

A photograph of a butterfly and its chrysalis on a tree branch. The butterfly is purple and white with orange eyespots, and the chrysalis is green and yellow. The background is a solid purple color.

THE STATE OF Change Management in Organisations

A Research Report
by GoodHabitZ

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The top-heavy change trap:

why training only managers is making transformation harder

Every year, organisations invest billions in change management training in the hopes that these initiatives will be a success.

But in our Europe-wide research of nearly 5,000 professionals and managers, we realised that the outcome is quite the opposite.

The majority of managers measure the success of change initiatives, but only half of the professionals are aware of this.

42% of managers state
that they measure success

but only **17%** of
professionals agree and
understand how that
success is defined

This perception gap isn't just a communication issue, it's a readiness crisis.

And the outcome?

Employees resist. Transformation stalls. Restructures create chaos.

The promise of positive results doesn't come into fruition, and nobody quite seems to know why.

That's why we set out to find the answer.

And here's what we found: it's down to a disproportionate imbalance. In other words, change capability is focused too heavily on the top-down.

About the study

This research was conducted by MarktEffect, commissioned on behalf of GoodHabitZ. The target group are professionals and managers with 3+ FTE in organisations with 50+ FTE (excluding agriculture, non-profits, and education – **except higher education in The Netherlands.**)

The following countries were included in this study:



Survey participants

A total of **4,732** managers and professionals were surveyed:

- **2,867** professionals
- **1,865** managers

A minimum n=350 professionals and n=200 managers were used for each country.

3 research questions were scoped for this study:

1. What are the current change management skills gaps in organisations?
2. How do professionals and managers deal with organisational or team-level changes?
3. What are the differences between the change management skills gaps of professionals and managers?

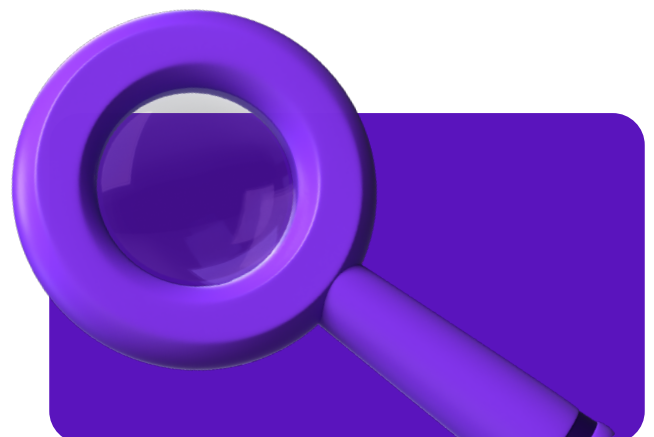
Data was collected between the 12th and 30th of December 2025. The questionnaire consisted of 31 questions for professionals, and 33 questions for managers, including screening and background questions.

What you'll discover in this report

This report will dive into the findings of our study of **4,732** professionals and managers, organised around **6** critical insights.

For each insight you'll see the relevant research findings, the challenge, and the solution to consider.

So, without further ado, let's examine what the data reveals.



Trend 1: The top-heavy change capability trap

The challenge

Organisations adopt change but rarely lead it.

When asked how their organisations approach change, most professionals (33%) and managers (33%) describe an ‘early majority’ mindset.

This wait-and-see approach has consequences. It means organisations react to change rather than shape it.

Here’s an overview of how organisations approach change, according to our research:

Organisation Type	Professionals	Managers	Description
Innovators	16%	21%	Initiate change ahead of others
Early Adopters	22%	33%	Adopt once potential is visible
Early Majority	33%	33%	Adopt after some evidence of success
Late Majority	18%	10%	Adopt slowly, after most others
Laggards	12%	2%	Adopt very late, when unavoidable

The emotional response to change also speaks to the risks of solely enabling managers to be able to navigate times of change.

Why? Because change doesn’t just create work; it creates an emotional burden. And our research revealed that this burden is far from being evenly distributed.

We asked how both parties feel when change is introduced:

39%

of managers reported
feeling energised,
compared with only

23%

of professionals.



20%

of professionals
experience feeling
anxious, compared to

16%

of managers.



This clearly tells us something: managers approach change with optimism and agency. They're the architects of change; they know why it's happening and they're equipped to deal with it as it unfolds.

But professionals experience an entirely different scenario. They're more likely to learn about change after decisions are made.

They lack context as to why certain developments are taking place and even bear the operational brunt of implementation without the strategic context that managers have.

And the most worrying of all? They lack the training to navigate the emotional and practical challenges that arise because of changes.

The solution

First, fix the emotional foundations related to change management, and mitigate the burden that it creates for everyone across the organisation.

Yes, the numbers may show that professionals need emotional foundations more. But that doesn't mean that managers shouldn't be prioritised.

And the wider business impact is huge. The Journal of Occupational Health Psychology reported that workers who have high levels of resilience will also have [10% to 20% lower rates of intent to quit](#).

This prompts an important consideration for organisations: **do you foster a psychologically safe environment?**

When there's a shared belief that the team is a safe place to take risk, there is more openness towards change. Without psychological safety, employees often simply follow directions to avoid negative consequences.

By comparison, a culture of psychological safety builds commitment: active and voluntary dedication to a common goal.

For example, this could take the form of a 'managing change stress toolkit' equipped with real-time stress regulation techniques, reframing uncertainty as temporary.

Or you can consider implementing a 'change announcement day', where the same message is communicated to everyone; why the change matters, what success looks like, and how it will be measured.

Most importantly, transparency underpins this; communicating what's been decided, what's still up for debate, and even where people can influence outcomes.

It's important to emphasise here that cautious optimism around change can transfer to genuine enthusiasm when people feel equipped.

The bottom line? Deploy [Stress management](#) and [workplace resilience](#) training to everyone.

Our research shows that organisations need learning interventions that:

- Help teams take ownership of change earlier in the process, before outcomes become visible
- Build confidence through practical scenarios that mirror real change situations
- Create a shared language around change that reduces the emotional gap between managers and professionals

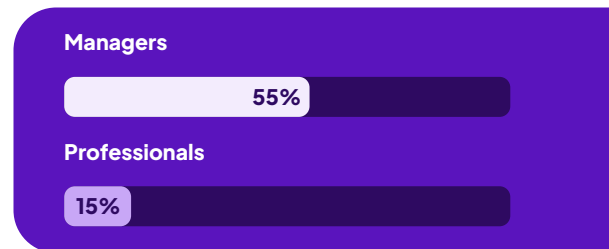
Trend 2: The perception gap is real and costly

The challenge

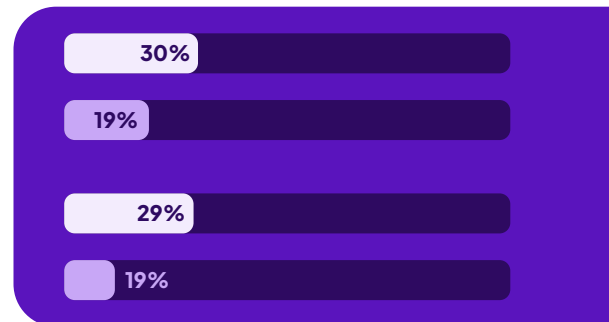
Managers and professionals are describing the same events but experiencing completely different realities.

Here's what the numbers tell us:

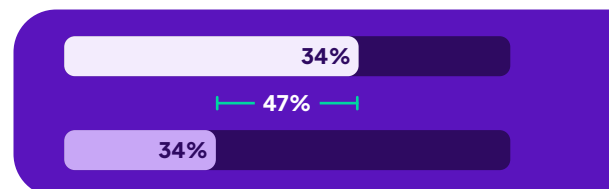
The timing of involvement: **55%** of managers believe that they loop their team (professionals) from the start of the process, when scoping a change initiative. Conversely, only **15%** of professionals agree.



Communication: **30%** of managers held team meetings to discuss change, yet professionals perceive this at a much lower rate, at **19%**. Furthermore, **29%** of managers believe that they clearly explained the reasons and vision behind the change, with only **19%** of professionals in agreement.



The support inequality: this is the most concerning. **66%** of managers feel supported or fully supported by HR and L&D, whereas only **34%** of professionals report the same, meaning nearly half of professionals (**47%**) feel unsupported, or completely unsupported.



When these 3 data points compound together, it's more than just a communication problem. It's a trust, performance, and potential retention problem.

“Workplace dynamics have fundamentally shifted. For example, many organisations have a less obvious hierarchical structure – it’s often more agile, with fewer layers of management. There’s a shift towards squads, groups representing a cross-section of the organisation.”



Anne-Marie Burbidge

Founder, The Spark L&D
Consultancy Ltd

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”

The solution

Close the perception gap by creating shared visibility, genuine involvement, and bilateral communication capability.

This approach aligns with how most organisations operate today.

Here are some examples for inspiration:

The theory

Transform measurement from a management activity into a shared transparency practice.

Train both managers and professionals on what genuine involvement looks like, and when it needs to happen.

Develop communication as a two-way street, both clear sending and active receiving.

Practice

Weekly visible updates with displayed metrics and what this means for professionals. E.g. **60%** adoption of XYZ tool and what this means for you.

For managers, focus on elements like psychological safety, or asking the right questions.

For professionals, focus on areas such as asking clarifying questions to leadership.

For managers, it's down to giving context, such as the information they have that their team doesn't, or explaining the 'why' behind changes.

For professionals, it can be giving open and honest feedback, such as telling managers what's still unclear.

Trend 3: The training gap in times of change

The challenge

Skills development isn't evenly distributed.

The research reveals systematic inequality in who receives training, when they receive it, and how much priority their development receives.

The data reveals a clear disparity, in relation to the accessibility to training and development opportunities, regarding soft skills. Only **34%** of professionals reported receiving access to soft skill training on an ongoing basis. Conversely, **43%** of managers reported that they have access to leadership training on a consistent basis.

Furthermore, **36%** of professionals revealed that they have no access to soft skills training at all, compared to just **7%** for managers.

Professionals

34%

Managers

43%

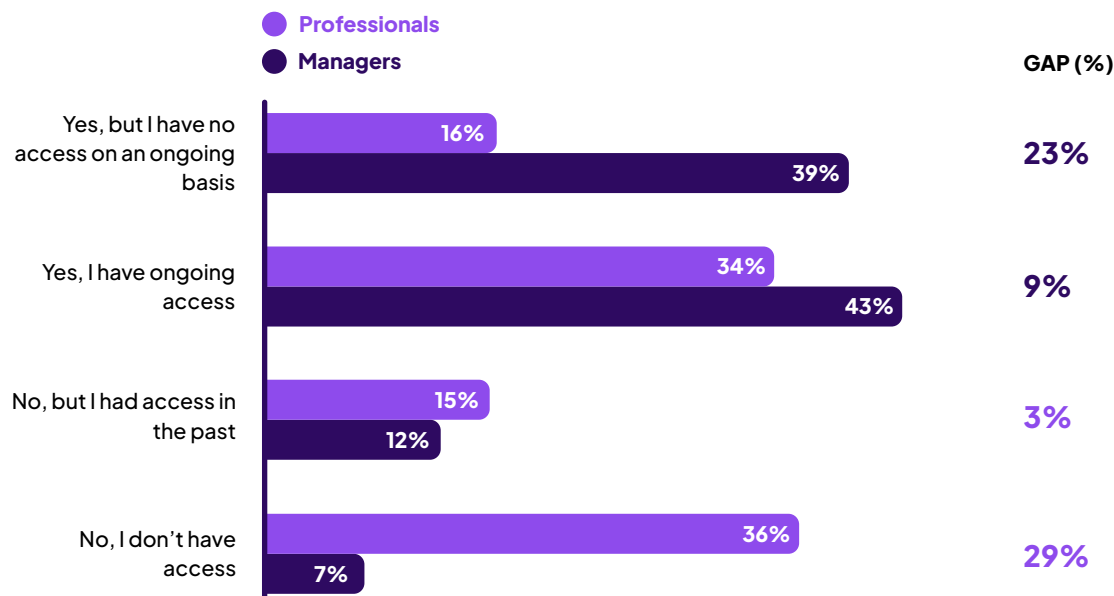
Professionals

36%

Managers

7%

Access to soft/leadership skill training (%)



Gaps in **light purple** reflect higher percentages for professionals, gaps displayed in **dark purple** reflect higher percentages for managers.

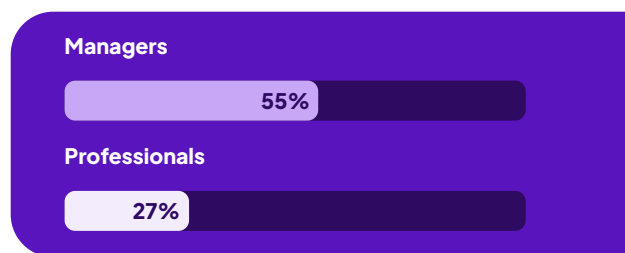
Do you have access to leadership training? | Base: managers (n = 1865)

Do you have access to soft skill training? | Base: professionals (n = 2867)

This points to how learning and development around change management is unevenly distributed across organisations.

When organisations prioritise developing change-related skills, managers receive more attention.

Whilst **55%** of managers report high or very high organisational priority on leadership skills, only **27%** of professionals reported the same level of priority for soft skills development.



Priority Gap

Managers receive 2x the organisational priority for skills development compared to professionals (**55%** vs **27%** reporting high/very high priority)

What's even more interesting is that this landscape exists against a backdrop where eLearning has become the most sought-after form of support for professionals when navigating times of change.

Not workshops, seminars, or outdated top-down training. Instead, there's an appetite for on-demand, accessible content that drives a self-directed learning culture.

Yet, despite this, there is an eLearning paradox, in relation to what employees want vs what they actually get:

What employees want (demand)

#1 Requested eLearning

'On demand'
'Learn at my pace'
'Role specific'

- ✓ Scalable
- ✓ Cost effective
- ✓ Accessible to all

What employees are getting (supply)

Where budgets actually go:

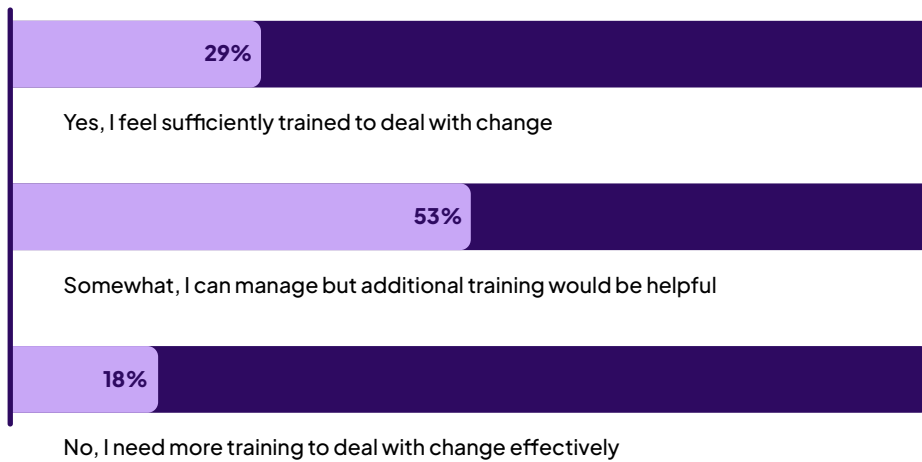
Leadership academies: **45%**
Executive coaching: **25%**
Management off-sites: **20%**
eLearning (management): **10%**
eLearning (for all): **<5%**

- ✗ Manager-focused
- ✗ Not scalable
- ✗ Time-intensive
- ✗ Concentrated access

Table: The eLearning Disconnect

And to take a step even further, half of professionals lack access to training, but offering change management training would greatly benefit nearly three-quarters of them.

Assessing change management training (%)



The solution

Prioritise democratising access to learning through methods like:

- Digital-first learning: make change management skills available as on-demand, accessible eLearning that professionals can access when change happens, not just during formal training windows.
- Integrated learning: connect learning directly to ongoing change initiatives, so skills transfer immediately to practice rather than sitting dormant until needed.
- Normalised development: position change capability as essential for everyone, not just managers, reducing stigma around needing support.
- Measured impact: track not just completion but application, are people using what they learn?

The goal isn't just more training. It's ensuring that when a change happens, every person involved has the skills to navigate it successfully.

Trend 4: The skills needed in times of change

The challenge

Both managers and professionals know skills matter for change.
But they disagree sharply on which skills matter most and who needs to develop them.

And why is skills development so crucial?

“Learning and development are crucial at points of transition or change within an organisation.

New skills to be learnt, new expectations to communicate, new ways of working to navigate. Where there is change there is a person potentially feeling vulnerable or out of their depth – certainly in terms of ‘newness’ to the role.”



Anne-Marie Burbidge

Founder, The Spark L&D
Consultancy Ltd

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Leadership skills: What professionals value most

Professionals were asked to assess which leadership skills matter the most to them, in times of change.

Communication came out on top, with **47%** of professionals saying it's important, versus **40%** of managers who are actively prioritising it.

Anne-Marie Burbidge emphasised why communication is hugely important for leaders' and managers' development:



“Communication links to an ability to translate what’s coming down from a business’ point of view and turn it into action for the people.”

Active listening follows a similar pattern, with **35%** of professionals valuing it, compared to just **26%** of managers.

Most Important Leadership Skills During Change

Skill	Professionals	Managers	Gap
Communication	47%	40%	+7%
Trust	40%	39%	+1%
Collaboration	38%	38%	—
Decision-Making	37%	36%	+1%
Active Listening	35%	26%	+9%
Problem-Solving	35%	32%	+3%

Where managers need to develop

When professionals were asked which soft leadership skills, they believe their managers need to develop the most, **24%** said communication.

On the other hand, when managers were asked which soft leadership skills they believe they need to develop the most, only **19%** mentioned communication.

Active listening follows a similar pattern, with **25%** of professionals versus **18%** of managers.

There is a strong agreement that these two skills are a priority development area for managers; however, professionals tend to perceive a bigger gap in these areas than managers do themselves.

Professional skills: What managers value most

When managers assess what skills professionals need for change, adaptability rises to the top (**38%**, compared to **35%** among professionals themselves). Managers also place higher value on problem-solving (**33%** vs. **27%**) than professionals do.

Professionals, meanwhile, prioritise communication (**43%**) far more than managers expect (**35%**). Once again, the communication gap appears, this time with professionals wanting better communication skills for themselves, whilst managers underestimate this need.

Most Important Leadership Skills During Change

Skill	Professionals	Managers	Gap
Communication	43%	35%	+8%
Adaptability	35%	38%	-3%
Trust	35%	35%	—
Active Listening	39%	32%	+7%
Collaboration	37%	35%	+2%
Problem-Solving	27%	33%	-6%

Where professionals need to develop

29% of professionals identify stress management as their #1 personal development need, which is a very human, inward-facing concern. This compares to **24%** of managers in agreement.

Managers, by contrast, put greater emphasis on adaptability and active listening as the biggest development areas for professionals, which are arguably more outward-facing, behavioural skills.

This reflects something rather interesting, which is a fundamental difference in perspective: professionals feel the emotional weight of change, whereas managers tend to observe how it impacts team performance and communication.

The solution

Here's the good news. When asked about the greatest obstacles to successful change, both groups aligned surprisingly well:

- Lack of vision from upper management (18 points for both groups)
- Resistance to change from employees (16 points professionals, 14 managers)
- Disconnection between management and employees (12 points professionals, 10 managers)
- Too many changes in a short period (11 points both groups)

This shared understanding of challenges creates a foundation for shared solutions. Both groups recognise the problems; they need aligned skills to address them.

And whilst there is a prominent skills gap, it is remarkably specific. This means that organisations don't need to reinvent the wheel and rebuild their entire workforce.

Instead, managers and professionals would benefit from targeted interventions on:

- **Communication**
(for both managers and professionals)
- **Active listening**
(especially for managers)
- **Adaptability**
(especially for professionals)
- **Problem-solving**
(for managers leading change)
- **Stress management**
(for everyone)



GoodHabitZ
can help you
develop your
leaders

[Discover how](#)

Trend 5: Why learning must happen in change, not before it

The challenge

Organisations train people for change before it happens, then wonder why the skills aren't being applied when change arrives.

Our research shows that managers tend to implement the learned skills faster to organisational or team changes, compared to professionals.

For example, **40%** of managers felt they could apply their soft leadership skills straight away as soon as change starts, whereas only **24%** of professionals agree.

This means that by the time change hits, training is a distant memory.

Retrospectives identify what should have been done differently, and development plans are just created based on gut feel, for 'next time'.

The bottom line? Learning without context doesn't transfer:

- ⊗ Here's how to handle resistance (6 months before anyone resists)
- ⊗ Here's how to adapt to shifting priorities (when priorities are stable)
- ⊗ Here's how to communicate during uncertainty (when there's no uncertainty to practice in)



The solution

Embed 'just-in-time' learning directly into live change initiatives, so people develop skills exactly when they need to use them.

Let's say your organisation was looking to scale AI usage across the organisation.

This requires AI literacy training because it isn't just another new tool; it's a fundamental shift in how work gets done.

Organisations adopting AI are asking professionals to:

- Change daily workflows and decision-making
- Navigate uncertainty about which tasks are suitable for AI, and which ones aren't
- Adapt to new productivity expectations
- Manage anxiety about job security and relevance

It triggers the same emotional and practical challenges we've outlined previously in this report: stress, resistance, and the need for new capabilities across the entire workforce. But with the right support, you can create the right foundations.

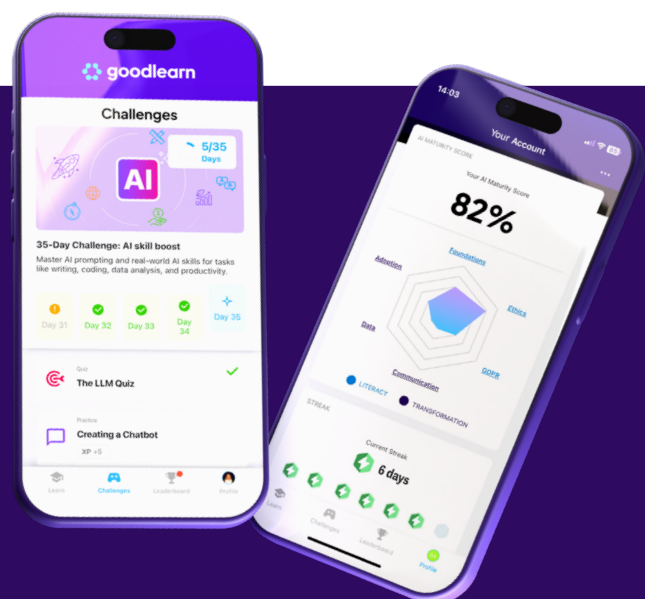
For instance, Goodlearn which is a mobile-first, gamified training app for AI literacy is a great way to facilitate 'just-in-time' learning for professionals and managers, as it's available exactly when someone encounters AI in their work.

Apps like this help to distribute change capability across the whole organisation and creates a sense of excitement and tangible understanding around the change.



**Ready to scale
AI literacy across
your entire
workforce?**

[Find out more](#)



Trend 6: The knowledge gap in times of change

The challenge

Organisations that wait to manage change reactively don't just struggle with execution. They lose their competitive advantage as knowledge walks out the door, exactly when the need it most. This is where all the previous challenges within the 5 trends we've outlined, culminate.

When:

- Change management is concentrated at the top
- Perception gaps create anxiety
- Emotional burdens go unsupported
- Learning happens at the wrong time...

The final consequence is knowledge loss during the very moments it becomes most critical.

Why?

- Change accelerates turnover.
- Restructures trigger retirements.
- Digital transformations push experienced employees out of the business.
- Mergers create redundancies.

And with each departure, critical knowledge walks out the door.



What knowledge disappears

- Undocumented processes ('everyone just knows how to do this')
- Troubleshooting expertise built over years
- Context about why things work the way they do
- The ability to train new hires effectively

When it disappears

Exactly when you need it most. Mid-transformation, when complexity is highest and margin for error is smallest.

The traditional response

"Let's document everything before they leave."

The problem

Traditional knowledge capture takes 3–6 months. Change doesn't wait. By the time the documentation is complete, the expert is gone, the crisis has passed, or the knowledge is already outdated.

The cost:

- New hires take 6–12 months to reach full productivity (instead of 2–3 months)
- Teams make expensive mistakes because institutional memory is lost
- Projects stall: “Only Sarah knew how to do that, and she left”
- Competitive advantage evaporates during transitions

The solution

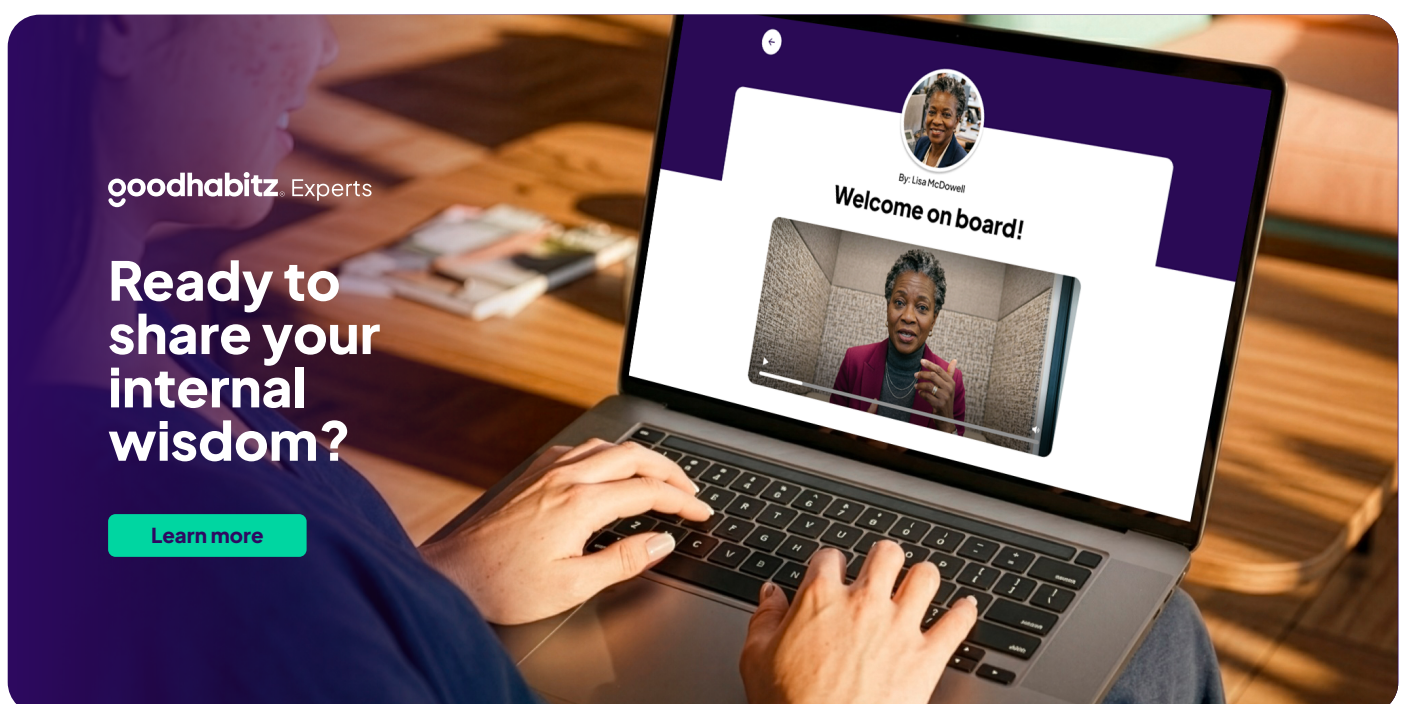
Make knowledge capture a core component of change readiness, not an afterthought. Let's dive into some practical examples:

The proactive approach: capture knowledge before it becomes critical.

Don't wait for departure announcements.

The moment change is announced, identify who holds critical expertise and begin rapid capture.

Use AI-powered authoring tools like GoodHabitZ Experts, to turn expert knowledge into accessible training modules within 48 hours, deployed within one week.



“Companies have an incredible amount of internal expertise, but it’s fragmented. If a person just leaves that knowledge normally walks out the door, there are no real standards or procedures on how to capture this on time.

And when there is something in place? It’s scattered across tools. Which results in different conversations, different documents. There’s no real baseline or standard.”



María Rosales
Product Manager,
GoodHabitZ

”

Activate learning ambassadors

Identify colleagues and peers who've successfully navigated the change. Then, let them share organically.

The key here is not to over-formalise; the power is in peer learning and that's what makes it tangible and authentic.

Also known as [learning influencers](#), these individuals address the gap between L&D programmes, and learning in the flow of work.

A learning influencer can shed light on change, share practical solutions, and make knowledge both accessible and relevant.

“Think about where people normally go if they have a question. Often, they'll ask a peer – they won't start searching online or the learning management system.”



Benjamin Jaksch
Learning & Transformation
Architect

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The final word on change management

Change and change management is a bit comparable to training a muscle.

Resistance to change shouldn't be overlooked but understood.

When organisations really focus on developing concrete learning initiatives around change management, they can shift their culture towards growth and resilience.

And remember, resilience requires an ongoing commitment – it's not a one-off exercise. Those skills we touched on before, like communication, active listening, and trust, all contribute towards this.

It's not about managing one change project at a time, in isolation. It's about training the entire organisation to be more agile, curious, and ready to embrace the future, whatever lies ahead.

“Work is a little bit like a subscription. When somebody turns up to work, they are subscribing to the experience that they're having with that employer, and they have a choice every month whether they want to renew that subscription or not. Every employee wants to know, what's my contribution to the mission and vision of the business, and how am I developing here.”



Anne-Marie Burbidge

Founder, The Spark L&D
Consultancy Ltd

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About GoodHabitz



With a vision of creating a world where human skills shape global progress, GoodHabitz is unlocking growth in organisations worldwide by **making learning a habit.**

Driven by the core belief that people move organisations forward, GoodHabitz provides digital skills development solutions, designed by educators and artists, to bring back the joy of learning while building learning habits that stick.

Leveraging technology, creativity and educational expertise, GoodHabitz' platform emphasises insights-driven development, combining self-assessments with tailored course recommendations across four key areas: performance, teamwork, digital skills, and wellbeing, unlocking human skills that fuel agile, thriving organisations.

Its technology and partnerships roadmap sets out a vision for a new skills ecosystem, reshaping how organisations identify skills gaps & needs, hire, develop and measure the impact of critical human skills.

[Find out more](#)

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