The Wagon Wheel Way™

An Enterprise Operating System

DEVELOPED BY

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"Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not one bit simpler"
Albert Einstein

The Wagon Wheel Way™ – an Enterprise Operating System

An operating system is the term used to describe the software that it loaded onto your computer that enables it to run a vast variety of more specific programs – applications software. The operating system can be closed – it can only be run on specific hardware as is the case with Apple – or it can be open like Microsoft's Windows that can be run on all IBM compatible hardware.

The Operating System - The Wagon Wheel Way™ (WWW) - is not a software program in the conventional sense but it performs essentially the same function. It is an open system and is therefore relevant to all types of enterprises. If the enterprise has its own in-house or out-sourced programs on Leadership or Communication for example, these are application software programs that can be run on The Wagon Wheel Way™ Operating System.

The WWW has one goal – to help enterprises achieve theirs.

The Wagon Wheel Way™ - its Purpose

The purpose of The Wagon Wheel Way™ is to provide management with a formalised, consistent, common, operational framework that guides every phase of an enterprise from planning, implementation, monitoring, measuring, adapting and back to planning again. It is unique in three ways. Firstly, it covers the complete operational cycle. Secondly, it works from basic principles so it can be applied to every sort of enterprise from a manufacturer to a legal practice to a university faculty. Thirdly, it is highly specific – it is not a world atlas; it's a detailed route map. The challenge was to integrate these features in one model that met the following criteria.

- It had to be universal in its application – an open rather than a closed model
- It had to separate – but demonstrate the connection between – "this is what we are going to do" from "this is how we are going to do it"
- It had to demonstrate the interdependency within and between the three major components of a) planning, b) execution and c) monitoring, measuring, adapting
- It had to be simple
- It had to be memorable
- It had to be dynamic
- it had to be practical

After experimenting with a number of different options, a wagon wheel was selected as it met all the above criteria.

The Wagon Wheel Way™ - Planning – Constructing the Wheel

A wagon wheel has four basic components – a hub, spokes, a wooden wheel rim and a metal band. Except for their dimensions, these four components never change. A wagon wheel is built by constructing the hub first and then inserting the spokes to which the wooden wheel rim is attached. Lastly, the metal band is placed over the rim to complete the wheel. A plan is constructed in an analogous fashion.

- The **Hub** represents "this is what we are going to do". It is made up of five elements –
  - Markets (customers, consumers, patients, students, clients etc)

- ❒ Products (services) that the enterprise is going to supply its Markets
- ❒ Activities (manufacturing, importing, design, development, distribution, supply, customer service etc)
- ❒ Competitive Strategy – how the enterprise is going to compete
- ❒ Competitive Advantage – what the enterprise does "differently" and "better" than its direct competitors

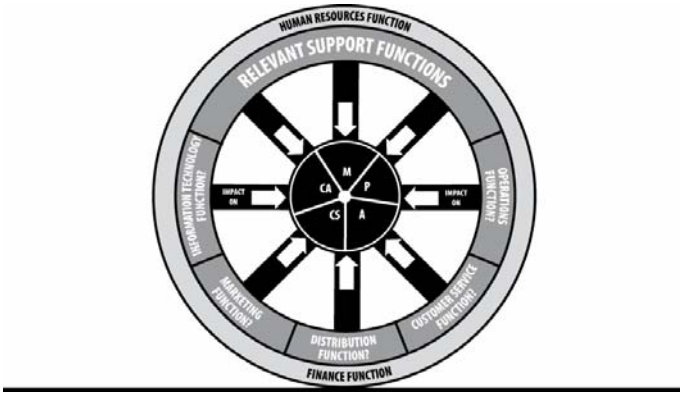
The combination of these five elements is referred to as the **Hub of the Plan**. In non-competitive organisations the last two elements are omitted.

- The **Spokes** form the connection between "this is what we are going to do" and "this is how we are going to do it" just as they form the connection between the Hub and the Wheel Rim.

- Every organisation operates with a number of **Support Functions**. Unlike the five elements of the Hub of the Plan, however, the make up of the **Support Functions –** the wheel rim - will vary from organisation to organisation. Remember WWW is an open system. Thus a hospital has no manufacturing function but it does have a logistics function. A law firm might not have a supply function but it might well have a marketing function. With the exception of Human Resources and Finance – see below – all such functions are known as **Support Functions**. They are the functions at the disposal of the enterprise through which the Hub of the Plan is realised. The question that generates the plan of "this is how we are going to do it" is – "what are the implications for each of the Support Functions on every aspect of this is what we are going to do".

- Finally, the metal band is attached to the wheel rim. The metal band represents the two **Enabling Functions** of Human Resources and Finance – without people and money, no plan can be implemented. With regard to the former, does the enterprise have the right number of people with the right expertise? Does the organisation have the right structure and the right culture to successfully execute the Plan?

- Up to the stage of agreement on the Enabling Functions, the arrows on the spokes point outwards because it is the Hub of the Plan that is driving the Support Functions that, in turn, are driving the Enabling Functions. However, before the Plan is ready for implementation, there has to be an initial **Action Program**. This is based on "this is how we are going to do it" rather than "this is what we are going to do". To reflect this orientation, the arrows on the spokes now face towards the Hub of the Plan.

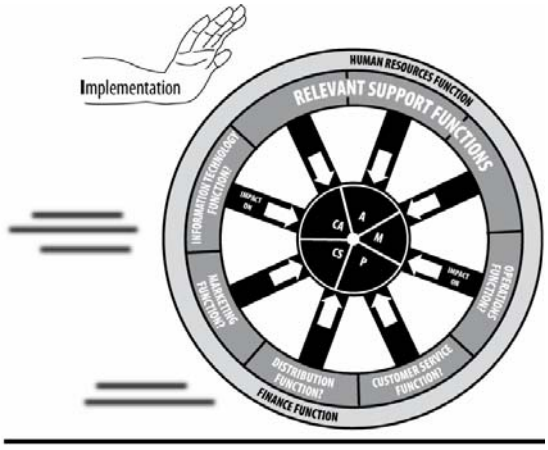


The completed Wagon Wheel set up for implementation

Whatever models or processes or tools are used to develop the Plan, the planners must a) decide on the five elements that comprise the Hub of the Plan; b) how that Hub will impact on each Support Function and c) how the Support Functions impact upon the two Enabling Functions of Human Resources and Finance. These models, processes or tools represent applications software that runs on the WWW Operating System. However, the Operating System is by no means complete. At this stage, it neither guides the implementation phase, nor does it address the issues of monitoring, measuring and adapting the Plan. So the Wagon Wheel Way is extended to encompass such issues and thus complete the operational cycle.

The Wagon Wheel Way™ - Implementation – Operating the Wheel

When we talk about the implementation of a plan, we often use expressions like "being on a roll" or "gaining traction".



Such terminology fits well with the WWW Operating System. Under the System, there are five requirements for effective execution:

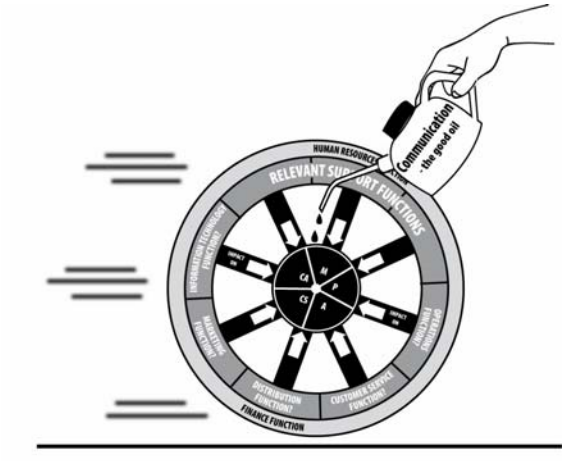
- **O**rganisational Alignment
- **M**anagement of Chang**E**
- **LE**adership
- **T**eams & **T**eamwork
- **E**mployee Engagement

If one takes the letters in bold, they form the word "**OMELETTE**" which is not only a useful memory hook but indicative of the fact that really great execution is only achieved when these five requirements are blended together. However, their order is highly specific as each requirement is dependent on the ones that precede it. Thus Organisational Alignment is dependent on the quality of the planning whilst Employee Engagement is dependent on a combination of a) the alignment of the plans themselves and the people charged with their execution; b) how well the changes required to implement the plan are managed; c) the ability of leaders to align the staff and manage the required changes, and d) the development of a team approach to the achievement of the plan's objectives. Employee Engagement – the employee's emotional connection to the organisation that results in a greater degree of discretionary effort – will inevitably grow.

The Wagon Wheel Way™ - Communication – Greasing the Wheel's Axle

No Enterprise Operating System would be complete without reference to Communication; it is, after all, the Central Nervous System of any organisation. If it's damaged, paralysis is the result.

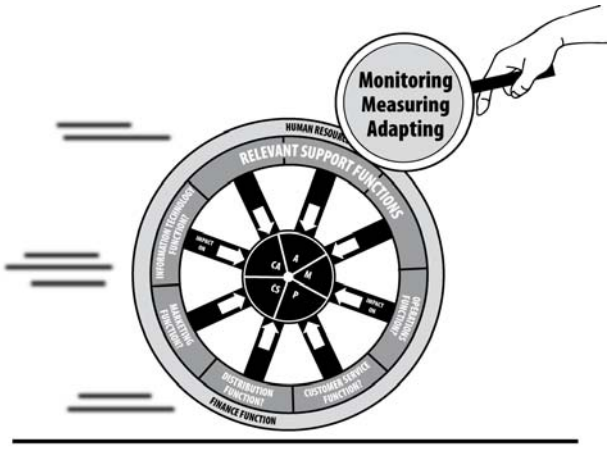
In the WWW Operating System, Communication is the lubricant on the axle that ensures that the wheel continues to revolve freely with the minimum of friction. It is the good oil.



Communication – the good oil

The Wagon Wheel Way™ - Monitoring, Measuring, Adapting – Maintaining the Wheel

If planning is the equivalent of constructing the Wagon Wheel and the OMELETTE factors – plus Communication – the equivalent of operating it, Monitoring, Measuring and Adapting is the equivalent of maintaining it. Maintenance takes two forms. Firstly, there is a need to measure progress towards the achievement of the various subsidiary objectives that are necessary to achieving the goals set out in the Hub of the Plan and, secondly, there is a need to monitor the currency of the Plan and adapt it to changes in the external environment that were not factored in at the time of the Plan's formulation.



Monitoring, Measuring, Adapting

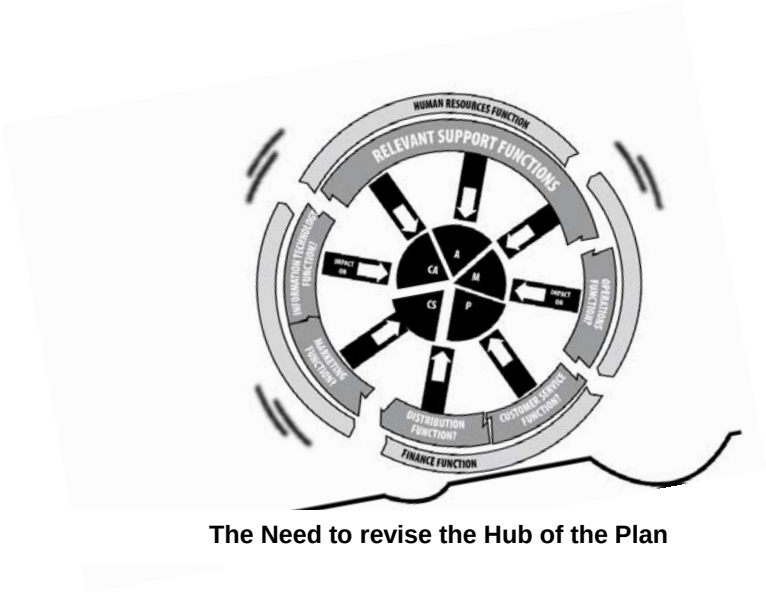
With the WWW Operating System, monitoring doesn't only cover the external environment but also embraces the OMELETTE factors and Communication. If there are significant changes in the former, there may be a need to adapt the plan to maintain its relevance since it's unlikely that the enterprise has any control over that environment. However, the enterprise should have control over its internal environment and can thus address any deficiencies in the OMELETTE factors and Communication.

"You cannot manage what you cannot measure ….. and what gets measured gets done" might be a cliché but as with other clichés it's become one because the opinion it espouses is generally held to be true. Do not confine measurement to quantitative data. Quantitative data by its very nature deals with past performance and tends to address symptoms without determining causes. Instead use a combination of qualitative and quantitative.

The one thing that can be guaranteed with absolute certainty is that over a period of years, not all the assumptions upon which the Plan was founded will maintain their validity. One of the many benefits of adopting the WWW Operating System is that separating "this is what we are going to do" from "this is how we are going to do it" facilitates the identification and correction of the factors that are causing the Plan's execution to fall short of the planners' expectations. In particular, it separates the assumptions made when the Hub of the Plan was constructed from the initiatives planned for the Support and Enabling Functions. Are the issues to do with a) "doing the right thing" or b) "doing things right" or c) a combination of both? If it's either a) or c), the plan needs to be adapted to accommodate such changes.

The Wagon Wheel Way™ - Revising – Rebuilding the Wheel

The last stage of the WWW Operating System is revising the Plan. This may occur because the Plan has been successfully implemented and the Plan's objectives achieved or it may be necessary because the changes are such in the enterprise's external environment that the Plan is simply unrealistic in the then present circumstances. In both cases, there is a need to revisit the Hub of the Plan and address all the subsequent changes that flow from such a major revision.



The Need to revise the Hub of the Plan

Revising the Hub of the Plan represents the beginning of a new cycle of the WWW Operating System.

The Wagon Wheel Way™ - Overcoming the Barriers to Execution**

To this point, there has been no mention of a key added value feature of the System. The Author has identified 36 barriers to execution. 13 of these relate to deficiencies in Planning, 14 to Implementation, 6 to Monitoring, Measuring and Adapting and 3 to Revising. Each barrier is linked to a particular node on the Wagon Wheel Operating System. This means that the sequence of barriers matches the sequence of the System. This ensures that barriers to implementation, for example, are not tackled before the potential barriers at the planning stage are addressed.

Would any enterprise contemplate having more than one operating system on their computers or using different applications software for the same purpose? We think not. A common operating system is essential if applications software is to run successfully on everyone's PC. The WWW Operating System is no different. To realise its potential in guiding the organisation towards the attainment of the organisation's goals, it's essential that it is adopted by all those charged with the development and execution of plans.

For example, imagine an organisation that has a Head Office and six regional offices. Regional and Head Office management have installed the WWW Operating System. Head Office develops the master Wagon Wheel setting out overall goals – "this is what we are going to do" and overall settings for the Support and Enabling Functions – "this is how we are going to do it". Each region then develops its own plan that is aligned to the Head Office plan but is designed to translate that plan into a regional context. The regions and Head Office all use the same Operating System to develop their plans and the common use of the OMELETTE factors and a common approach to Communication, Monitoring, Measuring and Adapting means that everyone is reading from the same page. Wheels within wheels, one might say.

Organisational alignment is the basis of successful execution.

- Everyone understands where the organisation is now
- Everyone understands the destination and the journey
- Everyone understands their role in getting there

Adopting The Wagon Wheel Way™ Operating System for your organisation will ensure that Organisational Alignment – and the succeeding requirements for great execution – are met.

Graham Haines
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**A detailed exposition of the Wagon Wheel Way together with the full list of the barriers to execution and how to overcome them will be found in my book – "Execution to Die For – the Manager's Guide to Making It Happen". The book is available from Amazon in both hard and electronic formats, from the Australian Institute of Management Bookshops and from myself at ghaines@planstoreality.com.au . Here are some comments from those who have read the book.

"Haines has done a brilliant job. I like the way he's come at the issue with some really practical ideas and examples. Loved Barrier #30 about meetings - haven't seen it framed like that before, so that got me laughing - it's so true."

"Most impressive. The power of the Wagon Wheel really comes to life through the excellent anecdotes and case studies which kept me enthralled throughout. Haines is a superb story-teller – highly readable!"

"Haines sets out the 36 barriers to execution he has found and provides very practical advice on how to tackle and overcome them. His 'Wagon Wheel' model provides a memorable framework that makes it clear how interdependent the issues and their solutions are".

Applications Software for The Wagon Wheel Way™ Operating System

Graham Haines Consulting Pty Ltd provides applications that run on the WWW Operating System covering Executive alignment, employee feedback, customer feedback, (www.planstoreality.com.au) team effectiveness, (www.t10t.productiveworkplaces.com) supply chain partnerships and strategic alliances (www.sccindex.com).