

How to get 87% Success in Last Planner®



Keywords: Lean, Last Planner®, pull planning, Implementation Strategy, facilitation, training, outcomes, success.

Project teams who implement Last Planner® System with a well-thought-out and complete Implementation Strategy involving outside facilitation and coaching and the building of strong internal teams continue to demonstrate success (73% to 87% of the time) whereas teams that start Last Planner® without a clear plan, tell team members to do it by edict or persuasion, fail more than half the time (with a success rate of only 35%-45%). These metrics are projected based on a recently published research study by Dean Fixen, Caryn Ward and Barbara Sims in 2014. The study was conducted in the social sciences, not engineering and construction, but the cross-disciplinary principles are the same. It is people who implement new strategies. And people are people regardless of occupation.

Nutt (2001 study)¹ examined implementation approaches and outcomes in 376 organizations (public, private, profit, non-profit). Nutt found that active implementation approaches (such as “Intervention/Facilitation”; “Participation/Internal Team” as champion) were used less often but produced superior outcomes in faster timelines during a two-year follow up study.

Less effective (see table below) were “Edicts”, which consisted of leaders deciding what needed to be done, announcing the decision, and describing the compliance requirements. “Persuasion” also was a top-down process with leaders engaging in a process to “sell” the innovation to staff by providing extensive information about the benefits, meeting with staff groups, and inviting experts to confirm the needs and benefits, but without employee ownership.

Approach	Usage	Success	Months
Intervention/ Facilitation	8%	87%	14
Participation/ Internal Team	18%	73%	16
Persuasion	37%	47%	21
Edict	37%	35%	15

Nutt (2001)

The results of Nutt’s research indicate that utilizing the intervention/facilitation approach will be most to successful to launch and sustain the Last Planner® System on any project – whether design or construction. The successful launch involves these classic stages:

¹ Reported in University of North Carolina Brief:

<https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/sites/nirn.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/SISEP-Brief4-ExplorationStage.pdf>

How to get 87% Success in Last Planner®



- **Stage #1 – Identify Pre-Conditions:** Identification of need and packaging Implementation for training and assessment (including how success will be defined)
 - This is typically the executive evaluation phase including discussions with the implementation facilitator to assess applicability to this project
- **Stage #2 – Pre-Implementation Planning and Training:** Explaining core concepts, customizing delivery, logistics planning, staff training, technical assistance (note: in Last Planner® System Implementation this typically occurs just before the Kickoff session)
 - For example: learning the difference between push and pull (as in Villego® simulations), exposure to concepts of flow and variation (as in Parade of Trades simulations), and/or training in Last Planner® System
 - Tailor to each individual team. Do the leaders feel threatened by this different approach? Or have they been pulled through proper preparation and training experiences? Do they want this? Do they buy in to the whole system or just some light version of “pull planning”? Lack of complete buy-in and willingness to sustain the effort over the long haul of the project will result in less value, and perhaps a failed implementation. If that happens teams will resort to old behaviors like fire-fighting and workarounds.
- **Stage #3 – Implementation:** ongoing support, additional training as needed, process evaluation (criteria developed during Pre-Condition stage)
 - The Kickoff: creating that first Milestone Pull, Phase Pull and Weekly Work Plan
 - Weekly Follow-Up Sessions with a facilitator/coach who quickly weans from the team: as they stand up, he stands down
 - Learning to use root cause analysis to address missed commitments and taking appropriate countermeasures to reduce future occurrences.
- **Stage #4 – Maintenance and evolution:** “making it your own”, tailoring changes to sustain the implementation, continued evaluation
 - Too many teams think that once they’ve gotten past the early stages they have now implemented LPS. They’re good to go. They know enough. They can wing it, coast along and just maintain the system. In so doing they doom themselves to failure.

The work of Dean Fixen and his colleagues suggests what happens when we don’t utilize such a complete and robust Implementation Strategy, **“Failing to engage in [all of] the Exploration Stage activities creates black holes that consume leadership time dealing with continuing crises, scarce resources and so-called ‘resistance to change’.”**

So the bottom line is: To assure a successful launch of Last Planner® System on your project, work with an experienced coach to plan out an evidence-based, time-tested Implementation Strategy involving training and facilitation and containing all the elements proven necessary to success. Then execute it per the plan. Every stage.