

Managing The Invisible

Five Vital Steps to Overcoming Invisible Obstacles

Uncover the crucial steps organizations must take to unearth, acknowledge, and conquer the invisible obstacles hindering progress and stifling strategic visions.



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There are silent forces that often go unnoticed in our places of work, yet they can obstruct progress, kill a strategic vision, and drain the energy of teams.

These invisible obstacles, often referred to as “elephants in the room,” “the emperor’s new clothes,” or “the 800-pound gorilla,” are detrimental to a company’s success. They lurk beneath the surface, impeding forward movement and holding teams back from achieving greatness.

Visible & Invisible

Every organization and its leaders operate with two primary forces: the visible and the invisible.

The visible domain includes what is seen, measured, and openly discussed — the reality that is tangible and quantifiable. It includes profit, loss, analytics, headcount, budget metrics, and the strengths and issues the team has acknowledged, which might consist of fears, obstacles, and areas of excellence.

Measuring, managing, and discussing what’s visible helps the business move forward.

However, there exists an invisible realm that eludes our immediate perception. It comprises the unspoken obstacles, the issues we choose to ignore or brush under the rug, and the future we have yet to create. These invisible elements can hinder our progress and limit our ability to realize our envisioned future.

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When an organization works to envision its future (aka strategic planning and visioning practices), it must mine the invisible obstacles within its current reality. If these obstacles, such as elephants in the room, remain unaddressed, they will impede progress and prevent the realization of the envisioned strategy.

To overcome invisible obstacles, there are five vital steps to follow.

- Unearth invisible obstacles by conducting thorough investigations and research to uncover what is not readily visible in our day-to-day operations.
- Acknowledge and openly name their existence, fostering a culture of truth and transparency.
- Identify what's at stake because of the obstacles. We can galvanize collective action by clarifying how these obstacles impact our ability to thrive and progress.
- Bond together to address the invisible obstacles. Once we have a shared understanding, we can coordinate our approach, agreeing on how to address, manage, and overcome these obstacles together.
- Commit to removing or overcoming the invisible obstacles at every level of the culture, developing a comprehensive plan with the entire team on board.

“You can manage what you can't see. And you can't realize your vision or strategy unless you overcome obstacles. Take solace in knowing that every organization has barriers, and overcoming them makes you more potent as a team.”

To navigate these conversations effectively, there are a few guidelines to consider.

- Create an environment of judgment-free curiosity, where diverse perspectives are embraced, and judgment is suspended.
- Encourage fierce vulnerability, allowing open and honest conversations while maintaining empathy and respect.
- Prioritize respectful honesty in all communications, expressing yourself with candor and compassion.
- Practice active and faithful listening, seeking to understand before attempting to solve the issues.
- Recognize that everyone has a voice and be mindful of any power dynamics hindering collaboration.

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Addressing these complex issues requires more than finding quick solutions; it demands a commitment to naming and acknowledging them. These discussions are not therapy but a catalyst for fostering healthy professional conversations.

“There’s nothing more powerful than a united group of souls ignited in a common cause with love at the core.”

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