

Far too many plans fail: Reverse the curse with collaborative planning & execution

A collaborative business planning and execution approach holds the promise of increasing the success rates for achieving corporate goals. This hack gives you the research-based rationale for taking the plunge and a simple way to test if this approach can help your organization.

Moonshots

- [Make direction setting bottom-up and outside-in](#)
- [Experiment more often and more cheaply](#)
- [Create a democracy of information](#)
- [De-politicize decision-making](#)

Why is it a challenge?

People, promotion, project and process

Far too many companies fail to achieve what they set out to do. We've all seen plenty of achievements not attained. I spent the last three years looking at why this is and what can be done about it. To put the pain into perspective, a 2009 Forbes Insights study showed that a third of all strategies fail and that 82 percent of those failures were preventable.

It is clear there are a number of culprits conspiring to make planning and execution a challenge. The Performance Factory, a leading research, training and advisory services firm, conducted a survey in 2010 of more than 1,100 companies in 36 countries. Their report identified four major gaps in business execution:

1. Inadequate strategy communication (**promotion**)
2. Poor initiative management (**project**)
3. Skills misaligned with the plan (**people**)
4. High failure rate of execution (**process**)

1/3 of all strategies fail

82% are preventable

-Forbes Insights

In the Forbes Insights study the most prevalent reasons given for failure were:

- *They fail because of a lack of understanding among those involved in developing the strategy and what they need to do to make it successful (19 percent).*
- *They fail because the strategy itself is flawed (18 percent) or because there is a poor match between the strategy and the core competencies of the organization (16 percent).*
- *They also fail because there is a lack of accountability or of holding the team responsible (13 percent).*

-Forbes Insights

Let's look at each of these areas in a little more detail.

Communication (promotion)

Lack of understanding is understandable when few plans are actually communicated in any meaningful way. What usually get presented are the goals of the organization. The plans to achieve those goals often lack specificity or are not even present. In addition, it is difficult to monitor execution, whether it's feedback on the status of implementation or changes in the direction taken. There is also a wide chasm between departments for sharing information. This impacts alignment and coordination.



"Our research shows that 22 percent of managers aren't happy with the way strategy is communicated within their organisation, 13 percent are unable to explain the strategy, 15 percent believe it's the wrong strategy and 24 percent have no idea what the strategic goals from other departments are."

-the performance factory

A flawed strategy or mismatch with competencies, can manifest itself as a lack of consensus or buy-in; while the root cause isn't communication-based, its resolution is. This is the hidden virus behind many breakdowns in execution. There will always be trouble when people don't think a plan is possible to achieve or they don't feel it fits what the organization should be doing. This lack of buy-in happens most often when management is out of touch. Consensus is a hard thing to muster, but is critical for success.

Initiative management (project)

Failure here comes from not selecting or prioritizing the right initiatives and not aligning projects with an overall portfolio approach that shows the big picture of what the company is trying to accomplish. Other areas of weakness that lead to failure are poor resource allocation and poor project management.

Companies that use project management software to track initiatives have a better idea of where projects stand. These companies are better off than most, but there are two key limitations to using project management software for initiative management. First is the inherently myopic view that

project management software offers. Projects are created and team members are invited. Within the world of a project, team members are unusually well informed on what's going on.

The problem is everyone within a team has on blinders to efforts outside of their own project. It's hard to see how the project you're a member of relates to the big picture. How does it fit in? Is the goal just to complete the project or is this project a building block to a bigger objective? Project management software creates a sea of islands with no connections between them.

Skills alignment (people)

Understanding what skills are needed by the key individuals who are tasked with executing the plan is critical. This topic is a document in itself and out of scope for this effort, but suffices to say organizations bear the responsibility for ensuring they have the correct skill set represented in their people. It's good to remember that people are motivated by mastering new skills. Rather than looking to hire the necessary skills you may first want to include business acumen and leadership development training as part of your organizational plan.

Execution (process)

Execution is a broad topic as well, but the performance factory has assembled a list of execution bottlenecks gleaned from their research.

Execution bottlenecks:

- *There is too much complexity.*
- *Managers don't understand the process.*
- *Clear ownership is lacking.*
- *The process and improvement actions are not visible on the executive radar.*
- *Managers fear proposing, and making, changes.*
- *The process isn't adapted to the needs of the organisation.*
- *The quality of the process isn't measured.*
- *One part of the process gets all of the attention, and others none.*
- *It's too expensive."*

-the performance factory

I'll hit on just a few of these bottlenecks. The first problem is the lack of data available that could give insight into the activities employees are pursuing to implement a plan. Companies get around this by holding regular update meetings and asking for status reports. Even though these are labor intensive and don't always give you an accurate picture, it's the only way companies know how to do it. From this we can start to understand why tracking financial metrics has become a substitute for tracking actual execution.

Is it such a bad thing to use key performance metrics as an analog to actually measuring the activities that implement the plan? Given the difficulty, it can be the only option for many companies. But keep in

mind the tradeoff, if you can monitoring what people are accomplishing you will have visibility into execution long before their efforts show up in key metrics. Having this early warning can make all the difference between success and failure.

Lack of ownership can also undermine the best laid plans. Or, more accurately, make them a waste of time and resources if they go nowhere and no one cares. Accountability is a two-part process. It first has to be assigned, but the owner also needs to be held responsible for bringing it to conclusion. I don't say, "Successfully completing it," because, as you'll learn later, failure as a result of experimentation should be OK, as well.

Monitoring what people are accomplishing will give you visibility into execution long before their efforts show up in key metrics

What can be done?

A people-centric process

The first thing you need to recognize is that planning and execution are people-centric endeavors. Whether people are involved in the planning process by collecting and analyzing data; generating insight and innovative efforts to move the business forward, or executing on those efforts through coordination and action, planning and execution are first and foremost defined by people.

As such, you need to always look at it through the lens of how people communicate, coordinate and collaborate.

Planning and Execution is a people-centric endeavor

In addition to the failure points identified by Forbes Insights and the performance factory, my personal research has pointed to four general approaches that should be in place to address the challenges of planning and execution. They are:

1. Document your goals and the plans for attaining them
2. Utilize execution best practices when you can
3. Support experimentation when you can't
4. Always tap the wisdom of your crowd

Surrounding these fundamental attributes is the notion that all of this must be wrapped in a social process. I view "social" as communication, coordination and collaboration happening in an efficient, open and transparent way. It is through this social process that strategic plans can be understood, believed, and acted on with enthusiasm by everyone in the organization - with a far likelier outcome of success than otherwise would happen. I feel this is the heart of Gary Hamel's Management 2.0 ethos.

Document it

The act of writing a goal down is hugely beneficial. It takes what otherwise would be temporarily stored in short-term memory and puts it into long-term memory. That simple act is powerful. Dr. Gail Matthews, a Psychology professor at Dominican University of California, conducted a study that found that people who wrote down their goals, shared them with others, and maintained accountability for their goals were 33 percent more likely to achieve them, versus those who just formulated goals.

You can guess why this applies to planning. Just by writing something down you are more likely to get it done.

Organizational planning is just scaling this process up to organizational activities and goals. It also has the huge benefit of making it easy for employees to reference the plan. E-mails get deleted, PowerPoint presentations get buried, and metrics-based dashboards are rarely actionable without a lot of leg work to get to the bottom of issues. Plans need to permeate employees daily work lives in a way that reinforces the goals and allows them to proactively participate in accomplishing them.

People who write down their goals are 33% more likely to achieve them

Use best practices

One of the books I read on my quest to understand failure and how to overcome it was *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get things Right* by Atul Gawande. In the book he describes the work of philosophers Samuel Gorovitz and Alasdair MacIntyre, who came up with some useful insights as to why we fail. One reason is what they call “necessary fallibility.” Our ability to achieve this is beyond our understanding and control. Not just the individual, but humans in general. Time travel would fall in this category.

There are other areas that *are* within our reach to understand them. In these areas, Gorovitz and MacIntyre break down failure into two categories – ignorance and ineptitude. With ignorance we’re relying on incomplete understanding, which leads to failure; cures for disease fit here. Ignorance can be forgiven, but, unfortunately, we have to take credit all ourselves for ineptitude because the knowledge exists, yet we fail to apply it correctly.

Gawande goes on to explain that even with the increase in knowledge in science, which should have shifted the scale away from ineptitude-based failure, we still suffer from it. And the trouble is not just in the medical field, but in many professions. This may point to the capability of individuals and their training, but as Gawande says, “Training in most fields is longer and more intense than ever.” What he speculates has happened is this:



“The reason that our failures remain frequent is increasingly evident: The volume and complexity of what we know has exceeded our individual ability to deliver its benefits correctly, safely, or reliably.”

-Atul Gawande

In search of a cure, he identified two industries that can't afford to fail and rarely do – the airline industry and the construction industry. It's big news when an airplane crashes and it's just as alarming when a building collapses, because they are so rare. These industries have spent enormous amounts of resources to avoid failure, because in their industries failure results in loss of life. What Dr. Gawande discovered was that they both use the simple checklist combined with plenty of communication to avoid failure. He is now working hard to introduce the checklist into high-risk healthcare procedures. And he's showing dramatic results.

With technology having a profound effect on business, through the volume of information delivered, to the speed of change happening, all bringing about the globalization of the world's economies, we, too, have exceeded our individual ability to deliver business benefits correctly, efficiently, or reliably. The promise is there but we suffer from ineptitude from sheer overload. This is where a checklist, in the form of a best practice, can be invaluable.

Support experimentation

Tim Harford, a columnist for *The Financial Times*, recently published *Adapt: Why Success Always Starts with Failure*. In this book he underscores that, in a complex world, the process of trial and error is essential. Dr. Gawande offers solutions for complex things we know how to do well, but need help implementing them. Mr. Harford provides thought around how to figure out complex things we don't know how to do well.

In a complex world, the process of trial and error is essential

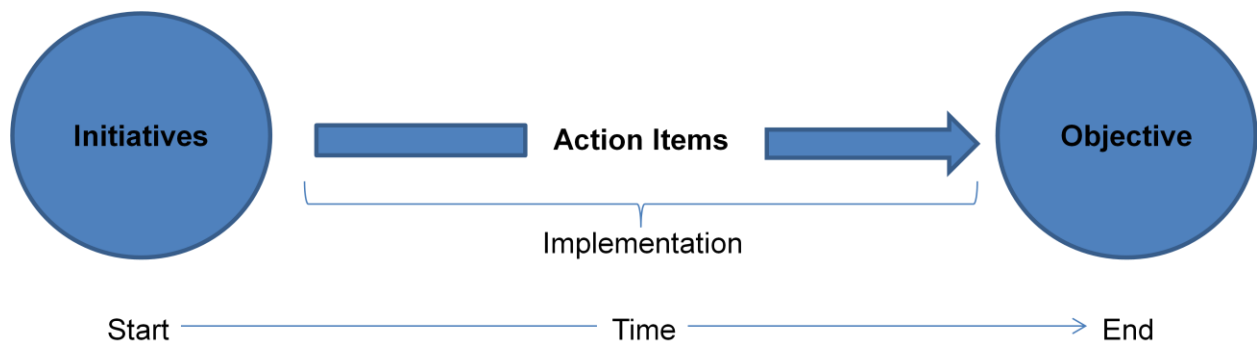
Although adapting makes sense from a theoretical standpoint, the challenge comes when we're enmeshed in execution. The problem lies in our inability to deal well with failure. We often treat it like a reflection on the skills and abilities of the person who was leading the failed effort, biasing them in our eyes. But what about all the failures which were just stepping stones to eventual success? In most cases, these successes would never have happened if those first failures had everyone throwing up their hands and going back to the ways things have always been done. We need to embrace an evolutionary approach to problem solving by making trial and error OK.

Thomas Edison may have said it best, “If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is often a step forward.” Just remember with good and bad ideas, you don't have one without the other.

There is a key to making experimentation part of the process. Here is an example. Many companies might have a goal of launching a new product. If they dug deeper they would find their real purpose in

launching a new product is something else. This would be easier to see if they separated their desired outcome from the ways to achieve this outcome. By separating the two you will also realize you are free to come up with many ideas to help you achieve your goal. If you have more than one initiative you have options, which allows some ideas to fail while you still have others to take their place, i.e. experimentation.

Let's say a competitor also wants to launch a new product, but they have separated their goals from their initiatives. This company would see that their real goal is to increase top-line revenue or reduce customer defections or some other "end state" that launching a new product could achieve. By separating the two you can now experiment with a number of ways to achieve the goal of increasing top-line revenue. You could expand distribution through another sales channel, start selling your current products in a foreign market or launch that new product. Here is a diagram to illustrate my point.



Objectives are the end state and initiatives are what need to be implemented to achieve them. Action items are the efforts of people working on implementing initiatives. So a plan of action is comprised of initiatives and their actions designed to achieve a particular goal or outcome (objective).

Listen to the crowd

There is a dynamic in Harford's premise that greater participation improves results, both in the number of experiments you perform and the number of voices that contribute to the feedback or dissention.



This leads us to a final area to explore which has benefits to the planning and execution process – crowds. In your case, the rank and file employees of your company are your crowd, but they can also include suppliers, customers and others who have a stake in your business.

In James Surowiecki's *The Wisdom of Crowds* he makes a strong case based on accumulated scientific research that crowds outperform experts and also expert committees on decisions

involving cognition, coordination and cooperation. The one we're interested in is cognition, or thinking and information processing decisions, like market judgments. It is here that planning could gain a big boost by asking a wider audience what they think. And where else are you exposed to a large group who you can still hold in confidence than with the employees of your organization?

In fact, given how knowledgeable employees are on areas relating to your business, there is probably no better group of individuals to tap into, as long as they meet the three conditions for the group to be "intelligent" – being diverse, independent, and decentralized. When these conditions are present these groups are remarkably intelligent and are often smarter than the smartest people in them. As much as leaders have demonstrated expertise in guiding businesses to success, the reality is they would be better served by reaching out and listening to their crowds.

What does it look like in practice?

Internet-based solutions hold the most promise

Collaboration is a discipline made for the Web. In 2011 my company launched a collaborative planning and execution application with the aim of improving business success. We didn't know it at the time, but we were creating a Management 2.0 system.

We call it OmniStrat – a conjunction of omnipresent strategy. Here's how it works:

The leadership of a company collaboratively document, debate and finalize their corporate goals. Middle managers can then construct their plans to achieve these goals and submit them for approval. Leadership then has a master plan they can finalize, share and socialize with the rest of the organization. Employees can now actively participate in and understand their role in achieving goals while capturing feedback and progress along the way. This in turn gives leadership visibility into execution they never had before, providing actionable insight long before efforts show up in key metrics.

Example of document & communicate (promotion)

The screenshot displays the OmniStrat web application interface. At the top, the logo "OMNISTRAT" is visible on the left, and user navigation links "Welcome, Matt | Admin Panel | My Profile | Sign out" are on the right. Below the logo, the company name "Bell & Wilson" is shown, along with strategy details: "Strategy [Change]: 2011 Strategy" and "Time Period [Edit]: Jan 2011 - Dec 2011". A navigation bar contains "Plan Act StratStore Help".

The main content area is divided into two sections. The left section, titled "STRATEGY", includes a "Manage" button and a "Print" link. It features a "New Strategy" and "Get Template" option, and a "Hide Rejected" filter for "Objectives", "Initiatives", and "Actions". The primary focus is the "2011 Strategy" section, which lists several strategic initiatives:

- ACT 2011 Strategy**
- Acquire Competitor
- Grow Revenue 20%
 - Expand Internationally (Show A's)
 - Launch Clock Radio (Show A's)
 - Sell Through Big Box Retailers
- Increase EBITDA 6%
 - Cost Reduction Program (Show A's)
 - Source Lower Cost Suppliers (Show A's)

A "Color Legend" link is located at the bottom left of this section.

The right section, titled "SOCIAL STRAT PRIVATE PANEL", contains a "Requests" and "Files" tab. It includes an "Add New" dropdown menu with options for "Topic", "Request", and "File". The panel displays a list of user interactions:

- Matt Johnson:** "How are things going on this?" (Sept. 1, 2011, 11:28 a.m.)
- Jill Bowers (uploader):** "Revised forecast" (March 14, 2012, 9:58 a.m.)
- Matt Johnson:** "Great to see the market responding." (March 14, 2012, 10 a.m.)
- Matt Johnson (requestor):** "Can you start setting up relationships due Aug. 31, 2011" (Aug. 16, 2011, 2:57 p.m.)

Example of best practices & skills development (people)

STRATSTORE Welcome, Matt! Admin Panel | My Profile | Sign out

Bell & Wilson Strategy (Change): 2011 Strategy Time Period (Change): Jan 2011 - Dec 2011 Plan Act StratStore Help

TEMPLATES PROFILES ?

All | My Private | My Organization | Public | Clients

Company Filters

- Community organizations
- Large businesses
- Medium businesses
- Non-profits
- Small businesses
- Start-ups

Strategy Filters

- Cost reduction
- Financial
- High growth
- In distress
- Innovation
- Market share
- Marketing & sales
- Mature markets
- New markets
- Product development
- Product launch

Clear all filters

Public Templates < 1 >


David Skok
Matrix Partners

"Accelerate Your Start-up" Plan

Updated 29-Jan-2012

Pricing FREE

In a series of three blog posts published in GigaOm, David Skok discussed the three key phases of a start-up lifecycle, and how each phase requires a different focus, and approach to spending. This plan is a representation of these posts, plus additional elements gleaned from posts in his blog "For Entrepreneurs". As a VC and five-time entrepreneur, David frequently sees two common mistakes ... [\(more\)](#)

 [View Full Template Details](#)

Company Type: Start-ups

Strategy Type: Cost reduction, Financial, High growth, Innovation, Marketing & sales, New markets, Product development, Product launch


Clay Christensen
Innosight

"The Innovator's Guide to Growth" Plan

Updated 29-Jan-2012

Pricing FREE

More than a decade ago, Clayton Christensen's breakthrough book *The Innovator's Dilemma* illustrated how disruptive innovations drive industry transformation and market creation. Christensen's research demonstrated how growth-seeking incumbents must develop the capability to deflect disruptive attacks and seize disruptive opportunities. Clayton Christensen and Mark Johnson founded Innosight in 2000 to help companies use the research described in *The Innovator's Dilemma* ... [\(more\)](#)

 [View Full Template Details](#)

Company Type: Large businesses, Medium businesses, Small businesses

Strategy Type: Financial, In distress, Product development


Nitin Nohria
Harvard Business School

"What (Really) Works" Plan

Updated 29-Jan-2012

Pricing FREE

The book this plan is based on represents a massive research undertaking covering 160 companies. Harvard Business School professor Nitin Nohria teamed with William Joyce of Dartmouth College's Amos Tuck School of Business and Bruce Roberson of McKinsey & Company to figure out which specific management practices have led to superior company performance over time. In a nutshell, the four primary areas for the ... [\(more\)](#)

 [View Full Template Details](#)

Company Type: Large businesses, Medium businesses, Small businesses

Strategy Type: Financial, High growth, In distress, Market share, Mature markets, New markets


Dharmesh Shah
HubSpot

"Inbound Marketing" Plan

Updated 29-Jan-2012

Pricing FREE

Based on Dharmesh Shah's and Brian Halligan's bestselling book, *Inbound Marketing*. Stop pushing your message out and start pulling your customers in. Traditional "outbound" marketing methods like cold-calling, email blasts, advertising, and direct mail are increasingly less effective. People are getting better at blocking these interruptions out using Caller ID, spam protection, TiVo, etc. People are now increasingly turning to Google, social ... [\(more\)](#)

 [View Full Template Details](#)

Company Type: Community organizations, Large businesses, Medium businesses, Non-profits, Small businesses, Start-ups

Strategy Type: Marketing & sales, Product development, Product launch

< 1 >

Example of experimentation & execution (process)

The screenshot displays the OmniStrat web application interface. At the top, the logo "OMNISTRAT" is visible on the left, and user information "Welcome, Matt | Admin Panel | My Profile | Sign out" is on the right. Below the logo, the company name "Bell & Wilson" is shown, along with the current strategy "Strategy (Change): 2011 Strategy" and its time period "Time Period (Edit): Jan 2011 - Dec 2011". Navigation tabs for "Plan", "Act", "StratStore", and "Help" are present.

The main content area is titled "STRATEGY" and includes a "Manage" button and a "Print" link. Below this, there are options for "New Strategy" and "Get Template", and a "Hide Rejected" section with checkboxes for "Objectives", "Initiatives", and "Actions".

The primary focus is the "2011 Strategy (4-execution)" section, which is expanded to show a list of initiatives and actions:

- Acquire Competitor** (Objective icon)
- Grow Revenue 20%** (Objective icon)
 - Expand Internationally** (Initiative icon) - [Show A's](#)
 - Launch Clock Radio** (Initiative icon) - [Show A's](#)
 - Sell Through Big Box Retailers** (Initiative icon)
- Increase EBITDA 6%** (Objective icon)
 - Cost Reduction Program** (Initiative icon) - [Hide A's](#)
 - Marketing** (Goal icon)
 - Packaging materials can be reduced** (Action icon)
 - Get rid of welcome mailer to new customers** (Action icon)
 - Manufacturing** (Goal icon)
 - Replace standardize CNC Machines** (Action icon)
 - Save process step in manufacturing** (Action icon)
 - New way to pack product on containers** (Action icon)
 - Owner:** Matt Johnson
 - Need Approval From:** Jill Bowers
 - Start:** Jan 2011
 - End:** Dec 2011
 - Estimated Cost:** \$2,500
 - Actual Cost:** \$3,445
 - DETAILS:** We can reduce the number of containers per shipment by 2 per month.
 - SUCCESS CRITERIA:** \$1,000 less in fees per month.
 - FINAL COMMENTS:** Effort was successful. We saved 8 cubic feet per pallet which translated into 2.8 less containers shipped per month. A great effort from the team on this one!
 - [Edit](#) [Promote](#)
 - Customer Service** (Goal icon)
 - Outsource repair** (Action icon)
 - Switch to part-time help for customer service** (Action icon)
- Source Lower Cost Suppliers** (Initiative icon) - [Show A's](#)

Example of wisdom of the crowd & initiative management (project)

OMNISTRAT Welcome, Matt! Admin Panel | My Profile | Sign out

Bell & Wilson Plan Act StratStore Help

SOCIAL STRAT ACTIVITIES STRATEGY ?

☐ Increase EBITDA 6% [view all](#) SOCIAL STRAT PANEL

Add New Topic | Request | File

Jill Bowers: **Revised estimates**
Who has the estimates on this?
Jan. 31, 2012, 12:09 p.m. PRIVATE Plan access only

Matt Johnson: Joe has them. I'll be seeing him this afternoon and will ask him to forward them over to you.
Feb. 8, 2012, 9:32 a.m. | [edit](#)

[Add Comment](#) | [Request](#) | [File](#)

📌 Launch Clock Radio [view all](#) SOCIAL STRAT PANEL

Add New Topic | Request | File

Jill Bowers: **Are we ready for the kick-off on this?**
Feb. 7, 2012, 9:45 p.m. PUBLIC

[Add Comment](#) | [Request](#) | [File](#)

☐ Grow Revenue 20% [view all](#) SOCIAL STRAT PANEL

Add New Topic | Request | File

Jill Bowers: **Agreement with 20% growth**
Are we in agreement with 20% growth across all product lines?
Jan. 31, 2012, 11:09 a.m. PRIVATE Plan access only

[Add Comment](#) | [Request](#) | [File](#)

Joe Friday (uploader): **Growth projections from competitors** | [download](#)
This is a link to projections on revenue growth for a number of our competitors.
Aug. 31, 2011, 4:21 p.m. PRIVATE Plan access only

Matt Johnson: Where did these numbers come from? The companies themselves or did the analysts come up with them?
Aug. 31, 2011, 4:31 p.m. | [edit](#)

Joe Friday: They make it ambiguous. The report says the numbers are from company reports, but don't specify what reports.
Aug. 31, 2011, 4:32 p.m.

Matt Johnson: We should be cautious as to how much weight we give these numbers
Aug. 31, 2011, 4:33 p.m. | [edit](#)

[Add Comment](#) | [Request](#)

Matt Johnson (uploader): **Pro forma financials** | [download](#)
These have best-case and worse-case growth for the next three years
Aug. 31, 2011, 4:15 p.m. | [edit](#) PRIVATE Plan access only

[Add Comment](#) | [Request](#)

The results you should see

Problem	Solution	Result
Middle managers don't fully understand what the strategy or plan is and how best to execute it	Have leaders select goals, but have managers document their own plan of action to achieve them.	Higher success rates: Writing down their plans will ensure their understanding and increase the likelihood of achieving it.
Employees may want, but are rarely allowed, to participate in the planning process	Make the planning process more transparent, encourage input from more people.	Buy-in: Participation in the deliberation process increases buy-in, even if participant's choice was not selected.
Initiatives are rarely managed as a strategic portfolio showing linkages between projects and goals	Show all the goals and initiatives as one master plan of action.	Alignment: This will make it easier to identify projects that are not a priority.
Poor match between strategy and core competencies	Embed training in the process of executing a plan.	Motivation: Employees are motivated by mastering new skills. These new skills have the added benefit of improving the company long term.
Employees don't understand what the company is trying to achieve	Make your plan visual which is the most effective way to communicate.	Effective communication: This will lead to understanding and thoughtful participation.
Leaders don't have visibility into the execution of a plan unless they ask	Visually track the actions taken to implement an initiative.	Early-warning: Increased visibility into execution long before results would show up in a financial report.
Accountability for results is often lacking	Assign one owner to each element of the plan.	Accountability: Ownership promotes dedication and follow-through.

What challenges will we face?

Culture is key

The theme running through nearly all these challenges can be boiled down to cultural issues. The degree to which an organization who wants to explore this Management 2.0 approach will face resistance has a lot to do with how collaborative the organization is to begin with. For highly collaborative organizations this may be an improvement to what you're already doing. For less social organizations the resistance can be formidable. It's best to take baby steps here and work on ways to practice collaboration before trying to push it out across the organization.

Challenge	Solution
<p>Behavior changes are often resisted: Getting people to change their behaviors is always a challenge, especially if it results in additional work. It's assumed the higher social involvement and tracking will increase workload.</p>	<p>Leader sponsorship is imperative, but the improvement in communication, coordination and collaboration and their beneficial results will help a lot in making the new behaviors stick. Promote hard to see benefits like less missed deadlines, having to redo things or having done the wrong things that are far more work than the time required for collaboration.</p>
<p>Transparency can be scary: Increased transparency of work behaviors may turn off participants as it could be perceived as shining a spotlight on individual performance, good and bad.</p>	<p>Don't use this process to penalize underperformers. Use it to champion success stories and good behavior. Also, reward experimentation efforts regardless of successful outcomes or not.</p>
<p>Lack of supporting systems: Creating a single system that visually displays a master plan, separates goals from initiatives, and supports experimentation and the social process is not easy.</p>	<p>Custom solutions could be created in-house or built on top of social platform like Microsoft SharePoint or Jive Software. OmniStrat offers a Web based solution if you would rather buy vs. build a solution.</p>
<p>Loss of command and control: Leaders and managers may not like losing their power of authority. This is a relic of 20th century management techniques, but still holds strong sway with those who have this power.</p>	<p>Leaders can incentivize middle management to utilize the new process, e.g. make the effective use of the process part of their bonus structure or reprimand those who fail to implement the process. If leadership is not willing to give up control than try using the system to increase departmental performance and demonstrate its benefits. This may convert those who are resistant.</p>

How do I experiment with this hack?

Hypotheses you should test

Will implementing a collaborative approach to business planning and execution lead to increases in successful outcomes? The cultural aspects that may change to bring this success about include:

- Improved engagement and learning (desirable productive behaviors)
- Higher availability, timeliness, and quality of information (exchange)
- Better decision making (wisdom of the crowd)
- Complexity reduction (self-organization & control, usage of technology)
- Reduction of interest conflicts and office politics (interpersonal trust)
- Improved morale (better motivated employees)

Measurement you should track

The key would be to test the level of perceived benefit against:

- The increased level of human effort to support the new process, and...
- Additional costs to create and support the collaboration system

This could be done through a simple survey on the participant's experience or if you have detailed data on project outcomes you could run a number of experiments using the new process and see if these projects have a higher success rate than projects not using the process.

Experimental subjects to use

The best group to test this hack out on would be:

- A department or team within your organization who choose to volunteer for the experiment.
- The size of the group should range from 5 to 20 members. It's critical to have enough members to have communication, coordination and collaboration challenges present.

Establish a control

You are the best judge on how you can test the experiment against a control:

- If you can find a control group with similar personal dynamics and test case as the collaborative group you can test both groups after to see if there is a demonstrable improvement in the results from one group over the other.
- If you can't find a control group with similar personal dynamics and test case as the collaborative group, you can test the same individuals participating in the experiment on a before and after basis. What you are testing for is the perceived improvement the group experiences in the new process.

Experiment timeline

Preparation (1-2 weeks)

Step 1 The participants should be instructed on the new behaviors you are encouraging:

- Document the goal(s) and initiatives to achieve them
- Search for and use best practices if you can
- Experiment when you can't
- Always tap the wisdom of the group

Step 2 Have the group decide on what type of endeavor they will pursue in the experiment (see types below). The test project needs to be a real endeavor and it should be one of two types:

1. If it's a project (initiative) the project should have uncertainty in the solution so you have fodder for deliberation and experimentation. The engagement will test the improvement in the process for coming up with a solution and the result of the implementation.
2. Alternatively, you can start with a departmental goal and test the collaborative process to come up with a sound plan of action to achieve the goal with options or contingencies. This type should also include the group effort to achieve the goal.

The cycle time from start to completion on the chosen endeavor should not be more than 3 months. It would be best if they were shorter, like 30 days, so you could test the process more than once.

Step 3 Select the tools you will use to facilitate the collaboration. You can do this manually with meetings and whiteboards, or existing technologies like email and excel or Google Groups/Docs. If you wanted to test a purpose-built system you could sign up for a monthly account with OmniStrat.

Work (3-8 weeks)

Step 4 The team should document their plan of action, being careful to separate the goals from the initiatives. They should also come up with alternative initiatives to achieve their goal.

Step 5 Have the team start working on the planning or execution work and keep encouraging the documenting, collaboration, experimentation, and search for best practices and actual outcomes.

Review (1 week)

Step 6 Wrap up the effort and survey the members on their impressions and ways to improve the process for next time.

Repeat process and after 90 days take the accumulated knowledge and decide if collaborative planning and execution can make a difference in your organization.

The future

Success!

All of these suggestions are within your reach to improve; your social interactions, your planning and execution processes, and leveraging best-practices and experimentation. They will take effort to implement and make stick, but to achieve repeatable success, there is nothing more important you can do than to improve your company's planning and execution capabilities.

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