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CI Deployment — The two-year cliff

Most continuous improvement deployments look healthy in year one. The launch is energetic, the first projects deliver visible wins, the early adopters are enthusiastic, and the executive sponsor is proud. Year two is when something quieter happens — and almost no one names it.

The original sponsors have moved on or moved up. The first wave of **wins** has been **absorbed into business-as-usual**, so they no longer feel like wins. The new ways of working have stopped being new, but they're not yet automatic — they sit in the awkward middle where people still have to **remember to apply** them. Meanwhile, the rest of the business has gone back to its normal rhythm, and CI has quietly become someone's part-time responsibility instead of a way the company operates. By year three, the people who launched it are surprised to find that almost nothing is left.

The two-year cliff isn't a failure of effort. It's a failure of CI deployment strategy — specifically, a strategy built around the launch rather than around **what happens after** the first initiatives and projects are implemented. Most deployments rely on a small group of champions to carry CI forward. That works until it doesn't. When the rest of the organization doesn't see CI as the direction the business is actually moving in — when it stays the work of a few individuals rather than how the company operates — that's where the fading starts.

The question worth asking at the start isn't "how do we go live?" It's "***what will it take for the whole organization to recognize CI as the way we work — not the work of a few?***"

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