

FIELD NOTE  
001

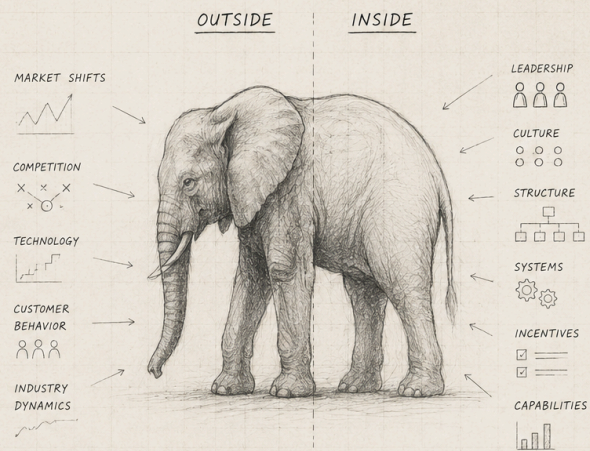
OBSERVATIONS ON SYSTEMS,  
STRATEGY & HUMAN BEHAVIOR

# Why Some Organizations Endure While Others Slowly Fail

An introduction to the internal and external forces that shape organizational survival, adaptation and long-term performance.

STRATEGY | ORGANIZATIONAL ARCHITECTURE | MAY 2026 | 12 MIN READ

"No single perspective reveals the whole. We see parts, not the system."



ALIGNMENT ← → MISALIGNMENT  
Adaptive systems compound over time.  
Small gaps compound. Decay becomes inevitable.

Failure is rarely sudden. It is a long series of small misalignments.

By Rafa Munaro

## The Question

Have you ever wondered why some organizations adapt and compound over time, while others slowly decay?

Not necessarily through one catastrophic event.

But gradually.

Sometimes despite having:

- more resources
- more talent
- stronger brands
- larger market share
- or seemingly dominant positions

Over time, this question kept resurfacing across many of the environments that shaped the thinking behind **SRV**.

And eventually, it started feeling surprisingly similar to something we observe constantly in nature.

Across evolutionary history, species rarely disappear overnight.

Most decline gradually.

Environmental conditions shift. Resources become constrained. Previously useful traits become liabilities. Adaptation slows. Complexity increases.

Some species evolve and survive.

Others slowly disappear.

Organizations often behave in similar ways.

Like biological organisms, companies exist within external environments they do not fully control.

Markets shift. Competitors emerge. Technologies evolve. Customer behavior changes.

And just as natural selection acts as a filtering mechanism in biology, markets often play a similar role in business.

**Organizations that adapt effectively tend to survive and compound.**

Others slowly fall out of alignment with reality.

Over time, one thing became increasingly difficult to ignore:

**there was no single explanation.**

---

## A Simplified Model

Of course, reality is far more complex than any simplified model could ever fully capture.

Organizations are messy, multi-causal, adaptive systems interacting with constantly changing environments.

But simplification is still useful.

Not because it perfectly explains reality.

But because it helps us understand the system at a higher level before diving deeper into the details.

At the broadest possible level, organizations can almost be thought of as systems that:

- exist within an external environment
- interpret that environment
- make strategic decisions
- and then configure themselves internally to execute against those decisions

In other words:

**organizations respond to the outside world by aligning themselves internally around a chosen strategy.**

The external world continuously creates pressure:

- markets evolve
- technologies shift
- competitors react
- customer behavior changes
- regulation emerges
- economic conditions fluctuate

Organizations then respond to those conditions by making strategic choices:

- where to compete
- how to compete
- what capabilities matter most
- and what kind of organization must exist to support those capabilities

And this is often where things start breaking down.

**Because success rarely depends on strategy alone.**

It depends on whether the organization can continuously align:

- people
- structure
- culture
- systems
- incentives
- and execution

with the reality of the environment it operates in.

Small misalignments rarely look dangerous at first.

But over time, they compound.

A plane that deviates by a single degree early in a long flight may initially appear perfectly on course.

Twelve hours later, it ends up hundreds of kilometers away from its intended destination.

Organizations often drift in similar ways.

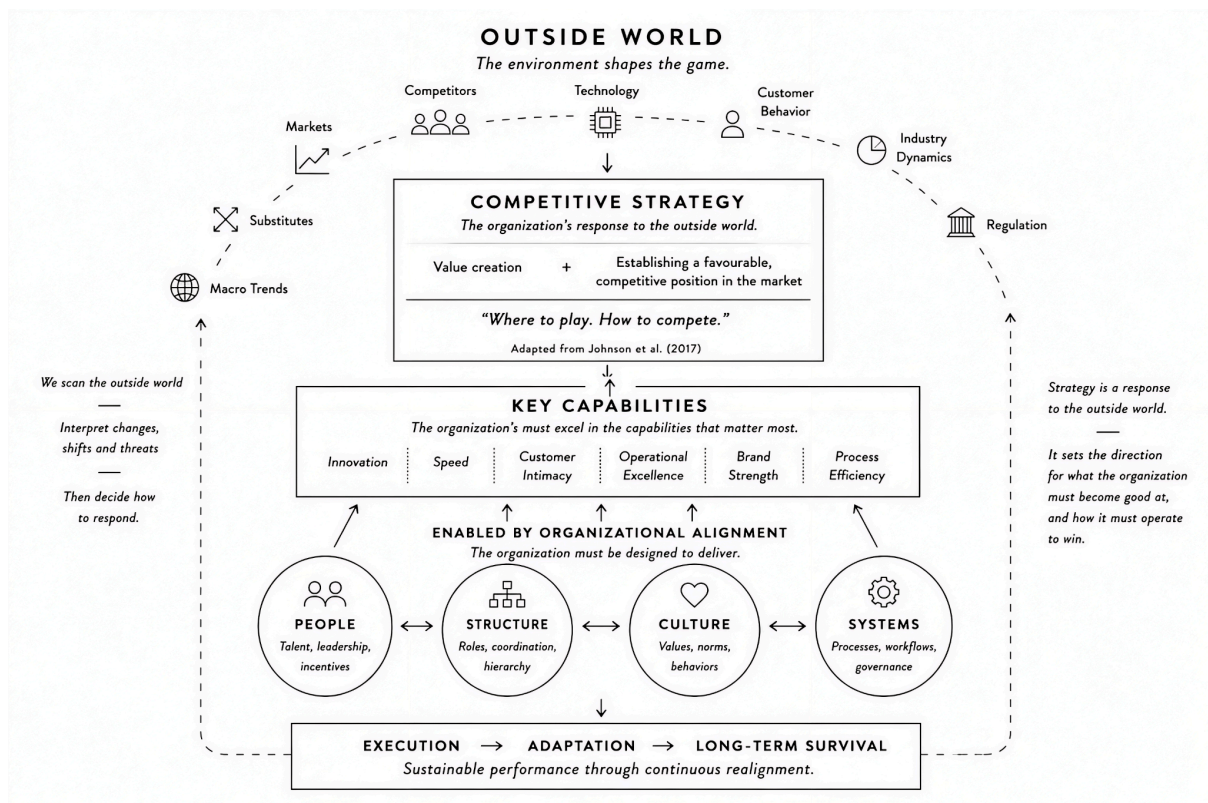
The outside world changes.

But internally:

- incentives remain frozen
- structures calcify
- processes optimize for yesterday's conditions
- and capabilities that once created advantage slowly become rigidities

In many cases, organizations do not collapse because of one catastrophic decision.

They slowly drift out of alignment with reality.



# The Outside Game

## Strategic Management

Once you start looking outside the organization, another layer of complexity appears.

Markets evolve. Competitors adapt. Technologies shift. Customer expectations change.

At its core, strategy attempts to answer a deceptively simple question:

**how do organizations create value and establish a favorable position in a changing environment?**

Thinkers like:

- **Michael Porter**
- **Igor Ansoff**
- **Clayton Christensen**
- **W. Chan Kim & Renée Mauborgne**

all explored different dimensions of that question.

And one of the most humbling aspects of strategy is that:

**there is no universal playbook.**

A strategy only makes sense relative to:

- the environment
- the competition
- the customer
- and the moment in time

In many ways, strategy is ultimately about understanding:

**what game you want to play, and how you intend to compete.**

Or put differently:

**how an organization chooses to respond to the external world around it.**

---

# The Inside Game

## Organizational Alignment

Eventually, another question starts to emerge:

**what must the organization become good at for that strategy to actually work?**

One of the most useful ideas from organizational design is that strategy alone is rarely enough.

**A strategy is only as good as its execution.**

Execution depends on whether the organization is aligned around the capabilities that matter most.

In other words:

**strategy determines which capabilities become critical.**

And then:

**the organization must align itself to develop those capabilities.**

One useful simplification is to think about organizations through four core elements:

## People

*talent, leadership, incentives*

## Structure

*roles, coordination, hierarchy*

## Culture

*values, norms, behaviors*

## Systems

*processes, workflows, governance*

Much like a biological organism, an organization only functions effectively when its core systems operate in alignment.

The core idea is surprisingly simple:

**all four elements must reinforce the capabilities required by the strategy.**

Otherwise, organizations slowly drift into misalignment.

**Different strategies require different organizational capabilities.**

And different capabilities require different combinations of:

- people
- structures
- cultures
- and systems

Because ultimately:

**strategy defines what matters.**

**Organizational alignment determines whether it can happen.**

---

# Misalignment & Slow Decline

One pattern appears repeatedly across business history.

**Organizations often remain optimized for environments that no longer exist.**

Processes continue reinforcing outdated assumptions.

Incentives reward behaviors that once created advantage, but no longer fit current conditions.

Capabilities that once differentiated the organization slowly become rigidities.

Companies like:

- Kodak
- Nokia
- BlackBerry
- Blockbuster

clearly did not fail because they lacked intelligence, talent, or resources.

In many cases, they simply remained optimized for a game that was already changing.

And the longer that misalignment persists, the harder adaptation becomes.

Which means the challenge is rarely finding permanent answers.

More often, the challenge is:

**continuously realigning the organization as reality changes.**

---

## Frameworks As Lenses

The deeper we explored these questions, the more another challenge started becoming visible.

Different disciplines seemed to illuminate different parts of the problem:

- strategy
- organizational architecture
- systems thinking
- behavioral psychology
- leadership
- competitive dynamics
- execution
- and many others

Each framework captured something real.

But none seemed capable of fully explaining organizational survival or decline on its own.

It started feeling a bit like the **old parable of the blind men and the elephant**.

Several blind men encounter an elephant for the first time.

One touches the trunk and concludes the elephant is like a snake.

Another touches a leg and believes it is like a tree.

Another feels the side and describes a wall.

Each perspective captures something real.

But none fully explains the whole system.

Organizations often feel similar.

**Different theories illuminate different dimensions of reality, but reality itself is usually far messier, more interconnected, and more multi-causal than any single framework can fully capture.**

That does not make frameworks useless.

Far from it.

If anything, frameworks become useful precisely because reality is so complex.

They help simplify, organize, and interpret parts of systems that would otherwise be almost impossible to fully reason about.

Not as universal answers.

But as lenses.

Ways of observing different dimensions of a much larger system.

---

## Why Field Notes?

These Field Notes are simply an ongoing collection of observations, reflections, frameworks, and first-principles thinking around:

- organizations
- systems
- strategy
- adaptation
- incentives
- leadership
- and human behavior

All explored through the lens of trying to better understand how complex systems evolve, survive, fail, and endure over time.

Always somewhere at the intersection between:

- academic theory
- practice
- and real-world complexity

In many ways, these notes are less about finding certainty, and more about:

**building better lenses for navigating complexity, making better decisions, and understanding the systems that increasingly shape the world around us.**

---

## Download Resources

[Field Note 001 — Full Essay \(PDF\)](#)

Long-form archival version of this essay.

[Organizational Alignment Model](#)

A simplified visual framework exploring the relationship between external reality, strategy, capabilities, and organizational alignment.

[Field Sheet 001 — The Organizational Alignment Model](#)

A one-page operational synthesis of the core principles, dynamics, and systems explored throughout this Field Note.

---

# Selected References & Influences

Selected influences behind many of the ideas explored throughout these notes include:

- **Michael Porter**
- **Igor Ansoff**
- **Clayton Christensen**
- **W. Chan Kim & Renée Mauborgne**
- **Richard Rumelt**
- **Henry Mintzberg**
- **Peter Senge**
- **Edgar Schein**
- **Daniel Kahneman**
- **Richard Thaler**
- **Johnson, Scholes & Whittington — Exploring Strategy**

along with broader work in:

- systems thinking
- organizational behavior
- complexity science
- evolutionary theory
- and behavioral psychology