



STEWARDED FLEXIBILITY FORWARD

One year ago, [The Flexibility Paradigm](#) was released into a world eager to regain its footing.

After years of disruption, organizations were ready to move forward, reclaim a sense of certainty, and return to what felt familiar. The urgency that once pushed us to experiment and rethink everything began to soften, and with it came a quiet risk. The lessons we learned during that intense period of change could start to fade.

This book was never meant to capture a moment and move on. It exists to help us carry forward what mattered most, especially the insights that emerged when change forced us to pay attention. When the pressure lifts, we get to choose what we keep. We get to decide which lessons become part of how we operate, not just how we respond in a crisis. What once felt necessary can become foundational.

We've seen this pattern before, but we've also seen something new emerge alongside it. Organizations are capable of stretching, adapting, and learning quickly when circumstances demand it, and those capabilities don't disappear when the urgency fades. They just need to be carried forward with intention. When we protect what we've learned, policies regain their purpose, efficiency and humanity can coexist, and decisions become more aligned with values instead of convenience. The future doesn't narrow when learning is preserved. It expands, creating more space for thoughtful design, meaningful work, and cultures that grow with the people inside them.

This Action Step invites us to view flexibility with a wider lens and deeper intention. Flexibility opened the door to learning, experimentation, and more human-centered choices, and those lessons are still available to us now.

This is a moment to pause and take stock of what became possible when change demanded our attention, and to carry those insights forward now that change is something we can choose.

The work ahead is to keep remembering, keep designing, and keep building organizations that evolve with their people.

From Implementation to Stewardship

When organizations were forced to change, they learned something important about work, about people, and about what becomes possible when old defaults are questioned. Flexibility showed us that culture is something you design, practice, and renew over time. This month's Action Step is about stepping into that next phase, moving from implementation to stewardship, and carrying forward what we learned with intention.

Stewardship means recognizing that flexibility lives inside a broader human-centered culture. One shaped by boundaries that protect wellbeing, by systems that prevent burnout, and by a sense of belonging that allows people to do their best work. It also means understanding that this work is shared, and that culture only holds when organizations, leaders, and individuals all participate in sustaining it.

1. Organizations Build and Protect Boundaries

For flexibility to work, boundaries have to be real, not just written down. When boundaries are unclear or unenforced, flexibility turns into overwork, constant interruption, and quiet exhaustion. Organizations play a critical role here by setting norms that protect time, reducing unnecessary urgency, and creating environments where people can speak openly about work life conflict without fear. When boundaries are designed into how work operates, flexibility supports energy, focus, and wellbeing instead of eroding them.

2. Leaders Model What Sustainable Work Looks Like

Leaders shape culture through what they reward and what they tolerate. When overwork is praised and availability becomes the signal of commitment, burnout follows. When leaders manage workload, check in early, and make space for life outside of work, they send a different message. One that says performance and humanity are not in competition. Leading with empathy, clarity, and care is what allows people to perform well over time.

3. Individuals Practice Flexibility with Ownership and Autonomy

Flexibility works best when people have both autonomy and clarity. Individuals need space to make decisions about how they work, along with clear expectations that help them focus their energy where it matters most. Practicing flexibility means communicating needs, honoring boundaries, and making intentional choices that support sustainable performance. When people are trusted and supported, flexibility becomes a skill they use with confidence, not a privilege they protect.

4. Belonging Is Designed Through Daily Practice

Belonging doesn't happen by accident. It grows in environments where people feel safe to speak up, to bring their full selves to work, and to trust that they'll be treated with fairness and respect. Organizations that intentionally build supportive communities, encourage openness, and address issues early create the conditions for collaboration, innovation, and engagement to thrive. Belonging is a core part of a healthy, high-performing culture.

Take Action: A 60-Minute Organizational Memory Reset

Think of this Action Step as a reset that helps you reconnect to the progress you've already made and decide how to build on it next.

You can do this alone, with your leadership team, or with a small group. What matters most is intention.

Step 1: Revisit the Moment of Change (15 minutes)

Start by looking back with curiosity and pride. When your organization had to change quickly, important learning emerged.

Reflect on a few of these questions:

- What did we learn about how people actually work and what they need to do their best work?
- What assumptions about productivity, trust, or performance shifted for us?
- What surprised us about what worked better than expected?
- What practices did we let go of that we're grateful to have left behind?

Step 2: Name the Capabilities You Built (20 minutes)

Now shift your focus from policies to capabilities. Many organizations built strengths they didn't fully recognize at the time.

Ask:

- What new leadership skills emerged during this period?
- What systems or processes became more flexible or responsive?
- What communication habits improved?
- What decisions became easier or faster?
- What long-standing barriers finally started to fall?

These are assets you already have. Naming them helps you to keep using them, even as conditions change.

Step 3: Recommit to Shared Responsibility (15 minutes)

Flexibility lasts when responsibility is shared. Take a few minutes to clarify what each group will continue to own moving forward.

- *As an organization:* What will we continue to design, review, and improve to support human-centered work?
- *As leaders:* What behaviors and norms will we keep modeling to make flexibility sustainable and healthy?
- *As individuals:* How will we continue using flexibility with intention, accountability, and care for ourselves and others?

Choose one simple commitment for each group and make it visible.

Step 4: Create One Guardrail for the Future (10 minutes)

Finally, choose one small practice that helps you remember and reinforce what you've learned.

It might be:

- A recurring reflection question
- A standing leadership agenda item
- A regular policy check-in
- A moment for story sharing
- A simple metric you revisit together

Pick one and let it become part of your rhythm.

Closing Reflection

As you move forward, remember that flexibility opened a door to something larger: a way of working that honors people, supports performance, and invites continuous improvement. The work ahead is about carrying forward the wisdom you learned and letting it inform what comes next.

Progress lives in what you choose to practice. Culture grows in what you choose to protect. And the future you are building is shaped, day by day, by the care and clarity you bring to this work.

Want Support Putting This Into Practice?

As a DFA member, you have access to dedicated support designed to help you.

Strategy Session

Every DFA member organization receives an annual one-hour strategy session. This is a working conversation, not a presentation. You can use the time to step back and look at what's emerging, sort through competing priorities, work through a culture or leadership challenge, or decide where focused attention will make the biggest difference in the months ahead.

Policy Review

Members can submit one policy or framework for review and feedback per membership cycle. This might be a flexibility policy, a leadership model, a wellbeing initiative, a talent approach, or something you're still shaping. The goal is to help you strengthen what you're building, spot gaps or misalignment early, and make thoughtful refinements before momentum is lost.

Advisory Hours (Champion and Leader Members)

Champion and Leader members also have access to advisory hours for ongoing support. These sessions create space to think out loud, pressure-test decisions, navigate complexity, and respond to change with more clarity and confidence. They're especially helpful when you're piloting new approaches or working through moments that don't have simple answers.

We're here to support you as you keep building organizations that can grow, adapt, and care for people well into the future.