

POINT OF VIEW

Simple and Affordable Ways to Stop Fighting Fires and Start Tending to the Forest

If you pick up the phone, call a handful of your closest friends and colleagues, and ask, “How are things going at work?” you are likely to hear some form of the same response multiple times: how busy they are, how crazy the office is and how they feel like everyone is always running around fighting fires. They will likely say that if they could focus on more strategic efforts for just a few days, they could make a significant difference in the productivity of their organization.

The challenge is figuring out where to begin – how to extinguish the fires, prevent new fires from beginning and then nourish the forest for growth. Unfortunately, the options are often expensive and daunting. They require significant investments in technology infrastructure, extensive and highly sensitive organizational restructures, or very complex strategic planning initiatives that are a challenge to implement.

What we’ve come to learn with our clients is that there are a number of simple, quick and highly effective activities we can undertake to help stop the firefighting and begin nourishing the forest.

Organizational Health Check

An organizational health check is a great way to get started. It involves a quick analysis of 3 key areas that identifies the roadblocks inhibiting an organization’s ability to get past firefighting and into performance mode.

- **Governance, Roles & Responsibilities:** The ways in which decisions are made, activities prioritized, and responsibilities divided among resources have a significant impact on whether they are carried out effectively or handled in a chaotic or disorderly manner. A health check can help leaders understand if, when and how decisions are breaking down, whether activities are properly prioritized, and whether there may

be confusion or mismatches of responsibilities among resources.

- **Performance Management:** Managing performance is a tie that binds organizations together and keeps them working smoothly. If individuals are not clear on what is expected of them, not incented to meet those expectations, or do not receive clear feedback regarding whether those expectations are being met, organizations will be challenged to meet goals. Understanding where there may be lack of clarity regarding goals, being clear about what motivates and inspires people, and uncovering when and why people are not receiving feedback (usually either a lack of metrics or lack of constructive conversations) will help any organization or team rally members around a goal and drive them to deliver.
- **Talent Alignment:** When teams and organizations lack a certain set of skills or capabilities, they often find themselves spinning their wheels while they try to make up for those gaps with existing resources. Clearly defining deficiencies is an essential first step that allows organizations to decide whether gaps can indeed be filled by or developed from existing resources, or whether they need to find them elsewhere – whatever will complete the team and get all team members contributing fully again.

Diagnosing Priorities

In working with clients of all sizes across all industries and geographies, we have found that by addressing just a few glaring issues, a significant difference will be made in the way a team operates. People will stop spinning, take a breath, and focus on the important things, which will result in less firefighting and more nourishment of the forest.

It is critical, however, that they focus on only the glaring issues and do not get bogged down in trying to solve everything at once. In order to do this,

organizations must look at their health check results and identify patterns: what are the glaring issues? Which are having the greatest negative impact? Which issues do most team members appear to be concerned with? By considering these questions and using them to narrow the focus to a few high priority items, teams and organizations have been able to maximize their results.

Organizational Action Plan

Once specific items have been diagnosed and prioritized from health check outputs, it is important to identify and implement no more than 5 critical actions that will address the priority items in the 3 key areas in a timely manner. By keeping the action plan small, organizations minimize confusion, maintain focus and ensure impact – making it easier to stop the firefighting.

- **Governance, Roles & Responsibilities:** We have seen organizations do a variety of things that effectively address issues in this area. Sometimes the actions have been as simple as creating or restating an organizational structure and establishing high-level approaches for decision-making in order to remove bottlenecks and keep things on track. Another option is to revisit and shift roles and responsibilities to ensure that the right things are done to meet goals and to help team members maintain clarity and differentiation between what they are each doing. That way, they can focus on their own

deliverables and work more effectively as a team when necessary without stepping on toes and creating confusion.

- **Performance Management:** Action plans for performance management often include a clarification of goals, an increase in goal specificity, and an approach to align team members to expectations for their respective contributions. Sometimes performance management action plans also result in metrics or scorecards that assess team or individual progress toward goals. Performance management action plans can also be of a more individual nature, enabling team members to receive or provide constructive feedback that helps people understand and act when they are not meeting expectations.
- **Talent Alignment:** Talent alignment action plans usually result in team member development or training, or, even more importantly, in the shifting or hiring of new resources or new methods to address capability gaps that have been creating challenges.

An organizational health check, a follow-up diagnosis, and action planning and implementation can take very little time and resources and have very positive results. This type of effort has helped numerous organizations address confusion, stop fighting fires and start focusing on the more important things without requiring a complex and daunting investment in time and resources.

At Satori Consulting, our mission is simple—to work side-by-side with clients to discover opportunities and solve problems. We strive to provide both comprehensive and expert service, mindful of every client's unique needs. Our team of highly-skilled management consultants brings a wealth of industry and functional experience to provide wide-ranging services in project and program management, risk management, change management, organizational effectiveness, strategy and advisory, business process engineering, performance management, and infrastructure and technology.