

Creating Team Alignment

While many of us might prefer to work alone and believe we would be much more successful and efficient if we could do so, the reality is that leading, managing and being a valuable member of a well-functioning team is critical for both short and long-term business and professional success. Very few of us are successful in isolation. There is an avalanche of research, models and advice about how to build high-performing teams. As a leader, learning never ends so ensure you allocate the time to be curious and to continuously expand your pool of knowledge.

Often when separate teams come together, each will tend to define their shared purpose in terms of their own personal or divisional lens. The marketing team sees the priority as protecting brand value and reputation, the finance team's goal is to reduce costs, while the manufacturing team wants to minimise re-work and dumping stock.

When any team is brought together it is critical that sufficient time be allocated to define and gain agreement on the joint purpose and goals, as well as how success will be defined. Without this basic agreement and understanding of what success will look like, the team will be working at cross-purposes to each other. Additionally, it is important that teams remind themselves of their goals at the beginning of each meeting to ensure that they stay focus and aligned. This is a simple habit to develop in work and more generally – openly discussing and defining objectives, aligning actions, ensuring focus and continually measuring success. In this module we would like to share a simple process to gain clarity and alignment, and to develop a process for team alignment.

As you complete the exercises in this module, we will explore each of the following.

- Creating a clear, aligned and inspiring objective, vision or purpose
- Creating your team culture and code of conduct
- Developing trust and rapport

Vision, Commitment, Roles, Actions

The most fundamental requirement of creating a high-performing team and ensuring successful outcomes is to have a clear, well-understood goal and vision.

Unfortunately, the pace of business often means we are jumping to conclusions, making assumptions or focusing on immediate functional outcomes rather than meaningful results, thus missing this crucial step of ensuring that everyone on the team understands and is on the same page with regard to objectives. In this exercise we are going to encourage you to take a step back in order to take two steps forward. As they say, poor planning leads to poor results, so let's spend some time planning.

The most successful team visions are:

- Clear – that is, they are easily understood and able to be communicated by all team members. There will be objective and measurable goals or metrics to determine successful outcomes.
- Aligned – that is, the vision should be consistent, with all team members working toward the same outcomes. It is impossible to win the game if you are shooting for different goals!
- Inspiring – that is, the vision needs to be relevant, achievable and meaningful to all involved. Inspiring visions tend to be customer-centric, non-monetary and focused on benefitting others.

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Defining purpose

The first and most important question to be asked and answered is 'Why are we here?' Specifically, we need to define what success will look like for this particular team.

Teams are formed for many reasons. For example, an executive team or divisional team is formed for the long-term, while temporary teams might form to manage a special project or specific crisis. Irrespective of the type of team, having a clear, aligned and inspiring vision is critical for success.

Let's consider an example, looking at possible purposes and goals for an executive team. Is the aim:

- to achieve long-term shareholder returns and present positively at the annual shareholders meeting?
- to achieve the quarterly budget so executive bonuses can be paid?
- to protect the brand reputation of the organisation?
- to create a safe, rewarding and challenging environment for employees to improve employee retention and productivity?
- to meet customer needs and achieve NPS metrics?
- to do whatever is required to keep their jobs or get promoted!?

Clearly, the actions taken and the results achieved will vary considerably depending on the objectives all members of the team agree on.

Unfortunately, this type of confusion occurs all too often in executive meetings, boardrooms and day-to-day team meetings. This lack of clarity and aligned purpose usually leads to ongoing conflict and a lack of overall success.

Achieving alignment

Let's work through a scenario together. Consider a team that has been brought together to manage a situation involving a truckload of the wrong peanut butter has been sent to a customer. The team has been asked to fix the issue.

But what does 'fix' mean? To decide, consider the following questions.

➤ **Who is the main stakeholder or who will determine your success as a team?**

Is it the customer, the consumer who is buying the product, the finance manager who doesn't want to pay for double freight, the warehouse manager who doesn't want to accept the incorrect inventory back into the warehouse, or someone else?

➤ **How will success be measured?**

Should it be measured in terms of cost, reputation, disruption, relationships, resources, time, lost opportunities or something else? What are the specific measures and benchmarks?

➤ **What are the other considerations we need to be aware of?**

Are there any legal, health and safety, financial or contractual considerations? Are there time or reputation considerations or restrictions? What company policies need to be considered? Do internal politics play a role?

➤ **Is there broad agreement on and commitment to the vision or objectives?**

This is the most important factor in ensuring success. Take the time to listen to all perspectives, to debate alternatives and to ensure that all team members agree on objectives.

It is unlikely there will ever be 100% alignment, but high-performing teams are able to debate and acknowledge different viewpoints, yet leave the room completely committed to the agreed-upon plan and actions.

Healthy, respectful and honest debate and discussion is essential for success of a team. All team members need to feel confident to share their opinions, but also need to be open to listening and compromising.

Remember to ensure that the agreed-upon objectives are SMART – that is, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound.



Building Trust & Rapport - Template

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Bad

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