Five Easy Questions to Check Organizational Alignment

Purpose:
This exercise is designed to provide feedback on the degree of organizational alignment. An aligned organization is one in which resources, people, and structures are all dedicated to the core purpose of the organization and in which resources and structures support the work of the people in achieving the purpose.

Directions:
1. Gather 3-5 critical members of the organization who represent different core functions. In private sector organizations, these members might include but are not be limited to leaders in sales, development, customer service, HR, and finance. In education, these might include, among others, executive leaders (superintendent and principals), curriculum and instruction specialists, or leaders in finance, HR, and special education.
2. In a **total of five minutes,** critical members, including yourself, should respond to the questions below, giving **immediate** reactions or thoughts to each. This time limit is important.
3. After five minutes, gather the responses and use the answer guide below to assess the organizational alignment.

Five Easy Questions:
- What is our organization's core purpose?
- What role do I play in fulfilling that purpose?
- What percentage of my time over the past two weeks was spent working in ways that directly support the purpose?
- What facilitators (other people, resources, policies, and structures) make it easier for you to work towards the purpose?
- What barriers make it challenging to work towards the purpose?

Interpreting Results:
Use the scoring guide below to generate a score between 5-15. A score above 12 indicates high alignment. A score of 10-12 suggests average alignment. A score of 7-10 signals that there are significant issues. A score below 6 reveals that something is drastically wrong.

Next Steps:
While aligning an organization is the core function of leadership, understanding the nature of the misalignment is a complex yet necessary task. Resist the urge to jump into action, and instead invest in identifying why the misalignment exists. Here are some strategies:
1. Work with the people who participated in the check to identify key problems by discussing the responses as a group. Capture thoughts, opinions, and ideas.
2. Review materials and correspondence for evidence of the purpose. Ideally, these materials and communications should include purpose-specific language and focus on things that move the organization towards its purpose.
3. Identify all major projects and initiatives and evaluate the degree to which they align with the purpose of the organization.
4. Consider working with someone outside of the organization to help provide perspective.

Scoring Guide

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Question	1	2	3
What is our organization's core purpose?	Significant differences, may be more focused on the core function than the actual purpose, no common language.	Important similarities, but inconsistencies in language, purposes are related, but not identical.	Strong similarities, common language, clearly identify the core purpose.
What role do I play in fulfilling that purpose?	Responses show that people don't connect their role to the actual purpose of the organization.	The majority of descriptions connect the person's core function to the organizational purpose or one closely related to it.	All descriptions connect the person's core function to the organizational purpose.
What percentage of my time, over the past two weeks, was spent working in ways that directly support the purpose?	The majority of people perceived that less than 50% of their time was spent on work directly related to the purpose.	The majority of people perceived that 50% or more of their time was spent on work directly related to the purpose.	All people perceive that 75% or more time was spent on work directly related to the purpose.
What factors (other people, resources, policies and structures) facilitate your work towards the purpose?	Facilitators are scarce and related to only core initiatives, people, or structures of the organization.	Facilitators are plentiful and are related to two core initiatives, people, or structures of the organization.	Facilitators are plentiful and are related to core initiatives, people, and structures of the organization.
What factors make it challenging to work towards the purpose?	A large number of barriers exist, three or more of which require changes to core initiatives, people, or structures of the organization.	A significant number of barriers exist, one or two of which require changes to core initiatives, people, or structures of the organization.	Barriers are few, easily addressed, and do not require changes to core initiatives, people, or structures of the organization. Barriers may be insurmountable due to external factors.

I hope this tool is helpful. Please let me know if this works for you and tell me what other tools might be helpful for your leadership.
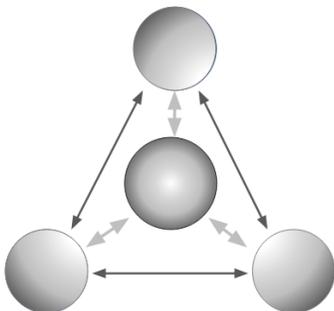
-Frederick

Frederick Buskey, EdD
Strategic Leadership Consulting, LLC
frederick@frederickbuskey.com

https://www.frederickbuskey.com/