CGI Global
Governance Summit
2026

Leading Through Uncertainty:

Staying Grounded When Everything Is Changing

Roshan Thiran



LEADERONOMICS
The Science of Building Leaders


Leaderonomics
The Science of Building Leaders

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Before we dive into Transformation and Leading:

Quick Understanding of The Uncertainty of Today . . .



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Transitionary Times



A World With No Standards

LEADERONOMICS
The Science of Building Leaders

What is the Context of Today?

The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Physical
Autonomous vehicles, robotics, 3D printing, new materials

Biological
Genomic diagnostics, treatment, engineering

Digital
IoT, Blockchain, disruptive business models



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Convergence of Tech is Leading Us to a Future Beyond Our Imagination!
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HOW AI IS CAUSING ANOTHER SHIFT

INDUSTRY & FUNCTION TRANSFORMATION

AI's 10X Effect

Seemingly impossible goals can be achieved

x

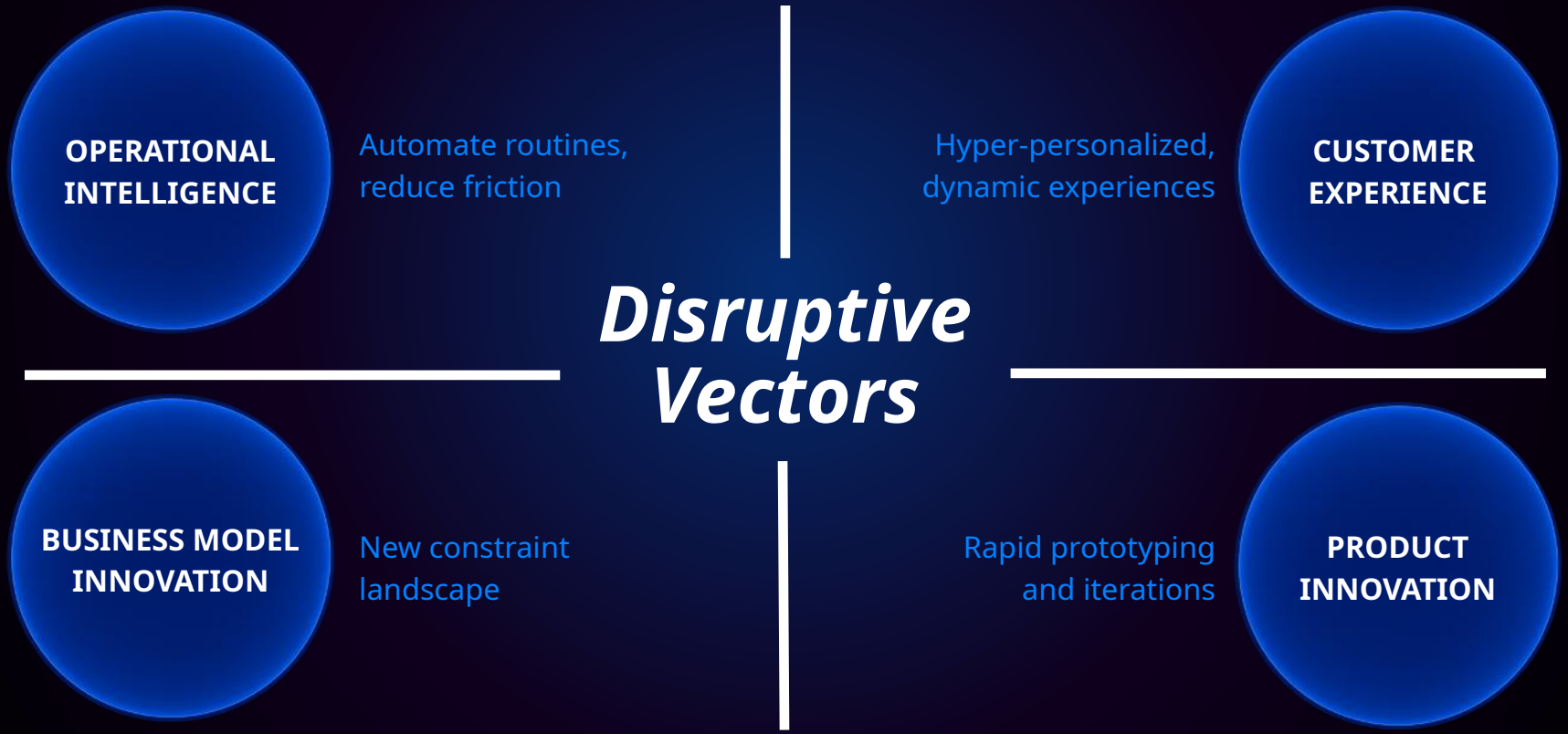
Art, music, personal work and tasks will all be done in collaboration with machines

x

Every industry and function will be transformed (Including Functional roles)

Ability for human and AI to work together at speed will determine the magnitude of success

AI's Disruption Vectors



Paradoxical Business Challenges

Standardization vs. Personalization: Leaders must create policies and procedures that apply to all employees, ensuring fairness and consistency yet recognize and accommodate individual differences and needs, which may require flexibility and personalization.

Employee Advocacy vs. Business Needs: HR & leaders often serve as advocates for employees, addressing their concerns and promoting their interests. However, they also need to consider the needs of the business, which may sometimes conflict with the interests of employees.

Strategic vs. Operational Focus: Leaders are expected to contribute to the strategic direction of the organization, aligning HR initiatives with business goals. At the same time, they are responsible for managing day-to-day operational tasks, such as payroll, benefits administration, and compliance.

Paradoxical Business Challenges

Change Management vs. Stability: Leaders often play a key role in managing change, whether it's implementing new policies, introducing new technology, or guiding the organization through a merger or restructuring. However, they also need to maintain stability and continuity, helping employees navigate change without disrupting their work or morale.

Transparency vs. Confidentiality: Leaders are often called upon to promote transparency, sharing information about the organization's strategies, policies, and decisions. However, they also have a responsibility to maintain confidentiality, particularly when dealing with sensitive employee information or difficult situations.

Paradoxical Business Challenges

Global vs. Local: In multinational organisations, leaders need to develop global strategies that align with the organisation's overall goals. However, they also need to consider local cultures, laws, and practices, which may require different approaches.

Performance Improvement vs. Employee Well-being: Leaders need to drive performance improvement initiatives to ensure the organization's competitiveness. However, they also need to consider the well-being of employees, balancing the demands of work with the need for rest, work-life balance, and mental health.

Contextual & Paradoxical Leadership

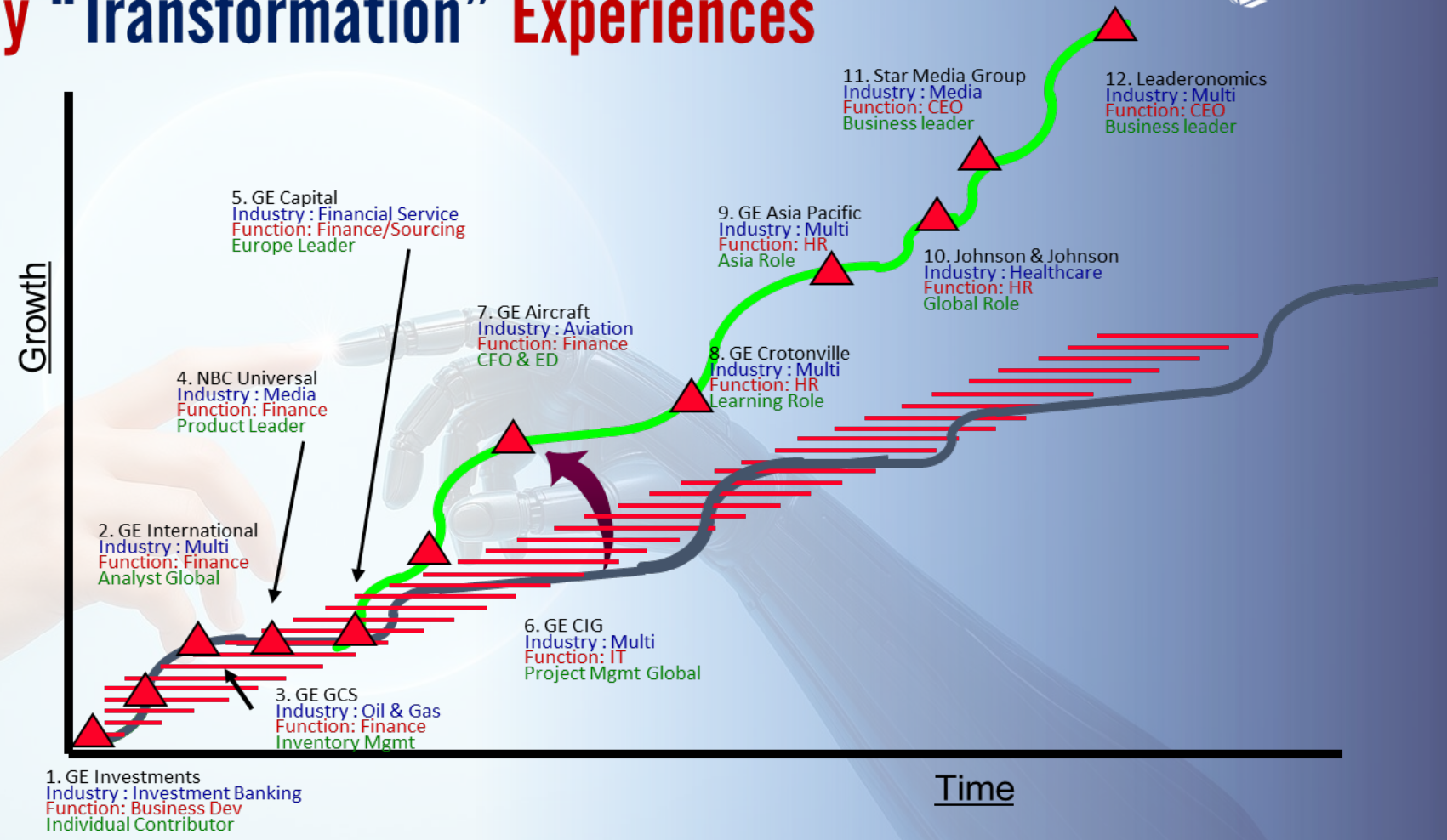
100% Humble
100% Visionary/Big Picture
100% Using Influence
100% Street Smart
100% Time for Self
100% Deeply Personal
100% Discipline & Process
100% Task-Oriented
100% Leveraging Strengths
100% Showing Love
100% Using Intuition
100% Visible
100% Ensuring Perfection
100% Listening
100% Telling Stories
100% Quitting
100% Teaching Others
100% Doing It Yourself
100% Break Rules & Experiment
100% Stubborn
100% Graciously Forgives



100% Confident/Assertive
100% Detail-Oriented/Execution
100% Using Authority
100% Academic Knowledge
100% Time for Community
100% Inherently Collective
100% Creativity
100% People-Oriented
100% Developing Weaknesses
100% Using Fear
100% Data-Based Decisions
100% Invisible
100% Ensuring Speed
100% Talking
100% Using Data
100% Persevering/Keep Going
100% Learning from Others
100% Delegating to Others
100% Adhering to Policy
100% Open Minded
100% Upholds Accountability

My "Transformation" Experiences

LEADERONOMICS
The Science of Building Leaders



The overhaul shop nobody wanted

550 days	to overhaul one engine — customers waited a year and a half – ***one customer Malaysia Airlines***
USD 30 mil	revenue — and bleeding roughly USD 60 mil in losses
Defects	high error rates; rework was a way of life
Morale	people felt like spare parts, not craftsmen



GE Engine Services Malaysia (GEESM)
A small shop in a big company's shadow


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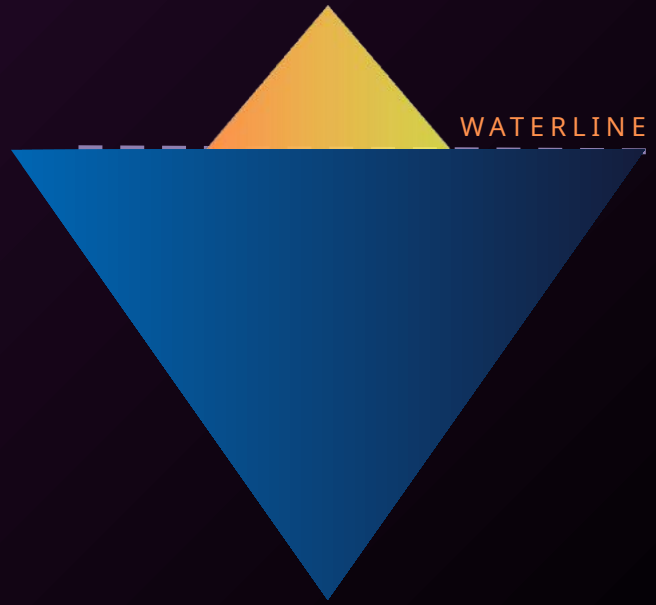
MY DEEP REALISATION IN LATE 1999

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE

Every result is the tip of an iceberg

10% is what the world measures.

90% is who you are when no one is watching.



THE QUESTION BENEATH THE QUESTION

Why do some people, **companies and nations truly transform**

— while most just perform?

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

THE COMMON MYTH

Leadership is what you DO.

So we collect tactics, frameworks, and best practices — and bolt them on from the outside.

THE UNCOMMON TRUTH

Leadership is who you ARE — leaking out.

Under pressure, you don't rise to your strategy. You fall to your identity.

WHY MOST CHANGE FAILS — PART 1

We try to lead from the outside in.

1. **Chase the result** — when the number slips, we panic about the number.
2. **Tweak the system** — reorganise, re-incentivise, re-launch.
3. **Rarely touch identity** — the one layer that actually drives the rest.

"Copy the best practice. Hire the consultant. Launch the initiative." It looks like progress. It rarely becomes transformation.

Transformation is an inside job.

You cannot push it in. You can only grow it out.

THE INSIDE-OUT ENGINE

CORE → CODE → CARGO

Who you are. · How you operate. · What the world sees.

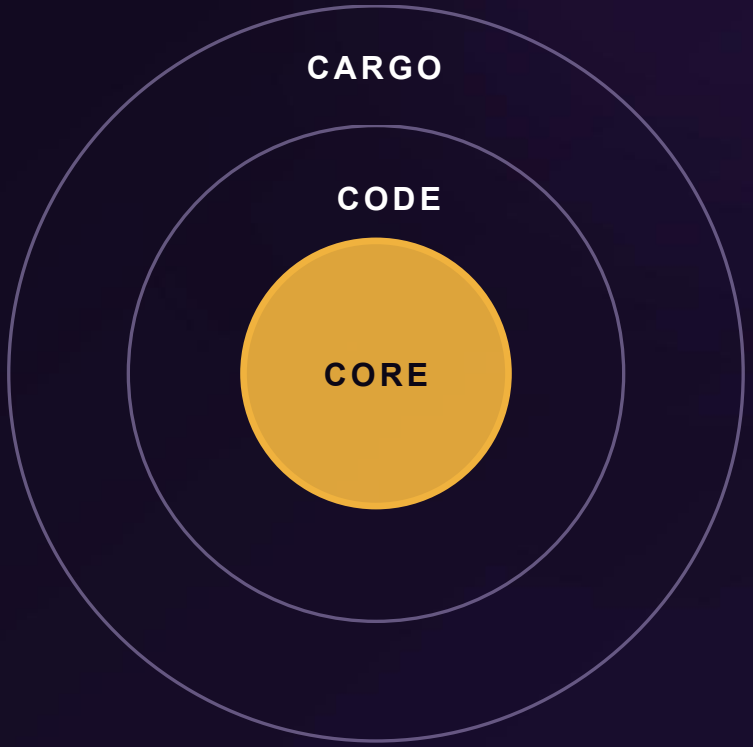
LAYER 1

CORE — who you are

Identity. Conviction. The reason you exist.

Invisible. Slow to build. Non-negotiable.

Individuals call it character. Companies call it culture. Nations call it values.



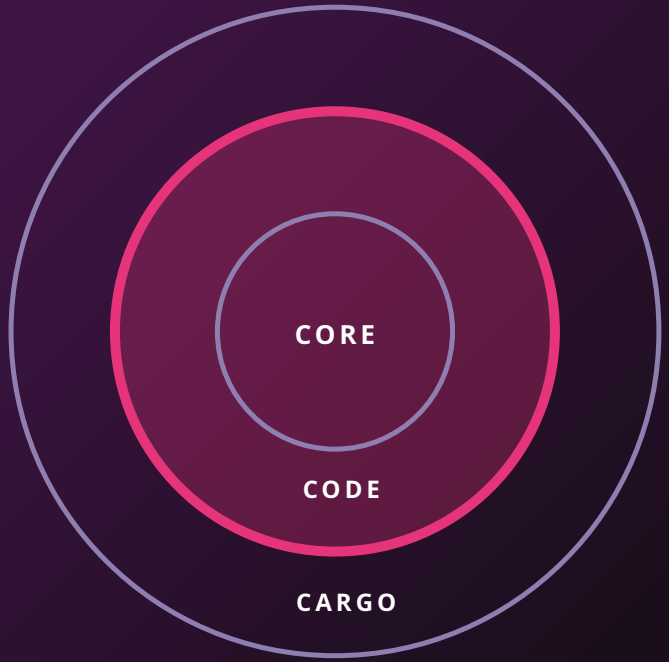
LAYER 2

CODE — how you operate

Your operating system: culture in motion — systems, structure, strategy, habits.

It turns the Core into action.

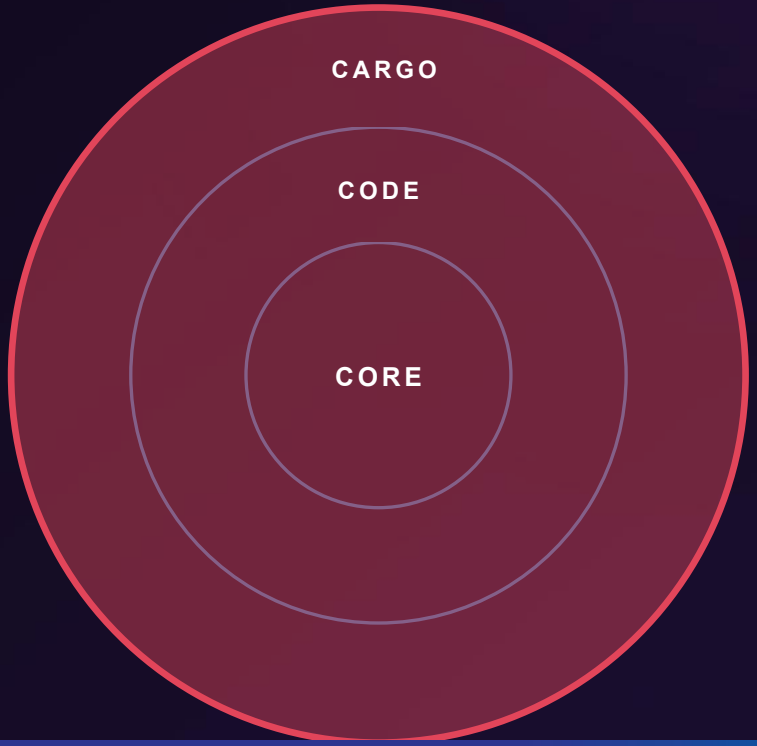
In the AI era, everyone can copy your Code overnight. ***Your Core is the only moat left.***



CARGO — what the world sees

Results. Growth. Output. Valuation.

The only layer the market measures —
and the last one you should start with.



THE SAME ENGINE, THREE SCALES

Individual. Company. Nation.

One law: output is a by-product of identity.

LEVEL 1 — THE INDIVIDUAL

Who you are sets the ceiling on what you build.

CORE



Who am I, and what do I stand for?

CODE



My habits, disciplines and relationships.

CARGO



My titles, wins and reputation.

Most people spend a career polishing the Cargo (the CV) while neglecting the Core (the character).

LEVEL 2 — THE COMPANY · CASE 1

Marvel didn't fix its products. It re-discovered its identity.

1996 Bankrupt. Buried under ~$250M of debt, fighting to stay a comic-book publisher.

The shift *"We're not a comic publisher. We manage a universe of 5,000+ characters."*

The result Clear Core → a licensing & film engine (Code) → Iron Man, 2008 → a global empire.

Same characters they'd always owned. What changed first was how they saw themselves.



LEVEL 2 — THE COMPANY · CASE 2

Microsoft: culture before code, code before Cargo.

2014, Satya Nadella rewires the Core: from a **"know-it-all"** culture to a **"learn-it-all"** culture. Identity first. Products second.



He changed the Core. The Cargo followed.

~$300B

2014

↓

$3T+

2024 · ~10x

LEVEL 3 — THE NATION

Nations rise from the inside out, too.

Singapore began with almost no resources — only **clarity.**

CORE A defined national identity & vision — incorruptible, meritocratic, world-class.

CODE Institutions, rule of law, education and housing built to serve that vision.

CARGO Third-world to first in a single generation.

Lee Kuan Yew didn't import a finished country. He clarified an identity — then built outward.

THREE YEARS LATER · THE SAME PEOPLE

550 → 40

days turnaround — the best overhaul shop in the world

30 → 200+

USD million in revenue, and solidly profitable

~ Zero

defects — quality became the habit, not the hope

Pride

the same 'spare parts' became the most valued people in GE's network

Same people. Same shop. Same country. Different system.

WHERE THE SCIENCE CAME FROM

We didn't have a model at that time.
We had experiments that grew into a model.

2 BIG FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE CONSTRAINTS:



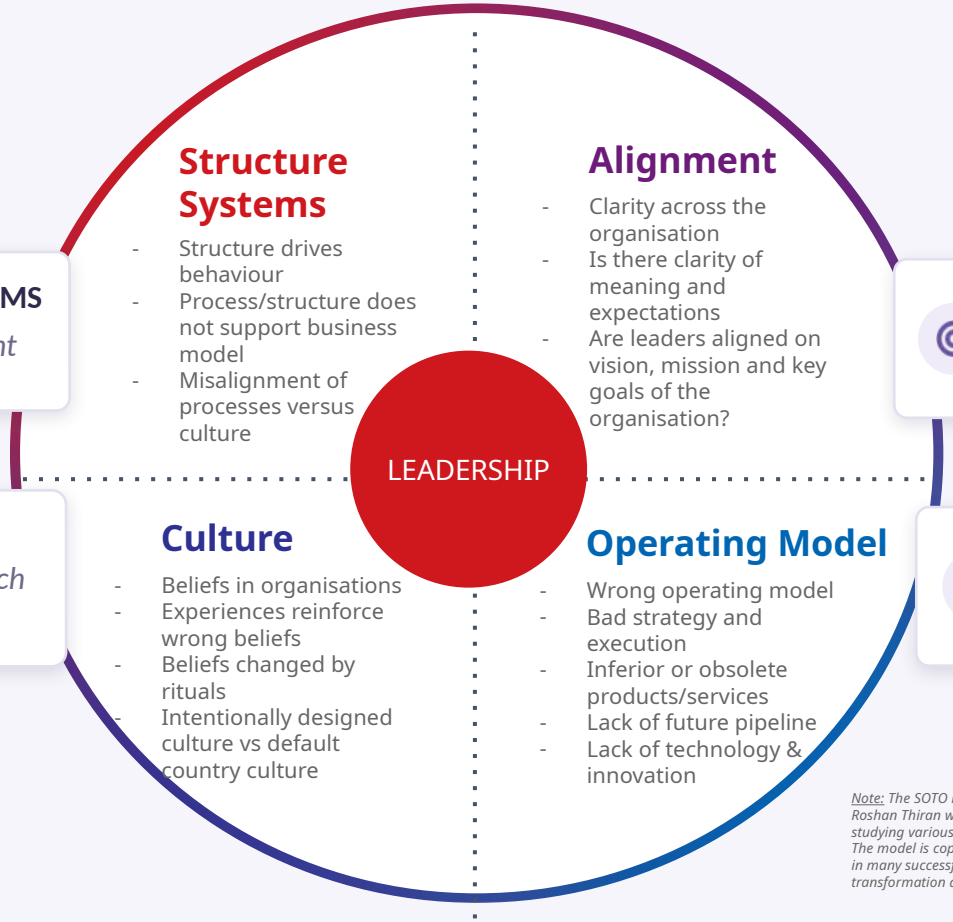




THE SOTO MODEL

And Lets' also take in the context of uncertainty today

Every organisational problem lives in at least one of these four areas — and leadership sits at the centre, touching them all.



02 STRUCTURE & SYSTEMS

Does structure make right easy?

01 ALIGNMENT

Is everyone playing the same game?

02 CULTURE

What do experiences teach people to believe?

04 OPERATING MODEL

Can we reliably create & capture value?

Note: The SOTO model is based on the work of Roshan Thiran who spent more than 20 years studying various successful and failed organisations. The model is copyrighted to him and has been used in many successful organisational growth, transformation and scaling projects

ALIGNMENT · CLARITY IS KEY

You cannot hold people accountable for what they cannot see.

CLARITY OF VISION

The end game — best-run in the world, and what 'best-run' means on a Tuesday.

CLARITY OF REALITY

Where we truly stand — the numbers and the unspoken truths. Honesty before strategy.

CLARITY OF MISSION

What my team must deliver this quarter — and what we will stop doing to deliver it.

Ambiguity upstairs always becomes anxiety downstairs.

CONSTRAIN 1: ALIGNMENT HAPPENS WHEN PEOPLE OWN IT



Structure & Systems

02

Structure & Systems

The processes, approvals and org design that quietly decide how people behave.

THE QUESTION AT ITS HEART

"Does the structure make the right thing the easy thing?"

WHAT IT MEANS

One of the biggest mistakes organisations make is to focus only on people. Focusing on process — systems and structure — is the key to high performance. Build proper institutional processes, and employees can perform to expectations without depending on talent and motivation alone.

Structures drive the behaviours and performance of employees. If you want people to change their behaviour, don't exhort them — change the structure they work inside.

SIGNS THIS IS YOUR BINDING CONSTRAINT

- [ ] Ordinary days require heroics: bottlenecks, bureaucracy and non-value-added loops steal capacity from real work.
- [ ] Processes and structure no longer support the business model — the machine fights the mission.
- [ ] Processes are misaligned with the culture you want — the system rewards exactly the behaviour you complain about.
- [ ] No one owns key chains end-to-end; work drifts to whoever cannot say no.

Structure drives behaviour.

Stop blaming attitudes for what your systems are teaching.

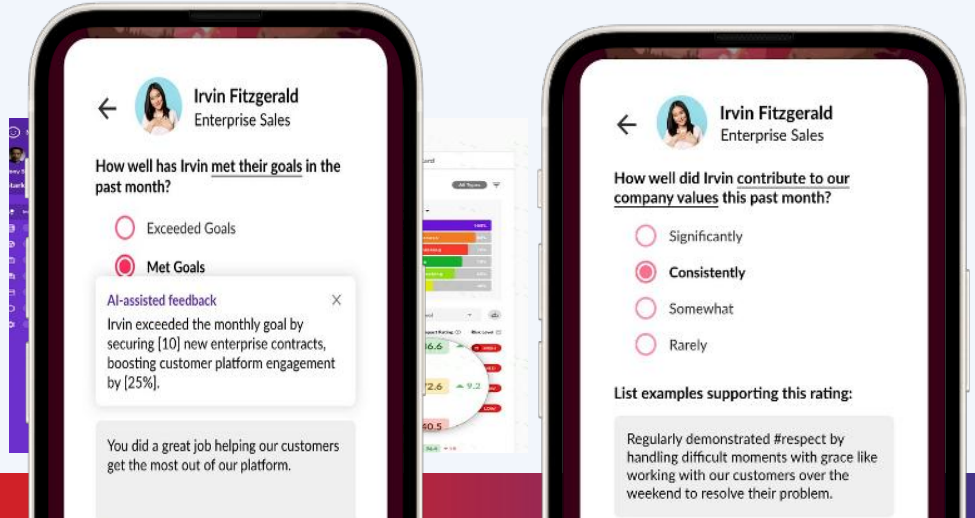
Five signatures to spend RM5,000	teaches your best people that initiative is a risk
Post-mortems that hunt for 'who'	teach everyone to hide the truth faster next time
Celebrating midnight firefighting	teaches the org that arson pays better than prevention
GEESM: authority moved to the craftsman	technicians got sign-off power within limits — quality went UP, not down

If you want empowerment, redesign decisions — not motivation posters.

CHANGING STRUCTURE TO CHANGE BEHAVIOUR

Performance Management at GE made me mad . . .

So I changed it to monthly for all of us at Leaderonomics and added rewards for everyone who performed each month. . .





Culture

03

Culture

The cumulative beliefs of the organisation, manifested in daily actions.

THE QUESTION AT ITS HEART

"What are our experiences teaching people to believe?"

WHAT IT MEANS

Culture is the sum of what people believe, shown in what they do. Beliefs are deep-seated — and they are not changed by memos, posters or townhalls. They are changed by experiences, and experiences are changed by rituals. Behaviour first; belief follows.

The hardest part of any transformation is making it part of the organisational DNA rather than a "flavour of the month." A culture left undesigned does not stay neutral — it defaults to habit, to blame, and to the surrounding country culture.

SIGNS THIS IS YOUR BINDING CONSTRAINT

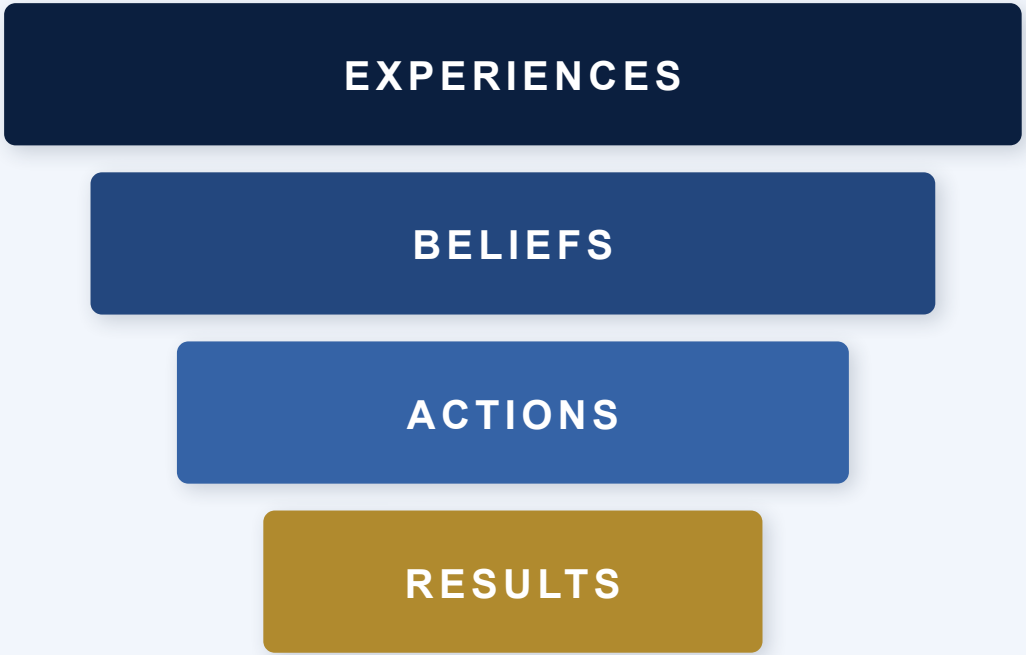
- ☐ Experiences keep reinforcing the wrong beliefs — people learn that speaking up is unsafe or futile.
- ☐ The blame game runs when things go wrong; investigation starts with "who?" instead of "why?"
- ☐ The culture on the walls and the culture in the corridors are two different cultures.
- ☐ Rituals are absent or accidental — so every change initiative fades once the launch energy is spent.

CONSTRAINT 03 · THE DEEP DIVE

Culture is the operating system.

Culture transforms organisations — and organisations cannot transform culture by memo.

Culture runs on a predictable chain



what daily work actually feels like — meetings, decisions, mistakes, recognition

what those experiences teach people is true, safe and rewarded here

behaviour follows belief — repeated behaviour becomes ritual

OTP, NPS, safety, profit — the lagging indicator of all of the above

Most leaders push on results. Best-run leaders redesign experiences.

CULTURE = RITUALS + PROCESSES (EXPERIENCES)

Aviation already ran the world's greatest culture redesign. In your cockpits.

THE CHECKLIST

Turned individual memory into institutional reliability — brilliance made routine.

CRM

After the 1977 Tenerife disaster: co-pilots trained — and required — to challenge captains. Hierarchy redesigned for truth.

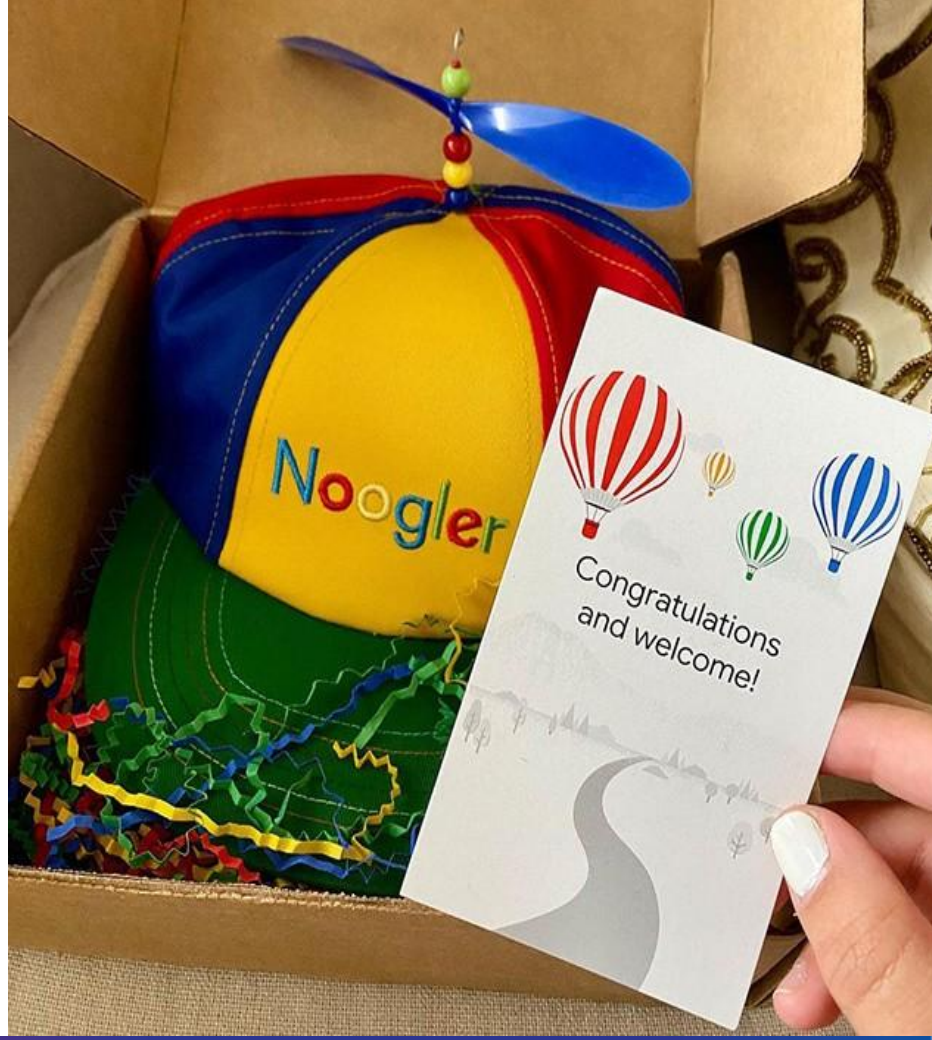
JUST CULTURE

Safety reporting that asks 'why', not 'who' — so bad news travels fast enough to save lives.

Rituals are values with a calendar invite. Now run the cockpit system in the boardroom.

IDENTITY

- Google – “Noogler” Orientation Cap: New hires at Google are nicknamed “Nooglers” and given a rainbow-colored propeller beanie hat to wear during their first week, particularly at their first all-hands TGIF meeting.
- This light-hearted initiation ritual immediately immerses newcomers in Google’s playful, quirky culture and marks them as part of the Google community. By donning the Noogler cap, new employees visibly identify with the company’s traditions and values from day one, reinforcing a shared



ACTION

"Just Do It" (Bias for Action) Award



amazon

- At Amazon, one of the core leadership principles is "Bias for Action," meaning employees are encouraged to proactively solve problems without waiting for permission.
- A famous ritual is the **"Just Do It" award**. At Amazon's all-hands meetings, founder Jeff Bezos (and other execs) will present a single oversized Nike sneaker as a trophy to an employee who took an extraordinary action on their own initiative
- By institutionalizing the "Just Do It" awards, Amazon sends a company-wide signal reinforcing the desired behavior: if you see something broken, **just do it** and fix it. The simplicity of the prize belies its impact; employees talk about it with pride years later.
- The ritual creates friendly competition to spot and resolve issues, and it legitimizes

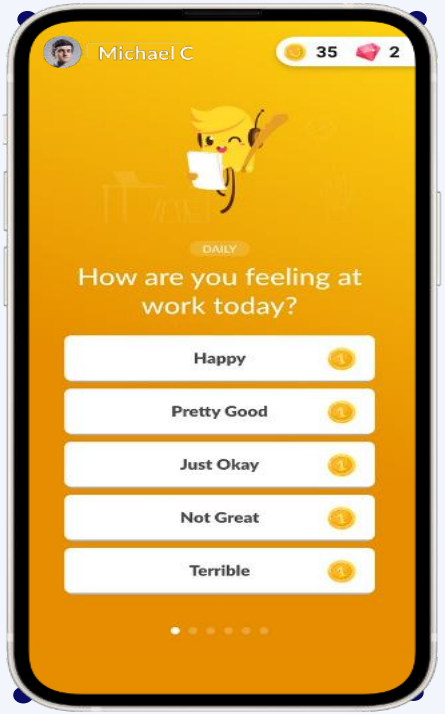
CULTURE – BAD RITUALS

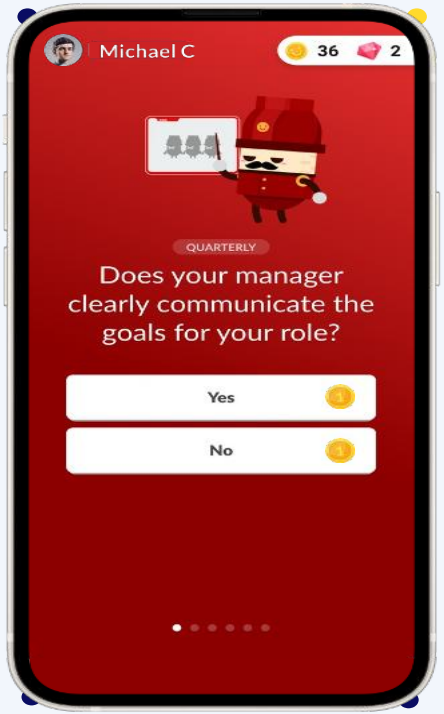


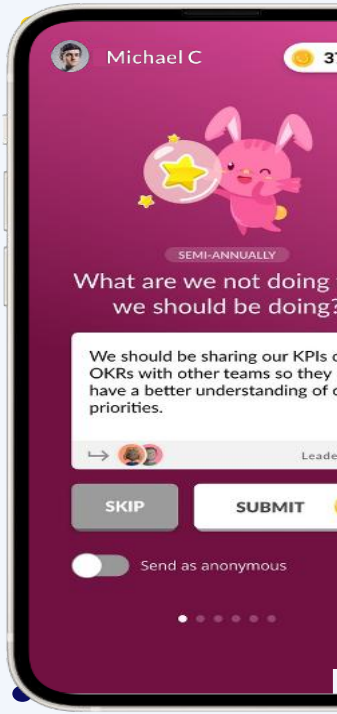
A Lot of our Rituals . . .are looking backwards…. Not forward

Like our Yearly Employee Surveys . . . Once a year

I changed that to daily







Most transformations don't fail.

They drift . . .

The HR function has the power to ensure we steer it right



DESIGNING YOUR CULTURE— DELIBERATELY

A culture left undesigned does not stay neutral. It defaults — to habit, hierarchy and blame.

01

DEFINE THE BEHAVIOUR

Not 'integrity' — 'we surface bad news within 24 hours.' Anchors, not adjectives.

02

BUILD THE RITUALS

Daily huddles, weekly read-backs, monthly AARs — values with a calendar invite.

03

EMBED IN SYSTEMS

Hiring, promotion, recognition, meeting design — so the org rewards what it claims to value.

04

PROTECT UNDER PRESSURE

The culture is what leaders do when the target is at risk. That moment is the real townhall.

Culture is not what you announce. It is what you repeatedly reinforce — and what you tolerate.

2 BIG FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE CONSTRAINTS:

Blocks that Are Ingrained in Individuals and in our organisation





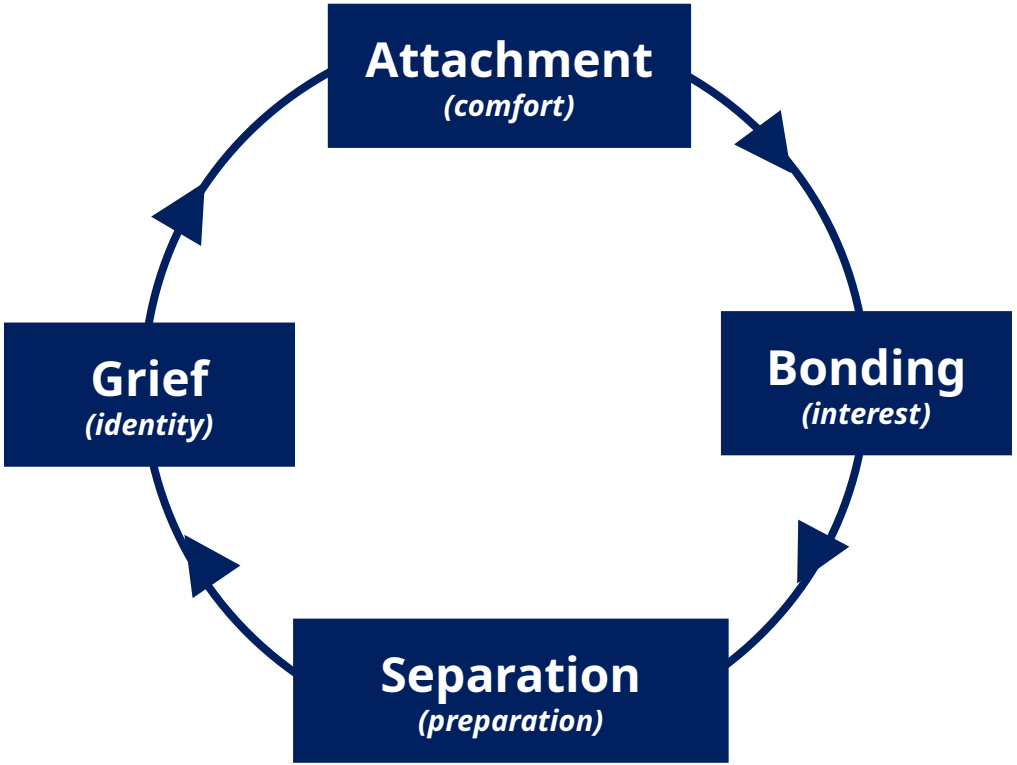
3 BIG OBSTACLES TO CHANGE That We As Individuals Face and We As Leaders Need to Help Our Team Overcome



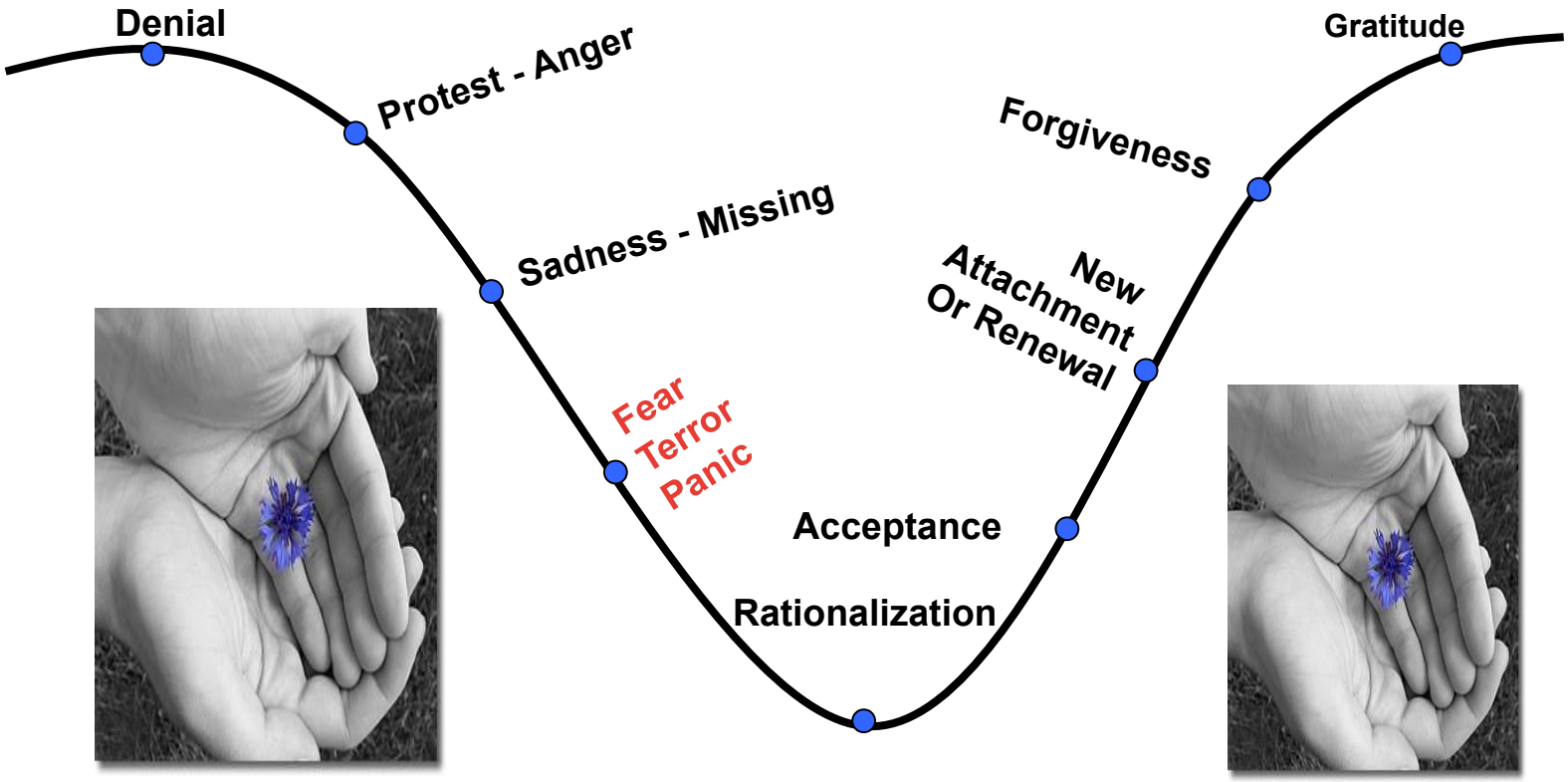




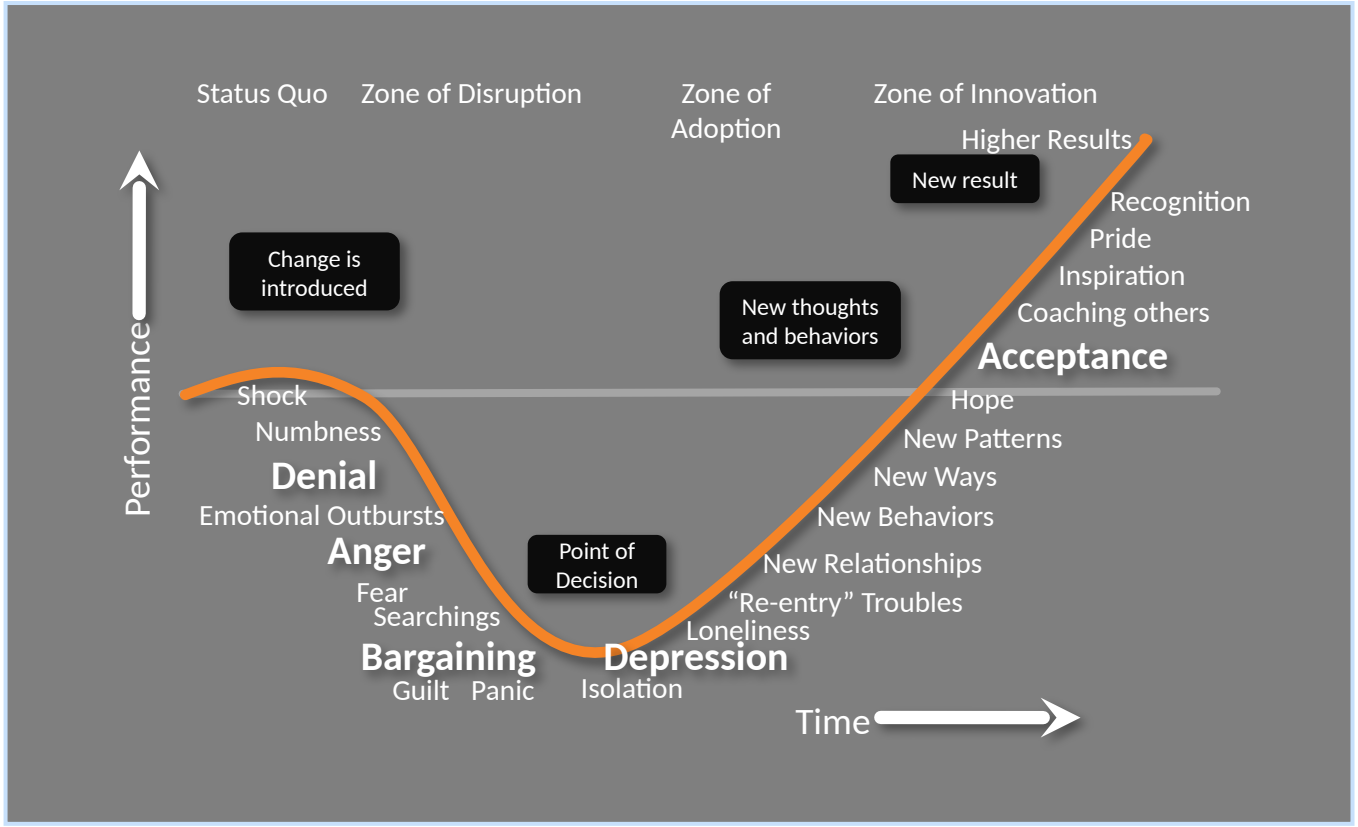
C. GRIEF PREVENTS CHANGE



STAGES OF GRIEF

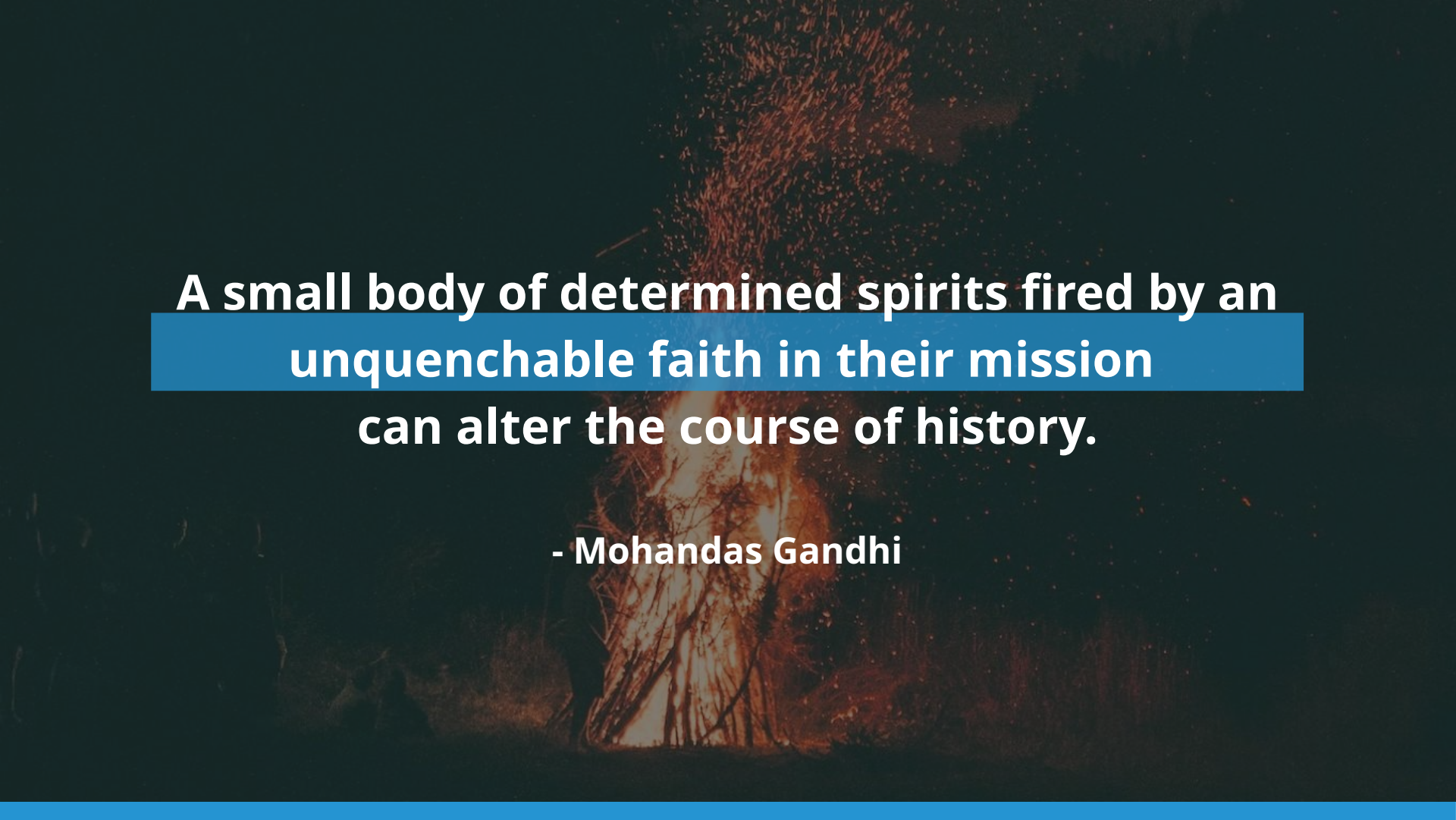


Change Zones – and the Grief cycle



Police Academy




A small body of determined spirits fired by an
unquenchable faith in their mission
can alter the course of history.
- Mohandas Gandhi