

Team Regeneration: How Leadership Teams Sustain Performance When Change Never Stops



On a recent call, a long-tenured executive paused and lamented, "I used to know exactly who would be sitting around this table for the next few years. It was the same people who'd been here for the last three."

She had spent more than two decades with the company. Strategy followed a steady rhythm. The team set direction, aligned at the beginning, and then executed. The leadership team had been stable for years; their CEO in place for a decade. Relationships were deep, decisions moved fast and the team knew how to work together. Now, that predictability was gone.

Over the past year, her team had been in constant flux. One leader retired. Another left for a CEO role elsewhere. Two new executives joined within months of each other, including one from the outside. At the same time, roles were being reshaped in response to market shifts. New capabilities were added. Others became less central.

At any given moment, someone was new, someone else was still finding their footing, and another was operating in a role that was being redefined in real time. The team was expected to deliver while still figuring out how to work together.

"We don't really get to a steady state anymore," she said. "We're always evolving."

For decades, the dominant narrative around team effectiveness followed a familiar arc: forming, storming, norming, performing. It assumed that, given time, leadership teams will stabilize and sustained performance will follow. However, that assumption does not reflect the reality that many C-suite teams face today, where they are now operating in a fundamentally different context.¹ Change is now continuous, reshaping both who is on the team and what the team is expected to deliver.

When teams and context change together

C-suite teams are no longer defined by stable membership. [In 2025, CEO turnover reached a new high across the global indices that RRA tracks, with departures rising 16% year over year and sitting 21% above the eight-year average.](#)² At the same time, leadership turnover intent continues to rise, with [nearly 70% of C-suite leaders considering a career move](#) outside their current organization.³

In many organizations, the team responsible for driving performance is being re-formed in real time. Even without formal [transformation](#),⁴ there is constant churn driven by attrition or succession. When the team changes, the dynamics reset. Who speaks, who influences decisions, how alignment forms, and how conflict surfaces all shift as team composition changes.

Meanwhile, the environment in which these teams operate is becoming more complex. [Leadership teams are navigating intertwined issues, radical disruption and shifting stakeholder expectations with less certainty and shorter time horizons.](#)⁵ Even if team composition remained unchanged, the way the team works would still need to change.

Together, these forces compound, pressuring the team to adapt while also in flux.⁶ The result is a near-permanent state of formation and re-formation, in which the "dust settling" moment that traditional models depend on has largely disappeared.

The mindset shift needed for sustained team performance

This calls for a different way of thinking about team performance; one that is linked to regeneration. **Team regeneration** is the leadership team's capacity to continuously renew itself by integrating new members, reconfiguring how it operates, and sustaining performance despite ongoing disruption.

Rather than viewing leadership change as a threat to effectiveness, regenerative leadership teams treat it as a core operating condition. They are not built once, then maintained; instead, their internal capacity to recalibrate is key to how they function, even during significant disruptions such as when new leaders join the team.

When new leaders join

In many teams, integration rests on the shoulders of the new joiner. If they succeed, they're seen as capable. If they struggle, it's often viewed as a hiring mistake. But in reality, integration is rarely an individual challenge. The question is not only whether a new leader can adapt to the team, but also whether the team is willing to adapt to the new leader.⁷

RRA's transition research highlights the persistence of this challenge. For example, among [Fortune 500 general counsel](#), 31% of departures in 2025 occurred within the first three years of appointment, and more than 70% of those early exits were external hires. Of the external hires who left after a short tenure, more than one-third did so because of cultural misalignment,⁸ underscoring how difficult it can be to integrate into established team dynamics.

Even highly experienced leaders can struggle to navigate informal influence structures, decision-making norms, and unspoken expectations embedded within established teams. A leadership team's willingness and ability to incorporate new perspectives and ways of working is the real test of its "regenerative ability." Teams that struggle to absorb and integrate new members often default to hiring for "fit," reinforcing existing patterns and limiting the team's ability to evolve.

Teams that navigate transitions well take a different approach—making implicit norms explicit, adjusting how they work to incorporate new perspectives, and treating integration as a shared responsibility. Integration becomes an ongoing capability that focuses on strengthening, rather than simply preserving, the team.

Stories from the field

One global insurance and risk management company faced this challenge when three executives joined its leadership team within a short period. Rather than treating integration as the responsibility of the new leaders alone, the CEO and leadership team used the appointments as an opportunity to strengthen how the team operated.

Together, the team aligned around a shared ambition and clarified the role each leader would play in delivering it. They invested time in building trust, deepening mutual understanding, and creating stronger connections across the team. Just as importantly, they established forums that encouraged open dialogue, constructive challenge, and enterprise-level thinking. The result was not simply successful onboarding, but a leadership team that became stronger because of the transition.

Regeneration is built through team habits

There is no single intervention that makes a leadership team regenerative. What matters is a set of simple, consistent practices, centered around self-awareness and built into the team's working rhythm

01 Incorporate regular pauses into the operating cadence

Instead of waiting for formal reviews to reassess effectiveness, regenerative leadership teams create short, structured moments to reflect; for example, at the end of key meetings, after a successful project, or following leadership exits. These moments create space to consider what worked, what didn't, and how to embed those insights into team operations going forward.

02 Continuously align on purpose, roles, and decisions

As leadership teams change, alignment can drift faster than teams realize. Regenerative leadership teams treat alignment as an always-on priority and deliberately draw attention to it when mandates shift and the team changes. This means agreeing on shared purpose and clarifying individual roles alongside enterprise responsibilities. It also requires revisiting decision rights, ownership, and priorities in real time as conditions change. By keeping alignment current, teams reduce friction and maintain momentum even as composition and context alter.

03 Strengthen enterprise thinking

When leaders prioritize enterprise outcomes over functional or regional agendas, it shows a strong teaming mindset. Members balance accountability for their own areas with a shared responsibility for the performance of the whole. This requires stepping beyond functional boundaries, challenging narrow perspectives, and moving beyond individual agendas to think and act with an [enterprise mindset](#).⁹

04 Normalize openness, trust and healthy challenge

Regenerative leadership teams take shared responsibility for how they work together. They assume positive intent and invest in trust, connection, and psychological safety, creating space to raise concerns and ask for support.¹⁰ As team composition and context shift, these elements need to be continually rebuilt. Subtle tensions can emerge and go unspoken; effective teams surface them early and address them directly. Making open dialogue and constructive challenge part of the team's rhythm prevents issues from festering and enables stronger decision making over time.

05 Make it everyone's responsibility to create space for new voices

This means being explicit about how a new member will contribute, and where team dynamics or ways of working may need to adjust. It also requires making room for new voices. Over time, participation patterns can settle, making it harder to surface fresh perspectives. Leadership teams that stay effective are deliberate about opening that space, inviting input from newer members, rotating who leads discussions, and ensuring that dissenting views are considered. This helps the team continue to evolve how they think and operate.

06 Periodically reassess team design and structure

Leadership team structures that worked for one stage of the business don't always carry forward to the next. As part of long-term succession planning and leadership evolution, CEOs, CHROs and boards should periodically reassess whether their leadership teams' roles, size, and configuration still align with their updated strategy and context. This includes considering where new capabilities may be needed, how responsibilities are shifting, and whether current structures continue to support effective decision-making and execution.

Stories from the field

One biotechnology company encountered this challenge as it moved from a development-stage business into commercial scale. The founder-CEO and leadership team that had successfully guided the organization through years of scientific and regulatory milestones now faced a different set of demands. Commercialization required different capabilities, new leadership roles, and a different operating model.

Initially, the leadership team approached these changes as a series of individual decisions. Over time, however, it became clear that it was necessary to examine whether the team itself was configured for the next phase of growth. This led them to reassess roles, decision-making processes, and how leaders worked together across the enterprise.

The lesson was simple: success in one phase of growth does not guarantee success in the next. Sustained performance required the team to adapt alongside the business it led.

Managing a moving leadership system

Sustaining performance through ongoing change is a shared responsibility of the leadership team. The CEO plays a critical role in setting the tone, but regeneration ultimately depends on how the entire team responds to change and adapts together.

To create these regenerative conditions, treat each change as a system-level shift and use a set of diagnostic questions to guide discussion:

- How novel is this change for the leadership team?
- How will this disrupt existing decision-making and influence patterns?
- Where is misalignment most likely to emerge?
- What expectations, interfaces, and ways of working need to shift as a result?
- How many transitions are happening at the same time, and how do they interact?
- What needs to be preserved to maintain continuity, and what needs to change?

These questions are not just for the CEO to consider, but for the leadership team to work through together as it recalibrates over time.

Sustaining performance through regeneration

Sustaining performance in today's environment depends less on settling into alignment and execution, and more on maintaining effectiveness as the ground shifts. Teams that navigate this well absorb disruption without losing coherence or momentum. They integrate new members without losing pace, surface and metabolize friction early, and recalibrate how they work as roles, priorities, and expectations change.

Leadership teams may never return to the stability that earlier models of team effectiveness assumed. The advantage will belong to those that can continually recalibrate how they think, work, and lead together as both the team and its context evolve. Regeneration is becoming a defining capability of high-performing leadership teams.

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¹ **Maynard, M. T., Kennedy, D. M., & Sommer, S. A.** "A Stimulus-Based Model of the Team Adaptation Process: An Integrated Conceptual Review." *Academy of Management Annals*, 2024

² Source: [RRA Global CEO Turnover Index Report 2025](#)

³ Source: [RRA H1 2026 Global Leadership Monitor](#), n=430 C-level leaders

⁴ Source: [RRA Transformational Leadership Study 2025](#)

⁵ Source: [No Company Can Outperform Its Leadership](#)

⁶ **Sanford, N. J., Lounsbury, O., Anderson, J. E., & Rafferty, A. M.** "Team adaptive capacity and adaptation in dynamic environments: A scoping review of the literature." *Human Factors in Healthcare*, 2024.

⁷ **Chong, J. X., Gagné, M., Dunlop, P. D., & Wee, S. (2024).** Facilitating newcomer motivation through internalization: A self-determination theory perspective on newcomer socialization. *Human resource management review*, 34(4)

⁸ Source: [Short Tenure of External Hires Driving Turnover Among Fortune 500 General Counsel](#)

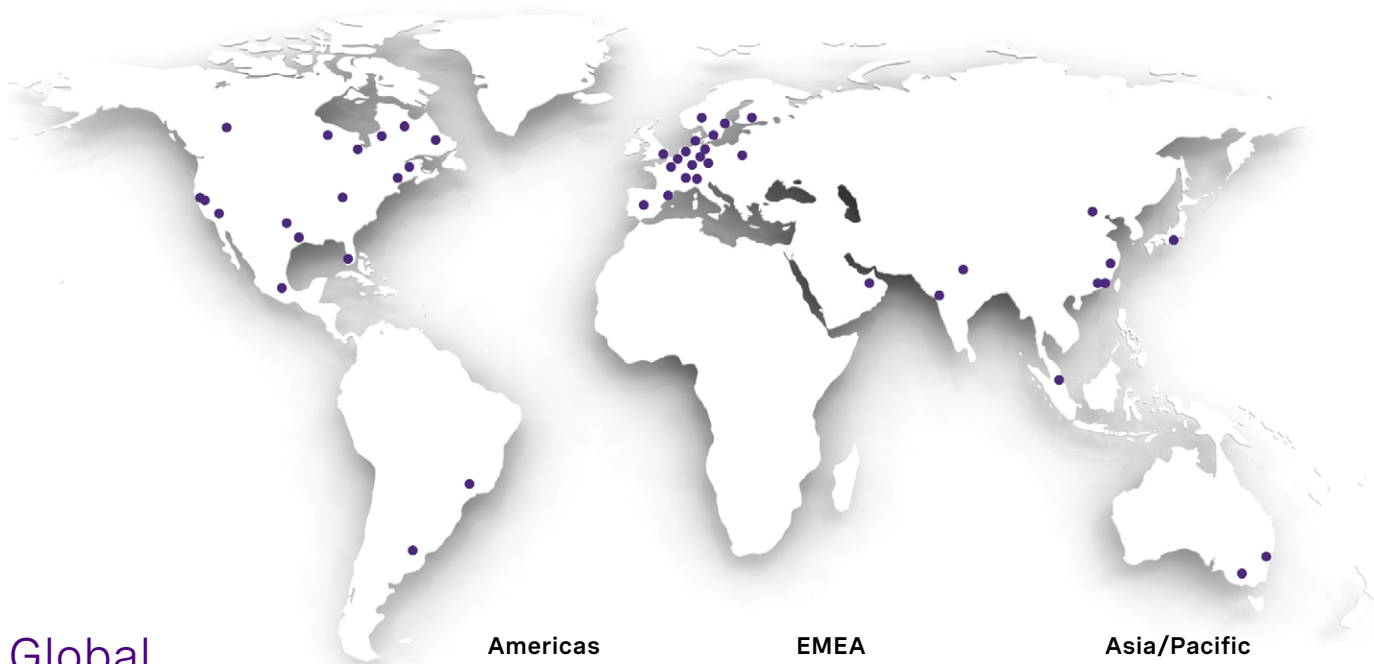
⁹ Source: [Transformational Leaders Think Beyond their Function](#)

¹⁰ **Edmondson, A. C., & Bransby, D. P.** "Psychological Safety Comes of Age: Observed Themes in an Established Literature." *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 2023.

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