

THE EMBEDDED MARKET · CHAPTER NINE

Thirteen Weeks: A Field Manual

Chapter Nine of The Embedded Market

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A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

This work is offered for education and leadership development. It is not legal, financial, accounting, investment, medical or psychological advice; take the advice of a qualified professional who knows your circumstances. Companies and events are described from the public record as the author understands it; characterisations are the author's analysis. Examples are illustrative, and no particular outcome is promised to any reader.

ABSTRACT

A leader has read this far and is persuaded. The organisation, or the part of it she is responsible for, hears mostly exit. She has filled in an audit on the train and found more lines marked exit only than she expected. She wants to change it, and she has a quarter. What she does not have is a sequence. The earlier chapters each end with a tool, and each tool is useful on its own. Used in the wrong order, or all at once, they become a programme: a launch, a slide deck, a survey nobody trusts, and a quiet return to the old rhythm by the summer. Every organisation has watched that happen to some initiative or other, and the people inside it remember. The memory is part of what this work has to overcome, because the price of voice, as the third chapter set out, is set by what happened the last few times somebody spoke.

CHAPTER NINE

Thirteen Weeks: A Field Manual



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Monday, nine in the morning

A leader has read this far and is persuaded. The organisation, or the part of it she is responsible for, hears mostly exit. She has filled in an audit on the train and found more lines marked *exit only* than she expected. She wants to change it, and she has a quarter.

What she does not have is a sequence. The earlier chapters each end with a tool, and each tool is useful on its own. Used in the wrong order, or all at once, they become a programme: a launch, a slide deck, a survey nobody trusts, and a quiet return to the old rhythm by the summer. Every organisation has watched that happen to some initiative or other, and the people inside it remember. The memory is part of what this work has to overcome, because the price of voice, as the third chapter set out, is set by what happened the last few times somebody spoke.

This chapter is the sequence. It runs for thirteen weeks, one quarter, because a quarter is long enough for a changed habit to be seen and short enough for a leader to hold in her head. It names the roles, the decision at the end of each phase, and what most often goes wrong at that point. It is written for a leader of a team, a department, a small firm or a division. A household can run a smaller version of it, set out at the end of the chapter, and the chapter on the kitchen table takes that version further.

One principle governs all of it. Ammanuel Santa Anna's *Organizational Soul Work* gives it in eleven words: the living-systems posture is to "listen first, deeply and patiently, before you do anything at all". The first four weeks of this manual contain almost no changes. That is deliberate. An organisation that has learned to hear mostly exit will treat any sudden invitation to speak as a test, and it will be right to. The listening has to be seen to be real before anyone will risk much on it.

The four roles

The work needs four people, or four functions held by fewer people in a small organisation. Name them in week one and write the names down.

The sponsor. The person with the authority to change how decisions are made in the area covered. Usually the leader herself. The sponsor's job is not to run the work. It is to do three things visibly: act on what is heard, say what was acted on, and protect the people who speak. Detert and Burris's study of 3,149 employees and 223 managers found that managerial openness, what leaders actually do with what they are told, was more consistently related to employees' improvement-oriented voice than transformational leadership was, and that the relationship ran through employees' sense of psychological safety.[34] The sponsor's behaviour is the instrument. Everything else measures it.

The convenor. The person who keeps the sequence, books the conversations, keeps the ledger and the notebook, and chases the follow-up. In a team of twelve this may be the leader's deputy. In a firm of three hun-

dred it is a half-time role for a quarter. The convenor must not be the sponsor, because the sponsor's attention will be pulled elsewhere in week six and the sequence will stall if it depends on her diary.

The listeners. Between two and six people, depending on scale, who will hold the voice conversations in weeks three to ten. They are chosen for two qualities: people trust them, and they can keep a confidence. They are not chosen for seniority. In many organisations the best listeners sit one or two levels below the top, close enough to the work to understand what they are told and far enough from the power to be told it.

The second reader. One person, inside or outside the organisation, who has no stake in the result and whose job is to read the record at each gate and disagree with it. The second reader asks the questions the sponsor would rather not: who did we not hear from, what did the numbers not look at, is the improvement we see real or did we change how we counted. The house practice of a second reading exists because the author of a piece of work is the one person who cannot see its blind spots, and this work is no exception.

Write down, before week one ends, what each of the four will do and how much time it will take. A sponsor who cannot give two hours a week for thirteen weeks should not begin. It is better to start next quarter than to start and stop, because a stopped initiative raises the price of voice for a year.

Weeks one and two: the audit

What happens. The sponsor and the convenor complete the Embeddedness Audit from the second chapter for the whole area covered. Every relationship the area depends on goes on the sheet: people, places and materials, money. For each, the second column records the last time that party told you something you did not already know; the third, the channel it came through; the fourth, any exits in the past year; the fifth, one small act that would open a channel.

The audit is done twice, independently. The sponsor completes it from her own knowledge. The convenor completes it by asking: walking round, checking the records, talking to the people who manage each relationship day to day. The two versions are then laid side by side.

What it shows. The difference between the two sheets is usually the first real finding. Where the sponsor believes a channel is working and the convenor finds it silent, the sponsor has been reading a structure as if it were a practice. A monthly supplier meeting that exists on the calendar is not a voice channel if nothing has been said in it for a year.

The gate. At the end of week two the sponsor, the convenor and the second reader meet for an hour. The decision is which relationships the quarter will cover. Not all of them. Choose between five and fifteen lines from the audit: the ones where the relationship carries something Polanyi would call fictitious,

people's working lives, the places and materials you depend on, or the credit you run on, and where the channel is marked *exit only* or *none recalled*. Those lines are the scope. Write them down.

What goes wrong. The commonest failure here is scope. A sponsor who has just seen how much of her organisation hears only exit wants to fix all of it, and chooses forty lines. Forty lines cannot be served by four listeners in a quarter, follow-up slips, and the people who were invited to speak and then heard nothing are worse off than before. The second reader's job at this gate is to cut the list.

The second failure is defensiveness. The audit will show that some relationships the sponsor is proud of are quieter than she thought. The right response is the one *Organizational Soul Work* describes for any hard truth: receive it before explaining it. The book is precise about why: "When a truth is named and immediately followed by a solution, the system doesn't fully receive the truth." Weeks one and two are for receiving.

Week three: the ledger

What happens. The sponsor completes the Voice Cost Ledger from the third chapter for her own conduct over the past six months. The last ten concerns raised with her; for each, who raised it, how, how long she took to respond, what she did, and whether she told them. Each concern is scored for cost. The missing voices are listed: the people who report to her, supply her or depend on her who appear nowhere among the ten.

The convenor does the same for each listener, in a short version: the last five concerns each of them received and what happened.

What it shows. The ledger is the sponsor's own record, and it is usually uncomfortable. Its value is that it is specific. "We need to listen more" is an intention. "Six of my last ten concerns took more than seven days to answer, and I told only three of the people what I did" is a finding, and it points at the habit to change.

The gate. No meeting this week. The sponsor chooses one cost from the ledger, the one that appears most often, and commits to changing one habit for the rest of the quarter. The habit is written down and given to the convenor, who will check it at every later gate. A common choice is a rule to acknowledge every concern within three working days, even if only to say when a decision will come.

What goes wrong. Sponsors skip the ledger, or delegate it. It is the one tool in this manual that cannot be delegated, because its subject is the sponsor. A ledger completed by someone else measures the organisation's opinion of the sponsor, which is useful, but it is not the same instrument.



Week four: the map

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Week four: the map

What happens. The sponsor, the convenor and the listeners draw the Membrane Map from the fourth chapter together, in one ninety-minute session. The circle in the centre is the area covered; outside it, every party in scope. Each meeting point is marked V for a working voice channel, E for exit only, S for a voice that has gone silent. Every E and S on a relationship that carries people's time and safety, land or premises, or the credit you run on is circled.

What it shows. The map turns the audit into a picture the listeners can hold. Its most important marks are the Ss, because they are the places where voice once worked and stopped, and each has a story. The listeners will often know the story. Someone raised something, something happened to them, and others drew the conclusion.

The gate. At the end of week four, the sponsor, convenor, listeners and second reader meet for ninety minutes. Two decisions. First, assign each circled party to a listener. Second, decide which of the circled parties are suppliers or external partners, who will be served by the Supplier Voice Protocol in weeks five to ten, and which are internal, who will be served by listening conversations.

What goes wrong. The map is drawn by the sponsor alone. A sponsor's map shows the membrane as she believes it to be. The listeners' map shows it as it is. They are different pictures, and the difference is the work.

Weeks five to ten: the conversations

This is the long middle of the quarter, and it is where most initiatives die. Six weeks is long enough for the sponsor's attention to drift, for a crisis to arrive, and for the people who were invited to speak to start wondering whether anyone is still listening.

What happens, with external partners. For each supplier, contractor or partner in scope, the assigned listener runs the Supplier Voice Protocol from the fifth chapter. The conversation is held apart from price, and the separation is stated in writing: nothing said in it will be used in commercial negotiation. The four questions are asked in the same words each time. *What is not working well for you in how we work with you? What problem do you see coming that we have not raised? What would you change in our specification, process or timing if you could? What have you stopped telling us, and why?* The answers are written down in the partner's words. Within thirty days, each answer is returned to the partner marked *acted*, *not acting* with the reason, or *investigating* with a date.

What happens, inside. For each internal group in scope, a team, a shift, a function, the assigned listener holds a forty-five minute conversation every fortnight with a small group, between four and eight people. The same four questions, adapted. The listener writes down what is said, without names unless the speaker asks for their name to be attached. The convenor collects the notes each Friday.

The weekly rhythm. Every Friday, the convenor brings the week's notes to the sponsor for thirty minutes. The sponsor decides, for each item, *act*, *explain why not*, or *investigate by a date*. The convenor records the decision. Every Monday, the sponsor says, in whatever forum the area already uses, a team meeting, a written note, a short message, what was changed in the past week because someone spoke. One sentence per change. No names, unless the person wants to be named.

That Monday sentence is the single most important act in the quarter. It is the moment the organisation learns whether voice is heard. Detert and Burris's finding that openness, what a leader is seen to do, matters more than inspiration is a finding about exactly this kind of public, repeated, small evidence.[34]

The gate, week seven. A mid-point meeting of all four roles, one hour. The convenor brings three numbers: how many items have been raised, how many have been closed with a response, and the median days from raising to response. The second reader asks who has not been heard from. The decision is whether to continue as planned, or to change the listener assignment for any party that has stayed silent.

What goes wrong. Three things, in rough order of frequency.

The first is a gap in the Monday sentence. One week the sponsor is travelling, or nothing feels worth reporting, and it is skipped. The organisation notices. A second gap confirms what people suspected. If there is genuinely nothing to report, the sentence says so: *nothing was changed this week; these three items are still being looked at and will be answered by Friday.* An honest small sentence is better than silence.

The second is the problem that cannot be solved in a quarter. Someone raises a question about pay, or structure, or a long-standing decision that the sponsor cannot change. The temptation is to treat it as out of scope and say nothing. The protocol's answer is the *not acting* response, with a reason, given promptly. People can accept a refusal they understand. They do not forget being ignored.

The third is retaliation, usually unintended. A manager below the sponsor hears that a concern came from his team and treats the team differently. Morrison and Milliken describe organisational silence as a collective state built on shared beliefs that speaking up is futile or dangerous, and a single visible consequence for a speaker can rebuild that belief across a whole group.[35] The sponsor must make it clear, before week five begins, that any adverse treatment of someone who spoke through these channels will be treated as a serious matter, and then act if it happens. *Conscious Governance Models* puts the requirement in a sentence: "It must be cultural — a genuine collective commitment that truth-telling is valued even when it is uncomfortable."

Weeks eleven and twelve: the second map

What happens. The listeners and the convenor redraw the Membrane Map for the parties in scope. Each E or S from week four is checked: is there now a working channel, has the party used it, and did they see what happened to what they said? The sponsor redoes her Voice Cost Ledger for the concerns raised since week three. The convenor prepares the record for the gate: items raised, items closed, median response time, and a list of parties still silent.

What it shows. In most first quarters, the number of concerns raised goes up. This is the most commonly misread result in the whole manual. A rise in concerns is not a sign that things have got worse. It is the measure working: problems that existed all along are now arriving where someone can act on them. The

next chapter takes this up at length, because it is where a measurement system most often lies to the people who built it.

What goes wrong. The second map is drawn by the same people who drew the first, with the same hopes, and it shows improvement because they want it to. The second reader's role here is to check three or four marks independently: to ask, directly, a party now marked V whether they would say so.



Week thirteen: the reading and the decision

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Week thirteen: the reading and the decision

What happens. A two-hour meeting of all four roles. The convenor presents the record. The second reader presents what she found. The sponsor reads both and makes the decision the whole quarter has been building to: what continues.

Three outcomes are possible, and each is legitimate.

Continue and widen. The channels opened are working; the Monday sentence has become a habit; the median response time has fallen; some silent parties have spoken. The scope is extended to the next set of lines from the original audit, and the rhythm continues with fewer formal gates.

Continue and narrow. Some channels are working and others are not. The work continues on the ones that are, and the sponsor takes a hard look, with the second reader, at why the others failed. Often it is a listener mismatch, a relationship that needed a different person; sometimes it is a relationship that was never going to carry voice and is better held at arm's length.

Stop, and say so. If the work has not taken, because the sponsor could not hold the rhythm, or because a reorganisation or a crisis overtook it, the right ending is a plain statement to everyone who took part: what was heard, what was done, and why the formal work is ending. This is the least comfortable outcome and the most important one to get right. An initiative that fades without an ending teaches people that voice is fashionable. One that ends honestly teaches them that it is taken seriously even when it stops.

What goes wrong. The meeting becomes a celebration. A good first quarter feels like an achievement, and it is one. But the house practice is to read for what the numbers did not look at before reading for what they show. Who was never in scope? Which exits in the quarter were not linked to any voice? Is the fall in response time real, or did the convenor start counting differently in week six? *Organizational Soul Work* has a sentence that belongs on the wall of this meeting: "The truth you cannot speak becomes the architecture you inhabit."

After the quarter: the weekly review

The formal sequence ends in week thirteen. The rhythm does not. From week fourteen, the sponsor keeps the Weekly Exit and Voice Review from the thirteenth chapter, fifteen minutes every Friday: exits this week and whether the reason is known; voices this week and what was done; the linked pairs, where an exit followed a voice that was not acted on; one call to someone who left; one thing given before it was asked for.

That review is the permanent form of the work. The quarter built the channels. The review keeps them breathing. Santa Anna's *Luminous Moral Development* makes the case for a small practice kept over a large

one launched, in a sentence about personal courage that fits an organisation exactly: "You build it by lifting manageable weights repeatedly."

The household quarter

A household can run the same sequence in a much smaller form, and the chapter on the kitchen table sets out why it is worth doing.

Weeks one and two. One adult completes the Embeddedness Audit for the household's dozen most important relationships: employers, landlord or lender, the doctor, the school, the few providers of things that break, the people nearby who help. A second adult, or an older child, does the same separately. Compare the sheets.

Week three. Each adult completes a short Voice Cost Ledger for the household itself: the last five times a family member, including a child, raised a worry, and what happened.

Week four. Draw the membrane map on one sheet at the kitchen table, together.

Weeks five to ten. One conversation a week, fifteen minutes, at a regular time, in which each member is asked what is not working and what they are worried about that no one has asked. Write it down. By the next week, say what was done.

Weeks eleven to thirteen. Redraw the map, look at the ledger again, and decide together what continues.

The roles shrink. The sponsor is whichever adult holds the household's decisions; the convenor is whoever is better at keeping a list; the listener, for a child, is often the adult the child already talks to; the second reader can be a friend or relative who is asked, once, to look at the sheets and say what they notice.

Reading the whole sequence

The thirteen weeks have a shape that is worth seeing in one piece. The first four weeks listen and change nothing, so that the listening is believed. The middle six open channels and close loops, publicly and repeatedly, so that the price of voice falls. The last three read honestly, so that the work is judged by what happened rather than by what was hoped.

That shape is not invented here. It is the shape of every working membrane described in this book: a period of sensing, a period of exchange, and a period of reading what came through. The Toyota supplier network, the andon cord at Fremont, the inquiry at Stafford, told in chapters 5 to 8: each succeeded or failed according to whether signals raised at the edge reached someone who could act and came back with an answer. A quarter is one turn of that cycle. The organisation learns its rhythm by going round it.

Ecstatic Economics states the requirement in one line about organisations that work: "Vitality-centered organizations cultivate feedback richness — multiple channels, rapid loops, and the psychological safety to

deliver and receive honest information without punishment." Multiple channels, rapid loops, safety: the three things a quarter can build, one week at a time. Ammanuel Santa Anna's full account is in *Ecstatic Economics*, and the companion book in this series on gainsharing, gainsharing, shows what becomes possible in an organisation once the people closest to the work are routinely heard. For setting the quarter's few objectives without turning them into targets, see the Alpha Paper *Alpha OKR*.

The Tool: The Thirteen-Week Plan

One sheet, kept by the convenor, read at every gate.

1. Name the roles (week one). Write the names of the sponsor, the convenor, the listeners and the second reader, and the hours each will give per week. If the sponsor cannot give two hours a week, stop here and choose a later quarter.
2. Audit twice (weeks one and two). Sponsor and convenor each complete the Embeddedness Audit independently. Lay them side by side. Gate: choose five to fifteen lines in scope, those carrying people, place or credit and marked *exit only* or *none recalled*. The second reader cuts any list longer than fifteen.
3. Price the sponsor's voice (week three). The sponsor completes the Voice Cost Ledger for herself. Choose the most frequent cost and write one changed habit. Give it to the convenor.
4. Draw the membrane (week four). Sponsor, convenor and listeners draw the Membrane Map together. Gate: assign each circled party to a listener; mark each as external (Supplier Voice Protocol) or internal (fortnightly conversations).
5. Open and close (weeks five to ten). External: the four questions, held apart from price, answers returned within thirty days. Internal: forty-five minutes fortnightly, four to eight people, the same four questions. Every Friday: sponsor decides *act*, *explain*, or *investigate by a date* on each item. Every Monday: one sentence per change, said where the area already gathers. Before week five, the sponsor states plainly that adverse treatment of anyone who spoke will be treated as serious.
6. Check the middle (week seven). Gate: items raised, items closed, median days to response, parties not yet heard from. Reassign any listener whose party has stayed silent.
7. Redraw (weeks eleven and twelve). Redraw the map; redo the sponsor's ledger. The second reader checks three or four V marks directly with the parties concerned.
8. Read and decide (week thirteen). Gate: continue and widen, continue and narrow, or stop and say so. Whichever is chosen, tell everyone who took part what was heard, what was done, and what happens next.
9. Keep the rhythm (week fourteen onward). The sponsor keeps the Weekly Exit and Voice Review, fifteen minutes every Friday.

Reading the plan. At week thirteen, look for four things: the Monday sentence never missed, or missed honestly; median response time lower than at week seven; at least some S marks turned to V; and the number of concerns raised higher than at the start. If all four hold, the quarter worked. If concerns fell while response times rose, the organisation is moving toward silence, and the next quarter begins again at week one.

Your page — run the The Thirteen-Week Plan here, dated.

A note on method

The roles and gates in this chapter are a practice design drawn from the tools of the earlier chapters and from the research cited; they are not a reported trial, and no outcome figures are claimed for them.

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