Team Pulse by CoastZone — The Deep Dive

Week 28, 2026 (Monday 6 July 2026)

Teams, leadership and behavior in early July 2026: clarity is the week's currency

Companion read to the podcast. Written for consultants working in a Danish/Nordic context. Every claim links to its source so you can dig in.

The big picture

The new July–August issue of Harvard Business Review has landed, and it is unusually practical: a cover story on **false alignment** in leadership teams (featuring Danish jewelry group Pandora as a case), field research on why **decision rights** go wrong in practice, and an evidence review that dismantles the punishment reflex when someone **breaks the rules**. The thread running through all three: what looks like a people problem is usually a *clarity* problem — about agreement, about roles, about what the rules are actually for.

And because it is week 28 — the heart of Denmark's collective summer holiday — we close with the recovery science of vacations: why the benefit peaks around day eight, why it evaporates within a week of returning if you land badly, and what a leader can do about both. (Honesty note: that fourth theme is well-established research with a seasonal hook, not breaking news. The three HBR pieces are genuinely new this month.)

Theme 1 — The false alignment trap: "We're aligned" usually means "we're not in each other's way"

Most organizational change efforts fail. The fresh contribution in *The False Alignment Trap* (HBR cover story, July–August 2026, published July 1) by BCG's Julia Dhar, Kristy Ellmer and Philip Jameson is a precise diagnosis of *where* the failure starts: at the top, before execution ever begins.

What's moving. Every transformation, they argue, needs truly shared answers to three questions: *Why* are we changing? *What* are we changing (and not changing)? And *how* will the change happen? Most leadership teams believe they agree on these — and don't. As the authors put it in a line worth taping to the wall: "When company leaders say, 'We are aligned,' what they usually mean is, 'We are not in one another's way.'"

The evidence. False alignment arises from vague discussions, avoidance of disagreement, and pressure to move too quickly — and it produces paralysis, wasted activity, misdirected progress or watered-down compromises. The alternative is what the authors call **true agreement**: detailed, explicit compacts that leaders can hold one another accountable to. The article draws on behavioral science and the authors' change research (their 2026 book *How Change Really Works*, which we flagged briefly in Week 25 — this is the deep version).

A concrete case. The cover story is built around a case from **Pandora** — the Danish jewelry group — showing what the work of converting surface alignment into true agreement looks like inside a real transformation.

The Danish angle. Beyond the pleasure of seeing a Danish company as an HBR cover case: Danish consensus culture is a double-edged sword here. Low power distance makes it easy to *say* we agree; conflict-shyness in the leadership team ("vi er jo enige om retningen") is precisely the vague-discussion mechanism the authors warn about. False harmony is false alignment in its Sunday clothes.

What to do Monday. Run the simplest possible test: have each member of the leadership team write down the why/what/how of the current change *separately*, then compare. The distance between the answers is your real starting point — and far cheaper to discover now than mid-rollout.

Theme 2 — Decision rights: RACI doesn't fail, the way we use it does

Frameworks for decision rights (RACI and its cousins) are among the most-deployed and most-cursed tools in organizational life. New field research explains the gap.

What's moving. In *What Companies Get Wrong About Decision Rights* (HBR, July–August 2026), Lindy Greer (Michigan Ross), Jennifer Jordan (IMD) and Maxim Sytch (Michigan) draw on their research and their work with **more than 100 companies** (Michigan Ross announcement).

The evidence. Four recurring mistakes: (1) setting decision roles **before clarifying the goal** of the decision; (2) treating decision rights as a **static list created by a single senior leader**; (3) **misunderstanding what each role actually means** in behavioral terms; and (4) letting **hierarchy override** the assigned roles when push comes to shove. Their prescription: co-create roles with the people involved in or affected by the decisions, define clear behaviors for each role, revisit assignments regularly, and keep talking about them. Used that way, the tools reduce conflict, improve collaboration, and increase both the quality and the speed of decisions.

A concrete case. The authors' material is the 100+ companies themselves — the pattern of the same four failure modes recurring across industries is the finding.

The Danish angle. Flat Danish organizations often pride themselves on informality — which is exactly where unclear decision rights hide. When nobody says out loud who decides, the org chart decides anyway (mistake #4), just invisibly. Trust-based leadership, as Væksthus for Ledelse frames it, is not the absence of structure; it *requires* clear frames to function. (We covered the individual psychology of delegation in the June 28 deep dive — this is the team-level architecture on top.)

What to do Monday. Pick one recurring decision that generates friction. Have the team co-create the roles for it — who is consulted, who decides, what each role looks like in behavior — and put a date in the calendar to revisit the assignment. The revisit is the part everyone skips.

Theme 3 — Rule breaking: curiosity before judgment

When a rule gets broken, the leader's instinct is speed: punish and move on. The evidence says that instinct is expensive.

What's moving. Michael J. Gill (University of Oxford), in *How the Best Leaders Respond to Rule Breaking* (HBR, July–August 2026), synthesizes **more than 250 studies** of workplace rule breaking. There is also a companion HBR IdeaCast episode (June 2026).

The evidence. People break rules for a wide range of reasons — personal gain, yes, but also pressure from their environment and, strikingly often, a **desire to help others**. Many violations that look harmful on the surface are driven by positive intent or by flawed policies. Patterns of repeated misconduct usually signal deeper problems with incentives or expectations, not defective character. Leaders who respond with **curiosity instead of assumptions** are far better positioned to fix root causes.

A concrete case. The 250-study synthesis is itself the case: across that literature, the "punish the offender and move on" response repeatedly misses what the rule break was actually telling the organization.

The Danish angle. Danish workplaces run to an unusual degree on trust and judgment (dømmekraft) rather than rulebooks. That makes the punishment reflex doubly costly here: it teaches people to hide workarounds instead of explaining them — and a hidden workaround is organizational intelligence you no longer receive. This connects directly to the psychological-safety evidence we covered in Week 25: sanction the messenger and the messages stop.

What to do Monday. Institute a first-question rule: when a rule is broken, ask *"what does this tell us about the system?"* before asking *"who is to blame?"* And look for patterns across incidents rather than adjudicating single cases — the pattern is where the incentive problem lives.

Theme 4 — Vacation science: the benefit peaks on day eight and fades within a week — unless you design the landing

Denmark is on collective holiday, so let's take the research to the beach. (Honesty note again: this is established recovery science with a seasonal hook — the freshest item below is a 2025 review.)

What's moving. Nothing this month — July is. With most Danish workplaces running skeleton crews, the leader's contribution to team performance right now is protecting recovery.

The evidence. The classic meta-analysis by de Bloom and colleagues (Journal of Occupational Health, 2009, with Sabine Sonnentag among the authors) found that vacations produce real improvements in health and well-being — but that the effects typically **fade out within the first week back at work**. Follow-up research found well-being peaks around day eight of a holiday (de Bloom et al., Journal of Happiness Studies), and a newer meta-analysis in European Psychologist (2023) — pointedly titled *We Continue to Recover Through Vacation!* — confirms both the recovery effect and its fade-out. The active ingredient is **psychological detachment** — mentally letting go of work, not just physically leaving it — the mechanism at the heart of Sonnentag's stressor-detachment model (Journal of Organizational Behavior, 2015). A 2025 review in Cureus (Giridharan & Pandiyan, July 2025) adds three practical points: **frequent shorter vacations sustain energy better than one long annual break**; complete disconnection from work communication is crucial for detachment; and benefits erode faster when people return to a high-stress environment.

A concrete case. The fade-out finding is the case: the same employees who measurably improved on holiday were back at pre-vacation strain levels within about a week — not because the holiday failed, but because the re-entry was unmanaged.

The Danish angle. Væksthus for Ledelse / Lederweb calls the summer holiday the longest recovery period of the year and treats protecting it as a *leadership task* — plan the shutdown, cover the roles, and don't let "lige en hurtig mail" puncture anyone's detachment. Their companion piece *Ferien blev ingen energi-indsprøjtning* describes exactly the fade-out pattern from the Danish trenches, and *Planlæg nu og få en arbejdsfri sommerferie* gives the practical checklist. Denmark's collective July shutdown is actually an advantage here: when everyone is away at once, nobody's detachment is punctured by the colleagues who stayed.

What to do Monday. Make a team vacation compact: who covers what, no messages to people on holiday, and — the step everyone skips — plan a **soft-landing week** for each returner (no back-to-back meetings on day one, a real handover back). The first week home is where the vacation's value is either banked or burned.

Books & tools to watch

- **Dhar, Ellmer & Jameson — *How Change Really Works*** (2026): the book behind this month's cover story; the "false alignment" tip sheet is a free two-minute version for client conversations.
- **HBR IdeaCast — The Right Way to Manage Rule Breakers** (June 2026): Gill's argument in listenable form for the commute back from the summerhouse.
- **The July–August 2026 issue of HBR** as a whole is a strong one for team consultants — the three pieces above all sit in the same issue.
- **Lederweb's summer series** — shutdown checklist and planning guide — client-ready Danish material for July and August.

The three things to remember

1. **Test agreement; don't assume it.** "We're aligned" often means "we're not in each other's way." Have leaders write down the why/what/how separately and compare — the distance is the work.
2. **Clarity is a team sport.** Decision roles co-created, translated into behaviors, and revisited on a schedule — otherwise hierarchy silently wins every time.
3. **Rule breaks and vacations point at the same truth: fix the system, not the person.** Meet violations with curiosity about causes — and design the holiday landing instead of hoping about it.

When did your leadership team last write down its agreement — separately? And who is protecting your team's detachment this July?

Sources & dig deeper

International research & media - Harvard Business Review, July–August 2026 — Dhar, Ellmer & Jameson, The False Alignment Trap (cover story; see also The Leader's Agenda commentary); Greer, Jordan & Sytch, What Companies Get Wrong About Decision Rights (Michigan Ross note); Gill, How the Best Leaders Respond to Rule Breaking (IdeaCast episode) - de Bloom, Kompier, Geurts, de Weerth, Taris & Sonnentag — Do We Recover from Vacation? (Journal of Occupational Health, 2009) - de Bloom et al. — Vacation (after-)effects on employee health and well-being (Journal of Happiness Studies) - We Continue to Recover Through Vacation! Meta-Analysis of Vacation Effects on Well-Being and Its Fade-Out (European Psychologist, 2023) - Sonnentag & Fritz — The stressor-detachment model as an integrative framework (Journal of Organizational Behavior, 2015) - Giridharan & Pandiyan — Maximizing Recovery: The Superiority of Frequent Vacations for Well-Being and Performance (Cureus, July 2025)

Danish sources & voices - Væksthus for Ledelse / Lederweb — Luk ned i tide — og red ferien; Planlæg nu og få en arbejdsfri sommerferie; Ferien blev ingen energi-indsprøjtning; Tillidsbaseret ledelse i praksis - Pandora (Danish case company) — see the HBR cover story