Using TRIZ in "Reverse" for Organizational and Business Problems

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In the late 1960's Boris Zlotin and other original TRIZ Masters of Altshuller came up with a very clever "reverse" method of using TRIZ principles. This application goes by several different names such as Anticipatory Failure Determination™ and Predictive Failure Analysis™. The basic principle is to invert the classical TRIZ problem solving algorithm as follows (we'll use an organizational as opposed to a technical problem as an example):

1. State the Ideal Result: We want to make sure that all of our employees know all they need to know to do their jobs to sustain the organization's objective
2. Invert this statement: We do not want our employees to know what they need to know to assist their organization in achieving its goals
3. Exaggerate the inverted Ideal Final Result statement. (This is the key mental step that may be hard to do just as the normal TRIZ ideal result is difficult to express): We NEVER want our employees to have the information they need to assist the organization in achieving its goals.
4. What resources are available to achieve this "inverted ideality"? Are they available? Can they be created?

Some things coming to mind? Don't tell our employees what our goals are? Don't show then how their jobs relate to these objectives? Don't show them the potential positive financial benefits that might accrue? Don't help them do their jobs better? Isn't your list longer than the one you got from your human resources department? Did you feel the difference between "check listing" and deliberately trying to make something go wrong? We have changed the question from "What?" to "How?" and our brains are in a different quadrant. It is truly amazing to watch the light bulbs go off in a group setting when this process is used.

There is no one accepted checklist for organizational and business problems it depends upon the latest book you read (and believe) or the latest conference you attended. That's what makes this so useful it transcends complexity in an elegantly simple way and gets right to the heat of the matter. Let's take some other examples.

New Product Launches: We usually have these and they contain technical and legal issues, but as before, they are in the form of checklists. What if we ask these questions?

1. How would I make sure that the new product did not show up on the grocery shelves at the same time as the coupons are mailed to households? What's required to make this happen? Have we considered all these possibilities? Don't do the mailing times? What resources are required to make this happen? Are they available? Are the shippers on strike? Does the grocery store know about your promotion? How do you know? How would we make sure they didn't?

2. How would I make sure that I did not know what my competitors were doing at the same time? Make sure that competitive intelligence is not available? Make sure that we give away what we are planning to do?
3. How would I make sure that there was a product liability suit in the first week of a new product's launch? Make sure that I had not thought about all the possible ways my product might be misused? By who?

Business Continuity

1. We want to insure that our business continues despite the possibility of a major hurricane striking our area. How would we make sure our business never recovered? No backup data? Backup data in a vulnerable location? Make sure that our property is underinsured? By a less than reputable insurance company? Concern ourselves primarily with the goods of the business rather than the employees and customers? Don't laugh, but we had a case here in Tampa where a data backup company was selling data backup services with the backup system located on a lower floor than the primary backup in a flood prone area!
2. How would I make sure that customers could not order other than only in a retail store? Web purchasing? Set up a delivery system only in these circumstances?

Personnel Issues

1. How would I make sure that the new "merit plan" and employee evaluation system caused us to lose 25% of our top technical talent? Don't do a thorough competitive market analysis for the skills I employ? Don't understand what motivates my employees? How many of my employees are "management" vs. "professionally" oriented?
2. How would I make sure that staff meetings are a total waste of time? Ask for input when a decision has already been made? Don't communicate agenda, time, responsibilities, and agenda? Don't clearly communicate the objective of the meeting?

Take some of your own management and organizational problems and try to make them worse and see what new ideas you come up with that you should worry about! Then look at your organizational and personal resources and ask if it's possible for this to happen. If it can, consider the consequences and make decisions and action plans accordingly.

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