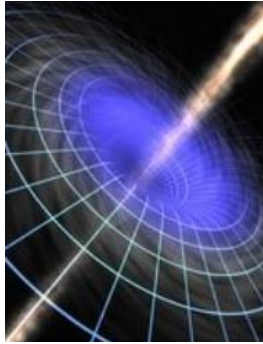


Black Holes—an invisible danger to change initiatives



In this article you will learn about black holes and how to prevent them from endangering change initiatives.

Change is rarely easy. Developing new roles, relationships, and processes is stressful and evokes problems even in highly skilled and committed teams. Misunderstandings and conflict about priorities, problem solving, and decision making are inevitable throughout change efforts.

Empowerment alone is not sufficient

Empowerment of teams to manage such issues is very important but not sufficient. In the midst of the complex demands and pressures of work, leaders with supervisory authority—the authority to define roles, assign tasks, assure accountability, and allocate resources—have a crucial role.

At least three actions from these leaders are key:

1. They maintain shared attention on the change as a priority through strong public and private commitment both to the change itself and to a work environment of collaboration and empowerment.
2. They assure ongoing meetings at least monthly with other leaders up, down, and across the organization and with teams they supervise in order to assess progress and the state of the work environment and to address barriers. Their participation models openness, honesty, and courage in order to elicit and work through confusion, disagreements, and concerns.
3. With emergent issues brought to them inside and outside of review meetings, they make decisions in a timely way including input from those who will be impacted and those with relevant expertise.

Why gaps in leadership are often invisible

Daryl Conner in his book **Managing at the Speed of Change** used the term “black holes” to refer to gaps in essential leadership actions because of the resulting substantial risks for delays and failures in change initiatives.

While the risks are especially high when actions of senior leaders or front-line managers fall short, any breaks in the chain of strong leadership support from the top down are problematic.

Lack of sufficient leadership is often invisible as the cause of problems with change efforts because it usually manifests in difficult *team and interpersonal behaviors* like conflict or resistance. As a result, interventions too frequently overlook leadership to focus primarily on team development and communication.

The essential leadership actions--sustained, visible commitment; ongoing engagement in tough conversations; and timely decision making--are very hard to do consistently. If leaders don't recognize this, they put results and the well-being of their teams in peril.

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About Neil Baker M.D.

Neil Baker M.D. works with organizations to enhance leadership and team impact through *In-the-Moment Leadership Strategies*. This means using any work situation, even the most complex and difficult, as an opportunity to achieve immediate impact on quality of work relationships and on progress toward results.

He has developed these approaches as a leader, speaker, consultant, and executive coach for 30 years. Past positions include serving as Director of Psychiatric Inpatient Services at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver, Colorado; Medical Director of Clinical Improvement at Group Health Cooperative in Seattle, Washington; and faculty and improvement advisor for more than twelve years for the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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