



Our Focus on Execution and Why It Matters

Our consulting places a laser focus on execution, and with good reason. There is no substitute for executional excellence. There is a great deal to say about execution, but the place to start is why it matters. The next papers in this series will deal with describing in more detail how our view of execution differs from the norm.

Execution is getting things done, which is the foremost purpose of a business. Nonetheless, business leaders and managers tend to take execution for granted. A recent survey reported in Harvard Business Review found that over two-thirds of large organizations struggle with achieving executional excellence, and large and small organizations experiences repetitive problems due to lack of execution. Business leaders too often think of execution as a result and fail to see execution as an environment. They often treat execution as something that happens in lower tiers of the organization. They frequently use isolated processes for strategy development, operations and budgeting, and people.



Seeing execution as an environment changes the way you do things. Although lack of execution is the root cause of the vast majority of business challenges and failures that leaders and managers cite, few organizations and the consultants they hire directly address execution, and when they do, they address it in the context of a

specific process or activity and not across the entire organization as needs to be done. Execution needs to be seen as an environment in which all the functions and processes of the company occur. Without an execution environment, the critical functions and processes of a business become too much about doing things, rather than about getting things done. A good example is strategic planning where the purpose of strategic planning becomes the plan itself, rather than being an activity that results in getting things done beyond just preparing the plan. How often do you hear that the plan didn't get acted on? An execution environment demands that each and every activity result in getting things done beyond the activity itself.



Execution is important because what gets done determines how customers, investors and stakeholders judge performance. The reality is that customers, investors, and stakeholders, not the company's management and leaders, define the metrics by which the company is assessed. Isn't it ironic that everyone outside of an organization who is involved with it is looking for results, but the performance metrics inside the organization often have nothing to do with results? Another reason execution is important is that we recognize and deal with problems when we are accountable for getting something done. Having to get things done makes everyone clarify "where the buck stops." You recognize and address the flaw in the strategy, or the error in the market expectation, even if these came from much higher above you in the organization, because you are where things have to get done and "where the buck stops."

Without an execution environment, the person who created the flawed strategy, or who made the flawed market estimate is viewed as the person who is accountable, even though they are layers above you and likely divorced from and unaware of the flaw you uncovered. The result is that what needs to get done doesn't get done, and there is no clear accountability for that result. Doesn't this sound like a lot of organizations today? All too often strategic plans are just conceptual and ambiguous, but accountability for getting things done makes you craft strategies and plans that are far more specific and practical. Execution as an environment permeates everything you do and changes it to be pragmatic and results-oriented.

Execution is a defining characteristic of any leading company such as GE, or Apple. They may have good strategies, but what really stands out is that they do what needs to be done. And it's done better and completed on time. Companies that lack execution may well have good strategies, but all too often important targets are missed. They fail to execute and nothing overcomes poor execution.

Spotlight Business Consulting

Spotlight Business Consulting (SpotlightBC) was formed with a mission to provide businesses with consulting that is informed by a focus on execution. What distinguishes businesses with superior performance is the way they execute and overcome ambiguity and insufficient information and insight. Rather than simply apply our extensive experience, we are unique in offering you a contemporary, information-driven consulting process, every aspect of which is informed by a focus on execution.