

THE FIVE WOUNDS OF CHANGE

THE CONVERSATION IN ONE MINUTE

The Five Wounds gave the webinar its framework. But the bigger conversation was about what leaders do after they recognize the wounds. Jason Averbook and Jess Von Bank challenged the familiar sequence of transformation: choose the technology, deploy it, measure adoption, then try to fix the human problems that follow. Jess argued that when technology can change how work gets done and how value is created, organizations should invest at least as much in workforce transformation. Jason pushed further: invest more.

The shift is from deploying AI into today's work to deliberately designing what work, value, expertise and leadership should become next.

FOUR IDEAS WORTH CARRYING FORWARD

- 01 Adoption is not embodiment.

Seats, logins, prompts and licenses tell you whether people touched the technology. They do not tell you whether the work changed. The better question is whether people think, collaborate and solve problems differently because of AI.
- 02 Don't put AI on top of yesterday's thinking.

Jason was explicit: if all we're doing is putting AI on top of existing thought, "We're wasting AI." Jess pushed the same idea further, describing AI as a thinking and value partner rather than an answer machine that simply returns responses to prompts.
- 03 Workforce transformation has to lead technology transformation.

Rolling out tools first can create a destructive loop: adoption looks weak, leaders diagnose a capability problem, more training and enablement get added to already overloaded employees, and the resulting exhaustion gets interpreted as resistance. Jess's point was that organizations are often diagnosing and remedying the wrong problem because they started with the technology, not the humans.
- 04 Stop looking for the universal best practice.

Jason urged leaders not to chase benchmarks because every organization's culture, expertise, context and operating environment are different. AI creates an opportunity to design around your organization rather than forcing your organization to conform to someone else's process.

SEVEN QUESTIONS LEADERS LEFT WITH

- 1 How do we redesign work instead of incrementally improving the old way?

Start with the outcome, not the existing process. Use experience design and first-principles thinking to define what the work needs to accomplish, then design the people, journey and technology around that outcome. The goal is not a better washboard. It is recognizing when you need the washing machine.
- 2 How do we create clarity when there are no benchmarks for the future of work?

Don't confuse clarity with certainty. Jason argued against relying on benchmarks because every organization is different. Jess's answer to operating in this new frontier was strong decision criteria and governance. Leaders may not know the final destination, but they can be clear about the outcomes they are designing for, the principles guiding decisions and how people will participate in getting there.
- 3 What level of AI use will become necessary simply to remain effective at work?

The webinar surfaced this question but did not resolve it. That matters. The discussion moved away from measuring whether someone uses AI toward whether AI changes the quality and value of their work. The leadership question is therefore bigger than setting a usage minimum: what new capability does this role require, and what should remain distinctly human?
- 4 How do we measure the business value of shadow AI?

Measure the changed work, not the hidden usage. The room challenged traditional adoption metrics directly. If employees independently save time with AI, the meaningful question is where that capacity goes: better decisions, faster cycle times, improved outcomes, greater quality, or nowhere at all. Measuring AI adoption can become the equivalent of measuring how often someone scans into the office.
- 5 How should leaders make decisions when "best practice" no longer exists?

Replace borrowed certainty with explicit decision criteria. Jason's advice was not to benchmark your way into the future. Jess reframed governance as something that can enable speed rather than prevent it. The discipline is knowing what outcome you're pursuing, what guardrails matter and which decisions are reversible.
- 6 How should the "verification tax" change the way we calculate AI productivity?

Time saved is not value created if someone has to spend it checking the output. The webinar showed how trust problems can create invisible verification rituals, including a case where every AI-generated deliverable created another 30 minutes of review. Productivity measures need to include the human work required to validate, correct and safely use the output.
- 7 When is it too early to make workforce or headcount decisions based on AI?

Before you have redesigned the work and understood the value. This question came from concern in the room that leaders are making workforce decisions based on AI hype before implementation or a corresponding change in thinking. The webinar's broader argument points toward sequencing: understand the work, redesign around outcomes, determine where humans and AI create value together, then make workforce decisions from that model, not from assumed productivity.

HOW THE WOUNDS SHOW UP AT WORK

The Five Wounds rarely announce themselves by name. They show up in the behaviors leaders are already seeing.

- FEAR

looks like hesitation, quiet resistance and performative adoption when people hear "augmentation" but worry about elimination.
- MASTERY

shows up when experienced people question the value of expertise they spent years building, or when people without that expertise lack the judgment to challenge AI output.
- FATIGUE

looks like another tool, another workflow and another layer of review added to people already at capacity. What gets labeled "resistance" may actually be exhaustion.
- TRUST

erodes when AI promises do not match people's experience. The result can be invisible workarounds, verification rituals and employees quietly checking what the technology was supposed to make easier.
- IDENTITY

surfaces in a deeper question: If AI can do more of what made me valuable, where do I contribute now? Without a credible answer, leaders leave people to write that future story for themselves.

THEY COMPOUND.

Fear affects adoption. Loss of mastery affects trust. Fatigue looks like resistance. Identity affects whether people can see themselves in the future at all.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SEE THEM

Don't treat the symptom as the problem. Before prescribing another tool, training session, communications campaign or adoption target, ask which wound may be underneath the behavior you're seeing.

Then use that diagnosis to change the response. If the issue is fear, more enablement may not create confidence. If it's fatigue, another training session adds load. If it's trust, another promise will not repair credibility. If it's identity or mastery, people need clarity about where their judgment, contribution and value go next.

The Five Wounds are a diagnostic lens, not a checklist.

Use them to ask a better question before acting: What are people actually experiencing, and what does that tell us we need to redesign?

Diagnosis has to come before treatment.

TAKE THIS BACK TO YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

Instead of asking "How do we get people to adopt AI?", ask:

- What work are we trying to make better?
 - What outcome would we design if today's process did not exist?
 - How will we know the work actually changed?
- Where does human judgment become more valuable, not less?
 - What are we asking people to become as their work changes?

Because the point of transformation is not to prove that the technology was deployed. It is to create a better way of working.

Want us to present this to your team? Email us at hello@nowtonext.ai