

Delivering organisational results

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17 July 2019

There is so much that has been written on the subject of clarity of purpose and vision and how that should shape and drive everything done in an organisation to optimise organisational results. Without a clear vision and purpose how are the people in an organisation able to see the roadmap ahead of them to the desired successes and achievements? If organisations only keep looking into the middle distance, people might encounter blocks and diversions along the way thus making the achievement and realisation of success all the more challenging. If there is not clarity and alignment, people within an organisation may be pulling in different directions and heading for different outcomes.

In Ben Hunt-Davies book, 'Will it Make the Boat Go Faster' he explains that "You get what you focus on. You don't have to work harder; it's not through doing more hours, it is by being more focused within those hours." Spending the time to communicate the vision and purpose will enable the people to focus on what matters most and what will make the biggest difference.

Does your Trust have a compelling purpose and vision informed by a set of strong core values? Is this translated into practice in delivering of your charitable objective – the provision of education?

It is tempting and perhaps on a superficial level easy to say 'yes' to both questions. After all, many would be able to recite the DfE's view on the three core functions of governance with ease, the first of which is ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.

Real value comes when you spend focussed time as a Board and leadership team reflecting on these key questions deeply. In this short article I touch on two key themes to reflect on. I would also suggest that these are questions it is worth regularly revisiting to make sure the focus and clarity is not diluted over time.

Setting the vision & purpose and translating it into practice

As Simon Sinek puts it "all organizations start with WHY, but only the great ones keep their WHY clear year after year" (2009). The Board should take the time to identify their organisation's purpose and articulate it simply so that all stakeholders will understand it and believe it. It should become the DNA of the organisation and run through everything that everyone does.

An interesting example from outside of education is SodaStream. SodaStream is on a mission to "revolutionise the beverage industry by empowering people to enjoy beverages that are better for (them) and for the planet." This is a powerful statement that clearly sets out their WHY. Underpinning this statement are five vision statements that all of its people sign up to. It's easy to understand, it makes sense and it's easy for an employee to check that their actions and decisions are aligned.

In multi-academy trusts there is often a plethora of vision statements and goals – at Trust level, school level and functional level. In an environment where there are competing priorities of what good should look like the people are surrounded by a terrific amount of 'noise'. This lack of clarity can get in the way of the Trust achieving its vision and goals.

Aligning the entire organisation to deliver the core purpose

In the education sector, improving educational outcomes for children surely has to be everybody's business. If what is being delivered is not enabling the improvement of educational outcomes then what is the point to that activity? The boat will not be going any faster – it's

highly likely that the boat will be travelling in circles.

Whilst the Trust may want to enable each academy to have its own vision, it must connect and be congruent to the overarching trust-wide vision. Connected to that vision may be a set of value statements and also a set of objectives. For example; it may be that school improvement is the driving factor for all activity and therefore those objectives 'lead the pack' over all.

Each set of functional objectives would contribute and connect to the Trust-wide objectives including the objectives/targets set in each academy.

It is worth reflecting on how best to set objectives in your Trust to connect everyone to the Trust's objectives. Hunt-Davis describes in his book that in the run-up to the Sydney 2000 Olympics, goal setting was of absolute importance. He talks about the concept of 'layered goals' – from the absolute aim to the bite-sized everyday goals that are required so that a purpose runs throughout it all.

Furthermore Hunt-Davis discusses the importance of teams having a common purpose whilst also recognising that individuals have their own success criteria: it's ensuring an appropriate balance between the two which reinforces team cohesion. This would apply to multi-academy trusts. The Trust-wide vision is the common purpose but connected to that are individual success criteria for each academy, each function and each individual.

This article was originally published by [the Trust](#), the Journal for Executive and Governance Leaders on 22 May 2019.

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