

WHITE PAPER · 2025

Navigating Continuous Change with Empathy.

Four areas where empathy radically improves change outcomes: equipping leaders, including deskless workers, supporting people through AI-driven transformation, and communicating with clarity and compassion.

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Kindness is not an add-on. It is your strategy.

Change is no longer a one-off event. It is the new normal. But whilst transformation is inevitable, burnout doesn't have to be. Over 71% of employees feel overwhelmed by workplace change, and more than half consider leaving as a result. The antidote is not a better change management process. It is empathy.

Kindness and empathy are not soft extras. Research from The Kindness Corporation calls kindness "the glue that holds employee engagement together," particularly during restructures and technology rollouts. Empathy gives people the psychological safety they need to adapt, stay motivated, and work through uncertainty. This paper explores four areas where empathy changes outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

- 01 Only 27% of employees globally feel their leaders are trained to lead through change (Changing Point, 2022). In New Zealand, the figure is 23% (HR in Aotearoa, 2025). Leaders need support, not just briefing packs.

- 02 80% of the global workforce is deskless, yet most change programmes are designed for office workers. This creates a significant inclusion gap that empathy-led design can close.

- 03 71% of employees feel concerned about AI in the workplace, and 65% worry it could replace their role (EY, 2023). Psychological safety is not a bonus during AI rollouts. It is a prerequisite for adoption.

- 04 Up to 70% of change efforts fail, with poor communication cited as a leading reason (Mooncamp, 2023). The top three reasons employees resist change: mistrust (41%), lack of understanding (39%), and fear of the unknown (34%).



Transformation is inevitable. Burnout doesn't have to be.

Change is no longer a one-off event. It is the permanent backdrop of most organisations. Restructures, technology rollouts, shifts in strategy, hybrid work models, AI adoption. The pace has accelerated significantly in the past five years.

Over 71% of employees feel overwhelmed by workplace change, and more than half consider quitting as a result (Capterra, 2023). This change fatigue erodes trust, engagement, and performance. It is not a personal resilience problem. It is an organisational design problem.

The antidote is empathy: in how leaders communicate, in how change programmes are designed, and in how organisations think about the people who are furthest from the decision-making table. Organisations that lead with kindness consistently outperform in engagement, trust, and resilience.

"Kindness is the glue that holds employee engagement together, especially during restructures and tech rollouts."

THE KINDNESS CORPORATION, "MANAGING CHANGE WITH KINDNESS"

This paper covers four areas where empathy changes outcomes: equipping leaders to lead with heart, including deskless and frontline workers in the change process, supporting people through AI-driven transformation, and communicating with clarity and compassion. Each section includes practical tools, approaches, and examples.



Equip leaders to lead with empathy.

01

Leadership is the most powerful lever in change, but also the most under-supported. Only 27% of employees globally feel their leaders are trained to lead through change.

- Offer real coaching, not just a comms pack. Run short, hands-on workshops to help leaders listen, respond, and navigate emotional conversations.
- Set expectations. Make change leadership part of KPIs and job descriptions. Clarify that leading change is a core part of the management role.
- Create peer support networks. Let middle managers share challenges and swap practical advice in safe spaces.
- Build change champions: respected managers or employees who receive extra training in empathetic communication and mentor peers.

"When employees see their manager role-modelling change with empathy, they're far more likely to get on board."

Changing Point, 2022



Include frontline and deskless workers.

Around 80% of the global workforce is deskless. Yet most change programmes are designed for office workers, delivered through email, intranet updates, and Slack briefings. That creates a significant inclusion gap.

If people cannot access the message, they cannot engage in the change. The consequence is a workforce that is divided: desk-based employees who feel informed, and frontline workers who feel left behind. Empathy means designing change communications for the people who are hardest to reach, not just the easiest.

Practical ways to reach deskless teams

- Use mobile-first tools: SMS updates, WhatsApp groups, QR codes, or scheduling apps.
- Go analogue where appropriate: posters in break rooms, inserts in payslips, printed summaries to take home.
- Use face-to-face channels: team huddles, toolbox talks, and team leader briefings.
- Design messaging for time-poor people. Bullet points, not paragraphs. Short, not comprehensive.

Involve them early

- Include deskless staff in pilot groups or testing phases before rollout.
- Run short listening sessions with each shift.
- Use surveys with QR codes or paper forms to gather frontline insight before decisions are made.

"In 2021, Walmart gave 740,000 US frontline workers free smartphones with the Me@Walmart app. It wasn't just about the technology. It was about inclusion."

CBS NEWS, 2021



Foster psychological safety during AI change.

AI is changing how we work. For many employees, it also raises fears: Will I be replaced? Will I have to learn tools I don't understand? Will my work be monitored differently?

According to EY (2023), 71% of employees feel concerned about AI in the workplace, and 65% worry it could replace their role. These fears are not irrational. They need to be addressed directly, not managed around. Psychological safety is not a bonus during AI rollouts. It is a prerequisite for adoption.

- Be honest early. Explain what the technology is, what it does and doesn't do, and which roles it affects.
- Normalise uncertainty. It is acceptable not to have all the answers. "We are figuring this out together" is better than silence.
- Encourage questions. Use anonymous Q&A tools or open forums so people can express concerns without fear of judgement.
- Back your middle managers. Give them talking points, safe spaces to ask their own questions, and emotional support. They cannot calm others if they are not calm themselves.
- Make learning non-punitive. Let employees know it is safe to make mistakes and that the learning curve is expected and planned for.

"Psychological safety is vital to the successful adoption of AI."

TECHUK, 2023

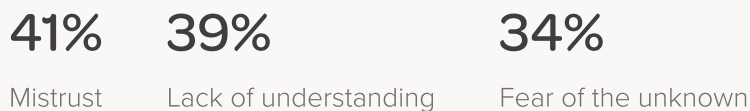


Communicate clearly, kindly, and often.

Up to 70% of change efforts fail, with poor communication as a leading reason. Communication isn't just about delivering a message. It is about building understanding, trust, and motivation.

- Be transparent. Share the "why" behind the change, in plain English. People who understand the reason for a decision are more likely to support it.
- Balance logic and emotion. Facts matter, but stories motivate. Explain how the change helps people, not just processes.
- Tailor the messenger. Employees want to hear the vision from senior leaders, and the practical impact from their team leader. Both voices matter.
- Keep it two-way. Set up feedback channels and act on what you hear. "We heard your feedback, so we are doing X" is one of the most trust-building things you can say.
- Maintain momentum. Even when there is no update, communicate that. "We are still working through X, here is the next step" prevents rumours filling the silence.
- Be human. Especially during difficult changes, communicate with warmth and authenticity. Acknowledge emotions. Don't sugarcoat.

THE TOP THREE REASONS EMPLOYEES RESIST CHANGE



Changing Point, 2022



Our recommendations.

Organisations that lead with kindness outperform in engagement, trust, and resilience. When you design change with people at the centre, they are more likely to stay, adapt, and thrive.

01 Invest in leader capability before the change begins.

A comms pack is not leadership development. Give managers the skills and support they need to have real conversations during change.

02 Design for your hardest-to-reach employees first.

If your change programme works for deskless and frontline workers, it will work for everyone. The reverse is not true.

03 Address AI anxiety directly and early.

Silence creates rumours. Honest, early communication about what the technology does and does not do is the most effective way to build the psychological safety that AI adoption requires.

04 Make communication two-way, not just broadcast.

Feedback channels are only valuable if you act on what comes through them, and say so. That closing of the loop is what builds trust over time.

SOURCES

Capterra (2023) · Change Fatigue Survey · Changing Point (2022) · Change Fatigue and the Role of Trust

Tomorrow's People (2025) · HR in Aotearoa · EY (2023) · Work Reimagined: AI and Employee Concerns

TechUK (2023) · Psychological Safety and AI · Mooncamp (2023) · Why Change Management Fails

The Kindness Corporation · Managing Change with Kindness · CBS News (2021) · Walmart frontline tech



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