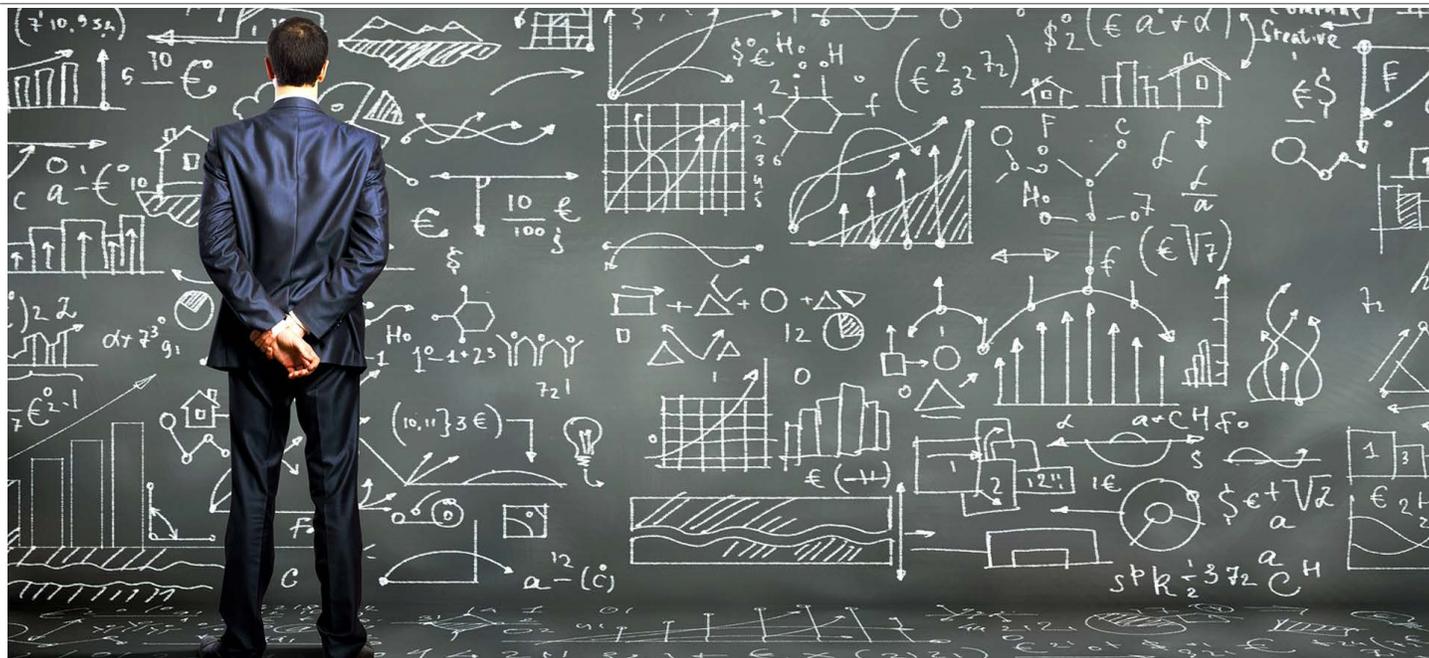


Making Big Things Happen: Four steps to taking on a complex challenge

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The bigger an idea is, the tougher it can be to see it through. That's because huge undertakings are complicated: they have lots of moving parts and involve lots of people and they demand strong leadership, but they are often also complex: changes in one part of the system will often have unanticipated consequences in other parts of the system and by sheer logic, the more you have happening, the more you can have things go wrong.

But those aren't reasons not to pursue powerful accomplishments, especially those that have never before been achieved. In our experience working on capital projects, my colleagues and I have seen even the most complex and difficult of undertakings find the direction and focus needed to prevail.

For example, we're currently working with a joint venture of companies who've joined forces to develop a remote deep-water gas field. For more than four decades, energy giants have tried to extract the natural gas resources, but ultimately failed to get their projects off the ground. What has stood between these global powerhouses and

success on this project? There certainly has been no lack of resources or determination to succeed, or even good will amongst corporate partners.

What's been missing? Access to how to get people to do the right things, and only the right things, in service of the broader mission. That may sound simple, but it's also elusive. And the bigger a challenge is, the more elusive it gets.

There's the old saying, "the devil's in the details." Not so much, in our experience. The trickiest aspect of tough, complex projects can actually be the bigger picture. It has to be framed in a way that gets to the heart of what you're striving for, and what makes your organization and your endeavor unique. When you have that, you have a mission everyone can access, and one that people can devote themselves to, every day until it is achieved.

Establishing that critical frame is powerful in and of itself, but for a complex project it's not enough. Leaders must contend with the inertia that is often the integrated work plan. Too often even large projects rely on project

plans that, in spite of all best efforts, do not have the full clarity and ownership required of a fully integrated and jointly developed plan. However, to successfully tackle a complex mega-project, a strong, integrated work plan must be built within a meaningful strategic frame.

So where does that strategic lens come from? You can get there in four steps.

Step 1: Identify what's most important to your business

– those things that are of fundamental importance to your key stakeholders: the Board, investors, government, community and your leadership team. This is not a simple task. In many organisations these areas may initially appear to be conflicting; in almost all organisations, they are not identified sufficiently clearly and comprehensively. Usually when we work with people, we find there's an overarching aspiration everyone can agree on. What gets people engaged is rarely something like "delivering return on investment." In the case of our joint venture client, for example, the leaders cared about doing something considered impossible and creating a proud legacy. Starting there, one needs to inquire and probe (and sometimes argue) to clarify and reach a common understanding of the strategic elements that will ensure the overarching concern is achievable. These areas can be things like effective stakeholder relationships, continuous value enhancement, or certain performance capabilities. They enable the rest to happen, but aren't overly prescriptive.

Next we work with people on **Step 2: Identify the outcomes that address – or to use another word, "fulfill" – those areas of fundamental importance.**

Together, these Outcomes describe the specifics of a future state in which what's fundamental to the enterprise are fully delivered - the things that must happen if the project is going to remain true to its purpose, for instance, the creating and maintaining all definitions of value to satisfy the financial hurdles of each joint venture partner.

From here, we usually see the people involved become more fluid in their conversations and decision-making, grounded by their agreed-upon areas of fundamental importance and Outcomes. This comes into play as they take on **Step 3: Identify the results that create the pathways to ensure that all elements of the Outcomes have been realized.** If any result articulated isn't ultimately in service of fulfilling a particular Outcome, it won't be part of the plan, period. The same holds true when hashing out Step 4: Identify the precise actions that, when executed, will produce your results. If any actions under consideration don't clearly link back to the results, outcomes, and fundamental concerns identified, they don't belong in your plan.

Now, with all that clarified, you can revisit your detailed, integrated work plan. Our clients often report that the realism and deliverability of their plans expands significantly as critical strategic elements previously unanticipated or taken for granted are integrated and foreseen. And if you adhere to these steps, you will find that your plan is free of the things that aren't necessary to do, and the costs required to do them. You will also see there's a transparency to what's being done and why, who's responsible for what, and how those things translate to greater employee engagement. You'll see elimination of waste and counter-productive actions and behaviors. You'll witness true alignment between individual and business performance. And – as we have seen with our clients – you could find yourself on the path to achieving something that's never before been done.

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