How To Successfully Implement Your Strategy

Do you have a fantastic strategy but are struggling to implement it effectively. It is often said a 3 star strategy with a 5 star implementation is far better than a 5 star strategy with a 3 star implementation.

However why not have both!

One definition of strategy is that it is the aligning of external opportunities with internal capabilities. One element of your internal capability therefore is your ability to implement!

A recent study found that "70% of strategic failures were due to bad execution and rarely because of a lack of intelligence and vision".

This therefore begs the question, how do you improve the execution / implementation of your strategy? In other words how do you improve your capacity to deliver the strategy?

So why is implementation so difficult?

Well, firstly there is a conflict between the day job and the new activities and goals that move the organisation forward. Both are absolutely essential but they can clash.

We have all had the experience of how the urgent overtakes the important. The urgent, which typically means activities to support the day job, takes over and absorbs your time. The important, which doesn't necessarily have a level of urgency to it is therefore put to the back of the list even though you know it is vital in the long term to the continued development of the business.

In this instance you have to act on them and proactively manage your time. The reality is though new activities / projects do get choked by the urgency of the day job. In summary when **URGENT** meets **IMPORTANT** urgent nearly always wins!

The real challenge therefore for good execution is not simply executing a goal, it is executing a goal amongst the urgency of the day job!

In their book "**The 4 Disciplines of Execution**", Chris McChesney, Sean Covey and Jim Huling, identify 4 disciplines you can implement in your business to improve your execution success rate.

They are simple in nature but do require a change in mindset to ensure they are successful.

So what are they?

1) Focus on the **Important**
2) Act on **Lead** measures
3) Build a compelling **Scorecard**
4) Create a climate of **Accountability**

Let's look at each of them in turn.

1) Focus on the Important

There is definitely the law of diminishing returns when it comes to implementing new initiatives / goals. The more you have at any one time the less likely any of them will be successful. Therefore focus on doing 2 – 3 things really well rather than 10 poorly.

Typically we want to do more, not less! But there will always be more good ideas than capacity to execute them. Because of that, it is necessary sometimes to say no to good ideas. Not easy but something we know we have to learn to do.

Without doubt when an organisation moves from 6 or 10 "it would be good to do this" goals to just 3 or 4 "no matter what" there is a tangible change in morale in the business as people know what to focus on.

2) Act on Lead measures

This methodology uses something called the lag and lead measures. What does this mean?

Well the lag measure refers to the actual measure of the goal itself, whereas the lead measure tracks something that affects the achievement of the goal itself.

The great thing about a lead measure is that :

- It is something the team can influence in the short term.
- It is predictive of the likely success or otherwise of achieving the lag measure.

A practical application of this might be weight loss :

- The lag measure is the amount of weight you want to lose i.e. the goal.
- The lead measures are things such as
    - Diet - number of calories taken in
    - Exercise – number of calories burned

The great thing about these two lead measures is they are highly predictive of weight loss and they can be influenced on a regular and short term basis. In other words you know if you are making progress towards your goal.

The problem is that we often focus on the Lag Measure rather than the Lead Measure, even though the lag measure cannot be directly influenced.

We do that for two reasons:

- the lag measure matters –it's the thing you want to achieve, it's the thing you are accountable for.
- the data is easier to obtain.

In the weight loss example it is easy to get on the scales and get the data on how much weight you have lost, but it's more difficult to know how many calories you took in or how many you burned through exercise.

So, it is important to get the lag measure and the lead measures right and it is also important to remain focused on those measures.

3) Keep a Compelling scorecard

The purpose of the scorecard is to record the Lag Measure and the Lead Measures. Without a scorecard, the team will quickly forget what they agreed the Lag and the Lead measures actually were.

Constructing a scorecard is not difficult. Constructing a *compelling* scorecard is more difficult.

There are 4 rules for creating a compelling scorecard :

- It must be simple
- It must be able to tell immediately if you are winning or losing
- It must be visible to all
- It should contain both the lead and lag measures

The single biggest contributor to employee engagement is whether a person feels they are winning in their work and therefore a scorecard which indicates progress against a longer term target is an essential tool in actually achieving that target.

4) Build a climate of Accountability

It is essential that everyone feels responsible for and engaged with achieving the goal. For that it is necessary to ensure :

- good communication is in place
- the objectives are clear for all
- the goal is perceived as important and a priority

Each person feeling responsible and accountable is the key to the successful execution. Goals must be reviewed regularly and consistently. It is imperative that everyone who owns an important goal has an opportunity for regular review.

At these regular reviews, participants must come to the meeting with only one thing on their mind :

"What are the 2 or 3 things that I can do in order to impact the scorecard?"

Each person has to focus on 3 things in the review:

- Update on commitments from the last review –did I do what I said I would?
- Review and update the scorecard – is the lead measure moving and if so is the lag measure responding?
- What am I going to do this week/month? – based on what the scorecard is telling me.

This approach drives "just in time" planning – it is responsive to what the lead measures tell you and allows you to make weekly/monthly adjustments

So in summary, in a world where short term priorities (the urgent) take priority over the achievement of longer term goals (the important) the application of the 4 Disciplines achieves 3 things :

- It clarifies the organisation's priorities separating important goals from the day job.
- It engages every member of the team.
- It allows an organisation to focus on achieving its important goals in the midst of the whirlwind of the day job!

If you are struggling to implement your strategy then why not call Business Doctors. We are a national business support network, dedicated to helping small and medium sized businesses achieve their vision.

"We don't just coach, we get on the pitch"