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Many projects are lost before the charter is written.

"Lack of sponsorship" and "resistance to change" are rarely why a project fails. They're the conditions almost every project starts in.

I see these explanations on LinkedIn almost daily, and they always make me pause. Not because they're wrong. Both are real. But anyone who has worked in transformation for a while expects them. **We go in knowing sponsorship will need building and resistance will need understanding**, and we start on both long before a charter is written. When they appear in a post-mortem, the label usually covers something more specific: **the situation was never read realistically**.

In my experience, that unrealistic read tends to take one of two opposite forms.

The first is **simplification**. The change is described as process steps, instructions and emails, and everything else drops out of the picture: how many people are involved, how they work today, where performance really stands, what systems and data can support, how many functions must agree before anything moves. **Then comes the hope that once it's written down and sent out, it will happen**. Materials management, permit to work, maintenance work preparation: I've seen improvements like these planned on paper as if habits, training and controls build themselves. Most managers have lived through initiatives that stalled this way. Why the pattern keeps repeating, I honestly don't know.

The second is **complexity**. I once worked with an experienced planning manager, new to his organisation. He brought me everything at once: work preparation, contractors, systems and data, preventive and corrective maintenance, short- and long-term planning, major jobs. All real, all connected, and impossible to see as patterns while tangled together. We didn't solve anything in that first conversation. We sorted the problems into groups. And he already felt better. He could see what mattered most, what could wait, and what the next few years might look like.

Simplification sees less than is there. Complexity sees everything at once, with no shape. Both miss the same thing: **an honest picture of where we stand and what it will take**. And that picture always includes people, because that's where the real complexity sits.

Sometimes the honest picture says the conditions aren't there. Then the useful answer is to reshape the ambition, or to recommend not starting. It's rarely a popular recommendation. It's often the most valuable one.

Ambition survives when the picture is honest: big enough to matter, real about what it takes, and clear about where to start.

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