

Does Everyone in your Organization Speak the Same Language?

We don't mean French or Mandarin. We're talking about consistent terms and definitions – a Common Business Language – that everyone uses. It's easy to underestimate the importance of the words you use every day and what they mean. For example, "What's your market share?" seems like a straightforward question, but are you sure everyone is on the same page? Which patients (by ATC and ICD code) define your market? Are pediatric and/or geriatric patients in or out? Or is market share defined by a set of competitor products instead?

Organizational alignment and effective teamwork starts with a common language.

Think about the drastic difference in market definition between one team looking at selected competitor products and another team looking at a set of defined patients with selected medical conditions. The first team would miss the entire market potential represented by patients that are (i) not properly diagnosed, (ii) not put on treatment, or (iii) treated with a class of products not in our market definition. The second team might discover that there is a lot of uncaptured growth potential by improving diagnosis and treatment rates, as well as increasing adherence rates, etc.

At Cogent Consulting we've seen first-hand the impact of different teams using different words or definitions when describing their business. From a regional or global leader's perspective, it prevents any valid benchmarking of performance metrics from one country to the next. Or worse, you do benchmark without realizing you are comparing apples and oranges – missing the real insight into the real business potential and how to capture it in a given market. Growth opportunities in one country may be "out-of-scope" in another. What one market considers their most significant competitor isn't even part of the discussion elsewhere. A country's "limited" revenue potential, may only be limited by how they define their market.

Common language and definitions can open minds to see situations in a new perspective

What begins with a shared language and consistent definitions leads to a common perspective on business opportunities. It is the responsibility of the global leader to ensure that all teams across markets speak the same language when it comes to describing market dynamics, business opportunities, and current performance. It is a pre-requisite to having a common framework or model of the market place and current business opportunities. By continually fostering a dialogue that does not stop with general terms, but probes into the speaker's underlying assumptions and beliefs, you will be able to achieve a deeper understanding, a better discussion, more learning, and ultimately better strategies or action plans to win in your market place.



A case in point

One client set out to foster more patient-centric thinking in their organization in order to generate new insights on how to grow their already mature business. We started out with an international, cross-functional team to define the “Patient Journey” including key steps in the process, stakeholders along the way, current behaviors, attitudes and beliefs leading to these behaviors, and observations of what could be better. The next step was to quantify these steps and model how these current behaviors and attitudes affected their business. Each country team contributed their data, experience, and insights to create unique, but comparable market assessments. In the process, we defined terminology that everyone now understands the same way.

Seeing the real similarities and differences across countries enabled a new type of discussion. At the end, the question was not “how do we grow sales?”, but “how can we change key stakeholders’ behaviors to create a better patient experience and more effective medical care?” It was a learning curve accelerated by speaking the same language. After clarifying what each step in the journey really represented and whose actions were more or less influential, the discussion focused on specific stakeholders, behavior changes, real barriers to overcome, and ultimately what the client could do to change key stakeholders’ behaviors. The goal became finding new solutions to improve the patient experience and medical outcomes – leading to new insights and new ideas of how the client could improve the patient journey and benefit at the same time.

Having created a robust model (both the mental framework and the mathematical calculations), the business impact of pursuing different initiatives was readily determined. As everyone used the same language and KPI definitions, investment returns across countries were comparable and the global manager could identify priorities, synergy potential, and come up with an optimal business plan for the region. There is only one definition of “ROI” but how teams defined and calculated their “R’s” and their “I’s” was different for every ROI until the organization started using the same model(s).

As one business manager put it: *“Our business review meetings became much more productive after going through the Cogent process: We spend very little time on aligning on the current situation and had time to focus on developing strategic options and evaluating which are the best for this market.”*

Collaborating with Cogent not only creates a Common Language of terms, definitions and metrics, it will embed that language in the thinking process of the organization. This leads to clear communication within and across teams, which generates better alignment and focus on the right goals and best initiatives to achieve those goals.

For more information about Cogent Consulting and how we can foster organizational alignment, please e-mail us for a personal discussion at info@kogentconsult.com.