

Framing Strategy to Get Staff Buy-In & Executing it Well



For leaders and managers, there are useful lessons around how to frame a strategy to ensure staff and other stakeholders back it, in the points discussed below.

Emotions Rule People's Decisions


Do not assume that people will take objective information and statistics as seriously as they should. As has been proven experimentally, the framing of an idea changes the decisions that people make. Humans do not just view things objectively, but rely on emotion, opinion and connotations; their decisions are shaped by their 'cognitive schemas' – that is, patterns of thought or behaviour that are influenced by individual characteristics.

When looking to frame a strategy that staff will buy into, executives and senior managers can use this to their advantage by ensuring they use appropriate language. For instance, using the term "those people" to describe a particular group is likely to provoke implicit and unintended responses among employees who do not immediately identify with a particular strategy, and could alienate the very people you need to get onside.

Consider Storytelling

6-Step Leadership Storytelling

1. Emotional Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Common experiences• Personal stories• Show empathy: "I can feel your pain"
2. Appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Celebrate the good news• Be specific (task, people, achievements)• Genuine & Authentic (tone of voice)
3. Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is our common enemy?• How bad is this? (provide context)• What are the consequences?
4. Consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do we need to do to win• Options available• Critical assessment
5. Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What we decide to do• How are we going to make it happen• Why it will work (RTB)
6. Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Next steps• What we will achieve as a team• Project the future



Conversely, effective framing can also help generate buy-in for a particular strategy. Make use of storytelling and metaphors to create a particular image or to convey a potential future situation.

Research has found that evoking implicit storylines which invite moral considerations and emotions into the decision-making process has a significant impact on outcomes. It's a technique deployed to great effect by marketing agencies. Soft-drink brands will present images of people drinking their product on a beach with a party going on around them to create positive associations with the product; in reality, very few people will enjoy their drink like this.

But it's a powerful image, and a technique that business owners/managers can also use when selling a vision to staff, customers or even investors. They should look at their different stakeholders and identify the framing strategy that is most likely to resonate with them and be seen by them in a positive light.

You could use these 'storytelling wells', to draw stories from:

- **Public well** - available to everyone. You might see something on YouTube or read a story online for example.
- **Professional well** – stories about things that happen at work, could be from your employees, customers or stakeholders.
- **Personal well** – draws on your personal experiences for stories to share. This is the richest place to hunt for stories. You might feel vulnerable when you share personal stories, yet you know instinctively that they pack a punch. As in life, the greater the risk, the greater the reward. What keeps you safe is understanding the difference between your personal and private wells.
- **Private well** – contains the stories you decide not to share. Each storyteller must decide what is private for them.

Understanding the different wells helps you get the balance right between vulnerability and over-sharing. They'll also give you a bottomless treasure chest of potential stories.



Source: "The Science of Storytelling" - Gabrielle Dolan

Ensure Others Know About It

When looking to frame a strategy in a particular way, it's important to ensure that other departments involved, are also aware of just how important framing is and how a particular strategy is being positioned.

This could include marketing, internal communications, media and external relations or employee engagement teams, as well as line managers. If necessary, consider investing in training so staff understand how to frame their own messaging around a strategy.

Know Where To Draw The Line

There is a dark side here, with the obvious potential for framing to be used to justify things that are questionable or unethical.

Influencing the senior management team to make a debatable investment, or key investors to reach a particular position, may be morally dubious.

It's important that any framing is conducted within the right ethical parameters, where a degree of persuasion is useful and acceptable, but misleading and conveying a false impression is not.

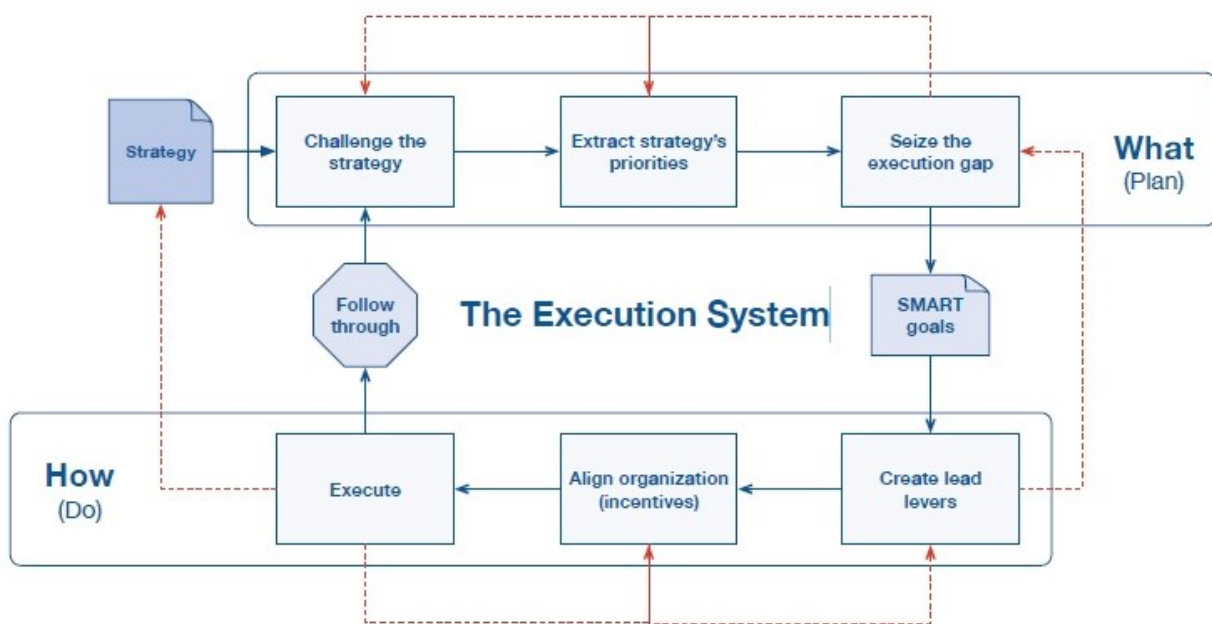
Watch Out For Other People Using Framing On You

As well as using framing to help deliver a strategy, it's important for business leaders to be aware that their own decisions can be affected by their own instinctive reactions. They need to put in place measures to ensure they assess any strategy or decision objectively, so they do not fall victim to the effect of framing.

The best way to overcome the framing bias is to ensure there is a diversity of inputs into decisions. There are techniques to accomplish this, such as dividing a team into two groups and asking them to research and debate opposing positions. Another method is to appoint somebody as a 'devil's advocate' whose role it is to challenge the assumptions underpinning proposals and arguments, with the aim of preventing any framing bias.

Communication is essential to the implementation of any strategy, and there is a lot more to it than just exchanging information. Knowing and using the true potential of language with the right framing can help people become more effective strategists and leaders.

Executing Strategy



Execution is about making strategy happen and doing so entails processes and systems to ensure that goals are being achieved. Without effective execution, strategy has no meaning and that's why any serious effort to design a company's strategy must consider its ability to execute it.

The real execution of a strategy must address the strategy itself, which outlines where to compete and how to win; and the business model, which addresses the basic building blocks of how the strategy is delivered. Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) describe the business model as a blueprint for strategy, which means, at a minimum, describing your intentions around:

- Which customer segments you will target;
- What value propositions will attract those customers;
- Through which channels you will make your offer and service those customers;
- How the customer relationships will be maintained (e.g. through great products, great service, low cost);
- What resources are required to deliver on your promises;
- What activities will these resources, at a very high level, perform; and
- Which partnerships are needed.

A lot of good material has been written about execution which makes it a bit difficult to come up with a single, unified system, but for a good execution approach it:

■ **Has The Right People In The Right Jobs:**

Execution-focused leaders don't cut corners to ensure that the right people are occupying the right jobs. This is one case where knowing your people really goes a long way. That means that as a leader you must be reachable and in direct contact with your subordinates to develop an active sense of awareness. Asking questions and honestly listening to the answers are powerful techniques that pay off big time when implementing your strategy.

■ **Rewards High Performance:**

People who perform well at doing their jobs must be rewarded better than those who don't. It is that simple. A company may have great, smart talent, but if they don't understand their jobs or are not focused on achieving high performance, the company will be wasting time and money and may never reach its goals.

■ **Manages The Trajectory, Not The End Point:**

Most organisations set goals during their annual business reviews, then everybody goes back to work and comes back a few months later to see whether they met their goals, but by then it's too late to act if something didn't go as planned. High-performance organisations, on the other hand, track the execution of the underlying tasks closely, so that there's no surprise when the results come in, giving executives the chance to act immediately if something goes out of whack.

■ **Establishes Clear Accountability:**

Providing clarity on what needs to be done, by whom and by when is very important when it comes to execution. That is perfected by keeping clear accountability during implementation, so that all key people know who's on target and who's falling behind. While many companies operate in silos with clear goals defined vertically, horizontal alignment is also important and makes coordination across teams more efficient.

■ **Provides And Encourages Feedback:**

Providing timely feedback is essential to keep high performance on things that are going well and correct poor performance on time. In this sense, feedback must be bi-directional, coming from leaders to all people in the organisation, and from people on the front lines of execution back to the leadership. Both need to report how things are going and provide early notice of changes that could affect results down the road. If feedback is provided in a sincere and non-judgemental way, people will be more open to sharing things that are not going well or that could become a problem later. No one can fix a secret, so you must encourage people to speak up and get the help they need when they need it.

■ **Provides Flexibility And Allows Agile Pivoting:**

The "plan-then-do" approach to execution may have worked well in the past, **but in a more dynamic environment agility, flexibility and the ability to regroup when faced with unexpected roadblocks**, can give companies an execution advantage in the different markets where it operates.

Conclusion

Based on these ideas, a series of activities – steps - that if implemented systematically, can help ensure that the strategy is well executed, providing early signals about things that could be getting off track. These activities include:

1. **Challenging and fine-tuning the strategy:** Streamline the strategy and get it ready for execution by challenging its fundamentals and assumptions, exploring the different ways in which it could be achieved and finally selecting the best ways to execute it.
2. **Extracting strategic priorities:** Identify leadership priorities from the strategy and break them down into their main underlying drivers. Those drivers will become the levers that the individual units must act upon to achieve their individual goals.
3. **Seizing the execution gap:** Evaluate your ability to execute the strategy and look for gaps or missing links that could create confusion or derail your implementation efforts.
4. **Managing through lead levers:** Identify the leading metrics that should be used to track execution and create a system to monitor progress.
5. **Aligning the organisation for execution:** Create the right incentives to align individual interests with the strategy of each division or business unit.
6. **Executing and following through:** Set execution in motion, continually monitor the implementation of the strategy, and quickly react to changing environments. Keep your ear to the ground for emerging opportunities.

Additional Resources

For further information on Business Storytelling, please refer to the following excellent resources from Australian global thought leader on strategic storytelling and real communication, Gabrielle Dolan: -

- “*The Science of Storytelling*” whitepaper, can be accessed [HERE](#)
- Another whitepaper “*Business Storytelling*”, can be accessed [HERE](#)
- An article “*Four Types of Stories You Need in Business*”, can be accessed [HERE](#)

Disclaimer:

Business Plus is distributed monthly by CBSW Tax & Business Advisors to provide information of general interest to our clients. The content of this newsletter does not constitute specific advice. Readers are encouraged to consult their CBSW advisor for advice on any specific business matters.

Providing you
professional
direction



Our liability may be limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation.