



Oak Engage's Change Report

A report which tackles the issues of organisational change, change resistance and recommendations from industry experts on how to drive successful change.



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A message from our CEO

Welcome to Oak Engage's Change Report for 2023.

Organisational change takes many forms. Whether structural, process-driven, technological or otherwise, they have one significant thing in common; only people can deliver change successfully.

Pretty much every organisation has gone through forced change during and after the pandemic, in the form of adapting to remote or hybrid working and a shift in priorities for employees as individuals - as proved by the Great Resignation and the emergence of similar trends.

That being said, why do 70% of change programmes fail? What are the differences between these organisations and the 30% who enjoy its rewards? This report gets to the heart of these issues from the perspective of our 1000 surveyed UK employees, who have experienced change to varying degrees, alongside commentary from industry experts.

It is so important to learn from mistakes made during change programmes. With this, the candidness of our contributors of their own experiences, adds so much value to the research.

We thank Becky Turner (Workplace Psychologist), Lisa Wheatcroft (Change Management Consultant), Jenni Field (Internal Communications Expert) and Hilary Scarlett (Author of Neuroscience for Organisational Change) for their insight. I have no doubt that any leader or employee who takes their expertise onboard will be better equipped to drive successful change than they were before.

As internal communication and employee engagement experts ourselves, we at Oak hope to help you navigate the challenges of change, setting leadership and employees up for success.

Enjoy the report.

Will Murray, CEO of Oak Engage



Our research



Over 1000 employees surveyed from across the UK

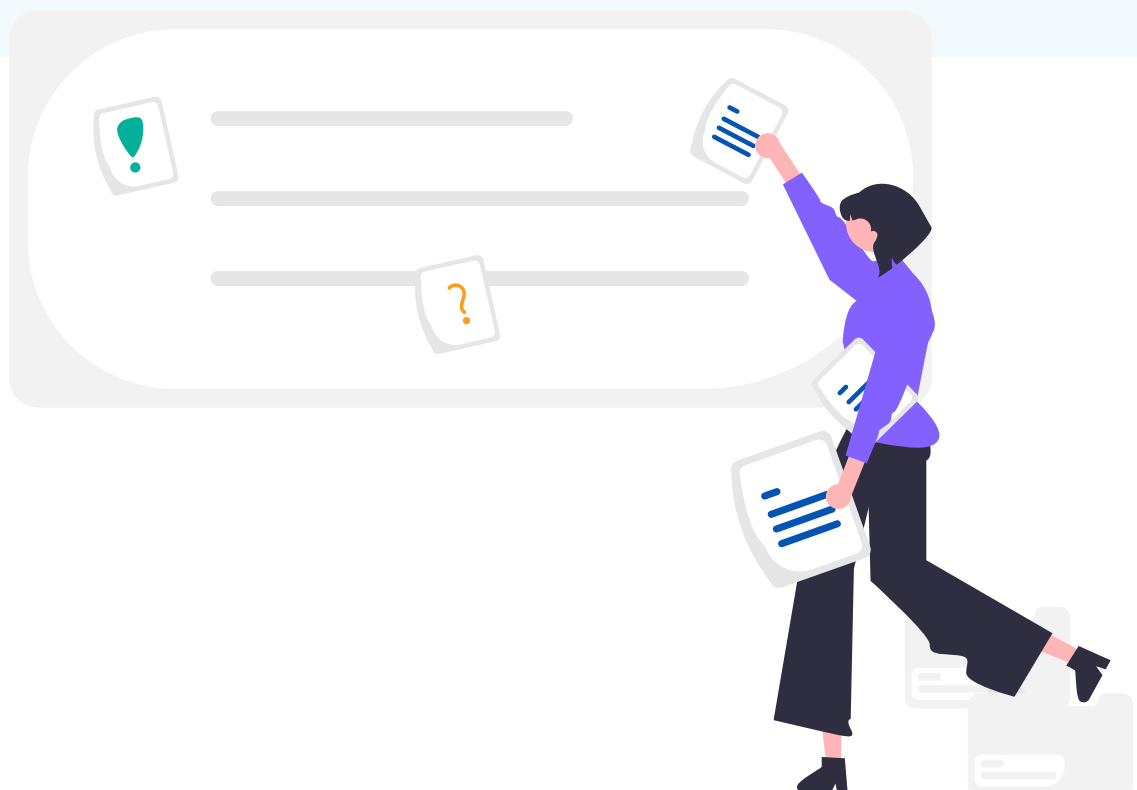


In all age groups from 16 to 55+



91% had been through change within their business

The research was conducted by Censuswide on behalf of Oak Engage, with 1,035 employed respondents from a nationally representative sample of UK adults aged 16+ across the UK between 16/02/2023- 17/02/2023.



Our expert contributors



Jenni Field, Business Communications Expert & Author



Becky Turner, Workplace Psychologist at Claremont



Lisa Wheatcroft, Change Management Expert at Oriri

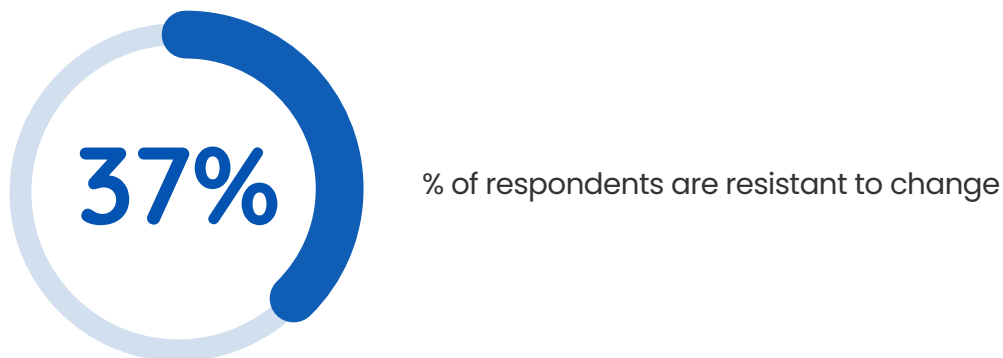


Hilary Scarlett, Change Management Speaker & Author

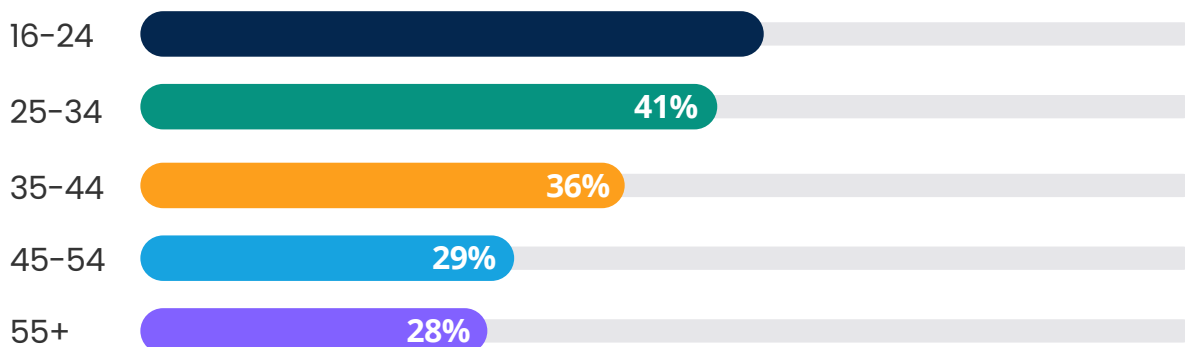


Key findings from our research

We conducted a survey of over 1000 UK employees on organisational change and their perspective on change within their organisation.



% of respondents resistant to change by age group



“Change often takes away some of the things that our brains crave. For example, brains like habits because they feel less stressful and less effortful but change means we are going to have to do things differently. Change takes away this ability for our brains to predict.”



Hilary Scarlett, Change Management Speaker & Author

We asked respondents, “what would make you most resistant to change?”

Mistrust in the organisation



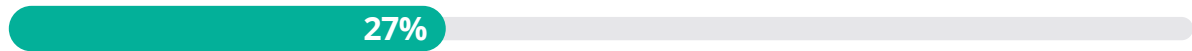
Lack of awareness around the reason for change



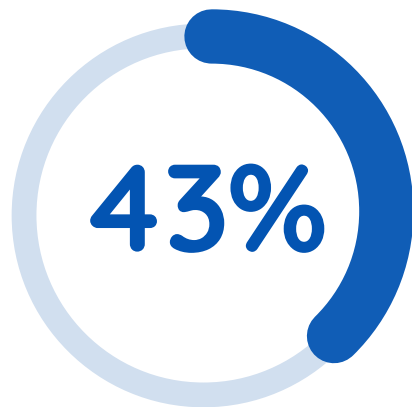
Fear of the unknown



Change of job role



Exclusion from change-related decisions

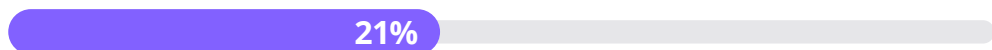


% who agree that their place of work is not prepared to effectively manage change

Disagree



Neither



Don't know



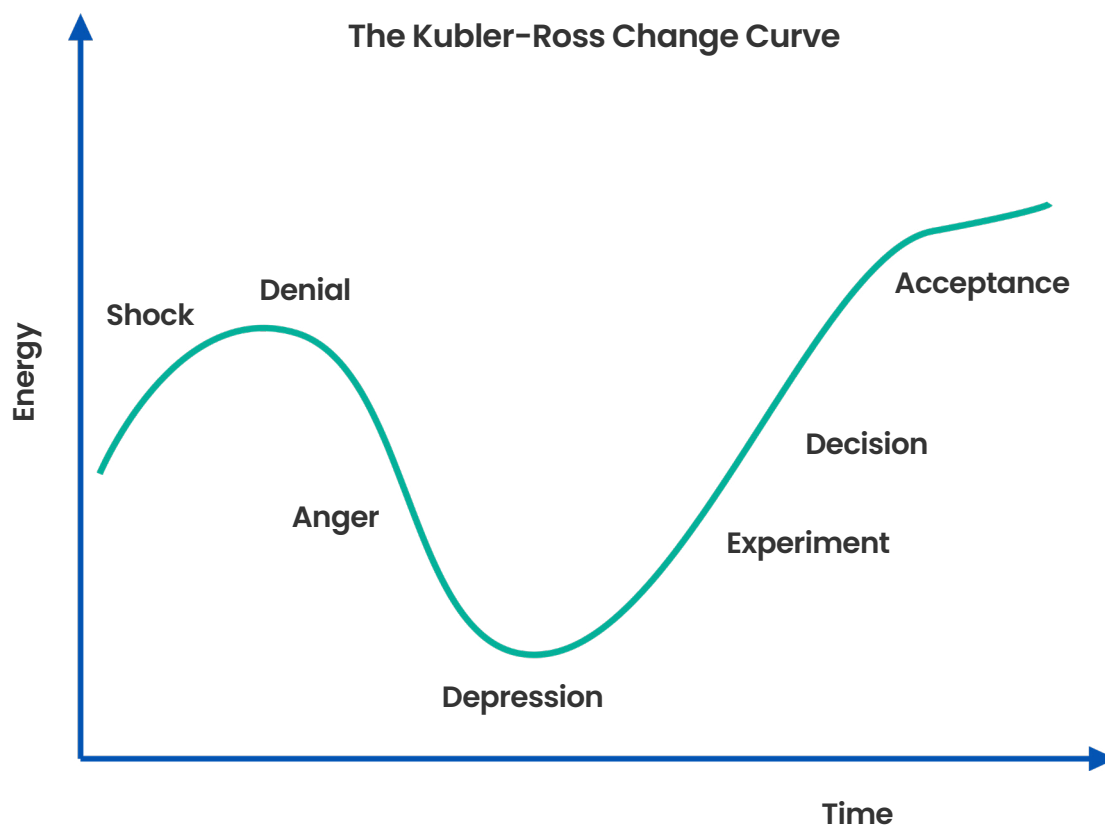
Attitudes towards change

Welcome to Oak Engage's Change Report for 2023.

Our research shows that well over a third of UK employees are resistant to change, but they will all have different needs. No two attitudes towards change are the same and each individual needs a different level of nurturing or communication.

Generally, people will need some level of convincing that the change is beneficial to them and the way they work, which is reflected in our results.

However, people will go through stages when dealing with change, which starts with letting go of what they had, otherwise known as the 'grief stage'. Kubler-Ross's change-curve model documents the various phases of change attitudes.



“The change-curve model goes from shock to denial (which is disbelief), into frustration, depression and acceptance. The depression element is a low mood, lacking in energy and motivation, then you come up and out to where you’re looking at experiment. So that initial engagement with the situation, then onto a decision of ‘right I’m going to be doing this’ and then you’re integrating into the new changes. That is the curve you go through in change.”



Jenni Field, Business Communications Expert

Thinking back to the last time your business went through significant change, what best describes your attitude towards it?

I was sceptical for a period of time but I was open to being shown by managers or colleagues why it was a good thing.

30%

I felt positively but only when I was convinced that it would be a good thing.

21%

I was sceptical throughout of how change would benefit me or the business.

18%

I felt positively about the change at all times.

14%

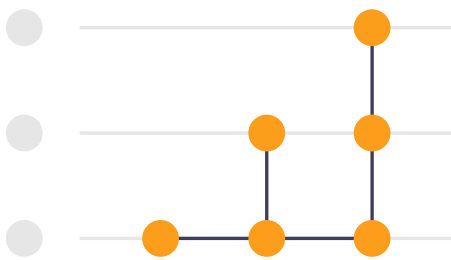
The business makes poor decisions generally, so I was against the change.

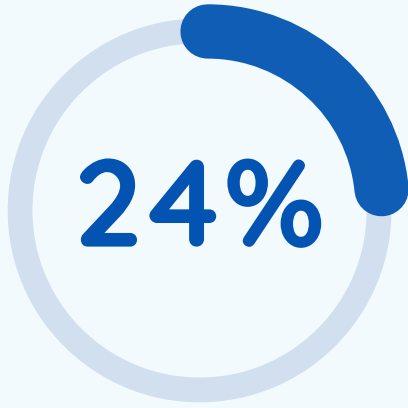
8%

"As human beings, we don't like change generally and that's because our brains are designed to keep us safe. If we can't predict what's going to happen, we are going to worry and feel a bit anxious. Some of us more than others."



Jenni Field, Business Communications Expert





% of people who are generally excited towards change



% of people who feel worried towards change



% of people who feel happy towards change



% of people who feel anxious towards change



% of people who feel uncertain towards change



% of people who feel a loss of control

What our experts say...

Lisa Wheatcroft on... why changing perceptions on a wide scale starts with people

"I've seen lots of employee disengagement during periods of transformation. Most notably, I worked on a change programme in the aviation industry. There was a high volume of people, undertaking a relatively repetitive but challenging role. It took four-years of focussed change management activity, and collaboration with the teams, trade unions and various other key stakeholders."

"I've seen similar situations in other organisations where there's high disengagement, high employee turnover and poor leadership which ultimately creates a bad experience for clients and the teams. Cultural change is not easy and it takes time."

"It's about having a robust plan that doesn't just cover whatever physical changes you're planning to make. Organisations need to be clear on how you are going to make the change, how are people going to be affected, how are they going to feel throughout that? The biggest part of change is to focus on the people element, not the change task."

"You need to make sure there is a robust communication plan and it has to be two-way communication. There is little point to distributing information in emails, when this isn't supported with good leadership, engagement with teams or the ability for people to feed back. For me change is a process of consultation and engagement."



Lisa Wheatcroft, Change Management Expert at Oriri

Becky Turner on... workplace attachment & the importance of buy-in

“There can be a perception of change that change is great and you’re gaining something new so ‘why would anyone miss what they had before?’ For example, the work we do at the moment is creating much better, more efficient work environments that reflect your brand values, but there’s almost a sense of stockholm syndrome and workplace attachment, all to do with the memories they’ve created in this space. This is true of any type of change.”

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Becky Turner, Workplace Psychologist at Claremont

Hilary Scarlett on... why social spaces are needed to create positivity around change

“Human beings are deeply social creatures. This is an area many organisations underestimate – our need for social connection.”

“Feeling that we belong, that our manager is interested in us, that we have someone who will listen to us at work makes a big difference to our resilience, our staying power and ability to think.”

“There is nothing soft about social connection – research studies show it has a big impact on performance.”



Hilary Scarlett, Change Management Speaker & Author

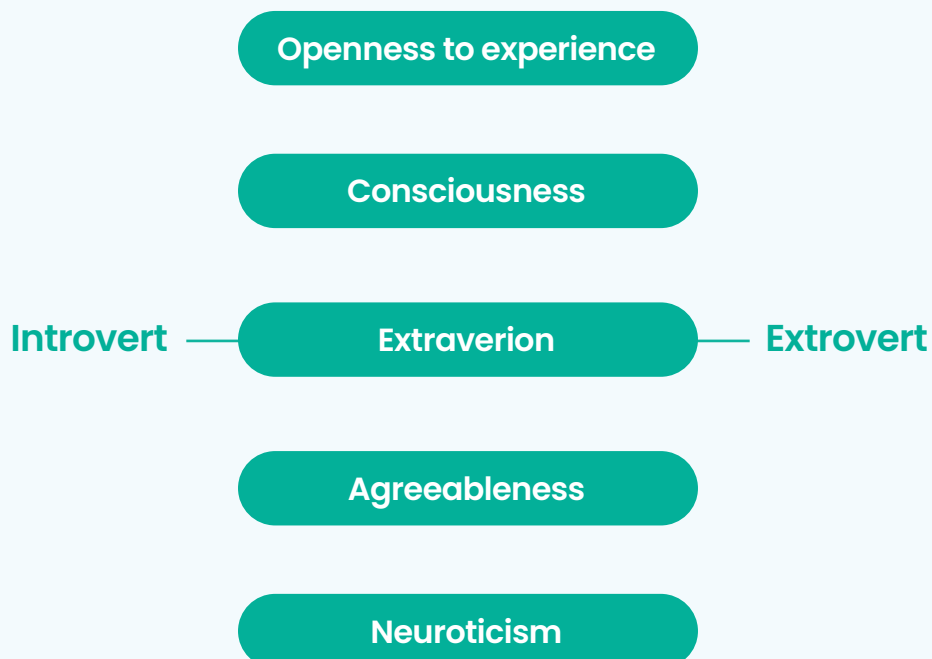
Change communication

Communication should be at the heart of change. Not only do individuals need specific information on any changes to their role or the structure of the organisation for any transformation programme to run smoothly, they also need to feel heard and that they have a voice. A lack of two-way communication will lead to anxiety and uncertainty, leading to resistance as discussed in the previous section or at best a change that isn't the right fit for your workforce.

When communicating change it is important to understand the various personalities you will encounter. The 5-factor personality model (or OCEAN) is a good starting point to understand the communicative needs of stakeholder groups.

It will also help you to pinpoint potential 'change ambassadors' or 'saboteurs' who are likely to have strong influence over perceptions within the workforce.

OCEAN Change Personality Model



“Anyone who scores highly on the scale openness to experience (this is the primary factor that applies to change) and are extroverts, they are going to be your change champions (given that the change is just), positively influencing their colleagues, whereas the lower scorers tend to be change resistant. That’s not to say they won’t be open to the idea of it but they may need more education around it.”



Becky Turner, Workplace Psychologist at Claremont

In my organisation, change has been communicated...

Well



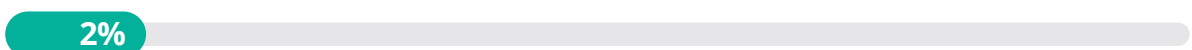
Okay



Badly



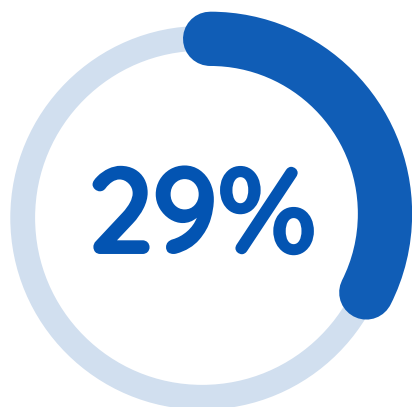
Don't know



"You need to make sure there is a robust communication plan and it has to be two-way communication. There is little point to distributing information in emails, when this isn't supported with good leadership, engagement with teams or the ability for people to feed back. For me change is a process of consultation and engagement."

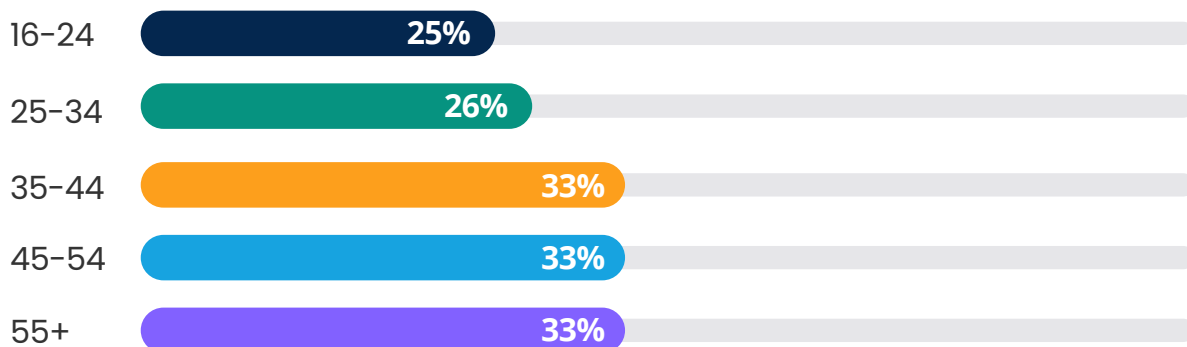


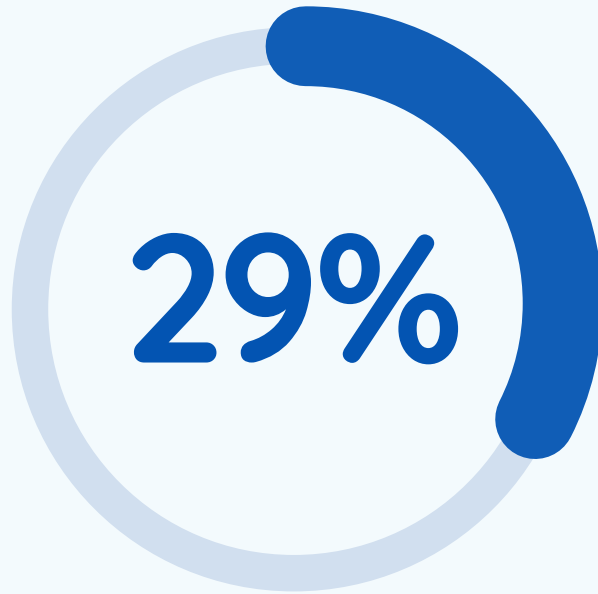
Lisa Wheatcroft, Change Management Expert at Oriri



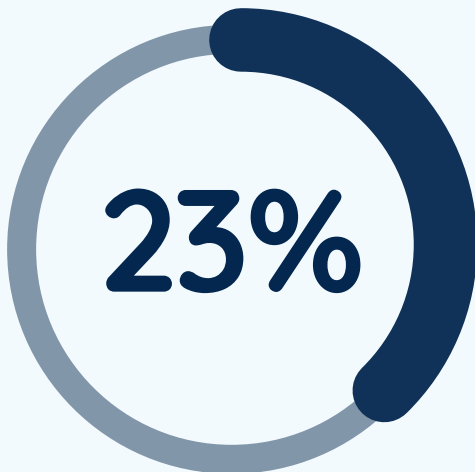
% who say change is not communicated clearly in their organisation

% of respondents by age group





% who do not feel included when change is happening in their organisation



Greater London



Rest of UK Average

What our experts say...

Jenni Field on... why dedicated information spaces are essential during change

"You need to make sure that you've got a dedicated space for information about what's going on with the change and that you are consistent in that."

"When I was doing a merger acquisition, we created a dedicated microsite that was updated and from that we did a newsletter that went out every Thursday morning at 10am."

"If there was nothing to say it still went out and it said there's nothing to say. You can't say to people 'we'll just let you know when we know'. Their brain is going to go 'but when are we going to know?' There's just too much ambiguity in there."

"It's that consistency that's really important to show up weekly or depending what your change programme is, but whatever you say you're going to do you have to do that."



Jenni Field, Business Communications Expert

Becky Turner on... the importance of authenticity in change communication

"When communicating change, have a very clear idea of where you are and where you're going. If there are any areas where you anticipate evolution after that phase, be open, even if you're unsure."

"Transparency is key to getting people on board."

"Be authentic about the change, provide that psychological safety for people who aren't too sure about it."

"Provide spaces for employees to have a voice where they can be anonymous in

their concerns or someone they can talk to peer-to-peer as a change champion or depending on how open your organisation is, a leadership member.”

“You can’t over communicate in a change. Little and often is preferable than a big email, but it should be multi-channel. Video guides, town halls, email, your intranets... utilise your channels. Those who are resistant may read the whole thing and the information will help them to feel less anxious and those more open on the change scale may read little bits and be like ‘yeah that’s fine’. Consider all groups when you’re communicating.”



Becky Turner, Workplace Psychologist at Claremont

Hilary Scarlett on... filling the information gap

“Good communication during change is essential. Managers are often in the tricky position of being expected to lead their teams without perhaps being part of the decision-making. ”

“Providing information is important – brains respond to information in much the same way they do to food. Brains crave certainty: if the organisation does not provide enough information, then people speculate and try to fill the void, trying to create their own certainty.”

“We can waste lots of time and energy trying to fill that information gap – just when we need to spend our energy on learning and adapting.”



Hilary Scarlett, Change Management Speaker & Author

Leadership & change

Three-quarters of employees feel leadership in organisations need to do more to understand why people are resistant to change. Leaders are supposed to be an example and inspire change in the workforce but clearly there is a disconnect.

On the reason why, one respondent commented: **"Because we're all human. Position in a company is irrelevant if a human cannot relate to another human."**

When communicating change, leaders need to be more visible and find other ways to bridge the gap to people at other levels. Whether this is through cascaded comms and efficient flows of communication to managers or directly from themselves.

A respondent of the survey added: **"Sometimes decisions are made higher up without taking the workers into account. Higher ups don't always necessarily understand how things are run in the office for example and make decisions that make life harder for people for no reason."**

Another employee added: **"Management doesn't ask staff on the front line how changes will affect our roles and then when changes come into place they are in fact making our roles harder."**

Leadership should also have representation in the workforce in the form of change ambassadors which will help build a bigger influence within, align communication within the wider organisation to reflect leadership's change objectives and give them a better understanding of the sentiment at ground level.

13 Behaviours of Trust

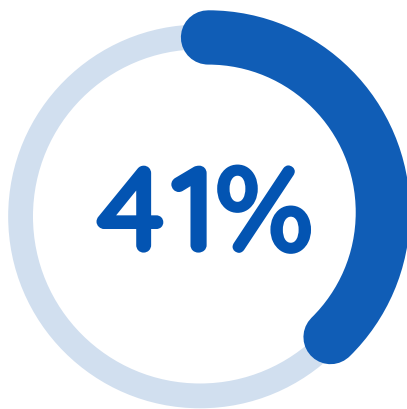
- 1 Talk straight
- 2 Demonstrate respect
- 3 Create transparency
- 4 Right your wrongs
- 5 Show loyalty
- 6 Deliver results
- 7 Extend trust
- 8 Get better
- 9 Confront reality
- 10 Clarify expectations
- 11 Be accountable
- 12 Listen first
- 13 Keep commitments



“When it comes to trust, look at 13 behaviours of trust which is from Stephen M. R. Covey’s book The Speed of Trust. Those 13 behaviours are what we want to really build on. We have to remember that we are judged by our behaviours, not by our intentions. But, we judge ourselves by our intentions because we know what they are, so it’s just getting some of those little things lined up that are really important for change.”



Jenni Field, Business Communications Expert



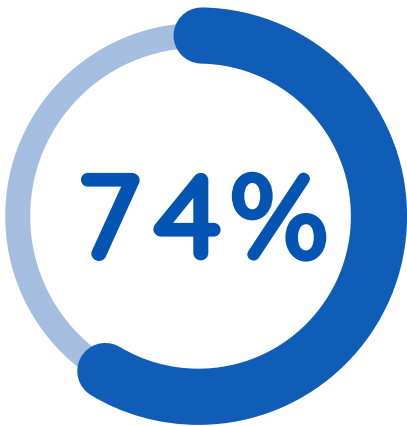
% of employees say a lack of trust in leadership makes them resistant to change - the biggest reason

Greater London



Rest of UK Average





% of people who think leaders need to be doing more to understand why people are resistant to change

“As communicators, make sure that the leadership team are doing things the right way. Now this will depend on your culture. There may be examples where leaders have the best interactions but their behaviours don’t demonstrate that.”



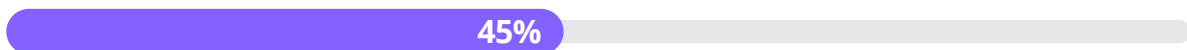
Jenni Field, Business Communications Expert

We asked those who said leadership need to do more why they thought this:

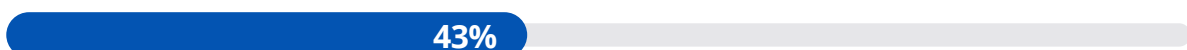
It would improve staff retention



It would make people more productive



It would invite more collaboration



It would improve the population’s mental health



What our experts say...

Hilary Scarlett on... how leadership can create certainty in small ways

"Creating certainty where you can for employees is really helpful. As leaders or managers we might not be able to provide certainty about the bigger picture or the longer term, but we can aim to provide certainty in smaller ways."

"For example, guaranteeing to communicate on a certain day each week what we do and don't know; if we are inviting people to a meeting, we should send an agenda so that they know what to expect – these small things can help settle the brain and help us to focus during times of change."



Hilary Scarlett, Change Management Speaker & Author

Becky Turner on... why change must start from the top

"Change has to come from within. I would much rather we help set up the tools for change engagement processes, change champion workshops, etc. and if they need more detail on the nitty gritty, but actually for change to work it's got to be driven from within."

"Equally, change needs to be led from the top. If it has come from them or if colleagues have asked for the change and they've inputted from the beginning, they will be there driving the change and hopefully you'll meet in the middle and have a perfect seamless change."



Becky Turner, Workplace Psychologist at Claremont

Lisa Wheatcroft on... why cultural change starts with leadership

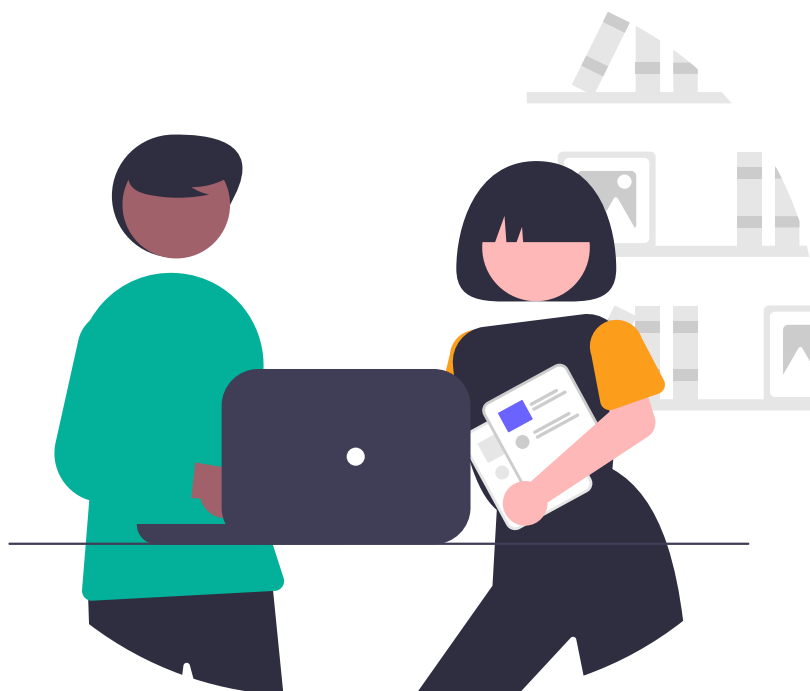
“When working with organisations to develop their culture, we would typically build a plan which is focussed heavily on employee engagement. This would include projects related to ways of working, reward and recognition, communications, learning and leadership as examples. We consider all aspects of engagement and build a framework to suit the business need. Having a strategy or framework critical to delivering a cultural change and to facilitate other change programmes, and this strategy needs to be sponsored and supported by the most senior people in the business.”

“Ultimately cultural change must be driven through great leadership. For me, leadership development and leadership capability has to be at the heart of any cultural change.”

“In all organisations I’ve worked with, change programmes have been supported by a learning programme with leaders to improve capability and ensure that the end goal is delivered.”



Lisa Wheatcroft, Change Management Expert at Oriri



Our recommendations for delivering change

Create a culture of openness and spaces for feedback

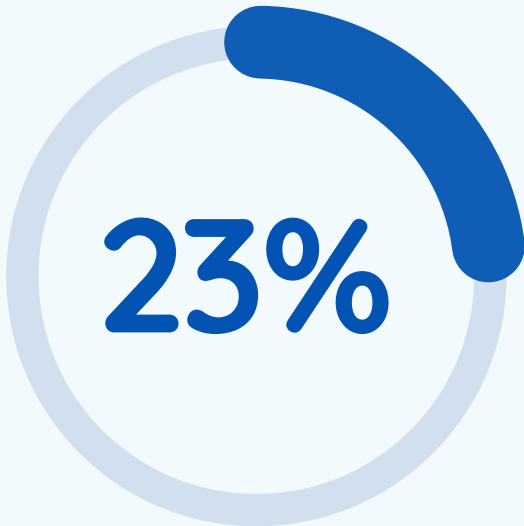


% said they were resistant to change because of mistrust in leadership or the organisation.

It's clear from the report that leaders and communicators need to be doing more during periods of transformation, with mistrust being the biggest reason for change resistance. There is a level of mistrust that is an automatic trigger when organisations have not been fully transparent or engaged in conversations with their employees.

Having safe spaces to feedback and acting upon that feedback is absolutely essential for any organisation to build trust in their workforce. Encouraging honest feedback will allow any grievances to be aired so you can address them before they become an issue. If you have [real-time analytics](#) attached to surveys you are sending out you'll also be in a position to make informed decisions, showing you value input of employees.

Being honest and open about challenges you are facing during change will also help you. Not only do you appear more authentic and build trust, you're more likely to get the benefit of the doubt from even those who are more inclined to resist change. If you communicate how the change is going regularly, employees will generally feel more positively about the change.



% said they were resistant to change because they felt excluded.

“Provide spaces for employees to have a voice where they can be anonymous in their concerns or someone they can talk to such as peer-to-peer with a change champion/representative or depending on how open your organisation is, a leadership member.”



Becky Turner, Workplace Psychologist at Claremont

“I’ve been in organisations with experience in change who won’t communicate or send anything out if it isn’t moving. Just say you’re ‘still working on it and we’ll update next week’. that will make people feel better when they’re communicated with regularly on a micro level.”



Lisa Wheatcroft, Change Management Expert at Oriri

Be clear and consistent in your internal comms



Nearly a third said that change wasn't communicated clearly in their organisation.

"It is about that real compelling vision, being really clear constantly and being consistent about the vision. People often talk about 'this is the culture we want to create' and then ultimately move away from it. You've got to be consistent and aligned in what you're communicating to make change feel safer."

I've seen this done really well at Heathrow. There were 4 key pillars to the vision during change - a visualisation of what they wanted to achieve. This was always visible in communication. It was everywhere; all the branding and everything had to link back to it. If it didn't fit with the 4 pillars it didn't get done."



Lisa Wheatcroft, Change Management Expert at Oriri

The report found that **nearly a third of employees think change wasn't communicated clearly in their organisation**. Confusing, unaligned and inconsistent messaging is a prerequisite for change failures.

Internal comms have a responsibility to work across the organisation to define the change, what the end result is, how long it is going to take and develop a comms strategy based on this. Even though changes to schedules can be unavoidable and reactive communication needed for this, being as best prepared as possible will help you be more consistent and regular with updates surrounding transformation.

With [Oak's Curated Content](#), you can spend more time developing a strategy and messaging that aligns, without the legwork of sending it out to multiple audiences. Our AI engine will take care of that.

The image shows a social media post by Luke Towns, posted 22 hours ago to Oak Engage UK. The post text reads: "Hi everyone, hope you all had a great weekend, we w feedback surveys for all departments to fill in so keep coming your way this week! Have a great week!". Below the post is a heart icon with the number 5. To the right of the post is a 'SHARING' panel with three sections: 'Can See (2)' with 'Oak Engage UK' and 'Anthony Hughes'; 'Should See (1)' with 'Outbound Calls' and a 'Promote until 20th March 2023 11:28' option; and 'Must See (2)' with 'Customer Success' and a 'Promote until 20th March 2023 11:28' option.

8 March 2023
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Understand the needs of individuals



% said they did not receive the necessary information to understand change.

“You need to consider the different needs and demonstrate that you’ve considered different needs and equip them for that change.”

“For example, if you’re neurodivergent and have had a really stressful journey into the office, you can be in that phase of needing to let out this energy so we will put you in a soundproof wellbeing area close to the entrance – if they don’t have a proper guide on how to use this space and know how to use this they’ll suffer the same way they would without it.”

“You also need to consider different personas on the change scale when planning your communication. Those who are resistant may read the whole thing and the information will help them to feel less anxious and those more open on the change scale may read little bits and be like ‘yeah that’s fine’. Consider all groups when you’re communicating with them.”



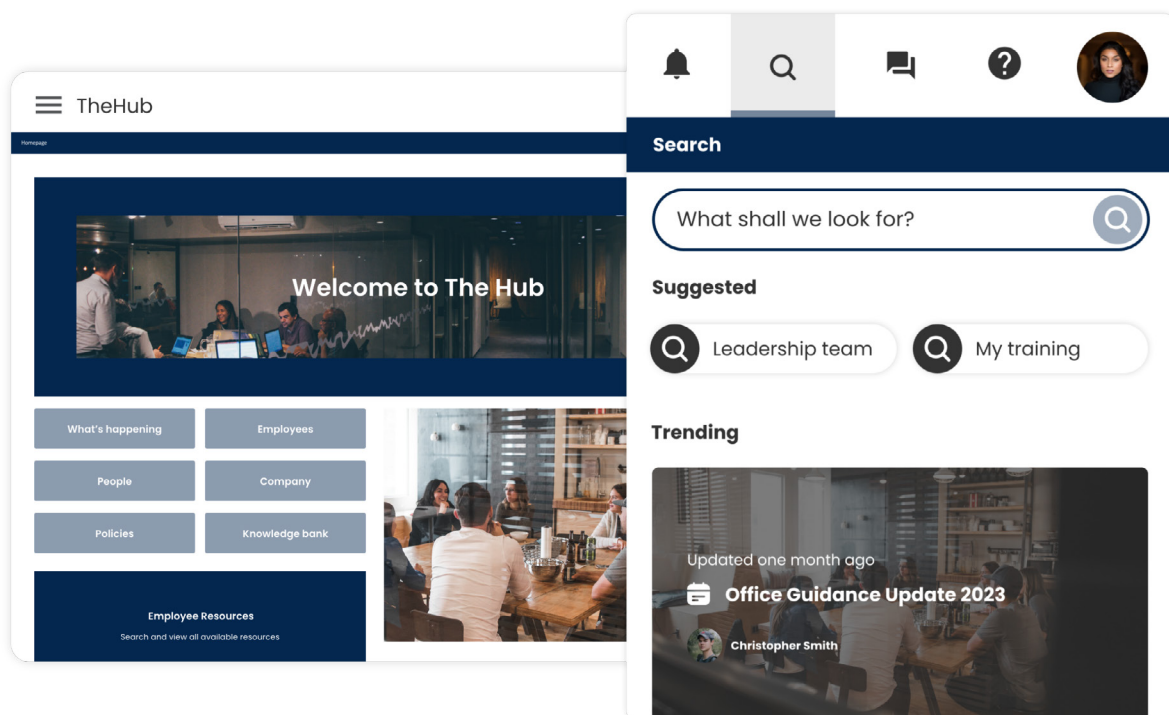
Becky Turner, Workplace Psychologist at Claremont

Well over a quarter of employees do not have the necessary information to understand change. It only takes a few people to derail change, so this significant number of those who don't have the right tools or knowledge provided is quite alarming.

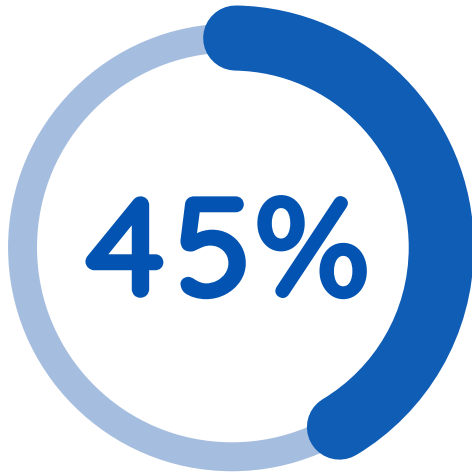
There are two main areas you need to look at to avoid this from happening:

The first is to segment your audiences so you can communicate with them appropriately, before, during and after the change. For instance, the needs of your frontline staff are completely different to the needs of staff working in finance, so you shouldn't be sending out blanket comms that get lost.

The second is to create a central source of truth in the form of a [content management platform](#) that houses ALL important information such as process, policy docs, etc. [Oak's AI-powered search functionality](#) also makes it far easier for employees to access information that they need to adapt to change quicker and ensure that there is no confusion spread across the workforce.



Measure and track your progress



45% said if leaders did more to understand change resistance it would make people more productive.

“Make sure that you’re understanding the impact that it has on the different stakeholder groups that we’ve got. For example, it might be that it’s just that top third of the organisation that this makes a difference to and that’s where we need to focus our attention.”



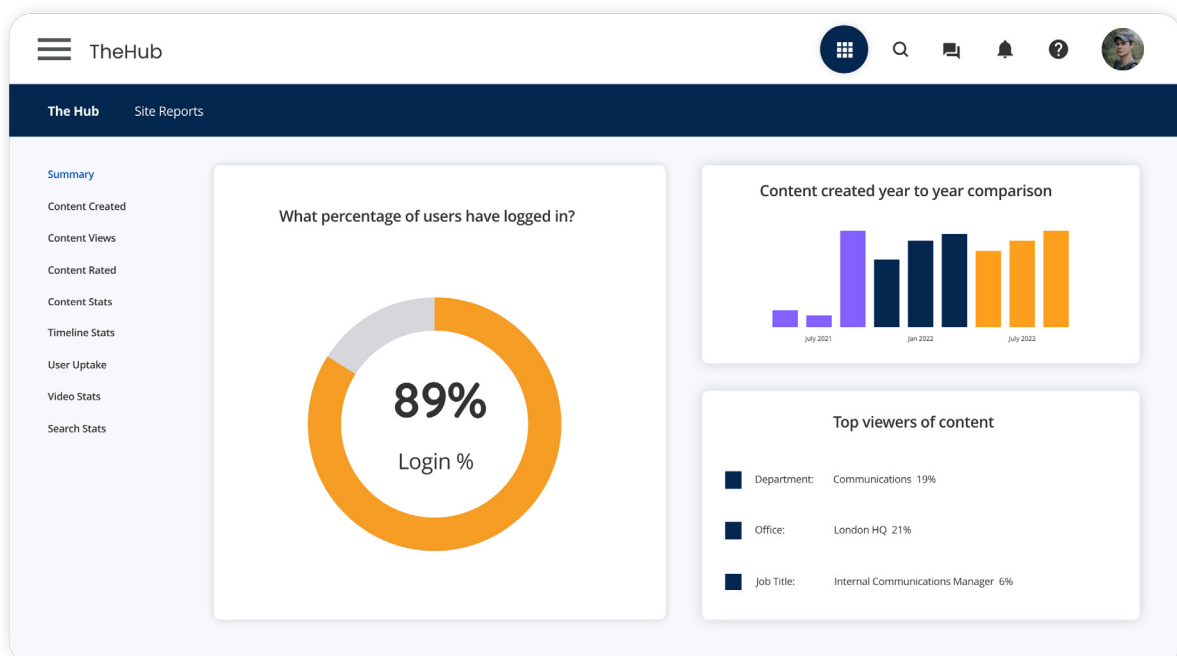
Jenni Field, Business Communications Expert

Almost half of respondents said that people would be more productive if leaders did more to understand change. That is a significant amount of output you could be losing out on due to an inability to ready the business for change.

How do you do this?

The most straightforward way of doing this is to have metrics applied to change and communication objectives so you can track effectively and make alterations to your strategy in real-time as opposed to realising when it's too late.

Oak's platform allows you to do this in a number of ways. Through Oak's in-depth [analytics](#) you can easily measure the success of your messaging campaigns so you can monitor how well each one is performing and how engaging it is. The data that you gather from [Pulse Surveys](#) gives you actionable insights on employee feedback, so utilise this to gather sentiment on the ongoing change throughout.





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and intranet solution

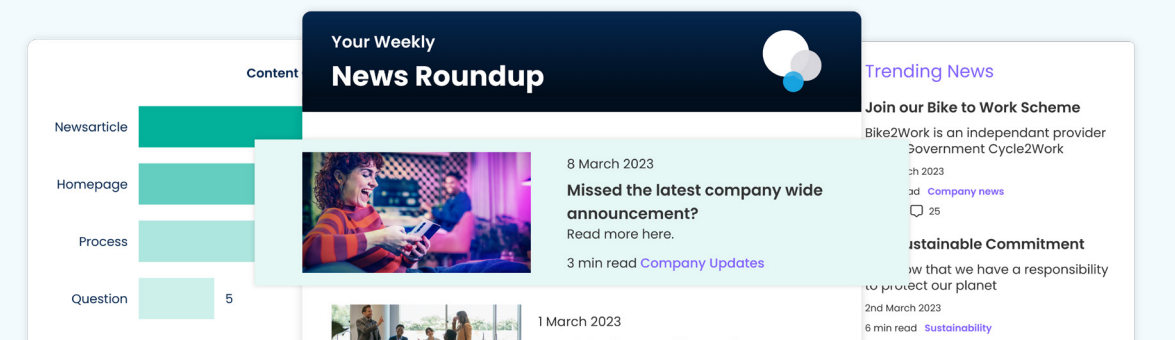
What we do

Oak Engage delivers next generation curated content across a modern intranet and employee engagement app. We empower HR and internal comms teams to surface relevant content, to the right people, at the right time.

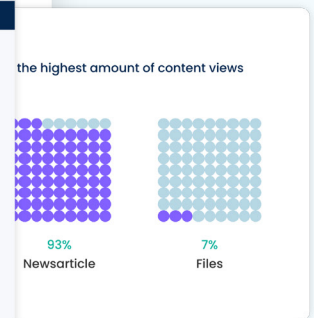
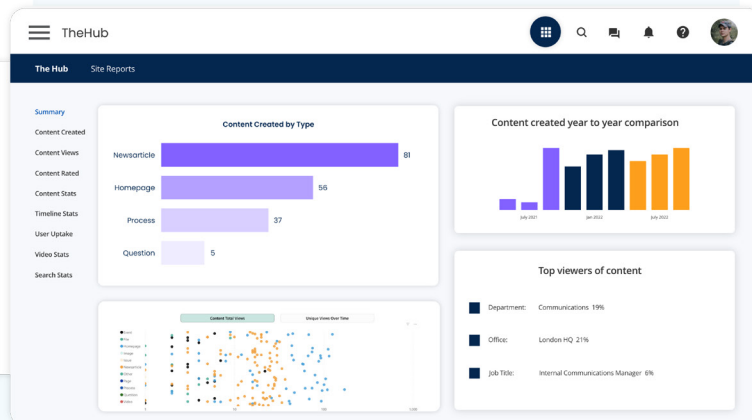
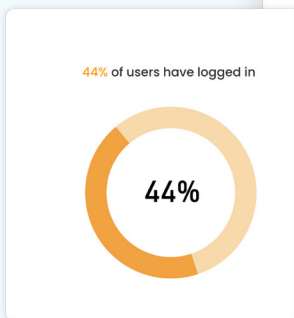
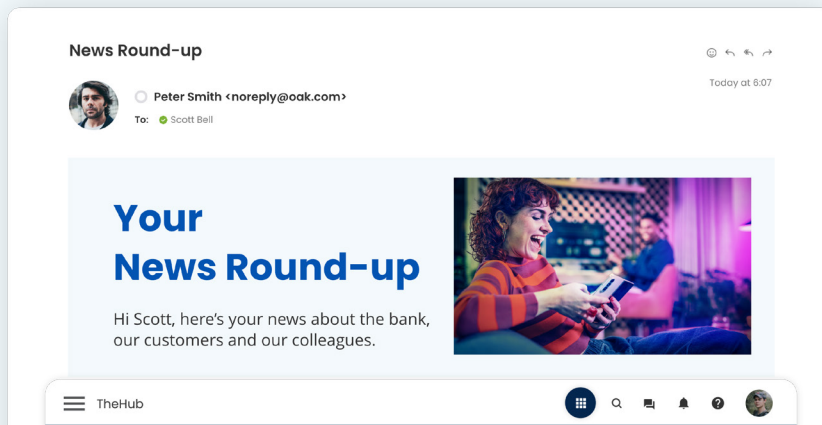
Our mission

We're here to make communication simple.

We believe there is a better way to use technology to engage employees, cut through the noise, and inspire action that puts people at the heart of organisations.



Trusted by the world's biggest brands



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