Gap Analysis
A Roadmap to Effective Planning

"If you don't know where you're going, you might end up someplace else." ~Yogi Berra

The oldest known maps date back to 500B.C. and, 2500 years later, maps are still heavily relied upon across the globe (albeit in digital format.) Maps allow a traveler to reach a desired location by determining 2 specific points - their starting location and their destination. By understanding these 2 critical points on the existing *landscape*, the traveler is able to determine all feasible routes available, as well as the distances and known pitfalls of each route, thereby determining the most optimum route for a given set of circumstances with some certainty. This concept can readily be adapted to the realm of business management, whereby the *starting location* is represented by 'where the business is today', the *destination* by 'where the business should be tomorrow', and the gap is quite literally the distance between those two points. Taken together, these fundamental concepts form the basis for Gap Analysis - an effective tool for helping business leaders plan for organizational change.

The Future State.

The "Future State" represents the **desired** conditions and characteristics of the organization, system, or process to be improved. This state is often defined by interviewing key stakeholders to explore, understand, and document requirements. A stakeholder is any person or group who may have a vested interest in a project, such as those who would be directly or indirectly involved in the project, those who may be impacted by a project, and those who may have an impact on a project.

Effectively collecting requirements requires some experience and soft skills to delve beyond the 'what' and determine the 'why' - that is to say, it is imperative to uncover and understand the root underlying motivations behind each stakeholder requirement. For example, a stakeholder who indicates that a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is required may not necessarily need a CRM. With a little probing, the Project Team may uncover that the stakeholder really needs 'an effective means to track applicants through the system.' By understanding this key motivation, the Project Team will be able to better plan improvements by evaluating a range of possible solutions (including the CRM) and determine which solution will best address not only the application tracking requirement, but all requirements.

The Current State.

With a firm understanding of the Future State, the Project Team can turn its attention to understanding and documenting the Current State of affairs as it may pertain to the desired state. The "Current State" refers to the existing state of affairs within the organization, system, or process to be improved and is a necessary component of any improvement initiative. The Current State should be established by interviewing the stakeholder(s) with the most intimate knowledge of the matters being evaluated.

For example, consider the goal of 'effectively tracking applicants through a system'; the Current State might include the current operating procedures, existing problems and challenges, available resources (personnel, technology, connectivity, etc.), training plans, etc.

Gap Analysis.

With these 2 key points established and accepted by the key stakeholders, the Project Team can focus on determining the total disparity ("gap") between those two states - this understanding will be key to effectively planning for organizational change. The resulting analysis will ultimately form the basis for any improvement initiatives to follow.

Using the Gap Analysis.

Reconciliation Planning (Alternatives Analysis)

Once a **Gap Analysis** has been completed, the Project Team can begin brainstorming alternatives, evaluating possible solutions, and selecting strategies to eliminate (or reduce) the gap between Current and Future States. The Project Team should also collect pertinent constraints, such as schedule, budget, and available resources - this information will be utilized to further evaluate identified alternatives and determine the optimal solution, given the circumstances. The selected solutions, once implemented, will drive the organization closer to its stated goals.

Defining a Project Scope

While the project strategies identify *what* the organization wishes to accomplish, the project scope specifies *how* it will go about accomplishing the strategies. The scope will identify all the work that must be completed to implement the change and will allow the project team to determine schedules, budgets, and other key project details.

Executing

Execution is the 'doing' portion of the project and is ultimately *where the rubber meets the road*. Once the project plan has been completed and approved, the Project Team must execute the work per the plan.

Monitoring & Controlling the Project

The Project Team must consistently monitor the project work and ensure that the results are as planned, or if exceptions or variations exist, the project work must be modified so that it will produce the desired results.
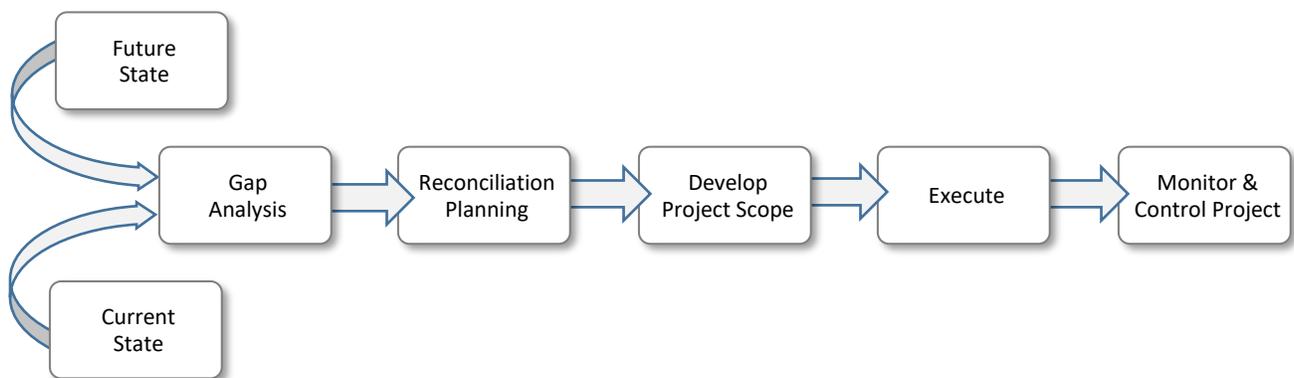
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