11.958 Getting Things Implemented: Strategy, People, Performance, and Leadership
IAP 2009

TAKE-HOME EXAM

This is a set of word problems. Apropos our discussion of the multiple purposes that performance measures can serve, this problem set has two main purposes. The first and foremost is to generate learning. These problems will help you review, rethink, and apply core concepts we've discussed. I think you'll enjoy thinking about the problems, in fact, and internalizing new concepts you've learned in a deeper way.

The (very) secondary purpose is to let me evaluate your mastery of the concepts, assuming you're taking the course for credit. Remember that the course is pass/fail. **A passing score for this problem set is 75 points.** (If you're not taking the course for credit but want to complete the problem set and get my feedback, I'd be happy to read your submission.)

You may discuss the problems with classmates if you like, but your submitted answers should be your own. Your submission to the Stellar website constitutes a sworn honor statement, under MIT rules, that the work is your own.

Also, you may, in preparing your answers, use any and all course materials (cases, readings, notes, and handouts). There's no need to consult outside sources or extra materials. *Your answers are due on Stellar no later than 5PM five days after the end of the course.*

Format and general instructions

- I'll grade the answers generously, focusing on whether you clearly understand the main concepts and how—in broad terms—to apply them to real-world situations. Nonetheless, please submit a professional document: spell-checked and proofread. You're free to have a friend or writing tutor proofread the document for you before you upload it to the Stellar website>Homework section.

- You need not re-type the problem text or other extras. Just type your name and "11.958 Exam, 2009" on top, then number your answers so that I can follow them.

- Go easy on my eyes: Use a 12-point font (no micro-print, please), double space your document, and use margins of at least an inch on all sides.

- No footnoting or formal academic referencing, please. Give your answers, in their entirety, in the main text you write for each problem. By all means, support your ideas with references to key sources or specific frameworks. But keep it informal. The problems are written to simulate real-world exchanges and observations of implementation issues, not formal requests for reports, memoranda, essays, etc.

- The word limits are suggested. You don't need more words to answer these questions effectively. But if you wish to elaborate a bit, that's fine.

Problems

1. A friend calls to ask your advice on a challenge she's facing. "I was excited to join this organization," she says. "I mean ... they're working on the issues I care most about, and I thought a new environment would make me grow. But there's tremendous conflict, and we don't seem to be making progress. I can't get cooperation from the other departments, our work doesn't even seem integrated with theirs effectively, and information just isn't shared in the ways I would like. The staff members who have been here for years are always calling in favors to get things done across departments. And then a consultant came in the other day and made a presentation. He said we should consider a new strategy for the organization, and that led to a long, big-picture discussion about what our impact on the community could be 10 years out ... 10 years out! The head of our organization is a "vision" person—he isn't known for "doing details" well—so he loved that. But it seemed way out to me even though the consultant seemed smart and eager to be helpful. I wonder, does that advice sound right to you? Do we necessarily need a new strategy, or is something else holding us back?" Answer your friend's question based on the info she has conveyed so far, briefly identify the kinds of actions that might respond to the problems she has identified in her organization, and identify a few things you would want to know more about (i.e. to be more helpful and specific about how to address her organization's woes). Feel free to address her directly, i.e. "you" and "your organization could ..." (20 POINTS, Suggested length=150 to 200 words)

2. You're invited to advise a local government on whether to partner with nongovernmental, community-based organizations to create basic infrastructure—such as effective sanitation and water supply—that is cost effective and well maintained. The government is considering a program that would take it out of the "direct service" role but is unsure how to think about the potential risks and rewards, and it does *not* want to contract with private companies ("privatize"), for fear that approach would not create the benefits of "community partnership." Advise them in broad terms on the potential risk and reward issue, and suggest a few operating capacity issues that might arise if they go ahead with the "partnership" approach that engages community organizations. (10 POINTS, Suggested length=100 to 150 words)

3. You're working in a new, socially responsible real estate firm, with several departments tackling different lines of work—affordable housing in community development contexts, creating "green" commercial buildings that are energy efficient, and more. The company was launched with great fanfare and excitement last year. But you notice that the quality of the work is not where it should be. In fact, it seems to be declining, and you know that's bad news since your company has not yet established its reputation or much financial cushion. You make some time to walk around and observe your organization at work, plus interview staff at all levels informally. For all the activity that's evident—it's a busy place—the outputs seem few and slow. And in the interviews you conduct, a few complaints come up again and again: There's so much staff turnover, especially at the junior project associate and assistant levels, that key

managers are spending large amounts of time hiring and training new people. So managers have less time to coordinate with each other or reflect on how the company's work is getting done—reflection that might lead to real improvements in the services, financial bottom line, social impact, etc. In operating capacity terms, what kinds of things is the agency not able to do right now that it should be able to? And what kinds of responses can you suggest to the "high turnover" problem, which, leaving its consequences aside for the moment, might have several causes? (10 POINTS, Suggested length=100 words)

4. You're commuting weekly from DC to Boston, and then, one week mid-winter, there's a blizzard. It isn't clear, before you arrive at the airport on the DC end, whether any shuttle flights are leaving. Once you're there, you see a crowd of impatient people anxiously gathered near the airline counter. Everyone is waiting to find out which flights are leaving, if any, whether they've still got a seat, etc. And you can't help but notice, off to the side, the gleaming electronic kiosks for check-in under "normal" circumstances. The sleek blue airline logo flashes in animation. Too bad that electronic box doesn't have the info you and the other customers need … There's a muffled announcement coming through the loudspeaker above your head—which no one seems to understand—and then the customers are staring at each other and complaining anxiously again. After 45 minutes, a customer service agent appears and yells out from his counter that *all shuttle flights have been cancelled.* Everyone is upset, and so are you. But what to do now? The agent comes out into the crowd and repeats himself several times, so that everyone can hear: "You may want to try the trains or buses, and we have sheets with all the phone numbers and schedule information." He begins to hand out a photocopy that looks as though it has been sitting in the drawer for the last decade. Some people wait to get those, others have their cell phones out and are calling loved ones. You overhear a few people talking about renting a car. That sounds exhausting, in light of the snowstorm, but you might have to consider it. Yet *everyone* will be trying those alternatives, and it would be nice to know, say, if the trains are all booked up already. From an implementation standpoint, how might the airline have improved the key processes functioning (or dys-functioning) in this scenario? And what are some innovative ways to rethink the value the airline might create for its customers in a weather emergency such as this? (15 POINTS, Suggested length=150 to 200 words)

5. Revisiting the DC case, and drawing on the Kaplan and Norton chapter about "Strategy Scorecards in Nonprofit, Government, and Health Care Organization," explain the difference between (a) having a strategy for city government *alongside* a set of performance measures for each of its agencies and (b) *linking* a strategy for city government to measures (within or across agencies) that are grouped in specific ways, such as the "financial" and other groupings that Kaplan and Norton recommend. Then highlight a few lessons that you think DC might learn from the City of Charlotte, which is profiled in the Kaplan and Norton chapter. They're different places, and the Mayors and other leaders may have very different priorities in one place versus the other, but as an analytic exercise, see if you can identify some lessons worth considering in the DC

context, based on the different approach that Charlotte took to local government "performance strategy." (25 POINTS, Suggested length=200 words)

6. As a general matter, when a public-interest organization or initiative falls out of strategic "alignment," what kinds of problems can arise in terms of the organization's potential for impact or value creation? And what approaches can decisionmakers consider for re-aligning the organization, assuming that it should continue to operate? (10 POINTS, Suggested length=100 words)

7. How does the "One Church, One Child" case illustrate skillful *political management* by Coler, the entrepreneurial state agency official? (10 POINTS, Suggested length=100 words)