



THE
RED PILL
EXECUTIVE

WORKBOOK

think

WORKBOOK INTRODUCTION

Now you know our secret... You know that there is a Red Pill way and a blue pill way. You might have had a feeling all along that something like this was true. Maybe you've butted up against blue pill thinking and wondered why it was so hard to drive projects that succeed by the "Iron Triangle" measures. Perhaps knowing that a Red Pill approach exists was novel and inspiring to you. Either way, after reading the book, the next question becomes, How do I navigate my own Red Pill journey? This workbook can serve as a guide, prompt valuable reflection, support your own and your team's Red Pill development, and drive Red Pill conversations and practices.

You'll find exercises and tools to help you think through Red Pill operations in relation to:

- Yourself
- Your Team
- Your Organization

Leverage the Workbook

Roll up your sleeves and dive into this work. These exercises will do very little if you skim over them. Think deeply, write down your thoughts, be brutally honest in your assessments, make Red Pill choices and learn from the results.

Make the workbook work for you. It is not meant to be completed sequentially. Use the tools in the order that makes sense for you, your starting point, and your journey.

Re-use the tools and exercises. Many of the exercises can and should be used more than once. Assess and reassess over time. Use completed exercises as a reference point to measure growth and adoption or as justification for making new choices.

Enlist others. Gain valuable insights by having colleagues, peers or subordinates complete part or all of a tool/exercise. Use the workbook to develop Red Pill thinking in others.

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SELECT A TOOL/EXERCISE

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RED PILL OR BLUE PILL: WHICH ONE AM I?

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 9: The Secret Ingredient.

*Culture battle hardens everything we do.
Red Pill operators see the battle as a reconnaissance mission.
- The Red Pill Executive*

Introduction

You've read about culture and you've learned to begin to see its impact on everything you do. You've also read about Red Pill and blue pill behaviors and now know the difference. However, knowledge doesn't easily transfer to changed behavior. It might be a good idea for you to informally assess yourself (or perhaps someone you interact with frequently) to see how Red Pill you really are. This simple questionnaire can be easily gamed. If you want to "assess" as Red Pill, select nothing but ones and skip to the end. If you are really a Red Pill operator, you will be brutally honest with yourself as you consider these questions. This is a self-diagnostic tool and is only as good as your answers are accurate.

Instructions:

Respond to the following 10 statements to assess whether you have Red Pill or blue pill tendencies. For each statement, assess how often you operate as described:

- 1- Always
- 2- Usually
- 3- Occasionally
- 4- Rarely

1

I manage by making sure that my team and I operate to extract maximum value for the organization, rather than solely following established principles.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

2

When I see something that needs to be changed within my team or someone else's, I will change it even if it exposes me to professional risk.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

3

When looking for viable solutions, I examine processes, perspectives, and incorporate new ways of thinking.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

4

Speaking out and pushing back when I see an opportunity for strategic alignment comes naturally to me.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

5

I ensure that staff are clear on what the company rewards/values.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

6

I am willing to scrap ideas that are overstretched and unrealistic.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

7

I do not hesitate to question the strategic alignment of each project.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

8

I rely on principles more than processes as the way to increase success.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

9

I respond in a calm and controlled manner to stressful situations.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

10

I ensure that project stakeholders are clear on a project's value potential.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Key Takeaway

Review your answers to see how many 1s, 2s, 3s, and 4s you have. Use the guidance below to assess your tendencies. If your answers are:

Mostly 1s: Congratulations! You have watched, listened, and learned from your experiences and are the embodiment of a true Mature Red Pill Operator.

Mostly 2s: You are well on your way to assimilating the components of Red Pill methods. With time and practice, you'll move from an Immature Red Pill Operator to a Mature Red Pill Operator.

Mostly 3s: You are a Red Pill Poser at this point but you're getting there. You likely see and appreciate the effectiveness of Red Pill Operators but still have some blind spots to overcome. Be sure to keep the book handy for reference and work your way through the handbook again at some point(s) later to assess your progress.

Mostly 4s: There is value in having processes and procedures and a clear need for adherence. As a Blue Pill Operator, your challenge will be to depart from the safety of these confines, embrace creativity, and encourage innovation. Amazing success can be achieved when you hire exemplary people and drive principles over procedures.

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



VIRNA ELLY, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER

Virna Elly is a Healthcare IT focused project leader with 15+ years of success managing application, system, and process transformation and modernization efforts for government agencies and corporations. She is a Certified Project Management Professional and Certified Scrum Master, skilled in aligning business goals with technology solutions to drive process improvements, managing complex multi-year IT projects; and, patient engagement with subject matter expertise in End Stage Renal Disease.

READY FOR ENDURING CHANGE?

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 5: Rewiring the System.

*What makes us expertly human is
the ability to slow down and interpret the direction from System 1.
- The Red Pill Executive*

Introduction

Changing the way you instinctively react to situations is what Chapter 5 refers to as, “Limbic Learning.” This process is based in neuroscience and actually comes with a fairly simple recipe. The question is, “Are you getting the right stimulus, in the right way, and at the right time?” By the way, if you setup conditions correctly, you don’t need a sage floating around waiting to notice when you are about to make a mistake. This can be self-taught and self-learned behavior, though it is admittedly easier to do this with a mentor or team that can help with safety and strategic information provisioning.

Before you took the Red Pill (read The Red Pill Executive), you probably didn’t even know that hacking your brain to perform better was even a thing that you could do for your professional career. It’s no wonder that you haven’t already set up your environment to hack your brain in a productive manner, or for that matter, set up conditions so your direct reports could do the same thing.

In Chapter 5, you learned that you need the proper conditions to make System 1 perk-up and pay attention: Stress and safety; novelty and uncertainty. You also learned that once System 1 is engaged you need both experiential variety—a stream of situations never seen before and strategic information provisioning—a resource for tips and insights. There it is; the recipe in a nutshell. The problem is that every executive’s situation is just different enough that there isn’t a simple one-size-fits-all solution. You have to build your own.

1

Let's start by thinking about your professional environment. Rate the how much you experience each of the following with 1 representing very little and 10 representing frequently:

Stress

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Safety

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Novelty

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Uncertainty

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Examples:

- Plenty of stress and very little safety
- Plenty of uncertainty and very little novelty
- Plenty of stress and uncertainty; little safety and cannot even gauge novelty
- Little Stress, plenty of safety; nothing but unicorns and rainbows
- Little novelty and practically no uncertainty; I work at the Motor Vehicle Administration

We know these things work in pairs, but don’t let that distract you. We’ll identify how to make a strong pair next.

2

Now identify the most useful pair. Select the pair that contains that one item that you experience the most frequently in your professional environment.

1. Stress and Safety
2. Novelty and Uncertainty

This is the first step in building your own environment to create that neuroplasticity brain chemical cocktail to trigger. You'll work on balancing your pair next.

Examples:

- I'm kind of middle of the road on stress and safety, but novelty and uncertainty are rare. I'll select Stress and Safety.
- Plenty of stress, little safety and a lot of uncertainty but stressful situations are more frequent. I'll select Stress and Safety.
- Safety is high and stress is low; not much in the way of novelty and uncertainty. I'll select Stress and Safety.
- Uncertainty is high, but it doesn't matter much so stress is minimal and I guess safety is not really high or low. I'll select Novelty and Uncertainty.

3

What is the strongest component of your selected pair?

1. Stress
2. Safety
3. Novelty
4. Uncertainty

The key here is in triggering System 1 to let System 2 know that it's time to pay attention. This often takes a little setup. One of the best ways to do this is to create sort of an internal mental agreement that causes System 2 to recognize that this condition is present. System 2 can then reframe it for System 1 so that it recognizes a match pair.

Examples:

- Plenty of stressful situations. My chest gets tight, blood pressure builds. Most of the time I barely realize it but I can pay more attention to use that to trigger reframing what I'm experiencing.
- I haven't thought of situations being safe and mundane, but there's plenty of that. If I pay attention I should be able to identify those situations to trigger reframing what I'm experiencing.
- When I provide input, the downstream impact is uncertain, but that's for someone else to manage. I've not spent much time thinking about it, but could probably use that uncertainty to trigger reframing what I'm experiencing.

4

What is the weakest component of your selected pair?

1. Stress
2. Safety
3. Novelty
4. Uncertainty

This is the hard part and the piece of this brain hack that is difficult to build as a one-size-fits-all. You are tasked with conceiving of some way to let System 1 know that the condition opposite of the one you are experiencing is present too. You may need:

- pre-built safety nets,
- ways to introduce stress (if you are too safe),
- some way to make mundane situations novel, or
- learn to recognize the uncertainty of the situation you are in.

Examples:

- Safety is the weakest of my pair. But if I stop and leverage the tools and processes I have around me, there is some level of safety. At the end of the day, I am going to be able to figure things out, I just need to remind myself of that.
- I guess I'm lucky, but stress is the weakest of my pair. Usually, I'm just part of a process and don't really feel the stress of the people who need things from me. It would be easy to create "what-if" scenarios that would enable me to feel just a little of that stress. Might even put a new edge on things.
- Novelty is the weakest of my pair. It's groundhog day, every day. I could create whacky, make-believe scenarios that provide a sense of novelty to what I'm doing. I might even start to notice things that I've been blind to if did that.

5

Experiential variety and strategic information provisioning. Devise a framework that feeds you ways to look at things differently. This can be a coach-like figure who is immediately accessible or it can be a system that you can use for self-coaching. Which is best for your situation?

1. I have a coach/mentor
2. Going to need to develop this on my own

Remember that once you have triggered the neuroplasticity cocktail by recognizing your pair, you only have about 7-10 minutes to develop new neural connections. What you do next is critical. If it's the same thing you always do, you'll simply reinforce that behavior. You now need to alter your instinctive reaction to the situation to reinforce arriving at a different and better way of thinking about things.

In sports, a coach would recognize that you just missed, or are about to miss something. They'd point it out and ask you to look at the situation differently. You'd wonder why you didn't recognize what the coach saw (novelty) and try to imagine that if you did recognize the situation you could try do something differently (uncertainty) to lead to a new outcome. We rarely receive such coaching in business so it's likely up to you to create a system that can help you self-coach.

Examples:

- I have a mentor that I can engage to help me identify new ways to think about things at the right times. I'll need to orient them on this process and explain how I intend to use neuroplasticity to rewire my thought processes, but I think they can do it.
- I'm going to need to develop this on my own. As long as I can trigger conditions needed for neuroplasticity, I can teach myself to step back and look at each new situation independently. From there I can use any number of pre-formed questions to cause the cognitive frame shifting needed to challenge my working model of the world and to develop new instinctual responses to certain situations. This is essentially the same thing as self-coaching. I just need a system in place to do it.

Key Takeaway

You can hack your brain to improve your instinctual reactions but you need to be deliberate about it. Executives have often been through enough hard-knocks to figure out some of this, but you probably also have areas where you'd like to react differently. Remember that you need to recognize opportunities when your brain is ready to develop new neural pathways and then have the wherewithal to look at each situation independently. If you understand that what you did last time, in a similar situation, may not provide you with the best outcome you are on your way to setting up experiential variety. Next you challenge how you are perceiving the situation and look at from multiple perspectives. This causes the cognitive frame shifting needed to identify new ways to react to the situation. In this whole book, this is the closest equivalent to actually taking the Red Pill. Unfortunately, you may have to do it a few hundred times to really begin to change the way you intuitively react to situations. It's brain training.

If you need help with cognitive frame shifting aspect of this process, let's look at how Think has operationalized using BKPM principles to provide off-line coaching to our consultants when a mentor is not available. We have developed our own pocket guide that we require our consultants to keep with them. In this guide, we have documented our basic operational framework, standards for completing often-repeated activities and a list of BKPM principles. We coach our consultants to learn to feel stress (our most likely driver in our business). When they recognize stress, they know they we have standards, process and back-up, to address that stress. It's a "safety" net that we've operationalized.

Given that each situation is unique (experiential variety) the only thing needed to complete the brain hacking recipe is strategic information provisioning. Our list of 30+ BKPM principles are used to help our consultants look at things from a new perspective. All they need to do is scan the list of these principles and they take full advantage of their lightning fast System 1. When a principle triggers a new way to view what's going on, it's like a coach is whispering in their ear, "Ah! You've found yourself on the wrong side of the three-sided table, haven't you? You'd better find a way back to your side and reinforce that arms-length relationship model." Soon, recognizing that they are getting co-opted by the sponsor or fulfilment team becomes instinctual.

One final thought. What can you do to help your direct reports do the same thing? Can you build the safety net and help them develop into higher level performers?

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



JEFF WELCH, VICE PRESIDENT, CHIEF SERVICE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Jeff Welch is a technical executive, specializing in the use of technology to deploy training, simulations, and performance-enhancing information systems. Jeff is an engineer by trade, an Agile Transformation Coach, and he has worked as a lead Learning Solution Architect for Pearson Performance, Vangent, and later PDRI. His first co-authored book, Bare Knuckled Project Management (BKPM): How to Succeed at Every Project, by Tony Gruebl and Jeff Welch, has more than 15,000 copies in circulation. Jeff is also a co-author of The Red Pill Executive, Morgan James Publishing, 2020, to which this workbook is a companion.

HOW DO I MEASURE SUCCESS?

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 1: Why Project Management Fails a Whopping 70% of the Time.

No plan of operations reaches with any certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main force.
- Helmuth von Moltke 1800–91, Prussian military commander

Introduction

You've read about how the industry views success and failure. Let's examine it through your own perspective, as well as from a project manager's point-of-view. The two views are typically very different and that's part of the problem.

1

Let's start by identifying a recent project where you were personally vested in its execution.

Project Name:

It doesn't matter if the project was a success or a failure in your eyes, but it would be nice to select one where the measure is complicated or somewhat subjective.

Examples:

- Customer project implementing our services or technology
- Sales and Marketing initiative
- On-prem transition to cloud
- Security audit
- Regulatory compliance implementation
- CRM implementation
- Salesforce modification
- Service Now module implementation

2

Consider the project from your executive point-of-view. How would you rate the project's success? *Why?*

- 4 – splendid, love it when a plan comes together
- 3 – with a few exceptions, that's what I wanted
- 2 – that was rough but probably worth it
- 1 – little value and a lot of disruption
- 0 – utter and complete failure

We often see that executives view success through a longer-term and strategic perspective. They have room to maneuver, in fact they plan in order to maintain that maneuverability (hold funding in reserve, plan for inevitable delays).

Examples:

- 4 – I've setup the business to work more efficiently and now have access to capabilities we desperately needed to grow.
- 3 – The effort delivered most of what I wanted and I didn't mind that it took a little longer than planned. The way things go around here, that's a success, but there always room for improvement.
- 2 – I got some of what I wanted, but the cost and disruption was difficult to justify. My reputation took a hit on that one.
- 1 – Just one problem after another. I had to compromise on features to the point that I wonder if it was worth doing at all. The only thing that didn't come down was the cost to get this far.
- 0 – This effort has wasted time and resources. The business is hardly better off and I'll probably need to launch a different effort to try and reach the capabilities I was looking for.

3

Identify additional value you would have liked this project to deliver to the business.

Capture Additional Value By:

It doesn't matter if this is a missing capability or something far less tangible, like organizational retention of the knowledge to execute similar efforts even better in the future. Perhaps this was an opportunity to enhance your DevOps capabilities or while the project was completed, you now have a series of work-arounds that are going to cost time and effort downstream.

Examples:

- If I could have accelerated completion, I would have been able to capture additional customers or sales sooner.
- There is a parallel effort that really should have overlapped with this one, but it was too risky to put it into motion too.
- This was a golden opportunity to increase our delivery cadence through automated testing, but we'll need to try to accomplish that on some other effort.
- In hindsight, I would have been happy with half of the capability twice as fast. Should have broken this up into two efforts

4

Now, rate the project using these 3 measures (the triple constraints).

Time expectations were met:
(no) 0 1 2 3 4 (yes)

Cost expectations were met:
(no) 0 1 2 3 4 (yes)

Scope expectations were met:
(no) 0 1 2 3 4 (yes)

Examples:

- **Time** expectations were met:
4 – the project completed exactly when the plan said it would. It was a perfect pace.

1 – slip after slip. This thing ran on for much longer than anyone expected
- **Cost** expectations were met:
3 – There were a few unexpected costs, but I had reserve to cover them. Actually ended up better than I had anticipated.

0 – The project exceeded budget significantly. I had to request additional funding and my reason for it was that we couldn't afford to waste the investment we had already poured in it .
- **Scope** expectations were met:
3 – The most critical capabilities were delivered, but we did have to remove some of them that we originally desired in order to maintain schedule.

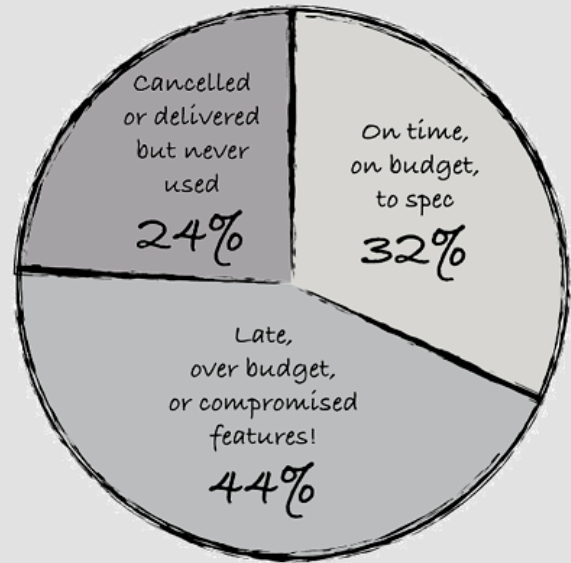
2 – We replaced a few critical capabilities with short-term workarounds in order to complete the effort. Now I'm going to need to deal that later, which is going to impact other things I need to get done.

5

According to the industry, anything less than a 4 in all three ratings in the previous step (time, cost, scope) represents some sort of project failure. How would the industry rate your project? (Select all that apply.)

- Late
- Over Budget
- Compromised Features

You can see in this pie chart, failures in these three areas account for 44% of failed projects. There's a new category here that also involves failure: **Cancelled or delivered** but never used. Some projects are killed before they ever have a chance to be completed. Hopefully, that happens fast so business resources aren't wasted. Then there are others still that are essentially completed but never used.



Key Takeaway

Compare how the industry would rate your project to how you assess success or failure. Executives work in the gray areas of business, where things aren't quite so black and white, so your assessment is probably far more nuanced.

Take a look back at your item 3. Would it have been better to capture that value even it cost a little bit more or took just a little bit longer? Perhaps, every situation is different.

Now consider how the industry has trained Project Managers to view things. There is no room to maneuver outside of the triple constraints, even if it means capturing more value for the business. Changing a plan is equated with taking a step closer to failure, but we know that we learn things along the way. This is one of the reasons that agile practices have become so prevalent.

As an executive, you look for business value and capturing it is part of a complex algorithm. Don't allow those managing your projects to take the simplistic view represented in the triple constraints. It's a tool, not a success measure. Communicate where you see opportunities to capture additional value and train your directs to bring you options to do so. Teach them to think like you!

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



JEFF WELCH, VICE PRESIDENT, CHIEF SERVICE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Jeff Welch is a technical executive, specializing in the use of technology to deploy training, simulations, and performance-enhancing information systems. Jeff is an engineer by trade, an Agile Transformation Coach, and he has worked as a lead Learning Solution Architect for Pearson Performance, Vangent, and later PDRI. His first co-authored book, Bare Knuckled Project Management (BKPM): How to Succeed at Every Project, by Tony Gruebl and Jeff Welch, has more than 15,000 copies in circulation. Jeff is also a co-author of The Red Pill Executive, Morgan James Publishing, 2020, to which this workbook is a companion.

DID I KILL IT?

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 2: What Does It Take to Win?

*There's a difference between knowing the path and walking the path.
-Morpheus in The Matrix*

Introduction

It's a common statistic that projects fail, at least partially, about 70% of the time. With numbers like this, we've all encountered a project that did not live up to the triple constraints. Let's take a look at a project that failed and learn from it.

1

Think of the last time a project went really badly. What was the project name and why did it go badly?

Choose a failed project that happened recently. Choose one that was fairly complex.

Examples:

- Viper 2.0 – We heavily modified a terrific SaaS product to make it align with old business processes. Now we aren't using the power it could have provided. We should have stopped modifications and looked more seriously at changing business processes.
- South Carolina Marketing Initiative – Overall cost estimate was too low. Project finished 2 months late and \$60K over budget. Key decision makers just kept wanting more data to provide guidance and what we ended up with was just a shadow of what we wanted.
- Customer Service 2.0 – Implementation of the new CRM took twice as long as expected, which pushed it right into a major product release. Didn't sleep for weeks.
- Salesforce Modification – Key sponsor and lead quit 2 months into the project. The project continued for 3 months before being stopped completely.

2

Now, recall how it ended. Did you kill it early? Why or why not?

We often see projects start to fail, but we continue moving forward because we've been too afraid to stop it. Other times we are not given the option to do anything but complete the work.

Examples:

- No – we pressed forward and took longer because of the extensive rework.
- No – we had no option to do anything but finish.
- Yes – we realized we did not do enough design and planning so we stopped the project. We plan to revisit it next quarter.
- Yes – but not soon enough. We moved forward for 3 months without a vision or leader before we stopped.

3

Let's take a step back. Was the project strategically aligned with business needs when it was initiated? Why or why not?

When determining strategic alignment, test, push, and question everything. Ask yourself questions like:

- How does this project further our business strategy?
- As the Operations Executive sponsor, how does this project help me succeed?
- Where does this project rank among all my initiatives?
- How will other departments view the importance of this project?
- Do I still want us to proceed even if we can't show that it supports the mission of the business?

Looking at how a project is or is not strategically aligned provides us a new way to assess its success or failure. It gives us a way to assess whether we start a project, but also whether it provided business value at the end. Sometimes the strategy changes while the project is going on – and that's ok.

Examples:

- No – Viper 2.0 was the brainchild of the CEO but was so far from our 'norm' that it was difficult to implement.
- Yes – Sales growth is number 1 on the list, we just need to get better at it.
- Yes – Business process improvement and Customer Satisfaction are both on the list this year.
- No, not at the end – The former District Sales Manager was the guiding force behind this project. When he left the company, the strategic alignment to increase District sales left as well.

4

Projects may fall out of alignment over time. Was the project strategically aligned with the organization at the end? Why or why not?

If the project is not in Strategic Alignment, then it should be left on the white board. The same is true at any point during execution. If at any time the initiative veers out of Strategic Alignment, stop immediately.

Examples:

- No. The new software is too far from our operations and comfort zone and should not have started.
- Yes. While we went over time and budget, it was aligned.
- Yes. A new CRM fulfills 2 strategies.
- Yes. It was in alignment when we started the project, but that changed after the DSM left.

Key Takeaway

Strategic Alignment is the best indicator of a project's ability to capture Business Value. If it's not there from the start, the project isn't 'worth it', no matter how well it goes. If alignment is lost during the project, either because of shifting business demands or project scope modifications, you should seriously consider whether you should kill it. Having the ability to frame decisions around strategic alignment will help you decide and help you communicate your rationale for that decision. As a management model, the triple constraints (a.k.a. Iron Triangle) must be demoted to a useful-tool status, replaced by Business Value with focus given to the ability to recognize full value potential.

Is saving major expenditures in time and money a win for the organization? Absolutely. Quickly killing a wasteful project is also a success. Important lessons can be gained and applied to future projects. Mindfully acknowledging a project's impending failure makes your teams smarter and increases their ability to identify wasteful projects in the future. It shows them it's ok to stop doing something that isn't worth it in the long run and instead focus on what matters.

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



ERICA MCQUISTON, DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS CONSULTING & DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OFFICER

Erica McQuiston is a detailed, driven senior project manager with over 15 years of experience managing large scale, multi-year projects, and product development. She is a servant leader fostering cohesive teams maintaining effective working dynamics between cross-organizational and cross-functional project teams. Her excellent communication and creative problem-solving abilities have enabled her to manage distributed teams around the world successfully.

DO I ALLOW MY DIRECTS TO OWN THEIR PROJECTS?

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 3: Taking Off the Gloves.

*An operator who is not emotionally connected to their projects is only going through the motions.
- The Red Pill Executive*

Introduction

You've read about your role as a Red Pill Operator. You are Rocky's Mickey, you're the seasoned mentor who has the street smarts to lead your trainee to victory, despite the odds. You're training wolf pups to become kick-butt operators, and you must enable your directs to own their projects. Let's examine how you do that.

1

Start by identifying your most recent Strategic Initiative. Provide examples of how you empowered your directs to fulfill their role.

Examples:

- Provided clarity on the role of each player involved using the 3-sided table
- Clearly articulated the desired project outcome in terms of fidelity in the true value potential
- Delegated responsibility to directs to gain control
- Created an environment where there are no secrets
- Provided P&L responsibility to my directs

When you cultivate teams of operators to act effectively in almost any situation, your company's management team or PMO will learn to respect decisions and methods that drive toward the true value potential of such initiatives.

2

The Wolf represents your Red Pill Operator of the future. Identify three traits displayed by The Wolf that you'd like to see in your directs when they own the project.

Examples:

- Dispassionate, despite others around him freaking-out
- Uses direct language, but isn't rude
- Committed
- Tests for risks
- Takes control
- Owns the problem
- Identifies himself as solving problems
- Focuses the team

1.

2.

3.

When you develop your wolf pack, you become Marcellus, calling in your best Red Pill directs to handle tough situations and trusting them to take care of business.

3

We discussed the importance of your Red Pill directs being emotionally connected to their projects in order to develop ownership. What are some potential barriers to your directs developing an emotional connection?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

An operator who is not emotionally connected to his/her project is only going through the motions. It becomes easy for them to think that they are doing all that they are responsible for and lay potential failure on others. Maintaining a high level of ownership takes care and feeding and often results from a responsibility to others. This isn't easy sometimes and they may need trust that they can confide openly and honestly with peers or you.

Examples:

- **Unrealistic expectations:** They setup conditions where you cannot win
- **Accountability without authority:** People cannot be accountable without the authority to make changes
- **Lack of accountability:** When this is part of organizational culture, there is little difference between success and failure
- **Teams do not commit to anything:** They always find a way to need something from someone else
- **Lack of team comradery:** This results in isolation and an inability to collaborate
- **Inconsistent performance:** This often results from lack of experience and skill, which lowers expectations for everyone
- **Personal/professional risk to taking on a difficult project:** This occurs when your directs don't feel that they have a safety net or proper levels or support, especially on high-risk projects

4

Keeping the barriers you listed above in mind, how can you enable your team to own their projects?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

By pushing Jules and Vincent a second time, The Wolf made them consider possibilities they might have overlooked. This wasn't a challenge levied against them, it was a way to make sure everyone was working from the same standards. In that sense, it was collaborative and laid the groundwork for additional planning. Note that when someone feels danger and uncertainty about a project, only specific training and support will help them stop and assess. With more danger and/or unknowns, there will be a natural tendency to fill in the blanks with things that align with one's personality. This is where you find safety in numbers. Where being able to openly and honestly expose concerns can result in far better decision making.

Examples:

- Develop conditions where the team becomes accountable to each other.
- Improve training opportunities; raise performance expectations across the team.
- Standardize on methodologies that foster rapid immersion & control.
- Provide 1:1 coaching; push and test for ownership; work to maintain a winning scenario.
- Use team building exercises to develop comradery.
- Provide stress management exercises.
- Assign reading; develop the team's ability to use a common vocabulary, metaphors and shorthand.

Key Takeaway

Ownership is a key ingredient for project success. The three-sided table helps clarify where ownership lies for maximum efficiency and effectiveness: Red Pill Operators own the desired outcome, Red Pill PMs own the process (but not the outcome) and Red Pill teams own their piece of the project. What's not so apparent is the role that Red Pill Operators play in helping their directs be emotionally connected to the project. By staying in tune with what might prevent your directs from taking ownership and then working to reduce or remove those barriers, you set yourself and the entire team up for success. Investing in coaching and training your directs pays dividends over time... it's a gift that keeps on giving.

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



DAN KÜFFER, VICE PRESIDENT & CHIEF OF STAFF

Dan is a senior consultant focused on the application of technology to business functions. He has 27 years' experience leading teams and completing technical projects in complex and demanding environments. Prior to joining Think, Dan served 21 years in the Australian Army, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2014. Dan is PMP and ITILv3 qualified and holds three degrees: Masters in Project Management, Masters in Strategy and Management, and Bachelor of Arts in Information Technology.

BUILD OR BUY? DO I HAVE THE TEAM?

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 4: Finding Red Pill Recruits.

*If you want to train good operations managers,
you have to empower them to take control.
-The Red Pill Executive*

Introduction

You've read about the four traits and the balance needed for a successful Red Pill PM. Let's take a look at your staff to determine:

1. If you have team members who could fulfill the role today,
2. If you have team members who may have the potential to fulfill the role, or
3. If you need to consider hiring new team members and the traits you are looking for in a candidate.

1

Who is your most promising direct report or current staff member to consider?

2

Rate him/her on the four traits (Operator, Focuser, Relator, Integrator) from your executive point of view. In particular, consider how you have seen him/her perform under pressure or stress. For each statement, assess how often the person operates as described:

- 1 - Rarely
- 2 - Occasionally
- 3 - Usually
- 4 - Always

Operator - This person shows a natural preference for completing tasks; if something makes his/her list, it will get done. S/he is a great planner and is naturally detail oriented—but can sometimes get bogged down in the small stuff.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Focuser - This person shows a natural preference to lead teams and drives others to commit to getting the job done, no matter what obstacles stand in the way. However, this person can sometimes leave a swath of damage in his/her wake.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Relater - This person is great at building personal relationships, which often provides additional motivation for support—but s/he can get so wrapped up in protecting relationships that large goals lose their focus.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

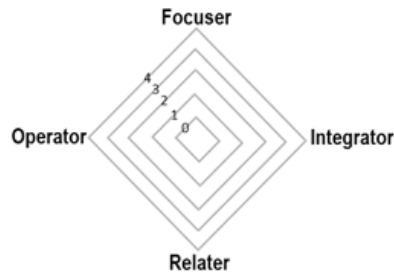
Integrator - This person is a natural brain stormer and problem solver with a never-ending supply of ideas—but s/he doesn't always follow through and is notoriously bad at managing time.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

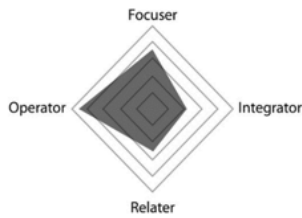
What distinguishes a promising Red Pill recruit isn't a particular personality style. It's a way of doing business. It's a combination of drive and how they relate to others.

3

Plot out graphically where you identified the candidate falls in the four traits of Step 2.



Example:



The BKPM Resting Zone leans toward the Operator with the other traits in lesser amounts. Operators tend to be detailed, accurate, organized, and methodical.

4

Finally, evaluate your plotted results. Does this person have the traits to be a Red Pill PM?

- Yes
- No

BKPM Resting Zone has definite boundaries. All Red Pill PMs are inside that area on the chart. Everyone outside is not Red Pill material. Not that they are bad. They are simply not ready-made to be a Red Pill recruit. If you find some that are close, they can, in many cases, be conditioned to operate within the zone. This takes time and specific effort, but can lead to dramatic increases in productivity.

Key Takeaway

Much of performance is a combination of nature and nurture. But in the case of a Red Pill PM, nurture (or training/coaching/development) can only take a candidate so far. If a candidate is somewhere near the BKPM Resting Zone, then with your nurturing, they can likely become Red Pill PMs. Be careful not to be swayed by individuals who demonstrate the key traits when all is going smoothly. Stress changes everything. If those traits are not natural tendencies, in the moments of greatest stress, the person will revert back to Blue Pill tendencies.

Another thing to be aware of is that as Red Pill operators climb into executive levels, they will begin to cover more and more of all axes. This is a simplistic view of how people prefer to operate, but can help identify operators and even those with executive potential.

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



RENEE LAWRENCE, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER

Higher Education IT focused leader with 15+ years experience working with online and brick & mortar institutions. Subject matter expertise in student Admissions and Registration as well as complex back office system implementation and integration. Focused on business process definition, improvement, and training.

DEVELOP RED PILL OPERATIVES

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 7: Spreading the Red Pill Mindset.

Strong roots grow only when effectiveness proves this stuff works
-The Red Pill Executive

Introduction

You've read about creating a Red Pill Mindset, now let's look around your organization to see where and how you might cultivate it. One of the keys to developing your strategy is to recognize what is valued in your organization. There's no better way to determine this than to look at your organization's culture and how it operates.

1

Start by thinking about the different groups within your organization and how they recognize good work. What does your company reward?

Think about the projects you've used in other exercises. Who was rewarded and why? Think about different groups in your company. Do they reward differently? Does your executive team reward one group more than another?

Examples:

- **Speed** – completing work quickly or ahead of schedule
- **Organization** – clear, detailed and methodical work
- **Workload** – amount of work completed at the end of a day/week/work cycle
- **Safety** – perfect safety record with no injuries.
- **Agility** – ability to think quickly and make changes as needed
- **Commitment** – doing what you say you will do, when you say you will do it
- **Sales** – selling more products or services

2

Next, consider how your company prioritizes spending. What does your company spend its budget on?

Money talks. If your company budget has a balloon item, that's a sure indication of what the culture values.

1. Which departments get ample funding each year?
2. Which departments are underfunded?
3. Which projects have the biggest budgets?
4. Do you give bonuses or other incentives for good work?

Examples:

- Sales
- Marketing
- Innovation
- Product Development
- Top Talent

3

Now change your focus to identifying the most effective performers in your organization. What are your most effective people or teams?

You've determined how your company rewards good work and where it spends money. If you can identify people or teams that work in the well-funded and rewarded areas of your organization, that's great, but sometimes you'll find highly effective people or teams outside of those areas too.

Examples:

- Development team given bonuses for completion of a highly visible project ahead of schedule
- Marketing Director promoted after a successful ad campaign generated 15% increase in sales
- Product Owner given an award at the Annual Company meeting for increased customer satisfaction
- Warehouse Manager recognized for a perfect safety record in Q4.

4

Now assess that person or team against your overall company culture. Are they effective because they work within the culture or outside the culture?

This is a telling question. If your pockets of effectiveness are not in line with the overall culture of your company, you will have a different plan for creating the Red Pill Mindset than if they are in line.

Go back to item 3 – can you find a pocket of effectiveness that is in line with your overall culture? If not, that's ok.

Examples:

- **Outside:** The development team has self-organized and created their own working style within IT
- **Within:** We are a sales-driven organization and the Marketing Director executed the sales campaign flawlessly
- **Outside:** The Product Owner is outspoken and doesn't always follow the strict processes in place
- **Within:** We value safety as number 1 and this Warehouse Manager embodies our culture

5

Finally, let's determine where to plant your Red Pill seeds. Where could a Red Pill alliance root?

Your answer to item 4 will now allow you to choose your path forward. If you are up against a blue pill culture and your pockets of effectiveness are seen as outsiders, patience is key.

If your pocket of effectiveness is in line with your overall culture, give them the room to share their knowledge. Red Pill thinking spreads best by example, by demonstrating effectiveness and showing success.

Examples:

- Effectiveness is well rewarded in my area of operations and I know who would make terrific Red Pill candidates. There should be little resistance in directing further reward and recognition toward higher levels of effectiveness and a Red Pill Mindset, so I can begin planting the seeds to build my Red Pill cadre with little risk of causing disruption to the organization.
- Effectiveness in my area of operations is not directly rewarded. In fact, I see that the Blue Pill machine is fully engaged and working to protect itself from any new perspectives. Working within this construct to get higher levels of effectiveness valued is going to be key, so I'm going to need to be subtle and change the value equation over time. I have identified a small team that I trust to become Red Pill operators, but we are going to need to take steps not to directly challenge the Blue Pill culture for now.

Key Takeaway

The temptation to become a Red Pill evangelist can be strong. Spreading the Red Pill message becomes a hypothetical exercise that won't produce results if it is targeted at the wrong culture. Strong roots grow only when effectiveness proves this stuff works.

Remember, spreading the Red Pill perspective cannot happen by coercion or mandate. It has to happen organically. The Red Pill perspective is not mental assent. It is a change in core beliefs that hold true under pressure.

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



ERICA MCQUISTON, DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS CONSULTING & DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OFFICER

Erica McQuiston is a detailed, driven senior project manager with over 15 years of experience managing large scale, multi-year projects, and product development. She is a servant leader fostering cohesive teams maintaining effective working dynamics between cross-organizational and cross-functional project teams. Her excellent communication and creative problem-solving abilities have enabled her to manage distributed teams around the world successfully.

COVERT OPS: DEVELOPING A RED PILL ORGANIZATION

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 8: Planning Evolution.

*Shape behaviors by rewarding effectiveness
-The Red Pill Executive*

Introduction

The Red Pill mindset resonates with you and you would like to develop a Red Pill Organization (RPO). Let's consider how aggressively you can pursue this endeavor within your current organization's culture and which effective tactics you can use.

1

Start by thinking about the current corporate structure and how change is driven within your organization. Is there an entity that governs operations, like a PMO? How effective is it?

Examples:

- Yes, but it is ineffective and provides insufficient value
- Yes, it is effective and provides sufficient value
- No, but we are looking to establish one
- No and there are no current talks of establishing one

If your organization already has a PMO, it is important to understand its effectiveness for determining a strategy. If it provides sufficient value, the RPO can enhance that value. However, if it fails 70% of the time, the RPO can gradually replace it.

2

Where is the culture along the continuum of process-driven to entrepreneurial?

Examples:

- 1 – we are a financial institution and much of the process we follow is based on regulatory requirements that we must abide. Outside of that it's normally business as usual, with little to disrupt the management of business.
- 4 – we are in a highly competitive market and must constantly evolve to retain market share. We frequently try new things and will gladly accept small failures in order to grow and adapt.

0 1 2 3 4 5

process-driven

entrepreneurial

Highly process-driven cultures can be slow to adopt change. When change is promoted, it is often after careful consideration is given to everyone and everything the change might impact. This is not to say that being slow to adopt change is necessarily bad, some organizations require this type of culture to fulfill their mission. Entrepreneurial organizations are often quick to adopt change and tend to recognize change as a normal way of life.

3

Next, let's think about how you prefer your team to operate within the organization. What behaviors do you want out of your team?

When thinking about the behaviors you want out of your team, you need to temper your expectations with the reality of what the organization will tolerate. How much the organization will tolerate will determine how covert you need to be while implementing these changes.

Examples:

- Encourage initiative, not just meeting requirements
- Push limits & capture more value
- Expand & contract as awareness develops
 - If business value increases, add time or budget
 - If cost outstrips benefit, scale back or cancel
- Emphasize Strategic Alignment
 - Test, push & question everything to validate
- Set the compass toward Business Value
- Foster open, honest discussion with the RPO
- Consider killing a useless endeavor as a win for the team
- Teach everyone to stay on their own side of the three-sided table
- Reward effectiveness

4

Rewarding effectiveness is key to changing behavior, encouraging new business practices/values and planting the seeds to help grow an RPO. How can you reward behaviors?

It is important to know that organically growing an RPO is a naturally slow evolution. However, in addition to crisis & need, rewarding effectiveness can move the process forward. It's also important to know what motivates each person on your team to select rewards that are meaningful to them.

Examples:

Intrinsic Motivators

- Personal/public recognition for the value they are contributing
- Personal coaching and mentoring
- New access to people and information
- Team building activities
- Company provided training & continuing education
- Leadership assignment on larger scale project
- Team picnics/lunches

Extrinsic Motivators

- Monetary Bonus Payouts
- Vacation Time Bonuses
- Promotions

5

How can you track progress and monitor your success?

Examples:

- Team members begin using the same Red Pill terminology
- Increased ownership
- Grounded in real world ideas
- Higher completion rate of projects
- Projects provide more business value
- Comfort in killing projects when appropriate

As we've said, growing an RPO can be a slow process. It's important to track your progress to maintain focus and energy over time and to course-correct when needed. Develop your own rubric and keep records so you can watch the change occur over time.

Key Takeaway

What can you expect from implementing a Red Pill Organization (RPO)?

In addition to understanding your organization's culture and readiness to operate as an RPO, it is equally important for you to understand if you are ready for the journey. If you and your team are ready, identify the methods you can use to get there.

The real question is whether you want to spend a lot of time and energy developing your indigenous RPO slowly through organic gardening, or whether you want to speed things up by bringing in Red Pill contractors and trainers to seed your department, water and prune. Either approach can work.

Before you begin, consider these additional questions:

- Are you creating a pocket of Red Pill operatives using your top cover as protection or seeding the entire company?
- Will initiating a Red Pill movement require you to spend your own effectiveness Benjamins and keep spending them to maintain it?
- How much energy will you need to establish momentum?

Beware of overzealous action. First, it rarely works and, second, you could end up a casualty of your own unbridled enthusiasm. Push the culture too hard and it might snap back... on you.

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



SCOTT KLINGER, M.B.A, PROJECT MANAGER

Healthcare Technical Product Manager with 12+ years experience working with integrated health systems and health plans. Subject matter expertise in Population Health Management, Care Management, Utilization Management, Value-Based Wellness Incentive Programs.

KNOW YOUR OPERATIONS, SEE YOUR CULTURE

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 10: Throw Out Your Old Yardstick

*Red Pill operators have cultural awareness, but Blue Pill operators never see culture.
-The Red Pill Executive*

Introduction

The diversity in issues that top executives face is expansive. Breaking-down and inspecting these issues is probably something that you do intuitively, though perhaps not specifically through the lens of how they impact operations and company culture. Difficulties in implementing changes can often be traced back to how your culture will impact any plans you've made. This worksheet will guide you through looking at what you would like to accomplish from several new perspectives. Think routinely conducts such analysis to develop options for action that can be successfully executed and, perhaps even more importantly, understand how company culture will embrace or reject those plans. Follow this simple process to better understand one key aspect of your current operations. Once you've accomplished that, you can learn more about a framework that will help you better understand the totality of your operations.

1

Let's start by identifying the most important issue you are facing. What is keeping you up at ight?

Examples:

- I am about to lose a major customer
- I cannot attract the right talent
- I am afraid we will be breached
- Consumer habits are changing, and we cannot keep up
- My budget won't support my departmental goals
- We need to reduce costs significantly now
- We cannot keep up with the demand for our department's services

2

Now, let's put your top issue into an operational category.

Examples:

Issue	Category
We are about to lose a major customer	Customer retention
We cannot attract (or retain) the right talent	Requirement and employee retention
I am concerned we will be breached	Cybersecurity
Consumer habits are changing, and we are not adapting quickly enough	Research and Development / Innovation
My budget can't support my department goals	Budget Management / Planning
We need to reduce costs significantly now	Operations Management
We cannot keep up with demand for our departments services	Demand Management

Placing your issue into an operational category will enable you to attach operational traits to it more easily. It may seem like you're just restating the issue, but we are shifting our focus to those things that occur during daily operations that are relevant to your top issue.

3

Next, ask "Why are we having problems with (insert category)?" Enter the top three reasons and link each reason to an operational category.

Reason	Category
1.	
2.	
3.	

You may have guessed that we are going for a little root cause analysis here. The operational category you came up with may be a bit too broad to evaluate easily. Sometimes, asking "why" a few times can get you down to the main issue. If you come up with a new main issue, repeat the categorization exercise like you did in the previous step.

When you are satisfied that you are focused on an issue category that you can directly relate operational practices to, continue.

Examples:

Reason	Category
A competitor is providing a better product	Product Research
Our customer service needs improvement	Customer Relationship Management
Customers don't like our policies	Legal and Regulatory Enforcement

4

Rate it! Use the ratings and guidance below to further assess your issue.

Reason	(from Step 3)
Category	(from Step 3)
Importance	(from Importance scale below)
Effort	(from Effort scale below)
Maturity	(from Maturity scale below)
Cultural Alignment	(from Cultural Alignment scale below)

Examples:

Reason	A competitor is providing a better product
Category	Product Research
Importance	Level 2 (Secondary)
Effort	Medium (size 2)
Maturity	25%
Cultural Alignment	+1

The following section provides details on how to rate importance, effort, maturity and cultural alignment

Importance:

- **Level 1 (Core)**
- **Level 2 (Secondary)**
- **Level 3 (Tertiary)**

Importance should be thought of in terms of importance to the successful delivery of your products or services. Things that are secondary or even tertiary (e.g., think of back-office activities) can still be needed in the grand scheme of things.

Importance:

- **Level 1 (Core)** – represents the highest importance. If you stopped working on this area, everyone would notice, and daily operations would be affected greatly.
- **Level 2 (Secondary)** – represents a secondary process that is considered important to daily operations but is not necessarily required to achieve success.
- **Level 3 (Tertiary)** – represents a process that is not considered essential to the success of your daily operations. Few people would notice if you stopped doing it.

Effort:

- **None (size 0)**
- **Small (size 1)**
- **Medium (size 2)**
- **Large (size 3)**

The amount of Effort expended to perform activities is a simple relative measure that should be used to reflect on how resource intensive an activity is in your operations.

Effort:

- **None (size 0)**– represents that there is no time or thought given to this node.
- **Small (size 1)**– representing little effort. Very little time is spent working on or thinking about this node.
- **Medium (size 2)**– representing an average effort. A moderate amount of time is spent working on or thinking about this node.
- **Large (size 3)** – representing a large effort. A significant amount of time is spent working on or thinking about this node

Maturity:

- **0%**
- **25%**
- **50%**
- **75%**
- **100%**

Maturity – This is where we incorporate the good aspects of things like the Crawford Model and CMMI standards. We often find that maturity needs to be managed to a “Goldilocks Zone” where practices are mature enough to valuable but not overly mature to restrict nimbleness. This too is a subjective measure so don’t overthink it.

Maturity:

- **0%** – There is no evidence a process exists for this node.
- **25%** – A process exists but is not well documented and/or followed
- **50%** – A process is in place, documented, and followed with varying levels of adherence and consistency.
- **75%** – A well-documented process exists. In most cases, the process is followed and executed consistently.
- **100%** – Process adherence is universal, and the process outcomes are consistent. The process is well-managed and continually improving.

Cultural Alignment:

- -2
- -1
- 0
- +1
- +2

Cultural alignment, or misalignment, becomes obvious when considered at this level. If the culture perceives value in activities associated with a category, then we consider them well-aligned. Once we understand how well each category aligns, options for making the activities more effective become easily recognizable. Misalignment, or disruption, may require modifying activities so the culture views them as valuable. It may also require modifying the culture so it recognizes the value provided (much more difficult but often needed).

There is also the option to enforce the performance of activities that the organization does not find valuable, but that requires constant expenditure of resources and should only be seen as a short-term strategy.

Cultural Alignment:

How does your organizational culture accept these practices? In terms of operational disruption, ambivalence, or value, how do the people who perform these activities feel about them? This has little to do with how valuable these activities are to you, it's about how they disrupt or bring value to the people who fulfill your products and/or services.

-2 There is significant misalignment to the cultural acceptance of activities resulting conflicting operational objectives and priorities; a great deal of disruption to the organization.

Example: Leadership requires highly detailed reporting, analysis and high levels of predictability, but these activities have no discernable benefit to actually getting the work done by levels below leadership.

-1 Activities are viewed as unproductive by the culture, but are not worth expending energy to correct.

0 Activities are not seen as disruptive or valuable. Whatever is being done, if anything, is accepted as is. Cultural alignment is neutral or the culture is indifferent to the activities.

+1 Activities are viewed as helpful but may be sacrificed to support other operational or organizational needs.

+2 Activities are seen as highly valuable to the organizational culture and to the success of operations.

Example: Activities have a direct and noticeable impact on operational stability, thereby enabling the organizational culture to focus on getting work done with minimal operational disruption, negotiation, or re-planning.

Key Takeaway

In this exercise, you have:

- identified a top issue,
- created a category for operational activities related to it,
- assigned operational attributes to the category in terms of importance, effort, maturity, and
- have considered how well aligned those practices are to your organizational culture.

In all likelihood, you'll recognize that you need to make some changes. You may decide that you need to increase effort in a specific area or may want to push the organization to more mature processes. Even better, you may have recognized some activities are too mature or rigid and you can save some effort by balancing them within your organizational culture.

If you do want to make changes and you are already culturally aligned, how is the culture going to respond to the changes? You could find a sweet spot and enhance cultural alignment with the changes, but if you believe change will cause disruption, you'd better have a plan to deal with it.

You've now worked through considering just one operational area (i.e., category). It was one that we walked you through identifying on your own, so its relevance should be obvious. There is another way to approach this type of operational assessment, but it involves looking at many more aspects of your operations, rather than just one, as you just did in this exercise.

When Think goes into an organization to help with strategic planning, especially for assessing how well a PMO is performing, we often reference a core set of operational categories (we call them nodes in our framework). These include:

- Active Project Management
- Reporting
- Governance
- PM Team Training and Coaching
- Organizational Change Management
- Performance Management
- Methodology
- Planning
- Risk Management
- Resource Management
- Portfolio Management
- Financial Management
- Communication
- Project Change Control
- Project Manager Cultivation
- Configuration Management
- Quality Management
- Vendor Management
- Tools
- Level of Service
- Infrastructure Management
- Project Integration and Control
- Business Analyst Cultivation

Other times, we are more focused on technology, regulatory compliance, business process innovation, or any number of other operational needs. In those cases, we have found that using a different set of nodes is necessary, but that considering the current state of operations through the perspective of importance, effort, maturity and cultural alignment is always valuable. It helps us "see" the current state, prioritize activities to reach a future state, and always keeps one eye on cultural alignment.

To learn more about Think's Operational Effectiveness Model (OEM) and how it may be used to assess your operations, visit our website at <https://www.thinkconsulting.com/white-paper-modernizing-the-pmo-maturity-assessment/>

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



JEFF WELCH, VICE PRESIDENT, CHIEF SERVICE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Jeff Welch is a technical executive, specializing in the use of technology to deploy training, simulations, and performance-enhancing information systems. Jeff is an engineer by trade, an Agile Transformation Coach, and he has worked as a lead Learning Solution Architect for Pearson Performance, Vangent, and later PDRI. His first co-authored book, Bare Knuckled Project Management (BKPM): How to Succeed at Every Project, by Tony Gruebl and Jeff Welch, has more than 15,000 copies in circulation. Jeff is also a co-author of The Red Pill Executive, Morgan James Publishing, 2020, to which this workbook is a companion.

IS MY NEXT PROJECT STRATEGICALLY ALIGNED?

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 2: Strategic Alignment and Executive Alignment.

*Too often, the project succeeds, but it fails against
the bigger mission of the business.
-The Red Pill Executive*

Introduction

When looking at the type of projects you want to take on within the organization, you need to ask yourself what the purpose and result of the project should be. Is your project more internally focused to enhance your existing infrastructure and process so that you can do more things effectively and efficiently? Or is your project more externally focused to bring in revenue or better position the organization within the industry? Internal and external focused projects both need to be strategically aligned, but the questions and criteria being used to evaluate the projects can be very different and it will be up to your organization to figure out which projects take priority.

In this exercise, you'll explore ways on how you can create your own scorecard to help evaluate your project, determine the impact the outcome will have, the risk involved in doing the project, and the cost and effort it will take to accomplish the project. This method will include both objective and subjective criteria to help simplify the process in getting a general sense of the alignment of the project and whether or not your company should take it on without spending too much investigative hours on it. You will need to customize this workbook to best match your organization's mission, strategic plan, and risk thresholds.

Investigating a project can take a long time to do, but if you are able to make high level and accurate examples, it can save a lot of time in determining if you should pursue the project or not. If it looks promising, you can invest more time in the investigation. If not, then you have only lost the minimal time you have put in so far. This scorecard method allows you to make that high-level determination if you should proceed with the project or end it there.

CONSIDER THE PROJECT

1

Is this project needed to meet regulatory requirements?

Yes

No

If the answer is yes, then you must do the project regardless of its strategic alignment. However, continue to see how you can keep efforts strategically aligned.

2

What is the project name?

3

What are the project’s desired outcomes?

Empty yellow box for project outcomes.

4

How will those outcomes be achieved? (Provide a high-level description of how the project will be executed.)

Empty yellow box for project execution description.

CALCULATE COST AND EFFORT LEVEL

5

What is a rough range of staffing hours required to complete the project from start to finish? Circle the appropriate point value.

NOTE: These values are what we find as being typical of mid-market efforts. To adjust the ranges to meet your needs, simply define small medium and large efforts from your organization’s past and build a new scale. Once the measures are scaled to your environment, this exercise will help guide you.

Hours	Hour Point Value
0 - 5	0
51 - 200	25
201 - 800	50
801 - 3200	75
3201+	100

6

What is a rough range of additional costs for the project? (Consider contractors, consultants, equipment, software, training, etc.) Circle the appropriate point value.

NOTE: Adjust the ranges as needed to meet your needs.

Costs	Costs Point Value
\$0 - \$5000	0
\$5000 - \$20,000	25
\$20,000 - \$80,000	50
\$80,000 - \$320,000	75
\$320,000+	100

7

Transfer the point values circled in steps 1 and 2 into the table below and complete the calculation.

Costs & Effort Point Total	
Hours Point Value	from step 5
Costs Point Value	from step 6
Sum Total	

8

Circle the Cost & Effort Level that applies to your project based on the green sum total above.

NOTE: Your value in the Cost & Effort Level column will be used in Step 13.

Point Sum Total	Project Size	Cost Effort
0 - 25	Tiny	Negligent
26 - 50	Small	Low
51 - 100	Medium	High
101 - 150	Large	High
151+	Enterprise	High

CALCULATE IMPACT LEVEL

9

Recalling your company's mission, enter three critical areas of the mission in the table on the left (e.g., key market/target audience, contribution/product or service, distinction, etc.). Enter + (positive), - (Negative), or None to estimate the impact of doing the project on that area of the mission. Complete the calculations in the table on the right to determine Mission Impact.

Critical Mission Area	Project Impact (+, -, None)
1.	
2.	
3.	

(Maximum available points = 30)

# of Positives	X 10 =	
# of Negatives	X -10 =	
Company Mission Sum Total		

10

Recalling your company's **strategic plan**, enter three initiatives that are most critical to the plan in the table on the left. Enter **Positive**, **Negative**, or **None** to best estimate the impact of doing this project on each strategic plan initiative. Complete the calculations in the table on the right to determine **Strategic Plan Impact**.

Strategic Plan Initiative	Project Impact (+, -, None)
1.	
2.	
3.	

(Maximum available points = 30)

# of Positives	X 10 =	
# of Negatives	X -10 =	
Strategic Plan Sum Total		

11

Consider the **administrative effectiveness** associated with this project. Read each statement below and enter **Positive**, **Negative**, or **None** to best estimate the impact of doing this project. Complete the calculations in the table on the right to determine **Admin Effectiveness Impact**. Note: These statements can be edited to fit your organization.

Administrative Impact	Project Impact (+, -, None)
Fulfills a need considered critical and stated by one or more departments or groups	
Improves organizational processes or services	
Transforms the organization in a highly significant way	
Improves organizational communication	
Avoids a major operational breakdown	

(Maximum available points = 50)

# of Positives	X 5 =	
# of Negatives	X -5 =	
Admin Effectiveness Sum Total		

12

Complete the calculations in the tables below to determine the **Project Impact Level** of this project.

Company Mission Total	from step 9
Strategic Plan Total	from step 10
Administrative Effectiveness Total	from step 11
Impact Sum Total	

Impact Sum (Transfer the totals from the prior page.)

Impact Sum Total	from step 12	/ 110 =	%
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Impact Magnitude

(Impact sum total divided by the maximum points available for all three areas.)

Impact Magnitude Percentage	Impact Level
Impact %: 0 - 26%	Low
Impact %: 27 - 100%	High

Project Impact Level

Convert the Impact Magnitude number to a percentage and circle the level of impact for your project using this table.

SUMMARIZE COST & EFFORT AND IMPACT LEVELS

13

Transfer the levels you determined for Cost & Effort and Impact Levels to the table:

- Cost & Effort Level (Step 8) (Negligent, Low, High)
- Impact Level (Step 12) (Low, High)

Section	Level
Project Cost & Effort Level	from step 8
Project Impact Level	from step 12

NOTE: Your values in the Level column will be used in Step 18.

CALCULATE RISK

14

Answer the questions about your solution below to assess the project's technical risk. Note: These statements can be edited to fit your organization.

Technical Risk	Answer (Yes or No)
Is it immature (brand new) or custom (not off the shelf)?	
Is it new, or have we used/implemented a similar solution before? (Yes = new, No = used before)	
Will it require external assistance with implementation?	
Does it require integration with the other systems?	
Does it require significant custom coding?	
Does it require high security measures to be taken?	
Does implementing it require new skill sets?	
Will it be hosted internally?	
Does it require Disaster Recovery set-up?	
Does it require significant network re/design work?	

Technical Risk Total

Enter the number of yes responses from above. Complete the calculation.

(Maximum available points = 50)

# of Yes Responses:	X 5 =	
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15

Circle the option that best answers each question below to assess the project's non-technical risk. Note: These statements can be edited, and answer ranges can be adjusted to fit your organization.

Size of the project team:

Option	Point Value
1 - 5	0
6 -10	5
11 - 15	10
16+	15

Organization level affected:

Option	Point Value
Single department	0
Multiple departments	5
Enterprise-wide	10

Degree to which existing workflow is modified:

Option	Point Value
Low	0
Medium	5
High	10
Severe	15

Level of cultural change required:

Option	Point Value
Low	0
Medium	5
High	10
Severe	15

Deployment schedule required:

Option	Point Value
1 - 6 months	15
7 - 11 months	10
1 year	5
2+ years	0

Complexity of internal political implications:

Option	Point Value
Low	0
Medium	5
High	10
Severe	15

Sum the non-technical risk point values by entering your selections above into the table below.

Non-Technical Risk Total

(Maximum available points = 85)

Team Size Point Value	
Organization Level Point Value	
Workflow Modified Point Value	
Cultural Change Point Value	
Deployment Schedule Point Value	
Political Complexity Point Value	
Sum Total	

16

Complete the calculations below to determine the **full risk level** of this project.

Risk Sum

Technical Risk Total	from step 14
Non-Technical Risk Total	from step 15
Risk Sum Total	

Risk Magnitude

Complete the calculations below. (Risk sum total divided by the maximum points available for both areas.)

Risk Sum Total		/ 135 =	%
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Project Risk Level

Convert the Impact Magnitude number to a percentage and circle the level of impact for your project using the table below.

Risk Magnitude Percentage	Risk Level
Risk Magnitude %: 0 - 24%	Low
Risk Magnitude %: 27 - 100%	High

NOTE: Your value in the Cost & Effort Level column will be used in Step 17.

SUMMARIZE COST & EFFORT AND RISK LEVELS

17

Transfer the levels you determined for Cost & Effort and Impact Levels to the table:

- Cost & Effort Level (Step 8) (Negligent, Low, High)
- Impact Level (Step 16) (Low, High)

Section	Level
Project Cost & Effort Level	from step 8
Project Risk Level	from step 16

NOTE: Your values in the Level column will be used in Step 18.

ANALYZE RESULTS

18

Plot the two sets of summary data on the charts below.

Cost & Effort / Impact

(from step 13)



Cost & Effort / Risk

(from step 17)



Key Takeaway

By the time you have worked through this worksheet, you will have asked yourself critical questions that help you understand your project or initiative. Some will not require such a through understanding and some could require much more.

Becoming intimate with such details is a sure way to begin the ownership development process, whether you decide to perform this analysis yourself or ask a direct report to do it and come back and brief you, the familiarity you develop with it will help you plan and communicate accordingly.

Now that you have this information, how do you use it? Are you going to hand someone a project that is a Nice to Have and Dangerously risky? You absolutely might, but make sure you have also provided commensurate support and top cover. Demonstrate how Red Pill you are and how Red Pill you expect others to be. You may be pressured to start it, but if you know that you may need to kill it quick, you'll be ready for it. Other combinations of quadrants, like Worth it and Manage might provide real opportunities to capture unseen value for the company. Learn to maneuver and make decisions that are always strategically aligned and have considered both opportunities and risks.

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



SCOTT SAX, SENIOR MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT

Scott Sax is a senior level project manager with 14+ years of experience in technology and marketing, specializing in leading and motivating teams, setting team vision, organizing and maintaining schedules, and getting things done. Avid presenter, communicator, project manager, scrum master, creative problem solver, and mentor. Scott is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP), Agile Certified Practitioner (PMI-ACP), Risk Management Professional (PMI-RMP), and Certified Scrum Master (CSM). Scott holds an Executive MBA from Loyola University Maryland, a Bachelor's Degree in English Writing and History from the University of Pittsburgh, and an Associate's Degree in Specialized Technology in Computer Animation from the Art Institute in Philadelphia.

CAPTURE MORE VALUE

To learn more about these concepts, review Chapter 6: The Currency of Effectiveness.

Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things.
- Peter Drucker

Introduction

You've read about how strategic alignment of your efforts is critical to your success. That's easy enough, but how do empower not only your own decision making to capture more value, but also that of your direct reports? The answer isn't difficult, conceptually, but it is tricky to operationalize. Communicating and maintaining focus on why you are undertaking efforts all the way down to why you are expecting certain deliverables from your team is key. When you know you are doing the right things and have a rationale for all of the little decisions that direct how things get done, you enable everyone to work toward your goals in the most effective way possible.

1

Let's start by listing the top 3 strategic goals for your business.

Examples:

- Decrease time-to-market
- Grow market share
- Invest in innovation
- Empower and grow operational teams
- Delegate decision making down the organization

Determining your strategic goals and communicating them clearly across your organization is only step-one to mastering effectiveness. Strategic goals are intentionally high-level and thus present an interesting challenge when it comes to honing your focus.

Once your strategic goals are defined, assess potential initiatives based on the true business value they deliver. Executing to attain business value is a straightforward way to remain in strategic alignment.

2

Now, let's consider one of your highest priority projects or initiatives. Connect the business value it will deliver to one or more of your strategic goals.

Examples:

Name: Migration to Data Lake

Name:

Business Value	Strategic Alignment

Business Value	Strategic Alignment
Enhanced DevOps	Decrease time-to-market
Customer focused product management	Grow market share
Reduced fixed on-prem costs by move to cloud	Invest in Innovation

A keen understanding of “why we’re doing what we’re doing” is essential to remaining in strategic alignment. Each project/initiative should have a clear and logical tie to business value. How do you know what constitutes project success? If you maintain focus on the business value, your portfolio of top projects should be naturally aligned to your strategic goals.

3

Next, select one of your business value areas and describe key deliverables that are needed to make it successful. Then describe how each is strategically aligned.

Business Value:

Deliverable	Alignment Description

This is when we begin to see the value cascading through the levels of your organization.

Strategy → Business Value → Project/Initiative → Deliverables

It's not coincidental that this is also how you grow your operational teams. This is what everyone "rowing in the same direction" looks like in practice.

Examples:

Business Value: Enhanced DevOps

Deliverable	Alignment Description
Workflow and process diagrams	Ensure team understands the multitude of processes and how each contributes overall. Do it correctly, consistently and fast.
Automated testing tool selection and acquisition	Automated functional and regression testing provides fast feedback to development teams and accelerates product releases.
Expert implementation	Contract vendor to enable expert implementation of automated testing.

Key Takeaway

Ok, so we've done the easy-ish part of determining why we're dedicating time and resources to our effort and articulating how the deliverables link to strategic goals. With this alignment, you should begin to recognize new opportunities and be able to adapt toward capturing more business value. Now comes the hard part. The goal is to identify hidden value, while simultaneously avoiding risks. A number of risks will arise during your project and it's important to look at them from different perspectives. Some risks will be obvious and need to be dealt with head on (e.g., a tendency to rebuild our old processes in a new app rather than embrace a new workflow). Another perspective involves opportunity risks. This is where "hidden" business value often lurks. Identifying them requires you to identify the nuances that exist within your operations and the culture of your organization.

Example: Continuing the example from above, the plan was to contract a vendor to enable expert implementation of automated testing. While this may keep the project within the original timeline and budget, you might want to slow down the initiative in order to develop that capability in-house and spread it into other areas of the business. This option may pose additional risk, but it is an option and should be evaluated against the total value that you can deliver to the business.

Risk	Opportunity/Hidden Value
Lack of system or process adoption	Use data generated by operational teams to receive management's buy-in. This will empower the teams and strengthen reporting structures.
Gathering incomplete requirements	Use interviews to uncover opportunities that are only visible to few but could have an important impact. The view is different depending on where you sit.

EXERCISE CREATED BY:



BEN ADRIAN, M.B.A., PROJECT MANAGER & OPERATIONS CONSULTANT

Ben Adrian, Project Manager and Operations Consultant with an MBA focused in Management Information Systems and a BS in Finance. Experience leading projects and driving change management in multiple industries including healthcare, education, broadcast, as well as work in government and non-profit sectors. Ben has a track record of leading major operational and technological initiatives that align organizations for long-term, lasting success.