



The Agility Advantage:

4 Steps to Respond to Change and Achieve Consistent Business Results

FranklinCovey

You did all the right things. As a leadership team, you created focused goals, put clear measures in place, got buy-in from the team, and established accountability—and then the landscape shifted. Maybe it was economic uncertainty, a technological innovation, or a major change in your target market. Whatever the disruption, the net effect is that your goals are now out of sync with the situation on the ground.

When your industry changes, your strategy needs to change too. The question is, how do leaders make the right adjustments without losing momentum or focus? The answer is agility.

Successful organizations are agile and responsive to the constant change in today's unpredictable world. Agile leaders support their teams with a solid execution system that's focused enough to produce results and flexible enough to allow teams to refine their goals, day-to-day priorities, processes, systems, and measures to ensure they continue to achieve consistent results.

In this guide, we'll explore four steps you can take to help your teams respond to change with agility.

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Step 1: Redefine Your Strategic Goals and Set Clear Targets

Reset goals to align with new priorities

The first step in responding to dramatic change is to ask whether your team's original goals are still relevant to your organization's new priorities. Maintain as much as you can of your original strategic framework, then pinpoint the areas where you need to recalibrate and bridge the gap between new priorities and your team's area of expertise.

"It's our tendency as human beings to want to throw a new solution at everything," says Scott Thele, national practice leader for FranklinCovey's Business Outcomes Practice. "The more you can keep disciplined, the better off you are." If you can keep some parts of your strategy consistent, your team will be able to pivot and execute more effectively because they won't be starting fully from scratch.

"The more you can keep disciplined, the better off you are."



Translate goals into clear targets

Clarify each new goal by being crystal clear about three things:

A STARTING LINE: Where you are now

A FINISH LINE: Where you want to be

A DEADLINE: When you want to be there

Being specific is also important. Take a business development team as an example. “It’s easy to say, ‘What people need to do is call more clients.’ It’s harder to say, ‘What is a quality phone call? How do we define specifically what you talk about to count as a quality call?’” says Thele. Once you create a clear definition of success and then put a deadline at the end of it, your teams will be set up to achieve your goals.

Build commitment

Changes, even positive ones, can be [unsettling for your team](#). That’s why it’s important for you to craft a narrative to communicate new goals—and why they matter—to every person and team. Start by reviewing your organization’s mission and vision, then be transparent about how and why your goals are shifting, where they’re staying the same, and what actions you’re taking as a result of your new strategy. Ask team members for their ideas and feedback throughout the process.

The better team members understand the strategic pivot the organization is making, the more committed they’ll be and the better they’ll execute their part of it. “The communication plan is everything,” Thele says.



Step 2: Focus Your Team's Energy Toward Your New Goals

Create accountability

Regular team check-ins, scoreboards, and reports are vital for accountability and motivation. [Scoreboards are a great tool](#) to help team members see progress in real time and channel healthy competitiveness and emotional engagement. Because engagement is the point, Thele advises against automating scoreboards. “We want to build execution muscle. And if it's automated, it goes right past people. It's like having somebody do your sit-ups for you.”

Once you have a scoreboard in place, you can use weekly team check-ins to do three things:

1. Report on what each person committed to last week.
2. Review and update the scoreboard.
3. Make new commitments for the current week.

Reviewing progress every week is key, even when teams are busy. “Sometimes people say, ‘Can I do this every other week?’ That tells me they've lost leverage. If you don't have at least a weekly meeting of accountability, you will lose inertia,” says Thele.



Help your team stay focused.

Part of a leader's responsibility is to provide air cover as other requests come in so teams can stay focused. Identify and reward the specific behaviors that lead to achieving your organization or team goals, and make sure team members have the time and resources to do those things.

In particular, [watch out for distractions](#) like irrelevant meetings, unnecessary reporting, high-urgency or low-importance emails, tasks, phone calls, and so on—and make sure your leaders aren't part of the problem by saddling people with tasks that keep them from more important work. Protect your team so they can act on the most important things, not react to the most urgent ones.

Empower team members to hold peers accountable.

Sometimes it's challenging to get individual people to take ownership of shared team goals. Often, team members feel a deeper sense of responsibility to each other than to an organization, so making them accountable to each other for progress toward goals can increase their drive to deliver and avoid letting down their teammates.

Commitments are not just professional agreements between a leader and a team—they're [personal commitments between all members of a team](#). When team members choose and make weekly commitments within their power to keep, and see their peers consistently follow through on their commitments, they learn to trust each other, and performance can improve dramatically.



Step 3: Measure Progress and Align Incentives

Update your analytics and reporting structure

Part of building an agile culture is creating reporting structures that can adapt to your organization's changing priorities. When your strategy shifts, you may need to adjust your current set of reports or invest in new dashboards or tools to align measurement with your latest goals and deliverables. Whatever systems you use, they should be easy for team members to access, understand, and apply to their day-to-day work.

Your organization's success is based on [two kinds of measures](#), so be sure you have a way to track each of them:

LAG MEASURES

- Tell you if you have achieved the goal.
- By the time you see them, the performance that drove them has passed.

LEAD MEASURES

- Tell you if you are likely to achieve the goal.
- Include activities that drive or lead to the lag measure.
- Can be influenced directly and measured immediately.



Adjust incentives tied to performance or results.

Your existing incentives were designed to help achieve your former goals. Ensure your team is motivated to advance new initiatives by revisiting performance appraisals, compensation, internal recognition and award programs, and other incentives to determine whether they reward the right behaviors—or if not, how they could be tweaked to align with your new measures.

You can also identify misaligned incentives by observing your team members. If they're struggling to adopt new goals, there might be a hidden incentive or belief holding them back. If you understand their current motivation, you can make a change to draw out the new behavior that will advance your strategic goals.

Ensure consistent improvement across the organization.

When goals and measures are aligned at every level, from the CEO down to frontline contributors, performance improvements cascade—meaning that the goals achieved by your frontline team contribute to success at each subsequent level as you move up the organization. When goals are aligned across your organization, and each team consistently executes against its specific objectives, you can drive repeatable results with a system that's scalable and sustainable.

“There are two things that are execution's best friend—simplicity and transparency,” says Thele. “As a leader, I need to be able to see what teams are doing, how it's impacting the goal, and what I can do to help.” With the simplicity that comes from clearly defined goals and targets, the leverage that comes from transparency, and the engagement that comes from measurement and accountability, you've created a game everyone in your organization can win.



Step 4: Course-Correct for New Information

Know when to pivot your approach

During periods of rapid change, you may need to pivot your approach somewhat frequently. Leaders shouldn't hesitate to make adjustments when they're warranted while keeping in mind the impact changes will make on their teams and using their best judgment about how and when to make a move.

“Some organizations have a flavor-of-the-month goal, like a revolving door,” says Thele. “What you find is people put a progressively smaller amount of energy towards the breakthrough, and they just wait and see. It rewards people for passivity and punishes people for proactivity because if you're proactive, you just wasted your time.”

Instead, be thoughtful about the changes you make, grounding them in your mission, your vision, and the reality of your shifting environment. And when you have to change strategy, make sure the “why” is clear to your teams so they fully buy in to the new direction (see step 1).



Start again with resetting strategic goals

Each time you determine a change will benefit your organization and help you stay on track to realize your vision, it's important to go back to the start and reset your strategic goals. Then you can adjust your related targets, accountability mechanisms, measurement mechanisms, and incentives, so everything is in alignment with your new objectives.

Trying to change goals, measurement, or accountability methods without having clear, updated strategic goals could result in internal misalignment and wasted effort. But following these steps to ensure an agile response gives you a repeatable process you can turn to whenever it's time for a change.

Agility is the key to success

In today's fast-paced world, change is inevitable. No matter how on-point your strategic goals are, the world will shift, and sometimes, your goals need to shift along with it.

Leaders and organizations that know how to respond to change with agility never have to miss a beat. When disruptions happen, they act immediately by assessing and resetting their goals, then building commitment and accountability, and finally setting up their organizations to achieve breakthrough results by adjusting their measures and incentives. This cycle allows organizations to be nimble and responsive, and most importantly, to continue to achieve their goals in the face of any challenge.

With an agile approach to strategy and business outcomes, you can be confident they're ready for anything the future brings.



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