How to improve clarity in the workplace
Leading yourself – 5. Apply the framework

The Leadership Framework

A manager's role is to set the right conditions for productive work.

People perform their best work when they are:

- Clear about their goals.
- Clear about what is expected and the boundaries within which they must work.
- Given some freedom to determine how they are going to achieve their goals.
- Able to contribute to the development of the task to ensure a clear and shared understanding of the work to be performed.

Therefore, to perform at their best, people require clarity in two ways.

i. Clarity on the tasks to be performed, and

ii. Clarity on how they are to work with others.

Clarity on task performance

Clarity on the tasks to be performed relates to how organisations define, align and cascade their work, including their strategic goals. This requires every manager at every level to provide:

- Clarity of direction
- Effective role design
- Clearly assigned tasks

Clarity of direction

The direction of an organisation, and therefore the context of the work for each person, is defined by the organisation's purpose and strategy. An organisation's strategy specifies what it will and will not do. This results in initiatives, designed to achieve the defined organisational objectives ie what the organisation is attempting to accomplish over a period of time. These initiatives provide focus on the work to be done. Without this focus, the context of people's work will be confused, and unproductive work will occur. There will be a lack of prioritisation of projects and a waste of time, effort, and resources. There will be confusion on what is important to the organisation. This resultant confusion will affect working relationships and outputs across the organisation.

To provide clarity of direction organisations need to:

- Clearly define their strategy – clarifying strategic objectives and their related initiatives so they can be implemented.

- Align the organisation – getting the organisation ready for strategy deployment by aligning the working organisation to support strategy implementation, connecting planning and budgeting and allocating accountability and authority at a high level.

- Effectively cascade work – engaging employees and assigning tasks with appropriate measures throughout the organisation.

- Monitor and assure strategy implementation – reviewing the progress of strategy implementation and the effectiveness of the strategy itself.

This process ensures all employees can answer the following questions:

- Where are we heading (as an organisation)?

- What is my role?

- How is my performance measured?

See website: Leading the Organisation > Implement Business Strategy

Effective role design

One of the most common causes of poor performance or failure to deliver business outcomes is poor role design. Poor or incomplete definition of the work content of a role, unclear relationships between roles, overlapping work boundaries, or inappropriate authority causes confusion and uncertainty and will ultimately result in poor performance, poor morale or conflict.

Role design establishes a role in the organisation, its purpose and objectives, its accountabilities and authorities, and its working relationships with other roles. Effectively designed roles, filled with capable people, are the foundations for building a successful team. Well-designed roles:

- Enable focused thinking on the work to be done

- Enable people to work together productively towards business goals

- Allow people to apply their knowledge, skills, and experience to achieve outcomes

- Enables people to exercise judgment in making decisions and builds individual confidence and esteem

- Empowers people to work together to achieve team goals.

To fully define a role, the manager must clearly define:

- The key outputs (tasks) of the role and how they relate to the objectives of the business.

- The key working relationships of the role (see 'Clarity on cross team working relationships' in this article).

See website: [Leading People > Create Effective Roles and Fill Them with Good People](#)

Clearly assigned tasks

It is by setting clear tasks with clear boundaries for work that managers create the necessary conditions for productive work and create an environment that maximises creativity, ensuring optimum output. How many times do managers say, 'No, this is not what I wanted' when a team member has spent large amounts of time completing a task. For example, if a manager asks for a 'report on the current status of a project,' what does this look like in the team member's mind? Is it a 50-page report outlining the current status of a project with successes, issues and possible delays, or is just a short verbal update so the manager can pass the information on to his or her manager?

To be performed correctly, tasks must be assigned in a way that ensures team members have a clear understanding of the task. This requires managers to provide, for each task, its:

1. **C**ontext (Why?)
2. **P**urpose (What?)
3. **Q**uantity (How much?)
4. **Q**uality (How well?)
5. **R**esources (Resources to deliver?)
6. **T**ime (by when?)

To ensure clarity, when assigning any task, whether verbal or written, the manager should 'check off' the CPQQRT elements with the team member.

See website: Leading People > Effectively Assign and Assess Work

Clarity on how to work together

Role clarity extends beyond the tasks in the position description. It includes the broader accountabilities of all employees on how they are to work with their manager, their team and others in the organisation.

Clarity on how people work together is about understanding roles and respecting those roles. It is with clarity that individuals, teams and the organisation can work together to perform their work.

Clarity on the role of being a 'team member'

In organisations, all employees are obliged to deliver the outputs required of their role and use the resources and process specified by the organisation. Expectations, however, go beyond this. There are standards of behaviour on how people are expected to interact to achieve business outcomes.

To work together in a constructive and effective manner requires all team members ie all employees to:

- Fulfil commitments made
- Bring their full capability to work
- Continue to develop their performance effectiveness
- Provide their manager with feedback
- Work together productively.

While these requirements are clearly defined in The Leadership Framework, each organisation needs to define what this looks like for their organisation.

See website: Leading Yourself > Understand your Role

Clarity on the role of managers

Often organisations do not have a clear and common understanding of the role of a manager. If fact, often senior leaders have conflicting views of what a manager should be, know and do. In these circumstances, how can an individual manager understand their role in an organisation? This leads to confusion on expectations across the whole organisation.

In The Leadership Framework the role of the manager is *to achieve the business goals set for them, while providing an environment that allows their team to be effective and satisfied with their work while developing their full potential.*

Managers set the purpose and direction of their team and enable team members to move along together in the required direction with competence, commitment and enthusiasm, dealing with obstacles on the way. They are accountable for building the capability of their team to achieve the required outputs.

To do this, managers are specifically accountable for:

1. Their own personal effectiveness.
2. The output and behaviour of their team.
3. Building and leading an effective team, so that each member is fully committed to, and capable of, moving in the established direction.
4. Continuous improvement of work processes and methods.

To ensure clarity managers must also ensure all team members can answer the following questions:

- Where are we heading (as a team)?
- What is my role?
- How is my performance measured?

See website: [Leading Yourself > Understand your Role](#)

Clarity on the role of Managers Once Removed

Nearly every employee in an organisation has a Manager Once Removed (MOR). The Manager Once Removed is each individual employee's manager's manager.

While most organisations do not specifically identify the role of MORs, they build their accountabilities into the organisation's systems of work for people management, such as approving employee appeals or for dismissal. This lack of formal identification of the MOR role is a gap that can cause relationship issues between managers, their direct reporting team members and their own manager.

The manager-once-removed relationship

MORs ensure clarity by:

i. Ensuring the consistency and quality of leadership for their Team Members-Once-Removed. They link vertical and horizontal role relationships to ensure collaboration and alignment.
ii. Integrating the work of their team of teams by setting the context for work of the business unit.
iii. Ensure fair treatment.
iv. Build capability for the future.

See website: [Leading Yourself > Understand and Respect the Role of Others](#)

See website: [Leading the Organisation > Enable Systemic Trust and Fairness](#)

Clarity on cross functional working relationships

In the horizontal structure, confusion often tends to be at the handoff points, where work crosses from one function to the next, for example, from marketing to sales. Issues often relate to accountability and authority, resourcing and systems of work. Unless this work is properly aligned, silos will develop and workarounds will occur. Functions may start duplicating the work of other functions to achieve outcomes. Alternatively, employees will try to resolve issues by developing personal relationships across functional boundaries. They will start swapping favours to get work done. Clearly, this is not acceptable. It is the work of the CEO to integrate the work of an organisation's functions by clearly outlining the handover points for work.

While it is important to integrate the work for all divisions, a common issue for many organisations is the integration of the work of corporate specialist functions, such as finance and human resources, with that of core functions. Typical issues are:

- What is the role of the specialist function?
- What are the specialist function's accountabilities and authorities?
- How do they integrate with manager accountabilities and authorities?

For example, in people management issues, what is the role of the human resources function and what is the role of the manager:

- If there is a people management issue, who is accountable to fix it?
- If there is corporate training on bullying and harassment, as a manager, do I have to send my team members to the training, because I don't think it is an issue in my department?
- A manager wants to give a certain pay increase, but HR says no.

These are common questions in organisations and a lack of clarity often creates conflict, not just between the corporate function and the manager but also between managers and their team members.

To enable the achievement of business goals, the accountabilities and authorities of core and corporate specialist function must be clear. Line manager roles and corporate specialist roles must be complementary. They need not be created with inbuilt conflict. The accountabilities and authorities of each function should be designed, from the start, to align with their counterpart roles.

See website: [Leading the Organisation > Design the Organisation](#)

Clarify on cross team working relationships

Role relationships, and the authorities that define them, must be specified to enable everyone in the organisation to work together effectively and collaboratively. This is especially true for team specialist roles such as planners, work coordinators and technical specialists.

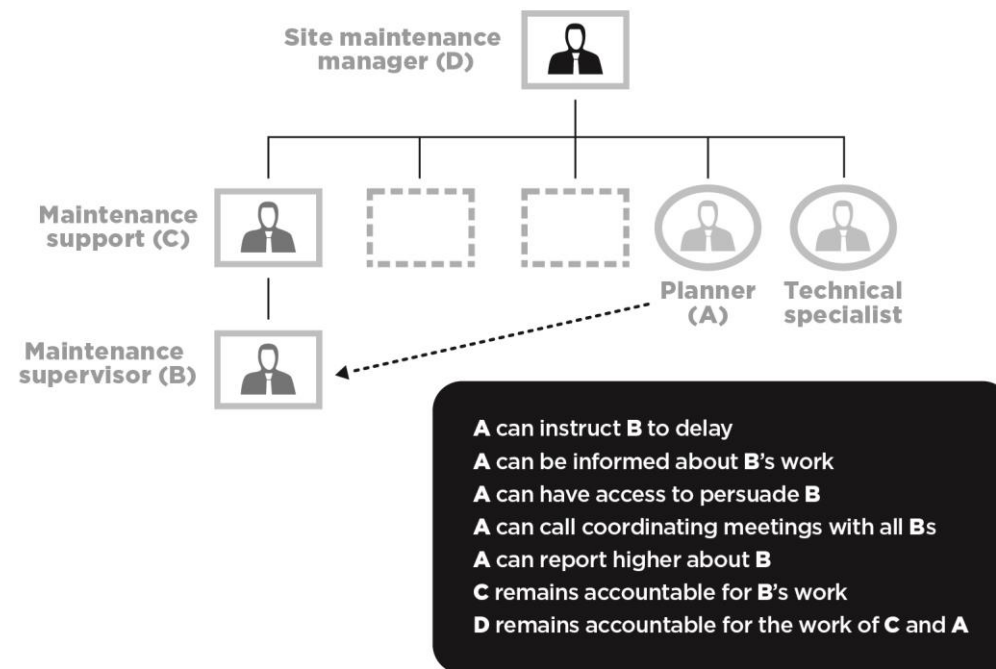Typical issues for employees working with specialists are:

- What is the role of the specialist?
- What are the specialist's accountabilities and authorities?
- How do they integrate with my manager's accountabilities and authorities?
- How do they impact with my accountabilities and authorities?
- How do they work with other team members?

Examples of common questions people have are:

- Can I be informed about the work of another and/or receive reports on that work?
- Can I be advised or try to persuade another role – and if so, which role is accountable for the outcome?
- Can I delay something or stop something – and if so, which role is accountable for the outcome?
- Can I require another role to attend a meeting or to monitor the work of another, and if one role does not cooperate what are the next steps?

An example of defining working the relationship, between a specialist Planner and a Maintenance Supervisor, is shown in the diagram on the following page.

Defining working relationships

Site maintenance manager (D)

Maintenance support (C)

Planner (A) **Technical specialist**

Maintenance supervisor (B)

A can instruct **B** to delay
A can be informed about **B**'s work
A can have access to persuade **B**
A can call coordinating meetings with all **B**s
A can report higher about **B**
C remains accountable for **B**'s work
D remains accountable for the work of **C** and **A**

Clarifying roles and role relationships sets some of the important conditions for team members to work to their full capability and enables employees to work together productively. Any issues must be resolved in the role design process and not left for individuals to sort out for themselves. When managers create specialist roles, they must be designed for a specific business purpose with clear accountabilities and authorities for the specialist's work.

Failure to specify the accountabilities and authorities for specialist roles at the corporate or department levels creates the environment for conflict and has predictable consequences:

- Blurred accountabilities and authorities will result in duplication of effort and / or gaps in delivery. As a result, office politics may emerge, with the related poor behaviours undermining the organisation's effectiveness or undermining its values.

- Work will be performed by the wrong roles - time and resources will be wasted in "sorting out" the work.

- Workarounds and unauthorised systems of work will be developed as people will still want to achieve their objectives outside the authorised system of work eg creating local spreadsheets to collate data for reporting.

- Managers will not be able to hold team members to account for their personal effectiveness as they are likely to be trying to deal with ineffective working relationships and may not to have clear authority to act.

- Employees will need to rely on the goodwill of their peers to get work done.

- Many meetings with little outcome.

All this impacts the ability of people to work together and hinders workforce strategy implementation. The issue is not about relationship management. It is about providing clarity through organisational/role design to allow people to use their individual capability.

See website: Leading Yourself > Understand and Respect the Role of Others

See website: Leading People > Create Effective Roles and Fill Them with Good People

See website: Leading the Organisation > Design the Organisation

Why is clarity important?

The Leadership Framework is underpinned by seven beliefs about people at work. Five of these beliefs are:

i.   People are naturally motivated to work, they are not intrinsically lazy

ii. People are social beings and work is an environment where social interaction is required to achieve business outcomes

iii. Organisations and their employees share a common goal in the need for productive work

iv. The work environment critically influences an individual's ability to do their best work

v.   People seek to work at a level in which they can use their capabilities to the full

What do these beliefs about people at work mean for managers?

- Firstly, it means that people come to work to do the best job they can but their natural motivation to work and their performance effectiveness is affected by workplace conditions. It is a requirement of managers to set the right workplace conditions or environment to enable people to be productive. Managers do not need to motivate people, a manager's role is to set the right conditions for productive work.

- Productive work is only enabled when managers provide an environment that allows people to work together, be effective and satisfied with their work while, at the same time, developing their full potential.

- People want to work at a level where they can use their capabilities to the full.

- As work is a social environment where social interactions are required to achieve business outcomes, a clear understanding of the social norms and the rules of engagement in an organisation is essential.

- Providing clarity on the tasks to be performed and on how people are to work together empowers people to do their best work.