

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: STRATEGY, DESIGN and CULTURE by Kirby Martzall

In our fast-paced, ever-changing world, organizations are constantly seeking ways to gain and sustain competitive advantage. Though there's no single thing that makes an organization successful—no secret ingredient—some concepts do universally apply. One fundamental is to create a foundation for success by ensuring alignment in your organization dynamic relative to strategy, design and culture.

The Leader as Visionary

The potential for the overall success of an organization in creating alignment is directly related to the passion of the leader and leadership of the organization. Leaders give life to the vision for the organization, allowing it to inform direction and decision-making throughout. Vision can not be delegated—it must initiate and flow from the top leader to leadership in order to inspire others in the organization. Organizations with engaged, involved leadership are those for which the sense of alignment is palpable—in the quality of its decisions, among its staff and in customer interactions. Alignment must be lived.

Adaptability to Change

An essential core competency is an organization-wide ability to effectively deal with change. And to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Change is not an option. It exists everywhere—in every industry, every social sector initiative. When organizations build expectation around the ability to ride the waves of change into the culture—and manage that expectation—they fundamentally position themselves for success. Culture is the true driver here, and the way a culture is before a change is a great indicator of how it will deal with change in general. It speaks to how the organization will interact, measure its progress and deal with subsequent changes following an initial change.

The Organization Dynamic Model

The interaction and integration of the three critical components creating the dynamic within an organization can be illustrated by an intersection diagram, a pretzel, if you will. When put together in a way that aligns, these three components—strategy, design and culture—work together as a dynamic that helps an organization gain and sustain competitive advantage. Alignment determines the organization's potential for success in the marketplace and creates the internal environment to get it all done. As a dynamic it creates your way of working.

Strategy links to vision and strategic intent. It creates where the organization is going and defines the road it takes to get there. Clarity and agreement around what the organization is designed to do is an essential driver to success. Having a “living” common purpose is critical.

Design involves the tangible elements—organizational structure/reporting, systems, processes, policies/practices, facilities, etc. Design creates the framework within which organizations operate. It is the skeleton and becomes the engine.

Culture is the organization's heartbeat—an expression of spirit and soul, an articulation of values. Culture reflects why and how people interact inside and outside the organization. It is the soil in which organizational behavior (group dynamic) grows or dies—functions and dysfunctions. It is where commitment and investment reside. Culture is the experience.

Dynamic Alignment as a Long-Term Commitment

Creating organizational alignment is a journey, not a destination. As the world changes, systems for scanning, measuring and ensuring continued alignment become basic requirements. By developing, embracing and aligning this dynamic, you best position your organization to create sustained excellence and success—resulting in competitive advantage.