

## Article

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### A Process not a Product

Every organization has an annual requirement to produce “The Plan”. It goes by different names—corporate plan, long range plan, some just call it the budget. Regardless of its name, it too often shares a couple of things in common with the flu season. First there is the objective of getting through it as unscathed as possible. Second, the fewer people in contact with it, the better the chance of avoiding problems—i.e. infection.

Both of these characteristics miss the opportunity to use the planning process as a vehicle to build capacity and commitment within the organization.

Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great* discusses how the truly great organizations face the brutal facts of their current reality. This requires a culture where the truth is heard. This means discussion and debate. It means reviewing the strategic situation and facing the tough realities. It means undertaking an autopsy from time to time without fear of blame. Finally, it means coalescing around opportunities that may take some risks.

Building the plan without incorporating that kind of dynamic makes the plan irrelevant to the cultural and strategic realities.

That is not to say the plan needs to be crafted through an Athenian democratic assembly, but it should be the final output of a deliberate process that:

- Solicits honest appraisals of performance challenges and opportunities
- Identifies the true competitive strengths and weaknesses of the organization
- Incorporates external intelligence from those employees who are best situated to be “lookouts”
- Establishes outcomes and performance targets that have been discussed, challenged and committed to

Finally, the plan needs to be sufficiently self-evident that work units can easily develop operational plans that are aligned to the organization’s strategic thrusts. That is a lot easier to do if you have been engaged within the planning process, not just the recipient of a final product—The Plan.

