

Key insights for senior UN leaders

Transformative leadership: unleashing impact through change management

Senior UN leaders are pivotal for steering transformations within their organizations and for empowering external changes. By effectively leading change, they can ensure that the organization remains responsive, resilient and relevant in a rapidly changing world. Change leadership is not merely about managing change, but rather about envisioning and driving transformational change, fostering a culture of adaptability and ensuring that change initiatives align with the organization's strategic objectives.

However, staff and external stakeholders alike risk being overwhelmed by the large volume of change taking place simultaneously. That's why organizations need to be systematic and strategic about how they guide, prioritizing and manage "the people side of change". The discipline of change management offers a range of proven approaches and tools for successfully adopting and sustaining changes over time. But it is only effective when senior leaders role-model the change they want to see; and when they adequately sponsor and participate in change management activities.

Read on for:

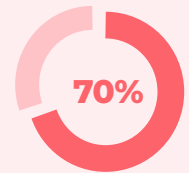
- Insights based on the perspectives shared by change practitioners through the *State of Change Management in the UN System* survey;
- Suggested actions you can take, provided by the UN Lab for Organizational Change and Knowledge (UNLOCK) project at the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC).

Key insights for senior UN leaders



Change fatigue is real and needs to be managed

Seventy per cent of organizations (26 out of 37) report five to nine changes that are ongoing simultaneously. Sixty-three per cent of respondents say their organization is nearing or is at or beyond the point of change saturation. This is an important backdrop to factor into your plans for new changes you want to initiate. Spare capacity is greater among smaller UN entities.



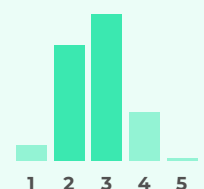
Five to nine simultaneously ongoing changes



Only few organizations score high on change management maturity

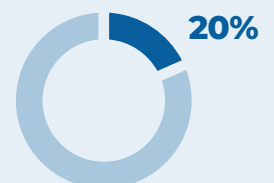
An organization achieves change management maturity when it can effectively implement, manage and sustain changes while minimizing disruptions and maximizing benefits. No change management lead rates their organization at the highest level of five on the change management maturity scale. Moreover very few offer rates even at level four. Most rate their organizations as being in the middle, at levels two and three.

Level of maturity



Senior leader awareness and support matters significantly

Only 20 per cent of respondents indicate that senior leaders are fully aware of the importance of change management. Respondents specify that a lack of support from leadership is their biggest challenge (45 per cent), followed by other leadership issues such as buy-in, alignment and resource allocation.

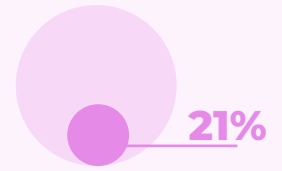


Fully aware of the importance of change management



Change managers do not always involve senior leaders

Senior leaders can call on change management practitioners to support them in sponsoring change. However, the survey reveals that only 29 per cent of respondents offer training to senior leaders and 21 per cent insufficiently involve them in change management activities.

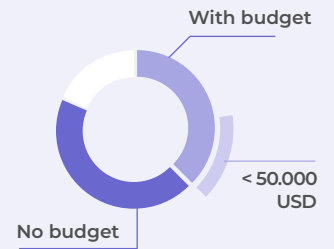


Insufficiently involving them in change management activities



Financial resource allocation is uneven and insufficient

Forty one per cent of respondents say they have budgets for their change initiative. Yet, 38 per cent of respondents report having no budgets. The percentage is higher, 49 per cent, among smaller entities. Almost a third (32 per cent) who have a budget say it's under \$50,000.



Staff allocation for change management varies significantly

Some organizations count on one or two full-time practitioners and others can call upon teams of 20 or more. Only 30 per cent of survey respondents work on change management full-time.



Expertise of practitioners is high but also comes with gaps

Change management practitioners excel in communication, strategy, project management, change portfolio management and facilitation. They often lack expertise in behavioural science, research, monitoring and evaluation, innovation and UN reform. Certified practitioners show better use of good practices than their uncertified colleagues.



As a senior leader in the UN system, you can:



Embrace your role to steer and model transformation and change agility and tap into the knowledge, experience and skills of change management practitioners to support you.



Appropriately and sustainably resource change management activities, support structures such as a Central Change Management Functions and ensure the systematic application of good practices.



Encourage everyone to do their part in supporting and adopting change. Change management is a collective responsibility that cannot be delegated to a change management team. Your leadership will make a significant difference.



Leverage yearly Leadership Culture Assessments and staff satisfaction surveys as drivers of, and structures for, continuous improvements.

About the *State of Change Management in the UN System* survey

The State of Change Management in the UN System is produced by the UNLOCK project at the UNSSC. It's the first-ever comprehensive stocktaking of its kind and captures the responses of 104 change practitioners from 37 organizations surveyed in July/August 2023.