The alignment

Athlete × Arena → Alignment. When you and your arena fit, your strengths produce results. When the two pull apart, the same strengths cause friction.

CASE

General Stanley McChrystal in Iraq

From October 2003, McChrystal commanded the special operations task force fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq.[3] He has said that in 2004 the task force was losing.[2] Its raids were precise, and they did not slow the insurgency.[1]

2004 · MISALIGNED

18 raids in August 2004, across all of Iraq[1]

- Thorough planning led to delays.
- Information passed up the chain and waited for a decision.
- Careful analysis slowed every decision.

→ **He changed himself and the task force.**

2006 · ALIGNED

300 raids a month by August 2006, about ten a night[1]

- Teams adjusted fast, and speed became the advantage.
- Information was shared across the whole force.[2]
- People close to the problem made the decisions.[1]

Change takes both

1. Change yourself

He stopped making each decision himself. He set the conditions, and he trusted people far from headquarters to decide.[1,2]

2. Change the environment

A daily video brief was open to thousands of people, in up to 72 places.[3] Teams worked on one open floor, and liaison officers sat in partner agencies.[2]

The book credits both changes, made together.

The effort trap

Friction → More effort → Stronger habits → More friction

When the fit is poor, more effort pushes harder on your strongest habits, and the friction grows. Effort does not fix a mismatch.

> **You can cover a mismatch for a long time. The longer you do, the harder the habit is to change.**

Check your own fit

1

Where are you working hardest for the smallest result?

A lot of effort for little result points to a mismatch.

2

Which of your strengths seem to be causing problems?

A strength that used to work and now causes trouble means the conditions have changed.

3

Who does well here with a different approach?

If others do well another way, their fit may be better. Their ability may be the same as yours.

The four arenas

	LOW STABILITY	HIGH STABILITY
HIGH THREAT	Chaotic	Crucible
LOW THREAT	Clouded	Cultivated

Each arena rewards different traits. Whether a leader does well depends on the fit.

A mismatch describes how you and your conditions interact. **It says nothing about your worth.** McChrystal's results in 2004 showed which conditions he was up against.

P×E supports reflection and development. It is not a validated hiring, promotion, or performance-prediction tool.

From *Right Leader, Wrong Arena* by Damon Wells, 2026. amazon.com/dp/B0GFWSR6B8

1. Stanley McChrystal, interview, "Generation Kill," *Foreign Affairs*, 11 February 2013. foreignaffairs.com
2. Stanley McChrystal, Tantum Collins, David Silverman and Chris Fussell, *Team of Teams*, 2015.
3. Liam Collins, "Rapid and Radical Adaptation in Counterinsurgency: Task Force 714 in Iraq," Modern War Institute, 28 September 2021. mwi.westpoint.edu

Seeing a lot of effort and little result? Talk it through on a 30-minute call. Book a call calendly.com/summaryleadership/30min