

If implementation management were easy then there would not be so many failed implementations. For a successful process it is important that you operate in a focused, effective manner within a clear conceptual architecture—in other words that you know precisely “Why (vision) do I want to achieve what (goals) how (strategy) and in what manner (concept) and using what procedure (plan)?” In addition to this, as discussed in Chap. 1, a differentiation must be made between the various components in theory and in practice.

There are, in essence, three things which hinder implementation projects or make them impossible:

**1. Time and resources** As a rule implementation projects have fewer resources (employees, money, etc.) at their disposal than they require while the implementation should, at the same time, be achieved as quickly as possible. In order to tackle this long-term conflict you must generate genuine implementation momentum.

**2. Activities instead of results** Since most people— particularly in group processes—operate in a manner which is more activity- than thought-oriented the key focus of implementation projects lies on the input side (activities, plans, etc.). The output, the desired result, in contrast usually quickly drops out of view. It goes without saying that the actions are the preconditions for results. Actions (plans; activities; reports; controlling mechanisms; risk management; quality management systems; processes etc.) are, however, nothing more than the means to an end (result) by which everything and everyone must be measured at all times. Only a self-imposed structure and discipline provide the opportunity to achieve the agreed goal.

**3. Self-interest versus corporate or project goals** Goals, strategies and their implementation always have something to do with change. “Yes, obviously!” you will say. So why do we sometimes behave as if the thing itself were the sole focus of interest, ignoring the organizational and thus very personal changes required for it? Because the greater the change in the thing, the less, paradoxically, implementation is concerned the thing but rather with the participants’ self-interest and corresponding emotions. This third dilemma is the most difficult and, fatally, is the one which

is addressed and managed the least systematically, whereby it can only be tackled by means of a well-thought-out, consistently applied implementation policy.

In the next section I would like to consider these three dilemmas in more detail with you and show ways in which they can be successfully managed in situations in which they cannot, because inherent to the system, be avoided completely.

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## **2.1 Implementation Momentum—Between Frustration and Flow**

Strategies and changes must always be implemented and managed parallel to operational business. As a matter of principle an organization is, for a start, focused on carrying out its standard processes like a well-oiled machine by means of its activities in the operational business. The better lubricated the organization is, the more professional and efficient and, as a rule, profitable and successful it is. Professionalism only originates through practice and deep in the DNA of the defined processes and opinions. This means two things—firstly, the employees are not generally bored and do not yearn for additional projects to implement strategies or changes. Secondly, the organization does not have a lot of practice in thinking about its well-worn paths, much less in carving out new ones or even changing the corresponding traffic rules. The resources and time dilemma is thus simultaneously a problem of mindsets and attitudes.

In companies which are inexperienced at dealing with change the task of reorganization is faced with extremely limited if not exhausted resources. Since, however, the shelf life of strategies and changes is already decreasing fundamentally, and the latter must, as a result, be ever more intensive and also faster, such organizations will increasingly find themselves in difficulty. The old corporate motto “If things are going well I concentrate on the operational business; if things are going badly I tighten my belt two notches and slowly start to think about how to keep the show on the road” is obsolete and no longer functions. Organizations must master both their operational business as well as also their further development or change simultaneously. There is no alternative. Clients of mine who have completed this process more frequently are now also more well-versed in it, i.e. faster and successful.

Because it is hard enough to accomplish operational business and strategy implementation at the same time it is even more important that the time and resources dilemma is met head on and from the very outset. In order to avoid investing an unnecessary amount of time and resources in things which have nothing to do with the result it is essential to create a basis for genuine implementation momentum. What is concealed behind implementation momentum? You will also have already experienced implementation projects which were uncomplicated. All the participants worked hard and were focused; the things which were developed interlocked; there was little friction and despite the enormous efforts which were undertaken almost all the participants experienced the entire process as not even having been strenuous.

The outcome was a really good result and people meeting in the corridors still say to each other “That was a great project!”

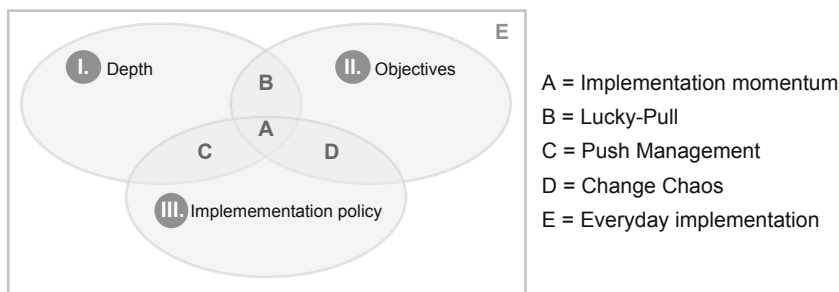
The element which carries these projects is something I call implementation flow. “Flow” conjures up the image of relaxing; feeling good and having fun. Do implementation projects have to be fun to be successful? No, absolutely no. What we’re talking about here is achieving an implementation process status which psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2007) describes as “flow”. Originally used in the context of high risk sports it is generally used to describe a status facilitating total immersion in a task, a kind of ‘task high’ during which highly focused work to achieve a prescribed goal takes place. Be it individually or in a team—feelings, desire and thoughts are focused on a goal in such perfect harmony that “effortless” but simultaneously absolutely purposeful action becomes possible. The object in this context is not subjective pleasure in things but rather an oblivious immersion in them while remaining highly concentrated and aware. In order to achieve this state of “flow” a procedure is required which provides continuous positive feedback and avoids any and all forms of unnecessary stress and “anti-flow”. In addition to the actual event this flow must be at the heart of implementation management. In my experience this saves around one third of the effort and a high degree of unnecessary stress, no matter whether the matter concerned is strategy implementation, “change” or a project.

The decisive question in this context is “What makes the difference between frustration and flow?” Is it the goal? Is it the team? Does it have to do with top management? Is it dependent on time and resources? Is the pressure decisive? Or is it simply a matter of luck or coincidence? What I can, with certainty, tell you is that debates and generalizations will not move you forward. There are no best practices or standards on offer guaranteeing you implementation flow either. Rathermore it is your own competence; experience and self-confidence which are required at this stage. In addition to the precondition that you put more courage and trust in your own understanding and your team’s skills I have, on the basis of wide-ranging experience of flow and also frequently of its opposite, anti-flow, I have been able to identify three principles which are key to successful implementation momentum:

1. Conceptual depth—think things through in sufficient depth
2. Objectives—focus on the result using attractive, clear visions
3. Implementation policy—Do not leave policy and emotions to chance

Very few implementation projects systematically devote themselves to these three principles. On the contrary—the majority, I call them “everyday implementation projects” (cf. Fig. 2.1), do not really take any of these principles into consideration.

In practice there is generally a mixture of depth and implementation policy which leads to a form of “push management” (Type C) within the scope of which more or less successful but not really sustainable implementation is achieved by means of corresponding, consistently employed programme or project steering and controlling mechanisms (pressure). Some of the most difficult implementation projects are those which remain stuck in a “change chaos” mode (Type D). This means working with a relatively motivated team which, based on a well-thought-out implementation policy, may even be very active but—because without conceptual depth—achieves little. You



**Fig. 2.1** The three key factors for implementation momentum

will only experience genuine momentum if you are to bring the above mentioned three principles together.

**1st Principle: Conceptual Depth—Think Things Through** Prevailing uncertainty is usually the reason why there is no implementation flow. This uncertainty can originate for two reasons: It is not really clear to the participants what exactly the strategy or the change aspired to should achieve. Or while the participants may have understood the strategy, the divisional heads; sub-project managers; departmental heads; etc. lack the detailed knowledge about what they must do or while they may have this knowledge for their area it does not match that of the others—i.e. the interpretations are too different.

Before planning and action can begin on the basis of a goal or strategy a well-grounded implementation concept will be required. This implementation concept portrays in a coherent, compact manner how the organization as a whole or the relevant divisions affected by the implementation project will function and be inter-linked in future. The basis for true implementation momentum is thus a short but very intense phase during careful thought goes into what is intended for the individual process phases. Which interpretations and deductions are the correct ones? And how can you tell that you have really understood each other correctly? Within the scope of this process of formulation it is essential to work consistently from the end, from the result backwards. In most cases one individual has a very clear image of this result or it develops within the scope of discussions in a very small group which never consists of more than five to seven members.

The procedure in companies is usually different. Communication of the strategy by top management to operational management takes place within the framework of a kick-off meeting to get to grips with the business cases and implementation and mid-term planning based on the strategy; to discuss interim implementation goals; to define programme steering and to agree milestones. As soon as the individual projects have been defined things get started. Every sub-project has its goals and milestones and is ready to focus its activities on them. Everything is reported to the programme management. However in the process something occurs which is absolutely typical for such a project procedure. Over the course of time the projects increasingly have

less to do with each other! They diverge ever more widely from one another; are increasingly viewed in isolation; are no longer interlinked and usually no longer even synchronized. The actual goal, the implementation of the strategy, disappears more and more out of focus. The programme degenerates into what is purely an efficiency enhancement measure. The cause of this is the fact that course has already been falsely charted at the kick-off meeting since the latter was exclusively “how” oriented. Instead of clarifying the “How are we going to do it?” immediately after the strategy and thus expending a much greater effort in terms of time and resources than required, what the implementation team actually needed in advance was a consistent “what” orientation. The key factor for efficient implementation is depth and this presupposes that you think and work consistently backwards from the result. And in detail.

**2nd Principle: Objectives—Work Towards the Result Quickly and in a Focused Manner** It is true that the conceptual basis, the required depth, provides security and clarity, thus creating the basis for productive implementation. However, because an implementation concept in the truest sense of the word is logical it also prevents implementation momentum from being generated. Logic gets people to think, however it is emotions which provide the required impulses for action. Really good implementation projects always have a powerful element. In other words, there is a clear vision of what should be achieved. And not on the rational or logical level but rather on the emotional level. The team is on fire for the project. It wants to achieve the results.

A high performance implementation project is only achieved if an emotional driving force is “grafted onto” the logic. There must, however, always be a conceptual substructure because otherwise you will create something which, as mentioned above, I call “change chaos”. Actively provide emotionally charged objectives, “films of the future”—overall, for every division, for every sub-project or every department. The key individuals in your team must be able to recognise what the result will look like; what it will, metaphorically speaking, feel like; what will be different and what new. The Head of Sales must be able to see and feel what the abstract description of the new customer orientation means for himself and his division. Synchronised with the head of sales’ vision the IT manager sees how what is described in the concepts will be filled with life in the future (in 2 years) and the Customer Services Director’s film of the future fits coherently into this overall image. This does not happen by itself—you must actively take charge of the generation of these images, these films of the future. If, for example, the Head of Sales describes how in the future he will use his iPad to configure plant equipment when visiting a customer and also follow this up by “adding on” the corresponding service package in order to be able to make an immediate price calculation this will provide the IT manager with a completely different image than if the two of them embarked on a theoretical comparison of the sales and IT strategy.

Two challenges must be mastered when developing films of the future:

- Every individual with responsibility needs a clear and authentic film of the future specifically tailored to him for his division, his sub-project within the scope

of the implementation project. This necessitates systematic alignment of the participants' self-interest with the overall implementation project.

- The relevant film of the future, the relevant image of the future must fit into the individual with responsibility's conceptual distance. The average range of thought within the scope of which humans can anticipate visions of the future for intrinsic motivation is, in my experience, 6–9 months. Very few people are able to work with images of the future which are further in the future than this. The difficulty and thus also the art is that you have to help your people to create the films of the future which are right for them, i.e. which lie on pleasant conceptual horizon, and to implant them. Even better, you assist them in generating these visions themselves.

I have experienced two types of managers who successfully use objectives within the scope of their implementation projects—those who have a gift, a natural intuition, for providing their managers and teams with the right inspiration at exactly the right conceptual distance, thus creating the required basis for implementation momentum, and the majority, who have to follow this principle systematically. Steve Jobs, for example, had a natural talent or a knack of providing his managers and teams with the right inspiration at exactly the right conceptual distance, thus creating the required basis for implementation momentum.

**3rd Principle: Implementation Policy—Do not Leave Policy and Emotions to Chance** Let's turn to the last of the three aspects, implementation policy. Even if you have created the required depth using good implementation concepts and have used the right goal images to place the proverbial carrots at the correct distance, you may, in doubt, still only experience an everyday implementation project. Because the diverse ranges of interests of the individual participants; the contradictions; latent needling and, in some cases, destructive currents within a project can cause its progress to stall time and again. If you want to systematically induce implementation flow, a systematic implementation policy, whether consciously or unconsciously pursued, is also required in addition to conceptual depth and goal images (cf. in detail in Chap. 6).

Learn to pursue a systematic implementation policy. What is meant by this? The combination of Niccolò Machiavelli's definition (ca. 1515)—“Policy is the sum of the means required to acquire power; to remain in power and to make the best use of power”—and that of Arnold Bergstraesser (1961)—“We understand policy to be the art of organizing and putting into effect the leadership of human groups”—expresses exactly what good implementation policy is all about. Parallel to this I would also like to consciously distance myself from the term “change management”, which is used in an inflationary manner, since I more often encounter it in the form of an end in itself rather than as an effective means to implement strategies and changes.

People have their own interests and goals and that is a good thing. What is required is that they know and understand them. In addition to these goals and interests you should also be sure to systematically gain clarity concerning the participants' abilities and weaknesses as well as also their interrelationships. Because you want to conduct the orchestra consciously, not “by accident”. Whether you are able to succeed

intuitively in this or you employ specific conceptual and structural instruments for this purpose (interest diagrams, political maps, sociograms, etc.) and think implementation through like a chess game is a question of style and your own competences. I myself cannot work intuitively, but instead have to proceed systematically, which, in the case of large projects, makes it easier for me to consider and coordinate implementation policy with the key bodies. What counts is that you think about the issue; make decisions and structure your implementation management in a correspondingly proactive manner. It could thus, for example, become clear to you within the scope of your implementation policy that one of the players must be sent off the pitch because implementation will otherwise never be truly successful. You will, however, only be able to successfully accomplish this if you are able to convince two members of the board of the necessity of the measure vis-à-vis the board's interests. Or you establish that it would be intelligent to designate the Regional Director North as programme manager because of his excellent network of relationships even though he does not have the technical competences of the candidate actually envisaged for the role. This can mean that you have to have a clear vision of your implementation policy in your head, like Steve Balmer (Microsoft), and that, as a consistent leader, you have to push it through correspondingly. Or you decide to systematically think through and write down the relevant aspects, making decisions within a small group. Or you feel more comfortable developing the implementation policy collaboratively in a team, like Götz Werner (founder of the dm health and beauty store chain), also adapting yourself during the process. There is, in this context, no single correct path; everything revolves around your style and system of values and that you consider and actively manage this third and last principle.

**Implementation Insight No. 5**

In order to overcome the existing conflict between on the one hand the lack of resources and, on the other, the pressure to execute the project quickly a genuine implementation momentum must be generated by formulating a well-grounded implementation concept (conceptual depth); by providing emotionally charged objectives with regard to the result (objectives) and following a systematic procedure to ensure that policy and emotions are not left to chance (implementation policy).

The following chapters discuss the above-mentioned three key factors to achieve implementation flow in more detail. Even though the majority of this book is concerned with exactly how implementation flow can be created there is, however, no guarantee that this will be successful. As a rule of thumb I would say that 50 % of the success of implementation projects and the generation of implementation momentum depends on the zeal and passion for leadership of a handful of key players. Because, in addition to all the methodology, technique and tactics, the passion and inner conviction of just a few managers can prove to be of crucial significance. They

must be absolutely convinced of the goal and be fired up for it, not just seeing it as a task which must be completed. If you lack these genuine leaders then change the setting or, better still, do not even embark on the process in the first place.

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## 2.2 On an Inappropriate Understanding of Planning and Monitoring

The firm conviction that the planned implementation result can be achieved by means of precisely defining activities, milestones and project plans can easily lead to the second implementation dilemma—focusing on activities instead of results. I myself also get sucked into this undercurrent time and again. You must constantly be on your guard against this input/activities and planning orientation since it is easy to fall prey to it. This is best achieved by means of disciplined, systematic consideration of results.

When projects are planned in great detail and with great precision at the outset, all too often the consequence is that things become more complicated and the process unfolds more frustratingly than necessary. Our fear of dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity generates a pronounced planning attitude; we try to break topics down until we arrive at individual activities and believe that we know exactly what will happen how and exactly how we must handle it. This supposed process certainty makes implementation projects far more complex than necessary and, at the end, we discover that (a) everything turned out differently and (b) to how we expected. Chaos is the result and we spend all our time managing some kind or other of plans and reports which serve no purpose towards the goal itself. We lose sight of the result because of all these planning and control activities.

There are four specific risks in connection with this input orientation

1. Unnecessary complexity

Planning and controlling a whole host of things requires time, resources and processes and a lot of input to make the planning “resilient”. The frequent corresponding time and effort this involves, in particular also due to the coordination of individual resources and actors, results in unnecessary complexity.

2. Defocusing

The effort outlined above places planning in the focus, not the result. The consequence is that the organization focuses on these plans; spends time studying them and, as paradox as it may sound, gives them precedence over the actual goal.

3. Justification politics

Everyone views what has been discussed and planned as the rules—logically this also applies to any monitoring. This means that instead of focusing resources on what has to be achieved a lot of time is invested in clarifying why you are not on schedule. Your focus should, however, be on the future and the goal and the expected results.



#### 4. Unnecessary activities

Plans which have once been well-thought-out are no longer questioned, dictating the orientation. The result is often the pursuit of activities and milestones which are not really relevant. Because, however, this is what was planned this is what is done; the plan is above all else—a strange development which, however, I experience frequently.

The logical consequence arising from the risks above is that you should always focus solely on the result, consistently basing your planning on the short term, in other words not operating too far into the future. You can, and probably must, tackle the resulting uncertainty which you may, under certain circumstances, generate among stakeholders by means of consistency and a methodical approach (cf. Chap. 7.3).

The corresponding current activities and projects must be reviewed regularly with regard to the result to be achieved. Put another way—you must examine whether they are serving to get closer to the result, i.e. if you are operating successfully or not. Ask yourself how you establish that, and whether, your implementation project is really bringing you closer to your goal. You will certainly not clarify this by ticking off some kind or other of activities or milestones on a to-do list but instead will specify results which must be achieved. (cf. Chap. 4).

#### **Implementation Insight No. 6**

Don't fall prey to the input gremlin by launching yourself into your implementation project, focusing on details and activities, thus losing sight of the result you are striving to achieve. Instead allow the output angel more space and power, thus ensuring highly productive implementation management by stringently thinking through your actions from the end backwards and making the correct decision whenever the question comes up "What must I do to achieve a specific result?".

At a mechanical engineering company a large group met regularly, sometimes also at irregular intervals, to discuss the next activities within the scope of the "Neuland" (New Territory) programme. At the end these meetings were characterized solely by discussions about details. Topics included, for example, whether the type of process modelling used in the Service department corresponded to process standards; how the partner model for foreign business (a marginal issue!) could be developed; which regulations had to be complied with in corporate governance; who bore responsibility in specific roles; etc. Discussions were always heated and the actual reason behind the entire programme was totally forgotten! To tackle this I defined five questions which every project manager was required to go through consistently every week:

1. Am I taking the simplest, fastest route to the result?
2. Does what I am currently doing really make sense or it just input?
3. Which project meetings really bring me closer to my implementation success and which ones can I cancel?
4. Is the effort I am putting into project documents really required?
5. Will the method I would like to use really help me to achieve the result?

In this way all the participants learned to think through their all actions from the end backwards and make the correct decision whenever the question came up “What must I do to achieve a specific result?” Little by little a consistent “output philosophy” was established.

### 2.3 Brakes on Change—The Spirit Is Willing But . . .

We all have our own, different interests and goals which, it goes without saying, are not always the same as the interests and goals of the others. Such opposing interests are often what thwart the implementation of strategies and changes. A popular countermeasure to combat this is the change management ‘battering ram’, which, however, does not really have any significant impact. Countering existing resistance with coaching; team-building or change measures of any other kind does not do much to change the divergent fundamental interests of the individuals concerned.

I experienced this dilemma within the scope of the strategy implementation project of a multi-industry group with numerous member companies. The project was, among other things, concerned with realizing systematic synergy effects among the group’s companies. For 20 years the managing directors of the member companies had concentrated solely on their own company’s best interests. The objective of the new strategy was to bring the member companies closer to the group and thus also to one another. However, the implementation of this strategy was not making any real progress.

In the beginning I was surprised that there was no acceptance for the project and that it had stalled. From my point of view the strategy was undoubtedly advantageous for the member companies since there was certainly no shortage of genuine synergy effects, not just nebulous cost reductions, which would benefit the member companies and, in addition to this, would facilitate an improved transfer of know-how. There was also an authentic management commitment on the part of the central management board members, meaning that the majority of the measures would be centrally financed.

That this, put positively, would sow the seeds of mistrust was only apparent to me later when I became aware of the company’s history and its previous leadership and steering. I recognised that I had not paid the attention required to the true individual interests which were also further reinforced by the management system, which had not undergone change. The “member company princes” were too concerned with not rocking the boat; not endangering their own results and also, from mere habit, not letting go of the status quo even if interlinking with the other divisions, supported by logical arguments, already made sense purely in terms of self-interest and they were committed to achieving it. So it was perfectly natural that they continued to try to exploit the interests of their own company (“principality”) to the maximum and were not prepared to simply give up their own power. These fundamental interests are not, per se, bad and do not mean that the individuals are against the company or that the change or implementation could not be carried out.

After this became clear to me I confronted the interests of the individual managing directors and their worries, fears and goals decisively together with two members of the central management board, searching for, and finding, ways to identify the right intersection of interests. In order to lead the implementation project to long term success we eventually had to slow down the process and also to change the structure of the management bodies within the overall group dealing with decisive courses for the future so that the managing directors of the member companies were correspondingly represented and continued to have the feeling that they were equipped with the, from their point of view, necessary levers.



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