Annual Planning Meetings

By Mark Abbott

Coming out of the Foundation Day and Vision and Goal Setting Sessions, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) should be focused and 100% in agreement on the company's Vision and long-term goals. Guided by these Focus Filters, they know what point to aim at as they charge the hill.

Once per year, the SLT needs to revisit its Vision and Goals by holding an **Annual Planning Meeting (APM)**. During this meeting, the current 3-Year Goals are advanced based upon the progress of the last year, new 1-Year Goals are set, certain Pey Performance Indicators (KPIs) are adjusted, and a new set of 90-Day Goals (Rocks) are agreed to.

With new 1-Year Goals, the SLT and all of its teams will have a clear line of sight on what needs to happen each quarter to turn that part of their Vision into reality.
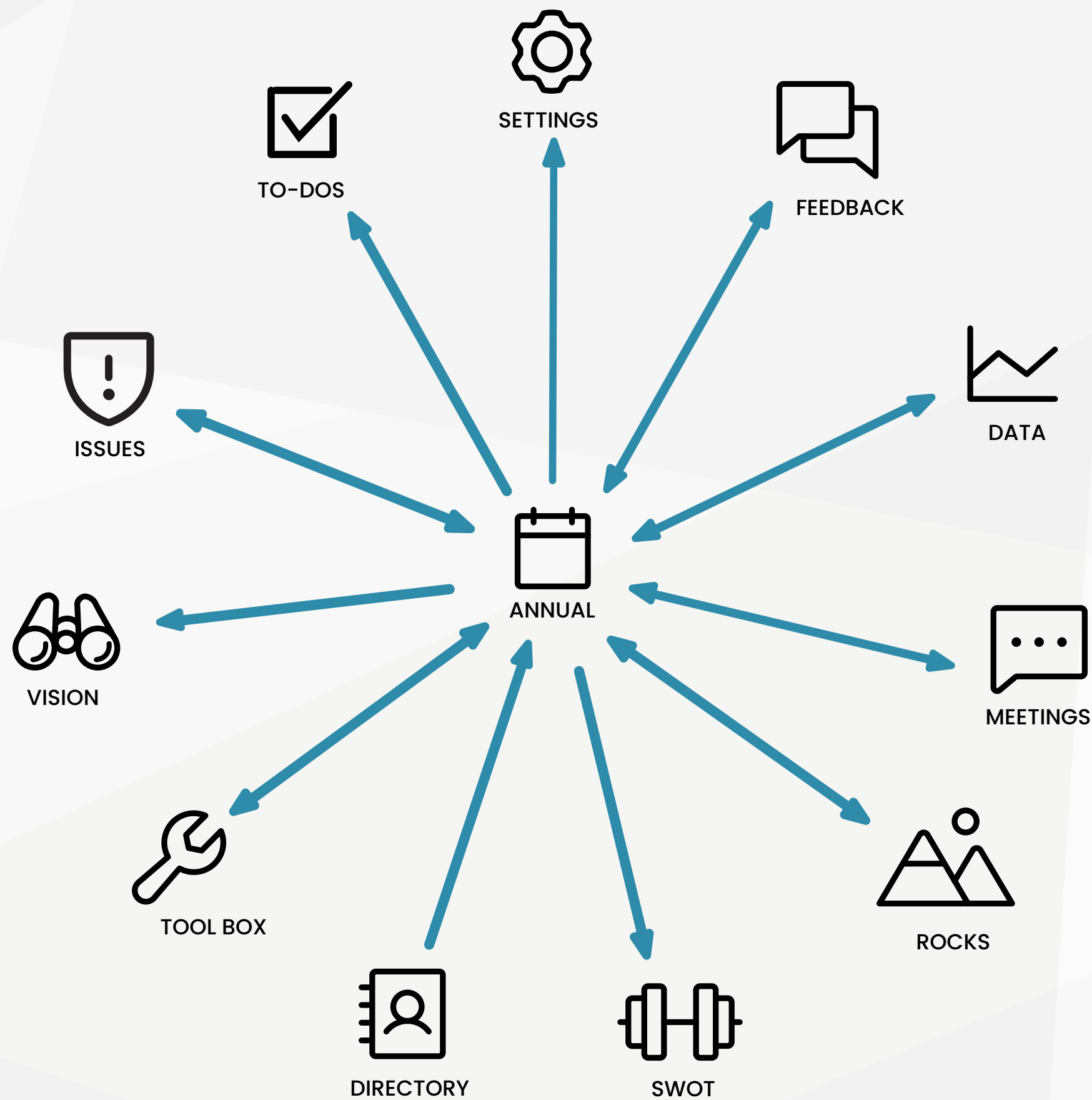
The Annual Planning Meeting

The APM typically takes two days. Ninety's standard agenda is similar to a Quarterly Planning Meeting, except the time horizon encompasses the entire year instead of a single quarter. Companies can also create custom meeting agendas to fit their specific needs.

Day One's objectives are to review the previous quarter and year, increase our team's health, and make sure our company Vision is clear. Day Two's objectives include setting our 1-Year Goals, creating next quarter's Rocks, and resolving critical Issues.

DAY ONE AGENDA

1. **Objectives** — Begin the APM with an introduction from the person leading the meeting. This Facilitator walks the team through the agenda and sets goals for the meeting.

2. **Check-In** — Next, we have an extended version of our Weekly Team Meeting's check-in. Each person shares:

   • A personal and professional best from the last 90 days

   • What's working and what's not working

   • Their specific expectations for the day

   These open-ended questions often bring to light Issues we need to add to our Long-Term Issues list. They also make clear what each person needs and what a collective "win" for the day looks like.

3. **Quarter and Year Reviews** — Reflect first on the past quarter, and then on the past year to see where the team succeeded and where there is room for improvement. We look at both Numerical Goals (financial and KPI-based goals such as revenue, number of paying users, and net promoter score) and Rocks (during the Quarter review) or 1-Year Goals (during the Annual review).

4. **Team Health Building** — Time for a few exercises that help the team connect as human beings. We're huge fans of Patrick Lencioni's *Five Dysfunctions* book and the associated exercises. Our guide On Annual Planning Meetings explains several team health exercises in detail.

5. **9 Core Competencies** — Take advantage of our Baseline Assessment or Org Fitness Review to see how well the organization is mastering the essential knowledge and skills needed to be great company builders.

6. **SWOT Analysis** — Create or update your SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). Add any Issue, Goal, or Rock candidates to the Long-Term Issues list.

7. **Vision and Focus Filters** — Review each component of the Vision (Ideal Customer, Unique Value Proposition, and Core Values) to ensure everyone is still on the same page. These components are the Focus Filters guiding all daily decisions. If the SLT is meeting, this review includes adding potential changes to the Issues list.

8. **3-Year Goals** — Review and revise these goals every year to ensure the team has a good sense of scale and scope.

1. **Objectives** — The Facilitator aligns the whole team around the meeting's desired outcomes and agenda.

2. **Check-In** — We talk through yesterday's progress and whether we're on track to meet expectations for the APM.

3. **3-Year Goals Recap** — Refresh the discussion from Day One so everyone tracks the same goals.

4. **1-Year Goals** — Prioritize what needs to happen over the next 12 months to take a step closer to the 3-Year Goal.

5. **90-Day Goals** — Set what needs to happen this next quarter (both Numerical Goals and Rocks) to achieve our 1-Year Goals.

6. **Long-Term Issues** — Time to Raise, Discuss, and Resolve (RDR) Issues. As a team, we look at and resolve the Long-Term Issues that weren't turned into Rocks and aren't candidates for future Rocks. Be mindful of time because once Issues are raised, it's easy to fall down the proverbial rabbit hole. To ensure you address the most important Issues, we recommend prioritizing issues before starting.

7. **Next Steps** — During this short segment, the Facilitator reviews all the To-Dos we've created and any communications the team must cascade to other teams.

8. **Conclude** — Finally, the team assesses whether the APM was conducted effectively and met expectations. Each participant grades the meeting on a scale of 1 to 10. Any grade below a 9 should be accompanied by an explanation of how the meeting missed the mark and what could have been done differently.

Context

The APM is essential both from a strategic perspective and for morale. Following an APM, team members understand each other deeper as people.

At Ninety, our SLT is always energized coming out of Annuals. Motivation levels are high. Everyone knows what they're doing for the next year; everyone is focused and aligned on what's most important. When we get back, we hold a State of the Company meeting because that energy is contagious, and we want it to spread throughout the entire company.

Core Disciplines of Great APMs

1. **Get out of the office.** Inspire a different frame of reference. It's not a party, though — that can be an element of team health, but don't let it take over the entire Annual.

2. **Prepare for the meeting.** Have a draft budget ready to be approved, complete the Baseline Assessment or Org Fitness Review, and add candidates for your 3-Year and 1-Year Goals and Rocks to the Long-Term Issues list. Clean house by removing any Issues that are no longer applicable, and decide on the team health activity.

3. **Document ideas as the discussion happens.** Think about any new Seats the team may need to add to the Org Chart over the next year. Real-time adjustments make it easier for the team to visualize changes and reduce data entry after the meeting.

Hopefully Helpful Hints

Have a tactic to prioritize the Issues. Take advantage of Ninety's Issues Prioritizing System ahead of time. Make sure to revisit the Priority Ratings from the prior Quarterly Planning Meeting.

The first time a team runs an Annual, it's a great idea to spend some time explaining each of the [Business Operating System](#) tools. For example, some team members might be well-versed in performing a SWOT analysis, but it might be entirely new for others. A brief overview ensures everyone is on the same page.

Takeaway

Annuals are an essential part of your overall long-term planning. By breaking down a 3-Year Goal into a 1-Year Goal, and that 1-Year Goal into Rocks, team members have the benefit of knowing that their everyday actions directly impact the company's future.

Want to dive deeper into Annual Planning Meetings? Check out our guide [On Annual Planning Meetings](#) or [Meetings Best Practices post](#) for an in-depth look at each section and additional resources for running great Meetings.

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