

Chapter 4: Initiation

The initiation phase of a project is where everything starts taking shape. It's when the sponsor says, "Let's do this," and the team starts defining what "this" actually is. But too often, what's getting scoped, budgeted, and scheduled doesn't fully consider who it will affect, and how those people will need to be brought along.

This chapter is about making sure you don't skip the most important part of any journey: getting your crew on board from the beginning.



Why Initiation Is Make-or-Break for Change

This is the point where the project sponsor is fired up, a rough idea of the solution exists, and people are just starting to define deliverables. The focus is usually on business case, timeline, scope, and resources.

But here's the problem: If you don't start talking about change right now as in how it will impact people, who needs to be involved, and what success *really* looks like then you'll spend the rest of the project catching up.

You've probably heard the phrase, "Well, we'll figure that out later." That phrase is how most change failure stories begin.

The Disappearing Sponsor

The project had a highly respected executive sponsor. She was on board, vocal in the kickoff, and genuinely supportive. Then she disappeared.

Not maliciously - she was just busy with other priorities and other meetings. The team kept going, but when employees started raising concerns or showing resistance, there was no leader visibly reinforcing the vision, saying, "This matters. We're in this together."

By the time she resurfaced, the change effort had lost momentum and trust.

Why Sponsorship Matters (Early and Often)

If you only remember one thing from this chapter, make it this: People don't follow projects. They follow people.

A sponsor's role isn't just to sign off on budgets. It's to set the tone, reinforce the "why," and be the face of the change. That starts on Day 1. If you don't have visible, committed leadership at the start, don't expect people to line up at the finish.

What Change Management Looks Like in Initiation

What should OCM be doing in this phase? Here's a short list:

- Clarify the "why" behind the project. What business problem are we solving, and what will success look like from a *people* perspective?
- Start identifying who's impacted. Who will need to do their job differently because of this?
- Map out your early stakeholders. Who needs to be at the table not just to approve things, but to shape them?
- Define the sponsor's role. Spell it out clearly. Visibility, advocacy, and accountability.
- Document behavior-based outcomes. Don't just say "new system implemented." Say "90% of users are actively using the system within 30 days."



Pro Tips

A sponsor without visibility is just a name. Make sure they know their real job is being present, vocal, and consistent.

Behavior belongs in the business case. If it's not tied to how people will work differently, you're only telling half the story.

Your first deliverable as a change lead? A map of who's impacted and how. It'll shape everything that follows.

If you're new to OCM or just want a starter kit, [Appendix F walks you through the basics.](#)