

# State of Change Management in the UN System 2025

## Leadership and change management

### In brief

- Executive leaders are more likely than any other stakeholder group to be seen as primarily responsible for leading organization-wide change.
- Four in ten respondents identified lack of leadership support as one of the main challenges in sponsoring, managing, or implementing change.
- People often have different perceptions of how successfully change is being managed, depending on where they sit in the system. Bridging this perception gap is essential in creating an aligned approach to change management among key stakeholders.

### Primary responsibility for leading organization-wide change efforts



### 1 Responsibility for change

The survey provides useful data on how senior leadership is perceived by those working on change.

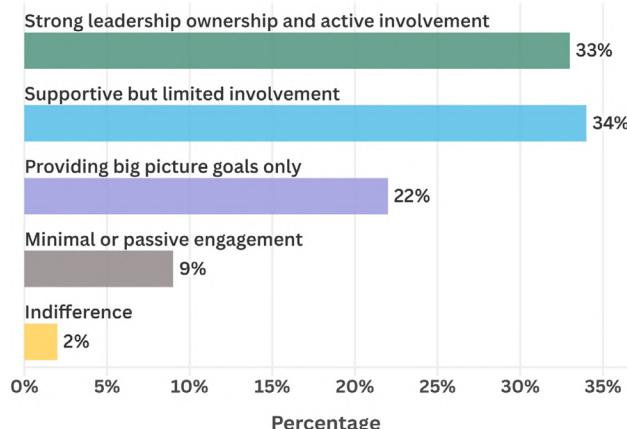
First, when asked who they see as “primarily responsible” for leading organization-wide change efforts in their organizations, around half (52%) of respondents said they saw “Executive leadership” as primarily responsible. More than a third see responsibility resting either with a change management function (20%) or with a project or initiative team (16%).

Q9: Who is primarily responsible for leading organization-wide change efforts in your organization? (n=122)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

Second, most respondents describe senior leadership as having a somewhat distant role in driving change. A third (33%) describe the role of senior leadership as one of “strong leadership ownership and active involvement”, but the remainder describe leaders as having a more limited role in change, ranging from “supportive but limited involvement” to “indifference”.

## Role of senior leadership in driving change

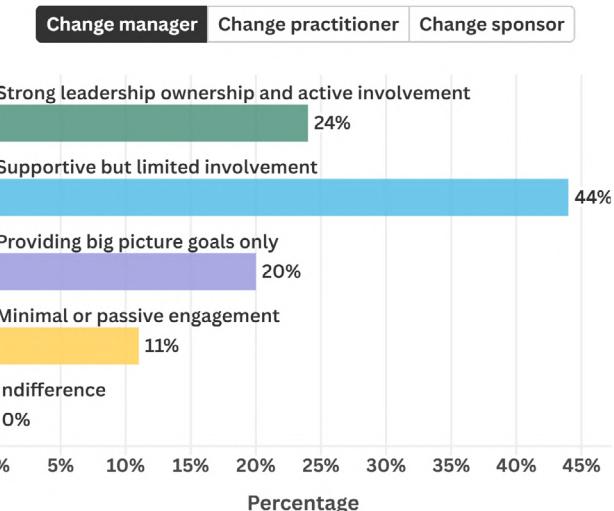


Q10. How would you describe the role of senior leadership in driving change in your organization? (n=122)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

Third, a total of 41 percent of respondents identified lack of leadership support or prioritization as one of the main challenges they are facing in their work. Although concerning, this represents a slight improvement compared to 2023, when 45 percent of respondents identified lack of leadership support as a challenge.

## Role of senior leadership in driving change, by respondent role



Q10. How would you describe the role of senior leadership in driving change in your organization? (n=122)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

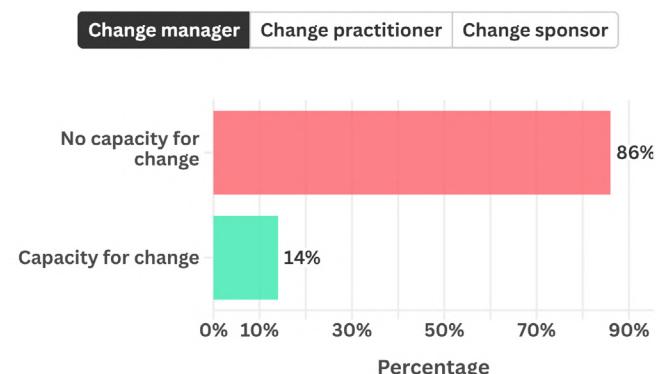
Change sponsors are also much more likely than those involved in managing and implementing change to say that their organization has some remaining capacity for change. A total of 61 percent of change sponsors believe that their organization has some or plenty of spare capacity for change, compared with just 14 percent of change managers.

## 2 Differing perceptions

Change sponsors have a more positive perception of both senior leadership and of the organization's capacity for change than change managers have.

Change sponsors are significantly more likely than change managers and practitioners to describe senior leaders as taking strong ownership of driving change, and of being actively involved in the change process. Two thirds (65%) of change sponsors describe senior leadership in these terms, compared to just one quarter (24%) of change managers.

## Organizational change saturation/ change fatigue, by respondent role



Q14. What do you estimate the level of change saturation/change fatigue to be in your organization at the moment? (n=122)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

[Click here for the interactive version of this graph](#)

# 3 Implications

## Implications for change sponsors

- As a change sponsor, be clear and intentional about the role you take in relation to managing change and ensure that this is clearly communicated and understood.
- Establish where primary responsibility for a given change initiative lies; if not with you, then agree where responsibility and accountability need to lie to maximize the chances of the change initiative succeeding.
- Stay alert to the possibility that your seniority means you are not aware of the strategic and operational challenges which change managers and practitioners are experiencing. Check in with them on a regular basis and keep an eye out for signs of change saturation.

- Invite feedback from colleagues at all levels, including change managers and practitioners, about your role as a leader of change and what you might do differently to help the change succeed.

## Implications for change managers and practitioners

- Be clear about the role you need your change sponsor to play in relation to change and speak with your change sponsor when you see the need for further clarification.
- Share with your change sponsor any insights or evidence you gather on factors influencing change, such as senior leadership engagement and change saturation. Their relative seniority means they may not have the same experience or awareness as you.
- Share with your change sponsor any data you may have regarding the extent of change saturation in your organization with the change sponsor; include any suggestions you may have for action or support needed to address this.

