

Newsletter - April 2026:

The Strategy-Execution Paradox

I've always found it interesting that there is so much business content written about strategy, but only a fraction about execution. On Amazon.com, there are over 40,000 books on business strategy and only about 1,000 on business execution.

To me, that's strange.

First, strategy is actually pretty simple. Or it can be. And should be.

Where do you compete and how do you win?

Also, companies - even competitors - often have similar strategies, as any highly paid consultant will tell you. Consultants can just change the logo on the slide deck, and voilà: a "complete" strategy

The difference between companies that win and those that don't isn't the slide deck. It's the execution.

Roughly 2/3rds of strategies fail in execution. And over 80% of strategies - even those that get halfway executed - fail to achieve their original objectives. That is dismal, and a massive cost to all organizations.

The Three Pillars

Where does it fall apart? My belief and experience is that great leadership stands on three pillars:

1. **Strategic Vision.** Creating, communicating and aligning the direction.
2. **Emotional Intelligence.** Leaders knowing, understanding and managing themselves and their teams.
3. **A Growth Mindset.** The leaders and their teams believing that they can learn, develop, change and achieve the vision.

The friction that stops execution almost always comes down to a gap in one of these three.

Strategic Vision: Is the strategy clear, simple, and connected to what people do daily? . Having 'great' execution of a non-existent direction is like driving a Ferrari over a cliff. Lots of power and performance, but heading the wrong way.

Connection & Trust: Do people feel that they can discuss the strategy? Challenge it? This is about psychological safety - Google's Project Aristotle found this is the #1 element of high-performing teams . Do leaders listen deeply before proposing solutions? Do they know how and when their ego is leading them down the wrong path?

Growth Mindset: Do people believe they can accomplish new things?. Momentum requires experimentation - testing ideas quickly rather than waiting for perfect plans . If leaders and their teams have a fixed mindset, then they don't believe in the achievability of the vision, so why execute?

The Biology of the "Tell" Trap

Often, the ego of the leader - intentional or not - creates the friction. They believe their role is to "create and communicate" the vision. But there is a biological cost to this.

When a strategy is simply "announced," the team's brain defaults to compliance mode. This is low-energy and energy-conserving . To get commitment, you need the Prefrontal Cortex engaged . And the only way to engage someone else's PFC is through Co-Creation.

If they didn't help build the direction, they won't own the result . This is why your "perfect" plan is dying. It belongs to you, not them.

The Result is Multiplicative (80% or 0%)

Richard Clarke (US Cybersecurity Chief) famously said: *"A mediocre strategy executed brilliantly is often better than a brilliant strategy executed poorly."*

Spend less time perfecting the strategy offsite with the leadership team and external consultants, and more time building it with the people who execute it. You might only get 80% of the "perfect" strategy you wanted, but it will be

executed with 100% ownership . That's 80% of ideal. Or you can create the 100%"perfect" strategy, but fall into the 2/3rds that never get it executed. That's 0%.

How to Eliminate the Friction

These "fixes" below are representative, not exhaustive. The first real step is to assess where you have friction in your organization - Vision, EQ, or Growth Mindset - and then address the specific area and challenge.

I have something I call my **Leadership Momentum OS** that does just that, but the suggestions below are often the "big rocks" to get some momentum going:

- **Involve the executors immediately:** Even if the strategy is "done," use dialogue and workshops to pivot it based on bottom-up feedback. Small changes create massive engagement. I've seen this happen again and again, and a key signal you'll experience is that **people start acting before they are asked**. That is the ultimate reflection of understanding, ownership, and alignment.
- **The 1-Page Rule:** Massively simplify. If it's more than one page and three key points, it's too complex . Humans like simple. Complexity is the enemy of momentum.
- **Build Progress Visibility:** People need to see evidence that the organization is moving . Celebrate early wins and small movements to build the flywheel.

The Challenge: Stop Pushing, Start Designing

I believe in "swinging the pendulum." Incremental shifts rarely fix stalled execution.

If you aren't seeing the movement you need, stop trying to "try harder." Instead, find the friction and remove it with a sledgehammer.

But be warned: the source of the friction is often looking back at you in the mirror . Building momentum requires you to take your ego out of the equation. It means walking into a room, being brutally honest about what isn't working, and listening to the people who actually do the work - even when you don't like what they have to say .

That isn't "soft" leadership. It's behavioural engineering.

Stop trying to be the Visionary who has all the answers and has to push every initiative. Start being the Architect who designs the conditions for momentum .