

The Mechanism Canvas

Good intentions do not scale past the line of direct sight. A mechanism is a set of practices and tools that converts defined inputs into desired outputs, together with the means to drive its adoption and to inspect whether it is working.

Some people hear “mechanism” and think bureaucracy. It is closer to the opposite: structure that helps people execute in a complex, fast-moving environment, and that can be measured and improved instead of merely exhorted.

1 BUSINESS CHALLENGE AND RESULTS

The organization-level challenge this mechanism exists to address

What resolving it produces

How we would describe success in twelve months

A mechanism without a named challenge becomes a process nobody can retire.

2 MECHANISM DESIGN

The eight organizational levers that convert inputs into outputs. Fill in the ones that apply; most mechanisms use four or five, not all eight.

#	LEVER	WHAT IT IS	WHAT IT IS HERE
01	Mental models	Ideas about how the world works, carried in a phrase or a metaphor. Hardest to use and the most effective.	
02	Goals	Align everyone on the output. Used to forecast, evaluate and motivate.	
03	Organization structures	Who has formal authority.	
04	Policies and rewards	The drivers of recognition, compensation and satisfaction.	
05	Process steps	How the mechanism actually operates.	
06	Message flows	Who gets what information, the feedback loops, how good practice spreads.	
07	Metrics	Manage the inputs, monitor the outputs, show up the patterns and the outliers.	
08	Resources	Money, people and technology, and the essential inputs.	

Inputs

Outputs

The levers work inside a loop: inputs go to the tool, the tool needs adoption, inspection checks the adoption, and what inspection finds goes back into the tool. The outputs come out of adoption rather than out of the tool.

3 ADOPTION

Who the mechanism touches, inside and outside the organization, and how adoption is actually won.

STAKEHOLDER	WHAT IT ASKS OF THEM	WHAT IS IN IT FOR THEM	HOW THEY FIND OUT

Answer this section before the design section is finished, not after. A mechanism nobody adopts produces nothing, however well the levers are set.

4 INSPECTION

How you will know whether it is producing the desired outputs, whether it is being adopted, and where the gaps are.

WHAT WE WATCH	HOW IT IS MEASURED	WHO LOOKS AT IT	HOW OFTEN
Is it producing the output?			
Is it being adopted?			
Where is it being avoided?			

Give each row a standing time in someone's calendar. Inspection is part of the mechanism rather than a report on it, so it needs a named owner and a date the same way the rest of the design does.

5 ITERATION

Who may change it

On what cadence

What we would have to see to retire it altogether

A mechanism that cannot change is a policy.

WHERE THE METHOD COMES FROM

Documented mechanisms at Amazon, Pixar and Bridgewater, systematic innovation practice, and the ISO 56000 family of standards for innovation management.

Designing a mechanism of your own?

Thirty minutes on the challenge and what it would take to run.

calendly.com/amir-elion/meet-amir

