

## HUFF POST BUSINESS

### The Gap: How to Unintentionally Destroy Value and Exhaust Yourself in the Process

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Over the past 15 years, my colleagues and I have been obsessed with business and leadership transformation, understood through stories of success. When I say "transformation," I mean how otherwise ordinary leaders, teams and organizations become extraordinary.

The one thing this 15-year obsession has taught me above all else is that transformation is not a matter of intention; it's a matter of alignment. Why do I say that? All leaders have noble intentions. I've never met a leader who aspires to destroy shareholder value, irritate customers, and alienate staff, yet 70 percent of all change efforts fail.

Having lived my professional life at the intersection of large-scale business transformation and the personal journey of the CEO, I have been granted a unique vantage point from which to study the gap between intention and reality. I have come to understand that this gap is a primary source of value destruction in organizations, and exhaustion in leaders.

#### It's Never Been More Challenging to Lead



This is a simple word-map analysis of how the 5,000-plus leaders we have worked with and studied over the years describe the greatest challenges they face. The bigger the word, the more prevalent the sentiment.

Clearly, we are leading in an increasingly volatile and chaotic business world driven by the relentless march of new technologies, the radical disruption of traditional business models, unrelenting public scrutiny, increasing accountability to more powerful and varied stakeholders, and the public failure of major institutions, to name just a few factors. The resulting chaos means it's never been more difficult to lead. It's also never been easier to blame external forces for under-performance in our organizations or disorder in our personal lives.



Take a closer look at this second word map. If we strip out the elements from the original version that are mostly out of our control, we are still left with more than half of the original content.

All of us must lead amid the chaos, yet some succeed and others fail. That is because some leaders take this chaos and dance with it, learn from it, and adapt to it, but many of us take this chaos and unwittingly create more chaos. The cost is not just unrealized value for our organizations but lost time with our loved ones, broken relationships, enormous stress, and diminished health.

Before you get too despondent, understand that I'm not describing hopeless leaders or broken organizations. Our sample of leaders comes from more than 100 organizations, across the broadest range of industries, and includes some of the world's most reputable brands.

In fact, the very best leaders have an additional challenge in my experience: Success encourages ego, ego tends to encourage complacency, and in a world where nothing stands still for very long, complacency is usually followed by atrophy.

Recently I was challenged by a leader grappling with the chaos in his environment who said to me:

I know we're doing lots of really great things, and I suspect we're doing some dumb things. The trouble is I'm not always sure which is which until it's too late. Your stories of success are great, but what I would really appreciate you talking to me about is failure. How do I recognize the things that are costing me time and money much more quickly?

Think of your organization as a snowball, where the goal is to create unstoppable momentum toward your intentions and aspirations. What inhibits your snowball is friction and drag. In our research and practice,

we have uncovered four major sources of friction and drag that result in value destruction and leader exhaustion, listed in the graphic below:

**FRICION SOURCE #1**

**We are using a set of beliefs and assumptions that no longer serve us**

**FRICION SOURCE #2**

**We're very committed, but are not quite sure what we're committed to**

**FRICION SOURCE #3**

**We accept mediocrity**

**FRICION SOURCE #4**

**There is a gap between our leadership vision and our impact on those we lead**

I will investigate each of these elements in future blog posts, helping you identify the sources of value destruction and leader exhaustion in your organization.