

The background of the slide features a close-up, vertical view of several surfboards. The boards are in various colors, including bright yellow, blue, and orange. They are slightly out of focus, creating a sense of depth. Overlaid on the left side of the image are several large, semi-transparent, curved shapes in shades of orange, pink, and red, resembling stylized waves or abstract architectural elements. At the top of the slide, there is a horizontal bar divided into four colored segments: pink, purple, blue, and green.

NineFeetTall

People First. AI Second.

Why AI Transformation must be
Change-Led, not Technology-Led

Why AI Transformation must be *Change-Led*, not Technology-Led

For years, organisations have approached transformation as a technology problem. A new ERP system. A new platform. Now, a new wave of AI tools. The assumption is simple: deploy the technology, and value will follow.

But the reality is far messier.

It has been well documented that only 35% of major change initiatives achieve their goals. At Nine Feet Tall, we consistently see the same pattern: organisations invest heavily in technology and still struggle to realise meaningful outcomes. Not because the technology is flawed, but because the transformation approach is.

The difference between success and failure isn't the sophistication of the tool.

It's whether the transformation is *Change-Led* or *Technology-Led*.



What is the difference between Technology-Led and Change-Led?

	TECHNOLOGY-LED SPECIALIST PARTNER	CHANGE-LED SPECIALIST PARTNER
Starting question	What does the system need to do?	What does the organisation need to become?
Definition of success	Go-live on time and on budget	Sustained adoption and benefits realisation
When change work begins	Comms plan drafted before go-live	Change capability, culture and values assessed before design
Who leads the work	Technical architects and project managers	Change specialists with market/technology expertise
Middle manager role	Recipients of cascade communications	Co-designers of process and culture
Risk measures	Solution fit, compute power, parameter sizes/definition, and model inference capacity	Adoption risks, privacy impacts, changing employee value proposition, attrition
Legacy	A working system	A change ready and capable organisation for the future



Starting in the Wrong Place

Technology-led transformation often begins with the solution:

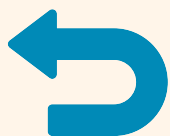
We need AI.

We need automation.

We need a new system.

From there, organisations work backwards, attempting to retrofit use cases, processes, and behaviours around the chosen technology.

This creates predictable challenges:



UNDEFINED VALUE

Unclear how success will be measured



LOW ADOPTION

People don't understand why change is happening



FRAGMENTED USE CASES

Pockets of innovation without business wide impact



WASTED INVESTMENT

Scaling solutions that don't solve real problems

In AI specifically, this often results in “pilot paralysis,” a proliferation of experiments with limited business impact.

Anchoring Change in Outcomes

Change-Led transformation takes a different approach and flips the starting point.

Instead of asking “What technology should we implement?”, it asks: “What measurable outcomes do we need to achieve and what capabilities will get us there?”.



Technology, including AI, then becomes an enabler – not the driver.

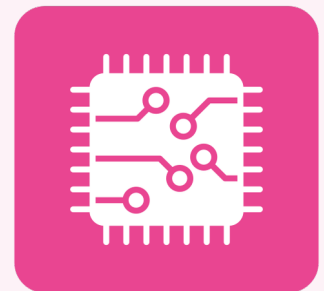
This approach focuses on:

Clear business outcomes, e.g. cost reduction, productivity, customer experience

End-to-end process improvement, not just automation

People and behaviour change, ensuring adoption and sustainability

Prioritisation of high-impact initiatives, rather than spreading effort thinly



We see this in practice in our own work, where organisations that define value early can stop non-value-adding initiatives and redirect investment to what truly matters.



Why This Matters More Than Ever for AI

AI has been the talking point of every Digital Transformation conversation for some time, yet according to McKinsey research:

“ nearly two-thirds of organisations are still in AI experimentation or pilot phases.”

We know that AI has the potential to amplify both opportunity and risk for most organisations. By focusing on Change-Led transformation for AI implementation we are more likely to have long term success and a clearer ROI. Done well, it can transform productivity, decision-making, and customer experience. Done poorly, it becomes expensive experimentation with limited return.

**The reason is simple:
AI is only as effective as the work it is embedded within.**

If you embed AI into unclear workflows, you create confusion... faster. In fact, currently over 80% of AI projects fail to deliver any business value.

That's why AI transformation must be treated as a business change programme, not a technology rollout, a theme increasingly recognised across the market and reflected in industry thinking.

American Express introduced AI to enhance its customer service operations, using machine learning to predict customer needs and personalise interactions. Early efforts focused on deploying advanced models and integrating them into service channels.

However, real impact only came when the initiative was treated as a broader business change programme. American Express changed customer journeys, aligned teams around new service principles, and trained agents to collaborate with AI insights rather than replace them.



The Critical Role of People in AI Adoption

One of the most overlooked aspects of AI transformation is the human dimension. Adoption is not guaranteed simply because a tool is powerful.

People need to:

Trust the
outputs

Understand how it
changes their role

Be confident
in using it

See the value it
creates for them
and the organisation



We've seen across multiple transformation programmes that **cultural change and capability building are often the missing link**, even when the technology is sound.

In AI, this challenge is even more pronounced. Without a clear narrative of value, AI can feel abstract, threatening, or irrelevant.

A Practical Shift in Approach

Moving to a Change-Led transformation approach requires a deliberate shift in mindset and execution. Here is a process you can follow to make sure you are making a meaningful adjustment:



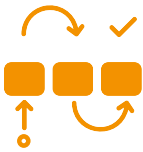
1. Start with value, not tools

Define the business outcomes you want to achieve and how you'll measure success. Focus on the organisational change required, not just the capabilities of the solution.



2. Identify high-value opportunities

Prioritise initiatives that can create measurable business impact and support strategic objectives, rather than those that are simply easiest to implement.



3. Design for humans, agents and governance

Reimagine workflows end-to-end, considering behavioural, cultural and operational impacts from the outset, with technology as one part of the solution.



4. Invest in people, change and shared learning

Build understanding, trust and capability early. Engage leaders and middle managers as active participants in shaping new ways of working, rather than simply communicating change.



5. Scale with governance and continuous improvement

Move quickly from pilots to scaled impact once value is proven, supported by governance, review points, guidance and learning that enable organisations to adapt, expand or retire solutions as needs evolve.

Transformation is not something technology delivers. It's something organisations achieve through clarity of value, effective governance and sustained change.





by Vicky Rann, Change Lead and
Senior Manager at Nine Feet Tall

At Nine Feet Tall, we believe the organisations that will succeed with scaling AI aren't those with the most advanced tools.

If you're considering taking the next step with AI, why not book a *Digital Readiness Assessment* with us? This tailored review will help you determine whether your organisation has the foundation necessary to implement AI effectively, ensuring you're positioned for lasting success.

Get in touch today to arrange your assessment and unlock your organisation's potential.

ninefeettall.com/contact

info@ninefeettall.com
020 3126 4412

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