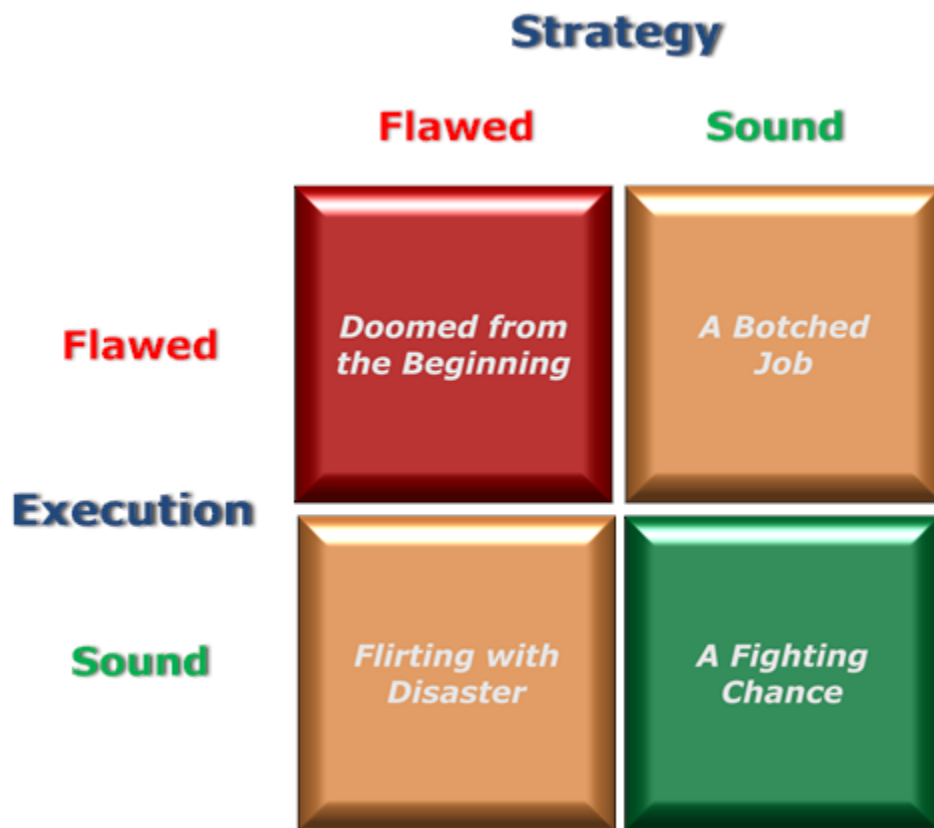


# Strategy IS Execution: Don't Shoot Yourself in the Foot

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Things don't always turn out as planned. This is especially true of strategy. The strategy you contemplate or envision and that same strategy as it plays out are often two very different matters. *Strategy as realized* is the result of efforts to execute *strategy as contemplated*. Said a little plainer, "What you get is the result of what you do." Hence the title of this post: Strategy IS Execution.

The effectiveness of a strategy involves getting it right and doing it right. On the one hand, you have to envision the right course of action. On the other hand, once you settle on a course of action, you have to carry it out properly. The interplay of strategy and its execution yields a 2 x 2 matrix (see Figure 1).



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Figure 1 – Strategy and Execution

If your strategy and its execution are both flawed, the effort is "doomed from the beginning." Your chances of success are zero, nil, nada, zilch.

If your strategy is sound but its execution is flawed, you are guilty of muffing it. You have "botched the job." The real but hidden danger here is that you will be quick to blame the strategy instead of its execution. With the strategy condemned, a new one, perhaps of lesser quality, will be sought out. A series of events in which sound strategies are botched during execution can result in a series of shifts to increasingly inadequate strategies. This can lead to a downward spiral in the level of your organization's performance.

An odd situation arises when your strategy is flawed but you execute it flawlessly. In this case, you are doing extremely well something you shouldn't be doing at all. When this is the case, you are "flirting with disaster." You run the risk of shooting yourself in the foot. For example, if your organization has little in the way of competition and believes its products are seriously under-priced in relation to their value, you might elect to raise prices as a way of increasing revenues only to discover (to your chagrin) that very strong price sensitivity was there all along. The result is a sudden and unexpected loss in volume and revenue, perhaps also giving birth to serious competition.

Only when your envisioned strategy and its execution are both sound do you stand a pretty good chance of success. Even then success is not guaranteed. If your competitors have better strategies and execute them with more dispatch, diligence and dedication, you will still lose the battle of business. So, even if you get the strategy right and even if you carry it out efficiently and effectively, all you can really say is that the odds are in your favor, that you have "a fighting chance."

The matrix in Figure 1 emphasizes the importance of making certain that the right strategy is selected *and* that it is properly carried out. Three out of four possibilities lead directly to failure of one kind or another. Only one of the four possibilities holds forth any hope at all and it hinges on a sound strategy coupled with sound execution — doing the right thing right.

This all boils down to some basic questions you might ask yourself about strategies you are contemplating and might implement:

- Assuming we have the right strategy, do we have the capabilities required to execute it properly?
- Assuming we have the right strategy but muff its execution, what is our recovery strategy and how do we avoid blaming the strategy?
- If we have the wrong strategy, what are we putting at risk if we are really effective at implementing it?
- If we have the wrong strategy, what are all the costs that we incur as a result of muffing it?

Finally, in terms of parting advice, I have two points:

- Don't opt for a strategy you can't implement.

- Don't shoot yourself in the foot as the result of implementing the wrong strategy.

***About the Author:** My name is Fred Nickols. I am a writer, an independent consultant and a former executive. Visual aids of one kind or another have played a central role in my work for many years. My goals in writing for SmartDraw's Working Smarter blog are to: (1) provide you with some first-rate content you can't get anywhere else, (2) illustrate how important good visuals can be in communicating such content and (3) illustrate also the critical role visuals can play in solving the kinds of problems we encounter in the workplace. I encourage you to comment on my posts and to contact me directly if you want to pursue a more in-depth discussion. I can be reached at [fred@nickols.us](mailto:fred@nickols.us).*

