

Momentum Matters: The Importance of Balancing Quick Wins Within Transformational Change

BY AUDREY BLOOMER, ALEX HELMAN, AND JIMMY MITCHELL

I'm sure you have heard it before: Don't sweat the small stuff. When it comes to process improvement projects, however, the small "stuff" has the potential to make or break a successful effort.

Quick wins are typically defined as opportunities that require minimal investment of time and resources and can yield positive benefit. They have the potential, however, to become anything but quick and can distract from the original goals of the initiative. Having a strategy to manage quick wins is vital to striking a balance between "low-hanging fruit" and transformational improvement opportunities that will determine long-term success.

Picture this scenario: an executive hires you to lead a large company-wide initiative with goals to reduce operational cost and streamline core business processes to support new product growth. While you know that both large transformational process change and organizational change will be required to achieve these strategic goals, the executive is under enormous pressure to provide the business with an early return on its investment. You are also faced with important stakeholders who refuse to support the initiative because of past process improvement projects where no perceived changes were ever implemented.

While larger improvement opportunities tend to yield the greatest long-term benefit, quick wins can provide enormous value to the overall project in several ways.





Potential Benefits of Quick Wins:

ALLOW FOR QUICKER RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Quick wins can allow the business to more quickly see results and realize ROI. For the executive under pressure to deliver results, quick wins can prove enormously helpful in demonstrating value as the project develops, not just when it is completed. The typical quick win can be implemented and start reaping benefits within just 30 days.

MOTIVATE STAKEHOLDERS

Process improvement projects can become a grind for business stakeholders who are asked to divert time from their daily responsibilities to participate in sessions and interviews. Their feedback is often not incorporated into any solutions for months or even years, which can cause stakeholders to slowly lose interest in the process and disengage. Quick wins are a useful mechanism to catch the attention of busy stakeholders, demonstrate that their thoughts are being heard, and prove that small successes can be achieved, encouraging further participation.

FOSTER A SPIRIT OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

One of the greatest legacies a process improvement project can leave behind is a culture of continuous improvement. Quick wins can be a tremendous tool to empower stakeholders at all organizational levels to look critically at their processes and identify simple solutions that will provide incremental improvement and value.

While quick wins can be advantageous, they can also derail a project and distract from larger transformational opportunities if not managed appropriately.



Potential Negatives from Quick Wins:

IMPACT TIME AND RESOURCES THAT COULD BE USED FOR OTHER INITIATIVES

If a quick win becomes a greater effort than originally anticipated, it can cause unnecessary strain on teams that could otherwise be focused on larger, more valuable initiatives.

DISTRACT FROM STRATEGIC GOALS OF THE PROJECT

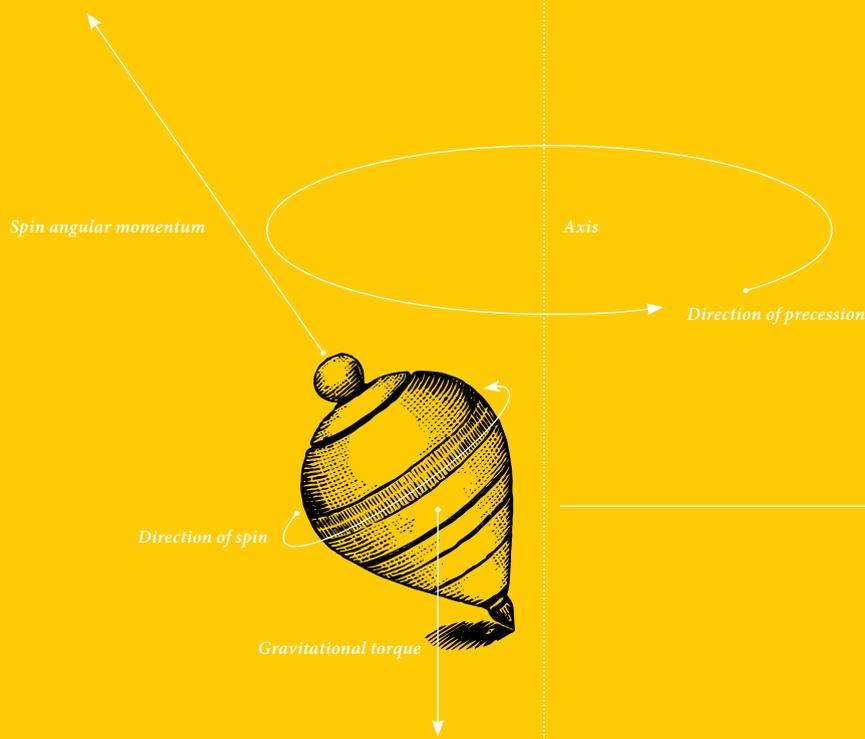
Trying to achieve quick wins can cause you to get stuck in the weeds, focusing too much on details at the expense of the overall project. Quick wins can easily stray from the strategic goals of the initiative and fall out-of-scope if not evaluated correctly.

OVER-EMPHASIZE 'FRONT LINE' STAKEHOLDERS RATHER THAN LEADERSHIP

Operational stakeholders often say, "I don't need anything fancy. I just need this result." While this can sometimes be true, it is important to balance the thoughts of front-line workers with the goals of leadership.

Though there are potential pitfalls that can result from quick wins, they also have the potential to build momentum for the project if they are handled through an organized approach.





Keys to Achieving Balance and Momentum:

ALIGN TO THE BIG PICTURE

Just as major initiatives should have alignment to the organization’s strategic goals, quick wins should support those initiatives. Providing a clear path from quick win to strategic goal enhances the value and visibility of the effort and provides a “why” to motivate those performing the work as well as those affected by it. As part of any process improvement project, it is important to first identify the business’s strategic goals in order to make sure that all identified improvement opportunities fit within the broader strategic goals of the organization. Once the strategic goals are defined, it is important to identify key metrics that align to each goal. As you work to break down the effort required for the initiative and identify potential quick wins, the key metrics can be used to decide which process improvement opportunities to complete. Evaluating quick wins based on whether or not they move the needle on our determined metrics allows us to stay aligned to the overall business goals.

ALIGN TO RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Remember that investment in projects and quick wins aren’t just measured in dollars and hours spent and saved — there’s also employee engagement, customer

satisfaction, and the emotional toll of change to consider as well. It is important to find quick wins of two types — those that create substantial financial ROI and those that generate significant emotional ROI.

Agreeing on an objective evaluation tool such as a prioritization matrix can help the team and organization make fast, unbiased decisions to decide which quick wins to pursue. A matrix can also help the team quickly identify each quick win’s estimated level of effort as well as the potential financial, customer, and organizational benefits. The team can then prioritize the quick wins accordingly, based on what the organization and team feel to be important. For example, a sales team with high turnover could value employee satisfaction as a targeted benefit, while a mature shared services organization could strongly value time and cost savings. An objective and unbiased approach promotes the engagement and satisfaction of all team members and ensures that decisions are made based on the best interests of the organization. Based on the results of the assessment, a quick win can be given the green light to move forward now or be incorporated in the longer term roadmap without distracting from other team responsibilities.

→ **To keep your balance, you must keep moving.**

ALBERT EINSTEIN

ALIGN TO THE STAKEHOLDERS

Large projects typically have executive sponsorship and can have impacts ranging from the top of the organization to the bottom, as well as external impacts to customers. Letting the quick-win teams present their results to leadership gives ground-level employees empowerment and provides leadership the visibility they desire. It is also important to ensure that mid-level management has the tools needed to support requests from both leadership and ground-level employees.

In process improvement projects, consider and incorporate each essential stakeholder, whether a technician or a vice president. Each improvement recommendation should be evaluated holistically and from four different perspectives: process, people, technology, and leadership. By doing so, you are able to see not just the process and technology aspects of a project, but also uncover the potential people-oriented solutions (such as resources and training) and leadership solutions (such as ownership, responsibility and accountability) as well. Bringing a holistic analysis to quick wins allows you to identify the right involvement and support for each level of the organization.

Quick wins can be powerful tools when performed in concert with a larger improvement effort but can derail the project if not managed appropriately. With this in mind, it is important to have a plan for organizing and evaluating quick wins so that the team can make informed decisions about which quick wins

to pursue without slowing or hindering the progress of the overall project. The tools and strategies outlined here can help maintain momentum and strike a balance between the quick wins and larger improvement opportunities that will achieve lasting transformative impact for the organization. By aligning the quick wins to business goals, prioritizing higher ROI opportunities, and engaging key stakeholders, quick wins can become a tool to create early momentum while accomplishing long-term success.

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AUDREY BLOOMER

audrey.bloomer@jabian.com

Audrey is a Manager at Jabian with experience in project management, process analysis, and change management methodologies



ALEX HELMAN

alex.helman@jabian.com

Alex is a Manager at Jabian specializing in process improvement, project management, and product strategy



JIMMY MITCHELL

jimmy.mitchell@jabian.com

Jimmy is a Manager at Jabian with expertise in process improvement, operations strategy, and supply chain optimization

