




# Cohesing the Executive Team



**As we aspire to regenerative futures and the best way to nurture sustainable growth for our people and systems, the focus falls squarely onto the cohesion and performance of our executive teams.**

So, what mindset is needed for high performing teams to be able to work in synchronicity and what can get in their way?

At the high level here are seven key challenges commonly encountered by executive teams, which we will dig into more deeply further on:

- The team's collective work is often vague, leading executives to focus on their role-specific accountabilities rather than the enterprise agenda.
- The most talented, hard-charging executives are not always the most effective team players.
- Team processes, particularly decision-making processes, are often implicit rather than explicit, leading to issues of trust.
- Teams do not attend to adopting the standards of behaviour (norms) that foster trust and productive relationships necessary to integrate and energize the team.
- Leadership teams typically give little thought to their ongoing development and, as a result, they fail to grow as a team.
- Effective team functioning occurs in phases and can decrease if the team leader does not consistently focus on fostering the conditions for a high-performance team.
- Executive teams often don't think to exercise service leadership with each other

*Source: Korn Ferry*



## Managing Conflicting


## Tensions with a Mindset

## Shift

Often senior teams are filled with high functioning individuals who consistently achieve excellence in the day-to-day. This is how they got to where they are. The big challenge for these teams is managing the tensions that come with strategic work, competing priorities and stress.

According to [research conducted by RHR International published by the HBR](#) the “ability to manage conflicting tensions” is the characteristic most predictive of top-team performance. Researchers ascribe this to a number of common polarities: risk vs results, external vs internal and top-down vs bottom-up interventions. Unexpectedly, there are [significant pressures and opposing interests](#) in this leadership space, which can lead to derailment of group dynamics if not properly balanced.

So, in addition to working on general team cohesion or connection activities with senior executives, it’s helpful to be more targeted in our approach towards building the capabilities and environment for managing positive conflict.



No matter how much we work together as a team, if individuals don't come to play — it will be a struggle to find a meaningful operating rhythm. When it comes to individual perspectives, there are a number of key mindsets that need to be at the forefront of our senior executive team:




**Abundance mindset** — Abundance is the opposite of scarcity. Rather than seeing oneself in a competitive relationship with others for scarce resources, leaders sitting in abundance are open, interdependent and say “yes, and” to opportunities and ideas around them.



**EI mindset** — Emotional Intelligence is about understanding ourselves so we can better understand others. The more we have insight into our own behaviour, the more we can understand the motivations and factors influencing others. We can also better regulate our responses to triggers and choose how we act to achieve our ends.



**DE&I mindset** — Leaders operating with a diversity, equity, and inclusivity mindset value diversity of people and opinions and foster high levels of psychological safety. This in turn, allows for honest and pragmatic discussion of different ideas. Those kinds of discussions are the pathways to deep understanding and sustainable high performance.



What these shifts in thinking are aiming to achieve is the possibility for **task conflict without relationship conflict**. If we are able to move away from personal attachments to positions and views, then we can embrace the positives of fluid debate and constructive controversy. We are also more likely to take a learning-oriented viewpoint towards the positions of our colleagues, rather than a non-productive threat-oriented stance.

But trying to shift this thinking isn't always easy. One way to do this is through leadership interventions, coaching and assessments (such as 360 reviews or **LSI** or **GLP** assessments). Another is to be purposeful around setting clear expectations for how your leaders should be operating and nurturing a certain organisational culture — and then modelling it.

## Aligning Outcomes and Goals

The other component to handling differences within executive teams is about aligning on outcomes and goals.

Often it is the case that KPIs are connected to the performance of each individual's group, division or function. While this makes sense as one measure of success, it can lead to scarcity behaviour or vying for resources and commendation. Organisational outcomes must be valued over functional outcomes. Otherwise, it is easy to have individuals pursuing the interests of their own discrete areas.

As **research has shown**, often leadership teams — despite being full of leaders — are under-designed and under-led, lacking in purpose and process. We need to be very mindful about setting a strong unified purpose and process for our senior team.

## Diverge to Converge

Once we have alignment on organisational success, we can then move to grounding in an understanding that the best organisational outcomes come from the tension of divergence followed by the commitment of convergence. In other words, we choose to operate in a space of shared intention, even if we are not holding shared views.

This means agreeing on standards of behaviour and respect that will build trust and productive relationships. One way to enact this, is to practice being a service leader in service of each other. Nurture each other in the way we would care for and invest in those in our discrete broader team. This includes looking for ways to support each other to flourish and develop professionally.

If we are able to get our executive team aligned across the dimensions of the inner and outer, cohesion will follow. We will see, and be, the best we can in the inevitable tensions to come.



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