

Managing change that never stops

Supporting your team, reducing
overwhelm, and staying aligned when the
ground keeps moving

Sector Support Series – January 2026





 **People Centered Change**

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Hi, I'm **Julia**

I support **people-centered transformation** and **participatory strategy development** for nonprofits and foundations.

Today's purpose & intended outcomes

Why are we here, and what do we hope to accomplish?

Purpose	The purpose of this session is to equip nonprofit leaders and teams with practical, people-centered approaches for navigating ongoing, compounding organizational change .
Intended outcomes	<p>In service of this purpose, together we will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore different the different types of change that organizations experience;• Use a people-centered lens to understand how change impacts individuals and organizations, and why;• Discuss practical approaches that you can adopt in the short-, medium-, and long-term to help promote organizational and individual resilience and sustain mission impact.

Why this? Why now?



Nonprofits are navigating **continuous, overlapping, and shifting** change.



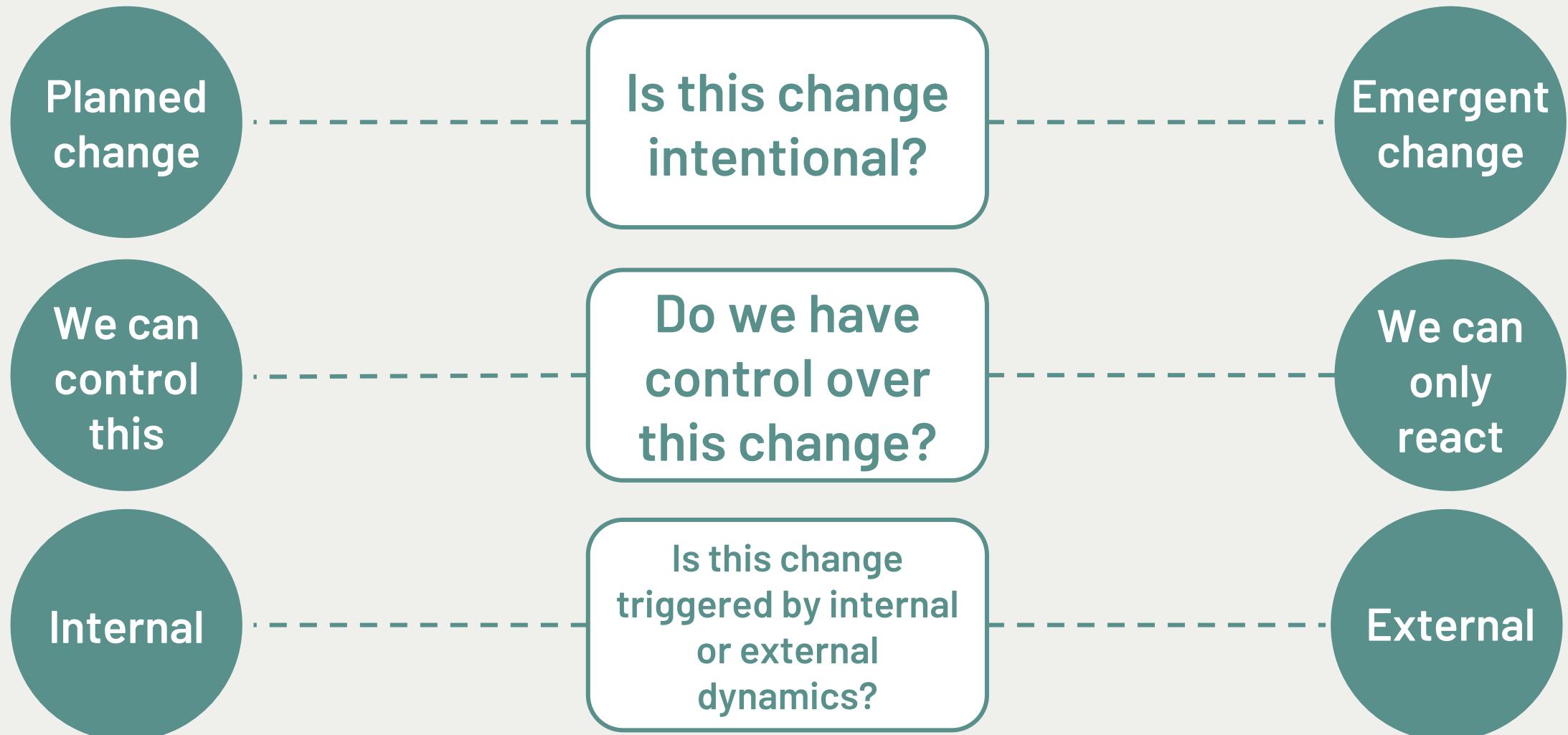
Change is **rarely discrete or sequential**, and many teams are reacting to new changes before earlier ones have settled.



The strain people feel is often about **accumulation** vs. any one specific trigger.

How do we experience
change in organizations?

One way to think about types of change





Cognitively

Our brains are wired for **predictability**.

Competing or unclear priorities increases our **cognitive load**.



Emotionally

Lack of predictability feels unsafe, creating **fear and anxiety**.

Uncertainty can **trigger grief, loss, or vigilance**.

Lack of clarity on what to focus on creates **frustration**.

Greater **fear around making decisions** when it's not clear what we are working toward.



Impacts

Anxiety and fear make it **hard to focus and collaborate** effectively.

Fear and anxiety create **interpersonal friction** – relationships between individuals and teams can become strained.

Inconsistency creates **functional friction** – we spend too much time figuring out what or how we should be doing.

Things are more difficult and / or take longer than they otherwise would.

Sense of stress or overwhelm that doesn't line up with real work volume.

Greater **decision fatigue**.

How we experience change is also rooted in our individual identities & experiences

Our overall sense of belonging and safety within an organization

The support systems we have (or don't) outside the workplace

Overall physical and mental wellbeing and access to healthcare

How we've been impacted by change in the past

Pressures on our behavior based on oppressive gender & racialized dynamics

Degree of financial security

Caregiving roles & responsibilities

Why is overlapping and ongoing change uniquely hard?

- Every new change draws on us – our attention, our emotional capacity, and our judgment.
- When changes overlap and compound, cognitive load increases, recovery time shrinks or disappears, and small issues feel disproportionately hard.
- This is a normal and predictable response and not an individual failing or flaw. We are just people, after all. ;)

Creating the conditions to navigate continuous change

So now what?

For the most part, we can't eliminate the need for change.

Here's what we *can* do.

1. Slow or pause changes where you do have control to reduce pressure and give folks more space.
2. Reduce unnecessary cognitive load.
3. Create stability where possible and flexibility where it's needed.

Strategies & tactics: Organizational-level

Goal: To create clarity and stability where we can, name uncertainty where we can't, and reduce cognitive load so people have the capacity to do their work well in the midst of ongoing change.

Short term / quick wins

- Establish & uphold a predictable communication cadence & aligned messaging.
- Transparency about what is known and what isn't.
- Clarity around how decisions are made & by whom.
- Resist escalation and reactivity.

Mid-term strategies

- Ensure people managers are well-supported & have the information they need.
- Create intentional spaces for leaders to process complexity.
- Create flexibility in policies related to people's time, autonomy, and work location.

Long-term culture change

Ensure organization-wide clarity around what matters most, what success looks like, and why your work matters. This enables smoother and less painful pivots and the cost of constant re-orientations.

Strategies & tactics: Team-level

Goal: To create psychologically safe spaces where people can process change together, align on what matters most, and support one another in navigating ongoing shifts.

Short term / quick wins

- Build space into team meetings to check in & provide space for processing & sensemaking.
- Normalizing asking for and offering help to support workload management.
- Name what is clear and what is unknown.

Mid-term strategies

- Leverage teams for bi-directional communication – down from leadership & up from staff.
- Ensure clarity on team priorities & values.
- Establish shared norms for how you process stress, conflict, & uncertainty.

Long-term culture change

- Build resilience by developing shared habits of reflection, learning, and adaptation.
- Invest in trust and psychological safety (e.g. Q&A during staff meetings).
- Reinforce team's role as source of insights and solutions during change.

Strategies & tactics: Individual-level

Goal: To support people in navigating ongoing, overlapping change by pairing organizational care with individual agency, skill-building, and self-awareness.

Short term / quick wins

- Name and normalize that people experience & carry change differently.
- Encourage individuals to notice their own signals of overload and stress.
- Make expectations around boundaries, flexibility, and support explicit rather than assumed.

Mid-term strategies

- Ensure access to mental health supports (e.g., EAP).
- Create intentional opportunities for connection and relationship-building.
- Support individuals in clarifying how their role and work connect to your wider mission impact.

Long-term culture change

- Normalize using supports, setting boundaries, and naming limits.
- Reinforce norms around self-awareness, responsibility, and care for collective impact (how my stress affects others).
- Individual learning around change and resilience.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

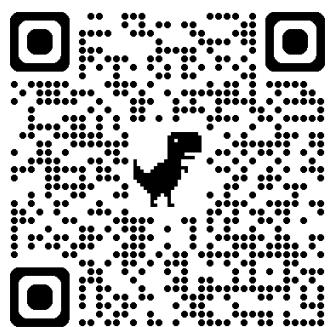
- **We all experience change differently.** People will engage differently, and participation will vary across different organizational initiatives. That's ok.
- **Design for difference.** When deciding what kinds of strategies you want to put in place, plan for different kinds of opportunities to meet diverse needs (e.g., social vs. mission-oriented, skills-building vs. experience processing).

Continuing the conversation



Share feedback

I would love your feedback on this workshop and future topics you'd find valuable - use this QR code to get started!



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