

## Multi-Tier Alignment

*Achieve high-impact change.*



by Howard M. Guttman

ASK SHAREHOLDERS what the CEO and top team are paid to do, and the answer will likely be *focus on strategy*—and today *focus* translates to strategy execution.

The challenge is this: While strategy formulation is often a solo performance for the top management team, execution involves the next tiers down.

*The multi-tier alignment process is a disciplined way to develop performance muscle, beginning with the senior team, moving to functional teams, and then to successive tiers.* The end result is the creation of capability for sustained high performance. Leaders are responsible to be the driving force behind this powerful route to OD.

Multi-tier alignments differ from the usual OD interventions in four major ways:

- *The vision is a high-performance, horizontal one.*

Within and between levels, the thrust is to break down hierarchies, eliminate silos, distribute decision making, and create a sense of “we accountability.” Leaders are required to go horizontal

for real, transforming first the top team and then the top two tiers into a mini board of like-minded, high-performing leader-players.

- *The goal is squarely on business results.* What fuels the alignment approach to high performance is a major business challenge that must be met by the leaders. What matters is accelerating their performance to achieve the desired results. There is no gap between the change effort and the results it seeks to produce.

- *The focus is on tight targeting.* Getting leaders to operate horizontally—with the same strategy, accountabilities, interdependencies, and ways of working—is the fastest way to develop capacity to generate sustained strategic and operational results. Aligning them speeds up all value-creating activities—issue resolution, decision making, and design-to-market-time.

- *The emphasis is on building momentum.* After we align a senior team, and



its members experience the benefits of working as a horizontal, high-performing team, they want to extend those benefits to the people who report to them. When you are on a high-performing team, the productive tension is palpable. People ask, “How do we get more people to operate this way?”

At the same time, the next level has been told about the top team’s alignment and has noticed dramatic change in behavior: they’re asking for suggestions, listening attentively to complaints, involving people in decisions, talking about meeting goals. The next level knows the game is afoot, and wants in.

### Multi-Tier Alignment: A Case in Point

INTRA, Inc. operates the leading portal for ocean containerized freight. When CEO Ken Bloom first aligned his senior team, he wanted to raise the bar: “My goal was for every employee, worldwide, to perform at the highest level and to think strategically.”

Before the first alignment, the VPs had been so immersed in urgent issues that they didn’t take the long view. Some were wary of one another, and so in the alignment session we helped them improve their working relationships.

After the alignment, Bloom reinforced the high-performance concepts to keep the team from backsliding into tactical thinking and behavior. He also ensured that managers went through an alignment: “Once management was prepared to perform at a higher level, VPs could let go of operational issues.”

Single-level alignments were followed by the first multi-tier. “We aligned senior leaders with operational leaders to ensure that everyone was aligned and held accountable for results. You need to change the culture on both levels.”

After another multi-tier alignment, the company grew beyond expectations. A steering committee made up of two people from each level was appointed to ensure that commitments made in the alignment sessions are honored.

Organizations perform better when their people work together. OD is about developing a *horizontal, high-performance culture* where everyone leads, owns, questions, challenges, creates, solves problems, makes decisions, and plans—as a seamless goal-driven entity. LE

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**ACTION:** Create a culture of great, aligned teams.

## Measuring Learning

*Going beyond training programs.*



by Kee Meng Yeo

WHEN ORGANIZATIONS consider *measuring the impact of their spending on learning programs*, most gravitate to the Kirkpatrick Four Levels model.

From there, the conversation migrates to the question of ROI of training and attempts at using models designed for finance to attribute the success of the training to organizational success, often negating other variables and minimizing or even ignoring the efforts of marketing and sales, for example.

You might even hear: “The training we launched in November resulted in a 10,000 percent ROI over the holidays.” This conversation focuses on specific training initiatives. Seldom does the dialogue evolve to measuring the *quality of learning* across the enterprise.

The Kirkpatrick model looks at four levels: 1) *Reaction*, 2) *Learning*, 3) *Behavior*, and 4) *Results*. This model was designed primarily to examine the effectiveness of training programs in manufacturing. Its expansion for use with soft skills and office-oriented training programs isn’t always bad; however, the model is inadequate for measuring learning that goes beyond the aggregation of different training programs.

### The 5-Pillars Model

Through the sponsorship of the Sloan Consortium, universities have been using a 5-Pillars model that has been adapted by companies such as Johnson & Johnson and Amway to measure the *quality of learning*. This model is depicted as five pillars that hold up the quality of learning. All five pillars equally support learning—no one pillar is more or less important. Elements of the Kirkpatrick model are embedded within the 5-Pillars model.

**Pillar 1, access to learning**, addresses the question of the reach of learning opportunities. Metrics include the percentage of all the learning programs, however you define *learning programs*, that is accessible to all employees. If you utilize learning technology to deliver these learning experiences, such as a LMS or a Learning Portal, you could also look at the accessibility of the technology across the enterprise as