

BOARDROOM & BREATHWORK™

The Four Arguments

why teams get stuck, and which one is yours

There are four. Almost every team is mainly one of them,
and the four need different things.

Be the most regulated person in the room.

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HOW TO USE THIS

Diagnose before you prescribe.

Most organisational problems get a solution before they get a diagnosis. A team is slow, so it gets a productivity tool. People are disengaged, so it gets a survey. The solution is competent and it is aimed at the wrong thing, and the failure of it is then taken as evidence that the problem is intractable.

These four are diagnoses. They present almost identically from the outside, they feel completely different from the inside, and they need different responses. Reading the wrong one is not a small error: a ninety minute session aimed at a two year pattern will feel good, change nothing, and teach the room that this kind of work does not work.

Each page has the same four parts: what it sounds like, what is actually happening, what it costs, and one question you could ask your team on a Tuesday without anybody thinking you have been on a retreat.

Nothing here asks you to believe anything. Every one of these is observable in your own calendar.

ARGUMENT ONE

Execution

THE GAP BETWEEN THE PLAN AND THE WEEK

The strategy is fine. It does not survive Monday.

The thinking is rarely the problem. A plan is built by the part of the room that reasons, and it is carried out by people whose capacity is already committed. A plan that assumes spare capacity is a plan that quietly requires overtime, and overtime is borrowed from the same place judgement comes from.

WHAT IT COSTS

Decisions get made late and defended long. The work still happens, and it happens at the expense of the thinking that would have made it unnecessary.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

A resourcing problem, or a prioritisation problem. Both get solved, and the plan still does not survive the week.

THE QUESTION

Ask the room: what did we agree at the last offsite, and what actually moved? Not to assign blame. To find out which of these four it is.

ARGUMENT TWO

Stall

THE SAME WALL, EVERY TIME

It starts well. It stops at about the same point.

If initiatives die at roughly the same distance from the start, that is not a resourcing problem. Resourcing problems are irregular. A pattern that repeats belongs to the people rather than to the projects, and it usually belongs to the layer of leaders who were never given a way to hold their own state under sustained pressure.

WHAT IT COSTS

The organisation learns that things fade. After the third one, nobody fully commits to the fourth, and that is rational rather than cynical.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

A motivation problem, or the wrong people. Neither survives the observation that it fails at the same distance every time.

THE QUESTION

Ask the room: name the last three things that lost momentum. How far in did each one get? If the answer is similar, you have found it.

ARGUMENT THREE

Belief

GOALS NOBODY ACTUALLY BELIEVES

Everyone is executing. Nobody wants it.

Compliance and commitment look almost identical on a dashboard, and one of them is far more expensive. When people work toward something they inherited rather than chose, you get the numbers and you lose the discretionary effort, which was never in the numbers and is most of the value.

WHAT IT COSTS

Your best people leave first, and they leave politely, and the exit interview says something about progression.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

A communication problem. The strategy gets explained again, more clearly, to people who understood it perfectly the first time.

THE QUESTION

Ask the room: if we could change one thing about what we are aiming at, what would it be? Then wait. The first answer is the polite one.

ARGUMENT FOUR

Change

SOMETHING ENDED THAT NOBODY CHOSE

A restructure, a departure, a direction reversed.

Change asks the body for something before it asks the diary. That is why a plan can be signed off and the room can still be slow. People are not usually resisting the new thing. They are still carrying the old one, and almost no organisation gives anybody a way to put it down.

WHAT IT COSTS

Eight to twelve weeks of half speed that gets attributed to the new structure rather than to the transition, and so gets solved with another structure.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR

Resistance to change. It is almost never resistance. It is carrying.

THE QUESTION

Ask the room: what changed, and when. Then leave a gap. The timing matters more than most people expect.

WHAT NOW

*Two of these are a room.
Two of these are a programme.*

Execution and Change usually move with one well run session, because what people need first is language and permission.

Stall and Belief are patterns, and a pattern needs the longer arc. A single workshop aimed at either will feel good and change nothing, which is worse than doing nothing at all.

*If you are not sure which one you are,
that is what the thirty minutes is for.*

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Thirty minutes, free, no pitch.

Be the most regulated person in the room.

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