



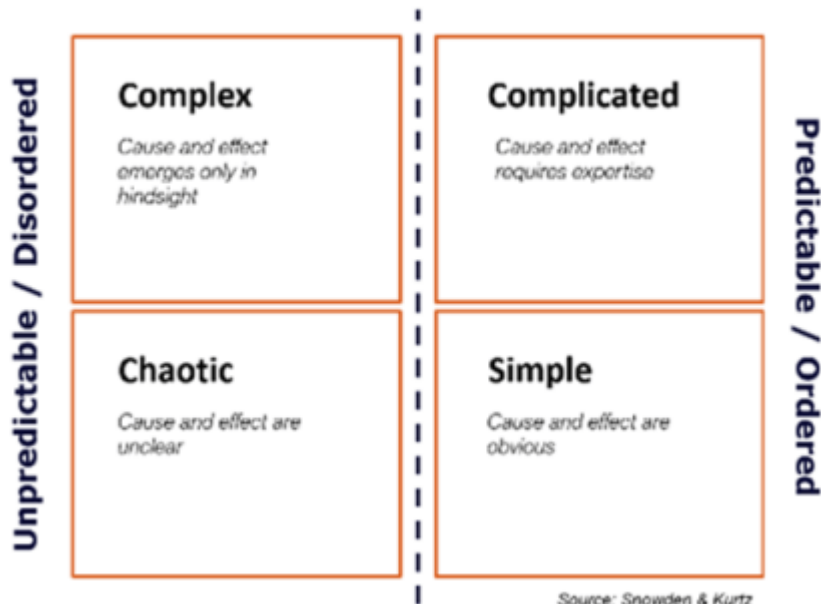
by Ted Delicath and Danny Kenny

Trust serves as the foundation and fuel of our Team of Teams' core capabilities. During a crisis, pre-established trust speeds and deepens a team's response and impact. In contrast, an absence of trust creates friction and apprehension, the last things you need in an already time and resource-poor environment. So here is how we recommend establishing, intensifying, and sustaining trust in preparation for the next inevitable fight.

Insuring against the cost of a crisis - Why trust is your organization's most effective insurance policy

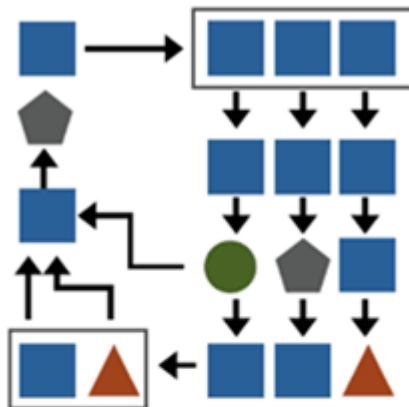
Team of Teams & The Age of Complex Crises

The Cynefin Framework



When General McChrystal, CEO & Chairman of [McChrystal Group](#), codified our Team of Teams methodology around 2014, he proposed an operating system for leaders who realized they now led in a complex, instead of complicated, environment. Made famous in the Cynefin Framework by David Snowden and others, unpredictability (among other factors) separates a complex environment from a complicated one. Most recently, COVID-19 revealed that our playbooks are just a starting point during a complex crisis. Once our checklists no longer resembled the crisis before us, effective responses to complex challenges required constant communication, adaptability, and resilience—each requiring trust to succeed.

Before several crises forced General McChrystal to rethink his worldview, he believed leaders resembled chess masters who can dictate an effective response to a complicated problem set, which often entails clear cause and effect. His experiences over the last twenty years, especially during many crises, showcased the lie behind a persistent illusion: The most significant challenges we face are often complex, not complicated, requiring us to rethink how we lead and respond.

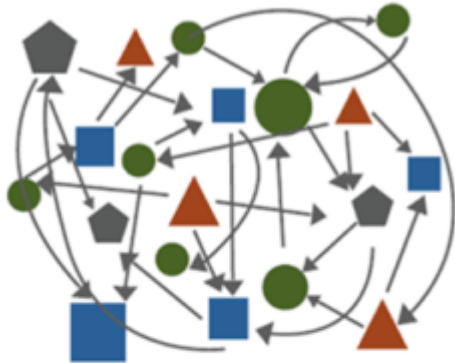


COMPLICATED

System has multiple components joined together in predictable ways, adhering to understood rules that expertise can manage

Example: Internal combustion engine

Complex environments are more likely to produce unexpected outcomes that don't always play well with 'rinse and repeat' formulas. The speed of today's technology and the global nature of our connections make any understanding of 'cause and effect' a muddy proposition. Instead of chess grandmasters, complex environments ask us to take the approach of gardeners. In this role, success sources from leaders and organizations who set conditions and provide flexible guidance with clear guardrails to their teammates closest to the problems. This empowerment formula



COMPLEX

System has multiple components that interact in unpredictable ways without a fixed set of rules, and is more challenging than the sum of its parts

Example: The "break" in a game of pool

allows those teams to respond as unexpected situations inevitably unfold, showcasing the importance of empowerment during a crisis.

Previewed above, shifting from complicated to complex asks teams and organizations to rethink and restructure. General McChrystal created the Team of Teams methodology to help teams successfully navigate that transition. A successful transition invites organizations to scale the most compelling aspects of world-class teams to the enterprise level. Born out of studying how elite small teams (usually under 30) consistently operate with excellence in all environments but especially crises, we identified **four sequential core capabilities** that were common to groups across nearly all domains:



TRUST

Faith in the benevolence, competence, and integrity of a teammate



COMMON PURPOSE

Unifying goals & values that transform free agents into a committed, driven team



SHARED KNOWLEDGE

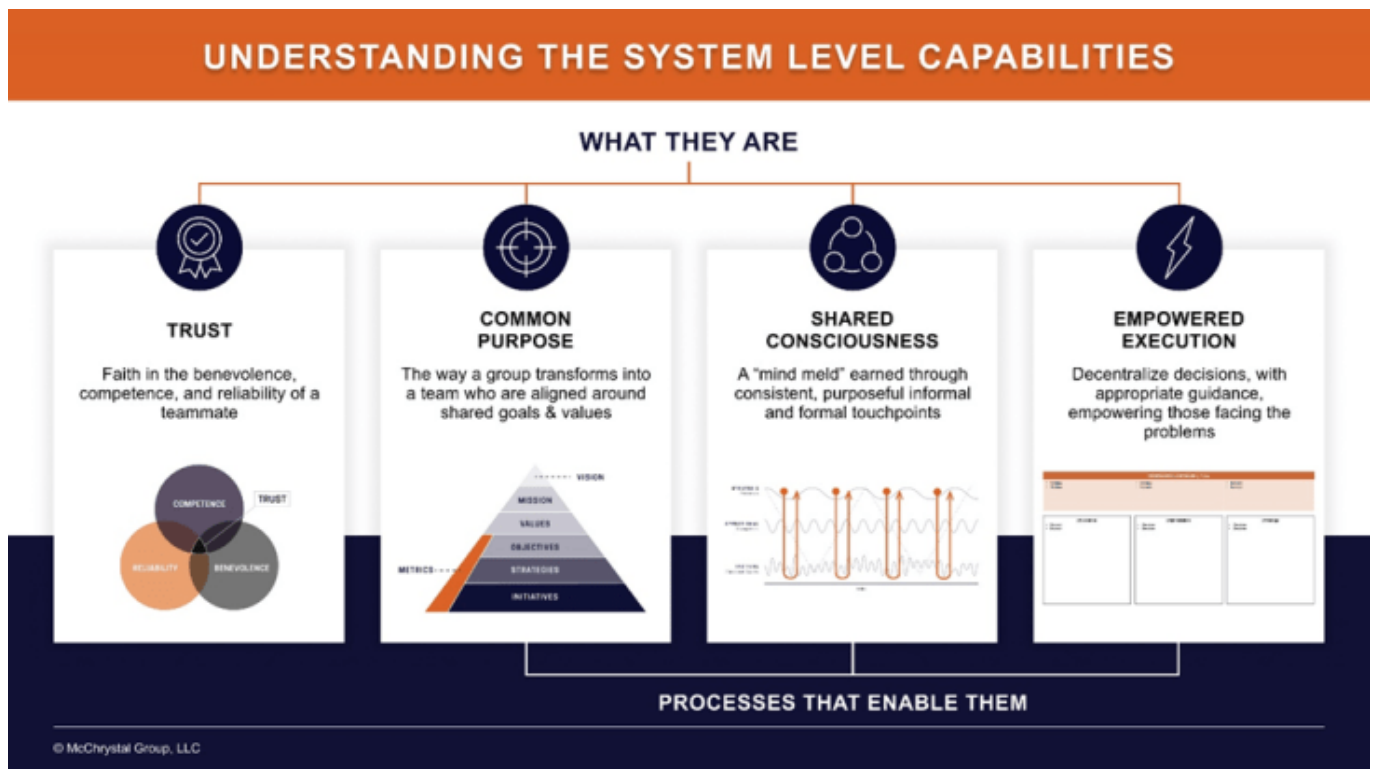
Evergreen understanding of how org-internal ops meet external demands, created via consistent purposeful connections



EMPOWERED EXECUTION

Decentralized decision-making to the level necessary to outpace competitors and the environment

Creating a Team of Teams challenges leaders to elevate those capabilities throughout the organization. We understand this can be easier said than done which is why we've developed an accompanying toolkit to explain, operationalize, and implement these core capabilities.



Understanding & Building Trust Before the Next Crisis



However, no one can fabricate trust where the seeds do not already exist. Our Trust Model deconstructs trust into three buckets, encouraging teams to realize that earning and improving trust is possible. Eloquently explained by [James Kerr](#) on [McChrystal Group's No Turning Back podcast](#), environments are not *trust neutral*. They are products of our choices, many of which are under our control. Specifically, you can focus on these three interconnected facets to create pro-trust spaces and cultures. Therefore, cultivating trust is a conscious choice available to all teammates and the duty of leaders with comparatively greater executive power.

Knowledge alone, however, rarely translates into action. And of all the core capabilities, **trust is the hardest to build when crisis strikes** — time-poor environments require teams to assume their teammates' competence, benevolence, and reliability or miss critical opportunities. When mistakes arise, which they inevitably will, a lack of trust will introduce friction into an already inefficient system, causing avoidable errors that cost dollars and, at worst, lose lives.

No approach provides a “one-size-fits-all approach” to cultivating trust, but some are more effective than others. Just as complexity and crises necessitate creative, context-specific responses, earning trust requires leaders and organizations to adapt best practices to the demands of the moment and continuously adjust throughout the process.

With that understanding, we offer a system of behaviors and approaches that instill and increase trust between our teams across various crisis-prone environments. What follows pulls from US special-operations organizations, emergency management teams, crisis fusion cell centers, and many more crisis professionals who worked to build teams thick with trust before the crash.

“When COVID came, there was no time to build trust...” - Midwest COVID Response Leader

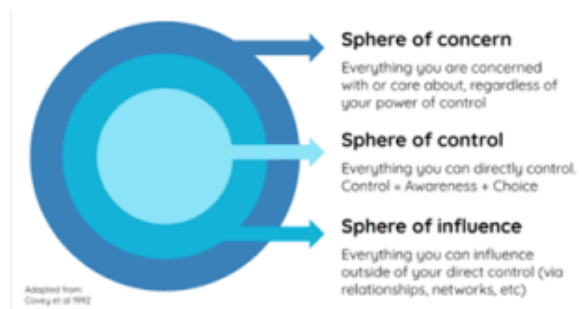
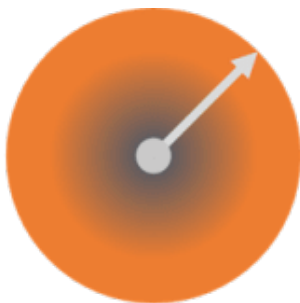
Earned through our teammates' many years leading in austere, crisis-prone environments, McChrystal Group understands trust as an ongoing commitment that organizations, leaders, and teams add to or detract from daily. Drawn from our direct experience and supported by academic research, we believe three approaches can have an outsized impact on creating and intensifying trust:

1. **Name Limits** - Introduce & acknowledge your organization's sphere of control
2. **Close Gaps** - Eliminate your say-do gap through clearer decision space

3. **Fail Fast** - Encourage productive failure with a Minimum Viable Product mindset

Name Limits, Sphere of Control & Influence - *What's in and out of our control, and what to do about it.*

A flexible concept invoked across a range of domains from personal development to international relations, we depict the sphere of control & influence (SoCI) as a circle where your power lessens the further you stray from the middle. Most often demarcated between three separate spheres—control, influence, and concern—McChrystal Group believes such tidiness looks comforting but ultimately lies to leaders. Instead, today's complex challenges are more [greyscale](#), challenging leaders to evaluate the potential impact of their response and adapt accordingly. Importantly, where an organization determines they fall within the SoCI influences their possible responses. What might seem like an obvious point is nontrivial: Crises create time-poor environments. If organizations let go of what's outside their control, they avoid wasting time on ineffective options.



Difference in a Complicated vs. Complex SoCI Model

The more common depiction on the right clearly demarcates between control, influence, & concern. While helpful conceptually, such tidiness belies the messy reality of leading in a crisis. Less comforting but more accurate, the picture on the left embodies a more complex outlook, trading out crisp borders for ambiguous gradations.

To model the SoCI mindset, leaders should look to [Diana Chapman](#) of the Conscious Leadership Group. Diana coined the difference between “by me” leadership versus “to me” leadership.

- **By-me:** A by-me outlook recognizes that personal “emotional states, my physical states, my mental states, are happening *by me*. The circumstances are not ultimately the cause of my direct experience here.”
- **To-me:** In contrast, a to-me perception wallows in the outer bands of the SoCI,

dwelling on what's outside of its control

Equipped with both a model and a mindset, our most influential partners leverage both frequently. First, leaders work with their teams to identify where they are within the SoCI. Because complex challenges are often ambiguous, teams usually place their potential responses along a spectrum from direct control to outer influence. With their desired end state in mind, the team then identifies their most efficacious course of action—given the constraints of the situation—and moves out, leaving what they can't control behind.

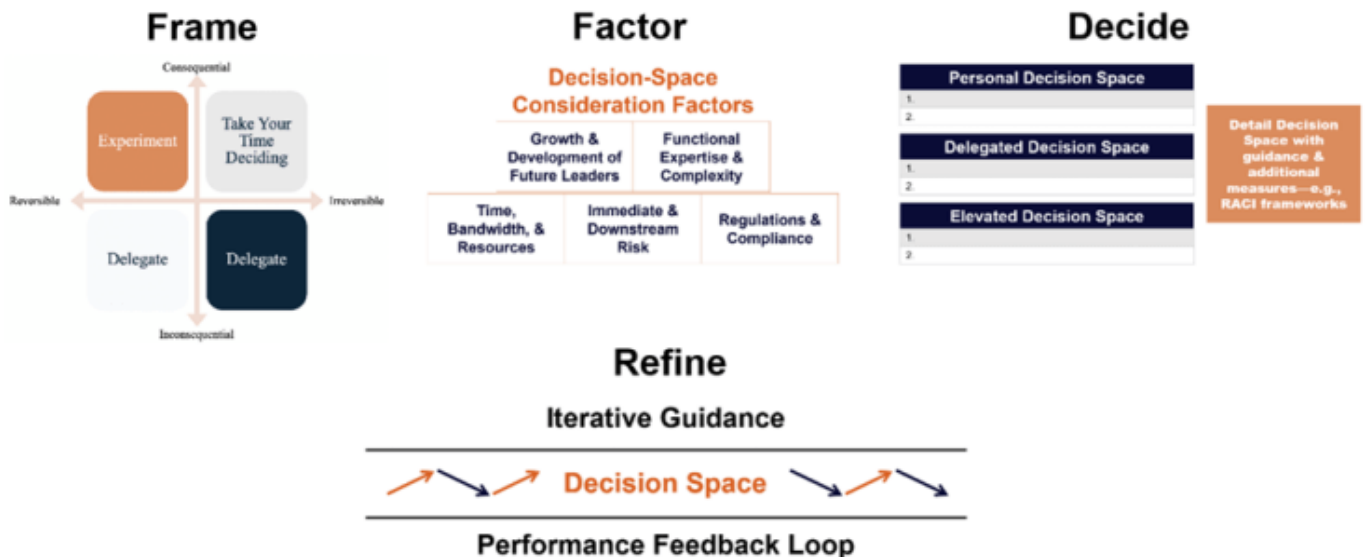
In creating the conditions for greater personal and institutional trust, our partners' feedback explains that the SoCI model and approach create a common framework and language that all teammates understand. Practiced frequently, teams feel confident in the organization's decision-making process and are, at minimum, aligned even if not in agreement.

Close Gaps, The Say-Do Gap - *How sunlight between what you say and do erodes institutional and personal trust*

Employing the SoCI model is necessary but insufficient for creating a pro-trust environment. Once we decide on the path forward, what you say must match what you do. Failure to follow through undermines credibility, and if your team cannot trust you in calm waters, then there is little chance they will believe in you when crises come.

At the McChrystal Group, one of the tools we use to close the say-do gap is called "decision space," which is most intimately interrelated to the core capability of empowered execution. In essence, we use decision space to delineate what I am responsible for, what you are responsible for, and what, if anything, needs to be escalated or delegated to a different level. The tool orders the institutional response, creating clear expectations: What is my work and what is your work, and anything that falls in the gray space signals the need to convene, discuss, and decide.

How to Develop Decision Space



Decision Space Sets Expectations & Expectations Foster Trust

Time and attention are our most precious leadership resources. Given our constraints, leaders must determine what decisions they can delegate. Step One of framing helps leaders determine where to invest their limited focus and what are those decisions, they can involve others in or give away completely. From there, factoring determines who is best positioned to take part or take on that decision. The clarity from the first two steps equips leaders to explicitly decide what they will retain, what they will delegate, and what guidance is required. From there, teams should iterate repeatedly to refine what's working, what's not, and how to optimize decision space to achieve the mission.




Logically, SoCI orders your environment and proposed response.

From there, decision space, structures that proposed action with by-name accountability and guidance that sets limits for where a teammate's decision space encroaches on someone else's lane. Done well, this eliminates chokepoints where too many responsibilities fall to one teammate. It also empowers people closest to the problems to solve them proactively and creatively without unnecessary bureaucratic input from those disconnected from the on-the-ground reality.

Clear decision space thus furthers trust by dividing an agreed-upon course of action into by-name lanes of responsibility, eliminating ambiguity and empowering teammates.

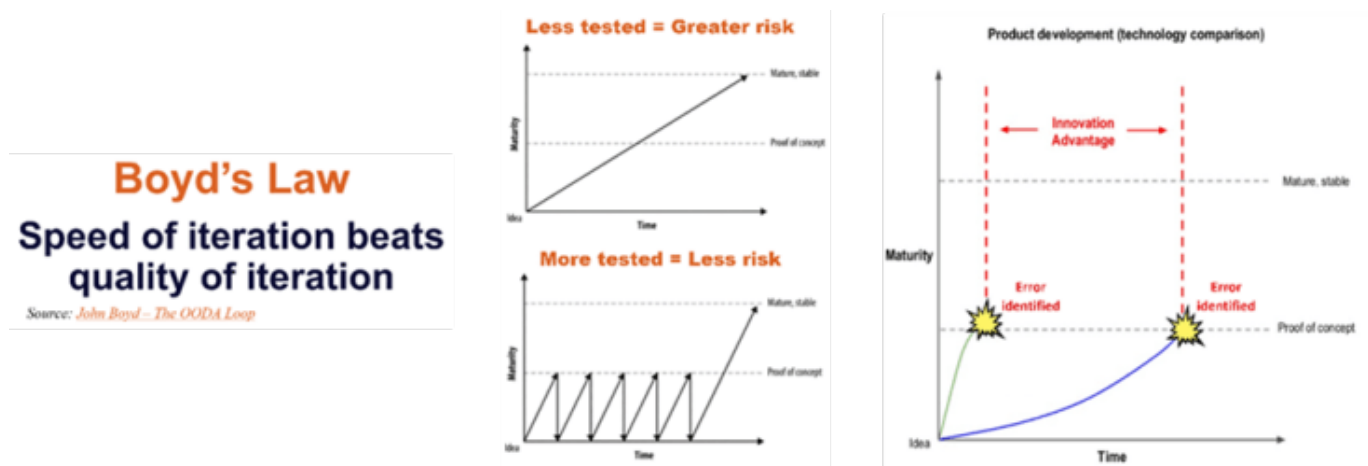
Fail Fast, The Minimum Viable Product Mindset - How redefining failure as learning improves organizational trust and spurs innovation

MVP Logic

-  **Some assumptions are wrong**
-  **But we don't know which ones**
-  **MVP is the tool to solve the problem**

Most prominent in the tech sector, the **minimum viable product** (MVP) concept redefines failure as learning. Moreover, many tech firms see the speed of learning (fail quickly) as a risk mitigation measure against the asymmetry of what we don't know we don't know.

In our partnership, we encourage our leaders to embrace an MVP mindset—choosing messy curiosity over fabricated certainty. However, leaders often arrive in their roles after decades of experience and expertise. Tragically, many leaders feel handcuffed by their previous success, scared to trade what's worked to this point for what will serve them, their teams, and the organization moving forward. The MVP outlook changes the leader's dynamic as a boss with answers to a teammate with questions: "How do I uncover my blind spots—and fast? Where are the voices closest to the problem? What's our most direct route to the information necessary to (in)validate our hypothesis?"



Translating MVP Theory into Practice

McChrystal Group melds John Boyd's OODA Loop with the MVP mindset to provide a framework of "productive failure." Leaders provide minimum viable guidance above which teams are empowered to create, test, evaluate, and adapt as fast and productively as possible. As the graphs show, when adopted, teams mitigate risk and increase innovation. More broadly, organizations signal they trust their teammates to try.

When modeled by an organization's leadership, teammates trust their exploration will be charitably interpreted, even heralded as a courageous attempt to quickly learn how they're mistaken to build a more resilient enterprise. Paradoxically, [the MVP approach](#) wins trust by encouraging failure.

Slow, Steady Actions Build Smooth, Trusting Teams

In complex environments, it is a question of when, not if, the next crisis will strike. And whether it's an emergency or not, trust provides an organizational insurance policy—the coverage needed to ensure survival and promote resilience.

Building trust doesn't happen overnight, but we can take action to build it now - owning what we can control within our limits, close the gaps between words and actions, and embrace a fail-fast mindset. Those are actions of great teams, and great leaders. It is this slow, smooth work that builds the capacity for fast action when it's needed most and provides the foundation for a resilient recovery on the other side crisis—**which is coming, and will test if you and your team are prepared.**

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[1] Parrish, Shane. "Diana Chapman: Trusting Your Instincts." The Knowledge Project. Accessed March 13, 2022.

<https://fs.blog/knowledge-project-podcast-transcripts/diana-chapman/>.

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