

Strategy Execution in Modern Organisations



“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.” Antoine De St Exupery, Writer (1900-1944)

Antoine De St Expury offers us a part of the solution to the challenge of modern business, that is how to execute strategy in a large 21st century organisation.

But why is it so difficult to execute that elegantly crafted plan?

Firstly when we crafted the plan we almost certainly didn’t have perfect information so the plan may have a few holes. Secondly as our people start trying to make the plan a reality they don’t act in the way that we expect them to and thirdly because of market forces our peoples’ actions don’t deliver the outcomes we wanted in the first place. Throw in different cultures, systems that don’t talk to each other, some staff resistance, before we talk about competitor action and, Voila! Our execution does not deliver our strategy! So what do we do to get it right this time! Gather more information to make sure the plan is as perfect as possible. Issue really detailed instructions they will understand and put in place lots of controls to ensure they stay on track. Right? Wrong! Unfortunately the solution lies in the opposite direction. In addressing these three challenges the solution is counter intuitive but well proven and it comes from the military who have been wrestling with the fact that “no plan survives contact with the enemy” for 100s of years.

Firstly we need to rethink our view of strategy. It is not a plan but a framework for decision-making and needs to be created in light of what we can do in the competitive environment. We need to clearly articulate

What we are trying to achieve and **Why** we are doing it in a manner that is simple and useful. So if you want to grow revenues in Brazil keep it simple and like Antoine get people excited about why? Next be clear on outcomes – not the tasks don’t start telling people **How** to do it but be clear what success looks like in measurable targets.

The second challenge is to align the people. Help them to sit in your chair so they understand the world from your perspective and encourage them to connect with those left and right of them so that their interdependence is clear. Set clear boundaries and free them to make plans with your intent in mind. Therefore as the situation changes they understand their decision-making authority explicitly and if they need to make a choice they do so mindful of your intent.

Finally develop the confidence to get out of the way when you can and coach only as much as you have to. As we move through the year stop off and check the situation and adjust the plan to meet your intent. The actual plan may not resemble anything you would have crafted at the outset but if you have articulated your intent well and excited your people to deliver it, like Antoine de St Exupery, you just might get the ship you want.

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