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Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail

John Kotter, Harvard Business Review, 1995

The eight steps of successful change, and the mistake most organisations make at the very first one.

The big idea

Kotter studied organisations trying to transform themselves and found that most of them stumbled. Change, he argued, goes through a series of stages that take time, and skipping steps only creates the illusion of speed. He set out eight steps, starting with creating a real sense of urgency.

The famous example

The first of Kotter's eight steps is the one most organisations get wrong.

THE MODEL

8 steps

From urgency to embedding change

STEP ONE

Urgency

Make the case for change

WHERE IT FAILS

Over 50%

Fail at this first step

Kotter wrote that well over half the companies he watched failed in this first phase, because they underestimated how hard it is to drive people out of their comfort zones.

Why it matters

Whether it's a business or a team trying to change how it plays, people won't move until they feel the need to. Playing not to lose is often a sign that the urgency was never there.

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Read the original

Kotter, J. P. (1995). Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 73(2), 59–67.

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