

The 7 Secrets of Strategy Execution Excellence

By Sandy Richardson, B.Sc., M.Ed.

Depending on which statistics you believe, between **60 to 90 percent of organizational strategies won't be successfully executed this year**. This is a truly frightening statistic. And these results haven't changed much since 1984 when they were first reported in a *Fortune Magazine* article. Unfortunately, it seems that poor strategy execution has become the norm in our organizations regardless of sector, industry, or size.

Poor strategy execution comes with huge costs. The sub-optimization of business operations; physical assets, tools, and technology; financial investments; and human capacity has significant direct and indirect financial consequences. Poor strategy execution almost always translates into customer attraction, retention, satisfaction, and growth challenges. The ultimate result of poor strategy execution is the failure to achieve key organizational performance goals. Knowing this, it is easy to see that **there are rewards and competitive advantages awaiting those organizations that get strategy execution right.**

No one is going to tell you that achieving strategy execution excellence is easy – it takes time, effort, dedication, and discipline. However, if you implement the seven secrets for success outlined here, experience has shown that your organization will ultimately beat the statistics, becoming a strategy execution and achievement success story.

1. All organizational leaders MUST be actively engaged with strategy execution every day

Leaders at all levels of your organization (including those in the C-suite) must actively facilitate and model strategy execution. Always. Asking knowledgeable questions about the fundamentals of proposed action plans, testing their validity, and probing on action plan progress are all critical activities leaders should complete to be dynamically involved with strategy execution.

2. Embrace the facts of every situation no matter what

Many organizations refuse to face the truth of their situation, particularly when they

have business problems and they don't like what they discover.

Playing the blame game or ignoring problems doesn't create a solid foundation for strategy execution success. It is critical for organizations to cultivate an internal environment where the relentless pursuit of the facts of every business situation is expected and supported. Facing the truth and then learning, adapting, and changing based on those findings are essential to successful strategy execution and achievement.

3. Build a culture of accountability

An organization's culture is a product of its behaviors, beliefs, and values, and is built into all supporting organizational processes and structures. Organizations that excel at strategy execution display a dedication to action and follow through, building it right into their culture. In fact, they go so far as to define, value, support, and reward this commitment to accomplishment. All of this forms the foundation of a culture of accountability. Living this culture of accountability includes taking the time to link every action to a person who has responsibility for getting it done (right and on time), and assigning (often shared) accountabilities for results achievement.

4. Establish clearly defined direction and priorities

Needless to say, to execute strategy you need to have an actual strategy in place! A good strategy outlines a clearly defined direction (including supporting objectives, goals, and measures) and details the desired business performance results. A good strategy also identifies a vital few set of strategic priorities. This level of focus helps make strategy execution excellence much easier to attain.

Unfortunately, most strategic plans are written at a high level, making it difficult to know how to put it into action effectively. To deal with this problem, organizations must take the time to "operationalize" their strategy. This means translating their strategy into clearly defined, actionable (i.e. more operational) terms so that front line employees can actually see themselves and their work in the strategic plan. The best tool for operationalizing strategy is the strategy map - a visual communication tool that

organizations use to “draw a picture” of their value creation strategy, that includes the organization’s values, mission, vision, and strategy (in the form of strategic objectives), and is effective in developing a consistent understanding of what the strategy looks like in action.

5. Build organizational bridges that last

All organizations, regardless of size, have (or should have) core business processes, plans, and structures in place for managing their operations, people, and resources. In most cases, these processes, plans, and structures exist and operate in isolation - bearing little or no relationship to each other and the organization’s strategy. To enable strategy execution excellence, organizations must integrate all of these processes, plans, and structures and align them with their strategy. Furthermore, organizations must institutionalize this integration and alignment so that it systematically becomes the way they work. In effect, this organizational integration has to be a process in itself, supported by the organizational structure, and actively managed and improved on an ongoing basis.

6. Build your people’s capabilities

Strategy execution relies on people. In fact, to be successful, an organization must have the right people with the right (i.e. strategically necessary) skills doing the right job in the right place at the right time. To achieve this level of synchronicity, organizations must attract and hire people with the required strategic competencies and they must commit to the ongoing development of the necessary strategic skills and capabilities in their people. Taking this approach allows organizations to build and retain the skilled workforce they need to execute their strategy successfully on an ongoing basis.

7. Make strategy execution personal

When people feel invested in something they naturally commit to making sure that it is sustainable and successful. Employees invest in their organization and its strategy when they: participate in creating it, understand it, and can see how their work links with, and contributes to, strategy execution and achievement. Organizations can make it even more personal by engaging everyone in meaningful, two-way dialogue on strategy and what it takes to implement it. By encouraging everyone in the organization to participate in strategic improvement and the strategy making process,

and by facilitating and supporting healthy cross-functional discussion and collaboration, the commitment to strategy execution and achievement extends to the grass roots level – enhancing the likelihood of strategy execution success.

To get your organization on the path to strategy execution excellence, begin by working as a team to assess current capabilities in relation to each of these success elements. Remember to tell the truth! Once your team has identified the opportunities for improvement, develop a plan to systematically close the gaps and then launch into your strategy execution journey without delay!



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Sandy is a subject matter expert in the areas of strategic planning, strategy mapping, strategy execution strategies, performance measurement and management, accountability and governance framework development, and organizational alignment and is recognized as a master balanced scorecard practitioner and trainer.

As a published author, conference speaker, and expert facilitator, Sandy comments regularly on the process and benefits of transforming into a strategy focused organization.

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