

Full Length Research Paper

Converting the military strategy principle of simplicity into a successful tool for strategy execution in a geographically dispersed organisation

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Accepted 28 February, 2012

The research reports a case study conducted to determine whether the application of simplicity as a military principle can assist a geographically dispersed organisation in executing strategy more effectively. An investigation was first conducted into the main reasons why strategy execution is not fully effective in an identified geographical dispersed organisation. A survey and semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify these inhibitors. A comparison with existing literature identified the 4 main requirements to effective strategy execution in this organisation. A review of the application of simplicity in the military context was then completed and a comprehensive secondary assessment, integrated with semi-structured interviews with general staff in the South African Army identified military approaches to simplicity and its impact on execution successes. A conceptual content analysis matched successful military approaches to simplicity with the main drivers of ineffective strategy execution in the organisation. The output was strategy execution inhibitors in the organisation, with matched approaches to simplicity from interviews with military professionals. The compilation of a specific framework for simplification was proposed for strategy execution at all levels within the organisation, with tools and techniques discussed to ensure the simplification of the execution of the strategic objectives.

Key words: Strategy implementation, simplicity, military strategy.

INTRODUCTION

To achieve strategic goals, a company requires a sound strategy and effective operations to execute the strategy (Kaplan and Norton, 2008). Both are critical for success and they must be interconnected.

Just as a military force is deployed for battle in the field, a geographically dispersed organisation has capabilities and resources that it must apply at the right time and place to ensure that the desired effect is obtained. This means that the efforts and skills of all the geographical hubs must be concentrated and focussed on achieving the strategic objectives from head office.

Recent studies found that only 10% of large companies achieve their growth targets (Moore, 2008) and that

companies realise only 63% of the financial performance promised by their strategies (Mankins and Steele, 2005). This indicates that the strategies employed by most companies end up in failure in terms of the achievement of the objectives of these strategies.

Jensen (1997) suggested that strategies fail in execution due to the complexities inherent in them as well as the inability of management to communicate clear goals and objectives.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to determine whether and how the military principle of simplicity can be applied to a geographically dispersed organisation to improve its strategy execution. The three objectives of this research

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were to firstly determine the underlying causes of ineffectiveness in strategy execution in a geographically dispersed organisation, secondly to establish how simplicity improves strategy execution in military organisations on the operational level and lastly to determine and define specific military approaches to strategy execution that can improve strategy execution in a geographically dispersed organisation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategy is derived from the Greek word “strategos”, literally meaning “general” (Horwath, 2006). In business terms, Pearce and Robinson (2005) define strategy as a process where the flow of information through organized stages of analysis assists and ensures that a company achieves its predefined aims.

David (1997) defines strategic management as the art and science of formulation, execution and evaluation of cross-functional decisions enabling an organisation to achieve its set objectives. It requires the focus of integration of internal functions and capabilities to achieve organisational success. Raps (2004) states that a strategy must not only define an organisation’s direction, but is also the simplified definition of top management’s long term responsibilities.

The most challenging task for management is to implement a strategy in accordance with the strategic plan. For this, strategy must be understood by everyone involved in and responsible for strategy execution (Kaplan and Norton, 2001). Any deviations will warrant re-alignment, re-planning and require change management (Jones and Hill, 2009).

Apart from reaching organisational goals, well defined and implemented strategies will ensure an organisation’s welfare by enhancing an organisation’s ability to identify and manage organisational challenges and problems; use resources optimally; focus on the best alternatives for organisational success; and reducing the probability and effects of resistance to change (Pearce and Robinson, 2005).

Li et al. (2008) reviewed various definitions and perspectives on the meaning of strategy execution and defined it as a dynamic, iterative and complex process, consisting of a set of decisions and activities by managers and employees. This process is affected by numerous internal and external factors and aims to turn strategic plans into reality in order to achieve strategic objectives.

Military strategy

The execution of a business strategy, just as the execution of a military strategy, must be able to evolve to respond to the changing environment in which it is

executed. According to Clemons and Santamaria (2002) warfare takes place on a physical, psychological and analytical level.

It is the responsibility of military commanders (senior managers) to ensure that resources available to them not only survive, but prevail in operational theatres (Clemons and Santamaria, 2002). A successful military commander must establish and maintain a balance between what he requires (the aim or end state), the methods available to him (ways) and the resources available to achieve his objective (means) (Maude and Graham, 1997).

The levels of business strategy can be compared to the military strategy, operational and tactical levels in military strategy and can be defined as follows (Tom and Barrons, 2006): Military strategy determines the overall availability of resources to achieve a desired and realistically achievable aim or outcome. Operational strategy entails the leadership and guidance from commanders in the actual theatre of operations and the tactical level is the spear end of any force and the business end of the fighting.

Principles of war and strategy execution

War at the strategic level is considered an intellectual process, with the development and execution of strategy both being creative activities (Johnsen et al., 1995). A framework is required to assist military leaders in the definition, planning and execution of strategy. The nine Principles of war are the foundations on which all military operations are planned and executed (US Army Field Manual, 2010).

Taking this into account, it is clear that investigating the link between military and business strategy is not a new topic (Tom and Barrons, 2006).

The following principles of war are considered applicable to strategy execution (Abbott et al., 2008; US Army Field Manual, 2010; Johnsen et al., 1995): Objective (selection and maintenance of the aim), initiative (offensive actions), unity of effort (unity of command), focus, economy of effort (economy of force), concentration of force, flexibility, sustainability and simplicity. Simplicity ensures that strategies and plans are clearly defined, concise and easily understandable. This ensures motivation, focus and a unified effort to ensure successful strategy execution (Etling, 1985). Simplicity implies the planning and execution of a strategy that would not exceed the capabilities of the organisation responsible to execute the strategy (Johnsen et al., 1995).

Simplicity and strategy execution

Hrebiniak and Joyce (1986) identify the translation of long term strategic aims into specific short term objectives as a critical requirement of the process of successful

strategy execution.

De Bono (1998) suggests that an organisation with smaller operational units organised so that they are capable of serving the mission of the organisation can be controlled more effectively by management than an organisation comprising of large units.

Simplicity and strategy execution in the military

Jones (1996) describes simplicity as a very important military principle, with experience in the military domain indicating that complex plans often fail due to the inherent difficulties caused by the complexity thereof. This inhibits effective coordination between forces (resources) and ultimately affects the successful execution of strategic plans.

Tom and Barrons (2006) describe the three components critical to be clear and defined in the execution of military operations namely ends (the strategic objectives); ways (the methods and options to achieve organisational goals); and means (all resources available). In military terms, simplicity leads to a better understanding of a commander's intent (strategic objectives) and will ensure leaders at all levels understand and are capable of accomplishing the mission (US Army Field Manual, 2010).

The application of concepts enables simplicity in military execution (de Bono, 1998). Concepts assist a military commander in defining the general direction and purpose for the envisaged operation.

Simplicity and strategy execution in the organisation

Hrebiniak and Joyce (1986) stipulate that organisations must take deliberate actions to reduce the complexity and scope of their strategic plans to manageable and focussed portions, with responsible personnel allocated and accountable for the execution of these smaller objectives. Simplicity addresses the required relationship between managers, employees and other functions within the organisation.

Simplicity in strategy execution will minimize the possibility of misunderstandings and can limit confusion at lower levels in an organisation (Seitz et al., 2002). The strategic plan must be communicated in such a manner that the intended executors must totally understand the desired deliverables of the strategy, whether the short term objective, or the overall desired outcome (Johnsen et al., 1995).

Strategy execution in a geographically dispersed organisation

Companies that operate in geographically dispersed areas encounter differing requirements and market

conditions, thus requiring different approaches in delivering services or products (Pierce and Robinson, 2005). David (1997) states that geographically dispersed companies require strategies that are tailored specifically to the needs and characteristics of the clients within that area.

Pearce and Robinson (2005) also indicate that the inherent responsiveness to local market conditions that these companies have, is the key strategic advantage of this type of structure. This requires strategies at operational level (tactics) to be aligned to the needs of each geographical area specifically. For successful strategy execution, close functional coordination is required with the target market (the customer).

To ensure effective execution of strategy, managers must ensure that all levels and areas of an organisation understand the link between strategic thought (knowing) and the tactical actions required (obtaining) (Eicher, 2006).

Pleshko and Nickerson (2008) state that strategic orientation, instead of the structural configuration of an organisation, are most relevant to the overall performance of the organisation in strategy execution. They further state that this alignment with strategic objectives also incorporates adaptability within the organisation to external changes, when required.

Raps (2004) emphasises that traditional strategy execution approaches, as applied in most organisations, overemphasize organisational structural aspects and limitations in strategy execution. The organisation should rather attempt to focus on all organisation-internal success factors responsible and required for successful strategy execution, namely an organisation's culture, human resources and control systems.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A case study design was followed since the focus of the research was on determining "WHY" strategy execution is ineffective in a geographically dispersed organisation and "HOW" simplicity, as a principle of war, can assist in the improvement of this occurrence. A case study was best suited for this research because multiple sources of evidence were utilised and prior research and theoretical propositions were then used in the analysis of the objectives (Yin, 2003). The case study involved a mixed methodology of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research was conducted in four phases:

Phase 1: Investigated the main reasons and indicators why strategy execution is not fully effective in a geographically dispersed organisation. This phase involved the quantitative analysis of a survey, whose content was informed by the literature and sent to the management of the subject of the case study.

Phase 2: Reviewed the application of simplicity in the military context through semi-structured interviews with currently serving military personnel with operational experience.

Phase 3: Looked at 'pattern matching' of successful military approaches to simplicity with the main drivers of ineffective strategy execution in the geographically dispersed organisation.

Phase 4: Involved the compilation of a specific model and tools of

simplification as a suggested application tool in a geographically dispersed organisation to ensure the simplification of strategic objectives in execution.

Host company description

To obtain a better understanding of interview and survey responses, a description of the geographically dispersed company, henceforth referred to as the "host company", is required.

The host company is a subsidiary of a privately held organisation. It provides dry bulk material-handling services, as well as crushing and screening and minerals beneficiation services on an outsourced basis. It has a substantial fleet of mobile equipment for moving and managing materials on mines and smelters on an outsourced basis, in both their raw and beneficiated form.

It also designs, builds, operates and maintains fixed and semi-fixed plant and conveyors in these service areas for their customers. Further services range from stockpiling and feeding materials for collieries and metals processing plants to disposing of coal discard and ash in an environmentally acceptable manner.

The head office is situated in Johannesburg, with regional hub offices in Mpumalanga, Gauteng, the Northern Cape and North West provinces. The host company is currently divided into two distinctive operational business units, namely Coal and Metals. Operational directors are appointed for the functioning of these business units.

Within these business units, area managers are responsible for the operational functioning of defined hub areas, allocated according to clients. Hub areas are sub-divided into Site Offices, situated at client premises. It applies a key performance indicator (KPI) system to manage the organisation effectively. Although it applies standardised policies and procedures (through a system called the library of standards (LOS)) to govern operational activities within the organisation, operations and the application of assets and equipment can differ from site to site and even from area to area.

RESULTS

Host company survey

Questionnaires were forwarded to 228 managers within the host company. 52 questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher. From these respondents the distribution between the levels of management is as follows:

1. Senior management – 15 respondents. Senior management included the managing director, directors and senior managers reporting directly to them.
2. Middle management – 14 respondents. Middle management included area managers and head office department managers.
3. Lower management – 23 respondents. Included site managers, safety managers and site clerks, training officials, as well as area offices' functional managers.

The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions aimed at determining possible reasons and indicators that inhibited successful strategy execution in the host company.

The specific questions were drawn up after reviewing the requirements for successful strategy execution at organisational level as identified by Evans and Richardson (2008), Frigo (2003), Hrebiniak (2004) and Pearce and Robinson (2005).

In reviewing these writings, 4 main requirements were identified as most applicable to successful strategy execution in an organisation and were used as inputs for the survey questions with results indicated subsequently.

Requirement 1: Clear and simplified short term measurable plans aligned with long term objectives

73% of the respondents understood the strategic objectives of the organisation but commented that there was inconsistency and uncertainty of the strategy. Only half the respondents agreed that the organisation had methods in place to reduce the uncertainty associated with the strategic plan execution. Comments from respondents included that the strategy execution could have been simpler to avoid certain effects. 69% of the respondents felt that strategic plans were understandable but commented that this was often only at upper management level with less information given to the employees.

Requirement 2: Effective change management capabilities to adapt to influencing factors

62% of respondents agreed that change was effectively managed but commented that too many plans and meetings made the process slow while the focus should be on the clients. 58% of the respondents felt that responsibility for achievements were taken by the operational managers but that most managers were result orientated and only responsible for certain objectives.

Requirement 3: Employee empowerment with clear responsibilities during execution to ensure clarity on the desired outcome and subsequent rewards

67% of respondents acknowledged that the objectives were communicated to them but commented that they were not discussed in detail or addressed to the lower levels. 77% of the respondents felt that they contributed to the attainment of the objectives in the execution of daily tasks but regular contact with management and discussions of short term requirements was lacking. Only 33% of the respondents agreed that rewards were aligned with the attainment of predefined and communicated goals on a yearly basis.

Only 50% of the respondents felt that the intent of the Exco was clearly stated. 73% of respondents felt that

their responsibility directly helped to achieve strategic objectives but that there were problems with ineffective communication. 79% of respondents agreed that their tactical action plans contributed directly to the attainment of the objectives but that this was a reactive approach.

Requirement 4: The organisation is aligned with short term goals and long term objectives

65% of respondents felt that the organisation considered capabilities and limitations when setting goals but that consultation was minimal as a result of incapable managers and limited consistency in work distribution; 58% felt that operational requirements were complementary to the strategy and when it was well defined and communicated it was evident. Only 38% felt that all departments were committed to the strategy of the organisation in execution as the head office was often a bottle neck in service delivery as the required capabilities and tools were not always available to execute the strategy. Only 46% felt that resources and time frames were effectively managed and that more effective use could be made of resources to capitalise on time frames, as long as objectives were clear.

Host company interviews

Open ended interviews were conducted with five full time employees (one senior manager, two middle managers and two lower managers) from the host company.

Responsibility for strategy execution

The respondents indicated that the executive committee ("Exco") is responsible for strategy execution in the host company who receive guidance from the Group Exco on an annual basis. The host company Exco team is then responsible for defining the strategic objectives in line with these guidelines which are defined in a yearly planning cycle. The operational directors remain responsible for the execution of strategic objectives throughout the year.

Certain respondents had day-to-day focussed tasks and responsibility may be delegated down the structure to applicable levels.

Responsibility for communication of strategic objectives to all responsible levels

Directors are responsible for communication of strategic objectives to area and functional managers who must then allow communication to flow down the organisation

with the planning and execution left to the discretion of operational directors. The quarterly communication session conducted by the managing director is attended by area managers and other higher ranking employees only and any relevant matters are addressed with the personnel in a formal and structured manner. Communication in the business units is managed at the discretion of the director with no standardised approach. This can create conflicting interpretations and focus within the host company. Strategic objectives also differ between business units and are guided by key performance indicators (KPIs) that the directors receive. This communication session was found to be ineffective as it is high level and only attempts to define the objectives, instead of obtaining commitment and buy-in.

Common organisational focus on attaining strategic objectives

There is a common focus within the company and all objectives are aligned with the company values with every business unit to aligning KPIs with these values but showing limited alignment and focus between business units. There is a lack of cohesiveness on the higher levels and room for improvement on focus at the executive level leading to operational silos in which execution is done differently.

A perception exists that only the directors understand and need to understand strategic objectives with specific groups receiving specific objectives together.

Tracking of progress towards attaining strategic objectives

Regular communication sessions with subordinates (formally and informally) to determine the status and progress on tasks attributing to the attainment of strategic objectives are held. No standardised feedback procedure or fixed format exists. It has a very strong operational focus and this caused a break in synchronisation between area managers and business units on the progress of strategic initiatives.

There appears to be no official reporting structure in certain business units or the company to guide the reporting of critical points or to verify alignment so goals in line with given objectives are tracked monthly. The main effect of this shortcoming is that there is very little buy-in on actively focussing and working towards strategic objectives. Official reports to directors on progress may be supplied, but this is not a standardised process.

Certain area managers and lower levels focus on financial indicators only thus a major shortcoming is tracking availability and utilisation of equipment in specific

areas, which is not clear in financial reporting. This causes sites to protect internal capabilities in reserve (spare machinery as required by the client to be on standby) instead of applying them on *ad hoc* and opportunist works. Sites do not understand the bigger picture and this creates silos being formed within the business units. The effect becomes evident when reviewing efficiencies between areas business units and the host company.

Operational activities are tracked daily and reported to the direct line superiors. Formal feedback meetings occur weekly or bi-weekly where production is reviewed and decisions pertaining to operations are made. These activities and forums do not encourage discussion about the progress in terms of attaining strategic objectives as the focus is purely driven by operational short term results.

Setting short term goals aligned with strategic objectives

Strategic objectives are not broken down into shorter term goals. There is thus a need to find a practical, workable solution to mobilise these objectives that can be standardised and applied throughout the organisation.

Another shortcoming of the current strategy is that it is developed and rolled out with no input from the lower levels in a top-down approach with little buy-in from lower levels through the whole cycle. Objectives are stated, resources are given and desired outcomes defined without considering the current status, limitations and capabilities.

The focus remains on operational indicators, mainly delivering services to clients at an optimal R per ton amount at the area and site level, often with only monthly production targets given.

Alignment of capabilities and limitations to strategic objectives

Lower level capabilities and limitations are not optimally considered in defining strategic objectives resulting in strategic decisions being taken in the past without inputs or considerations of expertise from lower levels, with significant effects on the company.

Certain sites are clearly more profitable and efficient than others, even with the same equipment applied and similar scope of works, indicating that internal factors were not considered.

Planning is expected to be done by superiors and tasks executed by others as received by them. Sites will attempt to reach targets as given with the resources and capabilities available to them and will escalate challenges to operational feedback meetings.

Clarity and understanding of strategic objectives at all levels

A clear understanding of strategic objectives is not evident in the host company and is an area that requires urgent attention as misalignment causes inefficiencies throughout the company. There has been a significant improvement with reference to communication to the area managers' level over the last few months, but the effects of it from there to lower levels are not clear. The message communicated and its interpretation from area managers down to site managers and lower level employees is also not clear.

The impact of this, specifically on site level, is a major concern, since this area ensures the revenue stream health of the host company.

The simplification of required outcomes is a major requirement to ensure alignment to the strategy throughout the whole company. For this to become a reality, 2 way communication (up and down) must be healthy as well as translating high level information into understandable lower level messages that are comprehensible and applicable to the lower level employees.

Lower level management does not understand the company's strategy and coordination is required at senior level to break down existing silos and to communicate the correct bigger picture to the organisation as a whole. Lower level management is also unable to influence strategic objectives, because they had no input in defining the strategy. Currently, area and site management focus is short term driven and operationally focussed while focus is required on developing efficiencies at lower level.

Alignment to strategic objectives is the responsibility of area managers and that lower management are dependent on them to guide them in the execution of their operational tasks. There is currently uncertainty with reference to the company's strategy at senior level which flows down into the organisation and causes major misalignments, confusion and rumours with the organisation.

Military personnel interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 3 generals currently serving in the SA Army. These generals were:

1. Major-General X, a Chief Director at the SA Army Headquarters in Pretoria;
2. Brigadier-General Y, a Director at the SA Army Headquarters in Pretoria;
3. Brigadier-General Z, a General Officer Commanding of a brigade.

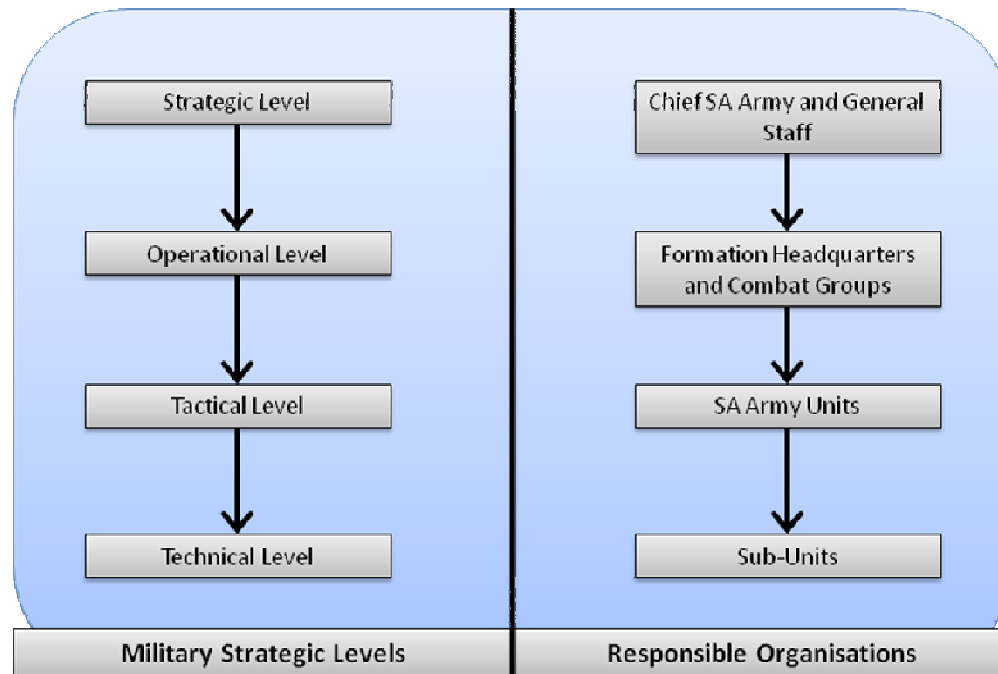


Figure 1. Strategic levels and SA Army organisation.

Traditionally, strategic objectives are filtered down from strategic level to technical level in the SA Army. The formulation process of strategic objectives answers 3 criteria, namely:

1. What are the objectives (ends)?
2. What are the concepts to apply to obtain these objectives (ways)?
3. What are the means available to obtain these objectives (means)?

In the SA Army the definition and attainment of strategic objectives are the responsibility of the Chief of the SA Army and his general staff. They formulate the strategy for the SA Army from objectives and requirements received from Chief of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF).

Operational objectives are formulated from the strategic objectives by formation headquarters and combat formations (43 and 46 SA Brigades) at the operational level and communicated to the tactical level. SA Army units (battalions and regiments) are responsible for the execution of and delivery on these objectives. Tactical execution occurs on the technical level (the physical troops and equipment on the ground). Figure 1 illustrates these levels.

An important principle to this process is that a commander must always understand the strategic intent of his superior commanders 2 levels up (this implies that

on the tactical level, a unit commander must understand the strategic intent of the Chief of the SA Army and his general staff). The reason for this is to ensure that the commander on the tactical level cannot operate outside the framework of the high-level strategic intent.

The SA Army applies the mission command principle through all levels of the organisation. This implies that authority and responsibility should lie at the level where decisions are made during execution in an organisation. The higher commander defines the means and desired end-state and the lower responsible commander formulates the plan for execution and is responsible for the execution. Tom and Barrons (2006) define mission command as "... the system of delegation and empowerment used in the armed forces today and has come about through necessity."

To be able to execute a plan at any level effectively, a superior commander must ensure that the best suited person is in the command position; the required means to execute is available to him; and the subordinate commander has the freedom of action to be able to execute the plan.

Internal obstacles to strategy execution in the military

Firstly, the inability of commanders to ensure that their subordinates understand their intention (ends) completely

is a major obstacle to successful strategy execution. For a subordinate commander to understand his role and responsibilities, he has to also know exactly what his flank forces are doing. This is to ensure that he executes what is expected of him and does not keep himself engaged in activities for which other commanders are responsible. If he understands this framework, it allows and empowers him to creatively achieve his assigned intermediate end-state, thus contributing to the overall end-state.

Secondly, not providing the required resources (personnel and equipment) to execute their activities is another important challenge that needs to be overcome. A commander must ensure that his subordinate commanders have all the resources (means) available to them to facilitate their ability to execute a task successfully.

Thirdly, there must be no uncertainty about the parameters and guidelines in which subordinate commanders must execute their responsibilities. The commander must ensure that he defines and communicates the “how” clearly to his subordinate commanders (ways).

If one does not allow for subordinates to function in a challenging environment, they are not stimulated and stretched to their limits. Being too prescriptive in the “ways” inhibits creativity and prevents accepting responsibility and ownership, because it is somebody else’s ideas.

Subordinates must have freedom of action in order to enhance decentralised decision making. In this regard a strategy/higher order objective, spells out what is required (the end-state). In addition to the “what”, guidelines provide planning and execution parameters.

Applying simplicity to overcome internal obstacles

A campaign plan is to be kept as simple as possible. This allows subordinates to grasp what is to be achieved and where they fit into the picture. The notion of a “single aim” at all levels is of utmost importance in order to ensure simplicity.

This enables participants to focus on one issue within a specific time frame. To attain simplicity, logic and common sense have to prevail. The reasons for the construct must be explained *ad nauseam* by the higher commander personally to ensure this. One-on-one discussions to test subordinates’ grasp of a plan is very important. Through this the commander can ensure that a common picture prevails. Subordinate commanders must also have the complete overall plan to facilitate understanding. The common operation picture must be maintained during execution through a proper situational awareness plan to ensure all commanders are on the same page.

The SA Army has developed a model that is applied as a planning framework to mobilise subordinate commanders one level lower. This model is described by the acronym POSTEDFITB, comprising of the following elements: P: personnel, O: organisation, S: sustainment, T: training, E: equipment, D: doctrine, F: facilities, I: information, T: technology, B: budget.

Superior commanders will give a specific objective (end-state) to a commander, but will populate each of these elements with specific means and capabilities (means) to the disposal of the commander. The commander is then responsible for drawing up a plan considering these means per element (ways) and presents it to the superior commander for approval. This ensures that any required end-state is simplified to a level that all influencing factors and requirements are clear to the commander and defined within the framework.

Levels to which objectives are communicated and how commanders ensure these objectives are understood

A commander must communicate his objectives at least two levels down. Personal visits, liaison and discussions with subordinate officers will facilitate the understanding of objectives. This allows the commander to clarify uncertainties that exist with the commanders who will execute the operation. This inspires confidence and promotes the feeling of co-accountability. It also contributes to the overall confidence of subordinate commanders by recognising their roles in the military organisation responsible for execution of an operation.

Together, and equally important to the feeling of co-accountability, is the fact that a commander must understand the intent of his commanders at least 2 levels up. This ensures that he plans his execution within the boundaries of the stated intent of those commanders.

Ideally, a commander will plan an operation with his direct subordinates. This ensures that more ideas and clarity is obtained at both levels and saves on planning and communication time. This also facilitates the principle of “independent check”, as he has the opportunity to bounce his plan off subordinates who will be responsible for executing specific tasks. These subordinates also have the technical competencies to ensure all factors are considered, as they are the resources and they use the means to execute.

Characteristics of a force capable of achieving the commander’s objectives

1. Enabled: Subordinate commanders must be enabled and so have the means and resources to execute their responsibilities at their disposal and are empowered with

the necessary training to successfully deliver on the required stated objectives.

2. Prepared: All plans must be rehearsed with subordinate commanders to ensure that all logistical preparations are in place and that they are psychologically prepared for the task at hand.

3. Motivated: An eager and enthusiastic force will be able to execute an operation successfully. A commander must understand his target group and how to motivate them.

Tracking progress towards obtainment of objectives

Tracking progress during the execution of an operation is most successful by means of control measures. A control schedule depicts critical outcomes that must be achieved to ensure overall operational success. This "event list" allows subordinate commanders to report certain outcomes to the commander as and when they are reached. In military terms, these events are referred to as decisive points and they allow the commander to monitor the critical path in terms of the execution. Outcomes have to be validated, because follow-on actions are launched from a firm base to a firm base.

Control measures must also be simplified, as a commander cannot check every task his subordinates are busy with in detail. The lower the task is executed in an organisation, the more detailed the execution plan must be. Thus, the intervals for reporting of progress become shorter.

How simplicity as a military principle assists lower level commanders to manage change during execution

Change is necessitated by a variety of factors, but contingency plans provide the basis for change management. The new situation has to be contemplated in order to determine which contingency is applicable and is then refined in order to address the new set of requirements. This allows the commander to remain fixed on achieving his original objective, or if required, the follow-on objective. These should rarely change in execution. Change relates to the "ways" in execution and focuses on achieving an objective despite a previous unsuccessful effort.

Strategy execution with capabilities and limitations of the force considered

Feasibility tests, before execution, must be done to ensure that capabilities and limitations are appreciated and will determine whether a task is still executable and if the objective can still be achieved. The results of these

risk assessments must be shared with all involved down the chain of command. The execution plans must be appreciated taking capabilities, limitations and risks into account. Risk must be mitigated by means of creative approaches that focus own strengths against the opposing force's weaknesses. It is wise, as a commander, to put all facts on the table when confronted with these circumstances.

Buy-in from all levels is necessary to ensure unity of effort which is possible when the creative energy and the will to succeed from the team as a whole can be tapped into.

Commanders must have the "moral guts" to confront their superiors in cases where objective achievement is not possible.

If a command is given, a commander must ensure that the all the POTEDFITB elements have been considered and have been communicated to the responsible commander for execution.

Maintain focus on objectives during execution

Select the right person for the right objective and create an environment where accountability is of utmost importance. Constantly supervise and guide subordinates as they can only remain focussed on specific objectives if the higher level of command is completely focussed on it. Outcomes must be clearly defined and the desired end-state must be formulated as specifically and clearly as possible.

DISCUSSION

The strategic level of the SA Army can be compared to the Exco level of the host company. The operational level can be compared to the business unit and senior manager level. The tactical level can be compared to the area manager level and the technical level to the site manager level. This comparison allows for the functions of each level in strategy execution to be evaluated.

Strategic level functioning in strategy execution

The attainment of strategic objectives in the host company must remain the responsibility of the managing director and his executive committee. In this regard, Raps (2004) indicated that a strategy must not only define an organisation's direction, but is also the simplified definition of top management's long term responsibilities.

This team receives guidelines and high level strategic objectives from the holding company Exco and must define them to apply in the organisation. Strategic long term objectives are defined, considering the POSTEDFITB model and communicated with the

operational level of the organisation. The Exco must ensure that the means (resources) to execute are available to the operational level, in appreciating the strategic objectives.

The Exco contract with the operational level on the delivery of the stated objectives, according to the POSTEDFITB elements, and this interaction ensures that these objectives are communicated 2 levels down in conjunction with the operational level staff. This communication must be focussed on clearly describing the desired strategic objectives to this level. The single aim of this communication must be to describe and clarify the MD's intent for the year to the operational and tactical level. Paterson (2010) confirmed that effective communication in strategy execution gives subordinate managers a clear understanding of what is expected from them, how their outputs will be measured and how they will be held accountable for their required deliverables, compared to the goals set for them in the execution of the strategy.

The main characteristic required to develop the capabilities to achieve strategic objectives applicable to the strategic level is motivation. The Exco must ensure that the personnel two levels down remain motivated by ensuring that these levels are empowered with the means to understand the objectives and intent of the MD and thus deliver on these strategic objectives. This is best achieved only if buy-in and commitment to these objectives is obtained since these personnel would understand the true value and advantages of obtaining these objectives.

Formal and standardised progress from the operational level must be reviewed on a quarterly basis. This feedback should confirm that the required end-state is still clear and specific and understood at operational level.

The last responsibility of the Exco in execution is to continuously scan and review companywide and business-unit-specific opportunities in the external environment. In this respect, Gay and D'Aprix (2007) reiterated that external barriers can greatly influence the future attainment of strategic objectives.

Operational level functioning in strategy execution

The business unit management teams are responsible for translating strategic objectives into understandable concepts for each specific business unit and the area management levels. This management level must also ensure the means to execute are available 2 levels down (on tactical and technical level). The operational level managers must continuously ensure that the area management level reporting to them understand and function within the boundaries of the long term strategic goals and that the MD's intent is understood clearly and

without uncertainty throughout the execution period. Strategic long term objectives are received and defined into shorter term goals, considering the POSTEDFITB model and communicated with the tactical level of the organisation. Hrebiniak and Joyce (1986) identified the translation of long term strategic objectives into specific short term objectives as a critical requirement of the process of successful strategy execution. Short term objectives reduce uncertainty, complexity, and limitations to successful strategy execution (Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1986).

The operational management level must be responsible for delivery on defined quarterly goals, which are in turn defined and quantified out of the strategic goals. For this to become a workable reality, progress on the delivery of goals must be measured and reviewed on a monthly basis. This reporting must be milestone and issue driven. Subordinate managers must report on the status of delivery of these goals and point out issues that affect or impede the delivery of these goals. It is the responsibility of the operational management level to then review resource allocations and to re-align the quarterly goals to the strategic objectives. Thus the means to achieving the stated end-state is evaluated and the re-allocation of resources is made to facilitate the achievement of the long term objectives, considering the real-time progress on shorter term goals.

Another key function required at the operational level is to continuously mirror and review the capabilities and limitations within the business units against the desired strategic objectives, as received from the strategic level. The application of mission command will greatly assist in the lower level management functioning more effectively on attaining defined goals. Operational level managers must empower the subordinate managers responsible for delivery on quarterly goals. This implies ensuring that the focus of the subordinates remains on quarterly goals given, while tactical level managers still have the freedom of action to execute tasks according to their plan formulated to attain these goals. Operational managers must guarantee that the common "picture" of the desired outcomes within the business unit remains in place.

Operational level management must also develop the capabilities and knowledge of the tactical level managers within a structured format, to ensure that these subordinate managers have the required capabilities and skills set to execute their tasks. This refers to the enablement of the subordinate managers in terms of the stated capabilities that must be developed to ensure continuous delivery on defined goals. Eicher (2006) stated that middle management and their subordinates need to be empowered to successfully execute operational plans aligned with strategic objectives.

Another critical function at this level is to synchronise activities between areas. This will ensure that different area managers are aware of activities conducted in other

areas and that duplication of effort does not occur. This will also greatly enhance the sharing and dissemination of intelligence between areas.

Jensen (1997) stated that actions in execution must be synchronised to meet the company's strategic objectives at a lower level.

Tactical level functioning in strategy execution

Tactical level management must understand the intent of management 2 levels up, which is the MD's intent. By applying the POSTEDFITB model, short term goals must be defined as they are received from the operational level and broken down further into specific short term goals that are then contracted with managers on the technical level.

The area managers are responsible for delivery of the goals on a monthly basis. These goals are target driven and quantified in terms of actual output compared to monthly targets. Kaplan and Norton (2008) stated that a requirement for the successful alignment of strategy and operations is the tracking of performance through quantified and graphic displays of progress against defined goals.

Area managers must take ownership of ensuring the preparedness of personnel at the technical level. This includes planning for the required training and development of personnel. Gay and D'Aprix (2007) stated that companies must ensure that there is "line of sight" between lower management and the organisation's strategic objectives, through lower management's commitment and ownership of the strategy and operational execution plans.

Tactical level managers must be the "masters" of technical aspects in their responsible areas. They must understand the functions and activities conducted on sites, thus ensuring the "means" to execution are focussed and effectively applied. With this, an area manager must understand the uniqueness of each site that resides under him and must physically be "on the ground" and so coordinate and understand the complexities of each site thus also contributing to his understanding of the challenges, uncertainties and development priorities that exists on each site and also to identify opportunities and commonalities that exists between sites.

The area manager must manage progress on short term objectives with the technical level on weekly interviews. Targets must be negotiated and contracted with the site managers and the site manager must develop and execute the plan to attain these targets. Through this process the main responsibility of the area manager is to constantly supervise and guide subordinate managers in the execution of tasks to obtain short term objectives.

Technical level functioning in strategy execution

The technical level managers (site managers) must have a daily focus on operational delivery of targets. Technical level managers must understand the intent from the operational level, as defined to him, in conjunction with the area managers and translate the short term goals into operational functions on site.

Site managers must ensure the availability and utilisation of equipment and personnel on site are synchronised towards the stated targets and that these resources are optimally applied.

Continuous delivery on targets can also only occur with disciplined and focussed application of resources on site. The site managers are the main role players in ensuring the attainment of these objectives.

Goals and targets must be communicated as simply as possible to subordinates. This communication must occur daily and in such a manner that no uncertainty exists over what is required as the target; what means must be applied to obtain the target; who is responsible for delivery on the target; and how the attainment of the target contributes to the short term goals of the site.

To ensure the realisation of the previous mentioned requirements, the site manager must control daily operations by means of event lists and target attainment graphs, indicating daily progress towards short term goals.

Comparison of host company strategy inhibitors to military approaches to simplicity

From a military perspective, the focussed and deliberate identification and application of the ends, ways and means available to a commander are critical to the execution of a strategy (Tom and Barrons, 2006).

In this respect, a comparison of the main inhibitors to successful strategy execution in a geographically dispersed organisation are compared to the application of simplicity as a military principle, allowing for the following recommendations, captured under the identified requirements for successful strategy execution, as determined in this research:

Requirement 1: Clear and simplified short term plans aligned with long term objectives

Currently, there is uncertainty and inconsistency on all management levels when it comes to understanding the company strategy and its communication downwards. The military approach of simplicity instead requires that the 'ends', 'ways' and 'means' as previously described must be clear to managers at all levels and translated into understandable context for every management level concerned in the execution of the strategy.

Currently, strategic plans are unclear with only certain parts applicable to certain areas. Simplicity here requires that managers at all levels must understand the intent of management 2 levels up assisting in fixing a framework of operation within the strategic intent of the organisation. Thus from this management should plan execution of short term activities with lower managers 2 levels down.

Requirement 2: Effective change management capabilities to adapt to influencing factors

The company's strategy execution abilities are not adaptive to change and its management thereof is slow and reactive. Rather mission command should be applied namely its responsibility and accountability should be focussed at the management level where decisions are made during execution.

In the company, the understanding and interpretation of objectives are not always clear thus with suggested changes as per the military approach, senior management would ensure that lower management understand the organisations strategic intent; are equipped and empowered to execute tasks and understand the framework in which execution is required.

Senior management must translate a 'single aim' focus throughout the company keeping strategic and operational plans as simplistic as possible, thus negating conflicting messages and uncertainty. They must not inhibit freedom of action to execute but ensure the 'end – state' is clear and means to execute available. 'Ways' of execution must be defined and implemented by the responsible manager.

Requirement 3: Employee empowerment with clear responsibilities to ensure clarity on required goals

In the company defined criteria for strategic success are not always given and strategic plans are unclear and not understood by some managers. From the military approach it can be translated as senior managers ensuring that all managers are enabled to execute their responsibilities; are prepared for the level of execution expected from them and motivated to contribute to the success of the organisation.

The POSTEDFITB model (as previously discussed) can be applied to mobilise managers 1 level lower by ensuring absolute clarity and focus on short term deliverables aligned with long term strategic objectives. While not all operational managers are linked to operational performance awards, the rewards are linked to profitability, safety and cash flow management not strategy delivery. Using the POSTEDFITB model a discussion between the superior and responsible manager needs to clarify and agree upon expectations

and performance review criteria.

Requirement 4: The organisation is aligned with short term goals and long term objectives

The company has minimum consultation in short term goal establishment with inconsistency in the consideration of limitations and capabilities in the distribution of work. Thus capabilities and tools are not always available to execute work effectively.

Mission command will ensure senior management define the desired 'end-state' in an understandable format where execution is required. It must also be ensured that the required means are available to compliment successful delivery of strategic objectives.

The head office is considered a bottle neck in service delivery so a military approach would ensure that management appoint the best personnel in positions responsible for strategy delivery; and the means are available to lower management to execute effectively and have the function of action to execute plans effectively.

Trust is placed in the capabilities and empowerment of lower managers to execute tasks of a short term nature thus contributing to the attainment of strategic objectives. Thus senior management must always be responsible for the development of lower management knowledge and abilities one level down.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The inability in any level of an organisation to deliver on strategic objectives can significantly contribute to the underperformance of that organisation. Managers at all levels within the organisation must take responsibility for and affect the required results they are capable of, in order to realise strategic objectives.

This research paper attempted to answer the following problem: "How can the application of simplicity as a principle of war, and its employment in military terms, be applied to a geographically dispersed organisation and improve strategy execution in the organisation?"

The following concepts and applications, derived from simplicity as a military principle, can improve strategy execution in a geographically dispersed organisation. The definition and clarification of long, medium objectives into short term goals by:

- 1) Ends: Clearly defining and communicating desired End-States at applicable organisational levels;
- 2) Means: Allocating required resources to deliver on required ends; and
- 3) Ways: Empowering lower level managers to execute their plans with the required freedom of action, within a controlled progress tracking structure.

The review and tracking of progress through a structured and standardised feedback structure, where time intervals are aligned with the level of execution and the complexity of the executed tasks. This must also allow for effective contingency management to address change management and re-allocation of resources requirements.

Clear and understandable communication of identified strategic objectives to appropriate levels by superior managers, according to the POSTEDFITB breakdown.

Linking responsibility, accountability and performance measurement criteria with desired outcomes, as an interactive function between the superior manager and the responsible lower level management.

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