

# **The Overlooked Breakthrough:** **The Lean Approach to Strategic Planning**

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2026 Lean Government Summit

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# Learning Objectives

1. What is the cost of too many priorities?
2. How can we reduce the number of priorities?
3. How can we better execute our remaining priorities?
4. Three things to try out.

# From 22 priorities to 2 priorities

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A grayscale photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a striped sweater, sitting at a desk. She is talking on a mobile phone held to her ear with her right hand, while her left hand is on the keyboard of a laptop. The laptop screen displays a webpage with text and images. In the background, there are vertical blinds covering a window. The overall scene illustrates multitasking in a professional or office environment.

Too many  
tasks at  
same time...

When we “multi-task\*”, **we get less done.**

\*actually, “switch-task”

# Time Yourself

0:00.0

Scenario 1 (**Focus-Tasking**)

1. Write:

**Multitasking eats time**

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20**

2. Note in the chat how long that took.

# Time Yourself



## Scenario 2 (**Context Switching**)

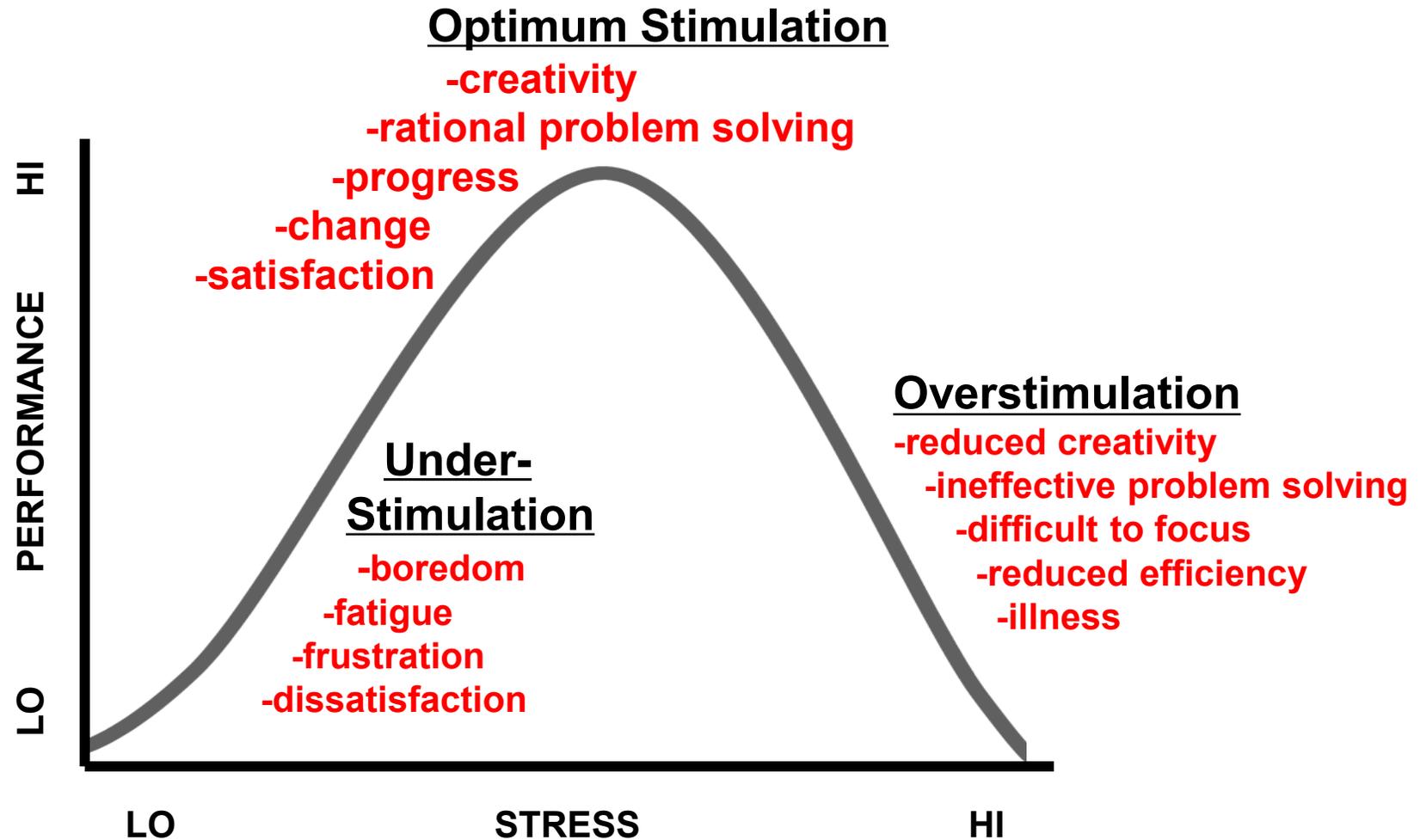
1. Write one letter, then one number, one letter, one number, etc:

### **Multitasking eats time**

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20**

2. Note in the chat your 1<sup>st</sup> round and 2<sup>nd</sup> round times.

# Yerkes-Dodson Curve



Yerkes RM, Dodson JD . "The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation". Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology 18: 459-482

# Cost of Too Many Priorities

| # simultaneous projects | % of time available for each project | % time lost to switching | Hours per week lost (per person) |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1                       | 100%                                 | 0%                       | 0 hours                          |
| 2                       | 40%                                  | 20%                      | 6 hours                          |
| 3                       | 20%                                  | 40%                      | 12 hours                         |
| 4                       | 10%                                  | 60%                      | 18 hours                         |
| 5                       | 5%                                   | 75%                      | 22 hours                         |

From: Weinberg, Gerald M. *Quality Software Management* (New York: Dorset House)

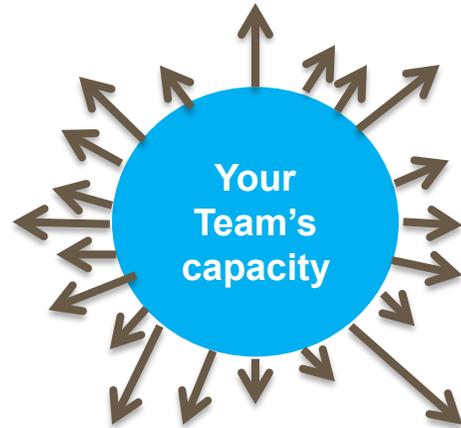
# The “Tax” on Slow Work

What problems are likely to happen to an initiative that takes 12 months to finish  
versus  
the same initiative that takes 12 focused days  
to finish?

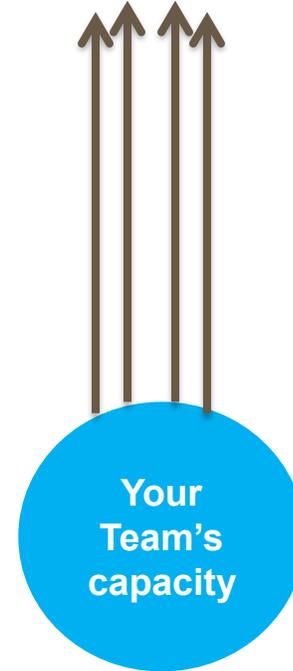
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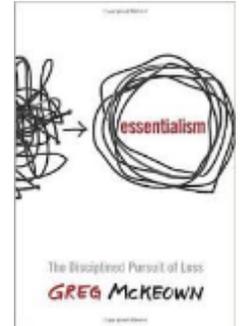
# “Try to do it all” vs. “Focus and Complete the *Critical Few*”?



Do it all.  
It's all important!



Execute the “Critical  
Few”  
(same amount of  
effort, but focused)



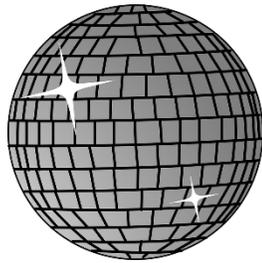
# How can we reduce the number of priorities we pursue?

1. Start with the problem to be solved, instead of “initiatives”
2. Sort into “Must-Do, Can’t Fail” vs “Should Do” vs “Don’t Do”
3. Estimate capacity available and capacity required

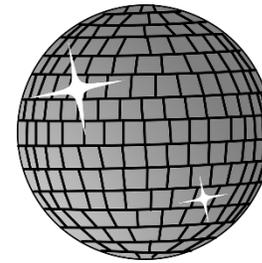


**“Before I state the problem,  
are there any solutions?”**

Without a specific, well-defined “problem to solve”,  
we may develop elaborate, elegant



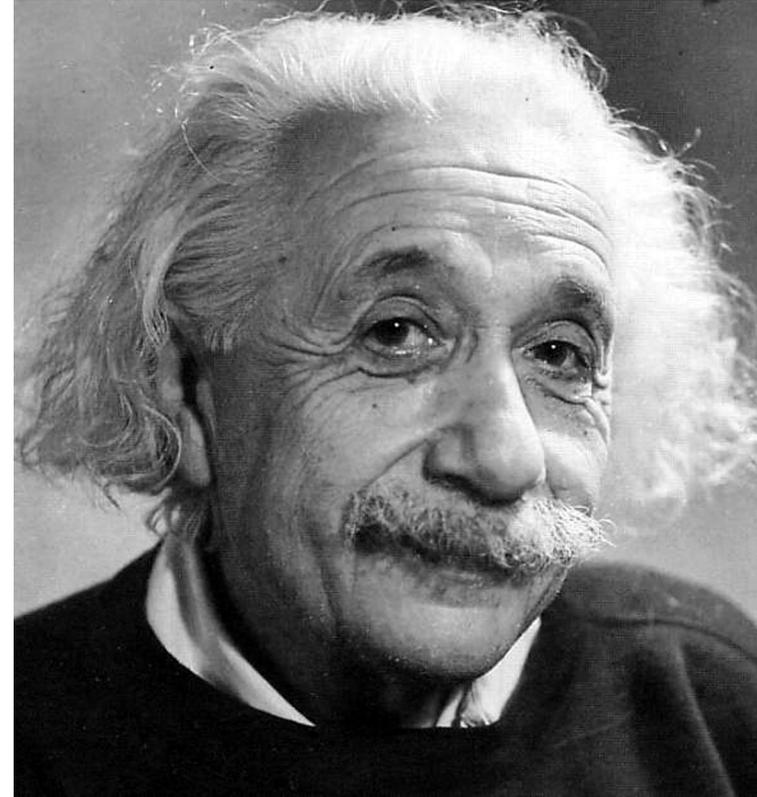
**shiny objects**



that don't solve the problem.

# With a clearly-defined problem, the solution takes less effort

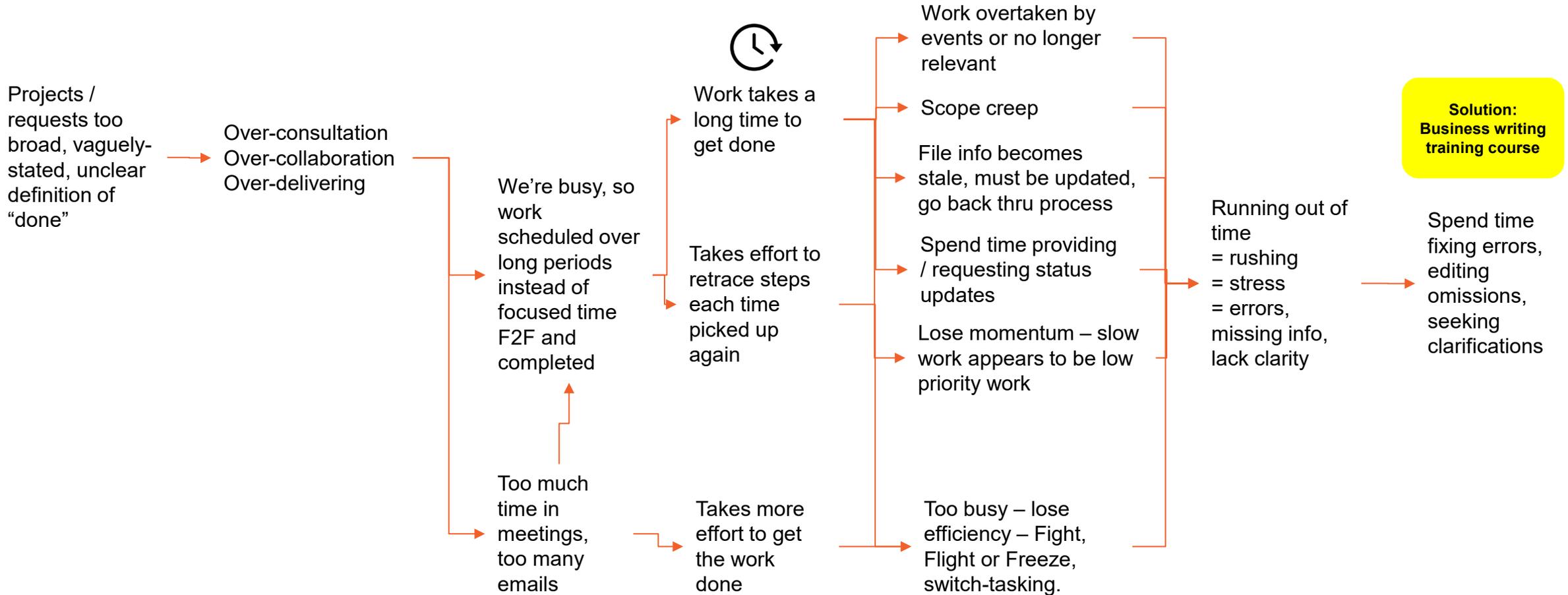
“If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions.”



# Illustration: Understand the complex chain of events

Upstream

Downstream



# To create clarity, go upstream to root causes

Upstream

Downstream



Projects / requests too broad or vaguely-stated, unclear definition of "done"

**Solution:**  
define projects / requests more precisely at start, with definition of "done"

Over-consultation  
Over-collaboration  
Over-delivering

We're busy, so work scheduled over long periods instead of focused time F2F and completed

Too much time in meetings, too many emails



Work takes a long time to get done

Takes effort to retrace steps each time picked up again

Takes more effort to get the work done

Work overtaken by events or no longer relevant

Scope creep

File info becomes stale, must be updated, go back thru process

Spend time providing / requesting status updates

Lose momentum – slow work appears to be low priority work

Too busy – lose efficiency – Fight, Flight or Freeze, switch-tasking.

Running out of time  
= rushing  
= stress  
= errors, missing info, lack clarity

~~Solution:~~  
~~Business writing training course~~

Spend time fixing errors, editing omissions, seeking clarifications



Benefits of starting with problems to be solved  
(instead of initiatives)?

Highest  
Value



Lowest  
Value

**1. Must-do, can't fail.** e.g.

- a) Major legislated changes
- b) Responses to critical emerging events
- c) Breakthrough priorities building critical capabilities / freeing-up significant capacity to deliver more mandate, better.

**2. Should do** (e.g. Adds value or relieves symptom not root cause)

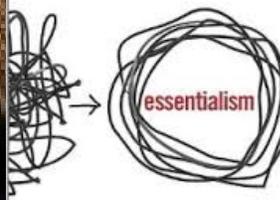
**3. Could do** (e.g. nice to have)

**4. Do not do**

- Pet project
- Shiny object
- *Everyone else is doing it* priority



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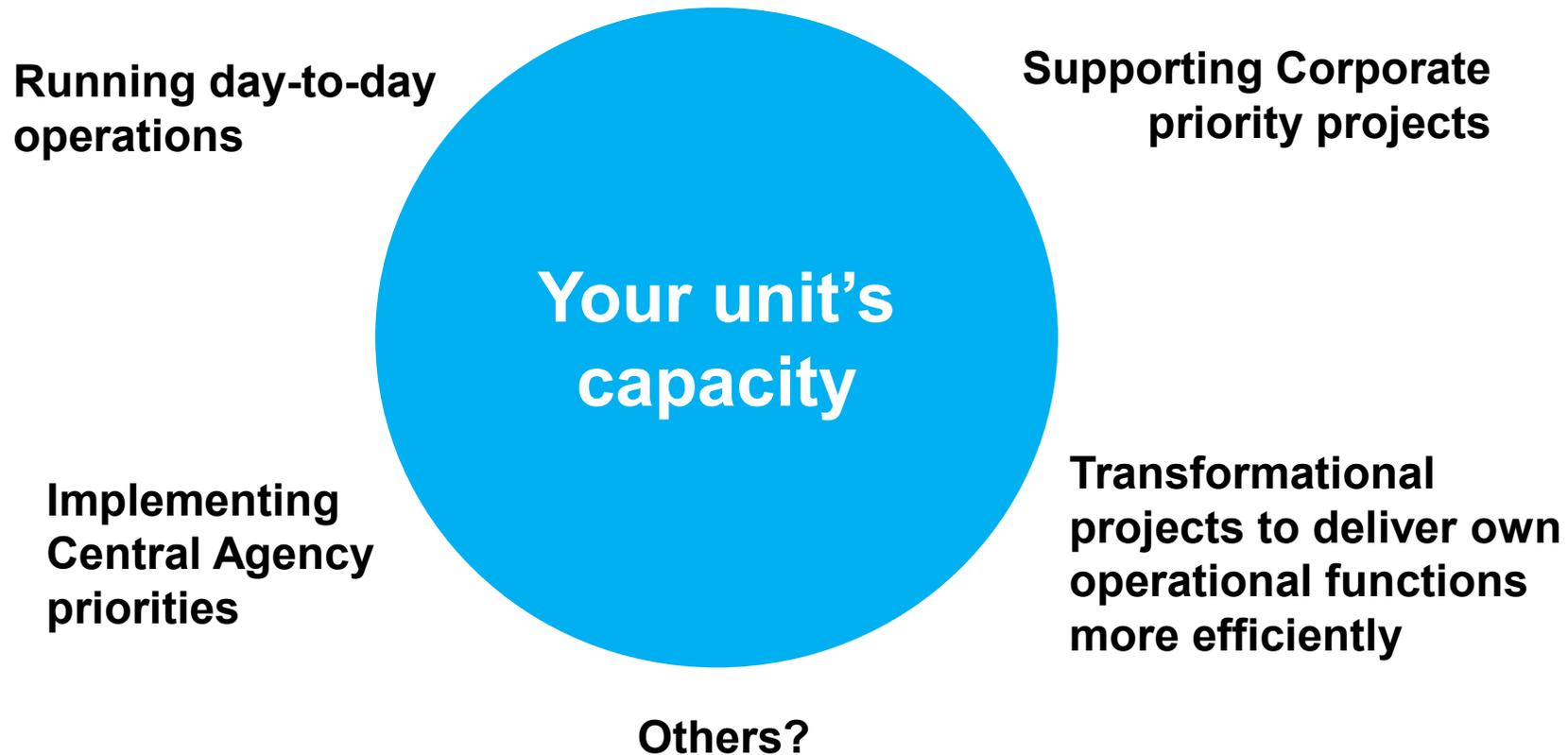


**essentialism**

The Disciplined Pursuit of Less

**GREG MCKEOWN**

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**Can you really get it all done in the next 12 months?**

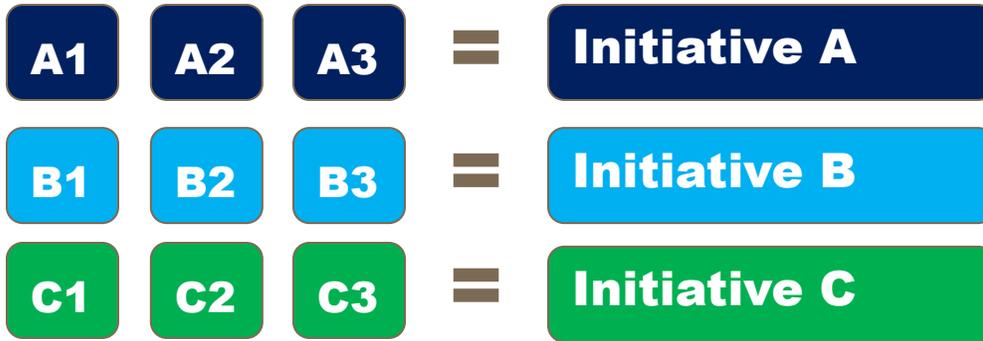
**How much capacity is available?**

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# Tighten Scope

- Clear problem to be solved?
- Addresses causes or symptoms?
- Clear definition of done?
- Going deeper or farther than needed?
- Easier, faster, cheaper way?



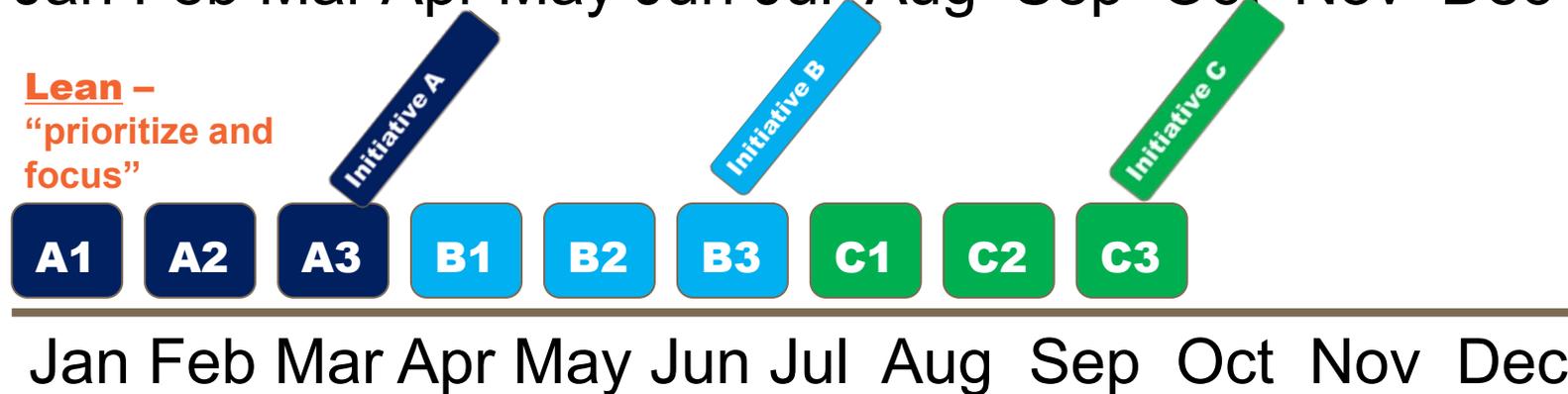
Lean Approach:

- Less “context switching”
- faster
- less effort
- less rework

**Traditional** – “it’s all important - do it all at the same time”



**Lean** – “prioritize and focus”





**“in the history of the world, no one has ever washed a rented car.”**



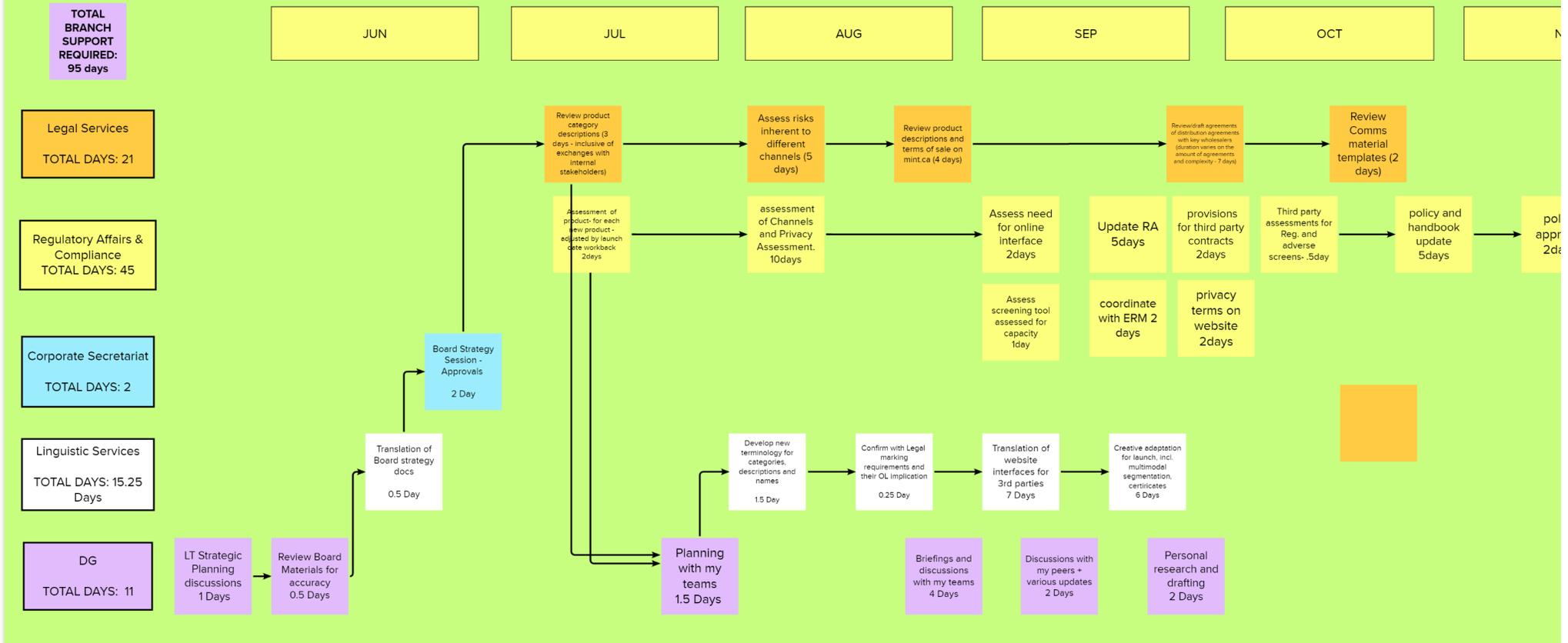


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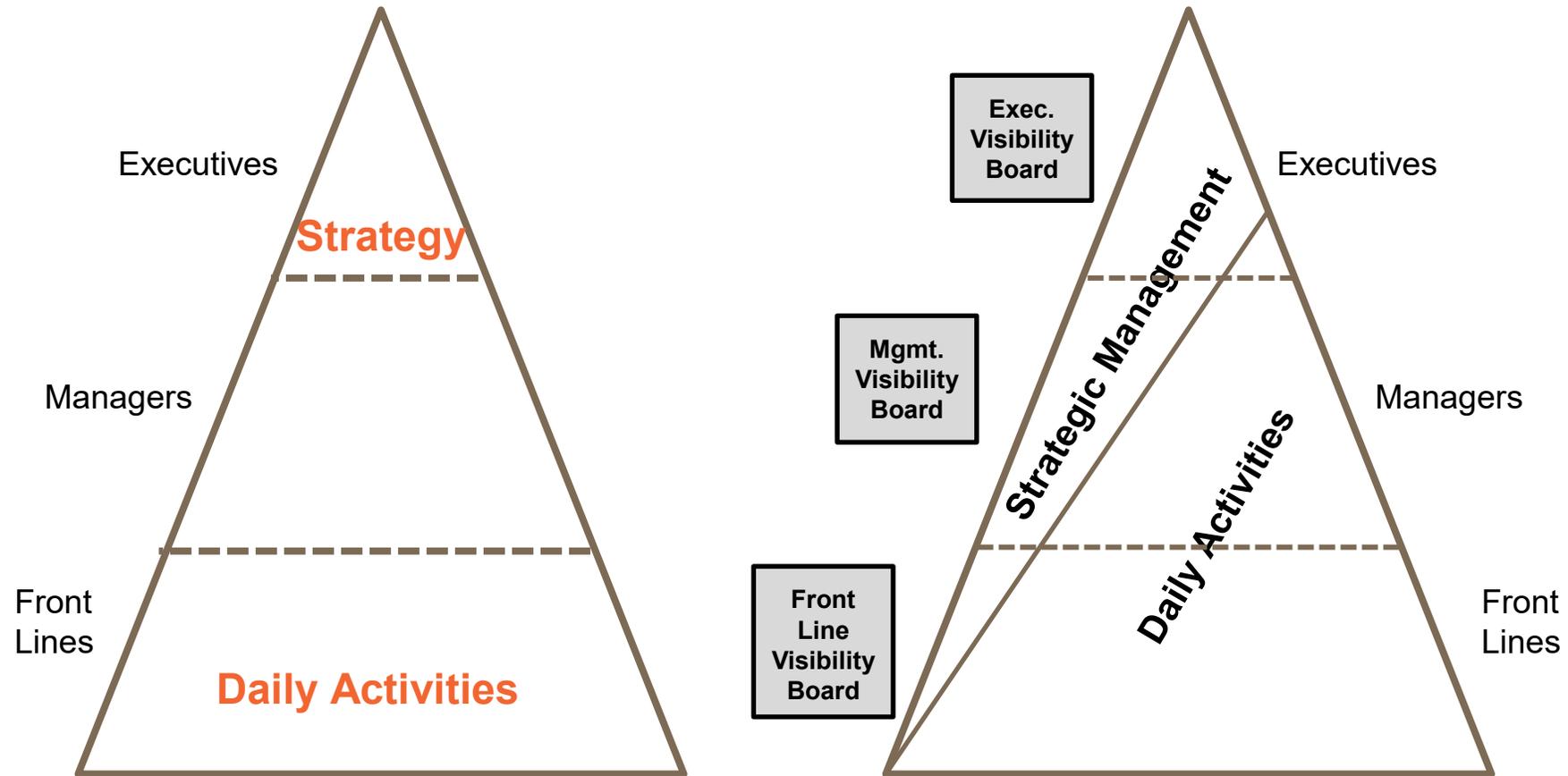
# Implementers give feedback on plan, realism, how to get to Point B -- “Catchball”



Priority Name: DEVELOP TRJ FRAMEWORK AND LAUNCH PLAN



# Traditional vs Lean Strategic Planning



Source: Kesterson.



# Regular Updates and Reviews: “Wall Walks”



Saskatchewan Ministry of Education DM, ADM's and D-G's

# How to handle new, urgent priorities?

Keep “slack” time for urgent priorities

Monthly check-ins, visual boards to assess overload and adjust

Other?



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# Three things to try out

1. **Narrow Priorities** Which are truly “must-do, can’t fail” versus “should do”, “could do” and “don’t do”?
2. **Estimate Capacity Required for Each Initiative** and see where the plan is unreasonable/unrealistic
3. **Refine Your Remaining Priorities** Clear problem statements? Causes not just symptoms? “Just enough”?

Article: <https://leanagility.com/en/lean-strategic-planning>



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### Lean Strategic Planning (Spring 2026)

#### About the Program

Far too often, leaders find themselves overwhelmed by unfocused strategic, management and individual plans, inundated with too many priorities that consume far more capacity than is available. In the Lean Strategic Planning program, leaders will have the opportunity to refine their leadership approach with this innovative 1-day program tailored to streamlining the annual planning process. This practical, action-oriented program provides leaders with a strategic approach and a comprehensive toolkit to reduce the number of priorities they take on, with greater focus and better execution, saving capacity for unexpected events, better execution, and a more humane pace of work.

#### Who Should Attend?

Leaders (Senior Managers to Executives) who:

- Are charged with creating and implementing strategic plans for their organization, branch, department, or work unit.
- Wish to create better, more realistic, plans and strategies that make breakthrough progress.

#### What You Will Learn

1. What Lean Strategic Planning and Deployment are and how they differ from traditional planning and execution.
2. Key shortcomings of traditional strategic planning (the cost of too many priorities, starting with the solution instead of the problem, lack of consideration of true capacity, low ownership of the plan, lack of an effective retrospective routine and visibility throughout the year) and how to address them.
3. How to gain consensus on the “must-do, can’t fail” versus “should do” versus “don’t do” priorities, and how to say “no, not yet” to lower-value priorities.
4. How to respond to unplanned, unexpected events throughout the year.
5. How to create ownership and alignment of the plan at all levels, from the highest executive levels to the front lines.

#### Program Takeaways

1. A practical toolkit for implementing a Lean approach to planning and techniques for utilizing this toolkit in your planning process.
2. A better understanding of how to assess available capacity, and how much capacity the plan will consume, enabling the creation of more realistic and achievable plans.
3. How to use the concept of “Catchball” to create broader and deeper ownership of the plan across various organizational levels and silos, enhancing the likelihood of successful execution.
4. How to manage and optimize execution of the plan throughout the year, including how to get the “critical few” priorities completed ahead of all others, and reduce the amount of effort priorities require.
5. Strategies for building organizational buy-in and support for this Lean approach to planning and execution.

#### Details

[REGISTER](#)

#### Registration Deadline

Friday, March 6, 2026

#### Format

Virtual

#### Date

Tuesday, March 24, 2026  
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

This program is also offered in [Fall 2026](#).

#### Fee

\$1,100 +HST  
[Cancellation & Payment Policy](#)

#### More Information

[executiveprograms@telfer.uottawa.ca](mailto:executiveprograms@telfer.uottawa.ca)  
613-562-5921

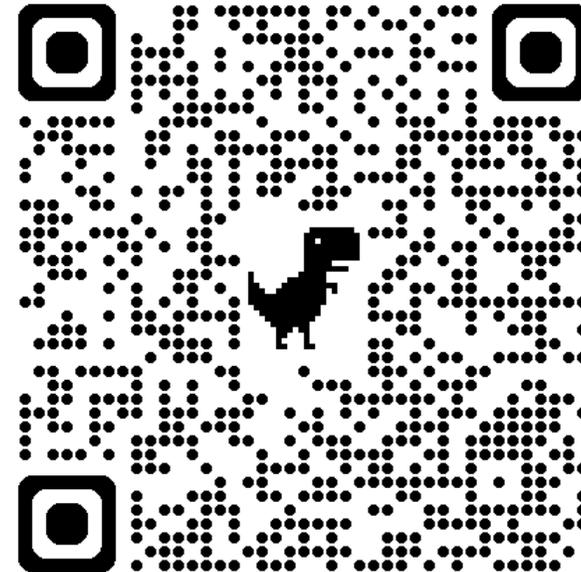
#### Tailored Programs

Our programs and certificates can be delivered to your employees and tailored to fit your organization's specific requirements.

To discuss your needs, please [contact us](#).

# One-Day Virtual Training March 24, 2026

Learn the detailed approach  
and get the toolkit to apply it  
in your organization.



<https://telfer.uottawa.ca/en/executive-programs/our-programs/for-individuals/lean-strategic-planning-3/>