WHITE PAPER

The *Missing* Discipline

Why well-run change efforts still stall — and what senior leaders can do about it.



3 in 10

Across **more than 1,200 leaders and individual contributors** navigating significant change, fewer than three in ten believed their organization's effort would succeed.

Brad Smith & Kristy Braden
INFLECTION POINT LEADERSHIP

InflectionPointLeadership.com

01 THE BELIEVABILITY GAP

Three in ten

<30% In diagnostic work with **more than 1,200 leaders and individual contributors** inside organizations actively navigating significant change, **fewer than three in ten** believed their organization's change effort would succeed.

These were not failing organizations. The plans were credible. The communications had gone out. Milestones were tracking. Execution was disciplined.

And most of the people inside the effort still did not believe it would hold.

> *That gap is the work this paper is about. It is the work IPL has done since our inception — and it is where the actual leadership work of continuous change increasingly lives.*

Change is what happens. Shift is what it triggers.

Even a well-built change plan, executed competently, produces friction, fatigue, and regression — because people do not respond only to plans. They respond to the *experience* those plans create.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Addresses the plan

Sequences activities, drives alignment through information and milestones, and reduces implementation risk. It remains essential.

SHIFT LEADERSHIP

Addresses the lived experience

What the plan disrupts, exposes, threatens, and asks of the people who must move through it.

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02 TWO TRACKS, ONE EVENT

The same event splits in two

Almost every change event runs along two tracks at once — the managed plan, and the human experience it sets off.

CHANGE A new strategy is announced.	→	**SHIFT** People question their role, capability, and future.
CHANGE A new system goes live.	→	**SHIFT** Work feels clumsy, competence feels threatened, collaboration breaks.
CHANGE A senior leader moves on.	→	**SHIFT** Identity, trust, and informal influence rearrange.

Shift Leadership does not replace change management. **It expands what change management is equipped to address.**

03 THE WRONG-LAYER MISMATCH

Most leaders respond at the wrong layer

Most friction inside a managed change is not produced by poor planning or weak intent. It is produced by leaders responding to the right person at the *wrong layer* of experience. A meaning problem gets answered with information. An overload problem with encouragement. An ending problem with a push toward what is next.

≈2/3 asked what they needed to engage more fully, **roughly two-thirds named Heart needs** — role, standing, contribution, and what the change said about how leadership saw them. The most common leadership response observed? **More information.**

> *The friction does not resolve — it migrates. It explains why thoroughly explained changes still stall.*

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04 THE FRAMEWORK

The IPL Shift Leadership Model™

We organize the experience side of change into four interconnected layers. Each one answers a different question the friction is raising.

Layer 01
Shift Filters™
How is this being interpreted?

Head · Heart · Hands

Layer 02
Transition Phases
Where is someone in the internal journey?

Ending · Neutral Zone · New Beginning

Layer 03
Traction Conditions™
What conditions are shaping the experience?

The 6Cs

Layer 04
Transition Personas™
How is someone currently showing up?

Nine recognizable patterns

Intervene at the right layer and movement increases. **Intervene at the wrong layer and friction migrates.**

Shift Leadership

Senior leaders can usually read interpretation, transition, and individual patterns. The layer most often missed — and most often the actual lever — is **Traction Conditions**.

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05 THE LEVER LEADERS MISS

Traction Conditions™: the 6Cs & 6Es

Six conditions determine whether a shift lands. Each pairs with the lived experience it produces when it is strong.

CONDITION (6CS)	THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS	EXPERIENCE (6ES)
Clarity	*Do I understand what is happening well enough to move?*	**Enlightened**
Connection	*Am I still part of something — and does it matter?*	**Engaged**
Confidence	*Do I believe this can work, and that I still matter within it?*	**Entrusted**
Capability	*Do I know how to do what this shift now requires?*	**Equipped**
Capacity	*Do I have enough room to absorb this?*	**Effective**
Change-Agility	*Can I keep adapting as this shift continues to move?*	**Empowered**

When a shift stalls, the instinct is to read the room and draw conclusions about people. The behavior is real — what is usually wrong is the *source*.

"Disengaged"	→	is missing **Connection** — no longer feels part of something worth contributing to.
"Skeptical"	→	is missing **Confidence** — not convinced this will hold.
"Slow"	→	is missing **Capability** — wants to move and does not yet know how.
"Resistant"	→	is missing **Capacity** — already carrying more than the shift accounts for.

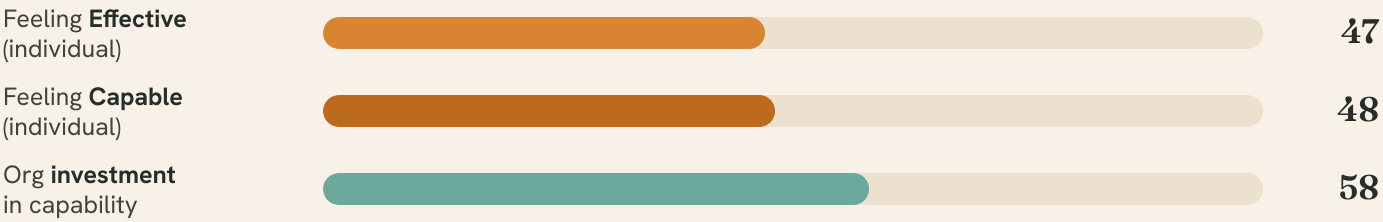
> *The behavior is the signal. The condition is the lever. "Resistant" is a conclusion. Naming the missing condition is a move.*

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06 WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

The investment was real. It was not landing.

The lowest score across the entire dataset was the personal experience of being **Effective** during change. Capability scored just **48** from the individual's perspective — even as people rated their organization's investment in capability at **58**.



Capacity strain is not evenly distributed. It falls disproportionately on people with less structural authority, fewer relationships, or roles that absorb more ambient friction. The people most often labeled "resistant" are frequently the ones being asked to carry the most without the authority to reduce it.

07 THE OPERATING DISCIPLINE

A single, repeatable loop

Reading the layers without a discipline to act on the read produces analysis, not movement. The IPL operating loop is the same in every tool and every conversation:

1. **Detect** — Notice what is loudest now.
2. **Unlock** — Understand what that layer is asking for.
3. **Choose** — Pick the one lever that matters most.
4. **Act** — One small move, sized to the next 24–72 hours.
5. **Learn** — Check what changed. Assume the driver migrates.

The sharper question is smaller: **if I could improve only one thing in the next 24–72 hours, what would most change how this person is experiencing the shift?** Not the comprehensive plan. The next accurate one.

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08 FOR SENIOR LEADERS

Three governance moves to make this systematic

Most senior leaders do not need another framework explained. They need a different question being asked at the moment leaders are most prone to defaulting to the comfortable one.

1 Change the review question

In transformation reviews, do not only ask "Are we on plan?" Ask **"What experience is the plan creating?"** — and require evidence. Adoption is a result; conditions are the lever.

2 Equip leaders to name the layer first

Make leaders adept at naming the layer driving resistance or disengagement **before** prescribing a fix. The four-layer diagnostic is a fifteen-minute conversation — and it changes which interventions get approved.

3 Build a re-read cadence

The driver migrates. What worked at month two is rarely what works at month four. **Schedule the re-read before it is needed.**

> *None of these require new budget. They require a different read.*

The leaders who navigate continuous change best are not the ones who communicate most, push hardest, or try to address everything at once. They read the experience accurately enough to make the next useful move — and then read again as conditions evolve.

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09 WORKING WITH IPL

What this looks like in practice

Three ways IPL helps senior leaders, CHROs, and HR business partners build this into how their organizations actually work.

Equip every leader with personal practice

When Shift Gets Real: The Field Guide for Individuals puts the Shift Leadership Model™ — including the nine Transition Personas™ and 17 Field Note Worksheets — into the hands of individual leaders and contributors. Built for use in the moment, not for the shelf.

AVAILABLE IN BULK FOR ORG-WIDE ROLLOUTS

Build shift leadership as an organizational capability

Diagnostic instruments, learning modules, and team-level workshops convert shift leadership from individual practice into systemic capacity — surfacing where Endings are concentrated, where New Beginning energy is building, and where targeted support has the highest leverage.

Partner directly on consequential change

For organizations navigating high-stakes, multi-shift transformations, IPL works alongside senior leadership teams to read the experience the plan is creating, sharpen the next move, and build the in-house discipline to keep doing it after we leave.

Shift Leadership

The work lives in the gap.

The gap between managing the plan and leading the shift is, increasingly, where the actual work of leadership lives. That discipline is teachable — and it is the work we do.

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Lead the shift.
Make the *next accurate move.*

If your change effort is tracking on plan but stalling in practice, that gap is exactly where we work.

Book a call inflectionpointleadership.com/contact-us

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Methodology note. Diagnostic findings are drawn from IPL surveys of more than 1,200 leaders and individual contributors inside organizations actively navigating significant change. Each survey is anchored to a specific organizational shift at a specific point in time; findings reported here are aggregate patterns across that body of work, not a longitudinal study.

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