

The Huddle Pros

CHANGE PRACTITIONER Interview & Vetting Guide

*Five Questions, Probing Follow-Ups & Watchouts
to Help You Look Beyond the First Answer*

SURFACE OR SUBSTANCE?

*A practical tool for organizations evaluating change expertise
and scholar-practitioners preparing to demonstrate depth.*



How to Use This Guide

Change expertise can be difficult to evaluate. Credentials can be impressive. Experience can sound extensive.

Methodologies can appear sophisticated. Transformation stories can be polished. Research terminology can sound authoritative.

But surface signals do not always reveal the substance behind them.

This guide is designed to help organizations move beyond the prepared answer when interviewing or evaluating change practitioners. It can also help scholar-practitioners prepare to clearly demonstrate the depth behind their own practice.

The strongest change expertise does not come from scholarship alone or practice alone.

That is why The Huddle Pros promotes the *scholar-practitioner* model because credible expertise is built by integrating scholarly depth, relevant business experience, and meaningful applied organizational practice.

One of our services is to help organizations vet, evaluate, and select change practitioners and transformation talent using a deeper lens than titles, certifications, or polished résumés alone. Traditional recruiting processes can identify candidates, but they may not fully assess the depth, rigor, and applied expertise required to lead complex organizational transformations effectively.

We also work with practitioners who want to clarify, position, and articulate the depth of their expertise so organizations can better understand the value they bring.

To learn more about these services, contact us at: support@thehuddlepros.com

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Use the Guide in Five Steps

1. Ask the question without explaining what you are looking for.
2. Listen to the initial answer before helping or redirecting.
3. Use the probing questions to move beyond a rehearsed response.
4. Look for evidence that substantiates important claims.
5. Pay attention to how the practitioner responds when challenged.

PURPOSE

The objective is not to catch someone giving a “wrong” answer. It is to understand how they think, what their expertise is built on, where its boundaries are, and whether their knowledge holds up when the conversation moves beyond the surface.

Question 1

“Research shows that 70% of organizational changes fail. Why do you think the failure rate remains so high?”

What You Are Really Evaluating

Does the practitioner automatically accept the premise, or question it?

The familiar 70% organizational-change failure rate has been repeated for decades, yet Hughes (2011) found no valid and reliable empirical evidence supporting the claim. A strong response should therefore demonstrate more than knowledge of common reasons organizational transformations struggle. It should demonstrate critical thinking and research literacy.

Probe Deeper

- ☐ What evidence supports the 70% figure?
- ☐ Are you familiar with any scholarly analysis of that claim?
- ☐ Why might a universal organizational-change failure rate be methodologically difficult to establish?
- ☐ How would you define success for an organizational transformation?
- ☐ What would constitute failure? What would constitute partial success?
- ☐ How would you distinguish implementation success from sustained success?
- ☐ When would you measure the result—at go-live, 90 days later, one year later?
- ☐ Whose perspective should determine whether the transformation succeeded?
- ☐ Would your definition change depending on the type of organizational transformation?
- ☐ What evidence would cause you to change your current view?

Look for Substance

- ☐ The lack of reliable empirical support for a universal 70% failure rate.
- ☐ Hughes (2011) or related scholarship.
- ☐ Differences in how organizational change is defined.
- ☐ Measurement problems, time horizons, stakeholder perspectives, and organizational context.
- ☐ The distinction between correlation, interpretation, and causation.



WATCH-OUT

Do not stop simply because the practitioner says, “The 70% statistic is a myth.” That answer can be memorized too. Ask them to explain why. Someone with genuine depth should be able to move beyond the conclusion and discuss the research and measurement problems underlying it.

VERIFICATION POINT

If the practitioner repeatedly refers to “research,” ask: “What research would you recommend we read to evaluate that claim independently?” A strong practitioner should be comfortable pointing you toward evidence rather than asking you to rely solely on their interpretation of it.

Question 2

“What relevant education, certifications, experience, and evidence qualify you to lead this organizational transformation?”

What You Are Really Evaluating

What is the expertise actually built on? Education, certifications, professional experience, business experience, research knowledge, and methodology training can all contribute to expertise. They are not interchangeable.

A certification may teach a methodology. Advanced graduate education may develop deeper theoretical and research literacy. Doctoral preparation may include designing rigorous research and contributing original knowledge. Professional experience can develop judgment. Business experience provides exposure to the operational, financial, political, strategic, and human realities of organizational life.

Probe Deeper

- ☐ What was your education actually in, and how does it inform this work?
- ☐ What research-methodology preparation have you had?
- ☐ What did each certification actually require?
- ☐ Which certifications or certificates involved assessment of competence versus attendance or course completion?
- ☐ What kinds of organizations have you worked inside, not simply advised?
- ☐ What business responsibilities have you personally held?
- ☐ What types of organizational transformations have you led, and at what scale?
- ☐ Were you advising, supporting, managing, or directly accountable?
- ☐ What decisions did you personally own?
- ☐ How have you kept your knowledge current?
- ☐ What have you changed your mind about during your career?
- ☐ Which parts of your practice come from research, theory, professional experience, or proprietary methods?

Look for Substance

A strong scholar-practitioner should be able to distinguish statements such as:

- ☐ “Research suggests...”
- ☐ “Theory proposes...”
- ☐ “In my experience...”
- ☐ “Our internal data indicate...”
- ☐ “Our methodology assumes...”

Those statements represent different forms of evidence. Depth includes knowing the difference.



WATCH-OUTS

Be cautious when years of experience substitute for explaining what the person actually did; certifications are presented as proof of mastery; global experience that cannot be translated into specific accountability; expertise in another discipline is treated as automatic qualification to advise complex organizations; or academic credentials are extensive but meaningful business experience is limited.

A Gartner survey, proprietary benchmark, internal employee survey, or consulting study may provide useful information. But data existing does not automatically make it rigorous empirical research, nor does it automatically establish causation or generalizability. Reference : *Not All Research Is the Same* page 5 to learn more.

VERIFICATION POINTS

Where appropriate, verify degrees and fields of study, degree completion status, certifications and their requirements, employment history, actual titles and responsibilities, the size and scope of transformations, personal accountability, global experience claims, and references from people who observed the work directly. Do not verify only that the practitioner was present. Verify what they were responsible for.

Not All Research Is the Same

When someone says an approach is “research-based,” ask what they mean by research.

A Gartner survey, proprietary consulting benchmark, internal employee survey, case study, peer-reviewed academic study, systematic review, and meta-analysis are all sources of information but they are **not interchangeable**, and they do not provide the same level or type of evidence.

For example, a proprietary industry survey may provide valuable insight into what a group of organizations or executives reported at a particular point in time. But depending on how participants were selected, how questions were written, how outcomes were measured, and how much of the methodology is available for independent review, the findings may not tell us whether one factor **caused** another or whether the same findings would apply across other organizations, industries, or populations.

Peer-reviewed academic research is typically subjected to greater methodological scrutiny and independent review, but even peer review does not automatically make a study strong. Study design, sample size, measurement quality, limitations, replication, and the broader body of evidence still matter.

This is why credible practitioners should be able to distinguish among **industry data, organizational data, professional experience, theory, and scientific evidence**—and explain what each source can and cannot legitimately support.

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The question is not simply, “Do you have research?”

The better question is, “What kind of evidence do you have, how strong is it, and what does it actually allow us to conclude?”

Need help evaluating the evidence behind a practitioner, methodology, or proposed organizational intervention? **The Huddle Pros can help organizations look beyond the research-based label and examine what the evidence actually supports. Contact support@thehuddlepros.com to learn more.**



Question 3

“Walk me through an organizational transformation you personally helped lead. What did you own, what worked, what failed, and what would you do differently?”

What You Are Really Evaluating

Can the practitioner move beyond a polished transformation story and demonstrate real accountability, reflection, and learning? Words such as led, supported, partnered, managed, and advised can conceal very different levels of responsibility. Listen especially closely to the difference between “we” and “I.”

Probe Deeper

- ☐ What did you personally own? Which decisions were yours?
- ☐ What were you accountable for?
- ☐ What was the first indication that something was not working?
- ☐ What surprised you?
- ☐ Who disagreed with your recommendation?
- ☐ What did they see that you initially did not?
- ☐ What evidence caused you to change your mind?
- ☐ What did you change as a result?
- ☐ Which outcome fell short of expectations?
- ☐ What happened 30, 90, and 180 days after implementation?
- ☐ What workarounds or unintended consequences emerged?
- ☐ What would an executive sponsor say about your contribution?
- ☐ What would a frontline employee affected by the transformation say?
- ☐ What would you do differently if you led the same transformation today?



Look for Substance

- ☐ Clear personal accountability.
- ☐ Specific decisions and measurable outcomes.
- ☐ Unexpected consequences and evidence that changed the practitioner’s thinking.
- ☐ Adaptation, mistakes, lessons learned, and sustained outcomes rather than launch activities alone.

Ideally, a change practitioner has enough depth to understand both worlds, having been accountable for the consequences of implemented transformations, not simply advising others on what should be done.

WATCH-OUTS

Be cautious when every transformation was a success; responsibility remains hidden behind “we”; the practitioner lists standard change activities instead of outcomes; no recommendation ever failed; no leader ever disagreed; no unexpected employee response occurred; or the story ends at implementation. Real organizational transformation is rarely that clean.

VERIFICATION POINTS

For significant claims, ask whether the practitioner can provide outcome measures, anonymized artifacts, dashboards or evaluation approaches, implementation evidence, an executive sponsor reference, an implementation-team reference, and—where appropriate—someone closer to the workforce affected by the change. Candidate-selected references are not conclusive, but comparing accounts across organizational levels can make exaggerated stories more difficult to sustain.

Question 4

“How does your approach meaningfully differ from conventional change methods and when would you NOT use it?”

What You Are Really Evaluating

Is the methodology genuinely different or primarily differentiated through branding? And does the practitioner understand its boundaries? Almost anyone can describe an approach as people-centered, agile, evidence-based, human-centered, customized, data-driven, or collaborative. Those descriptions tell you little unless the practitioner can explain what they actually do differently.

Probe Deeper

- ☐ What specifically happens differently because you use this approach?
- ☐ What would I observe you doing that I would not see in a conventional approach?
- ☐ What research or theory informs it?
- ☐ Which elements are your own adaptation? Which are proprietary?
- ☐ What assumptions does the approach make?
- ☐ What evidence supports those assumptions? What evidence might challenge them?
- ☐ What are the approach's limitations?
- ☐ When would you not recommend using it?
- ☐ When would another methodology be more appropriate?
- ☐ What part of your approach have you modified over time, and why?
- ☐ How do you account for organizational context?
- ☐ How would you adapt your approach to our situation?
- ☐ What would cause you to abandon your original plan?



PLAIN-LANGUAGE TEST

If sophisticated terminology is used, ask: “Explain that to us in plain language.” Then ask: “Tell us what that concept changes in practice.”

Look for Substance

- ☐ The theoretical foundation and practical application.
- ☐ The methodology's differentiators, underlying assumptions, and limitations.
- ☐ Where the evidence is strong and where it is limited.
- ☐ When another approach may be better.

A strong scholar-practitioner should understand the methodology well enough not to become trapped by it.

WATCH-OUTS

Be cautious of “It works everywhere,” “Our methodology is proven,” proprietary terminology layered over familiar activities, academic language that cannot be translated into practical action, claims of being “evidence-based” without identifiable evidence, an inability to describe limitations, or the same solution repeatedly prescribed to very different organizational problems.

VERIFICATION POINTS

Give the practitioner an unfamiliar scenario and ask: “Based only on what you know so far, how would you begin approaching this situation? What would you need to learn before recommending an intervention?” Substance often appears not in how quickly someone recommends a solution, but in what they know they still need to understand.

Question 5

“When this engagement ends, what should our organization be able to do without you?”

What You Are Really Evaluating

Is the practitioner building organizational capability or consultant dependence? A successful engagement should leave behind more deliverables. It should leave behind knowledge, judgment, tools, confidence, and internal capability.

Probe Deeper

- ☐ What should our employees know at the end that they do not know today?
- ☐ What should our leaders be able to do independently?
- ☐ Which tools will remain with us, and who inside the organization will own them?
- ☐ What knowledge will be transferred? What will remain proprietary?
- ☐ How will our internal people learn to interpret the data?
- ☐ How will we know capability transfer has occurred?
- ☐ What decisions should we be able to make without calling you?
- ☐ How would we lead a similar transformation next year without bringing back the same external team?
- ☐ What should we no longer need you for once this engagement succeeds?
- ☐ When would you recommend that we bring external expertise back in?

Look for Substance

- ☐ Internal judgment and analytical capability.
- ☐ Problem-solving capacity and decision-making confidence.
- ☐ Measurement capability and knowledge transfer.
- ☐ Tools employees understand and ownership inside the organization.
- ☐ The ability to adapt the approach independently.



WATCH-OUTS

Be cautious when the organization cannot use important tools without the consultant; interpretation remains dependent on proprietary expertise; employees receive deliverables but little knowledge transfer; the engagement repeatedly creates the next engagement; or no one can clearly explain what the organization will be able to do differently after the consultant leaves.

Dependence should not be the deliverable.

VERIFICATION POINT

Ask to see capability transfer explicitly reflected in the proposed scope of work. If developing internal capability is truly part of the engagement, it should appear in deliverables, roles and responsibilities, knowledge-transfer activities, measures of success, and transformation or handoff plans.

The Second Answer Often Matters More Than the First

A polished first answer tells you what the practitioner prepared to say. The next question begins to reveal how they actually think.

Keep going.

- ☐ How do you know?
- ☐ What evidence supports that?
- ☐ What are the limitations?
- ☐ What would challenge your conclusion?
- ☐ What did you get wrong?
- ☐ What changed your mind?
- ☐ Show me.
- ☐ What would happen if the opposite were true?

Then notice what happens. Do they become defensive or curious? Do they retreat into jargon or explain more clearly? Do they immediately prescribe or ask better questions? Do they present uncertainty as weakness or recognize where uncertainty genuinely exists? Do they defend their methodology or adapt their thinking?

**Surface can survive the first question.
Substance should survive the next one.**



WATCH OUT

Watch How They Handle Challenge

Look beyond the interview. Review **how the practitioner responds when their ideas are respectfully challenged on LinkedIn or other professional platforms.**

Do they become condescending, dismissive, personal, or combative? Do they shut down disagreement or become curious and engage with the substance of the question?

Public behavior does not tell you everything about a person, but **repeated patterns can offer important clues about intellectual humility, openness to dissent, emotional regulation, and the psychological safety they may create when others disagree with them.**

Expertise should be able to withstand respectful scrutiny without attacking the person asking the question.

Quick Interview Scorecard

Use this as a conversation aid not as a mechanical hiring formula. Rate each area from 1 (limited evidence) to 5 (strong evidence).

Dimension	What You Are Evaluating	Rating
Critical Thinking	Questions assumptions; examines premises; avoids unsupported certainty	1 2 3 4 5
Research Literacy	Understands evidence quality, methodology, limitations, and competing findings	1 2 3 4 5
Scholarly Depth	Can connect research and theory to practice rather than merely naming sources	1 2 3 4 5
Relevant Business Experience	Understands strategy, operations, financial realities, leadership, and organizational context	1 2 3 4 5
Applied Accountability	Has personally owned meaningful parts of organizational transformations and their consequences	1 2 3 4 5
Reflective Practice	Can discuss failure, uncertainty, lessons learned, and changes in thinking	1 2 3 4 5
Methodological Flexibility	Understands assumptions and limitations; adapts rather than forcing a model	1 2 3 4 5
Evidence Discipline	Distinguishes research, theory, benchmarks, proprietary data, experience, and opinion	1 2 3 4 5
Capability Transfer	Intentionally leaves knowledge, judgment, tools, and ownership inside the organization	1 2 3 4 5
Overall Substance	Expertise remains credible as questions become deeper and less rehearsed	1 2 3 4 5



Interview Notes & Verification

Use this page to capture the evidence behind the answers not just your impressions of the interview.

Strongest evidence of substance:

Areas requiring further verification:

Claims or credentials to verify:

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Questions for follow-up:



A Final Reminder

The objective is not to hire the person with the most degrees, the most certifications, the longest résumé, the largest consulting brand behind them, or the person who can quote the most research.

For complex organizational transformation, look for the integration of scholarship, relevant business experience, and meaningful applied practice - the scholar-practitioner.

The strongest scholar-practitioners can move among all three. They can evaluate evidence without becoming trapped in theory. They can draw on experience without mistaking personal experience for universal truth. They can use methodologies without allowing the methodology to dictate the problem. They can operate inside the realities of business while still questioning assumptions that everyone else has accepted.

And they can help your organization become more capable because they were there, not more dependent after they leave.

FLIP THE SCRIPT.

Do not simply ask whether a change practitioner sounds knowledgeable.

Ask whether their knowledge can survive the next question.



Ready to Look Beyond the Surface?

Whether you are an organization seeking stronger transformation talent or a practitioner ready to distinguish yourself in a crowded field, **The Huddle Pros can help.**

One service we provide is enabling organizations to vet, evaluate, and select practitioners and firms with the depth, judgment, and experience to lead complex transformations.

In addition, we help practitioners **clarify their expertise, strengthen their positioning, and articulate what truly differentiates them.**

We also offer flexible ways to engage, including self-service resources, practical tools, and courses, so organizations and practitioners can choose the level of support that fits their needs, budget, and internal capabilities.

Whether you need targeted guidance or a more comprehensive partnership, we can meet you where you are.

To learn more, contact support@thehuddlepros.com

Reference

Hughes, M. (2011). Do 70 percent of all organizational change initiatives really fail? Journal of Change Management, 11(4), 451–464. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2011.630506>