MASTERING STRATEGY
MAKING STRATEGY A TEAM SPORT

Is Your Strategy Ready for Execution?

A Practical Readiness Check for Leadership Teams

Many strategies do not fail because the plan is weak. They fail because the leadership team moves into execution before the strategy has been translated into clear priorities, explicit choices, defined ownership, meaningful measures, and regular leadership routines.

The plan may be approved. The direction may sound right. Leaders may agree in principle. But execution can still break down if the team has not done the disciplined work required to make the strategy actionable.

This readiness check is designed to help leadership teams assess whether their strategy is ready to move from intention to action.

It can be used after a strategic planning process, during an annual planning cycle, before launching major initiatives, or whenever leaders sense that execution may be harder than expected.

How to Use This Readiness Check

For each statement, choose the response that best reflects your current reality.

- ✓ **Consistently True** This is clearly and consistently true across the leadership team.
- ✓ **Partly True** This is true in some respects, but not yet consistently true across the team or organization.
- ✓ **Not Yet True** This is not currently true, or it has not been addressed in a meaningful way.

The purpose is not to produce a perfect score. The purpose is to identify where the strategy may need more work before execution begins.

Pay particular attention to statements where leadership team members would answer differently. Different answers often reveal different interpretations, unresolved assumptions, or gaps in alignment.

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1. Strategic Direction Is Clear

Execution begins with shared understanding.

A strategy may sound clear at a high level but still leave leaders with different interpretations of what it means in practice. Before moving into execution, the leadership team needs a common understanding of the strategic direction and why it matters.

Assessment Statements

1. We can explain the strategy in clear, practical language.
2. The leadership team understands the strategy in the same way.
3. We know what the strategy is intended to accomplish.
4. We can explain why this strategy matters now.
5. The strategy provides enough direction to guide real decisions.

Watch For

Strategic language that sounds clear but can be interpreted in different ways.

Words such as growth, innovation, excellence, transformation, customer focus, and efficiency may be directionally useful, but they are not enough on their own. Unless they are translated into specific choices and implications, they can create the appearance of alignment without the discipline required for execution.

2. Priorities Are Focused

Execution requires concentration.

Many strategies contain too many priorities, initiatives, goals, and workstreams. When everything is important, leaders and teams are left to decide for themselves what deserves attention.

A strategy is more execution-ready when it identifies a small number of true priorities and makes clear where focus is required.

Assessment Statements

1. We have identified a small number of true strategic priorities.
2. Our priorities are specific enough to guide action.

3. We have distinguished strategic priorities from routine operational work.
4. We understand which priorities require the most leadership attention.
5. We have the capacity to execute the priorities we have named.

Watch For

A long list of initiatives presented as strategy.

If the leadership team has not made hard choices, those choices will be pushed down into the organization. That usually leads to inconsistent decisions, competing demands, resource strain, and uneven progress.

3. Choices and Trade-Offs Are Explicit

Strategy requires choices.

Execution becomes difficult when leaders agree on general direction but avoid the trade-offs required to make that direction real. If the strategy does not clarify what the organization will and will not do, day-to-day decisions will gradually dilute focus.

An execution-ready strategy makes choices explicit enough to shape resource allocation, decision-making, and leadership behaviour.

Assessment Statements

1. We have made clear choices about where we will focus.
2. We have identified what we will not pursue, at least for now.
3. Resource decisions reflect the priorities we have chosen.
4. Leaders understand the trade-offs required by the strategy.
5. We have agreed on how to handle attractive opportunities that do not fit the strategy.

Watch For

Continuing to add work without removing anything.

Without explicit trade-offs, every new opportunity, request, problem, or executive preference can be treated as equally important. This creates overload and makes disciplined execution unlikely.

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4. Ownership and Progress Measures Are Defined

Execution requires clear ownership and visible progress.

Even a well-designed strategy can stall if responsibility is vague or progress is hard to assess. Leadership teams often agree on priorities but fail to define who owns outcomes, who supports execution, and how progress will be reviewed.

An execution-ready strategy makes accountability and progress visible.

Assessment Statements

1. Each strategic priority has a clear owner.
2. The expected outcomes are defined.
3. Key initiatives have clear responsibilities and decision rights.
4. We have identified a small number of meaningful progress measures.
5. We have agreed on how progress will be reviewed and discussed.

Watch For

Confusing activity with progress.

A team may be busy, meetings may be happening, and initiatives may be underway, but that does not necessarily mean the strategy is moving forward. The best measures help leaders understand whether execution is gaining traction.

5. Leadership Routines Are in Place

Strategy needs a rhythm.

Once execution begins, day-to-day pressures will compete for attention. Without regular leadership routines that keep the strategy active, even important priorities can fade.

An execution-ready strategy includes a practical cadence for reviewing progress, making decisions, resolving barriers, and adjusting when needed.

Assessment Statements

1. Strategy execution is built into our regular leadership agenda.
2. We have agreed on how often strategic priorities will be reviewed.

3. We have a way to surface and resolve execution barriers.
4. We review existing priorities before adding major new work.
5. We have a process for adapting without drifting from the strategy.

Watch For

Treating strategy as something separate from regular leadership work.

If strategy is discussed only during annual planning, quarterly updates, or special meetings, it may not have enough presence to shape ongoing decisions.

Interpreting Your Results

After completing the readiness check, look for patterns.

Mostly Consistently True

Your strategy appears to have a solid foundation for execution.

The opportunity is to maintain discipline as the work moves forward. Focus on leadership routines, progress visibility, and decision consistency.

Many Partly True Responses

Your strategy may be directionally sound but not yet fully execution-ready.

This is common. It usually means the leadership team has more work to do to clarify priorities, define ownership, align decisions, or establish routines before launching too aggressively.

Several Not Yet True Responses

Your strategy may be at risk of execution breakdown.

Before moving forward, the leadership team should address the gaps most likely to create confusion, overload, drift, or inconsistent follow-through.

Common Warning Signs

Your strategy may not be execution-ready if:

- Leaders explain the strategy in different ways
- Priorities are too numerous or too general
- Important trade-offs have not been made
- Functional plans are not clearly connected to the strategy
- Ownership is vague
- Measures focus on activity rather than progress
- Resource decisions do not reflect stated priorities
- New work is added without revisiting existing commitments
- Strategy is not part of the regular leadership agenda
- Day-to-day pressures quickly overtake strategic work

These warning signs do not necessarily mean the strategy is flawed. They mean the leadership team needs to strengthen the conditions for execution.

Before You Move into Execution

Before launching major implementation work, the leadership team should be able to say:

- We understand the strategy in the same way.
- We know what matters most.
- We have made real choices.
- We understand the trade-offs.
- We have clear ownership.
- We know how progress will be measured.
- We have leadership routines that will keep the strategy active.
- We are prepared to make consistent decisions under pressure.

If those statements are not yet true, execution can still begin, but it is unlikely to be as focused, disciplined, or consistent as it needs to be.

Final Thought

Strategy execution does not fail all at once.

It weakens through small inconsistencies: unclear priorities, competing initiatives, delayed decisions, mixed messages, unresolved trade-offs, vague ownership, and leadership routines that allow urgent work to overtake strategic work.

Execution readiness helps leadership teams address those issues before they become execution problems.

A strategy is ready to move forward when the leadership team has translated direction into shared discipline.