

INSTITUTE STUDY – NOVEMBER 2025

Middle management as change capacity

Change capacity lives in the middle layer – finite, measurable, and usually already spent.

The layer every programme depends on and most programmes exhaust. A capacity model.

SAMPLE

n = 47 programmes

OBSERVATION PERIOD

2023–2025

EXTENT

22 pages · full edition

REFERENCE

MKM-R-2025-009

PUBLISHER

Markham Institute

RECORD · STUDY

Outcomes verified under the Markham Verification Standard (MKM-F-003)

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ABOUT THE MARKHAM INSTITUTE

The Institute is the research arm of Markham Consulting. It maintains the outcome dataset, stewards the framework library, and publishes its methods in full – so the thinking can be audited before it is paid for. Positions are argued, priced, and open to challenge.

IN THE FULL EDITION

22 pages · v1.0 · Current

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Pagination refers to the full edition. The excerpt reproduces the executive summary, headline exhibit and method notes only.

Change capacity lives in the middle layer — finite, measurable, and usually already spent.

Every transformation plan assumes the middle layer will carry it: translate the strategy, absorb the exceptions, keep the operation running while changing it. Across 47 programmes we measured what that layer could actually carry. The median middle manager was already committed to 118% of available capacity before the programme began.

The study publishes a capacity model that treats middle-management attention the way an engineer treats load: rated limits, current utilisation, and headroom that must exist before new load is added. Programmes that measured this headroom delivered at more than twice the rate of those that assumed it.

“The plan was drawing on an account that was already overdrawn.”

The overdrawn layer

n = 47 programmes · 2023-2025



Median utilisation of middle-management capacity at programme start, against rated limit. Full method and cohort definitions in the closing chapter of the report.

VERIFIED · MKM-F-003

01

118%

Median pre-programme utilisation of middle-management capacity.

02

2.3x

Higher delivery where middle-layer headroom was measured first.

03

31%

Middle-management time consumed by reporting on change, not making it.

04

6 mo

Median time to visible attrition above 130% sustained utilisation.

Every figure is measured against a frozen month-0 baseline and re-tested at month 12 before publication. No figure on this page is self-reported.

The findings, as Monday-morning decisions.

a Measure middle-layer utilisation before approving the plan. Above 100%, the plan is fiction until something stops.

b Cut the reporting tax first. Reclaiming the 31% is the cheapest capacity in the building.

c Sequence change into the layer at the rate headroom actually exists – a number, not a judgement call.

d Watch sustained utilisation above 130% as an attrition leading indicator. It gives six months' warning.

HOW THE NUMBERS ARE MADE

SAMPLE	47 programmes across 39 organisations, each with instrumented capacity data for 12+ months.
INSTRUMENT	Capacity read from calendars, spans of control, initiative assignments and absence data.
VERIFICATION	Outcomes verified under MKM-F-003; capacity effects tested against delivery at month 18.
INTEGRATION	Maintained as the middle-layer component of the Transformation Load Map (MKM-F-006).

CITATION

Markham Institute, Middle management as change capacity, MKM-R-2025-009, v1.0 (November 2025). Citation permitted with attribution.

STANDARDS APPLIED

Baselines frozen under change control · one attribution line per benefit · independent evidence review · twelve-month survival re-test. The full standard is published as MKM-F-003 and may be applied without licence.

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