

5 Ways To Get Your Initiative Off The Ground

You've been here before. A great idea, a well thought through cost projection and a host of anticipated benefits – but the idea fails to secure the support of the senior team. So, what happened?

1. Asking people to agree to something new is the same as asking people to change

It's tempting to start work on your initiative after you have gained the support of the senior team. Often this will be too late and your initiative will either be opposed or diluted to such an extent that it no longer delivers what you intended. However, if you adopt the perspective that what you are fundamentally asking people to do is 'change' then you can configure your approach accordingly. John Kotter's 'eight steps to successful change', provides a clear pathway to follow, so before launching your initiative ensure that you have already laid the foundations for successful change by letting Kotter's change process guide you. Take our questionnaire overleaf to find out whether you have adopted a change mindset when seeking support for your latest initiative.

2. You can never communicate too much

A critical success factor in every stage of Kotter's model is communication. Communicating widely will leverage success however it is important to communicate continually and consistently so that you have an existing network to tap into. There is a risk of being perceived as a political animal if you only communicate when trying to push your own agenda. Maintain relationships by communicating with people frequently and valuing their input. Listen carefully to people's concerns and position yourself appropriately – this will help you influence the critics in the future and give you the information you need to handle difficult or controversial questions. Be informed about who holds positional power and autonomy in decision making but also seek out those people with personal power and strong influencing skills.

Taking a blended and agile approach will increase the chances of success when getting your initiative off the ground.

3. Organisations and individuals exist within an emotional and psychological landscape

A senior team may act as a single entity but it will be characterised by a highly diverse set of agendas, motivations, interests and personalities. Consciously addressing the senior team as a group of 'individuals' with different learning styles and demonstrating understanding of what is important to each of them will increase levels of engagement. For a visual person, try conjuring up images. Talk to those people who are more auditory and appeal to people with a kinaesthetic style by getting them physically involved. Change is highly emotive and may trigger deeply embedded individual mentalities, such as fear, loss and lack of trust - left unrecognised and unaddressed these hidden barriers to change will be significant. It is worth remembering that the organisation also has a personality with history, memories and attachments. The extent to which your initiative conflicts with the personality of the organisation will determine the extent of the challenge you face.

4. Conflict is necessary for change

Some degree of conflict is likely in most interactions. When proposing a change you will almost certainly experience conflict. There is value in preparing a positive mental model about what conflict is, how you can respond and how conflict can be beneficial. This positive reframing of conflict will also help you facilitate conflicts that occur between others. The Thomas Kilmann conflict model demonstrates that highly assertive and highly co-operative people will be collaborative thereby expanding options and achieving win-win outcomes; these are the perfect conditions for moving your initiative forward positively and for the long term. Managing your own levels of assertiveness and co-operation will largely regulate the response you engender in others. At Notion we have coined the phrase 'creative tension' to capture the spirit of the intention of that conflict.

5. Decisions are multi-faceted

Understanding how people arrive at decisions will help you gain understanding and agreement. If you provide information in a way that makes most sense to them, they will be more susceptible to your proposal. To do this effectively it is worth understanding their decision making style.

For example, if you are addressing a manager who has a low tolerance for ambiguity and has a rational way of thinking, they are likely to be efficient and logical and make decisions fast. In these instances, it is important to get your message across quickly and concisely by providing context and clarity from the outset. But, if the highly rational manager also has a high tolerance for ambiguity, they will be more careful in decision-making, so it is beneficial to provide these managers with projections, facts and figures to help them arrive at decisions.

Managers with a very broad outlook will prefer to focus on the long term and enjoy looking for alternatives. Engage these creatives by involving them in a process of 'design' and reflect their ideas back to them in your dialogue. The friendly face in the room is likely to have a behavioural approach to decision making. They will be keen to listen to your proposal and be receptive to your ideas. These managers are good advocates but will have a high need for consensus, so don't rest on your laurels - to win these managers over it's important to get others on board too.

Taking a blended and agile approach will increase the chances of success when getting your initiative off the ground. Remember to prepare for the idiosyncrasies of your senior team, communicate (a lot), notice and respond to subtle but critical emotional and psychological responses, and embrace conflict as a vehicle to mobilise effective decision making.

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Try answering the questionnaire below to find out if you have adopted a change mindset when seeking support for your latest initiative:

KOTTER's 8 STEPS - Have you...		Yes/No
Created a sense of urgency?	<i>Is your initiative imperative?</i>	
	<i>Does it have commercial or social value and can you demonstrate it?</i>	
	<i>Will there be costs in delay?</i>	
Formed a guiding coalition?	<i>Have you already approached your stakeholders?</i>	
	<i>Have you solicited critical feedback and responded accordingly?</i>	
	<i>Do you have a mix of support from the leadership team, experts, and decision makers?</i>	
Created a vision?	<i>Have you defined in detail what the change looks like?</i>	
	<i>Can you explain why this future is better than the past?</i>	
	<i>Is it compelling and easy to understand?</i>	
	<i>Do you have a clear and inspiring roadmap?</i>	
Communicate the vision?	<i>Will your vision capture the hearts and minds of others?</i>	
	<i>Do you have a communication strategy that will mobilise the vision?</i>	
	<i>Can you demonstrate opportunities for repetition and integration?</i>	
Empowered others to act on the vision?	<i>Have you identified barriers to change?</i>	
	<i>Have you determined what training will be required?</i>	
	<i>Do you have an approach to reward and recognition for success?</i>	
Created quick wins?	<i>Does your plan have incremental, low cost, easily achievable goals?</i>	
	<i>Have you determined ways in which to communicate short-term successes in context of the overall initiative?</i>	
Built on the change?	<i>Can you show how you will analyse each achievement?</i>	
	<i>Do you have a process for continuous improvement?</i>	
Anchored the change?	<i>Can you identify other business processes that can support the change?</i>	
	<i>Do you have a plan for integrating the changes?</i>	
	<i>Does your plan build momentum and refresh?</i>	

Add up the number of questions you answered 'YES' to and find out where you are:

Yes = 0-8	Yes = 9-16	Yes = 17-24
<p>You have a new idea and are on your way but there's more work to do. Take the time to revisit what exactly it is you want to achieve. You will benefit from establishing a clear agenda and identifying key stakeholders. Careful planning and communication will help get your initiative off the ground.</p>	<p>You have made good progress and have scanned your environment and leveraged your stakeholders. You will benefit from keeping an eye on the detail, maintaining effective relationships and using mid-project strategies to sustain the motivations and interests of others.</p>	<p>You are already a strong influencer and have made excellent progress. Your project has momentum and is on the agenda. To keep on track, focus on what strategies will support your efforts, how to keep reinforcing the message and how to continuously improve your activities.</p>

How Can Notion Help?

Creating momentum for change is what we do. We have partnered with many top FTSE organisations to develop 'enquiry-led' approaches that create the conditions required for people to adapt and embrace change. We have also worked on the largest change programme in UK history to develop leaders and managers to enable and embed sustainable change. As a result, we have lots of experience working with leadership teams to generate support and advocacy for new initiatives. So, if you are thinking about how you can effectively implement change in your organisation, let us help you from the outset. Talk to us about what you want to achieve and we can work with you and your key stakeholders to make it happen. Call us or visit our website www.businesscoaching.co.uk to find out more.

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