

# ADAPT TO THRIVE: BUILDING CHANGE-READY ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS

Thought Leadership

In today's dynamic business environment, driven by rapidly evolving technologies like generative AI, market trends are continually shifting.

Alongside these developments, workforce skilling and upskilling, the need for innovation, and employee resilience have become critical considerations for companies worldwide. In this landscape of constant change and growing uncertainty, the ability to adapt has emerged as a crucial competency for organizational survival and sustainability.

A study published in the *MIT Sloan Management Review* revealed that companies that successfully sustained high performance during these shifts were those that rapidly adapted to changing conditions. Korn Ferry analysis of 6 million global employee opinion survey data further underscores organizational adaptability to financial outcomes. Responses from 50 high performing companies who lead their industries in a set of financial measures are compared against those from 500 peer companies. The analysis found that a company's capability to respond effectively to changes in the business environment is one of the biggest areas of differentiation. In high performing companies, 82% of employees respond favorably, versus 69% of employees in other companies.

Adapting to the evolving business environment means companies have to adjust at least some aspects of their operations. However, traditional change management approaches—particularly top-down strategies embraced by 75% of organizations, according to a 2022 Gartner survey—often fall short. Employees tend to perceive such changes as imposed and autocratic, and the strategies often lack necessary detail for effective execution.

## The pivotal role of middle managers in change

As businesses wrestle with the implications of transformative technologies and shifting workforce dynamics, the role of leadership in promoting change readiness becomes paramount. More specifically, middle managers, due to their more intimate understanding of employee perspectives and needs, have a critical role to play. The challenge is not merely to achieve a one-time transformation; instead, it is to embed the capacity for continuous adaptation and transformation into the company's DNA.

Success breeds confidence. When an organization succeeds, its leaders and members tend to attribute success to themselves rather than to luck. They grow more confident in their own abilities and of their company's existing programs and procedures. Reinforced by past success, these practices are normalized and routinized, rarely challenged by members in the organization.

Once-conscious choices become implicit beliefs that are deeply ingrained and reflexive, dictating the organization's behaviors and decision-making processes. These mindsets function like scripts, setting a sequence of appropriate responses to specific situations. However, to navigate the new realities introduced by technological disruption or other market changes, organizations must reexamine these implicitly held assumptions and adopt new, more flexible perspectives.

## Unpacking the 6 organizing principles

Astute organizations, inherently ready for change, operate based on six organizing principles that represent these transformational mindsets:

- **Anticipate the Unexpected:** Astute organizations are always prepared for deviations and exceptions, viewing them as opportunities for growth and learning.
- **Diversify Perspectives:** These organizations challenge established assumptions and seek alternative interpretations, driving innovation through diverse thinking.
- **Anchor on Purpose:** They emphasize the “why” behind their actions, aligning their activities with their purpose, instead of becoming fixated on “what” is done.
- **Progress over Perfection:** Astute organizations adopt an action-oriented approach, learning through doing and acting quickly to seize new opportunities, rather than focusing solely on perfection.
- **Trust in Partnering:** They rely on collaborative intelligence, bringing together knowledge, experience, and intuition from across the business to respond to unexpected situations.
- **Sustain Resilience:** These organizations demonstrate the ability to maintain operations while adapting to new challenges and changes.

## Embracing the opportunity to cultivate change readiness

As technology continues to advance at an unprecedented pace, organizations can reassess and redefine their readiness for change. They can implement a framework that enables middle management to cultivate these six organizing principles within their teams, thereby fostering a change-ready environment from within.

This framework provides a shared language to facilitate the development of collective mindsets throughout the organization, contextualizing leadership programs within the broader narrative of organizational transformation. It also underlines the unique role of middle managers in driving change, emphasizing sustainable behavioral change via mindset alteration.

By aligning leaders across various functions through these shared mindsets, organizations can nurture a culture that embraces change as a

catalyst for innovation. Ultimately, in a world defined by technological disruption, the emphasis should not only be on preparing for change, but also on fostering an organizational culture that proactively drives change from within. Companies that can shift their collective mindset toward these principles will be better equipped to turn the uncertainties of the future into opportunities for growth and transformation. The future belongs to those who are astute, mindful, responsive, and proactive. By focusing on these six principles and embracing a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, organizations can thrive amidst the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Modern organizations, after all, are not merely the sum of their technologies and products, but the collective mindsets of their people. In a world where the only constant is change, readiness for transformation is no longer just a competitive edge—it’s a requirement for survival, a catalyst for innovation, and the key to long-term success.

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