

Identify the Human Factor Third in a Series of Five Articles

Beverly D. Flaxington
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One of the most overlooked steps in goal-setting and goal-achievement is considering the human element in the planning process. Once you have clearly defined your desired outcome, and once you have identified and categorized the obstacles you have faced or expect to face, you must turn your attention to the people involved.

This is the third step in my S.H.I.F.T. Model for Success™. Previously, I have [written](#) about the first step, (S) Specify a Desired Outcome, and the second step, (H) Highlight and Categorize Obstacles. This week, I will discuss (I) Identify the Human Element, and in the weeks ahead we will examine (F) Find Alternatives and (T) Take Disciplined Action. If you missed the articles on the first two steps, you can view them [here](#).

The human factor involves both the individuals that will be involved with or otherwise affected by your plans. It also covers your own personal, behavioral style or emotional concerns. For example, in many cases, when we work with advisors we hear of a goal or objective they've set but have been unable to reach. We may focus on the tactical issues, such as what did they plan? What went wrong with execution? But even when these answers are uncovered, more often than not, the real culprit holding them back from achieving their goal is far more personal. It could be a fear of "what will happen to me?" if changes are made, or it could be an individual's personal, behavioral style that prevents her from taking necessary steps. An example of personal style could be that she is a methodical, slow-to-act individual who hesitates about taking risks. If the goal is perceived to be "risky", she will have difficulty taking action – her personal style holds her back.

For example, in one case where we worked with the president of a firm we were helping with organizational design and putting plans in place to run the business more efficiently. The president seemed very engaged and cooperative, and he moved things forward rapidly. When it became clear that the process would change his role quite dramatically, however, instead of discussing the impending changes, he just started to sabotage the process. Every decision was delayed. He would change something once its implementation was already underway. All along he would complain about the lack of progress, but he himself was creating the problems. "The truth is that I'm worried," he finally admitted to me one day in a meeting. "If we get all of these changes in place, what



happens to my role? I don't have a purpose anymore." In his case, it was vitally important that he could both identify and raise this issue so that we could address it.

Many people don't stop to consider the personal impact of change on them or their employees, so they may unconsciously resist or find themselves unable to complete the tasks they must to move a plan forward. Unless someone stops to think about what they really want and how what they are hoping to accomplish will affect them, he will overlook the personal and emotional side of what's happening.

In addition, each of us has our own preferred behavior styles on four main scales; problems, people, pace and procedures. On the problem scale, some people are very aggressive problem-solvers — they want to go out and get things done right away! Others are more patient and want to take the time to look at each step and consider consequences. On the people scale, there are those who are very verbal, very comfortable around people and actually derive their energy from involvement with others. Others are more skeptical and reserved and prefer only to engage and verbalize when necessary. On the pace scale, there is a big difference between the fast-moving, ball-juggling, change-oriented type and her more placid, more steady-as-you-go counterpart. Lastly, when it comes to rules, there are people who are very highly rules-compliant and those that prefer to "do it my way."

Behavioral styles are key to making changes because at times we are trying to make a change that is inconsistent with what we do naturally. The quiet, non-verbal advisor who is rules-oriented struggles with a goal that involves being a motivator, leading the troops and "thinking outside of the box." She is asking something of herself that isn't natural. In any planning and goal-setting process, it's critical to understand one's style and develop plans consistent with what we do naturally.

Externally, with regard to the human factor, there are stakeholders to consider. Who will changes affect? What is their ability to help or hinder the process? Who might be a participant in change, and who might rebel against it? To consider stakeholders, make a list of all of the people who might have a "stake" in what you want to accomplish. In most firms, these can include the clients, prospects, staff, portfolio managers, other staff members (even spouses of staff) and the landlord or neighbors. Think of stakeholders on a grid, with one axis being their influence or power and the other being their interest in whatever you are planning. For stakeholders who are low-influence and low-interest, you will give them little consideration. For those with high influence but little interest, you will want to meet their needs and keep them satisfied throughout the process. For those with low influence but high interest, you will want to show them consideration by updating them or asking their opinion. Those who are high on the influence scale and demonstrate high interest are your "key players." These are the people you will want to engage as a key part of your process.



In many cases, we've seen a leader frustrated because his staff isn't going along with a change or isn't showing the kind of behavior he expects. Often when that happens we find a stakeholder issue underneath. The leader who asks "Why can't my people take more risk?" or "Why aren't my people more proactive?" will often find they have put plans in place without regard to the employees as stakeholders. Once stakeholders are identified, it's critical to create a plan for their involvement and cooperation or participation. It's not effective to just proceed ahead hoping for the best. The stakeholders must be identified and then considered in the process.

What to do with the human element? Once someone uncovers what might be holding her back or what else is required for her to proceed confidently and comfortably, she can plan around the human element. The converse is true too – someone might find she has a particular talent or interest that has gone unnoticed and needs to be integrated into the planning process. Stakeholders, once identified, can be dealt with as well by creating a plan that takes into account their level of influence and interest.

Before moving on to Step 4 in the S.H.I.F.T. Model for Success™ – the brainstorming process wherein you seek alternatives to meet goals and solve problems – the human element must be highlighted and considered. The human element is often the reason a well-laid plan will fail. Advisors will want to spend some time at this stage of the process and ensure they have identified, planned for and integrated the human element.

Beverly Flaxington is Principal, [The Collaborative](#) and [Advisors Trusted Advisor](#). She has 16 years of experience working with advisors on a day-to-day basis, has been an Interim Chief Operating Officer at an advisory firm, is a college professor teaching management and Leadership and has general experience helping individuals and organizations to make change.

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