

Why your Strategy Needs an Execution Strategy

By Ausrar Wambiya

While the development of a strategy is a complex matter, often requiring expertise, extensive consultation and heavy costs on institutions, the execution of a strategic plan to turn around the fortunes of an institution is often the more difficult part. This explains why many strategic plans are gathering dust on shelves across institutions. Contemporary studies have deduced seven deadly sins that explain this difficulty to actualize the intentions of every well-meaning strategic plan.

Based on research, specific actions by stakeholders stifle the implementation of strategic plans process. They include but are not limited to death by planning, loss of focus, reinterpretation, disconnectedness, behavioural compliance, misreading resistance and broken agreements. Let's us review each briefly.

Death by planning can also be referred to as analysis paralysis. It is the mistake strategic planners do by overemphasizing on analysis and on planning the strategy rather than on delivering on its implementation. The success of a strategic plan depends on its execution. Great planners must know when to integrate planning and execution in tandem without one compromising the other.

Loss of focus results when attention to the strategy erodes and everyone returns to business as usual either due to other competing organizational priorities or fatigue in the implementation process. This is why an implementation organ is necessary as an integral part of a strategic plan to keep stakeholders' hands on the deck and conduct regular reviews to monitor and evaluate progress in the implementation process.

Reinterpretation means that people adopt the terminology used in the new strategy but use it to describe what they already were doing. It is easy to call the same thing by another name and operate under the illusion that change has occurred in the strategic planning execution stages. Practitioners must be worried of verbosity and the use of new language that does not necessarily change people's approach to the implementation process.

Disconnectedness happens when strategy is purely based on top management's perception of reality. While implementation and execution of the objects of a strategic plan are roles of all stakeholders in an organization, top management sometimes eclipse the rest of the stakeholders and tend to execute the strategy based on their ivory tower mentality. The significance of a bottom-up approach to the execution process in order to capture all perspectives in the execution process cannot be overemphasized. This way, the perception of reality at all levels are taken into account in the execution regime.

Behavioural compliance has to do with people literally doing what is asked from them without really buying into the new strategy. Probably because of the top-down approach of management and with instructions on the strategic planning process handed down to employees by employers who abhor consultation and are usually authoritative, employees tend to just behave in a manner that conform to the instructions but are not sold in on the strategic plan ideals. Such compliance is also widely noticeable in the presence of supervising authority. Those charged with the execution of the strategic plan document only follow through under strict supervision as a compliance issue and not an organizational culture.

Misreading resistance means that employees are blamed for resisting the change, while in fact something else is going on. This usually happens when the process of the development of the strategic plan was detached from the key stakeholders who support would be required to execute it like institutional staff. They therefore tend to resist. Still, difficulties among staff in a totally different area of work could lead to resistance in that area but which could be misread as targeting the envisaged changes by the strategic plan. Organizations must therefore diagnose all forms of resistance and address each independently without falling to the temptation of generalization.

Finally, broken agreements may impact negatively on the strategic plan execution mandate. This means that the management promotes the strategy in words but undermines it with what they do in action. While this is sometimes deliberate and intended, management sometimes break agreements out of ignorance by falling victims to the pre strategic organizational culture. Deliberate effort must be made to do as they say and say as they do to avoid this mismatch. Ultimately, execution is the weakest link in strategic planning process. An execution strategy to address these maladies must therefore be part of the whole strategic planning process. This is why your strategy needs an execution strategy, urgently.

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