

# Fuzziness is the Enemy of Execution



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## Fuzziness is the Enemy of Execution: part 2 of the 'Execution Excellence' series

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***FOCUS Management** has produced a five part series on tackling the many challenges corporations face associated with strategic execution – the number one issue facing CEOs according to a recent study by the Harvard Business Review.*

**In Part 1**, you were introduced to a disease called strategy “executionitis”, which can be deadly for an organization... it is certainly bad news for equity owners whose return on investment depends on its companies’ strategies being successfully and efficiently deployed. This article is about an effective antidote—clarity, alignment and commitment to:

- The strategic focus and direction
- Individual accountability

When you have lots of both, you get “Great Execution of What Matters Most” or execution excellence.



Oftentimes, organizations struggle with poor execution. Even worse, organizations are devoting costly resources to execute well on the wrong things. When you are short of clarity, alignment and commitment, for either the strategic direction or individual accountability, these are the situations in which you are likely to find your organization. . None are desirable. And once again, all can be deadly.

So let's get started on the antidote to executionitis. We will start with clarity of the strategic direction of the organization. According to research, just over one-third of employees say that they have a clear understanding of what their organization is trying to achieve. Other research says that only about 20% say they can see the connection between their work and the corporate direction; and only 10% are committed to this direction. So understanding the end game; the destination, the 'why', is where all good planning should start. In real life it often starts without this hawk-eye clarity; the results often reflect that. Fuzziness is the enemy of execution.

How clear are these statements of strategic intent?

What does "optimized customer loyalty" really mean? How about "maximizing the inherent benefits of our products". And what the heck is "growing through employee engagement"? I am not challenging the goodness of these statements but as clear beacons of direction they fail the test of visibility. One should be able to look at an organizational goal, mission, or vision and say "I get it. I know what I need to do on Monday to help the enterprise, my department, and my team get there." One also needs to know where one is every day relative to the goal. 'Are we there yet?' is a question every parent hears during a family journey.

Compare the above fuzzy statements to these: 'By t year-end, 24 -per cent of our sales will be to repeat customers'; '30 per cent of our sales will be attributable to our unique value proposition by the end of Q-3'; '20 per cent of our open positions will be filled by internal candidates by year end'. These are examples of statements of vague strategic intent turned into SMART Goals where S= specific; M= measurable; A=achievable; R=relevant and T=time bounded.

So if I am the VP of HR, I now know that I need to set up my recruiting strategy to include internal candidates. The Manager of Training will need to think about how to get aligned to support the achievement of the goal by getting internal talent ready for new challenges.

**Commitment is a result of intra and inter-team conversations accelerated by the impact of personal rewards through the compensation mechanism.**

If I am the VP of Sales I will need to meet with Marketing and Product Development to determine how to sell to repeat customers and to our unique value propositions. Sales and Marketing need to be clearly aligned to inter-team dependencies.

The commitment to these goals will be enhanced by linking the compensation to the achievement of the SMART Goals

So you can see how clarity at the top drives clarity and alignment within the organization. Commitment is a result of intra and inter-team conversations accelerated by the impact of personal rewards through the compensation mechanism.

A simple test of clarity, alignment and commitment for you: Ask one of your reports this question:

“What are you working on these days that will help us execute our corporate strategic goals?”

After asking the question, wait....do not say a thing/do not coach/do not re-cap the strategic goals. Listen....make mental notes....say thank you. After 8-10 probes make a summary of your findings. How many were clear about the company's strategic goals? How many had personal objectives that were aligned with the corporate direction? Who seemed committed to achieve their objectives/action plans?

Based on your sample where would you put your mark along the 'Y' axis of the Execution Excellence chart? To what degree would you say that your sample group was clear, aligned and committed?

In the next article we will provide you with a way of assessing the degree of clarity for personal accountability, defined as who is responsible for what actions and what decisions.

This is the 'X' axis of the Execution Excellence Model.

The 'we' as expressed in the strategic intent needs to eventually turn into work that is expressed as 'I' will take action and I will make decisions that are aligned with strategic priorities. All strategic intentions should turn into work for someone.