact. Bear in mind that communication is not just a once-off event. Keep your people informed throughout the change process.

Beyond clear communication, managers also have an important role to play. They need to be available and approachable to address any uncertainties or anxieties team members may have. You can support managers with this by providing training that focusses on psychological safety and effective communication.

## ENDINGS

Aim

Build trust

What

- Ensure transparency in all communication.
- Provide regular updates.
- Support managers to be available and approachable.

How

- Internal comms channels
- Town hall meetings
- Manager training
- Employee resilience training



# Stage Two: Neutral Zone

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At this stage, your employees are working out how to adapt to the change and may be experiencing a whole range of emotions. The priority here is to minimise stress. You want to create a supportive work environment so that employees feel safe to seek help and share their challenges. This might include providing coaching and signposting to employee assistance programs.

You can also provide opportunities for connection. Peer support groups, buddy systems and mentorship programs are just some of the ways your people can share insight and offer support.

At this stage, learning is also critical. Employees will need to acquire new skills and knowledge they may need to fulfil their roles. They will also benefit from strengthening their resilience skills to adapt to the ongoing change. So, ensure that training opportunities are tailored to the evolving organisational needs and support both managers and teams.

## NEUTRAL ZONE

Aim

Minimise stress

What

- Create a supportive environment
- Create opportunities for connection
- Focus on workforce skill development

How

- Coaching
- EAPs
- Peer support groups
- Buddy systems
- Mentoring
- Tailored training

# Stage Three: New Beginnings

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Employees will now be integrating the change. Here, you should focus on celebrating progress.

Strategies to consider include peer recognition where employees are encouraged to show appreciation for their colleagues. Celebratory events could include team lunches or company-wide celebrations. You can also use various communication channels to highlight the positive impact that individuals and teams have made.

At this stage, it's also important to remember to take the time to gather feedback. By listening to your people's experiences, you can incorporate lessons learned into future change efforts. Tools might include surveys or focus interviews.

## ENDINGS

Aim

Celebrate progress

What

- Focus on rebuilding morale
- Reinforce positive behaviour
- Promote ongoing feedback

How

- Peer recognition systems
- Celebratory events
- Public appreciation
- Surveys, focus groups

# Strategies to Manage Change

	ENDINGS	NEUTRAL ZONE	NEW BEGINNINGS
Aim	Build trust	Minimise stress	Celebrate progress
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure transparency in all communication.</li><li>• Provide regular updates.</li><li>• Support managers to be available and approachable.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a supportive environment.</li><li>• Create opportunities for connection.</li><li>• Focus on workforce skill development.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on rebuilding morale.</li><li>• Reinforce positive behaviour.</li><li>• Promote ongoing feedback.</li></ul>
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Internal channels</li><li>• Town hall meetings</li><li>• Manager training</li><li>• Employee resilience training</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coaching</li><li>• EAPs</li><li>• Peer support groups</li><li>• Buddy systems</li><li>• Mentoring</li><li>• Tailored training</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Peer recognition systems</li><li>• Celebratory events</li><li>• Public appreciation</li><li>• Surveys, focus groups</li></ul>

# CULTIVATING CHANGE READINESS



46% of CIOs report  
that culture is the  
biggest barrier to  
change

(Gartner, 2019)



# Cultivating Change Readiness

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Managing change as it unfolds is one thing; developing a workforce that is both resilient and ready for change is another.

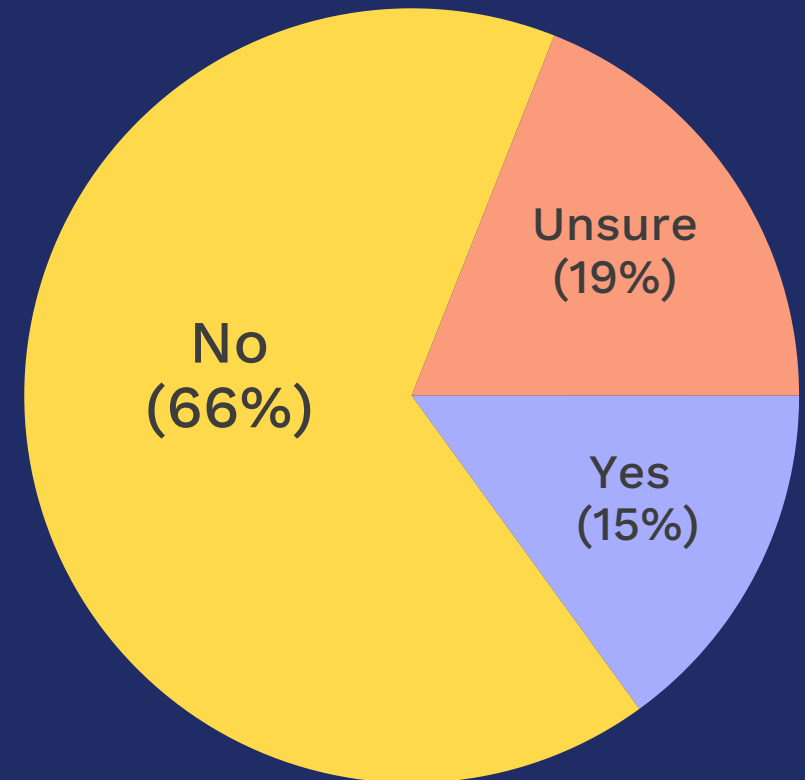
If you want your organisation to remain competitive and successful over the long-term, it is imperative to have change readiness woven into the cultural DNA.

Achieving this will look different for each organisation but integrating change readiness into the culture should feature:

- Change-based training
- Resilience assessments and training
- Strong support systems (e.g. mentoring)
- Rewarding flexibility and adaptability

When you do this, you can ensure that your organisation is ready for whatever comes next.

**“Is change readiness part of your current training offering?”**



(Source: Survey of 71 people professionals, Building a Change-Ready Workforce Webinar, 2024)

# Cultivating Change- Readiness

When thinking about the whole workforce, interventions and training should focus on building resilience and awareness. It's about ensuring every employee is equipped with the skills to navigate their personal journey through change.

Managers are critical in the change process. Ensure that managers are given training and coaching to effectively communicate with their teams and cultivate psychological safety.

Here are some strategies to consider.

## WORKFORCE

### Interventions

- Resilience assessment
- Training and development
- Team building exercises

### Focus areas

- Personal resilience
- Stress management
- Change awareness

## MANAGERS

- Coaching and mentoring
- Change leadership training

- Psychological safety
- Pressure management
- Wellbeing conversations

# Conclusion

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Let's summarise the key takeaways:

- Change is now perpetual, pervasive and exponential. A change-ready workforce is therefore a business imperative.
- It's not enough to just manage the change operationally. You need to support the psychological journey of your people through change.
- People teams have a critical role to play at each stage of the transition.
- To enable ongoing change-readiness, embed change resilience into your training plans.

By doing this, you're future-proofing your organisation. Research by [McKinsey](#) (2021) has shown that change-ready organisations are 2.5 times more likely to be high performers in 3 key areas:

- profitability
- customer satisfaction
- employee engagement.

And who doesn't want that!

If your teams are struggling with change, get in touch. We're here to help.

[Get in touch](#)