

AMY BRANN AND DR KAREN MOLONEY

**EMOTIONAL CAPITAL, NEUROPLASTICITY AND THE FUTURE OF WORK**

THURSDAY 15TH MARCH 2018 | ROYAL GARDEN HOTEL, LONDON



### Dr Karen Moloney

#### **Lyrical Leadership: The secret of building emotional capital**

Karen shared her ideas on demographics, talent, the building of emotional capital and culture change. She also touched on one of her interests, male and female leadership styles, the impact of technology on business models and strategic alignment in complex matrix organisations. She has a passion for human difference and takes a hard and critical look at issues such as diversity and challenged a few management myths along the way.

She started her talk with a short Musical Mashup and an introduction to the power of smiling, and how so many musicals leave people feeling upbeat. She then moved on to explore the typical business world, she shared some of the dynamics in play for poets and musicians, introducing the many processes involved in writing a play, or writing lyrics and music, and how all these can come together in a magical way, to create great Musicals. In exploring this, she highlighted the organisational complexity, taking the idea from 'page-to-stage' for a musical where this time can range from 3 to 10 years, and in that time, how does the project stay funded and resourced in what is inevitably a dynamic, creative and to a large extent, a highly unpredictable endeavour?

For the actors involved, or should we say singers, or indeed dancers, probably the most helpful term is artists' that have the ability to sing, dance on moving conveyor belts, oh and act! Karen went on to highlight that the size of Musical Theatre sector (£400M in London alone in 2016) is an important contributor to public purse. This sector is facing major talent challenges due to skill shortages as the pipeline of talent has not been well managed in recent years.

(Special note: If you would like to read the 2017 House of Lords report on this issue 'Skills for theatre: Developing the pipeline of talent' click here <https://goo.gl/Y1a9rr> )

Reflecting on her early business experience, she recalled how she was supporting the City and Guilds (Timber Sector) and in one of her early meetings, she realised that of the 10 men she was meeting, they only had 93 fingers between them. Curious about this observation, she asked, why. To her amazement, the response was, *'well this is what happens in the timber trade, occupational hazard and when something goes wrong, you lose a digit or two'*. From that point in time, Karen realised Leadership teams can benefit from external help, and that's what she was going to provide. Over the years, Karen came to realise, Leadership teams in every industry face similar challenges, and to some extent, similar journeys.

Finding the right people for the current opportunities | Building a talent alchemist that understands 'difference' can be critical | Spotting and sizing business opportunities that others may miss | Facing challenges, as for sure they will come when least expected | Coping with the post-truth era, where societal influences are being exerted through emotional connection, often disconnected from facts. | Trusting others | Facing difficulties alone as you go higher |

Telling stories while paying attention to the rules of rhetoric (Integrating pathos, logos, ethos within the stories to have the desired impact) | Employing outliers, so you do not fall into the trap of employing others 'just like me' | Navigating gender issues in an effective and efficient manner, avoiding the traps. | Surfacing unconscious bias and appreciating what is and is not possible to control | Hang In there, when the times get tough, for they will for each and every one of us!

**To bring this to life, Karen introduced a fictional character called Sandeep, and we explored Sandeep's story through Musical Theatre**

**The need to hire good people:** At the end of the day, organisations aren't run by spreadsheets, and a qualification is not always the indicator that a person that can contribute in the way organisations' need. Using the lyrics of the Beatles song '*Baby you can drive my car*' highlighting the following: '*But I've found a driver and that's a start...*'

**The job is to mix, meddle, and arrange chemistry:** Being a talent alchemist, understanding the 'full package' doesn't exist in just one person. Leading teams from the front, or from within, as is needed in the moment. In fact, becoming an amateur psychologist is almost what Sandeep needs to become. Karen used the Stephen Sondheim demo '*Anyone can whistle*' to make the point you might be very successful at some things, but not everything.

**Finding and seizing opportunities:** As we progress in our career, we become under increasing pressure to add value in new ways. We start to realise opportunities don't **always come from where we would expect**. We need to be constantly vigilant, watch for the '**weak signals**' and look for connections which could be easily overlooked. One way to support this is to network outside his normal sector, as that is where novel connections will likely be found. Karen used the rather gruesome story of *Sweeney Todd*. The particular scene is called '*Priest*' – where Michael Ball and Imelda Staunton are discussing 'between the lines', alternative sources of 'meat' for the pies, very enterprising indeed!

**Facing challenges (typical age this occurs is 39 to 43 years old):** In this story, he is overlooked for promotion, he has made some mistakes, the resources he uses and deploys, are being watched. At this point it is quite possible one can lose confidence. In the research by Amy Cuddy, Amy highlights how your body language can influence how others see you. It can also influence how you see yourself!!! If you are curious, have a look here. Amy Cuddy (**Your body language may shape who you are**) TED Talk <https://goo.gl/XcY39K> 'Fake it to feel it'. Back to the world of Musicals: '*Whistle happy and I am*' and '*For when I fool the people I fear, I fool myself as well*' from '*The King and I*'.

**Taking feedback:** Karen shared how research has shown that citizens from The Netherlands and Scandinavia are more able to take and learn from feedback, than their UK counterparts. In the case of Sandeep, the story unfolds, and he is told he is not being very strategic. It's a tough message, and his father says it's a gift, for Sandeep, it didn't feel that way. The musical reference we then watched was Hamilton, and the song '**Aaron Burr**'. *'Talk less smile more, don't tell people what you are in it for'*

Sandeep decides to move on to a new job, and to do so, he needs to be able to explain what he stands for. Having the ability to explain yourself is a vital capability when working with new teams, and it's a very effective shortcut to on boarding. The Musical used here was 'Funny Girl' showing the scene when Barbara Streisand was trying to approach the producers and share what she stood for.

Karen shared there are three 'forms of being' we have in each of us that will influence how we are able to 'take' feedback. Self-confidence, Self-assurance and Self-esteem. The latter often being established early in life by people who loved and showed you, you're worthy.

**Coping with the post-truth Era:** Sandeep was out of his depth (white water, turbulent time) and now he realised leaders can no longer use their positional power, they need to use their 'soft' power. The musical to capture these thoughts was '**It's a puzzlement**' from The King and I. Why might this be so, well its due to our current VUCA era (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of general conditions and situations).

**Trusting others:** Now becomes critical, which means we need to be able to form deeper relationship with people, once again "The King and I" comes into play, '**It's a puzzlement**' and part of the lyric, *'Unless somebody trusts somebody'*

**Facing difficulties alone:** Some decisions that others don't want to endorse will need to be taken by Sandeep. His team will see him under siege, will they leave him to stand alone? If he stands strong, the first follower will surely arrive. The musical used here was Carousel '**When you walk through a storm | Hold your head up high | And don't be afraid of the dark**'

**Telling stories:** At this point Karen shared three different items, a song, a film and a musical. '**Ode to Billie Joe**' recorded by Bobbie Gentry as an example of how to share with impact. The challenge always being to deliver with impact and not to water down the power of language. The power of language was captured by the film, '**Darkest Hour**' and the '**weaponisation**' of it. The final part of this trio are the rules of rhetoric, for broader communications where Logos, Pathos and Ethos come into play. The musical '**West Side Story**' and the scene where the gang were rehearsing how they would talk with officer Krupke.

**Employing outliers:** Understanding the need for some 'new blood', wanting to bring in someone who is different from the rest! For this the musical '**La La Land**' audition – '**Fools Who Dream**' performed by Emma Stone - *'Here's to the ones who dream. Foolish as they may seem...'*

**Navigating sex and gender issues:** Sandeep, in our story is accused of faulting an employee. At this point he starts to realise that knowing how to treat people who aren't like us is quite complex. Part

of the challenge is we make assumptions that everyone 'is like us' so this can mean we don't always consider others perspective. The musical that came to play was '*My Fair Lady*', Lyrics from '*Hymn to Him*' – showing how Rex Harrison remains confused by Women. The challenge for us all '**How will we open up our minds and hearts, for this will be needed?**'

**Controlling our EGO:** For Sandeep, his reputation is growing, he gets promoted, starts to feel and act differently. Now this is where EGO may come into play. The musical '*The Book of Mormon*' '*I've always had the hope ...you and me. But mostly me...*' came to play

**Hanging in there:** At this point Sandeep has dealt with many challenges, he is resilient as he is still in play. The point here is sometimes, you just need to hold on till the right opportunity emerges. Enter '*Saturday Night Fever*' and '*Stayin' Alive*' by the Bee Gees.

**To close: Leaderships can be learned, Musical theatre rocks, the calibre of business leaders can be measured by 'the number of fingers' left on their hands.**

**Book Reference:**

**Karen is currently preparing a book on the future of work and writing a novel**

## **Amy Brann**

### **Synaptic Potential: People strategies**

Amy explored the essential building blocks of change and explained the fascinating science that shapes our decisions and behaviours daily. Amy's sessions were designed to improve our knowledge of how learning happens in the brain, which in turn will have positive ripple effects throughout our organisations and deliver returns for years to come. Delegates were able to take away the key areas of neuroscience we need to be aware of and be empowered to develop the behavioural flexibility of themselves and their peers.

To start the talk, Amy shared a story of a GP friend of hers. This friend had been dealing with some of the most challenging cases you could imagine in terms of social and health care issues. There was one occasion where she went beyond the call of what others may have done, following her instinct. She felt a relatively minor symptom a patient had, may actually be more serious than it seemed. It transpired her action saved this person's life as the severity of the patient's condition became clear, only after further investigation by the hospital medical staff. When the patient learnt of their fortunate encounter with Amy's friend, they contacted her to say, thank you for saving her life. This profound experience of someone saying thank you, has positively influenced Amy's friend to continue her great work. The passionate way Amy shared her friends personal story, clearly impacted the people in the room. The power and longevity of a genuine thank you, is not to be underestimated.

One area Amy specialises in is Neuroscience and she uses many props to share the core points she wanted to get across to those in the room. The first exercise was a 'volunteer' to come to the stage and to juggle just three balls. It was clear unless you are already skilled at this, this was not so straightforward. She made the point that if one practices long enough, many develop the capability to juggle the three balls successfully. This was to set the stage for sharing some of the research findings where this same task was set for a number of students and their brains were scanned before and after they had learnt to juggle. What was found as a result of learning to juggling, were changes in the density of the white matter of the brain. This meant the number of synaptic connections at back of brain (above the upper neck) had increased in only 6 weeks. Similar studies such as learning 'The knowledge' for London Taxi drivers, also is known to result in significant changes in the hippocampi.

**The conclusion 'What we do, will physically shape our brains, resulting in structural changes'**

What might the implications be for the organisation? Research has shown, environmental conditions can influence the probability for those that have a predisposition towards stress, to become even more stressed. The ways to try and counter this may include Mindfulness, as this can help. The idea is to reduce Cortisol levels which we know is achieved when the routine of mindfulness is practiced. Amy also shared how, just having two or more people being together, engaged in non-judgmental dialogue can have the same effect of reducing Cortisol levels. Another example of Neuroplasticity is illustrated by the research of Dr Edward Taub who spent many years exploring Stroke rehabilitation. He discovered, if a patient has a 'paralysed' left arm, then he would strap-up and immobilise the 'good' right arm and over time, the patient was able to find ways to move the 'paralysed' arm, the brain was 'updating itself' to enable new areas of the brain to instigate the new physical movement!

Untimely this is about behavioural change. Amy shared a simple structure, to be used to help maximise the success of any behavioural change initiative.

**Behavioural Breakdown:** This is about capturing at the most detailed level, the behavioural changes you are looking for. To make the point about the level of detail, she described all the movements one needs to take to get tea from a cupboard and make a cup of tea. When you capture the detail, it was quite amazing how many separate yet necessary dependant steps there are.

**Problem Solving:** This is about considering what could go wrong at each step, and what one could do to mitigate that problem from occurring, this was more about rehearsal, rehearsing what you did not want to occur.

**Monitoring:** This was about paying attention to the progress (even if slow) that was made, to positively reinforce and acknowledge when positive developments were being made. If no progress or negative outcomes were being observed, reflect, learn and adjust accordingly. Is it really that simple? Well no, because we have a tendency to get in our own way much of the time! **The Problem:** We have a tendency to focus on the '**Doers**' not the '**Thinkers**'. We put people in **distracting environments**. This is known to limit our decision-making capacity, due to cognitive overload, and our brains become aware, oh no, it's Monday Morning once more!!!

**The Future:** Amy asked the room to consider were any of our organisations currently using machine learning or discussing the possibility of using machine learning? What might be the implications given our better understanding? She introduced a great framework called 'Brain Suckers', the three things when not in their optimal states will cause cognitive drain, sucking the energy out of our brains!!! **The Brain Suckers:** 'Cognitive Overload' | 'Contribution' | 'Connection'. We can ask too much cognitively of someone, we may not enable them to 'Connect' with others or 'Contribute' in a way that is meaningful for them. **Bottom line, less productivity for all.**

She had three volunteers join her on the stage, playing with those juggling props. Three people were passing equally the ball, and unknown to one of the participants, upon Amy's signal, the other two would exclude this participant. The act of excluding this person resulted in a lack of 'connection' and in a work setting may also result in a lack of 'contribution'. The result, starting signs of negative feelings toward what was occurring by the person excluded. This simple demonstration has evidence supporting the same outcome as this was also performed in a research lab using the insights provided by an MRI scanner. At one level, this is not a surprise as many realise loneliness is a killer, in fact it is a major killer in the UK. You can be in a busy city or Organisation, and still be lonely.

**Shaping the here and now in your Organisation: Don't we all want to be:**

- Strengthening your people's brains for future challenges
- Honouring and developing the skills that make your people human
- Boldly shaping your organisation for a dramatically different way of working

**The Present:** What is it that makes people human? We are naturally **CURIOUS**, and Amy shared with the room an acronym she has developed for this word. **Community** - bring diverse people together regularly | **Unconstrained** - allow mind wondering without limitations | **Read** - different thing | **Investigate** - ask questions, probe using all our senses | **Optimism** - there is something here for me to learn or experience | **Unknown** - dive into it & explore and think | **Systemise** - it

### **Becoming a Neural Architect**

**The simple model that gets results:** Understand these three items are core, and that they interact with each other. Results | Environment | Behaviour

Several years ago, there was an experiment with rats, some were placed in an enriched, creative environment for some time (Living the life of Rat luxury provided by neuroscientist Bill Greenough, 'the Rat equivalent of Disneyland'). The outcome was a noticeable increase in more physical and sociable activity. When their brains were later examined, the 'enriched' environment rats had 25% more synapses (connections between a neuron and another cell) per neuron than their counterparts that did not experience the relative luxurious environment. The additional synapses meant the rats

were clever and quicker to find their way through mazes and were able to learn landmarks faster. Even when these well stimulated rats were put into a more impoverished environment, their enhanced capability persisted for at least 30-days, showing a level of resilience to the less pleasant environment.

### **What are the building blocks of change and what shapes our decisions & behaviours?**

Amy shared what she terms the Hot and Cold Approach™ with the following meaning.

- Hot | Implicit (automatic and fast) unconscious, emotional
- Cold | Explicit (self-controlled) conscious, Logic based, limited by working memory

**This is important to understand as the Hot system could be playing a bigger part than we realise in our decision making.**

We intuitively know teams working well together are in the interest of the Organisation. So how do we get better team work? If we can find ways of enhancing trust, we will likely increase our Oxytocin levels. Increased Oxytocin enhances our ability to form closer bonds with another person. It's interesting to note that men have typically 30% less Oxytocin than women. Oxytocin is needed for Empathy, ways to increase Oxytocin include hugging for 20-sec. What is really interesting given our increasing virtual world, how we feel about the other person in the virtual world will affect our Oxytocin, even when in digital environments!!!

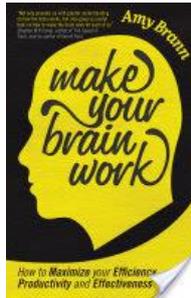
Other factors that we know from research: When exploring Collaboration, environmental conditions will influence how people behave. When money is involved, it draws our focus away from social responsibility.

**Alignment:** To bring about behavioural change, be intentional and be aligned, break down the behaviours, then the internal and external environmental factors and focus on what is important. At the close, Amy introduced another framework called 'The Landscape for™ Behavioural Change' and this highlighted a number of items we need to pay attention to, to enhance our ability to bring about the change that is wanted.

Loss, Anchoring, Norms, Default, Salience, Commitments, Ambassador, Priming, Emotion, Feedback, Optimism, Reward.

Book Reference

**Make Your Brain Work:** How to Maximize Your Efficiency, Productivity and Effectiveness



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<https://goo.gl/s55q4v>

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