Individual Contributors

From Holdouts to Holdups

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IT REVOLUTION
DevOps Enterprise Forum 2017
Portland, Oregon

IT REVOLUTION

25 NW 23rd Pl
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Portland, OR 97210

First Edition
Produced in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover design and interior by Devon Smith

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PREFACE

In April of this year, we at IT Revolution had the pleasure of hosting technology leaders and experts from across the DevOps Enterprise community at the DevOps Enterprise Forum event in Portland, Oregon. The Forum's ongoing goal is to create written guidance to overcome the top obstacles facing the DevOps Enterprise community.

Each year at the Forum, the topics covered have included organizational culture and change management, architecture and technical practices, metrics, integrating and achieving information security and compliance objectives, creating business cases for automated testing, organizational design, and many more.

For the first two years, we organized the participants into large teams that worked on a small number of broad topics. However, this year, we shifted our approach in two ways—first, we invited a core group of past participants to propose topics they would like to work on and second, we asked them to narrow their topics so that they could have "nearly shippable" artifacts by the end of the second day. The result was more teams working on more problems with more written guidance.

After the Forum concluded, the groups spent the next eight weeks working together to complete and refine the work they started together. The results can be found in this year's collection of Forum papers. I hope you will agree that the smaller teams and reduced scope of the guidance benefits both the teams as well as the reader.

IT Revolution is proud to share the outcomes of the hard work, dedication, and collaboration of the amazing group of people from the 2017 DevOps Enterprise Forum. Our hope is that you will gain valuable insight into DevOps as a practice.

—Gene Kim
June 2017
Portland, Oregon

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to identify the individual(s) that could be considered critical to the organization and are the lone holdouts to the DevOps transformation. These holdouts are often longer term employees that have historically experienced false starts around transformational change. These failed attempts at driving toward a new framework or culture may have disenfranchised the individual contributors and caused them to withdraw from supporting the efforts.

This paper will seek to identify practical approaches to categorizing the personalities of the resistant individuals and help identify a clear path that will align them closer to the movement. Developing an understanding of the root cause of the behavior will be derived through the evaluation of incentives, drivers, fears, and the contextual knowledge of the employee. The approach must be lightweight, easy to implement, non-destructive/non-threatening, and provide value to transformation.

BUILDING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Hypothesis

Challenges around starting, driving, and building transformational change are, at the core, people challenges. Individuals are unique in their circumstances and their approaches to the world. This creates a challenge in discovering the "right" approach to re-engaging a disenfranchised employee. There is no single tactic that works for every individual or every time; therefore, an interchangeable, experimental, iterative framework is the best approach.

A flexible framework for approaching holdouts assists in rapid experimentation toward a solution. A lightweight framework will allow for tight feedback loops and easy experimenting with different approaches. Each iteration through the framework flow provides valuable data and insight into the best approach to finding an equitable solution. The Improvement Kata and PDSA[1] (plan-do-study-act) loops set achievable short-term goals.

Archetypes

Wikipedia defines an archetype as a statement, pattern of behavior, or prototype (model) which other statements, patterns of behavior, and objects copy or emulate. This paper leverages archetypes as a framework to better understand a specific individual contributor so that a specific communication plan may be tailored to increase understanding, shared camaraderie, and performance.

Literature and other sources suggest classic archetypes such as the Hero, the Martyr, or the Evil Genius. Additional archetypes can be suggested and tailored for the DevOps context to more closely resemble individual contributors one might encounter. An important fact to remember is that a person can exhibit multiple archetypes simultaneously. While we

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[1] The PDSA Cycle (Plan-Do-Study-Act), also known as the Deming Wheel or Deming Cycle, is a systematic series of steps for gaining valuable learning and knowledge for the continual improvement of a product or process. For more info, visit: https://deming.org/management-system/pdsacycle.

recognize no individual falls neatly into just one archetype, choose the one that most reflects their behavior at the specific situation.

Archetypes

	Fears	Goals	Characteristics
The Sage	To be duped/misled. To be ignorant. To be confused.	To find the truth. To understand the world through analytics. To be objective and honest.	Typically, rational, investigative, and disciplined and may come across as unfeeling and dogmatic. They want to know and comprehend the truth in all things and come to an objective conclusion.
The Magician (aka The Oracle)	To have unintended negative consequences. To fear their own potential to do harm. To have a lack of self-awareness.	To understand the fundamental laws of the universe. To make dreams come true. To alter/transform the known world. To transform themselves/achieve a high plane of existence.	Idealistic visionary with high standards—sometimes too high—that is willing to take calculated risks others would shrink from. They utilize manipulation, charisma and inspiration to drive their agenda, even if it is not aligned with the organization.
The Rebel (aka Evil Genius/Troll)	To be powerless. To be ineffectual. To be annihilated. To be left empty.	To shock. To disrupt/destroy. To change/overthrow what isn't working. To let go of their anger/driving force and return to balance.	Outrageous and radical with desire to remain innovative, creative, and free. Feelings strongly dictate work ethic, which leads to recklessness, instability, and careless of safety.
The Orphan/ Regular Guy or Gal	To be alone. To be alienated. To stand out from a crowd. To be abandoned. To be exploited.	To belong. To restore a feeling of safety. To connect with others.	Typically, independent, pragmatic, and resilient in the face of challenges or setbacks. Orphans may play the victim, and use prior misfortunes as an excuse for present circumstances (such as Eeyore or Debbie Downer).
The Explorer	To be trapped. To be subject to conformity. To be bored. To feel inner emptiness.	To experience a more authentic/fulfilling life. To search for meaning. To discover uniqueness of self.	A craver of new experiences, boundary pushing and independent exploration, the explorer is a self-sufficient achiever. The insatiable urge to do things themselves can exclude others and prevent collaboration and team building.

cont. from p. 7	Fears	Goals	Characteristics
The Caregiver	To be selfish. To be ungracious. To burn out.	To protect others. To care for and help others. To make a difference.	Responding to needs is exciting and challenging to them. Resentment can set in when too many demands are made, and eventually, this can lead to self-martyrdom.
The Hero (aka The Firefighter)	To be weak. To be vulnerable. To be incompetent. To be seen as a "chicken."	To prove worth through courage. To be strong and competent. To achieve mastery in order to improve the world. To succeed despite the odds. To infuse meaning in what they do.	Typically, goal-oriented, focused, and determined to rise to the occasion/beat the odds. Although they accomplish a great deal under duress, these behaviors are typically not scalable nor repeatable over the long run.
The Innocent (aka Initiate, Rookie, Apprentice)	To be captive (physically, emotionally, etc.). To be punished for doing something wrong. To be rejected or abandoned. To be in danger.	To be happy. To be free. To be unconditionally loved and accepted. To be protected and safe.	Typically trusting, optimistic, and well-liked for their enthusiasm and positive energy. Innocents may become too dependent on others, blame others, or deal poorly with transitions or change.
The Creator (aka The Artisan, The Craftsman)	To have a mediocre vision. To only execute a vision half way. To believe all is an illusion. To remain unchanged/ unmoved by beauty.	To create things of enduring value. To see a vision realized. To hone artistic control and skill. To create culture through self-expression.	Like to see new ideas take shape, express their innovation, individuality, and freedom. Often perfectionists, they might lose sight of the forest for the trees. They can be outsiders, separated from average Joes by their incredible talents.
The Lover	To be alone. To be rejected/unwanted/ unloved. To lose the love they already have. To instigate disharmony.	To be intimate. To be in a relationship. To sustain a relationship. To experience life to the fullest. To create harmony amongst others.	Charming, charismatic, friendly, and fun. Emotional, optimistic, values harmony and building relationships. Works hard to make a good impression; wants to please others and avoid conflict.

cont. from p. 8	Fears	Goals	Characteristics
The Jester	To be bored with lack of stimulation. To bore others. To not be "alive."	To live in the moment. To have fun and enjoy life. To lighten up the world.	Uses humor to lighten up stressful situations and turns hard or mundane work into something fun and light-hearted. They are charismatic, magnetic, mischievous, and clever, using quick wit to deliver critical remarks, which could be hurtful instead of uplifting.
The King **(aka The Tyrant)**	To be overthrown. To be in chaos/disarray. To abdicate responsibility. To be corrupt (or caught if corrupt).	To be in control. To prosper sphere of influence. To be protectors. To be respected/revered.	Authoritarian, my-way-or-the-highway, goal oriented, influencer, detail oriented. Applies their power and influence to make things better, empower others to do their best, susceptible to bad data.

Information in this table was pulled from Jeannie Campbell's blog The Character Therapist, http://charactertherapist.com/.

Symptoms

Now that we've explored some of the common archetypes of "holdouts," let's look at some of the common manifestations of "holding out" that can be displayed by individual contributors in the organization.

- **Cynicism:** The individual contributor has been through prior unsuccessful transformations and will just "wait this one out too."
- **Demotivated/Disenfranchised/Disillusioned:** Unwilling or unable to take on new changes, they withdraw from engaging with the team, displaying apathy or absenteeism.
- **Poor Performer Hiding in the Crowd:** These individual contributors prefer to sustain the situation and obfuscate their performance.
- **Spectator:** This individual contributor may display Schadenfreude, that is they sit back and take pleasure in the misfortune of others; in this case, they may sit back and watch what they believe will be a failed transformation.
- **Active/Passive Sabotage:** "If I slow-roll this, maybe it will just go away and I can get back to what I want to do." These individuals oppose any attempt to evolve.

- **Entrenchment:** High degree of ontological arrogance and unwillingness to change, won't believe data or dismiss it.
- **Disruption:** The individual contributor disrupts the progress/productivity of others, such as showing up late to meetings or blowing them off; is unwilling or unable to ask for help, will churn in the corner by themselves for weeks before reaching out.
- **Aggressive Behavior:** Usually verbal, but not always, the individual contributor uses intimidation tactics to maintain the status quo, including rudeness, bullying, harassment, arrogance, insults, etc.
- **Emotional Outbursts:** Technical disagreements can become overly emotional, resulting in outbursts.
- **Productivity Swings:** The individual contributor may exhibit inconsistent, inefficient performance, with productivity dipping in certain periods.
- **Excuses:** The individual contributor uses constant excuses for lack of progress; lies about non-existent progress.
- **Lone Wolf:** The individual contributor is unwilling to collaborate and work with the team; goes it alone.
- **"That's Not My Job":** Some individuals may be unwilling to expand their job responsibilities and adapt to the new process, often reverting to "that's not my job" or "that's not in my job description."
- **Married to a Tool:** These individuals are "stuck" with a tool or process that essentially defines them and their role in the organization. Their fear is often that if the tool/process changes or goes away, so will they. A common example is when an individual contributor has either been in charge of choosing the tool in question, managing it, or even developed the in-house solution which isn't scaling/working/etc. and wants to sink more work into it.
- **Control Issues:** An individual contributor may be unwilling to let go/automate/self-service due to the perception that this will impact their standing and influence in the organization.
- **Political Maneuverer:** The contributor sees their power center as tied to the current process/tools/etc.[2]

Root Cause Analysis

Before trying tactics and approaches to re-engage an employee, we must first understand the forces that are contributing to the behavior of the individual contributor. Gaining a clear

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[2] Kate Taylor, "13 Signs of a Disengaged Employee (Infographic)," *Entrepreneur* (June 2, 2014) https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/234436; David Mizne, "5 Surprising Signs of a Disengaged Employee (Infographic)," 15Five.com, accessed May 24, 2014, https://www.15five.com/blog/5-surprising-signs-of-disengaged-employee/.

understanding of what is driving the behavior, combined with the individual's archetype and some proven tactics, results in a well-informed and effective approach. The actions of the individual contributor are often coping mechanisms for dealing with the anxiety around change or transformation. First, we use three categories to gain additional insight into the causes of the symptoms they're displaying.

- Fears:
  - Fears are the most powerful and important factor to examine and consider. The majority of decisions we make in our lives are either directly driven by or influenced by fear. You must understand the individual contributor at a personal level and have the contextual experience with her or him to understand what they fear.
  - Addressing and mitigating both rational and irrational fears are incredible forcing factors toward transformational alignment.
- Incentives:
  - How is the individual incentivized by the organization? Extrinsic incentives are reward based and often less impactful than intrinsic rewards. The organizational culture provides powerful intrinsic incentives, and it is crucial to understand how those incentives affect behavior. For example, is this individual rewarded by "diving catches or fire-fighting"? How will this individual be recognized after moving to DevOps?
  - Changing these incentives can help to influence behavior and re-engagement in the transformation.
- Drivers:
  - What drives the individual? Do they seek advancement or peer recognition? Is it a spectrum with one being weighed more heavily than the others?
  - Incentives and recognition of achievement should be modeled on the drivers that are most important to this individual. When incentives empower drivers, powerful change can result.

Tactics and Frameworks

There are several different tactics that can be used to help re-align the individual contributor with the proposed transformation. Below, we've outline several of these tactics and the archetype(s) that they may be most suited for. However, remember that no two individuals are exactly alike. What works with one individual may not work with another. The key is to experiment, and try, try again.

Here are some tactics to try:

- Empowerment and Ownership:
  - Most suited for: The Artisan, The Oracle, The Sage.
  - Motivate the individual through their desire to lead and manage, to direct the progress. This individual wants to see their baby grow. Helping to give the employee ownership over a piece of the transformation can help achieve this. Use this tactic when the individual has exhibited strong behavior around the desire to be the decision-maker.
- Coaching:
  - Most suited for: The Innocent, The Orphan.
  - Provide guidance and next steps for success in common objectives. This can include multiple course corrections until alignment is met. Unlike mentoring, where you seek to help the person achieve their goal, coaching is helping the person achieve our goal.
  - Use this tactic when the person is newer to the process and workforce. The individual must be an open and willing participant in this approach or it will not work.
- Skill Building/Training/Plant Intuition:
  - Most suited for: The Uninitiated, The Rookie.
  - In some cases, the "holdout" has not had the opportunity to learn and experience the value of the transformation. This is a simple case of lack of exposure and can be resolved through several means. Leveraging your knowledge of the employee's personality and provide training through the means that are best consumable to him or her.
  - Use this tactic when the person is a high performer, eager, and ready. It is often the case that the person just hasn't had time to learn, so ensure that providing this learning opportunity is a priority for the employee and your team.[3]
- Appeal to Authority (implement best practices vetted by subject matter experts):
  - Most suited for: The Sage, The Hero, The Innocent.
  - Information can sometimes be more readily absorbed and consumed when it comes from someone other than the one in charge. Using a third party to convey the value and importance of the DevOps transformation can be a powerful tool if used correctly and at the right time.
  - Use this tactic when the person tends to not trust the information being published from the sitting authority. This can be because of a track record of incomplete or not well thought out directives from leaders in his or her past.
- Direct Compensation:
  - Most suited for: The Hero, The Orphan.

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[3] For an example, check out the Envelope Game from Nordstrom: https://vimeo.com/128617767.

- Motivating the individual contributor will best be defined by your understanding of the individual. Compensating the employee to try to encourage behaviors that are aligned with the transformation can be monetary or experiential or a little of both.
  - Examples include:
    - Spot bonuses—Cash incentives on meeting objectives.
    - Experience bonus—Inclusive vacations, zip-lining, free dinner, etc.
- Let's Try It/Small Chunks:
  - Most suited for: The Orphan.
  - Small objectives and biteable chunks can allow stepping stones to progress to the overall objective. Sometimes taking change one small step at a time makes the overall transformation more digestible.
- Shared Responsibility/Accountability:
  - Most suited for: The Orphan, The Innocent.
  - Provide assurance that the team will stand by to defend any of its members and will work through the challenges together. This helps to ensure that a scapegoat culture is never created and can ease the anxieties and fears of some "holdouts."
- Change the Environment:
  - Most suited for: All archetypes.
  - Physical, emotional, team, organizational, and more, uprooting the current environment might be a healthy disruption to align.
  - For example, consider redoing the seating chart to shake up the cliques that can build over time.
  - Lateral moves as a mitigation tactic can also be helpful. This allows people to experience/experiment with another role or take some of the bottleneck out of the process, at least temporarily.
- Shared Vision and Long-Term Strategy (the "why," the bigger picture):
  - Most suited for: All archetypes.
  - This is an important tactic for any large-scale transformation initiative, across all team members and archetypes. Be sure to share the broader context for why the DevOps transformation is so critical, what the goals are, and how the pieces will come together to achieve these goals.

THE PROCESS FLOW

Fast feedback loops, process iteration, and experimentation are some of the key tenants of DevOps. As seen in the diagram below, we want to follow a rapid and repeatable process flow when experimenting with which tactic works best on any specific "holdout." Ultimately, the goal is to re-engage the employee in the transformation taking place in the organization, not to alienate them or further ostracize them. The process requires support not only from the leader and employee but also from the organization itself. Alignment is the key to creating a smooth, workable, and repeatable process. To achieve this, we will follow the following flow, as seen in Figure 1.
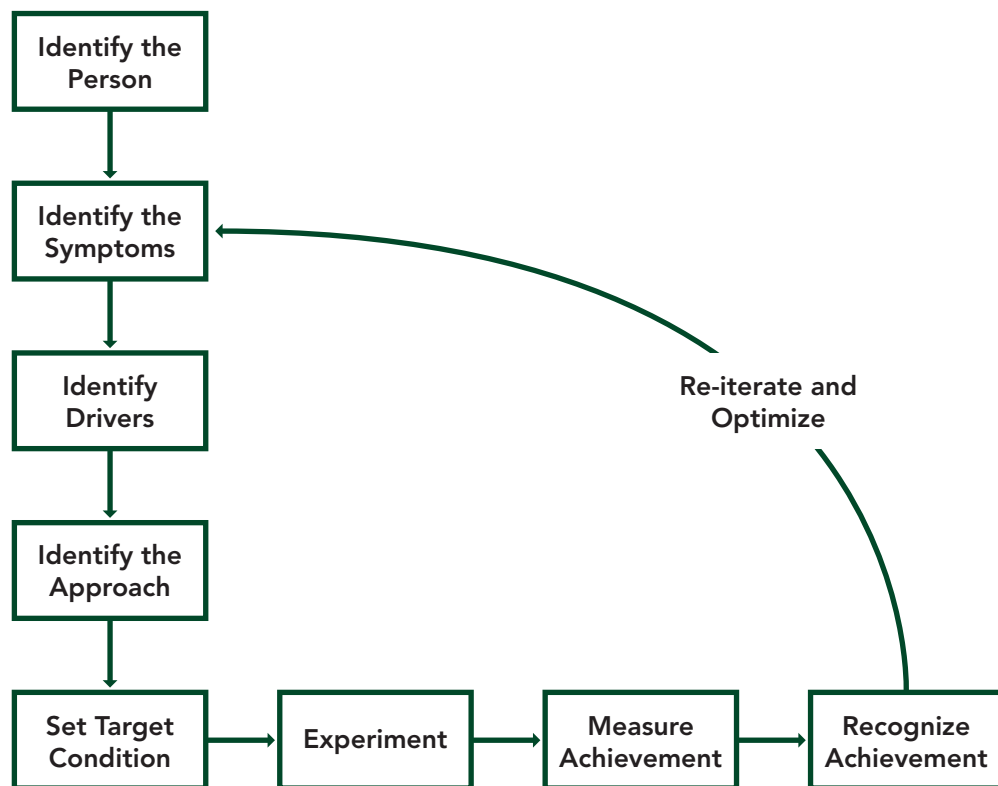
Identify the Person → Identify the Symptoms → Identify Drivers → Identify the Approach → Set Target Condition → Experiment → Measure Achievement → Recognize Achievement → Re-iterate and Optimize → Identify the Symptoms

Fig. 1: The Process Flow

Process Flow

- Identify the individual contributor, the "holdout," and that person's archetype(s).
- Identify the symptoms/problem/concerns of the individual.
- Identify the individual's incentives, drivers, and fears (as mentioned above).
- Identify the approach/tactic. Using the root cause analysis and contextual understanding of the employee, create a uniquely tailored experiment. Remain focused on developing a path to common objectives.
- Set target condition. Define a measurable, desired outcome and report out results.
- Experiment. Execute your plan.
- Measure achievement. Track progress and milestones.
- Recognize achievement. Reward when appropriate.
- Re-iterate and optimize.

CONCLUSION

Identifying the needs of the employee and organization through an iterative approach to change is just the beginning. As you embark on your own transformation and are faced with "holdouts" on your team, remember that mindset change must come from within. As leaders, we can seed the change but growth requires care and feeding to truly blossom. By showing clear results and transparent benefits to your team, you can increase motivation, and a strong focus on open and honest communication will build the framework for systemic and positive change.

As you begin to engage holdouts, it is key to understand that different people have different motivations for career and job satisfaction. Resist any urge to judge or convict others for their differences. Discover what truly drives and motivates the individual, not just the team, to help engage that individual in the transformation. Often individuals take the leap of faith based on a compelling emotional argument versus facts and figures.

You will not convince everyone, but a group decision must be backed by the entire team. If one or both parties decide this isn't the right environment for them, parting ways can be accomplished in a respectful and positive manner.

A symbiotic relationship exists between the boss and the employee, and both should be able to get what they want. This give and take must be mutual and even on the whole. People essentially want to do the right thing. Be helpful, effective, successful. It's our job as leaders to help them get there.

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