

Why Change Management Fails: Principles and Outcomes



Purpose: diagnose and prevent change failure — don't blame resistant people



Core premise: failures are systemic and predictable — sponsorship, clarity, capacity, measurement



Learning outcomes: spot failure patterns, apply evidence-based principles, define credible metrics



Roadmap: evidence, root causes, principles, sponsor role, resistance, fatigue, measurement, cases



Working agreement: test your own initiative against each principle as we go



What the Failure Numbers Really Mean



- Headline rates range from ~37% to ~84% — definitions differ, not just performance
- The famous '70% failure' figure is a measurement artifact, not a universal parameter
- Defined rigorously, failure prevalence runs roughly 30% to 65%+
- About 30% fully succeed, ~50% deliver fragile value, ~20% collapse
- Sponsors: declare which failure you are preventing, and how it will be measured



The Cost When Change Fails

PEOPLE
PROGRESS
POSSIBILITIES

Financial Cost



Average digital transformation costs \$10.9M; failures can triple budgets (\$86M to \$290M)



Four failure modes: missed objectives, no measurable effect, non-sustainment, termination

Human Cost



Employees report burnout (55%), workload spikes (31%), dissatisfaction (53%), turnover (45%)



Leaders report complexity, added cost, lost productivity and innovation, eroded confidence



Trust is the hidden balance sheet:
each failure makes the next change harder

Root Causes: Why Change Management Fails

STRONGER CHANGE
BUILDS BRIGHTER TOMORROW >>



Absent, passive, or delegated sponsorship — the most consistently cited failure factor



Unclear 'why': goals not linked to strategy or day-to-day metrics; 64% start without a roadmap



Underestimated people side: 74% cite poor change management, yet 83% agree people matter



Weak engagement and no feedback channels drive employee-cited failure



Fatigue treated as attitude, not capacity

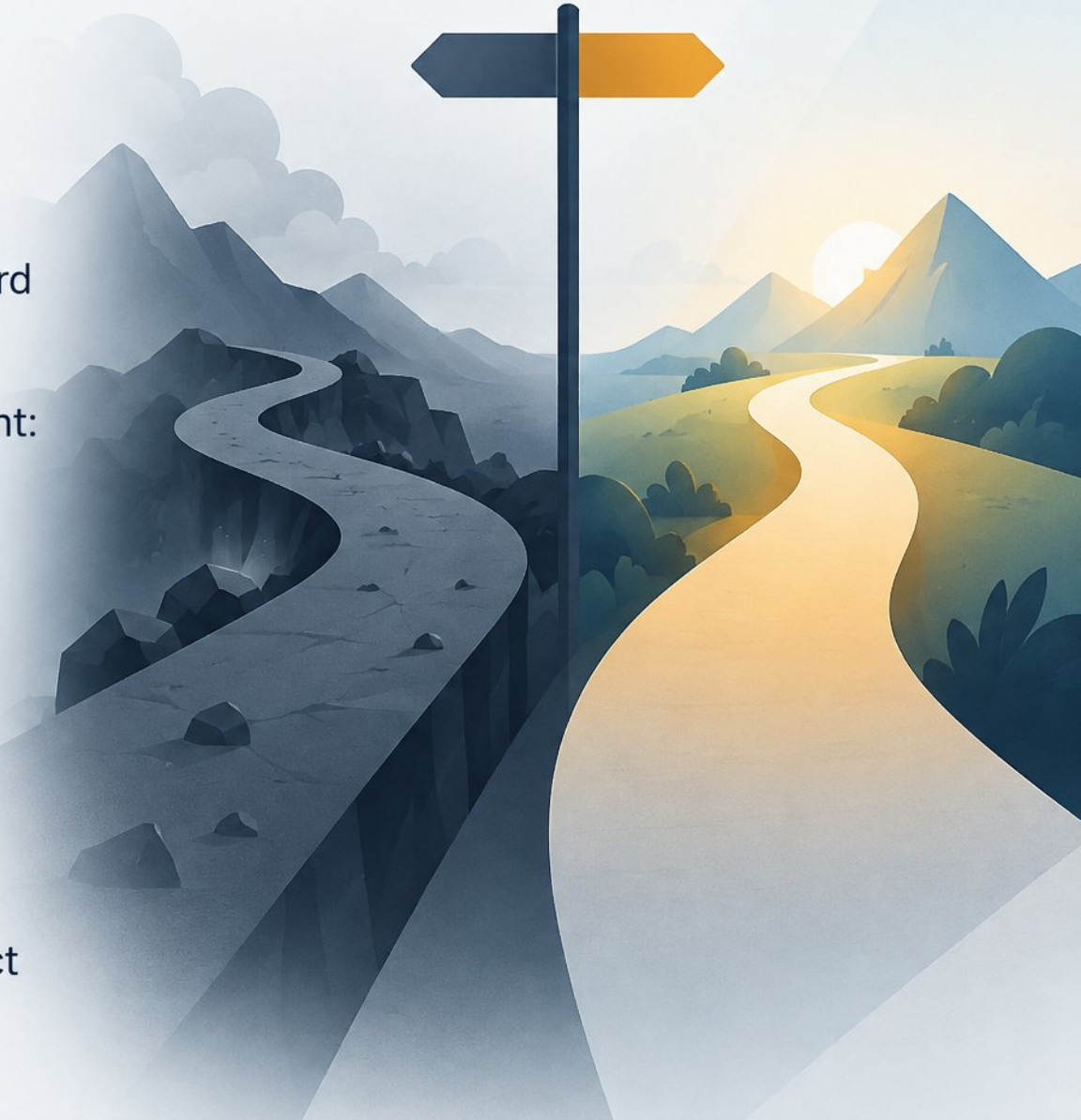


Change treated as a finite project — gains quietly reverse

CHANGE PROGRAM

Principles That Separate Success from Failure

- Active, visible senior sponsorship: the #1 success factor, by 3-to-1
- A clear, quantified case for change, tied to strategy and existing metrics
- Change management integrated with delivery — not bolted on afterward
- Poor change management: ~15% hit targets; excellent change management: ~93%
- Effective communication triples success odds; credible messaging roughly doubles them
- Build readiness and capability before go-live, reinforce after
- No universal formula — tailor to structure, networks, scale, and impact



The Sponsor's Role: Why Passive Sponsorship Fails

VISIBLE LEADERSHIP TURNS CHANGE INTO REAL PROGRESS



Accountabilities

legitimize the change, secure resources, build a coalition, communicate, remove barriers



Failure modes

sponsor saturation, role disconnect (support $\neq$ sponsorship), missing knowledge or coaching



Without visible leadership and communication, change is 5.5x more likely to fail



Cadence

30-minute monthly check-in on people data, one-page scorecard, standing decision forum



Hold sponsors accountable to clear objectives and their own KPIs — coach upward

STRONG SPONSORSHIP
ENABLES LASTING CHANGE



COMMON FAILURE MODES



Sponsor saturation



Role disconnect
(support $\neq$ sponsorship)



Missing knowledge
or coaching

PEOPLE CHANGE
TOMORROW

Resistance and Readiness:

Diagnose Before You Respond



Resistance is information:

top drivers are job-security fear (78%) and poor communication (65%)



Responses span proactivity, acceptance, resistance, and often-missed disengagement



Readiness dimensions:

awareness, capability, willingness, capacity — measure 4–6 weeks pre-go-live



Participative approaches and structured training correlate with ~40% higher change success



Normalize the mid-implementation dip: budget most support for months 6–18, not weeks 1–6



Change Fatigue and the Manager Bottleneck



Capacity is the constraint: employees absorb 1–2 major changes a year; leaders expect 3–4



Change fatigue is depletion, not defiance — restore energy, don't persuade



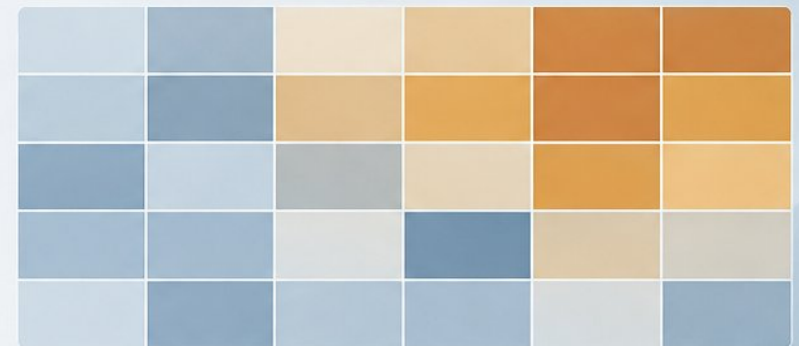
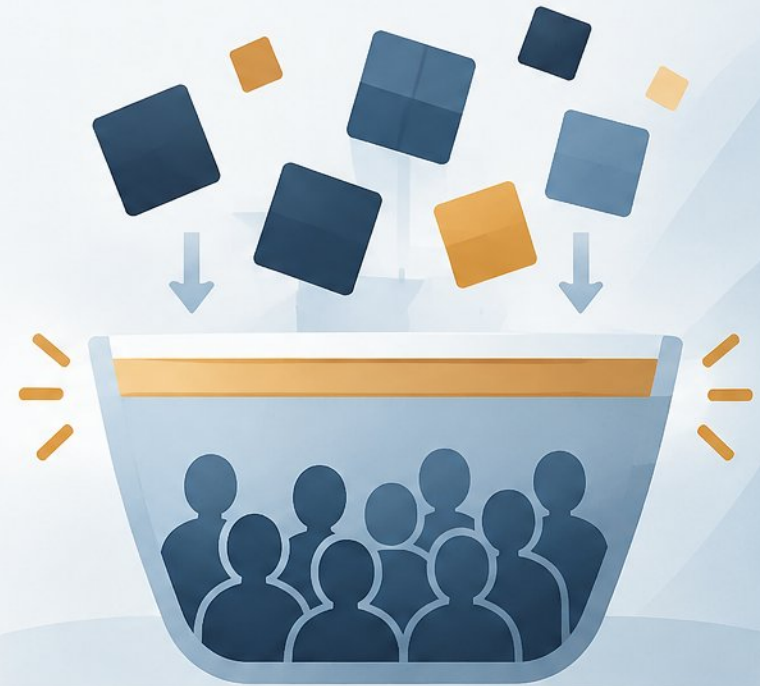
Watch the signals: rising errors, last-minute absences, slower output, fewer ideas, collaboration breakdown



Managers are the translation layer; only ~41% will change their own behavior to sponsor change



Pace the portfolio: heatmaps, quarterly change-load reviews, sequencing before launching anything new



Measuring Outcomes: What Success Actually Looks Like

- Measure four families: usage, proficiency, sustainment, and business outcome
- Build a ladder of evidence: engagement, learning, behavior, then outcomes
- Adoption is necessary but not sufficient — track workarounds, rework, time-to-complete
- Re-measure at 30, 90, and 180 days; track reversion rate
- Define baseline, target, owner, and cadence before launch
- Avoid vanity metrics and overstate-free attribution



Case Lessons: Anatomy of a Failed Change and a Recovery

CQC (UK)



failed organizational transformation took the IT system with it

- Diluted clinical leadership, 'toxic positivity', contingent labor, constrained user testing

Manitoba Public Insurance Project Nova



\$86M grew to \$290M before cancellation

- Ineffective governance, overlooked requirements, unrealistic timelines, leadership churn

Birmingham City Council ERP



training didn't match the system, late engagement; bankruptcy in 2023

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Common thread: technical failure is a visible artifact of organizational failure



Recovery:

accepted target operating model, clear decision rights, 12–24 month increments, feedback loops

Diagnostic: Score Your Own Change Before Launch



Sponsorship test: active and visible sponsor, coalition built, role documented with cadence



Clarity test: every manager can state the why, quantified goal, and six-month success



Readiness test: awareness, capability, willingness, capacity — measured by segment, not aggregate



Capacity test: locate initiative on the change heatmap; decide what to stop or delay



Measurement test: 3–5 adoption KPIs, owners, and post-go-live re-measurement dates named



Score results:

separate "ready to launch" from "fix the foundation first"

"ready to launch"

"fix the foundation first"

Minimum Viable Change Plan

PEOPLE | PLANS | PROGRESS



FROM AWARENESS
TO LASTING CHANGE

Role-Specific Next Steps: Change Leads, Sponsors, Managers



Change leads

- **Change leads:** coach upward with a success scorecard, one-page updates, and ready-to-use talking points



Sponsors

- **Sponsors:** run a 30-minute success-definition session early and deliver visible communications only you can



Managers

- **Managers:** name the three or four behaviors the benefit depends on, then observe and coach them



- **All three:** agree on your single largest risk and who owns the response



- **Avoid enterprise failure modes:** change capability not treated as its own change, undefined future state, and a single-tool approach

Key Takeaways and 30-Day Commitments



Failure is predictable — if you define which failure you're preventing



Four non-negotiables: quantified why, visible sponsor, equipped managers, pre-launch measures



Fatigue is a capacity problem — pace the portfolio deliberately



Measure at go-live and at 30, 90, and 180 days



Commit within 30 days: one diagnostic action, one measurement action

Four Non-Negotiables



quantified why



visible sponsor



equipped managers



pre-launch measures



My 30-Day Commitment

FROM INSIGHT
TO LASTING CHANGE

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