



BEYOND THE CHECKBOX:

Why Digital Transformations Fail Without Real Change Management

How Operations Leaders Can Drive Sustained Adoption, Cultural Alignment, and Long-Term Impact in Industrial Transformation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital transformation is supposed to bring clarity, efficiency, and innovation.

But for many industrial operations, the reality is far less inspiring. Despite major investments in platforms and tools, adoption lags, teams resist, and the expected impact never quite materializes.

In Dexcent's multi-part webinar series with leaders from Suncor, Enbridge, Plant.Digital, and Prosci, a clear pattern emerged: transformation fails when change is treated as an afterthought; when people are expected to adapt without support, context, or a voice in the process.

This eBook is a candid look at why conventional change management often falls short in complex, asset-heavy environments. Drawing from real-world experience and lessons shared in our panel discussions, it offers insight into the leadership behaviors, cultural dynamics, and practical actions that truly drive transformation.

Inside, we explore:

- Why "go-live" is just a milestone, not a finish line
- How to shift from passive compliance to active engagement
- What leaders must do to earn trust and credibility
- When to scale up change efforts and when to simplify
- What metrics actually reflect real, lasting change
- Practical tools and methodologies that work in industrial settings

Transformation doesn't happen because of software. It happens when people see the point, trust the process, and feel empowered to act. This guide shows how to make that happen.

CHAPTER 1

The Industrial Transformation Dilemma

Digital tools are evolving rapidly, offering the potential to modernize how industrial organizations operate.

Predictive analytics. Centralized data. AI-assisted decision-making. These technologies promise smarter, faster, more resilient systems.

But across the energy sector, something gets lost in translation.

Systems are implemented but not adopted. New tools are launched, only to be quietly sidelined. Frontline teams revert to legacy processes. Despite millions in investment, the transformation fizzles.

"A lot of companies are putting these wonderful, shiny systems in place," observed Peter Enns, Digitalization Director at Suncor. **"But if people don't change the way they work, they'll still make the same decisions they did before."**

This disconnect isn't about the software. It's about the people expected to use it.

"Technology is often prioritized because it's easier to buy," explained Betsy Bond, Senior Director of Program Delivery at Prosci. **"But what actually delivers value is the behavior change. And that part is harder."**

Teams don't push back out of spite. They disengage because they haven't been brought along. They haven't seen the purpose, don't trust the outcome, or feel the solution was imposed rather than built with them.

That's where resistance takes root. When people feel excluded from the change process, they protect themselves by avoiding, delaying, or working around the new system. This creates a dangerous illusion where leadership sees technical success while operational reality tells a different story.

Digital transformation isn't just about data, systems, or architecture. It's about how people interact with those systems - how they shift habits, re-learn workflows, and adopt new ways of thinking.

When that human side is treated as an afterthought, the whole strategy is at risk. The transformation dilemma is not a tech problem. It's a leadership challenge. And solving it requires a new level of focus on what actually drives adoption: trust, clarity, and co-ownership

CHAPTER 2

The Real Cost of Poor Change Adoption

Most industrial organizations measure transformation success by the same metrics: go-live dates, project budgets, and whether the system technically works.

But the real costs - the ones that quietly erode value - show up long after the dashboards go green.

When change isn't adopted, frontline teams bypass the system. Supervisors create manual workarounds. Data becomes fragmented. And leadership gets a false sense of progress.

Peter Enns describes the challenge: "The biggest risk is that the tool gets implemented, but people don't use it the way it was intended. They keep making decisions based on what they've always done."

In other words, the system is there. But the behavior hasn't changed. And without behavior change, transformation doesn't stick.

The consequences aren't always obvious. At first, it looks like business as usual. But under the surface, costly misalignments are forming:

- **Strategic decisions** based on outdated processes
- **Misuse or underuse** of expensive platforms
- **Burnout** from repeated rollouts that don't deliver value
- **Erosion** of trust in leadership

"When people don't feel supported through the change, they lose confidence in the organization's direction," explained Betsy Bond. "You start to hear 'Here we go again.' That skepticism spreads." The result is that even well-designed initiatives struggle to gain traction.

Resistance becomes reflexive. Teams disengage. Leaders become frustrated, assuming the issue is technical or personnel-related. But in reality, the issue is cultural - a failure to treat change as a process that must be earned, not enforced.

That is the hidden cost of skipping change management. It's not just a few missed clicks or training gaps. It's the slow unraveling of trust, momentum, and alignment across the organization.

CHAPTER 3

Why Traditional Change Management Fails in Industrial Environments

Many change management practices originated in corporate settings where teams are co-located, routines are structured around meetings and communications are primarily digital.

But industrial environments bring their own unique dynamics. Operations run 24/7. Workforces are spread across shifts and sites. Safety, uptime, and physical processes shape every decision. These realities require a more field-aware approach to engaging people in change.

This disconnect is one of the biggest reasons traditional change methods fall short in heavy industry. A one-size-fits-all approach simply doesn't work in these complex environments where safety, uptime, and operational reliability dominate every conversation.

Industrial settings require change strategies that are field-aware, safety-conscious, and operationally relevant. Sending a rollout plan from head office is not enough. Teams need to see that the plan works within their context.

"If the people on the ground don't believe it fits their reality, they'll resist. Quietly or openly," said Sandy Nolette, Technical Business Analyst and Change Management Practitioner. And that resistance doesn't always look like protest. Often, it looks like delay, disengagement, or quiet workarounds.

Traditional models also assume a level of communication and visibility that many industrial organizations lack. In complex environments, cascading messages can get lost, misinterpreted, or deprioritized. Leaders often underestimate how many layers sit between their intent and its execution.

You can't manage change from behind a desk. You need to be present. You need to hear what's working and what isn't, directly from the people doing the work.

This is where traditional change management hits its limits. It struggles to translate into environments where every decision has immediate operational consequences.

To succeed, change management must adapt. It needs to speak the language of operations, align with daily workflows, and prove its value in real time, not just in a slide deck.

CHAPTER 4

Behavior Before Tools

Technology often takes center stage in transformation projects.

It's visible. It's budgeted. It's exciting.

But what actually drives the outcome is how people behave around that technology.

You can introduce the best platform in the world. If teams don't understand its value, don't trust its outputs, or don't change the way they work, nothing meaningful shifts.

"You're not just implementing a tool. You're asking people to think differently, make decisions differently, and collaborate differently," said Peter Enns.

That kind of shift takes more than training. It takes belief. It takes clarity. And it takes sustained engagement from leaders who are willing to meet people where they are.

"Sometimes the change is simple, but the behavioral shift is massive," noted Betsy Bond. "People have to let go of what made them successful before."

This is a difficult ask, especially in environments where consistency and control are rewarded. Asking someone to adopt a new system means asking them to abandon habits, take risks, and trust something they didn't choose.

When leaders fail to recognize that reality, they focus on installation instead of adoption. The project may be technically complete, but the organization hasn't actually changed.

Programs can be delivered on time and under budget, yet a year later, no one is using the system. That's the difference between technical implementation and behavioral transformation.

The shift from technology-first to behavior-first isn't about deprioritizing tools. It's about recognizing that tools are only valuable when they are used well. And that only happens when people feel ready, equipped, and aligned.

CHAPTER 5

The Leadership Imperative

No change initiative survives without committed, visible leadership.

Yet in many industrial transformations, executives set the direction, approve the funding, and then step back. They rely on project teams to manage the rollout and expect frontline teams to fall in line.

That rarely works.

"People need to see that leadership is not just supportive in words, but in action," said Betsy Bond. "If you're asking teams to change, you have to show them that you're in it with them."

Leadership presence doesn't mean micromanagement. It means being close enough to the work to understand the pain points, celebrate progress, and course-correct when necessary.

"When leaders stay engaged, it builds credibility," added Peter Enns. "It signals that the change is real and that it matters."

This is especially true in complex organizations where multiple departments, locations, and systems must align. If leaders send conflicting messages, trust breaks down. If they vanish after kickoff, momentum fades.

Teams don't need perfection. But they do need consistency. They need to hear the vision repeated. And they need to know that someone is listening.

"If we're not walking the floor, if we're not hearing what people are dealing with, we're going to miss the signs of resistance," said Sandy Nolette.

CASE STUDY:

When Resistance Signals Deeper Problems

During one transformation effort at Suncor, Peter Enns shared that a control room operator actively resisted a new system by deliberately allowing a situation that the technology was designed to prevent. It wasn't sabotage. It was a signal. The operator didn't trust the system and hadn't been brought into the change.

This resistance cost the team time, confidence, and operational credibility. It was a powerful reminder that real buy-in isn't earned through email updates. It's earned through daily engagement and genuine inclusion. The operator's behavior revealed a fundamental gap in how the change was being managed - not as a technical rollout, but as a human process requiring trust and understanding.

CHAPTER 6

Trust is the Hardest Variable



Change moves at the speed of trust.

In any industrial transformation, the biggest hurdle isn't technical complexity; it's skepticism.

Frontline teams have often seen change initiatives come and go. Promises are made. Systems are launched. And when the dust settles, nothing really improves. In some cases, it gets harder.

That history creates a kind of organizational scar tissue. People may smile and nod, but underneath there's hesitation.

"You can hear it in the quiet. You can feel it when teams disengage," said Sandy Nolette. "When people don't trust the process, they stop giving you their best thinking."

Trust is not built in kickoff meetings or slide decks. It's built through conversations, consistency, and response. It's built when people raise concerns and see that they're taken seriously.

"The biggest wins we had came from listening more than talking," said Peter Enns. "Teams knew the change was coming. What they needed was proof that it would be worth it."

Trust is also fragile. It only takes a few missteps - a missed follow-up, a conflicting directive, an executive who disappears - to undo progress.

"You can't build trust on top of a broken relationship," said Betsy Bond. "You have to start by repairing that before expecting adoption."

CASE STUDY:

Rebuilding Trust After Past Failures

During the panel, Peter Enns described at Suncor how one part of the organization had been burned by previous technology deployments. When a new system was introduced, the team smiled in meetings but quietly avoided using the tool. They didn't believe it would last.

The turning point came when leadership addressed the past directly, acknowledged the frustration, and made space for dialogue. This didn't happen in a status meeting. It happened during field visits and informal check-ins where people felt heard. Only after rebuilding that foundation of trust could real engagement begin.

CHAPTER 7

Sustainment Over Sign-Off

In many projects, success is declared at go-live.

The system works. The training is complete. The team moves on.

But for change management, go-live is not the finish line. It's the beginning of the moment that matters most - what happens after the project team packs up.

"Victory is not at go-live. It's at the realization of the benefits," said Betsy Bond. "That happens six, twelve, eighteen months later. That's when you know if it worked."

Sustainment means the change actually sticks. It means the new way of working becomes the default, not the exception. It means teams aren't just trained, but fluent. Not just compliant, but confident.

"Success is when the system becomes part of how people do their job without thinking about it," added Peter Enns.

But this stage is where many transformations start to decay. Support is pulled. Leaders turn their attention to the next initiative. Metrics shift to new priorities. And the adoption effort loses momentum.

"You need a long runway for reinforcement," said Sandy Nolette. "That's where true adoption is built, after the project ends."

Sustainment requires planning, ownership, and continued visibility. It means measuring success not just in technical terms, but in behavioral ones. Are people using the system? Are they using it well? Are they helping others succeed?

CASE STUDY:

The Fade-Out Effect

Sandy Nolette shared that in one transformation, teams were successfully trained and deployed. But six months later, usage had dropped significantly. When they investigated, they found that without ongoing reinforcement, teams had started reverting to legacy tools.

It wasn't sabotage. It was habit.

Without leadership reinforcement and embedded champions, even the most well-implemented change can fade into the background. This case illustrates why sustainment planning must be as rigorous as the initial rollout strategy.



CHAPTER 8

Using Structured Tools and Methodologies

Effective change management isn't guesswork.

It requires structured approaches that bring objectivity to what can often feel like a “soft” discipline. Organizations like Prosci have developed frameworks that help leaders assess, plan, and measure change more systematically.

These methodologies provide critical benefits:

Risk and Impact Assessment: Not every change requires the same level of support. Using structured tools like Prosci’s risk assessment model helps organizations right-size their change management approach based on factors like organizational complexity, cultural readiness, and the degree of disruption to daily workflows.

ADKAR Model: This framework focuses on the individual level of change, measuring Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement. It provides clear checkpoints for understanding where people are in their change journey and what support they need next.

Change Readiness Evaluation: Before launching any initiative, structured assessments can reveal potential obstacles and cultural barriers that might derail adoption. This includes evaluating leadership alignment, past change experiences, and organizational capacity for transformation.

Measurement Frameworks: Rather than relying on anecdotal feedback, structured methodologies provide specific metrics for tracking adoption, engagement, and sustainment over time.

CASE STUDY:

Structured Assessment Prevents Project Failure

Betsy Bond from Prosci shared an example where a comprehensive risk assessment revealed that a planned technology rollout would likely fail due to poor leadership alignment and change fatigue in the organization. Rather than proceeding with the original timeline, the project team invested six months in cultural preparation and leadership development. The eventual rollout was highly successful because the foundation had been properly built.

This demonstrates how structured tools can prevent costly failures by identifying and addressing root causes before they become project-ending problems.

CHAPTER 9

What to Measure Instead

Traditional project metrics tell you about implementation, not transformation.

If you want to know whether change is really working, you need different measures.

From Attendance to Adoption: Training attendance doesn't predict usage. Instead, measure post-training confidence, time to proficiency, frequency of use, and whether people can teach others.

From Implementation to Realization: Change isn't successful when the tool goes live - it's successful when benefits are realized. Track reduction in process time, increase in data accuracy, uptake of new workflows, and sustained use of automated tools.

From Static KPIs to Continuous Feedback: Staying power matters. Measure retention rates, knowledge transfer capabilities, requests for additional training, and system utilization patterns over time.

Cultural Indicators: Watch for signs of deeper alignment - increased trust in leadership, frontline suggestions for improvements, teams building on the new system rather than avoiding it, and fewer manual workarounds.

These metrics speak to real-world engagement, not just compliance. They help distinguish between surface-level adoption and genuine transformation



CHAPTER 10

From Buy-In to Belief

It's not enough for teams to comply with change. They need to believe in it.

That shift, from passive buy-in to active belief, is the difference between surface-level transformation and real operational evolution. It's the moment when people stop asking, "How long will this last?" and start saying, "This is how we work now."

"When you focus on people, process, and performance equally, that's when transformation becomes sustainable," said Betsy Bond.

You need to see change not as a task, but as a journey you're on with your people. That's when the results start to scale.

Achieving that requires more than a solid project plan. It takes leadership visibility, cultural alignment, and a sustained commitment to making change meaningful. It means treating change management as strategic infrastructure, not administrative overhead.

What This Looks Like in Practice

Organizations that successfully build belief rather than just buy-in share common characteristics:

- Leaders who remain visibly engaged throughout the transformation
- Change strategies that are tailored to operational realities
- Structured methodologies that bring rigor to the human side of change
- Metrics that measure behavior and sustainment, not just implementation
- Cultural foundations built before technical deployment begins

At Dexcent, we believe the real challenge of digital transformation isn't technological. It's human.

And we help industrial organizations navigate that complexity with strategies built around how people actually think, work, and adopt new tools.

Whether you're in the early stages of planning or deep into implementation, the questions are the same:

- Have your leaders earned trust across all levels?
- Have your teams been invited into the change?
- Is adoption being measured in behavior, not just system use?
- Will your investment still be delivering value a year from now?

If you're unsure how to answer any of those, now is the time to revisit your approach.



CONCLUSION

Key Takeaways for Industrial Leaders



Across all the experiences shared by leaders from **Suncor**, **Prosci**, and **Dexcent**, several critical themes emerge that every operations leader should understand:

Change fatigue is real and accelerating.

Energy sector teams are navigating intense pressure with more technology, higher targets, and fewer resources. Without proper support, even the best initiatives will stall under the weight of organizational exhaustion.

Middle management is the crucial missing link.

Leaders set the vision and frontline teams do the work, but middle managers translate change into reality. They're often left unsupported despite being critical to success.

Resistance is information, not opposition.

When people resist, they're telling you what matters to them. Great change leaders listen, empathize, and adjust rather than pushing through.

Sustainment is the real success metric.

Going live isn't the end - it's the beginning. Real impact shows up in lasting behavior change, sustained adoption, and cultural alignment that persists long after project teams depart.

Structured methodologies matter.

Using frameworks like Prosci's ADKAR model and risk assessment tools brings objectivity and rigor to change management, helping organizations avoid costly failures and right-size their approach.

What You Need to Do Differently

To move from checkbox change to meaningful transformation, organizations must:

- **Involve people early and often, especially those closest to the work**
- **Equip middle managers to lead change, not just deliver updates**
- **Define success in human terms: confidence, usage, peer learning**
- **Make measurement matter by tying data to behavior, not just deliverables**
- **Invest in empathy as a leadership skill, not an optional trait**
- **Use structured tools to assess risk and plan appropriately**

Most critically, treat change management as an enabler of business value, not an afterthought.

The Path Forward

Change doesn't have to fade. It doesn't have to stall. And it doesn't have to be a cycle of rework, resistance, and retreat.

With the right strategy - one that puts people first, uses proven methodologies, and maintains long-term focus - your transformation can succeed not just at go-live, but for the long haul.

The future of industrial operations doesn't belong to the organizations with the most technology. It belongs to those that best understand how to help their people thrive alongside that technology.

If your organization is ready to take transformation seriously, start where it matters most: with the human side of change.

Ready to Get Started?

[Watch the full webinar replays](#) to hear directly from experts at Suncor, Prosci, and Dexcent at dexcent.com/webinars.

Ready for a real-world change readiness review?

Start a conversation with Dexcent today at dexcent.com/contact-us. We'll help you assess your risks, align your teams, and build the momentum your transformation deserves.

Don't let your next digital transformation become another expensive lesson in what doesn't work. Make it the foundation for lasting operational excellence.