

HOW WE MIGHT FIND OUR OWN WAY

(AVOIDING THE AVALANCHE OF PRESCRIPTION)

INTRODUCTION

In our [article](#) about avoiding prescriptions for a 'new normal' and finding our own way, we offered to share examples of what it means in practice to develop your organisation's capability for constant exploration, learning and renewal. Less about a pivot or a reset and much more about an ongoing depth of agility.

WHAT ARE WE BEING CHALLENGED TO DELIVER?

HYBRID
WORKPLACE?

AGILITY?

DIGITAL?

STRATEGY
ALIGNMENT?

TRANSFORMATION?

CULTURE?

SOME IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES

Start with the principle that what needs developing are the approaches, processes and abilities to create your own organisation's responses to these challenges.

The development of these capabilities also requires the organisation's acceptance that there is not a neat and ready-packaged answer somewhere - waiting out there to be found and then installed.

The capability for rapid exploration, learning and re-invention needs to become the enduring 'reset' (or the 'new normal'). This is the real shift to being prepared for whatever the future offers usor throws at us.

WHAT THIS MIGHT MEAN IN PRACTICE

- A focus on effectiveness and then efficiency, and both of these above expediency
- Developing your own people, the users, to do the work of exploration & learning
- Being driven by curiosity and possibility
- Being user-centric rather than solution-centric: 'What do our people need to make this happen?' NOT 'What solution seems to fit?'
- Galvanising people-leaders, to own change and be the pivotal delivery channels to reach all of your people
- Deeply understanding the current starting point, the 'as-is' organisation
- 'Radical candour', i.e. exceptional honesty with ourselves and each other that catalyses insight and breakthrough
- Openness to intuition, pattern-spotting, sensing etc. as complementary to data, logic and numbers
- Developing your people to prototype and experiment, and to understand how that is different from 'piloting'
- Engaging the wider population in substantial, and not cosmetic, roles in the process
- Agile style interventions that are short, frequent, regular, local and delivered in the business, and are all about the business

...and using **proven methods** for navigating through the process of discovery

SOME REAL EXAMPLES...

Using: Theory-U. A method for allowing patterns and possibilities to emerge and be tested.

Client: Europe's largest comms & media business.

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Using: Collaborative/Action Research. Learning together, driven by curiosity and experimentation.

Client: Communications infrastructure & engineering.

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Using: Appreciative Inquiry. Taking the best of what we do, however much of an exception, and amplifying it to become commonplace.

Client: Major Financial Services organisation.

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Using: L-UX (Leadership User-Experience). Finding what your people need from leadership and ensuring it is delivered.

Client: Established and exemplar pioneer in FinTech sector.

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EXAMPLE 01

Using: Theory-U. A method for allowing patterns and possibilities to emerge and be tested.

Client: Europe's largest comms & media business.

Challenge: Transformation, strategy alignment and cultural alignment - from product-centric to customer-centric.

Approach: Level by level, starting at the frontline of the business, a cross-section of employees facilitated Deeply Listening sessions to ask and to hear what people felt it would take for them to deliver a customer-centric organisation in real day-to-day practice. Immersive work shadowing also allowed for both observations and deeper reflections about how the organisation was currently focused otherwise than on the customers.

The powerful insights generated from this real-world data was then used in a two-day design conference to build a workshop format. This format was used by trained client staff to facilitate profound and transformational 'real' conversations of managers and people. This rolled back out towards the frontline, engaging each layer in engaging the next. In these Releasing Potential workplace-sessions real work was undertaken live as each manager worked with their people to address and resolve fundamental issues of customer-centric performance. A very different experience from uniform sheep-dip workshops.

"The results are speaking for themselves and straight away: buy-in, positive change and NPS up 9 points in a month."

"You have empowered every manager, team leader and the front-line, and they have embraced the responsibility with passion and real belief. This is the way forward."

"I feel that since this (Releasing Potential work) I am much more motivated and positive about being there for our customers. My productivity has improved and so has my attitude towards work."

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EXAMPLE 02

Using: Collaborative/Action Research. Learning together, driven by curiosity and experimentation.

Client: Communications infrastructure & engineering.

Challenge: Transforming to become an exemplar of engineering diversity and inclusion. Many more women were being recruited to the client's engineering roles but the environment and culture was not encouraging them to stay!

Approach: Something different from the client's typical installing of pre-designed solutions was needed, something which would not exacerbate an already 'us and them' culture in this masculine engineering environment. Our approach involved an uncompromisingly inquiry-based approach. Using some of the practices from Design Thinking and Collaborative Inquiry, cohorts of existing engineers in the business who represented the desired diversity were facilitated over 6-months to undertake their own immersive research. This was research into the 'lived-experience' of inclusion and exclusion in the business (an ethnography). The research phase led to the creation of hypotheses about how the organisation could be more inclusive. These hypotheses were tested in prototypes and experiments from which to learn and inform the organisation's D&I strategy.

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EXAMPLE 03

Using: Appreciative Inquiry. Taking the best of what we do, however much of an exception, and amplifying it to become commonplace.

Client: Major Financial Services organisation.

Challenge: Recognising that exceptional and desirable ways of working became possible in the bank in response to the pandemic: how could the bank learn from this exceptional experience and sustain the benefits beyond the circumstances of the pandemic?

Approach: Large numbers of employees were trained in virtual workshops to use the data-gathering methods of Appreciative Inquiry. They then set out as in-house researchers to interview as many of their colleagues as possible.

The data from these in-house researchers was collated, in interactive online and Miro facilitated sessions, into core principles to take forward in the organisation. The principles described the pre-conditions necessary for the exceptional to become the more consistent truth.

These core principles were then ratified in experiential large group online events of colleagues and are now being built into practice throughout the organisation and are being built into the approach to strategy for 2021.

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EXAMPLE 04

Using: L-UX (Leadership User-Experience). Finding what your people need from leadership and ensuring it is delivered.

Client: Established and exemplar pioneer in FinTech sector.

Challenge: Re-aligning leadership to deliver and maintaining pioneering agility whilst ensuring consistency in a rapidly growing business.

Approach: L-UX, Leadership User-Experience, is a means by which an organisation can shift leadership from being about descriptions of leaders' behaviour, mindsets etc and instead be directly about what leaders deliver to their people, the Users of Leadership, as real outcomes in the business.

We worked with the client organisation to help their people define what they needed from leadership in order to deliver the performance and culture required by their strategy. This was then defined as their five current 'Leadership Outcomes' that needed to be measurably delivered to their people.

Teams of people-leaders from the ExCo onwards worked together to design experiments and prototypes in ways of working that delivered their Leadership Outcomes to their people. This team-working approach was structured into Agile sprints in the workplace and the work day.

Each individual and each team had the freedom to work in whatever ways played to their strengths to deliver the required outcomes for their people - there was no company-wide prescription of one right way to be a leader.

As a consequence of the work, people leaders have greater clarity about what is expected of them and how they are performing against that leadership responsibility.

The approach has been felt to be so effective that it is now being used during an acquisition to create alignment across the newly integrated organisation.

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