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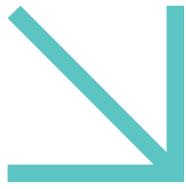
High-Performance Culture Debrief & Team-Level AI Adoption

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

January 15, 2026
Palo Alto, CA

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Executive Connection & Framing

Anja Nabergoj, Stanford University

This opening session set the tone for the day by intentionally shifting participants from "professional mode" into relational and reflective mode. Rather than beginning with data or frameworks, Anja used simple but human exercises—sharing name stories and daily habits—to establish psychological safety, peer connection, and presence. The design choice mirrored the core thesis of the research itself: behavior change begins with how teams relate to one another, not with tools or mandates.

By grounding the room in personal context, the session reinforced that high performance is not driven by abstract principles alone but by everyday habits, norms, and interactions.

The session underscored a critical leadership insight: how change efforts are introduced materially affects how they are received. The day was framed as a collective learning experiment rather than a performance evaluation, creating permission to engage honestly, reflect openly, and learn across companies without defensiveness.

Executive Connection & Framing

Anja Nabergoj, Stanford University

Key Takeaways

1. Framing Is the First Intervention
How you open a conversation shapes everything that follows. Psychological safety starts before content is introduced.

2. Small Habits, Big Impact
Minor, repeatable behaviors are often more powerful than large-scale programs. Consistency beats intensity.

3. Connection Enables Learning
Teams learn faster when they feel seen as people, not roles. Human context lowers resistance to change.

4. Model the Change You Want
The session itself demonstrated the behaviors the research later validated. Design is leadership in action.

"High performance doesn't start with frameworks—it starts with how people relate to each other."

What the Data Shows Across 300+ Teams

Michael McCarroll, Teamraderie

This session presented the core empirical findings from Teamraderie's multi-company experiment, spanning over 1,150 teams across more than 40 organizations. The central question was not whether high-performance behaviors matter—but whether they can be changed quickly and reliably in real operating environments. The answer, supported by rigorous pre- and post-measurement, was yes.

Michael emphasized that this was not a satisfaction study or engagement survey. The data focused on observable behaviors that differentiate top-performing teams, measured consistently across contexts. Results showed positive movement in 85% of teams, with behavior change driven most strongly when teams targeted their weakest areas rather than reinforcing existing strengths.

The analysis surfaced clear amplification factors: algorithmic selection of focus areas outperformed manager intuition; leader engagement dramatically increased impact; and intentional program design at the organizational level produced up to 3x greater lift. Importantly, improvement was observed across industries, company sizes, team maturity levels, and work models—indicating broad applicability.

The session reframed team development as an operating model decision rather than a pilot or perk. The data demonstrated that behavior change is not only possible, but designable—when treated with the same rigor as other enterprise-wide decisions.

What the Data Shows Across 300+ Teams

Michael McCarroll, Teamraderie

Key Takeaways

1. Behavior Change Is Measurable and Movable
High-performance behaviors can shift quickly in real environments. This is not theoretical—it's observable.

2. Treat Weakness, Not Strength
Teams improve most when they address their lowest-scoring behaviors. Comfort zones limit impact.

3. Leaders Are the Amplifier
Minimal leader engagement (even 5–15 minutes) dramatically increases results. Indifference erodes gains.

4. Design Matters More Than Scale
Intentional rollout beats broad availability. Fewer teams, better designed, deliver higher ROI.

5. This Is an Operating Model Choice
The question is no longer "does this work?" but "how deliberately will we implement it?"

> "The real question wasn't whether these behaviors matter—it was whether they're movable."

Why Friction Is the Enemy of Performance — and Sometimes You Need It

Bob Sutton, Stanford University

Bob Sutton challenged a deeply ingrained assumption in modern organizations: that speed and efficiency are always virtues. Drawing on decades of research, he argued that high-performing teams are not those that eliminate friction entirely, but those that intentionally manage it—removing bad friction while preserving (or even adding) good friction where it improves decision quality, ethics, and execution.

Through vivid examples—from healthcare and aviation to Stanford's own bureaucracy—Bob illustrated how rushing leads to errors, unethical behavior, and shallow thinking, especially in complex or irreversible decisions. He emphasized that creativity, trust, and judgment require time, disagreement, and reflection. Leaders who push constant urgency often mistake motion for progress.

A key insight was the idea of leaders as "trustees of others' time." Reducing unnecessary burdens is a moral responsibility, but so is slowing teams down when stakes are high. Bob reframed friction as a design variable, not a flaw—something leaders must actively tune.

The session offered a powerful counterweight to AI-driven acceleration narratives: real performance gains come not from doing everything faster, but from knowing when to pause, simplify, and deliberately slow down.

Why Friction Is the Enemy of Performance — and Sometimes You Need It

Bob Sutton, Stanford University

Key Takeaways

1. Speed Is Not Neutral
Moving fast increases error and ethical risk in complex work. Slowing down is sometimes the responsible choice.

2. Good Friction Enables Better Outcomes
Some processes should be harder by design. Difficulty can protect quality and judgment.

3. Leaders Steward Time
Wasting employee time is a leadership failure. Thoughtful friction honors human attention.

4. Creativity Cannot Be Rushed
Innovation requires disagreement, iteration, and patience. Pressure undermines originality.

5. Use Friction Strategically
Add rules to remove chaos. Constraints can simplify systems at scale.

"There are a lot of things in life that should be slower, harder, and even impossible."

Inside a Teamraderie Experience: "Prioritize to Accelerate"

Anja Nabergoj, Stanford University

This session pulled back the curtain on how a single high-performance culture experience is designed—and why it reliably produces behavior change. Using live participation and a deceptively simple Lego experiment, Anja demonstrated a core cognitive bias: people instinctively add complexity when trying to improve systems, overlooking subtraction as a powerful lever.

The experience reframed prioritization not as choosing what to do first, but as deciding what to stop, simplify, or remove. Participants explored common "friction patterns" such as zombie meetings, layered decision-making, slide deck factories, and constant digital interruptions. Rather than prescribing solutions, the experience guided teams to design their own experiments using rules, roles, and rituals.

What made the approach effective was its emphasis on experimentation over perfection. Teams were encouraged to try small, reversible changes, measure impact, and iterate. This scaffold—shared language, visible commitments, and lightweight accountability—helped teams translate insight into action without over-engineering.

The session illustrated why prioritization and simplification showed some of the fastest gains in the data: subtraction is actionable, concrete, and immediately felt. It also demonstrated how experience design—not content delivery—drives durable behavior change.

Inside a Teamraderie Experience: "Prioritize to Accelerate"

Anja Nabergoj, Stanford University

Key Takeaways

1. Subtraction Is a Blind Spot
People default to adding complexity. Effective teams deliberately remove.

2. Prioritization Is Behavioral
Stopping work matters as much as starting it. Focus is created, not declared.

3. Rules Beat Intentions
Clear rules, roles, and rituals sustain change. Good ideas fade without structure.

4. Experiments Lower Resistance
Small trials feel safe and actionable. Learning accelerates through iteration.

5. Design Creates Agency
Teams change faster when they design their own solutions. Ownership drives follow-through.

"Prioritization isn't just about choosing what to do first —it's about deciding what not to do at all."

CHRO Perspectives: What We Learned and What We Changed

Capital Group, Twist Bioscience, Goodwill, Curinos, Gilead

This multi-organization segment grounded the research in lived experience, with CHROs and talent leaders sharing candid reflections on what worked, what didn't, and how insights translated into real decisions. Despite wide variation in industry, size, and maturity, common themes emerged with striking consistency.

Successful implementations shared three characteristics: intentional team selection, active leader involvement, and clear framing of purpose. Teams that were newly formed, under pressure, or navigating change showed particularly strong gains—especially when leaders participated authentically rather than delegating engagement. Conversely, teams where leaders disengaged or treated the experience as optional often stalled or regressed.

Several speakers emphasized that the value was not in any single session, but in the shared language created across teams—enabling faster coordination, clearer prioritization, and more productive disagreement. Importantly, many organizations chose not to scale universally, instead treating team development as a product that requires design, sequencing, and stewardship.

The session reinforced that team effectiveness is not a "nice-to-have" cultural initiative, but a strategic lever. The case examples illustrated how data-informed judgment—not blanket rollout—leads to sustained impact.

Key Takeaways

1. Leader Participation Is Non–Negotiable
Teams follow cues, not programs. Leader presence legitimizes the work.

2. Change Readiness Matters
Teams in transition absorb more value. Timing amplifies impact.

3. Shared Language Scales Faster Than Tools
Common vocabulary improves coordination across teams. Alignment beats customization.

4. Don't Force It
Voluntary engagement outperforms mandates. Readiness predicts results.

5. Treat Learning Like a Product
Design, test, iterate, and scale intentionally. Adoption is not automatic.

"The shared language changed how teams showed up for each other, especially under pressure."

— *Paula Green, Twist Bioscience*

Why Team-Level AI Adoption Is the Hard Part

Michael McCarroll, Teamraderie

Michael opened the AI Adoption day by reframing a common misconception: that AI adoption is primarily a skills or tooling problem. Drawing on early data from Teamraderie's AI Index, he showed that while individual AI proficiency has increased rapidly, team-level workflows, coordination patterns, and decision rights have largely remained unchanged. The result is superficial adoption—people experimenting in isolation without a durable impact on performance.

The core issue, Michael argued, is that AI fundamentally alters how work flows across teams, not just how individuals execute tasks. Existing team structures—already strained by overload, ambiguity, and fragmented accountability—are ill-equipped to absorb this change. Without addressing these structural constraints, AI becomes another layer of complexity rather than a force multiplier.

This session positioned AI adoption as a teaming problem that requires deliberate behavior change, shared diagnostics, and explicit experimentation at the team level. For CHROs, the implication was clear: AI ROI will not come from training alone, but from redesigning how teams prioritize, decide, and coordinate work together.

Why Team-Level AI Adoption Is the Hard Part

Michael McCarroll, Teamraderie

Key Takeaways

1. Individual Skill ≠ Organizational Impact
AI proficiency does not automatically change how work gets done. Teams are the bottleneck.

2. AI Exposes Existing Friction
AI amplifies coordination and decision problems already present in teams.

3. Adoption Is a Workflow Shift
Real value comes when AI changes roles, handoffs, and ownership—not just speed.

4. Diagnostics Matter
Shared language (like the AI Index) helps teams see where they're stuck.

"AI adoption is not a technology problem—it's a teaming problem."

Why Modern Teams Struggle to Change How Work Gets Done

Bob Sutton (Stanford University), Paul Leonardi (University of California), Michael McCarroll (Teamraderie)

This panel explored why teams—even motivated, capable ones—struggle to translate new tools like AI into sustained behavioral change. Bob Sutton and Paul Leonardi highlighted how modern teaming conditions—distributed work, overloaded coordination, unclear decision rights, and constant urgency—create structural resistance to change.

Rather than a lack of will or intelligence, teams face invisible constraints embedded in how work is organized. Fragmented accountability, excessive handoffs, and unclear ownership mean that even strong individual experimentation fails to compound into team-level transformation. AI, in this context, often increases pressure without resolving underlying coordination problems.

The discussion emphasized that teams rarely slow down long enough to redesign how work flows. Leaders unintentionally reward activity over effectiveness, reinforcing patterns that block adoption. The panel reframed change not as a motivation issue, but as a systems-design challenge that requires intentional friction, clearer boundaries, and shared norms.

The takeaway was sobering but empowering: durable change requires altering the conditions under which teams operate, not simply encouraging better behavior.

Why Modern Teams Struggle to Change How Work Gets Done

Bob Sutton (Stanford University), Paul Leonardi (University of California), Michael McCarroll (Teamraderie)

Key Takeaways

1. Teams Are Overloaded Systems
Change fails when added on top of already broken workflows.

2. Coordination Is the Hidden Constraint
AI exposes weak handoffs and unclear ownership.

3. Motivation Isn't the Problem
Structural barriers block even willing teams.

4. Leaders Must Redesign the System
Behavior follows context more than intent.

> "Most teams aren't resisting change—they're constrained by how work is structured."
>
> — *Paul Leonardi*

> "When everything is urgent, nothing gets redesigned."
>
> — *Bob Sutton*

From Individual Use to Team Transformation: How Teams Actually Get Started

Paul Leonardi, University of California

Paul Leonardi focused on what differentiates teams that move beyond "AI as a productivity boost" to meaningful workflow transformation. Successful teams, he explained, start small but deliberately—anchoring AI use in real work rather than abstract use cases or sweeping redesigns.

Instead of automating everything, these teams identify specific bottlenecks, decision points, or coordination failures where AI can meaningfully change outcomes. They avoid over-engineering and resist premature scaling, treating early efforts as experiments rather than implementations.

Crucially, teams that succeed establish shared understanding early: why they are using AI, what problem it solves, and how success will be measured. This shared framing prevents fragmentation and ensures learning compounds across the team rather than staying siloed.

The session provided a practical roadmap: AI transformation starts not with ambition, but with disciplined focus, experimentation, and team-level ownership.

From Individual Use to Team Transformation: How Teams Actually Get Started

Paul Leonardi, University of California

Key Takeaways

1. Start With Real Work
Abstract AI use cases stall momentum. Ground experiments in live workflows.

2. Small Wins Build Credibility
Early success creates pull, not resistance.

3. Shared Framing Prevents Fragmentation
Teams must agree on purpose before tools.

4. Avoid Over-Engineering
Simplicity accelerates learning and adoption.

"AI adoption is not a technology problem—it's a teaming problem."

Designing the First Experiments That Actually Move the Needle

Anja Nabergoj, Stanford University

This interactive session demonstrated how teams move from insight to action without falling into analysis paralysis. Anja emphasized that teams often get stuck not because they lack ideas, but because they over-plan and under-experiment.

Using a forward-looking, experiment-driven approach, she showed how teams define credible first steps—small enough to execute, meaningful enough to matter. The emphasis was on agency: helping teams feel capable of acting now, rather than waiting for perfect alignment or certainty.

Participants explored how constraints, clear ownership, and visible commitments accelerate learning. The session reinforced that experimentation is not about risk-taking for its own sake, but about designing safe-to-fail tests that build confidence and capability over time.

The session clarified what "getting unstuck" actually looks like in practice—and why early experiments are a leadership design challenge, not an execution problem.

Designing the First Experiments That Actually Move the Needle

Anja Nabergoj, Stanford University

Key Takeaways

1. Action Beats Alignment
Progress comes from doing, not debating.

2. Design for Credibility
Experiments must feel real to matter.

3. Agency Drives Momentum
Teams move faster when they own the next step.

4. Constraints Enable Action
Boundaries focus effort and reduce fear.

"Teams don't need better plans—they need permission to act."

Why Time Savings Fail — and What Real AI ROI Looks Like Instead

Matt Beane, University of California

Matt Beane challenged one of the most common—and flawed—assumptions in AI investment: that time saved automatically equals value created. Drawing on research and CFO perspectives, he showed why "hours saved" arguments consistently fail to justify ROI.

Real value, Matt argued, emerges horizontally across systems: improved flow, reduced bottlenecks, faster learning, and stronger skill development. AI that simply speeds up isolated tasks often increases downstream congestion or erodes capability over time.

He encouraged leaders to rethink ROI in terms of capacity creation, resilience, and long-term performance—not short-term efficiency. For teams, this means designing AI adoption to improve coordination and judgment, not just throughput.

The implication was critical: AI ROI conversations must evolve if organizations want sustained investment and credibility at the executive level.

Why Time Savings Fail — and What Real AI ROI Looks Like Instead

Matt Beane, University of California

Key Takeaways

1. Time Saved ≠ Value Created
Efficiency without flow often backfires.

2. ROI Is Systemic
Value emerges across workflows, not tasks.

3. Skill Development Matters
AI can deskill teams if poorly designed.

4. CFOs Expect Better Logic
Horizontal impact beats anecdotal savings.

"Time savings are the weakest possible ROI argument. Value comes from improving flow, not just speed."

What Six Months of Team-Level AI Adoption Actually Looks Like

Terilyn Monroe & Andrew Burns, Guardant Health

Guardant Health closed the day with a candid account of what happened after moving from intention to execution. Rather than presenting a polished success story, Terilyn and Andrew shared what genuinely changed, where teams struggled, and what surprised them six months in.

Progress was uneven. Some teams integrated AI into workflows meaningfully, while others stalled due to unclear ownership, competing priorities, or insufficient reinforcement. Importantly, early enthusiasm did not guarantee sustained adoption—behavior change required continued leadership attention and structural support.

The session reinforced that AI adoption is not linear and that setbacks are data, not failure. Guardant's experience highlighted the importance of pacing, reinforcement, and revisiting assumptions about readiness.

This session grounded the day's ideas in reality: durable change requires patience, learning, and ongoing design—not one-time interventions.

What Six Months of Team-Level AI Adoption Actually Looks Like

Terilyn Monroe & Andrew Burns, Guardant Health

Key Takeaways

1. Adoption Is Uneven by Nature
Variation is expected, not a red flag.

2. Reinforcement Is Essential
Early gains decay without follow-through.

3. Leadership Attention Sustains Change
What leaders revisit gets embedded.

4. Learn From What Didn't Move
Stalls reveal structural constraints.

"What we learned very quickly is that intention doesn't equal execution. Leadership attention turned out to be the difference between momentum and stall."

— Terilyn Monroe

"Once teams saw this as an experiment, not a verdict, their behavior changed."

— Andrew Burns

From Insight to Action: What Your Teams Will Do Next

Michael McCarroll, Teamraderie

Michael closed the day by connecting insights to concrete next steps. Rather than prescribing actions, he outlined what early data from baselined teams already shows about where organizations tend to stall—and how upcoming Teamraderie experiences are designed to address those sticking points.

The emphasis was on shared learning: moving forward together, comparing outcomes, and refining approaches based on evidence. The close reinforced that this work is not a one-off initiative, but a multi-month journey requiring deliberate sequencing and design.

The close clarified expectations: progress comes from disciplined experimentation, not broad mandates—and from treating team behavior change as a strategic capability.

Key Takeaways

1. This Is a Journey, Not an Event
Sustained change unfolds over months.

2. Shared Learning Accelerates Progress
Comparative insight strengthens decisions.

3. Design Beats Intention
How teams are supported matters more than ambition.