

FROM CHANGE FATIGUE TO CHANGE CAPABILITY

How Learning and Development Can Build a Focused, Adaptable,
and High-Performing Workforce During Continuous Disruption

A WHITE PAPER BY

ALEXIS KING, MBA, CPTD®

Keynote Speaker | Leadership Strategist | Talent Development Expert
Creator of The Career Ninja Mindset®

August 2026

About This White Paper

Workplace change is no longer a temporary phase between periods of stability. For many organizations, it is the operating environment. New technologies, shifting customer expectations, reorganizations, changing roles, constrained resources, and evolving business models require employees and leaders to adapt while continuing to deliver results.

This paper presents the Change Capability Model, a practical approach grounded in learning and development, leadership, and performance. It is designed for senior HR, learning, talent, change, and business leaders who are responsible for helping people perform through disruption rather than simply endure it.

Central proposition

Organizations cannot communicate their way through continuous change. They must build the clarity, skills, behaviors, leadership support, and reinforcement that allow people to keep learning and performing while change is happening.

Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. 1. Continuous Change Has Become a Workforce Capability Problem
3. 2. The Hidden Cost of Unsupported Change
4. 3. Why Communication and Training Alone Are Not Enough
5. 4. The Change Capability Model
6. 5. Prioritize: Create Clarity for Action
7. 6. Practice: Turn Information Into Capability
8. 7. Persistence: Sustain Momentum Without Burnout
9. 8. The Expanded Role of Learning and Development
10. 9. The Manager as Change Translator
11. 10. A Five-Stage Implementation Roadmap
12. 11. Measuring Change Capability
13. 12. Recommendations for Leaders
14. Conclusion
15. Change Capability Diagnostic
16. References
17. About the Author

Executive Summary

Organizations are asking people to absorb more change, more frequently, and often with less time to prepare. Artificial intelligence is redesigning workflows. Organizational structures are becoming more fluid. Roles are evolving faster than traditional job descriptions, training calendars, and annual planning cycles can accommodate. The result is not simply “change fatigue.” It is a growing gap between the pace of disruption and the workforce’s capacity to respond effectively.

The World Economic Forum reports that employers expect 39 percent of workers’ core skills to change by 2030, while resilience, flexibility, agility, leadership, and social influence continue to rise in importance. Microsoft’s 2025 Work Trend Index found that 82 percent of leaders viewed the year as pivotal for rethinking strategy and operations, while 80 percent of the global workforce reported lacking the time or energy to do their work. These pressures create a difficult mandate: transform the organization while maintaining performance. [1][2]

Many organizations respond with communication campaigns, town halls, tool demonstrations, and one-time training. These activities matter, but they often stop at awareness. Employees may understand that something is changing without knowing how to reprioritize their work, practice new behaviors, make decisions under uncertainty, or sustain performance after the launch. When adoption stalls, the problem is frequently described as resistance. In practice, the deeper barriers may be unclear expectations, insufficient opportunity to practice, weak manager support, competing priorities, or inadequate reinforcement.

This paper defines change capability as the ability to maintain clarity, adapt behavior, acquire and apply new skills, and sustain productive action when priorities, roles, technology, or expectations are changing. It introduces a practical model built on three disciplines from The Career Ninja Mindset®:

- **Prioritize:** Translate change into clear decisions, expectations, and near-term priorities.
- **Practice:** Give people realistic opportunities to apply new skills, receive feedback, and build confidence.
- **Persistence:** Reinforce the new behaviors, protect capacity, and sustain momentum beyond the launch.

Together, these disciplines shift change from an event to be managed into a capability to be developed. They also reposition Learning and Development from a provider of courses to an architect of adaptability. L&D can diagnose performance barriers, identify critical behaviors, design practice in the flow of work, equip managers to coach, and measure whether learning is producing adoption and business results.

The business implication is direct: organizations that want faster adoption, stronger engagement, and sustained performance must build systems that help people interpret change, rehearse the future, and continue taking effective action when the path is not fully clear.

1. Continuous Change Has Become a Workforce Capability Problem

For decades, many organizations treated change as a defined initiative with a beginning, a rollout, and an end. Leaders announced a new strategy, introduced a system, restructured a function, or launched a transformation program. Employees were expected to move through a temporary period of adjustment and eventually return to a more stable operating rhythm.

That assumption no longer reflects the experience of many workplaces. Teams may be integrating artificial intelligence while redesigning processes, responding to market pressure, adjusting headcount, serving changing customer needs, and learning new tools at the same time. One transformation overlaps with another. Employees are not only learning new tasks; they are continually reassessing which tasks matter, what good performance looks like, and where human judgment adds value.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 projects significant labor-market disruption through 2030 and identifies skills gaps as a major barrier to business transformation. It also emphasizes the continued importance of analytical thinking, creative thinking, resilience, flexibility, agility, and technological literacy. [1] These are not competencies that can be installed through a single course. They must be developed through repeated use in real work.

The shift toward AI-enabled work intensifies the challenge. Microsoft's 2025 research describes organizations moving toward human-agent teams and more fluid, outcome-oriented ways of working. The report also highlights a capacity gap: leaders expect greater productivity while many employees report insufficient time and energy. [2] When organizations add transformation work without removing, sequencing, or redesigning existing work, change becomes an additional burden rather than a new operating model.

Key distinction

Change management focuses on moving an initiative toward adoption. Change capability focuses on strengthening the people and systems that must continue adapting across many initiatives.

This distinction matters because no communication plan can fully anticipate every decision employees will need to make. No training program can cover every exception. Organizations need people who can interpret direction, learn quickly, exercise judgment, collaborate across boundaries, and make progress even when information is incomplete.

2. The Hidden Cost of Unsupported Change

The visible costs of transformation often include technology, consulting, implementation, and training. The less visible costs appear in the daily work: delayed decisions, duplicated effort, avoidable errors, competing priorities, rework, declining trust, manager overload, and the loss of discretionary effort.

Gallup has reported that leaders and managers are more likely than individual contributors to experience extensive disruptive change. More than half of managers in its 2024 analysis said their organizations had restructured teams, while many were also navigating budget reductions. [3] Managers are therefore expected to absorb the change, translate it for employees, manage emotional reactions, maintain output, and often learn the new system or process themselves.

Deloitte's 2025 Global Human Capital Trends research similarly points to pressure on the manager role. It found that managers spent a substantial share of their time addressing immediate problems and administrative work, while dedicating far less time to developing people. The research also found broad recognition that the manager role needs reinvention, but limited progress in doing so. [4]

When employees do not receive clear priorities or local interpretation, they fill the gaps themselves. Some continue doing the old work and add the new work on top. Some wait for certainty. Some focus on what is most visible rather than what is most valuable. Others protect themselves by minimizing risk, withholding ideas, or avoiding decisions.

These behaviors are often interpreted as disengagement or resistance. Yet a more useful diagnostic asks:

- Do employees know what matters most now?
- Can they describe the behaviors expected of them?
- Have they had realistic opportunities to practice?
- Do managers have the time and skill to coach them?
- Are systems, incentives, and workloads aligned with the new expectations?
- Is progress visible enough to sustain effort?

Resistance can be real, but labeling every delay as resistance can hide design failures. A person cannot consistently demonstrate a new behavior that has never been defined, practiced, supported, or reinforced.

3. Why Communication and Training Alone Are Not Enough

Communication creates awareness and meaning. Training builds knowledge and skill. Both are essential. Neither is sufficient on its own.

A town hall can explain why a new operating model is necessary, but it may not tell a project manager which meetings to stop attending or which decisions can now be made without escalation. A systems demonstration can show employees where to click, but it may not prepare them to handle an unusual customer situation. A leadership workshop can introduce coaching techniques, but managers may return to workloads that leave no space to use them.

The gap between knowing and doing is the transfer problem. Recent CIPD guidance emphasizes that skills development requires practice, permission, and opportunity, and that line managers play an integral role in helping employees apply learning to performance. [5] Learning must be supported by the environment in which the behavior will occur.

Traditional approaches often break down in four places:

Awareness is mistaken for readiness

Employees can repeat the strategy and still be unprepared to act. Readiness requires clarity about decisions, behaviors, tools, resources, boundaries, and consequences.

Content is delivered without application

A well-designed course may increase understanding, but capability grows when employees use the skill in realistic conditions, receive feedback, and try again.

Managers are treated as communication channels rather than capability builders

Managers are frequently given talking points but not equipped to coach, diagnose barriers, resolve conflicting priorities, or reinforce new behaviors.

The launch receives more attention than the sustainment period

Organizations often invest heavily before go-live and reduce support precisely when employees begin encountering real exceptions, setbacks, and workload tradeoffs.

The practical test

Do not ask only, “Did employees complete the training?” Ask, “What must employees do differently, under what conditions, and what will help that behavior continue?”

4. The Change Capability Model

The Change Capability Model is built on three disciplines: Prioritize, Practice, and Persistence. These disciplines are drawn from The Career Ninja Mindset® and adapted here as an organizational framework for workforce performance during change.

Discipline	Primary need	Organizational question	Desired result
Prioritize	Clarity	Have we reduced ambiguity enough for people to act?	Focused effort and faster decisions
Practice	Capability	Can people rehearse the future of their work?	Confident application and learning transfer

Discipline	Primary need	Organizational question	Desired result
Persistence	Reinforcement	What will sustain the behavior after launch?	Adoption, resilience, and durable performance

The sequence is intentional. People struggle to practice when priorities remain unclear. They struggle to persist when they have not developed confidence through application. Each discipline strengthens the next, and all three must be supported by leaders, managers, learning systems, and the design of work.

5. Prioritize: Create Clarity for Action

During change, employees rarely suffer from a lack of information alone. They suffer from difficulty determining which information should shape today's decisions. Prioritization converts strategy into action.

Leaders may communicate an ambitious transformation vision while employees continue to receive requests, deadlines, and performance expectations rooted in the previous model. When everything remains important, the safest behavior is often to keep doing everything. That creates overload, slows adoption, and weakens trust in the change.

What organizations must clarify

- What is changing, what is staying the same, and what remains undecided.
- Which outcomes matter most during the transition.
- Which work should stop, pause, decrease, or be redesigned.
- Which decisions employees can make independently.
- Which behaviors signal successful adoption.
- How performance will be evaluated while people are learning.

The role of L&D

L&D can help translate broad strategic language into critical moments and observable behaviors. Rather than beginning with a list of content topics, the design process should begin with questions such as: What decisions will people need to make? Where are they likely to hesitate? Which mistakes are recoverable? Which mistakes carry significant risk? What must managers reinforce?

The role of leaders and managers

Senior leaders create enterprise-level direction. Managers make that direction usable. They connect the change to team goals, identify tradeoffs, clarify local expectations, and revisit priorities as conditions evolve. Gallup's engagement research consistently emphasizes the importance of clear expectations, necessary resources, development, and meaningful manager conversations. [6]

Practical tools

- A one-page change narrative that explains why, what, when, and what it means for employees.
- A “stop, start, continue” map for each affected role or team.
- Decision rights that distinguish what employees can decide, recommend, or escalate.
- A weekly priority reset during periods of high uncertainty.
- Manager discussion guides focused on decisions and tradeoffs, not only announcements.

Prioritize in practice

Clarity does not require leaders to know every answer. It requires them to distinguish what is known, what is being tested, what matters now, and when employees can expect the next decision.

6. Practice: Turn Information Into Capability

Capability is not created by exposure. It is created by application. Employees need opportunities to use new tools, behaviors, and judgment before the highest-stakes moment arrives.

This is especially important when change alters more than a process. AI adoption, for example, may require employees to rethink task ownership, quality standards, escalation, ethics, customer communication, and the boundary between human and machine judgment. A demonstration can show what a tool does. Practice helps employees determine when, why, and how to use it responsibly.

Design practice around real work

- Use scenarios based on common decisions, exceptions, and customer situations.
- Create low-risk simulations before full implementation.
- Allow employees to compare old and new workflows.
- Build peer practice and observation into team meetings.
- Provide feedback close to the moment of application.
- Offer job aids, prompts, and performance support inside the workflow.

Move from content coverage to behavior rehearsal

The design question is not “How much material can we cover?” It is “What must people be able to do reliably?” A shorter learning experience followed by structured application can be more valuable than a comprehensive course that employees cannot transfer to the job.

Build confidence through progressive difficulty

Practice should begin with common, lower-risk situations and progress toward ambiguity, exceptions, and complex judgment. Confidence is not a motivational slogan. It is often the result of evidence: employees have attempted the behavior, received useful feedback, corrected mistakes, and experienced improvement.

Create permission to learn

Employees need explicit permission to slow down temporarily, ask questions, test new approaches, and surface problems. If every learning curve is treated as a performance failure, employees will hide uncertainty and revert to familiar methods.

Practice principle

People need more than training on the new process. They need rehearsal for the decisions, conversations, and exceptions the new process will create.

7. Persistence: Sustain Momentum Without Burnout

Change rarely fails only because the initial idea was poor. It often loses momentum because the organization underestimates the sustainment period. Early enthusiasm fades, operational pressure returns, exceptions multiply, and old habits remain easier than new ones.

Persistence is not the expectation that employees push harder indefinitely. It is the discipline of creating reinforcement, visible progress, and sustainable conditions for continued action.

Reinforce the behavior, not merely the message

- Managers observe and coach the critical behaviors.
- Leaders recognize progress and explain what the organization is learning.
- Systems and incentives reward the new way of working.
- Teams review barriers and make adjustments without abandoning the direction.
- Employees receive refreshers and performance support when real problems emerge.

Protect capacity

Persistence becomes burnout when organizations add new expectations without removing lower-value work. Microsoft's research on the capacity gap is instructive: productivity expectations are rising while many employees report insufficient time and energy. [2] Sustainable change requires workload choices, sequencing, and the redesign of work, not only encouragement.

Make progress visible

People are more likely to continue when they can see evidence that the effort is producing value. Organizations should share early wins, adoption patterns, customer impact, quality improvements, and lessons learned. Progress does not need to be perfect to be motivating, but it needs to be credible.

Normalize adjustment without normalizing drift

Effective persistence combines commitment with learning. Leaders remain clear about the outcome while allowing methods to improve. This reduces the false choice between rigidly following a flawed plan and abandoning the change at the first setback.

8. The Expanded Role of Learning and Development

Continuous disruption requires L&D to operate beyond the course catalog. The function's strategic value lies in helping the organization build capability at the speed of work.

LinkedIn's 2025 Workplace Learning research argues that career development, leadership development, coaching, and internal mobility can accelerate the flow of critical skills and strengthen organizational adaptability. [7] This supports a broader mandate: L&D should connect learning to the future of work, employee growth, and the organization's most important performance shifts.

From order taker to performance partner

When a business leader requests training, L&D should investigate the desired performance, current behavior, environmental barriers, manager expectations, and measures of success. Training may be part of the answer, but it should not be the automatic answer.

From event design to capability systems

A capability system may include formal learning, practice, coaching, peer learning, job aids, knowledge resources, workflow prompts, manager routines, communities of practice, and data. The objective is not to maximize participation. It is to enable reliable performance.

From completion metrics to business evidence

Attendance and completion can confirm reach. They cannot confirm behavior change or business value. L&D should work with stakeholders to define adoption indicators, proficiency measures, quality measures, and operational outcomes before building the solution.

From supporting change to shaping it

L&D should be involved early enough to influence role design, implementation sequencing, manager readiness, and employee capacity. When learning is added after the core decisions are complete, the function is often asked to solve problems created by unclear processes or misaligned systems.

9. The Manager as Change Translator

Employees experience enterprise change locally. Their practical understanding is shaped by what their manager explains, prioritizes, models, permits, and reinforces.

The manager's role is not to pretend to have every answer. It is to help employees make sense of available information, connect it to the team's work, surface questions, provide feedback, and maintain trust while decisions evolve.

Five manager responsibilities during change

- Interpret: Explain what the change means for the team and its customers.
- Prioritize: Translate enterprise direction into near-term choices and tradeoffs.

- **Coach:** Observe new behaviors, ask questions, and provide actionable feedback.
- **Escalate:** Surface patterns, obstacles, and unintended consequences to decision-makers.
- **Reinforce:** Recognize progress, revisit expectations, and protect time for learning.

Managers cannot fulfill these responsibilities through talking points alone. They need preparation, forums to compare experiences, access to decision-makers, coaching tools, and permission to raise implementation concerns. They also need relief from administrative overload so that people leadership is not continually displaced by urgent tasks.

Manager enablement question

Before asking managers to carry the change, ask whether they understand it, believe they can discuss it honestly, know what to reinforce, and have the capacity to support their teams.

10. A Five-Stage Implementation Roadmap

The Change Capability Model can be implemented through five stages: Diagnose, Align, Develop, Reinforce, and Measure.

1. Diagnose

Identify the performance problem before selecting the learning solution. Gather employee and manager input, observe workflows, review business data, and locate the moments where ambiguity, skill gaps, process barriers, or workload conflicts are affecting results.

2. Align

Define the business outcomes, critical employee behaviors, leadership expectations, decision rights, and measures of success. Clarify what must stop or change in the work environment to make the new behavior possible.

3. Develop

Build an integrated solution that includes clear communication, targeted learning, realistic practice, manager enablement, job support, and opportunities for feedback. Design for the highest-value behaviors rather than maximum content coverage.

4. Reinforce

Create post-launch routines. Equip managers to coach, use team meetings for problem solving, recognize progress, refresh difficult skills, and resolve environmental barriers. Continue support long enough for the new behavior to become normal.

5. Measure

Track understanding, confidence, practice, adoption, proficiency, and business outcomes. Use the data to adjust the implementation rather than only to judge it after the fact.

A practical 90-day sequence

Period	Primary focus	Example actions
Days 1-30	Diagnose and align	Stakeholder interviews; workflow observation; priority map; behavior definition; baseline measures.
Days 31-60	Develop and practice	Manager preparation; role-based scenarios; pilots; job aids; feedback loops; communication.
Days 61-90	Reinforce and measure	Coaching routines; adoption reviews; barrier removal; recognition; proficiency checks; adjustment.

11. Measuring Change Capability

Measurement should show whether people are becoming more able to act, not merely more informed. A balanced scorecard includes leading indicators that reveal readiness and adoption, along with lagging indicators that reveal sustained performance and business impact.

Leading indicators

- Priority clarity: Employees can identify the most important outcomes and tradeoffs.
- Role clarity: Employees understand what is changing in their responsibilities.
- Manager readiness: Managers can explain, coach, and escalate effectively.
- Practice participation: Employees have completed realistic application activities.
- Confidence and self-efficacy: Employees report growing ability to perform the new behavior.
- Adoption: New tools, workflows, or behaviors are being used in the intended situations.
- Time to proficiency: Employees reach an agreed standard within the expected period.

Lagging indicators

- Productivity and cycle time.
- Quality, defects, errors, and rework.
- Customer experience and service outcomes.
- Employee engagement and retention in affected groups.

- Manager effectiveness and team performance.
- Internal mobility and skill deployment.
- Financial, operational, or risk outcomes connected to the change.

Use multiple sources of evidence

No single metric provides a complete picture. Combine surveys, manager observations, system data, work samples, quality reviews, interviews, customer measures, and operational outcomes. Compare findings across roles and locations to identify where the change is working and where the environment is constraining it.

Measure learning in context

A knowledge check can reveal whether employees remember information. A scenario, work sample, or observation can reveal whether they can apply it. Business measures can reveal whether the behavior produces value. These measures answer different questions and should not be treated as interchangeable.

12. Recommendations for Leaders

Treat adaptability as a capability, not a personality trait.

Avoid dividing employees into people who “like change” and people who do not. Define the skills and behaviors required, then create conditions in which they can be developed.

Translate transformation into observable behavior.

Strategy becomes actionable when people know what they must decide, do, stop, and continue.

Design practice into the flow of work.

Use scenarios, pilots, coaching, and job support so employees can build capability while producing value.

Prepare managers to translate and reinforce change.

Give managers more than scripts. Build their skill, access, time, and authority to support employees.

Remove work as deliberately as you add it.

Protect capacity by stopping, sequencing, simplifying, or automating lower-value activity.

Measure adoption and performance, not attendance alone.

Define evidence of successful behavior and business impact before the rollout.

Sustain support beyond launch.

Maintain coaching, feedback, communication, and barrier removal through the period when real-world exceptions appear.

Conclusion: Build the Capacity to Move

Organizations cannot eliminate uncertainty, and leaders cannot predict every consequence of technological, economic, or organizational change. They can, however, strengthen the capability of their people to respond.

That capability begins with clarity. It grows through practice. It endures through reinforcement and sustainable persistence. When these elements are absent, employees may appear resistant, hesitant, or disengaged. When they are present, people are more likely to make decisions, learn from experience, adapt their behavior, and continue producing results even before every answer is available.

The organizations that thrive through change will not necessarily be those with the most communication, the largest training catalog, or the fastest initial rollout. They will be those that make adaptability part of how work is designed, how managers lead, how employees learn, and how performance is measured.

The leadership imperative

Do not simply prepare people for the next change. Build the capability that allows them to move through change with focus, confidence, and sustained performance.

Change Capability Diagnostic

Use the following questions to identify strengths and gaps. Rate each statement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Diagnostic statement	Rating (1-5)	Evidence / action needed
Employees can explain what matters most during the current change.		
Leaders clearly distinguish what is changing, what is stable, and what remains undecided.		

Diagnostic statement	Rating (1-5)	Evidence / action needed
Teams know which work should stop, pause, or decrease.		
Critical new behaviors have been defined in observable terms.		
Employees have realistic opportunities to practice before high-stakes application.		
Managers are prepared to coach and reinforce the new behaviors.		
Employees have the time, tools, and permission to apply what they learn.		
Feedback is available close to the moment of performance.		
Progress and early wins are visible to employees.		
Systems, incentives, and performance expectations support the new direction.		
The organization measures adoption and proficiency, not only participation.		
Leaders use data and employee feedback to adjust the implementation.		

Interpretation: A low score in Prioritize-related items suggests a clarity and alignment problem. A low score in Practice-related items suggests an application and learning-transfer problem. A low score in Persistence-related items suggests a reinforcement, capacity, or systems problem. Use the

evidence column to identify the next organizational action rather than treating the score as an employee deficit.

References

- [1] **World Economic Forum.** The Future of Jobs Report 2025. January 2025. [Source](#)
- [2] **Microsoft.** 2025 Work Trend Index Annual Report: The Year the Frontier Firm Is Born. April 2025. [Source](#)
- [3] **Gallup.** Disruptive Change Is Hitting Leaders and Managers Hardest. May 22, 2024. [Source](#)
- [4] **Deloitte.** 2025 Global Human Capital Trends. March 2025. [Source](#)
- [5] **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.** How L&D Can Create Value: The Role of the Line Manager. March 13, 2025. [Source](#)
- [6] **Gallup.** How to Improve Employee Engagement in the Workplace. [Source](#)
- [7] **LinkedIn Learning.** 2025 Workplace Learning Report: The Rise of Career Champions. February 2025. [Source](#)

Research note: This first edition synthesizes publicly available workforce research and the author's practitioner framework. It does not present original survey or interview findings. A future edition can incorporate proprietary data from the proposed Career Ninja Change Capability Study and interviews with HR, L&D, and business leaders.

About the Author

Alexis King, MBA, CPTD®, is a keynote speaker, leadership strategist, executive coach, and Amazon Best-Selling Author who helps organizations navigate rapid, disruptive change so their people stay engaged, adaptable, and driving results instead of falling behind.

Drawing on more than 20 years of corporate leadership and talent development experience, Alexis has worked across banking, technology, corporate training, entrepreneurship, real estate investing, and nonprofit leadership. She has led global teams, guided professionals through career and organizational transitions, and developed practical strategies that connect learning, leadership, communication, and performance.

Alexis is the creator of The Career Ninja Mindset®, a framework that combines mindset, messaging, and momentum to help people move through change with clarity, confidence, and strategic action. Her keynotes, workshops, consulting, and coaching help leaders and teams strengthen resilience, improve visibility and communication, and sustain performance in uncertain environments.

alexiskingconsulting.com

Keynotes | Leadership Development | Workshops | Consulting | Coaching