



Decision-Thinking for Senior Management

Enabling Data-Capable Leadership

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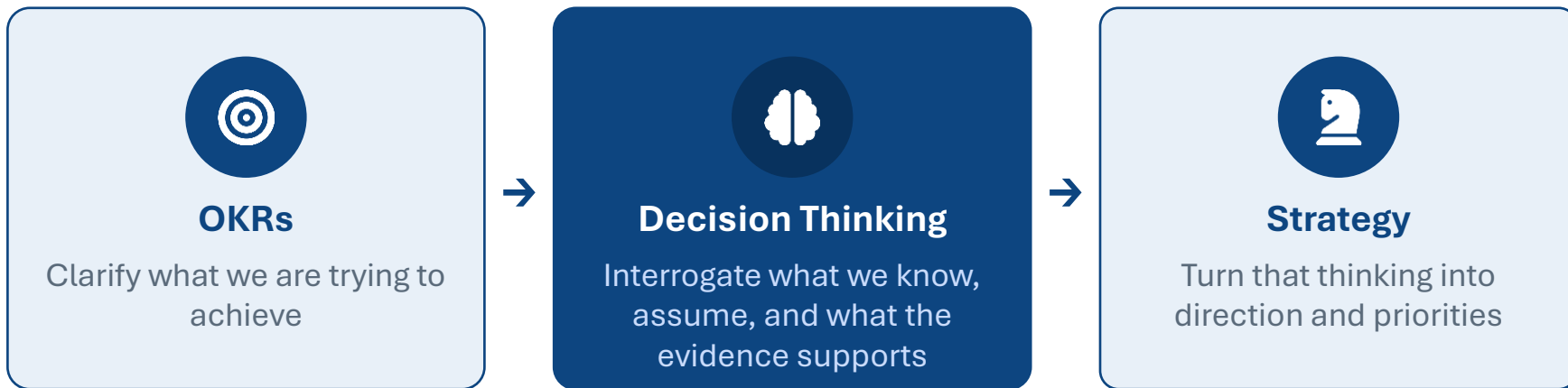
Agenda

Block	Time
Opening - Data Is Evidence About Reality, Not Reality Itself	09:25 – 10:30
Break	10:30 – 10:45
Module 1 - Recognizing and Naming Blind Spots	10:45 – 11:40
Module 2 - From Goals to Better Questions	11:40 – 12:00
ReadSG	12:00 – 12:30
Lunch	12:30 – 01:30
Module 2 – From Goals to Better Questions (continued)	01:30 – 02:10
Module 3 - Leading the Conversations That Matter	02:10 – 03:00
Module 4 - AI as a Thinking Partner	03:00 – 03:30
Break	03:30 – 03:45
Module 4 - AI as a Thinking Partner (continued)	03:45 – 03:55
Closing - Your 30-Day Division Action Plan	03:55 – 04:35

Where Today Fits

This is not another data course

It is the thinking layer between setting goals and making strategic choices



You have set the goals. Today sharpens the thinking that turns them into sound strategic choices.

The Five Behaviours

In March, your data stewards and leaders learned five decision-thinking behaviours

Today we go deep on the two that most depend on you as their leader



Spot Blind Spots



**Ask Better
Questions**



**Find Relevant
Data**



**Justify with
Value & Risk**



**Communicate &
Escalate**

Your teams learned the behaviours

Today is about what you do when they use them

A Real Conversation

Mid-year review. A program manager (left) brings a recommendation to their director (right)

The after-school reading program is doing well. Participation is up 18%. We'd like to expand it to three more branches.

18% is strong. What's driving it?

The new evening slots, mostly. Though participation counts sign-ups, not whether the children actually read more.

Noted. Let's keep it simple for the board.

...of course.

The Same Conversation, Continued

Hold on. You said something about sign-ups. Say that again.

Participation counts sign-ups. It doesn't tell us whether the children kept reading afterwards.

Then what would tell us it's actually working? The board meets Friday, so I need it tomorrow.

[Next day] Repeat attendance is strong at two branches, weak at the third. We have nothing yet on borrowing after the programme ends.

Then let's expand the two that are working, hold the third, and start tracking reading levels before we go any further.



On Your Own For The Next 2 Minutes

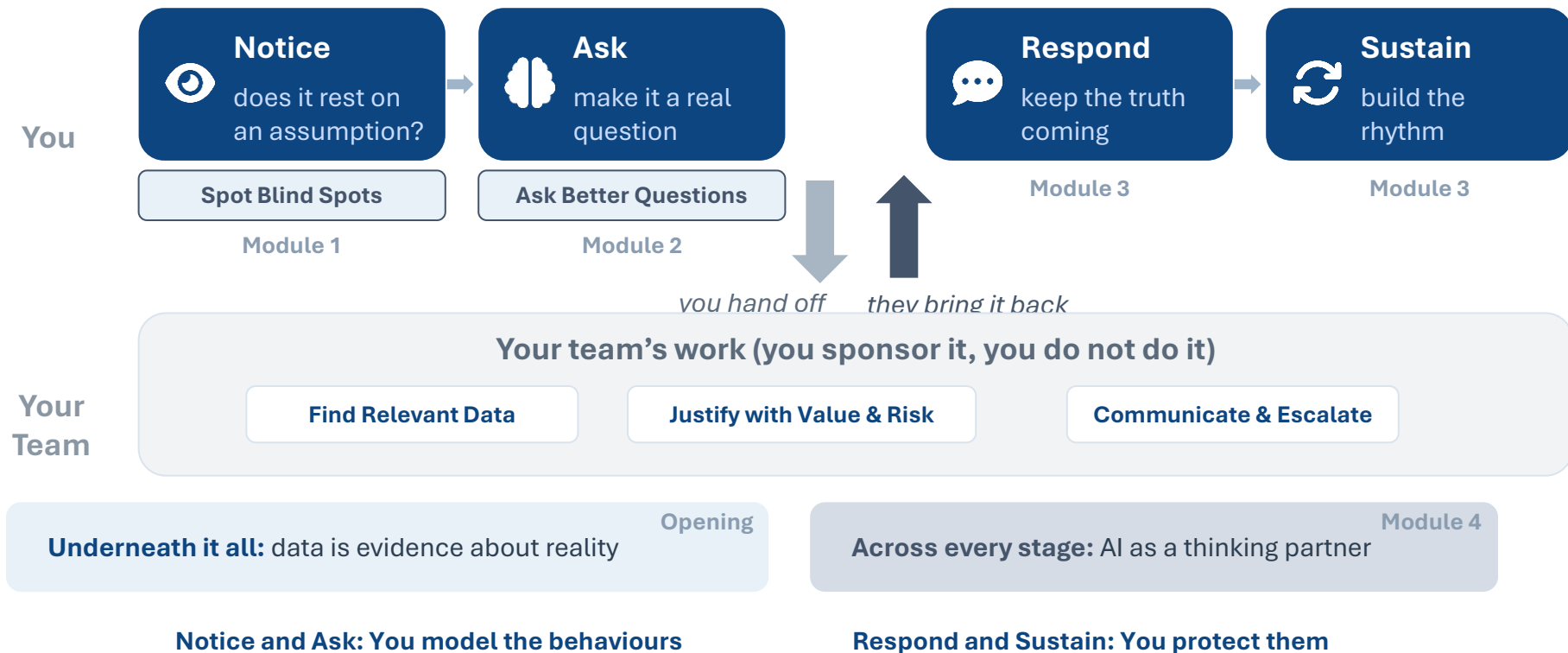
What did this leader do well?

Where did this leader fall short?

At each moment, what did the leader teach the team about what to bring next time?

The Leader's Loop

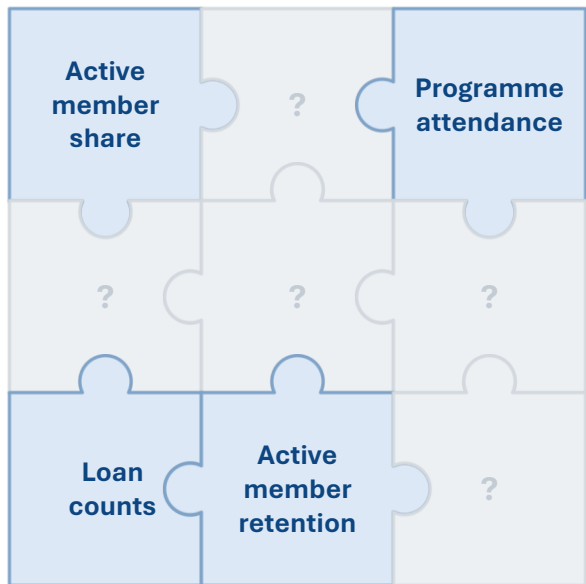
The conversation you just saw visualized as a loop, including the four things a leader drives for every decision



Data Is Evidence About Reality, Not Reality Itself

Each number is true, and each one is a fragment. The question is how much of the picture we have, and whether it's enough to act

The picture we are trying to see: Are we building a nation of readers?



Each Tile is Evidence About Something

Loan counts → *reading*

Programme attendance → *community engagement*

Active member share → *reach across the population*

Active member retention → *sustained engagement*

Four tiles of nine

What would you commit to now? What would you need before you signed it off? What does 'Active' actually count?



KEY IDEA

You never get all nine. Deciding well is deciding with the tiles you have.

And even the tiles you have are less solid than they look

Every Number Rests on a Choice Someone Made

A measure is a rule applied to the world. Change the rule and the number moves while reality stays put.

The Measure	The Rule That Changed	What It Means For The Trend
Active member	The definition of an active member was revised	<i>Members before and after cannot be compared</i>
Customer satisfaction	Changing the survey from a 5-point scale to another scale	<i>Scores before and after cannot be compared</i>
Digital visitorship	Were all website visits from real customers?	<i>The old series was counting visits it should not have</i>

Before you read a number, ask what it counts

Before you read a trend, ask whether it counted the same thing all the way along

Opening Activity: Read One Metric



Activity

Opening activity (10 min): Choose one metric, then work it through the five prompts on your own before you compare with a partner.

Reach Index · Physical visitorship · NLB Mobile App Sessions · Active member retention rate · Programme participation

1

What does it actually count?

*What has to be true for something to be included?
Who set that, and when?*

2

What can't it tell us alone?

What is this metric not able to show us?

3

What is it a proxy for?

What outcome is it standing in for?

4

What am I assuming when I read it?

What must be true for it to mean what I think it means?

5

What other evidence would you want?

What else would you want before an important decision?



Optional prompts: If the outcome you care about takes time to appear, is there anything you could look for earlier (a leading indicator)? Could this number have changed because the measure changed?

The reframe: *Metrics are not the thing itself. They are evidence about something we care about, and that gap is where the strategic questions live.*

Activity Debrief



Debrief

Active member retention rate

1 What does it actually count?

Someone chose a threshold. Borrowed once in twelve months? Logged in? Whatever the line is, the number only reports who crossed it.

And that line was drawn by a person, at some point, for some reason.

2 What does it not tell us?

Nothing about how far past the line anyone is. Recency, frequency and depth can all be falling while retention rises.

A member who borrowed once in January counts the same as one who visits weekly.

3 What am I assuming when I read it?

That retained means engaged. That last year's members are the right comparison. That the threshold still means what it meant when it was set.

None of those are stated anywhere on the dashboard.

4 What else would I need before deciding?

Depends on the decision. To justify the budget, trend & comparison. To decide where to invest, the split of deepening & reaching new members.

The metric does not change. What it needs to sit beside does.

The number went up, and we still cannot say whether things are better
That is not a flaw in the metric. It is what one metric is

Choose the Decision You'll Work Today

Pick one real decision or OKR your division is facing now
You will carry it through every activity today, and leave with it sharpened



One decision with five lenses

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Module 1 | What do we know, assume, and not know? |
| Module 2 | What question should we really be asking? |
| Module 3 | How would I respond if my team challenged it? |
| Module 4 | How could AI pressure-test it? |
| Closing | What will I change while we work on it? |

No single decision that fits all five? Use the closest one, and swap in another where it works better.



Module 1

Recognizing and Naming Blind Spots

What Are We Actually Deciding With?

We are deciding whether to expand the after-school reading programme from two branches to five. Participation is up 18% at the two pilot branches. What do you have in front of you when you make it?

What We Decide With

What Is Not In The Pile

What Are We Actually Deciding With?

What We Decide With

The numbers we track

What the team recommends

Past experience

Precedent from elsewhere

Professional judgment

What leadership expects

What Is Not In The File

Missing information

Data we do not have

Outcomes we cannot see yet

Unquestioned assumptions

Beliefs we treat as facts

What we assume transfers

Narrow perspectives

Voices not in the room

Questions nobody raised

Everything on the right has a name. These are blind spots, and there are three kinds.

What Is A Blind Spot?

Anything a decision rests on that we have not seen, have not checked, or are treating as more solid than it is



Missing Information

Data we do not have, or a measure standing in for the real thing

*Loans tell us about borrowing.
We treat them as telling us
about reading*



Unquestioned Assumptions

Beliefs we hold that feel obvious, so we do not challenge them

*We assume this will work the
same way in every branch*



Narrow Perspectives

Viewpoints or experiences that could change how we see the situation

*We haven't heard from the
people who would be most
affected*



KEY IDEA

Blind spots are not bad, they are a natural part of how we make decisions

The goal is to make them visible, then judge which ones matter

Why Seniority Keeps Blind Spots Hidden

Information degrades in both directions, and you sit at the point where both are fixable

Doubt Thins On The Way Up

Reality on the ground

People see the uncertainty, the trade-offs, and the concerns

"I'm not sure this will work"



Team Members



Filtering happens

People adjust what they share, smoothing out doubt or conflict

"I should be more positive about this"



Middle Managers



It gets polished

Messages get simplified to fit what leaders seem to want

"Let's focus on the key positives"



Senior Leaders



Certainty at the top

Leaders hear a cleaner, more certain picture than exists on the ground

"This looks straightforward and on track"



Executives

Context Thins On The Way Down

"Just send the numbers" ←

the task ←

the priority ←

the full strategic picture



KEY IDEA

Doubt thins going up and context thins coming down. You are the only person who can fix both
Ask for the doubt, and give them the context.

So What Is The Solution To Blind Spots?

Not Every Blind Spot Deserves More Data



How confident are we
in what we currently know?



What happens if we're wrong?
How consequential is this decision?

Low Decision Risk

High Decision Risk



Act with what we know

Uncertainty is low and the downside is small



Acknowledge uncertainty

Proceed, but be clear about what we don't know and monitor for new signals



Seek more evidence

The uncertainty or potential impact is high enough to justify additional data



Reduce exposure or delay

The potential impact of being wrong is too high to act now



KEY IDEA

The goal is not certainty

It is confidence appropriate to the consequence

Worked Example

The Decision: Should we expand the after-school reading programme from two branches to five?

What we know

Evidence we are reasonably confident in

Participation is up 18% at the two pilot branches, and the rise tracks with the new evening slots.

The tell: *Verifiable. We can point to the record.*

What we assume

Beliefs we are treating as facts

That participation means the children are reading more.

That what worked in two branches will transfer to three more.

The tell: *We have not checked either. Both are doing real work in the plan.*

What we have not asked

Questions no one has raised

Do the children come back after the programme ends?

Why is the third branch weaker than the other two?

The tell: *Nobody in the room had raised these until we looked.*

And which of these could actually change the decision? Whether the children come back. If participation is a hollow signal, expanding multiplies the mistake.

The other gaps are real, but we would proceed anyway. That judgment is the point of the exercise, not a longer list.

Activity 1: Map One Real Decision

Work it through the four questions below on your own first, then compare with a partner or two

1

One thing you know

What evidence are you reasonably confident in?

2

Two things you are assuming

Beliefs you are treating as facts but have not checked

3

One thing you may not have thought to ask

What question, perspective, or evidence might be missing?

4

Which of these could actually change the decision?

If we're wrong or missing something, what matters enough to investigate before we act?

Then pair up and compare: *Where was an unnamed assumption doing the heavy lifting? Which uncertainty actually matters to the decision?*

Activity 1 Debrief: What Did We Discover?



Debrief

Better decisions start by seeing more of what's true. This exercise helps us open the aperture.

Our goal: Expand what we're seeing so we can focus on what actually matter

1

What do we know?

Look at the solid ground

- What evidence did you list as something you are reasonably confident in?
- How did naming it shape the rest of your thinking?
- Did you uncover more than you first realized?



Share one piece of evidence you're most confident in

2

What are we assuming?

Surface the invisible beliefs

- What assumptions did you uncover about the situation, the solution, or what will happen?
- Which felt most risky or least checked?
- What would it take to test them?



Share one assumption that, if wrong, would change your thinking

3

What have we not thought to ask?

Find the blind spots

- What question, perspective, or evidence might be missing?
- Whose viewpoint or data have we not included?
- What could a better question reveal?



Share one question or perspective you hadn't thought to ask

4

What actually changes the decision?

Focus on what matters

- Of everything you listed, what could actually change your decision?
- What is worth investigating before you act?
- What did you decide to look into more deeply?



Share one thing that would change your decision if it turned out to be true

We cannot see what we do not look for. Good leaders widen the view before they narrow the path.

Module 1 Takeaways



Takeaway

First, from you: *What is one thing you will do differently when someone surfaces uncertainty?*

The goal is not to eliminate blind spots. It is to make them safe to name, then judge which ones matter.

- ✓ Blind spots are information, assumptions, or perspectives a decision may depend on without us realizing it.
- ✓ Not every blind spot needs to be closed. The response should match the consequence of being wrong.
- ✓ Seniority can make important blind spots harder to see because people increasingly adjust what they surface to you.
- ✓ Your reaction teaches the team whether uncertainty and challenge are safe to surface next time.

Lunch Break Till 1:30PM



Module 2

From Goals to Better Questions

What Would Come Back?

What You Ask For

Understand how residents are using our digital services

Should we put the next tranche of learning investment into branches, homes, or partners?

Advance lifelong learning across Singapore

Do we relocate the service at this branch, or redesign it in place?

Look into why visitor numbers are down

What Comes Back

Not which is better worded. What work does each one create?

What Would Come Back?

What You Ask For

Understand how residents are using our digital services

Should we put the next tranche of learning investment into branches, homes, or partners?

Advance lifelong learning across Singapore

Do we relocate the service at this branch, or redesign it in place?

Look into why visitor numbers are down

What Comes Back

A dashboard of usage by channel. Three weeks of work. No decision made.

Three costed options and a recommendation.

A strategy paper restating the objective in more words.

A comparison, with what would make each the right call.

Charts of visitor numbers. Probably several theories, no answer.

Three of these are topics. Two are decisions. Most of what we send down is in the first group.

A Topic Is Not a Decision

At the leadership level it matters even more, because you set the questions your division follow.



A Topic

Describes an area of interest. Feels productive, but no one can act on it.

“Understand visitor engagement trends”

“Advance lifelong learning in Singapore”

“Optimize digital resource usage”

Topic → Data → Analysis → *So what do we do?*



A Decision

Names a choice, with options, that evidence can help judge.

“Should we extend weekend hours or change staff schedules?”

“Should we concentrate lifelong learning in physical branches, homes, or partner channels?”

“Should we decommission this specific digital service?”

Decision → Question → Evidence → Choice

What a Framed Decision Contains

Your teams learned this in March. You do not need to write one, only to notice which part is missing and ask for it.

What A Decision Brief Contains

If It Is Missing, Ask

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | The decision | What specific choice are we making? | <i>“What choice is this helping us make?”</i> |
| 2 | Why now | The problem, or what forces the timing | <i>“What happens if we decide this in six months instead?”</i> |
| 3 | The options | Two or three real paths, including doing nothing | <i>“What were the other options, and why did those lose?”</i> |
| 4 | Success criteria | How we would know it worked | <i>“What would we see change if this worked?”</i> |
| 5 | Key questions | What we need to know to choose between them | <i>“What would we need to know to choose differently?”</i> |

**Almost every weak plan is missing three or five
No options means no decision. No success criteria means no way to be wrong.**

When It Arrives as a Topic

More often than you commission a topic, one lands on your desk. One question sends it back sharper, and shows the team what you wanted.

What Arrives On Your Desk

A paper titled "Review of digital engagement"

An OKR whose key result counts activity: 200 sessions delivered

A recommendation with one option in it

A dashboard, and "what do you think?"

The Question That Sharpens It

"Before we go further, what choice is this paper helping us make?"

"What would we see change if this worked? And what could we look at earlier?"

"What were the other two, and why did those lose?"

"What decision were you hoping this would settle?"

Say thank you first. Any of these questions can land as a rebuff. Acknowledge the work, then ask. That is the difference between coaching and correcting.

Four Moves That Sharpen a Team's Thinking

Use these moves to turn broad topics into better questions, better evidence, and better decisions.

Set Direction



Clarify the choice and align on the outcome that matters

1 Turn a topic into a decision

Move from a broad area of interest to a specific choice with options

? *“What choice are we actually trying to make?”*

2 Connect the metric to the strategy

Link the numbers and signals to the outcome we are trying to influence

? *“What does this tell us about the outcome we care about?”*

Challenge & Calibrate



Test assumptions and right-size the effort to the risk

3 Ask what would change your mind

Separate inquiry from confirmation bias by inviting disconfirming evidence

? *“What evidence would cause us to choose differently?”*

4 Match rigor to consequence

Right-size the evidence to the risk, reversibility, and potential impact

? *“How much evidence does this decision deserve?”*



KEY IDEA

Leaders set the questions. Questions shape the evidence.
Better questions lead to clearer trade-offs and stronger decisions

The Question That Breaks Confirmation Bias

“What evidence would change our mind?” It is the fastest way to tell genuine inquiry from a search for a rubber stamp



Confirmation inquiry

The question it really asks

“What data shows we are right?”

It gathers support for a conclusion already reached.
The team learns to bring you evidence that agrees.



Disconfirmation inquiry

The question it really asks

“What specific result would prove us wrong?”

It names, in advance, the evidence that would change the decision. The team learns to bring you the truth.



QUESTION

“Before we commit, what would we have to see to conclude this is wrong?”

The Line of Sight: From Number to Strategy

Teams bring you the number they can measure. Your job is to ask what it tells you about the strategy, and how soon it can tell you.

Strategic Goal

Cultivate a reading nation



Outcome

People read more, including new readers



Operational Metric

Loans up 6% this year



If loans move, do we know the strategy is working?

Not necessarily. It could be the same readers borrowing more.

Three kinds of measure sit on that ladder

Each is useful. They answer different questions



Leading

Early signals you can act on before the outcome is known

e.g. Enrolments in a new programme's first month



Proxy

Correlated with the outcome, but not a direct measure

e.g. Programme participation, loans



Lagging

Confirms the outcome, but only after the fact

e.g. Reading levels after six months

Earlier,
less certain



Later,
more certain

No Single Measure Reaches the Outcome

The outcome: Joy and passion for learning at all life stages

Early Signals

Return within 30 days

Did the experience pull them back?

Re-enrolment in a next programme

Chose more, unprompted

What is Happening Now

Repeat borrowing

Reading as a habit, not an event

Progression into new genres

Curiosity widening

Satisfaction score

How it felt on the day

Confirms It Later

Sustained reading a year on

The outcome itself

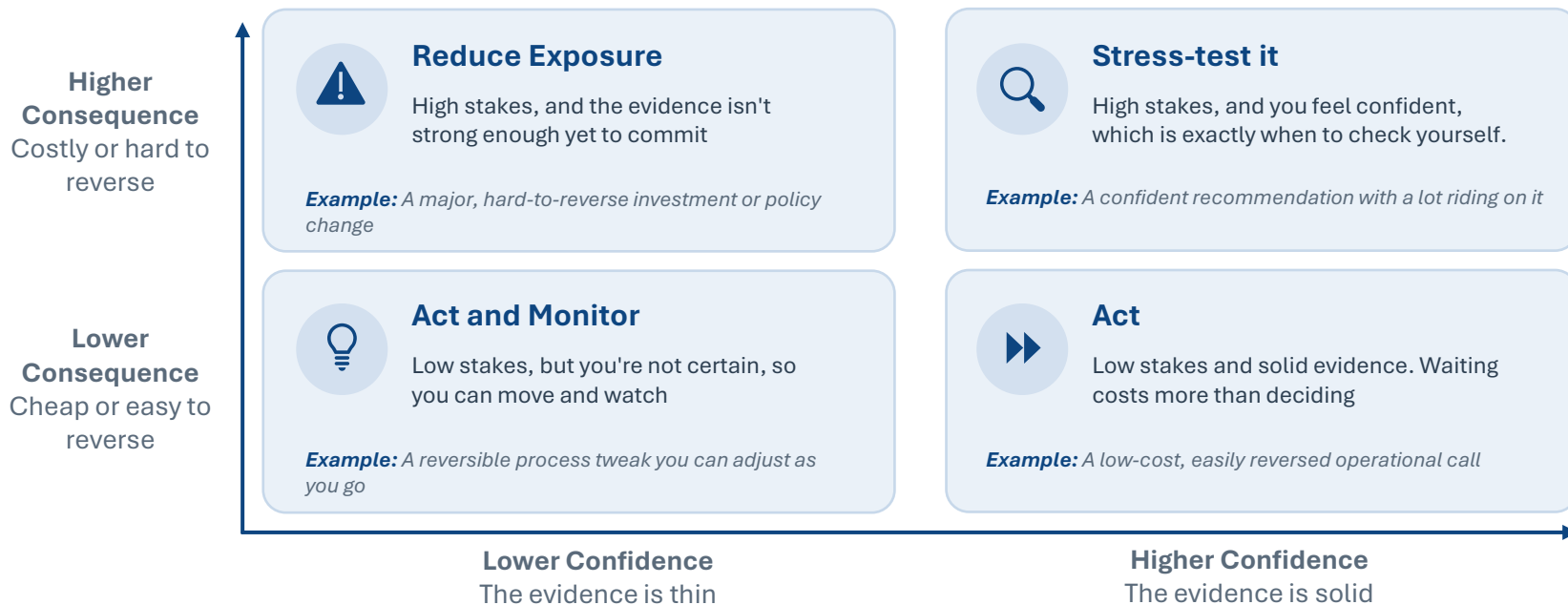
Reading in homes we had not reached

Joy that spread

Not one better measure. A set, where each one answers a question the others cannot, and you know which is which.

Seven measures here are illustrative, not a recommendation. The useful question is which of them you would actually want, and which you have

How Much Evidence Does This Decision Deserve?



KEY IDEA

Match the rigour of your evidence to the impact and reversibility of the decision
More is not always better. The right evidence, at the right time, is better

Decide Now What Would Change Your Mind

The cheapest moment to set a review point is before you start. Afterwards, every signal arrives attached to a decision you have already defended.

What would we expect to see if this is working, and by when?

Name the signal before the work begins, or you will read whatever arrives as confirmation.

What would make us stop, or adjust rather than continue?

Set the threshold now. Sunk cost has not arrived yet.

When will we look, and who is going to look?

A review with no date is a wish. A review with no owner does not happen.

And When You Look, There Are Only Three Honest Answers

Continue

The signal is there. Carry on, and keep watching.

Adjust

Something is off, but the case holds. Narrow it, pilot it, change the format.

Stop

The assumption did not hold. Release the resource to something else.

Worked Example

The OKR as written: Strengthen digital engagement across the network

Key result: increase NLB App Sessions by 20% this financial year

1

Name the decision

“Grow digital engagement” is a direction, not a choice.

Where do we concentrate digital investment for the next two quarters? (a) acquisition, (b) depth with registered users, (c) reach residents not online with us at all.

2

Test the line of sight

The key result tells us accounts were created.

It does not tell us whether anyone used the account twice, or whether these are new residents or existing borrowers switching channel. A 20% rise is achievable entirely from people we already serve.

3

Write the better question

Tests the assumption that more sign-ups means broader reach.

“Of the engagement we would add, how much is new reach, and how much is the already-engaged doing more?” A split of new versus returning users would change the choice.

4

Calibrate the rigor

Moderate consequence, reasonably reversible.

Enough evidence is a new-versus-returning split, not a full segmentation study. Not certainty. Just which option the number is hiding.

Activity 2: Pressure-Test One of Your OKRs



Activity

Take one of your OKRs and run it through the four moves on your own, then compare with a partner or two

1

Name the decision

What choice does this OKR require you to make? Name two or three real options.

2

Test the line of sight

What outcome are you actually trying to influence? What does your current key result tell you about that outcome, and what doesn't it tell you?

3

Write the better question

What question would help your team sharpen the evidence? What assumption would it test? What evidence could change the choice?

4

Calibrate the rigor

How much evidence does this decision deserve? Consider consequence and reversibility before asking the team for more.

Activity 2 Debrief: What Did We Discover?



Debrief

Better questions lead to better evidence, and better evidence leads to better decisions

Our goal: Replace automatic questions with questions that generate deciding information

1

What did you decide?

Look back at your OKR

- What decision did your OKR require you to make?
- What were the 2–3 real options you named?
- Did naming options surface anything new?



Share your decision and the options you considered

2

What did you learn?

Examine your line of sight

- What did your key result tell you about the outcome you want to influence?
- What did it not tell you?
- What assumptions about that outcome did you uncover?



Share one insight about what your key result does, or doesn't, tell you

3

What question emerged?

Focus on the better question

- What better question did you write?
- What assumption does it test, or what evidence could change the choice?
- How is it different from what you'd normally ask?



Share your better question and why it's more useful

4

What changed?

Reflect on rigor & confidence

- How did calibrating rigor change your view of what this decision deserves?
- What evidence would you now seek before deciding?
- What will you do differently?



Share one thing you'll do differently because of this

A better question is not more complicated. It earns the right to your team's time and attention.

Module 2 Takeaways



Takeaway

First, from you: *What question will you ask your team that you would not have asked this morning?*

A better question is worth more than a faster answer

- ✓ **Start with the decision:** name the choice before asking the team for evidence
- ✓ **Connect the metric to the outcome:** ask what the number actually gives you the right to conclude
- ✓ **Ask what would change your mind:** better questions test assumptions instead of confirming them
- ✓ **Match rigor to consequence:** ask for the evidence the decision deserves, not simply more data



Module 3

Leading the Conversations That Matter

A leader's job isn't simply to respond well to good thinking. Sometimes the leadership act is protecting thinking that was difficult to say. Sometimes it is reopening your own thinking. And sometimes it is helping unfinished thinking become better without taking the work away from the team.

Your Team Is Watching How You React

Theirs

They flag a gap or a limit in their own work

You are judging evidence. Nothing you decided is at stake.

What gets in the way: Impatience

Yours

They challenge a premise you set, or a decision you announced

You are being asked to reopen something you own.

What gets in the way: Defensiveness

Nobody's Yet

The work arrives before it has been framed as a decision

There is nothing to judge. Something is simply missing.

What gets in the way: The urge to correct it

Different Situations, Same Responsibility

Whether it's their work, your work, or something that isn't finished, how you react decides what reaches you next time

When It Is Their Work, and When It Is Yours



Their Work Is In Question		You are judging evidence	What They Are Risking
“We don’t know”		Admitting a gap	They risk looking unprepared
“This is our best proxy”		Naming a limit in their own measure	They risk undermining their own recommendation
Your Work Is In Question		You are reopening something you own	What They Are Risking
“I think that assumption is wrong”		Challenging a premise you may have set	They risk contradicting you in front of others
“The evidence changed”		Arguing to reverse a decision you announced	They risk reopening what you closed
Each one costs them more than the one above And the more it cost them, the more your reaction is worth			

When The Question Is About Their Work

Shuts It Down

Opens It Up

The Moment

“This is our best proxy, but it misses the seniors who use a family member’s account”

When the measure is imperfect

“Then it’s not a very good measure, is it? Get me one that works.”

Don’t bring me caveats. Next time they present the number clean and bury the doubt.

“Good, you know its limits. How wrong could it be, and does that change the decision?”

Naming the flaw is valued. Next time they bring the number and the caveat, which is what you need.

The Moment

“We don’t actually know yet. The data can’t tell us that with confidence”

When the team says we don’t know

“I need an answer, not a maybe. Come back when you have one.”

Uncertainty is unwelcome. Next time they give you a confident number they do not believe.

“Thank you for saying so. How wrong could our estimate be, and what would help us narrow it?”

Honesty about the unknown is valued. Next time they flag the risk early, while you can still act.

Neither response on the left is cruel
Each one quietly trains the team to stop telling you the thing you most need to hear

When The Question Is About Your Work

“I think that assumption is wrong”

The premise may be one you set. Reopening it means conceding in front of the room.

“The evidence changed”

The decision may be one you announced. Reversing it costs you something visible.

What Makes These Different

What gets in the way

- It is no longer their evidence being judged. It is your call
- Sunk cost is in the room, and everyone can see it
- Reversing looks like weakness, so you defend without deciding to

What still works

The same four moves

- “Say more. I would rather know now than after the board”
- “If you are right, what follows? Let us work that through”



KEY IDEA

Changing your mind in public is not a loss of authority

It is the clearest signal you will ever send that evidence matters here

When Something Incomplete Arrives

Ordered By How Much It Wastes	<i>The earlier the gap, the more is wasted</i>	The Question That Recovers It
1 There is no decision	<i>A topic. Everything downstream rests on nothing.</i>	<i>“What choice will this help us make?”</i>
2 There are no options	<i>One path presented. Nothing to choose between.</i>	<i>“What were the others, and why did they lose?”</i>
3 There is no success measure	<i>A delivery date. It cannot be wrong, so it cannot be learned from.</i>	<i>“What would we see change if this worked?”</i>
4 The assumptions are invisible	<i>Recoverable, but you will not see the risk until it lands</i>	<i>“What are we assuming that could be wrong?”</i>

How To Respond When the Plan Is Not Ready

A plan lands on your desk: “Improving engagement with our digital collection. Analyse usage, identify patterns, recommend improvements. Deliver by end of Q2.”

Shuts It Down

“This isn’t a decision. Take it back and reframe it properly”

- They learn: do not show him anything until it is right
- You get later drafts, safer drafts, and less of the thinking
- The gap was never capability. It was that nobody asked

Opens It Up

“What choice will this help us make? If it came back tomorrow, what would we do differently?”

- They find the decision themselves, out loud, in about ten seconds
- They learn: he will help me think, and he asks the same question every time
- Next time, the decision is on the page before it reaches you



KEY IDEA

The verdict fixes this plan but the question fixes the next ten

What the Good Responses Had in Common

Theirs

“Thank you for saying so. How wrong could our estimate be?”

They admitted a gap

It answered the person before the problem

Theirs

“Good, you know its limits. Does that change the decision?”

They named a flaw in their own measure

It probed whether the flaw actually mattered

Yours

“Say more. I would rather know now than after the board.”

They argued the evidence had changed

It made reopening your own decision safe

Nobody's Yet

“What choice will this help us make?”

The plan had not been framed as a decision

It turned a verdict into a question they could answer



KEY IDEA

Different words, same underlying moves

None of them took longer than the response that would have shut it down

Four Moves That Keep the Thinking Open

1 Acknowledge before you evaluate

Respond to the person before the problem. “Thanks for raising that.”

2 Turn it into a question, not a verdict

Ask rather than rule. “What would help us judge this?”

3 Probe what actually matters

This is the one that changes shape

If it is hard: “Does that flaw change the decision?”

Not all flaws matter, and not every gap is the one holding the plan back. Find the part that actually decides it.

If it is incomplete: “Which part is missing?”

4 Make the next step shared

Decide together what happens next: investigate, mitigate, monitor, or move

None of these takes more time than the response that shuts it down. They just point the other way.

Activity 3: Pressure-Test Your Response



Activity

Pair up, or work in threes. One of you is the leader. The other picks a situation and makes it real.

Pick The One That Happens Most Often To You

Theirs

Bring a gap or a limit in your own work

“We don’t know” / “This is our best proxy”

Yours

Challenge a premise or decision the leader owns

“That assumption is wrong” / “The evidence changed”

Nobody’s Yet

Bring a plan that is not ready

No decision, no options, or a delivery date as the measure

1 Play it out

The team member makes it real, using the decision you have worked with today. The leader responds naturally. No rehearsing.

2 Debrief the response

What did that response teach about what is safe to bring next time? Did it also move the thinking forward?

3 Pressure-test it

What could you say next to keep the reasoning visible, without agreeing, rejecting, or asking for more data?

Activity 3 Debrief: What Did We Just Practice?



Debrief

Every response teaches your team something about what is safe to bring, and about how you think

Our goal: Keep the hard truths coming AND make better decisions

1

React

What happened in the moment?

- The scenario your partner brought
- How you responded in the moment
- What your intent was



Share your scenario and one thing you noticed about your own response

2

Learn

What did your response teach?

- What it taught the team member about what is safe to say next time
- Whether it also moved the decision thinking forward
- Whether your intent and its effect matched

3

Improve

What would you do differently?

- What you could say to keep the reasoning visible
- Without just agreeing, rejecting, or asking for more data
- One move to practice this week



Share the one thing you'll try in a real conversation

Good leadership is not about having the right answer. It is about inviting the right thinking.

Module 3 Takeaways



Takeaway

First, from you: *What is the one thing you'd want your direct reports to notice you doing differently?*

Whether the thinking survives is decided in these conversations

- ✓ Your teams learned the disciplines; your response decides if they keep using them
- ✓ Two things arrive diminished: the doubt they were afraid to raise, and the thinking that never reached the page
- ✓ The damaging reaction is rarely cruelty. It is impatience, or reflexive fixing.
- ✓ Welcoming a caveat trains them to keep bringing the truth. Asking a question rather than returning the work trains them to bring better drafts.
- ✓ Both behaviours, Spot Blind Spots and Ask Better Questions, are reinforced or weakened in these moments



Module 4

AI as a Thinking Partner

AI Does Not Have Access to Reality Either

Try It On Something We Know

“Is our after-school reading programme working?”

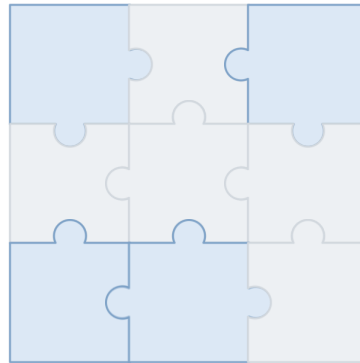
What It Can Answer From

Participation figures, loan records, published reports, whatever we have written down. It will give you a fluent, reasonable, well-organised answer.

What It Cannot Reach

Whether the children kept reading afterwards. Nobody measured it, so it is not in the evidence, so it is not in the answer.

Remember The Puzzle



AI can read every tile we have. It cannot turn the ones we never collected.



KEY IDEA

AI can only ever be as good as the evidence you have. It does not add tiles to the picture.

So we use it for spotting blind spots and asking better questions

AI in Service of Spotting Blind Spots

AI can generate challenge without social risk: It can surface uncomfortable possibilities that may not come up in the room. But it cannot replace making it safe for your people to challenge you, which is the work of Module 3.



Surface hidden assumptions

"What is this plan assuming that we have not stated?"



Generate the counter-argument

"Make the strongest case against the direction I favor"



Name unintended consequences

"Who could be worse off if this works exactly as planned?"



KEY IDEA

The generation trap: AI can generate another assumption, counter-argument, or risk
Treat what it generates as something to investigate, not something it has discovered

AI in Service of Asking Better Questions

AI can help you improve the question before your team spends time answering it. It can reframe what you ask, introduce perspectives you may have missed, and test the logic behind a choice. But a better-sounding question is not automatically a better decision question.



Reframe a vague goal

“Turn ‘improve engagement’ into three decisions we could actually make.”



Bring in missing perspectives

“Whose view on this are we not hearing in the room?”



Run the scenario

“If we choose option B, what would have to be true, and what could go wrong?”



KEY IDEA

The framing trap: AI can sharpen the question while leaving the wrong premise untouched

Ask it to challenge the question, not just improve the wording

Generation Is Not Discovery

We asked it: *“Make the strongest case against expanding the reading programme from two branches to five”*

Discovery

“Participation may reflect the convenience of the new evening slots, not demand for reading”

It is reasoning from what we gave it. We told it participation rose and that the evening slots were new. It worked the logic of our own evidence and found something we had not said.

Generation

“Expanding could dilute the volunteer pool that makes the programme work”

It has no data on our volunteers. None was given, and none exists in anything it can reach. This is a plausible pattern from other organisations, written in the same confident prose.

The one on the right might well be true. That is what makes it hard. It is not wrong, it is unverified, and it does not announce which it is.



KEY IDEA

Fluency is not evidence

Treat what it produces as something to investigate, not something it found.

Five Questions for What Comes Back

You have asked AI to challenge you and to sharpen the question. Now you judge what it handed back.

1



What is this resting on?

Is this reasoning from what I gave it, or a plausible pattern filling a gap? Ask it to say which.

2



Whose view is still missing?

It answers from what has been written down. Who would disagree, and were they ever recorded anywhere?

3



Could I argue this myself?

If I act on it, can I explain why in my own words, without the tool being the reason.

4



What is it assuming?

Which of its assumptions would I need to test before this changes what I do.

5



What stays mine?

It can widen the options. The call, and the accountability for it, do not transfer.



Key Takeaway

None of these needs you to be technical

They are the same questions you have asked all day, pointed at a different source

AI can widen what you consider

Deciding what deserves your attention, and answering for it afterwards, stays with you

What an Exchange Actually Looks Like

Your Prompt

“I am deciding whether to expand an after-school reading programme from two branches to five.

Options: expand to five, expand to two more, or hold. I am leaning towards expanding.

Evidence: participation up 18% at the two pilot sites, driven by new evening slots. Participation counts sign-ups, not reading outcomes.

Make the strongest case against expanding.”

AI Returns

- Participation may reflect the convenience of evening slots, not demand for reading
- The pilot branches may have conditions the others lack: staff, a nearby school, a volunteer base
- Expanding could dilute the volunteer pool that makes it work
- Already-engaged families may absorb most of the growth

Include the decision, the options, your leaning, and the evidence in words

What an Exchange Actually Looks Like

Then, Sharpen the Question

“Given those, what question should I be asking before I decide?”

Then, sort what it gave you



Matters, and testable

The local-conditions point. Check staffing and school proximity this week. Could change the plan.



Plausible, needs checking

Volunteer dilution. It has no data on our volunteers. One question to branch leads.



Set aside

Engaged families absorbing growth. Untestable in the timeframe; would not change this decision.



What stayed yours: whether the evidence is good enough to commit public money, and the accountability if it underdelivers.

Activity 4: Use AI as a Thinking Partner

Activity

Take the decision you have carried through the day and work with AI on your own first, then compare with a partner or two

1 Challenge the decision

Give it context, then: what are we assuming? Make the strongest case against this. Who could be worse off if it works as planned?

2 Sharpen the question

“Given those possibilities, what question should I be asking before I decide?”

3 Judge what it gave you

What actually matters? What sounds plausible but needs checking? What would genuinely change what you do?

4 Name what stays yours

What judgment and what accountability remain yours, whatever it suggested? AI widens the options. It does not own the call.

Steps 3 and 4 are the point. Anyone can ask AI to challenge them.
The work is judging what comes back, and owning the decision anyway

Activity 4 Debrief: What Did We Learn from AI?



Debrief

AI is a thinking partner, not a decision maker. Its value comes from expanding and sharpening our thinking.

Our goal: Use AI to surface more possibilities and better questions, then apply our judgment to decide what matters

1

What did AI surface?

Look back at what AI generated

- What assumptions, counter-arguments, risks, or perspectives did AI raise that you had not considered?
- What new angles or questions did it give you?
- What surprised you?



Share one thing AI surfaced that expanded your thinking

2

What did you do with it?

Focus on your judgment

- Which ideas or questions felt most worth pursuing, and why?
- What sounded plausible but you chose to set aside?
- What would change the decision if it were true?



Which AI output would most improve your decision if you followed up on it?

3

How will you use AI next time?

Make it part of your process

- When will you bring AI in: at the start, the middle, or before you decide?
- What prompt or move from today will you use again?
- What stays your responsibility that AI cannot do?



Share one thing you'll try with AI on this decision this week

AI helps us see more and ask better. Our judgment decides what matters, and what we do next.

Module 4 Takeaways



Takeaway

First, from you: *If AI only has access to evidence, not reality itself, what does that mean for how much you should trust its answer?*

AI expands thinking. You own judgment, and you own accountability



AI can expand what you consider, but generation is not discovery

An assumption, risk, or counter-argument it produces is something to investigate, not automatically believe



Use AI to challenge your thinking and sharpen the questions you ask

Surface assumptions, seek counter-arguments, bring in missing perspectives, and test scenarios



A better AI answer does not remove the need for your judgment

Ask what matters, what deserves investigation, and what could actually change the decision



The leadership questions stay with you, whatever tool you use

What is this based on? Who might it work differently for? What is it assuming? Can we explain it? Who owns the judgment?



Closing

Your 30-Day Division Action Plan

What Difference Will You Make?



Takeaway

Your teams learned the behaviours. Your job is to create the conditions where those behaviours happen and survive

Today you...



Strengthened your thinking

You saw what evidence can do, and what it can't



Practiced better questions

You built the habit of challenging assumptions and seeking what's missing



Used AI with purpose

You experienced how it can expand thinking without replacing judgment



Set a plan in motion

You committed to two behaviours, real work, and early signals



Led through your example

You made a personal commitment your team is going to feel and see



Your commitments over the next 30 days



Anchor on the two behaviours: Spot Blind Spots and Ask Better Questions



Make your plan real, embedded in the work your team already does



Watch early signals in how your team works, not just what the numbers say



Review progress with the CE in 30 days and adjust based on what you learn



Keep your personal commitment. Your team will follow your example

Lead the conditions. Ask better questions. Make stronger decisions. Together.

What Your Plan Will Say



Our priority behaviour

Which of the two behaviours will make the biggest difference in our division right now, and why?

Focus on impact, not just the biggest problem



Where we will practice it

One live decision, OKR, meeting, or leadership routine to deliberately practice this behaviour

Make it part of real work, not another activity



My commitment as sponsor

The one thing I will personally change or start doing to model this behaviour

Start with yourself



What I need from the CE

Cross-division support or decisions only the CE can make to help us succeed

Be specific about the support that will unlock progress



What I will do

Two or three specific leadership moves I will take over the next 30 days

Be specific and realistic



Early signals I will look for

What I should notice in how my team works within 30 days

Observable behaviours, not lagging metrics



1

Draft your plan

Use the template and your workbook notes from today. Be specific and realistic

2

Stress-test with a peer

Pair with a leader from a different function. Peers should use these specific tests

1. Is this a real leadership behaviour, or something you're asking your team to do?
2. Is it embedded in real work rather than added as another activity?
3. Would you actually be able to see evidence of change within 30 days?

Better Decisions Start Before the Answer

Numbers inform our work but our questions shape what's next



Data is evidence about reality, not reality itself

A number is a partial view. Separate the measure from the mission.



Ask what the evidence gives you the right to believe

Name the decision first. It gives the evidence a job to do.



Aim for confidence appropriate to the consequence, not certainty

More evidence is not always better. Match the rigour to what is at stake.

Leadership in a Data-Rich World

Ask better questions
Make stronger decisions
Create a brighter tomorrow



The team holds the blind spots. You hold the key to surfacing them

Clues are spread across your team. Your seniority decides whether doubts reach you.



Your response is the real training

How you react to uncertainty teaches people what to bring next time.



AI expands the thinking. It does not own the decision

It analyses evidence faster, but generation is not discovery. You own the judgment.

Post Training Content

Workbooks, Slides, Frameworks for this session - <http://turningdataintowisdom.com/nlb-smc>

Content From Data Steward/Leader March Training - <http://turningdataintowisdom.com/nlb>