

# Core Roles in Change Management

## A Coordinated System of Support

The ultimate goal of change management is to drive organizational results and outcomes by engaging employees and inspiring their adoption of a new way of working. Whether the change is to a process, system, job role, organizational structure, or all of these, a project or initiative can only be successful if individual employees change their behaviors. This is the essence of change management. And to manage change successfully, all core roles must participate.

Much like putting on a play—where actors, directors, costume designers, lighting and sound crews coordinate their unique talents to deliver a single successful outcome—change management requires individuals in key roles to engage with the change and coordinate their efforts in defined ways. From the highest levels of leadership to front-line employees, an entire system of people within the organization must support employees through the transition.

This article examines the core roles in change management:

- Change practitioners
- Sponsors
- People managers
- Project managers
- People (impacted employees)



# Descriptions and Misconceptions

The table below describes each core role from the perspective of the person or group executing it. These “I-by” statements illustrate what each individual or group might say when they understand their role and are actively engaged in managing change. The table also includes what they might say when they do not clearly understand their role.

Role	How they should describe their role:	How they could misunderstand their role:
Change Practitioners	“I, change practitioner, contribute to successful change outcomes through adoption and usage by preparing, equipping and supporting people with integrated strategies and plans.”	“I feel like I’m on an island here. People expect me to do everything and have all the answers.”
Sponsors	“I, sponsor, contribute to successful change outcomes through adoption and usage by <b>Actively</b> and visibly participating throughout, <b>Building</b> coalitions, and <b>Communicating</b> directly.”	“I gave you funding and signed the charter, now go make it happen!”
People Managers	“I, people manager, contribute to successful change outcomes through adoption and usage by performing the roles of <b>Communicator</b> , <b>Liaison</b> , <b>Advocate</b> , <b>Resistance Manager</b> and <b>Coach</b> .”	“I feel like I’m going to be directly affected by some of these changes, and I wish I knew what was going on.”
Project Managers	“I, project manager, contribute to successful change outcomes by designing with adoption and usage in mind and integrating with the people side.”	“My focus is getting to go-live. Once I flip the switch, I’m moving on to the next project.”
People/Impacted Employees	“I, employee, contribute to successful change outcomes by engaging, adopting and using the change.”	“I’m just going to wait and see what happens. It seems like this change and its success are not my responsibility.”

# Employee-Facing vs. Enabling

Of the core roles presented above, two have direct contact with front-line employees impacted by the change—they're actors on the stage and in the spotlight. Two other roles do more of their work behind the scenes. They're the directors and stage crew who quietly guide others to successful outcomes.

## Employee-Facing Roles

Sponsors and people managers are the two roles that interact directly with individuals who need to change. To the impacted employee groups, they are the visible actors on the change stage. Sponsors and people managers deliver communications, and support and coach teams through their transitions. They also present the organization's "desired future state" to impacted groups via one-to-one interactions and one-to-many interactions.

**Why are these two roles employee-facing?**

**Because these are the people that employees want to hear from.**

## Enabling Roles

Change practitioners and project managers are facilitators of change. Like producers and directors who operate off-stage to produce a successful play, enabling roles develop and coordinate the plans employee-facing roles will execute during change.

**Why are these two roles typically not employee-facing in times of change?**

**Because employees don't know who they are, and they are not preferred senders of messages.**

One of the most important takeaways from this discussion about roles is that change practitioners need to work with and through others to achieve change success. Although change practitioners are often resourced from a project team, HR, OD consultants, or a specialized change management group, most of the change management work gets carried out by others.

## Additional Roles

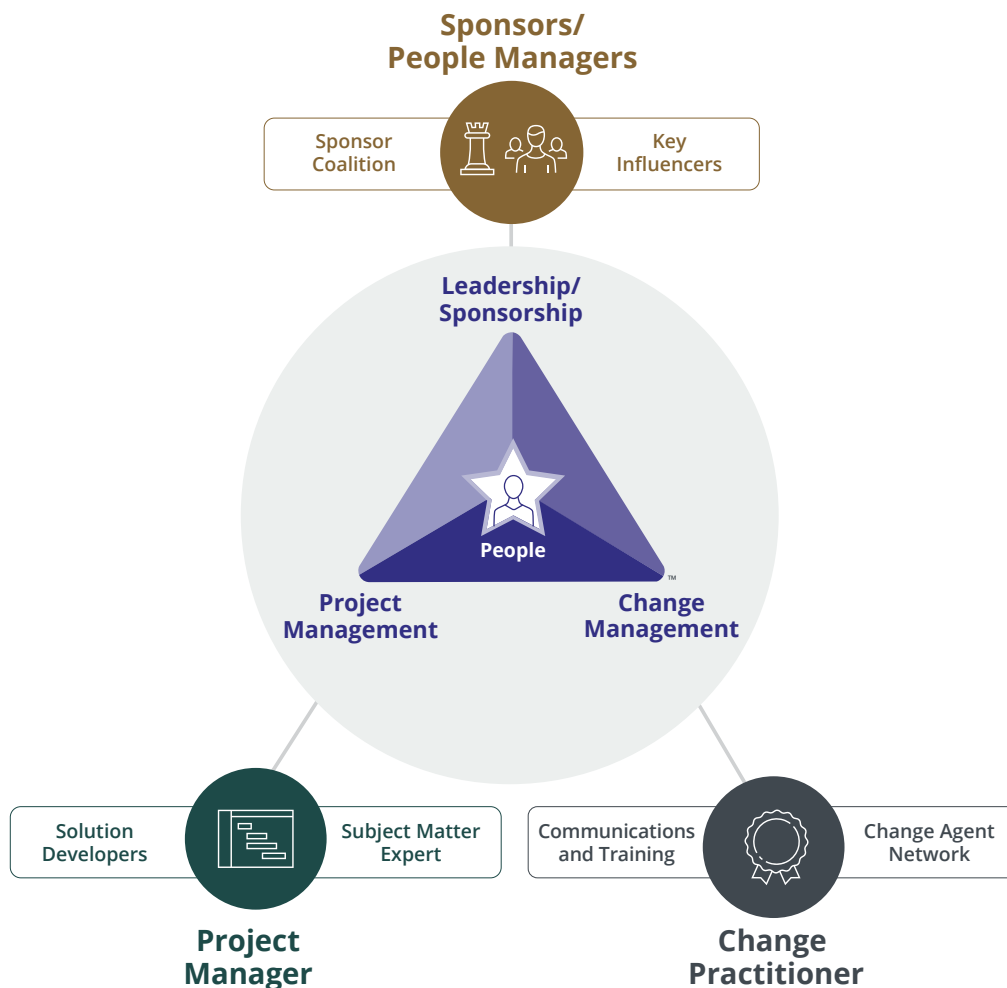
In addition to the core roles, you may need additional or what we call “extend” roles to execute your change management plan. Roles that extend your support resources may include, but are not limited to:

- Internal communication or training specialists
- Human resources business partners
- Organizational development staff
- Business analysts
- Subject matter experts
- Change agent networks
- Solution developers

When you identify the extend roles needed in your organization and for your particular change initiatives, it is important to select individuals who will actively engage with the role. They should also understand and be able to describe their roles using the structure of the “I-by” statement (as in the table above):

“I, \_\_\_\_, contribute to successful change outcomes (through adoption and usage) by \_\_\_\_.”

For example, “I, change agent network, contribute to adoption and usage by providing a voice for end users and sharing key messages in a timely manner.”





# Importance of Each Role

## Change Practitioners

### Why the dedicated change management resources are important:

- A growing body of data shows a strong correlation between the success of a change initiative and how well the people side is managed. According to Prosci's Best Practices in Change Management studies, change management projects with excellent change management are six times more likely to meet objectives and outcomes.
- Having dedicated resources for change management is consistently one of the greatest contributors to success in Prosci's Best Practices in Change Management research.
- Dedicated change management resources provide focus and keep track of change management activities. They act as a point of responsibility and accountability. When budgets and schedules are squeezed, change management activities are easily pushed to the bottom of the priority list if there are not dedicated resources.

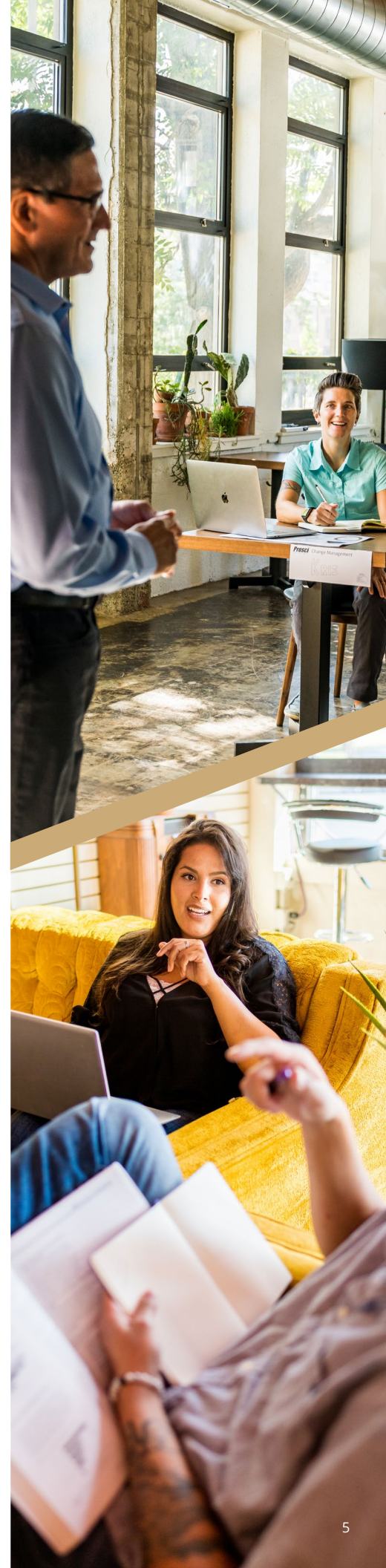
### What the change practitioners must do:

1. **Apply a structured change management methodology**  
Instead of operating in an ad hoc manner, the dedicated change management resources approach change management with structure and intent through a [proven methodology](#).
2. **Formulate strategy**  
They evaluate how big a change is and who will be impacted to develop a customized and scaled strategy for managing the people side of the initiative.
3. **Develop role-based and activity plans**  
Based on the organization's strategy work, the change team creates a tailored set of plans for moving people forward. Guided by an ADKAR Blueprint, change practitioners develop two role-based plans (Sponsor Plan and People Manager Plan) and follow with two activity plans (Communications Plan and Training Plan). The team may also need to add unique plans to address the organization's unique needs. Note that the ADKAR Blueprint is a primer for the set of plans. If the change is small enough, the team could choose to use only an ADKAR Blueprint.
4. **Support other roles**  
The change management resources are the coaches and go-to people responsible for enabling success with the other roles that are vital to change management.

## Sponsors

### Why sponsors are important:

- Active and visible sponsorship has been cited consistently as the top contributor to success with change management in Prosci's Best Practices in Change Management research for more than two decades.



- Employees want to see and hear the sponsor's commitment to the change. The authority they provide carries over to other change management roles.
- Effective sponsorship is a predictor of success or failure on the project.

### What sponsors must do:

Sponsors execute the ABCs—an acronym for the three roles a sponsor must perform to be an effective leader of change.

1. **Actively and visibly participate throughout the life of the project**  
There are three key ideas here: active, visible and throughout. Sponsors must be present and seen by employees from start to finish.
2. **Build a coalition of support**  
The sponsor coalition describes the group of leaders and influencers who will give the change credibility and prioritize it with their own departments, divisions and workgroups. The primary sponsor must build and maintain a healthy sponsorship coalition.
3. **Communicate directly with employees**  
Employees want to hear the business reasons for the change from someone at the top. Sponsors need to communicate, support and promote the change to impacted groups.

We call this the ABCs of sponsorship

## People Managers

### Why people managers are important:

- People managers are close to the action. Their teams are the people who must alter how they do their jobs to make a change successful. People managers are the preferred senders of messages about the personal impact of a change on their team members.
- In any organization, changes come from many sources, such as strategic initiatives launched by senior leaders and changes due to daily demands from customers and suppliers. People managers support their employees through all types of changes.
- The attitude and actions of a manager will show up in their people, whether the attitude is one of support or opposition.

### What people managers must do:

Managers and supervisors—or people managers—are essential during any change. They play five key roles, as described below.

1. **Communicator**  
Employees prefer to hear messages about how the change directly impacts them and their team from the person they report to.
2. **Liaison**  
The role of liaison involves interacting with the project team, taking direction and providing feedback.

We call this the CLARC role for people managers



### 3. Advocate

If the manager opposes the change, chances are their team will too—and vice versa. The first step the change management team must take is to get people managers on board with the change. Only then can they expect managers and supervisors to fulfill their roles in change management.

### 4. Resistance manager

Research shows that the best intervention to mitigate resistance comes from the employee's immediate supervisor because they know their people best and can work to prepare, equip and support them based on their unique needs and challenges.

### 5. Coach

Helping employees through their personal transitions is the essence of the change coaching that people managers do.

## Project Manager

### Why the project manager is important:

- The project manager focuses on the project's design, development and delivery—the technical side of the change.
- Without direction and management, the technical side of the project will not move forward.
- The project manager also helps ensure that change management is part of the project by providing appropriate time and resources, including budget and personnel.

### What the project manager must do:

Project managers play an essential role during change, as described below.

#### 1. Design the actual change

The project manager creates the solution that ultimately impacts how people do their jobs.

#### 2. Manage the “technical side”

With tools like the charter, business case, schedule, resources, work breakdown structure, budget, etc., the project manager advances the technical side of the change.

#### 3. Engage with the change practitioner

By working with the change practitioner, the project manager ensures that the technical side and the people side of the change move forward in unison.

#### 4. Integrate change management plans into project plans

Change management is most effective when it is engaged early at project initiation. By engaging at the right time and weaving the change management strategy and plans into the technical-side plans, the project manager creates a single, seamless project plan.



## People/Impacted Employees

### Why people/impacted employees are important:

- **People are the heart of change management**  
Employees impacted by change in their organization are at the center of what we do as change leaders. Helping people adopt change is simply the right way to treat people. Change happens one person at a time.
- **Organizational change requires individual change**  
If we don't help individuals adopt and use the change, the probability of achieving desired outcomes is very low.
- **Change management is the people-side framework**  
Just as project management focuses on the technical side of change, the change management framework centers on people—those who must do their jobs differently, how they will do their jobs differently, and what we must do to support them—improving adoption and usage as a result.

### What the people/impacted employees must do:

1. **Participate in the change**  
When individuals engage with the change, they more easily adopt it.
2. **Understand their emotional responses to the change**  
Although circumstances affect individual reactions to change, all people react to change in predictable ways. Understanding and addressing barriers to change enables people to move through it.
3. **Identify needed support**  
Communicating specific needs enables change leaders to help individuals take control of their change experience and thrive during change.



## Implications of the Additional or “Extend” Roles

Each of the roles discussed above is a core role and must be part of every project or change initiative. As mentioned earlier, your specific change might call for additional “extend” roles, which typically contribute to designing, developing and delivering the solution or engaging, adopting and using the solution. These complementary functions extend the execution of change management activities and help maintain strategic alignment with broader organizational goals.

### What the extend roles might do:

1. **Incorporate their experience and expertise**  
Extend roles bring experience on past changes that can be applied to the current change.
2. **Contribute knowledge**  
Each of these groups has specialized knowledge that can help the project team and the change management resource or team.
3. **Offer tools**  
Each of the areas brings specific tools that support change management activities. Support roles need to ensure their tools are applied in alignment with change management best practices.



# Build Your System of Support for Change

## 1

**Begin making a case for why it is important to manage the people side of change**

As a change practitioner, you must make a compelling case for the value of change management and how it supports both people and the organization. To build the system of support you need to be effective, you will need to make this case for each specific role:

- Project teams
- Sponsors
- People managers

Be sure to answer “What’s in it for me?” and connect change management to what they care about, such as meeting financial objectives (for sponsors) or delivering a project on time, on budget and on target to meet objectives (for project teams).

## 2

**Provide knowledge, training, tools and coaching**

For many of the different actors, applying change management is a new job requirement. You will need to help each of them build their personal competency for leading change. Whether it is a project team you are working with to integrate change management into the project plan, the division president you are asking to fulfill the role of sponsor, or a front-line supervisor you are asking to coach their direct reports, you need to be there to provide support and answer questions. You are now the coach for the agents of change throughout your organization.

## 3

**Apply change management principles to your engagement of other roles**

The Prosci ADKAR® Model of individual change provides a framework for engaging players who need to fulfill the other roles in change management. The ADKAR Model describes the five key building blocks an individual needs to successfully make a change.

The model states simply that for someone to effectively engage in their role in change management, they need:

- **Awareness** of the need for change management
- **Desire** to participate and support the application of change management
- **Knowledge** on how to manage change
- **Ability** to implement the required skills and behaviors for their role in change management
- **Reinforcement** to sustain change management

You cannot simply send someone to change management training or send them a memo and expect them to fulfill their role. They will first need Awareness of why it is important and a Desire to fulfill their role.

The conversation you have with a CEO will differ greatly from the one you have with a front-line supervisor. Draw on best practices and research to demonstrate the specific actions you need and the biggest mistakes typically made by these groups. In the end, you must connect effectively managing change with what the individual cares about.

# Work Together for Successful Change

A coordinated system of key roles works to bring about change in an organization. Some roles are the actors on stage while others orchestrate change activities behind the scenes. And employees make personal transitions with help from those who prepare, equip and support them during the change. Ultimately, the collective impact of these successful individual transitions helps the organization achieve its change objectives and realize the enriched future state its strategic leaders envisioned.



## Have Questions?

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