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The Global **Change Readiness** Report

Leadership, behavior & performance stability during **organizational change**



This report explores the **behavioral conditions** that help organizations **sustain performance through significant change.**

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Executive summary

Most organizations **aren't short** of experience when it comes to **change.**



In this study of **880 senior HR and people leaders** across **11 markets,** organizations reported experiencing significant organizational change every **3.2 years** on average. Half experienced significant change every two to three years, with a further **30%** every four to five years.

Despite that experience, many organizations remain underprepared for the impact of change.

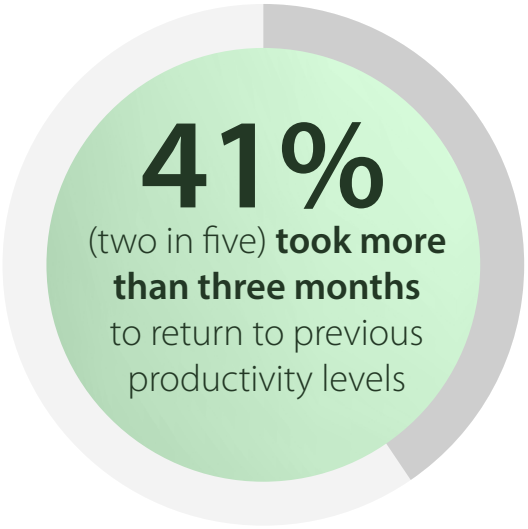
Before their most recent change program, **39%** of leaders anticipated moderate or major disruption to organizational performance. Once the program was underway, that figure rose to **51%,** suggesting many leaders underestimated the impact of change.

That disruption carries a performance cost.

Productivity fell during change in **17%** of organizations. This increased to **22%** among the least prepared organizations but dropped to **10%** among the most prepared.

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Recovery was rarely immediate for organizations where productivity declined:



A further **2%** **hadn't recovered** by the time of the survey

The real change readiness gap is **behavioral,** not operational



Behavioral readiness is the ability of leaders and teams to remain clear, consistent and constructive when change puts pressure on them and the way they work together. It shows up in how leaders make decisions, communicate uncertainty, manage tension, maintain trust and align teams when the operating environment becomes more demanding.

It is the human element that determines whether operational plans hold up under pressure.

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Behavioral readiness remains a gap for most organizations

87% were not highly prepared for their most recent significant change, and **46%** went into it having engaged with just one or two types of preparation. Of the six types of change preparation organizations undertake, **behavioral leadership preparation** is used least often.

Leader behavior during change is more nuanced than it first appears

63% of leaders were seen to behave more positively under pressure. However, even leaders rated positively overall still displayed behaviors that made change harder, including reduced collaboration and avoiding difficult conversations.

Around one in five displayed these behaviors, almost the same proportion as leaders rated negatively overall.



Of the leaders whose behaviors were perceived negatively overall, **44%** appeared to have no idea their behaviors had shifted. Negative behaviors are not uncommon during change. The greater concern is that some leaders are unaware when their behaviors shifts.

87%
communicated priorities **clearly**



yet



46%
experienced confusion over decision-making authority

Communication is rarely the missing piece during change

87% of organizations said priorities were communicated clearly during change, yet **46%** still experienced confusion about who held decision-making authority. **Knowing what's changing is not the same as knowing how to act on it.**

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When organizations prepared for change, outcomes were stronger

Among the most prepared organizations, **77%** reported higher productivity during change, compared to **53%** of the least prepared.

Where productivity improved, **74%** also observed leaders behaving more positively, compared to **46%** where productivity declined.

While the findings don't prove cause and effect, they tell a consistent story. The organizations that maintained performance weren't the most experienced at change. **They were the ones that prepared more deliberately for how change affects leadership behavior, decision-making, trust, team alignment and emotional pressure.**



The evidence suggests five practical actions for leaders:

1. Treat change readiness as a **behavioral capability,** not simply an operational process
2. Anticipate **human disruption** as seriously as operational disruption
3. Align **leaders** before asking them to align the wider organization
4. Make decision-making clarity, trust and behavioral consistency **visible** measures of progress
5. Build readiness **continuously,** not as a one-off activity

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About the research

This report is based on a survey of 880 senior HR and people leaders across 11 markets: the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Germany, France, Poland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Spain, with 80 respondents in each market.
All respondents worked in organizations with at least 250 employees and predominantly office-based workforces.

Organizations ranged in size from 250 to more than 2,500 employees, and respondents spanned single-country, multi-country and global HR remits, from senior managers to chief executives; a full sample profile appears in the appendix.

For the purposes of the research, significant organizational change was defined as a major planned transition that affects how an organization operates or how people work. Respondents were asked to reflect on the most recent significant organizational change at their current place of work. Examples included leadership team changes, market expansion, organizational restructures, operating model shifts, workforce reductions, strategy resets and technology-driven change, including AI-enabled solutions.

The research explored how organizations prepare for, experience and recover from significant change, with particular attention to leadership behavior, decision-making, working styles, team alignment, cultural friction, productivity and performance stability.

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Introduction

Most organizations are **experienced** in change. **Few are truly ready for it.**

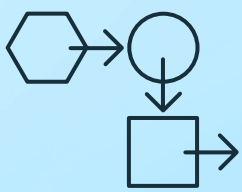
Most leaders don't need another report telling them the world is moving quickly, technology is accelerating disruption or that organizations need to adapt. They know this already. They are living it.

Experience with change is growing, but are organizations getting better at navigating it? The research suggests the answer is more complicated than many leaders expect.

HR and people leaders reported regular exposure to significant organizational change. Half of all organizations **(50%)** go through major change every two to three years, and a further **30%** every four to five years, giving an average interval of 3.2 years. **14%** experience significant change annually or more often.

On average, organizations go through a **significant organizational change** every

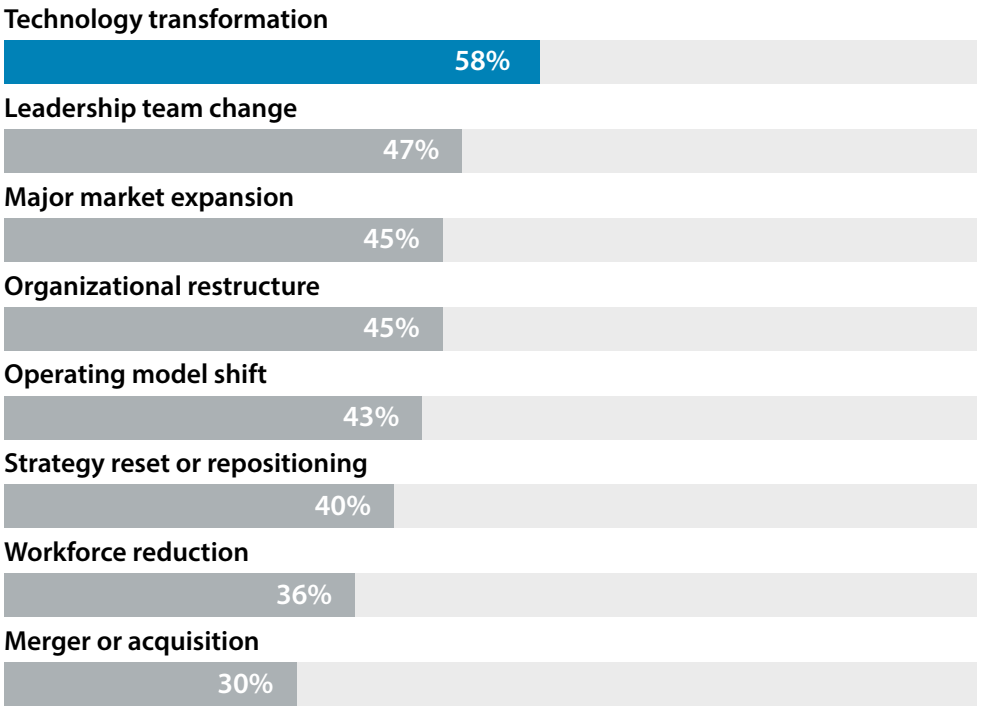
3.2 years



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Technology transformation was the most common form of change over the past decade, but organizations experienced a wide range of major organizational changes from leadership change and organizational restructure to strategy reset and positioning.

Technology transformation is the most widely experienced major organizational change



Base: 880 respondents. Q12: 12 types of significant organizational change experienced within the organization in the last 10 years.

Organizations are not encountering change as novices. They have history, experience, processes, frameworks and lessons learned.

But, the research suggests that experience alone is not enough.

Before their most recent significant organizational change, **39%** of leaders anticipated moderate or major disruption to performance, compared with **51%** who experienced it during the change.

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The same pattern shows up in preparation. Almost every organization has the foundations: **96%** have shared frameworks for discussing leadership behavior and working styles, and **97%** have tools and processes for discussing behavioral differences constructively. However, only about a third of organizations use these tools consistently and widely.

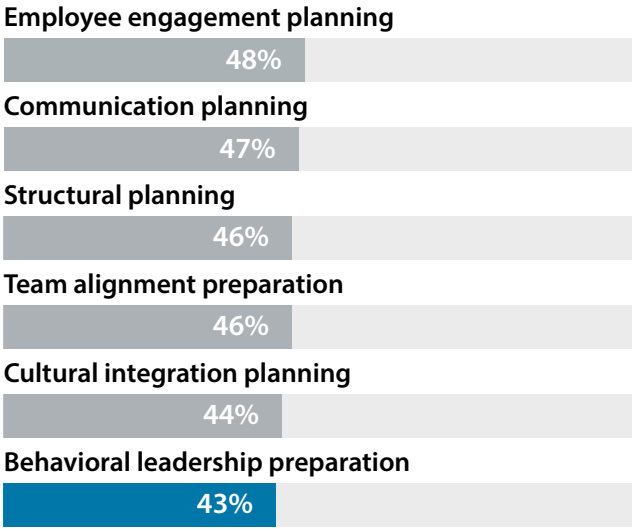
Across the six areas of preparation organizations undertake for significant change, employee engagement ranks highest, while behavioral leadership preparation ranks lowest. The intent and foundations are there, but preparation isn't always as thorough as it could be.

96%
have **frameworks** for **discussing leadership behavior**

but only

33%
use them **consistently** and **widely**

Out of six change preparation areas, behavioral leadership preparation ranks last



Base: 880 respondents. Q5: Preparation areas typically undertaken before significant change. Presented in percentage points

Change is a behavioral stress test

Significant organizational change doesn't only affect structures, systems, roles or processes. It changes the conditions in which people are expected to perform.

It alters decision-making. It tests trust. It creates ambiguity. It increases emotional pressure. It exposes misalignment. It can change how leaders behave, how teams collaborate and how people interpret what is happening around them.

In other words, change isn't only an operational event. It's a behavioral stress test.

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The behavioral readiness gap

Most organizations prepare for what will change: The structure, the technology, the timeline, the communications, the process. Fewer prepare as thoroughly for what the change will do to their employees: How it will affect clarity, confidence, relationships, leadership behavior and team dynamics.

Behavioral readiness is the ability of leaders and teams to remain clear, consistent and constructive when change puts pressure on them and the way they work together.

It doesn't mean avoiding disruption. Disruption is often part of change. It doesn't mean eliminating tension. Some tension is necessary when organizations are making difficult trade-offs or moving into new territory.

Behavioral readiness means having leadership habits, relational conditions and shared expectations that allow people to work through disruption without losing alignment, trust or momentum.

The findings suggest that behavioral readiness is a missing link between change activity and change performance.

> "Organizations are often more prepared for the mechanics of change than for its emotional and behavioral impact. Leaders may be eager to present themselves as change-ready, but true readiness means recognizing that uncertainty, discomfort and disruption are not side effects of change — they are part of the experience."
>
> Paul Thompson, Managing Director, Westminster Associates

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1. The **anticipation** gap

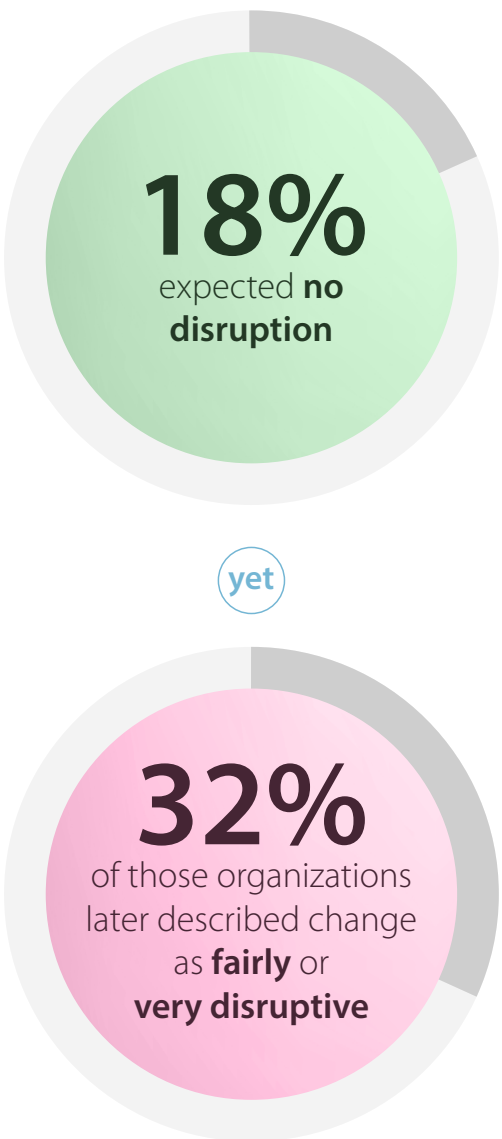
Why change experience doesn't automatically create change readiness

Organizations **consistently underestimate** the disruption created by **significant change.**

Leaders aren't blind to disruption. **77%** said senior leaders anticipated at least some disruption before their most recent change, and two in five of those **(40%)** expected it to last three months or more.

Most organizations expected some disruption. What they underestimated was how disruptive it would be.

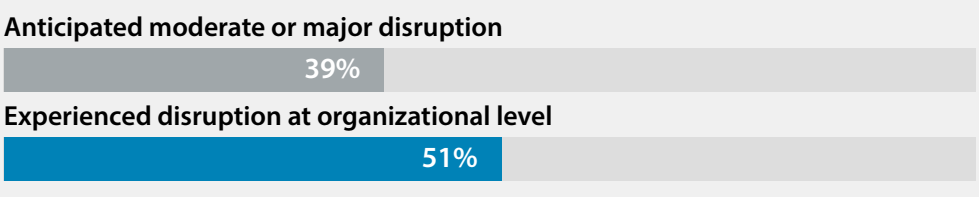
Only **39%** anticipated disruption to performance at a moderate or major level. By contrast, once the change was underway, **51%** described its impact as fairly or very disruptive at an organizational level.



The same pattern emerged among organizations that expected little or no disruption. Almost one in five leaders **(18%)** said no disruption to performance was anticipated before the change began. Yet, nearly a third of those organizations **(32%)** later described the change as fairly or very disruptive. Likewise, among organizations expecting only minor disruption, **39%** went on to report the change as fairly or very disruptive.

The findings suggest that organizations are generally good at recognising that change will bring disruption, but less accurate at predicting its scale. Anticipating disruption isn't the same as being prepared for its full impact.

Leaders anticipate less disruption than they experience

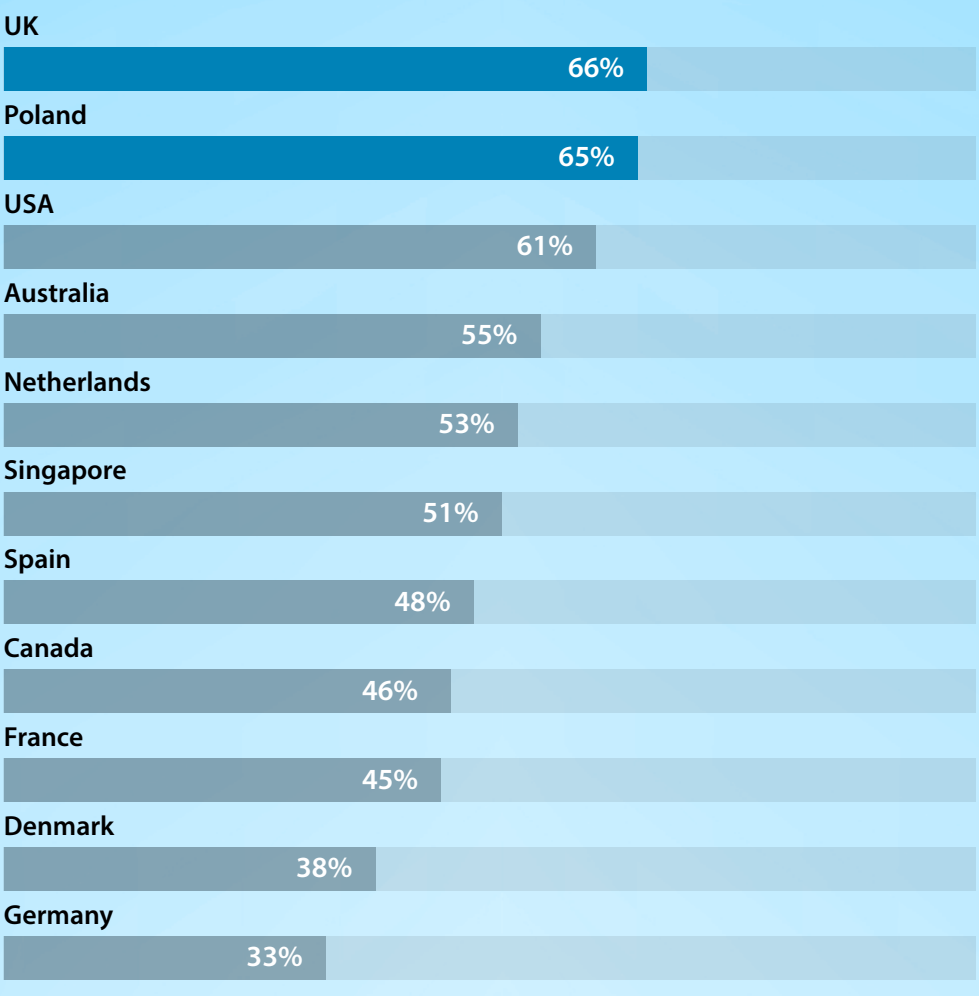


Base: 880 respondents. Q16: Anticipated disruption to organizational performance before the most recent significant organizational change. Q18: Experienced level of disruption at organizational level during the most recent significant organizational change.

Disruption was not felt evenly across markets

Leaders broadly expect disruption. What varies is the extent of disruption experienced, with the least reported in Germany and the most in the UK and Poland.

Distruption at organizational level was most pronounced in the UK and Poland, least in Germany



Base: 880 respondents. Q16, Q18: disruption experienced at organizational level, per market. Presented in percentage points.

Familiarity can create false confidence

The findings challenge the common assumption that organizations become better at change simply by experiencing more of it.

Half of organizations go through significant change every two to three years, and a further **30%** every four to five years. **14%** experience it annually or more often. Yet experience alone does not appear to translate into greater readiness, or sustained performance.

When organizations go through repeated change, they may become more familiar with the mechanics: governance, project plans, communication rhythms, implementation phases and stakeholder management. But familiarity alone can create false confidence if it's not matched by equal attention to the human dynamics of change.

> There is a type of Dunning-Kruger effect around change. We have been through it before, so we tell ourselves it will be fine, overestimating our own capability and underestimating the disruption.
>
> We put on blinkers and treat change as a narrow sliver we can control, when in reality we are operating in complex ecosystems with far more moving parts than any plan accounts for. And because we rarely stop to bank the learning from one change, we arrive at the next and make the same mistakes again.
>
> Justin Kinnear,
> Head of Research,
> HPC

Leaders may understand the program, the business case and the timeline. But they may still underestimate the emotional, relational and behavioral disruption that change creates.

This is where the anticipation gap becomes more than a measurement issue. It becomes a question of leadership behavior.

If leaders underestimate disruption, they are less likely to prepare people for it. If they underplay the strain, they're less likely to create the conditions people need to stay aligned. If they assume experience equals readiness, they may miss the signals that determine whether change strengthens or weakens performance.

Anticipation isn't the same as readiness

The problem isn't that leaders fail to see disruption coming. Most do. Expecting disruption isn't the same as being ready for it. Anticipation is a forecast. Readiness is how organizations respond to it.

The goal isn't to dramatize change, but to understand its impact clearly.

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2.
The cost of **misjudging** change

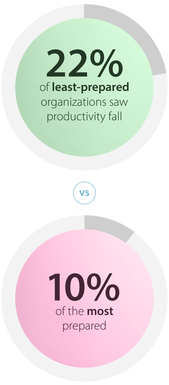


When disruption is underestimated, performance pays the price

The gap between the disruption organizations expect and the disruption they experience carries a **performance cost.**

Productivity fell during change in **17%** of organizations. That figure rose to **22%** among organizations that undertook the least preparation, and fell to **10%** among those that undertook the most preparation.

Productivity outcomes also varied sharply by market. In the UK, **75%** of respondents said productivity increased during change, compared with **73%** in Australia. By contrast, **31%** of respondents in the Netherlands said productivity decreased during change.



Implementation isn't the same as performance

Change is often judged by whether implementation happens: The restructure is completed, the new system goes live, the operating model changes, or the strategy is launched.

Implementation is only part of the story.

A change can be technically delivered and still leave the organization weakened: slower, less trusting, fragmented, fatigued or less able to respond to the next challenge.

Recovery is rarely immediate

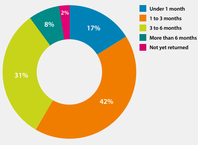
When productivity declined, recovery was rarely immediate. Two in five organizations **(41%)** took more than three months to return to previous productivity levels.

Time to return to previous productivity levels

Set against a change cycle that comes round every **3.2 years** on average, those recovery periods matter.

If an organization repeatedly enters major change underprepared, experiences a productivity dip, and then spends months recovering, the cost isn't confined to the change program itself. It becomes part of the organization's operating rhythm.

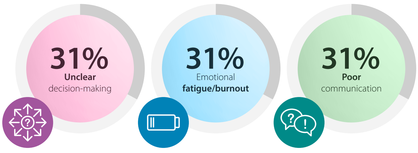
The performance drag accumulates.



Base: 151 respondents who experienced a productivity decline. Q34: time taken to return to previous levels.

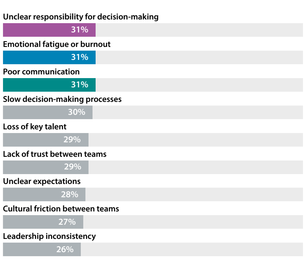
The barriers are mostly human

Unclear decision-making, emotional fatigue or burnout and poor communication are the most commonly reported barriers to maintaining performance during change. No single issue dominates.



Nine barriers sit within five percentage points of one another, and almost all of them are behavioral or relational rather than operational.

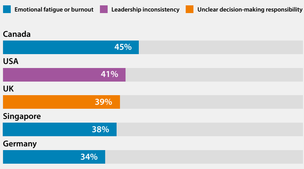
The barriers to performance are behavioral, and tightly clustered



Base: 880 respondents. Q4: biggest barriers to maintaining performance during significant change (top nine shown).

Global market view. The pattern also varies by market. Leadership inconsistency is the single biggest barrier in the United States, cited by **41%** against a global average of **26%.** In the UK, the leading barrier is unclear responsibility for decision-making **(39%),** followed by loss of key talent **(34%).** Emotional fatigue or burnout is the number one barrier in Canada **(45%),** Singapore **(38%)** and Germany **(34%)**.

The leading barrier differs by market



Base: 880 respondents. Q4: leading barrier to performance in selected markets.

These barriers are less about implementation than they are about behavior and relationships: how people experience change, how leaders behave under pressure, whether teams trust one another, whether decision rights are clear and whether people have the emotional and cognitive capacity to keep performing.

This is why behavioral readiness matters. If change risks were only structural, planning alone would be enough. But the research suggests the risks associated with performance decline are largely human. They sit in the space between people, where trust is built or eroded, alignment holds or fractures and change becomes either manageable or exhausting.

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3. Behavioral readiness predicts **performance**

Change puts leadership behavior under pressure

The strongest finding in the study may also be the most human one: Leaders behave differently during significant organizational change.

81% of HR leaders observed senior leaders behaving differently during change. Only **19%** saw no noticeable difference.



63%
saw leaders become
more positive

but

18%
saw leaders become
more negative

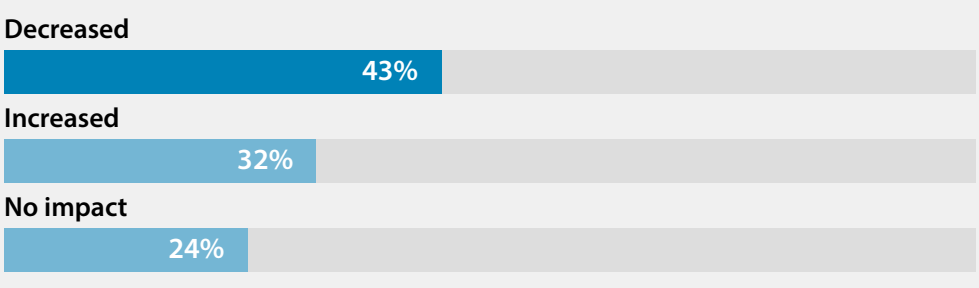
Most of these observed shifts were positive. **63%** of respondents observed leaders behaving more positively, while **18%** observed leaders behaving more negatively.

Under pressure, many leaders were seen increasing their visibility, communicating more clearly, collaborating more or becoming more proactive. That is encouraging, and it shouldn't be dismissed.

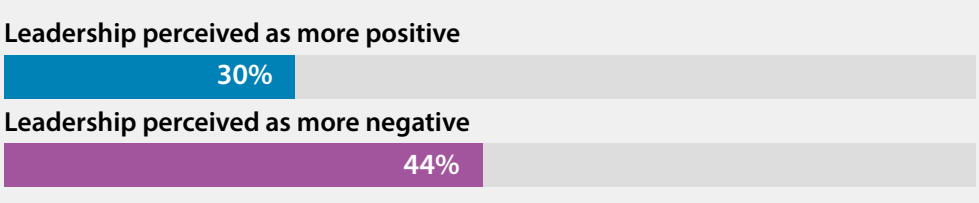
> So much of how a leader behaves through change comes down to whether they have genuinely bought into it. When they have, their behavior tends to be positive and responsive, and they stay conscious of the people beneath them who are going through it too. When they are just along for the ride, they let the change happen to them, and they stop accounting for how their teams are experiencing it.
>
> Jay Longowa, Vice President, Talent Management at Forward Air

Global market view. Leaders were seen behaving more positively in every market, peaking in Australia **(76%),** Spain **(74%)** and the UK **(73%).** Negative shifts in leadership behavior were most commonly reported in the Netherlands **(30%)** and the United States **(24%).** But the data also suggests that positive intent isn't always enough.

Leadership behavior was more likely to reduce team friction than increase it



Among respondents reporting increased team friction



Base: 880 respondents. Q25: perceived impact of leadership behavior on team friction during the significant organizational change. Right-hand chart shows respondents reporting increased friction, segmented by leadership perception (Q22).

Leadership behavior generally reduced team friction. Respondents who observed more negative leadership behavior were considerably more likely to report it.

Global market view. The pattern varies sharply by market: friction fell most often in Spain **(59%)** and rose most often in the United States **(45%).**

Even where leadership behavior was seen as more positive, nearly a third of organizations still reported friction rising. Leaders may be responding constructively to change, but their team's experience may still be mixed. More communication doesn't always create clarity. Faster decisions don't always create confidence. Greater visibility doesn't always create trust.

Leadership behavior matters. So does its effect across the wider system.

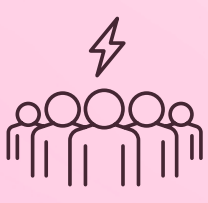
The same behaviors appear across all leaders

The individual behaviors reveal an important pattern.

Among the **712** respondents who saw leaders behaving differently, the most commonly observed changes were clearer communication and direction **(30%),** greater centralization of decision-making **(26%)** and stronger collaboration across teams **(26%).**

At the same time, six negative behaviors were each reported by around one in five respondents: Reduced collaboration across teams **(22%),** less tolerance for differing opinions **(20%),** increased conflict within leadership teams **(20%),** avoidance of difficult conversations **(20%),** faster unilateral decision-making **(20%)** and reduced transparency in communication **(20%).**

Comparing these behaviors by overall leadership rating produces one of the study's most surprising findings. Across five of the six behaviors, the differences between leaders rated positively overall and those rated negatively were small.



1 in 5
reported **negative behaviors** even among leaders rated **positively overall**

Only avoidance of difficult conversations showed a more noticeable gap.

The group of leaders rated negatively is relatively small (160 respondents), so these differences should be interpreted with caution. Even so, the overall pattern is consistent.

Being seen as a good leader overall during change doesn't protect teams from specific behaviors that make change harder. Those behaviors appeared almost as often among leaders rated positively as among those rated negatively.

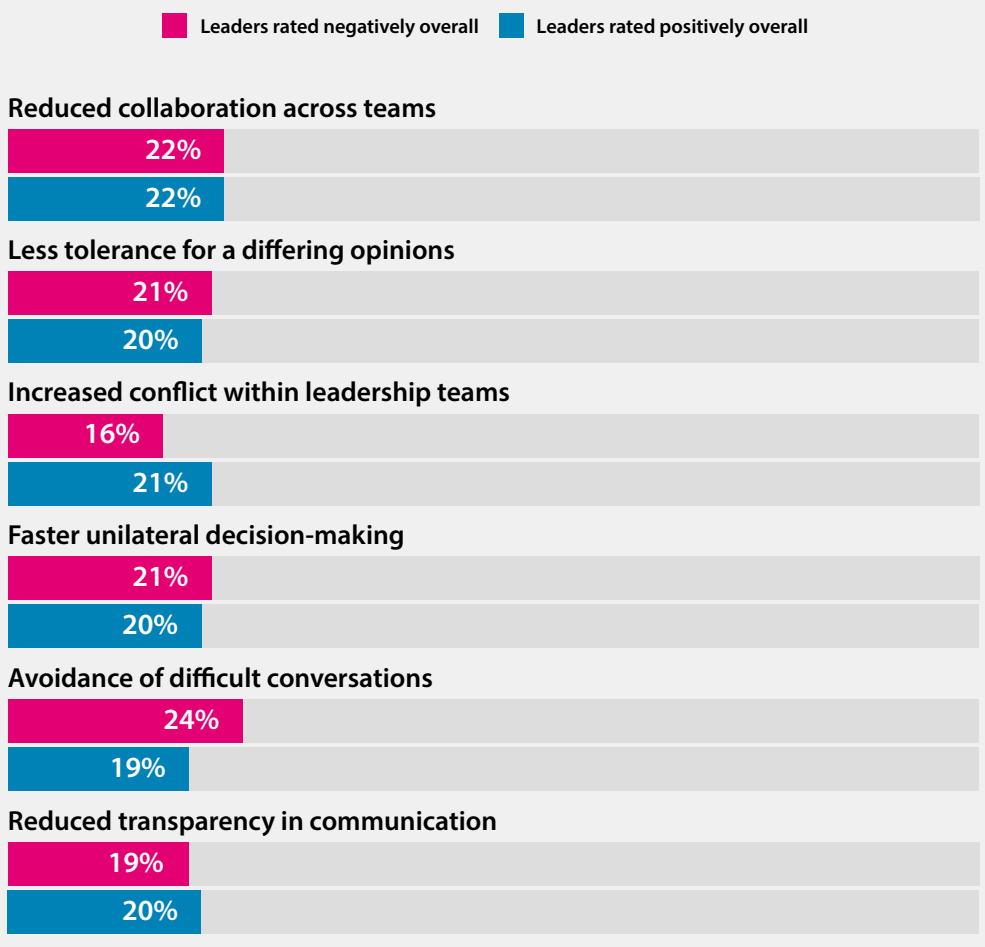
This is the behavioral readiness gap at play. This isn't a story about bad leaders. It's a story about the blind spots pressure can expose in otherwise effective ones.

> Pressure does not create dysfunctional behaviors; it reveals them. The moments that test organizations most severely are often the moments that expose the quality of trust, alignment and psychological safety that already existed beneath the surface.
>
> Paul Thompson, Managing Director, Westminster Associates

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Overall leadership ratings masked similar patterns of negative behavior

Negative behaviors appear at similar rates whether leaders were rated positively or negatively



Base: 712 respondents who observed a behavior change, negatively-rated subgroup n=160, read as indicative. Q24 by Q22.

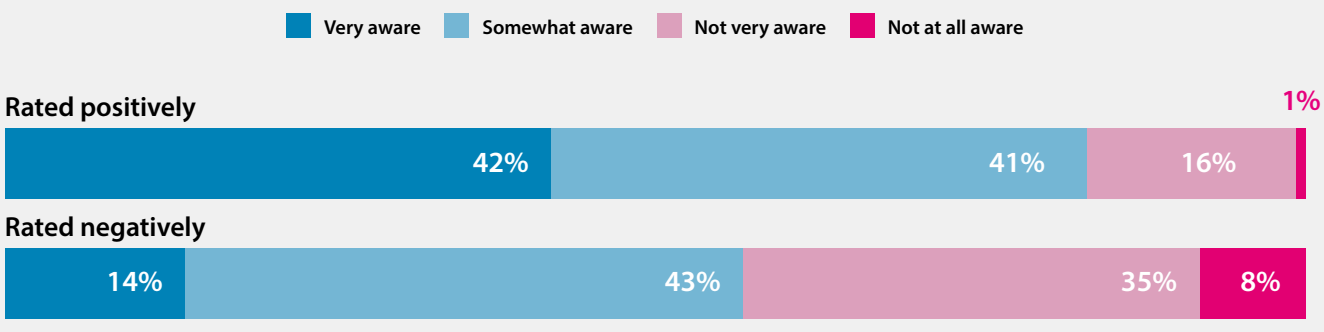
The self-awareness gap

The study also points to a self-awareness gap. Leaders whose behavior became more negative during significant change were far less likely to be seen as aware of that shift.

77% of leaders seen to behave differently during change were viewed as aware of the changes in their behavior. This rose to **83%** among leaders perceived as behaving more positively, suggesting those behavioral shifts were often intentional. By contrast, only **57%** of leaders whose behavior became more negative were seen as aware of the change.

More than four in ten leaders displaying more negative behaviors under pressure were perceived as being largely or completely unaware their behavior had changed. Specifically, **35%** were seen as not very aware, while a further **8%** were seen as not at all aware.

Leaders who behaved more negatively were seen as less aware of it



Base: 712 respondents who observed a change in senior leaders' behavior during the most recent significant organizational change. Q23: To what extent were those leaders aware that their behavior had changed during this period? NET: Aware = very aware + somewhat aware.

> The higher people rise, the more likely it is that those around them stop telling them what is really going on. Leaders can become isolated from how they are actually showing up, so when pressure pushes them into a different way of behaving, they often have no idea it has happened, and no one feels safe enough to point it out. Many of them genuinely believe they are open and approachable, which is exactly why the shift goes unnoticed.
>
> Justin Kinnear, Head of Research, HPC

> Across the 144 organizations in our research on organizational trust, the pattern was striking. The organizations that are struggling almost always have a senior leader who overestimates how well things are going, while the ones doing better are led by people who read the situation accurately, or even underestimate it. You end up with leaders who are out of touch, and they simply do not know it.
>
> Dr Rob McKenna, WiLD Leaders

That finding gets to the heart of the behavioral readiness gap.

The risk isn't that some leaders behave less constructively under pressure. The risk is that they may not realize they are doing it.

A leader or a leadership team cannot manage behaviors they can't see.

This is why behavioral readiness should be built before the pressure peaks. Once change is underway, leaders are often already dealing with ambiguity, urgency, competing priorities and emotional load.

If they haven't created shared expectations for how they will behave, make decisions, handle disagreement and communicate uncertainty, they're more likely to rely on default habits.

Some of those habits may help. Others may create friction.

Behavior and performance move together

Leadership behavior and organizational performance are closely linked.

Respondents in organizations where productivity increased were far more likely to report positive leadership behavior than those where productivity declined.

Leaders were more often seen behaving positively where productivity rose, and negative behavior was roughly twice as common where it fell



Base: 880 respondents. Q22: whether senior leaders were seen behaving more positively or more negatively during the significant organizational change, split by productivity outcome (Q31). 'No noticeable difference' responses (11% where productivity increased, 26% where it decreased) not shown.

Behavioral readiness can be observed, and it can be built.

It can be supported through clearer expectations, coaching, more deliberate preparation for emotional responses and more disciplined tracking of behavioral indicators.

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4.

Why **communication** alone is not enough



The difference between knowing what is happening and knowing how to work through it

Most change programs invest heavily in communication.

People need to understand what's happening, why it matters, what's changing and what it means for them.

But this study suggests that communication alone isn't enough.

87% of respondents said communication of organizational priorities was clear during change, with **37%** describing it as very clear and **50%** as fairly clear. Only **13%** said communication was unclear.

Despite high levels of communication clarity, **17%** of organizations still reported a decline in productivity during change.

This suggests that while clear communication is essential, it isn't sufficient on its own. Communication helps people understand what's changing, but it doesn't necessarily equip them with the mindset and interpersonal skills needed to adapt effectively.

The communication paradox

The weaker point is decision-making clarity.

While communication was largely rated as clear, nearly half of respondents still experienced confusion about who's making the decisions. **46%** said their teams experienced confusion about decision-making authority frequently or occasionally during the change. Only **8%** never experienced confusion about decision-making authority.

That's the communication paradox in two numbers: **87%** said organizational priorities were communicated clearly. Yet **46%** still experienced confusion about who's making decisions.

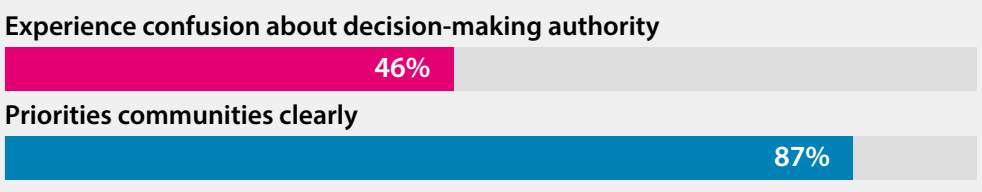
Only **8%** **never experienced confusion** about decision-making authority

87% said organizational priorities were **communicated clearly**

yet

46% **experienced confusion** over decision-making authority

The communication paradox: Clear priorities, unclear authority



Base: 880 respondents. Q27: (clarity of priorities) and Q29 (confusion about decision-making authority).

Communication tells people what, behavior tells them how

Communication helps people understand what's changing. Decision-making clarity helps people understand how to act.

During significant change, people need more than updates. They need to know who has authority, how trade-offs will be made, where to escalate tensions, what principles guide decisions and how leaders expect teams to work together when priorities compete.

Without that clarity, communication becomes a broadcast rather than guidance. People may understand the message but still feel unsure how to move.

This is one reason change communication can feel successful on paper while teams still experience friction in practice.

The problem is that communication is often treated as the primary mechanism for readiness, when it's only one part of it.

The questions readiness must answer

Behavioral readiness requires a deeper set of questions:

1. **Do leaders have shared expectations for how they will behave under pressure?**
2. **Are teams able to address tension constructively?**
3. **Can leaders recognize when their behavior creates friction?**
4. **Are leaders tracking trust and alignment as seriously as project milestones?**
5. **Do people feel safe enough to raise concerns early?**
6. **Are decision rights clear?**

These questions are part of the real work of change. When ignored, they become challenges that slow performance.

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5. **Preparation** works when it goes **beyond** logistics

The organizations reporting stronger outcomes prepare differently



The research suggests that preparation matters.

But not all preparation is equal.

The clearest pattern in the study is what organizations prioritize least in their preparation.

Asked which types of preparation they typically undertake before significant change, respondents ranked employee engagement planning first **(48%),** followed by communication planning **(47%),** structural planning **(46%),** team alignment preparation **(46%)** and cultural integration planning **(44%).** Behavioral leadership preparation ranked last, at **43%.**

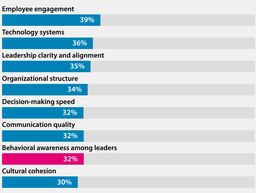
Organizations aren't neglecting behavioral preparation outright. They're doing less of it than every other form of preparation, consistently across markets.

Global market view. Only in the Netherlands does behavioral leadership preparation lead the list, cited by **53%** of organizations, while in the United States communication planning dominates at **64%.**

The same pattern appears in what leaders say matters. When asked what's most important for maintaining performance during significant change, respondents put employee engagement first at **39%,** then technology systems **(36%),** leadership clarity and alignment **(35%)** and organizational structure **(34%).** Behavioral awareness among leaders came seventh of eight, at **32%.**

Global market view. France is the only market where behavioral awareness among leaders is the top priority **(40%),** and Singapore the only one where cultural cohesion leads **(44%).**

Behavioral awareness among leaders ranks seventh of eight for maintaining performance



Base: 880 respondents. Q3: most important for maintaining performance during change.

Organizations rank behavioral awareness near the bottom of what matters, and behavioral preparation last in what they do. Yet **81%** of their leaders behave differently during significant change, and among leaders whose behavior became more negative, **44%** were perceived as unaware of that shift.

How preparation was measured

In the study, change preparation was categorized into six areas:



Respondents were then grouped according to how comprehensively they prepared for change, based on the number of these **six preparation areas** they completed before their most recent significant organizational change: **one area** was classified as minimal preparation, **two** as low, **three** as medium, and **four or more** as high preparation.

High preparation is rare

Only **13%** of organizations undertook four areas of preparation. By contrast, **87%** did not reach this level, and almost half **(46%)** entered significant change having completed just one or two areas of preparation.

87% were **not highly prepared** for significant change

87% were not highly prepared for their most recent significant change



Base: 873 respondents. Q12: number of preparation areas taken before the most recent change.

High preparation is rare

Higher preparation was associated with stronger outcomes.

High-preparation organizations were more likely to report productivity increases and less likely to report decreases. **77%** of organizations that completed four preparation areas saw productivity increase, against **69%** of those that took three and **53%** of those that took one or two. Productivity decreased in **10%** of the most prepared organizations, **14%** of the medium group and **22%** of the least prepared.

77% of **highly prepared organizations** saw productivity increase

Organizations that **prepared least** were more than **twice as likely** to see productivity fall.

The pattern held for leadership behavior. **78%** of the most prepared organizations observed leaders behaving more positively, against **53%** of the least prepared organizations. Negative leadership behavior was observed in **11%** of the most prepared organizations and **23%** of the least.

78% of **highly prepared** organizations saw leaders behave **more positively**

vs

53% of **least-prepared** organizations

Least-prepared organizations were **5x more likely** to report team alignment breaking down **(28% vs 5%)**

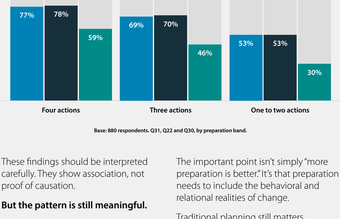
Team alignment showed the same pattern. Among the most prepared organizations, **59%** said teams maintained alignment on priorities and decisions very effectively, and only **5%** said alignment hadn't been maintained effectively. Among the least prepared, **30%** said teams maintained alignment very effectively and **28%** said not effectively.

The least prepared organizations were **more than five times** as likely to say alignment broke down.

Outcomes improve at every step up in preparation

Preparation depth is linked with productivity and leadership behavior, in the same direction and at similar magnitude.

Outcomes improve at every step up in preparation



Base: 880 respondents. Q31, Q22 and Q30, by preparation band.

These findings should be interpreted carefully. They show association, not proof of causation.

But the pattern is still meaningful.

Organizations that prepare more comprehensively appear more likely to create the conditions in which people can perform and leaders can behave constructively during change.

The important point isn't simply "more preparation is better." It's that preparation needs to include the behavioral and relational realities of change.

Traditional planning still matters. Structural and operational planning, communication planning and employee engagement all remain important. But the wider pattern in the findings suggest that logistics alone do not create readiness.

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6.
What **behaviorally ready** organizations do **differently**



The findings suggest that behavioral readiness is a set of practices.

These five practical shifts move change readiness from a planning activity to a behavioral capability. They focus on anticipating where human disruption may occur, aligning leaders before pressure peaks, preparing for behavior shifts under strain, monitoring the human signals that affect performance and building readiness continuously between change events.

1 They anticipate human disruption, not just operational disruption

Most organizations anticipate some disruption during change. The issue is that they often underestimate its scale or misunderstand its nature.

Behaviorally ready organizations ask more human questions before change begins:

- **Where are we most likely to underestimate the scale of disruption?**
- **Which parts of the organization are most exposed to trust, fatigue or alignment risks?**
- **Where could previous change experience create false confidence?**
- **Which teams or leaders are likely to experience the greatest emotional load?**
- **What could slow performance if people become unclear, overloaded or disconnected?**
- **What assumptions about "readiness" do we need to test before the change begins?**

This isn't about being pessimistic. It's about being prepared.

2 They align leaders before asking leaders to align everyone else

Change often exposes differences inside leadership teams.

Different priorities, working styles, decision-making preferences and tolerance for ambiguity can all become more visible under pressure.

The research shows that where leaders were seen to behave more negatively, friction between teams was more common (**44%** compared with **30%** where leaders behaved more positively).

Alignment on priorities and decisions also held far better in organizations that had prepared across more domains, with **59%** of the most prepared maintaining alignment very effectively compared with **30%** of the least prepared.

Behaviorally ready organizations don't assume alignment. They create it deliberately by agreeing before communicating:

- **What people should prioritize when everything feels important**
- **Who owns which decisions and where decision rights may shift**
- **How trade-offs will be made when teams disagree**
- **What leaders will say when there is uncertainty or incomplete information**
- **What behaviors leaders expect from one another under pressure**
- **How they will spot and address friction between teams early**

This kind of alignment isn't a one-off conversation before change. It's embedded throughout the change program and revisited regularly.

3 They prepare leaders for pressure

The study found that **81%** of HR leaders observed senior executives behaving differently during significant organizational change.

That changes what leadership preparation needs to involve.

If leaders are likely to behave differently under pressure, then readiness can't simply mean briefing them on the change plan. It must also mean helping them anticipate how pressure may affect their behavior.

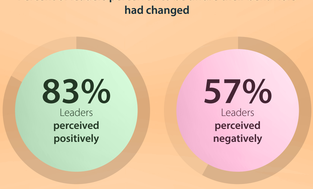
This includes preparing leaders to:

- **Recognize their own default behaviors under pressure**
- **Communicate clearly without pretending to have all the answers**
- **Make timely decisions without becoming unnecessarily centralized**
- **Stay open to challenge even when disagreement feels inconvenient**
- **Have difficult conversations rather than avoiding them**
- **Recognize signs of fatigue, frustration or withdrawal in themselves and others**
- **Invite feedback on whether their behavior is creating clarity or friction**

The self-awareness finding has important implications for leadership preparation. Leaders who behaved more positively during change tended to be aware their behavior had changed, while those who behaved more negatively were perceived as unaware of that shift. Leaders cannot adjust what they are not aware of.

The awareness gap

Percent of leaders perceived to be aware their behaviors had changed



Base: 712 who observed leaders behaving differently. Q23: perceived of behavior change during the organizational change.

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4 They monitor behavioral indicators during change

Most organizations measure change through milestones, timelines, budget, adoption and delivery.

Those things matter. But they don't tell the whole story.

The study suggests that behavioral signals are closely associated with performance. Where productivity increased during change, **74%** of respondents had seen leaders behaving more positively. When productivity decreased during change, only **46%** saw leaders behaving more positively. Negative leader behaviors were seen in **28%** of organizations experiencing productivity declines, but in only **14%** of organizations experiencing productivity increases.

Alongside milestones, timelines and adoption metrics, behaviorally ready organizations track:

- **Understanding of decision-making authority**
- **Trust between teams**
- **Emotional fatigue**
- **Clarity versus confusion related to the change**
- **Confidence in leaders and the direction of the change**
- **Ability to address tension constructively**
- **Consistency of leadership behavior**
- **Psychological safety to raise concerns**

These are leading indicators of whether performance is likely to hold.

5 They build readiness continuously

One of the most useful findings comes from what organizations say they wish they had done differently.

Asked what they wish their organization had done or had in place before the most recent change, respondents put more information about impacts first **(42%)**, followed by more communication tools **(41%)** and more behavioral guidance **(40%)**. Clearer expectations came next **(39%)**, then more training for managing uncertainty **(38%)**, more time to plan **(36%)** and more alignment with other leaders **(36%)**.

Behavioral guidance stands out. It's the area organizations prepare for least, yet one of the things they most wish they had more of. In Denmark and Poland, it's the single most requested improvement, at **48%** and **43%** respectively, and it ranks in the top three in France, Germany and Spain.

Behavioral guidance ranks third of seven on the wish list



Base: 880 respondents. Q14: what respondents wish their organization had done or had in place.

Behaviorally ready organizations don't treat readiness as a box to tick before change begins. They treat it as something to build, test and improve over time.

They prepare. They observe. They learn. They adapt. They don't assume that success means there are no gaps. They use success to see the next gap more clearly.

Behaviorally ready organizations:

- **Capture what each change reveals about leadership behavior, trust and alignment**
- **Turn lessons learned into shared practices, not just retrospective notes**
- **Build behavioral guidance into leadership development and change routines**
- **Revisit decision-making expectations before the next major change begins**
- **Treat feedback, reflection and adjustment as part of the operating rhythm**
- **Use successful changes to identify the next readiness gap, not to assume readiness is complete**

The global picture: How the markets differ

Behavioral readiness plays out differently across the eleven markets. Three patterns stand out.

Disruption lands unevenly. At organizational level, it was most pronounced in the UK **(66%)** and Poland **(65%)**, and least evident in Germany **(33%)**, as shown earlier.





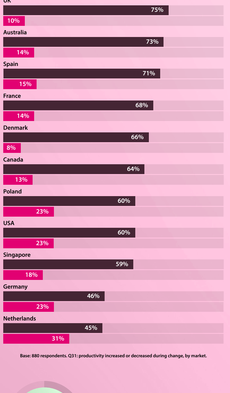
Leaders were seen more positively in most markets, but negative shifts persisted everywhere

Base: 880 respondents. Q22: leaders seen behaving more positively or more negatively, by market.

Leadership behavior follows a similar pattern. Leaders were seen behaving more positively in every market, peaking in Australia **(76%)**, Spain **(74%)** and the UK **(73%)**. But negative shifts persisted everywhere and were most visible in the Netherlands **(30%)** and the United States **(24%)**.



Productivity outcomes varied widely: The Netherlands was the clear outlier for decline



Base: 880 respondents. Q31: productivity increased or decreased during change, by market.



Productivity outcomes varied most of all. The UK **(75%)** and Australia **(73%)** most often saw productivity rise, while the Netherlands stood out for decline **(31%, roughly one in three).**

The Netherlands was also the only market where behavioral leadership preparation ranked first. **This is a reminder that preparation shapes the odds rather than guaranteeing the outcome.**

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7.

What HR and business leaders should do **differently**

First, stop equating change experience with change capability

An organization can go through multiple restructures, strategy resets, technology implementations or leadership changes and still be underprepared for the next one. Experience only becomes capability when it's reflected on, codified and translated into better behavior. After every major change, organizations should not only ask what happened, but what decision-making and behavioral lessons need to become part of future practice.

Second, put behavioral readiness into the change plan from the start

Behavioral readiness shouldn't sit in the culture workstream as a soft add-on. It should be part of the core change architecture. That means naming the leadership behaviors required, clarifying decision rights, identifying likely points of friction, preparing leaders for emotional responses, and measuring trust and alignment throughout the process. Behavioral readiness should have named owners, defined measures and visible milestones, just like operational readiness.

Third, treat decision-making clarity as a performance issue

The gap between general communication clarity and decision-making clarity is one of the report's most useful insights. Communication of organizational priorities was rated clear by **87%** globally, yet **46%** of organizations still experienced confusion about decision-making authority frequently or occasionally, and only **8%** never experienced it at all. That gap is where confusion grows. Clarity about priorities matters. Clarity about who decides often matters more.

Fourth, prepare leaders to notice their own shifts under pressure

Leadership behavior shifts during change. That isn't inherently negative. Many leaders appear to respond with more positive behaviors, but behavioral shifts need to be visible. The findings suggest that leaders are often less aware of negative shifts in their behavior than positive ones. Organizations need to build structured feedback, coaching and reflection into major change initiatives, particularly for senior leaders operating under pressure.

Fifth, measure the human system, not just project progress

During change, organizations routinely monitor project milestones, budgets and implementation progress. They should be equally disciplined about tracking behavioral indicators such as trust, alignment, fatigue, confidence in leadership and decision-making clarity. These indicators provide early warning that performance may be at risk before productivity and engagement metrics begin to move.

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Conclusion

Change readiness is **behavioral readiness**

The research tells a clear story.



Organizations aren't inexperienced in change. Most have been through significant change recently, and many experience it regularly.

But experience alone doesn't guarantee readiness.

The organizations that struggle aren't necessarily those that fail to communicate or fail to plan. Many do both. The deeper issue is that change puts pressure on the human conditions that make performance possible: Trust, clarity, consistency, alignment, emotional capacity and leadership behavior.

When those conditions are weak, change becomes harder to absorb.

When they are strong, organizations appear better able to sustain performance, reduce friction and recover more effectively.

That is why behavioral readiness matters.

It gives leaders a more practical and more human way to think about change. It shifts the conversation from "How do we deliver the change?" to "How do we help people perform while the change is happening?"

That question is becoming more urgent.

As technology, market disruption and AI-enabled transformation continue to reshape work, organizations won't be judged only by how often they change, or how ambitious their strategies are. They will be judged by whether their people can keep collaborating and adapting under pressure.

The organizations best prepared will be those that build the behavioral conditions for people to stay aligned, effective and human when change makes work harder.

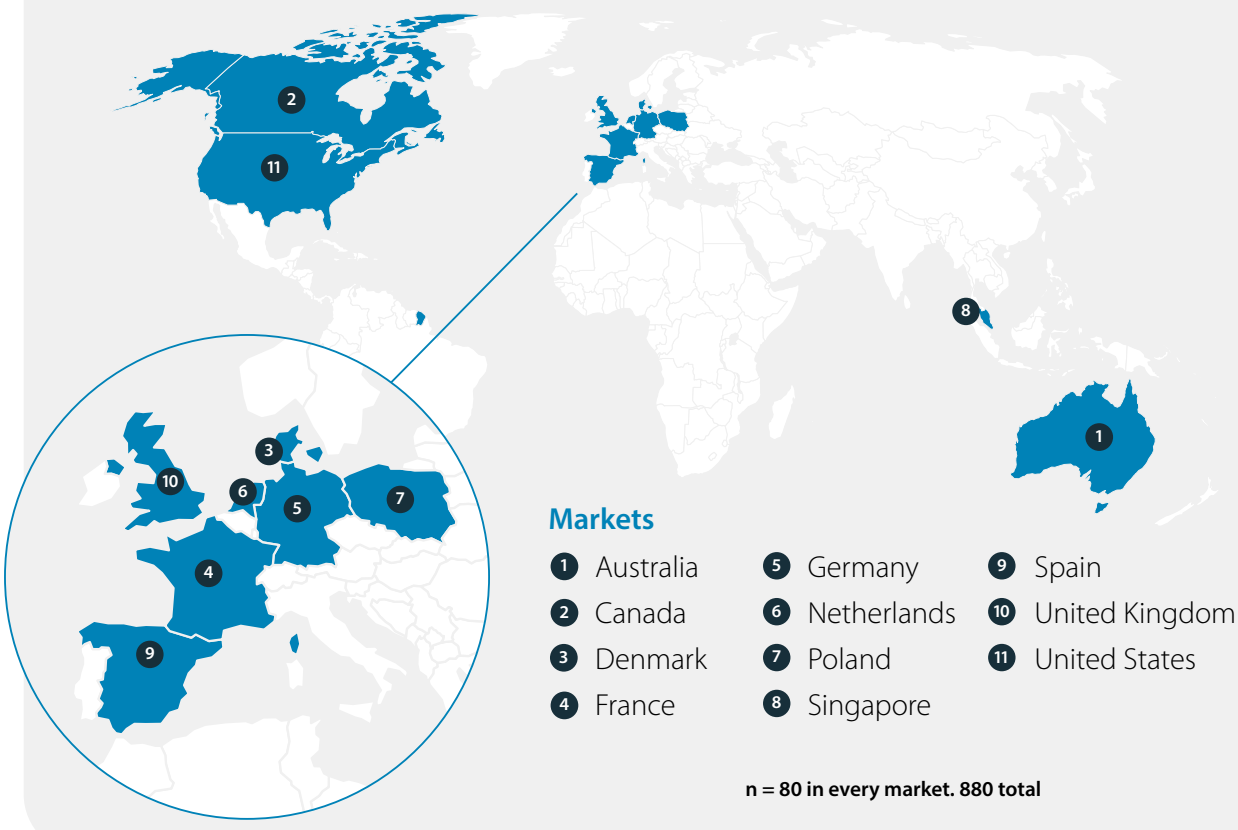
That is the real readiness gap. And it's also the opportunity.

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Appendix

880 survey respondents sample profile

The research surveyed 880 senior HR and people leaders, 80 in each of eleven markets, all working in organizations of at least 250 employees with predominantly office-based workforces.

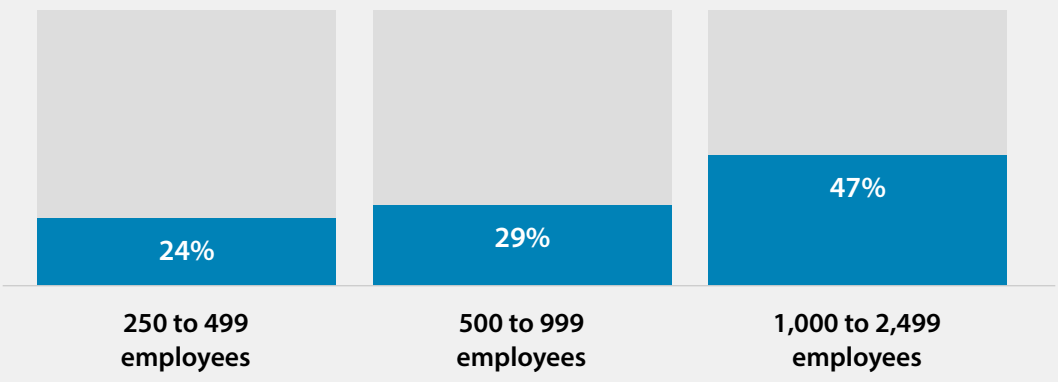


Markets

1. Australia
2. Canada
3. Denmark
4. France
5. Germany
6. Netherlands
7. Poland
8. Singapore
9. Spain
10. United Kingdom
11. United States

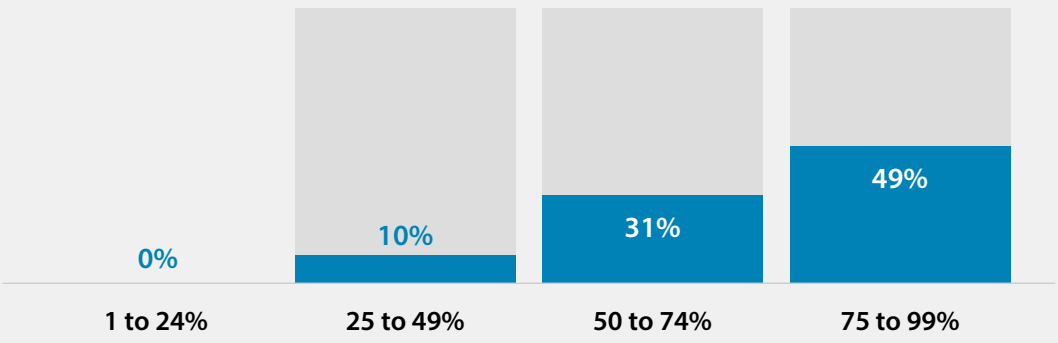
n = 80 in every market. 880 total

Business size



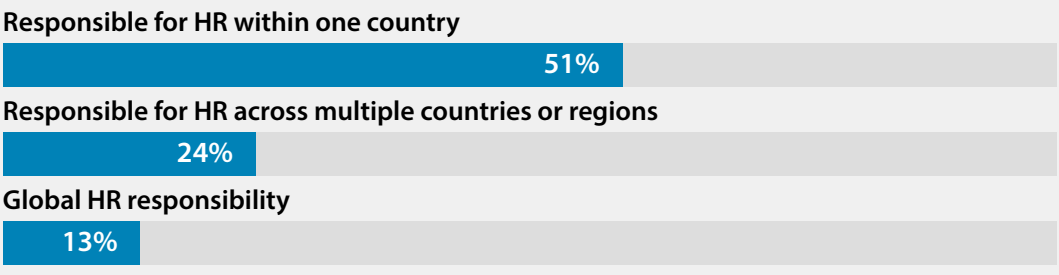
Base: 880 respondents. Business size.

Share of the workforce that is office-based



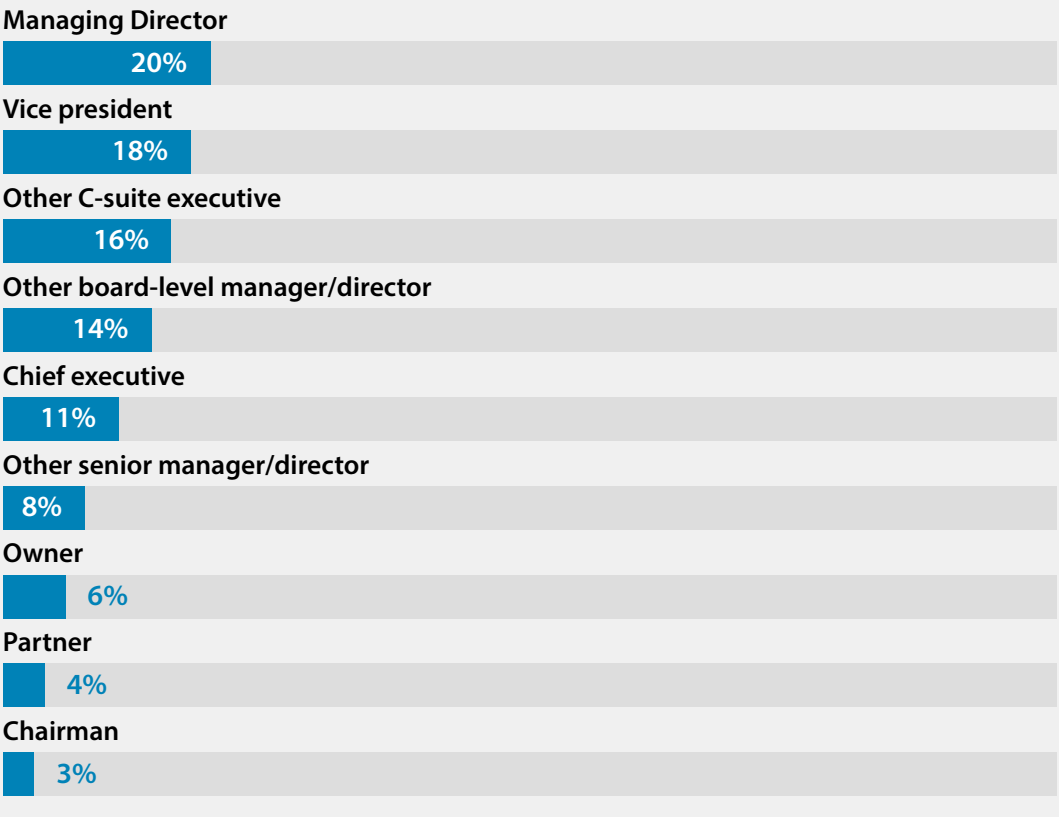
Base: 880 respondents. Share of workforce that is office-based

Scope of HR responsibility



Base: 880 respondents. Scope of HR responsibility

Seniority of respondents



Base: 880 respondents. Seniority of respondents

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