

The Right Questions

- Is your leadership team fully aligned with what your business aims to deliver?
 - Are you absolutely 100% certain about that?
 - Is it safe to discuss areas of disagreement, or does everyone just comply?
 - Do they know why the organisation exists?
 - Are they clear on how they can deliver your strategic imperatives?
- Are they even clear on the difference between vision and mission, or mission and strategy?
- Do you have real strategic alignment across the business?
- And do all of your employees understand how their work contributes to the bigger picture?

These are just a few of the vital questions that don't get asked in business because we are all too busy doing the business to check if we all agree on what 'the business' actually is.

Based on 25+ years of facilitating executive teams, we have devised a library of questions for testing clarity, understanding and buy-in which can help to identify areas of concern in a safe and respectful way.

Starting with Simon Sinek "Why, not what", we work through a profound purpose audit with the top team, facilitating gently and respectfully to elicit any and every area of confusion, dissent, cannibalisation and sabotage. At the end of this event, we will return to you a leadership team 100% aligned with the business goal.

The benefits of this programme will support your performance management process, your likely success at managing and implementing wider organisational change, the quality and quantitative of communication, and the effectiveness of your leadership. In fact, you cannot hope to achieve a high performance culture without asking these questions which are so crucial to your success.

Case Study - Fit for the Future

In September 2018, we were asked by a client to investigate why their ambitious change programme had failed to deliver on any of the objectives set, and was far from meeting any of the KPI targets determined by the board.

Communication is always key to successful change implementation, so we started there. The programme had been launched nearly three years earlier, but leadership communication had dried up nearly a year ago. "There's a big clue!" we suggested, but the HR Director looked awkward. "That can't be the answer. Please - there must be something else."

It was a strange reaction, and raised some important questions. Why wasn't the lack of comms allowed to be the answer? Who was managing the comms strategy to support the initiative? And why did nobody want to discuss change comms with us. So, we dug deeper, running a series of focus groups with staff selected from various parts of the organisation, including the employee forum, business improvement team, and the comms team. There was general confusion about the programme, and most people were surprised to hear it being mentioned. "I thought that had died a long time ago!" was a common response. We went deeper still, holding a series of 1:1 meetings with the power brokers in the business, senior managers, key influencers and other go-to people. Their understanding was vague and contradictory. Finally, we went and interviewed each member of the executive team. The CEO was very clear about the reason for the change programme. Fit for the Future was his idea. But what we very quickly discovered was that the CEO was the *only* member of the exec team who thought it was a good idea. All the rest of directors thought the programme was ill-conceived, impractical and unrealistic. "Have you raised this with the CEO?" we asked. "No, he doesn't want to hear it."

We wrote up a list of anonymised findings to protect the confidences shared, with recommendations for a repositioning and relaunch and supporting comms plan. But our recommendations included some very specific activities designed to check alignment and surface concerns. We met again with the CEO, and discussed our findings, including resistance from within his team. The mood became very ugly, very quickly. "They are all fully on board!" he insisted. "No, they are not, and we'll prove it to you" we replied. We carried out a group activity with the wider exec team, surfacing issues and discussing anticipated problems, then followed with a powerful intervention designed to promote alignment and ownership. The programme was relaunched company-wide, and has finally proven to be a great success, achieving all of its 9 strategic imperatives.

We should never take for granted that the most senior and experienced leaders of an organisation are all in agreement on every point of strategic alignment. Our approach will ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction, and communication gets done right the first time.