



NCNM Alignment Model 2011–2016

ii. The NCNM Alignment Model

In 2008, the NCNM Board of Directors embarked on a journey to clarify and align NCNM’s purpose, vision, mission and values with the intent to create a “source” document against which all official documents, decisions and actions would be made and measured. The reasoning was to ensure consistency, congruency, clarity, and effective communication, decision-making and problem-solving.

The chosen framework is based on the work of Gregory Bateson, a cultural anthropologist, social scientist and linguist (among a wide variety of other “-ists”). His well-known books include: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* and *Mind and Nature*. Robert Dilts, a leader in the field of neuro-linguistic programming, used Bateson’s research and created a visual model, which we have adapted to fit NCNM’s specific situation. Bateson’s basic theory is that we operate simultaneously from multiple levels and we can speak from any one of the levels in any situation. Each level involves a different quality of “neurology,” and has varying degrees of influence over all other levels.

The reason this is important is that where we focus our energy and efforts may or may not be the most efficacious. By understanding consciously the level at which we are operating, we can often move to a higher or deeper level and get more powerful results for the same or a lesser amount of effort.

The higher we go in the alignment model, the more it impacts the lower levels, for good or for worse. It turns out that any problem that manifests at the lower levels of environment and behavior can be directly traced to a policy or belief at the top.

In an organization such as NCNM, we all play important roles, and we play naturally at different levels of the model. The board “holds space” for NCNM’s attainment of its vision and goals by focusing on the non-visible realms of the Product of our Product (what our “clients” get when they “buy” NCNM), and on our purpose, vision, and values. The president holds the spot between the board and the place where the mission is carried out by committees, councils and operational teams, and individuals. He has the responsibility to align and guide all decisions and actions in alignment with the “product of our product,” purpose, vision and values. Committees, councils and operational teams play in the visible levels of capability/strategies, behavior/tactics, and environment/operations. These groups examine the possible causes of the manifested “problem” by asking questions based on the model.

Each level in this model carries a question:

Environment/Operations: Where, when, with whom?

Behavior/Tactics: What? e.g., What are we doing in that environment?

NOTE: These two levels are observable; they are also less stable, easily affected by any perturbation in the environment. Focusing change efforts at these lower levels will create quick, superficial and short-term change. If this is the intent, that works. However, long-term, deep and sustainable change must start from the top of the model.

Capabilities/Strategies: How?

Beliefs/Values: Why?

Identity/Vision: Who are we?

Purpose: Why are we here?

Product of our Product: What do our “clients” get when they “buy” us?

Being aware of the questions at each level allows us to ask the most appropriate question to solve an issue.

An important point can be made here: Einstein once said that in order to solve a problem, you have to use a higher level of thinking than that which caused the problem; if there is any issue, any problem, then we must at least use the next higher level to solve it. For instance, if there is an issue at the foundational/environmental level, we must at least go to the tactical/behavioral level to solve it. If there is an issue at the behavioral level, we must at least go to the capabilities level.

As every issue manifested at the environmental and behavioral levels can be traced directly back to the “top” of the organization via unintended consequences of policies, practices or beliefs, it is more efficacious, however, to go straight to the “top” of the model and remember:

- The Product of our Product: At NCNM this is “**HealThy Self**” – what our “clients” get when they “buy” a product/service from NCNM.
- Our purpose: “**To promote and exemplify health, sustainable living and self-healing through education, research and service.**”
- Our vision: **NCNM is the known leader in natural medicine education** (as evidenced by our key progress indicators and annual business plan).
- Our values: **respect, integrity, creativity/innovation, commitment, excellence.**

Using this dynamic model, with every decision or action we can ask, “To what degree does this (decision/action) achieve, correlate and align with (the top of our model)?”

A clear advantage of using this model is that regardless of our role in the NCNM community, we can each take responsibility to solve issues at the appropriate level in the model. It is a template allowing us to engage intentionally and consciously as we progress on a daily basis toward our purpose, our vision and our HealThy Selves.