

Turn a Negative Situation into Positive Action

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1 Purpose of This Document

Often a negative situation is understood by everybody involved in great detail. Just, nobody takes the initiative to turn it around. This document provides you with a tool to use the knowledge of the negative in a creative way to define a path towards a better situation. You will achieve two effects: (1) the plan will be very sound and supported by everybody in the process, (2) through creating the plan together all stakeholders will also implicitly understand – without finger pointing – how important their change in attitude and behavior is. We recommend an Excel-based effort – for those who prefer flipcharts or paper, please go ahead. Should you find any detail questionable or to be updated, please contact us at office@mqs.at.

2 How to turn negative into positive

The method can be described by the phases in this Section. In order to make things more tangible we are adding an example:

- Definition of a goal (“How to successfully start a company”)
- Turn the goal into the negative (“How to start a company without success”)
- Take 20 minutes for a brainstorming session to collect ideas how to reach the negative goal (“How to start a company without success”)
- Analyze the present situation with respect to all items collected in your brainstorming session and define an action which leads to reaching a positive goal.
- After collecting all the actions, prioritize them and analyze how much of them are completed / reached already.
- Repeat the latter part as a regular meeting. Use this time also to check whether your actions are covering all aspects needed.
- Remove the colors.

Figure 1 shows what the results of a brainstorming session could be.

Figure 1: Results of an assumed 20-minute brainstorming.

How to start a company without success	
1	Base it on a bad idea
2	Do not know your competitors
3	Have no business plan
4	Choose wrong team
5	Imbalance of cost to sales prices
6	No demand for your product
7	Revenue too low
8	Product / company not known / badly advertised
9	Many better competitors
10	Not enough products sold
11	Underestimate side effect costs
12	Sickness / accident of the founder(s)
13	Underestimate time to success
14	Underestimate financial reserves needed

When doing the brainstorming session, these rules are essential:

- Do not comment, ridicule or “argue away” ANY topic – let the session flow.
- When proposals stop to come be stubborn and be able to live with the silence, ideas will come again.
- The most important part of this session is to achieve a COMPLETE picture. With collecting negative input it is usually easy to get a complete picture if you observe the two rules mentioned above.

Figure 2 shows how to turn knowledge about all the negative aspects into an analysis and then into positive action. When reading through Figure 2, please note the following:

- In the Excel tool provided, the brainstorming results are simply copied into the second page.
- The main activity here is, benefiting from the complete collection of the arguments, getting now a complete analysis of the status. For your activity, project or plan you should now see that some items are already addressed.
- Correspondingly when you define the necessary action, based on the related analysis, you also should try to get a rating for the priority of the action. In the example below, the priority is expressed by numbers 1, 2, 3... in the “P-column”, 1 representing the highest priority.

Figure 2: Turning negative into analysis and then into positive action.

How to successfully start a company				
#	Negative	Actual	Action	P
1	Base it on a bad idea	Idea is known / not new	Sharpen / Re-shape idea (matrix) and compare vs. competitors list with matrix	1
2	Do not know your competitors	No comprehensive study of competitors done	Sharpen / Re-shape idea (matrix) and compare vs. competitors list with matrix	1
3	Have no business plan	Plan exists - how realistic is it?	Assess present business plan with expert	5
4	Choose wrong team	Team seems excellent - perhaps "skeptical", "economic" missing	Get feedback from as many people as possible	4
5	Imbalance of cost to sales prices	Both not known yet	Explore fast. Get sales numbers from competitors	2
6	No demand for your product	Not known. Explorative phase is part of plan.	Explore fast. Get sales numbers from competitors	2
7	Revenue too low	Not known. Explorative phase is part of plan.	Explore fast. Get sales numbers from competitors. Constantly Improve Business plan	2
8	Product / company not known / badly advertised	True at present	Develop advertisement plan	3
9	Many better competitors	Not known. Many competitors. Are they better?	Sharpen / Re-shape idea (matrix) and compare vs. competitors list with matrix	1
10	Not enough products sold	Not known	Addressed in other Actions (sales number, product features, sales numbers)	-
11	Underestimate side effect costs	Not known	Explore operations fast to see how much activity is needed for complete operation	2
12	Sickness / accident of the founder(s)	Risk is there	Create backups	6
13	Underestimate time to success	At present no issue as company is developed on the side	Constantly improve business plan	7
14	Underestimate financial reserves needed	Risk is there	Constantly improve business plan	7

Figure 3 shows the defined actions with additional statistics:

- The actions are sorted by the priority values, shown in the “P-column”.
- The “Open-column” shows whether an action is still open – “Y” means yes, for “yes, it is open”.
- The “% of work” column is supposed to show how much of energy is supposed to go into the respective activity – the total is supposed to be 100% and checked on the top of the column.
- The “% done” column shows how much of this activity is completed already.
- The “% wd” shows how much of the total work was done already to improve the situation – in this example it is 22 % as calculated on top of the column.

Finally, Figure 4 represents the values shown in Figure 3 in a graphical way, to show priorities and degree of completion at a glance.

Figure 3: The actions from the previous chart, condensed and with some statistics.

ACTIONS for a successful company start					
			100		22
P	Action	Open	% of work	% done	% wd
1	Sharpen / Re-shape idea (matrix) and compare vs. competitors list with matrix	y	25	20	5
2	Get sales numbers from competitors	y	25	0	0
3	Explore operations fast to see how much activity is needed for complete operation	y	25	40	10
4	Constantly improve business plan	y	10	50	5
5	Create backups	y	5	0	0
6	Develop advertisement plan	y	5	0	0
7	Get feedback from as many people as possible	y	5	40	2
8	Assess present business plan with expert	y	0	0	0

3 Conclusion

The method described here is adequate to address any negative situation, or more general, any situation. The essential starting point is to use the “negative creativity” of all stake holders to get a complete spectrum of all potential risks, failures and shortcomings. The methodology brings everybody to the table and ensures a common understanding and enables a good follow up tool / reporting as well, used in regular meetings after the original plan was defined. If you should find Sections not clear enough or if information, you expected, was missing, please contact us at office@mqs.at.

4 References

[1] For training, consulting, project management and part-time engineers/managers please contact us under office@mqs.at.

Figure 4: Showing the status of all actions defined in Figure 3 at one glance.

