

STRATEGY



WHY BUSINESS **NEEDS** MILITARY **STYLE** TACTICS

Military methodologies succeed in the most hostile conditions.
Here is why they are vital to successful business execution

BY SIR ROBERT FRY

If you are about to place someone in a life or death situation, you have to convince them that your plan of action is sufficiently robust for them to willingly get behind the mission.

You also need to communicate your strategy with such clarity that they fully understand the part they play in it. This is a vital skill that all military leaders learn early in their careers. Without it, their strategies fail and their soldiers risk injury or death.

Although the motivation and reasoning are totally different, the same thinking and methodology can be applied to a business strategy. Whether it is a brand or a regiment, both aspire to be the best and to create high performing teams to fulfil this aim.

Both work in alliance and have to confront an adversary: in

strategic vision to execution that unites people behind the mission. Rarely in business do you find the same shared sense of purpose throughout an organization.

Big businesses often pay consultants large sums of money to help to develop a strategic vision. But unless they pay the same amount of attention to how this vision will be disseminated and executed throughout the organization, it becomes nothing more than a set of slogans adorning the chief executive's wall.

While business strategy is a well known feature of the business landscape, many organisations have yet to grasp the necessity of having a mechanism to execute and back up that strategy. For those in business with a military background, the two are indivisible.

Mission leadership

So how can what we call mission leadership help business today? Mission leadership is about taking a strategic mission, and, as a leader, analyzing what is required from you in order to succeed.

Having established your personal responsibilities, you will then be in a position to cascade supporting missions to your direct reports and on down through the entire depths of the organization, so everyone knows what they are required to do in order to execute the strategy.

This bears no resemblance to the ritual goal setting

procedures large organization habitually undertake, rather, it is an intellectually demanding process which adapts proven military techniques to create single, unified understanding throughout an organization which links strategic intent with tactical execution in unbroken process. In other words, it is real business execution.

There are a number of reasons why many strategies fail to be successfully implemented. There may be inherent conservations or resistance to change. Or perhaps fatigue has set in because each new strategy has been heralded as the next big game changer, but then it hasn't delivered.

Above all though, strategic visions often fail to be properly achieved because the quality of the tools used to disseminate the message throughout the organization aren't good enough. Such strategic messages hit permafrost that exists just below board level and don't progress any further.

Mission leadership breaks this down to ensure that strategy permeates all levels of the organization. What is sometimes overlooked is that mission leadership is profoundly emancipating.

When employees have the security of knowing how they can contribute, they have a sense of purpose, drive and unity. This confidence encourages them to be more innovative and imaginative when fulfilling their



SOLDIERS during training and Sir Robert Fry, a former lieutenant general in the British Army and advisor to top local companies.

the case of a company, the alliance is made up of its partners and its supply chain, while the enemy is the competition. Both need a strategy to defeat their opponents.

The military excels at providing an internal narrative from

role, which helps to produce a high performing team.

Strategic shock

During periods of economic uncertainty, Business Execution (BE) is more important than ever if organizations are to maintain their competitive edge. But there is also the threat of strategic shock.

This can best be described as an event that changes how we think and live our lives on an individual and corporate level. We have seen two such events in the past decade: 9/11 in 2001 and the global financial crisis that began in 2008. The former redefined the global security landscape; the latter challenged business practice and ethics and the role of the state.

The effects of both are still being felt: military action after 9/11 continues to affect individual lives and the world of business; and government involvement in commerce after the financial crisis has brought a new dynamic with which chief executives must deal.

Both events have led the public to

question the actions of politicians and business leaders. The global financial crisis, in particular, eroded much of the trust that existed between the public and, for example, bankers.

The impact of these events is compounded by our highly networked world. Information is available instantaneously and people act on it in a near instant manner.

Strategic shock can be triggered by premeditated events or by accident. No one can anticipate the shape, form and timing of the next such even. The only thing that is certain is that there will be one.

The unpredictability of such events makes it difficult for business to anticipate what impact strategic shock could have on their work. The only way to insulate against it is to ensure that a strong internal narrative links vision practical execution, so that the organization can withstand whatever is thrown at it.

There needs to be shared understanding of the business strategy, with everyone in the company aligned to

this. Without this, an organization is likely to be severely tested by strategic shock; with it, a company enjoys clear competitive advantage.

Military methodologies are designed to deal with the most violent activity that humankind takes part in. At McKinney Rogers we believe that they have an important part to play as BE tool in today's uncertain times. Like the concept of BE itself, they may not have reached the mainstream yet, but this is likely to change.

The increased military activity of recent years means we will see a far higher proportion of former services personnel entering the business world whose experience has been forged on the battle field. Techniques such as mission leadership and mission analysis will be second nature to them and they will bring a new slant on the established practices of BE.

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