

From Resistance to Results: How Human–AI Collaboration Rescued a \$5M Civic Transformation Project

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Executive Summary

A mid-sized American city's revitalization plan hinged on a major art museum's expansion. With \$5 million in external funding at stake, internal board gridlock posed a serious threat to execution. A respected but rigid stakeholder insisted that all decisions adhere strictly to a static strategic plan—one that lacked operational clarity.

A consultant brought in to support the growth effort used a generative AI–powered advisory framework to uncover root causes, identify stakeholder dynamics, and develop a path forward. The resulting guidance enabled the Executive Director to realign the board, secure the funding, and advance the museum's role in the city's broader development strategy.

This case demonstrates how AI-augmented consulting—when strategically applied—can accelerate insight, resolve conflict, and support high-impact decision-making in complex, mission-driven environments.

Context

The museum had long served as a civic and cultural anchor. Its expansion was central not only to its institutional evolution, but also to a larger urban renewal initiative involving multiple stakeholder groups.

While external momentum was strong, internal governance was fractured. A long-serving stakeholder, who authored the current strategic plan, resisted all proposed actions that deviated from it. Their insistence on strict adherence to a high-level plan, which lacked tactical implementation detail, created organizational paralysis.

The Consultant's Role

With deep experience in nonprofit transformation, the consultant recognized the danger of escalating the internal conflict. Rather than relying solely on conventional strategic tools, she partnered with an AI Facilitator and a generative AI Dream Team—a set of structured personas representing deep professional maturity in key domains such as behavioral strategy, systems design, and creative problem-solving.

The AI Facilitator's Role

The AI Facilitator guided the interaction, teasing out core issues and surfacing considerations that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Her deep experience working with AI Dream Teams allowed her to frame statements and questions from the consultant in ways that were meaningful to the AI personas. She was also able to rephrase responses from the Dream Team when explanation was needed. This allowed the consultant to access expert input across disciplines and generate actionable insights rapidly.

Surfacing Insights

Using this framework, the consultant and facilitator surfaced several critical insights:

- The blocking member's resistance stemmed from emotional investment and perceived authority, not simple obstruction.
- The strategic plan required translation into phased, measurable action.
- Reframing the plan as a collaborative, evolving document would redefine ownership while enabling progress.
- Clear KPIs and review checkpoints were essential to ensure accountability without politicizing the process.

Advisory Output

The consultant delivered a structured briefing to the Executive Director, which included:

- A reframing strategy positioning the plan as a directional anchor rather than a restrictive rulebook.
- A proposal to convene a cross-functional action-mapping process to translate strategic goals into executable workstreams.
- Communication guidance for addressing the blocking member's concerns respectfully, while maintaining focus on outcomes.
- A performance framework outlining milestones, responsibilities, and review intervals.

*(For a detailed breakdown of how the Dream Team works and what makes its results replicable, see **Appendix A: Inside the AI Dream Team Method**. To see how a Dream Team interacts with human users and its own personas, see **Appendix B: Conversation Excerpts**)*

Implementation

Equipped with this guidance, the Executive Director led targeted discussions with board stakeholders. The approach de-escalated tension, shifted the blocking member's influence, and created consensus around moving forward. Rather than rewriting the strategic plan, the organization aligned around its operational execution.

Results

1. \$5 Million in Capital Secured

The museum moved forward with its expansion and retained public-private funding that was critical to forward progress.

2. Strategic Conflict Resolved

Board dynamics stabilized without reputational fallout or restructuring.

3. Extended Consulting Engagement

The consultant's role evolved into a long-term advisory partnership focused on implementation.

4. Stakeholder Confidence Reinforced

Team members and partners expressed renewed commitment following the successful internal resolution.

Strategic Insights

1. AI Clarifies Complexity

AI-driven personas accelerated analysis across behavioral, structural, and political dimensions. What would have taken weeks of stakeholder interviews was surfaced in less than two hours.

2. Consultants Must Lead with Judgment

AI did not provide decisions. It enabled better ones. The consultant synthesized and contextualized insights using professional expertise.

3. Reframing is More Effective Than Confrontation

Taking a step back and redefining the contribution of the blocking member—seeing it in an entirely new light—preserved organizational cohesion and allowed the whole team to overcome entrenched organizational blocks.

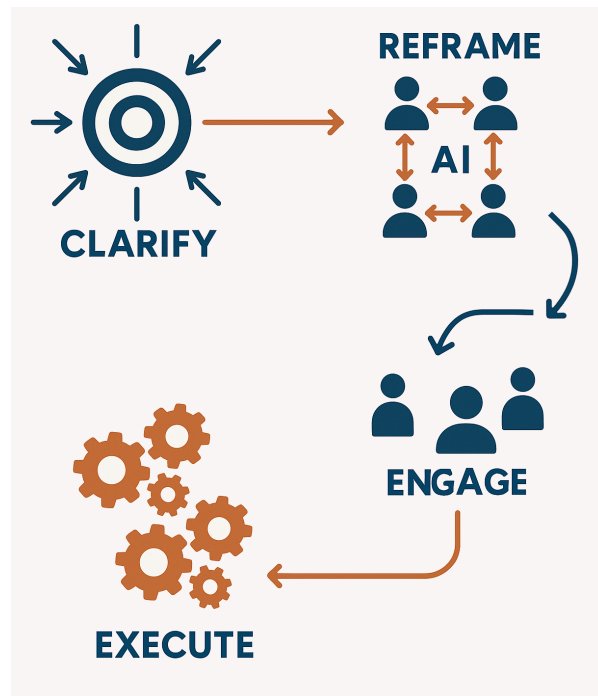
4. Mission Requires Execution Support

High-level vision is not sufficient. In civic contexts, executional clarity must be embedded within stakeholder-sensitive implementation plans.

Framework for AI-Augmented Consulting

Clarify → Reframe → Engage → Execute

- **Clarify:** Surface stakeholder assumptions, misalignments, and emotional dynamics.
- **Reframe:** Redefine obstacles as design challenges. Shift from rigidity to adaptability, with AI in a central role.
- **Engage:** Support leaders with strategic communication and stakeholder modeling.
- **Execute:** Define measurable actions, assign ownership, and implement feedback loops.



Conclusion

The case illustrates a new standard for strategic consulting—one where AI is not an automation tool, but an augmentation layer that expands human capacity for insight, empathy, and precision.

Consultants who master the use of AI as a structured thinking partner—not a novelty—will be best positioned to deliver results in complex, multi-stakeholder environments. As AI tools become more common, the competitive edge will belong to those who apply them with discipline, discretion, and leadership.

Interested in Your Own AI Dream Team?

AI-assisted advisory models aren't a gimmick—they're a strategic asset when used with intent and structure. If your organization faces complex stakeholder dynamics, unclear strategy-to-execution paths, or high-stakes decisions under time pressure, an AI Dream Team may be the right complement to your leadership approach.

Could a Dream Team Help You Unlock Stalled Strategy?

If you're facing misalignment, resistance, or strategic inertia—and the stakes are high—there may be a better way forward. We offer two approaches:

1. Facilitated AI Dream Team working sessions, to ramp you up quickly and see results

The Facilitated AI Dream Team method combines facilitated modeling, behavioral insight, and rapid scenario testing to help consultants and executive leaders move from friction to focus, faster.

Whether you're advising a board, designing a strategic initiative, or preparing for a high-stakes conversation, we can help you explore how to:

1. Diagnose hidden stakeholder dynamics
2. Reframe stalled strategies into operational roadmaps
3. Test narrative framing before going live with clients or teams
4. Accelerate clarity without compromising trust

2. Dream Team Building: Design your own AI-powered advisory team.

Want a team of your own that you can turn to anytime, day or night? We'll work with you to define the context, issues, and specific skills you'll need to draw on. Together, we'll build a genuine Dream Team of objective, impartial, non-judgmental, supportive AI team members who are there for **you**. This team will **grow with you**, adapting to your needs over time.

Schedule a consult to explore which AI Dream Team approach is right for your challenge.

(See Appendices A & B for a behind-the-scenes look at how the Dream Team works.)

Appendix A

Inside the AI Dream Team Method

What Is an AI Dream Team?

An AI Dream Team is a structured ensemble of AI-generated expert personas, designed to simulate a high-functioning interdisciplinary consulting team. Each persona is modeled to reflect a distinct area of expertise, with its own tone, problem-solving approach, and decision-making lens.

This configuration allows consultants, strategists, and leaders to:

- Explore multifaceted problems from multiple perspectives
- Test scenarios, assumptions, and stakeholder reactions
- Accelerate insight generation without relying on traditional team structures

The Dream Team doesn't replace real-world collaboration—it enhances it. It provides a strategic sounding board that helps consultants clarify issues, reframe challenges, and prepare more impactful client engagements.

Team Composition: Who's at the Table?

Each persona was designed to reflect a core competency required in high-stakes strategic organizational advisory work. They were given certain characteristics that simulate real-world value-add skills and abilities. The team structure can be customized, but the following roles were used in this engagement:

1. Dr. Evelyn Cross – Behavioral Strategist

- **Specialty:** Conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, team dynamics
- **Credentials:** PhD in Behavioral Psychology; Certified DISC Behavioral Specialist
- **Experience:** 15+ years in psychology and organizational consulting across healthcare, corporate, nonprofit, and education sectors
- **Personality:** Thoughtful, direct, empathetic
- **Primary Role:** Diagnose emotional undercurrents, Help surface motivations behind resistance, Advise on high-trust conversations and stakeholder engagement

2. Jonathan “Jon” Patel – Systems Architect

- **Specialty:** Organizational strategy, systems thinking, structural redesign

- **Credentials:** PhD in Organizational Development; Certified Organizational Design Professional (CODP)
- **Experience:** 20+ years in organizational design, strategy execution, and change management for Fortune 500s, public institutions, and tech firms
- **Personality:** Analytical, pragmatic, systems-oriented
- **Primary Role:** Identify breakdowns between strategic intent and operational capacity, Propose models to bridge vision and execution, Emphasize measurable progress and structural integrity

3. Mia Torres – Creative Solutions Partner

- **Specialty:** Experiential learning, engagement strategy, creative facilitation
- **Credentials:** MA in Instructional Design; Certified in Design Thinking and Experiential Learning
- **Experience:** 12+ years in training, development, and leadership program design across corporate, nonprofit, and education sectors
- **Personality:** Energetic, intuitive, non-linear thinker
- **Primary Role:** Recast stale conversations with fresh frames, Inspire collaborative thinking in tense environments, Design inclusive engagement approaches

4. Marcus Chen – Insightful Evaluator

- **Specialty:** Organizational metrics, feedback systems, performance analytics
- **Credentials:** BA in Economics; Certification in Organizational Analytics and Evaluation Strategy
- **Experience:** 15+ years in data strategy and behavioral analysis, including nonprofits, civic systems, and consulting firms
- **Personality:** Calm, precise, evidence-driven
- **Primary Role:** Introduce feedback loops and KPI frameworks, Ground strategic shifts in measurable outcomes, Translate abstract plans into evaluation-ready structures

How the Consultant Worked with the Dream Team

In this case, the consultant collaborated with the Dream Team via an AI facilitator (the author of this case study). This intermediary role allowed for a curated, efficient experience.

Workflow Overview:

1. **Situation Briefing:** Consultant described the problem and stakeholder context.
2. **Persona Selection:** Based on the issue, specific personas were brought in one at a time.
3. **Dialogue & Exploration:** Each persona responded with insight. The consultant and facilitator both posed follow-ups, tested counter-positions, and encouraged tension between perspectives (e.g., Evelyn vs. Mia).
4. **Insight Synthesis:** Consultant received a distilled summary of recommendations, framings, and next steps.
5. **Action Planning:** Consultant brought the resulting framing to the client for real-world implementation.
6. **Engagement:** Using findings and proposed next steps from the consultant, the client took action to substantively address gating issues and open a path to revived execution.
7. **Resolution:** The main blocking issue which threatened the entire project was resolved.

One working session was conducted for about an hour. The consultant-facilitator-AI interaction was conversational, strategic, and iterative.

That session was followed by check-ins with the Dream Team by the consultant over several days. The plan adapted as the situation evolved.

How This Differs from Traditional Advisory

Traditional Advisory	AI-Augmented Dream Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requires sourcing multiple experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simulates multiple expert lenses instantly
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High cost and long lead time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low cost, near real-time collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-person facilitation required	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fully asynchronous and accessible
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relies on real-time recall	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preserves insights across sessions

Note: An AI Dream Team is not a substitute for human collaboration—but it does eliminate unnecessary delays and helps a consultant prepare with depth and confidence.

Lessons from the Field

- Structure matters. Clear roles (behavioral strategist, systems architect, etc.) prevent generalized or unfocused output.
- Conflict can be productive. Simulated tension between personas often generated the most novel insights.
- Speed increases strategy quality. The consultant was able to iterate in hours rather than days, bringing more precision to her client work.
- The consultant remains in charge. AI augmented thinking, but did not replace leadership, judgment, or stakeholder nuance.

What Could *Your* Dream Team Look Like?

Now that you've seen how the AI Dream Team method works in practice, you may be wondering what a tailored version might look like for your organization.

Whether you're a solo consultant, part of an advisory firm, or leading a strategy office inside a nonprofit or civic organization, AI-assisted collaboration is becoming a powerful differentiator.

Through structured facilitation or full integration, we help teams:

- Identify the personas most relevant to their strategic challenges
- Customize behavioral, operational, and evaluative lenses
- Build a repeatable internal capability for insight acceleration
- Maintain a clear human-led decision structure, augmented by AI

Let's talk.

If you're ready to explore what it takes to build a Dream Team that thinks the way *you* do, we'll help you design it.

Appendix B

Conversation Excerpts

This is an actual (anonymized) excerpt from the AI Dream Team working session that surfaced the issues and solutions, which were ultimately implemented for a successful resolution of a potentially catastrophic impasse.

Consultant:

We have a "tough nut" we want to discuss with you. There's a ----- that's trying to expand, and there is a ---- that is supposed to make it happen. However, [a blocking stakeholder] is standing in the way. We need to figure out how to work with or around this , because growth is non-negotiable. We must grow or cease to exist

AI Dream Team:

That's definitely a challenging situation, but I'm glad you reached out for support. It sounds like the ----- in question may have either personal concerns, strategic differences, or even a different vision for the future of the museum. Let's break it down so we can address this methodically.

I'll invite the team in one by one to give you insight into possible approaches. Dr. Evelyn Cross, let's start with you.

Dr. Evelyn Cross (Behavioral Strategist):

It's crucial first to understand the behavior and motivations of the ----- who is standing in the way. Often, individuals who resist change do so out of fear or a perceived threat to their values or position. I'd suggest having an open, empathetic conversation with them to uncover their concerns. Do they feel overlooked? Are they worried about the potential risks to the -----'s reputation or financial stability? Identifying their emotional triggers can help in shaping the right approach—whether it's addressing a misunderstanding, providing reassurances, or perhaps framing the growth in a way that aligns with their values.

Would you be able to gather some more context about this individual's stance or reluctance?

Consultant:

That's helpful. I'd like to revisit a conversation we've had a few times - maybe with you and the team's input, we could come up with a better approach.

AI Dream Team:

Absolutely, I'd be happy to revisit it with the team's insights and refine our approach. Let's take a moment to revisit the issue together and think through any new angles or adjustments that might be necessary to move forward effectively. If you could remind me of the details of the conversation or the strategies you've tried before, we can build on that and make sure we have a more solid plan this time.

Would you like to give me a recap, or should we dive right into a new approach?

Consultant:

To date, the [blocking member] created the strategic plan, and wants all decisions to flow from the strategic plan. However, the rest of us see and agree that the strategic plan is not operational. There is a disconnect between strategic vision and tactical realities

AI Dream Team:

Thank you for clarifying that. It sounds like the [blocking member] is heavily invested in the strategic plan they created, and understandably wants it to be the guiding force for all decisions. However, as you and the rest of the board are seeing, there's a gap between high-level vision and the practical steps needed to make growth a reality. This can be a tricky situation—because they likely see their plan as the blueprint for success, while others see it as insufficient for actually driving results.

Let me call in Jon Patel, our Systems Architect, to provide some perspective on this.

Jonathan “Jon” Patel (Systems Architect):

In cases like this, the challenge often lies in the translation between strategy and execution. It's clear that the strategic plan needs to be reframed into actionable, measurable steps. I would suggest developing an operational roadmap that bridges the strategic vision with tactical needs. One way to approach this is by breaking the strategic plan into smaller, actionable chunks—identify the key outcomes they're aiming for and match them with operational objectives that the rest of the team can follow.

The key is to work collaboratively on this roadmap, making it clear that while the vision is crucial, the practical steps are just as important to ensure sustainability. A good strategy doesn't just sit on paper; it drives the day-to-day decisions, and right now, there's a gap between the two. Perhaps you could propose this as a solution: "Let's make sure that we align the strategic vision with the realities of implementation by creating a clear action plan."

Does that seem like a workable next step? Would it be possible to present it in a way that honors their vision, but also reflects the urgency of operationalizing it?

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To recap:

- **The [blocking member]** sees the strategic plan as the blueprint, and is insisting that everything flows from it.
- **The rest of the team** recognizes that while the strategic vision is important, the plan isn't operational enough to support the needed growth.

This creates a classic challenge of **strategy vs. execution**—where the vision is clear but the tactical realities haven't been addressed. The key is to **translate the strategy into actionable steps** while respecting the initial vision.

Let's proceed by diving into some possible next steps.

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Let's start the round robin debate, and I'll let Mia and Evelyn go back and forth on each point, embracing some tension, but ultimately working toward alignment.

Round 1: Acknowledging the Blocking Member's Vision

Mia Torres (Creative Solutions Partner):

I think acknowledging their vision is **crucial** in a public setting. If we don't show appreciation for the work they've done, we're automatically putting them on the defensive. That could shut down any potential for collaboration right from the start. If we recognize their leadership publicly—especially in front of the board—then we can open the door for collaboration. The power of **public recognition** can't be underestimated. It sets a tone of respect and inclusivity, which makes it easier to get buy-in.

Dr. Evelyn Cross (Behavioral Strategist):

I disagree. **Recognition is important**, but it can't just be about making them feel good. The **focus** needs to be on **getting results**, and sometimes that means calling out uncomfortable truths. If we're too focused on cushioning the conversation with praise, we're going to be stuck in the same place. They have to see that **the strategy is flawed**—not just that it's "good" but that it's not operationally realistic. I think we need to be **clear** about the issues upfront, even if it causes discomfort. That's the only way forward.

Round 2: Framing the Conversation

Mia Torres (Creative Solutions Partner):

I understand your point, but framing the conversation as a **problem to fix** will make them feel like they're being publicly attacked. That's a quick way to set up resistance. Instead, let's frame it as an **opportunity** to enhance something that already has value. Saying, "How do we improve this?" instead of "This is broken and needs fixing" is a huge

difference. The framing needs to focus on **shared ownership** of the problem. When we put it that way, it encourages everyone—especially them—to feel like they’re part of the solution, not the problem.

Dr. Evelyn Cross (Behavioral Strategist):

But if we don’t **address the reality**, we’re just masking the issue. It’s not about attacking them—it’s about facing the truth: the plan doesn’t work as it stands. If we spend too much time focusing on “improving” what’s already insufficient, we’ll never get anywhere. **Honesty** is key. We need to communicate that **the strategy needs significant work** to meet the current challenges of the museum. It’s uncomfortable, but people respect **directness** when it’s done with professionalism.

Round 3: Public vs. Private Conversations

Mia Torres (Creative Solutions Partner):

In a public setting, we need to **reframe the narrative** from “us vs. them” to “us with them.” We need to **protect their ego** because they’re the one leading the strategy. If we publicly challenge them too directly, it will not only cause them to shut down but could lead the rest of the board to turn on them, which could fracture the entire team. They need to feel like they’re still in control of their vision, but that we all need to **work together** to make it practical. **Collaboration** is key here.

Dr. Evelyn Cross (Behavioral Strategist):

I see your point, but we can’t dance around the fact that the current strategic plan is **not working**. If we go in with this approach of “collaborative opportunity,” we run the risk of softening the message to the point that nothing changes. **They need to understand** the operational shortcomings, and I don’t believe we can do that effectively by sugar-coating the conversation. If we continue to **protect their ego**, we’ll end up accommodating the issues and not solving them. **Honesty and clarity** are especially critical in a public setting.

Round 4: Reframing the Strategic Plan as a “Living Document”

Mia Torres (Creative Solutions Partner):

I think the idea of the plan being a “**living document**” is a fantastic way to **bridge the gap**. It allows everyone to take ownership without making anyone feel like their work is being discarded. We’re not throwing out the strategic vision—just adapting it to the current needs. This reframing makes the plan more **flexible** and allows us to make adjustments as we go. This isn’t about creating a rigid plan; it’s about creating something that evolves.

Dr. Evelyn Cross (Behavioral Strategist):

I understand the appeal of calling it a “living document,” but I think it risks **diluting the**

message. The plan can't evolve indefinitely without some hard decisions being made about its core elements. If we continue to allow for too much flexibility without clear accountability, we risk **never getting things done.** We need a clear roadmap, with **specific goals**, even if it means **revising their original vision.** Adaptation is important, but so is clarity and precision in execution. A living document should be focused on clear deliverables, not an endless cycle of adjustments.

Round 5: Working Together as a Team vs. Challenging Authority

Mia Torres (Creative Solutions Partner):

There's a risk that focusing too much on **challenging authority** could lead to a **fractured team dynamic.** What's more important—the **plan itself** or the **team's cohesion**? If we push too hard against them, we might alienate them and the rest of the team. Collaboration means finding middle ground, and if we push too hard for a complete overhaul, we may create unnecessary conflict. Let's work **together** to refine it, not tear it down.

Dr. Evelyn Cross (Behavioral Strategist):

But **team cohesion** is built on **shared honesty and accountability**, not on avoiding difficult truths. If we don't challenge their plan directly and make the necessary revisions, we risk creating a false sense of unity that only delays the real solutions. We're **not here to placate** each other—we're here to make tough decisions. It's not about tearing them down; it's about **setting the museum up for success.** If we only focus on keeping the peace, we could end up with more problems down the road.

Final Alignment and Next Steps

Mia Torres (Creative Solutions Partner):

I see where you're coming from, Evelyn. I think we both agree that the **strategic plan needs adjustment** to be operational, and that's our main goal here. I'm just advocating for **not destroying the collaborative spirit** in the process. Yes, we need honesty, but we also need to make sure we're all in this together, and that everyone feels valued—especially the [blocking member], since this plan is their brainchild.

Dr. Evelyn Cross (Behavioral Strategist):

I agree that **honesty is key**, but I also think we need to allow room for **a sense of collective ownership** in fixing the issues. The challenge is finding the balance—directness without crushing collaboration. Perhaps what's important is framing the conversation in a way that doesn't dismiss their leadership but also **holds the plan accountable to the museum's growth goals.** We can't avoid the tough truths, but we can still work to create a **cooperative environment** for making necessary changes.

Next Steps:

1. **Acknowledge their vision publicly** at the next meeting, making sure to show respect for the hard work they've put in. Frame the conversation as a **shared opportunity** for improvement rather than a critique.
2. Use a **structured collaborative session** to unpack the current strategic plan. Focus on **operationalizing** the vision with clear, measurable steps that can be tracked and executed.
3. Acknowledge that the plan is a **living document** that must evolve. However, set clear **milestones** and **accountability** within that flexibility, so the plan remains **goal-oriented** and doesn't drift without purpose.
4. **Facilitate the conversation** using “we” language to reinforce **collective ownership**. Be **honest about the operational issues**, but avoid framing it as a personal failure. Encourage everyone to contribute to the solution.

By combining **respectful collaboration** with **clear accountability**, we can move forward and create a plan that works both for the blocking member and the team.

[End Excerpt]

Want your own AI Dream Team to work through tough issues? **Let's talk.**