QUALITY OF DIALOGUE MATTERS

Everyone knows when the senior team is not having the right conversations. Not just team members, but their colleagues and their own staff. It filters down pretty quickly to the rest of the organization.

What does an executive team with poor quality conversations look like?

- A lack of challenge and of open debate
- The inability to speak 'truth to power'
- Meetings that are perfunctory , not relationship-building
- Lackluster contributions from team members
- Too little participation from everyone
- Too much reporting out of individual responsibilities, rather than 'thinking together' conversations
- Lack of trust ; doesn't want colleague to speak with "my team" directly

Yet despite this, few leadership teams actively look at the quality of the conversations they have.

Why great dialogue really matters on the executive team

What if the quality of conversations in an organization is one of the biggest factors affecting its performance? What if it directly affects the quality of decision-making, the inclusiveness of strategy development, innovation, cross-functional collaboration, and most importantly, employee engagement.

The whole point of a high-functioning leadership team is to think together. By doing so, the team becomes aligned around a course of action, and it typically creates a better designed outcome. Thinking together, though, requires the team to be proficient in dialogue.

Learning how to maximize the effectiveness in talking and listening to each other helps executive teams to safeguard the business and capitalize on opportunities.

How to assess the quality of dialogue

Sometimes an in-depth, full-bore assessment of an executive leadership team is not required, or not possible. Measuring the quality of dialogue is light-touch. It can be used on its own as a quick pulse check. It can also be used as part of a broader team development effort.

All top teams have habits and behaviors that shape the way they have conversations and discussions, some of which are likely to be effective and others less so.

1. **Productivity** - How useful and productive are conversations as a whole?

2. **Attentiveness** - How attentive and present are team members in conversations?

3. **Structure** - How structured are typical conversations? How much scope is there for flexibility?

4. **Voicing** - What is the typical balance between building consensus and airing differences of opinion? How comfortable are team members to challenge each other?

5. **Power** - What is the role of power and hierarchy in typical conversations?

6. **Inquiry** - How good are team members at listening, and how aware are they of their impact on others?