

## Getting Aligned

Draw on all the analyses discussed in this chapter to develop a plan for aligning your organization. If you're repeatedly frustrated in your efforts to get people to adopt more productive behaviors, step back and ask whether organizational misalignments might be creating problems.

### ACHIEVE ALIGNMENT—CHECKLIST

1. What are your observations about misalignments among strategic direction, structure, processes, and skills? How will you dig deeper to confirm or refine your impressions?
2. What decisions about customers, capital, capabilities, and commitments do you need to make? How and when will you make these decisions?
3. What is your current assessment of the coherence of the organization's strategic direction? Of its adequacy? What are your current thoughts about changing direction?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the organization's structure? What potential structural changes are you thinking about?
5. What are the core processes in your organization? How well are they performing? What are your priorities for process improvement?
6. What skill gaps and underutilized resources have you identified? What are your priorities for strengthening key skill bases?

## CHAPTER 7

# Build Your Team

When Liam Geffen was appointed to lead a troubled business unit of a process automation company, he knew he was in for an uphill climb. The extent of the challenge became clearer when he read the previous year's performance evaluations for his new team. Everyone was either outstanding or marginal; there was nobody in between. It seemed his predecessor had played favorites.

Conversations with his new direct reports and a thorough review of operating results confirmed Liam's suspicion that the performance evaluations were skewed. In particular, the VP of marketing seemed reasonably competent but by no means a minor god. Unfortunately, he believed his own press. The VP of sales struck Liam as a solid performer who had been scapegoated for poor judgment calls by Liam's predecessor. The relationship between marketing and sales was understandably tense.

Liam recognized that one or both of the VPs would probably have to go. He met with each of them separately and bluntly told

them how he viewed their performance ratings. He then laid out detailed two-month plans for each. Meanwhile, he and his VP for human resources quietly launched outside searches for both positions. Liam also held skip-level meetings with midlevel people to assess the depth of talent and to look for promising candidates for the top jobs.

By the end of his third month, Liam had signaled to the marketing VP that he would not make it; he soon left and was replaced by one of his direct reports. Meanwhile, the head of sales had risen to Liam's challenge. Now Liam was confident he had strong performers in these two key positions and was ready to move forward.

Liam recognized that he couldn't afford to have the wrong people on his team. If, like most new leaders, you inherit a group of direct reports, it is essential to build your team to marshal the talent you need to achieve superior results. The most important decisions you make in your first 90 days will probably be about people. If you succeed in creating a high-performance team, you can exert tremendous leverage in value creation. If not, you will face severe difficulties, for no leader can hope to achieve much alone. Bad early personnel choices will almost certainly haunt you.

But even though finding the right people is essential, it is not enough. Begin by assessing existing team members (direct and indirect reports) to decide what changes you need to make. Then devise a plan for getting new people and moving the people you retain into the right positions—without doing too much damage to short-term performance in the process. Even this is not enough. You still need to align and motivate your team members to propel them in desired directions. Finally, you must establish new processes to promote teamwork.

## Avoiding Common Traps

Many new leaders stumble when it comes to building their teams. The result may be a significant delay in reaching the break-even point, or it may be outright derailment. These are some of the characteristic traps into which you can fall:

- **Criticizing the previous leadership.** There is nothing to be gained by criticizing the people who led the organization before you arrived. This doesn't mean that you need to condone poor past performance, nor does it mean that you can't highlight problems. Of course you need to evaluate the impact of previous leadership, but rather than point out others' mistakes, concentrate on assessing current behavior and results and on making the changes necessary to support improved performance.
- **Keeping the existing team too long.** Unless you are in a start-up, you do not get to build a team from scratch; you inherit a team and must mold it into what you need to achieve your A-item priorities. Some leaders make major changes in their teams too precipitously, but it is more common to keep people longer than is wise. Whether because they're afflicted with hubris ("These people have not performed well because they lacked a leader like me") or because they shy away from tough personnel calls, leaders end up with less-than-outstanding teams. This means they and the other strong performers must shoulder more of the load themselves. The extent of team change and the time frame for making shifts depends on the STARS situation you confront; it may be shorter in a turnaround, and longer in a realignment situation. Also,

there may be constraints on your ability to make changes; you may have to accept that and figure out how to get the most out of the people you've inherited—for example, by defining roles. In any case, you should establish deadlines for reaching conclusions about your team and taking action within your 90-day plan, and then stick to them.

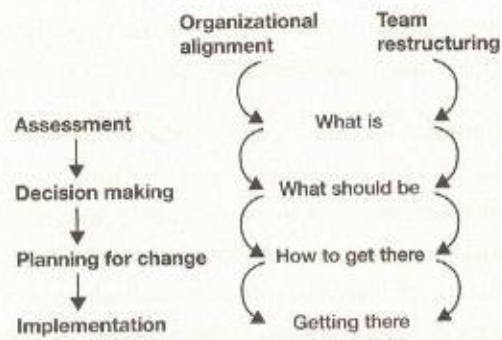
- **Not balancing stability and change.** Building a team you've inherited is like repairing a leaky ship in mid-ocean. You will not reach your destination if you ignore the necessary repairs, but you do not want to try to change too much too fast and sink the ship. The key is to find the right balance between stability and change. First and foremost, focus only on truly high-priority personnel changes early on. If you can make do for a while with a B-player, then do so.
- **Not working on organizational alignment and team development in parallel.** A ship's captain cannot make the right choices about his crew without knowing the destination, the route, and the ship. Likewise, you can't build your team in isolation from changes in strategic direction, structure, processes, and skill bases. Otherwise, you could end up with the right people in the wrong jobs. As figure 7-1 illustrates, your efforts to assess the organization and achieve alignment should go on in parallel with assessment of the team and necessary personnel changes.
- **Not holding on to the good people.** One experienced manager shared hard-won lessons about the dangers of losing good people. "When you shake the tree," she said, "good people can fall out, too." Her point is that uncertainty about who will and will not be on the team

can lead your best people to move elsewhere. Although there are constraints on what you can say about who will stay and who will go, you should look for ways to signal to the top performers that you recognize their capabilities. A little reassurance goes a long way.

- **Undertaking team building before the core is in place.** It is tempting to launch team-building activities right away, but this approach poses a danger; it strengthens bonds in a group, some of whose members may be leaving. So avoid explicit team-building activities until the team you want is largely in place. This does not mean, of course, that you should avoid meeting as a group. Just keep the focus on the business.
- **Making implementation-dependent decisions too early.** When successful implementation of key initiatives requires buy-in from your team, you should judiciously defer making decisions until the core members are in place. Of course there will be decisions you cannot afford to delay, but it can be counterproductive to make decisions that commit new people to courses of action they had no part in defining. Carefully weigh the benefits of moving quickly on major initiatives against the lost opportunity of gaining buy-in from the people you will bring on board later.
- **Trying to do it all yourself.** Finally, keep in mind that restructuring a team is fraught with emotional, legal, and company policy complications. Do not try to undertake this on your own. Find out who can best advise you and help you chart a strategy. The support of a good HR person is indispensable to any effort to restructure a team.

FIGURE 7-1

## Synchronizing architectural alignment and team restructuring



Assuming you avoid these traps, what do you need to do to build your team? Start by rigorously assessing the people you inherited, and then plan to evolve the team into what you need it to be. In parallel with this, work to align the team with your strategic direction and early-win priorities, and put in place the performance-management and decision-making processes you need to lead effectively.

### Assessing Your Team

You likely will inherit some outstanding performers (A-players), some average ones (B-players), and some who are simply not up to the job (C-players). You will also inherit a group with its own internal dynamics and politics; some members may even have hoped for your job. During your first 30 to 60 days (depending on the STARS mix you inherited), you need to sort out who's who, what roles people have played, and how the group has worked in the past.

### Establish Your Evaluative Criteria

You will inevitably find yourself forming impressions of team members as you meet them and digest results and performance reviews. Don't suppress these early reactions, but be sure to step back from them and undertake a more rigorous evaluation.

The starting point is to be conscious of the criteria you will explicitly or implicitly use to evaluate people who report to you. Consider these six criteria:

- **Competence.** Does this person have the technical competence and experience to do the job effectively?
- **Judgment.** Does this person exercise good judgment, especially under pressure or when faced with making sacrifices for the greater good?
- **Energy.** Does this team member bring the right kind of energy to the job, or is she burned out or disengaged?
- **Focus.** Is this person capable of setting priorities and sticking to them, or prone to riding off in all directions?
- **Relationships.** Does this individual get along with others on the team and support collective decision making, or is he difficult to work with?
- **Trust.** Can you trust this person to keep her word and follow through on commitments?

To get a quick read on the criteria you use, fill out table 7-1. Divide 100 points among the six criteria according to the relative weight you place on them when you evaluate direct reports. Record those numbers in the middle column, making sure they add up to 100. Now identify one of these criteria as your *threshold issue*, meaning that if a person does not meet a basic threshold

TABLE 7-1

**Assessment of evaluative criteria**

Evaluative criteria	Relative weights (Divide 100 points among the six issues)	Threshold issue (Designate with an asterisk)
Competence		
Judgment		
Energy		
Focus		
Relationships		
Trust		

on that dimension, nothing else matters. Label your threshold issue with an asterisk in the right-hand column.

Now step back. Does this analysis accurately represent the values you apply when you evaluate people on your team? If so, does it suggest any potential blind spots in the way you evaluate people? It is worthwhile to spend some time thinking about the criteria you will use. Having done so, you will be better prepared to make a rigorous and systematic evaluation.

**Check Your Assumptions**

Your assessments are likely to reflect assumptions you hold about what you can and can't change in the people who work for you. If you score relationships low and judgment high, for example, you may think that relationships within your team are something you can influence, whereas you cannot influence judgment. Likewise, you may have designated trust as a threshold issue—many leaders do—because you believe you must be able to trust those who work for you and because you think trustworthiness is a trait that

cannot be changed. You may be right in these assumptions, but it's essential that you be conscious you are making them.

**Factor In Functional Expertise**

If you're managing a team whose members have diverse functional expertise—such as marketing, finance, operations, and R&D—you need to get a handle on their competence in their respective areas. This task can be daunting, especially for first-time enterprise leaders. If you're an insider, try to solicit the opinions of people you respect in each function who know the individuals on your team. (For more on the transition to enterprise leadership and its challenges, see Michael Watkins, "How Managers Become Leaders," *Harvard Business Review*, June 2012.)

If you're entering an enterprise leader role, consider developing your own templates for evaluating people in functions such as marketing, sales, finance, and operations. A good template includes function-specific key performance indicators (KPIs), what the KPIs should and should not show, key questions to ask, and warning signs. To develop each template, talk to experienced enterprise leaders about what they look for in these functions.

**Factor In the Extent of Teamwork**

The weights you apply in evaluation should vary depending on the work your direct reports are doing. Suppose, for example, that you're taking a new job as vice president of sales, managing a geographically scattered group of regional sales managers. How would your criteria for evaluating this group differ from those you would apply if you had been named to lead a new-product development project?

These jobs differ sharply in the extent to which your direct reports operate independently. If your direct reports operate more or less independently, their capacity to work together will be far less important than if you were managing an interdependent product development team. In situations like this, it may be perfectly acceptable to have a high-performing group rather than a true team.

#### **Factor In the STARS Mix**

The criteria you apply may also depend on your STARS portfolio—the mix of start-up, turnaround, accelerated-growth, realignment, or sustaining-success situations you have inherited. In a sustaining-success situation, for example, you may have the time to develop one or two high-potential members of your team. It may be OK if they currently are B-players, if you are confident you can get them to the A-player level.<sup>1</sup> In a turnaround, by contrast, you need people who can perform at the A-player level right away.

You also should evaluate people based on their STARS experience and capabilities as well as their match to the situation at hand. Suppose, for example, you're taking over a business that was once very successful, started to slide, and wasn't successfully realigned. Now you've been brought in to turn it around. You may have inherited people who would be A-performers in sustaining-success or realignment situations but who are not the types of leaders you need in a turnaround.

#### **Factor In the Criticality of Positions**

Finally, your evaluations of team members should depend on how critical their positions are. As you make your assessments, keep in mind it's not only about players but also about positions.<sup>2</sup>

So take some time to assess how important the various positions held by your direct and indirect reports are to your success. If it helps, list the positions and assess the criticality of each on a 1–10 scale. Then keep these assessments in mind as you evaluate the people you inherited.

It's important to do this, because it takes a lot of energy to make changes on your team. It may be all right if you find that you have a B-player in a position that isn't high on the critical list, but not at all acceptable if the position is critical.

#### **Assess Your People**

When you begin to assess each team member using the criteria and assessments of position criticality you have developed, the first test is whether any of them fail to meet your threshold requirements. If so, begin planning to replace them. However, merely surviving the basic hurdle does not mean they are keepers. Go on to the next step: evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, factoring in the relative value you assign to each criterion. Now who makes the grade, and who does not?

Meet one-on-one with each member of your new team as soon as possible. Depending on your style, these early meetings might take the form of informal discussions, formal reviews, or a combination, but your own preparation and focus should be standardized:

1. **Prepare for each meeting.** Review available personnel history, performance data, and other appraisals. Familiarize yourself with each person's technical or professional skills so that you can assess how he functions on the team.
2. **Create an interview template.** Ask people the same set of questions, and see how their answers vary. Here are sample questions.

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of our existing strategy?
- What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing us in the short term? In the medium term?
- What resources could we leverage more effectively?
- How could we improve the way the team works together?
- If you were in my position, what would your priorities be?

3. **Look for verbal and nonverbal clues.** Note choices of words, body language, and hot buttons.

- Notice what the individual does not say. Does the person volunteer information, or do you have to extract it? Does the person take responsibility for problems in her area? Make excuses? Subtly point fingers at others?
- How consistent are the individual's facial expressions and body language with his words?
- What topics elicit strong emotional responses? These hot buttons provide clues to what motivates the individual and what kinds of changes she would be energized by.
- Outside these one-on-one meetings, notice how the individual relates to other team members. Do relations appear cordial and productive? Tense and competitive? Judgmental or reserved?

### **Test Their Judgment**

Make sure you are assessing judgment and not only technical competence or basic intelligence. Some very bright people have lousy business judgment, and some people of average competence have extraordinary judgment. It is essential to be clear about the mix of knowledge and judgment you need from key people.

One way to assess judgment is to work with a person for an extended time and observe whether he is able to (1) make sound predictions and (2) develop good strategies for avoiding problems. Both abilities draw on an individual's *mental models*, or ways of identifying the essential features and dynamics of emerging situations and translating those insights into effective action. This is what expert judgment is all about. The problem, of course, is that you don't have much time, and it can take a while to find out whether someone did or did not make good predictions. Fortunately, there are ways you can accelerate this process.

One way is to test people's judgment in a domain in which feedback on their predictions will emerge quickly. Experiment with the following approach. Ask individuals about a topic they're passionate about outside work. It could be politics or cooking or baseball; it doesn't matter. Challenge them to make predictions: "Who do you think is going to do better in the debate?" "What does it take to bake a perfect soufflé?" "Which team will win the game tonight?" Press them to commit themselves; unwillingness to go out on a limb is a warning sign in itself. Then probe why they think their predictions are correct. Does the rationale make sense? If possible, follow up to see what happens.

What you're testing is a person's capacity to exercise expert judgment in a particular domain. Someone who has become an expert in a private domain is likely to have done so in her chosen

field of business, too, given enough passion about it. However you do it, the key is to find ways, beyond just waiting to see how people perform on the job, to probe for the hallmarks of expertise.

### **Assess the Team as a Whole**

In addition to evaluating individual team members, assess how the entire group works. Use these techniques for spotting problems in the team's overall dynamics:

- **Study the data.** Read reports and minutes of team meetings. If your organization conducts climate or morale surveys of individual units, examine these as well.
- **Systematically ask questions.** Assess the individual responses to the common set of questions you asked when you met with individual team members. Are their answers overly consistent? If so, this may suggest an agreed-on party line, but it could also mean that everyone genuinely shares the same impressions of what's going on. It will be up to you to evaluate what you observe. Do the responses show little consistency? If so, the team may lack coherence.
- **Probe group dynamics.** Observe how the team interacts in your early meetings. Do you detect any alliances? Particular attitudes? Leadership roles? Who defers to whom on a given topic? When one person is speaking, do others roll their eyes or otherwise express disagreement or frustration? Pay attention to these signs to test your early insights and detect coalitions and conflicts.

### **Evolving Your Team**

Once you've evaluated individual team members' capabilities, factoring in functional expertise, teamwork requirements, the STARS portfolio, and the criticality of positions, the next step is to figure out how best to deal with each person. By the end of roughly the first 30 days, you should be able to provisionally assign people to one of the following categories:

- **Keep in place.** The person is performing well in her current job.
- **Keep and develop.** The individual needs development, and you have the time and energy to do it.
- **Move to another position.** The person is a strong performer but is not in a position that makes the most of his skills or personal qualities.
- **Replace (low priority).** The person should be replaced, but the situation is not urgent.
- **Replace (high priority).** The person should be replaced as soon as possible.
- **Observe for a while.** This person is still a question mark, and you need to learn more before you can make a definitive judgment about them.

These assessments need not be absolutely irreversible, but you should feel 90-plus percent confident in them. If you remain uncertain about someone, leave her in the "observe" category. As time goes on and you learn more, you can revise and refine your assessments.

**Consider Alternatives**

You may be tempted to begin right away to act on high-priority replacement decisions. But take a moment first to consider alternatives. Letting an employee go can be difficult and time-consuming. Even if poor performance is well documented, the termination process can take months or longer. If there is no paper trail regarding poor performance, it will take time to document.

In addition, your ability to replace someone at all may depend on a host of factors, including legal protections, cultural norms, and political alliances. Sometimes it simply is not possible to replace someone, even if he is performing miserably. If this is the case, you must figure out how to play the hand you were dealt as well as possible.

Fortunately, you have alternatives. Often, a poor performer will decide to move on of her own accord in response to a clear message from you. Alternatively, you can work with human resources to shift the person to a more suitable position:

- **Shift her role.** Move her to a position on the team that better suits her skills. This is unlikely to be a permanent solution for a problem performer, but it can help you work through the short-term problem of keeping the organization running while you look for the right person to fill the slot.
- **Move her out of the way.** If she simply can't contribute productively or is a disruptive or dispiriting influence, then it is better to have her doing nothing than destroying value. Consider shrinking her responsibilities significantly. This also has the virtue of sending a strong signal to her about your view of her contributions, which may help her see that it would be best to move on.

- **Move her elsewhere in the organization.** Help the person find a suitable position in the larger organization. Sometimes, if handled well, this move can benefit you, the individual, and the organization overall, but don't pursue this solution unless you are genuinely convinced the person can perform well in the new situation. Simply shifting a problem performer onto someone else's shoulders will damage your reputation.

**Develop Backups**

To keep your team functioning while you build the best possible long-term configuration, you may need to keep an underperformer on the job while searching for a replacement. As soon as you are reasonably sure that someone is not going to make it, begin looking discreetly for a successor. Evaluate other people on your team and elsewhere in the organization for the potential to move up. Use skip-level meetings and regular reporting sessions to evaluate the talent pool. Ask human resources to launch a search.

**Treat People Respectfully**

During every phase of the team-evolution process, take pains to treat *everyone* with respect. Even if people in your unit agree that a particular person should be replaced, your reputation will suffer if they view your actions as unfair. Do what you can to show people the care with which you are assessing team members' capabilities and the fit between jobs and individuals. Your direct reports will form lasting impressions of you based on how you manage this part of your job.

## Aligning Your Team

Having the right people on the team is essential, but it's not enough. To achieve your agreed-to priorities and secure early wins, you need to define how each team member can best support those key goals. This process calls for breaking down large goals into their components and working with your team to assign responsibility for each element. Then it calls for making each individual accountable for managing his goals. How do you encourage accountability?

As illustrated in figure 7-2, a blend of push and pull tools works best to align and motivate a team. *Push tools*, such as goals, performance measurement systems, and incentives, motivate people through authority, loyalty, fear, and expectation of reward for productive work. *Pull tools*, such as a compelling vision, inspire people by invoking a positive and exciting image of the future.

The mix of push and pull you use will depend on your assessment of how people on your team prefer to be motivated. Your high-energy go-getters may respond more enthusiastically to pull incentives. With more methodical and risk-averse folks, push tools may prove more effective.

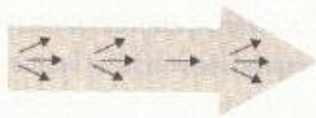
The right mix also will depend on the STARS situations you're dealing with. Turnarounds typically provide plenty of push. The problem teaches people that something needs to be done. In

FIGURE 7-2

### Using push and pull tools to motivate people

#### Push tools

- Incentives
- Reporting system
- Planning processes
- Procedures
- Mission statement



#### Pull tools

- Shared vision
- Teamwork

realignment situations, however, it may be challenging to create a sense of urgency. When this is the case, focus more attention on the pull side of the equation—for example, by defining a compelling vision for what the organization could become.

### Define Goals and Performance Metrics

On the push side, establishing—and sticking to—clear and explicit performance metrics is the best way to encourage accountability. Select performance measures that will let you know as clearly as possible whether a team member has achieved her goals.

Avoid ambiguously defined goals, such as “Improve sales” or “Decrease product development time.” Instead, define goals in terms that can be quantified. Examples include “Increase sales of product X by 15 to 30 percent over the fourth quarter of this year,” or “Decrease development time on product line Y from twelve months to six months within the next two years.”

### Align Incentives

A baseline question to ask yourself is how best to incentivize team members to achieve desired goals. What mix of monetary and nonmonetary rewards will you employ?

It is equally important to decide whether to base rewards more on individual or collective performance. This decision is linked to your assessment of whether you need true teamwork. If so, put more emphasis on collective rewards. If it is sufficient to have a high-performing group, then place more emphasis on individual performance.

It's important to strike the right balance. If your direct reports work essentially independently and if the group's success hinges chiefly on individual achievement, you don't need to promote teamwork and should consider an individual incentive system. If

success depends largely on cooperation among your direct reports and integration of their expertise, true teamwork is essential, and you should use group goals and incentives to gain alignment.

Usually, you will want to create incentives for both individual excellence (when your direct reports undertake independent tasks) and for team excellence (when they undertake interdependent tasks). The correct mix depends on the relative importance of independent and interdependent activity for the overall success of your unit. (See box, "The Incentive Equation.")

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### The Incentive Equation

The *incentive equation* defines the mix of incentives that you will use to motivate desired performance. Here are the basic formulas:

$$\text{Total reward} = \text{nonmonetary reward} + \text{monetary reward}$$

The relative sizes of nonmonetary and monetary rewards depend on (1) the availability of nonmonetary rewards such as advancement and recognition and (2) their perceived importance to the people involved.

$$\text{Monetary reward} = \text{fixed compensation} + \text{performance-based compensation}$$

The relative sizes of fixed and performance-based compensation depend on (1) the extent of observability and measurability of people's contributions and (2) the time lag between performance and results. The lower the observability or measurability of contributions and the longer the time lag, the more you should rely on fixed compensation.

$$\text{Performance-based compensation} = \text{individual performance-based compensation} + \text{group performance-based compensation}$$

The relative sizes of individual and group-based performance compensation depend on the extent of interdependence of contributions. If superior performance comes from the sum of independent efforts, then individual performance should be rewarded (for example, in a sales group). If group cooperation and integration are critical, then group-based incentives should get more weight (for example, in a new-product development team). Note that there may be several levels of group-based incentives: team, unit, and company as a whole.

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Designing incentive systems is a challenge, but the dangers of incentive misalignment are great. You need your direct reports to act as agents for you, whether they're undertaking individual responsibilities or collective ones. You don't want to give them incentives to pursue individual goals when true teamwork is necessary, or vice versa.

### Articulate Your Vision

When you're aligning your team, don't forget about the organization's vision. After all, it's a key reason why you and your team come to work every day.

An inspiring vision has the following attributes:

- It taps into sources of inspiration. It is built on a foundation of intrinsic motivators, such as teamwork and contribution to society. One orthopedic medical device company, for example, had "Restoring the joy of motion" as its vision statement, accompanied by stories about injured athletes being able to compete again, and grandparents being able to hold their grandkids.

- It makes people part of “the story.” The best statements of vision connect people to a larger narrative that provides meaning—for example, a quest to recapture the organization’s past glories.
- It contains evocative language. The vision must describe in graphic terms what the organization will achieve and how people will feel to have achieved it. Launching twelve rockets in ten years is a goal; putting a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth by the end of the decade, as President John F. Kennedy put it, is a vision.

Use the categories in table 7-2 to help craft your shared vision. Keep asking yourself, *Why should people feel inspired to expend extra effort to achieve the goals we have defined for the organization?*

TABLE 7-2

### Inspirations for vision statements

<p>Feeling committed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to an ideal</li> <li>• Sacrifice to realize the ideal</li> </ul>	<p>Achieving great results?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drive for excellence, quality, and continuous improvement</li> <li>• Provide challenging opportunities</li> </ul>
<p>Making a contribution?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service to customers and suppliers</li> <li>• Create a better society and a better world</li> </ul>	<p>Being part of a team?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teamwork and constant concern for the good of the team</li> <li>• A climate that emphasizes personally rewarding work in groups</li> </ul>
<p>Promoting individual growth?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for the individual, expressed as elimination of exploitative or patronizing practices</li> <li>• Provide the means for people to reach their potential</li> </ul>	<p>Having control of one’s destiny?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quest to be dominant and in control</li> <li>• Rewards, recognition, and status—individually and for the organization</li> </ul>
<p>Embodying trust and integrity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical and honest behavior</li> <li>• Fairness</li> </ul>	

As you work to create and communicate a shared vision, keep the following principles in mind:

- **Use consultation to gain commitment.** Be clear on which elements of your vision are nonnegotiable, but beyond these, be flexible enough to consider the ideas of others and allow them to have input and to influence the shared vision. In that way, they share ownership. Off-site meetings are often a powerful way to create and generate commitment to a shared vision, as long as you take care to ensure they are well designed. (See box, “Off-Site Planning Checklist.”)
- **Develop stories and metaphors to communicate it.** Stories and metaphors are potent ways to communicate the essence of a vision. There is something surprisingly powerful in a parable. The best of these stories crystallize core lessons and provide models for the kind of behavior you want to encourage.
- **Reinforce it.** Research on persuasive communication heavily underlines the power of repetition. Your vision is more likely to take root in people’s minds if it consists of a few core themes that are repeated until they sink in. Even when people have begun to understand the message, you should not stop. Strive constantly to deepen people’s commitment to the vision.
- **Develop channels for communicating it.** You cannot hope to communicate your vision directly to each person in your organization. This means that in addition to working with small groups such as a top team, you must be effective in persuading from a distance. This means developing communication channels that you will use to spread your vision more broadly.

Finally, and above all, take care to live the vision you articulate. A vision that is undercut by inconsistent leadership behaviors—by you or members of your team—is worse than no vision at all. Be sure you are prepared to walk the talk.

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### Off-Site Planning Checklist

Before you schedule an off-site meeting for your new team, you need to clarify the reasons for doing so. What are you trying to accomplish with this meeting? There are at least six important reasons for having off-site meetings:

- To gain a shared understanding of the business (diagnostic focus)
- To define the vision and create a strategy (strategy focus)
- To change the way the team works together (team-process focus)
- To build or alter relationships in the group (relationship focus)
- To develop a plan and commit to achieving it (planning focus)
- To address conflicts and negotiate agreements (conflict-resolution focus)

### Getting Down to Details

If you decide that an off-site meeting would indeed be useful for the group, start to consider the logistics of the meeting based on your answers to the following questions:

- When and where should the meeting be held?
- Which issues will be dealt with, and in what order?
- Who should act as facilitator?

Don't neglect the facilitation question. If you are a skilled facilitator and if the team respects you—and is not enmeshed in a conflict—it may make sense for you to be both leader and facilitator. If not, you'd be well advised to bring in a skilled outsider—either an expert on the substance of the issues you're dealing with or a skilled orchestrator of team process.

### Avoiding the Traps

Don't try to do too much in a single off-site meeting. You can't realistically accomplish more than two of the goals outlined earlier in a day or two. Target a few, and stay focused.

Don't put the cart before the horse. You can't try to define the vision and create a strategy without first establishing the right foundation: a shared understanding of the business environment (diagnostic focus) and workplace relationships (relationship focus).

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### Leading Your Team

As you make progress in assessing, evolving, and aligning the team, think, too, about how you want to work with the team on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis. What processes will you use to shape how the team gets its collective job done? Teams vary strikingly in how they handle meetings, make decisions, resolve conflicts, and divide responsibilities and tasks. You will probably want to introduce new ways of doing things, but take care not to plunge into this task precipitously. First, familiarize yourself thoroughly with how your team worked before your arrival and how effective its processes were. In that way, you can preserve what worked well and change what did not.

**Assess Your Team's Existing Processes**

How can you quickly get a handle on your team's existing processes? Talk to team members, peers, and your boss about how the team worked. Read meeting minutes and team reports. Probe for answers to the following questions:

- **Participants' roles.** Who exerted the most influence on key issues? Did anyone play devil's advocate? Was there an innovator? Someone who avoided uncertainty? To whom did everyone else listen most attentively? Who was the peacemaker? The rabble-rouser?
- **Team meetings.** How often did your team meet? Who participated? Who set the agendas for meetings?
- **Decision making.** Who made what kinds of decisions? Who was consulted on decisions? Who was told after decisions were made?
- **Leadership style.** What leadership style did your predecessor prefer? That is, how did he prefer to learn, communicate, motivate, and handle decisions? How does your predecessor's leadership style compare with yours? If your styles differ markedly, how will you address the likely impact of those differences on your team?

**Target Team Processes for Change**

Once you grasp how your team functioned in the past—and what did and did not work well—use what you learn to establish the new processes you judge necessary. Many leaders decide, for example, that their team's meeting and decision-making processes would benefit from revision. If this is true of you, begin

spelling out in specific terms what changes you envision. How often will the team meet? Who will attend which meetings? How will agendas be established and circulated? Setting up clear and effective processes will help your team coalesce and secure some early wins as a group.

**Alter the Participants**

One common team dysfunction—and a great opportunity to send a message that change is coming—concerns who participates in core team meetings. In some organizations, key meetings are too inclusive, with too many people participating in discussions and decision making. If this is the case, then reduce the size of the core group and streamline the meetings, sending the message that you value efficiency and focus. In other organizations, key meetings are too exclusive, with people who have potentially important opinions and information being systematically excluded. If this is the case, then judiciously broaden participation, sending the message that you will not play favorites or listen to only a few points of view.

**Lead Decision Making**

Decision making is another fertile area for potential improvement. Few leaders do a great job of leading team decision making. In part, this is because different types of decisions call for different decision-making processes, but most team leaders stick with one approach. They do this because they have a style with which they are comfortable and because they believe they need to be consistent or risk confusing their direct reports.

Research suggests that this view is wrongheaded.<sup>3</sup> The key is to have a framework for understanding and communicating why different decisions will be approached in different ways.

Think of the different ways teams can make decisions. Possible approaches can be arrayed on a spectrum ranging from unilateral decision making at one end to unanimous consent at the other. In unilateral decision making, the leader simply makes the call, either without consultation or with limited consultation with personal advisers. The risks associated with this approach are obvious: you may miss critical information and insights and get only lukewarm support for implementation.

At the other extreme, processes that require unanimous consent from more than a few people tend to suffer from *decision diffusion*. They go on and on, never reaching closure. Or, if a decision does get made, it is often a lowest-common-denominator compromise. In either case, critical opportunities and threats are not addressed effectively.

Between these two extremes are the decision-making processes that most leaders use: *consult-and-decide* and *build consensus*. When a leader solicits information and advice from direct reports—individually, as a group, or both—but reserves the right to make the final call, she is using a consult-and-decide approach. In effect she separates the “information gathering and analysis” process from the “evaluating and reaching closure” process, harnessing the group for one but not the other.

In the build-consensus process, the leader both seeks information and analysis and seeks buy-in from the group for any decision. The goal is not full consensus but sufficient consensus. This means that a critical mass of the group believes the decision to be the right one and, critically, that the rest agree they can live with and support implementation of the decision.

When should you choose one process over the other? The answer is emphatically not “If I am under time pressure, I will use consult-and-decide.” Why? Because even though you may reach a

decision more quickly by the consult-and-decide route, you won't necessarily reach the desired outcome faster. In fact, you may end up consuming a lot of time trying to sell the decision after the fact, or finding out that people are not energetically implementing it and having to pressure them. Those who suffer from the action imperative are most at risk of this; they want to reach closure by making the call but may jeopardize their end goals in the process.

The following rules of thumb can help you figure out which decision-making process to use:

- If the decision is likely to be highly divisive—creating winners and losers—then you usually are better off using consult-and-decide and taking the heat. A build-consensus process will fail to reach a good outcome and will get everyone mad at one another in the process. Put another way, decisions about sharing losses or pain among a group of people are best made by the leader.
- If the decision requires energetic support for implementation from people whose performance you cannot adequately observe and control, then you usually are better off using a build-consensus process. You may get to a decision more quickly using consult-and-decide, but you may not get the desired outcome.
- If your team members are inexperienced, then you usually are better off relying more on consult-and-decide until you've taken the measure of the team and developed their capabilities. If you try to adopt a build-consensus approach with an inexperienced team, you risk getting frustrated and imposing a decision anyway, and that undercuts teamwork.

- If you're put in charge of a group with whom you need to establish your authority (such as supervising former peers), then you're better off relying on consult-and-decide to make some key early decisions. You can relax and rely more on building consensus once people see that you have the steadiness and insight to make tough calls.

Your approach to decision making will also vary depending on which of the STARS situations you're in. In start-ups and turnarounds, consult-and-decide often works well. The problems tend to be technical (markets, products, technologies) rather than cultural and political. Also, people may be hungry for "strong" leadership, which often is associated with a consult-and-decide style. To be effective in realignment and sustaining-success situations, in contrast, leaders often need to deal with strong, intact teams and confront cultural and political issues. These sorts of issues are typically best addressed with the build-consensus approach.

To alter your approach to decision making depending on the nature of the decision to be made, you will sometimes have to restrain your natural inclinations. You are likely to have a preference for either consult-and-decide or build-consensus decision making. But preferences are not destiny. If you are a consult-and-decide person, you should consider experimenting with building (sufficient) consensus in suitable situations. If you are a build-consensus person, you should feel free to adopt a consult-and-decide approach when it is appropriate to do so.

To avoid confusion, consider explaining to your direct reports what process you're using and why. More importantly, strive to run a fair process.<sup>4</sup> Even if people do not agree with the final decision, they often will support it if they feel (1) that their views

and interests have been heard and taken seriously and (2) that you have given them a plausible rationale for why you made the call you did. The corollary? Don't engage in a charade of consensus building—an effort to build support for a decision already made. This rarely fools anyone, and it creates cynicism and undercuts implementation. You are better off to simply use consult-and-decide.

Finally, you often can shift between build-consensus and consult-and-decide modes as you gain deeper insight into people's interests and positions. It may make sense, for example, to begin in a consensus-building mode but reserve the right to shift to consult-and-decide if the process is becoming too divisive. It also may make sense to begin with consult-and-decide and shift to build-consensus if it emerges that energetic implementation is critical and consensus is possible.

#### ***Adjust for Virtual Teams***

Finally, how should you modify your approach to building your team if some or all of the members are working remotely? It's a big challenge to gain and sustain cohesion in virtual teams. It also makes it more difficult to evaluate team members, especially if the situation precludes early face-to-face meetings. Although most of the principles of effective teamwork apply to virtual teams, there are a few additional things to consider:

- **Bring the team together early if at all possible.** The technology to support virtual interactions is improving. However, if true teamwork is required, there still is no substitute for getting people together to establish a shared foundation of knowledge, relationships, alignment, and mutual commitment.

- **Establish clear norms about communication.** This includes which communication channels will be used and how they will be employed. It also means having explicit agreements concerning responsiveness—for example, that urgent messages will be responded to within a specified time. Often it's essential as well to have clear norms about how people will interact during virtual meetings—for example, interrupting less than usual when meeting face-to-face, but also being more efficient in putting points across.
- **Clearly define team support roles.** Virtual teams need to be more disciplined about capturing and sharing information as well as following up on commitments. It often helps to assign people specific team support roles (perhaps on a rotating basis), such as note-taker and agenda-creator.
- **Create a rhythm for team interaction.** Co-located teams naturally establish patterns and routines for interaction; these can be as simple as arriving at roughly the same time or talking over coffee. Virtual teams, especially those working in multiple time zones, lack natural opportunities to create these reassuring routines. Therefore, it's essential to provide a lot of structure for virtual team interaction—for example, setting meeting times and following specified agendas.
- **Don't forget to celebrate success.** It's easy for members of a virtual team to feel disconnected, especially if most of the team is co-located and only a few are working remotely. Although it's always important to pause occasionally to recognize and celebrate accomplishments, it's essential in virtual teams.

## Jump-Starting the Team

Your decisions about the team you inherited probably will be the most important decisions you make. Done well, your effort to assess, evolve, align, and lead the team will pay dividends in the focus and energy people bring to achieving goals and securing early wins. You will know you've been successful in building your team when you reach the break-even point—when the energy the team creates is greater than the energy you need to put into it. It will take a while before that happens; you must charge the battery before you can start the engine.

### BUILD YOUR TEAM—CHECKLIST

1. What are your criteria for assessing the performance of members of your team? How are relative weightings affected by functions, the extent of required teamwork, the STARS portfolio, and the criticality of the positions?
2. How will you go about assessing your team?
3. What personnel changes do you need to make? Which changes are urgent, and which can wait? How will you create backups and options?
4. How will you make high-priority changes? What can you do to preserve the dignity of the people affected? What help will you need with the team in the restructuring process, and where are you going to find it?

5. How will you align the team? What mix of push (goals, incentives) and pull (shared vision) will you use?
6. How do you want your new team to operate? What roles do you want people to play? Do you need to shrink the core team or expand it? How do you plan to manage decision making?

## CHAPTER 8

# Create Alliances

Four months into her new job at MedDev, Alexia Belenko already was deeply frustrated by the bureaucratic maneuvering going on at corporate headquarters. “Where’s the support for needed change?” she wondered.

An accomplished sales and marketing professional, Alexia had risen through the country-management ranks of MedDev, a global medical devices company, to become the firm’s managing director (also informally known as “country manager”) in her native Russia.

Senior leaders recognized Alexia’s potential and decided she needed broader regional experience. So they appointed her regional vice president of marketing for EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa). In this new role, Alexia was responsible for marketing strategy for MedDev’s country operations in the region. Alexia reported directly to Marjorie Aaron, the senior vice president of corporate marketing, who was based at the company’s U.S. headquarters, and Alexia had a dotted-line reporting

relationship with her former boss, Harald Jaeger, the international vice president for EMEA operations, to whom all the managing directors in the region reported.

Alexia dove in with her usual enthusiasm. She conducted a thorough review of current affairs, including one-on-one conversations with managing directors across the EMEA region and with her former boss. She also traveled to the United States expressly to meet with Marjorie and a couple of Marjorie's direct reports.

Drawing on those discussions, as well as her own experiences in the field, Alexia concluded that the most pressing problems—and opportunities—lay in better managing the tension between centralizing and decentralizing marketing decisions for new-product launches. Alexia put together a business case, outlining her assessment and recommendations for increasing standardization in some areas (for example, decisions concerning overall brand identity and positioning) and giving the managing directors more flexibility in others (such as making important adjustments to advertising promotion plans).

Marjorie and Harald saw merits in Alexia's approach, but neither was prepared to commit. Both directed her to brief the key stakeholders: MedDev's corporate marketing executives in the United States, and the EMEA country managers.

Six weeks and many confounding meetings later, Alexia felt as if she was caught in quicksand. She had scheduled a meeting with important members of the corporate marketing team, including David Wallace, the executive reporting to Marjorie Aaron in charge of global branding. She then flew to the United States to present to a group of more than thirty people. Virtually every one of them had suggestions, all of which would result in more central control, not less.

She was surprised, too, when a conference call with the EMEA country managers—her old colleagues who reported to Harald Jaeger—didn't go much better. They were more than happy to accept any ideas Alexia had that would give them additional flexibility. But when there was any mention of more limits to their autonomy, members of the group rapidly closed ranks. One respected managing director, Rolf Eiklid, expressed concern that the flexibility they were being offered wouldn't be enough to compensate for what they would be giving up and that corporate wouldn't really honor agreements. "We've been promised more flexibility in the past, and it hasn't materialized," he said.

The usually sure-footed Alexia was thrown off her stride by this turn of events. She was left wondering whether she had the patience and finesse to navigate the politics of her new regional role.

To succeed in your new role, you will need the support of people over whom you have no direct authority. You may have little or no relationship capital at the outset, especially if you're onboarding into a new organization. So you will need to invest energy in building new networks. Start early. Discipline yourself to invest in building up "relationship bank accounts" with people you anticipate needing to work with later. Think hard about whether there are people you haven't met who are likely to be critical to your success.

Recognize, too, when a new role presents you with very different influence challenges from those you've experienced in the past. Alexia was used to operating with a lot of positional authority and a team that reported directly to her. She didn't recognize early enough that she needed to influence in very different ways—through persuasion and alliance building—than she had in the past.

Even if you have significant positional authority in your new role, however, you should focus on building support for your early-win objectives. This means figuring out whom you must influence, pinpointing who is likely to support (and who is likely to resist) your key initiatives, and persuading swing voters. Plans for doing this should be an integral part of your overall 90-day plan.

### Defining Your Influence Objectives

The first step is to be clear about why you need the support of others. Start by thinking about the alliances you need to build in order to secure your early wins. For which of these wins will you need to gain the support of others over whom you have no (or insufficient) authority? Armed with a clear understanding of what you're trying to accomplish, you can drill down and figure out whose support is essential and how you will secure it. Consider creating an alliance-building plan of each of your early-win projects.

Alexia's main goal was to negotiate a new deal (a "grand bargain") between her new and old bosses and their respective organizations about the ways important marketing decisions would be made in EMEA. The status quo reflected a long-standing compromise between the two sides. It was an uneasy equilibrium, but more or less stable. And on the face of it, any changes were win-lose propositions. The corporate marketing organization naturally favored more centralization and standardization. The managing directors in the EMEA region wanted more local customization. The implication was that an agreement, if one could be found at all, would consist of a package of trades that both sides could support.

To secure such an agreement, Alexia needed to build supportive alliances within both sides. It was unlikely she'd be able to achieve complete unanimity, because some people would have too much invested in the status quo. So she should have focused instead on winning a critical mass of support for agreement in both the corporate and the regional organizations.

Had Alexia understood this from the start, she might have focused her initial efforts differently—not only on diagnosing problems and proposing rational solutions but also on understanding how her agenda fit into the broader political landscape on both sides of the Atlantic. She would not have assumed that the strength of her business case would carry the day, nor would she have felt compelled to win over every single stakeholder.

Instead, she should have identified the specific alliances she needed to build and then figured out how to exert the necessary influence in the organization. This process of mapping the influence landscape also might have helped her identify potential blockers: what or who might stand in the way of getting support for her direction? How could she get those in opposition to finally say yes?

### Understanding the Influence Landscape

Armed with clarity on why you need to influence people, the next step is to identify who will be most important for your success. Who are the key decision makers? What do you need them to do, and when do you need them to do it? Table 8-1 provides a simple tool for capturing this information. Consider creating such a list for each early-win initiative you're pursuing.

TABLE 8-1

**Identifying influential players**

Start to map your influence landscape by identifying influential players, what you need them to do, and when you need them to do it.

Who	What	When

**Win and Block Alliances**

Next, for each of your early-win initiatives, ask yourself which decision makers are essential for things to move forward. Together, these people are your *winning alliances*—the set of people who collectively have the power to support your agenda.<sup>1</sup> Alexia, for instance, needed to secure approval for her proposals from Marjorie on the corporate side, and from Harald on the EMEA side. Together, they were the winning alliance Alexia needed to build.

\* It also pays to think hard about potential *blocking alliances*—those who collectively have the power to say no. Who might band together to try to block your agenda, and why? How might they seek to impede the process? If you have a good sense of where opposition might come from, you can work to neutralize it.

**Map Influence Networks**

Senior decision makers usually are influenced to a significant degree by the opinions of others on whom they rely for advice

and counsel. So the next step is to map *influence networks*—who influences whom on the issues of concern to you. Influence networks can play a huge role in determining whether or not change ultimately happens. Formal authority is by no means the only source of power in organizations; people tend to defer to others' opinions when it comes to important issues and decisions. Marjorie, for example, may defer to David's assessment of the impact of increased local customization on brand identity. Likewise, Harald may defer to Rolf because he commands the respect of and represents his peers.

Influence networks are channels for communication and persuasion that operate in parallel with the formal structure—a sort of shadow organization.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes these informal channels support what the formal organization is trying to do; at other times, they act to subvert it. To achieve her objective, Alexia needed to map networks of influence within corporate marketing, as well as with her old colleagues in the EMEA regional organization.

How do you map influence networks? To a degree, they will become obvious as you get to know the organization—by, for example, working with your peers. But you can accelerate the process. One good way to start is by identifying the key points of contact between your organization and others. Customers and suppliers, within the business and outside, are natural focal points for alliance building.

Another strategy is to get your boss to connect you to key stakeholders. Request a list of the key people outside your group whom he thinks you should get to know. Then set up early meetings with them. (In the spirit of the golden rule of transitions, consider proactively doing the same thing when you have new direct reports coming on board: create priority relationship lists for them, and help them make contact.)

Take care, too, to observe carefully in meetings and other interactions to see who defers to whom on crucial issues. Notice whom people go to for advice and insight, and who shares what information and news. Who defers to whom when certain topics are being discussed? When an issue is raised, where do people's eyes track?

As you learn more, try to identify the sources of power that give particular people influence in the organization. Here are examples:

- Expertise
- Control of information
- Connections to others
- Access to resources, such as budgets and rewards
- Personal loyalty

Over time, the patterns of influence will become clearer, and you'll be able to identify those vital individuals—the opinion leaders—who exert disproportionate influence because of their informal authority, expertise, or sheer force of personality. If you convince them, broader acceptance of your ideas is likely to follow.

You will also begin to recognize the *power coalitions*: groups of people who explicitly or implicitly cooperate over the long term to pursue certain goals or protect certain privileges. Figuring out their agendas, and linking yours to them, can be a powerful way to build support, as long as you don't end up watering down what you're trying to do or get enmeshed in political machinations that could undercut you.

### Draw Influence Diagrams

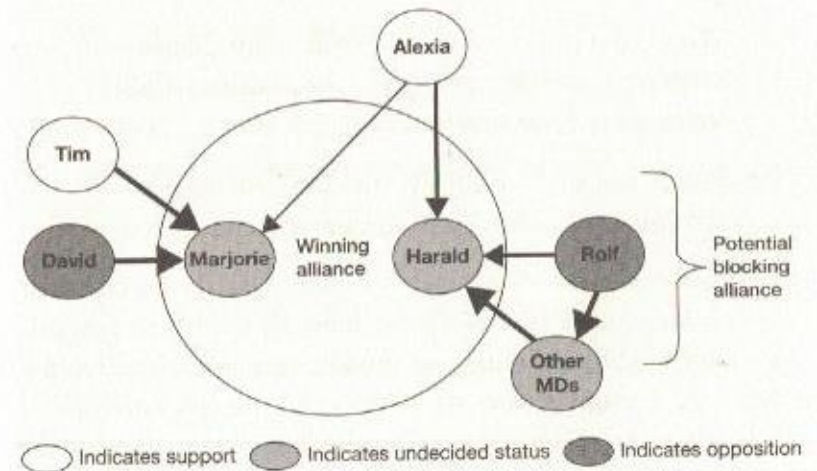
It can be instructive to summarize what you learn about patterns of influence by drawing an influence diagram like the one for Alexia's situation shown in figure 8-1.

At the center circle are the critical decision makers—Marjorie in corporate marketing and Harald in EMEA operations. Alexia needed both to agree with the proposed package of changes, so they jointly constituted a winning alliance. However, as the arrows in the diagram indicate, these two executives would be influenced by people within their own organizations. (Heavier arrows denote a greater degree of influence.) Marjorie would be strongly influenced by David, her vice

FIGURE 8-1

### Alexia's influence diagram

This diagram illustrates the key influence relationships that will shape decision making on the issues Alexia Belenko is trying to address in her organization.



president of global branding, and Tim Marshall, vice president in the corporate strategy group. Harald would be influenced by the collective opinions of the country managers who report to him. But Rolf, the longtime managing director of the Nordic countries, would be highly influential both in shaping Harald's views and in influencing the other managing directors. The diagram also shows that Alexia herself had significant influence on Harald and some on Marjorie.

### **Identify Supporters, Opponents, and Persuadables**

The work you've done to map influence networks in your organization can also help you pinpoint potential supporters, opponents, and persuadables. To identify your potential supporters, look for the following:

- People who share your vision for the future. If you see a need for change, look for others who have pushed for similar changes in the past.
- People who have been quietly working for change on a small scale, such as a plant engineer who has found an innovative way to significantly reduce waste.
- People new to the company who have not yet become acculturated to its mode of operation.

Whatever supporters' reasons for backing you, do not take their support for granted. It's never enough merely to identify support; you must solidify and nurture it. So don't forget to preach to the converted. Be sure, too, to ask supporters to be force multipliers by helping you influence others and by providing them with the most persuasive arguments for doing so.

As you look for support, be sure to identify people with whom you could build *alliances of convenience*. There will be individuals

with whom you disagree in many areas, but with whom you align on the specific issue of concern. If this is the case, think hard about how to educate and enlist them.

Then there is the opposition. True adversaries will oppose you no matter what you do. They may believe you're wrong in your assessments of the situation. Or they may have other reasons for resistance to your agenda:

- **Comfort with the status quo.** They resist changes that might undermine their positions or alter established relationships.
- **Fear of looking incompetent.** They fear seeming or feeling incompetent if they have trouble adapting to the changes you're proposing and perform inadequately afterward.
- **Threats to core values.** They believe you're promoting a culture that spurns traditional definitions of value or rewards inappropriate behavior.
- **Threats to their power.** They fear that the change you're proposing (such as giving more decision rights to front-line managers) would deprive them of power.
- **Negative consequences for their allies.** They fear that your agenda will have negative consequences for others they care about or feel responsible for.

But be careful not to assume that people are adversaries. When you meet resistance, probe for the reasons behind it before labeling people as implacably opposed. Understanding resisters' motives many equip you to counter their arguments. For example, you may be able to address their fears of appearing incompetent in the new environment by helping them develop new skills.

Keep in mind, too, that success in winning over adversaries can have a powerful, symbolic impact. “The enemy who is converted to the ally” is a powerful story that will resonate with others in the organization. (Another example is the story of redemption—for example, helping a person who has been marginalized or labeled as ineffective prove himself.)

There also will be people with whom you have good relationships and agree on many issues but who are not aligned with your specific agenda. These are a special class of opposition, and the key here is to find ways to preserve these relationships while still moving things in needed directions. See if you can do this by explaining what you need to do and why, by engaging in constructive problem-solving, and perhaps by finding ways to make up for their losses by helping them with other issues or returning the favor later.

Finally, don’t forget about the *persuadables*—those people in the organization who are indifferent or undecided or uncommitted about your plans but who might be persuaded to throw their support your way if you can figure out how to influence them. Once you have identified them, figure out why they’re uncommitted. They may be:

- **Indifferent.** There may be many ways to get them to support your agenda in return for your support of theirs.
- **Undecided.** Find out why, and work to educate and persuade them.
- **Political operators waiting to see which way the wind will blow.** You need to convince them that things are going your way so that they climb on the bandwagon.

Your assessment of support and opposition can be summarized in your influence map, as illustrated earlier in figure 8-1. The darker circles indicate people who are opposed, light gray

means they are supportive, and medium gray designates the undecided. (You also can use green-yellow-red color coding). On the corporate side in Alexia’s situation, Tim was supportive, whereas David was undecided. On the EMEA side, Rolf was somewhat opposed to Alexia’s proposed changes. Note that, once again, she had to win a critical mass of support on both sides for a deal to be struck.

### Understanding Pivotal People

Now that you’ve analyzed the influence networks in your organization, identified the players and alliances, and mapped out support and opposition, the next step is to focus on the pivotal people you need to influence. In Alexia’s case, these were David and Rolf.

Start by assessing their intrinsic motivators. People are motivated by various things, such as a need for recognition, for control, for power, for affiliation through relationships with colleagues, and for personal growth.<sup>3</sup> The relative weightings of these motivators can vary greatly. So take the time to figure out what makes the pivotal people tick. If it is possible to engage them directly in dialogue, ask questions and engage in active listening. Seek especially to understand what potential opponents like Rolf are opposed to, and why. Given what motivates them, are there specific losses they’re trying to avoid? Is there something you can give them—a valuable trade—that might help compensate?

Understanding people’s motivations is only part of the story. You also need to assess *situational pressures*: the driving and restraining forces acting on them because of the situation they’re in. Driving forces push people in the direction you want them to go, and restraining forces are situational reasons they would

say no. There is a lot of good social psychology research showing that we overestimate the impact of personality and underestimate the impact of situational pressures in reaching conclusions about the reasons people act the way they do.<sup>4</sup> Rolf's opposition could be rooted in intrinsic inflexibility and a need to preserve his power and status, or he could be responding to situational pressures such as his business goals and incentives or the opinions of his peers (or a combination). So take the time to think about the forces acting on the people you want to influence. Then find ways to increase the drive and remove some restraints.

Finally, think about how key people perceive their alternatives or choices. What are the options from which they believe they can choose? Critical here is to assess whether opponents like Rolf believe that resistance—overt or covert—can succeed in preserving the status quo. If so, then it could be important to convince them that the status quo is no longer a viable option. Once people perceive that change is going to happen, the game often shifts from outright opposition to a competition to influence what sort of change will occur. Could Alexia have convinced the key decision makers that the current situation was not acceptable, that change needed to take place?

Concerns about the implementation of agreements also fall into this category. People may believe that concessions offered by others will not really materialize and that they are better off fighting for the status quo than taking a chance. This seems to be one concern that Rolf was voicing when he expressed worries about whether corporate would honor agreements to give the managing directors more flexibility. If worries about insecure agreements turn out to be blocking progress, see whether there are ways you can increase the confidence level. For example, you might propose phasing in the changes, with each step linked to success in implementing the previous ones.

TABLE 8-2

### Analyzing motivations, driving and restraining forces, and alternatives

Use this table to assess what motivates pivotal players, as well as the driving and restraining forces acting on them, and their perceptions of their alternatives (what choices they believe they have).

Pivot players	Motivations	Driving and restraining forces	Alternatives

Table 8-2 provides a simple tool for capturing information about motivations, driving and restraining forces, and perceptions of alternatives for pivotal people.

### Crafting Influence Strategies

Armed with deeper insight into the people you need to influence, you can think about how to apply classic influence techniques such as consultation, framing, choice-shaping, social influence, incrementalism, sequencing, and action-forcing events.

*Consultation* promotes buy-in, and good consultation means engaging in active listening. You pose questions and encourage people to voice their real concerns, and then you summarize and feed back what you've heard. This approach signals that you're paying attention and taking the conversation seriously. The power of active listening as a persuasive technique is vastly

underrated. It can not only promote acceptance of difficult decisions but also channel people's thinking and frame choices. Because the questions leaders ask and the ways they summarize responses have a powerful effect on people's perceptions, active listening and framing are a potent persuasive technique.

*Framing* means carefully crafting your persuasive arguments on a person-by-person basis. It's well worth the time to get your framing right. Indeed, if Alexia can't develop and communicate a compelling case in support of her proposed changes, nothing else she does will have much impact. Your messages should take an appropriate tone, resonate with the motivations of influential players and the forces acting on them, and, critically, shape how the key players perceive their alternatives.

Alexia, for example, should have explored what it would take to move Rolf from being opposed to at least being neutral and, ideally, supportive. Did he have specific concerns that she could have addressed? Was there a set of trades that he would have found attractive if implementation could have been guaranteed? Were there ways of helping him advance other agendas he cared about in exchange for his support of Alexia's approach?

As you frame your arguments, keep in mind Aristotle's rhetorical categories of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.<sup>5</sup> *Logos* is about making logical arguments—using data, facts, and reasoned rationales to build your case for change. *Ethos* is about elevating the principles that should be applied (such as fairness) and the values that must be upheld (such as a culture of teamwork) in making decisions. *Pathos* is about making powerful emotional connections with your audience—for example, putting forth an inspiring vision of what cooperation could accomplish.

Effective framing focuses on a few core themes, which are repeated until they sink in. It is a sure sign of success when people begin to echo your themes without knowing they're doing so.

Focus and repetition are effective because we learn through repetition. By the third or fourth time we hear a song, we can't get it out of our minds. It is possible, though, to hear a song so much that we get sick of it. Similarly, using precisely the same words over and over makes it apparent that you're trying to persuade, and that can provoke a backlash. The art of effective communication is to repeat and elaborate core themes without sounding like a parrot.

As you frame your arguments, think about how you can inoculate people against counterarguments you expect opponents to make. Presenting and decisively refuting weak forms of expected counterarguments immunizes audiences against the same arguments when they're advanced in more potent forms.

Table 8-3 provides a simple checklist for framing the types of arguments you need to make.

TABLE 8-3

### Framing arguments

Use the following categories and questions to identify the types of arguments you need to make to convince people.

Logos—data and reasoned arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What data or analysis might they find persuasive?</li> <li>• What logic(s) might appeal to them?</li> <li>• Are there biases to which they are falling prey and, if so, how might you demonstrate this?</li> </ul>
Ethos—principles, policies, and other "rules"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there principles or policies that they could be convinced should operate here?</li> <li>• If you are asking them to act counter to a principle or policy, can you help them justify making an exception?</li> </ul>
Pathos—emotions and meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there emotional "triggers," for example loyalty or contribution to the common good, to which you could appeal?</li> <li>• Can you help them create a sense of meaning by supporting or opposing a cause?</li> <li>• If they are reacting too emotionally, can you help them step back and get perspective?</li> </ul>

*Choice-shaping* is about influencing how people perceive their alternatives. Think hard about how to make it hard to say no. Sometimes choices are best posed broadly, at other times more narrowly. If you're asking someone to support something that could be seen as setting an undesirable precedent, it might best be framed as a highly circumscribed, isolated situation independent of other decisions. Other choices might be better situated within the context of a higher-level set of issues.

Selling choices perceived as win-lose propositions is particularly difficult. Broadening the range of issues or options under consideration can facilitate mutually beneficial trades that enlarge the pie. Progress likewise can be stalled by the presence of toxic issues. These sometimes can be neutralized by explicitly setting them aside for future consideration or by making up-front commitments that allay anxieties.

*Social influence* is the impact of the opinions of others and the rules of the societies in which they live. The knowledge that a highly respected person already supports an initiative alters others' assessments of its attractiveness. So convincing opinion leaders to make commitments of support and to mobilize their own networks can have a powerful leveraging effect. Likewise, research suggests that people prefer to operate in these ways:

- **Remain consistent with strongly held values and beliefs.** These values tend to be shared with important reference groups. People asked to engage in behavior inconsistent with their values or beliefs experience internal psychological dissonance.
- **Remain consistent with their prior commitments and decisions.** Failure to honor commitments tends to incur social sanctions, and inconsistency is a signal of unreliability. People prefer not to make choices that require

them to reverse themselves or that overtly constrain their future choices by setting undesirable precedents.

- **Repay obligations.** Reciprocity is a strong social norm, and people are vulnerable to appeals for support that invoke past favors they've received.
- **Preserve their reputations.** Choices that preserve or enhance one's reputation are viewed favorably, whereas those that could jeopardize one's reputation are viewed negatively.

The implication is that you need to avoid, to the extent possible, asking others to make choices that are inconsistent with their values and prior commitments, decrease their status, threaten their reputations, or risk evoking the disapproval of respected others. If someone you need to influence has a competing prior commitment, you should look for ways to help them gracefully escape from it.

*Incrementalism* refers to the notion that people can move in desired directions step-by-step when they wouldn't go in a single leap. Mapping out a pathway from A to B is highly effective, because each small step taken creates a new psychological reference point for people in deciding whether to take the next one. For instance, Alexia could have started by meeting with people just to explore the centralization-versus-flexibility problem. Over time, however, the group could have analyzed each of the issues involved. And finally, after they had deliberately walked through all major concerns, the participants could have discussed basic principles for what a good solution might look like.

Getting people involved in shared diagnosis of organizational problems is a form of incrementalism: involvement in the diagnosis makes it difficult for people to deny the need for tough decisions. Once there is agreement on the problem, you can shift to defining the options and then the criteria that will be used to evaluate them.

By the end of such a process, people are often willing to accept outcomes they would never have accepted at the outset.

Because incrementalism can have a powerful impact, it's essential to influence decision making before momentum builds in the wrong direction. Decision-making processes are like rivers: big decisions draw on preliminary tributary processes that define the problem, identify alternatives, and establish criteria for evaluating costs and benefits. By the time the problem and the options have been defined, the actual choice may be a foregone conclusion. So remember that early success in shaping the process can have a big impact on the eventual outcome.

*Sequencing* means being strategic about the order in which you seek to influence people to build momentum in desired directions.<sup>6</sup> If you approach the right people first, you can set in motion a virtuous cycle of alliance building. Success in gaining one respected ally makes it easier to recruit others—and your resource base increases. With broader support, the likelihood increases that your agenda will succeed, making it easier still to recruit more supporters. Based on her assessment of patterns of influence at MedDev, for example, Alexia definitely should have met first with corporate strategy VP Tim Marshall to solidify his support and arm him with additional information for persuading Marjorie.

More generally, Alexia's sequencing plan would consist of a well-thought-through series of one-on-one and group meetings to create the momentum for change. The critical point here is getting the mix right. One-on-one meetings are effective for getting the lay of the land—for instance, hearing people's positions, shaping their views by providing new or extra information, or potentially negotiating side deals. But the participants in a serious negotiation often aren't willing to make their final concessions and commitments unless they're sitting face-to-face with others, and that is when group meetings are particularly effective.

*Action-forcing events* get people to stop deferring decisions, delaying, and avoiding commitment of scarce resources. When your success requires the coordinated action of many people, delay by a single individual can have a cascade effect, giving others an excuse not to proceed. You must therefore eliminate inaction as an option.

You do this by setting up action-forcing events—events that induce people to make commitments or take actions. Meetings, review sessions, teleconferences, and deadlines can all help create and sustain momentum: regular meetings to review progress, and tough questioning of those who fail to reach agreed-to goals, increase the psychological pressure to follow through.

### Putting It All Together

Alliance building entails figuring out whose support you need, mapping the patterns of influence, and identifying potential support and opposition. Success in these actions helps you identify pivotal people, understand their motivations, situational pressures, and perceptions of the alternatives, and craft the right strategies to build your winning alliances.

### CREATE ALLIANCES—CHECKLIST

1. What are the critical alliances you need to build—both within your organization and externally—to advance your agenda?
2. What agendas are other key players pursuing? Where might they align with yours, and where might they come into conflict?

3. Are there opportunities to build long-term, broad-based alliances with others? Where might you be able to leverage shorter-term agreements to pursue specific objectives?
4. How does influence work in the organization? Who defers to whom on key issues of concern?
5. Who is likely to support your agenda? Who is likely to oppose you? Who is persuadable?
6. What are the motivations of pivotal people, the situational pressures acting on them, and their perceptions of their choices?
7. What are the elements of an effective influence strategy? How should you frame your arguments? Might influence tools such as incrementalism, sequencing, and action-forcing events help?