

AGREEMENT IS FUTILE; ALIGNMENT IS CRITICAL

Alignment does not happen by chance.

The Four functions of an Executive Team

1. Set the direction of organization
2. Set Priorities & Allocate Resources
3. Monitor progress and remove barriers
4. Models the culture ; Nurtures & Develops talent

The chief purpose of a leadership team is to bring together senior leaders of diverse functions, in order to solve shared problems, and ensure aligned action and collective responsibility for the organization's performance.

A productive team can't be left to chance. It has to be designed according to the context. And since the effectiveness of the team is dependent on the quality of conversations by the team, great effort should be spent on ensuring meaningful dialogue.

Circle where on the graph you would rate the quality of the "Dialogue on this team?"

WEAK		MODERATE		STRONG	
Drama	Passive Aggression	Individualistic	Purposeful	Poised for Leadership	Leadership Caliber
Open conflict among team members. Decision-making is slow and ambiguous. Avoidance of team conversation. Back door politics	Team members play nice when together, but oppose each other when apart. CEO is often the referee mediating between executives.	Still a group of individuals, not a fully-functioning team. Some procedures work; such as agenda management. Solo decisions often made without informing other exec team members.	Team procedures in place. Roles of team members clear. Some productive dialogue. Content can be good; strategy, resource allocation and monitoring in progress. Destructive team members removed.	Team mostly aligned. Conversations among members are productive and produce good decisions. Team roles unambiguous. Some mutual accountability. The greater good of the whole organization comes first. Leadership talent is discussed at least once a year.	Team aligned. Mutual accountability. Conversations allow for constructive debate, but disagreements stay in the room. All decisions supported publicly as if they were the first choice of everyone



WHAT ALIGNMENT LOOKS LIKE

Strategic clarity

If there is any doubt or disagreement among the leadership group about the strategic direction, it quickly becomes obvious to others. Small disagreements are suddenly amplified. Staff members are able to exploit the gaps between leaders. They can press for departmental or functional interests ahead of the interests of the organization. **But, if there is one story, told well, there is no room for staff to misinterpret.**

Being personally accountable

Each leader has the courage and integrity to take ownership of the decisions of the group. Not all decisions will be their preferred first choice, but an aligned group agrees to support ALL decisions, as if they were their first choice. And then they support those decisions in public. **If they cannot do that, they should not be in the leadership group.**

An executive team, Stands shoulder to shoulder

Each member of the team makes an organizational contribution, not merely a department or functional contribution. When sitting around that table, they represent the whole organization and put the interests of the whole above their personal or departmental interests.

Leaders as role models of organizational culture

Organizational culture is the aggregated output of leadership actions, particularly the behavior of leaders. Acceptable and unacceptable behavior among the executive team and extended leadership group must be defined and measured.

Collaboration among the extended leadership group

Successful collaboration requires good working relationships among the leadership group. This cannot be forced, but it can be encouraged. Collaboration is required to ensure the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. **And leadership groups who behave with civility, even enjoyment, are more likely to contribute effectively together.**



The Game Plan – How to Create Alignment

One Strategy Story

This is achieved by an inclusive approach to developing strategy. Not everyone needs to be consulted. But by widening the circle of contributors, the more likely the strategic story will be internalized.

For this to stick, it is vital to ensure that there are no major disagreements among the extended leadership group (direct reports to the CEO, and direct reports to the direct reports) about the direction or choices made by the organization.

Involve this extended group in the strategic conversation. Enable the group to think together in large-scale leadership events. Constant leadership communication will ensure that there are no gaps in the story for staff to exploit.

Executive Team

Executive teams need to be built. They don't happen by chance. Constructed well, with the right protocols, incentives and relationships, the executive team will earn high praise from others, and will make good decisions for the organization.

For CEOs, it can be helpful to think about the large extended leadership group in two categories, in order to work on alignment in a methodical way:

1. The executive team

This group is the most visible leadership forum. Many want to be a member of it, or be in front of it. Any cracks in this group, and it will be detected immediately by others.

2. The extended leadership group

This should include, at a minimum, direct reports of your direct reports. This group will need constant communication and engagement.

Leaders' Goals

Be sure to have one or two shared goals/incentives (in addition to the individual goals) for a set of leaders, in order to reinforce collaborative behavior and create a focus on the whole organization, as well as the individual parts. Be strict in only permitting leader behavior that is in the best interests of the organization.



Organization Design

The way the organization is designed must be in harmony with the strategic story. Well-designed organizations are ones that have been intentionally built to execute in a way to maximize the strategic output.

Environment always wins! Research shows that structure determines behavior, or at least some behaviors. If the organization is built with multiple confusing matrixes, leadership alignment is likely to suffer.

WEAK		MODERATE		STRONG	
No Alignment	Many Gaps	A Few Gaps	Still Some Gaps	Mostly Aligned	Maximum Alignment
<p>Leaders publicly disagree about the strategy.</p> <p>Fighting for resource allocation can get ugly.</p> <p>Leaders' behavior focused on promoting self and/or department.</p>	<p>Some alignment on the strategy.</p> <p>But, leaders publicly disagree about priorities.</p> <p>At the executive team, topics are avoided because 'too hard to resolve.'</p>	<p>Strategic alignment good.</p> <p>Some leaders don't want to play nice, though.</p> <p>Special interests win out over the logic of the strategy.</p> <p>Executive team is not well designed or well built, so is unable to make effective decisions.</p>	<p>No public disagreements among leadership. Strategy not questioned.</p> <p>Leaders contribute to the organization beyond their own function or department.</p> <p>Executive team working well.</p>	<p>Leaders seen as great role models of the culture, by their behavior.</p> <p>They collaborate where necessary for the greater good of the organization.</p> <p>Leadership events create a sense of purpose and direction.</p>	<p>A clear strategic story that all leaders are committed to.</p> <p>Leaders take personal responsibility for all decisions, even if not their first choice.</p> <p>Executive team well-regarded by employees as effective decision-making body.</p>

