



Case Study:

Gaining Team Consensus in Project Planning - Part 2

By Jerry P. Keslensky

One of the most difficult and critical aspects of working with a project team is consensus building. Part 2 of this case study focuses on Steps 2 and 3 below.

Step 2: Solicit obstacles - "Why can't it be done?" Most people feel that "nobody wants to listen to my concerns" therefore this approach helps to build trust and respect.

Step 3: Derive intermediate objectives - "What must be achieved so that the obstacles will be overcome?" This is when we create a prerequisite tree diagram to focus the team on separating into manageable pieces, the overwhelming prospect of realizing our ambitious target .

"What are the obstacles that exist in our current reality that must be overcome in order to achieve our final solution objectives?"

The team having established a list of Final Solution Objectives now was faced with developing a plan to achieve those objectives. The team had agreed that if these Final Solution Objectives could be achieved that the business problem would be well addressed. The real problem facing the team was getting from here to there. Everyone could see huge roadblocks and pitfalls standing in the way.

The first step in obtaining order from the erupting chaos was to allow everyone in turn to surface all of the obstacles that they could identify, so that each could be addressed. Each obstacle is essentially only one sentence, clearly stated. We go around the group, one person at a time and let every person contribute or pass until all obstacles are raised.

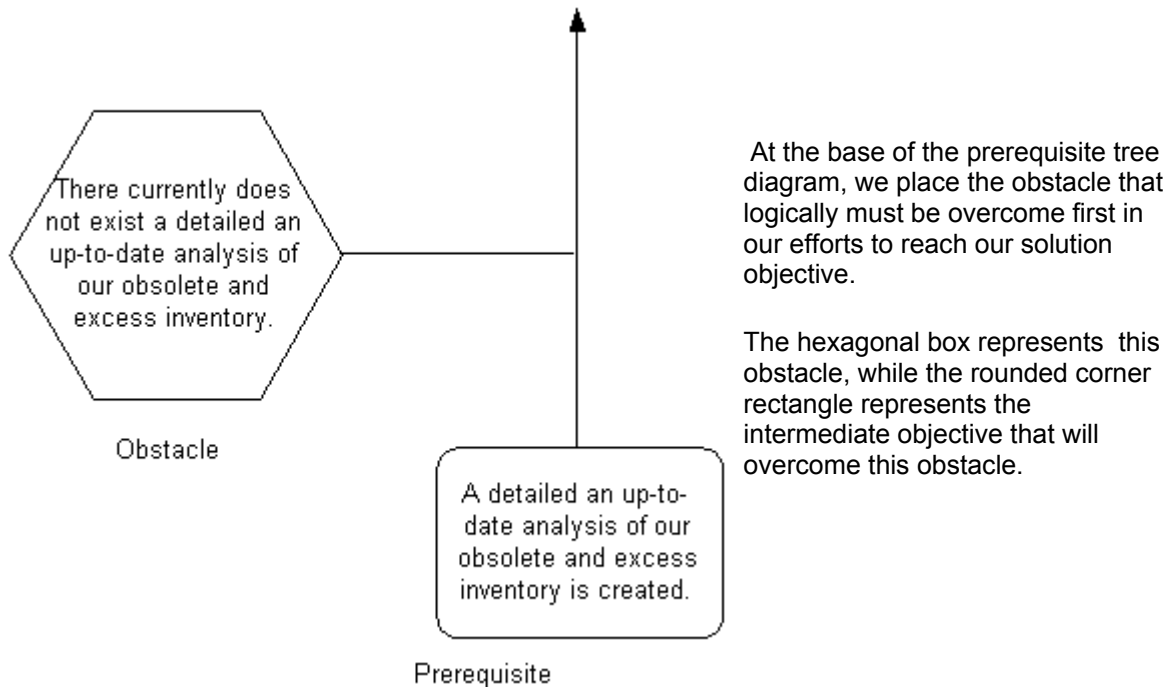
Here is the list as generated by the team.

- * Many of our current suppliers are not operationally ready to meet the demands of our business requirements.
- * Many of our suppliers are currently operating under very narrow profit margins and will be reluctant to perform additional services unless they receive additional compensation, which will raise the cost of some of our parts.
- * Relationships with many of our suppliers are informal and not well defined as to performance expectations.
- * The current insignificant levels of business we provide for many of our suppliers can result in the supplier not being willing to provide additional services or to cooperate in a supply chain performance improvement program.
- * Supply chain management methodologies do not currently exist formally in XYZ operations.
- * We do not currently know the readiness level of our suppliers to be able to accommodate requirements we have for improving our supply chain performance.
- * A uniform method of measurements and performance metrics currently does not exist between XYZ, our customers, and our suppliers.
- * We have many of the same suppliers doing business with multiple XYZ business entities in an uncoordinated manner with no single point of relationship management in existence.
- * We currently don't have a detailed list of potential supplier coordination conflicts.
- * Suppliers are currently complaining that they are overloaded with information with regards to multiple XYZ programs and initiatives.

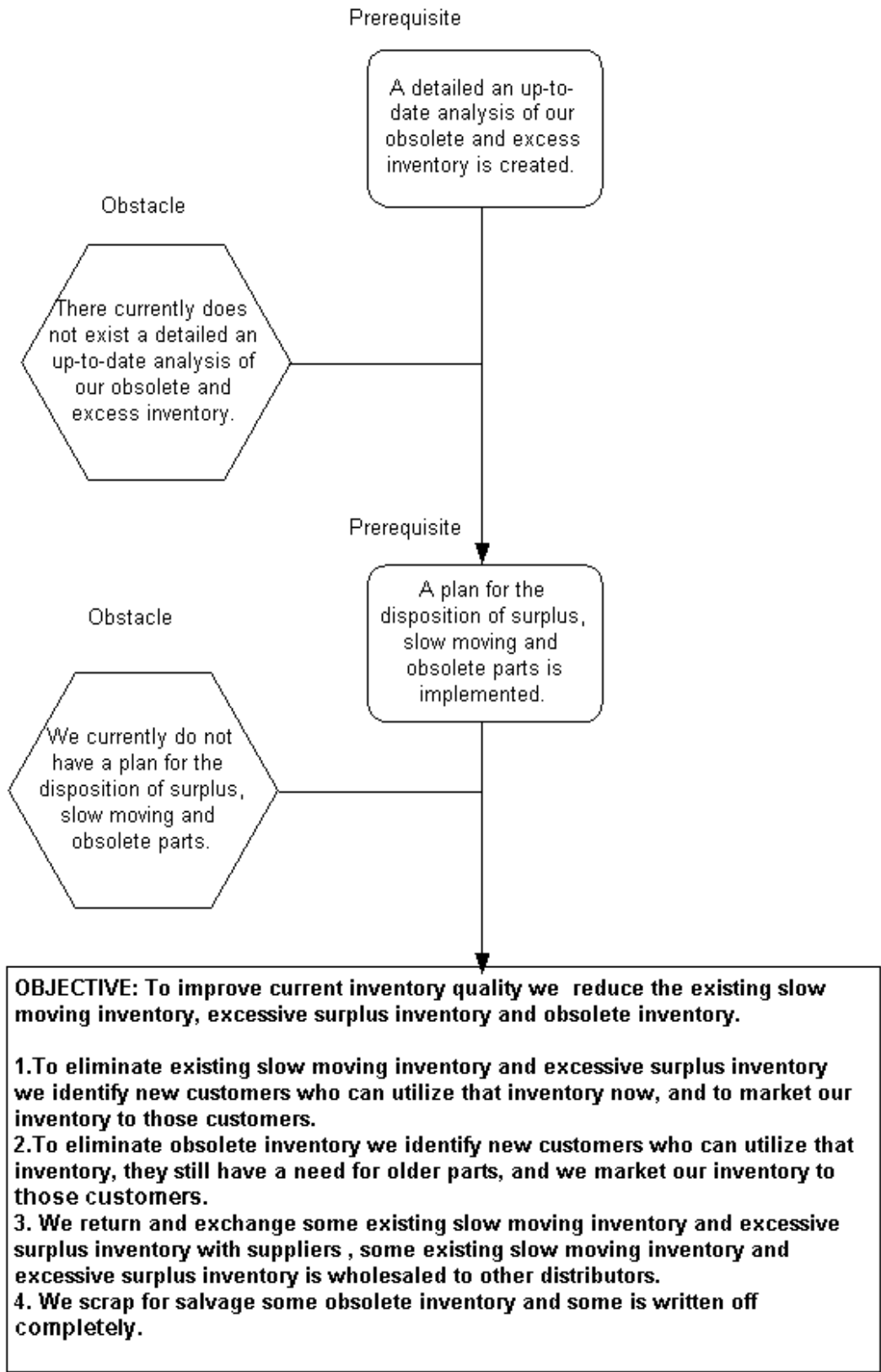
- * The demand for many parts that XYZ distributes is understated due to the lack of data being captured at time of order entry with regards to “fill or kill” orders.
- * Current poor communication between entities inside and outside XYZ creates many planning and forecasting disconnects.
- * We currently have no formal plan or methodology for processing returns from customers so that they do not adversely affect the quality of our inventory
- * We currently do not have a plan for the disposition of surplus, slow moving and obsolete parts.
- * We currently do not provide forecasts to our suppliers.
- * There currently does not exist a detailed and up-to-date analysis of our obsolete and excess inventory.
- * Many customers and suppliers don't have confidence in our forecasting or other programs because we have not been able to deliver as expected in the past. This detracts from our ability to convince our suppliers to participate in new initiatives.

Once the list of obstacles had been constructed, the obstacles were logically organized into associated groups. Then the task of sequencing the obstacles was addressed. Which obstacles had to be overcome first, second, third and so on. At this point a prerequisite tree could be constructed.

Starting at the bottom of the prerequisite tree diagram would be the first obstacle that had to be addressed and the associated prerequisite intermediate objective that would overcome that obstacle. Then obstacle by obstacle each additional prerequisite intermediate objective was added to the tree until a final solution objective was reached.

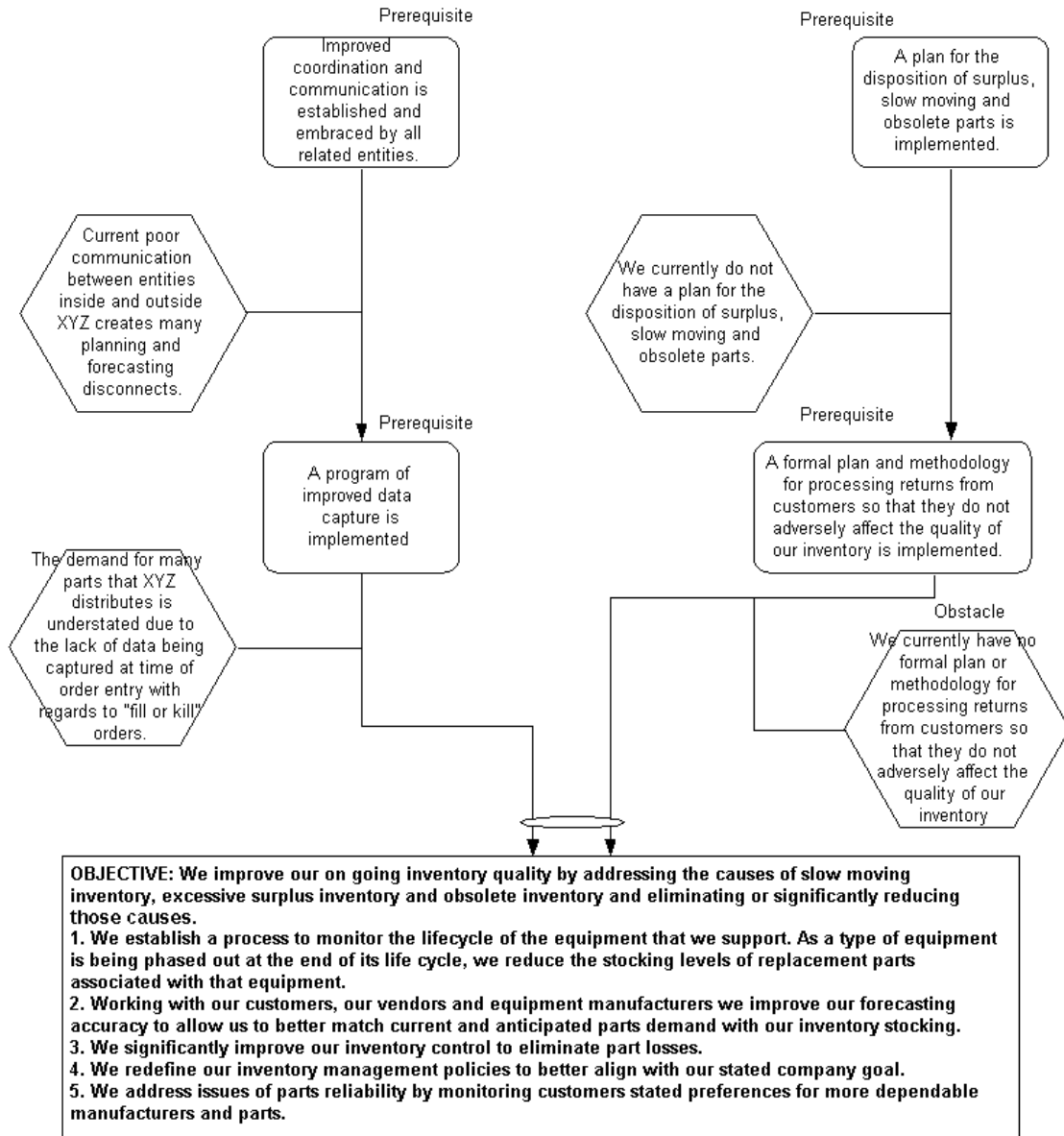


Then we move to the next sequentially logical obstacle and determine its appropriate intermediate objective. Finally, we complete this branch of the prerequisite tree by indicating that with the completion of the two intermediate objectives we are ready to implement this desired solution objective as shown in the squared corner rectangular box at the end of the branch.

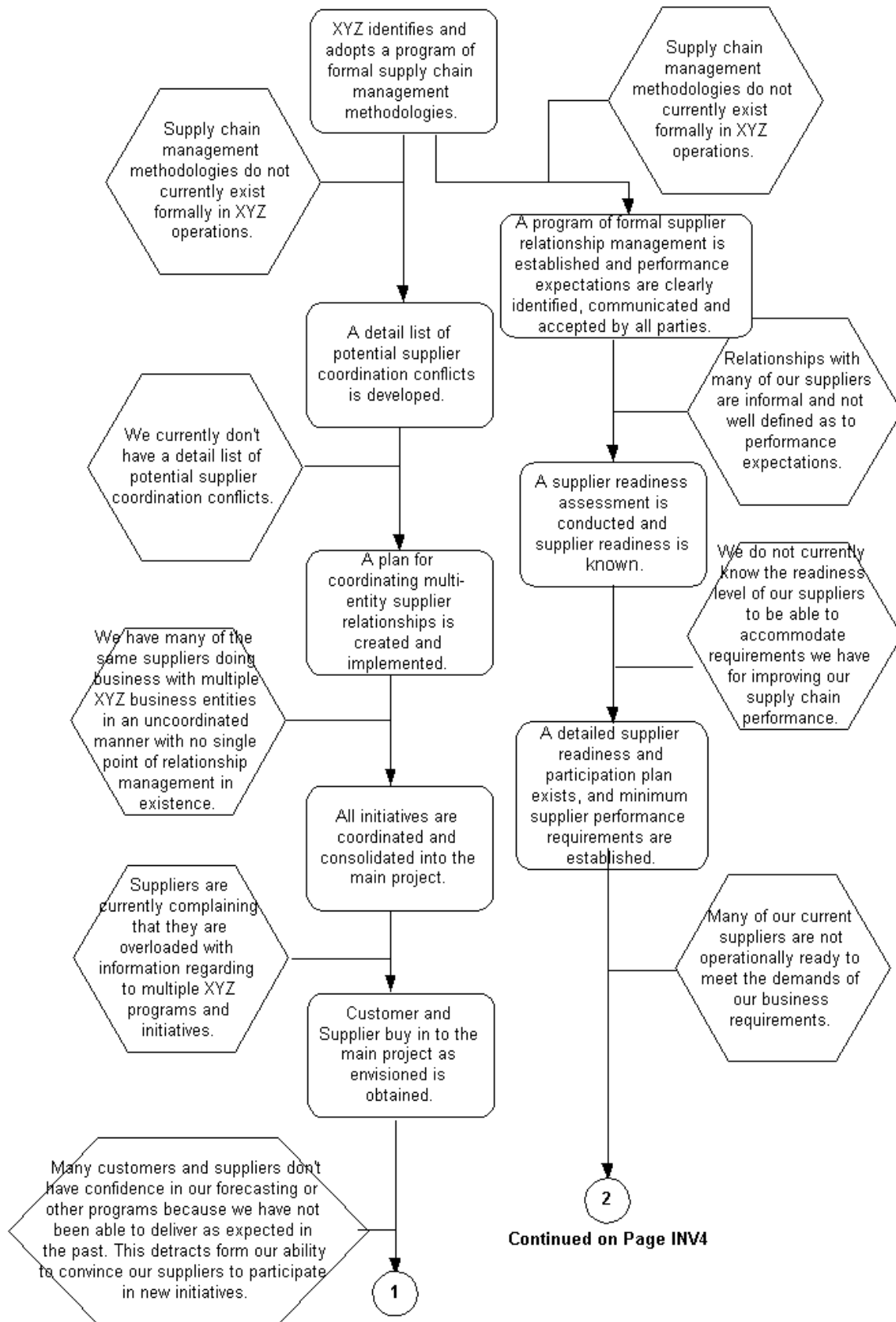


PRT Branch 1

Next we begin at the bottom of a new branch with the first obstacles and their intermediate objective solutions. We are building the tree from the bottom up with two parallel paths in this example. Finally we end off this prerequisite tree branch by indicating that after the completion of all of the prerequisite intermediate objectives in the two parallel paths at the base of the tree, we are ready to begin implementing the solution objective in the square cornered rectangular box.

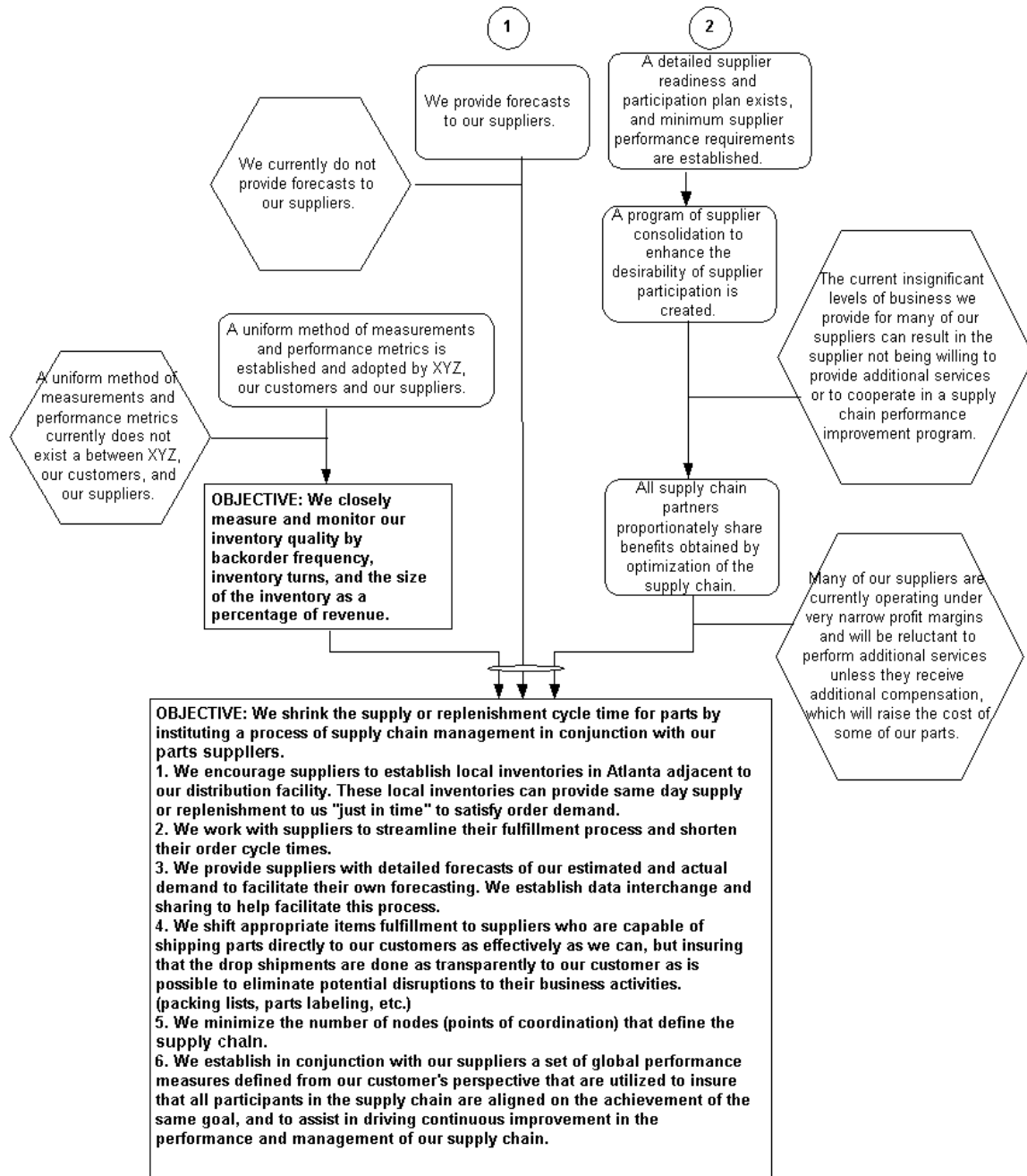


PRT Branch 2



This last prerequisite tree branch is the most complicated as it has three parallel paths to the final solution objective. These are the first two paths starting at the bottom of the tree.

This is the completion of the last branch of the tree; it shows three separate paths that terminate into the final solution objective. The prerequisite tree as a focusing tool has provided the team with a structured approach to understanding the required intermediate objectives and their implementation sequencing so as to prepare us to implement our aggressive solution target objectives.



PRT Branch 3

The oval shaped symbol at the junction of the three paths as they enter the final solution objective indicates that the completion of the prerequisites in all paths is required before implementation. It is the equivalent of a Boolean logical "AND" operation.

The team members' confidence in the process grew as each small logical step in working out all of the required objectives was introduced and explained. The main advantage of the tree approach was its stepwise refinement of the problem analysis and the focusing of effort that it facilitated. Both the experienced members of the team and the less experienced members of the team became very comfortable with the process. Tree building is very interactive and promotes excellent engagement from everyone. Regardless of their age or experience, each participant had a strong sense that they were being heard and that they were an equal contributor to the total solution. The result was team consensus with the outcome of the planning process. In Part 3 we will see how these objectives are related to actions to help the team develop a project network.

About The Author

Mr. Keslensky, an executive with over 25 years experience, is the head of Connected Concepts a management consulting firm which specializes in applying Constraint Management and the Theory of Constraints for Manufacturing, Logistics, Supply Chain Management, Project Management and Service Industries.

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