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## Lost in translation? Seven solutions for turning leadership decisions into delivery

### Why do most great strategies lose the intended value?

Research in recent years shows why great strategies, great ideas, and big leadership decisions do not get well executed - and the intention is lost in translation. The value of an organisation is no more than the sum of the decisions it makes and successfully executes. Only 15% of companies say they are designed and managed to make and execute decisions effectively. Yet as Thomas Edison said: "Vision without execution is hallucination".

Looking at a range of published material, an integrated and systemic approach is what is needed to turn strategic decisions into action, effectively. It has seven components:

1. **Compelling direction and aligned leadership:** with a clear vision and priorities combined with aligned leadership to drive them. In average companies, only 12% of executives *strongly* agree with the vision and priorities, compared to 74% who do so in high-performing companies.
2. **Clear and effective decision process:** where leaders take decision-making seriously enough to have a well-understood process, audit its effectiveness, train for improvements and apply this across the organisation. Good leadership team decisions have four stages of this process:
  1. Gathering, sharing and understanding evidence from the right sources
  2. Developing two or three strong options, with clear criteria
  3. Making a decision with robust, safe debate and commitment to the outcome
  4. Executing the decision, with clear accountability, a plan and progress-tracking.

Recent neuroscience adds another vital factor: that better ideas and decisions are more likely when there is time for quiet reflection between these stages of working in teams.

3. **Clear decision accountabilities:** where roles and accountabilities for decisions are clear, reinforced by regular progress checks, a few strong metrics and feedback points. In a survey of organisations good at execution, 71% of people know who makes what type of decision. In others it is only 31%.
4. **Communication and follow-through:** where there is transparency about priorities and progress measures, senior decisions will not come as a surprise, and are much more likely to lead to action. Similarly, clear communication of a decision to the right people maximises the chance of success.
5. **Right people in the right jobs:** where jobs are defined to emphasise deliverables, outcomes and the importance of pace. People are selected and promoted on the basis of delivery capability and training to excel that way. Clever, expert, technocrats do not always make the greatest implementers.
6. **Culture of excellent frontline execution:** 'At my time at IBM I came to see that culture isn't just one aspect of the game – it is the game' said Lou Gerstner. A 'delivery' culture is best based on more than just money (which is not the strongest motivator). Issues such as quality, customer satisfaction, efficiency are more powerful drivers of motivation for excellent execution. They need to be combined with leadership which demands and creates a strong delivery culture, backed by metrics and measures to track effectiveness.
7. **Processes and rules support, but do not drive:** where there is a strong execution culture. With clear direction, priorities, roles and accountabilities, there is less need for rules, hierarchy and bureaucracy.