

How To Bring Your High-Level Strategy Down To Earth

High-level strategy is as useful to most workers in an organization as a high-flying airliner is to people in a bus queue. The bus passengers may briefly look up and notice the plane and its vapor trail, but, even if it is traveling in the same direction, it cannot possibly help them reach their destination.

Similarly, unless you can bring your strategy down-to-earth it will have no discernible effect on your organization's performance, or, worse, it will create confusion, paralysis and decline.

It is often said that a strategy doesn't fail in its formulation but in its implementation. I don't agree. I believe that in many cases strategy fails falls through the gap between formulation and implementation directly because it is insufficiently grounded: it fails in its *translation*.

Many leadership teams, in their excitement and enthusiasm to turn their strategy into reality, fail to take the necessary steps to ensure that it can be delivered effectively by the organization. Taking the time and energy to translate the strategic vision into operational success, as set out in the chart, demands that you focus on the following six *leadership disciplines*:

1. **Genuine alignment.** When I was younger I used to ski on the Scottish Cairngorms. Each morning I would check the weather, knowing that the merest hint of a breeze down in the glen would mean that a gale would be blowing on the mountain top. Executive alignment is very similar to the weather conditions in the Cairngorms. Tiny differences of opinion in the boardroom can become huge divisions across the organization, rapidly reducing your chances of successful implementation.
2. **Relentless communication.** Your strategic intent and agenda should form the basis of all your communication with the organization. When you make and communicate a decision, for example, you should clearly state how it will help move the strategy of the business forward.
3. **Resource allocation.** Resources should be allocated on their ability to deliver the agreed strategy, and not simply reflect historic trends and decisions.
4. **Talent deployment.** Your best and most appropriate people should be leading the delivery of your key strategic objectives. Not only does this increase the chances of success, but it also sends a signal to the organization about what you consider important.
5. **Accountabilities.** The individual performance, and the collective performance of the top team, should be directly based on implementing the strategy.
6. **Corporate KPIs.** Your KPIs should mirror the strategy, as should your associated rewards and bonuses. Have you, for example, set a high-level strategy around innovative new growth, and yet remain fixated on monthly margins and costs? If so, don't be surprised that your managers pay less attention to innovation and more to innovation. If you are serious about your strategy you will find ways to track its delivery effectively.

Don't leave your strategy at 50,000 feet. The success of your team or business is based on your ability to bring it down-to-earth so that your people can implement it and deliver on-the-ground results. Here are three actions you can take today:

1. Determine, honestly, the level of alignment you have around your strategy across your top team. Where you have genuine disagreements, take steps to surface and resolve the issues you have identified.

2. Assess the level to which your key resources – people, money, and assets – are allocated across your strategic priorities. How well have you matched your resources with your key objectives?
3. Review the KPIs and performance management systems you have in place to manage the delivery of your strategy. What changes need to be made before you have confidence that your accountabilities have been established and that you have the information required to monitor progress?

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