

Speculand gives tips to execute the right strategies

MUSCAT — Robin Speculand, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Bridges Business Consultancy International, a renowned innovative management guru and author of two popular books — *Bricks to Bridges: Making Your Strategy Come Alive and Turning It On* — and an upcoming media celebrity, gave the first part of a two-day seminar, at the Shangri La's Barr al Jissah Resort and Spa, yesterday.

Denoting the high popularity of the author, the seminar hall was filled chock-a-block with some of Oman's top CEOs and top-tier managers. No one at the seminar was disappointed, as Speculand broke down the barriers and went headlong into the crux of modern-day business malaise — 'Implementation', or to put it more correctly, 'Implementation of Strategy'.

Following on from a welcome speech by Devavrat Nambiar, Business Development Manager, Oman Resources Development Consultants LLC, Andrew Duff, CEO of National Bank of Oman (NBO) introduced Speculand.

He noted from his previous experience, as a CEO in a Malaysian trading bank, how Speculand's tool kit methodology had allowed them to solve a particularly nagging problem with regard to guarantees.

After putting the methodology to use, they were able to reduce the time-span process of guarantees from 4.5 days to a mere 1.5 hours, and this with zero per cent mistakes. In-turn, this led the bank to receiving more clients

and, consequently, a substantial rise in revenue, said the CEO.

In addition to this, Duff pointed out that when the methodology was implemented throughout the organisation, they were able to double profitability in just two years. Other benefits they derived from implementation of the strategy was that they came out unscathed by the Asian financial crisis as well as from a general regional recession.

In his charismatic style, Speculand spoke of many current-day organisational shortcomings, which have resulted in

90 per cent of crafted strategies not being implemented successfully. This, he said, is unacceptable and must be changed so as to meet the implementation challenges posed by new strategies.

He pointed out that the remaining successful 10 per cent are those organisations implementing strategy well. For the huge 90 per cent of unsuccessfully implemented strategies, organisations must consider doing things differently, said Speculand.

Failure to execute strategy is directly due to the company's

By Ali Ahmed al Riyami

failure of implementing it. In this regard he noted a good strategy could still fail if it is not possible to implement. This then, he said, is the implementation challenge and, more often than not, leaders tend to underestimate this important point.

A short presentation was screened highlighting idealised management strategy from the 60s right through to the end of the 20th century. For 2006 emphasis is on implementation

— "take the right action" is the new call to arms, said Speculand.

Other issues addressed by Speculand were: Why does change fail? How do people respond to implementation? What are the eight critical elements of successful implementation? How do you galvanise your workforce into action beyond a coffee mug and T-shirt? And, what works and what should you avoid?

Saleh bin Mohammed al Shanfari, Chairman, and Dr Nasser bin Zaher al Mauly, CEO of A'Saffa Poultry Farms, spoke

to the *Observer* on the occasion.

Dr Nasser noted the seminar acted as a good reminder on strategic management and on how to plan and implement strategies properly; which is most important of all.

Speculand's approach and the way he presents the seminar is both realistic and practical, allowing participants to benefit and to re-evaluate their companies. As a CEO himself, he said he felt the seminar would improve his abilities and help guide him towards the right direction. He added that he does conceive changes to the

way his company is run based on this two-day workshop.

The different way of looking at things and their different point of view allows experienced experts, such as Speculand, to come in and guide companies to greater and further success, said Dr Nasser. In this regard, he said he sees nothing wrong with this type of advisory arrangement which can help companies avoid disastrous consequences.

Saleh said he agrees with Speculand's viewpoint on strategies and that it is time for companies to take up issues of strategy implementation. We must ask ourselves the question 'why do strategies fail'? He said the seminar has proven to be a learning stage and that such events are important.

We must bring in the best trainers to the country to pass on required knowledge and skills to company personnel at all levels so that necessary changes can be made for the further development of the country, added the chairman.

Speculand's seminar and dynamic presentation assist in bringing home the message of "making your strategy come alive."

The *Oman Daily Observer* and its sister Arabic daily, *Oman*, published by OEPNPA, are media sponsors of the event.

The seminar is presented by Oman Resources Development Consultants (ORDC) LLC and co-sponsors are A'Saffa Poultry Farms.



RENOWNED innovative management guru Robin Speculand addressing top CEOs and top-tier managers at the two-day workshop on effective strategy implementation. — Pictures by Abdullah al Shuhi

FROM PLAN TO ACTION

When it comes to implementing a strategy, discipline and involving staff are key. Derek Parker examines the theories

THERE is a cliché about failing to plan and planning to fail, but the reality is rather more complicated. A new book, *Bricks to Bridges*, by business consultant Robin Speculand, claims 90 per cent of business plans fail due to poor implementation and lack of follow-through.

His conclusions come from interviews with 150 executives in companies that have tried to introduce change. "With many companies, at the start-up entrepreneurial stage, there is no written plan at all," says Speculand. "When the company is very small and everyone does whatever is needed, maybe the lack of a written strategy doesn't matter.

"As the company enters the second stage, with more employees and specialised functions, that model no longer works. A plan, a strategic direction, is needed. In fact, there is already quite a lot of information and help on creating a plan. Where the process often falls down is in the implementation.

"It takes at least twice the effort to implement strategy as it does to create it. Successful implementation is not complex but requires discipline, the discipline to do the things you're supposed to do when you need to do them, and to keep on doing them until you achieve the right results."

Speculand believes that the most common cause for implementation failure is a lack of support and action from people in the organisation. To work, a strategy has to be accompanied by a specific plan of action, as well as a mechanism to guide the transition between the old way and the new.

"It's the people at the coalface who actually have to do the implementation work," says Speculand. "But they have to know that the senior managers are committed to the strategy and involved with it."

One suggestion he makes is for the CEO to record a short message and, over the weekend, upload it to the phone system so that, first thing Monday morning, everyone gets a phone message reinforcing the importance of the strategy. But symbolic moves such as this must be buttressed by visible and accessible leadership.



Robin Speculand

Speculand also underlines the importance of being able to measure the pace and direction of change. "Relying only on financial indicators is unwise," he says. "A company can benefit from a regular review from an external party. But this is unusual, especially when the news might be bad. Ironically, the companies most likely to ignore bad news are the ones who most need to hear it."

Jeremy Bolt, a partner with Deloitte, agrees a strategic plan needs to be underpinned by solid research, both to assess the current position and to chart the future.

"Strategy is sometimes seen as separate from operations, but it must be embedded in KPIs or other metrics, with a good understanding of the strategic pillars of the business," he says. "But you have to be careful about trying to include too many indicators. A good plan is a good simple plan."

Bolt also argues that implementation issues should be considered early in the process and input sought from across the organisation to ensure available resources and capacity.

"The CEO might have final responsibility, but the chances of successful implementation increase if there is a broad ownership," he says. "Some corporate leaders might think that seeking the views of a lot of people could lead to fragmentation and dissension, but that is not my experience. A bit of debate can be a good thing, as long as the final product is agreed. In fact, a strategic plan greeted by silence from the executive team is a very bad sign."

Bricks to Bridges: Make Your Strategy Come Alive, Robin Speculand, Bridges Business Consulting, 2005.

Deloitte has a series of booklets on formulating and implementing strategic plans, available from:

