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# Special Briefing

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Mastering Change:  
**Why Organizational Change Fails**  
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*There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Have you experienced a failed change lately? Been a part of a team or an organization that attempted something different...and failed?

We've all seen attempts at change bomb. What happens to scuttle well-intentioned effort? The following are some of the most common reasons I've identified why organizational change fails. You can use the list for diagnostic purposes, or to prevent mistakes in future attempts at change.

## 1. Misstarts

A misstart occurs when a change is ill-advised, hastily implemented or attempted without sufficient commitment. This can be a killer of leadership credibility.

## 2. Making change an option

When leadership commits to a change, the message must be that the change is not an option. But the message that often comes across is "We'd like you to change, we're asking you to change, we implore you to change, please change..." Whenever people have the option not to change, they won't.

## 3. A focus only on process

Leaders can get so caught up on planning and managing the process that they don't notice that no tangible results are being achieved. The activity becomes more important than the results.

## 4. A focus only on results

This stems from a belief that the end justifies any means. Organizations tend to fail miserably in this regard: they downplay or ignore the human pain of change. It is this insensitivity to



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employees' feelings that not only prevents the change but destroys morale and loyalty in the process.

## **5. Not involving those expected to implement the change**

A great deal of resentment is aroused when management announces a change and then mandates the specifics of implementation. Employees need to be involved in two ways. First, their input and suggestions should be solicited when planning the change. Secondly, after a change has been committed to, they should be involved in determining the means. Leadership needs to communicate, "Here's what must happen. How do you think it can best be done?"

## **6. Delegated to "outsiders"**

Change is an inside job. Although outsiders like consultants might provide valuable ideas and input, people inside the systems must accept responsibility for the change. Scapegoating and passing the buck is not an option.

## **7. No change in reward system**

If you keep rewarding employees for what they've always done, you'll keep getting what you've always gotten. Make sure that rewards, recognition and compensation are adjusted for the desired change.

## **8. Leadership doesn't walk the talk**

For change to happen, everybody involved must buy-in. Leadership, however, must take the first steps. Change is aborted whenever leadership doesn't demonstrate the same commitment they expect from others.

## **9. Wrong size**

In this instance, the change is too massive to be achievable or too small to be significant. Like a good goal, a change program should be neither too easy nor too impossible.



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## 10. No follow-through

The best planning is worthless if not implemented, monitored and carried out. Responsibility must be clearly defined for making sure that follow-through is timely and intense.

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