Purpose, Outcomes, Process = POP

A clear path forward

The best way to be sure that you are focused and aligned in any planning or decision-making process is to start by taking the time to carefully define and articulate the fundamental:

- **Purpose** involved (“Why is this important?”),
- **Outcomes** to be gained (“What do we most need to accomplish?”), and
- **Process** to be used (“How will we accomplish the outcomes?”).

In this context, the “purpose” we are talking about tends to be very focused and pragmatic. It is derived from a larger, over-arching mission that sets the context and gives meaning to all organizational efforts and activities. In turn, necessary outcomes are defined based on a clear understanding of the identified purpose, while appropriate processes must be aligned with the intended outcomes.

- Answering the “*Why?*” question is critical for engaging people’s caring and commitment (without which people’s best thinking is seldom engaged).
- Answering the “*What?*” question is critical for aligning expectations and focusing attention (without which a lot can get said – and even done – but little accomplished).
- Answering the “*How?*” question is critical in preparing people to engage and participate appropriately, enabling a swifter, more focused accomplishment of the outcomes.

A common mistake people make is to decide or act before being really clear on the answers to these three questions. This reveals our shared impatience with thought and bias toward activity. But as many have noted (business gurus Peter Senge and Stephen Covey among them), when it comes to people and performance, you often have to start slow to go fast. Once a solid context
for action has been set, it is easier to make appropriate choices as well as to prepare for (and respond more quickly to) unexpected contingencies.

As shown in the model below, each layer of the POP model is subordinate to the one above it. If at any point there is confusion or uncertainty in people’s minds, the best response is to work your way back up the model and re-check the quality of the linkages and alignment involved.

Using this model, what you create is a shared “map” by which:

- **Individuals** can more quickly and effectively make good decisions, and
- **The team** (group, organization, etc.) can coordinate efficiently, ultimately reaching the targeted destination together.