



• A DIAGNOSTIC FIELD TOOL • THE DRIFT TAX

Did anyone decide who owns *communication*?

A structural self-assessment for executive directors and organizational leaders.

Most communication problems in small organizations get diagnosed at the wrong altitude. A missed story, a thin newsletter, a launch nobody amplified — these look like execution failures, so the instinct is to push harder on output or hire someone to produce more of it. But execution rarely fails first. What usually fails first is a decision that was never made: who holds communication, what authority that role carries, and whether anyone below it feels permitted to act.

• THIS IS THE DRIFT TAX

The quiet, recurring cost an organization pays when roles, habits, and authority around communication go unnamed. The questions below are pitched at that level — they aren't about whether your team is producing enough. They're about whether the conditions for communication to function were ever put in place. **Answer honestly. The questions you can't answer cleanly are the ones worth sitting with.**

PART ONE

The *Authority*.

Whether communication responsibility actually rests somewhere — and has the standing to act.

- 1 ☐ **Would the person you'd name as comms owner agree they own it?**
If I named the person who owns communication for this organization, would they agree that they own it?
- 2 ☐ **Authority to decide, or only to execute?**
Does that person have the authority to *decide* what we say publicly — or only to execute what others approve?
- 3 ☐ **Is the call clear without escalating to me?**
When a fast decision is needed — a statement, a response, a moment to seize — is it clear who makes the call without escalating to me?
- 4 ☐ **Was the role assigned, or did it accumulate?**
Have I ever *assigned* communication as a role — or has it accumulated to whoever had time?
- 5 ☐ **If they left tomorrow, would the role transfer?**
If that person left tomorrow, would the responsibility transfer — or vanish?

PART TWO *The Permission.**Whether the people closest to the work feel authorized to surface it.*

- 1 ☐ Do program and field staff believe it's part of their job to flag what's worth sharing — or do they assume that's someone else's lane?
- 2 ☐ Has anyone been told, implicitly or explicitly, to route everything through me or through a single gatekeeper before it moves?
- 3 ☐ When something goes unshared, is it because no one **noticed** — or because no one felt **allowed**?
- 4 ☐ Do staff know what they're permitted to say on the organization's behalf **without asking first**?
- 5 ☐ Is silence in this organization a choice, or a default no one set out to create?

PART THREE *The Flow.**Whether information has a path from where it's generated to where it becomes public.*

- 1 ☐ Is there a known, low-effort way for any team to surface something worth communicating — or does it depend on individual initiative?
- 2 ☐ Do fundable stories, research, and field insight reliably reach the people who could use them — or do they sit where they were created?
- 3 ☐ When partners, funders, or policymakers should hear something, is there a route — or does it happen only when I carry it?
- 4 ☐ How much of what reaches the public passes through me? Is that **by design**, or by **absence of an alternative**?

PART FOUR *The Honest Reading.**What your answers are telling you.*

IF YOU NOTICED...	IT USUALLY SIGNALS...
No one clearly owns communication, or ownership is informal.	→ <i>A role was never designed — the work is running on goodwill.</i>
Someone owns it but can't decide anything without approval.	→ <i>Authority and responsibility were split apart. That gap is costly.</i>
Staff don't feel permitted to surface their own work.	→ <i>Silence is structural, not personal. People are waiting for permission that was never granted.</i>
Most public communication still routes through you.	→ <i>The function hasn't been distributed — it's concentrated in your chair.</i>

If several of these were hard to answer, the issue isn't your team's effort or your own. It's that **communication was treated as output to be produced rather than infrastructure to be built**. This sheet surfaces one piece of the Drift Tax. *Strategy Lab Collective* diagnoses where that cost lives, what holds it in place, and what it would take to resolve it — before the next hire or campaign.

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