

HUMANE IN THE MEMBRANE, LLC

From Conflict to Capacity

A Leadership Team's Transformation

Where strategy meets heart—and transformation begins

A LEADERSHIP CASE STUDY

Christina Jones, M.Ed., Ed.S. — Founder & CEO

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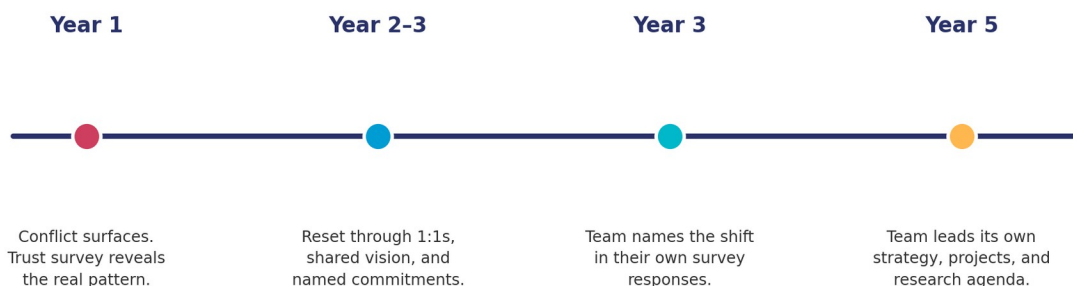
THE SITUATION

A Team Talented Enough to Do the Work — Too Fractured to Do It Together

A mission-driven organization supporting students and communities brought in a new leader to a team of specialists — content-area experts responsible for leading and coaching teacher-leaders across their district. The core team the leader managed directly consisted of five to seven specialists, each of whom in turn led their own team of at least six teacher-leaders — part of a broader cross-departmental group of roughly fourteen people. On paper, the team had everything it needed: deep expertise, a clear mission, and talented people. In practice, meetings had become arguments. Decisions stalled. Nothing got done.

The dysfunction wasn't new, and it wasn't really about the team itself. Just before this new leader arrived, upper leadership had unilaterally named two team members as team leads — without the team's input, and in direct contradiction of an internal agreement the team had made together. The result was a team carrying real, legitimate anger: not at each other, but at a decision made above them that landed squarely on their relationships with one another.

This is the story of what it took — over five years — to turn that fractured team into one that ran its own meetings, built its own strategy, and mapped its own future.



HEART FRAMEWORK™ — PHASE ONE

Hear & Harmonize: Listening Before Leading

Rather than stepping in to referee an existing conflict, the new leader used her outsider status deliberately: as a new team member herself, she had standing to ask the team to reset together, rather than relitigate who was right.

The process started individually — one-on-one conversations with every team member to build relationship, hear their perspective on the team's current state versus where they wanted to go, and open the floor for them to ask her anything in return. Only after that foundation of individual trust was in place did she introduce a collective diagnostic: a team assessment built on Patrick Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team model, paired with DiSC behavioral profiles, to surface the team's shared patterns — not just individual grievances.

The responses were unfiltered, anonymous, and honest:

"I tend to take control and don't always trust my team's skills. I realize that this does not empower them or make the change sustainable."

— Team Member

"I sometimes tend to shy away from offering up my thoughts in group settings if I believe my opinions will open a 'can of worms' ... this will happen with items that are core to my beliefs."

— Team Member

"I feel that our team is still working on being open and receptive to feedback."

— Team Member

When the results were brought back to the full team, the reaction was mixed: some team members were defensive — the data made them look bad, and it was uncomfortable to see it named in black and white. But after a conversation about how teams naturally move through cycles of conflict and growth, most agreed the findings were accurate. What surfaced next was a harder question: were they too far gone to move forward, or was there still a path ahead?

HEART FRAMEWORK™ — PHASE TWO

Envision with Empathy: Naming the Future, Together

The path forward began by validating that doubt — the feelings were real, and they deserved acknowledgment before anything else. From there, the leader guided the team through a structured visioning conversation: not an abstract discussion of values, but a concrete exercise in what their future state would look like, sound like, and feel like if they got this right.

From that vision, she named the four things that would actually have to happen for the team to move forward: forgiveness, grace, honesty, and courage. Then she asked each team member to publicly name which one they would personally commit to starting with — and she named her own, modeling the same accountability she was asking of them.

"Teams don't fix themselves by staying quiet about what's broken. They fix themselves by getting specific about what they're building instead — and by each person naming their own part in it."

HEART FRAMEWORK™ — PHASE THREE

Activate with Intentional Action: Making the Vision Real

Commitment on paper is easy. The harder work was sustaining it. The leader coached the team collectively and individually in parallel — watching for effort that was genuine versus effort aimed at simply avoiding conflict or

seeking approval. Rather than suppressing tension as it arose, she let real issues surface when they needed to, then helped the team work through them rather than around them.

One of the most pivotal interventions came in the form of a full 360-degree feedback process: individual interviews with every team member, asking each person to name the strengths and growth areas of every other team member — anonymously and without filters. She then compiled the collective feedback for each individual and met with them one-on-one to share it.

The reaction was often surprising. Some team members were affirmed. Other team members believed they were seen far more negatively than the feedback actually showed — or discovered blind spots they hadn't recognized in themselves. That reality check became a genuine wake-up call, and a turning point in how the team related to one another going forward.

Concretely, the dysfunction had shown up as an inability to be vulnerable: team members couldn't bring problems to each other, ask for help, or share works-in-progress without fear of it being used against them. The cost was tangible — each specialist was building curriculum and assessments entirely from scratch, alone, doing the work of two or three people because peer support wasn't yet safe. Rebuilding trust wasn't an abstraction here; it was the difference between five people quietly duplicating each other's labor and five people finally building on each other's work.

RUNNING ALONGSIDE EVERY PHASE

The Long Game and the Short Game: Building Capacity in Real Time

Repairing trust and building operational capacity were never treated as two separate phases — one waiting for the other to finish. They ran in parallel, each strengthening the other, for all five years.

On the individual track, the leader coached each team member — including leadership coaching — and intentionally handed off additional duties and responsibilities designed to stretch them just past their current comfort zone, always leveraged against each person's authentic strengths rather than a one-size-fits-all growth plan. Over time, this deepened each team member's skill, knowledge, and leadership capability.

On the team track, that same individual growth became the raw material for building shared strategy, process, and infrastructure: strategic sequencing designed to hit specific targets and outcomes across multiple initiatives at once, rather than one project at a time.

The result, by the later years, was a genuinely shared leadership space — team members designing and leading their own instructional rounds, facilitating conversations that had once been the leader's job alone, and running projects end to end. The real skill wasn't distributing leadership evenly. It was matching each decision to the team member who could lead it most authentically — which meant the team's leadership structure looked different for every initiative, built around real readiness and real strength rather than title or tenure.

"Building a team isn't just healing what's broken. It's also handing people bigger things to carry, in the areas where they're already strong — at the same time you're rebuilding the trust that lets them carry it well."

STRUCTURAL CHANGE, NOT JUST CULTURAL

The Meeting Cadence Reset

Before this engagement, the team's response to conflict had been to create more meetings — without ever addressing the underlying dysfunction. The result was a calendar full of overlapping structures that consumed enormous time and energy without producing different outcomes.

Redesigning how the team met became one of the clearest, most concrete expressions of the culture shift underway. Rather than one generic “team meeting,” the leader built five distinct, purposeful structures — each with its own goal, cadence, and ownership:

Meeting	Purpose	Cadence & Ownership
Team Check-Ins	Coordinate workstreams and surface emerging needs from the field	Weekly — rotating team facilitation
Team Work Sessions	Collaborative work time on shared deliverables and shared tools	Bi-weekly — co-led with a rotating team member
Professional Learning Sessions	Deepen shared skill and knowledge as a team	Bi-weekly — fully team-led and facilitated
1:1 Coaching Meetings	Individual coaching, relationship-building, and growth planning	Weekly or bi-weekly — 45–60 minutes
Content-Area Strategic Meetings	Strategic planning specific to each content area's needs	Monthly — co-led with content-area leads

The rationale documented at the time was simple: “To elevate team performance through transparent communication, team collaboration, and individual and collective accountability.” Rotating facilitation across nearly every structure was deliberate — it meant shared leadership was built into the calendar itself, not just discussed as an aspiration.

The values named earlier — forgiveness, grace, honesty, courage — weren't left as a one-time conversation. They became the literal first five minutes of every meeting agenda, every time: a short, plain-language set of team expectations (“Be prepared,” “Be respectful,” “Be curious — challenge and question ideas often and respectfully,” “Be the first to listen, last to speak”), paired with a shared decision-making tool for moments the team needed to land on something together. It wasn't a poster on the wall. It was built into the operating rhythm of the team, meeting after meeting, for years.

A NOTE ON CONTEXT

Leading Through Resistance, Not Just Alignment

Not every part of this transformation happened with support from above. The leader navigated real resistance from upper leadership throughout much of the engagement — often learning of decisions only after they had already taken effect. Her response was to work proactively: clarifying ambiguous expectations directly with upper leadership, then translating them into clear, actionable direction for the team, while consistently communicating the team's progress and proposed remedies before problems could become a hindrance. Rather than waiting to react to resistance, she controlled the narrative on the team's behalf — protecting their fragile

progress while it was still taking hold, even without organizational backing. This is a distinction worth naming: building sustainable team capacity doesn't require a perfectly aligned environment. It requires a leader who can hold the work steady even when the conditions around it are not.

HEART FRAMEWORK™ — PHASE FOUR

Reflect with Results: The Team's Own Words

By year three, something had measurably shifted — and the team began naming it themselves, unprompted, in the organization's own leadership surveys:

"She has been working hard to build our team and make us stronger..."

— Team Leadership Survey

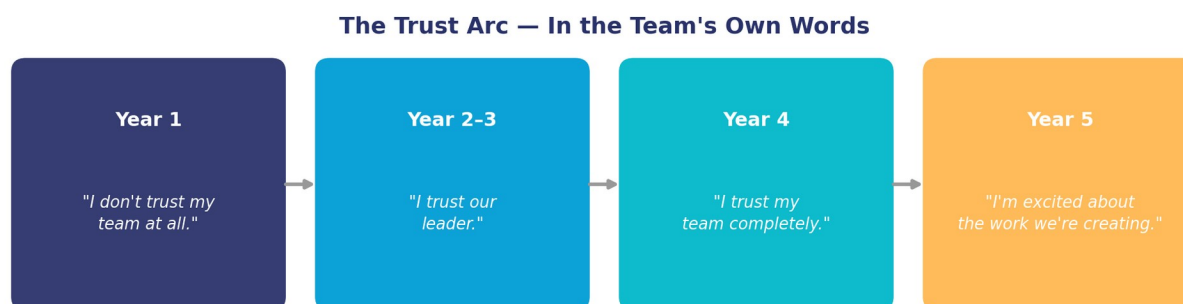
"She is more than capable of leading our team..."

— Team Leadership Survey

"I am confident that she is the right leader for our team."

— Team Leadership Survey

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the transformation is the arc of trust itself, tracked in the team's own survey language over time:



This progression — from open distrust of the team, to trust in the leader, to trust in each other, to genuine excitement about the work — reflects a team that didn't just tolerate change, but internalized it.

90%+

satisfaction across
professional learning
and team support surveys

5

years of sustained,
embedded coaching and
leadership development

2

new team members hired
into a stronger, healthier
team culture

100%

of team members reported
increased trust by the
final team survey

HEART FRAMEWORK™ — PHASE FIVE

Transform with Purpose: Capacity That Outlasted the Engagement

By the end of the five-year engagement, the team was unrecognizable from where it started. They ran their own team meetings without needing the leader to facilitate. They translated the broader organization's strategic plan into their own tactical implementation — work that had previously been handed down rather than co-created. Individual team members led their own initiatives, each contributing to both their content area and the team's collective goals.

The team had also grown: two new members were hired into a team culture strong enough to absorb and strengthen around them — rather than fracture further, as new additions might have done in year one. And the team was in the process of scoping the next phase of an ongoing university research partnership — designing their own research questions rather than simply participating in someone else's study, when the engagement concluded.

The leader's own role had transformed alongside the team's: what began as near-constant navigation of conflict and resistance became, by the final years, something closer to stewardship — supporting a team that was increasingly capable of leading itself.

When this leader's role ultimately ended, the team did not remain intact as a single unit. Some team members chose to leave alongside her. Others were recruited into leadership positions elsewhere — heading their own departments, in roles they hadn't been ready for five years earlier. Rather than a gap in the story, this is arguably its clearest proof: the capacity built here wasn't dependent on staying in one place. It traveled with the people who had developed it.

WHY THIS MATTERS

What This Case Study Demonstrates

This transformation illustrates every phase of the HEART Framework™ in its most demanding form: not a single engagement with aligned leadership support, but a multi-year rebuild of trust, conducted while actively navigating resistance from above. It shows that sustainable capacity-building isn't about applying a framework once — it's about staying with a team through defensiveness, doubt, conflict, and slow, earned change, until the capacity to lead genuinely lives within the team itself.

It is this same methodology — Hear & Harmonize, Envision with Empathy, Activate with Intentional Action, Reflect with Results, Transform with Purpose — that now underpins every engagement delivered through the Humane Blueprint Suite™.

For a condensed, year-by-year view of this transformation — including how its milestones map to a shorter engagement timeline — see Appendix A.

APPENDIX A

The Five-Year Milestone Map

This engagement unfolded over five years. Most Humane Blueprint Suite™ partnerships are scoped for weeks or months, not years — so this map exists to show two things at once: the full progression this team experienced, and which milestones tend to appear earliest in any HEART Framework™ engagement, regardless of its length.

Milestone	What Happened	Maps to Blueprint Suite™ Tier
Year 1	1:1 relationship-building, Five Dysfunctions & DiSC diagnostic, collective reset, envisioning session, named commitments.	<i>Tier 1 — Strategic Clarity: discovery, diagnosis, and a clear roadmap forward.</i>
Year 2-3	Meeting structures redesigned; individual coaching and stretch assignments begin; 360 feedback delivered; team names the shift in its own surveys.	<i>Tier 2 — Implementation Support: hands-on, co-designed execution with regular check-ins.</i>
Year 4-5	Team leads its own meetings, strategy, and projects; hires and onboards new members; scopes its own research agenda.	<i>Tier 3 — Transformation Partnership: embedded, ongoing partnership and internal capacity-building.</i>

The takeaway for a shorter engagement: the earliest milestones — an honest diagnostic, a shared vision, and named individual commitments — are achievable in a matter of weeks, not years. Year 1 in this story spans a full year because the leader was building trust entirely on her own, without external support or an outside framework to lean on. A structured partnership compresses that same diagnostic and reset work considerably — particularly when leadership above the team is aligned from the start rather than a source of resistance.

Ready to move from chaos to clarity, and vision to lasting impact?

Let's build capacity together.

CONTACT

hello@humaneinthemembranellc.com

720-441-2771

www.humaneinthemembranellc.com