



# HUMAN INTEGRATION AS A DISCIPLINE

Created in the Trenches, Built to Heal What Breaks Us

Human Integration is a practical discipline designed to repair what breaks between people and processes in modern organizations. Born from frontline experience, it addresses the root causes of dysfunction, misalignment, fear, and replaces them with clarity, trust, and forward motion.

This paper introduces a structured approach to aligning people, systems, and strategy across functions. If your teams are stuck, disengaged, or fractured, Human Integration offers ways to work, starting with you.

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# The Human Integration Discipline

## Intended Audience, Purpose and Desired Outcomes

The Human Integration discipline is meant for everyone; from executives to frontline staff, from consultants to cross-functional leaders. While the application may differ by role, the core need remains: every organization struggles with human disconnect, misaligned expectations, and broken handoffs. Human Integration offers a practical way to address those invisible breakdowns, regardless of title or department.

Personally, I began writing this white paper to articulate and formalize the practices I've refined throughout my career. I wanted to clearly explain what I do, how I do it, and why it matters, particularly for prospective hiring managers who may be unfamiliar with the language of integration but have felt its absence. If this paper resonates more broadly, I welcome that. If it helps others become stronger contributors in their organizations, that would be deeply rewarding.

This is not a sales pitch for a certification or a consulting practice. I'm not trying to monetize the idea. My goal is simple: to share a philosophy and framework that I've found incredibly effective and to invite others into the conversation.

What I'm seeking in return is feedback. Your questions, reflections, and critiques help refine the work and expose blind spots. I'd love to hear whether this resonates with your experience. Do you see what I see? Have you applied similar thinking in your own work? Could you envision this approach helping in your current role?

If so, let's explore what's possible, together.

## Introduction

Human Integration is a personal discipline and an evolving framework essential to any organized group of people. Whether it's your community, church, school, government, business, or even your family, this discipline brings unity and improvement wherever it's applied.

This white paper focuses specifically on business organizations. It explores how the Human Integration discipline addresses the human dynamics between staff and functions, dismantling silos, restoring trust, and enabling organizations to execute with unity, creativity, and purpose. Through this work, people become better humans, build stronger relationships, and generate better outcomes.

Imagine a workplace where handoffs are seamless, decisions are made collaboratively, and tension doesn't default to blame but to shared curiosity. Where people from different departments speak the same language not because they were forced to, but because someone helped them build the bridge. A team that used to argue over responsibilities and deadlines now collaborating with ease, handoffs are smooth, tensions are addressed early, and everyone understands how their work fits into the bigger picture. Misunderstandings don't spiral; they surface and get resolved. Trust is high. Results follow. That's what Human Integration makes possible.

### Do You Need Human Integration?

Ask yourself:

- Are handoffs between teams consistent, clear, and successful or are they often dropped or delayed?

- Do people avoid certain colleagues, departments, or conversations?
- Is there confusion or conflict around goals, ownership, or decision-making?
- Do you see “us vs. them” dynamics between teams?
- Are issues diagnosed by function (e.g., “IT dropped the ball”) rather than the system?
- Do you feel like you’re not getting to the truth quickly or that conversations stay surface-level, political, or unclear?

If you answered “yes” to two or more—Human Integration can help.

## The Problem

Modern organizations are struggling with fragmented execution, siloed strategies, and cultural drift. Even with smart, capable people, many organizations fail to achieve meaningful transformation. Damaging friction takes hold, an “us vs. them” mindset divides departments, trust erodes, and the behaviors that follow only make things worse.

Broken relationships and broken handoffs become the norm. Information is everywhere, but useful truth is scarce. Critical context fails to travel up to the leaders who could act on it or down to the teams who need it. Shared goals and objectives are handed down without connection, clarity, or relevance, leaving people confused, disengaged, or resentful. Projects are greenlit without cross-functional understanding, and without translation through the ranks as to why this matters now.

Unruly behavior starts to take root, passive aggression, withholding information, territorialism. It begins to divide teams and infect the culture. Missed deadlines, turf wars, and information hoarding become normalized. Just as harmful as missing a deadline is meeting one by excluding those who are “not in line”; a shortcut that erodes trust, narrows solutions, and reinforces division under the guise of progress.

It becomes a vicious cycle. As trust breaks down, behaviors deteriorate. As behaviors deteriorate, trust breaks down further. What’s worse we often recognize these patterns in others long before we notice them in ourselves. We default to being blameless because we don’t feel safe enough to be accountable or because our egos are driving us to protect our image, even at the expense of growth or resolution.

Across every conversation and interview I’ve had in developing this discipline, one theme echoed loudly: *we’d be fine if it weren’t for them*. Regardless of industry or org size, people pointed fingers at “the other” for getting in the way but few had strategies for resolving that tension. This is where Human Integration brings unique value. It confronts that discomfiting truth that solving missteps isn’t about fixing “the other” but recognizing one’s own role in the dynamic. It invites individuals and leaders alike to become better integrators: curious, courageous, and relationally skilled in the face of misalignment. While not always easy to accept, this mindset shift is critical to long-term, sustainable collaboration.

We need a new approach, one rooted in behavioral health, psychological safety, translation, and understanding. In truth, we should all adopt the role of Human Integrator. We should be becoming better humans. We should be fixing our broken relationships. We should be addressing our broken handoffs within and between teams. We should be constantly seeking clarity around all the big pictures and how our systems of work support it. And there are no shortcuts. You cannot skip over relationship-building and expect handoffs to improve. If you try to fix process without first fixing trust, the result will often be more damage than progress.

Wherever you sit in the organization, this is on you. It's not just your boss's job. It's not just on your team lead or HR or that one person who "owns culture." ***Every day, you're either contributing to the dysfunction or helping to improve it. You're either helping integrate the humans or further dividing them.***

Human Integration isn't a program you roll out but rather a shift in how people show up. It begins with self-awareness, and then extends out, one relationship, one handoff, one moment of clarity at a time. The most effective integrators are those who've done their own work first.

The emphasis on personal responsibility in Human Integration is not meant to ignore systemic issues but to offer a starting point. Broken relationships and broken systems often create a cyclical pattern of dysfunction. It's rarely clear which came first, and in practice, most people experience them as one frustrating, tangled knot. When expectations are unclear, handoffs fail, or trust erodes, people often default to blaming each other rather than interrogating the underlying systems.

By saying "it starts with you," Human Integration challenges individuals to step into this murkiness with curiosity instead of defensiveness. The goal is not to assign blame, but to take agency. When something feels clunky, unclear, or misaligned, it becomes your responsibility to investigate why, whether it's a broken process, a missing expectation, or a systemic flaw. From there, you can either repair the relationship, adjust the expectation, or raise visibility to fix the system.

Organizations today hold deep knowledge and experience, but too much of it goes untapped because teams are fragmented, and people are disengaged. The "us vs. them" mentality takes root, psychological safety is lost, and key voices go unheard. ***Yet when we build collective wisdom, by making people feel safe, seen, and included, great innovation and productivity emerge.*** We've invested heavily in integrating enterprise level processes, systems, and data. It's time we invest in integrating people.

We need more people trained in the Human Integration discipline and I call them Human Integrators.

This perspective empowers people at every level to interrupt negative cycles instead of being consumed by them. It also creates healthier dialogue around what really needs fixing, inviting both personal growth and organizational evolution.

## Human Integration

Human Integration is not a role or a title. It is a discipline, an evolving framework, one that cuts across silos and functions, not to disrupt, but to harmonize. It empowers forward momentum by challenging you to:

- Become a better human by recognizing and evolving past ego, fear, and bias.
- Own your behavior, examining how you might contribute to dysfunction, even unintentionally.
- Acknowledge and repair your broken relationships, especially the ones you've been avoiding.
- Identify and improve broken handoffs, without blame, across teams and functions.
- Understand your cross-functional peers as well as you understand your own department.
- Clarify strategy and goals for yourself and others, especially when leadership fails to do so.
- Articulate the true capabilities and limits of your team so others can plan accordingly.
- Improve how you communicate: upward, downward, and sideways.
- Learn your own systems of work and those of your partners and seek alignment without uniformity.
- See what happens before and after your role in the workflow and make better decisions as a result.

When you adopt this discipline, you become a powerful differentiator, not just for yourself, but for your team, your department, and your organization. The ultimate goal of Human Integration is to reach truth faster, so that organizations can unleash the full potential of a collaborative, unified workforce.

Human Integration helps us shift from... to...

From	To
Working in silos	Working across functions
Blame	Curiosity
Avoidance	Direct communication
Defensiveness	Shared responsibility
Assumptions	Clarified expectations

While Human Integration overlaps with well-established fields such as organizational development, change management, and systems thinking, it offers a distinct emphasis on trust, humility, and behavioral transformation. What sets it apart is the recognition that most team and cross-functional breakdowns are not merely structural or procedural, they're relational. This discipline centers on the human experience of work, particularly the unseen dynamics of trust, misunderstanding, and fear. In many organizations, people default to "us vs. them" thinking, reinforcing division and inefficiency. Human Integration challenges that paradigm directly not with top-down mandates, but through the deliberate cultivation of shared understanding, psychological safety, and authentic connection across departments and teams.

Those who adopt this discipline, Human Integrators, serve as bridge-builders, mediators, coaches, and truth-tellers. They ask the questions that cut through complexity and bring hidden issues to light. They ensure teams have what they need to resolve the real problems, not just the visible symptoms. They draw from a variety of frameworks and models to design systems that reflect how people actually work, not just how the org chart says they should. They are effective because they make others feel safe and included. They are brave enough to have the conversations others avoid. They honor differences in thinking, goals, priorities, and working styles. They listen to all voices and draw wisdom from every corner. With inclusion comes clarity. With clarity, solutions surface.

The best Human Integrators aren't just skilled in strategy or systems, they're emotionally grounded. They've done their own work. They show up curious, not combative. They model the behavior they're trying to create.

Although Human Integration can be layered into existing operational, cultural, or leadership models, it also stands on its own as a discipline. It is framework-agnostic, meaning it integrates seamlessly with Agile, Lean, EOS, or other strategic systems already in place. The focus isn't on replacing what works, it's on improving how humans work *together*. The power of Human Integration lies in its flexibility, it creates a consistent behavioral foundation that enhances execution across any process or toolset. Whether your organization is rigidly structured or highly adaptive, Human Integration strengthens alignment, trust, and cross-functional flow.

At first glance, one might assume that roles like HR, project managers, COOs, Directors of Operations, or EOS-style Integrators already encompass the work of Human Integration. But in practice, that's rarely the case.

HR professionals are often trained to protect the organization from risk, not to bridge relationship gaps or foster cross-functional trust. Their default tools like formal complaints or performance documentation can reinforce division rather than healing it. Few HR approaches directly address the interpersonal dynamics or emotional narratives that fracture collaboration.

Project managers, meanwhile, are trained to manage scope, timeline, and resources but not trust, clarity, or cohesion. Despite being embedded in cross-functional teams, they're rarely equipped to identify or resolve the human breakdowns between functions. I've stood up multiple PMOs and tried to informally train my teams in this discipline; some grasped it instinctively, but many didn't, because the methodology isn't part of standard project management education.

COOs and Directors of Operations often operate at the execution layer, juggling performance metrics, systems, and throughput. While they may recognize cultural or relational breakdowns, their role (and reward system) rarely gives them the time or mandate to address the root causes. Similarly, EOS-style Integrators are structurally closest to this work as they bridge strategy and execution, but they tend to focus on cadence, accountability, and systems alignment, not emotional safety or relationship repair.

Human Integration isn't a replacement for these roles but rather it's a missing capability that strengthens them all. It turns invisible harmful human friction into visible, actionable work. It's the practice of treating collaboration and trust with the same rigor we give to systems, data, and metrics, allowing every other framework or function to perform better.

This discipline is intentionally scalable. While its impact is most visible in larger organizations where cross-functional friction naturally emerges, the principles of Human Integration can be practiced at any scale. Whether applied in a small team or a global enterprise, the same dynamics appear, silos form, assumptions build, and trust erodes. Human Integrators are equipped to notice these patterns and step into the spaces between people, teams, and priorities no matter the organization's size.

This paper will explore the five pillars of the Human Integrator as a Discipline:

- Become a Better Human
- Fix Your Broken Relationships
- Fix Your Broken Handoffs
- Understand all the Big Pictures
- Understand Systems of Work

## Become a Better Human

Human Integrators begin with themselves. They examine their own ego, fears, and biases. They perform honest self-assessments with each interaction and ask, "Am I making this better or worse?" They don't bulldoze others, they listen deeply. They offer their teammates the benefit of the doubt instead of rushing to judgment. They actively seek out "us vs. them" mentalities in their organizations and confront the ways they may be unintentionally contributing to that dynamic.

They understand that unchecked poor behavior leads to broken relationships and broken handoffs. They don't remove themselves from responsibility, they recognize they are part of the machine. And within any system, you are either contributing to the problem or actively working toward the solution.

Traditional professional environments often reward dominance, discourage vulnerability, and shame what is perceived as weakness. But these traits are exactly what break human integration. Human Integrators hold space for multiple truths. They reject zero-sum thinking where if one person is “right” the other must be “wrong”. Instead, they help teams see that there can be many “rights”, we need to honor all of the options and then choose one path forward together.

They also understand the role fear plays in dysfunction; fear of missing out, fear of losing control, fear that resources are scarce. Scarcity creates division. Human Integrators challenge this fear-based thinking and model a mindset of abundance, possibility, and shared success.

They stop using the word autonomy. In organizations, there is no such thing. Autonomy is only possible when you’re a team of one. In organizations of many, interconnected systems, collaboration, accountability, and alignment matter more than going it alone.

Human Integrators track their own evolution. They ask: Am I growing as a person? Am I stuck in the same patterns I held 15 years ago? They believe that as individuals evolve, so does the organization. But if people stay stuck, the organization does too.

They value vulnerability, humility, and curiosity, not as soft traits, but as foundational strengths. They coach behaviors that support alignment over defensiveness. They dismantle “us vs. them” thinking because they know true synergy only emerges in its absence. And they lead with courage, knowing that courage is contagious.

## Fix Your Broken Relationships

Human Integrators understand the value of strong relationships at work, especially with the people who make that difficult. They intentionally invest time and energy into repairing and strengthening relationships. They don't avoid tension; they address it. They identify who they're avoiding, those who gets under their skin, and then they do the hard work: they go to those people and build or rebuild a professional relationship.

They stop sidestepping conflict. They seek out those who may be avoiding them. They don't wait for perfect timing. They learn to have crucial conversations in real time, with courage and clarity because they know it works.

Human Integrators read body language, listen between the lines, and take time to know their teammates not just those in their own group, but across functions. They adopt a posture of "How can I make you successful?" They see others as valuable, necessary, and worthy of respect.

They honor differences of opinion and perspective. When someone sees the world differently, they don't label them as wrong or naïve, rather, they seek to understand. Human Integrators believe that understanding is not the same as agreeing, and that learning from difference makes teams smarter and stronger.

They take responsibility first. When relationships are broken, they look inward before blaming outward. They learn to manage personal tensions and conflicts with transparency and vulnerability. They share openly when relationships are strained and help others feel seen, heard, and safe. They gather what's not being said in the open and create space for it to be spoken.

Human Integrators work to improve psychological safety. They coach others to unite rather than divide. They know the goal isn't artificial harmony, it's creative, healthy friction. They help dismantle the “us vs. them”



dynamic and replace it with self-awareness and shared responsibility. They call out gossip, information hoarding, and passive-aggressive behaviors. They identify where agency is missing or people feel unsafe, and they work to fix it.

They champion environments where debate, challenge, and pushback are not just accepted but encouraged leaving people feeling energized, not oppressed. They foster collaboration across difference. They advocate for teammates, not just in words, but in actions. They take the time to understand their coworkers' concerns, constraints, and internal dynamics and they help lift them up instead of talking behind their backs and belittling them.

They assume that if someone is acting out, they may be suffering. They choose curiosity over judgment because once you truly know someone and their struggle, it's harder to belittle or dehumanize them and quicker to seek resolution.

Human Integrators respect distinct roles, healthy friction, and checks and balances. A thriving organization is not one without conflict but one where conflict is kind, honest, and productive. They assume others are here for a reason, come to work wanting to add value, desire agency and to feel included and that real collaboration surfaces hidden dependencies and blind spots.

Believing these truths allows us to communicate with more clarity, act with more empathy, and build something better together.

## Fix Your Broken Handoffs

Human Integrators take the time to identify and repair broken handoffs as they are often the root of both inefficiency and strained relationships. In truth, it can be difficult to know which comes first: the fractured relationship or the flawed process. Most of the time, it's a cycle: broken handoffs fuel frustration, which weakens relationships, and broken relationships further sabotage coordination.

When handoffs fail and misaligned expectations exist then confusion sets in, and delays follow. Frustration builds, especially when ownership is ambiguous. What should be a simple, repeatable process becomes clunky and stressful. Under pressure, people may fall into bad behaviors: blaming, complaining, or retreating. Human Integrators resist that reflex. Instead, they roll up their sleeves to uncover where the breakdowns are happening and then fix them.

Human Integrators start with strategic prioritization, but don't overlook low-hanging fruit. Sometimes a single, small fix to a common handoff failure can dramatically improve the workflow and the mood. Clarifying expectations even before full systems are in place can create immediate relief. They define clear ownership and document expectations even if informally, so that everyone knows what's expected, by whom, and by when.

While enterprise-level process changes matter, Human Integrators recognize the power of small wins. Many teams underestimate just how much they can do to repair day-to-day handoff issues within their own sphere of influence. A willingness to collaborate on fixing those pain points builds trust and momentum.

Human Integrators also surface cross-functional friction before it festers. They lean on their relationship-building skills to sustain smoother handoffs and keep work from stalling. Even the simple act of showing up,

listening, and offering to help repair broken handoffs can earn credibility. It signals that you're a partner, not a bottleneck but a teammate working toward solutions, not just pointing out problems.

## Understand All of the Big Pictures

To integrate humans effectively, you must first understand the landscape they're navigating. Human Integrators go beyond their own team's objectives they take time to understand the organizational goals, department-level priorities, and the interdependencies between teams. They study not only their department's role but also the roles of the key departments they rely on or that rely on them.

There is never just one strategy. Even when departments like Marketing and Finance share a goal say, "Increase Revenue by 30%", the way that goal translates into departmental objectives can be radically different. Sometimes, those objectives even conflict. That's not a failure, it's a reflection of healthy checks and balances. But making it work requires good relationships, smooth handoffs, and most importantly, skilled translation.

Most organizations declare shared goals in the name of alignment. But shared goals don't mean shared ownership. Telling Finance, they're responsible for customer experience, or asking IT to own revenue, doesn't create cohesion it creates confusion. It's not wrong, it just requires *translation*.

Human Integrators work to understand every version of strategy, goal, objective, and priority within their scope of influence. They honor the unique contributions of each function, and they seek points of alignment rather than forcing uniformity. When strategy is murky or undocumented (a common problem), they don't complain they draw it out. They listen, observe, connect the dots, and articulate a clear narrative of how each team contributes to the whole. Then they validate that narrative with leadership and translate it into plain, actionable language that resonates with each team.

When Human Integrators encounter directional confusion, they pause. Too often, teams dive into execution before understanding what success actually looks like. When asked, they'll say things like, "The direction wasn't clear," or "The priority didn't make sense...but we started anyway." Human Integrators call this out. They invite everyone to pause and realign: What exactly are we trying to achieve? What does success look like for us, specifically?

They also learn the characteristics and constraints of their coworkers and cross-functional partners. The more you know about your coworkers for example, their strengths, pressures, blind spots, and working styles, the fewer assumptions you make. And the fewer assumptions, the easier it becomes to collaborate, troubleshoot, and solution together.

They are translators, connectors, and clarifiers ensuring that the "big picture" is more than a slide deck. It becomes shared language, shared purpose, and shared energy.

## Understand Your Systems of Work

Another common cross-functional challenge is that departments often operate within their own distinct systems of work. They have their own language, disciplines, and frameworks for getting things done. Problems arise when leadership declares, "Here's how we'll work from now on," assuming alignment will follow. Just like declaring shared goals, announcing a new system of work does not create alignment. It often breeds confusion among teams used to their own rhythms and methods.

Formal systems of work are the defined, documented, and repeatable structures organizations use to manage complexity, ensure consistency, and maintain accountability. These are explicit, teachable, and supported by tools, roles, or documentation. Examples include project and program management, SDLC/ITIL, change boards, risk management and data governance frameworks, systems of record, SOPs, and service delivery playbooks.

Informal systems of work, on the other hand, are the unspoken and unofficial ways things actually get done. They are not captured in org charts or SOPs, but they shape work as much if not more than formal systems. Examples include “Ask Jane” dynamics where influencers carry key knowledge, urgent tasks handled in DMs bypassing formal systems, hallway decisions never recorded, and shadow tracking of progress in private documents.

Even if you’re the lowest-ranking person on the team, a Human Integrator learns how work actually flows around them. What system(s) is your team using? What happens before and after your piece of the puzzle? Who is affected if you miss a handoff? These questions uncover blind spots and reveal the real structure of execution.

Understanding both formal and informal systems enables you to spot gaps and guide improvements that matter.

Human Integrators are well-versed in many frameworks and disciplines, allowing them to recognize and translate between the different systems teams use. Since teams have their own blend of formal and informal practices, rather than demanding uniformity, Human Integrators seek interoperability. They respect the uniqueness of each system, while creating cohesion across them, helping teams move from “aligned on paper” to genuinely co-owned outcomes.

They understand lifecycles. Every methodology, Agile, Waterfall, Lean, Six Sigma, etc. follows a common pattern, they are all lifecycles. When we recognize that, it becomes easier to integrate departmental differences into a single end-to-end flow. The same rhythm shows up everywhere. Just as nature has its lifecycles, say winter, spring, summer, fall; business have lifecycles of assessing, building, testing, and learning. Human Integration is no different, it is a developmental lifecycle. As awareness deepens, individuals and organizations learn, adjust, and grow. This evolution doesn’t reach a finish line; it continues, creating the conditions for ongoing alignment and momentum.

Human Integrators establish safe communication channels to surface uncomfortable truths. You can feel when “the right information” is not flowing even in organizations saturated with communication tools and updates. The frontline knows; leadership doesn’t or vice versa. Human Integrators fix that. They uncover the truth and communicate it effectively upward, downward, and across the organization.

Human Integrators flag hidden interdependencies and capacity assumptions that often derail initiatives. Leadership may greenlight projects without recognizing shared resource strain. When that happens, misalignment and friction are guaranteed. Often, the real problem isn’t resourcing it’s that the right information isn’t flowing to those making decisions.

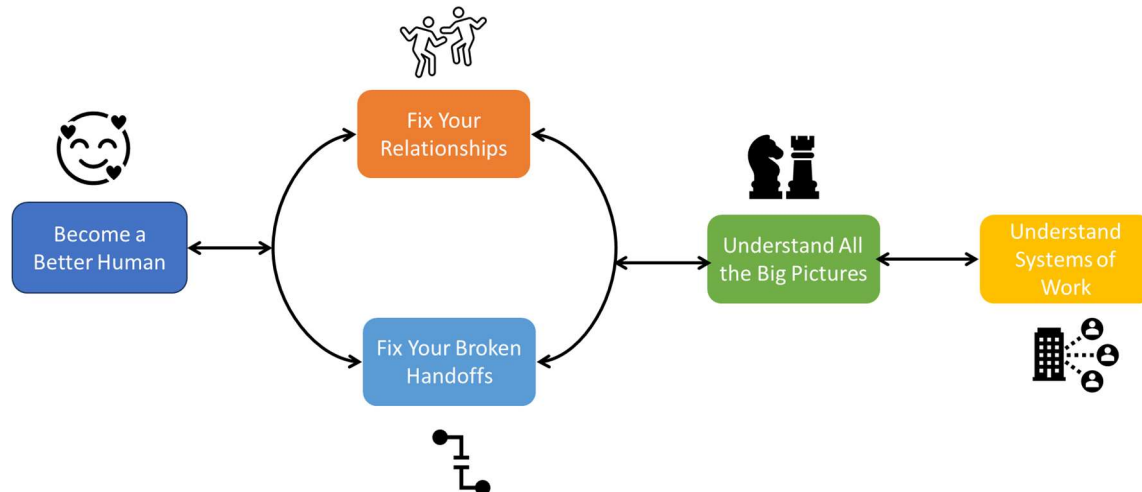
When behavior becomes a barrier, Human Integrators introduce ‘rules of play’ that address toxic habits directly. Sometimes, it’s as simple as naming the bad behavior that has become normalized and committing to doing better.

Human Integrators measure the quantity and quality of work produced by the systems. They are honest about gaps in their own team, which gives others permission to be honest too. That honesty becomes a wellspring of insight real information leadership can act on.

Technology accelerates whatever foundation it's built on. If people and processes are misaligned, new tools won't fix the problem they'll amplify it. Human Integrators know that technology should come after team health, handoff clarity, and shared systems of work. Beware the sales pitch for any tool or system that promises transformation without addressing human integration.

# Human Integrator Discipline Components

## The 5 Core Pillars of the Human Integrator Discipline



## Key Results and Outcomes

When Human Integration is embraced, the impact is tangible across all levels of an organization. Execution becomes faster, and decision-making sharper, as teams operate with greater clarity and alignment. Confusion, rework, and cross-functional conflict decrease significantly replaced by a sense of shared direction and mutual accountability. As a result, goals, teams, and budgets begin to align more effectively, creating a tighter connection between strategy and execution.

When actively practiced, measurable improvements can extend well beyond “better relationships” or increased psychological safety. In my own leadership experience, applying this discipline across departments led to improvements in every key performance metric: corporate objectives, operational efficiency, team engagement, and customer outcomes. When people feel psychologically safe and trust is present, employee survey scores rise and those same employees are more likely to take exceptional care of customers, further boosting customer experience scores.

Although many existing performance measures improve when Human Integration is present, I also believe we need new metrics specifically designed to capture how and why those improvements happen. This will be part of my next use case. Right now, we don’t have a great way to quantify things like “us vs. them” thinking, relational bottlenecks or breakdowns in information flow.

Additionally, we don’t do a great job of understanding the real pulse of our employees. Traditional engagement surveys often miss the mark not because people don’t care, but because they’ve learned the risks of being honest. In many organizations, there’s an unspoken “train to the test” culture, where employees are either coached on how to respond or instinctively game the system to avoid scrutiny. When feedback feels unsafe or futile, people stop telling the truth. And when that happens, leaders lose their line of sight into what’s actually happening on the ground. I’d like to pursue a truer, more human-centered means of measuring engagement, one that reflects real emotional safety, not just survey compliance.

Lastly, I'm not sure how to measure what people often describe as "the air feels different" that subtle but powerful shift that happens when a team evolves together. It's when shared thinking and stronger relationships begin to emerge. People stop hoarding information and start sharing it freely. The "us vs. them" dynamic gives way to mutual understanding and genuine cross-functional cooperation. Leaders begin to demonstrate alignment not just in words, but in actions. Unity, momentum, and purpose become tangible. This is something I hope to explore more deliberately in my next use case.

## Pillars of the Human Integrator Discipline

- Be A Better Human
- Fix Broken Relationships
- Fix Broken Handoffs
- Understand all the Big Pictures
- Understand Systems of Work

## Practices and Procedures

The first practical actions a staff member or leader can take to apply Human Integration begin with the two foundational pillars: becoming a better human and repair broken relationships. Too often, people unintentionally carry unresolved relational tension, assuming that performance success justifies letting relational bottlenecks fester. But lingering friction drains trust, slows collaboration, and undermines long-term effectiveness even if short-term goals are met. Project and solution success or wins often happen despite poor integration, not because of it and what we miss is that these wins might have been even more successful, more sustainable, or significantly cheaper to execute had Human Integration been in place.

Human Integration starts with humility and curiosity. Ask yourself: where have I let a strained relationship go unaddressed? Where might my own assumptions, communication gaps, or emotionally charged behavior be contributing to the divide? Then seek out conversation, listen fully, and begin to rebuild trust. This personal accountability creates the conditions for others to follow.

Communication plans and conflict training are helpful, but what's often missing is the hard work of sitting down together and writing it out, drawing it on a whiteboard, wrestling with the breakdowns, and reaching mutual understanding. We need to define expectations in real time, not just in documents. Tools like process maps, SLAs, and OLAs can help clarify handoffs and reduce confusion, but they're only effective when built together with shared meaning, not assumptions.

As teams mature in their integration, it becomes essential to surface and rewrite the unspoken rules that quietly govern behavior, especially the broken ones. Every organization has them: rules that get bent or ignored so often they become part of the culture. Instead of pretending they don't exist, Human Integrators help teams name them, document them, and commit to healthier alternatives. It's not about making more rules, it's about identifying the few that are routinely broken, understanding why, and agreeing together to avoid those patterns. This act of co-creating new agreements reshapes team culture in practical, lasting ways.

Measuring output is essential, not just to track progress, but to challenge assumptions and dismantle unspoken narratives. Much of the "us vs. them" tension stems not from facts, but from feelings shaped by incomplete or inaccurate information. A team might say, "they never deliver," when in reality, delivery rates

are strong, but a few memorable misses or unclear expectations have skewed perception. Human Integrators help surface both qualitative and quantitative outcome measures to reveal the truth beneath the frustration. When we bring real data to perceived problems, we make room for curiosity, clarity, and constructive dialogue.

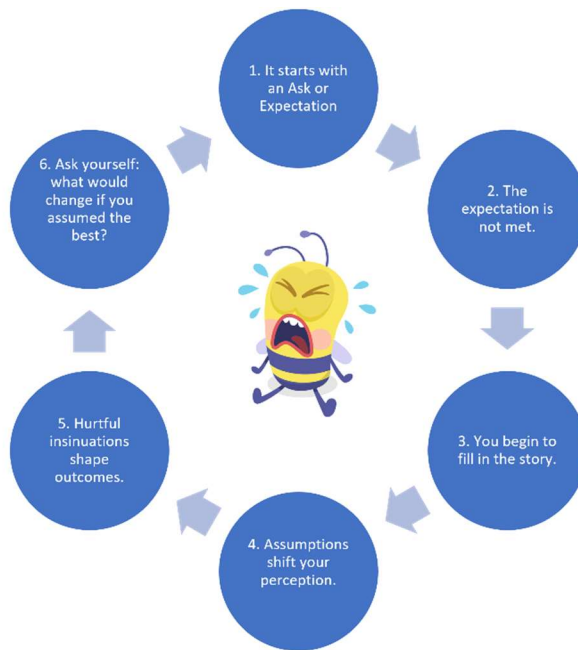
Resistance to human integration is common especially from leaders who pride themselves on decisiveness, efficiency, and results. Many believe they're already effective human integrators simply by virtue of their title or years of experience. But in practice, ego often clouds their ability to see relational gaps, unresolved tensions, or the ways in which their teams are underperforming due to poor cross-functional trust.

Some leaders dismiss Human Integration as “soft”, something secondary to financial, operational, or strategic priorities. But that mindset is shortsighted. In my experience, the very leaders who resist emotional or relational work are often the ones whose teams suffer from chronic breakdowns through miscommunication, failed handoffs, and toxic “us vs. them” dynamics. The good news? Adoption doesn't have to start at the top. This work often gains traction at the team level, through mid-level leaders, natural influencers, or project managers who are ready to operate differently. Culture shifts when someone chooses to go first. The challenge is that Human Integration takes time, humility, and sustained attention, qualities that aren't always rewarded in traditional leadership cultures.

A common pushback I encounter is: “We don't have time for this, we have urgent deliverables to hit.” At first glance, focusing on relationships or handoffs might seem like a distraction from pressing business needs. But in practice, the opposite is true. When handoffs are unclear or relationships are strained, urgency only amplifies dysfunction. Teams move slower. Misunderstandings multiply. Communication breaks down under pressure. This is precisely when human integration becomes most critical.

Even small steps toward repairing trust: having a clarifying conversation, resetting expectations, extending empathy can immediately reduce friction and enable teams to deliver faster. It doesn't require a full “fix” before results show up. In fact, I've found that simply demonstrating a willingness to address the issue often unlocks momentum.

# The Behavior Wheel: Breaking the Cycle of Assumption and Division



## 1. It starts with an Ask or Expectation.

You have a request, a need, or a belief about how something should go.

## 2. The expectation is not met.

A coworker, staff member, or leader doesn't respond the way you hoped.

## 3. You begin to fill in the story.

Instead of seeking clarity, you assume why it didn't happen. Your thoughts may turn disparaging:

- "They just don't like change."
- "They're stuck in the past."
- "They don't care."
- "They're not accountable."
- "They have no sense of urgency."
- "They just spend without thinking."

The Certainty Trap – this happens when we become certain of our assumptions and false narratives, making it more difficult to combat

## 4. Assumptions shift your perception.

Your tone changes. Your body language shifts. You start to treat them differently. Maybe not overtly but the change is there.

## 5. Hurtful insinuations shape outcomes.

Without realizing it, you behave in ways that confirm your assumptions. Trust erodes. Collaboration suffers. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## 6. Ask yourself: what would change if you assumed the best?

What if this person cares deeply, is doing their best, and wants to succeed? What if they're navigating something you don't know?

When we approach others with curiosity and compassion not certainty, we interrupt the cycle and build stronger, more resilient teams.

The Behavior Wheel offers a framework to understand one of the most subtle yet damaging patterns in organizational life: the way we interpret gaps with suspicion instead of curiosity. It helps us name our assumptions, question our certainty, and replace judgment with inquiry.

How likely are you to make negative assumptions and fill in the story with a false narrative when someone does not meet your expectations or when there's a gap you don't understand? In my opinion, this is a quiet epidemic in most organizations and really, in any group of humans.

When something doesn't go your way or someone doesn't meet your expectations, it's incredibly common to default to judgment. Rather than pausing to seek understanding, you may find yourself making assumptions that justify your irritation or sense of disruption. These assumptions feel natural and even justified because your brain is trying to reduce ambiguity and regain control.

This is where the behavior wheel comes in. It illustrates how a single assumption can set off a cascade of judgment and misunderstanding that spiral into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

You begin by filling in the story:

- They didn't reply to my email. They must not care.
- That team pushed back on my request. They're just afraid of change.
- That process keeps breaking. They're lazy, stuck in the past, or don't get it.

Other examples of the kinds of false narratives people create every day:

- They just randomly change stuff.
- They spend without regard to budget.



- They have no sense of urgency.
- They don't care about getting it right.

When you don't understand someone's behavior or your expectations weren't met, your ego and fear start filling in the gaps with a story that makes you feel superior, certain, or even righteous. And once you feel certain, you stop seeking the truth. That's the certainty trap. It's where the real damage begins.

That certainty turns your assumptions into a lens. You start behaving in subtle ways that confirm your judgment. Maybe you withhold information, disengage, or avoid collaboration. Your assumptions begin to shape your behavior in your tone, your timing, your body language and those cues influence the other person or team's response or their lack of response. That interaction then shapes the outcome and quietly turns your assumption into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Without even realizing it, you've created evidence for a story that was never true. And worse, you might share that story with others, who then carry it forward as if it were fact.

In my experience, humans get this wrong far more often than we get it right and at absurdly high rates. But when we slow down and actually seek what's getting in the way, we often discover our internal narrative was completely off.

More often than not, the real issues fall into one of the five pillars of Human Integration. This list isn't exhaustive, but it's a useful place to start:

*Me:* They don't feel safe enough to speak truthfully to me. My presence, power, or behavior might be unintentionally shutting them down.

*Broken Relationship:* They're avoiding me altogether because our connection is strained or damaged.

*Broken Handoff:* They're doing the work, but the breakdown is happening somewhere invisible between us.

*Misaligned Big Pictures:* They're following goals, objectives, or priorities from their boss, but those don't align with what I'm hearing from mine.

*Misaligned Systems of Work:* They're doing the work the way they were trained or structured to do it and their system doesn't line up with mine.

This is the kind of insight the Behavior Wheel is designed to surface. It interrupts the reflex to assume and invites us to investigate with curiosity, humility, and a willingness to reframe.

What if, instead of filling in the gaps with negative assumptions, you chose to assume the best? What if you believed the person cared deeply, was doing their best, or was struggling with something you couldn't yet see?

- Maybe their late reply wasn't disrespect to you, but a reflection of too many high priority demands.
- Maybe they didn't challenge your idea because they were afraid of conflict, not because they didn't care.
- Maybe that missed deadline happened because they were trying to fix a bigger issue no one saw.
- Maybe their silence in the meeting was self-protection, not disengagement.
- Maybe the tension you feel is theirs too and they're just waiting for someone to go first.

When we start from empathy instead of assumption, we open space for clarity, connection, and course correction. It doesn't mean ignoring problems, it means approaching them in a way that preserves relationship and builds trust.

## The Behavior Progression



This shift creates psychological safety. It invites honesty. It makes space for the real story to come forward. And once you know the truth, you can work on real problems not imagined ones. You can solve issues instead of fanning the flames of resentment or miscommunication.

The behavior wheel helps teams see that bad assumptions and false narratives aren't just bad manners they're operationally expensive. They lead to delays, broken handoffs, fractured relationships, and missed opportunities for collaboration. Choosing curiosity over certainty builds stronger, more resilient teams and dramatically accelerates the path to truth, clarity, and shared success.

Being a human integrator means recognizing when you're on the wheel and choosing to step off. It means pausing when tempted to judge, and instead asking: what am I missing? What could be true that I don't yet see?

The result is faster problem-solving, stronger relationships, and a culture where people are seen, heard, and understood. That's the kind of environment where innovation thrives.

## Can You Really Teach This?

One of the most common questions I get is: This all makes sense, but can it be taught?

It's a fair question. This paper is grounded in what I've done, not yet in what I've formally taught. While the principles of Human Integration are designed to be transferable, scalable, and teachable, I haven't yet had the opportunity to run a structured pilot that proves that out. My next use case will focus on answering this very question.

That said, I've been teaching this work informally for years through conversation, modeling, critical questions, and tools like the Behavior Wheel.

Even after decades of doing this work, I still wrestle with ego, bias, and fear, especially under pressure. Human Integration is not about arrival; it's about conscious repetition and emotional awareness. I also recommend a number of books and resources (see References section) that help build this mindset over time.

As I look to what's next, I'm eager to explore:

- What tools or coaching structures help others become integrators?
- How do we measure growth in alignment or cohesion across functions?
- What makes someone more (or less) ready to lead from the middle?

This is hard work. If behavior change were easy, I wouldn't be writing this paper. It takes courage to surface blind spots, model healthier behavior, and create space for teams to evolve. But when you try and begin to see results, it becomes one of the most deeply satisfying experiences in your professional life.

## Human Integration as a Discipline Maturity Model

### Level 1: Unaware / Disconnected

- Us vs. them dynamics dominate. Teams operate in silos, with blame-shifting and territorial behavior.
- Poor communication and unresolved conflict. Broken handoffs are normalized.
- Informal and inconsistent systems of work. No shared understanding of expectations or responsibilities.
- People are unaware of their contribution to dysfunction. No personal accountability.
- Low morale, frequent rework, leadership blind spots, and low trust.

### Level 2: Aware / Awakening

- Individuals begin recognizing their own biases and communication breakdowns.
- Some effort toward reconciliation. Occasional feedback conversations happen.
- Some mapping of processes and expectations begins. SLAs/OLAs may exist but are siloed or unclear.
- Staff begin asking questions about team dynamics and unclear expectations.
- Isolated improvements, reduced tension in some areas, early signs of collaboration.

### Level 3: Practicing / Repairing

- Teams are engaged in training on self-awareness, communication, and conflict resolution.
- Active work on broken handoffs and repairing trust. Rules of Play established.
- Teams begin aligning informal and formal systems across functions. Expectations are documented.
- Emerging Human Integrators begin co-creating solutions. Individuals take ownership beyond their role.
- Fewer misunderstandings, improved cross-functional project outcomes, measurable relationship progress.

### Level 4: Embedded / Collaborative

- Staff exhibit high emotional intelligence and safety. People surface issues early and speak with clarity and respect.
- Trust is the norm. People give each other the benefit of the doubt and seek root cause vs. blame.

- Systems are interoperable. Shared language and frameworks are used to align.
- Human Integrators are emerging across functions. Collaboration is part of the culture.
- Predictable execution, unified goals, high employee engagement, and visible cross-functional success.

#### Level 5: Evolving / Regenerative

- Teams perform continuous reflection and personal growth. Assumptions are surfaced and reframed quickly.
- Conflict is constructive. Relationships are monitored, maintained, and quickly repaired when stressed.
- Dynamic system of work co-created and continuously improved with input from all levels.
- Human Integration is everyone's job. Leaders model and coach it. It's embedded into onboarding, evaluation, and culture.
- Strategic agility, resilient collaboration, fast access to truth, high innovation, and a palpable sense of unity.

## Human Integrator Stories

### My Very First Human Integrator Experience

It was my second job, and I was young, excited, and eager to contribute. My first role had been in customer service, and I had just transitioned into Clearing, a department responsible for auditing and approving the orders taken by customer service.

I quickly noticed ways customer service could improve their processes to make clearing more efficient. There were pieces of information they consistently missed; details that made our work more difficult and slowed things down. To me, it was obvious. So, I brought my ideas to my boss.

I was told to stay in my lane.

It was the first time I realized that many managers are uncomfortable with staff who analyze beyond their role. There's a fear that thinking too broadly is disruptive. But the truth is, those who "see things" across functions are often the ones who can improve the whole. I was acting as a human integrator before I had a name for it, and I was shut down.

Over time, I learned how to couch my observations in ways that felt less threatening to my leaders. Eventually, I earned enough trust to be heard. Some of my suggestions were implemented for example, unnecessary data collection in customer service was eliminated, and a couple of small but impactful process changes made clearing significantly faster.

That experience energized me. I started moving laterally through the organization, gaining insights into how it truly operated and where things were breaking down between departments. I also kept practicing how to present what I saw in a way that leaders could hear. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes it didn't. But it taught me two key lessons: the power of cross-functional insight, and the importance of how you deliver it.

### Shared Goal Conflict Between Departments

They were updating the company website. It seemed simple, until it wasn't.

The marketing leader wanted to reduce the number of clicks required for customers to sign up for service. Less friction, better conversion. Meanwhile, the customer service leader wanted to add a few steps to capture more data at signup, ensuring accurate fulfillment and fewer support issues later.

Both leaders had the same goal: improve the customer experience. But their definitions of what that meant were in direct conflict. Not wrong but in conflict none-the-less. And so, their teams fought for competing objectives in project meetings with no one side giving in to the other. The project was stuck.

This is where a project manager, who had no formal authority over either leader, stepped in and practiced the discipline of a human integrator.

The project manager had already built relationships with both leaders. They had identified and helped correct some broken handoffs earlier in the project, earning credibility. But this would still require courage. Rather than let the project grind to a halt, they requested a meeting between the two department heads.

The project manager began with this simple truth: “You’re both right.” The PM acknowledged that each leader was acting in the customer’s best interest, one focused on ease, the other on accuracy. That validation set the tone. No one felt attacked.

Then, the PM gave them the problem to solve together: “Let’s see if you can work this out together” while unsaid “without needing your bosses to decide for you” giving them agency.

The customer service leader eventually agreed to withdraw their added click requirements. But they did so with the understanding that they weren’t being dismissed. The PM asked, “What else could we do on the backend to help ensure fulfillment succeeds even with a shorter form?” helping create some alternative solutions.

New backend processes were introduced to flag risks earlier and support fulfillment more effectively. Marketing got their clean signup flow. Customer service got better assurance. The customer got the best of both worlds.

This moment could have gone another way. The PM could have stepped back and said, “Not my job to bring leaders together, that would be their bosses’ responsibility.” They could have waited for dates to slip or conflict to escalate. But instead, they stepped in, not with force, but with humility. They offered a safe space to create a path forward without making anyone wrong.

That’s what human integration looks like. Courageous conversations. Mutual respect. Creative problem-solving that brings the best out of everyone.

## Human Integrator Use Case

**Title:** Turning Around a Toxic Ops Culture in a Small Startup

### **Situation**

When I stepped into a small startup as an operations lead, the organization was in visible distress. Within my first 90 days, it was evident: morale was low, communication was broken, and the culture was toxic. Teams were disjointed and reactive. Productivity suffered under the weight of infighting, disengagement, and unresolved tensions.

Staff were emotionally exhausted. Screaming matches weren't uncommon, and absenteeism was a near-daily issue. Broken relationships casted long shadows, it didn't just affect two individuals, it dampened innovation, collaboration, and forward motion across the entire system.

The leadership team wanted results such as faster delivery, fewer delays, and smoother installs but their approach relied heavily on top-down pressure. Staff had been conditioned to seek approval for every decision. Ownership was scarce. Processes were unclear. Handoffs were botched. And most of all, no one felt safe.

### **Integration Action**

I didn't begin with systems I began with myself. I had to confront my own biases and frustration. I chose curiosity over judgment, compassion over control. That's when the real work began.

I introduced Human Integration as a discipline. At first, there was resistance, staff couldn't imagine working with people they had come to mistrust. But slowly, we rebuilt connection. I asked team members to share their work, their process, their experiences on whiteboards, and in casual meetings. And what surfaced wasn't just frustration it was broken handoffs, misaligned expectations, and systems that pitted people against each other.

We focused on process visibility and mutual understanding. People started seeing the negative friction not as a personality problem, but as a systems issue. We reframed the work and the stories we told about each other.

Leadership strategy lacked clarity, so I became the translator connecting top-line objectives to day-to-day operations in a language each team could understand. I surfaced the formal and informal systems we relied on and brought shared meaning to both.

### **Systems Changes**

We set clear operational goals:

- Build self-sustaining, continuously improving teams
- Eliminate unnecessary overtime caused by broken processes
- Improve customer satisfaction and reduce rework
- Instill a culture of ownership, not compliance
- Fix the absenteeism problem

We integrated Human Integration methods into the work:

- Adopted psychological safety practices across all levels
- Facilitated alignment sessions to translate across functions and resolve operational friction
- Rewrote performance management to reflect growth and team health
- Tied operational metrics directly to corporate goals
- Celebrated friction as a sign of trust, not dysfunction

We made work visible: tracking breakdowns, documenting handoffs, and co-creating new expectations.

### **Outcomes (by Year 2)**

The change was undeniable. The atmosphere had shifted, and lightness replaced dread. Staff were laughing, supporting each other, checking in on health and wellbeing. Friction became productive. Engagement soared. Teams owned their work and challenged leadership when needed.

Was it perfect? No. Under stress, old behaviors resurfaced. But now, people recognized the slip and course-corrected quickly. Success wasn't about avoiding breakdowns it was about responding to them with maturity and trust.

Cross-functional collaboration became smoother and even enjoyable. Teams moved with purpose. Operations became more stable, more sustainable, and ready to grow.

### **Key Results**

- Self-managing teams that collaborate with confidence
- Dramatic drop in toxic behaviors and absenteeism
- Major infrastructure projects completed on time, without team casualties
- Core processes documented, owned, and improved
- Virtually eliminated wasteful overtime
- Operations receiving consistent 5-star reviews
- Measurable gains in customer retention, installation efficiency, and cost control
- Increased transparency, better planning, and team-wide traceability on build work
- A thriving safety program and staff-led training documentation effort

This turnaround wasn't driven by a formal framework or a top-down initiative, it was sparked by human integration in action. It started with choosing curiosity, rebuilding trust, and aligning people and process in real time. The results speak for themselves. This became my proof point: Human Integration doesn't just heal teams, it strengthens operations, elevates culture, and creates momentum that lasts.

## **Supporting Research**

### **A Practical Guide to Cross-Functional Work (Medium)**

This guide underscores the operational and emotional friction that often occurs in cross-functional teams, misunderstandings, duplicative efforts, and unmet expectations stemming from unclear communication or disconnected processes. It supports my argument that much of this struggle isn't about individual incompetence, but structural misalignment and relational disconnects. The article offers tactical suggestions like role clarity, shared definitions of success, and tighter feedback loops, all principles that echo Human Integration's core belief: we can't build high-trust, high-performing teams without intentionally designing the in-between. The guide's emphasis on clarity and intentional support framework validates both my behavior wheel and the use of qualitative cues to assess team cohesion.

### **All About Teams: A New Approach to Organizational Transformation (McKinsey)**

McKinsey's research reinforces the idea that teams, not org charts, are the atomic unit of transformation. It echoes what Human Integration teaches: when you improve how people work together across silos, outcomes naturally follow. The article highlights successful transformation traits like empowered teams, distributed leadership, and adaptive rhythms; traits aligned with the Human Integration pillars of psychological safety, unity, and capacity clarity. It also reminds us that cross-functional unity isn't a "soft skill" but a strategic lever for efficiency, adaptability, and growth. Human Integration adds depth by offering tools to achieve these outcomes when trust is low, or systems are misaligned.

### **Dynamic Silos: Increased Modularity in Intra-Organizational Communication Networks during the Covid-19 Pandemic (arXiv)**

This research takes a fascinating systems view of communication networks, showing how silos became more modular during remote work, a shift that made some workflows more efficient, but others more fragmented and emotionally distant. It affirms Human Integration's emphasis on relational context: when we stop "bumping into each other" physically, it becomes even more vital to design for connection, feedback, and understanding. The paper supports my assertion that misalignment isn't always intentional. It's often a natural byproduct of evolving work structures. Without a deliberate effort to maintain psychological and operational bridges, the "us vs. them" dynamic accelerates, especially in times of disruption.

### **Cross-Functional Collaboration in the Early Phases of Capital Projects (ScienceDirect)**

This study reveals how even highly structured, resource intensive projects suffer from early-stage misalignments, especially when one team's assumptions aren't shared or clarified with others. This mirrors Human Integration's observation that breakdowns often happen not during execution, but in the setup. The paper's focus on coordination, expectation setting, and knowledge transfer highlights the need for cross-functional fluency, a central tenet of the Human Integration discipline. It reinforces the idea that without someone serving as an integrator, someone to translate, challenge assumptions, and clarify interdependencies, projects risk stalling or losing momentum before they even begin.

### **Understanding Complex Work Using an Extension of the Resilience CARE Model (Sanford et al., BMC Health Services Research)**

Recent research in Resilient Healthcare echoes much of what Human Integration is designed to address. A study using the CARE (Concepts for Applying Resilience Engineering) model documented nearly 400 breakdowns between demand and capacity in a busy London hospital. These weren't big failures, but small, everyday misalignments: not enough staff, missing equipment, unclear handoffs, or poor communication. And what did people do? They adapted, quietly, creatively, often invisibly. This idea of work-as-done and what actually happens versus what's written in the playbook is central to both the CARE model and Human Integration. When we acknowledge that people are constantly adjusting to meet real-time needs, we stop judging symptoms and start understanding systems. That's the shift. We can't improve what we don't see, and we won't see it if we're stuck in blame. This research reminds us how important it is to surface misalignments, make room for curiosity, and build capacity for smarter, more human systems of work.

## **Final Reflection**

I know this sounds simple. In some ways it is. But simple doesn't mean easy. Behavior change is hard. It's uncomfortable. It asks us to unlearn habits of blame, defensiveness, and detachment and practice curiosity, clarity, and repair instead. That's why Human Integration is as much a practice as it is a framework. And it's why we don't need perfect humans to do this, we need honest ones.

You will face resistance. Most organizations prioritize the visible: strategy, systems, and metrics. But when the humans don't integrate, even the best-designed plans fall short. That's why this work matters.

You, yourself will be resistant. This work asks you to look inward first, to question your own assumptions, to confront strained relationships, to take ownership of what isn't working. That can feel uncomfortable, even threatening. It's easier to look outward and wait for "them" to change.



But if you commit, if you model the behaviors of a Human Integrator consistently and humbly, the systems around you begin to shift. Trust deepens. Information flows. Alignment strengthens. And when the system changes, so do the outcomes.

And now, the next chapter begins. I'm ready to test this as a repeatable and trainable discipline. I want to create and test tools that help others lead this work without me. I want to understand what guiding systems they need, how we measure growth, and what gets in the way. I recognize this work would benefit from a more structured implementation plan, and I hope my next use case will provide the opportunity to design and test that framework in practice.

I welcome your reflections and feedback. You can connect with me on LinkedIn at [www.linkedin.com/in/kim-bettinger](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kim-bettinger).

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