

DECLASSIFIED

NASJE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

Unsabotage Your Organization

What an 80-year-old sabotage manual reveals about organizational dysfunction

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1944

The Office of Strategic Services — forerunner to the CIA — publishes a field manual.

Its job: teach ordinary citizens in occupied Europe how to destroy productivity from the inside — without tools, without training, and without ever getting caught.

What if that manual is still being followed today — in your building?



*“I enjoy cooking with wine,
sometimes I even put it in the food...”*

- JULIA CHILD

The Document

EXHIBIT A

SIMPLE SABOTAGE FIELD MANUAL

Strategic Services (Provisional)
Office of Strategic Services
Washington, D.C.

DECLASSIFIED 2008

AUTHOR

OSS — wartime forerunner of the CIA

AUDIENCE

Ordinary civilians in Nazi-occupied Europe

METHOD

No weapons required — just everyday behavior

STATUS

Declassified by the CIA in 2008; publicly available

“Simple” Sabotage

Intro

“Simple sabotage does not require specially prepared tools or equipment; it is executed by an ordinary citizen...

. . .

It is based on universal opportunities to make faulty decisions, to adopt a noncooperative attitude, and to induce others to follow suit...

This type of activity, sometimes referred to as the ‘human element,’ is frequently responsible for accidents, delays, and general obstruction even under normal conditions. The potential saboteur should discover what types of faulty decisions and the operations are normally found in this kind of work and should then devise his sabotage so as to enlarge that ‘margin for error.’”

Practical Tips and Tricks

Top 5 Tips

- (1) "When you go to the lavatory, spend a longer time there than is necessary."
- (2) "Hamper official and especially military business by making at least one telephone call a day to an enemy headquarters; when you get them, tell them you have the wrong number."
- (3) On disrupting movies: Put "two or three dozen large moths in a paper bag. Take the bag to the movies with you, put it on the floor in an empty section of the theater as you go in and leave it open. The moths will fly out and climb into the projector beam, so that the film will be obscured by fluttering shadows."
- (4) "Spread disturbing rumors that sound like inside dope."
- (5) "Make train travel as inconvenient as possible for enemy personnel. Make mistakes in issuing train tickets . . . issue two tickets for the same seat in the train, so that an interesting argument will result."

“Unsabotage: A Roadmap”

01

Recognize the tactics

02

**Understand why they
work**

03

Detect and Adjust

The Genius

Simple sabotage

It works because it looks
to reward: caution, the

A behavior that looks
reasonable



ally courts) are built

omes invisible



HAVE YOU
BEEN
SABOTAGED?

Five Categories

CONFERENCES

MANAGERS

EMPLOYEES

EVERYONE

DIGITAL

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 1 OF 3

CONFERENCES

...a decision that
safe?



, just to be

Just when I thought I was out,
they pull me back in.

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 11(a): "Refer back to matters decided upon at the last meeting and attempt to re-open the question of the advisability of that decision."

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 2 OF 3

CONFERENCES

...a one-line policy update that turned into a week-long debate over exact wording?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 11(a): “Haggle over precise wordings of communications, minutes, resolutions.”

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 3 OF 3

CONFERENCES

...a proposal sent to a committee “for further study” that was never heard about again?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 11(a): “Refer all matters to committees, for ‘further study and consideration’... never less than five.”

A vintage yellow television set with a black screen and control panel. The screen displays the text "And now for a word from our sponsor..." in a white, italicized, serif font. The control panel on the right side of the screen features two large circular knobs, a speaker grille, and a small orange indicator light.

And now for a word from our sponsor...

Organizations & Conferences

Weaponizing Bureaucracy

SECTION 11 (A)

"Insist on doing everything through 'channels.'"

"Refer all matters to committees... never less than five."

"Haggle over precise wordings of communications, minutes, resolutions."

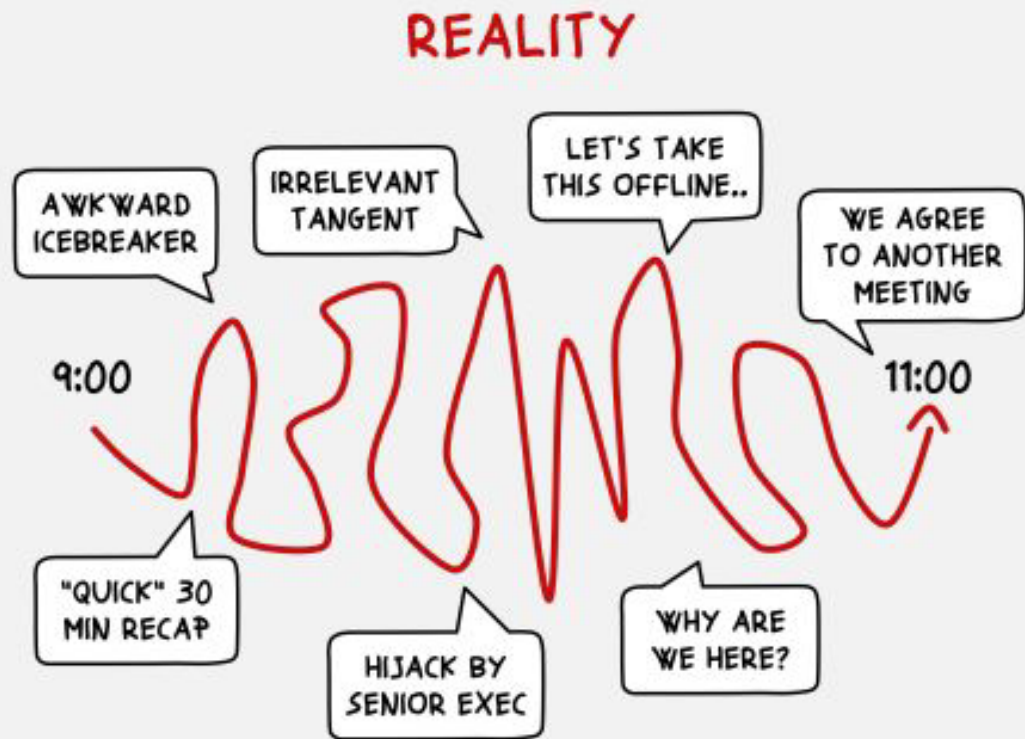
"Refer back to matters decided upon at the last meeting and attempt to re-open the question."

"Bring up irrelevant issues as frequently as possible."

"Be worried about the propriety of any decision—raise the question of whether such action as is contemplated lies within the jurisdiction of the group or whether it might conflict with the policy of some higher echelon."

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TODAY

- A task force convened to review a task force's recommendations
- A decision reopened three meetings after it was settled
- A one-line policy update stuck in a wording debate for a week (or longer)
- Procedures that haven't been re-evaluated in decades
- Meetings that center on tangents
- Analysis paralysis
- "What about . . . ?"



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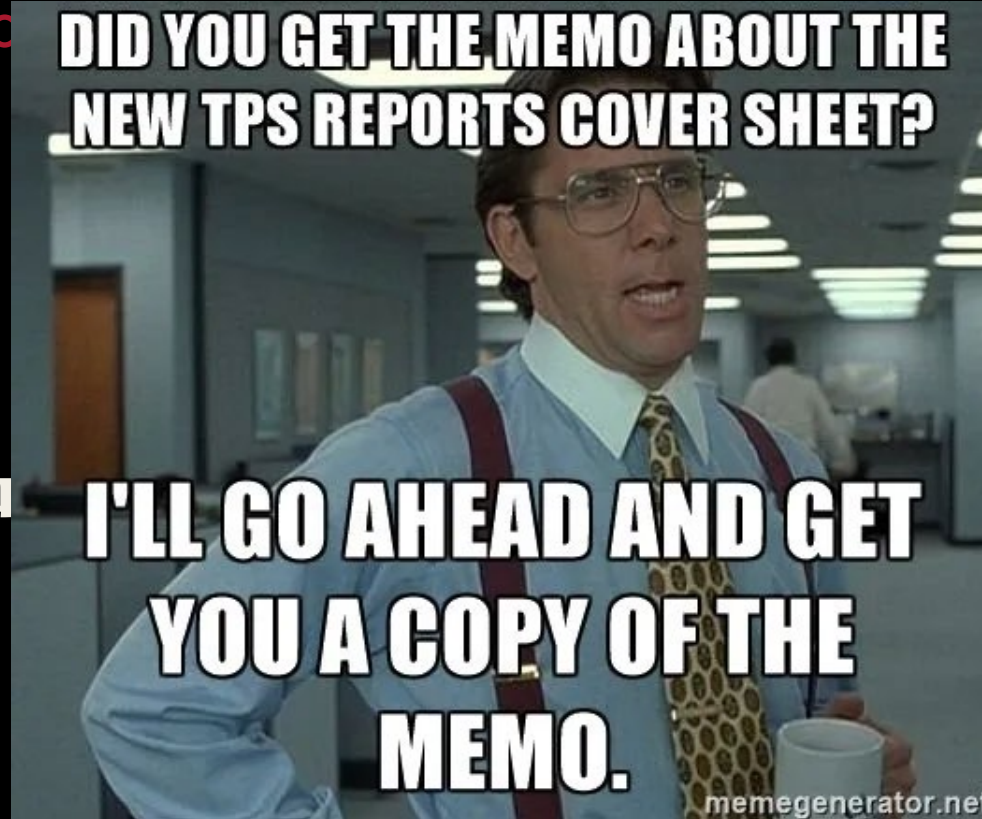
HAVE YOU
BEEN
SABOTAGED?

HAVE YOU EVER ENCO

ROUND 1 OF 3

MANAGERS

...overzealous “qu
unimportant?



was relatively

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 11(b): “Insist on perfect work in relatively unimportant products.”

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 2 OF 3

MANAGERS

...someone who didn't seem able to understand even the simplest instructions?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 11(b): “‘Misunderstand’ orders. Ask endless questions or engage in long correspondence about such orders.”

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 3 OF 3

MANAGERS

...a situation where you started a new role or were tasked with an assignment but given no guidance or instruction?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 11(b): “When training new workers, give incomplete or misleading instructions.”

A vintage yellow television set with a black screen and control panel. The screen displays the text "And now for a word from our sponsor..." in a white, italicized, serif font. The control panel on the right side of the screen features two large circular knobs, a speaker grille, and a small orange indicator light.

And now for a word from our sponsor...

Managers & Supervisors

Malicious Compliance

SECTION 11 (B)

"Demand written orders."

"'Misunderstand' orders. Ask endless questions... quibble over them when you can."

"See that three people have to approve everything where one would do."

"Apply all regulations to the last letter."

"Insist on perfect work in relatively unimportant products."

"When training new workers, give incomplete or misleading instructions."

"To lower morale...be pleasant to inefficient workers; give them undeserved promotions. Discriminate against efficient workers; complain unjustly about their work."

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TODAY

- Requiring a "wet" signature
- The discourse that never ends . . . Or results in a decision.
- "Put that in writing" used as a stall, not as a safeguard
- Endless or convoluted chains of approval
- Requiring litigants to jump through hoops
- Malicious compliance



HAVE YOU
BEEN
SABOTAGED?

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 1 OF 3

EMPLOYEES

...work that seemed to take at least three times as long as it should have?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 11(c): "Work slowly... measure dimensions twice as often as you need to."

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 2 OF 3

EMPLOYEES

...a colleague that hoarded knowledge instead of passing on expertise to new colleagues?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 11(c): "Never pass on your skill and experience to a new or less skillful worker."

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUN

ROUND 3 OF 3

EMPLOYEES

...a colleague who w
performance or out



stability for poor

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 11(d): "Do your work poorly and blame it on bad tools, machinery, or equipment."

A vintage yellow television set with a black screen and control panel. The screen displays the text "And now for a word from our sponsor..." in a white, italicized, serif font. The control panel on the right side of the screen features two large circular knobs, a speaker grille, and a small orange indicator light. The television is set against a light blue background.

And now for a word from our sponsor...

Office Workers & Employees

Administrative Subversion

SEC. 11 (C) – (D)

"Prolong correspondence with government bureaus."

"Misfile essential documents."

"Work slowly... measure dimensions twice as often as you need to."

"Snarl up administration... fill out forms illegibly so they will have to be done over."

"Never pass on your skill and experience to a new or less skillful worker."

"Do your work poorly and blame it on bad tools, machinery, or equipment."

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TODAY

- "Just to clarify" replies that reopen instead of resolve
- The form bounced back for an unexplained missing field
- "Let me loop in one more person" on the fifth loop-in
- Unintuitive systems, websites, and forms
- "We've always done it this way"
- Mandatory reports that no one reads



HAVE YOU
BEEN
SABOTAGED?

HAVE YOU

EVERYONE

...a collection
two-paragraph
question

IF YES — YOU

Manual, § 12

Recent polls have shown a fifth of Americans
can't locate the U.S. on a world map.
Why do you think this is?

I personally believe that U.S.
Americans are unable to do so,
because, uh, some ... people out
there in our nation don't have
maps, and, uh, I believe that our
education like such as South
Africa and, uh, the Iraq
everywhere like, such as and ...
I believe that they should, our
education over here in the US
should help the US, er, should
help South Africa and should
help the Iraq and the Asian
countries, so we will be able
to build up our future,
for our children...



OUND 1 OF 3

to a

."

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 2 OF 3

EVERYONE

**...someone who could derail a room just by being difficult,
without ever quite crossing a line?**

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 12: "Be as irritable and quarrelsome as possible without getting yourself into trouble."

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 3 OF 3

EVERYONE

...a new policy, initiative, or colleague written off before
anyone gave it a real chance?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Manual, § 12: "Boycott all... in any way connected with the [new] authorities."

A vintage yellow television set with a black screen and control panel. The screen displays the text "And now for a word from our sponsor..." in a white, italicized, serif font. The control panel on the right side of the screen features two large circular knobs, a speaker grille, and a small orange indicator light.

And now for a word from our sponsor...

General Devices for Lowering Morale

Damaging Morale

SECTION 12

"Give lengthy and incomprehensible explanations when questioned."

"Be as irritable and quarrelsome as possible without getting yourself into trouble."

"Boycott all... in any way connected with the [new] authorities."

"Act stupid."



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TODAY

- An explanation that answers a different question than the one asked
- Non-participation due to being "too busy"
- Treating a new policy — or a new colleague — as illegitimate until proven otherwise
- Resisting change at all costs



HAVE YOU
BEEN
SABOTAGED?

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 1 OF 3

DIGITAL

...a reply-all thread that was only ever supposed to be one
“thanks!” — or somebody's vacation photos?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Addendum (unofficial): “Always reply all — even if, especially if, it's just to share multiple photos of your pet, or just respond ‘thanks!’”

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 2 OF 3

DIGITAL

...someone who never once mutes themselves on a call — until it's their turn to talk, and then they can't seem to unmute?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Addendum (unofficial): “Always ‘forget’ to mute yourself, except when it's your turn to talk — then mute yourself ‘without realizing it’ for as long as possible.”

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED...

ROUND 3 OF 3

DIGITAL

...a password taped to a monitor that somebody still can't remember?

IF YES — YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN SABOTAGED.

Addendum (unofficial): "Keep all of your passwords on a Post-it note by your computer, but still conveniently forget them whenever possible."

Sabotage in the Digital Age

NOT IN THE ORIGINAL MANUAL

CC everyone. It fills up inboxes with irrelevant emails and collectively implicates everyone on the receiving end.

Use multiple platforms that don't talk to each other and a different tool for the same task depending on who you ask.

Start as many different communication channels (and groups) as possible. Never use the same one(s) consistently.

"Forget" how technology works every time you use it.

Stream sports, the news, a movie, anything at the busiest part of the day.

Delay installing any updates for as long as possible.

Meet every modernization effort with objections and hurdles, until the tech is obsolete anyway.



HAVE YOU
BEEN
SABOTAGED?

The Courts' Unique Vulnerability

THE PIVOT

PROTECTIVE PROCESS

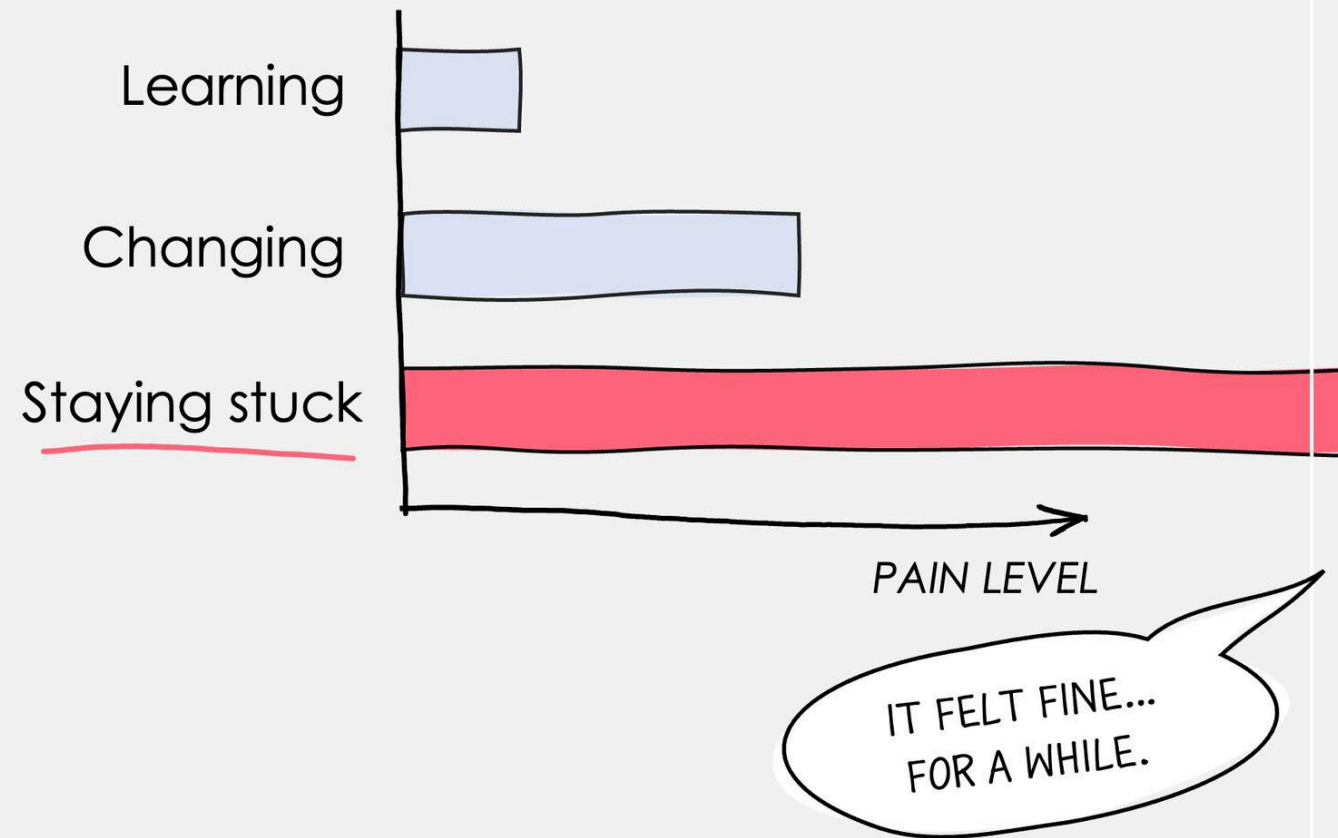
- Risk aversion that drives onerous approval processes and stifles innovation
- Committees on committees
- Judicial independence

SABOTAGE IN DISGUISE

- Caution invoked to avoid a decision, not to improve one
- Defaulting to status quo
- Trying to maintain an air of mystique or mystery in the name of “independence”
- Avoidance of risk BECOMING the risk

CHOOSE YOUR PAIN

@ EDOARDO PALLARO



SEGMENT 4

Detect the Saboteur

The Sabotage Audit

WORKSHEET

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Can you name who holds final decision authority on important initiatives? | ☐ How many sign-offs does a routine decision require — and is that number necessary or habitual? |
| ☐ In the last month, was a settled decision reopened without new information? | ☐ Are the recurring meetings on your schedule actually necessary? And productive? |
| ☐ Does your process scale to the risk of the decision, or does everything run through the highest-risk path? | ☐ Could a new colleague tell the difference between caution that protects and caution that just stalls? |
| ☐ Does your organization take professional development and succession planning seriously? | |

SEGMENT 5

Counter-Sabotage

Practical interventions and tools that can help

The Countersabotage Officer

INTRO

"Thus the central mission of a countersabotage officer is the same as that of an expert in counterespionage—the utilization of knowledge to guide executive action. In order to perform this function efficiently we must strive constantly to increase our store of information by interrogations and operational means. In addition, the countersabotage officer must supply to security and plant-protection officials the data they require to do their job; and in order to do this properly he must be well acquainted with their job. In all cases information concerning new sabotage devices and targets must of course be handed on as quickly as possible."

Source: Eric W. Timm, "Countersabotage - A Counterintelligence Function," CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence (approved for release 1993)

Protective and Preventive Measures

1943

Protective and Preventive Measures Against Sabotage

A survey should be made of conditions that will permit of simple and involved sabotage so these can be corrected or controlled to avoid trouble. This will minimize the vulnerability occasioned by such hazards. The continued protection of each industrial facility in question will depend upon the alertness of the personnel and the enforcement of the protective measures adopted.

Source: U.S. Office of Civilian Defense, "Sabotage and Preventive Measures" (OCD Publication 3100, Part III), December 1943

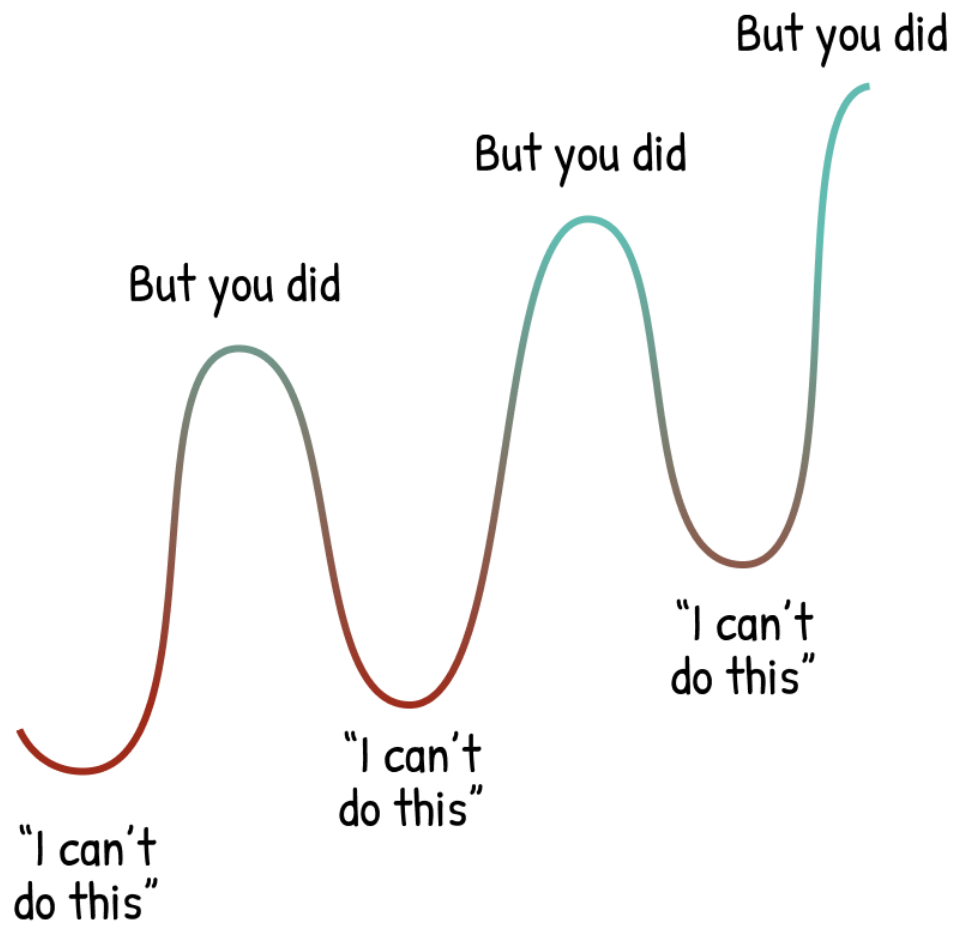
Run a Discovery Sprint

01

Talk to the people closest to the problem, map what's really happening, and leave with a scoped, actionable plan, not another study or referral to a committee. If you don't have the bandwidth or are too close to the problem, consider hiring an outside consultant to conduct a review.

FREE TOOL

The USDS Discovery Sprint Guide is a free, step-by-step field guide for running one — built for government teams by the U.S. Digital Service. Free at sprint.usds.gov.



GROWTHBYVISUALS

Decision Rights Clarity

02

COUNTERS: CHANNELS & COMMITTEES

Clearly name one decision-owner and a deadline. Ensure any committee's role is clear: Are they simply advising or do they have decision-making authority? Who can make the decision to retract a task from committee? And how?

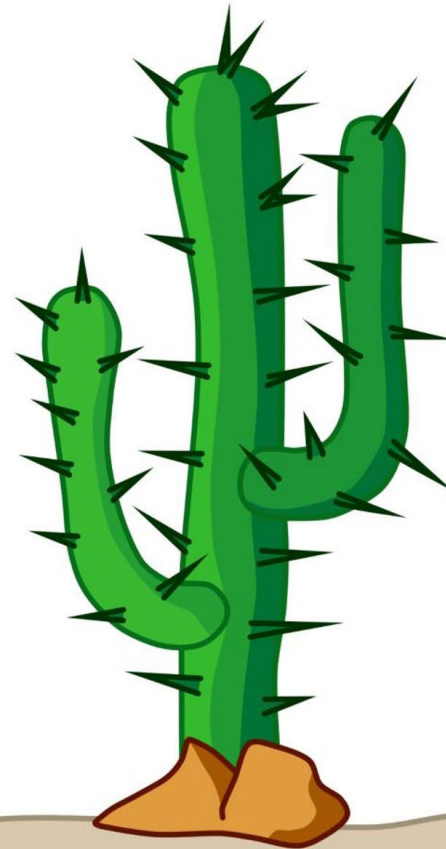
FREE TOOL

DACI names one Driver and one Approver per decision — free template at atlassian.com/team-playbook/plays/daci.

CREATIVITY



BUREAUCRACY



ROBERTOFERRARO.ART

Sunset Rules on Reopening

03

COUNTERS: REOPENING SETTLED DECISIONS

A decided issue can be reopened only with new facts, stated in writing, within a defined window — not on request.

FREE TOOL

Architecture Decision Records: a free template for writing down why a decision was made. Templates at adr.github.io.



THINKING



OVERTHINKING

- the poison is in the dosage -

Right-Sized Risk

04

COUNTERS: THREE PEOPLE APPROVING EVERYTHING

Match review layers to actual risk. Reserve full multi-level review for high-stakes decisions; streamline the rest.

FREE TOOL

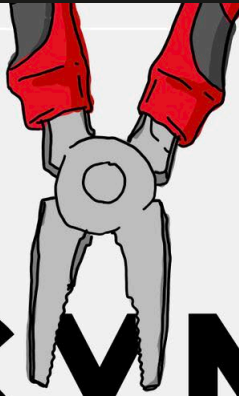
A RACI matrix shows when “three approvers” is really one Accountable person. Free at <https://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence/templates/raci-chart>.

From

BUSYNESS

To

BUSINESS



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PictARISE.art

Write It Down

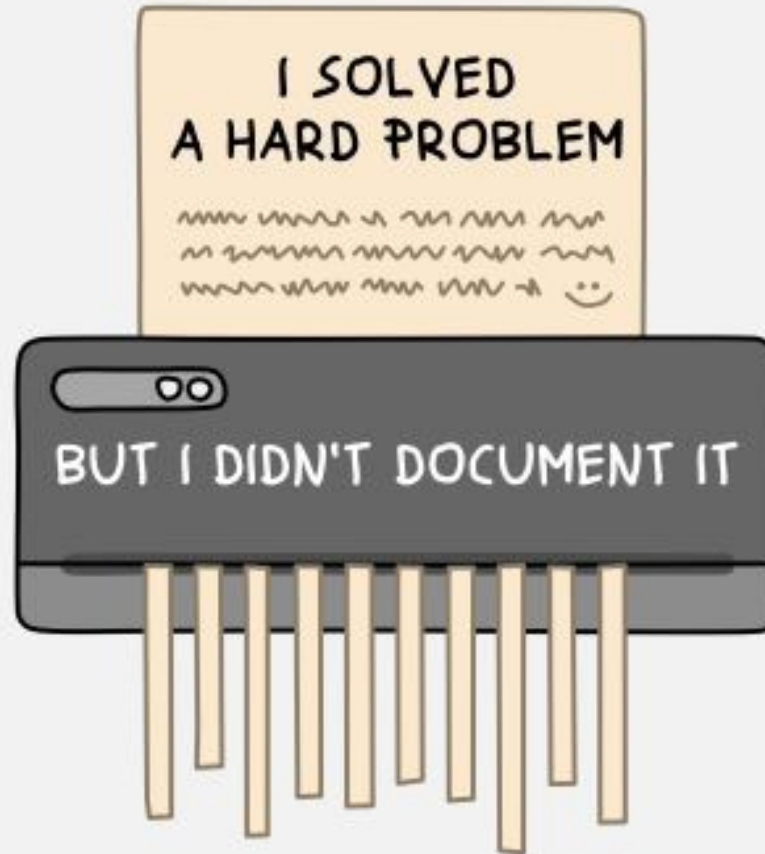
07

COUNTERS: DEATH BY MEETING

A one-page memo travels further than a meeting invite. Write down the problem, the proposal, and the ask — then let people react to something concrete instead of debating in the abstract.

FREE TOOL

“Write It Down: How a Written Memo Can Help You Gain Support For Your Ideas” — a free companion essay from the authors of Hack Your Bureaucracy. Free at <https://medium.com/hack-your-bureaucracy/write-it-down-how-a-written-memo-can-help-you-gain-support-for-your-ideas-81de0a06711f>.



Find Your Paperclip

05

COUNTERS: WAITING FOR THE PERFECT MOMENT

Don't pitch the total overhaul. Find one small, visible win you can make happen this week, then trade up from there — momentum recruits allies faster than a five-year plan does.

FREE TOOL

Read the story of One Red Paperclip — a single paperclip traded, in fourteen steps, all the way up to a house. Free at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_red_paperclip.

Waiting for the
perfect moment.



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Shared Vocabulary

08

COUNTERS: ALL OF THE ABOVE

Give staff a neutral, non-accusatory way to name a sabotage pattern — so it can be interrupted without conflict.

FREE TOOL

No special software required. Just agreement on how to communicate effectively and without causing offense.

The Rewrite

EXERCISE

THIS _____	COULD HAVE BEEN A _____
Meeting	An email.
Committee	—
Diatribes	—
Manual process	—
Paper form	—
Complex workflow	—
Confusing manual	—

Key Takeaways



Sabotage doesn't look like sabotage — it looks like diligence.



Procedural rigor is necessary in judicial education — and it's also the best hiding place these tactics have.



The Unsabotage Playbook: Recognize it, call it out, resolve it.

MISSION COMPLETE

Questions?

Link to Simple Sabotage Manual:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/26184/pg26184-images.html>

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