

# The Science of Talent to Value

## Three Shifts that Bend the Curve


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A vertical strip on the left side of the page shows a blurred background of a business meeting. It features several people, including a man in a white shirt and glasses, and a woman, looking at documents and talking.

The capital system is rigorous. It has tools, models, return thresholds, review cadences, and board-level scrutiny. The talent system has judgment, hierarchy, and an annual process that rarely keeps pace with how fast strategy moves or value shifts.

This gap isn't cosmetic. Capital and talent are the two primary levers of enterprise value. When one gets discipline and the other gets intuition, you get a structural disconnect between strategy and execution. Organizations don't typically fail because they chose the wrong strategy. They fail because the wrong people, in poorly designed roles, with misaligned authority and ambiguous outcomes, were left accountable for delivering it.

FulcrumQ's mission is to close this gap. Over more than a decade and 230+ applications across CEOs, CHROs, and Private Equity partners, the science of Talent to Value has matured from a methodology into a compounding discipline. Its central finding is both simple and disruptive:

**Enterprise value is disproportionately driven by a small number of roles, and the probability of value arriving as planned rises sharply when those roles are identified with precision, assessed with rigor, and enabled with discipline.**



This paper is organized around three gearshifts. Not sequential steps, but an integrated system that shapes how leaders think and act to move strategy faster. Each contains the tools for precise intervention at pace. Together, they form the architecture of a discipline we call **Inflection Point Intelligence**: the ability to identify moments where targeted decisions disproportionately determine outcomes, and to act on them with clarity and speed.

## GEARSHIFT 1: BREAK THE HIERARCHY

The first shift is the hardest because it asks leaders to release an assumption reinforced across their entire careers: that the importance of a role is determined by its position in the hierarchy. It Isn't.

**The criticality of a role is determined by its proximity to value.**

The traditional model allocates resources, attention, and talent to the top of the organization chart and expects impact to cascade down. This logic worked when volatility was low and value pools were predictable. It doesn't work today. Transformation windows are compressed. Macro volatility, rapid digitization, and AI disruption drive value shifts faster than organizational structures can adapt. **The result is a backward-looking talent trickle-down model that consistently over-resources legacy positions while the roles closest to emerging value remain underweight.**



Talent to Value starts with a precise map of where new enterprise value will be created, built on two scenarios:

**The Momentum Case** defines the value expected if the organization stays on its current trajectory: good execution, no major disruptions. This captures current value pools and the risks associated with them.

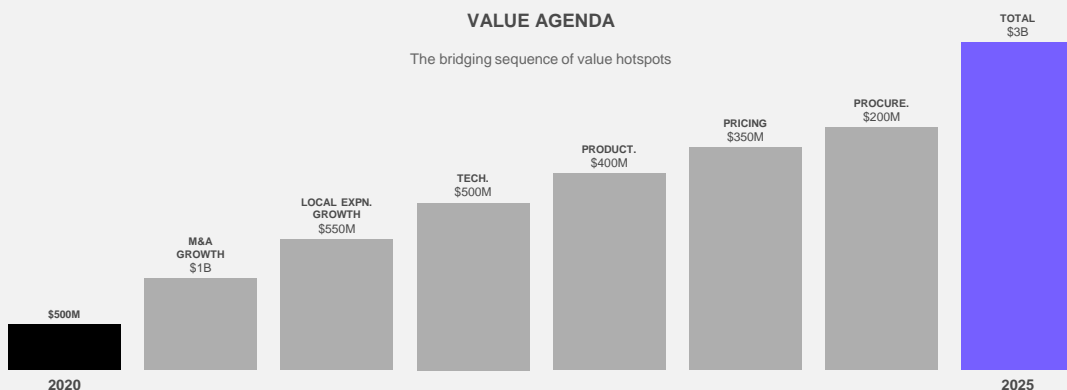
**The Bend the Curve Case** asks a harder question: what are the pivots the strategy demands where bold, focused bets and disciplined execution could create materially more future value?

Between these two scenarios, leaders clarify and align typically four to six concentrated value pools – the Value Hotspots – where accelerated investment and exceptional execution will drive disproportionate outcomes. Not "what are all our priorities?" but "where must we concentrate resource and exceptional talent to drive exceptional execution?" That's a fundamentally different question, and the discipline it imposes is often uncomfortable.

## IN PRACTICE

### From \$500M to \$3B: Making the Value Map Real

A national aggregator of local vehicle maintenance and repair shops set a value agenda with a single ambition: grow from \$500M to \$3B in five years. To build a bridge from today's value to tomorrow's, the leadership identified six value hotspots — tangible places where seventy to eighty percent of the value agenda would be created and captured. Each hotspot represented a specific dollar amount of value, a set of activities, and several key roles associated with that work. The hotspots, ranked by value, ran from a \$1B M&A growth engine down to a \$200M procurement opportunity. The discipline of naming and sequencing these hotspots — rather than listing all possible priorities — was itself the first act of resource clarity.



At Unilever in the early 2000s, this approach revealed that the company's future value was concentrated in emerging markets that were systematically under-resourced in favor of legacy business units. Senior leaders had earned their positions through performance in contexts that no longer informed the opportunities ahead. The required move wasn't a reorganization. It was a precise redeployment of proven leaders into the hotspots, regardless of hierarchy. The result: a doubling of share price.

Once hotspots are clarified, the discipline generates **The List: a roster of typically 20 to 35 Critical Roles most proximate to value.** The List isn't derived from the organization chart. It's built from the value map. At each hotspot, leaders visualize a **Value Squad** to identify the roles most proximate to the hotspot's value. This starts with identifying the critical work required for value to arrive, then allocating that work to the roles in the squad who must deliver it. Interdependencies are mapped to assemble enabling and support roles without whom the squad can't deliver. New roles are identified where emerging work is underserved by current role designs.

**Across 230+ engagements, typically 60%+ of Critical Roles sit below the leadership team and their direct reports. Often 5 to 10% are new roles. And the composition is cross-functional, not limited to revenue and P&L positions.**

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**IN PRACTICE****What the Value Map Surfaces**

In an American multinational CPG company, the Talent to Value process revealed that one interdependent critical role — invisible on the organization chart — was more valuable to the enterprise than all the roles occupied by forty country leaders combined.

In a North American manufacturing company, a procurement role was found to carry responsibility for \$600M in value creation and \$60M in EBITDA. It was being compensated at \$60,000 a year. Neither insight would have appeared through a hierarchy-first lens.



The List doesn't catalog talent. It provides the GPS coordinates of value. And it changes as strategy evolves, refreshed at the same cadence as value shifts.

Our research shows that PE portfolio companies that rapidly reallocate the right talent into Critical Roles at Value Hotspots deliver superior returns.

## GEARSHIFT 2: BEYOND THE TALENT

The second shift is the most scientifically significant, and the one most consistently underestimated. It moves from a talent-centric diagnostic to a full-spectrum execution risk assessment.

When most organizations evaluate whether talent in a Critical Role will succeed, they focus almost entirely on the person. Is the leader capable? Do they have the right experience? Are they a cultural fit? It's a natural instinct. Necessary, but not sufficient.

**Across 230+ applications, we consistently find that roughly 70% of execution risk lives in the Work and the Role, not in the Talent.**

### IN PRACTICE


#### **When Talent Isn't the Problem**

Consider what happens when a company buys a recognized talent from Google, Amazon, or Apple to lead a digital transformation. With great fanfare, they are placed into a new Chief Digital Officer role and tasked with delivering a significant chunk of value. Twelve to eighteen months later, it is obvious to everyone that the appointment has not produced the results intended. People claim the person was a bad match with the culture, or blame the individual for their inability to make progress. The talent is changed out. A year later, the company is back in exactly the same place.

The talent was not the problem. The role — its decision rights, its capacity, the resistance it faced — was never examined. This is where strategy goes to die.

"Seat empty, seat full" is the beginning, not the end. The only finish line that matters is: seat empty, seat full, value delivered.



A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows two men in business attire. One man is standing and looking at a document held by another man who is seated. They appear to be in a meeting or collaborative work environment.

A highly capable leader placed into a role with misaligned authority, under-resourced capacity, or poorly defined jobs to be done will underperform. That's not a talent problem. It's a work and role context problem. And when that leader is replaced, the cycle repeats, unless the context issues are addressed.

This reframes the diagnostic question. It's not "Is this person good enough?" It's: **What is the work this role must deliver? Is the role designed to enable success? Then, and only then, is the talent ready to deliver the work in this specific context?**

### *Assessing the Work*

**Outcome Alignment** examines whether shared clarity exists among all stakeholders about intended outcomes, sequencing, and timelines. Misalignment here is the leading driver of leadership failure.

**Execution Complexity** maps the structural difficulty inherent in the work: workstreams, decision-making depth, technology dependencies, stakeholder interdependencies.

**New Work** assesses whether the jobs to be done are familiar to the organization or require expanding into genuinely new territory: new capabilities, new markets, new operating models.

**Competitive Intensity** evaluates the strength of market forces acting on value delivery that must be overcome to win.



## *Assessing the Role*

**Authority** asks whether decision rights are clear and adequate. Where does the role sit on the spectrum from Coordinate to Convene to Influence to Decide?

**Capacity** assesses whether personal capacity, resources, budget, and organizational capabilities are sufficient for the mandate.

**Attractiveness** determine whether compensation, career path, and context are competitive enough to attract and retain the required talent.

**Resistance** surfaces entrenched cultural or organizational behaviors likely to block the change the role must drive.

**Superpowers** define the edge any talent in the role must possess to overcome the risks in the work and role context.

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### IN PRACTICE

#### **Diagnosing the Role Before the Talent: VP of M&A**

At the national aggregator, the VP of M&A role carried \$500M of expected value. Before any candidate was assessed, the role diagnostic revealed three compounding risks. On Authority: the role lacked the decision rights to expedite deals prior to the letter of intent stage — a structural gap, not a talent gap. On Capacity: while the role had direct authority over the right capabilities, financial resources fell short of what the mandate required. On Resistance: a handful of founders from legacy acquisitions were actively resisting centralization, creating a headwind that would face anyone placed in the role, regardless of their ability.

These findings defined the Superpower any candidate would need: deal-making expertise combined with a superior ability to build strategies and teams at scale — and critically, an ability to influence entrepreneur-founders. That kryptonite alone could have scuttled future deals.



## *Assessing the Talent*

Talent is assessed only once the full context of Work and Role is established, across these factors:

**JTBD Readiness:** Ability of the talent to deliver the specific JTBDs, based on prior experience and skill.

**Superpower Match:** Evidence of the talent match on the specific qualities to mitigate the inherent risks driven by the Work Challenge and Role Design of the role.

**Two Way Fit:** The mutual match between the talent's motivations and the organization expectations.

## *The Role-Talent Card and Risk Dashboard*

The three dimensions (Work, Role and Talent) are collated into the **Role-Talent Card**: a single-page synthesis highlighting risks in each element and calibrating overall risk to value delivery. When compiled for all Critical Roles, they define a **Risk Dashboard** that reveals patterns invisible at the individual role level:

- Concentration of capacity or capability risks in certain functions
- Systemic issues with decision rights implicating the operating framework
- Vacant roles carrying disproportionate value at risk

The Risk Dashboard converts the diagnostic into a strategic tool that answers not just "where are the risks?" but "**which interventions, in which sequence, will remove the most risk in the least time?**"



## GEARSHIFT 3: toValue

The third shift is the most decisive, and the one that separates insight from impact. The science of Talent to Value doesn't end with diagnosis.

Most transformation efforts accumulate analysis. Reports are produced, dashboards reviewed, and action delayed because interventions feel too complex, too politically sensitive, or too uncertain. The discipline breaks this pattern by shifting the question from "what could be done?" to "what is the least that should be done to accelerate value delivery?"

### *Value Enabling Plans*

For each Critical Role, the risk insights from the Role-Talent Card translate into a **Value Enabling Plan**: a concentrated, evidence-based set of interventions targeting the specific risk factors identified. This is not a development plan. It's a value delivery plan organized around the jobs to be done, with actions mapped to milestones and accountabilities assigned to specific owners.

The goal is to distill the fewest possible interventions across work, role, and talent risks. The risk insights enable an informed conversation, co-created with the incumbent talent, the line manager, and the HRBP, to define the minimum set of interventions to mitigate the risks. Equally important: defining what success looks like for each intervention and a review cadence that creates the framework for objective, periodic evaluation of what has actually happened.



## IN PRACTICE

**Minimum Intervention, Maximum Release**

At the national aggregator, rather than initiating a company-wide transformation, four targeted interventions were made at the M&A Table — the organization's highest-value hotspot.

Decision rights for the VP of M&A were adjusted to expedite deals prior to the letter of intent stage, removing the single most consequential authority gap. The CEO began holding weekly one-on-one meetings with the VP as he built his team and developed the acquisition strategy. The Head of Integration role, previously undefined, was formally scoped — with its Jobs to Be Done adjusted to account for the company's underlying IT issues, which would otherwise complicate every future acquisition. And Role-Talent Cards were prepared for candidates to fill the Table's two vacant seats.

**Four actions. One table. \$1B in value at stake.**

*The Value Mobilization  
Dashboard and Cadence*

The **Value Mobilization Dashboard** is the living system through which the science sustains impact. It tracks progress on value, interventions, and talent in the same frame for each Value Hotspot. It surfaces where action plans are stalling, where business context has shifted the risk profile, and where early implementation is already generating measurable outcomes.

The cadence mirrors the heart rate of the organization: quarterly at minimum, monthly or weekly where execution is most contested. Alan Mulally's turnaround of Ford offers a compelling example: weekly business plan reviews focused equally on value, capital, and talent, with the same data discipline applied to human deployment as to financial forecasting. The most advanced organizations redesign their operating routines to combine value, capital, and talent moves in a single integrated cadence.





## *Inflection Points*

The science works in any context. But it works with greatest force at **moments of inflection**: moments where small decisions materially alter value trajectories. A market entry. A major acquisition. A CEO transition. A technology disruption. At these moments, the cost of talent misalignment isn't operational. It's strategic and often irreversible.

FulcrumQ defines and leads the category of **Inflection Point Intelligence**: the discipline of connecting talent to value with precision at points of inflection when businesses are required to pivot.

### WHEN THE SCIENCE TAKES HOLD

The three gearshifts aren't sequential. They're interlocking. Breaking the Hierarchy establishes the GPS coordinates of value. Beyond the Talent illuminates the full spectrum of execution risk. toValue converts risk insight into delivery and sustains it through rhythm, evidence, and precision.

Together, they constitute **the toValue Operating System**: the institutional architecture through which Talent to Value becomes embedded in organizational life rather than applied once to a single transformation. The system extends across the full arc of enterprise use cases:

- **Hiring toValue** for talent selection at critical junctures
- **Succession toValue** for continuity in roles that carry disproportionate impact
- **Capability toValue** for building the discipline inside the organization through the Talent to Value Academy



The toValue Operating System also extends into a full suite of applications across the deal lifecycle for private capital contexts. Our research shows that PE portfolio companies working with these disciplines reduce leadership churn post-acquisition, get onto the new value curve faster, and deliver superior returns.

Our evidence base spans 230+ applications across geographies, sectors, and business life stages. Organizations that master these gearshifts move from chasing value to shaping it, deploying capital and talent at the same pace as value shifts.

The science doesn't eliminate uncertainty. It reduces execution risk to its minimum irreducible level and ensures that when talent decisions are made at moments of inflection, they're made on evidence, not intuition, hierarchy, or simply because "that's how it's always been done."

FulcrumQ is committed to the continuous advancement of this discipline. The Talent to Value Academy institutionalizes this knowledge within client organizations. The Talent to Value Community extends the work into a broader network of leaders and practitioners.

**We're students of this science. The invitation is open.**



Thank you

