

Transformation that sticks. Strategy that moves.

Most organisations are not short of ambition, investment, or ideas. What stalls them is the gap between strategy and execution, and the leadership, alignment, and execution problems that live inside it.

That is what Scarlet Kites Strategy exists to close.



Digital and AI transformation is the decade's most significant commercial opportunity.

**But 81% of your organisation is not getting ROI from AI.
Here's why, and what to do about it.**

Only 19% of
AI users feel skill and
readiness aligned

~50% stuck in the
emergent middle;
effort without traction

10% blocked entirely.
Investment going nowhere

Source: Microsoft Work Trend Index 2026, 20,000-person survey across 10 countries

You have invested in AI tools, training, and technology. Yet adoption is patchy, resistance lingers, and the transformation feels like it is stalling. You are not alone in thinking:

"The technology works. The humans haven't caught up".

"We ran the pilot. It worked. Then nothing happened".

"Our people aren't resistant to change — they're exhausted by it".

"The board approved the strategy. Six months later, I'm not sure anyone remembers what it said".

“Only 4% of organisations are creating substantial value from AI”.

['Where's the Value in AI?'](#) Boston Consulting Group (2024)

Why Transformation Stalls

There is a structural problem at the heart of most digital and AI transformation programmes.

Change management and agile delivery are almost always running on separate tracks: different teams, different metrics, different conversations.

Technology moves fast. People are expected to follow. They rarely do automatically.

Prosci's ADKAR model identifies five conditions that must exist before any individual genuinely adopts change:

Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement (ADKAR).

Most programmes invest in **A**wareness, **K**nowledge (communicating the change), and in **A**bility (training people on the system).

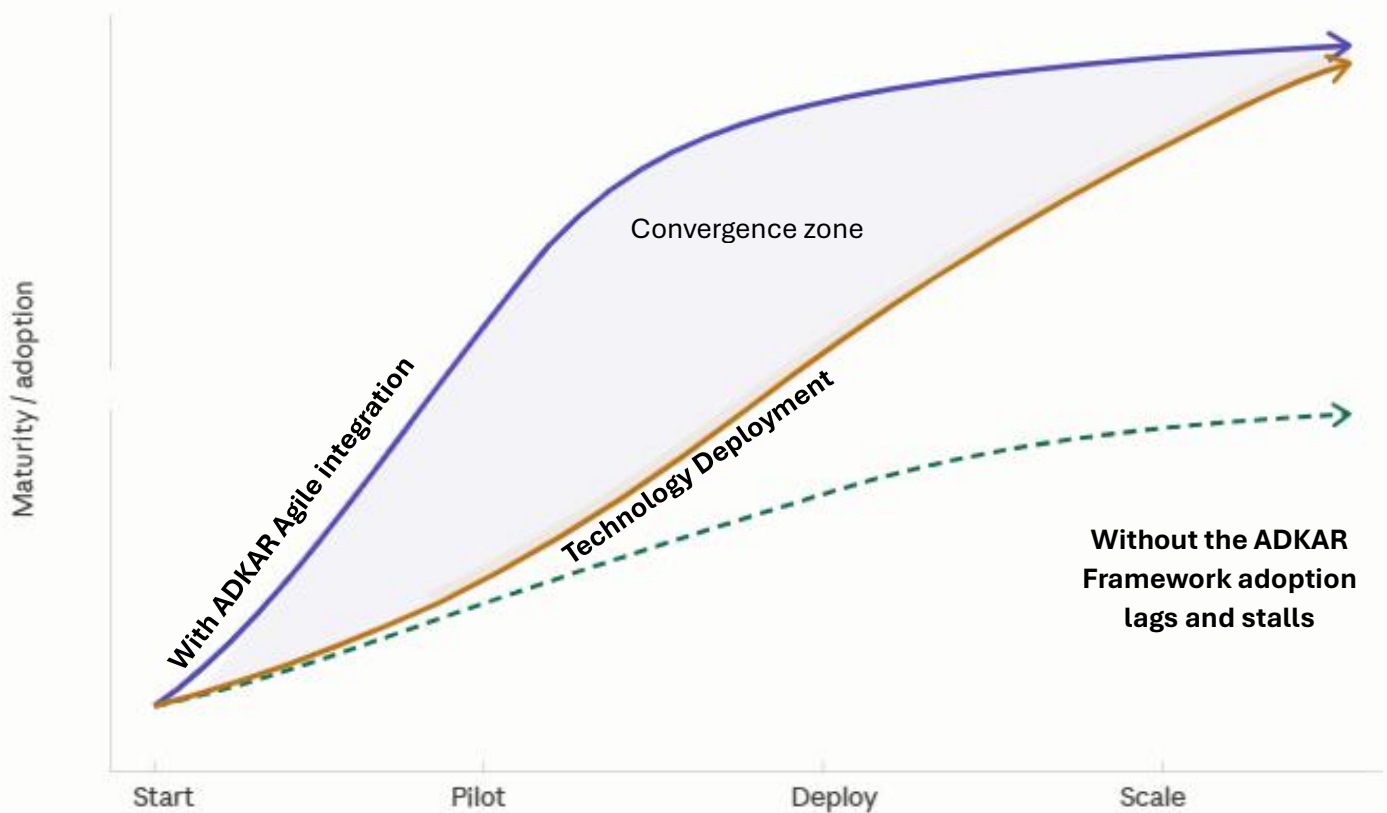
Desire, and **R**einforcement are where adoption quietly unravels.

Desire cannot be manufactured from the outside. It must be grown from within, through involvement, through trust, through people feeling that the solution was built with them rather than at them.

Reinforcement, the sustained work of embedding the change until it becomes how the organisation actually operates, is almost always the first thing cut when timelines tighten or budgets shift.

**That is not a technology problem.
It is a leadership, alignment, and execution problem.**

And it is solvable, when the right methodology is running underneath it.



The Framework

Blueprint Phase

Agile Mechanism	ADKAR Focus	What This Looks Like in Practice
Initial Backlog & Discovery	Awareness: Build stakeholder awareness	Stakeholder mapping and listening sessions run before solution design. Executive alignment on outcomes secured. SoW grounded in what people need, not just what the technology does.
Sprint 0 / Programme Kick-off	Desire: Generate genuine desire	End-user groups invited to articulate pain points in their own words. Their language shapes the backlog. Resistance risks are identified before a line of code is written.

Build Phase

Agile Mechanism	ADKAR Focus	What This Looks Like in Practice
Sprint Planning	Knowledge: Identify knowledge gaps	Before each sprint: who is impacted, what they need to understand, and what communication or training must land before the increment goes live. Change planning and backlog planning happen in the same conversation.
Definition of Done (DoD)	Ability: Embed ability criteria	DoD includes training material ready, field-mapping validated with end users, and data cleansing signed off. No sprint is 'done' until people can actually use what was built.
Daily Stand-up	Awareness & Desire: Early warning system	Human blockers carry the same urgency as technical ones. "Users don't understand this feature" and "resistance is re-emerging" are tracked alongside failed builds.
Sprint Review	Knowledge & Ability: Accelerate adoption readiness	Reviews redesigned as ADKAR accelerators, not just demos. Show what is changing and why it matters. Demonstrate the new process. Create space for questions that surface hesitation before it hardens into resistance.

Release Phase

Agile Mechanism	ADKAR Focus	What This Looks Like in Practice
Sprint Retrospective	Reinforcement Drive reinforcement	Not just: what can the team do better? But are users adopting? Where are they struggling? Resistance that resurfaces feeds directly into Reinforcement activities, the stage most programmes abandon too early.
Post-Go-Live Metrics	Reinforcement Sustain reinforcement	Adoption metrics tracked alongside delivery metrics. Low adoption triggers a return to listening, not an acceleration of delivery. The programme does not close until the change is visible in how the organisation works.

The Framework in Action: Case Study

When the Strategy Becomes the Proof

The brief was deceptively simple: prove that AI could process large volumes of data in seconds, eliminating the hours employees spent manually reviewing, interpreting, and filing paper-based reports.

The opportunity was significant. The potential for resistance, entirely understandable. The solution was never going to be purely technical.

Starting with alignment, not assumptions

Before a sprint was planned or a line of code written, we secured genuine C-suite alignment, not consensus for its own sake, but documented agreement on what success looked like commercially, and what a failed adoption would cost. From there, we conducted full stakeholder mapping. Some team members had spent years processing the same paperwork.

This was not just a workflow. It was a professional identity. And in a business environment already marked by change fatigue, where people had lived through restructures, system overhauls, and shifting priorities, asking them to now hand their work to a machine was asking a great deal. That reality shaped everything that followed.

"In a business environment already marked by change fatigue, asking people to hand their work to a machine was asking a great deal."

The ethics of asking people to change

Responsible AI transformation carries an obligation that goes beyond delivery. When technology threatens to redefine what people do, and by extension, who they are at work, the organisation has a duty to bring them with it, not simply inform them of what is coming. Junior team members were not resistant because they lacked vision. They were afraid. Afraid of redundancy. Afraid of being made to look incompetent in front of colleagues. Afraid that expertise built over years would be quietly devalued overnight.

Acknowledging that fear honestly and designing the programme around it rather than around it, was not a soft choice. It was the right one.

Listening before designing

We engaged end-user groups directly, not to present a solution, but to listen. Their frustrations became the design brief. Their priorities shaped the backlog. Their voices were in the room before the technology was. For people already carrying the weight of change fatigue and genuine anxiety about AI, this was not a communications exercise. It was a trust exercise. And trust, once extended, changes the nature of every conversation that follows.

Integration in practice

The ADKAR model and Scrum did not run in parallel. They ran as one. Stand-ups tracked human blockers alongside technical ones. Sprint Reviews were redesigned as ADKAR accelerators; structured moments to demonstrate what was changing, why it mattered, and to surface hesitation before it hardened into resistance. Retrospectives became our Reinforcement engine, asking not just what the team could improve, but whether users were actually adopting.

When resistance intensified

Mid-programme, adoption metrics lagged in one business unit. The instinct in those moments is almost always to accelerate, to push harder on delivery and assume the people will follow. That instinct is almost always wrong.

We did something different. Outside the scheduled sprint governance cadence, we convened an all-hands session, open to everyone with a stake in the outcome. I opened it not with a presentation, but with questions. What was concerning people? What did they not yet understand? What did they not trust? We listened to the objections without defending the programme.

"People moved from watching something being done to them, to feeling part of something being built with them. That distinction is everything".

Then we handed the room to the people who had been closest to the work, not the director, not the suppliers, but colleagues. Team members who had been part of the early trials, who had played with the system, who had seen what it could do, stood up and showed their peers.

Not a polished demo of a completed product. A genuine showcase of possibility, delivered by people the room already trusted, from a position of curiosity rather than authority.

The instruction to everyone present was simple: play. Explore. Tell us what you think should change. Feedback on what we build next.

The shift in energy in that room was visible. Not instant conversion, that is not how trust works.

But something loosened. People moved from watching something being done to them, to feeling part of something being built with them. That distinction is everything.

The result

AI processing time reduced from hours to seconds, with the full confidence of the people using it.

Adoption was not mandated. It was earned from the very first conversation and reaffirmed in every one that followed.



What does this mean for your programme?

A self-diagnostic. Be honest. These questions are designed to surface where your programme is stalling, and which action to prioritise first.

Diagnostic: Blueprint. Did you listen before you designed?

- Were end users involved in shaping the brief before the solution was designed, or were they informed of it afterwards?
- Can you name the specific fears, frustrations, and professional concerns your most affected team members raised — in their own words?
- Does your Statement of Work reflect what people said they needed, or what leadership decided they needed?

If you answered no to any of these, your Awareness and Desire foundations are weaker than your delivery plan assumes. Start with Action 1.

Diagnostic: Build. Is change integrated into every sprint?

- Does your Definition of Done include a human readiness condition — training ready, communication landed, field-mapping validated?
- Are human blockers tracked with the same urgency as technical ones in your daily stand-ups?
- Do your Sprint Reviews create space for questions and hesitation, or are they primarily product demonstrations?

If your change management and delivery planning happen in separate conversations, you are running two programmes and calling it one. Action 2 closes that gap.

Diagnostic: Release. Are you treating adoption as the finish line?

- Do you have adoption metrics running alongside your delivery metrics right now?
- When adoption is low, is your first instinct to return to listening — or to push harder on delivery?
- Has your programme formally closed a phase or go-live without confirming that the change is visible in how people actually work?

If your programme ends when the technology goes live, you are stopping at the point where the real work begins. Action 3 keeps you in the room until it counts.

Where do you sit on the Frontier map?

A simple scoring frame to close the diagnostic, one line per zone:

- **Answered YES consistently across all three:**
You are operating at or near the Frontier. The question is whether you can scale it.
- **Mixed answers across Build and Release:**
You are in the emergent middle; effort is being invested but traction is uneven. Actions 2 and 3 will move you.
- **Answered NO predominantly in Blueprint:**
Your programme is built on assumptions rather than insight. Return to the beginning before accelerating delivery.

Actions to take

Action 1: Listen before you design

(Blueprint Phase: Awareness & Desire)

Before a backlog is built or a sprint planned, map your stakeholders and create structured space for end users to articulate the problem in their own words. Their language shapes the brief. Their frustrations become the design criteria. Resistance that is heard early does not harden into blockers later.

Action 2: Integrate change into every sprint

(Build Phase: Knowledge & Ability)

Expand your Definition of Done. Before each increment goes live, ask: who is impacted, what do they need to understand, and what training or communication must land first? Human readiness is not a workstream that runs alongside delivery. It is a condition of delivery.

Action 3: Treat adoption as the final sprint

(Release Phase: Reinforcement)

Most programmes close when the technology goes live. The organisations that reach the Frontier stay in the programme until the change is visible in how people work, not just in what the system can do. Retrospectives ask not just what the team can improve, but whether users are actually adopting. Low adoption triggers a return to listening, not an acceleration of delivery.

About Scarlet Kites Strategy

Scarlet Kites Strategy exists for one reason: to close the gap between where ambitious organisations are, where they need to be and the transformation in between; aligning leadership, building the foundations for growth, and directing implementation until the results are visible. Not handed off. Proven.

Jennifer Crago first encountered the ADKAR model twenty-two years ago, leading engagement during the transformation of the international music industry when Napster and iTunes fundamentally disrupted the sector. The methodology has evolved considerably since then. The human challenges it addresses have not. Fear of redundancy, change fatigue, and the quiet erosion of hard-won buy-in are as present in AI transformation programmes today as they were in the earliest waves of digital change.

That depth of experience, across entrepreneurial consultancies, enterprise AI and digital transformation, climate tech, ethical retail, and global media institutions, shapes an approach that is deliberate about one thing above all others: staying in the room until the transformation is visible. Not on a slide. In how the organisation works, and in how its people feel about the work they do.

Ethics, governance, and human-centred AI underpin everything Scarlet Kites does. Technology should elevate human judgement, creativity, and connection; not replace it. That is not a policy position. It is a design principle that shapes how every engagement is conceived and delivered, from the first diagnostic conversation through to measurable impact.

Every engagement is directed personally. Senior attention, depth of experience, and clear accountability from day one.

The numbers that matter

- £11M digital, data, and AI transformation portfolio built from the ground up
- Two failing \$14M transformation programmes restructured and rescued
- \$13M programme investment secured within eight months of a Board-approved strategy launch
- 200 stakeholders engaged across 24 centres and 8 international programmes

The right place to start is a conversation. Book a complimentary Introductory Call Today.