

Resist, reframe, or reimagine?

Confronting uncertainty and
the new speed of adaptation

The constructs that hold us back



A plethora of personal and organizational factors can get in the way of change—we discuss a framework and some critical questions that can start to combat inertia or resistance within the C-suite.

Throughout this publication, we've discussed the C-suite's uncertainty threshold, **a new way of thinking about significant macro forces at play**, and leadership in an era of continuing transformation.

We've covered those topics without yet acknowledging an enduring, albeit problematic, truth: **Humans don't always want to change.**

Being human

Every member of **your C-suite is subject to a wide range of both personal and organizational constructs** that shape how people ultimately act.

In an environment of uncertainty and change, these can present as resistance, where **individuals actively work in their own self-interest, and/or inertia, where strategic intent struggles to gain traction or stalls**. Inertia can result not from individuals' conscious actions, but rather a corporate, political, or bureaucratic malaise that simply slows things down and gets in the way.

And it's not just the C-suite. While **they inevitably manifest differently depending on context**, these constructs pervade all corners of an organization regardless of seniority, experience, or function.

Most crucially, these constructs will be different down to an individual level. The fact that a group of **people are united by a common circumstance**—such as sitting on your executive committee—in no way means their motivations will be united or consistent.

Power and status. The ability to hold influence over others or over actions and choices. Our **appetite for risk and psychological “safety”** limits. Comfort with norms and desires to preserve a status quo. Independence, self-determination, and control. Access to economic resources, either personally or within one's domain. Personal ambition, career aspirations, and self-esteem. Accountability and potential for blame in the face of failure.

The range of **underlying societal, contextual, and psychological factors that shape our motivations and behaviors** in the face of change and uncertainty are too complex to solve or pay justice to in this short commentary.

What we hope to offer is a starting point—not an exhaustive solution—for how CEOs can **address potential conflict or misalignment within the C-suite** as a collective. This starting point can support a more in-depth and nuanced strategy for individual executive committee members.

Overcoming leadership inertia

If the concept we refer to as the uncertainty threshold rings true, and if, as CEO, you recognize the importance of adaptability, consider this simple framework in the context of how your C-suite collectively responds to change.

Shared interpretation combined with individual accountability guided by a connected response on the part of the organization. Intentional action on these three fronts—in concert—is critical to outweigh and overcome latent resistance to change or underlying inertia among leaders.

SI × **IA** × **CR** > **LI**

Shared interpretation

Individual accountability

Connected response

Leadership inertia

Shared interpretation

Embracing diverse inputs and reactions but forming shared conclusions and imperatives.

Critical question: Has your team collectively made sense of the macro forces and signals of change looming for your organization, rather than simply settling for stated acceptance of a consensus or directive? Crucially, have they formed a coherent and shared interpretation of the implications for the organization, its priorities, and resulting immediate actions?

Individual accountability

Translating direction and strategy into personal objectives, key performance indicators (KPIs), and performance management.

Critical question: Are the priorities and objectives on which your executives are focused (i) reflective of the C-suite's interpretation of change, the implications, and the resulting priorities; (ii) connected across individual domains with identified interdependencies; and (iii) aligned with performance metrics, compensation, and reward at the collective and individual levels?

Connected response

Ensuring a business-wide rather than functional or a collection of siloed responses to change.

Critical question: Does each member of your C-suite have clear short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans to ensure that their domain's priorities, resources, and KPIs are aligned to change imperatives? Most importantly, are they joined up across your C-suite to ensure that efforts are synchronized and appropriately sequenced, with interdependencies identified and an aggregate view of the organization's response clearly visible?



This is not intended as a “paint by numbers” guide to change management. Nor is it meant to be a detailed blueprint. Just as **every organization and its C-suite are unique**, so, too, will be their responses to macro forces and the economic and competitive positioning in the next wave of change.

However, this formula is a meaningful starting point for planning for **true alignment among your executive team**. If your present response to change is insufficient to overcome inertia and resistance, it can also aid in diagnosing where vulnerabilities or shortcomings may lie.

If only as an illustration of your starting point, **ask these critical questions** of each of your C-suite independently.

In all likelihood, you’ll receive varied, if not divergent, responses. **Understanding the size of the gulf isn’t the worst place to start.**

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