



Do You Need an Alignment?

Most of us have learned to differentiate between symptoms and the underlying causes when our car's steering is out of alignment. We feel the shakes and shimmies, the pull to the left or the pull to right. We see the uneven tire wear. We know that investing in new tires will only grant temporary relief. Replacing the tires (treating the symptom) does little long term good. We learn that uneven tire wear will reappear in short order unless the alignment (the underlying cause) is properly addressed. In a car we check and repair the ball joints, racks, bushings, gear boxes, tie rod ends, steering pads, etc.... Once the underlying problem is correctly diagnosed and corrected we expect sustained performance.

The symptoms of a supply chain that is out of alignment include higher costs, poor performance, growing past due, extended lead times, process uncertainty, process unreliability, growing inventory, excess expediting and organizational fatigue (among many others). Each screams for our immediate attention but if we don't invest time and expertise to correctly diagnose the underlying cause(s) our solutions will not be sustainable. Temporary relief yields to a painful variety of déjà vu

as we find ourselves fixing the same old problem ... again.

The solutions are as varied as the problems we face; however, before we commit to a particular solution we need to verify that we understand the underlying cause. We need to check our alignment. In our organizations that means we need to check and repair our processes, our technology, our people, our data and our culture. With all five in alignment the corrective action will work and the improved performance level will be sustained.

A BRIEF ALIGNMENT CHECKLIST

Ask yourself questions like these:

- Are our processes well documented and are they being followed as written?
- Are our information systems aligned with our documented processes?
- Do our people have the competencies they need to do the job we are asking of them? Do we understand what competencies they require?

- Does our data support our processes, systems and people? Is it accurate? Do we share a common understanding about what the data means?
- Does our culture reward the right behavior? Are our key performance indicators and incentives aligned with the right customer?

If you feel you are struggling with the same old problems, ... if relief from the solutions you labored over is temporary or fleeting, ... if changes you implement are not sustained, ... if you find yourself thinking "I have heard all this before" ... It could be time to check your alignment.

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