

Bailey & French.

Psychological Flexibility: Adapting to Change with Confidence



How Psychological Flexibility Is Helping Leaders Stay Human in Uncertain Times

If you've worked in leadership over the past few years, you'll know this: change isn't coming in waves anymore. It's here, all the time. Whether it's economic uncertainty, restructures, or the evolving reality of hybrid work, the pace of change is now the baseline, not the exception.

At our recent Bailey & French roundtable, we brought together senior people leaders to talk about something we believe is essential for thriving in this environment: **psychological flexibility**.

It's not a buzzword. It's a skill – and more than that, it's a way of thinking and leading that could make all the difference when everything around us is shifting.

So, what is psychological flexibility?

Put simply, it's the ability to stay open, present, and adaptable – especially when things feel uncertain or difficult. It helps us respond in ways that align with our values, instead of reacting out of stress or fear. It's not about pushing discomfort aside, but about learning how to work with it and still move forward.

We're seeing more and more how psychological flexibility supports:

- **Wellbeing** – by improving emotional regulation and reducing overwhelm
- **Resilience** – by helping us adapt to challenges with a growth mindset
- **Performance** – by keeping us focused, calm and effective under pressure



What we heard from leaders

The stories were real and honest. Here are some of the themes that stood out:

1. Change needs a new narrative

We used to treat change like an event. Something to plan for, survive, and then recover from. That model's broken. The leaders we spoke to are thinking differently now – asking not how to “manage” change, but how to lead through it with clarity and compassion. It's about readiness, not resistance.

2. Trust and transparency matter more than ever

Several people reflected on how autonomy alone doesn't work without genuine empowerment and a clear purpose. When people know *why* change is happening and how their role fits into the bigger picture, they're far more likely to stay engaged.

3. Connection is evolving – and that's okay

Remote and hybrid working has changed how we relate to one another. For some teams, that's meant a drop in energy or belonging. But others are seeing connection re-emerge in new ways – through digital communities, peer networks, and more intentional conversations. The key is to support this evolution, not resist it.

4. Leaders are stretched – and not always supported

One challenge that came up again and again was the sheer pressure on leaders. Many are being asked to juggle delivery, change leadership, emotional support, and more – often without enough time or tools. It raised important questions: are our organisations really designed to support the leadership we now need?

5. People are tired – and resilience has its limits

There was a strong sense that people are hitting emotional walls. We've all been encouraged to be resilient, but what happens when that runs out? The group talked about the need for psychological safety: spaces where people can say “I'm struggling” without fear, and where learning from failure is part of the culture.

6. AI is here – but we need to bring people with us

Unsurprisingly, AI came up. There was optimism around reducing admin and freeing up time, but also concern, especially from HR leaders, about how to stay relevant and human in an AI-driven world. The consensus? We need honest conversations, purposeful integration, and support that's as much emotional as it is technical.

What leaders are doing differently

The best part of these conversations is always the ideas people share – and this roundtable was full of them:

- One leader is setting up a “failure group” – a safe space for learning from what didn’t go to plan.
- Others are using platforms like Viva Engage to encourage connection and conversation across silos.
- Some are being more transparent in comms – being open about uncertainty rather than pretending to have all the answers.
- There was a lot of energy around developing tools like “Resilience Kits” for managers – small, practical resources to help teams navigate tough moments together.

These aren’t silver bullets, but they’re steps in the right direction. They show what psychological flexibility looks like when it’s put into practice.

Final thoughts

If there’s one thing we took away from this session, it’s that **psychological flexibility isn’t just a skill. It’s a mindset – and one that’s urgently needed.**

It’s about choosing courage over control, values over certainty, and people over process. And for leaders, it’s a call to create environments where others can do the same.

Because in this era of constant change, success won’t come from having all the answers. It’ll come from being human enough to ask the right questions – and brave enough to lead through the unknown.

