

Execution and Executability

When I ask audience members at my seminars and speeches “What is your biggest strategic planning problem right now?”, I inevitably hear the response “Implementation”. Without question, this is one of the biggest issues for any company trying to accomplish anything at a strategic level – execution seems to inevitably fall short of our stated intentions. As one CEO put it, “We say we will do something, and get excited about it, but a month later, it’s forgotten as we move on to the next thing”. This is perhaps true even when attempting to implement non-strategic objectives – but it’s far worse with the strategic ones. Why? Because nothing is more postponable than a strategic objective – until it’s too late to even think strategically. In addition, strategic objectives are much more likely to introduce powerful changes in your organization, and so they meet with far greater resistance than more operationally oriented objectives.

You can enhance your effectiveness at strategy implementation by the things you choose to do in your strategic planning process. There are three key areas where you can do this: 1. Implementation Planning, 2. Resource Allocation and 3. Implementation Monitoring. The approach we take to these three areas is quite different from the norm in strategic planning, and it yields superior results. According to Robert Half Associates, most companies achieve about 30% of the objectives they set for themselves in a process like strategic planning. Using Simplified Strategic Planning, you should be able to achieve an average that is closer to 80%. It is the unusual way we handle the three key implementation management steps that makes the difference.

First, in implementation planning, it is important to set objectives well. This means using the SMART approach – objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, results stated in a timely way. In addition, you should make sure you set a reasonable number of objectives. We find many companies improve their execution effectiveness simply by limiting the objectives they set in strategic planning. Secondly, you need to write a good, clear action plan that is useful for directing and tracking the implementation of your objectives. The approach illustrated in the Simplified Strategic Planning seminar and book is a robust way to assure this.

In resource allocation, we find that most organizations already pay a great deal of attention to the money required for effective implementation. This is the first resource you should look at. Money is important, but it is usually less important in strategy implementation that time. Ironically, few companies devote even half as much attention to time as they devote to money.

Finally, monitoring of strategy implementation is vital, even if it is sometimes difficult. This implies two important things. First, you must write your action plans to be monitorable – which means the steps should be stated as clear, finite actions which are clearly completed at some point, and also that each step needs a clearly stated start and completion date.

Assure that your team follows the recommendations in all three of these areas and you will find your execution will improve dramatically.



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Robert Bradford is the author of Simplified Strategic Planning and four other books on strategic management, and has created strategic plans with hundreds of organizations around the world since 1987. As a nationally acclaimed speaker and consultant, Robert has spent the last twenty years converting management theory into real-life application.

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