

State of Change Management in the UN System 2025

Delivering change with impact: Actions for change managers and practitioners

Introduction

This action paper considers the implications of the State of Change Management 2025 survey findings for change managers and practitioners in the UN system, and makes recommendations for future action.

Change managers and practitioners are those who are responsible for and contribute to the implementation of organizational change and change management approaches. Their focus is on turning turn strategic intent on change into successful implementation, and helping people across their organization understand, engage with, and adapt to the change.

In an environment of ongoing change and disruption, how can change managers and practitioners best contribute to the achievement of the organization's change objectives?

1

Demonstrating support for change sponsors from the outset



At the outset of change, change managers and practitioners can support change sponsors by:

- Helping to scope the case for change (the vision, purpose and benefits) and the definitions and metrics of success
- Helping build a case for investment in change management tools, systems, and capacity-building
- Demonstrating how resourcing change management increases the likelihood of successful change and, in the longer term, organizational performance
- Ensuring that change sponsors are equipped to advocate for change management within strategic decision-making forums by providing them with data and stories on the benefits of effective change management

2 Staying connected to strategic priorities

Maintaining a close relationship with senior leadership more generally (not only with change sponsors) will help change managers to better understand:

- The organization's current and emerging strategic priorities and how they intersect with ongoing change initiatives
- The operational context in which leadership decisions about change are being made
- Opportunities that may exist in the future to align the work of change management with the organization's broader goals.

When change managers and practitioners are connected with, and aware of, where leaders are focusing their attention, they are better able to position change management as a proactive contributor to achieving successful organizational change.

3 Clarifying and communicating value

Change managers and practitioners need to be intentional and proactive in defining and communicating the strategic, operational, and relationship-building skills they bring to change sponsors. These might include:

- Ensuring that change sponsors are aware of the skills and experiences that change managers and practitioners bring, such as strategic insight, the ability to identify

practical solutions to the challenges of managing change, tools for assessing organizational change readiness, collaboration, and relationship-building

- Sharing concrete examples of where their change management approaches have improved outcomes, and making concrete proposals for change management support in forthcoming changes
- Ensuring that the change sponsor understands the contribution that change managers and practitioners make to staff engagement, project delivery, and risk reduction.

4 Becoming a trusted ally of change sponsors

Change managers and practitioners can contribute to building trusted relationships with change sponsors on an ongoing basis by:

- Being explicit and transparent about what they need from change sponsors and where their active involvement is most critical in maximizing the chances of successful change.
- Providing regular, honest, and open input on factors influencing change success, such as perceptions of leadership engagement, pressures on change management capacity, and change saturation.

The seniority of change sponsors may give them limited visibility into these dynamics; the insights from change managers and practitioners could help change sponsors lead change more effectively.

5 Defining and measuring success

Change managers and practitioners have an important role to play in defining and measuring successful change, establishing clear, measurable change management metrics, and using the data to:

- Track progress and identify risks to successful change early on
- Report discrepancies and emerging issues to the change sponsor, advocating for the iterative use of metrics in strategic decisions about change
- Build a data-driven narrative about change, capturing what's working, what's challenging, and what adjustments may be needed on next steps.

6 Building organizational maturity and agility

Building organizational organizational maturity and agility on change management requires rigour and consistency in the use of standardized change management tools, templates, and frameworks across the organization. Increasing the use of standardized approaches by all those involved in change, wherever they sit in the organization, will help:

- Create a common language for change
- Reduce duplication and confusion across projects using different tools, templates, and frameworks

- Create a foundation for reliable, scalable approaches to change management
- Contribute to shared learning and the ongoing professionalization of change management across the UN system.

7 Acknowledging change saturation

The role of a change manager or change practitioner is not an easy one, and change managers and practitioners often experience change saturation themselves while they support others through organizational transformation. Change managers and practitioners are encouraged to share their observations about organizational change saturation with the change sponsor – how it manifests itself, the impact it is having, and the kinds of interventions that might help alleviate it, such as clearer prioritization of change initiatives and investment in building change management capability.

8 Mapping the change management ecosystem

Understanding and mapping the change management ecosystem (the key stakeholders involved in change management in an organization) can help change managers and practitioners connect with the right people to progress change more effectively. This could include:

- Mapping the internal change management ecosystem beyond formal change

- management functions, to understand where key stakeholders sit, how they interact, and how decisions flow
- Building relationships with stakeholders in human resources, learning and development, information technology, internal communications and other internal functions, recognizing their essential role in change delivery
- Being deliberate about networking across functions to foster alignment and collaboration, and to share tools and approaches.

- Joining the UNLOCK network of change managers and practitioners as a place for exchanging good practices, sharing challenges and solutions, and strengthening system-wide change management capability
- Promoting and enabling peer learning among those involved in change management in their organizations and who have other professional backgrounds, to help build collective learning and capability
- Familiarizing themselves with the 2025 UNLOCK papers on mergers, downsizing, and relocation.

9 Contributing to peer learning on change management

The change management community thrives on learning and shared practice. Change managers and practitioners in the UN system should consider:

In summary

Change managers and practitioners are vital to the success of change. Their partnership with change sponsors, their use of evidence and consistency in change management tools and approaches, and their ability to engage the wider ecosystem are what turn change management intentions into real, sustainable outcomes.

