The 4 Most Common Challenges Facing Enterprise Strategy Teams Today

Strategy teams are tasked with seeing around corners. It’s a challenging job.

February 25, 2018 6 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

A corporate strategy team is tasked with analyzing information about its company’s challenges, objectives, capacities and opportunities. These types of teams consolidate strategic aims and emerging facts from multiple business areas into a defined, comprehensive framework, then recommend how best to implement the strategy across their organizations.

The enterprise strategy team might seek top-line growth through an acquisition-centric strategy or through potential joint ventures. It could also recommend launching a new product or selling through a new channel. Alternatively, it could pursue profitability growth by enhancing operational efficiency via streamlining or restructuring. To say that strategy teams have a challenging job would be an understatement. They’re asked to look around corners, envision the future and make bets on some of the most unforeseen developments.

While the job is always challenging, we spoke to folks across our client base to better understand some of the biggest challenges confronting enterprise strategy teams today:

1. Lacking internal expertise.

Most companies are facing unprecedented disruption from key market trends, but that doesn’t mean the enterprise strategy team has the bandwidth to fully analyze and understand them. For instance, it’s impossible to develop a strategy based around, say, predictive analytics and the Internet of Things (IoT) if your strategy team lacks sufficient knowledge and subject matter expertise to analyze these important data science trends. Companies, unfortunately, typically focus on what they’re good at — until something new comes along and is potentially even more critical.

Possible Solution: Develop innovative, future-oriented ways of bringing in the talent your strategy team needs. For example, experts with skills in predictive maintenance might be prohibitively costly to hire on a full-time basis, but your enterprise strategy team could access on-demand talent platforms that allow you to bring in experts. Additionally, many companies are starting to think differently about the way they manage, retain and incentivize top talent for their strategy teams. Many forward-thinking companies are adopting on-demand talent platforms to increase their precision in accessing strategic talent via internal employees, alumni, retirees or external workforce channels.

Related: “7 Things to Outsource Immediately to Scale Your Business”

2. Meeting aggressive timelines.

Corporate strategy teams are often given tight deadlines based on the scheduled release of earnings reports or board meetings, which have little or nothing to do with the underlying challenges of the project. These “externally driven deadlines” can get in the way of delivering optimal results. Unrealistic deadlines, untethered to the internal demands of

the project itself, can also burn out the strategy team, leading (again) to disappointing deliverables.

Possible Solution: You may need to assemble teams from multiple sources to deliver on strategic goals in a way that meets externally driven deadlines, perhaps using on-demand talent to supplement full-time members in order to reach the finish line faster. You're agile only when you develop this capacity to assemble and blend the assets you need. Hollywood has been assembling talent this way (such as FTEs from studios working with on-demand talent like actors) for decades, and now enterprise strategy teams are doing the same.

3. Learning to blend digital tools and hybrid teams.

Every corporate strategy team should be constantly pursuing efficiency. That's a growing challenge, however, because it requires the capacity to constantly restructure enterprise assets and talent. As new digital tools like the IoT emerge, enabling enterprises to collect data in real time, strategy teams will be hard-pressed to learn how to use all of this data to inform strategic development and decision-making.

Basic questions need to be answered: What value creation does the data enable? How do we understand the role of technology and people in creating that value? Do we have the right technology and people to fully leverage our data strategically? How do we pull all of these assets, including our data, together in an optimal way to define and drive strategy (and the work of strategy teams)?

Possible Solution: Learning here means trying things out, testing, monitoring progress and then integrating the lessons as you scale across the organization. The learning is never finished because technologies continue to evolve, creating new strategic opportunities every day. A great new technology may

help your team work better, get a pilot project going or further grow your strategy team's "organizational speed limit." It demands you start small, learn and then quickly scale what you've absorbed.

Related: "Having a Digital Edge Is Not Just About Technology"

4. Evangelizing a "change nindset."

Corporate strategy teams that fail to adopt innovative strategies and fall behind their market rivals have one thing in common: a bias favoring the way they've always done things. Strategy is about change, and driving change requires individuals and organizations to have a "change mindset." It takes humility to admit that a better way might exist elsewhere; it takes an open mind to understand why that better way worked somewhere else and how it might be applied here; it takes determination and follow-through to drive change, aligning your people, processes and systems around new ways of working. Coping with and taking advantage of change is the ultimate challenge for enterprises and strategy teams.

Possible Solution: Find, hire, develop and reward strategic thinkers who exemplify a mindset of change. Fully develop the employees you have within the enterprise strategy team and bring in new talent for know-how and fresh perspectives. Having walls between the "inside" (how we do things here) and "outside" (how others do things) is dangerous in a business landscape that's evolving so fast. Break down the walls to seek great, strategic ideas everywhere, even far beyond your enterprise.

Related: "Change Is Not Enough – We Must Evolve"

The key challenges described above demand agile talent solutions flexible enough to keep up with today's accelerating pace of change. This will require strategy teams to build in agility, preparing them for whatever comes next. The process

will require new muscles to be developed, but in the end, it should leave strategy teams (and their companies) far more effective and dynamic than they are today.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/309334