



DISCUSSION GUIDE

***Accelerate* Discussion Guide**

This discussion guide will allow teams, work groups, functional areas or divisions to engage more deeply in the concepts and practices described in the book, *Accelerate*, by Dr. John P. Kotter.

Planning your discussion: You'll find this guide covers a lot more than can be discussed in just one or two hours. Read the questions ahead of time and take into account the relevance of each question to the current state of your organization. Some pages of this guide may take several hours to discuss thoroughly, and others may have less relevance for your current situation. Consider whether some ideas are best shared prior to your meeting so that participants have time for individual reflection, and can bring their thoughts or notes to the discussion. You'll notice an area designated for "Reflection and Action Planning" on each page. We suggest that you ask participants during your discussions to consider how they can think and act differently as a result of reading the book and your group discussions.

While discussing these questions, reflect on the conversation generated. Consider what it can teach you and your organization about the best method to address any challenges you have identified, and how best to capture the opportunities you see.

These questions are not to test one's understanding of the concepts, but to help you recognize opportunities, paths and barriers that, when addressed, will move your organization to action. To maximize the impact of your discussion, be sure to capture actions that you and those in your group can take to move ahead toward the opportunities identified.

This Guide Contains

- Book summary – In case you haven't memorized the book yet!
- Video Link – Hear the ideas straight from Dr. Kotter at <http://www.kotterinternational.com/our-principles/accelerate>.
- Discussion Questions – Put ideas from the book into action.
- Slide Deck – Provides a visual for group discussion.



For more information

Kotter International helps organizations implement large-scale strategies with the agility to move at the pace of change.

Our holistic approach builds leadership competencies across all levels of the organization so important work gets done faster and more effectively. Working directly with people at all levels of your organization, we help unleash people to make significant impact and accelerate your results.

By applying Dr. Kotter's process, our firm equips clients with the ability to adopt and implement the approach themselves. This way you can scale and sustain large-scale change without long-term dependency on external resources.

In addition to these advisory services, we offer educational programs for individual leadership development or group learning, as well as experts who speak on the topics of leadership and organizational transformation.

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Summary of the Book

Is it even possible to stay ahead of today’s dizzying pace of change?

It’s a familiar scene in organizations today: a new competitive threat or a big opportunity emerges. You quickly create a strategic initiative in response and appoint your best people to make change happen. And it does—but not fast enough. Or effectively enough. Real value gets lost and, ultimately, things drift back to the default status.

Today, we need a powerful new framework for competing and winning in a world of constant turbulence and disruption. Our traditional organizational hierarchies evolved to meet the daily demands of running an enterprise. For most companies, the hierarchy is the singular operating system at the heart of the firm. But the reality is, this system simply is not built for an environment where change has become the norm.

Accelerate describes a new system—a second, more agile, network-like structure that operates in concert with the hierarchy to create a “dual operating system.” This network is dynamic and free of bureaucratic layers. Its core is a guiding coalition that represents each level and department in the hierarchy. And its drivers are a “volunteer army” of people energized by and committed to the coalition’s vision and strategy. These principles and accelerators define a dual operating system:

The Five Principles:

1. Get buy-in from more than 50% of the organization for the initiative.
2. Create a “get-to” environment that generates an army of volunteers for your initiative.
3. Involve people’s hearts (not just heads). Their passion brings more power to the initiative.
4. Invite, encourage, and promote many, many small acts of leadership.
5. Ensure all those involved are in alignment.

The Eight Accelerators:

1. Urgency aligned around a big opportunity
2. The Guiding Coalition
3. Change Vision and strategic initiatives
4. Attract volunteers
5. Drive initiatives
6. Celebrate wins
7. Don’t let up
8. Integrate these changes into the culture



The dual system allows companies to capitalize on rapid-fire strategic challenges—and still make their numbers today.

Accelerate! The Evolution of the 21st Century Organization



For a quick introduction to the ideas in *Accelerate*, Dr. Kotter offers this YouTube video. It's a great resource to get everyone on the same page, and we recommend that you show this video to your group before you begin your discussion.

In this video, Dr. Kotter discusses the challenges facing today's organizations due to the limitations of the management-driven hierarchy, and introduces us to the agile, innovation-oriented, network-like structure of nearly all early-stage organizations. Dr. Kotter shares how he's observed the power of these two organizational systems working in parallel, to provide the much needed agility and innovation for organizations to not only survive, but to get ahead in the 21st century.

Watch on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pc7EVXnF2aI>

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What Barriers Are You Encountering Today?

Reference pages: 8-12, 41-56

On pages 8 and 9, Dr. Kotter states that over time, a successful organization evolves to the point where the hierarchy can develop barriers to change.



Discuss:

1. What barriers could prevent your organization from seizing the opportunities in front of you today?
2. Barriers can be as simple as commonly accepted statements that, while they appear helpful, can stop new attempts to get past legacy barriers. Here's a list of some things people say that can sometimes become barriers. Which of these have you heard in your organization?
 - "We can't do that."
 - "That's too hard."
 - "It's just not done that way."
 - "We tried that but it didn't work."

Are there others?

3. On pages 41-56, Dr. Kotter cites a case study of an organization that encountered several barriers to its change initiative. Have past change initiatives in your company failed? If so, what barriers stopped them from succeeding?
4. Discuss how these types of challenges may be affecting current initiatives or affect initiatives you undertake in the future.

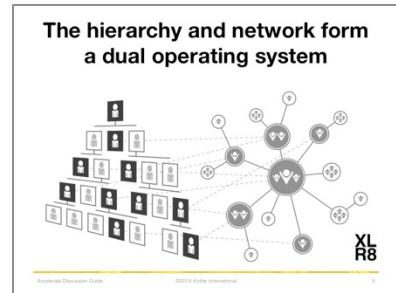
Reflection and Action Planning:

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Are You Aligned for Acceleration?

Reference pages: 82-88, 131

As Dr. Kotter states on page 131, “The energy that is at the core of accelerated action and dual operating systems is an aligned energy. The kind of pioneers who create these systems begin by developing not just a powerful sense of strategic urgency among large numbers of people, but a force for change that aligns people’s feelings, thoughts, and actions.”



Discuss:

1. Where in your organization are people aligned around a single idea that inspires them to do things that move ideas forward?
2. Do people within your organization speak about the goals in the same way with the same priority? If not, how can these be aligned?
3. Ask each person in the group what they think the company vision is – are they the same or similar? Discuss the differences.

Reflection and Action Planning:

A large, empty rectangular box provided for reflection and action planning.

What Is Your Big Opportunity?

Reference pages: 131-152

Chapter seven of *Accelerate* describes a Big Opportunity as an idea centered around the possibilities that exist for the organization right now, given the dynamics of the business and the marketplace. It says a Big Opportunity ignites the passion and interest of your whole organization – regardless of position or title.

Create and communicate a Big Opportunity Statement

Most are:

- Short
- Rational
- Compelling
- Positive
- Authentic
- Clear
- Aligned

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Discuss:

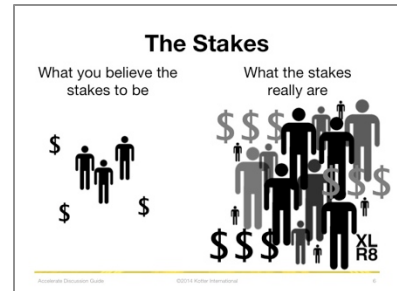
1. Do you see a Big Opportunity that could ignite the hearts and minds of the people? If yes, discuss that opportunity.
2. Write down your Big Opportunity statement. The rules are that it must be:
 - Short
 - Rational
 - Compelling
 - Positive
 - Authentic
 - Clear
 - Aligned

Your Big Opportunity statement:

What Are the Stakes?

Reference pages: 41-56

As Dr. Kotter demonstrates in the case study on pages 41-52, underestimating what is at stake is incredibly common within organizations.



Discuss:

1. Discuss any past initiatives for which the potential losses or gains were underestimated in your organization. How did that affect the outcome?
2. For any Big Opportunity you discussed previously, what are the stakes if you succeed? What are the consequences if you fail?
3. Are there areas in your organization where if time, attention, or resources are more heavily invested, you could achieve greater success?

Reflection and Action Planning:



Are You Succeeding at Implementing Your Strategic Initiatives?

Reference pages: 136-138, 86-87

On page 137, Dr. Kotter defines strategic initiatives as “Activities that, if designed and executed fast enough and well enough, will make your vision a reality.”



Discuss:

1. Are the strategic initiatives you're working on tied to a larger vision shared by your organization?
2. Consider how strategic initiatives are staffed today in your organization. Would engaging volunteers on strategic initiatives work in your organization? Why or why not?
3. In the past, what strategic initiative in your organization engaged people the most? Why do you think they were engaged?
4. Consider how new strategic initiatives in your organization have been communicated in the past. Has the method of communication had an impact on the outcome? Why?
5. The case on pages 86-87 describes the energy and effort an organization put into communicating to the organization. Would your organization be more successful at achieving their initiatives if they were communicated in the same way?

Reflection and Action Planning:

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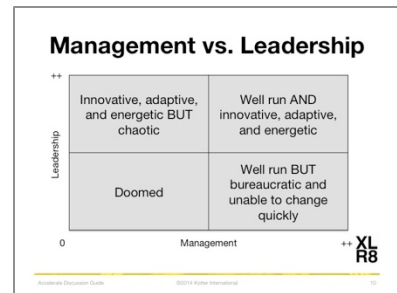
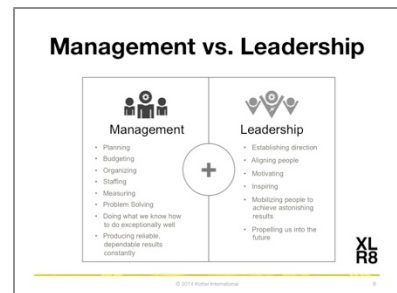
What Is the Balance of Leadership versus Management?

Reference pages: 59-64

On pages 59-64, Dr. Kotter describes the differences between management and leadership, and how both are critical to an organization's success.

Discuss:

1. What is the balance of leadership and management in your organization?
2. On page 64, you'll find the management/leadership matrix. In which quadrant does your organization belong on this chart?
3. Where are there opportunities for people up and down the hierarchy to behave more like leaders in your organization? What specifically could change?
4. Consider your team or department – does this group fall in a different quadrant? What are the differences and why?

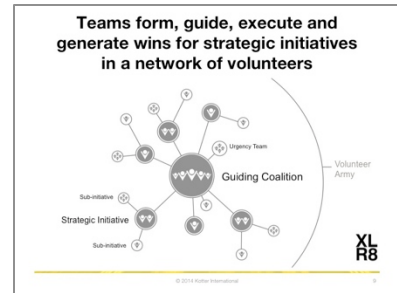


Reflection and Action Planning:

Are You Tapping Your Volunteer Network?

Reference pages: 23-24

Dr. Kotter states that "...history has demonstrated that it is possible to find many change agents ... but only if people are given a choice and feel they truly have permission to step forward and act." (Page 23-24)



Discuss:

1. What examples do you know of people in your organization who “step forward and act”? If there are few such examples, are there barriers stopping people?
2. What avenues are available to you and others in your organization to voluntarily advance the goals that take advantage of a Big Opportunity? If there are few such avenues, what advantages do you see in developing them?
3. Are employees in your organization invited and encouraged to help the organization implement its strategies? If yes, what are some examples of these successes? If not, what can your organization do differently in order to encourage employees to join in?
4. What could you do to develop a volunteer army in your organization? What are some ways that such volunteers could be effective in advancing goals or taking advantage of a Big Opportunity?

Reflection and Action Planning:



Is Your Organization Engaged in Achieving a Vision?

Reference pages: 95, 75-107, 137

In the case study on page 95, Dr. Kotter describes how the vision of what the organization needs to look like in order for it to achieve the Big Opportunity was shared with employees. When strategic initiatives that would advance the organization toward the change vision were shared with employees, one of them responded, “For the first time ever, I understand where we need to go, and how. And it actually makes sense!”



Discuss:

1. If you followed the example of how to accelerate your organization described in chapter five, what effect would that have?
2. What strategic initiatives are currently being pursued in your organization? How do these strategic initiatives connect with the overarching vision?
3. If there is such a vision, what other strategic initiatives can you see that will need to be achieved in order to achieve the vision?
4. Assume that at some point in the future, all of the strategic initiatives underway in your organization have been implemented successfully. What is different about the organization from the way it is now?
5. If you indicated that your strategic initiatives are not connected to a greater vision, consider this question: If your organization's strategic initiatives were connected to the change vision and Big Opportunity according to the diagram on page 137, what would happen to the number of and engagement level of people involved in making those strategic initiatives happen?

Reflection and Action Planning:

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Do You Generate and Celebrate Wins?

Reference pages: 99-103

Because a change vision can take a long time to achieve, Dr. Kotter's research has shown that generating and celebrating wins along the way is essential to keeping the energy focused on accelerating toward the goal. The case study on pages 99-103 illustrates that concept.



Discuss:

1. What are some examples of initiatives in your organization that were successful and part of a sustained effort? Why did they work?
2. How often do you hear about successes in your organization? If rarely, do you think that is because there aren't any or because, if there are, they are not shared and celebrated?
3. What simple efforts toward recognition or celebration of accomplishments can you make? Will this encourage others to want to help work toward the organization's goals?

Reflection and Action Planning:

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The logo features the letters 'X!' in a bold, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a complex, multi-colored pattern of red, black, and white lines that create a sense of motion and depth. The exclamation point is a solid black vertical bar. To the right of the exclamation point, the word 'ACCELERATE' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

X! ACCELERATE

The logo features the letters 'R8' in a bold, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a complex, multi-colored pattern of red, black, and white lines that create a sense of motion and depth. The '8' is a solid black vertical bar with two white circles inside, representing the loops of the number.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

The 8 Accelerators ensure purposeful, coordinated execution

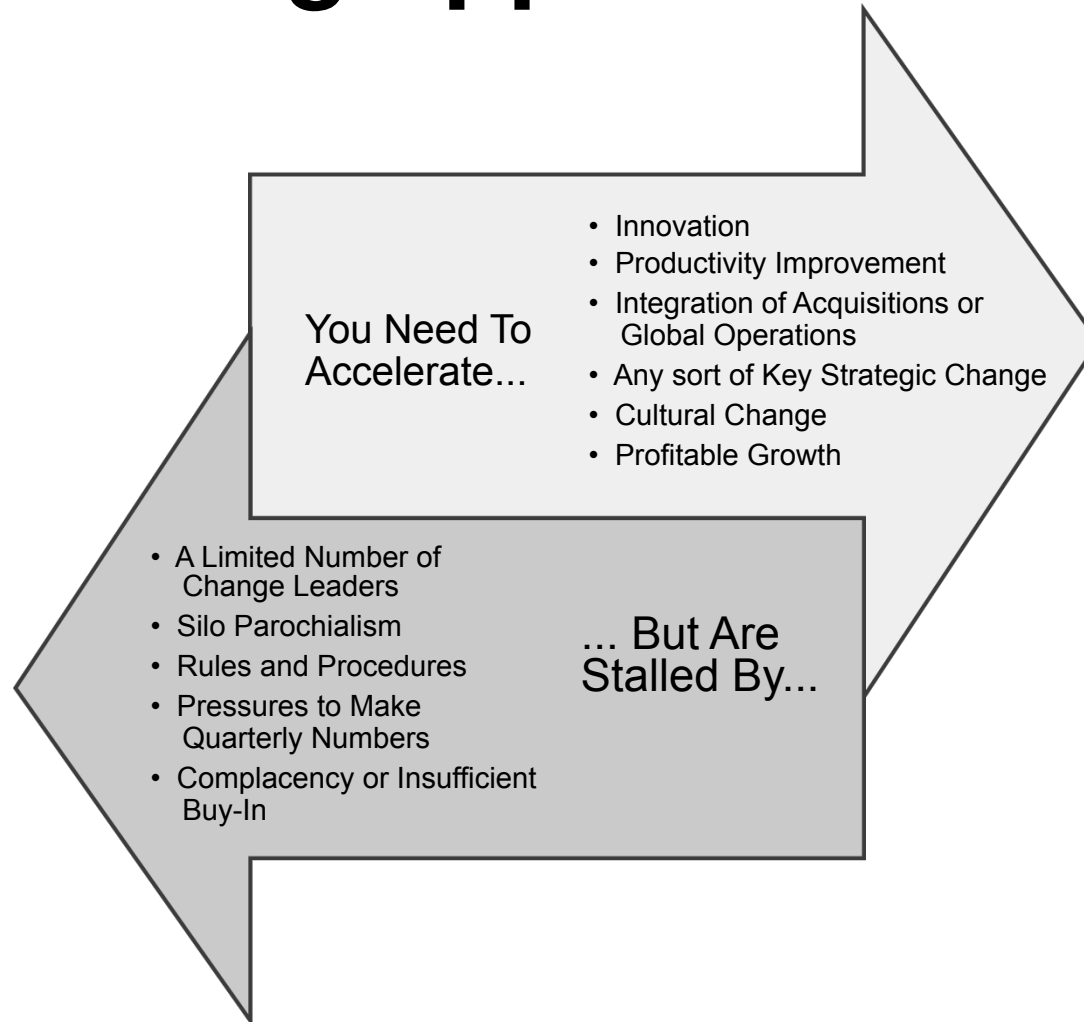
- Aligning Around an Opportunity
- Forming Teams
- Creating Strategic Vision
- Designing Strategic Initiatives
- Building a Volunteer Army
- Executing Strategic Initiatives
- Removing Barriers
- Capturing & Communicating Business Impact



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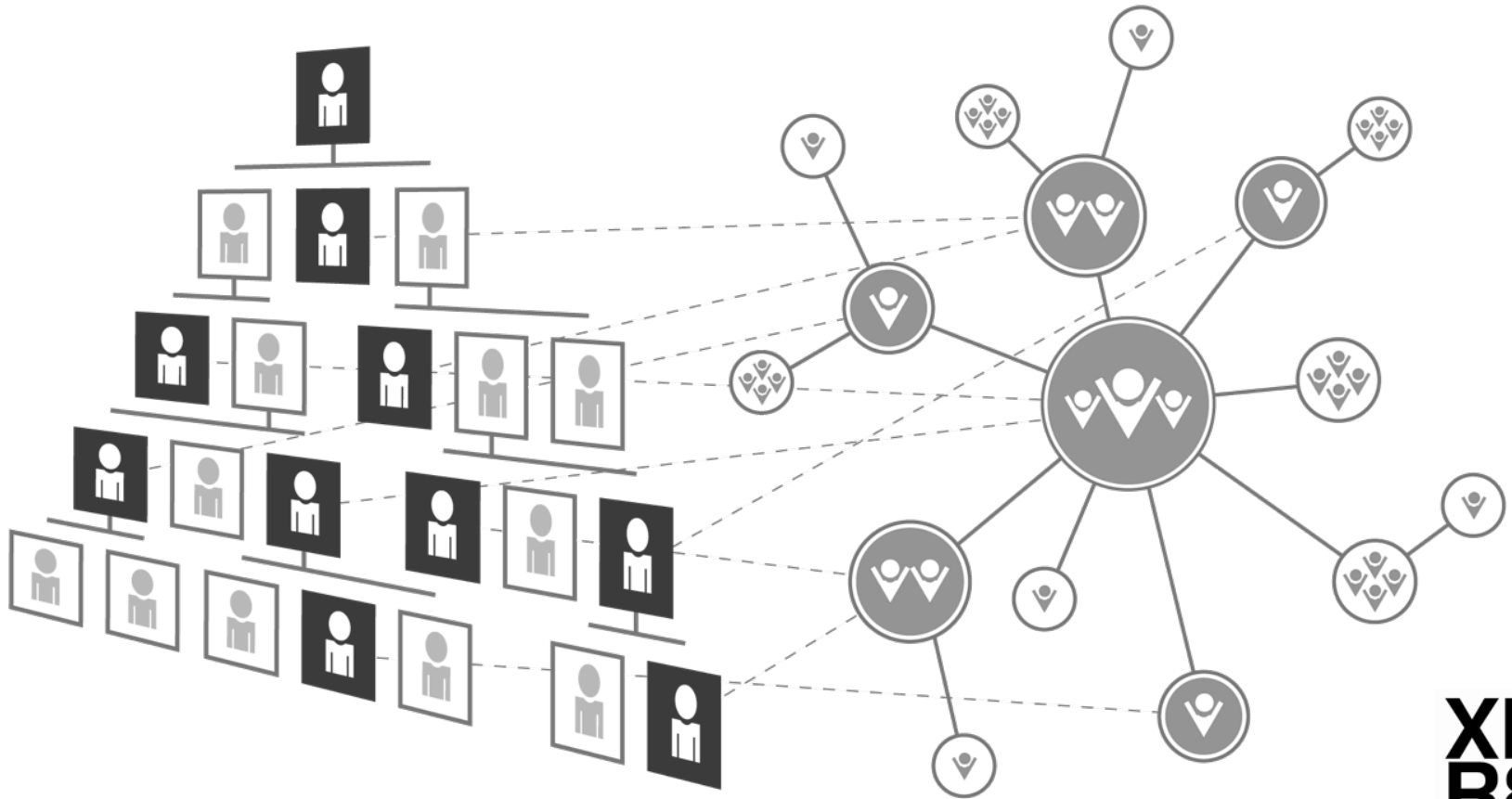
A video player interface showing a man in a dark suit and light blue shirt speaking. The background is dark with white text and hand-drawn cloud graphics. The text reads "RELIABLE EFFICIENT FAST Agile". The video progress bar is at the bottom, showing 3:57 / 6:07. The video player controls include a play button, a volume icon, a progress bar, a full screen icon, a settings icon, a CC icon, and a share icon.

Barriers prevent you from seizing opportunities



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The hierarchy and network form a dual operating system



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Create and communicate a Big Opportunity Statement

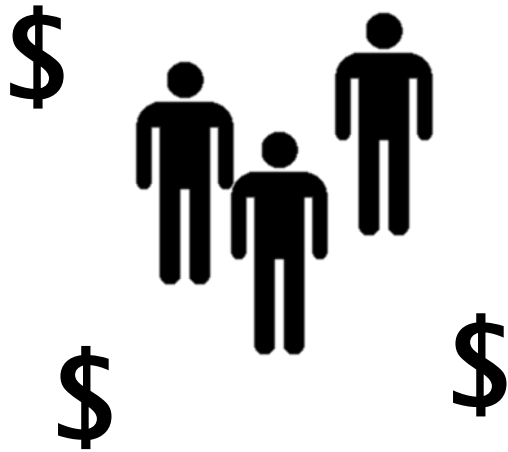
Most are:

- Short
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- Compelling
- Positive
- Authentic
- Clear
- Aligned

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The Stakes

What you believe the stakes to be



What the stakes really are



Are You Succeeding at Implementing Your Strategic Initiatives?

The Big Opportunity begets...

What it is: A window into a winning future that is realistic, emotionally compelling, and memorable



... a **Change Vision**, which begets...

What it is: What you need to look like to be able to capitalize on the Big Opportunity

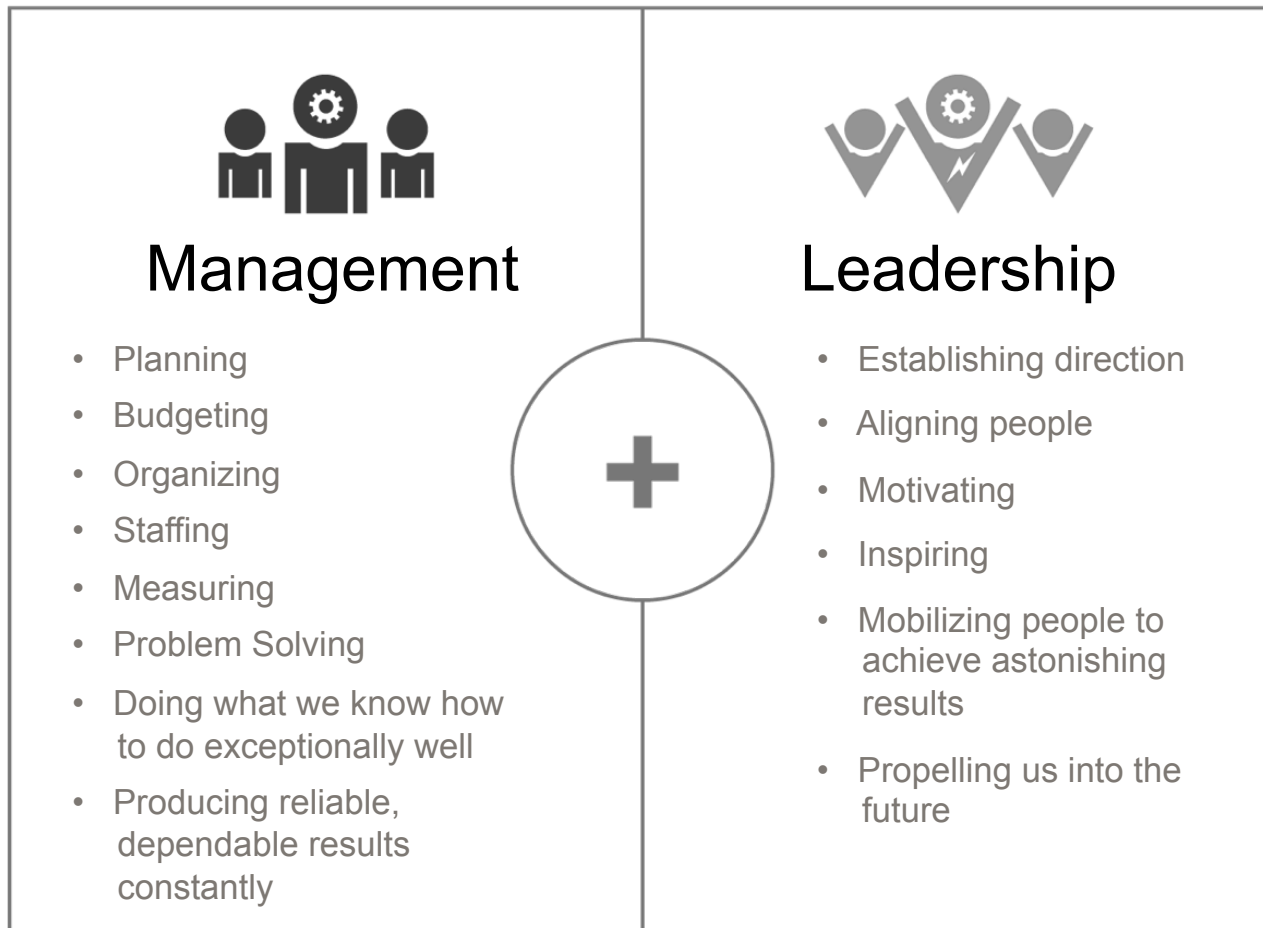


... **Strategic Initiatives**.

What they are: Activities that, if designed and executed fast enough and well enough, will make your vision a reality

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Management vs. Leadership



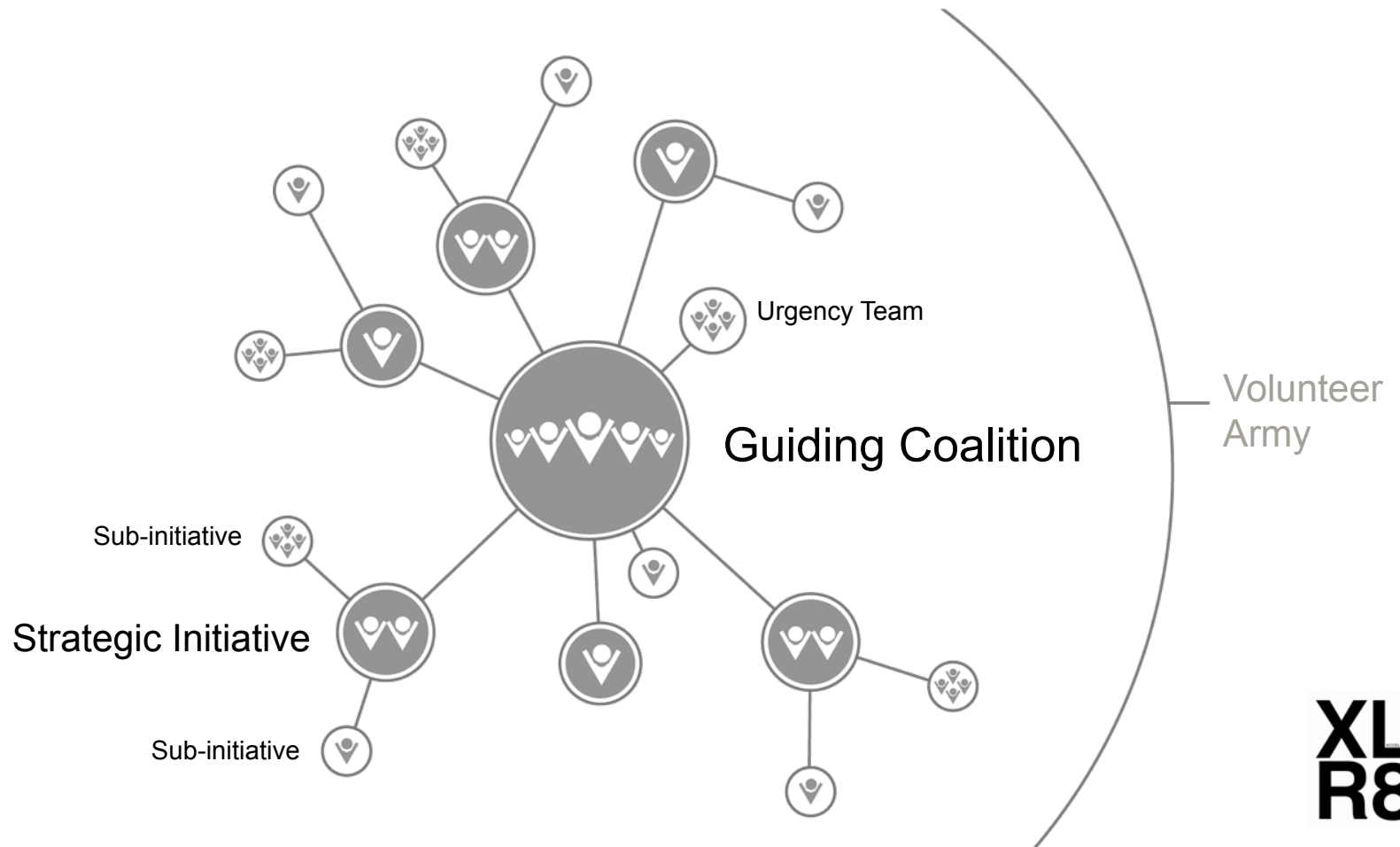
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Management vs. Leadership

++	Innovative, adaptive, and energetic BUT chaotic	Well run AND innovative, adaptive, and energetic
Leadership	Doomed	Well run BUT bureaucratic and unable to change quickly
0	Management	++

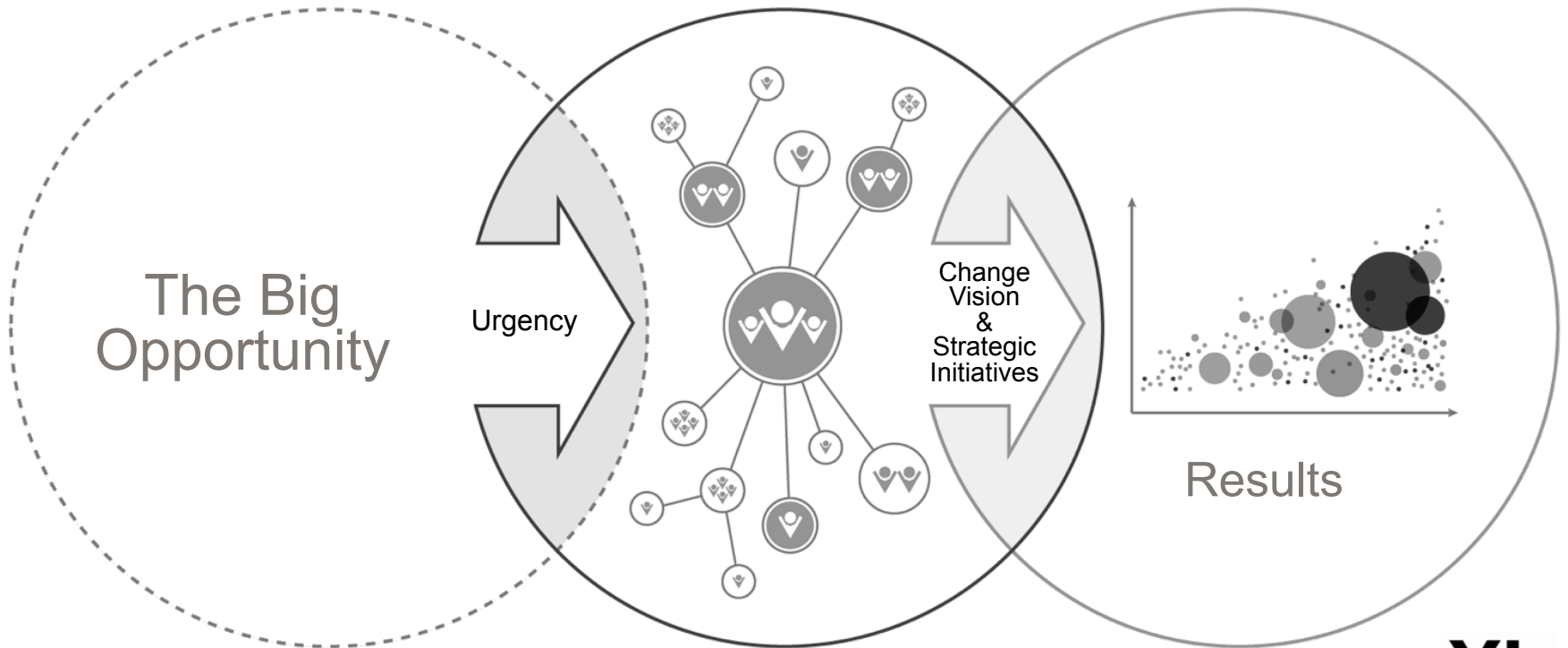
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Teams form, guide, execute and generate wins for strategic initiatives in a network of volunteers



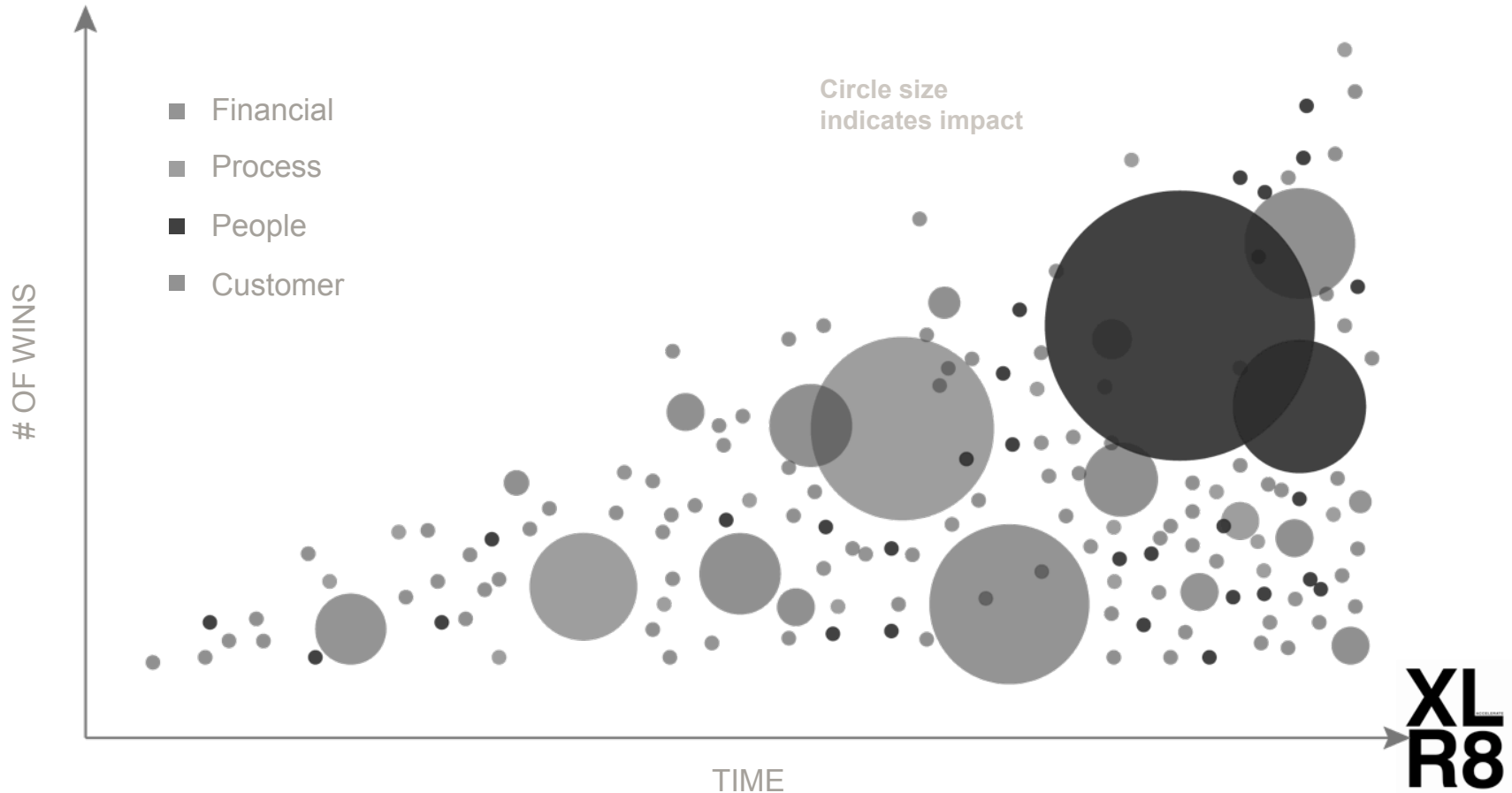
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Engaging your organization in the vision that leads to results

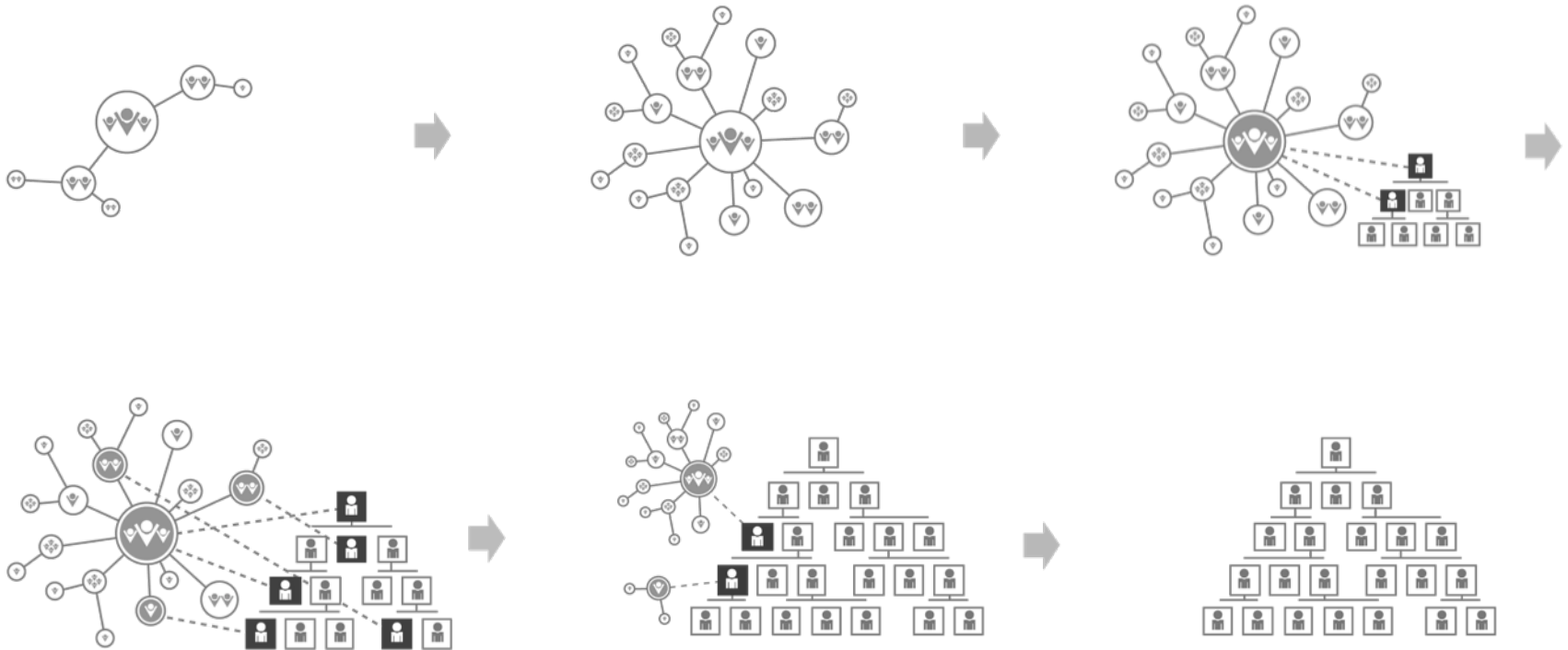


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Wins accumulate over time and lead to real business results.



How does your organization operate?



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For more information:



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