

# AI Change Management:

## The Inverted Transformation Imperative for the C-Suite

How to lead AI change when you can't keep up with it yourself



# For the first time in business history,

we are seeing something completely new: regular employees are using new AI technology faster than the companies they work for. This is not just another technology that needs a quick fix. Instead, it completely changes how companies adopt new technology. In the past, new technology moved from top leaders down to workers. Now, it moves from everyday workers up to leadership. The center of change has shifted from the boardroom to employee chat channels and personal accounts.



“Individuals—human beings both in and outside of business—are adopting AI quicker than can be embraced at the enterprise level. As leaders, we’ve realized we’ve got a vulnerability here.”

**Toby Boudreaux**  
Global Vice President of Data  
Engineering at Publicis Sapient

## The “Shadow AI” phenomenon

The evidence of this “Shadow AI” phenomenon is both overwhelming and vaguely terrifying. A staggering 73.8 percent of workplace ChatGPT accounts belong not to the corporate domain but to personal email addresses circulating beneath official channels. Between March 2023 and March 2024, the corporate data being fed into these unsanctioned AI tools exploded by 485 percent, a figure that would trigger a heart event in any self-respecting CISO.

## AI technology is ahead of AI culture

Meanwhile, the C-suite finds itself in the unfamiliar position of playing catch-up, like parents discovering their teenagers have been throwing parties while they were away at management retreats. Leadership is dutifully developing strategies, allocating budgets and commissioning consultants to develop upskilling roadmaps, yet Cisco’s AI Readiness Index reveals an organizational culture unprepared for the revolution already occurring.

Only 9 percent of companies report being fully prepared culturally for AI integration—a figure that inspires approximately the same confidence as a paper umbrella in a hurricane.



# AI change management is... on the decline?

The statistics on AI change management are bleak: while 76 percent of organizations claim to have some form of AI change management plan (down from 79 percent last year), a mere 28 percent would describe their plan as comprehensive. The remainder exist in various states of doneness—62 percent “in progress” and 10 percent in “draft form,” which one suspects might translate to “someone mentioned it in a meeting once.”

A ProSci Survey helpfully reminds us that only 1 in 8 projects with “poor change management programs” met or exceeded goals, a correlation that should surprise exactly no one.

**So how does the C-suite lead change management when adoption speeds have already left organizational readiness in the dust?**

In this strange new world, change cannot simply flow from the top like holy wisdom. Instead, we need bi-directional movement: leadership providing the guardrails, north star priorities and compliance frameworks, while simultaneously embracing (or at least acknowledging) the employee-driven knowledge and innovation already transforming workflows at the bottom.

What follows are insights from seven Publicis Sapient consulting veterans, who’s collective 150+ years of experience grants them the wisdom to navigate this particular corporate paradox.

They explain how **each member of the C-suite is uniquely positioned to drive AI change management—or at minimum, prevent it from driving them into existential crisis.**



# Key takeaways



**A Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** who's still relying on secondhand decks to grasp AI strategy is already behind—the only way to lead is to actually use the tools.

**For Chief Operations Officers (COOs)**, the priority isn't crafting the perfect rollout plan—it's setting a focused direction so teams can experiment and learn quickly.

**Chief Information Officers (CIOs)** are driving change in the most fragile part of the org, where legacy systems, data silos, and compliance worries collide—and they still have to deliver early wins before anyone else can move.

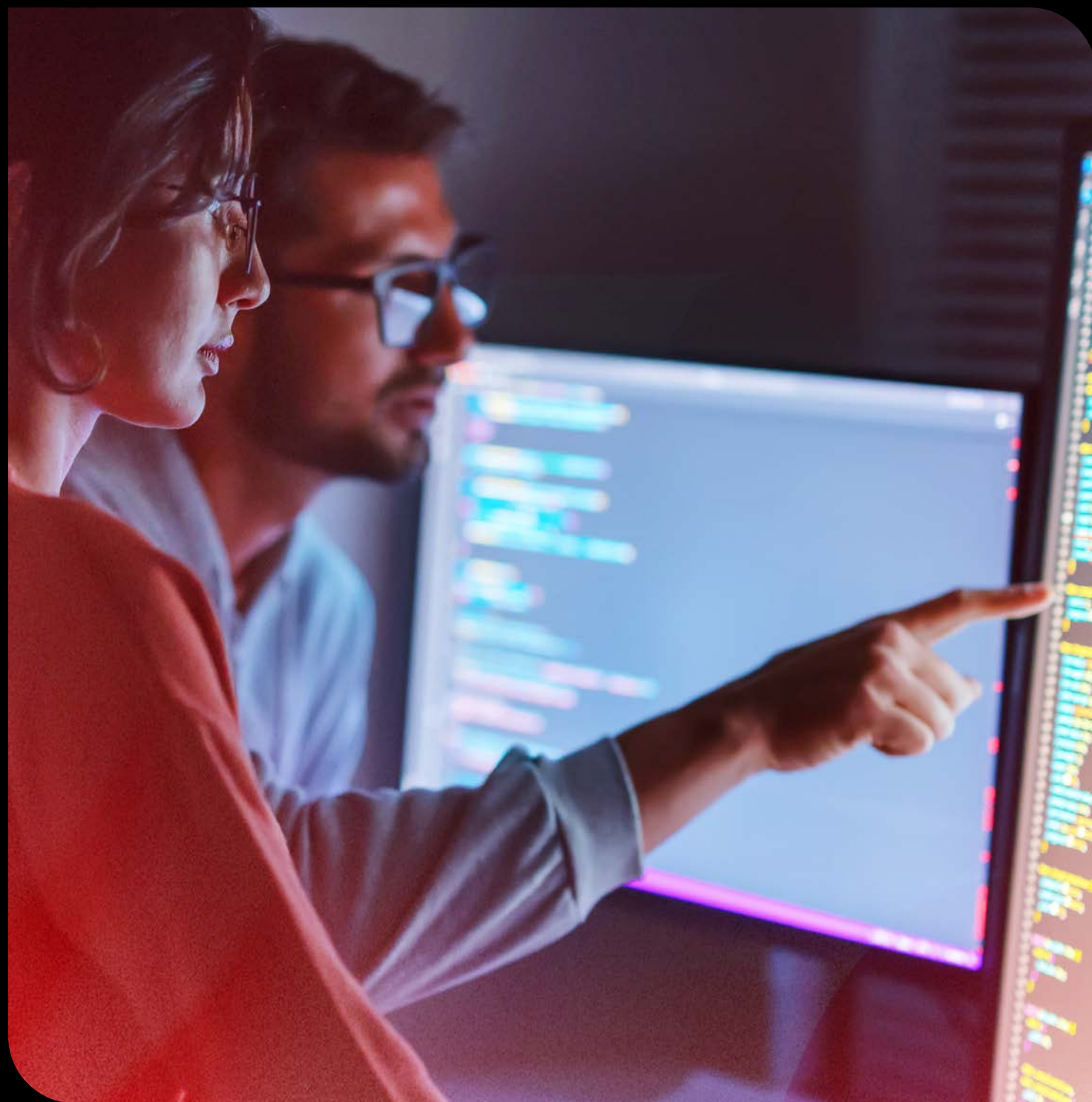
**Chief Technical Officers (CTOs)** need to stop measuring productivity by lines of code. AI is changing how dev teams work—and what they're even for.

**A Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)** may have unified customer data, but until they align the teams behind it, AI will only reinforce the same old fragmentation.

**For Chief Financial Officers (CFOs)** the math is changing fast—when AI can deliver outcomes in seconds, traditional billing models stop making sense.

**For Chief Experience Officers (CXOs)**, AI is already shaping every customer touchpoint, but unless you actively connect the dots across teams and channels, the experience will still feel completely disconnected.

**And the Chief Digital Officer (CDO)?** Your job isn't to evangelize AI—it's to make it usable, safe and scalable for teams who don't have time to wait.



# The CTO: AI-human partnership architect

As CTO, you're witnessing a strange new reality: your developers now code alongside AI that generates solutions at speeds that make human-only programming seem quaint. Your QA teams build testing agents that find bugs in places humans never thought to look. This isn't just a new tool in the toolkit—it's a fundamental reimagining of how technical teams function.

**“If we are not considering AI as a full-fledged, first-class citizen of the process, you are missing the point. Individual interactions with AI personas in the team will become more important.”**



**Rakesh Ravuri**

CTO and Engineering Leader at Publicis Sapient



## Change management imperative 1:

### Redesign teams for human-AI collaboration

The traditional Agile Manifesto told developers to value “individuals and interactions over processes and tools.” But in this new reality, we instead need an AI-Assisted mindset: “Individuals and AI interactions over rigid roles and ceremonies.” This isn’t about replacing humans with machines—it’s about creating partnerships where each contributes their strengths.

What does this mean in practice? Your development processes must now include AI as a team member, not just as a tool. Define clear responsibilities for what humans do and what AI does. Measure success by what you achieve together, not just by human productivity alone.

## Change management imperative 2:

### Make AI-powered software transparent

The Agile Manifesto prioritized “working software over comprehensive documentation.” The AI era demands “explainable, working software over comprehensive documentation.” When AI helps build your systems, people need to understand how decisions are made.

To achieve this, you’ll need to create standards for AI transparency. Build testing frameworks that verify AI-generated code is understandable. Train your teams to document how AI makes decisions, just as they document their own code.



## Change management imperative 3:

### Innovation never stops

In the past, innovation happened in bursts—a hackathon here, a special project there. With AI, innovation becomes constant. The new standard shifts from “Responding to change over following a plan” to “Responding at pace over perpetuating legacy patterns.”

This requires technical pipelines that quickly evaluate AI-generated solutions. You’ll need feedback systems that improve AI capabilities based on real-world performance. And you’ll need to measure innovation by how quickly you adapt, not by how well you stick to outdated plans.

## Change management imperative 4:

### Build connected systems, not isolated apps

Traditional development built standalone applications. AI creates value when different capabilities work together—document processing, conversation, decision support—all connected in one ecosystem.

Finding the right adoption speed is crucial. There’s pressure to join the “AI arms race,” but moving too fast can cause chaos if your organization isn’t ready. Moving too slowly means falling behind. The best approach is creating a thoughtful roadmap with input from across your organization before implementation.

To build these ecosystems, standardize how AI components connect to each other. Create shared knowledge bases. Set up governance that ensures consistency across all your AI systems.



# Change management imperative 5:

## Develop New Technical Skills


AI is changing what it means to be a technical expert. Instead of specializing deeply in specific technologies, the focus shifts to orchestration, judgment and innovation.

Successful organizations train developers to guide and evaluate AI contributions rather than write every line of code themselves. They create mentorship programs to help experienced engineers work with AI. And they update promotion criteria to reward effectiveness in human-AI teamwork.

**Bottom line:** The revolutionary moment for technical organizations isn't when AI writes perfect code, but when CTOs redefine their development culture to treat algorithms as team members with distinct strengths, weaknesses and working styles that complement rather than replace their human counterparts.



# The corporate revolution from below: final thoughts

A person stands at the end of a long, dark tunnel, looking out at a bright blue sky with white clouds. The tunnel's walls are lined with curved, metallic-looking panels that reflect the light from the opening. The person is a small silhouette in the distance, emphasizing the vastness of the light ahead.

The executive suite now faces a profound choice: attempt to control a revolution already in progress or become its most thoughtful enablers, creating frameworks that channel its energy rather than contain it.

The C-suite's value lies both in a decent understanding of AI capabilities (which will continuously evolve beyond any static comprehension) as well as in creating the organizational conditions where both humans and machines can continuously learn together.

What connects all successful AI transformations is humility—the recognition that no leader, regardless of title, fully comprehends the end state toward which we're collectively evolving. The organizations that thrive won't be those with the most advanced AI strategies on paper, but those that have reconstructed themselves, in difficult ways, to adapt continuously as AI capabilities expand in directions we cannot yet imagine.

The question isn't whether your organization will transform—it's whether that transformation will happen coherently, with intentional guidance from the c-suite, or haphazardly through a thousand unconnected adaptations.

The AI revolution won't wait for your carefully orchestrated change management plan. It's already happening, with or without your permission.