



**CRITICALEYE**

The peer to peer Board Community



# A LEADERSHIP BLUEPRINT





In a world characterised by change and disruption, the challenges of building and maintaining an effective and cohesive leadership team are more acute than ever. **Matthew Blagg**, CEO of Criticaleye, explores how you get various parts of your senior team moving as one, and in doing so reap the benefits of that alignment when driving strategy, innovation and change?

What's very clear is that you can't simply put together a group of highly motivated people, with the right experience and expertise, and assume they will spontaneously work well together. The CEO has a key role to play in both selecting the best individuals for the top jobs and then ensuring they are working together towards a common goal, regardless of their divisional responsibilities or geographical location.

### What Makes a High-performing Leadership Team?

There are a number of common traits and characteristics which we usually see in very successful, effective boards. Diversity is perhaps the most obvious. Leadership teams require a rich mix of people to perform at the highest level. Populate your C-suite with carbon copies and you will miss out on a broader range of opinion on strategy, innovation and greater diversity of thought.

It is now commonly accepted, although not always the case in reality, that boards need a variety of individuals who are prepared to challenge ideas and strategies, as well as offering the flexibility needed to adapt to external change in the market. Not only this, but diversity at the top of the tree usually translates to greater variety throughout the business in general, so organisations reap the benefits of diversity at every level.

Another common trait we see in high-performing leadership teams is alignment. You may have a diverse and varied group of executives but they must be focused on and

aligned behind a common goal if the business is going to drive strategy. There is no place for silos on the C-suite but too often we see behaviours on the board which seem to prioritise divisional or local responsibilities over the overarching aims and objectives of the business. Clearly the CEO has a central role to play in building and maintaining the focus of the executive team on a common goal, no matter where they are based, their divisional objectives or their personal ambitions.

And finally, but perhaps most importantly, the relationships within the leadership team must be based on complete trust. Without this, most boards will struggle to achieve their full potential and drive the business forward. Establishing trust will encourage individuals to be more honest and open, as well as adopting a flatter, more collaborative structure. Trust is an essential ingredient to creating and maintaining a leadership DNA which will form the basis of how well the business can perform. It also provides the right environment to build relationships both within and outside the board. >



## Addressing Change – Why Great Leadership Matters

The importance of having a high-performing and clearly aligned leadership team is becoming ever more essential in today's rapidly changing and complex world. Digital transformation and the need for more sustainable business practices are forcing executive teams to effectively lead change – a process which becomes very difficult when CEOs and their boards are not working together and there is no trust. Clearly, the issue becomes even more complex when you are operating across different locations and markets but the requirement of the leadership team remains the same.

Address the change needed, establish the strategic direction of the business and align the executive team behind that strategy to ensure the business remains successful and is taking advantage of external opportunities.

Working across locations, the central role of the CEO takes on an even greater importance. Changes needed in one division of the business may not apply in others but the European or global CEO must ensure the leadership DNA is firmly established so that whatever challenges their leadership team faces can be addressed.

To this end, spending time with executives in your various localities is crucial. Too often we hear of CEOs who spend very little time in their locations, despite the importance of their business there. As a rule of thumb it makes sense for CEOs to divide their time according to the value of the business in each region. So if a location generates around 20 percent of your business, you should be spending about 20 percent of your time there, working with the executives and ensuring your senior team is working as one. >

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## Time Out to Reflect and Change

Taking a step back from the everyday work of running an organisation is the first phase to achieving alignment. Indeed, here at Criticaleye, our CEO Members and their teams report that having the executive team together, focused and involved in the same debate is the most effective and efficient way of tackling issues that are hindering alignment and causing individuals to work at cross purposes. It enables the leadership team to establish a clear strategy and a framework for realising its aims and objectives.

Similarly, access to experienced individuals and mentors who have been through the same challenges, is also cited as highly valuable when building team alignment and knowledge.

Whether a business is undergoing a period of rapid growth, responding to external change or preparing for IPO, access to prior experience offers an invaluable source of help in challenging their strategy and the way they work together as a team. Having led organisations in their own operational careers, mentors are perfectly placed to provide an unbiased and experienced perspective to leadership teams.

That said, the success of any effort to build and maintain a high performing leadership team is going to be almost wholly dependent on the personalities of the CEO and individual members of the C-suite. Conflicting egos, silo mentality and failure to communicate effectively will have a negative impact on building alignment.

In most cases for CEOs that are seeking help to develop and transform their leadership team, something invariably has to change. This might mean a complete restructure of the team and making some tough decisions about whether certain individuals can work within a new leadership framework, or it might just be taking a step back with your existing team and putting the wheels in motion to put the C-suite back on the right track.

Most senior leadership teams are able to build alignment and trust with the right mix of leadership development and access to experiential learning. In our experience at Criticaleye, these two ingredients provide a valuable and truly effective way of building a cohesive and high performing leadership team every time, no matter what challenge needs to be overcome. ■

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This article was originally published in [European CEO magazine](#).



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## Inspiring Leaders to Succeed

### Respect

We advocate high levels of respect internally and amongst our Members so that there is value and appreciation of the various opinions, experiences and roles in the Community

### Collaboration

We work together by sharing knowledge and expertise to achieve results

### Challenge

We provide a safe environment where ideas and strategies are challenged, actively inspiring leaders to think differently

### Trust

We provide a trustworthy platform for peers to share knowledge and inspiration openly

### Integrity

We promise to drive results whilst honouring confidentiality

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