



5 Minute Strategic Mindset

“You don’t need a new plan for next year. You need a commitment.”

— **Seth Godin**



A hail of bullets

In WWI's Western Front trenches, you could be **court-martialled** for desertion, losing your weapon, or even falling asleep on sentry duty. The punishment was severe: death by firing squad. 306 men suffered this in the British Army.

Who formed this squad though?

Your own regiment, of course. To avoid crushing morale, 4 - 6 soldiers were assigned the task, half of whom had 'non-live' ammunition. As the hail of bullets hit their target, nobody knew whose bullet had done the work.

Indonesian medicine is like this: a while back, my wife was prescribed four different medicines for bronchitis (including a hospital-strength post-operative antibiotic). She took them and, next morning, was feeling much better.

Which worked? We don't know. Could fewer have worked? Probably.

Question: Do you know which part of your service offerings really work?

How accurately can we predict things?

When I was 15 I wanted to be a futurologist. This was 1980 and I imagined that by 2000 we'd have explored our solar system, supersonic planes would criss-cross the globe, and we'd have eliminated starvation and nuclear weapons.

None of these have happened. But other things have: the cold war ended; the internet happened; China and India developed a middle class. What hope is there that any organisation or partnership can predict its own future any better?

Or, a better question, is there value in trying to do so?

I think there is, but not the reason you might suspect. I don't think that we can accurately forecast much at all. So, given that we're entering another round of COVID lockdown here in Melbourne, I thought it would be good to ask, why gaze to the future at all?

In my view, there are three reasons:

- Doing so expands our frame of reference; it helps us see possibilities and connections that we wouldn't otherwise
- It helps us to be more rigorous about owning our assumptions, by naming them and "writing them on the wall"
- It gives us more honest ways of looking ourselves: our desires, our capacity and our competence.

The problem with being a futurologist, though, is a little like being a great artist: you have to know when to stop. Groups can lose their collective heads very easily without much to show for their efforts, except some stimulating conversations.

To avoid this, I like to use a simple three step approach:

1. Quickly sketch out some possibilities
2. Hold yourself to no more than 10 "testable assumptions"
3. Build these assumptions into your action plans

Question: What assumptions are your leaders making — explicitly — about the near-term and longer-term future?

Collaboration Anxiety

At about the same age, teachers would group us into threes or fours and expect us to produce something together. Two memorable products remain in my mind. A diorama of tectonic plates (Geography) that looked like one of the terrible desserts produced by Mrs Clifton (my friend Paul's mum).

The other was a wall poster (Biology) trying to explain how we germinated some plants. This looked OK from 10 feet away but quickly lost its meaning as soon as you started to actually read it, as Paul had a free hand with the Letraset stencils (remember those?).

I hated it all.

Mostly I thought, "I can do better on my own". We'd end up arguing, and the kid with the loudest voice, or whoever grabbed the texta first, would get their way. Other times, I just didn't like a couple of the kids I was grouped with. I spent my group time silent and sullen, while they produced something that they then presented as 'our' work. It wasn't.

A third time, I remember a teacher's pet in the group, who kept telling us, "But Miss Sheehan said to do it like this!" I had other ideas, but clearly these weren't going to fly.

Fast forward to adulthood.

We are still grouped together, in workplaces, in cross-functional or multi-disciplinary teams, or in multi-organisational alliances, partnerships and consortia. And, guess what? Those kids with the stencils, the loud voices, the texta-grabbers and the teachers' pets, they've also grown up too. And we have to work with them. Or, they might even be us.

In my work in dozens of organisations each year, I notice that many of us experience what I call Collaboration Anxiety. So what is it? It's a fear to cross boundaries, to speak honestly, and to get the maximum potential from co-work. I see Collaboration Anxiety manifest in nine ways.

See how many of these you experience with your primary team at work (Score yourself with 1 = never; 2 = occasionally; 3 = consistently).

1. **Doubt.** In your heart of hearts, you honestly don't believe collaboration works best; you think smart individuals would make just as good, if not better decisions.
2. **Mediocrity.** You don't have a group with enough intellectual firepower and so you end up with poorly thought-out ideas that everyone can agree on, but nobody's passionate about.
3. **Holy cows.** Your group won't challenge the status quo.
4. **Distrust.** You don't believe in each other's motives, others' commitment to follow through, or others' competence and capability.
5. **Power.** Either nobody feels like they've got authority, or one person does and they dominate. Sometimes, those who have the authority are reluctant to use it.
6. **Politics.** Subtly, or not so subtly, you are burdened by past disagreements and 'water under the bridge'.
7. **Fear.** You, or others, lack courage to talk about what really is going on, or what matters the most.
8. **Too fast.** You stop asking deep questions (like 'why?') too early and hence get focussed on the wrong issues or are railroaded into 'quick' decisions.
9. **Too slow.** You find it difficult to have discussions that are time efficient and, instead, waste time talking in circles. It's nobody's job to move the conversation towards a conclusion.
10. **Relevance-impaired.** You are making the wrong decisions at your level - they should be made by others.

Question: Rate yourself on the above 10 factors - how did you score?

[Score of 10 - 14: Well done - You have no or little Collaboration Anxiety; A score of 15 - 20 - You have some Collaboration Anxiety and need to reset team expectations; A score above 20 means you have significant Collaboration Anxiety and it's time to rebuild your team from first principles or seek help in doing so!]

As always, please send me your feedback by email to ww@workwell.com.au.

Which bullet above is your favourite? What do you want more or less of? Other suggestions? Let me know!

Have a wonderful weekend, all.

Andrew

Andrew Hollo wins the international award for the Society for the Advancement of Consulting's **Consultant of the Year 2020**



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