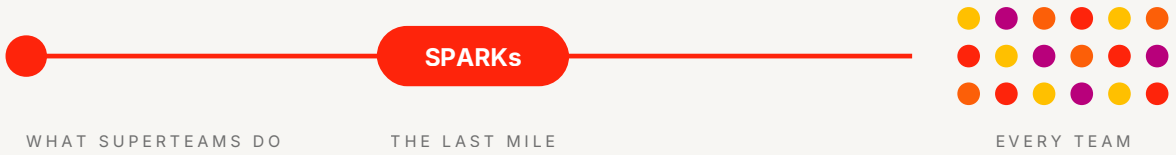
WHITEPAPER

Superteams Are Built in Everyday Work

What research shows about teams that keep getting better, and how these habits become routine in strategy execution and transformation.

For HR, Organisational Development and Transformation · November 2026



SPARKs bring the habits of high-performing teams to where teams already meet.

THE FINDING

New research (Harvard Business Review, May/June 2026) with more than 6,000 respondents: top teams differ less in talent than in habits.

THE GAP

Execution rarely needs new knowledge. It needs routines anchored in everyday work and methods that lead from problem to solution instead of stopping at complaints.

THE ANSWER

Routines last when they are tied to an existing ritual. The strongest ritual in any organisation is the regular team meeting. That is where SPARKs come in.

01

AT A GLANCE

Top performance is a matter of habit, and habits can be developed

In the May/June 2026 issue of Harvard Business Review, social psychologist Ron Friedman published the results of a survey of more than 6,000 knowledge workers. These are very recent findings. His conclusion: teams with outstanding performance differ less in exceptional talent than in the way they work together.

These teams experiment more, raise obstacles earlier, treat mistakes as learning opportunities and know what their work is for. For everyone executing strategies and transformations, this is good news. If top performance comes from behaviour, it can be developed.

The decisive question is how to put these insights into action. That takes less new knowledge or further insight. It takes two things: routines anchored in the everyday work of teams, and methods that deliver both problem and solution. Many formats make problems visible and stop right there. Then it ends in complaining, and week after week the urgent beats the important. Execution only happens when a team turns a named problem into a concrete next step, in hundreds of teams at the same time.

Our answer: routines take hold sustainably when they are tied to rituals, that is, to practices already firmly established in the rhythm of team life. The largest, most important ritual, established in every modern organisation, is the regular team meeting. This is the greatest lever for making strategy execution and transformation a routine.

An example from our practice shows that this works: within six months, the share of actions with which teams reduce complexity at team level rose from 9.7% to 58.3%. More on this in section 06.

> **The argument in one sentence:** Research describes what high-performing teams do differently. SPARKs are a way to anchor exactly these behaviours regularly in the everyday work of teams.

02

THE STUDY

What Ron Friedman examined

Ron Friedman is a social psychologist. The core idea of his study is simple and highly relevant in practice. He does not ask who works in top teams, but what these teams *do* differently. He asked employees to rate their team's performance and compared the behaviours of the strongest teams with those of other teams.

6,000+
knowledge workers surveyed

~50%
more experiments in superteams than in other teams

43%
more often, leaders in superteams focus attention on problems

Source: Friedman, 2026. The figures describe differences between groups and correlations, not proven cause-and-effect relationships.

The core message

For Friedman, top performance is not a state a team reaches but a movement it sustains. Superteams do not improve because they are especially gifted, but because they have made a habit of constantly working on themselves. This shifts the focus from selecting the right people to designing the right everyday work.

A NOTE ON METHOD

Friedman identifies superteams through employees' self-assessment, not through independent measurement of objective performance. The data also show correlations. It is conceivable that good teams experiment more because they feel safe, rather than the other way round.

This does not diminish the value of the study, but it shifts the question. Which behaviours go hand in hand with high team performance is well described. Whether deliberately practising these behaviours actually raises performance is something every method has to prove for itself. Ours included.

03

THE FINDINGS

Seven habits of teams that keep getting better

Friedman condenses his findings into seven principles. Remarkably, none of them requires exceptional skill. All seven describe how a team organises its everyday work and how leadership acts within it.

LEARNING IN THE FLOW · LEADERSHIP AS A MINDSET · DIRECTION AND MEANING

01
Experiment more
Question even processes that work and regularly try something new.

02
Make curiosity contagious
Ask questions, admit gaps in knowledge and learn from one another.

03
Surface obstacles openly
Use meetings to make difficulties visible early instead of only reporting status.

04
Roll up your sleeves
Stay close to the operational work and support without micromanaging.

05
Feedback that supports
Treat mistakes as learning opportunities and enable improvement through constructive feedback.

06
Foster growth
Support development even when it brings no immediate benefit to the company.

07
Meaning before metrics
Make clear what larger contribution the team's work makes.

The seven principles according to Friedman (2026), paraphrased. The colour grouping is by TATIN and not part of the original study.

04

ASSESSMENT

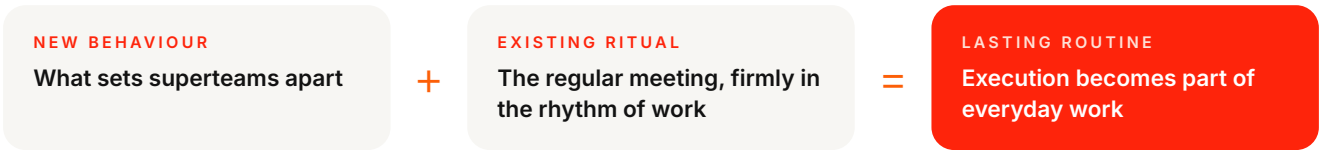
Three ways the research confirms our practice

First: improvement comes from behaviour, not knowledge

Friedman describes habits, not competencies. This matches what Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton described years ago as the knowing-doing gap: organisations usually know exactly what should be done, and still do not do it. For us, the only measure that really counts in execution is changed behaviour in the team. A team that has once experienced an openly raised obstacle being solved changes its behaviour faster than after any theoretical discussion about it.

Second: routines need rituals, and the strongest ritual is the regular meeting

Routines take hold sustainably when they are tied to rituals, that is, to established practices already firmly anchored in the rhythm of team life. New behaviour then does not have to fight everyday work, it becomes part of it. The largest, most important ritual, established across all modern organisations, is the regular team meeting. It happens anyway, in every team, at every location, week after week. That makes it the ideal place with the greatest lever for turning strategy execution and transformation into routine.



Friedman's data show the same from another angle: superteams use their meetings to make obstacles visible early instead of only reporting status. How a SPARK does this in around 20 minutes is shown by the cycle in section 06.

Third: small experiments beat big programmes

Friedman's first principle is also the strongest differentiator in his data. Every action from a SPARK is essentially a small experiment: a pragmatic first step with clear ownership, a deadline and a later check of whether it worked. A team does not need to run a SPARK every week. Once a month already makes a noticeable difference.

FRIEDMAN'S PRINCIPLE	HOW A SPARK MAKES IT CONCRETE	FIT
01 Experiment more	Every action is a small trial with ownership, deadline and impact check.	●●●
02 Make curiosity contagious	Every SPARK starts with a question. Leaders ask instead of prescribing answers.	●●○
03 Surface obstacles	All perspectives come to the table, the team chooses a focus within its own control.	●●●
04 Roll up your sleeves	The team lead works live with the team on real problems without prescribing solutions.	●●○
05 Feedback that supports	Recurring retros and impact checks. No individual is ever exposed.	●●○
06 Foster growth	Indirectly, through experienced self-efficacy. Targeted development needs additional formats.	●○○
07 Meaning before metrics	Teams link every action to the goals themselves. Each leader's dashboard makes the contribution tangible and manageable, from gut feeling to clear view.	●●●

Three dots: direct fit, two: clear, one: indirect fit. TATIN's own assessment.

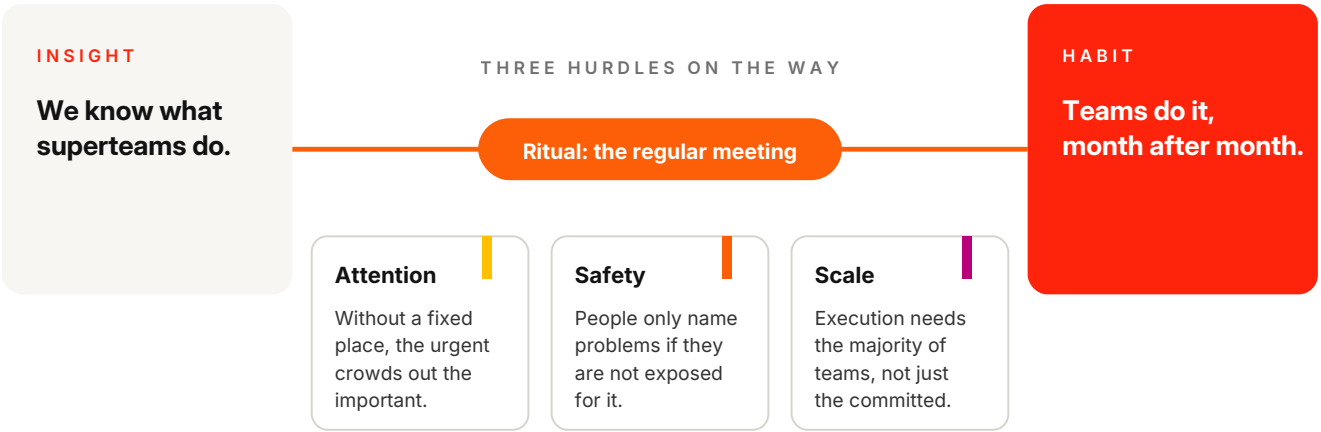
SPARKs support principle 6 only indirectly. Targeted capability building needs further formats; SPARKs then bring what was learned into the team.

05

THE REAL CHALLENGE

Between insight and habit lies everyday work

Friedman's recommendations are addressed mainly to leaders who are already under pressure. Yet another list of expectations for good leadership rarely changes their everyday work. In our experience, transfer into practice fails at three hurdles.



The gap between insight and habit, and what bridges it.

Safety therefore follows a clear principle: contributions in SPARKs cannot be traced back to individuals, and analyses are only available in aggregated form across at least five team leads. This is the precondition for honest answers.

06

GOING FURTHER

Where we go beyond the study

Friedman describes what sets good teams apart. For organisations executing a strategy or transformation, the picture of a single superteam is not enough. The SPARK cycle combines Friedman's habits in a routine of around 20 minutes.

SHARE → FOCUS → ACT → ANCHOR ↻

MINUTE 0–3

Share

A curated question, derived from the agreed goals, brings all perspectives to the table, simultaneously and anonymously.

MINUTE 3–13

Focus

The team sets a shared focus on what it can influence itself.

MINUTE 13–20

Act

One concrete action with an owner and a deadline, linked to the goals.

A FEW WEEKS LATER

Anchor

Check the impact. The team decides: keep, adjust or move to the next SPARK.

We consider four extensions to Friedman's picture decisive.

1. From leadership appeal to team routine

Instead of asking leaders to be more curious, we give them a good question. Every SPARK starts with a question that creates friction, for example what is currently costing the team the most energy. The leader does not need to bring a solution. They facilitate a conversation in which the team finds its own solutions. This relieves leaders instead of adding to their load. Whoever asks, leads.

2. Improvement with direction

Friedman's superteams improve continuously. What remains open is: on what? In an organisation executing a strategy, this is no minor detail. We therefore align the SPARK questions once a year with the goals of each unit. For every action, teams themselves indicate which goal it contributes to. This makes Friedman's seventh principle concrete: meaning emerges when a team sees how its next step connects to the bigger picture.

3. Assessing impact instead of rating performance

Friedman's data rest on self-assessments of team performance. We start at a different point. A few weeks after each action, the team assesses whether it actually worked. In our projects, the average effectiveness rating is 4.2 out of 5. This, too, is an assessment by those involved, but a very concrete one: about a single step the team chose and implemented itself. At the same time, execution risks usually become visible within the first four weeks instead of months later.

4. Making visible the obstacles teams cannot solve themselves

Friedman recommends raising problems early. But some problems lie outside a team's control, such as bonus rules or reporting requirements that stand in the way of the actual goal. Such systemic obstacles become visible in aggregated form at unit and company level, always across at least five team leads. They thus become options for action for senior management. In addition, what has demonstrably worked in one team becomes visible, so that other teams can learn from it.



THE LOGIC OF SMALL STEPS

at least 12.7%

Impact in one year if every team gets just 1% better each month (1.01 to the power of 12).

We deliberately calculate with the smallest meaningful assumption, so 12.7% is the lower bound. Very much in Friedman's spirit, impact comes from consistency and persistence, and from the number of teams working on it at the same time.

FROM PRACTICE · ENERGY FLOWS WHERE FOCUS GOES

How focus turns into impact

01

Define behaviour

Together with leadership, we clarify which team behaviour most increases the likelihood of reaching the goals and which prevents it.

02

Develop SPARKs

The SPARKs that teams use in their regular meetings are designed around exactly this behaviour.

03

Create transparency

Month after month it becomes transparent what is holding teams back, how they solve it and with what impact.

04

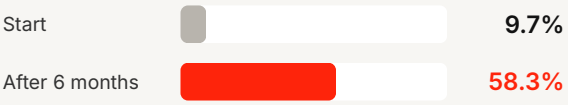
Sharpen the focus

These insights give rise to new SPARKs that set the focus deliberately.

EXAMPLE

All teams had clarified their contribution to success. Yet only 9.7% of the resulting actions dropped something in return, and energy remained spread across too many topics. With the SPARK **"Far too much energy for too little impact"**, the picture turned within six months: **58.3% of the actions developed now aimed at reducing complexity at team level**, without the teams losing sight of their goals.

ACTIONS THAT REDUCE COMPLEXITY



Six times as many actions that reduce complexity at team level

07

BENEFITS

What it delivers, and for whom

For Friedman, superteams are a team-level phenomenon. In executing strategies and transformations, value arises on three levels at once, and it only lasts if every level benefits.

TEAM LEADS

Relief instead of an extra task

A proven structure for raising difficult topics without having to have all the answers.

More focused regular meetings that lead from question to action instead of discussion loops.

A personal dashboard that only the team lead sees.

→ **Leading through questions becomes practical.**

TEAMS

Being heard and making a difference

Every voice counts, including the quiet ones, and no contribution can be traced to a person.

The team solves problems it considers important itself and experiences that things change.

Every action shows how the team's work contributes to the goals.

→ **Self-efficacy becomes tangible.**

SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Execution that becomes visible

See early where execution holds and where it stalls, aggregated and without additional surveys.

Systemic obstacles become concrete options for action.

All teams regularly work on the topics that are central to the strategy.

→ **Steering based on real execution.**

AND FOR HR, OD AND TRANSFORMATION

For those responsible for organisational development, the role shifts. Instead of designing programmes and hoping for transfer, you shape the questions that hundreds of teams work on in parallel. This is leading through questions at scale. Existing investments such as mission statements, leadership principles, employee surveys or 360° feedback gain impact, because their results arrive where they are meant to change behaviour: in the everyday work of teams.

08

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Five questions for your organisation

These questions help you assess how close your teams are today to the habits of superteams.

01

What do your teams use their regular meetings for?

How much time goes into status reports, and how much into what is currently stuck?

02

When did a team last try changing something that already worked well?

Is there a place where small experiments are welcome and evaluated?

03

What does senior management learn about obstacles teams cannot solve themselves?

And how long does it take to find out?

04

Can your teams say which goal their current work contributes to?

Not in the presentation, but in the next concrete task.

05

How many of your teams regularly work on their own improvement today?

And what would it take for that to become the majority?

ABOUT TATIN

Strategy only works when teams live it.

Since 2011, the TATIN Institute has supported organisations on the last mile of execution. After many years of strategy roll-outs and workshop cascades, we made a radical switch around seven years ago: since then, execution takes place in teams' regular meetings. Our methods are openly documented and published. A project with E.ON Italia was recognised by the Stanford Social Innovation Review in 2025.

Top performance is not a matter of talent but of habit. Habits form where teams already come together.

Robert Wreschniok

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