Making Strategy Readable

Idea In Short

Making Strategy Readable matters because strategy often lives in decks that only a small group can interpret, while everyone else is expected to act on their contents

Why unreadable strategy creates execution risk

Many organizations produce sophisticated strategy decks filled with charts, matrices and frameworks. These materials can be useful for senior strategy work, but they often fail as communication tools for the broader organization. People see slides but do not know how to connect them to their day-to-day decisions.

Unreadable strategy creates execution risk. Managers improvise their own versions. Employees interpret initiatives inconsistently. External stakeholders receive fragmented explanations. The gap is not only about alignment. It is about interpretive overload.

Making strategy readable is therefore not cosmetic. It is part of execution discipline.

What readable strategy looks like

Readable strategy is not simplistic. It is structured. It explains a few things clearly:

- Where we are
- Where we are trying to go
- Why that direction was chosen
- What will change and what will remain stable
- How different groups can expect to be affected

This narrative may still reference complex ideas — markets, technology, economics — but it does so in language people can work with. It can be retold without slides.

A useful principle:

> If strategy cannot be explained in a few paragraphs, it cannot be executed by a few thousand people

The narrative is what lets the idea travel.

Common patterns of unreadable strategy

One pattern is jargon-heavy communication. Leaders rely on internal labels, acronyms and consultant vocabulary. This can make them sound sophisticated but leaves many listeners unsure what is meant.

Another pattern is fragmentary explanation. Different parts of the organization receive different versions of the strategy, each with local emphasis, but no one sees the whole picture. That weakens trust and makes tradeoffs harder to accept.

A third issue is over-reliance on visuals without accompanying story. Charts show trends, but they do not say what the organization intends to do about them.

A better approach to strategy storytelling

A stronger approach begins with translation. Leaders or strategy teams should draft a prose narrative that captures the essence of the strategy in plain language. This narrative can then be adapted for different audiences — employees, managers, partners, boards — while preserving the core.

The narrative should answer practical questions: what is changing, why now, what stays constant, what will be measured and what support exists. It should also connect strategy to values, so people see not only the plan but the principles behind it.

Visuals can then support the story instead of trying to replace it.

Why readable strategy strengthens both alignment and autonomy

When strategy is readable, more people can act autonomously in ways that still support the direction. Managers do not need constant guidance. Teams can make local decisions that fit the broader arc. Stakeholders can evaluate choices more fairly.

Making Strategy Readable is therefore a lever for both control and empowerment. It limits misinterpretation while expanding who can participate meaningfully in execution.

In complex organizations, clarity is often the scarcest strategic resource. Investing in readable narrative turns that resource into something more widely available.

Summary

Leaders who make strategy readable do not dumb it down. They make it legible enough that competent people outside the strategy circle can work with it