

The Missing Story in Organisational Change

*Why 70% of Business Transformations Fail
– and How Story Offers The Solution*

2026

Change is the single constant in modern business **but most active efforts fail.**

Multiple studies show that 60–70% of change initiatives don't achieve their intended goals.

The costs are heavy across many key fields:

- **Billions wasted** in failed projects.
- **Rising employee stress and attrition** – 73% of employees report stress during change, and 54% of fatigued employees consider leaving.
- **Loss of leadership credibility** – 31% of CEOs are fired for poor change management.

But hidden in the data is a simple solution:

Story.

Organisations that frame change as a clear, compelling narrative – with a shared mission, believable future, and defined roles for employees – dramatically improve their odds of success.

Pulling on ten of years of data from multiple studies, this report explores:

- **Why most change initiatives fails.**
- **The hidden human costs.**
- **What the research shows works.**
- **How story is the missing link for achieving positive outcomes.**



Most Change Fails.

Across every study, the numbers agree:

- 70% of change initiatives don't achieve their goals (McKinsey, WTW).
- Only 34% of projects succeed (CEB).
- 31% of CEOs are fired for poor change management (LeadershipIQ).
- 50% of leaders admit they don't know if a change succeeded in delivering the goals (KPMG).
- 52% of managers feel responsible for helping their teams navigate change, yet only 45% feel adequately supported (Wiley).

Despite the constant nature of change, only 18% of respondents in Wiley's survey of 1,685 individuals felt they receive comprehensive change training. 76% believe such training would be valuable.

This reveals a systemic issue: organisations are not preparing employees for the ongoing, cumulative impact of unprecedented and continuous change.

The Consequences of Failed Change:



Financial loss from project budgets.
(Panorama)



Loss of employee trust in leadership.
(Capterra)



Employees reporting stress & fatigue during change, driving disengagement and staff turnover.
(Gartner)



Change is inevitable.
Surviving change and
succeeding is not.

Why Change Fails.

A man with dark, wavy hair and glasses is shown from the chest up, wearing a blue button-down shirt. He has his hands pressed against his face, covering his eyes and nose, suggesting a state of stress, frustration, or despair. The background is a blurred office setting. The image is partially obscured by a dark grey diagonal shape on the right side and a white diagonal shape on the left side.

In the absence of a clear, meaningful story, “lack of direction” is the one people tell.

Change fails when people are left out of the process.
The organisations who stumble neglect the human side of transformation, leaving employees unsure of their role in the journey.

The five biggest problem areas during change, revealed by research:

01

Clarity

Only 29% of employees can accurately identify their company's strategy (HBR).

39% of employees resist due to lack of understanding/clarity (Gartner).

02

Communication

51% of executives admit messaging breaks down during transformation (KPMG).

29% of employees say change isn't communicated clearly (Oak Engage).

03

Leadership

72% of leaders admit they don't know what employees need to do differently (Gartner).

62% of organisations still use top-down plans that don't fit reality (CEB).

04

Fatigue

73% of employees feel moderate to high stress – directly reducing trust, energy, and performance (Gartner).

38% enjoy their jobs less after repeated changes (Capterra).

54% consider leaving when fatigue during change sets in (Capterra).

05

Culture

46% of CIOs say culture is the biggest barrier to change. (Forbes)

80% of organisations report cultural tensions or competing priorities (Changing Point).

The Human Cost.

Failed change initiatives don't just waste money.

They burn people out.

→ Stress Impact

95% of employees report stress; 36% say it's severe (Wiley).

60% say stress reduces productivity (Wiley).

72% say work quality declines under stress (Wiley).

82% report physical symptoms, from headaches to fatigue (Wiley).

89% report emotional strain, from anxiety to irritability and depression (Wiley).

→ Trust Erosion

37% of employees lose trust in their employer after repeated change failures (Capterra).

93% of fatigued employees say their employer backtracked on at least one initiative (Capterra).

→ Retention Collapse

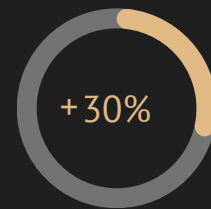
Only **43%** of highly fatigued employees plan to stay, compared to **74%** of low-fatigue employees (Gartner).

Success Leaves Clues.

Across dozens of studies, the organisations that succeed in change share common traits:

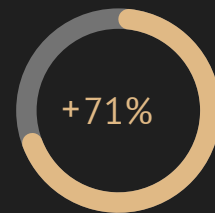
✦ **Employee Involvement**

Participatory approaches raise engagement and adoption, boosting success rates by **30%** (McKinsey).



✦ **Frontline Ownership**

When frontline employees drive change success rates rise to **71%** (Oak Engage).



✦ **Pilot Testing**

Makes adoption **3x** more likely (McKinsey).



✦ **Agile Change**

Rapid feedback loops and adaptive messaging speed up implementation and boost buy-in (Panorama).



✦ **Continuous Learning**

Organisations that embed upskilling and resilience are more adaptable, especially in AI-driven environments (Panorama).



Story-Driven Change



Change is always experienced through the lens of a story - where we're going, what we want, what lies in our way...

An organisation's people live and experience its story every day. Most leaders just haven't defined that story clearly enough to support and guide the outcome they want.

But the research is clear:

When leaders approach new goals and communicate change as a story, outcomes dramatically improve.

5.8x

CEO storytelling multiplies success.

Transformations are 5.8x more likely to succeed when CEOs tell a clear, compelling story that frames and drives the change (McKinsey).

+71%

Frontline narratives drive ownership.

Success rates jump to 71% when frontline employees are actively involved in shaping the change story (Oak Engage).

+54%

Participatory storytelling beats top-down.

With leader-only comms, only 20% of employees understand the change. With shared narrative approaches, that rises to 54% (CEB).

39%

Narratives reduce resistance.

39% of employees resist change because they don't understand why it's happening – clarity of story directly reduces this barrier (Oak Engage).

74%

Story strengthens trust.

74% of employees say leaders need to do more to understand resistance – co-creating a shared narrative closes that trust gap (Oak Engage).

Why Stories Matter

Direction

The numbers show clarity gaps are one of the top causes of failure. Story makes the destination clear and provides a roadmap through each stage in the process to simplify achieving a positive outcome.

Energy

Fatigue drops when new obstacles and changes are anticipated and understood as part of a process toward a defined goal, rather than endless disruption.

Ownership

Employee involvement in the story of change raises initiatives' success rates by up to 30% (McKinsey).

Meaning

Stress falls when employees understand *why* change is happening, *where* it's going, and *how* they fit in.

Progress

In every story, challenges signal movement into new territory. Identifying and framing obstacles as *necessary milestones* to overcome reassures employees that difficulty isn't failure - it's proof the organisation is advancing.



***Change without a story
is overwhelming chaos.***

***Change as part of a
story is progress.***

Strategic Story Driven Change

The data doesn't lie. Most change fails.

The costs are financial, cultural, and human.

But the solution is also clear:

Organisations that tell better stories succeed more often.

ThroughLine helps leaders and organisations:

- Understand the story they're in
- Define the one they want with clarity
- Map the four acts of organisational change to reach their desired ending
- Simplify the journey of achieving new goals

To explore how story can simplify achieving change in your organisation just [CLICK HERE](#) or scan the QR to find a time to chat:



Who We Are

Drawing on over twenty years' combined experience across television, advertising, learning and culture, we have a proven record of helping teams achieve desired changes and outcomes in challenging times.



Billy Cook

Story Expert &
Creative Strategist

Billy is a story expert and creative strategist with over 13 years experience shaping internationally acclaimed television drama. Across work spanning hit series such as the BBC's global phenomenon POLDARK, he has helped to bring powerful and emotionally resonant stories to millions.

Now, Billy helps teams and individuals use the power of story to navigate uncertainty, overcome limitations, and achieve meaningful change and new goals.



Matt Cook

Co-founder of
TheShift, Learning &
Culture Consultant

Matt is a leading Culture and People specialist and former co-host of an Apple #1 Business Podcast 'Eat Sleep Work Repeat'.

His expertise lies in helping people realise their potential and supporting organisations to design the right environment, systems and mindsets to facilitate this. Matt is a practitioner of Non-Violent Communication and Immunity to Change coaching models; a Mental Health First Aider and CIPD L3 HR qualified.