

Creating a Leadership Experience to Align on Strategy at TSYS

Since 1983, Total System Services, Inc. (TSYS), one of the world's largest payment-services firms, has been a leader in payment technology and processing, providing solutions to the financial services industry. TSYS serves more than 300 processing clients and 80,000 direct merchants worldwide.



The business need

Both TSYS and its clients were greatly affected by the recession, regulatory challenges, increased risk in data security, and the speed of technology changes. In addition, the company had grown rapidly, particularly in the last 10 years, expanding to customers in over 80 countries and offices in 20. Although the balance sheet was good, it was apparent that a significant change to the business model was needed if TSYS were to sustain growth and profitability. A transformation in how activities were aligned to the strategy seemed to be needed.

A new strategy introduced about five years ago was solid, but those in charge of implementing it were having trouble gaining traction for it. When they looked for reasons, they realized a fundamental mistake: They had assumed that everyone understood the strategy and could operationalize it. The usual methods had been used to roll it out – a brochure, posters, and other internal marketing tools – but they hadn't really thought about how to get people to make it happen.

The solution

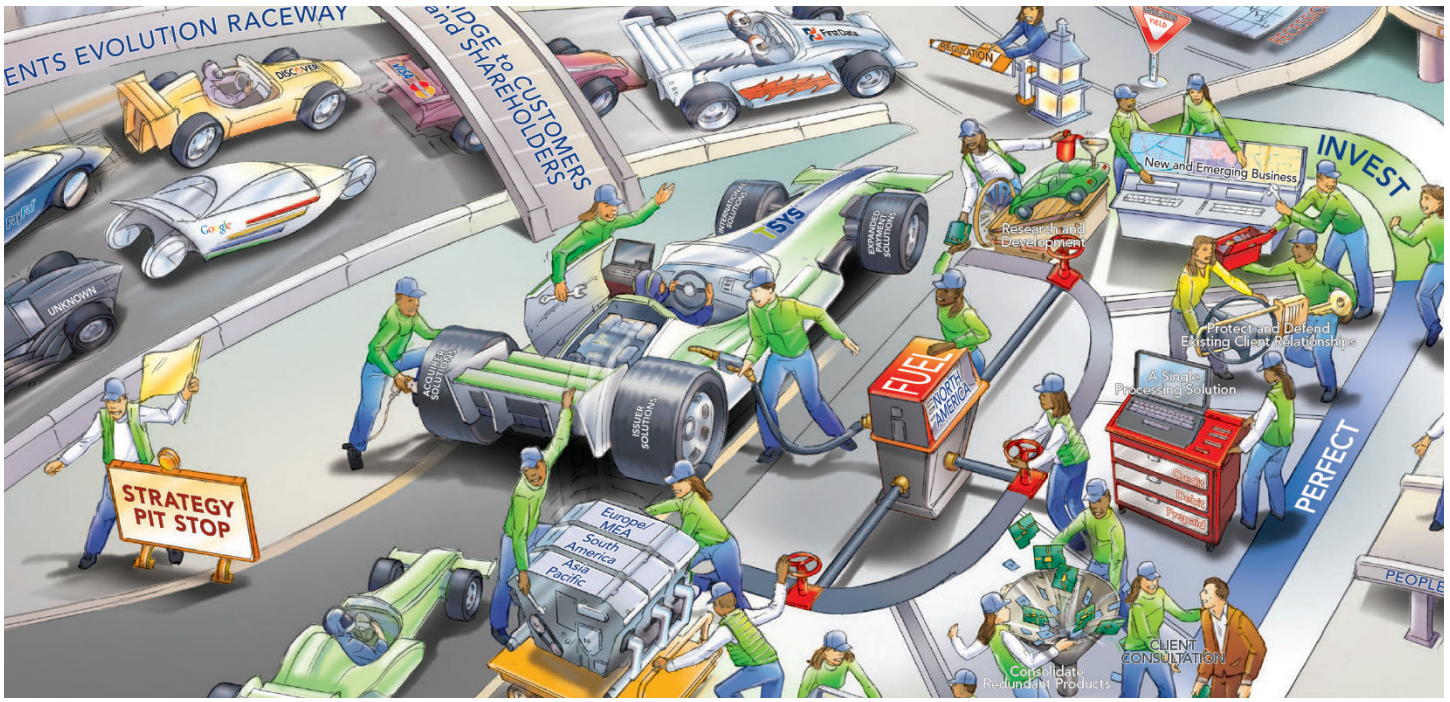
With Root, TSYS created a series of three Strategic *Learning Map*® modules to teach everyone in the company about the marketplace, their financial picture, and the new strategy. This was a great start, and the modules were well received.

Even though the strategy had been explained to everyone, leadership realized that even the people at the highest levels weren't sure how to make that strategy happen – and the transformation had to start at the top. They designed a Leadership Experience program to engage those who were responsible for translating the strategy to every level.

The Leadership Experience was exactly the right catalyst to build energy and excitement for the strategic efforts. The original event was a four-day process intended to get all senior executives together to discuss the current state – what was working and what was not – and the leadership behaviors that were practiced. This session included the top 15 leaders and many long-tenured leaders as well as many new people. No one was sure how the conversation would go. As a group, these leaders realized that they were all working “in” the business instead of “on” it.

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The strategy implementers decided to do something similar with all senior leaders in the company. The president of TSYS really bought in to the process, and he committed to being its champion. His support ensured that the leadership sessions would be sustained and invested in, and that people would be held accountable. To make it fun, engaging, and interactive, TSYS designed a session for 50 more leaders, executives who ran the various parts of the business. There was enthusiastic feedback, but the leaders were still asking, “How do I make this happen?” The change wasn’t happening as quickly as we wanted or gaining as much traction as they had hoped.

In late 2010, TSYS kicked off an initiative called “n>gen for Change: Bridging Strategy with Execution.” The n>gen for Change initiative was a commitment to transforming behaviors and habits of execution to align with the desired future state. Among many other activities, they designed a *Learning Map*® session for all employees at every level, where they reviewed internal and external realities and the need for change. Groups discussed the future state of TSYS, explored the strategy, learned about the metrics and milestones for tracking progress, and discussed behaviors and culture necessary for success.

Results

As a reward for all these efforts, the transformation has begun at TSYS. Change is hard work, but the leaders at TSYS are concentrating on their behaviors every day – striving for transparency, making fact-based decisions, collaborating, executing with intent, and demonstrating trust, clarity of purpose, and unrelenting leadership rigor.

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About Root

Root is a strategy execution company that helps organizations engage people as a catalyst for change using a proven framework that consistently achieves clarity, ownership, and results.

