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## PROCESS QUALITY:
### A MEASURE OF OUR DILIGENCE IN PLANNING AND BUDGETING

Leonid was the head of the Department of Languages at the St. Petersburg Polytechnic Institute and the most brilliant man I have ever known. He was a highly revered and well-known professor in Russia and had taken advantage of his language skills and intellectual capacity to master several major fields of study. He could discuss art history or complicated economic theories just as easily as languages, and he had the ability to sift through culture and history to integrate varying viewpoints into a coherent argument. He was also a principled man who had thrown off the delusion of communism for a life in Christ. When I wanted to understand Russia or its people, I went to him.

One night he asked me, "Larry, what was the single-most important factor that caused the demise of communism?" I thought for a moment and said, "I don't know, will you tell me?" He smiled wryly because he loved a willing student. Then he said, "It was unrealistic economic theory. Socialist theory tried to ignore the nature of man and change the economics of the marketplace, but the ideals of Leninist communism didn't last one month. From the first days of the revolution, there was favoritism and privilege for a few, and a black market for food coupons." The Soviet experiment was a fraud

from the very beginning. It was impossible to create processes to support its stated values because its manifesto rejected both faith in God and the fundamentals of a free-market economy.

Leonid had been a dispassionate member of the Soviet party, but in his own words, he had committed "great crimes" by failing to denounce the futility of socialist doctrine when he was a young professor. He knew that many had suffered because people like him had feared death or exile in the Siberian camps and kept silent. Every new generation of soviet leaders had either discounted the facts or believed they could force people's lives into conformance with their flawed vision. They had become so obsessed with defending what they thought was the morality of their original cause that they overlooked the economic measures that proved it had already failed. In fact, they were no longer defending the vision itself, but their own complicity in its sins. Leonid had long since rejected Soviet doctrine, but it was not until he had become a follower of Christ that he found cleansing for his guilt and a completed vision for life.

Over the years, I have studied carefully how economics (the acquisition and distribution of resources) control processes and indicate their vitality. Like the seventy years of Soviet rule, the wrong economic theory may produce a facade of success, but it will do so at great expense and personal sacrifice. Eventually, no matter how idealistic or high-minded a person's vision, the resources available to him will limit what he can accomplish.

Resources are exchanged through competitive markets which combine financial and human resources to produce a variety of products and services. When people respond positively to our ideas, they also have to decide what price they are willing to pay to participate in or support our vision. So whether our access to resources is through investors, paying customers, charitably motivated contributors, or obedient followers of Christ, economics will ultimately control our processes.

In Genesis 22, we learn that God always provides what we need to be obedient to Him. God provided Abraham a ram to sacrifice instead of Isaac, and he named the place of the sacrifice "Jehovah-jireh," which means, "the Lord will see to it, or the Lord who sees ahead and provides" (#3070). By adding this axiom of faith to the

realities of economics, we can say that a project that is in God's will can expect to be provided the resources it needs to succeed. If a man has ten dollars worth of vision, but can honestly access only six dollars in resources, four dollars of his vision is either invalid or premature. As a steward before God, it is his responsibility to discover what is wrong and make the adjustments.

*Process quality is a measure of our diligence in planning and budgeting.* The success of a product or service is determined by the requirements it fulfills and, most importantly, by whether processes can be organized to deliver on the promises we have made. Almost everyone has had the desire to create something meaningful and become financially successful. It is because of this entrepreneurial urge that men become pioneers in their field and draw people to their ideas. When creative energy is focused in an organized way, it can produce a reliable product or service. However, without the proper planning, it can result in undisciplined actions with disappointing results.

When I was younger, I had all kinds of entrepreneurial ideas. I dashed from one project to another looking for the one that would make me rich, but I lacked the prudence required to develop my ideas into reliable actions. In my eagerness to get to the marketplace, I was always missing some key part of the puzzle. I had learned to be systematic as an engineer, but was deceived by the energy of the business world. This caused me to underestimate the relevance of careful planning by failing to ask enough questions. I have found the same misconception in both business and ministry where intensely expressed faith or enthusiasm is substituted for the prudence of good process development. The careful, deliberate, planning disciplines I learned working in the Apollo program apply very effectively to any form of enterprise. As Proverbs 21:5 (TLB) says, "steady plodding brings prosperity," while "hasty speculation brings poverty."

In 1973, I invested nearly all our savings to start what was then called an "inter-connect" telephone company. We manufactured a teleconferencing device and were also representatives for several major brands of telephone systems, answering machines, and other accessories that had come to the market. One of them was an interesting gadget called the "briefcase telephone." The electronics, batteries and handset,

were built into a beautiful, black leather briefcase. Even though it was very expensive, businessmen who could afford such extravagances loved it. It gave them freedom from their offices and added professional mystique to their businesses. It was a good idea and the forerunner of the cellular telephone.

One day my partner and I were talking about how to leverage it into new markets. We began to list improvements we wanted to suggest to the manufacturer such as reduced size, weight, and expense. We were following this line of thought when we had the idea to make a base station small enough to connect to a home telephone line. By setting the handset free of the base unit, the cordless telephone was born. Within only a few weeks, we had arranged a joint venture to manufacture and sell the first cordless telephone for home use. It was my responsibility to work with the manufacturer to solve technical problems and develop the marketing strategy. My partner created the business plan and began arranging financing for the project.

It was hard, but exciting work, and we were breaking new ground almost daily. While we were working out technical criteria with the telephone company, we also found our first customer. One of the Bell companies agreed to purchase the first 10,000 units we manufactured and to test them in selected markets. We developed a working model and were prepared to begin production on a wide scale. I was filled with energy and was sure I was about to become wealthy. Then I received a fateful telephone call from the manufacturer.

He explained that they had failed to make timely payments on lines of credit owed to their bank and were being forced into receivership. He said the bank understood our plan and was prepared to work with us to complete the project. A clause in their line of credit gave the bank the right to become our partner. We had noticed some warning signs about the financial condition of the manufacturer, but with a huge sales backlog just in front of us, we were sure the cash-flow obstacles could be overcome. However, we had not asked enough questions and had made too many assumptions. Those mistakes became part of the Lord's plan to jolt me into reality.

The bank turned out to be a terrible partner and our deal fell apart. We were so entangled in legal and financial problems that nothing we did could save our project. Eventually, we lost our business.

It was amazing how quickly we went from a done deal to no deal at all, and how easily our dream slipped away. I had been blinded by my pride, unbridled desires, and the energy of the experience. I had not used a good process to evaluate the risks of the venture and had not anticipated the possibility of a problem putting us completely out of business. When it happened, I was enraged because of my losses and ignorantly railed against the Lord. But God mercifully used this failure to bring me to a greater knowledge of His ways.

The lesson for me, personally, was clear: "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Proverbs 16:18). I had taken on all of the attributes of an overconfident, egotistical entrepreneur. I had become self-indulgent and was not being faithful to anyone or anything but "my vision." Good ideas can suddenly unravel and fail for even the most innocuous reasons, especially if you are without the favor of God. Proverbs 21:30 says, "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord." That is good news if you have been seeking the Lord for His wisdom and praying about your work. It's bad news if you suddenly find yourself out of favor with Him and in a situation that requires the most penetrating insights.

Proverbs 16:16 (NAS) says, "How much better it is to get wisdom than gold!" I have learned a lot from my failures. In fact, most experienced men would say that failure is a necessary element of success. But, there is a better way. Proverbs 16:3 tells us to "commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed." This doesn't mean that all your projects will succeed. Every man is going to have difficulties and failures in life with or without the Lord, but one of the great benefits of being a follower of Christ is that He sustains us and helps us to learn His ways, thus avoiding a lot of problems. A good plan is one that provides reality checks along the way so that we can give up on ideas that are doomed to failure. There is no wisdom in wasting valuable time, energy, and money on bad ideas.

## Organize Ideas into Work-Processes

Fortunately, there is a scripturally consistent method that can help us organize our ideas into work-processes that can be measured and managed. Its simple steps provide a reliable framework for

evaluating opportunities, organizing projects, and accurately predicting resources before we become over-committed to what may be a bad idea disguised as a good one. Work-process analysis (WPA) operates on four simple premises:

*First, every good idea will ultimately require work of someone.* If little Joey has an idea for something good to eat, *someone* must prepare the food and serve it. If your boss has what he thinks is a good idea for a new sales campaign, *someone* will have to organize, plan and execute the idea. Every idea, good or bad, will require work of *someone* for the idea to become a reality.

*Second, all work takes place in segments (or steps) that together are called processes.* Almost everything we do at home or at work can be described as a process, with a beginning, end, and logical segments of activity in between. When we cook, mow the lawn, play ball, drive the car, write a proposal, or repair machinery, we are performing the work of an identifiable process.

*Third, resources flow through processes to produce specific outcomes.* To make a cheese omelet (a specific outcome), *someone* (a human resource) must acquire some eggs, cooking oil, a frying pan, a stove, plates, utensils, etc. (resources) and combine them using a specific procedure or sequence of steps (process). The design and implementation of every process is controlled by the resources that are available.

*Fourth, each segment or step in a process depends upon the successful completion of the previous steps.* If *someone* mishandles the eggs and drops them on the floor, there will be no omelet. To *prevent* this kind of error, a better procedure for handling eggs must be developed. When we concentrate on improving the individual segments of a process, we can make the overall process more reliable.

**Resources Flow Through Processes to Produce Specific Outcomes**
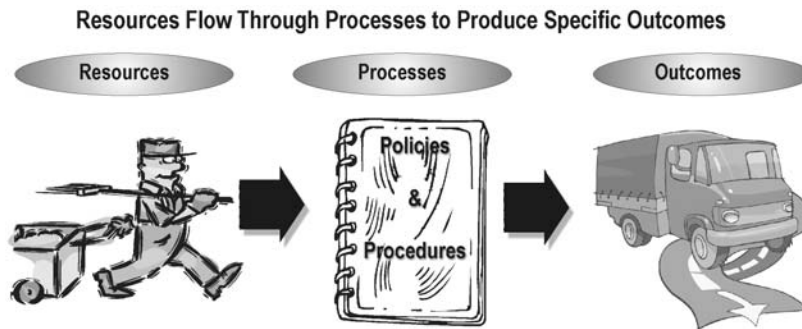
With enough information, anyone can make reliable development decisions, separating valuable opportunities from worthless adventures. Following the simple steps of the WPA method, which is an application of well-known project management principles, we can evaluate any project we might envision by separating it into its logical processes and segments of development and then researching their reliability. The information we accumulate while researching the validity of our ideas can then become the road map for how to do things right. Do not be surprised to see the elements of your vision (and your opinion of WPA) change and mature as your research and analysis progresses. People commonly react to the use of the WPA method in one of three ways:

1) Some men consider the gathering and analysis of the planning information as a waste of time or too clerical. They believe that purely spiritual methods such as "hearing from God in prayer," or trusting their "gut instincts" are more to the point. Hearing from God accurately certainly would be a shortcut to project development, however, my own experiences have proven that beyond helpful impressions and insights during prayer, I have had to "search out the matter" (Proverbs 25:2).

2) Some men will see the WPA method as an effective path for development and a way to avoid the spiritual demands of prayer. While its simple format does reduce anxiety and errors, it does not minimize the need for prayer. To rely on the WPA method without prayer would be as presumptuous as only praying. No man "know(s) what will happen tomorrow" (James 4:14).

3) Most men can understand the necessity of diligently plodding through the research steps of the WPA method while seeking guidance and wisdom from the Lord. This is the attitude that brings reliable results. Remember, Proverbs 24:3-4 (TLB) says, "Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts."

Now, let's review the Five Steps of Work-Process Analysis using a project idea that could be executed by either a for-profit or nonprofit entity.

## Step 1 – Describe What Needs to Be Done
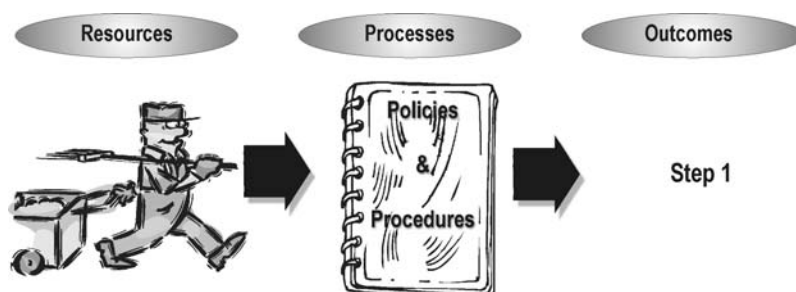
Before we implement an idea, we must define and research the specific outcomes we envision, and determine whether or not we have the resources to complete the project. Then we can implement our plan with confidence. The desired outcome may be a product, service, or a simple process improvement; but no matter what the goal might be, I think you will find the disciplined organizational approach of WPA to be very helpful. There are four parts to Step 1:

A) *Name the project.* In as few words as possible, describe the objective of your project. For example: A Sports-Medicine Rehabilitation Center.  Usually people have grand ideas for the name of the entity they will operate such as Rosewood Rehabilitation Center; a Full-Service Sports-Medicine Facility Serving Central Michigan and the World. But for now, just *describe what needs to be done.*  Don't spend a lot of time laboring on topics related to image/marketing until you have completed the design of the services you will offer. You might discover important facts as you work through the steps of WPA that will change how you thought you would reach your market or even which market you will ultimately pursue.

If you are going to produce a product such as a cordless telephone, then you might name the project: Manufacture and Distribute Cordless Telephone. If you are evaluating a process improvement opportunity for an existing product or service, then you might name the project more specifically, for example: Increasing Cordless Telephone Transmission Range to 500 Ft. Radius from Base.

*B) List and describe the key processes that will support the project.*  This is the beginning of an exercise in list-making.  Each step in the WPA method creates opportunities to reexamine the validity of your ideas and

rewrite your lists and plans. You will have to make many decisions about the amount of detail you include in your lists and when to replace old data with newer more reliable facts. There may also be some redundancy and overlap between your various lists. But you must accumulate enough accurate information about each item to make dependable decisions and keep the various sub-processes organized. This step helps you establish reasonable priorities for your planning and research, especially if there are a large number of supporting processes. For example:

Project Name:
    A Sports-Medicine Rehabilitation Center
Key Processes:
    1) Select and Design Core Services
    2) Develop a Marketing Plan
    3) Obtain Licensing
    4) Select Facilities
    5) Obtain Financing
    6) Hire and Train Administrative Staff
    7) Develop Policies and Procedures
    8) Equip the Staff and Facility
    9) Hire and Train Operations Staff

C) *List and describe the products or services that will be produced or the actions that will be required.* At this point, you should dream and describe ideal versions of what you want to happen. Putting your ideas down on paper and reexamining them causes you to discipline your thoughts and eliminate obvious conflicts, but you should feel no burden to get all the details "right" at this stage of your work. This is a preliminary step in WPA and you are only producing "drafts" of what might ultimately become your project. The details will become clearer as you continue to research and rewrite the requirements. It is quite normal to discover new information or have ideas that cause you to change the elements of a process, product, requirement, or even the central theme of your project. This additional step in formatting your planning list provides another piece of the organizational framework within which you can then fill in the details you will need to be successful:

# VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Project Name:
    A Sports-Medicine Rehabilitation Center
Key Processes/**Products, Services, Actions**:
    1) Select and Design Core Services
        A) Orthopedic Medicine
        B) Post-surgical Rehabilitation
    2) Develop a Marketing Plan
        A) Identity/Image
        B) Advertising Plan
        C) Referrals
    3) Obtain Licensing
        A) City
        B) County
        C) State
    4) Select Facilities
        A) Determine Floor Plan Requirements
        B) Build or Lease in Licensed Area
    5) Obtain Financing
        A) Preliminary
        B) Long-term
        C) Investors, Contributors, and/or Loans
    6) Hire and Train Administrative Staff
        A) Business Office
        B) Maintenance
        C) Admissions
        D) Clinical
    7) Develop Policies and Procedures
        A) Admissions
        B) Operations
    8) Equip the Staff and Facility
        A) Furniture
        B) Kitchen and Misc. Appliances
        C) Medical Supplies
    9) Hire and Train Operations Staff
        A) Physicians
        B) Nurses
        C) Specialists

D) *List and describe the requirements for each product, service, or action.* This is another expansion of your list. The details now become more important. You should include factors such as the size, shape, type, anticipated frequency of use, and any other known descriptors. This will be a good test of the knowledge and experience you already have that will apply to the project. The number of words that you use to *describe what needs to be done* for each item on your list can vary from a few paragraphs to a few sentences, or, as I have used for these examples, just a few words. Using "enough" but not "too many" words can become a challenging exercise in information management. For this example we will use one key process, 1) Select and Design Core Services, to demonstrate how a list can grow and expand as requirements become known.

Project Name:
    A Sports-Medicine Rehabilitation Center
Key Processes/Products, Services, Actions/**Requirements**:
    1) Select and Design Core Services
        A) Orthopedic Medicine
            1. Diagnostic/Imaging Systems
                A. X-Ray
                B. Ultrasound (Sonogram)
                C. Magnetic Resonance (MRI)
            2. Therapeutic Programs
                A. Exercise and Conditioning
                B. Massage Therapy
                C. Hydro-Therapy
            3. Surgical Consultation
        B) Post-surgical Rehabilitation
            1. Housing for 30 patients
                A. 100 square feet per patient
                B. Double occupancy

One of the first things we learn about writing lists is that they often need further refinement. In this particular case describing the requirements for Orthopedic Medicine has taken us to another level of service descriptors, with three different categories of orthopedic

medical services and additional descriptors for two of those categories. The initial requirements that we can describe for Post-Surgical Rehabilitation are somewhat more simple and detailed. The important lesson here is to remain flexible, yet organized.

Significantly more detailed information will be required to successfully develop this project. For example: in section A) Orthopedic Medicine, 1. Diagnostic/Imaging Systems, we must describe the x-ray and ultrasound equipment that will be needed, how it will be used, staffed, maintained, etc. We will also want to more specifically describe section 2. Therapeutic Programs, including how we will use massage and hydro-therapy, and what kinds of whirlpools or swimming facilities we will need.

And, we must begin sharing and repeating information in related sections of our list. For instance, relevant information should be added to 8) Equip the Staff and Facility, C) Medical Supplies about the imaging and hydro-therapy equipment that is required, preferred brands and models, and other facts of interest about what must be purchased. Also, the housing requirements described under B) Post-surgical Rehabilitation should be added to 4) Select Facilities, A) Determine Floor Plan Requirements, so that this critical information can be included in the architectural planning.

Managing information effectively for a project such as this one could become confusing without the help of spreadsheets and project management software. Architects and engineers routinely use this kind of technology to manage the many lists and details of their projects. With these user-friendly computer programs we can easily organize project categories and link them to one another, no matter how large or small the project; and they can be purchased inexpensively at your local computer store.

But even if you are only using a three-ring binder, *describing what needs to be done* through the simple discipline of "list-making" is essential to the success of any project. Each time we add dependable information to a list, we are reducing the probability of errors and increasing the reliability of our judgment on critical tasks at decisive moments in the development of a project.

## Step 2 – Research How to Do It Right
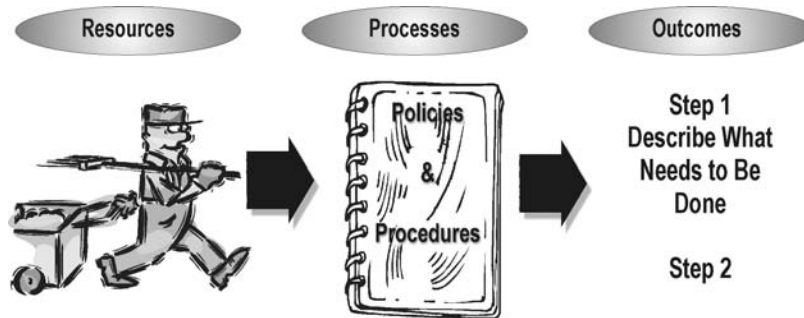


Now, we want to find out what other people think of our ideas. Potential customers, referral agencies, and other parties who may have an interest are interviewed to verify their needs and requirements, and gather suggestions they may offer about your design.  A project must be subjected to the scrutiny of potential customers, and the communities that will interact with or regulate its activities. This is very hard work. Doing market research is a little like being a ping-pong ball as you are propelled back and forth by people's conflicting ideas and input.  Even the ideas you receive from a single interview can sound like a list of opposing requirements. When what you think personally is in conflict with the responses from your research, it's good to remember: "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9 NAS).

A researcher should ask as many pertinent questions as possible; those who do not, often regret it later. Fatigue, excitement, or the fear of rejection, can cause a man to stop short of asking the right questions and finding valuable information. Proverbs 16:1 (NAS) says, "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord."  This is why research is so important and why it works.  You can have what you think are terrific ideas, but the answers that consistently surface are more likely to be what you need to hear. Both enthusiasm and cynicism can be misleading.  You should throw out the high and low responses and listen for the central theme. The objective of research is not to convince others about the viability of your project.  You should simply describe your plans and then listen for the data that is needed to succeed. Your research interviews should include:

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1) Potential clients, customers, or recipients—people who might use your product, service, or participate in the activities you plan. It can be especially helpful to talk with people who have already experienced a need for your product or service, to learn what they like or dislike about your plan.

2) The operators of parallel services—people who interact with your target clients but do not provide your proposed products or services. This could include regulatory agencies, police, teachers, health care workers, etc., who deal with the effect of a person's problems but are limited by regulation or resources in what they can actually do to help. Your product or service may become a resource to them. If so, they could become "screeners" of potential clients and "centers of influence" for your organization.

3) Potential competitors—people who are providing the same or similar products and services either in your city or another city or state. Your future colleagues can be amazingly open and supportive, especially if they will not be directly competing with you. They may have operational experience and information that is critical to the design of your project.

4) Potential investors, volunteers, and contributors—people who have an interest in your products or services and may also want to participate in financial or operational matters. Your interaction with future supporters of your project while you are in the developmental stages causes them to feel much more a part of the plans you are making. Their interest, or lack of it, will also be helpful to know.

You should share as much about your project as time will allow in each interview. However, it is more important to give each respondent time to evaluate and criticize your plans. A serious researcher encourages respondents to speak freely and carefully draws from their reservoir of experience. "Though good advice lies deep within a counselor's heart, the wise person will draw it out" (Proverbs 20:5 TLB).

Because a man's vision is personal, it can also be an emotional subject. But, "don't refuse to accept criticism; get all the help you can" (Proverbs 23:12 TLB). An open, collegial attitude is a fundamental expression of wisdom and prudence. We are reminded of this in Proverbs 8:12 (NAS), which says, "I wisdom dwell with

prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion." There have been inspired men who have ignored criticism of their vision and been proven right, but they are rare. When research warns a man of the uncertainty of his plans, he can choose to defy the odds, but if he does, the risk should be taken with the full knowledge of all the participants. As Proverbs 20:18 (TLB) says, "Don't go ahead with your plans without the advice of others; don't go to war until they agree." If your idea is truly wise, it will stand the test of critical analysis. Keep researching until the information you seek is clear and consistent.

When Step 2 is completed you will have acquired helpful insight into the design of your products or services, who will purchase them, and what they will pay. You will also have obtained a better understanding of the regulatory requirements. You should not move on to the next step until you have accomplished enough interviews to feel secure about the data you have accumulated. This is a true test for any developer. Proverbs 27:21 (NAS) says, "The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man is tested by the praise [or I think - criticism] accorded him." Be willing to follow your conscience even if it means going back for one more interview. "Timely advice is as lovely as golden apples in a silver basket" (Proverbs 25:11 TLB), especially if it's discovered to be crucial to your success.

## Step 3 – Calculate What It Will Cost
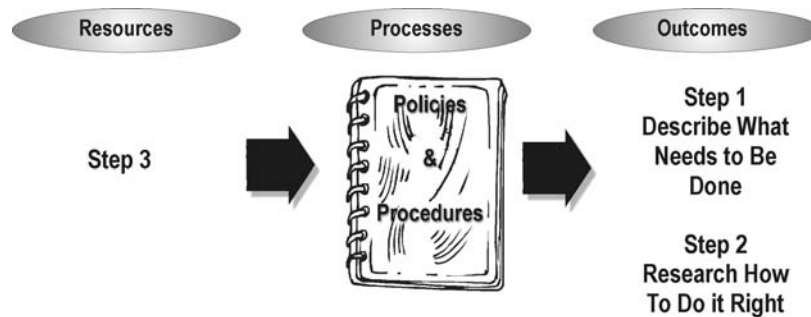


This step of WPA focuses on the production resources required to produce the described outcomes and whether or not a viable budget can be created. Each product or service requires specific human resources, facilities, materials, etc. If you are certain that the product

or service you have designed will meet the needs of the clients and the community for which it was intended, you must then determine how many people, places, and things are required to produce it, and what they will cost. Your vision must be relevant to the people and money that is required, and at your disposal, so the following list of action items may be crucial to your success:

1) Working from the list of outcome requirements for each product or service, you can define the production requirements (personnel, facilities, equipment, materials, etc.) that will be needed to create those specific outcomes. When this information is gathered, a budget can be produced. This is a critical step in the use of the WPA method, because accurate budget data is essential. You must be able to produce your product or service for less than you expect to receive in sales or contributions in order to keep your project alive and functioning.

2) If they are available, at least three sources should be researched for each major item in the budget. First, obtain written bids and then interview each bidder to determine how they produce their goods or services. This will provide comparisons on the competitive advantages one supplier offers over another and a perspective on which supplier will be most reliable. The bid and interview process will also expose you to the business practices and routine communications you can expect to experience as a customer. The lowest price is not always the best bargain in supplier relationships.

3) A major variable in the success of any project is the people. Good relationships with staff members, suppliers, and regulators can have an enormous impact on trust and cooperation when you need it most. So, when possible, spend time with people before you hire them or purchase their services. Talk to them about their values and business philosophy. What you learn in these conversations will provide strategic information for your final decision. The more you know about people, the more accurately you can estimate the costs of doing business with them.

4) After the budget has been constructed in draft form, it should be thoroughly researched to confirm its accuracy. By interviewing potential suppliers, you can re-verify the validity of the production requirements and cost estimations. The availability and lead-time

for resources can also be established so that procurement procedures can be planned around reasonable time-lines and cash demands. Adjustments and budget rewrites should be made when necessary.

5) An integral part of budgeting is the computation of production costs and profit margins. The excess between the cost of production and income is called profit, or in the nonprofit world, surplus. The surplus that is available after a business cycle is completed can be distributed for personal gain in a for-profit company. In a nonprofit venture, it must be applied to the purposes of the charter. When production and profit margins are not computed into the budgets of an enterprise, there will be no surplus resources to access for production errors, changes in markets, and other unpredictable factors. Reasonably operated enterprises calculate surplus into their production costs so that operating reserves are available to cover contingencies, update infrastructure, or research new products.

People generally react to the drudgery of creating budgets in one of three ways:

1) Some may think a more spiritual approach is relevant. They may believe that the verification of the expressed need by its potential customers is enough evidence to move ahead. However, this can lead to a presumptive application of the principle "where God guides, He provides." Expecting God to influence the provision for any project in business or ministry that His people are endeavoring under His leadership is a reasonable expression of faith. It is just as reasonable to expect His will to be confirmed through a workable budget.

2) Those who do not have adequate experience in accounting or purchasing, will typically try to concentrate solely on verifying the outcome design and delegate the number-crunching to others. But the people who write the budgets will be unable to make effective resource decisions unless they participate in the outcome research. A prudent man will stay involved in these activities to be sure that the budget-writers are making resource and cost estimations relevant to the critical factors of the project.

3) Faithful men will regard financial research as one of the ways to prove God's guidance and will eagerly pursue budget planning as an opportunity to further confirm or challenge the outcome research. They want to know the truth about their plans and believe God will

confirm their validity in a reasonable analysis of the numbers. Economics ultimately control processes; where there are no resources, there is no development process. It is imperative that the developer carefully defines the resource budget.

> For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it?  Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish."
> Luke 14:28-30 NAS

## Step 4 – Decide on a Course of Action
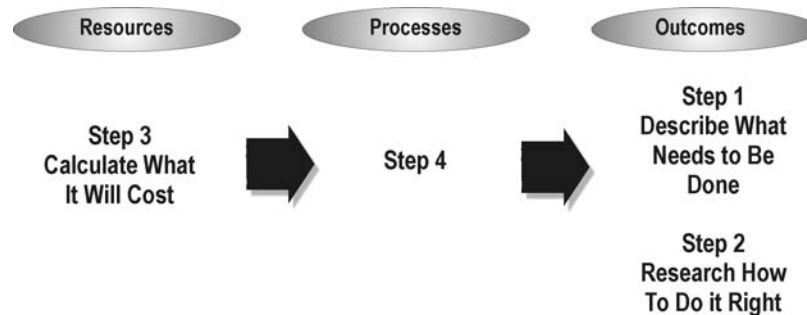


To help make a correct project decision more certain, you should revisit some previous respondents to your research for a final "reality check." This is an important opportunity to verify the reliability of your project design and retest people's financial interest in your work. Your development options should continue to include redesigning, delaying, implementing, or rejecting the project.

Using the budget as a guide, specific product or service costs should be presented to prospective customers or constituents to test the strength of their interest. Some of these contacts will be repeat interviews, while others should be new contacts, expanding the database for your final decision. The following are a few things to think about as you approach the decision point of your project:

1) The only way you can be sure of a person's interest in your work is to prove its value to them through the sales process. People must be asked to spend their money for your products or services. You must put them in the position to confirm or modify their previous advice by asking for an order (or contribution). What they may have said before could change as they realize you are nearing a final decision. If they will give you an order for your products or services, or make an investment, then their positive comments are believable. If not, their inaction should be considered as a signal to re-evaluate. To make a final decision without testing your constituency in real-life sales conditions, is to dangerously presume success.

2) Prospective customers should be consistently positive and willing to buy before you decide to implement your project. If people are reluctant to spend their money, your plans might need to be re-designed or scaled down. Without reasonable financial support, a project's chances for success must be seriously questioned. If prospects hesitate to buy, they should be encouraged to speak freely about their concerns.

3) A researcher can work through each step of the WPA method, rewriting and redesigning his project, and discover that it is enthusiastically accepted. It is also possible to work through all of the steps, with only positive responses until you revisit potential prospects, and then discover that you are not able to finance your project because of the lack of dependable interest. If so, you should be prepared to rewrite your plan, table it until a later date, or walk away satisfied that you discovered its vulnerability. "The advice of a wise person refreshes like water from a mountain spring. Those accepting it become aware of the pitfalls ahead" (Proverbs 13:14 TLB).

When I first began my sales career I remember someone saying, "Nothing happens until somebody sells something." It's true that all products and services require some sales efforts, and the movement of money and resources begins with a sale. Selling is not for the faint of heart, especially if your ability to pay your mortgage is dependent upon the commissions you earned thirty days ago. But sales experience does one important thing for a man—it causes him to be sure of the agreement between the buyer and the seller and not to assume the sale is made until the transaction is complete.

I learned that the success of the sales process depended upon my ability to define the needs of my customer (the outcome requirements), and provide them with an option that fulfilled their desires and their ability to pay.  When I had done this well, asking for the order was easier. I could also expect the buyer to feel comfortable with his purchase.  But sometimes I asked for the order and found that the buyer was reluctant. When this happened I knew that further discussion was required to determine what buying motives were unsatisfied.  Some buyers only need more information, while others balk at the sale because they want a better price, so they fish for negotiating room by criticizing some part of the proposal.

After I became a follower of Christ, I printed Proverbs 20:14 (NAS) on an index card.  "Bad! Bad! says the buyer, but when he goes his way, then he boasts."  Whenever I had made as good an offer as I could and was being challenged to do more, I would just turn it over on my desk and show it to the buyer.  The truth and the humor of it often worked to move us forward in our negotiations.  I mention this because the reliability of what people say in a sales interview is proven by what they actually do.  This is especially the case when you are verifying your vision.  People can say, "What a great idea!" while you are with them, but after you've gone they might say, "That guy is nuts to try that!"

Many people have "great" ideas that will ultimately be accomplished by someone else.  If you don't think so, take a look at the storefronts that open and close in your local mall.  Ten people can open restaurants and lose their fortunes in the same location.  An eleventh can come along with just the right menu and process controls, at just the right time in the marketplace, and make a fortune.  In the meantime, the only person making any money was the landlord.  The risks of a venture must be soberly compared to our ability to finish the course and our understanding of God's plan for our life.  God expects us to risk everything we have and everything we are, to follow Him, but He rarely calls a person to take the same risks for earthly matters.  Proverbs 18:13 (TLB) says, "What a shame – yes, how stupid! – to decide before knowing the facts!"

## Step 5 – Implement the Work-Processes
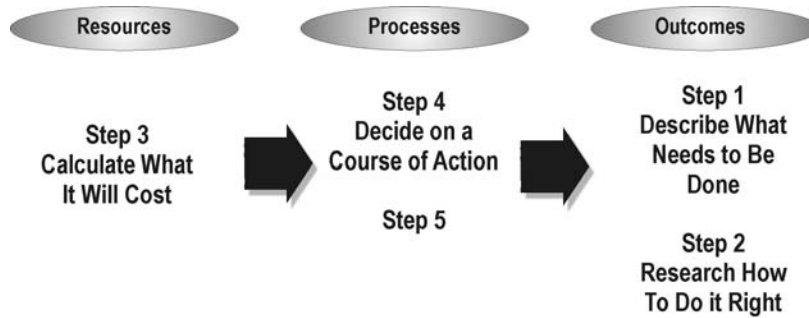


The eight management actions that are required by Step 5 of WPA can have an enormous effect on the success or failure of your project. So to relax your focus this close to the "finish line" would be foolish. Stay alert, keep paying attention to the details and remember: "An empty stable stays clean, but there is no income from an empty stable" (Proverbs 14:4 TLB). This proverb reminds us that implementing a new project can be exhausting work, but it can also be very satisfying and profitable. That's why so many men keep trying to do it. To increase the probability of success, you should continue the due diligence of the WPA method until every process is functioning smoothly. The following checkpoints will help you identify and eliminate the remaining sources of errors while they can be inexpensively corrected:

1) Write the policies and procedures. A vital task in project development is the conversion of the design and research data that has been accumulated into *written* policies and procedures. Although it is often regarded as challenging work, the person who has navigated each step of WPA should have little difficulty writing simple instructions about how and when to do things and the resources that will be required.

2) Obtain a short supply of resources. A short supply is the amount needed to turn on and practice the process. This includes people, facilities, equipment, materials etc. For this short period of practice, it is better to buy in small quantities regardless of the unit price. When possible, rent rather than buy and keep inventories at minimums.

3) Thoroughly train the staff. Every dollar you spend in a focused, productive effort to train the people who will operate the processes is an investment in the reliability of the entire project. When the staff executes its responsibilities according to an established set of procedures you can also more easily identify errors in the details of the procedure, the resources provided, the equipment utilized, etc.

4) Turn on the process. The objective is to allow the resources to interact within the confines of the processes to see if they function as designed and described in the policies and procedures. This can take place in a laboratory setting or at an actual location depending upon the type of product or service that will be produced.

5) Perform operations proofing. This step is a combination of quality control and quality assurance actions. We remove bad things from the process (errors) and put in the good things that are required (adjustments to the process, training, etc.). Inspect the interaction of the resources at every step of each process.

6) Obtain customer feedback. When the process appears to conform to the requirements, you may begin delivering the product or service to a customer. The customer's critique at this early stage is vital. Make him or her feel comfortable describing non-conformances, and be liberal with rework or refunds.

7) Take corrective action. Use the information you have obtained from operations proofing and customer feedback to adjust the processes. Rewrite whatever procedures are necessary and retrain the people who will operate the processes. Keep in mind that this is the most inexpensive opportunity you will have to make these changes.

8) Scale-up the process. This is a judgment call. By now, you will know a lot about your prospects for success. Reverify the resource budgets, operating expenses, and projected income. Then decide whether to "scale up" operations and create a continuous supply of resources, or return to operations proofing.

The idea of manufacturing a cordless telephone proved to be a good one, even a great one. We performed the design research required and knew our idea was sound, but we naively ignored the potential consequences of being poorly financed. We didn't realize it at the time, but we were putting our entire business at risk by expanding its product line. The shift in our sales and management energies

diminished the income from our core activities. In addition, there were unplanned expenses, and to make matters worse, we overlooked the possibility of losing our manufacturing partner.

If we had studied our financial situation more closely, we might have been able to take an alternate route. We could have brought the bank in on the planning earlier, keeping the manufacturer as our partner; or we could have sold the idea to a larger company, but we were too greedy for success and had a death grip on our plans. The truth is, "it is pleasant to see plans develop. This is why fools refuse to give them up even when they are wrong" (Proverbs 13:19 TLB). Like many men before and since, I plunged ahead, blinded by my earthly desires and the addictive energy of the development experience. I had not yet learned that "the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands" (Isaiah 32:8).

Of course the right plans develop when we allow the Lord to reveal His plan for us. This is not an easy concept for someone who is accustomed to moving the agenda forcefully ahead by himself. Even though we might be trying to "trust the Lord," our soul may be struggling to have its own way, saying, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it" (Isaiah 5:19). Every man who has followed the Lord has felt this way at least once, but the person who walks by faith is able to restrain himself. He will not try to take control of life with his own strength.

I once had a dream in which I saw the Lord standing at a large blueprint table. His arms were outstretched and His hands were resting on the front edge of the table. He was leaning over a blueprint the way a builder would study his plans. I was a little boy, and intrigued by what I saw Him doing, I found myself moving up next to Him. Before long, I rested my chin on His extended right arm, holding on to His arm with both hands. As I clung to His side, I felt close to Him and took great comfort in the strength I felt in His arm. Like a son would mimic his father, I began to look at the blueprint and study it, not knowing what I was looking at or what it meant. However, I did seem to instinctively know that what He was doing was very important to Him, and to me. Then He opened my understanding to let me see that it was His plan for my life.

When I realized He had a plan for my life, my heart began to pound with anticipation. My mind was full of ideas and questions, and I began to ask, "Wow! A plan just for me? What could it be? Where would it take place? When would it happen?" I wanted to know everything about it. "Did it include this or that? Would I get to do thus and so?" As all the things that every man wonders about at one time or another raced through my mind, I let go of His arm and moved underneath it. I was standing between Him and the table with my eyes transfixed on the plan. He had not moved, nor had He responded to any of my questions. He stood over me in the same way that a father would indulge his son and allow him to enjoy the moment. His hands, though, remained firmly on the edge of the table, holding the plans in place.

As I looked more closely at the plans, I began to recognize events that I had experienced and places I had been. It was fascinating to see a couple of things similar to what I had imagined might be in my future. But they were hard to see clearly from my vantage point and I could not be sure. I edged closer to the table, and for the first time, placed my own hands on the blueprint. As I moved my hand back and forth on the plan, I was surprised at how extensive it was. While the Lord had only let me understand parts of His plan, I wanted to make sure I did what was expected of me, so I began to pull myself up on the edge of the table to get a closer look. Without giving it another thought, I was lost in the pursuit of His plan for my life.

I began to press my finger against the lines of the plan, following them from one side of the print to the other. As I did, I began to form conclusions about how one thing I saw related to another, or how one event might precipitate the next. I wondered how I might be expected to participate in the fulfillment of the plan. I could see that there were some logical sequences in the plan, while other parts appeared to defy logic. I wanted to know how it would all fit together. Then I realized that there were several pages of the print, one on top of the other on the table. There was more! I grabbed both sides of the blueprints and picked them up in a bundle, holding them out in front of me like a painting. It was a magnificent puzzle! Suddenly, I felt alone. I spun around to discover that the Lord was gone. The strength and comfort I had felt when I stood by the Lord's side were

gone. The ability to understand the prints was gone, too. My hands fell to my sides and the lifeless prints sagged into a heap of confusion on the floor, and the dream ended.

That dream showed me just how easy it is for a man to confuse his own will with that of the Lord's. I had been given a glimpse of my future, and just like in the dream, I had taken up the plans for my life and started to think about how to implement them myself. In the process, I had lost intimacy with the Lord without realizing it. In fact, I had become so excited about my future that I had almost forgotten about how dependent upon Him I really was. This is a common error among men. We can become so caught up in our career that we go our own way and do our own thing, missing God's purposes. Isaiah 30:1 says, "'Woe to the obstinate children', declares the Lord, 'to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin.'"

We can avoid pursuing the wrong vision, and do a better job developing the right one, but to do so, we must learn how to stand respectfully at the Lord's side and allow Him to reveal His plans to us. Only then can we do our research with a pure motive and with the confidence that He will confirm what we think He has given us. When we are unable to prove the validity of our ideas through research, we should be prepared to back away in the fear of the Lord, waiting for a better idea, time, or place. "The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations" (Psalm 33:11).

## The Five Steps of Work-Process Analysis

Resources flow through processes to create specific outcomes. Before we implement an idea, we must define and research the specific outcomes we desire and determine whether or not we have the resources to complete the project. Then, we can implement our plan with confidence.

### Outcomes

**1. Describe What Needs To Be Done**
The desired outcome may be a product, service, or a simple process improvement.

**2. Research How To Do It Right**
Consult with the customers, clients, and communities we serve to identify their needs.

### Processes

**Organize Ideas Into Work-Processes**
Develop and test ideas through process planning and budget analysis before taking action.

**4. Decide on a Course of Action**
The risks associated with our actions or inactions (P.O.N.C.) are compared with the rewards.

**5. Implement the Work-Processes**
Write the policies-procedures, train and equip the staff, then start and scale-up the processes.

### Resources

**3. Calculate What It Will Cost**
The people, things, and places that will be required must be accurately budgeted (P.O.C.)