

# National Research Study

# CHANGE READINESS IN THOSE IN THE U.S.

KEY INSTIGHTS BRIEF February 2026

## ABOUT THE STUDY

Conducted by The Center for Generational Kinetics (CGK) in partnership with Cassandra Worthy, this national study surveyed 750 those in the US ages 16–65, weighted to the 2020 U.S. Census for age, region, gender, and ethnicity. Five questions were repeated verbatim from the 2022 benchmark study, enabling direct year-over-year comparisons. Results were analyzed by generation, gender, and job level\role.

## US BENCHMARK DATA (2022)

**Anxiety remains the dominant emotional response to workplace change**, driven largely by comfort with the status quo, even as most those in the US believe they have the ability to choose how they experience change and grow from it. The 2026 data reveals both the enduring emotional challenges and the emerging opportunities for organizations willing to invest in the human side of change.

## 4 KEY INSIGHTS

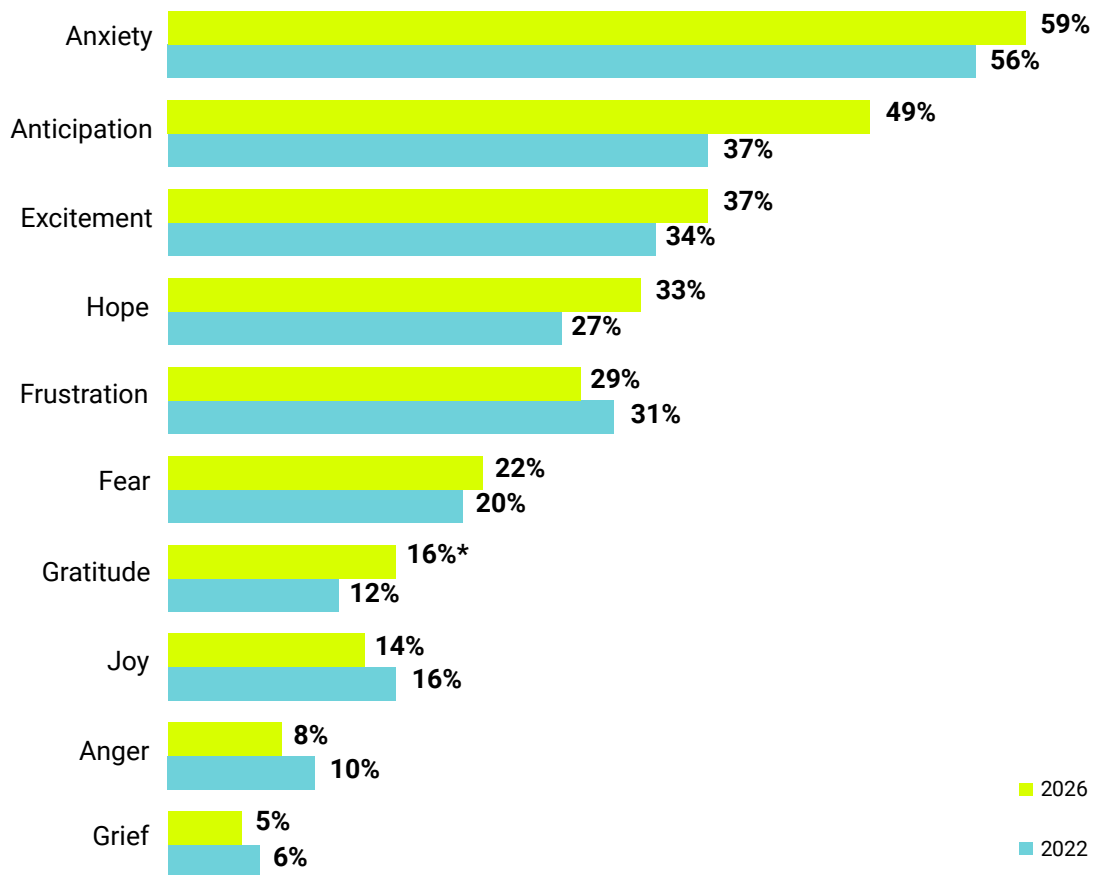


### ANXIETY REMAINS THE DOMINANT RESPONSE TO WORKPLACE CHANGE

More than half of those in the US in 2026 (59%) continue to feel anxiety more than any other emotion when experiencing change at work, closely tracking the 2022 benchmark (56%). This anxiety is primarily driven by comfort with the status quo: 37% of those in the US cite being comfortable with the way things currently are as a top contributor to their resistance to change, while 36% say they worry the change simply won't make things better.

Even as anxiety persists, there are promising signals: those in the US in 2026 are significantly more likely than in 2022 to feel anticipation (49% vs. 37%), hope (33% vs. 27%), and gratitude (16% vs. 12%) when facing change, suggesting that while anxiety remains the lead emotion, a broader emotional range is emerging.

## WHICH EMOTIONS DO YOU FEEL WHEN EXPERIENCING CHANGE AT WORK? (BY TOTAL)



Q1. Which of the following emotions do you feel experiencing *change* at work? Select all that apply. [BENCHMARK QUESTION]



82% of those in the US believe that people with stronger emotional intelligence handle change better.



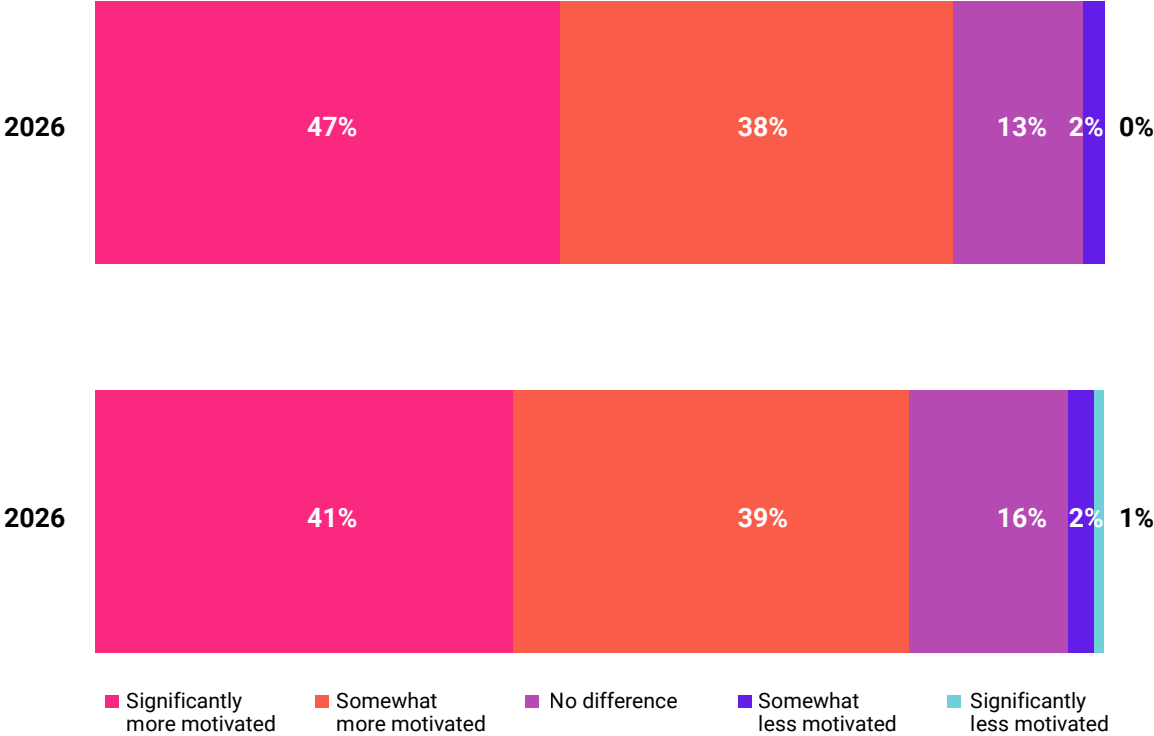
## FEELING HEARD IS THE BIGGEST UNLOCK

When it comes to motivating change adoption, the data is unambiguous: **psychological safety** and **feeling genuinely heard** are the most powerful levers available to organizations and leaders.

85% of those in the US in 2026 report being more motivated to adopt change when they feel truly heard and understood by their managers and peers, up significantly from 80% in 2022. Nearly half (47%) say they are significantly more motivated under these conditions, a meaningful jump from 41% four years ago.

Similarly, 83% of those in the US say they are more likely to adapt to change when they feel comfortable expressing their true emotions in the workplace. The message to leaders is clear: creating a psychologically safe, growth-oriented culture is not a soft benefit. It is the most direct path to change adoption.

**WHEN YOU FEEL TRULY HEARD AND UNDERSTOOD BY YOUR MANAGER AND PEERS ARE YOU MORE OR LESS MOTIVATED TO ADOPT A CHANGE?**  
(BY TOTAL)



Q8. When you feel truly heard and understood by your manager and peers, are you more or less motivated to adopt a change?  
Select one. [BENCHMARK QUESTION]

**85%**

of those in the US are more motivated to adopt change when they feel truly heard and understood by managers and peers in a psychologically safe, growth-oriented culture.

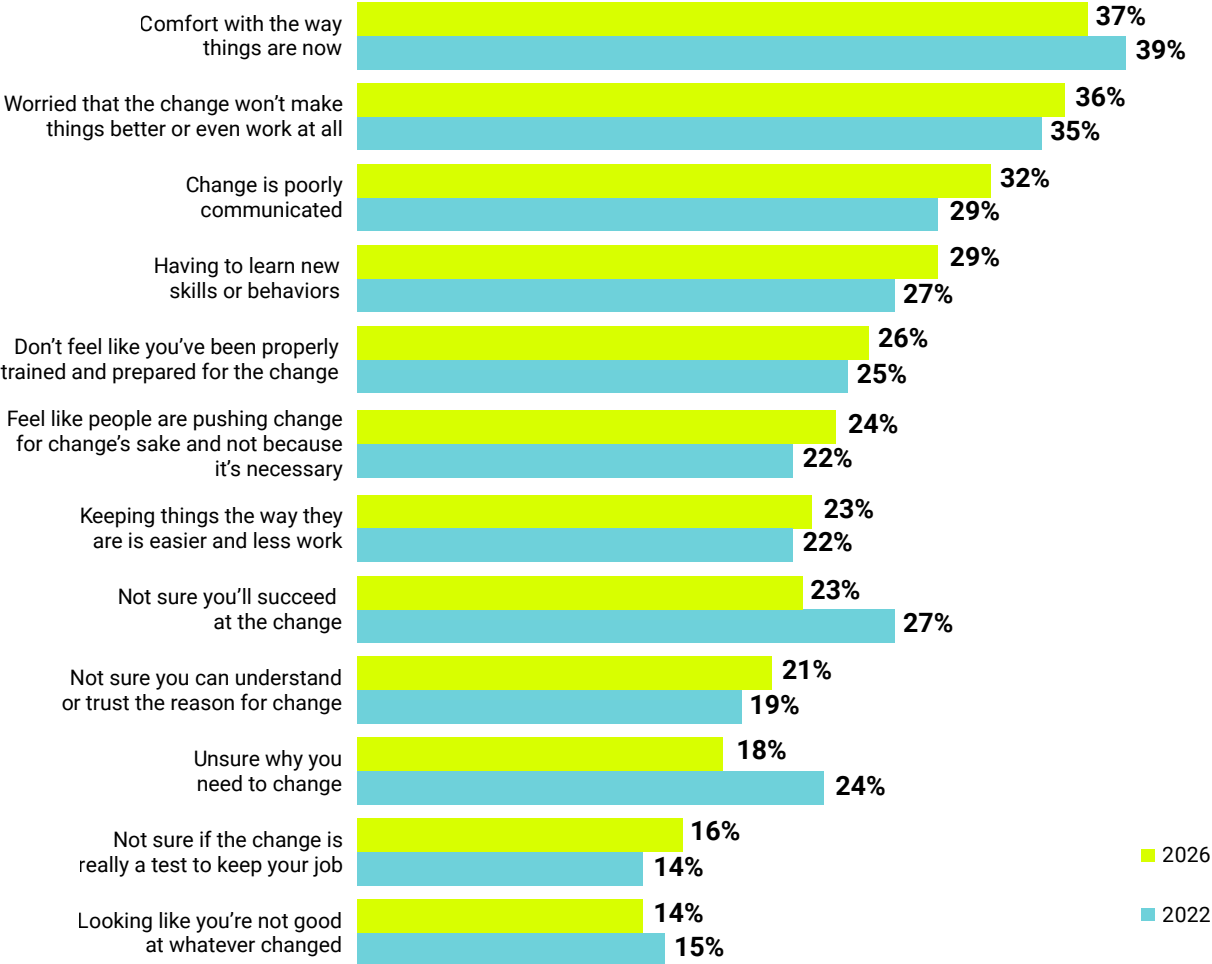
**CHANGE READINESS IS RISING, ESPECIALLY AMONG YOUNGER GENERATIONS**

The 2026 data tells an encouraging story: those in the US overall are becoming more positively oriented toward change compared to the 2022 benchmark. Those working in the US in 2026 are significantly more likely than in 2022 to bring their full selves to work, practice gratitude, listen actively in one-to-one, and stretch outside their comfort zones. These are all core behaviors of change-ready individuals and organizations.

Generationally, younger generations in the US are leading this shift. Gen Z in 2026 is significantly more likely than in 2022 to feel anticipation (49% vs. 30%) and hope (37% vs. 26%) when experiencing change. Younger Millennials have shed significant anger, and Older Millennials report more gratitude and less frustration compared to 2022. This generational momentum represents a genuine opportunity for organizations investing in change culture.

Managers and executives also stand out: executives (64%) are significantly more comfortable than employees (30%) expressing emotions around supervisors, a gap that points to the importance of modeling vulnerability from the top down.

**WHICH EMOTIONS DO YOU FEEL WHEN EXPERIENCING CHANGE AT WORK?**  
(BY TOTAL)



Q1. What most contributes to your resistance to change at work? Rank your top three. [BENCHMARK QUESTION]



of those in the US say that the pace of change at work has increased, and 85% expect it to continue to rise.



# THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO CHANGE ARE NOT TECHNICAL. THEY ARE HUMAN

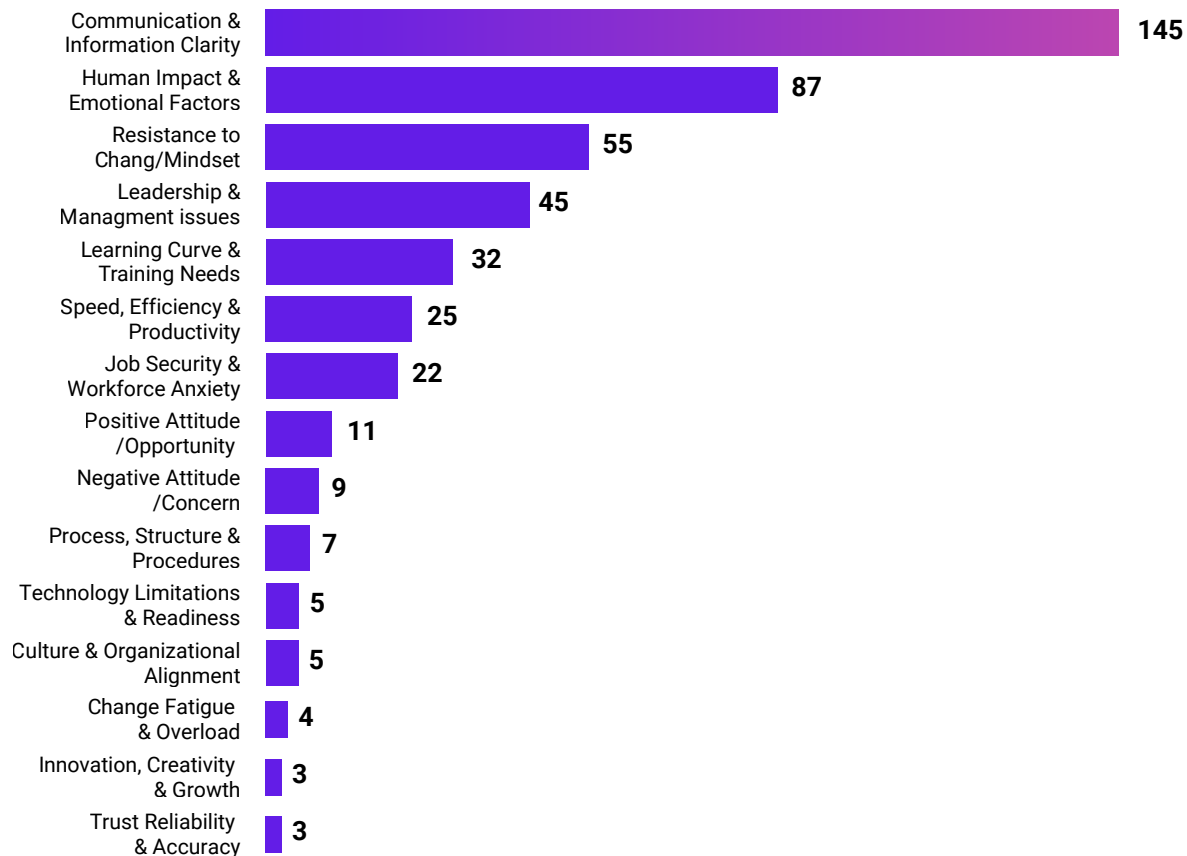
When asked in an open-ended format to name the biggest hidden barrier to change being effective in their organization, those in the US overwhelmingly pointed to human, emotional, and communication factors rather than technology or process.

Communication and information clarity (145 responses) topped the list by a wide margin, followed by human impact and emotional factors (87 responses) and resistance to change and mindset (55 responses). Technology limitations ranked near the bottom with just 5 responses, a powerful finding that challenges the assumption that change failures are primarily a systems or tools problem.

When asked what most effectively helps them fight resistance to change, those in the US ranked seeking support from co-workers, friends, or family first (62%), followed by evaluating options with their supervisor (59%) and mindfulness practices (56%). The human connection is also the solution, not just the obstacle.

## WHAT IS THE BIGGEST, HIDDEN BARRIER TO *CHANGE* BEING EFFECTIVE IN THE WORKPLACE TODAY?

(BY TOTAL; OPEN-ENDED VERBATIM RESPONSES; N=750)



OPEN-ENDED QUESTION. What is the biggest, hidden barrier to *change* being effective in the workplace today? Please be as specific as possible.

# VOICES FROM THE RESEARCH



**A LACK OF COMMUNICATION BY HIGHER-UPS  
TO EXPLAIN THE REASON(S) FOR THE CHANGE.**

-STUDY PARTICIPANT



**PEOPLE NEED EMPATHY DURING CHANGE,  
NOT JUST INSTRUCTIONS.**

-STUDY PARTICIPANT