

Human-Centred Transformation (HCT)

A Framework for Navigating Systemic Misalignment in Human Systems

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Organisation: Independent

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How to Read this Framework

This framework is concerned with how transformation is understood rather than how it is executed. Readers should approach it as a way of examining how systemic misalignment emerges and persists in complex human systems over time. The material that follows is not designed to be followed in sequence, it supports reflection on patterns, tensions, and dynamics that are already present in organisational contexts, particularly under conditions of pressure, uncertainty, and competing priorities.

The concepts and principles introduced here are not intended for one-off use or checklist application. Their value emerges from being revisited repeatedly as conditions change, interpretations shift, and new forms of misalignment surface through everyday decision-making and behaviour.

Readers may find that parts of the framework challenge existing assumptions or create a degree of discomfort or ambiguity. Such responses often indicate that competing objectives, interpretations, or constraints are already in play in complex human systems and warrant closer examination rather than immediate resolution.

What this document is

This document presents the Human-Centred Transformation (HCT) Framework.

The framework provides a structured way of thinking about systemic misalignment and of reasoning about how organisations learn and navigate change as transformation unfolds. It is concerned with how purpose, human behaviour, organisational conditions, and enablers interact over time, and why misalignment emerges even in well-intended, well-resourced transformation efforts.

In practice, this misalignment is experienced as repeated initiatives that consume time, investment, and leadership attention without producing sustained improvement, gradually eroding confidence, energy, and trust across the organisation.

HCT does not prescribe actions, delivery steps, or techniques. It does not offer a new change methodology, maturity model, or implementation playbook. Instead, it establishes a coherent lens for judgement, enabling leaders and practitioners to recognise misalignment as a normal condition of complex systems and to reason more deliberately about how it should be acknowledged, learned from, and navigated.

The framework is intended for leaders, practitioners, and those responsible for shaping or governing transformation. It supports clearer thinking, shared language, and disciplined attention to alignment, particularly under conditions of pressure, uncertainty, and competing priorities.

This framework lays the conceptual foundation for the HCT Discipline, which will translate these ideas into practical phases, practices, and guidance for application in real organisational settings. The discipline is a distinct and subsequent body of work.

HCT Framework Purpose Statement

The HCT Framework provides a structured lens for understanding systemic misalignment in transformation. It supports clearer judgement about coherence under real-world pressure by framing how business purpose, human behaviour, organisational conditions, and enablers interact over time.

1. Preface

Organisations today operate in environments defined by speed, uncertainty, and continual change. Markets shift, expectations evolve, and pressures of scale, cost, and competitiveness intensify, making transformation a constant feature of organisational life. However, despite decades of experience and widespread investment, most transformation efforts still fail to deliver expected outcomes.

This document introduces Human-Centred Transformation (HCT), a framework that supports recognition and understanding of the underlying conditions that determine whether transformation succeeds in practice.

HCT is grounded in a simple but often overlooked reality:

That transformation succeeds or fails based on alignment, and not ambition, effort, framework or technology alone.

The framework recognises that organisations are complex, adaptive human systems, and that transformation is not simply a matter of deploying new strategies, operating models, or technologies. It requires coherence across purpose, structures, behaviours, relationships, and the enabling conditions that shape how work gets done.

HCT does not replace existing methods such as change management, programme delivery, organisational design, or systems implementation. It strengthens them by surfacing the systemic conditions that determine whether they can succeed as intended.

The role of the framework is to connect awareness to capability. It helps organisations move beyond simply knowing that misalignment exists, towards being able to acknowledge it, learn from it, and navigate it more deliberately and constructively.

The aim of HCT is to support honest acknowledgement of complexity and clearer reasoning about how it is navigated.

2. Executive Summary

Transformation has become a constant requirement for organisational survival and competitiveness. However, despite sustained and significant investment, most transformation efforts still fail to deliver the benefits they promise.

This failure is rarely the result of insufficient effort, capability, or established methods. More often, it reflects a deeper and more persistent cause: systemic misalignment. Over time, disconnects emerge between business purpose, human capability, and organisational context. When these forces fall out of sync, transformation loses coherence, momentum, and measurable impact.

In response, many organisations invest heavily in technology, mistaking digital adoption for transformation itself. Technology does not create alignment; it amplifies the system it enters, accelerating drift and exposing friction where alignment is weak rather than resolving it.

Human-Centred Transformation (HCT) provides a structured way to approach misalignment. It does not replace existing change, programme, or project management methods. Instead, it complements them by surfacing the conditions that determine whether they can succeed as intended.

At its core, HCT views transformation as a complex, adaptive human system. Business purpose sets direction, value, and intended outcomes, while human capability and behaviour determine how effectively change is delivered and sustained in practice. Organisational context shapes how change unfolds, where friction arises, and why progress varies across different parts of the organisation.

Across these forces, enabling systems such as technology, processes, tools, and policies shape how work is carried out and how the organisation adapts. When enablers support shared purpose and reflect real working conditions, transformation becomes more achievable and more resilient.

HCT builds on systems thinking, organisational learning, and human-centred design, without treating any of them as sufficient on their own. It frames the relationship between awareness and capability by bringing intent, behaviour, structure, and enablers into coherent view. In doing so, it bridges the gap between transformation strategy and everyday operational reality and clarifies why change activity does or does not translate into measurable business outcomes.

Transformation cannot be achieved through effort alone; success depends on whether alignment is worked with continuously as conditions evolve, decisions shift, and people respond to pressures within their own context. HCT provides a framework that helps organisations understand this reality and engage with it without oversimplification or assumptions of control.

The sections that follow introduce the principles that underpin Human-Centred Transformation and show how they support alignment as transformation unfolds, setting the foundation for a framework that is both human in its approach and rigorous in its application.

3. Design Principles for Human-Centred Transformation

Human-Centred Transformation (HCT) is built on a set of shape how transformation is understood and governed, framing the conditions for coherent decisions about change.

In this context, design refers to the shaping of system conditions and decision-making rather than the design of specific solutions or experiences. These principles frame attention around real outcomes, human behaviour, and system coherence, rather than activity, assumption, or optimism.

The principles apply to every transformation, regardless of scale, industry, or operating model, although how they are expressed will vary by context.

3.1 Design Principles for Human-Centred Transformation

a) Transformation is anchored in a clearly defined business purpose

Purpose determines direction. Technology and methods shape how change is delivered, not where the organisation is going.

b) Human behaviour determines performance

Value is realised, or lost, through behaviour. Skills, trust, incentives, and lived experience are core system conditions, not secondary considerations.

c) Alignment is a leadership responsibility

Alignment is shaped by leadership decisions and their effects on system coherence, particularly where personal preference or legacy success measures dominate. When leadership decisions privilege local or historical priorities over shared purpose, misalignment becomes more likely and more persistent.

d) Technology enables; it does not determine

Tools amplify existing system conditions. Where misalignment is present, technology accelerates drift rather than resolving it.

e) Context shapes effective coherence

Coherence depends on how local realities and global intent are held in relation to one another, rather than assuming uniform conditions across the system.

f) Evidence grounds judgement

Outcomes and lived experience reveal system state more reliably than effort, intent, or optimism. Evidence clarifies where alignment holds and where it is under strain.

g) Coherence precedes speed

Movement without alignment creates rework, waste, and frustration. Speed has value only when the organisation is moving in a shared direction.

h) Transformation must be learnable and sustainable

Enduring change depends on internal capability. Confidence, judgement, and adaptability reduce reliance on external intervention and support alignment over time.

These principles are not theoretical; they exist because organisations often expect people to make good decisions in systems that pull them in different directions. HCT makes the conditions for good decisions visible and discussable, supporting leadership judgement grounded in purpose, behaviour, and clear accountability.

The next section explores why transformation continues to struggle in even the most capable organisations, and why these principles are essential in practice rather than optional in theory.

4. Introducing Human-Centred Transformation (HCT)

Many organisations now recognise that transformation must be treated as a continuous capability rather than a one-off event. Despite this growing awareness, transformation programmes continue to struggle or fail to realise the outcomes they intend.

The core issue is systemic misalignment: the disconnect between what an organisation intends and how work happens day to day. Plans often assume alignment, while operational reality proves otherwise.

Misalignment is a default condition of complex systems and cannot be eliminated.

At every level, leadership involves seeing the system as it operates in practice, acknowledging where misalignment exists, and understanding what coherent navigation requires.

Human-Centred Transformation (HCT) is a structured framework that helps organisations see and reason about systemic misalignment as a persistent condition of complex systems, rather than an exception to be resolved. It does not replace existing transformation methods, planning frameworks, programme structures, or delivery practices. Instead, it provides a lens for understanding how these approaches interact with business purpose and system conditions, and where they reinforce alignment or unintentionally work against it.

4.1 Why Transformation Continues to Struggle

Many transformation efforts begin with strong ambition and detailed plans but falter in delivery because the conditions required to sustain alignment do not hold in practice. This is not simply a matter of capability gaps or poor intent, nor is it explained away by resistance to change. Resistance, hesitation, and selective adoption are themselves rational behaviours that arise when people are asked to operate within systems that continue to reward existing priorities, interpretations, and measures of success.

In such conditions, organisational structures, incentives, governance arrangements, and cultural habits pull behaviour back toward the familiar, even when a new direction has been clearly articulated. Conflicting objectives emerge at every level of the organisation, from leadership through functions, teams, and individuals, shaping how priorities are interpreted and acted upon in day-to-day work.

Systemic misalignment emerges when:

- Strategic intent cannot be translated coherently into operational reality,
- Expectations shift faster than behaviours, incentives, and system conditions can adapt,
- Local objectives are prioritised over shared outcomes across levels and boundaries,
- Decision pathways remain unclear, slow, or contradictory,
- Accountability is delegated while responsibility for coherence is not retained.

Under these conditions, transformation does not fail in planning, but in the everyday environments where decisions are made, trade-offs are negotiated, and work is delivered.

4.2 How HCT Responds

HCT directs attention to the interaction between three interdependent forces.

Business purpose

The outcomes the organisation intends to achieve and the value it seeks to create.

Human capability and behaviour

The knowledge, skills, personal objectives, experience, and cultural norms through which change is delivered and sustained.

Organisational and external context

The realities of where and how the organisation operates, including market conditions, regulation, legacy systems, and established relationships.

These forces are shaped and mediated by enablers such as technology, processes, practices, and governance. Enablers either reinforce coherence with purpose and working realities, or they amplify existing misalignment.

Misalignment becomes observable through the HCT lens, clarifying its implications for system coherence.

4.3 What HCT Makes Visible

Human-Centred Transformation does not define actions to be taken or outcomes to be delivered. Instead, it provides a way of understanding the conditions that shape how transformation unfolds in practice.

Viewed through an HCT lens, organisations are better able to:

- Examine how business purpose is interpreted and enacted across different levels and contexts,
- Understand how behaviour, incentives, and structures interact to support or undermine alignment,
- Recognise where decision-making is coherent and where competing priorities create drift,
- See how enablers such as technology, governance, and process reinforce or conflict with real working conditions,
- Identify patterns of fragmentation, resistance, or inertia as signals of systemic misalignment rather than isolated failure.

This perspective does not eliminate complexity or resolve misalignment. It supports more deliberate judgement by making the dynamics that shape transformation easier to observe, discuss, and reason about as conditions evolve.

In this sense, HCT reframes transformation from an exercise in delivery to an ongoing challenge of maintaining coherence between intent, behaviour, and context in a complex human system.

5. Why HCT is Needed

Transformation often struggles not because organisations lack intelligence, investment, or intent, but because the systems through which change is expected to happen are misaligned in practice. Purpose, behaviour, structure, and real working conditions interact continuously, and when these elements are not coherently related, transformation loses traction.

This misalignment becomes visible when:

- Strategic objectives are set without sufficient regard for delivery realities, creating gaps between ambition and the capability, behaviours, and capacity required to achieve it,
- Organisational structures, incentive systems, and cultural norms reinforce existing behaviours rather than those required for change,
- Human interpretation, preference, and bias shape how people adopt, adapt, or resist change, often determining whether expectations take root or quietly fade,
- Enablers such as governance, processes, and technology are introduced in isolation from real business needs, resulting in fragmented efforts that fail to deliver sustained value.

When these conditions are present, progress slows or stalls not because individuals resist change or tools are inadequate, but because the system sends conflicting signals about what matters, what is rewarded, and how decisions should be made.

In practice, misalignment often becomes most visible through behaviour. Different levels, functions, and teams interpret the same ambition in different ways, protect local priorities, or act from experience and personal preference. These differences are rarely malicious, but they lead to conflicting decisions, duplicated effort, and quiet resistance that planning alone cannot resolve.

Human-Centred Transformation (HCT) responds to this challenge by providing a framework for recognising and understanding systemic misalignment, and for approaching it more deliberately as conditions evolve. It draws attention to several critical conditions:

- Business purpose is made visible and actionable rather than remaining abstract,
- Human capability and behaviour are examined and supported rather than assumed,
- Organisational and contextual differences are acknowledged rather than treated as uniform,
- Enablers, including technology, are considered in relation to purpose rather than allowed to define it.

It does not seek to eliminate complexity; instead, it offers a way of engaging with it more honestly, supporting clearer intention, coherence across functions and regions, practicality in day-to-day operation, and sustainability over time.

Organisations do not struggle because they lack intelligence, effort, or commitment. They struggle because they must transform while still operating. HCT helps organisations recognise misalignment as it emerges and understand how system conditions shape decisions and outcomes over time.

To examine why misalignment persists even when plans are strong and capability is present, the next section focuses on the human dynamics that shape organisational behaviour.

5.1 Human Behaviour Shapes Transformation in Practice

Organisations do not transform unless people are willing and able to change how they work in practice. Skills, mindsets, incentives, relationships, and lived experience shape whether new expectations are adopted or quietly ignored. Human behaviour is where alignment is enacted and becomes visible, and where misalignment is most clearly revealed.

Transformation frequently stalls when decisions are guided by habit, assumption, personal preference, bias, or organisational narrative rather than shared evidence and a practical understanding of how work must be done to deliver measurable value. In practice, these dynamics often outweigh plans or intentions once change is underway.

Human behaviour is central to understanding transformation because it reveals what the system truly rewards, what it enables, and where it silently resists change.

In every organisation, behaviour is influenced by:

- Personal and professional identity, experience, confidence, risk tolerance, recognition, and status,
- Local incentives and pressures, what is rewarded, avoided, simplified, or escalated,
- Cultural norms and shared habits, how things are done and how people protect what works for them,
- After-action consequences, what happens when someone deviates from expected standards or priorities.

These behavioural forces exist at every level of the organisation, from enterprise and region through to function, team, and individual. Depending on how they interact with purpose, structure, and incentives, they can reinforce coherence or drive fragmentation, and they are present whether they are explicitly recognised or planned for.

One way to make this visible is to contrast how behaviour interacts with purpose under different conditions:

If behaviour aligns with purpose	If behaviour does not align with purpose
Progress accelerates	Progress stalls or reverses
Decisions support outcomes	Decisions protect the status quo
Enablers amplify capability	Enablers expose and widen misalignment
Change becomes sustainable	Reversion becomes inevitable

Technology, governance, and structure can enable change, but behaviour is where transformation is enacted in practice. For this reason, human behaviour is treated as a central lens for understanding transformation:

- It is where alignment and misalignment become visible,
- It shapes whether enablers create value or friction,
- It mediates how intent is translated into repeatable outcomes over time.

HCT makes these behavioural dynamics explicit and discussable as part of the transformation system, allowing leaders to reason more clearly about the conditions that support or undermine change.

5.2 Human Factors Shape Transformation Dynamics

Transformation outcomes are shaped less by stated intent and more by the conditions organisations create through their systems, structures, and decision-making. These conditions influence how people interpret expectations, prioritise work, and act in practice.

Core insight

Misalignment emerges when systems continue to reward established behaviours while expecting different outcomes, placing people in situations where intent and reality pull in opposing directions.

These conditions exist in every organisation, but they often remain invisible until change is attempted. When people are expected to behave differently while systems continue to reward established patterns, progress stalls and resistance emerges as a rational response to conflicting signals. HCT helps make these pressures visible earlier, enabling leaders to reason more clearly about the conditions shaping behaviour as change unfolds.

When these human factors are understood and taken seriously in decision-making, transformation choices become clearer, friction reduces, and progress is more likely to be sustained. When they are ignored, systems fragment regardless of the tools or structures introduced.

Transformation is carried out by people, while technology amplifies the conditions already present within the system. This observation underpins a necessary shift in how organisations think about tools, platforms, and technology.

5.3 Leadership Disruption and Programme Drift

Leadership behaviour is one of the most powerful forces shaping organisational coherence. Depending on how direction is set, interpreted, and reinforced, leadership decisions can strengthen shared understanding or accelerate fragmentation across the system.

In many transformations, leadership changes occur while work is already underway, bringing different preferences, assumptions, and, in some cases, new partners or approaches. These shifts are often well-intended, but their systemic effects can be significant. Objectives shift without shared re-examination, teams are asked to adapt while maintaining existing commitments, work already in progress is questioned or undone, and energy is diverted into reassurance and rework rather than progress.

The result is programme drift, where the intended destination remains unchanged on paper, but the path becomes longer, more fragmented, and more costly as coherence erodes over time.

Viewed through an HCT lens, these effects become easier to recognise and learn from, including the hidden waste and erosion of trust that can arise when leadership change turns into organisational churn. This perspective supports continuity where it protects value and encourages adaptation where it strengthens coherence across the system.

5.4 Team Continuity and Capability Loss

Even when direction appears stable, the people involved in transformation change over time. In large transformation efforts, rotation is common, with individuals leaving roles, moving countries, shifting portfolios, or being promoted long before intended outcomes are realised.

Individually, these changes can seem minor. Systemically, they accumulate. Knowledge and rationale are lost at handover, decisions are revisited because context is no longer understood, standards diverge across teams and geographies, and energy is diverted into rebuilding confidence rather than advancing progress.

The organisation continues to move, but not necessarily in the same direction.

Core insight

Churn does not only reduce capacity. Over time, it erodes memory, coherence, and accountability, allowing misalignment to become normalised one handover at a time.

This highlights why progress in transformation cannot rely on the continuity of any single individual or team, and why organisational memory and shared understanding matter as much as capacity.

6. Rethinking Technology Adoption

Over time, the narrative of transformation has become increasingly dominated by technology, with organisations encouraged to modernise systems, automate work, adopt digital platforms, or deploy AI simply to remain competitive. As a result, technology adoption is often treated as transformation itself, an appealing assumption because it suggests that complexity can be resolved through the acquisition of new tools.

In practice, however, replacing or expanding technology without attending to purpose, people, and ways of working rarely delivers the outcomes organisations expect.

6.1 Where Technology Adoption Efforts Commonly Break Down

Even when technology investments are made with good intent, whether to increase efficiency, unlock data, reduce manual work, improve customer interaction, or support decision-making, the outcomes frequently fall short.

Technology often changes what is technically possible without changing what people do in practice. Organisational behaviour remains largely unchanged, and expected benefits fail to materialise.

6.2 Why This Happens

Technology alone cannot create coherence within an organisation, but it will amplify the conditions already present in the system. Where alignment is relatively strong, technology can support progress and reinforce effective ways of working. Where misalignment exists, it accelerates drift, exposes friction, and increases the cost of inconsistency. When decision pathways are unclear, technology tends to surface those weaknesses rather than resolve them.

This pattern is consistent across organisations and sectors and is often visible in the gap between successful system deployment and unchanged organisational behaviour:

The technology works	The organisation does not change
Systems are deployed successfully	Work continues largely as before
Data becomes more available	Decision habits remain unchanged
Processes can be automated	Teams revert to manual workarounds
Digital channels launch	Customers continue to use legacy ones
Performance dashboards exist	Reporting behaviours remain inconsistent

6.3 The HCT Perspective

From a Human-Centred Transformation perspective, technology is understood as one enabler among many, with its impact shaped less by its features and more by the conditions into which it is introduced.

These conditions include:

- Clarity of business need, the outcome the technology is intended to enable or improve,
- Systemic readiness, the extent to which structures, behaviours, decision pathways, incentives, and skills support the change,
- Human capability and trust, whether people understand how to use the tools and believe they will make work easier, more effective, or more meaningful,
- Feedback and learning capacity, the organisation's ability to learn and adapt as technology meets real working conditions.

Where these conditions are weak or poorly understood, even sophisticated platforms tend to deliver limited or short-lived benefits. Viewed in this way, technology adoption is better understood not through implementation alone, but through its relationship to purpose, system conditions, and human experience.

6.4 Reframing Technology Adoption

Human-Centred Transformation does not argue for reducing technology ambition. Instead, it reframes how that ambition is understood, encouraging organisations to consider the conditions under which technology adoption is more likely to deliver lasting value.

Viewed through an HCT lens, technology adoption is often observed to be more effective when it is:

- Purposeful rather than reactive,
- Sequenced rather than rushed,
- Supported rather than bolted on,
- Sustained rather than abandoned.

This shift is often visible in the assumptions organisations make about technology and change:

Common assumption	Reframed perspective
We need this technology	We need to achieve these outcomes
Tools drive decisions	Business purpose informs tool selection
Adoption is measured by deployment	Adoption is understood through sustained use
Technology arrives before behaviour	Capability and trust shape adoption
Systems scale misalignment	Systems can support coherent change

When adoption is defined primarily in terms of deployment, there is an implicit expectation that behaviour will follow. In practice, behaviour follows incentives, trust, meaning, and local priorities. Without attention to these human conditions, new tools tend to generate confusion, workarounds, or passive non-use, leaving organisations doing much the same work as before, but with additional layers of complexity.

6.5 What This Enables

When technology is treated as an enabler rather than transformation, several effects become more likely in practice:

- Technology investments are more clearly connected to real business needs,
- People are more willing to change how they work because they understand, trust, and see value in the tools introduced,
- Processes evolve alongside new systems rather than conflict with them,
- Governance clarifies decision-making instead of slowing it,
- Organisations are better able to learn, adjust, and scale as conditions change.

The aim is not to slow technology adoption, but to ensure that adoption contributes to measurable and sustainable performance improvement. Technology changes what is technically possible; human behaviour determines whether that potential is realised.

In simple terms:

Technology expands what organisations can do. Human-Centred Transformation helps organisations understand the conditions under which that potential is more likely to translate into meaningful, measurable, and sustained outcomes.

7. The Purpose of Human-Centred Transformation

Human-Centred Transformation (HCT) was developed to address a long-standing and widely recognised challenge: most transformation programmes do not achieve the outcomes they set out to deliver, not because of insufficient effort, intelligence, investment, or intent, but because of the way transformation is framed and approached in practice.

Transformation is frequently treated as a technical, structural, or procedural exercise, even though in reality it unfolds within complex human systems in which people, structures, processes, and enablers, including technology, interact continuously to shape how change is interpreted and acted upon. When these interactions are poorly understood or left unexamined, even well-designed plans struggle to translate into meaningful outcomes.

The purpose of HCT is to provide a coherent way of understanding these interactions and the conditions that shape them, offering a framework for making misalignment visible, developing shared understanding, and supporting more deliberate judgement as organisations work with change over time.

7.1 HCT's Focus

Human-Centred Transformation is not a replacement for existing transformation or change methodologies, nor does it prescribe a new delivery model. Instead, it provides a human-centred framework for understanding alignment, helping organisations apply existing approaches with greater clarity, coherence, and judgement.

HCT is oriented around three core aims.

1. Clarify Purpose and Its Role in Decision-Making

Every transformation begins with a business need, whether that is a problem to solve, an opportunity to pursue, or a challenge to address, yet in practice purpose is often diluted as initiatives expand, new stakeholders become involved, or priorities shift over time.

HCT draws attention to how purpose functions within the system, encouraging organisations to examine whether:

- Purpose remains visible and influential in day-to-day decision-making,
- Outcomes are defined through observable evidence rather than aspiration alone,
- Priorities shift without shared understanding of the implications,
- Trade-offs are recognised and discussed explicitly.

When purpose loses clarity or relevance in practice, misalignment becomes more likely.

2. Improve Coherence Across Boundaries

Many transformation challenges emerge at the boundaries between individuals, teams, functions, regions, or disciplines, where responsibility is shared but accountability is unclear.

HCT focuses attention on these interfaces, helping organisations explore:

- where work is fragmented, duplicated, or working at cross purposes,
- how strategic intent connects to operational reality,
- how collaboration occurs across functional, geographic, and cultural boundaries,

- how diverse expertise can be preserved without losing coherence,
- where implicit tensions arise from incentives, local interests, or competing narratives.

This emphasis supports coherence without forcing uniformity. Alignment, in this sense, is about shared understanding and informed contribution rather than standardisation.

3. Strengthen Organisational Capability to Work with Change

Transformation is not a one-off event or a programme with a clear endpoint, but a continuing condition of organisational life in environments shaped by uncertainty and change.

HCT draws attention to capabilities that shape how organisations work with change, such as:

- Shared language and understanding across teams and levels,
- The ability to surface and discuss misalignment earlier rather than later,
- Regular habits of reflection and learning,
- Greater confidence in navigating complexity and uncertainty.

Taken together, these capabilities help organisations respond more deliberately to change as it unfolds, reducing the need for late correction and repeated reset.

7.2 Transformation Through an HCT Lens

Human-Centred Transformation does not claim to eliminate complexity or replace leadership judgement. Instead, it provides a structured perspective for working with complexity, supporting more deliberate, informed, and human decision-making as change unfolds.

When viewed through an HCT perspective, transformation practice tends to be shaped by different assumptions about how change occurs and what influences outcomes.

When transformation is approached without an HCT perspective	When transformation is informed by an HCT perspective
Decisions are guided primarily by assumption	Decisions are guided by shared evidence and understanding
New behaviours are expected without examining enabling conditions	The conditions required for new behaviours are examined and discussed
Technology is treated as an end in itself	Technology is considered in relation to purpose
Roles and priorities remain implicit or contested	Accountability and contribution are made more visible
Improvements are fragile and easily reversed	Improvements are more likely to be understood and built upon

This contrast does not describe a guaranteed outcome or a fixed operating model. It illustrates how the use of an HCT framework can influence how leaders and teams' reason about change, where they place attention, and how they interpret signals as transformation progresses.

7.3 In Summary

Human-Centred Transformation bridges the gap between transformation strategy and everyday organisational reality by reframing how change is understood and navigated, supporting organisations in clarifying not only what needs to change, but how purpose, behaviour, structures, and conditions interact as change unfolds.

By providing a coherent framework for recognising misalignment and reasoning about its effects, HCT helps organisations move beyond abstract ambition toward more grounded judgement, supporting transformation that remains coherent, practical, and achievable over time without assuming stability, control, or uniformity.

8. Core Principles of Human-Centred Transformation

Human-Centred Transformation recognises that transformation unfolds within complex human systems, in which technology adoption, communication initiatives, cultural change, or process redesign do not deliver outcomes in isolation. Sustained change depends on how purpose, people, structures, and enabling conditions interact over time.

The principles set out in this section are distinct from the design principles introduced earlier. Rather than describing how transformation should be approached or structured, they articulate the core considerations that must remain in view when reasoning about change. Taken together, they provide a stable foundation for judgement in environments characterised by complexity, uncertainty, and continual adaptation.

1. Purpose as the Anchor

Transformation begins with a business need and the outcomes the organisation intends to achieve, with purpose providing direction and meaning that shape decisions and priorities across the system.

Purpose tends to be most coherent when it is:

- Explicit and visible across levels and functions,
- Traceable to measurable value rather than abstract aspiration,
- Present in day-to-day decision-making rather than confined to planning artefacts.

When purpose becomes unclear or diluted in practice, misalignment becomes more likely.

2. Human Behaviour and Capability at the Centre

Organisations do not change unless people change how they work. Objectives, skills, habits, incentives, mindsets, and everyday behaviours shape whether new expectations take hold in practice, and they are where both capability grows and friction becomes visible. When objectives compete or conflict across leadership, functions, teams, and individuals, misalignment becomes embedded in day-to-day decision-making.

Attention is directed toward:

- How work really changes in practice rather than only in design,
- How capability and confidence develop over time,
- How culture, incentives, and local pressures shape behaviour,
- How interpretation influences decision-making in real contexts.

Taken together, these factors shape how intended value is realised or quietly eroded in delivery.

3. Alignment Across Structures, Teams, and Contexts

Strategies fail when structures, reporting lines, incentives, and local realities pull in different directions. Alignment is not uniformity, but coherence across differences that enables diverse parts of the organisation to contribute without working at cross purposes.

Coherence depends on attention to:

- Structural and operational dependencies that shape how work unfolds,
- How decisions and activity connect across organisational boundaries,
- How geographic and functional contexts influence interpretation and priority,
- How local adaptation occurs without losing sight of shared purpose.

Because organisational conditions continue to shift, coherence is not achieved once and preserved; it is shaped through ongoing judgement as contexts, constraints, and priorities evolve.

4. Enablers Support Purpose, Not the Other Way Around

Processes, governance, tools, and technology amplify capability, with their value determined by how well they serve a real business need and the conditions in which they are introduced.

Enablers are most effective when:

- Purpose shapes tool and system choices,
- Adoption reflects organisational readiness rather than urgency alone,
- Effectiveness is interpreted through outcomes rather than deployment milestones,
- Technology amplifies coherence within the system rather than defining direction.

Tools change what is technically possible; behaviour determines what is done in practice.

5. Evidence Before Assumption

Transformation decisions are more robust when they are informed by shared evidence rather than habit, narrative, or personal conviction, particularly in complex systems where unexamined assumptions often shape action long before they are recognised.

From an HCT perspective, emphasis is placed on:

- Surfacing and testing assumptions rather than allowing them to remain implicit,
- Using data to inform action without treating it as neutral or complete,
- Treating observed behaviour as meaningful evidence of how the system operates,
- Maintaining learning as an ongoing discipline rather than a retrospective activity.

Used in this way, evidence helps reduce noise, clarify competing interpretations, and support more deliberate judgement.

6. Navigation, Not Control

Complex systems cannot be controlled into change. Tension, disagreement, and uncertainty are not failures of transformation but signals that competing priorities, interpretations, or constraints are at play.

Effective navigation of complexity depends on:

- Creating space for safe and open dialogue,
- Establishing feedback that makes emerging drift visible,
- Adjusting direction without losing sight of purpose.

Complexity cannot be removed, but it can be recognised and worked with deliberately.

Misalignment is a natural feature of complex systems, and progress depends on the quality of judgement exercised in response to it.

7. Leadership as a Distributed Responsibility

Leadership is expressed through clarity, accountability, and stewardship of purpose, exercised by anyone whose decisions materially affect outcomes, regardless of role or title.

From an HCT perspective, effective leadership in complex systems is characterised by:

- Making accountability and decision ownership visible,
- Inviting contribution while preserving coherence of direction,
- Synthesising diverse inputs into clear priorities and next steps,
- Sustaining clarity of purpose when pressure, uncertainty, or competing demands increase.

Empowerment and autonomy create value only when decisions remain connected to shared purpose and understood consequences.

8.1 In Summary

Taken together, these principles keep transformation anchored in purpose, grounded in human behaviour, coherent across structures and contexts, and attentive to the role of enablers in supporting progress rather than fragmenting it. They do not prescribe specific actions; they shape judgement, influencing how leaders and teams decide what to do when conditions are complex, trade-offs are unavoidable, and stakes are high.

9. The Human and External Dynamics of Misalignment

Misalignment is a default condition of complex systems in which people see the world differently, prioritise what they believe matters most, and act on the signals they receive locally. These differences are rational within each person's context, but they create drift when shared outcomes are not sufficiently reinforced through the conditions that shape everyday decision-making.

Systemic misalignment emerges when individual interpretations and local priorities diverge faster than shared understanding can keep pace, not as a sign of resistance or failure, but as the normal outcome of people acting rationally within the context they experience. These behavioural dynamics are present wherever work happens, with local decisions accumulating across teams, functions, and levels of the organisation in ways that can reinforce coherence or create fragmentation, often without deliberate intent.

External partners also influence alignment, as consultancy firms and vendors often promote solutions that reflect their own methods, tools, and capabilities. While such solutions may be credible in themselves, proposing them before the business need is fully understood can lead organisations to adopt approaches that do not fit their specific context, widening misalignment over time and increasing the risk of stalled, wasteful, or superficial change.

Viewed through an HCT lens, these human and external dynamics become easier to recognise and examine. Decisions can be understood as products of interpretation as well as information, while the influence of external partners can be seen as an additional force shaping behaviour rather than a neutral input. Making these dynamics explicit reduces the risk that well-intended activity generates further drift instead of coherence.

9.1 Internal Drift

Even when strategy is clear, teams interpret priorities through the lens of their own work, targets, and constraints, with outcomes shifting subtly as functions emphasise local success measures. Over time, the organisation continues to move, but not always in the same direction.

Core insight

Internal drift does not look like resistance. It looks like everyone doing their best, in different directions.

9.2 Vendor-Led Drift

Consultancy partners and technology vendors often introduce preferred methods, tools, and delivery models that reflect their own strengths and ways of working. These can add capability, but only when they are grounded in the organisation's defined business need and operating reality.

Core insight

When external solutions drive decisions, alignment becomes accidental and value becomes uncertain.

9.3 Localisation Drift

Global transformation efforts depend on scale and consistency, while local markets depend on adaptation to remain viable. When these forces are not well understood in relation to one another, divergence can emerge in ways that are difficult to detect early:

- Standards fragment across geographies,
- Capability varies significantly by region,
- Learning and insight fail to transfer,
- Teams optimise locally while enterprise coherence declines.

Localisation drift intensifies when teams assume that no one understands their customers, regulatory context, or ways of working as well as they do. Decisions become shaped by belief and preference rather than shared evidence, local priorities dominate, and divergence remains largely invisible until recovery becomes difficult.

Core insight

Every local adaptation changes the system. Without visibility, the system fragments.

Viewed through an HCT lens, local adaptation becomes easier to examine and discuss, making it possible to hold global intent and local relevance in productive tension rather than allowing them to pull apart.

9.4 Continuity Drift

Capabilities and knowledge degrade as teams rotate, handovers multiply, and work moves across regions, affecting even well-structured programmes when:

- Memory is lost between transitions,
- Intent is reinterpreted repeatedly,
- Accountability diffuses as ownership changes,
- New teams act with incomplete context.

Local reinterpretation compounds with each personnel change, gradually weakening coherence and shared understanding across the system.

Core insight

Churn does not only reduce capacity; it erodes coherence, memory, and accountability.

Viewed through an HCT lens, continuity conditions become easier to recognise and reason about early, reducing the risk that repeated handovers normalise fragmentation as people, priorities, and structures shift.

10. The Common Language Lexicon

Purpose

Transformation efforts frequently break down not because of a lack of intent, skill, or investment, but because people use the same words to mean different things. Terms such as programme, project, transformation, change, capability, design, and culture are often interpreted differently across teams, functions, and leadership groups, creating confusion in decision-making and coordination.

This lack of shared meaning leads to friction, competing priorities, and progress that slows or fragments over time. The Common Language Lexicon provides clear, practical definitions intended to support shared understanding across teams, disciplines, geographies, and levels of the organisation. These definitions are not academic; they are designed to be usable in real work, where clarity of language directly shapes judgement, coordination, and outcomes.

10.1 Core System Concepts

Transformation

The ongoing process through which an organisation works with changes to purpose, people, structures, and enablers in pursuit of measurable and sustainable outcomes over time. Transformation is not a one-off initiative, but a continuing condition of adaptation within a complex system.

Business Transformation

The purposeful redesign of how an organisation creates, delivers, and sustains value, driven by clearly defined commercial, operational, or societal outcomes.

Organisational Transformation

The cultural, structural, and behavioural shifts required to support business transformation at scale, shaping how people work, make decisions, and collaborate across the organisation.

Change and Transformation

- *Change* modifies specific parts of a system, often in response to a defined issue or requirement.
- *Transformation* involves coordinated shifts across the system, altering how outcomes are produced in practice.

Note: Change can often be reversed or rolled back, whereas transformation reshapes underlying conditions and therefore tends to be more persistent in its effects.

10.2 Structures and Delivery Terms

Transformation System

The network of people, relationships, priorities, enablers, and feedback loops through which transformation unfolds. This system exists whether it is explicitly recognised or not.

Programme

A coordinated set of initiatives intended to achieve a significant organisational outcome. Programmes organise delivery activity, but they are not transformation in themselves.

Project

A discrete body of work with a defined scope, timeframe, and output. Projects contribute to outcomes, but they do not guarantee them.

Workstream

A thematic area of sustained activity, such as culture, operations, regulation, or customer experience. Workstreams connect related projects and help maintain coherence across domains over time.

Phase

A way of organising work, for example discovery, design, delivery, or sustainment. Phases are not strictly linear; they often repeat, overlap, and adapt as learning occurs.

Framework

A structured way of thinking that organises concepts, principles, and relationships to support understanding in complex situations. A framework guides judgement and sense-making; it does not prescribe steps, activities, or deliverables.

Method

A defined way of doing work that sets out specific steps, activities, and sequences. Methods are designed to support repeatability and consistency, often producing defined outputs or artefacts.

Methodology

A coherent system of methods, tools, activities, and practices designed to produce consistent results. Methodologies are prescriptive, providing structure, sequencing, artefacts, and ways of working that direct how work is carried out.

Discipline

A sustained practice of attention, judgement, and learning applied over time. A discipline establishes shared ways of reasoning about conditions and consequences without prescribing steps, tools, or sequences. It shapes how people observe, interpret, and respond within complex systems rather than directing how work is executed.

Unlike a method or methodology, a discipline does not define how work should be done; it strengthens the capability to decide what is appropriate as conditions evolve.

Design

The practice of making intent tangible. In the context of HCT, design refers not only to product or service creation, but to shaping systems, experiences, and ways of working, translating purpose and insight into structured action that connects vision to practical change.

10.3 People and Capability Terms

Human Capability

The knowledge, skills, mindsets, and shared norms that shape how effectively people adopt, adapt to, and sustain new ways of working in practice.

Culture

The organisation's collective patterns of behaviour, expressed through how people act individually and in groups rather than what is stated in formal values. Culture can reinforce or undermine transformation depending on what it rewards and constrains.

Leadership

A pattern of behaviour rather than a formal status, expressed through decisions that shape direction, priorities, and consequences. Anyone whose decisions materially affect outcomes is exercising leadership, regardless of role or title.

Empowerment

Trusted accountability exercised within clear decision rights and shared understanding of purpose. Empowerment does not remove constraints or redefine priorities; it enables judgement within them. When boundaries are unclear, empowerment fragments decision-making rather than strengthening it.

Autonomy

Bounded freedom to act within shared evidence, constraints, and purpose. Because decisions always affect others, autonomy operates most effectively when its scope is understood. Unbounded autonomy increases fragmentation, while bounded autonomy supports coherence across the system.

10.4 Enabler Terms

Enablers

Tools, methods, frameworks, processes, and technologies that influence how change is delivered and sustained. Enablers have value only in relation to a clearly defined business need and the conditions in which they are applied.

Technology

A subset of enablers that can extend capability, scale activity, and increase speed or reach. Technology does not create clarity or coherence on its own; it amplifies the conditions into which it is introduced.

Process

A repeatable sequence that shapes how work is carried out. Effective processes reduce friction and uncertainty, while ineffective processes increase effort, workarounds, and fragmentation.

Governance

The structures and practices through which decisions are made, communicated, and acted upon. Governance is not control; its role is to provide clarity of authority, accountability, and decision pathways in complex systems.

Policies

Formal statements that set expectations for behaviour and decision-making. Policies establish boundaries and consistency, shaping how discretion is exercised across the organisation rather than prescribing action in detail.

10.5 System Alignment Terms

Alignment

The degree of coherence between purpose, behaviour, structures, and enablers as they shape decisions and action in each context. Alignment is situational and dynamic, emerging through how trade-offs are understood and acted upon rather than existing as a stable state.

Systemic Misalignment

The condition that arises when structures, incentives, behaviours, and priorities pull in different directions, producing drift, friction, and unintended consequences. It is rarely intentional, but it is always consequential.

System Visibility

The ability to see the transformation system, including its components, dependencies, pressures, and risks. System visibility supports more deliberate judgement by making the forces shaping decisions explicit, particularly when conditions are complex or contested.

10.6 Why the Lexicon Matters

A shared language does not remove complexity, but it makes complexity easier to navigate. When key terms are interpreted differently, intent fragments, decisions diverge, and coordination weakens, regardless of effort or expertise.

This lexicon provides a common reference point for reasoning about transformation. By clarifying meaning, it supports clearer judgement, more coherent discussion, and more deliberate decision-making across planning, governance, reporting, and everyday work.

11. Leadership Navigation Through an HCT Lens

Effective transformation leadership is not defined by authority or seniority, but by the quality of attention given to reality, consequence, and decision-making under pressure. In complex systems, leadership is exercised wherever decisions shape outcomes, regardless of role or title.

From an HCT perspective, transformation succeeds not because plans are well designed, but because leaders are able to notice emerging conditions, interpret what they mean, and respond with judgement as circumstances evolve, making navigation rather than control the central leadership challenge.

One way of understanding this navigation is through three interrelated modes of leadership attention: **See → Acknowledge → Navigate**. This is not a procedural loop or a prescribed practice, but a conceptual model that describes how effective leadership engages with complexity over time.

See

Seeing refers to the ability to perceive the system as it is experienced in practice rather than as it is represented in plans, dashboards, or formal reports. This includes noticing how purpose, priorities, behaviours, structures, and enablers interact in real work, and where pressures, tensions, or divergences are beginning to emerge.

Seeing well requires curiosity and proximity, depending on leaders being willing to look beyond surface indicators and attend to how decisions are being made and acted upon across the organisation.

Acknowledge

Acknowledgement is the discipline of taking what is visible seriously, without denial, defensiveness, or blame. It involves recognising where interpretations differ, where trade-offs are being made implicitly, and where the consequences of current conditions may undermine intended outcomes if left unattended.

Acknowledgement creates the space between awareness and response, as without its insight remains inert and misalignment persists beneath the surface.

Navigate

Navigation refers to the exercise of judgement in response to what has been seen and acknowledged, focusing on how direction is clarified, priorities are adjusted, and decisions are made in ways that respect context while remaining anchored to purpose.

Navigation is not a corrective act taken after failure or a linear return to plan, but the ongoing work of steering through uncertainty, balancing competing demands, and acting deliberately as conditions shift.

Because misalignment is an inevitable feature of complex human systems, leadership cannot rely on intent or optimism alone. Progress depends on the ability to see emerging divergence, acknowledge its implications, and respond before small differences compound into systemic drag.

Empowerment does not remove leadership responsibility. When systemic misalignment affects programmes or projects, leaders must recognise it, acknowledge its impact, and take responsibility for how navigation changes in response.

This way of understanding leadership prepares the ground for a more explicit articulation of how navigation is sustained over time. The next section introduces the HCT Transformation Cycle, which builds on this orientation to describe the rhythm through which organisations attend to misalignment, decision-making, and progress as transformation unfolds.

12. The HCT Transformation Cycle (first pass)

Transformation does not unfold as a linear journey from start to finish, as conditions shift, priorities compete, and interpretations change as work progresses. In this context, progress depends less on adherence to plan and more on the organisation's ability to attend to emerging conditions and respond with judgement over time.

The HCT Transformation Cycle describes a recurring rhythm through which organisations make sense of change, respond to misalignment, and adapt as conditions evolve. It is not a delivery method or a prescriptive sequence of steps, but a way of understanding how attention, decision-making, and action tend to move in effective transformation efforts.

The cycle comprises four interrelated four foci of attention that overlap, recur, and deepen as learning accumulates.

Lens 1 – See the System

This phase concerns developing a shared, evidence-based understanding of current conditions as they are experienced in practice. Attention is directed toward how purpose, behaviours, structures, and enablers interact in real work, and where tensions, constraints, or unintended consequences are beginning to emerge.

Seeing the system well allows assumptions to be tested against lived experience, creating a more grounded basis for subsequent decisions.

Typical effect

Greater clarity about what is happening, why it matters, and where divergence or friction is beginning to take hold.

Lens 2 – Strengthen Coherence

In this phase, attention shifts to how different parts of the system relate to one another, focusing on whether intent, priorities, incentives, decision pathways, and enablers are pulling in compatible directions or competing in ways that undermine progress.

Rather than attempting to eliminate difference, this phase is concerned with making trade-offs explicit and improving the conditions under which people can act with shared understanding.

Typical effect

Clearer direction and decision logic that is more resilient under pressure and variation.

Lens 3 – Progress in Practice

Here the emphasis is on how changes take root in everyday work, as new ways of working begin to influence habits, language, and decision routines, moving beyond temporary effort or programme activity.

Progress becomes visible not only in outputs or milestones, but in how work is carried out, how decisions are made, and how people experience change in practice.

Typical effect

Improvement that is felt at the point of work and reflected in behaviour rather than reported activity.

Lens 4 – Sustain Navigation

As conditions continue to change, attention returns to how the system is being navigated over time. This phase is concerned with maintaining awareness of emerging drift, responding to new pressures, and avoiding the need to repeatedly restart transformation under the guise of renewal.

Navigation here is continuous rather than episodic, recognising that adaptation is an ongoing requirement rather than an end state.

Typical effect

An organisation that is better able to adapt without losing coherence, even as priorities, people, and contexts shift.

13. How HCT Differs from Existing Approaches

Many established transformation and change models offer valuable guidance, particularly in helping organisations mobilise people and manage transition once a decision to change has been made.

Most of these models were developed for more predictable environments than organisations operate within today and tend to assume a level of clarity and alignment that rarely holds in practice. As a result, they focus primarily on how change should proceed once leaders have agreed what needs to change, why it matters, and how success will be measured.

Their primary focus is on how change should proceed after leaders have agreed what needs to change, why it matters, and how success will be measured. In complex organisations, these assumptions are often undermined before delivery even begins.

13.1 Why This Assumption Rarely Holds

In large, interconnected organisations, alignment at the outset of a transformation programme is uncommon. Even where senior leaders believe they share a common view, several conditions tend to erode that alignment quickly:

- Competing priorities and inherited structures mean that what matters most varies across functions, geographies, and stakeholder groups,
- Context evolves continuously, causing initial goals, scope, or success measures to become outdated,
- Differences in interpretation remain hidden until delivery exposes conflicting assumptions about outcomes,
- Political compromises create the appearance of agreement while unresolved tensions resurface during implementation,
- The pace of change outstrips planning, allowing misalignment to embed before work meaningfully begins.

Alignment is not achieved when a plan is approved. It is sustained only when misalignment is recognised and navigated as conditions evolve.

13.2 What Traditional Change Models Optimise

Established approaches are designed to perform well in situations where direction and intent are already defined. They typically excel at:

- Mobilising people around a defined change,
- Managing transition from one state to another,
- Embedding new behaviours within a bounded scope,
- Delivering programmes against agreed plans.

This remains necessary and valuable work.

What HCT Strengthens

Human-Centred Transformation addresses a different, often under-examined challenge:

- Organisations must transform while continuing to operate,
- Alignment must be worked with continuously rather than assumed at the outset,
- Behaviour must hold under real operating conditions, not only in design or training environments,
- Transformation must remain coherent as priorities shift and people change over time.

HCT focuses on the system conditions that allow existing methods to succeed in practice, rather than replacing them.

13.3 How HCT Complements Established Approaches

Approach / Model	What It Focuses On	Where HCT Adds What Is Missing
Kotter	Mobilising people and building momentum behind a defined change vision	Ensures purpose is clear before mobilisation and alignment is sustained after momentum builds
Lewin	Managing transition through finite stages toward a stable end state	Replaces the notion of “refreezing” with ongoing navigation as conditions continue to change
Prosci ADKAR	Individual adoption and behaviour change within a specific programme	Aligns the surrounding system so individuals are not asked to behave in ways the organisation contradicts
McKinsey 7-S	Diagnosing alignment across organisational elements	Extends diagnosis into continuous practice, making alignment visible in day-to-day leadership and delivery

The Core Distinction

Traditional models support organisations in managing change once it has been defined. Human-Centred Transformation supports organisations in navigating change as it unfolds, strengthening alignment as the system evolves rather than treating transformation as a one-off event.

Where established approaches mobilise action within individual initiatives, HCT helps ensure the organisation remains coherent while that action takes place, so progress is sustained and value is realised in practice.

14. Working with HCT

Human-Centred Transformation is not a delivery method or a process to be adopted. It is a structured way of seeing, understanding, and working with the conditions that determine whether transformation succeeds in practice. This section explains how HCT is intended to be used and how it supports real organisational work without replacing existing methods.

14.1 HCT as a Sense-Making Framework

HCT provides a structured way for organisations to make sense of the system they are operating within, including how purpose, people, structures, and enablers interact, where friction arises, and which conditions require attention.

Used in this way, HCT helps organisations to:

- Clarify the business need driving transformation,
- Understand why previous efforts stalled or fragmented,
- Bring coherence across multiple initiatives,
- Surface systemic tensions earlier rather than reacting late,
- Connect strategic intent with operational reality in a way that holds alignment.

Within HCT, the business need acts as the anchor. It is not negotiable, and it shapes subsequent decisions. With this anchor in place, HCT provides a disciplined way of reasoning about the conditions that shape transformation. It frames the work rather than dictating how the work should be carried out.

14.2 HCT Works Alongside Existing Methods

Most organisations already use a combination of project management, agile delivery, service design, operational excellence, and governance frameworks. HCT does not ask for these approaches to be abandoned. Instead, it strengthens their use by ensuring they are applied in service of a clearly articulated business need.

HCT reduces the risk of method-led delivery by helping organisations ensure that any approach used:

- Serves a clearly defined business outcome,
- Fits the organisation's real operating conditions,
- Strengthens alignment rather than introducing further fragmentation.

In this way, HCT keeps decisions grounded in purpose rather than preference, habit, or external influence.

14.3 External Partners and the Forces They Introduce

Consultancy firms, technology vendors, and delivery partners play a significant role in shaping transformation. Alongside expertise and capacity, they bring their own methods, tools, incentives, and assumptions.

When external solutions are introduced before the business need is fully understood, organisations often adopt ways of working that do not fit their context. This widens misalignment and adds avoidable complexity.

HCT helps make these forces visible by encouraging organisations to ensure that partners:

- Align to the defined business need rather than redefine it,
- Adapt preferred methods to organisational reality,
- Make trade-offs explicit rather than implicit,
- Contribute to internal capability rather than dependency.

Used in this way, external expertise is more likely to strengthen coherence rather than drive solution-led fragmentation.

14.4 Why Structure Alone Does Not Create Alignment

Transformation rarely fails due to a lack of structure, governance, or planning. These are usually present. Misalignment emerges when people interpret and act within those structures in different ways.

Two teams can share the same reporting line, platform, or operating model yet make decisions that pull in opposite directions. This occurs when:

- Priorities compete or shift without shared re-alignment,
- Incentives reward established performance rather than required behaviour,
- Decision rights are unclear or frequently renegotiated,
- Local pressures override organisation-wide intent,
- Capability, confidence, or experience varies across locations,
- Personal bias shapes interpretation,
- Structures are introduced faster than people can adapt.

Structures define where work happens. Behaviour determines how work unfolds.

Core insight

Alignment is not a structural property. It is a behavioural outcome supported by system conditions.

HCT brings these behavioural dynamics into view early, helping leaders' reason about where structures create clarity and where they introduce friction, ambiguity, or conflict.

14.5 HCT Strengthens Leadership and Accountability Across the System

Transformation depends on how people interpret decisions, prioritise work, and act under pressure. HCT provides a shared system view that supports more coherent judgement across leadership, teams, and contributors.

It helps organisations reason more clearly about questions such as:

- What are we trying to achieve, and how will success be recognised,
- What must change in behaviour, structure, or practice for progress to occur,
- Where leadership must intervene to resolve tension or remove obstacles,
- Which decisions are required now and what the consequences may be,
- How local context influences the wider system.

This shared clarity supports accountability that is visible, distributed, and grounded in purpose rather than role alone.

14.6 HCT Is Applicable at Any Scale

Because HCT focuses on alignment rather than organisational size or complexity, it can be applied at multiple levels, including:

- Enterprise transformation,
- Business unit change,
- Programme alignment,
- Team-level ways of working,
- Cross-functional problem solving.

The principles remain consistent. What varies is the scope of the system being examined and the depth of attention required.

14.7 HCT Encourages Continual Navigation, Not One-Off Action

Transformation does not unfold as a linear journey. Conditions shift, priorities evolve, and people adapt at different speeds.

HCT is intended to be revisited regularly, helping organisations to:

- Reassess alignment as context changes,
- Adjust decisions without losing direction,
- Maintain coherence under pressure,
- Recognise emerging misalignment before it becomes entrenched.

This supports intentional response rather than gradual drift.

14.8 What HCT Does Not Do

HCT is deliberately not a:

- Process map,
- Delivery playbook,
- Set of templates,
- Maturity model,
- Guaranteed formula for success.

It supports people in working with complexity rather than attempting to remove it. It sharpens judgement rather than replacing it.

14.9 In Summary

Working with HCT means using it as a lens, a shared language, and a way of maintaining coherence over time. It provides structure where needed and flexibility where required, supporting clearer priorities and more grounded decision-making.

HCT helps organisations do the work they already need to do, but in a way that is more aligned, more human, and more deliberate. This framework provides the foundation for the HCT Method, which will translate these principles into explicit phases, activities, and practices for delivery.

15. What Misalignment Looks Like in Practice

Misalignment rarely begins with visible failure. It tends to surface first through small behavioural signals that indicate people are working to different assumptions about what matters and why, often long before delays, cost overruns, or performance gaps become apparent.

Human-Centred Transformation helps organisations recognise these early signals, making it possible to attend to alignment while confidence, momentum, and credibility are still intact.

15.1 Early Signs of Systemic Misalignment

Misalignment develops through rational behaviour taking place inside systems whose conditions are no longer coherently aligned, rather than through accident or intent.

People act according to their objectives, pressures, and lived realities, and when these differ across the organisation, drift becomes predictable rather than exceptional.

In complex human systems, conflicting objectives and motivations are always present, arising from differences in role, accountability, incentive, experience, and personal context. Systemic misalignment does not stem from the existence of these differences, but from the extent to which they remain unacknowledged, implicit, or poorly understood as decisions accumulate over time.

The following patterns are common early indicators that a system is no longer aligned with its stated purpose.

1. Purpose Is Interpreted Differently at Every Level

- Teams pursue what benefits their own success measures
- Local, regional, and functional priorities override enterprise intent
- Decisions reflect personal judgement and bias rather than shared direction

Impact

Alignment fractures quietly, with everyone believing they are doing the right thing even as outcomes begin to diverge.

2. Leaders Change but Direction Does Not Reset

- New leaders overturn prior decisions based on their own experience or preference
- Work already underway is questioned, paused, duplicated, or undone
- Trust and momentum erode while delivery pressure remains

Impact

The programme retains its name but not its path, as churn gradually replaces progress.

3. Effort Accelerates but Progress Does Not

- Activity increases to demonstrate commitment
- Resources churn while capability remains unchanged
- Teams compensate for system weaknesses through personal effort

Impact

Delivery becomes performative, with frustration increasing and burnout following close behind.

4. Local Optimisation Damages System Performance

- Teams succeed locally while the organisation struggles globally,
- Processes and tools diverge to “get the job done”,
- Informal workarounds become the real operating model.

Impact

Silos strengthen, while friction and rework become normalised.

5. Technology Decisions Lead Instead of Purpose

- Solutions are adopted before the business need is clearly defined,
- Vendors influence direction more than internal strategy,
- Teams are expected to adapt to tools rather than tools fitting context.

Impact

Technology amplifies misalignment and exposes weak decision pathways.

6. Conversations Shift from Evidence to Opinion

- Power and persuasion substitute for shared understanding
- Risks are softened, debated, or deferred rather than addressed
- Progress reporting becomes narrative management

Impact

Leaders lose visibility, and decisions drift further from reality.

7. Accountability Diffuses Until It Disappears

- Responsibility for success is shared, but ownership of coherence is unclear,
- Authority to decide avoids conflict rather than resolving it,
- Teams optimise for what they can control.

Impact

Misalignment persists because no one owns the work of keeping the system aligned.

Misalignment should not be understood as a failure of intent, but as the gradual erosion of coherence between purpose and behaviour as rational decisions accumulate inside misaligned conditions.

Core insight

These patterns are not driven by resistance to change. They arise when systems continue to reward alignment with past conditions while expecting different outcomes, a tension that HCT helps make visible early, when course correction is still possible and comparatively low cost.

15.2 What Misalignment Does to Delivery

When misalignment persists, delivery activity continues while value creation stalls, resulting in effort being expended, cost increasing, and confidence eroding without corresponding progress.

Observable consequences often include:

- Plans changing faster than they can be delivered,
- Work being completed without producing intended outcomes,
- Lengthening decision cycles marked by rework and repeated approval,
- Reporting becoming increasingly optimistic while lived experience declines,
- Teams questioning whether their contribution still matters.

Impact

Delivery becomes a performance, with people working hard without moving the organisation forward.

15.3 Human Signals of Drift and Fragmentation

People usually recognise misalignment well before governance mechanisms do, with shifts in behaviour providing early evidence that the system is no longer holding together.

Common signals include:

- Teams avoiding the raising of risks because “nothing changes anyway”,
- Leaders asking for workarounds rather than removing obstacles,
- Functional preferences outweighing shared priorities in decision-making,
- Individuals protecting their own success measures first.

Impact

Alignment erodes from the edges inward as people retreat into what they can control.

15.4 Why Misalignment Remains Hidden Until Late

Organisations often fail to detect misalignment early because success is measured through activity rather than outcomes, allowing drift to remain concealed behind visible effort.

Misalignment tends to remain hidden when:

- Reporting emphasises progress rather than friction,
- Teams absorb system weaknesses through personal effort,
- Escalations are softened to protect relationships,
- Leaders assume alignment because no one openly contradicts them,
- Passion and commitment mask structural flaws.

Impact

By the time misalignment becomes visible in performance measures, the cost of correction has multiplied.

Core insight

Misalignment is rarely sudden, emerging instead as the cumulative effect of rational behaviour unfolding over time inside systems that pull in different directions.

16. Maintaining Alignment Over Time

Alignment is not a state that can be achieved and then assumed to hold. It is an ongoing condition that requires sustained attention as people change roles, priorities shift, leadership evolves, and delivery pressures accumulate. Small divergences in interpretation, incentive, or focus rarely announce themselves clearly, yet they compound quickly, allowing misalignment to emerge as the natural outcome when alignment is not actively worked with.

Human-Centred Transformation (HCT) supports organisations in maintaining alignment by helping purpose, behaviour, structure, and enablers continue to move together under real operating pressure, rather than relying on initial agreement or formal plans to do that work on their behalf.

16.1 Why Alignment Drifts

Organisations rarely set out to undermine alignment deliberately. Drift develops because people respond rationally to the conditions they experience locally, acting on what is rewarded, what is urgent, and what feels achievable within their immediate constraints. Over time, teams optimise for their own success measures, local priorities take precedence over shared purpose, leadership changes without collective re-alignment, and governance or process slows real work to the point where informal routes begin to dominate.

Each of these responses makes sense in isolation. Taken together, however, they weaken coherence across the system, increasing rework, eroding confidence, and reducing the value delivered for the effort expended.

16.2 Alignment as a Leadership Accountability

Alignment does not sustain itself through goodwill, empowerment, or intent. It is reinforced through leadership behaviour, particularly through the decisions that are made under pressure, the trade-offs that are surfaced rather than deferred, and the consistency with which stated priorities are followed through when conditions become difficult.

When responsibility for alignment is dispersed without ownership, direction becomes negotiable and effort fragments across competing interpretations of what matters most. Leaders therefore remain accountable for maintaining alignment as the organisation adapts, not by controlling activity, but by ensuring that coherence is protected as priorities shift and decisions accumulate.

16.3 Making Alignment Observable

Alignment is strengthened when it can be seen and discussed in the context of real work rather than inferred from plans or reports. HCT supports this by encouraging ongoing attention to how decisions move through the organisation, where dependencies create friction, whether the effects of change are understood at the edges, and where informal workarounds begin to substitute for agreed ways of working.

When these dynamics remain invisible, risks tend to be absorbed quietly through personal effort and polite silence until recovery becomes more expensive and disruptive than early adjustment would have been.

16.4 Alignment as a Continuous Practice

Maintaining alignment is best understood as a rhythm rather than a reaction, shaped through regular reflection on purpose, progress, and emerging drift. This includes revisiting priorities as conditions change, renewing shared understanding when teams or leaders shift, and adjusting direction before consequences compound into larger systemic problems.

HCT helps normalise this form of attention as part of everyday leadership practice, reducing the need for periodic reset or recovery programmes by keeping alignment under active consideration as change unfolds.

Core insight

Organisations do not fail because they change, but because change proceeds without sustained attention to how purpose, behaviour, and system conditions remain connected over time. HCT equips leaders to treat alignment as deliberate, visible, and accountable work, rather than as an assumption that quietly decays once transformation is underway.

17. Conclusion: From Awareness to Capability

Transformation is not achieved through effort alone. It succeeds when purpose, behaviour, structure, and enablers remain aligned over time, particularly as priorities shift and operating pressure increases. Human-Centred Transformation (HCT) provides organisations with a practical way to recognise misalignment early, work with it directly, and maintain coherence as conditions evolve.

Misalignment is predictable because it emerges when people act rationally within systems that pull in different directions. It is not the result of individual failure or lack of commitment, but of systems that continue to reward behaviours that no longer serve the outcomes organisations are trying to achieve.

For alignment to hold, it must be kept alive through clear decisions, visible accountability, and ongoing attention to what is working in practice and what is not. Leaders cannot assume alignment will persist once intent has been agreed; they remain responsible for holding the system together as trade-offs emerge, pressure rises, and change unfolds unevenly across the organisation.

HCT supports better decision-making by keeping the business need visible, making behaviour observable, and ensuring that technology, processes, and governance remain in service of outcomes rather than adding complexity. In doing so, it reframes transformation from a technical exercise into a human capability that strengthens with use rather than degrading over time.

When organisations are aligned, effort is focused and value is realised more consistently. When alignment drifts, effort increases while value diminishes, often without being immediately recognised. Transformation therefore does not fail because organisations change, but because change proceeds without sustained attention to alignment as a living condition.

Human-Centred Transformation represents a deliberate choice to treat coherence, clarity, and human judgement as essential to transformation success. It reflects a commitment to the people who make change real in practice, and to the leadership responsibility required to keep alignment intact as conditions continue to evolve.

17.1 The Next Step: The HCT Discipline

The HCT Framework provides a structured way to understand the conditions that shape transformation outcomes, highlighting where alignment is strong, where friction is emerging, and what requires attention for progress to hold. The method that sits beneath the framework will translate this understanding into practical guidance for navigation.

Building on the principles and shared language established in this document, the HCT Method will define how organisations apply the framework in practice, including:

- How alignment is assessed and revisited over time,
- How leadership decisions protect coherence under pressure,
- How teams recognise and respond to early signs of drift,
- How enablers are sequenced to support capability and outcomes,
- How learning is embedded so transformation becomes continuous.

The method will introduce structured phases, supporting tools, and a repeatable approach that can flex across different contexts, scales, and levels of maturity without becoming prescriptive.

Organisations do not need more models. They need a disciplined way to work with the reality of their own systems. The HCT Framework provides the foundation for that work, and the method will provide the means to put it into practice.

Appendix B

Bibliography and Intellectual Foundations

Preface

This bibliography reflects the interdisciplinary foundations that inform Human-Centred Transformation (HCT), including organisational change, systems thinking, human-centred design, digital transformation research, and operational improvement.

It is complemented by the author's experience leading and supporting transformation programmes across industries, where misalignment consistently emerged as the root cause of stalled or superficial change. Together, these sources shape the principles and perspective of HCT.

The works listed here contribute to the intellectual and practical grounding of the framework. They are not academic citations for specific claims, but the broader body of knowledge that underpins HCT.

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- Alignment research (McKinsey, BCG)
- Cognitive bias work (Liedtka)
- UX as a behavioural science (Norman, HCD sources)
- Agile as adaptive system practice
- Digital maturity as system capability
- Operational discipline as systemic optimisation
- The author's own consulting experience (2010–2020)