



# THE **LEADERSHIP CONTEXT**

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From Competing  
to Collaborating  
as a Leadership  
Team

# From Competing To Collaborating As A Leadership Team

## Background

The team leader was frustrated with the ongoing competing agendas that were pervasive amongst her team members. She suggested there was a strong silo-mentality and very limited internal collaboration - a surprise to her as a new leader to the organization.

*"Limited cross functional understanding that led to a lack of cooperation"*

## The Challenge

A recent engagement survey across the organisation suggested that there was a lack of collaboration with cross-functionally. Staff perceived the leadership team as non cooperative and potentially dysfunctional. The emerging urgency that forced her to seek external help was due to a strong competitor achieving results in traditional markets and one in which our client was previously dominant. This could not continue.

## Our Approach

As part of our initial 'needs analysis diagnosis' we realised there there was a real lack of team interaction amongst the team members. They did not possess any 'sense of team' and rarely met for reasons other than reporting on the previous month's activities in their operational functions. Our pre-workshop questionnaires illustrated that the members of the team had a limited cross-functional understanding of each other's operational responsibilities and therefore had limited reasons to develop communication amongst the members.

Each team member took a silo approach to leading and rarely thought about the stakeholders the organisation had, other than those served directly by the function they personally managed. This led to a situation where various stakeholders had 'needs and wants' from the leadership team. This placed the team in direct conflict with each other, often with no understanding (by the members of the team) as to why they actually were in conflict.



The initial team member discussions were centered around the need to be a team, as opposed to a silo based working group. Understanding different types of teams allowed for the group to decide what kind of team they wanted to be.

Next they interviewed key stakeholders to fully understand what each stakeholder group wanted from this leadership team. These interviews brought surprising insights to the team members and helped to illuminate each member as to the whole leadership role they needed to embrace. Until this point, each member was only partially leading as they were ignoring the needs of key stakeholders. The 'voice of the stakeholder' previously missing from leadership team meetings was now fully in the room with resonance.

With a clear map of the range of stakeholder voices, the team was able to clearly articulate the overall mandate the team had and what it needed to achieve. This provided clarity on individual contributions needed from each team member.

The group structured themselves differently in order to ensure that the inter dependencies needed to deliver the overall outcomes were enabled. Relatively quickly, they found the disharmony amongst team dissipating and efficiencies rising. Having a clear line of sight on stakeholder needs and therefore a clear purpose for the team allowed for silos to drop away and cross functional collaboration to improve. The concerns of the leader during the commencement of the assignment were no longer existing.

## **The Successful Outcomes**

Over time the group moved from being silo driven to having a shared agenda that brought them together. As individuals, they moved beyond leading their function to leading the business. Anecdotally each member expressed pride at the change in their individual leadership but also that of the leadership team.

The annual staff engagement survey showed significant improvements in cross- organisational collaboration and leadership cohesiveness as perceived by staff and external stakeholders. In the market, the organisation was able to compete more effectively and defend their traditional territories.

***"The voice of the stakeholder was now fully in the room."***

