

You've done it. You're holding it in your hands. The perfect strategic plan. Months of effort by leaders from across the organization. You can almost taste the success it promises. Well, almost...

Until you remember that's how you felt holding last year's plan. The one you only accomplished 30% of. Still, there's a sense of satisfaction that you met the goal of creating a plan. The planning season is over, time to move on to other battles. You distribute the plan and everyone puts it on the shelf next to last year's plan.

It would be nice to break the cycle of strategic planning that doesn't generate results, but how?

Redefining Strategic Planning

A common missing link is the connection between the strategic plan (originating in the Executive Suite) and individual performance plans (driven by HR). For the sake of this discussion, we'll assume you have a solid individual performance planning process that gives everyone in the organization a clear picture of the most important things they personally need to accomplish. And I'll assume your strategic planning process delivers a clear picture of the most important things the organization needs to accomplish.

Which comes first in your organization, the strategic plan or individual goals? If you said individual goals, you have a problem. The individuals in the organization are the ones who do the work that accomplishes the organization's goals. But they're setting individual goals without knowing the organizational goals their work is supposed to contribute to.

But if you said strategic planning comes first, you have another problem. Two problems, actually. One is that your plan is based on assumptions about what people can accomplish. You may feel confident in your assumptions, but then why didn't you hit last year's goals?

The second problem is bigger. It's usually evidenced in the eye-rolling that occurs when the leader announces this year's organizational goals. The buy-in is missing. It's a simple principle: People are more likely to buy into (a.k.a. work harder at) goals they've spoken into.

Integrated Planning

Strategic planning and performance planning are often isolated rather than integrated. If integration sounds too complicated, stick with your simpler approach that doesn't deliver results.

An integrated, interactive planning process assures that team goals add up to successful organizational goals, and that individual goals add up to successful team goals. It does require a couple of feedback cycles within the strategic planning process, and that's likely to stretch the planning cycle. So start earlier. Or get radical: Change it from an annual project to an ongoing process. Or just do it like you always have and accept those results.

This is a dramatic change for most organizations, but dramatic results usually require dramatic change. Contact us if you would like to explore how this might work in your organization.

