

Alignment and Engagement

'You can't have one without the other...'

Rapidly changing markets, new entrants growing at exponential rates in a matter of years, emerging technology, sophisticated software, new and exciting ways to interact with customers and instability in the world's economy are all creating opportunities for businesses that are attuned to these trends and shifts.

To take advantage of these opportunities, businesses need to be flexible, clear on their strategy to differentiate & compete and be able to mobilise their people to get involved, contribute their unique skills and experience and get the strategy in play faster and more effectively than their competitors.

Simply instructing or even 'selling' people on what to do to deliver the strategy won't suffice - there needs to be more...

Leaders want more of their people, doing more of the right things, more of the time.

We've experienced the importance and value of the co-existence of 'alignment and engagement' of people through our work with businesses across dozens of industries, multiple strategy executions and hundreds of thousands of employees.

Here's a short summary of what we've learned about how to get people aligned and engaged and why they must go 'hand in hand':



It's about the conditions

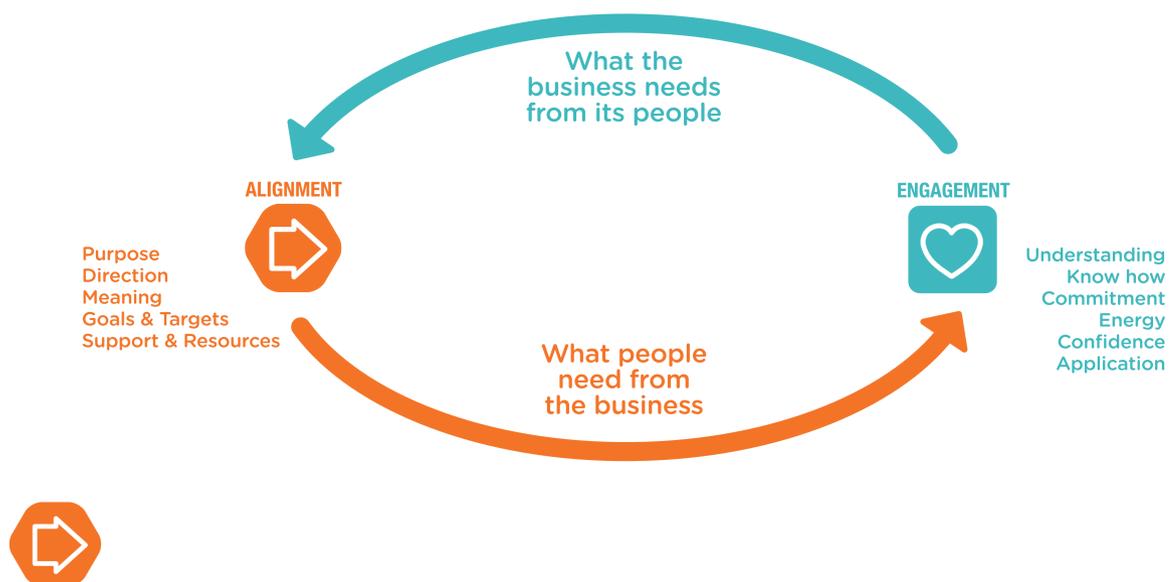
It's not possible to tell people to be aligned and engaged – it's a personal choice borne out of experience. And obviously it's not a 'stand alone state'. People need to be aligned and engaged in something – in this case, the strategy.

Leaders need to invest in creating the right conditions for getting the strategy in play. Done well, people will become aligned and engaged.

Difficulties arise when stand-alone initiatives are created to 'engage' people without a clear sense of what they need to be aligned to and accountable for. We have seen many of these initiatives, which often seem to be 'instead' of getting a clearly differentiated strategy in play.

And we have seen businesses in the music industry and sport full of highly engaged people (because they love what they do) and in a state of chaos and dysfunction.

We like to think of things like this:



Alignment

Alignment is about individuals making the personal choice to act in line with what the business is working to achieve. Alignment is manifest in three ways:

Aligned mindset

When I am aligned, I am clear about the direction and priorities of the business and what is to be done. I no longer feel confused, uncertain or overwhelmed about what's important and where the business is going.

Aligned action

If I am aligned, then I work "in line" with what the business is trying to achieve. My priorities are in line the overall priorities of the business. When people across the business are aligned, they collaborate and orchestrate their efforts, together, with a common purpose and direction.

Aligned messages

This is about the multiple messages sent and received across the business and whether these aligned or pulling in different directions and confusing people. It's about clarifying and simplifying key messages and clearing the overload.

For alignment to happen, people need a shared understanding of the purpose, direction, meaning, goals and targets of the organisation they work for – "What is our point of difference; what exactly is it that we are here to do?"



Engagement

Engagement is about the extent to which people bring their energy, confidence, understanding, capability and commitment to work each day. It's manifested in the positive energy people bring to their workplace – how they talk about it, how they think about it, how they apply their efforts and their desire to stay and grow with the business.

People want to be engaged at work - it feels good to be engaged. Conversely, being disengaged is a poor personal experience.

Engaged people have more confidence, commitment and energy: they understand what is required, and how to put their knowledge and know-how to good use, and they do so.

Our experience has shown that true engagement requires **alignment** first. And then, in close association, a supportive culture and values that are practiced and demonstrated by the leaders and managers in the right work environment.

Beware! There is a multimillion-dollar industry that has emerged around measuring employee engagement – use with caution and ensure the sophistication of the survey outputs are relevant and in line with the approach to leading the business. We often see abstract discussions around 'engagement' as a stand-alone issue, getting caught up in a debate between statisticians and corporate theorists.

Reaching a tipping point

When the right conditions are in place, a business will reach its own tipping point.

The power of alignment comes from the "multiplier effect" of having hundreds (or even hundreds of thousands) of people choosing to come together and move in the same direction. It starts with each individual making the decision to buy in - one person at a time. When there is a groundswell of people who are both aligned and engaged, a tipping point is reached which creates the momentum that gets the strategy in play.

Conclusion

People need the time, the opportunity and the conditions to unpack and find meaning in the strategy, before they will make the personal decision to align and become engaged.

To help this happen, leaders need to include their people in ways that help them discover what is required so they can draw their own conclusions. In old language, this might seem soft, but in the new world of work today, this is where the challenge is and it's what is required of leaders.

Is the way that you're implementing your strategy leveraging the power of more aligned and engaged people?

“ When there is a groundswell of people who are both aligned and engaged, a tipping point is reached which creates the momentum that gets the strategy in play. ”

