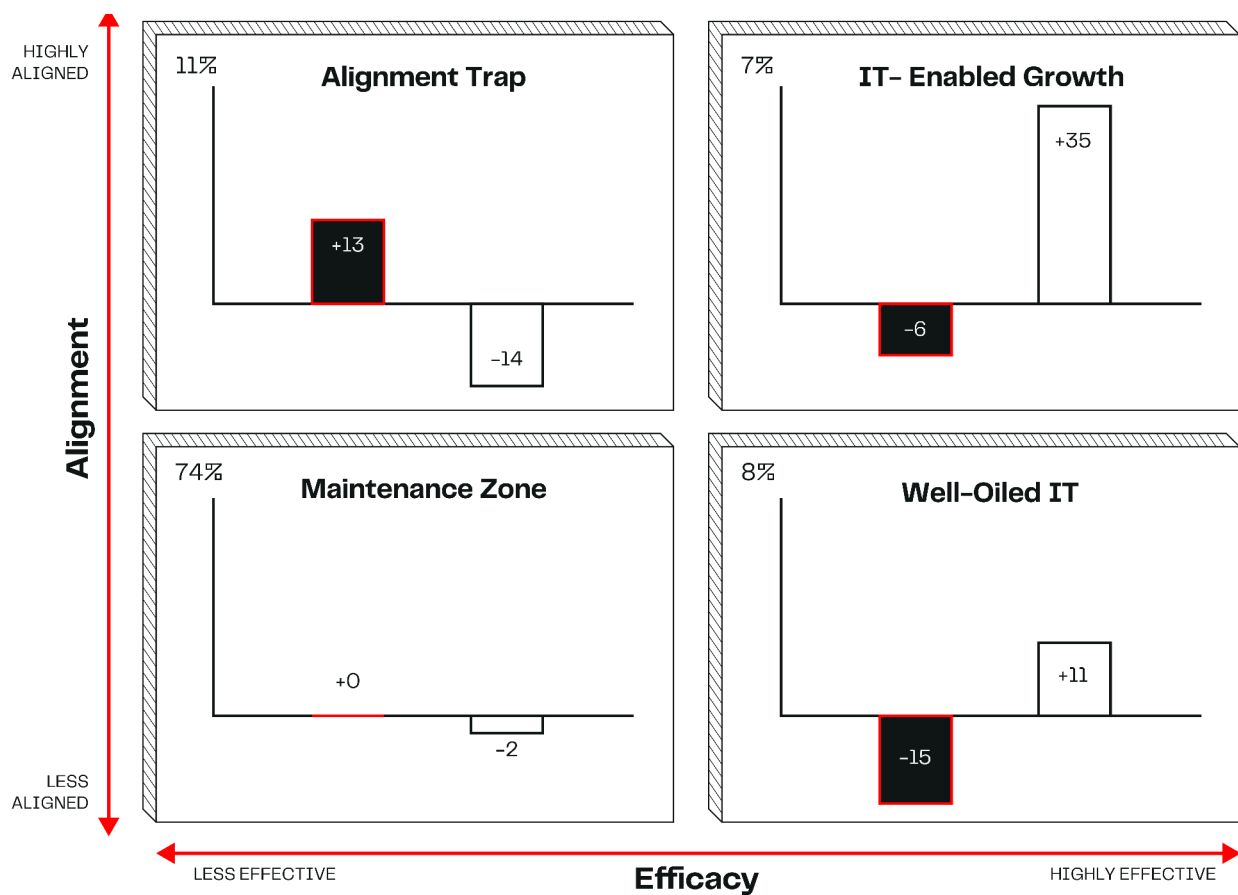# RISE8

Avoid the Alignment Trap

An Exercise in Risk Reduction

When large organizations decide to "go agile," their first instinct is often to focus on alignment. But research shows that pursuing alignment too early can actually increase risk, drive up IT spend, and stall growth. This is known as the Alignment Trap.

From "Avoiding the Alignment Trap in IT" by David Shpilberg, Steve Berez, Rudy Puryear and Sachin Shah

Legend:
- **%** Percentage of Respondents
- (red box) IT Spending
- (black-outlined box) 3-Year Sales Compound Annual Growth Rate

RISE8

The Model: Alignment vs. Efficacy

["Avoiding the Alignment Trap in IT"](#) by David Shpilberg, Steve Berez, Rudy Puryear and Sachin Shah presents a 2x2 model (see previous page).

- Y-axis: Alignment
- X-axis: Efficacy

This creates four distinct organizational states:

1. Maintenance Zone

- 74% of organizations fall here
- IT spend roughly flat
- −2% growth rate

Most organizations are stuck maintaining legacy systems without the ability to reliably deliver value.

---

2. Well-Oiled IT

- 8% of organizations fall here
- −15% less IT spend than average
- +11% growth rate

These organizations focus first on their ability to deliver software effectively. Even without heavy alignment structures, they outperform the majority of the market.

---

3. Alignment Trap

- 11% of organizations fall here
- +13% higher IT spend than average
- −14% growth rate

Organizations here invest heavily in alignment activities before they have effective delivery teams. The result is rising costs and negative growth.

Organizations in the maintenance zone that attempted to move toward alignment first saw IT spend go up dramatically while experiencing negative growth—effectively trapping them.

RISE8

This is commonly seen with large-scale SAFe implementations, where organizations spend significant time and money on so-called alignment activities, value stream architects, and systems architects before they even have teams capable of building and delivering software.

---

4. IT-Enabled Growth

- 7% of organizations fall here

- –6% less IT spend than average

- +35% growth rate

This is the destination. Alignment amplifies results—but only after strong delivery capability is established.

The Key Enabler: Continuous Delivery

The critical focus area to make this move is continuous delivery.

Without the ability to reliably and continuously deliver working software to users, alignment efforts only increase overhead and risk.

The Bottom Line

When alignment comes before efficacy, organizations optimize planning instead of outcomes—and never create the delivery capability required to generate value.

The correct path:

1. Establish Well-Oiled IT first by focusing on efficacy

2. Then focus on alignment to achieve IT-Enabled Growth