

WHY ORGANIZATIONS ARE DYING

(And Where Breakthroughs Actually Come From)

By Dr. Michael E Nagel



You've watched transformation initiatives underdeliver. Strategic changes that fell short despite, strong talent and resourcing. Maybe you launched them. Maybe you were part of them. Maybe you observed from the sidelines, wondering why promising efforts keep failing.

Whether you're part of a corporate team, nonprofit organization, social movement, or civic initiative, the pattern is the same.

Here's a quick assessment you and your leadership team can do: What percentage of your collective's energy goes to operational matters - continuing current operations, optimizing today's business - versus strategic matters - imagining and activating new possibilities for tomorrow? Most collectives are 80/20 or 90/10 operational/strategic. Yet breakthrough requires something closer to 50/50 or even 30/70 or higher.

That imbalance isn't a future problem. It's costing you this quarter in failed initiatives, unrealized potential, and energy consumed by operational demands that should be freed for strategic work.

Some organizations see pending irrelevance and try to address it - but most efforts fall short. Others don't appreciate the threat yet, or they see it but feel paralyzed. Both paths lead to the same place: gradual erosion through each underdelivered initiative, then sudden realization that competitors have pulled ahead.

But here's what matters: Breakthrough has a cause. Some collectives can generate it consistently. Most cannot. The difference isn't luck, better strategy, or more talented people. It's whether you can perceive and work with the causal forces operating beneath the surface - forces most leaders have never been taught to see.

What if you could develop that capability? To understand where breakthrough actually comes from?

To consistently manifest what's next rather than watch initiatives fail?

That capability can be developed. It's called Breakthrough Intelligence (BIQ). And whether you're shaping organizational strategy or contributing from your position, you can learn it.

What's Really At Stake?

Organizations are dying at unprecedented rates: S&P 500 company tenure has dropped from 33 years in 1964 to a projected 14 years by 2026 - a 58% decline. In the past thirty years, 76% of companies in the UK's FTSE 100 have vanished. Only 30% of middle-market companies reach their tenth anniversary.

45% of CEOs believe their companies won't survive the next decade on their current path. But death doesn't happen in ten years. It happens gradually - through each initiative that underdelivers, each quarter where operational demands consume strategic energy. Then suddenly, you're irrelevant.

What's actually at stake isn't just survival - it's flourishing. The ability to consistently bloom and create future value. Organizations flourish when they exercise the capacity to regenerate - creating breakthrough after breakthrough - generating enduring value aligned with their purpose.

Most organizations can't do this. They optimize operations but can't consistently generate the breakthroughs that create future value. Every quarter that passes without developing this capacity, they move closer to irrelevance.

You're losing twice: First, the immediate frustration of watching capable people and good strategies produce mediocre results. Second, the compounding cost of falling further behind organizations that have developed breakthrough capability.

Why Most Can't Generate Breakthrough

Up to 80% of executives recognize the need for ongoing transformation. They see disruption accelerating. They launch initiatives.

Yet less than one-third of transformation campaigns succeed at both improving performance AND sustaining those improvements. The pattern repeats across industries, sectors, organization sizes. Strong talent. Sound strategy. Good resourcing. Committed effort. Still, initiatives underdeliver.

When initiatives fail, collectives typically diagnose: 'We need better strategy,' 'We need better people,' 'We need better execution,' 'We need clearer goals.' These diagnoses aren't wrong - they're incomplete. They address symptoms while missing the root cause.

Why don't organizations regularly generate transformational breakthroughs from the inside? The difference isn't visible in strategic plans, org charts, or talent profiles - it's whether the collective can perceive and work with hidden causal forces that determine breakthrough.

This explains why two organizations implement identical strategies with dramatically different outcomes. The strategy isn't the variable. The capability to execute breakthrough is the variable.

If you've watched transformation efforts fall short... if you've seen talented people grow quiet rather than contribute breakthrough ideas... if your collective spends 80% of its energy on operational matters when breakthrough requires 50% or more on strategic work... you're experiencing the capability gap.

What if you could develop that capability? To understand where breakthrough actually comes from? To consistently manifest what's next rather than watch initiatives languish?

That capability can be developed. It's called Breakthrough Intelligence (BIQ). And whether you're shaping organizational strategy or contributing from your position, you can learn it.

What Breakthrough Actually Is

A breakthrough is the ability to manifest what's next - a meaningful advance that moves your collective closer to your highest aspirations. Breakthroughs begin with intent, but critically include bringing what's envisioned into reality. By definition, breakthroughs represent progress that currently feels out of reach or even unattainable.

Breakthrough isn't just 'doing better.' It's pushing past previous limits, exceeding the boundaries of what's currently seen as possible.

Breakthroughs span industries and scales: Battery technology that made electric vehicles viable. Microcredit that revolutionized financial access. A pharmaceutical company becoming the #1 talent brand to secure ultra-specialized oncology talent first. Marketing teams tripling conversions. Executive teams transforming competitive cultures into collaborative growth mindsets.

Often, organizations achieve breakthrough through a series of stackable breakthrough moments that compound over time. Sustained organizational relevance depends on the ability to achieve a continuing supply of such breakthroughs.

The Pattern That Creates Flourishing

Here's what determines whether organizations flourish or languish:

Causal forces → Breakthrough moments → Strings of breakthrough → Flourishing → Sustained relevance

Organizations pursue flourishing through strategy, talent, and resources. Yet these visible investments often fail. Why? Because they're built on a foundation most leaders never see - causal forces operating beneath the surface.

When you can perceive and work with causal forces, breakthrough moments emerge through collective capability. These moments stack. One breakthrough creates conditions for the next. The pattern compounds.

Flourishing organizations exhibit recognizable patterns: They consistently manifest what's next, not just optimize what is. They balance operational excellence with strategic breakthrough (often 50/50 or 30/70 or more). Initiative success rates are dramatically higher. People make breakthrough contributions rather than grow quiet. They reconfigure systems to scale breakthrough.

Leaders in flourishing organizations experience the immense satisfaction of breakthrough realization - not the exhaustion of initiatives that fail, but the confidence of leading collectives that consistently manifest breakthrough.

The Capability That Drives Outcome

What capability do flourishing organizations have that struggling organizations lack?

The answer is Breakthrough Intelligence (BIQ) - a developable capability that extends beyond traditional IQ and EQ frameworks. BIQ is the ability to perceive and navigate the causal forces that determine whether breakthrough happens or remain suppressed.

It's the sustained awareness that allows you to work with these forces rather than remain blind to them.

Most leaders have never been taught to perceive these forces. Leadership training emphasizes tangible tools - strategic plans, OKRs, processes. These matter. But they're built on a foundation most leaders never see: causal forces operating beneath the surface.

These forces exist whether you recognize them or not. They interact and create patterns that either enable breakthrough or keep it trapped:

1. Breakthrough Future - Whether you have a compelling, seemingly impossible vision that generates pull and mobilizes collective energy (an articulation of future reality that acts as a "liberating structure" - exerting influence that draws people toward it and supersedes structural constraints)

2. Social Structure - Whether your formal and informal mechanisms enable or constrain breakthrough (the invisible architecture of how work actually gets done - strategies, goals, roles, norms, decision rights)

3. Agency - Whether you can individually and collectively reflect and act together as a genuine collective (not just talented individuals sharing a conference room, but the capacity to think together and act with coordinated intention)

4. Organizational Context - Whether situational factors and environmental conditions support or undermine your work (market pressures, competitive dynamics, life cycle stage, stakeholder expectations, political dynamics - context isn't background, it's causally active)

5. Providence - Whether you're open to transcendent resources and guidance beyond human control (recognition that reality is larger than human effort or social structures alone)

These forces don't operate independently. When you work with all five simultaneously, breakthrough becomes possible. When you ignore them - or focus on only one or two - you hit predictable patterns:

- Overwhelmed: Exhausted leaders, initiatives that underdeliver
- Fragmented: Talented people withholding rather than collaborating
- Stagnant: Unable to transform outdated patterns

The BIQ gap reveals why patterns persist: Identical strategies yield different outcomes because one organization perceives causal forces while another remains blind. You can't shift what you can't see.

Organizations with higher BIQ can perceive and navigate these forces. They know how to frame breakthrough futures, develop collective agency, design enabling structures, work with context, and access transcendent resources.

Organizations without BIQ remain blind - and no amount of strategic planning or talent acquisition compensates for that blindness.

Why This Matters For You

Wherever you sit in your collective - whether you're shaping organizational strategy, leading transformation efforts, leading a team, or contributing as an individual - BIQ matters for your work.

These causal forces operate in every collective. Corporate teams and nonprofit organizations. Social movements. Community initiatives. Boards and senior leadership teams. Cross-functional working groups. Any grouping of people bound by shared purpose, operating with interdependence, attributing success to joint contributions.

BIQ reveals what's actually happening

beneath the surface. It explains the patterns you've been experiencing but couldn't name.

Here's what matters most: Breakthrough Intelligence is developable.

You don't have to stay blind to these forces. You can learn to perceive them, develop the capability to work with them, and bring this capability to your sphere of influence.

The Path Forward

Capability development starts with awareness - learning to see the five forces operating in your collective. Then it extends to practice - learning to work with these forces to generate breakthrough. Finally, it scales to collective capability - building BIQ across your team, culture or organization.

Developing BIQ helps you shift your operational/strategic balance intentionally - but shifting energy without the capability to perceive causal forces just creates frustration.

Organizations are dying at unprecedented rates. But death isn't inevitable. The survivors aren't lucky - they're capable. They've developed the ability to perceive and work with the forces that determine breakthrough.

You can develop this capability. Your team can develop it. Your organization can develop it. The question is: will you build breakthrough capability before gradual erosion becomes sudden irrelevance?

Where Will You Start?

Breakthrough has a cause. It emerges when you can perceive and navigate five causal forces operating beneath the surface. Most leaders have never been taught to see these forces - which is why transformation campaigns fail, talented people underperform collectively, and organizations fade.

This capability - Breakthrough Intelligence (BIQ) - can be developed. And it determines whether your next initiative succeeds or joins the 70% that fall short. Whether your organization flourishes or erodes toward irrelevance. Whether you experience the immense satisfaction of breakthrough realization or the frustration of watching potential go to waste.

Ready to Develop Breakthrough Intelligence?

Diagnose where you are:

- Take the BIQ Scorecard to assess your capability across the five forces [link]
- Download the Team Breakthrough Diagnostic to identify which patterns are keeping your collective stuck [link]
- Assess your collective's operational/strategic balance using the 5 Forces Framework [link]

Go deeper:

- Read *Flourishing Together: What Actually Drives Breakthrough?* [link to Amazon]

Develop BIQ capability:

- Explore certification options for yourself, your team, or your organization [link]

The capability that determines survival is waiting to be developed. Where will you start?

About the Author



Dr. Michael E. Nagel is the author of *Flourishing Together: What Actually Drives Breakthroughs? The Hidden Science of Collective Breakthrough Intelligence*. He helps leaders and their organizations develop the capability to recognize and work with the hidden forces that drive sustained organizational flourishing. Learn more at [CollectiveBreakthroughs.com](https://www.collectivebreakthroughs.com).