Alignment in Product Development
How different disciplines successfully interact within an organizational environment

Alignment is a system measure of the compatibility of interactions towards a common goal.

- It can be observed at the level of the individual ties and taken as an aggregate composite of those individual ties.
- The health of a tie is determined by the extent to which alignment is required, implementable and executed correctly.

The Problem
Members of an enterprise cooperate by distributing tasks to pursue a common goal better than they could do individually, if at all.

This raises the fundamental question of coordination or alignment. Harmonization between each element in the enterprise requires interactions among them, usually established through communication, to ensure that outputs of one stage are consistent with the expected inputs of the next stage.

Research Approach
Decomposing the relationships within the organization into three fundamental components, all observable using different research methods.

NEED
Is there a requirement that actors be aligned?

CAN
Is there capability for actors to align?

DO
Do the actors exercise the possibility to align?

Integrating the three components in a logic tree reveals the contributing state of a relationship to the system alignment.

Research Questions
- How does each individual perceive the work within the organization?
- How much do methods used affect the alignment state?
- What specialties are more susceptible to alignment?

Focus on the NEED component
How do practitioners know they need to work with someone? What leads them to engage in coordination?
And where in the organization do they focus their attention on? Are they focusing on the most valuable components?
Do the several alignment methods (co-location, core-team, obeya, ...) contribute?

Data Sources
Targets for data collection are product development focused organizations with a complexity dimension.
Complexity can be at the size and number of people to coordinate (>100), the product complexity (airplane), product portfolio (>5 distinct, non-platform products) or systems strategy.
Currently looking for more sources!

Case methodology
Select a product from organization and collect information on the product and developing team (qualitative).
Interview participants with quantitative survey.

Expected Contributions

Academic:
Decompose and represent multi-actor interaction in a complex system
Create an alignment assessment tool
Starting point for study of several other “alignment” questions

Industrial:
Management tools to assess and act on alignment (Information Dashboard)
Understand implications and usefulness of different methods at the system level
Share the holistic view with specialists
Improve efficiency and throughput of Product Development process

"The primary task of management is to get people to work together in a systematic way”

"In a turbulent, competitive environment in which customers are demanding and speed is essential, the underlying source of superior performance is integration. (...) [which means] linking problem-solving cycles, bringing functional groups into close working relationships, and achieving a meeting of the minds in concept, strategy, and execution.”