

The C-Suite



Having a C-Suite is one thing; having a C-Suit leadership team is something else and having a real C-Suite leadership team, empowered, engaged and aligned, is not easy.

C-Suite leadership teams are difficult beasts as egos are usually omnipresent

A C-Suit is usually made up from the company's top executives, directors, vice-Presidents, Senior-Vice presidents, etc. and those who get to the dizzy heights of the corporate ladder, usually do so thanks to their ego. Many have been to top universities and business schools and "have been around" for a while; they know the park and how to play the games that have got them, as individuals, to the top of their function, business unit or division.

The C-Suite is not simply about ensuring the operational reporting between the CEO and the other "C's"; the C-suite is the place where people with diverse (and often conflicting) opinions should be making robust strategic decisions for their organisation – it is not about playing "individually" but playing "collectively"

The majority of strategic decisions need to take into account, design, finance, production, marketing, HR, etc., i.e., "vertical" inputs are needed to be able to make "horizontal" decisions. Clearly, the heads of are well placed to identify the consequences, positive & negative, on their area – they

also, however, need to take off their “functional hat”, stop defending their turf and put on their “transversal hat”.

This, “wearing of two hats” is not easy and is even more difficult in organisations where people grow & develop vertically – for example, the sales assistant who becomes junior sales manager, then area sales manager, then regional sales manager only to become, one day, SVP Sales.

Expectations are often reciprocal, the head of feels that they should somehow, “protect” their function and their “people” feel they should be protected by their head of.

Many C-Suite leadership teams are only a team “in name”, with no effort to move from a de facto “heads of” C-Suite to an effective and efficient C-Suite leadership team; simply adding “leadership team” to C-Suite does little to change the dynamic.

Becoming the C-Suite leadership team doesn’t mean giving up individual ambitions; all teams have three overarching goals, collective work products, personal growth and performance results. However, there is a need to put personal ego to one side and channel the associated energy into the “collective ego”; individual success and growth comes through collective success and growth.

In his landmark (at least for me) book, “Making Teams Work at the Top” Jon R. Katzenbach identified five shortfalls in maximising team potential within leadership “groups”.

- Lack of appreciation of the discipline of teams and the performance potential teams can offer; even at the top
- No differentiation between team and nonteam opportunities
- Overdependence upon crisis-type events to trigger team behaviours
- Overreliance on the familiar discipline of executive leadership, which conflicts with, and typically

- overpowers, the discipline required for team performance
- Overlooking new options for team composition, modes of behaviour, and leadership roles they can play to build real teams in the right places

I've been working with senior leadership teams for around 30 years now; if you would like to discuss how to create an empowered, engaged and aligned leadership team; do not hesitate to contact me at boblarcher@boblarcher.com