

Creating Organizational Alignment

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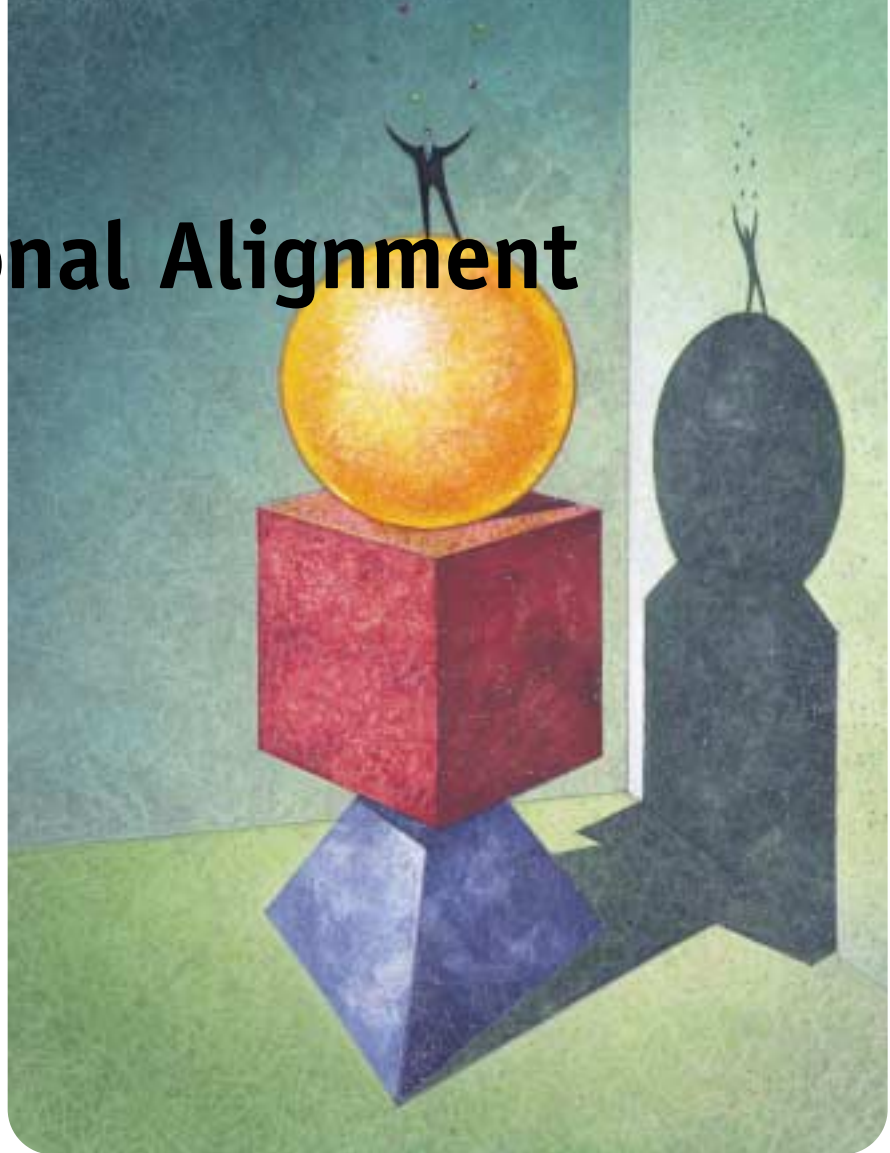


Organizational alignment is perhaps the most elusive component of the successful business environment. By way of definition, alignment is the congruence, the intentional congruence, between goals, functions and activities. HR plays a major role in creating alignment between strategic intent and operational reality. When that alignment is strong, values are congruent and people share the purpose and values of the organization. They work collectively to make the vision reality. This level of congruence translates into increased individual and organizational effectiveness.

So, what role does HR play in creating organizational alignment? There are four pivotal activities:

1. Providing infrastructure support
2. Creating intentional congruence
3. Serving as strategic partners
4. Linking performance measurement to strategic goals

Beginning with the first activity, the primary human resource function is providing adequate infrastructure support. Systems like training, leadership development, succession planning, rewards, recruitment and retention, performance measurement, recognition and career development must all intentionally support and reinforce the strategic intent of the organization. However, the work goes beyond these functional activities. HR is responsible for helping the organization define the critical success factors that make strategy



real. Often, organizations have competing or conflicting success factors. HR plays an important role in clarifying those factors and in making them meaningful in different business units.

Moving to the second activity, alignment dictates that business processes and functions are congruent with organizational propaganda. When the public relations messages are inconsistent with what colleagues and customers experience in regular interactions, we've successfully created a culture of hypocrisy. However, when we successfully create consistency between our messages and methods, we position the company to become an "employer of choice." It becomes the place where people want to invest their time and talent. The company then develops greater shareholder value and greater customer value because it has created greater employee value. All three of

these critical constituencies benefit from building congruity.

In order to create the authenticity that is a necessary by-product of alignment, HR has to function as a strategic partner on the leadership team. This is the third of the activities. It necessitates the ability to read a balance sheet, understand the key economic indicators that spell success or failure for your particular enterprise and the skill to converse in "The Language of Leadership." It is essential that HR people be able to communicate in the same language as other executives. That means paying attention to the metrics that matter in the different business units. HR executives are responsible for helping to provide the unified direction that business units need to make alignment tangible throughout the enterprise. This requires intimate familiarity with the issues faced by those units.

The fourth activity, and some would argue the most important, that creates alignment is linking performance measurement to strategic goals. Measurement enables the organization to consistently communicate its strategy in operational terms that everyone can understand. Using well-planned performance measurement methodologies enables HR to begin teaching new expectations throughout the organization. When the entire performance management methodology, not just the forms, is revised to reflect the critical success factors that undergird strategic intent, everyone begins to take notice and revise their *modus operandi*. Performance management enables people to understand how and why their actions create results, both positive and negative, in the business unit. Once that awareness is heightened, managers can begin leveraging each employee's efforts. This requires that all of the HR systems be redefined with common, consistent purposes, processes and formats so that there is no internal schizophrenia.

Each of the four activities outlined herein will help you begin building alignment within the enterprise. Instead of attempting all four at once, use them one at a time (in selected business units) to begin creating more congruence in pockets of the organization. This systematic approach will help you build both competence and confidence. Remember, creating internal congruity is a long, arduous process. Expect to encounter resistance and even a little rancor from the folk who benefit from organizational disconnects. Be sure to track and publicize your successes so that the benefits become clear throughout the enterprise. Your ultimate goal is to align strategic intent with operational reality. There will be great pay-offs for employees, customers and, of course, shareholders. ●

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