



# building the ability to execute

## Why are meticulously crafted strategies rarely executed as planned?

For years we've heard the consultants tell us that in a world of vanilla strategy and converged competitive landscapes, execution is the differentiator. Australian corporate history remains dotted with few examples of successful execution against the key business priorities.

We know the driving force behind execution is the senior leadership team. Success depends on their combined bench-strength. But which specific muscles are required to build a culture of achievement and accountability? Research<sup>1</sup> shows a *blend* of the top two capabilities are most important for senior leaders:

1. People leadership
2. Strategic management
3. Personal characteristics
4. Process management

The need for these combined talents is highlighted in the case of Mindset Matters Group (MMG) work with a global mining company needing to become an employer of choice to enable rapid expansion.

The senior leadership team were baffled by what specifically continued to get in the way of implementation. "As an organisation we had made numerous attempts over the years to set and achieve strategic goals. Each time they languished, somewhere between the planning and implementation phases," reports one General Manager.

Despite clear goals, rather than everyone pulling in the same direction, their experience was of politicking, wheel spinning and avoidance in making the tough decisions. Further, while the team had a clear idea of what needed to be done, a global employee survey showed the front-line had little understanding of why their work mattered and how it contributed to the achievement of corporate goals.

## What role do senior leaders need to play?

Often a first step is to clarify the key roles senior leaders need to perform to lead a high performing organisation. These are:

- Articulate the vision and lead change
- Role model new ways of thinking and working that demonstrate a shift from defensive to constructive
- Work cohesively as a leadership team to stick to key priorities
- Coach, mentor their teams

## It's also the culture!

A familiar cry. But what exactly is it? And how do you turn it around?

Culture describes how people believe they are expected to behave to 'fit in' and succeed. It changes when people consistently hear new messages about what's valued. These messages are picked up by watching how the most senior leaders behave. Interpreting these signals, people align their behaviour to the norm.

At the heart of how people behave are their mindsets or thinking styles. Deep

transformational change occurs by going beneath these visible behaviours to the drivers – people's values, beliefs and assumptions. Liza Spence, Director of Mindset Matters Group, coached the senior leaders to identify these drivers and develop more personally productive mindsets, specifically:

- Resourceful
- Adaptive
- Accountable
- Cohesive

### **Learning to pull in the same direction**

MMG worked with the team to agree the collective ways of working required to deliver on the key business priorities. A General Manager acknowledges, "As a leadership team we were fragmented; we had a lack of focus and weren't open or supportive of our people. Now we are now much more productive – we are able to focus on the real issues. In a meeting, people only need to stay 'stay above the line' for the team to refocus, making a conscious decision to move back into addressing issues constructively."

### **Signalling new ways of working**

Change does start at the top. Role modelling these new personal mindsets and ways of working as a cohesive team sent powerful signals to the leaders at the next level about what's expected. A solid start to creating an environment where people are free to be their best.

### **Broaden your view**

Execution relies on EVERYONE, not a chosen few.

To build execution focus and expand the business while managing business-as-usual, required changes on many fronts. Working with the senior team, a culture plan was built around initiatives to:

- Directly change values and mindsets
- Engage hearts and minds and align activities
- Achieve tangible quick wins in process that signalled change to the front-line
- Build capability of leaders (who were generally promoted from technical roles without adequate training)

Embed the new ways of thinking and working in organisation and people systems

Expand business performance measures from tonnes and safety to include people, community and the environment

The team had previously found "we were unable to take the strategy down to a transactional level; there was no rigour to the process." Executing against a holistic strategy that includes how people will be enabled set the team up for success.

### **Building Execution Focus Safety Culture Plan**

Engage	Build	Enable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Culture Diagnostic</li> <li>- Strategic Planning process for the mid term</li> <li>- Bureaucracy Busters workout process</li> <li>- Safety &amp; culture coaches</li> <li>- Quick wins - symbols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technical safety training</li> <li>- Mindsets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- achievement, accountability adaptability</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Senior leadership team transformation</li> <li>- Middle leader capability build for leading change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business performance dashboard</li> <li>- Individual performance measurement &amp; reward</li> <li>- Attraction &amp; retention</li> <li>- Talent development, career &amp; succession planning</li> </ul>
Sponsor & Communicate		
Program Governance & Continuous Improvement		

### **And the outcome?**

While only part way into the change journey, the HR General Manager has noticed tangible changes, in particular:

The senior team is cohesive and galvanised behind the challenges

Business priorities are clear and leaders sticking with them

Leaders are role modelling the new mindsets – people are commenting on the changes

People are starting to feel their efforts are valued and they can step up to make decisions and be proactive

People have stayed who I know would have left. The strategy has been cascaded – people at the frontline know how their work directly fits into the bigger picture.

<sup>1</sup>'Voice of the Leader' study, Corporate Leadership Council (CLC) 2001

## **case study**

