

To be honest, I hadn't a clue whether it did or not. I had no idea what a real strategy was, let alone any concept of how to evaluate the document. I leafed through the pages, it all seemed to make sense, the diagrams looked good and I didn't know what I was looking for anyway. So I responded "seems fine to me". However, the reason why I had chosen those words was more to do with the strategy looking familiar than anything else. I had seen the same words used in other documents, some of the same diagrams in other presentations and I had been to a conference where an industry thought leader had told me about the stuff that mattered. That stuff — "innovation", "efficiency", "alignment" and "culture" — had all been highlighted in the strategy document.

It was the comfort of familiar words and images that had given me the confidence to proclaim it was fine. My internal logic was a sort of herd mentality, a "backward causality" that since it had been right there then it must be right here. I was also young and had convinced myself that the senior executive was bound to know the answer and they were only asking me to test my abilities. I didn't want to show my inexperience. This moment however continued to irritate me over the years because I knew I had been false and I was just covering up my tracks, hiding from my own inability.

A decade later, I had risen through the ranks to become the CEO of another company. I was that most senior of executives. The company would live or die by the strategic choices I made, or so I thought. I wrote the strategy or at least variations were presented to me and I would decide. But, something had gone terribly wrong in my journey.