

Assessing organisational readiness for design

Ahead of undertaking any organisation design, it is imperative that organisations review their preparedness for design. Understanding the concept of design readiness will help you reflect on whether your organisation has the right foundations in place to make design work successfully and sustainably.

Understanding these themes is crucial for contextualising any potential design efforts. The question every leadership team must address before beginning a redesign is: **how can we assess that our organisation is ready?** This sets the stage for a deliberate, rather than reactive, approach.

Readiness matters

In organisation design, readiness is not a favourable option – it's an essential prerequisite.

Even when the issues are obvious relating to the way the organisation operates, initiating design work without the right foundational elements in place often leads to superficial fixes and outcomes that simply cannot be sustained.

Therefore, it is crucial to verify that the organisation is grounded in three key areas:

1. It must be **strategically aligned** so that the future operating model supports the intended goals.
 2. It must be **culturally open** to new ways of working.
 3. It must be **operationally capable**, possessing the internal bandwidth and skills to manage any transition.
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Indicators of readiness

Assessing readiness means systematically examining several interconnected factors that determine the organisation's capability and capacity for successful transformation.

- **Strategic clarity** – a design initiative must be anchored in a well-defined strategic direction, explicit in what markets are served, what products and services are offered, and the organisation capabilities required to make it happen. Furthermore, senior leaders must be completely aligned on this direction and the core rationale underpinning the need for change. Without this, any design effort risks creating misalignment with the ultimate business objectives.
- **Leadership commitment** – successful design is driven from the top. It requires the top team to be fully prepared to lead the change, serving as genuine role models for new behaviours and possessing the courage to make difficult trade-offs when necessary. Passive endorsement is insufficient; leaders must engage actively in the process.
- **Organisational appetite for change** – there must be a broad acknowledgement across the organisation that the current way of operating is insufficient for achieving future goals. The presence of 'productive discomfort' – a shared recognition of friction within the organisation system – is necessary to generate and sustain momentum for the design effort.

- **Capacity and capability to deliver** – design is complex and resource-intensive work. Sufficient internal resources (such as HR, organisational development, and a dedicated project team) should be available to support the effort. At Kozo, we encourage co-design which means involving full representation of the organisation throughout the design process. The organisation must be able to drive change progress without simultaneously undermining its day-to-day performance.
 - **Operational stability** – the underlying business must be stable enough to allow for forward planning and effective execution of the design. If the organisation is currently dominated by ongoing crises or firefighting, the priority must be stabilisation first; design should only follow once a baseline of calm is established (unless organisation survival is at stake).
 - **Cultural readiness** – cultural factors significantly influence adoption. Readiness is high when there is a foundation of trust, psychological safety, and genuine openness to collaboration across teams. Employees must also believe that their input truly matters, ensuring engagement and ownership.
 - **Change history and learning** – understanding the experience the organisation has had with change is crucial. This involves reviewing the track record of past transformations and uncovering any lingering "scars" from failed attempts or valuable lessons learned. These must be explicitly acknowledged and factored in to any design approach.
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Assess for readiness

To gain a clear and holistic picture of readiness, several diagnostic tools can be used, either individually or in combination:

1. **Stakeholder Interviews** – provide deep, qualitative insights into leader and key stakeholder alignment, mindset, and specific concerns.
 2. **Pulse Survey / questionnaire** – offer a rapid, quantitative read across various levels and functions to gauge general sentiment and key pain points.
 3. **Organisational health check** – a comprehensive review of current systems, leadership effectiveness, and cultural maturity.
 4. **Readiness workshop** – a facilitated, collective session designed to test the appetite for change and build a shared understanding of the required path forward.
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If the organisation isn't ready...

A lack of readiness should never be interpreted as a reason to abandon design; instead, it serves as a clear signal to adjust the approach and invest in foundational work. Options include:

- **Start small** – initiate a pilot design in a single function to prove the model, build momentum, and secure quick wins.
- **Build strategic alignment** – dedicate time to thoroughly clarify the strategic direction and articulate a compelling, undeniable case for change across the whole organisation.
- **Develop leadership capability** – focus on coaching leaders and developing the specific behaviours needed to support the new structure before the structure itself is implemented.

- **Name the pain** – facilitate sessions where teams can openly and accurately articulate what is currently not working, signalling why immediate change is essential.

Questions for reflection

- Where is your organisation demonstrably strong in terms of readiness?
 - Where might there be significant gaps that could potentially undermine success?
 - What specific preparatory actions would it take to build the necessary conditions for change?
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Final thought:

Assessing design readiness is essential to ensure the foundations are in place for successful and sustainable outcomes. Readiness requires the organisation to be strategically aligned, culturally open, and operationally capable of change, supported by committed leadership and clarity on its current capacity and change history.

Design pursued without a foundation of readiness will inevitably be design without traction. Completing a readiness check is not an act of delay – it is the essential catalyst for achieving meaningful, lasting transformation.