



## Turning strategy into success

### Andrew Griffiths

If leaders are to reap more of the tangible results their plans deserve, then they must clarify intentions, communicate better and, above all, keep things simple

**W**inston Churchill once declared: "However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results."

Organisations don't get results if they fail to execute, so what makes strategy happen and how does it change the way your business works?

I am continually surprised at how leaders behave in strategy execution simulations. The senior team prevaricates, procrastinates and over-develops strategy, middle managers seem to be totally dependent on their senior leaders, lack confidence and act like rabbits

"What leaders seek is less dependency on them for having the answers to everything. They want people to go out and find solutions"

in the headlights. And the workers? Well, they do what they always do, get on with things and in the absence of a strategy they just make it all up. If any of this sounds familiar, you are not alone.

A middle manager from a global steel company summed up the situation like this: "We are all in this together. The top of the organisation doesn't have all the answers... now we must work out the way forward."

In these uncertain times, what leaders want is less dependency on them for having the answers to everything. Executives seek more proactivity in their people going out and finding solutions, and having the courage to ask if expectations are unclear. Attitudes can be negotiated and answers generated over time with this collaboration, which may be liberating for those who feel lost

without direction. We know strategy execution requires leadership, teamwork and trust at all levels in an organisation, so where are the gaps?

First, it is vital to understand that the levers to execute strategy are decisions and choices; these are intentional, informed and integrated options that drive performance. When Hannibal created his strategy to defeat the Romans, he chose elephants to make the journey across the Alps. He did his situational analysis and executed his plan to gain victory using surprise and innovation. Employees must be clear about your 'intent' as senior leaders, understand which direction you want

picture from which they developed a storyline to communicate their strategy and unique capabilities to employees, clients and stakeholders. If your story grabs the attention and is memorable, it has more chance of sticking. Do you have a strategy story to tell?

Finally, as things become more complex we need to simplify. Leaders must make their language more easily understood, ask questions and constantly check assumptions and understanding. Spending time with your team and conveying strategic intent is a sound investment.

A collaborative culture makes communications easier, builds trust and avoids silo thinking. A UK power company regularly creates café events where different departments share the understanding of their strategy in 15-minute time slots. Departments rotate and challenge or question each strategy, providing valuable feedback to the top team. The greater the shared learning, the better teams and individuals are able to deliver and sustain value.

I encourage leaders to create their own 'dashboard' with questions to assess how they are doing. Here are five success factors to weigh up: How does the agreed strategy translate into priorities in my work? How can I bring the strategy to life for my team? How much time do I spend translating strategy and checking the team is aligned with the intent? Do I spend enough time looking at my results? Have a plan B, C, D and... F – in other words, remain flexible. And if at all possible, keep it simple.

Andrew Griffiths is a former naval officer who now runs Coral Leadership, a strategy consultancy. He is also an educator and orchestrator for Duke Corporate Education