Leading Through Organisational Change Without Losing Your Team

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Why change efforts so often stall

Research on organisational change, including John Kotter's widely cited work, consistently finds that most transformation efforts fail not because the strategic logic was flawed, but because of how the change was led: insufficient urgency, unclear communication, or a failure to address the emotional reality of the people expected to change.

A practical adaptation of Kotter's model

Build real urgency, not manufactured panic. People need a genuine, credible reason to change, not just a directive. Leaders who explain the actual cost of not changing, in specific terms, build far more durable commitment than those who simply announce a new initiative.

Over-communicate the vision. Most leaders underestimate how many times a message needs to be repeated, in different forms, before it is genuinely absorbed. A vision stated once in a town hall is not communicated; it is merely announced.

Address the emotional layer directly. Change often triggers real loss, of status, of familiar competence, of relationships, even when the change is objectively positive for the organisation. Leaders who acknowledge this loss explicitly, rather than only emphasising the upside, tend to encounter less quiet resistance.

Create early, visible wins. Long change programmes lose momentum without evidence that the effort is working. Identifying and publicising small, credible wins early sustains belief through the harder middle period.

Anchor the change in how things are actually done. Without embedding the change into real processes, incentives and daily habits, teams tend to quietly revert once attention moves elsewhere.

The leader's own posture through the process

Leaders often underestimate how closely a team watches their own visible confidence during change. A leader who appears privately uncertain but publicly overconfident tends to be read as inauthentic; a leader who is honest about the difficulty while remaining clearly committed to the direction tends to be trusted far more, even when the change itself is hard.

The lasting lesson

Change management is often treated as a communication exercise layered on top of a project plan. In practice, it is closer to a leadership discipline in its own right, one that requires sustained attention to urgency, meaning, emotion and reinforcement long after the initial announcement has

been made.