

The challenge of successfully implementing strategy

By Mike Perry

Lesson: Successful strategy execution is a unique blend of nuts, bolts and equally bright ideas!

As objective outsiders, we've been able to observe executives implementing hundreds of strategic initiatives. In implementing strategy, the executive's mission is to go beyond the creation of grand strategy and develop those innovative business solutions that aid and ensure successful execution – only then do they create the legacy of implementation excellence.

"Strategy" is a word with so many different interpretations that any collection of executives debating the issue could well be talking past each other.

We've come to realise that there are five levels of "strategy" and that the ideal strategy process must move seamlessly from the one level to the next. At any point in time, a company might have to focus its strategic planning process on only one or two of these strategy levels.

Critical to successful implementation is having a clear view of which of these levels is this year's point of focus.

The strategy levels that we observe are:



Implementing strategy is really hard work
Big strategic ideas are plentiful, yet relatively few strategies can be described as having revolutionised the entire organisation. Execution is extraordinarily difficult – this is where real innovation and ingenuity is required. Successful strategy execution is a unique blend of nuts, bolts and really bright ideas!

The pitfalls of implementing strategy and what to do about them:

Having been involved in more than 370 strategic implementation projects, we've noted many categories of "strategy break points" that come between the big strategic idea and innovative

the executive suite into the organisation. A quick survey by people who understand your strategy and how this should bring fundamental change can quickly pinpoint if and where this is the cause of non-delivery.

- 3. Not starting the process with a thorough unpacking of the detailed changes required to implement the new strategy.** Often this is hindered by the "not knowing what we don't know" syndrome. Again perhaps outsiders can help your team both understand the nuances and the extent of the many changes required.
- 4. Inadequate realignment of company resources with the new strategy.** Old habits die hard! For

Most important, tackle implementation issues fast! Problems of strategy implementation might seemingly be small (concept testing and making critical decisions) or large (a pattern of many strategy break points). It's necessary to tackle them immediately. Time flies and disillusionment with what should have been the big strategic idea can set in with great cost to the organisation.

Moving quickly to overcome implementation constraints maintains the momentum of change and the achievement of the holy grail of "successful strategic execution".