Steradian: Research Foundation & Analysis

February 2026 · Steradian Strategic Insights

How peer-reviewed research supports Steradian's approach to leadership alignment measurement, execution diagnostics, and structured dialogue.

> Leadership teams routinely overestimate how well-aligned they are. Two 2026 Harvard Business Review studies found this gap is systematic—leaders believe their peers share their strategic views far more than the evidence shows, and misalignment remains hidden until it surfaces as execution failure. The consequence is predictable: execution failures that are attributed to poor implementation when the real cause is undetected misalignment at the top. Steradian was built to close that gap. This document sets out the peer-reviewed and practitioner evidence base that underpins our measurement approach, and explains why alignment detection is a prerequisite—not an optional add-on—to strategy execution.

---

1. Summary

Steradian's value proposition—*detect leadership misalignment → enable strategic conversation → improve execution outcomes*—rests on a substantial body of peer-reviewed and practitioner research. This document synthesises that corpus, distinguishes *supporting*, *qualifying*, and *productive divergence* evidence, and connects key findings to Steradian's measurement framework.

Core conclusion: The research broadly supports that (a) strategic consensus and alignment are associated with stronger implementation outcomes; (b) the relationship is moderated by context—market dynamism, strategy type, and organisational stage all matter; (c) *alignment without conformity* is essential—productive debate improves decisions, while overconvergence (groupthink) degrades them. Steradian's survey-based detection, role-based variance analysis, and structured discussion facilitation are well grounded in these findings.

---

2. Research Corpus Overview

2.1 By Support Level

Category	Studies	Role in the Evidence Base
Supports	15+	Direct empirical or conceptual support for the alignment–execution link
Qualifies	6+	Boundary conditions, moderators, and nonlinear effects that shape interpretation
Productive Divergence	3+	Evidence that some disagreement is beneficial—and how to distinguish it from harmful misalignment

2.2 By Research Domain

1. **Executive Consensus → Execution Outcomes** (Dooley et al. 2000; Iaquinto & Fredrickson 1997; Priem 1990)
2. **Meta-Analyses** (Kellermanns et al. 2011)
3. **Mechanisms: How Alignment Creates Value** (Mathieu et al. 2000; Bowen & Ostroff 2004)
4. **Boundary Conditions** (Homburg et al. 1999; Walter et al. 2013; West & Meyer 1998)
5. **Productive Divergence** (Janis 1972; Amason 1996; Simons & Peterson 2000)
6. **Practitioner & Execution Governance** (Kaplan & Norton 2005, 2008; HBR 2026; BCG 2025; McKinsey; PwC; AchieveIt)
7. **Measurement & Strategic Fit** (Kathuria et al. 2007; Venkatraman 1989; Reich & Benbasat 1996)
8. **Dialogue & Implementation** (Beer et al.; Sull et al. 2015; Hrebiniak 2013)

3. Evidence Synthesis

3.1 Supports: Alignment → Execution

Source	Key Finding	Relevance to Steradian
Dooley, Fryxell & Judge (2000)	Consensus and commitment predict implementation speed and success	Core thesis: detecting misalignment enables the conversations that drive execution
Iaquinto & Fredrickson (1997)	TMT agreement on decisions and processes has measurable downstream execution consequences	Alignment is an execution variable, not merely a meeting outcome
Priem (1990)	TMT consensus and group factors predict firm performance	Foundational empirical support for the alignment–performance relationship
Kellermanns et al. (2011)	Meta-analysis across multiple studies: positive consensus–performance link confirmed; moderators matter	Supports both the value of alignment and the need for contextual score interpretation
Mathieu et al. (2000)	Shared mental models → team process → team performance	Mechanism: alignment enables coordination and reduces costly rework
Bowen & Ostroff (2004)	"System strength"—shared interpretations of priorities—drives consistent behaviour	Mechanism: strategic clarity reduces execution friction
Kaplan & Norton (2005)	Office of Strategy Management; execution failures are widespread and predictable	Measurement must precede execution; governance structures require alignment visibility

> **Synthesis:** The alignment–execution link is empirically supported across multiple independent studies and confirmed in meta-analysis. Steradian's focus on objective measurement and surfacing divergence *before* execution pressure mounts is directly grounded in this evidence.

3.2 Qualifies: Boundary Conditions

Source	Key Finding	Relevance to Steradian
Homburg et al. (1999)	The impact of consensus on performance varies by market dynamism and strategy type	Steradian scores are interpreted in context, not as absolute benchmarks
Walter et al. (2013)	Consensus–performance relationship is stronger at lower alignment levels; diminishing returns appear at high alignment	The goal is meaningful alignment, not maximal consensus—perfection is neither realistic nor necessary
West & Meyer (1998)	In new ventures, disagreement on secondary goals and means can correlate with better performance	Steradian distinguishes primary strategic misalignment (execution risk) from healthy debate on approach
Janis (1972)	Groupthink: excessive consensus pressure leads to deteriorating decision quality	Steradian's "alignment without conformity" positioning directly addresses the groupthink risk

> **Synthesis:** Alignment is valuable but not universally linear. Steradian frames variance as *diagnostic* rather than inherently negative—some divergence reflects healthy strategic debate, and the tool is designed to help teams distinguish the two.

3.3 Productive Divergence: When Disagreement Has Value

Source	Key Finding	Relevance to Steradian
Amason (1996)	Task conflict (constructive debate about the work) is fundamentally different from relationship conflict (interpersonal friction)	Steradian reveals *what* diverges and on which topics; facilitation guides teams toward productive task-focused debate
Simons & Peterson (2000)	Psychological safety and trust determine whether task conflict stays productive	Steradian's structured, non-blaming discussion approach supports psychological safety (Edmondson)
West & Meyer (1998)	Cognitive diversity can outperform convergence in dynamic, uncertain environments	Steradian distinguishes execution-risk misalignment (harmful) from strategic debate (healthy and valuable)

> **Synthesis:** Steradian differentiates *types* of divergence—priority gaps, confidence deltas, role splits—and facilitates structured conversation rather than forcing consensus. This is entirely consistent with the productive divergence literature.

---

4. How Steradian Measures Alignment

4.1 Measurement Framework

Steradian operationalises alignment through a multi-dimensional set of metrics, each grounded in peer-reviewed constructs:

Metric	What It Measures	Research Basis
Vertical alignment	Coherence of views across organisational levels: Board ⇔ C-Suite ⇔ Senior Leadership (0–100%)	Kathuria et al. 2007; Nadler & Tushman 1980
Horizontal alignment	Cross-functional consensus within the same organisational level (0–100%)	Kathuria et al. 2007
Domain-level variance	How much leaders' assessments diverge within each strategic domain. Expressed as an alignment percentage (higher = more agreement).	Shared mental models; strategic consensus indices
Consensus levels	High (≥ 80%), Moderate (60–80%), Low (40–60%), None (<40%): intuitive thresholds for executive interpretation	Kellermanns et al.; Walter et al.
Confidence delta (Optimism gap)	Difference between leaders' current assessment and their next-year expectations per domain. Reveals where the team expects improvement—or decline—and whether those expectations are shared.	Expectation alignment and confidence calibration research
Steradian Score™	Composite execution readiness: Capability Score × Combined Alignment (0–100). Penalises misalignment—high capability with low alignment signals concrete execution risk.	Kathuria et al.; multiplicative moderation models
Role-based views	Per-function and per-level averages and variance. Surfaces hidden disagreement that aggregate scores mask.	Hambrick & Mason; Knight et al.; false consensus research

4.2 From Research Construct to Business Insight

Each Steradian output maps to a well-established research construct, giving executives confidence that what the tool surfaces is not arbitrary:

- **Strategic consensus** → domain-level variance and role-based splits reveal whether the team shares a common strategic picture

- **Shared mental models** → alignment percentages and consensus levels quantify how well leaders understand the organisation the same way
- **False consensus / hidden disagreement** → role-based views expose divergence that polite meetings and group dynamics suppress
- **Task vs relationship conflict** → structured discussion facilitation focuses the conversation on strategic priorities, not personalities

---

5. Research Perspectives

The following perspectives synthesise how researchers and practitioners across three disciplines interpret the evidence base—and what it means for how leadership alignment should be measured and used.

5.1 Strategic Alignment Research

> "The meta-analytic evidence (Kellermanns et al.) and the Dooley et al. and Iaquinto & Fredrickson studies establish that consensus and commitment predict implementation success. The key practitioner insight is that consensus must be *measured*, not assumed. HBR's 2026 finding—that leaders systematically overestimate alignment—validates the core diagnostic premise. The boundary conditions (Homburg; Walter et al.) mean that a single alignment score should be interpreted in context: industry dynamism, strategy type, and organisational stage all shape what the numbers mean."
>
> *Synthesised from: Kellermanns et al. (2011); Dooley et al. (2000); Iaquinto & Fredrickson (1997); Homburg et al. (1999); Walter et al. (2013); HBR (2026)*

5.2 Organisational Psychology

> "Janis's groupthink and Amason's task-versus-relationship conflict framework are essential qualifiers for any alignment tool. The goal is not to eliminate all divergence but to surface it constructively. Structured, non-blaming facilitation maps well to Edmondson's psychological safety research and Beer's work on the 'silent killers' of strategy execution. Variance diagnostics and role-based views create a shared object for dialogue—shifting the conversation from finger-pointing to problem-solving."
>
> *Synthesised from: Janis (1972); Amason (1996); Simons & Peterson (2000); Edmondson (1999); Beer et al.*

5.3 Strategy Execution Practice

> "Sull et al., Hrebiniak, and Kaplan & Norton all identify execution failures as breakdowns in clarity, coordination, and accountability. A detection → conversation → action flow directly addresses each failure mode. AchieveIt and McKinsey data show that organisations with disciplined planning processes implement strategy faster, and that top-team alignment is a consistent differentiator. The Steradian Score (capability × alignment) gives boards and executive teams a single, interpretable metric: high capability with low alignment is a warning sign that experienced leaders recognise immediately."
>
> *Synthesised from: Sull et al. (2015); Hrebiniak (2013); Kaplan & Norton (2005, 2008); McKinsey; AchieveIt*

5.4 Where the Evidence Converges

All three perspectives align on four principles that define Steradian's approach:

1. **Measure before assuming.** Alignment cannot be inferred from seniority, tenure, or shared meeting attendance.
2. **Interpret in context.** A score is meaningful relative to the organisation's environment, strategy, and stage.
3. **Distinguish productive divergence from execution risk.** Not all disagreement is harmful; the critical skill is telling them apart.
4. **Dialogue is the mechanism.** Detection alone does not improve execution—structured conversation does.

---

6. The Evolving Research Landscape

The research base for leadership alignment is active and growing. Several questions are particularly relevant to executive teams using diagnostic tools like Steradian:

- **Does measured alignment correlate with long-term execution outcomes?** Early studies focus on short-term consensus; longitudinal designs linking alignment diagnostics to multi-year performance are an emerging frontier.
- **How do context and industry moderate the alignment–performance relationship?** Walter et al. and Homburg et al. establish that moderators exist; more granular industry-level research is developing.
- **Does structured facilitation improve outcomes beyond measurement alone?** Edmondson's psychological safety work and Beer's dialogue research point strongly in this direction, but controlled studies comparing assessment-only to assessment-plus-facilitation are limited.
- **How should alignment measurement incorporate environmental fit?** Venkatraman (1989) and Reich & Benbasat (1996) show that internal alignment must be considered alongside alignment with market conditions—an area where the field continues to evolve.

Steradian monitors this research actively and incorporates new findings into its methodology and interpretation framework.

---

7. References

References formatted in APA 7th edition. DOIs omitted where not publicly available; journal volume/issue/pages provided for all peer-reviewed articles.

Executive Consensus & Execution Outcomes

- Dooley, R. S., Fryxell, G. E., & Judge, W. Q. (2000). Belaboring the not-so-obvious: Consensus, commitment, and strategy implementation speed and success. *Journal of Management*, *26*(6), 1237–1257.
- Iaquinto, A. L., & Fredrickson, J. W. (1997). Top management team agreement about the strategic decision process: A longitudinal investigation. *Strategic Management Journal*, *18*(1), 63–75.

- Priem, R. L. (1990). Top management team group factors, consensus, and firm performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, *11*(6), 469–478.

Meta-Analysis

- Kellermanns, F. W., Walter, J., Lechner, C., & Floyd, S. W. (2011). The lack of consensus about strategic consensus: Advancing theory and research. *Journal of Management*, *37*(5), 1322–1354.

Mechanisms: Shared Mental Models & System Strength

- Bowen, D. E., & Ostroff, C. (2004). Understanding HRM–firm performance linkages: The role of the "strength" of the HRM system. *Academy of Management Review*, *29*(2), 203–221.
- Mathieu, J. E., Heffner, T. S., Goodwin, G. F., Salas, E., & Cannon-Bowers, J. A. (2000). The influence of shared mental models on team process and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *85*(2), 273–283.

Boundary Conditions & Moderators

- Homburg, C., Krohmer, H., & Workman, J. P. (1999). Strategic consensus and performance: The role of strategy type and market-related dynamism. *Strategic Management Journal*, *20*(4), 339–357.
- Janis, I. L. (1972). *Victims of groupthink: A psychological study of foreign-policy decisions and fiascoes*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Walter, J., Kellermanns, F. W., & Lechner, C. (2013). Decision making within and between organizations: Rationality, politics, and alliance performance. *Strategic Organization*, *11*(3), 304–328.
- West, G. P., III, & Meyer, G. D. (1998). To agree or not to agree? Consensus and performance in new ventures. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *13*(5), 395–422.

Productive Divergence, Conflict & Psychological Safety

- Amason, A. C. (1996). Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: Resolving a paradox for top management teams. *Academy of Management Journal*, *39*(1), 123–148.
- Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *44*(2), 350–383.

- Simons, T. L., & Peterson, R. S. (2000). Task conflict and relationship conflict in top management teams: The pivotal role of intragroup trust. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *85*(1), 102–111.

Measurement, Strategic Fit & Upper Echelons

- Hambrick, D. C., & Mason, P. A. (1984). Upper echelons: The organization as a reflection of its top managers. *Academy of Management Review*, *9*(2), 193–206.
- Kathuria, R., Joshi, M. P., & Porth, S. J. (2007). Organizational alignment and performance: Past, present and future. *Management Decision*, *45*(3), 503–517.
- Knight, D., Pearce, C. L., Smith, K. G., Olian, J. D., Sims, H. P., Smith, K. A., & Flood, P. (1999). Top management team diversity, group process, and strategic consensus. *Strategic Management Journal*, *20*(5), 445–465.
- Nadler, D. A., & Tushman, M. L. (1980). A model for diagnosing organizational behavior. *Organizational Dynamics*, *9*(2), 35–51.
- Reich, B. H., & Benbasat, I. (1996). Measuring the linkage between business and information technology objectives. *MIS Quarterly*, *20*(1), 55–81.
- Venkatraman, N. (1989). The concept of fit in strategy research: Toward verbal and statistical correspondence. *Academy of Management Review*, *14*(3), 423–444.

Execution, Governance & Strategy Implementation

- Beer, M., & Eisenstat, R. A. (2000). The silent killers of strategy implementation and learning. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, *41*(4), 29–40.
- Hrebiniak, L. G. (2013). *Making strategy work: Leading effective execution and change* (2nd ed.). FT Press.
- Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2005). The office of strategy management. *Harvard Business Review*, *83*(10), 72–80.
- Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2008). Mastering the management system. *Harvard Business Review*, *86*(1), 62–77.
- Sull, D., Homkes, R., & Sull, C. (2015). Why strategy execution unravels—and what to do about it. *Harvard Business Review*, *93*(3), 57–66.

Recent Practitioner Research (2025–2026)

- Harvard Business Review. (2026, January). What leaders get wrong about strategic alignment. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2026/01/what-leaders-get-wrong-about-strategic-alignment
- Harvard Business Review. (2026, January). To execute a unified strategy, leaders need to shadow each other. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2026/01/to-execute-a-unified-strategy-leaders-need-to-shadow-each-other

---