

# The Twelve Alignments - a compass for a transformational journey towards agility

**Kathrin Köster**

Agility is an overarching topic that covers a variety of themes. It is a challenge to grasp what exactly it is comprising of. But one thing is for sure: agility means change, deep change. Why? On one hand, agility is the reaction to change. It is the organizational answer to changing environments and markets on a global scale requiring organizational members to change their behaviors.

On the other hand, agility can be seen as an organizational answer to the search for meaningful work. An increasing number of individuals, mainly younger people, want to see purpose in what they do. They want to make a difference which seems to be easier in agile organizations.

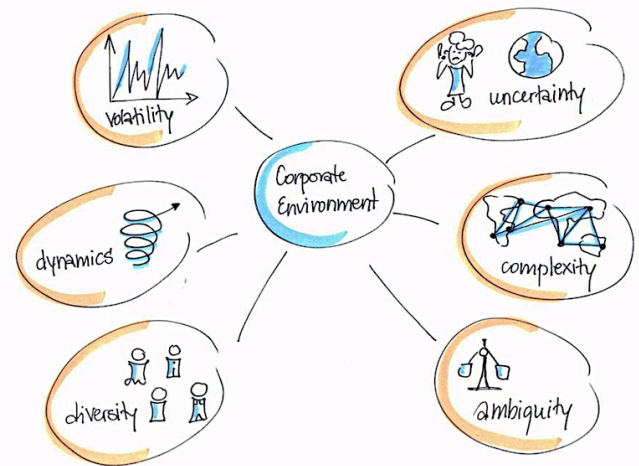
Whether we look at agility from a macro level or a micro level, it is related to a deep transformation. Deep-level changes come with uncertainty. Uncertainty is coupled with disorientation. No one knows the right path and there is limited visibility of the future. Therefore, stakeholders of any transformation process have a strong need for clarity and structure.

All four levels influence each other. Therefore, they are all vital to the transformation process.

Each level is composed of three dimensions that are color-coded:

1. The dimension of logic and rationale is **blue**.
2. The dimension of emotion is **red**.
3. The physical dimension, the form, is **green**.

The three dimensions and the four levels follow the same principle: interdependence. The dimensions interact with each other. A change in one dimension has an effect on the other dimensions. In addition, there is the principle of balance and alignment. Balancing means acknowledging and integrating all



This is what the systemic approach of the Twelve Alignments offers: it structures the thinking and acting in times of transformation.

**How?** The Twelve Alignments focus on the main elements of the transformational process and visualize them in a simple way. All levels are considered that are crucial for making the transformation effective: The global level, the organizational level, the team level, and the individual level.

relevant dimensions to make them fit. If one dimension is modified, this can cause friction or tension in other dimensions.

It is crucial to have all three dimensions at each of the four levels on the radar screen to be able to identify misalignments as soon as they appear.

With the visualization below, the Twelve Alignments help to develop systemic

It is easier to keep track of the dimensions when they are broken down level by level:

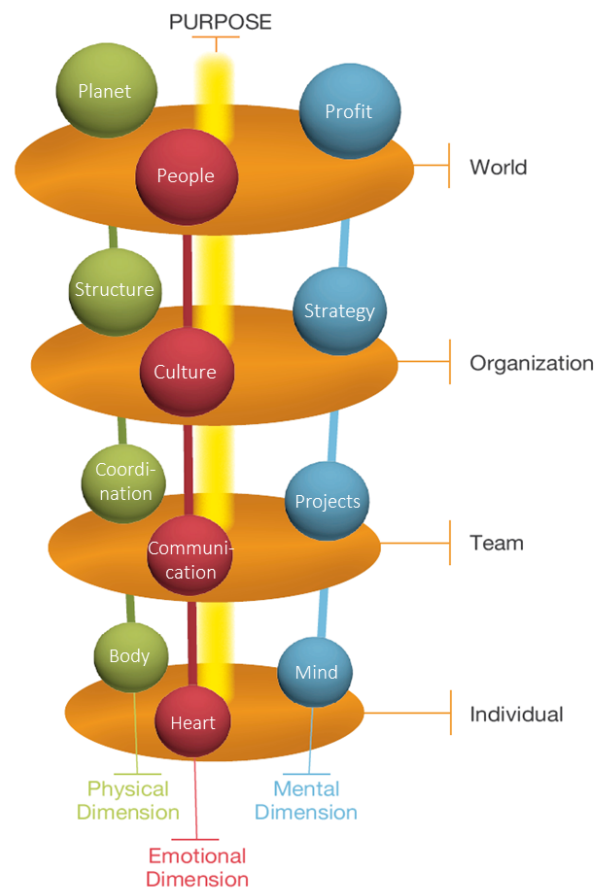
For the individual, the rational is found in the mind, emotions are in the heart, and the physical dimension is in the body. Concerns that are related to change belong to the heart. Typically, the emotional dimension becomes misaligned in the course of transformation. The same can be true for the mental level as the mind needs to open up and allow new ways of thinking. The body also reacts with misalignments showing signs of stress and even illness in a challenging, agile environment.

In any organization, the individual typically works in groups or teams. On a team or group level, we have emotions mainly reflected in communication behavior, be it verbal or non-verbal, whether we are aware of our emotions or not. Who shares which information and how? Who talks with whom and how?

The physical dimension is reflected in the coordination mechanisms – the rules and processes determining effective coordination and collaboration. A typical example for misalignment are days with endless meetings without any final decisions being taken. The rationale is reflected in the projects or the tasks the team is working on. Do all projects make sense related to the overall strategy? If not, are they terminated? If not, why not?

The projects are the direct link to the next level, the organizational level. The entire portfolio of projects forms the organization's strategy which can also be seen as the mind of the organization, if we look at an organization as an organism like a human being. The structure would be equivalent to

intelligence. Systemic intelligence, in turn, is an essential skill for an agile leader.



the body, and the organization's culture to the human heart.

Organizations need to be aligned with their environment if they want to exist and grow long term. They contribute to a healthy global community if they go beyond material needs, reflected in 'profits', and include the needs of the environment, 'planet', as well as fundamental human needs of meaning, belonging and appreciation, reflected in 'people'.

To close the loop, a balanced individual needs a balanced macro-environment in terms of sufficient financial resources well distributed, a sound natural environment, and societies where human needs are met in a way that promotes a peaceful coexistence. Vice versa, a

balanced individual has a positive impact on balancing the macro-environment through the involvement in organizations of his or her choice.

All four levels with its dimensions are aligned by 'purpose'. Purpose deals with the essence of the organization: why does it exist at all? What needs does it serve? The purpose is comparable to an organism's spine providing stability yet allowing for agility. Like nerves, all organizational members are connected to the spine providing and developing passion. To be connected, all members have to be aware of the entire system as well as their personal purpose, comprising their strengths and their key motivation. A clear and present purpose on all levels is the pre-condition for a healthy organization.

Transformational journeys towards agility need to focus on the organization's purpose as it functions as a 'natural aligner'. On a micro-level, it helps attracting individuals whose personal purpose and passion overlap with the team's and organization's purpose. On a macro-level, the purpose can be seen in a broad sense to contribute to a re-alignment of the three dimensions' profit, planet and people. Thus, purpose-driven organizations follow an inherent triple bottom line approach, namely the reconciliation of financial needs

The approach of the Twelve Alignments as such is suited to turn the entire organization **CORAF**:

#### **COURAGE:**

The 12 Alignments provide the structure along which organizations can move on their transformation path towards greater agility. They serve as a compass. With impulses on HOW to change, they facilitate navigation and thus encourage moving forward.

#### **OPEN-MINDEDNESS:**

The model provides a helicopter view by reducing complexity without over-simplification. It widens horizons with the integration of different levels and dimensions.

with the needs of the organization's stakeholders and the needs of our planet.

With reference to the Twelve Alignment chart above, we can repeat the breakdown process. This time, we do it top-down. The purpose and the triple bottom line approach is key input for strategy crafting. The strategy answers the 'What Question': What are the deliverables of the organization and what are its future aspirations? The spheres of Structure and Culture answer the 'How Questions': How is the organization designed (Structure), and how do people collaborate to realize their common purpose (Culture).

To create alignment throughout the organization, all units or teams have to be synchronized. Each of them has to check how its project portfolio reflects the overall strategy. It needs to ensure that all team members are connected in a transparent and effective way. Smart communication is crucial to realize the team members' purpose. It is built on the integration of everybody's strengths and clarity on the stakeholders' needs.

The individual is the fundament of the organization. It is vital that individuals develop themselves in order to thrive in an agile environment. They will contribute best to the organization if they display CORAF-qualities: being **c**ourageous, **o**pen-minded, **r**esilient, **a**ppreciative, **f**ocussed, and **a**ction-oriented

### **RESILIENCE:**

The approach comprises the crystallization and clarification of organizational purpose. Thus, it helps stabilizing and energizing the entire organization.

### **APPRECIATION:**

Due to its multi-layered nature and multiple dimensions, the Twelve Alignments facilitate the change of perspectives across levels, functions and units. Considering different views leads to better decisions.

### **FOCUS:**

The 12 Alignments model helps to ask the right questions to identify blind spots and pain points. This provides insights for selecting and prioritizing transformation work packages.

### **ACTION-ORIENTATION:**

The approach comprises a portfolio of learning methods and tools that help to implement new behavioral patterns at individual and team level. It thus helps to make transformation happen.

At the beginning, they may be difficult to remember, especially if you don't have the visuals at hand.

The 1-2-3-4-formula makes the Twelve Alignments easier to apply:

**One purpose**  
**Two principles - interdependence and balance**  
**Three dimensions - rationale, form and feelings**  
**Four levels - individual, team, organization and world**