

# Why Change Management Initiatives Fail in the Life Science Industry and How to Overcome the Barriers

Successful Change Management: An Inside Job



VERISTA

# Leaders driving mission-critical and operational excellence projects grapple with the fact that ~ 70% of change management efforts fail.

This statistic holds regardless of the change model used, or the type of change initiative. (1) (6) While Verista's work focuses on systems, validation, compliance, quality and IT initiatives, we have seen this over and over again. The good news is there are some common threads and solutions that can be implemented to ensure program success and employee satisfaction.

In client engagements we often find that companies who excel at the technology and process elements of organizational change management, do not take into consideration the "people" part of this important triad. The result is that projects are unable to gain the necessary traction for project success and sustainability. This whitepaper provides insights and best practices to overcome this misstep by so many companies.

## Why Transformation Projects Fail

The reasons cited for this discouraging statistic vary, yet constant and often competing initiatives can lead to change exhaustion and may foster a subconscious aversion to change. (1)(13) This subconscious aversion to change works as a subtle undermining force multiplier within corporate cultures and the individuals who contribute to them. The impact of these factors often spell trouble for projects from the start and stall the timely completion of necessary transformation.

## Many Studies Point to 2 Co-Contributing Causes of Failure:



**While some theorize success hinges on identifying key milestones and celebrating small wins along the way, these theories do not to address the cumulative effects of constant change on individuals.** (1)(13) When left unacknowledged and unmanaged, this oversight threatens the sustainability of initiatives and is likely a contributing factor to employee turnover. The impact of constant change for those who are not given tools to manage it plays out in many dynamics, causing friction and draining the creativity from a

companies' best and brightest employees. It works to subtly undermine the spirit of innovation, which is critical for organizations trying to navigate the ongoing cycles of disruption when implementing new tools and processes and channeling them into new ways of working. The impact of constant change on individuals, if left unaddressed, accumulates over time and, like muscle memory, is likely to be triggered during the next change initiative.

## **Human Physiology and the Connection to Program Failure...and Success**

Making the leap to successful organizational transformations requires a look into human physiology and the limbic system. From this perspective, change agents can gain an understanding of how the primitive brain reacts to change. And with this insight, leaders can learn to lift projects and teams out of the mire of blame and spiraling loops of “this is the way we have always done it” narratives which only serve to keep people and teams stuck.

Current research in neuroscience is shedding new light on how our brains are wired and the biochemical cascade which is set off when we have an emotional response. **Our brains are wired to fear change.** (16) Through this understanding, we can address the mix of biochemistry and muscle memory which drives subconscious human behavior. (17) When we overlay human behavior onto organizational behavior (Table 1), the similarities and impacts are unmistakable. Such a perspective offers insight into how human emotion works as a biochemical hijacking of behavior at a subconscious level.

If strategies for assisting people with the stresses of the change are not addressed, survival behaviors individuals may use to cope can stall the change initiatives. Providing a framework is not only vital to organizational evolution, but also for individuals to thrive in dynamic environments.

As Deming said in *Out of the Crisis*, “the job of a leader is to accomplish transformation of his organization.” So, while companies excel at process and technology, they must incorporate a plan for the piece of this triad.

## **Brain Agility and Mindfulness**

Thousands of articles on the topic of leadership and mindfulness have been published and discuss their findings on human lifespan learning and brain plasticity. Some demonstrate the complex nature of the human mind/body, and detail how human emotions and the fight or flight response have evolved to set off biochemical responses. Of importance is how these biochemical events drive neural responses and play a key subconscious and often detrimental role in human behavior.

While the fight or flight response is very useful for survival, it can impair one's ability to focus and respond in ways which contribute to creative solutions. It is possible to learn mindfulness techniques which allow us to move past the fight or flight response and open the possibilities of higher-level thinking and more successful, collaborative problem-solving behaviors. Brain agility assists seeing a single problem from different angles and holds open the possibilities offered by different perspectives or points of view.

The sympathetic nervous system governs the fight or flight response, and this biochemically hijacks the ability for the human brain to think creatively. Once this biochemical cascade occurs it is not possible to mitigate the less desirable impacts of stress. It is possible, however, to train our minds to navigate situations effectively from the parasympathetic, which fosters a centered and neutral perspective and contributes to long range planning read as the ability to generate sustainable solutions to issues.

## Organizational Systems Mirror the Human Nervous System





Human Body Component	Human Function	Organizational Equivalent
 <b>The central nervous system</b>	Integrates information from all parts of the body and coordinates activity	Senior executive team and direct management functions
 <b>The parasympathetic nervous system</b>	Controls internal functions under normal conditions	Company operating procedures
 <b>The sympathetic nervous system</b>	Controls internal functions under stressful conditions	Company policies and guidelines
 <b>The peripheral nervous system</b>	Correlates and responds to external stimuli	Data from business units and customers

Table 1: Organizational Systems Mirror the Human Nervous System

## Strategies for Organizational Change

Many organizations are harnessing these insights and teaching people ways to govern the body with breath and other techniques which can mitigate the impacts of this biochemical soup of which we are largely unaware. The Navy and other branches teach their elite teams how to acknowledge the fears we all subconsciously hold onto. They use techniques like mindfulness to improve individual as well as team performance. (17)

Planning for successful organizational change initiatives should seek to foster self-awareness in change champions and strive to take the opportunity to walk thru how change impacts us as individuals who make up the organization. Mindfulness techniques can be learned and included in training programs. Corporate cultures seeking to bring out the best in the talent they've attracted can begin to integrate change awareness before change management initiatives, which supports overall organizational excellence.

**The key takeaway in planning for any successful change initiative is recognizing that change is first and fundamentally an inside job.** Accepting this fact and opening the dialogue on how change works within individuals can open the door to exploration of self-awareness. And, importantly, how humans can learn to adapt and thrive in dynamic environments. Progressive companies can teach their employees why their nervous systems have evolved in the ways they have and employees can learn how this biochemical response works to trigger the cascade of chemicals which serves now to hold them hostage to fearful responses. Mindfulness techniques free us of the fight or flight cycles and teach us to help ourselves and others to successfully navigate in environments which are dynamic and shifting. (14)(16)(17)

DiVanna states: “Successful change initiatives aren’t possible without modifying the day-to-day behavior of people throughout the organization.”

## Summary

Whether the organizational change type is developmental, transitional, or transformational, the failure rate for change initiatives is extremely high. Key elements of failure include employees who are uncomfortable leaving their comfort zone and poor internal communications.

While companies excel at the process and technology aspects, the human element needs to be considered in any successful organizational transformation program. Creating a culture which embraces employee focused programs and incorporates mindfulness techniques contributes to the spirit of a learning environment and recognizes the human elements in our complex world.

While results and outcomes are important building blocks in any change initiative, Cameron and Green (Figure 1) remind us to pay attention to the underlying emotions of employees. They speak to the importance of addressing competing interests and human emotions if organizations wish to create and sustain change for the long term, along with building a culture that focuses on individual growth and employee advocacy.

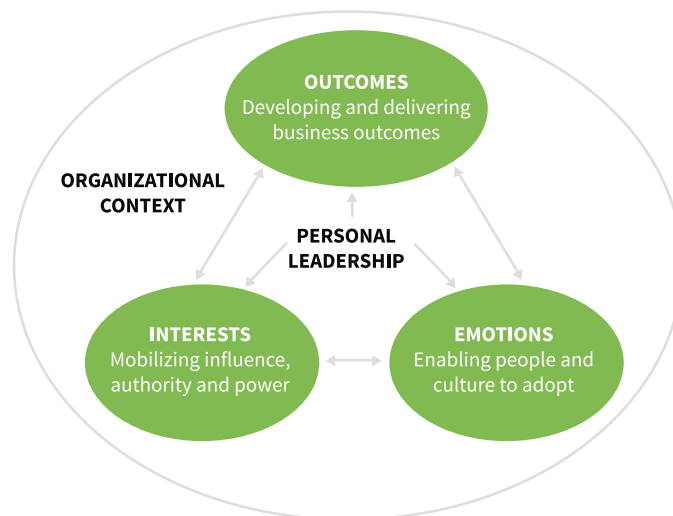


Figure 1: Three dimensions of leadership

Source: Developed by Mile Green, Andy Holder and Mhairi Cameron

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