

8 Questions to Assess Executive Team Alignment

Is the executive team aligned? Do the team members understand the strategic vision of the organization and agree on what needs to be done to implement it? Do they understand their role as executives with responsibility for functional units within the organization and their role as executive team members?

We have identified eight questions every executive team should answer and discuss to determine alignment:

1. What are your biggest successes?

- Do executive team members agree on the biggest successes?
- Do they define success as functional unit based or organizationally based?
- Do they define it as a sentinel event (i.e. starting the company, hiring a key employee, acquisition of a new client or another company)?

2. What are your biggest challenges?

- Are challenges defined in terms of the organization or in terms of each executive's area of responsibility?
- Are the challenges defined in broad general terms such as "we need to grow"?
- Are they described in specific terms such as "we need to reduce our cost of production

by a certain percent to be more competitive"?

- Are they based on assumptions rather than on data, information and analysis?

3. Who are your customers?

- How is the customer defined?
- Are customers segmented into logical categories based on the nature of the business?
 - Demographic
 - Gender
 - Buying Habits
 - Psychographic
 - Socio-economic
 - Industries
 - Sectors within industries
 - Buyers within sectors within industries
 - Other condition relevant to your marketplace

In healthcare this would be something like all patients who require hospitalization within a 10 miles radius of the facility, or all patients who need open heart surgery

- Service providers

4. Who are your competitors?

- Do all team members agree on the competitors?
- Do any executives answer: we have no competitors?
- Do any executives give the same answer for competitors as they did for customers?
- Are competitors mentioned by name?
- Are competitors defined as organizations in the same business or are they defined as organizations that provide a different product or service but compete for limited buyer funds.

- Do they define units within the organization as competitors?

5. What are your differentiators? - How are you different?

- Do executives answer this question with more detail than they answered the question on competitors?
- Do they understand and articulate differences but are unclear on whom they are different from?
- Do executives list differentiators in broad general language?

6. How are your clients, customers, or patients better off because they work with you or receive service from you?

- Do executives respond to the question using the concept of value provided to its customers?
- Is the response functional unit focused?
- Is the response organizationally focused?
- Is the response framed in broad general terms?
- Can the executive provide specific examples of how clients, customers or patients are better off?

7. Are you on target?

- How do executives interpret on target?
- Is it in financial terms, market share, customer satisfaction or other terms?
- Can the executives provide examples of why the organization is on target?

●Is the answer focused on their functional unit or on the organization?

8. What is your 3 to 5 year vision?

- How similar or different are the interpretations of the future for the organization?
- Is the future defined in terms of the functional unit and its future impact on the organization?
- Is the future defined with specific details or in generalities
- Is the future defined as:
 - New product development opportunities
 - Gaining market share using a new strategy
 - More growth and higher profits
 - To be the best in our market

Executive team alignment is critical to the success of the organization. No executive works in isolation.

The president of a publicly traded manufacturing company felt the company was well positioned for growth in its market niche. The new executive team was comprised of seasoned executives some from businesses with a similar product line. The strategic vision was well articulated in the company literature and on its web site. The president, however, was concerned that the team was not working well together and it was causing delays in implementing the initiatives required for growth.

Each executive, in a one on one interview, answered the eight questions. When the

answers were summarized and presented to the executives, there was surprise. The biggest issue identified was the degree to which each executive operated independently from the other team members. The executives were doing a very good job within their functional area, but were not effectively coordinating their individual effort with the other members of the executive team. This resulted in an uncoordinated approach to the marketplace. The president took corrective action to improve team work and create team accountability for results.

A service company was experiencing a slowdown in its service offerings after seven years of strong sales and high customer satisfaction. They had one major client and a few smaller ones. Repeat business was generated by “walking the halls”. The company was managed as a partnership with each partner living in a different part of the country. Their services were project based. They did not have the opportunity for daily contact that would exist if they were in one location.

After independently answering the eight questions, they found during the summary discussion that there was general agreement on the answers to the eight questions. What was revealing, however, were their answers to the questions on competition and differentiators. The discussion shifted to thinking about the company in different terms. While it was accurate that they completed projects for their

clients, the partners realized that completing projects resulted in helping their clients position the client’s products more effectively. They realized they were not a project company; they were a product positioning company.

In the examples, each executive team had an opportunity to see and understand how other executives felt about the organization. They were able to find common ground and identify areas where improvement, adjustment, or refocus, was needed.

Understanding how each executive views the organization, its challenges and its opportunities provides an important foundation for strategic and implementation planning. “Being on the same page” is more than an adage; it is essential for organizational success.

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Tony Kubica & Sara LaForest are co-founders of Kubica & LaForest Consulting and the Growth without Sabotage™ model for performance and organizational improvement.

The information presented is based on the ideas and concepts presented in their forthcoming book on the damaging effects of self-sabotaging behaviors in business.

We can be reached at:
KUBICA & LAFOREST CONSULTING
132 Governors Drive
Warwick, RI 02018
(401)595 7485; (907)229-7948
www.growthwithoutsabotage.com
tony@growthwithoutsabotage.com
sara@growthwithoutsabotage.com