Start With Alignment

By Fred Jewell and Tracy Reznik

In this seventh article in a nine-part series, we look at the next section of the Jabian Engagement Framework: How alignment can be used as a lever to influence engagement.

After years of researching happiness and fulfillment, psychologist and author Jonathan Haidt at the University of Virginia wrote that "getting the relationships right between yourself and others, between yourself and your work, and between yourself and something larger than yourself" are keys to developing a sense of purpose and meaning.[1] We call this "alignment" and have broken it into five key elements we can more easily work with:

· PURPOSE
· GOALS
· STRATEGY
· CAPACITY
· BELIEF

Deliberately addressing these key elements before starting any endeavor will help maximize successful outcomes, whether as an individual, as part of a team, or as part of a larger project. Ignoring alignment increases risk and requires extra work. Just like it takes extra work to keep your car on the road when your wheels are out of alignment, it takes extra work to keep yourself, your team, or your project on track when purpose, goals, strategy, capacity, and belief are out of alignment.

Alignment also applies to the different levels of an organization. The more aligned an organization is within the community where it operates, the more leaders of an organization are aligned with each other, teams are aligned with their leaders, and individuals are aligned with their teams, the more energy everyone puts into the system.

Alignment components

TERMS	WHAT THIS MEANS	QUESTIONS TO ASK
PURPOSE	Mission Vision Values Calling "The Why"	· What is the mission of this effort? Do I/we agree with this mission? · How is the mission aligned with the bigger organization's purpose? · How is the mission aligned with my individual and my team's personal mission and purpose? How is this contributing to something bigger than ourselves?
GOALS	Direction Objectives Desired Outcomes Desired Results "The What"	· What are the specific goals I'm/we're setting out to accomplish? · Do I/we clearly understand the goals and objectives? · Do my personal goals align with the goals of the project and the overall organizational goals?
STRATEGY	Planning "The How"	· How will we accomplish our goals? · Are there multiple levels of alignment to the strategy? Person, team, organization? · Is the strategy well-defined and known to others?
CAPACITY	Bandwidth Resources Execution Ability	· Do I/we have the bandwidth to do this work at the appropriate quality? · Do I/we have the mental and physical capacity for this project?
BELIEF	Fortitude Moxie Confidence Faith Self-efficacy Optimism	· Do I/we believe that we can be successful in delivering a quality result? · Are our expectations realistic? · Do I/we have optimistic confidence?

PURPOSE

Purpose defines the "why" behind what we do. Businesses spend the lion's share of time managing toward extrinsic goals and motivations (e.g., as MBOs and performance targets) and almost no time talking about what is intrinsically motivating to individuals. Enlightened companies, teams, and individuals also have a clear purpose, something that explains why they do what they do, and its impact on making a difference in the world.

Disney's purpose is "to use our imagination to bring happiness to millions." Johnson & Johnson's is "to alleviate pain and suffering." If you're a leader at Disney or J&J and want to get the most out of the people on your project team, you would find ways to communicate and demonstrate how the purpose of your project aligns with the purpose of the overall organization.

People intrinsically want to make a difference in the world. With alignment to purpose, you see the value of your contribution to your own growth and, more importantly, as Haidt states, "something larger than yourself." At the individual level, it is worthwhile to take the time to work with each project team member to help them understand how their own purpose and goals align with the goals of the project. Without alignment, at best you'll miss out on an opportunity to increase engagement and motivation, and, at worst, the work could turn out to be drudgery.

If you don't know the purpose of your organization, or your people haven't spent the time to understand how they are intrinsically motivated toward making an impact on something larger than themselves, exploring purpose is a great place to start.

GOALS

While it may sound trite, one of the most important things to get right before you start anything is to understand the goals for the project or initiative. Goals help get the relationships right between yourself and the rest of the people you'll be working with, and between yourself and the work. Goals focus attention, increase effort, and increase persistence.[2] They increase security by providing clarity, and when they are achieved, they generate a sense of accomplishment, both keys to employee engagement. Actions can lead to results without explicit goals, but the achievement falls flat. It's like saying, "I meant to do that" when something good happens without your planning on it. Luck is often important to a successful outcome, but it's not fulfilling or engaging.

STRATEGY

Once we understand the goals, we must plan—or strategize—on how to accomplish them. Strategy as an engagement lever tells us the high-level "how" behind how our goals will be met. A good strategy defines the prioritized initiatives that will, collectively, meet our goals. It shows us the way forward and motivates us to drive to accomplishment. Strategy can be defined at multiple levels: person, team, and organization. As leaders, it's our responsibility to promote alignment among each level, and to promote alignment between the leaders who will drive the execution of the strategy.

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CAPACITY

The discipline to stop and understand if the capacity and resources to perform the work are available is another key factor in getting the relationship right between yourself and your work. This is all about individual bandwidth, financial resources, supplies, tools—everything you'd need to complete a project or build an organization. Starting without the right capacity or the ability to procure it ensures failure. Leaders should also take the time to analyze and understand the emotional and physical energy required to deliver. Can we manage this effort? Will our stakeholders be able to absorb this change? Will this fit in with the other initiatives already underway? Capacity, like all the engagement levers, can be considered at the individual, team, or organization level. Loading teams and individuals with too many "priority" projects results in multitasking, working at an unsustainable pace, a lack of focus, an inability to achieve flow, and, ultimately, burnout.

BELIEF

The last component of alignment, addressing the relationship between yourself and others as well as the one between yourself and your work, is to make sure that the entire organization believes that success is possible. Psychologists call this self-efficacy. High self-efficacy has been shown to improve performance. Think of this optimistic confidence as the opposite of cynicism and doubt. Individuals, teams, and organizations that generate a sense of optimism and focus on positive outcomes increase their likelihood of success. On the contrary, cynical talk and other indicators of doubt throughout the organization (e.g., Dilbert cartoon postings) are a red flag that should not be ignored. A sense of optimistic confidence and belief in the likelihood of success are motivating and reassuring during the more challenging moments of any endeavor.

When people are battling the gut feeling that the work they're doing is inconsistent with who they are, is not moving them toward a meaningful goal to generate a sense of accomplishment, and not contributing in a positive way to who they believe they are and why they're here, or when people sense that attempting this goal is futile, the amount of work to achieve success will likely exceed the energy that the individual or team is able to generate. Conversely, when projects are in alignment, we are able to maximize the intrinsic motivations of individuals. That coherence helps people get into a state of flow where tremendous amounts of work can get done in short periods of time.

Finding ways to align purpose, goals, strategy, capacity, and belief with confidence maximizes intrinsic motivation and creates coherence that drives outstanding outcomes and an engaged workforce. ⬥

NOTE:

Please refer to the fall 2016 issue of The Jabian Journal *for an introduction to the Framework: "Exploring the Dynamics of Employee Engagement" by Fred Jewell and Tracy Reznik. With engagement at the center, the Framework includes six engagement drivers: growth, relationships, autonomy, security, fairness, and well-being. The emotions and behaviors associated with each of these drivers determine our level of engagement with our company, with our team, and within our personal lives. Three categories of tools can be used to influence these engagement drivers and create engaged and fulfilled teams: alignment levers, implementation levers, and governance levers. In this article, we explored the first category of levers—the alignment levers. This article is an updated version of an article originally written by Fred Jewell and Antonia Cohen for the fall 2013 issue of* The Jabian Journal *when the Jabian Engagement Framework was still in its infancy.*

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Sources:
1   *Baumeister, Roy F., & Tierney, John (2011). Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength. New York: The Penguin Press. Haidt, Jonathan (2006)*

2   *The Happiness Hypothesis. New York: Basic Books. Mackay, John, & Sisodia, Raj (2013)*