

# ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

Leading Teams in Real Time

WHITE PAPER



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Leadership fails when we lead the way we prefer instead of the way the team needs. The gap is almost always capability, confidence, or both. Leadership is a process: deliver the leadership required in the moment required. Adaptive leadership is value creation—and the output is a team that improves its system, elevates its standards, and produces results bigger than the sum of its parts.

The core problem this paper addresses is observable and repeatable: ambiguity, misalignment, and inertia create a vacuum. Leaders get pulled into firefighting symptoms, unsure whether to coach, push, redesign, or stabilize—while teams hesitate, escalate the same issues, and burn energy trying to guess what “good” looks like. Over time, performance becomes dependent on heroics instead of a reliable leadership rhythm.

Our solution is a practical, field-deployable model that combines two elements:

1. The CI Mindset—three leadership responsibilities: **create Focus, provide Clarity, and enable Problem Solving at the Point of Impact.**
2. Five **Leadership Archetypes**—intentional modes a leader can step into based on what the team needs most in the moment.

The archetypes are not personality types. They are leadership postures that can be selected and switched “like gears to match the terrain.” This matters because teams evolve. As groups move through **Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Transforming**, the leadership they need changes. The right move at the wrong time creates friction. Alignment creates trust, momentum, and shared accountability.

To keep this model practical—not theoretical—this paper teaches a simple diagnostic leaders can use on entry (in a stand-up, a planning session, a Gemba walk, or a problem-solving moment): Is the team clear on what winning looks like today? Are they stuck in tension, avoidance, or blame? Are they stable but constrained by the system? Are they capable but drifting into comfort? From there, leaders choose the archetype that closes the most urgent gap in focus, clarity, or problem solving—and apply a consistent set of prompts and behaviors in real time.

Finally, this paper provides structure and resources to support leadership development and immediate deployment: leader rhythms and routines (Leader Standard Work), daily management and visibility practices (tiered boards, short-cycle checks), Gemba behaviors, reflection tools, and practical prompts aligned to the archetypes. The goal is not “better intentions.” The goal is a repeatable leadership system that helps leaders observe clearly, respond effectively, and develop teams through disciplined feedback loops—starting today.

## INTRODUCTION

Leading teams is harder than leading individuals because team performance isn't just a reflection of talent—it's a reflection of alignment, capability, confidence, and the system the team operates inside. As teams form, collide, and evolve through change, leaders face a recurring dilemma: the same leadership move that works in one moment can create friction in the next. Under pressure, leaders often default to what feels natural—pushing harder, rescuing execution, redesigning the process, or coaching one person at a time—without a reliable way to diagnose what the team actually needs right now. The result is predictable: ambiguity turns into drift, friction turns into conflict, routines fade, problems get hidden or normalized, and performance becomes dependent on heroics instead of a stable leadership rhythm.

This white paper introduces a systematic approach to adaptive leadership—one that treats leadership as a learned behavior and a value-adding process. The model combines the CI Mindset (creating Focus, providing Clarity, and enabling Problem Solving at the Point of Impact) with five Leadership Archetypes leaders can shift between intentionally: Navigator, Architect, Operator, Mentor, and Challenger. Together, these tools give leaders a practical way to read the team's development stage, recognize the real gap (focus, clarity, or problem solving), and choose the leadership posture that best helps the team progress. The goal is not a perfect leader. The goal is a team that can execute, learn, and improve in real time—transforming its processes and producing results bigger than the sum of its parts.

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### THE LEADERSHIP DILEMMA (WHAT WE KEEP OBSERVING)

Teams don't struggle in random ways. The same failure patterns repeat—especially during change, growth, or cross-functional work:

- **Ambiguity creates drift.** People stay busy, but priorities aren't aligned. Work piles up, meetings multiply, and ownership becomes unclear.
- **Friction turns into conflict.** As pressure increases, working styles collide, trust gets tested, and defensiveness shows up. Without the right leadership response, conflict stops being productive and starts becoming political.
- **Variation creates rework.** When standards are unclear or inconsistent, results depend on who is working, not how the work is designed. That drives repeat failures, workarounds, and fatigue.
- **Missed targets get hidden or normalized.** Problems are worked around, not surfaced. Leaders either jump in to fix it themselves or accept instability as “normal,” which trains the organization to tolerate (and sometimes hide behind) drift.
- **Capability doesn't scale.** The same decisions escalate to the same people. A few strong performers carry the load. New leaders struggle to find their footing. The system becomes dependent on personalities instead of habits.

These are not personality problems. They're misalignment problems—between what the team needs and how leadership is showing up.

The challenge is that leaders often don't have a reliable way to diagnose the moment. Under pressure, we default to what's comfortable:

- Some leaders push the standard.
- Some redesign the system.
- Some jump into execution.
- Some coach individuals.
- Some try to create alignment.

Any of those moves can be right. Any of them can also be wrong—if the timing is wrong.

That's the real problem this paper solves: **leaders need a systematic way to recognize what the team needs now, choose an effective leadership posture, and shift as conditions change—without turning leadership into guesswork.**

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#### WHY TEAM DEVELOPMENT MATTERS (THE STAGE CHANGES THE NEED)

Teams evolve. Their needs change as they move through development. In this paper we use a five-stage view of team development:

- **Forming:** uncertainty is high; the team needs structure, clarity, and psychological safety.
- **Storming:** tension rises; the team needs truth, productive conflict, and a leader who can hold standards without making it personal.
- **Norming:** rhythm starts to form; the team needs routines, visibility, and reinforcement that makes good work repeatable.
- **Performing:** trust and capability increase; the team needs autonomy, coaching, and systems that remove constraints without slowing momentum.
- **Transforming:** the team outgrows the current system; it must adapt, renew, and transfer learning forward—improving the process while running it.

This is why leadership must be fluid. A behavior that helps a Forming team can stall a Performing team. A posture that rescues a team in crisis can weaken them in the long run. The point is not to “be consistent” in style. The point is to be consistent in **purpose**—and adaptable in method.

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#### THE COLLIDER LENS: WHY “COLLISIONS” MATTER

In the Collider Lens, these stages aren't just phases. They are collisions—moments where intention meets reality:

- A new goal collides with unclear roles.

- A process change collides with old habits.
- A standard collides with the truth at the point of impact.
- A capability gap collides with rising expectations.

Collisions create friction. And friction is where progress either gets forged—or falls apart.

This is the leadership moment that matters most: not what a leader believes, but how a leader responds when the plan meets the floor.

#### OUR DEFINED SOLUTION: A SYSTEMATIC MODEL FOR ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

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This paper proposes a simple, deployable solution:

**COMBINE A CLEAR DIAGNOSTIC LENS WITH FIVE LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES THAT LEADERS CAN SHIFT BETWEEN INTENTIONALLY.**

The model has two core parts.

#### PART 1: THE CI MINDSET (YOUR DIAGNOSTIC LENS)

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We anchor leadership decisions to three responsibilities:

1. **Create Focus**  
People know what is expected, how success is measured, and what the priority is today.
2. **Provide Clarity**  
Standards are visible. Normal vs. abnormal is obvious. Roles, handoffs, and decision rights are understood.
3. **Enable Problem Solving at the Point of Impact**  
Problems are surfaced early. Leaders respond calmly. Teams contain, learn, and improve where the work happens—without waiting for escalation.

This lens prevents leadership from becoming mood-based. It gives leaders a practical question:

**What's missing right now—Focus, Clarity, or Problem Solving?**

#### PART 2: THE FIVE LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES (YOUR INTERVENTION OPTIONS)

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The archetypes are not personality types. They are leadership modes—repeatable patterns of behavior, questions, and presence that you can step into on purpose.

- **Navigator:** restores direction and alignment when focus is missing or priorities drift.
- **Architect:** designs the system when clarity is missing and variation drives repeat failure.
- **Operator:** stabilizes execution when abnormal is ignored and routines are slipping.
- **Mentor:** develops capability and confidence so ownership scales.

- **Challenger:** raises the standard when drift, comfort, or avoidance start winning.

Think of them like gears. The goal is not to pick one gear and live there. The goal is to shift gears to match the terrain.

#### THE PRACTICAL MECHANISM (HOW A LEADER USES THIS IN REAL TIME)

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This white paper is not asking leaders to memorize theory. It gives a repeatable entry routine you can use in a stand-up, a planning meeting, a Gemba walk, or a problem-solving moment.

When you enter a team space, start here:

1. **Is the team clear on what winning looks like today?**

If not, you likely need Navigator (and sometimes Mentor).

2. **Is the team stuck in conflict, blame, or avoidance?**

If roles, standards, or truth are unclear, you likely need Architect or Challenger.

3. **Is the team operating, but constrained—by system limits, instability, or burnout?**

If execution is drifting, you likely need Operator. If capability is the constraint, you likely need Mentor. If the system is the constraint, you likely need Architect.

Then make the most important move in adaptive leadership:

**choose the posture intentionally, apply it with consistent prompts, and close the loop.**

This is how leadership becomes systematic instead of reactive:

- Observe the signal (not the story).
- Select the archetype that closes the gap.
- Act with disciplined behaviors and language.
- Confirm closure.
- Reflect and adjust.

#### WHAT “SUCCESS” LOOKS LIKE (WHAT THIS MODEL PRODUCES)

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When this system is applied consistently, you can see the outcomes:

- Teams can state priorities clearly and make decisions faster.
- Abnormal conditions become visible early instead of being discovered late.
- Work becomes more repeatable; variation and rework drop.
- Conflict (or “collision”) becomes productive instead of personal.
- Escalation decreases because capability increases.

- Improvement becomes part of daily work—not an occasional event.
- Leadership becomes a shared language, not an individual personality.

That’s the deliverable: a team that can execute, learn, and improve without needing the leader to be the hero.

#### WHAT THIS PAPER PROVIDES (STRUCTURE + RESOURCES YOU CAN DEPLOY TODAY)

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To make this usable immediately, this paper includes:

- A stage-by-stage breakdown of team development (Forming through Transforming), including what you’ll hear, what you’ll see, and what to watch out for.
- The Collider Lens for recognizing collisions and using friction as fuel instead of fallout.
- A practical guide to the five archetypes with cues, consistent prompts, and case vignettes.
- Tools you can deploy now: leader rhythms (Leader Standard Work), daily visibility practices (tiered boards and short-cycle checks), gemba behaviors, reflection tools, and assessment worksheets to build range over time.

This is not a “be a better leader” message. It’s a leadership operating system: diagnose the need, choose the posture, apply it consistently, and build the team’s capability until the system runs through them—not around them.

#### TUCKMAN STAGES OF TEAM DEVELOPMENT

The Tuckman stages of team development offer a practical framework for understanding how groups evolve and perform over time. First introduced by psychologist Bruce Tuckman in 1965—Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing—the model names the predictable patterns teams move through as they shift from polite uncertainty to real trust, shared ownership, and sustained execution.

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#### THE COLLIDER LENS: COLLISIONS AS CATALYSTS FOR GROWTH

In a Collider lens, these stages aren’t just “phases.” They’re Collisions—moments where intention meets reality. A new goal collides with unclear roles. A process change collides with old habits. A standard collides with the truth on the floor. Those collisions create friction, and friction is where progress either gets forged or falls apart. That’s why leadership can’t be one-size-fits-all. The same leader behavior that helps a Forming team (structure, clarity, safety) can stall a Performing team (over-control, unnecessary direction). The job is to adapt leadership to the team’s current development level—not to your personal default style.

A quick note on the “fifth stage.” Tuckman’s original 1965 model included four stages. Adjourning was added later (often credited to Tuckman and Mary Ann Jensen in the 1970s) to describe what happens when a team’s work ends—closing out, handing off, and disbanding. That addition makes perfect sense for project teams and temporary groups where completion is the goal.

But in continuous improvement cultures, we’re rarely building teams just to finish and dissolve. We’re building teams to learn, adapt, and keep getting better as the system changes. So we’ve made a deliberate adaptation: instead of ending with *Adjourning*, this document uses “*Transforming*”.

Not because Adjourning is “wrong,” but because it’s not the highest aim for CI-driven teams. Our version reflects what world-class operations actually require: teams that don’t just execute a process, but improve it while running it. That level of evolution is supported by enabled problem solving at the point of impact—clear standards, fast visibility to abnormal conditions, calm leadership response, and coaching that builds capability where the work happens. When teams can contain, solve, and standardize locally, the work doesn’t “end.” It transforms.

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### WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE NEXT SECTIONS

In the sections that follow, we’ll break down each stage with a Collider angle—what the collisions look like at that point in development, what behaviors and language show up, and what adaptive leadership moves help the team progress from forming trust...to transforming the system.

#### 1. FORMING: THE STARTING LINE OF DEVELOPMENT

Forming is where teams begin—and where the first collisions show up immediately. A new objective collides with unclear roles. A new workflow collides with old habits. New people collide with unspoken expectations. Everyone is watching, measuring, and trying not to be the one who breaks something.

In this stage, teams are polite, cautious, and uncertain. They’re learning the work, the expectations, and each other. In a Continuous Improvement (CI) culture, Forming is foundational because it’s where the team learns one of two lessons fast: “We surface problems here,” or “We stay quiet and wait for instructions.” The leader sets that pattern through Focus, Clarity, and—most importantly—how they respond when reality doesn’t match the plan.

#### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Polite interactions, low trust
- High dependence on leadership
- Unclear roles and expectations
- Focus on tasks, not system

#### WHAT YOU’LL HEAR

- “What are we doing again?”

- “I’m not sure who handles that.”
- “We’re just getting started.”
- “Should I check with someone before doing that?”

#### WHAT YOU’LL SEE

- Low participation in standups or huddles—people are quiet or deferential.
- Team members waiting for instructions rather than taking initiative.
- Repeated questions about basic workflows, roles, or expectations.
- Individuals working in parallel rather than collaborating as a system.

#### WATCH OUTAW45 FOR

- Over-reliance on the leader for decisions, approvals, and problem solving.
- Avoidance of conflict—people may agree outwardly but hold back concerns.
- Unclear ownership leading to duplication, dropped handoffs, and slow learning.

#### LEADER’S ROLE

- Establish Focus (clear goals, priorities, and what “success” looks like) and Clarity (visible standards, roles, and decision rights).
- Create psychological safety—problems are data, and mistakes are learning opportunities.
- Introduce CI fundamentals early (visual work, fast signals, short daily syncs).
- Model a calm, curious response when something goes red so people learn it’s safe to surface issues.
- Start shifting ownership toward the point of impact by coaching the team to name problems, contain issues, and learn fast.

#### ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

A newly formed product squad inherits a backlog and starts a sprint. Within days, the first collision hits: user stories are vague, environments don’t match, and QA finds issues late. Instead of pushing harder, the leader makes the work visible—tightens a Definition of Ready, clarifies ownership (product, design, engineering, QA), and adds a lightweight daily red/green check on build health and blocked work. When blockers surface, the leader coaches the team to contain and resolve at the source—pairing on the first few examples—so the team learns the operating rule early: we don’t hide red, we use it to improve the system.

## 2. STORMING: WHERE TENSION MEETS GROWTH

### OVERVIEW

Storming is where the real collisions start to generate heat. Opinions collide. Priorities collide. Working styles collide. In a CI culture, this stage is a turning point because the team is finally close enough to the work—and each other—to feel what isn’t working. That friction can become fuel, or it can become fallout.

This is the most challenging stage because conflict is no longer theoretical. Resistance shows up. Defensiveness shows up. People protect their turf. If leadership tries to “keep the peace,” the team stays stuck. If leadership turns conflict into clarity and directs the energy toward the process, the team grows.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Rising tension and disagreement
- Competing priorities and unclear ownership
- Emotional reactions and resistance to change
- Blame and defensiveness may surface

## WHAT YOU'LL HEAR

- “We’ve always done it this way.”
- “That’s not my job.”
- “No one listens anyway.”
- “Why are we changing this now?”

## WHAT YOU'LL SEE

- Tension during meetings or handoffs—eye rolls, interruptions, or silence
- Resistance to new processes, standards, or role clarity
- Passive-aggressive behavior, blame-shifting, or defensiveness
- Competing priorities or confusion about who owns what

## WATCH OUT FOR

- Conflict being ignored or escalating without resolution
- Burnout from unresolved friction or unclear expectations
- Silos forming—teams or individuals protecting their turf

## LEADER'S ROLE

- Normalize conflict as part of development and keep it productive
- Facilitate open dialogue and use structure to keep it from turning personal
- Reinforce CI thinking to shift from “who” to “what in the process”
- Coach through discomfort—don’t rescue, don’t blame, don’t disappear
- Re-anchor Focus and Clarity when noise starts replacing signal

## ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

A hospital unit is rolling out a new patient handoff protocol. Nurses feel it adds paperwork. Physicians say it slows rounds. Tension rises and shortcuts creep in. Instead of forcing compliance or debating opinions, the leader runs a short, structured “process review” at the point of impact: observe two handoffs, capture where the protocol breaks down, and ask, “What must be true for this to work in real life?” The team identifies one friction point (duplicate documentation) and tests a simplified handoff checklist for 72 hours. Conflict doesn’t disappear—but it becomes useful. The team learns to aim frustration at the workflow, not each other.

## 3. NORMING: BUILDING RHYTHM AND TRUST

### OVERVIEW

Norming is where collisions start producing momentum instead of damage. The team learns how to work

together, how to disagree without breaking, and how to use standards as a foundation—not a cage. In a CI culture, this is where teams stop reacting to problems and start building routines that make problems easier to see and solve.

You'll feel the shift in tone. Less posturing. More shared ownership. More follow-through. The team starts to believe, "We can handle hard things together."

#### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Increased cooperation and shared ownership
- Clearer roles and expectations
- Growing confidence and psychological safety
- Early wins and momentum

#### WHAT YOU'LL HEAR

- "Let's talk it through."
- "We've got a rhythm now."
- "I'll check with the team."
- "That's not perfect, but it's better."

#### WHAT YOU'LL SEE

- More balanced participation—people speak up and listen
- Standards are followed and improved over time
- Feedback loops form—reflect, adjust, standardize
- Team members support each other and share responsibility

#### WATCH OUT FOR

- Complacency—assuming the team has "arrived"
- Hesitancy to challenge norms or raise new issues
- Over-reliance on a few strong voices while others stay quiet

#### LEADER'S ROLE

- Reinforce standards and routines (visual work, daily syncs, reviews, lightweight PDCA)
- Celebrate progress and learning—not just outcomes
- Encourage peer coaching and shared ownership
- Keep strengthening problem-solving discipline
- Maintain clarity and protect focus as priorities shift

#### ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

A construction team had early chaos on job sites—missed handoffs, rework, and constant phone calls. After several weeks, they install a simple daily coordination rhythm: a 10-minute morning huddle, a visible "today plan" board, and a clear escalation path for constraints (materials, permits, inspections). Foremen begin coordinating directly instead of routing everything through the project manager. The

leader steps back from firefighting and focuses on reinforcing the routine and teaching the team how to remove constraints early. The work gets smoother because the team built a shared operating rhythm.

## 4. PERFORMING: HIGH TRUST, HIGH IMPACT

### OVERVIEW

Performing is where the team hits its stride. Collisions still happen—but they don't derail the team. In fact, they build momentum. The team is leveraging diversity of experience and opinion to improve the system. They trigger learning. The team is aligned, autonomous, and fast at problem solving. In a CI culture, this is where the mindset is embedded and the team drives results without needing constant direction.

This stage isn't "easy." It's disciplined. The difference is the team has the trust and capability to stay calm, respond quickly, and keep improving.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- High trust and autonomy
- Proactive problem solving
- Strong communication and accountability
- Continuous learning and improvement

### WHAT YOU'LL HEAR

- "Let's test it and see."
- "We figured it out together."
- "We're ahead of schedule."
- "We already solved that."

### WHAT YOU'LL SEE

- High ownership—follow-through without being chased
- CI habits are visible and effective (experiments, reviews, clear signals, standards)
- The team self-corrects without waiting for permission
- Cross-functional collaboration is proactive and productive

### WATCH OUT FOR

- Burnout from sustained intensity or high expectations
- Overconfidence—assuming feedback or outside input isn't needed
- Exclusion—new or quieter members struggling to integrate

### LEADER'S ROLE

- Empower the team—shift from directing to enabling
- Keep the bar high—challenge the team to stretch and innovate
- Protect capacity and sustainability (pace, priorities, focus)

- Remove systemic barriers and strengthen cross-functional flow
- Reinforce improvement as a daily habit, not a special event

### ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

A distribution center team consistently ships on time with low errors. They notice a pattern: certain SKUs spike mis-picks during peak hours. Without being asked, they run a quick experiment—adjust slotting, add a clearer visual cue, and change the replenishment trigger timing. Within a week, errors drop and throughput holds. Then they document the change and share it with a sister site. The team doesn't just execute well—they detect weak signals early and improve the system before it becomes a bigger problem.

## 5. TRANSFORMING: CONTINUOUS GROWTH, NOT CLOSURE

### OVERVIEW

Most versions of this model end with “Adjourning”—the team disbands. But CI cultures aren't built on endings. They're built on evolution. Teams change goals, absorb new members, inherit new work, and face new constraints. Transforming reflects the reality that high-performing teams don't just run the process—they improve it, upgrade it, and carry learning forward.

This is the highest evolution: a team that is transforming the system while operating inside it. That only happens when problem solving is enabled at the point of impact—when the team has the clarity, permission, and capability to see abnormal conditions and improve what creates them.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Reflection and renewal
- Integration of new members and new goals
- Sustained improvement and adaptability
- Culture of learning and resilience

### WHAT YOU'LL HEAR

- “What did we learn from that?”
- “Let's update the standard so this doesn't come back.”
- “We should teach this to the new folks.”
- “What's the next constraint we need to break?”

### WHAT YOU'LL SEE

- The team regularly reflects and upgrades its ways of working
- Knowledge transfer is intentional—playbooks, onboarding, mentoring
- Standards evolve without chaos—change is controlled and communicated
- Improvement spreads—patterns and practices move across teams

### WATCH OUT FOR

- Change fatigue—too many transformations without recovery

- “Elite team” arrogance that blocks outside learning
- Loss of signal—improvements happening, but not captured or shared
- New members left behind because the team’s pace is too advanced

#### LEADER’S ROLE

- Facilitate reflection and make learning transferable (capture, standardize, share)
- Support onboarding and renewal without resetting the team to zero
- Encourage experimentation while protecting stability and focus
- Reinforce improvement as a mindset and operating system—not a project phase
- Keep the team anchored to purpose as goals and conditions change

#### ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

After a successful turnaround of customer onboarding, a financial services team doesn’t declare victory and move on. They package what they learned into a reusable operating system: updated standard work, a clear set of visual signals for stuck applications, and a lightweight weekly review focused on removing constraints. Then they rotate experienced team members into a new product launch to seed the same habits early. The process keeps improving because the team treats learning as something to transfer, not something to celebrate once.

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#### WHEN TEAMS REGRESS

Team regression is rarely random. It is usually triggered by disruption to clarity, trust, or shared rhythm. Common catalysts include:

- A **net new problem** or unfamiliar process that resets competence
- A **change in team members**, shifting dynamics and informal norms
- A **new leader** introducing different expectations or standards
- A visible **failure** that shakes confidence
- Moving too quickly without **alignment or buy-in**

When these events occur, teams often slide backward into earlier-stage behaviors—hesitation, conflict, dependency, guarded communication, or blame. What once felt stable suddenly feels uncertain. Regression is not dysfunction; it is a predictable human response to disrupted equilibrium.

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#### WHY REGRESSION HAPPENS

Regression occurs when change outpaces shared understanding. Clarity drops. Psychological safety wavers. Standards feel unstable. In that vacuum, people revert to self-protective behaviors. The team is not failing—it is recalibrating.

The risk increases when leaders assume prior alignment still exists after conditions have shifted. It rarely does

The DVF>R model (Beckhard & Harris, 1987) provides a simple but powerful equation for change:

**Dissatisfaction (D) + Vision (V) + First Steps (F) must outweigh Resistance (R).**

If dissatisfaction with the current state is weak, people won't move.

If the vision is unclear, people won't commit.

If first steps are ambiguous, people won't act.

When any of those three elements are underdeveloped, resistance dominates—and regression follows.

## HOW LEADERS MINIMIZE REGRESSION

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Strong change management strengthens all three forces:

- Make the **need for change visible** (D).
- Define clearly what success looks like (V).
- Sequence practical, manageable next actions (F).

When DVF genuinely exceeds resistance, teams move through disruption with resilience instead of retreat. Regression becomes temporary turbulence—not a collapse of progress.

## THE FIVE COMMITMENTS OF ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP

The five commitments of CI leaders reflect the mindset and behaviors required to foster a culture of continuous improvement—one where teams grow, problems surface, and performance evolves through trust and ownership. These aren't abstract values—they're practical leadership disciplines. Committing to meet teams where they are, prioritize growth over comfort, model culture, coach through real work, and leave every room better than you found it demands intentional behavior. These leaders don't just set direction—they shape conditions for learning, accountability, and transformation by how they show up.

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### 1. MEET TEAMS WHERE THEY ARE

Meeting teams where they are requires adaptive leadership — not a fixed style. This is where the **Navigator** and **Architect** are often critical early on, helping teams gain focus and clarity when direction or structure is missing. During Storming, the **Challenger** may need to surface tension while the Mentor stabilizes confidence. In Performing stages, the **Operator** reinforces rhythm and discipline. The commitment is not about being flexible for comfort's sake; it is about choosing the right archetype intentionally. Leaders who misdiagnose the stage apply the wrong posture and create friction. Leaders who adapt build trust because the team feels understood before being pushed.

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### 2. PRIORITIZE GROWTH OVER COMFORT

Prioritizing growth over comfort often calls forward the **Challenger** archetype. When standards drift or complacency sets in, the Challenger raises the bar using truth and data — not emotion. But growth also requires the **Mentor**, who develops capability through coaching rather than control. The **Architect** may redesign systems to remove friction that blocks progress. This commitment recognizes that short-term comfort can stall long-term performance. Leaders who default to harmony avoid necessary conversations; leaders who flex between Challenger and Mentor create constructive tension that stretches the team without breaking it.

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### 3. MODEL THE CULTURE YOU EXPECT

Culture is reinforced through visible behavior. The **Operator** models discipline by reinforcing standards and responding to red conditions. The **Navigator** keeps the team aligned to purpose. The **Architect** ensures that visual management and standard work reflect what “good” looks like. The **Mentor** demonstrates reflection and learning. The **Challenger** refuses to normalize mediocrity. This commitment means leaders use the same boards, language, and rhythms they expect from others. Culture is not declared — it is demonstrated. When leaders embody the archetypes appropriately, the CI Mindset becomes tangible rather than theoretical.

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### 4. COACH THROUGH REAL WORK

Improvement does not happen in conference rooms alone; it happens at the point of impact. The **Mentor** coaches through questions. The **Operator** stabilizes execution when needed. The **Architect** clarifies broken systems. The **Navigator** connects daily work to strategic intent. The **Challenger** pushes teams to examine root causes instead of accepting symptoms. This commitment ensures that leaders do not rescue teams prematurely or escalate too quickly. Instead, they enable problem solving in real time. Capability grows because learning is embedded in the work itself.

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### 5. LEAVE EVERY ROOM BETTER THAN YOU FOUND IT

This commitment integrates all five archetypes and is the essence of Kaizen. The **Navigator** leaves clarity. The **Architect** leaves structure. The **Operator** leaves stability. The **Mentor** leaves confidence. The **Challenger** leaves a higher standard. Leaders who honor this commitment improve the environment, the system, or the person — even in small ways — during every interaction. Over time, these small deposits compound. Teams do not improve because of one heroic intervention; they improve because leadership presence consistently raises focus, clarity, and problem-solving capability.

Your goal isn't to be perfect. It's to show up consistently in the right ways. That means building a leadership system that reinforces:

- Focus – by prioritizing what matters
- Clarity – by making standards and signals visible
- Problem Solving at the Point of Impact – by coaching capability into the team

We do this through three components:

1. Adaptive Leadership: The 5 Leadership Archetypes
2. Dynamic Leader Standard Work (LSW)
3. Tiered Daily Management

## ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: FIVE LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES

### ADAPTING LEADERSHIP TO TEAM NEEDS

As teams move through the Tuckman stages—**Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Transforming**—the leader’s job is to adapt to what the team needs *right now*. Each stage calls for a different kind of leadership, not just in what you do, but in the presence you bring. In Forming, teams depend on guidance and clarity. In Storming, they need a leader who can hold tension, navigate conflict, and keep dialogue productive. The wrong move at the wrong time creates friction and resistance. But when your leadership is aligned to the team’s current stage, you build trust, momentum, and shared ownership.

### LEADERSHIP AS A FLUID PRACTICE

That’s why there is no single “right” way to lead a continuous improvement effort. The most effective leaders treat leadership as fluid: they read the team’s development, then choose the posture that best supports growth and collaboration.

### LEADERSHIP AS BEHAVIOR

Leadership also isn’t a personality trait—it’s a process. We can’t teach charisma, and we don’t need to. What matters is consistent, intentional behavior: how you create focus, provide clarity, and enable problem solving when it counts. That means leadership can be learned. It’s a set of behaviors you can practice, refine, and adapt—especially as teams move through transition and their needs change.

This is precisely why the leadership archetypes exist: to bring structure and clarity to the inherently dynamic and sometimes messy realities of leading teams through change. The archetypes offer a framework that helps leaders translate intention into practical action, no matter how unpredictable the environment. In the next section, you’ll discover each archetype in detail, along with a practical tool for choosing the right leadership mode—so you can confidently guide your team, adapt your approach, and support progress at every stage.

### EVOLVING LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES

In this section, you’ll be introduced to the **five Leadership Archetypes** and a practical tool for deciding when to **direct, coach, challenge, align, design, or step back**—so your leadership evolves alongside the team, from early formation through transformation.

### THE PURPOSE OF ARCHETYPES

We call them **archetypes** because they aren’t job titles, fixed styles, or personality labels. An archetype is a recognizable leadership *mode*—a repeatable pattern of actions, questions, and presence you can step into on purpose. You may have defaults, but the goal isn’t to “pick one.” The goal is to build range.

Real leadership is knowing which mode the moment requires, and being able to shift without losing yourself—or losing the team.

Each archetype is a leadership mode, not a personality type. You can move between them intentionally—like switching gears to match the terrain.

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#### ARCHETYPES ARE ADAPTIVE, NOT SEQUENTIAL

These archetypes are not a step-by-step sequence. Great leaders shift between them fluidly, based on:

- The stage of team development (Tuckman),
- The team’s current capability and confidence,
- And the situation on the ground.

For example:

- During Storming, you may toggle between Navigator and Architect within the same coaching session.
- During Transforming, you might close a cycle with the Mentor, then step back in as Navigator for the next challenge the team faces.

Ask yourself:

- What does this team need most right now—focus, clarity, or problem-solving?
- Where are they in the development journey?
- Am I reacting with my default style—or choosing my response with intention?

When leaders pause and choose their posture, teams feel it.

- That’s how psychological safety grows.
- That’s how performance scales.
- That’s how cultures transform.

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#### LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES COMPARISON CHART

Archetype	Primary Use Stage	Focus Area	Key Behaviors	Alignment to CI Mindset
<b>Navigator</b>	Forming, Storming	Direction, Expectations	Clarifies purpose, sets expectations, spots friction	Focus

<b>Architect</b>	Storming, Norming	Structure, Clarity	Builds systems, defines roles, visualizes work	Clarity
<b>Operator</b>	Norming, Performing	Execution, Discipline	Drives accountability, standardizes process, ensures flow	Problem Solving
<b>Challenger</b>	Performing, Transforming	Growth, Reflection	Pushes learning, uses data provocatively, breaks patterns	Problem Solving
<b>Mentor</b>	All Stages (esp. Transforming)	Development, Resilience	Coaches growth, asks powerful questions, builds confidence	All Three

## HOW TO RECOGNIZE, APPLY, AND PREPARE FOR EACH LEADERSHIP MODE

This guide equips leaders with practical ways to flex between five distinct leadership archetypes based on what the team needs most. Each section includes:

- What the archetype is for
- When to use it
- How to apply it
- How to prepare
- What cues to watch for in the field

When you enter a team space—whether a Gemba walk, stand-up, or problem-solving session—start with these three questions:

1. Is the team clear on what success looks like today?
  - If **focus** is missing or priorities feel scattered, step into the **Navigator** or **Mentor** archetype to re-align direction and ownership.
2. Is the team stuck in conflict, blame, or avoidance?
  - If **clarity** is missing—roles, standards, or truth are unclear—shift into the **Architect** or **Challenger** archetype to design standards, raise expectations, and signal what matters.
  - If the bar is too low or avoidance is present, use **Challenger** to raise the standard and address the truth directly.

### 3. Is the team operating well but hitting system limits or burnout?

- If **problem solving** is missing, or capability is lagging, step in as **Operator** to stabilize and as **Mentor** to build skill and confidence.
- If instability or risk is present right now, first use **Operator** to stabilize the situation, then **Architect** to fix the system for lasting improvement.
- If there is a recurring issue or weak standards, adopt the **Architect** archetype to design robust standards and signal their importance.
- If the team is busy but drifting without clear progress, use **Navigator** to re-align priorities and clarify ownership.

Sometimes the most powerful move is to ask one great question, and then let the team own the answer. Other times, it's to model the behavior you expect, or build a new system to reduce friction. These are all valid CI leadership moves. Knowing when to use which is what separates good leaders from great ones.

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## LEADERSHIP IS FLUID: PICK THE NEED BEFORE THE MODE

It's an easy trap to fall into: staying in one mode for too long simply because it's comfortable, rather than meeting the team where they truly are. Leadership is a process and a learned behavior.

When the pressure hits, we default to what's comfortable:

- Some of us push (Challenger).
- Some of us fix the system (Architect).
- Some of us jump into execution (Operator).
- Some of us coach (Mentor).
- Some of us try to create alignment (Navigator).

Fluid leadership starts with a simple internal discipline:

### **Signal > story. Find the signal, then choose the archetype.**

What's missing right now—focus, clarity, or problem solving? Then step into the mode that closes the gap.

What follows is a narrative guide for each archetype, including how a leader thinks as they step in, plus one case vignette and consistent prompts (aligned to your one-pager) to keep language tight across materials.

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## NAVIGATOR — GUIDE THE PATH FORWARD

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### WHAT THE LEADER IS THINKING

**“They’re working hard, but they’re not pulling in the same direction.”**

Navigator mode is what you step into when progress feels like motion without traction: busy calendars, full boards, constant meetings, lots of activity—but no shared definition of what matters most. The leader can feel it in the atmosphere: people are doing “their part,” yet the whole isn’t moving.

The Navigator’s job is not to motivate. It’s to **orient**. To take ambiguity and turn it into a path: purpose, priorities, sequencing, ownership, and the next decision that unlocks forward movement.

## HOW THE LEADER SHOWS UP

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A Navigator walks into the room listening for misalignment patterns:

- People are unclear on priorities.
- Handoffs are messy.
- Ownership is fuzzy.
- “*We’re waiting on them*” is becoming a lifestyle.

Then they do something that initially feels slow, but actually speeds everything up: they **force clarity before motion**. They don’t add work. They remove confusion.

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## CASE VIGNETTE: CROSS-FUNCTIONAL DRIFT

A regional operations leader oversees a new customer onboarding process spanning Sales, Operations, and Billing. Everyone is “slammed.” Sales says Ops is slow. Ops says Billing is unclear. Billing says Sales sends incomplete information. The leader’s first instinct is to referee and assign tasks—then they pause.

*“This isn’t a motivation issue. It’s a directional clarity issue.”*

They gather the right people for a short alignment huddle and start with a framing question that resets the room:

### What does winning today look like?

Not “what are you working on?” but “what must be true by end of day?” Answers are inconsistent—which is the signal. The leader names it without blame:

*“We don’t have shared priorities or clean ownership. That’s why we’re stepping on each other.”*

They tighten the next layer:

- *What must be true by end of day/shift?*
- *Where does the work handoff break?*
- *Who owns the next decision right now?*

Within 30 minutes, they identify the real choke point: onboarding packets arriving incomplete. Ops can't start and Billing can't finish. The leader doesn't lecture Sales—they establish a shared definition of “ready,” make it visible, and set a short daily check for a week to confirm the handoff holds.

A week later, the noise drops—not because people worked harder, but because they worked aligned.

---

## NAVIGATOR PROMPTS (CONSISTENT LANGUAGE)

- What does winning today look like?
- What must be true by end of day/shift?
- Where does the work handoff break?
- Who owns the next decision right now?
- What are we saying no to so the priority can win?
- What's the next smallest step we can take in the next 60 minutes?

---

## TRANSITION: NAVIGATOR → ARCHITECT

When you realign direction, something becomes obvious: **the system either supports the path—or fights it.**

Once priorities and ownership are clear, the next constraint often shows up as variation, rework, and “it depends.” That's the moment a fluid leader shifts from guiding direction to designing repeatability.

## ARCHITECT — DESIGN THE SYSTEM

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### WHAT THE LEADER IS THINKING

***“We're asking people to be consistent inside a system that isn't.”***

Architect mode appears when performance depends on tribal knowledge, shift-to-shift preference, or who happens to be working. Leaders often misdiagnose this as a people problem and try to “hold them accountable harder.” Architects see the deeper truth: repeat issues and high variation usually mean the system is missing, unclear, or unreliable.

Architects don't start by writing procedures. They start by studying reality and building the minimum structure needed to make success repeatable—and abnormal obvious.

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### HOW THE LEADER SHOWS UP

The Architect gets curious and concrete. They go see the work and look for where the process forces humans to improvise:

- Where do people hesitate?
- Where do they search?
- Where do they create workarounds?

- Where does the signal fail?

Then they build clarity into the system: simple flow, clear roles, visible standards, and governance that prevents fade.

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## CASE VIGNETTE: REPEAT QUALITY FAILURE

A plant manager keeps seeing mislabeled bundles leaving shipping. The team has “trained on it” repeatedly, yet it returns. The leader feels the urge to challenge the team harder—then pauses.

*“If it repeats, the system is teaching it.”*

They step into Architect mode with a single opening move:

**Show me the work as performed.**

They watch three associates label bundles. Each does it differently. One checks twice, one relies on memory, one prints labels in batches and sorts later. The printer is away from the point of use, and supplies are mixed.

The leader doesn’t blame. They diagnose with clarity prompts:

- What is normal, and how is it defined/visible?
- Where should the signal appear when it goes off?
- Is it missing, ineffective, or not followed?

They design a minimum effective standard by tomorrow:

- Labels print at point of use.
- One-piece flow: print → apply → verify → move.
- A simple verification zone that makes mismatch visible.
- Ownership and governance: the shipping lead owns the standard; the supervisor audits daily for two weeks.

Two weeks later, the repeat issue drops sharply—not because people suddenly cared more, but because the system made the right behavior obvious and repeatable.

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## ARCHITECT PROMPTS (CONSISTENT LANGUAGE)

- Show me the work as performed.
- What is normal, and how is it defined/visible?
- Where should the signal appear when it goes off?
- Is it missing, ineffective, or not followed?

- What's the simplest standard we can implement by tomorrow?
- How will we govern it, so it doesn't fade?

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## TRANSITION: ARCHITECT → OPERATOR

A designed system is only potential energy. The moment you introduce real life—pressure, staffing gaps, urgent work, fatigue—standards get tested.

This is where fluid leadership shifts into Operator mode: make the system real, make abnormal visible, stabilize execution, and stop drift early.

## OPERATOR — ENABLE EXECUTION

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### WHAT THE LEADER IS THINKING

*“This can't stay invisible. We have to stabilize the moment.”*

Operator mode is what leaders use when performance is volatile and red conditions are being ignored, normalized, or worked around. The Operator isn't “strict.” The Operator is steady. They protect the team and customer by restoring control through disciplined routines and real-time containment—without blame.

If the Architect creates the lane lines, the Operator keeps the organization from swerving into the ditch.

---

### HOW THE LEADER SHOWS UP

Operators tighten the feedback loop:

- They go to the point of impact.
- They define normal clearly.
- They make abnormal unmistakable.
- They contain today's risk.
- They confirm closure instead of assuming it.

Operator mode is often the first response in instability. Once things stop wobbling, the leader may shift back to Architect to redesign what caused the instability in the first place.

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### CASE VIGNETTE: VOLATILE PERFORMANCE AND IGNORED RED

A service center begins missing same-day turnaround. Everyone has an explanation—volume, staffing, “one of those weeks.” The leader walks the floor and notices the real signal: work-in-process is stacked everywhere, but nothing is marked abnormal. No trigger. No containment.

The leader's thought is immediate:

*"We're drifting, and we're pretending it's normal."*

They open with the non-negotiable:

What's the abnormal condition—and how do we know?

The team can't answer clearly. That's the issue. The leader sets containment:

- *What containment prevents impact today?*

They establish a short-cycle check every hour for the rest of the shift. Each check ends with closure discipline:

- *When do we check back to confirm the loop is closed?*

Within days, stability returns. Now the leader can pivot into Architect mode to prevent recurring pile-ups by redesigning intake flow and signals.

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## OPERATOR PROMPTS (CONSISTENT LANGUAGE)

- What's the abnormal condition—and how do we know?
- What containment prevents impact today?
- What does the standard say—and are we following it?
- Where is the earliest likely failure in the next hour?
- When do we check back to confirm the loop is closed?

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## TRANSITION: OPERATOR → MENTOR

Stability is a gift—but it's also a trap if leaders keep doing the stabilizing forever. If the leader becomes the system, the team never grows.

Once execution is under control, fluid leadership shifts to Mentor mode: **transfer capability so the team can run the system without escalation.**

## MENTOR — DEVELOP THE PERSON

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### WHAT THE LEADER IS THINKING

*"If I solve this for them, I win today and lose next month."*

Mentor mode is how leaders build capability so performance doesn't depend on escalation or heroics. The Mentor sees that the real constraint is often not effort—it's judgment, confidence, and a consistent thinking process under pressure.

Mentoring isn't cheerleading. It's structured development: a challenge, a learning loop, and reflection that turns experience into skill.

## HOW THE LEADER SHOWS UP

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Mentors keep the work real and the coaching focused. They don't overwhelm someone with feedback. They build one capability at a time through repetition:

- clarify the outcome,
- review what's been tried,
- explore causes without blame,
- run one small experiment,
- reflect and adjust.

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## CASE VIGNETTE: NEW LEADER, SHAKY JUDGMENT

A new frontline supervisor struggles to run daily huddles. They either overreact to every issue or avoid issues entirely. The leader could step in and run the meeting—but chooses Mentor mode.

Their internal thought:

*"This is capability, not character."*

After the huddle, they avoid broad critique and start with a grounding prompt:

**What outcome are you aiming for—and why?**

They move to learning, not lecturing:

- *What have you tried, and what did you learn?*
- *What do you think is causing it?*

Then they keep it practical and small:

- *What's one small experiment we can run next (PDCA)?*

They close by offering support without removing ownership:

- *What support do you need from me vs. from the system?*

Two weeks later, the supervisor is calmer, the team trusts the huddle, and problems surface earlier—because capability grew.

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## MENTOR PROMPTS (CONSISTENT LANGUAGE)

- What outcome are you aiming for—and why?
- What have you tried, and what did you learn?
- What do you think is causing it?
- What’s one small experiment we can run next (PDCA)?
- What support do you need from me vs. from the system?

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## TRANSITION: MENTOR → CHALLENGER

As capability increases, a new risk appears: comfort. Teams can become competent and still drift. They can hit “acceptable” and stop reaching.

When the bar quietly lowers—when avoidance, excuses, or complacency creep in—fluid leadership shifts into Challenger mode: **raise truth and raise the standard without breaking trust.**

## CHALLENGER — PUSH THE STANDARD

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### WHAT THE LEADER IS THINKING

*“We’re protecting comfort instead of protecting the mission.”*

Challenger mode is necessary when underperformance gets normalized and the team starts defending the current state like it’s inevitable. The Challenger doesn’t bring heat for entertainment. They bring truth to restore ownership.

The Challenger’s target is not people—it’s **the story that keeps the system stuck**. Their job is to confront drift early, raise standards clearly, and convert hard truth into commitment.

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### HOW THE LEADER SHOWS UP

Challengers are direct and grounded:

- They name reality with data and observable facts.
- They confront limiting narratives without shaming.
- They protect psychological safety by attacking systems and behaviors, not character.
- They demand a commitment and a follow-up cadence.

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## CASE VIGNETTE: NORMALIZED UNDERPERFORMANCE

A product team has accepted late releases as “just how it goes.” Postmortems are polite. Nothing changes. The leader senses avoidance.

Their internal thought:

*“We’re drifting into learned helplessness.”*

They open with reality:

- *Are we winning or losing—what does the data say?*

Excuses surface—dependencies, scope, “other priorities.” The leader doesn’t debate. They challenge the tolerance:

- *What are we tolerating that we shouldn’t?*

Now the real issues come out: weak definition of ready, last-minute scope changes, unclear ownership of integration testing. The leader makes the consequence visible:

- *What’s the cost of leaving this unsolved?*

They raise the bar explicitly:

- *Is the standard actually good enough?*

Then they force the shift from talk to commitment:

- *What commitment will be true before the next review—and what will be different?*

They leave with one measurable change, one owner, and a short cadence. The standard rises—not through motivation, but through truth and follow-through.

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## CHALLENGER PROMPTS (CONSISTENT LANGUAGE)

- Are we winning or losing—what does the data say?
- What are we tolerating that we shouldn’t?
- What’s the cost of leaving this unsolved?
- Is the standard actually good enough?
- What commitment will be true before the next review—and what will be different?

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## CLOSING LOOP: CHALLENGER → NAVIGATOR (AND THE CYCLE REPEATS)

Challenger mode raises the bar. But once the bar is raised, the team often needs a new path: sequencing, priorities, ownership, and a fresh definition of “winning.” That’s where a fluid leader cycles back to Navigator mode—because higher standards require clearer alignment.

This is the core teaching: **leadership is not a fixed identity. It’s a series of intentional shifts.**

You don’t pick an archetype to represent you. You pick an archetype to serve what the team needs next—based on the signal you can see.

## ARCHETYPE SELF ASSESMENT

Strong leaders flex between multiple styles. But most have defaults—ways they instinctively lead, stretch, or avoid. This tool helps you discover:

- **Your Primary Archetype** – your most natural leadership style
- **Your Secondary Archetype** – a style you often use when needed
- **Dormant Archetype(s)** – styles you rarely use or tend to avoid

This version includes both strengths and blind spots to help you reflect honestly. You may have more than one dormant archetype—and that’s normal.

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### STEP 1: RATE YOURSELF HONESTLY

For each of the 20 statements, rate how often the statement reflects your actual leadership behavior. Be honest with yourself as you respond. Use the following scale: 1 means the statement is rarely or almost never true for you, and 5 means the statement is almost always true. Try to avoid choosing answers based on how you wish to be seen—assess what is genuinely accurate for you.

Score	Meaning
<b>5</b>	Almost always true
<b>4</b>	Often true
<b>3</b>	Sometimes true
<b>2</b>	Rarely true
<b>1</b>	Almost never true

## Leadership Archetype Self-Reflection Quiz

Note that some questions are reflective to help surface blind spots. Read each question carefully. This will help you find your primary and dormant archetypes.

#	Statement	Score
1	I often recognize misalignment only after problems show up.	
2	I enjoy building or improving systems that make work more reliable.	
3	When things go wrong, I step in directly to fix the issue.	
4	I often find myself giving answers instead of helping others reflect.	
5	I tend to avoid hard conversations if I'm unsure how they'll land.	
6	I help clarify the bigger picture when the team is unclear on what matters.	
7	I think about how to make work more repeatable and scalable.	
8	I'm usually the one jumping in to stabilize when results are slipping.	
9	I block time to help individuals develop—not just complete tasks.	
10	I push the team to raise expectations when I sense we're coasting.	
11	I help people connect across teams when handoffs or ownership is unclear.	
12	I use visual tools or standard work to help people do their jobs better.	
13	I notice when daily routines are slipping—but don't always intervene.	
14	I help others define meaningful goals and coach their growth over time.	
15	I've challenged long-held norms—even when it was unpopular.	
16	I sometimes realize too late that we've drifted away from the purpose.	
17	I enjoy mapping workflows and clarifying steps with the team.	
18	I try to coach others through execution barriers, but sometimes just fix it myself.	
19	I recognize when someone is ready for more and stretch them with support.	
20	I avoid calling out performance issues when I sense resistance.	
21	I sometimes delay raising concerns when I know the team isn't ready to hear them.	



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## STEP 2: SCORE BY ARCHETYPE

Group your scores by archetype. Some statements are intentionally reflective to help surface blind spots.

<i>Archetype</i>	<i>Related Questions</i>	<i>Your Total (out of 25)</i>
<b>Navigator</b>	1, 6, 11, 16, 20	
<b>Architect</b>	2, 7, 12, 13, 17	
<b>Operator</b>	3, 7, 8, 13, 18	
<b>Mentor</b>	4, 9, 14, 18, 19	
<b>Challenger</b>	5, 10, 15, 20, 21	

Note: Some questions (e.g. 7, 13, 18, 20) show up in more than one archetype. Score them in **each** category where listed.

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## STEP 3: INTERPRET YOUR RESULTS

- **Primary Archetype** – Your highest total
- **Secondary Archetype** – Your second highest
- **Dormant Archetype(s)** – The lowest score(s)

You may have more than one dormant archetype. That’s common—and it shows where your leadership style may need development.

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## STEP 4: WHAT EACH ARCHETYPE REPRESENTS

- Navigator** – Guides direction, brings clarity, and helps teams align around purpose.  
**Architect** – Builds systems, designs process, and brings structure to chaos.  
**Operator** – Drives daily execution and ensures stability at the point of impact.  
**Mentor** – Develops others, coaches through reflection, and builds capability.  
**Challenger** – Raises the standard, confronts drift, and pushes for growth.

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## STEP 5: GROW YOUR RANGE

<i>Want to Strengthen...</i>	<i>Try This</i>
<b>Navigator</b>	Lead a strategy session or clarify cross-functional goals.
<b>Architect</b>	Map a process or create a visual standard with your team.
<b>Operator</b>	Support a daily huddle, walk the process, and reinforce routine.
<b>Mentor</b>	Schedule coaching sessions and ask open-ended reflection questions.
<b>Challenger</b>	Use performance data to confront drift and invite ownership.

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## STEP 6: OPTIONAL REFLECTION

Use this to debrief with your leader or journal on your own:

- **Primary Archetype:**  
Why does this feel most natural to me?
- **Secondary Archetype:**  
How and when do I lean on this?
- **Dormant Archetype(s):**  
What makes these harder for me to access?
- **Stretch Goal:**  
What archetype do I want to build more intentionally this quarter?
- **Action Plan:**  
What will I do to strengthen it in real situations?

## DYNAMIC LEADER STANDARD WORK

Adaptive leadership is not improvisation. It is disciplined flexibility anchored in a designed system. Dynamic Leader Standard Work (LSW) is that system—the structure that makes leadership repeatable, and the mechanism that makes it adaptable.

Leadership grounded in a Continuous Improvement mindset rests on three responsibilities: creating **Focus**, providing **Clarity**, and enabling **Problem Solving at the Point of Impact**. Those responsibilities do not fulfill themselves. They require rhythm. They require inspection. They require reflection. When leadership is treated as personality, variability increases. When it is treated as process, it can be refined.

Dynamic LSW treats leadership as a value-creating process with inputs (strategy, signals, constraints), activity (presence, coaching, decisions), and outputs (alignment, capability, trust, performance). It is how leaders refine their own process over time—without drifting into either strategic abstraction or daily busyness.

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### FROM STRATEGY TO DAILY LEADERSHIP

Dynamic LSW begins at altitude and deliberately cascades to the floor.

True North defines the end game—why we exist. A strategic vision describes the 3–5 year direction. Annual objectives establish what must be true by year-end. Quarterly sprints narrow that direction into focused bets. Weekly planning identifies sequencing, constraints, and fragility.

The final distillation is the **Daily Operational Commitment (DOC)**.

This cascade matters because it prevents leaders from living either too high (in strategy) or too low (in activity). It ensures daily presence reflects strategic intent. And it creates a disciplined handoff between what we say matters and what we actually do today.

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## THE DOC: WHERE INTENT BECOMES POSTURE

The DOC is a short, disciplined reset that turns leadership from reactive motion into intentional impact. It is not a checklist and it is not a morning affirmation. It is a daily decision about what must be true, where it is most likely to break, and how you will show up so your team can execute and learn without you becoming the bottleneck.

DOC exists because operating systems don't drift loudly—they drift quietly. When leaders start the day without a definition of done, work expands to fill every gap. Priorities blur. Problems get chased instead of contained. By late afternoon, the day has been busy but directionless. DOC is the line in the sand that prevents that. It creates **Focus** by naming what matters today in observable terms, creates **Clarity** by identifying the earliest likely failure and what abnormal will look like, and enables **Problem Solving at the Point of Impact** by deciding where you will show up—and what you expect the team to do when you're not there.

Just as important, the DOC forces archetype selection. Adaptive leadership requires movement between five archetypes: **Navigator** (align direction and interpret conditions), **Architect** (redesign broken systems), **Operator** (reinforce standards and execution), **Mentor** (develop capability and confidence), and **Challenger** (raise standards and confront drift). The DOC is where the leader decides which energy the system requires. Without that deliberate selection, leaders default to preference. With it, leadership becomes adaptive by design.

In practice, DOC is five minutes, written down, and revisited once.

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## THE THREE DOC QUESTIONS

### 1) WHAT MUST BE TRUE TODAY?

This isn't a generic statement and it isn't a re-labeled to-do list. It's your reality-informed commitment for the day—shaped by your operating rhythm, your focused objectives, and the improvements currently in flight. "What must be true" is a clear definition of done that creates Focus: it names the outcome that moves the needle toward your weekly plan, your quarterly sprint, and the strategic priorities you're responsible for. It answers, plainly, "What will I leave better than I found it?" Without this, drift shows up fast. You overwork because there's no line in the sand. You default to firefighting because priorities aren't explicit. Decisions become reactive. And you end the day busy but unsatisfied—still wondering what you actually accomplished.

A weak DOC answers this from the leader's point of view. It sounds responsible, but it stays generic. It describes intent instead of conditions. It cannot create focus because it never defines "done."

**Immature example:** "Improve customer reliability today. Keep the schedule stable. Make sure the handoff goes well."

These are good ambitions, but they don't draw a line in the sand. No one can verify success without debate.<sup>6</sup>

A refined DOC answers from the system’s point of view. It defines the condition that protects the strategic objective and makes it measurable in the work. It is not a to-do list. It is a reality-informed definition of done.

**Refined example:** “Customer reliability requires a stable shift handoff. Today, the 2:00 PM transition completes within 5 minutes with zero rework and zero ‘missing work’ discovered after the handoff. By 1:50 PM, the schedule board is reconciled—work released, priorities confirmed, and the first 60 minutes of the next shift owned and visible.”

## 2) WHERE IS THE EARLIEST LIKELY FAILURE?

Once you name what must be true, call out where it’s most likely to break first. Be specific. Be honest. Don’t just predict the obvious—identify the earliest point of drift and name what “abnormal” will look like today. Use time-bound indicators where you can: “If X isn’t true by 10:00,” “If the queue exceeds Y,” “If we’re missing Z by noon.” This question creates Clarity and forces a choice: you can’t be everywhere, every day. So decide where you will show up, and what you’ll expect the team to see and respond to when you’re not there. When the abnormal appears, the goal is containment and learning—not escalation by default. You’re building the conditions for problems to be solved at the point of impact, while you stay focused on what only you can do.

A weak DOC treats risk like a general warning. It names what might go wrong, but it never defines how drift will be detected early. Without triggers, abnormal stays subjective and the leader ends up reacting to whatever becomes loudest.

**Immature example:** “Shift transitions are usually messy. Keep an eye on it. Make sure communication is good.”

That is awareness without clarity. It doesn’t specify where, when, or what “abnormal” will look like.

A refined DOC names the earliest failure point in time and place, then defines the trigger that makes abnormal unmistakable. It also clarifies containment expectations so problem solving happens at the point of impact instead of default escalation.

**Refined example:** “The earliest likely failure is 1:45–2:05 PM, when schedule updates happen informally and ownership becomes ambiguous. Abnormal is clear: if the schedule is not reconciled by 1:50 PM, or if any work is discovered ‘unassigned’ after 2:05 PM, the handoff is failing and must be contained immediately. The first response is not escalation—it’s reconciling the board, assigning ownership, and restoring the standard before work moves forward.”

## 3) HOW WILL I LEAD ON PURPOSE?

You’ll likely need to show up as different archetypes today—sometimes within minutes of each other. The hard part isn’t knowing the archetypes. The hard part is switching on purpose. You can’t walk out of one conversation with Operator energy and walk into the next as Mentor without a reset. This question is your intentional transition plan. It’s a 5-minute pre-brief that helps you enter each interaction the way

your team needs you—not the way your default wiring wants to show up. If you know a conversation will require an archetype you're weaker in, prepare for it. Decide your posture. Bring a short set of questions. Clear your head between rooms. Show up calm, direct, and present—ready to create Focus, bring Clarity, and enable problem solving rather than taking it over.

A weak DOC leaves posture undefined. It assumes good intent will carry the day. That's where leaders unintentionally mislead teams—showing up as their default archetype even when the moment requires something else. The result is inconsistency: too much directing in one moment, too much rescuing in another, and a team trained to escalate instead of contain.

**Immature example:** “I'll support the team today and help if needed. I'll be available during the transition.”

That sounds helpful, but it doesn't declare posture or boundaries. It doesn't protect team ownership.

A refined DOC declares archetype energy in advance, ties it to what the system needs, and sets a boundary: the leader will coach and confront drift without stealing the work.

**Refined example:** “I will be at Gemba from 1:40–2:20 PM. I will use Challenger energy to confront ambiguity in ownership and protect the standard: ‘Done means reconciled, owned, and visible—every time.’ I will use Mentor energy to coach the supervisor and leads on a simple definition of done for the handoff and to confirm they can detect abnormal without me. By end of day, we will leave behind one improvement: a visible handoff checklist with named owners and a single response rule when the trigger is hit.”

This is adaptive leadership practiced as process. The leader is intentionally combining Challenger and Mentor energy, and posture is clarified before the day begins.

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#### THE DOC DIRECTS THE LEADER TO GEMBA

DOC should lead to the place where work is performed. Leadership presence at Gemba is diagnostic. It reveals whether standards are understood, whether drift is forming, and whether the system is stable. DOC narrows the leader's field of attention. It prevents wandering. It prevents symbolic presence. It sharpens inquiry.

At Gemba, archetype selection becomes observable in behavior: the questions asked, the tone used, the standards reinforced, and the coaching delivered all reflect the posture chosen in the DOC. This is where leadership stops being theoretical and becomes visible in the work.

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#### DYNAMIC LSW IS NOT A STATIC CHECKLIST

Historically, Leader Standard Work has often been reduced to static checklists or spreadsheet tracking. Cadence is necessary, but static documentation cannot sustain adaptive leadership in a modern operating environment. Business conditions move faster. Signals are more complex. Collaboration spans functions and time zones. Leaders must integrate data, human signals, and systemic feedback continuously.

LSW must evolve—not by abandoning structure, but by modernizing it. Leaders need systems that connect strategic objectives to daily commitments, make drift visible in real time, capture reflection and deep learning, enable collaboration across levels, and surface patterns—not just completed tasks.

Artificial intelligence and collaborative digital platforms now make this possible. Instead of static Excel checklists updated after the fact, leaders can operate within living systems that connect goals, cadence, reflection, and coaching insights dynamically. The objective is not digitization for its own sake. It is disciplined adaptability supported by modern tools.

Dynamic Leader Standard Work is the philosophy. Modern platforms—such as ColliderOS—seek to support that philosophy by connecting strategy, cadence, and reflection into a living leadership system.

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## LEADERSHIP AS A PROCESS, NOT A PERSONALITY

Leadership isn't magic. It's not "charisma," and it's not a mood. Leadership is a repeatable process that produces outcomes—alignment, capability, trust, performance—or it produces noise. When you treat it as personality, you accept variability as inevitable. When you treat it as process, you can improve it.

### **THIS DOESN'T MEAN LEADERSHIP BECOMES MECHANICAL. IT MEANS IT BECOMES INTENTIONAL.**

A leader creates value when their presence produces Focus, Clarity, and Problem Solving at the Point of Impact. When those three outcomes are strong, the day feels lighter. Work moves. Decisions stick. Problems get contained where they happen. When they're weak, the day gets heavy—more meetings, more escalation, more rework, more second-guessing. That heaviness is not fate. It's signal.

Improvement language gives leaders a way to see that signal clearly. "Flow" in leadership isn't about speed for its own sake—it's about reducing friction. It's the difference between a team that can hand work off cleanly and a team that spends half its day restarting conversations. It's the difference between decisions that stay decided and decisions that get re-litigated because expectations were never made clear. It's the difference between a standard that lives in the work and a standard that lives in someone's head.

"Pull" is the reminder that the work tells you what it needs—if you're willing to listen. Teams communicate demand through signals: missed handoffs, recurring escalations, confusion, disengagement, "we didn't know," "we're waiting," "we thought someone else had it." The DOC is a discipline that keeps leaders from pushing their preferences into the day. It forces the leader to pull the day from what the system is actually saying—before the day starts running them.

And then there's waste—muda—not on the floor, but in leadership. Leadership waste shows up as preventable escalation because ownership is unclear. It shows up as decision churn because inputs weren't gathered early. It shows up as meeting sprawl because signals aren't visible. It shows up as emotional rework—tension, frustration, and defensiveness—because ambiguity was allowed to linger. It shows up as leaders rescuing teams, not because the team can't solve, but because the leader hasn't

created the conditions where solving is expected and safe. That waste doesn't just cost time. It costs trust. It teaches dependency. It quietly lowers the standard.

Dynamic Leader Standard Work is how you reduce that waste without becoming rigid. It gives you rhythm without turning you into a checklist. The DOC is the daily distillation—what must be true, where it will break first, and how you will show up. It directs you to the point of impact so your presence is diagnostic, not symbolic. It helps you reinforce standards without taking ownership away.

But the system isn't complete until the leader closes the loop.

Reflection is what turns repetition into refinement. Not casual reflection—disciplined reflection. The kind that looks at cause and effect and tells the truth about what your leadership amplified. In Japanese practice that depth is called Hansei, and the point is not self-blame. The point is improvement: Did the earliest failure happen where you expected? Did your archetype posture create clarity or friction? What did your presence strengthen—ownership or escalation? What will you adjust tomorrow in where you go, what you ask, what you reinforce, and how you show up?

Without reflection, LSW becomes compliance. With reflection, it becomes continuous leadership improvement—because the leader stops trying to “lead harder” and starts learning how to lead cleaner.

## TIERED DAILY MANAGEMENT

Tiered Daily Management builds the infrastructure through which an organization manages up from the point of impact. It shifts the flow of leadership energy. Rather than pushing direction downward and waiting for status to travel upward, the system allows signal at the frontline to pull leadership presence to where value is fragile.

THIS IS NOT A SEMANTIC DISTINCTION. IT IS STRUCTURAL.

When teams surface signal in real time — through visible KPIs, red/green contrast, and disciplined escalation — they are actively managing up. They are communicating, through the system, where leadership value is required. Tiered Daily Management creates the pathway for that communication to travel upward clearly, proportionally, and without delay.

LEADERSHIP, IN TURN, MUST RESPOND.

## TIER 1: THE ORIGIN OF SIGNAL

Tier 1 is where performance becomes visible and where managing up begins. The board defines target versus actual. It distinguishes normal from abnormal. When a metric turns red, the system is not generating a report. It is generating a pull.

THAT PULL DEMANDS PRESENCE AT GEMBA.

Gemba is the disciplined act of going to the real place where work is performed. Within Tiered Daily Management, it is not casual observation. It is structured engagement with live conditions. The board reveals deviation; Gemba explains it.

At Tier 1, leadership engagement takes the form of a Red Hour walk. A Red Hour walk is how leadership practices Gemba in response to live signal. It narrows the time horizon intentionally and asks a focused question: Where did we experience red in the last hour at the point of impact?

This compression of time matters. It prevents red from aging. It ensures that problem solving happens in real time, where the work occurs, rather than in retrospect.

During a Red Hour walk, the leader confirms the signal against the standard, explores what changed in the process, and coaches through the gap with the associate closest to the work. If the issue can be resolved locally, it is resolved immediately. If it exceeds local authority or capacity, it escalates within the tiered structure.

#### THIS IS MANAGING UP IN ACTION.

Signal originates at the frontline. The team surfaces the condition. Leadership shows up at the real place and adapts in response.

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#### ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP AT THE POINT OF IMPACT

When decision making and problem solving are enabled at the point of impact, leadership cannot remain static. It must adapt to the signal it receives.

Red Hour walks expose fragility in real time. They force leaders to decide how to show up. Stability may require Operator discipline. A skill gap may require Mentor development. Complacency may require Challenger clarity. Systemic design flaws may require Architect thinking. Cross-functional misalignment may require Navigator alignment.

#### ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IS NOT PERSONALITY-DRIVEN. IT IS SIGNAL-DRIVEN.

As teams manage up through disciplined visual management and structured escalation, leaders are pulled into the work. Their responsibility is to provide the value required in that moment — not generic oversight, but targeted posture aligned to the condition.

Without adaptive leadership, empowerment at the frontline collapses. If teams surface red and leadership responds with rigidity, blame, or delay, trust erodes. Managing up stops. Signal is suppressed.

Tiered Daily Management therefore demands adaptive fluency. Installing boards and huddles is insufficient. Leaders must evolve their presence.

#### TIER 2: STRUCTURED ABSORPTION OF UPWARD PULL

When Tier 1 cannot fully resolve an issue, escalation occurs within structure. Tier 2 absorbs that pull. Supervisors and cross-functional leaders examine patterns emerging from repeated red signals. Run charts reveal instability over time. Pareto analysis highlights recurring drivers. Action logs reinforce accountability.

#### TIER 2 DOES NOT EXIST TO REVIEW PERFORMANCE. IT EXISTS TO RESPOND TO THE PULL CREATED AT TIER 1.

At this level, leadership scope expands. The question shifts from “What happened in the last hour?” to “What condition is allowing this to continue?” Leaders must determine whether the issue reflects local variability, capability constraints, resource misalignment, or systemic fragility. They coach supervisory problem-solving quality, remove barriers, and redesign unstable systems where necessary.

The system functions only if each level responds proportionally. Tier 1 resolves what it can. Tier 2 resolves what exceeds Tier 1 capacity. If the issue reflects structural constraints beyond the department, it moves upward again.

**SIGNAL TRAVELS UPWARD. SUPPORT TRAVELS DOWNWARD.**

This layered enablement reinforces accountability without abandonment.

### TIER 3: STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE AND ROADMAP ALIGNMENT

Tier 3 is where daily signal meets strategy.

If Tier 1 is real-time and Tier 2 is diagnostic, Tier 3 is integrative. It brings strategy, roadmap priorities, cross-functional alignment, and executive accountability into the same conversation. Tier 3 ensures that recurring signal from the point of impact informs structural decisions rather than remaining isolated operational friction.

At this level, leaders ask whether persistent patterns reflect misaligned quarterly priorities, under-resourced initiatives, outdated standards, or strategic assumptions that no longer hold. They examine whether the roadmap addresses the constraints most frequently escalated. They clarify ownership across functions and reinforce accountability for systemic countermeasures.

**TIER 3 DOES NOT REPLACE LOWER TIERS. IT COMPLETES THE LOOP.**

Managing up only works if daily signal has the power to shape direction. When Tier 3 is disciplined, strategy becomes responsive rather than static. Adjustments are informed by validated signal, not anecdote. Accountability is reinforced across functions, not deferred to the frontline.

In this way, Tiered Daily Management becomes both operational and strategic. It connects the red of the last hour to the priorities of the next quarter.

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### PULL THINKING APPLIED TO LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR

Lean principles regulate production through pull. Tiered Daily Management applies the same principle to leadership flow.

When red signal appears, leadership engagement is pulled. When no signal exists, leaders resist the temptation to overproduce intervention. Overproduction in leadership manifests as unnecessary direction or escalation without need. Overprocessing appears as micromanagement of issues that can be solved locally. Tiered Daily Management disciplines this instinct. It clarifies when leadership must engage and when leadership must trust. It protects both performance and autonomy.

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## THE CULTURAL OUTCOME

When Tiered Daily Management, Gemba engagement, and Red Hour walks operate together across Tiers 1, 2, and 3, managing up becomes cultural muscle.

Associates trust that surfacing red will be met with support and coaching at the real place. Supervisors trust that escalation will bring barrier removal rather than scrutiny. Senior leaders trust signal because it is disciplined, visible, and connected to strategy.

Adaptive leadership becomes habitual because it is practiced repeatedly in short cycles. Leaders are not reacting to monthly summaries. They are responding to live signal. They refine posture through repetition. They reflect, adjust, and improve.

Tiered Daily Management is therefore more than operational governance. It is the infrastructure that enables empowered teams to manage up and forces leadership — operational, functional, and strategic — to adapt in response.

- ✓ Signal creates pull.
- ✓ Pull demands presence.
- ✓ Presence shapes direction.
- ✓ Direction reinforces standards.

That is how performance improves without relying on pressure alone.

## CONCLUSION: LEADERSHIP IS A SYSTEM — BUILD IT THAT WAY

Adaptive leadership is not a personality trait. It is not charisma, instinct, or style preference. It is disciplined responsiveness to signal.

Throughout this paper, we have explored a simple but demanding truth: leadership must move at the speed of the work. When teams are empowered to surface real-time signal at the point of impact, leadership must adapt proportionally and immediately. When signal travels upward through Tiered Daily Management, strategy must respond rather than remain static. When red appears, leaders must go to the real place and provide the value required in that moment.

This is not optional in high-performing organizations. It is structural.

The Leadership Archetypes provide posture. They give leaders language and range — Mentor, Challenger, Navigator, Architect, Operator — each necessary in different moments. The question is never “Which one am I?” but “Which one is required right now?”

Dynamic Leader Standard Work provides rhythm. It connects annual objectives to quarterly sprints, weekly focus, and Daily Operational Commitments. It ensures leadership presence is intentional rather than reactive. It forces reflection through Hansei and reinforces that leadership, like any process, must be improved continuously.

Tiered Daily Management provides infrastructure. It creates disciplined signal at Tier 1. It reinforces structured problem solving at Tier 2. It integrates strategy and accountability at Tier 3. It allows the organization to manage up from the point of impact and pulls leadership attention to fragility before it compounds.

When these elements operate together, leadership becomes systemic. Signal shapes presence. Presence shapes capability. Capability shapes performance. Performance informs strategy. Strategy refines standards. The loop repeats. This is how adaptive organizations are built.

## THE CALL TO ACTION

Do not treat this as theory.

Start at the point of impact.

- ✓ Make performance visible.
- ✓ Distinguish normal from abnormal.
- ✓ Commit to Red Hour walks when red appears.
- ✓ Clarify escalation pathways.
- ✓ Establish Tier 3 conversations that allow daily signal to shape strategic priorities.
- ✓ Define your Leader Standard Work — and make it dynamic.
- ✓ Write your Daily Operational Commitment.
- ✓ Practice archetype fluency intentionally.
- ✓ **Reflect. Adjust. Repeat.**

Leadership will not improve through aspiration. It improves through structure and repetition.

If you want an adaptive organization, build the infrastructure that forces adaptation. Empower your teams to manage up. Then discipline yourself to respond with maturity, speed, and range.

- ✓ Signal creates pull.
- ✓ Pull demands presence.
- ✓ Presence builds capability.
- ✓ Capability sustains performance.

