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A successful implementation policy will eliminate strategic failures that spell doom for a company

IMAGINE the scene. The CEO walks on to the stage and a hush comes over the auditorium. With tremendous authority and passion, he shares the new strategy of the company. He tells the employees how the new strategy will move the company forward, how it will make it more competitive and, most importantly, how they will benefit.

Fast forward 12 months. The same CEO once again walks on to the stage to address the staff and announces: "We just had a strategic failure."

Surprising? Not quite, when you consider research which shows that nine out of 10 strategies fail to be implemented successfully.

Indeed, companies all over the world constantly embark on new strategies to win market share, improve service and grow revenues. But most of them fail to deliver the anticipated results.

Rarely, if ever, does the CEO announce that a particular strat-

egy failed. Instead, the bar of expectations gets lowered or a new strategy is quickly adopted.

It is time to put the focus on strategy implementation. After focusing on the product, the process, customer service, technology and innovation and creativity, strategy implementation will be the next business differentiator.

For 40 years, ever since change management became a business topic, it is ironic that the only thing that has not changed is our approach to change-management itself. Change-management does not work as it is applied today; if it did, there would not be so many "strategic failures".

In general, managers underestimate the challenge of implementation. Most of their time, energy and focus go into setting the vision and creating the strategy. When this is accomplished, they believe the hardest part is over. In reality, they have only completed one-third of the journey.

Learning to set the vision and strategy is a tough challenge that is supported by plenty of books, consultants and tools such as Swot, Pest and Five Forces. But when it comes to implementation, managers are generally left on their own. Few books and even fewer consultants will stay the course with the company.

To be successful, leaders must better understand the complete implementation challenge. They must impose the structure and discipline that is missing today. Instead of leaders being left to wander aimlessly through an implementation maze, they need a framework and guidelines. To make implementation come alive, they must at least double the effort they spent on creating the strategy and the time.

Implementation involves not a singular event such as a CEO speech or a computer presentation but a cluster of structured activities. Here are the eight crucial areas that leaders must address and key questions for



It is not enough to just decide on a winning strategy. The real work begins when you have to put it in place.

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which they must find answers:

1 Leadership does not implement strategy, people do.

Questions to consider: Do you have the right calibre of people? Do they have the competencies to execute the new strategy? Are they motivated to do so?

2 The reasons for adopting the strategy.

Questions to consider: Why is the strategy centrestage? Do your staff members know what to do differently on the Monday morning after implementation is announced? Do they have the right tools and techniques to implement the strategy?

3 People can adopt a strategy only if they know about it and understand it.

Questions to consider: Do all your staff know what the new strategy is and why it has been adopted? Is the strategy communicated in a way that it comes alive?

4 "Inspect what you expect." Have the right measures in place.

Questions to consider: Do you have the right measures for the new strategy? Are the measures being leveraged to guide the implementation?

5 You must change the day-to-day activities of your staff members and have a culture that supports and fosters change.

Questions to consider: What needs to change in the fundamental way you work so as to encourage the adoption of the new culture? Are you using the language of the new strategy?

6 There must be congruence between what you say you are going to do (strateg implementation) and what you are doing (the process).

Questions to consider: Do your processes support or hinder the new strategy? How can you redesign the process so it is more supportive and effective?

7 Reinforce the expected behaviours and outcomes so that they are continuously repeated.

Questions to consider: When staff members step into the unknown and deliver results, are they recognised and rewarded? Does the reinforcement encourage them to continue to demonstrate the desired new behaviours?

8 You must constantly review what steps have been taken, and whether they will deliver the right results.

Questions to consider: Do you know if the actions being taken are producing the right results? Do you know what has been learned from the implementation in the last 90 days? Do you know what you need to start doing differently from now?

By paying attention to all these areas, managers can get a realistic perspective of the challenge ahead and leaders can identify the actions they should take to deliver the new strategy's

anticipated results.

Article by Robin A. Speculand, the CEO of Bridges Business Consultancy International, which specialises in making strategy come alive. He will conduct a seminar "Bricks to Bridges – Make Your Strategy Come Alive" at the Singapore Institute of Management on Oct 7. For details, call Christy Lo at 6248-9415 or e-mail christylo@sim.edu.sg

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