Title:
What's the Game Plan?

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Summary:
Browse through any management book these days and you'll be amazed at the number
of concepts that have appeared in the last decade: SWOT analysis, business
process re-engineering, CRM, competitive advantage, analysis tools, fix-it tools
and measuring tools.

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green belt, management, gannt, black belt, lean flow

Article Body:
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process re-engineering, CRM, competitive advantage, analysis tools, fix-it tools
and measuring tools.

One frequently used (and overused) term is strategic planning. Look at any mid-
size to large corporation, and we're sure there's at least one Vice President
for Strategic Planning. If you really think about it, it would suffice to say
"planning" because planning implies that there's some strategy involved. It
would also suffice to say "strategizing" simply because it implies that planning
is involved.

What makes for good planning in the context of change?

1.   Don't just brainstorm with team members. Jot down ideas that are worth
reviewing. Have you ever walked into a room and noticed that meeting attendees
are verbalizing, trying to outsmart one another but no one seems to be jotting
anything down? When ideas are tossed about, someone should be taking notes. At
the end of the day, who is going to remember those ideas to which everyone said
"aha!"

By putting discussions into paper, team members can decide at the next
session what issues merit a repeat discussion.

2.   Organize ideas by starting with the basics. Here's an example of how you

can organize your planning:

Question: What specific change do we want to implement in the customer service department?
Answer: Include another shift to accommodate customers from Asia. This means we need people to work from the hours of 9 pm to 5 am the next day.
Question: How many more people do we need?
Answer: Let's start with four and see if we need to add to that number.
Question: What languages are we looking at?
Answer: Since China is our biggest market, we need Mandarin and Cantonese speakers. We probably also need people who are fluent in Hindi and Korean.
Question: So how soon do we need to implement this midnight shift?
Answer: In two months – to align it with our product launch in Shanghai.
Question: How much will this cost in terms of manpower and facilities?
Answer: Details will follow, but we're looking at a ballpark figure of $75,000 a year.

By breaking down discussions into smaller components, it is easier to identify direction and objectives that are realistic. Imagine a situation where team members say, "we need more customer service people" without explaining the how, why, when, where and who.

3.   Once the "start-up" information is settled, think of the possible problems and obstacles you're likely to encounter together with potential solutions. Listing problems is the easy part. The harder task is jotting down possible solutions. Let's take the example above:

Potential problem # 1: We may be able to recruit people who speak these languages but they have zero experience in customer service:

Possible solutions: (a) recruit them anyway and then train them in customer service, (b) see if there are personnel in your China and India branches who can double up as customer reps (c) outsource the customer service midnight shift to a provider country or (d) ask suppliers and distributors if they can provide a solution.

Potential problem # 2: Management might disallow the $75K budget.

Possible solutions: (a) prepare arguments justifying the cost, (b) come up with actual and projected statistics on how many people from Asia are calling or e-mailing us weekly to ask about the product, (c) how much more

sales can we expect if we beef up customer service to exclusively serve Asian customers, (d) do a comparison chart of competitors who already have a customer service department servicing Asia and are doing very well.

4.   "Just do it." One reason why a group fails miserably at executing a plan is that there's an element of laziness or a waning of enthusiasm when the initial excitement wears off. Taking the same example above, one week has passed and the justification for adding a midnight shift to be sent to management hasn't been written. When the person assigned to do it is asked why, he says, "oh I found out that Mr. Jones is out of town for three weeks. So I haven't done it." What this person fails to understand is that even if Mr. Jones is away, he can get cracking with the arguments and could even send it by e-mail to Mr. Jones. Why wait? Just do it!

5.   Assess your plan periodically. Circumstances can force a change of priorities, so looking at the plan from time to time will help you determine if changes need to be made.

You need a plan to work with. A sound plan is one that has foresight and alternatives in the event certain activities don't work out.