

Communicating Strategy

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Preface

In early 2006, I noticed that my websites were getting a lot of activity on the topic of ‘communicating strategy’. It was closely behind ‘strategy’ as a topic of interest. As I researched the Internet to see what else was available on the topic, I realized it was a topic that was not well covered.

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However, within a few sites I came across one that suggested five principles of communicating strategy, of which one was, ‘You should not communicate your strategy, as you will leak your strategy to the competition.’ I was incensed by this idea, for two reasons. If your strategy is so unsustainable that your competitors can simply copy it that easily, then it is a pretty poor strategy. Secondly, if you don’t tell your people about your strategy, how can they possibly execute it and help you refine it and deliver it?

So, incensed by the ‘don’t communicate your strategy’ idea I looked for books on communicating strategy. There seemed to be none. There were plenty on strategy formulation, and strategy implementation. There were many on public relations. There were lots and lots of interpersonal communications. But there seemed to be nothing specifically on communicating strategy. So I decided to write one.

I have been helping organizations describe, develop, articulate and communicate their strategy more effectively for over 12 years. I have been privileged to work in some great consultancies with some great colleagues and wonderful clients. The experiences that make up this book come from a whole variety of different types of organizations. I have been on the receiving end of strategy, as a line manager, and helped to formulate it in a variety of organizations. When I worked for the originators of the balanced scorecard, Norton & Kaplan, the emphasis was always on the understanding and drivers of the strategy much more than just its measurement and management. Rather it has been about helping the management team be clear about the underlying thinking around the strategy, so they could walk out of their boardroom with a complete and consistent understanding in their heads of what they were trying to achieve, and why. Much of this has involved helping

them have a richer conversation as they develop and articulate it. They then have a deeper understanding of the assumptions and underlying thinking, so they can tell the story effectively to their people. The techniques I have seen, learnt and developed through these experiences are in this book.

This book started as a short e-book, but soon developed into this fuller book. Its working title was 'Heads, hearts and hands', which reflected the strategy being in the head, as a logically correct thing to do; being in the heart, as an emotional response and engagement; and being in the hands, so it is executed.

Part of the reason for the growth in the content was the need to explain the many practical ways in which the strategy is communicated. It is easy to say what should be done. It takes longer to explain how to do it, and I wanted the 'how to do it' in this book. I also wanted to provide people with options. There is no one way to communicate strategy well. This is a book of strategy communication tactics that people can pick and choose from as they see fit.

My work with clients has often involved coaching them in language and presentation techniques to help get the message across. Many of these techniques I have learnt in my training as a facilitator and presenter. Some come from my training as a Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) master practitioner. However, I rarely tell my clients that they are using NLP techniques, preferring just to show people great ways to do things. Of course if they ask, I tell them (and I have had several side conversations that go, 'You are using NLP techniques, aren't you?'). You will recognize techniques from a variety of sources. No prior understanding of these techniques or approaches is required for this book.

I recently bumped into a chief executive I had worked with around 3 years earlier. She said that one of the biggest differences the work had made was to the middle managers, who were now engaged with the bigger picture. They were no longer working in silos, but making a much larger contribution to the organization. I like to think that this has not only helped the senior managers, but has made the working lives of those middle managers better, as well as those of the organization's customers.

Throughout this book there are many examples that illustrate points or provide an example. They have come from my many clients over the years and some I have interviewed for research. It is in the nature of strategy work that it remains confidential. They know who they are. There are many others, such as fellow consultants and colleagues, who have also contributed to this work in so many ways that they are probably not aware of.

I am grateful to my colleague Liz Morrison, who read an early draft and encouraged me to develop the book properly. Also to Jonathan Norman of Gower, who saw the value of such a title and on reading a version

kindly referred to it as 'a lovely little book'. Gower has moved away from their normal practice and are publishing this as a paperback rather than a hardback. I thank him for his support.

Finally I would like to thank my wife Deborah, who read through the various versions, tidying up my language, checking for errors and correcting my grammar. Any remaining errors are mine. The final recommendation comes from her, when she said, 'This is no worse than any other management book I have read.'

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