89. Alignment Bridge

How can I improve cross-unit alignment in my organization?

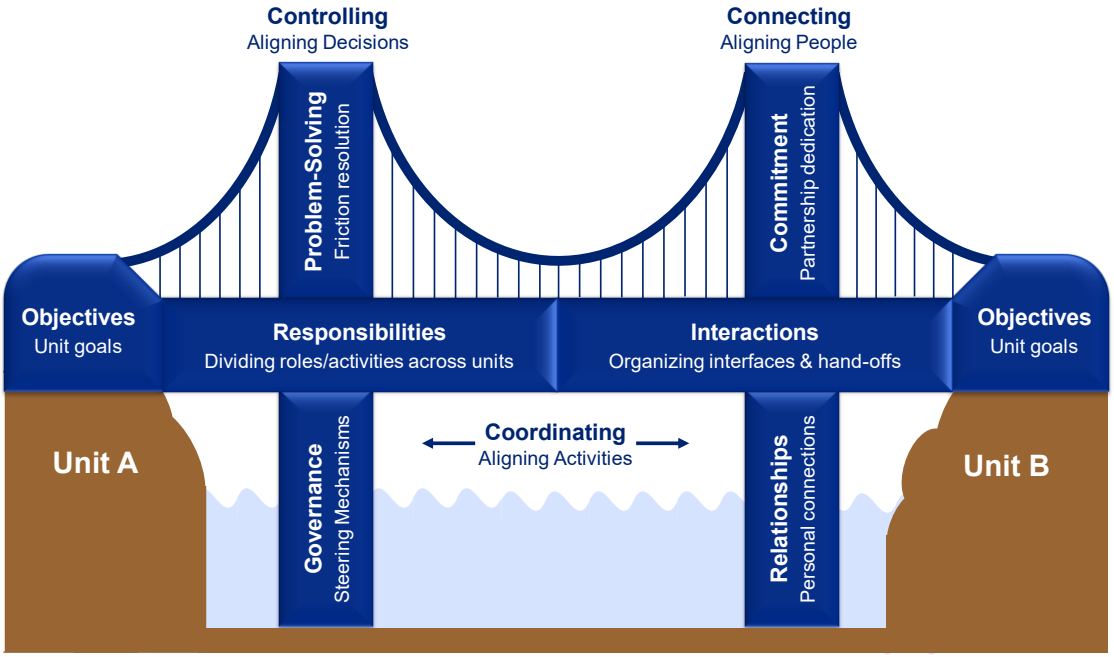
Key Definitions

An *organizational structure* is the way that an organization formally divides its value-adding activities, and the people who perform them, into a variety of smaller units. Depending on their size, organizations can be split up into divisions, businesses, regions, departments and teams. This structuring into separate units can be visualized in an *org chart*.

For organizations to work effectively, these units shouldn't function as independent silos but require some level of *cross-unit alignment* – coordination between them to achieve joint goals. This need for alignment doesn't show up in an org chart but can be captured in *process maps*, such as value stream diagrams and RACI matrices but both are limited in supporting alignment.

Conceptual Model

The *Alignment Bridge* model gives an overview of the key factors required to achieve alignment between two or more units. It suggests that both sides need to bridge the gap between them by first aligning their objectives and then their activities, to realize coordinated value-adding processes (also called value streams) or cross-unit synergies. To "hold up and support" these coordinated activities, both sides also need to align their decisions and their people. To build and maintain the bridge requires continuous effort from both units. This model can be used as a checklist for joint discussions on how to initiate and sustain valuable cross-unit alignment.



Key Elements

The seven factors contributing to effective cross-unit alignment are the following:

1. ***Objectives***. Alignment should always start with determining why the units need to work together in the first place. Do they follow each other in a process, or does one provide

services to the other, or can they achieve joint synergies? Both need to negotiate in which areas they want to cooperate, what they want to achieve and under which conditions.

2. ***Responsibilities***. Once the shared objectives have been set, the two sides can determine who does what. They can "contract" which activities will be carried out by each side, ensuring that all bases are covered, while there is no unnecessary overlap. Part of the agreement includes clarifying mutual expectations regarding quality, timing and budget.
3. ***Interactions***. With the activities divided, both parties also need to determine where the interfaces between the activities will be and where products, services or resources will be handed off to the other. The interfaces are moments of contact where coordination or joint activities can take place, while hand offs are the moments of transfer between parties.
4. ***Governance***. Once the activities have been coordinated, both sides need to determine how related decisions will be made, implemented, reviewed and adjusted, as well as who will be involved in what manner. They must also agree on a joint set of rules and regulations, to control what type of behavior is allowed and expected.
5. ***Problem-solving***. Yet, even with a well-designed governance set-up, there will always be unforeseen frictions that need to be resolved. Smaller issues can often be tackled by informal contacts on the work floor, but more challenging problems often require more structured problem-solving mechanisms such as trouble-shooting teams or taskforces.
6. ***Relationships***. Still, alignment requires more than organizational systems and processes. Besides controls to align decisions, personal connections are needed to align people. Individuals need to have workable relationships with each other, built on an understanding of the other's qualities and mindset. Interpersonal alignment hinges on mutual confidence.
7. ***Commitment***. Just as good governance doesn't prevent all problems, good relationships don't prevent interpersonal frictions, misunderstandings and irritations. Therefore, both sides need to be dedicated to their partnership, willing to work on their relationship and resolve occasional issues, even if it would be easier to blame and shame the other party.

Key Insights

- ***Cross-unit alignment is essential but hard.*** Work is easily divided among people, but much less attention is paid to getting them to work together, especially across units, such as teams or departments. The usual approach is to let a higher level of management enforce cooperation, instead of making alignment the responsibility of the units themselves.
- ***Cross-unit alignment starts with aligning objectives***. To get two or more units to voluntarily build a bridge over the gap between them, they must begin by clarifying where their interests coincide. This can be the basis of shared goals that motivate cooperation.
- ***Cross-unit alignment should focus on aligning activities***. With shared goals, both sides need to determine who will take *responsibility* for which activity and how they will *interact*.
- ***Cross-unit alignment should be supported by aligning decisions and people***. Yet, just aligning activities is not enough to ensure smooth coordination. The bridge needs two pillars to hold up and support the aligned activity flow. The first pillar is aligning decisions, by organizing good *governance* and effective *problem-solving*. The second pillar is aligning people by building strong *relationships* and stimulating *commitment* to the partnership.
- ***Cross-unit alignment should be contracted.*** Often, it is believed that a simple RACI matrix (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed) is good enough to achieve cross-unit alignment. But using the Alignment Bridge as a framework to "contract" between two or more units is a much richer approach to achieving lasting cross-unit alignment.

Meyer's Management Models

Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

July 2019	*Mind the Gap Model*	*Change Management*
August 2019	*Digital Platform Map*	*Digital Strategy*
September 2019	*Interaction Pressure Gauge*	*Interpersonal Interaction*
October 2019	*Revenue Model Framework*	*Revenue Model Typology*
November 2019	*House of Engagement*	*Organizational Engagement*
December 2019	*Confidence Quotient*	*Trust Building*
January 2020	*Competition Tornado*	*Competitive Strategy*
February 2020	*11C Synergy Model*	*Corporate Synergy Management*
March 2020	*Leadership Fairness Model*	*Leader-Follower Interaction*
April 2020	*Strategic Agility Model*	*Strategy Process Approach*
May 2020	*Control Panel*	*Corporate Control Dimensions*
June 2020	*Rising Star Framework*	*Talent Management*
July 2020	*Strategy Development Cycle*	*Strategy Process Steps*
August 2020	*7I Corporate Center Model*	*Corporate Organization*
September 2020	*Storytelling Scripts*	*Leadership Communication*
October 2020	*Strategic Bets Framework*	*Strategic Decision-Making*
November 2020	*Rebound Model of Resilience*	*Organizational Resilience*
December 2020	*4C Leadership Capabilities*	*Leadership Competences*
January 2021	*Digital Product Model Dial*	*Digital Strategy*
February 2021	*Digital Distribution Model Dial*	*Digital Strategy*
March 2021	*Empowerment Cycle*	*Employee Empowerment*
April 2021	*Innovation Box*	*Innovation Approaches*
May 2021	*Knowledge Sharing Bridges*	*Best Practice Sharing*
June 2021	*Followership Cycle*	*Leader-Follower Interaction*
July 2021	*Everest Model of Change*	*Change Management*
August 2021	*Fruits & Nuts Matrix*	*Priority-Setting*
September 2021	*Powerhouse Framework*	*People & Organization Strategy*
October 2021	*Strategy Hourglass*	*Strategy-Making Steps*
November 2021	*Disciplined Dialogue Model*	*Interpersonal Communication*
December 2021	*Team Building Cycle*	*Team Building Process*
January 2022	*Market System Map*	*External Analysis Framework*
February 2022	*Strategic Alignment Model*	*Business Level Strategy*
March 2022	*Creativity X-Factor*	*Creativity Enhancement*
April 2022	*Organizational System Map*	*Organizational Analysis*
May 2022	*Corporate Value Creation Model*	*Corporate Level Strategy*
June 2022	*Change Manager's Toolbox*	*Change Methodologies*

July 2022	*Sustainable You Model*	*Personal Sustainability*
August 2022	*Value Proposition Dial*	*Business Level Strategy*
September 2022	*The Tree of Power*	*Organizational Power*
October 2022	*Psychological Safety Compass*	*Team Dynamics*
November 2022	*Strategic Action Modes*	*Strategy Process*
December 2022	*Corporate Management Styles*	*HQ Management*
January 2023	*Thinking Directions Framework*	*Reasoning Skills*
February 2023	*5I Innovation Pipeline*	*Innovation Process*
March 2023	*Resistance to Change Typology*	*Change Management*
April 2023	*Ambition Radar Screen*	*Motivation Analysis*
May 2023	*Corporate Strategy Framework*	*Corporate Strategy*
June 2023	*Cultural Fabric Model*	*Organizational Culture*
July 2023	*New Pyramid Principle*	*Presentation Approaches*
August 2023	*Activity System Dial*	*Value Creation Analysis*
September 2023	*Customer-Centricity Circle*	*Organizational Design*
October 2023	*Status Snakes & Ladders*	*Leadership Branding*
November 2023	*Stakeholder Stance Map*	*Stakeholder Management*
December 2023	*Best Practice Sharing Modes*	*Sharing Methods*
January 2024	*Duty of Care Feedback Model*	*Feedback Method*
February 2024	*BOLD Vision Framework*	*Organizational Vision*
March 2024	*MOVING Mission Framework*	*Organizational Mission*
April 2024	*Leadership Circle Map*	*Leadership Skills*
May 2024	*Digitalization Staircase*	*Digital Strategy*
June 2024	*Time Management Funnel*	*Personal Time Management*
July 2024	*Wicked Problem Scorecard*	*Organizational Decision-Making*
August 2024	*Hunting & Farming Typology*	*Sales Management*
September 2024	*Guiding STAR Matrix*	*Objective Setting Approach*
October 2024	*Corporate Synergy Typology*	*Corporate Level Strategy*
November 2024	*Self-Centered Thinking Traps*	*Thinking Styles*
December 2024	*Sustainability Maturity Ladder*	*Sustainability Management*
January 2025	*Top Line Growth Pie*	*Growth Strategy*
February 2025	*Innovation Sins & Virtues*	*Innovation Management*
March 2025	*Interaction Drivers*	*Communication Determinants*
April 2025	*Frictionless Flow Framework*	*Customer Journey*
May 2025	*Five Phases of Change*	*Change Management*
June 2025	*Courageous Core Model*	*Leadership Behaviors*
July 2025	*Integration Zippers*	*Corporate Strategy*
August 2025	*Innovation Arena*	*Innovation Management*
September 2025	*Conversation Elevator*	*Communication Approaches*
October 2025	*5T SMART Plan*	*Strategic Planning*

November 2025	***Organizational Diamond***	***Organizational Design***
December 2025	***New Learning Curve***	***Personal Learning***
January 2026	***Strategic Assignment Matrix***	***Corporate Strategy***
February 2026	***Five Company-Centric Forces***	***Organizational Dynamics***
March 2026	***Personal System Map***	***Personal Development***
April 2026	***Resource Base Dial***	***Business Level Strategy***
May 2026	***Humanistic Organization***	***Organizational Paradigm***
June 2026	***Feedback Flavors Framework***	***Interpersonal Feedback***
July 2026	***Organizational Partnering Model***	***Interorganizational Relations***
August 2026	***Competence Guilds***	***Organizational Learning***
September 2026	***Personal Quick Guide***	***Personal Insight***
October 2026	***Quadruple Diamond Decisioning***	***Team Decision-Making***
November 2026	***Alignment Bridge***	***Cross-Unit Cooperation***
December 2026	Leadership Brand Model	Leadership Reputation
January 2027	M&A Clock	Acquisition Process
February 2027	Stakeholder Typology	Strategic Leadership
March 2027	Followership Fellows	Followership Types
April 2027	Synergy Value Matrix	Corporate Level Strategy
May 2027	Change Contracting Cube	Organizational Change
June 2027	Personal Development Pathways	Leadership Development