

A PROGRAMME METHODOLOGY FOR REASONABLE PEOPLE

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You know ... even in this day and age of business enlightenment, an incredible number of programmes and projects continue to fail their initial requirements / timescales / budgets. From experience, and I do mean that, so many organisations know what they have to do but don't know how to – and so “wing it”.

Sometimes this works. And when it does, it's great. And yet ... and yet ... more often than not, it doesn't. More often than not, the process (or lack of) of winging it results in a catalogue of mistakes that invariably increases cost and risk. This decreases impact and the business benefits required. This will always – always – feed back into a depressed bottom line profitability.

I've seen this happen so often. And, you have to be honest here, in all likelihood you also have seen it.

And what's amazing is that companies who should know better – don't. They are quite willing to put up with costly mistakes with quotes like “it's always been done like this”, “don't rock the boat”, “if it ain't broke, don't fix it”, “here, no one gets ahead by taking risks”.

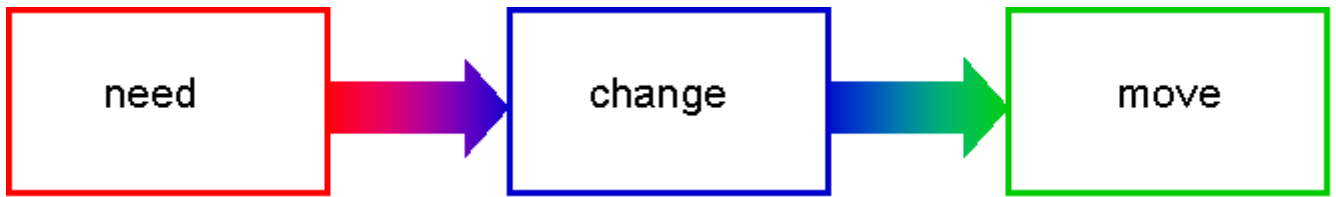
But that's the point isn't it? The system of winging it is broken. Winging it is risky business. In this day and age no organisation can afford the pointless expenditure and needless cost of mistake after mistake after mistake – then justifying this culture of error and a lack of management responsibility by then saying stupid things such as “it's always been done like this”. If “it's always been done like this” and with the same hit and miss results, isn't it about time to change things?

Work smarter.

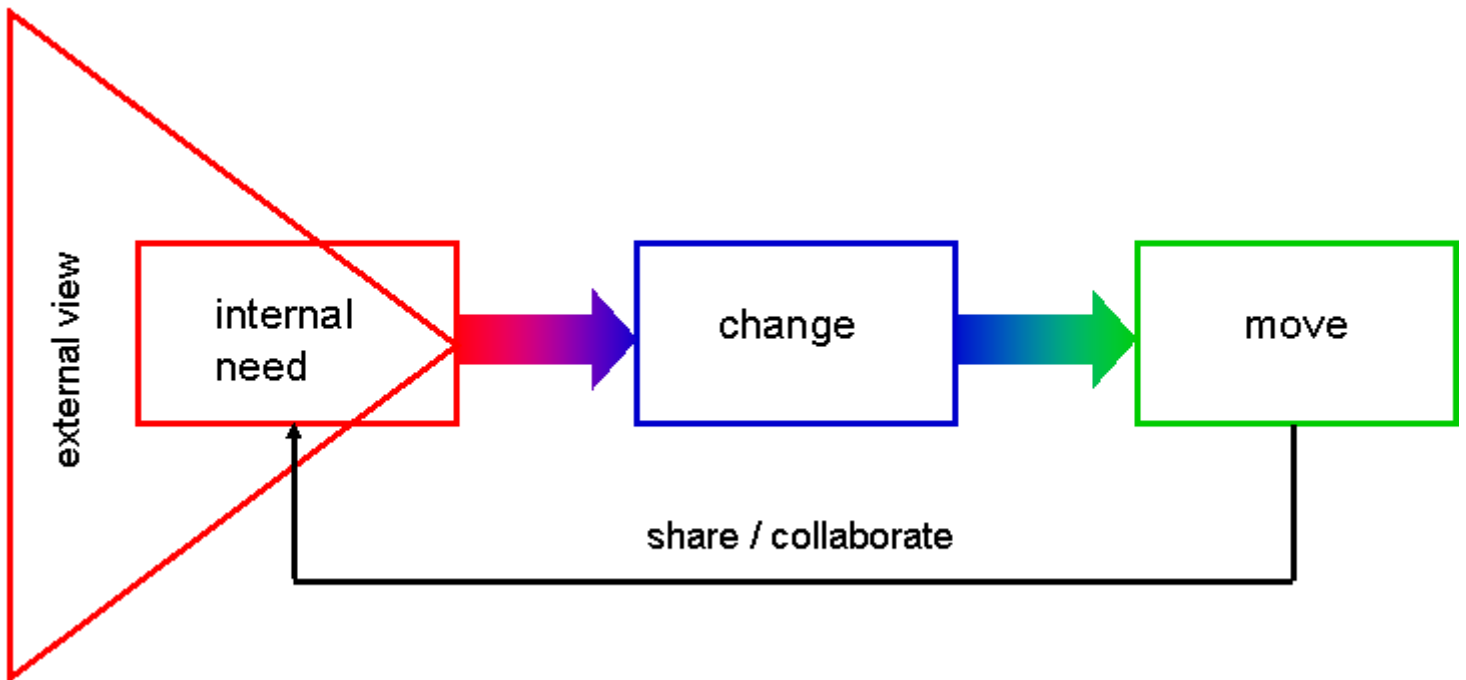
Take a look around. Success is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity – and then being intelligent about making this a sustainable success. Automation saves money. Yet automated decision making within a dynamic and evolving commercial landscape is a recipe for disaster. If you are pushing harder and harder to increase revenue, yet see this increased revenue rapidly diminish through the sieve of delivery that results in little or no movement of profitability ... then you have a serious problem.

It's time this was sorted out.

The simplified view of the usual situation:



Needs to change to:



To include:

- the external view and how the wider world impacts business – and importantly, how it will impact in the near future
- continuous improvement through collaboration, to increase business impact and reduce cost / risk. Why re-invent the wheel?

With all the management training, all the programme and project training and methodologies flying around the business world, you'd honestly think this problem would be sorted out long before now. But it lingers – and in some areas of business is stronger than ever before. The above graphical change has not been widespread. As a result, organisations invariably and needlessly increase their cost and risk while minimising opportunity from already achieved knowledge.

This is a matter of bad culture that has to be altered by a top-down approach – and by more than well meaning words from any CEO.

However, although the beneath the surface culture pervades through every area of the organisation to perpetuate mistake and missed opportunity, it is the actual change and doing part – the programme and project developments – that often bear the brunt of blame and scrutiny. Indeed, this is where some serious mistakes are made. Yet to return to an original point – they continue to be made, and are tolerated, because of an inappropriate business culture.

And yet ... and yet ... if there is anywhere that can show the worth of a change of approach, it is at the programme / project level. This needs to be a generic approach involving:

- structure to produce solid foundations
- formalising documentation, accountability, visibility, communication
- diminishing assumption
- creating reduced risk and cost through continuous improvement
- a pathway to identify, track and realise a range of business benefits

Impossible?

If you think it is, then for sure you're in the wrong job. If you think it's long overdue then you are on the right track. If you think it'll never work where you work, then try it and feel free to gloat about and take credit for the results.

The thing is ... making mistakes is a human trait. Making continuous mistakes and living with them is a sign of business insanity. Internal effectiveness is often a far better method of positively affecting profitability than running to stand still by increasing revenue. Every company tries to increase revenue. Every company wants to work smarter ... but so few manage it. Now is YOUR opportunity to step out of the chaos and to be smarter than your competitors – and have this boost your profitability simply by making fewer mistakes.

So ... how does it work?

Below is a brief methodology that is based on experience. It is a methodology for reasonable people, who think in reasonably logical terms, and who want to be a part of a successful corporate machine.

What it does entail is:

- someone taking the reins
- active senior sponsorship
- a clear plan of action
- appropriate governance mechanisms
- an ability and willingness to learn – and be better next time
- knowledge of how the strategic pieces fit together

PLANNING:

A2B – what is B?

What needs to be achieved? Working backwards – the necessary steps required to show how it will be achieved.

DOING:

Reaching B - putting the plan into action

Communication, visibility, accountability, governance, continuous improvement.

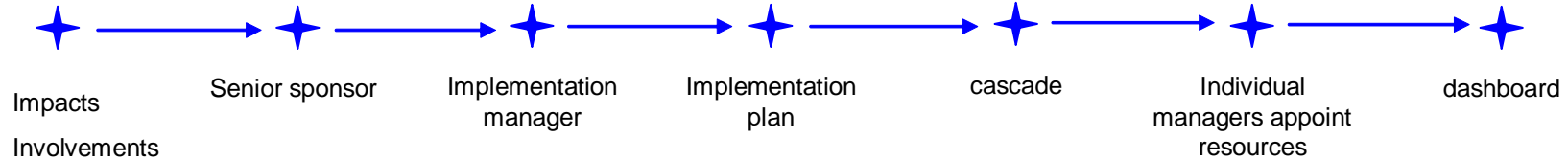
Essential point: the clear and concise documentation of each stage and the gateway handover of full information.

“B” is not the end point. It is a strategic stepping stone to achieve the necessary corporate goals – a part of the jigsaw, so needs to fit

★
Sign off

START

What is it?



Impacts

Involvements

Benefits

Budgets

★
Team + extended resources (EG: training)

★
details / responsibilities – explained / agreed

★
Conf calls / share best practice / knowledge

★
Change control / governance

The essential foundations: document every stage – handover. No assumptions.

Building upon solid foundations: document every stage - handover. Communication and feedback.

Reasonable, isn't it?

There's nothing shocking or strenuous about it. It's common sense. Yet within the chaotic culture of winging it and putting up with errors and mistakes, this is a common sense approach that WILL produce results.

It's human nature. We all want to be associated with and be a part of something successful. As always, it's up to us to make it happen. Companies and organisations may seem like huge monoliths, too huge for a single person to change. But someone has to start somewhere otherwise we will for always have to put up with costly mistakes that diminish profitability, diminish that sense of worth and achievement from being a part of something successful.

If you are in a position of authority within an organisation – take a look at the methodology above and see where it deviates from your existing processes. By existing, I mean actual, not theory. If there is a deviation then this will give clues as to where budget is leaking and how best to reduce the loss and increase the impact.

Make no mistake. Business benefits are important. What's the point of having programmes and projects if not to deliver a range of expected business benefits? This means that in order to deliver the range of expected business benefits – in full – on time and on budget, there is a requirement for an efficient method of programme / project delivery.

Now you have one.

There are a number of key elements to the above methodology:

- **clear and concise up front planning**
 - if there is no clarity around requirements then the development is likely to change rapidly adding significantly to the cost and time, increasing the risk of failure.
- **the identification of benefits**
 - the basis of any development. It is deadly to lose sight of the benefits to be attained. It's the reason for the programme in the first place.
- **senior level sponsorship**
 - "active" sponsorship from a senior manager who has the ability and bandwidth to be the "guiding light" of the programme – and to assist in pushing it forward should it experience difficulty.
- **steering group**
 - no one person can think of everything. It is important to involve other senior managers and experts where relevant in order to facilitate the smooth running of the programme – and to share the decision making from the feedback governance mechanisms.

- **governance mechanisms**
 - flexible, informative, giving visibility, creating accountability. These mechanisms MUST be kept clear of “measurement madness” and extra overloaded resource simply to produce reports. Reports need to be automated as far as possible – and help inform. This will feed directly into the decision making process.
- **roles, responsibilities, resources**
 - nothing undermines a programme more than confusion over who should be doing what, by when. An essential fundamental of the communication process should be to explain these details – and importantly to gain explicit confirmation that these details are accepted by the different staff members involved.

So there you have it. A straightforward methodology for reasonable people that will help overcome many of the pitfalls experienced (but rarely spoken about) in today's corporate world. This type of structure will greatly assist in changing the culture to one where efficiency and dynamism is core.

Doubtless, some people will resist this change because it will open them up to a level of responsibility previously unknown to them, and they seek to minimise their personal risk. But, you have to ask yourself, how long can your company pay the high price of someone else's resistance to change?

Are you willing to foot the bill and accept a reduced profitability?

Regards

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