



The Difference Between Coping With Change and Building Capability

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One of the questions I often ask people is, *What do you want this experience to leave you with?*

It is not a question most people expect.

When we are in the middle of significant change, our attention is usually focused on getting through it. We want the uncertainty to pass, the disruption to end and life to feel familiar again. That response is totally understandable.

Change can be emotionally and mentally demanding, and there are times when coping is all we have the capacity to do. But coping and capability are not the same thing.

Coping helps us manage the immediate experience. *Capability* changes what we are able to bring to future experiences.

Many approaches to change focus almost entirely on helping people cope.



They offer techniques for reducing stress, managing uncertainty and becoming more comfortable during difficult periods, and those forms of support have value.

The difficulty arises when coping becomes the destination rather than the beginning.

Coping asks, *How do I get through today?*

Capability asks, *What can I develop through this experience that will remain with me tomorrow?*

That distinction changes the questions we ask.

- What is this experience showing me about how I respond to uncertainty?
- What assumptions are influencing my decisions?
- What strengths am I using that I may not have recognised before?
- What could I practise now that would better equip me for the future?



These are not questions designed to make difficulty sound positive, they help invite a difficult experience to leave us more capable.

I have seen the difference within organisations. Some organisations invest considerable effort in helping employees cope with a major change. Once implementation is complete, attention moves elsewhere and people return to business as usual.

When the next change arrives, the organisation begins from almost the same place again.

A better way is to treat change as an opportunity to build future capability, because when change ends, capability remains, such as creating time for:

- reflection
- strengthening communication, decision-making, adaptability and self-leadership
- integration

The same applies in our personal lives.



Every significant change can leave us with something we carry forward. It may be greater confidence, clearer boundaries, stronger decision-making, deeper resilience or a more accurate understanding of what matters to us.

Capabilities do not eliminate future difficulty, they change how we meet it. This belief sits at the centre of my work. I want people to become more capable because they have moved through change intentionally.

Life will continue to change. Careers will evolve. Organisations will transform. Relationships will begin and end. Opportunities and challenges will arrive without consulting our plans. We cannot prevent that.

What we can do is ensure that meaningful experiences leave us better equipped for whatever follows.

Perhaps the most useful question is not only, *How do I get through this?*, it is also, *What capability am I developing because of it?*



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Navigating Change

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