



Why do our strategies fail?

Developing a strategy for our business generally starts with a vision. We define where we want to be in say 5 years, and work out the steps we need to take to get there. We consider the human resources required, the operational processes to be applied, we map how the products have to evolve, what investments will be made, how to respond to competitive forces and other macro economic conditions.

Yet too often little attention is given to defining the *current* reality of the business and where it actually *is* relative to the vision. It is somehow taken for granted that we have a shared understanding about the 'here and now'

But do we really have a shared understanding about the current reality? It turns out that much of the time we don't. Our reality is subjective, it's our individual reality and it is different from others. And often this is the reason why we don't achieve desired goals.

Imagine you are the captain of a ship and you want to reach Rio in ten days. In order to find your best route you must keep an eye on your current location. If your first officer and you have a different opinion about where you are, you are unlikely to come up with the same route to Rio. It's very similar when developing your business strategy.

Understanding current reality is vital if an organisation wants to advance. Its absence will inevitably lead to aimlessness, lack of focus, and waste of resources.

Other symptoms that can occur is poor communication within the organisation; without a common base there are numerous misunderstandings and doubling up on tasks. Priorities differ and errors occur due to false assumptions. Then, one starts doubting the effectiveness of the strategy and the worthiness of the goals. This will cause the organisation to oscillate and progress will eventually come to halt.

What do we need to understand to achieve a more objective reality? Robert Fritz talks about different ways of thinking. We have a propensity towards *comparative thinking*. We match new information with our internal database of experience, beliefs, and assumptions, and try to compartmentalise it as we strive to bring order to our universe. It is analytical and mainly occupies the left part of our brains. Our propensity towards this way of thinking starts at an early stage in life and is fostered by our education system that leaves little room for expression and creativity.

Agreeing on an objective current reality is a team effort. It is when different perspectives of reality are challenged that we have the best chance of determining an objective one. There are various ways to develop an understanding of the objective reality of a business whereby engaging not just analytical thinking but also creative-right brain- experiential processes. Diagramming or working with images, such as developed by Peter Senge, Robert Fritz, and other System Thinkers, can help teams to explore what the current reality of their business is. Once found, the vision will become clearer and the best route will emerge.

When management teams develop strategies, its best not to assume that everyone in the room is starting on the same page. The reality is that we all start on *our* page and *our* pathway to achieving the goals, and these will differ. So it is important to first map out a shared current reality, which becomes the common map from which objectives and goals can then be developed.