

Notebook - Leadership Is Language

kindle

Marquet, L. David

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| was raised to believe being right and having the answers was a hallmark of leadership.

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| When I didn't know the answers, I felt insecure and I did not want people to see it. So I overcompensated by pushing.

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| Curiosity was our core value. We celebrated what we didn't know, and know-it-alls weren't welcome.

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| I hired people and asked them to teach me.

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| The navy is highly competitive; top spots are scarce.

Page 2 | Highlight

| Operating this way—conforming to hierarchical roles, maintaining emotional distance from others, avoiding vulnerability at all costs—is lonely and unfulfilling.

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| Improving my decisions simply couldn't happen fast enough to matter.

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The problem, I realized, wasn't that I'd given a bad order, it was that I was giving orders in the first place.

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can-do is fragile.

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We needed to match our zest for can-do with a zeal for "can-think."

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I agreed to never give another order. Instead, I would provide intent, the goal of what it was we were trying to achieve. They agreed never to wait to be told what to do. Instead, they would provide their intentions to me, how they were going to achieve my intent. This shift was reflected in a simple change of language, replacing "request permission to" with "I intend to."

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The language changed in three ways: We replaced a reactive language of convince, coerce, comply, and conform with a proactive language of intent and commitment to action. We replaced a language of "prove and perform" with a language of "improve and learn." We replaced a language of invulnerability and certainty with a language of vulnerability and curiosity.

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our language revealed our thinking and changed our thinking.

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I'd always believed that I couldn't remain quiet because people wouldn't speak up. Finally, I realized that people weren't speaking up because I couldn't remain quiet.

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I learned was that waiting for people to prove themselves in order for me to trust them was backward. I needed to entrust people with authority and autonomy in order to give them the opportunity to prove themselves.

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I learned that if I can only keep my mouth shut for a few extra seconds, ask the kinds of questions that encourage people to share their thoughts, and actually pay attention to what others are saying, their ideas, points of view, and suggested actions are often as good as—often even better (!)—than what I'd had in mind.

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preplanned and preprogrammed responses that we have—patterns of action (and in our case, language) in response to, and triggered by, certain events or scenarios.

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underlying approach that oscillates between action and reflection, doing and deciding. They are, in order: Control the clock instead of obeying the clock. Collaborate instead of coercing. Commitment rather than compliance. Complete defined goals instead of continuing work indefinitely. Improve outcomes rather than prove ability. Connect with people instead of conforming to your role.

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They feel like they have to leave their humanity at the door: their creativity, empathy, and sense of purpose.

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the right balance of doing and thinking drives learning.

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Our interaction with the world is doing. Improving our interaction with the world is thinking. Proving

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and performing is doing. Growing and improving is thinking.

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Industrial Age organizations. They divided their people into leaders and followers, deciders and doers.

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the six leadership plays

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This is the Industrial Age play of continue. Continue is what has many of us chasing our tails in continuous action without reflection.

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fell into the trap of an escalation of commitment—sticking with a failing course of action simply because the decision had been made.

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the Industrial Age play of obey the clock. Under obey the clock, we feel the stress of time pressure and are motivated to get our work done within our allotted time.

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As a stressor, however, it creates all the effects any stressor will have on us: we retreat into self-preservation mode, with a resultant reduction of cognitive activity and a narrowing of perspective.

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It's language we see over and over again and it is part of the Industrial Age play of coercion. We are too polite to use that word so we call it "inspiration" or "motivation," but the fundamental issue is

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that the captain needed to get people who were not part of making the decision to comply with the decision to take the exposed Atlantic route.

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a permission-based environment.

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The language is hesitant, self-diminishing, deferential, and nervous. This makes it easy for the captain to reject the unwanted information.

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Encouraging people to speak up, or even “empowering” them with statements like “don’t hesitate to change course” in an environment of top-down decision-making, simply does not work. Leaders say these things to assuage their conscience. When things go wrong, they can blame others for not speaking up despite the leader’s encouragement to do so. But leadership is about making the lives of others easier, not blaming them. Leadership is about the hard work of taking responsibility for how our actions and words affect the lives of others.

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They were trapped in a set of old plays—CONTINUE and COMPLY. Follow the plan, don’t question the plan.

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If the captain had displayed vulnerability, the other crew members would have felt safe enough to chime in. Emotions are necessary for decision-making.

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Share of voice is the proportion of words attributed to each person in a conversation and is an excellent indicator of the power gradient within an organization.

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This may seem tremendously obvious, but the more you talk, the less you are listening. If you want

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We need to always remember that the organization is perfectly tuned to deliver the behavior we see, and people's behaviors are the perfect result of the organization's design. As individuals, we should embrace our responsibility for being the best we can be within the design of the organization. But as leaders, our responsibility is to design the organization so that individuals can be the best versions of themselves.

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"overclaiming," in which people participating in shared tasks tend to take more credit than warranted for an outcome.

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Overclaiming happens because our own efforts are more visible to us.

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the wisdom of the loud. The first number, underpinned by authority, anchors the group,

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The result this time is the wisdom of the crowd. Under the right conditions, the group is consistently smarter than any individual in the group. It's a term coined by James Surowiecki in his enlightening book *The Wisdom of Crowds*.

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Thinking through complex variables is hard work. Zeroing in on a clear consensus unified around the voice of authority, on the other hand, is deeply satisfying. It takes a rigorous and systematic approach to resist the natural human tendency to reduce uncertainty as quickly as possible.

Here are the six plays the crew of El Faro were programmed for, and the six plays that would have saved them: They obeyed the clock when they should have controlled the clock. The captain coerced the crew into compliance when he should have collaborated for a commitment. The coerced crew complied when they should have made their own commitment. They continued following a monolithic plan to take the Atlantic route when they should have completed one section at a time—to the first decision point at the top of the Bahamas and then to the second decision point at Rum Cay. They were in prove mode when they should have been in improve mode. This was a result of being in a can-do mode when they should have been in a can-think mode. Throughout it all, they conformed to their roles when they should have connected with each other.

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Doing is important, but action must be balanced with thinking. Just like Fred and Sue in the introduction—too much activity without thought results in wasted or erroneous actions and bad decisions, and too much thinking without action results in inaction and frustration.

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Thinking about something, even making decisions, without committing to action to test your ideas will not result in learning.

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Here is the key difference: Thinking benefits from embracing variability. Doing benefits from reducing variability.

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The language of embracing variability is open, curious, probabilistic, and improvement focused. It sounds like “How do we know?” or “How safe is it?” It is the language of curiosity and vulnerability.

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Either redwork or bluework by itself is inadequate; we need the right amount of each.

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Humans are easily seduced by the good feelings triggered by “getting stuff done.” It is only with time that the churn of getting stuff done starts to feel empty if not properly balanced with reflection.

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The problem is that the language we use is only about doing, not thinking.

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it feels more natural to say “Are you sure?” rather than “How sure are you?”

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Redwork sounds like this: “Get it done!” “Make it happen.” “Let’s finish this.” “Are we on track?”

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Bluework sounds like this: “How do you see it?” “How ready are we for this?” “What can we do better?” “What did we learn?”

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This approach to management is exemplified by Frederick Winslow Taylor’s 1911 book, *The Principles of Scientific Management*.

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organization. First, the system is fragile and nonadaptive. While efficient, the system is not adaptive because workers can operate only within a narrow range of situations.

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When we involve everyone in thinking, we get a win-win situation. The company wins because it becomes more adaptive, more agile, more resilient, and more profitable. The people in the

company win because they have more fulfilling jobs, as well as richer, fuller, healthier, and longer lives—and their children do, too! The challenge facing organizations in the twenty-first century is this: How do we create environments where we have both redwork and bluework, but not redworkers and blueworkers? How do we integrate the redworkers, previously labeled as the followers or doers, into the decision-making business of bluework?

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Deming's first key insight was that quality did not cost money, it saved money.

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Total Quality Management

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Deming advised integrating quality into the manufacturing process and eliminating the inspectors altogether.

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Deming's third insight was that the previously classed redworkers, in this case the assembly line workers, should be involved in bluework.

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New red-blue approaches such as Total Quality Leadership (TQL), pioneered by Deming, significantly advanced manufacturing by applying statistical methods and involving the workers in developing solutions to manufacturing problems.

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Crew Resource Management (CRM)

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In addition to CRM, there are a host of other modern management approaches with an overall objective centered around an idea like empowerment, engagement, ownership, having people think, allowing people to speak up, creating psychological safety, coaching instead of commanding, or asking the right questions.

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Here's another example, from sport. In open-water swimming, the course is typically indicated by large orange buoys. Swimming is more efficient with your head down and your hips elevated, so swimmers spend most of their time in that position. They travel faster, but they can't see where they're going. Occasionally, they find it necessary to check their location by raising their heads, sighting the buoys, and adjusting course. This process creates a rhythm: (1) sight the buoys (bluework), (2) swim in that direction for a while (redwork), (3) raise your head to check your progress. Keeping their heads down for longer periods means faster swimming overall, but they may end up much farther off course, erasing any lead their pace had given them.

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There's a natural tendency in businesses to avoid interrupting production work to pause and reflect.

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there is a tendency to focus on the errors in redwork and to underappreciate the errors in bluework and, critically, errors in structuring the redwork-bluework balance. The reason for this is that errors in execution work are immediately visible:

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Inspectors and evaluators love these types of errors because they are irrefutable and unambiguous: Did you wash your hands or not?

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The next time you have a problem at your company, think about this: Is this simply a problem in execution, or was there a decision in the past, perhaps the distant past, that set us down the path where this operational problem was more likely to happen? Is the problem rooted in faulty bluework

in the past?

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There's no decision to evaluate because it's not clear anyone made a decision to do, or not do, something.

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experience-derived rules can become unhelpful biases that distort our thinking and prevent us from seeing things as they truly are.

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Another system 1 cognitive shortcut manifests as the overconfidence bias. In this bias, the brain tends to believe that we'll succeed at whatever we attempt to do, nudging us to take risks that may result in significant rewards.

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Deadlines, incentives, and other forms of external pressure have a positive, or at least a neutral, effect on redwork, but the same factors can quickly diminish our effectiveness at bluework. Stress depletes the same cognitive resources that bluework demands,

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Since the Industrial Age specialized in reducing human effort to simple, individual, physical, and repeated tasks, adding stress became the go-to motivational technique for managers.

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In highly stressed environments, we often see individuals become much more self-serving than in relaxed environments. When teams have difficult problems to solve, and we, as leaders, put them under stress, team members turn into lizards. Then we don't understand why we see antisocial behavior, low empathy, and reduced creativity. It's because we led them to these behaviors and emotions!

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There are two sides to the performance mindset. We either try to prove competence (I can do the project) or protect ourselves against evidence of incompetence (I don't want to be discovered as incompetent).

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the best way not to make an error is to do nothing, and organizations where people have been stressed into protect mindsets exhibit a bias toward inaction.

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It is the openness of the improve mindset that allows us to detach emotionally from our past work and improve it.

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avoiding a protect mindset in all cases, and adopting a prove mindset for redwork and an improve mindset for bluework.

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When it comes to the words we use, and how we use them in the workplace, our current language is heavily weighted toward redwork: Knowledge companies hold “all hands” meetings. fn2 Companies’ employees are divided into two groups of people: “leaders and followers,” “white collar and blue collar,” “management and labor,” “nonunion and union.” Special “innovation brainstorming sessions” are scheduled, implying that innovation and creativity are not part of “normal” work. We aspire to be “can-do” teams. Bosses direct and subordinates report (we even call them “direct reports”).

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The goal of agile development was to start with the most basic product feasible, test it, then decide what to do next.

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One challenge is that the pressure to obey the clock keeps teams moving from redwork to redwork without thoughtful reflection.

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Once one action is completed, the next task on the schedule is tackled, without pausing for deliberate consideration about whether the next task is appropriate. All

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This is the new playbook, which comprises six main plays: CONTROL THE CLOCK, not obey the clock. COLLABORATE, not coerce. COMMIT, not comply. COMPLETE, not continue. IMPROVE, not prove. CONNECT, not conform.

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REDWORK AND BLUEWORK Redwork is doing. Redwork is clockwork. Redwork consists of a constant battle for efficiency and for getting work done against the clock. This is why workers clock in and clock out and many people are paid “by the hour.” People performing redwork feel the effects of this pressure as stress and are “under the influence of redwork.” They cannot help it. Our mindset in redwork is a prove-and-perform mindset. The protect mindset is an unhelpful subset of the performance mindset and is to be avoided. Variability is an enemy to redwork. Bluework is thinking. Bluework is cognitive work. Bluework is harder to measure based upon the time input. Bluework is about creative input and decision-making. Bluework lives in service to redwork. Stress has a strong negative impact on people trying to perform bluework. Our mindset in bluework is an improve and learn mindset. Variability is an ally to bluework. Redwork and bluework require two different languages. The Industrial Age company separated who did the bluework and redwork by class, into blueworkers and redworkers. We use different cultural signals to indicate these classes: leaders and followers, salary and hourly, white collar and blue collar, lab coats and overalls. The need to shorten periods of redwork and inject more bluework has increased as the world moves faster and the future horizon shortens. Without our knowing or thinking about it, our language and organizational structure are biased toward performing redwork. The differences between redwork and bluework can be summarized in the table below.

REDWORK	BLUEWORK
Avoid variability	Embrace variability
Prove	Improve
Do	Decide
Repetitious	Dissimilar
Blue collar	White collar
Physical	Cognitive
Individual	Team
Homogeneity	Heterogeneity
Production	Reflection
Performance	Planning
Process	Prediction
Compliant	Creative
Conformity	Diversity
Simple	Complex
Hourly work	Salary work
Narrow focus	Broad focus
Steep hierarchy	Flat hierarchy

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This set the stage for a lack of trust and cooperation between them and for misinterpretation of each other's actions onstage.

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Beatty and Dunaway have been primed to think of their jobs as redwork, following a sequence of steps: dress nicely, walk onstage, open the envelope, read the card. There is no expectation of thinking or decision-making. And they want to prove they can do this work. They do not expect bluework—deciding whether they should read the card—to be part of their job.

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Stress pushes us all back to the oldest part of our brain, that original reptile brain at the top of our spines. That reptile brain is interested in one thing: self-preservation

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This is one of the barriers to speaking up: labeling as “wrong” a pause which is simply asking for a check that turns out to be unnecessary. To call it resilience, verification, or a questioning attitude would be a better label.

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So, the question is not “Who's to blame?” but “What's to blame?”

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The traditional organizational response is to encourage people to speak up. We invest in lectures, posters, and assertiveness classes. None of these addresses the root causes that make it hard for people to speak up. All they accomplish is encouraging us to drive harder at the barriers. Instead, we need to remove the barriers.

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TO MOVE TOWARD CONTROLLING THE CLOCK Instead of preempting a pause, make a pause possible. Instead of hoping the team knows what to say, give the pause a name. Instead of

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pressing on with redwork, call a pause. Instead of relying on someone to signal a pause, preplan the next pause.

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most organizations, people get promoted for being go-getters, by making quick decisions and executing them in short order.

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My ability to urge, cajole, and motivate people to get stuff done got me promoted.

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These are preemptive statements because they erect barriers to questioning the decision.

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Here are some things leaders say: “We have time to do this right, not twice.” “You may have heard that this is an important milestone. That is true, but if we can’t get this done safely, I’ll recommend a postponement and I’ll be responsible for it.” “I invite you to call pause if necessary.” “You all have yellow cards to signal the need to slow down.”

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“Let’s be aware of any unusual situations.” Score: 4.

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“How ready are we to shift to production?” Score: 5.

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“What am I missing?” The latter is the best option, because the emphasis is on the leader’s gap.

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In support of the goal of performing the redwork, we narrow focus, reduce perspective, and work “head down.”

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and his actions were motivated by the desire to avoid error, which ironically made the error more likely.

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protect ourselves from being “under the influence of redwork” before we launch into that redwork.

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“Time-out.”

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“Hands

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yellow card. Pulling a cord.

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We call a pause “practicing resilience,”

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every pause is necessary to establish a culture in which people are comfortable raising their hands when there is less than 100 percent certainty, which is to say, all the time.

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Andon cord.

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The mindset that optimizes a team in redwork (the prove mindset) views delays as bad.

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leaders have the responsibility of creating a culture that accepts and invites pauses from the team and of providing the team with the mechanism—like the Andon cord—to call a pause.

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allow a break or planning a more formal pause for the project every two weeks.

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incorporate less frequent events, like annual strategic reviews.

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Because the length of the sprint is determined ahead of time, there is a planned exit from the redwork.

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IN SUMMARY, TO CONTROL THE CLOCK Instead of preempting a pause, make a pause possible. Instead of hoping the team knows what to say, give the pause a name. Instead of pressing on with redwork, call a pause. Instead of relying on someone

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preplan the next pause.

Control the clock is the start of the cycle. Control the clock is when we exit redwork and shift to bluework. The Industrial Age has programmed us to obey the clock, which tends to keep us in redwork, feeling the stress of time pressure. Controlling the clock is about the power of pause; the power of our ability to control the clock rather than obeying the clock; being mindful and deliberate with our actions; and broadening our perspectives. Teams in redwork want to continue in redwork. Since people who are engaged in redwork often have a performance (prove or protect) mindset, it is difficult for them to call time-out on themselves. Because they want to get things done and are penalized for any delays, they do not want to be the source of interruptions to the work. This responsibility lies with the leader. The team relies on the leader either to preplan the length of the redwork and the moment of exiting redwork or to spontaneously call a time-out during a redwork period, in essence, an audible when needed. Historically, the fundamental reason bosses needed to coerce teams was because the boss decided what the team needed to do. The deciders and the doers are different people in Industrial Age organizations. Controlling the clock sets us up to collaborate.

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the deciders need to convince, cajole, bribe, shame, or threaten the redworkers to do work they had little or no part in choosing. The appropriate verb is “coerce.”

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We don’t use that word often in polite society, it’s ugly. So we label it with other words like motivate, inspire, or collaborate. Often “collaborating” is really coercion in disguise.

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The solution can be summed up as follows: let the doers be the deciders.

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when leaders attempt to collaborate with their teams to make decisions, they often end up skipping the divergent part (“What does everyone think?”) and jumping straight to the convergent part (“Here’s what I think. Does everyone agree?”).

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Coercion, as I am using it here, means using my influence, power, rank, talking first, talking more, or talking louder to bring people around to my way of thinking.

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the boss decides and seeks validation from the group.

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When I hear bosses say things like “get everyone on board” or “build consensus,” that’s coercion. That’s trying to convince people “I’m right, and you need to change your thinking.”

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We judge ourselves by our intentions, but we judge others by their behavior. If we fall short, we come up with external reasons to explain what prevented us from acting in a way that is consistent with how we think of ourselves. When others fall short, we tend to blame them as people and discount the environmental barriers that might have been in the way.

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TO MOVE FROM COERCION TO COLLABORATION Vote first, then discuss. Be curious, not compelling. Invite dissent rather than drive consensus. Give information, not instructions.

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seen a good variation in responses quickly become more uniform once results-in-progress are revealed.

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Ask probabilistic questions instead of binary ones. Instead of the binary “Is it safe?” or “Will it work?” ask “How safe is it?” or “How likely is it to work?”

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Probability cards are a helpful tool to facilitate this in meetings. This is a set of cards that display the following percentages: 1, 5, 20, 50, 80, 95, 99. We want to focus on the outliers, the team members with the strongest positive and negative feelings.

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“What do you see that we don’t?” or “What is behind that vote?”

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It becomes harder for the minority to speak after the majority has spoken.

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Stephen R. Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, considered this concept of “curiosity first” so important he titled his fifth habit “Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood.”

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Idea Swap Have people argue for the opposite position.

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Using this exercise, we often see groups come to an agreement or compromise without needing the boss to act as a decision-maker. This is because it trains your brain to think considerably about ideas other than your own—and opens your perspective on what the situation might actually be.

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it allows those outliers to feel heard.

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I call this the “cheap and easy” story line, in which a risky decision is justified by promising that it will be “cheap and easy.”

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The Seven Sins of Questioning

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Question stacking Example: “So, how much testing has been done? I mean, do we really have all the bugs identified? Yeah, I just really think it’s important to know that—are we good to go?”
Question stacking is asking the same question repeatedly in different ways or drilling down a logic tree you think defines the problem. Just ask one question once, then button it.

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2. Leading questions Example: “Have you thought about the needs of the client?”

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I hear this a lot from people who think they have the right answer but don’t want to just say so, so they try using the Socratic method as a “teaching moment.” It’s annoying and arrogant.

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“Why” questions Example: “Why would you want to do that?” This type of question puts people on the defensive and reveals that you think “that” is a bad idea. In such cases, it’s best to reserve judgment and simply say, “Tell me more about that.” Another option is to ask, “What is behind your decision?” or “How do you see the issue?”

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Self-affirming questions are often binary questions with a special motivation: to coerce agreement and make us feel good about the decision we have already made.

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SEVEN WAYS TO ASK BETTER QUESTIONS Instead of question stacking, try one and done. Instead of a teaching moment, try a learning moment. Instead of a dirty question, try a clean question. Instead of a binary question, start the question with “what” or “how.” Instead of a “why” question, try “tell me more.” Instead of self-affirming questions, try self-educating questions. Instead of jumping to the future, start with present, past, then future.

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The wisdom of the crowd can be undermined in several ways. Anchoring and social conformity are two of those ways.

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In our earlier exercise, the number stated by the first person to speak anchors the group, whether they want to be anchored or not. Others may argue to adjust the number up or down—but it will always be in comparison with the initial anchor point.

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Once a majority starts to form an opinion, it becomes much harder for those in the minority to voice their dissent.

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The lesson here is to make it safe and easy for people to dissent.

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The point is that we do not want a “harmonious conversation.” What we want is an accurate picture of reality. Harmonious and wrong means out of business or dead people.

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dissenting with the best interests of the organization in mind,

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Instead of arguing with the dissenter and explaining why that person is wrong, members of the group should ask curious questions. These curious questions sound like this: “What’s behind what you are saying?” “Can you tell us more about that?” “What are you seeing that leads you to believe that?”

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Give Information, Not Instructions

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Provide information. Inform people of the consequences of their behavior and let them choose. This works best when they experience the consequences. If someone else experiences the consequences of your bad behavior, the feedback loop is broken.

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This is why it’s important to establish the metrics we expect to see before we begin. By deciding these things ahead of time, we remove sunk-cost decision-making and prevent an escalation of commitment.

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Finally, a predefined endpoint when this original hypothesis will be reevaluated—in this case, the Rum Cay cutoff—opens the door to questioning the route without having to tell the captain he is wrong.

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With coercion, the best we can hope for is compliance. With compliance, we get effort, but not discretionary effort. The output of collaboration, however, is a commitment to move forward.

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TO MOVE FROM COERCE TO COLLABORATE Vote first, then discuss. Be curious, not compelling. Invite dissent rather than drive consensus. Give information, not instructions.

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Collaboration is a core process of bluework. When we resort to coercion, we get compliance. When we engage in collaboration, we get commitment,

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Commitment comes from within, whereas compliance is forced by an external source. Commitment is more powerful, because it is an intrinsic motivator. Commitment invites full participation, engagement, and discretionary effort. Compliance invites doing just enough to get by, get through, or get it done.

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You can tell yourself you can't eat sweets or that you don't eat sweets.

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you want to keep your commitments, try using "don't," not "can't." "I don't buy product insurance," not "I can't buy product insurance." "I don't miss deadlines," not "I can't miss this deadline." "I don't spend my time that way," not "I can't spend my time that way."

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The key is that there must be choice before there is commitment. If a person has no choice but to say yes, then what we have is compliance.

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Gallup defines an engaged worker as one who is involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to his or her work and workplace.

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Compliance gives us a pass on thinking. Compliance only requires a person to follow rules, instructions, and actions that someone else has determined.

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Compliance also does not require a lot of context.

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Compliance may have worked for simple, physical, repetitive, individual tasks, but it does not work for complex, cognitive, custom, team tasks.

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TO MOVE FROM COMPLIANCE TO COMMITMENT Commit to learn, not (just) do. Commit actions, not beliefs. Chunk it small but do it all.

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Developing hypotheses requires making decisions not only about what to do but what to learn.

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escalation of commitment.

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Here's the rule about the blue-red-blue cycle length: shorter periods of redwork increase learning but reduce production output, and vice versa. Therefore, in environments and under conditions of high uncertainty and unpredictability, we need to shorten redwork periods.

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The commitment statement should include a resolve to do the redwork and a plan to shift back to bluework based on meeting some condition or after some duration of redwork.

Page 148 | Highlight

"How sure are you?"

Page 148 | Highlight

“How likely is that assumption to be true?”

Page 148 | Highlight

“How does ____ affect ____?” or “How do you see that?”

Page 149 | Highlight

“How could we start?” “How could we test that quickly and cheaply?”

Page 149 | Highlight

“What is the smallest slice we could make?” “What can we do?” “What would that look like?”
“What would a first step look like?”

Page 150 | Highlight

“What could we do first?”

Page 150 | Highlight

“What would you do if you were me?”

Page 150 | Highlight

“It should be ready.” “It should work.” “You should do it like this.” “You shouldn’t feel that way.”
“The company should give us better chairs.”

Page 150 | Highlight

commitments tend to be self-reinforcing.

Page 151 | Highlight

Once we commit to a small step, humans have a tendency to continue to commit in that direction.

Page 151 | Highlight

Escalation of commitment means that once we select a course of action, we stubbornly stick to it, even in the face of evidence that the course of action is failing.

Page 151 | Highlight

humans will persist in trying to turn the losing decision into a winner.

Page 153 | Highlight

In a redwork world, escalation of commitment sounds like: “We started this; we’re going to finish this.” “I’ve made my decision.” “We’re doing this. Resistance is futile.” “Come on, let’s go.” “We’re burning daylight.” “Failure is not an option.”

Page 155 | Highlight

separate the decision-maker from the decision-evaluator. This removes the decision-evaluator from the emotional investment that the decision-maker had in the decision.

Page 157 | Highlight

What does the alternative sound like in organizations? It rests on the word “intent.”

Page 157 | Highlight

the initial intent statement is just the start of the conversation and is incomplete without the rationale behind the decision.

Page 158 | Highlight

Collaboration sets us up for commitment. Coercion results in compliance. Commitment is better than compliance because it releases discretionary effort in people. For complex, cognitive, custom teamwork, discretionary effort is everything.

Page 159 | Highlight

heavily influenced by Taylor, who we discussed in chapter 2. Again, the idea was for leadership to come up with the One Optimal Way to mass-produce the One Optimal Design.

Page 162 | Highlight

Running the COMPLETE play means thinking of work in terms of smaller chunks of production work (redwork) and frequent intervals of reflection, collaboration, improvement, and hypothesis creation (bluework).

Page 164 | Highlight

the redwork continues, it begins to diverge from the optimal because the world around it changes.

Page 165 | Highlight

Without completion, we do not feel a sense of progress for what we've accomplished or learned.

Page 165 | Highlight

Controlling the clock gives us the operational pause we need to reflect and improve upon our processes.

Page 165 | Highlight

thought of the work in terms of multiple decision points where the plan would be deliberately reevaluated.

Page 166 | Highlight

Making decisions while in continue means that when we reach a fork in the road, we do not recognize it as a fork in the road.

Page 167 | Highlight

The change in plan must be justified, whereas simply continuing what we are doing does not need

justification.

Page 168 | Highlight

Planning the length of the redwork periods and the frequency of bluework interruptions is a key operational tempo design element for organizations.

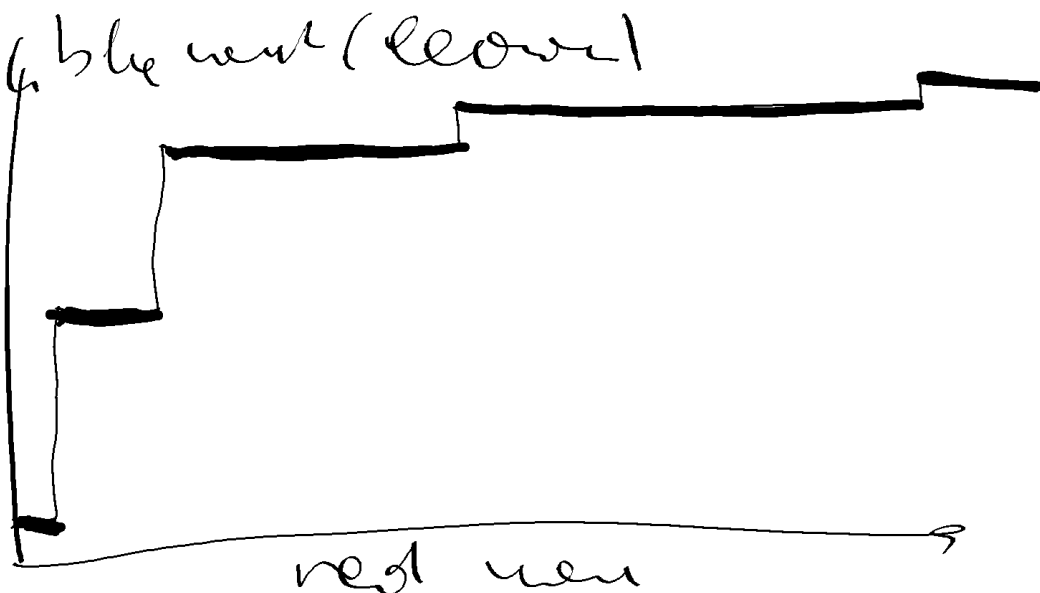
Page 168 | Highlight

Here are four ways to execute the COMPLETE play. TO MOVE FROM CONTINUATION TO COMPLETION Chunk work for frequent completes early, few completes late. Celebrate with, not for. Focus on behavior, not characteristics. Focus on journey, not destination.

Page 169 | Highlight

As the project continues, the decision space closes down.

Page 170 | Note



Page 171 | Highlight

Done right, celebrate does several things for us—it gives us a sense of accomplishment, allows us to detach from the past and move on to the next thing, and, done right, it reinforces the behaviors that allowed us to be successful.

Page 174 | Highlight

Bringing Out the Best in People,

Page 174 | Highlight

that only consequences affect long-term behavior change.

Page 175 | Highlight

Daniels's work went further. He classified consequences along three dimensions: immediate or delayed positive or negative certain or uncertain. It turns out that immediate, positive, and certain rewards are the most powerful for establishing and maintaining a behavior. This explains, from a neurological level, why smoking is so addictive. The nicotine high that comes after smoking a cigarette is immediate, positive, and certain. Although smokers know logically that smoking increases the risk of cancer, that consequence is delayed, negative, and uncertain.

Page 177 | Highlight

To celebrate with, not for: appreciate, don't evaluate; observe, don't judge; and prize, don't praise.

Page 177 | Highlight

Descriptive statements can start with "I see," "I noticed," and "It looks like."

Page 178 | Highlight

Just describe the action and how that made things better. Appreciate, don't evaluate. Instead of saying, "You showed great leadership getting your team to deliver on time," say, "I saw you coordinating frequently with your team to deliver on time; it looked like a disciplined delivery process."

Page 178 | Highlight

Psychologist Carol Dweck found that praising someone for an attribute—“You’re so smart” or “You’re so talented”—leads them to identify with that attribute. Once it becomes a part of their identity, they tend to avoid scenarios that challenge that attribute. Essentially, it has the opposite effect from what was intended.

Page 179 | Highlight

if we are conditioned to think of ourselves as “the smart one,” we will avoid challenges that actually test our intelligence and its limits.

Page 179 | Highlight

So as a general rule, acknowledge the behavior that is controllable—such as dedication in the face of obstacles, careful review prior to action, inviting others to provide early feedback on an idea—rather than praising someone for an intrinsic characteristic or ability like being a “deep thinker” or “natural leader.”

Page 179 | Highlight

One requirement for stating the observations is that you saw enough of the internal struggles to make the observation.

Page 183 | Highlight

I call this leadership action “observe and celebrate” because it’s so important to pause, say thank you, and signal appreciation before moving on to describing that effort, let alone deciding on next steps or possible improvements.

Page 184 | Highlight

TO MOVE FROM CONTINUE TO COMPLETE Chunk work for frequent completes early, few completes late. Celebrate with, not for. Focus on behavior, not characteristics. Focus on journey, not destination.

Complete marks the end of redwork and is the signal that we go back to bluework. Before we get to the collaboration of bluework, however, we rest and celebrate. Completion is about a sense of progress and accomplishment. Progress feeds progress. The COMPLETE play also lets us test our hypotheses and the decisions that we've made thus far. When we celebrate, we want to be careful not to manipulate or to make praise be the purpose of the celebration. The sense of accomplishment should come from the completion of the task itself. When celebrating, avoid expressions like, "Great, but ..." because they do not allow enough time for anyone to feel like their efforts were appreciated. Instead, we need to hear the story behind the achievement. This allows us insight into the behaviors. Without understanding behaviors, we are tempted to praise, not prize, and we are tempted to shortcut our observations toward characteristics rather than the behavior. Praising attributes like intelligence or leadership ability tends to program people toward risk avoidance, when we often want the opposite. Instead, observe the actions, efforts, and behaviors that resulted in the desirable outcomes you're celebrating. This means that when celebrating we ... Focus on behavior, not characteristics, and Focus on journey, not destination. Executing the COMPLETE play also gives a sense of psychological detachment from our previous actions. This sense of "moving on" and "letting go" enables us to look dispassionately at our past actions and decisions with an eye toward getting better. Executing the COMPLETE play sets us up for the IMPROVE play.

Page 187 | Highlight

"You should take as long as you need to find the answers." He didn't say the deadline didn't matter, but by using these words he had called the CONTROL THE CLOCK play.

Page 189 | Highlight

Improvement—which comes from egoless scrutiny of past actions, and deep reflective thinking about what could be better—is the core purpose of bluework, which is meant to improve redwork. Bluework in isolation is useless. It's relevant only to the extent that it makes redwork better: more efficient, more relevant, more resilient, more responsive.

Page 192 | Highlight

AIM FOR DISCONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT In this vein, I think the term "continuous improvement" does not accurately describe how improvement happens. Improvement happens in batches, in increments, just like the dropping marbles. We have repeated, incremental periods of improvement—the bluework—where we change the process or change the product, like adjusting the funnel over the target. And we follow these with periods of testing and experimentation—the

redwork—where we interact with the world and observe the results. The correct image of the improvement process (the learning process) is a stairway, not a ramp.

Page 194 | Highlight

people are typically attached to their previous work and now we need them to admit it could be done better.

Page 195 | Highlight

When questioned or even presented with an alternate perspective, the “be good” self goes into defensive mode. Had the Frozen team invoked their “be good” selves, they would have defended their existing work.

Page 195 | Highlight

The “be good” self and the “get better” self are not friends.

Page 197 | Highlight

If you recognize a mistake you’ve made, but no one else notices, it’s tempting to stay quiet. You’ll probably get away with it.

Page 197 | Highlight

Neither redwork nor bluework alone results in learning. It is the two modes working in concert that drives growth.³

Page 197 | Highlight

Full participation in an improve session also presents the risk of a loss of autonomy. People worry that admitting to any inadequacies invites the boss to take back control of their job, leaving them with less freedom.

Page 198 | Highlight

Extrinsic motivation is carrot-and-stick motivation: punishment for poor behavior and reward for good behavior. Extrinsic motivation carries the implicit idea that superiors have earned the right to judge their inferiors.

Page 199 | Highlight

The gap between “good enough” and “awesome” on a creative thinking project is huge, whereas the same gap is small on an assembly line because there is a limited range of expected results from any individual worker.

Page 199 | Highlight

three fundamental components of intrinsic motivation: competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

Page 199 | Highlight

Competence is the feeling of mastery. Relatedness is the sense of connecting with other human beings. Autonomy is the sense of being in control of the things that matter in one’s life.

Page 199 | Highlight

Admitting you could have done something better threatens your feeling of competence. Pointing out the errors of others threatens your relatedness to them. Being transparent about what you did and why threatens your autonomy.

Page 200 | Highlight

“Don’t worry about it. We have it under control.” This uses vagueness to protect autonomy. “All the client needs to know is that we are taking care of it.” Again, this is a bid to use vagueness to defend job autonomy.

Page 201 | Highlight

In other words, employees with the autonomy to decide how to go about solving problems and achieving goals innovate. Those constrained to operate as their superiors instruct do not.

Page 203 | Highlight

FOR THE IMPROVE PLAY, USE LANGUAGE THAT INVITES A MENTAL FOCUS THAT IS:
Forward, not backward. Outward, not inward. On the process, not on the person. On achieving excellence, not avoiding errors.

Page 204 | Highlight

“If someone else had to take over this project, what would you say to them to make it even more successful?”

Page 205 | Highlight

“Thinking about the work itself, what do we think could be improved?” “How could this be done better?” “What improvements could we make to the process?”

Page 205 | Highlight

avoiding errors is not an inspiring motivator. Few people are inspired by the negative goal of being less bad at something than before. But people are inspired and moved by the possibility of achieving something great, something excellent.

Page 206 | Highlight

The most basic timeline is the redwork timeline.

Page 206 | Highlight

The next-level timeline is the bluework timeline. The bluework timeline identifies key decisions and who made them.

Page 207 | Highlight

Decisions are made by individuals, not teams.

Page 207 | Highlight

Trying to convince every dissenter that the decision is right gives too much power to those positions to stop progress. It will invite more obstructionism because of the power and attention it brings.

Page 208 | Highlight

ideal conditions for thinking in groups include diversity of thought and independent judgment.

Page 211 | Highlight

Agile practices to help tame the “be good” self is the reading of the “Prime Directive” at the beginning of these retrospective sessions. Here it is: Regardless of what we discover, we understand and truly believe that everyone did the best job they could, given what they knew at the time, their skills and abilities, the resources available, and the situation at hand. —NORM KERTH, PROJECT RETROSPECTIVES: A HANDBOOK FOR TEAM REVIEW

Page 212 | Highlight

the idea is to focus on the future, accept that everyone did their best at the time, but also recognize that there is room for improvement and that our collective intent is to improve.

Page 212 | Highlight

Improve is a specific play as well as the objective of the redwork-bluework operating system. Improve is about reflecting on what we’ve done and making it one better. Improve pits the “get better” self against the “be good” self. The desire of the “be good” self to defend itself will crowd out efforts to get better. In order to open ourselves for improvement we need to tame the fears of the “be good” self. Improve happens through collaboration. The output of the IMPROVE play is the next hypothesis to test. Improve sets us up to commit and launches us back into redwork.

Page 216 | Highlight

A lot of organizations say “safety first,” but the actions of people, such as this crew, reveal that it’s really “hierarchy first.” Never underestimate the power of fear to distort common sense in environments with a strong culture of control and compliance.

Page 218 | Highlight

We say things like “motivate” or “inspire.” But what we mean is manipulate and coerce.

Page 220 | Highlight

CONNECT IS ABOUT CARING. TO DO THIS: Flatten the power gradient. Admit you don't know. Be vulnerable. Trust first.

Page 221 | Highlight

Here are several proxies to measure the steepness of the power gradient: salary or pay rate, office size, carpet thickness, physical separation such as reserved parking spots and private dining rooms, access to particular people and inclusion in particular meetings, stripes on sleeves, seating location (distance from the top boss), number and attractiveness of assistants (male or female), amount of talk time allocated, tolerance of tardiness, and whether people laugh at dumb jokes.

Page 221 | Highlight

Here's the rule with power gradients: the censoring of information is directly proportionate to the power gradient. Have a steep power gradient and employees will carefully censor their communications to the boss. They will edit out bad news, draft and reword emails, and stay silent when the boss has suggested an idea, whether they think it is a good one or not. They will invoke the prove self.

Page 222 | Highlight

orders should follow the chain of command, but information should be able to flow freely throughout the organization.

Page 225 | Highlight

Another steep power gradient move is to invoke another authority.

Page 229 | Highlight

So, if you must make an assessment, focus on the work by using nouns rather than verbs. But

Page 229 | Highlight Continued

better is to try to remove yourself as judge and make observations.

Page 234 | Highlight

Vulnerability is anything but weak. In fact, it's a tremendously powerful tool for creating connection.

Page 235 | Highlight

Trust people first because your trust in them will affect their behavior. They will work harder, stay longer, and unlock more discretionary effort when they feel trusted.

Page 239 | Highlight

emotions a critical source of information for social and personal issues, as well as in scenarios where available information for decision-making is incomplete.

Page 241 | Highlight

pilots crash planes more frequently because copilots are less willing to correct pilot mistakes than the other way around.

Page 241 | Highlight

When longer-term employees speak of their "experience," they are invoking the social power gradient of "I was here first."

Page 241 | Highlight

that simply being lower in social status results in more stress,

Page 244 | Highlight

The rule of power gradients is that the steeper the gradient, the more difficult it is for information—think, truth—to flow upward.

Page 244 | Highlight

A perfectly flat power gradient confuses people, leaves decisions up in the air, and makes people unhappy. As

Page 244 | Highlight

CONNECT IS ABOUT CARING. FOUR WAYS WE CAN DO THIS ARE: Flatten the power gradient. Admit you don't know. Be vulnerable. Trust first.

Page 245 | Highlight

Connect is the enabling play that makes all the other plays work better. The Industrial Age play is conform. Connect is about caring: caring what people think; caring how people feel; caring about their personal goals. Connect is not a superficial "friendship" but caring for someone else and wanting the best for them. Connect is love. The key concept for connect is power gradient. Power gradient is how we feel hierarchy in human relationships. A steep power gradient means my boss seems much more important than me. Salary, office size, and accessibility are proxies for power gradient. We want a low and smooth power gradient. If the power gradient is steep, it makes it hard for team members to speak truth to power. If the power gradient is flat, the team wastes time and energy understanding decision rights. Part of flattening the power gradient involves leaders demonstrating vulnerability and being able to admit they don't know. Trust is the result of practicing transparency over time. Trust means I believe you mean well. Whether or not you do well depends on many factors beyond just wanting to do well.

Page 249 | Highlight

Redwork is the active production work that benefits from reducing variability and a prove mindset, whereas bluework encompasses the reflective, collaborative thinking processes that benefit from embracing variability and an improve mindset.

Page 252 | Highlight

every conversation is an opportunity to reengineer the way we interact.

Page 257 | Highlight

While not all changes are that easily reversible, the closer you can get to the model of running an experiment, the better—make adjustments to your redwork, establish a quick bluework period of

Page 257 | Highlight Continued

evaluation with a firm endpoint, then finalize the changes to your redwork as deemed most effective.

Page 267 | Highlight

I began to formulate my response before the other person was finished;

Page 267 | Highlight

My perspective became strictly internal:

Page 267 | Highlight

lost the ability for detachment and monitoring.

Page 270 | Highlight

being drawn into a redwork action mode without any time to do bluework reflection.

Page 274 | Highlight

chronic stress from working in a place where you do not feel fully appreciated will take a toll on your health.

Page 275 | Highlight

Front-end bluework words about decision-making include decide, determine, propose, initiate, commit, recommend, and choose. Bluework verbs capturing the function of reflection and learning include reflect, learn, formulate hypothesis, test, experiment.

Page 276 | Highlight

describe responsibilities in terms of outcomes, not as tasks.

When thinking about applying the plays, try to read the situation and deliberately call the play you want. If you are in redwork, then to open up the possibility for collaboration will require you to CONTROL THE CLOCK. If the team is in bluework mode, you may notice people who are still running the old plays: coerce, comply, continue, prove, and conform. In these cases, you will want to deliberately call the plays from the new playbook: COLLABORATE, COMMIT, COMPLETE, IMPROVE, and CONNECT. Sometimes it is useful to think in terms of roles: the role of managing the redwork (this is the role that most of us have been programmed for), the role of managing the bluework, and the role of structuring the rhythmic oscillation between redwork and bluework.

Page 281 | Highlight

setting specific, challenging goals boosts performance in the short term.

Page 281 | Highlight

goal setting can have unintended negative consequences.

Page 282 | Highlight

information could be present

Page 282 | Highlight

the presence of specific goals can actually induce unethical behavior.

Page 282 | Highlight

Without specific mechanisms to allow employees to control the clock, employees feel incapable of controlling the outcome and are more likely to resort to unethical means to achieve the goal.

Page 282 | Highlight

A single evil, unethical, or simply wrong person can derail an entire company only in top-down hierarchies, because it is the top-down nature of the hierarchy that relieves everyone else in the organization from responsibility for their decisions.

Page 284 | Highlight

STRICT GOALS + STEEP HIERARCHIES = UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

Page 285 | Highlight

a culture of compliance, fear, and pressure to meet targets.

Page 285 | Highlight

the redwork, prove-and-perform mindset is superior in the short run for achieving results, but the bluework, learn-and-grow mindset is more adaptive in the long run.

Page 285 | Highlight

The problem with goals, challenge goals, is that the strategies people use to achieve goals are often at odds with learning. That is, specific goals impede learning and adaptation.

Page 285 | Highlight

goals that are met give people permission to stop working. Goals serve as a cap on performance.

Page 286 | Highlight

viewing strategy as learning.

Page 286 | Highlight

While engaging in the strategy, operational goals would be set for learning objectives as well as performance objectives.

Page 287 | Highlight

In a complex, fast-changing world, long-term survival is more about adaptation than achievement.

Page 292 | Highlight

the discipline of the backlog

Page 292 | Highlight

the habit of deliberate action. Deliberate action meant that we would pause, vocalize what we were about to do, and state our decision that it was the right thing to do just prior to doing it.

Page 293 | Highlight

vocalizing of intent invited collaboration.

Page 294 | Highlight

When we do not regulate ourselves, we are asking others to do it for us.

Page 295 | Highlight

in the modern world, to maintain relevance we need to apply the rhythm of blue-red-blue to our lives.

Page 299 | Highlight

THE REDWORK-BLUEWORK OPERATING SYSTEM There are two modes of human activity: thinking and doing. We call thinking bluework. It is cognitive, complex, creative, and uncertain. Variability is an ally to bluework. During bluework, we collaborate, invoke the “get better” self, seek to improve, make decisions, and develop hypotheses. We call doing redwork. It is often physical, skill based, focused, and deliberate. Variability is an enemy to redwork. During redwork, we work, invoke the “be good” self, seek to prove, and perform our jobs. Implementing a redwork-bluework operating system means deliberately practicing the rhythm of redwork followed by bluework. Leaders have three domains in which to influence the system. The first domain is determining the overall balance between red and blue—with more frequent bluework at the beginning of a project when there is more uncertainty and the focus should be on learning. Then they extend the length of the redwork periods, spacing out the bluework later in the project as the focus shifts toward production and most major decisions have been made. The second domain is within the bluework periods—getting everyone involved in bluework rather than leadership only, and managing the bluework periods with a goal of embracing variability. The third domain is within the redwork periods—setting goals and a focus for the team. This is the domain leaders will be most familiar

with and which received the least attention among these plays. I often see ways of doing the redwork better. There are many tools available, such as Lean, to assist leaders in this domain. The rhythmic oscillation between redwork and bluework can be applied at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. It applies to teams and individuals. It can be applied in our lives. The outcome of the redwork-bluework rhythm is learning—learning at work, at home, and at life.

Page 301 | Highlight

it was their ingrained patterns of language, drawing on an outdated playbook, that turned their best intentions into a disastrous situation.

Page 312 | Highlight

SAVING EL FARO USING THE NEW PLAYBOOK With the CONNECT play, saving El Faro starts before the ship gets under way. The captain establishes psychological safety now, knowing that when it comes to future bluework, an atmosphere of psychological safety will invite greater diversity of discussion, more creativity, and more resilient problem-solving. He also establishes the expected norm that the person who sees a need to CONTROL THE CLOCK has the authority to do so. The team is thinking two and three steps ahead so that when the next decision point comes, they are ready. Even in a demanding operational environment, the crew applies a learning and growth mindset, thus invoking the IMPROVE play. Members work to tame their “be good” selves and elevate their “get better” selves. They have confidence that they will be listened to and that they have control over their lives. In the absence of that, they would not participate. A junior person runs the decision meetings, allowing the captain to remain in the role of decision-evaluator. This inoculates the team against the temptation toward escalation of commitment. During meetings, they practice voting first, then discussing, and being curious instead of compelling. Confident that they will be heard, they do not need to clamor

Page 312 | Highlight

attention.