

# Chapter 5

## Leaders Impede Change

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, organizations face unprecedented challenges that require innovative approaches to implementing successful change adoption. Change failure continues to be a problem plaguing many organizations. Leadership research fails to explore how leaders with all the world's knowledge at their fingertips still manage to impede change. Leadership research focuses on how to be a good leader, how to apply leadership styles, and how to influence change through the right actions. This chapter explores unconventional approaches to leadership and informs leaders of their own potential pitfalls that contribute to change failure. Lastly, the chapter provides recommendations on ways leaders can get out of their own way and to ensure positive long lasting change.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

If we know so much about what makes change successful, why do organizations continue to get in the way of successful transformation and change adoption? There is a vast amount of research identifying the factors that make change adoption successful. A quick internet search will yield a multitude of suggestions further segmented down into industry type, different approaches, measures of success, and leadership's positive effect on change. Successful change adoption requires strong leadership, engagement and involvement, effective communication, clear vision and objectives, and the support necessary to address resistance. "An important driver of successful change adoption is the involvement of senior leadership; before the adoption of any change, senior leaders should justify the purpose and

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-9556-1.ch005

appropriateness of the proposed change” (Mali et al., 2020). Senior leaders should be committed throughout the entire change adoption process, to support the progress of the change in the organization, and furthermore, a lack of senior-level support is a critical hindrance to implementing enterprise risk management (Mali et al., 2020). The extensive amount of information on change adoption is readily available to leaders that are exploring ways to implement and effect enduring, positive changes within their organization. However, there is much less research on change failure and perhaps this lack of research contributes to the reason we continuously see change initiatives fail.

Failure, more specifically, change failure is where change agents attempt to formally change existing foundations, but the attempt breaks down and lasting change is not achieved. Change failure happens when an attempt has been made to implement a new process, system, or some other type of organizational shift, but does not achieve the intended outcomes. Failure can manifest itself in many ways, examples include failing to meet company goals, going over the allocated budget on a project, creating more problems, implementing ineffective processes, or not gaining acceptance from employees. Leaders are only learning about one side of the problem when learning about change adoption techniques. It’s about time we also identify the ways that we as leaders contribute to change adoption failure. A hard look into the ways leaders contribute to failure is long overdue. Too often leadership misses the mark and unfortunately impedes the very change they want to make. “Despite what we know about how organizations and their members respond to change, organizations continue to spend an inordinate amount of time confronting, mitigating, and dealing with failure during change” (Schwarz et al, 2021). So how does a leader, equipped with the right information, the right tools, and a plethora of research still get in the way of change? This chapter takes a pragmatic approach to exploring how leaders impede change in their organization and identifies a path for leaders to get out of their own way.

Schwarz et al., (2021) explain that most visible examples of organizational failures during change are due to impaired judgment, missed targets, or general decline; but there is no common, agreed upon definition of organizational failure. Thus, organizational failure in this context will refer to the unsuccessful adoption of change, the inability to achieve objectives and goals, meet defined thresholds, achieve ambitions, or reach the anticipated results the organization has previously identified. “Researchers have considered how, in the face of uncertainty and complexity, employees try to regain control, predictability, and positive meaning in their work by crafting a clear and coherent narrative of the change, by actively making sense of what the change means – which can lead to the emergence of multiple accounts of the goals, expectations, desires, and outcomes of organizational changes” (Hay

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