

# The Campaign Cascade

Why cross-cutting initiatives multiply instead of completing — and the three ways out.

## The Loop

A platform team identifies a cross-cutting problem — a Java 21 upgrade across repos, a Kubernetes migration across services. They launch a campaign: open PRs across hundreds of entities owned by other teams. The PRs stall. The manager escalates to the director, who escalates to the SVP, who broadcasts a directive: *merge these PRs*. The directive lands with selective adoption. A tracking campaign is created to chase compliance on the original campaign. Each incomplete campaign spawns the next.

Campaign → Stall → Escalate → Directive → New Campaign → ...

### The Anti-Pattern: Human in the Loop, No Context in Hand

The cascade isn't caused by the shape of the work — the fan-out of PRs or the tree of escalations are just symptoms. The root cause is: **bringing a human into the loop without giving them the context to act.**

When a PR lands in a team's repo from the outside, they don't know why it matters, what breaks if they ignore it, or how it fits into anything they're working on. Someone else wrote the code — they can't review it, can't own it. It demands effort without providing understanding. So it sits.

## Three Ways Out

If you need a human in the loop, give them context. If you don't need a human, don't put one there.

	Path A: Zero-Touch Operation	Path B: Own It Vertically	Path C: Skillset + Next Intent
Approach	Go all the way. PR creation, validation, and merge are fully automated. No human review needed.	A dedicated team permanently owns the cross-cutting concern with merge authority. It's their core job, not a side quest. They have context because they built the expertise.	Don't do the work for other teams. Tell each team the next action to take on their entity and give them the knowledge to do it themselves.
Looks like	Safe automated codemods with CI verification, canary rollout, and auto-merge on green. Zero human touchpoints.	A small platform sub-team that owns migrations end-to-end: writes the PRs, has authority to merge, and is accountable for completion.	Each entity carries a visible next intent: what to do, why it matters, a migration guide, known gotchas, estimated effort, and who to ask. The owning team builds the PR themselves.
Why it works	No context problem because no human is in the loop. The machine does the full job.	The human in the loop has deep context and authority. No dependency on another team's bandwidth or motivation.	The human in the loop has full context. They own the change because they wrote it, reviewed it, and understand it.
Tradeoff	Only works for mechanically safe changes.	Requires permanent headcount and org commitment.	Hard to scale. Works best with strong team autonomy.

### ⚠ THE DEAD ZONE

The anti-pattern lives in the middle: you do the work for the team (create the PR) but stop short of completing it (require them to merge).

**No automation. No vertical ownership. No enablement.** Just a human in the loop with no context. This is where campaigns die.

**Automate completely, own it vertically, or enable completely.**

The only wrong move is putting a human in the loop and leaving them in the dark.