



**The Chartered Management Institute's Short Course Programme in association with ProSeminar**

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## **Making strategy work**

### ***Jean Pousson discusses the common pitfalls of Strategy Implementation***

It is well documented that although the strategy may have been the 'right' one, the Executives simply could not make it happen. Strategy Implementation is not like an architect handing over a building design to the appropriate contractors. It is much more complex than that. As Peter Drucker once remarked ... at some point strategy must degenerate into work...

So what are those killers of strategy implementation?

#### **Lost in translation**

The articulated vision and strategy is unclear to the majority of people within the organisation. The typical words such as 'global', 'leading', 'world-class', 'first-class' mean different things to different people and, as the strategy percolates down the organisation, different business units start to put their own (well- intentioned) spin on the corporate strategy. The result is disconnecting, conflicting objectives, competing business unit strategies and an overall unhealthy state of affairs.

In addition, even if the vision has been well articulated and communicated, if it is not shared - if the employees do not believe in it - there will be immense implementation issues. Do not therefore underestimate the need to win the hearts and minds of your people.

#### **A simple test**

Give your statement of vision/mission to a good representative sample of your employees and ask them to write a couple of bullet points as to what these statements mean to them. Then compare the findings.

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**Short Course for Management & Professional Development**

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## **Key success factors**

Another reason for implementation difficulties lies in the fact that very often key/critical success factors are not properly transferred into key performance indicators and measurements. People manage what they are measured on. This will never change! Therefore if business units' budgets and performance indicators are arrived at in isolation of the overall key success factors the organisation ends up with a high number of non value added measurements. The wrong things are being measured! Looking at a typical cost centre manager's budget one should be able to reconcile the metrics there with the overall statement of strategy.

## **Bureaucracy**

'A device for converting energy into solid waste.' This quote aptly describes what can happen if the organisation's structure and processes are not aligned to its strategy. Activities happen because they always have. Behaviour becomes mindless. Precedent and memory substitute for thinking. It becomes a case of '*we have always done it this way*'. Executives therefore constantly need to fight this straight-jacket of conformity and not allow this busy idleness to take root.

## **Culture**

There are enough books and writings devoted to this subject. Suffice to say that culture and strategy need to be aligned. A recent executive casualty was the departure of Ms Carly Fiorina of Hewlett Packard, where her tough management style constantly clashed with the more collegial culture in place. In assessing the possible strategic choices an assessment of the organisation's culture and values must feature in the choice process.

## **Leadership**

Again there are numerous books on the topic. In the context of strategy and implementation leaders must '*walk the talk*'. They must communicate clearly. Executives often fail to understand that they are always sending a message that their behaviour and communication are always under the spotlight. They need to be particularly careful about off-the-cuff comments and behaviour which are often interpreted as hard data.

## **In summary . . .**

Strategy implementation must not be viewed as a discrete set of activities that can simply be delegated when the Board has approved the strategy. Implementation issues must feature upfront when all strategies are being assessed. Executives underestimate implementation obstacles at their peril.