



Achieving Change Success: Mindset and Behaviors

Separating Success From Failure During Transformational Change

connerpartners⁷

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Introduction

One of the challenges we face as change practitioners is how to make sense out of the often extremely complicated and perplexing dynamics that influence the outcomes of the initiatives we help execute. Once we understand what's going on, we must then help our clients grasp what is unfolding and guide them to the best course of action.

It's easy to fall into the trap of using simplistic explanations; however, this doesn't describe the true complexity of major change initiatives. On the other hand, we can get lost in the convoluted intricacies of a transition and offer help that is more baffling than enlightening. The secret to being an effective change agent is to find what Matthew Mays refers to as the "elegance on the other side of complexity."

We need a set of *lenses* through which we can view the most confounding of implementation dynamics in order to find some level of clarity. (We'll never have all the answers, but if we don't have more than our clients do, we are baggage, not a guide on their journey.) Practicing our craft without lenses to expose the veiled issues, pitfalls, and opportunities hidden below the surface will leave us with only good intentions, hope, and luck in our tool kit.

The clarity we seek comes when we use lenses to identify and interpret the concealed *patterns* that influence how people function and events unfold. With the proper lenses, we will be able to observe both the mindset that is being applied to an initiative, and the behaviors that are driven by that mindset. These patterns (mindset and behaviors) are the configurations of influence that make up the order beneath the confusion. Some patterns are associated with change success while others are indicative of initiatives that fall short of expected results.

Patterns are invisible to the untrained eye, and so typically go unnoticed by most people. Lenses function much like a pair of prescription glasses. They allow the patterns to come into focus, opening up a range of interpretations and actions that would otherwise not be possible.

The affect of these patterns on the outcomes of change is powerful; ignorance of their impact is not an adequate defense for failing to address them. Just as failing to understand—or worse, denying—the relationship between smoking and lung cancer offers no protection from the consequences, our inattentiveness to the patterns of change will not shield a sound business solution from being ravaged by the predictable risks associated with major change.

We can “own” lenses but not patterns

Many practitioners lay claim to a proprietary set of lenses, but none of us can assert that we own the patterns our lenses reveal. There are many lens “frameworks” available, all describing the same mindset and behavior patterns that emerge during transformational shifts. Conner Partners has developed a change methodology filled with lenses and related guidance, as has John Kotter, David Nadler, Bill Bridges, Linda and Dean Anderson, Prosci, most of the larger consulting firms (Accenture, KPMG, IBM, etc.), numerous graduate schools, and countless others. In addition, many organizations have developed their own change methodologies for use exclusively within their confines. These typically are comprised of a combination of other frameworks along with some original thinking that has been forged into an implementation approach unique to a particular enterprise.

As one example, Conner Partners uses a set of change success lenses to look at five different mindset and behavior patterns.

- The importance placed on matching challenge and commitment
- The importance placed on intent
- The importance placed on sponsors
- The importance placed on agents
- The nature of organizational change success

Most, if not all, approaches to change offer their own sets of lenses associated with achieving change success. Lenses are to professional change facilitators what a stethoscope, thermometer, and sphygmomanometer (blood pressure gauge) are to a physician—they are foundational tools for practicing our craft. With a proper set of lenses, you can see the hidden patterns that channel the flow of change. Copyrighted lenses (approaches, techniques, nomenclature, etc.) are important, but we need to keep them in perspective. They are nothing more than a set of conceptual tools used to see and interpret what is happening within the pattern. This is where the real work of change implementation is accomplished.

Patterns are the underlying, meta-level dynamics of change. As such, they are indigenous to our species, evolving from eons of human struggle with how to adjust to unfamiliar circumstances. Our ancestors, by trial and error, gradually formed what are now engrained neuron pathways and deep intuitive tendencies associated with how we respond to significant changes in our lives. Through years of research and careful observation, these patterns have been uncovered by various practitioners. However, the patterns themselves don't belong to any one person or group any more than someone can hold the rights to how we breathe or to the aging process. A consulting firm or a group of internal practitioners can develop a unique way of

recognizing a pattern and even possess proprietary language for how to describe it, but the pattern itself is inherent to the human experience.

Mindset patterns

A mindset for implementing change provides right-brain guidance in that it consists of beliefs, expectations, and assumptions about how to accomplish transitions. A person's mindset towards implementation encompasses mental and emotional structures that shape his or her perceptions, interpretations, and actions. It reflects insights, biases, and philosophies the person uses to understand and orchestrate the dynamics of change. Mindsets patterns, in turn, influence behavior patterns. For example, leaders and their change agents who consistently deliver expected results from major transformation endeavors display certain signature behaviors resulting from the mindset they apply.

Delivering change success requires a specific mindset that is shared among key players as they perform their respective roles. This success mindset reflects the insights and lessons learned from people who have confronted the tough realities of what it really takes to deliver on organizational transitions. It refers to a particular frame of reference and set of priorities that support the accomplishment of important initiatives.

Behavior patterns

Mindset patterns are translated into actions through behavior patterns. Organizational change, like many things in life that appear to be random or unfathomable, actually has a structure. At the level of observable actions, the structure consists of discernable behavior patterns and reflects how people tend to react to the circumstances that develop during transitions. While most people are unaware of these patterns, they represent the behaviors typically demonstrated during major change, as well as the likely sequence of events that will transpire. Here are some of the more common behavior patterns that lenses can detect:

How practitioners use the mindset and behavior patterns

When executing large-scale initiatives, sponsors often feel victimized by what they don't understand. The more we can demystify the dynamics of change for them by offering relatively simple ways to comprehend what is happening, the more likely they will feel they can affect the outcome. Practitioners, therefore, should be able to do four things.

- Be familiar with the array of mindset and behavior patterns that usually play out during significant organizational transformations
- Recognize them when they surface
- Be able to describe their impact in easy-to-understand language
- Know what guidance to offer for each one or any combination that forms

The understanding that a specific mindset and associated behaviors will facilitate or impede success provides you with a level of insight that is not accessible to a sponsor who is unfamiliar with change dynamics. As an example, knowing that the success mindset contains a mindset and a behavior pattern that *commitment is not left to chance* allows you to work with the sponsors and change team to plan for ways to build commitment. As the initiative moves forward, that mindset will lead the sponsors to take the actions necessary (behaviors) to foster momentum and a critical mass of commitment throughout the organization.

Knowing that certain events will, in all likelihood, occur at predictable points in a transition allows you to provide guidance in both the planning and execution of initiatives. For example, if you can predict the emotional reaction people are likely to have to a major change, you can recommend specific actions to either encourage or inhibit that response. If you can anticipate why and how strongly a particular group will resist an initiative before it is announced, you may suggest a modification to the communications to avoid or minimize some of their concerns. For those concerns that can't be mitigated, you can at least help the sponsor anticipate the reactions people will have and prepare a response.

Both mindset and behavior patterns exist and are influential to outcomes, whether clients see them or not. As practitioners, it is our responsibility to adopt a set of reliable lenses through which we can determine which patterns are exercising influence on a change initiative at any given time. You may decide to become proficient in one set of lenses (a specific methodology), combine aspects from several different frameworks, augment one with some of your own lens creations, or start from scratch and develop an entire implementation approach on your own. However you get there, it's imperative that you ground your practice on a reliable set of lenses.

Supporting clients in the development of a successful mindset is a key part of our role as professional change agents. Helping to ensure that behavior patterns align with that mindset is equally important. While there is a direct relationship between mindset and behaviors, we don't always act—without fail—in accordance with our mindset. Thus, having a success mindset is not enough. The ability to recognize both success and failure patterns of behavior is important as well. The remainder of this paper explores the success mindset lenses in more detail, while providing both the mindset and behavior patterns associated with each lens.

An Example of Lenses

The Conner Partner example introduced earlier consists of five lenses.

- The importance placed on matching challenge and commitment
- The importance placed on intent
- The importance placed on sponsors
- The importance placed on agents
- The nature of organizational change success

Each of these allows the practitioner to examine a series of patterns (mindset and behaviors) and to view them within the context of the patterns displayed by leaders who consistently succeed with change.

Lens	Patterns (Mindset and Behavior)
The importance placed on matching challenge and commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention and resource allocation is dictated by a change's "degree of difficulty" to execute • Commitment is not left to chance
The importance placed on intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent is not strategy • Intent comes after struggle • Simple is best • Intent integrity is imperative
The importance placed on sponsors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant organizational change can only succeed if led by deeply committed sponsors • Paradigms are not replaced by consensus • Methodology is not a substitute for courage and discipline • Leaders can't transform their organizations unless they are willing to transform themselves
The importance placed on agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsors need support from skilled agents • Agents need to be frank and straightforward • Agents should avoid bad business • Agents should avoid working harder than their sponsors
The nature of organizational change success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discomfort is inherent in change success • Everyone struggles with the implications of significant change • There is always a risk in transformational promises • It takes resilient people to support success • Success depends on learning from mistakes • Succeeding with major organizational change is as much an art as a science • Change is messy • Much of the work associated with major organizational change is cathartic in nature • Sometimes the best you can do isn't good enough to keep promises made

What follows is a summary of the Conner Partners change success lenses introduced earlier, along with the mindset and behavior patterns that might be seen through each lens. In this example, what is being shown are both success and failure patterns.

Lens: The Importance Placed on Matching Challenge and Commitment

Mindset Pattern: Attention and resource allocation is dictated by an initiative’s “degree of difficulty” to execute.

The degree of difficulty of a change is determined by answering three questions:

- How much change does the initiative represent? (Will the change result in incremental shifts, or will it or transform certain fundamental aspects of the way things operate?)
- What kind of fulfillment must be achieved to deliver success? (Can the pledge be consummated by installing certain things, or are significant shifts in mindsets and behaviors required?)
- How critical is the success of this initiative to the health of the overall business? (Is it just a “good idea” or should it be considered a business imperative?)

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Leaders insist on understanding the degree of difficulty for all initiatives requiring their approval and do one of three things: 1) allocate the proper attention/resources needed to succeed; 2) reduce the overall difficulty rating to a range requiring less attention/fewer resources (by lowering the burden of one or more of the elements); or 3) do not approve the initiative.	Leaders do not include difficulty ratings as part of their due diligence for approving projects, or they sanction initiatives naively, thinking there is an unlimited amount of mindshare/resources that can be applied to change, or they sanction initiatives despite knowing that the ratings require more attention/resources than will be allocated.

Mindset Pattern: *Commitment is not left to chance.*

Succeeding at major organizational change requires that people believe the price for the status quo significantly exceeds the cost of transition. Leaders believe that development of commitment is simply too essential to be left to chance. It can and should be orchestrated to support achieving the desired outcome.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
<p>Leaders invest resources to understand the commitment requirements for their initiatives, devote time and energy to understanding effective approaches to building it, and ensure that their plans include activities that foster momentum and a critical mass of commitment throughout the organization.</p>	<p>Leaders want support for changes they implement but have little understanding of what is involved in securing it (i.e., they confuse communications with gaining commitment and truly enrolling people, etc). Many of those who do understand the resources needed to build commitment balk at the time and expense required. They want strong support for their endeavors but are not willing to pay the price to have it.</p>

Lens: The Importance Placed on Intent

Mindset Pattern: *Intent is not strategy.*

Important changes are typically defined at too high a level to guide execution, or even to determine whether the change is—in fact—feasible. Ultimately, the leadership team must move from words

- to shared meaning,
- to believing in the possibility the change creates,
- to aligning as a team,
- to allocating resources and funding it, and, most importantly,
- to staking their reputation on delivering the true intent.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
<p>Leaders devote sufficient time to developing intent at the level of detail required to achieve true understanding, commitment, and alignment. They consider what is necessary not just to build their own resolve, but to extend the same tenacity to those impacted by the change.</p> <p>As intent is unfolding, leaders encourage open dialogue and the expression of diverse points of view. When complete, the reasons for the change and the expectations for the future state are clearly understood and survive short-term deviations from the path toward the desired future state.</p>	<p>Leaders confuse high-level business strategy with intent clarification, and confuse agreement on the strategy with the commitment needed for the change. They think the articulation of the strategy is sufficient for successful execution of the change but find themselves unable to sustain momentum during the implementation process. As a result, they do not invest in developing a clear articulation of the intent.</p> <p>Those impacted do not understand the intent for the change. Resistance increases, making it difficult to build commitment and critical mass for the change.</p>

Mindset Pattern: Intent comes after struggle.

Cohesion and co-ownership among those on the leadership team is essential for the effective enrollment of others in successfully executing change. However, achieving understanding, commitment, and alignment to the true intent of major change initiatives is never easy. Leaders must ensure that all of their perspectives are heard and valued, and that they understand the tradeoffs and choices associated with the final view of the desired future.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
<p>Leaders have the courage and take the time to make the tough choices associated with defining the intent. Therefore, they understand the consequences of moving forward (or not) and they can make a sober decision about whether to commit to the change.</p> <p>Throughout the process, leaders listen deeply to the views of others, discuss issues without prejudice, and support the final decisions even when they are not in complete agreement. They are also able to enroll others in the intent of the change without expressing personal concerns or reservations.</p>	<p>Leaders rush to judgment when defining the intent. They passively accept words, phrases, and decisions during group discussions and then complain later that their voices were not heard. Key constituents are not included in the conversation and do not support the intent. Alternatively, sponsors delegate the development of the intent to agents, and then rubber-stamp it until the going gets tough and they reverse their decisions. Leaders do not really understand what's before them when they embark on the change and publicly express dissent and disagreement with particular elements of the intent.</p>

Mindset Pattern: Simple is best.

The statement of intent must be as straightforward as possible. This is not accomplished when nothing more can be added, but when nothing more can be taken away. Simplicity itself is not the goal, however. The goal is to have everyone who will impact and be impacted by the change understand it.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
<p>Senior leaders can describe the intent of the change in a simple and meaningful way that ensures the core elements of the story survive telling and retelling without distortion.</p> <p>People across the organization understand and can describe the change concisely and consistently. Once the change has been cascaded and fully discussed, debate around the meaning of the intent is minimized and there is a clear understanding of what success looks like. Decisions are made quickly and are fully aligned with the purpose of the change.</p>	<p>The primary vehicle for explaining the intent of the change is a lengthy slide deck that attempts to explain everything known to date about the expectations and plans for the change. It may even go beyond the intent and start to describe the solution.</p> <p>People frequently misinterpret what leaders really want or continually return to seek explanations and challenge unclear direction. Progress toward success will be delayed by constantly revisiting and seeking revisions of the original statement of intent.</p>

Mindset Pattern: Intent integrity is imperative.

As the new change initiative begins to unfold, persistent attention must be directed toward ensuring decisions and actions are consistent with and support the new direction.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
There is an active process and dedicated resources for monitoring and managing intent integrity. Decisions made throughout the design and implementation stay true to the intent unless there is a conscious decision by leaders to do otherwise. The intent remains current and meaningful, and ongoing communications are carried out in that context.	Development of the intent is a one-time activity at the beginning of the initiative. After the initial cascade, it is assumed that everyone “gets it.” Over time, there is scope creep and a loss of direction and people do more or less than is needed for success. The original intent becomes lost through a series of seemingly inconsequential decisions that add up over time.

Lens: The Importance Placed on Sponsors

Mindset Pattern: Significant transformations can only succeed if led by deeply committed sponsors.

Succeeding with transformational shifts requires leaders who provide the endeavors with sustained guidance, resources, support, consequences, and unrelenting tenacity. They understand their role and are willing and able to apply it toward a wide range of change inhibitors. Any risks to success can be addressed as long as the sponsors’ motivation and skills keep pace with challenges as they unfold. A high resolve for change at senior leadership levels is a necessary, but not sufficient, criterion for success. The same sense of urgency and criticality that is visible among initiating sponsors must be cascaded down throughout the organization and demonstrated among the sustaining sponsors as well.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations are convinced of the criticality of sponsorship and are willing to invest in the work required to prepare leaders to perform this role effectively. They will not proceed with a major change unless there is adequate support from one or more initiating sponsor as well as the appropriate sustaining sponsors. Leaders are cautious about the number of initiatives they sponsor because they fully understand the responsibility and burden they accept when they do so.	Organizations lack an appreciation of how essential sponsorship is to change success. This results in leaders delegating implementation responsibilities to change agents and then operating from the sidelines. They assume that agents can compensate for any lack of preparation, time, and attention on their part. Leaders do one of three things: 1) fail to take on sponsor duties; 2) accept responsibility for too many initiatives and dilute their ability to perform as needed to ensure success; or 3) secure sufficient initiating sponsorship but fail to cascade the same level of resolve to the appropriate cadre of sustaining sponsors.

Mindset Pattern: Paradigms¹ are not replaced by consensus.

Incremental change unfolds differently, but true transformative change is not the result of a democratic vote, negotiated settlements, or the application of consensus management techniques. The governance of successful organizational change has a particular pattern signature: it is characterized by strong, definitive leadership that seeks out, values, and is influenced by various viewpoints; however, key decisions are ultimately made by those in sponsor roles. Paradigms are transformed by a balance of power—leaders who have the unquestioned authority to make the critical decisions, and followers who have the unquestioned capacity to help the sponsor use her or his authority wisely.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Sponsors clearly establish expectations so people understand that their input will be valued and used during key change-related deliberations, but that the decisions themselves will be made by the sponsor.	Sponsors either provide confusing or ambiguous guidance about how decisions will be made, or attempt to use democratic voting, negotiations, or consensus approaches to resolve critical choices.

Mindset Pattern: Methodology is not a substitute for courage and discipline.

While implementation tools, procedures, and skilled agents are important facilitating mechanisms, they are only enablers in support of change success. The real secret to fundamental transformation is the degree to which sponsors display:

- **Courage**
 - Acknowledging to oneself and others the resources and tough decisions achieving success truly requires
 - Taking the appropriate actions to pursue success despite the fears, obstacles, and adversity one encounters
- **Discipline**
 - Living up to the standards of what must be done each and every time their courage is called for. (Courageous, disciplined sponsors allow “no time-outs and no substitutions” for themselves and others.)

¹ In the context of this paper, the term “Paradigm” is used to reflect the perceptions shared by people concerning what their organization’s purpose is and how it is to be achieved (i.e., what are the key goals and how is work to be accomplished).

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Leaders know that a reliable implementation methodology and people skilled in its application must be supported by sponsors who have the courage and discipline required to address significant obstacles and challenges to success. They exhibit both courage and discipline unwaveringly, “no time outs, no substitutions.”	Leaders become overly reliant on an approach to change or on agents/consultants to address issues only the sponsors can resolve. They often do so because they are unwilling or unprepared to apply the courage and discipline required for change execution to achieve success.

Mindset Pattern: Leaders can’t transform their organizations unless they are willing to transform themselves.

Generally speaking, leaders who have resided in a changing organization for extended periods are a product of the culture they are attempting to reshape. They may not be aware of how extensive its influence is on their perceptions and judgment, or see that new knowledge and skills may be required to fulfill their sponsor duties. Successful leaders recognize that they need to continually raise the bar on their performance as sponsors during major change.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Regardless of their level in the organization, leaders are prepared to be “students” of the change process and, in particular, are willing to learn what is needed to perform their sponsor duties, including making significant adjustments to their style of dealing with others.	Some leaders have difficulty embracing a student perspective, admitting they may not have all the answers, or are not open to coaching and guidance. They see themselves as not needing any special guidance to function in their sponsor role and/or they are unwilling to engage in meaningful modifications of their own style of operation.

Lens: The Importance Placed on Agents

Mindset Pattern: Sponsors need support from skilled agents.

Even leaders with plenty of change experience—who have all the right instincts and the courage and discipline needed to orchestrate difficult transitions—remain vulnerable. They must be supported by skilled agents who understand how to provide the proper guidance to their leaders.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations apply solid due diligence to the selection and training of agents. They look for a range of knowledge and skills, along with a pre-disposition for this type of work, and only choose the most qualified people. All agents see themselves as completely in service to their sponsor. The lead agents have unrestricted access to the initiating sponsor and primary sustaining sponsors.	Organizations either don’t assign agents to sponsors, or select ones who lack the readiness to perform the role properly. They don’t commit full-time resources; they select from the available people rather than the ones best suited for the role.

Mindset Pattern: Agents need to be frank and straightforward.

Sponsors must charter agents to ask the tough questions or recommend the courageous actions. Under these circumstances, it would be unconscionable for agents to be anything less than explicit and unreserved when conveying key messages.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations value agents who base their working relationships on the belief that being truthful and direct is ultimately in everyone’s best interest, even if it generates discomfort in the short run.	Sponsors see agents who speak frankly and directly about uncomfortable issues as unnecessarily bold, brash, or even arrogant, and discourage this kind of candor and explicitness.

Mindset Pattern: Agents should avoid bad business.

Bad business exists when sponsors are willing to make and engage significant changes, but are not prepared to follow through with all the political, logistical, and economic requirements to succeed. Leaders who consistently succeed with major change require their agents to be direct with them when they appear to lack sufficient capability or commitment.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations encourage agents to only accept assignments with sufficient sponsor predisposition for success, and allow agents to either turn down assignments as “bad business” if they do not feel that the sponsorship is adequate or to be explicit about sponsorship being a risk factor that could jeopardize success. Sponsors listen carefully to the concerns that agents raise before and during a change initiative.	Agents are not given the opportunity to turn down assignments, or even raise sponsorship as a risk factor. Sponsors take offense when agents decline work they have been asked to pursue. If agents do raise concerns to sponsors about sponsor readiness to pay the true price for change, sponsors dismiss or ignore them.

Mindset Pattern: Agents should avoid working harder than their sponsors.

“Working harder than the sponsor” means the agent becomes more dedicated to change success than does the sponsor. When agents take on “pseudo-sponsor” roles, targets recognize and respond to the lack of true sponsor commitment; as a result, they fail to display the behaviors and mindsets needed for the new way of operating.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations are clear about the responsibilities of sponsor and agent roles. They ensure that they are not asking agents to substitute for poor sponsorship, are alert to agents raising concerns about faltering sponsorship, and are responsive to these issues.	Sponsors try to shift much of the burden of their responsibilities to agents, or agents pre-empt the sponsor (out of concern for how busy the sponsor is), by taking action on matters that are best left to the sponsor.

Lens: The Nature of Organizational Change Success

Mindset Pattern: Discomfort is inherent in change success.

The job of sponsors and agents isn't to keep people happy. It is to help them make the transition despite inherent discomfort.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations recognize that pursuing major change creates discomfort. Sponsors and agents work to ensure that measures of success are focused on true success indicators rather than on more traditional assessments of how happy people are with what is taking place.	Sponsors assume they can keep everything running smoothly with little uneasiness or tension during a major transition. They expect agents to measure how happy people are as a key indicator of success and they interpret symptoms to the contrary as a sign of failure.

Mindset Pattern: Everyone struggles with the implications of significant change.

When faced with dramatic shifts, people have reservations about the content of the change they are involved in, the implementation approach being used, or their ability to perform their role(s) in the change. It is often assumed that targets will resist certain aspects of major change initiatives, but even the sponsors and agents who promote change fall prey to wavering determination and skepticism.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations do not assume sponsors and agents are immune to the adaptation dynamics that affect targets. Before people are considered fully prepared for these roles, they are provided ample opportunities to express their own fears and anxieties about the change and are encouraged to come forward with their concerns as the implementation process unfolds. Apprehensions, even resistance, are considered a normal part of the transition process, not just for targets, but for sponsors and agents as well.	Organizations expect sponsors and agents to assume their roles in the change process with no regard to how the implications might be affecting them as targets. This does not prevent them from experiencing fears and anxieties, but they are not openly expressed. This leads to mixed signals and confusing actions, resulting in increased jeopardy to achieving success.

Mindset Pattern: There is always risk in realizing transformational change.

The nature of major transitions inevitably includes surprises, challenges, and missed expectations, as well as mistakes. Often, however, leaders try to hide from—or put a “spin” on—anything that deviates from the planned path. In fact, many leaders have spent their entire careers diluting or covering up risks that unfolded as they executed major change initiatives. Leaders who consistently succeed with major organizational changes promote a *red is good*

perspective toward status reporting. They encourage people to honestly portray the true condition of projects, and to express their actual concerns.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Sponsors don't "shoot the messenger" when they learn of risks, choosing instead to focus on resolution. Agents learn that they must bring risks forward rather than protecting leaders from the problems. As a result, organizations are more confident that a true assessment of current conditions will prevail.	Both sponsors and their lead agents are likely to become very uncomfortable when risk surfaces. Agents see their role as protecting sponsors from having to deal with problems, and sponsors view agents' honest appraisal and reporting of issues as unnecessarily escalating challenges that sponsors shouldn't be bothered with.

Mindset Pattern: It takes resilient people to support success.

Resilient people suffer less from the dysfunctions of highly disruptive change, bounce back quickly, and usually prosper during major change. They achieve more of their objectives, maintain a higher level of quality and productivity in their work, and preserve their physical and emotional health to a greater extent than their less-resilient counterparts.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations recognize the link between resilience and change success. They hire, train, and reinforce people who demonstrate a predisposition toward high levels of resilience. They also establish the mechanisms to create and foster a nimble culture.	Organizations see resilience-related activities as peripheral or even irrelevant to accomplishing the initiatives they currently face and therefore invest little, if any, time and energy in their pursuit.

Mindset Pattern: Success depends on learning from mistakes.

Despite the rich learning opportunities that are missed, when engaged in major change initiatives, many leaders have a tendency to avoid acknowledging mistakes. Facing errors or poor judgment is not a pleasant experience, but is fundamental to developing greater competence in any new area; executing significant change is not an exception.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
People in key change roles readily accept feedback, acknowledge their mistakes, and take the time to reflect and learn from them. Organizations support this by building cultural messages and consequences that reverse the tendency to hide mistakes and instead promote <i>learning</i> as the way people can recover from the inevitable errors that happen.	People in key change roles inhibit their own development by not being open to feedback and refusing to acknowledge and learn from the inevitable mistakes that take place as they become familiar with their change responsibilities. Organizations reinforce this by punishing people for mistakes.

Mindset Pattern: Succeeding with major organizational change is as much an art as a science.

Navigating the treacherous waters of major change draws on cognitive and analytical skills, as well as more intangible and intuitive abilities. Although they are often more comfortable relying on their intellect and logic, sponsors and agents must learn to draw on their imagination and creativity—their willingness to “trust their gut.” Consistent with this balance, major transitions should be approached as an art form as much as a science. They have “hard” tangible, quantitative, and analytical components. However, these are inadequate for success in the absence of addressing the more intangible and non-linear aspects of the change process.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations consistently apply their framework for managing change to the predictable aspects of their initiatives (science). At the same time, they encourage innovation by skilled agents when unique circumstances are encountered (art). They understand both the mindset and associated actions—patterns—required to achieve success (science). Finally, they continually seek to expand that understanding and adapt those patterns based on new learning (art).	Organizations either do not have a consistent approach to managing change, or they seek to apply a consistent approach rigidly, regardless of the circumstances. They take an approach of, “If we follow the process, we will achieve the results,” and are unprepared for the inevitable surprises that are a part of major change. They tend to operate with a closed mind to new ways of seeing, understanding, and doing.

Mindset Pattern: Change is messy.

High tolerance for ambiguity, managing paradox instead of contradictions, making tough decisions with insufficient data, and learning from mistakes are all crucial elements to succeeding with major change.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations prepare sponsors, agents, and targets for both the art and science aspects of successful implementation. They assign individuals to these roles who demonstrate a predisposition for the creative as well as the analytical demands they will face. In particular, attention is paid to bolstering their tolerance for ambiguity and paradox, their confidence in applying instinct to making decisions, and their ability to learn from falling short of objectives.	Organizations select people to perform sponsor or agent duties based on their left-brain skills and ability to “push through barriers” to accomplish what is expected. These people tend to be under-prepared for the messiness of change. They fail to achieve success, and when this happens, they are prone to blaming others. They also often feel extremely frustrated and even guilty that they didn’t “solve the difficulties,” as if the problems were a math equation with a purely logical resolution they couldn’t identify.

Mindset Pattern: Much of the work associated with major organizational change is cathartic in nature.

Most efforts to execute large-scale strategic initiatives are heavily weighted toward the intellectual components (e.g., data reviews, logical analysis, and rational decision-making); they fail to adequately address the degree of emotional investment called for to succeed. Although there should be an overall parity in logical and emotional perspectives throughout the implementation process, a disproportionate weight needs to be placed on the emotional aspects at times in order to break through some of the more entrenched mental blocks and resistance patterns.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations are open to delving deeply into the emotional side of transformation, when necessary, and value the insights they achieve when they engage in this aspect of the implementation process. Sponsors and their agents want to learn more than just the technical components of change—they want to prepare themselves to engage the personal and emotional part of the transformative process as well.	Some sponsors and agents are not predisposed to addressing the emotional side of commitment and therefore might see the cathartic nature of change as ethereal, unnecessary, or even counter-productive. They may over-focus on the physical deliverables and underestimate the affective component involved in successful change.

Mindset Pattern: Sometimes the best you can do isn't good enough.

Even extraordinary efforts by exceptional people don't always result in sustainable change. The myth that *any change is possible with the right people applying themselves* is held so strongly that evidence to the contrary is often discounted or ignored altogether. Failing to confront the uncomfortable truth about what can and can't be accomplished results in wasting time and energy on unrealistic change initiatives rather than pursuing less lofty, but more attainable, goals.

If this is understood/acted upon (success behavior pattern):	If this is not understood/acted upon (failure behavior pattern):
Organizations ensure that they have the right people involved, and keep them fully invested in their work, but they also have the courage to ask the really hard question— <i>Is our best enough to actually succeed at this endeavor?</i> Sponsors recognize that failure can't always be avoided by conviction and hard work, and they are able to distinguish “the best we can do” from “what is required for success.”	Sponsors push people to the burnout point in pursuit of impossible goals. When this fails to produce the desired results, they deceive themselves and others into accepting something less than the intended outcomes, asserting that the goals were actually achieved. In doing so they not only fail to deliver what was needed but they also are caught off-guard when the symptoms of the shortfall begin to surface. Worse still, people learn that partial results are permissible substitutes for true success.