

# Organizational Drift Audit

## 10 Questions To See If Your Company's Symbols Have Outrun Reality

*A. Jacobs | Reality Drift Framework*

### Where Drift Begins

Most organizations do not fail because they stop working. They fail because they continue to function while losing alignment with reality.

The dashboards update, the metrics improve, and the language stays confident, while something underneath begins to drift.

This audit tests whether your organization's symbols, including metrics, narratives, reports, and signals, still correspond to what is actually happening.

### The Audit

Answer each question honestly. The purpose is detection, not perfection.

#### **1. Are your key metrics easier to improve than the underlying outcome?**

If performance can be increased without meaningful change in reality, you are likely optimizing a proxy.

#### **2. Do internal reports feel more coherent than the day-to-day experience?**

When representations are smoother than reality, they are no longer describing it—they are replacing it.

#### **3. Are problems first noticed by customers or frontline employees rather than leadership?**

This suggests signal degradation as information moves upward through the system.

#### **4. Has language become more important than outcomes?**

If framing, positioning, or narrative alignment carries more weight than actual results, symbolic performance is taking precedence over real performance.

#### **5. Do meetings focus more on explaining metrics than examining reality?**

When time is spent defending or interpreting numbers rather than questioning them, the system is orbiting its own representations.

## **6. Are success criteria stable, or do they shift to preserve the appearance of success?**

If definitions of success change after results are known, the system is protecting its symbols rather than evaluating its outcomes.

## **7. Is it difficult to trace a metric directly to a real-world change?**

If the connection between measurement and reality is unclear or indirect, semantic drift has likely occurred.

## **8. Do teams optimize for visibility rather than impact?**

When work is shaped by how it will be perceived internally rather than what it achieves externally, symbolic incentives are driving behavior.

## **9. Are exceptions, edge cases, or qualitative feedback routinely dismissed?**

Ignoring inconvenient inputs is a common way systems preserve internal coherence while drifting from reality.

## **10. Does everything appear to be working, yet something feels off?**

This is often the earliest and most reliable indicator. Drift is frequently detected intuitively before it becomes measurable.

## **Scoring**

- **0–2 “yes” answers:** System likely grounded
- **3–5 “yes” answers:** Early-stage drift
- **6–8 “yes” answers:** Active misalignment
- **9–10 “yes” answers:** Symbolic system has likely detached from reality

## **What This Reveals**

Organizational drift emerges from a structural shift in how the system operates:

- measurement becomes a target
- representation becomes a substitute
- symbols become self-reinforcing

The system continues to operate, but it is no longer anchored to what it was designed to do.

This shift can be surfaced with a single question: **Are we optimizing the representation, or the thing itself?**

## **Where Alignment Breaks**

Drift is not always visible in performance metrics. It emerges in the gap between what is reported and what is experienced, between what is measured and what matters, and between what looks correct and what actually changes. Most organizations do not notice this gap until it becomes costly, but it can be seen earlier if you know where to look. The absence of failure is not proof of alignment.