

# Performance x Operations

The intersection of planning and performing

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*This piece sets out why performance plans break, not because the science behind them is wrong, but because of what happens to a plan after it leaves the page. Drawing on two decades across football, AFL, basketball, Olympic sport and elite cycling, it names two forces that quietly compromise every plan: the operational wall, where travel, schedules and the everyday realities of professional sport erode what was designed, and the capacity front, where one practitioner's expertise can only reach so many athletes, however hard they work. Both are treated here as victims of infrastructure rather than failures of expertise, and the article closes by suggesting that the same fix, a plan built as adaptable infrastructure rather than a static document, addresses both problems at once.*

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## The Plan Was Never the Problem

*Every performance plan I have ever built, in two decades across elite sport, has been compromised from two directions at once. Almost nobody talks about either of them.*

We are very good, as a field, at building plans. The science behind performance, nutrition, recovery, and training has never been more sophisticated. The practitioners are capable, there's no question.

A plan, though, rarely survives. Not because it was wrong. But because of what happens to it after it leaves the page.

### Two fronts, one plan

My current thinking on performance plans sits at the intersection of two forces: both constant, both largely invisible in how we talk about our work, and both highly compromising of the plan.

The first is operational. The plan is designed in a controlled environment, and then it meets travel, schedules, hotels, fixture changes, and the thousand small logistical realities of professional sport. This is disruption from outside. A good plan, dropped into a disrupted week, is eroded piece by piece until what's delivered bears only a loose resemblance to what was designed.

The second is capacity. Even in an environment with zero disruption, no travel, no schedule chaos, everything running smoothly, a practitioner's time and attention can only reach so far. A squad of thirty or forty athletes, one expert, a handful of hours a week for individual interaction. This is dilution from within. The plan exists for everyone in principle. In practice, it reaches a fraction of the people it was designed for, with the depth it deserves.

## Why this framing matters

Here's what I think is slightly wrong. When performance outcomes fall short, the instinct is almost always to look at the plan. More data. More granular introspection. A more sophisticated model. Sometimes that's the right call: the plan does keep improving, and it should.

Across every environment I've worked in, though, and now in the conversations I have multiple times a day, the plan is rarely the weak link. The weak link was what happened to the plan after it was built: whether it survived the operational reality it was meant for, whether it was adaptive, and whether it reached the people it applied to.

Both of those are failures of infrastructure, not failures of expertise. Infrastructure failures don't get fixed by better expertise. They get fixed by better infrastructure.

In this article I will discuss each in depth. First, the operational front: what happens when a plan meets the real world, and why this is true in every sport and culture I've worked in. Second, the capacity front: why even a perfectly resourced, stable environment still can't make one practitioner's expertise reach everyone who needs it. Finally, I'll bring both ideas together, and since I believe they share a root cause I'll propose the solution.

## The Operational Wall: When the World Doesn't Cooperate

I'm starting with the norm. Not the disaster, not an outlier: the norm. An unremarkable week in a professional sporting environment. Because that's where this lives. We tend to picture failure as something dramatic: a missed flight, a cancelled fixture, a crisis that makes the news. The version that erodes a plan, however, is quieter than that, and it

shows up every single week, in ways we rarely think to log. It probably comes as no surprise (or does it?).

### A normal week

The weekend's performance didn't go to plan. The result didn't match expectations. The schedule changes Sunday night. The chef is off sick. Staff turnover happens overnight. Extreme weather leads to safety issues. Altered training times to fit a different agenda. Broadcast changes the kick off time. The plan changed multiple times over.

It isn't just at home, either. Travel makes the disruption more visible, because it's so compressed and obvious. A flight delay (or cancellation). The coach is late. Banked up traffic. Cold food at the buffet. Eating too late. One room short. The examples are endless.

This might seem like an over-exaggeration, or like all doom and gloom. It's not. It's just the reality of what happens on any given week. I've come to think of it as 'The Operational Wall'.

*"It's not the big moments that kill the plan. It's the accumulated small compromises that nobody planned for."*

### The bottleneck that doesn't change

I've worked in football, AFL, basketball, and Olympic sport, across three continents. The sport changes. The culture changes. The resources change dramatically. The bottleneck never does.

I'd argue that the plan is perpetually held hostage by the schedule: what could be called the governing reality of performance. In that sense, the conversation often leans into 'how do we execute this efficiently, effectively and on a budget?'. Cue logistics and operations. Outside of the specialists (since it is a skilled role), much of this is driven by personal preference, skills learned on the job, experientially influenced, and contributed to by multiple stakeholders: coaches, support staff, administration. What is important here is that it isn't the training, qualifications, certifications, exams passed, textbooks read or journal articles written that are driving outcomes. It is lived experience and varying perspectives that often prevail.

In elite cycling, a Grand Tour means three weeks of racing, different hotels, different set ups, varying catering staff. The nutrition plan exists, but executing it consistently is a daily operational challenge. In the NBA and MLB, 82 and 162 games respectively bring relentless scheduling, extensive travel, hotels, planes, transit time. In football, increasing competition, fixture congestion, postponed fixtures, pre-season tours, and consecutive three-game weeks do the same.

In Olympic sport, the cycle compresses everything into fewer, higher-stakes windows: a training camp moved, a venue change six weeks out, a qualification event rescheduled, with no following week to recover the lost ground.

The operational wall is front and centre for everyone, and it compounds over time. What changes is the shape of the disruption, not its presence. A football club absorbs it in congested fixture lists; a cycling team absorbs it nightly, hotel by hotel; an Olympic programme absorbs it in occasional but severe shocks. Different rhythm, same wall.

*"This is not a sport-specific problem. It is not a resource problem. It is a structural one."*

### Why we don't talk about it

I think part of why this remains under-discussed is that high performance sport operates under real pressure to project competence. The narrative of control, incremental performance impact, relentlessly compounding, is valuable. Admitting that a logistics plan, chosen for convenience or because it was 'easier' to do in such a way (or the only way), derailed a performance plan doesn't fit that narrative, however, and it tends to stay out of the conversation as a result.

That silence has a cost. It leaves practitioners feeling like the gap between plan and reality is their failure, rather than a structural feature of the environment everyone is working in. It isn't. Performance and Operations go hand in glove.

### The Capacity Front: When There Isn't Enough of You

We've just looked at disruption from outside: the operational wall, where the world doesn't cooperate with the plan. Next, I'll discuss something quieter, and in some ways more fundamental. Even in an environment with no disruption at all, a stable schedule, no travel chaos, everything running smoothly; the plan still doesn't reach everyone it was written for.

*Even a perfect environment can't fix a plan that only reaches some of the people it's for.*

### The maths of a squad

Take a professional squad of thirty athletes. A practitioner will spend so many hours each week on individual interaction, once planning, admin, meetings, and operational demands are accounted for. Divide that time across the squad and the answer is obvious before you do the calculation.

A handful of athletes get real depth: the ones who ask, the ones who are injured, the high risk ones, the ones most visible day to day. The rest get what fits: a group session, a generic plan, a team level recommendation, a message when something urgent comes up. This isn't a failure of effort. It's arithmetic. One person's expertise, divided by thirty athletes, divided again by the hours available, produces a number smaller than what we aspire to.

## Why this matters

Athlete knowledge, whatever its shape or context, is often reported as poor. In response, practitioners work to raise the floor: more education, more upskilling, more attempts to close the gap. The issue isn't really about effort on either side, though. It's twofold. The athlete's bandwidth is finite: there's only so much they can absorb between training, competition, travel, media, recovery, and everything else competing for their attention. The practitioner's capacity is limited by time, reach, and particular style and approach. Advancing processes and systems that impact athletes may assume that knowledge is a bottleneck. That might be true, in which case the question becomes whether there is a way to shortcut that cycle of knowledge translation, to spread understanding faster and more widely, so expertise reaches the moment it's needed, and at scale, rather than the moment there's time for it. Underneath that sits a behavioural challenge: knowledge alone doesn't change behaviour. Motivation and opportunity do at least as much of the work, and those are harder to scale than information, harder still when the systems historically designed to deliver them don't scale either.

## Endless ways, limited time

Another theme linked to capacity: the number of ways things are done is endless. Every practitioner I speak to builds strong, well thought out systems: spreadsheets, templates, frameworks, plans – all refined over years. Almost none of it scales beyond the person who created it though.

Multiply that across every practitioner, every team, every sport (especially with the turnover that exists), and you get a field where a huge amount of time is spent rebuilding systems and tools that, in essence, means reinventing a wheel that already exists somewhere else. The same issue remains: when that wheel is reinvented, capacity and reach is still the internal rate limiting factor. The question, then, is how scale and capacity can be baked into 'reinventing the wheel', thus augmenting impact, rather than reinventing the wheel and hitting the same roadblock of reach and time.

## The ceiling effect

When you put these together, the limited reach and capacity, you arrive at a ceiling. There is a limit to what one practitioner, however expert, however hard-working, can deliver. We've quietly gone about trying to push through that ceiling by working more hours, getting in earlier, leaving later, being busier, without acknowledging it's a ceiling at all. Some call it 'the grind'.

In practice, reach and capacity only feeds a narrative of serving priority athletes. What if there was a world where everyone was a priority, where attention and expertise go to whoever is in the room? The truth in the matter is that, no matter how it is perceived or considered, it is very difficult to out-work a capacity problem.

What I find most interesting when looking at this alongside the operational wall is they might look like different problems: one is about the world disrupting a plan, the other is internal and about a plan not reaching enough people. But both come from the same place: a plan that exists as something static. Something that needs to be manually protected from disruption, and manually redesigned and re-applied to every athlete, one by one, with finite time.

When we consider that these share the same root cause, then the fix, if one exists, should address both fronts at once.

## The shared root cause

In both cases, the plan exists as something static. A document, a spreadsheet, a set of recommendations built for one athlete, in one set of circumstances, at one point in time.

On the operational front, that static plan can't adapt when circumstances change: the travel, the schedule, the hotel, so it breaks. On the capacity front, that static plan can't be efficiently re-applied to other athletes: each one needs their own version, built individually, by the same practitioner, in the same finite hours, so it doesn't scale.

*The same fix that solves 'this plan won't survive the trip' also solves 'this plan won't reach the whole squad', because both were really the same problem: plans that couldn't move.*

## What a plan needs to do instead

If the problem is a static plan, the answer is a plan that isn't static: one that exists as infrastructure, built once using the practitioner's expertise, applied and individualised to all that need it, adapted, and reapplied across circumstances and across athletes.

What if there was a tool or system that did this? A practitioner builds a plan once: a recovery framework, a nutrition plan, an integrated and periodised solution around training, competition and travel, capturing their expertise and judgement in a reusable form. That infrastructure is then layered and applied across athletes and squads, with a level of personalisation that each individual needs, rather than rebuilt by hand every time.

## How this closes the operational front

Go back to the travel and schedule problem. The reason a disrupted week compromises the plan is that the plan was built for one set of circumstances and has no mechanism to adjust when those circumstances change: an age old process where the adjustment happens manually, under time pressure, and increasing stress. Often it doesn't happen at all.

Something that's live, living and adaptive isn't a single fixed plan for a single week. It's the underlying structure: the practitioner's logic and priorities, which can be reapplied as circumstances shift. The travel week doesn't require the practitioner to rebuild the plan from scratch at 11pm. The structure already exists; what's needed is for it to be adapted to the new reality. That's a fundamentally different starting point than starting from zero.

Going back to the maths of the squad from earlier, the reason athlete knowledge is poor is that only a handful of athletes get all the depth when needed: one practitioner building one plan for one athlete, which systematically doesn't and cannot scale past a handful of people.

That same live, living and adaptive approach changes the unit of work. Instead of building thirty individual plans, a practitioner builds the infrastructure, the frameworks that encode their expertise, once. Those structures are then applied across the squad, with each athlete's plan personalised within that framework automatically. The athletes who previously fell through, the fringe players, the younger squad members, the ones who don't ask, now receive a plan built from the same expertise as everyone else, because the infrastructure permits scale, at no additional cost in resource, time or money.

The practitioner's expertise stops being something that must be manually re-delivered to every person, every time. It becomes something embedded in a structure that does the re-delivering.

## What doesn't change

What is clear here is this is not replacing expertise or resource. This is augmenting, scaling and delivering greater service for no extra lift in time and effort. A

practitioner is still building from their judgement: their expertise of periodised plans (fuelling and recovering) around the demands of their sport. That expertise is the entire value. Only now, they are not being compromised by the operational wall or the capacity issue.

What changes is where the practitioner's time goes. Less of it spent firefighting, restarting, changing the same plan from scratch for every athlete, every week, every disruption. More of it spent on the things that move the dial on performance: the conversations, the relationships, the judgement calls that no system can do for them.

## Where this leaves us

This article started by suggesting the plan was never the problem. Across this piece, I've tried to articulate where I believe a real problem exists: a plan that couldn't survive the operational reality it was dropped into, and couldn't reach the people it was written for, both because it was static, built and rebuilt by hand, every time, by one person.

Hexis has built an infrastructure, a system, a tool and functionality that addresses these issues simultaneously. Not a convenience tool. Not an operations platform. Not replacing the practitioner. Not a siloed performance service. Not by adding work. Instead, by placing performance at the centre, by considering the reality and complexity of the world in which high performance sport exists, and by giving the practitioner a tool and system that solves the everyday performance problem.

In enabling the integration of scientifically structured and periodised plans from across multiple performance verticals to be delivered to athletes at scale, that are adaptive, that are real-time and which survive the real world - this is the solution we have built. That's not a small shift. After two decades in this field, I think it's one of the most significant. The plan is rarely the problem. For the first time, though, a piece of infrastructure that prevents the operational wall, and unshackles the capacity front, now enables that performance plan at scale.

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