Did I

KILL IT ?

THE RED PILL EXECUTIVE WORKBOOK

CHAPTER 2

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. This exercise will do very little if you skim over it. 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. This chapter is part of a larger series, you can download the full workbook here: https://www.thinkconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Red-Pill-Full-Workbook.pdf. The work 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. This exercise can and should be used more than once. Assess and reassess over time. Use the completed exercise 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.

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:

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