



## News Blog Article Archive

Jonathan Stearn's post on CEO.com  
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### How to Achieve Sustainable Organic Growth and Overcome Complex Challenges

**Solving homelessness is much more difficult than building a house. Why? Because solving homelessness is a complex challenge.**

Many executives fail to appreciate the fundamental difference between simple and complex challenges.

When building a house, the final product is clear, and [the pathway to achieve it](#) can be laid out with confidence. Traditional project management techniques are sufficient.

With complex challenges – whether for a social good, or any business goal – it is often impossible to know at the beginning what solutions will work. The [“100,000 Homes” campaign](#) showed just how complex the homelessness challenge is – and shows how to solve that and other complex challenges with a “project management plus” approach that incorporates adaptive execution, experimentation, rapid learning, and discovery of optimal solutions that deliver required business outcomes.

A leading office supplies manufacturer, a global insurance company, and a manufacturer of wine closures had missed their growth targets for years. Each leveraged the three keys to success outlined below to generate sustainable top line gains.

***Articulate crisp, inspiring outcomes. Create clarity on current and future state, and the shifts required to bridge the gap.***

Awareness of where the organization is today and where its growth aspirations will take it often varies widely across the organization. The office supplies company had been framing their growth opportunity as just a new product development challenge. Once everyone understood that growth objectives had to be achieved by [leveraging existing products](#) – the landscape of opportunity expanded and teams got more creative. Only when the insurance company articulated a data-driven case for change around product density, conversion, and retention did the years of ongoing cross-sell initiatives ignite growth at the required scale.



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***Use urgent, results-focused learning efforts. Short-term projects that deliver meaningful business gains on metrics like revenue, market share, and new customers enable fast discovery of viable solutions and accelerate ROI.***

Rather than design and roll out solutions, executives must lay out expectations, drive accountability, and monitor performance. They commission local, temporary cross-functional teams that design their own solutions, leveraging what's available from corporate and other areas of the company, and tailoring them based on their experiences being closest to the work. Leaders support the teams as they experiment and figure out what actually moves the needle.

These 100-day (or less) projects target specific products or services, geographies, and/or customer segments. The insurance company looked to cross sell Property, Casualty, and Specialty lines in two offices. The wine closure manufacturing commissioned three fast, focused efforts: breaking into major wine labels in Napa and Sonoma, getting a foothold in the Chinese market, and successfully launching a new product in Italy.

***Sustain and scale success. Support teams as they create “sustainability and expansion plans.”***

Teams outline how new ways of working will be embedded into the fabric of the company, where they can be leveraged into other areas, and the best areas to tackle next. The office supplies company began jumpstarting its growth efforts with 14 projects across three divisions in one office. These generated \$15 MM in annualized incremental revenue in 100 days. One lesson learned was that many commercial products could easily be adjusted for retail use. Executives took the teams' advice and launched teams in 50 additional sites that year yielding another \$50 MM in annualized incremental revenue. The insurance company took the cross-sell successes in the first two offices and replicated them in other offices around the country. And the launch experience in Italy helped the wine closures company re-write the book on how they bring new products to market.

Any executive can use these keys to success to achieve their growth ambitions quickly with high engagement.