

# Adapt, survive and thrive:

## Leading successful transformation—part one

Because when projects  
succeed, society benefits





# Introduction

The accelerating pace of change means business leaders face the difficulty of contending with established challenges, as well as having to navigate new ones. Research by PwC found that 45% of global CEOs fear their organisation won't be economically viable in 10 years' time, with most of those saying they must reinvent their businesses for the future.

Adaptation is essential to surviving...and thriving. Leading transformations that make a business fit for the future requires the right people and processes, but also an understanding of the wider context that necessitates those transformations.

This is the first of two papers based on conversations that took place at roundtable events held by the Association for Project Management (APM) in winter 2024. Senior business executives from a range of sectors contributed to the discussions with ideas and expertise. Their insights are reflected in the content.

## Contributors

- Jo Ahmed, Practice Senior Partner, North West, Deloitte
- Prof. Adam Boddison OBE, Chief Executive Officer, APM
- James Cole, Managing Director, Panache Cruises
- Phil Jones MBE, Managing Director, Brother UK
- Richard Murray, Director, Drees and Sommer
- Sam Price, Talent Solutions Director, Morson Group
- Dr Andrew Schuster, Managing Partner, The Promoveo Group
- Barry Townsend, Senior Manager, Milliken
- John Porter, Co-Founder and Engagement Director, Engage
- Nik Wyers, Managing Director, Floorbrite Group



# Understand the context for change

For an organisation to deliver meaningful change, that change should be viewed in the context of wider organisational transformation. Contributors acknowledged that every business needs to transform somehow, but transformation needs to be integrated to stop inertia from creeping in.

When discussing pros and cons of transformative investment, it's important to understand what is changing in the external environment or what internal need is forcing your organisation to adapt. Examples include:

- Digital modernisation
- Regulatory change
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Process efficiency
- Capital projects
- Working environment

Based on this context, the expertise and experience needed to manage the delivery methods and associated risks can be identified and sourced.

Dr Andrew Schuster explained: "When organisations face major investment decisions, it tends to relate to one of these areas, although they aren't mutually exclusive.

"What I'd add to that conversation is the context in which those decisions are happening. Ask yourself 'why are we doing this and what is the consequence?' Is it because the environment is changing? Is it because you're trying to chase or catch up with something?

"The other thing that's changed is our work environment. That has changed how we work as teams...we have to think about how we interact with people in a different way using technology. Emphasising that human dynamic is another way the context is changing."

## A formula for success

Phil Jones MBE, Managing Director at Brother UK, shared a formula for successful transformation, as follows: "We're trying to navigate as business leaders; to steady our ships and, in some cases, to re-engineer our ships to sail different seas. We're in a very dynamic environment – more dynamic than it has ever been...That's very demanding on people leading change and transformation.

"I believe that successful transformation is a result of this formula:

**Strategy + execution x culture (people, policies and perspectives)**



**The three Ds of deviation (distraction, dysfunction and disalignment)**

"In all transformation, it's the bottom part that is often the major contributor to your ability to transform. That is to say, success is normally about the people.

"Every organisation needs to transform somehow. The issue is how you get the reasons for that transformation articulated clearly and across the organisation without causing inertia."



# Consider a phased approach for larger transformations



One contributor shared that their business was changing its IT system, its CRM system and workforce management system, as part of its diversification strategy.

"In order to stay ahead of the game, we're having to address our technology infrastructure.

"What we've always done might have worked, but we have to diversify...I truly believe if we don't think outside the box and develop new avenues and new ideas, we will get left behind."

Historically, projects were conceived as a long period of effort leading to an output. In the new world, a common management approach for large projects is to break them into smaller modules, sometimes referred to as 'proximate objectives' or – less informally – as 'chunks'.

Uncertainty prevents organisations, clients and stakeholders from making timely decisions. To speed this up (and reduce the chance of failure), challenges can be broken into labelled chunks. A chunk of change sets achievable goals, solvable problems and delivers an outcome that can be celebrated as a milestone. Setting up interim structures, guidance groups and temporary governance bodies for each chunk will support delivery.



# Design for pace, but don't force change

C-suite members often approach transformation with a sense of urgency. It has been said that time is a window through which more bad things can fly, the bigger it gets. As projects progress, systems and processes can become more cumbersome. This can slow the pace of decision-making and delivery, and often increases costs. Pace should therefore be the desired state for a project and the contributing factors that enable its delivery, such as decision-making.

It is important to balance the need for pace with patience, however, to avoid projects being forced or rushed through. Many different elements of a project's operating environment have to operate well, in addition to being connected with other live projects and business-as-usual functions. This creates complexity, and there will inevitably be change as a project progresses.

The governance structure and the management controls that support a project should be designed, implemented and operated with pace in mind. But the underlying sense of urgency must not drift into impatience that forces through delivery.

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A sense of urgency and impatience creates pressure, which can harm outcomes and our ability to be effective.

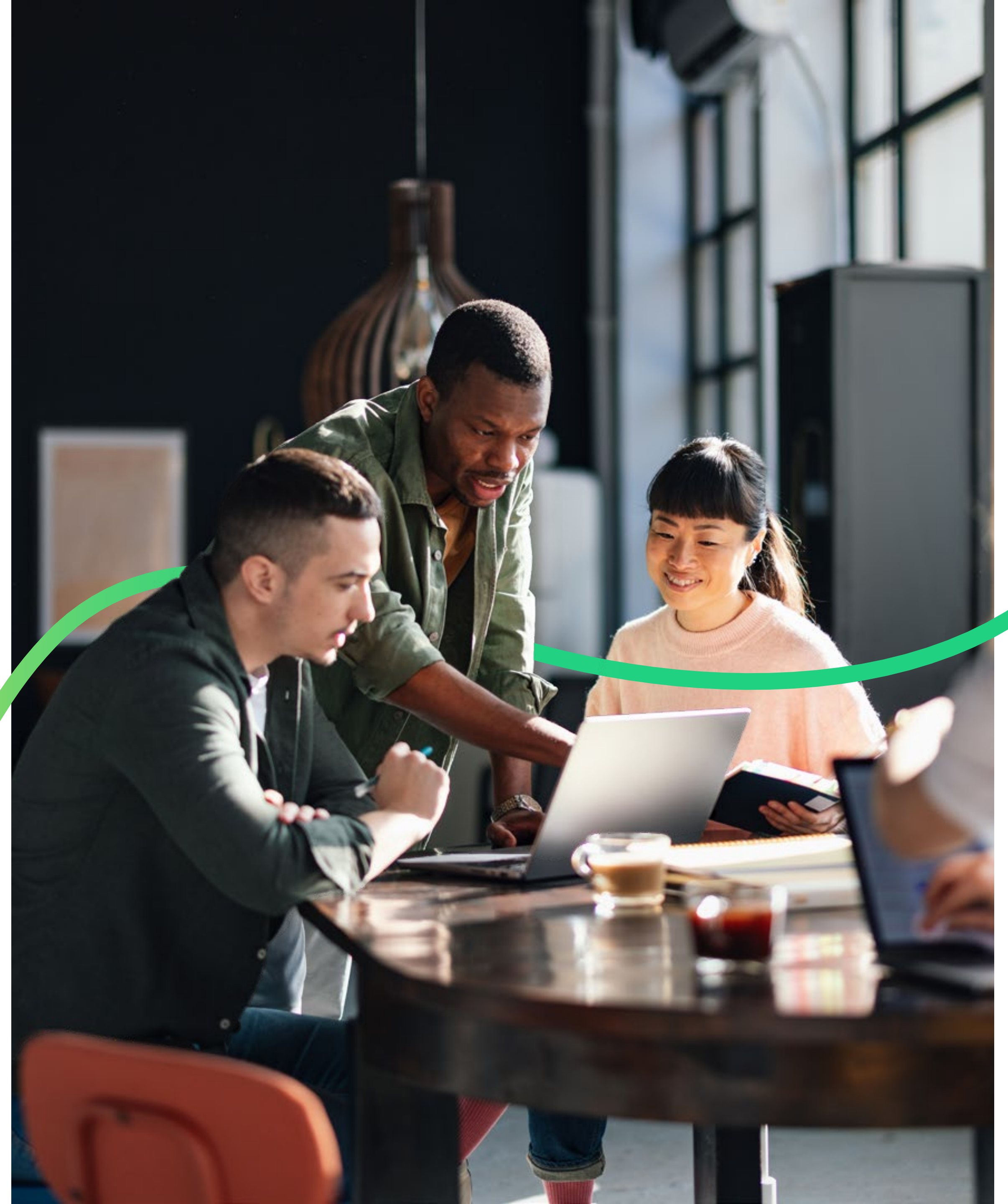


# Support change with appointments that fit your structure

For change that requires the development of certain skills, Champions can be introduced to support uptake. Champions are people who already have the required knowledge and/or skills who can relay them to other staff members, or who act as cheerleaders to encourage people to embrace an impending change.

Alternatively, a Chief Project Officer may be a worthwhile addition to your leadership team. This person can help other leaders and stakeholders understand the value of projects, as well as developing capability throughout. Importantly, they drive major strategic projects and ensure they are delivered on time, within budget, and to the required specifications.

Whatever decision is made must of course be the right fit for your organisation's unique needs and structure. One contributor shared an example of where their business appointed a Digital Transformation Champion but encountered difficulty because, they explained, the responsibility was too concentrated when it would have suited their structure better to have it spread out.





# Be guided by vision, mission and values

Strategic transformation is about realising a vision. Change initiatives undertaken to help a business survive and thrive must align to this. Having a strong vision, mission statement or organisational values provides a benchmark against which the outcomes of a change can be measured. But they also provide direction for the project leaders who are planning and delivering changes. This can be a powerful tool.

James Cole, Founder and CEO of Panache Cruises, explained the tangible impact of a strong vision on his company's growth, saying: "We didn't exist four years ago. We're now one of the fastest growing businesses in the UK. One key thing for us is that when we first started, we were guided by a strong vision and mission statements.

"We absolutely put our colleagues first. When you look to the long term, you invest in your colleagues.

"When you change habits, you get significant transformation."

For Panache Cruises, this belief was put into practice as they established training programmes for their staff and introduced quarterly 'cultural temperature checks' to gauge how well change is working and how it is supporting business goals. As Panache Cruises expanded into the USA, the business applied the same mentality of looking after people by providing its new U.S employees with the same work benefits as their British counterparts.

"Being led by our vision, mission and values, being focused on the culture and taking it seriously, that's what has helped us grow significantly."





# About APM

The Association for Project Management (APM) is a professional membership organisation that sets the standards for the project profession and raises its profile. APM is the only chartered organisation representing the project profession in the world. As a registered charity, APM delivers learning and networking opportunities, qualifications, research, resources, events, and best practice guidance for the project community, helping the profession deliver better.

APM currently has over 45,000 members and more than 470 corporate partners based in 140 countries.

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## Further resources

- [\*The difficult questions you must ask of your strategy\*](#)
- [\*Directing Change: A Guide to Governance of Project Management, 3rd edition\*](#)
- [\*What is Project Communication\*](#)
- [\*The Chief Project Officer – An Essential Part of the Future C-Suite\*](#)





# Join Us at the Next Windsor Project Summit

Following the success of the inaugural Windsor Project Summit, we invite senior executives to express their interest in attending our next event set to take place at St George's House, Windsor Castle on Thursday 23 October 2025.

Designed exclusively for C-suite leaders, this summit offers a unique platform to explore cutting-edge insights, share strategic perspectives, and shape the future of the project profession. To maintain the calibre of discussions and networking opportunities, participation is limited to executives holding C-suite positions. If you meet this criterion and wish to be considered for an invitation, **[please fill out this form.](#)**







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