

The Pocket Diagnostic

A team alignment framework: four things that pull teams out of sync, and their early warning signs

1. The Tempo Shift

Pace or priorities change without warning.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

- Team learns about changes after they start
- Deadlines accelerate with no added resources
- People ask "wait, when did we decide that?"

2. Unclear Parts

Roles overlap or leave gaps.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

- "I thought you were handling that"
- Two people quietly doing the same work
- Tasks nobody owns falling through cracks

3. Lost Feel

Culture erodes under change.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

- Right notes, but the music feels flat
- Less banter, shorter answers, cameras off
- People stop raising problems early

4. The Overplayer

Skilled, loud, and not listening.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

- One voice dominates every meeting
- Simple decisions get overcomplicated
- Quieter people have stopped contributing

How to use this

Once a month, scan the four boxes and circle every warning sign you have seen in the last 30 days. One circle is normal life. Two or more in the same box means that is where your team is out of the pocket, and it maps to a fix: tempo problems need a count-in (page 2), parts problems need role clarity, feel problems need presence and time, and overplaying needs space for other voices.

The 3-Sentence Count-In

How to communicate any change to your team before it starts

Drummers count the band in before every song so everyone starts together. Use these three sentences, in this order, before any change: a new tool, a new priority, a new timeline, a new hire. Say them out loud or write them at the top of the announcement.

1 Here is what is changing.

Name the change in plain language. One sentence, no hedging.

2 Here is why.

The honest reason, even if the reason is hard. Teams handle hard truths better than silence.

3 Here is when, and here is what I need from you.

The start date, and the one specific thing you are asking each person to do.

Worked example: rolling out an AI writing tool

(1) Starting next month, we are adding an AI assistant for first drafts of client reports. (2) Drafting eats about a third of your week, and we want that time going to client conversations instead. (3) Training is Tuesday the 10th, and I need everyone to bring one real report to rebuild in the new tool. Questions before then, bring them straight to me.

Three rules

Never promise certainty you do not have; "here is what I know and here is what I do not" is a count-in too. Give the count before the change starts, not after people notice it. And keep it to three sentences: if it takes a full page, the change is not ready to announce.

Loop or Live Worksheet

Decide what to automate with AI and what to keep human, as a team, in one meeting

A looper carries the repetitive foundation so the musician can focus on feel, judgment, and listening. AI should do the same for your team. List your team's recurring tasks, then sort each one into a column. Do this together: the conversation is the point.

PUT IT ON THE LOOP

Repetitive, predictable, rule-based. Automate it deliberately.

e.g. recurring reports, scheduling, data entry, first drafts

KEEP IT LIVE

Needs context, judgment, or a relationship. Protect it.

e.g. hard conversations, complex calls, creative work, clients

Three sorting questions for every task

1. Is it done the same way every time? (Same = loop.) **2.** If it is done slightly wrong, does anyone get hurt or lose trust? (Yes = live.) **3.** When this task is automated, where does the saved time go? If you cannot answer, decide before you automate: the efficiency dividend belongs to the team, not just the output quota.

Pulse Check

Three employee survey questions that surface alignment problems while they are still fixable

Add these to your next one-on-one, team check-in, or engagement survey. Ask them the same way every time so you can watch the trend, not just the snapshot. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

Q1. "I understand how my role may change in the next six months."

Team average:



WHAT LOW SCORES MEAN

Low scores here predict tempo-shift problems: people are bracing for change they cannot see. Fix with a count-in, not reassurance.

Q2. "I have the support and training I need to adapt to new tools."

Team average:



WHAT LOW SCORES MEAN

Low scores mean technology is being added faster than people are being prepared. Pause the rollouts, fund the training.

Q3. "When I give feedback, I see it lead to visible changes."

Team average:



WHAT LOW SCORES MEAN

The most important one. Low scores mean people have learned that responding is pointless, and disengagement follows. Close the loop publicly: "you said X, we changed Y."

Keep your team in the pocket year-round

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