

Your Strategy Is Wrong, But That's OK!

Strategy is going through another of its periodic difficult times. A recent commentator has remarked how the life gets sucked out of a meeting when someone declares that the company needs to do some serious strategic thinking. Last year, under half of executives surveyed by McKinsey said they were satisfied with their company's approach to strategy.

Perhaps we expect too much from strategy processes. I always tell clients that the one thing they and I can be sure of is that the strategy they produce will not be perfect - it may not even be right. I say this to be deliberately provocative.

My follow-up message is that, because none of us is blessed with prescience, this awareness helps us focus on strategy's implications. Their strategy has one absolutely critical thing going for it: the team that produced it has worked through all the issues and have agreed to it. They have a deep understanding of how they arrived at the strategy. It's therefore one that they can execute, and - as is likely - adjust as circumstances dictate.

Executing strategy is as important as developing strategy. Execution is where the sometimes uncertain ideas debated in a strategy forum get tested. Discovering that some of these ideas do not turn out quite as expected should not be a cause for alarm. It should be the signpost that the organisation can become more mature about strategy - that can, if it chooses, move towards being a strategic learning organization.

Of course, there a balance to be struck. Poorly executed strategies will always produce strategies that will never work. A good strategic planning process is essential. But believing that the strategy that the team has laboured on for so long is unblemished is dangerous. The team needs to begin the execution phase with a "confident scepticism" stance. The learning that the team has gone through to arrive at the strategy is just the start. Learning must continue as execution unfolds.

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