

# Building a Scalable Org Chart

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From Hustle to Structure Without Losing Your Soul

“Structure doesn’t kill initiative—it protects it.”

— Founder, 25-person design firm

Written by Manuel Zarate

# Building a Scalable Org Chart

Structure doesn't kill initiative—it protects it.

## 1 Responsibility

### Why it matters

Every person in a company should understand their role and duties.

### Process

Create a swimlane diagram with objectives and assigned activities.

### What founders fear

They'll hurt feelings if they put people in a box.

### Reframe it

People appreciate clarity about what they own.

		Objectives		
		Goal	CEO	CMO
Activities	Define Strategy	CEO	COO	CMO
	Standardize Processes		Improve Operations	Drive Marketing
	Oversee Campaigns			

## 2 Accountability

### Why it matters

People should be

### What founders fear

Structure lets people

## 1. Clarifies

### Responsibilities

#### Why it matters:

Without clear roles, decisions stall and accountability gets muddy. People step on each other's toes—or back off entirely, unsure if it's "their lane."

#### What founders fear:

"I don't want to offend anyone." Especially early hires who've been doing a little of everything.

#### Reframe it:

Clarity reduces tension. It protects friendships by removing guesswork.

#### Real-life example:

At a startup with 12 people, both the Head of Sales and Marketing Manager were contacting the same leads with different messages. A shared org chart separated ownership and aligned messaging.

#### Process:

1. List all major responsibilities.
2. Identify current owners.
3. Assign one clear owner per task.
4. Share and iterate the chart.

### Tip 1:

#### Use verbs, not just titles.

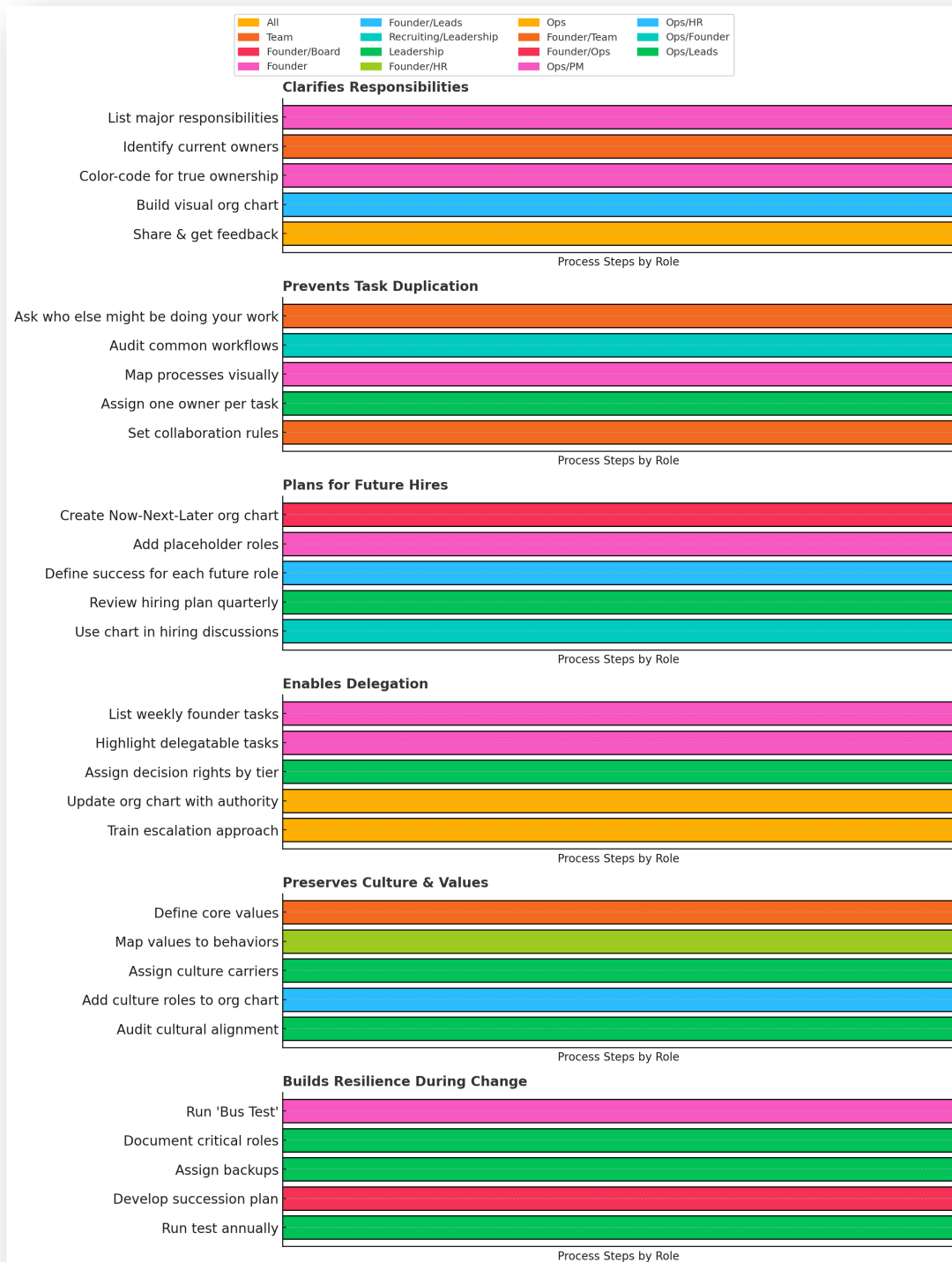
Don't just write "Marketing" — clarify *who owns creating the newsletter, running ads, or writing copy*.

**Tip 2:**

**Run a “who’s confused?” test.**

Ask your team to anonymously write down any responsibility they’re unsure about. Overlap often hides in silence.

**Illustration: Responsibility Matrix**



## 2. Prevents Task Duplication

### ***Why it matters:***

Redundant work not only wastes time—it creates confusion for customers and tension within teams.

### ***What founders fear:***

“If I create lines, I’ll kill collaboration.”

### ***Reframe it:***

Collaboration thrives when it’s intentional, not chaotic.

### ***Real-life example:***

A 15-person agency found both sales and client services were contacting lapsed clients. After mapping responsibilities, they split the pipeline and increased reactivations by 22%.

### ***Process:***

1. Ask: “What are you doing that others might be too?”
2. Visualize the workflow.
3. Assign sole accountability.
4. Add coordination check-ins.

### **Tip 1:**

#### **Audit your last 30 days.**

Pick one recurring process (like customer follow-up or content publishing) and ask: *Who touched this? Twice?*

### **Tip 2:**

#### **Assign visible “owners of the week.”**

For overlapping areas (like internal updates or outreach), rotate ownership weekly until structure stabilizes.

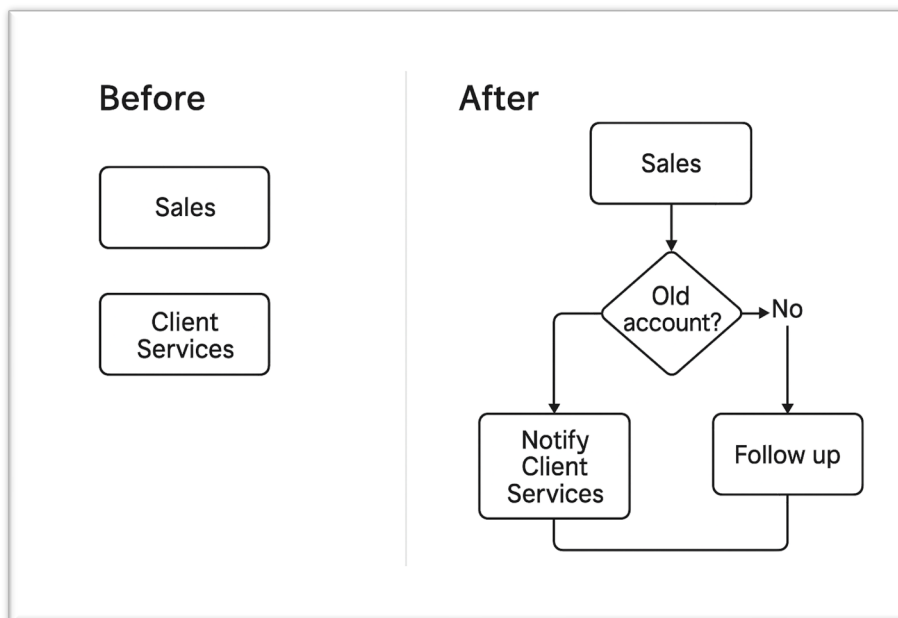


Figure: 2.  
Prevents Task  
Duplication

### 3. Plans for Future Hires

#### ***Why it matters:***

Without a forward-looking org chart, new hires are often brought in with vague mandates and overlapping roles.

#### ***What founders fear:***

“We’ll figure it out when we hire.”

#### ***Reframe it:***

A future org chart is a sketch of your next version—not a rigid plan.

#### ***Real-life example:***

A health tech startup built an 18-month org chart pre-Series A. After funding, they onboarded quickly and avoided confusion.

#### ***Process:***

1. Build a 'Now/Next/Later' org view.
2. Add future placeholder roles.
3. Define success for each.
4. Align hiring roadmaps.

#### **Tip 1:**

##### **Write job descriptions before you need them.**

Future-state roles should have success outcomes and 90-day goals — even before you post them.

#### **Tip 2:**

##### **Color-code the org chart.**

Use green for filled roles, yellow for interim, red for unfilled. Helps visualize readiness at a glance.

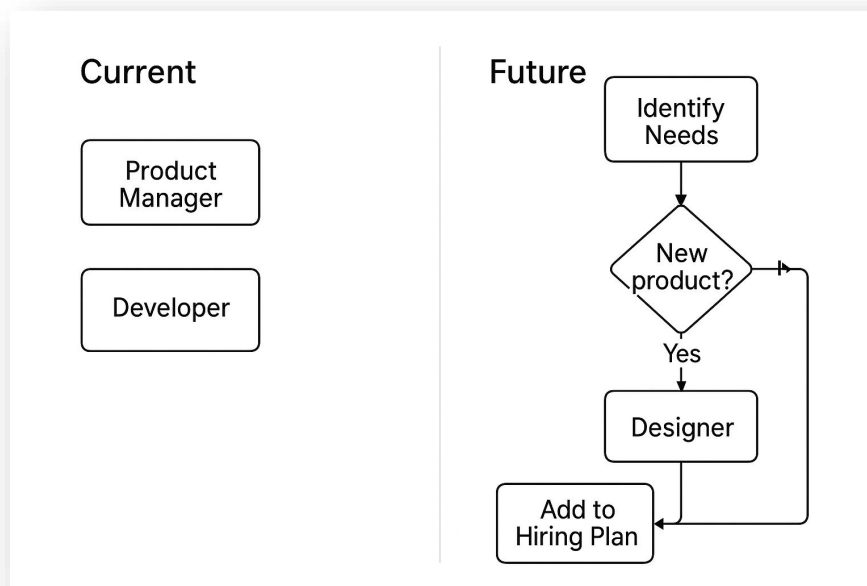


Figure: 3.  
Plans for  
Future  
Hires

## 4. Enables Delegation

### *Why it matters:*

Founders often become bottlenecks—reviewing every contract, approving every refund.

### *What founders fear:*

“If I let go, things might break.”

### *Reframe it:*

Delegation isn’t abdication. It’s structure plus trust.

### *Real-life example:*

A DTC founder reviewed every vendor contract. After setting tiered permissions, she saved 30 hours/month.

### *Process:*

1. Audit the founder’s weekly tasks.
2. Categorize decisions by delegation tier.
3. Document authority levels.
4. Train the team on escalation.

### **Tip 1:**

#### **Use a 3-tier escalation card.**

Encourage team leads to check off: “I own this,” “I need input,” or “I need approval.” Train to level up.

### **Tip 2:**

#### **Set a weekly founder check-out list.**

Each week, hand off one decision or task permanently. Momentum builds through subtraction.

**Delegation Tiers** define how decision-making authority is distributed across a team or organization. They help founders and leaders gradually shift control while maintaining oversight where it matters. Here's a practical breakdown:

### **Delegation Tier Framework**

#### **Tier 1 – Full Autonomy**

**“You decide. I don’t need to be involved.”**

- The team member has full authority to make the decision.
- Founder only needs to be informed (if at all).
- **Examples:**
  - Customer service issuing refunds under \$50

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- Marketing team scheduling social posts
- Ops manager ordering office supplies

## **Tier 2 – Decision with Check-In**

**“You propose. I approve or adjust.”**

- The team member leads, but reviews the decision with the founder or leader.
- Often used for higher-impact or first-time decisions.
- **Examples:**
  - Choosing a new vendor
  - Launching a marketing campaign
  - Making mid-tier hires

## **Tier 3 – Founder Retains Control**

**“I’ll make this call.”**

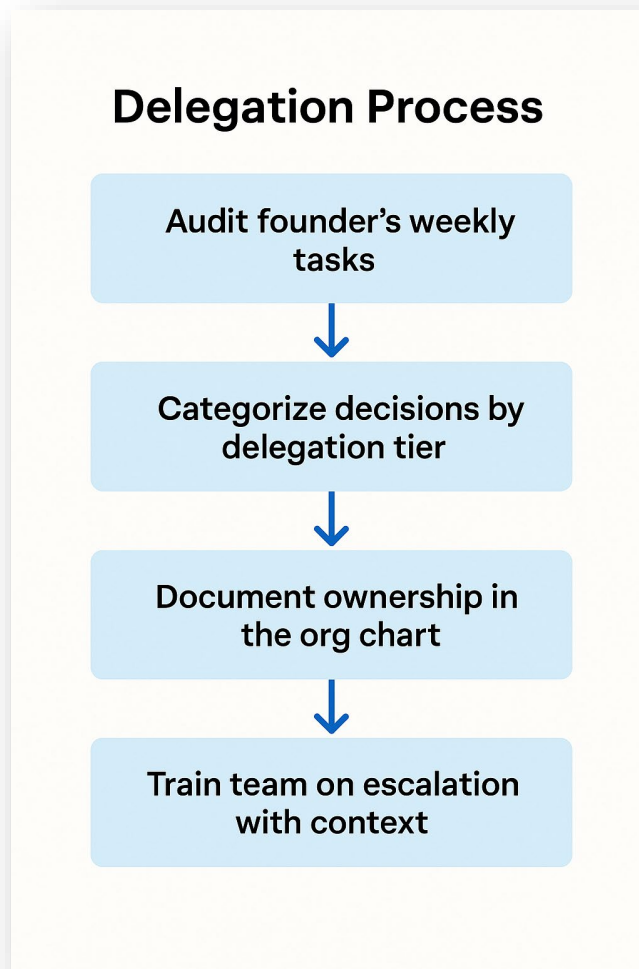
- These decisions remain with the founder, either due to strategic importance, legal risk, or trust-building phase.
- **Examples:**
  - Equity grants or compensation decisions
  - Final sign-off on new product directions
  - High-stakes legal or PR responses

## **Why Tiers Work**

- They **build confidence** in team members over time.
- They **reduce bottlenecks** without compromising key decisions.
- They give founders a **language for delegation** that’s scalable and rational—not emotional.

Figure: 4. Enables Delegation

Tier	Decision Type	Who Decides	Examples
Tier 1 Full Autonomy	Routine decisions with low risk or impact.	Team member or function lead.	Customer refunds under \$50, ordering supplies, social media posts.
Tier 2 Check-In Required	Important decisions that need visibility and approval.	Team member proposes; exec or founder approves.	Hiring a freelancer, choosing a CRM, budget reallocations.
Tier 3 Founder Only	Strategic, high-risk, or irreversible decisions.	Founder or executive leadership only.	Equity grants, rebranding, investor updates, legal responses.





## 5. Preserves Culture & Values

### ***Why it matters:***

Culture doesn't scale on good intentions alone. Without structure, values get diluted.

### ***What founders fear:***

"We'll lose what made us special."

### ***Reframe it:***

Structure protects culture when values are embedded into roles.

### ***Real-life example:***

A nonprofit struggled with collaboration after growth. By embedding values and naming 'culture carriers,' cohesion returned.

### ***Process:***

1. Identify your top 3 core values.
2. Translate into observable behavior.
3. Assign culture carriers.
4. Make values part of the org chart and audit rhythm.

### **Tip 1:**

#### **Culture carriers aren't always managers.**

They're trusted team members who naturally model company values and can mentor others.

### **Tip 2:**

#### **Record stories, not just values.**

Capture 2-minute team stories that show your values in action. Share them in onboarding and all-hands.

### **Tip 3:**

#### **Tag Slack messages with values.**

Create Slack reactions for each value (e.g., "🌱" for growth). It makes culture visible in daily behavior.

## 1. Culture Audit Worksheet

Use this to: Identify non-negotiable values.

Prompt	Your Response
What behaviors do we celebrate here, even informally?	
What would break this company if we lost it?	
What values guide your hard decisions?	

What's the best compliment a customer or employee could give us?	
List 3 core values you refuse to compromise on.	1. 2. 3.

## 2. Value → Behavior Mapping Table

Use this to: Translate values into behaviors and workflows.

Value	Behavior in Practice	Embedded In
Transparency	Share meeting notes within 24 hrs	Slack, Notion, email updates
Ownership	Each project has a single accountable lead	Asana/Trello board lead
Respect	No meeting interruptions or last-minute adds	Meeting norms doc
Growth	Monthly personal learning budget is tracked	Payroll + 1:1s

## 3. Culture Carrier Nomination Sheet

Use this to: Assign culture carriers.

Candidate Name	Department	Behavior They Exemplify	Why They'd Be a Strong Culture Carrier
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## 4. Culture Integration & Audit Checklist

Use this to: Make values part of the org chart and audit regularly.

### Org Chart

- Values appear next to each team or pod's name
- Roles reflect value alignment (e.g., "People Ops – Empathy + Execution")
- Culture carriers are visibly marked

### Hiring & Onboarding

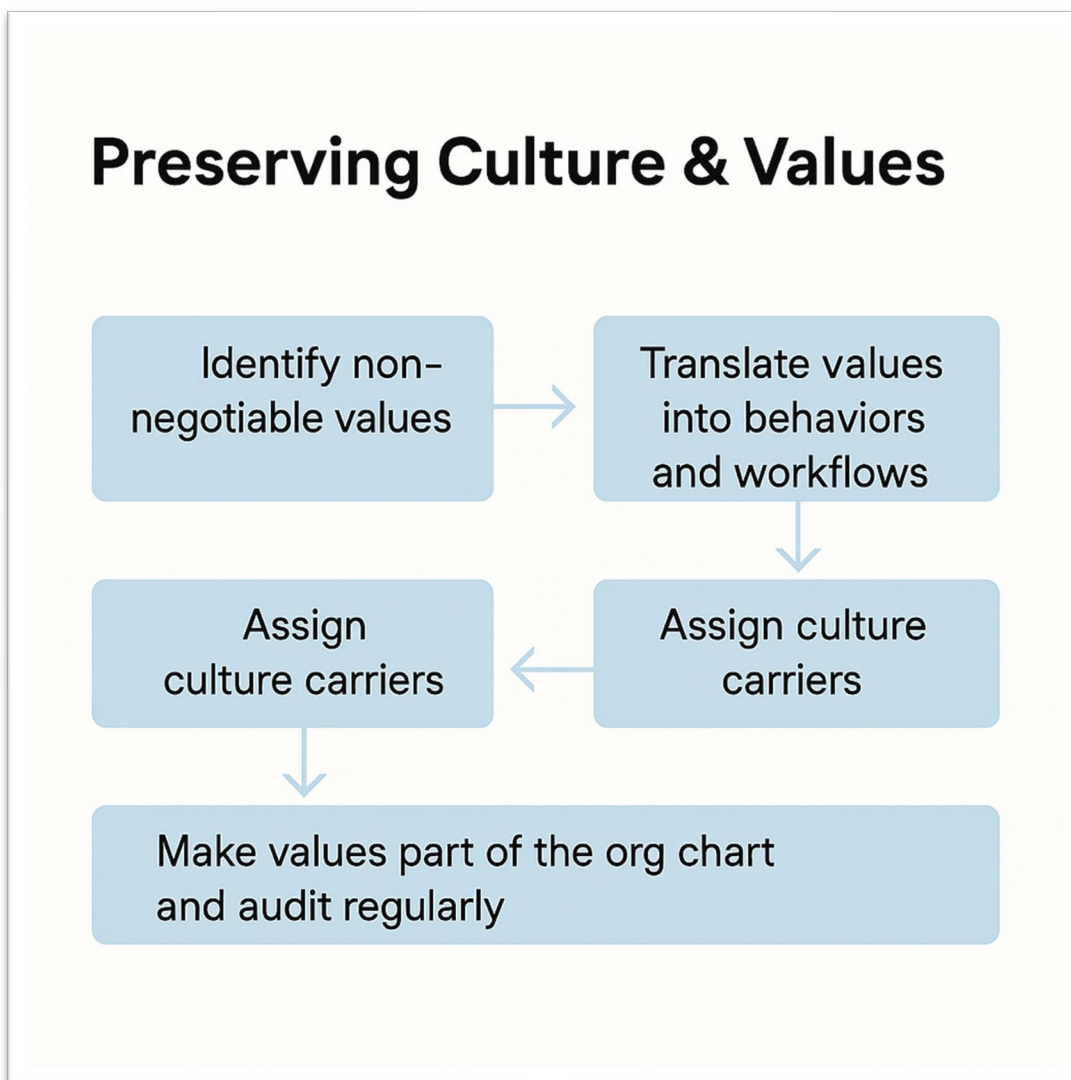
- Interview rubric includes value alignment
- Onboarding includes culture walkthrough

- New hire receives a culture buddy

**Annual Audit (Choose 1-2x/year)**

- Are values still visible in behavior?
- Are new hires modeling them?
- Are leadership decisions aligned?
- Do culture carriers need rotation or support?

Figure: 5. Preserves Culture & Values



## 6. Builds Resilience During Change

### *Why it matters:*

Change is inevitable—funding, transitions, founder shifts.

### *What founders fear:*

“What if something happens to me?”

### *Reframe it:*

Structure is your safety net.

### *Real-life example:*

When a co-founder left suddenly, the remaining team realigned using the org chart.

### *Process:*

1. Run a 'Bus Test.'
2. Document essential roles.
3. Assign backups.
4. Build a succession plan.
5. Simulate and adjust quarterly.

### **Tip 1:**

**Simulate one leadership gap each quarter.**

Ask: “What if [name] is offline for a week?” Then role-play the impact and response with their team.

### **Tip 2:**

**Pair every strategic role with a deputy.**

If someone’s name is on the org chart more than twice, they need a backup — now.

## *Change Management Plan: Org Chart Resilience*

### **Objective:**

Enable the organization to **absorb, adapt, and respond** to changes (personnel shifts, funding rounds, founder transitions) without operational disruption or culture loss.

### **Step-by-Step Plan**

#### **1. Run a “Bus Test”**

*What breaks if a key person disappears for 30–60 days?*

### **Tool:**

Role	Mission-Critical Tasks	Backup Exists?	Notes
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<b>Founder</b>	Strategic Partnerships, Fundraising	NO	Need a second voice with investors
<b>Ops Lead</b>	Payroll, Compliance	YES	Finance team trained last quarter

## 2. Document Mission-Critical Roles

Capture the 1-pager essentials for every key role.

**Template:**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Tools/Access Needed</b>	<b>Top Priorities</b>	<b>Recurring Tasks</b>	<b>Known Risks</b>
<b>Head of Growth</b>	Karen Lee	HubSpot, Google Ads	New user acquisition	Weekly reports	Platform dependency

## 3. Assign Clear Backups

Designate shadow roles or secondary leads for each priority area.

**Visual Tip:** Use dotted lines in your org chart to indicate “shadow roles” — the next person up.

## 4. Build a Succession Map

Anticipate who grows into which leadership role in the next 12–18 months.

**Worksheet:**

<b>Current Role</b>	<b>Future Role</b>	<b>Successor Candidate</b>	<b>Development Plan</b>
<b>Ops Manager</b>	VP of Ops	Angela Torres	Weekly mentorship, lead Q3 launch
<b>CTO</b>	CTO	TBD	Cross-train tech leads Q2–Q4

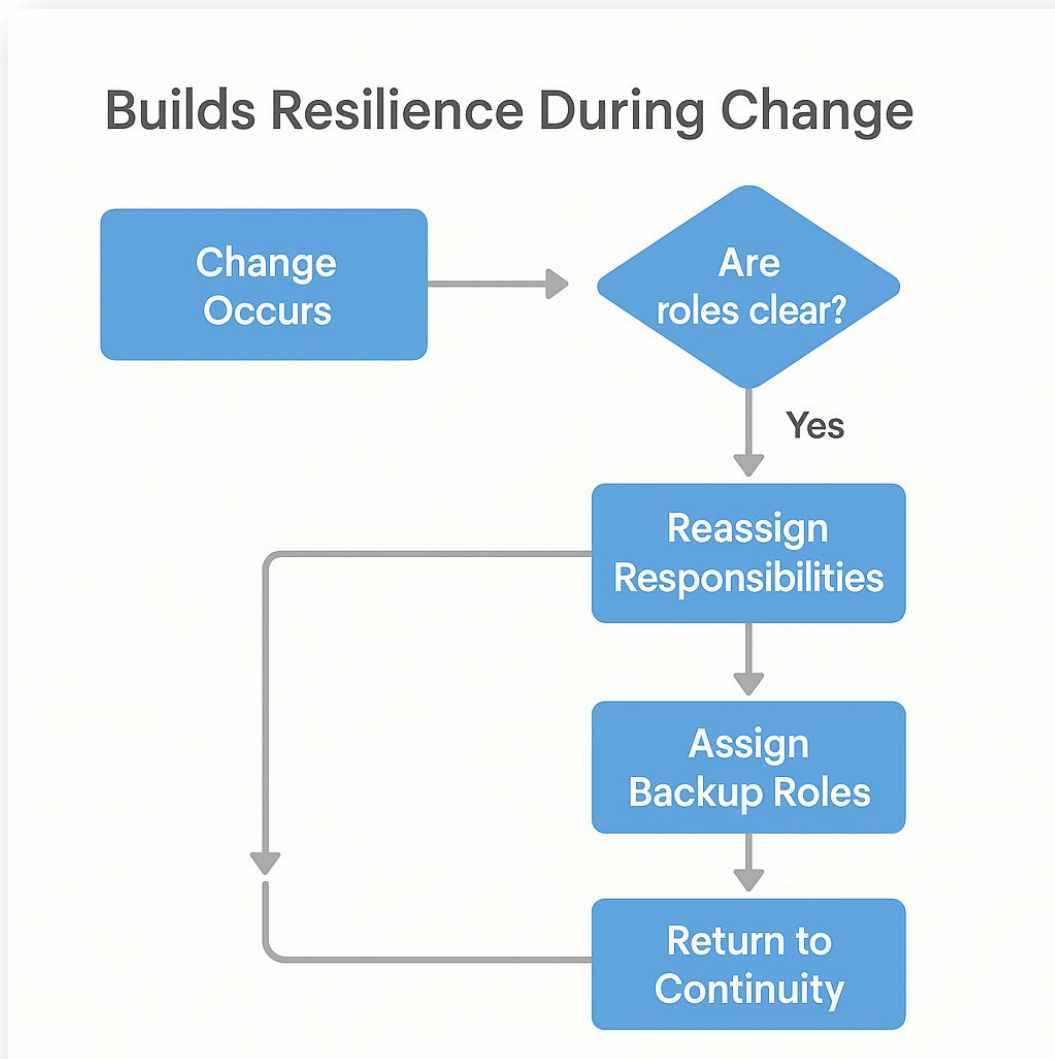
## 5. Conduct Simulation/Stress Test

Choose a scenario: “Founder unavailable,” “Key exec resigns,” “New funding closes.”  
Run a 1-day tabletop to walk through response and reassignment.

## 6. Update Quarterly

Build resilience into your QBR or offsite cadence.

Figure: 6. Builds Resilience During Change



## Closing Thought

You started your company — or are running one — because of a vision. A belief in yourself, and in your people. That is the **core of your culture**.

It's easy to overlook or excuse cultural lapses. But:

### **A. Culture is the only thing that scales without capital.**

It shows up in every decision, every customer interaction, and every moment of conflict — even when no one's watching.

### **B. Founders use culture as a rallying cry early on... then abandon it.**

As hiring ramps up, leaders shift to ops, growth, and fundraising — quietly assuming culture will “hold.”

### **C. Culture is the foundation for trust.**

Without it, org charts become power charts. Delegation becomes risk. Leadership becomes firefighting.

### **D. Excuses replace accountability.**

You've heard it:

“We'll fix culture after the next milestone.”

“We don't have time for that right now.”

But a value delayed is a value denied.

Culture collapse isn't visible — until it's expensive. Turnover. Passivity. Lost customers. Mediocrity. These are symptoms. The root is always cultural erosion.

Preserving culture is an act of design, not memory.

Culture doesn't live in posters.

It lives in behaviors, decisions, roles, and feedback loops. It must be built, measured, and protected as intentionally as any product roadmap. Of the six principles in this guide, Preserve Culture & Values is the quiet engine behind them all. Clarity, Delegation, and Planning all die without culture.

### **Without culture:**

- Clarity becomes control.
- Delegation becomes fear.
- Hiring becomes resentment in a hoodie.

**With culture:**

- Trust flows.
- Ownership rises.
- Structure becomes strategy.

You can clarify responsibilities all day — but if people don't share values like accountability or respect, clarity becomes control. You can delegate — but if the culture punishes mistakes, no one will take ownership. You can plan future hires — but without cultural alignment, you'll onboard resentment in a hoodie.

Remember, culture isn't a soft thing — it is the framework that holds up your organization. It determines:

- Who gets promoted
- What gets praised
- How people disagree
- Whether feedback travels
- What happens under pressure

If these aren't aligned with your values, your company will drift toward survival behavior — not innovation. Ask yourself why you started or chose to lead this company. And yes, money is a factor but people don't join companies. They join cultures.

"It's a great place to work."

"They listen to their people."

These are reflections of culture — not perks, not policies or pay.

*An org chart shows who reports to whom. Culture shows who trusts whom.*

It decides whether people escalate or act, hide or speak, grind or build. And yes — it applies to countries. Countries rise or fracture on shared values.

- When a nation has clarity of purpose and shared norms, it absorbs shock — war, collapse, leadership failure.
- When the cultural glue weakens, even prosperity can't hold it together.

Institutions are the org chart of a nation. **Culture is coherence.**

Without it:



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- Courts still function, but trust evaporates.
- Elections happen, but legitimacy erodes.
- Laws exist, but no one believes in them.

Culture defines *how* those institutions function: with integrity or corruption, with public trust or doubt. If culture erodes, institutions are hollow. They still stand — but people stop believing in them.

The same applies at scale:

- In companies: poor culture = bad handoffs and political fog.
- In countries: poor culture = voter apathy, populism, fragmentation.

*Culture decides whether a citizen says, “I belong here” or “I must protect myself from this place.”*

And just like in startups, it's always postponed:

“We’ll fix division after the election.”

“We can’t talk about values right now.”

But what’s being postponed is **the only thing that holds the center**. Zoom out far enough, and it’s the same story:

- A company
- A country
- A family
- A friendship

All live or die by what’s honored, what’s modeled, and what’s tolerated. So think clearly about your org chart. It’s not just a piece of paper. It’s who and what you are.

A map of trust.

A story of ownership.

A record of belief.

It shows who leads where — and how a team grows without losing its soul. *“Structure doesn’t kill initiative — it protects it.”*

Especially when it’s built to serve people, not just processes.