

## **Why are so many organisations rubbish?**

**Here are twenty reasons I have seen far too many times**

**Andrew Gibbons**

A few weeks ago I was working with a group of young people, fairly new to the world of work, and whilst discussing the best way to be effective within an organisation, was asked an extremely powerful question – does any organisation really impress you?

This made me think, and I like that, so I thought, and do you know what, I had to say that of the rather large number I know and have known well, the answer was a disappointing, yet totally emphatic ‘no’.

Some have come close, some have impressed for a time – typically whilst someone led the whole beast then when they went, so too did the impressive practices.

The sad reality for me is that every organisation I work with and have done for thirty years ultimately fails to impress.

The reasons for this are many and various, and are not always down to the vision or direction of one person. One reason I see a lot lately is that management at all levels, including the very top are being tested hard for the first time in many years and it finds out those who are ready for the challenge of difficult times and those who are very clearly not.

To be successful, and effective (not the same things by the way), in easy trading times of safe budgets, or a steady flow of customers does not take the unusual skill that organisations need when things get as tight as they are now. This is why so many to me at least, are totally incapable of delivering impressive performances when needed most.

One specific area that has begun to really interest me is the reasons why, when the need is greatest, so many organisations, particularly the over-complex and cumbersomely bureaucratic, resist excellent ideas, often with as cast iron as it can get likelihood of returning strong, financially measurable returns in the short term.

I read a very thought provoking article by John Kotter, cited below, and watched a video that reinforced the message – one of 773 videos I have collected in the past two years. This led me to develop the list below I hope you find valuable. I dare you to show it to your top team if you can get to them.

### **Twenty reasons why and how really good ideas are shot down or are unwelcome**

1. We have higher priorities than this – so it will have to go on the back burner.
2. We can't afford this, money is tight, and this is a real gamble.
3. You exaggerate the issues – it's not as big or serious as you make out.
4. You are suggesting we have failed at this – I am not having that!

5. What's the hidden agenda here?
6. You don't know the whole picture – this sounds fine but what about...
7. Your proposals go too far/don't go far enough.
8. This makes me or someone else significant look bad, you imply I should have had this idea.
9. It sounds too simple and straightforward – if was that easy we'd have done this by now.
10. No-one else is doing this, so that suggests it's not as good as you think.
11. It's too difficult to grasp – I don't really understand what you are saying.
12. It's a great idea, but now isn't the right time.
13. This needs a champion, and that person will feel very exposed – and we are risk averse.
14. It just sounds like this will mean too much work to get the results you are projecting.
15. It might have worked elsewhere, but we are different here.
16. We don't have the expertise or capacity to make this happen.
17. Well it sounds great, but you are a bit junior in this organisation, so what do you know?
18. This sounds like something we tried before and that didn't work.
19. I am in favour of this but the positive returns will take too long to come in.
20. More work? You must be joking, we are under-resourced and over stretched as it is!

Developed from the work of John Kotter  
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The frequency with which I have to hear these sort of responses to great ideas with real potential to make serious and annualised differences to organisations under extreme pressure is the current reason I can't think of one that really impresses.

Sometimes we need more very senior champions of good ideas that are prepared to take a punt and show some courage, to expose themselves to a risk and back ideas that really make a difference. Unless this happens more often, creativity will be killed off, and organisations with real potential to be different and better will at best flatline until the return of the easier times, when scared or talentless leaders can again look better than they really are.

**Andrew Gibbons**

[www.andrewgibbons.co.uk](http://www.andrewgibbons.co.uk)

[andrew@andrewgibbons.co.uk](mailto:andrew@andrewgibbons.co.uk)

