

Alternative pathways

8
HOURS

15-20
PEOPLE



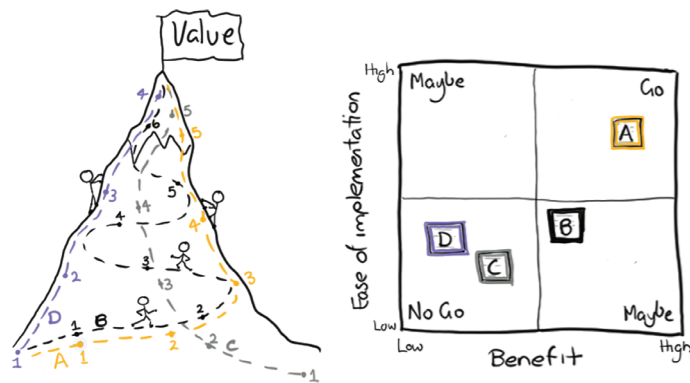
An alternative pathways workshop is designed to identify alternative development pathways for a project by incorporating a fresh set of eyes and removing existing constraints.

The outcome is a short list of alternatives to increase project profitability with their identified issues.

Benefits

Project studies can often hit a stumbling block. Over the project lifecycle market conditions often change; selling prices can fluctuate and capital can be constrained. Investment hurdle rates can also change which makes it more difficult to receive project sanction.

Continuing our project under the original assumptions will not work. The business case will not stack up and deliver business benefits. This workshop provides an opportunity for us to look for new ideas to improve the project profitability. It removes the current constraints and requires participants to open their minds and look for alternative pathways to realise the benefits. It is not looking closely at the project estimate to improve the business case, its redefining the scope.



When our project hits a major stumbling block as it is no longer profitable we must identify and prioritise new alternatives to improve the profitability or stop the project.

The process is very challenging as participants need to break from their existing ideas and create new thinking patterns. Having participants not previously involved in our project is paramount as this fosters creativity, challenges the existing project team and the project's current structures.

Activities

Pre-work

1. Work with the project sponsor to design and plan the workshop using the planning tools.
2. Create a workshop communications deck and ask the sponsor to send it to the participants; this raises the importance of the activity.
3. Review the project background documentation including previous study reports to:
 - Create a high level project overview (what, why and who is involved).
 - Create and document a burning platform why the current project is not profitable.
 - Create a draft opportunity statement and identify what's in/out of scope.
 - Create a high level alternatives framework that will form the basis of the brainstorming.
4. Create workshop posters, the minutes template and arrange a scribe to be ready for the workshop.

Steps

1. Bring everyone onto the same page using the SPACER tool.
2. Provide a common understanding of the project context and objectives.
3. Provide a common understanding of the burning platform to find alternative pathways.
4. Provide a common understanding of the alternative pathways process.
5. Validate the draft opportunity statement, what's in/out and mark up changes.
6. Identify and prioritise the facts, risks and uncertainties that relate to the opportunity statement using brainstorming and N/3.
7. Identify ideas to improve profitability using the alternatives framework and channel brainstorming.
8. Group the ideas into common alternatives using affinity grouping.
9. Identify viable alternatives using an absolute criteria screening.
10. Prioritise viable alternatives using a payoff matrix.
11. Create a project plan to investigate the go forward alternatives using the project initiation and planning scenario tools.
12. Document the next steps to be completed outside the workshop including communicating the outcomes.
13. Wrap up the workshop and capture feedback using the plus/deltas tool.

Post session

1. Nominated scribe to populate the alternatives minutes' template during the workshop.
2. Facilitator to finalise the alternatives minutes.
3. The sponsor is to validate the alternatives and issue to the project team.
4. Project team to execute the plan and investigate the alternatives.

Tips

- Participants can be very frustrated when starting this workshop as they may have spent months or years heading down a pathway only to find it will not work – so be very patient.
- Make sure the sponsor sets the scene and helps participants to come to terms with the situation and the importance of looking for new, creative alternatives.
- Being creative is very difficult, people often struggle with this and return to their old thinking patterns. Spend time communicating the importance of being creative and setting clear ground rules that all ideas are welcome.
- Including a basic initiating and planning scenario at the end of the workshop ensures that alternatives can be investigated immediately and the momentum continues.

Duration

- The length of the workshop will depend on the size of the project. Good workshop planning will reduce the workshop duration as the team are more focused.
- A major project will require 8 hours to ensure all the possible alternatives are considered and prioritised.
- A minor project will need half the time as there are fewer alternatives to be identified.

Tools

- Mandatory facilitation tools
- Detailed context
- Project objectives
- Opportunity statement
- Whats in/out
- Communication plan
- Channel brainstorming
- Affinity grouping
- N/3
- Payoff matrix
- Absolute criteria screening