American Institute of Architects Large Firm Roundtable & Young Architects Forum

Building Change Resilience

Session Workbook & Toolkit

Thursday October 16, 2025 Kansas City Missouri

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A Shared Path Forward

As you well know, the AEC and professional services industry is evolving. Yet many firms remain tethered to structures, leadership models, and mindsets built for a different era. While change accelerates around them, firms often respond by reinforcing familiar ways of working. This resistance is understandable, but ultimately unsustainable.

The truth is: Change is happening, with or without us. And it's not going to wait for us to catch up. The choice isn't whether we change—it's whether we want to help shape that change or let it happen to us. Not to control the forces of change, but to understand them, see where we are

contributing to the status quo, and adapt intentionally. To thrive, leaders at every level must shift from trying to pre-

serve what was, to actively shaping what's next.

This session represents a critical moment for Large Firm Roundtable and Young Architects Forum to build connective tissue across leadership levels, bridge generational perspectives, and identify shared strategies to shape the AEC industry's future.

The choice isn't whether we change it's whether we want to help shape that change or let it happen to us.

This is a conversation, it is not a training. It is an opportunity to benefit from the lived experience and diverse perspectives in the room—not an exercise in adding more content to an already crowded dialogue. And it is about creating a shared understanding of what the future might hold—not steering you toward a preconceived notion of what the future will be or how you should operate within it.

Using this Book

This book was commissioned by the LFRT to serve two vital roles:

- Session Workbook—A companion and reference during our session on October 16, 2025
- Change Toolkit—A resource filled with tools, frameworks, and prompts you can revisit to support ongoing change efforts within your firm

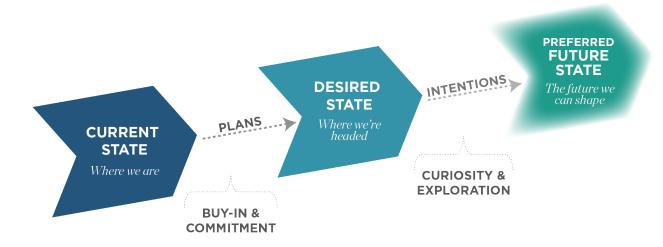
Throughout the session, we'll refer to the workbook often. Some pages include the primary tools for key activities. Others are there for your personal use—we encourage you to take notes, reflect, and make this resource meaningful to you.

The toolkit section is optional, but designed to help answer the question: "So what?" It's here to help you take the broad concepts we'll explore in the session and translate them into practical, tangible actions. When revisited regularly and reinforced over time, these tools can support your firm's ability to adapt, evolve, and build a culture that's truly resilient in the face of change.

Many of the models and tools included in this book will be available for PDF download at the end of the session either from LFRT or from sarahkesher.com (see QR code on the back cover).

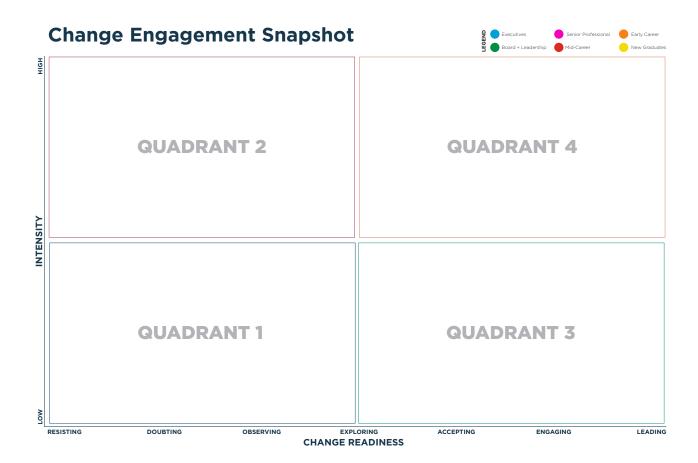
Session Framework

Change Resilience Model



ELEMENT	PURPOSE	NOTES
Current State		
Plans		
Buy-in & Commitment		
Desired State		
Intentions		
Curiosity & Exploration		
Preferred Future State		

Current State Mapping



X-axis: Change Readiness

Resisting—Actively or passively pushing back against the change.

Doubting—Questioning the value or feasibility of the change, but not outright rejecting it.

Observing—Watching to see how the change unfolds before forming a strong opinion.

Exploring—Beginning to ask questions and try small steps toward the change.

Accepting—Willing to go along with the change, though not necessarily enthusiastic.

Engaging—Actively participating in and contributing to the change process.

Leading—Driving the change forward and influencing others to get on board.

Y-axis: Intensity

Low Intensity—Quiet, passive, or hesitant behavior, whether resisting or supporting.

High Intensity—Vocal, visible, and active behavior, whether resisting or supporting.

Current State Mapping (continued)

What keeps the people in quadrants 1 and 2 stuck? What behaviors do we see in this group?

What gets the people in quadrants 3 and 4 moving forward? What behaviors do we see in this group?

What factors impact their intensity levels?

One-Year Desired State Mapping

What would this new state look like for each group? What behaviors would you see change?

How clear are you of what you're asking from them? Is it measurable?

How well do your people understand the behaviors you expect? If you asked your staff, would they be able to articulate it back to you?

If the goal were to simply get started, vs getting it done, what does that change?

Commitment & Buy-in

Emotional Intelligence Domains & Competencies

Self- areness	Self- Management	Social Awareness	Relationship Management
	Emotional self-control		Influence
	Adaptability	Empathy	Coach and mentor
otional wareness	A chi ayana ant		Conflict management
	Achievement orientation	Organizational awareness	Teamwork
	Positive outlook		Inspirational leadership

Source: More than Sound, LLC, 2017

6Fs of Stress (Trauma) Response

	FIGHT	FLIGHT	FREEZE	FAWN	FLOOD	FATIGUE
Definition	Posturing against or confronting the perceived threat	Fleeing or symbolically fleeing the perceived threat	Disassociation in response to the perceived threat	Placating the perceived threat in an attempt to forestall the imminent danger	Being overwhelmed with emotions in response to a perceived threat	Feeling tired or sleepy in response to a perceived threat
Presentation	Explosive outbursts, anger, defiance, or demanding behavior	Anxiety, fidgety, over-worrying, workaholic ten- dencies	Spacing out, losing time, feeling unreal, brain fog, or feeling numb	People pleasing, fear to express oneself, flattery, being a "yes" person, exploitable, afraid of not fitting in	Emotional disregulation, crying	Disassociating, extreme fatigue, sleep

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AS A CHANGE LEADER...

...what are my WEAKNESSES?

How do I reduce buy-in & commitment? Where do I create worry or stress, undermine, or demotivate?

...what are my STRENGTHS?

Where do I bring others along, inspire, or encourage? How do I build buy-in and commitment?

RESISTANT CHANGE

What behaviors (intentional & unintentional) do others SEE from me when I am...?

HEAR from me when I am...? (or specific words) do others What type of speech

JOURNEY OF CHANGE EMOTIONAL THE

you have experienced in your career. Where did you fall on the change readiness Reflect on a specific substantial change spectrum during this time?

READY CHANGE

& unintentional) do others SEE from me when I am...? What behaviors (intentional

(or specific words) do others What type of speech HEAR from me when I am...?

STRESS RESPONSES

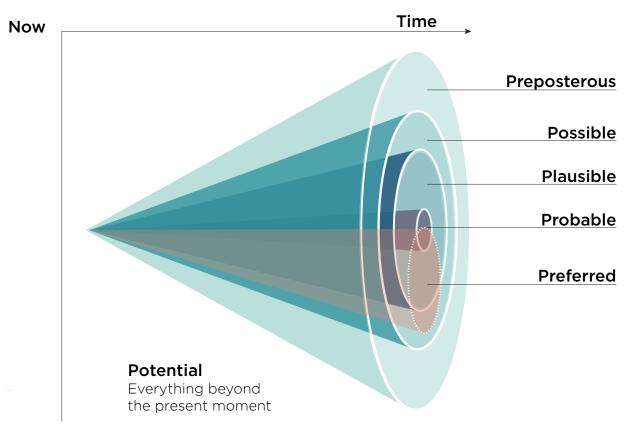
While all change can be stressful, are these different when I am change ready versus change resistant? How do my stress responses affect others in the workplace? Which stress responses am I most likely to experience?

The Preferred Future State

As defined by futurists, a preferred future state represents the vision of a **future that we intentionally choose**—one that aligns with our values, aspirations, and strategic goals. Unlike predictions or trends, which describe what might happen, a preferred future is about what we want to happen. It's not a forecast but a deliberate act of imagination and agency, rooted in the belief that the future is not predetermined.

By articulating a preferred future, individuals, organizations, and societies clarify their priorities, surface implicit assumptions, and establish a sense of direction that can guide current decisions and investments.

Futurists emphasize that envisioning a preferred future is not about utopian thinking or wishful optimism. It requires critical foresight, creative synthesis, and a rigorous understanding of present dynamics. The process invites us to explore multiple plausible futures first—scanning signals, disruptions, and emergent patterns—and then to define the future we most want to create within that landscape. This creates a platform for strategic action: by working backward from the preferred future, we can identify key leverage points, build resilience to change, and **make choices today that move us closer to that the future we want to see**.



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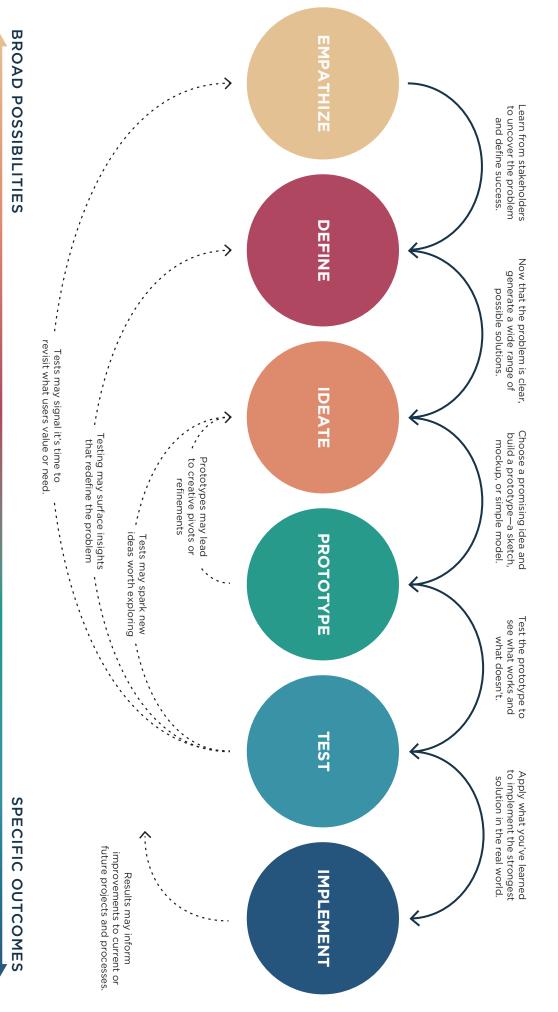
The Future Firm Canvas is a collaborative tool to help teams explore what success could look like in different future scenarios, and identify what actions they can take today to be ready for whatever comes next.

		Summary of		
Current Date	Future date	proposed future		
Value Propositions	Key Capabilities	Culture & Talent	Tools & Investments	Client Types
What do your clients value most? What do you provide that makes you competitive?	What core skills, roles, or tech would your firm need to succeed?	What kind of talent do you need—and what is it like to work in your firm?	What tools would you need to add? What big bets or infrastructure are required?	Who are your ideal clients in this future? (public, private, developers, nonprofits, etc.)
	Partnerships & Ecosystem Who do you collaborate with? (consultants, platforms, contractors, Al providers, etc.)		Delivery Models How is your work designed, produced, and delivered? (Tech, AI, teams, processes, etc.)	
Success Measures How do you define success in this future? (Profit, awards, impact, retention, etc.)		Profit Levers How will your revenue strategies need to evolve to fund these changes and remain sustainable?	S Venue strategies Dain sustainable?	
Already in Motion Which of these elements are already taking shape—or beginning to emerge?		Laying the Groundwor What can you start doing now to help your firm move toward this future—or shape the future in a way that reflects your values and goals?	Laying the Groundwork What can you start doing now to help your firm move toward this future—or shape the future in a way that reflects your values and goals?	

Curiosity & Exploration

For the following, reference the Design Thinking/Human Centered Design Model on page 12.
Why is Curiosity and Exploration important in this discussion?
How can we use the Design Thinking/Human-Centered Design Model or other familiar concepts and practices to build curiosity and exploration?
How are we/can we build time, space, and opportunities to grow these skills in our firms?
Looking at the Design Thinking/Human-Centered Design Model, how can we apply this to influence our preferred future?

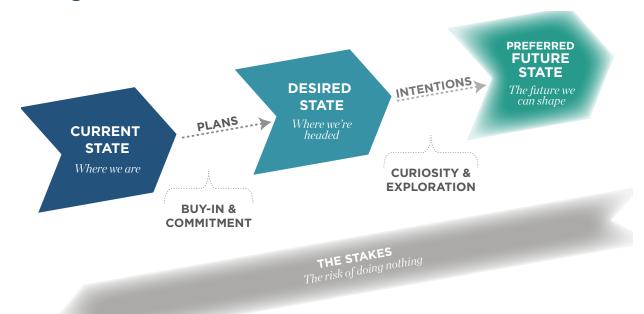
Design Thinking/Human Centered Design Model





Getting Off Go

Change Resilience Model for Communication



You saw this model before, but now we're adding one more critical piece: The Stakes.

Why? People don't just need to know where you're going—they need to know why it matters, and what we stand to lose if we don't take action.

You can use this model for communication in two ways:

- To explain a specific change (e.g., a new process, structure, or initiative)
- Or as an ongoing way to frame progress and reinforce your evolving direction

In either case, the formula is simple:

Start with the Current or Desired State

Describe where you are now (Current) or where you're headed (Desired)— whichever gives the clearest starting point.

2. Then reference the other

If you started with Current, explain the Desired State next—or vice versa. Show the movement.

3. Explain the Plans

Share what's happening to move from Current to Desired. Keep it focused and actionable.

4. Connect to the Preferred Future State

Explain how this change helps bring your firm closer to the future you want to shape—not just what's next, but what's possible.

5. Reinforce your Intentions

What values, hopes, or principles are guiding the change? Make sure people hear what's motivating the work, not just what's being done.

6. Communicate the Stakes

Before or after sharing the Preferred Future, take a moment to clarify: Why now? What happens if we don't act? This helps generate urgency and alignment.

Getting Off Go (continued)

As we wrap up the session take a few minutes to capture key insights and decide what action you'll take—now, soon, and later. As much as it might be tempting, it's impossible to go back and try to implement every idea right away. Focus on one thing for the immediate, one for the near future, and one for within the next year.

Actions	What supports do I need to make this happen?
What one thing can I realistically do to make progress on change resilience in the next 10 days?	
What one thing can I realistically do to make progress on change resilience in the next 10 weeks?	
What one thing can I realistically do to make progress on change resilience in the next 10 months?	

American Institute of Architects Large Firm Roundtable & Young Architects Forum

Building Change Resilience Toolkit

Essentials for Change Strategy, Implementation, Planning & Skill Building

Building Change Resilience in Your Firms

The tools in this section are designed to help you build lasting change resilience across your firm—not just for one initiative, but as part of how your organization works and grows.

These resources support curiosity, collaboration, leadership alignment, and momentum—so your teams are better equipped to adapt to whatever comes next.

Curiosity & Exploration Activities

These three facilitation-ready activities are designed for CEOs or senior leaders to sponsor within their firms. Each activity supports change resilience by developing strategic foresight, curiosity, and creative problem-solving—all sharing the spirit of a concept your staff may know well: Design Thinking/Human Centered Design methodology. All of these activities ask, "What would happen if we apply the design thinking skills we use with our client and project work to help adapt to change and influence our future realities?"

Futurespective + Backwards Mapping

Objective: Imagine a successful future and work backward to identify the shifts and milestones needed to get there.

Steps:

- 1. Set the scene. Ask teams to imagine the year is 2030 and the change has succeeded beyond expectations.
- 2. Empathize with that future: What are clients/staff saying, doing, feeling? What's different?
- 3. Define key features of that future.
- 4. Map backwards: What must have happened in 2029? 2027? 2025? What's needed now?
- 5. Identify leverage points for action today.

Primary Design Thinking Phases: Empathize, Define, Implement

Suggested Time: 60–90 minutes

Debrief Prompts:

- What patterns emerged across futures?
- What assumptions were challenged?
- Where might we begin testing toward that future?

Parallel Worlds/Alternate Futures Role-Play

Objective: Encourage perspective-taking by immersing teams in future scenarios and playing out decisions.

Steps:

- 1. Define 2-3 plausible future scenarios relevant to your industry.
- 2. Assign roles: future customers, regulators, disruptors, new hires, etc.
- 3. Role-play a leadership team meeting or decision in that future.
- 4. Capture tensions, tradeoffs, and surprises that emerge.

Primary Design Thinking Phases: Empathize, Define, Test

Suggested Time: 60 minutes

Debrief Prompts:

- What did this perspective reveal about current blind spots?
- What assumptions were challenged?
- How might we test or act on these insights now?

Design-Hop/Reframing Jam

Objective: Shift perspective on a current challenge by reframing it in creative ways and prototyping new angles.

Steps:

- 1. Choose a current change challenge.
- 2. Define how it's currently framed (including hidden assumptions).
- 3. Introduce reframing lenses: reverse the problem, remove constraints, flip user roles, etc.
- 4. Ideate alternate framings and select one.
- 5. Sketch a low-risk prototype or test tied to the new frame.

Primary Design Thinking Phases:

Define, Ideate, Prototype

Suggested Time: 45-75 minutes

Debrief Prompts:

- Which framings opened new ideas?
- How did prototyping help clarify the frame?
- What's one probe we could launch right away?

Additional Resources



Stanford d. School book collection, especially <u>Navigating</u> <u>Ambiguity</u>, <u>Making Possibilities</u> Happen, and This is a Prototype

<u>Micro-Resilience</u> by Bonnie St. John and Allen P. Haines

The Psychological Safety
Playbook by Karolin Helbig and
Minette Norman

Wired to Resist by Britt Andreatta, Ph.D.

HBR Emotional Intelligence Series especially <u>Resilience</u>, <u>Influence + Persuasion</u>, and Empathy



Stanford d. School Tools, especially the Uncover Unexpected Possibilities collection

Berkley University Change Management Toolkit, by Priya Sarran, Delia Clark, and Kathy Mendonca



How to Think Like a Futurist, IDEO

Links to these resources can be found at https://sarahkesher.com/lfrt-resources



Building a Culture of Curiosity & Exploration

Ideas to Normalize Discovery, Divergent Thinking, and Future-Readiness

SIGNALS

Tiny indicators, out on the fringes,

of what's coming

TRENDS

Emerging patterns to watch

DRIVERS

Big forces pushing change

forward, faster

These are lightweight, low-cost ways to build the habits of inquiry, sense-making, and creativity across your firm. You don't have to do them all—just pick one or two that fit your context and experiment from there.

Curiosity & Trendspotting

Monthly "Signal Share" Lunch & Learn

A volunteer shares a trend, signal, or surprising data point; the group explores implications. (Bonus: Use the Future Firm Canvas to sketch possible impacts.)

 What Are You Noticing? Chat Thread

> Create an informal thread or channel where people post emerging signals, news, or curiosities.

· Team "Horizon Walks"

Once a quarter, ask each department to bring a trend or issue they're watching and explain how it might shape their work.

"What If Wednesday"

Set aside 30 minutes every month to ask playful or provocative questions like "What if Al did 40% of our work?" or "What if our office had no managers?"

Strategic Imagination

Scenario Sprints

Invite small cross-functional teams to imagine your firm in a wildly different future (e.g., 10x growth, new market, talent exodus) and share back what would have to be true.

Customer of the Future Exercises

Periodically explore: "What will our future clients care about most?" or "What might they value that we don't offer today?"

Reverse Prototyping

Ask: "If we had already solved this, what

would it look like? What clues does that give us?"

"How Will This Set Us Up for the Future?"

At the end of every meeting where decisions are made, ask this simple prompt. It reinforces intentional progress toward your Preferred Future State.

Framing Conversations with the Change Resilience Model

Use the Model to Frame All Major Planning

Whenever a new plan, strategy, or initiative is being discussed, locate it in the flow: Where are we now (Current State)? Where are we headed (Desired State)? What kind of Preferred Future are we trying to shape?

· Remind People of the "Why"

Reconnect plans to purpose often. "Why this now?" "Why does this help us evolve?" Use the model to anchor those answers.

Reflection & Feedback Loops

"That's Interesting..." Round

In meetings, close with each person sharing one thing that surprised or intrigued them during the discussion.

Learning Roundups

At the end of projects, don't just ask what worked—ask what was most surprising, most confusing, and what you'd try differently next time.

Micro-Pilot Celebrations

Celebrate not just successes, but thoughtful experiments—even ones that didn't "work." Reinforce learning, not just results.

Preparing for Specific Change

This section is for leaders preparing to implement a specific change.

Use the tools to help lead with clarity, confidence, and foresight.

These tools aren't about managing every detail. Instead, they focus on what leaders need to consider to help the change go smoothly: anticipating friction points, aligning stakeholders, reinforcing new behaviors, and ultimately increasing adoption.

Why Take the Time to do Change Right?

Change isn't hard because people are bad at it—it's hard because we often skip the things that make it work. We get busy. We get rushed. We think if we just roll out the new plan or send the right message, people will catch on.

But meaningful change doesn't stick just because we announced it. It sticks when people understand it, believe in it, and see a clear path forward. In other words, change works when we take the time to do it right. This is one of those "slow down to speed up" moments.

Change Behavior Essentials

At the heart of every change are people—navigating their emotions, their logic, their habits, and their fears. And people need three things to move toward something new. These are the essentials if you want behavior to shift in a way that actually lasts:

1. Clarity

People need to understand where we're going, why it matters, and what it means for them. This isn't just about a vision statement—it's about making the path forward feel concrete and real.

Here's why it matters: Our brains are wired to seek certainty. In the absence of a clear direction, people don't push back because they're difficult—they hesitate because ambiguity feels like risk.

A study by McKinsey found that successful transformations are 3.5 times more likely when organizations clearly communicate their change story early in the process. Clarity creates momentum.

2. Energy

Change takes effort. And effort requires motivation.

We like to think people will change because it's logical—but logic isn't what drives action. It's emotion that fuels movement. In fact, research in neuroscience shows that emotion and reason work in

tandem, and that emotion often gets the final say in decision-making.

This is why so many change efforts fail not because the idea was wrong, but because people were exhausted, disconnected, or unsure of what it meant for them.

3. Structure

Even when people want the change, they need help making it doable.

That means breaking it into small steps. Creating habits and nudges. Making the new behavior easier to choose than the old one. When structure is missing, people default to what's familiar—not because they're resisting, but because it's what they know.

Research by BJ Fogg at Stanford confirms that tiny, well-timed changes in environment or routine are more effective at shaping behavior than motivation alone. In other words, don't just ask people to act differently—make it easier for them to succeed.

The Bottom Line

You don't need a PhD in change theory to make change work. But you do need to slow down long enough to get the basics right:

Be clear.

Ignite engagement.

Shape the path.

These three ingredients—clarity, energy, and structure—aren't just "nice to have." They are what make change possible.

When you build them in at the start, you save time, rework, and frustration on the back end. And you build trust along the way, which makes the next change easier, too.

Because how we do change is culture. And culture is worth doing well.

Balancing Energy, Effort, & Impact

Where to invest early attention for long-term success

The percentages shown here offer directional guidance—not rigid formulas—for how organizations might allocate energy across a change effort. These estimates support intentional planning—not because every phase needs equal attention, but because every phase needs the attention it *requires*, not just the time we *wish* it would take. Of course, these percentages can be adjusted based on the scope, complexity, and people impacted by the change.

Leadership Alignment

Shared understanding and commitment among leaders.

Stakeholder Impact Analysis

Insight into who is affected, how they're affected, and what support they'll need.

Capacity Building

Training, resources, structures required to successfully execute and sustain the change.

Adoption Strategies

Approaches to build buy-in, shift behavior, and guide people through the change.

Communication

Clear messaging, active listening, and ongoing dialogue to inform and involve stakeholders.

Reinforcement

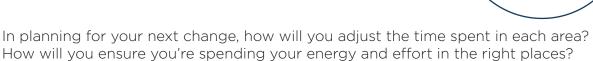
Systems, signals, and support that embed and sustain the new way of working.

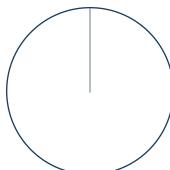
Communication
(including engagement & feedback loops)

Adoption strategies

Capacity Building

How does your firm typically spend it's time planning for change? How does it compare to the percentages above?





Leadership Alignment Pulse-Check

When leaders are misaligned—even slightly—those cracks show up quickly across the organization. Mixed messages, inconsistent priorities, or conflicting behaviors can erode trust and stall momentum before change even begins. Leadership alignment isn't just about agreement on strategy; it's about clarity, consistency, and modeling what's expected.

The tools in this section are designed to help you assess alignment across your leadership team and identify simple, practical ways to close gaps and reinforce a shared direction.

Ahead of your next change, start by honestly assessing how aligned you are with the rest of your leadership team.

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not at all aligned and 5 being uniformly aligned, how aligned do you feel as a leadership team—not just in what you know, but in how you show up?



Where are we in sync?

Where are we saying slightly different things—or emphasizing different priorities?

What do our teams see or hear that might signal misalignment?

Where might someone need a boost—or a 1:1 conversation?

Who's With You? And Who's Not?

Stakeholders are the people that can influence how others view the change, they may be responsible for executing pieces and parts of the change, and their degree of patience and willingness to adopt can make or break the change impact. When planning for a specific change, it's important to know where your stakeholders fall and make a plan for how you can bring them along

Not all stakeholders experience change the same way—or at the same time. Understanding who will be affected, how significantly, and what support they'll need is one of the most important steps in any change effort. Without this, leaders risk underestimating resistance, misdirecting communication, or overlooking critical groups.

The tools in this section will help you map impact, uncover potential friction points, and prioritize engagement strategies where they'll matter most.

Change Commitment Spectrum

others.

involved

Extend a per-

sonal invitation

for them to get

people

will resist

Let go; the more

vince them, they

you try to con-

exists

forward

Ask them how

they would like

involved going

to be updated or



invitation to get

problem-solving

conversations so

that you build

something to-

involved

gether

Engage in

Clarify their

responsibilities

Confirm their

commitment to

role and

support

negative impact

on the people

and process.

invitation for

them to aet

involved at an

appropriate level.

Extend an

LIST YOUR STAKEHOLDERS	STRATEGIES FOR ALIGNMENT
Saboteurs	
Skeptics	
·	
MAT- 661	
Wafflers	
Supporters	
Champions	
·	
Zealots	

The Ripples of Change

Change doesn't just affect people—it affects policies, systems, behaviors, and processes. And it rarely stays contained to just one team. Before you move forward, make time for a departmental ripple check: What are the secondary impacts of this change, and who else needs to be ready?

Ripple	Considerations	Who do I need to involve?	What direction do I need to give them?
Habits & Behaviors	 What old habits or defaults will need to shift? How will we recognize and measure meaningful adoption? What reinforcements (or consequences) are needed to make new behaviors stick? 		
Systems &	 What systems or platforms will need updating—or be used differently? Are there integrations or access 		
	ing these adjustments?		
Policies &	 needed to support the change? Are existing processes aligned—or will they compete 		
Policies & Procedures	 aligned—or will they compete with the new direction? What guidance or training will people need to work within the new rules? 		
	What emotional support or resources will employees need during the transition?		
People & Support	and reinforce the change on their teams?		
	 Are there any unintended con- sequences for employee expe- rience, equity, or workload? 		

Ripple	Considerations	Who do I need to involve?	What direction do I need to give them?
Finance & Accounting	 Are there budget or billing implications for this change? Will billing structures, project codes, or cost allocations need adjustment? Are there cash flow or forecasting impacts that need to be flagged? 		
Marketing, Communications, & Business Development	 Does our communications staff have the skills and capacity to lead change communication? Will messaging (internally or externally) need to change? Do clients need to be informed or educated about new processes? Does the change affect how we position ourselves in the market? 		
Design & Techni- cal Delivery	 Does this change impact the way design work is reviewed, coordinated, or delivered? Are there tools or methods that must evolve? Does the change affect the way we collaborate across disciplines? 		
Project/Practice Management	 Will project teams need new ways to track progress or coordinate? Are roles and responsibilities shifting? Does this affect timelines, milestone reviews, or resource planning? 		
Admin & Support Services	 Are administrative staff or office coordinators being asked to support the change in new ways? Do they have the visibility, authority, or clarity they need? 		

"The pace of change has never been this **fast**, yet it will never be this **slow** again.

You are rightly anxious about how quickly our existing business models are being disrupted. Still, if you're anxious, imagine how the folks who aren't in this room are feeling."

-Justin Trudeau



To download these models, resources, tools, & more, use the QR code or visit sarahkesher.com and look for Tools & Resources.

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sarahkesher.com sarah@sarahkesher.com 612.227.9744