

Overcoming Strategy Communication Pitfalls

Strategy execution is still a relatively new topic in business and leaders struggle how to do it. They face many execution challenges and the top one is communicating the strategy. If you understand the most common pitfalls in communication, hopefully you can avoid them.

Today's post is by Robin Speculand, author of [Excellence in Execution](#) ([CLICK HERE](#) to get your copy).

What are your preferences?

- Apple or Galaxy phones?
- Working in the morning or at night?
- Tea or coffee?
- Work alone or in a group?
- Window or aisle seat on the plane?

Just as everyone will answer these questions based on their own preferences, people have their own ways of answering the call to executing a new strategy. Leaders who achieve excellence in execution recognize this as they prepare to communicate a new strategy. They consider how to respond to people's different preferences and strive to create the right first impression. Consider that you never get a second chance to start a good execution.

As an essential business topic, strategy execution is in its infancy. Yet it's quickly evolving as leaders demand more knowledge, structure and resources on how to achieve it. When they address how to execute strategy, it's not always with the same energy, drive and conviction they applied to crafting it. Often, they're missing the skills and tools needed to excel in their execution efforts.

A leadership team doesn't walk into a conference room and declare, "Let's create a bad strategy!" Although they believe they have crafted a winning strategy by the end of the planning, they only know if it's good once it's executed.

Each step of your implementation journey creates an opportunity to dramatically improve employee engagement, culture, performance and profits. As a leader, you can seize this phenomenal opportunity by recognizing why execution has previously failed and what needs to happen differently to succeed. You can then lead the organization through the journey, delivering on strategy promises to customers and stakeholders along the way. By crafting a winning strategy and achieving excellence in execution, you have a powerful business differentiator over your competitors and the payoff for everyone is tremendous.

And the number one reason why strategy execution fails, from our [recent research](#), is poor communication.

Given that most employees are unable to explain even the broad strokes of their organization's strategy, the current communication approach doesn't work. Here are the most common pitfalls to avoid:

Pitfall #1: Relying on town hall meetings and emails

When leaders perceive the goal in execution is only to notify everyone about the new strategy, then they believe holding a town hall meeting or email will suffice. In one example, a regional manager of a medical supplier delivered eight two-hour 160-slide presentations around his region. But when someone in a session asked him a question afterward, he replied, “I showed you that in the presentation.” In this regional manager’s mind, he had explained the strategy and was done.

Many leaders are guilty of communicating across too few mediums. They provide too little information and their people don’t understand why the organization must transform, so they don’t take any new actions.

The aim is not to launch the strategy but to nurture the communications throughout the implementation journey.

Pitfall #2: “Strategy Speak” – Overcomplicating communication

Leaders sometimes overcomplicate what they’re saying, making it hard for people to understand even the simplest message. They have a bad habit of using “strategy speak”—saying popular expressions and giving long explanations rather than speaking simply and directly.

To be effective, leaders communicate the strategy in a way that enables people to understand what’s changing. They explain why transformation is needed and clearly state what people should do differently. They avoid using ambiguous terms that blur the objectives and leave people confused about what actions to take.

Pitfall #3: Dumbing down the strategy message

Some leaders dumb down the strategy message when sharing it. This is the opposite of Pitfall #2: “Strategy Speak.” Leaders leave out key messages, arguments and persuasion points. As a result, people lack relevant information to understand why changing strategy is important and lack a desire to participate. Keeping the strategy message clear and straightforward is different than dumbing down the message.

Pitfall #4: Not reinforcing awareness with actions

The awareness efforts fail if leaders are saying one thing and doing something else. Their words have to be aligned with actions that are reinforced. People in the organizations have to not only *hear* about the transformation from their immediate bosses but *see* them being consistent in their values and actions.

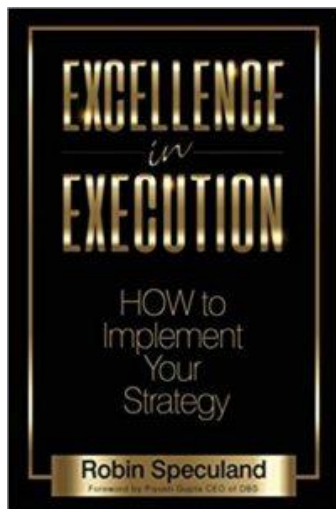
Pitfall #5: Not communicating a message that inspires

When leaders are preparing the strategy execution message, what they base their main message on doesn’t typically relate with the majority of people’s inspirations. They often talk about market share, client impact and financial performance. With the exception of investment bankers and a few others, most people don’t come to work in the morning feeling passionate about adding shareholder value. They simply aren’t inspired by this kind of language, so they don’t take the new actions required to execute. Rather, they go back to work and keep doing what they were doing. As a result, the execution fails to gain traction.

Leaders have to identify the factors that encourage their people to participate and then speak directly to those factors.

Pitfall #6: Discussing the medium before the message

Commonly, leaders struggle to agree on how a message should be disseminated before they agree what should be said and why. Should we create a website? How many pages should it have? How about a video? What about an email from the CEO? These questions are thrown around, but they distract leaders from communicating the right messages through the right medium to the right audience. Leaders first need to identify what they want people to hear *before* they discuss ways to share it.



Robin Speculand, author of *Excellence in Execution* ([CLICK HERE](#) to get your copy), is the founder and CEO of Bridges Business Consultancy and creator of the Implementation Hub – the first portal in the world dedicated to strategy implementation featuring over 500 resources. Bridges has worked with governments, multinational corporations, and local organizations across five continents to execute their strategies. For more information, please visit: www.excellenceinexecutionbook.com.

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