

How to get change to **actually stick** — *without* huge consulting bills.

75% of transformations fail to generate value. That number hasn't moved in thirty years. The method itself is the problem — and it's a capital allocation issue.



BY

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FORMAT

Executive Brief · 12-minute read

The numbers haven't moved in thirty years.

Boards are funding transformation at unprecedented levels. Employees have never been less willing to support it.

Three numbers tell the story. None has improved in three decades — despite trillions in transformation spend and a generation of consulting playbooks.

79%

Of employees are not engaged at work

GALLUP

38%

Support organizational change — down from 74% in 2016

GARTNER

75%

Of transformations fail to generate value

BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP

What every board **should be concerned about.**

In 2022, organizations invested approximately **\$1.8 trillion** in digital transformation. By 2027, that figure is projected to exceed **\$4 trillion**. Boards are funding transformation at unprecedented levels.

Employees are less willing than ever to support it. The majority of initiatives fail. The unavoidable conclusion is not that leaders lack intelligence, nor that strategies are poorly conceived.

If the failure rate were ten or twenty percent, we could attribute it to poor execution. At seventy-five percent, the method itself is the problem.

*The question worth asking is not why do our people resist change? It is: **why does our model of change keep producing the same outcome?***

We are attempting to drive rapid adaptation in the 21st century with a *20th-century 'change management' playbook* — that largely failed.

The conventional sequence assumes information produces motivation.

THE 20TH-CENTURY 'CONSULTING' PLAYBOOK

Strategy → Process → Technology / Data → Training → Governance

It assumes a linear, rational chain: tell people what to do, enable them sufficiently, hold them accountable, and the results will follow.

This worked when there was less volatility, stronger institutional trust, and a different workforce. It was not poorly designed. **It was designed for a different world.**

Information does not equal intrinsic motivation. The dashboard lights up green. The behavioral change never materializes. The growth that was supposed to follow the investment simply does not arrive.

***The flawed assumption:
if people know what they
"should" do, they'll do it.***

In many cases, they will not.

Three systemic drivers stand out.

01

Underinvestment in adaptive capacity.

77% of employees lack the adaptability today's environment requires. **84%** of organizations are not meaningfully investing in building it.

McKinsey: when adaptability, resilience, psychological safety, and support converge, engagement and innovation rise **6x**.

Adaptability is not a "soft" skill. It is the precondition for effective action.

02

A top-down model that has lost trust.

Willingness to support change fell from **74% in 2016** to **38% in 2024**. **79%** report low trust in their organization's ability to manage change.

Trust is built by participation, autonomy, and evidence — not by long emails or town halls.

People do not resist change. They resist being changed.

03

The frozen middle.

The middle layer bears the heaviest burden of transformation: translating strategy into action under ambiguity, with misaligned incentives and portfolio overload.

When a strategy asks the frontline to push price *and* grow share at the same customer, it is not the people who are broken.

The design, not the people, is broken.



— THE OPERATOR'S VIEW

**The strategy is academically correct.
Executing it requires people to
fundamentally think and act differently.
That is the real challenge.**

A modern approach reverses the sequence — and eliminates passive resistance.

THE NEW SEQUENCE

Mindset → Skillset → Toolset

01 · MINDSET FIRST

Measure how people respond to adversity.

Use validated science — AQ® — to get your people to turn obstacles into opportunities, not excuses.

02 · SKILLSET IN REAL WORK

Frontline teams design their own 90-day projects.

Operator Coaches™ provide on-the-job coaching, helping teams identify real business problems and build skills in the work itself.

03 · TOOLSET ON DEMAND

Provide playbooks and tools as needed.

When people frame their own problems, they pull for tools and actually use them. Adoption ceases to be a problem.

Shift from “managing change” to *engineering adaptation*.

Six challenges to solve. **At the same time.**

Adaptive capacity isn't a force multiplier on a list of priorities. It is the precondition without which the others cannot be realized.

Change resistance → **intrinsic motivation**

Fragmented execution → **global consistency**

Reverting habits → **behavioral adaptation**

Consultant dependency → **internal capability**

Compliance → **real commitment**

Heroic efforts → **scalable systems**

Adversity Quotient® (AQ) is measurable, and can be *permanently improved*.



THE SOURCE

Dr. Paul G. Stoltz is the originator of both AQ® and GRIT™, and the world's leading authority on human adaptability, resilience, and performance under adversity.

ADOPTED AT

Harvard · MIT · INSEAD · Carnegie Mellon

MASTER COACH TO

The U.S. Olympic Team

LEADERSHIP TEAMS COACHED

Apple · Amazon · FedEx · Marriott · AT&T · Deloitte — and dozens more Fortune 500 enterprises.

Most executives responsible for transformation have never encountered the science of **Adversity Quotient**. Four decades of research and **3,500+ peer-reviewed studies** show that adaptability and resilience can be measured — and permanently improved.

The board-level implication: **adaptive capacity is not an abstract virtue**. It is a strategic asset that can be assessed, strengthened, and linked directly to performance outcomes.

PROOF CASE



THE OPERATOR

Roy van Griensven

Head of Business Transformation · ~\$7B specialty chemicals company

He scrapped the consulting plan, and rebuilt it from the ground up.

A global industrial company needed to build commercial capability across three continents. The new Head of Commercial Excellence inherited a traditional plan from a top strategy firm: roles, competency frameworks, classroom training.

He had seen it before. Strong attendance. Excellent feedback scores. **Negligible impact on earnings or behavior.**

He cut **80% of consulting spend**, reversed the sequence, and measured each leader's hardwired response to adversity first.

German HQ, deeply skeptical of behavioral methodologies, embraced the science because it held up under scrutiny. He told his frontline leaders:

"You are the consultants."

Teams surfaced real problems and converted them into 90-day **Growth Projects™** with weekly coaching. By giving people *one percent* design authority, the other ninety-nine landed with less resistance.

Mid-8-figure

EBITDA impact within 12 months, **validated by the CFO**

50+

Intrinsically motivated Growth Projects™, across **6 Academy cohorts**

300+

Frontline leaders & middle managers engaged, **with zero resistance**

The familiar cycle. The **emerging alternative.**

Fund transformation. Spend millions on consulting. Announce the plan. Encounter resistance. Blame execution or the market. Reset strategy.

The pattern repeats because the model that produces it has not changed.

You cannot mandate adaptation. You must *design the conditions* for it to occur naturally.

WHAT'S WORKING RIGHT NOW...

- 01 Diagnose friction and adaptive capacity upfront.
- 02 Co-design pilot initiatives with front-line participation.
- 03 Embed skill-building in real-world projects with on-the-job coaching.
- 04 Measure both business impact and behavioral shifts.
- 05 Scale what demonstrably works.

— ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Commercial Excellence Consortium™

The Consortium is an **invite-only peer community of 200+ senior executives** at large global enterprises responsible for enterprise transformation and organic growth.

Monthly executive roundtables. Practitioners who believe operators — not consultants — are best positioned to solve the hardest problems in commercial excellence.

THE NEXT STEP

Hear it directly from the operator who did it.

*A confidential, peer-to-peer briefing with **Roy van Griensven** — the Head of Business Transformation from the proof case. He'll walk your team through what worked, what didn't, and how to apply it.*

No pitch. No proposal. Operator to operator.

[Schedule Your Peer Briefing →](#)