

Strategy Alignment

Most leadership teams believe they agree on what matters most. Many don't — and they are surprised when the difference is made visible.



A visual summary of the book by **Per Christensen**

01 THE PROBLEM

Everyone ranks from their own chair

Ask a leadership team to rank the company's goals and each member puts their own area first. None of them is wrong — the danger is that nobody **knows** the others see it differently.

FINANCE DIRECTOR

#1 • Financial goal

SALES DIRECTOR

#1 • Market goal

HEAD OF HR

#1 • People goal

ALIGNMENT

Can be measured

How far team members share the same priorities among the strategic focus areas.

COHESION

Must be built

How that alignment shows up day to day — in decisions, action plans and execution.

02 WHY IT GOES UNNOTICED

Four reasons misalignment stays invisible

We see from our own position

What is obvious to me, I assume is obvious to everyone.

Words hide meaning

Two people both say "profitable growth" — one means price discipline, the other new markets.

Teams avoid looking

Open disagreement can feel like a threat to unity or to the leader's authority.

It wears a disguise

It shows up as resistance, rivalry or stalled decisions — so leaders respond with "more of the same".

03 THE THEORY · ORGANISATIONAL ECOLOGY

An organisation is an ecosystem, not a machine

Its parts depend on each other, behaviour serves a function, and quick fixes have long-term side effects. Nine principles guide change:

1 Common interests

Low alignment is a lack of shared understanding — not conflicting interests.

2 Rivalry

Agreed focus areas create one shared territory.

3 Productivity

Small words can tip large outcomes.

4 Degree of openness

Aim for an optimum, not total agreement.

5 Function replacement

Holding on to a priority may protect something. Ask what.

6 Hierarchy

Work through the team leader; respect the structure.

7 Conditions for results

Content, context and order decide the effect.

8 Stability & adaptability

A team saturated with change needs careful timing.

9 Feedback

Feedback governs systems. Measure again to close the loop.

04 TWO LENSES FOR EVERY RESULT

Three positions

1st My view — from my own interests.

2nd Your view — from the other person's interests.

3rd The system's view — from outside, for the common interest.

Surface vs deep

SURFACE STRUCTURE · THE WORDS

"Profitable growth"

DEEP STRUCTURE · THE MEANING

Price discipline in existing markets? Or expansion into new ones?

Same words don't prove shared meaning — and different rankings don't rule out shared intention.

05 THE METHOD · STRATEGY ALIGNMENT ANALYSIS™

Rank, compare, see the pattern

4–7

focus areas, usually five, in the team's own words

10 min

for each member to rank them alone — every rank used once

Every pair

of members compared, shown on one Alignment Index

Why rank, not rate? On a rating scale everything can be "important". Ranking forces the same choice leaders face every day.

THE ALIGNMENT INDEX

DIVERGENT → CONVERGENT

Divergent

Mixed

Target zone

Convergent

Why not 100% agreement? A team where everyone thinks alike is a monoculture — and monocultures degenerate. The desired level sits *below* complete agreement, leaving room for healthy tension.

At desired level

Room to strengthen

Different priorities — needs attention

SAA never scores a person and never judges whether the focus areas are the right ones. It only shows how closely the team's priorities align.

06 THE PROCESS

Eight steps, in a fixed order

Questionnaire to written report in under two weeks. Order matters (principle 7): change a focus area mid-way and you are measuring something else.

1 Initial questionnaire

Team leader, before scoping

2 Focus-area meeting

Explore with the leader

3 Confirm focus areas

Within 1–2 days · wording fixed

4 Individual ranking

Within 1–2 days · no conferring

5 Written report

3–4 days · full + 2-page summary

6 Presentation & workshop

The heart of the process

7 Summary alignment report

A written reference point

8 Debrief & next steps

One-on-one with the leader

07 FROM ALIGNMENT TO COHESION

The workshop: pairs work below the surface

About an hour. Pairs are formed **across** the weakest relationships and work through one focus area at a time with four questions:

SURFACE

What does the title say to you?

DEEP

What would be the proof it's delivered well?

INTENTION

What were you protecting or promoting?

THIRD POSITION

What does the team as a whole need?

A ranking is behaviour; the conversation is about intention. Resistance is treated as feedback — and a low-alignment member may be the one who sees what others missed.

08 A REAL CASE

Nine leaders, five focus areas

An established industrial supplier with a well-formulated strategy. Each leader's ranking (1 = top priority):

Focus area	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
People first	1	2	2	2	3	1	2	3	1
Safety, quality & HSE	2	3	4	1	4	4	1	1	3
Customer at the centre	4	4	1	3	1	3	4	4	4
Profitable growth	3	1	3	4	2	2	3	2	2
Sustainability	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

Rank

1

2

3

4

5

Outliers were insight

C and E, the least aligned, ranked the customer first. Their roles sat closest to customers.

Different words, same aim

"Customer first" and "safety first" both protected one thing: the company's reputation as a reliable partner.

Priority vs condition

Many ranked safety lower because they saw it as non-negotiable — a condition, not a choice.

3 focus areas confirmed **by the team itself**: People first · Profitable growth · Safety, quality & HSE — the frame for its strategy to 2028.

09 SAA+ · FROM COHESION TO EXECUTION

Link the focus areas up and down

Vision

5–10 years

The future the organisation wants to create

Focus areas

2–3 years

Already aligned in SAA

Goals

1 year

Quantified, each with a named owner

Action plans

30–90 days

Actions, resources, milestones

Implementation rests on four prerequisites: **quantify** every goal · **report** progress · **feed back** to all levels · **adjust** the strategy.

10 FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- A strategy on paper is not a shared strategy. Ask the team what matters most.
- Conflicts of interest are usually misunderstandings. Look for the common interest.
- Some difference is healthy. Aim for the target zone, not unanimity.
- Measuring keeps the conversation factual, not personal. Repeat it in 3–6 months.
- Ownership comes from 3rd-order leadership: the team generates and chooses its own conclusions.