

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of several modern skyscrapers with glass facades, set against a clear blue sky. The buildings are arranged in a way that they appear to converge towards the top center of the frame, creating a sense of height and scale. The lighting is soft, suggesting either dawn or dusk.

McChrystal Group

NO TURNING BACK:

**The Leader's Playbook to Successfully
Reimagining an Organization for the
post-COVID World**

Get in touch.

Visit us at mcchrystalgroup.com for more information, or reach out to one of our team members below if you have any questions.



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REBUILDING FOR RESILIENCE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION:

BRIDGING FROM CRISIS TO NEW NORMAL

Since the onset of this pandemic, we claimed that this cataclysmic event would reshape organizations, industries, and markets across the globe. It was this deep-seated belief that spurred us to launch our *No Turning Back Series* in early May, highlighting how world-class leaders prepare for this new world. As new data emerge, they confirm this new, unprecedented reality. Most notably, there have been clear changes to our communications: Zoom users have jumped to over 200 Million from 10 million in 3 months, and Microsoft Teams, Microsoft's workplace chat and meeting platform has surpassed 75 million daily active users, up more than 31 million in the month of April. Meanwhile, the economic reality is dire: US unemployment rate rose to 14.7 percent and forecasts of the 2020 US GDP are around -6%.

As organizations struggle to find their footing in this new normal, most are falling prey to one of three missteps. Many are in a state of denial – longingly waiting in expectation for the world to return to its Pre-COVID 19 state with record low unemployment and ever-growing global trade. There is also a significant number of organizations who have embraced a hyper-reactive response – adopting wholesale changes to their strategy, operating structure, and culture in a desperate attempt to stay competitive and relevant. A third group knows they have to make changes but are paralyzed by daily firefighting and continued uncertainty and don't know where to start.

None of those approaches will pay off. Those organizations that survive this crisis and thrive in the new normal will be those who seize this opportunity to inject resiliency into their organization. Resiliency can only be engineered with a strategic and pragmatic approach. Over the last several weeks we have had the chance to discuss leadership for this 'new world' with a series of fascinating leaders for our *No Turning Back* video series. From these conversations, certain themes emerged, characterizing what is unique about today's challenges. What also became clear is that there is a need for a framework to start thinking about the key challenges for the next era of business. We focus this workbook on the key questions that leaders should be asking themselves as they embark in this cycle. The framework below is crucial to purposefully build agility into an organization's strategy.

We know many of our friends and clients are looking at dramatically reshaping their plans. Factoring for the months of unexpected changes that lie ahead, organizations must still contend with the current crisis, rebuild for resilience, and thoughtfully change the way they operate.

INTRODUCTION

This playbook will outline the key steps and actions that one must take to rebuild but focus on how a leader must be thinking about his or her organization to successfully guide it and allow for necessary innovation. We will outline two axes of planning that will need to be considered in more depth: categories of change, and degree of disruption (a framework that we introduced in our [No Turning Back Article](#) from May 26, 2020). We will guide you through key aspects that must be considered along both axes to visualize potentials for a “new normal”, make informed decisions, and prepare for what will come next.

This is just one framework that we believe an organization should go through to successfully rebuild and thrive in this new normal but we will focus on a specific aspect of taking stock of the current reality and developing plans: what questions you should be asking yourself.

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NO TURNING BACK: RE-ENTRY

In Part Four of our No Turning Back series, we discuss the two axes of planning for re-entry: categories of change, and degree of disruption. In order for businesses to facilitate a successful re-entry strategy, leadership teams must construct plans along both axes. Doing so will allow space for continuous planning and revision, and account for a new culture over time as part of this “new normal.”

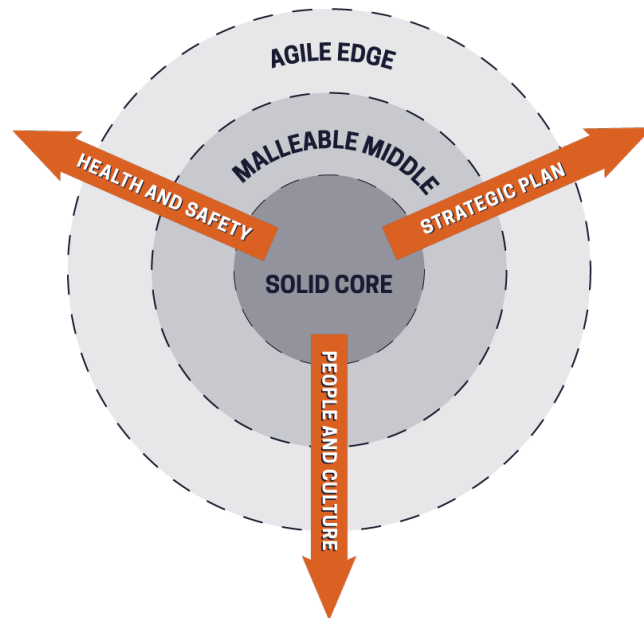
This article was originally published on [mcchrystalgroup.com](#) on May 26, 2020.

BY: CHRISTOPHER FUSSELL

SECTION 1: Understand and Define your Organization

Truly understanding what we consider core, malleable, or fully agile parts of our organizations is crucial to enabling an organization to change with the environment without losing itself.

We know that many of us leaders have emotional attachments to certain aspects of our companies. It is important to reflect honestly and differentiate what is really essential from what we are simply comfortably used to. COVID-19 has pushed us outside of our comfort zone. Now is the best time to determine what is really needed.



DEGREE OF DISRUPTION:

Resilient organizations adapt and change. Change is necessary and good. But not everything in your business should change at the same pace. You and everyone in your organization must be clear about that.

Solid Core: These elements can be changed, but these shifts should be infrequent. To change these is to redefine who you are as an organization. These are the stable and guiding “north star” regardless of what’s happening in the external environment.

Malleable Middle: These elements can change or be shifted to maintain effectiveness but must be done deliberately and reviewed on a regular cadence. These are changes to product lines, or the systems and processes that provide an operational structure that can be shifted to maintain effectiveness in their current context. To change these may be non-trivial, but is not existential to defining your organization. You don’t want to change things in this category with great frequency, given the real and opportunity costs of such change, but they should be “on the table” as possibilities.

Agile Edge: These elements can (and should) change quickly to be able to effectively respond to the environment or innovate ahead of the market. These are changes that are necessary to keep up with the market and respond to risks and opportunities. Changes here can and should be made as needed, and at pace with the market. Your organization should be set up to minimize the costs (including opportunity cost) of these changes.

CATEGORY OF CHANGE:

Change can be overwhelming. In order to make sense of this change quickly, we recommend you bucket your decisions and choices into the three categories below. The degree of disruption will determine the speed of the change within each of these categories.

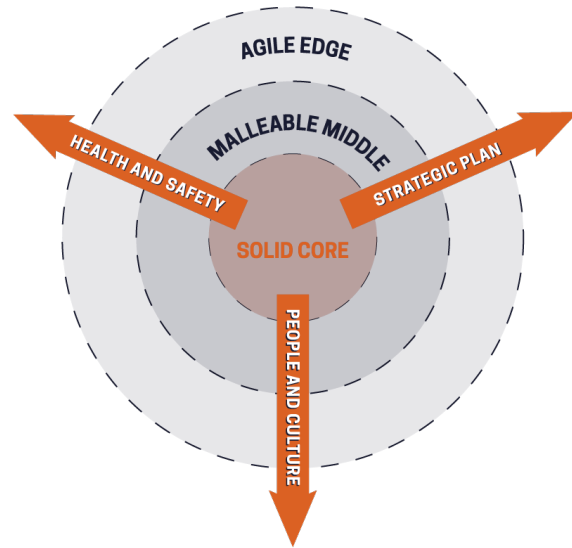
Strategic Plan: these are the “usual” components of your business plan. Your organizational strategy, your customers and products—and how your assumptions about the market and economy have changed since the onset of the COVID crisis.

Health & Safety: these are the often-logistical details about how your teammates, customers, and other stakeholders interact with your organization. These are decisions about the number and distribution of employees in your spaces, retail layouts, annual conferences, and customer experience.

People & Culture: these are the human elements that are affected by your strategic planning and responses to health and safety. These are the nature of the relationships between your organization and employees, community, other stakeholders, and between your employees.

CONSIDERING YOUR SOLID CORE:

Resilient organizations have elements that serve as a stable and guiding “north star” regardless of what’s happening in the environment. In our work with clients, we find that most consider too many things imperative, which reduces their ability to adapt and build resilience. For many, crisis can be a useful forcing function to highlight those elements which are truly imperative; the questions below can guide more targeted thinking (for more on thinking differently about this, consider *red team thinking*).



Evaluating along each axis, ask yourself:

STRATEGIC PLAN

Concepts:

- **Core Purpose:** what defines your business?
- **Objectives:** what is the definition of winning? Objectives should be distinct, tangible and tied to a metric
- **Business Imperatives:** things you **must do** to survive as a business
- **Brand:** the promise you take to the marketplace and represent to your customers

Questions to ask yourself:

- What is your brand? Does your value and promise to your customers still resonate in the changed environment?
- Which of your objectives are a business imperative?
- Have your objectives changed? Are there any objectives that should be dropped?
- Which, if any, of your products are fundamental to who you are as an organization?

PEOPLE & CULTURE

Concepts:

- **Values:** how do you define “what’s important” and “what’s right” for your organization?
- **Culture:** how do you define belonging to your organizational team (not the activities and interactions that lead to this, but the outcome itself)?

Questions to ask yourself:

- What are your organization’s immovable values?
- What are fundamental attributes of your people?
- Do those support your brand and business imperatives?
- What in your operations and processes is essential to supporting those attributes and values?

HEALTH & SAFETY

Concepts:

- **Regulation:** the core regulatory requirements that define H&S in your industry
- **Essential delivery:** features that cannot change in how your organization delivers its services

Questions to ask yourself:

- What has to remain intact in the way that your business interacts with its employees despite heightened and evolving H&S standards?
- Setting aside regulatory requirements, what do you define as your core H&S values?

After a review of the above questions use the templates below to communicate to your team.

Our Organization's Business Core is:

Vision:

Goals:

Values:

To survive as an organization we must:

As a commitment to our people we will:

We recommend leaders to clarify and routinely reconfirm the solid core. We also recommend, in times of stress, that you reaffirm this core through abundant proactive communications.

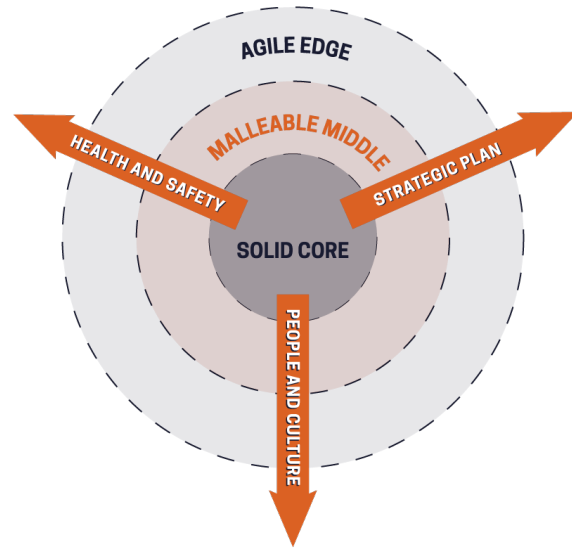
Plan for the next 6 weeks of communications: where and how will you make it clear to your organization what its solid core is and what that means for them and for how they conduct their work.

Use the worksheet below to sketch out those communications.

AUDIENCE	CHANNEL (email, phone, meeting, townhall, website)	DATE	MESSAGE

CONSIDERING YOUR MALLEABLE MIDDLE:

These elements can change or be shifted to maintain effectiveness but must be done deliberately and reviewed on a regular cadence. This flexibility allows organizations to capitalize on short- and mid-term opportunities.



Evaluating along each axis, ask yourself:

STRATEGIC PLAN

Concepts:

- **Strategy:** The ways and means by which you achieve your goals. They should clearly support your organizational objectives.
- **Organizational Structure:** An organizational structure defines how activities such as task allocation, coordination, and supervision are directed toward the achievement of organizational aims.
- **Operating Rhythm:** The cadence of activities and information flow that drives individual and teams' execution against the organization's strategic priorities.
- **Communications:** The way people and teams share information, internally and externally

Questions to ask yourself:

- Which of the assumptions underlying the strategies have changed?
- Have you changed the strategies that rely on these now-outdated assumptions?
- What adjacent products or services have you been forced to develop? What is their future in your organization?
- What has changed in your operating rhythm to reflect the crisis? Do these new connections and cadences add value moving forward, or should they be reverted or re-thought?
- Do shifts in strategy, markets, and ways of working necessitate modification of how you evaluate success in these areas (i.e. metrics)?

PEOPLE & CULTURE

Concepts:

- **Interactions:** how your team members interact with each other, and with your customers and community.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What environmental changes may necessitate clarification of your organizational values in a new context?
- What are other mechanisms you can reinforce your culture?
- What has changed the way your people interact? Which changes are sustainable?
- What has changed in how your people deliver services to your customers? Which changes are sustainable?
- When should these changes be revisited?
- For those changes you wish to keep, what does the organization need to do to support these changes?

HEALTH & SAFETY

Concepts:

- **Trigger:** event that will engender a set of changes. The triggers must be clearly outlined and communicated to the team.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What has been the best change that your organization has made in terms of health and safety? Is it sustainable? Are the effects measurable? When should it be revisited?
- What are the H&S policies that you will currently not change but want to revisit at a regular cadence? What is that cadence?
- What are areas in which you anticipate gradual H&S changes in your industry as the crisis evolves?

Consider filling this simple grid setting up a 30-60-90 day rolling plan for key initiatives:

INITIATIVE	OWNER	MEASURE OF SUCCESS	TIMELINE

Consider filling this tables setting up clear goals around support for people and culture in the next couple of months:

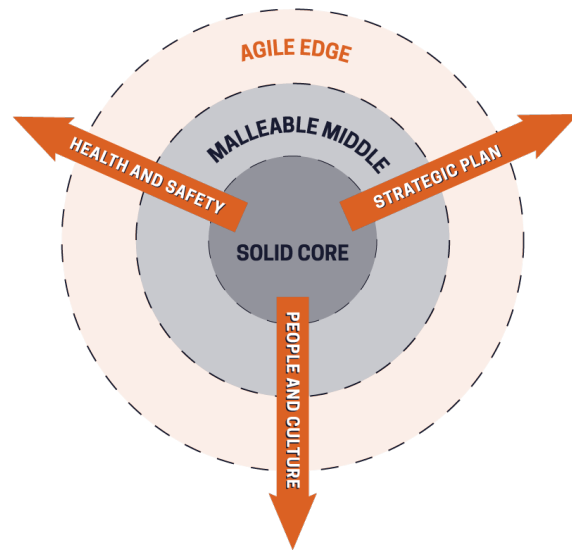
STAKEHOLDERS/ POPULATIONS	INITIATIVE	MEASURE OF SUCCESS	GOAL	FREQUENCY OF ASSESSMENT
<i>All Employees</i>	<i>Supporting home office setups</i>	<i>Engagement Survey Data</i>	<i>Working from home satisfaction increases by 10%</i>	<i>Quarterly</i>

Consider filling a simple grid with the key health & safety policies, how you will determine its success, when you will be revisiting it and what may happen that would demand a change out of the regular cycle:

HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY	MEASURE OF SUCCESS	FREQUENCY OF ASSESSMENT	RISK	TRIGGERS FOR CHANGE
<i>1/3 of employees will work in the office, respecting strict distancing and H&S protocol</i>	<i>No COVID-19 contagion at office work</i>	<i>Bi-weekly</i>	<i>COVID-19 contagion. Disengagement of employees working at home</i>	<i>Spike of cases in the office population. Spike of cases in the area</i>

CONSIDERING YOUR AGILE EDGE:

Resilient organizations must respond quickly to opportunities and risks by adapting their tactics and tools in an iterative fashion based on rapid changes in the environment. These are changes organizations are poised (and their people are empowered) to make quickly, and not viewed as a threat to the organization's core identity. They have operational costs low enough to be actioned rapidly and independently.



Evaluating along each axis, ask yourself:

STRATEGIC PLAN

Concepts:

- **Priorities:** The most important initiatives you are undertaking.
- **Technology:** the technology tools you are using to accomplish your work, be it communications, project management, goods' production or delivery.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What are the highest priority initiatives right now? Why? Do your employees know that?
- What new business tactics has your team employed? Are they sustainable? Should they be changed back?
- What part of your plan is a temporary fix that will likely be revisited in a couple months?
- What part of your plan needs to be changed now?

PEOPLE & CULTURE

Concepts:

- **Resourcing:** people, budget and time applied to an activity or initiative
- **Decision Space:** Team members' authorities and responsibilities to make decisions in specific areas of the business

Questions to ask yourself:

- What has changed in your people's ways of working?
- What is not sustainable and will create disengagement or burnout in your people?
- At what cadence will you check on your employees' engagement?
- How have team members' roles changed? Should these changes be retained or reverted moving forward? How will you communicate this to the team?

HEALTH & SAFETY

Questions to ask yourself:

- What are the areas in which you anticipate more rapid H&S changes in your industry as the crisis evolves?
- What H&S measures may not be mandated, but could provide peace of mind for employees and clients as you enter this next phase?
- What H&S feedback loop from your employees to the leadership do you have or need to create?

SECTION 2: Align Goals and Develop A Plan

It is critical that organizations approach their re-entry as strategically as they approached the crisis. That will require creating a re-entry plan that is:

- Clear enough to be understood by all
- Concise enough to digested
- Compelling enough to inspire people to action it

A very tactical and useful framework to follow for re-entry after the COVID-19 crisis is the grid here below:

RE-ENTRY PLAN FRAMEWORK			
	BUSINESS PLAN	PEOPLE & CULTURE	HEALTH & SAFETY
<p>RE/START</p> <p><i>What strategic tasks that were put off the shelf during the crisis, must be restarted?</i></p> <p><i>What tasks were not in our previous strategy which need to be started now?</i></p>			
<p>STOP</p> <p><i>What tasks from the crisis are no longer relevant in the current reality?</i></p>			
<p>CONTINUE</p> <p><i>What tasks from before or developed during the crisis must continue?</i></p>			

McChrystal Group

McChrystal is your people performance partner. We help organizations leverage human potential to achieve business outcomes by applying our Team of Teams framework to three critical areas of performance: developing your leaders, implementing strategy, and measuring your organization's performance.

For more information on our services, please visit mcchrystalgroup.com or email contact@mcchrystalgroup.com

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