

Towards more effective strategy execution

The role of leadership and other key components

The importance of both strategy phases

Jack Canfield once stated that people can make their own luck by preparing well and having a good strategy. Few would argue with the US author's sentiments. However, strategy development is only one part of the success equation. There is also its implementation to consider. Now a fair few people reckon that aspect is significantly more important. And with good reason too. The best strategy in the world would be doomed to failure if the execution stage is not up to scratch.

Essentially, they come as a double act. You cannot have one without the other. Despite this, a sizeable gap often exists between planning and implementation. The quest to find effective ways of narrowing that gap is occupying the thoughts of many business scholars.

Shortcomings in the public sector

The problem is especially prevalent within the public sector, where poor execution of strategies impacts on the quality of services delivered. Lack of uniformity in the sector serves to compound the challenge. Making comparisons between different countries perfectly illustrates the point. Factors relating to such as the economy, population, stakeholders and corruption levels are just some of the issues to habitually affect both planning and execution.

Another negative is the poor standard of relations with private sector firms. Many state organizations view them as direct rivals and productive collaboration is minimal as a result. Failure to develop good working relations is a real missed opportunity though. There is little doubt that state companies could learn much from their private sector counterparts. How to operate in a more transparent manner would be a good place to start.

As things stand, the public sector is hardly renowned for such qualities. Some might even say that transparency and accountability are almost viewed as dirty words. Maybe that at least partly explains why something of an ad hoc approach to strategy implementation largely seems to prevail.

Gaining some insight into how private companies design and implement strategies would be hugely beneficial. Benchmarks could then be established and key components of the process identified. Being armed with this critical knowledge makes it substantially easier to identify precisely where improvements are needed.

Aligning the different factors to enhance their overall impact

Learning more about the vital role played by organizational leaders is yet further justification for creating closer links with the private sector. Leadership is widely

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considered a critical aspect of strategic planning and implementation. Many regard it as the most critical component of all. In their view, inferior leadership is the main reason when implementation fails.

Reducing the strategy-execution gap needs strong leadership to guide what must be a multi-disciplinary approach. Their guidance is essential to ensure that key organizational aspects are properly integrated.

Prospects of success increase markedly when the leader is fully committed to and immersed in the strategy process. Their presence helps clarify the vision and direction and can inspire and motivate other participants. And given the inherent complexities involved that should include pretty much the entire firm.

It also helps enormously to have a clear strategic plan. Thoroughness is a must, along with sufficient flexibility that permits swift response to inevitable changes in the operating environment such as client needs, for instance.

To be frank, all the different components and process play their part in ensuring that everything runs seamlessly. If any proof were needed that the whole really is greater than the sum of its parts, then this surely is a perfect example.

Weaknesses are without doubt a real no-no. The possibility that execution will totally fail looms large if any of the components come up short of the mark. It hardly needs pointing out that it is for reasons like that why thorough and ongoing measurement is hugely important.

Performance measurement is undoubtedly one of the most crucial aspects associated with strategy implementation. Shrewd operators will be cognizant of this and of the need to ensure that both internal and external measuring is performed. Doing so provides knowledge of such as input from different stakeholders and best practices of rival companies. Gaining awareness of potential risks is obviously more than useful as well.

Closely associated with measurement are the evaluation and reporting dimensions. Their presence is further testimony as to why overall alignment is necessary. Effectiveness communication is at the hub of these components and must occur at each level of the firm to make sure that all different stakeholders remain fully informed.

Regardless of the sector they operate in, no organization should rest on its laurels. Those guilty of becoming complacent soon find themselves rubbing shoulders with the also-rans. But if the planning and execution framework is appropriately designed, then fears of that happening should significantly diminish.

More specifically, this means ensuring that significant emphasis is placed on learning and improvement. Productive dialogue should again find itself in the spotlight, this time accompanied by quality knowledge management systems. Reviews held in the wake of learning can then identify how to improve future performance.

With these components working in tandem and generated by a core driving force, public sector firms become much equipped to enhance a process that is notoriously slow to reach fruition at present. As a result, such organizations will be able to respond more quickly and efficiently to deliver the effective services that clients rightly expect.

Comment

The review is based on: "Strategy execution in public sectors: empirical evidence from Belgium," by Sasidhar Reddy Bhimavarapu, Seong-Young Kim and Jie Xiong, published in Journal of Business Strategy. Effectiveness of any strategy demands proficiency in both planning and execution. Poor performance in the latter is common though, especially in the public sector. Strong leadership to guide the process and close alignment of other components can significantly improve the outcome.

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Reference

Bhimavarapu, S.R., Kim, S.-Y. and Xiong, J. (2019), "Strategy execution in public sectors: empirical evidence from Belgium," *Journal of Business Strategy*, ISSN 0275-6668, doi: [10.1108/JBS-01-2019-0025](https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-01-2019-0025).

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