

# ALIGNMENT



## DEFINITION

### ALIGNMENT:

1. arrangement in a straight line, or in correct or appropriate relative positions
2. a position of agreement or alliance

In business, alignment is simply the linking of an organization's vision with employees' daily activities, ensuring all departments have consistent goals. As a result, each team can identify clear improvement targets for their processes and define key projects that align with these goals. Alignment also helps remove the "silo" effect and identify critical overall value stream improvement initiatives.

The term for the leadership-driven process for achieving strategic alignment is called Policy Deployment, or Hoshin Kanri, a term that literally means, "compass management." Hoshin Kanri was developed by Japanese planning specialist Yoji Akao in the 1950's and was included in the Deming Prize criteria in 1951.

## A SNAPSHOT OF THE STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT PROCESS

### Strategic Plan

The process begins with creating the plan. The Executive Committee defines the organization's short (1 year) and long (3-5 year) range key company goals and objectives ("the True North"), including drivers, values, initiatives, targets, and sponsors. From here, it will cascade down through next levels of the organization where it will be embedded into teams' daily work.

### X-Matrix

The X-Matrix is a structured way to build and deploy the plan by showing cause and effect to reflect how daily activities link to the overall business strategy. It reflects the key initiatives (activities), targets and milestones (dates for completion and sponsors who will support each initiative), objectives / impacts (financial return), and the key value drivers of the process. This ensures accountability and follow through.

### Catchball

The Catchball process fosters buy in and transparency between leadership and the rest of the organization by allowing communication and feedback between organizational levels. Catchball is an integral part of the plan and business renewal process in that it ensures all levels are aligned in direction, strategy, implementation, measurement, and resources.

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## A SNAPSHOT OF THE STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT PROCESS (cont'd)

### A3

Key objectives defined at each level are translated into detailed projects using A3 formatting which tracks projects' target statements, proposed actions, implementation plans, and time for completion.

### PDCA

The Plan/Do/Check/Act cycle, is used frequently throughout the planning process to ensure that progress on plans and Key Performance Indicator (KPI's) are carefully monitored, and changes are made where necessary.

Monthly and quarterly meetings are scheduled to monitor project progress and realign as necessary.

## BENEFITS OF ALIGNMENT

When there's proper alignment within an organization:

- objectives have clarity
- operations are optimized
- people and processes are more efficient
- waste is eliminated
- best practices are adopted
- regular reviews are in place
- peak performance is achieved

## KEEP IN MIND

Like all other CI concepts, it takes discipline and continuous reinforcement: be consistent. Consider that when:

- processes are aligned, conflict and uncoordinated activities can be avoided
- projects are aligned, activities and goals are in keeping with the strategic vision of the organization
- organizational alignment allows for empowered employees and greater clarity around decision making and execution
- strategic alignment is about asking the right questions not about working harder. Peter Drucker said it best when he said, *"the most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers. The truly dangerous thing is asking the wrong questions."*

## TAKING IT BACK HOME

We encounter examples of alignment in daily life without even realizing it; without alignment, basic infrastructures and otherwise symbiotic relationships would be in disarray. Consider, for example, alignment of:

1. Work and core values (click [here](#) to learn more)
2. The military infrastructure
3. The highway system

## (STRATEGIC) ALIGNMENT, NOT TO BE MISTAKEN FOR:

Comedic assignment. Mary mistook her bosses' request that she research "strategic alignment" for instruction that she complete a comedic assignment, thus explaining the befuddled look on his face when she presented him with a certificate of completion to the circus clown school beginner's class she attended.

## INSIGHTFUL QUOTES

*"Consistent alignment of capabilities and internal processes with the customer value proposition is the core of any strategy execution."*

—Robert S. Kaplan

*"Even the most seemingly unpleasant situations—if you become aligned with it, something good will emerge from that."*

—Eckhart Tolle

## IF ALL ELSE FAILS... ALIGNMENT LIFE HACKS

1. See a chiropractor
2. Get braces
3. Take your car to the shop

...like to learn more about how the strategic alignment process can help teams achieve optimal efficiency in your organization? [Click here](#) for details on our Lean Leadership event coming up in Chicago.

