

cascading

strategy to align your organisation



Right thinking

- Having a continuously integrated and aligned cascading of strategy is essential for the wellbeing of organisations
- To remove obstacles to a smooth cascading of strategic objectives throughout the organisation:
 - succinctly and clearly communicate the strategy
 - adequately resource and test
 - be self-aware
 - clarify individual roles and accountabilities
 - adequately engage and communicate
 - align processes and performance measures

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Bookshelves abound with business strategies for growth, profit, market-share growth, innovation and social responsibility. But while getting the right strategy is hard enough, getting the strategy right is often an even greater challenge.

The best-laid strategies can be brought undone by a failure to execute, perhaps at the first hurdle, or even at the last. Such failure sometimes comes about when organisations don't invest enough time and effort in ensuring strategic objectives are aligned with operational execution.

It can be helpful to picture strategy and its implementation as being akin to a river: it might start as a trickle high up in the mountains, pure and healthy at its source, but it needs to cascade down through various terrains and climates, each level influenced by forces of nature and human behaviour – pollution, drought, diversion. The trickle might well become a mighty river, but the water may not finish its course pure and healthy.

So the purity and health of a strategy developed by the highest or best minds of an organisation will only cascade down to the fields of success if it can go through various tiers of the organisation's workforce, and can survive intended or unintended organisational equivalents of 'pollution', 'drought' or 'diversion'.

Unlike a river that finds its way naturally down through the paths of least resistance, however strategy does not naturally flow anywhere. The strategy needs to be shepherded through the different terrains and tiers of an organisation, and those terrains and tiers need to be prepared and cultivated. Doing so can help to ensure that an organisation's strategy 'river' does not lose its force or momentum by being split into varying streams of understanding or effort.

What can be done to remove obstacles to a smooth cascading of strategic objectives throughout the organisation, thus giving the strategy the greatest prospect of success?

Succinctly and clearly communicate the strategy

The organisation's strategy must be clearly understood and embraced, with a common language and understanding of that language, so there is no risk of 'Chinese whispers' or individual interpretations diluting the intent. The various components that come together to communicate strategy — missions, visions, values, objectives, themes, targets, and others — must remain consistent with each other and enhance, not diminish, clarity of the strategy.

Adequately resource and test

A strategy must only be implemented after it has been the subject of rigorous resource planning, and possibly only after some limited trials to verify the basis of the strategic thinking and assumptions. Many a good strategy has under-achieved because of lack of resources or testing, to give it a winning shot.

Be 'self-aware'

There needs to be an acute understanding of the organisation's capacity to successfully implement the strategy. This applies at each level, including board, senior executives, staff, and possibly key suppliers and customers. Is the organisational structure appropriate for the strategy? Are the executives sufficiently skilled and experienced? Is there sufficient depth and breadth of skills to do each and every part of the strategy? Does the organisation have the capacity and the appetite for the task?

Clarify individual roles and accountabilities

From senior executives down through organisational tiers, there needs to be clarity about who is responsible for what, where individual and collective accountabilities lie, and where and why there is interdependency between individuals and/or groups. Such clarity helps the flow of information to and from the right people, and it facilitates understanding of the choices that can or cannot be made by individuals, which will lead to better decision-making.

Adequately engage and communicate

In most cases, a strategy will impact both internally and externally. Having a clear understanding and focus on who will be impacted and when, and how/when they can be optimally engaged, will boost momentum and commitment and minimise unexpected obstacles.

Align processes and performance measures.

All the 'mechanics' and dynamics of an organisation need to be aligned. This includes the organisational scorecard, individual and collective performance measures, job descriptions, performance reviews, rewards and incentives. Together with clarifying roles and accountabilities, this increases understanding and 'valuing' of individual contributions to the strategy.

The more effort that is put into not just getting the right strategy, but getting the strategy right, the greater the prospect an organisation will get to having the strategy flow through each tier, division and discipline, and then have it inform and be part of daily activity.

Just as a continuous flow of good clean water is essential for the wellbeing of humankind, so a continuously integrated or aligned cascading of good clear strategy is essential for the wellbeing of organisations.



want to know more?

If you want to know more about Right Lane's approach to cascading strategy, contact **Brad McSwain:**

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