AEC
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SUMMIT
THE A/E/C INDUSTRY'S LARGEST HR CONFERENCE

The Butterfly Effect:

*A case study in **BOLD** accountability*

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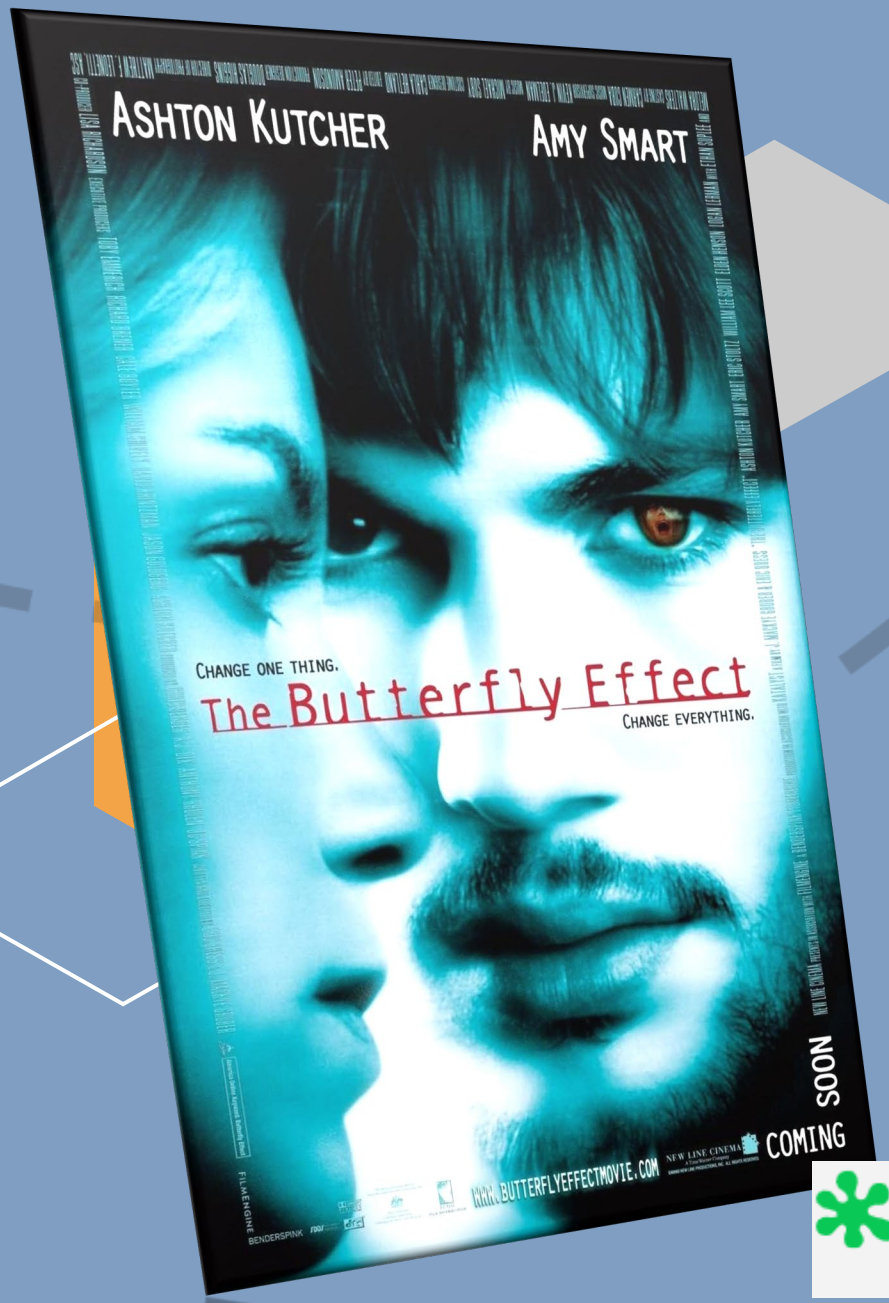


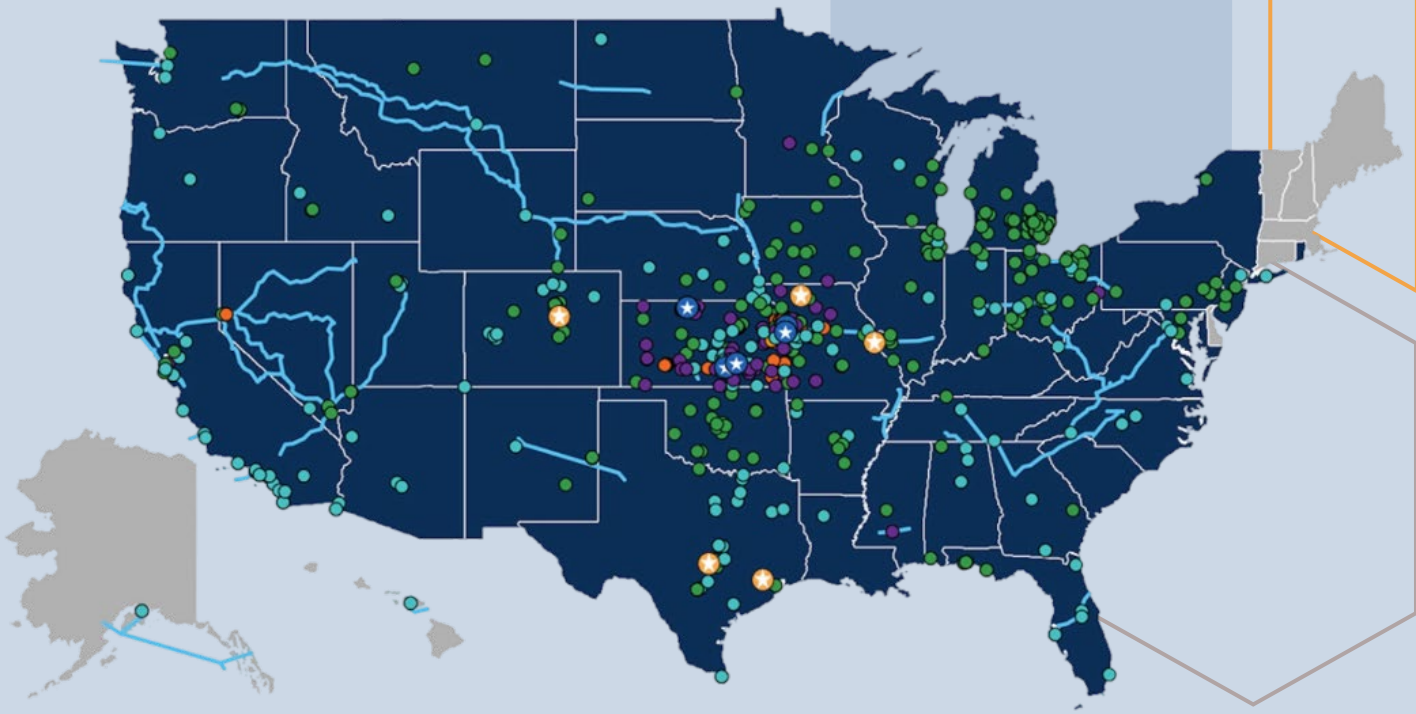
34%
Tomatometer
170 Reviews

butterfly effect (noun):

*a property of **chaotic systems** (such as the atmosphere) by which **small changes** in initial conditions can **lead to large-scale and unpredictable variation** in the future state of the system*

CIVIL ENGINEERING / SURVEYING / UTILITIES

- 3 Kansas offices – nationwide project reach
- Civil site development, public works, construction inspection, telecom, and surveying
- 130 employees
- Three offices across Kansas; nationwide reach
- Team of 4 HR professionals



WHAT IS A "SACRED COW"?

noun. A person or thing considered to be exempt from criticism or questioning.

“If we could just get rid of , things would be so much better...”

> *- every HR professional at some point in their career, probably*

“Look, thanks for listening, but nothing is going to change while

is still here…”

THE TIPPING POINT

"We lost a major client due to their poor communication and low-quality work, and now top performers are threatening to leave."

"We are too busy to handle the workload if they quit or are let go… we can't afford to lose them right now."

Having BOLD Conversations

1. Be transparent and direct.
2. Challenge the “we can’t” mentality by asking WHY.
3. Identify barriers, then eat the elephant one bite at a time.
4. Simplify and reframe the issue.

"We lost a major client due to their poor communication and low-quality work, and now top performers are threatening to leave."

Low performer is held accountable; top performers stay with company.

"We are too busy to handle the workload if they quit or are let go… we can't afford to lose them right now."

Low performer is retained; top performers leave the company.

Building a BOLD Business Case

1. Problem employees don't get better with time. Assess, develop a plan, then address issues with swift and decisive action.
2. Document everything. Equip your supervisors to do the same.
3. Demonstrate the associated costs.
4. Don't shy away from calling out behaviors that others may overlook.

Your ability to affect change is limited by your leaders' willingness to embrace it.

Grew complacent performance management

Not adhering to best project management practices

Lack of accountability and ownership

Making BOLD changes

1. Your problems don't magically disappear with the person.
2. Determine how and why their behavior was allowed to take root.
3. What meaningful changes can you make to ensure accountability in the future?
4. Identify your key influencers.

February 2024

Loss of major client.

Began search for new Director.

May 2024

is terminated.

New Director is hired; former Director moves into client-facing role.

August 2024

Staff reduction occurs.

New Director pulls in project managers and supervisors to lead reorganization of the group and elevating key people.

September - October 2024

Director focuses on building trust across the team; tackles best practices and processes for project management.

Another department struggling with accountability follows suit; partners with HR to reorganize group.

November 2024

One of our largest clients is acquired; all promised project work is eliminated.

'Sacred Cow Zombies' continue to pop up and haunt us.

February 2025

At annual kickoff we announced leadership team would be dissolved.

New leadership structure identified including next layer of company leaders; key part of succession planning.

March 2025

Project and federal funding delays, coupled with bad weather, lead us to our worst revenue month post-pandemic.

Company is re-incorporated to allow for more diverse ownership and leadership.

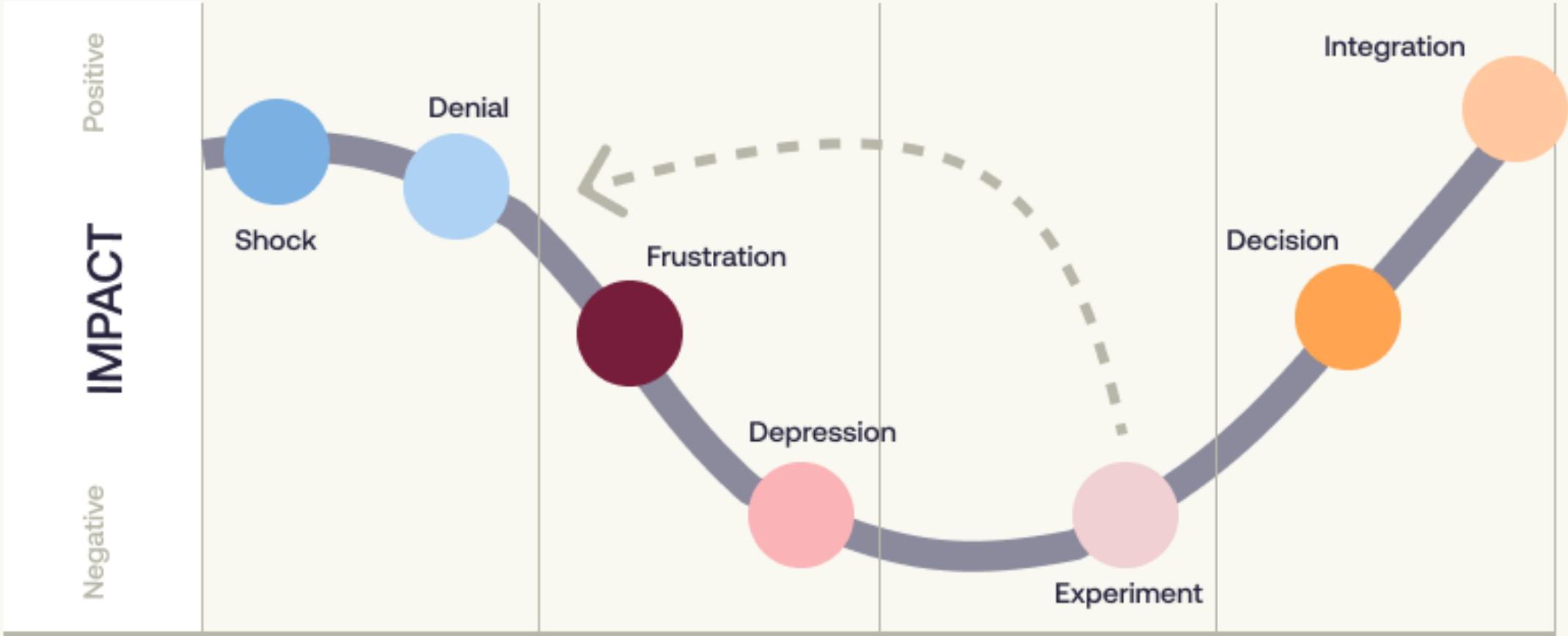
April 2025

Staff is right-sized in order to rebound.

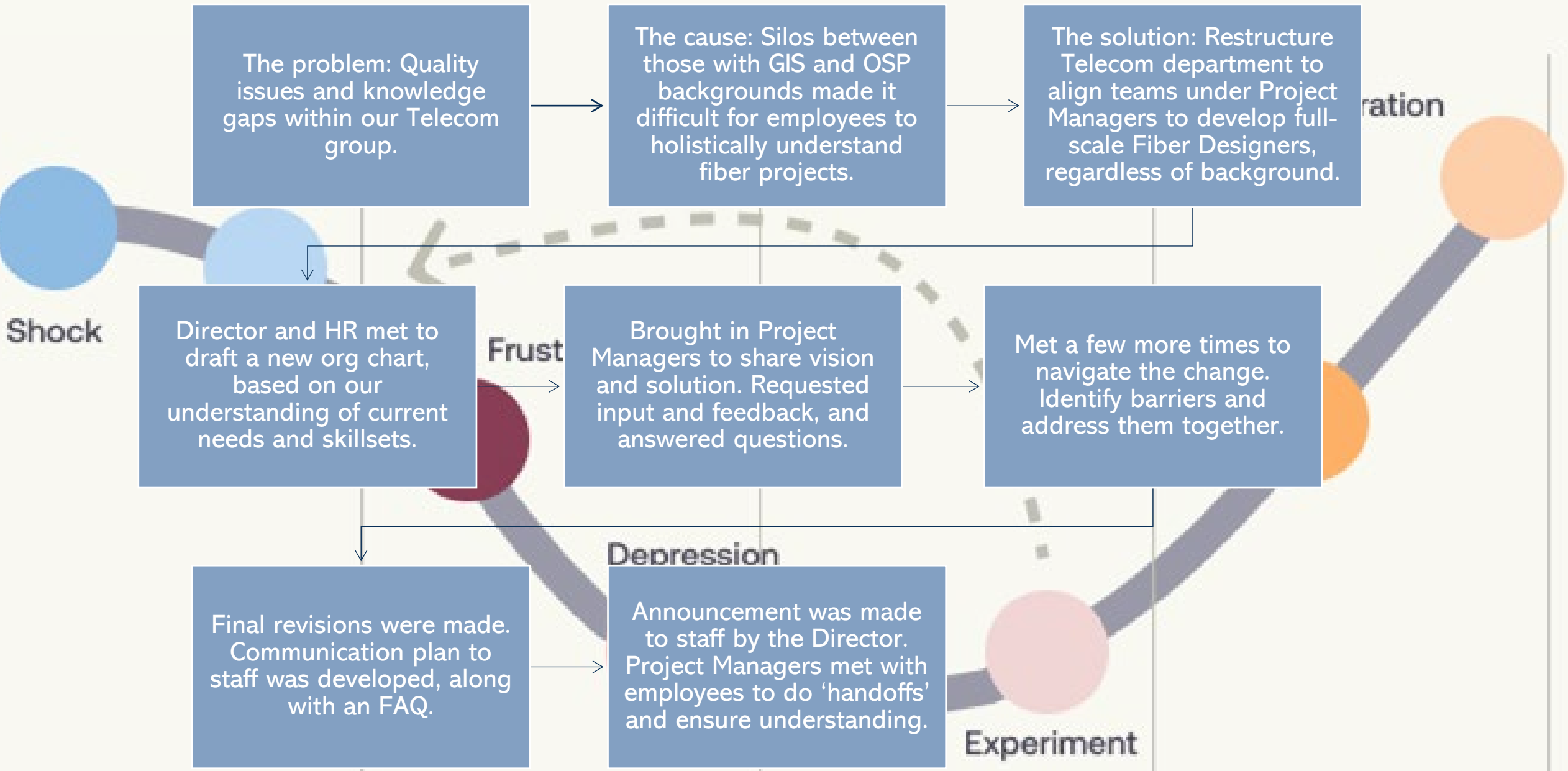
New Board of Directors is elected.

New company leaders meet for the first time to begin tackling objectives.

The Change Curve



State	Status Quo	Disruption	Exploration	Rebuild
Reaction	Shock, Denial	Anger, Fear	Acceptance	Commitment
Approach	Communicate, Contextualize, Explain	Watch, Listen, Support and Guide	Explore, Test, Itterate and Empower	Communicate success and acknowledge resistance



Status Quo	Disruption	Exploration	Rebuild

IT'S A MARATHON,
NOT A SPRINT.

Having BOLD resiliency

1. Make informed decisions and commit to your strategy.
2. Tie everything you do to your core values and mission. Know the WHY.
3. Celebrate the small wins
4. Doing the hard things the right way takes time and energy. Do them anyway.

Key Takeaways

- Build trust with leaders and influencers early and often
- Understanding and guiding others through the change curve
- Accountability starts at the top
- Setting clear expectations and being transparent about the things that matter
- The longer you wait to address problem employees, the longer it will take to deal with the fallout

Thank You!