



Co-Exponential™

The Org Chart Was Ready. The Leadership System Wasn't.

How a global automotive IT leadership team turned a major organizational redesign into a practical new way of leading.



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Large organizations can redesign structures surprisingly quickly.



New reporting lines can be announced. Roles can be defined. Product structures can be created. Governance can be redesigned.



But none of those things determine what happens when two priorities collide, when resources become scarce, when accountability is unclear, when a decision cuts across organizational boundaries, or when pressure makes the old hierarchy suddenly feel safer.



That was the challenge facing a newly assembled senior IT leadership team inside a global automotive and mobility enterprise.



A significant organizational transformation was about to go live. The new model was designed around greater end-to-end responsibility, empowered teams, lateral leadership and stronger alignment around products and value.

The structure was nearly ready.

The leadership system was not.

“

The two days felt **genuinely engaging**, not forced.



The real challenge was not organizational design



Ahead of the transition, Co-Exponential conducted confidential conversations across the leadership group.



There was considerable belief in the potential of the new organization. There was also an equally clear recognition that the group was not yet operating as one leadership team.



New roles were intersecting in unfamiliar ways. Leaders would need to exercise influence without relying on hierarchy. Decisions previously pushed upward would increasingly need to be made closer to the work. Scarce budget and capability would have to be allocated across the whole system rather than defended locally.

The most important risks were therefore not boxes on an organization chart.

They were questions such as:



Who decides when priorities compete?



What does empowerment really mean when the decision is difficult?



How do leaders protect autonomy without losing alignment?



What happens when the new model collides with established corporate processes?



How do people move from “my resources, my budget, my area” to responsibility for the performance of the whole system?



And how does a newly assembled group become a leadership team quickly enough to lead a transformation already underway?

The leadership group itself identified the required shifts: greater end-to-end accountability, shared responsibility across organizational boundaries, delegated decision making, influence without authority and big picture over silo thinking. They also recognized exactly where the new model would be tested: budget pressure, board expectations, existing approval processes, portfolio mechanisms and escalation routes.



The Goal: A Minimum Viable Leadership Collaboration System.



Objective: don't try to solve every organizational question in two days.



This would have been unrealistic, and moreover, counterproductive.



Instead, the goal was to establish the **minimum viable leadership collaboration system** the team needed to begin operating differently.

The work focused on six interconnected areas:



The foundation: relationships, trust and collective responsibility.

The foundation that determines whether any leadership model works in practice.



The distinction mattered.

This was not about designing the perfect future organization in a conference room.



It was about giving leaders enough clarity, confidence, shared language and practical agreements to **start operating differently immediately**.



Start With Purpose Before Debating Structure.



The team first established a shared North Star for the transformation.



They aligned around creating a focused, adaptable technology portfolio, delivered with greater speed and flexibility through clear priorities, empowered teams and transparent decisions.



They then translated that aspiration into practical priorities that covered the transformation effort alongside critical business as usual initiatives.



That created an important shift in the conversation.

Instead of asking only:



“What is my role?”

The team could begin asking:



“What does the organization need from us collectively to achieve the North Star?”

That is a **fundamentally different** leadership question.

“

The energy in the room was **visible and memorable.**



The Breakthrough Came When The Agenda Stopped Mattering.

The original experience had been carefully designed.

Two issues emerged that required significantly more attention than planned: decision making and the new budget process.

The easy facilitation choice would have been to protect the agenda.

The right choice was to protect the transformation.

So the team stayed with the difficult conversations when reality intervened.

The group also clarified specific areas, including:



**Technology
choices**



**Vendor
decisions**



**People-related
decisions**



**The relationship
between operational
leadership levels**

One principle emerged very clearly: operational leaders should be able to make decisions unless they cross agreed strategic boundaries.

By the time the team moved into prioritization, the language had changed dramatically representing an aligned and empowered team:

“

It's our decision... we decide... we use our judgement!

That sentence captures the shift better than any framework could. Leadership autonomy had moved from theory toward practice.



Using The Real Work Created Real Value.



The budget discussion was not a case study or simulation.
It was work the leadership team **genuinely needed to complete.**



By creating the conditions for the team to make progress on it together,
the workshop simultaneously advanced the transformation and
accelerated an immediate business task.



One participant described the outcome simply:

“

Happy we have prioritization on the budget activity.
Saves us two weeks.



That is an important principle in how we work.

Leadership development becomes much more powerful when the
real business becomes the laboratory.



Do not teach collaboration

and then send leaders back to collaborate.



Do the difficult work together

and use what happens in the room to reveal how the team actually leads.



From Hierarchy To Guardrails.

One of the hardest transitions in a matrix organization is psychological rather than structural.

Leaders may be told they are empowered while still waiting for permission.

Senior leaders may say they want distributed decision making while unintentionally pulling decisions back upward.

Teams may talk about shared accountability while continuing to optimize locally.

The group confronted those tensions directly.

The resulting leadership commitments were striking.

Senior leaders committed to
support and coach rather than reclaim control.

They told colleagues:

“This won’t be easy; we are committed to protect your decisions.”

And they also said:

“Tell us if we don’t act in the way we committed to today.”

Those statements matter because empowerment is not created by telling people they are empowered.

It is created when senior leaders change what they do after somebody makes a decision they might have made differently.

“

The experience was enjoyable as well as productive.



Giving The Team Language To Challenge Itself.

Teams also need a way to notice when old behavior is returning.

The group adopted Teamitis, the Co-Exponential term for the quiet gap between what a team is capable of and what it actually delivers.

It was introduced not as a diagnosis but as an invitation to interrupt unhelpful patterns and get the team back on track.

Teamitis™

The quiet gap between what a team is capable of and what it actually delivers.

Not a diagnosis

It is an invitation to interrupt unhelpful patterns.

A shared language

It helps the team notice when old behavior is returning.

A practical tool

It gets the team back on track.

By the end of the session, one participant's personal commitment was:

“

Point out **Teamitis** whenever I sense it.

That gives the leadership team something most teams lack: permission and shared language to challenge behavior in real time.



What Changed In Two Days?

This was not a claim that a complex enterprise transformation had been completed in 48 hours.

The real organization was only beginning its journey, and the new leadership model still had to survive everyday operational pressure.

But by the end of the experience, the team had moved materially forward.

- 1 They had established a shared North Star and priorities.
- 2 They had confronted the leadership shifts required by the matrix.
- 3 They had clarified important decision boundaries and increased freedom for operational leaders.
- 4 They had accelerated a difficult budget and prioritization discussion.
- 5 They had identified ecosystem dependencies.
- 6 They had created communication responsibilities, owners and dates.
- 7 And they had translated the conversation into specific business actions rather than leaving with a collection of workshop observations.

Most importantly, the language of the team had started changing.
One leader described:

“A clearer picture on how to work together and how decisions will be made.”

“

**“I got a recalibration of my role and my mindset
a couple of times; it was **mindblowing!**”**

And the leadership sponsors closed with a commitment to operate as one team, support conflicts across organizational boundaries, protect delegated decisions and invite the group to hold them accountable for their behaviors.

That is a **very different starting point from a new organization whose leaders have merely received an updated org chart.**



Five lessons For Any Organization Going Through Structural Change

1

A new structure does not create new behavior.

Organizations routinely underestimate the lag between changing reporting lines and changing how leadership actually happens. If decision habits, incentives and relationships remain unchanged, the old organization survives inside the new one.

2

Decision rights become real only under pressure.

Do not spend hours debating abstract governance. Put a genuine contested decision on the table and watch what happens. That is where ambiguity, hierarchy and trust become visible.

3

Purpose must precede prioritization.

Leaders cannot make meaningful trade-offs until they agree what they are collectively optimizing for. A North Star provides the reference point that makes saying “no” possible.

4

Empowerment requires protection from above.

Delegating authority is easy. Allowing someone else to exercise it when the stakes are high is much harder. Senior leaders have to actively protect the decision space they create.

5

The workshop should advance the work, not sit beside it.

The most valuable moments often occur when the designed agenda gives way to the real problem. If a team leaves with stronger leadership capability and two weeks of business work accelerated, those are not competing outcomes. They are evidence that leadership development and business performance can reinforce one another.



The Work Begins When The Workshop Ends.

The test of any leadership experience comes later.



What happens when budgets tighten?



When a senior stakeholder disagrees?



When two teams want the same capability?



When somebody makes a decision that would previously have been escalated?



When the organization is busy enough that the North Star becomes harder to see?

That is why this work was designed as the beginning of a leadership journey rather than the culmination of one.

The leadership team left with:



Explicit
actions and
owners



Commitments
to keep the new
mindsets alive



Mechanisms for
communication
across the
ecosystem



A subsequent accountability
session designed to inspect
what actually survives contact
with reality.

Because ultimately, transformation is not demonstrated by what a team agrees in a workshop.

“

**It is demonstrated by what the team does
differently when the pressure returns.**



The Co-Exponential perspective.

Many organizations do not have an organization-design problem. They have a leadership-system gap.



The strategy has changed.



The structure has changed.



The roles have changed.

But decisions, relationships, priorities and behaviors are still running on the previous system.

That is the gap Co-Exponential helps leadership teams close.

We work with the real tensions already inside the business to help teams align faster, make better decisions, operate effectively across boundaries and convert structural change into collective performance.

**If your organization has changed faster
than the way your leaders work together,
that is probably the conversation
to have next.**



Co-Exponential

For Enterprise Leaders