

The Top 7 Reasons Why Strategy Maps Fail in Organizations

An excerpt from
**The Practical Guide to
Strategy Mapping**

*A Hands On Approach to
Translating Strategy into Action*

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Many people and organizations will tell you that they are not in favor of the strategy map. These opinions are usually a result of bad experiences (either experienced by them or their colleagues) with creating and using the strategy map. There are seven very specific reasons for these poor results and strategy map failure:

1. Lack of leadership buy in and low levels of executive commitment to strategy mapping – *Any new and different approach to business strategy and organizational performance management requires full and active executive and leadership participation and commitment to be successful. Lack of leadership participation in, buy in for, and commitment to, strategy mapping and the resulting strategy map will almost certainly result in the failure of the strategy map within the organization. In fact, when there is a lack of executive and leadership buy in for strategy mapping and strategy management via the strategy map, organizations should not proceed with strategy mapping.*

Steps for Success: *Ensure executive and leadership buy in and commitment for strategy map use before beginning with strategy mapping.*

2. Lack of employee participation - *Employee involvement in the creation of an organization's strategy map will result in a higher quality product and will help build greater employee buy in for strategy implementation and management using the resulting strategy map. While it can be mitigated to some degree through extensive strategy map education and communication activities, low levels, or the lack of, employee participation in the development of an organization's strategy map can play an important role in strategy map failure.*

Steps for Success: *Ensure broad, cross-functional employee involvement in your strategy mapping process.*

3. Not focusing on the "vital few" – *A great strategy map includes a focused set of strategic objectives (12 to 16 maximum) and a limited set of cause and effect arrows. That is, it focuses on the "vital few" elements of an organization's strategy. Many strategy maps display too many strategic objectives and arrows, making the strategy map overwhelming and difficult to make sense of. While it is quite usual for first draft strategy maps to include too much information, most organizations will refine and simplify their strategy map over time and with use. Strategy maps that do not focus on the vital few will be difficult to understand and use, making it likely that the strategy map will fail within the organization.*

Steps for Success: *Adopt a ruthless focus on the vital few when creating your strategy map.*

4. Failure to define strategic objectives – *To keep the strategy map concise and easy to understand, strategic objectives are generally short, three word statements. While they carry a certain level of meaning in this format, it is impossible to communicate the full intent of the strategic objective in just a few words. As a result, it is usual to create more detailed strategic objective definitions that are supplementary to the strategy map. When detailed strategic objective definitions are not created, the value of the strategy map as a strategy implementation and management tool is diminished, opening up the possibility of strategy map failure.*

Steps for Success: *Ensure that everyone has the same understanding of your business strategy by creating detailed definitions for each strategic objective on your strategy map.*

5. Not using strategy map weighting to set business priorities – *The weighted strategy map is an important tool that communicates the relative priority of strategic objectives, and the supporting work effort, over a defined period of time. Successful companies will widely communicate the weighted strategy map and then refer to the various business priorities on an ongoing basis through the strategy management process. Finally, successful organizations will encourage managers and employees to use the weighted strategy map as a tool to help them filter work requests, prioritize day to day work efforts, and make important decisions. When organizations fail to use the strategy map in this important way, the strategy map is sub-optimized and may be prone to failure.*

Steps for Success: *Weight your strategy map and train employees to use it to filter work requests, prioritize day to day work efforts, and make important decisions.*

6. Not making the strategy map a critical component of the strategy development, implementation and management process – *The strategy map plays a pivotal role in the development, implementation, and management of strategy. Typical missteps that precipitate strategy management failure in this regard include not understanding the true role of the strategy map in long-term strategy development, not using the strategy map as a key strategy communication tool, and not using the strategy map to align the organization (e.g. business processes, projects, and resources) with strategy.*

Steps for Success: *Make the strategy map the center piece of your strategy development, implementation, and management process.*

7. Not keeping the strategy map relevant over time – *The strategy map is designed to be dynamic, changing as required to accurately reflect the current thinking on the elements of the business strategy and the cause and effect relationships between them. If, on the other hand, the strategy map remains static over time, it loses its value as a strategy management tool. When this happens, the strategy map becomes irrelevant and it is no longer used by the organization to implement and manage strategy.*

Steps for Success: *Make your strategy map dynamic and sensitive to change to keep it relevant.*