

The Benefits Goal Alignment

Over the past few weeks I have presented a number of training sessions on Goal Alignment. During these sessions I always ask attendees (usually supervisors and team leaders) to indicate their level of understanding of company goals and how they can contribute to this. In most cases supervisors are uncertain about company goals and what they can do to help achieve them. Often supervisors are not aligned with the bigger picture and fail to manage more than just their daily routine. They focus on day to day work activity, meeting production targets and solving problems, but never take a longer term view of their teams.

When I ask supervisors about their longer term visions for their teams, they often don't have an answer. Part of the problem is that supervisors are often only managed on short term production targets and daily and weekly work outcomes. They are not encouraged to think further ahead or to build long term capacity in their teams. As a result they muddle through their daily routine without any focus on building stronger teams through coaching and mentoring.

Every time I present one of these Goal Alignment sessions it becomes clearer to me that companies do not see the true benefits of Goal Alignment clearly. In view of this I would like to point out some of the benefits of a proper Goal Alignment process:

Productivity. Some recent studies have shown that employees spend up to 48% of their time at work doing tasks not related to business goals. Goals determine which tasks are important and which tasks should be prioritized. If you don't share information about what is important, employees cannot align their work activity with your goals. They spend time on non-value adding tasks, wasting costly resources and time. Employees need something to 'test' their work activity and productivity against. Goal Alignment helps to explain what is important to do and on which activities employees should focus their energy.

Focus. If employees know what to focus on, they can plan and prioritize work activity to achieve those specific outcomes. It helps them to focus on what is important and to avoid non-value adding work. If all employees focus on the company goals our chances of achieving those goals significantly increases. In the absence of clear goals, employees do what they want to do, instead of what they need to do. Goal Alignment helps to focus our attention and activity on what is important for the business.

Culture. Goal Alignment can help you to establish the right business culture. With constant focus on goals and regular feedback on performance you can teach employees ownership and involvement. Through Goal Alignment you encourage participation and engage employees in business success, leading to increased innovation and improved problem solving. Employees quickly learn work standards and the right work ethic, helping them to adapt to meet your business expectations.

Confidence. Goal setting theory tells us that people perform better when they have specific goals to achieve. But something else, just as important, is also communicated through goals - when you set targets you are telling your team that you believe in their ability to achieve those outcomes. It builds their confidence in their own skills and talents and makes them feel valued. If team members cannot make the link between their work activity and business outcomes, they feel uncertain about their contribution and thus about their value to your business. Through Goal Alignment you have the opportunity to show employees that they are valued and that their contributions matter.

Standards. In addition to clarifying goals, Goal Alignment also helps you to explain to what standard you want tasks done. For instance, we can use Goal Alignment to teach employees that it is not just good enough to meet production targets, but to meet these productions targets in conjunction with other business outcomes such as quality and cost. If we cleverly design goals to meet multiple business outcomes, we can encourage employees to higher work standards.

Decision making. Poor decision making can be costly. The soundness of business decisions should be tested against business goals. If supervisors (or any employee) don't understand goals, or even worse, if they don't know about goals, this will influence the quality of their decisions. Our goals form the basis of process analysis, drive the decisions we make and determines how we react to challenges.

Structure. "Form follows function". I am sure that when architect Louis Sullivan coined this phrase he was not referring to Goal Alignment, but the principle remains the same. Just as the design of a building should be based on its intended use or purpose, supervisors and managers need to structure their teams based on the goals they want to achieve. In many organizations unfortunately, the opposite is sometimes true - we design our outcomes based on the skills we have available. Or even worse, we don't have a clear structure or plan, because we don't know what the goals are. If we spend more time on setting and communicating goals, it will become easier to structure our plans and teams to meet those outcomes. Our teams will function more effectively to achieve those specific outcomes, given us a better chance of success.

Control. By applying good Goal Alignment practices we achieve better management of our processes. Goal Alignment forms the basis of the Plan-Do-Check and Adjust cycle and when we use this as the basis of our daily routine meetings, we maintain control over performance. It allows us to review progress over short intervals and to adjust our plans where goals are not achieved. If we continue to manage our processes in this fashion we become better at what we do, move closer to goal achievement and ultimately increase each teams' outputs.

Each business should ask if it is doing enough to align employees with goals. Proper management processes should be put in place to communicate expectations and provide feedback on performance. There should be no uncertainty about what is expected from each team and individual, and how they are performing against these expectations.

The supervisor's role is to ensure understanding and to manage their processes towards these goals. In view of this, each supervisor should take charge of two important responsibilities. Firstly, it is the supervisor's job to maintain focus on goal achievement through visual performance management. Secondly, supervisors need to anticipate the skills and resources the team will need in the future to achieve long term goals. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to manage the performance and skills of each individual towards goal achievement. For this reason the supervisor cannot only focus on daily tasks and routine work activity, but also needs to plan ahead to meet future requirements. For this the supervisors need a clear mental picture of where they want to take the team in future.

Each employee in turn should align their work activity with goals. They need to understand that they can contribute significantly to business outcomes, and should be valued for this contribution. They cannot work effectively without taking ownership. The need to execute strategy, make suggestions and help solve problems to help the organization get closer to goal achievement. This is only possible if they understand goals and are able to link their performance directly with business goals.

Every head needs to be in the game! Goal Alignment provides the opportunity to achieve this, and so much more.

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