

Chapter 1 Overview

The Sage's English Dictionary and Thesaurus defines the word 'overview' as "A general summary of a subject".

As the subject of my book is 'Dream then plan then experience' I will be addressing each topic in sequence. I will prove beyond a shadow of doubt that if you want to experience the benefits of your (or anyone else's) dream (or dreams) then you had better have a better plan.

If the planning approach that you are using does not firstly and foremostly deliver you with at least one benefit and if you are unable to define said benefit (or benefits) then you will (without a shadow of a doubt) end up being totally disillusioned. This means that you had better prepare yourself and your fellow stakeholders for either trying to live a fantasy at best or suffer the hardships of living a nightmare at worst. These are the only 3 outcomes.

If you want to experience the benefits of any dream, you had better come up with a better plan, using the best possible planning approach.

If you settle for anything other than a benefit, then you may have to rely on luck if you think that the planning approach that you are currently using will deliver what the developers of said approach promised.

But first things first. In this chapter I will summarise the following ideas/concepts

- 1) Dreams
- 2) Genres of planning
- 3) Traps to be avoided
- 4) Symptoms of the traps
- 5) Causes

1. Dreams:

This is the subject of Chapter 2. Everyone dreams. Basically (according to the Wikipedia) a dream is

“a succession of images, ideas, emotions, and sensations that usually occur involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep”

The stages of sleep can vary between the waking stage (reverie or day dreaming) to deep sleep. The most interesting thing about a dream is that if the content of the dream is not documented immediately after experiencing it, the dream may be lost forever.

Hence the need for planning in order to document the dream, which brings me to the next topic, the genres of planning.

2. Genres of planning:

This is the subject of chapter 3. Benjamin Franklin is purported to have stated the following “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail”. Sir Winston Churchill is credited with another, oft repeated, saying: “Those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it”.

Whichever statement resonates best with you, the first thing that you need to understand is that there are but 2 distinct genres of planning methods namely, ‘top-down’ (aka ‘strategic planning’) & ‘bottom-up’ (aka ‘project planning’).

I have searched the internet to see if anyone else has reported finding these two genres but so far I have been unsuccessful in finding anything. Hence I had to search my own experience and came up with the aforementioned 2.

Using these 2 genres, the next item on the agenda is to realise that each method hides a number of traps that could render the dream unimplementable. This brings me to my next topic, the traps that you need to be wary about and avoid.

3. Planning traps:

This is the subject of chapter 4. As I could not find any mention of the 2 genres, identifying the traps was not an easy task. However I remember hearing the 2 phrases ‘Paralysis by analysis’ and ‘A death by a thousand cuts’. Hence I concluded that the strategic planning approaches or ‘Top-down method’ could lead to ‘paralysis by analysis’ and IT project planning or the ‘Bottom-up approach’ could lead to ‘a death by a thousand cuts’.

Here are some references to the phrase ‘paralysis by analysis’:

- Aesop’s fables – ‘The Fox and the Cat’, where it is ‘Better one safe way than a hundred on which you cannot reckon’
- Shakespeare – ‘Hamlet’ where ‘And Reason Panders Will’
- Voltaire – ‘Perfect is the enemy of good’
- The Reverend C. Leslie Glenn – ‘from being too speculative instead of definitive, needing real work instead of investigations’
- Winston Churchill – ‘Nothing avails but perfection’
- Charles R. Schwartz – ‘We will do less guessing; avoid the danger of becoming extinct by instinct; and, by the adoption of one uniform evaluation guide, escape succumbing to paralysis by analysis’

Finding definitive references to the phrase ‘a death by a thousand cuts’ was a bit more difficult, however I did manage to glean the following meanings:

- A buzz word derived from the idea that a small cut will not kill you but, if you get enough of them, you could bleed to death. The term is derived from an ancient form of torture, in which the condemned person was subjected to a number of less devastating wounds over time until the accumulation of damage eventually became fatal’
- ‘Failure To Deliver’

Avoiding either of these traps, is vital if your plan to implement your dream is to yield positive results. Therefore it is vital that that you find and choose an approach that integrates both approaches and bypasses both of these insidious traps.

A number of suggestions as how to avoid these traps have been proposed, however most of the ones that I have managed to find are implicit as the authors failed to recognise the 2 genres.

Here are some of their suggestions:

- **‘Set a “drop dead” date’** – ‘Determine the last possible timeframe by which a decision must either be made or removed from the decision-making table’
- **Get a sanity check** – ‘Including others in the decision making process serves multiple purposes’
- **Curb your curiosity** – ‘If the information you have now answers the call, it's time to move forward’

Which brings me to my next topic which is, what are the symptoms of planning failures?

4. Planning failure symptoms:

This is the subject of chapter 5. Irrespective of which planning method you choose, there are a number of common symptoms. Some of these are (Forbes researcher):

- 1) Having a plan simply for the sake of having one
- 2) Not understanding the environment
- 3) Not having the right people
- 4) 'Shelf life' of the plan
- 5) A ‘straight jacket’ plan
- 6) Wrong people in the wrong job
- 7) Ignoring reality
- 8) No accountability
- 9) Unrealistic (or implicit) objectives

I found approximately 33 symptoms, however on diagnosing them further I did manage to isolate a definitive number of causes. This brings me to my next topic, the causes of all planning failures.

5. Causes of planning failures

This is the subject of chapter 6. Without a thorough understanding of the 2 genres, the traps that have to be avoided and the symptoms, finding the causes of planning failures is an almost impossible task. As I have managed to circumvent these shortcomings, here then are my 5 causes that produce the above symptoms:

- 1) Implicit deliverables
- 2) Incorrect starting process
- 3) Implicit business models which do not suit the business needs
- 4) Time wasted on wrong follow up steps
- 5) The cost of producing the implicit deliverables

Once you have examined chapters 2 through 6 of book 1, you will then have to make up your mind as to whether you are a (business) strategic planner (in which case you will need to read book 2) or an IT project planner (in which case you will need to read book 3 as the 5 causes of planning failures differ vastly between these two genres.