
The Leadership Alignment *Pulse.*

*Surfacing the specific disagreements
hiding inside shared enthusiasm.*

A short instrument an executive team can run on their own —
to convert general agreement about AI into specific, testable,
defensible positions.

— ENTHUSIASM IS NOT ALIGNMENT

When a leadership team agrees on importance, it often believes it agrees on *direction*.

It rarely does. What feels like alignment in a conference room tends to be individually-held interpretations of a shared vocabulary — each leader translating broad language into something specific, each quietly believing their translation matches everyone else's.

The cost of discovering this late is steep. Priorities drift. Functions run plays in different directions. Teams spend cycles defending interpretations that were never actually reconciled. The result looks like execution difficulty; the root cause is definitional divergence.

The Pulse is designed to surface that divergence *before* it becomes execution debt. It does so through the single reliable mechanism we have found: asking each leader to write their answer before anyone speaks.

HOW THIS INSTRUMENT WORKS

Each leader answers privately. Then the team compares.

Five prompts. Each executive writes a short answer *before* the conversation begins. The facilitator reads answers aloud without attribution. The delta between answers is where the alignment work actually lives.

— WRITE BEFORE YOU DISCUSS

Each leader completes all five prompts individually. Keep answers brief — a sentence or two. Specificity matters more than eloquence. The point is to surface what you actually think, not what you would say in the meeting.

PROMPT 01 • DEFINITION

In one sentence, what is our AI strategy?

YOUR ANSWER

CONFIDENCE THIS MATCHES THE REST OF THE TEAM

LOW



HIGH

PROMPT 02 • BOUNDARY

Name one thing we are explicitly *not* doing with AI, and why.

YOUR ANSWER

CONFIDENCE THIS MATCHES THE REST OF THE TEAM

LOW



HIGH

PROMPT 03 • PRIORITY

If we could only pursue one AI-related outcome in the next six months, which one?

YOUR ANSWER

CONFIDENCE THIS MATCHES THE REST OF THE TEAM

LOW



HIGH

— PROMPTS 4 & 5

PROMPT 04 • RISK

What is the risk we are most likely to underweight as we move faster?

YOUR ANSWER

CONFIDENCE THIS MATCHES THE REST OF THE TEAM

LOW ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ HIGH

PROMPT 05 • OWNERSHIP

Who on this team is accountable for our AI outcomes — and for what specifically?

YOUR ANSWER

CONFIDENCE THIS MATCHES THE REST OF THE TEAM

LOW ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ HIGH

Once everyone has written —
the team compares *out loud*.

45 MIN TOTAL

STEP 01

Read, don't attribute.

The facilitator reads each prompt's answers aloud without saying who wrote which. The team listens for delta before discussion.

STEP 02

Name the distance.

Where do the answers diverge — in scope, in priority, in owner, in risk? Name the divergence out loud before defending positions.

STEP 03

Commit to a sentence.

For each prompt, the team agrees on one sentence specific enough to disagree with — not broad enough to satisfy everyone.

— WHAT THE DELTA IS TELLING YOU

Disagreement is not the problem. Discovering it late is.

Most executive teams score somewhere between surprising alignment and surprising divergence — usually both, on different prompts. Treat the pattern as diagnostic, not as a verdict on the team.

HEALTHY SIGNALS

What **designed** alignment looks like.

Answers are specific enough to disagree with. Leaders can name what they are *not* doing and why. Ownership has a person attached, not a function.

- One-sentence strategy sounds the same from three leaders.
- Priorities reference the same outcome, not the same vocabulary.
- Risk language includes something uncomfortable.
- Ownership traces to a named individual.

DRIFT SIGNALS

What enthusiasm-as-alignment looks like.

Answers use the same words for different things. No leader names a real boundary. Risk is described abstractly. Ownership lives in the passive voice.

- Strategy statements are broad enough that all five are technically true.
- Every leader picks a different priority — or the same priority for different reasons.
- Risks are recited, not felt. Nobody names something specific.
- Ownership attaches to a function (“product owns it”) rather than a person.

THE CALIBRATION QUESTION

Compare each leader’s self-rated confidence (the dots) to the actual delta in answers. A team that rated itself high-confidence but produced five divergent answers has a **visibility problem**, not an alignment problem. That is the most important thing to surface.

— RUNNING THE SESSION

Forty-five minutes, designed in six steps.

You don't need a neutral facilitator. A CEO can run this, a Chief of Staff can run this. The discipline is in the sequence — not in who holds the pen.

0:00 – 0:03	Frame, briefly.	"We're going to answer five short prompts silently, then read our answers out loud without attribution. The goal is to hear the distance, not defend positions." Do not elaborate.
0:03 – 0:15	Write, silently.	Everyone answers all five prompts independently. Phones down. No cross-talk. If a leader finishes early, they re-read and refine — not chat.
0:15 – 0:30	Read aloud, un-attributed.	The facilitator reads all five answers to Prompt 01 in sequence, then Prompt 02, and so on. No one interrupts. No one defends. Just hear it.
0:30 – 0:38	Name the delta.	For each prompt where answers diverged, name the divergence before debating it. "These three see scope differently." "Two of us named a risk the others didn't." Sit with it for a beat.
0:38 – 0:43	Commit to one sentence.	For each prompt, agree on a single sentence specific enough that someone reasonable could disagree with it. If the sentence feels safe, it isn't done.
0:43 – 0:45	Close with owners.	For each committed sentence, name the person accountable for the next move. No parking lots. No follow-up work groups. One name, one sentence.

— IF THE ANSWERS SURPRISED YOU

That's the work you didn't know you had.

A healthy team can run this Pulse and find its own way to alignment. A team with deep divergence often benefits from outside design — someone whose only job is to translate five reasonable views into one specific, testable position, without absorbing any of the positional cost.

BOOK A DISCOVERY CALL

A 30-minute, no-pitch conversation about what your team's answers are telling you.

Share the pattern — not the answers themselves if you'd rather not. We'll reflect what the delta tends to mean, the sequence we'd propose to close it, and whether outside design is the right lever here at all. If it isn't, we'll say so.

SCHEDULE calendly.com/charlie-northlinestrategy/discovery-call

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ABOUT NORTHLINE STRATEGY

Northline Strategy helps executive leaders design AI strategy, governance structures, and organizational systems that enable responsible acceleration — with clarity, alignment, and resilience. We are pro-design, not anti-speed.

A shared vocabulary is not a shared position.

— Northline Strategy