

What We're Seeing

October 2026

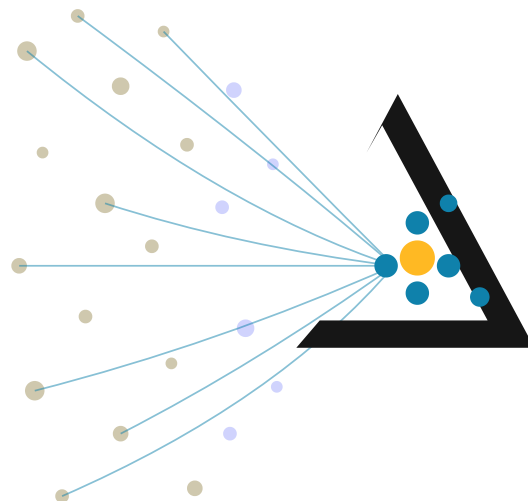
THIS MONTH'S THREAD

How do organizations adapt without losing shared attention, judgment, and the human side of work?

Each month, we look across recent research and practice to identify a few ideas that seem especially relevant to people working in coaching, consulting, leadership, learning, and organizational change.

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Attention that is scattered across many targets becomes performance only when it converges on a shared few, around what matters most. The open delta marks the space where that convergence is designed rather than assumed.

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communication
or attention?

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What We're
Taking With Us

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A note on how to read this digest. What We're Seeing is informed guidance, not prescription. We draw on peer-reviewed research where it exists and on practitioner research where it is the best available signal, and we label each so you can weigh it accordingly. Findings are context-dependent, the evidence base is evolving, and what works in one system may not transfer to another. We offer these ideas as starting points for your own judgment, in your own context, with the people you work with.



PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH

Your team's communication problem may actually be an attention problem

Recent research in *Personnel Psychology* examined collective attention in virtual teams, in NASA-funded team simulations: the extent to which team members are focused on the same shared target at the same time.

The researchers found that communication delays can disrupt collective attention, which can then hurt team performance.

That distinction matters.

When a team feels disconnected, our instinct is often to prescribe more communication. But the better question may be:

Are people actually attending to the same priorities, information, and decisions?

For leaders, consultants, and facilitators, that shifts the diagnostic lens:

FROM

"How do we get people communicating more?"

→

TO

"Where is shared attention breaking down?"

Why this matters for practice. Communication is the visible behavior; attention is the underlying condition it is meant to produce. A team can be communicating constantly and still be attending to different things. Diagnosing at the level of attention gives you a more precise place to intervene, and a more honest measure of whether the intervention worked.

Source: Carter et al. (2026), *Personnel Psychology* ↗

Evidence: Peer-reviewed empirical research

REFERENCE

Carter, D. R., Lungeanu, A., Pearman, J., Carter, N. T., Shuffler, M., Pendergraft, J., Bauer, L., Landon, L., DeChurch, L. A., & Contractor, N. (2026). Collective attention in virtual teams: A pathway for mitigating communication delays. *Personnel Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.70024>



PRACTITIONER RESEARCH

AI adoption is becoming a work-design question

The conversation around AI is starting to move:

BEYOND

“What tools should we use?”



TOWARD

“How does the work itself need to change?”

Recent practitioner research from McKinsey and Deloitte points to a growing gap between adopting AI technology and redesigning workflows, roles, decision rights, and organizational systems around it. That matters because adding a new tool to an old process does not necessarily create a better process.

For consultants and leaders, some of the more useful questions may now be:

- 01 What work should remain distinctly human?
- 02 Where should AI assist rather than decide?
- 03 What decisions need clearer ownership?
- 04 What skills become more important as AI takes on more routine work?
- 05 What parts of the operating model need to change along with the technology?

Our takeaway

AI implementation is not only a technology project. It is increasingly an organizational design project.

Source: McKinsey (2026) ↗

Source: Deloitte (2026) ↗

Evidence: Practitioner research; not peer-reviewed

REFERENCES

- Deloitte. (2026, March 4). *From tensions to tipping points: Choosing the human advantage* (2026 Global Human Capital Trends). Deloitte Insights. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/human-capital-trends.html>
- Tinkoff, D., Van der Veken, L., Chui, M., & Balakrishnan, T. (2026, August 25). *The state of AI in 2026: On the road to ROI*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai>

DELOITTE 2026 GLOBAL HUMAN CAPITAL TRENDS

85% vs. 7%

85%

of leaders say building the ability to adapt at today's required speed is **critical**.

7%

say their organizations are **leading** in helping the workforce continuously grow and adapt.

Agree adaptability is critical



85%

Report leading on it



7%

Same survey of leaders. The 78-point difference is the space between agreement and capability.

That is a striking gap.

Organizations appear to broadly agree that adaptability matters. The harder question is whether they are actually building the systems, leadership practices, learning environments, and cultures that make adaptability possible.

So perhaps the question is no longer simply:

FROM

“How do we manage this change?”

→

TO

“How do we help an organization get better at changing?”

Why this matters for practice. The first question treats each change as an event to be handled. The second treats adaptability as a capacity to be built, which means the work is less about the current initiative and more about what it leaves behind: clearer decision rights, learning that is expected rather than optional, and leaders who can hold uncertainty without transmitting it as urgency.

Source: Deloitte, 2026 Global Human Capital Trends ↗

Evidence: Large international practitioner survey; not peer-reviewed

REFERENCE

Deloitte. (2026, March 4). *From tensions to tipping points: Choosing the human advantage* (2026 Global Human Capital Trends). Deloitte Insights. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/human-capital-trends.html>



AN EiC PRACTICE EXERCISE

Try a Team Attention Audit

Inspired by the emerging research on collective attention, one simple practice is to pause with a team and ask:

Where is our attention aligned, and where is it fragmented?

A quick team conversation might explore three different kinds of question. They are grouped here because each points to a different place to intervene.

Priorities	Coordination	Signal and noise
◇ What are the three things that matter most right now? ◇ Would everyone on the team name the same three? ◇ Where do priorities become unclear?	◇ Where do handoffs create confusion? ◇ What decisions are waiting because ownership is unclear?	◇ Which meetings help us focus? ◇ Which meetings scatter our attention? ◇ Where are we receiving so much information that the important signals are getting lost?

The goal is not simply to increase communication. It is to increase shared attention around what matters most. If the conversation surfaces disagreement about the “three things,” that is not a failed audit. It is the finding.

IMPORTANT NOTE

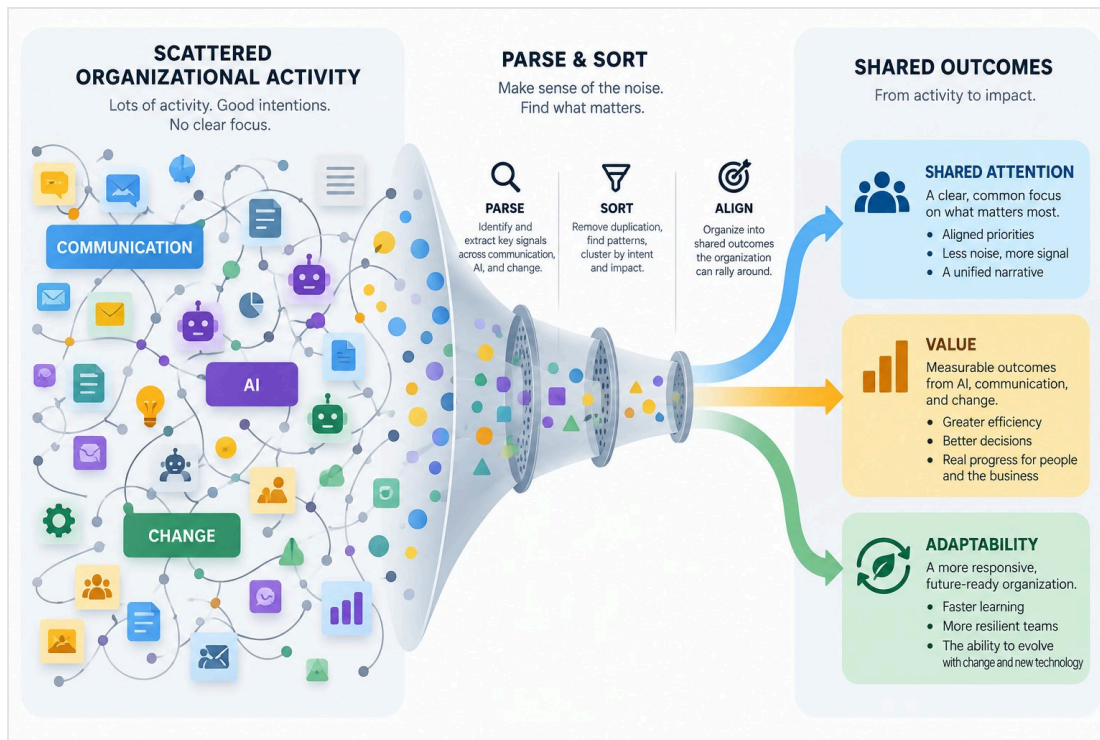
The Team Attention Audit is an EiC practice exercise informed by collective-attention research. It is not a validated assessment instrument.

INFORMING RESEARCH

Carter, D. R., Lungeanu, A., Pearman, J., Carter, N. T., Shuffler, M., Pendergraft, J., Bauer, L., Landon, L., DeChurch, L. A., & Contractor, N. (2026). Collective attention in virtual teams: A pathway for mitigating communication delays. *Personnel Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.70024>

A COMMON THREAD

Organizations may not need more activity as much as they need greater alignment.



Activity becomes impact only when it is parsed, sorted, and aligned. The three outcomes on the right are the three things this month's research kept pointing to.

More communication

does not automatically create shared attention.

More AI

does not automatically create organizational value.

More change initiatives

does not automatically create adaptability.

Sometimes the more useful question is:

What needs to become clearer, more coordinated, or more intentionally designed?

That is what we're watching this month.



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