



# ***Making Initiatives Stick***

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*Your people can stop a key initiative dead in its tracks*

## **I. Your Initiative Does Not Have to Become the “Flavor of the Month”**

IT'S MADDENING. You have a key initiative. It is important. But it's failing. The organization is not supporting it. Your initiative is becoming the flavor of the month. It's a tired cycle: You push an important initiative using proven business processes for change. For a while people appear to support it, then the organization reverts to its old ways of doing things—not because it was a bad initiative, but because of the way its transition was managed—or not managed. The good news is you can fix it!

This white paper's objective is to guide you in the beginning part of the process of *making initiatives stick*.

## **Why Organizations and Their People Kill Initiatives**

*The main reason that initiatives fail is because the organization is not prepared to accept the change*

- There is a missed first step: decision makers and their insiders fail to tap the wisdom of their employees *before* launching the key initiative
- Decision makers do not have a way to get the honest truth
- Decision makers assume employees will support their initiative
- Employees believe they have better alternatives
- People by nature resist change; the greater the scale of change the greater the resistance



## 9 Warning Signs Your Initiative Is In Trouble

- Leadership does not know where the landmines are
- People do not understand the meaning of the initiative
- Organization relationships are characterized by closed or mostly closed boundaries leading to silos
- Power and authority structures prevent acceptance
- Current rules and standards can not support it
- It does not integrate or sync with existing work processes
- It suffers from isolated information and poor communications
- People are unwilling to adapt to changing conditions

## II. 4 Initiative Killers

*An initiative confronts how we are organized. It challenges the organization's beliefs, rules, and processes. Too often initiatives unnecessarily become the enemy*

An initiative changes—reorganizes—the organization. There are four initiative killers:

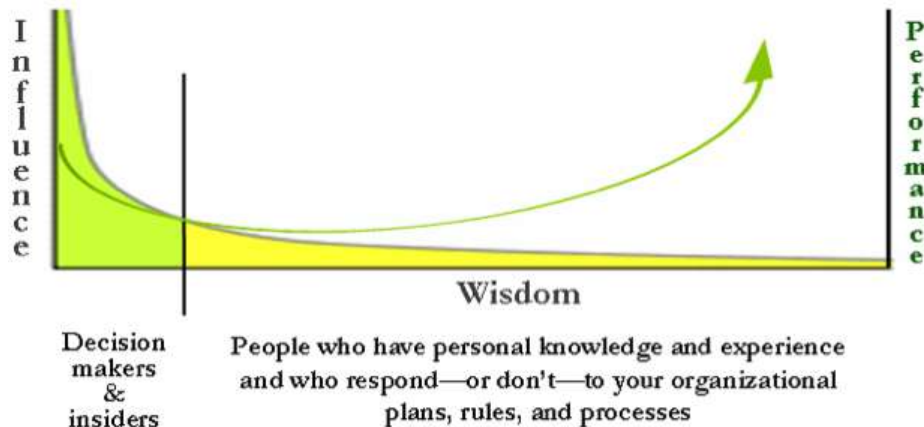
1. Initiatives challenge organization *beliefs*
2. Initiatives challenge organization *rules*
3. Initiatives challenge organization *processes*
4. Change does not start with tapping your people's wisdom

In our experience, *three primary elements* help form an organization: beliefs, rules, and processes. It is because of mishandling these that initiatives typically fail. Beliefs, rules, and processes provide the fundamentals of all kinds of organizations: business, education, political, government, military, religion, and—most of all—family. Each primary element itself has certain building blocks, and it is within your power to organize them so that they will support your key initiative.

Fourth, when planning for your initiative's success, take your people's wisdom into account. This is because your initiative challenges how things are done today. If you want a more desirable way of doing things, you have to bring your people along with you.



### III. An Organization's *Long Tail of Wisdom*<sup>TM</sup>



#### What is your Long Tail of wisdom?

*Find out if your people are onside, and if not, what issues exist*

The Long Tail describes the wealth of unique expertise and experience in the organization held in relatively small quantities by each employee. Though these people typically lack influence, they individually and collectively greatly affect the performance of an initiative.

Yes, decision makers and insiders are influential and informed. But knowledge and insight also reside in people who are rich with personal expertise and experience—the ones who do the “hands on” work of the organization, the ones who are part of an organization’s Long Tail of Wisdom. Though rich in talent and knowledge, people in the front lines usually lack the power and authority of executives, decision makers and insiders.

We have learned that the people best equipped to help their leaders achieve successful results are those left out at the beginning of an initiative. So, we recommend tapping into your organization’s long tail of wisdom. For example in an ERP change, an initiative can become user-driven.

#### You’re not alone

It bears repeating, leadership pushes down key initiatives for others to execute. But these initiatives too often become “flavor of the month” programs, only to run out of steam within a short period of time, and ending in failure. Leadership missed finding



out where the landmines were, were unaware of closed or mostly closed boundaries, and consequently suffered a lack of support. If you've experienced this, you're not alone.

## IV. Three Elements of Organization Can Kill Initiatives

### Initiatives Challenge Beliefs

*If your initiative is part of leadership's focus, good. If not, you have trouble on your hands*

*Initiatives must take into account the human equation*

BELIEFS DIRECT THE ORGANIZATION. Organizations usually have strong beliefs and cultures, some formal, many informal. If your initiative challenges the existing culture and its beliefs, you must take this into account. Three of the main *building blocks* of beliefs are leadership focus, meaning, and relationships. Each can dramatically affect your initiative. If you miss them, they can kill your initiative.

### Initiatives Challenge Rules

*Assess your power and authority structure. Your initiative needs its support and resources*

*Determine whether the rules can accommodate your initiative*

RULES GUIDE THE ORGANIZATION. There are three main *building blocks* of rules: power & authority, standards, and feedback. If the people with power and authority won't support your initiative, it's doomed. Also, over time, organizations establish all kinds of rules. Your initiative has to deal with them, some organization wide, some departmental, and some at an interpersonal level. Some rules work, others don't. Too many initiatives are able to die because feedback is not a requirement, and accountability and deadlines are missing.

### Initiatives Challenge Processes

*Many organizations are not in touch with themselves*

*Your initiative depends on the organization's ability to adapt to it*

PROCESSES FACILITATE AN ORGANIZATION'S WORKFLOW. How must work processes change? Process determines whether your initiative gets integrated and synched with the work of the organization. For example, initiatives tend to suffer from closed boundaries if information is isolated and not communicated. Again, like beliefs and rules, processes have three main *building blocks*: work processes, communications, and adaptability. Adaptability is a big skill and important to the success of your initiative.



*People support what they themselves create*

## V. The Solution: Tap Your People's Expertise and Opinions so that They Work For Your Initiative, Not Against It

The meter shown below can register the likelihood of success of your initiative. You can identify gaps in the organization that can kill your key initiative. You can learn what it will take for your initiative to gain support and traction.

**Organization's Ability to Make Transition Stick**



*“So if I have a process that can discover building blocks, the combinatorics start working for me instead of against me. I can describe a great many complicated things with relatively few building blocks.”  
—John H. Holland*

In the case of your initiative, each slider represents one of nine organization building blocks, ranking each building block's effectiveness or ineffectiveness to accommodate the initiative. You can describe a great many complicated things, letting you successfully manage your initiative's progress.

Reorganize the building blocks of your organization so that they work for your initiative, not against it.



## The VALUE of Tapping Your Long Tail of Wisdom

*Managing the transition right is essential for your initiative to succeed*

The fourth killer of initiatives is a mismanaged initiative transition. Managing the *transition* right offers tangible benefits for executives and managers who want their key initiatives to succeed:

*People will change when they believe is in their best interest*

- **Locates serious issues:** Before you commit valuable, scarce resources, locate potential and actual trouble. Do it in a way where people feel safe telling you
- **Speeds time to full implementation:** Discovering issues and identifying landmines *before* you begin the transition saves time and promotes a smoother change process
- **Reduces costs of change:** You can save costs of delays or even failure when you tap your long tail of wisdom
- **Wins broader support fast:** Because key people across the organization participate, initiative support is won more broadly
- **Reduces sabotage:** People support that which they themselves develop and create
- **Improves relationships:** You break down the boundaries of organization that isolate people, their units, and customers
- **Improves accountability:** Participants will accept accountability and deadlines



*Use an outside specialist*

## VI. What to Look for in a Specialist Who Can Help You Discover the Landmines

Use an outside specialist. Insiders are burdened with politics, conflicting authorities, and closed or only partially open boundaries. Outside specialists can provide impartiality.

When you seek an outside specialist, ask a few key questions:

*Clarify the goals of your initiative. Assess your people's wisdom using the building blocks of organization; then hold a think tank and discover issues and solve them. Develop action plans with accountability and deadlines. After you implement your initiative, get feedback on how well it is doing*

- **What is their ORGANIZATION EXPERIENCE?**  
Seek a specialist who has worked at the bottom, middle, and top of an organization. Don't hire someone only to discover later that a junior person is doing the day to day transition or change work your initiative requires.
- **Can they ASSESS your people and gain their wisdom?**  
The answer should NOT include focus groups. Nor should the answer promise individual answers back to the organization. The assessment should *guarantee* anonymity and privacy to all assessors. Otherwise you will not get the true facts.
- **What is their REPORT METHODOLOGY?** Seek reports that illustrate your organization. Seek reports that pinpoint gaps and landmines. Get a think tank process that encourages participants to identify and analyze issues.
- **How will they help you get BUY-IN for the initiative?**  
Ask the consultant to explain the initiative's transition process and how it will win the support needed. Make sure you understand how others will participate and create action plans that will result in success for your initiative.
- **What will be MEASURED? Why? How? When?** Ask about their feedback methodology. Ask how it tracks your initiative's progress, or lack of it.



*We help you make your  
initiative stick*

## VII. Our Advantage

*We help decision makers make their initiatives stick. Our advantages include:*

- **Organization Assessment Expertise.** Our online questionnaire is private, anonymous, and helps raters give the facts—in *any language*. All individual data is private, but reports use aggregated data and shared with clients in a variety of reports.
- **Initiative Think Tank Expertise.** Our specialized think tanks draw on assessment reports, identify problems, find solutions, and develop action to resolve key issues.
- **Business Process Change Expertise.** Our methodology uses the building blocks of organization so that they will work for your initiative and organization.
- **Partial List of Clients:** Advent, Eaton Educational Group, Great Western Bank (now part of Chase), IBM (global), Microsoft (global), and Oracle.

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