IE 101 | Innovation and Entrepreneurship 101

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CHAPTER 05 | EVIDENCE Common Mistakes: Strategy, Story, Evidence, and Execution

CHAPTER PURPOSE: This chapter helps teams find the weak spots in the project before demo-day pressure makes them harder to repair.

Figure 15. Common story and strategy mistakes to check before the next execution cycle.

A Clear Story Can Still Be Wrong

Many teams believe that a clear pitch means the project is becoming true. That is a misconception. A team can speak clearly and still be solving the wrong problem. It can describe a large market and still have no adoption path. It can show a prototype and still have no evidence that anyone cares. The purpose of this chapter is to make the team harder on its own reasoning.

Example: If ten users praise a prototype but none will schedule a second meeting, the story may be clear but the evidence is weak.

CONTRAST: A polished story is a communication asset. Evidence is a project asset. The team needs both.

The Most Common Mistakes

All logic, no emotion: the argument is rational, but no one feels urgency.

Solving the wrong problem: the team built around an assumption instead of the user's real pain.

Unquantified value proposition: the benefit is attractive but not measurable.

Market-size nonsense: the team uses a large top-down number instead of a believable bottom-up path.

Financial-model errors: the economics do not match the real selling, delivery, or operating model.

Core-competency errors: the project requires capabilities the team or sponsor does not have.

Evidence gaps: the team confuses activity, compliments, or slide polish with proof.

Diagnose the Evidence Gap

Before the next iteration, name the missing proof. Is the gap customer proof, technical proof, value proof, adoption proof, traction proof, or team-execution proof? A team that can name the gap can choose a better next action.

Figure 16. Use the evidence gap matrix to choose the next project action.

Do not repair a weak story by adding more words. Repair it by finding the missing evidence.

Example: The Friendly Interview Trap

A student team interviews ten classmates. Eight say the idea sounds useful. The team concludes that customer validation is strong. In contrast, a better test asks whether anyone has tried to solve the problem before, paid for an alternative, joined a waiting list, used a prototype twice, or introduced the team to a real buyer. Friendly interest is not yet traction. Behavior is better evidence.

Repair Before Scaling

The project should not scale until the team has resolved the most serious uncertainty. Scaling a weak assumption only makes the mistake more expensive. The practical discipline is simple: identify the largest risk, design the smallest useful test, and update the story honestly.

Practice Exercises and Questions

Where is the story overclaiming?

What is the weakest evidence in the current NABC?

Which assumption would an investor, sponsor, or customer challenge first?

What should the team stop doing because it is not producing evidence?

Project Guide

1. Mark the project evidence gaps by type: customer, technical, value, adoption, traction, or team.
2. Rewrite the weakest part of the NABC.
3. Choose one test or build that directly addresses the largest gap.
4. Prepare a revised 10- to 12-slide narrative only after the evidence plan is clear.