

# DESIGNED TO LEAD

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## When Heroism Becomes Operational Risk

Most leaders celebrate it.

A critical shipment was rescued at the last minute. A compliance audit was cleared because one person stayed until midnight. A product launch was salvaged because your VP of Operations just handled it.

In regulated manufacturing and MedTech, we are trained to value this. We promote the firefighters. We reward the people who run hardest into the flames. But what we rarely ask is: who lit the fire?

**Hero dependency is not a talent strategy. It is a systems failure that has learned to disguise itself as high performance.**

The pattern is clear: the image of the heroic leader carrying an organization through crisis does not build resilience. The most durable organizations are not sustained because one person keeps saving the day. They endure because the system was designed to respond with clarity, consistency, and discipline.

Sources cited in the editorial version: MIT Sloan Management Review; Journal of Organizational Behavior; Harvard Business Review.

### What a hero culture really costs

When an organization depends on individual heroics to hit its goals, it is not operating as a high-performance organization. It is operating as a fragile one.

Every month-end that closes on the back of one person's extraordinary effort reveals a gap in the system: in forecasting, in capacity planning, in escalation protocols, or in operating discipline.

In regulated environments, the stakes are even higher. Hero cultures create undocumented workarounds, concentrate critical knowledge in one person, and erode the standard procedures that inspectors, auditors, and leaders depend on.

### What designed performance looks like

Organizations that sustain performance under pressure share one common trait: the system does the work, not the people.

That does not mean the people are not exceptional. It means their talent is channeled into building and improving the system, not bypassing it every quarter.

**Ask yourself three questions:**

- 1 If your top performer left tomorrow, which processes would be affected immediately?
- 2 In the last 90 days, how many wins depended on one person working outside their defined role?
- 3 Are the behaviors rewarded in performance reviews the same ones that build repeatable, auditable, scalable systems?

If the honest answers make you uncomfortable, you are not alone.

Breaking hero dependency is not about doing less. It is about designing the conditions for everyone to do more, consistently, without the organization holding its breath.

**One question to carry into this week**

**Where in your organization is one person currently the answer to a question that should have a system-level solution?**

If this resonates, share it with someone leading in a regulated environment. And if you are ready to identify where invisible hero dependencies live in your organization, let's connect.

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