

# Map out decisions with your team

There are a number of reasons why business strategies can fail. Business consultant and author **Bryan Whitefield** says teams must have buy-in to the decision-making process to have any chance of success

**YOU AND I** both know we are good decision-makers, and it's everyone else who has a problem, right?

Well, we are partly right. It's not you or me that is the problem, it's that making decisions gets more and more complex as more people become involved, even if you have the final say.

Take the simple example of deciding where to have dinner in Paris this evening. If it's you making the decision, and you've had a restaurant recommended by multiple people as a 'simply must go', you just go. Now bring your partner into the process. Your partner has had a different restaurant recommended to them. Or perhaps the restaurant you would like to go to specialises in seafood and your partner is not too keen on seafood. Now think about fussy kids becoming involved!

The complexity of team and team leader decision-making results in a less-than-stellar performance by executives globally. According to a report by Dan Lovallo and Olivier Sibony on a McKinsey & Company survey of more than 2,200 executives in 2009, "only 28% said that the quality of strategic decisions in their companies was generally good, 60% thought that bad decisions were about as frequent as good ones, and the remaining 12% thought good decisions were altogether infrequent".



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## How do we define successful strategic decisions?

Landing a man on the moon in 1969 was one of humankind's greatest achievements, yet it had its problems along the way. Three astronauts died, it cost way more than originally projected, and although NASA met the deadline President Kennedy set in 1961 to achieve this massive feat 'by the end of the decade', the entire project took much longer than planned.

So, what is a successful strategic decision?

The measure I have adopted is the one Paul C. Nutt describes in his book *Why Decisions Fail*, in which he unpacks decades of research into 400 decisions made by managers of organisations from a broad range of industries and many countries. Many of the companies are household names in the US and worldwide, like AT&T, Disney and Ford.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION



Nutt's criteria for judging a successful decision are whether the decision was "put to use", and whether it was sustained over at least two years. While any number of arguments could be made for a different set of criteria, Nutt's are tough but reasonable given that these are strategic decisions.

Nutt found that more than half of management decisions fail. That is staggering, given the time, money and will that are put into making them.

### Secret sauce for successful strategic decisions

The first part of the secret to making great strategic decisions concerns your team. It's well understood that a diverse team is essential. It's also well understood that aligning the purpose of individuals with that of the team, and the team's purpose with the organisation's, is critical for success.

In the case of executive teams, the challenge is that each team member has competing priorities. Seldom is there an overabundance of resources, hence team members need to fight for them. And some may be competing for your job. Sometimes

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the competition is beneficial, sometimes not.

Your ability as a team leader to foster a collaborative team is, of course, imperative. My experience of working with executive teams is that the more open-minded and orientated to creative thinking they are, the more collaborative they tend to be.

They need to know their business, but they need a fair understanding of every other part of the business, like you do. At the opposite end of the scale is a 'team' of siloed thinkers.

But this is not the end of the story. You also need to create a team that is synchronous.

### Putting together a synchronous team

Synchronous infers that team members know and understand who is making a decision, and how and when it is being made. Furthermore, they understand their role in supporting each decision as it is relevant to

them, and they have worked out how to do so efficiently and effectively.

Did you just think, "Of course they do!"? Remarkably, unless you have explicitly had this conversation, not everyone is on the same page. We paint pictures in our minds, and no two people's pictures look exactly alike. So, map the process.

Map out how decisions are made by you and your team when it comes to bigger strategic decisions. What I know for sure is this: once everyone is aligned, creative and innovative ideas will emerge. **MPA**

Bryan Whitefield is a business consultant who has worked with hundreds of influential industry leaders. He is also the author of *Risky Business* (2021) and *Team Think: How Teams Make Great Decisions* (2024). Find out more at [www.bryanwhitefield.com](http://www.bryanwhitefield.com).

