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Leadership and Alignment

Successful leadership stems from effective corporate alignment, period. Alignment is a skill that encompasses all leadership characteristics, including the physical attributes of a leader. The importance of a leader's ability to align organizational elements that affect corporate identity and personality cannot be denied. The concept of alignment can be best understood by analyzing the vision, mission, culture, goals and communication patterns operating within an organization. These factors build corporate personality. An organization is best known by its culture, product innovations, vision and goals. Leaders thus need to focus on aligning these parameters through an effective communication plan.

Alignment is a universal leadership formula. However, applying it in its raw form would be of little use. Alignment as a concept underscores marrying vision and reality. However it means different things to different leaders and organizations. It all largely depends on the corporate vision and culture. Corporate alignment, though universally applicable, needs to be customized to suit corporate requirements.

The essence of alignment

Alignment is about getting the right vision, right people, right job and right timing in one slot. Further, leaders need to concentrate on the path or method of achieving the predetermined goals rather than being focused only on the outcome. In addition, leaders need to chart out effective communication channels to facilitate the process of educating employees about future growth plans, the methods that will be used and their specific roles in achieving these goals. From a communications perspective, leaders have to be extremely forthright, transparent and encouraging. Ideally, senior leaders should clearly outline the specifics in terms of goals, action plans, expectations and the execution needs that supervisors should carry out. Effective execution helps employees get a better perspective of the exact requirements of the leader and helps them better align themselves to the corporate vision.

Despite various efforts, leaders have to deal with conflicting corporate goals and individual objectives. Striking a state of harmonious alignment where both employees and customers are satisfied is indeed the most desirable state a leader can hope to achieve. However, arriving at a mutually beneficial proposition calls for certain strategic measures. These include:

Awareness about the basic purpose of being

What is the purpose of an organization's existence? What is it striving to achieve? The answers could range from breakthrough product innovations to mere profit making business strategies. Whatever the purpose, those working towards it should have a clear insight into their macro level objectives. Once employees get the big picture right, it becomes easy to direct their energies in the right direction.

Set sub-goals



TenStep Supplemental Paper

Under the umbrella of the larger goals, managers should articulate a set of sub-goals for their work teams that would finally add up to meeting the ultimate objectives. Sub-goals make an effective motivation and self-check strategy. Continuous assessment on pre-determined short-term targets helps employees keep a tab on their performance and prevents them from going astray. Further, conquering short-term targets in spurts gives employees the extra zing required to achieve the set goals.

Get a life

All work and no play is a bad idea in today's high-stress work environment. Leaders and managers need to ease out on the reins and take a breather. Striking the right balance between the professional and personal demands is thus critical for successful leadership.

Organizations must also align their objectives with the corporate culture. Culture drives success through inspiring stories, a motivating work environment and providing employees opportunities to flaunt their skills and talent.

An organization's communications network largely determines the successful propagation of corporate culture and the values it champions. Companies with a strong culture have stories of success that reflect on the role that culture plays in aligning business parameters. Success stories reinforce corporate vision and mission and help employees stay on course.

Reality check

Unsure about your alignment strategy? Here is a checklist to stay in line:

- Reinforce corporate mission periodically
- Strategize and communicate
- Align method with action
- Clearly state the order of execution to coordinate actions better
- Formulate short-term goals
- Frame malleable vision and mission statements

Alignment is a prerequisite for leadership success. Organizations must thus be aware of the factors that could misalign and realign their success moves. Despite the evident need to align, leaders should use their discretion since there are times when organizations are better off stepping out of line than staying in line with what "*has* " been and becoming oblivious to the changing business needs.