



# Senior Leadership's Commitment to Critical Organizational Change

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*Orchestrating major enterprise-wide change can be daunting for any organizational structure. This is especially true for large international NGO/nonprofit entities with dispersed decision-making authorities and governance structures such as federations and movements. Fortunately, no matter how an organization is structured, there are actions that can be taken to help mitigate the risks to implementation success. One of the more important actions is for senior leaders to develop and subsequently demonstrate exceptionally strong personal commitment to the complete installation and full realization of their change efforts.*

*Commitment to successfully implementing any critical change is, of course, vital at all levels of an organization; however, the most crucial transitions are primarily the responsibility of the chief executive and his/her direct reports, often referred to as the executive leadership team (the ELT). As such, we have chosen to focus this paper on ELT commitment to initiatives that are particularly challenging—that is, ones that are transformational in nature, where nothing short of full realization is acceptable, and that are considered crucial to the organization’s desired future.*

*The questions addressed here include: What constitutes the level of ELT commitment required for change efforts of this magnitude? How is this commitment developed, demonstrated, and sustained by senior leaders? And how can leaders be better prepared to pay the price necessary for this kind of commitment?<sup>1</sup>*

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As opposed to the relatively easy undertaking of “installing” change (putting solutions in place that are intended to have a desired impact), “realizing” change (fully accomplishing the desired impact) is a much more challenging endeavor. We are all creatures of habit and are prone to formalizing our preferences into reinforcing mechanisms like structures, rules, policies, pressures, or incentives. This makes pivoting away from the familiar and toward an alternative future nearly impossible without considerable intention and effort. To do so, particularly when the change demands a dramatic

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the same dynamics related to building, maintaining, and regaining profound commitment described here are relevant for less critical, smaller-scale endeavors, as well, just not to the same extent and intensity.

departure from ingrained mindsets and behaviors, requires dedicating and sustaining attention, tenacity, and resources. In a word, it requires *commitment*.

## UNCOMMON COMMITMENT TO UNCOMMON CHANGE

Commitment to organizational change is a powerful dynamic that has a huge bearing on whether new initiatives achieve their stated goals. The more difficult an endeavor is to implement, the greater the level of commitment that is required, particularly among the leaders who will be driving the change. Yet, complex initiatives are often embarked on without a well-formulated strategy for fostering commitment among either the ELT or those who will be affected.

Changes that pose the most daunting implementation difficulty and, therefore, require the most commitment possess three distinct features: Their objectives are *transformational* (versus incremental) in scope, success is measured against reaching full *realization* of the intentions (versus simply installing them), and accomplishing the desired outcomes is considered a crucial *imperative* (versus merely a good idea).<sup>2</sup>

Each of these characteristics represents both a defining feature of a change effort and a potential obstacle to its implementation. When all three converge, a “trifecta” of change is formed that dramatically increases an organization’s risk of falling short of intended outcomes. Without sufficient commitment exercised by the ELT and passed down the organization, these kinds of initiatives usually fail to deliver on the full measure of anticipated results.

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<sup>2</sup> See our white paper “Identifying Difficult Change Initiatives: When Implementation Warrants Special Attention” for further details on the features of especially challenging change initiatives.

# PROFOUND COMMITMENT IS HARD TO COME BY

For any major organizational change to succeed, there is a baseline of senior-level commitment required. At a minimum, leaders must:

- Invest resources such as time, attention, energy, money, and political capital in achieving the change
- Pursue the goals consistently over time
- Reject ideas or actions that may promise short-term benefits but are inconsistent with or inhibit reaching change objectives
- Apply creativity, ingenuity, and resourcefulness to resolving implementation problems or issues

It would seem obvious that these are necessary executive actions if an important change is to be successfully executed. Yet, far too many initiatives fall short of their objectives precisely because top leaders can't or won't deliver on these basic requirements. This is true even for routine changes, but it is particularly noteworthy when leaders fail to ensure the success of undertakings they declare are transformational, realization-focused, imperative departures from current operations.

Attempting complex, challenging change takes commitment requirements to a whole new level. Above and beyond the minimums that were just mentioned, trifecta change calls for a *profound* level of commitment that is characterized by four additional stipulations:

- First and foremost, this kind of commitment runs *deep*. ELT members must fully internalize the necessity of succeeding with the endeavor. They must consider reaching the stated objectives to be not only an organizational responsibility but also a personal pledge.
- Profound commitment is *durable*, meaning the ELT must remain steadfast and focused in the face of considerable challenges, limitations, and hardships.

- ELT members must *authentically* embody the dedication they ask others to demonstrate. Championing aspirations and platitudes isn't enough; senior executives must be role models in exhibiting the mindsets and behaviors needed to ensure change success.
- Finally, profound commitment is *contagious*. Leaders with this level of commitment must not only walk the talk; they must also demonstrate their personal conviction so consistently and convincingly that it cultivates commitment in others.

## REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE

### Commitment in Action: ELT Recalibration

Profound commitment is deep, durable, authentic, and contagious. We are fortunate to have worked with several leaders who have demonstrated this level of commitment. One example is Ann-Marie, the CEO of an international NGO who maintained its core mission but radically redefined how it went about accomplishing that outcome in the communities it served.

Ann-Marie took her board's mandate seriously when they said they wanted to fundamentally shift how the needs of the people the organization was serving were being addressed. She quickly determined that one of many bold moves that would be necessary was to recalibrate what it meant to be on the ELT. After assessing the future demands and current performance levels of her direct reports, she delivered an unequivocal message to them:

*Your tenure here has created remarkable results of which you should be proud. However, what has been commendable in the past is no longer sufficient. To respond to this new era of more perilous challenges and compelling opportunities, we must demonstrate a significantly higher degree of resolve, make different kinds of decisions, and take very different actions than before. The magnitude of change that must take place throughout the organization will be nothing short of daunting, and the transition must start with us.*

*The board and I are committed to ensuring new leadership is in place to navigate the turbulent waters ahead, and I truly hope everyone here is capable of shifting*

*into that higher performance gear. You will be given the chance to prove your ability to do so , but please hear me clearly: Over the course of this next year, whoever is on the executive team will be demonstrating a much higher level of both operational skill and commitment to change than in previous years.*

The CEO provided ample support (e.g., encouragement, guidance, coaching) to help incumbents try to pivot toward the new operational paradigm. However, these executives were the same leaders who had created the existing way of doing things; it was hard for some of them to see why a few well-placed “fixes” to the status quo weren’t sufficient. They felt a major overhaul of the current structure was both unnecessary and too risky. As a result, most were either unable and/or unwilling to make the necessary progress in committing to the new vision. Over the next 12 months, Ann-Marie ended up replacing seven of her nine direct reports. Though this much transition at the top was both emotionally and operationally difficult to bear, the ELT came out on the other side stronger and more capable of navigating the turbulent waters ahead.

## TRIFECTA CHANGE COMES WITH A HIGH COST FOR EXECUTIVES

It’s rare, but there are upper-echelon leaders who naturally exhibit profound commitment to their organization’s strategic intentions. Their inherent predispositions, professional experience, and evaluation of presenting circumstances instinctively lead them to demonstrate the kind of deep, durable, authentic, and contagious commitment needed to sustain the demands of a significant organizational change effort.

Unfortunately, this isn’t the case for many senior leaders. They may be “all in” when conceptualizing the desired outcome; they have no problem supporting why the organization needs to pursue a dramatic change, and they genuinely want it to succeed. The problem is that they are unaware of, and therefore unprepared for, what it takes to get there.

Few top executives have experience planning and executing enterprise-wide change at this scale. They may have engaged in incremental efforts that involved a lot of people and money. They may have even participated in a trifecta change. However, that's not the same as standing at the helm, having responsibility for effectively leading organizational shifts of this magnitude and complexity resting squarely on their shoulders.

When theories about big leaps forward come face to face with the actual experience of navigating trifecta change, many executives who were staunch supporters of a bold new venture begin to falter. They'll begin to complain about "too much coming too fast" and feeling overwhelmed by trying to add change sponsorship duties to their everyday responsibilities. They may continue to verbally champion the stated outcome, but they will inevitably start searching for ways to get there with less effort and risk on their part.

Sometimes this sort of bargaining is explicit, but more often it is conveyed subtly and even subconsciously. No matter how overtly or covertly it may be expressed, the purpose is always the same: to see if it's possible to realize dramatic change objectives without contending with the added requirements executives find are being placed upon them.

Of course, no one wants to put in unnecessary effort or incur avoidable risks or expenses. Looking for ways to improve efficiency should always be part of change planning. With trifecta change, however, there is a point where leaders must contend with a harsh reality: These are unusual initiatives in pursuit of unusual results, and with them come unusual leadership demands.

At the ELT level, executives must either pay the price for the change to succeed—i.e., do what is necessary to create a critical mass of support throughout the organization—or pay the price for the change faltering and leaving the organization stuck with its unsolved problems and/or underleveraged opportunities. What isn't negotiable is that a price will be paid, and with trifecta change, either invoice is sizeable. Senior leaders must therefore ask:

- What is the full price to be paid (in terms of time, money, effort, political capital, lost opportunities, etc.)?



- What is the “invoice” paying for: continuing with the status quo or accomplishing the trifecta outcomes?

## REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE

### “Invoicing” in Action: Paying the Price for the Status Quo

One international NGO had an ELT that for years complained that they had too much on their plate and as a result, people further down the ranks consistently missed their assigned objectives. Countless hours of discussion took place with the senior team lamenting the fact that they felt stretched and overloaded to the point of dysfunction. They could intellectually accept that something needed to be done to reduce the demands that were creating this overload; however, emotionally, the price was too high for them to engage the actions necessary. The leaders had dedicated their professional lives to serving those in need, and saying “no” to one group of recipients in order to better serve another set of needs felt too painful. It was emotionally easier to say “yes” to both opportunities, even though it meant resources were stretched to the point that none of the recipients received the level of support they needed. Ultimately, the ELT couldn’t bring themselves to pay the price for change (serving fewer recipients better) so instead they paid the price for maintaining the status quo (serving more recipients less effectively).

## HOW CAN YOU TELL IF TOP EXECUTIVES ARE COMMITTED?

The kind of commitment we are exploring here is revealed in the extent to which executive leaders demonstrate tenacious dedication to realizing a trifecta change. But how can you measure someone’s steadfastness when commitment resides within a person’s heart and mind?

One way people infer the level of investment coming from senior leaders is by the **language** they use when describing a change and the importance they place on it. Are communications clear and do they express a sense of urgency? What is said about the implications of a change being successfully or unsuccessfully implemented? And what lengths are leaders saying they are prepared to go to ensure the intended results are achieved?

Here are some examples of the kind of language that can indicate profound leader commitment:

- *“I can’t guarantee that the change will succeed, but I promise to do everything within my power to reach the desired outcome . . . and I expect no less from you.”*
- *“This is more than an organizational priority for me—it’s a personal imperative.”*
- *“Failure is not an option. On my watch, we will successfully execute this change.”*

These statements provide strong evidence of sincere executive commitment, but it’s risky to rely on rhetoric alone. A more complete and robust profile of ELT steadfastness toward a particular change is best obtained by matching words with **actions**. Are leaders’ messages (verbal and/or written) consistent with their deeds?

Specifically, are senior leaders:

- Acting in ways that validate and amplify not only what is changing but why, who will be affected, how it will unfold, and when it will happen?
- Allocating sufficient resources to properly support the change (e.g., money, time, people, political capital)?
- Actively helping their direct reports see the change as an absolute imperative for the organization?
- Ensuring meaningful positive and negative consequences are in place to help translate supportive sentiments into tangible actions?
- Rejecting ideas or actions that, while offering short-term benefits, could jeopardize the change?

- Standing fast in the face of adversity and remaining determined and focused in their pursuit of full realization?
- Applying innovation and risk-taking to resolve problems or issues that would otherwise hinder successful implementation?
- Holding themselves and other senior leaders accountable for adopting the new mindsets and behaviors required by the change?
- Developing stronger change leadership capabilities (e.g., becoming more effective when interacting with others, demonstrating greater courage when making tough decisions, being more disciplined about holding back from engaging too much change too fast)?

If people down the organization hear senior executives talk about how important a change is but then fail to see them act accordingly, they usually conclude that whatever level of leader commitment exists is superficial and will be short-lived.<sup>3</sup> The same is true for members of the ELT when assessing determination above them (CEO and board) and within their own ranks. Just as staff members judge executive commitment by comparing rhetoric and actions, top executives do the same when determining the strength of commitment that exists above them and with colleagues at the same level.

The bottom line is that fully realizing trifecta changes within NGO and nonprofit organizations requires congruence between senior leadership's written and verbal communications and their observable behavior. Profound commitment is believable only if words and actions match.

## ELT COMMITMENT ISN'T ENOUGH

A key test of a leader's commitment to dramatic change is his/her effort in bringing enough other leaders and staff on board to ensure the endeavor reaches full realization. This is critical to successful implementation because ELT commitment alone isn't enough; staff throughout the organization must

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<sup>3</sup> See our paper "Characteristics of Effective Sponsorship" for a deeper dive into the mindsets and behaviors necessary to lead major change.

also come forward with persistence and tenacity to achieve trifecta outcomes. Their dedication may or may not match the profound commitment displayed by the senior team, and commitment levels will vary across the organization. Nonetheless, for a fundamental change of this nature to be viable, enough determination must be manifested by enough people to achieve a “critical mass” of support to operationalize the new vision.

## Informing vs. Enrolling

To secure enough people with enough commitment, the ELT must enroll key staff throughout the organization into the transformational journey. Most organizations do a relatively good job of *informing* people of an impending key change, but few properly *enroll* them in striving to reach full realization.

**Informing** people about a change involves explaining the basics—what is going to happen, why it is necessary, when it will occur, and who will be involved in making it happen. This kind of information dissemination from leadership to staff is often conveyed in a single, brief, one-way verbal and/or written communication accompanied by limited Q&A. No matter the number of communications, their length, or the wording used, the tone conveys a “heads up” announcement—*There is something you need to know*.

These interactions often have an “us/them” feel to them: *We (decision-makers) are informing you (those impacted) of the future we have determined*. The objective is never to be intentionally disrespectful to staff; it’s about efficiency—the most concise message transmitted in the shortest amount of time.

The motive behind this minimalist approach might be leaders’ view that the change is a good thing for all involved and that everything will be sorted out in due time. Or they might be trying to dodge as much flack as possible if they know the change will be unpopular. Either way, the intention is to get past the “announcement” phase as soon as possible.

On the face of it, this approach can be seen as reasonable under the right conditions. However, when a trifecta change is in play, what is being conveyed isn't a minor disruption to the status quo. This is about a change of transformational proportions, where senior executive performance will be measured against full realization of the stated objectives and implementation success is an absolute, nonnegotiable necessity. Under these circumstances, merely "notifying" the tiers of staff below the ELT is asking for trouble. Yet, much of the time, this is how consequential change is introduced.

Again, these actions don't reflect ill intent on the part of most leaders. For some, there may be a lack of empathy (which doesn't help), but usually the biggest factor prompting "short and sweet" communications is the pressure the leaders themselves are under. An unstated, maybe unacknowledged, and even possibly subconscious state of mind leaders often have is:

*I don't have much time, but you need to know what's happening. Here is what is about to take place. . .*

*Sorry about this, but your immediate compliance is required because I'm busy dealing with a number of other issues. Also, this is a done deal, so you'll need to get over any concerns you might have as soon as you can. The reality of the situation is that getting on board is your only option.*

**Enrolling** people in supporting a dramatic change has a very different feel to it. It includes—but goes far beyond—delivering the fundamentals of what, why, when, and who, along with performance expectations. Instead of leaving people on their own to sort out what the change means for the organization and for themselves, leaders who engage in proper enrollment activities create an environment where decision-makers and those being impacted explore together the deeper implications of what has happened or is impending.

Enrollment for a trifecta change is not a one-and-done event. Regardless of how well details are presented, no one can digest all the ramifications of a complex endeavor in one sitting. People not only need time to think about what they have heard; they also need to hear again what they might have missed the last time the change was discussed.

Enrollment requires repeating key points as well as listening and responding to reactions on multiple occasions. It's an ongoing educational campaign punctuated by frequent updates and discussions, all designed to promote people's comprehensive grasp of the initiative. At its core, it's a series of exchanges intended to further commitment by enabling people to examine all aspects of a change—what appeals to them, what causes concern, and what may be unwelcome or threatening.

The specific style and wording of these exchanges varies by senior leader, but after the basics are covered (what, why, when, who), the most effective outcomes occur when leaders establish a certain mood or atmosphere characterized by candor, empathy, a realistic assessment of the challenge, and encouragement. Here is an example:

*I recognize that it's going to take some time for you to sift through what all this means. Whether you initially see it as a positive or negative, this a big deal—it's going to have a significant impact on each one of us, myself included. For this reason, we need to work together to make sense of things.*

*Today, I encourage you to express any thoughts or emotions you have—fears and doubts as well as excitement and enthusiasm. Also, any question you want to toss my way is fair game. I may not have all the answers, but I'll address everything I can. If I don't have answers or can't share certain information yet, I will be straight with you and say so. And if you have more thoughts or questions after this session is over, you'll have several more opportunities to share them in future meetings dedicated to this initiative.*

*A lot still needs to emerge for us to have a full picture of this change, but there are a few things I can share right now. First, transitions of this scope don't come out of the box fully baked. Leadership has a clear vision of the finish line, but we haven't worked out all the details about how to get there. This is where your input is vital. You have an opportunity to help shape the future of this organization, and I hope you'll leverage it.*

*Second, as I've been able to sit with this information for a while, I've concluded that this is absolutely the right move for our organization. That doesn't mean it's a perfect solution, but I'm convinced that it's the optimal course of action.*

*My view on this change may never match yours, and that's okay. All I ask is that you listen to the complete case for change before coming to conclusions. Behavior can be legislated, but no one can dictate what you become committed to; that's a personal matter between your head and your heart. However, after we discuss all the factors and ramifications, I'm betting you'll join me in becoming dedicated to the change's success.*

*No matter how you ultimately feel about the change, I'll need a minimum of two things from you: (1) to comply with what the change will ask of you and (2) to operate in a way that acknowledges how deeply committed I and the other leaders are to its realization. These two things are essential. Please help this change succeed by doing your part to support its implementation.*

The wording here isn't as important as the tone of the exchange and the intentions behind it, which need to reflect:

- *This is no minor change; it's going to have a significant impact on all of us.*
- *We all have unanswered questions, so let's work together to find the answers.*
- *Raise any issue or question you have, and I'll do my best to respond.*
- *I'm committed to this change being successful, and I hope that becomes true for you, as well.*
- *Regardless of reservations any of us have now or later, we need to do everything in our power to ensure successful implementation. That's what you will see from me and what I'm expecting from everyone on our team.*

Enrollment dialogues may take the form of carefully planned and facilitated meetings or impromptu one-on-one conversations, but they always have the same aim: to create opportunities for leaders to help set expectations and for their teams to surface and discuss questions, concerns, ideas, enthusiasm, resistance, and whatever else might come up.

This is a tall order. It calls for a serious investment of time and effort directed toward building as much support from staff as possible. Remember: What's at stake is a trifecta change, and initiatives

of this magnitude require engagement, advocacy, and meaningful progress from the entire organization to reach their realization objectives. To generate this kind of dedication to the intended outcomes, senior executives must demonstrate their own deep, durable, authentic, and contagious commitment while executing an organization-wide enrollment campaign. Merely informing people is not enough.

## Carrots and Sticks

Unfortunately, even the most committed leaders who facilitate a series of impeccable enrollment activities sometimes fall short of creating their desired result.

Enrollment is designed to advance people beyond a basic grasp of a change and help them explore the deeper implications that often go unacknowledged or are not openly expressed. That knowledge, however, can open the door for positive or negative views of the change to emerge. As the enrollment process unfolds, learning and understanding can generate either confidence and enthusiasm (furthering commitment) or concerns and anxieties (hindering commitment). If apprehensions remain unallayed, they can grow strong enough to stall or even reverse commitment. This is when consequences, both positive (carrots) and negative (sticks), come into play.

### Carrots

Optimism and inspiration are powerful forces for creating support for change. Anticipated benefits to an organization, group, or individual can serve as highly influential motivators to ensure the change is realized. Carrots therefore involve “enticing” activities that promote favorable cost–benefit interpretations rather than imposing solutions and coercing engagement.

Whenever possible, an effective approach is to highlight the benefits of a change and encourage people to lean into it rather than demand their support. By framing the change in a positive light, the ELT can increase the likelihood of fostering internalized, self-regulating



commitment among staff, lessening the need to invoke compliance-driven mechanisms to secure support.

## Sticks

Fear and pressure can also be powerful forces to create support for change. In fact, structures, rules, policies, and pressures are important elements of a successful implementation strategy. With enough undesirable inducements, individuals can become highly motivated to adopt changes, even ones they strongly oppose.

However, overreliance on “sticks” is a questionable strategy for achieving any significant initiative, and it is absolutely untenable for trifecta change. When leaders lean too hard on compliance, minimal fulfillment can become the norm, ground gained is often temporary, ongoing resistance is common, and enforcement costs tend to mount. Moreover, heavy-handed mandates often embolden opposition rather than engender support.

If leaders use primarily or exclusively negative consequences to drive an initiative, they should limit their efforts to incremental shifts where behavioral change alone is acceptable.

Dramatic, fundamental change calls for modifications in mindsets as well as behaviors, but this doesn't usually occur if implementation is too much stick and not enough carrot.

Facilitation and enforcement are not mutually exclusive tactics for accomplishing organizational change. Either can be overemphasized, which hinders their effectiveness. But, when each is applied in moderation with the intent of integrating with (not overcompensating for) the other, they can merge to form an implementation plan that is highly persuasive and generates enduring buy-in.

It's not easy to balance carrots and sticks in such a way as to ensure optimum staff support for a trifecta endeavor. Doing so requires a level of creativity, tenacity, and endurance that is hard to find in leaders who lack profound commitment for the change being advanced. Those who fall short of this threshold tend to omit enrollment activities, plan and execute them poorly, or overemphasize

the use of either carrots or sticks. Once again, deep, durable, authentic, and contagious ELT commitment is the bedrock of securing strong support throughout the organization.

## REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE

### Enrollment in Action: Carrots and Sticks

An example of balancing carrots and sticks comes from Michael, the chief operations officer at an international organization, who was sponsoring a major transformation. He was implementing a new, enterprise-wide technology that enabled staff to radically alter the way they worked with one another. As the new system was being rolled out around the globe, Michael made a point in his monthly all-hands meetings to publicly recognize teams that had embraced the new tools and ways of working. This was the carrot part of his approach.

Michael augmented his use of carrots by employing some sticks, as well. For example, when his direct reports or their staff members sent him emails, reports, or presentations for his review, Michael would return the material unread if they had generated these materials using the old technology. His message was simple: "If you want my time, attention, and support, submit your work using our new tools. I will read your material and respond once your team uses the tools that we have invested in over the past few months and which enable our future ways of working." It didn't take long for word of Michael's carrot-and-stick approach to spread across the global organization and for teams to adopt the new technology and, over time, new ways of collaborating.

## THE WALL

Profound, enduring commitment on the part of senior executives is only possible when they have a realistic idea of what lies ahead during trifecta implementation. Without accurate expectations about what they will be asked to take on, senior leaders are often surprised when they hit a wall soon after change planning begins. The wall is where change naïveté first encounters the harsh reality of what a

transition of this nature actually entails. At this point, uninformed optimism (*I've got this, no problem*) usually starts morphing into informed pessimism (*What was I thinking?*). Often, the result of this wake-up call is disillusionment and cynicism. As such, it is one of the first serious tests of leadership's commitment to a dramatic change. Is there resolve to reach realization after facing the sobering truth of what it will actually take to get here? Is there resolve every time this truth must be faced? Because leaders will face more than one such wall. Time after time, they will accomplish a key milestone or successfully address a significant challenge, only to find that any elation they experience is short-lived because a new wall of daunting reality quickly emerges.

Hitting these walls during implementation is inevitable. However, how "hard" leaders hit, how well they recover, and their ability to renew their commitment and go on to successfully lead trifacta change can all be influenced by leaders being better primed for what they will face. Admittedly, at the beginning of a massive change, it's impossible to predict exactly what leaders will encounter. The full extent of what it means to shepherd transformational, realization-based, imperative change won't reveal itself until well into the transition. What is feasible, however, is for ELT members to begin the process of knowing how trifacta initiatives tend to unfold and the stumbling blocks they are likely to encounter.

## CONCLUSION: SETTING TRIFECTA EXPECTATIONS

In other publications, we have provided expectation-setting guidance about a set of predictable challenges with which leaders must contend during dramatic change. These challenges include establishing strategic intent for change, sponsoring change, managing implementation risk, and reshaping culture.<sup>4</sup> In this piece, we have added to this knowledge base by addressing commitment-related challenges leaders should expect to face and what actions they should be prepared to take to foster progress toward realization.

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<sup>4</sup> See [conneradvisory.com](https://conneradvisory.com) for a complete listing of our research papers.

In sum, profound commitment to trifecta change must be developed, demonstrated, and sustained by executive leadership throughout implementation. Deep, durable, authentic, and contagious dedication to realizing an initiative's intended outcome does not occur by chance, nor is it sustained on its own; it requires an ongoing and conscious investment by the upper echelon to adopt the necessary mindsets and behaviors. These efforts must be informed by a deep understanding of how commitment unfolds over time for both the individual as well as the team.

To further deepen your understanding and gain additional insights from our research on commitment, see our paper "How Commitment Forms: What to Expect When Building Commitment to Organizational Change."

Conner Advisory will continue to monitor and study the factors that are aiding or impeding the progress of INGO leaders and their organizations as they adapt to—and hopefully thrive in—this unprecedented environment of change and disruption. We invite you to download our other research papers and follow future insights on our website, [conneradvisory.com](https://conneradvisory.com).

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Ed is cofounder and CEO of Conner Advisory, a consulting firm established for the sole purpose of supporting leaders who are pursuing *changes that matter*. In this capacity, he collaborates with

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Prior to starting Conner Advisory, Ed was a partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), where he headed up the U.S. People and Organization consulting practice. In this role, Ed was responsible for leading a team of more than 400 practitioners who helped clients execute large-scale strategic projects. Before that, he served as President and Chief Executive Officer of The Forum Corporation, where he advised senior business leaders involved in major change initiatives.

A recognized leader in the field of strategy execution, Ed co-authored *Strategic Speed: Mobilize People, Accelerate Execution* (Harvard Business Press, 2010), which provides a blueprint for leaders who are executing transformational change in their organizations. Ed earned his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. While at Penn, he also attended The Wharton School where he received a certificate in Business Administration.

Ed is currently a strategic advisor to the NeuroLeadership Institute, an international organization that applies the insights of brain science to organizational performance, change execution, and leadership development.

## Daryl Conner

Daryl is co-founder and Chairman of Conner Advisory, a consulting firm providing change execution support to civil society organizations that are advancing the quality of the human experience and who find themselves facing transformations beyond their capacity to successfully execute. Conner Advisory serves INGO and non-profit leaders addressing some of the world's most intractable and critical challenges of our day, including homelessness, hunger, medical crises, and healthcare. Representative clients include: Habitat for Humanity, Doctors without Borders, Pact, and YWCA.

During his 50 years of practice, Daryl has educated and advised strategic leaders and seasoned change practitioners in many of the world's most successful organizations. His focus has always been on helping them both understand and address the challenges and opportunities they face during transformational change.

Daryl's work is built on a strong foundation of research, extensive consulting experience, and a master's degree in psychology. He has authored two books—*Managing at the Speed of Change* (Random House, 1993) and *Leading at the Edge of Chaos* (John Wiley & Sons, 1998)—and more than 250 publications, including journal and magazine articles, monographs, book chapters, and videos. In recent years, his newer published work has been made available through blogs, essays, and white papers ([Advisory Research](#), [Raising Your Game Blog](#), [Essays on the Mastery Path](#), and [Change Thinking](#)).

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

These publications may be found and downloaded for free on our website: [www.conneradvisory.com](http://www.conneradvisory.com)

*Characteristics of Effective Sponsorship*

*Cultural Implications of INGO Mergers and Acquisitions*

*How Commitment Forms: What to Expect When Building Commitment to Organizational Change*

*Identifying Difficult Change Initiatives*

*Leading Successful Change Amidst a Disruptive INGO Environment*

*Managing Intent: Delivering on Promises and Achieving Full Realization*

*Managing Overload: Balancing Adaptation Capacity with Demand*

*Organizational Culture and Its Impact on Change in the Civil Society Sector*

*Senior Team Synergy: Forging Strong Leadership Teams to Execute Urgent Strategic Priorities*

*The Board's Role in Major Change*

*What Comes First, the Mission or Me?*

If you would like to receive future white papers related to successfully leading organizational change, sign up on our website for our periodic newsletter.

