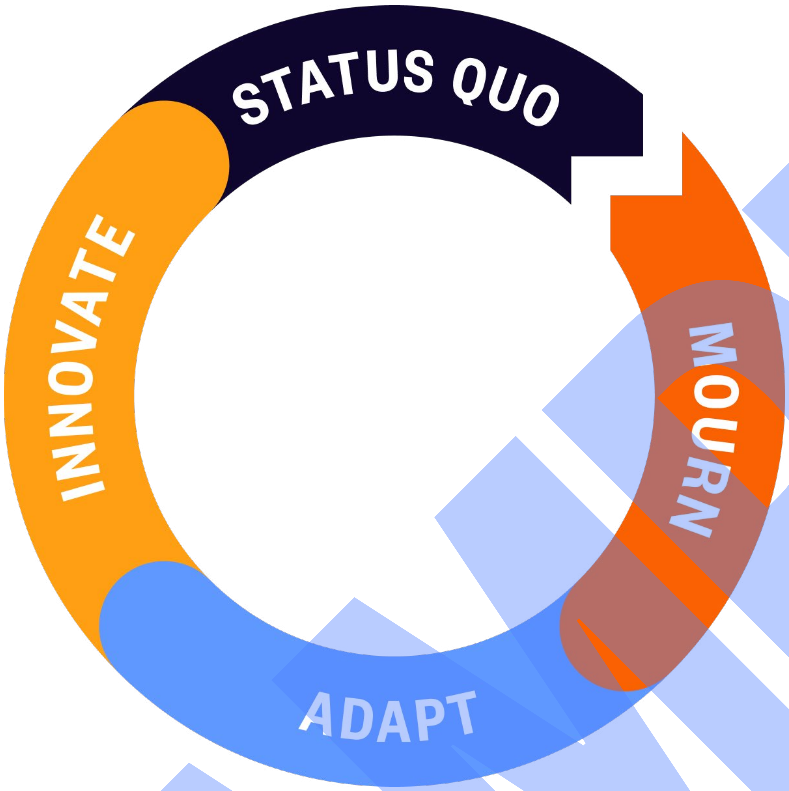
ADAPT IN 30™

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

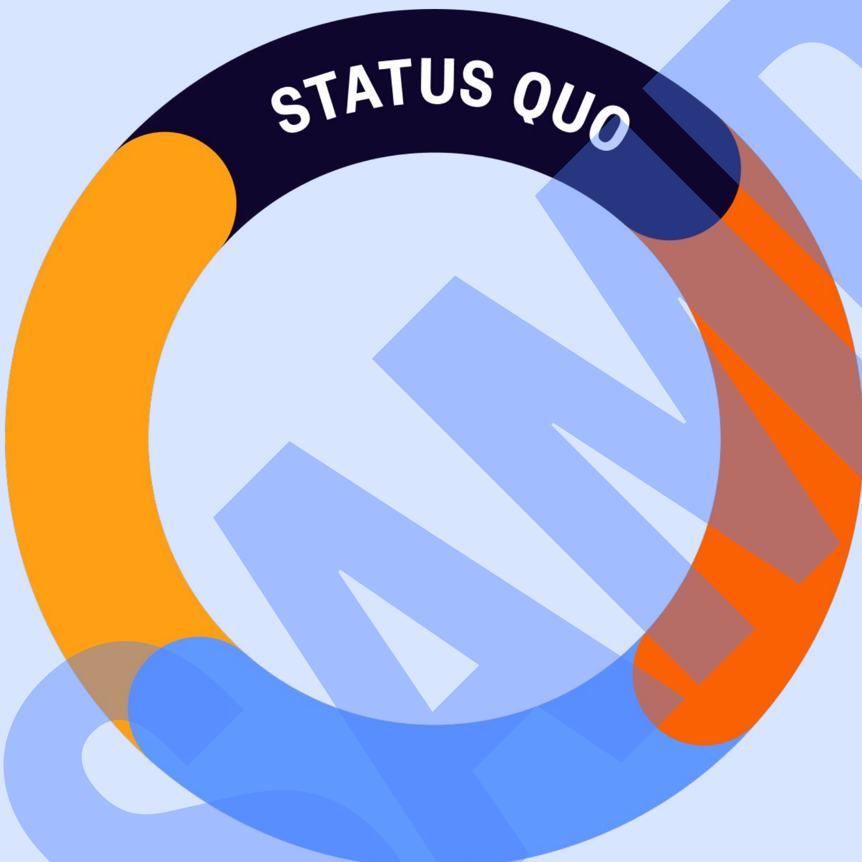


CHANGEOS

Leading Teams Through Change

Status Quo

A belief that any outcome can be achieved through intentional choices and consistent actions.



Brains... are essentially prediction machines.

ANDY CLARK

The Neuroscience of Status Quo

The human brain functions as what cognitive scientist Andy Clark calls a “hierarchical prediction machine.” This represents a scientifically validated model of neural operation where the brain continuously generates predictions about incoming sensory information. When predictions are accurate, the system operates with remarkable efficiency.

Research Foundation

Clark’s influential work in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* demonstrates that brains use hierarchical generative models to minimize prediction error within bidirectional cortical processing. This framework suggests that familiar patterns require fewer cognitive resources to process compared to novel information, though specific energy percentages vary across individuals and contexts.

Our Response to Change

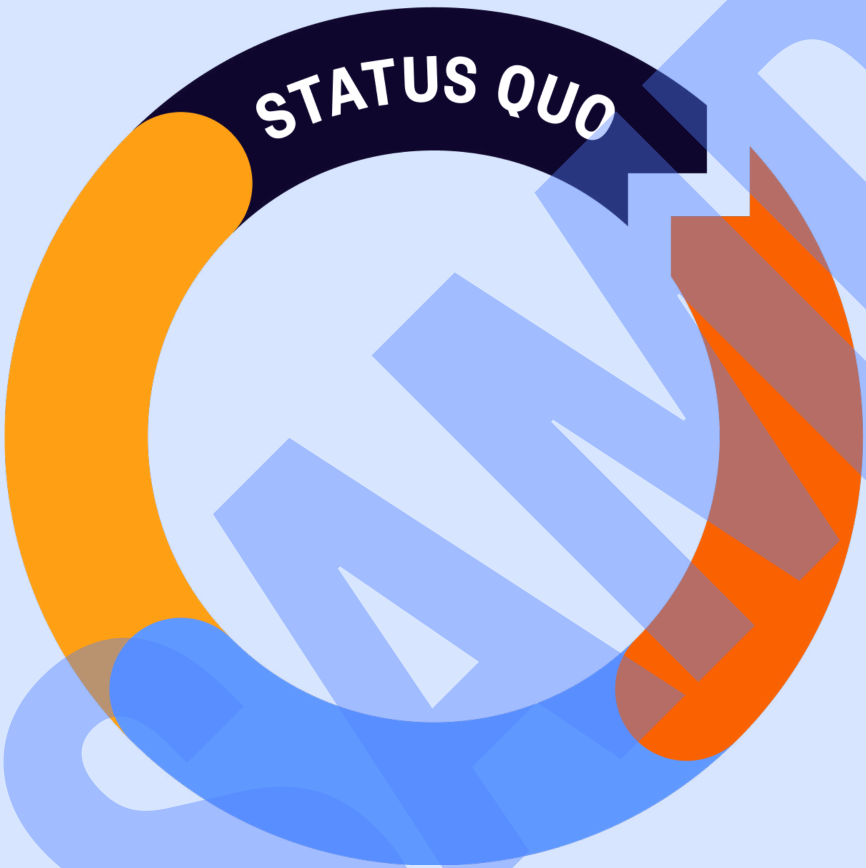
When familiar workplace routines are disrupted, several neural systems activate:

- Amygdala activation occurs rapidly, detecting potential threat
- Stress response engages the sympathetic nervous system
- Prefrontal cortex resources shift from routine processing to threat assessment and adaptation

Research in neuroscience confirms that the amygdala can effectively “hijack” prefrontal cortex functioning during perceived threats, temporarily reducing analytical processing capacity. This creates a neurological state where complex decision-making becomes more difficult.

Disruption

Any significant shift (internal or external) that breaks a team's established routines.
These events force teams out of their comfort zone.



Problem

Most change efforts fail because they focus on processes and timelines while ignoring the emotional journey people experience. When leaders are blind to the grief, fear, and resistance that naturally accompany disruption, work gets done at the expense of people instead of with them.

Principle

Successful change occurs when leaders prioritize the people side because results depend on it. **ChangeOS** recognizes that individuals process emotional disruption and rebuild trust before they can fully engage with new goals. By guiding people through that transition, leaders accelerate adoption, unlock innovation, and advance real work.

The job of a leader isn't to eliminate disruption; it's to lead through it.

Principle

CHANGE OPERATING SYSTEM

A three-phase operating system that guides teams through the complete journey of change.

Like any good operating system, it provides the essential functions needed to process disruption: first helping people mourn what they're losing, then adapting to new realities, and finally innovating beyond where they started.

Skills

MOURN

Mourn addresses the emotional impact of change by helping teams process loss and grief before moving forward. This phase acknowledges that people need to say goodbye to familiar ways of working after a disruption and validates their feelings about what they're leaving behind.

ADAPT

Adapt focuses on aligning with a new reality through data collection and realistic planning. Teams develop the skills to stay curious about their changing environment and modify their approach based on what they discover.

INNOVATE

Innovate transforms disruption into opportunity by reviewing lessons learned, adjusting mindsets, and experimenting with new possibilities. This phase moves teams from simply surviving change to actively shaping their future through creativity and experimentation.

If we cannot control the volatile tides of change, we can learn to build better boats.

ZOLLI & HEALY

CHANGE PLANNER

Map Your Disruption

Change doesn't happen in a vacuum. Before you can lead your team through any transformation, you need to clearly identify what's actually changing and how it's affecting your world.

Identify the Current Disruption

What specific disruption is your team experiencing right now?

- When did it begin, and how long is it expected to continue?
- Is it primarily external (market, technology, regulations) or internal (reorganization, new leadership, process changes)?

Describe your Disruption below:

Map Your Disruption

Change doesn't happen in a vacuum. Before you can lead your team through any transformation, you need to clearly identify what's actually changing and how it's affecting your world.

Define the Problem

How has this disruption created problems for your team specifically?

- * What challenges has it created for your broader organization?

Complete this statement below: "Because of this disruption, our team is struggling with..."

Diagnose the Status Quo

Before leading your team through the Disruption you've chosen for your Change Planner, you first have to help them identify the Status Quo(s) they are leaving behind.

Map Your Status Quo

Consider your team's established ways of working before the disruption occurred. For each category below, identify 2-3 Status Quo(s) that define your previous "normal":

Workflows & Processes

- What daily/weekly routines did your team follow?
- Which processes did people rely on to get work done?
- What systematic approaches defined "how we do things here"?

Monday morning team huddles, quarterly planning retreats, specific approval workflows

Assess the Impact

For each Status Quo above, assess how much it will be impacted by the Disruption.

- Label each Status Quo with a grade of: High, Medium, or Low
- Identify what specifically is changing

Assess the Intensity

On a scale of 1-5, rate the attachment your team members feel toward each Status Quo.

1 = Easy to change, low emotional investment

5 = Deeply attached, high emotional investment, will be challenging to let go

Diagnose the Status Quo

Before leading your team through the Disruption you've chosen for your Change Planner, you first have to help them identify the Status Quo(s) they are leaving behind.

Relationships & Social Structure

- What working relationships were central to team success?
- Which communication patterns did people depend on?
- What informal networks or "go-to people" structures existed?

Cross-functional partnerships, mentoring relationships, office coffee conversations

Assess the Impact

For each Status Quo above, assess how much it will be impacted by the Disruption.

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Physical & Environmental

- What physical spaces or environments were essential to your work?
- Which tools, technologies, or resources were central to daily operations?
- What environmental cues helped people feel oriented and productive?

Open office collaboration spaces, specific software platforms, physical whiteboards

Assess the Impact

For each Status Quo above, assess how much it will be impacted by the Disruption.

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Diagnose the Status Quo

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Cultural Norms & Unwritten Rules

- What behavioral expectations did everyone understand but rarely discuss?
- Which values or principles guided decision-making?
- What traditions or rituals gave your team identity?

"We always deliver this way," informal dress codes, and celebration traditions

Assess the Impact

For each Status Quo above, assess how much it will be impacted by the Disruption.

- Label each Status Quo with a grade of: High, Medium, or Low
- Identify what specifically is changing

Assess the Intensity

On a scale of 1-5, rate the attachment your team members feel toward each Status Quo.

1 = Easy to change, low emotional investment

5 = Deeply attached, high emotional investment, will be challenging to let go

Measure the Impact

Disruption always creates ripple effects. Understanding what's been affected helps you prioritize where to focus your change leadership efforts.

Business Results

Which business results or outcomes have been negatively impacted by this disruption?

- Are there specific metrics, timelines, or performance indicators that have suffered?
- What opportunities might be lost if it isn't managed well?

List 2-3 specific business results that have been impacted below:

Measure the Impact

Disruption always creates ripple effects. Understanding what's been affected helps you prioritize where to focus your change leadership efforts.

Identify Team Key Results

If you could lead your team effectively through this disruption, how would it improve the results in the "Business Impact" section? We will consider each of these an "Objective" below.

- For each item, what specific metric could you use to measure success? You'll use these as a "Metric" below.
- What realistic timeline can you set for seeing improvement in these areas?

Objective & Metric

Objective & Metric

Objective & Metric

STORIES

Are You Here to Save Us?

Start With Heart, Then Change Process

She was sitting in her Dallas home that morning, wrestling with a blog post she'd decided to call "Impact." Two events had been weighing on her mind: the teenagers protesting in Parkland after the school shooting, and the recent passing of Billy Graham, who had shaped her faith since childhood. At 58, having just retired from a 36-year career at AT&T, Marshall found herself caught between these two forces, youthful activism and seasoned wisdom, wondering what her next chapter would hold.

"What am I going to do next to truly have an impact?" she wrote.

The answer, it turned out, was waiting in her voicemail. When her husband finally convinced her to return the calls, she found herself talking to Mark Cuban, owner of the Dallas Mavericks. She had never heard of him. Her kids were incredulous. "Ma, you have to call him back now!"

What Cuban didn't tell her in that first conversation was this: the day before their call, Sports Illustrated had published a devastating investigation revealing twenty years of sexual harassment within his organization. Employees had described the workplace culture as "Animal House" and an "open secret." Former CEO Terdema Ussery had been a serial harasser. A ticket sales executive named Chris Hyde openly watched pornography at work, earning the nickname "Pants DJ." The organization was so broken that women were afraid to report violations to their own HR department.

Cuban needed Marshall to fix his franchise. What he got instead was something far more revolutionary: a masterclass in why putting people before process creates lasting transformation.

Marshall almost turned down the job. When she visited the Mavericks headquarters for her interview, she was ready to decline Cuban's offer and return home to pray about it.

But as she was leaving, two female employees approached her.

"Are you here to save us?" one asked.

"That was my sign right there," Marshall would later tell the Dallas Observer.

Most organizational consultants would have immediately focused on new policies, compliance training, and disciplinary procedures. Marshall did something different. Before implementing any new processes, she made an audacious promise: she would meet one-on-one with every single employee in the organization.

All 180 of them.

"Give me your whole life story," she would begin each meeting. When people started with their work history, she'd interrupt: "Stop, stop, stop. Were you born here? Start from the beginning."

This was Marshall's radical hypothesis: you cannot change organizational behavior until you first heal organizational hearts.

Her childhood had taught her this truth in the most visceral way. Born in Birmingham, just blocks from where the 16th Street Baptist Church would be bombed, she fled with her family to California at three months old, only to witness her father shoot a man in self-defense when she was eleven. "That was self-defense on my father's part," she would later explain, but the trauma of seeing human dignity under assault never left her.

During her 36 years at AT&T, Marshall had perfected what she called "people-first leadership," the counterintuitive idea that addressing human needs accelerates rather than delays organizational change. Under her guidance, AT&T became the first Fortune 50 company to make Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For list.

The conventional wisdom says that in crises, leaders must act fast with new rules and systems. Marshall's 100-day plan turned this wisdom on its head.

She established what she called CRAFTS values (Character, Respect, Authenticity, Fairness, Teamwork, Safety), but not as policies to enforce. As emotional foundations to nurture. She hired new executives, but only after the existing team felt heard and valued. She implemented zero-tolerance policies, but only after creating psychological safety that made reporting feel possible rather than punitive.

"If nothing else, I am proud of the speak-up culture we have," she told reporters. "Our people have a voice. The level doesn't matter."

The results defied organizational change theory. Within 100 days, the Mavericks transformed from the NBA's most toxic culture to its model for inclusion. Employee turnover plummeted. The leadership team went from having zero women and people of color to 50% women and 47% people of color. The franchise won consecutive NBA Inclusion Leadership Awards.

Marshall's phone call with Mark Cuban lasted longer than expected that February day in 2018. By the end, she had accepted a position that would make her the first Black female CEO in NBA history.

But the real story isn't about breaking barriers. It's about breaking assumptions. In an era when organizational change is increasingly about systems, processes, and compliance frameworks, Marshall proved something profound: the fastest way to change behavior is first to change hearts.

"For me, it's people first, always," she says.

In a world obsessed with digital transformation and operational excellence, Marshall's success suggests we've been asking the wrong question. The question isn't how fast we can implement new processes. The question is: how deeply can we connect with the humans who must live within them?

Who we are, as organizations, cannot be separated from how we treat the people we serve.

The Day They Broke Black Friday

When Self-Disruption Turns Into Powerful Opportunities

The question came from inside REI's Kent headquarters, posed by the company's head merchant to Chief Creative Officer Ben Steele: "I know we could never do this, but what would happen if we closed on Black Friday?"

It was an impossible question. Ben Steele knew it. Jerry Stritzke, REI's CEO, knew it too when the question eventually reached his desk in late 2015. You don't close on Black Friday if you're a retailer. It's like a restaurant closing on Valentine's Day, or a tax service shutting down in April. Black Friday was one of REI's top 10 sales days annually. The math didn't work.

But here's the thing about impossible questions: sometimes they reveal something that was hiding in plain sight all along.

Jerry Stritzke was not the kind of man you'd expect to torch a retail convention. He was methodical and precise, a former Coach executive who understood luxury consumers and profit margins. When he became REI's CEO in 2013, he brought the discipline of traditional retail excellence to the outdoor co-op.

But Stritzke was also sitting on top of a contradiction that was slowly eating away at his company's soul. REI sold outdoor adventure to people who increasingly had no time for outdoor adventure. The company's 12,000 employees spent Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, when families typically gather, managing checkout lines instead of hiking trails. The biggest shopping day of the year had become the day that least represented what REI claimed to believe in.

"We did this to share our passion for reconnecting with the people we love, in the outdoor places we love," Stritzke would later explain. But in 2015, that passion was suffocating under the weight of retail expectations.

What happened next defied every principle of modern capitalism.

Stritzke didn't just consider the merchant's impossible question; he decided to answer it. In October 2015, REI announced that all 143 stores would close on Black Friday. Not reduce hours. Not offering limited sales. Close. Completely.

The company would pay its 12,000 employees to take the day off. REI invited the entire country to join them in something they called #OptOutside.

Wall Street analysts called it corporate suicide. Retail competitors privately mocked the decision. Inside REI, the reaction was more complex.

Ben Steele, REI's Chief Creative Officer, later admitted the internal challenge: "There are challenges in continuing this work… being laser-focused on the purpose, the reason we're doing it". Teams that had spent months perfecting Black Friday logistics suddenly had their expertise declared irrelevant.

Finance departments mourned predictable revenue streams. Marketing teams abandoned discount campaigns they'd already created. Store managers who'd mastered crowd control found themselves with crowds to avoid rather than manage.

But something interesting happened during this period of organizational grief. Chief Operating Officer Eric Artz, who would later become CEO, watched employees process not just the loss of familiar routines, but the cognitive dissonance they'd been living with for years.

The mourning period forced everyone to confront a simple question: What if the thing we were best at was also the thing that was slowly destroying what we stood for?

The first year's results were staggering: a 7,000% increase in social media mentions, 2.7 billion impressions in 24 hours, and something unprecedented: 150 other retailers joining the movement.

But the real adaptation was happening inside REI. Employees were given new platforms to become brand ambassadors for the outdoor lifestyle rather than just sales professionals. Steele's team created what he called "an entire platform" of trail guides, expert advice, and tools for people to use in their pursuit of fun outside.

By later years, more than 275 organizations had joined the movement, from the National Parks Service to local trail groups. Nearly 1 million people endorsed #OptOutside in its second year alone.

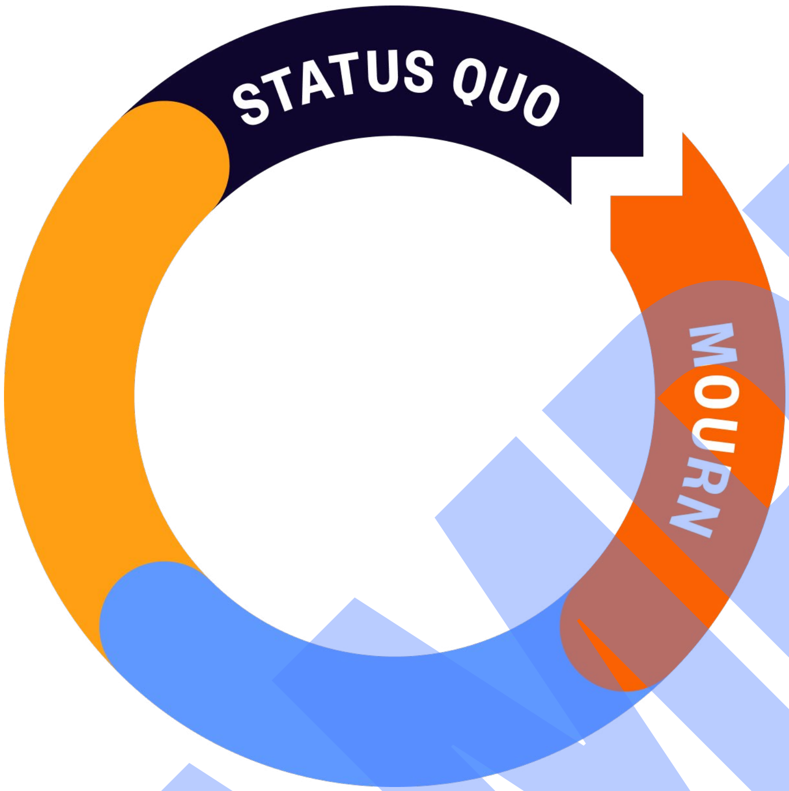
Steele captured the transformation: "What started as a moment has kind of become a movement. It's about behavior change and giving people tools to do something different with their time".

In 2022, REI made OptOutside permanent, closing every Black Friday forever. When Jerry Stritzke stepped down in 2019, Eric Artz inherited an organization that had solved one of business's most fundamental puzzles: how to grow by doing less.

The numbers tell the story: $2.78 billion in sales, up 6%, and $47.1 million in net income, up 54%. REI had turned organizational self-disruption into a competitive advantage.

As Steele reflected: "Trail guides and expert advice are great, but perhaps #OptOutside's biggest draw… is how it represented a brand putting its people and overall mission above short-term sales".

Here's what Jerry Stritzke understood that most leaders miss: sometimes the most profitable thing you can do is refuse to participate in everyone else's definition of profit. The question that seemed impossible, "What would happen if we closed on Black Friday?" had revealed a simple truth hiding in plain sight.

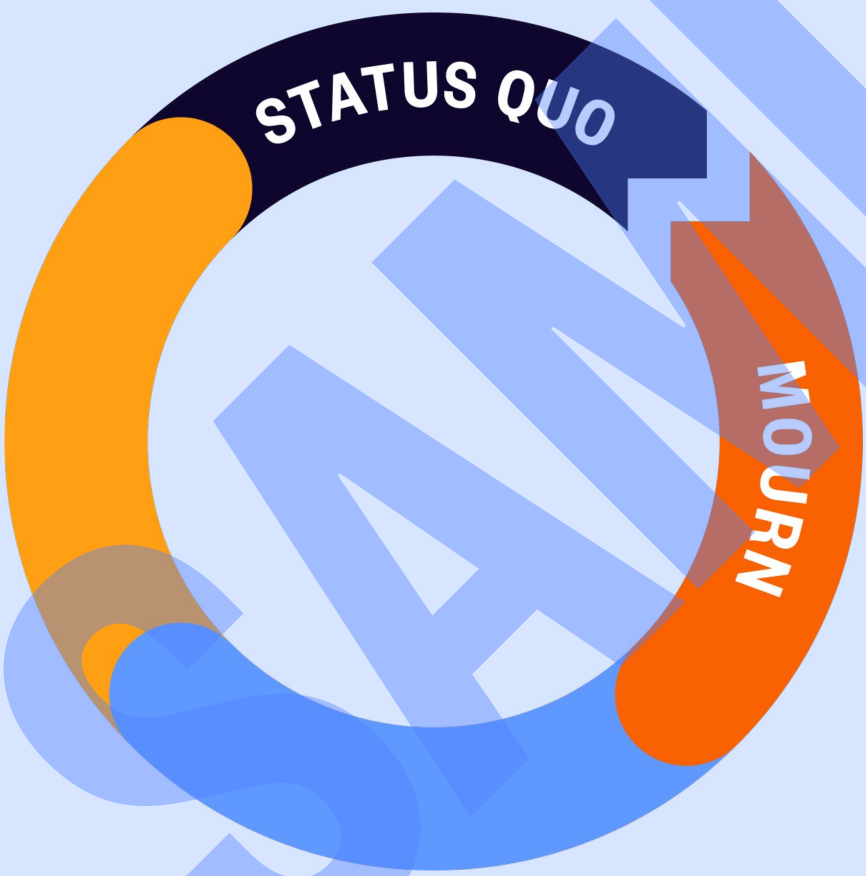


MOURN

Grief Before Change

MOURN

Deal with the emotional impact of change by helping team members process loss and grief. This phase recognizes that individuals need to say goodbye to familiar ways of working after a disruption and affirms their feelings about what they're leaving behind.



Workplace Grief: A Missing Component

Research demonstrates that employees genuinely experience grief during major organizational changes. Canadian workplace studies show that approximately 3.2% of all employees take bereavement leave annually, with additional numbers experiencing grief related to workplace changes.

The Dual Process Model

Psychologists Stroebe and Schut's research demonstrates that healthy grief processing alternates between "loss orientation" and "restoration orientation."

- **Loss orientation**: Processing what's ending (familiar processes, relationships, routines)
- **Restoration orientation**: Engaging with new realities and possibilities

Impact of Unprocessed Grief

Harris and Gwilliam-Wright (2023) emphasize that organizations must create space to normalize grief and loss, noting that employees navigating loss appreciate acknowledgment of their grief experiences.

Research shows that when grief is not acknowledged:

- Resistance to change increases
- Adaptation timelines extend significantly
- Stress-related absences become more frequent

Problem

Disruption triggers employee grief for "the way things were"—familiar processes, relationships, and routines. Leaders typically focus on logistics while ignoring this emotional reality, creating a **Grief Gap** between what people need (emotional validation) and what leaders expect (immediate adaptation). This gap drives resistance and failed change initiatives.

Principle

People can't move forward until they've reconciled what they've lost. Mourning isn't weakness; it's a necessary phase that makes adaptation possible. **Validating the Loss** means helping team members mentally align with a new reality.

No new life can arise... without the death of the old.

CARL JUNG

Principle

VALIDATE THE LOSS

Change always involves loss, and people need to mourn before they can move forward. When leaders **Validate the Loss** by acknowledging what teams are giving up familiar processes, relationships, or ways of working, they demonstrate genuine care and under-standing. This creates a collaborative movement forward, when a team feels that the leader 'understands' their experience.

Skills

COMMUNICATE OPENLY

Share what you know and don't know while actively listening to team concerns. Proactively inform people before rumors spread.

ACKNOWLEDGE EMOTION

Recognize and validate feelings during transitions. Name emotions as normal rather than dismissing them as obstacles.

REFRAME DISRUPTION

Help your team shift perspective from loss to opportunity by addressing fears and highlighting possibilities.

EVOLVE EXPECTATIONS

Adjust goals, timelines, and success metrics to match transition realities while maintaining motivation.

CARE

COMMUNICATE OPENLY

Share what you know and don't know while actively listening to team concerns. Proactively inform people before rumors spread.

Strategies

VISIBLE

Meet your team where they are and be present during uncertainty. People trust what they can see.

ACCESSIBLE

Make yourself easy to reach. A guarded leader feels like an absent one.

TRANSPARENT

Say what you know, what you don't, and what you're working to find out. Candor calms anxiety.

Acknowledge Emotion

Leaders who acknowledge emotions before presenting solutions achieve higher levels of team engagement and cooperation.

Validation Mistakes

Leaders often believe they're validating emotions when they're actually minimizing them. Phrases like "Don't worry about it" or "Everything will be fine" trigger psychological reactance—the opposite of the intended effect. These responses communicate that the person's feelings are inappropriate or inconvenient.

Try these steps:

- **Echo**: Reflect back what you're hearing
- **Affirm**: Share empathy & understanding of the emotion
- **Respond**: Ask how you can help

Example 1

Ineffective: "I know this is frustrating, but we need to move forward"

Effective: "It sounds like you're frustrated about having to learn a completely new process. That makes complete sense—you were really skilled with the old system."

Example 2

Ineffective: "Your job is secure, don't worry about it"

Effective: "Uncertainty about job security during a restructure is one of the most stressful experiences I've faced. What have you seen that's made your worry?"

CARE

REFRAME DISRUPTION

Help your team shift perspective from loss to opportunity by addressing fears and highlighting possibilities.

Strategies

SHRINK THE PROBLEM

Break overwhelming change into specific, manageable components.

EXPAND THE UPSIDE

Help your team see the opportunities a disruption creates.

Evolve Expectations

Maintaining pre-change performance expectations after Disruption creates unnecessary stress and resistance. While specific percentages vary across organizations and change types, studies consistently show that unrealistic expectations during change leads to:

- Higher stress levels among team members
- Increased resistance to new processes
- Extended adaptation periods before normal performance returns

Consider Temporary Adjustments

Distinguish between temporary adjustments and permanent standard reduction. Tell your team:

- What's changing temporarily and why
- What standards remain non-negotiable
- When normal expectations will resume
- How progress will be measured during the transition

Diagnose Current Expectations

Audit current performance standards and identify which require adjustment:

- **Productivity metrics**: May decrease during initial adaptation period
- **Quality standards**: Maintain core quality while allowing learning curves
- **Timeline expectations**: Build in buffer time for skill development and system mastery

Communicate Your Reasoning

Explain why adjustments are strategic investments rather than compromises:

"We're temporarily adjusting our response time targets from 2 hours to 4 hours while the team learns the new system. This investment in proper learning will ultimately make us more efficient than before."

Set New Milestones

Create progress markers (below are hypothetical):

- **Week 1-2** Focus on system familiarity and basic competence
- **Week 3-4** Achieve 75% of previous productivity levels
- **Week 5-6** Meet or exceed previous performance standards

You can't achieve growth without grief.

CHANGE PLANNER

Communicate Openly

Before your team can move forward, they need to trust that you understand what's happening and that you're being honest about the uncertainty ahead.

Be Visible

- Where is your team (physically or virtually) spending most of their time?
- When was the last time you were present in those spaces without an agenda, just to be seen and available?
- What specific actions can you take this week to increase your visibility in the space above during uncertain moments?

Write 2-3 specific ways you'll increase your visibility:

Communicate Openly

Before your team can move forward, they need to trust that you understand what's happening and that you're being honest about the uncertainty ahead.

Stay Accessible

- How easy is it for your team members to reach you when they have concerns or questions about the disruption?
- What barriers (scheduled meetings, closed doors, delayed responses) might be making you seem "guarded" right now?
- What's one change you can make to your accessibility this week?

Complete this statement: "To make myself more accessible during this disruption, I will..."

Communicate Openly

Before your team can move forward, they need to trust that you understand what's happening and that you're being honest about the uncertainty ahead.

Practice Transparency

- About your current disruption, what do you know for certain?
- What don't you know yet, but are working to find out?
- What honest update could you give your team right now that would reduce their anxiety?

Draft a transparent message you could share with your team:

Acknowledge Emotion

Your team is experiencing real grief about what they're losing. Acknowledging these emotions doesn't make you weak; it makes you effective.

Name the Emotions

- What specific emotions have you observed in your team since this disruption began? (frustration, anxiety, anger, sadness, confusion, etc.)

  Which of these emotions are you tempted to dismiss or "fix" quickly?
- What familiar processes, relationships, or routines is your team losing because of this disruption?

  Which of these losses is your team grieving most deeply?

Reframe the Change

Help your team shift from focusing solely on what they're losing to recognizing what they might gain.

Shrink the Problem

- When your team talks about this disruption, what language makes it sound overwhelming? ("Everything is changing," "Nothing will be the same," etc.)
- What's one specific aspect of the change that your team could tackle first?

Example

Shrink this mindset: "Everything is changing..."

Into this mindset: "We're **adjusting** [specific thing 1], **learning** [specific thing 2], and **updating** [specific thing 3]..."

Rewrite one overwhelming statement about your disruption into smaller, manageable pieces:

Reframe the Change

Help your team shift from focusing solely on what they're losing to recognizing what they might gain.

Expand the Upside

- What opportunities does this disruption create that weren't available before?
- Does this change resolve any limitations or frustrations people used to have with the "old way?

List 2-3 specific opportunities this disruption creates and/or previous problems this disruption resolves:

Evolve Expectations

Your team needs realistic expectations that account for the emotional journey they're on, not just the business timeline.

Adjust for Reality

- What Key Results, timelines, or tactics were set before this disruption occurred? Which of these needs to be modified to account for the time needed to Adapt?

Evolve Expectations

Your team needs realistic expectations that account for the emotional journey they're on, not just the business timeline.

Maintain Motivation

- How will you communicate your adjusted expectations without sounding like you're "lowering the bar"?
- How will you celebrate and recognize progress during the Mourn phase?

Complete this statement: "While we're adjusting to this change, success looks like..."

STORIES

The Question that Changed Everything

Make Progress During Dark Times With Reframe

For Southwest Airlines, the scrappy, Dallas-based carrier known for peanuts, no-frills service, and a relentlessly cheerful corporate culture, the defining moment came at exactly 8:46 AM on September 11, 2001. That was when the phone rang in their headquarters, at the precise instant American Airlines Flight 11 struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

What happened next would separate Southwest from every other major airline in America. But not for the reasons you might think.

The Puzzle of Two Questions

Here's the puzzle: By year's end, every major airline in America would be hemorrhaging money and jobs. United announced 20,000 layoffs. American, 20,000. Delta, 13,000. US Airways, 11,000. The industry collectively shed 140,000 positions as air travel collapsed in the wake of the most devastating attack on American soil.

Southwest Airlines, by contrast, became the only major carrier to post a profit in the fourth quarter of 2001.

The mystery isn't that Southwest had better planes, or better routes, or even better financials, though their balance sheet was indeed stronger than their competitors'. The mystery is what happened in the first critical hours after the attacks, when CEO Jim Parker (just three months into the job) faced the same impossible situation as every other airline executive in America.

Most asked the obvious question: "How do we survive this?"

Southwest asked something different entirely.

The Man in the Crisis

Jim Parker was an unlikely figure to reshape an industry's response to tragedy. A University of Texas-trained lawyer who looked, as colleagues said, "like he'd be more comfortable writing wills in a country town than running an airline," Parker had spent sixteen years as Southwest's general counsel before his sudden elevation to CEO that summer.

When the first reports reached Southwest's makeshift crisis center that morning, Parker was seated beside company co-founder Herb Kelleher, the cigarette-smoking, Wild Turkey-drinking legend who had built Southwest's people-first culture over three decades. Kelleher, scrawling notes on his trademark yellow notepad with a simple No. 2 pencil, wrote down something that would prove prophetic: "Get cash."

But Parker was asking a different question entirely. Instead of "How do we cut costs fast enough to survive?" he was asking: "Even in this tragedy, how do we prove who we really are?"

The Reframe That Nobody Saw Coming

What Parker understood intuitively, perhaps, was something that organizational psychologists would later identify as the power of cognitive reframing. When our brains face overwhelming crisis, they default to tunnel vision: immediate threats, survival mode, defensive thinking. It's an ancient response that served us well when dangers were simple and direct.

But modern crises are different. They're complex, multi-layered, and often require the opposite of defensive thinking. They need what researchers now call "adaptive reframing," the ability to see the same devastating situation through a completely different lens.

While competitors were asking survival questions, Southwest reframed the crisis as an identity test.

The first decision came within hours: while other airlines were preparing layoff announcements, Parker sent a letter to every Southwest employee: "We don't know what the future holds, but know this: Your jobs are safe, and we're going to keep issuing paychecks even though not a single plane is in the air."

The second came weeks later: Southwest honored its scheduled $179 million profit-sharing payment to employees. Industry analysts called it financial suicide.

But here's what Parker had figured out, and his competitors had not: the crisis wasn't just about planes and routes and revenue per seat mile. It was about something far more fundamental: trust.

The $20 Bill Mystery

Then something extraordinary happened. Something that reveals why Southwest's reframe worked in ways that pure cost-cutting never could.

When Southwest offered no-questions-asked refunds to any customer wanting to cancel their flight, it was a radical departure from standard airline practice, and many customers did something unprecedented. Instead of asking for their money back, they sent money to Southwest.

“It’s hard to describe the emotion of opening an envelope and a $20 bill comes flittering out,” Parker recalled years later.

Those twenty-dollar bills weren’t charity. They were investments. Customers were saying, in effect: “We need companies like you to survive, because you think differently than everyone else.”

The Pattern Hidden in Plain Sight

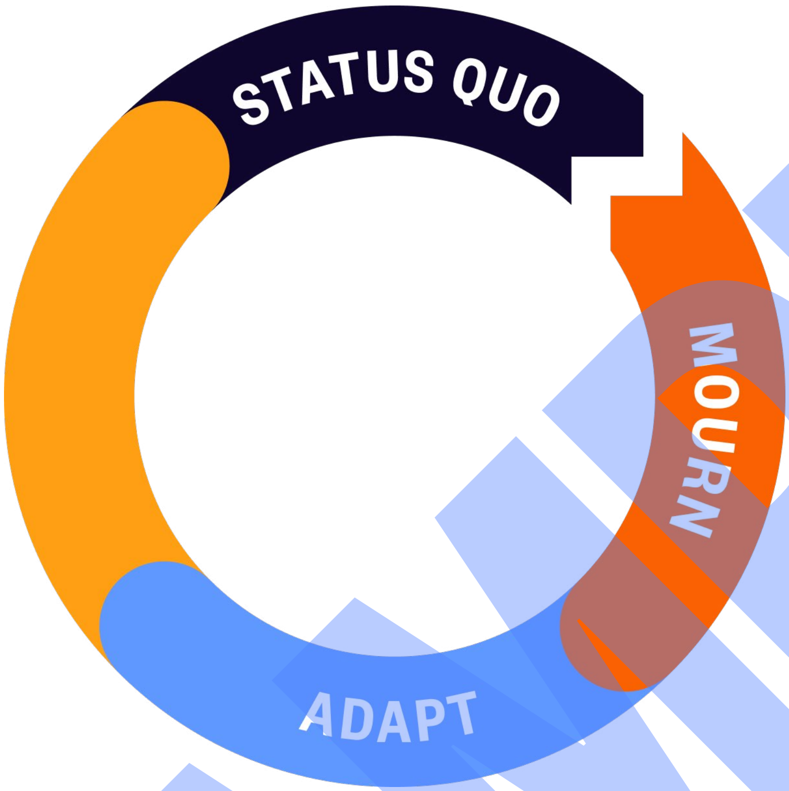
Southwest’s story reveals something profound about how we navigate crisis. The companies that thrive during devastating disruption aren’t necessarily those with the strongest balance sheets or the smartest strategies. They’re the ones that can reframe the disruption itself.

Instead of seeing September 11th as purely a threat to their survival, Southwest saw it as the ultimate test of their values. Instead of asking “What can we cut?” they asked “What must we protect?” Instead of “How do we minimize damage?” they asked, “How do we prove our promises are real?”

The reframe didn’t change the external reality; planes were still grounded, revenues still collapsed, and the future still looked terrifying. But it changed everything about how Southwest responded to that reality.

Modern work, it turns out, demands exactly this kind of cognitive flexibility: the ability to see the same situation from completely different angles, especially when the stakes are highest and our instincts are screaming loudest.

Southwest’s secret wasn’t that they were better at crisis management. It’s that they were better at crisis reframing. And in a world where disruption is constant, that may be the difference between companies that merely survive and those that come out stronger than before.

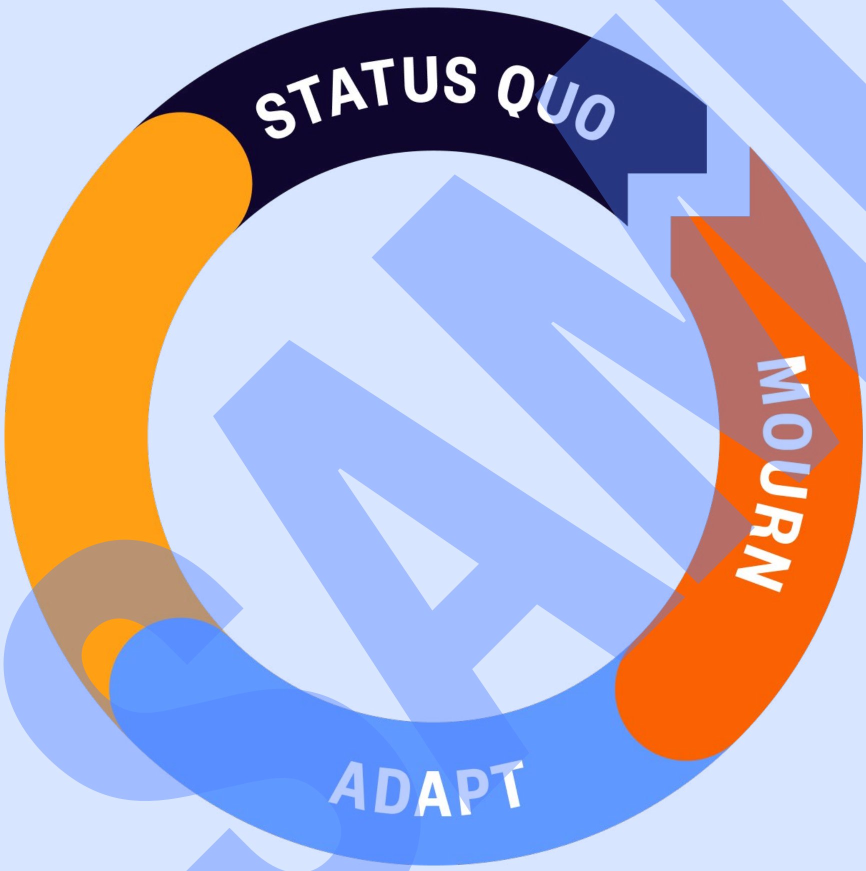


ADAPT

New Realities Require New Systems

ADAPT

Align team members with a new reality through data collection and realistic planning. Teams develop the skills to stay curious about their changing environment and modify their approach based on what they discover.



Problem

When disruption hits, teams get trapped in uncertainty that clouds their judgment and decision-making. **Fear creates a mental fog** that makes everything seem overwhelming and paralyzes teams from taking effective action. This fog prevents leaders from seeing clearly what's actually happening versus what they're afraid might happen.

Principle

The antidote to fear-based reactions is information-based responses. When teams actively gather facts about their new reality, they replace anxiety and speculation with clarity and direction. The more you know, the less room there is for fear to control your decisions.

Fear to Facts: Information & Your Brain

Fear activates the amygdala, which can effectively “hijack” the prefrontal cortex (the brain region responsible for rational decision-making). It effects your brain in various ways:

- Reduced information processing capacity
- Risk assessment distorted toward negative outcomes
- Impaired creative problem-solving abilities

The Amygdala-Prefrontal Relationship

The amygdala and medial prefrontal cortex work as partners in emotional regulation. When the amygdala detects threat, it can bias prefrontal processing to predict higher likelihood of negative outcomes and exaggerate their potential impact. This bottom-up engagement influences top-down control, making the brain more likely to engage anxiety-related circuits.

An Information Intervention

Research indicates that concrete, factual information helps restore prefrontal cortex dominance in decision-making. Studies show that when people receive clear, actionable data about uncertain situations, stress responses decrease and analytical processing improves.

Principle

SHIFT FROM FEAR TO FACTS

The antidote to fear-based reactions is information-based responses. **Shift from Fear to Facts** means moving from emotional speculation ("What if we fail?") to evidence-based assessment ("What do we actually know?"). When teams actively gather facts about their new reality, they replace anxiety and speculation with clarity and direction. This shift requires specific skills to seek the right information, adapt plans based on what you learn, and build routines that sustain your new approach.

Skills

SEEK INFORMATION & DATA

Actively pursue facts from multiple sources to understand what's really happening during change. Instead of relying on assumptions or rumors, systematically gather data to ground your decisions in reality.

ADJUST THE PLAN

Modify your goals, strategies, and tactics based on new information and changing circumstances.

BUILD NEW ROUTINES

Create new habits and processes that align with your new reality. Test systems & behaviors that make new workflows automatic and sustainable.

Fear to Facts

SEEK INFORMATION & DATA

Actively pursue facts from multiple sources to understand what's really happening during change. Instead of relying on assumptions or rumors, systematically gather data to ground your decisions in reality.

Strategies

ZOOM OUT

Look beyond your immediate team to understand the broader organizational and market context.

ASK SIDEWAYS

Gather perspectives from peers, other departments, and frontline staff across functions.

PRIORITIZE THE "CUSTOMER"

Focus on external stakeholders' needs rather than internal convenience.

Avoiding Analysis Paralysis

When presented with too much information simultaneously, decision quality decreases despite having more data. This “choice overload” phenomenon occurs because the human brain has limited capacity for processing multiple variables concurrently.

Information Overload

Cognitive research shows that when people face more than approximately 7±2 pieces of information simultaneously, they experience “cognitive overload,” leading to:

- Decreased decision quality despite more information availability
- Increased decision time without proportional benefit
- Higher stress levels and decision avoidance behaviors

Quick Assessment

Ask three questions:

- **Actionability**: “Will this information change our decision?”
- **Timeliness**: “Will waiting for this data cost us opportunities?”
- **Reversibility**: “Can we course-correct if we learn something new later?”

Fear to Facts

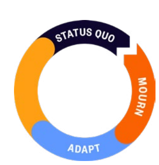
ADJUST THE PLAN

Modify your goals, strategies, and tactics based on new information and changing circumstances.

Strategies

DEFINE YOUR CORE

Clearly identify which elements of your mission and values remain constant while everything else can be flexible.



Fear to Facts

BUILD NEW ROUTINES

Create new habits and processes that align with your new reality. Test systems & behaviors that make new workflows automatic and sustainable

Strategies

MASTER OF ONE

Focus on implementing one new routine at a time rather than overwhelming your team with multiple changes.

PROMPTS & CUES

Create environmental triggers and reminders that make new behaviors easier to remember and execute.

Making Routines Stick

Research suggests focusing on implementing one new routine at a time rather than overwhelming teams with multiple simultaneous changes. This approach increases success rates by allowing neural pathways to solidify before adding additional complexity.

Environmental Cues

- **Physical**: Place reminders in visible, relevant locations
- **Digital**: Set up calendar alerts and system notifications
- **Social**: Establish team accountability partnerships

What It Sounds Like

Instead of: "Everyone needs to start doing X differently"
Try: "We'll test this new approach for two weeks, then evaluate what's working and what needs adjustment"

Instead of: "This is how we'll do things now"
Try: "When [specific trigger] happens, we'll do [new behavior]. Let's practice this together and refine as needed"

Instead of: "Change everything about how you work"
Try: "Let's master this one change thoroughly before adding anything else to our plate"

You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.

JAMES CLEAR

CHANGE PLANNER

Seek Information & Data

Replace speculation and anxiety with facts about what's actually happening during your disruption.

Zoom Out

- Beyond your immediate team, what other departments or groups are experiencing this same disruption?
- What industry trends or market conditions are influencing this change?
- How are similar organizations or competitors handling comparable disruptions?

Seek Information & Data

Replace speculation and anxiety with facts about what's actually happening during your disruption.

Ask Sideways

- Who in your organization has a different perspective on this disruption than you do?
- Which peers, other department leaders, or frontline staff could provide insights you're missing?
- What questions could you ask them to understand their experience of this change?

Identify three people you'll interview and choose one key question for each:

Seek Information & Data

Replace speculation and anxiety with facts about what's actually happening during your disruption.

Prioritize the "Customer"

- Who are the external stakeholders (customers, clients, patients, partners) most affected by this disruption?
- What do they actually need from you during this change, rather than what's most convenient for your team?
- What information should you gather directly from them about their experience?

Complete this statement: *"Our customers/stakeholders need us to focus on _________ during this disruption, even if it means changing _________."*

Adjust the Plan

Modify your approach based on new information while remaining focused on what matters most.

Define Your "Core"

- What elements of your team's mission, values, and purpose remain absolutely constant during this disruption?
- Which goals, processes, and strategies can be flexible or modified as you learn more?
- What would compromise your team's identity vs. what's just a change in method?

Core [Non-Negotiable]: Mission - Values - Key Relationships
Adaptations [Flexible]: Processes - Timelines - Methods

Adjust the Plan

Modify your approach based on new information while remaining focused on what matters most.

Revise Based On Facts

- What new approach would better align with the information & data you've discovered?

Identify one significant plan adjustment you need to make:

Build New Routines

Create sustainable systems that support your new reality rather than fighting against it.

Master of One

- Of all the changes your team needs to make, which single new routine would have the biggest positive impact?
- How can you break this routine into the smallest possible daily/weekly action?
- What would success look like after your team consistently practiced this routine for 30 days?

Design Your Routine

New Routine...
Daily Action...
30-Day Metric...

Build New Routines

Create sustainable systems that support your new reality rather than fighting against it.

Prompts & Cues

- What environmental triggers could remind your team to do the routine you're focusing on? Which existing habits or meetings could serve as cues for the new behavior? How will you make the new routine easier to remember than the old way?

Create a Prompt Plan

Prompt (or Cue) I'll Use...

Existing Trigger It's Attached To...

How I'm Going to Make the Routine Easier...

Build New Routines

Create sustainable systems that support your new reality rather than fighting against it.

Test & Iterate

- How will you track whether this new routine is actually working after one week?
- Who will be responsible for monitoring progress and suggesting improvements?

Map a Progress Plan

My Week 1 metric for success is...

The person responsible for monitoring that metric is...

[Fill In The Blank] will be my signal to adjust the routine.

STORIES

A Sequential Revolution

One Small Skill, Everyday

In the fall of 1974, a stocky Bolivian immigrant with a thick accent and an engineering degree walked into the mathematics department of James A. Garfield High School in East Los Angeles. Jaime Escalante had taught math and physics for twelve years in Bolivia. He expected to find students ready to learn.

What he found instead was chaos.

The students couldn't do basic arithmetic. They arrived unprepared, unmotivated, and hostile. The school was facing loss of accreditation. The average reading level of tenth-grade students was equivalent to that of a student in the second month of fifth grade.

Escalante was so disheartened that he called his former employer and asked for his old job back. But then something remarkable happened. Rather than trying to fix everything at once, curriculum, discipline, expectations, and college preparation, Escalante did something counterintuitive.

He focused on just one thing.

Here's what conventional wisdom tells us about educational reform: when a school is failing, you need comprehensive change. Overhaul the curriculum. Fire weak teachers. Raise standards across the board. Transform the culture overnight.

Here's what Jaime Escalante actually did: he established one simple routine. Students had to solve one homework problem correctly before entering the classroom.

That was it. No grand speeches about college. No advanced placement courses. No discussions about future careers in engineering. Just one math problem at the door.

The administration was appalled. "He said to 'Just get them inside,'" Escalante later recalled. "'I said, 'There is no teaching, no learning going on here. We are just baby-sitting.'"

But something interesting began to happen. Students started arriving prepared. They began expecting to work. The single routine had created a foundation not for learning calculus or passing advanced placement exams, but for something more fundamental: the habit of mathematical thinking.

By 1978, Escalante was ready for his next focus: algebra. Not geometry and algebra and trigonometry and pre-calculus all at once. Just algebra.

He started with twelve students willing to take an algebra class. Still no talk of calculus. Still no grand promises about MIT or Princeton. Just the methodical mastery of algebraic concepts, built on the homework discipline he had established four years earlier.

That same year, he offered his first calculus class to five students. Two passed the Advanced Placement exam.

Traditional reformers would have called this a failure. Just two students? In four years? But Escalante understood something they didn't. He was building something sustainable. Something sequential. Something that wouldn't collapse the moment he left the room.

The counterintuitive principle that guided Escalante's transformation has a name: Master of One. While others were trying to implement multiple reforms simultaneously, Escalante mastered one routine at a time, ensuring each was embedded before adding complexity.

By 1982, eighteen of his students passed the AP Calculus exam so successfully that the Educational Testing Service suspected cheating. When fourteen students retook the exam under scrutiny, twelve passed again. But here's the remarkable part: this "overnight success" had taken eight years of sequential mastery.

First, the homework routine. Then algebraic thinking. Then, the creation of a course pipeline. Finally, the systematic scaling is being implemented throughout the department and feeder schools.

Escalante and principal Henry Gradillas ultimately created what they called a "pipeline" from algebra to geometry to algebra II to pre-calculus to calculus. Still, they built it one course at a time. They influenced junior high schools to offer algebra in eighth grade, but only after mastering high school algebra instruction. They established summer programs at East Los Angeles College, but only after proving the basic model worked.

By 1987, eighty-three students passed the AB version of the calculus exam, with another twelve passing the BC version. At the height of Escalante's influence, Garfield graduates were entering the University of Southern California in such numbers that they outnumbered all other high schools in working-class East Los Angeles combined.

Success is not a random act. It arises out of a predictable and powerful set of circumstances and opportunities. Most importantly, it arises from the discipline to focus on one thing at a time.

When Escalante left Garfield in 1991, the program eventually declined. Not because his methods were flawed, but because the institution tried to maintain everything at once without the sequential mastery that had made success possible in the first place.

The lesson? In a world obsessed with comprehensive change, sometimes the most radical thing you can do is focus on just one thing. Master it completely. Then move to the next.

Five Hidden Traps of Routines

Research-backed insights for leaders who want change that actually sticks

Here's a story that might sound familiar: Your team enthusiastically commits to a new weekly planning routine. Three weeks later, you've quietly returned to the old way of doing things, and no one knows why.

You're not alone. Research shows that 70% of organizational change initiatives fail, but here's the liberating truth: the failure rarely stems from poor strategy or lack of commitment. Instead, leaders fall into five predictable traps that sabotage efforts before they take root.

Rather than lecture you about why routines matter (you already know), let's examine these hidden traps. Understanding them isn't just about avoiding failure; it's about designing change that sticks.

Trap 1: The Timeline Mirage

We dramatically underestimate how long real change takes

"We'll have this down in a few weeks," leaders promise with good intentions built on wishful thinking, not scientific reality.

Dr. Phillippa Lally's landmark study at University College London revealed something that should reshape how we think about change: habits take an average of 66 days to become automatic, ranging from 18 to 254 days. That's months, not weeks.

The psychology behind this mirage is understandable. Excited brains trick us into believing adoption happens faster than reality allows. We mistake initial compliance, where people do something simply because they should, for actual habit formation, where behavior becomes automatic and effortless.

The most successful leaders take a different approach. They tell teams upfront: "This will take three months to feel natural. That's not a bug, it's a feature. Real change takes time, and we'll give it the time it deserves."

Consider This: Set expectations for 8-12 weeks of conscious practice. Celebrate consistency over perfection, and resist abandoning ship when enthusiasm dips around week three.

Trap 2: The Capacity Illusion

We overestimate our mental bandwidth

“We can handle multiple improvements at once. We’re high performers!”

This reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how brains work. Cognitive Load Theory reveals that working memory has strict limits of about seven pieces of information at once. Complex new behaviors compete fiercely for these mental resources.

I’ve watched marketing teams attempt four simultaneous changes: new project management, weekly strategy reviews, client protocols, and revised reporting. Six months later, none stuck. Their fractured mental bandwidth made every routine feel overwhelming rather than helpful.

The neuroscience is clear: when brains learn multiple behavioral patterns simultaneously, we create “cognitive interference.” Each routine competes for the mental energy required to form neural pathways.

High performers succeed not because they juggle more, but because they’re selective about what they juggle. They understand that mastery involves focus.

Consider This: Choose one routine. Focus collective attention on making it automatic. Only after it requires minimal conscious effort (usually 8-10 weeks), introduce the next change.

Trap 3: The Isolation Myth

We ignore the social ecosystem that shapes behavior. New routines succeed within social ecosystems, not isolation. Yet leaders focus on individual compliance while ignoring the social forces that actually drive change.

Consider this: A senior VP announces “data-driven decision making” and institutes weekly metrics reviews. Meanwhile, in executive meetings, that same VP makes gut-feel decisions, dismissing data when it conflicts with intuition. What message does this send?

Research consistently demonstrates that humans detect behavioral inconsistencies with exquisite sensitivity. When leaders model behaviors that contradict their stated values, it not only undermines the specific change but also signals that these values aren’t necessary.

Dr. Robert Cialdini’s work on social proof reveals why this matters: people determine correct behavior not by listening to what others say, but by observing what others do, especially authority figures.

Consider This: Before launching any routine, audit the social environment. Who needs to model this behavior for legitimacy? What existing practices send conflicting signals? Address the social ecosystem first.

Trap 4: The Explanation Gap

We teach the WHAT but skip the WHY

"We're implementing weekly one-on-ones" feels different from "We're implementing weekly one-on-ones because our engagement survey shows 73% of team members feel disconnected from managers, and research demonstrates that regular check-ins build trust that improves performance."

One feels like bureaucratic busywork. The other feels like meaningful progress.

Self-Determination Theory reveals why this distinction matters. Humans have three fundamental needs: autonomy (feeling our actions are chosen), competence (feeling capable), and relatedness (connecting to something larger).

When we explain only mechanics without a deeper purpose, we satisfy none of these needs. People comply because they must, not because they understand how change serves their interests.

The most successful change leaders connect tactical changes to meaningful outcomes. They know that sustainable behavior change requires both clarity and buy-in.

Consider This: For every new routine, clearly articulate the problem it solves and the benefit it creates. Align the change with your team's existing values and goals.

Trap 5: The Training Fantasy

We over-invest in instruction and under-invest in the environment

"We just need better training sessions" is perhaps the most seductive trap. Training feels productive and measurable. Environmental design feels harder to quantify.

But research reveals that your environment constantly trains your team, often contradicting explicit instruction.

Consider this: You train teams on a communication protocol emphasizing structured updates and clear action items. But your email system, meeting rooms, and workflow tools make the old style faster and easier. Daily, hundreds of small environmental cues signal that the old way remains preferred.

Dr. BJ Fogg's Stanford research demonstrates that sustainable behavior change depends more on environmental cues than motivation or willpower. Environment wins not because it's more potent than training, but because it's more persistent.

Consider This: Audit your environment for cues that support or undermine new routines. Make the desired behavior easier than the old behavior. Design systems that naturally prompt routines rather than requiring people to remember.

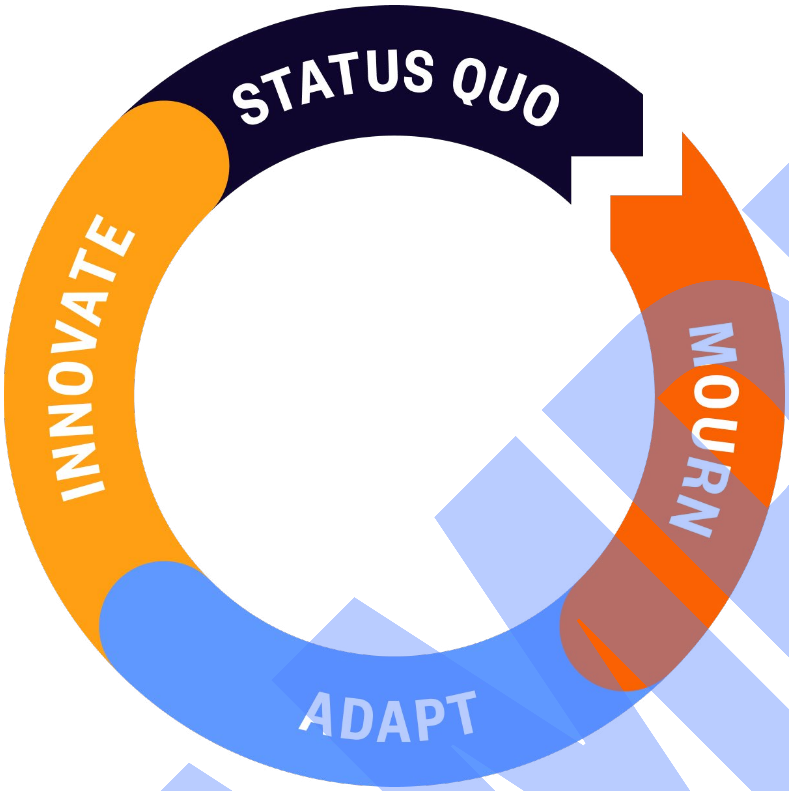
The Path Forward

These traps aren't character flaws—they're predictable patterns emerging from how humans learn and change. Leaders who create lasting routines aren't superhuman; they monitor for "traps."

They set neuroscience-based timelines rather than wishful thinking. They focus cognitive resources on one change at a time. They tend the social ecosystem that shapes behavior. They connect every routine to a deeper purpose. They design environments that make desired behavior inevitable rather than effortful.

Before launching your following routine, audit it against these five traps. Those extra preparation hours could mean the difference between temporary compliance and lasting transformation.

The goal isn't just implementing change, it's creating change that improves how work gets done, day after day, for years to come. That kind of change is worth getting right.

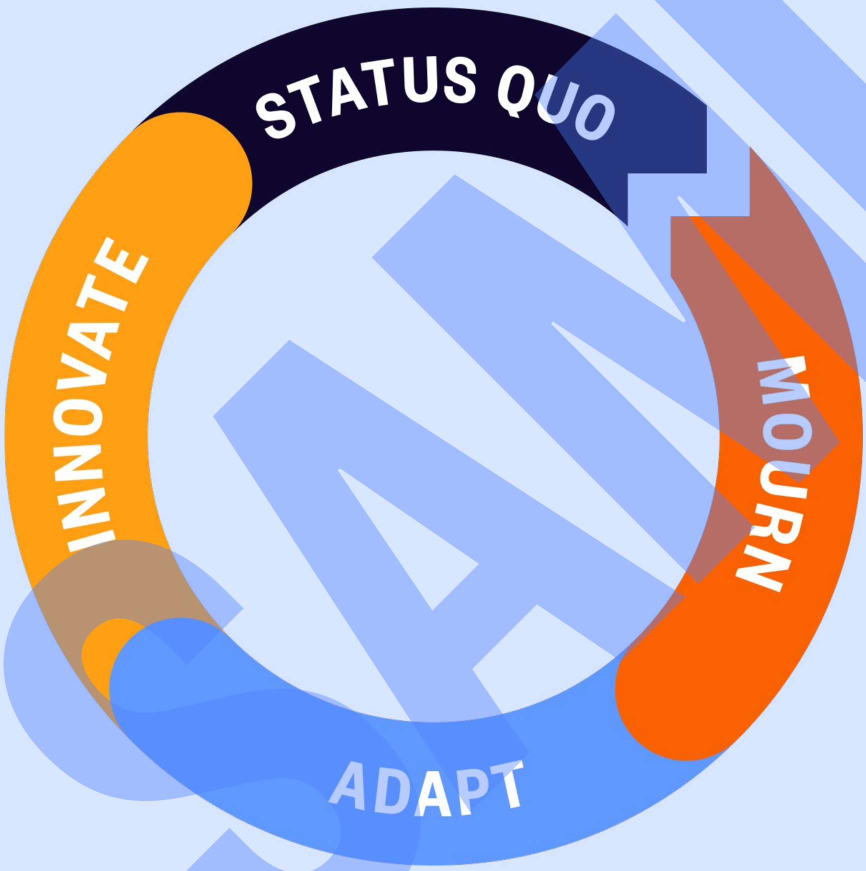


INNOVATE

Don’t Bounce Back, Break Through

INNOVATE

Transform disruptions into opportunities by reviewing lessons learned, adjusting mindsets, and experimenting with new possibilities. This phase moves teams from simply surviving change to actively shaping their future through creativity and experimentation.



Change is inevitable, transformation is optional.

Problem

When the pressure to Adapt ends, relief often replaces urgency, and that feels like success. Instead of a breakthrough, teams glide to autopilot, mistaking calm for accomplishment. The "**Relief Mirage**" undermines forward momentum before innovation truly takes hold.

Principle

Instead of aiming to get back to where you were, **Move the Finish Line** to a new, more ambitious target. Disruption creates unique opportunities for breakthrough innovation that don't exist during stable times.

Beyond Recovery to Breakthrough

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) research demonstrates that 50-80% of individuals report positive psychological changes following major challenges[22]. In organizational contexts, this translates to teams that don't just recover from disruption but achieve performance levels that exceed their pre-disruption capabilities.

Five Domains of Growth

Tedeschi and Calhoun's research identifies five key areas where growth typically occurs:

1. **Enhanced relationships**: Deeper trust and collaboration within teams
2. **Increased personal strength**: Greater confidence in handling future challenges
3. **New possibilities**: Recognition of opportunities invisible before the disruption
4. **Appreciation of work/purpose**: Renewed sense of meaning and priorities
5. **Philosophical development**: Clarified values and deeper understanding of purpose

Principle

MOVE THE FINISH LINE

Use disruption as a springboard to go further than you would have before, not just return to where you started. Instead of restoring the past, build a better future by shifting from managing change to creating it. Transform the resilience gained from adapting into momentum for leading and innovating.

Skills

REVIEW YOUR PLAN

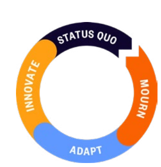
Systematically examine your current strategies and goals to identify what needs to change. Use disruption as a catalyst to question assumptions and explore new directions.

ADJUST YOUR MINDSET

Shift your thinking from recovery mode to breakthrough mode. Replace "How do we get back?" with "How do we break through?"

EXPERIMENT YOUR WAY FORWARD

Lead change by treating new ideas as small-scale experiments: form hypotheses, test quickly, learn from outcomes, and use that insight to make iterative adjustments.



Move the Finish Line

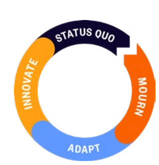
ADJUST YOUR MINDSET

Shift your thinking from recovery mode to breakthrough mode. Replace “How do we get back?” with “How do we break through?”

Strategies

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Reframe the situation from internal problem-solving to external opportunity-seeking. Ask “What else can we do?” to identify new ways to meet customer needs and create value beyond just fixing what’s broken.



Shifting Mindset

Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck's extensive research demonstrates that mindset (beliefs about whether abilities can be developed) significantly impacts performance, innovation, and resilience. In organizational change contexts, leaders with fixed mindsets create cultures that resist adaptation and learning.

What "Fixed" Sounds Like:

- "We've never done it that way"
- "This is too risky for our organization"
- "We don't have the right people for this"
- "If it's not broken, don't fix it"
- Focus on proving competence rather than developing it

Shift to Growth

In comparison to a "fixed" mindset, shifting toward "growth" means that intelligence and abilities are not fixed traits but can be developed through effort, effective strategies, and learning from feedback. In contrast to a fixed mindset, a growth mindset views challenges and setbacks as opportunities to grow rather than as evidence of limitations.

Growth Questions to Consider:

- "What did we learn from this week's challenges and setbacks?"
- "What experiment or new approach should we try next week?"
- "How can we build on what worked well this week?"
- "What assumption should we test or challenge this month?"

Growth Behaviors to Display:

- Publicly share your own mistakes and what you learned from them
- Ask for feedback on your own performance and decisions
- Celebrate team members who take intelligent risks, regardless of outcome
- Frame setbacks as data and learning opportunities rather than failures
- Use "yet" language: "I don't understand this yet" vs. "I don't understand this"

Move the Finish Line

EXPERIMENT YOUR WAY FORWARD

Lead change by treating new ideas as small-scale experiments: form hypotheses, test quickly, learn from outcomes, and use that insight to make iterative adjustments.

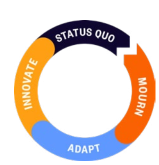
Strategies

DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Treat new initiatives as hypotheses: define what success looks like, test fast, and iterate.

COURAGE TO BE WRONG

Rely on curiosity, not perfection. Embracing failure as feedback transforms risk into insight.



Failure isn't a necessary evil. In fact, it isn't evil at all. It is a necessary consequence of doing something new.

ED CATMULL

CHANGE PLANNER

Review Your Plan

Use your hard work during Adapt as a catalyst toward questioning assumptions and exploring new directions that go beyond simply returning to normal.

Challenge Your Assumptions

- Which of your pre-disruption goals now seem too small or misdirected?
- What opportunities has this change revealed that weren't visible before?

Review Your Plan

Use your hard work during Adapt as a catalyst toward questioning assumptions and exploring new directions that go beyond simply returning to normal.

Identify What's Outdated

- Which strategies, processes, or goals were you pursuing (pre-disruption) simply because "that's how we've always done it"?
- Which objectives can you now see were holding your team back from something better?

Complete this statement: *"Before this disruption, we were focused on ________, but now I realize we could be pursuing ________."*

Review Your Plan

Use your hard work during Adapt as a catalyst toward questioning assumptions and exploring new directions that go beyond simply returning to normal.

Spot the New Possibilities

- What new capabilities has your team developed while adapting to this disruption?
- Which relationships, skills, or systems are now stronger than they were before?
- What would be possible now that wasn't possible six months ago?

Identify one significant new capability or opportunity:

Adjust Your Mindset

Shift from recovery mode to breakthrough mode. Replace “How do we get back?” with “How do we break through?”

From Recovery to Breakthrough

- When you think about the future, are you primarily focused on getting back to where you were or getting to somewhere better?
- What would “breakthrough” look like for your team rather than just “recovery”?
- How would your decisions change if your goal was to emerge stronger rather than survive?

Complete the statement: *“Now that we’ve recovered, we have the opportunity to...”*

Experiment Forward

Lead change by treating new ideas as small-scale experiments rather than significant commitments.

Design for Learning

- Of the breakthrough opportunities you've identified, which one could you test with minimal risk?
- What would success look like for this experiment after 30 days?
- How could you structure this as a hypothesis to test rather than a permanent change to implement?

Experiment Forward

Lead change by treating new ideas as small-scale experiments rather than significant commitments.

Create Learning Loops

- How will you track progress and gather feedback during your experiment?
- What data will tell you whether your hypothesis is correct?
- Who else could provide insights about whether this experiment is working?

Create a Learning Plan

My weekly check-in method's include...

[Fill In the Blank] are the key data points I track...

The feedback sources I trust are...

Experiment Forward

Lead change by treating new ideas as small-scale experiments rather than significant commitments.

Courage to Be Wrong

- What's the worst thing that could happen if this experiment doesn't work as expected?
- How could you turn a "failed" experiment into valuable learning for your next attempt?

Experiment Forward

Lead change by treating new ideas as small-scale experiments rather than significant commitments.

Scale or Pivot

- If your experiment shows early success, how would you expand it?
- If results are mixed, what modifications would you test next?
- If it fails, what different approach would you try instead?

STORIES

What Else Can We Become?

The Two Words That Built a $100 Billion Bank

In 2013, a fifty-three-year-old banker from Meerut sat across from one of China's most powerful technology titans and experienced what he would later call an epiphany. The banker was soft-spoken, methodical, a creature of spreadsheets and regulatory compliance. He wore aviator glasses and had the careful demeanor of someone who had spent twenty-seven years climbing the corporate ladder at Citigroup. The technology titan, Jack Ma, was describing a future where information and data would "revolutionize the nature of finance." Most traditional bankers would have nodded politely and returned to their quarterly reports. Piyush Gupta did something else entirely.

"I came back just thinking that as soon as these guys start coming out of China into our neck of the woods, we're going to be history," Gupta would later recall, "unless we fundamentally rethink what it means to do banking or financial services."

What happened next defies every assumption about how large organizations change and reveals why the most powerful transformation strategy might be hiding in a simple question.

To understand what made Gupta different, you have to understand what he inherited in 2009. DBS Bank was a respectable but unremarkable Singaporean institution, nicknamed by locals as "Damn, Bloody, Slow." It was what Gupta himself called "a stuffy bank, a loan shop" still recovering from the global financial crisis. Market capitalization was modest. Customer complaints were high. Digital innovation was an afterthought. The conventional move would have been incremental improvement, better interest rates, streamlined processes, and cost-cutting measures. In the banking world of 2009, this was considered bold leadership.

But Gupta had an unusual background for a banker. Unlike his peers who grew up on the lending side, he had built his career in product management, technology operations, and data centers. He had even tried his hand at entrepreneurship in 2000, launching a dot-com venture called Go4i.com that collapsed during the bubble. Most executives would have buried such a failure. Gupta talked about it openly, describing how the experience shaped his "tech-forward banking approach."

When Jack Ma painted his vision of data-driven finance, something clicked. "After hearing his vision for what he was going to do with what was then Alipay," Gupta said, "it blew me away."

Here's where the story gets interesting. Most leaders facing disruption ask: "How do we defend our business?" Gupta asked something radically different: "What else can we become?"

The question sounds simple, but it represents a fundamental shift in thinking. Instead of asking "What does the bank want to do?", the question that had driven banking strategy for decades, Gupta reframed everything around a different puzzle: "How do we make dealing with DBS easy, fun, convenient, and meaningful?" This wasn't semantics. This was a cognitive revolution.

"We came up with this whole agenda to do a radical transformation," Gupta explained. "We called it the Making Banking Joyful program." The mission statement was so unconventional that early employees thought it was a joke. Banking and joy were not words that belonged in the same sentence.

But watch what happened next. DBS stopped thinking like a bank and started thinking like a technology platform. "Our frame of reference had to be Amazon or Alibaba," Gupta said. "We had to stop thinking about what other banks will do."

By 2017, DBS had launched the world's largest banking API platform with 155 APIs. Today, it has over 1,000 APIs connecting 400+ partners. But here's what makes this remarkable: they weren't just digitizing banking, they were reimagining what banking could become in customers' lives.

Property shopping? DBS embedded real-time loan affordability checks directly into PropertyGuru. Planning travel? DBS created Singapore's first integrated travel marketplace with Singapore Airlines. Choosing utilities? DBS built comparison tools into its app. The bank became invisible, woven into the fabric of daily life.

The results were staggering. DBS became the first bank in history to hold three global "Best Bank" awards simultaneously. Market capitalization quadrupled. Share price delivered 600% returns. Net profits reached SGD 11.4 billion in 2024, one of the highest returns on equity among developed market banks.

"We achieved a record financial performance in 2024 with return on equity of 18.0%," Gupta announced in his final year as CEO, "one of the highest among developed market banks."

Harvard Business School published multiple case studies on the transformation. Academic institutions lined up to study what they called "one of the most comprehensive transformation programmes for a bank."

But here's the deeper pattern that Gupta's story reveals, and why it matters far beyond banking: the most successful leaders don't ask better versions of old questions; they ask entirely different questions.

Most organizations facing disruption focus internally: "How do we fix our problems?" "How do we improve our products?" "How do we cut costs?" These questions, no matter how expertly answered, trap leaders in defensive thinking.

Gupta's genius was in recognizing that the most powerful innovations come from shifting the entire frame of reference. Not “How do we do banking better?” but “What else can banking become?” Not “How do we compete with fintech?” but “How do we embed ourselves so seamlessly into customers’ lives that banking becomes joyful?”

This is what psychologists call “cognitive reappraisal,” the ability to reframe challenges as opportunities. But most leaders do this accidentally, if at all. Gupta did it systematically, embedding the “What else?” mindset into the cultural DNA of 33,000 employees through hackathons, innovation awards, and what he called “culture by design.”

“Behaving like a startup meant shifting the bank’s mindset,” Gupta explained, “from that of a mature multinational to one that is more nimble, more agile; one which is constantly learning, experimenting and innovating on the fly.”

The banking industry had been asking the wrong question for decades. Gupta’s insight was recognizing that the most powerful transformations begin not with better answers, but with better questions. Who we are cannot be separated from what we ask.

And sometimes, the difference between stagnation and revolution is as simple as adding two words: “What else?”

Who Closed The Tube?

A Closed Subway That Opened Minds

In a study conducted at Cambridge and Oxford Universities, researchers examined what happened when London's Underground (a system that moves 3.4 million people daily through 270 stations) suddenly stopped working. The results revealed something particularly curious about human rationality.

On February 4, 2014, workers went on strike, shuttering 171 stations and stranding hundreds of thousands of commuters. This created what Dr. Shaun Larcom of Cambridge's Department of Land Economy called "a natural experiment" in behavior. What followed would challenge our most basic assumptions about decision-making.

The researchers had negotiated access to something remarkable: anonymized Oyster card data spanning twenty days and encompassing more than 200 million individual journeys. "We're looking at whether consumers usually make the best decision," explained Dr. Ferdinand Rauch from Oxford, "but it's never been empirically tested using a large consumer dataset."

Yet the London Underground map itself embodies a fundamental deception. Conceived in 1933 by electrical draughtsman Harry Beck, it reimagines the sprawling Victorian railway as a clean circuit diagram, abandoning geographical accuracy for clarity. Stations miles apart appear equidistant; others, practically neighboring, seem vastly separated. For eighty years, this elegant simplification has guided millions of daily journeys (while quietly misdirecting them).

During the strike, Londoners adapted as humans do: they took buses, rented bicycles, walked forgotten routes. Some discovered that surface travel from Paddington to Bank was faster than the Underground. Others found that bus-rail combinations, previously considered unthinkable, significantly cut commute times. When regular service resumed, approximately one in twenty affected commuters chose not to return to their original routes.

They had discovered, through necessity, that their "emergency" alternatives were superior to routines established over years, sometimes decades.

"For the small fraction who found a better route," Larcom observed, "when multiplied over time, the benefit outweighs the inconvenience suffered by many more." Despite widespread disruption and chaos, the strike had produced a net economic benefit for London, a conclusion that borders on the absurd, yet remains mathematically sound.

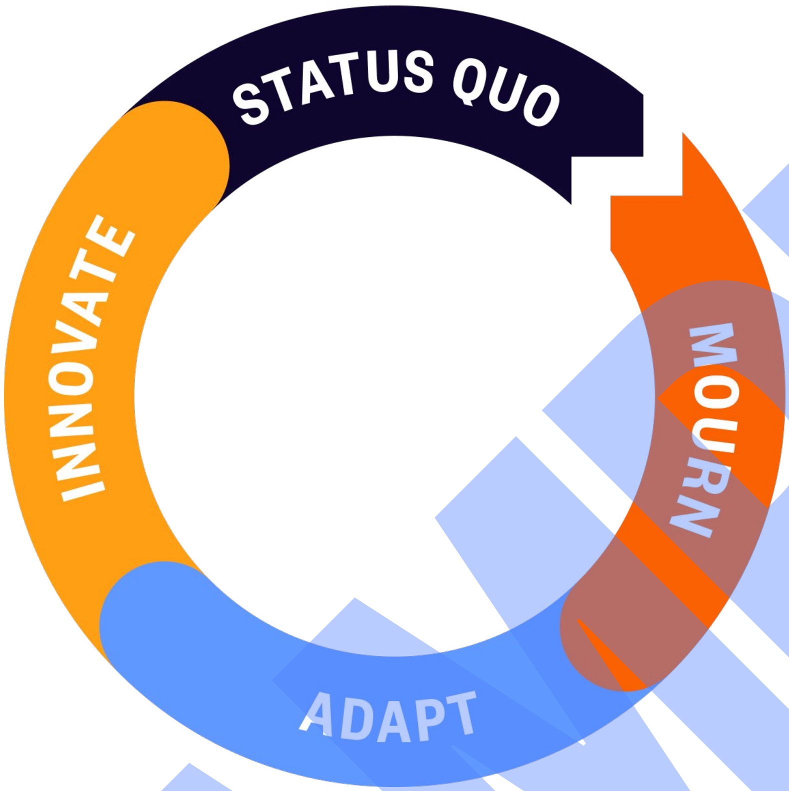
The phenomenon has a name in behavioral economics: "satisficing," settling for the first adequate solution rather than seeking the optimal one. "People get stuck with suboptimal decisions because they don't experiment enough," Rauch noted with characteristic academic understatement. Nevertheless, the more profound irony emerged when researchers examined which commuters were most likely to benefit from disruption.

By digitizing Beck's map and comparing it to actual distances, they discovered that commuters traveling through areas where the map's distortions were greatest were also most likely to stumble upon better routes during the strike. The very tool designed to help Londoners navigate had been systematically misleading them for generations.

This raises questions extending far beyond public transportation. "Given that the challenges faced by businesses are arguably more complex than the commuter-problem analyzed in this paper," the researchers concluded, "it seems likely that many firms are not operating efficiently either." Yet how many organizations voluntarily disrupt their established processes to test for better alternatives?

The answer is vanishingly few. We develop routines, master familiar patterns, then stop experimenting, not because we've found optimal solutions, but because adequate ones feel sufficient. Only when circumstance eliminates our usual choices do we discover what we've been missing.

Sometimes, the most efficient path forward requires having your usual route blocked entirely.



HUDDLES

Overview & Weekly Agendas

Principle

HUDDLES

Each week, learners are assigned to a specific group to meet outside of class. These meetings are called **Huddles**. Each group selects a weekly meeting time that best suits their specific needs.

WEEKLY AGENDAS

The following Huddle agendas are structured 45-minute discussion guides designed to merge your Learner Portal exercises into practical application.

These agendas facilitate small group conversations where leaders review course concepts, share real-world challenges, and develop solutions together.

Huddles create an environment where participants refine their strategies through peer feedback and collaborative problem-solving.

Each agenda follows a three-phase structure:

Connection (relationship building)
Partner Practice (feedback & planning)
Group Discussions (group insights & brainstorming)

WEEK 1 CHANGEOS

Connection

10 minutes

- Your name and role, plus one thing about your current work that you genuinely enjoy (it doesn't have to be related to AI or technology)
- A recent change you've successfully navigated in your personal or professional life - what made the difference in how you handled it?

Pair Up

20 minutes

- Review your Status Quo Diagnosis from pages 15-18 of your Participant Guide.
  Share your assessed impact and intensity with your partner.
  Ask each other: *Does your assessment seem realistic? Are there blind spots you might be missing?*
- Share your Team Key Results that you identified in your Change Planner.
  Ask your partner to help you refine the objectives and metrics, if needed. Focus especially on clarity and measurement: *Will your team understand exactly what success looks like*?

With Your Huddle

20 minutes

- Review your Status Quo Diagnosis from pages 15-18 of your Participant Guide.
  Share your assessed impact and intensity with your partner.
  Ask each other: *Does your assessment seem realistic? Are there blind spots you might be missing?*
- Share your Team Key Results that you identified in your Change Planner.
  Ask your partner to help you refine the objectives and metrics, if needed. Focus especially on clarity and measurement: *will your team understand exactly what success looks like*?

WEEK 2 MOURN

Connection

10 minutes

- What's one positive change you're looking forward to implementing with your team in the coming month? It could be from this course or something else entirely.
- What's your natural reaction when facing unexpected changes at work - do you tend to jump in quickly, pause and analyze, or seek input from others first? (No wrong answers!)

Pair Up

20 minutes

- What is your plan to be **Visible, Accessible, and Transparent**? Review your strategy from your participant materials.

  If you need help creating a plan, ask your partner for their insights. Focus on specific, actionable behaviors your team will actually notice.

- Turn to page 42 and brainstorm various ways that you can **Shrink the Problem** and communicate that mindset to your team. Work together to generate at least 3-5 practical approaches you haven't considered yet.

With Your Huddle

15 minutes

- Discuss pages 44-45. As you look at the need to **Evolve Expectations**, what modifications did you make to team timelines, deliverables, and results? Share specific examples and the reasoning behind your adjustments.

WEEK 3 ADAPT

Connection

10 minutes

- What's a favorite part of your job that keeps you energized? You can't say "lunch," "going home," or "vacation days."
- When you're adapting to something new, do you prefer to experiment quietly first, or dive in publicly and learn as you go? What's the advantage of your approach?

Pair Up

20 minutes

- Share the **Routines, Prompts, & Cues** you chose on pages 67-69 of your Participant Guide.

  Brainstorm potential edits and refinements you can make. Focus particularly on which routines will be most sustainable under pressure and which cues your team will actually notice and respond to.

With Your Huddle

15 minutes

- Turn to page 65 and discuss the balance between defining your team's **Core** and building flexibility outside of that core.

  Share how each of you has defined that within your team and openly request/offer feedback. What's working well? What feels too rigid or too loose

WEEK 4 INNOVATE

Connection

10 minutes

- What's one insight from this **AI30** course that has shifted your thinking about leading through change? How are you already applying it?
- Looking at current events (work-related or world events), where do you see examples of leaders either thriving or struggling with disruptions? What can we learn from both?

Pair Up

20 minutes

- Share your new opportunities from page 90 of your Participant Guide. Ask your partner to help you brainstorm opportunities that you haven't considered yet.

  Push each other to think beyond obvious solutions - what could be possible if you removed certain constraints?.

With Your Huddle

15 minutes

- What advice can you share with the group about how you maintain a "courage to be wrong?" Additionally, what weaknesses hinder this process? Be specific about both mindsets and practical strategies.
- Discuss the delicate balance between recognizing when an experiment shows signs that it should scale versus when your experiment shows signs that you should pivot to something else. Share examples and decision-making frameworks that help you navigate this tension.

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ADAPT IN 30