

Are You In High Action and High Alignment?

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To achieve results, leaders commit to taking a course of action that will make a difference. These actions align with and leverage the actions of other leaders and partners who are working toward a shared result. Leaders who consistently and frequently assess whether their commitments accelerate positive changes and build on and leverage the work of other leaders make progress towards results. They move forward together by consistently answering the question, “Are we in high action and high alignment?”

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Making a Powerful Commitment

Commitments are actions that an individual pledges to undertake. Powerful commitments are made with a conscious intent to get things done. The focus is on making one or two commitments that have the greatest potential to move the work forward, not on creating a long to-do-list. Use the following questions to assess the power of a commitment:

- Is the commitment stated clearly? Does it describe what will be done by whom and when?
- Is the commitment observable and measurable?
- If the commitment is carried out well, will it support or leverage change that works toward a stated goal or benchmark, thereby driving the achievement of results?
- Is the commitment actionable? For example, can the person(s) making the commitment carry it out? Is the commitment clear on how to engage those who need to be involved?
- Do the actions of the commitment stretch beyond the leader’s everyday work? Does the commitment challenge the leader to address the adaptive challenges that are barriers to moving forward?

Weak Commitments	Powerful Commitments
At the next staff meeting, I will share what we talked about in the leadership session.	I will meet with my reportees next week to review our trend line on adoptions and complete a factor analysis. This information will inform the next steps that we will take to meet our targets.
Talk with director about the need to change policy and procedures to improve outcomes.	I will collect information and data to demonstrate what is working and not, and link to best practices. By the end of the month I will make a policy implementation recommendation to the director.
Design job fair	By next month, two key partners and I will attend two job fairs in the tri-state area to gather information. We will present our design recommendations at the next quarterly meeting of the work group.
Use MBTI in my work.	I will review my MBTI preferences and reflect on a conflict occurring between my executive director and myself. I will type-watch him and then implement a strategy to address our conflict by next week.

Data Drives Leadership Efficacy

While an action commitment can be written to be powerful, this power is only realized when implemented. Developing a practice of accountability is essential. Leaders who hold themselves accountable for performance are more likely to complete action commitments.^{1,2} Completion rates increase when action commitments are committed to in writing, shared publicly with the team or workgroup and then reviewed and discussed regularly to improve execution and efficacy.³

Action commitments are assessed along a continuum of action and alignment. Collaborative groups spend a great deal of time collecting information and planning, but often lose momentum and fail to execute at a scope and scale that will make a difference. The following assessment tool allows leaders to assess whether they are

¹ Littlefield, J. & O’Brien, J. *Policymaking through Collaborative Networks: Issues of Accountability and Performance*. Poster presented at the annual conference for the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Boston, Massachusetts, November 4-6, 2010.

² Pillsbury, J., Goddard-Truitt, V. & Littlefield, J. *Cross-Sector Performance Accountability: Making Aligned Contributions to Improve Community Well-Being*. Panel presentation at the American Society for Public Administration Conference, Miami, FL, 2009.

³ O’Brien, J., Littlefield, J. & Goddard-Truitt (2013). *A Matter of Leadership: Connecting a Grantmaker’s Investments in Collaborative Leadership Development to Community Results*. *Foundation Review*, V5: 1, 26-42.

in high action and high alignment. By knowing where they stand individually and as a team, leaders can make decisions about the likelihood of effecting positive change and how to strengthen actions to accelerate results.

Rating the Level of Action

No Action (0)	Assessing/Pre-Planning (1)	Planning/Preparing (2)	Execution (3)	Increasing Scope/Scale (4)
<p>No action commitment is made that focuses on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes, benchmarks • Actors (direct reports or peers, program recipients, superiors or external partners) • Personal leadership development 	<p>The action commitment focuses on the collection or sharing of information. It might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting baseline information and data • Understanding underlying issues and factors • Sharing general information to increase awareness of the problem, but without the expectation of influencing the outcomes/result • Developing personal leadership skills 	<p>The action commitment focuses on the preparatory phase required for successful execution. This commitment might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing strategies or structured activities • Preparing people, materials or products required for execution • Meeting with others to leverage contributions to achieving results • Joining strategic partners who will make a direct contribution • Collecting information or data to assess the needs of a population or to strengthen strategies 	<p>The action commitment focuses on implementation of strategies/activities/tactics. This involves action that has a direct impact such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing activities to improve the well-being of a population • Preparing strategic partners to make a direct contribution • Using information to assess effectiveness of strategies • Providing information to target populations for their use 	<p>The action commitment is focused on strengthening actions or taking actions to scale. These commitments might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructuring strategies for better impact • Expanding the scope or scale within the group, agency or community • Expanding the scope or scale to broaden reach across agencies or communities

Rating the Level of Alignment

In collaborations, strategies and activities are lined up in such a way that they bridge, leverage and support each other for greater impact. Imagine a rowing team with each member rowing in a different direction—lots of action but no forward movement! When in high alignment, collaborative groups are linking goals and objectives to focus on a common result, with each leader making a contribution.

No Alignment (0)	Low Alignment (1)	Moderate Alignment (2)	High Alignment (3)	Alignment with Others Outside of Original Scope (4)
<p>Actions are not connected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results • Goals • Strategies • Interests of other leaders • Development needs of leaders 	<p>Actions aligned with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development needs of leaders • Supporting the structure of a team • Building basic understanding of agreed-upon results • Connecting with individuals to build familiarity • Joining new people without specifying role and contributions • Deeper understanding of other leaders' perspectives, values, resources and interests 	<p>Actions aligned with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad vision and strategic direction • Needs to build capacity in self and others • Agreed-upon preliminary actions • Strengthening relationships and resolving conflicts • Accepting the distribution of work to accomplish strategies based on common agreements 	<p>Actions aligned with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed-upon strategies and actions • Assessment of the impact of actions and performance to inform decisions and accelerate results • Leveraging relationships on behalf of results, strategy or performance • Leaders holding self and others accountable for commitments • Actions are based on holding a part/whole perspective 	<p>Actions taken to link and connect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions with positive outcomes for greater impact • Leaders trusting the resilience of relationships to take risks and make the changes necessary to execute effective strategies

Getting and Staying in High Alignment and High Action

Once leaders have used the above rating tools to self-assess their own level of action and alignment, and give feedback to other leaders, the information can be displayed to show progress over time and identify opportunities for moving to higher action and higher alignment. The visual display of ratings supports problem solving, accountability and increases collaborative leadership efficacy.⁴

⁴ Rating data can be easily displayed and analyzed using the Excel HA/HA Assessment Tool found on the www.rbl-apps.com site. Are you in High Action and High Alignment? www.rbl-apps.com