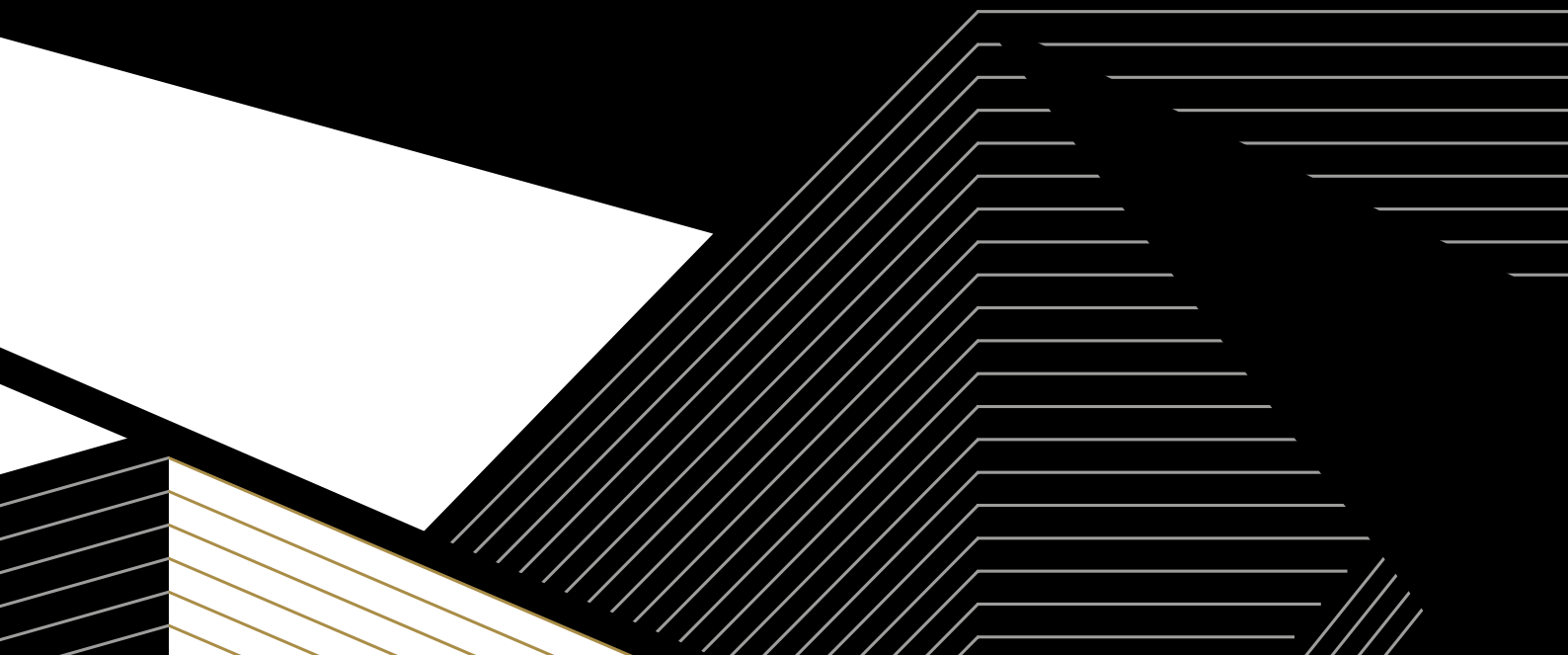
B2B Marketing

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
Circleresearch
The B2B experts

B2B Leaders Report 2016

Agents of change



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About this report

Agents of change brings together insights from a range of B2B leaders, and aims to demonstrate what it takes to drive and manage change successfully in B2B marketing departments.

Approximately 100 B2B leaders took part in the survey for this research project, including members of the B2B Leaders programme.

The research took place in August 2016, and was carried out in association with Circle Research. All writing, editing and design was carried out by B2B Marketing.

Introduction

Riding the tidal wave of change

Riding the tidal wave of change



Joel Harrison
Editor-in-chief, B2B Marketing

There's one skill or attribute above all others that is fundamental to determining a senior B2B marketer's success or otherwise in 2016: their ability to manage or respond to change.

Change is all around us in corporate life – never have organisations faced demands to change so often, so quickly or so comprehensively. And this makes life difficult for B2B leaders: typically they are bombarded relentlessly by requests, appeals, instructions or demands for change, which can come from any source and affect any number of aspects of the marketing team or function. Keeping pace with this tidal wave of demands is an exhausting, bewildering, confusing and above all overwhelming challenge, which is likely to defeat all but the sharpest of operators.

But it doesn't have to be this way – this scenario assumes that marketers are only, and can only, be the facilitators or deliverers of change instigated elsewhere. What if they were to become the drivers or agents of change? What if they could shape, determine or even initiate changes that organisations felt driven to align

Becoming an agent of change is absolutely central to the battle of relevance and responsibility that B2B marketers have been fighting for decades

with and focus on? It's not such a crazy idea – a few B2B leaders are already demonstrating this in practice, but too many remain the subject of change programmes conceived elsewhere, and are therefore at the mercy of these often fickle ideas and their originators.

This report is designed to show senior B2B marketers how to make this subtle but profound transition, from facilitators of change to instigators, and explores how they can benefit from it.

To begin, we look at the results of our own research into the relationship that B2B leaders currently have with organisational change, and how they currently engage and respond to it. We then look at the characteristics and behaviours required to pivot towards this new way of operating, and the implications for marketers in the field.

Becoming an 'agent of change' isn't something easy to achieve; it may require patience and political adeptness on the part of the individual marketer, and is unlikely to happen overnight. But it can reap significant rewards for both individual marketers and the wider organisation in terms of commercial success. More to the point, it's absolutely central to the battle of relevance and responsibility that B2B marketers have been fighting for decades and will continue to fight for years to come.

Section 1

The frequency of change

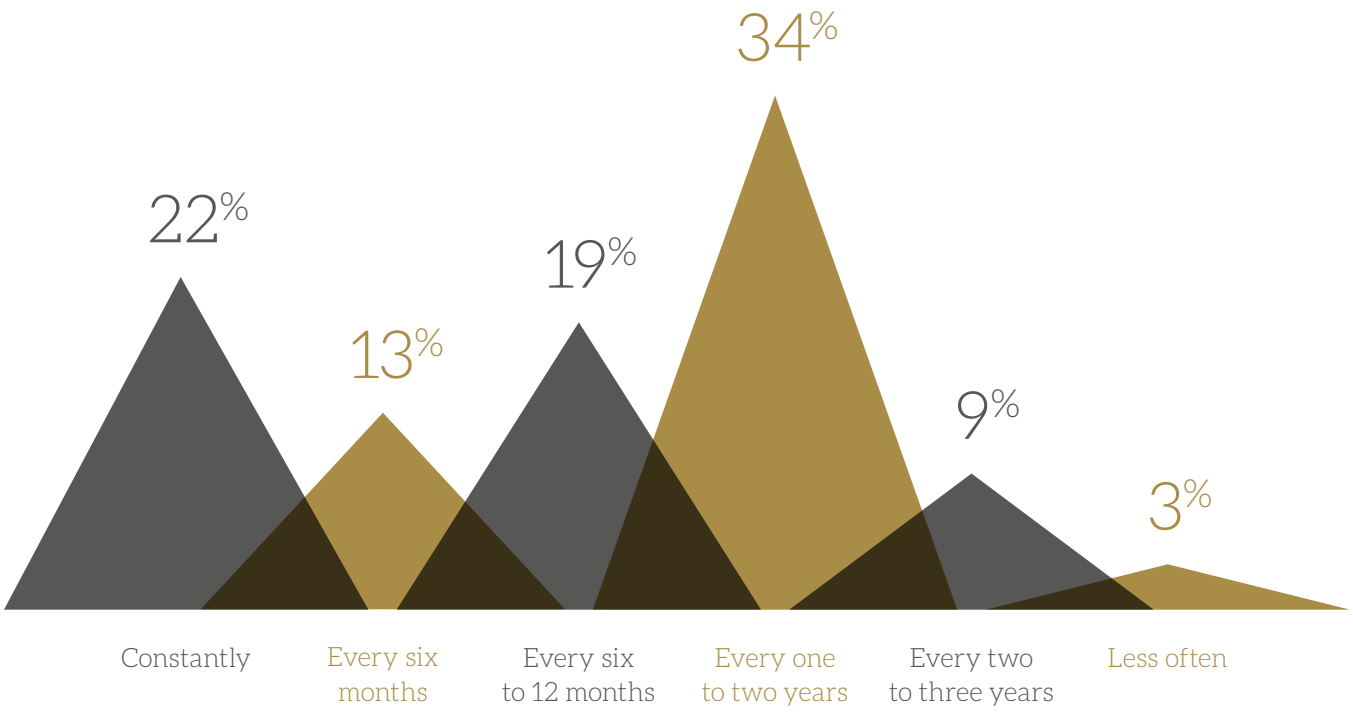
How often is change really happening?

Change is always around the corner

B2B marketing leaders are tasked with dealing with change in their organisations all the time – all while getting on with the day job. When asked 'how often do significant changes tend to take place in your organisation (e.g. a restructure or major acquisition)?', nine in 10 B2B marketers say change occurs at least every two years, while half say it occurs at least every year. There is also a significant proportion (22%) of B2B leaders who are having to deal with organisational change 'constantly'.

A significant proportion of B2B leaders are having to deal with organisational change 'constantly'

How often do significant changes tend to take place in your organisation (e.g. a restructure, new strategy, integration or an acquisition)?

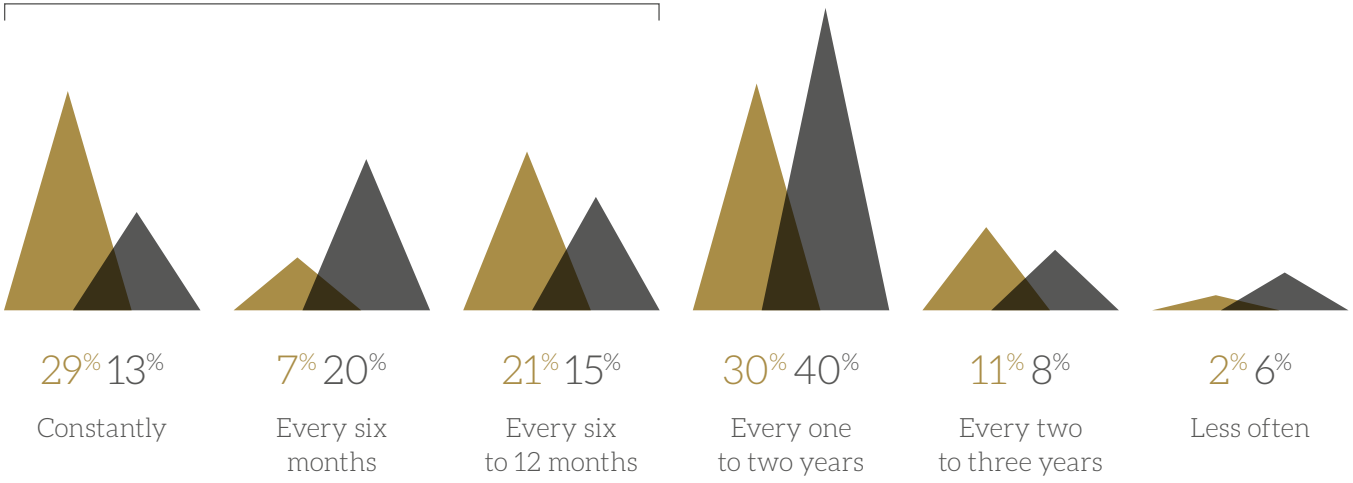


Frequent change isn't necessarily a bad thing

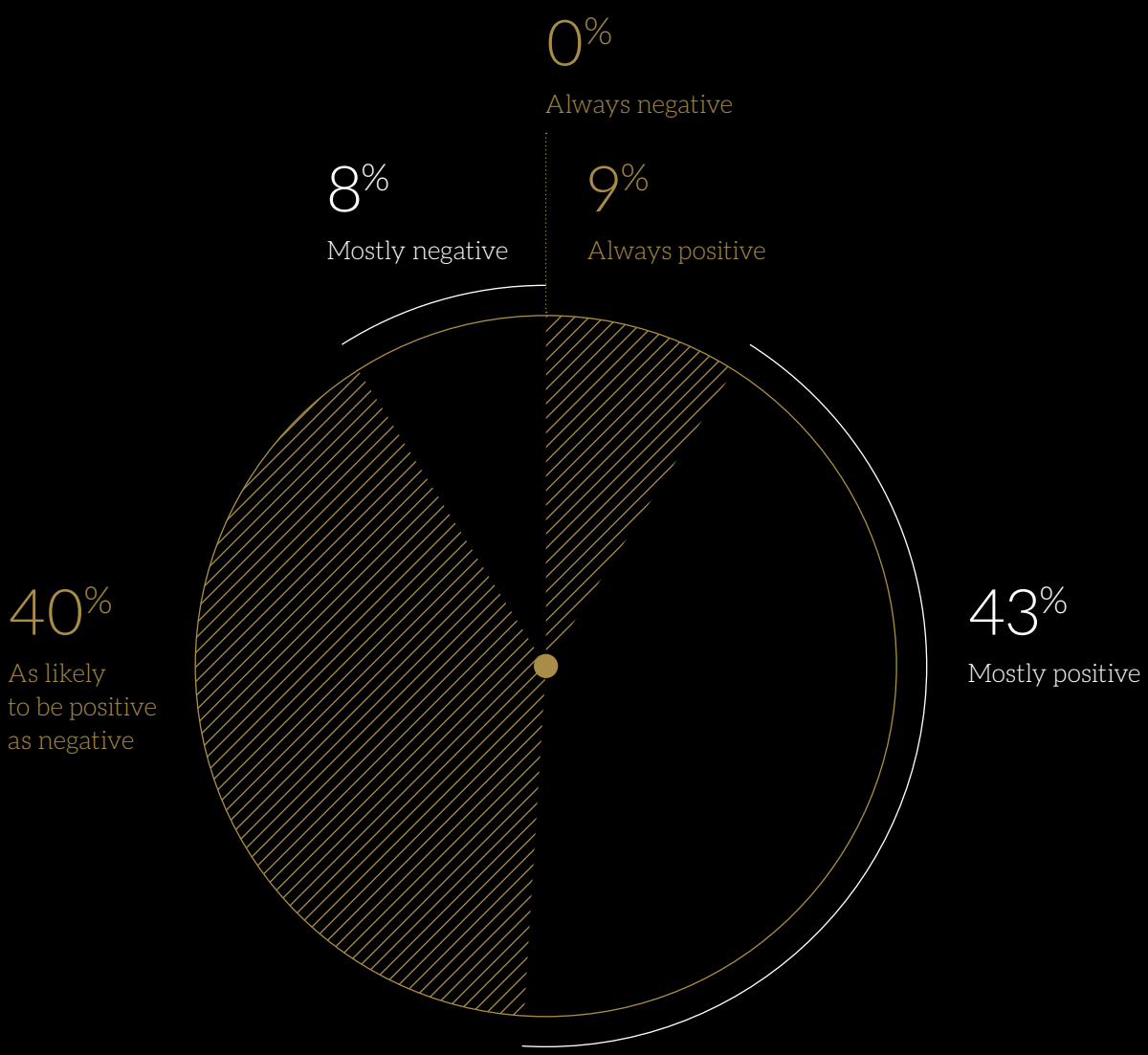
Surely all this upheaval is an undeniable challenge? Not so. While it could be assumed that going through so many changes on such a regular basis would be a recipe for instability and dissatisfaction, it appears change doesn't necessarily carry negative consequences for the wider organisation or the marketing team.

Indeed, organisations accustomed to dealing with change on a regular basis are also much better placed to cope with it. When we asked leaders how effective their organisations were when it comes to managing change, and mapped this against the frequency of change, it's those who are going through change the most regularly who are also the best equipped to deal with it.

Some 57% of those who believe their organisation is effective at dealing with change say it occurs at least every year.



When your organisation undergoes a significant change, does its impact on marketing tend to be more positive or negative?



Section 2

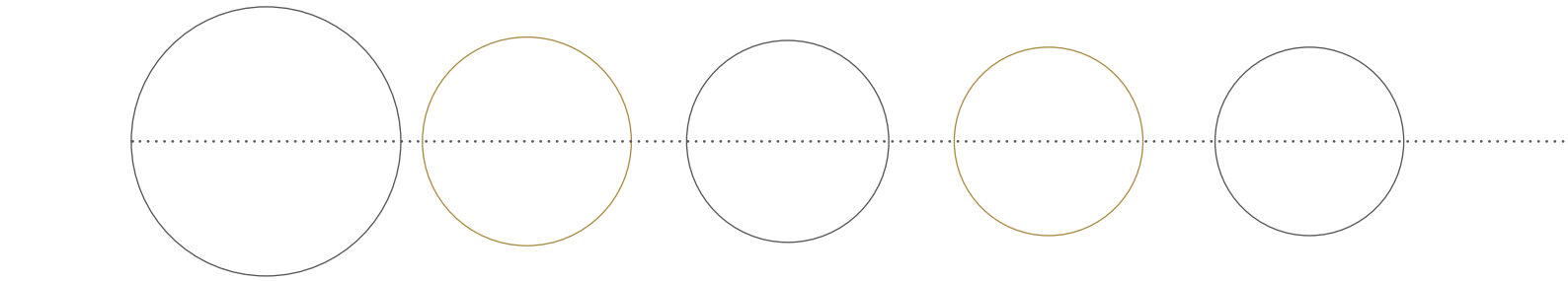
Types of change

Which kinds of change have the biggest impact?

What sort of change are we talking about?

We've seen that the majority of change happening within organisations either has a positive impact on marketing, or is just as likely to be positive as negative. But what kind of change is taking place within organisations, and what impact is it having? When we asked which types of organisational change tend to have the greatest impact on the marketing department, the top three answers were 'financial instability' (40%) 'development and implementation of new strategy' (31%) and 'changes following a merger or acquisition' (30%).

In your experience, which of the following changes in the wider organisation tend to have the greatest impact on the marketing department?



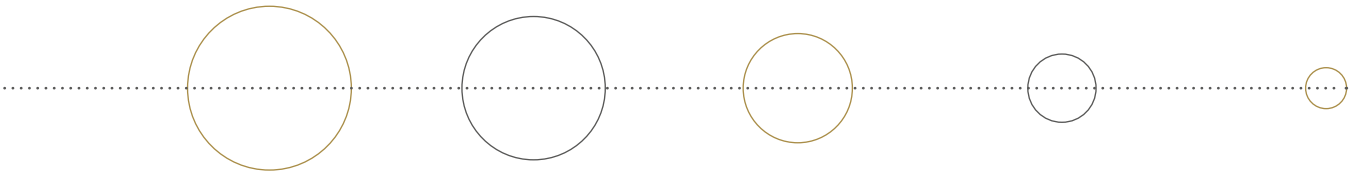
40% Financial instability

31% Development and implementation of new strategy

30% Changes following a merger or acquisition

28% Product development

28% Change in leadership



24% Organisational restructure

21% Expansion into new markets

16% Implementation of new technology

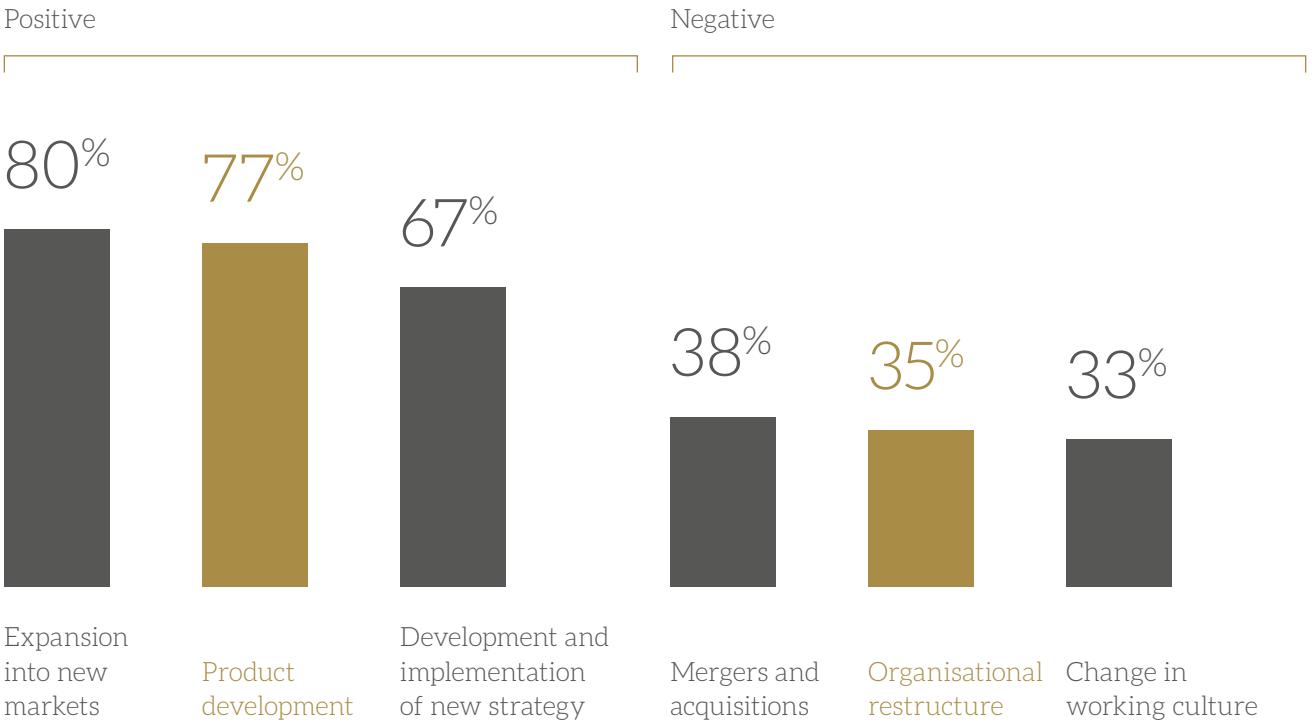
10% Change in working processes

6% Change in working culture

The type of change that has the most positive impact on marketing is, to an extent, understandable: 'expansion into new markets' is seen as beneficial by 80% of leaders, followed by 'product development' (77%) and 'development and implementation of new strategy' (67%).

At the other end of the spectrum, there is one standout type of change that is seen to have a particularly negative impact on marketing: mergers and acquisitions (perceived as negative by 38%).

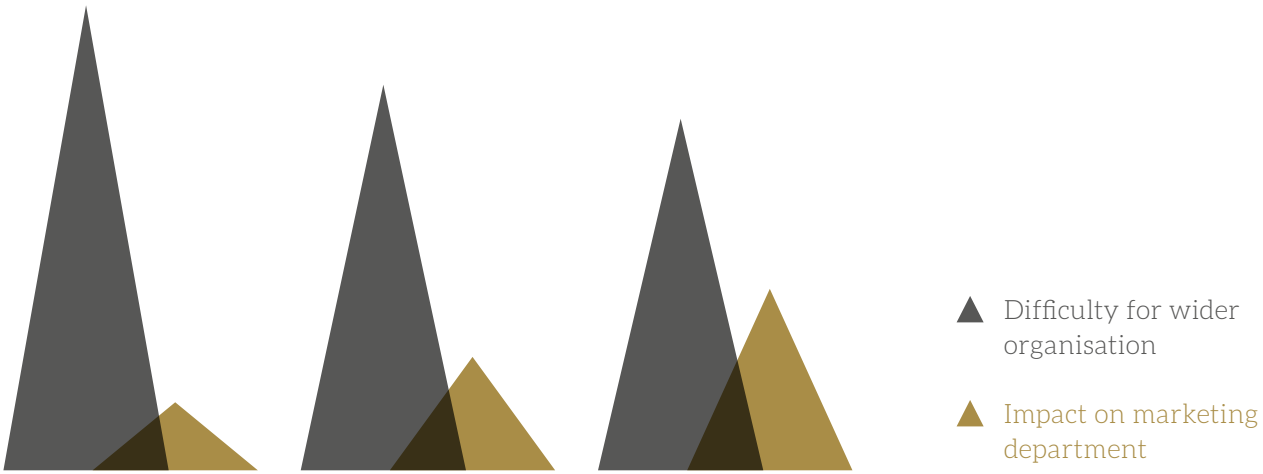
Which types of change have the most positive or negative impact on the marketing department?



Which types of change cause the biggest headaches?

So, certain types of change have more of an impact than others, but which types of change throw up the most problems for organisations and their marketing departments? The numbers reveal an interesting story here, as it seems the most challenging changes for businesses also have a limited impact on marketing. 'Change in culture', 'change in work processes' and 'implementation of new technology' were seen as most problematic at organisational level, while at the same time they are seen to have minimal effect on marketing.

These findings indicate a notable disconnect between marketing and the wider organisation, something backed up by the fact that only 52% of boards include a representative from marketing – something we'll explore in more detail later on.



Section 3

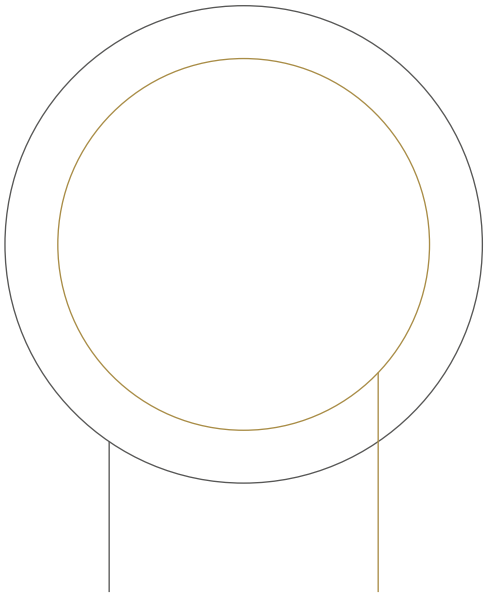
Adapting to change versus driving change

Why is driving change so important?

The difference matters

The difference between 'adapting' to change and 'driving' change may not necessarily seem important, but when you consider that it's about being proactive versus reactive, and what this means in terms of the broader success of marketing within the business, the difference becomes quite significant.

And while leaders are optimistic about their ability to both adapt to and drive change, it's clear there's a gap in ability between the two.



Percentage of B2B leaders who say they're 'good' or 'very good'

77% Adapting to change

66% Driving change

To some extent, leaders' hands are tied when it comes to being able to effectively drive change

What's stopping leaders from driving change?

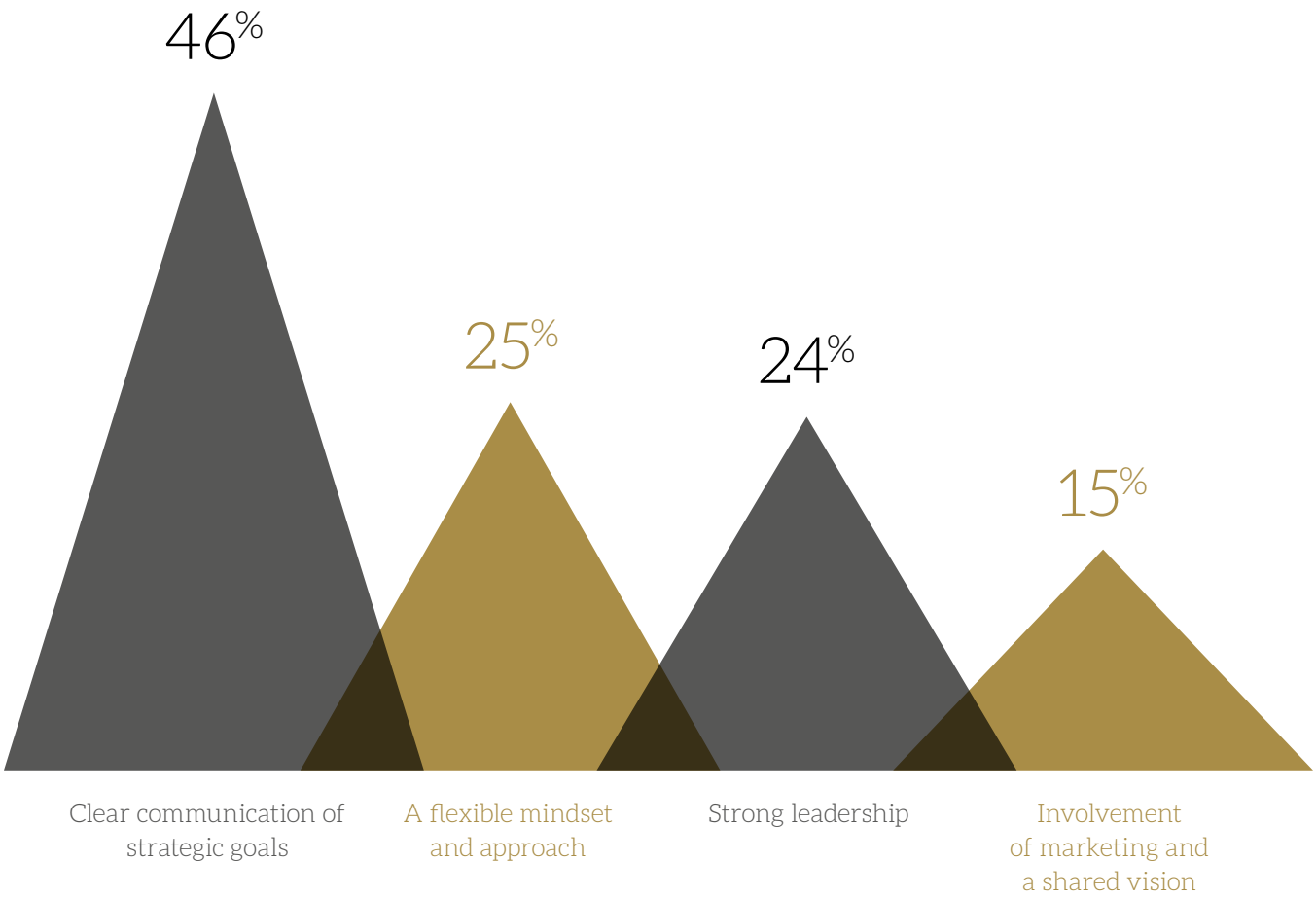
The next question is: why are marketing departments – and their leaders – better able to adapt to change than drive it? To find out, we asked about the most common barriers and enablers to driving change.

The responses further suggested that marketing departments are not necessarily operating in the most positive environments, which is holding marketing leaders back from being able to effectively drive change.

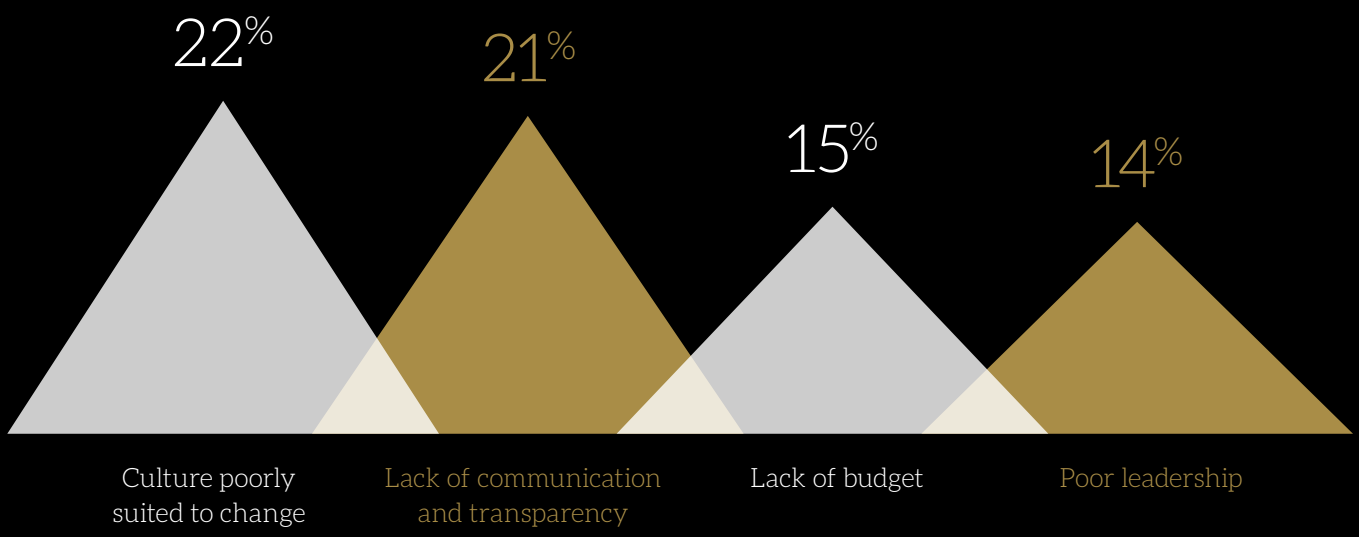
The results suggest that, to some extent, leaders' hands are tied when it comes to being able to effectively drive change. The most common barrier is a company culture that is poorly suited to change and slow to take on innovation, and when we asked leaders what their biggest challenge is when it comes to handling change (rather than just driving it), the most common answers included 'skills shortages within the team' (36%), 'a lack of budget' (33%) and 'a lack of coherent strategy' (30%).

In terms of the enablers for successfully driving change, by far the most common theme was clear communication and honest dialogues, alongside clear strategy and specific goals.

When it comes to driving change, what do you feel are the most common enablers?



When it comes to driving change, what do you feel are the most common barriers?



Section 4

How to become a successful change-maker

What are the keys to successfully driving change?

The skills and qualities of successful change-makers

We've seen that the ability to drive change is a crucial skill for marketing leaders and their teams, so what can leaders do to make sure they're best positioned to drive change in the future?

The answer lies in marketing's position and influence within the organisation, and the data clearly backs this up. Some 80% of those who say they're strong at driving change are either 'highly influential' or 'influential' when it comes to driving wider business strategy in the organisation. Furthermore, 73% of those who describe themselves as effective at driving change say marketing's contribution to the business is valued at board level, compared to just 50% of those who say their department is weak when it comes to driving change.

The qualities of change-making organisations

The features of organisations best equipped to manage change effectively include:

76%

Clear leadership from the top

63%

Communication of reasons for change across the business

35%

Definitive goals and timelines

But what of marketing leaders themselves? What are the skills and attributes of those who *are* change-makers within their organisations? We posed this question, and five key themes emerged:

Being supportive

Providing your team with encouragement and reassurance in the face of significant change is vital. It may be a case of holding a few hands while you take the lead, but the most experienced marketers understand that unsupported team members can prove a big barrier to success.

Honesty and transparency

Do you pride yourself on your authenticity? Your team will pick up on any attempt to obscure the real reasons behind the changes you're introducing, so make sure you remain as candid and sincere as possible.

Exceptional communication skills

Making sure your team understands your plan, the big-picture reasons behind it, and their role in implementation is absolutely key. Without clear dialogue they're likely to feel isolated and undervalued, so make sure channels of communication are open at all times.

A positive attitude

Despite occasionally feeling challenged and worn down by colleagues resistant to change, it's important to outline the positive outcomes of the changes you're driving. If the instigator and driver of change appears unconvinced of its merits, how do you expect the wider team to feel?

Pragmatism and flexibility

It's important to be able to work with change, rather than take a rigid and resolute approach. The most successful leaders know that change is a fluid process and flexibility is key.

Change can be a hugely positive thing and send ripples of excitement through teams itching for a new challenge

It's clear then that the marketing leaders emerging front of pack are those who accept that driving change is about creating and articulating a vision of the future, and planning accordingly. Knowing where they see their team going is key: it gives leaders the ability to take a big-picture view of the role marketing plays in the wider business' commercial success, which can only be a good thing.

Added to this, an ability to influence at board level is crucial. Holding sway in the boardroom means leaders' visions for the future can be more than just vague, far-off pipedreams. Making grandiose-sounding plans a reality will always require the support of your most senior stakeholders, and they should be brought on side at the earliest possible moment.

And if the board needs serious consideration, so too does the leader's team, with the most experienced CMOs and heads of marketing aware that driving change is also about communicating their vision to those who will be implementing it. As our data suggests, transparency and pragmatism are crucial; it's also a good idea to invite feedback from your team around what could be changed in the future. You might be the person ultimately responsible for driving change, but a junior team member's suggestion could be what sparks that much sought-after transformation. It should come as no surprise that change can be a hugely positive thing and send ripples of excitement through teams itching for a new challenge and the chance to prove themselves. But it can also be viewed with scepticism, so in order to guarantee success, the most experienced leaders know they need to make sure the entire marketing team is brought along with them. Communicating what change will look like, how it will impact the team and the benefits it will bring will ensure their buy-in; it's about painting a picture of what the future looks like once change has taken place.

That, after all, is what it's all about: driving change for the better, and this is what the most successful marketing leaders are able to do. As our research clearly shows, change – in its many different facets and forms – happens all the time and being at the vanguard is what will continue to set the best apart from the rest in the future.

Section 5

Views from the top

Views from the top

We asked B2B leaders: what skills and qualities would you say a marketing leader needs to have to drive change effectively?

They have to believe (or be seen to actively support) the change agenda, even if the impact on the team isn't great. Acknowledge people's concerns – don't just ignore them.

A positive attitude with an eye on the horizon: marketing should be driving or anticipating change at all times. It's our job to spot it first.

A charismatic personality, positive attitude and 'walk the talk' management style.

Be humble, live what you preach, and show first how you deal with change before asking others to do so.

A powerful, convincing personality and a collaborative management style that brings people on board and doesn't berate them into making change.

Three-hundred-and-sixty degree awareness, listening skills and persistence.

An ability to create and then articulate a vision of the future – the dream of what will be.

They need to be pragmatic and willing to listen to alternative ideas for change – and, if they are good ideas, be prepared to accept them.

You need to demonstrate understanding and compassion – change is always about people, many of whom feel insecure, as much as it is about process and financials.

You need to be a team player – and team unlocker – so that you, and those in your team, are collaborating with the right people across the business.

Be an influencer at board level and understand full business strategy.

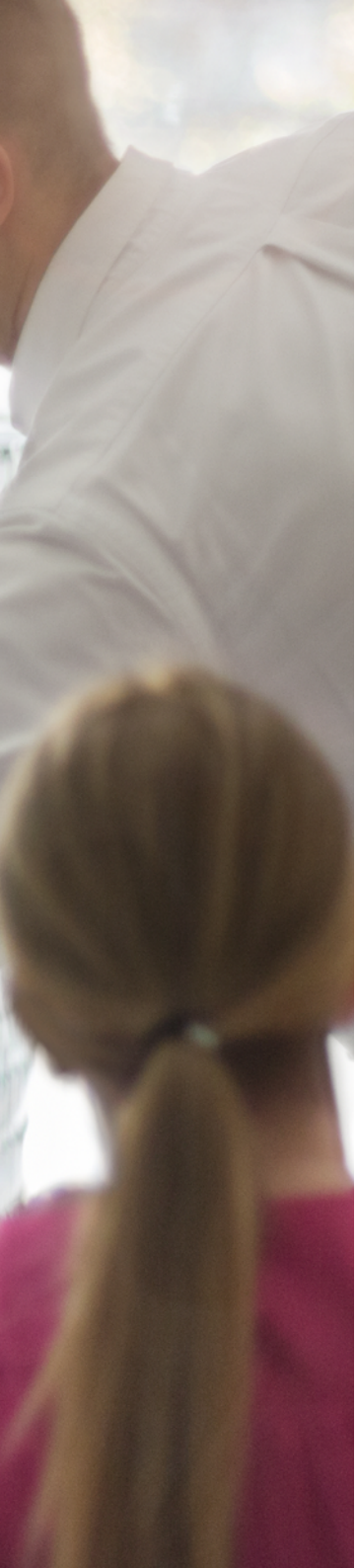
Even if a change needs to be 'imposed' it's important that everyone feels they're part of the journey.

See every change as a new opportunity rather than catastrophic devastation.

Leaders must have the vision to see the changes necessary, be able to convert that into a strategy and then be tenacious in effecting change. They must also have the leadership skills to take people with them on the journey.

They need to lead from the front with enthusiasm and clear communication.





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About

B2B Leaders

The B2B Leaders programme is a network of the most senior figures in the B2B marketing space, from heads of marketing to global CMOs of leading brands.

Members benefit from a unique and invaluable opportunity to regularly network and collaborate with senior-level peers, share insights and discuss strategic challenges.

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- Monthly roundtables, focused on key marketing leadership topics
- Monthly roundtable findings reports
- An annual *B2B Leaders Report*, with key research data and insights.

The B2B Leaders programme counts senior marketing names in Deloitte, Oracle, Atos, Dell, HSBC, KPMG and Adobe among its members, all sharing ideas on topics ranging from team development to board interaction.

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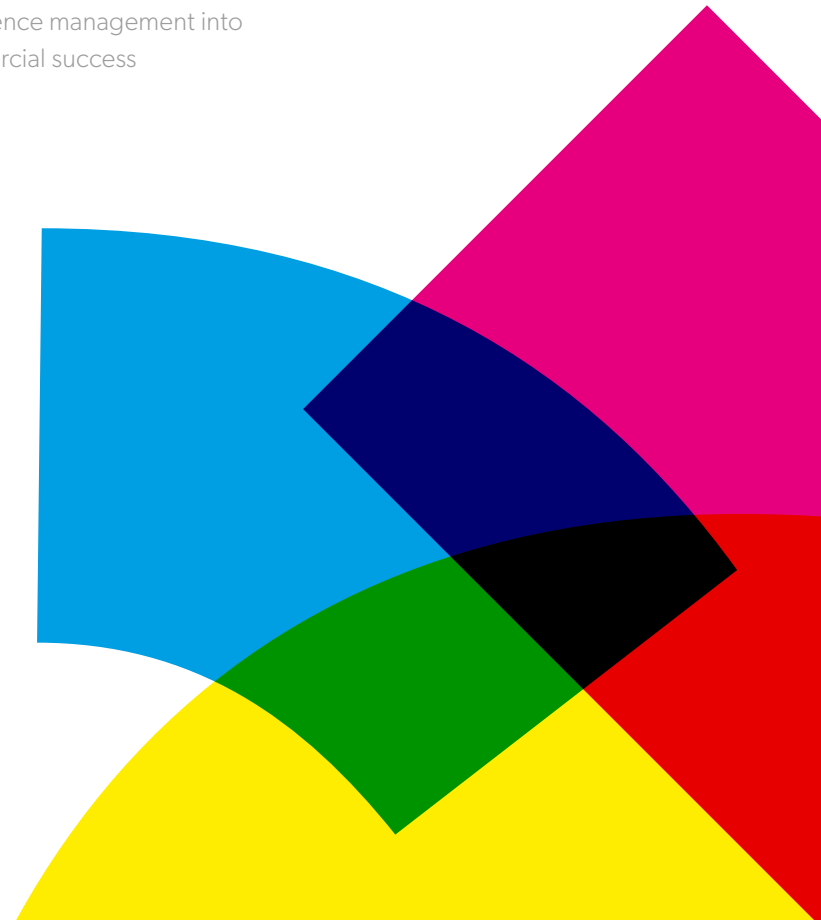
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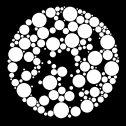
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