



THE COST OF LAUNCHING BEFORE YOU'RE READY

Why Strategic Initiatives
Fail and How Readiness
Assessments Can Prevent It

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The Problem Organizations Can't Name

Here's the scenario we see over and over again:

A strategic initiative launches with fanfare throughout the organization. The project plan is solid. Milestones are mapped. Leadership is aligned. So everyone assumes.

Six months later, the strategic initiative lives only in executive slide decks. The timeline has slipped. Twice. The budget has expanded 30–50%. Staff are frustrated, confused, or quietly resistant. And somewhere in a conference room, executives are asking, “What went wrong?”

WHAT WENT WRONG IS PREDICTABLE. AND PREVENTABLE.

Seventy percent of organizational transformations fail to achieve their intended outcomes. Strategic initiatives do not fail because of flawed strategy or poor project management; they fail because the people affected by the change were treated as an afterthought or ignored entirely.

Avo knows this based upon decades of research from McKinsey, Prosci, and Dr. John Kotter's foundational work on leading change. The data is clear: projects with excellent, people-focused change management are seven times more likely to meet their objectives than those without it. Organizations that measure their people's readiness see 76% of projects meet or exceed objectives, compared to just 24% for those that don't measure.

Yet most organizations skip assessing readiness.

The Two-Legged Stool

Think about how your organization manages strategic initiatives today.

You probably have project management disciplines in place: timelines, milestones, resource allocation, status reporting. Good. Project management is one leg of the stool.

The second leg of the stool is your strategy. You have a clear vision of what you're trying to accomplish and how it will benefit your organization.

But what about the third leg? Change management.

Change management asks about the people who must change their way of working.

Do your people understand the change? Do they want to participate? Do they know what's expected of them? Do they have the support to succeed?

If you do not answer these questions about your people and address gaps before launching the strategic initiative, you will be left wondering why adoption stalls, why timelines slip, and why you're still burning the budget after eighteen months of "rolling out" the initiative.

Change management is the third leg. A readiness assessment is how you know whether that leg is sturdy enough to hold weight.

What Readiness Actually Means

Even when people seem positive in meetings, they might not be ready for change.

THE ADOPTION ARC: FROM WILL TO IMPACT

People don't adopt change all at once. They move through a predictable Adoption Arc™, and every transformation either follows it or fights it.

Avo's Adoption Arc is a proprietary framework that measures how people move through change, from Will to Skill to Habit to Impact. The Adoption Arc draws on decades of research, including Jack Phillips' V-Model for Business Alignment, Prosci's ADKAR® model, Kotter's leading-change methodology, and McKinsey's transformation studies.

With your transformation on the horizon, the bands of the Adoption Arc that matter most are Will and Skill.

Avo's Risk and Readiness Assessment measures both Will and Skill because they determine whether your people are confident and prepared to carry the transformation forward.

Assessing Will reveals whether your people understand the “why” of the strategic initiative and whether they want to participate in it. Low willingness inevitably produces passivity or resistance.

Assessing Skill tells you how much training and infrastructure your organization must build before launching the initiative, and where adoption may stall after launch. Together, the Will and Skill scores tell you whether your organization is ready to launch.

Once the change goes live, two more bands of the Adoption Arc emerge: Habit and Impact. Habit measures whether your people are consistently working in the new way. Impact measures whether the initiative is producing the results it was designed to deliver. Avo measures Habit and Impact with instruments distinct from the Risk and Readiness Assessment, typically 3–6 months after launch.



WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY

“Avo’s gap assessment revealed blind spots we hadn’t considered. Their process didn’t just diagnose issues; it gave us a roadmap our team could use.”

Laura Flournoy, Program Manager

The Gaps That Derail Initiatives

Here's what we find in almost every organization we assess:

The people at the top think the organization is more ready than it is. Senior leaders have been living with the strategy for months. They've debated it, refined it, bought into it. By the time they announce the initiative, they've forgotten that everyone else is hearing about it for the first time.

Senior leaders project their own readiness onto the organization. They assume that because the strategy makes sense to them, it will make sense to everyone. They interpret silence as agreement and mistake compliance for commitment.

Advocates are your champions. These are the influential peers that your workforce watches. Engaged early and equipped well, advocates drive bottom-up adoption in a way no executive memo can. If advocates are engaged late or left to make the case for the strategy on instinct, they are a missed opportunity or a sign to their peers that the change won't take hold.

Management is caught in the middle. Management is expected to translate a strategy they may not fully understand yet into team-level action, while fielding questions from their people that leadership hasn't answered.

Meanwhile, employees are wondering what this means for their jobs. They're asking whether their roles will exist in six months, why this is happening now, and why no one has asked what they think.

When these gaps go unaddressed, initiatives stall and actively drain the organization:

- **Leadership attention stays stuck** on a struggling initiative instead of moving to the next strategic priority.
- **Advocates go quiet**, unwilling to stake their reputations on an initiative that isn't landing.
- **Managers spend hours each week** explaining, re-explaining, and managing confusion.
- **Employees divide their focus** between the old way, the new way, and trying to figure out which one really matters.
- **Projects languish** as they wait in line behind the one that should have launched six months ago.

The perception gaps — between what senior leaders believe, what advocates are positioned to reinforce, what management can translate, and what employees experience — are where initiatives stall and begin to collapse. Gaps can emerge between any of the four roles. In Avo's experience, the most common gap is between managers and the employees they lead. When that gap exceeds 15%, risks increase dramatically, even in well-planned transformations.

A Risk and Readiness Assessment reveals those gaps before they become crises. It shows you exactly where the disconnects are, across every level of the organization, and what to do about them.

What Avo Measures

Avo's comprehensive Risk and Readiness Assessment measures readiness across five critical areas, capturing perspectives from all four roles.

1. Understanding the Reasons Behind the Change

Can people articulate *why* this initiative matters, not in corporate-speak, but in terms of real problems it solves? When people understand the “why,” they move from passive observers to active participants.

2. Perceptions of the Change's Impact

Do people see this as an opportunity or a threat? Do they understand how their specific role will change? Clarity here reduces anxiety and enables preparation. Ambiguity allows fear and resistance to grow.

3. Communication Effectiveness

Has leadership painted a clear picture of the future state? Have concerns been heard and addressed, or just acknowledged and dismissed? Unresolved concerns don't disappear; they go underground.

4. Resource Allocation and Capability Building

Do people believe the organization can pull this off? Do they feel confident about their own ability to develop new skills? Low confidence creates hedging, workarounds, and contingency plans that undermine the initiative.

5. Support Systems and Infrastructure

Are there training and support systems in place? Do people know where to get help when they're stuck? Resources that exist but aren't known might as well not exist.

For each area, we establish quantitative scores using a validated 5-point scale. Each readiness score reflects the percentage of respondents who answered 4 or 5, which are the responses that indicate active commitment. Neutral and negative responses are not counted toward readiness, because in transformation contexts, hesitation is functionally a soft no. The result is a number you can trust to predict adoption.

For each area, we establish quantitative scores using a validated 5-point scale. This enables statistical analysis, gap identification across all four roles, and progress tracking over time.

WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY

“Avo’s recommendations sparked real conversations among leadership. We aligned our resources with gaps we hadn’t seen before.”

*Monica Alvarez, Organizational Change
Management Project Lead*

Why Projects Finish But People Don't

Most organizations follow a project plan and assume their people are keeping up, but your project plan and your people move on different timelines. We've seen what happens: the technical solution launches, but nobody's using it properly. The process is implemented, but people work around it. You end up with a technically complete project that never delivers its promised value. This happens because people were left behind while the project marched forward without them. Organizations must address the human side of change.

MAPPING THE AVO METHOD TO YOUR PROJECT PLAN

We map our AVO Method to your project plan to ensure your people move through specific readiness thresholds that allow your organization to achieve a lasting transformation. As shown below, your project plan's Execute phase and Monitor & Control phase correspond to the AVO Method's Align, Validate, and Own phases. You can see when specific bands of the Adoption Arc — Will, Skill, Habit, and Impact — are important to measure at different phases of the transformation. A solid green circle indicates measurement by Avo's Risk and Readiness Assessment. An outlined circle indicates measurement by other Avo instruments.

Project Phase	Execute		Monitor & Control	
AVO Method	Align	GO-LIVE	Validate	Own
Will	●		●	
Skill	●		●	
Habit			○	○
Impact			○	○

● - Measured by Avo's Risk and Readiness Assessment. ○ - Measured by other Avo instruments (surveys, pulse checks, business metrics and outcomes)

In Align, Will is the foundation. People need to understand why the change is happening and want to participate before the organization can go anywhere. They must be willing. At this point, Skill is diagnostic and tells you what training and support you must build. (Measured 3–6 months before Go-Live.)

In Validate, Skill becomes the focus. People need to know how to perform in the new environment, and support systems need to be in place and ready to use. To measure Skill, we use the Risk and Readiness Assessment and other Avo instruments. In Validate, Habit can be measured through separate Avo instruments that track whether people are working in the new ways. Impact is assessed using operational metrics and business outcomes. (Measured 3–6 months after Go-Live.)

In Own, the change becomes our standard. In this phase, we measure Habit and Impact: are people sustaining the new behavior, and is it producing the outcomes the change was meant to deliver?



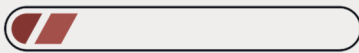
You can complete every line of your project plan and still fail if your people aren't brought along.

What Your Scores Mean

Your readiness score is a diagnostic that tells you where to focus and where to intervene.

GO-LIVE READINESS


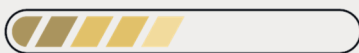
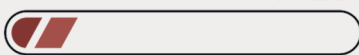
Will is the driver of Go-Live Readiness. If your people don't believe in the change, no amount of Skill can overcome that. When Skill is higher at go-live, the smoother the first weeks of launch will be.

	Sr Leadership	Advocates	Management	Employees
 <p>READY</p>	<p>Will \geq 95%</p> <p>Skill \geq 85%</p>	<p>Will \geq 95%</p> <p>Skill \geq 85%</p>	<p>Will \geq 75%</p> <p>Skill \geq 70%</p>	<p>Will \geq 75%</p> <p>Skill \geq 70%</p>
 <p>GETTING READY</p>	<p>Will 80–94%</p> <p>Skill 70–84%</p>	<p>Will 80–94%</p> <p>Skill 70–84%</p>	<p>Will 60–74%</p> <p>Skill 55–69%</p>	<p>Will 60–74%</p> <p>Skill 55–69%</p>
 <p>NOT READY</p>	<p>Will < 80%</p> <p>Skill < 70%</p>	<p>Will < 80%</p> <p>Skill < 70%</p>	<p>Will < 60%</p> <p>Skill < 55%</p>	<p>Will < 60%</p> <p>Skill < 55%</p>

Senior Leadership and Advocate thresholds are higher because they must be further along to effectively bring the rest of the organization with them.

ADOPTION READINESS

Skill is the driver of Adoption Readiness. If your people can't perform in the new environment, the change won't take hold. At this point, Will still matters as the indicator that belief is holding. If Will is slipping post-launch, Skill alone won't save you.

	Sr Leadership	Advocates	Management	Employees
 <p>READY</p>	<p>Will \geq 95%</p> <p>Skill \geq 85%</p>	<p>Will \geq 95%</p> <p>Skill \geq 85%</p>	<p>Will \geq 90%</p> <p>Skill \geq 85%</p>	<p>Will \geq 90%</p> <p>Skill \geq 85%</p>
 <p>GETTING READY</p>	<p>Will 80–94%</p> <p>Skill 70–84%</p>	<p>Will 80–94%</p> <p>Skill 70–84%</p>	<p>Will 75–89%</p> <p>Skill 70–84%</p>	<p>Will 75–89%</p> <p>Skill 70–84%</p>
 <p>NOT READY</p>	<p>Will < 80%</p> <p>Skill < 70%</p>	<p>Will < 80%</p> <p>Skill < 70%</p>	<p>Will < 75%</p> <p>Skill < 70%</p>	<p>Will < 75%</p> <p>Skill < 70%</p>

Before launch, Skill scores are diagnostic; they tell you how much training and support infrastructure you'll need. After launch, Skill gaps become active barriers. People who don't know how to perform create workarounds, errors, or revert to old behaviors entirely.

Training and support are what separate organizations with people who sustain adoption from those with people who revert. When people know where to go for help, they build confidence in the new environment, and that confidence is what turns a launched change into a lasting one.

WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY

“Avo developed communication strategies designed to remove barriers and drive acceptance of the program at all levels of the organization.”

Michael Donlon, Chief Safety Officer

The Cost of Not Knowing

Organizations that skip readiness assessments pay for it in ways that don't always show up in project budgets.

- **Extended timelines.** The time “saved” by skipping readiness work gets repaid with interest during a prolonged, painful adoption phase. Teams spend months retraining people who learned wrong the first time.
- **Duplicated effort.** When people don't understand what's changing or why, they maintain shadow processes. They do things twice, the old way and the new way, because no one's confident the new way will stick.
- **Talent flight.** When employees feel uncertain about their future, top performers leave for stability elsewhere. Your organization loses the people you need for successful transformation.
- **Morale costs.** Failed or struggling initiatives breed cynicism. Organizational scar tissue builds up.
- **Leadership credibility.** Managers burn their credibility when they force people to adopt systems that don't work. Trust erodes. Future initiatives face steeper resistance.
- **Tapped-out capacity:** Not only does the initiative fail, so does the organizational capacity for change.

Avo's Risk and Readiness Assessment costs a fraction of one month's delay. The question isn't whether you can afford to assess, but whether you can afford not to.

What Your Assessment Delivers

Avo's comprehensive Risk and Readiness Assessment enables you to:

Measure Readiness Quantitatively

Get specific scores across each dimension, broken out by all four roles and by department.

Pinpoint Perception Gaps

See exactly where each role's beliefs diverge from others' experiences, and use that data to change conversations before breakdowns occur.

Identify Risks Early

Identify specific barriers and concerns before they become implementation crises, giving you time to course-correct while it's still affordable.

Target Your Interventions

Receive specific actions tied to specific gaps, tailored to what different stakeholder groups need.

Prioritize A Change Management Plan

Know what must happen before launch versus what can be built during rollout, and how you'll measure progress along the way.

Your Risk and Readiness Assessment generates a quantitative score that shows exactly where your people are versus where your project needs them to be. This score can be tracked over time and compared across departments, giving you an objective measure of risk throughout your transformation.

THE BOTTOM LINE

You wouldn't launch a product without market research. You wouldn't make a major investment without due diligence. So why would your organization launch a strategic initiative without measuring whether its people are ready to take an active part in the change?

A readiness assessment provides data-driven discipline. You'll know exactly where gaps exist and what to do about them.

The investment in a readiness assessment pays dividends throughout the transformation: fewer surprises, faster adoption, sustainable results.

Change is hard. We make it worth it. The AVO Method helps organizations evolve and scale by making change more strategic, more sustainable, and more human.

Avo doesn't disappear after the plan is delivered. We stay until adoption takes hold.

Find Out Where You Stand

TRANSFORMATION READINESS INDICATOR

This is a free self-assessment that captures your perspective as a leader. In just a few minutes, you'll answer a handful of strategic questions. Within 24 hours, you'll receive a personalized report showing your readiness baseline and the blind spots that could impact implementation success.

The Transformation Readiness Indicator is a preview, not a verdict. It tells you whether there's a gap worth investigating. It doesn't tell you where that gap is, how wide it is, or what to do about it.

Launch the Self-Assessment www.avoinc.com/transformation-readiness

RISK AND READINESS ASSESSMENTS: GO-LIVE & ADOPTION

This is the full assessment, consisting of 18 questions across all four roles (Senior Leadership, Advocates, Management, and Employees), for a total of 72 data points. It runs pre-launch to determine Go-Live Readiness and post-launch to determine Adoption Readiness. It breaks down results by role and by department so you can see exactly what and where gaps are. In addition, it generates a Risk and Readiness Index you can track over time.

Schedule your Risk and Readiness Assessment 916-409-6001 | sales@avoinc.com

PREFER TO TALK FIRST?

Whether you've already taken the assessment and want to discuss your results, or you'd rather start with a conversation about what you're seeing in your organization, we're here.

Contact Avo 916-409-6001 | sales@avoinc.com | avoinc.com

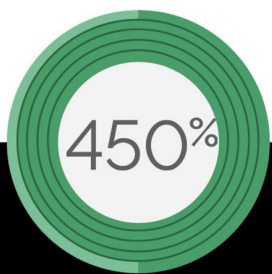
How we turned 18 months of resistance into bottom-up advocacy

The Challenge: A multinational tech company with 150,000+ employees across 100 countries was stuck after 18 months of failed communication platform rollout. Traditional top-down deployment tactics weren't working; people were clinging to outdated systems.

Our Approach: We shifted from corporate mandates to peer influence.

We identified natural influencers within the organization and equipped them with behavior-focused tools to create sustainable bottom-up adoption momentum.

The Result: 450% increase in adoption rate within 60 days



**FEEDBACK GOAL
ACHIEVED**

(1 month vs.
3 months planned)



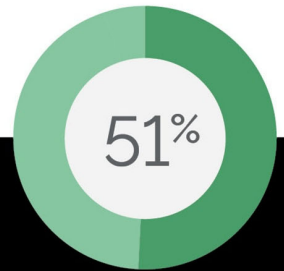
**USAGE GOAL
ACHIEVED**

(2 months vs.
3 months planned)



**USE CASE STUDIES
COMPLETED**

(2 months vs.
12 months planned)



**ANNUAL USAGE
TARGET**

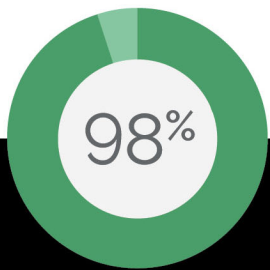
hit in just
60 days

How we turned bureaucratic compliance into employee empowerment

The Challenge: A \$5 million safety program for 5,000 employees across 100+ locations needed executive support while navigating organizational politics. The new safety office had to secure buy-in from management and executive leadership.

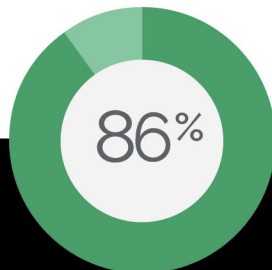
Our Approach: We developed a six-hour executive workshop focusing on leadership behaviors rather than program information. We aligned executives around program commitment, strategy application, and barrier removal.

The Result: 98% executive buy-in and sustained program support



**BUY
IN**

by executive leadership
(vs. 75% industry
standard)



**MANAGEMENT
BUY IN**

up from 36% in
six months
post-training



**PROGRAM
CLARITY**

exceeded goal for
understanding safety
program objectives



**INCREASED
ABILITY**

to track and
report performance
across divisions

How we turned a struggling sales team's crisis into sustainable success

The Challenge: A global sales team of 100 professionals was caught between unrealistic expectations and unclear processes. Schedule delays and disruptive implementations left clients dissatisfied.

Our Approach: We educated the client on implementation reality and complexity. Our assessment revealed gaps in organizational culture and change management practices. We focused on collaborative readiness and realistic goal-setting.

The Result: Rebuilt team confidence and sustainable performance improvement



SHORTENED

sales cycle through better expectation management



INCREASED

customer satisfaction scores



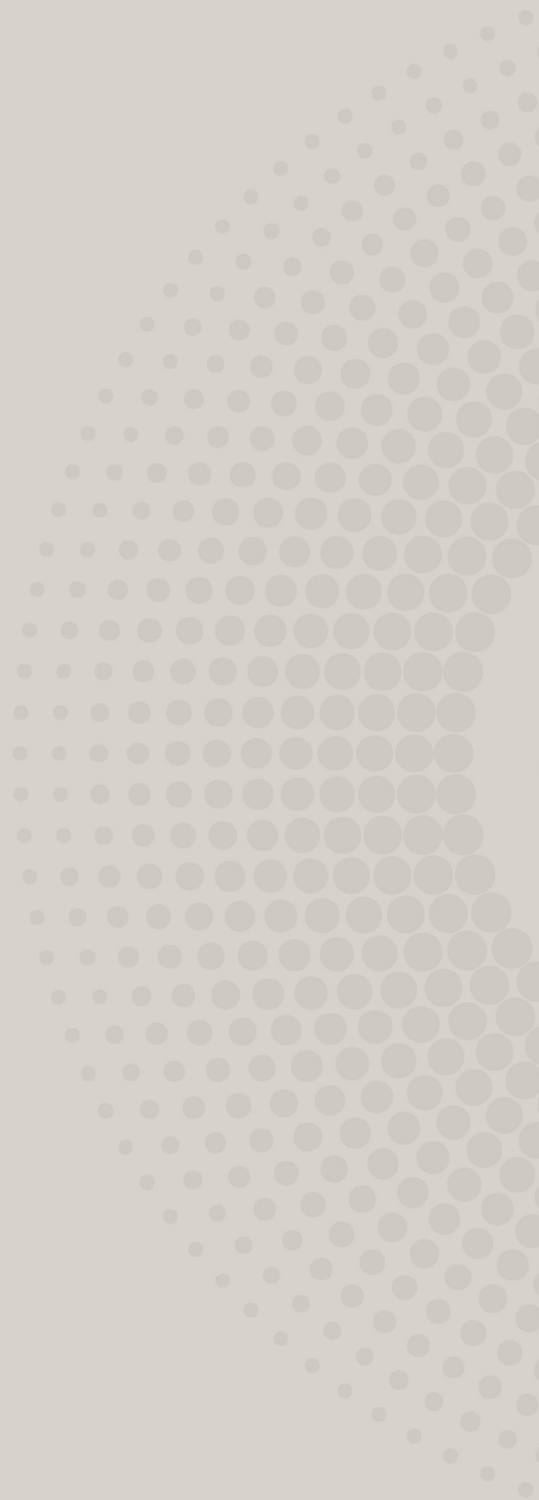
REALISTIC

implementation expectations aligned with business impact



IMPROVED

client stakeholder engagement and project ownership



Avo is a boutique firm focused on reshaping how organizations adopt change, making it more strategic, more sustainable, and more human since 2011.

