Paradise by the Dashboard Lights

When measuring the business replaces managing it

James Gardner | FLOW PATH | October 20, 2026

Version 1.0 | October 2026 | Tracking reference WK43-01

Leadership must do the hard work first

A business can become increasingly sophisticated at displaying performance while the same operating problems remain unresolved. Reviews become routine, red indicators become familiar, and requests for additional information consume attention needed to improve the work. The organization becomes more capable of describing its condition without developing an equally effective response.

Leadership must do the hard work of building a management system before expecting a dashboard to support it. That includes establishing a clear shared goal, resolving conflicting priorities, teaching people how their work contributes, and providing the capability, resources, and authority to act. It requires direct involvement where work stalls, difficult conversations about responsibility, and follow-through until improvements hold.

This is the dirty work of leadership. Installing electronic boards cannot complete it. When leaders advance before establishing the fundamentals, they risk displaying unresolved weaknesses with greater sophistication. The daily operating test is whether people understand what matters and act appropriately without waiting to be prompted.

Develop the people who will use the information

FLOW PATH proposes the progression Understanding → Information → Education → Commitment → Execution. Direct manual participation in a few fundamental measures provides the recommended starting method. Teams learn to explain the numbers, connect them to the shared goal, and act within their authority. Electronic boards can then help them examine further connections.

Drawing on my operational experience, this paper presents FLOW PATH’s approach for engine maintenance, repair, and overhaul leaders. The development sequence and recommendation to begin manually are practitioner positions. Research supports guided practice and feedback [1]; it does not establish a universal requirement to use physical boards before electronic ones.

When reporting becomes the management routine

In my experience, the pattern begins when reviewing results becomes the main management activity. Problems return without resolution. Leaders request additional detail or revised displays before acting on conditions already understood. Dashboard refinement becomes a continuing project, often shaped by senior leadership's presentation preferences.

The burden follows a recognizable sequence: revisions consume time needed to solve problems and develop people; repeated reviews then become routine. Software, integration, maintenance, data verification, and meeting time all carry costs. Manual recording and reconciliation carry costs too. Evaluate the full effort and the operating value of either approach.

Each requested revision should identify the decision it will improve, the person who will use it, and the consequence of waiting. Further analysis is warranted when it can materially change the decision. A known repair queue waiting for qualified inspection coverage does not necessarily require a new display before leaders can evaluate coverage and work sequence.

The daily review updates action already underway

People should arrive at the daily review having acted on matters within their responsibility and authority. The meeting updates progress, actions taken, changing conditions, and support required. When people first seek permission there to make routine changes, the management system has built waiting into the operation.

A barrier requiring higher authority should be escalated when recognized. Escalation creates an obligation for the leader with that authority to respond. The team continues managing what it can control while leadership resolves the barrier beyond it. The review updates progress on both responsibilities.

Recurring red requires deeper investigation

A recurring adverse condition requires investigation into why the previous response was insufficient. Leadership must examine causes, earlier decisions, available resources, and restrictions on action. Corrective action needs an expected result and follow-up that tests whether the change worked. Closing a task or sending an email does not establish recovery.

A red signal warrants assessment in context. A target may exceed what the current process can reliably deliver; leadership may need to change the system. Examine trends and variation over time rather than changing priorities for every fluctuation [2]. A recovery that takes time must still show credible progress. Repeating the same explanation is insufficient.

Departments succeed through the complete flow

“Look at us, but forget them” describes a departmental failure: local indicators turn green while neighboring operations struggle and customer commitments remain exposed. High utilization or completion counts may reward activity that leaves the next team waiting or creates work it cannot use.

A department’s success must include how it enables the operations on its left and right to succeed. This means understanding both what it needs to receive and what support, information, and output it owes its neighbors. Leaders must examine whether local priorities contribute to problems at either interface and act within their influence.

Agree the commitments together

Leaders must develop fundamental measures together across departmental boundaries. The sending and receiving teams agree what a successful handoff requires. These commitments must be documented simply, understood by employees, and applied across shifts and supervisors.

Quality Define the required condition and acceptance criteria so the receiving operation can use the work as intended.

Quantity Agree the amount and mix required to support the next operation, rather than maximizing local output regardless of need.

Timing Agree when the handoff is needed and when a developing miss must be communicated so recovery remains possible.

Information Provide the status, findings, decisions, and supporting records needed to proceed without avoidable clarification.

Moving incomplete work into another department does not establish progress. The handoff succeeds when the receiving team can proceed as agreed. Measures should reveal whether these commitments are fulfilled and how failures affect the shared goal.

Resolve failed handoffs jointly

The sending and receiving departments investigate a failed handoff together. They identify which commitment was missed and take corrective action within their authority. Barriers beyond that authority are escalated promptly. Joint investigation preserves each role’s duties while preventing disputes over where the problem belongs from delaying recovery.

Leadership must distinguish avoidance from inability to act. Establish whether the goal and role were clear, capability and resources were available, authority was usable, and instructions were consistent. Where those conditions exist, repeated avoidance requires accountability. Where they do not, leaders must correct the conditions they control.

How understanding develops into execution

The proposed progression describes how leadership develops the ability to manage. Its elements reinforce one another; execution generates information and feedback that can deepen understanding. “Hand, then heart, then results” expresses the human side of this development.

Understanding

People first understand the goal, why it matters, and their contribution. They can explain what the business needs and what their department owes neighboring operations. Announcing a target does not establish shared understanding. Leaders must work through conflicting priorities and verify that employees can explain the purpose in their own words.

Information

With a purpose established, employees work directly with relevant facts. They observe, record or verify measures, and discuss changes. Manual participation should require attention to the work behind the number. Copying a figure without examining its source or consequence does not fulfill this purpose.

Education

Education develops the ability to connect facts, explain relationships, and judge a response. Leaders demonstrate, guide practice, ask questions, and provide feedback [1]. A team learns why a hold matters, which decision is required, and how delay affects the next operation and customer. Repetition alone is insufficient; misunderstandings must be corrected.

Commitment

Personal meaning provides a basis for accepting responsibility. People recognize the consequences of their actions for colleagues, customers, and the business. Commitment appears in conduct: raising concerns, honoring obligations, and following through. Understanding and education support it, but do not automatically guarantee it.

Execution

People act promptly within established authority and examine the result. Capability, resources, and timely escalation enable execution. Micromanagement undermines that development when competent employees repeatedly need approval for decisions already within their responsibilities. Appropriate boundaries and technical authority remain essential.

Hand then heart then results

Hand represents direct participation that develops understanding and education. Heart represents the personal meaning and responsibility supporting commitment. Results depend on informed, empowered execution. A dashboard can supply information while leaving the rest of this development incomplete.

Earn the progression to electronic boards

Progression to electronic boards is earned through demonstrated capability. A rollout date cannot establish readiness. Retain manual boards until people can explain the goal and measures, fulfill agreed handoffs, and act without prompting within their authority. Leaders must observe that capability across normal shifts and operating conditions.

Readiness includes recognizing when investigation is needed, explaining consequences for neighboring operations, and escalating beyond authority. Digital boards can offer useful advantages: a Sandvik case study identified more perceived advantages than disadvantages, although it did not measure comparative performance effects [3]. FLOW PATH's recommendation concerns the capability developed before transition. Continue verifying understanding afterward.

Preserve the reasoning as the organization changes

Growth and turnover can leave an organization with the display and its routines while the underlying knowledge erodes. New employees may learn what to update without learning why it matters. Sustaining capability requires deliberate renewal of the purpose, relationships, and lessons behind the system.

This is an organizational responsibility. HR and operational leadership must incorporate that foundation into onboarding, talent development, succession, and leadership preparation. Department leaders and experienced employees reinforce it through practice and coaching. Revisit it during personnel changes, process changes, and periodic development reviews.

Know the history before developing the future

Incoming leaders must learn the shared goal, reasoning behind measures, commitments between departments, and lessons that shaped current practices. Before changing a routine, they should explain the problem to solve, examine effects across the flow, and establish how value will be verified. Personal presentation preference is insufficient justification.

Knowing the history helps leaders distinguish a safeguard worth retaining from a practice whose purpose has expired. Preserve the reasoning and experience so the organization can make informed changes. Know the history, understand the purpose, then develop the future.

Verify the why through explanation and application

Verification should resemble an oral examination: people explain a measure's purpose and respond to follow-up questions about an operating condition. Ask why a hold matters, who is affected, what action is within authority, and what requires escalation. Observe application in the work as well. Training completion records participation; explanation and appropriate action provide evidence of capability.

An engine MRO application

Consider an illustrative shop with acceptable average turnaround time and strong labor utilization. Several engines are approaching committed delivery dates while their modules wait for inspection disposition, repair decisions, or material. Local results appear favorable, but handoff failures and aging work threaten the customer outcome.

Leadership establishes the shared goal and brings the affected departments together to agree handoff requirements. Teams work directly with a simple board showing the engine exposure, time without progression, and decisions required. Qualified people act within their roles; unresolved matters move promptly to the authority able to decide. The daily review updates actions and remaining barriers.

The following measures are illustrative starting points. Select them for the operating problem rather than treating them as a universal package.

Management question	Practical measure	Decision supported
Are customer commitments at risk?	Deliveries against committed dates and work at risk	Set recovery priorities and communicate exposure
Where has work stopped?	Elapsed time without progression by engine or module	Act within the responsible role or escalate the hold
What is restricting output?	Queue age and throughput at the current constraint	Adjust coverage or sequence work
Are we creating repeat work?	First pass acceptance and rework by process	Investigate causes and verify corrective action

Define each measure before use. Preserve original and revised customer commitment dates. Define progression as meaningful advancement toward the required outcome; administrative movement alone should not reset a stopped-work clock. Define first-pass acceptance by process and denominator so repeated work remains visible.

Stay focused on fundamentals, then peel back as needed. Examine the affected work, timing, variation, and dependencies when the summary cannot explain the condition. Required technical, financial, and compliance records remain in service throughout. Delivery urgency cannot authorize an unsupported disposition or bypass inspection requirements.

To evaluate the approach, record the starting condition and subsequent actions. Examine decision response time, work resuming, handoff reliability, recurrence, and customer exposure over a representative period. The example is illustrative; operating benefits must be verified in the actual application.

The FLOW PATH test for a useful measure

What goal and decision does it support? People should explain the intended outcome, how their work affects the measure, and what choice it informs. Preserve access to detail that is needed only for investigation.

Are responsibility and authority understood? Routine action should follow established roles. Confirm capability, resources, and clear boundaries; define coordination across departments and escalation beyond authority.

What condition warrants a response? Assess deviation, trend, consequence, and the recovery already underway. A recurring condition calls for deeper investigation and effective corrective action.

When must action occur? Match timing to the consequence of waiting. Act and escalate when the condition is recognized. Use the daily review to update progress and support needs.

How will we know the response worked? Verify operating improvement and whether it holds. Examine effects on neighboring operations, quality, resources, and customer commitments.

Begin with one operating flow

Agree the goal and select a recurring problem. Define handoffs jointly, use a few understandable measures, and coach the team through interpretation and response. Compare the full reporting effort of manual and electronic approaches. Freed time becomes usable capacity; it is not automatically a cash saving. Check results and unintended consequences over time.

Build the management discipline first. Develop understanding, use information to educate, build commitment, and enable execution. Preserve that foundation as people and leaders change. Introduce electronic boards when the team demonstrates readiness, then use them to deepen capability and support the shared business goal.

Selected supporting reading

[1] Sweller, J., van Merriënboer, J. J. G., and Paas, F. (2019). Cognitive Architecture and Instructional Design: 20 Years Later. Educational Psychology Review, 31, 261–292. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09465-5

[2] Institute for Healthcare Improvement. Model for Improvement: Establishing Measures. https://www.ihi.org/library/model-for-improvement/establishing-measures. Accessed October 20, 2026. Supports outcome, process, and balancing measures and examination of change over time; applied here to MRO.

[3] von Haartman, R., Samen, L., Bengtsson, L., and Eriksson, S. (2023). Visual management in the era of Industry 4.0: perceived advantages and disadvantages of digital boards. International Journal of Advanced Operations Management, 15(1), 24–41. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJAOM.2023.129524

© 2026 Flow Path Consulting LLC. All rights reserved. Version 1.0. WK43-01 is provisional intake tracking pending permanent white paper assignment. FlowPathGrp.ai | info@flowpathgrp.ai