



Achieving radical and sustainable improvement in top line performance

Why is Strategy Execution So Elusive?



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The Situation:

I will never forget the time at a client's Q'4 strategy retreat when the client invited the CEO of a strategic competitor to speak to the Senior Operating Management Group.

To the amazement of everyone in attendance (myself included), the CEO openly shared what appeared to be a truthful and insightful version of his company's strategic priorities.

At the end of his presentation during Q&A he was immediately asked by a participant, *"Assuming what you have presented is truthful and not disinformation, why did you openly share your crown jewels with us?"* With a steely eyed look the CEO responded, *"As you know there are no real secrets in this business. Hence, the only difference between our firms is the inherent ability to execute. We clearly know how to execute and (pointing his finger), and your firm does not."*



The Challenge

Based on our experience, the vast majority of organizations continue to struggle with execution. A recent study in the Harvard Business Review suggests that less than 10% of organizations consistently deliver on their financial goals. We all know that senior leadership teams spend a large amount of time on strategy and planning, yet there is a consistent missing of promises to the Board and external stakeholders. What are some of the underlying reasons for this? To quote Yum Woon Sun, *"Strategy without tactics is the longest path to victory; but tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."*

We typically see that execution is something that is much easier to say than it is to do. Achieving alignment, mobilizing the entire organization in pursuit of clearly defined organizational goals is easier said than done. When we ask the question to our client CEO's, *"What keeps you awake at night?"* invariably the ability to execute is a recurring theme as their number one challenge.

Below are some of the key diagnostics for consideration in your firm.

1. Just because a CEO and the senior leadership team believes they have "figured out" the strategy (the next right set of things to be doing), doesn't mean it is known nor understood by the troops. This is usually manifested when you hear employees grouching; *"What strategy?...The firm has no strategy...or if there is one, it's top secret...I have no clue what is going on in the ivory tower."*
2. If there is a strategy, it is accompanied by a lack of accountability and roles and responsibilities for its accomplishment.
3. There is typically no formalized process for driving actions and monitoring/reporting back on execution.

4. There is a lack of visibility as to whether any actions once executed will be sufficient to make any difference and result in the planned and forecasted business outcomes.



Next Steps

To overcome the above challenges we suggest a good place to start is by answering these three questions.

1. Are we on track to deliver on our objectives?
2. If the answer is no, are we doing anything different to rectify the situation?
3. Ultimately will any new actions we have initiated get us to goal accomplishment?

Team members with visibility into their organization's goals are better able to help identify barriers to success. Owners are held accountable only through visibility and are better able to identify and diagnose issues during execution.

When team members are held accountable for execution, stuff will get done. The ability to assign initiatives to individuals with one person as the owner for driving results adds to effectiveness in execution.

Remember, employees that are strategically aligned and not just busy are more effective.

Strategy execution may be difficult to apply, but without it you will experience "the noise before defeat."

***“Strategy execution requires discipline;
the discipline of getting things done.”***
....KappaEast

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