Culture Without the Fluff: Pragmatic Levers for Executives

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Welcome

Where are you joining us from today?

Let us know in the chat!

What we will cover

Outcome

Share pragmatic levers to intentionally evolve culture and navigate uncertainty.

Framing culture in **practical levers** we can address

Exploring **six common pitfalls** and **uncommon sense moves** to make faster progress

Q&A – submit questions throughout!

Being surrounded by unprecedented uncertainty and volatility is our new normal...
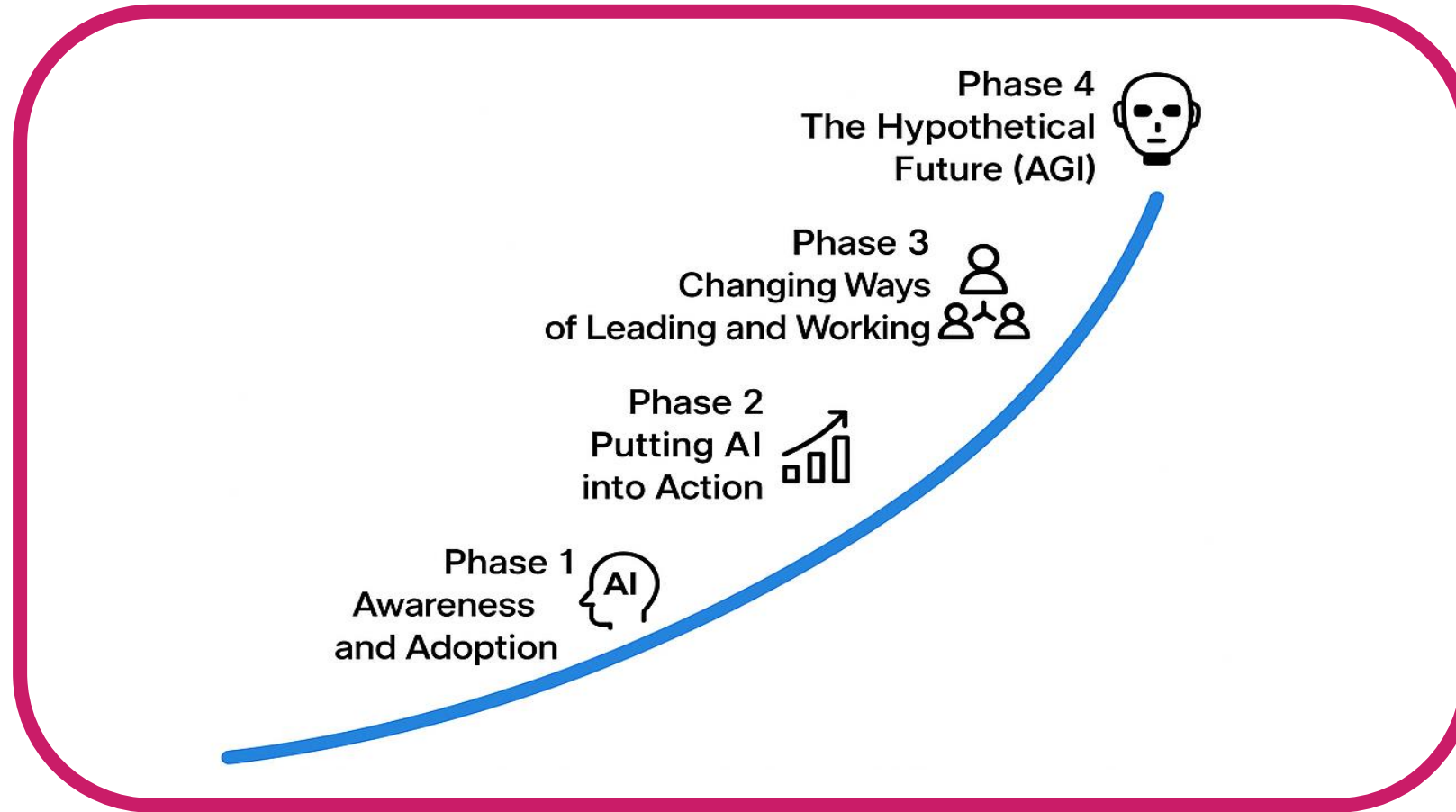
Global Economic Instability

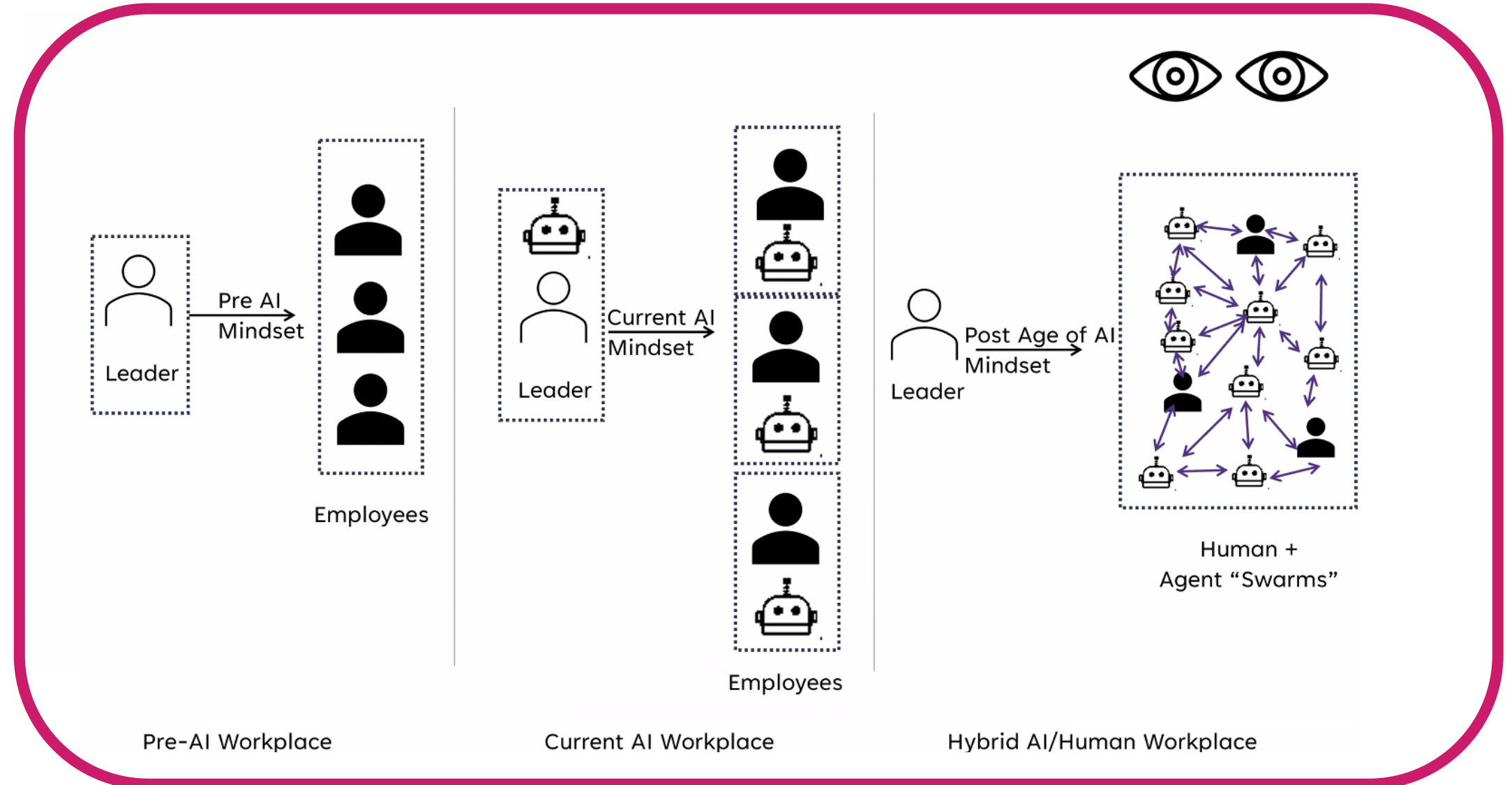AI

Tariffs

Geopolitical Volatility

Generational Workforce Shifts

Climate Extremes Escalation

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As organizations move up the AI maturity curve, culture and ways of working will need to continue to evolve more rapidly.

AI Maturity Curve

Our workplace dynamics will continue to shift, where teams are looking different than ever before.

Leader — Pre AI Mindset → Employees

Pre-AI Workplace

Leader — Current AI Mindset → Employees

Current AI Workplace

Leader — Post Age of AI Mindset → Human + Agent "Swarms"

Hybrid AI/Human Workplace

Addressing culture in the context of strategy from purpose to direction to action, is required so organizations can iterate and move with speed.
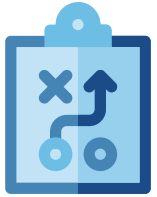

BTS Culture/Strategy Pyramid™

Purpose

Values

Vision & goals

Direction

Mindset & behaviors

Strategies

Action

Organizational shifts & people processes

Initiatives, workflows & systems

People & Culture

Strategic Intent

Culture can seem theoretical, so we break it down into practical levers to consider and intentionally change.

Instinctual, second nature, and bigger than any one person in the organization

A collective set of beliefs or a way of thinking that determines behavior, outlook and mental attitude

A set of **deeply held** **organizational mindsets** that shape **who we are** and **how we do things**

Our purpose, values and identity

Actions we take individually, in groups and teams, at broader organizational level and accepted practices that support them

So What?

The traditional playbook of moves is too slow and insufficient to meet the moment

We'll unpack six common pitfalls—and show how to target the right levers, move fast, and iterate in step with today's demands

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Six common pitfalls—and the practical shifts that help your culture evolve as you iterate on your company's future.

	Pitfall		Uncommon Sense Move
1	Tackling symptoms, not causes.		**Get to the why beneath the why**
2	Believing that a compelling message is sufficient to drive adoption		**Make the future real—begin practicing the shifts it demands**
3	Relying on individuals and volunteer champions to own the change		**Tap into the social capital of groups and credible influencers**
4	Working against, rather than with, resistance		**Treat resistance as engagement**
5	Over indexing on one change lever		**Shift operating habits, behaviors and structures together**
6	Everything, everywhere, all at once.		**Prioritize, practice and iterate**

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Pitfall 1: tackling symptoms, not causes.

Spending a disproportionate amount of time defining where to go.

Assuming we understand where we are today from surface level indicators.

Uncommon Sense Move 1: Get to the why beneath the why
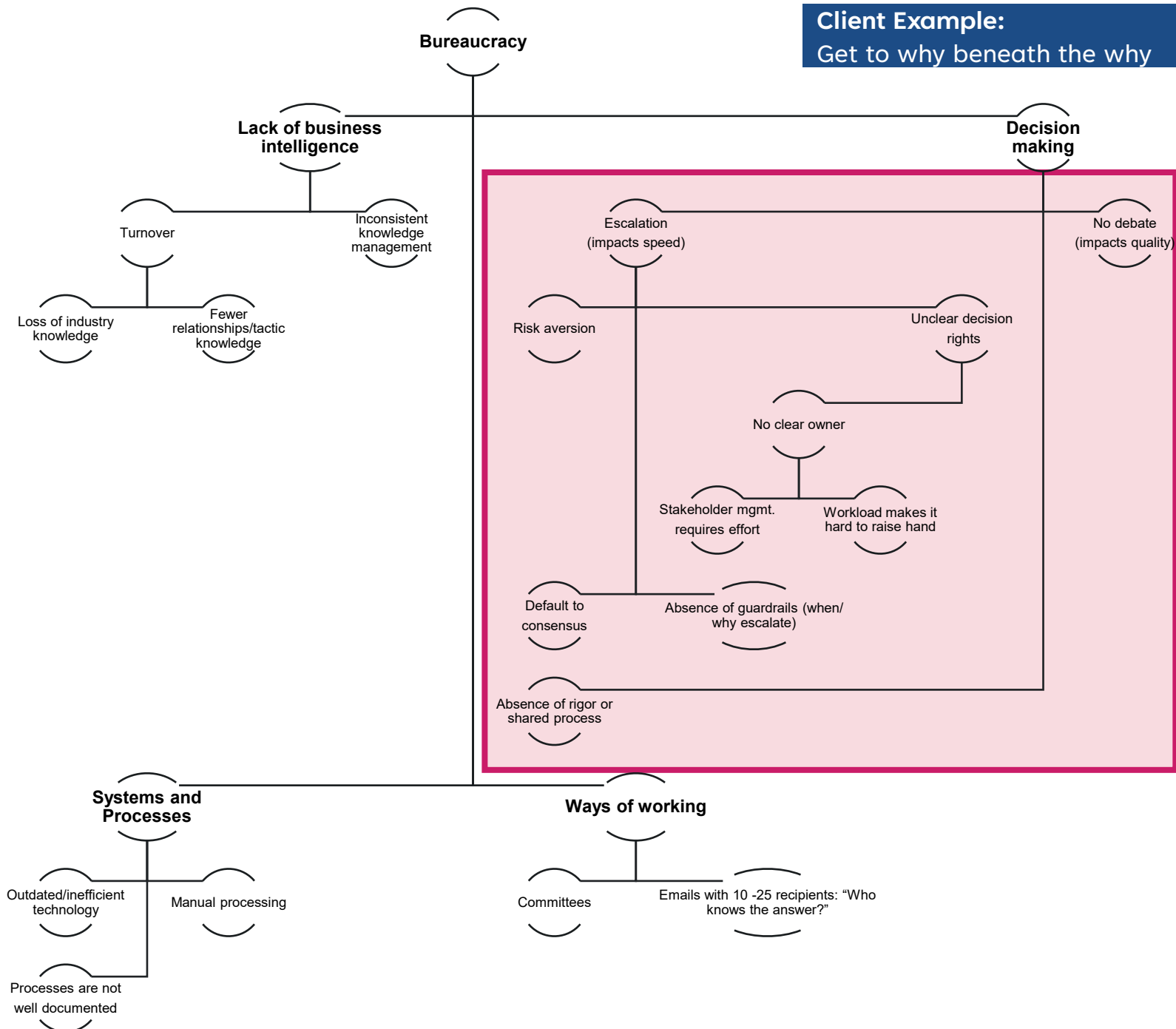
What to do instead?

Go beyond buzz words. Spend time going deep into how culture is showing up today in beliefs and ways of working.

Identify the root causes that, if addressed, will have an outsized impact on the overall culture transformation.

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Example:
Disentangling Bureaucracy

Where they decided to focus:
1. Clarify decision rights
2. Shift how we manage risk
3. Lean into constructive conflict

Client Example:
Get to why beneath the why

Bureaucracy

Lack of business intelligence

Turnover

Inconsistent knowledge management

Loss of industry knowledge

Fewer relationships/tactic knowledge

Decision making

Escalation (impacts speed)

No debate (impacts quality)

Risk aversion

Unclear decision rights

No clear owner

Stakeholder mgmt. requires effort

Workload makes it hard to raise hand

Default to consensus

Absence of guardrails (when/ why escalate)

Absence of rigor or shared process

Systems and Processes

Outdated/inefficient technology

Manual processing

Processes are not well documented

Ways of working

Committees

Emails with 10 -25 recipients: "Who knows the answer?"

Pitfall 2: Believing that a compelling message is sufficient to drive adoption

If we communicate the desired state to people enough times, they will get on board.

Uncommon Sense Move 2: Make the future real—begin practicing the shifts it demands

What to do instead?

A change in information does not equal a change in behavior

To be understood, valued, and adopted, culture has to be tangible and real - define what it looks like in daily ways of working and let people experience it.

Example of culture distilled in daily moments that matter

Moment: When a decision needs to be made and there are many people involved...

How we show up

Great	Not-Yet-Great
Mindset: *To make a thoughtful decision, we must have a clear definition of the decision to be made, the guidelines we will use to make the decision, and a clear decision maker.*	Mindset: *I am not empowered to decide so involving more people will get me buy-in. Ultimately, have someone higher up will make the decision. My voice cannot influence group consensus.*
• Invite stakeholders who bring a unique and relevant perspective that is necessary to make the decision • Describe the desired outcome and how it will benefit the customer • Define important criteria for making the decision (i.e., time, owners, influential and impacted stakeholders, other parameters) • Ask "Who owns this decision?" and "Who is necessary to help ensure the decision is supported and executed successfully?" • Share reservations about the proposed decision based on potential impacts on the business, including risks and opportunities • Commit to decisions with strong "yeses" and "nos" within the pre-determined timeline	• Invite a representative from every management chain to validate a decision • Collect opinions from various people without a plan to use them • Stay silent when you disagree with the proposed decision or have no intent to implement it once decided • Argue against ideas that do not align with your preconceived point-of-view • Say "This will not work for [my division] because..." as your default position • Revisit a decision after it has already been made

Pitfall 3: Relying on individuals and volunteer champions to own the change.

Enlisting an army of volunteer champions to own the culture change.

Focusing on individual development efforts for the rest of the organization.

Uncommon Sense Move 3: Tap into the social capital of groups and credible influencers

What to do instead?

Engage established groups and credible people in the business as a support mechanism for adopting new ways of thinking and working.

Pitfall 4: working against, rather than with, resistance.

Directing attention to "overcoming" resistance and focusing attention on those who already support our culture aspiration.

Alternative Move: Treat resistance as engagement

What to do instead?

Seek to understand resistance as data to help inform where to focus and what 'elephants' to address up front.

Be careful about over-indexing on people who support a change. Doing so may cause you to miss out on a vital feedback loop.

What senior leaders were assuming:

"We have the wrong people"

"People are not taking ownership; this is just a 9-5 job for them"

"We are losing the winning spirit"

"Complacency will kill us"

What they discovered from engaging resistance:

- People wanted to take ownership but were missing the compelling "why"

- People were only hearing "deliver financial results"

- People wanted to connect to a bigger vision about compelling products and delighting the customer
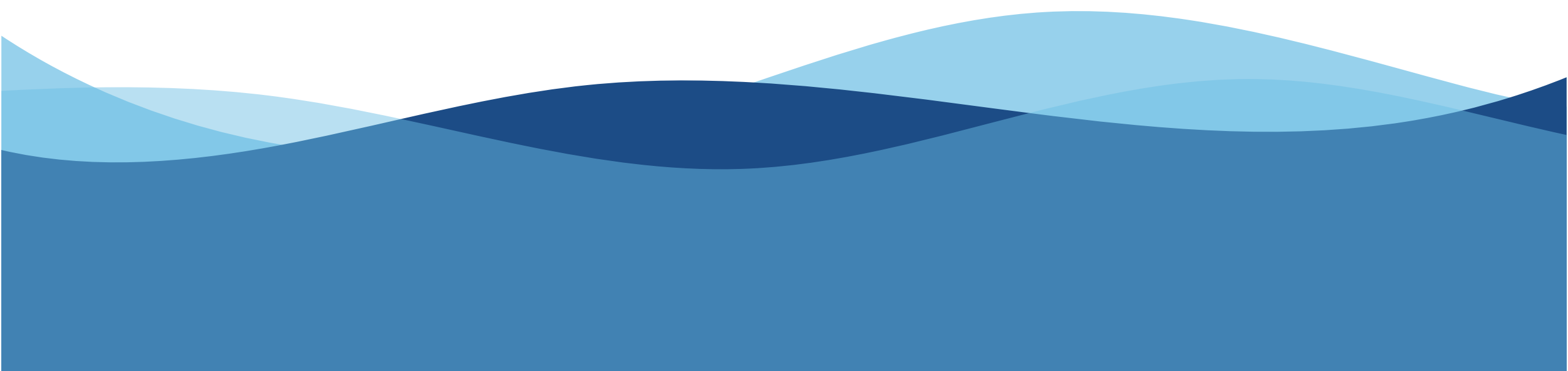
Pitfall 5: Over indexing on one change lever

Assuming a process, system or structure change will force a culture change.

Trying to shift mindsets and behaviors without supporting operating habits and structures.

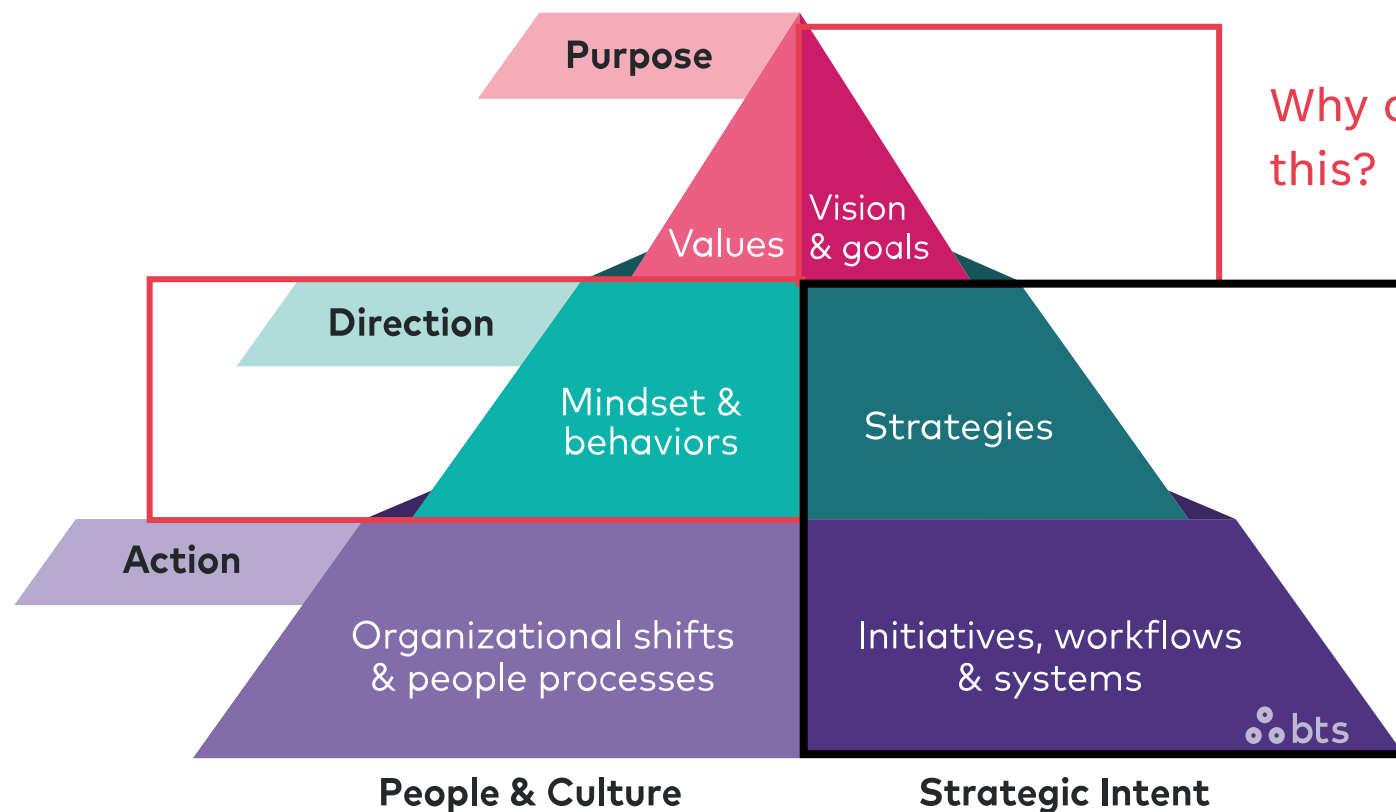## Uncommon Sense Move 5: Shift operating habits, behaviors and structures together

What to do instead?

Focus on consistent daily operating habits that signal something is different and the supporting mindsets/behaviors to uphold them in tandem with structures and processes.

Example: Reinventing a business model from a bunch of small acquisitions

Where we helped:

- *"T" shaped capability*
- *New ways of working across teams*
- *Collaboration*
- *Decision rights*

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Strategic Intent

Why are we doing this?

What they did well:
- *Crafting the new strategy*
- *Focusing on growing external partnerships*
- *OKRs*

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Pitfall 6: everything, everywhere, all at once.

To expedite impact, organizations will try to tackle all efforts at once, overwhelming the organization and ultimately stalling meaningful progress.

Uncommon Sense Move 6: Prioritize, practice and iterate

What to do instead?

Prioritize the most critical shifts that will have outsized impact first.

Get a lot of people focusing on shifting one thing and practice and iterate, learn and adapt.

Doing so enables acceleration towards a tipping point by focusing on small wins and what the org can digest.

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We form a structure that harnesses collective effort & creates a tipping point embedding real change

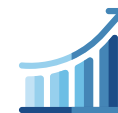## ...*we call them Sprints*
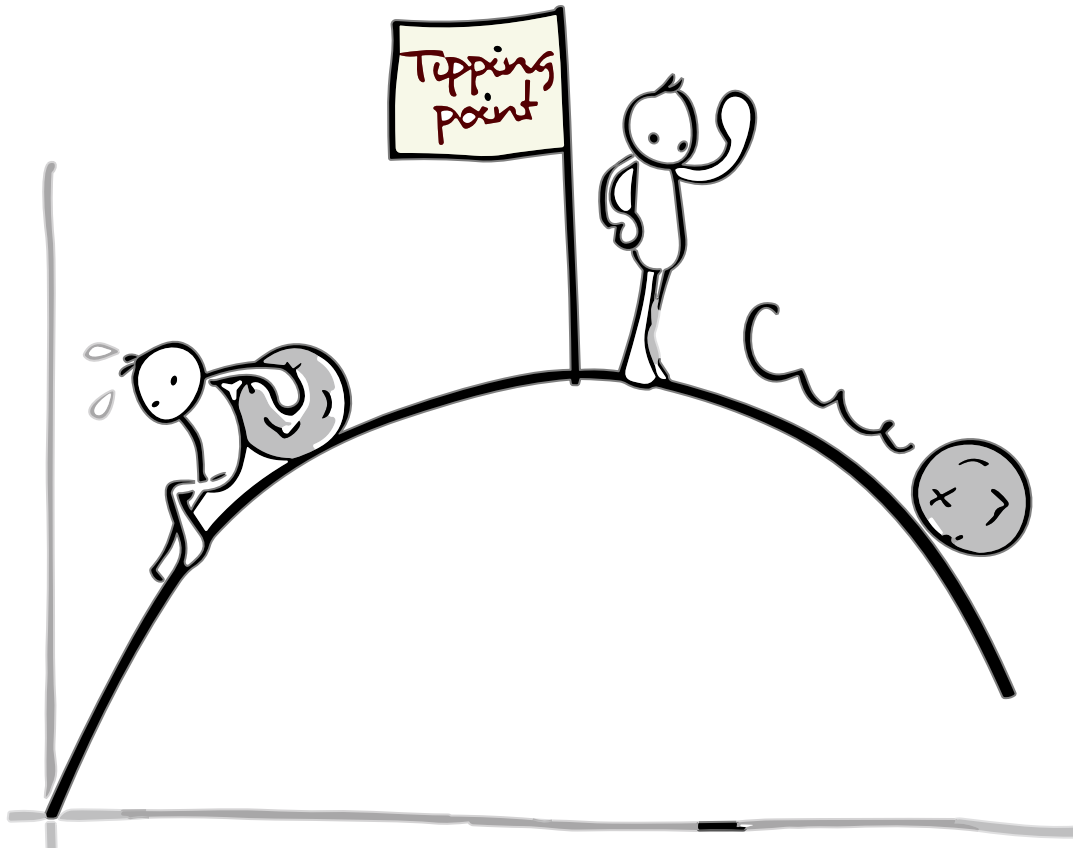
Identify the mindset, process or way of working that will make the biggest difference

Makes changes practical

Forms a **social support network**

Measures progress quickly, learning as we go

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Small changes deliver a tangible impact

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People in 8 weeks

21 → **18**

Avg. hours in meetings

6 → **5**

Avg. people in meetings

56% → **69%**

Reported 'Effective decisions'

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Strategy made personal

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