Why Continuous Change Drains the Energy of People

22.06.2026 18:18:49 | Management Insights, Lukas Michel | 0 Comments | Change

And what you can do about it.

Some organizations are always moving.

There is always a new initiative.
A new structure.
A new priority.
A new reporting line.
A new accountability model.
A new transformation narrative.
A new push for responsiveness, execution, customer focus, or strategic alignment.

From the outside, this can look energetic. It can even look modern.

The organization appears active, adaptive, and serious about change.

But inside the lived experience of the organization, a different truth often emerges.

People are tired.
Attention is fragmented.
Initiatives overlap.
Structures shift faster than meaning settles.
Managers intervene constantly.
Targets multiply.
Employees learn to endure change rather than contribute to it.

This is the core tension of the change-based pattern.

In *Patterns of Mastery*, change-based organizations are described as operating in a dynamic context while still using traditional

management techniques. Direct interventions by managers dominate. Incentive programs, targets, and reorganizations are used to align people with shifting market demands. The result is often acceptable success, but not great outcomes, because the organization consumes the energy it actually needs for adaptation.

That is why the change-based pattern deserves closer attention.

It is often mistaken for adaptability.

But movement is not the same as mastery.

Why change-based organizations often look impressive

Change-based organizations rarely appear passive.

They are usually large, established, scale-oriented businesses under real pressure to respond. They operate in dynamic markets, face changing customer expectations, and cannot simply stand still. The manuscript describes them as typically operating at the changers maturity level, in the delegation growth stage, with an exploitation-oriented business model and acceptable but not great outcomes.

This gives them a certain visible energy.

They look busy.
They look serious.
They look strategic.
They often look more responsive than slower, more rigid peers.

And in some respects, they are responsive. They do react.

But reaction is not the same as fit.

That is the hidden issue.

Many change-based organizations are dynamic in environment, but not yet dynamic in operating logic. They are trying to navigate change with tools shaped by an older management philosophy. The manuscript is explicit here: the environment is dynamic, but the organization continues to rely on traditional command-and-control processes and procedures.

That mismatch changes everything.

The paradox of the change-based pattern

The paradox is simple:

The organization is changing all the time, but the way it manages change remains too traditional.

Leaders see movement and assume adaptation is happening. Managers see restructuring and assume progress is being made. Teams see urgency and assume their exhaustion is the price of relevance.

But the deeper pattern is less productive.

The manuscript describes typical change-based organizations as repeatedly adapting internal resources, reallocating structures, and using direct managerial interventions to keep up with change. It also warns that these repeated changes draw down the energy of people, leaving them with reduced motivation and creativity.

This is the key insight.

A company can be highly active and still be misaligned.

It can be full of change and still struggle to become genuinely adaptive.

It can be successful and still waste enormous capability through the way change is managed.

What this pattern looks like in practice

From the outside, a change-based organization may appear like a company that never stops evolving.

Business units are adjusted.
Roles are redesigned.
Resources are redirected.
Projects are launched.
Decision-making is pushed around the structure.
Leaders demand responsiveness.

Inside, however, people often experience something else.

They feel repeatedly redirected rather than genuinely supported.

They meet goals, but rarely exceed them with commitment.
They learn to protect energy rather than invest it.
They work through procedures and incentives, but do not fully believe in the operating logic around them.

The manuscript describes this pattern with considerable precision. People in change-based organizations often have only average trust and choice, low focus of attention, and a level of anxiety that makes them feel that the challenges exceed their ability to meet them. This keeps speed and performance low relative to what the organization could achieve.

That is an important distinction.

The problem is not that people refuse change.

The problem is that the organization repeatedly uses forms of change that make focused contribution harder.

Why repeated restructuring is so costly

Restructuring can be necessary.

There are times when markets shift, accountabilities need to move, or structures no longer fit the customer reality.

But restructuring becomes costly when it becomes the dominant way an organization responds to pressure.

Then change turns from adaptation into disruption.

People spend energy reinterpreting roles.
Relationships have to be rebuilt.
Trust becomes conditional.
Priorities shift before learning settles.
Attention fragments across overlapping demands.

The manuscript captures this well. Change-based organizations frequently alter structures and reallocate resources in response to changing needs, but the result is often poorly motivated people who follow procedures and meet goals, not more.

This is where the hidden tax of continuous change shows up.

It is paid in energy.

Not always visibly.
Not always immediately.

But steadily.

And once enough organizational energy is absorbed by adaptation overhead, less remains for creativity, learning, customer insight, and meaningful performance.

The culture effect: movement outside, stagnation underneath

One of the most revealing points in the manuscript is that change-based organizations often show decent systems and decent leadership scores, yet still have a weak culture. In the Leadership Scorecard, culture is described as the barrier that limits performance. Leaders and systems are too weak to establish a productive culture, even when implementation capability is relatively strong.

This is a powerful observation.

Many organizations assume that if they keep changing structures, culture will eventually follow.

In practice, the opposite often happens.

The more structure is moved without resolving the underlying operating logic, the more people fall back on survival patterns. They become cautious. They narrow their contribution. They rely on informal networks. They conserve energy. They say the right things, but disengage inwardly.

So the organization looks dynamic at the surface.

But underneath, the culture hardens around confusion, caution, and status quo preservation.

That is why some of the most change-heavy organizations are also the least truly adaptive.

Why classic change management often makes this worse

The manuscript is direct in its critique of conventional change management. It notes that structured, sequential change theories were better suited to more stable environments and that many

current methods are now seen as outdated. It also points out that top-down change often treats employees as followers who must be brought into line, and that “resistance to change” is frequently misread when the real issue is how change is being managed.

This matters enormously.

Because in many change-based organizations, leadership still assumes that the solution to change is more initiative, more urgency, more alignment pressure, more incentives, and more managerial direction.

But if the system is already draining people, these moves can intensify the problem.

Pressure rises.
Focus falls.
People protect themselves.
Managers become more directive.
And the organization mistakes compliance for progress.

That is not transformation.

It is motion without recovery.

The real issue: energy is a management resource

One of the most important sentences in the manuscript is almost understated: leaders too often forget that the energy to drive the organization comes from people and is a resource that requires refueling.

That is the deeper leadership lesson.

Change is not only a structural challenge.

It is an energetic one.

Every reorganization, every shifting target, every new priority, every intervention into the work environment draws on human attention, trust, and focus. If leaders ignore this, they may believe they are driving adaptation while actually burning the fuel needed for it.

That is why change-based organizations often become less creative exactly when they need creativity most.

The energy has been consumed by the mechanics of change itself.

The leadership challenge: from interference to support

The manuscript identifies the leadership style of change-based organizations as typically systemic: high structuring, low involvement with front-line employees, and a strong tendency to tell people what must be done while letting them figure out the rest. It also notes that this leadership style does not align well with the needs of people in change.

This is a crucial point.

Change-based organizations do not usually suffer from a total absence of leadership.

They suffer from leadership that structures heavily, intervenes indirectly through systems and targets, and underestimates the effect of ongoing change on people’s energy.

That means the leadership task is not simply to communicate change better.

It is to reduce interference.

To design systems that support focus instead of multiplying confusion.
To align tools with dynamic principles rather than traditional control logic.
To help people make sense of change without exhausting them through constant redirection.
To delegate intelligently rather than restructure habitually.

That is a very different leadership discipline.

What leaders should look for

Leaders in change-based organizations should look for the signs that motion has become a substitute for fit.

Where are people busy but unfocused?
Where are managers intervening more than enabling?
Where do targets and incentives shape behavior more than

shared understanding?
Where is culture weakening under repeated structural adaptation?
Where are people complying with change without truly contributing to it?
Where has “this is how we do it here” hardened precisely inside a company that thinks of itself as constantly changing?
Where are strong core capabilities being underused because the operating system does not support emergence, self-organization, delegation, and options?

These are not only operational symptoms.

They are signs of a pattern.

And until that pattern is recognized, more change will rarely solve what change has already aggravated.

The development path: align the operating system with a dynamic reality

A change-based organization does not improve by stopping change altogether.

Its challenge is not movement itself.

Its challenge is the operating logic beneath the movement.

The manuscript’s action agenda is very clear. To move toward mastery, change-based organizations need to align the operating system with a dynamic context through the right choice of systems, leadership, and culture; align leadership style with the needs of people in change; choose tools that support rather than control people; and prepare for the next growth stage by developing dynamic operations and coordination capabilities.

This is a disciplined path.

It does not call for passivity.
It does not romanticize autonomy.
It does not deny the need for control.

It calls for better fit.

Dynamic context requires dynamic principles.
If the environment demands emergence, self-organization,

delegation, and options, then the toolbox has to support those realities rather than quietly suppress them.

That is how a company moves from repeated change to genuine adaptability.

The first step: create your own Organization Twin

The most practical first step is not another transformation program.

It is to create your own Organization Twin.

Through a Structured Reflection—a standardized online questionnaire that takes about 15 minutes—you create a first evidence-based representation of how your organization currently works.

This produces two practical views:

The Capability Profile, which makes visible the broader organizational pattern: strategy, business model, organizational form, management context, growth stage, operating capabilities, and competitive barriers.

The Leadership Scorecard, which reveals how systems, leadership, culture, and success interact, and whether the organization supports understanding, thinking, delivery, engagement, and meaningful boundaries.

Together, they help leaders see whether their organization is truly adaptive—or simply highly active while exhausting the people inside it.

Not as a judgment.
Not as a ranking.
Not as a criticism of individuals.

But as preparation for a Guided Clarity Session.

Better change begins when leaders protect energy

The change-based pattern is not weak because it changes.

It is weak when it changes in ways that consume more energy than they release.

That is the deeper lesson.

Organizations do need to respond to dynamic environments. They do need to shift, adapt, redesign, and evolve. But they cannot do so sustainably if every cycle of change reduces focus, weakens motivation, and blunts creativity.

That is why leaders need to pay closer attention.

Not only to structures.
Not only to plans.
Not only to implementation milestones.
But to the human energy required for adaptation.

Because continuous change is not a sign of mastery.

Mastery begins when the organization can change without draining the very people it depends on.

About Management Insights

Founded by Lukas Michel, Management Insights draws on more than 25 years of research and practice to help people understand how their organizations work. The Organization Twin brings organizational patterns into view for reflection, dialogue, and informed choice.

BEGIN REFLECTION

Private · Free of charge · Approximately 15 minutes

- Version zum Drucken
- Per E-Mail versenden
- Newsletter abonnieren

- Twittern

No comments yet.