

# Alignment: Mission Integrated Decision Making

What do we want? Alignment

When do we want it? Now!

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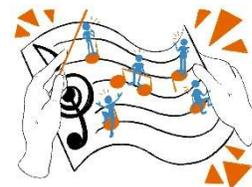
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## Executive Summary

**Alignment:** *What is it good for? Absolutely something.* All leaders know they need to regularly communicate the mission, externally and internally. It “gets everyone on the same page, singing from the same sheet of music.” What does that mean? Beyond mere intuition, “alignment” is often neither understood nor made practicable. It has the hallmarks of a classic complex organizational problem:

- eye-rollingly obvious,
- consultant revenue generating, and
- managerially confusing.



The good news is that because “alignment” activities are so rarely systematically performed that there is not so much bad behavior to unwind. The better news: we can do something about it.

## Introduction

We all sense that we need to be “in alignment” however, as decisions tumble down the organizational hierarchy and challenges to those decisions climb their way back up, many organizations lose the connection of decisions-to-mission. Worse, individuals may see the decisions as influenced by non-mission organizational politics. We ask, “why did that get decided?” and we accept resource decisions that are driven by whoever gets to the boss first, or whoever makes the loudest complaint. Decisions are simply not linked to a standard set of mission objectives.

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*“Forgetting our objectives is the most frequent of all acts of stupidity.” –  
Fredrick Nietzsche*

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For decisions with constrained resources, such as “which staff positions should be filled now?” or “which of these projects should we start?” an objective structure that keeps leaders focused on “what matters around here” is important. It allows us to have efficient use of resources and to increasing the connection of resource-to-mission outcomes.

### Do we really need alignment?

Too often the requirement for alignment surfaces like this:

- We have a mission (after some long afternoon of refining the mission statement)
- Someone realizes that everything we do should be “in alignment”
- They indicate this with hands sawing the air up and down in a touchdown-like manner.

That’s the requirement.

There is a *real* requirement in a resource constrained environment. **Decisions** relating to **resources** and **actions** must be specific to achieving the mission (or strategy). Implicitly, the demand for alignment suggests that we naturally *do not* use resources, take actions, or make decisions that assist in achieving the mission. Organizational entropy leads us to drift from purpose. Getting alignment reduces unnecessary activities and costs, and for public service organizations, increases the chance of achieving mission. For commercial organizations, alignment drives profit. What organization doesn't need to capture more mission or money?

## The Problem

We say, "we need alignment," but we do alignment. The underlying difficulty is in not having a method that makes leadership reflect and communicate on what matters most, on the priorities that make achieving the mission possible. The mission is all encompassing by design. Decisions descend into smaller and smaller levels. "Lower" level decisions lose sight of the...alignment, and thus lose the connection back up to the large, high-level mission.

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*We don't have a method to resolve the alignment problem.*

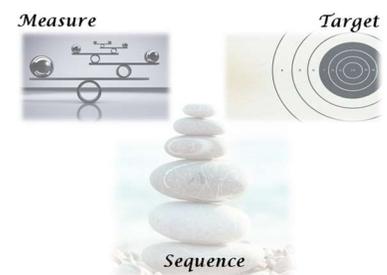
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Leaders look to alignment to prioritize decisions in a meaningful way, so as not be "making it up as we go," but:

- We have no standard measurement system, a yardstick of alignment for decisions that help us achieve mission (or the strategy).
- We do not define the target decision topics in a standard way so as to have something for the yardstick to measure.
- We do not create transparency and replicability in the process. Leaders do not know if they are consistently aligning correctly and getting the buy-in and understanding that supports consistently good decision-making.

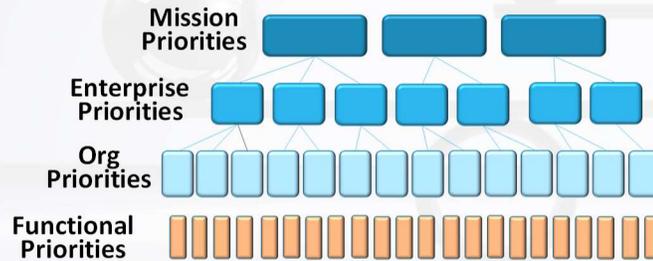
## What is to be done?

**Measuring, Targeting** and **Sequencing** can create the standardized, transparent and reusable alignment strategy. It gives us a yardstick, a definition of what is measured, an integrated sequence of the two.



## The Measure

This phase gives us the ability to know the contribution of different layers of priority to attaining the mission. We build the **Scaffold**, a branching tree of priorities, from Mission-Enterprise-Organizational-Functional layers.



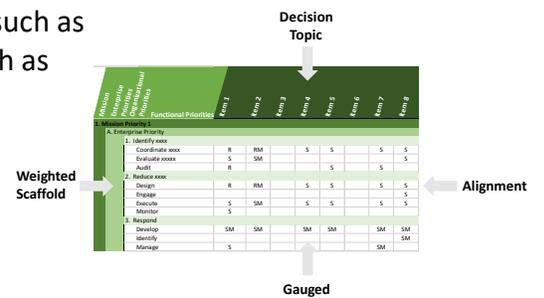
## The Weighting is the hardest part

Weights assigned at all the levels, show underlying patterns of priority. The weighted scaffold is the reusable yardstick, the measuring cup by which all target topics are measured. Simply put, some areas of mission support have more priority (weight) than others. We should identify them.

## The Target: What are we aligning?

We can align positions to be filled, projects to be discussed to create a portfolio, stakeholder analysis, risk analysis. Any management topic that requires trade-offs in time or resources could be prioritized by mission demand (alignment). Once defined, that decision areas can be “snapped on” to the weighted scaffold. We must Align and Gauge (with evaluation criteria) the Decision Topic to the weighted scaffold.

A good target is one that has units that are commonly defined, such as “project” and has categories of attributes that are common, such as “complexity.” Another category might be “position vacancies” (roles) characterized by “flexibility.” With a list of units in our decision topic, we can **align** each unit on the scaffold. The gauging process lets us see higher scores going for those units having better attributes.



## Sequence

Combining the weighted scaffold with the attribute scores, we can produce a sequenced list that orders the decisions for taking action. It answers, “which (vacancies/ projects/ risks/ assets) do we consider (filling/ selecting/ discussing/ purchasing) first. This index (which can be organized in similar priority groups) is the mission aligned, integrated, decisions structure that allows leadership to sequence discussions for decisions.

Priority Group	Sequence	Items	Sub-Items/Notes
1	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
	6		
	7		
	8		
	9		
2	10		
	11		
	12		
	13		
3	14		
	15		
	16		
	17		
	18		

## It’s so PC

Getting teams used to using the Index, once built, requires both a process everyone knows and a strong commitment to communicate. “Why are my priorities not very high on your list?” is the implicit concern of all participants in the decision process. Build the change management into the alignment undertaking, documenting the “Process” for using the index as well as the meaning and reason for undertaking the alignment design. Once defined, the Index can be used recurrently, and so a process for loading updated information, indexing it, sharing the information, and structuring the decision-making conversations is important in enabling teams to participate and increase the speed and volume of decisions requiring group trade-offs.

All of this demands good communication to share the big news: with the scaffold, leadership has highlighted what the main drivers to mission of the organization are. They have determined the manner of prioritizing important decisions and they have constructed the approach with key elements of collaboration, transparency and standardization built in. The entire management team must know the story, therefore developing and implementing a communication plan is important to maintaining ongoing alignment.

## Summary

The key to getting decisions “in alignment” with the mission or strategy is to realize that the big goals can be decomposed into supporting elements, discovering drivers of priorities and identifying key attributes of importance in a variety of types of decisions.

Combining the weighted scaffold of priorities with the evaluated attributes of important decision areas gives the structure for sequencing the decisions. With this approach, whether directed or collaborative in its build, subsequent decisions can be seen as more fair, transparent, and standard. Rooted in mission, or in the key components of a strategic plan, this approach aligns organizational resources by highest need and impact.