

Enterprise adaptation is **not a change management problem.**

It is an operating-environment problem. Most enterprise change does not fail through visible opposition — it fails through gradual disengagement.

Pull adaptation, don't push change

Behavior follows context. Design an environment that reinforces ownership, relevance, safety, and learning — and adaptation becomes the natural outcome.

BY

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FORMAT

Executive brief

READING TIME

10 minutes

 THE ROOM

A persistent question senior leaders keep **circling back to**.

Senior Commercial Excellence, Transformation, and GTM leaders convened for a private executive roundtable to examine one question: **why does adaptation remain so difficult, even when strategy is clear and intent is aligned?**

They came from medtech, specialty chemicals, industrial manufacturing, logistics, FMCG, pharmaceuticals, and B2B services — collectively responsible for influencing behavior across tens of thousands of employees, often without direct authority.

**Change rarely fails through visible opposition.
It fails through **gradual disengagement**.**

People comply where required — and **preserve habits where it matters.**

Compliance is easy to observe. Commitment is not. Where it counts most — in customer conversations, pricing decisions, account prioritization, and daily trade-offs — experienced professionals quietly keep doing what has long worked for them.

WHAT THAT MEANS

The rollout looks adopted on the dashboard.

The **decisions that move the business rarely change.**



— WHAT EXECUTIVES SAID

Frontline teams are not confused. They are **saturated** — and change lands as additive work.

Six drivers — and **not one of them is clarity.**

01

Capacity, not clarity, is the dominant constraint.

Frontline teams are not confused. They are saturated. Unless something is deliberately removed, change becomes additive work on top of a full plate.

02

Identity and ego are frequently triggered.

Resistance emerges when experienced professionals feel excluded from the design of the new ways of working they're asked to adopt.

03

Change fatigue compounds faster than leaders expect.

After enough half-finished initiatives, people ration their effort. They wait to see whether this one is real before committing anything to it.

READ IT AS FEEDBACK

Resistance is not emotional. It is **adaptive.**

People stop investing effort in changes they don't believe will endure.

Fear, friction, and the **manager layer**.

04 **Fear of failure and ambiguity are under-addressed.**

New pricing models, CRM workflows, and negotiation approaches create real uncertainty in high-stakes moments — so people fall back on what feels safe.

05 **The “feed the monster” problem undermines adoption.**

Frontline teams are asked to enter data and follow processes that primarily serve governance and reporting — not their own work. Effort flows to the dashboard, not the customer.

06 **The manager layer is the silent bottleneck.**

When managers lack the time, skill, or incentives to coach, behavior change decays rapidly after training. The middle is where adoption lives or dies.

THE THROUGH-LINE

None of these are problems of willpower.

They are properties of the **environment — which is something you can change.**



— THE SHIFT

**Stop pushing change
through the organization.
Design conditions that
let adaptation occur on
its own.**

Three moves that change **how** the environment behaves.

01 · CO-DESIGN

Let operators shape the solutions they must use.

When the people who live in the work help design it, realism improves and ownership shifts from imposed systems to shared solutions.

02 · SUBTRACT FIRST

Remove outdated work before adding new work.

Before introducing new expectations, deliberately retire the reports and processes they replace. Capacity is the constraint — so create some.

03 · COACH

Install coaching as the reinforcement engine.

Training creates awareness. Coaching creates behavior. Without it, the new way decays back to the old the moment pressure rises.

Behavior follows **context**.

When the environment reinforces ownership, relevance, safety, and learning, adaptation occurs. When it reinforces compliance, overload, and distance from reality, resistance follows. The lever is not the message — it is the environment the message lands in.

When people are treated as capable adults, involved in solving real problems, supported through learning, and coached through uncertainty, resistance recedes as a central concern.

Adaptation is not something you drive.
It is what a well-designed system **produces.**



— THE NEXT STEP

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Founder and Group Moderator of the **Commercial Excellence Consortium™**, an invite-only peer community of 250+ senior executives at large global enterprises responsible for enterprise transformation and organic growth.

The Consortium hosts monthly executive roundtables and convenes practitioners who believe that *operators* — *not consultants* — are best positioned to solve the hardest problems in commercial excellence.

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