

# The Executive Culture Alignment Workbook

*Fifteen Questions Every Senior Leader Should Ask Before Saying “Yes”*

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## Introduction

When you reach the executive level, interviews stop being about whether you *can* do the job. They become about whether the organization will *let* your leadership work.

Culture is the invisible infrastructure that either amplifies or suffocates impact. You can have the right strategy, the right people, and the right intentions, but if the environment resists your way of leading, you’ll spend more time managing friction than creating value.

This workbook is designed to help you make sense of what you’re stepping into. Think of it less as a checklist and more as a *sensemaking tool*. Each item invites reflection and curiosity - not judgment. The goal is not to find a “perfect” culture (none exist) but to find one where your leadership can *land*.

Use it before you accept an offer, when you’re onboarding, or even when you’re reassessing your current environment.

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## Executive Culture Alignment Checklist

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### 1. Is the organization’s direction clear and shared by everyone you speak to?

Ask three people where the organization is heading. If you get three versions of the story, you’re walking into confusion disguised as collaboration. Clarity of direction reveals alignment at the top, and alignment is what allows strategy to live beyond PowerPoint.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 2. How is success defined - and does it make sense to you?

When expectations sound like “figure it out,” it’s not empowerment. It’s avoidance. Strong cultures translate ambition into clarity so leaders can lead, not guess.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 3. Is there evidence of progress, not just talk of transformation?

Ask, “What has tangibly changed in the past year?” Vision without movement is theatre. Real transformation has fingerprints, not slogans.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 4. How much space does the CEO occupy in a room?

A leader who listens creates leaders. A leader who dominates creates followers. Watch who speaks, who interrupts, and who stays silent - it tells you more about the organization’s values than any mission statement.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 5. How does the organization talk about people who’ve left?

If departures are treated like divorces, expect denial and blame. If they’re spoken about with honesty and reflection, you’re looking at a culture that learns rather than hides.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 6. Do energy levels feel sustainable?

Observe tone, body language, and pace. Fatigue is rarely operational - it’s cultural. A tired organization signals a leadership void somewhere along the line.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 7. Are you given the opportunity to meet your future peers?

If you're kept away from the team you're supposed to co-lead, something's off. Healthy cultures don't fear transparency.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 8. Are boundaries clear - or blurred by the “we’re a family” story?

Warmth is not the same as overreach. Cultures that lean too heavily on “family” often confuse loyalty with accountability. Remember, you're there to lead, not to parent.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 9. Does your intuition whisper something you can't yet explain?

At this level, your instincts are data. Don't dismiss discomfort simply because you can't articulate it yet. Intuition often catches what logic misses.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 10. How does the organization respond to conflict or disagreement?

Do leaders debate ideas openly, or do they defer to hierarchy? Psychological safety is not a buzzword - it's a window into how truth travels inside the organization.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### 11. Are decisions made close to where the work happens?

Cultures that push every decision upward breed dependency and fear. Pay attention to how much authority sits at the edges versus the center.

Score (1–5): \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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**12. What stories do people tell when they describe the company?**

Ask for an example of something they're proud of. The story they choose reveals their values far more than their official documents ever will.

**Score (1–5):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**13. Is there room for curiosity and experimentation?**

Organizations that punish mistakes are organizations that fear change. Innovation dies quietly in cultures that reward only compliance.

**Score (1–5):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**14. Do they celebrate the right things?**

Recognition tells you what really matters. Is it people who make things better - or people who keep things comfortable?

**Score (1–5):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**15. Do they seem more interested in what you'll *do* or who you *are*?**

Cultures that value authenticity over performance metrics are rare. But when you find one, your leadership will not just fit - it will flourish.

**Score (1–5):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How to Use This Workbook**

- **Don't rush it.** These questions aren't meant to be checked off in one sitting. Take them into conversations, listen between the lines, and watch what people don't say.
- **Score them loosely.** Rate each item from 1 to 5 based on your confidence in the answer (1 = concern, 5 = alignment).

- **Look for patterns.** A single red flag is manageable. Several in a row mean you're about to inherit a culture that resists its own progress.
  - **Reflect honestly.** Ask yourself: *Would this environment stretch my leadership or strangle it?*
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### Final Thought

Before you say yes to any role, remember: leadership doesn't succeed in isolation. It succeeds in context.

The smartest leaders are not those who accept the biggest roles, but those who choose environments where their impact can breathe. Use this workbook to choose *alignment over opportunity*. Because in the long run, alignment sustains both performance and peace of mind.

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