



State of play

Activating
change

9 behaviours that
set projects up for
success

Mindflick

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“Performance isn’t built in the heat of the moment. It’s built long before – in the conversations, behaviours, and decisions that shape the environment.”

Sir Andrew Strauss, Mindflick

Foreword



Sir Andrew Strauss,
Executive Chairman,
Mindflick

In elite sport, as in business, the most successful teams understand one thing: performance isn’t built in the heat of the moment.

It’s built long before. In the conversations, behaviours, and decisions that shape the environment.

The same is true of change.

At Mindflick, we’ve had the privilege of working with leaders across sectors, from Olympic sport to global infrastructure. We’ve seen one pattern repeat itself: the projects that succeed are the ones that get the early moments right.

That’s what this report is about. It’s a practical guide for leaders looking to set change up for success, not with slogans or silver bullets. With the small, behavioural foundations that unlock clarity, accountability, and action.

If you’re leading change, big or small, I hope the insights in this report help you do it with greater pace, purpose, and impact.

Leading from the front



Dr Mark Bawden,
CEO and Co-founder,
Mindflick

Change is difficult. Behind every successful change initiative is a team of people who were clear, connected, and ready to act.

And behind most failed ones?

Teams that never quite aligned in the first place.

Whether you're leading a digital transformation, a culture reset, or a global reorganisation, most change efforts stall before they've even started. The issue isn't just poor delivery. It's poor setup.

This report explores what it really takes to set projects up for success before strategy turns into action.

We've distilled years of research, fieldwork, and executive collaboration into nine small behaviours that create big ripple effects.

Think of them as your pre-flight checklist—designed to help you build clarity, alignment, and adaptability into your project from the very beginning.



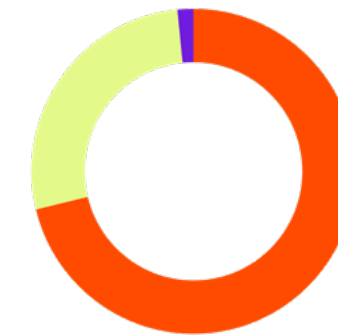
“Most change efforts stall before they’ve even started. The issue isn’t just poor delivery—it’s poor setup.”

Dr Mark Bawden, Mindflick

The setup problem: Why change fails early

Mindflick Labs

Projects that involve digital transformation, cultural reinvention, and structural overhaul remain the major currency of change.



- Efforts failing
- Delivering
- Delivering on time, budget, and benefits

Yet according to Oxford professor Bent Flyvbjerg, global authority on mega-project leadership, only 0.5% of major projects deliver on time, on budget, and on benefits. 70% of change efforts fail outright.

Most change efforts falter due to:

- Lack of clarity around vision, pace, or roles
- Over-reliance on senior sponsorship without genuine team buy-in
- Misaligned assumptions and unspoken expectations
- Rigid plans that fail to account for learning and adaptation

In other words: most change fails in the setup.

That’s why we’re sharing this behavioural checklist. It’s shaped by research, expert contributions and executive collaboration - to help you assess whether your change effort is truly execution ready.

Balancing mindsets:

Prime yourself for project success



Dr Chin Wei Ong
Head of Behavioural
Science and Impact,
Mindflick

In complex projects, any single mindset can add value — but when over-relied on, even well-intentioned approaches can limit progress or create unintended risks.

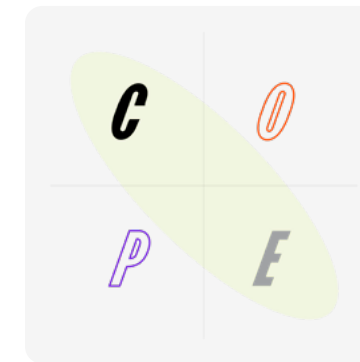
High-performing leaders recognise the need to balance opposing mindsets, using the natural tension between them to strengthen decision-making, execution, and resilience under pressure.

Mindflick's Head of Behavioural Science and Impact, Dr. Chin Wei Ong calls this '[The Tension of Mindsets](#)'. He highlights how leaders, who combine two critical mindset tensions, can unlock a third way of thinking.

Dr Ong names these two critical mindset tensions as 'Paranoid Optimism and Committed Dynamism'. Leveraging these mindsets is the real setup work.

The checklist that follows, taps into these two core leadership tensions - opposing forces that, when held well, unlock high performance under pressure.

Rather than choosing one or the other, these mindsets combine both - using the tension between them to create agile and robust action.



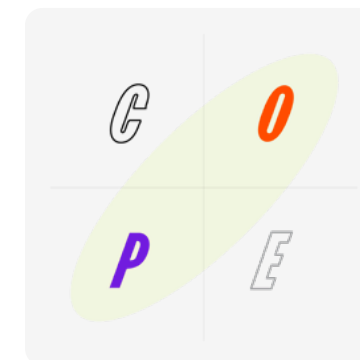
Committed Dynamism

The ability to stay committed to purpose and outcome, while adapting how you get there.

This tension combines the strengths of two mindsets:

- Contained – level-headed, measured, consistent
- Engaged – ready, instinctive, dynamic

It helps leaders respond with agility without losing direction - steady under pressure, dynamic when a shift is required.



Paranoid Optimism

The ability to move forward boldly, while maintaining a healthy alertness to risk.

This tension combines the strengths of two mindsets:

- Prudent – cautious, wary, pragmatic
- Optimistic – bold, speculative, risk-taking

It fuels decisive action without blind spots. Not pessimism. Not blind positivity. Just smart, balanced momentum.

9 behaviours:

A pre-flight checklist for change

A behavioural lens for leaders who want change to stick

Before strategy turns into action, these nine behaviours help build the real conditions for success - clarity, alignment, and adaptability - before momentum has the chance to stall.

This isn't another framework. It's a practical lens to spot what's working, what's missing, and where to focus before delivery begins.

Drawn from fieldwork, coaching, and conversations with those leading transformation efforts, this checklist maps directly to the behavioural patterns we've seen separate successful change from failed attempts. Each behaviour highlights signals of readiness - or risk.

For senior leaders, this is your pre-flight check. Use each to ask: Are we really ready to deliver?

01

Clarity of outcomes

Be specific about the goal.

If you can't describe it clearly, you're not ready to deliver it.

Ask yourself

→ Can every stakeholder articulate our goal - and why it matters - in one line?

02

Build the delivery chain

Align the system behind the outcome.

Align the system - from the front line to the senior leadership team - behind the outcome. Every link needs to know how they contribute and what they're responsible for.

Ask yourself

- Where does clarity break down in our system?
- Where is our chain strong, and where might it need fine-tuning?

03

Manage distractions

Protect what matters most.

If everything is a priority, nothing is. Build systems that shield core priorities.

Ask yourself

- What noise are we allowing to hijack our focus?
- What do we need to stop, pause, delegate or de-prioritise to move faster?

04

Learn in motion

Prioritise progress over perfection.

Build regular reviews after delivery to reflect and course correct.

Ask yourself

→ What did we learn this week that should shape next week's action?

05

Be curious

Failure is feedback.

Don't assign blame - fix the system, not the person.

Ask yourself

→ Are we treating this failure as feedback - or assigning blame?

06

Ask the hard questions

If no one is pushing back -

You're not asking the right questions.

Ask yourself

→ What's the cost of not challenging it?

07

Line it up

Your strategy and story must match.

If they don't, the system will not follow.

Ask yourself

→ Is our plan being communicated clearly - and consistently - at every level?

08

Know the bell curve

Adapt your engagement.

People respond to change differently, and at different speeds.

Ask yourself

- Who's bought in?
- Who's resistant?
- Who's lagging behind?

09

Aim high

Already know how to do it?

You're not aiming high enough.

Ask yourself

- Are we aiming high enough to stretch?
- Are we structured enough to learn as we go?

**“In complex systems,
activating change starts
with shared understanding.
Once teams align early,
execution accelerates.”**

Mott MacDonald

Case studies: Activating change in practice



Mott MacDonald
Masters of mega projects

Activating change cross global infrastructure projects

Mott MacDonald operates at the sharp end of complex, multi-region infrastructure delivery — where alignment isn't just helpful, it's essential. In globally dispersed teams, small misalignments can escalate quickly. Mott MacDonald recognised that sustainable change doesn't happen through process alone, it happens through people.

That's where mobilisation plays a critical role: creating early alignment, surfacing honest conversations, and connecting people both during bids and as projects go live.

We partnered with Mott MacDonald to help activate change from the inside out.

Using the Mindflick platform and targeted workshops, we helped:

- Identify friction points across teams and regions
- Align leaders and stakeholders behind shared goals
- Build a common behavioural language across delivery layers

The outcome: stronger mobilisation, faster collaboration, deeper trust and a measurable shift in delivery pace. In complex systems, activating change starts with shared understanding. Once teams align early, execution accelerates.



Brompton Bicycle
Leaders in innovation

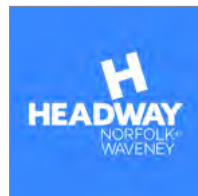
Activating change from boardroom to shop floor

When you're building thousands of bikes a week, precision matters. But at Brompton, they too knew that alignment mattered more.

To unlock the next stage of growth, they needed their C-Suite, Directors and shop floor workers working as one system. Through a series of bespoke sessions and full platform integration, we helped activate change at every level of the business.

Mindset shifts to practical leadership tools, Brompton's leaders built trust, challenged better, and created the kind of psychological safety that fuels progress.

When teams see strong behaviours modelled from the top, change doesn't just start - it sticks. And when the boardroom and shop floor are aligned, performance flows.



Headway Norfolk and Waveney
Experts in brain injury care

Activating change where it matters most

At Headway, performance isn't measured by profit or productivity - it's about presence, care, and impact. But after team restructures and budget pressures, even the most purpose-driven environments can lose their rhythm.

We partnered with Headway through our Pay It Forward initiative to help re-energise their people and reset connection across the system.

Our single session intervention (Ignite) created space for reflection, insight, and renewal - helping staff reconnect with their own mindset preferences, with each other, and with the purpose that drives them.

“When teams see strong behaviours modelled from the top, change doesn't just start - it sticks.”

Brompton Bicycle

Expert contributions: Insights from the field

Insights from leaders who've led major change programmes. From infrastructure to sport, they share what's worked, what's failed, and what they wish they'd done sooner.



Andy Moulds
Head of Strategic Advisory,
Mott MacDonald

The most successful change efforts don't start with announcements - they start with alignment. When change is something done to people, you get resistance, confusion, and surface-level compliance. But when it's shaped with people, you get ownership, clarity, and meaningful action.

That's because change isn't just strategic - it's social. It happens in the conversations between colleagues, in how decisions are made under pressure, and in what gets rewarded (or ignored) day to day. If your teams aren't in the room early, they won't feel the same urgency or commitment later. This is why "activation"

isn't just about cascading messages - it's about activating strong relationships.

Leaders who engage their people in shaping what good looks like create the conditions for momentum. They generate clarity from the noise, tap into intrinsic motivation, and reinforce belief that the change is for them, not just from the top.

Change might start on a slide, but it only sticks in a system. And systems are powered by people.



Mike Rotheram
Head of Delivery,
Mindflick

At the start of any change, clarity matters. Leaders need to be crystal clear on what success looks like - and equally clear on what's truly needed versus what's simply nice to have. Without that definition upfront, priorities blur, scope drifts, and momentum stalls.

One of the projects I'm most proud of was getting our new model for team performance ready for use with our clients. What made it work wasn't just defining roles - it was getting people aligned and playing to their strengths. We realised early on that some team members were naturally geared to test assumptions and challenge the rigour of what we were building, while others were better placed to shape the conceptual design and explore different options.

My role was to hold the process together, keep us moving forward, challenge thinking, and bring the right people into the right conversations at the right time. Once everyone was clear on where they added most value, the work accelerated - sharper thinking, faster decisions, stronger ownership.

If there's one big takeaway from our research and observations of how to successfully activate change, it is the importance of leveraging the tension of mindsets. Change rarely lives at one extreme - it lives in the balance. Leaders who can flex between competing demands and hold those tensions well create the conditions for sustainable progress.



Ged MacDomhnaill
CEO & Founder,
The Climbing Hangar

Change requires a simple principle: go slow to go fast. When leading a new project, it's easy to forget how long you've already been thinking about it. By the time you introduce it to others, you've often spent weeks or months turning it over in your own head - but for your team, it's brand new. Expecting them to match your excitement or clarity on day one rarely works.

That's why it's important to create space early for people to process the change emotionally as well as intellectually. Consult trusted partners first.

Share the idea, let it sit for a few days, and allow initial reactions to surface. The early responses you hear often reflect what the wider team will feel too. This creates a safer environment to gather feedback, adjust your communication, and build a stronger, more realistic plan for engagement.

By giving people time to 'feel all the feels' upfront - the excitement, the uncertainty, the resistance - you reduce friction later. When it's time to move, people are far more aligned and ready to build momentum. Go slow at the start, and you'll go faster when it counts.



Lauren Myers
Chief of Staff,
Lunio

If you're leading big change, don't just focus on the plan. You have to make space for the people inside it. It's easy to get caught up in timelines, milestones, and strategy - everyone loves a Gantt chart or accountability matrix. But real change doesn't happen in spreadsheets. It happens in conversations, in uncertainty, and in how people feel as things shift around them.

It's shaped by how prepared people feel, how willing they are to lean into the unfamiliar, and the strength of the support around them.

Leaders often obsess over getting everything perfect - but most people aren't looking for perfection. What they need is presence.

They want to feel seen, involved, and valued throughout the process.

That sense of inclusion is what builds trust, confidence, and ultimately, momentum.

Yes - have a plan. But stay present. Because when people know they matter, they're far more likely to engage with the change ahead.

“Change isn’t a single event
– it’s a constant. But while
organisations move forward,
individuals transition at
different speeds and with
different mindsets.”

Hilary Clarke, University of Liverpool



Hilary Clarke
Organisational Developer,
University of Liverpool

Change isn’t a single event – it’s a constant. But while organisations move forward, individuals transition at different speeds and with different mindsets. Some remain anchored to previous experiences – positive or negative – which shape how they approach what’s ahead.

That’s why communication needs to start early, with as much clarity as possible. The sooner people understand what’s happening, why it matters, and how it affects them, the more likely they are to engage.

And it’s not just about information – it’s about having support structures in place from the very start to help everyone navigate the transition.

People also approach change through different lenses. Some need reassurance around risks; others see opportunity.

Recognising these differences allows leaders to tailor conversations, build trust, and maintain momentum.

One of the most meaningful projects I’ve led was a ground-breaking community initiative that brought schools, emergency services and volunteers together to deliver life-saving skills training. The clarity of purpose – knowing we could make a real difference – united everyone behind the vision. And that purpose translated into real outcomes: two lives were saved as a direct result of the programme.

Change works best when people feel informed, supported, and inspired by the purpose driving it – especially when the stakes are this high.



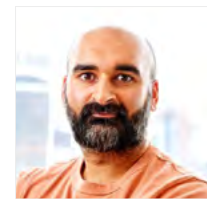
Seanie Meyler
Performance Coach,
Meyler Performance

Change often moves fastest when you start small. Behaviour can be a powerful lever. When people take action, build simple habits, and experience early progress, it often accelerates shifts in mindset, confidence, and engagement. Sometimes, seeing small wins helps people adopt new ways of thinking faster than they expected.

One project I'm proud of involved coaching a leader to move away from a purely instructional model - telling people what to do - towards asking better questions. Many coaches' default to telling, especially when communicating tactics or strategy. But when leaders

learn to ask open questions, they create space for others to think, contribute, and take ownership. Athletes became more engaged, opened up new ways of thinking, and felt invested in the solutions - because they had a hand in shaping them.

If I had one piece of advice for leaders starting a big change: set the vision early. Help people see where they're heading. Craft a story they can believe in, connect to, and want to follow. When people feel part of that journey, ownership and commitment follow naturally. Change starts with action. Progress builds belief. Ownership sustains it.



Anil Ram
Head of Performance,
AR High Performance

When leading change, the instinct is to view it from your own perspective - what needs to happen, when it needs to happen, and how you plan to deliver it. But real impact comes when you step into other people's shoes and consider: what does this change feel like for them? What will they need to be able to engage with it fully?

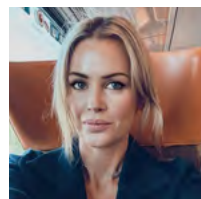
One practical approach is to use frameworks like FLEX and COPE (the behavioural and mindset frameworks from Mindflick's performance psychometric) to shape your thinking. Not everyone responds to change in the same way. For some, task clarity and structure matter

most. For others, it's the people side of communication, involvement, and emotional safety. As a leader, your role is to flex your messaging, adapt your style, and dial up or down the elements that matter most to the people you're trying to bring with you.

When leaders make this shift - from broadcasting plans to tuning into people - change feels less like something being done to people, and more like something they're part of shaping. That's where ownership grows, and momentum builds. Change lands best when leaders frame it through the lens of those they lead.

“When people connect to the why, the what becomes far easier to deliver.”

Gary Smith, Path to Potential



Cally Cooper
Health and
Performance Coach,
WellCrew

Too often, change gets judged purely on outcomes. What's been delivered, what's been achieved. But the deeper value often lies in the process itself. Change isn't always permanent. What lasts are the skills, tools, and growth people develop along the way.

The challenges, setbacks, and adjustments become part of the learning that carries forward long after the change itself.

At the heart of navigating that process is emotional intelligence. The ability to stay self-aware, regulate emotions, stay motivated, show empathy, and communicate effectively gives leaders the tools to manage uncertainty with calmness and clarity.

When leaders lean into EQ, they help teams stay engaged, resilient, and focused - even when the path ahead isn't always clear.

If I had one tip for leaders starting any big change: keep it simple. As Steve Jobs said, "Simple can be harder than complex. You must work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But once you get there, you can move mountains." Simplicity takes discipline, but it gives people a clear target to rally around - and the space to perform at their best.

In change, simplicity and emotional intelligence turn complexity into momentum.

performing leaders tune in to these differences. They don't assume what motivates them will automatically motivate everyone else. Instead, they invest time to understand individual drivers and adapt their approach accordingly.

The ability to work effectively with people who think, feel and respond differently is what separates good leadership from great leadership during change.

So much of decision-making is emotional and instinctive. If you miss that, you'll struggle to build the buy-in, trust, and momentum needed to carry change through.

One of the biggest mistakes leaders make during change - is focusing only on logic and rational arguments - assuming if people just understand the case for change, they'll automatically engage. But it's emotion that truly drives behaviour.

Every person views change through their own lens, shaped by personal experiences, instincts, and values. What feels like a risk or threat to one person may feel like an opportunity to another. That's why understanding people's drivers - what matters to them, what makes them tick, what worries them - is essential if you want genuine engagement. High-



Danielle Swain
Head of L&D,
Hendy Group



Gary Smith
Executive Coach,
Path to Potential

When people face change, the default focus is often on what needs to happen - the actions, tasks, costs, or resources involved.

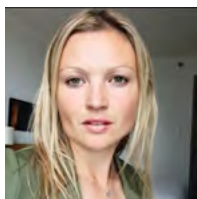
But real engagement starts with something far more fundamental: why the change is happening in the first place.

Even when people disagree or feel conflicted, if they fully understand the underlying reason for change - the context, the drivers, the urgency - they're far more likely to engage constructively. Without that clarity, resistance grows.

With it, people can channel their energy, strengths, and ideas into helping make the change work, even if they don't fully agree with every detail.

In one change programme I led at NatWest Group, this principle made all the difference.. We were introducing a new way of working that impacted colleagues personally. The key was taking time to listen to individuals, address their concerns, and repeatedly reinforce why the change was necessary. Once people felt heard and understood the reasoning behind it, they became active contributors to the solution.

If I had one piece of advice for leaders: take time upfront to carefully position the change. Anticipate how people will receive it, think from their perspective, and structure the conversation around why this change, why now, and why it matters to them. When people connect to the why, the what becomes far easier to deliver.



Kimberley Harman
Lead Station Manager,
St Pancras International,
Eurostar International Ltd

If you want change to stick, start with listening. Too often, leaders launch straight into plans, but the most valuable insights often sit with the people closest to the work - especially frontline colleagues who deal with customers every day. They're a goldmine of knowledge that can shape better decisions, highlight risks early, and surface ideas you may never have considered.

Make time at the very start to run structured listening sessions. Use coaching skills and open questions to draw out what matters to people. Then truly listen - no judgement, no counterarguments, no interruptions. Just genuine curiosity.

People want to feel heard, and when they do, it not only strengthens engagement but also supports wellbeing through times of change.

When colleagues are involved from the outset, they develop real ownership. They see their ideas brought to life, which fuels passion, engagement, and personal development. Recognition is key - celebrate not just outcomes, but the positive behaviours and effort shown throughout the process.

If you start with listening, many of the next steps reveal themselves. The path forward becomes clearer, stronger, and more widely owned - because people helped shape it.



Matthew Clark
Senior School
Improvement Officer,
Derby Diocesan
Academy Trust

One of the biggest mistakes we make in change is rushing. We move too quickly into action, without pausing long enough to properly diagnose the problem we're trying to solve. In many cases, we don't go far enough upstream to understand the real source of the issue - instead, we focus on the most visible surface symptoms.

In education, for example, we often set out to improve outcomes. But before launching into change, how often do we step back and ask: is this a teaching issue? A curriculum issue? An assessment issue? A behavioural or cultural issue? Without that deeper precision upfront, we risk solving the wrong problem and wasting effort on changes that don't stick.

Sustainability is equally critical. There's little value in making changes that don't embed. Effective change isn't just about what needs to shift - it's about identifying the new habits, behaviours, and routines required to sustain it.

Leaders need to plan for that behavioural shift from the outset and build in nudges, reinforcement, and support systems that help the change become part of the culture - the way we do things around here.

Real change happens when we slow down early, diagnose precisely, and set people up to build lasting new habits.

“Clarity allowed people to make informed decisions, process the change in their own way, and ultimately stay focused on performance.”

Adam Davies, Gymshark



Adam Davies
Head of Talent
Development and
Internal Communications,
Gymshark

When it comes to change, many leaders fall into the trap of under-communicating - believing that less is more, or that holding back information somehow makes things easier for people to process. But the opposite is true. The more transparent you can be, the better.

Whatever the message - good, bad, or uncertain - people want to understand what's happening and why. Information helps them make sense of the change and equips them to engage with it.

In one project I'm particularly proud of, it was the honesty and transparency that made the difference. We were open about why the changes were happening and what they would mean for people individually.

That clarity allowed people to make informed decisions, process the change in their own way, and ultimately stay focused on performance. The consistency of messaging built trust and reduced uncertainty.

If I had one piece of advice for any leader starting a big change: work backwards from the end goal.

Ask yourself:

- What outcome are you driving towards?
- How do you want people to think?
- How do you want them to feel?

And when it's done, how would you want them to describe how this change was handled?

When you design the change experience with these questions in mind, you create the conditions for trust, ownership, and sustained performance.



Stephanie Rix
Chief People Officer,
HLB International

When activating change, there are two areas that are often overlooked — but make a huge difference to whether change sticks or stalls.

First, start with the leadership team. Every group has a history and an appetite for change, shaped by what's gone before. Leaders who've been in the business a long time may carry the legacy of previous initiatives — both good and bad. Taking time to explore that history and offering the right scaffolding and support makes a big difference. It's also useful to identify what's worked well in the past — what were the conditions and behaviours that made those changes successful?

Second, never underestimate the emotional journey. Every change brings an emotional response. The key is to plan for it. Build in listening strategies, track sentiment, and go beyond generic communications.

Tailor your interventions — whether through engagement, messaging, or training — based on how people are actually experiencing the change. When people feel understood and supported, trust increases, resistance lowers, and momentum builds.

Change doesn't just live in plans — it lives in people. Understand the story behind the leadership, and the emotional pulse of those impacted, and you'll build stronger, more human foundations for success.



Claire Foy
Head of Wealth
Capability, Coutts
and Executive Coach
of Flying Iguana Ltd

One of the biggest reasons change projects fall short is a failure to define what success actually looks like — before the work begins. You need to be clear on what will be different afterwards. What are your “before and after” measures? What would you expect to see, hear, or feel if the change has worked? If that isn't locked in early, it becomes impossible to measure progress or impact. Whether people enjoyed it or not isn't the point — meaningful change often feels uncomfortable. The true signal of success is that something has shifted.

Equally, don't underestimate the power of stakeholder engagement. If you want the change to stick, bring your people with you — early and honestly. Ask: why will this change be better for them? Why does their role in it matter? What might be hard, and how can you help?

When people feel seen, involved, and informed — not just sold to — they're more likely to trust the process and take ownership.

Whether it's through data, storytelling, creativity, or clear deliverables, make sure you're building the case for change with people, not just at them. The difference it makes is bigger than most leaders realise — and harder to measure, but impossible to ignore.

Moving forward: Making change stick

Activating Change

Most change efforts don't fail in delivery - they fail in setup. What happens before the strategy turns into action is what determines whether the action sticks.

What we've shared in this report isn't a new framework - it's a behavioural lens. A checklist. A rhythm. A way to ask better questions earlier. Whether you're leading change in a classroom, a control room, or a boardroom, the same principle holds: clarity, alignment, and adaptability are built, not assumed.

So, what's next?

Use the 9 behaviours as your pre-flight checklist. Make them part of your team rhythm. Model them as a leader. And most importantly - start small, but start now.

Because change doesn't begin when the plan is signed off.

It begins in the small moments - where conversations shape clarity, behaviours build trust, and teams choose to move forward together.

If you're ready to activate change in your world - we're here to help you make it stick.



Let's set your teams up for what's next.

To explore how we can support your team to activate change and deliver results that stick, get in touch:

hello@mindflick.co.uk

Whether you're preparing for a new initiative or rethinking one already underway, we can help you:

- Build alignment early
- Strengthen delivery culture
- Embed tools and behaviours that last

