

Are You in Agreement or Alignment?

by Steve Crawford, Director and Senior Consultant

Is your team in agreement or alignment? Does it matter? Yes!

Agreement is going to the same place but each of us having our own individual ideas about how to get there. This can often open the door to right/wrong and conflict because we plan from a position of being 'right'.

Alignment is coming from and going to the same place while recognizing what is best for the team, company, and customer—and being agile along the way. It eliminates back doors for blame, right/wrong, and requires generous conversations, transparency, and participation.

It is easy to agree externally with words but internally not really line up with what you just said – this is where alignment comes into play. Alignment starts deep inside of us, and it relates to our values and sense of completion. If there is anything inside of us that is unspoken and incomplete, that unspoken communication will limit alignment and agreement becomes the default. When you agree, but internally have doubts or unspoken communications, this is an indicator that you are simply in agreement and not in alignment. This also applies to values—you can agree on the outside, but if on the inside you feel what is happening does not match your values, there is a good chance that you are not in alignment.

Are you thinking from the individual, team, or organizational perspective?

When struggling to get into alignment, it could be based on what vantage point we are doing our thinking. Thinking can happen three ways:

1. Individual perspective (what's in it for me or how will this impact me)
2. Team perspective (what's best for the team, will this move the team forward)
3. Organizational perspective (does this serve the company mission, vision and values)

Example: The Sales Manager proposes to the team that they rollout a new CRM system that has many features and benefits they are missing with the current platform. Suzy, one of the sales team members, immediately pushes back citing the time it will take to learn the new system and that it will distract her from making sales. The Sales Manager confirms and clarifies Suzy's concern and then challenges her to think from a 'team' mindset. When Suzy considers the long-term benefits and efficiencies that will be gained for the team, she is able to align to the change.

How can you foster more alignment in your team?

In order to create alignment with an individual or team, you must communicate in the appropriate context—the two go hand in hand. Giving context allows you to see if their inner values line up with the outer ones. It enables them to see the entire picture and the WHY, so that it becomes easier to choose into alignment. The why and the big picture is very important to people and if done well, it enables them to see and hear, so that their questions and concerns are reduced.

Without context, people do not have the WHY and often they then get stuck more in the HOW or in a limited point of view. Context enables people to see the whole picture, the landscape, and from there they can check if their values line up and if the WHY is compelling or makes sense. Without context you will get lots of questions and points of view.

The more context you provide, you'll often get fewer questions and opposing points of view so that you gain greater alignment. In other words, if you are getting a lot of questions, resistance, and individual points of view, create more context and see what happens... it is compelling! Context can create paradigm shifts—it is that important!

Example: I need to drive at 55 MPH on our state highway. I do not agree to this, however I will move into alignment because I know ultimately it is safer for everyone and reduces accidents. I do not agree to it—but I am in alignment with it because it lines up with values I have about the safety of others and myself.

Working with your team to create true alignment will result in achieving a much higher percentage of your objectives and will foster a culture of honest and transparent conversations. Like trust, it is built on connecting, communicating, and digging deeply into personal beliefs.

To learn more about programs offered by MPS for alignment and accountability, visit our website at www.mcgheepro.com or connect with me at steven.crawford@mcgheepro.com.