

Breaking Out of Silos

Leadership Thinking & Action for Complex Healthcare Systems

An interactive workshop for healthcare leaders navigating cross – system complexity competing priorities and real constraints.

2.5-HOUR INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP

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You will leave with:

A way to diagnose where systems stall

Tools to shift conversation in real time

A practical approach to leading across boundaries



The Reality You're Leading In

You are no longer leading *within* a system.
You are leading **across systems that were never designed to work together..**

Work Across Organizations

Not just within your own department or system, but across institutions, agencies, and communities.

Deliver More With Less

Results are expected even as staffing, budgets, and time shrink. Efficiency alone is no longer enough.

Integrate Mismatched Systems

Connecting platforms, processes, and people that were never designed to work together.

Competing Priorities

Making judgment calls in environments where multiple stakeholders have legitimate but conflicting agendas.





The Inherent Tensions of Modern Leadership

You are expected to do all of this simultaneously:

Think System-Wide

See the whole landscape, not just your corner of it.

Act Locally

Deliver results within your specific context and constraints.

Move Quickly

Respond to urgency while managing complexity.

Align Broadly

Build consensus across organizations with different interests





Why Work Actually Slows Down

Work doesn't slow down because people don't care.
And, everyone in the room is working hard.

Work slows down because:

- Trade-offs aren't named
So, decisions get deferred
- Ownership is unclear
So, Accountability get diluted.
- Conversations stay safe
So, real issues never get addressed

And over time...

We unintentionally reinforce the very systems we find frustrating.

Real leadership starts when we see our role in the system clearly.



What Does "Breaking Silos" Actually Mean?

Three Ways Silos Get Reinforced

- **Stay in Your Lane**
Defaulting to your formal role or mandate rather than the broader need
- **Wait for Alignment**
Holding back action until everyone agrees — which rarely happens organically
- **Keep It Familiar**
Keeping conversations within known groups, reinforcing existing blind spots

Three Moves That Break Silos

Expand the Frame

Shift from "my area" to "what does the system need?"
A deliberate reorientation of perspective

Shift the Conversation

Name what's not being said. Surface trade-offs early before they become invisible constraints

Rewire Connection Points

Bring the *right* people together and not just the usual ones who are already aligned



Table Reflection

Take a few minutes at your table and name **ONE** specific situation, not a general pattern. Ground it: Name the meeting. Name the people. Name where it is stuck.

Where Is Work Slowing Down?

Think about handoffs, approvals, or decisions that seem to take longer than they should. What's at the center of the slowdown?

Where Are Decisions Getting Stuck?

Where are you waiting for clarity, alignment, or permission that never quite arrives? What keeps decisions in limbo?

Where Are Silos Most Visible?

Which groups, teams, or systems seem most disconnected from each other and what is the cost of that disconnection?



A Model for Strategic Hope

C.R. Snyder's Hope Theory



Clear Goals

Shared understanding of what success looks like and not just within your team, but across the system.



Multiple Pathways

More than one viable route to the goal.
When pathways feel singular or blocked, learned helplessness sets in.



A Sense of Agency

The belief that your actions can actually influence outcomes and that you are not simply waiting for the system to move.

Insight | When leaders lose hope, usually *one of these three elements is missing*.
Diagnosing which one is the first step to restoring momentum.



See the System You're In

Before you can shift a system, you need to see it clearly. Most leaders are operating inside systems they've never fully mapped and that invisibility is exactly what keeps problems stuck.

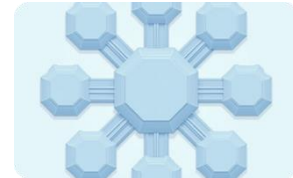


Map Your Current Challenge



Stakeholders

Who is involved and critically, **who is missing?** The absent voices often hold the key to what's stuck.



Dependencies

Where does progress rely on others? Identify the handoffs, approvals, and inputs that create invisible bottlenecks.



Decision Points

Where does work actually get approved, delayed, or stopped? Not where it should but where it *actually* does.



Friction Points

Where does work consistently slow down? Friction that repeats is a signal and it's the system telling you where it's misaligned.

The Insight: Most problems are not stuck because of effort. They are stuck because of how the system is structured.



Diagnose Your System

Rate Your System (1–5)

Be honest – rate your current system on each dimension:

Clarity of Goals

How well-shared is the definition of success across stakeholders?

Availability of Pathways

How many viable routes exist when the primary path stalls?

Sense of Agency

How strongly do leaders believe their actions create change?

The Critical Question

Once you've rated each dimension, ask yourself:

Which one are you reinforcing – intentionally or not?

Leaders often focus energy where the problem already feels most acute. But real leverage may sit in a different dimension entirely.



The Reality of Complex Systems

Goals: Clear ✓

In most healthcare systems, there is genuine consensus on what matters: quality care, patient safety, system sustainability.

Pathways: Blocked ✗

Structural constraints, siloed budgets, approval chains, and competing accountabilities make even well-intended paths difficult to navigate.

Agency: Limited ✗

Leaders increasingly feel they are reacting rather than shaping and are caught between system inertia and escalating expectations.

Clarity is not the issue. **Movement is.** The leadership challenge is not about knowing where to go – it's about unlocking the ability to get there.





Because you see the system clearly, a different question emerges,

Where might you be underestimating your influence?

Authority

Authority is positional and it comes with the title, the budget line, the reporting structure. It is real, and it matters.

But in complex systems, authority alone rarely moves things.

Influence

Influence is relational, contextual, and far more portable than authority. It travels across org charts. It operates in hallways and side conversations. It shapes what gets prioritized and what doesn't.

Most leaders have more of it than they realize.



Default Thinking — The Patterns That Limit Us

"If it's not mine, it's not my problem."

Reinforces silos. Signals disengagement from the larger system.

"We've already tried that."

Forecloses options. Assumes the context hasn't changed.

"We don't have the budget / time."

Often true and also often used to avoid uncomfortable conversations.

"That's not how it works here."

Protects the status quo. Transfers accountability to "the system."

"Let's wait for direction."

Abdicates leadership. Creates bottlenecks upstream.

What else?



Expansive Thinking: How System-Movers Think Differently



Think Beyond My Role

"What does the system need and not just my role?" Elevates perspective beyond immediate accountability.



Who Is Missing?

"Who is missing from this conversation?" The absent voice is often the key one.



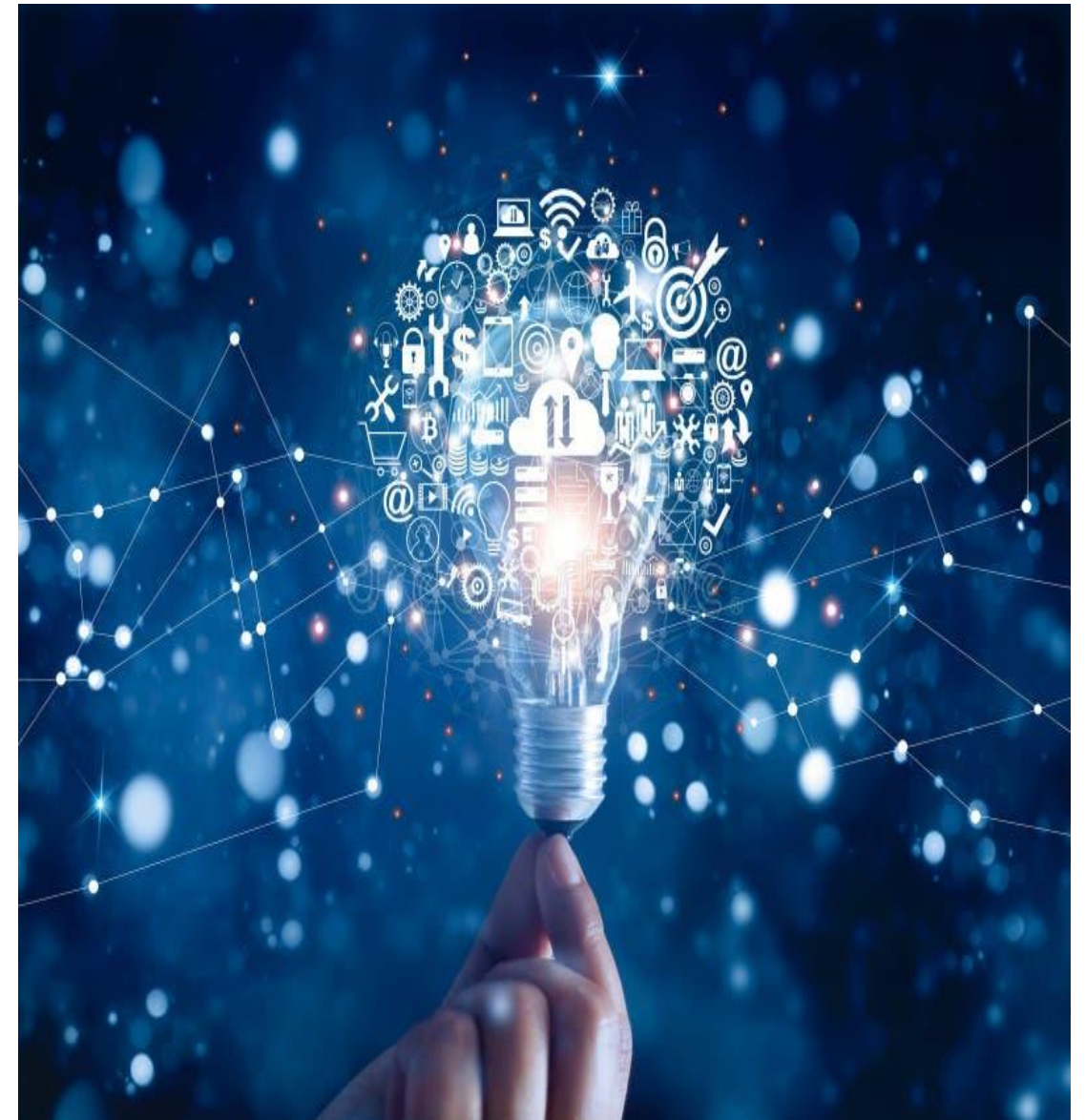
Stay Curious?

"What are we not seeing?" Creates space for blind spots to surface before they become problems. Curiosity keeps the doors open.



One Small Move

"What's one small move we could test?" Shifts from analysis paralysis to action and learning.



**Different thinking creates different options.
The shift starts in how you frame what's in front of you.**



Table Exercise: Shifting the Mindset

i Choose a real challenge your table is facing and not a generic example. The more specific, the more useful this exercise becomes.

01

Name the Default Mindset

What is the dominant belief or assumption driving current behavior? Say it plainly, even if it sounds unflattering.

02

How Is It Limiting Options?

What pathways, conversations, or possibilities does this mindset close off? What are you not doing because of it?

03

What Shift Could Open Possibility?

What alternative belief, if adopted, could unlock a new approach? What would become available that isn't available now?



Let's Name Reality Clearly

What You Do NOT Control

- System structure and organizational design
- Enterprise-level priorities and mandates
- Budget allocation and resource decisions
- Other leaders' choices and actions

This is real. It matters. And it is not the whole picture.



And Yet...

You influence outcomes every single day.

Not because you control the system but because you are **inside** it, shaping it through every conversation, decision, and interaction.

The question isn't whether you have influence. The question is whether you're using it **intentionally**.



Influence Without Authority

Real influence in complex systems doesn't wait for a title change or a budget approval. It operates through the everyday choices of how you show up.

How You Frame Issues

The framing of a problem shapes who engages, what's considered, and what solutions become possible.

The Questions You Ask

Questions are one of the most underused tools in leadership. The right question at the right moment shifts a room.

The Relationships You Build

Trust, built over time, is the currency of cross-system influence. It can't be rushed – but it can be cultivated.

Who You Bring Into the Room

Convening is a form of leadership. Who sits at the table determines what perspectives are possible.



Collaboration is not the problem. How we collaborate is.



Better collaboration is not more voices in the room — it's better design before anyone enters it.



Designing Collaboration That Actually Moves Work

Most collaboration fails not because people don't try, but because the essential design questions were never asked. These four questions create the clarity that transforms meetings into movement.

Who actually needs to be here?

Not everyone – the *right* people. Inclusion without intention creates noise, not progress.

What are we optimizing for?

Cost? Speed? Experience? Quality? Be explicit - hidden optimization criteria create endless conflict.

Who owns the decision?

Without clear ownership, nothing moves. Shared accountability often means no accountability.

What trade-off are we making?

If it's not named out loud, it's being avoided. And avoided trade-offs come back very expensively.



Micro Skills: Shifting Systems in Real Time

Leadership leverage doesn't always come from big strategic moves. In practice, it lives in precise, in-the-moment interventions that redirect energy and open options.



Reframing

"What problem are we actually solving?"

Pulls the group back to the real question when discussions drift into solutions too early.



Clarifying

"What are we optimizing for?"

Surfaces hidden assumptions and competing definitions of success before they derail alignment.



Expanding

"Who else needs to be here?"

Widens the aperture. Prevents decisions that create problems for stakeholders not in the room.



Challenging

"What trade-off are we avoiding?"

Names the elephant. Creates conditions for real decision-making instead of indefinite deferral.



Quick Practice: Pair Activity

This exercise makes the micro skills real.
You can't learn influence by reading about it, you must practice it in the moment.

Round One

Person A shares a real, current stuck situation – specific people, specific context, specific tension.

Person B must:

1. Reframe the issue in one sentence
2. Ask three powerful questions
3. Offer one genuinely new perspective

Round Two

Switch roles. Repeat the exercise.

After both rounds, reflect together:

- What question landed most powerfully?
- What reframe changed how you saw the situation?
- What did it feel like to be influenced?



What actually shifted thinking?

What Worked and What Didn't

Not every question lands. Not every reframe resonates. That is not failure — that is information.

Real influence is iterative. It requires paying attention to how people respond, adjusting in real time, and developing a feel for what each moment needs.

This Is Influence

What you just practiced, that noticing, that responsiveness, that precise intervention is what influence actually looks like.

Not persuasion. Not pressure. **A shift in how someone sees the situation.**



Scenario: Long-Term Care Development

Demand Is Rising

Aging populations are accelerating the need for LTC capacity faster than current infrastructure can absorb.

Funding Is Constrained

Capital and operating budgets are under pressure. Every dollar is accountable and contested.

Timelines Are Pressured

Political and regulatory windows are narrow. Decisions that miss the window may not come back around.





Simulation Roles

At your table, assign one role per person. Each role represents a real stakeholder perspective – with its own priorities, pressures, and definition of success.



Health Authority / System Leader

Responsible for system-level outcomes. Accountable to the ministry and the public for capacity, access, and cost efficiency.



LTC Operator

Runs day-to-day operations. Accountable for staffing, quality, and resident safety within fixed operating budgets.



Developer / Infrastructure

Manages capital investment and construction. Project viability depends on financial return and timeline predictability.



Resident / Family Advocate

Speaks for those who will live in these spaces. Prioritizes dignity, choice, and lived experience over metrics.



The Task

i You have **20 minutes** to reach a decision as a table. Every stakeholder's hidden constraint is in play even if you don't know what others are carrying.

01

Agree on ONE Path Forward

The group must land on a single, actionable direction, not a list of options, not a framework for future discussion.

03

Name ONE Real Trade-off

Identify explicitly what you are choosing not to do, or who is getting less than they need. Name it. Don't bury it.

02

Balance Cost AND "Home"

The solution must address both financial viability and the lived experience of residents. Neither can be sacrificed entirely.

04

Be Prepared to Defend It

You will share your decision with the full room for discussion.



WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

Table Presentations

Each table shares their simulation outcome with the full room. Presentations should be direct and honest.



Your Decision

What did your table agree to? What path did you choose and how did you get there?

Your Trade-off

What did you consciously give up? What priority was sacrificed to reach agreement?

Who Loses

Be honest: whose interests are least well-served by your decision? Name the stakeholder. Name the cost.



Simulation Debrief

1 Where did tension show up?

When did the conversation get hardest? Was it around values, resources, or accountability?

2 Who held power and how?

Who shaped the direction of the conversation? What gave them influence? Was it authority, framing, relationships, or persistence?

3 Where did alignment break?

At what point did the group struggle to move together? What was underneath that breakdown?

4 What actually helped movement?

What interventions, albeit, questions, reframes, concessions created momentum when the group was stuck?



What's Really Happening When Collaboration Breaks Down

1

Misalignment

People are pulling in different directions, often without realizing it.

2

Overload

The system and its people are stretched beyond the capacity to collaborate well.

3

Disconnection

The right people are not talking to each other and likely not often enough.





Pattern 1: Misalignment

What It Looks Like

- Same words and genuinely different meanings
- Heads nodding in meetings, divergent action afterward
- Decisions made together that somehow don't hold

The Leader's Contribution

Avoiding clarity conversations. Not pressing when there's apparent agreement. Letting ambiguity feel like consensus because naming it feels risky.

The Interrupt Move

| "What are we each optimizing for?"

This question makes implicit priorities explicit. It doesn't create conflict, it surfaces the conflict that's already there, before it derails execution.



Pattern 2: Overload

What It Looks Like

- Too many stakeholders in every conversation
- Too many inputs, none of them dispositive
- No one is clearly accountable, so nothing moves

The Leader's Contribution

Including everyone in the name of collaboration, while structuring nothing. Treating inclusion as the goal, rather than as a means to better decisions.

The Interrupt Move

| "Who actually owns this?"

Ownership doesn't eliminate collaboration. It gives it direction. When accountability is clear, everyone else's role becomes clearer too, including when to step back.



Pattern 3: Disconnection

What It Looks Like

- Teams working in parallel and are unaware of each other
- Late surprises that unravel what seemed like progress
- Critical voices absent until the decision is already made

The Leader's Contribution

Not convening early enough. Waiting until a decision is ready before involving those who will be affected by it or who hold critical information.

The Interrupt Move

| "Who's not in this conversation?"

This simple question prevents the most common and costly form of disconnection: making decisions without the people who will determine whether they succeed.



Reflection: Your Own Pattern

01

Which Pattern Shows Up Most?

In your current system, which of the three patterns, misalignment, overload, or disconnection, is most consistently slowing things down?

02

What Is the Cost?

Be specific. What decisions are stalling? What relationships are fraying? What results are you not getting because of this pattern?

03

What Are YOU Doing to Reinforce It?

Not your peers. Not the system. Not leadership above you. **You.** What is your specific contribution to the pattern you just named?



The Leadership Shift

Where Leaders Often Focus

Structure

Redesigning org charts, reporting lines, and governance models.

Process

Creating new workflows, approval pathways, and coordination mechanisms.

Tools

Implementing platforms, dashboards, and communication systems.

Where Real Leverage Sits

Thinking

The mental models and assumptions leaders carry into every room.

Conversations

The quality, honesty, and breadth of dialogue across the system.

Relationships

The trust and connection that make alignment possible when it's hard.

Shift these – and systems move.

Leading in Complexity

New Conversations

Introducing perspectives and voices that aren't currently in the room, including the ones that feel inconvenient.

Shared Ownership

Distributing accountability so that no single person carries the whole load — and no one can fully opt out.

Broader Thinking

Elevating perspective beyond immediate roles and near-term pressures to see the system as it actually is.

Tolerance for Ambiguity

Holding uncertainty without rushing to false clarity — making provisional decisions while staying open to new information.





Progress is sitting inside conversations we are not having.

Not Because They're Impossible

The conversations that could move your hardest problems forward are rarely technically difficult. The information exists. The people are reachable. The options are visible.

Because They're Uncomfortable

Naming a trade-off. Surfacing a conflict. Telling someone their approach isn't working. Asking for something the system hasn't offered.

These conversations are avoided not because they can't happen but because they require a leader willing to be uncomfortable first.



Reflection: The Conversation You Are Not Having

What Conversation Could Move It Forward?

Not an email, not a report, a real, direct conversation. With whom? About what? What would need to be said that hasn't been said?

What Would Make It Safer?

Not comfortable, safer. What conditions, framing, or support would make it possible to have this conversation with less risk?

Why Aren't You Having It?

Be honest. Is it fear of conflict? Uncertainty about your standing? Concern about the relationship? Name the real reason.

What Role Do You Need to Play?

Initiator? Convener? Challenger? Listener? What is your specific job in this conversation, and are you willing to do it?



Small Moves, Big Impact

1

One Different Question

That reframes how a room sees a problem and opens options that weren't visible before.

2

One New Connection

That bridges two people or teams who have been working in parallel without knowing it.

3

One Reframed Issue

That transforms a barrier into a design challenge and something to be solved rather than endured.

4

One Real Conversation

That names the thing everyone knows but no one has been willing to say out loud.



A Simple Playbook for Leading Across Systems

When you're stuck in a complex system, resist the urge to solve everything at once. Use this three-step playbook to find your next deliberate move, the one that creates the conditions for everything else to shift.



1. See the System

Who's involved? Where are the dependencies? Where is it *actually* stuck and not where it should be stuck?



2. Shift the Conversation

What are we optimizing for? What trade-off are we avoiding? Who is missing from this conversation that needs to be in it?



3. Make One Strategic Move

One new connection. One reframed issue. One real conversation that hasn't happened yet. That's how systems begin to move.



Personal Commitment

- ① Take five minutes individually. Write down three specific commitments. They should be concrete enough that someone else could hold you accountable to them.

One Situation I'll Approach Differently

Name the specific meeting, project, or relationship. What will you do differently and what thinking shift does that require of you?

Commit to One Move

Something tangible. Something with a timeline. Not "I'll think about it", a specific move you will make within the next two weeks.

One Conversation I'll Start

The conversation you identified in the last reflection. Name the person. Name the topic. Commit to having it not someday, but soon.

Make it real. Make it soon.

Closing

You May Not Control the System

The structure, the budget, the priorities, the timelines – these are real constraints that exist outside your direct authority. That is the truth of complex systems leadership.

The System Is Waiting

Not for perfect conditions, more resources, or better structures. It is waiting for leaders willing to lead **inside** the complexity, not around it.

But You Shape It... Every Day

Through how you think about the challenges in front of you. Through how you show up in rooms where the hard conversations aren't happening. Through the conversations you choose to have and the ones you choose not to defer.





Think differently — together.

Systems don't change because someone finally has the right answer.

They change when the people inside them start seeing differently and start **thinking differently together**.

That shift doesn't require a mandate from above. It requires leaders like the ones in this room choosing, one conversation at a time, to lead with more intention, more honesty, and more courage than the system currently demands.

You don't need more structure to move your system.
You need different leadership moves.

- A diagnostic for where systems stall
- Micro skills for in-the-moment influence
- Three patterns to interrupt
- One real commitment to act on

That's enough to start moving things.



Thank You

The work each of you do – leading across complex systems on behalf of residents and communities – is some of the most important work happening in healthcare right now.

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Keep the Conversation

These ideas work best when they stay alive after the workshop ends. Bring them back to your teams, your partners, your next stuck moment.

Return to Your Reflections

Revisit what you wrote in the personal reflection exercise. The commitments you made to yourself today are worth honoring.

Stay Connected

Questions, follow-up, or a conversation you want to continue, please reach out. Good thinking rarely needs to stop when the room clears.