



Facilitate the progress of an **action plan**

The challenge

The great satisfaction often derived from defining a clear and realistic plan of action may easily create the illusion that the job is nearly done! Indeed, many managers naturally get actively involved at this stage of the process, which they consider to be of prime importance, but leave implementation entirely up to their teams. However, many obstacles can cause even the best-laid plans to go astray, as unexpected problems or emergencies arise, as efforts drift off course, as motivation naturally dwindles, etc.

Key managerial roles and action drivers

The leader of a project or team must get actively involved to ensure that the defined action plan progresses in the desired direction and at the desired pace.

Five key managerial roles

- 1 Organize action**
Even if everyone on the team appears to agree on the need to implement desired initiatives, it is not rare to discover that an entire part of the plan has not made progress; the various members of the team assume that someone else is taking care of it. The manager must make sure that this does not happen.
- 2 Maintain a certain degree of pressure**
People may naturally tend to procrastinate on tasks that are less gratifying or more difficult. A certain amount of pressure is consequently needed to keep these tasks moving forward.
- 3 Lift roadblocks**
When the team runs into trouble, the manager can sometimes help find a solution, for example, by bringing in high-level contacts, negotiating for additional resources, making tradeoffs with other projects, providing technical support, etc.
- 4 Clarify priorities**
When unexpected tasks must be integrated into the action plan, when a task takes longer than anticipated or when new priorities emerge, the manager must be careful to help the team redirect its efforts in light of the new context.
- 5 Update the action plan**
An action plan must not be cast in stone; the person responsible for execution must be able to adapt to unexpected events, by rescheduling deadlines, for example, or adjusting expected performance according to what has already been accomplished.

Key action drivers

- ▶ **Clarify responsibilities**
Clearly naming who is in charge of what is the surest way to keep each topic progressing effectively.
- ▶ **Set deadlines**
Establishing a calendar is critical to keep projects from dragging on longer than necessary. For long-term initiatives, setting intermediary objectives is a good way to make people aware of potential delays early on and thus encourage them to take remedial measures in time.
- ▶ **Organize progress reports**
Simply asking people to present their progress at a meeting is surprisingly effective in spurring them into action!
Depending on the context, these progress reports may take the following forms:
 - Feeding data into a scorecard,
 - Face-to-face updates between the manager and each team member,
 - Teleconference with the various stakeholders,
 - Meeting of all those involved.
- ▶ **Measure progress and analyze gaps**
Not only should progress indicators be established for each initiative, but the overall advancement of the action plan must also be assessed (e.g. 60% of the plan has been completed). These measurements are extremely helpful to anticipate potential delays and identify ways to overcome snags or adjust the objectives accordingly.
- ▶ **Decide on needed corrective measures**
An action plan must be managed in such a way that it is possible to revise priorities or objectives which turn out to be unrealistic or unsuited to changes in the situation.