December 2019

Right Lane Review

Think. Plan. Do.

Commit to taking action

In this issue

1. The 'great business bake-off': Has your organisation got the Ex-FACTOR?

In this article we outline six critical steps (Frame, Align, Cascade, Task, Oversee and Review) to help avoid common strategy execution pitfalls. To truly excel at strategy execution though, organisations must go beyond a basic recipe and discover their own 'Ex-FACTOR'.

2. Helping hands promote successful change

This article explores a case study to show how the mnemonic, the HANDS of change – Hardwiring, Ability, Narrative, Desire and Support – can help our project teams to address what's required for success.

3. Three practices of agile resource allocators

Allocating resources in a more flexible way is a persistent challenge for clients. We consider three practices of agile resource allocators that enable organisations to allocate resources where they are needed, when they are needed.

4. After the event: How to get full value from your strategy workshop outcomes

Hard though it is, choreographing a great strategy workshop, with meaningful, compelling outcomes is only half the battle. The other half is doing something with them – committing to a series of interrelated next steps and getting them done.

5. Stakeholder engagement: Developing business cases for not for profit projects

Business case advice mostly focuses on traditional businesses and driving profits. What about when you are in government or a not for profit and you get asked to write a business case? We share insights about how to approach business case writing in an inclusive way.

As this decade comes to a close many of us are invariably reflecting on the past ten years and thinking ahead to the next decade. What will be different this decade? In this edition of the Right Lane Review we are asking you to commit to taking action. Sometimes it feels like we expend all our energy in the thinking and planning, and that the doing falls flat. It takes real commitment to see things through and it is often what is lacking in organisations. This edition focuses on action – frameworks and tools to help you commit to your course of action and see it through to success.

When it comes to strategy execution the proof of the pudding is in the *doing*. In our first article we outline the six critical steps that help organisations avoid common execution pitfalls. But we also implore you to discover what that 'Ex-FACTOR' is that will enable you to excel at strategy execution.

Change management efforts rarely meet their intended outcomes, and the research shows that many efforts end in failure. Our second article looks at the 'helping HANDS' required for a successful change management process. HANDS is a mnemonic that equips project teams with what's required when planning for a significant change.

Our third article considers how we allocate resources more flexibly, with less friction, to where they are really needed, when they are really needed. We take a look at three practices of agile resource allocation.

It can be easy to feel like the hard work is done once you wrap up your strategy workshop, however, committing to a series of interrelated next steps and getting them done is where you can get full value of the workshop outcomes.

In our final article, we look at our recent work with the African Australian Community Taskforce and the importance of building an inclusive business case process. We articulate steps organisations can take when creating their own project business case.

We hope these articles inspire you to think about starting 2020 with a commitment to taking action where it is needed in your organisation. If any of these articles have inspired you to act or raised questions, we'd love to hear from you and start a conversation.

Think. Plan. Do.

by dr marc levy & dr james mills

The great ‘business bake-off’ Has your organisation got the Ex-FACTOR?

Right thinking

In our experience helping hundreds of organisations with strategic development and execution, we have found that those that adhere to six critical steps (Frame, Align, Cascade, Task, Oversee and Review) can avoid the common strategy execution pitfalls. To truly excel at strategy execution however, organisations must go beyond this basic recipe and discover their own ‘Ex-FACTOR’.

It takes more than just a great strategy session to revitalise a stalling business, dramatically improve customer experience or develop innovative products that leave the competition behind. In truth, crafting a brilliant strategy is just the first step towards winning in the market. The next challenge is delivering on the strategy.

The great 'business bake-off'

An analogy we use likens competing in the market to entering a baking competition. The first vital step is to decide what it is you are going to bake. Since the competition is fierce, many entrants enlist expert help to analyse the judges’ preferences, find out what the other contenders are baking, and design a recipe that is worthy of first place.

However, crafting a world class recipe is a far cry from winning the contest. As most who have some experience baking will attest, few cakes come out of the oven looking like the picture in the recipe book. The same is true in business.

The gap between strategy and execution

The academic and popular business literature is replete with perspectives on the challenges associated with strategy execution: ‘Strategy is easy; execution is hard’ (Mizrahi, 2016), ‘Why strategy execution unravels and what to do about it?’ (Sull et al, 2015), ‘Is execution where good strategies go to die?’ (Bonchek, 2017). Reputedly, as many as 67% of well-formulated strategies fail due to poor execution (Carucci, 2017).

But why is execution so difficult? Is it because some executives don’t know what to do? That’s probably part of it, although if you put any group of executives in a room for an hour and brainstormed strategy execution success factors, the chances are they would come up with a pretty good list. This is not to diminish it per se, but rather to recognise that there must be other factors at play.

The Ex-FACTOR

To better understand why some organisations succeed where others fail, we've reflected on the hundreds of organisations we've seen take brilliant strategies to market and identified the common elements which were present, or missing, in their strategic execution.

Based upon these learnings we have developed a six-step recipe for successful strategy execution. We call this recipe the Execution Factor or (a little self-consciously) the Ex-FACTOR. (See Exhibit 1).

In our experience, organisations that adhere to the six Ex-FACTOR steps rarely go too far wrong. Or, to return to our analogy, they successfully make a cake. But what separates the many organisations who can 'make cake' from the contest winners, those who really 'knock strategy execution out of the park'? In other words, what is the 'Ex' in 'Ex - FACTOR'?

The 'Ex' in 'Ex-FACTOR'

To answer this question, we observe that different bakers following the same recipe will typically not produce identical cakes. It is by bringing their own artistry to bear that experienced bakers can produce outstanding results. Perhaps the same is true in business: executives (mostly) know what to do (follow the FACTOR steps), but it is those who add their own flair to strategy execution that outshine the rest.

Just as different bakers have different styles, we've seen organisations take many and varied approaches strategy execution; our experience suggests that there is no single 'correct' approach. However, we have found that the organisations that excel at strategy execution are those which go beyond the basic recipe.

For some organisations the 'Ex' may come from the CEO relentlessly engaging the executive team in strategic discussions, in other words, being 'like a dog with a bone' when it comes to strategy. For others it may come from thinking like your best marketer when crafting messages to your people, or from engaging staff at all levels of the organisation in strategy execution via 'vertical-slice' project teams.

The question therefore becomes, 'what is your Ex-FACTOR?'. Or, put differently, how will you ensure your organisation is among the minority that truly excel at strategy execution?

We'd like to challenge you to consider this as you reflect on these ideas and to let us know your thoughts on this next time you find yourself speaking with a Right Lane consultant. We would love to hear how your organisation puts the 'Ex' in 'Ex-FACTOR'.

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Exhibit 1: The Ex-FACTOR

		Step	Critical features
F	FRAME	The strategic direction is comprehensive, internally consistent and accessible.	The high level strategic direction is: • comprehensive (everything needed is there) • internally consistent (contains clear causal relationships e.g. between goals and measures of success) • accessible (concise, visual).
A	ALIGN	The desired outcomes, and the approach to realising them, are well understood at the executive level. Executives know what success looks like for them.	Executives: • share a common understanding of the organisation's compelling strategic narrative • are well positioned and visibly lead the strategy • understand how the required activities link to the desired outcomes and are clear about what success looks like.
C	CASCADE	The organisation's strategic objectives are clearly reflected in functional, geographic, and business-unit strategies, and explicitly linked to budget and performance monitoring processes.	The strategy is cascaded to: • functional/geographic/business-unit strategies • resource allocation and budgeting processes • enterprise performance measurement.
T	TASK	Individuals and teams have the necessary skills and influence and are provided with the resources for success.	Success of strategic projects is enabled by: • appropriately assigning responsibility to ensure project teams have the necessary skills and influence • allocating sufficient resources to set up individuals and teams for success.
O	OVERSEE	Clear delivery expectations are set against which progress is closely monitored. Additional support is provided as necessary to overcome unforeseen obstacles and keep strategic projects on track.	Strategic oversight: • is founded on clear delivery expectations • includes highly visible progress reviews • is responsive to unforeseen challenges.
R	REVIEW	The expected and actual outcomes of strategic initiatives are reviewed and clear next steps agreed.	Review processes: • monitor measures of success, key activities and corresponding deliverables • have a clear 'rhythm of accountability' • are outcomes focused • result in clear next steps.

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by dr marc levy

Helping hands

promote successful change

> ### Right thinking
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> The evidence shows that change management efforts frequently go awry. We've found that using a mnemonic, the HANDS of change – Hardwiring, Ability, Narrative, Desire and Support – can help our project teams to address what's required for success. This article explores a case study to show how the helping HANDS of change function in practice.

Most change efforts are not done well. Research on failure rates back this up. As one observer put it, the discipline of change management '... has been in existence for over half a century. Yet despite the huge investment ... in tools, training, and thousands of books (over 83,000 on Amazon), most studies still show a 60-70% failure rate for ... change projects – a statistic that has stayed constant from the 1970's to the present' (Ashkenas, 2013).

We've found that an approach that we call HANDS can be an effective way to engage executive teams in planning for a significant change.

HANDS is an acronym: Hardwiring, Ability, Narrative, Desire and Support, with each element representing a digit.

This article shows how HANDS works with reference to a case study, which is actually an amalgam of a number of similar projects.

In recent years, we have helped several rapidly growing organisations with a change relating to their 'CEO plus two' group, the direct reports to a CEO's direct reports. In many of our clients, these CEO plus two roles have risen considerably in importance. Facing greater scrutiny and complexity, the executive team, the CEO plus one layer, has had to become more strategic and less engrossed in operational details. They simply no longer have the bandwidth to do what they once did. This inevitable evolution leaves a void for the CEO plus two group to fill.

Hardwiring

Metaphorically, the function of the fingers reinforces the role of each element in the HANDS framework. Hardwiring refers to the processes and systems that are the circuitry of an organisation. Just as the thumb is critical for grasping objects, without hardwiring, change efforts can fail to grip.

The organisations that are the foundations of the case presented in this article operate in highly regulated industries. Delegations of authority are an important part of their 'hardwiring'. In our case, the organisation adjusted delegations to empower level two decision makers, including delegations relating to talent acquisition and expenditure limits.

Perhaps wary of CEO plus one level managers drifting back into their recently vacated remits, the CEO initiated a process to develop a 'compact' between the executive team and their direct reports that reinforced the changes. She also put in place new portfolio-based management committees to give CEO plus two level managers greater visibility of and engagement with top level decision making.

To reflect the CEO plus two managers' new responsibilities, the organisation also implemented a mid-cycle review of their goals and priorities and the links between these and performance evaluation and the bonus algorithm.

Ability

Ability is the skill and capacity to effect and/or participate in the change of those impacted by it. Just as the index finger is the most dexterous, ability is pivotal to change efforts.

The organisation committed to a large scale formal management development program with a local business school and all CEO plus two managers were invited to participate. They also ran sessions with the executive team to transfer knowledge from executives to managers about how to make decisions – particularly cross-cutting decisions (De Smet, Lackey, & Weiss, 2017) – under different scenarios.

The organisation developed a capability matrix, covering the attributes required of senior leaders; assessed the CEO plus two level managers against these attributes; and put in place individual development plans where necessary to accelerate managers' development.

Narrative

Narrative is the rationale for the change in storyline form.

In our case, the CEO plus two managers needed to know why they were being asked to do more. Many of them were already pressed and felt that they were executing to plans that had already been agreed. Where did this new idea come from, that they needed to step up and into some of their bosses' work? What were they going to get out of it? One could anticipate the resistance if the rationale was anything but compelling, perhaps even the raising of a middle finger (metaphorically of course).

Change in the case we are exploring was inevitable: the organisation's operating model was about to break. The CEO plus one level executives were stressed out and cracks (and attendant risks) were beginning to open up. The narrative, presented consistently by the CEO and the CEO plus one level executives, centred on three factors: the logic and inevitability of the change; that the change would be managed comprehensively; and that there were opportunities for the CEO plus two level managers.

Desire

Desire refers to whether those involved in and/or impacted by the change are 'up for it'.

The ring finger is symbolic of commitment in some cultures. Successful change initiatives need to foster the desire that is frequently a pre-condition for commitment.

In our case, there were considerable opportunities for the CEO plus two level managers, including career development, and – in many cases – promotion and better remuneration. The organisation reviewed positions and pay where the changes to the scope of roles was significant enough to warrant doing so, and they revisited job titles to give greater status to managers taking on bigger jobs.

Perhaps more important than all of that, they elevated the change to the standing of a strategic initiative, sponsored by the entire executive team. Everyone in the organisation knew it was one of the most important things the organisation was working on. People got it and they wanted to be a part of it.

Support

Support is the extent to which an organisation follows up and follows through on the change. The pinky finger is the least often utilised of the five digits. This is reminiscent of a lack of ongoing support provided for change management initiatives. We've learnt that significant change requires consistent and persistent support.

The CEO plus one level executives were asked to commit to role modelling the changes required. The CEO made it clear that she expected executives to 'get out of the way' of their CEO plus two level managers; to more actively coach and provide feedback to their reports; and to adopt a more consistent cadence of development-focused, one on one meetings with their managers.

The CEO also made the change a mandatory agenda item for executive team meetings for a period of six months, to maintain visibility and momentum.

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That change management is challenging is axiomatic; but with helping HANDS it needn't be quite so daunting.

HANDS is an acronym: Hardwiring, Ability, Narrative, Desire and Support, with each element representing a digit ... Metaphorically, the function of the fingers reinforces the role of each element in the HANDS framework.

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The author would like to thank Debbie Williams for her comments on a draft of this article.

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by dr marc levy

Three practices of agile resource allocators

Right thinking

In response to a persistent challenge experienced by many of our clients – how to allocate resources more flexibly – we propose three practices of agile resource allocators. By re-anchoring the budget each year, reprioritising frequently and managing capacity with agility, organisations can allocate resources where they are needed, when they are needed there.

The widespread use of the term 'agility' in business, appears to have come about in the mid-to-late 1990s as a reaction to complexity; in the last decade it has become pervasive as an organising discipline in software development. More recently, it has spread to other domains, notably (from our vantage point) to strategy and resource allocation.

Right Lane started writing about agile strategy, ways of working and resource allocation nearly six years ago (Levy & Hardy, 2014), based on projects we had completed in the years prior to that. Despite some advances since (Levy, 2018), one question that resonated with our clients then remains pertinent today:

How can we allocate resources more flexibly – with less friction – to where they are really needed, when they are needed there?

It's obvious *why* we should answer this question, as to do so will increase speed and responsiveness and reduce waste. But for many of our clients a compelling, and enduring answer to this question has been elusive. Below we propose three practices of agile resource allocators for organisations looking for solutions.

1. Re-anchor the budget each year

Lovallo and Sibony (2014) described a budgeting scenario well-known to most CFOs: '… it was a long, exhausting process that was not particularly effective. As the presenters showed you their plans, you probably challenged every number and explored every assumption … but if you're honest, you have to admit that each unit's final budget for next year looked a lot like the one its managers proposed at the beginning of the budget process — which in turn wasn't much different from … the previous year.'

There are obvious and compelling arguments in favour of de-anchoring from last year's budget when setting this year's: there is a need to take an enterprise view to today's challenges; the accelerating pace of change requires a more nimble reallocation of people and money; the literature on zero-based budgeting is nearly 50 years old!

Despite these points, intractable mindsets get in the way. In some organisations, executives are preoccupied by a 'use it or lose it' mentality; in others, the budgeting process remains driven from the bottom, with executives feeling the need to defend their patches.

Organisations beset by these difficulties must move towards building the budget from the ground up every year and in the process provide greater comfort to their boards that their budgets are robust to contemporary realities.

Potential pay-off: A budget that gives your board the confidence that management's ask embodies give and take. In addition to spending more in some areas that require it, you will spend less in others that don't, as emphases change to reflect the issues and challenges facing the organisation now.

2. Re-prioritise frequently

Initiative prioritisation can be tricky, particularly for organisations in rapidly evolving industries with large project portfolios. We've found that our clients have become much more systematic and practiced at it, by, for example, striking a more sustainable balance between the urgent and important, better squaring effort and impact, and being alive to the power of sequencing.

Where organisations often fall down, however, is in the frequency and robustness with which they review and re-prioritise initiatives and projects, and the extent to which they take a total portfolio perspective when they do so.

We've found that using a 'suped-up' version of an old facilitation framework, 'start, stop, continue, change', quarterly, in concert with financial reforecasting, gets funds moving within and between departments, to where they are most needed.

To increase confidence in re-prioritisation, we are strong proponents of one, shared, source of truth: an integrated benefits realisation framework, with all initiatives and projects contributing in one or more ways to the same set of consistently defined value drivers (Levy & Chhikara, 2018).

Including out-of-cycle investment requests gives added significance to agile re-prioritisation. Managers should pitch for resources from the available funding pool – including funds made available from initiatives and projects that have been dialled down or turned off – to support project needs that arise outside the planning and budgeting cycle.

Organisations can further 'supe-up' re-prioritisation by training participants on decision biases that inevitably restrict re-prioritisation.

Potential pay-off: A portfolio of initiatives and projects, and associated resource allocation, that makes sense today and reflects the fact that management did not, and cannot, have 20:20 foresight when setting the budget.

3. Manage capacity with agility

We've observed before that projects are winning the battle for resource allocation: organisations are increasingly 'standing up teams' to get important things done rather than relying on staff in fixed roles to deliver projects in their spare time (Levy, 2018).

More organisations will look like professional services firms, with a higher proportion of their people being flexibly deployed and redeployed.

Many of our clients are continuing to add resources to their PMOs to meet project needs as they arise. Senior executives and executive teams are taking ownership of these increasingly prominent bodies of work and spending more time on them. Organisational leaders are 'bellying up' to the idea that some of their best people might be more effectively employed as flexible problem solvers rather than in conventional job roles.

With more people on projects, agile resource allocators have moved from waterfall to agile project management in order to improve performance. In doing so they have reframed project planning – moving from fixed scope, with variable timelines and resources, to variable scope (scope 'grooming', iterations based on feedback loops, etc.) with fixed resources and timelines (Aljaber, 2019) – aiming to increase productivity and cycle time and reduce cost.

Potential pay-off: Managing capacity with agility leads to a more engaged and productive workforce, that gets things done faster, with clearer line of sight to the strategy.

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That we should substantially do what we did last year, or marry our initiatives, or hire people for indefinite permanent roles that may not be of enduring importance, should be harshly scrutinised in light of the accelerating pace of change.

We advise clients to re-anchor the budget each year and to re-prioritise frequently. Not everything that made sense in April or May of the previous year, when the budget was fixed, makes sense now. Further along, management probably needs to change the scope of some initiatives and projects and stop or start others. And, we advocate managing capacity with agility: with unrelenting, and increasing, pressure on budgets, organisations need to constantly optimise the impact of their most important asset, their people.

We advise clients to re-anchor the budget each year and to re-prioritise frequently.

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by dr marc levy & chiara lawry

After the event

How to get full value from your strategy workshop outcomes

Right thinking

Hard though it is, choreographing a great strategy workshop, with meaningful, compelling outcomes is only half the battle. The other half is doing something with them – committing to a series of interrelated next steps and getting them done.

Board and executive team strategy workshops are expensive, as much as $50,000 a day, if you include the value of participants' time, consulting fees associated with expert facilitation and event management – and the travel, venue and other costs if you go offsite.

It's not surprising that organisations are prepared to invest this kind of money in a one or two day event. There's a lot at stake: typical strategy workshop topics – What's most important to us? Where will we focus our efforts? What will we fund or defund? – have far reaching implications for programs of work, with annual budgets often thousands of times the cost of the workshop.

When one of our larger listed clients takes their board and executive team offsite every year, they make major decisions about a body of work that costs about 200,000 times as much as the workshop.

Given the questions considered, it's not hard to justify the investment. Getting the best return on this investment requires you to get full value from the workshop outcomes.

Let's say you have a very successful strategy workshop: you come to a view on what's changing in the world and what it means for the organisation, you answer intractable strategic questions, you align on objectives and strategic priorities. Everyone is genuinely excited. What happens next? What are the steps you can take after the workshop? How can you give your team the best chance of acting on what they decided to do?

What to do within the first week of the workshop

Get the workshop outcomes documented and distributed quickly, certainly within the week and preferably much sooner. Make sure that there are concrete decisions and attendant actions coming out of the workshop, and that the corresponding 'single point' accountabilities and timings are unambiguous. The actions should be shared, and the senior group should, where possible, play a central role.

Draft four or five talking points for workshop participants to have on hand when their colleagues inevitably ask them, 'How did it go? What did you do?' It can also help to draft a workshop narrative, for workshop participants, to crystallise the outcomes.

Communicate with everyone impacted by the workshop outcomes. Depending on the size of your organisation, different communications apertures may be appropriate – an all staff town hall meeting, a departmental meeting cascade, a video, an email.

These initial communications convey the seriousness with which management is taking the workshop outcomes.

Agree what Franklyn Covey calls the 'cadence of accountability', the rhythm of meetings and interactions to which you will commit to keep the work you agreed to do at the workshop on track (McChesney, Covey, & Huling, 2012). Book the meetings.

Put someone in charge of the work, someone senior, with the clout, skills and 'dog with a bone' mindset to get it done. This person should ideally be the CEO, or a senior executive team member with the strong, visible backing of the CEO.

Within the first month

Hold the first meeting about the work you agreed to do. Ask those you charged with the 'single point' accountability and timings to populate, pre-circulate and present a plan on a page template for their specific work products. Provide feedback; ask them to quickly iterate plans as necessary; and give them permission to get cracking with implementation, if they haven't already started.

Report back to the workshop participants, and anyone else with an interest in the workshop outcomes who has been involved in a prior communications loop, about how the work is going – the good and the bad, what's been done, what hasn't, and what's next.

Within the first three months

Conduct the first of three progress review meetings at three-monthly intervals. Bring together the senior group. Public accountability gets people moving. Recall what was supposed to be done. Establish what has been done. What are the results so far? What have we learnt? What do we need to change? What support can the senior group provide? What work will be done before the next review meeting? What will be the markers of success we will look at?

Keep communicating about how the work is progressing, particularly any wins. There's a reason change management guru John Kotter (1995) suggested 'over communicating by a factor of ten'.

Within the first six months

At the second quarterly review meeting – the six-month point – refresh the work you agreed to do at the workshop as necessary. Circumstances change. Some decisions will be wrong. Some ideas won't work.

Celebrate the effort that's been put in and the results so far. Make the link to the performance review process so that people's contributions can be formally recognised.

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Most of what we have laid out above is common sense, but it is surprisingly uncommon practice. By committing to do what we have suggested, you can give your organisation the best chance of getting the return on investment you and your colleagues deserve for the hard work you put into your strategy workshop.

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An overview of the 'after event' process ...

Within the first WEEK

- Get the outcomes documented quickly; include concrete actions, accountabilities and timings
- Draft talking points for participants to share
- Communicate with everyone impacted
- Put someone in charge

Within the first MONTH

- Hold the first follow up meeting about work you agreed to do
- Ask those accountable to present a plan on a page template
- Get cracking with implementation
- Let everyone know what's going on

Within the first 3 MONTHS

- Conduct the first of three progress review meetings
- Agree the work to be done before the next review meeting
- Keep communicating about progress

Within the first 6 MONTHS

- Conduct another review meeting
- Refresh the workplan actions as necessary
- Link the work to the performance review process
- Celebrate the hard work that's been done

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Stakeholder engagement

Developing successful business cases for not for profit projects

Right thinking

In recent years, we've witnessed an elevation of expectations when it comes to developing business cases for government or not for profits. Business cases require evidence and a coalition of support. At Right Lane, we believe robust stakeholder engagement is the key to getting your project off the ground and for more fruitful collaboration once it is underway.

There is no shortage of business case advice around, but it mostly focuses on traditional businesses and driving profit. So, what do you do when you are asked to write a business case for government, or a not for profit?

In recent years, we've witnessed an elevation of expectations when it comes to writing business cases to justify spending on programs and services within government and not for profits. Decision makers want a sharper objective, a more comprehensive analysis of costs and benefits, more robust financial forecasts and greater clarity with respect to the specifics of implementation.

Perhaps most of all they want stakeholders properly consulted. Beyond the more perfunctory elements of a business case – the work to be done, the cost/benefit analyses and the models – public and not for profit sector decision makers want business cases that evidence a coalition of support.

With this in mind, we have described an approach to stakeholder engagement in support of business cases for government and not for profit projects.

'Start as you wish to proceed' is a maxim we hold dear at Right Lane and this is particularly important for community projects that rely on collaboration across multiple stakeholder groups for their success.

Map out your stakeholders to identify who best to engage with and build your coalition. Engage your organisation in peer-to-peer conversations with knowledgeable collaborators. Create common key messages and discussions guides and data capture templates to inform those discussions. Thoroughly mine and synthesise insights and report results and conclusions to ensure that no valuable 'nuggets' are overlooked.

With any project it is critical to get absolute clarity on your objective: Are you trying to realise an opportunity or are you trying to address a challenge? What are you trying to achieve?

Your objective should be SMART, specific, measurable, action oriented, relevant and timely. Also make sure it's outcome (not activity or output) focused and 'solved at the highest level possible' to allow flexibility in the scope of your problem solving (Conn & McLean, 2018).

When creating your objective, consult a mix of stakeholders, both 'insiders' and 'outsiders', as you seek to understand opportunities for impact and needs. 'Insiders' typically have a deep appreciation of the issues you seek to address. 'Outsiders' have a more holistic understanding of the context your entity seeks to operate within.

'Nihil novi sub sole' or there's nothing new under the sun. There may be other organisations that have attempted similar projects that you can learn from. Engage peer organisations to understand what's been done before. Look overseas and to other industries for analogues. 'Go to school' on what they've learnt and build on what they have done.

We've found that insights from other organisations with relevant experiences can be particularly prescient regarding factors to consider when building your business case; issues of project governance and accountability; resourcing and funding models; and monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

This kind of consultation has the added benefit of building awareness and support for your project. Those you consult with can champion your project within the communities you seek to serve and with partners (organisations and individuals) who could support the execution of your project.

We were recently engaged to develop a business case for the transition of the African Australian Community Taskforce (AACTF) to a long-term independent entity that supports the needs of the broader African communities in Victoria. Creating a long-term independent entity required input and support from representatives of the African communities, key government organisations, and other community organisations. Embedding collaboration and consultation into how the business case was developed resulted in a robust project design and ensured that stakeholders were involved and committed to the project throughout the process.

By welcoming stakeholders into the development of your project business case, you can demonstrate your willingness to be truly collaborative, establish lines of communication and encourage diverse perspectives to push the thinking, leading to better quality, and more buy in and support. Ultimately, a more collaborative approach will put you in good stead to get your project off the ground and for more fruitful collaboration once it is underway.

When creating your objective, consult a mix of stakeholders, both 'insiders' and 'outsiders', as you seek to understand opportunities for impact and needs.

Reference

Conn, C., & McLean, R. (2018). *Bulletproof problem solving: the one skill that changes everything*. New Jersey: Wiley.

want to know more?

If you would like to discuss this article in more detail, please contact **Chiara Lawry:** chiara.lawry@rightlane.com.au

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About Right Lane

Right Lane is a flourishing, top quality, management consulting firm.

We employ our distinctive ideas and processes, and our absolute commitment to delivery, to help clients we care about pursue their inspiring missions.

We work alongside clients who do great work within the sectors they operate, and we are excited to be involved in creating outcomes that truly make a difference.

We are an ethical consulting firm with a strong belief in the work we do, and with a passion to give back to the broader community with the skills and expertise available within our walls.

Right Lane was established in 1997 to help private, not for profit and public sector clients to clarify and accelerate their future plans. Over the past 22 years, we have helped the executive teams and boards of over 300 organisations to define and adapt their direction and strategy, identify and clarify their priorities, align their efforts with their aspirations, get their major projects started and finished, and measure and improve their performance.

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