

Becoming Easier Inc.

Removing friction to make work work better

Overview

This eBook provides an introduction to Easier Inc's approach to transformation.

It anchors a series of reports that explore what it means - and what it takes - to make work work better.

Throughout these reports there are case examples and links to further resources, many of which are freely available at easierinc.com.



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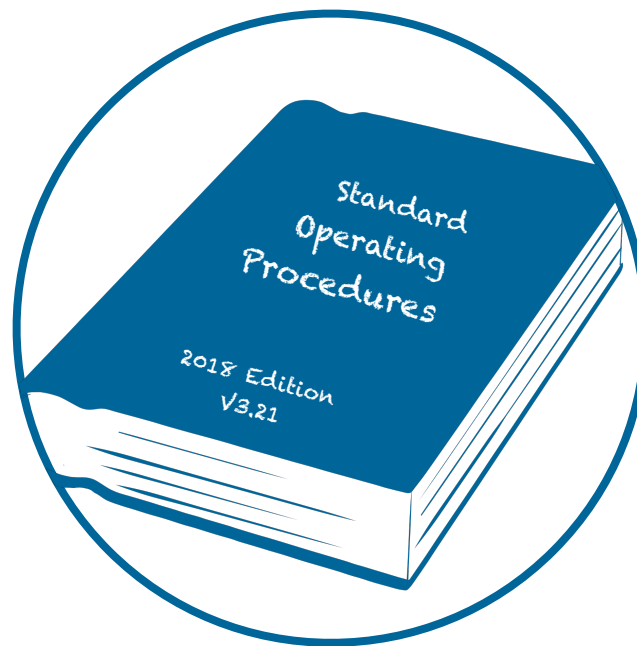
Introduction

Great performance is great but achieving it isn't always **easy**.

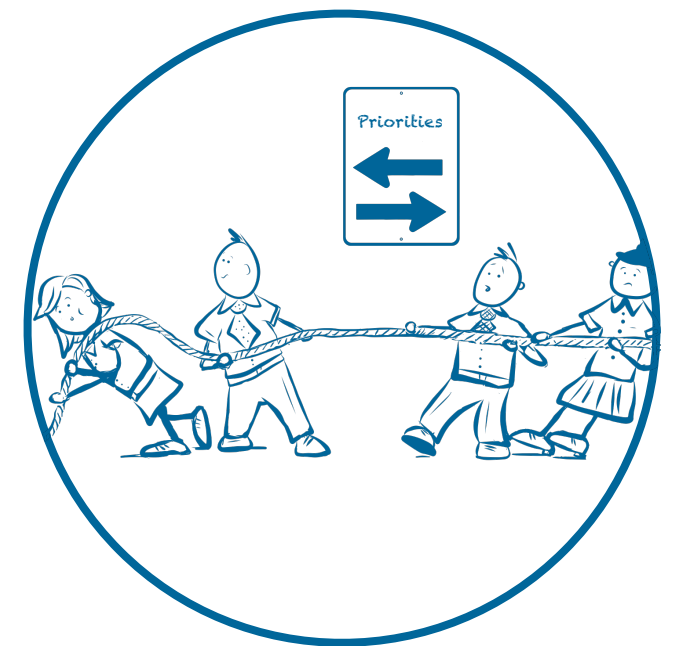
Getting things done can be tough...



For
Customers



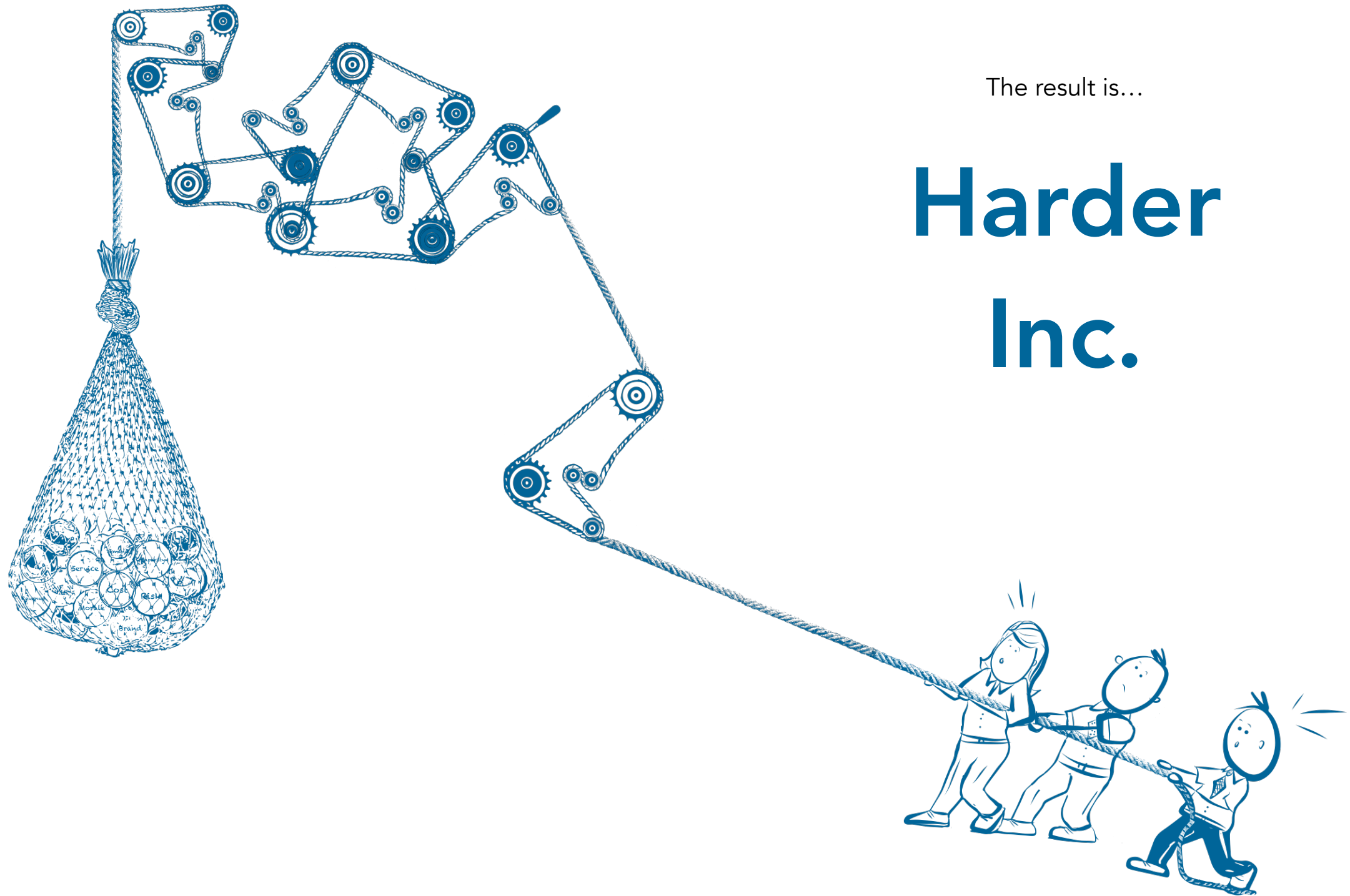
For
Colleagues



For
Collaboration

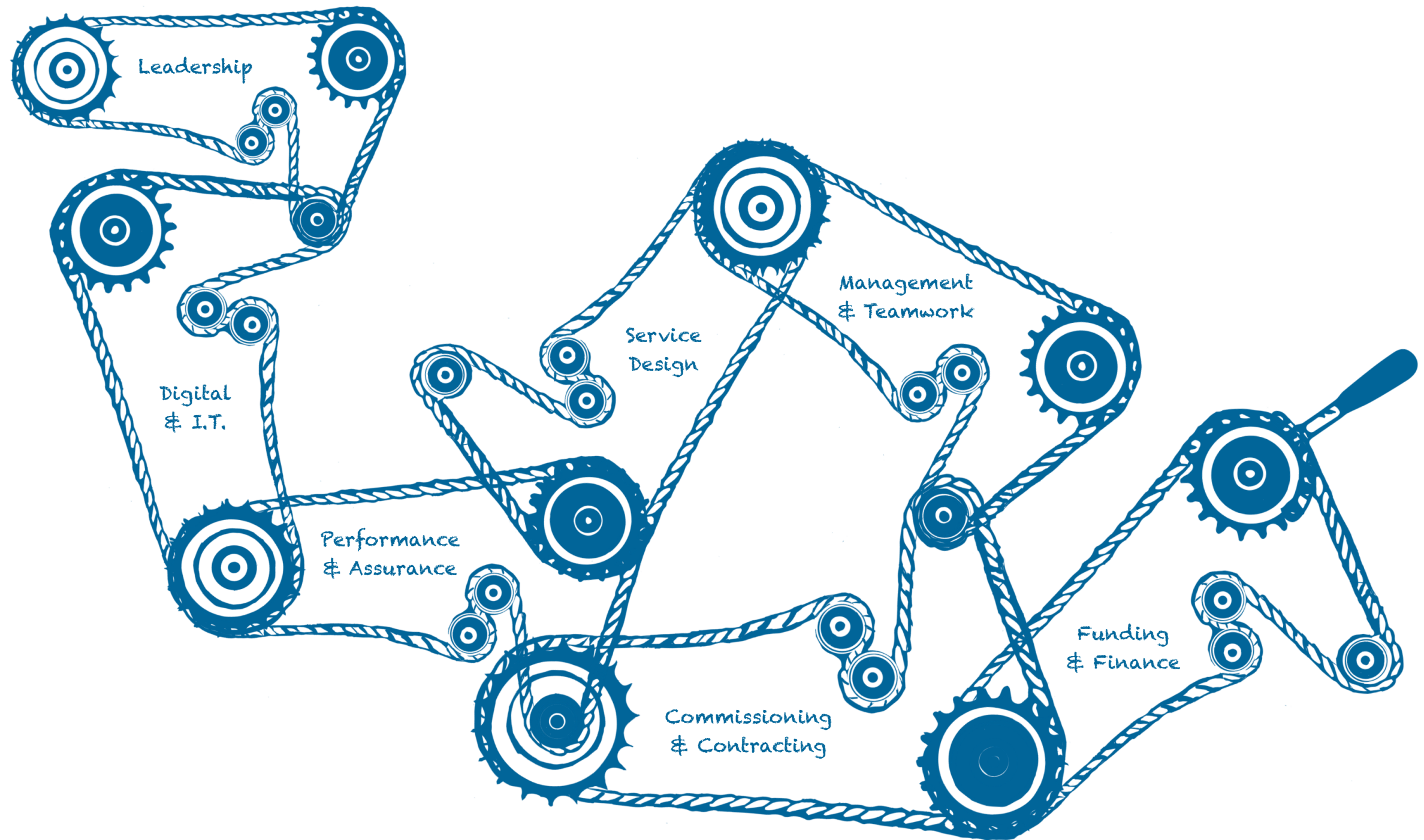
The result is...

Harder Inc.

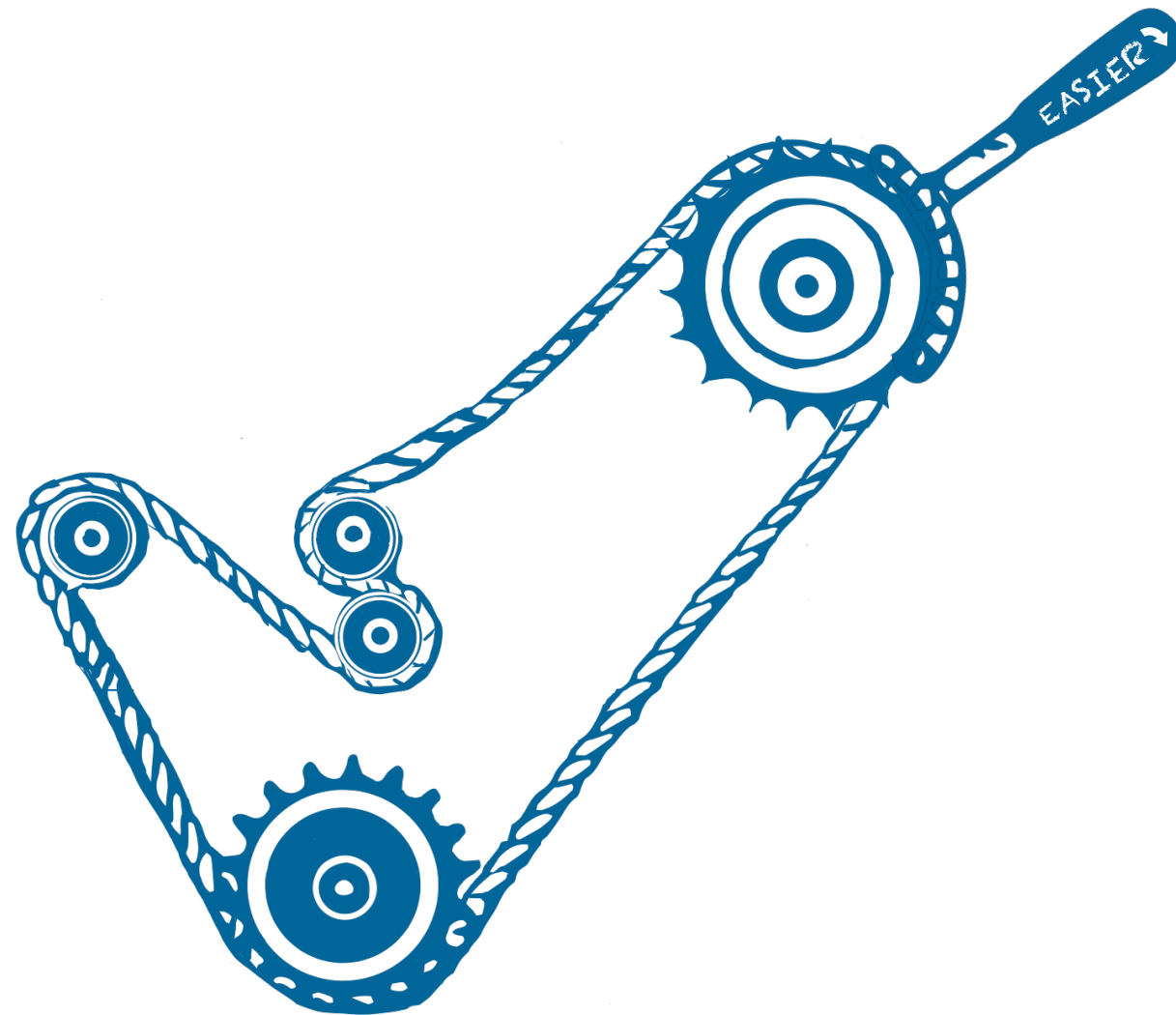


A place where keeping good performance up takes relentless **effort**.

Harder Inc. is caused by **friction** between the way that things work and the **needs** of customers, colleagues and institutions.



Understanding this friction, then acting to remove its causes
enables **more effective** ways of working...



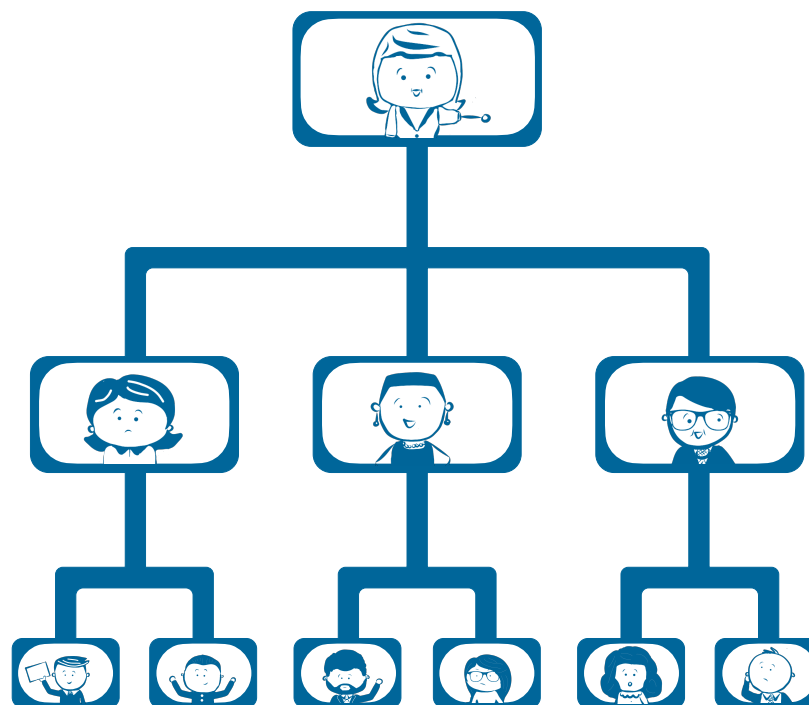
...helping organisations to shift gear
from being Harder Inc. to **becoming Easier Inc.**



Becoming Easier Inc.

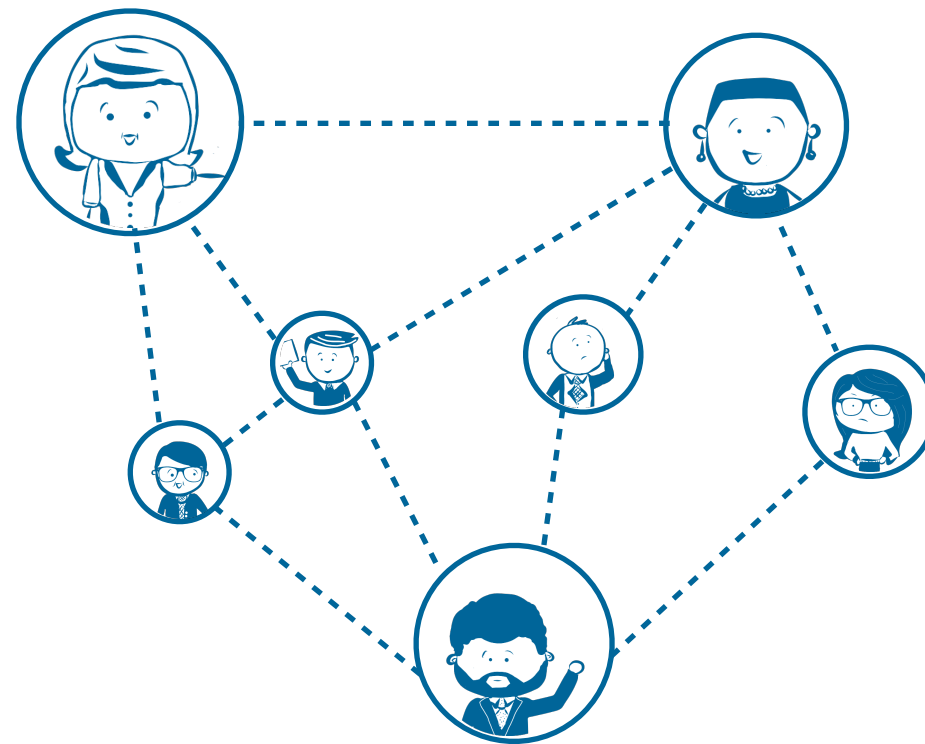
Removing friction requires ways of working to become better adapted to today's **complex world**.

Old ways, like **specify and report...**



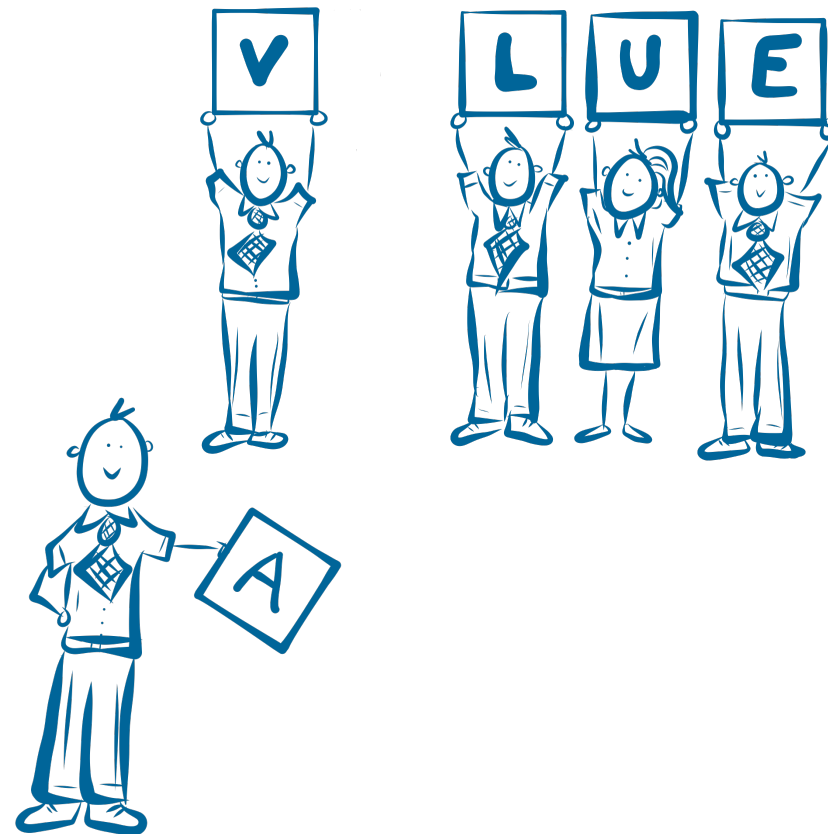
- Where what matters is **directed** through specifications, such as objectives, service level agreements, strategies and plans;
and where...
 - Adaptation relies on **reporting**, and so is constrained by the time it takes to pass information and decisions **through the structure...**

...need to give way to **more responsive** ways of working, like **sense and respond...**



- Where what matters is **discovered** through the interactions between people;
and where...
 - Adaptation happens **in the moment** or as close to the point of delivery as possible,
facilitated by locating **information and authority in the work.**

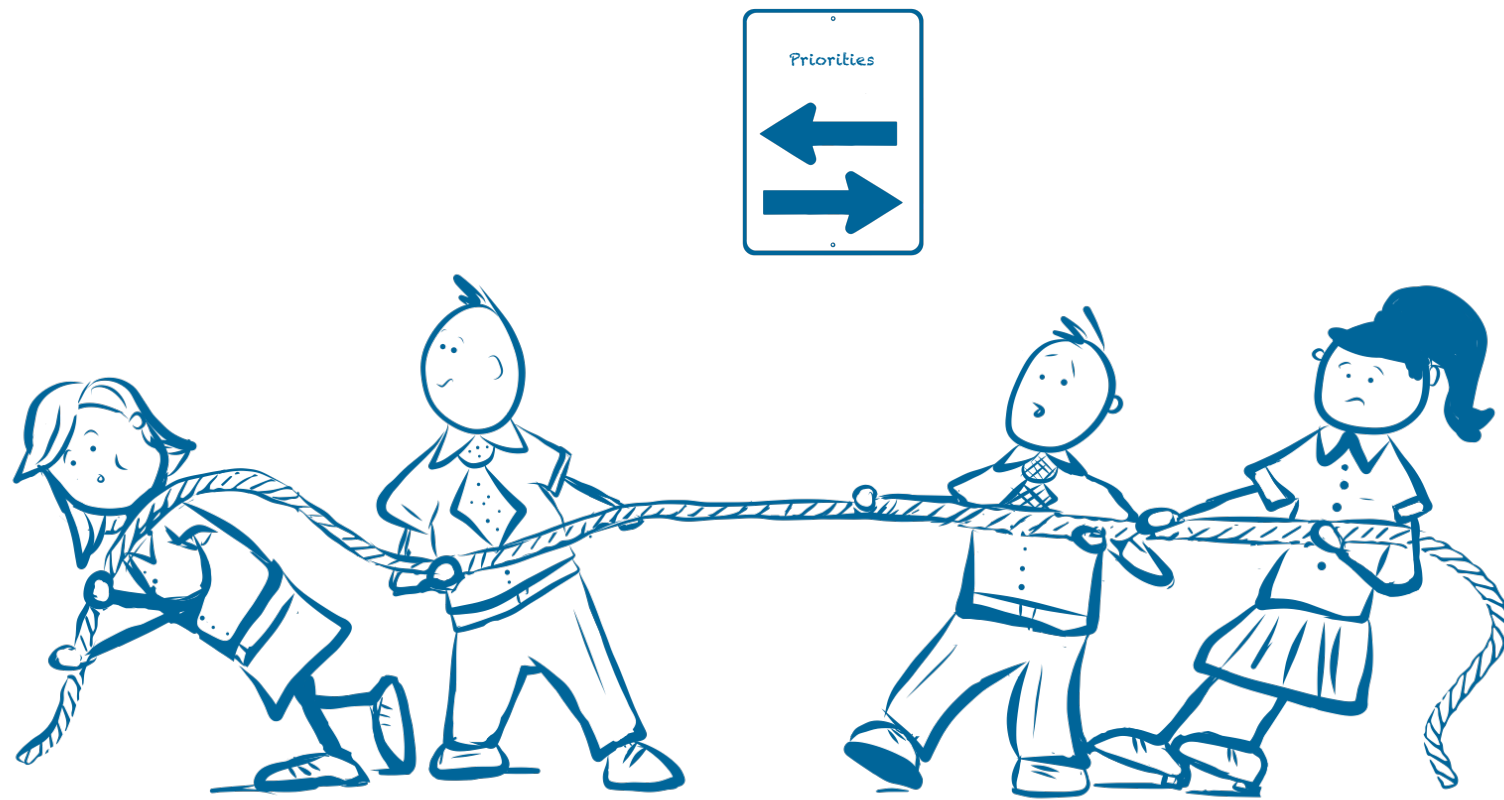
But being able to sense and respond effectively relies on maintaining a **sense of the bigger picture**, even while working at grass roots.



It means **understanding how our own work connects** with others' to **create value**.

Without this, adaptation has no anchor, except perhaps self-interest.

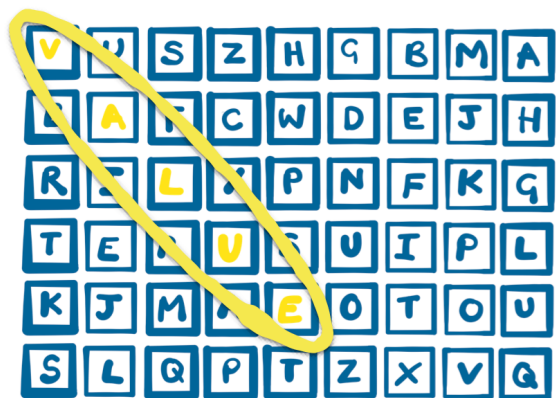
Self-interest cannot be dismissed though. Unless everyone has confidence that their **needs** will be met (which includes them having confidence that their **strengths** will be used and valued) don't be surprised if making progress continues to feel like hard work.



The better able our ways of working are at meeting all of these needs together, the more **effective, efficient and sustainable** they are likely to be.

All of this tells us a little something about what
better, more human(e) and more effective
organisations can look like,
if we choose to create them.

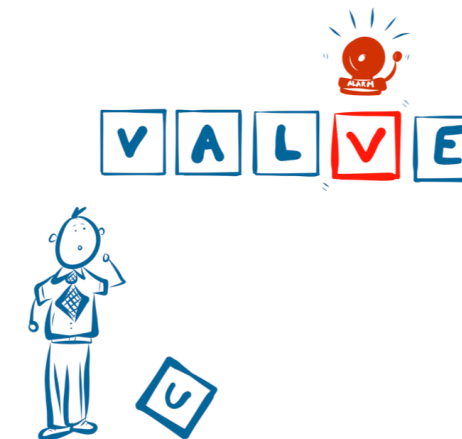
Becoming Easier Inc. means making it easier for people to...



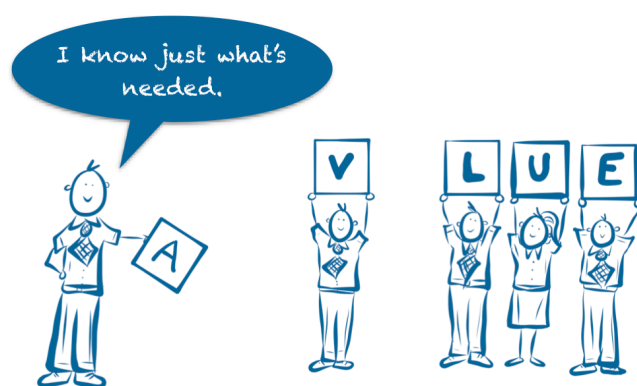
1. Make sense of complexity to focus on what really matters.



2. Understand how their work fits with other people's.



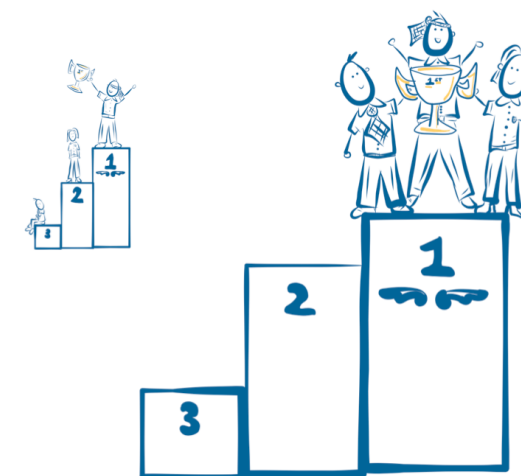
3. Learn from tight, rapid feedback loops.



4. Do the right things without needing to seek permission.



5. Get help when they need it.



6. Always win together.



Taking Action

Action always happens in a **context** and contexts vary.

This means that **principles and frameworks** are more useful than tight prescriptions and recipe-like approaches.

Our approach has been to develop a **method-of-methods**;
an organising framework that can help people to use
the right tools, at the right time for their context.

Sense-making is the engine for improvement

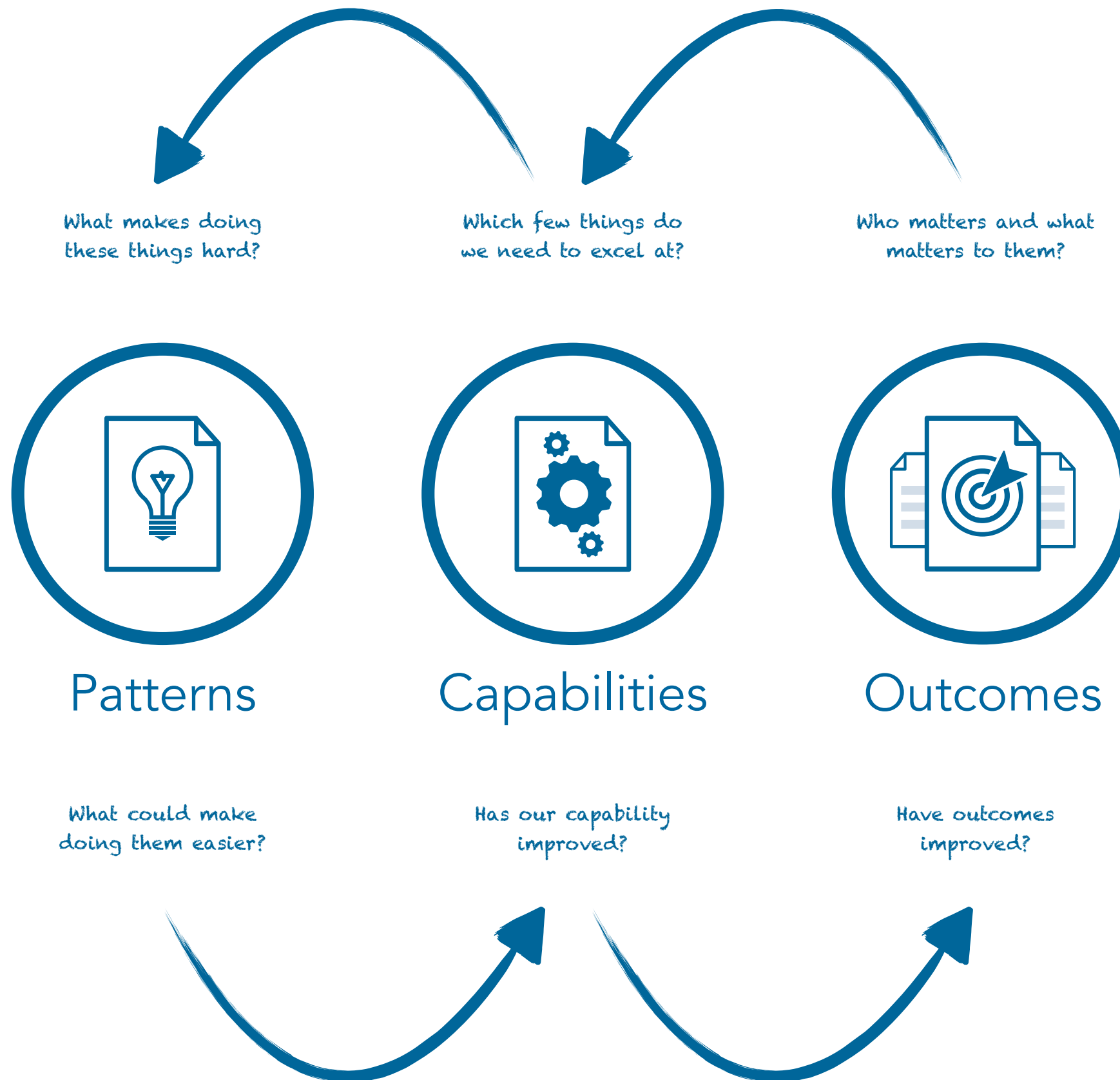
When facing into complexity, it can be hard to know where to start or how to make sense of what's happening and why. **Causes and effects blur**. Everything connects to everything else in ways that mean what really matters can quickly slide out of view.

Our **sense-making framework** (opposite) has been developed to help people see through **the fog of complexity**.

Continuously cycling through this framework can help people to **make sense of** and **stay connected to**:

- **OUTCOMES**; What really matters to the people and institutions that matter - these typically being numerous and wide ranging.
- **CAPABILITIES**; Which few things underlie our ability to achieve what really matters to these people and institutions - these typically being very limited in number and representing an opportunity to narrow focus and create shared effort *without sacrificing outcomes that matter*.
- **PATTERNS**; Which things predictably affect how easy or hard it is to deliver these capabilities in practice - these will vary in how actionable and material they are and so understanding them provides a way to prioritise improvement efforts and investment.

The faster the fog clears, the faster things will improve.



CASE STUDY 1: Zurich Life Assurance

Underwriting New Business

Key **OUTCOMES** that mattered to the company were market share, profitability and risk exposure (not wanting to underwrite customers at a price that left the company at risk). Customers wanted an insurance product that met their needs but also minimal hassle and delay in getting it. For the underwriting team, it mattered to have purposeful work and job security.

Using the **sense-making framework** it was established that **winning together** would mean increasing the **CAPABILITY** to quote on demand for new business while continuing to accurately rate customer risk. If this happened then processing costs and delays would be at a minimum, customers would be more likely to buy, brokers would be more likely to recommend Zurich and the team would have the satisfaction and security of a job well done.

In order to quote accurately on demand, the team also needed the capability to **gather only the right and relevant information 'one stop'** (i.e. at the first point of transaction and without need for follow up). This created a focal point for collaboration and learning, and revealed the key **PATTERN** affecting performance:

From fear of missing something important, underwriters were gathering enormous quantities of customer information that they predicted would have no bearing on the eventual customer risk rating and quote. This was driving wide variations in underwriting practice and increasing costs, delays, hassle and lost business. It was also undermining the underwriters' sense of purposeful work.

To overcome this fear, small scale tests of change were conceived that would allow underwriters to use increased judgement about what information to gather while maintaining their confidence that customer needs and risk ratings were being accurately understood. To read more about this >>> [click here](#).

By acting on this **PATTERN**, the team's **CAPABILITY** to quote on demand increased from 46% of cases to 87%, and to 96% following a short supplementary phone call which previously would have been done in writing. This translated into €2m of additional new business that would previously have been lost. Underwriters reported greater job satisfaction, customers were happier and brokers voted for Zurich Life Assurance to win the annual "Overall Financial Broker Excellence Award". Better **OUTCOMES** for all.

CASE STUDY 2: North Devon Healthcare

Lab Pathology (Medical Diagnostics)

In North Devon, healthcare partners knew that unnecessary testing was being done in the local pathology lab. Estimates put this at 20-40% of all testing activity but little progress had been made.

Over-testing affects **OUTCOMES** for everyone. While commissioners and providers see significant efficiency impacts, patients experience over-testing as various forms of harm, from increased anxiety to interventions that should have been avoided. For healthcare staff this breaks their Hippocratic oath and affects their sense of vocation.

Using the **sense-making framework**, partners developed some simple statements to capture the **CAPABILITIES** that they believed were needed for things to work well. Key amongst these were:

- There is a well-formulated clinical question from which it is possible to derive 'necessary and sufficient testing'.
- The request arrives at the point of testing in a state that allows the question to be answered.

Quickly a **PATTERN** emerged; clinical questions were not being shared at the interface between requesting clinicians and the lab, meaning that a key **feedback loop** was missing between lab pathologist (who had detailed knowledge of which tests could answer which clinical questions and what results mean) and requesting clinicians (who had a detailed understanding of each patient's circumstances). Clinicians were requesting test activity but the lab had no insight into what the purpose of that activity was. To read more about this >>> [click here](#).

Action to reintroduce this feedback loop:

- *Reduced demand into pathology to pre-2004 levels where it has stabilised despite previously growing at 5% per year.*
- *This was achieved with no reduction in pathology detected (i.e. sick patients were still being identified, not ignored).*
- *Testing costs reduced by £200,000 across a population of around 180,000 people, with downstream referral costs reducing by a similar amount.*

If sense-making is the engine, conversations are the lubricant

While the **sense-making framework** provides a means to help people focus on what really matters, it is by translating this focus into everyday conversations that performance and improvement can become a well oiled machine.

To support this, we have developed some simple **conversation routines** that are easy for people to adopt and adapt in their own context, and which help to make the work of clearing the fog and removing the friction easier, faster and more sustainable.

We call these the **conversations that make work work better** (opposite):

- **CHECK IN** conversations provide simple but structured approaches to making sense of what really matters, what's happening and what needs to happen so that alignment, momentum and mutuality are developed and maintained.
- **CHECK OUT** conversations ensure that clarity is maintained so that actions and decisions happen with a clear head and so that important issues don't slide out of view or become 'undiscussable'.
- **CHECK THAT** conversations provide a reinforcing loop and important opportunities for reflective practice, coaching conversations and generative dialogue. They are also a key mechanism for safely devolving the locus of control.

For illustrations of these conversations in practice see our blogs:

- A little blog about purpose >>> [click here](#)
- R.I.P. A.O.B. >>> [click here](#)

And for a deeper exploration of the perspective underpinning **CHECK THAT** conversations see our blogs on:

- Accountability >>> [click here](#)
- The Box That Ticked Itself >>> [click here](#)

Conversations That Make Work Work Better

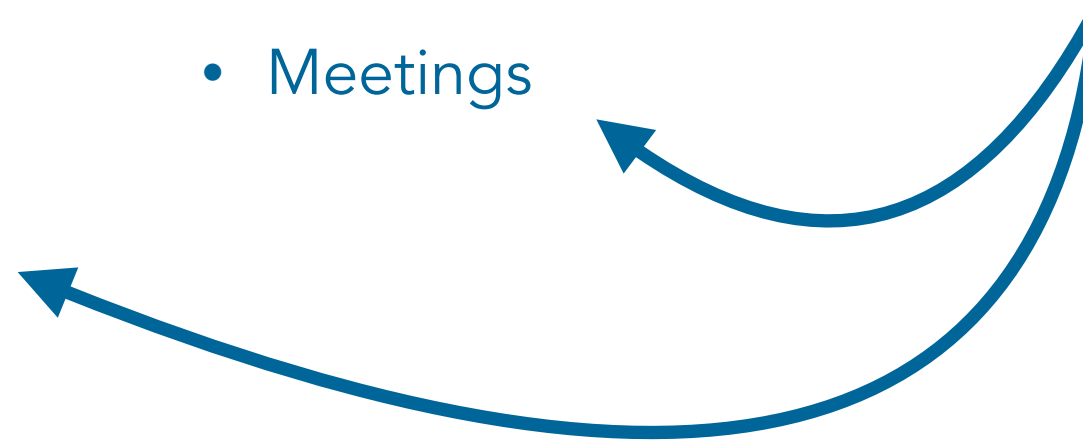
CHECK IN

- Purpose
- People
- Process
- Progress
- Planning

CHECK OUT

- Meetings

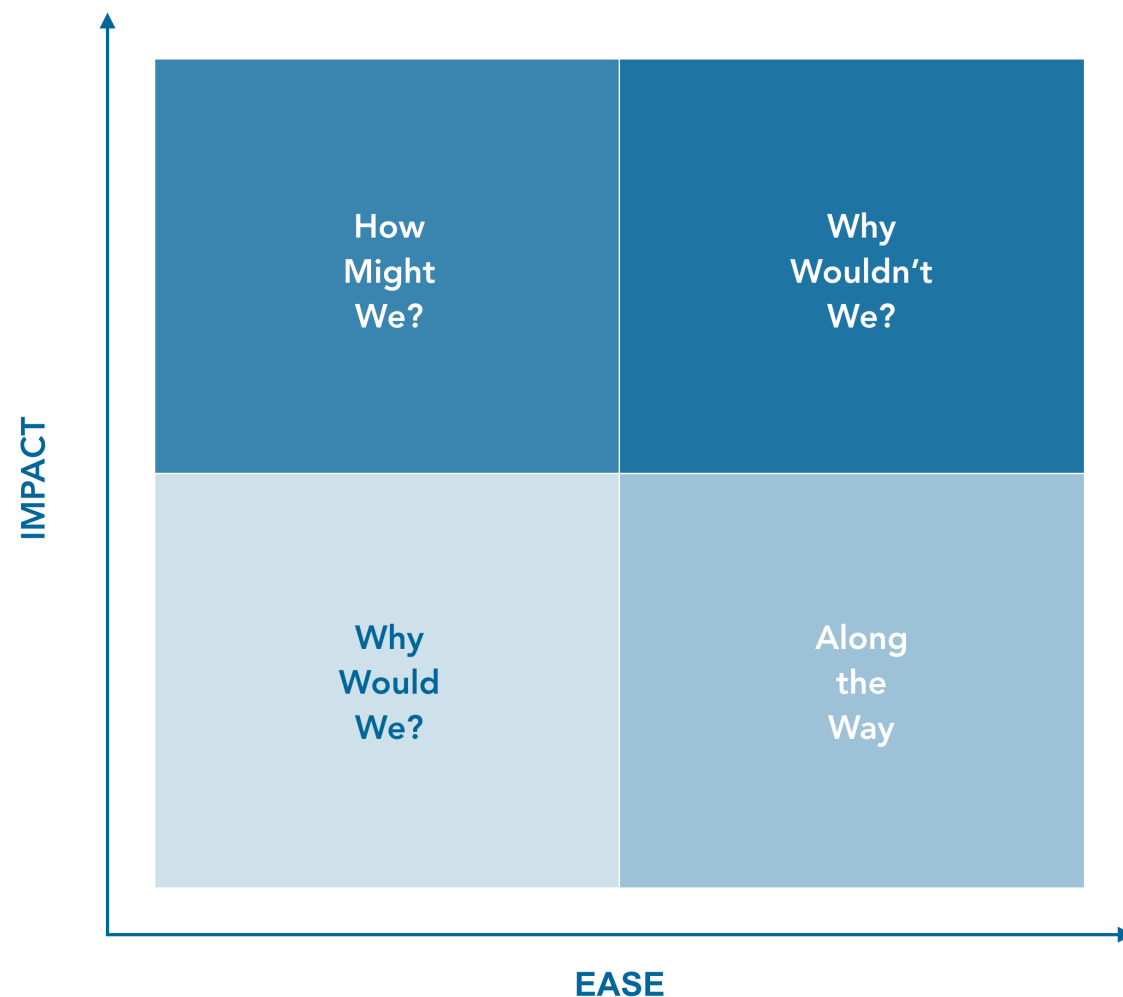
CHECK THAT



There's still a place for tools

Maintaining clarity and momentum benefits from having some great improvement tools. When we look at what's available though, there are too many tools to count and many of them can be hard to understand and easy to misapply. This cuts against the aims of improvement, where tools need to be simple, clear and accessible so that **systematically improving can be an everyone sport**, not just the preserve of experts.

We've worked hard to simplify many of the tools and approaches that seem to be most useful most often, such as our approach to helping people develop clear and shared priorities; the **Easier Impact Matrix**...



- Plotting ideas for improvement into this matrix, near-term priorities tend to emerge on the right - things that are easy or relatively easy to change and do now.
- On the left of the matrix, it's easy to see what could make a difference with appropriate investment of time, money, etc. It's also easy to see what would be a waste of those things.
- Looking to the top left box, the matrix also helps people to ask important second order questions about what makes the hard stuff hard, and what this could suggest about the benefits of taking on some wider strategic initiatives (see opposite).
- Coupled to the **conversations that make work work better**, this matrix provides a very simple way to continually surface and make shared sense of the underlying - often undiscussed - patterns that lock friction in place.

Not every new component needs to be manufactured from scratch

Over the years, work to remove friction has revealed **predictable patterns**; things that consistently make work easier or harder, regardless of context. These represent significant **strategic opportunities** to break from the norms of Management 1.0 and to accelerate improvement.

Context still matters of course, meaning that employing solutions that have been developed elsewhere is rarely plug-and-play but neither is it a matter of starting from scratch. The opportunity is to connect to what has already been developed and to what others are developing now, so that your own efforts can build on them to **go further and faster**.

To support this, **alongside a range of clients, collaborators and cool people** we have met along the way, we've been developing:

Resources



Easier Commissioning & Contracting

Achieving results through relationships.



Easier Funding & Finance

Cost transparency where no-one pays a price.



Easier Performance & Assurance

Generative learning for real improvement.



Easier Service Design

Creating simple service designs that work.



Easier Management & Teamwork

Coaching cultures of responsible practice.



Easier Digital & I.T.

Doing digital while spending wisely.



Easier Leadership

From followership to fellowship.



Easier Strategy

Removing friction, creating advantage.

Communities



Next Stage Radicals

Clients, collaborators and cool people who are 'Exploring Aloud' together.



Human. Learning. Systems.

Framing a new paradigm for public service; sharing 'Learning. To Help The World Work'.

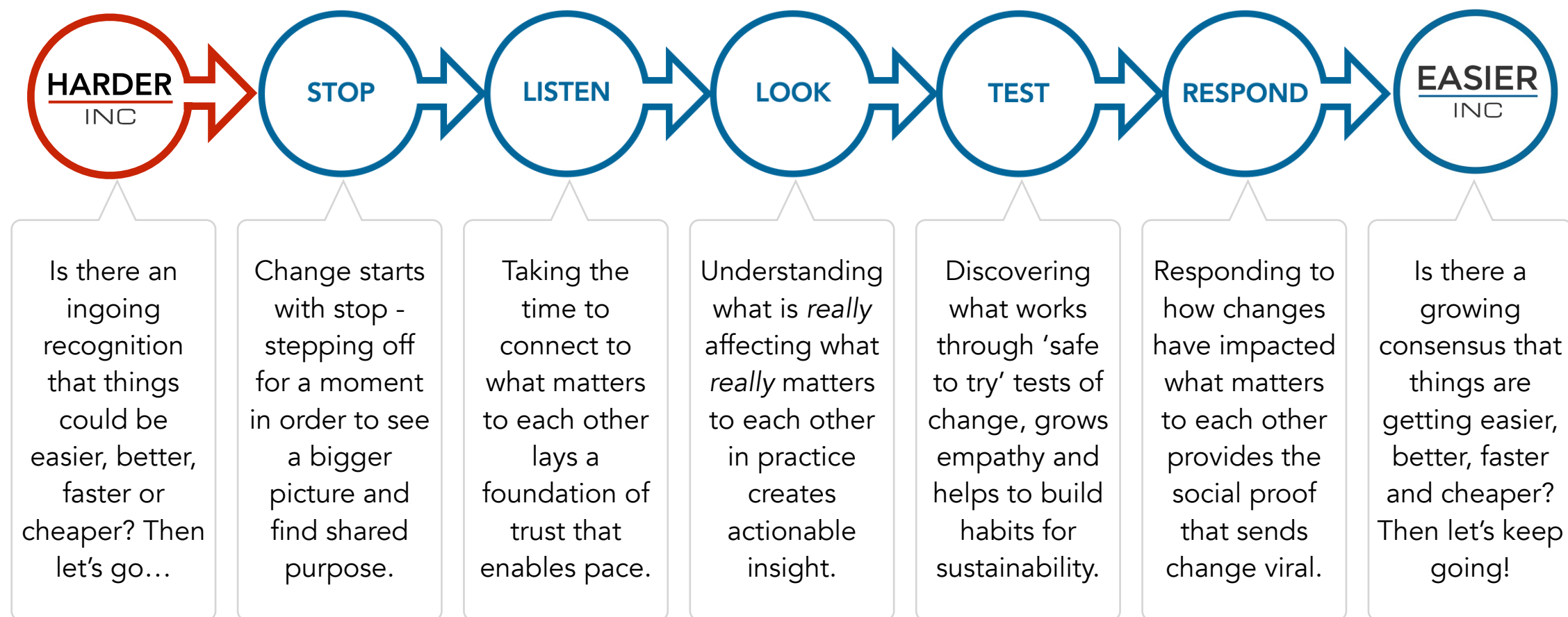
You can access all of this through our resource library and e-learning resources >>> [click here](#)

Change is still a journey and having a route map helps

Becoming Easier Inc. - i.e. removing friction to make work work better - will not always be easy! **'Easier' is the outcome** but the process still takes hard work and so it can be tempting to reach for the old tropes that categorise people into early adopters, laggards and resisters. Doing so is rarely helpful.

More helpful is to recognise that change is a **technical** and a **social** process; a process of **getting knowledge** about what works and a process of **building trust and empathy** so that it can work here.

In practice, these two elements are so bound up in each other as to be **inseparable** so, as you work to clear the fog of complexity and remove friction, it helps to have a route map to guide you on the road ahead.



Change travels at the speed of **trust**.

Trust grows at the rate of **empathy**.

Trust is the **outcome**. Empathy is the **practice**.

Since **behaviour is reciprocal...**

If we **want more change** then we should **show more empathy**.

Change goes viral when **empathy is the vector**.



Method-of-Methods

Change isn't easy but...

So change isn't easy but it doesn't have to be complicated *and it can get easier*.

Paying attention to **what really matters** to the people and institutions that matter, **clearing the fog of complexity**, working from **empathy**, being **learning-led** and emphasising action through simple '**safe to try, safe to fail**' **tests of change** can lay the **groundwork for greater ambition at greater pace and scale**.

The trick, as is the trick with all outcomes, is to recognise that **what we want** (better, faster, cheaper) is different from **how to get there** (easier).

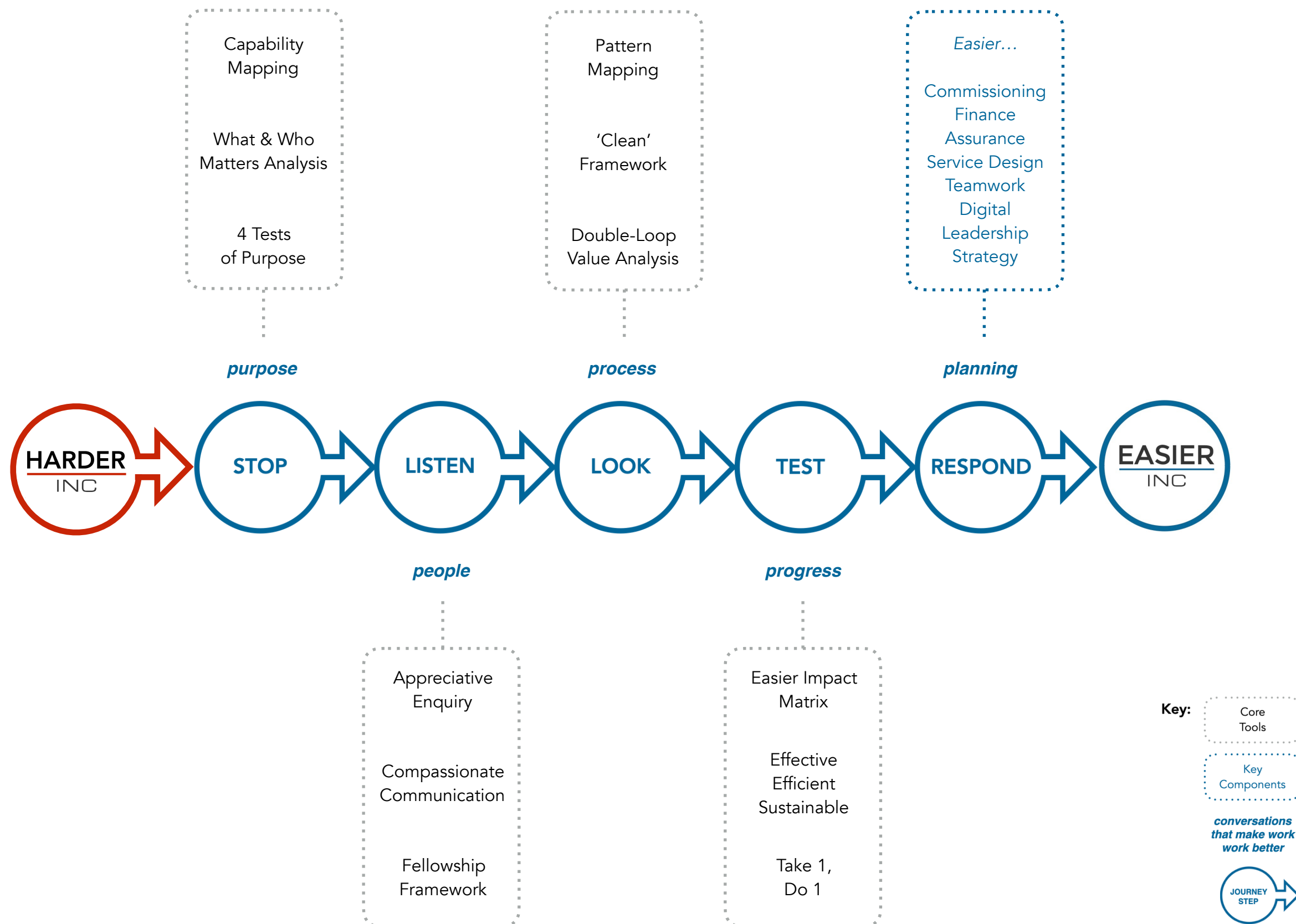
By embedding our sense-making framework within conversations that make work work better, and by weaving those together with selected tools and components in a simple journey of change, our **method-of-methods** approach (see opposite) can help you to get there.

To find a detailed case study of this method-of-methods approach in use, written independently by one of our clients, see:

- Results through relationships, a 5 blog series >>> [click here](#)

You can find further insights from this work at:

- Improving end of life care: what does good look like? >>> [click here](#)
- Personalised care: what matters to you? >>> [click here](#)





Notes:

Notes:



“There are four purposes for improvement: easier, better, faster and cheaper. These four goals appear in the order of priority.”

Shigeo Shingo

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