

Article 21 Losing momentum - why things don't get done

There are less than two months to Christmas and I know it's only half way through the financial year but as you contemplate the prospect of a few days off, it's hard not to review the progress – or lack of it – over the last six months.

Come on – be honest! I bet you haven't achieved half the things you intended to and I also bet you feel that it's not your fault but that of others in your company.

When I run a workshop on strategic planning, I invariably draft a workbook that provides the participants with both a model and a planning process that acts as a road map to get them from A to B. There is nothing novel about the planning process but the model is my own and one that I have progressively refined over the last 35 years or so. I can pretty much guarantee that the planning objectives of the workshop will be achieved and an action program drawn up to implement them.

What I can't guarantee is that the plan will be implemented in the agreed time frame or that it will be implemented at all!

So the least I can do is to alert the planners to the reasons why their wave of euphoria might come crashing down on them.

I have a list of 27 reasons why things don't get done.

Here it is.

1. There were no clear objectives.
2. The program was just a series of activities - there were no clear results to aim for.
3. Senior management gave insufficient support.
4. We were not given adequate information.
5. We did not have enough skills to carry out the program.
6. We did not spend sufficient time analysing the current situation.
7. There were no systems set up to monitor progress.
8. Others that I turned to for assistance did not share my enthusiasm or commitment. Their attitude was - it's not my problem - it's not my responsibility.
9. Individual roles in the programs were unclear.
10. Not clear where the buck stopped.
11. We spent insufficient time planning before moving to implementation.
12. There was no system set up to pick up problems and help sort them out.
13. We needed additional resources that were not made available.
14. No arrangements were put in place to allow us to focus on the program and our normal jobs at the same time.
15. Not enough people were given an adequate explanation or sufficient information about the program.
16. We did not understand the "big picture" and how our work fitted into it.
17. Other people resented me encroaching on their "territory".
18. It wasn't their idea so the people that I turned to for support did respond.
19. The operatives were uncooperative.
20. It was "flavour of the month" and people lost interest.
21. We had to start fire fighting again so the project was abandoned.
22. There were factors outside the company that we had no control over.
23. Progress was so slow that everyone lost interest.

24. We never agreed on the way in which the project should be tackled.
25. We had no timetable for implementation.
26. The company would not release the information we needed.
27. We could never find a time to hold meetings that everyone could attend.

The participants are asked to run through the above list by themselves and add stars to those reasons they believe are the ones most likely to derail the implementation program. Five stars is a major stumbling block, one star is insignificant. It should not come as a surprise that invariably all the stars are clustered around only three to four barriers to implementation. And if you agree on what the problems are, you can take steps to counter them before they exert their subversive influence on the implementation program. I use the word “subversive” deliberately and go back to my analogy of the spring-loaded door. The workshop provides the impetus for change and the door is pushed open. But over the succeeding days, weeks and months, the resistors of change go quietly about their business, a missed deadline here, absence at a review meeting there, inadequate feedback and “not enough time” and gradually and imperceptibly, the door closes again and your implementation program is dead in the water.

It doesn't have to be this way – but it so often is.

So has the list above struck any resonant chords? In some instances the planners have only themselves to blame. If the plan was simply a list of activities with no clear results to aim for, then the cause of failure is entirely the planners' responsibility. The change resistors wouldn't even have to take a deep breath.

If “time to hold meetings” gets more than its fair share of stars, then work out a solution before the workshop ends, not three months down the track. One client of mine now holds a phone hook-up on the last Friday of the month at 10.00am. What do they talk about? Simple – progress on the implementation of the workshop plan.

So next time you hold a workshop – 1. Use a facilitator – preferably bpi – and 2. Make sure you identify “why things don't get done” and then address them there and then.

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