

Maximize your leadership potential:

GENERATE ALIGNMENT

Execution – Do you have what it takes?

Some of the resources in our Leadership Toolkit explain the elements of successful execution. This job aid aims to not only address the elements of execution but, more importantly, the behaviors that are most closely related with successful execution. In a widely recognized Harvard Business Review article “The Secrets to Successful Strategy Execution”, Neilson, Martin and Powers present four fundamental building blocks to solid execution:

- Clarifying decision rights. Defining roles and responsibilities and establishing who has the authority to make a decision about something. When decision rights are clearly stated, employees understand what they are responsible for, make judgment calls accordingly and answer to their choice of action.
- Designing information flows. Using well-developed communication roadmaps can significantly aid the effectiveness of execution. Ensuring that all who need to know are properly informed and in a timely fashion is often the key to smooth implementation.
- Aligning motivators. The connection between performance and rewards is more easily established when there is clarity about roles and accountability. Defining results and how they will be measured not only gives an organization a tangible way of evaluating its progress towards execution but also provides motivation.
- Making changes to structure. Reorganizing the relationships between functions and processes make structural changes the most easily recognizable and implementable.

Why it matters?

Recognizing the importance of execution is only the first step to succeeding at it.

Understanding not only the basic components of successful execution but, more specifically, the behaviors associated with it can help leaders translate strategic objectives into productive actions for desired results.

How Effective Are We?

The challenge is that these four blocks are to be cultivated simultaneously and synergistically; leaders must adjust to the tug and pull of these four elements as they steer the organization towards the desired strategic goals by addressing the behaviors that will result in successful execution. These researchers set out to identify actions that most effectively enabled organizations to implement strategy. They created a profiler which allowed individuals to assess the execution capabilities of their organizations; the traits corresponded to one or more of the four building blocks.

Following is the list with each trait’s corresponding ranking and category as well as the strength index – out of 100- for each. Notice that, although as leaders we often resort to making changes in structure to deal with organizational challenges, the traits related to structure ranked lower and carried less strength than those in the other three categories. “In fact, our research shows that actions having to do with decision rights and information are far more important - about twice as effective - as improvements made to the other two building blocks.”

We’ve adapted the language of the profiler to better reflect the environment at UF as a public, academic institution.

<i>Decision Rights</i>	<i>Information</i>	<i>Motivators</i>	<i>Structure</i>
1. Everyone has a good idea of the decisions and actions for which s/he is responsible. (81)	2. Important information about the changing environment swiftly gets to unit leadership. (68)	9. The individual performance-appraisal process differentiates among high, adequate and low performers. (32)	13. Promotions can be lateral moves (from one position to another on the same level in the hierarchy). (29)
3. Once made, decisions are rarely second-guessed. (58)	4. Information flows freely across organizational boundaries. (58)	10. The ability to deliver on performance commitments strongly influences career advancement, compensation, recognition and rewards. (32)	14. Fast-track employees here can expect promotions more frequently than every three years. (23)
7. Supervisors up the line get involved in operating decisions. (32)	5. Employees at various institutional levels usually have the information they need to understand the bottom-line impact of their day-to-day choices. (55)	16. Individual and team efforts in support of strategic objectives are recognized and rewarded. (13)	15. On average, mid-level supervisors here have five or more direct reports. (19)
11. It is more accurate to describe the culture of this organization as “persuade and cajole” than “command and control.” (29)	6. Leaders have access to the metrics they need to measure the key drivers of their goals and objectives. (48)	17. Besides pay, many other things motivate individuals to do a good job. (10)	
12. The primary role of UF’s administrative offices is to support the university’s academic units rather than to audit them. (29)	8. Conflicting messages are rarely sent to the various stakeholders. (32)		

Consider sharing this profiler with your staff as a way of evaluating or to initiate a conversation around your organization’s effectiveness at execution. How do you measure up? What changes could be implemented to improve your execution? Compare your perception with your staff’s and, if there is discrepancy, start having the necessary conversations to identify and address needed changes.

References

Gary L. Neilson, Karla L. Martin, Elizabeth Powers, (2008). The Secrets to Successful Strategy Execution, *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from: <https://hbr.org/2008/06/the-secrets-to-successful-strategy-execution/ar/5>