

The 11 Mistakes: Patterns That Keep Teams Stuck

A Discussion Guide for Leadership Teams

By Dr. Michael E Nagel

Introduction

Most leadership teams make predictable mistakes that block breakthrough. These aren't random failures - they're recognizable patterns that emerge when teams work with incomplete understanding of what drives collective performance.

This diagnostic identifies 11 common patterns. Most teams exhibit 3-5 of these patterns. The question isn't whether you have gaps - it's which gaps are costing you most.

Take 10 minutes to complete this diagnostic. Be honest about what you observe. Recognition is the first step toward breakthrough.



Instructions

This guide works best when leadership teams engage with it together. You can use it in two ways:

Approach 1 - Individual then Team:

- Have each team member complete the assessment independently
- Check the box if you recognize a pattern in your team
- Count your total and note which patterns resonate most

- Come together to compare observations and discuss findings

Approach 2 - Team Discussion:

- Review each pattern together as a team
- Discuss: Do we recognize this pattern in our collective?
- Reach consensus on which patterns are present
- Use the scoring guide to interpret your team's results

The 11 Patterns

□ **PATTERN 1: TODAY OVER TOMORROW** - Putting most priority on today's business rather than intentionally balancing the current and future business

Description: Today's demands are urgent and visible. Tomorrow's needs are important but not urgent. Operational pressures consume time and attention. Your team operates 80/20 or 90/10 operational/strategic when breakthrough requires 50/50, 30/70 or more.

Why It Happens: Many systems emphasize and reward current performance over future investment.

What It Costs: Future atrophy, caught flat-footed by market shifts, perpetual reactive mode, innovation stalls, breakthrough requires future investment you're not making, competitors who balance better pull ahead.

□ **PATTERN 2: MISSING BREAKTHROUGH FUTURE** - Lacking alignment on a compelling breakthrough future that mobilizes collective energy

Description: Your team has strategic plans, annual goals, maybe a vision statement. But no compelling, grounded picture of breakthrough that genuinely mobilizes collective energy. People pursue individual agendas loosely coordinated under corporate strategy.

Why It Happens: Teams confuse strategic planning with breakthrough framing. They create goals to hit rather than futures to create. Planning is necessary but insufficient for breakthrough.

What It Costs: Diffused energy, competing priorities, lack of collective commitment, initiatives that address symptoms rather than create breakthrough, inability to make hard tradeoffs because there is no shared north star that we operate from.

□ **PATTERN 3: BREAKTHROUGH AS OPTIONAL** - Treating breakthrough capability as an optional enhancement rather than essential organizational infrastructure

Description: Your team views breakthrough work as "nice to have" or "when we have time." Core infrastructure gets investment. Breakthrough capability development is deferred. The assumption: operational excellence is essential, breakthrough capability is optional or of lesser importance.

Why It Happens: Most organizations haven't experienced existential threat that makes breakthrough essential. Default is to optimize the current state rather than attend to the creation of a compelling new reality.

What It Costs: Incremental improvement while markets transform, caught in innovator's dilemma, breakthrough happens by accident (if at all), competitors who treat breakthrough as essential pull ahead, when disruption arrives you lack capability to respond.



The 11 Patterns

□ **PATTERN 4: THE TANGIBLE BIAS** - Leading as if results come from the tangible while underestimating the intangible dynamics that drive breakthrough performance

Description: Your team focuses on what's visible and measurable: initiatives, org charts, processes, metrics, deliverables. The intangible forces – collective agency, structure, context, breakthrough goals, providence – are acknowledged but not actively worked with.

Why It Happens: Tangibles feel more controllable. Intangibles feel soft or ambiguous. Most leadership training emphasizes tangible tools (budgets, strategic plans, OKRs, processes) while treating intangibles as secondary.

What It Costs: Surprised when "good plans fail," culture undermines strategy, resistance appears despite logical case, relationships deteriorate while processes improve, breakthrough requires intangible dynamics you're not cultivating.

□ **PATTERN 5: POORLY DESIGNED GATHERINGS** - Having infrequent or poorly designed leadership gatherings that don't build team capability or manifest the collective breakthrough future

Description: Your team has standing meetings or occasional offsites. But they're not designed to build collective capability. Agendas are packed, facilitation is weak, follow-through is inconsistent. Gatherings consume time without building breakthrough capacity.

Why It Happens: Most leaders haven't learned to design high-quality collective experiences. Default is packed agenda + insufficient time for deep work. Urgent crowds out important. Facilitation and dialogue skills aren't developed.

What It Costs: Missed opportunities to build collective capability, team time doesn't compound (most gatherings start from scratch), collective synergy doesn't develop, breakthrough requires capabilities you're not building through intentional practice.

□ **PATTERN 6: REPORT-OUT MEETINGS** - Having team meetings that are report-outs instead of meaningful dialogue and collective decision-making sessions

Description: Team meetings default to updates, status reports, FYIs. People present. Others half-listen. Questions are clarifying, rarely challenging or generative. Real thinking happens before or after the meeting, not during. Meetings are information exchange, not collective sense-making, partnering or support.

Why It Happens: Report-outs feel efficient and predictable. Genuine dialogue is messy and time-consuming. Most leaders haven't learned to facilitate collective synergy. Meeting norms prioritize information sharing over generating and activating together.

What It Costs: Collective synergy atrophies, decisions emerge from compromise or authority (not genuine collective process), people disengage ("this could have been an email"), breakthrough requires collective engagement you're not practicing.

The 11 Patterns

□ **PATTERN 7: THE AGENCY TRAP** - Over-indexing on individual leadership rather than nurturing collective performance capabilities

Description: Your team hires excellent individuals, holds them accountable for individual / functional results, and largely rewards that individualized achievement. Yet collective performance is not happening or suffers. Individual excellence creates some collective dysfunction as members withhold some information or compete rather than collaborate.

Why It Happens: Many leaders believe better individual capability automatically creates better collective results. This logic is incomplete. Individual optimization can actively undermine collective optimization.

What It Costs: Information hoarding, turf protection, fragmented initiatives, team leaders exhausted by trying to coordinate independent actors, breakthrough that requires collective synergy and capability never emerges.

□ **PATTERN 8: THE PEOPLE FALLACY** - Believing collective breakthrough is largely about getting the right people

Description: When breakthrough doesn't happen, your team diagnoses "wrong people" and considers replacing team members. The assumption: right people = breakthrough results. But new people often encounter the same dynamics as the existing people.

Why It Happens: It's easier to change people than change patterns, systems, structures, or develop collective capability. "People problems" feel more concrete than "causal pattern problems." Most organizations emphasizes hiring and accountability.

What It Costs: Talent churn, good people leave, those who stay become cynical, underlying patterns persist regardless of personnel, breakthrough capability never develops, time and energy spent on recruitment and onboarding that should go to collective development.

□ **PATTERN 9: AVOIDING INNER WORK** - Staying in individual leader mode—avoiding the inner work to develop the emotional and psychological flexibility collective leadership demands

Description: Your team focuses on external work: strategy, execution, results. The inner work - developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, ego management, psychological flexibility, collective dialogue, reflection - is underdeveloped or dismissed as "soft." Leaders operate from unexamined assumptions and reactive patterns.

Why It Happens: Inner work feels uncomfortable, ambiguous, not the "real work." Most leaders were promoted for external results, not inner development. Collective leadership requires capacities most leaders haven't cultivated.

What It Costs: Ego-driven conflicts, reactive decision-making, inability to change complex systems or handle ambiguity, collective leadership demands flexibility you don't have, breakthrough requires inner capacities you haven't developed.



The 11 Patterns

□ **PATTERN 10: FILTERED TRUTH TELLING** - Defaulting to selective truth telling based on perceived consequences instead of creating ego-free reality assessment

Description: All progress begins with the truth. Yet your team discusses surface issues but avoids disclosing realities. People filter, hedge, soften, or defer rather than speak directly. What's said in meetings differs from what's said in parking lots. Consensus is performative rather than genuine.

Why It Happens: Speaking objective truths is perceived as risking relationships and standing. It can create discomfort or challenge hierarchy. Selective truth telling maintains social harmony short-term. Most teams haven't developed capacity for ego-free reality assessment.

What It Costs: Decisions based on incomplete information, problems fester unaddressed, trust erodes (people know the full truth isn't being told), collective synergy can't emerge when an orientation to partial truths persist, breakthrough requires striving for a clear sight of reality.

□ **PATTERN 11: HOLDING OUTDATED PATTERNS** - Not letting go of things that should not exist - holding on to outdated patterns, structures, investments

Description: Your team knows certain initiatives, structures, or practices no longer serve breakthrough. But they persist. Sacred cows or pet projects aren't challenged. "We've always done it this way" prevails. The courage to subtract doesn't match the ambition to add.

Why It Happens: Projects have champions, past decisions represent past judgment, questioning them feels like criticizing people. Subtraction is socially harder than addition. Most teams lack forums and fortitude for strategic subtraction.

What It Costs: Complexity accumulates, resources spread thin, new initiatives compete with old initiatives, team energy diffuses, breakthrough requires space you haven't created by letting go.

Scoring

YOUR SCORE

Total number of patterns you checked: _____

INTERPRETATION

0-2 Patterns: Your team has strong breakthrough intelligence capability. Focus on sustaining and deepening what's working. Consider: Are you being honest in your assessment, or avoiding recognition?

3-5 Patterns: Your team has gaps in breakthrough intelligence. While this is the most common range, common doesn't mean cost-free. These patterns are limiting your results right now. You're experiencing noticeable pain (sub-optimization, overwhelm, fragmentation, or stagnation) but haven't identified root causes. Recognition is valuable but these patterns won't self-correct. Your team would benefit from BIQ development in the areas you identified.

6-8 Patterns: Your team has significant breakthrough intelligence gaps. You're likely experiencing substantial pain: high frustration, fragmented execution, stalled transformation. The intensity of pain often indicates readiness for breakthrough work. Your team would benefit considerably from BIQ development.

9-11 Patterns: Your team is experiencing an acute breakthrough intelligence deficit. Nearly every pattern is present. Pain is likely high. Good news: When pain is high, readiness for change is also likely. Your team can rapidly transform with committed BIQ work.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Immediate Actions:

1. Share this diagnostic with your leadership team. Compare observations. Build shared awareness.
2. Prioritize 2-3 patterns that are costing you most. Don't try to fix all at once.
3. Identify which BIQ force each pattern relates to (often it's agency over-focus)

Deeper Assessment:

- Take the BIQ Scorecard to assess your team's balance across all 5 forces: [URL]
- Get the 5 Forces Framework visual to guide team discussion: [URL]
- Read *Flourishing Together* for a complete BIQ understanding: [Amazon link]

Professional Development:

- BIQ Certification - Develop comprehensive breakthrough intelligence capability: [URL]
- Team BIQ Assessment - Full diagnostic with personalized recommendations: [URL]
- Intact Team Retreat - Intensive breakthrough work for leadership teams: [URL]

Remember - Recognizing these patterns isn't cause for embarrassment. It's cause for hope and progress. Every pattern you recognize is a pattern you can address. Breakthrough intelligence can be developed. Your team's capability can be transformed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Michael E. Nagel is the author of *Flourishing Together: What Actually Drives Breakthroughs? The Hidden Science of Collective Breakthrough Intelligence*. He helps leadership teams develop the capability to recognize and work with the hidden forces that drive sustained organizational flourishing. Learn more at CollectiveBreakthroughs.com.