

Chaordic Drift Diagnostic

Spotting Misalignment Before It Becomes Habit

How to use this:

Read each statement and answer Yes / Sometimes / No.

- Any "Yes" is a red flag
 - More than two "Sometimes" = drift beginning
 - One "Yes" + several "Sometimes" = intervene now
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1. Purpose Drift

(The top of the system is weakening)

- People struggle to explain *why* this work matters.
- Purpose is referenced less often than deadlines or urgency.
- Decisions are justified by convenience rather than intent.
- Leaders assume alignment instead of checking it.

Interpretation:

When purpose fades, control rushes in to fill the void.

2. Outcome Drift

(Clarity is eroding into ambiguity)

- Teams ask for clarification *after* work has begun.
- "We'll know it when we see it" is used unironically.
- Outcomes change without being formally acknowledged.

- Success criteria exist only in leaders' heads.

Interpretation:

Vague outcomes force teams to guess—and guessing creates anxiety, rework, and politics.

3. Decision Drift

(Authority is creeping upward)

- Decisions that used to be local now require approval.
- Leaders are “looped in” by default.
- People delay action to avoid being wrong.
- Escalation is safer than ownership.

Interpretation:

When decisions drift upward, autonomy dies quietly.

4. System Drift

(Support structures are becoming obstacles)

- Teams work around processes instead of through them.
- Tools or workflows exist “because we built them.”
- Managers spend more time tracking than enabling.
- Feedback loops exist but aren't used.

Interpretation:

If systems don't reduce effort, they increase friction—and friction breeds control.

5. Practice Drift

(Emergence is being frozen or ignored)

- "Best practices" are treated as rules.
- Experimentation is quietly discouraged.
- People hide learning to avoid scrutiny.
- Variation is labeled inconsistency instead of intelligence.

Interpretation:

When practice stops evolving, outcomes eventually degrade—even if things look fine.

6. Leadership Drift

(The most dangerous form)

- Leaders intervene faster than they clarify.
- Leaders solve problems the system could handle.
- Leaders override decisions without explanation.
- Leaders feel busier—but less impactful.

Interpretation:

When leaders drift, the system follows—always.

Immediate Corrective Actions (Do These First)

If drift is detected, do not add rules, meetings, or approvals.

Instead:

1. Re-clarify outcomes publicly
 2. Re-state constraints explicitly
 3. Push one decision back down
 4. Remove one unnecessary approval
 5. Ask one uncomfortable feedback question—and listen
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The One Question That Catches Everything

Ask this—out loud, regularly:

“Where am I compensating for a lack of clarity with control?”

If you can’t answer honestly, that’s your signal.

Final Reminder (Put This in Bold Somewhere)

Chaordic systems don’t fail loudly.

They drift quietly—until they suddenly don’t work at all.