



When the Iceberg Starts Cracking

Leadership Lessons in Times of Change



Pamela Montgomery (Duke University)

MPA, RCC, RAI | Doctoral Candidate, Baylor University

Board of Directors, SRAI

SRAI Distinguished Faculty



When the Iceberg Starts Cracking

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What Happens When We Miss the Cracks?

Small fractures rarely announce themselves—the risk is failing to notice.

Framing the Session



Two truths we'll explore today

Change is constant

→ Always evolving

Leadership determines the response

→ Response is a choice.

Why This Matters Now

Regulations Evolving

Requirements rapidly evolving

Compliance Intensifying

Audit expectations at an all-time high

Technology Advancing

Technology transforming workflows

Workforce Shifting

Shifting expectations reshaping our teams



Change is not occasional.

It is continuous.

Thriving organizations don't avoid disruption—they lead through it.





A Moment to Reflect

What is one major change impacting your work right now?

How Many of You Have Experienced...

Policy Changes

New guidance, sponsor terms, institutional updates

Staffing Challenges

Vacancies, turnover, skill gaps

System Changes

ERP, platforms, reporting tools

Compliance Pressure

Audits, deadlines, risk exposure

Technical expertise is not enough.

Leadership is required.

Knowing the regulations matters.

Leading through uncertainty is what sets you apart.



Introducing the Framework



Our Iceberg Is Melting

John Kotter's fable follows a penguin colony facing crisis—revealing how organizations respond to disruptive change.

Today we use its lessons as a mirror for research administration leadership.

The Story

How change unfolds when warning signs are ignored

Status Quo
Stable & comfortable

Division
Uncertainty spreads

1

2

3

4

A Discovery
Signals emerge

The Choice
Act or delay



The Iceberg = Your Organization

Your institution—its structures, culture, processes, and people—is the iceberg.





The Cracks

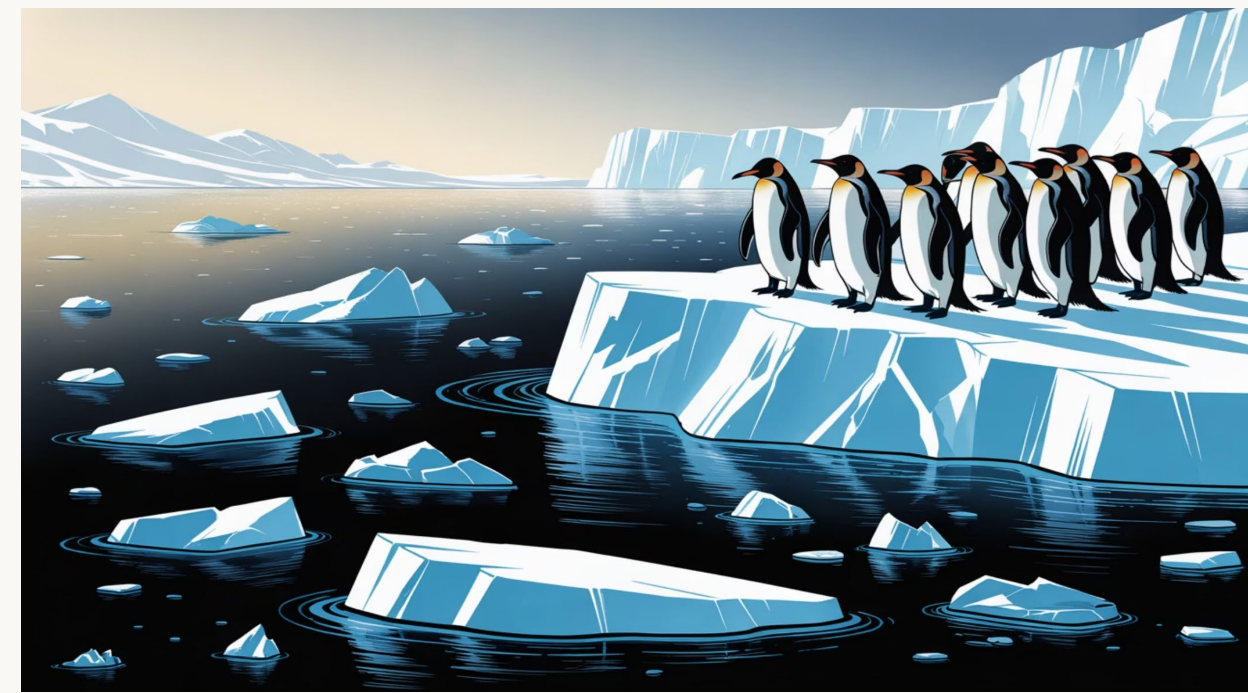
Cracks don't begin as catastrophes. They begin as **small signals** — easy to miss, easy to dismiss.

→ Signals missed

→ Risks builds

→ Problems emerge

The Cost of Missed Signals



Early Warning Ignored

- Audit findings filed
- Signals dismissed

Risk Compounds

- Small cracks widen
- Pressure builds

Crisis Arrives

- Options narrow
- Breakdown occurs

As You Watch — Consider This

Who Sees It?

Who recognizes the problem first—and why?

What Resistance Appears?

How does pushback show up—words, behavior, or silence? What drives it?



What stood out to you—and why?



Debrief: Unpacking the Clip

Who Recognized the Issue First?

- What helped them notice? (curiosity, role, willingness?)

What Resistance Showed Up?

- Fear, comfort, or power?
- How did the group respond?

Make It Real

Where does this show up in your work?

01

The Signal

What early signs did you notice?

02

The Response

How did you (or your team) respond?

03

The Outcome

What happened—and what would you change?

This Is Not Just a Story.

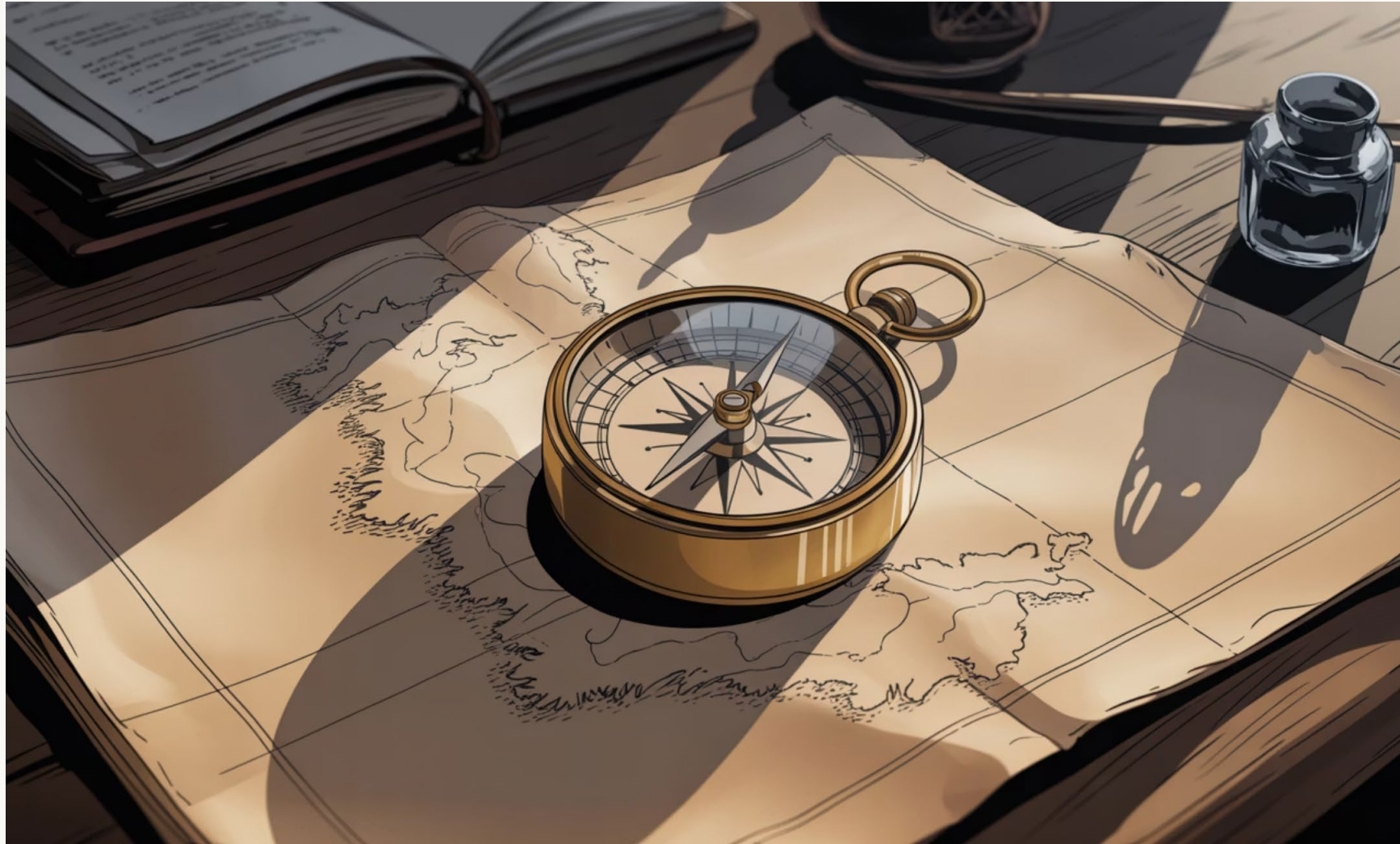
It reflects our
reality.

Every research administration office has its own iceberg—its own cracks, early warnings, resisters, and champions.

The question is whether your leadership is equipped to respond.



Leadership Readiness



Are We Ready for Change?

Readiness isn't just systems or training—it's **awareness, urgency, and alignment.**

Build readiness before the crisis.

Readiness Indicators

Awareness vs. Denial

Scanning early—or reacting late?



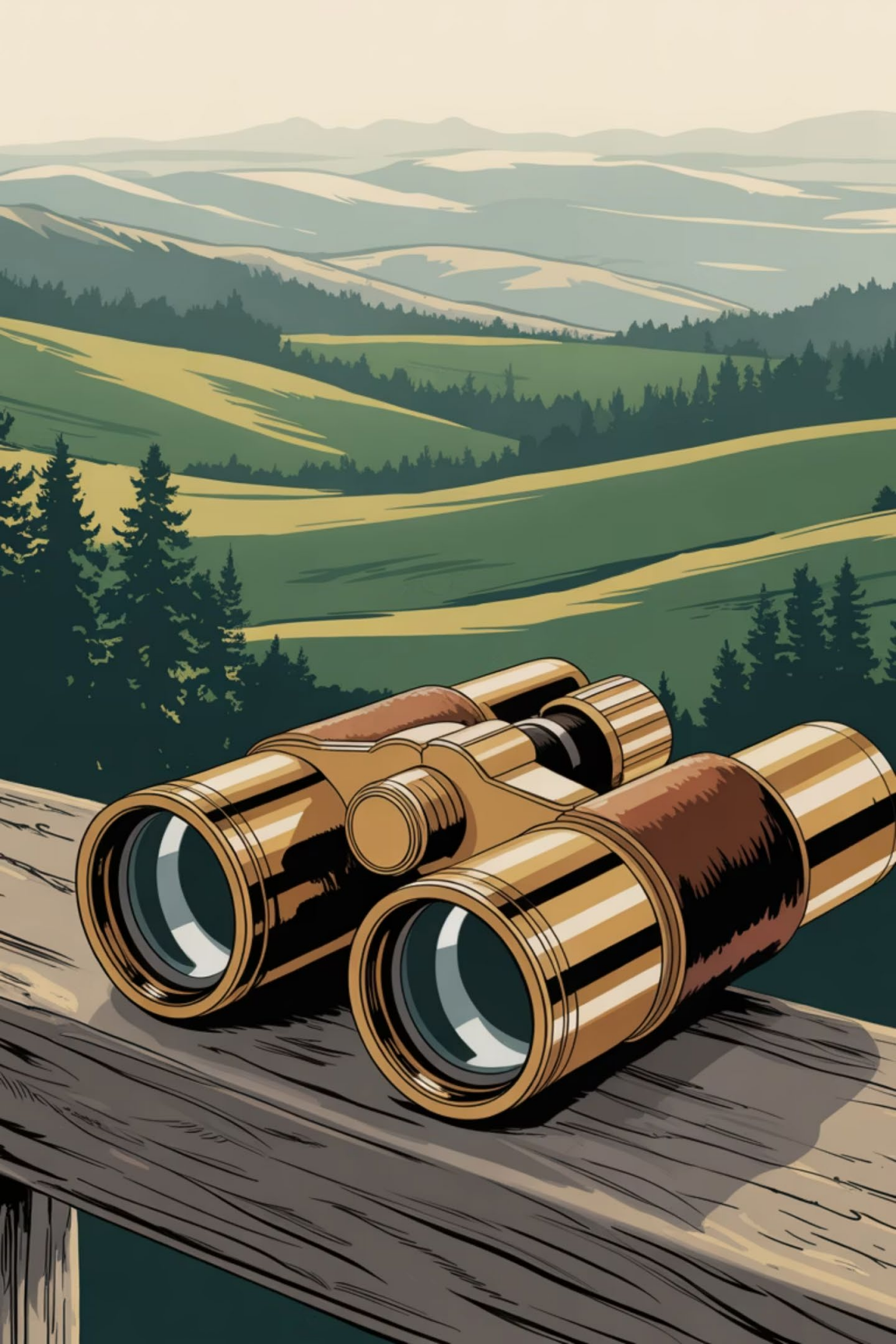
Urgency vs. Complacency

Acting now—or staying comfortable?



Alignment vs. Silos

Moving together—or working alone?



STRATEGY 1 OF 5

Recognizing Early Warning Signs

The most effective leaders build **anticipatory awareness**.

Examples of "Cracks" in Research Administration



Audit Findings

Recurring issues.



Policy Changes

New guidance not yet operationalized.



Staff Turnover

Loss of experience = loss of institutional knowledge.



Communication Gaps

Misaligned expectations across units.



Your Turn: What Cracks Are You Seeing?

Think about your office or institution:
What small signals might point to a larger issue?

Reflect and share.

STRATEGY 2 OF 5

Communicating Change

How you communicate change often matters more than the change itself.



The Four Principles of Change Communication



Clear

What is changing, why it matters, and what it means for your audience.



Consistent

The message doesn't shift by messenger.



Timely

Communicate early before rumors fill the gap.



Transparent

Share what you know, acknowledge what you don't, and keep people informed.

Communication Challenges — Your Experience

What communication challenges have you seen — or created — during a period of change?

Common Pitfalls

- Too much, too fast
- Inconsistent messaging
- Delayed updates

What Works

- Regular, brief updates
- Align messaging
- Communicate early

STRATEGY 3 OF 5

Addressing Resistance

Resistance is not the enemy of change — it is a signal.

Don't eliminate it.

Understand and engage it.



Why Resistance Happens

Fear of Change

People fear losing competence, relevance, or control.

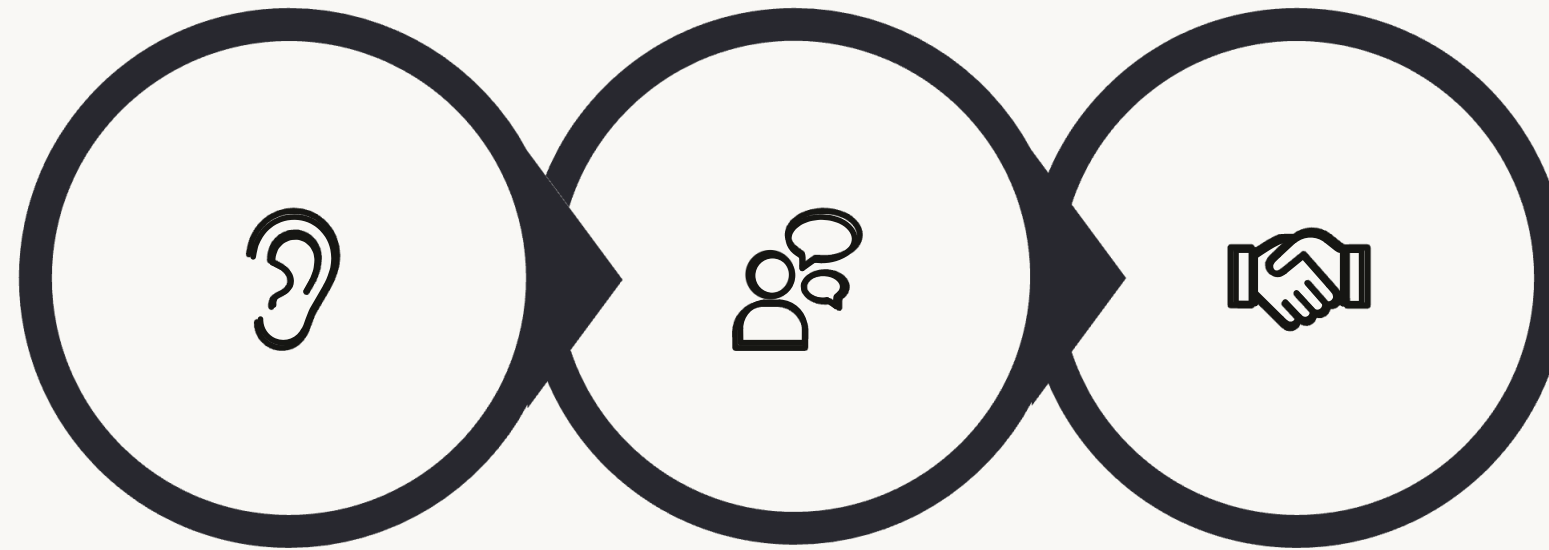
Increased Workload

Change adds work — at least temporarily.

Lack of Clarity

When people don't understand the “why” or impact, anxiety fills the gap.

The Leadership Response to Resistance



Listen

Engage

Involve

Bringing resistant voices *into* the process — not working around them — accelerates sustainable change.

STRATEGY 4 OF 5

Building Collaboration

No leader can navigate complex change alone.



Collaboration in Practice

Cross-Functional Teams

Bring together compliance, finance, faculty affairs, and IT early.

Shared Ownership

Involve people in designing change.

Open Communication

Create regular cross-department channels.

Change succeeds through **people.**

Not just processes.

Systems, policies, and procedures are the scaffolding.
But it is trust, relationships, and shared purpose that
make change stick — and that only leaders can build.





STRATEGY 5 OF 5

Sustaining Momentum

Starting change is hard. Sustaining it is harder.

Keeping Momentum Alive



Quick Wins

Act on early, visible improvements.



Celebrate Progress

Acknowledge milestones publicly.



Reinforce Change

Embed practices into structures and routines.



Let's Put It Into Practice

We've covered the framework and the five strategies. Now it's time to move from concept to action.



Scenario Activity

A structured group exercise applying the iceberg framework to a real-world research administration challenge.

The Iceberg Is Cracking in Research Administration

Your office has just received word of sweeping new federal compliance requirements — effective in 90 days. The challenge is not just regulatory. It's organizational.



The Scenario

New Federal Requirements

Major changes to data management, effort reporting, and subrecipient monitoring — all at once, all urgent.

Short-Staffed Office

Two key vacancies. Remaining staff are already at capacity.

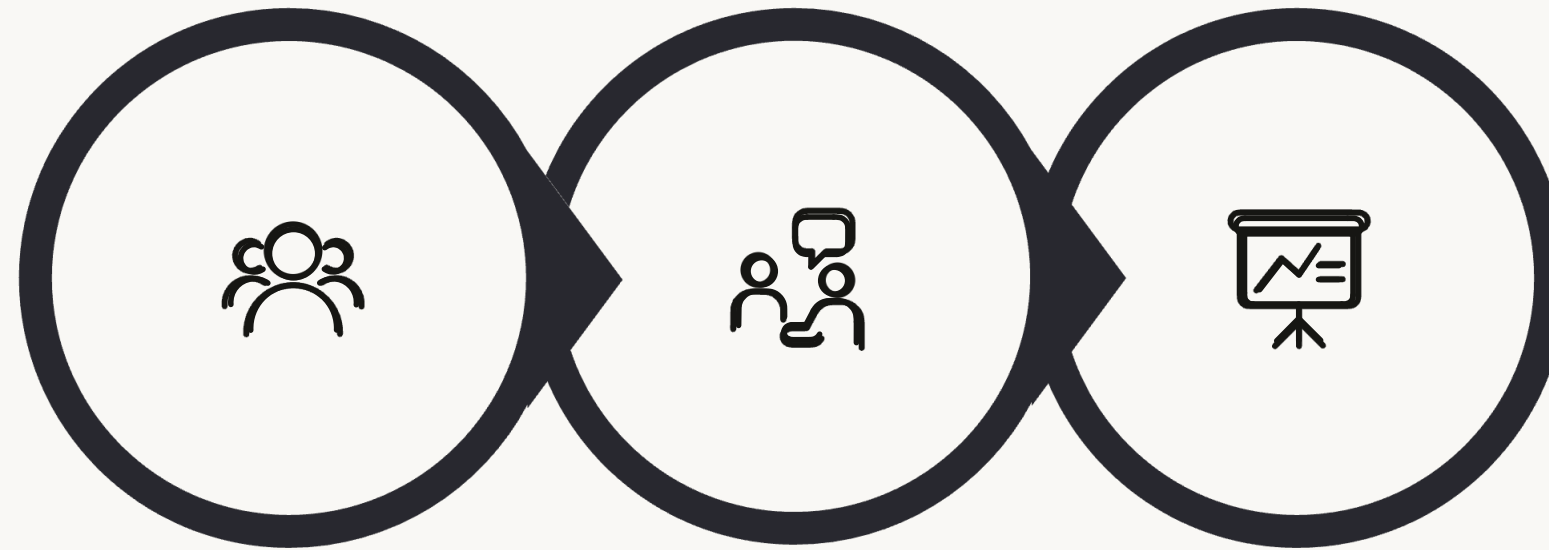
Confused Faculty

PIs are receiving conflicting information and are frustrated by the lack of clarity.

Leadership Urgency

The VP for Research wants a compliance plan —two weeks.

Activity Instructions



Form Groups

Discuss
Prompts

Report Out

Prompt 1

What are the **cracks** in this situation?

What early warning signs or system gaps do you see (process, communication, staffing, or culture)?

Prompt 2

Where will **resistance** show up?

Who will push back — and why? Is it the change, or how it's being handled?

Prompt 3

What is your leadership response?

What are your first three moves? Who do you involve? What do you communicate first?

Reflection: Prioritize Your Actions

From everything your group discussed — choose the 2 or 3 actions that would have the greatest impact right now.

- 1 What would you do in the first 48 hours?
- 2 What would you do in the first two weeks?
- 3 What long-term change does this require?

Share Out

What did your group identify?



Debrief

The Core Insight

Leadership is not about having all the answers. It is about how you show up — with clarity, composure, and the ability to move people forward.

What This Reveals

Leaders who navigate change well:

- Stay curious
- Stay connected
- Stay honest



Where Can You Apply This Immediately?

Think of one situation in your work right now that this session has reframed for you.

What is your Monday morning action?

Key Takeaways



Recognize Early Signals

Scan before cracks spread.



Communicate Clearly

Clear, consistent, timely.



Engage Stakeholders

Bring people in early.



Lead Intentionally

Choose how you show up.

Learning Objectives — Revisited

What We Set Out to Do

- **Apply** the framework
- **Recognize** early signs
- **Assess** readiness

What You're Taking With You

*Where are the cracks?
Who's seeing them?
Are we ready?*



Final Reflection

**What will you do
differently?**

Write down one specific action you will take in the next 30 days.



Change is
inevitable.

Leadership is a choice.

You have more influence than you think. Choose how you show up.

Thank You



Questions & Discussion

What questions do you have?
What resonated — or challenged
you?

Feel free to connect after the
session. Thank you for your
engagement, your candor, and
your commitment to leading well.

**Pamela Montgomery, MPA, RCC, RAI |
Doctoral Candidate, Baylor University**

Email: montgome@duke.edu

LinkedIn:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/pamela-montgomery-17353831>