

# The Agilist

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*The Agilist* mission is to help individuals & organisations sense & respond to a rapidly changing world.

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## **Storytelling - A Product Manager's Secret Weapon**

*by Jeff Gothelf*

[jeffgothelf.com](http://jeffgothelf.com)

Read most books, articles, blog posts or listen to a podcast about product management and the focus will almost always be on process (Lean! Agile! Design thinking!), methods (OKR! JTBD! ICE!) or deliverables (Roadmaps! Requirements! Backlogs!). These elements of product management are valuable and knowing what they are, when to use them and when to avoid them is a key part of being a successful product manager. Yet, none of these elements have any value if they don't reach a receptive audience in a compelling way.

## **Product Managers have no authority**

Martin Eriksson<sup>1</sup> (along with many other product management leaders<sup>2</sup>) made it clear<sup>3</sup> that most product managers, unless they're also founders, don't have much authority. They're not the CEO's of the product much less anything else. In fact, the biggest challenge to becoming a successful product manager is to influence – your team, leadership, customers – without any authority at all. Even the best combination of process, methods and deliverables falls flat if no one is paying attention (did that tree make a sound in the woods after all?).

## **Storytelling is the product manager's secret weapon**

The key to successful product management? Storytelling. I would go as far as saying that product management is 80% storytelling with the other 20% going to execution. I would go even further and say that every deliverable a product manager creates is a storytelling opportunity.

Every problem statement, competitive analysis, market sizing exercise, OKR and even user stories, hypotheses and (yep) JIRA tickets are storytelling opportunities. They must be compelling. They need to take the reader on a journey in a way that is

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<sup>1</sup> [martineriksson.com](http://martineriksson.com)

<sup>2</sup> [bit.ly/3uk4LtW](http://bit.ly/3uk4LtW)

<sup>3</sup> [bit.ly/33QXHHL](http://bit.ly/33QXHHL)

meaningful to them. It has to make them want to care about your idea.

Let me give you an example. Let's say you're in charge of the authentication flow for your product. You've noticed recently that login failures are spiking. You head into iteration planning with your team and hand them the following user story:

*As a user of our product*

*I want to log in*

*So that I can use the system*

Arguably your team will agree that this is an issue, discuss various ways to solve this and place it in the backlog based on a subjective scale of importance and priority.

Now, consider this alternative:

*Authentication failures have **increased by 73%** in the last 6 months. This has **reduced active users in the product by 52%** on a daily basis which **costs the company close to \$1MM** per day.*

*From customer interviews and analytics reports we know that **90% of authentication dropoff happens at the password field**. If we can **reduce this to 10%** we get close to **\$800k** of that daily revenue back.*

*We are considering solving this by **removing the password field completely** and texting/emailing users one time passwords each time they sign in. Our early low-fidelity prototyping of this idea returned nearly 100% success rates.*

What's the difference between these two stories? Which one do you believe

more? Which one do you care about more? Which one do you want to work on? Which one do you want to fund? Why?

The secret lies in **specific** storytelling. The first version simply says "we need to fix this." The second version paints a much more specific and compelling picture with only a few more words. "We have this problem. This is the impact it's having on the business. If we fix it, here's the benefit."

### Who reads your stories?

As with any creative exercise, it is critical to explicitly determine who your target audience is for each of your stories. This helps you determine what information to include, what to exclude and how detailed the story should be. For the product development team the story should include more specific and likely technical details. For an executive, the story should focus more on the impact your work will have on the area of the business they care about. Understanding what your audience is trying to get from your stories increases the influence you have with that audience. Don't know what they want to hear? Here's a tip: ask them for feedback on the last thing they read from you. Iterate, then ask them again.

### What makes a story compelling?

One of my favorite descriptions of storytelling comes from this TED talk from Andrew Stanton<sup>4</sup>. Stanton breaks down storytelling into its core components – situation, complication, solution – while telling one of the best jokes I've ever heard (warning: joke is rated R).

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<sup>4</sup> [bit.ly/3HgtHX3](http://bit.ly/3HgtHX3)

Your stories won't always be compelling. You have to learn how to write and tell them. This is design and it gets better with iteration. In this short video from Pete Docter from Pixar<sup>5</sup> he shares how even their stories don't always resonate right out of the gate and that, often, injecting your own personal experiences makes the story much more relatable. (The whole Pixar In A Box video course<sup>6</sup> is amazing.)

Just like you would discuss with your team what outcome you'd want to see if your product was successful, ask the same question about your story. What outcome would you expect if your story found its target audience in a compelling way? How will their behavior change? If you don't see that change when they read your deliverables ask them how they might be improved and iterate your story next time around.

### Your first test, do you believe it?

As you begin to rewrite your product management deliverables in a more compelling way the first test of efficacy is yourself. Do you believe what you just wrote? Does it inspire and motivate you to take action? Does it paint a clear picture of what you're trying to achieve? If the answer is yes, ship it. If the answer is no, go back and edit. If you can't convince yourself with your story you'll never influence somebody else in the organization.

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<sup>5</sup> [bit.ly/3giPCkE](https://bit.ly/3giPCkE)

<sup>6</sup> [khanacademy.org/computing/pixar](https://khanacademy.org/computing/pixar)

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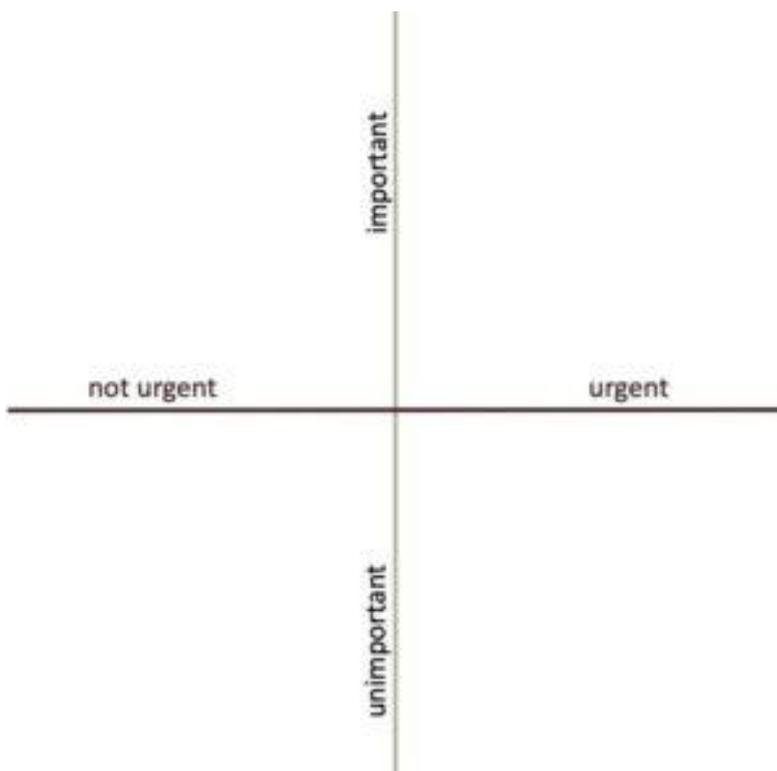


# The Eisenhower Matrix – Redimensioned

by Bernhard Sterchi

[palladio.net](http://palladio.net)

The Eisenhower Matrix is a well-known instrument of prioritization. You divide your tasks according to two criteria: urgent and important. Urgent means if you don't do it, something bad will happen. For example, paying your electricity bill is urgent, because otherwise you are without power. Since the bad thing usually depends on a timeline, time works against you in this dimension. Important means if you do it, something good – a benefit – will ensue. Taking a training is important, because then you have a new skill. If you take these two criteria to be the x



and y axis, you get a two-by-two matrix.

Out of these four quadrants you can draw specific conclusions:

If it is neither urgent nor important, dump it.

If it is urgent and important, do it now.

If it is urgent but not important – can you delegate it? Can you do it for now but make sure in the future you don't have to do it anymore?

If it is important but not urgent, plan it so you can defend your time against the onslaught of urgent, but unimportant things.

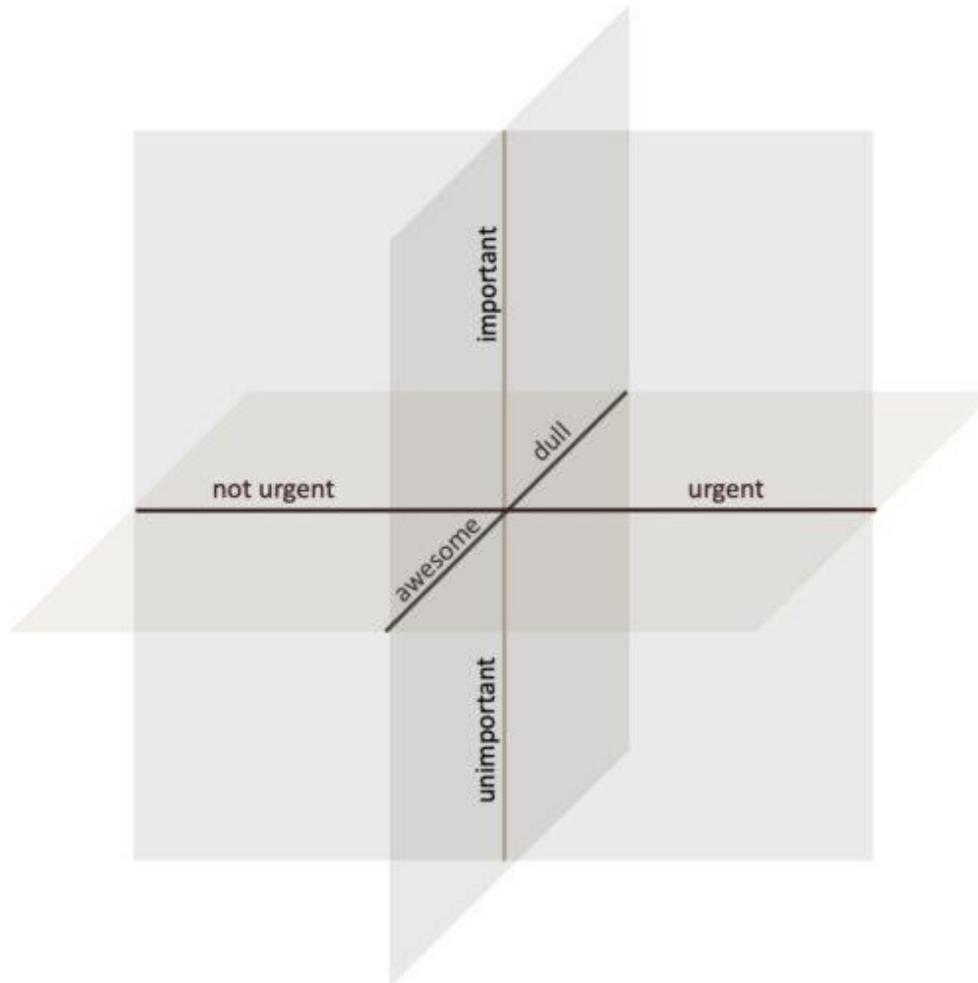
Looking at this matrix, we can ask ourselves a meta-level question: In order to improve our work method in the long term, what should we change? Our best try is to make sure we have less things urgent and important, and more things important but not urgent.

This way we make sure to be the master of our time more often, instead of being pushed by deadlines.

So far so good.

But my MESG friend Markus Orengo has pointed out that the Eisenhower matrix, while depicting how we should be deciding in an ideal world, lacks an essential third dimension that takes effect in reality: awesomeness. A task can be awesome or it can be dull.

That gives us a three-dimensional cube.



The reality is that most of us, consciously or unconsciously, change our attitude towards tasks according to this third dimension. It may not be what employers hope for, but awesomeness is an important criterion with which we decide how to dedicate our time.

So now we can do the same exercise as before, and see how it looks different.

If a task is dull, unimportant and not urgent, we dump it with a feeling of superiority. Stupid task!

If a task is dull, important but not urgent, we procrastinate.

If a task is dull, important and urgent, we grudgingly do it. Argh!

If a task is dull, unimportant and urgent, we shout at it and either angrily do it, or “forget” to do it with an air of defiance.

If a task is awesome, important and urgent, we feel we are doing meaningful work, perfectly motivated – a flow experience.

If a task is awesome, important but not urgent, we pull it anyway and convince ourselves we are masters of our own agenda.

If a task is awesome, unimportant but urgent, we slave away happily – we can’t do anything about it, can we?

If a task is awesome, unimportant and not urgent, we do it anyway with a nagging bad conscience.

Now here's where we should ask ourselves the meta-level question, just as we did in the two-dimensional version of the matrix: In order to improve our work method in the long term, what should we do about some of these boxes?

What is your take?

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## In Change, Beware Conflating Uncertainty with Risk

*“Uncertainty” and “risk” are not interchangeable. Amid change, organizations hazard losing time and returns to their competitors if they obsess over what's to lose versus what's possible*

*by NOBL.io*

As the world has become more connected, it has also become more uncertain.

Increased interdependence means not only that actions can have wider impacts (see the U.S. housing market collapse that brought down the global economy), but also that those impacts are increasingly felt faster, and are less predictable.

“Uncertainty” might seem overused, but it's an apt description for the era in which we live.

## Organizations are swimming in the Four C's of Uncertainty

**Conditions.** With an immense amount of data and rapidly changing trends, the conditions around an organization are difficult to pinpoint accurately at any given time and, once described, become immediately irrelevant.

**Competitors.** With categories blurring and technology progressively lowering barriers to entry, an organization's competitive set is impossible to predict over time (e.g., who won't Amazon challenge next?).

**Cause/effect.** With uncertain conditions and competitors, no one can divine exactly how any strategy may play out. Sure, organizations might have confident guesses, but when strategy relies on being at the right place, at the right time, with the right offering, any significant deviance can be deadly to its goals.

**Cultures.** Organizations have one final glaring uncertainty: how to manage their people and direct the firm's culture when the path forward isn't obvious.

As leaders, this level of uncertainty has a dramatic and observable effect on our brains: specifically, it triggers our threat response<sup>7</sup>. A lack of certainty produces the same cocktail of chemical responses in our brain as seeing a predator on the horizon. Anxiety comes next. Our “anxiety neurons” then talk to our hypothalamus, which cues our avoidance behaviors. As a result, we hem, we haw, we ignore, we retreat, and we frequently become obsessed with avoiding risk. This is why we see organizations continually kick the can

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<sup>7</sup> [bit.ly/3rprUJW](http://bit.ly/3rprUJW)

down the road when it comes to change and transformation: they are responding as if the changes around them are existential threats.

**But “risk” and “uncertainty” are not interchangeable.**

A risk is a known danger, in that we know the potential outcomes and we can apply a probability to those outcomes. For example, we know that if you are taking a long road trip, the average risk of an accident is 1 in 366. Your risk of dying in that accident? 1 in 103. Hence, your risk of dying on a long trip is highly unlikely. We know this because we have encountered these conditions repeatedly, enough that we can establish statistically significant predictions.

Uncertainty is categorically different. By definition, we haven't encountered these conditions before. The odds may be worse, but they could also be far better. Moreover, there may be untold prizes to be discovered in the journey itself. We simply don't know until we venture out.

Unfortunately, organizations constantly conflate risk and uncertainty. In doing so, we typically see organizations:

- Delaying their response because of avoidance behaviors; not only winnowing their potential gains but conceding ground to their competitors
- Investing in costly suboptimal solutions (choosing the devil they know), versus embracing safe-fail experimentation and survivable short-term losses that could return long-term gains
- Demanding ever more information and expertise in order to reduce

their risk, leading to overconfidence amid unpredictable outcomes

**As leaders, we have to train our brains to see risk and uncertainty differently.** In truly uncertain conditions, delays will only serve our competitors. Big-ticket “safe bets” are costly mirages. And no pile of information and expertise can confidently tell us what comes next.

Instead, this is how we advise leaders to respond to uncertainty:

- **Assess the novelty of the situation.** When presented with change and before your brain succumbs to a whirlwind of threat and anxiety, reflect on the level of novelty and ambiguity you're facing. If the situation is truly uncertain, switch your physiological response from anxiety to excitement. Embrace what's possible and not solely what's preventable. Instead of focusing on, “What's at risk?” ask your team, “What's possible?”
- **Acknowledge your fears.** Even when you can intellectually separate the two, uncertainty still may register as risk. It's healthy to admit it and to catalog the many ways you may feel at risk, including the cost of being wrong and the stigma of being seen as wrong by your peers. The goal here is to be ever more conscious of how your feelings of risk may impact your decision making. Extend this understanding to your team and their fears.
- **Embrace experimentation.** Think of your activities as a means not

just to produce a desired outcome, but to a deeper understanding of the conditions around you. In this way, think of the social game “20 Questions.” In that game, every question gets you closer to an understanding of the winning phrase; think of each of your tactics as a means of asking a question that can deliver an illuminating answer. In the beginning, bet small.

- **Manage your stress and recovery.** Lastly, know that uncertainty (over a prolonged period) produces an incredible amount of stress. The term “allostatic load” made headlines this year: it describes the wear and tear on one’s body and mind after repeated stress. Leaders and teams experiencing constant uncertainty also need repeated periods of rest and recovery<sup>8</sup>.

NOBL.io

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## Quotes & Quips

*“It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice”*

**Deng Xiaoping**

Former leader of the People's Republic of China

*“Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going”*

**Jim Ryun**

American former politician and athlete

*“We are creating an ecosystem where the cost of learning is less than the cost of ignorance and seeking to prevent the game playing that accommodates top-down approaches to change that seeks compliance and alignment”*

**Dave Snowden**

Creator of the Cynefin framework

*“All generalizations are false, including this one”*

**Mark Twain**

*“In historical events great men — so-called — are but labels serving to give a name to the event, and like labels, they have the least possible connection with the event itself. Every action of theirs, that seems to them an act of their own free will, is in a historical sense not free at all, but in bondage to the whole course of previous history, and predestined from all eternity.”*

**Leo Tolstoy**

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<sup>8</sup> [bit.ly/3L3rTmD](https://bit.ly/3L3rTmD)



by Over the Fence

[overthefence.com.de/manifesto](http://overthefence.com.de/manifesto)

Dear friends of the Manifesto for Slow Thinking, as one of the co-creators of the manifesto, I admit that I do love routines. Healthy routines. In our daily life and in organisations. Good routines save us time and energy.

They lead us to the desired outcomes and work for everyone involved. Not all routines are like this.

Sometimes we need to escape from our routines and uncover better ways of working together. Beyond the routine. For those situations we have created the manifesto.

### **Hey, not so fast!**

Fast thinking is our default mode of thinking. Nobel prize in economics winner Daniel Kahneman has proven that it works flawlessly in a completely familiar environment - but only there. In novel situations, we need to be more open to think better.

It requires a different mode of thinking. By the way, John Cleese calls it "open mode", in contrast to "closed mode" (in his talk about Creativity in Management [youtu.be/Pb5oIIPO62g](https://youtu.be/Pb5oIIPO62g)).

Do you like the manifesto?

Please read it again:

*We are uncovering better ways of collaborating beyond the routine. We appreciate the value of:*

**Questions** before **answers**

**Observations** before **evaluations**

**Change of perspective** before **Point of view**

**Self-reflection** before **criticism**

People tend to "think fast". This can lead to undesirable effects. The items on the left side facilitate "slow thinking". They improve the quality of the right side and should therefore be applied consciously and intensively.

**Apply the items on the left side one time more than your intuition tells you to!**

It says we appreciate the value of the items on the left "before" the items on the right. Did you notice? If not, you just have experienced a filter of perception, because you probably know the Agile Manifesto. It does not say "over". It says "BEFORE". We actually very much appreciate the value of the items on the right side and would like to improve their quality.

We hope you find some inspiration in there. Let's uncover better ways to think and work together!

If you want to learn more, check the upcoming events at Over the Fence<sup>9</sup>. Follow us, there is more to come. We love to share our knowledge and visual tools for better projects & decision-making!

**Karen Schmidt**

[overthefence.com.de/manifesto](http://overthefence.com.de/manifesto)

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<sup>9</sup> [linkedin.com/company/overthefence](https://linkedin.com/company/overthefence)

# Strategy & Transformation

*The Four Keys to Success*

by Roger Martin

[rogerlmartin.com](http://rogerlmartin.com)

## Four Keys to Transformation Success

1. Strategy

2. Patience

3. Resilience

4. Growth

Transformation is a hot topic these days, probably too hot. Putting transformation behind anything — finance transformation, go-to-market transformation, customer experience transformation, etc. — makes the thing sound cool and important. I have gotten so many questions about transformation that I thought I would dedicate my 51st Playing to Win/Practitioner Insights (PTW/PI) piece to Strategy & Transformation: The Four Keys to Success. (PTW/PI series<sup>10</sup>)

### Un-Transformational Transformations

By my observation, most transformation efforts fail to transform. The AT&T acquisition of Time Warner to transform AT&T into a “converged media and communications company,” failed utterly and was unwound at a huge

loss. The Bill Ackman/Ron Johnson attempt to transform JC Penney was an expensive flop. Marissa Mayer’s effort to transform Yahoo only transformed her from high tech darling to also-ran. And Jorma Ollila’s attempted transformation of Nokia at the inception of the smartphone era ended up sealing its fate as an irrelevant player in the business it previously dominated.

It is no surprise. Transformation is a challenging thing. It is a pretty dramatic word. It is not a gentle ‘improvement,’ ‘tweaking,’ ‘course correction,’ or ‘acceleration’ of the status quo. Transformation connotes a fundamental, discontinuous change — a revolution, a reboot, a makeover — otherwise we wouldn’t call it ‘transformation’ in the first place. In many respects, transformation is set up for disappointment.

### My Transformation Experience

What then can improve the odds of overcoming the transformation challenge? I will use my personal experience from three transformations which either I led or with which I was intimately involved to illustrate what I feel are the four more generalizable keys to transformation success.

The first of the three is the most dramatic large corporate transformation that I can name. That is the transformation of the Thomson Corporation from being comprised of the world’s largest newspaper company, the world’s largest textbook publisher (tied with Pearson), Europe’s largest travel company, and a major player in North Sea oil to Thomson Reuters, the leading supplier of on-line, subscription-based must-have information, analytics, and workflow solutions to professionals. I served on

<sup>10</sup> [rogerlmartin.com/archive/medium-posts](http://rogerlmartin.com/archive/medium-posts)

the board of the company for 14 years during the heart of that transformation.

The second is an historic non-profit transformation. I served as board member of Tennis Canada for 12 years (including three years as chair) starting at the inception of its transformation from an utterly irrelevant tennis nation to what is now routinely characterized by on-air by commentators, including multiple Grand Slam champion John McEnroe, as a “tennis superpower.”

The third is a transformation of an educational institution. I served as Dean of the Rotman School of Management for 15 years during which it was transformed from from the third best business school in southern Ontario to Canada’s only consequential global business school, with a faculty ranked as high as 3rd in the world in the Financial Times global ranking — after only Harvard Business School and the Wharton School.

### **Clear and Compelling Strategy**

A transformation can’t be a proliferation of initiatives or one big acquisition. These aren’t substitutes for strategy. Successful transformation has to be underpinned by a clear and compelling strategy.

There must be a Winning Aspiration (WA). For Thomson, it was to become the leading provider of must-have information for professionals. For Tennis Canada, it was to become a leading tennis nation. For Rotman it was to become Canada’s first globally consequential business school.

Plus, there needs to be a clear Where-to-Play/How-to-Win (WTP/HTW) combination that serves and reinforces the WA. For Thomson, it was must-have

data integrated into work flows of business, legal, accounting, finance, and scientific professionals. For Tennis Canada it was men’s and women’s singles (the most competitive part of the sport) and a unique hybrid of athlete development. For Rotman, it was a new way to think, relentless utility, and global scale.

You can’t set off with hope as your strategy or keep chasing the latest trend. There has to be a consistent, compelling vision of where you want the strategy to take you. But it needs to be flexible. Thomson eventually dropped financial and scientific professionals from its WTP. And Rotman absorbed design thinking and behavioral economics into its definition of a new way to think. The flexibility needs to maintain the robustness of the initial strategy rather than undermine it.

### **Patience**

If you want a fast transformation, my advice is don’t even start. You will fail, which is one of the reasons why transformation by way of a single big acquisition is so likely to fail.

The Thomson transformation started in earnest with the 1989 sale of the first of its core businesses, oil & gas, and wasn’t substantially complete until the sale of the fourth original business, textbooks in 2007. By that time Thomson was an all-digital, online player. There has been still more transformation since 2007, but the core transformation from newspaper/textbook publisher to on-line information provider to professionals took almost two decades.

At Tennis Canada, it took six years until first green shoots to appear with Filip Peliwo and Eugenie Bouchard winning

Canada's first Junior Grand Slam singles championships in 2012. It took eight years to see Bouchard make the Women's Wimbledon finals and Milos Raonic the Men's semifinals both in 2014. And it took 13 years to achieve the stated goal of winning a Grand Slam singles championship when Bianca Andreescu won the US Open. Between 2014 and 2021, Canada was the only nation with both three different male and three different female Grand Slam semifinalists.

At the Rotman School, it took 15 years to double the student cohort, quadruple faculty, build a new building, and build our global reputation. That is one quarter of my working life. It was purposely slow and steady. I wanted to achieve complete transformation but without making our constituents so nervous that they would freak out at any point on the journey.

### **Resilience**

All three transformations took withering criticism in the early days. The leadership group for a transformation needs to be tough-minded and supportive of each other throughout.

At Thomson, a critical step in the transformation was the purchase of West Publishing for \$3.4 billion in 1996. The analyst community slammed Thomson for overspending and rashly betting the company. But the majority owner, Ken Thomson, backed management and ignored the criticism. Successive Vice-Chairs John Tory and Geoff Beattie were instrumental in ensuring that management pushed the transformation agenda that the majority owner sought and supported, even when it required very firm pushing!

At Tennis Canada, there was brutal criticism from former leading player and national head coach, Pierre Lamarche, who wrote an influential newsletter in which he blasted Tennis Canada strategy over and over for its new strategy that he guaranteed would fail. Long time Canadian Davis Cup coach Louis Cayer left for the UK when the new strategy was put in place. But the core group made up of the Chair, two key Board members (who became the next two chairs), and the CEO held firm to the strategy.

At Rotman, one of most influential professors argued passionately and at length in the first Faculty Council discussion of the new strategy that it was going to be a disaster, a complete failure. Another leading professor resigned to go to a more prominent business school and wrote me a long letter explaining why I would be a certain failure and was a dreadful hire for the Dean's job. Fortunately, I was supported by the University President who had my back, plus a loyal Vice-Dean Academic, and a supportive business community. Happily, the former professor came to my office seven years later to apologize and thank me for not listening to him. The latter professor wrote me letter offering to come back from the School that was no longer more prominent than Rotman. But by that point the faculty had improved so much that his academic area felt it could do better by using the faculty slot on someone better.

### **Growth**

Growth greases the skids of transformation. If your dominant mode is the reallocation of existing resources, you will create immediate enemies of every group from whom you take

resources. If instead you grow the top line, you can put all the new resources behind the transformation and slowly scale back the things that don't fit.

Thomson revenues were \$5.1 billion in 1989 and had more than doubled to \$12.7 billion at the time I left the board in 2013. Tennis Canada had \$3 million/year to spend on high performance as of 2005 and within five years had grown its top line enough to be able to afford to spend \$12 million/year. The Rotman budget in my 15th year as Dean was just shy of ten times the size of the budget that I inherited in my first year. In all three cases, the robust growth enabled the dedication of new resources to the key transformation initiatives.

### **Practitioner Insights**

If you are contemplating a transformation, whether leading one, supporting a leader of one, or advising on one, don't call it a transformation. Transform rather than talk about transformation. Talk instead about the end state you seek. Very few people actually like what is involved in a transformation; they just like the end state. And I can assure you that calmness is better than agitation when you are transforming.

Then make sure to take a cold, hard look at whether you really have a strategy that can drive a transformation. Don't be like AT&T management with some vague and sloppy notion like we are going to transform into a vertically integrated "converged media and communications company" with "owner economics" and that is why it is worth paying \$85 billion for Time Warner.

My critique is not 20–20 hindsight. I was on the record at the time arguing that the acquisition would be a disaster, would end the career of CEO Randall Stephenson, would be sold within five years, and for consideration of half of the purchase price. I wasn't quite right. It was a disaster, ended Stephenson's career, was sold in three years, but I was off by \$500 million. It sold for \$43 billion, and I had predicted \$42.5, my bad. Or JC Penney: I predicted that strategy-free debacle too.

Take the time to think very carefully through your strategy. Test it with others. Ask what would have to be true (WWHTBT). Make sure you have a plan for overcoming the key barriers. Don't be AT&T!

Then determine whether you have the requisite patience. Assume that the desired transformation will take a decade. If it happens faster — hurrah. But don't go into it thinking that it will happen quickly, or you will disappoint yourself and all the people whose expectations you raised. I read once that Allied prisoners of war in World War II Japanese prison camps tended to have one of three mindsets — and only one was helpful to their survival. The ones who despaired from inception tended to expire.

The ones who believed that they would be liberated relatively quickly also expired when their hopes were dashed. The ones who survived believed that they were in for a long, difficult journey and steeled themselves for it. It is a good analogy for business transformations.

Then build a coalition that will help you achieve resilience. Assume that you will be told you are an idiot in the

early years — and told so by important, influential people. You will need the support of others around you to get through the attacks, which happily will stop when momentum starts to build.

Finally, have a growth plan. Only if you will have considerably more resources at the end of the transformation relative to the start is it even worth commencing. If the transformation involves shrinking first, don't do it. Spend your precious life doing something else.

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## Copy-pasting frameworks and expecting success is foolish

*by Maarten Dalmijn*

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The most dysfunctional Agile transformations I've seen happen because companies try to copy-paste an Agile framework or scaling framework. This is especially true for bigger companies.

At the core of Agile and Scrum are self-managing, empowered teams. This usually comes more naturally to start-ups and scale-ups.

More layers, hierarchy, silos, coordination, top-down instructions, checklists, analysis, planning will never result in self-managing and empowered teams.

Copy-pasting the Spotify model or SAFe, and expecting success, is at best wishful thinking. What actually often happens is you are only making things worse. You are burying dysfunctions with more dysfunctions.

The bigger your organisation, the more it's about removing and changing your organisation to fit with an Agile way of working.

You can't copy-paste something on top and expect to be Agile. That's like adding a cherry on top of a pizza so you can call it a cake. It doesn't work that way.

We are awesome at coming up with things to add to make things better. When you're big, you should start with removing and trimming organisational fat and changing the command and control mindset.

Doing this is difficult, scary, and challenging. You need to get out of your comfort zone. You need to act yourself in a new way of thinking before you get it. It requires a leap of faith that is difficult to make for many. When you get it, it seems easy and obvious.

Many prefer to not do this (understandable) and as a result it is inevitable that the only thing you can do is preserve the status quo.

But you do have an Agile sauce on top you can use for window-dressing, which is the main function the Spotify model serves for many organizations (looking at you banks).

Scaling doesn't start with adding, but with removing and changing your way of working.

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## Academic Research

*Goals Gone Wild: The  
Systematic Side Effects of  
Over-Prescribing Goal Setting*

[hbs.me/3sH62sE](https://hbs.me/3sH62sE)

Goal setting is one of the most replicated and influential paradigms in the management literature.

Hundreds of studies conducted in numerous countries and contexts have consistently demonstrated that setting specific, challenging goals can powerfully drive behavior and boost performance.

Advocates of goal setting have had a substantial impact on research, management education, and management practice.

In this article, we argue that the beneficial effects of goal setting have been overstated and that systematic harm caused by goal setting has been largely ignored.

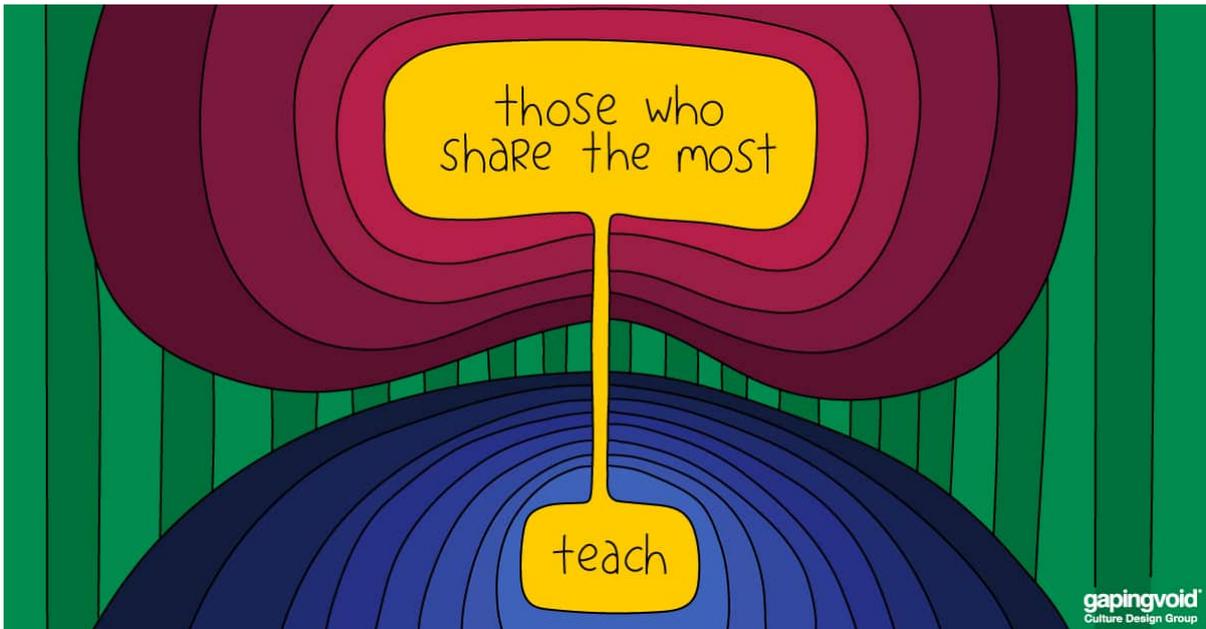
We identify specific side effects associated with goal setting, including a narrow focus that neglects non-goal areas, a rise in unethical behavior, distorted risk preferences, corrosion of organizational culture, and reduced intrinsic motivation.

Rather than dispensing goal setting as a benign, over-the-counter treatment for motivation, managers and scholars need to conceptualize goal setting as a prescription-strength medication that requires careful dosing, consideration of harmful side effects, and close supervision.

We offer a warning label to accompany the practice of setting goals.

**Lisa D. Ordóñez**  
**Maurice E. Schweitzer**  
**Adam D. Galinsky**  
**Max H. Bazerman**

Working Paper 09-083  
*Harvard Business School (2009)*



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## How To Build A Lasting Legacy

[Gapingvoid.com](http://Gapingvoid.com)

There are two ways to make a classical sculpture: call them “Addition” and “Subtraction”.

“Addition” is like Rodin: You start with a lump of clay, and you keep adding lumps of clay, shaping it as you go along until...voilà you end up with The Kiss<sup>11</sup>. Then you cast it in bronze. Bada-bing.

“Subtraction” is like Michelangelo. You start with a big block of marble and using a hammer and chisel, you keep removing little pieces of marble until you’re left with your masterpiece<sup>12</sup>. Bada-bing. Someone once asked Michelangelo how did he know when to stop carving, and he said, “Easy, I just stop when I reach the skin.” If you’ve

ever seen one of his non-finito sculptures<sup>13</sup>, this is exactly what it looks like. Amazing!

Apparently, when it comes to mentors helping mentees to form themselves, the Michelangelo POV works as well<sup>14</sup> – though instead of using tiny blows of a hammer on marble, you strike with tiny acts of constant affirmation, aiming towards the mentee’s ideal version of themselves.

Mentoring is important, simply because nobody lives forever. To build a truly lasting legacy one needs to be able to pass one’s skills along to the next generation. There’s also the idea that you don’t truly know a subject until you can teach it to somebody else- i.e. that the best way of mastering your craft is by teaching it to another. All success requires sharing knowledge on some level. And the art of mentoring is probably the most emotionally satisfying way of doing it. Exactly.

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<sup>11</sup> [bit.ly/3BlG95v](http://bit.ly/3BlG95v)

<sup>12</sup> [bit.ly/3HVoaWo](http://bit.ly/3HVoaWo)

<sup>13</sup> [bit.ly/3uJjkD3](http://bit.ly/3uJjkD3)

<sup>14</sup> [bit.ly/3HNUZEL](http://bit.ly/3HNUZEL)