

# Go slow to go fast

15 March 2016 by Jim Shaffer, IABC Fellow — Leave a Comment



When implementing change, one of the best ways to launch a system-wide overhaul is with small wins, accompanied by a healthy dose of bureaucracy busting. Attacking a small part of your organization first can get results fast and prove that taking the business to the next level is doable.

Starting small enables you to go after the easy stuff by way of controllable experiments. It enables you to try new things, learn from successes and mistakes and then move on. When it's time to expand to larger parts of the organization, you will have created a process that with some reliability can produce bigger wins.

Having created many successful small and big improvements in a variety of industries over the years, I've found that the success of small-win experiments depends on four factors:

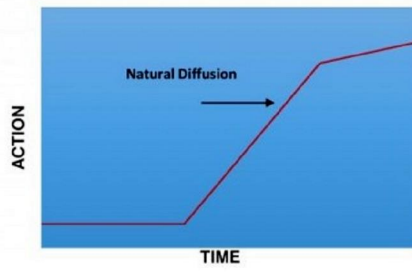
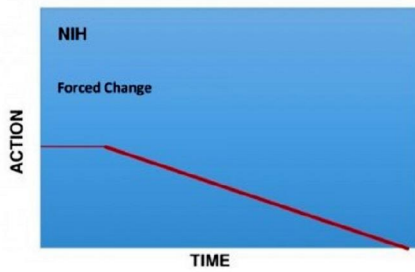
**1. A vision that paints a clear picture of what the organization needs to be in the future:** A vision helps people understand what the finished product is supposed to look like. When employees understand how they affect financial or operating performance, they will be more apt to do what's necessary to contribute to the larger picture.

**2. Guided autonomy:** A clear vision along with ongoing information sharing provide guidance for employees. Autonomy comes from involving people in goal setting, scorekeeping and ongoing continuous improvement processes. It's what former Dana Corporation CEO Ren McPherson described as "turning the company back over to the people who do the work."

**3. Aligned processes and systems,** such as measurement, rewards, recognition, learning and development, structure, policies and procedures and work processes, need to support decisions and actions that are consistent with the vision so the changes stick. One reason why change efforts fail is that the systems and processes aren't managed to reinforce the changes.

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**4. Natural diffusion**, which is the opposite of forced change, reduces resistance to change by encouraging participation in the improvement effort rather than mandating it. This builds broad ownership in and commitment to improving the organization. (See diagram below.)



On the left, forced change has caused the not-invested-here (NIH) syndrome to kick in and the change declines. On the right, initial implementation is slower as involvement and ownership build and natural diffusion occurs as the horizontal line ascends.

Natural diffusion can be slow-going at first. But in my experience, the improvement process is far more efficient and effective in the end and more likely to last than the forced change approach.



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Jim Shaffer, IABC Fellow, is an internationally recognized business adviser, author, speaker and leader of the Jim Shaffer Group. Shaffer was a principal and global leader of a Towers Perrin center of excellence. He was a practitioner in the firm's change management consulting practice. He is the author of the book *The Leadership Solution*, and his clients have included some of the world's most respected brands.

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