Why Your Team Keeps Starting and Abandoning Projects (And It's Not About Execution)

Something satisfying happens when you stop to think about why you do what you do.

The Quiet Power of Rationale

There's a peculiar tension in modern professional life. We're encouraged to move fast, break things, and iterate our way to success. Yet the most enduring decisions—the ones that actually compound over time—tend to emerge from something slower, more deliberate.

They emerge from rationale.

Not rationalization. Not post-hoc justification dressed up in strategic language. Actual rationale: the careful articulation of *why* before the *what* and *how* consume all available oxygen.

Why Rationale Matters More Than Ever

In an era where AI can generate strategy documents, write code, and produce marketing copy at unprecedented speed, the human capacity for reasoned judgment becomes the differentiating asset. Tools accelerate execution. They don't replace the fundamental need to understand *why* a particular path deserves acceleration in the first place.

> The absence of clear rationale doesn't create freedom. It creates drift.

Organizations without explicit rationale don't become more agile. They become more reactive, buffeted by whatever urgency screams loudest on any given day. Teams without shared rationale don't collaborate more fluidly. They fragment, each member optimizing for their own interpretation of success.

The Anatomy of Good Rationale

Strong rationale typically contains several interlocking elements:

- **Context acknowledgment** – What situation are we actually responding to?
- **Constraint recognition** – What boundaries shape our options?
- **Trade-off articulation** – What are we choosing *not* to do, and why?
- **Value alignment** – How does this connect to what we genuinely care about?
- **Falsifiability** – Under what circumstances would we reconsider?

That last element separates rationale from dogma. Good rationale includes the conditions under which it would change. It's not a fixed monument to past thinking. It's a living framework that responds to new information.

Rationale in Practice

Consider how this applies to technology adoption decisions. A team might adopt a new tool because it's popular, because a competitor uses it, or because someone read a compelling blog post. None of these constitute rationale.

Rationale would sound different:

"We're adopting this approach because our current bottleneck is X, this solution

addresses X through mechanism Y, we've validated that mechanism Y works in contexts similar to ours, and we're willing to accept trade-off Z because our analysis suggests Z matters less than X in our specific situation. If we discover that Z actually matters more than we thought, we'll revisit this decision."

That's not exciting language. It won't generate viral engagement. But it creates a foundation that teams can actually build on, question productively, and revise intelligently as circumstances change.

The Rationale Deficit

Most organizational dysfunction traces back to rationale problems. Not disagreement about rationale—that's healthy—but the complete absence of explicit rationale.

Decisions get made. Directions get set. Resources get allocated. But the underlying *why* remains implicit, assumed, or entirely unexamined. Each stakeholder fills the vacuum with their own interpretation. Alignment becomes impossible because there's nothing explicit to align around.

> You can't debate what hasn't been articulated.

This is why so many strategic initiatives fail in execution. The initiative itself might be sound. But without clear rationale propagating through the organization, everyone executes against their own imagined version of the goal.

Building a Rationale Practice

Developing strong rationale is a skill, not a personality trait. It can be cultivated through deliberate practice:

1. **Start with decisions you've already made.** Reverse-engineer the rationale. Often you'll discover the reasoning was flimsier than you assumed.
2. **Make rationale a deliverable.** Before greenlighting significant decisions, require explicit rationale documentation. Not lengthy—just clear.
3. **Revisit and update.** Rationale should evolve as you learn. Schedule periodic reviews of important rationales.
4. **Welcome challenges.** Good rationale survives scrutiny. If your rationale

crumbles under questioning, that's valuable information.

Rationale and Speed

A common objection: "We don't have time for all this articulation. We need to move fast."

This confuses activity with progress. Teams that skip rationale work do indeed start activities faster. But they also abandon those activities faster when results don't immediately materialize, because no one remembers why the activity made sense in the first place.

Speed without direction is just expensive wandering.

The teams that achieve sustainable velocity typically invest more upfront in rationale, then execute with greater confidence and less second-guessing. The time invested in reasoning pays compound returns in execution clarity.

Rationale as Communication

Perhaps the most underappreciated function of explicit rationale is its communication value. When you articulate *why* you're doing something, you give others the tools to help you do it better.

They can identify flaws in your reasoning. They can offer relevant information you lacked. They can suggest alternatives that serve the same underlying goal more effectively. They can extend your thinking in directions you hadn't considered.

None of this is possible when rationale stays implicit. The best your colleagues can do is react to *what* you're doing, without understanding whether your *why* makes sense.

The Personal Dimension

This applies beyond organizational contexts. Personal decisions benefit equally from explicit rationale work.

Career moves. Relationship choices. Health decisions. Financial commitments. All of these improve when you force yourself to articulate the actual reasoning, examine it critically, and remain open to revision.

The examined life isn't just philosophically superior. It's practically more effective. You make fewer decisions you'll later regret, because regret typically signals that your rationale was flawed in ways you could have caught with more deliberate examination.

The Invitation

What would change if you spent this week making your rationales explicit? Not just for major decisions—for the small daily choices that shape your trajectory?

Why that meeting? Why that priority? Why that response? Why that commitment?

The answers might surprise you. They might reveal that some of your activities serve no clear purpose. They might clarify which activities deserve more energy. They might surface contradictions between what you say matters and what your actual choices suggest matters.

That's uncomfortable work. It's also the foundation for intentional, coherent progress in any direction you actually choose.

The clearest competitive advantage in a world of infinite execution capacity is the wisdom to know what deserves executing.