

The Struggle [of Change] Is Real

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Most of us are aware that change is the one constant in life, especially in business. With technology evolving at warp speed and an ever-present and ever-growing list of industry disruptors, transformation is the new normal.

As the gap between technology and business widens, the opening fosters ways for new, innovative companies to upend industries. Companies must be willing to perpetually change or evolve rather than be beholden to a transformation effort with start and end dates.

While business articles offer guidance on the execution of complex, process-driven mitigation plans for this new environment, often missing in the literature is the need for a strategy that effectively addresses the human side of change.

To Transform Is Human

Focusing on change solely from a mechanical or process-driven approach causes us to lose sight of its inherent paradox: Change exacts a toll on the people who are critical to its execution. In June 2018, Gagen MacDonald surveyed participants at the Conference Board's annual Change and Transformation conference. They were asked about their common frustration driving business transformation and their most anticipated challenge in driving business transformation over the next five years. Respondents said their primary frustration was "navigating change fatigue" and their most anticipated challenge was "employees becoming disengaged and exhausted." In this environment of constant change, organizations are worn out.

How can organizations execute complex transformations while battling change fatigue? There's no process map, project plan, or app for it, but there are [Three Things That Change Everything](#). Executing these three components—a compelling story, committed leadership, and an intentional road map—can effectively shift an organization from an exhausted state to an energetic one that propels a company forward.

Compelling Story

Neuroscience tells us that people respond to a narrative more than other communication. [Paul Zak](#), founding director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies and professor of psychology, economics, and management at Claremont Graduate University, summarizes

that the chemical connection between our brains and stories is powerful enough to influence our emotions, change our behaviors, and spur us to action.

While storytelling has become the darling of many corporate functions, a story itself is not necessarily enough to alter a worldview and change behavior. Many organizations develop corporate narratives that fall flat because they are simply key messages that fail to grip the hearts and minds of employees (and thereby compel them to action).

A compelling story:

- acknowledges the current situation
- taps into individual and organizational purpose
- allows employees to see themselves within the narrative.

When employees are connected to a company's story through their hearts and minds, they are more engaged and willing to endure the turbulence of change.

Committed Leadership

Company leaders are the bridge between what an organization says and what it means. They are the translators helping employees understand how to connect company purpose to their work and achieve their professional goals. Fueling long-term change requires leaders who are confident and committed to the company's strategic direction.

A committed leader:

- maintains constant communication using face-to-face as a primary channel
- builds trust by maintaining an open environment to discuss company changes
- invites ownership of change outcomes through participation rather than commanding allegiance.

Aligning and equipping leaders to bring to life a company's narrative and purpose helps drive consistent engagement across an organization.

Intentional Road Map

Successful change initiatives occur when astute project planning meets persuasion and inspiration. People are complex in motivations, aspirations, and needs; rallying them to execute changes, whether large or small, is no easy feat. It requires delineating an intentional road map that gives clarity and insight into what is happening, why, when, and how. This road map must encompass a realistic and aligned approach for activating experience touchpoints among executive leaders, people managers, and employees. This harmonized approach is vital for people to effectively navigate, execute, and sustain change.

An intentional road map:

- flexibly allows for recalibration
- focuses on the employee experience
- ensures every activity works in tandem and builds on one another.

Conclusion

Change initiatives are often launched as high-profile projects but fall short of organizations' objectives. Failure to address the human elements of transformation can expose companies to the risk of change fatigue. Fueling organizational energy is critical to driving sustained outcomes and, ultimately, success for any transformation. We can address organizational energy by introducing the Three Things That Change Everything. When successfully aligned, these capabilities allow an organization to unleash its potential.