

FEC'D UP!



**How Fear, Ego, and Culture
Sabotage Change — and
What You Can Do About It**

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Prologue – When Progress Gets FEC'D Up!™

Every organization begins with a dream—something better, bolder, more alive than what came before.

And then, slowly, almost imperceptibly, the dream starts to protect itself.

Meetings multiply. Procedures harden.

People start whispering, “That’s not how we do things here.”

It happens in corporations and classrooms, in governments and families, in churches and start-ups.

It’s the moment when the original dream—so full of promise—turns inward to guard its own survival. When it starts protecting itself from any progress or change.

That’s when things get FEC’d UP™.

There Is No Static.

Nothing stays still.

Every system, every culture, every person is always in motion—growing, decaying, adapting, or resisting.

The only question is how do we want to show up in a constantly-changing world?

Do we **lead** change,

flow with it,

or let it happen to us and feel like **victims**?

This book is about doing the work—the real work—of understanding what impacts and impedes change, and then addressing it so we can improve, progress, and evolve.

We already have frameworks for leading change: Kotter, Prosci, Agile, ADKAR, Lean—each with tools, steps, and strategies that have guided organizations for decades. They explain what to do and how to do it.

But if you’ve ever followed one of those models to the letter and still watched your initiative stall, you’ve met the problems this book is about.

FEC’d UP! doesn’t replace those frameworks. It completes them.

It reveals the hidden layer underneath—the human software that determines whether those processes succeed or silently collapse.

Because even the best playbook, framework, or methodology can't save a team that's protecting itself from change.

It's not about project plans or adoption curves. It's about three things:

Fear, Ego, and Culture.

Three invisible forces that decide, more than any strategy ever will, what changes and what doesn't.

Research shows that roughly two-thirds of organizational change efforts fail to achieve their intended goals.

Billions of dollars and an incalculable amount of trust are lost this way—trust that progress is possible, and that we have the courage to make it real.

These forces don't appear on org charts or balance sheets, but they're in every hallway conversation, every budget cut, every new initiative that quietly dies after launch.

Fear hides behind **caution**.

Ego dresses up as **confidence**.

Culture smiles and says, "**That's not how we do things here.**"

Together, they create the gravitational field that pulls every change effort back to the familiar. The stronger the pull, the more we mistake inertia for stability.

You've seen it.

A bold new idea meets polite enthusiasm, followed by silence, followed by a slow return to business as usual.

A leader calls for innovation—and is quietly punished for the risk of sincerity.

A team that swears it wants change finds itself defending the very thing it swore to outgrow.

No one plans this.

It's not sabotage; it's instinct.

Fear wants *safety*.

Ego wants *identity*.

Culture wants *consistency*.

Each thinks it's trying to help—but together, they form an ecosystem that resists evolution.

You can't manage what you can't name—and you can't transform what you refuse to see.

People don't resist change—they resist threats.

And to the nervous system, **any** change = uncertainty, and uncertainty = threat.

The Somatics of Change

Neuroscience suggests that the brain treats experiences of social and professional loss in ways that can mirror how it treats physical pain—activating some of the same brain regions tied to the distress of physical hurt. This doesn't mean they're identical, but it helps explain why a demotion, exclusion, or culture shock can feel as urgent and as real as a physical injury.

What leaders often overlook is that **all change carries loss**. Even positive change—the promotion, the new system, the innovative strategy—requires giving up something familiar.

People lose the status quo that change replaces. They lose comfort, predictability, competence, relationships, routines, even identity. Every gain requires a letting go, and the body registers that letting go as loss.

Change, therefore, isn't just strategic—it's somatic.

Sudden or sweeping change can shock the nervous system, triggering the same stress responses we associate with threat or grief. And when change becomes relentless, that shock compounds. In trauma-informed terms, trauma is often described as “*too much, too soon, without support*.” By that definition, many workplaces are unintentionally cultivating trauma: launching one initiative after another without giving people time—or tools—to recover and recalibrate. When some organizations or leaders eventually realize this, they may rush to provide resources or wellness programs—but by then, the damage is often done. Another definition of trauma applies: “*too little, too late*.”

A 2024 *BMC Public Health* study found that employees undergoing organizational change were **1.5 times more likely** to experience sleep problems, nervousness, and fatigue than those who weren't.

PwC's *Hopes & Fears 2024* survey reports that **over half of workers worldwide** feel *too much change is happening all at once*. When change becomes constant, exhaustion becomes culture.

Leaders who understand this know that managing change isn't only about process—it's about physiology. Progress that ignores the body will eventually be resisted by it.

The wisest leaders pace transformation at the **speed of safety**, recognizing that stability, clarity, and support are not luxuries of change—they are its prerequisites.

Trauma doesn't stay contained in a single body; it reverberates.

One person's alarm becomes a team's tension, then a culture's hum of unease.

Organizations, after all, are just collections of nervous systems pretending to be processes.

The alarms triggered by sudden, sweeping, or constant change don't just live in individuals; they echo through teams and spread across entire organizations.

Soon, what began as a bold initiative becomes another polite failure wrapped in PowerPoint slides and Tableau dashboards.

Most leaders never see the real cause of slowdowns and breakdowns in change initiatives—because it isn't procedural. It's somatic—rooted in the body's instinct to protect itself long before the mind has time to rationalize. Until leaders can see what's truly driving these patterns, even the best-designed change will slip back into the familiar rhythm of frustration, fatigue, and failure.

This book is about that ecosystem—the hidden architecture of resistance.

It's about what really happens inside people and systems when we say, "We need to change."

It's about the biology beneath the business plan and the psychology behind the spreadsheet.

Because the truth is, change doesn't fail for lack of strategy. It fails because the nervous system revolts before the mind can agree.

Every organization has a pulse, a memory, and a self-image. When threatened, it does exactly what any living being would do: it protects itself.

The question is not whether these forces exist. The question is whether we'll learn to work **with** them—or keep pretending they're not running the show.

This book is about why change fails—and what leaders can do about it.

Over the next chapters, we'll explore the anatomy of this resistance:

- Fear, the instinct to protect.
- Ego, the armor of identity.
- Culture, the collective pattern that keeps the workplace familiar.

We'll trace how they evolve, merge, and multiply—forming what I call the **installed base of belief**: the unseen operating system that governs every human enterprise.

It's the organizational equivalent of code that never gets rewritten—beliefs and behaviors installed so deeply they feel like truth.

And we'll learn what it takes to lead through it, not around it.

This isn't a war manual. There's no enemy to destroy, no dragon to slay.

What we call resistance is just the mind's way of saying, “Please don't hurt me.”

The work of leadership—real, conscious leadership—is to listen closely enough to that voice that it begins to trust you again.

Because when Fear feels safe, Ego feels seen, and Culture feels connected, change stops being a threat.

It becomes evolution.

So consider this your map through the underworld of progress—not the polished conference-room version, but the human one: the messy, magnificent process by which people protect, defend, and, when they're ready, transform.

If we can understand the forces that keep us FEC'd UP, we can finally learn how to lead what's waiting to emerge.

Every organization's ability to change depends on what it truly values.

The Un-FEC'd Leader values:

- transparency over control
- honesty over image
- inclusion over speed
- and curiosity over certainty

The rest of this book is about how to live those values when it's hardest to do so.

Let's Be Honest About the System

Hard truth: some organizations don't fail at change because they misunderstand people.

They fail because they don't care to understand.

Reorgs become what I call “**reorgys**”—ritual acts of disruption disguised as innovation.

They chase stock prices and personal bonuses while entire teams absorb the trauma. People are laid off, reshuffled, or replaced, and the survivors are told to feel lucky.

This book isn't about fixing **that**. (*That's another book I'm working on!*)

It's not an exposé on capitalism or ethics.

It's about how Fear, Ego, and Culture—the protective instincts of every system—shape whether change heals or harms, or is successful.

Leaders will always follow whatever north star they've chosen: profit, prestige, or purpose.

But the ones who understand Fear, Ego, and Culture can build something better—an organization that values its people as much as its performance. Because if we do want to tackle systemic inequalities, we need to understand and master change.

You can't heal capitalism with a leadership framework.

But you *can* humanize your corner of it.

And sometimes, that's where real evolution starts.

So let's begin where all change should begin—not with a plan, but with awareness.

Every organization wants better.

Better results. Better efficiency. Better engagement. Better impact.

But *better* never happens by accident.

The only way to reach better is to *do, think, and decide differently*—in other words, to change.

Change is not optional.

It happens through action or neglect, through design or decay.

You can drive it or drift into it—but you can't escape it.

And yet, most organizations struggle with it.

Roughly two-thirds of all change initiatives fail to achieve their intended goals—not because leaders lack intelligence or skill, but because change activates threat.

To the human nervous system, all change is loss before it becomes gain.

Loss of control. Loss of competence. Loss of belonging.

That's what makes change emotional before it ever becomes operational.

Every resistance, no matter how sophisticated it looks on the surface, is powered by three simple forces:

Fear — the instinct to protect.

Ego — the armor of identity.

Culture — the memory that guards the familiar.

This book is not about running a better change process.

It's about *seeing and working with what stops* those processes from succeeding.

Because if you want a better chance at better results, you must lead change thoughtfully, compassionately, and clearly—and you must address the human reactions that come with it:

Fear, Ego, and Culture.

That's the landscape ahead.

Now let's begin the journey.