



THE HEART
OF CHANGE
GUIDE

THECHANGELAB

FROM THE MICHELLEMCQUAID GROUP

THE NEW NORMAL

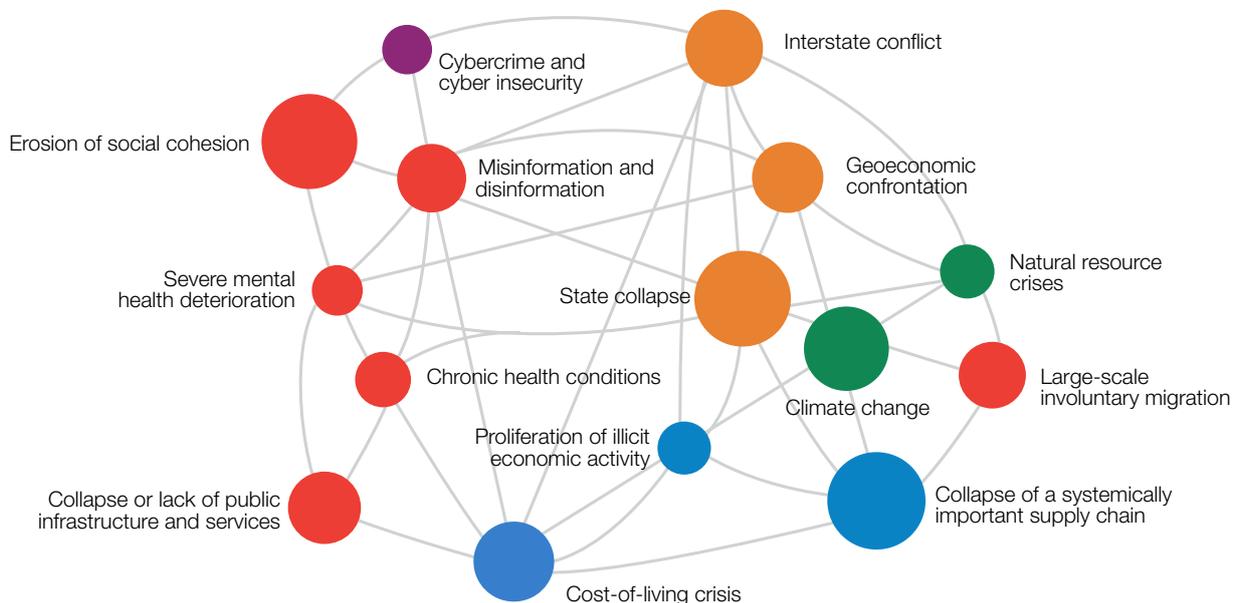
You know that feeling when everything seems to be changing at once? When you can't quite put your finger on why work suddenly feels different, relationships have started to feel strained, and nothing seems as predictable as it used to be? You're not imagining it.

We're living through a supercycle of change - where technological, social, geopolitical, climate, and economic shifts are colliding and amplifying each other.

It's creating constant 'Oh FUD!' moments - those overwhelming waves of **f**ear, **u**ncertainty, and **d**oubt that are causing many of us to feel like we're quietly cracking. Where we're doing okay on the outside, but inside increasingly we feel like we're falling apart.

Traditional ways of managing change weren't built for this kind of interconnected chaos. The evidence is everywhere: more than half of workplace changes are failing and 'poor change management' has become the leading cause of burnout.

What we need now are more human-centered ways of navigating this pace and complexity of change without breaking under it.



Risk categories ■ Economic ■ Environmental ■ Geopolitical ■ Societal ■ Technological

HUMAN-CENTERED CHANGE

To cope with this level of complex change, we need to feel 'safe enough' - not certain, not in control, but safe enough to stay curious and open.

The starting point: Embracing 'I don't know.'

When we can stop pretending to have all the answers, we can ask better questions and truly listen to each other. This kind of genuine conversation - not just another status update - is what sustains our connection amidst chaos.

The fuel: Find out what people care enough to own.

When we're invited to self-organize, rather than being micro-managed or controlled, resistance transforms into accountable momentum. It allows you to quickly discover where real progress is possible.

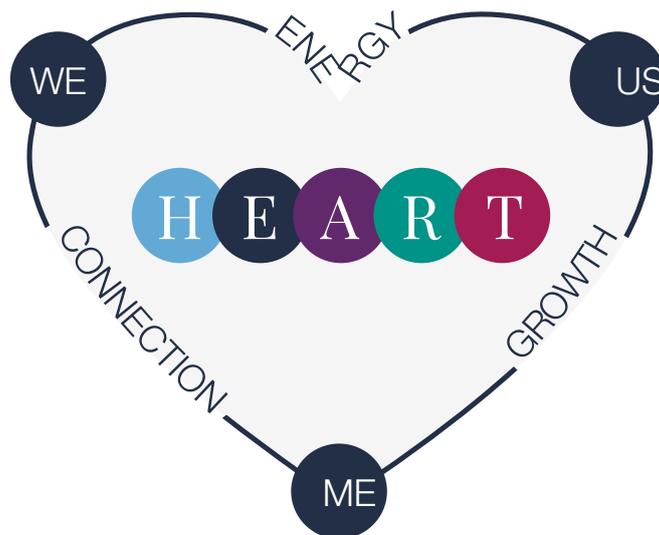
The goal: Growing our change capabilities.

Strengthening our ability to sense what's happening, adapt, and learn together as the world around us - and within us - keeps shifting. This isn't about 'making change stick.' It's about building the emotional and social capacity to confidently and competently navigate unpredictability.

All of this requires a different neurological approach to change.

It takes HEART - honoring each other's feelings, engaging purposefully in conversations, appreciating our strengths, reaching out for help, and taking tiny steps forward.

Because in a supercycle of change, we need to support our human experiences, not just rely on project plans.



[Click here to learn more about navigating the human side of change in episode 1 of our podcast.](#)

THE HEART OF CHANGE

When we lead change with HEART instead of just project plans, something remarkable happens. Our research with over 1,000 workplaces shows on average they achieve 69% change success rates (compared to 47% for traditional approaches) and reduce the poor change management experiences by up to 24%.

Here's how each factor works:



HONOR ALL FEELINGS: Recognize difficult emotions as valuable data that guide learning and growth, rather than problems to suppress or fix.



ENGAGE PURPOSEFULLY: Turn announcements into conversations that help people discover what they care enough to own.



APPRECIATE STRENGTHS: Build confidence during uncertainty by helping people leverage what they're good at and enjoy doing to sustain momentum.



REACH OUT: Create the psychological safety people need to willingly ask for and offer help, preventing the isolation that leads to quiet cracking and burnout.



TAKE TINY STEPS: Encourage people to break overwhelming change into manageable actions that make it easier to access flexible and adaptive thinking.

To navigate change successfully, you need to cultivate each of the HEART factors.

How much you'll need of each factor will vary depending on the type of change you're facing, the people you're working with, and the outcomes you want to achieve. For example, during a crisis, you might lean heavily into honoring feelings and taking tiny steps. But for a complex transformation, engaging purposefully and reaching out may be critical.

These factors work through a systems lens: individual (Me), leader and team (We), and organizational (Us).

What happens at each level influences the others - individual responses shape team dynamics, team approaches influence organizational culture, and organizational systems either support or undermine individual and team capabilities.

This is why the HEART factors are most powerful when implemented as an integrated approach, rather than isolated practices.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Before diving into each factor, it helps to see where you stand right now. The HEART Check below reveals patterns - both your strengths and your struggles - across individual, team, and organizational levels. Use these insights to guide which factors you want to prioritize.

Think about how you've navigated change over the past two weeks. Rate each statement from 0 (not at all true) to 10 (completely true):

MY HEART CHECK:

HEART FACTOR	STATEMENT	SCORE
HONOR FEELINGS	I expressed my true thoughts and feelings about the changes	
ENGAGE PURPOSEFULLY	I engaged in meaningful conversations about the changes	
APPRECIATE STRENGTHS	I used my strengths to contribute meaningfully towards the changes	
REACH OUT	I asked for help when I needed it around the changes	
TAKE TINY STEPS	I took actions that helped move the changes forward	

TEAM HEART CHECK:

HEART FACTOR	STATEMENT	SCORE
HONOR FEELINGS	My team spoke honestly about how we felt about the changes	
ENGAGE PURPOSEFULLY	My team had meaningful conversations about the changes	
APPRECIATE STRENGTHS	My team recognized and utilized our strengths to navigate the changes	
REACH OUT	My team reached out to others for help to navigate uncertainty	
TAKE TINY STEPS	My team broke down changes into manageable steps without feeling overwhelmed	

WORKPLACE HEART CHECK:

HEART FACTOR	STATEMENT	SCORE
HONOR FEELINGS	My workplace acknowledged that uncertainty can trigger a range of emotions	
ENGAGE PURPOSEFULLY	My workplace involved us in meaningful conversations about changes My workplace	
APPRECIATE STRENGTHS	clearly communicated how we can use our strengths to navigate changes	
REACH OUT	My workplace provided clear pathways to connect with others for support	
TAKE TINY STEPS	My workplace broke down change goals into small wins that built confidence	

OUR HEART CHECK RESULTS

Think of these results as conversation starters, not report cards. Here's where the interesting conversations begin. Ask yourself:

- **WHAT'S WORKING WELL?**

Spotlight the bright spots - those surprisingly effective approaches that are helping you navigate the mess. Even small wins count, and yes, having this conversation is definitely one of them.

- **WHERE ARE WE STRUGGLING?**

Make this your judgment-free zone for acknowledging the messy reality of change. If transformation was easy, everyone would nail it on the first try. Each challenge is just pointing you toward what you need to learn next.

- **WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?**

This is where patterns emerge and insights surface. What's this change teaching you about yourselves and how you work together?

- **WHAT DO WE WANT TO TRY NEXT?**

Time to get practical about moving forward. What small experiments could help you navigate this change more effectively? How can you set each other up for success?

Remember: These conversations aren't about having all the answers - they're about creating space to continue growing your emotional and social capacity to navigate unpredictability together.

By regularly checking in with the HEART Check and having these honest discussions, you're not just managing change - you're building the kind of trust and support that can turn uncertainty into opportunity. And that's worth more than any perfect score.

HONOR FEELINGS

People often spend enormous energy trying to keep their feelings about change under wraps. Fear about job security. Anger about what's being taken away. Overwhelm about the pace. But the feelings are there whether we acknowledge them or not.

When we don't make space for emotions, people's brains interpret the need to silence themselves as a signal that they're 'not safe enough.' Their nervous systems shift into protection mode and trigger their stress responses (fight, flight, freeze, fawn or flop).



Thinking slows down. Creativity shuts down. Trust dries up.

As a result, often the very people we need most engaged during uncertainty begin quietly cracking under the pressure of pretending they're "fine".

But when we make space to talk honestly about hard things, people's brains interpret this as a signal that they are 'safe enough.' Their nervous systems shift into connection mode triggering their curiosity, creativity, courage, compassion, and confidence.



Minds open up. Innovation lights up. Collaboration fires up.

The truth is people's emotions provide valuable data about what's working and what isn't when it comes to navigating the unpredictability that change brings.

That person who seems resistant? Their anxiety might be saying "I need more information to feel safer about this direction." The colleague who's been sharp in meetings? Their anger could signal "Something I value feels threatened." Even the sadness about how things used to work carries important information: "We're grieving what we're losing, and that's part of moving forward."

Try to get curious, rather than critical. Ask: "What are these feelings telling us?"



When you honor feelings instead of shutting them down, you create the psychological safety people need to embrace complex changes together.

[Click here to learn more about honoring emotions in episode 2 of our podcast.](#)

ENGAGE PURPOSEFULLY

Too often, change feels like something being done to people rather than with them. Emails replace conversations. Plans arrive fully formed. Efficiency trumps engagement. And in response, some comply quietly, others resist loudly, but many people just disengage.

This is rarely an act of deliberate defiance. Rather, when change arrives without consultation, people's brains search for relevance to their values and often struggle to find it. This triggers a 'not safe enough' signal, shifting their nervous systems into protection mode. As a result, they offer compliance but tend to withhold commitment.



Questions multiply. Uncertainty spreads. Hope falters.

In contrast, when people are engaged in meaningful conversations to design solutions - shaping the why, the what, and the how - their brains signal 'safe enough,' activating their nervous system's connection circuit. We create space for these conversations by inviting different points of view, listening to understand, and building shared solutions.

Only then do people have the chance to honestly explore: Why does this change matter to me? How do I want to help?



Ideas emerge. Commitment surges. Momentum rises.

Having found their personal connection to the change, people start finding resources, prioritizing actions, and taking responsibility for achieving the shared outcomes they want.

Resist micromanaging this momentum. Instead, keep it going by eliminating roadblocks, resourcing good ideas, creating regular check-ins, and celebrating learning - not just outcomes.

Continue asking: "What do you care enough to own?"



Engage purposefully by shifting from telling people what to do - to asking what they want to own and channelling their energy to where it's needed most.

[Click here to learn more about engage purposefully in episode 3 of our podcast.](#)

APPRECIATE STRENGTHS

It's human nature to fixate on what's not working during change. Our brains are wired to scan for risks, spot gaps, and list problems in our quest to eliminate uncertainty.

At first, this feels productive - like we're being responsible and thorough. But as change becomes more complex, this deficit focus tends to backfire. People's nervous systems become overwhelmed and shift into protection mode, draining the very energy and confidence they need to navigate change.



Minds ruminate. Capabilities are overlooked. Self-belief crumbles.

Here's where most of us go wrong: we spend about 80% of our energy trying to fix what's broken and only 20% building on what's working. But when we flip this equation and start appreciating strengths - those things people are good at and enjoy doing - their brains signal 'safe enough.'

When we can align what people are good at with what needs to happen, they enter that state of flow - they're 'in the zone' - where change becomes energizing instead of exhausting. They learn to dial up their strengths when they're hesitating and dial them back when they're overwhelming others or burning themselves out. Work stops feeling like something to endure and becomes something that sustains them.



Attention expands. Creativity flows. Confidence grows.

This doesn't mean ignoring what's broken - we still need to tackle real problems. But it does mean aligning what people can contribute during chaos.

For example, the person with strong interpersonal skills brings people together and builds trust. The team that thrives on solving puzzles uses their analytical skills to make sense of chaos. The leader who asks great questions opens up conversations that help people find meaning.

Try to focus on what people do well. Ask: "What part of this change excites you most?"



When you appreciate strengths more than you chase down problems, you unleash the capabilities people need to navigate uncertainty.

[Click here to learn more about appreciate strengths in episode 4 of our podcast.](#)

REACH OUT

People tend to go to great lengths to hide their struggles. They avoid asking questions that reveal gaps in their knowledge. They refuse to ask for help in case others think they can't cope. And, they pretend they have everything under control while quietly falling apart inside.

When struggling feels shameful, people's brains signal 'not safe enough.' Their nervous systems shift into protection mode, making the simple act of asking for help feel like a threat to their survival.



Problems multiply. Knowledge is hoarded. Relationships fracture.

But here's what people miss: none of us have it all figured out.

When teams normalize asking for help, something powerful happens: shared struggle replaces individual failure. Each request, whether answered or not, builds trust by saying "I value what you know." Once people see asking for help as learning together rather than failing alone, their brains signal 'safe enough.' This shift transforms uncertainty from a threat into a catalyst for collective growth.



Help is sought. Resources are shared. Trust deepens.

Supporting each other doesn't mean saying yes to everything. Effective helpers set boundaries, play to their strengths, and create solutions that benefit themselves and others.

Make reaching out routine. Ask: "What would make reaching out feel easier than struggling in silence?"



Your choice to reach out demonstrates how seeking help unlocks solutions that isolation keeps hidden.

Click here to learn more about reach out in episode 5 of our podcast.

TAKE TINY STEPS

When change feels complex, our brains crave control. Detailed deliverables. Clear deadlines. Guaranteed results. But when our roadmaps collide with reality, even the best laid plans can quickly fall apart.

The breakdown forces false choices. Should we prioritize speed or accuracy? Innovation or risk management? Our brains quickly get stuck trying to solve tensions that aren't meant to be resolved, leaving us feeling 'not safe enough.'



Uncertainty flares. Frustrations fester. Actions falter.

But complex changes have too many moving parts to reliably predict. Even the best forecasting tools can't map every ripple in advance. This is why taking tiny steps beats making grand plans - they let us test and learn as we go.

When teams feel 'safe enough' to run small experiments, they escape either/or thinking and find both/and solutions. Fast AND careful by testing quickly with checkpoints. Innovative AND grounded by trying new approaches within stable boundaries. Each tiny step builds their tolerance for uncertainty.



Senses sharpen. Learning quickens. Flexibility strengthens.

Taking tiny steps doesn't mean settling for less – it's about re-defining success. Instead of trying to make change stick, which makes us fragile when the world keeps shifting, we build skills to sense what comes next. We pilot ideas, not just launch them. We monitor people's energy, not just deadlines. We learn from setbacks, not just successes. We celebrate small wins, not just finish lines.

Shrink the change down. Ask: "What's the smallest action that would have the biggest positive impact right now?"



When we take tiny steps instead of betting on big plans, we develop the flexibility to turn whatever happens next into an opportunity.

Click here to learn more about take tiny steps in episode 6 of our podcast.

LEADING WITH HEART

The way most of us have been leading change works against people's brains. All that effort to control outcomes triggers the very protection responses that shut down thinking, creativity, and collaboration.

There's another way.

- Instead of pretending to have all the answers, you can embrace "I don't know" and start asking questions.
- Instead of confusing control with order, you can support people to self-organize around what matters.
- Instead of chasing the illusion that change will stick, you can improve people's capabilities to thrive through uncertainty.

This requires HEART - **H**onoring feelings, **E**ngaging purposefully, **A**ppreciating strengths, **R**eaching out, and **T**aking tiny steps.

These aren't feel-good practices. They're neurological necessities for navigating uncertainty.

This is how you lead through the constant 'Oh FUD!' moments - those waves of **f**ear, **u**ncertainty, and **d**oubt - that come with a supercycle of change. Not by pretending you can eliminate uncertainty with detailed plans, but by helping people to build the emotional and social capabilities they need to stay engaged without quietly cracking or burning out. And to keep learning as you adapt, adapt, adapt.

Where will you start?

WANT MORE?



FREE - NAVIGATING CHANGE TOOLBOX

Build the psychological safety needed for successful change initiatives. This free toolkit equips you with the HEART framework, assessment tools, and practical conversation templates that help teams navigate uncertainty together without quietly cracking or burning out. [Click here to download your free toolkit.](#)



FREE – HEART OF CHANGE SURVEY TOOL

Get personalized insights on navigating change more effectively in just 5 minutes. The survey measures five key areas – **H**onoring feelings, **E**ngaging in dialogue, **A**ppreciating strengths, **R**eaching out for support, and **T**aking tiny steps. Receive an immediate report with practical actions to make change easier. [Click here to take the survey.](#)



FREE – TINY NUDGES FOR YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Calm the “Oh FUD!” moments of fear, uncertainty, and doubt that hijack clear thinking during change. This free video series teaches evidence-based techniques you can use anywhere to steady yourself when uncertainty strikes. Includes downloadable playsheets with specific methods that work directly with your nervous system. [Click here to access the videos.](#)



LEADING HEART OF CHANGE MASTERCLASS

Develop neurologically-informed skills to help people move through uncertainty without quietly cracking or burning out. This masterclass provides assessment tools, conversation templates, and ready-to-use micro-practices you can co-brand and implement immediately. Perfect for leaders, champions, and practitioners supporting people through change. [Click here to secure your spot.](#)