

MODULE 1 · SESSION 2

Selecting Leaders and Distributing Authority

How to assess senior candidates and assign decision authority without creating bottlenecks or accountability gaps.

Theory session

Advanced

Running case: Northstar Forge

Where this session sits

1.1 redesigned the founder's role; 1.2 fills the authority it released

MODULE 1

From Founder to Leadership System

MODULE 2

Culture as an Operating System

MODULE 3

Strategic Continuity Under Pressure

SESSIONS IN THIS MODULE

1.1 Recasting the Founder's Operating Authority
Redesigning the founder's role and the executive team around it

1.2 **Selecting Leaders and Distributing Authority**
Assessing senior candidates and assigning decision rights

YOU ARE HERE

1.3 Making Accountability Visible in Practice
Turning delegated authority into observable commitments

What this session explains

Choosing leaders and defining what they may decide

01

Hire for the stage, not the pedigree

Experience at scale is not the same as the ability to reach it.

02

Interviews are weak evidence

The predictive validity literature is unambiguous, and mostly ignored.

03

Decision rights prevent both failure modes

Bottlenecks and accountability gaps are opposite symptoms of the same missing design.

04

Senior onboarding is a real investment

Context transfer is the work; assuming seniority substitutes for it is how good hires fail.

What actually predicts senior performance

Ranked by predictive validity, not by how comfortable the method feels

UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW

A conversation. Comfortable, universally used, and among the weakest predictors available.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Same questions, same order, anchored scoring. A large improvement for little cost.

WORK SAMPLE

They do a version of the actual job — a real plan, a real analysis, a real decision.

REFERENCED TRACK RECORD

Detailed back-channel on what they specifically did, from people who watched them do it.

Schmidt, F. & Hunter, J. (1998). The validity and utility of selection methods. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124(2), 262–274.

THE FINDING

Structure is the lever

Meta-analytic work consistently finds structured methods outperform unstructured judgement by a wide margin.

FOR SENIOR ROLES

Work samples are under-used

Ask for a ninety-day plan for your actual situation, then examine how they reason — not whether they are right.

THE HONEST CAVEAT

Small samples, high stakes

Senior hiring is a handful of decisions a year. Process discipline matters more precisely because you cannot learn from volume.

Stage fit and functional pedigree

The most common senior-hire failure is confusing the two

PEDIGREE

Ran this function at scale

WHAT IT EVIDENCES

They can operate a machine that already exists — process, budget, large teams.

WHERE IT FITS

When you genuinely have that machine and need it run better.

WHERE IT FAILS

When the machine does not exist yet and must be built from very little.

STAGE FIT

Has built this, at this size

WHAT IT EVIDENCES

They have taken something from roughly your position to roughly your next one.

WHERE IT FITS

Almost always, for a company between stages — which is most of them.

THE TEST

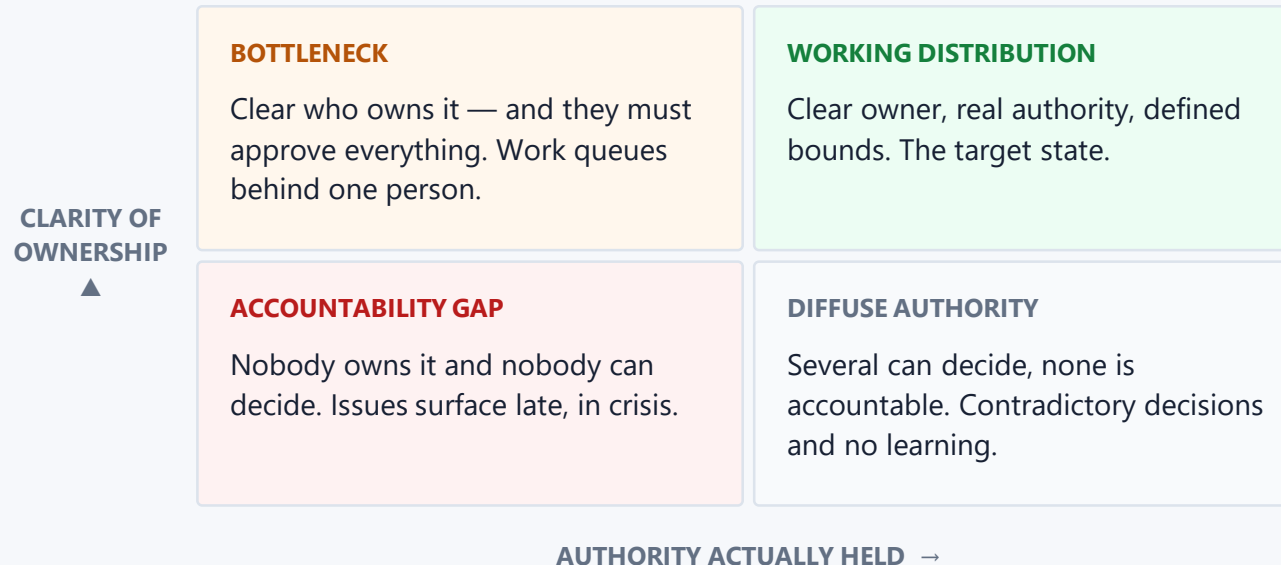
“Tell me about the state of the function when you arrived, and when you left.”

READING THE CASE

Diligent hired into a specific transition — around 100 robots deployed, fleet scale next. The relevant question was what each candidate had done at that boundary.

Bottlenecks and gaps are the same missing design

Authority either concentrates or evaporates; both are distributions



THE DIAGNOSIS

Both come from one omission

Neither is fixed by hiring. Both are fixed by writing down who decides what, with what bounds.

THE OVERLOOKED QUADRANT

Diffuse authority

Looks collaborative, produces contradictory commitments and nobody who can be asked why.

THE TEST

Ask three people

Who decides this? If you get three answers, the design is missing regardless of the org chart.

Distributing authority with explicit bounds

Five roles per decision; the last column is what makes it workable

Decision	Decides	Consulted	Informed	Escalates when
Hiring within approved plan	Function lead	People	Founder	Outside plan or above band.
Customer commitment on dates	Delivery lead	Product	Commercial	Affects another customer's committed date.
Production quality exception	Operations lead	Quality	Founder	Never — this is a non-negotiable.
Architecture change	CTO	Delivery, security	Executive	Cost or timeline moves by a quarter.
Discount beyond band	Commercial lead	Finance	Founder	Beyond 20%, or a non-standard term.

THE COLUMN THAT DOES THE WORK

A decision right without an escalation boundary gets escalated anyway. The boundary is what converts the table from a statement into a working rule.

Levels of delegation, stated explicitly

Most disagreements about delegation are disagreements about which level was meant

RECOMMEND You analyse and propose; I decide. Appropriate while context is still transferring.	DECIDE AND INFORM You decide and tell me afterwards. The working default for a competent leader in their domain.	DECIDE, NO REPORT You decide; I find out through normal reporting. Reserved for well-established areas.
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MAKING THE LEVEL EXPLICIT

What to say	Why it prevents conflict
“This is yours to decide — tell me after.”	Removes the ambiguity that produces both over-consultation and surprise.
“Bring me a recommendation by Friday.”	Sets the expectation that the analysis is theirs and the call is not.
“You own this area; I will see it in the monthly.”	Signals genuine transfer, which is what makes ownership felt.

Transferring context to a senior hire

The work that determines whether a good appointment succeeds

FIRST NINETY DAYS



THE STEP THAT ESTABLISHES THEM

The third box matters most. A senior hire who makes no visible decision in the first quarter is read by the organisation as not actually holding the authority.

Watkins, M. (2013). The First 90 Days. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

Three senior appointments that fail predictably

In each, the hire is blamed and the design was the problem

Hired into an undefined role

Looks like A strong candidate, no written decision rights.

Why it fails They collide with peers or wait for permission, and both read as weak leadership.

Fix Define the authority before opening the role.

Pedigree over stage

Looks like An executive from a much larger company.

Why it fails They ask for a machine that does not exist and cannot build one.

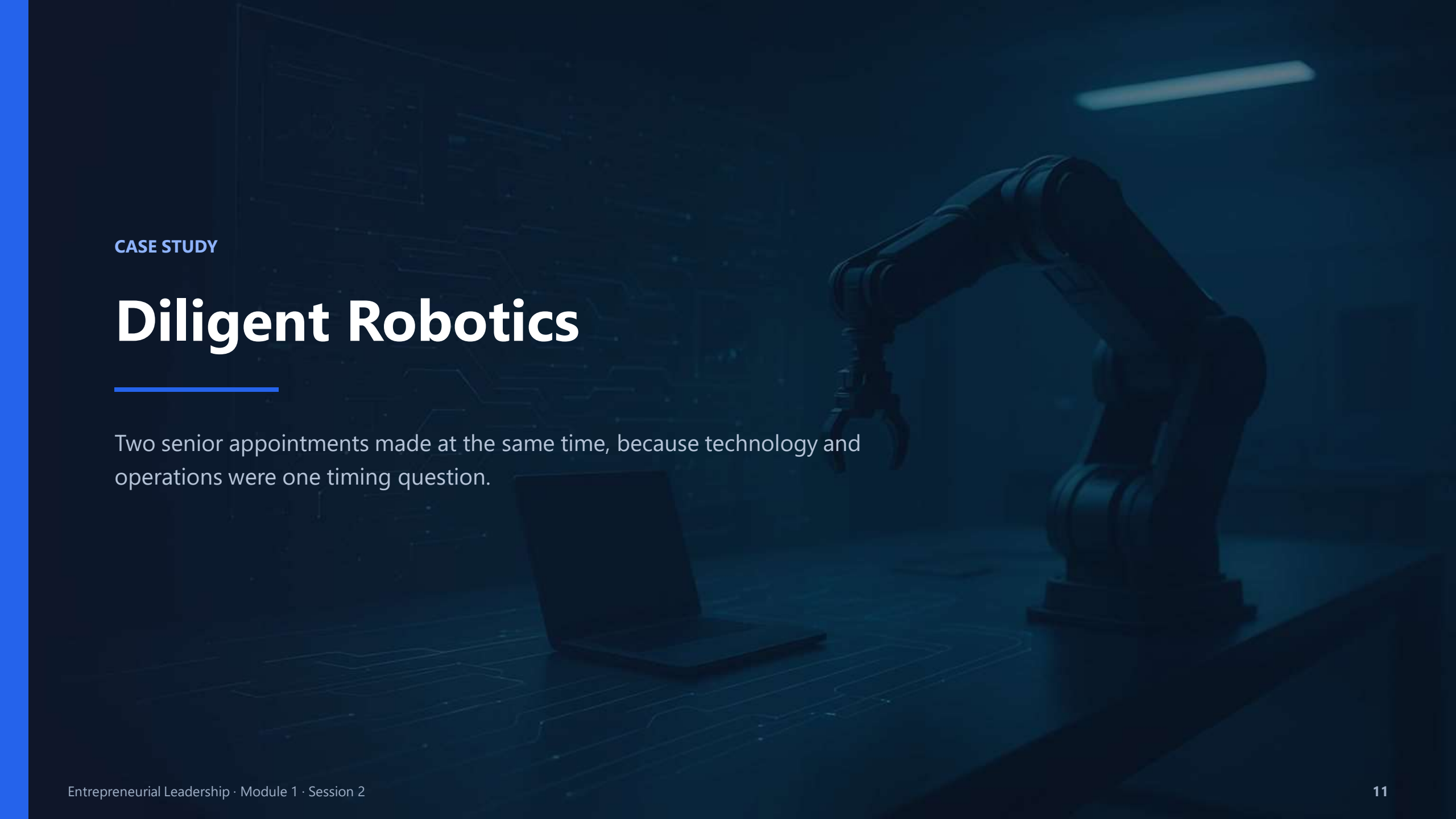
Fix Test for the specific transition you are in.

Consensus hiring

Looks like Everyone interviews, nobody decides.

Why it fails The least objectionable candidate wins, which is not the same as the best.

Fix One named decider; others advise against written criteria.

The background of the slide is a dark, blue-toned image. On the right side, a robotic arm is visible, its joints and gripper clearly defined against the dark background. In the center-left, a laptop is open, its screen glowing slightly. The entire scene is overlaid with a faint, glowing pattern of circuit lines and nodes, giving it a high-tech, futuristic feel. The lighting is low, with some highlights on the robot's arm and the laptop screen.

CASE STUDY

Diligent Robotics

Two senior appointments made at the same time, because technology and operations were one timing question.

Two appointments, one timing question

Leadership hiring as a statement about the work coming next

THE STAGE

Past deployment, before scale

THE PLATFORM

About 100 Moxi robots already deployed in hospitals and pharmacies before the hires.

WHAT THAT CHANGED

The company was operating beyond an experimental stage; the next question was fleet scale.

WHAT SCALE REQUIRES

Clearer ownership of both the technical platform and the operating machinery behind it.

THE APPOINTMENTS

Two roles, one decision

WHO JOINED

Rashed Haq as CTO and Todd Brugger as COO, both in July 2025.

WHERE THEY CAME FROM

Both from Cruise, bringing autonomous-driving experience into a robotics scaling push.

THE REASONING

Parallel senior coverage rather than treating technology and operations as separate timing questions.

READING THE CASE

The value was the fit between the company's stage and the roles added. Leadership hiring is a statement about what work is coming next, not a reward for work already done.

Drawn from the session case pack.

Bringing the theory to Northstar Forge

Filling the authority released in Session 1.1

Step	What you do	Northstar Forge example
Define before recruiting	Decision rights written first.	Commercial lead: pricing to 20%, hiring within plan, channel terms.
Specify the transition	From what state, to what state.	From founder-led deals to a repeatable process at 3× volume.
Use structured methods	Same questions, anchored scoring, a work sample.	A 90-day plan for our actual pipeline, discussed with two peers.
Reference specifically	What they did, from people who saw it.	Two back-channel references beyond the supplied list.
Name one decider	Others advise.	Founder decides; operations and finance advise against written criteria.
Plan the first decision	Visible, early, theirs.	Sets the new discount policy in week three, and announces it.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Session 1.3 turns this delegated authority into commitments that can be observed and reviewed.

What to carry out of this session

1

Hire for the transition you are in.

Experience running a function at scale is not evidence of being able to build one.

2

Structured methods beat unstructured judgement.

Same questions, anchored scoring, and a real work sample.

3

Bottlenecks and accountability gaps share one cause.

Both come from never writing down who decides what, within what bounds.

4

State the level of delegation explicitly.

Most delegation conflicts are disagreements about which level was meant.

5

Engineer an early, visible decision.

A senior hire who decides nothing in their first quarter is read as not holding the authority.

Sources for this session

Primary references behind each concept

SELECTION VALIDITY	Schmidt, F. & Hunter, J. (1998). The validity and utility of selection methods. <i>Psychological Bulletin</i> , 124(2), 262–274.
STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING	Campion, M., Palmer, D. & Campion, J. (1997). A review of structure in the selection interview. <i>Personnel Psychology</i> , 50(3).
DECISION RIGHTS	Rogers, P. & Blenko, M. (2006). Who has the D? <i>Harvard Business Review</i> , 84(1), 52–61.
SENIOR HIRING	Smart, B. & Street, R. (2008). <i>Who: The A Method for Hiring</i> . New York: Ballantine.
ONBOARDING	Watkins, M. (2013). <i>The First 90 Days</i> . Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
DELEGATION	Oncken, W. & Wass, D. (1974). Management time: who's got the monkey? <i>Harvard Business Review</i> , 52(6).
ORGANISATION DESIGN	Galbraith, J. (2014). <i>Designing Organizations</i> (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.