



Realization Mindset for Sponsors

Separating Success From Failure During Transformational Change

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Introduction

It is a harsh reality. Seventy percent of strategic initiatives fail to produce their intended results. The root cause of this poor track record is that most organizations *install* rather than *realize* the true purpose for which their strategies were approved and funded in the first place.

- **Installation** means putting a fix in place (e.g., new processes, technologies, organizational structures). This phase, which all change efforts go through, focuses attention on physically inserting solutions into the work environment. An organization has *installed* an initiative when it has announced, placed, and set up any needed support for the new solution, and when it has trained people in its appropriate use.
- **Realization** is the point at which a solution has its full, intended impact on the ultimate desired outcome. An organization realizes the value of its investment in the solution only if it achieves the ultimate desired business outcomes. Realization is about accomplishing what was originally promised when the money and other resources were allocated to build or buy the solution.

The Conner Partners Approach to Strategy Execution supports the achievement of full realization of critically important change initiatives. It is the result of decades of observing and cataloging what organizations do when they successfully accomplish major transformation. The Conner Partners Approach distinguishes between the patterns displayed by those who successfully achieve the full measure of their strategic initiatives and those who never accomplish the changes they seek, or expend far more time and resources than intended. Most importantly, it provides proven guidance for replicating the success patterns and avoiding the failure patterns.

The value that this approach creates is due not only to its processes, tools, and techniques, but also to the way in which it is applied. In other words, successful application of the Strategy

Execution Approach requires a specific *mindset* that is shared among everyone involved in executing the strategic change as they perform their respective roles.

The *realization mindset* reflects the insights and philosophies that people who succeed with key initiatives use to interpret and manage the dynamics of strategic change efforts. This document describes the key tenets that comprise this mindset. They reflect the lessons learned from people who have confronted the tough realities of what it really takes to successfully execute and realize transformational change.

Key Tenets of the Realization Mindset

A *mindset* is a set of beliefs, expectations, and assumptions a person uses to understand and approach a particular experience. Mindsets encompass mental and emotional structures that guide perceptions, interpretations, and actions.

To keep things simple, we will focus on two elements of mindsets:

- *Frames of reference*—the ways in which individuals make sense of situations
- *Priorities*—the relative importance and value of various options

Mindsets consist of frames of reference that lead to priorities. When mindsets are shared within an organization, they serve as the foundations of culture, ultimately leading to common patterns of behavior.

The *realization mindset* refers to a particular set of shared frames of reference and priorities that support successful execution of critical strategic initiatives. It includes perspectives on how organizational change either succeeds or fails and how key sponsors and agents should perform their roles when applying Strategy Execution approaches.

The realization mindset encompasses five critical elements:

- The importance of matching challenge and commitment
- The importance placed on intent
- The importance placed on sponsors
- The importance placed on agents
- The nature of organizational change success

Each element can be expressed as a series of *tenets* (see table on page 3). The extent to which sponsors and agents embrace these tenets separates those who achieve the full measure of their strategic initiatives from those who fall short of their objectives.

Realization Mindset	
Element	Tenets
The importance of matching challenge and commitment (page 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention and resource allocation is dictated by an initiative’s “degree of difficulty” (page 4). • Commitment is not left to chance (page 5). • Slow down to go faster (page 5).
The importance placed on intent (page 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent is not strategy (page 6). • Intent comes after struggle (page 7). • Simple is best (page 8). • Intent integrity is imperative (page 9).
The importance placed on sponsors (page 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only sponsors can create the conditions required for change success (page 10). • Significant transformations can only succeed if led by deeply committed sponsors (page 11). • Paradigms are not replaced by consensus (page 12). • Realization of transformational change requires a cohesive leadership team (page 13). • Methodology is not a substitute for courage and discipline (page 134). • During major change, sponsors must ensure communication and consequence management are well executed and aligned (page 1414). • Sponsors need to hear the voices of their targets (page 15). • Leaders can’t transform their organizations unless they are willing to transform themselves (page 15).
The importance placed on agents (page 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsors need support from skilled agents (page 17). • Agents need to be frank and straightforward (page 17). • Agents should avoid bad business (page18). • Agents should avoid working harder than their sponsors (page 19).
The nature of organizational change success (page 19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discomfort is inherent in change success (page 19). • Everyone struggles with the implications of significant change (page 20). • There is always a risk to realizing transformational change (page 20). • It takes resilient people to support realization success (page 21). • Success depends on learning from mistakes (page 21). • Change is messy (page 22). • Much of the work associated with major organizational change is cathartic in nature (page 23). • Succeeding with major organizational change requires innovation (page 23). • Sometimes the best you can do isn’t good enough (page 24).

The Importance of Matching Challenge and Commitment

Attention and resource allocation is dictated by an initiative's "degree of difficulty."

A change is *difficult* when it is neither easy nor impossible. In this context, difficulty reflects the degree of challenge inherent in realizing the intended outcomes of the change. It is a measure of the realization risk that exists for both the initiative and the leader.

The degree of difficulty of a change is determined by answering three questions:

- How much change does the initiative represent? (Will the change result in incremental shifts, or will it transform certain fundamental aspects of the way things operate?)
- What kind of fulfillment must be achieved to deliver on the promises made? (Will the change be merely installed, or must it be realized?)
- How critical is the success of this initiative to the health of the overall business? (Is it just a "good idea" or should it be considered a business imperative?)

At the low end of the difficulty continuum are change efforts that are incremental in nature, have installation as an acceptable outcome, and are viewed as good ideas. At the high end are initiatives that are transformational in their intent, realization based, and considered business imperatives. Most change projects fall somewhere between the two extremes. Some might be of the highest importance (business imperative) and nothing less than full realization will suffice, yet the shifts themselves fall within the limits of continuous improvement, not paradigm leaps. Other efforts might be highly transformational but are not an absolute necessity to accomplish.

Typically, the higher the difficulty continuum reflected in an initiative's makeup, the greater the likelihood of failure, the lower the quality of results, and the longer it will take to reach intended outcomes. To compensate for these risks, leaders who succeed with change ensure that more attention/resources (mindshare, knowledge, skill, money, people, courage, and discipline) are allotted to endeavors with high difficulty ratings. To determine the degree of difficulty for any change project, each of these elements must be assessed and an overall rating calculated. Doing so helps sponsors determine whether a project should be approved and, if so, what attention/resource allocation is warranted.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>Leaders don't allow themselves or their people to take on so many responsibilities and tasks that they hinder realization of critical change initiatives. Leaders insist on understanding the degree of difficulty for all initiatives requiring their approval and either: 1) allocate the proper attention/resources needed to succeed; 2) reduce the overall difficulty rating to a range requiring less attention/fewer resources (by lowering the burden of one or more of the three elements); or 3) do not approve the initiative.</p>	<p>Leaders do not include difficulty ratings as part of their due diligence for approving projects; or they sanction initiatives naively, thinking an unlimited amount of mindshare/resources can be applied to change; or they sanction initiatives despite knowing that the ratings require more attention/resources than will be allocated.</p>

Commitment is not left to chance.

Commitment is the pivotal link between understanding and alignment. Achieving full realization requires that people who play crucial roles in the change process demonstrate high levels of determination. The orchestration of momentum, along with the building of a critical mass of commitment toward a clear strategic intent, is one of the most important activities in the execution process. However, many people involved in organizational change know little about what commitment really is, how it is intentionally developed, and how it can be lost. As a result, the majority of strategic change initiatives lack an effective plan for building the necessary levels of support throughout the organization. They rely instead on the hope that people will simply understand the importance of the initiative and, on their own, feel a need to move from the status quo.

High levels of commitment cannot be dictated, but they can be influenced. Systematic approaches to orchestrating deep resolve, based on an accurate understanding of how commitment unfolds, increase the probability that people will demonstrate a sufficient degree of dedication and perseverance toward realization of the intended outcome.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>Leaders believe that developing commitment is simply too essential to leave to chance. They invest resources to understand the commitment requirements for their initiatives, devote time and energy to understanding effective approaches to building it, and ensure that their plans include activities that foster momentum and a critical mass of commitment throughout the organization.</p>	<p>Leaders want support for changes they implement but have little understanding of what is involved in securing it (i.e., they confuse communications with gaining commitment and truly enrolling people). Many of those who do understand the resources needed to build commitment balk at the time and expense required. They want strong support for their endeavors but are not willing to pay the price to have it.</p>

Slow down to go faster.

Successful change leaders understand that every strategic change initiative requires a strong foundation. Myriad activities—both large and small—need to be completed in advance of actually implementing the changes associated with the initiative.

Considerable leadership time and attention will be invested in clarifying the intent, and in building the understanding, commitment, and alignment of the senior team. A solution to delivering the intent needs to be designed and stress-tested to ensure that it will deliver realization. The portfolio of changes required to deliver the solution has to be established. Key metrics for measuring both installation and realization will be put in place. An integrated realization-based plan is needed. An appropriate infrastructure of skilled agents, as well as an effective governance structure, should be put in place. Each of these things—and many others—contribute to the foundation of successful change execution, and to a faster-paced execution once it is begun. Putting them in place requires “slowing down” at the front end, and not jumping too quickly into execution.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
The requisite time and sponsor attention is invested on the front end to build a strong foundation for success. Outcomes (e.g., intent clarity, sponsor commitment) are monitored as closely as—if not more so than—activities. The actual implementation of the change does not commence until the pre-determined elements of the foundation are in place. While the foundation is being laid, the vocabulary is one of thoughtful deliberation.	There is a penchant for action. Priority is given to “doing” over “preparing.” From the outset, the vocabulary is movement-oriented (e.g., “get this going,” “get out ahead,” “ramp it up”).

The Importance Placed on Intent

Intent is not strategy.

Strategy is a means for achieving a company’s, division’s, or department’s mission and vision. It defines the areas of strategic focus where resources will be deployed and actions taken. A strategy often includes a major shift in how an organization must operate or behave—a transformational change. For changes of this nature, the strategy is typically defined at a level that is too high to guide execution, or even to determine whether the change is, in fact, executable.

To be successfully implemented, a major change requires more than high-level direction. It calls for early clarification of the true intent of the initiative:

- A deep dive into the explicit and precise nature of the change and into the leaders’ expectations for realization
- A description of what’s needed for the leaders to be committed to the change, and ultimately what will foster commitment from those impacted by the change

The words used to express the intent are merely a starting point for leaders to connect with the true purpose of the change at a deep level. Ultimately, the leadership team must commit to the intent. That commitment requires moving from words to shared meaning, to believing in the possibility the change initiative creates, to aligning as a team, to committing resources and funding it, and, most importantly, to staking their reputation on delivering realization of the intent.

All of these things—words, meaning, belief, alignment, and commitment—are critical for good intent; all are more than strategy.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>Leaders devote sufficient time to developing intent at the level of detail required to achieve true understanding, commitment, and alignment. They consider what is necessary not just to build their own resolve, but also to extend the same clarity and tenacity to those impacted by the change.</p> <p>As intent unfolds, leaders encourage open dialogue and the expression of diverse points of view. When complete, the reasons for the change and the expectations for the future state are clearly understood and survive short-term deviations from the path toward the desired future state.</p>	<p>Leaders confuse high-level business strategy with intent clarification, and confuse agreement on the strategy with the commitment needed for the change. They think the articulation of the strategy is sufficient for successful execution of the change but find themselves unable to sustain momentum during the implementation process. As a result, they do not invest in developing a clear and easily communicated picture of the intent.</p> <p>Those impacted do not always understand the change's true desired outcome. Resistance increases, making it difficult to build commitment and critical mass for the change.</p>

Intent comes after struggle.

Strategic initiatives are, by their nature, complex undertakings. They involve and affect many people. They may take months, or even years, to realize. They include new ideas, concepts, or practices. Achieving understanding, commitment, and alignment to the intent of anything of such complexity is never easy. It requires the following:

- Open dialogue, acceptance of diverse opinions, and hard choices
- Discussing issues without prejudice
- Active involvement and inclusion of the senior leaders who will sponsor the change
- Taking the time necessary to listen deeply to all opinions, to diverge, and then converge, on what's most important
- Venturing beyond what's on the surface and moving toward what leaders will truly commit to following through on
- Struggling with the tough choices needed to achieve alignment across the leadership team
- Fully supporting the final decisions, even when not in complete agreement

Making hard choices when creating the intent is not about satisfying the majority; it's about making informed decisions with awareness of the consequences. Leaders must ensure that all of the different voices are heard, and that they understand the tradeoffs and choices associated with the final view of the desired future. Through the process of evolving intent, leaders connect with the purpose and expectations for the initiative at a much deeper level. In the process, they build understanding, commitment, and alignment within their team. Cohesion and co-ownership among those on the leadership team is essential for the effective enrollment of others in the realization of change. Once decisions are made, they require the full and unwavering support of the entire senior leadership team.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>Leaders have the courage and take the time to make the tough choices associated with defining the intent. Therefore, they understand the consequences of moving forward (or not) and they can make a sober decision about whether to commit to the change.</p> <p>Throughout the process, leaders listen deeply to the views of others, discuss issues without prejudice, and support the final decisions even when they are not in complete agreement. They are also able to enroll others in the intent of the change without expressing personal concerns or reservations.</p>	<p>Leaders rush to judgment when defining the intent. They passively accept words, phrases, and decisions during group discussions and then complain later that some of their perspectives were not reflected. Key constituents are not included in the conversation and do not support the intent. Alternatively, sponsors delegate the development of the intent to agents, and then rubber-stamp it until the going gets tough and they reverse their decisions. Leaders do not really understand what's before them when they embark on the change and publicly express dissent and disagreement with particular elements of the intent.</p>

Simple is best.

Major change is complex, but the expression of the intent for the change does not need to be. In fact, an increase in complexity often results in a decrease in understanding. If there is not sufficient understanding among the senior team, the lack of clarity will only intensify as the intent is cascaded lower in the organization. The telling and retelling of the story will quickly become distorted. The leaders' vision of the desired future state will become obscured and the true purpose of the change will be lost.

The statement of intent must be as straightforward as possible. This is not accomplished when nothing more can be added, but when nothing more can be taken away. Simplicity itself is not the goal, however. The goal is for everyone who will impact, and be impacted by, the change to understand it. This requires the ability to focus and eliminate information—to get to the basics and streamline articulation of the initiative's true purpose. It should include a minimum of four components:

- The case for change (*why* change)
- The desired future state (*what* we are changing to)
- Principles that guide decision making (*how* we will change)
- Realization indicators that illustrate progress (*how* we will know we have succeeded and that we are on track along the way)

Individually, each of these must be expressed in ways that are complete, concise, clear, and compelling...that is, in ways that are simple and straightforward. Collectively, they must enable a common understanding across all stakeholders impacted by the change.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>Senior leaders can describe the intent of the change in a simple and meaningful way that ensures the core elements of the story survive telling and retelling without distortion.</p> <p>People across the organization understand and can describe the change concisely and consistently. Once the change has been cascaded and fully discussed, debate around the meaning of the intent is minimized and there is a clear understanding of what success looks like. Decisions are made quickly and are fully aligned with the purpose of the change.</p>	<p>The primary vehicle for explaining the intent of the change is a lengthy slide deck that attempts to describe everything known to date about the expectations and plans for the change. It may even go beyond the intent and start to describe the solution.</p> <p>People frequently misinterpret what leaders really want or continually return to seek explanations and challenge unclear direction. Progress toward realization is delayed by constantly revisiting and seeking revisions of the original statement of intent.</p>

Intent integrity is imperative.

Focusing on intent is not a one-time activity reserved for the kickoff of an initiative. It is present throughout the implementation process. The intent statement for an initiative serves as a guidepost for where the organization is headed, for tracking progress along the way, and for testing decisions. Every action taken toward the change’s desired outcome must maintain the integrity of the intended realization.

Intent, however, is not static. New things are learned as the solution is crafted and as the changes are introduced to the targets. Sometimes this new information requires revisiting the original purpose. When this happens, there must be a conscious decision among the senior leaders to revise the intent. Any modifications must be appropriately cascaded to maintain understanding, commitment, and alignment throughout the organization.

Managing intent integrity is an active process that occurs throughout the life of a change; realization cannot be achieved without it. As the change unfolds, persistent attention must be directed toward ensuring every decision, action, and solution is coherent with and supports the initiative’s true purpose.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>There is an active process and dedicated resources for monitoring and managing intent integrity. Decisions made throughout the design and implementation stay true to the intent unless there is a conscious decision by leaders to do otherwise. The intent remains current and meaningful; ongoing communications are carried out in that context.</p>	<p>A statement of intent is never developed, or development of the intent is a one-time activity at the beginning of the initiative. After the initial cascade, it is assumed that everyone “gets it.” Over time, there is scope creep and a loss of direction; people do more or less than is needed for realization. The original intent becomes lost through a series of seemingly inconsequential decisions that add up over time.</p>

The Importance Placed on Sponsors

Only sponsors can create the conditions required for change success.

People look to their leaders to determine what is important, and where to focus their energy. If sponsors have not created—and/or are not maintaining—the conditions required for change success, the likelihood is that initiatives will be announced, but won't deliver the promised outcomes.

First, it is essential for sponsors to ensure that their organizations bring a realization mindset to every major change initiative. This kind of perspective cannot be developed, sustained, or ingrained into an organization's day-to-day operation in the absence of committed sponsors.

Next, it is essential that a reliable process be put in place—and applied consistently—when implementing crucial initiatives. Too often, an approach to change focuses on achieving installation objectives and leads to short-term and/or superficial outcomes. Change initiatives will consistently succeed only by establishing both the structure and the discipline to follow a reliable, realization-based process. Sponsors at the senior levels of the organization carry the responsibility for ensuring such a process is in place; the attention of sponsors at all levels needs to be on confirming compliance.

Sponsors must be willing to delay, reduce the scope, or not approve projects that might compete for the mindshare and resources required for the most important initiatives. If sponsors do not set—and ensure adherence to—change-related priorities, those decisions will be made elsewhere in the organization. All too often when this happens, the result is a disparate focus across the organization, and inadequate capacity to successfully deliver the results of critical business initiatives.

Critical change decisions must often be made with insufficient data. For this reason, leaders establish empowered relationships with people they value, listen to diverse input, and move quickly and decisively.

Teamwork is necessary to successfully support critical changes. Sponsors have a low tolerance for superficial politeness, silo mentality, or territoriality. They place a high value on common goals and interdependence. "Tough love" feedback is the norm. At the same time, they recognize that they can't exercise the proper influence unless they are understanding and empathetic toward those affected by the change, as well as respected and considered relevant by them.

Finally, being able to execute specific change initiatives successfully is necessary, but not sufficient, for an organization's longer-term viability. Sponsors need to invest in the creation of a nimble culture, one that has the sustained ability to respond to any significant change quickly and effectively while delivering high performance.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>Sponsors create the conditions necessary for change success. They foster an ongoing realization mindset. They ensure that there is a reliable process in place for executing specific change initiatives. In addition, they create the cultural DNA that fosters an overall nimble readiness to execute any change initiative. They set and enforce priorities, ensuring that the necessary mindset and resources are available for the most important changes. Decisions are informed by people they value. Targets understand that any announcement of change is strongly supported by the entire leadership team. The stated outcomes of the change will be delivered as announced, on time and within budget.</p>	<p>Sponsors are unaware of, or inattentive to, the conditions necessary for change success. There is little understanding of the distinctions between installing and realizing change. There are often multiple processes in place for executing change across the organization. Few, if any, of those processes ever deliver realization. Change-related priorities are not set; if they are, they are not adhered to. There is no attention to increasing nimble execution capability to meet foreseeable change demand. Leaders across the organization show biases in favor of their own initiatives and priorities, at the cost of inconsistently supporting the most important changes to the organization. Changes typically fail to deliver the promised outcomes. As a result, targets do not hear change announcements as credible, nor do they expect that stated outcomes of the change will be delivered.</p>

Significant transformations can only succeed if led by deeply committed sponsors.

The role of the sponsor is central to successful change. With weak or non-existent sponsorship, there are only two options: expend time, energy, and resources in the “hope” of changing things, or create the appearance of change with little chance of sustainability. Prolonged viability of change with dramatic impact is always the result of unrelenting tenacity by powerful leaders.

Leaders who succeed with a transformational shift in their organizations are prepared to engage in activities that provide sustained guidance and support. These activities include the following:

- Declaring which initiatives carry “business imperative” status
- Determining the degree of difficulty for each major initiative
- Ensuring competing demands don’t hinder full realization
- Making tough decisions, taking political risks
- Allocating resources
- Enrolling others throughout the organization by cascading understanding, commitment, and alignment related to the initiative’s success
- Delivering communications
- Applying positive and negative consequences
- Narrowing their attention to provide intense focus on initiative-related progress or problems
- Staying personally and visibly involved
- Ensuring the necessary balance of attention between attending to individual areas of responsibility and maintaining an enterprise-wide perspective

Beyond the requirements for any particular change project are the perspectives and responsibilities leaders carry for all strategic initiatives. This document describes the realization mindset needed for planned change to achieve intended outcomes on such a consistent basis that Strategy Execution becomes an organizational competitive advantage. This means that sponsors must not only engage in the activities listed above for specific endeavors, they must embrace and ensure that others exhibit the tenets that comprise the realization mindset.

This kind of leadership calls for deeply committed sponsors who understand their role and are willing and able to apply it when addressing a wide range of change inhibitors. Any realization risks can be addressed as long as the sponsors' motivation and skills keep pace with challenges as they unfold. Even the smallest risk to intended outcomes can become the dominant influencing force during implementation if adequate sponsorship is not present.

Moreover, this kind of committed sponsorship must be displayed at all levels of the organization. A high resolve for change at senior leadership levels is a necessary, but not sufficient, criterion for successful transformative change. The same sense of urgency and criticality that is visible among initiating sponsors must be cascaded down throughout the organization and demonstrated among the sustaining sponsors as well.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations are convinced of the criticality of sponsorship and are willing to invest in the work required to prepare leaders to perform this role effectively. They will not proceed with a major change unless there is adequate support from one or more initiating sponsors as well as the appropriate sustaining sponsors. Leaders are cautious about the number of initiatives they sponsor because they fully understand the responsibility and burden they accept when they do so. Throughout the execution of change initiatives, they ensure that attention is balanced between individual areas of operational responsibility and achieving realization of the change.	Organizations lack an appreciation of how essential sponsorship is to change success. This results in leaders delegating implementation responsibilities to change agents and then operating from the sidelines, focusing too much attention on individual areas of responsibility. They assume that agents can compensate for any lack of preparation, time, and attention on their part. Leaders: 1) fail to take on sponsor duties; 2) accept responsibility for too many initiatives and dilute their ability to perform as needed to ensure realization; or 3) secure sufficient initiating sponsorship but fail to cascade the same level of resolve to the appropriate group of sustaining sponsors.

Paradigms¹ are not replaced by consensus.

The governance of successful major change has a particular signature pattern. It is characterized by strong, definitive leadership that seeks out, values, and is influenced by various viewpoints; however, key decisions are ultimately made by those in sponsor roles. What actually changes, who is affected, and how fast it is deployed are all considered aspects of the transition process that warrant input from constituencies being affected. Nonetheless, the final determinations in these matters rest solely with sponsors.

¹ In the context of this paper, the term “paradigm” is used to reflect the perceptions shared by people concerning what their organization’s purpose is and how it is to be achieved (i.e., what the key goals are, and how work is to be accomplished).

Incremental modifications unfold differently, but true transformative change is not the result of democratic votes, negotiated settlements, or the application of consensus management techniques. Fundamental shifts demand an unequivocal center of leadership gravity to counter the inevitable tendency of bureaucracies to prevent full realization of intended outcomes in the first place, or to revert to the status quo once some initial progress has been made. While this kind of potent leadership is imperative, sponsors who do not encourage open expression of diverse opinions, deeply respect these views, and incorporate as many as possible into their deliberations fail to 1) engender the kind of support they need to ensure sound decisions are made and 2) sustain their change ambitions.

Paradigms are transformed through a balance of power—leaders have the unquestioned authority to make the critical decisions and followers have the unquestioned capacity to help sponsors use their authority wisely.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Sponsors clearly establish expectations so people understand that their input will be valued and used during key change-related deliberations, but that the actual decisions will be made by the sponsors.	Sponsors provide confusing or ambiguous guidance about how decisions will be made, or they attempt to use democratic voting, negotiations, or consensus approaches to resolve critical issues.

Realization of transformational change requires a cohesive leadership team.

At no time is “team” more important in the C-suite than during transformational change. When your organization is planning and executing a strategic shift of this nature, the understanding, commitment and alignment described earlier are necessary, but not sufficient. The organization’s leadership needs to be united in word, and in action; they have to come together around a common set of objectives, recognizing the team’s interdependence in accomplishing the desired outcomes. It is essential that they both trust one another, and are trustworthy themselves. And, as in any team environment, they have to be willing to make personal sacrifices if needed for the benefit of the whole. Quite simply, transformational change cannot succeed in the absence of a cohesive leadership team.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
The leadership team has established a high degree of understanding, commitment, and alignment in support of the change. They have made personal promises to themselves, one another, and the entire team regarding what they will do to operationalize their commitment; and they are living in accord with those promises. They are applying sound principles of sponsorship without favor or prejudice. Finally, they are acting consistently in the best interest of the realization of the change at the organizational level, even	There is an inadequate level of understanding, commitment, and/or alignment regarding the change. Sponsor actions do not support the change, or support it within the context of their individual areas of responsibility in ways that put overall realization at risk. Silo thinking, pet projects, sacred cows, and favored sons and daughters continue to take priority over realization of the change.

when it requires sacrifice within their own areas of responsibility.	
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Methodology is not a substitute for courage and discipline.

The intense pressure that leaders face during transformational change often tempts them to seek sweeping “plug and play” implementation solutions that can be applied with relative ease. This is driven by an understandable, but incorrect, assumption that methodologies for executing key initiatives can substitute for some of the hard work that is required of sponsors. While implementation tools, procedures, and skilled agents are important facilitating mechanisms, they are only enablers in support of the change process. The real secret to fundamental transformation is the courage and discipline of sponsors.

- **Courage** has two aspects:
 - Acknowledging to oneself and others the resources and tough decisions full realization truly requires
 - Taking the appropriate actions to pursue realization despite the fears, obstacles, uncertainties, and adversity one encounters
- **Discipline** means living up to the standards of what must be done each and every time their courage is called for (no time-outs/no substitutions).

Sponsors—particularly the initiating sponsor—carry the ultimate accountability for the realization of the changes they aspire to execute. No matter how effective the methodology, it is the combination of sponsor courage and discipline that translates intent into reality.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Leaders know that a reliable implementation methodology and the people skilled in its application must be supported by sponsors who have the courage and discipline required to address significant obstacles and challenges to realization.	Leaders become overly reliant on a methodology or agents/consultants to address issues only the sponsors can resolve. They often do so because they are unwilling or unprepared to apply the courage and discipline required for change execution to reach full realization.

During major change, sponsors need to ensure communication and consequence management are well executed and aligned.

Strong, consistent communication and consequence management work hand-in-hand to support change success. The responsibility for the execution of both rests on the shoulders of sponsors.

At all levels of the organization, it is the sponsors—not the agents—who are accountable for clearly and unequivocally communicating the change and for ensuring that the messages are understood. Strategic change is highly disruptive. Communication—in turn—is the lifeblood of successful change. The way ideas are transmitted throughout an organization enables people to coordinate their efforts toward a new goal. In implementing a major change, an overall communications campaign must be designed that introduces people to the change, positions it

as a business imperative, pre-empts as many concerns as possible, and manages information needs throughout the implementation process. Research by the Center for Risk Communications and others has shown that in such an environment, the individual’s immediate sponsor is typically most trusted and most credible.

Likewise, it is the sponsors who have the legitimization to administer consequences to those who support (and those who do not support) the change initiative. When both communications and consequences are well executed, they reinforce one another to ensure that execution of the change proceeds as planned. Unfortunately, leaders often fail to make the connection between these two sets of responsibilities. They may believe that the strength of their message is enough, and fail to follow through on the sometimes-difficult task of consequence management. They may miss the signals that tell them the change is not being fully supported. They might find reasons to justify waiving change expectations for specific individuals (e.g., the “star performer” or the long-term company loyalist). Regardless of the reasons, failure to execute each of these responsibilities successfully—and failure to execute each in a way that is supportive of the other—is fatal to change success.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Sponsors at all levels of the organization effectively communicate the change and their expectations of targets. They then hold the targets accountable for ensuring the successful execution of the change. They administer both positive and negative consequences as appropriate, and without exception.	Sponsors delegate communication of key aspects of the change initiative—and the sponsor’s support of it—to agents. Consequences are not consistently applied, or are not applied at all. Sponsors fail to make the critical link between effectively communicating the change, and administering consequences in a way that reinforces what they have communicated.

Sponsors need to hear the voices of their targets.

There is no question that transformational change calls for strong, direct, and decisive leadership. However, it also calls for sponsors who are both willing and able to listen to the voices of those whom they are sponsoring. Transformational change significantly disrupts targets’ expectations regarding their work and work environment, resulting in a loss of a sense of control. This, in turn, leads to resistance to the change, and has an impact on both productivity and the quality of the targets’ work.

Hearing the voices of targets provides the following:

- Surfaces the reasons that targets are resisting (or will resist) the change
- Adds to the sponsors’ understanding of the impact of the change, and ways in which that impact might be addressed
- Returns a sense of indirect control to the targets
- Fosters understanding of the change
- Builds commitment to the change

By hearing the voices of their targets, sponsors are able to substantially reduce resistance to—and even generate commitment to—the change initiative.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>Sponsors create an environment of two-way dialogue with those they are sponsoring. They clearly communicate their willingness to hear the voices of their targets, as well as the ways in which they might respond to their issues and concerns (e.g., “Whether or not we proceed with this change is not up for debate; however, your input will be helpful regarding how we proceed to implement it.”). Resistance remains above ground, and is mitigated. Sponsors, in turn, respond appropriately to what they hear. The targets’ understanding of and commitment to the change is fostered.</p>	<p>Communication tends to be one-way, from the sponsors to the targets. Resistance tends to go underground, and is heightened. The disruption of the change results in a greater loss of productivity and quality than would be seen if sponsors heard the voices of their targets.</p>

Leaders can’t transform their organizations unless they are willing to transform themselves.

Many sponsors are eager to determine which part of the organization (or which individuals or team) is in need of significant shifts in order to accomplish intended outcomes. However, they are unprepared to see themselves as in need of any substantial learning and/or adjustments. Sponsors tend to view their own clarity of intent, commitment to action, and communication skills as impeccable; therefore, any obstacles to realization must reside with others. It is often the case that leaders new to an organization are called on to “up their game” so they can provide the level of sponsorship needed. However, the need for this kind of learning is even more imperative for incumbent leaders. It’s possible—but extremely difficult—to have a long tenure in the very system one is responsible for dismantling and rebuilding. Generally speaking, leaders who have resided in a changing organization for extended periods are a product of the culture they are attempting to reshape. They may not be aware of how extensive its influence is on their perceptions and judgment, or see that new knowledge and skills may be required to fulfill their sponsor duties. For this reason, it is essential that leaders enter each major change initiative carrying the lessons from the past, while displaying an open mind and the humility required to seek new and better ways to execute them successfully.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>Leaders recognize that they need to raise the bar continually on their performance as sponsors during major change. Regardless of their level in the organization, they are prepared to be “students” of the change process and, in particular, are willing to learn what is needed to perform their sponsor duties, including making significant adjustments to their style of dealing with others. They display a learner’s perspective even as they lead.</p>	<p>Some leaders have difficulty embracing a student perspective, admitting they may not have all the answers, or being open to coaching and guidance. They think they don’t need any special guidance to function in their sponsor role and/or they are unwilling to engage in meaningful modifications of their own style of operation.</p>

The Importance Placed on Agents

Sponsors need support from skilled agents.

Even leaders with plenty of change experience, who have all the right instincts and the courage and discipline needed to orchestrate difficult transitions, remain vulnerable. They must be supported by skilled agents who understand how to provide the proper guidance to their leaders and engage with them in highly interdependent, synergistic teamwork.

While agents at all levels play critical roles, those in service to senior leaders (initiating and primary sustaining sponsors) are particularly important. These *lead agents* must be prepared to do the following:

- Offer leaders advice regarding how to best leverage the implementation process and how to perform their sponsor duties
- Operate as trusted advisors
- Attract, train, lead, and manage a cadre of change agents to function in similar ways for sponsors throughout the organization

Regardless of where they are located, every agent's primary allegiance is to the initiating sponsor of the projects on which they are deployed. They must learn to be as creative and flexible as possible when dealing with challenges and resistance, but uncompromising about staying within the boundaries of what the initiating sponsor has decided will take place.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations apply solid due diligence to the selection and training of agents. They look for a range of knowledge and skills, along with a pre-disposition for this type of work, and only choose the most qualified people. Agents see themselves as completely in service to their sponsor. The lead agents have unrestricted access to the initiating sponsor and primary sustaining sponsors.	Organizations either don't assign agents to sponsors, or select ones who lack the readiness to perform the role properly. They don't commit full-time resources and/or they select from the available people rather than the ones best suited for the role.

Agents need to be frank and straightforward.

Sponsors should be mindful of several implementation issues when they absolutely cannot afford to fall short of realizing dramatic change. In particular, they need to form a strong alliance with their agents and function as a team. Many aspects contribute to this kind of relationship, but one of particular importance is the agent's candor. Agents must be prepared to ask the tough questions and recommend the courageous actions needed to mitigate risks. To do so, they must partner with sponsors who appreciate direct communications and are ready to address what they are advised to do. Under these circumstances, it would be unconscionable for agents to be anything less than explicit and unreserved when conveying key messages.

Without being disrespectful or inappropriate, agents must clearly articulate observations, findings, and risk mitigation options, even when it makes them, or the sponsors, uncomfortable. This is not as easy as it might sound. Many agents find it difficult to be direct when they raise issues outside a sponsor's comfort zone; this comes with the territory. However, agents need to

move beyond this level of discomfort, and be prepared to engage in tough conversations when necessary. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Urge sponsors to live up to their stated aspirations or reduce the expectations they have set
- Prod sponsors to periodically assess the outcome they really want to achieve, the cost it will demand of them, and their willingness and ability to pay that price
- Challenge existing frames of reference, biases, viewpoints, and perceived limitations in a provocative but respectful manner

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations value agents who base their working relationships on the belief that being truthful and direct is ultimately in everyone's best interest, even if it generates discomfort in the short run.	Sponsors see agents who speak frankly and directly about uncomfortable issues as unnecessarily bold, brash, or even arrogant. They subtly or openly discourage this kind of candor and explicitness.

Agents should avoid bad business.

Bad business exists when sponsors are willing to engage in executing a strategic change but are not prepared to follow through with all the political, logistical, and economic requirements to fully realize the outcomes they say they want. When this occurs, the only inquiry left unanswered is *when* and *how badly* the endeavor will fail. For this reason, the critical question for an agent who receives a request to provide assistance on a major change initiative is, "To what degree is the sponsor truly prepared to do what is necessary to make the project succeed?"

Organizations that consistently succeed with change train their agents to be direct with sponsors who appear to lack sufficient capability or commitment to reach full realization. Agents are taught to assess sponsor readiness early, when they are first being considered for an assignment, and to be frank and straightforward if there appear to be reasons why the sponsor might not be willing or able to fulfill the sponsor duties needed for initiative success (e.g., too many other competing demands on the sponsor's time, political battles in which he or she is unwilling to engage).

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations encourage agents to only accept assignments with sufficient sponsor predisposition for success, and allow agents to either turn down assignments as "bad business" if they do not feel that the sponsorship is adequate, or be explicit about sponsorship being a risk factor that could jeopardize realization. Sponsors listen carefully to the concerns that agents raise before and during a change initiative.	Agents are not given the opportunity to turn down assignments, or even raise sponsorship as a risk factor. Sponsors take offense when agents decline work they have been asked to pursue. If agents do raise concerns to sponsors about sponsor readiness to pay the true price for change, sponsors dismiss or ignore them.

Agents should avoid working harder than their sponsors.

Although agents often put in more time and energy than sponsors, this, in itself, does not pose a problem. “Working harder than the sponsor” occurs when the agent is more dedicated to an initiative’s success than the sponsor is. There are two roots of this common problem. The first is sponsors who lack the time or inclination to engage in the activities needed to drive to realization (e.g., give tough messages, apply consequences, pursue political struggles with other sponsors) and ask the agents to take care of the issues themselves. The second is agents who try to demonstrate their value and/or protect scarce sponsor time and energy by picking up these sponsor responsibilities even without being asked to do so.

When agents take on a “pseudo-sponsor” role, targets recognize and respond to the lack of true sponsor commitment; they, in turn, usually fail to display the needed levels of sustained commitment to the new way of operating.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations are clear about the responsibilities of sponsor and agent roles. They ensure that they do not ask agents to substitute for poor sponsorship, are alert to agents raising concerns about faltering sponsorship, and are responsive to these issues.	Sponsors try to shift much of the burden of their responsibilities to agents, or agents pre-empt the sponsor (out of concern for how busy the sponsor is), by taking action on matters that are best left to the sponsor.

The Nature of Organizational Change Success

Discomfort is inherent in change success.

By their very nature, major initiatives disrupt expectations and make people uncomfortable. Uneasiness and distress are simply an unavoidable part of true transformation, as people confront tough decisions, difficult choices, and the true cost of getting what they want. The task of sponsors and agents is not to accomplish significant change while keeping everyone (including themselves) feeling secure and content. Rather, the goal is to help people establish different expectations, and to enable them to succeed in the new situations they face. Sponsors and agents aren’t there to make people comfortable during change—their job is to help them succeed despite the inevitable discomfort.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations recognize that pursuing major change creates discomfort. Sponsors and agents work to ensure that measures of success are focused on true indicators of realization rather than on more traditional assessments, such as how happy people are with what is taking place.	Sponsors assume they can keep everything running smoothly with little uneasiness or tension during a major transition. They expect agents to measure how happy people are as a key indicator of success; they interpret symptoms to the contrary as a sign of failure.

Everyone struggles with the implications of significant change.

Regardless of the role (sponsor, agent, target, or advocate), everyone wrestles with the repercussions of change at one time or another. When faced with dramatic shifts, people in each role have reservations about either the content of a change they are involved in, the implementation approach being used, or their ability to perform the role that has been assigned. It is common to expect that targets will resist certain initiatives. In actuality, even the sponsors and agents who promote change fall prey to wavering determination and skepticism.

Rather than being a problem, these doubts generally mean people are gaining a better appreciation for the challenging nature of an endeavor, the execution process, and/or his or her role. With this heightened appreciation for how difficult transformational change is, however, come the natural apprehensions associated with learning:

- Something is tougher to achieve than expected.
- What will be achieved is far less (or even radically different) than what was anticipated.

This means that although sponsors and agents are responsible for realizing an initiative's desired outcome, they often find themselves in the target's position—more focused on their own adjustment to the change than they are on encouraging others to accommodate it. This is normal and even a helpful part of the overall implementation process. Think of it this way: people need the latitude to feel and address their “target fears and anxieties” whenever they become prevalent, regardless of the other roles they are expected to perform. For example, before leaders can be properly trained in how to function as sponsors, they must address their own concerns about the content and/or process of the change. The same is true for agents. Without ensuring the right level of readiness, agents can find themselves consumed with their own downside implications for the very change they are trying to help implement.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
<p>Organizations do not assume sponsors and agents are immune to the adaptation dynamics that affect targets. Before people are considered fully prepared for these roles, they are provided ample opportunities to express their own fears and anxieties about the change and are encouraged to come forward with their concerns as the implementation process unfolds. Apprehensions, even resistance, are considered a normal part of the transition process, not just for targets, but for sponsors and agents as well.</p>	<p>Organizations expect sponsors and agents to assume their roles in the change process, with no regard to how the implications might be affecting them personally as targets. This does not prevent them from experiencing fears and anxieties. However, these are not openly expressed; this often leads to mixed signals and confusing actions, and results in increased jeopardy for the realization outcomes.</p>

There is always risk in realizing transformational change.

The nature of major transitions includes the inevitability of surprises, challenges, and missed expectations, as well as errors and mistakes. However, many leaders try to hide from or put a “spin” on anything that deviates from the planned path. Such an approach tends to block or delay issues from surfacing, which hinders the formulation of mitigation actions. Successful leaders help promote a *red is good* perspective toward status reporting—they encourage people to honestly portray the true condition of projects and express their actual concerns. Once this

view is accepted as a cultural norm, the objective for status meetings moves from keeping a project appearing flawless to elevating risk as quickly and completely as possible. This, in turn, provides the greatest leeway for timely risk mitigation.

This is a particularly challenging tenet to apply. Learning to apply *red is good* on a consistent basis can represent a significant personal and cultural shift in most organizations. Many leaders have spent their entire careers diluting or covering up risks that unfolded as they executed major change endeavors. However, this tenet is one of the most critical elements in consistently achieving sustained success.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Sponsors don't "shoot the messenger" when they learn of risks, choosing instead to focus on resolution. Agents learn that they must bring risks forward rather than protecting leaders from the problems. As a result, organizations are more confident that a true assessment of current conditions will prevail.	Both sponsors and their lead agents are likely to become very uncomfortable when risks surface. Agents see their role as protecting sponsors from having to deal with problems, and sponsors view agents' honest appraisal and reporting of issues as unnecessarily escalating challenges that sponsors shouldn't be bothered with.

It takes resilient people to support realization success.

Resilient people suffer less from the dysfunctions of future shock, bounce back more quickly, and usually thrive during disorder and disruption. They achieve more of their objectives, maintain a higher level of quality and productivity in their work, and preserve their physical and emotional health to a greater extent than their less-resilient counterparts.

The same change, introduced into two different organizations, can produce dramatically different levels of success. The one populated with people that are more resilient will experience a greater likelihood of realization with less disruption.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations recognize the link between resilience and realization. They hire, train, and reinforce people who demonstrate a predisposition toward high levels of resilience. When implementing their more challenging initiatives, they are also careful to ensure that the sponsors, agents, and targets are highly resilient.	Organizations see resilience-related activities as peripheral or even irrelevant to accomplishing the initiatives they currently face. They invest little, if any, time and energy in the pursuit of resilience. Sponsor, agent, and target resilience is not a factor that is considered, even when implementing their more challenging change initiatives.

Success depends on learning from mistakes.

There is an important distinction between *failures* and *corrective mistakes*. Failures are mistakes that render no value—they miss the mark, and the situation produces no learning. Corrective mistakes take place when falling short of expectations enables important discernment and illumination to surface. Transformational change sets up a rich environment for mistakes. When living on the edge, mistakes are part of the fabric for finding what's possible. *Corrective experiences occur when mistakes lead to learning and growth.*

After the early stages of developing an unfamiliar skill where affirmation and support is vital, people tend to gain more from their mistakes than from staying within the relatively safe boundaries of what they first learned. In a business setting, however, there is a tendency to avoid acknowledging mistakes. Facing errors or poor judgment is not a pleasant experience, but is fundamental to developing competence in any new area. People in key positions commit plenty of missteps as they acquire the skills needed to perform their change-related roles properly; the only question is whether they will learn from these experiences.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
People in key change roles readily accept feedback, acknowledge their mistakes, and take the time to reflect and learn from them. Organizations support this by building cultural messages and consequences that reverse the tendency to hide mistakes and instead promote <i>learning</i> as the way people can recover from the inevitable errors that happen.	People in key change roles inhibit their own development by not being open to feedback and refusing to acknowledge and learn from the inevitable mistakes that take place as they become familiar with their change responsibilities. Organizations reinforce this by punishing people for mistakes.

Change is messy.

If transformational initiatives could be limited to addressing clear-cut options and only employing the left side of the brain, their execution would be much more linear and straightforward. The future would be an extension of the past and there would either be a logical business case for the change or not. There would always be some disagreements over whose future or logic would prevail, but ultimately it would boil down to a cognitive assessment of the facts. Everyone would eventually defer to the soundness of the reasoning revealed by the data.

Fundamental change unfurls very differently...it's actually a very messy process. This is true primarily because the endeavors are discontinuous in nature and require both the left and the right hemisphere of our brains. It isn't that rational decision making is abandoned, but it brings a level of disorderliness that requires a high tolerance for ambiguity, managing paradoxes along with contradictions, making tough decisions with insufficient data, and learning from the inevitable mistakes.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations prepare sponsors, agents, and targets to draw on both hemispheres of their brains for successful implementation. They assign individuals to these roles who demonstrate a predisposition for the creative as well as the analytical demands they will face. In particular, attention is paid to bolstering their tolerance for ambiguity and paradox, their confidence in applying instinct to making decisions, and their ability to learn from falling short of objectives.	Organizations select people to perform sponsor, agent, or target duties based on their left-brain skills and ability to "push through barriers" to accomplish what is expected. These people tend to be under-prepared for the messiness of change. They fail to reach realization, and when this happens, they are prone to blaming others. They also often feel extremely frustrated and even guilty that they didn't "solve the difficulties," as if the problems were a math equation with a purely logical resolution they couldn't identify.

Much of the work associated with major organizational change is cathartic in nature.

Most efforts to execute large-scale strategic initiatives are heavily weighted toward the intellectual components (e.g., data reviews, logical analysis, rational decision making) and fail to adequately address the degree of emotional investment called for to support realization successfully. For example, it is difficult for a sponsor to maintain the energy and attention needed to ensure the success of a major change initiative when his or her relationship with the change is purely on an intellectual level. Only when the personal implications and emotions associated with the realization of key goals are taken into account can deep commitment be created and sustained. A critical implication of this is that true organizational transformation is not possible without a corresponding level of change taking place at the individual, human level.

Although there should be an overall parity in logical and emotional perspectives throughout the implementation process, at certain points in the process a disproportionate weight needs to be placed on the emotional aspects in order to break through some of the more entrenched mental blocks and resistance patterns. This is often uncomfortable for those involved, but it is an essential component of the transformation process.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations are open to delving deeply into the emotional side of transformation, when necessary. They value the insights that are achieved when they engage in this aspect of the implementation process. Sponsor, agents, and targets need to learn more than just the technical components of change—they must prepare themselves to engage the personal and emotional part of the transformative process as well.	Some sponsors, agents, and targets are not predisposed to addressing the emotional side of commitment and therefore see the cathartic nature of change as ethereal, unnecessary, or even counter-productive. They over-focus on the logic, and on the physical deliverables; they underestimate the affective component involved in successful change.

Succeeding with major organizational change requires innovation.

Continuous improvement allows organizations to enhance their quality and productivity incrementally, to test new ways of doing the same thing, and to maintain their competitive position in the short term. Major change, however, is not based on continuous improvement—doing the same things. Rather, it is based on innovation. In a truly innovative environment, the familiar and comfortable must often make way for the new and unexpected. Risks are taken. Mistakes are made. Things that aren't broken are fixed, or replaced.

In order to be successful, an environment of innovation fosters both candor and constructive conflict. Navigating the treacherous waters of transformation requires cognitive and analytical skills, as well as more intangible and intuitive abilities. Although some people are more comfortable relying on their intellect and logic, all sponsors and agents must learn to draw on their imagination and creativity—their willingness to “trust their gut.” While major initiatives have “hard,” tangible, quantitative components, these are stale and lifeless without the ability to address the more intangible and non-linear aspects of the change process. During major change, it is the responsibility of leaders to cultivate innovation.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure pattern):
Organizations define new markets, new products and services, and new ways of achieving success. While they support continuous improvement in ongoing operations, leaders recognize and support innovation as critical to succeeding with major change. They foster an environment that encourages risk-taking, candor, constructive conflict, learning from mistakes, and improving things that aren't broken.	Leaders support low-risk solutions. Continuous improvement, rather than innovation, is seen as the key to long-term success. Mistakes and conflict are not tolerated. There is a strong adherence to tradition.

Sometimes the best you can do isn't good enough.

Even extraordinary efforts by exceptional people don't always result in sustainable change. Since at least 70% of change initiatives fail, fully realized success, by definition, is more the exception than the norm. This is not, however, what many initiating sponsors want to believe about their own people and change endeavors. The myth that *any change is possible with the right people applying themselves* is held so strongly that evidence to the contrary is often discounted or ignored altogether. When this happens, mythology passes for methodology. Initiating sponsors fall into the trap of thinking, "The best we can do has to be enough—that's all we have." They simply aren't able to face the possibility that, even with maximum efforts, some change objectives will never be realized.

Failing to confront the uncomfortable truth about what can and can't be accomplished results in wasting time and energy on unrealistic change initiatives rather than pursuing less lofty, but more attainable, realization goals. To protect themselves from the inevitable problems when initiatives falter, sponsors sometimes default to defining failure as success. They (usually unconsciously) lower their expectations and settle for installation results while declaring realization objectives have been achieved. This means that not only does the organization fall short of the intended benefits it was seeking, but it also faces the negative consequences unprepared. It fails to anticipate oncoming difficulties and develop mitigation plans. In addition, people learn that installation results are permissible even when realization goals have been declared as business imperatives. The organization loses twice—not only are the change goals not met, but people stop paying attention to what leaders say.

If this tenet of the realization mindset is understood/accepted (success pattern):	If this is not understood/accepted (failure pattern):
Organizations ensure that they have the right people involved, and keep them fully invested in their work, but they also have the courage to ask the hard question, "Is our best enough to actually realize this endeavor?" Sponsors recognize that failure can't always be avoided by applying conviction and hard work, and they are able to distinguish "the best we can do" from "what is required for success."	Sponsors push people to the burnout point in pursuit of impossible goals. When this fails to produce the desired results, they deceive themselves and others into accepting something less than the intended outcomes, asserting that the goals were actually realized. In doing so, they not only fail to achieve what was needed but they are caught off-guard when the symptoms of the shortfall begin to surface. Worse still, people learn that installation results are permissible substitutes for realization promises and leadership credibility is lost.