



## Strategic Leadership Execution

### The Crucial Role Leadership Plays in Achieving Better Organizational Performance

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Organizations succeed or fail based upon their ability to execute strategy effectively. Many organizations in both the private and public sector have tried implementing performance improvement initiatives such as Lean, Six Sigma, Balanced Scorecard, or JIT to drive waste and variation out of processes in order to become more efficient and effective. In the private sector the objective is to be more competitive and profitable and in the public sector, to produce more mission capability with available resources.

*Factors that Lead to Failure in Execution*  
Often, despite the substantial amount of time and money expended to implement these performance improvement tools and methods, organizations become frustrated by their inability to sustain improvements and find it challenging to measure a return on their investment.

Our experience has shown the inability to sustain improvements and measure a return on investment is often due to failure in execution because of strategy and culture misalignment, poorly defined strategic goals, or a lack of accountability, plan governance, detailed planning or tactical execution. Other common contributors to failure of execution include long-term strategies not receiving the sustained leadership necessary to

succeed. This is most commonly due to urgencies of day-to-day operations as well as the leadership's inability to consistently implement strategic execution fundamentals.

*What is Strategic Leadership Execution?*  
Leadership Execution is essentially translating your strategy into reality. It is not just accomplishing a task or a goal, but also achieving the underlying business objectives. It has to enable a constant review and fine-tuning of your strategy. Strategic Leadership Execution focuses on *what* and *how* an achievement is linked to culture and people management.

*Keys to Effective Strategic Leadership Execution*  
There are three critical Strategic Leadership Execution fundamentals necessary to translate strategy into effective execution:

1. Maintain focus and establish clear, simple goals and objectives that are commonly understood throughout the organization
2. Provide the workforce with the tools, training, and resources required to achieve the goals and implement a tracking system for the planning and execution phases
3. Systematically remove the barriers that interfere with achieving the goals

*Basic Execution vs. Strategic Leadership Execution*  
Our lives are filled with basic

“Many people regard execution as detail work that’s beneath the dignity of an organizational leader. That’s wrong ... it’s a leader’s most important job.”

Larry Bossidy, former Chairman and CEO, Honeywell International

execution of day-to-day tasks. However, in organizations basic execution is not enough. Strategic Execution requires not only efficiency, doing things right, but effectiveness, doing the right things. Much of the success or failure of Strategy Execution is determined during the planning process and is dependent on leadership’s ability to lead the organization.

*Leading Strategic Execution*  
Successful Strategic Execution can only be realized if the leader of an organization is leading the organization rather than presiding over it. A leader who takes a *laissez faire* approach or puts faith in empowerment is not addressing the pertinent issues. With a ‘hands off’ approach the people responsible for poor performance are not being held accountable and organization’s problems are left unsolved.

Leaders, at all levels, must become passionately engaged in the organization and recognize that



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execution is their main job. Having the right people in the right jobs and ensuring that rewards and recognition reinforce performance is critical.

#### *Implementing Change to Both the Technical & Cultural Systems*

Strategic Leadership Execution focuses on what leaders must do to execute their core processes, drive strategic goals and objectives, and sustain gains in a continuous improvement setting. Unfortunately, people who work hard within a deficient system can only produce about a five percent improvement. To achieve a more dramatic improvement both the technical and cultural systems must be changed.

The technical system includes how we produce products and services, the cultural system that defines the environment in which we work, and the management system we use to execute. The technical system is the easiest to change. It involves elements of Lean and Six Sigma such as changing processes, moving furniture

and equipment, establishing flow and pull, removing waste and executing problem solving.

Changing the culture and management systems is harder. This involves changing people's behavior so they produce results by linking rewards to performance. An effective business culture defines, plans, and executes with a strong understanding that all aspects of the business are equally important. It is critical to understand that the organization's effectiveness is a result of the sum of its parts and cannot stand on a single strength. This creates the alignment and linkage that drives strategy to execution and allows organizations to achieve their strategic goals.

People need to understand the context within which they are operating and be empowered to make decisions based on the variables and choices that are present. Strategic thinking is embraced in organizations as it ensures organizational agility, superior customer service, and the realization of the strategic goals.

#### *Our Approach to Strategic Leadership Execution*

MainStream GS' approach to Strategic Leadership Execution is designed to assist leaders in effectively communicating the need for change and setting clear goals and expectations for their workforce. We focus heavily on the elements

Don't tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results."

George S. Patton, Jr., four-star general, U.S. Army

required to lead change, but we also place emphasis on the fundamentals of how leaders establish the right metrics and implement a governance system to track progress throughout the various levels of the organization. We address how to deal with barriers, both technical and cultural, in a timely and responsive manner.

Our approach aims to educate leadership on Strategic Execution as well as strengthens the seven essential leadership skills outlined in "Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done," by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan. These skills include: Know your people and your organization, insist on realism, set clear goals and priorities, follow-through, reward the doers, expand people's capabilities, and know yourself.

For more information about MainStream GS or to discuss this article further please e-mail [info@mainstreamllc.com](mailto:info@mainstreamllc.com) or call 877.785.4888.

"Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it."

Dwight D. Eisenhower, five-star general, U.S. Army, and 43rd President of the United States