The Tipping Point

Publicly funded organisations plan for a wide range of business as usual activities and new initiatives. Not all of those plans will be successful, but it is often difficult to recognise the point at which Plan A stops being viable and it is time to switch to Plan B. When organisations stick to a plan that is heading in the wrong direction, they not only fail to reach their destinations, but use up valuable time and other resources that are lost forever.

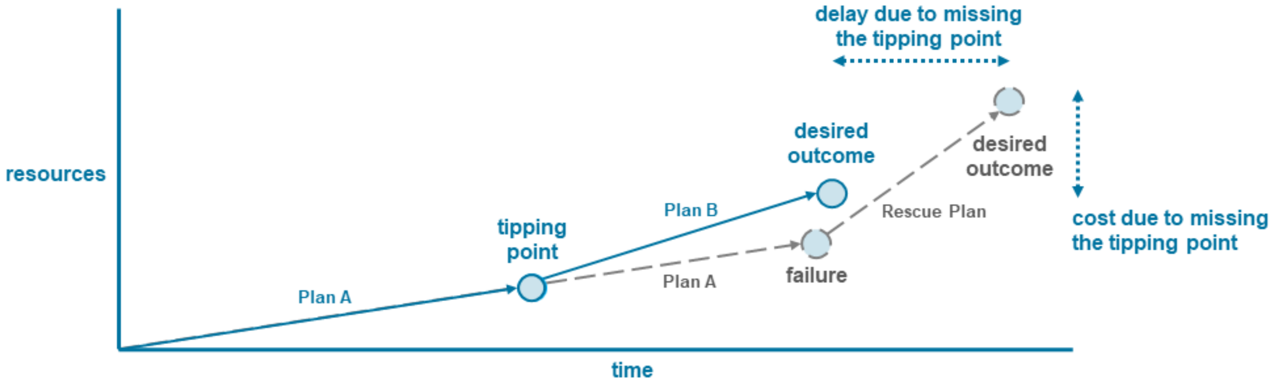
Once implementation begins, plans can take on their own momentum. The more resources are consumed, the harder it can be to redirect all that energy later.

It can be especially difficult for some publicly funded organisations to change direction once a plan has been agreed by key decision makers, even if that plan is not working.

Team members, and even stakeholders, can be so fixated on implementing the steps in a plan that they lose sight of the ultimate goal. Dedicated contributors can become so deeply invested in the plan that they develop optimism bias. When participants start to overweigh the odds of success and overlook major risks, they can end up sticking with a plan long past the point where it seems likely to succeed.

Waiting too long to change direction from Plan A to Plan B means that teams waste time and resources doing work that cannot achieve its objective. For resource-constrained publicly funded organisations, the opportunity cost is high. Wasted effort, loss of momentum when Plan A eventually fails, and the energy needed to start over can leave contributors feeling frustrated, exhausted, and discouraged.

Once Plan A passes the tipping point where a change of direction is required, further effort on the original course becomes less and less valuable. This makes it progressively more difficult to transition smoothly to a rescue plan. Delays, disruption, and distraction have flow on effects to other work, creating a vicious cycle of demands for ever more work with limited resources.



To avoid wasting time and resources beyond the point where Plan A seems likely to reach its destination, publicly funded organisations need to recognise the tipping point and divert effort to an alternative plan.

Lead indicators that assess the likelihood of a plan achieving its objectives can give measurable early warning signs that a plan is headed in the wrong direction. Teams should formalise and normalise processes for sounding the alarm if the path ahead no longer seems clear.

Once the need to change course is identified, decision makers need to act quickly. If they wait too long, perhaps hoping things will improve, they risk passing the tipping point. From that point on, further effort is wasted at best and can even be counter-productive.

Recognising the moment that Plan A is no longer viable, and sounding the alarm quickly, makes it possible for publicly funded organisations to avoid persisting on an increasingly irrelevant path.

Acting quickly when the tipping point is identified gives decision makers time and space to chart a new course, without losing momentum. Organisations that refocus towards key objectives without delay can direct more valuable resources and enthusiasm towards their goals.

Recognising the tipping point in a plan’s journey, and switching to Plan B promptly, helps to achieve more goals with less wasted effort. Looking further ahead creates opportunities to turn the corner quickly and efficiently, setting a new course to the destination.