

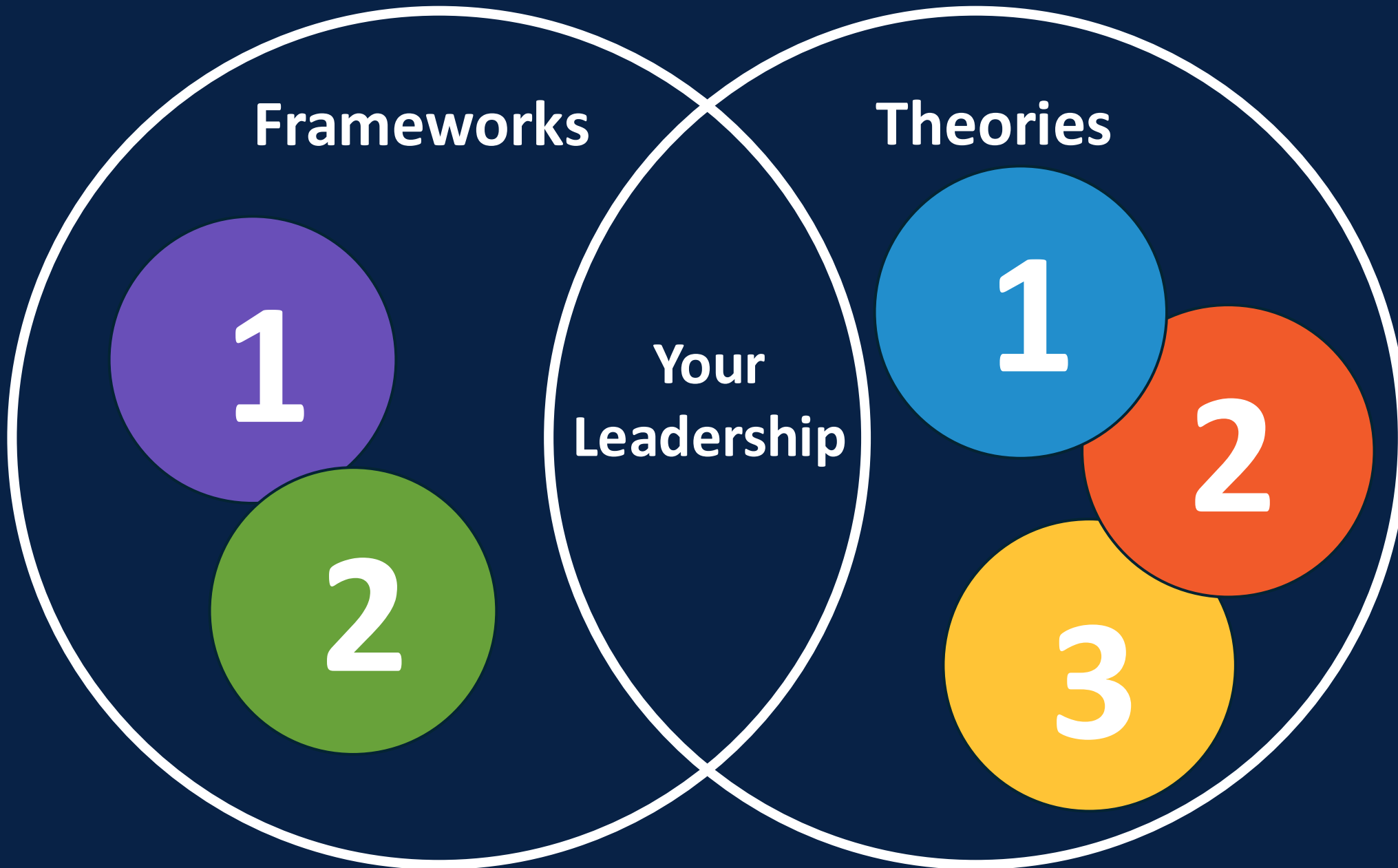
Leading from the Middle: Theory in Action

Meauxmentum Summit

February 4-5, 2026 • Lafayette, Louisiana

Nancy L. Zimpher

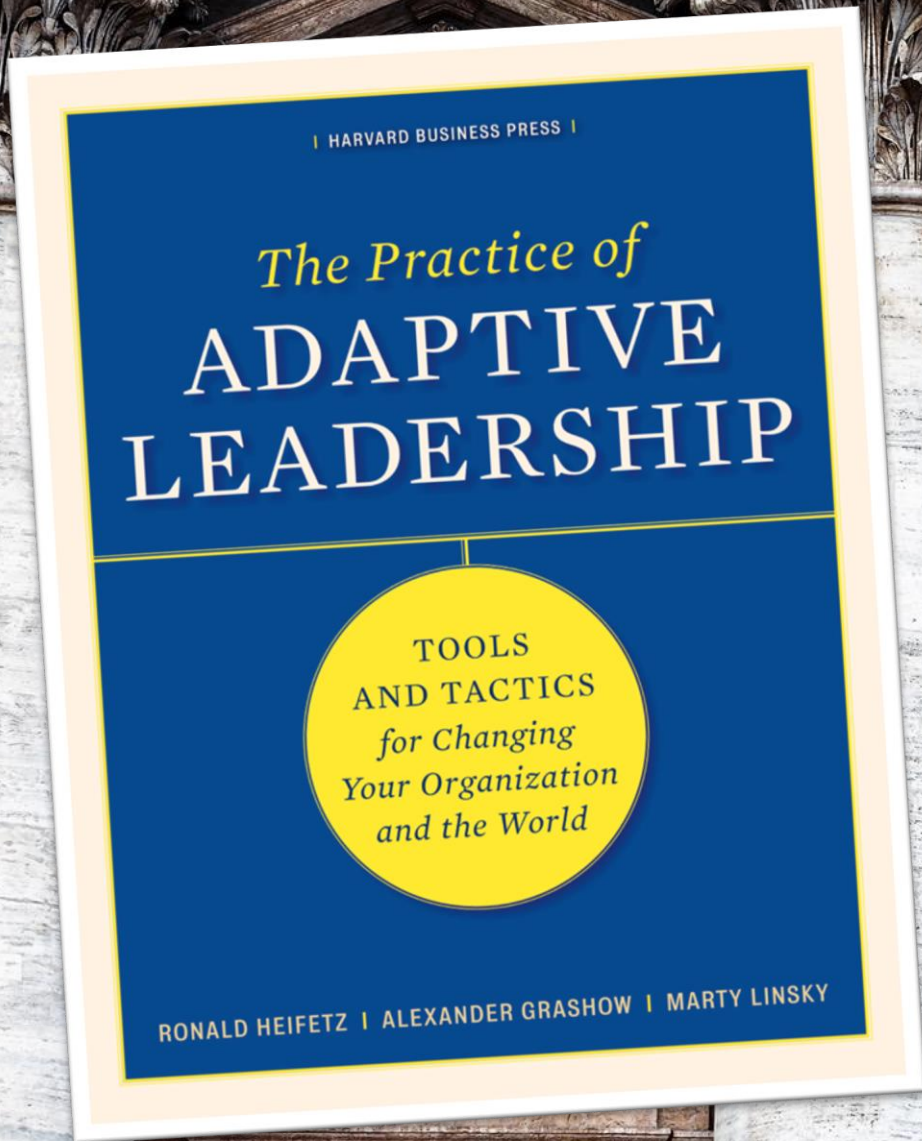
President, National Association of Higher Education Systems
Chancellor Emeritus, State University of New York



Two Frameworks

1 Adaptive Leadership

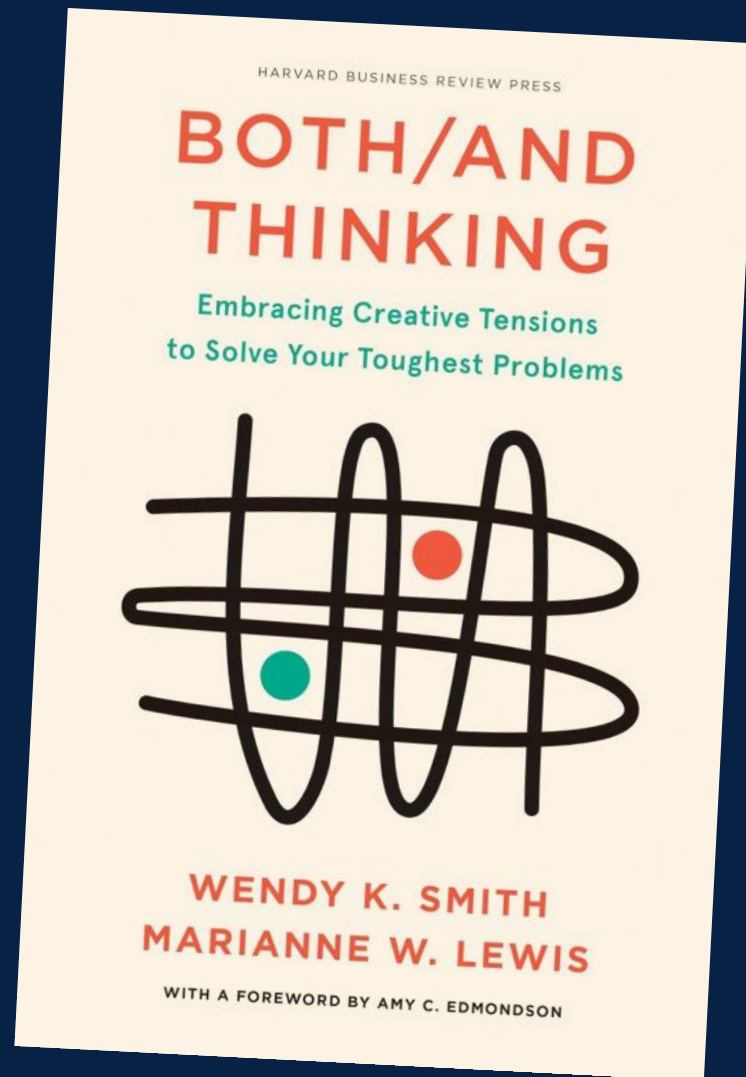
2 Both/And Thinking



NASH
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS


the **POWER** of **SYSTEMS**

#systemness



Three Theories

- 1 Leadership
- 2 Collective Impact
- 3 Improvement Science

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My Theory of Leadership



Way 1: Vision





Way 2: At the Hands of Many





the POWER of SYSTEMS



Way 3: Action



Six Big Ideas:

SUNY and
the World



SUNY and an
Energy-Smart New
York



the Power of
SUNY

SUNY and the
Entrepreneurial
Century



SUNY and a
Healthier
New York



SUNY and the Seamless
Education Pipeline



SUNY and the
Vibrant Community



Way 4: Accountability





DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

ACCESS

1. Full Enrollment Picture
2. NYS Residents Served by SUNY
3. Diversity
4. Capacity - programs and courses

COMPLETION

5. Completions
6. Student Achievement / Success (SAM)
7. Graduation Rates
8. Time to Degree

SUCCESS

9. SUNY Advantage (Applied Learning, Multi-Cultural Experiences, Student Supports)
10. Financial Literacy

INQUIRY

11. Total Sponsored Activity
12. Courses in SIRIS that include hands-on research, entrepreneurship, etc.
13. Scholarship, Discovery and Innovation

ENGAGEMENT

14. START-UP New York and beyond (businesses started / jobs created)
15. Alumni / Philanthropic Support
16. Civic Engagement
17. Economic Impact

COMPLETION AGENDA

INNOVATION

Way 5: Sustainability



Three Theories

- 1 Leadership
- 2 Collective Impact
- 3 Improvement Science



In Cincinnati for every
100 ninth grade students...



73 students graduate from
high school four years later...



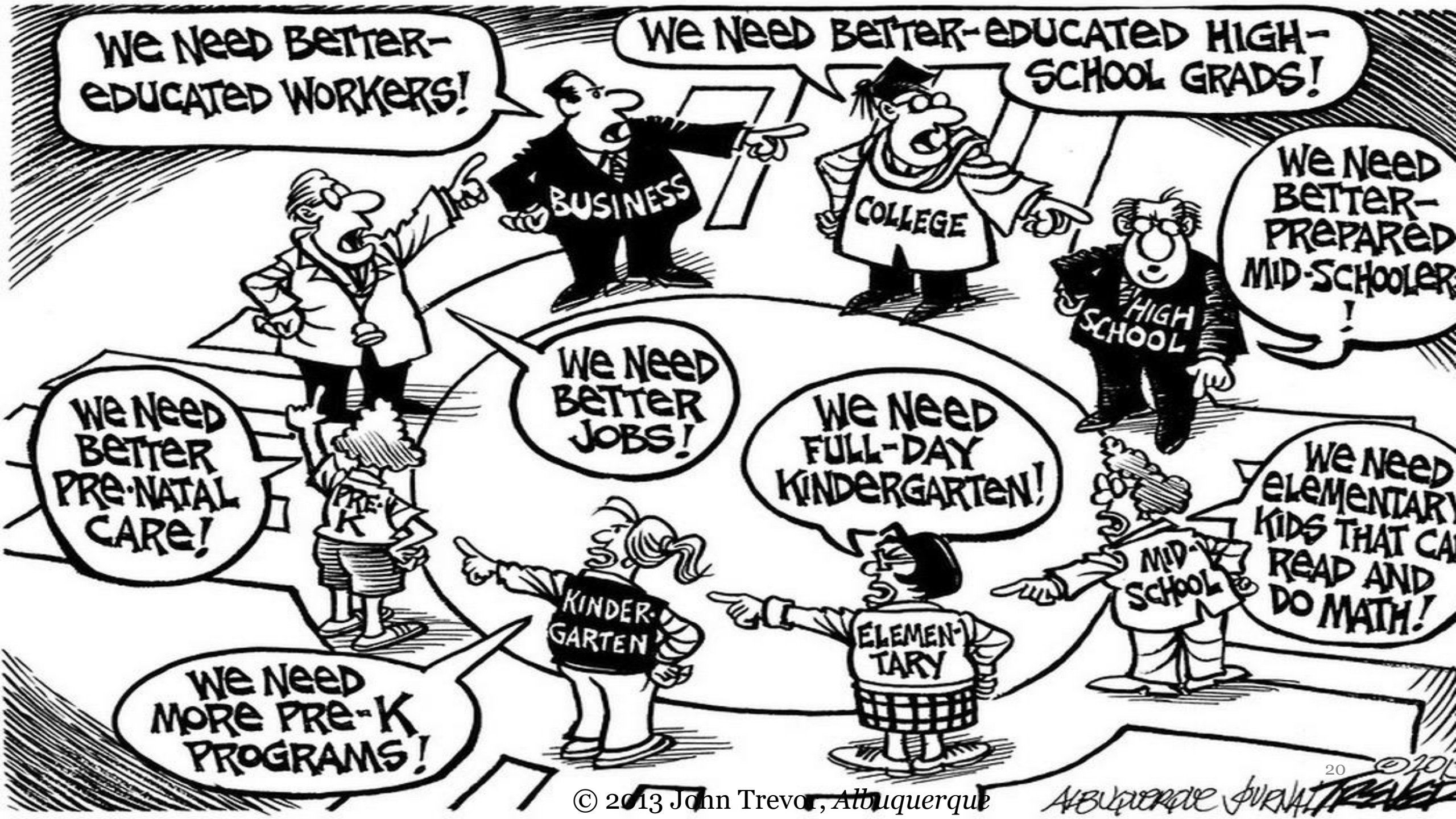
51 students immediately enter college...



37 students are still enrolled in their second year...



and 23 students graduate with either an associate's degree within
three years or a bachelor's degree within six years.



WE NEED BETTER-EDUCATED WORKERS!

WE NEED BETTER-EDUCATED HIGH-SCHOOL GRADS!

WE NEED BETTER-PREPARED MID-SCHOOLER!

WE NEED elementary KIDS THAT CAN READ AND DO MATH!

WE NEED FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN!

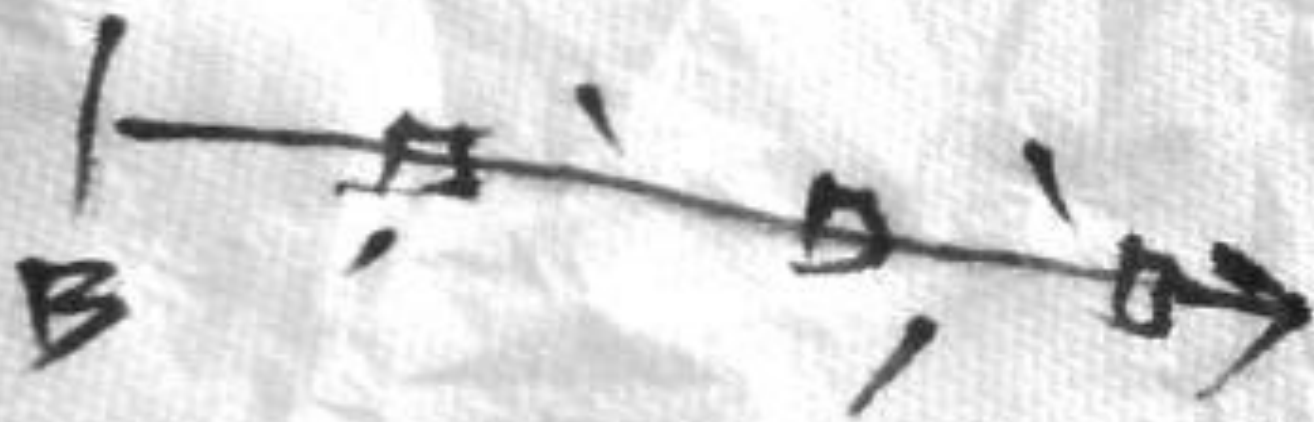
WE NEED BETTER JOBS!

WE NEED BETTER PRE-NATAL CARE!

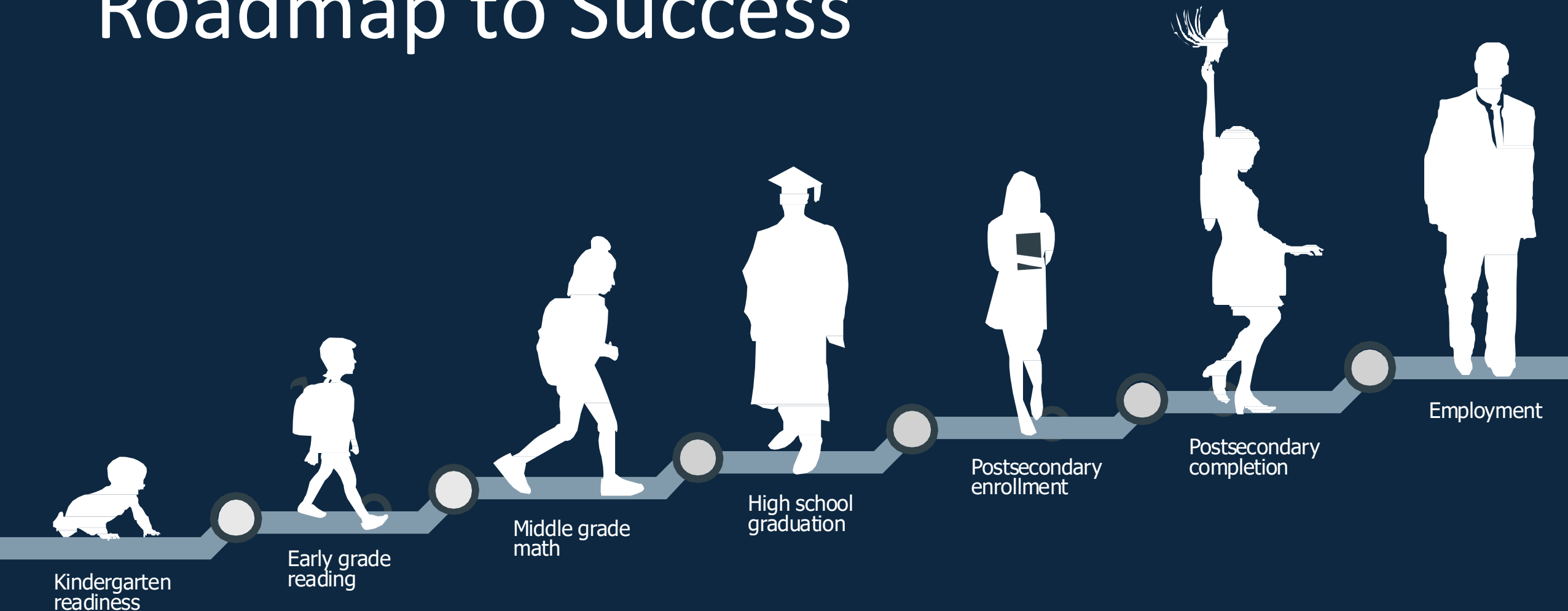
WE NEED MORE PRE-K PROGRAMS!



Student Roadmap to Success



Roadmap to Success



Key Stakeholders



Shared Goals

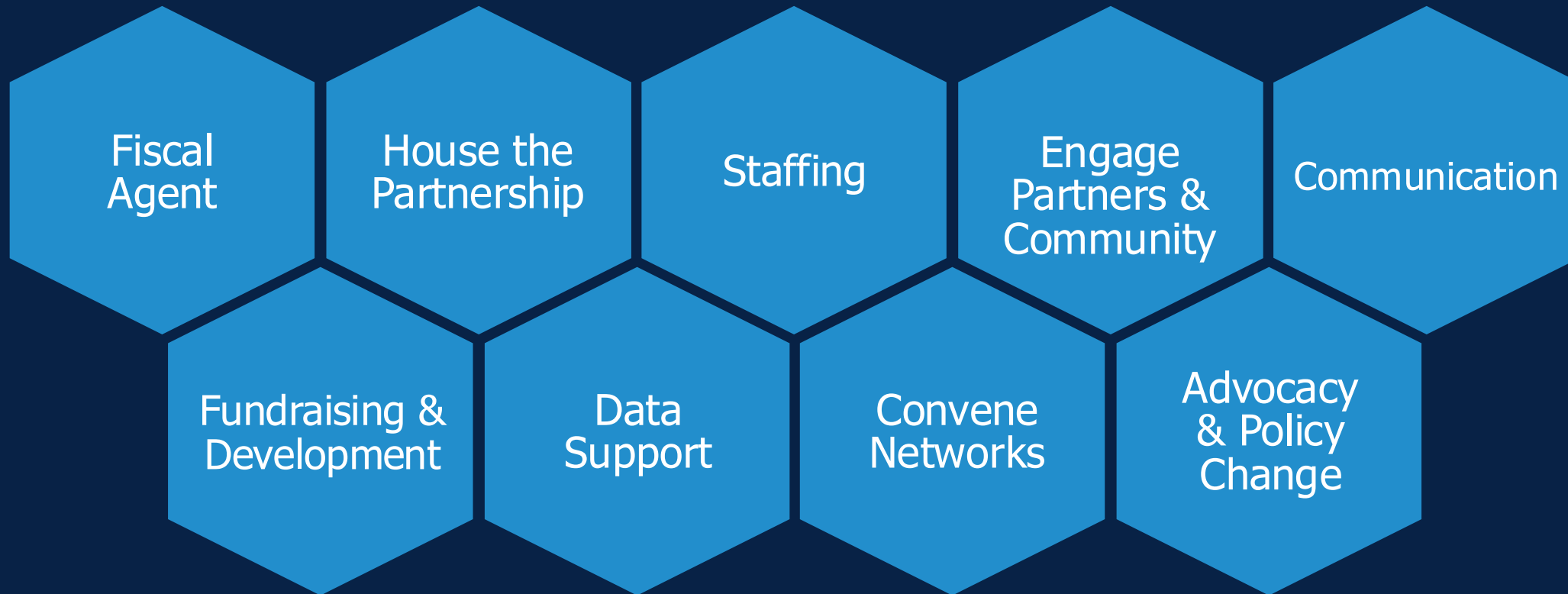


Evidence Based



Sustained Support

Backbone Functions



Three Theories

1

Leadership

2

Collective Impact

3

Improvement Science

Improvement Science. Really.

What works



...and how to make it work

bridging the knowledge gap

Solves For:

**Organization
al Paralysis**

**Solutioniti
s**

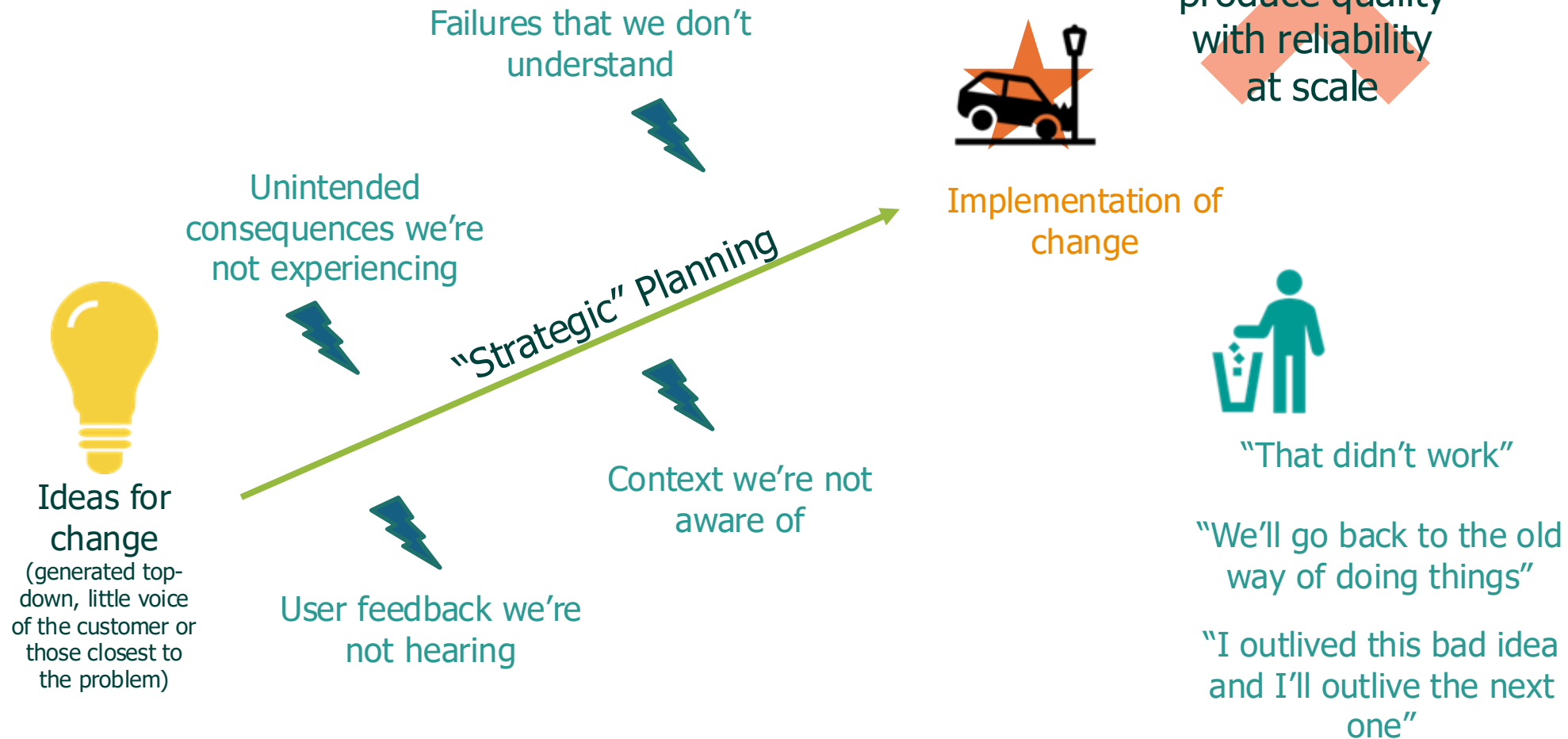
Low Trust

Fear

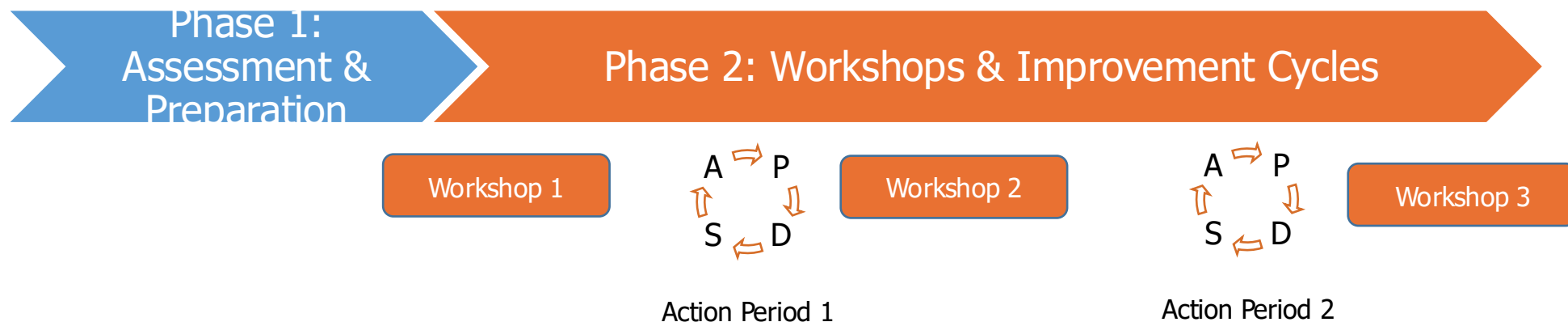
How to Create Massive Change: Improvement Science as an Approach for Breakthrough Results



Current Approach to Change



NIC Structure



Generating New Knowledge with Improvement Science

- Improvement Science is built for testing ideas in cycles to figure out what works to deliver the results we are aiming for.
- Once an idea shows promise of improving outcomes, teams engage in sequential testing, which helps us answer the question “Does this solution work across multiple contexts?” (ex. A team may test an intervention at a department level, then spread to 3-5 departments)
- After sequential testing and examining the results of the tests, teams begin to identify practices that have a high degree of belief, meaning we’re fairly certain that the practice can be replicated elsewhere, in another context, and deliver results.
- This is new knowledge.

YOUR Theory of Leadership: Improving Our Capacity and Impact

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