



Clarity Is a Leadership Responsibility

“ *Clarity is not about taking judgement away from people. It is about giving them enough context to use it well.* ”

Some of the clearest decisions I have been part of have become less clear the further they travelled.

A leadership team can spend hours working through an issue.

There are competing priorities, dependencies, risks, customer considerations and trade-offs. Options are tested. Assumptions are challenged. Some things are resolved and others remain deliberately open.

By the time a direction is agreed, it can feel obvious to the people in the room.

But the organisation has not been in that room.

It has not heard the debate, understood why one option was chosen over another, or seen which trade-offs shaped the final decision.

What eventually reaches a team may be the decision, the priority or the action required.

What does not always travel with it is the context that made the decision make sense.

I have learned how easy it is, particularly in senior roles, to underestimate just how much context we accumulate.

We build that picture through repeated conversations, decisions and trade-offs that others have not been part of.

Then we can forget that other people have only been given a small part of it.

That matters because people make decisions from the context available to them.

I have seen situations where teams were committed to the same broad direction and still moved in slightly different ways.

Not because they were resisting it.

Not because they lacked capability.

They simply held different understandings of what mattered most, what had already been decided, what remained open and where they had room to exercise judgement.

Each decision could make sense locally while the overall outcome became less coherent.

What can look like an execution problem is sometimes a clarity problem that started much earlier.

A decision can be made long before it becomes usable.

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There is still leadership work between reaching a conclusion and creating the conditions for other people to act from it.

For me, that does not mean stripping away every complication until something difficult sounds simple.

Complex organisations contain real complexity.

Some trade-offs need to remain visible. Some uncertainty cannot be resolved yet. Some decisions genuinely depend on information that is still changing.

Trying to make all of that disappear can create a different problem: people receive certainty that does not really exist.

But passing every dependency, qualification and unresolved question downstream is not clarity either.

The harder judgement is deciding what people genuinely need to understand.

What is most important.

What has been decided.

What has not.

Why the direction matters.

Which boundaries are real.

Where circumstances may change.

And where people are expected to use their own judgement.

I have found that people can operate remarkably well with uncertainty when the uncertainty itself is clear.

They do not always need every answer.

They do need to understand what they can rely on, what is still moving and what should guide their decisions in the meantime.

Because clarity is not the same as giving people more instructions.

In fact, too many instructions can create the appearance of clarity while making the organisation more dependent on the leader.

If someone understands only the task they have been given, the moment conditions change they often need to come back for another answer.

If they understand the intent behind it, the priorities that matter and the boundaries within which they can act, they have something more useful.

They can adjust.

They can make sensible trade-offs.

They can exercise judgement without waiting for every decision to travel back up the organisation.

Clarity is not about taking judgement away from people. It is about giving them enough context to use it well.

It is easy to ask whether something has been communicated.

I have become more interested in what people are now able to do because they understand it.

Can they make the next decision?

Can they tell what matters most when two priorities compete?

Can they move forward without continually needing someone more senior to interpret the intent?

That is a much harder test of clarity than whether a message was delivered.

And it places the responsibility in a different place.

Before asking why people did not understand, I think there is value in examining how much of the understanding ever left the room where the decision was made.

The real test of clarity is not whether I have explained the decision. It is whether people can make good decisions from it when I am not in the room.

Have I given people enough understanding to exercise judgement without me?