

The *HOW* of Leadership

Julie Williamson, PhD

An Abundance of Strategies

Companies have a phenomenal number of strategies highlighting **WHAT** they intend to do. Operations, talent, sales, IT, corporate – you name it, there's a strategy documented somewhere. Businesses spend a huge amount of time and money developing these strategies. Consultants are called, meetings are held, binders are created, and charts are developed. Maybe there's even a clever infographic!

After the consultants go home, meetings wind down, and infographics get pinned on the wall, the world goes back to normal. And a year later the annual cycle starts all over again.

Strategies are critically important for businesses – people need to know what the direction is and why they are heading there. Unfortunately, the investment in strategy is often lost because leaders don't personally change their decisions and behaviors in ways that deliver on the agreed-to plans.

Strategy unexecuted is potential unrealized.

An Explosion of Goodness

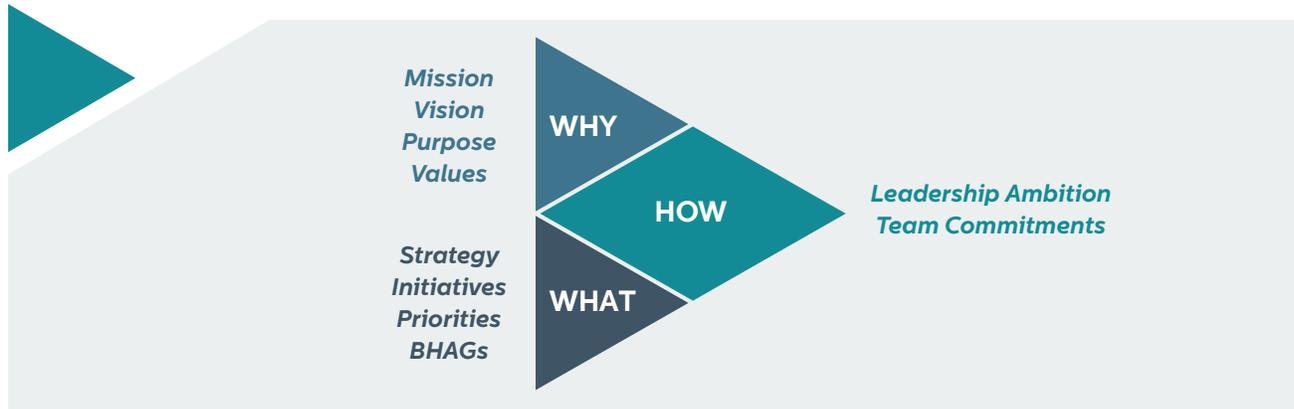
In almost equal measure, companies spend resources defining **WHY** they do what they do, often bringing in brand firms to create beautiful mission, vision, and purpose statements (what we call MVPs), underpinned by values that tell the world how they intend to act. The MVPs typically highlight a positive social impact, leading the industry in some way, and/or delivering to customers. Values are almost always some version of integrity, respect, excellence, innovation, accountability, and customer focus.

MVPs and values are worth stating because they clarify intention. Unfortunately, they tend to stop at clarity, becoming beautiful posters, knickknacks, and taglines for marketing to customers and employees rather than guardrails for decisions and action. MVPs and values only become more than words on a page when the most senior leaders visibly align their actions to them.

Nothing changes until leaders change.

The Missing Link

It is rare for leaders to be as clear on how to work together as they are on what they do and why they do it. We are obsessed with closing that gap.



HOW leaders lead together is the **missing link**. Senior leaders must define and align to how they work together to deliver more than any of them can do individually, if they want to create exceptional results organizationally. The strongest WHAT and WHY will fail to be executed without clarity on HOW senior leaders lead together.

Many leadership teams do well in a tactical crisis – they drop everything, come together, move quickly and decisively to mitigate the threat, and have success. The existential crisis of irrelevance needs equal if not more attention, and having a defined HOW of working is the best defense and offense. Not only does it ward off threats, it also drives growth in unexpected areas, because opportunities are identified early and converted fast.

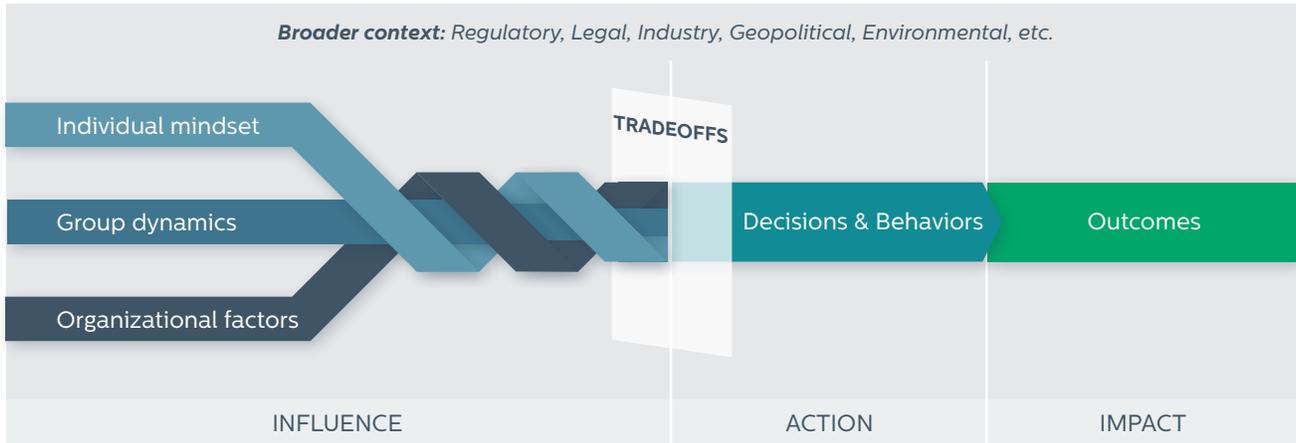
Without a clear HOW, organizational strategies and visions struggle to gain momentum and deliver results.

That's why we are obsessed with helping senior leaders focus on HOW they lead together to deliver on what they want to do and why they want to do it. As leaders get clear on how to lead together and to work in alignment with each other, the rest of the organization learns to do the same. The result? Innovation, transformation, growth. Without the need for a crisis.

Navigating complex connections to deliver differentiated results is the hottest skill for executives to have in today's business world. The world is becoming ever more interconnected, and the white space between functions, P&Ls, and geographies is the most powerful reservoir of new ideas and game changing innovations. It goes untapped when leaders don't have clear ways of working together to explore, invest, and deliver.

Start with Self

Leaders must start with themselves – how they show up is disproportionately impactful. That’s why we focus on a small group of influential leaders to define the HOW and align decisions and behaviors to it.



Alignment requires leaders to change deeply entrenched behaviors and decision processes to create different outcomes. At Karrikins Group, we focus on individual mindsets, group dynamics, and organizational factors that leaders bring into their processes. Then we help leaders identify the tradeoffs they negotiate every day that influence the outcomes they deliver.

Legacy ways of working hold teams back from delivering on their strategies and honoring their missions and visions. We believe that every executive in an organization has the potential to impact success, and it takes new ways of talking about and acting on tradeoffs to make it happen. Through our work, leaders get a new vocabulary for wrestling with tradeoffs, and they are able to connect with colleagues to solve problems in new ways.

Leaders must have the courage to change themselves before they work to change others.

Changing mindsets, dynamics, and factors is HARD WORK. It takes courage to go first, and intention to stay the course. It can be especially difficult for the most senior leaders in an organization. We help senior leaders dig into what gets in the way of partnering across the organization. In doing so, they unlock latent capacity and huge opportunities.

It is only by doing things differently that teams create different outcomes. Our singular focus is on helping teams to define and deliver on new ways of working together to create different outcomes.

Sometimes the solutions are as simple as changing organizational factors, like the order of a meeting agenda. Most of the time, the solutions require leaders to dig into individual mindsets and group dynamics, and show up in new ways that take courage and discipline to deliver. We stand shoulder to shoulder with clients as they navigate the changes that are needed and shift into powerfully aligned ways of working together.

To Define the **HOW**, Do It Together

This work cannot be done independently or by delegates. Executives must do the work together to create accelerated and impactful results.



When we work with companies to co-create their HOW, we engage with the most senior leaders in the organization, typically the CEO and their direct reports. This can't be delegated – the most senior leaders must invest the time to understand themselves before they can bring this type of transformation out to the rest of the organization.

We create the space for executives to work together in an effective and impactful process. The HOW they create moves them quickly to a new model of leadership that accelerates growth and transformation.

Constructing an aligned executive team is a challenge worth accepting.

Constructing an aligned executive leadership team from a group of independent business leaders who normally only interact for status updates and crisis management is a challenge worth accepting. When the work is done, the team knows how to execute collectively on agreed-to strategies and MVPs. They are aligned to mutual success because they've

shifted personally in ways that fundamentally change the trajectory of the whole organization. We believe in the power of HOW and the impact of alignment because we've seen it accelerate transformation and growth. When senior leaders put in the time and effort, the results are remarkable. They include:

- Stronger market position
- Accelerated financial growth
- Faster speed to market for new products
- More predictable outcomes
- Increased productivity throughout the organization

The organization delivers on leadership commitments in a way that sends a clear message to employees, customers, communities, and investors: ***we are aligned as a team***. It is a powerful platform and a compelling message that can't be created through clever marketing, big binders, or fancy charts. It comes from the leaders themselves.



Geographic Boundaries: Real Estate Development

Real estate development is a notoriously cutthroat industry. Leaders live and die by the success of their latest project, and the competition for financial resources is intense. When one project gets funded, another one doesn't, and leaders fight hard for their own regions, developments, or product lines to get the resources they need to grow and deliver. It is a high risk, high reward environment. As a result, successful leaders are often aggressive, determined individualists who want full control over every aspect of their businesses. Working together as peers is not in their wheelhouse – it takes time, which is their most finite resource, and it requires a level of transparency that is at best uncomfortable in a room of people who are all vying for the same dollars.

When we worked with the leadership team of a large North American real estate development company, what we heard repeatedly from the regional presidents was that they **couldn't afford to change**. The CEO was convinced that they couldn't afford **not to change**.

With the CEO's sponsorship and direct involvement, we brought the leaders of each of the businesses and shared services areas together. We provided the space for them to co-create clarity for the future vision. They then co-developed a framework for

how they would deliver together, including ways of working, communicating, and decision making. This clarity helped them to shift their mindsets and beliefs about each other and the CEO in ways that streamlined their budgets, improved their working relationships, and increased their growth opportunities in their respective markets. Each regional president committed personally to new ways of working. Then we worked with them to create environmental support for showing up with new mindsets and behaviors.

Through their new-found alignment, they now build their own local strategies that align to the corporate strategy, and they are better able to leverage the assets of the entire company. The brand is stronger, they have more effective reach in their local markets, and they have more assets to deploy as they work to grow. They are still very individualistic and fight for their budgets and their people – they haven't lost the entrepreneurial spirit. But they now do so within the context of a bigger end game for everyone that drives the brand exponentially. In our final meeting with them, one president noted that, "Our growth goals seemed unachievable a year ago...today I see a way to get there together."



Product Businesses: A Conglomerate Structure

Large conglomerates are often faced with the reality of disaggregated brands that seemingly don't need each other to be successful. Their struggles and wins feel independent of an overarching brand or culture, and senior leaders make decisions and set priorities outside of a connection to a bigger market objective, focusing almost exclusively on budget requirements negotiated with the corporate office. This gets reinforced when leaders only come together for quarterly reporting on financials. In these meetings, leaders often sit around a table while one after another provides a status of quarterly results. Meanwhile, everyone else sits silent, resisting the urge to check email. Or not, depending on the culture and team norms as enforced by the CEO. There may be an annual corporate strategy session or a pep talk about the importance of transformation and innovation. Then everyone goes back to running their own businesses in their own ways.

We've worked with this type of conglomerate, with five lines of business made up of 70+ companies in a highly commoditized industry. For years, the leaders talked about transformation, and many of their strategies and MVPs included that emphasis. However, there was little to no linkage across the companies or LoBs, and the power of the whole was missing from individual plans. The CEO recognized that this was holding back his two biggest desires: growth and innovation. He also realized the problem was at the top, with the most senior leaders and how they worked with him and together as peers.

His Executive Leadership Team (ELT) of 14 people simply didn't work together unless there was a crisis to manage. They didn't have the mindset, behaviors, or environments to support working together on setting and leading transformative strategies that would drive growth and innovation. Instead, they had norms that prevented them from pursuing opportunities together. For example, in quarterly reviews, business leaders wouldn't ask questions, because they didn't want to put a peer "in the hot seat" with the CEO, and they didn't have forums outside of the meeting to explore ideas together.

We worked with the team to understand the tradeoffs and barriers they were experiencing. In the process, we helped them to co-create new ways of working that have redefined their processes for strategy, budgeting, and leading across the businesses. They are now creating visibility and transparency in ways that are driving innovation and growth in previously untapped areas. They have changed their ways of meeting and working together, so their time is well spent as a team rather than as individuals reporting to the CEO.

As a result, they are reducing their cost by \$1.5B by leveraging capabilities from across the conglomerate, increasing their market share by providing end to end solutions for their customers, and creating growth opportunities for employees across the lines of business.

About the author:



Julie Williamson, PhD

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Julie's enduring interest in change starts with herself. She has pursued different educational, work, and personal opportunities over the last 30 years, always leaning into growth opportunities. She has been a technologist, a strategist, and today as a social scientist she finds passion and energy working with leaders of companies around the world as they tackle some of the biggest challenges in their companies. In today's increasing complex and interconnected world, Julie knows the power of aligned leadership. Through alignment, leaders can successfully discover and explore incredible new opportunities. That's why Julie is committed to helping the most senior leaders in organizations come together to convert on the potential that exists in the space between organizational P&Ls, functional areas, and other silos.

Contact us:

For more information, reach out to us at hello@karrikingroup.com. We'd love to talk with you about how we could inspire your leaders to move from agreement to alignment and deliver amazing results for your organization.

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About Karrikins Group

Karrikins Group is a global behavior change company that aligns leadership and organizations to accelerate transformational change. Find out more about the Karrikins Alignment Journey at www.karrikingroup.com.

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