

: *What is the Amazon working backwards approach?*

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Jeff Bezos, Amazon CEO, has had great success since the Amazon e-tailing website launched on July 16, 1995 as an Internet bookseller. Bezos pushes innovation and a Day 1 mentality. One process tool that Amazon managers use is called "working backwards" (WB). Using WB seems to encourage more successful innovation. The approach has become formalized, but the idea is simple: start product development with a vision of the final product and then work backwards to make that vision a reality. Goal or vision-driven behavior is not a new concept. It seems that managers at Amazon have added a few process twists that seem to work.

The process described by Ian McAllister (2010, 2012), is interesting, but it is not rocket science, a secret weapon, or a magic bullet. The Amazon working backwards process is an approach to help envision and define a new product prior to development. The process involves a series of interrelated tasks that, together, transform a vague idea into a more concrete product press release.

The Amazon working backward method is a product development approach that starts with the team imagining the product that will be ready to ship. The product team's first step is to draft a press release announcing the product's availability. The audience for this press release should be the envisioned product's intended customer.

A project proposal press release describes ideal customer end state and it contains information about the problem, how current solutions are failing, and why the new product will solve this problem. The proposal is intended to be a "gut-check" for whether the "new" product is worth building. If no one is excited about the product press release then document needs to be revised or perhaps the idea should be abandoned. The process of developing the press release encourages a new product team to reflect on the idea.

Bariso (2019) notes "By working backwards, you get the chance to work on your idea and flesh it out. But you're also forced to put it to the test. After writing and rewriting, refining and reiterating, it will become clear if the idea is really worth pursuing. That clarity often helps you to let go of mediocre ideas so you can concentrate on great ones."

Structured processes like working backwards can be very effective planning and decision making aids. McAllister's (2020) press release template is a thinking and decision aiding tool. Following the references is an example created with the template.

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Ian McAllister has a number of resources related to the working backwards approach at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ianmcallister/>.

References

Bariso, J., "Amazon has a secret weapon known as "Working Backwards"--and it will transform the way you work," Inc., December 16, 2019 at URL <https://www.inc.com/justin-bariso/amazon-uses-a-secret-process-for-launching-new-ideas-and-it-can-transform-way-you-work.html> .

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McAllister, I., "Working Backwards Press Release Template and Example," LinkedIn, April 23, 2020 at URL <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/working-backwards-press-release-template-example-ian-mcallister/>

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Last update: 2020-08-16 05:20