

OUTSIDE  MANAGEMENT



How to become an
Outstanding Organisation
Through Focus



INTRODUCTION

If you've got as far as downloading this ebook you have no doubt identified that you aren't 100% happy with the way your business is operating right now. Things aren't as clear as they should be. Well done for taking the first step. That's a massive step forward on your journey to becoming an outstanding organisation.

I have written a series of four ebooks to help Business Owners, Directors and Managers identify and understand where any issues within the business may be. They also show you how to resolve those issues in a way that will positively shape the future of the business.

Research by Karen Martin, a leading US change management expert, shows that outstanding organisations adopt four disciplines to keep them at the top of their game:

- 1) having **clarity** about what they are about,
- 2) being super **focused** on what they are doing and avoiding distraction,
- 3) being **disciplined** about how the work gets done and who does it,
- 4) **engaging** the whole workforce in the first three disciplines.

I totally agree with her findings and find much of what I do with clients fits with her research. I'm keen to share this research and the ebook series is one way to share it.

For each of the four disciplines I have developed four questions you can ask yourself and your colleagues. I have provided advice and actions that would help you answer yes to the questions and so put your organisation on the way to become outstanding.

This is the second ebook in the series, focused on achieving focus of attention. Avoiding excessive demands on your time, trying to do too much and not getting anything properly done.

Throughout each of the ebooks I provide lots of practical advice that has been tried and tested throughout my many years of working with organisations like yours.

**IF YOU DON'T
LIKE SOMETHING,
CHANGE IT.
IF YOU CAN'T
CHANGE IT,
CHANGE YOUR
ATTITUDE.**

Maya Angelou

Do you need to make changes in your business?

As a Business Owner, Director or Manager you will, undeniably, have the drive and determination to succeed. Along your journey, you might have come across a few obstacles, some you knew how to overcome and some you didn't. Usually some kind of change was required to overcome an obstacle. To become an outstanding organisation you will need to make more changes in your business.

DISCIPLINE TWO

FOCUS

So, now you have clarity about what you want, we need to look at the next discipline – focus.

The subject of focus in businesses seems to have two extremes:

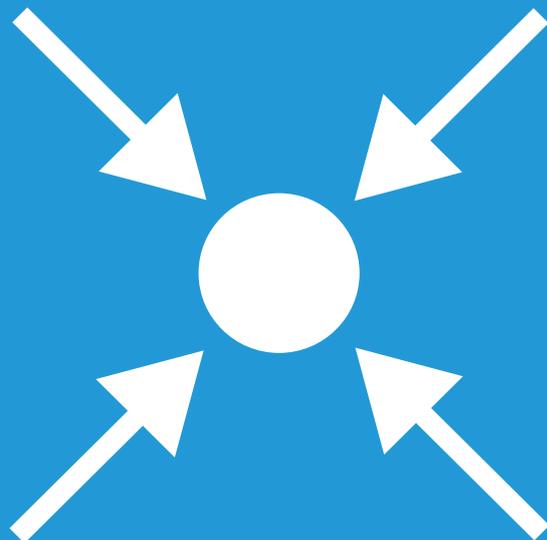
- Having no focus or priorities so letting the world set your agenda, or:
- Having so many priorities, initiatives or ideas that none of them have a priority

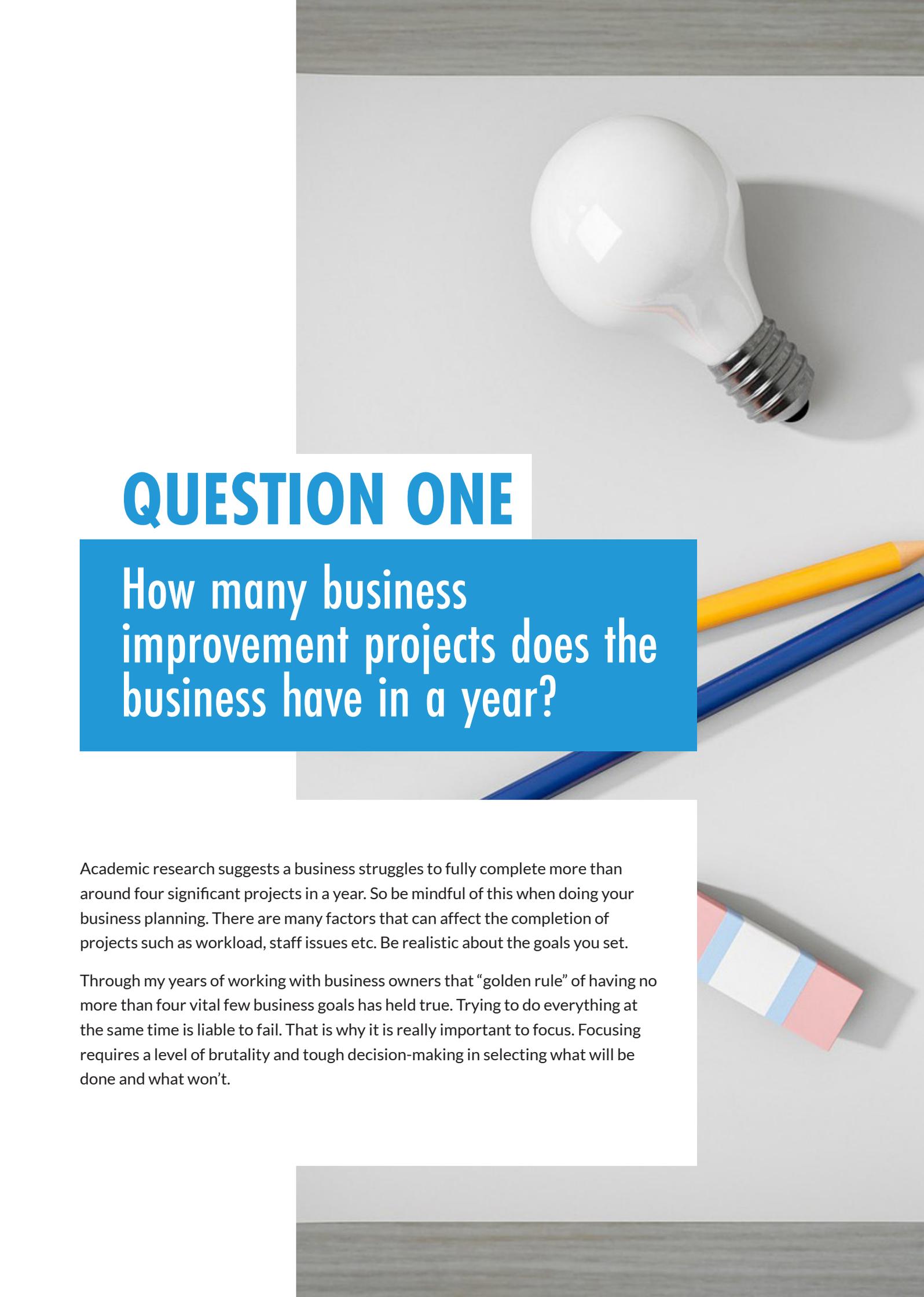
This latter extreme has been described by Karen Martin as ‘Organisational Attention Deficit Disorder’ and incurs a real cost, including:

- Draining the workforce of energy and attention to detail as they jump from one initiative to another
- Delaying the delivery of all initiatives as people and teams switch their focus and attention
- Reducing quality of effort.

You could also see the same symptoms from the other extreme of having no priorities. When there is no focus and the world sets your agenda, then life can seem like a series of fires to put out and forever being in reactive mode.

That is why everyone being focused in the business is vitally important. In fact the single greatest piece of advice to take from this ebook is around focus – put as much effort you can into **focusing on being focused**.



A photograph of a white incandescent lightbulb sitting on a light-colored desk. To the right of the lightbulb, two pencils, one yellow and one blue, are lying horizontally. Below the pencils, a small, colorful sticky note with red, white, and blue stripes is visible. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

QUESTION ONE

How many business improvement projects does the business have in a year?

Academic research suggests a business struggles to fully complete more than around four significant projects in a year. So be mindful of this when doing your business planning. There are many factors that can affect the completion of projects such as workload, staff issues etc. Be realistic about the goals you set.

Through my years of working with business owners that “golden rule” of having no more than four vital few business goals has held true. Trying to do everything at the same time is liable to fail. That is why it is really important to focus. Focusing requires a level of brutality and tough decision-making in selecting what will be done and what won't.

QUESTION TWO

Do you use a method to prioritise improvement projects or ideas?

To help you be more brutal in your focusing you need some tools. Here are a few tips to possibly develop a method should you generate some ideas for improvement.

When compiling your list of improvement projects:

- Prioritise projects before entering a budget setting process
- Seek a consensus around the priority-setting process and the final priorities
- Prioritise projects on the basis of the problem or issue you want to solve rather than a possible solution

A useful tool to prioritise projects is to categorise the projects into the following four columns:

Must-do	Delay	Eliminate	Maybe
---------	-------	-----------	-------

Allocate each project to a column to filter out those projects that:

- 1) Are not a must-do and could be delayed to another year
- 2) Should be eliminated from the list. You will end up with several must-do's and quite a few in the maybe column.

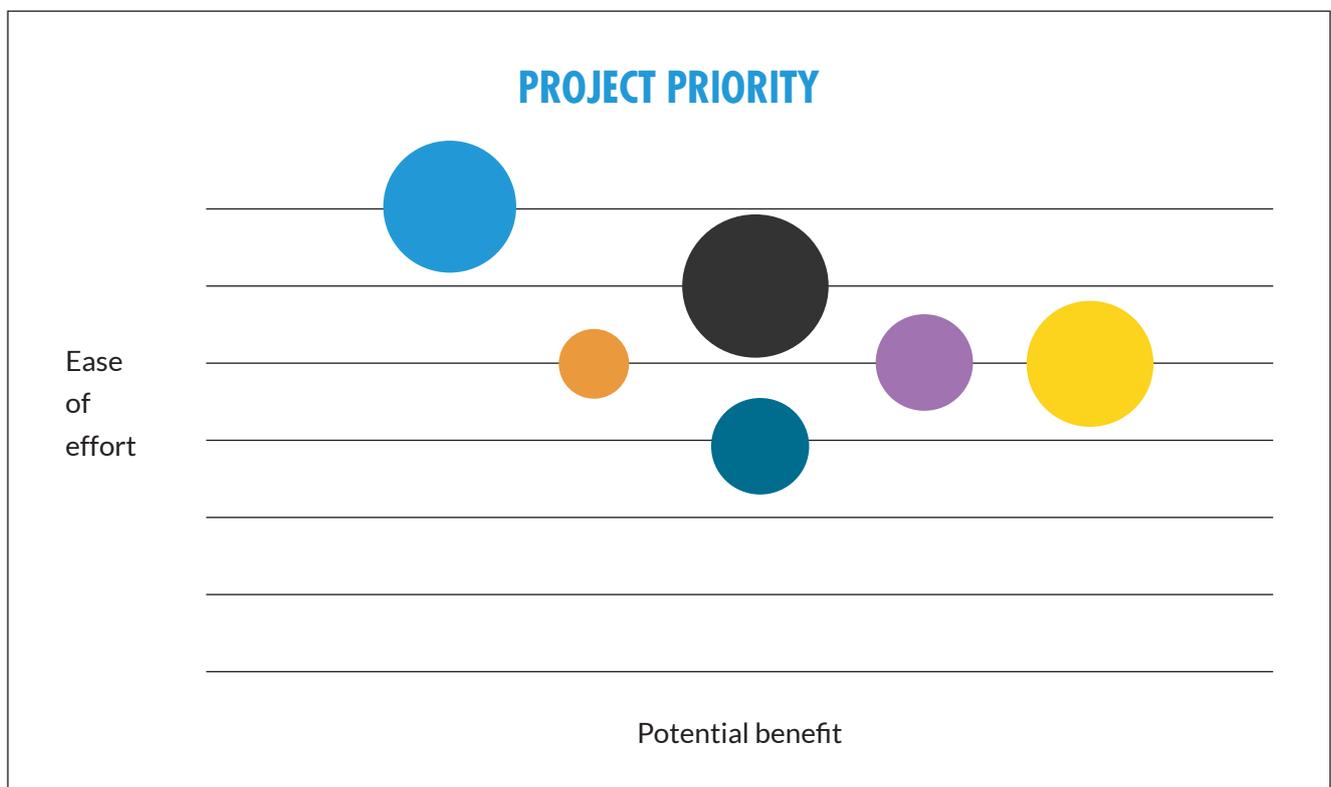
One common way to thin out the maybe list is to analyse each of the maybe projects against three criteria in a sort of 'bangs vs bucks' trade-off.

The three criteria you can measure are:

- Ease of effort - Y axis
- Potential benefit - X axis
- Urgency of completion - size of data point

Each of the criteria is scored on a simple scale - say 1 to 5. Then a basic bubble chart (available in Microsoft Excel or similar programs) can be used to plot the projects and decide on priority against the scored criteria.

An example chart could look like this:



QUESTION THREE

Does the business have a business plan that is rolled out across the business?

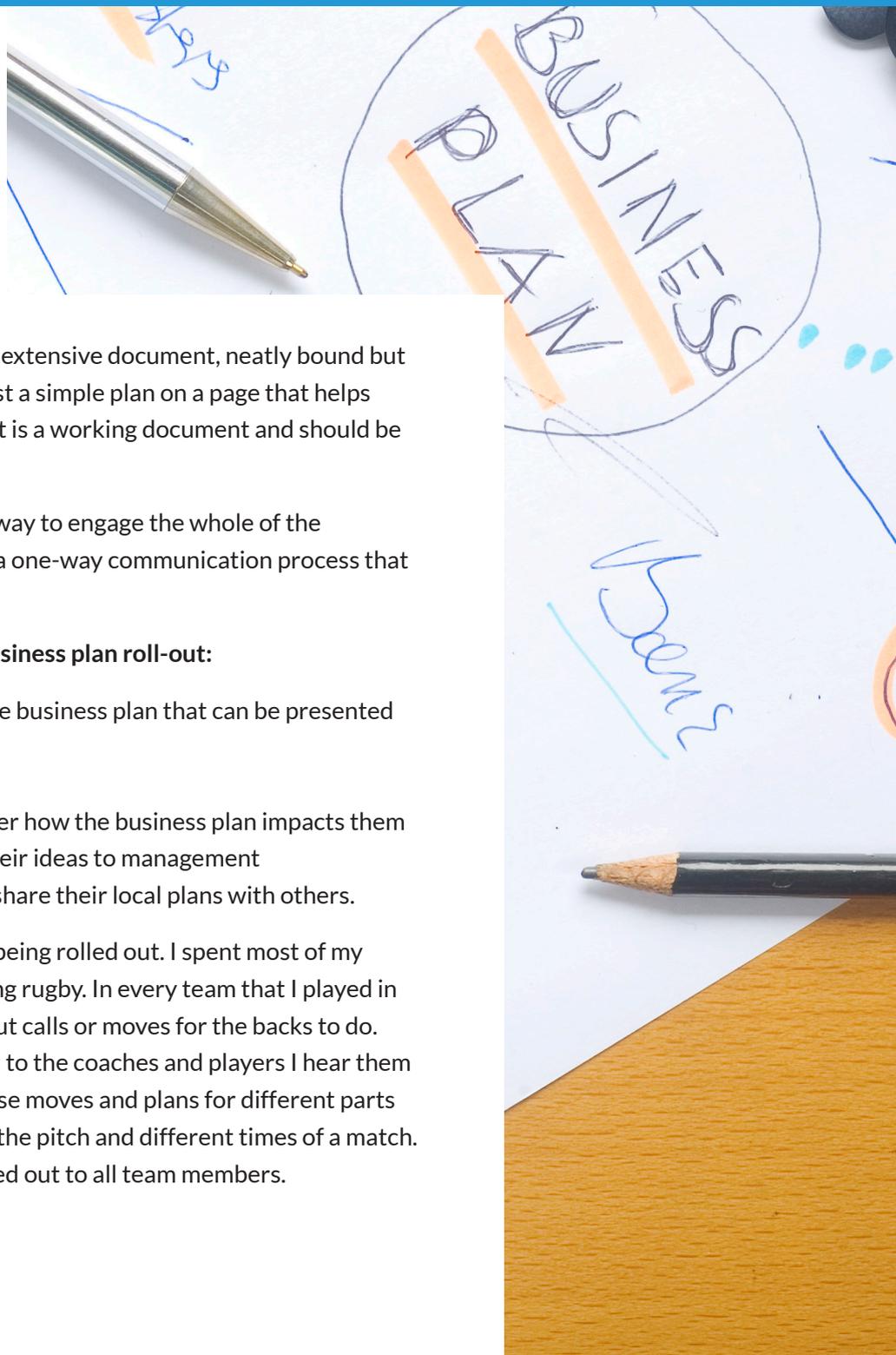
I don't mean you should have some extensive document, neatly bound but never read. I do mean having at least a simple plan on a page that helps the focus and clarity noted above. It is a working document and should be reviewed regularly.

Business plan roll-outs are a great way to engage the whole of the business, but at their worst can be a one-way communication process that encourages cynicism.

Here are a few tips to help your business plan roll-out:

- Create a simplified version of the business plan that can be presented on a single page
- Use graphics to present data
- Encourage individuals to consider how the business plan impacts them and ask them to present back their ideas to management
- Encourage those individuals to share their local plans with others.

As a quick aside that links to plans being rolled out. I spent most of my childhood and early adult life playing rugby. In every team that I played in we had a few moves, be they line-out calls or moves for the backs to do. When I watch rugby now and listen to the coaches and players I hear them talk about the whole range of precise moves and plans for different parts of the game, different locations on the pitch and different times of a match. All very planned and obviously rolled out to all team members.



A top-down view of a person's hands holding a red mug filled with dark coffee. The hands are positioned over a map of Sweden, which is spread out on a wooden surface. The map shows various cities, roads, and geographical features. The person is wearing a dark-colored sweater.

QUESTION FOUR

Does the business regularly check or review its business plan?

A business plan is just a plan - it can be changed in response to external or internal factors. I occasionally hear business owners say they don't do a plan because there's too much uncertainty and things change fast. And anyway, the plan would get out of date too quickly. My reaction, at least in my head, is that they have missed the point about plans and the process of planning.

Firstly, there is as much value in the process of planning as the final plan that is produced. Planning requires thinking and talking to colleagues. There is prioritising to do, thinking through the order of doing things, considering trade-offs, etc. That process helps to refine thinking and produce a better, well-considered plan. It also makes sure those who contributed to the plan have a better understanding of how they contribute to the plan - probably increasing the chances of it being successful.

Secondly, a plan is just that.... a plan. It can be changed to reflect better knowledge and more up-to-date information. If a plan has been well-built then adjusting it should be easier.



So, I've convinced you of the need to plan.

Regular reviews of business plans are necessary to maintain focus. The frequency of review should reflect the speed of the business, i.e. many businesses review their plans each month. Also, operational teams should review their performance against plan on a more frequent basis. As noted earlier, a weekly review cycle might be appropriate for you.

When reviewing plans there are usually 3 possible outcomes: sticking with the plan, adjusting the plan or at worst, giving up on it.

Two tools to help to decide which of the 3 options to follow are:

- The priority bubble chart describing earlier
- The consensus approach approach used to originally build the plan.

As you will see, there are many practical ways to ensure that you and your team have focus, but once you start applying these practices it will become second nature.

As Aristotle said:

**WE ARE WHAT WE
REPEATEDLY DO.
EXCELLENCE THEN
IS NOT AN ACT BUT
A HABIT.**

Aristotle

CONCLUSION

As a Business Owner, Director or Manager I hope you have found value in this ebook and have learnt some useful techniques that you can apply to help your business to become an outstanding organisation – specifically around achieving focus.

I see the same issues crop up in the businesses I work with and I've used these tried and tested

methods for many years. They just require a desire to change. Rome wasn't built in a day so be patient, but once you start to put the things you've learnt into practice you will start to see the results.

About me

I specialise in business improvement programmes for SMEs in Yorkshire.

I make businesses work better by:

- focusing on a sustainable business strategy and growth plan
- applying a creative approach to improvement

but most importantly:

- appreciating the power of the workforce to make it happen



in <http://uk.linkedin.com/in/petercruikshanks>

f <https://twitter.com/outsideinmgt>

 <https://www.facebook.com/outsideinmanagement>

 www.youtube.com/user/outsideinmanagement

www.outsideinmanagement.co.uk