

GRADS *of* LIFE

Defining the Change in a Skills-First Movement

Unlocking skills-first success begins with the “why”

Overview

Organizational change management enables the successful adoption of initiatives through moving stakeholders from a company’s current state to a desired future state. To begin this journey, it is crucial to **articulate the “why”** of implementing skills-first.

Adopting a skills-first approach requires a compelling “why” that resonates with logic, emotion, and ability. A strong change statement addresses how people are **ready (logic), willing (emotion), and able (ability)** to make the change. While other aspects of change are fluid, this foundational message should be consistent throughout the transformation to ensure alignment and drive adoption.

Defining the Change

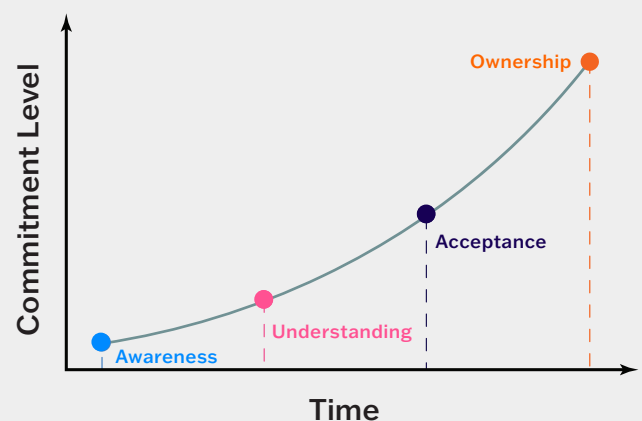
1. **What & Why:** Identify the current state, what will change, and why it is happening now.
 - a. This should include all aspects of why people are **ready, willing, and able** to make the change as well as what people may lose in adoption.
2. **Benefits & Future State:** Draw a compelling picture of the benefits to stakeholders and the ideal future state.
3. **How:** Outline strategies or activities that will lead to the future state.

The Change Adoption Curve

While change management is a process, movement toward adoption happens at the speed of individual readiness. The Change Adoption Curve illustrates how individuals move through various levels of commitment to change over time. The stages, in order of increasing commitment, are:

- **Awareness:** Is aware of proposed change and the need for change.
- **Understanding:** Understands how the change contributes to the organization’s mission and vision.
- **Acceptance:** Accepts and is willing to tell others how the change contributes to the organization’s mission and vision.
- **Ownership:** Owns and confidently shares the successes related to the change with others.

The purpose of all four tenets of skills-first change management is to move individuals along this curve, and it starts with the “why.”



Sample Change Definition

Below is an example of a skills-first change statement for a fictional organization.

What	What is changing? What is not? What is current state?	Starting in 2025, we will remove degree requirements for manufacturing roles. This shift will require retraining hiring managers and transforming talent acquisition processes to focus on skills, not credentials.
Why	Why are we doing this? What isn't working? Why now?	Talent shortages and competition have driven the need to find qualified candidates without unnecessary barriers. We must act now to meet rising production demands and stay competitive.
Benefits	What benefits do we anticipate? Why is this worth it?	By emphasizing skills over credentials, we create fairer hiring practices, retain more talent, and support employees in their growth, resulting in improved internal mobility and stronger talent pipelines.
Future State	What is our vision of the future? What would these benefits achieve long term?	A workplace where learning and growth opportunities are accessible to all, fostering fairness, increased promotions, and a shared understanding of role expectations.
How	What strategies will we use to achieve the future state?	Over the next 6-9 months, we will build skills profiles for key roles, train hiring managers on new processes, and collaborate with L&D teams to upskill employees and facilitate lateral mobility.

Key Takeaways

- A well-defined change statement crafts a clear, compelling case for change and ensures everyone is ready, willing, and able to move forward together.
- Be sure to articulate what is changing, what is lost, and what the benefits of the change are.
- Reference the change throughout each stage of the adoption curve.
- Use your change statement as a north star to drive a successful skills-first transformation and regularly align stakeholders.



Supporting Resources & Tools

Use [the DICE® calculator](#) by BCG to gauge your initiative's success potential today. The framework provides a subjective assessment of initiatives and spotlights interventions that would improve their chances of success. While it is recommended to use this at the start of an initiative, this tool is also useful during project reviews or milestones.