

SO, YOUR COMPANY IS DOING AN 'AI TRANSFORMATION'

Lessons From the Coal Face

Kate Gray
British Computing Society, Edinburgh Branch
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ABOUT ME

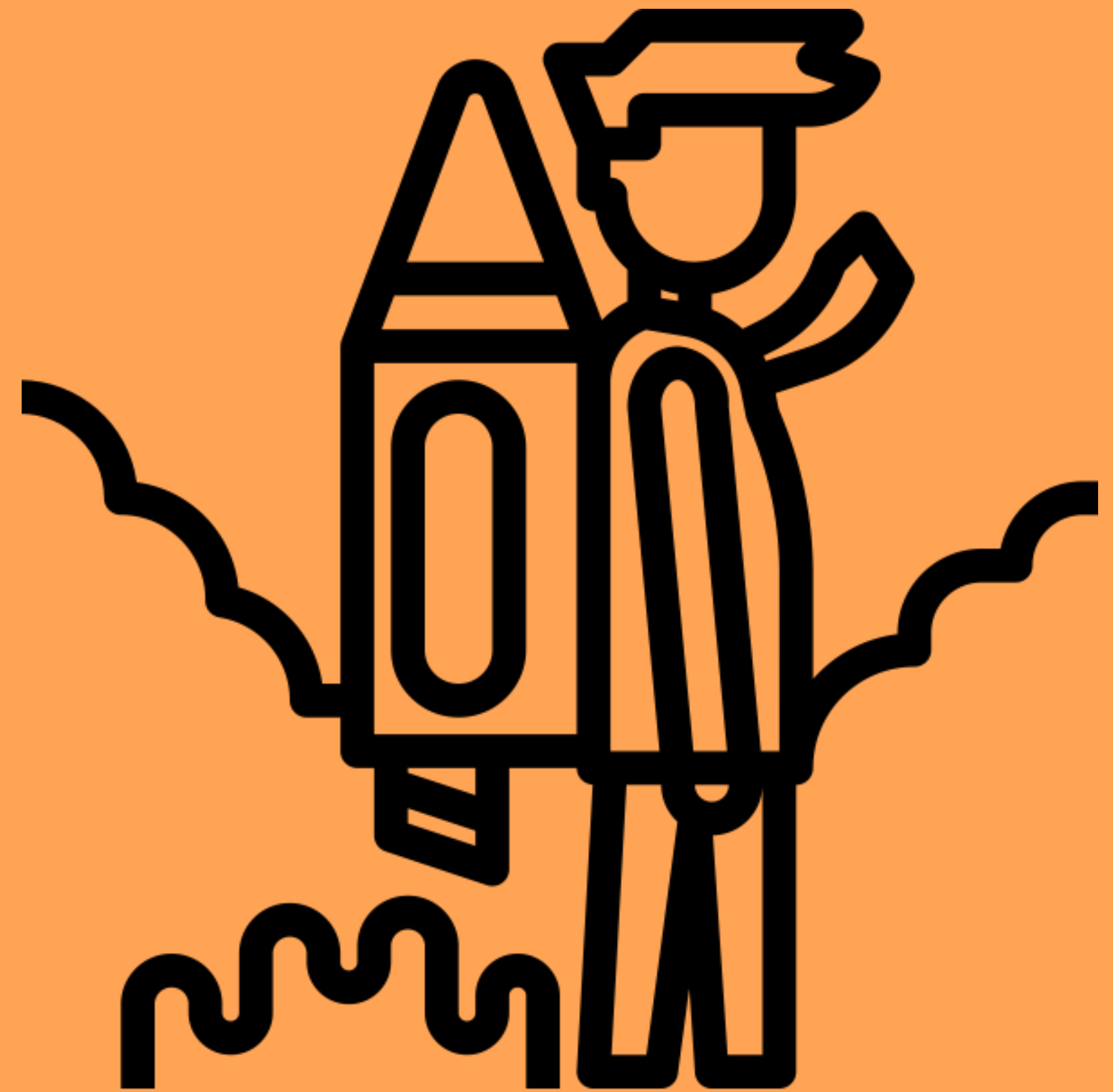
- Experience - technology-loving, global business exec
- Reputation - positive 'doer' brought in to get things done well
- Brain - insatiably curious and eager to learn
- Approach - listen first (for a long time) before speaking
- Passions - fresh air & the potential of tech for good
- Tribe - prefer people who are humble and generous vs tech bro attitude
- Flaws - too many to list...

I bring you some of my learnings from supporting organisations, including ideas for how you might achieve better outcomes from your transformation



FOR THIS EVENING

- Why is the promise of transformation so seductive?
- Why don't transformations deliver what they say?
- Why, so often, are people an afterthought?
- What might AI make better?
- How might you improve a transformation?
- Q&A - and thank you



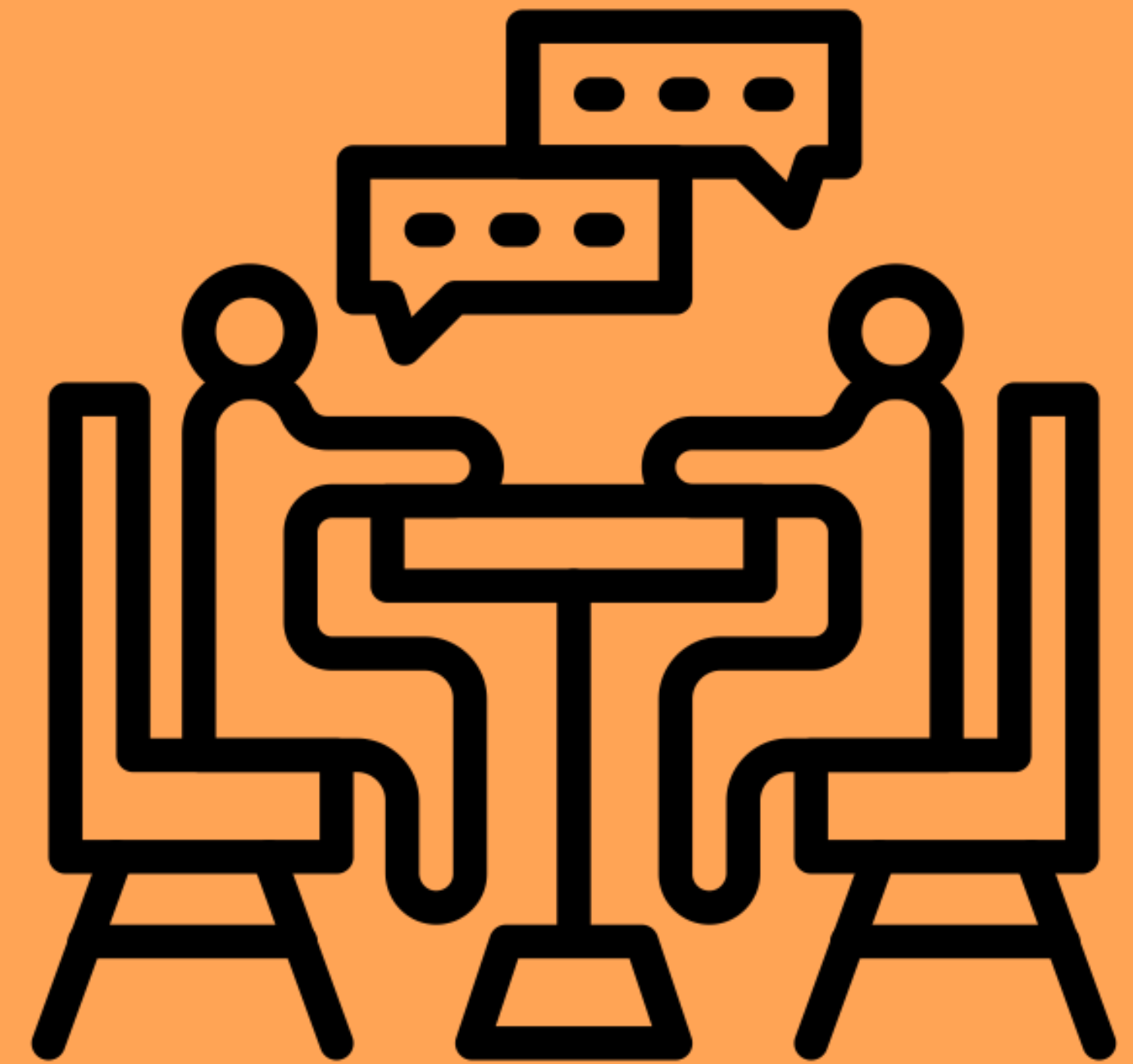
WHY IS THE PROMISE OF TRANSFORMATION SO SEDUCTIVE?



DEFERRING TO STORY-TELLING (& SELLING) 'EXPERTS'

- Deemed credible and yet...
- Often selling already legacy tech approaches that are commoditised rather than ground breaking
- Trained to make personal connections rather than develop technical expertise
- Comfortable making promises, looking very accommodating and supportive and, at times, making stuff up

When it comes to tech (and especially AI) I turn to <https://www.ben-evans.com/> when I need a break from sales speak...



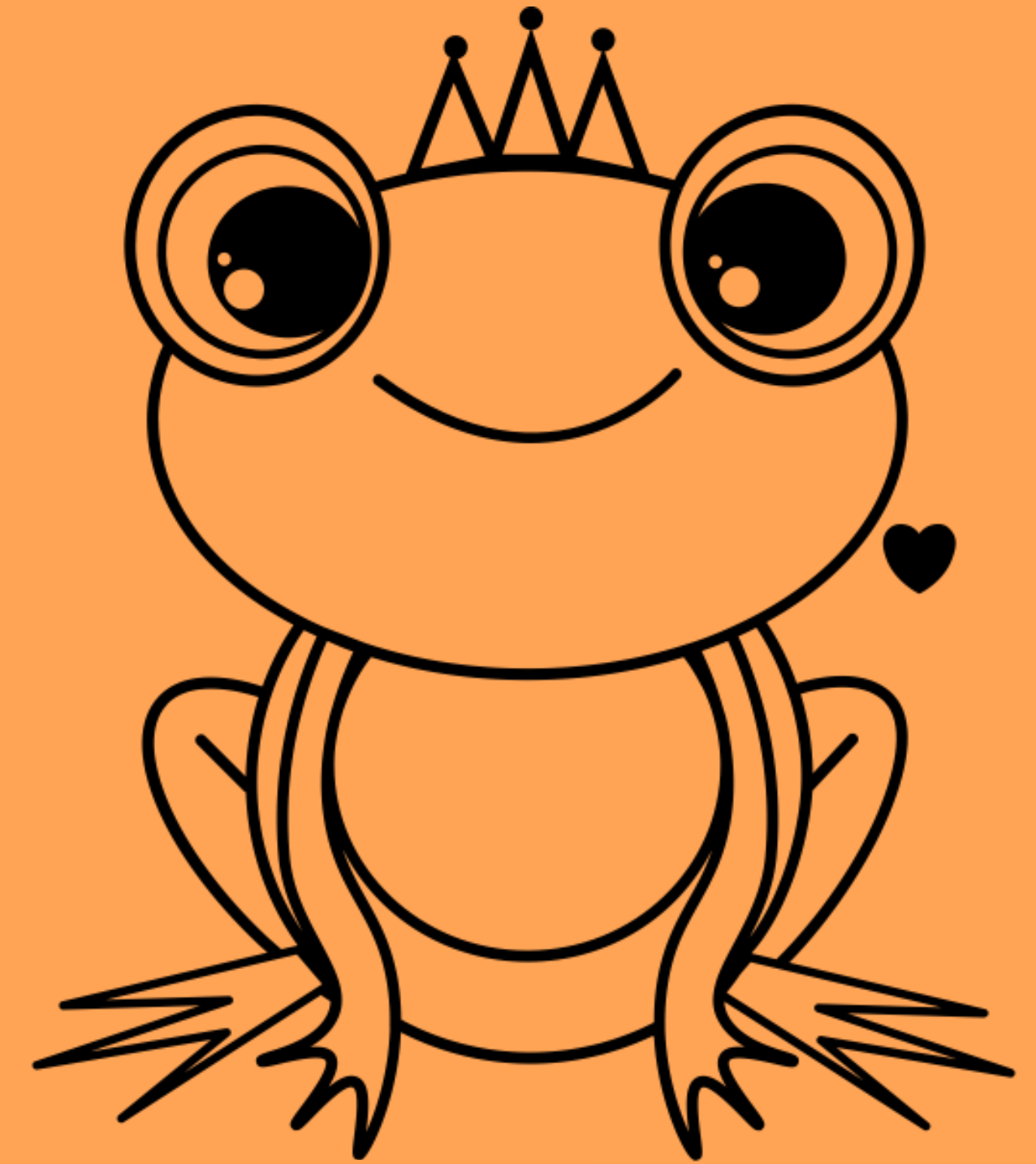
HONESTY MAY NOT BRING A PROMOTION

- It's not usually seen as sensible to request what it's really going to cost
- With consultants promising their approach won't take long and will deliver value early, who wants to hear a realistic view of the technical estate
- High-level roadmaps and transformation plans often, conveniently, leave out discussion of the mess that lies beneath

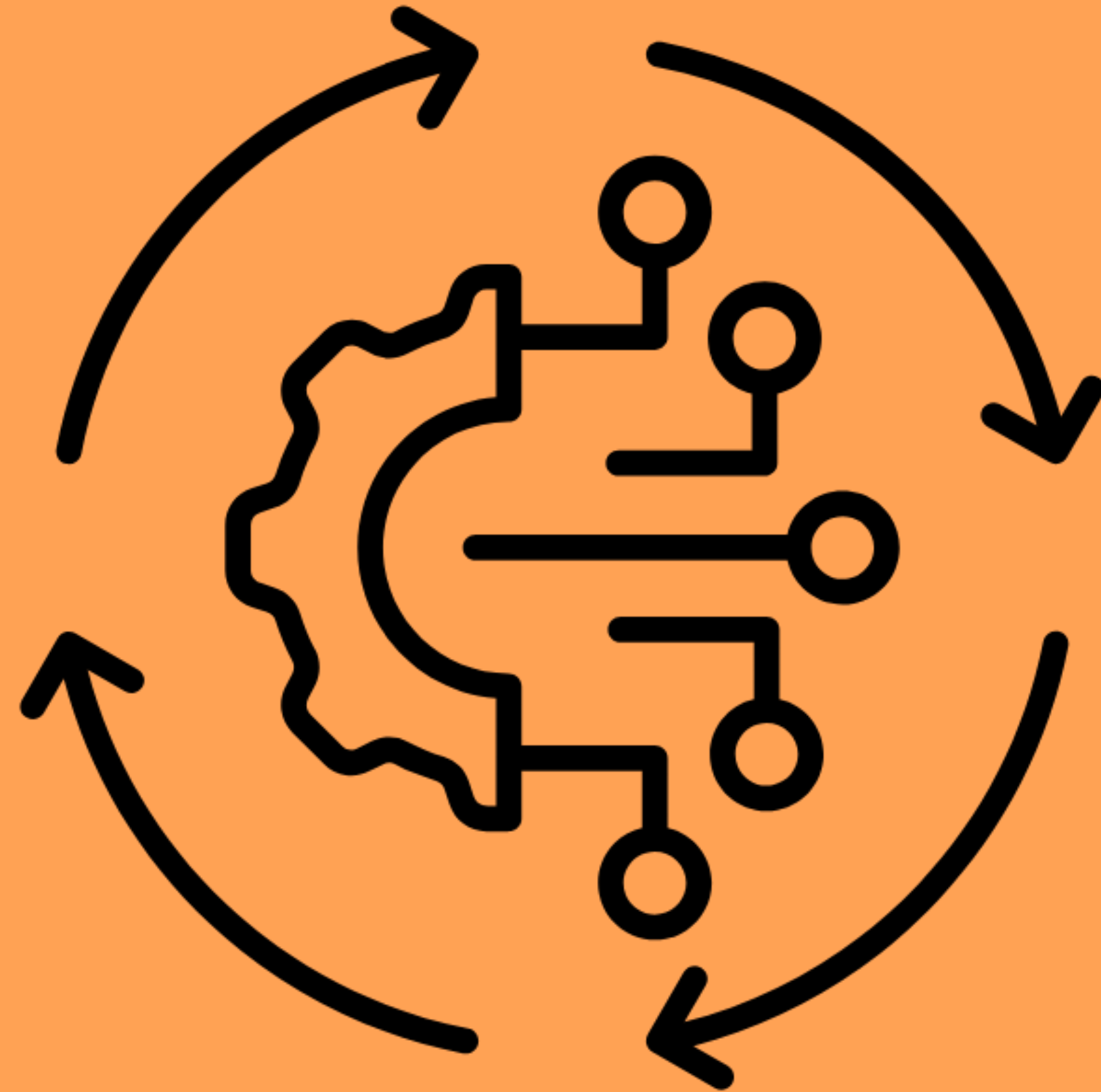


WISHING FOR A HOLLYWOOD FAIRY TALE ENDING

- Does any more need to be said here?

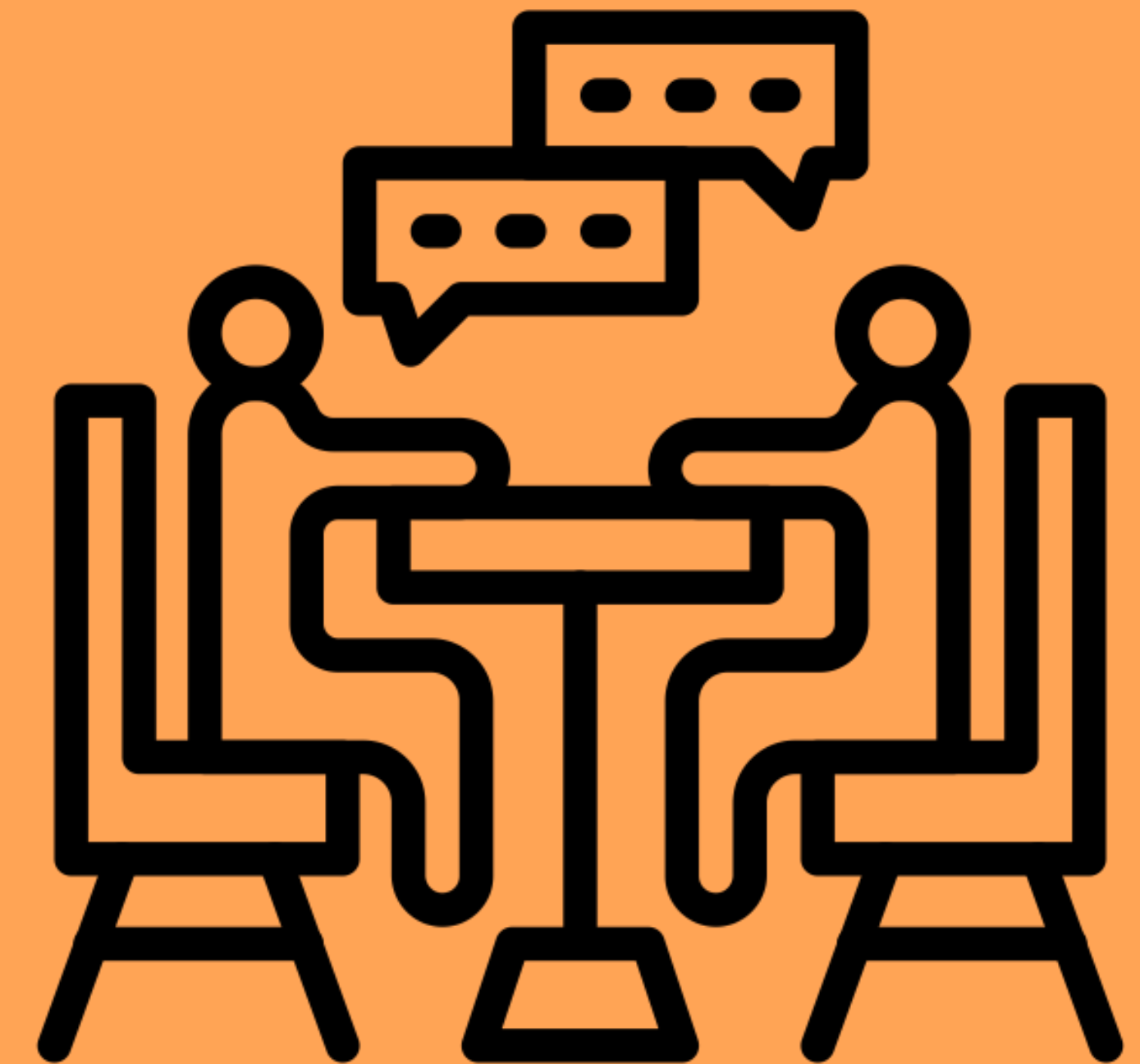


WHY DON'T TRANSFORMATIONS DELIVER WHAT THEY SAY?



THE ROLE OF COMPLACENCY

- Discussion focuses on risks rather than benefits or improvements (until an external situation forces otherwise)
- Over many years, 'tampering' with the 'system' and establishing processes for the as-is have become acceptable, adding to a complex estate
- If a managed service, that introduces a whole different set of 'what if' anxiety
- Change just feels too hard and too much



CONSTANT INVESTMENT CHALLENGES

- Lack of appetite to fight for improvements when the current system works okay now
- That love of 'tampering' and preference to adapt keeps budget numbers consistent and acceptable
- Business performance and global events continue to force hard choices that make proper investment challenging
- Change just feels too hard and too much



THE PROBLEM WITH A HIGH-LEVEL VIEW

- Senior leadership's 'stay out of the weeds' preference often leaves out information that needs attention
- Communicating to people with different levels of technology understanding requires critical 'translation skills' that incorporate technical knowledge with a non-technical vocabulary
- Be confident knowing that there will always be that day when ignored, avoided, and important information becomes critical and forces a change in priorities



WHY, SO OFTEN, ARE PEOPLE AN AFTERTHOUGHT?



PEOPLE ARE STILL THE KEY TO SUCCESS

- Often the cost of ambiguity is not considered
- So-called 'soft skills' are increasingly needed to motivate, support and enable people to adapt to new situations and ways of working
- Leadership at every level has a role to play by listening and honestly reframing situations to minimise concern and confusion
- Using the latest tech jargon doesn't really help too much...



RESILIENCE IS AN OVER-USED WORD

- Things will not go to the original, optimistic plan...
- Constantly restating a commitment to wellbeing and that change is hard for everyone is not quite the same as focusing on delivering a well-organised transformation
- Investment cases need to budget for ongoing support, proper learning and additional people at different stages - more than 'change champions' and a newsletter, please
- Senior leadership really does need to be close to the pain, listen with commitment, and act responsibly, and commit to transparency

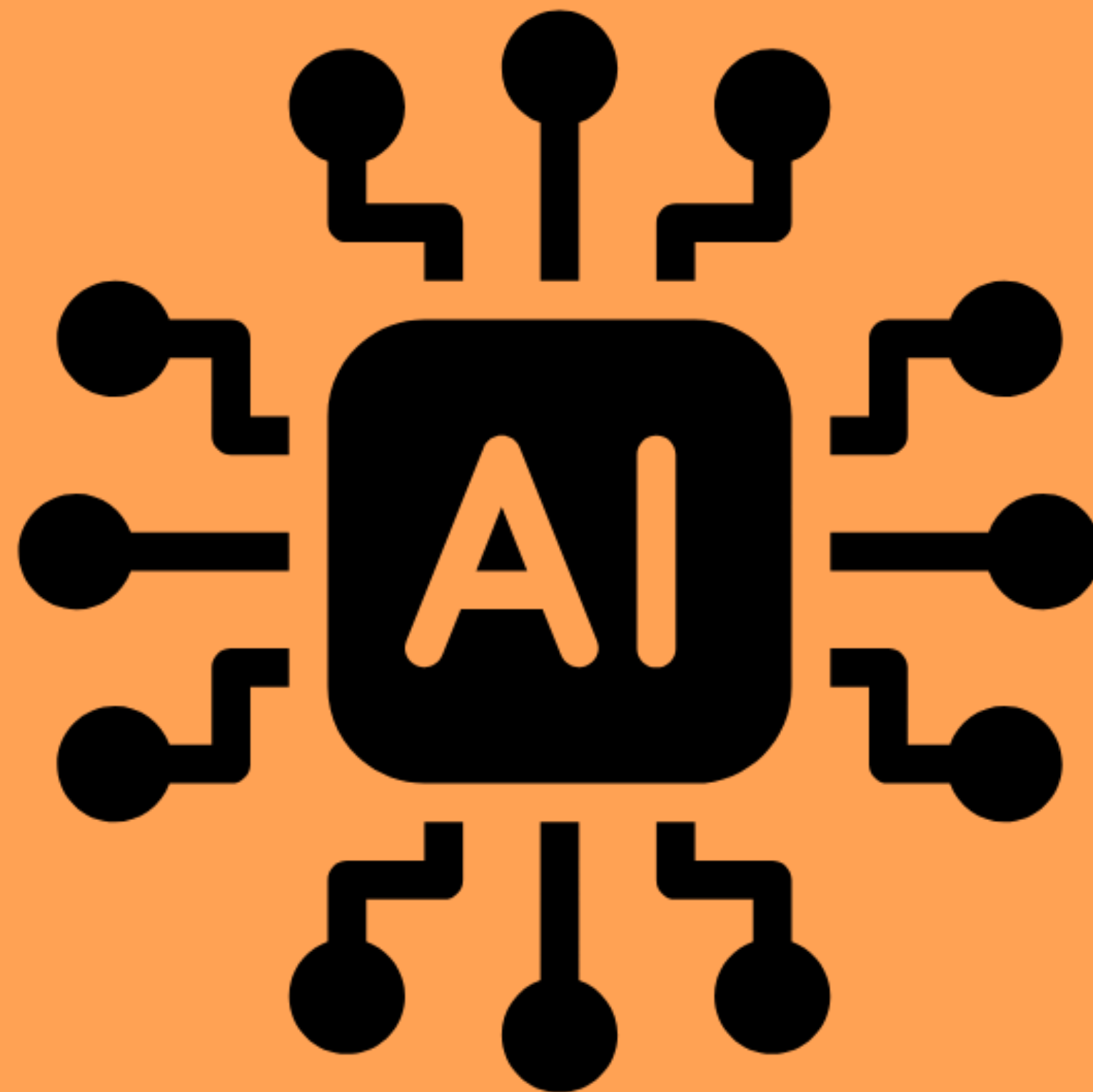


PEOPLE ARE MORE THAN RESOURCES

- Organisational knowledge and understanding is essential to access in a transformation
- Respecting the views of the many takes time and effort, and is worth the investment
- Creative and sensible ideas often come from those closest to the work
- Interpreting a discussion of pain points as moaning is unhelpful
- Expecting instant enthusiasm and commitment is naive



WHAT MIGHT 'AI' MAKE BETTER? *



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Created by Corner Pixel from Noun Project

*I am a fan of AI,
but not a fan of the hype

IT DEPENDS...

- Before moving straight to agentic adventures, develop a list of entry criteria - suitable for planning the overall transformation too - that includes, among other tasks:
 - know the as-is and target state of the technical estate
 - know everything about the data today and properly scope out data requirements in the target state
 - know the processes today - what should be redesigned, replaced or newly introduced
 - Identify and prioritise areas appropriate for AI
 - review governance and design new approaches
 - and take a few deep breaths...

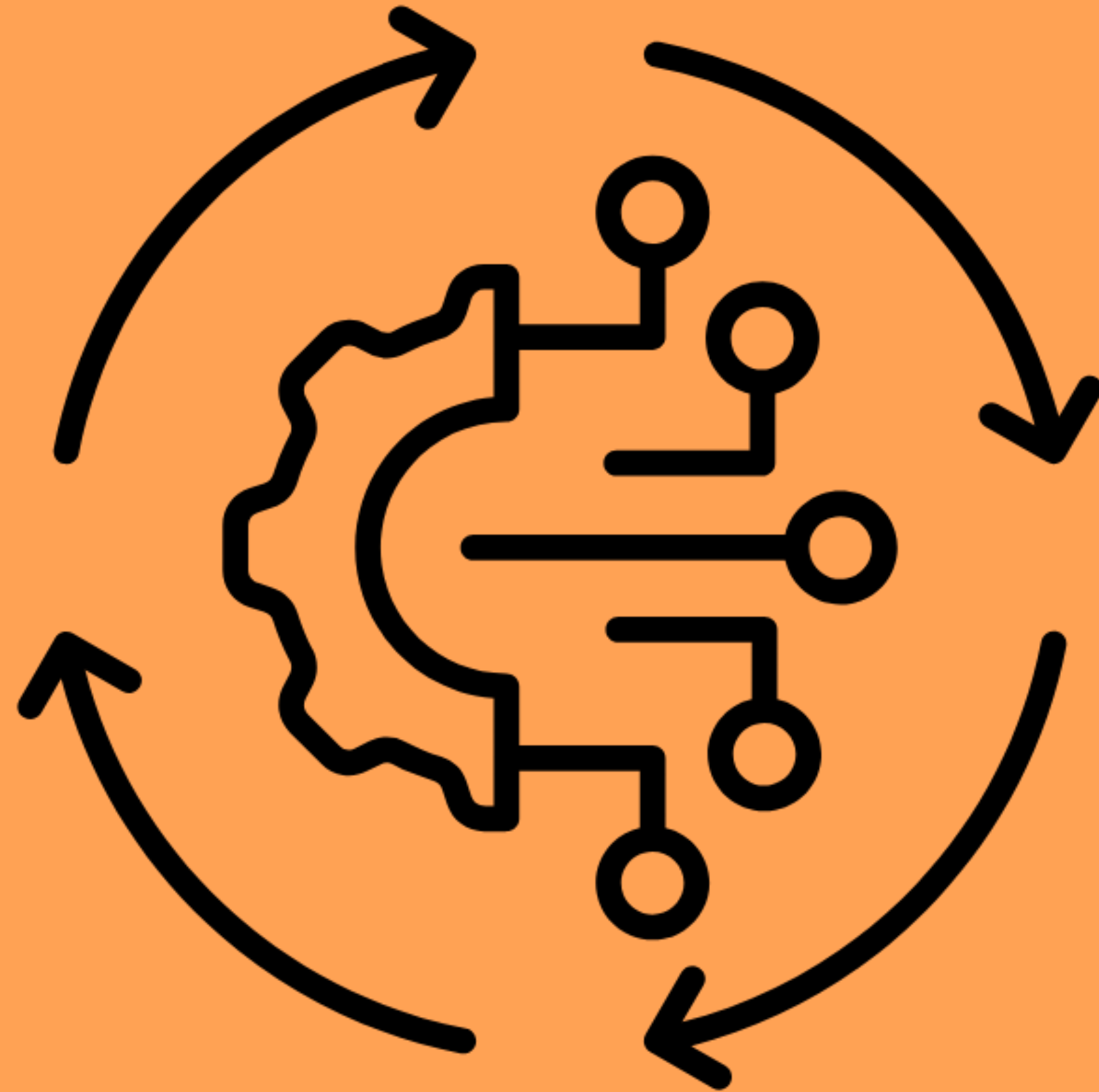


IT DEPENDS...

- Identify and develop internal AI knowledge - a counter balance to sales messages
- There is a lot of hype and fear being thrown around today which doesn't mean you have to be drawn into it ... and doesn't mean AI will be the big thing people claim it will be

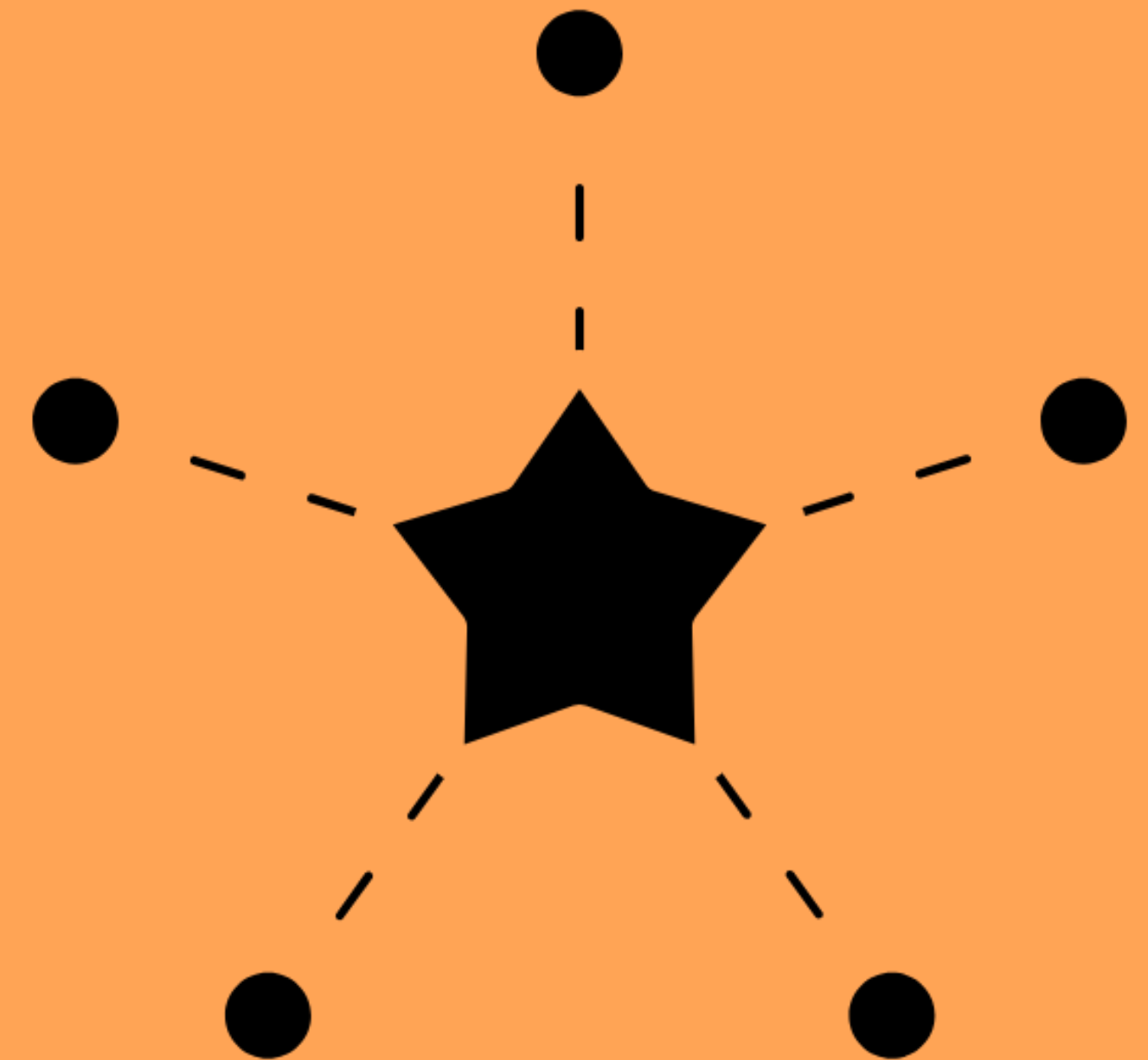


HOW MIGHT YOU IMPROVE YOUR TRANSFORMATION?



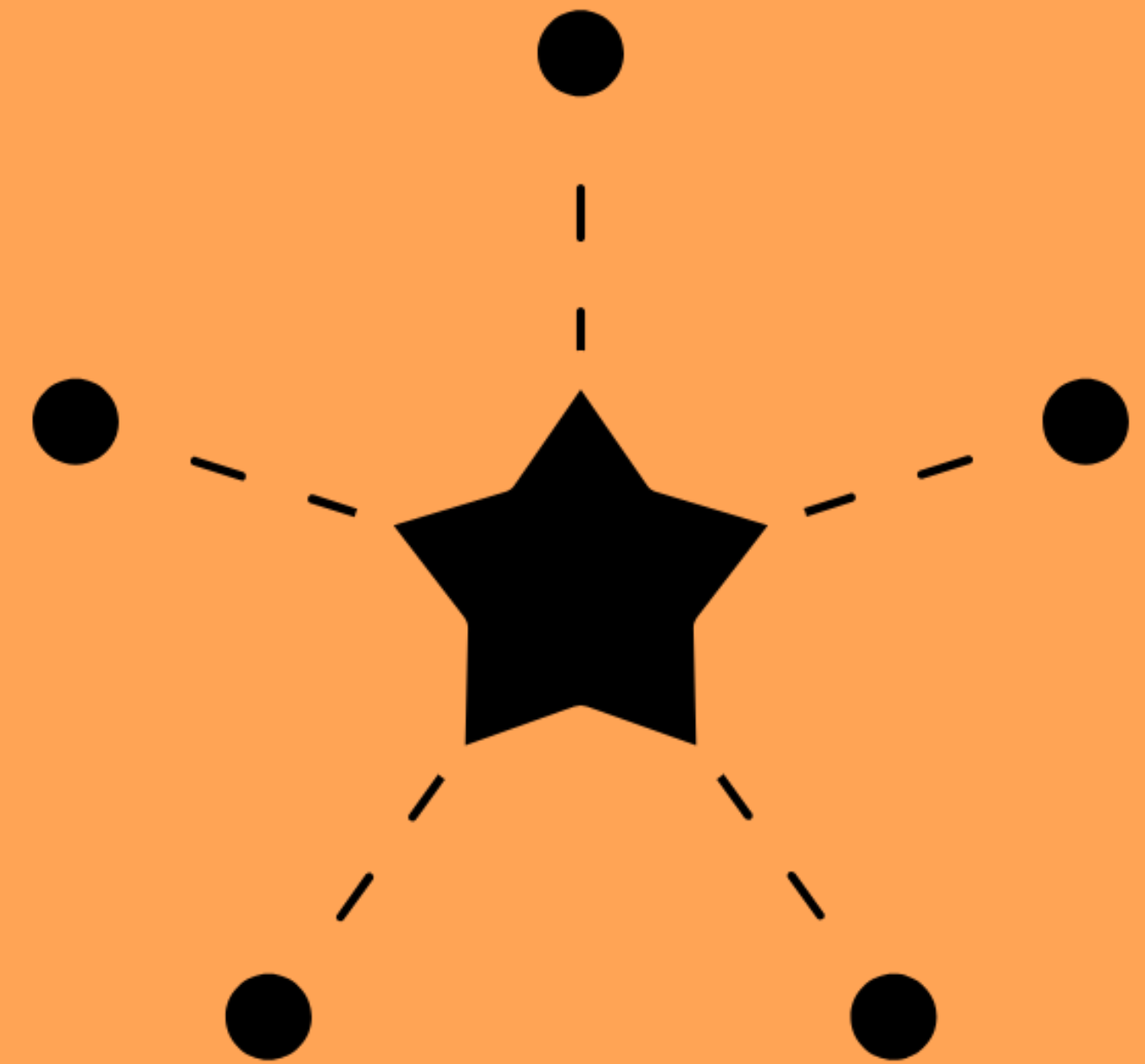
PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS YOU MIGHT FIND USEFUL

- Get to know who is involved in the early planning - find ways to contribute to the thinking of these people rather than wait to learn what they have agreed
- If suppliers and delivery partners are being considered, encourage requests for hard evidence of their experience and learnings from previous transformations
- If you happen to join an in-flight transformation, encourage a rapid, honest assessment of status, constraints and opportunities to change course



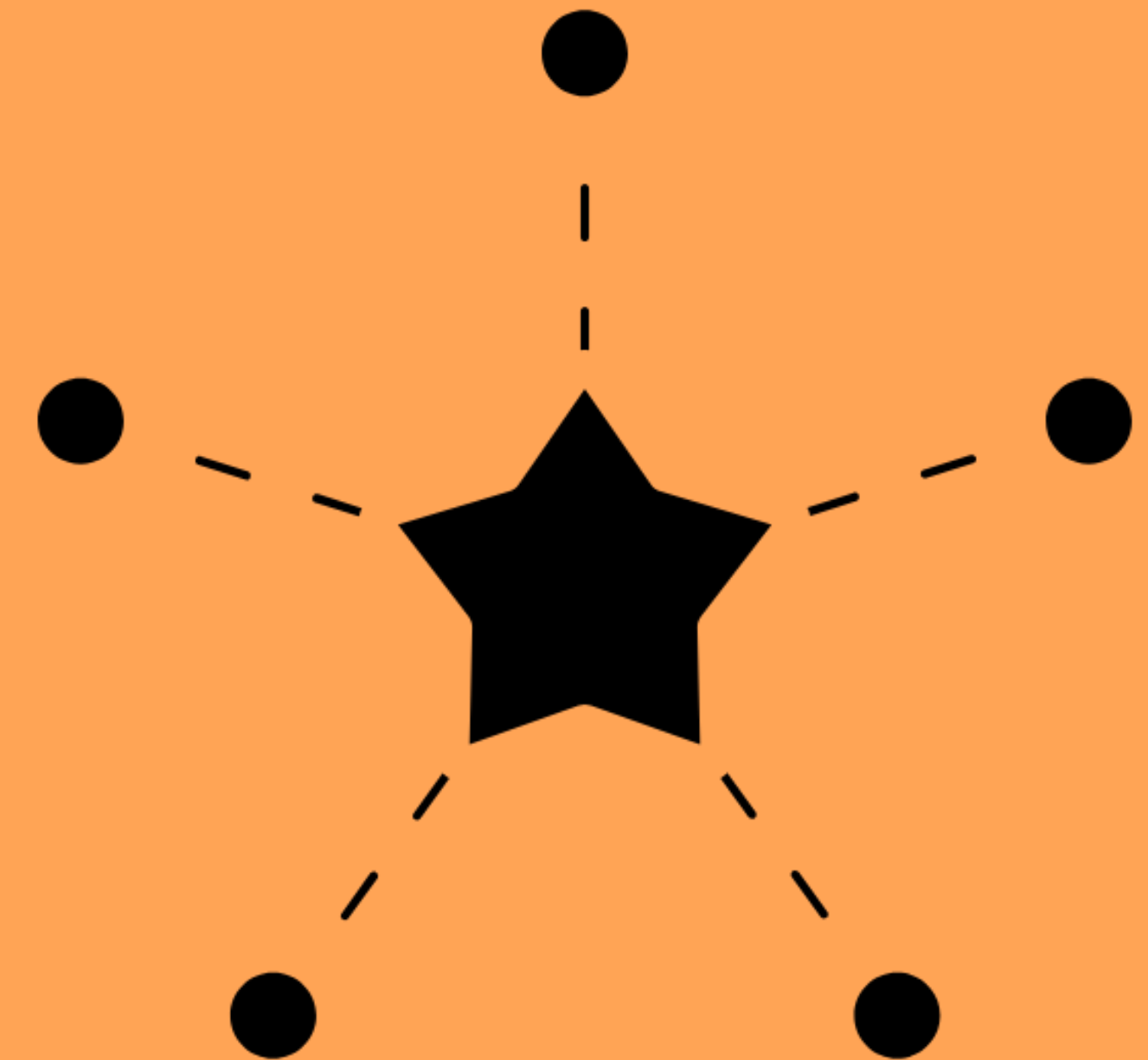
CONSIDER YOUR VIEW OF THE COMPANY

- Appreciate the view of the organisation you have, what you might not be aware of, and what else needs to be incorporated for success
- Lead with questions to bring others into the discussion and surface important information that may not have been considered
- Avoid moans and opinionated challenges as these make your voice more difficult to listen to



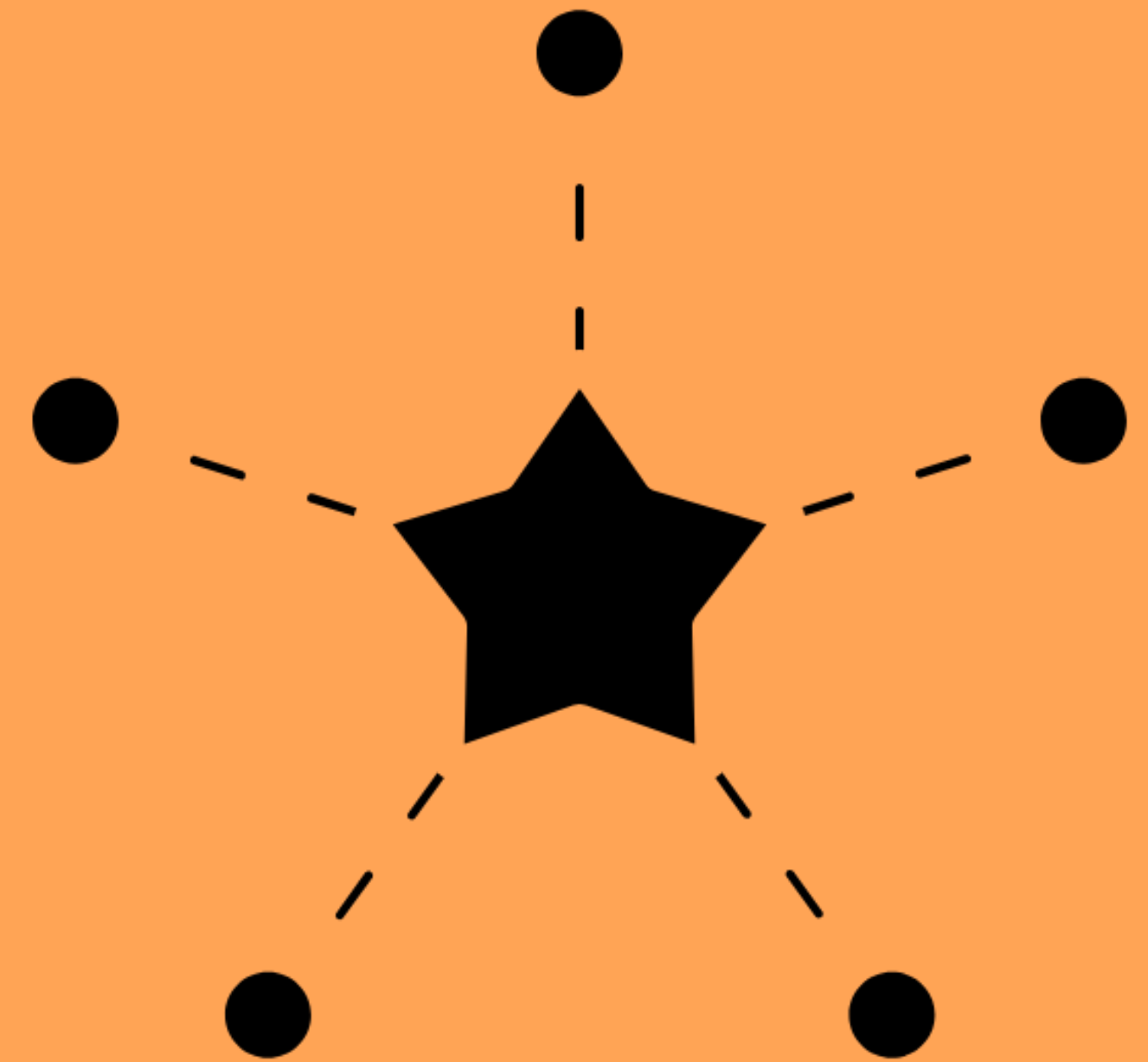
STARTER QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL

- What are we ultimately trying to achieve - what matters most when making trade-offs?
- In our future/target state, what outcomes should be prioritised?
- How do key processes work today and which functions need to be redesigned, replaced or newly introduced?
- Which requirements are non-negotiable and where can we compromise?
- What technology and data foundations are required for the future state?
- What will make a supplier or delivery partner right beyond functional fit?



KEEP CONTRIBUTING TO A BETTER OUTCOME

- Please don't give up - every transformation goes through a few revisions



A FINAL THOUGHT



A BIT OF LIFE (AND TRANSFORMATION) WISDOM FROM GILDA RADNOR

“I wanted a perfect ending.

Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next.

Delicious Ambiguity.”



Gilda Radnor - Wikipedia Image

QUESTIONS



THANK YOU

