

# It Comes Down to People - Every Time

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The textbooks will tell you how to achieve success at almost anything. Review the situation, collect and analyse the data, review your options, strategize and create a plan that fits your needs and the facts, and finally, act on the plan. If you follow the formula, everything should work out well, but it often doesn't.

Most of the time, failure occurs because one significant factor is not considered to the extent it should be people. People are that one variable that is difficult to analyse and account for in a plan, so most calculations leave out the "people" factor. Yet, failing to account for the way people feel about a plan and how they respond to it is often the very reason most plans fail in the implementation phase.

For example, I have seen many municipalities work on joint fire service agreements. After careful analysis, they produce a new model based on cooperation and collaboration among municipalities. The model usually shows the advantages of cooperation: better trained fire-fighters, better equipment with less debt, more efficient operations and more effective service for residents. Yet, I have seen many wonderful models fail to get approved and put into operation, even when they are dubbed "no-brainers".

Each failure occurred for different reasons. Sometimes the failure was territorial: "I am not giving up control of our fire station and our fire-fighters!" Sometimes the failure was possessional: "Our tax dollars paid for that fire truck and the fire hall!" Sometimes the failure was about distrust ("Why would we let someone we don't know run our fire department?") or dislike ("I'm not working with those people."). Regardless of the reasons given for opposition to the new model, the reason for the failure was that the plan did not account for people being people.

None of this is meant to imply that people are bad. It only means that people are human. Sometimes, when presented with the facts, they can occasionally let emotion and sentiment override evidence, especially when they are facing change. People fear change. It's instinctively viewed as disruptive at best, and risky at its worst, so they resist it until resistance is futile, or they succeed in stopping the change from happening.

This doesn't simply happen in municipal communities, however. It happens in business and client communities as well. I have heard many Blackberry loyalists indicate they stuck with the cellular phone for so long because it had a physical keyboard. There was a very obvious strong personal attachment to the physical keyboard by Blackberry owners. They didn't want to change, so they stuck with Blackberry, and Blackberry stuck with them. However, refusing to change and adapt is exactly what caused Blackberry to lose its market dominance and eventually become insignificant in the cell phone market, a cell phone market completely devoid of physical keyboards.

There are many great companies that have enjoyed remarkable success for many years. Competitors have tried to mimic their obvious business model, with the notion that copying the plan will produce similar results, yet they often fail. They fail because there is a factor that stretches beyond the plan, and that factor is always people. Lincoln Electric is an example of a company that has enjoyed well over a century of success. Competitors have tried to copy their business model, yet many have failed, and none

have seen the same success. That is because Lincoln Electric's success did not come as much from its business model as it did from the culture its founders established with employees 120 years ago, which still exists today. You can copy anyone's business model, but the culture people live in is not mimicable.

You can plan and strategize all you like. You can collect data and statistics that support your rationale. You can compile reams of arguments and case studies to support your recommendations. You can do everything that needs to be done, and makes sense to be done. You can be 100% right. However, if you haven't accounted for people and don't bring them along through the process-so you have real cultural buy-in-your plans will fail, because in the end, it all comes down to people.

It can be difficult to figure out how to integrate people into your process. It is not merely a matter of holding town halls. It is about creating a new story and bringing them along. It is not merely a question of more press releases. It is about creating champions and arming them with vision and purpose. It is more of an art than a science, which is why it is so difficult. However, if you really want to succeed, it is essential that you find a way. After all, if you are looking to succeed, it comes down to people-every time.

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