



A new way to understand the moments that matter: The Narrative Shift Matrix

Change is becoming more frequent, disruptive and challenging for organisations and communities to respond to.

Chaos is raising the stakes. The narratives that shape our beliefs and behaviours are both increasingly inflexible and brittle. The stories that fuel them are messier and less reliable. And the people and events at heart of those stories are less predictable.

When change arrives, most organisations focus immediately on what it means for their strategy, execution and communication. But the real challenge is something deeper that affects identity, culture and belief.

Today, more than ever,

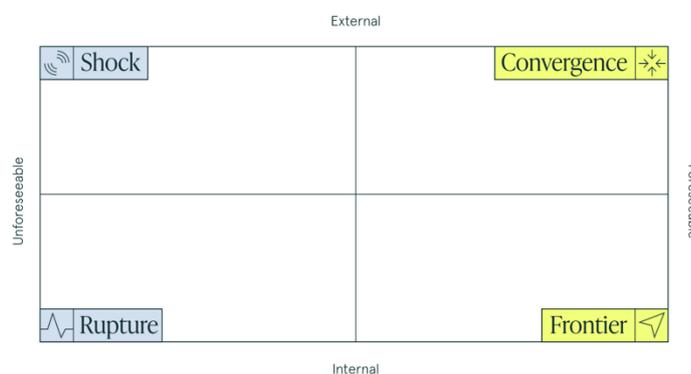
- If your goal is to help people respond positively to change, you need to understand change in terms of its impact on the stories they are already telling themselves
- If you want to shift the narrative, you need to switch from thinking about what story you want to tell and start with understanding people's story needs
- If you want to inspire and equip people with a better story, you need to know why it helps them live their values and become who they aspire to be

The Narrative Shift Matrix is a simple diagnostic tool designed to help organisations locate the moment they are in and respond with the right narrative strategy and story leadership.

What is the Narrative Shift Matrix?

The Narrative Shift Matrix is a communications strategy framework that helps leaders decide how to respond to change, by assessing the risks and opportunities for the story they want to tell.

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Each quadrant provides an insight into the destabilising nature of four types of change and what an organisation needs to prioritise in those moments.

Examples of how change arrives:

Shock:

- Pandemic
- War
- Black Swan

Rupture

- Cultural scandal
- Ethics failure
- Credibility collapse

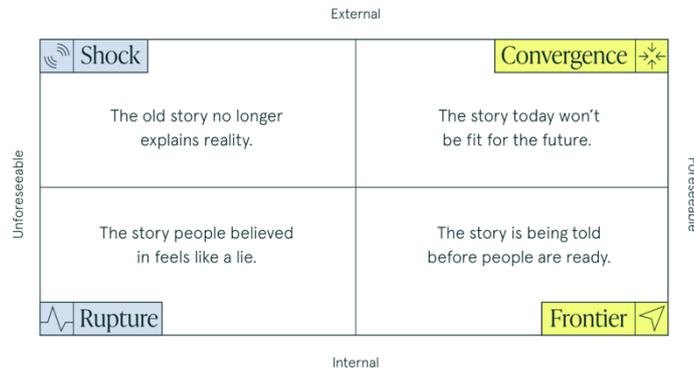
Convergence

- Demographic shifts
- Emerging system
- Legislation

Frontier

- Technology breakthrough
- Category creation
- Strategy reset

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These moments of change are significant and require attention but aren't necessarily bad. The same moment can leave a leader or an organisation diminished or strengthened. So, they matter, not so much for the change itself, but in terms of how people choose to respond to the destabilisation they cause.

“Unexpected change is a portal through which danger arrives to swipe at our throats. Paradoxically, however, change is also an opportunity. It’s the crack in the universe through which the future arrives. Change is hope. Change is promise.” Will Storr, Science of Storytelling

Unforeseeable, external: in a shock moment the danger is that the old story no longer explains reality. The opportunity is to create a better story that makes sense of what’s happened.

Unforeseeable internal: in a rupture moment the story people believed in feels like a lie. The opportunity is to create a better story that rebuilds trust and shared truth.

Foreseeable, external: in a convergence moment the story today won’t be fit for the future. The opportunity is to create a better story, renewed before it is forced to change.

Foreseeable, internal: in a frontier moment a new story is being told before people are ready. The opportunity is to create a better story that makes the future feel possible.

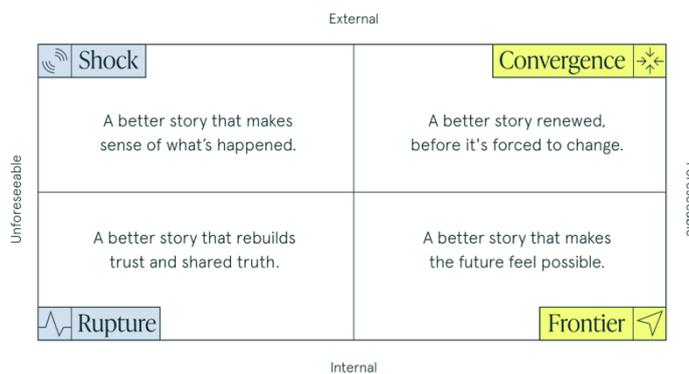


To get the most out of the matrix, we encourage organisations to:

- Use it to prepare for possible futures and to respond in the moment
- Expect to sit across more than one quadrant at once
- Pay close attention to narrative fidelity (how closely the story reflects lived reality) and story agency (how clearly people can see their role within it)
- Learn by listening and lead by co-creating the story of change

Our final thought is that meaningful change rarely begins with a new strategy, campaign or coalition. It begins when the story people are living inside starts to break down. These are moments that matter; the cracks where danger and possibility arrive together.

The task for leaders is not simply to explain or contain what it is happening but use that moment to create the conditions for a better story to emerge.



To learn more, [read our blog](#) on understanding narrative shifts and how to manage the risks and opportunities so you can tell a better story about change in the moment that matters to you.