

H4 Consulting Brief

(N)onboarding

In publicly funded organisations, new decision makers often join teams while work is underway. Inevitably, new starters have missed earlier key decisions and bring new perspectives that may encourage them to re-prosecute or overturn past decisions. Challenging or revising past decisions can change outcomes, constrain subsequent decisions, trigger extensive rework, slow progress, and potentially drag the whole initiative off course.

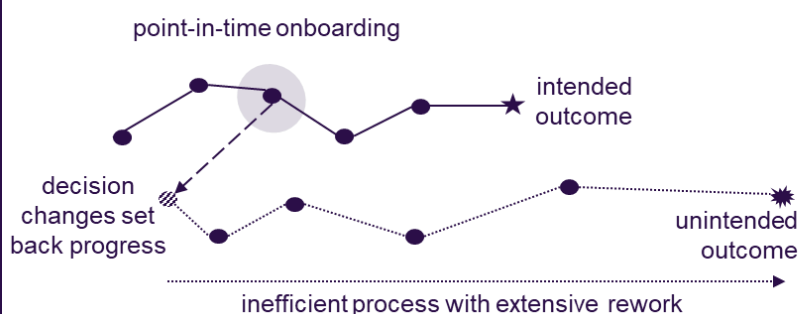
From conception to completion, most initiatives of publicly funded organisations involve many large and small decisions by authorised people, individually or in groups. The scale and duration of many publicly funded initiatives means some turnover in decision makers is inevitable. Publicly funded organisations that value consensus, sometimes at the expense of efficiency, can easily turn onboarding a new decision maker into revisiting all earlier decisions.

Senior decision makers tend to have broad areas of responsibility and are often expected to make the next decision with little context or history. They also, rightly, feel responsible for delivering quality outcomes and may, therefore, want to remake decisions rather than accepting the decisions of their predecessors.

Reversing or re-prosecuting validly made decisions without good reason can stall progress and trigger unwarranted rework, compromising efficiency without improving outcomes. Changing one decision can unravel other threads that are not readily apparent to new decision makers, with unintended consequences.

If major decisions are revisited every time a new decision maker gets involved, the message to workers is that no decision is final. This erodes momentum, motivation, and morale, and perversely encourages even more late revisions and lower quality work in the expectation of further changes. Those who helped conceive and make earlier decisions feel undervalued when their decisions are overturned, or the objectives they were working towards are changed.

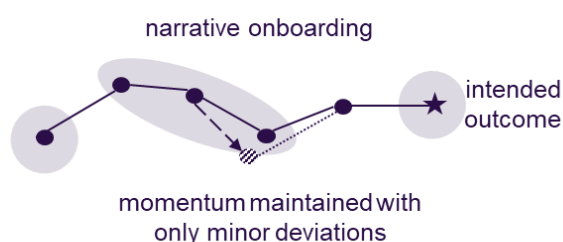
'you are here' onboarding



Decision makers can and should revisit past decisions only if the benefits of a change outweigh the costs and disruption. Past decisions should be presumed valid until a change is justified, rather than presumed invalid until confirmed by each new decision maker.

Delivery teams can help new decision makers to stay on course by adopting different onboarding strategies. Onboarding too often emphasises the next decision, merely telling decision makers 'you are here', with too little context to appreciate the work that has gone before. Narrative onboarding strategies recognise that the next decision is part of a story that explains 'why you are here.' Doing this well means keeping brief, but thorough, records of major decisions and their justifications in a format that can be easily understood as a journey towards a clear destination.

'why you are here' onboarding



Onboarding a new decision maker should not mean making sure they are 'on board' with every past decision. It should mean sharing the destination and major landmarks from the journey so far before demanding that they take accountability for deciding the next course of action. Decision makers equipped with a meaningful map are less likely to hesitate because they feel uncertain. They are also much better placed to recognise where a change might be warranted, and its likely downstream effects.

A little effort up front to tell the story can honour the efforts of contributors, build morale, and avoid a lot of unnecessary rework. Presenting past decisions as clear, justified, and closed by default communicates to decision makers, team members, and stakeholders that outcomes matter more than egos and helps the initiative stay on course to deliver public value.

To find out more about how you can use this approach in your organisation, contact us: info@h4consulting.com.au
Find additional resources at www.h4consulting.com.au/resources