

The Clay Brief

THE TRUTH TEST

Issue No. 006

The quality of leadership decisions depends partly on the quality of truth that reaches the room.

Leaders make decisions with the information available to them.

But information does not travel through institutions neutrally.

People learn what is safe to report.

They learn which questions are welcomed.

They learn whether bad news creates curiosity—or blame.

Over time, an institution can unknowingly create an environment where information becomes safer as it moves upward.

The dashboards remain.

The reports arrive.

The meetings continue.

But the truth becomes increasingly filtered.

The leadership challenge, therefore, is not simply: *Are people communicating with us?*

It is: **Are they telling us what we need to hear?**

WHY IT MATTERS

When difficult information cannot travel, leaders discover problems late.

Risks grow quietly.

Weak initiatives survive longer than they should.

Frontline knowledge remains disconnected from executive decisions.

And apparent organizational harmony can conceal institutional vulnerability.

A strong institution does not eliminate uncomfortable information. It makes it easier for uncomfortable information to travel.

THE BOARDROOM QUESTION

What have people stopped telling us, and what might we have done to make it difficult to say?

The second half of that question matters.

It moves leadership from blaming silence to examining the conditions that may have produced it.

THE CLAY TOOL: The Truth Test

Periodically ask your leadership team five questions:

1. When was the last time someone changed our minds by challenging an important assumption?
2. What happens here when someone brings bad news?
3. Which voices are closest to the work but furthest from the decisions?
4. Where might information be softened, delayed, or filtered as it travels upward?
5. What important question might people be reluctant to raise with us?

Do not rush to answer.

A leadership team that finds these questions difficult may already have learned something valuable.

ONE PRACTICAL HABIT

Before closing an important decision, ask: **“What might we be missing?”**

Then invite someone who has not yet spoken to respond first.

Small practices can interrupt hierarchy long enough for another perspective to enter the room.

ONE CAUTION

Candour is not permission for disrespect.

Healthy institutions do not choose between psychological safety and accountability.

They create environments where people can challenge ideas honestly while remaining responsible for how they communicate and for the quality of their work.

The goal is not unrestricted expression.

It is ***responsible truth-telling in service of the institution.***

CLOSING THOUGHT

Do not measure the health of an institution only by what people are willing to tell its leaders. Pay attention to what they have learned to keep to themselves.

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