

Thank you for downloading “Your Management Team as Mission Control”.

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Thanks again for your interest in our firm and our work. We look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Bob and Cary



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VIEWPOINT

YOUR MANAGEMENT TEAM AS 'MISSION CONTROL'

There is a point at which you want members of your senior team to look at things purely from the perspective of their unique function

Those of us of a certain age remember Mission Control.

When a NASA spacecraft was set to blast off, a boxy black-and-white television was wheeled into our schoolrooms so we could watch the scene live.

We'd see the rocket on the pad at Cape Canaveral (known as Cape Kennedy from 1963 to 1973) being fueled prior to launch. The TV cameras would take us into Mission Control in Houston, a room full of men (yes, they were all men) wearing headsets, each glued to a console with a label on top roughly translating into the functions of NASA, such as Telemetry or Medical or Meteorology.

At the center of the room, providing the "Control" in Mission Control, was Gene Kranz, NASA's flight director. Crew cut, white shirt, skinny tie, military bearing—the man with total authority to make the life-and-death decision whether to unleash a spacecraft. As the countdown progressed, a constant stream of information came in from each of the men at those consoles.

Just before the final countdown, Kranz would turn to the leader of each of the major systems for a final check. "Telemetry—go. Meteorology—go. Medical—go." Once he had sign-off from each of his primary crew heads, the final countdown would commence: "10 ... 9 ... 8 ..."

I was reminded of this scene this summer while doing research for a book on executive teams.

WHAT DO YOU WANT OF TEAM MEMBERS?

We've been interviewing chief executives about their top teams—the senior management team that gets together regularly. One of the questions we've been asking these CEOs is about functional vs. generalist orientation. Specifically, when the senior team gets together, does the CEO want the individuals at the table to be representing their functions, or do they want the team members to adopt a more holistic, company-wide perspective? Are they there as leaders of their functions or divisions, or are they there as the "wise people of the XYZ Corporation," providing top-level guidance and advice to the CEO?

While none of the CEOs responded that the team should be 100 percent functional or 100 percent generalist, the typical response was that they should skew 70 percent to 80 percent toward adopting the generalist, company-wide perspective. As one CEO, representing the prevailing view, told us: "If all they can do is speak from the perspective of their function, they shouldn't be at the table. I want people who can speak for the company first and for their function a distant second."

Most of the CEOs wanted a team comfortable commenting on, even critiquing, areas under the purview of one of their colleagues. It's not only O.K. in this view,

but required that Finance comment on Operations, and that Technology weigh in on a proposal from Marketing. And woe is the HR functional lead, or the division president, who comments only on issues from his or her own functional or divisional perspective.

But is that how Mission Control worked? Would it have been appropriate to hear Medical questioning Meteorology on the weather forecast? Certainly not.

VALUE OF FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Mission Control represented the top of a hierarchical organization in its purest form. Thousands of individual peoples' opinions supported by tens of thousands of data points, all streaming into one room, with Überboss Gene Kranz making the call. And, just before making the call, he checks one last time with his key lieutenants before putting the launch into motion.

The argument here is not that every senior management team decision be approached from a totally functional perspective, as with Mission Control. Far from it. But in an effort to be inclusive, to be holistic, many organizations have left behind the ability of their senior executives to publicly take a purely internalized, parochial view, to weigh in from an entirely Finance, or HR, or Marketing, or Sales, or Operational perspective. It

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has become too politically incorrect, too reflective of a need for those executives to lift themselves outside their boxes in the organization chart and see the “bigger picture.”

The answer lies, of course, in CEOs encouraging their teams to take both perspectives.

Senior management team members must be able to understand the interdependencies and complexities of how various decisions affect all the people around the table. And the push in this direction over the past decade has certainly lifted the overall level of strategic dialogue around boardroom tables.

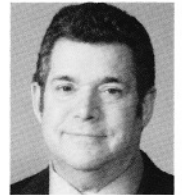
BACK TO THE CONSOLES AND HEADSETS

But the CEO also needs to create an

opportunity for each team member to be parochial. To respond to questions or look at issues from where they sit—as the leaders of their own organizations, with their own pyramids beneath them. Not only to look at the overall question, but also to be able to freely express concerns and raise reservations bubbling up through their organizations.

So the next time a major decision is getting made or an initiative is being launched, by all means look to your senior management team as a resource for seeing the world from a generalist, holistic, CEO perspective. But first, before the launch occurs, think about Mission Control. Encourage your team to go back to their consoles, put on their headsets, and link back into their domains. Let each person, one by one, give his or her own purely functional perspective.

If each team member knows that they will be asked their opinion from two distinct perspectives—once as a specialist and later as a generalist—they will feel able to speak with confidence on matters they are truly expert on without being penalized for being parochial or narrow. The overall quality of the information on the table, and the ensuing conversation, will be dramatically improved.



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