

THE  TIMES

# Career and Jobs

## How to turn a strategy into action

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### Start with the right strategy

1 The better the strategy the more likely people are to support it, says Paul Connolly, the head of policy and strategy at Serco Consulting. Good strategies are challenging and realistic. They take robust account of market realities and resources, then set the most exciting and demanding objectives given those limitations, he explains.

### Think about implementation

2 There's no point developing an exciting strategy that is all ambition and no realism. Too often people see strategy and execution as two different things, said Alan Downey, a partner at KPMG, the professional services firm. Think of it as having an engineer working with the architect from the outset so that you can be sure that the building will be stable as well as striking. Big dreams are all very well but a pragmatic, cost-effective approach is more useful in the long run.

### Involve and communicate

3 Senior executives develop strategy but all employees will have to deliver it, so get people involved from the outset. It's hard for someone working on the frontline to get excited about big-picture vision; instead, explain what new plans mean for them and for the customers they work with, said Dereck Clow, managing director of Celerant Consulting in the UK. Put it in language that's about action, he said. You have to create something for them to rally around. Mr Downey added: make sure that your strategy is understood and owned by the people who have to implement it and live with the consequences.

### Pare down to essentials

4 Don't keep anything out of nostalgia. Operational support functions can be deadweight, Mr Connolly said. They think that they run the show and can be resistant to change but they exist for no other purpose than making sure strategy is realised. Make sure that everything that remains aligns with your strategic aims.

### Spend

5 Most organisations do not invest the right resources in implementation, Mr Clow said. They tend to assume that people can implement the new plans on top of their day jobs but this is rarely the case: you need people dedicated to making it happen. Choose people who are

natural networkers, who know how to work through different levels of the organisation and who have credibility with other people.

### **Keep it simple**

6 Keep actions and accountability clear so that everyone knows who is responsible for what, said Richard Brown, the managing partner at Cognosis, a consultancy. Everyone should be clear on the desired outcome. Have a well-articulated set of milestones. Short-term goals are much easier to understand than a major strategic vision, says the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants' (CIMA) report *Strategy Under Stress: managing strategy in a downturn*.

### **Measure success**

7 Make sure employees know how success will be measured, then measure it and let them know how things are going, Mr Clow said. A straightforward scorecard or dashboard that lets people keep track of how things are progressing is also helpful, Mr Brown said.

### **Don't panic**

8 Yes, there's a recession. That doesn't mean throwing your hands in the air, the CIMA report says. It means that companies need to apply the traditional processes and disciplines for formulating and executing strategy to their decisions for coping with the recession.

### **Be flexible**

9 If your original plan isn't working, don't keep pushing harder look at what you need to change. Stuff happens, so be reasonably adaptable, Mr Connolly said. React to changes in conditions but don't get distracted by rubbish, in particular the lure of short-term counter-productive gains. Stay focused. Mr Brown recommended holding "stop and think" sessions at least every three months, or more often if you spot problems. These should stop people blindly charging ahead without questioning whether what they are doing is effective.

### **Persist**

10 There will be bumps in the road, Mr Clow said. There are no straight lines from A to B. You may even hit a dead end. Rather than giving up, learn from what went wrong and keep going. The reason that things lose momentum is that if something does not go well, people say "oh, that's the same as last time". You need to be robust enough to move on. You also need to be open-minded enough to recognise failure. Don't be stubborn, Mr Connolly said. When you know that you've failed, go back to the drawing board, have an honest look at what went wrong and learn from your mistakes.