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Editorial

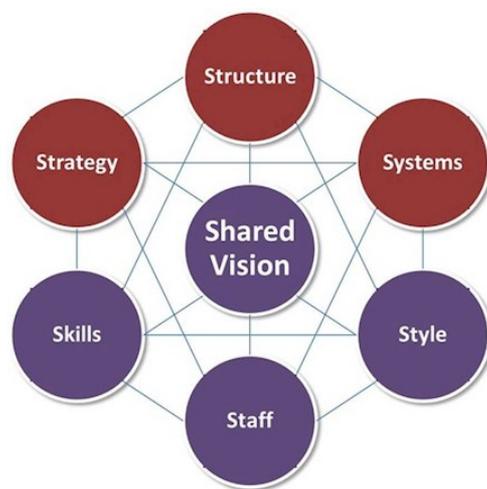
Lessons learned: marketing success and failure

- 18 March 2016
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One marketer's opinion on what works – and what doesn't – when trying to realise strategy.

Tell me of a senior marketer you know who doesn't have 'strategy' as a key part of their role?

Whether you're in a multinational or a three-person start-up, designing and implementing the marketing path is not easy, and all the more challenging given the disruptions and VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) events we face in our globalising markets.



McKinsey 7-S model

Here are some observations drawn from 30 years' experience around designing and implementing marketing strategy. I've categorised them using McKinsey's 7-S model. Why this one? Because aligning your organisation around it is really the only way you'll be able to orchestrate people and the infrastructure to move in the same direction. If any one of these 'vertebrae' is out of line, you cannot move forward.

These are what, in my experience, work well – and not so well – when we bring marketing strategy to life:

1. Start with your **shared vision**; what works is engaging your people through stories, real and mental pictures, not Excel sheets. Some of the greatest successes I've participated in have come from inspiring the team so they feel a sense of belonging, and understand how the vision translates into happy customers and clients, into loyalty, advocacy, growth, market share, innovation, creativity and energy.

Example: Steve Jobs [sharing his vision for the iPhone](#).

2. Next, your **strategy** should reveal how you plan on *realising* that shared vision, in ways that make your people feel part of it. This works well when you make sure it's based on the marketing team's and the business's existing capabilities, know-how and knowledge. It should also be formulated with reference to an engine that can deliver the growth, and should seek to protect that engine ('sustainable competitive advantage').

All too often I've seen CMOs doing the opposite – telling people what the strategy is in a manner that isn't emotionally engaging with an email, conference call or death-by-PowerPoint experience.

Example: the City of Nottingham has an engine for growth – the globally recognised Robin Hood brand – but it is not being leveraged, perhaps because of the city's boredom with it or through a lack of recognition of its pulling power for tourism and inward investment.

3. As form should follow function, the **structure** of the marketing function should give you the ability to implement and operate globally and locally – ‘freedom in a framework’.

Example: this is something I'm familiar with through international brewer SABMiller. The multinational has 44 global managing directors, each with a marketing director. They execute a global strategy locally, with some structural variations to serve markets ranging in size from the US to Uganda.

4. **Systems** give you a degree of consistency across marketing teams/business units/geographies/functions, so the organisation stops reinventing the wheel and transfers great practices to other parts of the enterprise.

One of the typical challenges I see is the range of marketing databases/CRM systems that have been allowed to run in parallel – a legacy of all those great M&A deals – but which aren't compatible. I recently encountered a pharma company that inherited several CRMs, but these can't be knitted together, so they don't have single views of their pharmacies, patients or prescribing doctors.

5. The marketing organisation's **skills** translate into how nimble or innovative it can be in the face of disruption. I've learned from experience that being a successful CMO is about creating an organisation that invests in learning, sharing information, working across silos, enquiry and advocacy, engaging and communicating – one that develops the marketing team's capability to disrupt itself, before challenger brands do it for them.

Example: in 2005, I was working with Sony Ericsson's marketing teams to put these skills in place. Had the company worked more closely across silos, I believe Sony Ericsson could have better understood the reason its retailers were reducing their orders and inventory to give shelf space to Apple's new iPhone.

6. Ensuring you have the right **staff** (capability) to achieve the strategy sounds pretty obvious, but if you're looking to identify consumption patterns or segment your market without marketing analysts, your ability to deliver on strategy is compromised.

Example: I know of a law firm that didn't have the communication skills in the marketing team to articulate the brand positioning or value propositions for the practice areas, resulting in confusion both internally and for its clients.

7. Finally, the **style** and culture of the leadership to enable the shared vision and strategy is critical. Is it empowering? Trusting? Open? Communicative? Ethical? Fearful?

Example: in my opinion, VW's autocratic leadership style and loyalty to the bottom line over customers or the environment has contributed to it becoming one of the case studies of the future in why it is so important to nurture the right kind of culture. On the other hand, Pret A Manger uses store staff to interview new applicants collectively, and empowers its employees to give away coffee to a customer as each sees fit.

So what does all this mean for marketers trying to mobilise their organisations to outperform the market? My experience tells me that it takes coordination, systems thinking, a willingness to experiment and most of all, great leadership.

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