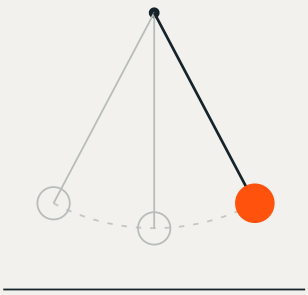
The Work of Staying in *Motion*



What enables some leaders to stay in motion while others stall?

A personal reflection.

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Introduction

This book is a personal reflection. Between the two of us, we have spent decades working alongside leaders who were trying to get something moving in an organisation, some of them more successful at it than others. This is where we share what we learned from working with them.

The question behind this book is practical: **what enables some leaders to stay in motion while others stall, with comparable resources and talent?**

We reflected on which qualities we saw make the difference, and we came to nine. We almost never met a leader who had all of them. Most were good at a number of them and not at the rest. What we have done is distil the nine, and for each of them select, from our own experience, one tool that serves it.

We use the word leader in its broadest sense, well beyond the narrower meaning of someone who holds a formal leadership role. Whoever is trying to get something moving in an organisation, and keep it moving, is a leader in these pages, whatever their title.

How this book is organised

The nine fall into three groups: reading the environment, positioning as the leader, and working with what drives people. The grouping is a way of finding your way around them, not an order to work through.

PART I: READING THE ENVIRONMENT

Leaders need to perceive what is happening before they can respond to it. Reading the environment means keeping three readings in balance: the individual, the team, and the culture they both sit inside. Each has a tool that serves it:

- **Appreciate**: reading individual behaviour *(Tool: DISC)*
- **Calibrate**: reading team dynamics *(Tool: Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions)*
- **Excavate**: reading the organisational culture *(Tool: Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's cultural model)*

PART II: POSITIONING AS THE LEADER

Reading a situation accurately is where it starts. Leaders have to turn perception into credible action, and the action has to be visible:

- **Model**: leading through visible example *(Tool: Frei's Trust Triangle)*

- **Align**: creating shared direction *(Tool: the Apendoctrine, a practitioner synthesis of primate leadership research after de Waal and van Vugt)*
- **Propel**: moving people toward action *(Tool: framing and storytelling, after Tversky, Kahneman and Heath)*

PART III: WORKING WITH WHAT DRIVES PEOPLE

The first two quality groups create clarity and credibility, and both depend on the leader continuing to supply them. These three do not. They work toward something that sustains itself, where the leader's intervention is needed less each time:

- **Fuel**: sustaining energy *(Tool: Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory)*
- **Activate**: designing for how people decide *(Tool: the System 1 and System 2 framework, after Stanovich, West and Kahneman)*
- **Nurture**: making the new way a habit *(Tool: Duhigg's Habit Loop)*

The tools are not the point; the qualities they develop are. But a quality without a way of developing it stays abstract, so each chapter pairs the two.

Each of the nine chapters that follow describes one quality as we have experienced it: where we saw it help a leader be effective, what it cost where it was missing, and the tool we chose for it, one we know well and have found effective, and good to work with. They can be read in any order.

I

Reading the environment

Leaders need to perceive what is happening before they can respond to it. Reading the environment means keeping three readings in balance: the individual, the team, and the culture they both sit inside.

01

Appreciate

reading individual behaviour

Differences between people are valuable input. A leader who can read them gives meaning to what is visible and what is not, instead of reading everything through their own filter.

Two desks

The example the two of us keep quoting to each other is a finance organisation where a change had to pass through two desks. Behind one sat a CFO who avoided conflict. Behind the other sat the head of financial control, who owned the annual accounts process and ducked every time it came up. How do you read the behaviour of each of them, as a person rather than as a role? And what does that mean for us, as the leader who wants to get a change through both desks? The wrong turn here is to slide from the person to the role; what we are reading is people who are each, in their own way, an active or a passive player in the field. There was a third, the person responsible for master data, a passive player in our case, with traits we had to see through before we knew how to hold a conversation with him, what weight to give what he brought us, and what to do with it.

We meet that pattern in every transformation we work in: what looks like resistance is, more often than not, a difference in perception, pace or priority.

Meetings overrun and issues stay open, and however much energy leaders put into bringing people together, agreement does not come.

Most of this friction comes from something plain: people perceive situations differently, process information at varying speeds, and prioritise separate elements of the same decision. Under pressure, these differences grow.

Shorter and shorter timelines make it worse. As organisations absorb successive waves of change, the time available to read people accurately shrinks. Interactions move to asynchronous channels. The informal observation that once happened naturally, the meeting before the meeting, the walk to the coffee machine, erodes. Leaders have less time to interpret what is driving the people around them, at the moment when misreading someone costs most.

When leaders cannot read these patterns accurately, they misattribute resistance, misdirect effort, and escalate decisions that could resolve earlier. Appreciating difference as input, which helps you read the situation and take the right decision, is what lets a leader resolve that friction early.

Where perception begins

Appreciate is reading the person in front of you: noticing what drives their response, translating across communication styles, and using difference as input, not as obstruction.

Leaders who develop this quality notice what others miss. They read where energy is directed, where trust is present or absent, where friction is structural versus situational.

Leaders who lack this awareness operate with an incomplete map. They see what people do and say, but miss why they respond as they do. The misreading compounds: a wrong diagnosis produces the wrong intervention, and decisions take longer because leaders are solving a problem that does not exist.

What we observe in practice

What we do see, and very often, is people working together who have not learnt to read each other's behaviour well enough. It looks like something everyone already does, which is why this quality is thin more often than the others. The symptoms are consistent and recognisable, and almost always attributed to something else.

The same conflicts recur across forums. A disagreement between two leaders resurfaces in steering committees, project boards, and bilateral calls. Each time, participants treat it as a new issue. The underlying pattern (one leader optimising for speed, the other protecting thoroughness) is never identified, so the tension is managed repeatedly but never resolved. The organisation pays for the same friction in every forum it touches.

Capable people are labelled as difficult. A programme director describes a finance lead as "obstructive". A CTO finds a risk officer "impossible to move". In both cases, what is being described is a difference in processing style and priority, not a performance problem. The leader who needs data before committing reads as slow to the leader who values pace. The leader who challenges directly reads as aggressive to the leader who values harmony. Without the ability to recognise these as style differences, leaders waste political capital managing people problems that are perception problems.

Leaders repeat themselves without adjusting. A senior leader delivers the same message three times, in a town hall, a leadership forum, and a written update, and finds that it landed with some audiences and missed others entirely. The message was clear. The delivery did not account for the fact that people process information through separate lenses. Those who value outcomes heard the strategic logic. Those who value relationships heard nothing about the people affected. Those who value precision found the

message too vague to act on. The leader communicates more, but alignment does not improve, because repetition is not the same as translation.

Decisions stall because they are presented in the wrong form. A proposal requiring board approval is written in the language of strategic aspiration when the audience needs financial precision. A risk escalation is delivered with analytical detail when the forum needs a clear recommendation. The content is sound; the packaging does not match the receiver.

The tool we believe helps

The most widely used tool for developing this quality is DISC, a framework that describes four primary energy patterns:

Dominance (D): results-oriented, direct, fast-paced. People with dominant D energy focus on outcomes, challenge directly, and move quickly. Under pressure, they become impatient with process and push harder for closure. They value speed and decisiveness. They resist what feels like unnecessary detail or delay.

Influence (I): energetic, optimistic, people-focused. People with dominant I energy inspire connection, build enthusiasm, and think expansively. Under pressure, they may overpromise or avoid conflict to maintain harmony. They value inclusion and relationship. They resist isolation or being excluded from decisions.

Steadiness (S): supportive, stable, consistent. People with dominant S energy stabilise teams, ensure follow-through, and protect continuity. Under pressure, they may retreat to maintain calm or resist change that threatens stability. They value predictability and reassurance. They resist abrupt shifts or loss of control.

Conscientiousness (C): analytical, precise, quality-focused. People with dominant C energy ensure accuracy, identify risks, and uphold standards. Under pressure, they may slow down to verify details or resist decisions made without sufficient analysis. They value correctness and thoroughness. They resist errors or shortcuts.

Most people show a blend of these patterns, with one or two dominant. It is a way of recognising energy patterns, so that leaders can adjust their approach.

DISC derives from the work of William Moulton Marston in the 1920s, later developed into assessment tools by several publishers. It has broad adoption in organisational practice but a mixed evidence base in academic psychology. It is used here as a perceptual tool, a way to sharpen observation, not as a psychometric measure.

How to use DISC in practice:

Start with yourself. Notice your own dominant pattern. Are you pushing for speed when the situation requires thoroughness? Building consensus when closure is needed? Demanding precision when the decision requires judgement? Self-awareness is the entry point to reading others accurately.

Observe before interpreting. When you encounter resistance, pause. Ask: what energy pattern am I seeing? Is this person protecting quality (C), seeking inclusion (I), maintaining stability (S), or driving results (D)? What looks like obstruction is often purpose-driven, and the purpose is not yet visible.

Translate, do not repeat. Speak in the language others can hear. With D energy, talk outcomes and timeframes. With C energy, provide data and logic. With I energy, connect to vision and impact. With S energy, create safety and reassurance. The same message lands differently depending on how it is framed.

Check the balance in decision forums. Too much D energy creates speed without thoroughness. Too much C energy creates analysis without closure. Too much I energy creates enthusiasm without follow-through. Too much S energy creates stability without adaptation. Effective teams balance these energies with intention.

Recognise stress amplification. Transformation intensifies whatever pattern is dominant. The D becomes more impatient. The I overpromises. The S retreats. The C slows down. Leaders who recognise these stress responses adjust their approach before friction escalates.

When it does not work

The strength of DISC and its trap are the same thing: it invites thinking in boxes. The first failure we see is a person put in a box automatically, without a further question asked. Nobody is ever one box. Most people carry several, in different priorities, and the situation decides which comes forward, so a reading that was right in the steering committee can be wrong in the corridor an hour later. The framework is by definition a simplification of a person's

psychological make-up. It reads the surface and says nothing about the cause underneath a particular behaviour. A leader who thinks, I have used the tool and I am covered, is not covered. What the tool can do is give words to something the leader was already feeling in the gut about a person, so that it can be examined instead of acted on. The reality is always more complex than the colour.

What difference tells you

The person who pushes back is showing you, without saying it, what they need before they will commit. The function that resists is revealing which priorities it protects. The meeting that will not close is showing you where translation has not yet happened. Differences between people are valuable input, and they are there for any leader willing to read them.

02

Calibrate

reading team dynamics

Did we give each other the space to have a conflict, or did we smother it?

The team we thought we were

We have been that team. On one engagement the two of us sat in a team that would have called itself a team. Did we all have the same understanding of the shared objective? Did we give each other the space to have a conflict, or did we smother it? An enormous share of the week went on the task level, the very top of the pyramid, and it took a remarkable amount of airtime to get along even there. What we tolerated, as a team, was that there were sub-teams inside it. As a collective we never reached the layer of a shared objective, let alone shared commitment or shared trust. People came and went, and the whole dynamic shifted with every personality that arrived or left.

It began with the leader. The leader did not trust the so-called team, and underneath that sat a core belief: people do not do what they say they will do. Everything downstream followed from it. The team was managed at task level and nowhere else. No shared objective was discussed; it was you take this, you take that, with the open question of whether the person handing out the tasks was the right person to be formulating them. And it ran in both directions. Someone who should not have been operating at task level chose to manage tasks. Someone who would have known far better what needed to happen, had they known where we were heading, had their wings clipped by having no say over how their own work was done.

We meet the same pattern in most leadership teams we work with: a team that looks aligned in the room fails to close decisions once it leaves. Meetings conclude with apparent agreement, yet the same issues resurface weeks later. Trade-offs that should have been resolved remain open. Commitments are recorded but not pursued with conviction. Leaders sense that something is held back: concerns that remain unspoken, objections that surface only after the room has moved on.

This pattern is frequently misread as a communication problem or a gap in meeting structure. It goes deeper: the trust between the people in the team is not calibrated for the pressure it now carries.

The quality to read team dynamics, and to build the trust that allows honest exchange under pressure, is what makes a team's decisions last.

Where trust sits in the system

Calibrate reads the dynamics between people who have to make decisions together.

The quality means creating conditions where disagreement surfaces early, not late; distinguishing between productive tension and unproductive friction; building commitment through clarity over consensus; and sustaining accountability that strengthens under pressure, not one that fragments.

Leaders who develop this quality recognise when a team is protecting comfort over truth. They notice when politeness is masking avoidance, when silence signals disagreement, and when accountability has become performative.

Leadership teams that lack this quality leave meetings believing they have agreed, only to discover weeks later that the agreement was superficial. Escalation increases because earlier decisions were never fully owned. Leaders lose still more time revisiting conclusions that should already be settled.

What we observe in practice

A team in which this quality is thin gives itself away in small things we have stopped counting. The one-to-ones after the meeting. Who holds the floor, and for how long: the sheer amount of airtime leaders spend sending, so that the room never reaches a discussion, never reaches collaboration, and never gets anywhere near the layer where a conflict or a question of trust could surface. The back-to-back meetings that make sure of it. And at the end, whether anything was discussed at all or only actions ticked off; who owns the action; whether it is clear what has to happen; and whether the owner ever said, in their own words, that they would do it. The examples are endless and we meet them everywhere.

Where trust is not calibrated for the pressure the team carries, the symptoms appear long before anyone names trust as the cause.

The corridor conversation after the meeting. The room empties. Agreement is recorded. And within the hour, two or three leaders are in the corridor, or on a call, raising the concerns they did not voice when it mattered. The decision that appeared settled begins to erode before execution starts. This pattern is common, and usually invisible to the leader who chaired the discussion.

Decisions that resurface without apparent cause. A commitment made three weeks ago returns to the agenda. Nothing has changed; it was simply never fully owned. Someone left the room unconvinced, and their silence was mistaken for consent. Over time the agenda fills with old decisions as well as new ones.

Polite disengagement in cross-functional settings. When leaders from different functions have to decide together, the quality of engagement often deteriorates under pressure. Leaders contribute within their functional remit but withdraw from the shared trade-off. Meetings get longer and settle less.

Accountability that becomes performative. Status reports are submitted. Dashboards remain green. Milestones are technically met. Yet leaders sense that the substance beneath the reporting does not match the picture. Follow-up conversations feel scripted. When accountability operates without trust beneath it, the organisation produces compliance instead of commitment, and the difference becomes visible only when pressure peaks.

Escalation as the default coordination mechanism. Issues that could resolve at working level travel upward, not because they require senior judgement but because no one at the table trusts the group enough to surface the real disagreement and work it through. Escalation becomes the way the organisation compensates for trust it has not built.

Energy draining from the team without visible cause. Leaders describe a heaviness that is difficult to locate. Performance is adequate, yet something feels depleted. What they are often experiencing is the cognitive cost of navigating a low-trust environment: the constant calculation of what is safe to say, what reaction to expect, and what consequence might follow honesty. That hidden effort uses up attention that would otherwise go toward the work itself.

The tool we believe helps

Among the frameworks available for diagnosing team trust and effectiveness, Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2002) is the one we use most frequently in practice. It provides a diagnostic lens for the symptoms described above and translates directly into what a leader can do.

The model describes five interconnected failures, each building on the one beneath it. Understanding the cascade helps leaders identify where the real breakdown is occurring, not just the surface symptoms:

Absence of Trust: the foundation. Trust in this context is not interpersonal warmth. It is the willingness to be vulnerable in front of others; to acknowledge uncertainty, admit mistakes, and ask for help without fear of consequence. When this trust is absent, team members protect themselves. They manage impressions and withhold concerns. Under pressure, this self-protection compounds. Leaders withhold reservations about decisions that carry cross-functional risk, and the room loses access to the information it needs most.

Fear of Conflict: the avoidance layer. When trust is low, teams avoid the productive disagreement that decisions require. Meetings become exercises in information-sharing, not resolution. Fear of conflict is rarely about hostility; it is about the absence of safety to disagree. This is where the corridor conversations originate: the tension that the meeting cannot contain finds expression elsewhere, informally and without resolution.

Lack of Commitment: the ambiguity that follows. When disagreement is avoided, real commitment does not form. People leave meetings without clarity on what was decided, or without confidence that the decision will stand. This is particularly damaging when decisions require integration across functions, because uncommitted decisions create rework downstream.

Avoidance of Accountability: the drift that accumulates. Without real commitment, following up on others feels uncomfortable or unfair. Standards lower gradually. Deadlines move. Deliverables arrive incomplete. This drift is often invisible until consequences materialise, by which point leaders' time has gone on addressing symptoms instead of causes.

Inattention to Results: the final disconnection. When accountability weakens, individual and functional priorities replace collective outcomes. Leaders optimise for their domain, not the shared result. The organisation performs, but below its potential, and the gap between intent and outcome widens without anyone being able to point to a single failure.

How to use Lencioni's model in practice:

Start with trust, and demonstrate it first. Trust-building in leadership teams begins when leaders show vulnerability themselves: naming uncertainty, acknowledging what they do not know, asking for input over defending positions. In organisations where this pattern is established, it tends to cascade. Teams that see their leaders engage honestly under pressure develop the same capacity.

Create conditions for productive conflict. This does not mean encouraging argument for its own sake. It means explicitly establishing that disagreement about decisions is expected and valued. Leaders in organisations that calibrate well often use structured approaches: asking each member to name one concern before moving to agreement, or requiring that at least one dissenting perspective be articulated before a decision closes.

Close decisions with specificity. End meetings with explicit statements of what was decided, who owns execution, and what the conditions for revisiting the decision would be. Ambiguous closure is where the dysfunction cycle usually begins, particularly under time pressure, when it is tempting to move on without full clarity.

Frame accountability as shared commitment. When following up on decisions, leaders in high-trust teams frame accountability as support, not scrutiny. The question moves from "why hasn't this been done?" to "what do you need to complete this?": a distinction that sustains trust without lowering the standard.

Reconnect the team to collective outcomes regularly. Under sustained pressure, functional gravity pulls leaders back toward their own domains. Periodic re-anchoring to the shared transformation outcome, as a working check on whether collective priorities are driving behaviour, prevents the drift toward inattention to results.

What changes

In the team we described at the start of this chapter, a large part of our own role, informally, was closing the gaps every week: the energy gaps, the emotional and mental ones, gluing things back together that a team with shared trust would never have let come apart. Had we done the work of becoming that team, none of it would have been needed. What changes, when a leader gives this quality serious attention, is that far less of the week goes on mental plasterwork.

Decision durability improves. Decisions made where trust is well calibrated survive execution. They are revisited less frequently, challenged less often after the fact, and implemented with greater fidelity.

Meetings produce outcomes. Discussions move from information-sharing and context-building toward resolution. Leaders find that they conclude

more decisions than they defer, and that the quality of exchange improves because concerns surface during deliberation, not after it.

03

Excavate

reading the organisational culture

What lasted, for us, was the moment we could see that two culture families sat inside one and the same organisation.

Two culture families in one organisation

The case that stays with us most is a mid-sized organisation that had decided to become more consultative in how it worked. On paper the decision was made. In practice, the part of the organisation that ran the business had the upper hand, and that part hung on its leader and on the leader's cultural values. Those values stood in tension with what the organisation said it wanted to become, and with the incumbent business inside the same group, which needed quite different cultural values to succeed. What lasted, for us, was the moment we could see that two culture families sat inside one and the same organisation. We have seen it since in other organisations of that size, and it is recognised the moment it is said aloud.

The pattern is common enough to describe in general terms. A leadership team agrees on the strategy. The business case is sound, the governance structure is clear, and the milestones are defined. Yet a year later the transformation has stalled, not from opposition but from something harder to diagnose: people followed the process without taking on its intent.

The instinct is to look for execution failures: wrong people, wrong structure, insufficient sponsorship. Sometimes that diagnosis is correct. More often, something else is operating, something that the strategy paper did not account for and the governance design did not address. The organisation has a culture of its own that shapes how work gets done, how authority is perceived, how decisions travel, and how change is absorbed or deflected. That culture was never made visible, so the transformation was designed for an organisation that exists on paper, not the one that exists in practice.

This is the gap Excavate addresses. It reads the organisational culture itself: the invisible operating system that determines whether what leaders do lands as intended or dissipates on contact.

The organisational scale

The quality means recognising which cultural logic is dominant in the organisation; understanding how that logic shapes the way decisions, authority, and change function in practice; anticipating where cultural patterns will support or resist a given intervention; and adapting leadership approach to work with the culture, not against it.

Leaders who lack this awareness design interventions for a generic organisation. They import practices that succeeded elsewhere without

recognising that elsewhere operated under different cultural assumptions. They interpret resistance as a people problem when it is a pattern problem: the organisation's cultural DNA rejecting a foreign input.

What we observe in practice

This quality is thin in most leaders, because culture is the water an organisation swims in and nobody reads their own water. We watched it in a multinational that was family-owned but corporate-run, headquartered in the DACH region and operating across Europe, on a growth and professionalisation agenda. The tension between family-owned and corporate-run was not in the org chart. It was in the language people spoke with each other, and in whether they understood each other at all. The useful question turned out to be which company culture the language was a proxy for, and what that meant for anything we wanted to do together: where, in culture, feeling, emotion and words, we would walk into a trap, and where the same things would carry us.

Leaders who have not developed this quality repeat the same mistakes and misattribute the cause every time.

Imported practices fail without obvious cause. A matrix structure that works well in one organisation creates confusion in another. An agile methodology that accelerates delivery in a task-oriented environment generates frustration in a relationship-oriented one. Performance management systems that drive accountability in hierarchical cultures erode trust in egalitarian ones. Leaders attribute these failures to implementation quality. More often, the practice was incompatible with the cultural grain it entered.

Change programmes produce compliance but not commitment. People attend the workshops, complete the assessments, and update the terminology, but the underlying way of working does not move. The organisation absorbs the initiative without being altered by it. This is frequently misread as change fatigue. In practice, it often reflects a cultural immune response: the organisation neutralising something it perceives as foreign.

Authority operates differently from what the structure suggests. The organisation chart says one thing about who decides. The culture says another. In some organisations, the most senior person in the room determines the direction regardless of formal decision rights. In others,

decisions require broad consultation before anyone will act on them. In others still, the team closest to the work expects full autonomy. Leaders who cannot read which pattern is operating spend energy pushing decisions through channels the culture does not recognise.

The same words carry different meanings. "Empowerment" in one cultural context means delegated authority with clear boundaries. In another, it means freedom to explore without constraint. In a third, it means the leader trusts you enough to ask for your input, but still decides. Leadership teams that use shared vocabulary without shared meaning create misalignment they cannot see.

Hybrid and distributed work reveals cultural assumptions that were previously invisible. Decisions that once happened through corridor proximity now require intentional design, and the design that works depends on whether the culture runs on relationships or on process. Leaders who treated the transition as mainly technological found that what they had lost was the informal cultural infrastructure that made decisions stick. The teams that adapted fastest were not those with the best tools, but those whose culture was already explicit enough to survive the shift.

The tool we believe helps

Thousands of people have typologised culture, whether of a country, a people or an organisation. The one we use is Fons Trompenaars' model of organisational culture, developed with Charles Hampden-Turner and set out in *Riding the Waves of Culture* (1993; third edition with Hampden-Turner, 2012). We chose it because we know it well, and in our experience it translates how culture works in a society into how it works inside an organisation. It is, like DISC, a simplification by definition. It gives you a handle on the culture, and that is what it is for.

The model uses two intersecting dimensions.

The first is **orientation to people versus orientation to tasks.** Some organisations organise primarily around relationships: who you know, who you trust, who has earned the right to lead. Others organise primarily around deliverables: what needs to be achieved, what expertise is required, what the data indicates. Both orientations have merit, and they create different environments for how decisions are made, how conflict is handled, and how change is received.

The second is **egalitarian versus hierarchical distribution of authority.** Some organisations operate on the assumption that people are essentially equal and that decision-making power should be distributed. Others operate on the assumption that authority flows from position, experience, or seniority, and that clear hierarchy enables effective coordination. Both carry advantages, and they produce different expectations about who speaks first, who decides, and what legitimacy looks like.

These two dimensions create four distinct cultural types:

The Family (hierarchical, person-oriented). Authority concentrates in experienced leaders who are expected to care for their people. Relationships are close, loyalty matters, and the leader's word carries weight that extends beyond formal authority. Decisions flow through personal trust. Change lands when the respected leader endorses it. Transformation that bypasses the relational structure, however well designed on paper, tends to stall.

The Eiffel Tower (hierarchical, task-oriented). Structure defines the organisation. Roles are clearly prescribed, processes are documented, and authority follows the hierarchy. People obey the role, not the person. Coordination happens through systems, not relationships. Change in these cultures requires adjusting the formal structure, the procedures, reporting lines and role definitions, before behaviour will follow.

The Guided Missile (egalitarian, task-oriented). The organisation orients around objectives and results. Teams form around tasks, expertise determines influence, and outcomes matter more than position. People are expected to do whatever it takes to achieve the goal. These cultures absorb change readily when it connects to clear objectives, but resist initiatives that feel process-heavy or relationally driven.

The Incubator (egalitarian, person-oriented). The organisation exists to enable individual creativity and fulfilment. Structure is minimal, hierarchy is almost absent, and people are given space to explore. Innovation emerges from individual energy, not collective direction. These cultures resist formalisation and control, even when scale demands it.

Their research found that no single culture type correlates with better performance. The highest-performing organisations integrate elements of all four, drawing on the Incubator's drive toward change, the Family's depth of commitment, the Eiffel Tower's structural clarity, and the Guided Missile's focus on achievement.

When it does not work

The same simplification that makes the model usable is where it fails. Four boxes cannot hold an organisation any more than four colours hold a person, and a leader who classifies the organisation and stops there has a label, not a reading. The model earns its place only when it is used to name a tension people are already feeling and cannot yet put words to, as in the two cases in this chapter.

The typology is used here as a diagnostic lens for reading organisational patterns, not as a fixed classification. Most organisations carry a blend: a dominant culture shaped by their history, industry, national context, and founding leadership, with subdominant cultures operating in specific functions or regions. The analytical function may operate as a Guided Missile within a broader Family culture. The innovation team may function as an Incubator within an Eiffel Tower organisation. These internal variations explain why the same initiative succeeds in one part of the business and struggles in another.

What changes

Interventions match the organisation that exists, not the one on paper. In a Family culture, leaders invest in relational endorsement before formal rollout; in an Eiffel Tower culture, they redesign structures and processes before expecting behaviour to change; in a Guided Missile culture, they connect change to measurable objectives; in an Incubator culture, they create space instead of imposing direction. The intervention may be similar in substance; the approach to landing it differs.

Resistance becomes interpretable. Leaders stop attributing resistance to difficult individuals or organisational inertia and begin reading it as cultural feedback. The organisation is not refusing change. It is telling you something about how change needs to arrive.

Behaviour over theory

Every organisation has a cultural logic. It was not designed; it evolved from founding choices, industry pressures, national context, leadership patterns, and accumulated habit. Leaders who cannot see it may be effective despite the culture, but they are unlikely to be effective through it.

II

Positioning as the leader

Reading a situation accurately is where it starts. Leaders have to turn perception into credible action: in how they carry themselves, in how they bring people behind one direction, and in how they move people from understanding to action.

04

Model

leading through visible example

The moment he shook your hand, the moment he walked into the room, the moment he stepped on stage: trust.

Two handshakes

In one organisation we both worked in, two people held leading roles at the same time. The first was responsible for marketing. The moment he shook your hand, the moment he walked into the room, the moment he stepped on stage: trust. The way he used words, the way he made eye contact. You trusted him as a person, and only afterwards did you think, what is he actually saying? By then it was much less relevant.

In the same organisation we had the chairman of the executive board. The moment he shook your hand, you thought, I am not sure about this. When he came into the room, everyone walked on tiptoe. When he stood on the podium, you thought, no idea what he has to tell us.

One organisation, two people who both led. The one we trusted completely, we did not listen to very closely. The one we did not trust, we listened to very carefully. The chairman needed the role of chairman to get speaking time at all. The head of marketing got his without any role, and people hung on his every word. And notice that we have not touched a single piece of content. Nothing here says anything about what either of them knew. It is purely and only the person.

When ambiguity increases and familiar structures no longer give the clarity they once did, leaders become the reference point. People stop looking to governance documents and strategy decks for direction. They look to leaders.

Less to what they say than to how they show up: whether they admit uncertainty, face difficulty, and treat people as partners. Every interaction is noticed. And where ambiguity lasts, those observations accumulate into a verdict: this person is worth following, or is not.

In slower environments, leaders could build credibility through results over time. Under sustained pressure, credibility is assessed continuously and revised quickly. Leaders who cannot model the behaviour they ask of others, who say one thing and do something different, create confusion that multiplies through the organisation. As decisions come faster, people see what a leader does almost as soon as it is decided. There is less time to recover from inconsistency, and less tolerance for it.

The quality to model leadership visibly and credibly under ambiguity has little to do with charisma or performance. It centres on alignment between

intent, behaviour, and impact, perceived in real time by the people whose commitment the transformation depends on.

Leaders who lack this quality produce a credibility gap. The strategy may be sound and the governance well designed, yet people hesitate. They wait for certainty that will not arrive, or they comply without committing, because the leader asking for change has not demonstrated what change looks like in practice.

What we observe in practice

Trust in the leader is something different from the trust Calibrate reads. Calibrate asks whether a team trusts each other: whether it has the conditions to argue, commit and hold one another to account. Model asks a narrower and more personal question. Do we trust *you*? We watch how a leader behaves, we feel whether it is sincere, and on that basis we decide whether we are still willing to listen to what they actually have to say. The two handshakes above are that question answered twice, in opposite directions, before a word of content was spoken.

People wait instead of acting. Despite clear direction and delegated authority, teams defer decisions upward or delay action until they receive explicit confirmation. This is frequently misread as a lack of empowerment or confidence. More often, it reflects a credibility deficit: people are not certain the leader means what they have communicated, because prior action has not matched prior messaging.

Mixed signals multiply under pressure. A leader calls for transparency but responds defensively when given difficult news. They advocate collaboration but make unilateral decisions when timelines tighten. They promote empowerment but intervene in operational detail. These inconsistencies are rarely intentional; they reflect the gap between intention and action that widens when leaders are stretched. But each inconsistency is noticed, interpreted, and remembered. Over time, people filter every message through what they have observed.

The leader becomes the story. In a transformation, leaders are discussed more than strategies. Who said what in which meeting, how a leader responded to a setback, whether a senior figure practises what they ask of others: these narratives travel through informal networks faster than any governance communication. When the story is one of consistency

and honesty, it accelerates trust. When it is one of contradiction, it accelerates doubt.

When these patterns persist, the effects compound. Communications are received with scepticism. Transformation language is treated as rhetoric. New initiatives are greeted with the assumption that this too will pass. Meanwhile, energy concentrates visibly around the leaders who *are* credible. Teams seek to work with them. Decisions involving them move faster. The contrast between credible and non-credible leaders is hard to miss.

The tool we believe helps

Frances Frei's Trust Triangle gives a practical lens for understanding where trust in a leader strengthens or fractures, and what to do about it. Developed through Frei's work at Harvard Business School and tested across organisations navigating significant change, the framework identifies three conditions that must be present for others to trust a leader (Frances Frei and Anne Morriss, *Unleashed: The Unapologetic Leader's Guide to Empowering Everyone Around You*, 2020).

A note on the framework: the Trust Triangle is a practitioner model, not an empirically validated instrument. Its value lies in its diagnostic clarity: it gives leaders a concrete way to identify *where* their credibility is weakening, not a single undifferentiated score. We use it here as a lens for self-awareness under pressure.

Authenticity: "Do I experience the real person?" People assess whether the leader they encounter is real or performing. This has less to do with informality or self-disclosure than with consistency: whether the leader shows up the same way in a board meeting and a corridor conversation, under pressure and in calm. When authenticity is present, people extend benefit of the doubt. When it is absent, when leaders appear scripted, guarded, or different depending on audience, trust erodes, often without anyone naming why.

Under pressure, authenticity is tested continuously. Leaders are tempted to project confidence they do not feel, to simplify messages beyond what is honest, or to adapt their persona to each audience. Frei's insight is that people detect inauthenticity accurately, and that the cost of being caught performing exceeds the cost of admitting uncertainty.

Logic: "Do I believe this person is competent?" The second condition concerns whether the leader's reasoning is sound and whether their judgement can be relied upon. Frei centres this on whether the leader can communicate their thinking clearly enough for others to follow it and assess it, not on intelligence or analytical skill as such. When logic is strong, people trust the direction even when they cannot see the full picture. When reasoning is opaque, inconsistent, or changes without explanation, confidence in the leader's ability to navigate complexity drops.

When there are many decisions to take, leaders cannot always explain each one in full. What matters is that the reasoning is visible when it counts, particularly for decisions that affect people directly. Leaders who make their trade-off logic explicit build more credibility than those who announce conclusions without showing the path.

Empathy: "Does this person care about me?" The third condition is whether the leader considers their people's experience, concerns, and wellbeing, or whether they are treated as instruments of delivery. Frei defines empathy as the demonstrated capacity to see the situation from another person's perspective and to act on that understanding. When empathy is present, people engage fully, even with difficult change. When it is absent, people protect themselves, reduce discretionary effort, and disengage from commitments that feel imposed.

A transformation puts particular strain on empathy. Leaders who are stretched often deprioritise the relational dimension of their role: reducing conversations to status updates, treating concerns as obstacles, and failing to acknowledge the human cost of sustained change. Frei identifies this as the most common point of failure for otherwise capable leaders.

The wobble. Frei's most useful contribution is the pillar that weakens first when pressure increases. Most leaders have one. Some lose authenticity when stakes are high, becoming overly polished or guarded. Others lose logic, failing to explain reasoning when speed demands it. Others lose empathy, becoming transactional when they are stretched. The wobble is not a character flaw. It is a predictable response to strain that can be anticipated and managed.

How to use the Trust Triangle in practice. Recognising your own wobble is the entry point. The quality itself develops through practice in the three areas where trust in a leader is most visibly built or lost.

The first is making reasoning visible at the moments that carry most consequence. When decisions affect people directly (restructuring, investment choices, priority shifts), leaders who explain how the trade-off was weighed build credibility even when the decision is unpopular. The practice is straightforward: name what was considered, what was prioritised, and what was accepted as a cost. This does not require lengthy justification. It requires honesty about the logic.

The second is demonstrating empathy through action, not language. Empathy shows up in adjusted conduct: asking what someone needs to deliver without burning out, acknowledging that a timeline creates hardship, protecting a team from unnecessary pressure by absorbing it instead. These actions are noticed and remembered more than any communication about values.

The third is actively seeking feedback on the gap between intent and perception. Leaders who do this well do not assume they know how they are perceived. They ask. They listen. And they adjust, not to manage impressions, but because the distance between what a leader believes they are modelling and what others experience is usually larger than they expect.

What changes

Discretionary effort increases. When people trust that a leader is authentic, competent, and concerned with their experience, they contribute beyond the minimum. They raise concerns early, volunteer for difficult work, and invest in outcomes they believe in.

Trust becomes transferable. In organisations where senior leaders consistently practise what they ask of others, the pattern spreads. Middle managers and team leads absorb similar practices, often without recognising they are doing so, and leaders who model consistently find they spend less time explaining, aligning and persuading.

05

Align

creating shared direction

I am no threat to you, you are no threat to me, let us look together at how we can join forces in this complex environment.

So many camps

We worked together, for a time, inside a large corporate transformation, and what we remember first is the camps. There were so many of them, each with its own leader who gathered the other apes around them, or failed to, and each did it in their own way. The most visible contrast was between two people. One had been appointed overall transformation director and radiated, in everything, fight, fight, fight. It came from the top of the pyramid: I am up here, the other apes will follow me. They followed, but only out of fear. The other had been appointed, inside that same transformation, to set up a new shared-services organisation, and was 180 degrees the other way. This was someone who went and groomed the other apes. I am no threat to you, you are no threat to me, let us look together at how we can join forces in this complex environment. Continual approach, never standing above.

It is fairly logical that the person appointed to run the transformation and the person appointed to build an important new organisation inside it clashed, and clashed enormously. That clash had a very large effect on the behaviour of every team beneath them, and of the informal teams among themselves.

The pattern shows before the trouble does, and before most leaders recognise it: visible activity, measurable progress, and growing divergence.

Functions deliver against their own priorities. Projects advance within their mandates. Leaders report upward with confidence. Yet when the work requires integration, when risk and delivery need to agree on sequencing, when HR and technology need to converge on a workforce decision, the organisation stalls. Not because people disagree, but because they were never aligned on what they were aligning toward.

Under pressure, leaders have less time to negotiate shared understanding, and more of the work now crosses functions, so there are more places where alignment is needed. And the informal coordination that once maintained coherence (the hallway conversations, the off-cycle check-ins, the relationship-based agreements) erodes before anyone notices it is gone.

The leadership challenge

The quality to align, to create and sustain shared direction under sustained fragmentation pressure, requires more than communication or governance design. It requires leaders who can fight for what matters, connect

people across boundaries, and establish the norms that make collective action possible.

Align is about getting several leaders, functions and teams to move in the same direction when their immediate pressures pull them apart.

Leaders who lack this quality reach for structural solutions: adding coordination layers, creating cross-functional committees, increasing the frequency of leadership meetings. These responses address the symptoms of fragmentation without touching its cause: the absence of leaders who actively create alignment through their own behaviour.

What we observe in practice

Underneath all of it is group behaviour: the primary reaction of people in a group, what evolution gave us, fight, flight or freeze. When this quality is thin, what we see is an organisation under constant pressure and a leader who, under that pressure, over-uses one capacity. We saw it very plainly in the two camps above, and we saw what it did to everyone below them. It is also where Model comes back in. If people do not trust you as the leader, the sub-camps follow their own leader instead.

Strategic intent dissolves between layers. A leadership team agrees on a transformation direction. By the time that direction reaches the teams responsible for execution, it has been translated, reinterpreted, and adapted to fit departmental priorities. Each translation is reasonable in isolation. Collectively, they produce an organisation executing five different versions of the same strategy. Communication is rarely the cause. More often, it is the absence of leaders who defend the original intent firmly enough to prevent erosion.

Collaboration becomes transactional. When alignment is weak, collaboration between functions reduces to negotiation. Each function optimises its own outcomes and engages with others primarily to manage dependencies, not to pursue shared results. A joint steering committee that was designed to integrate investment decisions becomes a forum where each participant defends their own budget line. Over time, leaders stop expecting these forums to resolve anything substantive and build parallel channels to get work done.

Each function tells its own story. Different parts of the organisation tell different stories about what matters, what is working, and where the real

challenges lie. The programme office sees a sequencing problem; the business sees a capacity problem; operations sees a delivery problem. Each narrative contains truth. None contains the whole picture. Without leaders who actively connect these perspectives and forge a shared account, the organisation operates with multiple, incompatible diagnoses, and treatments that work against each other.

Governance is bypassed, then overloaded. When formal forums fail to produce alignment, leaders route around them. Decisions that should move through established channels are made in bilateral conversations, back-channel agreements, and informal alliances. This keeps the organisation moving in the short term but erodes the legitimacy of formal decision-making and creates a parallel power structure that newer or less connected leaders cannot access. The reflexive response (adding more meetings, more reporting, more alignment processes) increases coordination overhead without improving decision quality. Leaders spend more time in forums and less time on the work those forums exist to enable.

The tool we believe helps

Research into primate behaviour and evolutionary psychology offers a direct lens for understanding how leaders create alignment in human organisations. Three researchers have shaped this field: Frans de Waal (*Chimpanzee Politics*, 1982), whose primatological work documented coalition behaviour in great apes; Mark van Vugt (*Naturally Selected: The Evolutionary Science of Leadership*, co-authored with Anjana Ahuja, 2011), who built the bridge to evolutionary psychology; and Patrick van Veen, a behavioural biologist whose practitioner work on "ape management" has brought these insights into Dutch and international leadership development. Together, their work documents how three great ape species solve the challenge of maintaining group coherence: gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos.

The Apendoctrine is not a published framework and it is not ours. There is no book or paper that carries the title. It is practitioner vocabulary out of Dutch leadership development, closest to van Veen's ape management work, resting on the research above. The science underneath it is well established. The three capacities it names, fight, connect and set norms, are a working shorthand rather than a finding.

The Apendoctrine identifies three capacities that effective leaders combine when creating alignment under pressure:

Fight: defend what matters (the gorilla principle). The silverback gorilla leads through protective authority. He determines where the group moves, intervenes in conflict, and defends the family against external threat. His leadership is unambiguous: the group knows where it stands because the leader makes his position unmistakable.

For leaders, this translates directly: the capacity to take a stand. Leaders who align organisations effectively know when to stop negotiating and start defending. They articulate what is non-negotiable in the transformation: which priorities will not bend, which standards will not erode, which commitments will be honoured regardless of pressure. This is what defending direction looks like when the direction itself is still forming. When everything is contested, the leader who fights for direction gives others something to orient toward.

Without leaders willing to defend strategic direction against the gravitational pull of functional optimisation, the organisation fragments, not through rebellion but through a thousand reasonable accommodations that collectively dissolve coherence.

Connect: build coalitions across boundaries (the chimpanzee principle). Chimpanzee leadership operates through social intelligence and coalition-building. The alpha does not maintain position through physical dominance alone; he builds and sustains alliances, manages relationships across the group, and invests continuously in the social bonds that make collective action possible. As de Waal documented, the leader who stops tending relationships loses support and, eventually, authority.

The organisational equivalent is the capacity to bridge. Effective leaders build coalitions across functions, creating the relationships that allow integrated decisions to form. They invest time in understanding what other functions need, what trade-offs they face, and what constraints they carry. They create the informal connections that enable formal governance to function: the trust between a COO and a programme director that allows a sequencing decision to take shape before it reaches a committee.

This capacity matters most when decisions have to be taken together. In traditional structures, alignment was maintained through hierarchy: disputes escalated to a common authority who decided. Where that is no longer enough, and people have to agree at the point of decision, leaders need the coalition-building capacity of the chimpanzee: the ability to create alignment laterally instead of relying on vertical authority.

Set norms: establish shared standards through relationship (the bonobo principle). Bonobo societies are matriarchal, led by female coalitions that keep the group together through relationship and shared norms rather than through dominance, and manage conflict through social bonding. No single leader commands the group: the collective has established, and actively maintains, the norms that govern how people act.

Translated into leadership practice, this becomes the capacity to norm. These leaders do not only fight for direction and build coalitions; they establish the behavioural standards that guide how the organisation operates when no leader is in the room. They define how decisions are made, how disagreement is handled, how commitments are honoured, and how accountability functions. These norms, once embedded, become the organisation's alignment infrastructure, operating even when leadership attention is elsewhere.

When the formal forums cannot keep up, norms carry an increasing share of the alignment load. An organisation whose leaders have established clear norms around decision-making, conflict resolution, and mutual accountability requires less coordination overhead, because people know how to operate without waiting for instruction.

How to use the Apendoctrine in practice:

Read the situation to determine which capacity the moment demands. Not every alignment challenge requires the same response. When strategic direction is being diluted by incremental accommodation, the moment calls for the gorilla: defend the direction. When integration is failing because relationships between leaders are too thin, the moment calls for the chimpanzee: invest in coalition. When the organisation keeps producing inconsistent practice despite clear strategy, the moment calls for the bonobo: establish and reinforce norms.

Develop range across all three. Most leaders default to one capacity under pressure. Some leaders fight well but struggle to connect. Others connect naturally but avoid the confrontation that defending direction requires. Others set norms effectively but fail to build the relationships that give those norms legitimacy. The Apendoctrine suggests that alignment requires all three, and that developing range across them is a deliberate leadership practice.

Recognise the cost of overusing one capacity. Overusing any one capacity carries a cost: resistance from fighting alone, dependence on personal

relationships from connecting alone, bureaucracy from norm-setting alone. The synthesis matters: fight for what matters, connect the people who must deliver it together, and establish the standards that sustain alignment when attention moves elsewhere.

When it does not work

The tool asks for range across all three, and what we saw in that transformation was what happens when there is none. The one at the top of the ape pyramid was shouting, and concluded that he had to shout louder. And then that he had to protect the family more, and went to even greater lengths to protect it. The family did not want only to be protected. It wanted leadership.

What changes

Strategic coherence survives the journey from boardroom to execution. When leaders at every level actively defend direction, the intent behind a decision tends to arrive intact at the teams responsible for delivering it.

Collaboration becomes substantive. In organisations where coalition-building is a conscious leadership practice, forums between functions tend to produce decisions, not compromises. Leaders engage with shared outcomes, because the relationships that enable integration have been invested in.

Coherence as daily practice

Alignment is kept up in what leaders do every day: in the meeting where direction is being diluted, in the relationship that has not yet been built, in the moment where a norm needs to be reinforced, not assumed.

06

Propel

moving people toward action

He came with ten pages of content, perhaps more. We had half an hour.

Ten pages for half an hour

One of our engagements was with a multinational group. The group CFO had called two of his direct reports into a meeting he had arranged with us, and he was explicitly looking for the big movement, the big energy. One of the two directors had prepared everything. He came with ten pages of content, perhaps more. We had half an hour. The CFO understood that this was about the movement and the story, and used a quarter of an hour on that. And the whole time this director sat on his hands: I have so much content, and I want to share it now. In the end he actually put a page down on the table, with an incredible amount of content on it.

We meet it again and again: leaders overestimate the power of analysis and underestimate the power of a story. Weeks go into building the case, and minutes into how the people in the room will take it in. The data is presented and commitment is expected, and when it does not come, the conclusion is resistance. More often, nobody told the story that would make action feel necessary, possible and urgent to the people who have to act on it.

It gets worse as the decisions pile up. When leaders face dozens of competing priorities, each supported by its own analysis, the question is no longer which argument is strongest. It is which framing captures attention, organises meaning, and directs energy. In crowded decision environments, the first credible frame to emerge tends to organise how people think about the situation. Subsequent frames must contend with it; they cannot start from scratch. If leadership does not provide the frame, the organisation will generate one, and it will usually be less constructive than the one leadership could have offered.

This does not mean rushing to communicate before thinking is complete. It means recognising that the absence of a frame is itself a frame, one that invites speculation, anxiety, and competing narratives. Effective leaders frame early, frame honestly, and frame with enough structure that it can evolve as understanding deepens.

The quality to propel, to move an organisation toward action through deliberate framing and storytelling, is a core leadership practice, not a communication skill layered on top of it. It determines whether sound decisions translate into collective movement. Propel is about generating momentum, through the explicit use of emotion, when rational argument alone cannot carry the weight.

Leaders who lack this quality default to explanation. They produce strategy documents that are analytically correct and emotionally inert. They communicate change through argument that addresses the mind but not the will. The organisation understands the case for change and waits for someone to make it feel real.

What we observe in practice

This is a quality we see missing in a particular kind of leader. The person appointed transformation director usually comes from the function. They are asked because they know exactly how and what, in terms of content. Then that person has to tell the story and raise the energy, one to one, in an email, preparing a steering committee, in front of a group, and nearly all of it is content. They struggle to speak in analogy, in imagery, in positive energy. They cling to detail and to prescribing what to do and how, when the moment asks for the bigger picture and for where we are working toward. It is not an easy one, and it has a great deal to do with the trust that Model describes. Such a person built their trust on delivering content, and is then hoisted onto a platform where that quality is no longer what is asked of them; a quite different energy is. Then the specialist in them comes to the fore, where the moment needs a leader. The function suggests leadership. The way it is filled in practice does not always.

Transformation language becomes wallpaper. The organisation has heard the words before. "We need to be more agile." "Customer centricity is key." "We must work differently." These phrases arrive in every town hall, every strategy document, every leadership message. They are received, processed, and discarded, not because they are wrong but because they carry no story. There is no frame that makes this instance of change feel different from the last three. Without a narrative that connects the present challenge to something people can feel, transformation language loses its capacity to mobilise.

Analysis deepens but energy remains flat. More information is gathered, more dashboards are built, more analyses are commissioned, yet uncertainty does not reduce. Each new data point supports multiple interpretations. Leaders respond by requesting further analysis, creating a cycle where the pursuit of certainty delays the action that would reduce ambiguity. Meanwhile, when people describe the transformation, their language is functional, procedural, and flat. The business case is complete. The programme plan is detailed. And there is no energy behind either, no sense

of purpose that would sustain effort when the work becomes difficult. Progress comes from leaders who frame what is already available in a way that makes a decision possible.

Early wins fail to generate momentum. The programme delivers results. Milestones are met. Yet these achievements do not create the forward momentum that leaders expected. This often occurs because the wins were never framed as evidence of something larger; they were reported as operational outcomes rather than narrated as chapters in a story that the organisation is living through. Without the narrative thread connecting individual achievements to a larger arc, each win stands alone and dissipates.

The tool we believe helps

Framing and storytelling serve related but distinct functions, and leaders need both. The distinction matters because leaders who conflate the two tend to do neither well.

Framing shapes interpretation. It determines which lens people use to understand a situation: what is visible, what feels important, and what actions seem logical. A restructuring can be framed as loss (what is being taken away) or as investment (what is being built). A challenging quarter can be framed as failure (what went wrong) or as learning (what the organisation now understands that it did not before). Neither frame is dishonest; both are selective. The leader's responsibility is to choose the frame that is truthful and that enables constructive action. This is not spin. Framing is the deliberate choice of which aspects of a complex reality to foreground, which connections to draw, and which meaning to attach to events.

Research on framing effects, notably the foundational work of Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman ("The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice", *Science*, 1981), established that the same set of facts, framed differently, produces materially different responses. Leaders who understand this recognise that they are not only transmitting information; they are shaping what that information means.

Storytelling provides the journey. Where framing organises interpretation, story generates movement: it makes the change tangible, personal, and emotionally accessible. People process narrative differently from analytical information. Stories engage emotion, create identification, and activate memory in ways that data and argument do not.

Chip and Dan Heath, in *Made to Stick* (2007) and *Switch* (2010), documented that successful change efforts consistently use concrete stories over abstract analysis to generate momentum. For leaders, this means that the strategy deck is necessary but insufficient. The story that accompanies it, the narrative about where the organisation has been, what challenge it faces, and what future it is working toward, carries the emotional weight that sustains commitment when the work becomes difficult.

The leader who frames without story produces clarity that lacks energy. The leader who tells stories without framing produces emotion that lacks direction. Together, these bodies of work confirm what effective transformation leaders discover in practice: that how something is framed and narrated determines whether people act on it.

A note on these tools: framing and storytelling are not a single published framework in the way that Frei's Trust Triangle or Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions are. They draw on established behavioural science (Tversky and Kahneman) and practitioner research (Heath and Heath). We use them here as complementary lenses: framing for interpretation, storytelling for movement.

How to use framing and storytelling in practice:

Frame the "why" before the "what". Before presenting the solution, frame the problem in terms people can feel. Not "we are restructuring the division" but "we have reached the point where our current structure prevents us from serving clients the way we want to, and the way they need us to." The frame creates the emotional context that makes the action comprehensible.

Use concrete stories, not abstract principles. Instead of "we need to be more customer-centric", tell the story of a specific customer interaction that illustrates why the current approach falls short, and what the alternative looks like. Concrete stories bypass the scepticism that abstract language triggers and create the identification that makes change personal.

Reframe rather than repeat. When the initial message has not landed, the instinct is to repeat it louder or more frequently. This rarely works. What works is reframing: finding a different way to make the same point that connects to what people are experiencing. If the rational case has not produced movement, a different frame, one that acknowledges the emotional reality of the change, may reach what the analysis could not.

Narrate progress as chapters, not milestones. When reporting on transformation progress, connect individual achievements to the larger

narrative arc. Not "we delivered phase two on time" but "this milestone means we can now do something we could not do six months ago, and here is what that makes possible next." This transforms operational reporting into storytelling and gives people a sense of forward movement that isolated metrics cannot provide.

When it does not work

It does not work at the ratio we meet almost every time, nine parts content to one part story. In every engagement where we have worked on this together, and in others we have worked on apart, a great deal of the focus went on exactly this. Turn it round. Ninety per cent story, ten per cent content. Feeling, emotion, movement.

What changes

Momentum becomes self-reinforcing. When progress is narrated as chapters in a larger story, each achievement creates energy for the next. People begin to see themselves as participants in something that is building rather than enduring something that is happening to them.

Resistance reframes itself. Much of what leaders label as resistance is an absence of meaning. When the framing is right, objections become part of a conversation, and leaders often discover that the people who pushed back hardest become the most committed, because they were the ones paying closest attention.

Meaning before logic

Every leader frames, whether they intend to or not. The question is whether the frame they offer is truthful, and strong enough to turn understanding into action.

III

Working with what drives people

The first two quality groups create clarity and credibility, and both depend on the leader continuing to supply them. These three do not. They work toward something that sustains itself, where the leader's intervention is needed less each time.

07

Fuel

sustaining energy

Willpower runs out and incentives wear thin. Intrinsic motivation outlasts both: the work stays hard, but it stops draining the people doing it.

Safe enough to make a mistake

In daycare, the conditions under which a person keeps developing are spoken about in so many words: safety, so that a child can be itself, feel competent, and grow. In that setting it is easy to be conscious of it. I have to create safety for these children. For whatever reason, in a business setting it is a great deal more complicated. The biggest obstacle we see is the whole performance-management way of thinking. Who is judged on their mistakes? The moment that is the question, safety falls away, because you have to be able to make mistakes to keep developing, and instead you are punished for them. It applies at both levels, for the leader and for the people who work for them.

And yet there are parts of organisations, never whole ones, where the leader manages it despite the appraisal system: we do this together, I am safe here, I can be myself, I can make a mistake, and of course I have to deliver. A hierarchy with roles, performance management and money attached will always make this hard to do in practice. That is not a reason to walk away from it, and leaders walk away from it too easily: not my responsibility, because. It is entirely the leader's responsibility. Of the nine, this is the one that asks real effort of a leader in whose nature it does not already sit.

Borrowed energy

Leaders begin a transformation with energy available to them: urgency, attention, and often real enthusiasm for what the change promises. Six months later, the urgency remains but the energy has changed character. People are still working, often harder than before, and deadlines are met, but the initiative and the extra effort have drained away. The organisation is performing on obligation.

Leaders typically respond to this pattern with more of what produced the initial momentum: tighter deadlines, clearer targets, stronger incentives, more visible consequences. These interventions work briefly. They generate compliance, which looks like engagement from a distance. But compliance is borrowed energy. It requires constant renewal and produces diminishing returns. The leader who relies on external pressure to sustain transformation effort is running a machine that consumes more fuel than it generates.

The deeper question goes unasked: what sustains human energy through prolonged periods of uncertainty, additional workload, and continuous adaptation? The answer is not willpower, and it is not incentives. It is

whether the conditions in which people work meet a specific set of psychological needs, needs that a transformation is particularly good at disrupting.

Effort that renews and effort that is consumed

Fuel addresses the challenge of sustaining intrinsic motivation through the extended demands of transformation.

In practice, this means learning to recognise when compliance is masquerading as commitment; to understand the conditions that generate intrinsic motivation instead of relying on extrinsic pressure; and to design work environments and leadership practices that replenish energy.

Leaders who develop this quality understand that motivation emerges when certain conditions are present, and disappears when those conditions are removed, regardless of how compelling the strategy or how generous the incentive. Leaders who lack this quality mistake activity for vitality. They see people working long hours and assume engagement. They see targets being met and assume commitment. The depletion often becomes visible only through its consequences: turnover, withdrawal, the sudden collapse of effort in teams that appeared to be performing well. Sometimes it never becomes visible at all; the organisation operates at a lower level and accepts it as normal.

What we observe in practice

Of the nine, this is the one we find hardest to give a real place in an organisation. It requires that people actually see each other, and not only at the transactional level. And the dynamic underneath it is complicated: the leader and the people under the leader both want a degree of autonomy, and both, at the same time, want a degree of shelter. What a leader can do, the moment they realise this at all, is small. Every so often, deliberately check in on one of those three, being seen, autonomy and shelter, or on all three. The tool below names the same conditions in its own words: autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Where leaders rely on extrinsic motivation during transformation, the symptoms are consistent, and consistently misread as individual performance problems when they are systemic energy problems.

Discretionary effort vanishes first. People continue to do what is asked of them. They attend the meetings, complete the deliverables, follow the processes. What vanishes is everything beyond the minimum: the extra thinking, the proactive problem-solving, the willingness to take on ambiguity without being asked. This withdrawal does not show up in dashboards or status reports. It surfaces in the quality of thinking, the speed of adaptation, and the increasing reliance on leaders to provide direction that teams previously generated themselves.

Talented people disengage before they leave. The most capable individuals, those with the greatest capacity and the most options, are often the first to withdraw energy. The conditions have stopped meeting their needs. They experience diminishing autonomy as governance layers increase. They feel their competence is underused when decisions are centralised. They sense connection eroding as relationships between the change team and operational managers become transactional. By the time the resignation letter arrives, the person's initiative, advocacy, and discretionary thinking left months ago.

Initiative concentrates in fewer people. A small group continues to drive the transformation with visible energy and commitment. Leaders point to them as evidence that the programme is working. What they miss is that this concentration is itself a symptom: the broader organisation has ceded initiative to the few who remain internally motivated despite the conditions. The programme runs on the energy of a diminishing core, not the distributed effort of the whole.

Recovery time between changes shortens without adaptation. Each wave of transformation draws on the same reservoir of organisational energy. When leaders do not replenish the conditions that maintain motivation, each successive wave starts from a lower baseline. People who navigated the first restructuring with resilience approach the second with resignation. The organisation develops what appears to be change fatigue but is more accurately described as motivational depletion, the cumulative effect of sustained demand without sustained nourishment.

The tool we believe helps

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan and articulated in *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior* (1985), provides a framework for understanding what drives human motivation. Unlike models that treat motivation as a single spectrum from

low to high, SDT distinguishes between *types* of motivation, and demonstrates that the type matters more than the amount. The theory has been tested across hundreds of peer-reviewed studies spanning education, healthcare, sport, and organisational behaviour; it is among the most extensively validated frameworks in motivational psychology.

SDT identifies three innate psychological needs that, when met, produce self-sustaining motivation and, when frustrated, produce the patterns described above.

Autonomy: the need for volition. Autonomy in SDT does not mean working alone or without structure. It means experiencing a sense of choice and ownership over one's actions. People with high autonomy feel that they are acting from their own values and judgement, not simply following instructions.

A transformation erodes autonomy systematically. As governance structures tighten, decision rights centralise, and standardisation increases, people experience a progressive loss of agency. Transformation often requires these constraints, but leaders who impose them without compensating for the autonomy cost find themselves managing increasingly passive teams. The practical question is how to preserve meaningful choice within necessary constraints. This might mean involving teams in *how* a decision is implemented rather than *whether* it is implemented, or creating space for people to exercise judgement on the problems closest to their expertise, and to take direction on the broader strategic choices.

Competence: the need for effectiveness. Competence is the experience of being capable and having impact, of applying skill to challenges that are neither too simple nor overwhelming. People with a strong sense of competence feel that their abilities matter and that their contribution makes a visible difference.

Competence is among the earliest casualties of change, and in ways leaders rarely anticipate. People who were experts in the previous operating model find their knowledge devalued. Established ways of working are replaced by unfamiliar processes. Roles are redefined in ways that separate people from the skills they have spent years developing. The result is a workforce simultaneously being asked to perform at a higher level and experiencing a diminished sense of competence. Leaders who recognise this provide deliberate support for competence, not through training programmes alone but by ensuring that people can see the connection between their effort and meaningful outcomes during the transition.

Relatedness: the need for meaningful connection. Relatedness is the experience of genuine connection with others, of being part of something that matters and contributing to a shared purpose. It goes beyond friendship or team-building exercises. The question is whether people feel connected to those they work with and to the purpose they are working toward.

Transformation fractures relatedness along familiar lines. Teams are restructured. Reporting lines change. People who built effective working relationships find themselves separated. Collaboration across functions becomes more necessary at the moment when the relational foundations for it have been disrupted. Leaders who understand relatedness invest deliberately in rebuilding connection through the quality of interaction within the work itself: shared problem-solving, honest dialogue about challenges, and visible evidence that individual contributions matter to the collective effort.

How SDT applies under transformation pressure:

The three needs interact as a system. Autonomy without competence produces anxiety: people have choice but lack the ability to exercise it effectively. Competence without relatedness produces isolation: people are effective but disconnected from the broader purpose. Relatedness without autonomy produces dependence: people feel connected but passive.

Leaders who understand this system find that motivational problems seldom have single causes. When energy drains from a transformation, the diagnostic question shifts from "how do we motivate people?" to "which of the three needs has this environment frustrated, and what would it take to restore it?"

This reframing matters because it changes the intervention. Instead of adding incentives (which address none of the three needs), leaders can examine whether people experience real choice in their work, whether they can see the impact of their contribution, and whether the connections that sustain purpose remain intact. These are design questions, not motivation questions, and they are within the leader's control.

When it does not work

It does not work where management, formally or informally, puts the emphasis on which mistakes were made. The system then makes the three needs hard to meet, and that does not excuse the leader.

What changes

Change starts, for this quality as for all nine, with awareness.

Energy becomes renewable. The organisation stops drawing down a finite reserve of goodwill and resilience. People bring energy to the work because the conditions generate it. This distinction is visible in the durability of effort: teams that are intrinsically motivated sustain performance through setbacks that would exhaust teams running on compliance.

Retention stabilises around engagement, not compensation. Leaders often respond to transformation-driven attrition by increasing compensation or offering retention bonuses. These interventions address the wrong variable. When the three needs are met, retention improves because people experience the work itself as worthwhile, a far more durable anchor than financial incentive. Leaders who understand this invest in conditions, not packages.

Energy by design

The leader's task is to create the conditions in which motivation sustains itself, and to repair what the transformation itself has damaged.

08

Activate

designing for how people decide

People decide fast, and on feeling, far more often than our processes assume. In the end they do what their surroundings make easy.

The wrong colour tie

Ninety per cent of our time, together, goes into producing PowerPoints, Excels and Word documents with an incredible amount of content in them, checked a hundred times by everyone, because it all has to be right, because a decision is going to be taken on it. Neither we who make it nor the people we make it for are wired that way. And yet we go into that process together, every time. So it can easily happen that you prepare something for, call it, the executive board. Enormous content. Your whole team has worked on it for days. It has cost you three weeks. Content, content, content. Then you stand there, and because you are wearing the wrong colour tie, the board thinks: I do not know what it is, but I do not believe it anyway.

Leaders design the process well. The governance framework is clear, the decision criteria documented, the information accessible. And yet, when the moment arrives, people do not decide the way the process intended.

They default to the familiar option instead of evaluating the new one. They follow the pattern that worked last quarter, not the framework introduced last month. They make the decision that feels safe over the decision the analysis supports. Afterwards, when asked, they can articulate the rationale for the better choice; they did not make it when it mattered.

It is a failure of design, not of intelligence, training or commitment. Leaders invest heavily in building rational systems (strategy frameworks, governance processes, decision trees, approval workflows) and then deploy them into environments where the people using them are operating under cognitive load that makes rational processing the exception. The system is designed for deliberation. The human is operating on instinct.

Transformation intensifies this gap. Every change initiative adds cognitive demand: new processes to learn, new relationships to navigate, new ambiguities to manage, new decisions to make with incomplete information. As the load increases, people rely more heavily on fast, automatic judgement, the mental shortcuts that handle most of daily life efficiently but produce systematic errors when applied to unfamiliar situations. Leaders who do not account for this reality build systems that people consistently work around.

Where the load lands

Activate examines the distance between how leaders design for decisions and how people actually make them under pressure.

The quality means learning to recognise when cognitive overload is driving behaviour more than policy or process; to design environments, choices, and defaults that align intuitive responses with desired outcomes; to reduce the friction between what people intend to do and what they do under pressure; and to use the design of decisions (sequencing, framing, defaults, simplification) as a leadership tool.

Leaders who miss this quality take behaviour that does not follow the process for resistance, incompetence or poor communication. They respond by repeating the message, adding compliance mechanisms, or increasing oversight. Each of these adds cognitive load to an already overloaded system, deepening the pattern they are trying to correct.

What we observe in practice

We remember, from our shared work, a counterpart who above all wanted to remain convinced that we take decisions purely rationally. We have met many more since. When this quality is thin, what we see is the three weeks of content above.

New processes are adopted in form but not in substance. The organisation rolls out a new decision framework, operating model, or approval process. People attend the training, complete the templates, and follow the documented steps, but the underlying decision-making has not changed. The templates are filled in after the decision has already been made through informal channels. The approval process is navigated, not used. The framework becomes administrative overhead instead of a decision tool. This is cognitive economy: when a new process requires more thought than people have attention for, people preserve the appearance of compliance and default to established patterns.

Decision quality erodes as decisions pile up. Early in a transformation, when attention and energy are high, decisions are made carefully. As the programme progresses and the number of decisions grows, quality begins to erode, in ways that follow clear patterns. Complex trade-offs are simplified prematurely. Options are narrowed before they are properly evaluated. Decisions that warrant careful thought are made with the same speed as

routine choices. Leaders experience this as the organisation "losing focus" when it is more accurately described as overload forcing a shift from considered to automatic processing.

Defaults determine outcomes more than analysis does. Wherever a decision has a default option (the existing vendor, the current structure, the established approach), that default exerts disproportionate influence. Choosing the default requires no additional cognitive effort; choosing an alternative requires evaluation, justification, and risk. Under normal conditions, people override defaults regularly. Under the load of transformation, the pull of defaults strengthens. Leaders who grasp this understand that changing the default is often more effective than improving the argument for the alternative.

Simplification replaces evaluation. When faced with complex decisions under time pressure, people substitute a simpler question for the difficult one. Instead of "which option best serves our long-term strategic position?" the decision becomes "which option can I defend if it goes wrong?" or "which option has the least immediate disruption?" These substitutions are not conscious; they are the automatic response of a mind managing more complexity than it can process with care. The result is decisions that are locally rational but collectively misaligned with the transformation's objectives.

The tool we believe helps

The System 1 and System 2 framework, developed across decades of research by Daniel Kahneman with Amos Tversky and published in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011), provides the lens for understanding why well-designed processes fail in high-load environments. The underlying research, including Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), has been validated across behavioural economics, medicine, law, and organisational decision-making, earning Kahneman the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002.

A note on the attribution: the labels System 1 and System 2 were coined by Keith Stanovich and Richard West. Kahneman credits them in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* and built the framework out on the work he and Tversky had done since 1969. We use his account of it because it is the one written for a general reader.

System 1 operates fast, automatically, and with little conscious effort. It is the mode of thinking that recognises faces, completes familiar phrases, and

navigates a known route without thought. System 1 handles most daily decisions, and does so efficiently. It draws on patterns, associations, and heuristics, mental shortcuts that produce workable answers most of the time. Under normal conditions, this is an asset. Under transformation conditions, where situations are unfamiliar and established patterns may no longer apply, System 1 produces confident answers to the wrong questions.

System 2 operates slowly, with significant effort and attention. This is where complex calculations happen, competing evidence gets weighed, and carefully reasoned trade-offs are made. System 2 is what leaders implicitly assume people are using when they design governance frameworks, decision matrices, and approval processes. The difficulty is that System 2 is a limited resource. It fatigues. It is easily disrupted by load, emotional pressure, and time constraints, all of which a transformation produces.

The practical implication is direct: transformation environments shift people from System 2 toward System 1 at the moment when System 2 is most needed. Every additional process, every restructured team, every ambiguous priority consumes resource that would otherwise be available for considered decision-making. Leaders who understand this stop designing exclusively for the rational decision-maker and begin designing for the cognitively loaded one.

How to design for System 1 in transformation environments:

Simplify the decision structure. Reduce the number of decisions people must make, and reduce the complexity of each. This does not mean dumbing down governance; it means ensuring that the cognitive demand of a decision is proportionate to its importance. Routine decisions should require minimal thought. High-stakes decisions should be supported with structures that compensate for load rather than adding to it.

Set better defaults. Where the desired practice requires a departure from the status quo, change the default instead of relying on people to choose differently. If collaboration between the programme office and line management is the goal, make the default meeting structure cross-functional rather than asking people to arrange it. If a new approval process should be used, make it the path of least resistance. Defaults are powerful because they work with System 1, not against it.

Reduce friction for desired behaviours and increase friction for undesired ones. Make the right thing easy to do. If leaders want teams to escalate risks early, the escalation mechanism should require less effort than managing the

risk alone. If the goal is knowledge sharing across functions, the sharing mechanism should be embedded in existing workflows, not bolted on as a separate action. Conversely, if old processes should be abandoned, make them harder to access, not through prohibition, which triggers resistance, but through design that makes the new path simpler.

Sequence decisions to preserve cognitive resource. Schedule complex, high-stakes decisions for moments when load is lowest, not at the end of a day of back-to-back meetings or during a week of organisational restructuring. Protect the space for decisions that genuinely require careful thought, and automate or simplify everything that does not.

Make the desired practice visible and social. System 1 is heavily influenced by social cues: what other people are doing, what appears to be normal, what is visibly rewarded. Leaders who make those practices visible and social are effectively programming System 1. When people see their peers adopting a new approach, the automatic assessment shifts from "risky and unfamiliar" to "what everyone is doing".

When it does not work

The same fact can be abused, and it is. People save effort, and under load they do not really think a difficult choice through. A difficult subject can be presented in another way so that it exploits the fact that, at the receiving end, System 1 will take over anyway: oh, that sounds clear, that is interesting, oh, nice.

What changes

Start with what does not change, if rationality stays your core belief. You miss a large piece of information, first about yourself and your own thinking and doing, and through that about the whole system. You keep pouring time into collecting facts, writing pages of text and building diagrams, without paying attention to how you actually reach the other person with your message, and to what your real message is, as opposed to what the diagram looks like. The content work still has to be done with care, because the system demands it. But the system is amorphous and anonymous, and on the other side there are always people, who cannot help it. They are wired this way: System 1, fast, deciding without much reason, on feeling, on very quick connections that may be right and may not.

Process adoption becomes real. When decision processes are designed for cognitively loaded humans, not idealised rational actors, people use them because they help rather than because compliance requires it. The distance between formal process and what people do narrows.

Leaders focus on design over persuasion. When new ways of working are easier to perform than old ones, adoption follows without the prolonged communication campaigns that traditional approaches require. The practice changes because the environment changes.

What the environment makes easy

The leader who develops this quality stops asking "why don't people do what we agreed?" and starts asking "what is the environment making easy, and what is it making hard?" The answer to that question, more than any strategy document or governance framework, determines what the organisation does.

09

Nurture

making the new way a habit

The whole system works as a crash barrier. It holds you on the road while you change your patterns for good.

A crash barrier

In general we do not ask a person to change. We ask that the focus of their time changes, and perhaps the focus of the content they are good at. The essence of this quality is how you organise the processes and systems inside which people function, knowing that we are creatures of habit and that the old pattern is called up again the moment we are under pressure, so that the whole system works as a crash barrier. It holds you on the road while you change your patterns for good. Once you have shaped the right processes and the right tools, then after the umpteenth time the new way is your habit, and it costs no effort any more. Little things, one per cent at a time.

Leaders declare the transformation programme a success. The new operating model is in place. The processes have been redesigned. The teams have been restructured. The leadership messages have been delivered. The programme office closes, the consultants leave, and the organisation is expected to continue operating in the way the programme intended.

Twelve months later, a pattern has emerged that no one planned for but everyone recognises. The new processes are still formally in place, but the way people work has drifted back toward what existed before. Not entirely; some changes have taken root. But the practices that required conscious effort, the ways of working that felt unfamiliar, the routines that depended on programme attention to sustain them: these have gradually, and often invisibly, reverted.

Leaders find this frustrating. The investment was substantial. The commitment was genuine. The logic was sound. Why does the organisation seem unable to retain the changes it worked so hard to implement?

The answer lies in a distinction that transformation programmes seldom make explicit: the difference between a behaviour that has been introduced and one that has become habitual. Introduced behaviours require attention, effort, and reinforcement to sustain. Habitual ones are automatic; they persist without conscious maintenance because they have been encoded into the routines of daily work. Most transformation programmes are designed to introduce new ways of working. Few are designed to make them habitual. And so the organisation reverts, not from resistance or failure but from the simple mechanics of how human behaviour works.

The pace of change makes this challenge more urgent. When new tools, processes, and ways of working arrive in rapid succession, each wave of change needs to embed before the next arrives. The window for habit

formation is shrinking at the same time the amount of change requiring it is growing.

How a practice becomes a habit

Nurture addresses the question of durability: how do new ways of working become the organisation's automatic response, persisting beyond the programme that introduced them?

The quality means learning to distinguish between practices that have been adopted and those that have become embedded; to design for habit formation instead of relying on sustained willpower or ongoing reinforcement; to identify which changes require habit-level embedding and which can be sustained through process or structure alone; and to build the conditions in which new ways of working become self-sustaining.

Leaders who develop this quality understand that the programme is not the change; it is the introduction to the change. The real work of transformation is what happens after the scaffolding comes down. Leaders who miss this confuse compliance with adoption. They see practices performed during the programme, when attention, incentives, and accountability structures are active, and assume they will continue when the support is removed.

What we observe in practice

In almost all our experience, one of the reasons to begin a change is that you want to see different behaviour. So you force it. You restructure the organisation, you restructure the processes, you use the system differently. Then you spend a great deal of time together on functional training, on the assumption that, since these are professionals, the job profile and performance management will do the rest and a deeply rooted habit will simply adjust. We know few change programmes that begin with habits. Between us, none. What makes the work worth doing, when we get the chance, is to work toward how it should be and, from day one, to look at who the people are who have to make it real, where they stand now, and how we can help them take the first step in the right direction today.

Where leaders introduce change without designing for durability, the same outcomes recur.

Old behaviours return under pressure. When workload spikes, deadlines tighten, or unexpected challenges arise, people revert to established

patterns, the routines encoded in muscle memory. The new approach, which requires conscious application, is the first casualty of pressure. Under cognitive load, the brain defaults to automatic routines. If the new practice has not become automatic, it cannot compete with the old one when resources are scarce.

Adoption varies by visibility. Practices that are publicly observable (meeting formats, reporting templates, language in presentations) tend to persist because social reinforcement maintains them. Practices that occur in less visible contexts, such as how decisions are made between the finance team and the project leads, how priorities are weighed in private, how trade-offs are resolved between individuals, revert more rapidly because no external cue sustains them. The organisation appears to have changed on the surface and operates much as it did before underneath.

Practices sustained by programme infrastructure erode when that infrastructure is removed. Some changes are sustained entirely by dedicated change managers, regular check-ins, visible dashboards, and active sponsorship. When that infrastructure is dismantled, as it inevitably is, the ways of working it supported begin to erode. This is the clearest indicator that a way of working was introduced but never embedded. It survived on external reinforcement, not internal habit.

Pockets of real adoption coexist with broad reversion. In every transformation, some teams and individuals adopt the new ways of working because they took root, not because programme oversight required it. These pockets often share common characteristics: the new practice was repeated frequently enough to become routine, it produced a reward that was immediate and tangible, and it was triggered by cues embedded in the daily work environment. Where these conditions were absent, reversion was the norm.

The tool we believe helps

Charles Duhigg, drawing on decades of neuroscience research by Ann Graybiel at MIT and others, articulated the mechanism through which behaviour becomes habitual in *The Power of Habit* (2012). The model is a three-part loop of Cue, Routine and Reward. It matters for organisational change because it explains both why reversion happens and what makes embedding possible. The neuroscience underlying the model is well established: brain imaging studies have demonstrated that habitual behaviours are processed in the basal ganglia, operating independently of

the conscious decision-making systems that transformation programmes typically target.

Cue: the trigger that initiates the behaviour. Every habit begins with a cue, a signal in the environment that triggers a particular response. Cues can be temporal (a time of day), spatial (a physical location), emotional (a feeling of uncertainty), social (the presence of particular people), or procedural (the completion of a preceding task). In organisational life, cues are embedded in the rhythms of work: the start of a meeting, the arrival of a report, the moment a decision is required.

For transformation, the critical insight is that new practices need new cues, or they need to attach to existing cues that already trigger action. When a transformation programme introduces a new way of working without connecting it to a reliable cue, it depends on memory and willpower. Both are unreliable, particularly under the cognitive demands that transformation creates. The practical question is: what existing moment in the working day or week will trigger this new practice automatically?

Routine: the behaviour itself. The routine is what happens in response to the cue. In habit formation, the routine must be specific enough to be repeatable and simple enough to become second nature. This has direct implications for how transformation programmes design new ways of working. Practices that are complex, multi-step, or require significant judgement each time they are performed resist habit formation. Practices that are clear, consistent, and executable without extensive deliberation are much more likely to embed.

This does not mean that complex practices cannot become habitual. It means they need to be decomposed into component actions, each of which can be cued and repeated until instinctive. A "culture of accountability" is too abstract to become a habit. "Starting every team meeting with a five-minute review of outstanding commitments" is specific enough to embed.

Reward: the reinforcement that sustains the loop. The reward is what makes the brain encode the loop for repetition. The reward must be experienced by the person who acts, not by the organisation in aggregate. An improved quarterly result does not function as a reward for the individual who changed their daily routine three months ago. The reward needs to be proximate, tangible, and connected to the action in a way the brain can register.

In organisational contexts, effective rewards for habit formation are often smaller and more immediate than leaders expect: the satisfaction of a cleaner decision process, visible recognition from peers, the reduction of a friction that was previously tolerated, the experience of a meeting that produces a clear outcome. Leaders who design for habit formation pay close attention to what people experience immediately after they have done it the new way, because that experience determines whether the loop strengthens or dissolves.

How to apply the habit loop in transformation:

Identify the practices that matter most and make them specific. Not every change requires habit-level embedding. Strategic changes, structural changes, and process changes can often be sustained through governance and systems. Changes in how people interact, decide, collaborate, and respond under pressure require habit formation. The first step is identifying which practices are critical and translating them from abstract aspirations into concrete, repeatable actions.

Attach new practices to existing cues. Leaders who develop this quality tend to connect the desired practice to moments that already exist in the working rhythm, instead of creating new triggers from scratch. If the goal is information sharing between the delivery team and operations, attaching it to an existing weekly meeting reduces the cognitive cost of adoption. If the goal is earlier risk escalation, connecting it to the existing reporting cycle achieves the same. Existing cues work because they are already automatic.

Engineer the reward. The long-term benefit seldom sustains the practice on its own. Leaders who design for habit formation pay attention to immediate, tangible reinforcement. This might mean making the outcome visible in real time, building peer recognition into the practice, or simply ensuring that the new way of working is noticeably less effortful than what it replaces. The reward does not need to be material; it needs to be felt.

Protect the repetition window. Habits form through repetition: the same cue triggering the same routine producing the same reward, enough times for the loop to consolidate. Studies on habit formation, including Philippa Lally's research at University College London, suggest this takes anywhere from about three weeks to eight months depending on complexity, with a median of roughly two months. During this window, the practice is fragile. Disruptions such as restructuring the team, changing the meeting cadence or shifting priorities can reset the formation process. Leaders who understand this protect the conditions for repetition during the critical embedding period.

When it does not work

What the tool asks for is a long list of one-per-cent things you can organise together, and a slow start on changing habits through the systems. That almost never happens. Everything has to be now, now, now, big and sweeping, and the goals of the transformation programmes are sky-high, so the gap is enormous. We are not saying that gap can be closed. We have learned not to be surprised when, after two or three years and a great deal of money and energy put into changing the system, many of the behaviours are still the same. What we would put more emphasis on, from the start, is the one-per-cent actions.

What changes

Do we do this ourselves? Not as much as we could. We get dragged along in the system too: the focus is on the big thing, and it has been explained that this is how it has to be now. We do it, but under the surface rather than making it explicit. And that is the whole essence of this quality. We are caught in the web of an organisation with everything that is formal in it, and we think we do everything on reason. Our first presentation is always in the language that fits the programme and what the leader wants to hear from it. Only afterwards do we say, oh, and by the way, we think this.

Change persists beyond the programme. The clearest sign is that people keep working the new way after programme infrastructure is removed. New ways of working have become the organisation's default response. The programme ends and the organisation continues, not because people remember to but because the new practice has taken hold.

Pressure reveals adoption rather than reversing it. In organisations where habits have formed, periods of high pressure do not trigger reversion to old patterns. The new practice is what people default to under load, because it is now the automatic response.

The embedding test

Transformation is complete when the new practice is habitual: when people do it without thinking about it, when it persists under pressure, and when it transfers to those who were not part of the original programme. Everything before that point is temporary.

How the nine leadership qualities work together

Each of the nine qualities addresses its own aspect of getting something moving and keeping it going. On their own, they sharpen how a leader reads what is in front of them, carries themselves, and works with the people around them. Together they do more than that, and this chapter is about how.

How qualities interconnect

The chapters are written in an order and it is a readable one. Leaders read what is in front of them, position themselves so that what they do carries, and work with what actually drives people. Within a single decision that is usually the order the qualities are needed.

It is not the order in which they develop, and it is not a route. Leaders develop qualities where the pressure is, and the pressure moves. Someone who has spent a year keeping a merger together may have deep Align and thin Appreciate. Any combination of the nine is possible and most leaders are some version of it.

Perception sets what the rest can aim at. Appreciate, Calibrate and Excavate change what a leader notices: what is driving the person across the table, where trust in the team is solid and where it gives way, which cultural logic the organisation runs on. Everything downstream inherits that reading. A leader who models credibly against a misread situation is credible about the wrong thing.

Credibility decides whether anything lands. Model, Align and Propel determine whether an accurate reading becomes something the organisation acts on. Until it does, Fuel, Activate and Nurture have nothing to work with. Motivation, decision design and habit all operate on practices people have already started.

The human patterns decide what survives. Fuel, Activate and Nurture determine whether progress outlasts the attention that produced it. A leader can read a situation precisely, lead it credibly, and still watch the change fade in the quarter after the programme closes.

The traffic also runs backwards, which is why this is not a sequence. Nurture is what keeps a Calibrate practice alive once the leader stops chairing the meeting. Activate is what lets Align's norms operate when nobody is in the room to enforce them. Calibrate is what makes people say the thing that Appreciate and Excavate need in order to read anything at all.

The later qualities are what stops the earlier ones depending on a leader's continued attention.

A leader who has built three of the nine is not three ninths of the way through. They are somewhere specific, with particular things now possible and particular things still out of reach. Which three is the useful question, and the diagnostic later in this chapter is where to answer it.

Why the nine are grouped as they are

The grouping reflects three kinds of work, and a leader can be strong in one kind and thin in another.

Part I Reading the environment	01 Appreciate	02 Calibrate	03 Excavate
Part II Positioning as the leader	04 Model	05 Align	06 Propel
Part III Working with what drives people	07 Fuel	08 Activate	09 Nurture

The nine qualities, in their three groups.

All three kinds of work matter. A leader who only reads produces clarity without movement. One who only positions creates progress that fades. One who only works with what drives people generates energy without coherence.

Leaders who sustain transformation have range across all three. The grouping shows where the gaps are.

Where to start

The question leaders ask most often is: where should we begin?

The answer depends on where pressure is most acute. Leaders who develop these qualities effectively do not attempt all nine at once. They start where the need is clearest, build from there, and expand as capacity grows.

The following diagnostic can help identify where to focus first. Each entry describes a pattern that signals a specific gap:

1. If perspectives diverge sharply, friction feels personal, and leaders misattribute resistance, the gap is in reading the individual: Appreciate.

2. If decisions do not stick, concerns surface only after forums close, and accountability feels performative, the gap is in reading team dynamics: Calibrate.

3. If imported practices fail without obvious cause, change produces compliance but not commitment, and authority operates differently from what the structure suggests, the gap is in reading the organisation: Excavate.

4. If people wait rather than act, mixed signals multiply under pressure, and cynicism is replacing engagement, the gap is in individual leadership credibility: Model.

5. If functions optimise independently, strategic intent dissolves between layers, and coordination between the programme and the business has become transactional, the gap is in creating shared direction: Align.

6. If the analysis is complete but nothing moves, transformation language has become wallpaper, and early wins fail to generate progress, the gap is in narrative and framing: Propel.

7. If discretionary effort has vanished, talented people are disengaging before they leave, and initiative concentrates in fewer and fewer people, the gap is in motivation: Fuel.

8. If new processes are adopted in form but not in substance, defaults determine outcomes more than analysis does, and decision quality erodes as decisions pile up, the gap is in decision design: Activate.

9. If old behaviours return under pressure, adoption varies by visibility, and change erodes as soon as programme infrastructure is removed, the gap is in habit formation: Nurture.

In most of the leaders we have worked with, several of these patterns showed at once. The place to start is where your own gap creates the most friction.

The nine tools, and where to read further

Every tool in this book is someone else's work. These are the sources each chapter names, in the order of the chapters.

- **Appreciate.** Marston, W. M. (1928). *Emotions of Normal People*. The origin of DISC, since developed into assessment tools by several publishers.
- **Calibrate.** Lencioni, P. (2002). *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*.
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What enables some leaders to stay in motion while others, with comparable resources and talent, stall? We came to nine qualities, in three groups: reading the environment, positioning as the leader, and working with what drives people. For each: what it looked like where it helped a leader, what it cost where it was missing, the one tool we chose for it, and, in most chapters, where that tool stops helping.

We hope that, in sharing how we see these nine qualities and the tools we chose for them, we contribute something to every leader who wants to get better.

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