The 100 Day Plan
By Peter Irish, Chairman, The Barrett Group

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INTRODUCTION

As an instrument for managing change processes, the Hundred Day Plan has proved invaluable to countless executives and organizations. It follows the theory that if you can get things moving in the right direction during the first 100 days, then any initiative is likely to be successful in the long run as well.

In its essence, the Hundred Day Plan (HDP) will define every key action required by the implementer over the first 100 days of an initiative. The implementer may be an individual, an organizational unit, or, indeed, the entire enterprise.

Usually an HDP can be divided temporally into three distinct phases:

- Discovery
- Hypothesis, and
- Implementation

During the Discovery phase the plan owner will investigate the organization affected by the change, metaphorically looking under every relevant stone to collect facts and key information that may be relevant to the plan and its successful implementation. Methods or discovery vary based on the context, but they may include any or all of the following:

- Personal interviews,
- One on one or one to many (town hall style) meetings,
- Surveys and polls,
- External (market) or internal research, and/or
- The use of authoritative third parties (consultants).

The Hypothesis stage represents a phase in the HDP process during which the owner begins to draw patterns from the information collected during the Discovery phase and formulate principles or possible solution sets for the issues and challenges the organization is facing.

For example, let us say that during Discovery the HDP owner realizes that a particular sales organization has been traditionally run by geography (East, North, South, and West) but the marketplace has become national due to the internet or interstate consolidation. Therefore the owner formulates an alternative organizational principal (channel, product type, target consumer, etc.) around which to organize sales so as to have a more efficient or effective interface to the evolving marketplace.

In this example, the HDP owner may formulate the hypothesis and then test it in various ways. Does the hypothesis fit the customer data? Will the approach probably be viable in two or more years, or is the marketplace continuing to change rapidly and if so, in what direction? Will the sales team probably support or at least understand the change? Will the rest of the organization support or understand the change? The Hypothesis test methods parallel the methods in the Discover phase.

In other words, the HDP owner might hold a small or larger meeting to share key findings from the Discovery phase, introduce the principles extracted, and share preliminarily his/her thinking about a potential solution (the Hypothesis) in order to see how the audience responds during this early draft stage.

Personal interviews, surveys and polls, quantitative research, and third party review may also play a role in the validation of the Hypothesis depending on the size of the organization and the stakes involved. In any case, at the end of the Hypothesis phase, the owner should have a fairly robust concept that the organization has participated in validating.

This last point—creating a sense of joint ownership—is key to any successful HDP, while imposing an HDP on an organization without soliciting their support is generally a recipe for disaster.

The Hypothesis must, of course, carry the seeds of its Implementation if it is to be fully rounded (i.e., if you cannot explain how you are planning to implement a concept, its acceptance cannot be more than superficial.) As a result, the Implementation should not be a big surprise to the organization that has been appropriately consulted along the way.

The Implementation phase may be complete during the first 100 days or it may only constitute as kick-off and then carry on for weeks, months, or even years (depending on its scope).

However, it will include specific, step by step responsibilities, deliverables, and timing defined for each key element.

Of course, parts of any HDP may have to be confidential if they affect people's jobs (as they generally do), so be sensitive to this aspect and only share appropriately during each of the phases outlines above.

One last key aspect of any HDP is the accountability that the instrument lends the owner and the process. Given the detailed, day by day planning, at any moment during the HDP it is possible to say whether the plan is on track or not, and therefore to change priorities if necessary to stay on track.

To summarize, in general an HDP will

- address an organization's challenges and drive change,
- specify every key action required in the first 100 days,
- consist of three distinct phases, and
- enable organizational and individual accountability.

Personally, I have developed and implemented HDPs at least five times during my career, so allow me to share a few examples.

In the first example, let's call it the FOOD case, I was hired as the general manager for an organization engaged in the development, manufacturing, and marketing of branded foods. The company wanted to enter a specific eastern European market via a combination of importation, acquisition, and green field manufacturing. Lucky for me, I had zero competence in those food categories or processes so my Discovery was sincere and driven as much by curiosity as a desire to succeed.

Discovery was complicated and lasted more than 100 days, but the essence could still be extracted fairly quickly. Let me focus here only on the Marketing and Sales aspects (although there was a similar plan for every functional area) and vastly simplify the HDP. Overall the plan looked a bit like this

FOOD EXAMPLE

Day:	1	8	15	22	29	36	42	49	56	63	70	77	84	91	98
(MARKETING ONLY)						DISCOVERY		HYPOTHESIS					IMPLEMENTATION		
Collect Recipe and Category Expertise	■	■	■												
Formulate Products				■	■										
Test Products Locally						■	■	■							
Design Packaging					■	■									
Calculate Product Costs						■	■	■	■						
Test Price Elasticity and Define Targeted Price Points									■	■					
Clarify Gross Margins										■	■				
Define Marketing Approach				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Define Sales Approach						■	■	■	■	■	■	■			
Define Supporting Infrastructure and Cost									■	■	■	■	■		
Forecast Operating Profit												■	■	■	
Obtain Executive Endorsement			■			■						■			■

The fact that many of the activities lasted weeks in this case represents a whole series of meetings, tests, and iterations until we came to a conclusion solid enough to constitute a reasonable Hypothesis. We faced all manner of obstacles from government regulation to the lack of experienced sales people in what had been a supply-sided command economy, etc.

Honestly, this was my first experience as a General Manager and we certainly made some mistakes as we learned, but ultimately the business thrived and we quickly became the market leader in the key food category, so we must have done something right.

Let me use one more example that was more organizational in character. In this case, the company participated in the POS (point of sale) and packaging marketplace. Let's call it the POS case.

As background, the organization had a manufacturing footprint spread out across ten plants, each with its own distinct history, culture, technical capabilities, and logistically efficient distribution territory. The sales organization had been developed geographically around the plants, but the marketplace has concentrated greatly and become much more continental, not to mention brutal, due to tenders, internet auctions, and the clients' aggressively motivated and empowered buying organizations. So the business structure and processes no longer really fit the marketplace.

My job was to take care of the front end of the business (the demand side, as opposed to the supply side), so, of course, I started with a 100 day plan that looked something like this: In this case, the marketplace had gravitated toward a category-oriented structure where we could clearly identify concentrations around, for example, food, drinks, confectionary, cosmetics, etc. within which the buyers' had similar esthetic and/or cost expectations while the POS products had similar structural, load-bearing, durability, cost characteristics, and technical requirements per category.

Using the 80 : 20 rule, the Hypothesis suggested that we should create virtual strategic business units (SBUs) around each of these categories, led by SBU managers, supported by shared, semi-centralized deep pockets of functional competence, for example, in the design and construction, logistical, controlling, human resources, and other key functional support areas. The concept also allowed for residual regional business units (RBUs) when diverse products did not fall easily into the key categories.

POS EXAMPLE

Day:	1	8	15	22	29	36	42	49	56	63	70	77	84	91	98
(DEMAND ORGANIZATION ONLY)															
Analyze the product, geography and customer dimensions of the business to identify areas of concentration and synergy	■	■	■												
Formulate an organizational form that fits the new marketplace				■	■										
Meet each plants' management and collect their feedback on the evolving market analysis and organizational approach		■	■												
Evaluate the sales and marketing organization with respect to performance and capability				■	■	■									
Identify talent that may be able to lead in the new organization as well as low performers who should move on						■	■	■							
Test the financial viability of the organizational concept				■	■			■				■	■		
Anchor the approach through town-hall style meetings at each major plant					■			■							
Develop "packages" for the expected team leaders and the team members who should leave the organization								■	■						
Make "package" offers										■	■				
Introduce the new organization via a motivational tour													■	■	
Report continuously on the process at least in a general way to the organization at large using videos and blogs			■			■			■			■			■
Obtain Executive Endorsement		■			■			■				■		■	

Phases: **DISCOVERY** (days 1–36) · **HYPOTHESIS** (days 42–77) · **IMPLENTATION** (days 84–98)

It was of course critical that the supply side of the business (the plants) support the Hypothesis, so we held repeated meetings with the plant management to share and "socialize" the concept while collecting feedback and input (creating a shared sense of ownership) as well as town-hall style meetings with the manufacturing employees to make sure that they also understood and supported the change initiative.

In this way we were also able to identify and release low performers in a fair and ethical way, so that the resulting organization was streamlined (via a significant organizational cost reduction) and relatively efficient with category expertise leading each SBU supported by shared functional resources.

Ultimately, I moved on, but several years later the organizational form survives and seems to have been well conceived for its purpose.

APPLICATION

At this point, you may reasonably ask, "So how does an HDP apply to my career change?"

When you enter any new job or organization, applying the principles outlined above will help you land on your feet, get to know the organization quickly, gain the confidence and support of all key stakeholders, create a sense of shared ownership for your introduction and/or change initiative, hold yourself accountable, and ultimately succeed far better than you would without an HDP.

Some of the many questions you may want to ask as you prepare your own HDP include:

1. What is your role and the objective of your role?
2. What are the key (internal and/or external) challenges faced by the company, division, or organizational unit?
3. Who are the key stakeholders who may have answers and/or whose support you will definitely require to succeed? These are probably mainly internal parties, but may possibly also include external parties, e.g., customers and suppliers).
4. How can you best organize your Discovery efficiently? Which Discovery methods should you employ and when will this input be necessary in the process?
5. What resources do you have and who can help you formulate, vet, and fine-tune your Hypothesis?
6. How can you efficiently conduct regular sharing and feedback sessions and with whom as your Hypothesis evolves?
7. Whose formal or informal endorsement and support is required so that you have the authority and financial wherewithal to actually implement the plan once developed?
8. Who are the functions or individuals most likely to resist the change effort? Can you utilize them to debug and test your Hypothesis to uncover potential obstacles and/or flaws before you move into Implementation?
9. Is your Implementation plan understood, supported, and likely to be successful, and what or who can make it more robust?
10. What informal feedback are you receiving along the way, how can you obtain more such informal feedback, and how can you best incorporate your learnings from it? (Consider chat in the corridor, body language, facial expressions, availability of key players, and other signals that the organization is more or less receptive to your ideas.)

Many years ago a colleague and natural leader said to me in a thick Georgia accent, "Any road will take you there if you don't know where you are going…"

Having a solid Hundred Day Plan will help you maximize your success regardless of your organizational level. Be prepared to hold yourself accountable.