The Optimal Team Make-up

What is the Talent Set Every Data & Analytics Leader Should Have – and How to Get Them

Jason Moline – Director of Analytics
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CDAO Chicago

The Optimal Te[illegible]

What is the Te[illegible]

Analytics Team: Assemble!

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Which team are you today?

Avengers
Lean Startup Pod

USS Enterprise
Transformation Team

Watchtower
CoE Enablement

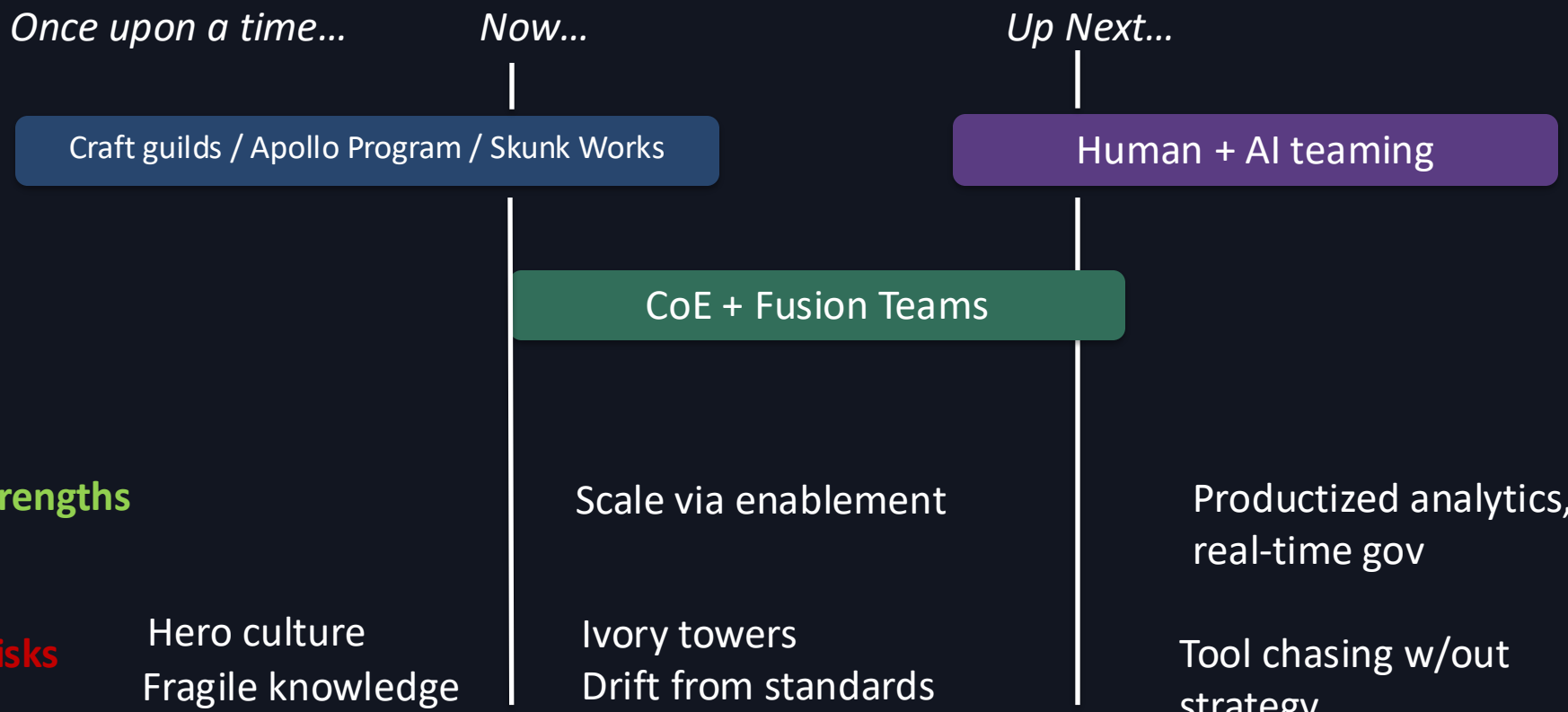
Ocean's Eleven
Hybrid Fusion

Batman
R&D Lab

Let’s chat about what these are and how they operate!

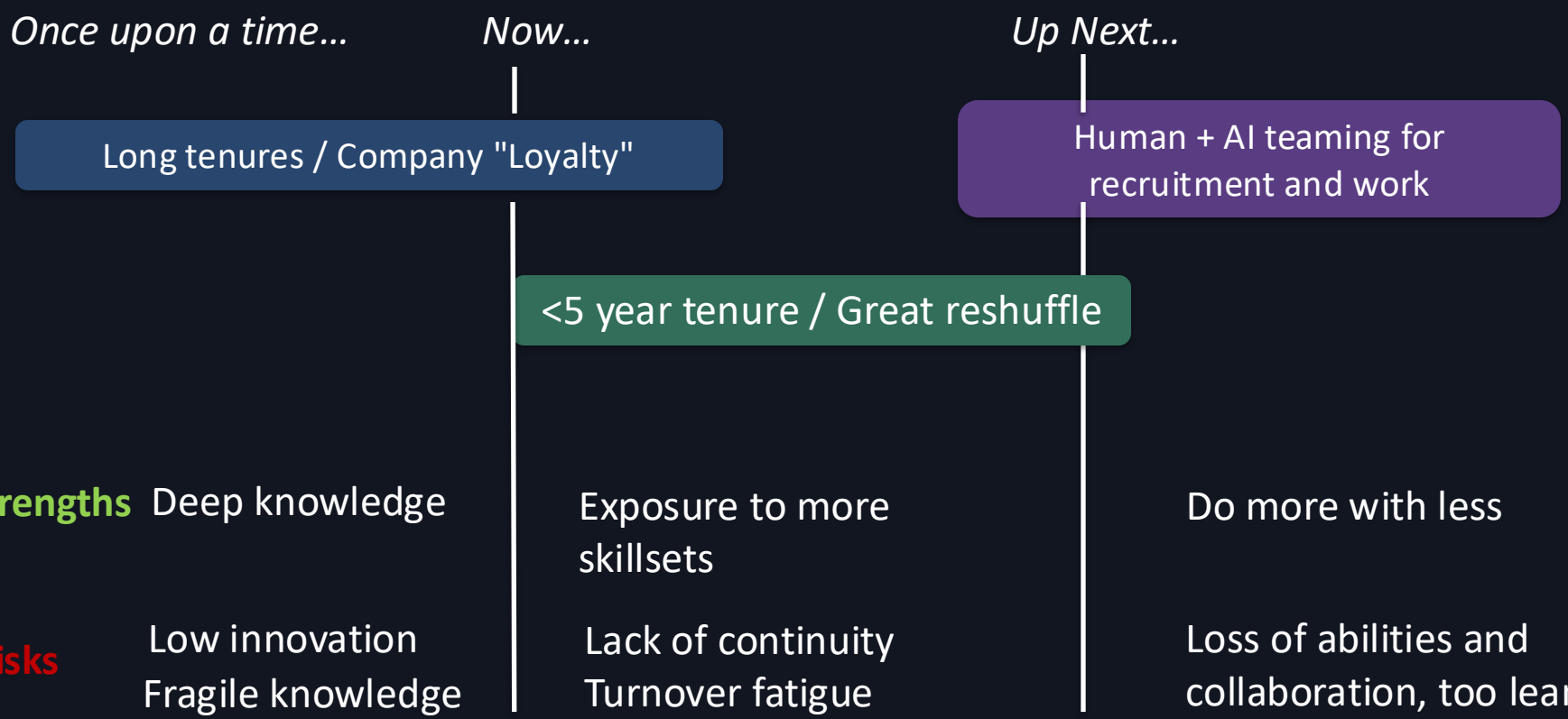
How Teams Get Sh*t Done

The Origin Story of These Teams



How Teams Get/Stay Together

The Origin Story of The Origins



The Work Team Cinematic Universe

Five models that fit different missions

Avengers
Lean Startup Pod

Enterprise
Transformation Team

Justice League Watchtower
CoE Enablement

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Avengers

Lean Startup Pod

Strengths

✓ Rapid iteration & MVPs
✓ Tight pod with PM/DE/Analyst
✓ **Fast** decision loops

Pitfalls

⚠ Hero dependency
⚠ Tech debt if not handed to platform

Attract and Retain

- Ambitious goals using new tech
- Defined use-cases for deliverables
- Success is easily visible

USS Enterprise

Transformation Team

Strengths

✓ Governance, scale, reliability
✓ Clear domain-by-domain rollouts
✓ Executive sponsorship

Pitfalls

⚠ Bureaucracy & slow velocity
⚠ Shadow IT resurgence

Attract and Retain

- Org that needs org
- Interpersonal experience
- Delayed gratification

Justice League- Watchtower

A CoE Enablement

Strengths

✓ Reusable templates & semantic layer
✓ Self-service at scale
✓ Analyst upskilling & office hours

Pitfalls

⚠ Central bottlenecks - **SLOW**
⚠ Low adoption if misaligned

Attract and Retain

- Interacting across the org
- More breadth, less depth
- Clear expectations

Best For

Consistent tooling
Guardrails

Ocean's Eleven Crew

“We’re getting the gang together for a job”

Strengths

✓ Embedded domain partnership
✓ High adoption & ROI
✓ Interpretable models

Pitfalls

⚠ Role ambiguity
⚠ **Governance gaps**

Attract and Retain

- High charisma and communication
- Complementary collaboration
- Continued support is a feature

Best For

Where domain **buy-in** is critical (Pricing, growth, ops)

Batman

Vigilante with a sweet R&D Lab

Strengths

✓ Innovation pipeline
✓ Safe prototyping
✓ Kill/scale discipline

Pitfalls

⚠ Cool demos, no adoption
⚠ Siloed inventions

Attract and Retain

- Highly specialized skillset
- Free reign to move fast
- Train a "sidekick", connect to org

Best For

AI/LLM pilots
Synthetic data
Causal/Experimental design

Good v. Bad

How to make or break any of these models

Do This

- ✓ Define mission and roles
- ✓ Cadence: standups, reviews
- ✓ Governance as product
- ✓ Plan the platform handoff
- ✓ Meet talent where they are at
- ✓ Culture of cross-pollination

Avoid This

- ⚠ Hero-only systems
- ⚠ Bottlenecks & opaque decisions
- ⚠ Shadow IT drift
- ⚠ One-size-fits-all model
- ⚠ Forcing talent into a role
- ⚠ Forcing a role into a team

Building a Crew

Talent is attracted by...

Benefits
Pay, WFH, RSUs, Pension, WLB

Work
Real work that has impact

Tools
Python, GPUs, Cloud, No Excel

Flexibility
Openness to trying new things

Vibe
Teams that are collaborative, fun, growth mindsets

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"Retention" = 3-4 years

How Models Evolve

Teams change shape as missions change

Role Definition

An in-depth discussion

Role	High-Level Definition	Tagline
Data Engineer	*Designs, builds, and maintains the pipelines and platforms that make clean, reliable data available for analysis and modeling.*	**Builds and maintains data plumbing**
Data Analyst	*Interprets and explores data to answer business questions, build reports, and surface actionable insights.*	**Turns data into answers**
ML Engineer	*Operationalizes machine learning models — from training and validation to deployment, monitoring, and scaling in production environments.*	**Puts models into action**
Analytics Translator	*Connects business goals with analytics solutions; ensures questions are framed well, insights are explained clearly, and actions are taken.*	**Speaks business and data fluently**
Product Owner	*Defines the vision and priorities for analytics products or platforms, manages backlog, and aligns delivery with stakeholder needs.*	**Guides product to deliver value**
Domain SME	*Brings deep business-area expertise (e.g., marketing, operations, finance) to ensure analytics work reflects real-world context.*	**Knows the business inside out**
Governance Lead	*Establishes and enforces data standards, quality, and compliance to ensure trusted, ethical, and legal use of data.*	**Keeps data safe and compliant**
Data Architect	*Designs the overall data ecosystem — schemas, integrations, and structures — to enable scalability, performance, and accessibility.*	**Maps the data blueprint**
UI/UX Designer	*Crafts user-friendly, intuitive interfaces for analytics products, making insights accessible and easy to act on.*	**Designs how insights are seen**
Experimentation Expert	*Designs and interprets tests (A/B, multivariate, causal inference) to measure the impact of business decisions or product changes.*	**Tests ideas to see what works**

…just kidding, here's the gist

Even Superheroes Fight

People/Aliens/Demigods are flawed

Avengers – Lean Startup Pod

✅ Superpowers
- Fast-moving and adaptable
- Can go from zero to MVP
- Comfortable with ambiguity

💡 Excels At
- Exploratory problems
- Rapid prototypes
- MVP launches

Behind the Cape
- Tinkerer Engineer
- Cowboy Analyst
- PM-as-Glue

⚠ Weaknesses
- Skips documentation
- Not built for scale
- Shadow systems risk

⚡ Friction Points
- PM struggles to coordinate
- Analyst vs Engineer over quality
- Poor handoff to platform

Enterprise – Transformation Team

✅ Superpowers
- Great at deprecating old systems
- Scales reliably
- Champions governance

💡 Excels At
- Architect vs product conflict
- Old guard resistance
- Process overload

Behind the Cape
- Legacy Whisperer
- The Architect
- Change Evangelist

⚠ Weaknesses
- Slow to iterate
- Can overdesign
- Change fatigue risk

⚡ Friction Points
- Modernization projects
- Long-term migrations
- High-risk platforms

Watchtower – Center of Excellence

✅ Superpowers
- Scales self-service
- Supports onboarding
- Creates reusable templates

💡 Excels At
- Enablement at scale
- Reducing dashboard chaos
- Data governance

Behind the Cape
- BI Craftsman
- The Coach
- The Librarian

⚠ Weaknesses
- Detached from business needs
- Perceived as bureaucratic
- Underappreciated value

⚡ Friction Points
- Analysts bypassing CoE
- Creative frustration
- Low adoption

Ocean’s Eleven

✅ Superpowers
- High business alignment
- Bias toward action
- Clear value delivery

💡 Excels At
- Churn modeling
- Segment strategy
- Pricing experiments

Behind the Cape
- Embedded Domain Expert
- Translator Analyst
- Quiet DS
- Streetwise PM

⚠ Weaknesses
- Hard to scale
- Inconsistent documentation
- Trust-dependent

⚡ Friction Points
- Translator burnout
- PM stuck between business and tech
- DS misunderstood

Batman – R&D / Lab Team

✅ Superpowers
- Cutting-edge ideas
- Prototyping the impossible
- Safe place to fail

💡 Excels At
- LLM pilots
- Causal inference
- AI feasibility testing

Behind the Cape
- Inventor DS
- Tech Scout
- Skeptical Business Partner

⚠ Weaknesses
- Low adoption
- Siloed outcomes
- Disconnected from production

⚡ Friction Points
- Business doesn’t adopt
- No feedback loops
- Tool overload

Key Takeaways

Design > Hire: Architect teams for the mission

Scale via enablement, not heroics

Plan evolution: Avengers → Watchtower → Enterprise

Focus on the optimal conditions for work to be done now and future

Accept retention goals are shorter, have menu of options for growth and accomodation of team evolution

Questions?

Which model are you now—and which do you need next?