

EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

The ADAPTS™ Change Leadership Model

(ADAPTS™) — *A Six-Discipline System for Leading Sustainable Change*

Prepared for: Board & Executive Leadership

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Purpose: To present the ADAPTS™ Change Leadership Model and its implementation flow for board review, and to invite TLCI faculty engagement in support of the organization's next transformation initiative.

As featured in Forbes Coaches Council: *"Why Change Efforts Still Fail And What Leaders Can Do Differently," Forbes.com, April 2026.*

Executive Summary

Executives today have more change management frameworks available to them than ever before, yet transformation efforts continue to fail at alarming rates. TLCI's field research — drawn from engagements across corporations, public institutions, nonprofits, and governments — points to five recurring failure patterns: lack of shared clarity, incomplete diagnosis, premature implementation, weak trust, and insufficient mechanisms to sustain change. The ADAPTS™ Change Leadership Model was built directly from those patterns and released publicly in 2025.

ADAPTS is not a replacement for foundational change theory — it builds on the lineage of Kotter's eight-step model and the wider change-management literature. What it adds is sequencing discipline: clarity on when and why each step must occur before the next. This briefing presents the model's six disciplines, the diagnostic tool that operationalizes it, its application across sectors, and the engagement model through which TLCI faculty can support your organization's next transformation.

Why Change Efforts Still Fail

Insights from Prosci, drawn from more than 2,600 change practitioners in its Best Practices in Change Management research, point to a consistent pattern: how an organization approaches change is closely linked to measurable business performance. Yet the gap persists even where leaders invest heavily in strategy, talent, and technology. TLCI's research locates that gap between leadership intention and the systemic realities of change.

What Traditional Models Get Right — and What's Missing

A landmark synthesis in Academy of Management Annals confirms the enduring value of classic change theory: urgency creation, coalition building, and reinforcement of new behavior remain essential. John Kotter's eight-step model expanded the leadership dimension further, emphasizing urgency, a guiding coalition, and visible short-term wins anchored into culture. These frameworks remain valuable. But today's environment is faster-moving, more informed, and more resistant to top-down announcement — leaders need a discipline for sequencing decisions, not just a list of what needs to happen.

The Performance Case

WTW's 2023 research found that organizations with strong change management capabilities generate nearly three times more revenue growth than organizations with below-average change capability. The cost of a gap compounds the later it is discovered: addressing uncertainty at the Alert stage costs a fraction of addressing it at Scale and Sustain, after momentum, budget, and credibility have already been spent.

The Six Disciplines of ADAPTS

ADAPTS treats change as a progression of leadership actions, not an announcement. Each discipline is interdependent — skipping one degrades every discipline that follows — and the whole sequence runs underneath a continuous feedback loop: measure, learn, adjust, improve, repeat.

STEP	DISCIPLINE	DEFINITION & EVIDENCE
01	Alert the System	Create shared clarity about why change matters now — naming the signals (performance decline, turnover, quality issues) and connecting them to measurable impact. A 2024 study in the <i>Journal of Strategy and Management</i> found shared sensemaking requires structured dialogue; employees are active participants in understanding change, not passive recipients of an announcement.
02	Diagnose the Gaps	Understand what is working, what is not, and why — before designing a solution. The Stouten, Rousseau & De Cremer research review found that leaders who skip diagnostic work before execution consistently reduce the effectiveness of the change that follows.
03	Assess Readiness	Assess readiness across leadership alignment, workforce capability, infrastructure maturity, and cultural appetite, then choose a route: Pilot Fast, Stabilize First, or Dual Track. A 2025 systematic review of 47 studies in <i>Implementation Science Communications</i> confirmed readiness is one of the strongest predictors of whether change is adopted and sustained.
04	Participate Through Dialogue	Engage people through open dialogue (surfacing concerns) and closed dialogue (committing to clear decisions) — participation as structure, not symbolism. A 2022 <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> study of 359 employees found that perceived procedural fairness strongly predicted readiness to support change, even when the final decision didn't go their way.
05	Transform Through Alignment	Navigate tension and conflict rather than avoid it, converting it into alignment through clear decision rights and consistency between what leaders say and how they act — built on a foundation of mutual trust and respect. Healthy conflict produces better ideas and stronger solutions; unhealthy conflict produces delay, distrust, and bigger problems.
06	Scale and Sustain	Institutionalize the change through systems, capability pathways, and operating rhythms that outlast the initial launch energy. WTW's 2023 research found organizations with strong change capabilities generate nearly three times more revenue growth than below-average peers.

Executive Diagnostic: Before Your Next Initiative

Before launching a transformation, TLCI recommends running this six-question diagnostic against the ADAPTS disciplines. It is designed for board and executive-team use — five minutes, six questions, one per discipline.

- 1. Alert** — Have we created shared understanding of why this change is necessary now, or are we assuming people already see what we see?
- 2. Diagnose** — Have we diagnosed root causes, or are we designing solutions for symptoms?
- 3. Access Readiness** — Have we honestly assessed leadership, workforce, and infrastructure readiness, or are we hoping readiness catches up to momentum?
- 4. Participate** — Have we created genuine dialogue so affected people feel heard before decisions are final?
- 5. Transform** — Are leaders modeling the behaviors this transformation requires, or is alignment happening only on paper?
- 6. Scale & Sustain** — Have we built systems, patterns, and governance to sustain this change after the launch energy fades?

How to read the results: if any question surfaces uncertainty, that uncertainty is diagnostic. The cost of addressing a gap at the Alert stage is a fraction of the cost of addressing it at Scale and Sustain.

Cross-Sector Applicability

ADAPTS was built from field research across corporations, public institutions, nonprofits, and governments — which is why the same six disciplines transfer cleanly across sectors that share the same underlying challenge: leading people through change without losing their confidence along the way.

- **Corporate & Enterprise** — apply ADAPTS to technology rollouts, restructures, and M&A integration, where premature implementation and weak readiness assessment are the most common causes of failed transformation.
- **Government Institutions & Agencies** — use the model to sequence policy implementation and agency reform, where public trust and procedural fairness make the Participate Through Dialogue discipline especially critical.
- **Nonprofit Organizations** — apply ADAPTS to program redesigns and funding transitions, where the Alert and Diagnose disciplines prevent well-intentioned change from outrunning stakeholder buy-in.
- **Ministries & Faith Communities** — use the model to sequence structural or leadership transitions within congregations and ministry networks, where the Transform Through Alignment discipline protects trust during periods of tension.
- **Community Organizations** — apply ADAPTS to guide local initiatives through leadership handoffs and structural growth, using the Scale and Sustain discipline to keep momentum from depending on any one individual.

Every ADAPTS engagement begins with the Executive Diagnostic, so the sequencing and pacing are calibrated to the organization's actual readiness rather than a fixed template.

Engagement: Inviting TLCI Faculty Support

TLCI faculty can lead or support each ADAPTS discipline — from Alert and Diagnose through readiness assessment, dialogue facilitation, alignment coaching, and the systems design that makes change stick at Scale and Sustain. Engagement can be scoped as a single discipline (for example, a readiness assessment) or as a full multi-discipline partnership across an entire transformation initiative.

Recommended next step

A discovery conversation between TLCI faculty and the board or executive sponsor to run the Executive Diagnostic together, confirm scope, and define a phased engagement timeline.

To schedule a discovery conversation or request a formal proposal, contact:

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The Leadership Channel Institute

Scalable Leadership Framework™ · ADAPTS™ Change Leadership Model · Lead & Scale Method™

Founder featured in Forbes, Fox, NBC, CBS, and ABC