



Roundtable Member,
Jennifer Smith, Director
of Sales & Marketing
Operations at Johnson
& Johnson Medical
Companies shares her
tips for navigating a
complex leadership
environment to keep
projects on track.

Mentoring **MATTERS**

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I work within a heavily matrixed organization and have to get the buy-in of multiple senior leaders in order to get anything done. I'm finding that the senior leadership team is not aligned on the strategy which means I'm regularly being pulled in two (or more) different directions. How can I navigate this complex leadership environment and actually get work done?

There is a crucial step that many leaders fail to complete that, if omitted, can lead to the ambiguity and disruption that you describe. That step involves aligning your team's goals and objectives upfront with key partners, including Senior Leaders.

When the Senior Leadership cascades the strategic priorities for the business down throughout the organization, your role as a leader is to translate those priorities into your own team's call to action. That means marrying the business priorities with the capabilities of your team to arrive at a select number of initiatives that will best contribute to moving the business forward.

You need confirmation that the leaders and teams on whom you will rely to be successful, will provide the necessary support and partnership. For them to provide this reassurance, they need to clearly understand the milestones and timelines and the ways in which they will need to support or contribute to your project.

Similarly, your team needs a line of sight to the support that you will be called on to provide to support the success of other teams. Failure to invest the time and effort from the start will lead to disruptions and headwinds later, including seemingly unpredictable and inconsistent messaging from Senior Leaders.

In the absence of clear markers and stakes in the ground come ambiguity and uncertainty in the minds of others about your focus and activities. Leaders may step in to fill a perceived vacuum and seek to guide the solution. Your call for support from their functional area may meet resistance in instances where resources are committed to competing priorities.

Beyond the immediate inefficiencies and disruptions in executing your business objectives, there are other negative impacts to your team and the business, including employee engagement and development.

If you fail to involve your employees in the exercise of translating the company's objectives to your team's role in the organization, then you miss the opportunity to help your team members connect what they do day-to-day with the broader company operations.

That connection is critical to employee engagement. It is also an important factor in aligning their day-to-day decision-making to optimal business outcomes.

If there is a gap in the communication and alignment around goals and objectives for the year, then there is a lack of objective measures upon which Senior Leaders will weigh in on the performance of your team and you on your employees.

In a scenario where your team's goals have been fully vetted and aligned, regular one-on-one interactions with Senior Leaders and cross-functional partners are efficient and productive; discussions center on progress to milestones on shared projects, with a focus on collaboratively addressing risks or bottlenecks.

It is natural for there to be a healthy tension between functional leaders; each has unique ambitions, perspectives, and deliverables. There should never be a question about the strategic direction or priorities of the organization. Engaging upfront in collaborative goal setting aligned to a single strategic focus for the business will allow you and your team to be productive and successful.



Jennifer Smith is the Director of Sales & Marketing Operations at Johnson & Johnson Medical Companies. She is a strategic Operations leader with deep roots in Finance, and with experience spanning Medical Devices and Pharmaceuticals, in Canada and abroad. Her superpower is navigating complexity and ambiguity. She brings structure and clarity to big and unwieldy business problems and then gets teams marching together down a path to a solution. Over the past decade, she has been selected by Management Boards and Leadership Councils to lead a variety of complex and strategically important change initiatives. Jennifer has an International MBA from the Schulich School of Business and is a Certified Public Accountant. Outside of work, Jennifer mentors foreign trained professionals and volunteers with organizations that support marginalized or disadvantaged citizens.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.