



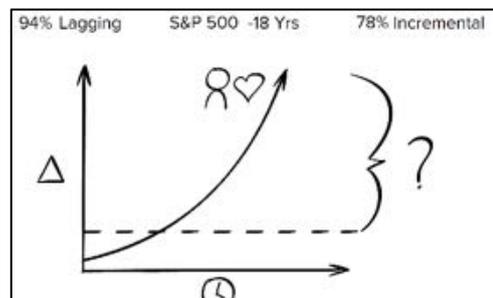
Adam Billing – Human-Centred Design and Innovation

In their presentations, Adam and Chris both included a number of common themes but from different perspectives: practical advice on what organisations can do to keep pace with changes in their business environments, creating a culture of fast failure, the need for and value of organisational learning, and the ubiquitous importance of leadership cultures and behaviours.

Reflecting on Adam’s presentation; I have used many of the practices of design thinking in my own work, but most of my knowledge has been somewhat informally acquired. So I was delighted to be at this session and hear such a clear description of design thinking which was jam-packed full of practical examples.

Setting the context

Adam kicked off his session by warning us that innovation is a big topic, and he was going to cover a lot in a short period of time. Throughout his presentation, Adam kept coming back to this diagram; it is typical of organisations that are struggling to keep pace with changing business needs, eg from new or disruptive business models, and new technologies.



PwC has assessed that innovation strategies are lagging in 94% of organisations. A typical organisation lifespan used to be 60 years; now it is 18 years. This means that organisations need to keep re-establishing their relevance in the market.

It has also been assessed that 78% of innovation spend is expended on incremental developments, which typically focus on process efficiencies, rather than focussing on bringing genuinely new products and services to the market.

Adam referred to these issues as the Relevance Gap; how do you make your organisation more relevant, and how do you move new ideas through your organisation? Adam’s presentation answered these questions structured around these 3 segments:

- A. A deep dive into an innovative toolset for ‘closing the gap’: Design Thinking
- B. Explore new ways of embedding these methods and habits in your culture
- C. “Going Digital” - the future of how innovation work is done

Segment A - A primer and deep-dive into Design Thinking

Adam started by asking us all what we understand by design thinking. Our knowledge included using rapid testing and learning, small group working, rapid iterations, and small multi-disciplinary teams.

He emphasised that the heart of design thinking is having empathy with our customers. Key to the methodology is to think about how we can gain empathy and uncover what they care about and value. He gave us the definition of design thinking from the CEO of IDEO (which Adam described as the “Godfather of human centred design”):

“Design thinking is about accelerating innovation to create better solutions to the challenges facing business and society. It starts with people – what we call human centred design – and applies the creative tools of design, like storytelling, prototyping, and experimentation to deliver new breakthrough innovations.”

It relies on the principle of taking risks, running prototypes, and fast failure.



In simple terms, all products and services developed using design thinking need to pass these tests:

- Desirability – people want it
- Feasibility – we can build it
- Viability – it will make money

A great deal of effort should be put into assessing the desirability of a potential new product or service. At the heart of this is developing that real understanding and empathy with our customers.

Adam provided us with this overview of design thinking methodology, and subsequently returned to this diagram as he took us through each step of the design thinking process:



1 – Field research

Field research is vitally important. Adam explained that one of the barriers to successful innovation is that many leaders have an expert bias, ie they think that they should know what their customers want, and are unwilling to invest in real field research or with real customers. There are also

significant barriers to getting away from previous, and often successful, ways of working and assumptions.

But how do you carry out field research? These are 5 methods that Adam recommends:



Adam gave us tips for some of these methods:

- When looking for workarounds, look for any time that you see someone using something in a way that it wasn't designed or where the user changes something, such as the lady using her bread slicing machine to open a medicine bottle.
- Gaining empathy for a patient in a hospital was done by giving him a video camera to record his experience. This uncovered his experience of how much of the time he was looking at the back of clipboards or the ceiling and lights.
- If you can't do direct observations, try learning from analogues. An example that Adam shared was observing motor racing pit crews as an analogue for an operating theatre. This led to the observation that the pit crew relied on sets of pre-packed kits for fixing common problems, and this approach was taken up by operating theatres.

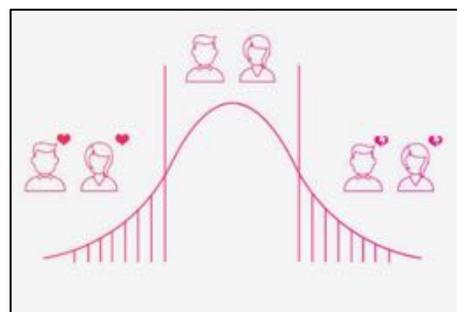
He explained that the primary purpose of field research is to gain insights into what people care about, and to generate many ideas for prototyping. He also emphasised how difficult it can be to get people to try these new methods, and the importance of stopping people from jumping to solutions before they have gained true insights into their customers.

A key tool in this data gathering is to develop empathy maps for different customer archetypes. Empathy maps go beyond what customers say and do, and establish what they are thinking and feeling.



He gave us a great example of putting this into practice: a fresh produce company wanted to know how their customers made their buying decisions. They carried out some customer observations and interviews. When one of the customers was looking at a produce display, she picked up a grape and then ate it. She then picked up a pack of raspberries and shook them. However, when asked, she said that she made her buying decision based on price. There was a clear disconnect between what she said and what she did. So it is critical to go beyond what people say, and establish what they do, think and feel.

But how do you start this process? Adam's recommendation is to start with extreme users, eg people who either love or hate your product/service.



These are the best customers to start with because they will have thought about it, they will have an emotional response, and they will certainly have something to say.



However, this doesn't mean that you should be limited by the thinking limitations of your customers. A great example is that the Bank of America developed a radically new proposition known as the "Keep the change programme". In this, they rounded up debit card payments and fed the difference to a savings account. This was a blockbuster innovation that led to a massive increase in savings, and the popularity of the service.

2 – Form insights

The main purpose of this stage is to discover what people care about. Sometimes this is done by following our hunches, eg "I wonder if" or "How would look/feel?". These types of question suggest that you are uncovering insights.

A very powerful example that I am sure we will all remember was the example of CT scanners for children. Children found repeated CT scans to be a scary and unpleasant experience, and typically 90% of children needed sedation to go through the scanner.

The data gathering and insight process included visiting the homes of children who have chronic problems and repeated CT scans. By comparing different children's bedrooms, the team identified

that these children are often missing out on the excitement and adventures experienced by their siblings.

This led to the CT scans being completely re-contextualised into an adventure. The children were



given adventure books to read in advance of the procedure, the appointment letter was re-designed like a scroll, the staff and children dress as pirates, and the language in the scanning room was transformed.

This changed the children’s experience so that they look forward to the scan and sedation rates dropped to <10%.

Adam then gave us a brilliant little exercise to uncover learning about our colleagues in the room. He asked us to work in pairs, and for our colleague to come up with insights about us just based on the contents of our purses/wallets. This can be backed up by one simple question - “Why is this important to you”? We discovered this to be so simple, but such a powerful exercise of great charm and depth (I definitely now have that exercise tucked away in my back pocket!).

Insight:

I wonder if this means that people like (my partner) really value _____ because _____

3 – Focus the challenge

We now need to carry out some convergent thinking to focus down the many insights that we will have gleaned. A top tip at this point is to simply re-phrase the insight into a question:

how opens up possibilities	might free from judgement	we let’s do this together
--------------------------------------	-------------------------------------	-------------------------------------

In the sick kids example, that simple re-phrasing was to ask “How might we help sick kids get a bit more adventure into their daily lives?”.

4 – Generate ideas

As in most idea generation processes, the aim here is to create quantity of ideas rather than quality. I am sure that we all have ground rules for our own idea generation processes, but these are Adam’s rules.

The 7 rules of effective brainstorming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• defer judgment• encourage wild ideas• build on the ideas of others• stay focussed on the topic• one conversation at a time• be visual• go for quantity
---	--

He also showed us a video of a team generating ideas for new bath toys. We shared our own observations about the team in the video, eg:

- The team members were all standing up, leading to a lot of energy.
- There was lots of positive building on each other's ideas.
- They gave time for each person to speak without talking over each other.
- There was a clear topic.
- They used post-its to draw pictures to describe their ideas, eg "Too hot Henry".
- They were given time to explain their ideas.
- The facilitator held back, but also created pace and structure.
- They celebrated success at the end.

Adam made the point that while this presentation was about design thinking, successful organisations also bring these ways of working into their everyday culture.

5 - Prototyping

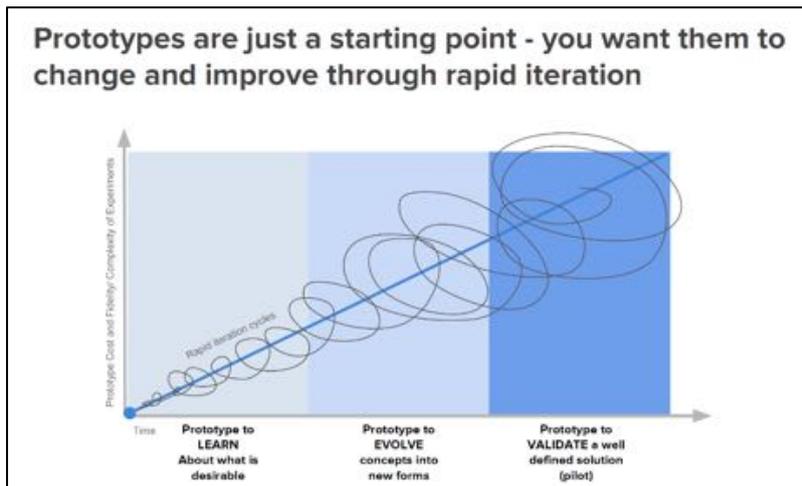
<p>Why prototype?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get fast feedback for iterations• Identify flaws while they are cheap and easy to fix• Accelerate time to launch• "Build to think"	<p>The key philosophy behind prototyping is to "Fail fast to succeed sooner". This is primarily done by using low cost low risk experiments to try out different ideas.</p>
--	---

Adam emphasised the need to build to think, ie build prototypes to test ideas; prototyping is not about building the final solution. He then suggested these main methods for prototyping:



You can get creative about developing prototypes. For example, he showed us a video that looked like a person talking on a mobile phone. In reality it was someone holding a foam board in front of them, with a cut out designed to replicate a mobile phone screen.

Adam emphasised that when developing prototypes, it is vitally important to list and test the assumptions you are making, eg what are people going to do, and how are they going to use the new product/service? In the Skip restaurant app example, some of the assumptions included that cafes would want to use the app, that people would know in the morning what they would want for lunch, and that people would feel comfortable with walking to the front of a queue to collect their pre-order. To test one of these, a team member stood in front of an office at the start of the day and asked incoming people if they knew what they wanted for lunch that day. Typically, people did not know, and this was a great example of fast failure before a single line of code was written.



Adam made the point that, over time, prototypes become more robust. When prototyping we need to be prepared to sacrifice many of our ideas and concepts.

Towards the end of prototyping, we need to move towards developing real pilots which incorporate testing of the final solution.

Adam shared these key habits and mindsets that underpin the design thinking process:

<p>Empathy Empathy for the people you are designing for – focusing on what they think and feel, not just what they say.</p> 	<p>Show Don't Tell Communicate your vision in an impactful and meaningful way by creating experiences, using illustrative visuals, and telling good stories.</p> 	<p>Radical Collaboration Bring together innovators with varied backgrounds and viewpoints. Enable breakthrough insights and solutions to emerge from the diversity.</p> 
<p>Embrace Experimentation Prototyping is not simply a way to validate your idea - We build to think and learn.</p> 	<p>Be Mindful of Process Stay keenly aware of what stage of the design process you are engaged in</p> 	<p>Bias Toward Action Bias toward doing and making over thinking and meeting. Stop talking, and start doing!!</p> 

Source: Method & School

In response to an audience Q&A, he finished with two top tips:

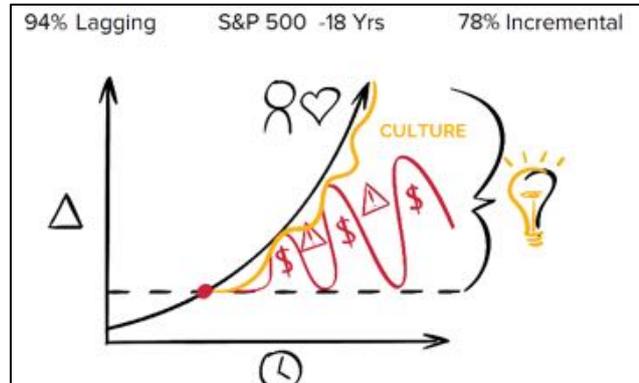
- Bring the end users in early and involve them all of the way through the process.
- Develop the minimal viable product to test the new product in the market place.

We then broke for coffee with the promise of returning to hear how to introduce these methods into our own organisations.

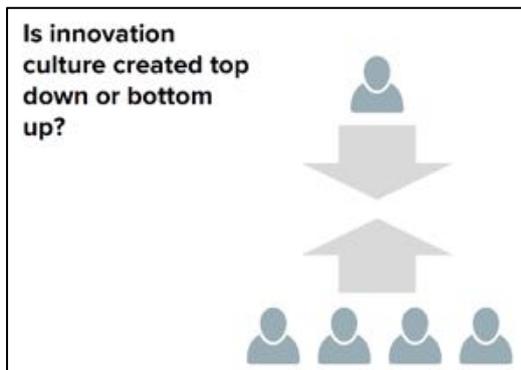
Segment B – Exploring new ways of embedding these methods and habits in your culture

After the break, Adam welcomed us back with a reminder about the innovation gap, and both the damage and opportunity that this provides for our organisations.

Traditionally, when organisations start to recognise that they are diverging from their users’ needs, they call in the consultants. This can lead to solutions being “done to” the organisation, and once a solution is in place, the expertise walks out of the door.



This approach might also be combined with sending people in the organisation through training, but this often does not deliver the ROI because the individuals return to a culture that hasn’t changed and isn’t ready for these new ways of working.



What organisations need to do is to develop a truly strategic core capability for design thinking, and for this to become business as usual.

Adam posed a question about whether innovation is driven top-down or bottom-up. His view is that it is both: the top of the organisation needs to give permission to people lower down in the organisation to develop their ideas, and the leaders need to be involved and provide support.

He emphasised that three components need to be in place to achieve an innovation culture:

1. Leaders need to understand the desired culture, why it matters, and be rewarded for achieving the change.
2. There needs to be broad awareness across the organisation, which can be achieved through training, away days and webinars.
3. Design thinking needs to be applied to real work so that people start seeing success stories in the real world.



Adam shared his top tips for leadership behaviours in an innovation culture:

- Make it safe and provide air-cover – this new culture puts people at risk of looking bad, so you need to protect them, eg “If it fails I will take the blame; if it succeeds they will take the credit”.
- Nurture insights and instincts, avoid asking for proof too early – it is important to not keep focusing on the business case for any ideas. If an idea is genuinely new, it is unproveable, so it is not possible to do a business case
- Ask for simple mock ups, and provide feedback accordingly – Adam’s top tip for a feedback process is “I like, I like, I wonder”. Being a devil’s advocate is not helpful!
- Be humble - avoid leading with ideas or assumptions; lead with curiosity.
- Identify the catalysts in your organization and support them – being able to identify and support the catalysts will make a huge difference.

Segment C - “Going Digital” - the future of how innovation work is done

When scaling up to create innovation cultures in large organisations, there are a number of challenges:

- Teams struggle to apply design thinking after training workshops.
- Internal catalysts need to build confidence.
- There is significant cost and hassle of convening the diverse teams required for more continuous innovation work.
- It is difficult to keep distributed teams on track without constant external support.

In response to this challenge, Adam and his team have developed different ways of working and an on-line platform (Sprintbase) to support distributed organisations. Sprintbase takes people through the design thinking process in a structure way, and has demonstrated that it is possible to make a step change in innovation when you empower people and provide appropriate tools to support them.

One of the most surprising outcomes from the work so far carried out using Sprintbase is the exceptional creativity that people have used to develop ideas when empowered to do so.

Despite some people’s reservations, Adam firmly believes that innovation can be done digitally, and in many cases it is an advantage to go that route.

Advantages of ‘going digital’

1. Valuable voices get heard
2. Introverts unleashed
3. Flexible teams and timeframes
4. Experimentation happens and more ideas get explored
5. Newly-trained leaders getting results



Adam completed his presentation by presenting this virtuous circle to implementing the culture change. It starts with leadership commitment, which leads to organisational impact, which leads to shared success stories, which leads to greater leadership confidence and commitment etc etc.

Chris Nel

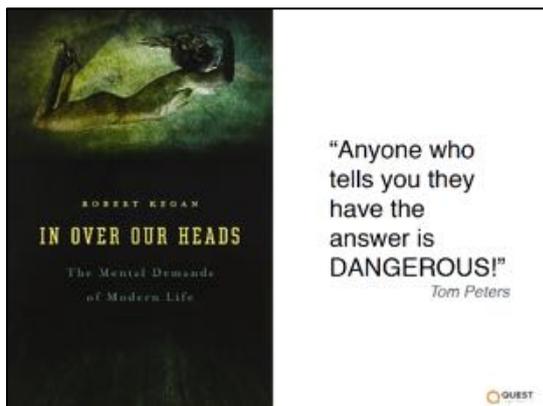
Leading Change and Adaptive Capability

Chatting with Chris before the conference, I was delighted to find that we had some experiences in common. This led to a very happy few minutes reminiscing with Chris about our experiences onboard ships during [naval gunfire support](#) missions and exercises; with Chris working on the operational side and my role being to carry out weapon system performance analysis. Happy Days!

Anyway, enough of this reminiscing Chris clearly demonstrated throughout his session how his very challenging experiences of leadership during his military career had given him some great learning and insights into organisational and team performance, in particular about how teams learn, adapt and improve. Throughout his presentation, Chris brought his methods to life by interweaving examples from working with organisations throughout his career; as Bob said in his introduction, Chris clearly came across as both a man of action and a thinker.

What does successful change look like?

Chris kicked off his session by emphasising how we all have change at the heart of our lives; so we all need to become more successful at change. But, why can some organisations adapt and some not?



Chris is with Tom Peters on this in that there is no single answer to this question, but would spend the session talking about change that works and things that can go wrong, ie Adaptive Capability.

In many organisations, the word “change” strikes fear into our hearts. However, this can be overcome by building capability into our organisations so that change and adapting to it becomes embedded in the culture.

Chris’ own consultancy goes as far as to say that *“We believe ... the only sustainable competitive advantage an organisation can have is its ‘Adaptive Capability’. That is why we are dedicated to developing this ability in our clients.”*

We can develop a product or service, but they will eventually become redundant. However, the ability to be adaptive is needed for ever.

Adaptive Capability starts with an Adaptive Intent

Chris gave us some examples of “Adaptive Intent” in different organisations, such as:

- Be more vigilant and proactive in order to deliver stronger, more profitable growth in our market that is both volatile and highly competitive? (Tech start up).
- React faster than our competitors to market disruption and regulatory demands? (Financial services).

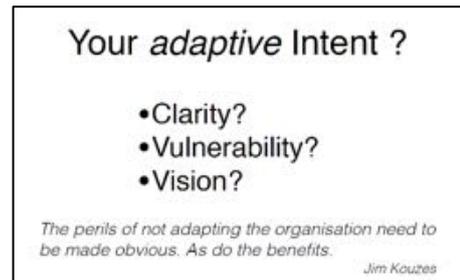
- Develop a culture that delivers competitive advantage not through undercutting rates but by contrasting our service provision to that of our competitors? (Financial services).
- 1+1 = 3 not 1. Harmonise the processes and practices of two successful businesses (Post merger Aero engineering).

He emphasised the importance of starting with a diagnostic and creating sufficient safety so that senior leaders can acknowledge that there are problems and accept their own vulnerability.

Chris then invited us to think about our own organisations and have table group discussions about the Adaptive Intent for our own change challenge.

He gave us this 3-point framework for describing our Adaptive Intent.

In Chris' experience, one (bad) feature of many management cultures is the unwillingness to admit vulnerabilities – *"If they can't see it, we can't help them"*. He put particular emphasis on the need to uncover leaders' vulnerabilities, and where there is resistance to doing this, he works hard to uncover these, typically using an investigative process such as diagnostic interviews.



Adaptive Capability emerged from research into a major military failure

The shooting down of Iran Air 655 led to a large tranche of research into the underlying causes; what went wrong in USS Vincennes' Ops Room of 18 people, that led to this catastrophic loss?



A number of different factors emerged.

One of the challenges of military operations is that on any one day the personnel can be deployed to 3 different types of soldiering:

1. Aid operations
2. Peace keeping/making
3. War fighting

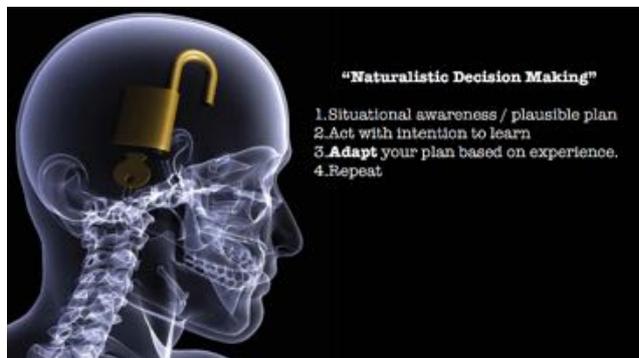
It is stretching the ability of the military to train people in all of these types of operations, and I think that we can all see that it would stretch the capability of individual personnel to switch between the different mindsets and behaviours needed.

This situation happens in all different sectors and organisations, and leads to “scenario fulfilment”; ie when we are under pressure, confused and our brains are over-loaded, we revert to what we know and have experienced before.

We also tend to ignore contradictory information.



So, in the case of the USS Vincennes, the crew had recently been practising their defence against missile attacks, so they were primed to look for missiles. Missiles have certain flight characteristics, but under pressure the crew did not recognise that the flight was too slow, too high, or that it was not dipping towards them as a potential target, ie they discounted the contradictory data.



In response to this research, Gary Klein developed the concept of “Naturalistic Decision Making”, which was then adopted by the Army.

Fundamental to this process is to follow a plausible plan based on your best estimates, and not strive for or believe that you have a perfect plan.

Chris then went a little deeper into each of the four steps in naturalistic decision making:

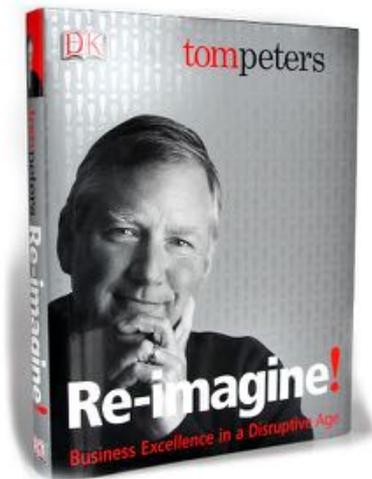
1. **Situational awareness / plausible plan** – strive to see what’s going on, what is in the gaps, what is on the horizon.
2. **Act with intention to learn** – not take action to prove that “I got it right”, not “Aren’t I clever”. We need to re-wire people’s brains to “What have I learned by trying”.
3. **Adapt your plan based on experience** – the mindset needs to be “I’ve tried something, I’ve learned something, and now I’m going to adapt my plan”. If you are implementing this approach, one of the top tips is to challenge anyone who doesn’t change or modify their original plan based on their actions in step 2.
4. **Repeat** – ie “the next plan is”.

Chris then challenged us by saying that this approach looks easy, but asked for our ideas about where it goes wrong. Answers from the floor included:

- The goal posts change.
- The culture doesn’t support it – eg people will jump from step 1 to 3, and will hide from admitting that they don’t know the answers. Accepting that your original plan is flawed does not make you a bad leader; bad leadership is sticking to a bad plan.

What is Adaptive Capability?

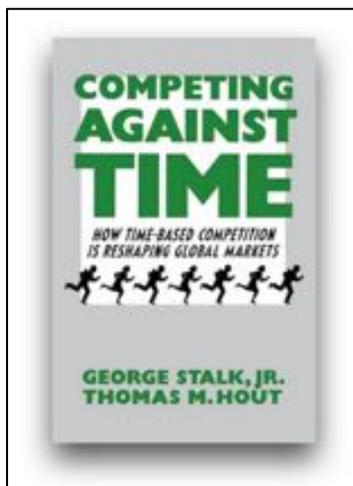
In his book, Re-imagine, Tom Peters proposed that Leaders need to develop their environmental awareness and learning, as well as their leadership skills.



Leaders need to be considering how big is their and their organisation's change appetite, and what will the new world be like? It also needs leaders who develop exemplary relationships with their teams and colleagues. Chris used [Transaction Analysis](#) as a model for describing Adult-Adult relationships and interactions, and therefore increasing the likelihood that people will engage and adopt change.

Chris then took us through his top methods and tips for developing capability in each of these three dimensions.

1 - Adaptive capability: Developing awareness



In their book "Competing Against Time", Stalk and Hout identify that most products and services are actually only receiving value for 0.05 - 5% of the time they are in the value delivery stream of your business. The majority of corporate effort is spent on control and reporting processes.

Chris gave us the example of a motor claims company that took 27 days to process each claim. The vast majority of this time was spent with the claim either waiting to be processed, or in internal controls and quality assurance, eg seven people were checking the claim before it was paid.

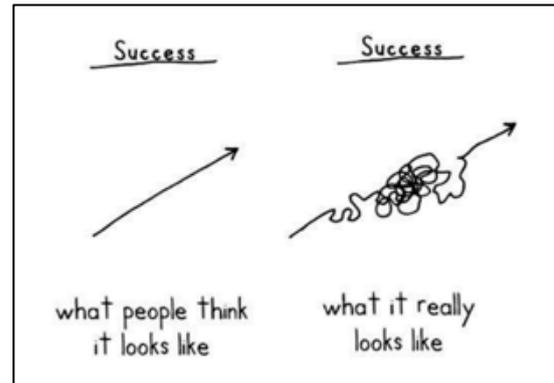
This business was then overtaken by a new-entrant disrupter who sent loss adjusters out on the road to authorise immediate claims within hours. Chris also gave the

examples of other businesses which had not adapted to environmental changes, eg Kodak, Blockbuster, Woolworths and Philips.

Pursuing environmental awareness is core to developing a business strategy, and Chris gave us a list of the different dimensions to use when carrying out an environmental review:

- Geopolitical / Trade
- Legal / Regulatory
- Technological
- Demographic
- Competitor activity/new entry
- Supplier/buyer activity
- Product / service substitution.

He also emphasised that many people have the mistaken view that change progresses in a linear manner, whereas in reality change is typically very messy, and there need to be many course adjustments on the way to a successful outcome.



Developing awareness needs to be done separately by individuals and teams.

At an individual level, we are all influenced by a number of factors including our values, beliefs, feelings, instincts, observations, experiences and assumptions, and we should all adopt methods to uncover how these are influencing our ability to “see” the environment.



At a team level we can use frameworks such as [Porter's Five Forces Analysis](#) to give us a structured way of assessing our environment. [Author's note – the link takes you to a description on the BusinessBalls.com – this is one of my favourite websites for business models and frameworks!].

Chris' made the point that there are a number of good models for environmental scanning, and it is not so important which model you use, but much more important to do it well and avoid overlooking or ignoring key information. He also emphasised the value of bringing the team together to carry out these analyses, both to ensure a diversity of perspectives and to help create a [guiding coalition](#) for change.

2 - Adaptive capability: Leadership

Chris gave us this model of leadership, and shared the definition of leadership from Packard’s “The Pyramid Climbers”:

“Leadership is the art of inspiring others to want to strive for something that you are convinced should be done.”

Or put another way we’re here to help people deliver the result that the organisation needs, and get people to want to do something through a personal or emotional commitment.



<u>The Critical Ratio</u>	
Management	Leadership
"To handle ..."	"To guide ..."
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Organising • Staffing • Budgeting • Controlling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging • Inspiring • Enabling • Modeling • Encouraging

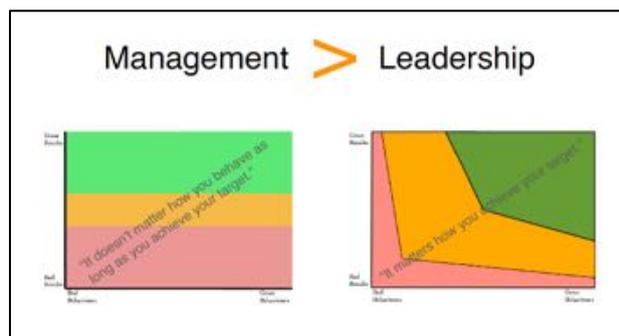
Chris went on to emphasise the “Critical Ratio” for leaders to understand the proportion of their time that they are spending on management tasks rather than leadership activities. He again emphasised that it doesn’t matter which leadership framework you use, but it is important to be pragmatic, stick with it, and don’t keep changing it.

He noted that in many organisations, leaders spend disproportionate amounts of time in management tasks, typically driven by the need to control financial leakage. He also highlighted one of the difficulties in switching to leadership activities, in that many of these are intangible, and it is often much more difficult to assess their value rather than the much more tangible management tasks.

Chris then invited us to assess the Critical Ratio in our own organisations ie, are we over-managed or under-led?

He went on to share some of his own philosophy about leadership development, beginning with his firm belief that leadership is about having a conviction to change something. Leaders are not born; everyone can improve their leadership skills, and we shouldn’t confuse seniority with leadership. He cited the example of [Mairead Corrigan](#) who founded the Northern Ireland Peace Movement, and went on to win a [Nobel Peace Prize](#). She didn’t see herself as a leader but did deliver extraordinary leadership in the most difficult circumstances.

Taking the Critical Ratio a step further, Chris emphasised the need for leaders to differentiate between their results and how they go about it. Ultimately, are organisations prepared to put as much emphasis on behaviours as well as results when we are assessing leadership performance?



He then introduced us to the Sigmoid Curve. In this context the blue curve is showing the growth of an organisation or new business.

Point A is a critical point; at this point and after a period of significant growth, people are usually feeling pretty good, they may feel it is easy, and even be feeling smug. But at this point it is critical to take stock and use adaptive leadership to avoid the danger of failing to adapt to (eg) changing market conditions, competitor responses, internal inertia etc etc.



At this point, many people show resistance to change and just don't see the need to be doing anything differently.

This resistance is typically driven by one of four emotions:

Management > Leadership

"Resistance to change is motivated by one of 4 emotions":

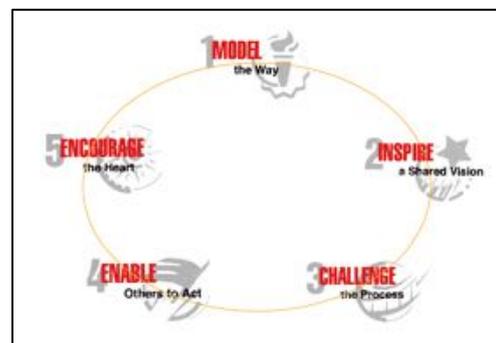
1. Fear
2. Misunderstanding
3. Drawbacks
4. Indifference

J. Rank, V. Pace & M. Freese. "Three Avenues for Future Research on Creativity, Innovation and Initiative." Jnl App Psychology Sept 2004

1. They **fear** they won't have a job as a result of the change.
2. They **misunderstand** what you are saying.
3. They have **spotted a drawback** that you haven't seen. The way to overcome this one is to act with intention to learn.
4. They **don't care** what happens in the organisation, and they may be quite willing to prove you wrong.

To develop leaders, Chris and his team use the leadership framework developed by Kouzes and Posner, which is described in "The Leadership Challenge". Chris also uses the LPI (Leadership Practices Inventory) assessment to develop and coach leaders. The five practices espoused by Kouzes and Posner provide a robust framework for assessing and developing adaptive and change leadership:

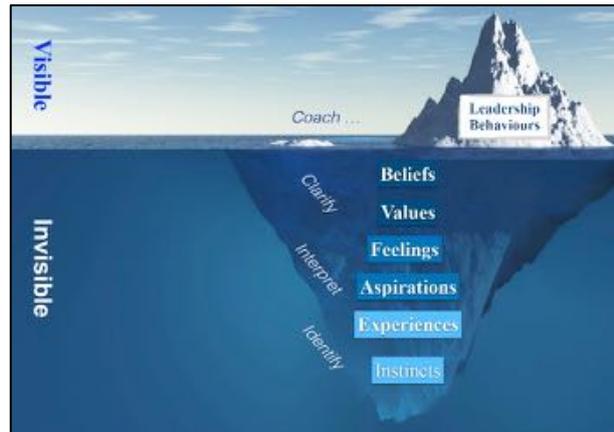
1. **Model the Way** – leaders need to be consistent in what they say and do. Establishing and maintaining credibility is key.
2. **Inspire** – focus on understanding, agreeing with and caring for your team.
3. **Challenge** – typical challenges are "What has got to change?", "What would be a better way?", "What is wrong with?", "How are we going to be affected by?".
4. **Enable** – leaders need to provide training, resources, and increase the belief that we are going to deliver and be successful.
5. **Encourage** – there is a trick here in understanding and implementing ways to recognise people that is meaningful to them.



Chris emphasised that he sees his role as a coach in shaping visible leadership behaviours, and aligning these with the right behaviours for that organisation.

But he also works to help the individual to uncover their own values and beliefs, and to understand how these align with the leadership required in their organisation.

He shared his view that it is essential for the wider team to be fully engaged and supporting the vision and plan. Therefore, if the leader changes, the overall mission will continue.



In answer to a question from the floor, Chris also shared his belief that it is better to develop leaders from within rather than hire from outside. The exception is where a conscious decision is made to fill a critical skills gap. He has observed that too little attention is paid to the selection of leaders, and there is too much willingness to hand the process over to headhunters.

3 - Adaptive capability: Learning

Chris then moved on to the third leg of adaptive capability, ie Learning.



He shared the really powerful example of team learning, as used by the Red Arrows. Many of us will remember seeing this documentary and the extraordinarily structured and robust post-exercise review and learning sessions.

He reminded us how children learn to walk by falling over (ie failing) many times. However, we start training not to do this in school and this continues into our organisational lives. We stop believing in the power of trying, failing and learning to develop our own and our organisation's capabilities.

He reminded us how children learn to walk by falling over (ie failing) many times. However, we start training not to do this in school and this

Chris demonstrated how important this was to him personally, by sharing the story that he had chosen his son's school based on their commitment that "Curiosity is the most important trait that we want to develop in your children".



He also gave us the example of Jamie Dimon, and his commitment to a learning culture. This was his response to the question "What is your most important lesson?"

Chris shared the military belief that leadership practices need to be simple to learn, and once learnt there has to be an immediate opportunity to put them into practice.

Chris clearly has a really strong belief in the power of organisational learning, and he invited us to discuss how effective learning is in our own organisations.

He wrapped up by discussing the example of [Roger Allsop](#); he is 70 years old and has the record for being the oldest man to swim the Channel.

Chris made the point that Roger spent many months planning, talking about the swim and raising sponsorship; however there comes a moment when you just have to dive in and get on with it.



Sally Cross

Founder of Engage for Growth – Unleashing the potential of people, teams and organisations

sally.cross@engageforgrowth.com

www.engageforgrowth.com

+44 (0) 7970 287009