**Stakeholder Alignment and Collaboration in Action**:

*How to get from “I think this” to “we all agree to do that”*

This series brings insights to challenge, inspire and support leaders to make superior decisions on any strategic topic.

**Article 4**

**Are your objectives and goals the right ones?**

A fundamental step at the outset of any collaboration is to agree its goals and objectives. Yet the studies we looked at in our previous article [LINK] found that a team can rarely explain why its goals are the right ones.

To achieve a consensus about why you are setting a certain set of goals, you need to move from process thinking to system thinking.

**System thinking**

Humans are conditioned to view action as cause and effect. We find an issue and act to resolve it. But in a complex organisation this process-driven thinking is too simplistic and therefore flawed.

Corporations and value chains are complex, interconnected subsystems with many interwoven parts. So, problem solving and goalsetting should embrace the knowledge of these complex systems in the right way.

**Identify the themes**

Systems thinking studies show that in the average collaboration there are around 15 critical themes to address in order to achieve your goals.

Exercises conducted with managers have found that an individual will identify 7-8 themes on their own. A team working together will tend to come up with 10-12 themes – but that still leaves up to a 50% gap where important areas have not been identified.

This may well be why so many collaborations overrun – because some of these missing themes only arise later in the project, requiring substantial rework to address them.

**Planning time**

It’s much overstated - but no less true - that the planning stage of a collaboration is crucial and needs substantial commitment. Given the above, organisations should continue to explore the main themes of a project until they have identified the full 15.

This may often require the establishment of sub-teams within each relevant business function. These teams should each identify 10-12 themes which can then be distilled by the main collaborative committee into the full scope of work.

Only by spending time mapping out the full reaches of a project can you be certain that you will head off in the right direction and avoid the pitfalls that lie along the route.

**Our next article will explore how best to identify the right themes for a collaboration.**