



AHA Team Training

Leading Without Certainty: Six Superpowers for Today's Healthcare Leaders

September 9, 2026

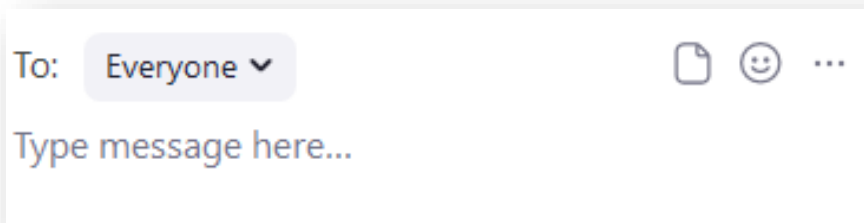


**American Hospital
Association™**

Advancing Health in America

Rules of Engagement

- Audio for the webinar can be accessed in two ways: 1) through your computer speakers or 2) dialing in by phone – *listen only mode*
- Q&A session will be held at the end of the presentation
 - Written questions are encouraged throughout the presentation
 - To submit a question, type it into the Chat Area and send it at any time
- Other notable Zoom features:
 - This session is being recorded, the chat will not be included in the recording
 - Utilize the chat throughout the webinar. To chat everyone, make sure your chat reflects the picture below:



Continuing Education Credit

To receive 1.0 CE credit hour for this webinar, you must:

- **Create a Duke OneLink account.** You only need to create an account once – you may use it for all future webinars. Instructions will be chatted in and/or you may find them in your registration confirmation email.
 - Step 1: Register for a OneLink account
 - Step 2: Activate your account and ***confirm your mobile number***
- **Text **NUKZOT** to (919) 213-8033 after 1:00 pm ET today – 24-hour window**

In support of improving patient care, the Duke University Health System Department of Clinical Education and Professional Development is accredited by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), and the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME), to provide continuing education for the health care team.



**Speakers have no financial disclosures*

Upcoming Team Training Events

○ TeamSTEPPS Master Training

- September 24-November 12 – *Virtual*
- September 24-25 – Houston Methodist
- October 5-6 – Northwell
- October 14-15 – AHA/Chicago
- November 5-6 – UCLA

○ TeamSTEPPS Sustainment – Virtual

- Strategies for Long-Term Sustainability – October 20

*For registration information – [check out our website!](#)

Today's Speakers

Leslie Wainwright PhD, Partner & Senior Strategist, Do Tank

Matthew Kelly, Founding Partner, Do Tank



Learning Objectives

Assess

your own leadership approach to identify which of the six superpowers are strengths and which require further development.

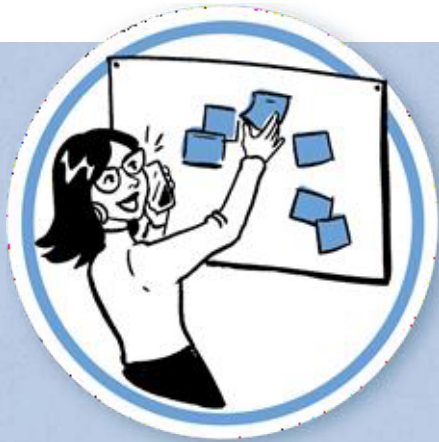
Select

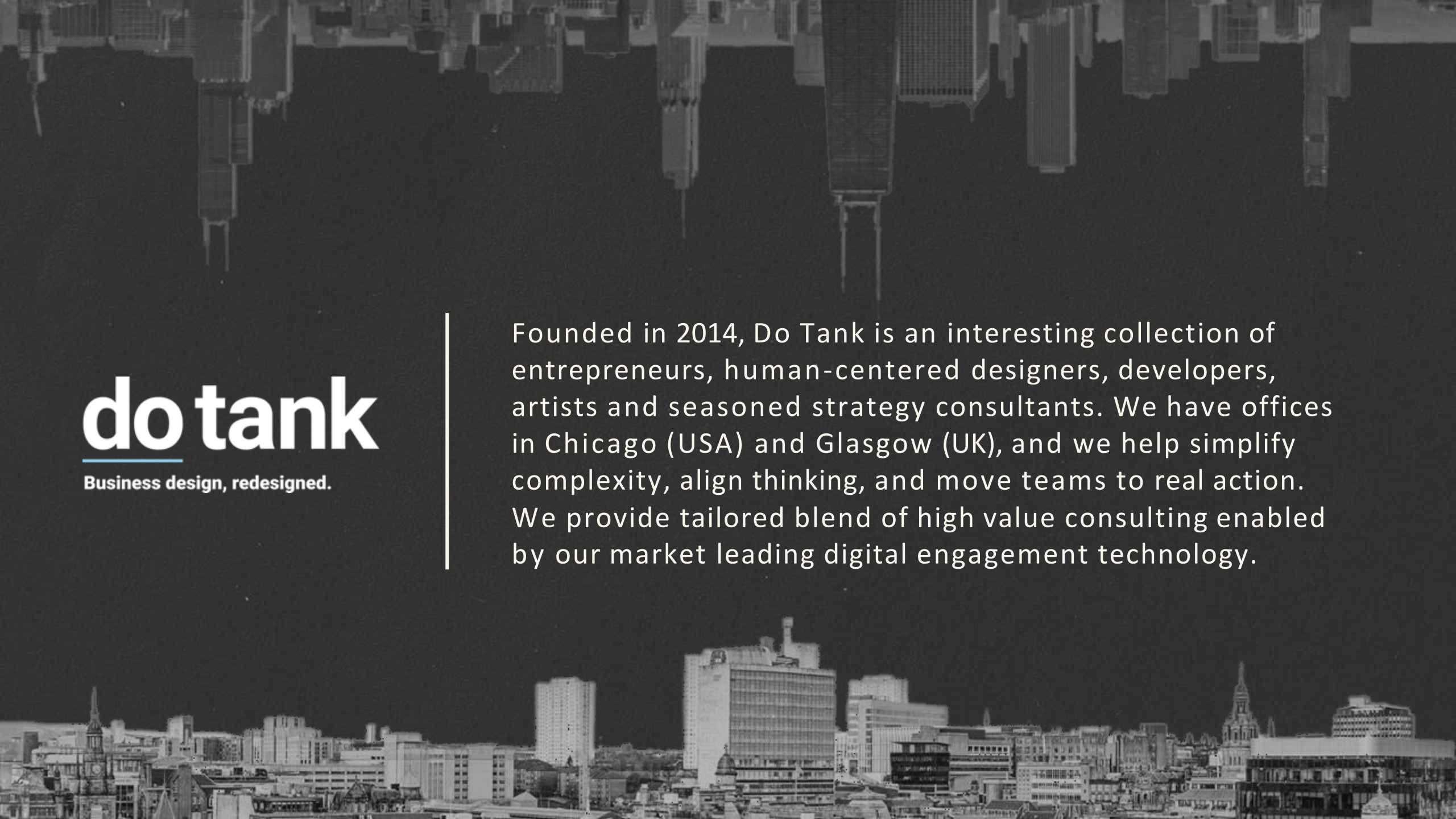
the superpowers best suited to different types of challenges, from building alignment and navigating uncertainty to accelerating learning and driving execution.

Develop

a practical next step for strengthening one or more leadership superpowers within their own team or organization.

A cartoon illustration of a superhero with a blue cape and mask flying through the air. Below him is a blue rocket ship with flames coming out of its engine. To the left of the rocket is a small satellite with two solar panels. The background is a light blue sky with a large white circle containing concentric blue rings, suggesting a target or a portal.



A black and white photograph of a city skyline, likely Chicago, with various skyscrapers and buildings. The skyline is visible in the background, with some buildings appearing upside down at the top of the frame.

do tank

Business design, redesigned.

Founded in 2014, Do Tank is an interesting collection of entrepreneurs, human-centered designers, developers, artists and seasoned strategy consultants. We have offices in Chicago (USA) and Glasgow (UK), and we help simplify complexity, align thinking, and move teams to real action. We provide tailored blend of high value consulting enabled by our market leading digital engagement technology.

“If any field should be human-centered, it’s healthcare.”

We help teams at the intersection of quality, equity, and innovation design a safer, healthier future.”

do tank

Business design, redesigned.



Today's Agenda

1

The Challenge: *Leading When the Answer Isn't Obvious*

2

The Superpowers: *Six Capabilities for Leading Through Uncertainty*

3

Activation: *Which Superpower Does the Moment Require?*



01.

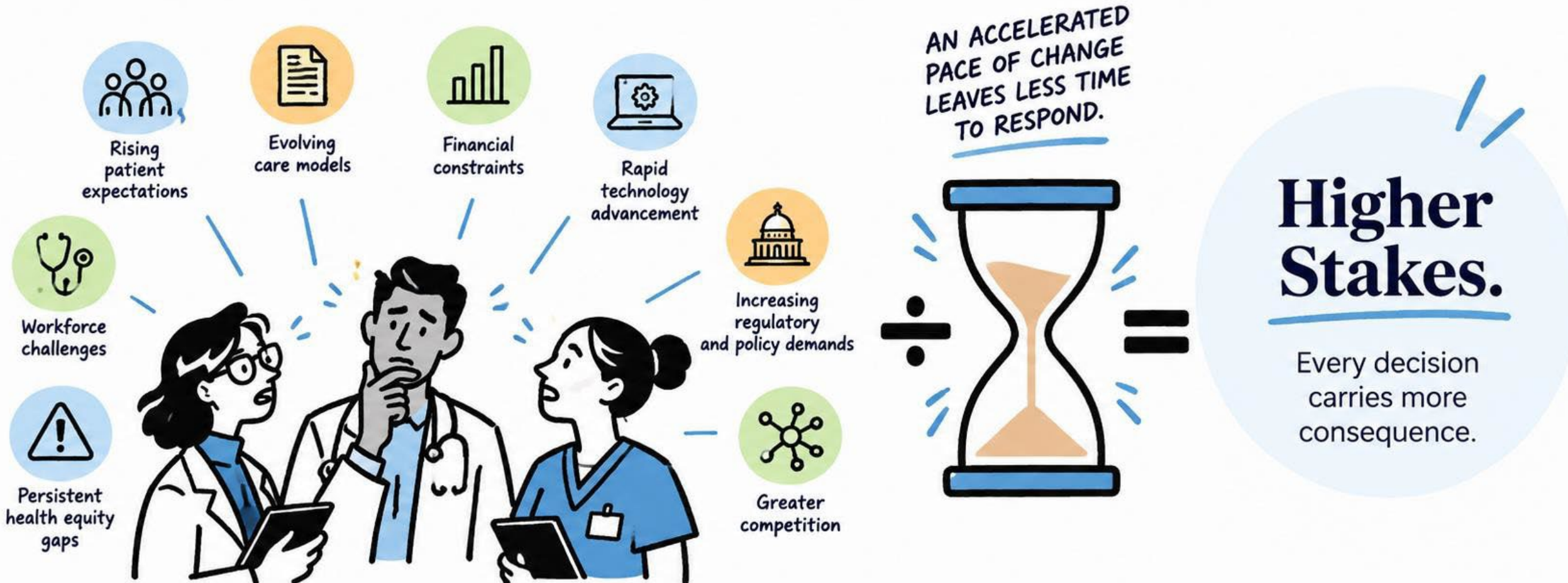


The Challenge:

Leading When the Answer Isn't Obvious



Healthcare Leaders Are Under More Pressure Than Ever



The Leadership Model Is Shifting



TRADITIONAL MODEL

Know



Plan



Align



Execute



TODAY'S REALITY

Understand



Decide



Try

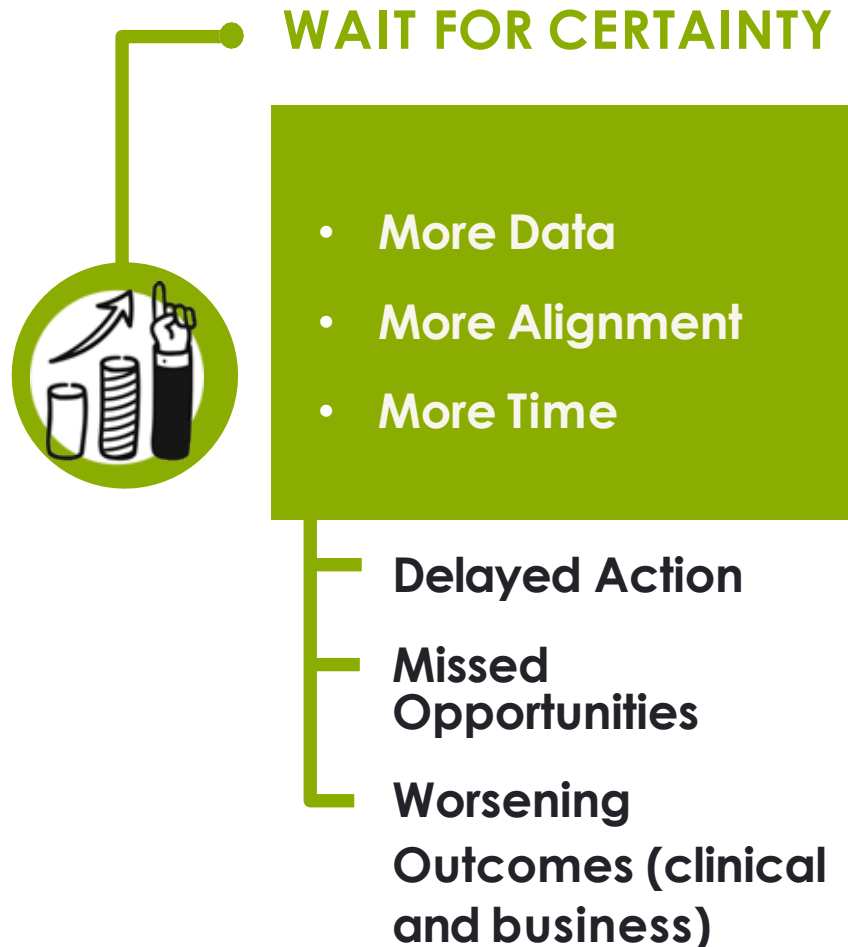


Learn

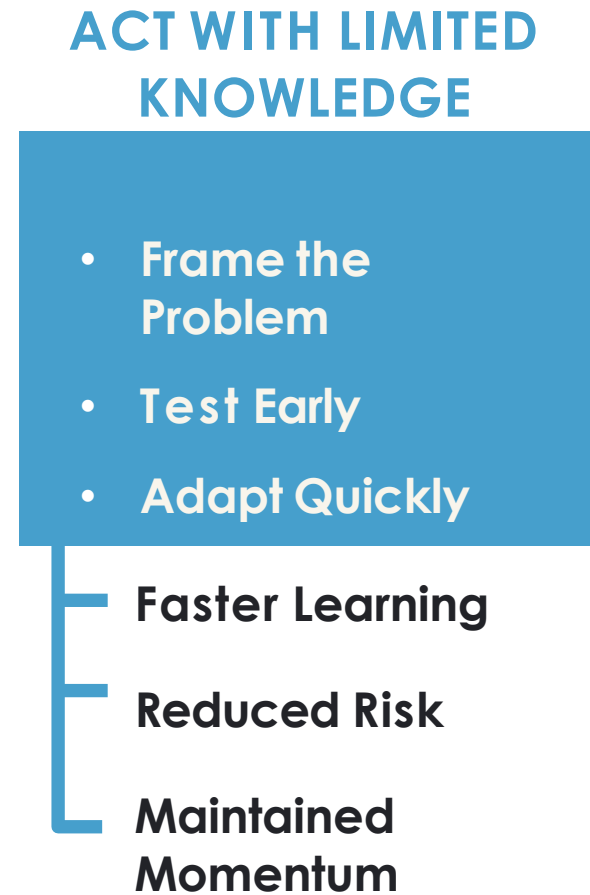


Adapt

For Leaders, the Cost of Waiting Is Now Higher Than the Cost of Being Imperfect



VERSUS



How do you move forward *before* you feel fully ready—without being reckless?”

Design Thinking Is Foundational for Leading When Uncertainty Exists

What is design thinking? It is a human-centered, iterative problem-solving approach that emphasizes empathy, creativity, and experimentation to develop innovative solutions.



USER-CENTERED INNOVATION

Empathy-driven, improved relevance



REDUCES RISK OF FAILURE

Fast feedback and iteration



ENCOURAGES CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Promotes out-of-the-box thinking



FASTER PROBLEM SOLVING

Rapid experimentation and learning



CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND ENGAGEMENT

Increases user satisfaction



CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

Brings together diverse teams

Quantified Impact of Design Thinking



+32% Revenue Growth, +56% Shareholder Returns



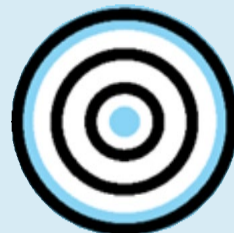
Up to **+75%** Faster Time-to-Market, **+85%** Higher ROI



2.6x More likely to have a defined innovation strategy



+75% Increase in team alignment



Why It Works?

- **Empathy-driven insights** – better fit with user needs
- **Rapid prototyping** – agile, testable solutions
- **Cross-functional input** – broader buy-in and creativity
- **Iterative process** – resilient and adaptive plans

Sources: McKinsey & Company. *The Business Value of Design*. McKinsey & Company, 2018, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-design/our-insights/the-business-value-of-design>; IBM and Forrester. *The Total Economic Impact™ of IBM's Design Thinking Practice*. IBM, 2018; Capgemini. *The Innovation Game: Why and How Businesses Are Investing in Innovation Centers*. Capgemini Digital Transformation Institute, 2020; IBM. *Enterprise Design Thinking Impact Report*. IBM Design, 2016; Rotman School of Management. *Design Thinking in Leadership and Strategy*. University of Toronto, n.d.

02.



The Superpowers:

Six Capabilities for Leading Through Uncertainty





Leverage culture



Nimbleness & pace



Testing mindset



Be a storyteller



Lead with empathy



Own business rigor



Six Design Thinking Superpowers

Not Six Definitions: Six Jobs a Leader Has To Do



Empathy

See what you're missing.



Testing Mindset

Learn before making the big bet.



Culture

*Create the conditions
for people to move.*



Storytelling

Give people a reason to move.



Nimbleness + Pace

*Create momentum
without creating chaos.*



Business Rigor

Make the idea survivable.

The Shadow Side of Every Superpower

Overused or unbalanced, each strength becomes a limitation



The Empathizer

who never decides.



The Tester

who never scales.



The Culture Builder

who avoids conflict.



The Storyteller

without an operating model.



The Fast Mover

who outruns the organization.

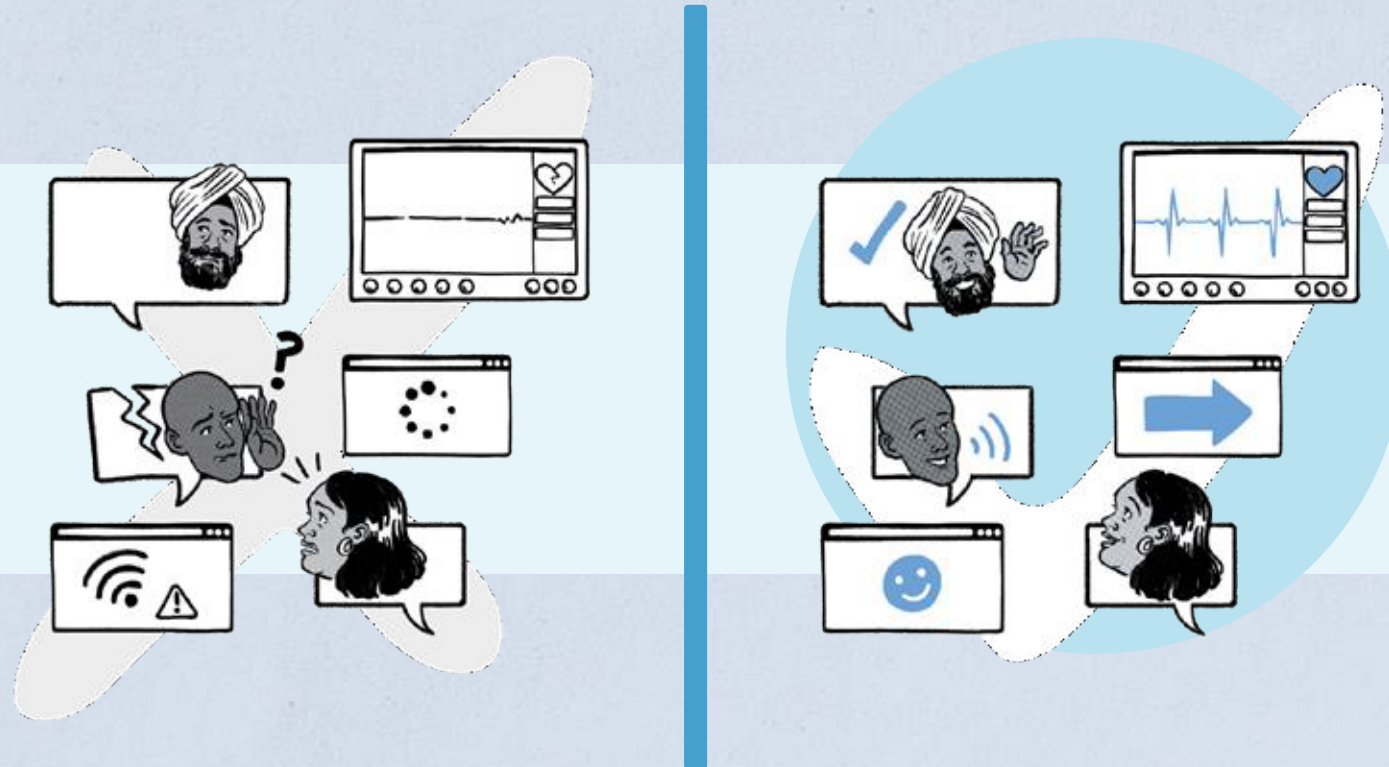


The Rigor Leader

who analyzes the life out of an idea.

You don't choose one.

Leadership happens in the
tension between them.



Empathy helps leaders understand the people behind the problem



Leading with empathy means intentionally seeking the perspectives of patients, families, clinicians, staff, and partners before moving to solutions. It is the discipline of listening, observing, asking thoughtful questions, and challenging assumptions so that organizations solve the right problems, not just the visible ones.

The best solutions begin with a deep understanding of the people they are intended to serve.

Lead with Empathy

See what you're missing.



WHAT LEADERS GET WRONG

"I've been doing this for 25 years. I know what the problem is."



PROVOCATION

What if the problem you're solving isn't the problem people are experiencing?

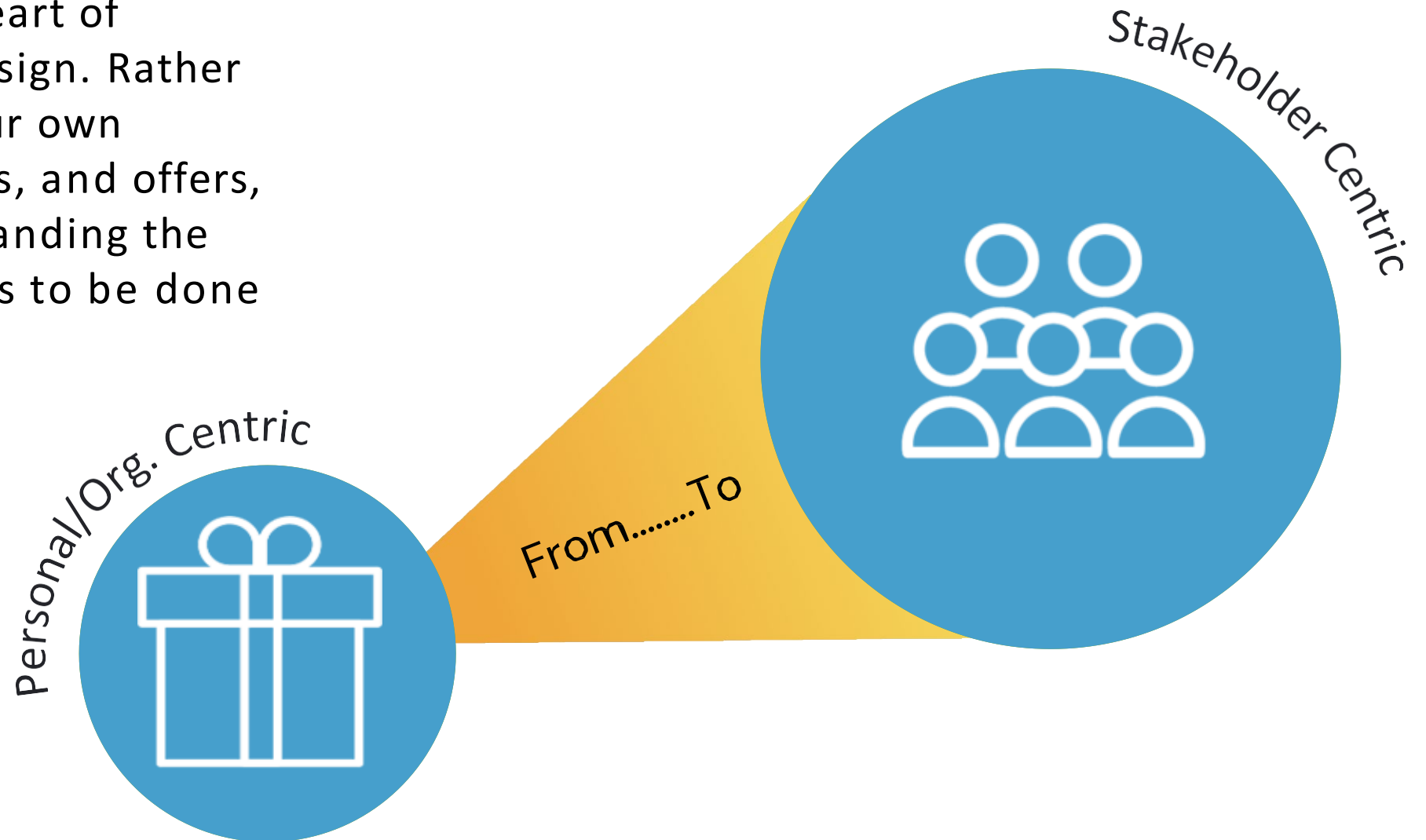


TRY TOMORROW

Ask one person closest to the work: "What do I not understand about this?"

Empathy Foundations

Empathy is at the heart of human-centered design. Rather than starting with our own interests, capabilities, and offers, we start by understanding the pains, gains, and jobs to be done for our stakeholders.



Empathy in Action



- **Actively seek diverse perspectives:** Engage frontline staff, patients, families, and community partners to better understand lived experience beyond leadership assumptions.
- **Validate and reflect back:** Reframe and play back what you hear to confirm understanding and demonstrate that input is valued.
- **Build direct engagement capabilities:** Develop skills such as interviewing, focus groups, surveys, and observation so teams can gather insight directly rather than relying only on dashboards and reports.

Culture determines whether change becomes "the way we work."



While strategy sets direction, culture shapes how people communicate, collaborate, respond under pressure, navigate conflict, and make decisions when leaders are not in the room. When intentionally cultivated, culture becomes a strategic advantage rather than a passive byproduct of organizational life.

***Culture is not built through statements on a wall.
It is built through everyday leadership behaviors.***

Leverage Culture

Create the conditions for people to move.



WHAT LEADERS GET WRONG

Treating culture as atmosphere rather than infrastructure.



PROVOCATION

What happens in your organization when someone says, “I think we’re wrong”?

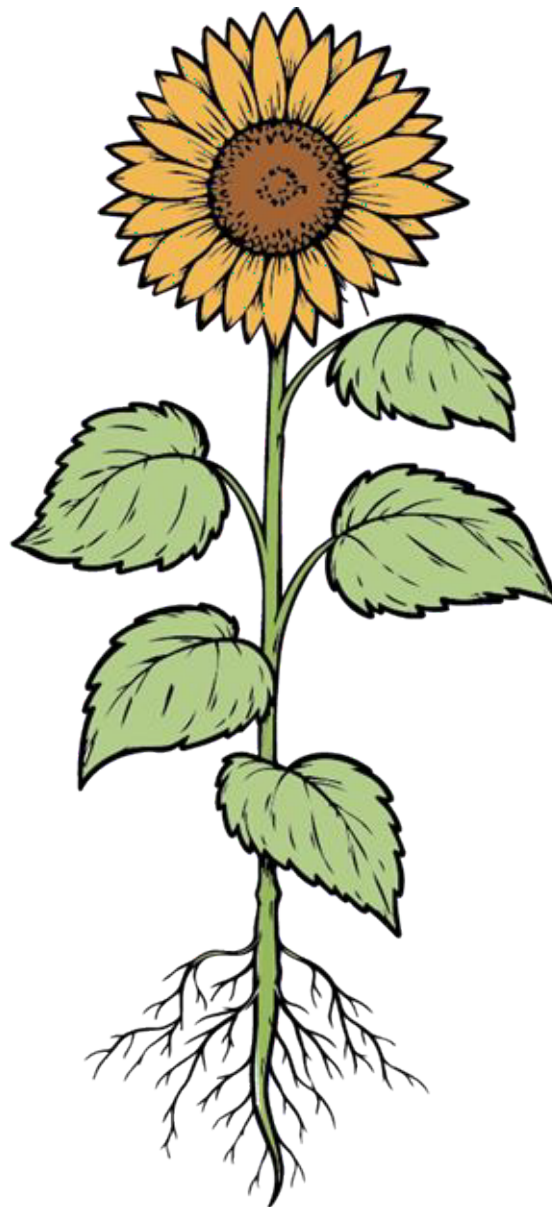


TRY TOMORROW

At your next meeting, ask: “What aren’t we saying?”

Cultural Foundations

Leaders cannot force behaviors, let alone outcomes, but they can create the structures, processes, and good examples that enhance the likelihood of a strong culture.



Outcomes

Behaviors

Enablers/Blockers



Culture in Action



- **Activate values consistently:** Use organizational values as active leadership tools — grounding meetings, communication, hiring, performance conversations, and difficult decisions in the behaviors the organization claims to prioritize.
- **Build psychological safety and healthy conflict:** Create environments where people feel safe speaking honestly, challenging assumptions, raising concerns, and working through tension productively without fear of embarrassment or retaliation.
- **Make culture participatory:** Treat culture as something teams actively shape together by giving people voice, ownership, and visibility into how norms, expectations, and ways of working evolve over time.

Nimbleness and Pace in healthcare require that you define how decisions are made



Healthcare leaders face problems that rarely have perfect information or obvious solutions. Nimbleness is the ability to move forward thoughtfully despite uncertainty and learning through small experiments rather than delaying action until every answer is known.

***The goal is not to eliminate uncertainty.
Instead, it is to learn faster than the challenge changes.***

Move with Nimbleness + Pace

Create momentum without creating chaos.



WHAT LEADERS GET WRONG

Waiting for certainty.



PROVOCATION

Where are you using “we need more information” as a substitute for making a decision?

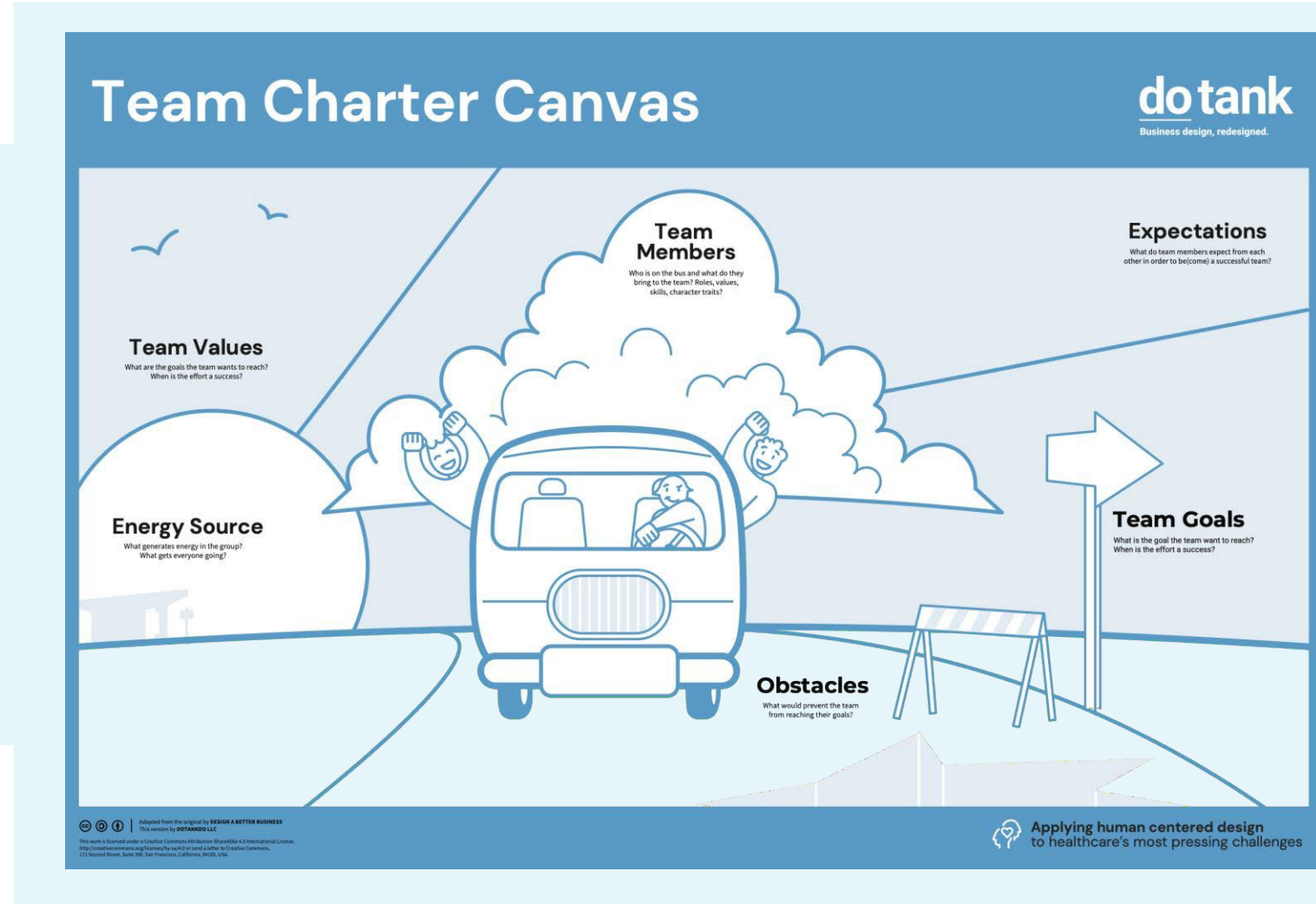


TRY TOMORROW

Ask: “What is the smallest decision we can responsibly make now?”

Nimbleness and Pace Foundations

Nimble teams move faster when expectations, team charters, decision rights, communication norms, timelines, and accountabilities are established upfront rather than negotiated repeatedly during execution.



Nimbleness and Pace in Action



- **Act decisively with incomplete information:** Effective leaders clarify decision criteria early, determine what information is truly necessary, apply sound judgment, and move forward using the best evidence available at the time.
- **Empower expertise closest to the work:** High-performing organizations defer to the people with the strongest operational insight, regardless of hierarchy.
- **Build adaptability into routines and planning:** Gameplanning, huddles, rapid debriefs, scenario planning, and after-action reviews help teams maintain momentum, anticipate risks, and adjust quickly as conditions evolve.

Reflection on a scale of 1 to 5...



EMPATHY:

I intentionally seek direct input from people affected by decisions rather than relying only on reports or secondhand summaries.

I reinforce empathy as an organizational expectation through leadership behavior, decision-making, and culture.

CULTURE:

I create environments where people feel safe surfacing concerns, ideas, and uncertainty.

I shape organizational norms through what I reward, model, and reinforce consistently.

NIMBLENESS and PACE:

I recognize when situations require urgency and when they require reflection.

I help others navigate uncertainty while continuing to move work forward responsibly.

Testing is not about proving your idea works. It is about learning how to make it work better.



Great ideas rarely emerge fully formed. They become stronger through feedback, experimentation, and continuous refinement. Testing helps leaders uncover hidden assumptions, identify unintended consequences, and improve solutions before significant time and resources are invested.

The fastest way to improve an idea is to put it in front of the people who will use it.

Have a Testing Mindset

Learn before making the big bet.



WHAT LEADERS GET WRONG

Treating testing as something that happens after the solution has already been chosen.



PROVOCATION

What assumption would be most expensive if we were wrong?



TRY TOMORROW

Test that assumption — not the entire solution. Don't ask "Did the pilot work?" Ask "What did we learn that changes what we do next?"

Testing Mindset Foundations

We constantly need to make decisions based on incomplete information, but it is important to always distinguish facts from assumptions. Assumptions can be validated or invalidated through tests of change and pilots.

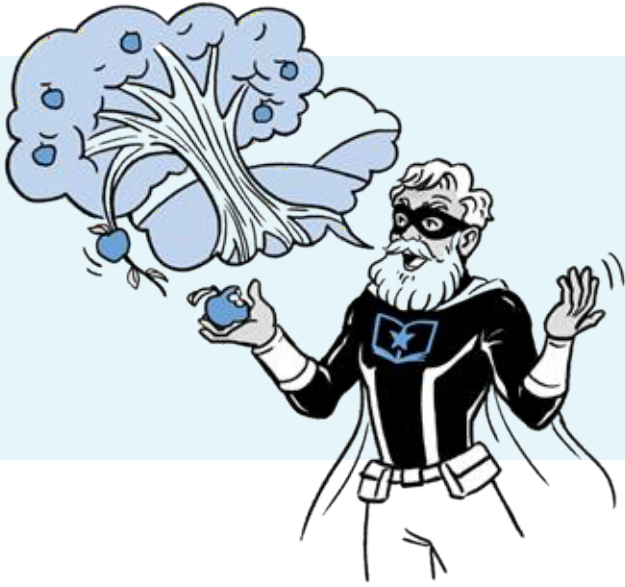


Testing Mindset in Action



- **Anchor testing in existing healthcare values:** Healthcare already believes in learning before scaling through science, quality improvement, high-reliability principles, and patient safety practices. Position testing as an extension of these deeply familiar disciplines.
- **Test more than products and services:** Strategies, workflows, narratives, operating models, and communication approaches all benefit from testing. Early experimentation builds understanding and stakeholder ownership long before formal implementation begins.
- **Match the testing method to the environment:** Creative experimentation matters, but so do structured approaches such as checklists, audits, simulations, and compliance testing. Effective leaders balance innovation with safety, regulation, and operational reliability.

Storytelling enables change when it describes both the reason and the destination.



Facts and data explain problems, but stories help people understand why change matters and where the organization is going. Effective leaders connect evidence with emotion, helping others see themselves as part of a shared future rather than passive recipients of change.

***The most powerful stories do more than inform.
They inspire people to act together.***

Be a Storyteller

Give people a reason to move.



WHAT LEADERS GET WRONG

Communicating the strategy instead of creating meaning around it.



PROVOCATION

If your people can't retell the strategy, do you actually have alignment?



TRY TOMORROW

Explain one priority using Head. Heart. Eyes.

Storytelling Foundations



We encourage three fundamental considerations when building and evaluating stories: Is there strong logic and rationale? Does the story create an emotional and human connection? Is the aesthetic and sensory experience compelling?



Storytelling in Action



- **Test stories before high-stakes moments:** The strongest narratives are refined through feedback, early conversations, and iteration. Testing builds both clarity and stakeholder ownership before formal presentations occur.
- **Use language people recognize as their own:** Stories become more persuasive when they reflect organizational values, strategic priorities, and the language stakeholders already use to describe their work and goals.
- **Keep people at the center:** Ground stories in real human experiences and tangible problems to solve. Supporting visuals and presentations should reinforce the narrative rather than compete with it.

Business rigor makes momentum sustainable.



Innovation creates possibilities, but business rigor ensures those possibilities deliver measurable value. Effective leaders balance creativity with operational discipline, making thoughtful decisions about priorities, resources, governance, measurement, and execution.

***Innovation creates momentum.
Discipline turns good ideas
into lasting results.***

Own Business Rigor

Make the idea survivable.



WHAT LEADERS GET WRONG

Two extremes: “Let’s innovate!” versus
“Show me the 47-page business case.”



PROVOCATION

What has to be true for this idea to actually work here?

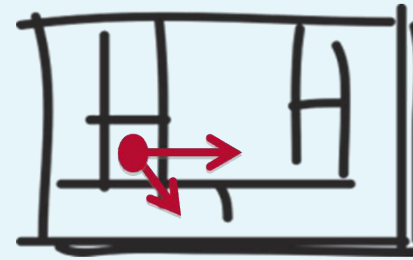


TRY TOMORROW

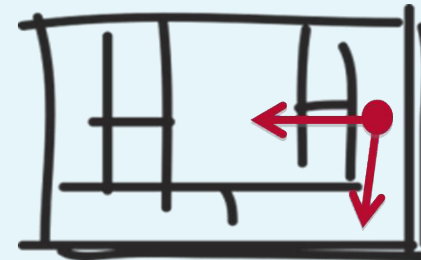
Force the conversation across: People • Workflow •
Technology • Economics • Risk

Business Rigor Foundations

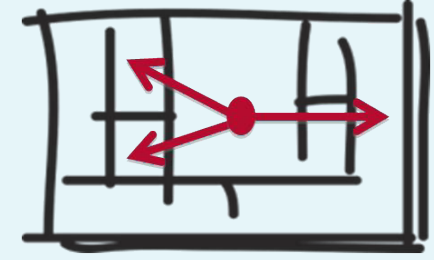
When making a change or launching something new – whether it is a policy, process, or product – consider the entire ‘business model’. All aspects of how you are creating, delivering, and capturing value must be considered for a rigorous, holistic understanding.



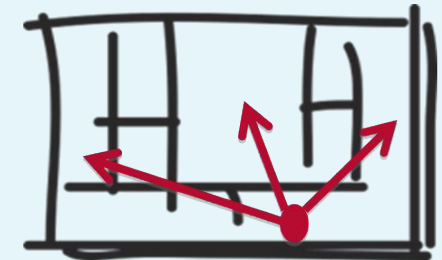
RESOURCE DRIVEN



CUSTOMER DRIVEN



**PROPOSITION
DRIVEN**



REVENUE DRIVEN

Business Rigor in Action



- **Model the broader system:** Before becoming attached to a solution, examine how it affects staffing, workflows, incentives, costs, technology, and long-term sustainability. Strong leaders look for ripple effects, dependencies, and operational consequences early.
- **Balance speed with structure:** Apply enough rigor to strengthen decision-making without slowing momentum unnecessarily. Effective leaders avoid both impulsive action and analysis paralysis.
- **Use data and lived experience together:** The strongest decisions emerge when quantitative data is paired with the perspectives of patients, clinicians, frontline staff, and operational teams. Numbers explain patterns; people explain reality.

Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 5...



TESTING:

I treat assumptions as things to test rather than facts to defend.

I design small experiments to generate learning before making larger investments.



STORYTELLING:

I balance anecdotes, data, and evidence to create more persuasive communication.

I adjust messaging when I sense confusion, resistance, or disengagement.



BUSINESS RIGOR:

I identify risks, dependencies, and operational implications before major decisions are finalized.

I maintain rigor without creating unnecessary bureaucracy or slowing learning.

03.



Activation:

Which Superpower Does the Moment Require?



The Scenario



Your organization has decided to implement an AI-enabled clinical documentation solution.

Physicians are excited. Nursing is skeptical. IT says integration will take nine months. Compliance has concerns. Finance wants ROI in year one. The CEO wants something announced next quarter.

Physicians

Excited

Nursing

Skeptical

IT

9-month integration

Compliance

Has concerns

Finance

Wants
year-one ROI

CEO

Wants it announced
next quarter



Each superpower brings a different lens to this scenario



Empathy

What are clinicians actually experiencing?



Culture

Can people raise concerns safely?



Nimbleness

What can we move on now?



Testing

What assumption should we validate first?



Storytelling

Why are we doing this?



Rigor

What makes this viable and sustainable?

Turn this session into one concrete action



1

Name the initiative

Think about one consequential initiative you're leading right now.



2

Pick the superpower

Which superpower would most change the trajectory of that work?



3

Commit to a move

What is one thing you will do differently this week?

Follow us for updates!

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/dotankdo/>

How can you become more intentional in how you use your superpowers?



Matthew Kelly
matt.kelly@dotankdo.com



Leslie Wainwright, Ph.D.
leslie.wainwright@dotankdo.com

Key Takeaways

Leadership requires a broader toolkit.

Traditional leadership skills remain essential, but today's challenges also demand human-centered capabilities that help leaders move forward without waiting for certainty.

The six superpowers work together.

Empathy, culture, nimbleness, testing, storytelling, and business rigor create a practical framework for leading through complexity and change.

Small shifts create outsized impact.

Strengthening even one superpower can improve decision-making, stakeholder alignment, and an organization's ability to adapt and innovate.

Final Reminders

- **Evaluation**

- Please complete the evaluation form that appears on your screen once the webinar ends

- **Continuing Education**

- Create a Duke OneLink account if you have not done so
 - Instructions can be downloaded from the Files pod or your registration confirmation email
 - **Text NUKZOT to (919) 213-8033 within 24 hours**

Any Questions?

Email us at teamtraining@aha.org
