

A Universal Model for Strategic Planning, Process Improvement & Problem Solving

This simple model is a powerful tool for strategic planning, process improvement or problem solving. If you have ever sat in a problem solving meeting where everyone is sitting in uncomfortable silence because they don't know how to start tackling a problem, all you have to say is, "What's our desired reality?" and the floodgates will open.

The key to designing an effective plan is in-depth research into the current reality. The more you know about the current reality, the easier it is to connect the dots to your desired outcome. This is counter-intuitive because we assume we're all familiar with the current reality. One useful question is, "What does it actually cost us to do X (whatever process is being discussed)?"

A plan with significant financial or organizational impact should be validated. It may take several iterations to fine tune a plan before rolling it out on a large scale. Small, cheap and quick should be the key design specs for experiments because these are the experiments that will get done. Every experiment generates information which is what leaders need to navigate by.

Successful execution of any plan requires a detailed breakdown of who is going to do what, by when and with what resources. A great resource for understanding how to organize projects successfully is *Critical Chain* by Eliyahu Goldratt.

Determining if the plan has been validated requires clear definition of what success looks like, quantitatively and qualitatively. There should be little ambiguity about how successful the pilot was.

Rolling out a major initiative requires much more communication than is intuitively obvious. All organizational changes will produce an anxiety reaction. Communicate, document and train.

The best of plans may have unintended consequences. Did your efforts create true improvement or just change?

