

# The Operator's Eye

By Rahul Jindal

---

Every leadership team I talk to describes their operating cadence the same way. Crisp weekly check-ins. Focused monthly reviews. Real annual planning. Then I sit in their actual meetings.

What is actually happening: the same three fires every week, the monthly review nobody read the pre-read for, whichever item someone escalated loudest. Strategic discussion gets the smallest slice. Annual planning happens in a panic the week before the offsite.

The fix is not more meetings or fewer meetings. It is a different question: what would we have to stop doing for the cadence we describe to actually exist? Most teams have never asked it.

*“A “good operating model” comes down to whether the team can answer one question. Most teams cannot.”*

## The Operating Maturity Grid

Two axes. Intentionality on the vertical: does the team know what it is trying to do? Execution discipline on the horizontal: can it reliably make decisions, hold them, and move? Plot any leadership team on those two and four archetypes fall out.

High intentionality / Low discipline

The Philosophers

Beautiful strategy decks. Quarterly offsite revelations. The room nods. Then the operating system swallows it unchanged. Every reorg is the answer.

High intentionality / High discipline

The Machine

Knows what it is for, decides crisply, and the decision travels. If the team did not meet for a month the org would still know what to do.

Low intentionality / Low discipline

The Busy Room

Permanent firefight. Calendar is full. Outcomes are ambient. People are tired and not sure what they shipped this quarter.

Low intentionality / High discipline

The Doers

Brilliant execution on the wrong thing. Ship dates met every quarter. Five years in, the company has built a spectacular cathedral facing the wrong direction.

These are warmer names than what most operating-model consultants use. They are also more diagnostic. Most leadership teams I sit with are in three of the four quadrants simultaneously, depending on the function, which is itself the diagnostic.

## Six dimensions

The four archetypes are the silhouette. The texture lives in six dimensions: the things you can actually see in a leadership meeting if you know where to look.

1. **Operating cadence.** The rhythm a team describes versus the rhythm its meetings reveal. The diagnostic question: which meeting on next week's calendar would actually produce a decision the org would feel?
2. **Measurement.** Activity dressed as outcome. Hours logged, slides built, meetings held. The diagnostic: if the dashboard moved by 10%, what would we do differently?
3. **Decision clarity.** The decision that was made in the room versus the decision people downstream heard. The diagnostic: ask three people in three functions what was decided last month. Compare answers.
4. **Strategic vs political airtime.** Strategy in the deck is bold aspiration. Strategy in the room is what the CEO seems to want, whose budget takes the hit, whose legacy initiative survives. Most teams have never separated these two.
5. **Information flow.** The single source of truth that has three versions. The pre-read nobody read. The shared doc with twelve owners. The diagnostic: where does the same number have three different values, and who decides which one is real?

6. **Role clarity.** The org chart says X. The room confirms Y. The work follows Z. Three layers, rarely aligned. The diagnostic: when a cross-functional issue lands, who picks it up without being told?

## Three traps

Why teams get stuck in the wrong quadrant.

**The cadence trap.** Confusing rhythm with progress. Weekly meetings run; nothing actually moves. The team feels productive because the calendar is full. The diagnostic gives it away: cancel three meetings for a month and ask what you missed. If the honest answer is "nothing," the cadence was a trap.

**The metric trap.** Measuring the activity that produced the outcome instead of the outcome. Pipeline coverage instead of revenue. Slides produced instead of decisions made. Hours billed instead of client outcomes. The metric trap is hard to see from inside because the metric is moving; it just is not the metric that matters.

**The reorg trap.** The structural answer to a behavioral problem. Re-drawing the org chart instead of changing the conversation. The reorg promises clarity, delivers a six-month confusion tax, and leaves the original problem intact for the next leadership team to misdiagnose the same way.

## A self-diagnostic

Five questions to ask your own leadership team this week. Each one points at one of the dimensions above.

1. If we did not meet for a month, would the organization still know what to do?
2. Pick the dashboard the CFO actually opens. What single number does the team trust? Why?
3. What was the most important decision made last month? Ask three people in three different functions. Are the answers the same?
4. Which standing meeting could be cancelled tomorrow without anyone outside the room noticing?

5. When a cross-functional issue lands in the team's lap, who picks it up without being told? If the answer is "the CEO," the operating model is a single point of failure.

None of these questions require the OMI assessment. They just require honesty. A leadership team that sits with these for forty-five minutes will learn more about its operating maturity than most consulting engagements deliver in a quarter.

## **Close**

The question I ask every leadership team I work with: if you did not meet for a month, would the org still know what to do?

The teams in the Machine quadrant say yes without hesitation. The teams in the Busy Room realize they do not know. Neither answer is a problem on its own. Not knowing which quadrant you are in is.