

When Strategy Meets Monday Morning

Organisational execution capability – from strategic decisions to shared leadership, training and measurable results

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Beautiful strategies are worthless in practice when Monday morning arrives unless the organisation has developed a substantial capacity to act.

Plans do not execute themselves. People do.

It sounds obvious. Yet many companies discover that carefully developed strategies, ambitious objectives and impressive action plans fail to deliver the expected results.

The management team has spent time on analysis, priorities and strategic decisions. Perhaps a successful strategy workshop produced agreement about the direction. But three weeks later, day-to-day operations have taken over the agenda again.

Meetings revolve around the same problems. Decisions are postponed. Strategic initiatives compete with urgent operational tasks, and employees carry on much as before.

The problem is not necessarily the strategy. It is the organisation's ability to put it into practice. This is where organisational execution capability becomes decisive.

1. What is organisational execution capability?

Organisational execution capability is a company's collective ability to translate decisions and strategic ambitions into coordinated action, changed behaviour and tangible results.

Decision-making capability: The ability to choose a direction, set priorities and make necessary decisions – even when information is incomplete, interests conflict or the consequences are uncomfortable.

Execution capability: The ability to turn decisions into real action, with people cooperating, taking responsibility, solving problems and maintaining momentum.

Neither capability can stand alone. A management team may excel at making decisions but be weak at following them through. Conversely, an organisation may be full of skilled, hard-working employees efficiently completing tasks that no longer support the company's strategic direction.

Organisational execution capability emerges when decision-making capability and execution capability are connected through shared leadership.

It is not just about doing things right, but about doing the right things – and enabling the whole organisation to work purposefully towards them.

Let us examine what prevents this from happening – and what it takes to succeed.

2. Why does strategy execution stall?

When strategies are not implemented, there is rarely a single explanation. More often, several organisational and leadership factors combine:

- Too many priorities compete for the same resources.
- Responsibility is shared among several people without clear ownership.
- The strategy is expressed in language that has little meaning in day-to-day operations.
- Leaders agree in meetings but prioritise differently afterwards.
- Decisions are not followed up consistently enough.
- Organisational structures and habits reinforce existing behaviour.
- There is insufficient room to learn, experiment and adjust.

It is tempting to respond with more plans, more meetings and even more reporting. But when the underlying problem concerns leadership behaviour and insufficient organisational capacity, further planning is rarely the answer.

We need to investigate what actually happens between a strategic decision and operational action.

What do leaders do differently on Monday morning because the strategy has been adopted?

If the answer is unclear, implementation is already in difficulty.

3. Execution capability begins with inner leadership preparedness

In more than 35 years of working with leadership, I have repeatedly experienced that organisational execution capability begins with the individual leader.

A strategy may be logical and well supported. But if a leader lacks the personal preparedness to handle uncertainty, conflict and pressure, creating the necessary momentum becomes difficult.

Since 1998, I have worked with the concept of “inner preparedness” – the personal resources that enable us to maintain perspective, make decisions and act when circumstances demand it.

- Self-awareness and understanding our own patterns of reaction.
- The ability to remain calm and exercise sound judgement under pressure.
- The courage to make difficult decisions.
- The willingness to acknowledge mistakes and change course.
- The ability to listen, challenge our assumptions and learn.
- Confidence in our ability to deal with new and unforeseen situations.

Inner leadership preparedness is not a personality trait that some people are born with and others lack. It is a capacity that can be developed through experience, reflection, feedback and purposeful training.

A leader who cannot turn decisions into action will struggle to mobilise an organisation to do so.

4. Zooming in and out – a crucial leadership discipline

A central element of organisational execution capability is the ability to shift perspective deliberately. For many years, I have worked with the idea of “zooming in and out” in leadership: just as a camera can do both – though not simultaneously – a leader must master both extremes.

Zooming out means lifting your gaze from the immediate task to see the organisation in a broader context. What is our strategic direction? What has changed? How do individual decisions relate to customer needs, company resources and desired outcomes?

Zooming in means focusing on the specific situation. What needs to be decided now? Who does what? What instructions are required? How do we ensure the task is completed?

Both perspectives are essential. A leader who constantly zooms in risks becoming immersed in details and losing sight of strategic direction. A leader who constantly zooms out risks becoming so preoccupied with visions and broad perspectives, disconnected from reality, that no one translates decisions into action.

Good strategy execution requires the ability to switch between the big picture and practical action at the right moment.

This applies not only to the individual leader but to the entire management team. Leaders must maintain a shared direction while acting quickly and independently when circumstances require it.

5. From individual leaders to an action-oriented leadership team

An organisation does not become capable of decisive action simply by employing a number of talented leaders. Its overall leadership capacity depends largely on how those leaders work together.

Individual members of a management team may be highly competent and results-oriented yet generate limited collective progress. This happens, for example, when:

- Departmental objectives take precedence over shared company goals.
- Difficult issues are not addressed openly.
- Disagreement is hidden behind apparent consensus.
- Decisions are renegotiated outside the meeting room.
- No one holds colleagues accountable for follow-up and delivery.

That is why I work with developing shared high team standards. The management team itself defines and trains the standards that should characterise its cooperation and leadership behaviour. For example:

- We challenge each other's views before making decisions.
- We support collective decisions, even when our own proposal was not chosen.
- We hold one another mutually accountable for agreements, actions and results.
- We help each other succeed across organisational boundaries.
- We learn systematically from successes and take responsibility for our mistakes.

Such standards only create value when translated into concrete behaviour and practised in the management team's daily work. A shared standard is not a poster on a wall. It is something observable in meetings, decisions, collaboration and results.

6. Why resistance to change is natural

When a strategy calls for new workflows, changed roles or different priorities, resistance will almost always arise. This is rarely a sign of poor commitment; rather, it is a natural phenomenon.

Organisms subjected to destabilising influences automatically seek a new equilibrium. Resistance to change is not ill will; it is predictable and can therefore be planned for.

People and organisations develop habits and ways of working that provide stability and predictability. When these are challenged, uncertainty arises. Some employees worry about their competencies. Others are unsure what changes mean for their roles, responsibilities or relationships.

Some leaders may themselves hesitate to abandon ways of working that previously made them successful. Strategy execution therefore cannot be reduced to communicating a decision and then checking whether it has been carried out.

It requires leading people. Leaders must build an understanding of why change is necessary, involve the relevant employees and help the organisation develop new skills and working habits. There is, in fact, an effective method for addressing this, called "Firestorm".

Change only becomes lasting when the new behaviour becomes a natural part of how the organisation works.

This requires clear leadership, practical training and consistent follow-up.

7. Execution capability can be trained – even under pressure

One important lesson from my work with High Performance Teams is that execution capability is not developed through teaching and discussion alone. It must be experienced and practised.

Through OLTC, we have conducted numerous intensive leadership training programmes over the years, where participants develop decision-making, collaboration and execution skills in demanding circumstances.

It is a distinctive setup in which leaders spend three to four days alongside experienced special-forces instructors, in Denmark and abroad, practising the ability to solve complex tasks as one team.

The purpose is not to put people under pressure for its own sake. The purpose is to make leadership behaviour visible. When time is short, information is incomplete and the situation changes unexpectedly, it becomes clear how people actually make decisions and work together.

Who takes responsibility? Who maintains perspective? Who listens? Who loses focus? And how does the team help each other get back on track?

After one programme, a participant described the importance of choosing a priority, filtering out distractions and maintaining complete focus. Another emphasised the ability to remain calm and authoritative when things became intense. Together, these experiences illustrated how to zoom out to understand the whole situation, decide quickly and then zoom in to give clear new instructions.

Training only has real value when the experience leads to better decisions and changed behaviour in the organisation.

8. From strategy to action – a practical execution discipline

How can a management team develop greater organisational execution capability? My suggestion is to work systematically through six connected steps.

Step 1. Establish a shared understanding of reality

Start with facts. What do customers experience? How do processes work? Where do errors, waiting time, duplicated effort or missing decisions arise? Use relevant data, interviews, customer insights and dialogue with employees. Building collective execution capability is difficult if the management team does not share a picture of the organisation's current situation.

[See how we work with customer insights in practice.](#)

Step 2. Choose a few decisive priorities

A strategy also means choosing what not to do. If every initiative is equally important, none receives sufficient priority. The management team should be able to articulate the few most important results to achieve in the coming period. Just as importantly: What must we stop doing to free up capacity?

Step 3. Translate strategy into concrete leadership behaviour

What must leaders do differently? Delegate more? Follow up more closely? Cooperate better across functions? Involve customers earlier? Make decisions faster? Describing desired results is not enough. We must also identify the behaviour that will create them.

[See how we develop leadership behaviour in practice.](#)

Step 4. Establish clear ownership

Every strategic initiative must have an accountable owner. Others may contribute, but it must be clear who is responsible for progress, coordination and follow-up. Ownership also requires the authority to act and access to the necessary resources.

Step 5. Train and test in the real organisation

Leadership development should be directly connected to the challenges posed by the strategy. This may involve action learning, practical development assignments, feedback, coaching and joint management-team training. Participants must not merely understand what they should do. They must practise doing it.

[See how we develop management teams.](#)

Step 6. Follow up, learn and adjust

Agree on a regular follow-up rhythm, for example every two weeks for the most important initiatives. The management team should review not only results but what actually happened: Which actions have been completed? What have we learned? What obstacles have emerged? What decisions are needed now? The purpose is not more control but greater shared learning and momentum.

9. Measure not only results – measure the behaviour that creates them

Many companies measure the impact of a strategy only once it appears in revenue, profitability or productivity. These are necessary measures, but they often arrive late.

The management team should therefore also track indicators showing whether the organisation is moving towards the desired outcomes. These might include:

- Completed strategic milestones.
- Progress on cross-functional initiatives.
- The quality and speed of decisions.
- Customers' experience of quality and cooperation.
- Changes in relevant work processes.
- Observable leadership behaviour.
- Employees' ability to apply new competencies.

What matters is that the measures are connected to the strategy. A long list of KPIs does not necessarily create greater execution capability.

A few relevant measures, combined with clear accountability and consistent follow-up, can be far more valuable.

This is also where the management team's ability to zoom in and out matters: it must assess overall strategic progress while understanding the specific factors affecting results.

10. Four questions that reveal a management team's execution capability

One simple way to examine the organisation's ability to execute is to ask the management team four questions:

1. What are the three most important results we must achieve in the coming quarter – and what will we stop doing to make room for them?
2. Who has unequivocal responsibility for each result, and what authority do they have?
3. What will we follow up on every two weeks to see whether our actions are creating the intended progress?
4. What do we actually do when an agreement is not honoured or reality changes the assumptions?

If the management team cannot give clear, shared answers, there is reason to examine whether the strategy is truly ready for implementation. The questions are simple. But they often demand more courage, openness and leadership discipline than one might expect.

Conclusion: When strategy works – even on Monday morning

Organisational execution capability is not about making people work faster or squeezing more activities into their calendars. It is about creating an organisation where people know what matters, understand their responsibilities, cooperate effectively and have the competence and courage to act.

It requires alignment between strategy, leadership, structure, culture and everyday behaviour. It requires leaders with strong inner preparedness who can zoom in and out, make decisions and create a shared direction.

It requires management teams with shared high team standards, where members both support and challenge each other. And it requires practical training and systematic follow-up so the organisation becomes better at acting – not merely better at planning.

The real test of a strategy does not come when it is presented to the management team. It comes on Monday morning, when people must do something differently.

That is when organisational execution capability proves its worth.

Further reading

- [Strategy and execution – from decision to action](#)
- [High Performance Teams](#)
- [Change Management and Organisational Culture](#)
- [When Leadership Works: Why Good Intentions Are Not Enough](#)