



From Ideas to Impact

Building Systems of Delivery as the Defining Leadership Capability in the Age of AI

Abubakar Suleiman

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Capability in the Age of AI

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With a practical workbook for applying the delivery system

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Preface

This book began as a set of handwritten notes. The notes tried to answer one question. What is the most powerful capability a leader can build today?

My answer surprised me. It was not vision. It was not creativity. It was not even intelligence. It was the capacity to turn ideas into impact — and to do it through a system, not through heroics.

I wrote this book for leaders who have too many ideas and too few results. That includes most of us. The institutions we rely on to deliver our ideas often prove inadequate. The people are rarely the problem. The system is.

Part I of this book makes the argument. It explains why delivery has become the defining leadership capability in the age of AI. It offers a checklist of six questions to ask before committing to any idea. It then lays out a roadmap of six elements that together form an engine of delivery.

Part II is a workbook. It exists because reading about delivery is not the same as delivering. The workbook takes one real idea — yours — and walks it through the entire system, worksheet by worksheet. I encourage you to write in it, argue with it, and return to it with every new idea.

Ideas are now abundant. Impact is not. This book is about closing that gap.

A.S.

PART I

The Book

Why delivery has become the defining leadership capability — and the system that makes it repeatable.

Chapter 1 The Age of Abundant Ideas



For most of modern management history, we believed the scarce resource was the good idea. Strategy retreats, innovation labs, suggestion boxes, and consulting engagements were all built on one assumption. Find the right insight, and value will follow.

Artificial intelligence has quietly destroyed that assumption.

Ideas are now not only a dime a dozen. With AI, they can be generated on demand. They can be crowd-sourced from the collective knowledge of humanity. They can be stress-tested against precedent and presented in a polished, persuasive document — all before your first cup of coffee goes cold.

This abundance is real and measurable. Generative systems can produce dozens of plausible strategic options in hours. Researchers note that this capability both accelerates and paralyzes decision-making. It traps organizations in what has been called the “idea trap” [1]. AI has dramatically reduced the cost of thinking. But organizational execution has not evolved at the same pace. The result is a structural imbalance between what organizations can conceive and what they can deliver [2].

Nigel Vaz, chief executive of Publicis Sapient, puts it plainly:

“The defining challenge of the AI era is no longer invention alone. It is execution — the ability to translate intelligence into durable changes in how a business actually runs.” [3]

When ideas are abundant, competitive advantage migrates. It moves away from the possession of insight. It moves toward the capacity to act on insight — efficiently, reliably, and repeatably.

This is not new in the history of technology. Electricity did not transform economies until factories were physically redesigned around it. The internet did not unlock productivity until businesses rewired their processes around digital workflows, rather than bolting websites onto analog operations [3]. Every general-purpose technology reaches a point where the limiting factor is no longer the technology itself. The limiting factor becomes the system around it. AI has reached that point. The system that now matters most is the system of delivery.

The evidence that organizations lack such systems is overwhelming, and it predates AI. Research cited by Harvard Business Review found that 67% of well-formulated strategies fail because of poor execution [4]. Kaplan and Norton estimated that up to 90% of strategies are never executed successfully [5]. In the world of major programs, the picture is bleaker still. Bent Flyvbjerg’s “iron law of megaprojects” — *over budget, over time, under benefits, over and over again* — describes the fate of the vast majority of large ventures. Only a fraction of one percent deliver on budget, on time, and with the promised benefits [6] [7]. A 2025 global study by the Project Management Institute, covering more than 5,800 professionals, found that only about half of all projects succeed [8].

The failure is rarely one of intelligence. It is a failure of systems.

This book begins from a personal observation that many leaders will recognize. Translating ideas into impact is the most powerful capability a leader can focus on today. Most leaders have far too many ideas. The institutions they rely on to deliver those ideas frequently prove inadequate. Crucially, this does not mean the people in those institutions are incompetent.

It means there are deeper issues that need a more honest diagnosis — issues of articulation, ownership, timing, resourcing, opposition, and economics. No amount of raw talent can compensate for these if they are left unexamined.

The chapters that follow borrow from the fields of leadership, project and program management, and the study of major programs. They build a checklist within a roadmap. The roadmap prioritizes six elements, in deliberate order: **simplification of ideas, communication with clarity, incentives amplification, building teams as communities, context and stakeholder engagement, and resourcing upfront.**

Together, these form what this book calls a *system of delivery* — the engine that converts abundant intelligence into scarce impact.

Chapter 2 The New Scarcity — Why Delivery Defines Leadership



The collapsing value of ideation

The economics of leadership capabilities behave like the economics of anything else. Value concentrates in what is scarce.

For a century, the scarce inputs to organizational success were information, analysis, and creative recombination. These are precisely the inputs that large language models now supply in abundance. A leader who could synthesize a market, frame a strategy, and articulate a bold vision commanded a premium — because those acts were hard. Today, a mid-level manager with a well-crafted prompt can produce a strategy document that would have taken a consulting team weeks to assemble. The document may even be good.

What it cannot do is deliver itself.

This is the quiet inversion of the AI era. The celebrated capabilities — vision, ideation, analysis — are being commoditized. The unglamorous capabilities — sequencing, resourcing, alignment, persistence — are appreciating in value. As Vaz observes, the organizations that talk the most about AI innovation are

often the least able to turn it into measurable outcomes. They sit in “pilot purgatory” while competitors turn the same technologies into new revenue lines and new ways of operating [3]. Leadership in the age of AI “will be defined less by bold declarations and more by operational discipline — by the ability to turn intelligence into outcomes” [3].

None of this diminishes the human contribution to thinking. Scholars such as Otto Scharmer warn against an “intelligence monoculture,” in which leaders assume machine intelligence is the only intelligence worth investing in, letting deep sensing, intuition, and creativity erode [9]. The argument of this book is complementary. Precisely because machines now flood the zone with plausible ideas, the distinctly human work of leadership shifts. It shifts toward judgment about *which* ideas deserve life. And it shifts toward building the systems that give them life.

Not one thing, but two

Building the capacity to move from idea to impact is the most powerful human capability of our time. But it is not one thing. It is two things working together: a **system of thinking** and a **discipline of doing**.

The system of thinking is diagnostic. Before a single resource is committed, it asks: Is this idea clearly articulated, end to end? Has its “why” been made compelling? Is the timing right? Is the context tolerant? Who stands to lose, and have we reckoned with them? Do the unit economics justify the commitment? These questions form the checklist in Chapter 4.

The discipline of doing is architectural. It builds the engine: a simplified idea, communicated relentlessly, powered by honest incentives, executed by a team that behaves like a community, protected by stakeholder engagement, and fueled by resources secured upfront. This is the roadmap in Chapter 5.

The two halves reinforce each other. Thinking without doing produces the familiar graveyard of brilliant strategies that died in committee — what Pfeffer and Sutton called the “knowing-doing gap” [10]. Doing without thinking produces the equally familiar graveyard of energetic projects that were doomed from the start. The timing was wrong. The stakeholders were hostile.

The economics never worked. A system of delivery institutionalizes both halves.

What “system” means

The word *system* is chosen deliberately. A system, unlike a heroic effort, has three properties.

It is **efficient**. It does not waste the organization’s scarcest resources: attention, trust, and capital.

It is **reliable**. It produces similar results under similar conditions, independent of any single individual.

It is **repeatable**. It improves with use, because each cycle generates learning that feeds the next.

Organizations routinely treat delivery as a series of one-off projects — something to be staffed, pushed, and moved on from. But the leaders who compound advantage treat delivery as infrastructure. Once the organization has rewired around a delivery engine, every new idea can be executed faster and at lower marginal cost. The gap between such organizations and their slower peers compounds over time [3].

Chapter 3 Why Good Ideas Die in Good Institutions



When a leader's ideas repeatedly fail to become impact, the reflexive explanations are usually wrong. The most common explanation — “the people are not good enough” — is also the most corrosive.

Institutional failure to deliver rarely means the people are incompetent. There are many other issues that require a deeper dive.

Decades of research on strategy execution point to systemic causes. There is the disconnect between strategy and day-to-day operations. There is the absence of accountability and clear metrics. There is the leader's own “idea infatuation” — falling for the next shiny initiative before the last one has landed. And there is problem paralysis in the face of risk [5]. When executives themselves are studied, they fail to execute largely because they are too internally focused — absorbed in operational minutiae at the expense of the strategy itself [4].

In major programs, Flyvbjerg's research adds further systemic culprits. Optimism bias and the planning fallacy lead us to systematically underestimate cost and time. Strategic misrepresentation leads proponents

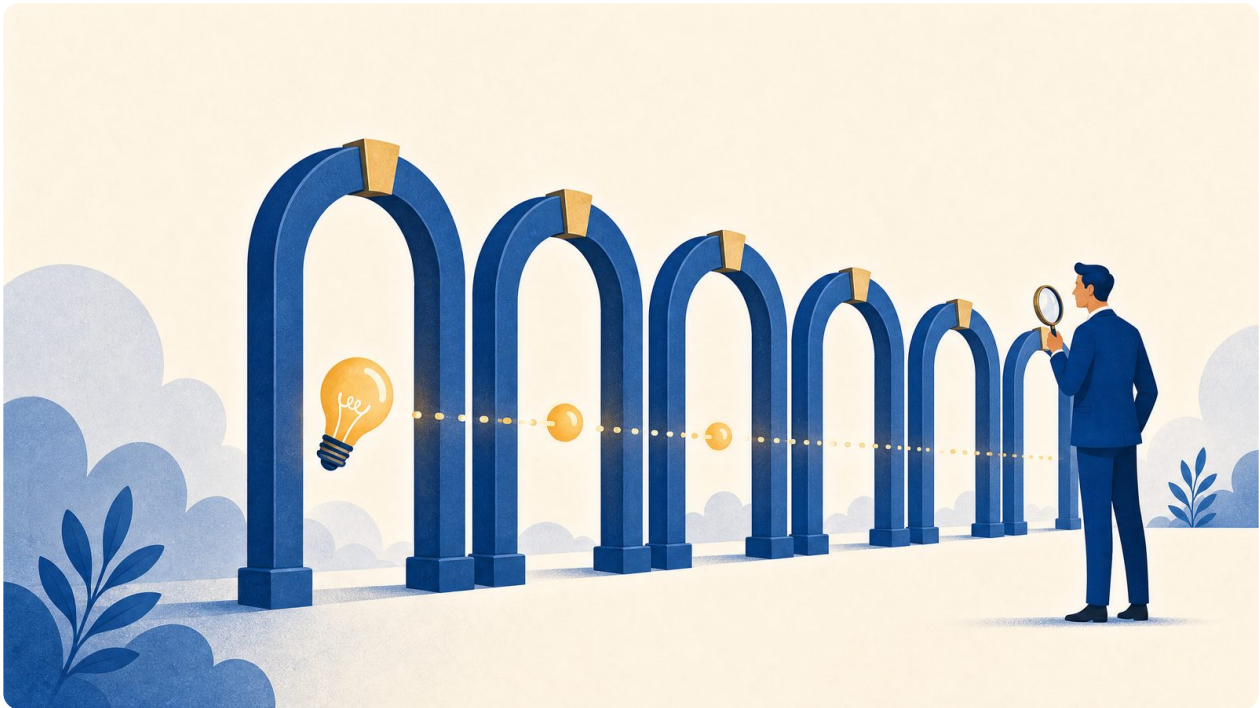
to understate costs to win approval. Premature lock-in escalates commitment before the idea has been properly stress-tested [6].

His prescription is memorable: *think slow, act fast*. The planning phase is cheap and safe. The delivery phase is expensive and dangerous. So leaders should invest heavily in testing, simulation, and planning before committing. Then they should move through delivery as quickly as possible, to shrink the window in which context can turn hostile [7].

The delivery system proposed in this book absorbs these lessons. It treats the death of good ideas not as a talent problem but as a systems problem. And it gives the leader a structured way to find where the system is broken.

That structure begins with six questions.

Chapter 4 The Checklist – Six Questions Before Commitment



Before an idea enters the delivery engine, it must survive an honest interrogation. The following six questions form the diagnostic core of the system of thinking. They are asked in order, because each builds on the one before it.

ARTICULATION

1

Has the idea been clearly articulated, end to end, and communicated with sufficient clarity?

OWNERSHIP

2

Has the communication triggered the right amount of interest or a sense of ownership? Is the "why" of the idea clear enough, and does the idea matter sufficiently to the team?

TIMING & CONTEXT

- 3 Even if clearly articulated and generating shared interest, is it the right idea *now*? Is the timing right? Is the context tolerant? Are the other factors necessary to execute in place?

RESOURCING

- 4 Is the idea properly resourced? Has stakeholder commitment been duly sought and willingly given?

OPPOSITION

- 5 All ideas have natural promoters as well as detractors, many of whom stand to lose something if change happens. Do we know them? Are we insulated from them, or are we willing to negotiate with them?

ECONOMICS

- 6 Does the idea deliver the unit economics to justify the resources to be committed?

Each question encodes a distinct failure mode. Each deserves elaboration.

Question 1 – Articulation

The first and most common failure is the leader's own. An idea that lives vividly in the leader's mind often reaches the team as a fragment: a headline without a mechanism, a destination without a route.

“End to end” is the operative phrase. The articulation must cover not just what the idea is, but how it works, what it displaces, what it requires, and what success looks like. If the team's version of the idea differs from the leader's, the idea has not yet been articulated. It has only been announced.

Question 2 – Ownership

Communication is not transmission. It is transformation. The test is not whether the team has heard the idea, but whether the communication has triggered genuine interest and a sense of ownership.

This is where Sinek's insight about starting with “why” becomes operational [11]. If the purpose of the idea — its benefit to the customer, the society, or the institution — is not clear enough to move people, the idea will be executed with compliance rather than conviction. And compliance has never delivered a breakthrough.

Question 3 – Timing and context

An idea can be clearly articulated, warmly received, and still be the wrong idea — because the timing is wrong or the context intolerant. Markets, regulators, technologies, and organizational energy all have seasons.

The disciplined leader asks whether the surrounding conditions necessary for execution are actually in place, or merely assumed. Many failed initiatives were good ideas executed in the wrong year.

Question 4 – Resourcing and commitment

The fourth failure mode is the unfunded mandate. Ideas are routinely launched with enthusiasm and starved of resources, on the implicit theory that success will attract funding later.

The delivery system inverts this. Resourcing is secured upfront. Stakeholder commitment is *duly sought and willingly given* — not extracted under pressure. Commitments extracted under pressure evaporate at the first difficulty.

Question 5 – Opposition

Every idea redistributes something: budget, status, relevance, power. Its natural detractors are therefore not irrational. Many of them stand to lose something real if change happens.

The leader must know who they are and make a deliberate choice: insulate the initiative from them, or negotiate with them. What is fatal is the third

option most organizations default to — ignoring them until they surface at the moment of maximum leverage.

Question 6 — Economics

Finally, the idea must clear the bar of unit economics. Does the value created per unit of effort justify the resources to be committed?

This question is asked last not because it matters least, but because it can only be answered honestly once the first five have been faced. An idea that survives all six questions has earned its resources. An idea that fails any of them has told you exactly what to fix — or exactly why to kill it.

Chapter 5 The Roadmap – Six Elements of a Delivery System



The checklist filters ideas. The roadmap delivers them. The six elements below are presented in the order a leader should build them. Together, they constitute the discipline of doing.

Element 1: Simplification of ideas

Breakthrough ideas do not often lend themselves to simplification. That is precisely why simplification is the leader's job.

The task is to strip away all the complexities and reduce the idea to its most basic and elegant form *without losing the power of the idea*. This is not dumbing down. It is distillation. A simplified idea travels through an organization without degradation. A complex one mutates at every handoff.

The Heath brothers' research on why some ideas survive and others die reaches the same conclusion. The ideas that stick are simple, concrete, and stripped to their core — like the military's "Commander's Intent," a single statement of the plan's goal that survives even when the plan itself does not [12].

In the age of AI, simplification acquires a second function. It is also the specification. A leader who can state an idea in its most elegant form can direct both human teams and machine agents with precision. A leader who cannot will discover that AI amplifies confusion just as efficiently as it amplifies clarity.

Element 2: Communication with clarity

Once simplified, the idea must be communicated — and then communicated again. The process must be repeated often, until each member of the team can explain the idea as well as the leader.

This is the operational test of communication. Not “did they hear it?” but “can they teach it?” When every member can articulate the idea and its why, the organization has achieved what military theorists call shared consciousness — the state in which distributed teams make aligned decisions without waiting for instructions [13].

Leaders systematically underestimate the repetition this requires. Kotter’s research on failed transformations found that most leaders under-communicate their vision by a factor of ten or more. The vision must be woven into every channel — meetings, reviews, decisions, behavior — before it takes hold [14]. Repetition feels redundant to the speaker long before it feels clear to the listener.

The delivery system therefore treats communication not as an event at launch, but as a standing process with a measurable endpoint: universal fluency in the idea.

Element 3: Incentives amplification

Once the idea is understood, and the “why” for the consumer or the society is convincingly explained, the next job is to create the incentives: a clear set of benefits that the team can relate with and are willing to sacrifice for.

Two design principles are essential.

First, the process must be **totally honest and upfront**. Incentives that are vague, discretionary, or revealed late breed exactly the cynicism they are

meant to overcome. People will make extraordinary sacrifices for an outcome they believe in and a deal they understand. They will make none for a promise they suspect.

Second, the benefit must be **spread across the timeline, not just at the end**. Long delivery journeys fail when all the reward is loaded onto a distant finish line that many team members privately doubt will ever arrive. Kotter identifies the generation of short-term wins as a non-negotiable stage of successful transformation — visible, unambiguous benefits that arrive early enough to sustain belief [14].

Incentives amplification means engineering the reward structure so that the journey itself pays: in recognition, in growth, in early wins, and in tangible benefit at every milestone.

Element 4: Building teams as communities

Critical to building this delivery engine is building the right team — and building it the right way.

We often think of the right team in terms of technical knowledge and relevant experience. But in most cases, finding the right **attitude and chemistry** is far more important. Knowledge can be taught. Experience can be hired around. Attitude and chemistry are the substrate on which everything else grows — or fails to grow.

This is why the delivery system speaks of teams as *communities*. A team is a group of people assigned to a task. A community is a group of people bound by shared identity, mutual obligation, and a common story. Communities absorb setbacks that would shatter mere teams.

The leader's choice — build or buy the team — must therefore be evaluated not only on skills, but on whether the resulting group can develop the right attitude, culture, and community. Research on team effectiveness consistently supports this ordering: psychological safety, mutual trust, and shared purpose predict performance more strongly than the aggregate talent of the members [15].

In the age of AI, the premium on community grows further. Routine technical work increasingly flows to machines. Humans concentrate on exactly the collaborative, creative, and judgment-laden work that communities do best [3] [9].

Element 5: Context and stakeholder engagement

No idea executes in a vacuum. The delivery system therefore institutionalizes **context evaluation** as a standing discipline, not a one-time gate.

Three questions anchor it: Is the timing right? Is the project resourced? Are the obstacles surmountable? Beyond the immediate horizon sit two sustainability tests: Can the effort be sustained? Is the benefit sustainable? An idea whose effort cannot be sustained will die of exhaustion. An idea whose benefit is not sustainable will die of irrelevance shortly after its triumphant launch.

Stakeholder engagement is the human half of context. Stakeholders — those who affect or are affected by the initiative [16] — hold the resources, permissions, and goodwill on which delivery depends. Their commitment must be duly sought and willingly given, never assumed.

The mapping of promoters and detractors from Question 5 of the checklist becomes, in the roadmap, an ongoing practice. Engage. Negotiate. Insulate where necessary. Re-verify commitment at every major milestone — because context shifts, and yesterday's supporter is tomorrow's skeptic. Flyvbjerg's studies of major programs show that unmanaged stakeholder dynamics and shifting political context are among the most reliable killers of large ventures [6].

Element 6: Resourcing upfront

The final element is the most prosaic and the most frequently violated: resource the idea **upfront**.

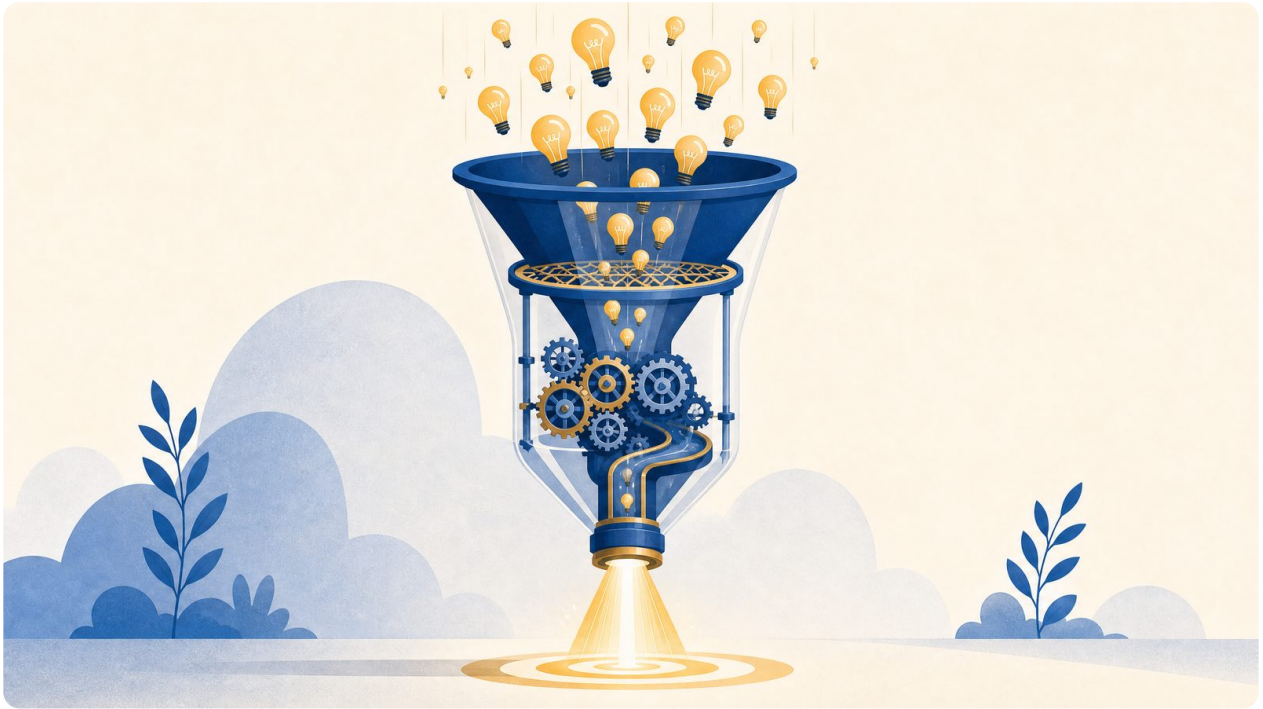
The prevailing organizational habit — launch first, fund incrementally, force the initiative to continually re-justify its existence — feels prudent. It is often false economy. It converts the delivery team's energy from execution to internal fundraising. It signals institutional ambivalence to every stakeholder

watching. And it guarantees that the initiative meets its hardest moments with its thinnest reserves.

Resourcing upfront does not mean writing a blank check. It means that before commitment, the full requirements of delivery — people, capital, technology, leadership attention, and time — are honestly estimated, correcting for the planning fallacy and optimism bias that systematically distort such estimates [6]. It means the resources for the committed scope are secured before execution begins.

Paired with the unit-economics test of Question 6, this discipline produces a portfolio of fewer, fully-resourced initiatives instead of the familiar landscape of many half-starved ones. Fewer ideas, fully resourced, will outdeliver many ideas partially resourced — every time.

Chapter 6 The System at a Glance



The six elements assemble into a single flow. Ideas enter at the top. Impact exits at the bottom. Everything in between is the system.

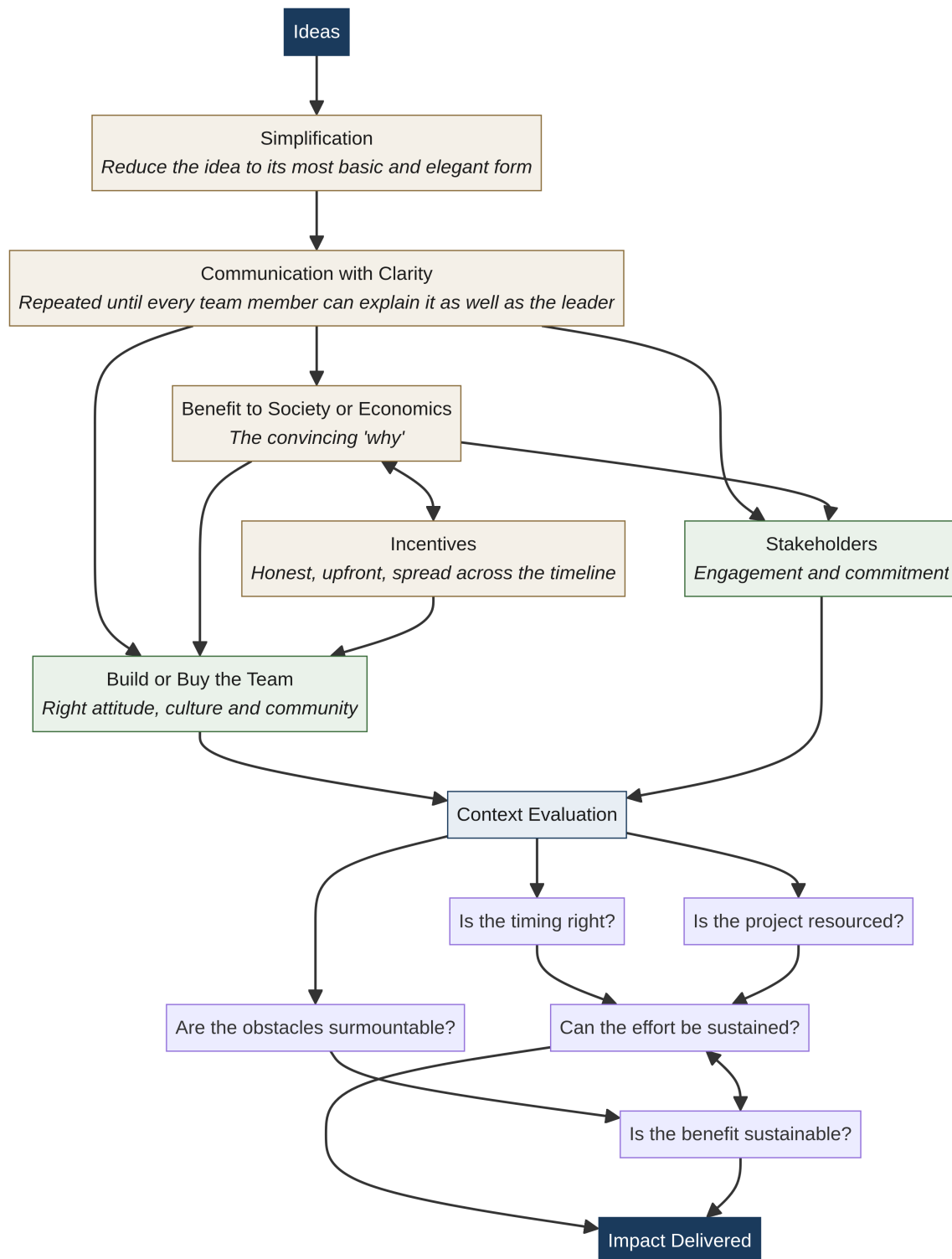


图 1 The Delivery System: from Ideas to Impact

The flow reads as follows. An **idea** is first put through **simplification**, reducing it to its most basic and elegant form without losing its power. The simplified idea powers **communication with clarity**, which radiates in three directions at once: to the **team** (built or bought for attitude, culture, and community), to

the **stakeholders** (whose commitment must be won and kept), and through the articulation of the **benefit to society or economics** — the convincing “why” that gives the idea moral and commercial force. **Incentives**, honest and spread across the timeline, bind the team to the journey. They are themselves anchored in the benefit case.

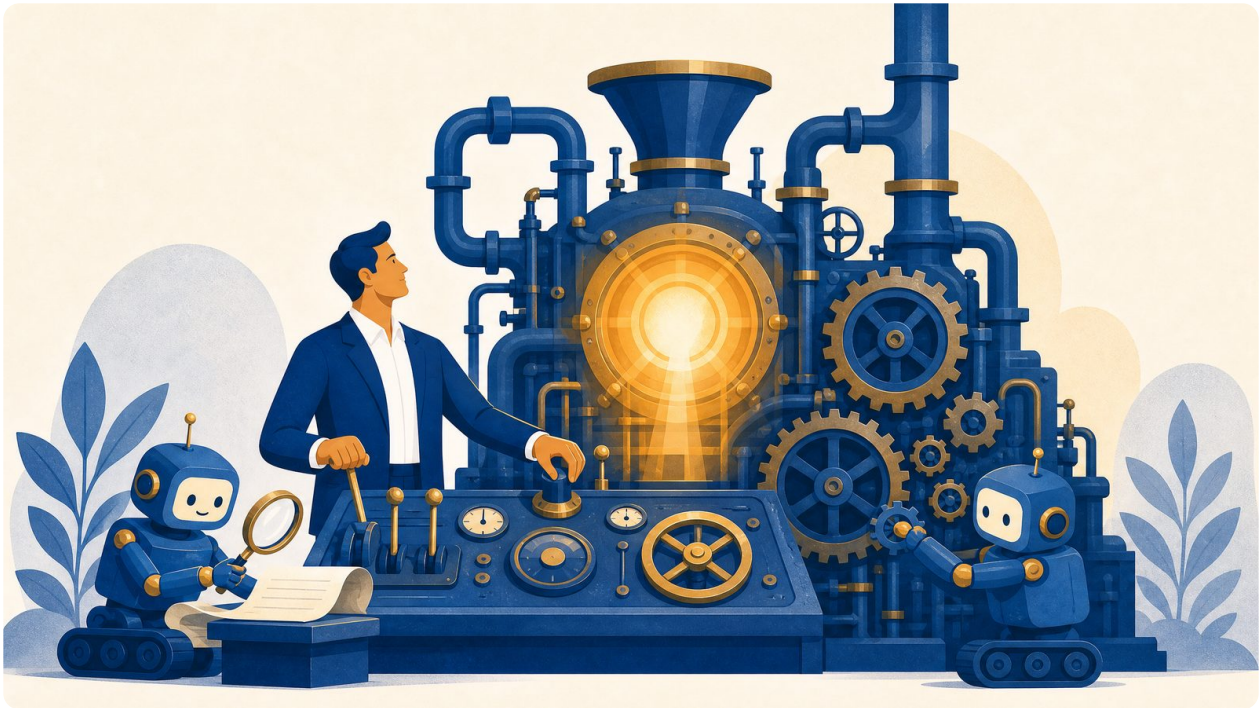
The assembled engine then passes through **context evaluation**. Is the timing right? Is the project resourced? Are the obstacles surmountable? Then come the twin sustainability tests: Can the effort be sustained? Is the benefit sustainable? Only when the system answers these questions affirmatively does the flow terminate in its purpose: **impact delivered**.

Two properties of this diagram deserve emphasis.

First, it is a *loop in practice*. Context evaluation is continuous. A change in timing, resourcing, or obstacles sends the leader back up the flow — to re-communicate, re-incentivize, or re-negotiate — rather than forward into denial.

Second, every node is a checkpoint. Each is a place where the leader can diagnose precisely where a struggling initiative is broken — instead of concluding vaguely that “execution is weak,” or unfairly that “the people are not good enough.”

Chapter 7 Leading with the Engine – Implications in the Age of AI



The delivery system reframes what leaders should spend their time on, what they should measure, and what they should build.

Reallocate personal time from ideation to system-building. If AI can generate and refine ideas at near-zero cost, the leader's comparative advantage no longer lies in having ideas. It lies in judging them (the checklist) and delivering them (the roadmap). Leaders should audit their calendars accordingly. Time spent generating the eleventh idea is now worth far less than time spent building the engine that could deliver the first one.

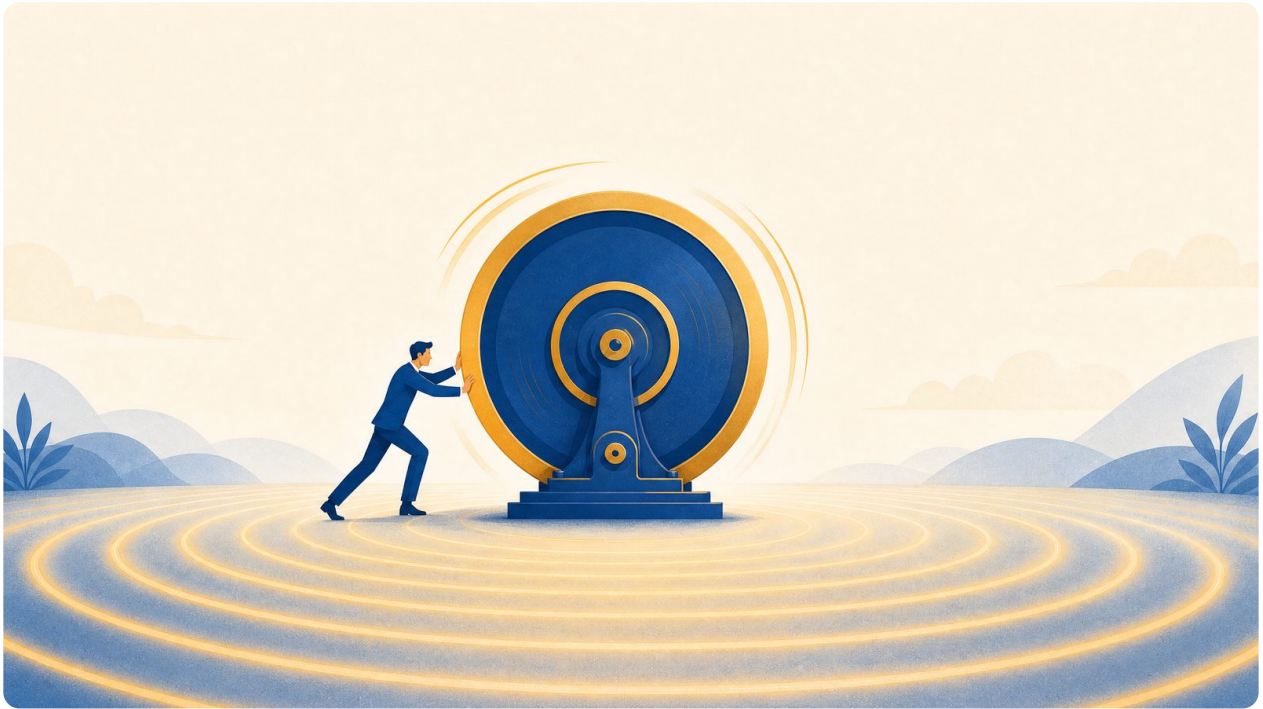
Use AI on both sides of the system. The delivery system is not a defense against AI. It is the structure that lets AI create value. On the thinking side, AI can stress-test articulation, simulate stakeholder reactions, red-team the timing and economics, and surface detractors' arguments before they are made. On the doing side, AI can draft communications for different audiences, track commitment signals, monitor context for shifts, and free the team's human energy for the work of community, negotiation, and judgment that machines cannot do [3] [9].

Measure fluency, not just milestones. The most novel metric this system proposes is communication fluency: can each member of the team explain the idea as well as the leader? This single measure predicts more about delivery than most dashboards. It captures whether the organization actually possesses the idea it is trying to execute.

Kill more ideas, earlier, with pride. A leader with too many ideas and an inadequate delivery institution has only one rational move: raise the bar for commitment. The six-question checklist is a killing mechanism as much as a filtering one. That is its virtue. Every idea killed at the checklist stage returns its resources to the ideas that survived. In an age of abundant ideas, the kill decision is a creative act.

Build the engine once; run it forever. The ultimate prize is not the delivery of any single idea. It is the possession of a system that delivers reliably and repeatably. Organizations that rewire themselves around such an engine compound their advantage with every cycle. Those that treat each initiative as a fresh heroic effort start from zero every time [3]. The engine is the asset. The ideas are merely its fuel.

Chapter 8 Build the Engine Once, Run It Forever



Building the capacity to move from idea to impact is the most powerful human capability of today. But it is not one thing.

It is a system of thinking that interrogates every idea with six honest questions. And it is a discipline of doing that assembles six elements into a reliable engine: simplification of ideas, communication with clarity, incentives amplification, teams built as communities, continuous context and stakeholder engagement, and resourcing secured upfront.

The age of AI has settled an old debate. Ideas, however brilliant, are no longer the differentiator. They are the commodity input. What remains scarce — and is becoming scarcer as the flood of machine-generated options rises — is the leadership capability to choose the right ideas and carry them, intact and alive, all the way to impact.

The leaders who build systems of delivery will define this era.

The rest will be remembered, if at all, for their very compelling documents.

PART II

The Workbook

Ten worksheets that take one real idea — yours — through the entire delivery system.



How to Use This Workbook

Reading about delivery is not delivering. This workbook exists to close that gap.

The method is simple. Choose **one real idea** you currently own — an initiative, a product, a reform, a venture. Not your favorite idea. The one you most need to move. Then work through the ten worksheets in order, writing your answers as you go.

Three rules will make the workbook worth your time.

Be honest. The worksheets are diagnostic instruments. They only work with true inputs. Flattering answers produce flattering plans, and flattering plans fail.

Write, don't think. An answer that stays in your head is an answer you have not tested. The act of writing exposes gaps that thinking conceals.

Return often. Context shifts. Commitments decay. Re-run the checklist at every major milestone. The workbook is a standing instrument, not a one-time exercise.

A note on verdicts. Several worksheets end in a decision: commit, fix, or kill. Killing an idea here is not failure. Every idea killed at this stage returns its resources to the ideas that survive. In an age of abundant ideas, the kill decision is a creative act.

Worksheet 1: The Idea Card

Every delivery journey starts with articulation. Before anything else, capture your idea in a form someone else could act on.

Complete the card below. If any row is hard to fill, that difficulty is information — it marks exactly where your articulation is incomplete.

Field	Your answer
Idea name (3–6 words)	
The idea in one sentence	
What it is (the mechanism: how it actually works)	
What it displaces (what stops, shrinks, or changes)	
What it requires (people, capital, technology, time, attention)	
What success looks like in 12 months (specific and observable)	
Who benefits, and how (customer, society, institution)	
Why now (what makes this the right season)	

The announcement test. Ask two team members to describe the idea back to you in writing, independently. Compare their versions with your card. Every difference marks a spot where the idea has been announced but not yet articulated.

Worksheet 2: The Six-Question Gate

Score your idea against each of the six questions from Chapter 4. Be severe. Use the evidence column to record *why* you gave the score — an assertion without evidence scores zero.

Scoring: 1 = clearly failing, 3 = partially true and needs work, 5 = demonstrably true with evidence.

#	Question	Score (1-5)	Evidence
1	Is the idea clearly articulated, end to end, and communicated with sufficient clarity?		
2	Has the communication triggered real interest and a sense of ownership? Is the “why” clear enough, and does the idea matter sufficiently to the team?		
3	Is it the right idea <i>now</i> ? Is the timing right, the context tolerant, and are the other necessary factors in place?		
4	Is the idea properly resourced? Has stakeholder commitment been duly sought and willingly given?		
5	Do we know the detractors — those who stand to lose? Are we insulated from them, or willing to negotiate with them?		
6	Does the idea deliver the unit economics to justify the resources to be committed?		

Reading your total (out of 30):

Total	Verdict	Action
25–30	Commit	Proceed to the roadmap worksheets with full resourcing.
16–24	Fix	Do not commit yet. Work on your two lowest-scoring questions, then re-score.

Total	Verdict	Action
6-15	Kill or radically reshape	The idea as currently formed will consume resources without delivering. Kill it with pride, or reshape it and start again.

My verdict: _____ **Two lowest scores to fix first:** Q___ and Q___

Worksheet 3: The Simplification Drill

Simplification is distillation, not dumbing down. Reduce your idea to its most basic and elegant form without losing its power.

Step 1 — Fifty words. Explain the idea completely in at most 50 words.

Step 2 — Twenty words. Now in at most 20 words. Cut complexity, keep power.

Step 3 — Eight words. Now in at most 8 words. This is your rallying phrase.

Step 4 — Commander's Intent. Complete this sentence: *“Even if everything else in the plan changes, we will have succeeded if _____.”*

The power test. Show your eight-word version to someone who knows the idea well. Ask: “Does this lose anything essential?” If yes, you have simplified too far or simplified the wrong thing. Iterate until the answer is no.

Worksheet 4: The Communication Fluency Plan

The test of communication is not “did they hear it?” but “can they teach it?” Plan the repetition your idea needs, then measure fluency directly.

Audience and channel map.

Audience	What they must be able to explain	Channels you will use	Frequency
Core team			
Wider organization			
Key stakeholders			
External (customers, partners, public)			

The repetition budget. Kotter found leaders under-communicate by a factor of ten or more. Count every planned communication of the idea in the next 30 days (meetings, reviews, one-to-ones, written updates): _____. Now multiply your instinct by ten and re-plan.

The fluency test. Once a month, ask three team members, chosen at random, to explain the idea and its “why” — without preparation. Score each explanation: as good as the leader’s (2), partial (1), fragment (0).

Month	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Total /6
1				
2				
3				

A total of 5 or more means the organization possesses the idea. Below that, keep communicating — the delivery engine is not yet fueled.

Worksheet 5: The Incentives Map

Incentives must be honest, upfront, and spread across the timeline — not loaded onto a distant finish line.

The benefit timeline. For each milestone of your initiative, name the benefit that arrives *at that point* for the team. Recognition, growth, early wins, and tangible rewards all count. If a milestone row is empty, the journey does not pay at that point — expect belief to sag there.

Milestone	When	Benefit to the team at this point	Benefit to customer/society at this point
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Final			

The honesty check. Answer yes or no.

Check	Yes/No
Has the full deal — what the team gives and what the team gets — been stated explicitly, in writing?	
Is every promised benefit within your actual power to deliver?	
Would you accept this deal yourself, at the most junior level it applies to?	
Is any part of the reward vague, discretionary, or “to be decided later”?	

Any “no” on the first three, or “yes” on the last, marks an incentive that will breed cynicism. Fix it before launch.

Worksheet 6: The Team-as-Community Canvas

Knowledge can be taught and experience can be hired around. Attitude and chemistry cannot. Audit your team as a community, not a roster.

Build or buy. For each critical role, decide deliberately.

Role	Build (develop inside) or Buy (hire in)?	Skills adequate?	Attitude and chemistry fit?	Action

The community audit. Score each statement 1 (false) to 5 (true).

Statement	Score
Members speak up with bad news early, without fear.	
Members feel obligated to each other, not just to the task.	
The team shares a common story of why this work matters.	
A serious setback would pull this group together rather than apart.	
People on this team make sacrifices for each other without being asked.	

A total below 18 means you have a team, not yet a community. Communities absorb setbacks that shatter teams — invest here before the hardest phase of delivery, not during it.

One commitment. The single thing I will do this month to strengthen this community: _____

Worksheet 7: The Stakeholder Map

Every idea redistributes budget, status, relevance, or power. Know your promoters and detractors before they surface at the moment of maximum leverage.

Stakeholder	What they gain or lose	Promoter / Neutral / Detractor	Influence (H/M/L)	Strategy: Engage, Negotiate, or Insulate	Owner	Next action

Three discipline checks.

For every detractor with high influence: have you chosen — deliberately — between insulation and negotiation? Ignoring them is the fatal third option.

For every promoter: was their commitment *duly sought and willingly given*, or merely assumed? Assumed commitment is not commitment.

Set a re-verification date. Stakeholder positions decay; yesterday's supporter is tomorrow's skeptic. I will re-verify every commitment on: _____

Worksheet 8: The Context and Sustainability Check

Context evaluation is a standing discipline, not a one-time gate. Run this check now, and again at every major milestone.

Test	Question	Answer (with evidence)	Verdict (Pass/At risk/Fail)
Timing	Is the timing right — for the market, the regulator, the organization's energy?		
Resourcing	Is the project resourced for its committed scope?		
Obstacles	Are the known obstacles surmountable with the means we actually have?		
Effort sustainability	Can the effort be sustained — by this team, at this intensity, for this duration?		
Benefit sustainability	Will the benefit last after launch, or fade with novelty?		

If any test fails: do not proceed forward into denial. Go back up the flow. A timing failure sends you to re-sequencing. A resourcing failure sends you to Worksheet 9. An obstacle failure sends you to Worksheet 7 (who can remove it?). A sustainability failure sends you to the incentives map or the benefit case itself.

Next scheduled context check (date): _____

Worksheet 9: The Resourcing Plan

Resource the idea upfront. Estimate honestly, correcting for the optimism that distorts every plan.

The honest estimate. For each resource, record your first estimate, then apply a correction for optimism bias — Flyvbjerg’s research shows initial estimates are systematically low. Multiply cost and time estimates by at least 1.3–1.5 unless you have hard reference data from similar past projects.

Resource	First estimate	Corrected estimate	Secured? (Y/N)	Source / approver
People (roles × time)				
Capital / budget				
Technology / tools				
Leadership attention (hours per week)				
Time to first win				
Time to full delivery				

The upfront rule. Do not begin execution until every row for the committed scope reads “Y”. If full resourcing is impossible, shrink the committed scope until it is fully resourced — fewer ideas, fully resourced, will outdeliver many ideas partially resourced, every time.

The portfolio question. What currently-running initiative should be stopped, and its resources returned to this one? _____

Worksheet 10: The 90-Day Delivery Rhythm

The engine needs a rhythm: fast enough to shrink the window in which context can turn hostile, structured enough to generate learning every cycle.

The 90-day plan.

Window	Delivery goal	Early win to be made visible	Fluency test	Context check	Kill/continue review
Days 1–30			☐	☐	☐
Days 31–60			☐	☐	☐
Days 61–90			☐	☐	☐

The weekly cadence. Fix a standing weekly rhythm and protect it.

Ritual	Day/time	Duration	Purpose
Delivery stand-up		30 min	Progress, obstacles, decisions needed
Stakeholder touch		30 min	One commitment re-verified per week
Communication rep		15 min	The idea, retold — one audience per week

The learning loop. At day 90, before planning the next cycle, answer in writing: What did the system deliver? Where did it break — articulation, ownership, timing, resourcing, opposition, or economics? What will the engine do better on the next idea?

The goal is not just to deliver this idea. It is to leave behind an engine that delivers the next one faster. Build the engine once. Run it forever.

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