



Executing on Strategy

So, your strategic planning process is complete and it's time to execute.

Uh,oh. Here's where most companies fail.

Successful execution requires several things: clear goals for everyone, metrics or ways to measure the progress toward those goals and an accountability loop that tracks and reports on whether people are meeting their goals. It's basic good business and a major problem for most companies.

Research from the Project Leadership Associates Study shows that:

- 36% of executives acknowledge a lack of clarity and/or consensus regarding overall strategic direction
- Up to 85% of employees have never been exposed to the strategy or plan in any form
- 68% of executives agree that day-to-day firefighting inhibits focus on longer-term strategic priorities.

When executives lack clarity on the strategy there is a tremendous waste of time and resources due to a culture of indecision and inefficiency. People aren't exactly sure what to do and so they do the best they can, which is often not aligned with the strategic intent of the organization but is more aligned with "business as usual."

Organizations who take the time to make strategic initiatives crystal clear to all of their employees are the ones who win. Take the "hallway walk" and ask random employees on your walk what the company's strategy is – this exercise will show you immediately, and simply, how deeply (or not) your strategy has been integrated into everyone's work.

The most fundamental parts of your strategy should answer these three questions, and your people should be able to easily and clearly state the answers:

- Who are we?
- Where are we going?
- How are we going to get there?

Use this pyramid to better understand how to integrate strategy and to create a framework to tie it all together:

At the top of the pyramid is your Process for Accountability. Getting this right is crucial for successful execution. Many organizations are challenged by accountability because there is so much activity within an organization that looks like progress, but can just be "the way we do things around here."

Successful execution comes from clearly defining a goal, setting the activities required to reach that goal, determining who will complete those activities, how the progress will be measured and who is ultimately responsible for the outcome.

Organizations without a culture of accountability will face an uphill battle in executing their strategy, no matter how well intentioned. For help with changing your culture to one of accountability and for more information on processes you can incorporate into your organization, contact Jeff Bleacher at Ross Buehler Falk & Company (jbleacher@rbfco.com).

