

WHAT *STRANGER THINGS* CAN TEACH US ABOUT LEADERSHIP

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Stranger Things is referenced for educational commentary.
This session is not affiliated with or endorsed by Netflix.

Reality Check

You're really here for the **Small and Rural Cities Winning Playbook** session at 1:30pm and arrived responsibly early.



Reality Check

You looked at the other choices—
**Liability Landscape, Governing in the
Fishbowl, Resolutions Committee**—
and thought, “I could use a different
kind of monster.”



Reality Check

You have kids, saw *Stranger Things* on the schedule, and decided this might be the first conference session title you could explain at home.



AND YOU

THOUGHT WE'D

BE LEARNING

FROM THEM.





WHEN ACTUALLY

IT'S ABOUT

THIS GUY.

Hint: He was on to something...

Different worlds. Familiar patterns.

THE UPSIDE DOWN

YOUR CITY, CALIFORNIA

SHARED OPERATING PATTERNS



Shared awareness



Connected network



Coordinated action



Stronger after
setbacks



VECNA

MIND FLAYER / HIVE MIND

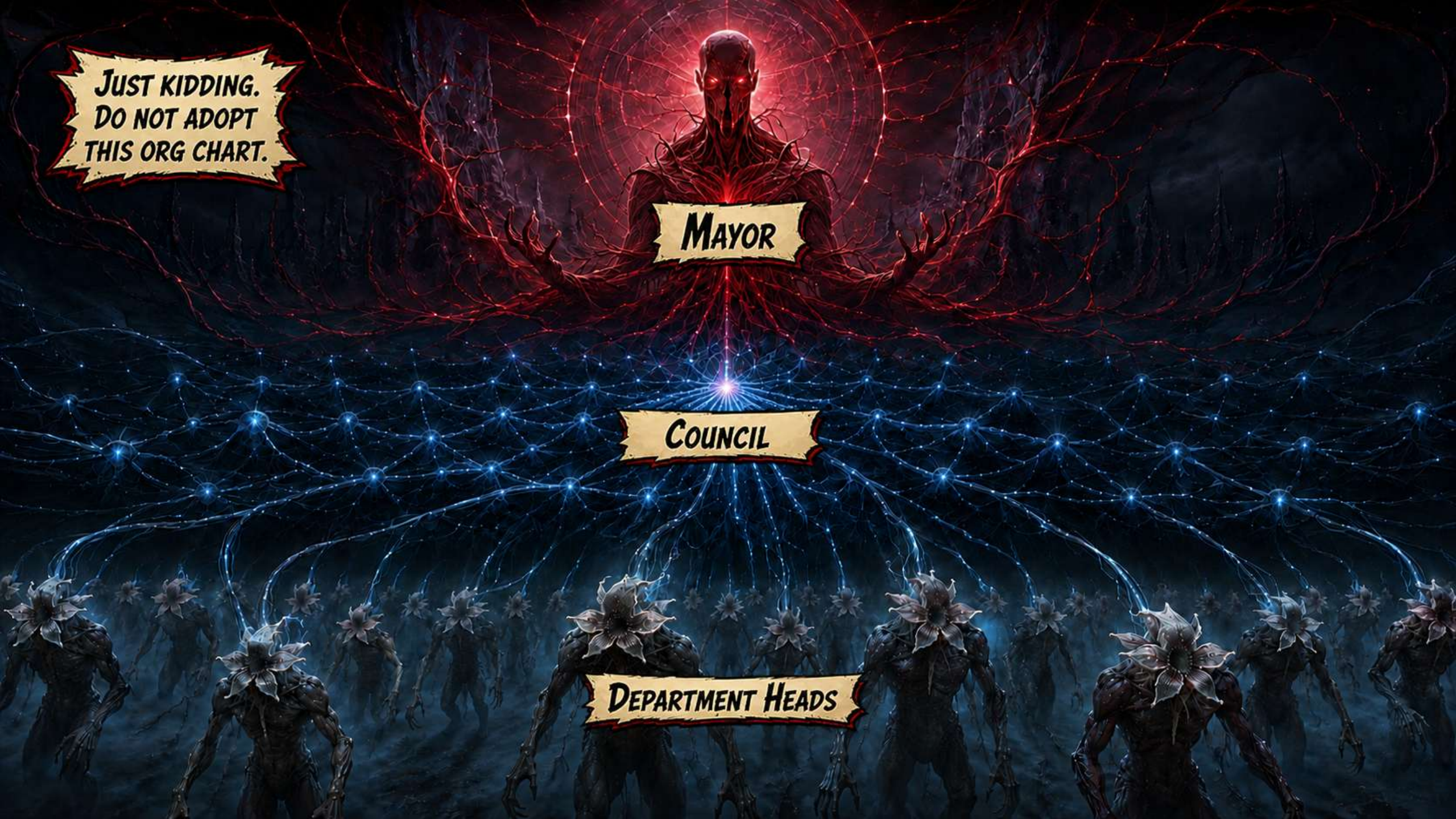
DEMOGORGONS

**JUST KIDDING.
DO NOT ADOPT
THIS ORG CHART.**

MAYOR

COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT HEADS





 **Community Purpose** 

 **Situational Awareness** 

 **Empowered Decision Makers** 

*A LIVING NETWORK
BENEATH HAWKINS,
INDIANA.*

*THE HIVE MIND SENDS
THE SIGNAL. EVERY
CREATURE CARRIES
OUT THE WORK.*





**Information
flows in.
Coordinated action
flows out.**

**A HIT IN ALASKA
SENDS A SHOCKWAVE
TO HAWKINS.**

ALASKA

**HAWKINS,
INDIANA**



**WHEN ONE
TEAM IS
STRAINED,
THE WHOLE
SYSTEM
RESPONDS.**



**SOMETIMES DEFEAT
IS JUST THE PAUSE
BEFORE A STRONGER
RETURN.**



**Resilient teams
pause, learn, and
rebuild stronger—
together.**



Don't do *everything* like the Upside Down.

THE UPSIDE DOWN



YOUR CITY, CALIFORNIA







I made my decision.
Now just do what
I say.

Let's put the full
picture on the table—
then decide together.



Never mind,
I'll just do it.

I trust my frontline team
to get this done.



We don't need
to worry about that.

I'll call the County
now—so they can begin
preparing to help.



Jerry, this is
your mess. Now you
have to fix it!

Garry, let's unpack what
happened—and get our
teams aligned on the fix.

A group of four people, two men and two women, are standing on a rocky path overlooking a town and mountains at sunset. On the left, a large, weathered sign with a decorative border and lightning bolt accents contains text. The people are dressed in outdoor or work attire; one man wears a high-visibility vest and a cap, another holds a lantern, and one woman holds a clipboard. The background features a town with a prominent church, surrounded by mountains under a bright, hazy sunset sky with some digital-style light effects.

HIVE MIND IN ACTION

PURPOSE. PICTURE. PERMISSION.

Start with the outcome.
Share the picture.
Let people act.

PURPOSE

START WITH THE COMMUNITY OUTCOME.

Before a project, incident, or major decision, state the shared outcome in one sentence.

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO PROTECT, RESTORE, OR IMPROVE FOR THIS COMMUNITY?





PICTURE

BUILD A COMMON OPERATING PICTURE.

Create simple 15-minute cross-departmental check-ins.

***WHAT CHANGED?
WHAT MATTERS NOW?
WHO IS AFFECTED?
WHAT DECISIONS ARE NEXT?***

A group of four people, two men and two women, are standing on a rocky path overlooking a town and mountains at sunset. They are dressed in outdoor gear, including jackets, pants, and a hard hat. One man is holding a lantern, and another is holding a clipboard. In the foreground, a large, weathered sign is mounted on wooden posts. The sign has a decorative border with lightning bolt motifs. The background features a town with various buildings, including a church, and a range of mountains under a bright, orange-hued sky with a large sun or moon. The overall scene is a mix of nature and human-made structures, suggesting a frontier or wilderness setting.

PERMISSION

EMPOWER PEOPLE TO ACT.

Define decision guardrails so the person closest to the issue can move.

NOT EVERY ANSWER NEEDS TO CLIMB THE ORG CHART.

**SOME DAYS,
IT FEELS A
LITTLE LIKE THIS...**



You don't need a hive mind!



Purpose. Picture. Permission.





THANK You

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