Leadership Team Alignment

What creates an aligned, high-performing leadership team?

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Leadership team alignment is the integration or harmonization of aims, practices, and actions within the leadership team. Leadership team relationships therefore require a highly dynamic, responsive way of relating to each other with high levels of commitment to integrity, communication, responsibility, mutual respect and mutual purpose. Think of a Formula One racecar going 200 miles an hour. You optimize speed and minimize drag by streamlining everything affecting the aerodynamics of the car. No open windows, not objects sticking out. One flap opened out of alignment could flip the entire vehicle. You wouldn’t get into a racecar that lacked alignment! An aligned leadership team creates greater organizational velocity and impact. It harnesses the collective imagination and intelligence of the group for greater productivity and profitability.

**Six Steps to Creating Leadership Team Alignment**

1. Align on Vision
2. Align on Values
3. Align on Strategic Intent
4. Align on Goals
5. Align on Strategies
6. Align on Tactics

**Align on Values**

“Organizational Values” answers the question, “What is most important?” It is another way of saying; “This is how we do things around here in order to preserve what is most important.” To look at what is most important, think about why you are doing this work in the first place? What is the contribution that you want your business to make to the world, to the community, to the employees and to shareholders? What values matter most in the way that you do business? What values are upsetting when they are not present? Values such as, “treating people with respect,” “creativity and innovation,” “trustworthiness,” and “extraordinary service,” are examples. The *integrity* of an organization is based on how well it operates in a way that is congruent with its stated values. A person’s integrity is based on how well their actions match who they say they are. If I say “you can count on me” and then I fail to keep my agreements with you, I am out of integrity with you and with myself. The integrity of a leadership team is based on its agreed upon values and its ability to show up ways that are congruent with those values and to make choices that bring the values to life and make them real for the organization. Values represent the guiding principles of any organization. All decisions and actions are held up against the values for congruence.

**Align on Vision**

A vision is what the values look like when fully expressed or actualized in the world. If this company were totally successful in its purpose and in full demonstration of its values, what would that look like? Get a clear picture. A team without a compelling vision is like a group of people driving in separate cars to separate destinations. “Organizational Vision” answers the question “Where are we going and how will we know when we get there?” A vision can be one created and shared by the head of an organization, or a leadership team can develop it. When the team is aligned on a clear and compelling vision, everyone is now on the same bus with a driver that knows where he’s going. You ability to create appropriate goals is based upon clarity of vision and values. Without that clarity, goals are random and may be inconsistent with desired outcomes. It is the North Star that guides all organizational decisions and actions.

**Align on Strategic Intent**

Strategic Intent is a grand, compelling 1 – 5 year goal that is a landmark achievement toward the vision of the organization.

A clear and compelling goal that serves to unify a team or an organization’s efforts. It stretches and challenges the team or organization, yet is achievable. It has a finish line and a specific time frame for its achievement. It is clear and engaging, requires little or no explanation, grabs people in the gut. Also known as “A big, hairy, audacious goal.” The Strategic Intent serves as the primary aim that sets the course for the entire organization. All goals flow from the Strategic Intent.

**Align on Goals**

The company’s goals drive the company’s Strategic Intent and Vision. Goals represent the various milestones and breakthroughs toward the strategic intent. One way of formulating goals is to answer the question, “What is currently missing, that if provided, would allow us to create a significant breakthrough toward our Strategic Intent?” Goals should be challenging and demand the high performance of the leaders and the employees in order to achieve them. Research shows that most people operate at somewhere between 50 and 70% capacity. If you want to motivate people toward a 100% job performance, create goals that require that. On the other hand, if you make unrealistic goals, you will demotivate your staff because they will feel like they’ve failed before they’ve begun. Goals should be questioned and challenged by the leadership team to make sure that the goals created by each department are really the primary drivers of the company’s Strategic Intent.

**Align on Strategy**

Once the team has aligned on the organizational goals that will drive the Strategic Intent, the team must align on clear accountabilities and authority for each goal or project. It is essential to distinguish clear accountabilities, responsibilities and authority for each member of the leadership team. Often leaders are accountable for results without the full authority to fulfill on their accountabilities. And even more often there is confusion on who is accountable for what and who is has what authority. It is each leaders responsibility to make requests for necessary authority from the person who can grant that. Each accountable leader must formulate a plan that includes:

Measurable results, timelines and major milestones of the project, who will be on the team, and what support and resources they will need. Direct requests to the team and to team members should be presented with clear commitments and accountabilities.

Do the policies and protocols of the organization support the strategic intent and the values? Any policies or procedures that thwart the values or the forwarding of the strategic intent, need to be reevaluated and altered if appropriate.

What are the important criteria for meeting goals? What are the must-haves of the solutions and tactics that are formulated? What needs to be present and part of the design of any ideas or solutions? (Example: must be within current budget, must enhance the customer experience, etc.)

**Align on Tactics**

The day-to-day operations and who-does-what-by-when is formulated and agreed on by the various departments and project teams. What needs to be considered is how goals and tactics impact other departments and what permissions, agreements and interdepartmental triads need to be formulated to ensure seamless execution. We are looking for alignment in people, systems and action. Are the right people doing the right things in the right way? Are there clear agreements with clear accountabilities and timelines?

In the workplace environment, people interact with each other in a jointly constructed production, one conversation and one interaction at a time. This means that each individual in concert with others creates the day-to-day business and operation of the company. Their collective and individual ideas, attitudes and interactions give rise to the experience of organizational life, and in turn define the emerging results of the company. Seamless responses only occur when there are successful interactions between employees. Once again, it’s the people successfully relating with each other, one interaction after another, that ensures the company will be able to respond successfully to its changing environment and daily demands. It is therefore essential to promote strong relationships, teach good relationship skills and immediately address relationship breakdown amongst staff members. Unresolved relationship breakdowns can stop a project in its track, cause the loss of a contract, create financial losses, time loss and significantly set a company back.

*“Leadership begins with your ability to create team and organizational alignment toward a grand goal.”*

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