

## 3 Ways Your Team Struggles with Execution

According to Donald Sull, Charles Sull, and Rebecca Homkes [in their Harvard Business Review article titled “Why Strategy Execution Unravels.”](#) execution suffers because people fail to collaborate horizontally. After interviewing and researching thousands of employees, researchers found that execution suffers not because teams are not aligned vertically but because they fail to work together horizontally. It is important to understand the difference.

If you are a leader or if you have a leader, the people you lead or the person you report to are in “your vertical.” Execution often does not suffer because of breakdowns in these relationships. Savvy and wise leaders learn to communicate well, to hold people accountable, to set goals, and to move people in a direction.

But more than “vertical leadership” is required. Working with people on other teams, working laterally across multiple areas, is essential in execution. According to the research, struggles with execution happen because people who need to work together across teams struggle to do so. When coordination falters, so does execution. Why do teams and leaders often struggle here? From my observation, for at least 3 reasons:

### 1. Lack of community

People desire to help those they trust and respect, but trust takes time to build. And if there is lack of community across teams, working laterally will be a challenge. A staff at a local church, for example, can quickly degenerate into a plethora of sub-ministries that share the same office space, each focused solely on his/her areas of responsibility. When the relationships are not fostered, trust is low; thus, people have a difficult time influencing others laterally.

### 2. Lack of care

Execution on a broad scale requires multiple people and teams carrying the burden. If execution falters, care and concern likely did not spread widely enough. If care for an initiative or project is localized only to your team, it won't reach levels of broad adoption. For some things, this is fine, as much of the work of your team is localized to your team. But for projects or tasks or initiatives that spread across multiple areas, a lack of care across those areas will doom execution.

### 3. Lack of communication

Both community and care require communication. In many ways, [lateral leadership is the hardest kind of leadership](#). You serve alongside people but don't report to them, and they don't report to you either. But because leadership is about influence, execution requires influencing people who do not report to you. This will not happen without communication of goals, priorities, and sequencing. If execution is faltering, lateral communication is likely faltering as well.

Peter Drucker quipped, “Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.” The hard work of execution requires more than just you, and even more than

just your team.

> [Read more from Eric.](#)

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