

Turbo-charging your executive team

Tackling the hallmarks of dysfunction – Kate Jury



There has been a huge focus in the last few years on board development, board competency and board performance. Well-led assessments have rightly focussed on the ability of the whole board to effectively steward the organisation, however, there are two key components which comprise an effective unitary board. The first is a functional, experienced and challenging group of non-executive directors, the second is a capable, effective and impactful executive team.

Often the effectiveness of the executive team as a whole (and indeed the non-executive team) is given insufficient focus when compared to the function of the whole board. No amount of non-executive trust and challenge, board development or assurance reviews will work if there are fundamental weaknesses within the executive team.

Many organisations who have spent time focussing on the function of the executives as a group, will, in turn, reap significant dividends as a board. When executive teams are fractured, failing to 'sing from the same hymn sheet', or failing to gain traction with staff and services, the net impact can be damaging and ubiquitous both internally and externally to the organisation. Executive teams are often surprised when they realise how visible some of that dysfunction is to staff and to key external stakeholders. Most executive teams have little or no idea of their impact and effectiveness but a short, targeted piece of improvement work could result in significant and transformational progress.

Of course, in the rub of the real world, it is a challenge to get a group of six or so, experienced individuals to work together towards the same end (and that is before you

add into the mix limited resources and often competing portfolios). Likes, dislikes, experiences, behaviours, past bruises and different priorities all conspire to fracture the notion of 'team' – but being open about these challenges, and safely bringing them to the surface, can help to support the development of a significantly more cohesive team and, ultimately, a more mature and confident executive.

What are the hallmarks of dysfunction?

1. You consistently dread executive team meetings (instead of the odd one!).
2. There are 'cliques' on the team, favouritism and partisanship.
3. The Chief Executive struggles to adopt an even-handed, fair approach to all.
4. You feel conversations and agreements have been made outside of the team environment.
5. There is a lack of basic process around how the meetings work.
6. You fail to move issues on collectively, it is just one persons problem.
7. You have no sense of 'being in it together' working towards the same end.
8. The team has no sense of its impact either internally or externally.
9. Staff are confused around the consistency of 'the message' from the executive team.
10. Significant amounts of 'churn' within the team.