

How to Articulate a Robust Team Purpose



Henley Business School's research shows that the effectiveness of management teams is now the most cited challenge for organisations and that shared purpose is a critical element of effective teams. In our experience teams are most highly motivated when their purpose aligns to a company purpose that is itself defined as 'the positive difference this organisation is called on to make in the world'.

So, how do you align the team's purpose to support the delivery of the wider organisation's purpose in a way that is consistent with the company values?

And, for top teams, how do you test that your current organisational purpose might indeed make a positive difference in the wider world?

Here are two tools you can adapt and use.

Name of Tool: Team Purpose Articulation

This first tool supports teams to create a clear purpose aligned to the company's current Purpose, Goal and Values

Group size: 4 – 6 (if up to 12, begin in pairs)

Length of Time: 60+ minutes

Problem statement: "The team is not clear or united in its purpose. It needs to create a purpose aligned to the company's Purpose, Goal and Values."

The exercise is particularly useful if your team needs to develop strength in the following 2 elements of the Team Health Check: Shared Direction and Outward Focus. If the result of this exercise also

raises issues about the organisation's 'noble purpose', the team may need to work on their capacity for Courageous Challenge.

Key message/ outcome of the exercise: "We can articulate our team's purpose, specifically and positively in keeping with our organisation's purpose, strategy and goals."

Set up: Step by Step

In advance, create the following slides:

- Slide #1 with your company's Purpose, Goal and Values
- Slide #2: 'Why does this team exist? What is or could be its unique contribution to this company? If this team didn't exist, what would be lost?'
 - "The Purpose of this team is to..."
- Slide #3 with the following definitions:
 - Purpose: why we exist
 - Goal/Vision: what we really want to achieve to realise our Purpose Values: the ethical constraints that guide our behaviour
 - Strategy: what we need to do to get from where we are today to our Vision and Purpose

Facilitation step by step:

- Discuss with the group the importance of having a Purpose to achieve alignment within the team and a sense of 'meaning' that engages all its members
- Show Slide #1 of your company's Purpose, Goal and Values. This is a given, so the question is "How is the purpose of this team uniquely to support the delivery of this company's goal in a way that is consistent with the company values."
- Show Slide #2
- Ask each individual to write 3-5, positively stated bullets to complete the following sentence: "The Purpose of this team is to..."

Then use one of these two methods to integrate and funnel thinking so that what may seem a difficult or individual task can be solved by group input.

Collective Co-creative Build

1. One team member offers his or her top bullet, then others offer their statements that build on that
2. Another offers a different starting bullet point and the team repeat the process
3. Keep going until all ideas are extracted
4. Refine and simplify into one, simply stated sentence

Group Funnel

1. Collate the individual answers
2. Re-organise the team into pairs, ask the same question again and collate the answers
3. Re-organise the team again to either threes or fours and again pose the question and collate the answers
4. Eventually you will get one or two answers to the originally posed question.
5. Refine into one, simply stated sentence

Top Tips:

- If there is confusion on definitions, show Slide #3

- Encourage the team to avoid jargon throughout. Ideally the 'purpose' sentence should be as clearly understood by colleagues outside the team as within it
- It is important to state a purpose in the positive as we are far more likely to achieve success if we are aiming for something rather than aiming to avoid something
- Encourage the Team to put the sentence in the present tense

Name of Tool: Testing the Purpose

This second tool supports top teams to refine their organisation's purpose. It's not a substitute for research and engagement but an experiential exercise which uses the wisdom of the team to provide insight.

Other teams can also use this exercise to test and refine the purpose articulated through the first exercise.

Facilitation step by step:

- For a top team, write up the organisational purpose on a flip chart. For other teams, write the team purpose. Below this, write the company values
- Identify the organisation's/ this team's critical external stakeholders, either groups or individuals, no more than five in all
- Assign the roles of the stakeholders to members of the team. Ask them to put aside their own views and represent the stakeholder fully
- Ask a further member of the team to represent 'what the world most needs from this organisation/ team'
- Invite the stakeholders and the additional representative to stand in relationship to the purpose written on the flip chart where each feels is true for them. Note how close or distant they stand, whether they face the purpose, stand sideways, or turn away.
- Ask each representative in turn to report if and how the purpose and values meet their needs as stakeholders.
- Now discuss, refine, and rewrite the purpose, note which values are most needed to support it. Test again with the representatives: do they feel better served by the purpose? Where are they standing now?

Note: You may find that stakeholders have strong opinions about each other. This can give you material for future team discussions, for now stay focused on refining the purpose.

Richard Spence

Original source: David Presswell and Richard Spence. With thanks to John Whittington and David Presswell for inspiration for 'Testing the Purpose'.

References:

See also John Whittington's book 'Systemic Coaching and Constellations' Richard Spence (7th February 2017)



You can download a PDF of the Henley Corporate Learning Survey 2016 at:
www.henley.ac.uk/files/pdf/exec-ed/Corporate_Learning_Survey_2016_report_final_WEB.pdf

For more fresh thinking, resources and practical tools visit <https://eye2eyedev.com/resources/>

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