Launching Teamnets: Taking Off by Thinking It Through

The most difficult transition that any group makes is the first one:
going from a vague idea to putting it into action. Projects need sufficient momentum, commitment, and critical mass to take off. Many fail because they just can't get up to speed. Let's explore Phase 2: Launch-.---how to get your teamnet off the ground.

On the Wings of a Big Bid

April 24, 1991, is a big day at Digital Equipment Corporation. On that date, McDonnell Douglas chooses Digital as one of two final bidders to become the computer systems integrator for its new commercial jumbo jet, the MD-12. To respond to this highly complex bid, Digital's core team of nine will need to expand to about 50 people—technical experts from across the company representing

several dozen disciplines. To win, Digital has to rapidly create and make operational a team that crosses traditional boundaries.

A few days after Digital's selection as a finalist, the core team meets to plan its next steps in Digital's Irvine, California, facility. Irvine is just a short ride south on Route 405 from Douglas Aircraft's (St. Louis—based McDonnell Douglas's commercial division) Long Beach headquarters. The planning meeting is a "raucous event," according to one participant. With phones ringing, and people coming and going, the group still manages to churn out some of the essentials: a mission statement, a list of broad goals, a "key concepts" graphic, and the invitation list for the second meeting a week later.

The group statement of purpose—to *win the MD-12 bid and prepare Digital to deliver on the* contract—expresses why the group wants to cooperate for mutual benefit.

Two weeks later, the "MD-12 team" now numbers 30. It meets in Irvine again to integrate new people and repeat the process the core group went through. The team reviews the purpose, translates it into a clear set of goals, and begins to assign tasks. Ten days after that, a third planning meeting takes place, this time in Massachusetts, near Digital's home base on the East Coast. This time, 50 people attend, representing engineering, manufacturing, and services. They iterate—go over all the aspects of—the plan again, subdividing into seven distinct "Goal Teams." Each addresses a separate objective, each has its own leader, and each depends on people working together from different functions. Tasks are designed and assigned for each component part of the proposal to Douglas. Each Goal Team competes for management attention, organizational support, and allocation of overall resources, both within the team and with other parts of the corporation.

Digital's MD-12 program fits the criteria of a boundary crossing teamnet:

- ? Purposes cross traditional boundaries.
- ? Members cooperate for mutual benefit.
- ? It and its members have independence.

BEING ASKED TO DANCE

A "close to the customer" salesman brings Digital the MD-12 project. As a longtime vendor to Douglas, he invests in personal relationships and chance encounters at the customer site. Eventually, he detects the early signs of a new program that in time will need a systems integrator. *Systems integrators* tie together the disparate parts of an organization's computer installations. Since most companies have bought their computer systems without much planning, it's a huge market.

Douglas does not list Digital as one of the original companies invited to bid on the program, which includes IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Andersen Consulting, Computer Sciences Corporation, and Electronic Data Systems. Digital wins its spot when a few of its people, including a very senior, experienced executive, participate in Douglas's six-week MD-12 brainstorming session in summer 1990.

During that session, Digital positions itself as understanding the *process* of product development. The building of the MD-12, with its complex partner/investor arrangement—each major "supplier" will invest its portion of the plane, including the engines, the wings, and the fuselage—is less an engineering and manufacturing issue than it is a process one. Digital's central message to Douglas is simple:
"Integrate process and product," which Digital holds to through the down select and its final bid.

Why does Digital make the final bid round, when it doesn't even qualify for the first round? It sponsors a key customer event. In mid-March 1991, Digital facilitates and hosts a three-day meeting for the senior Douglas MD-12 executives in Digital's Irvine facilities. Under preparation for months, and delayed several times, the MD-12 general managers' meeting finally takes place just as Douglas names a new MD-12 program manager. The meeting includes his boss, the vice president charged with new product development. In this ideal, though intense, session, the importance of attention to process demonstrates its power in the team's development. Our role at this event and in the resulting MD-12 project is that of process consultants.

THE THREE-DAY PLANE PLAN

The executive conference room is packed. There are 10 general managers from Douglas and six people from Digital, along with some portable computers, an electronic white board, a poster maker, and numerous dignitaries floating in and out.

With more than 200 years of plane-building experience in the room, the group devotes the first day to establishing its purpose. They agree on a mission statement, strategies, key concepts, and common assumptions. Here, preparation has been critical. For several months prior, a Digital management consultant worked these elements in interviews with the Douglas managers and their staffs. The two weeks before the meeting have been particularly intense and the group experiences considerable success in this part of the process.

During the next day and a half, the group sketches out two plans: one for the next four months, and the other for the next five years. They define phases, list tasks, rough out the logic, and estimate times, some in detail. The Digital team captures all this information in real time, both with traditional notes, flip charts, and copy board, as well as directly into word processing on a portable computer and into other computer modeling tools. The software tools not only capture the data, but process them, too, generating several views, including a schedule.

Because of the fast turnaround time, the group has its first view of the data within hours. It is able to revise its assumptions, enabling participants to see the effects of their changes. In 36 hours, they complete three iterations—run-throughs—of the short- and long-term MD-12 plans. By the end of the third day, the group begins to make key decisions as certain things become obvious even at the coarse level of detail.

This meeting reinforces Digital's message about the importance of process. While demonstrating its capabilities, it also obtains invaluable insight into the program. Significant personal relation-

ships strengthen among people in the two companies, while Douglas benefits from a genuine service.

Six weeks later, Douglas selects Digital as one of two finalists. The other is EDS.

THE THREE-WEEK BID PLAN

Douglas forms technical evaluation teams to review the proposals. It assigns an official liaison person to the Digital team, whom Digital in turn invites to its team planning meetings. Douglas provides security badges and makes offices available to all members of the Digital team; Digital then shifts its base of operations from Irvine to Long Beach. The aircraft company assures access to its people so that Digital can obtain the information it needs to propose solutions and make its bid. It sponsors tours of the MD-1 1 production facilities, its current flagship plane. EDS enjoys the same privileges.

At Digital, a handful of people suddenly find themselves riding atop a very big project, a systems integration bid two orders of magnitude greater than the average business in the area.

One day during the project, an MD-12 team member says, seemingly out of the blue, "One hundred fifty-eight." His partner starts to laugh. We are all standing in the Irvine hallway as a Digital employee from the United Kingdom walks by.

"One hundred fifty-eight?" we say quizzically.

They interrupt each other to explain that they've been keeping track of the number of people involved, and the British fellow who just walked by is the 158th person to be associated with the MD-12 project.

In a few weeks, the Digital team grows from an ad hoc, mostly part-time, group of fewer than 10 to a funded, functioning program of 50, with as many more active at any one time, drawing on and reporting to several hundred more.

To plan its work and get up to speed, Digital uses the same process it used with Douglas. The company holds a series of three

planning meetings over the next several weeks. In these meetings, the Digital team designs the organization that will guide it for the next four months until proposal delivery at the end of August. We call these meetings Work Process Design (WPD) sessions.

The first iteration of the Digital team's own WPD is the raucous two-day event at the beginning of May. By the second WPD session, the group has grown to 30 or so, people who have much of the experience and life cycle diversity (e.g., engineering, manufacturing, and product support) required to develop a comprehensive proposal. The packed conference room looks much like the MD-12 general managers' meeting held just across the hall eight weeks earlier.

Over the next two days, the group clarifies its purpose, defines its goals, and forms "goal teams." Materials developed in the first WPD session seed these tasks, which speeds things up. With attention paid to leaving enough time for "bio breaks," meals, and schmoozing, each goal team brainstorms its lists of tasks, then reconvenes with the other goal teams to knit together the overall logic. In the large group, people identify who will own each task, define cross-functional relationships, and estimate how long each task will take.

With the same simple set of tools used in the March Douglas meeting, the team captures, displays, revises, and redisplays its planning data quickly enough to iterate it twice. People leave with a 30-page handout of their joint work, including a directory of participants, a schedule, and a cross-functional chart of milestones and deliverables.

While the team accomplishes a great deal in a short time, it is still in its very early shake-out period. Clearly, the group needs more time to complete sufficient planning, while the usual politics and power problems erupt. Some gaps open up, and the team realizes it needs to involve other people. In the next few days, the team reforms and heads east for one more two-day planning meeting the following week.

For the third meeting, each team member receives a personalized "MD-12 Program Handbook," containing basic information, key

documents, the WPD results to date, and their names printed on the cover and the spine. Directories, task lists, models, schedules, and the like all have their places in the three-ring binder, designed for updates of more current material.

With some new blood and a chance to absorb the experience of the previous week, the team runs through the process again. The goal teams, which now have formal status in the group, break out tasks by specific deliverables, schedule key meetings, and define where they will have to make major decisions. They work on the task logic, resolving vague and overcomplicated areas. People review their commitments, including the cross-functional ones. They estimate resources and generate rough budgets. The meeting far exceeds most people's expectations and Digital's MD-12 team is launched.

THE THREE-MONTH PLANE PLAN

During the third session, an ad hoc group forms—including people from several goal teams—to look at the whole life cycle of the MD-12 plane-building process. Digital has won down select on its process promise. Now the task is to produce a plausible high-level process view of the plane as a whole. Digital will tie its technology solutions to the work described in that view.

A self-initiated work process design team pulls together the available information and begins the process of synthesizing an initial picture of the MD-12 development life cycle. Three weeks later, Digital invites key Douglas general managers and their staffs to a presentation of its initial findings.

It's the ribbon cutting for Digital's "MD-12 Process Room"—the first of several process rooms at both Douglas and Digital. The oddshaped room (12 by 20 by 15 feet at its largest) contains graphics of the vision, theory, and method of Digital's approach. Information covers the walls, gleaned from the March MD-12 executive meeting, formal briefings, and from responses to recent information

requests. The first draft of the MD-12 Work Process Framework occupies the "power spot" on the wall: it has the phases of the plane along one axis and the functions along the other.

The MD-12 Process Room opening is a success, the most important measure being Douglas's instant willingness to cooperate with Digital to flesh out the Framework and to develop multiple process views.

Within hours, Digital hosts the first of 10 meetings over the next two months with various cross-functional mixtures of Douglas staff. New information replaces obsolete information, blanks get filled in, concepts jell, and new graphics capture the shifts. All this information shows up on the walls of the Process Room, now moved to a Douglas building at Long Beach, with a window overlooking the runway, where MD-us are running their test flights.

As the picture of the MD-12 process stabilizes, the Digital team tests its various solutions against the long-term view of the work required. In numerous technical meetings with Douglas organizations and experts, Digital's view gradually shifts from getting requirements to demonstrating increasingly better solutions. By the time Digital submits its proposal at the end of August, it ties all technology solutions to the required work according to the plane's life cycle framework.

Planning Is Doing

Each of the three scales of planning described in the MD-12 story used a similar methodology—the three-day meeting for 10 people, the series of three meetings for 50 people, and the three-month distributed planning process for a five-year effort. Once you are comfortable using a basic set of planning elements, you can easily scale their application to the situation at hand.

The remainder of this chapter and the next provide you with a methodology and supporting set of tools to apply to your situation, whether small and simple, or large and complex.

INVEST IN BEGINNINGS

Get it right early and often.

Investments in good beginnings reap big rewards in later stages and final outcomes. This big lesson from the corporate trenches translates into a team that jells around a purpose, lays out a sensible plan, and launches itself on a path to success with high expectations.

Planning is hard work. A critical mass of the people involved in carrying out the work must do the planning. Although good templates that incorporate past experience greatly enhance and accelerate a new planning process, planning in absentia does not work. When was the last time you put together a dynamite plan, then handed it over to someone else to carry it out successfully? Planning and doing go hand in hand; it's the reason work process design is so important, and why it works.

Using a river as a metaphor to represent processes, early activities are "upstream." They set parameters and determine big choices. Performance is "downstream," where rework and redesign caused by poor initial planning take effect. Suppliers are upstream; customers are downstream. Value chains of suppliers and customers inside and outside the enterprise are processes within processes. They run downstream from customer to customer.

> *Beware the lure of the downstream fix. It is always cheaper and better to fix*
> *something upstream. The trick is finding the right fix early.*

A rule of thumb in the software industry is that a bug found in the early stages that would cost $1 to fix could cost as much as $1,000 to

fix when found after the product is deployed. Most of today's major business improvement movements emphasize the long-term payoff for early efforts, stressing concepts like the motto "Begin with the end in mind." The goal of good planning is to get the shared mind of the group to see the same end.

"Concurrent engineering" is one of a number of product development approaches that bridge conventional boundaries. It brings downstream players into upstream activities. In reality, this means something quite practical, like inviting manufacturing and service representatives to early engineering design meetings, or inviting customers to new product development brainstorming sessions. Experience indicates that these cross-functional teams produce designs with far fewer changes later for manufacturing and product support. Hence, they yield products that have higher quality, cost less to produce, and reach the market sooner.

CALS is a U.S. Department of Defense initiative similar to concurrent engineering.[1] It puts the quality viewpoint to work for the government as the customer of defense contractors. CALS takes the far downstream activities of logistics and product support as the starting point for requirements. Engineering and manufacturing need to conform to product support requirements, rather than the other way around. Data show that planning for product support reaps great value for the customer, propelling the CALS initiative far beyond the defense market to many of America's biggest businesses. Its benefits are convincing, showing up in such simple things as clutches in cars designed for easy repair without having to dismount the engine to reach them.

MD-12 is an example of a very large, very long life cycle, new product program. Big project or small, plan early and involve all the players. These are the secrets to success. Every moment spent planning is an investment in a streamlined, sensible process.

WHERE JOURNALISM COMES IN HANDY:
THE FIVE QUESTIONS

Sound complicated? It's not. There is a relatively easy way to plan— to develop a work process design. It only requires taking a page from the reporter's notebook. To plan, you first need to understand the story. The first thing every reporter learns is that to get the story, you have to answer the five W's:

> *? Why?*
> *? What?*
> *? When?*
> *? Who?*
> *? Where?*

Good managers intuitively ask themselves these questions in the present and future tense. Why are we doing this? What do we need to do? When will this happen? Who is involved? Where is everyone located?

?Why is the starting point. It expresses the driving need, the mission, the vision of the future that galvanizes the group. It provides the ultimately unifying fabric.

? What transforms purpose into work. It is the specific set of activities people need to accomplish to achieve their goals.

?When takes the discrete activities and turns them into a dynamic process that unfolds over time.

?Who is the team, the network of people and organizations that is going to accomplish the work.

?Where names the locations in which the team and its work reside, bounding the physical universe that must be accommodated.

The key to success is rapid iteration of answers to these questions involving key people in the group. Convene "work process design sessions" to answer the five questions in sequence. Consider face-to-face meetings as expensive, precious resources.[2] The most effective ones are well thought out and well designed. False starts are very costly. Follow up on action items and decisions in meetings. Once initiated, you must nourish your process. Maintain momentum—it's critical.

Honesty and trust are basic values for any successful group. Ask questions. This is an ancient and honorable method of learning the truth. Honesty with oneself and others is a prerequisite to understanding. The five W's make it easy to take the first steps on this path.

THE PROCESS OF DOING THE DESIGN

It takes time and patience to ask and answer basic questions about goals and work. They require gathering information from different people with multiple perspectives. People don't just give out information without some idea of how it will be used. What are the benefits of deriving the information? This situation holds the potential both for creativity and for conflict. Use an orderly process to mitigate the normal problems of planning.

Work process design is a people-intensive process, requiring the right players in the same room at the same time focused on the same task. You can sketch out a high-level rough plan in a morning. You can lay out a somewhat more thorough, though still preliminary, set of detailed plans in a three-day working session. You can support very long, very complex processes of cross-functional collaboration in a three-month project.

Gain the power of WPD from *iteration.* Iteration is to planning what early blocking sessions and rehearsals are to stage performances. They allow you to see the whole and expose the problems while it's still easy to address them. Think about the whole thing. Rethink it early and review it often until the plan stabilizes. Hold a session that corresponds to the level of detail that you need. Ask your group to consider these questions:

Why are we doing this project? What do we know? Where are the obvious holes? What are the downsides? What are the major parts? Whom do we need to involve? When are the key milestones? How much will it cost?

By defining the purpose, you can specify tasks. Defining objectives leads back to purpose. When new people and organizations engage, they inevitably cause the group to loop back and revise the "why" and recut the "what." Time and cost estimates cause a rethinking of goals. And so it goes. These factors are, of course, interrelated, and cannot be determined in isolation. Yet human nature—differences in function, responsibilities, or style—usually leads people to look at one or two factors and miss the dynamic whole. "Don't get blocked by the problems and apparent showstoppers. Go on and come back to them when you know more," says Roy Rezac, director of R&D at Protocol, a division of Zycad Corporation.

The *experience* of iteration in a condensed period of time conveys the power of WPD. By capturing planning in real time and rapidly processing changes, the participants have constant feedback to their ideas. With experience and working with others, you will be able to undertake a highly complex face-to-face WPD for a highly distributed process.

The First Run-through

It's time to begin planning and you have all the players in the room—one way or another. Those who can't be there in person can attend by speaker phone; and for the truly technologically wealthy, by video conference. Essential equipment is all very low-tech: flip charts, overhead projectors, white boards, a telephone, a box of new

markers (perhaps the most scarce resource in any conference room), and a pot of coffee. An electronic white board, at a premium in most companies, is a superb tool for planning if you can commandeer one. Encourage people to bring their laptops and arrange to have a printer available for real-time output. Consider this picture of physical readiness as a metaphor for thinking about what's really important: people going through the process of developing a successful teamnet by addressing some very basic questions.

WHY?

> *?*   *Find the source.*
> *?*   *Express the needs.*
> *?*   *Determine readiness.*
> *?*   *Broadcast benefits.*

Why is the starting point. Ask this question to drive your group's early sporadic process. Pieces of the answer can come from anyone anywhere. It may emerge very slowly. It may seem to appear from many places at once. The information you need is not necessarily in the room. Be creative in gathering information from many unlikely quarters.

Customer needs are a good place to start when asking "why." You may recognize needs inconspicuously from a casual customer comment, or have them burst forth to you in a blinding flash of insight. Customer needs usually lead you to ask another fundamental question, "Who is the customer?" Typically, the "why" question clarifies itself at a face-to-face meeting among a critical number of team members. Use one of numerous organization development techniques to help your group discover its core mission—or to discover that it has none. Use all the materials in the room to express the mission.

Are you making progress toward your explicit purpose? This is the first measure of a group's readiness to undertake real work. Nothing in business gets started and keeps going unless it brings benefits. When people question why they are doing something, they usually are asking, "What's in it for me?" Unless the benefits are large and obvious, most people will not sign up for the frustration involved in trying to get something going. Sometimes negative benefits provoke people to act. The threat of dire consequences if the old ways continue much longer or the crisis of traditional systems collapsing gives birth to many an organizational change.

WHAT?

> *?Scope the work.*
> *?Sketch the system.*
> *?List the tasks.*
> *?Estimate the size.*

The first concrete step in "getting your arms around" the work is to understand the big picture. When you "scope the work," you give it broad definition, outlining the magnitude of the effort—for example, to develop a new product, undertake a joint marketing program with another company, or reorganize the group you're in. It's a struggle in early stages to establish a "bird's-eye view" of the whole, but it's mandatory.

This is when the back-of-the-envelope sketches and the placemats come into play. A group brainstorms what the project is all about. Then everyone goes to lunch. A few people turn over their paper placemats and sketch how the whole thing fits together. They lay out the handful of components and activities required to give shape to the idea. One Cambridge, Massachusetts, restaurant, the Bennett Street Cafe, recognizes the importance of

planning over lunch. Instead of placemats, its tablecloths are pieces of butcher paper, and fat crayons sit on every table next to the salt and pepper.

What, broadly speaking, are the basic tasks? Make a list of what you need to do. Someone goes to the white board, and the group very quickly lists the tasks. Once the list of steps is in front of you, you can begin to see relationships among the tasks.

The last step in this sequence is to estimate the cost of each task. This is not a budgeting exercise at this point. Try to as-certain ballpark figures so that you can understand and communicate the order of magnitude of the effort from a quantitative perspective.

Thy this exercise out with your group, with the goal of merging all the models into a one-page sketch.

WHEN?

> *? Rough out phases.*
> *? Initialize milestones.*
> *? Check givens.*
> *? Think critical.*

In the rich soup of process, it is *time* that forms the stock, the basic substance in which everything else swims. Above all others, the time element demands repeated iteration. Set and revise. Set and revise. A process is nothing without time.

At the beginning of your process, time seems to stretch forever, into the unknown far future. Use the first run-through of "when" to span the whole distance of the development process. With the complete, high-level picture in hand, then you divide long time spans into *phases,* more manageable chunks. In our first full-day planning

meeting for this book, Jim Childs, our editor, went to the white board in the conference room and sketched out the major phases of the book's production, marketing, and sales. When this kind of spontaneous work process design activity gets written down, as it was that day, it becomes a record of the learning and an ongoing management tool.

For teamnets to be successful, this activity is mandatory. The teamnet must chunk its work into explicit phases. Set up a straw set of phases based on the best available current information. This is an excellent way to stimulate further thinking about the whole life cycle of the process.

While chunking out the big phases, also try to set up some initial milestones along the route. Consider periodic reviews, interim products, prototypes, test sites, draft documents, test markets—in short, deliverables, meetings, criteria, and decisions to mark progress toward the goals. Product developers know these milestones as "stable intermediate forms."

Time, in the long sense of "the whole amount of time available for this," often comes with the circumstantial territory: a market window, a budget cycle, quarterly pressures, limited resources, an upcoming trade show. There is rarely enough time. And don't forget the effects of seasons and holidays on the realities of the group doing its work. (Time permeates our whole lives, not just our work lives.)

Time also dictates the order in which to do some work. You need to start some things even before you've fully planned the work or really made your Launch decisions. From the beginning, you already know about some tasks; they sit squarely on the critical path of the project flow. You also know about some long lead items—like real estate, buildings, nailing down known key resources, or critical components. So you need to get started before you're really ready. But beware the fire drill. This reactive mode of project management, which leaps from burning building to smoldering embers, is only crisis management. For prevention and control, you need to take the time to set out the long view.

WHO?

? Spark of life.
? Team types.
? Fluid leadership.
? Strength of weak ties.

A process starts with an idea. Perhaps it crystallizes problems and possibilities that have been simmering for some time. Someone, or someones, give voice to the idea, concept, need, change— whatever—with sufficient emotional impact at the right time and the right place. A "spark plug," someone emotionally committed to an idea who shares it with others, first articulates purpose. Spark plugs and other visionaries see what's possible; they are early leaders. Yet if leadership never moves beyond spark plugs, you have hierarchy rather than a network.

Visionaries, risk takers, communicators, negotiators, and exceptionally well-connected people are all at a premium as part of the early mix. Recruit them. The early stages of any business process require significant right-brain capability to supplement the traditional left-brain strength. This is often why consultants and facilitators have a business in new group formation. They bring some extra intuitive and intrapersonal skills into the early stages.

In a prototeam that is not all situated in the same place, "circuit riders" and other communicators can often be found traveling among the core group. They carry the word from person to person and one cluster to another. Percy Barnevik, the CEO of ABB, with dealings in over 100 countries, travels constantly, so much so that his office is his plane. People like Barnevik provide some of the interim face-to-face glue that every teamnet requires.

Besides initiators, communicators, and consultants, other early

leaders include key supporters, critical representatives of stake-holder groups, and even an important customer or two. At this stage in the process, everyone is still in the rough camaraderie of peers.

Every teamnet has a periphery as well as a core. All the myriad connections to your core team connect at the edges: reporting connections, professional associations, contacts from previous projects, past jobs, and, of course, family and friends. *Nothing is quite so powerful—and so underutilized—as "the strength of weak ties."*[3] This great insight from social network research reveals the boost and amplification you get from connecting at the *edges* of your network. Look for new information, new leads, new viewpoints, and new insights from the people you don't know well rather than just from the ones you do.

WHERE?

> *?*   *Nowhere or somewhere.*
> *?*   *Meeting places.*
> *?*   *Shared data.*
> *?*   *Connection technologies.*

Physical location used to mean everything. Now it means little. The average person can physically travel halfway around the world in 24 hours. A telephone call takes no time at all. A fax takes a minute or two. TV puts us "on the spot, up to the minute." "No sense of place" is the way one writer puts it."

Identifying where the people in your group are and how they can be reached is a key early piece of work. Where does the group meet? Is there any common space? Typically, places where the work occurs belong to members.

An easy, early way to establish the group's sense of place is to gather basic information together and "publish" it as a memo, file folder, presentation, briefing book, or other compilation of diverse material. This is the first edition of your "Teamnet Handbook." Combine *who* and *where* information to create a membership directory.

Phones, faxes, and computer conferencing—which allows people to carry on structured conversations via computer—are good supportive technologies for these efforts. They offer some of the immediacies and contact that help build trust and grease the wheels of interaction. Remember that *where* includes more than traditional mail addresses and physical meeting places, but also electronic addresses of increasing variety and numbers.

Turning Questions Into Answers

Each of the five questions—the five W~—generates an associated set of results—the five T's: targets, tasks, time, team, and territories. Careful tracking of the five T's enables a teamnet to function in an effective, coordinated manner, capturing its learning as it goes.

To initiate a systematic process of designing the work, you must extract "targets" from answers to the "why" question. Targets are tangible results expected by specific dates, such as a prototype up and running by the second quarter. "Tasks" answer "what," like doing a draft of the marketing document. When you attach specific peoples names and organizations to targets and tasks, you designate "teams" answering "who"—Richard and Debra take responsibility for the draft. When you answer "when" with "time"—task durations and dates—you make a schedule, the means of coordinating work, i.e., the draft by the end of the month.

Each of the five W's has its corresponding one of the five T's.

Why	*>*	*Targets*
What	*>*	*Tasks*
When	*>*	*Times*
Who	*>*	*Teams*
Where	*>*	*Territories*

?Targets result from translating *"why,"* the purpose, into specific actionable goals.

?Tasks result from answering *"what"* questions that convert purpose into specific chunks of work.

?Times result from estimating *"when"* questions for task durations, forming a schedule based on task dependencies.

?Teams result from answering *"who"* questions, linking people's names to specific tasks.

?Territories result when *"where"* questions are settled, putting names on common places, physical and electronic.

When you tie tasks to targets, you create clear purpose—the essential glue for teamnets—with a focus on work. Your common set of tasks, then, identifies your common process. By focusing on a cooperatively developed set of tasks, your teamnet can see its work through multiple views of relationships among the tasks. This is a very powerful method, made even more so when you apply computer tools.

A common view of the process is the sine qua non of teamnets. Unless everyone has a common view of the work, the distributed committee does indeed design a camel when it means to design a horse. But don't leap to conclusions. A camel is an excellent result from the design process if your goal is to respond to your customers who need reliable transportation across hot deserts.

The Second Run-through

While the first version of the plan is important, it's the second iteration that usually gets you close to a real working plan. Call a Launch session and go through these steps:

> 1. *Set the targets.*
> 2. *Define the tasks.*
> 3. *Estimate the times.*
> 4. *Select the teams.*
> 5. *Choose the territories.*

T1. SET THE TARGETS

All programs begin with purpose. Based on a vision, an idea, an opportunity, a discovery, a challenge, a crisis—something catalyzes a need and crystallizes into a mission.

   Getting to clear purpose is not trivial. It is often the first test of a new teamnet's survival, and the last test of an old one struggling with change. Fortunately, there are many methods, techniques, and tools available to assist groups. Here's the point:

> *Clarify your purpose until goals and overall milestones can be written down as targets. Tasks gain their parameters, personalities, and credibility from goals.*

Ideally, you can expand a mission statement into an interrelated set of goals that you can pursue in parallel. Each goal needs to have a concrete outcome attached to it, and a time (however rough) by

which it is to be completed. With concrete targets, the qualitative purpose takes on its first quantitative expression.

But setting out targets once is not enough. Purpose remains incomplete unless it communicates easily. A felt sense of shared purpose often precedes any formal purpose statement. Mission statements alone are rarely sufficient vehicles to communicate the "why" of doing the work.

Your group expresses its creativity by coming up with words and visuals that adequately capture your vision. This is an essential part of the process. Pull out the markers, big sheets of paper, tape, scissors, and a copier. One of our favorite slightly higher-tech tools here is a poster maker, which enlarges normal sheets of paper into the size of posters. (It's a tool that lawyers use to produce their visuals for the courtroom.) Graphics and desktop publishing have their places here, too, and multimedia promise even more effective tools.

T2. DEFINE THE TASKS

The next step in Launch is for you to define the tasks. Tasks are "little purposes," micro-missions woven together to achieve an overall macro-mission. Tasks at one level are the breakout of the goals of the level above; they become the purposes of the level below, the nested hierarchical order that gives WPD its small group-to-enterprise scalability.

Although the original transformation of goals into tasks can appear to be magic, it is simply part of the process. Take the first goal and ask, "What do we need to do to make this happen?" Your answer generates a seed set of tasks. Your inevitable incompleteness and overlaps at the start begin to straighten out into a clear picture when you have a sufficient number of tasks on the table.

In this step, you are slicing up the work. *Name the tasks* in mutually understood language. Identify and represent the time sequence *logic of tasks dependencies.* Besides dependencies, task names label a metaphorical folder of characteristics like:

- ? The purposes served;
- ? The people involved;
- ? The duration of the tasks;
- ? The resources needed;
- ? The deliverables; and
- ? The key decision points.

With the capacity to code all this information by task, you have designed the basic conceptual infrastructure for your program management system.

To accomplish simple objectives, you need do little more than write the list of tasks on flip chart or white board, indicate who is going to do them, and when they need to be done. Copy down the list and send it out to all participants and interested parties. For larger, more complex, more distributed projects, you need considerably more than a simple list, but the basic principles are the same. In the MD-12 proposal effort, we used project management tools both for real time capture-process-display and as the longer-term planning medium that tracked tasks, dependencies, schedule, and risks.

T3. ESTIMATE THE TIMES

The next step in Launch is to look at the numbers—both how long it will take and, eventually, how much it will cost. Things become very real with the question of "How much?" How much time, how many people, how much equipment, and how much capital is needed?

Experienced people know approximately how long it takes to do things. Ask them directly for their best guesses. In the thick of a planning session, it is not difficult to get these estimates.

*When you add the estimates to the task
logic, and assign a start date, you can
generate a schedule.*

Compare dates with the desired outcome set in your goals and milestones during the purpose stage of planning. Most groups do not hit the milestones in their first iteration—not by a long shot. The discrepancies between the desired and estimated end dates serve as a powerful motivator for the group to revise the plan. One high-end project tool asks people for normal-best-worst case time estimates and generates a *risk profile,* demonstrating how probable it will be to meet desired milestones based on the estimates.

During the first few iterations, use time as a proxy for all costs. As tasks stabilize, however, you can take a detailed look at real costs in time, people, and other resources. As the project becomes more specific, join time-to-market concerns with the realities of scarce resources to understand total cost considerations. This forces further refinements and iterations to bring all these factors into dynamic, doable alignment.

T4. SELECT THE TEAMS

From a distance, the cross-functional picture of a project looks broad and integrated, well matrixed and beautifully networked across the life cycle. Too often, however, the up-close reality is a hair-raising cacophony of competing interests. Everyone, it seems, needs to be involved in everything.

Not so. Most tasks require only a small, albeit cross-functional subset of the whole network at any one time. The trick is to get the right people together on the right task at the right time.

Design two essential activities that enable this to happen:

1. *Name the organizational functions* required to do the work using mutually understood terms; and
2. *Identify the functional dependencies,* the necessary relationships among the people and groups involved to complete each task.

History, politics, and personalities are facts of life in organizations, large and small. Defining *work—independent of who specifically is going to do it*—is important in early iterations. Attaching names and faces to the required work is easier in later stages as the process formalizes.

For each task, name at least one functional owner—and perhaps more—and involve a cross-functional set of participants. Associate deliverables, decisions, and meetings with tasks. Make each task the responsibility of a specific person or function. Participants range from those involved in the input (suppliers) to the tasks, to those who perform them, to those who receive the output (task customers). This cross-functional planning technique is common practice in Japan, and is only now beginning to be used in the West, most often in total quality efforts.

T5. **CHOOSE THE TERRITORIES**

In traditional organizations, territory is paramount. Guess what? In teamnets, it's the same. One critical element of independence is territory, and teamnet members tend to be quite territorial. Most of the territory important to a teamnet is thus defined by membership. People tend to bring their places with them. Whether country, city, or office, where people are situated is a key, always idiosyncratic, feature of teamnets.

Networks and teams require support. They are not free. The minimal amount of coordination and infrastructure work necessary to maintain a vital process either must be hosted by one of the members, rotated or otherwise shared, or conducted from a place the team calls home.

In the beginning teamnets are almost always hosted by one of the members, often a leader, who provides offices, staff support, a phone number, and access to a copier. At first, work tends to float. As the teamnet and process begin to jell, more permanent solutions appear as part of the overall work plan. When this happens, you know your Teamnet Launch is complete—at least for this round.

The Target Method offers a systematic planning process for small groups and large. For large or otherwise complex situations, some simple tools can augment the method, the subject of the next chapter.