

Don't waste the reboot.

make this “next normal” better than the last

Version 1.0, April 30, 2020

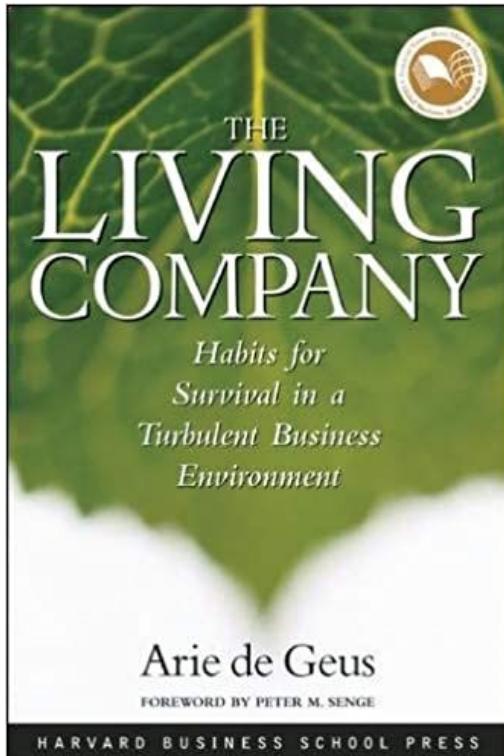


Presented by

The **Yak Collective**

The Challenge: Adapt or Die

Covid-19 won't just kill a lot of people. It will kill a lot of companies, entire sectors, and perhaps even nations.



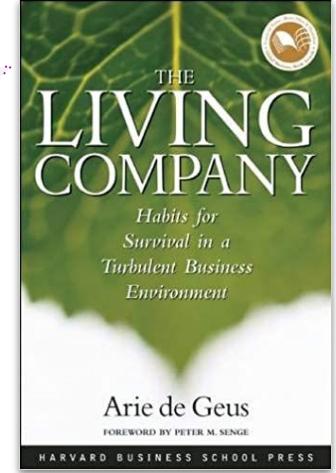
"Stora ... survived the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the wars of the 1600s, the Industrial Revolution, and the two world wars of the twentieth century. For most of its life, it depended on runners, horsemen, and ships instead of on telephones, airplanes, and electronic networks to carry messages. Stora's business shifted from copper to forest exploitation, iron smelting, hydropower, and eventually paper, wood pulp, and chemicals. Its production technologies changed over time from steam to internal combustion to electricity to the microchip. And Stora continues to adapt to an ever changing world."

Eight factors drive company survival

Eight factors from research study

1. Conservatism in Financing
2. Sensitivity to the World Around Them
3. Awareness of Their Identity
4. Tolerance of New Ideas
5. Valuing People, Not Assets
6. Loosening Steering and Control
7. Organizing for Learning
8. Shaping the Human Community

Book based on unique study of long-lived companies conducted by Shell



What does this mean for the kind of external advice, support, and counsel you should seek out to support your internal efforts?

Indie* Approach Offers Alternative Perspective

Living Company Attribute	Traditional Consulting	The Indie Approach
#1 Conservatism in Financing	Premium pricing for prestige optics, crony signaling to industry	Value-based pricing, for substance and actually thinking about the problem
#2 Sensitivity to the World Around Them	Narrow-band filters based on standard sensing channels	Unpredictable and broad range of signals that change/shift with VUCA
#3 Awareness of Their Identity	See you in terms of familiar tropes, cliches, and models	Hold up many different mirrors; showing you unexpected aspects of yourself
#4 Tolerance of New Ideas	"Literary industrial complex" pipeline of warmed-over ideas	Highly varied pipeline of a chaotically changing set of ideas
#5 Valuing People, Not Assets	Positioning school; labor as a priced asset	People school of management; humans as complex system
#6 Loosening Steering and Control	Refined and consistent late-industrial playbook	Large variety of approaches and a fundamentally improv approach
#7 Organizing for Learning	MBA learning mindset; closed-world "playbook"	An eclectic hacker approach to learning; open-world "what works" for a given company in a specific context
#8 Shaping the Human Community	Interchangeable suits running a highly rehearsed playbook	Distinct individuals who think for themselves — and with you

*"Indie" (**noun**): An abbreviation for independent consultant and inclusive of solo creators, consultants and artists

It's time for a new playbook ...

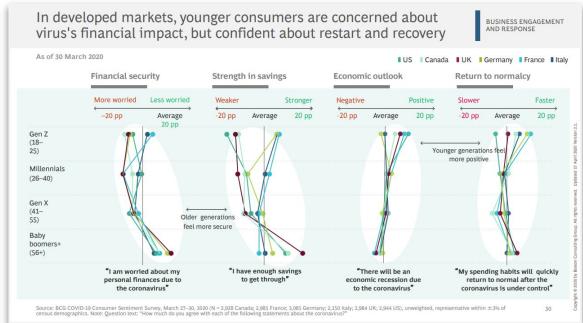
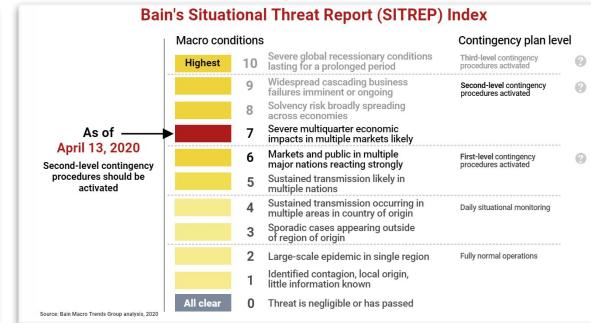
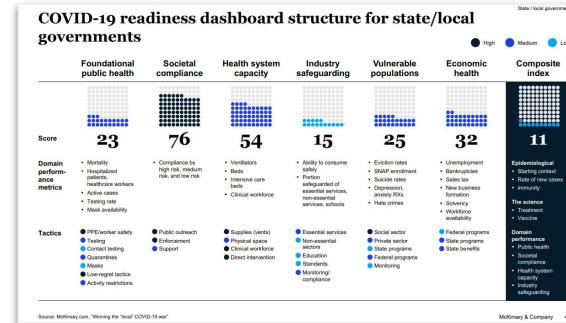
The **Covid-19 reboot challenge** is not like any other challenge any company has faced in living memory. Warmed-over “crisis management” models and hastily repackaged models drawn from the last half century of “normalcy” in the business environment, and uncritically run by interchangeable spreadsheet grinders, all graduates of the same bootcamp is not going to cut it.

You need something different. This is something different.

The ideas included in this deck do not constitute a “playbook” you can execute uncritically like a machine. Rather, think of this deck as sheet music. Music that can help you dance with the unfamiliar alien forces driving this situation, learning to play with it, getting inside its essence, bringing fluidity, aliveness, imagination and boldness to the the most exhilarating task a company can every take on: surviving an environment determined to kill it.

Big 3 Firms Hitting Their Sweet Spot ...

High-quality analytical perspectives & valuable healthcare industry expertise



... but positioning top-down initiatives dependent on return to “normal”

McKinsey: “Resolve, Resilience, Return, **Reimagination**, Reform”

BCG: “Flatten, Fight, **Future**”

Bain: “Protect, Recover, **Retool**”

Setting agenda / updating frameworks to continue to sell work in their defined “new normals”

The State Of Consulting Advice: Boston Consulting Group

Focused on The Future

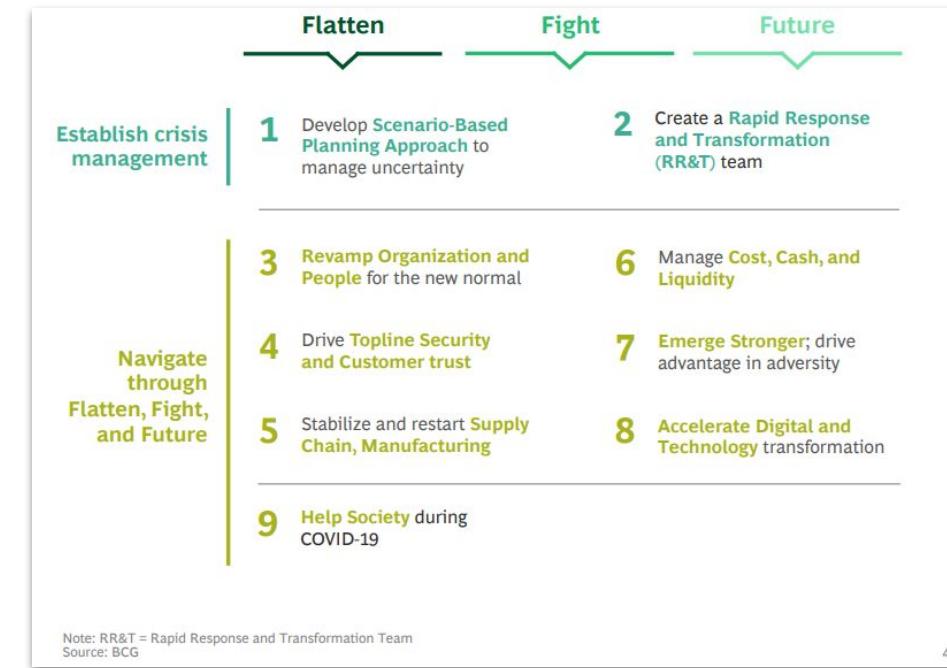
"Immediate action is critical, but leaders must also embrace a new agenda—one aimed squarely at what comes next."

Doubling Down On Leader as Shaper Of Change

Emphasizing purpose, engagement, task forces, communication combined with a strong vision for the future

Two Core Phases Suggested For Businesses

1. **Establish Crisis Management:** continuous scenario planning managed by a dedicated crisis response team
2. **Navigate through Flatten, Fight & Future:** Manage cost structure, develop plans for "restarting" operations and have a plan focused on emerging stronger



Yak Thoughts: Boston Consulting Group doubles down on the "Transformation" approach that guided its work and firm mission in the late 2010s. While it gives leaders a simple "playbook" for action in this crisis, it fails to address the underlying fragility and efficiency that was the explicit outcome of its approach over the last 5+ years. The optimism and suggested actions for companies to "emerge stronger" comes off as more wishful thinking from the 2018–2020 period than actionable advice for companies in the current crisis.

The State Of Consulting Advice: McKinsey & Company

Everything framed in the context of the “next normal”

Stop the bleeding, but put everything in the context of the future: “The future is not what it used to be: Thoughts on the shape of the next normal”

Crisis response via “nerve center”

Similar to the BCG approach of a crisis readiness team, but with more edge. Highlights agile thinking like “team of teams” and OODA but doesn’t match with their specific actions

Optimism: Everything is an opportunity

All current teams should be prepared to shift rapidly to “plan ahead” in a very tactical way.



Yak Thoughts: It is hard to miss the sleight of hand in shifting from the “new normal” post 2008 financial crisis to the “next normal” in this framing. This comes off as a bit awkward as McKinsey rolls out the same ‘08 playbook but in a world where collective sensemaking and streams of information on Twitter cut through the noise more effectively than 91 page decks. While McKinsey does tip its cap to more agile tools such as the OODA loop and “team of teams” the underlying content comes from the same top-down Board & CEO driven agenda that the firm has ran the last 20+ years.

The State Of Consulting Advice: Bain & Company

Framing around a future-looking “great retooling”

Similar to BCG, they frame around two phases:

1. Act now
2. Plan for the future

They encourage leaders to “question everything” and think about the future: “rally your people around a big idea to reimagine the firm, its assets, people and boundaries; and prepare for the changing needs of the customers who will emerge from this crisis.”

Using crisis to get business leaders on to its platform

In contrast to BCG & McKinsey’s more public and proactive information sharing, they are requiring business leaders to register with Bain.com to access “macro surveillance platform.”

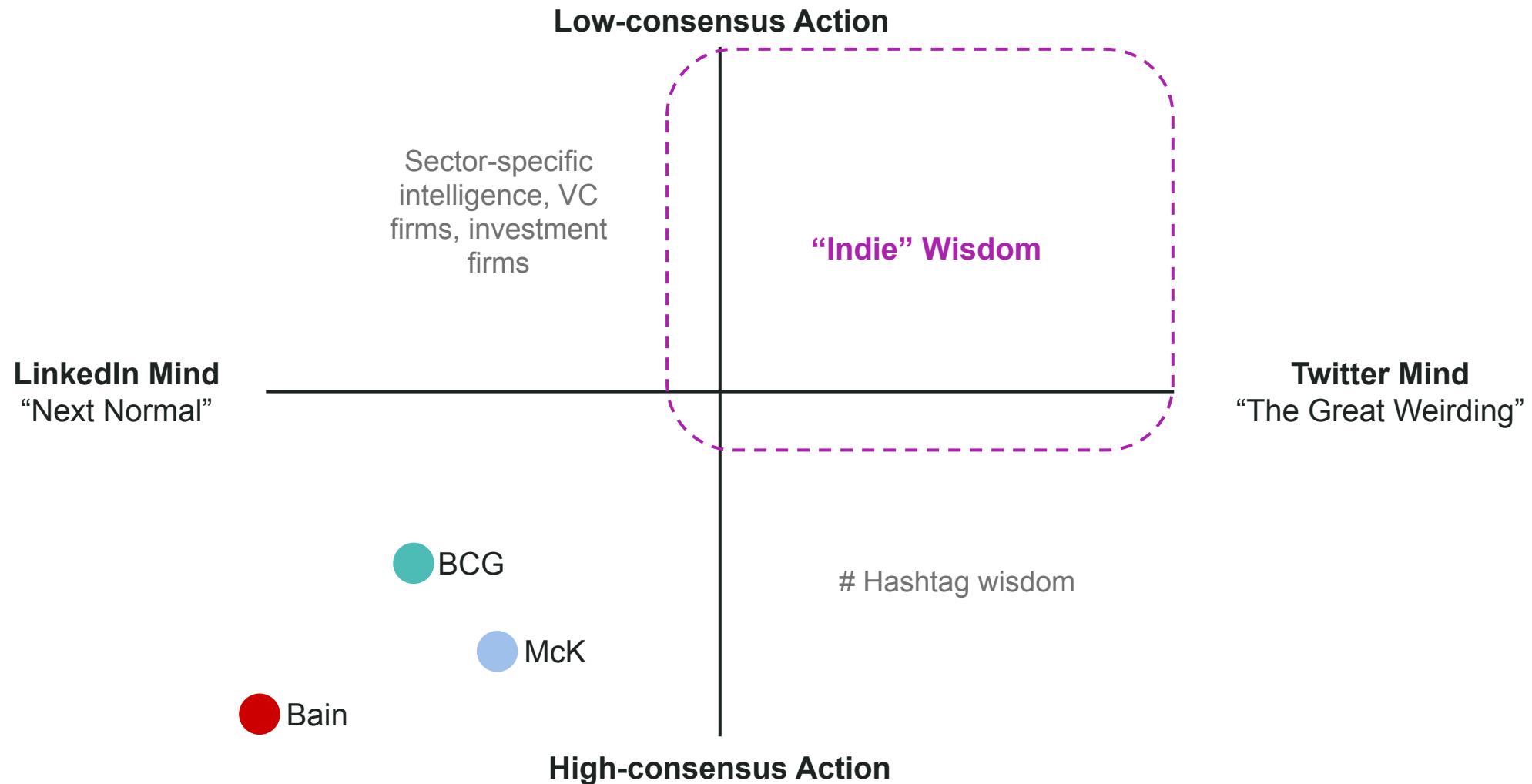


For Our Clients
Macro Surveillance Platform

For more detail on the business implications of coronavirus from Bain's Macro Trends Group, log on to the Macro Surveillance Platform. Learn more about the platform >

Yak Thoughts: Bain’s insights come off as light compared to the in-depth analysis from BCG and McKinsey. They offer a high level “great retooling” narrative, but offer little in terms of details beyond cliches like “reimagine your firm.” Bain comes off as the weakest of the big three. One interesting sign is their push to get clients and business leaders to sign up for their digital platform, which might signal Bain is reimagining its own approach post-crisis.

Indies Cover the Low-Consensus/Weird Blindsight



25 Ideas, Six Core Themes

Rating	Idea	Person	Page
Theme #1: Response & Learning			
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Idea Legend			
	Insight or Provocation		Actionable tool or workshop-ready
			Fully-deployable system or program

The background of the image features a detailed marbled pattern, likely created using the 'stone' or 'vein' technique. It consists of large, irregular, rounded shapes in shades of light blue, teal, and pale pink, separated by thin, winding veins of darker pink and blue. The overall effect is organic and textured, resembling stone or water patterns.

*Response &
Learning*

#1: Responsiveness > Preparedness



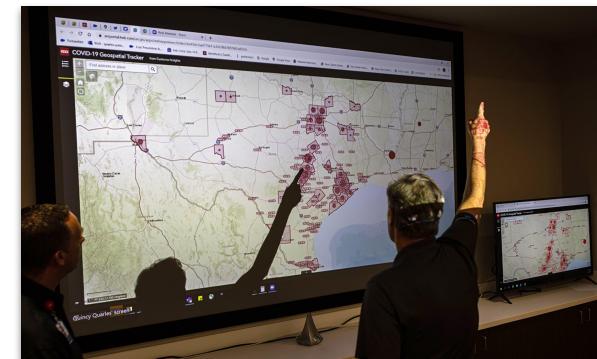
In an age of disruption and global interconnection, optimization and efficiency are synonyms for fragility. Flexible systems can take advantage of opportunities and respond to crises in ways that optimized systems cannot.

Three principles of responsiveness

1. Build for flexibility and speed by keeping excess resources in the right places.
2. Respond to crises before they occur. Look for data to foresee what's coming.
3. Invest in possible futures; waiting for certainty means losing to faster competitors.

Case Study: H-E-B

Using data from Chinese and European retailers who were further along the COVID curve, the Texas grocery chain revamped their supply chains to respond to upcoming demand shifts, partnering with restaurant suppliers and other disrupted businesses to fill gaps in stock and distribution.



David McDougall
Lusiad Innovation

Previously: Product Management in SMEs across US & UK
Indie Status: 3+ years

#2: Rebooting With OODA



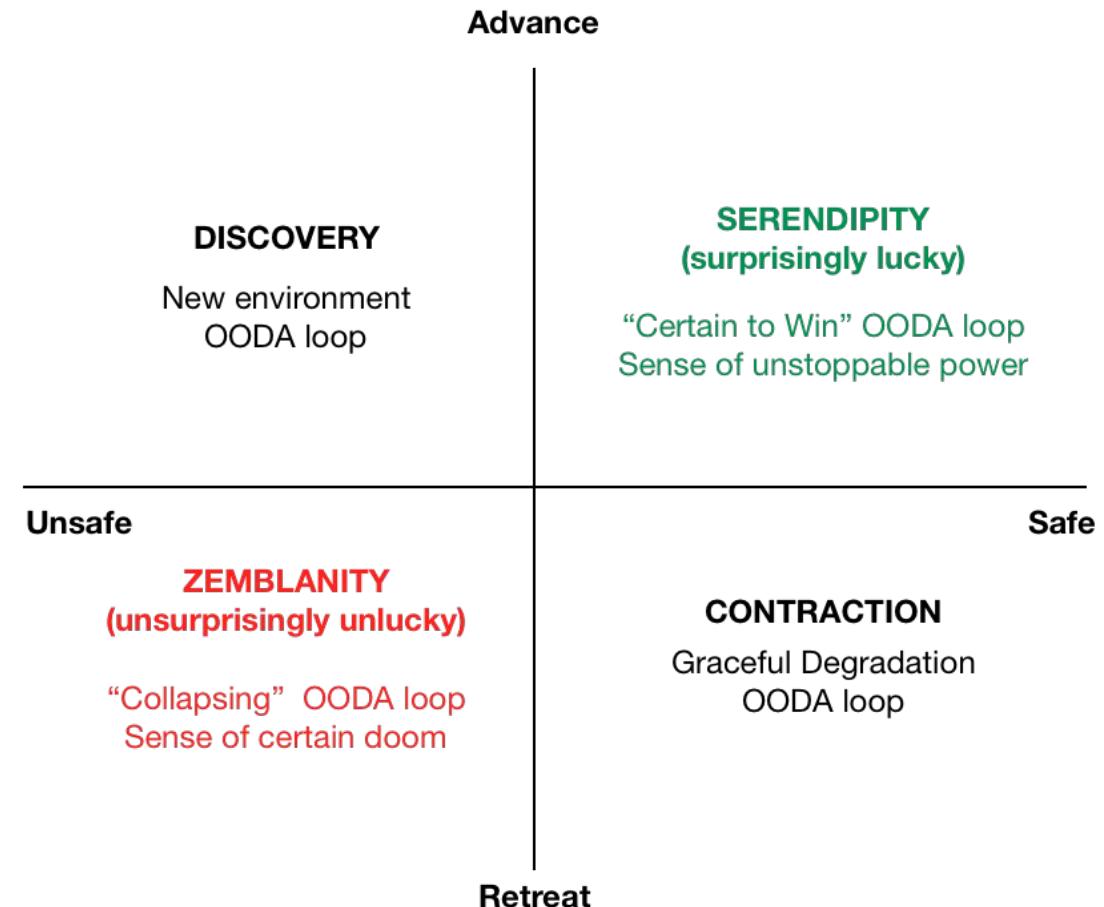
The OODA model — Observe, Orient, Decide, Act — originally pioneered by Col. John Boyd in the 1970s-80s as an approach to military strategy has emerged as the definitive approach to navigating all sorts of environments of high VUCA — Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity.

The core of OODA is to think in terms of GAINING A TIME ADVANTAGE. Instead of waiting for reliable information/predictions to coalesce into an accurate map, you ACT to gain TIME steadily amid VUCA.

OODA is possibly the best operating framework for navigating the Covid-19 reboot with strength, turning UNSAFE RETREAT into SAFE ADVANCE by gaining enough of a TIME ADVANTAGE.



Venkatesh Rao
[ribbonfarm / Art of Gig](#)
Previously: Xerox
Indie Status: 9+ years



#2: Rebooting With OODA

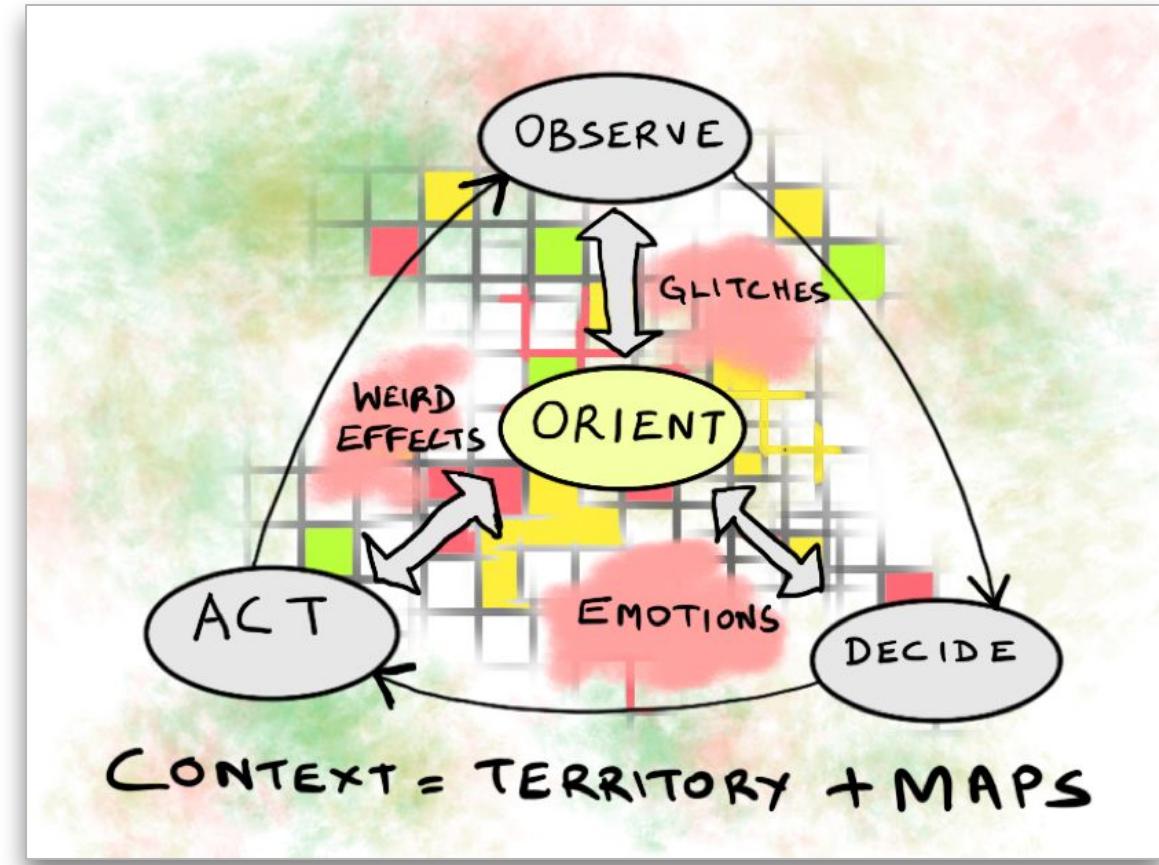


An OODA approach to Covid19 reboot can handle highly noisy, glitchy, environments, misleading maps full of misinformation and disinformation, and steadily gain you a time advantage to work with, which can then be translated into CASH and CONTROL advantages.

Resources:

- *Certain to Win* by Chet Richards
- *Boyd* by Robert Coram
- *Science, Strategy, and War* by Frans Osinga

An online recorded version of my in-person corporate workshop on OODA is currently under preparation.



Venkatesh Rao
[ribbonfarm / Art of Gig](#)

Previously: Xerox
Indie Status: 9+ years

#3: Plant Seeds, Harvest Volatility



When the dust settles, it becomes clearer that, in most sectors, Covid-19 didn't fundamentally change the future but rather accelerated it.

What long-term beliefs does one's organization have conviction around?

How can one take advantage of market dislocations to cheaply place directional bets and advance durable moats?

Talent has never been more acutely in need of work. Assets have never been more acutely distressed. On the flip side, good stories have never been more important for an audience stuck at home.

Diversification and hedges become both attractive and affordable. Moonshots and stretch goals feel ever closer in reach. Seeds may, even, find unexpectedly fertile opportunities to break taboos such as divesting legacy businesses, dramatic pivots, or partnering with companies which ostensibly are competitors.

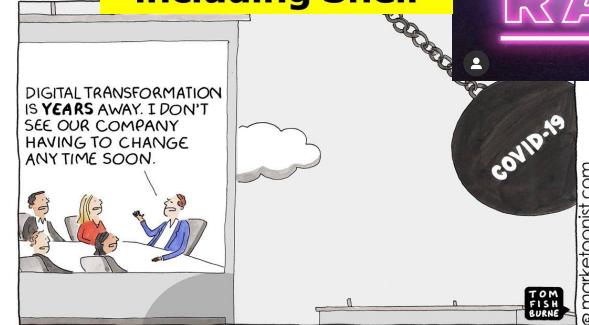
With a long time preference, the patient gardener and calm operator can reap long-term rewards.



Darren Kong
Principal, [Varietal Digital](#)
Previously: [Other Internet](#)
Indie Status: 3+ years

"Never let a good crisis go to waste" — Rahm Emanuel

Saudi Arabia buys stakes in four big European oil firms, including Shell



Case studies:

- Saudi Arabia buys stake in European oil firms (and Carnival!)
- Instagram Live & Hip Hop media
- Apple & Amazon's surprising video partnership

#3: Plant Seeds, Harvest Volatility



A volatile and disrupted market is a market seeking mediation.

Businesses should take account of assets and capabilities and consider how to respond quickly and profitably. Take abrupt signals at face value. Don't second guess. Don't try to create new categories.

Market volatility enforces legibility as signals become noisy. Look for ways to meet the market where it's at ... while it's there.

Don't create markets → respond to markets (without price gouging).

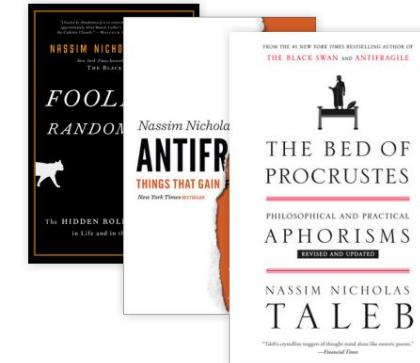
In doing so, savvy businesses can facilitate vital functions by injecting needed services and supplies into a fractured market; encouraging others to do the same.

Savvy businesses manufacture, source, and distribute PPE. Savvy businesses work on funding vaccines and provisioning testing. Savvy businesses deliver last mile groceries.

Savvy businesses stay in business. Savvy businesses save lives.

Harvest volatility, and be a part of the solution.

"Be fearful when others are greedy. Be greedy when others are fearful." — Warren Buffett



Case studies:

- Banks may lose money on defaults but make money market making/trading
- Manufacturers like GM spin up PPE production
- Restaurants become Grocery stores (and toilet paper suppliers!)



Darren Kong
Principal, [Varietal Digital](#)
Previously: [Other Internet](#)
Indie Status: 3+ years

#4: Designing for Continuous Adaptation



Covid-19 creates massive uncertainty. It's clear that business-as-usual will be impossible until there is a vaccine (18–24 months). The fatal flaw for businesses is to assume that there will be a single new normal until then.

Instead, Covid-19 uncertainty means there will be a **succession of new normals** as coronavirus countermeasures are continually developed, implemented, and refined. Each new normal potentially requires a different strategy and set of tactics.

Businesses must redesign themselves to be flexible enough to pivot repeatedly and unpredictably for the next 18–24 months. This redesign should touch strategy-setting approach, goal-setting methods, incentive structures, hiring processes, and workflows.

One normal: Adaptedness	Many normals: Continuous adaptation
Set strategy, execute, and refine	Experiment continuously with strategy
Pursue clearly defined, concrete subordinate goals	Pursue superordinate goals that are appropriate under a wide range of conditions
Promote action through incentives	Promote action through desperation by design
Select employees for best-fit with clear and stable job descriptions	Search for employees who can adapt to open-ended roles
Optimize your workflows	Buffer your workflows



Vaughn TAN

Strategy and organization design for uncertainty; [bio](#) | [book](#) | [newsletter](#).

Previously: Google Inc. (And currently: University College London School of Management)

Indie Status: 5+ years

#5: Simulating Creative Destruction



Quadrantology is a personality test and card-game based social-physics simulation engine built around six archetypes of creative destruction:

- Hacker
- Investigator
- Contrarian
- Operator
- Legalist
- Holy Warrior

Together these 6 archetypes help think through periods of organizational creative destruction as a race between forces of exit and disruptive innovation versus forces of voice and sustaining innovation.



Venkatesh Rao
[ribbonfarm / Art of Gig](#)
Previously: Xerox
Indie Status: 9+ years

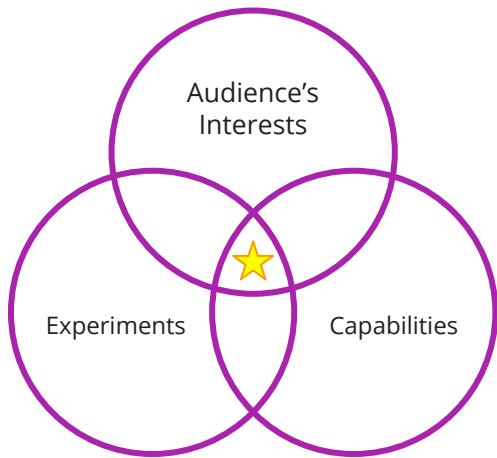
The background of the image features a detailed marbled pattern with a repeating cellular structure. The colors used are primarily shades of pink, light blue, and white, creating a fluid and organic look. The overall effect is reminiscent of a microscopic view of biological tissue or a hand-painted surface.

*Experimentation
& Innovation*

#6: Cultural Fringe as Free R&D



Brilliant people around the world are experimenting with new modes of social interaction and culture — use them as free R&D.



Look for the overlap of **successful experiments** on the fringe, **your audience's interests** and **your capabilities**. What are you already in position to help people with?

Learn from what people are doing and follow fast with new offerings that are more polished.



Randy Lubin
Consulting Entrepreneur
Indie Status: 10+ years

CASE STUDY: GoFundMe

Noticing that many people were actively being creative in ways to support small businesses, GoFundMe leveraged its established platform to launch a landing page highlighting small businesses and also announced a matching grant program to double down on their support of small businesses.



URGENT CAUSE

Help small businesses affected by COVID-19

GoFundMe launches initiative to support our friends and neighbors at local businesses facing financial loss from the pandemic.

[Donate now](#)

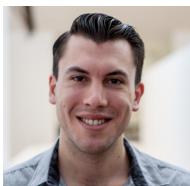
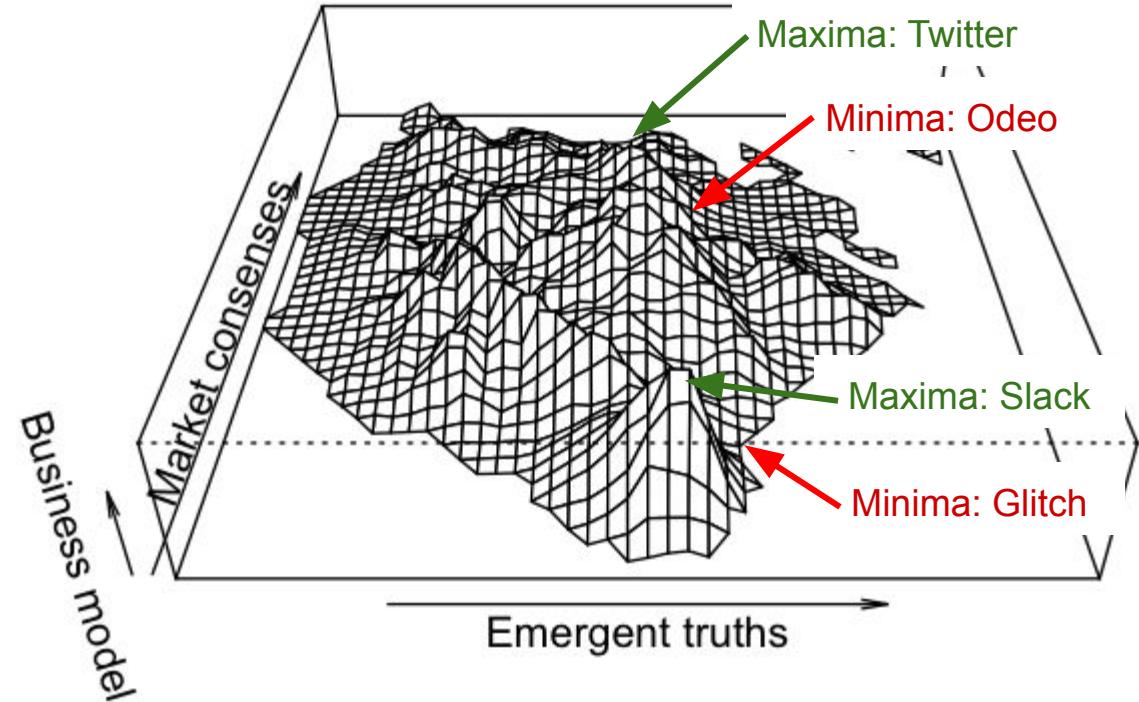
#7: We're in a Crisis, Time to Play



The greatest success stories from Covid-19 will be companies that discover something that's true and unpopular — earned secrets from an emergent topological landscape.

Tinkering playful exploration will feed the OODA loop and give birth to these discoveries as new truths (opportunities) are born in the wake of societal change.

"The reason big new things sneak by incumbents is that the next big thing always starts out being dismissed as a "toy." — Clay Christensen



Vlad Mehakovic
Growth Consultant
Indie Status: Aug 19

#8: Brilliant Failures Accelerate Learning



Failures happen all the time. The key is to make sure they become a '*brilliant failure*'. This is when the company extracts such an understanding of what happened that they can use it to generate value in at least two ways:

1. Ongoing: day to day improvement of the BAU from the regular learnings, as well as pre-mortems of new projects;
2. Bullseye: once every while an outlier return when a learning is applied and a new product, business or even market lifts off (see examples on the right).

Unfortunately, admitting failure is one of the higher risk things to do if you *work for* a business. While decapitating failed operators is a practice that was mostly shed in the late 1700s, employees across many firms still act as if they might be and stay quiet. There is no upside.

To counter this, companies can unlock [brilliant failure](#) learning by a bespoke mix of norm setting, leadership examples, team interventions and formal logging.



Thomas Verhagen
[Analyse, structure & boost](#)
Indie Status: 1+ year

EXAMPLES OF HIGH YIELDING BRILLIANT FAILURES



Failed wallpaper cleaner to new toy market



Failed radar experiment to new class of kitchen utensils



Failed sanatorium diet to global breakfast cereal



Failed hypertension medicine to global market for ED cure

#9: Mistakes and Improv as Fuel in a Crisis



We are terrified of *mistakes*, yet in improv they are fuel.

Mistakes, and how participants respond to them, are the brilliant and subtle ways the performers say ‘yes’ to whatever happens, no matter how ‘strange’ or ‘wrong’ it may seem to the judging mind, creates an environment of shared play for players and audience alike.

Uncomfortable at first, real power comes from **not knowing** and acknowledging where we are, in this moment. From there, anything is possible.

The “goal” of improv is not about *getting a laugh*, instead it is about finding shared connection and understanding. **It is recognition of our shared reality.** In the business world, then, we might think about stepping into fear, reacting to mistakes as they come and using it as a way to discover a new way forward for your teams rather than reacting or “fixing” things as quick as possible.

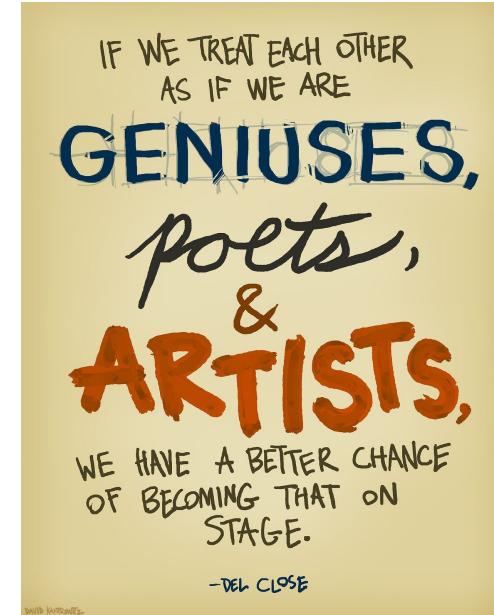


Alex Dobrenko

Improviser / Writer / Filmmaker

Previously: [Distance](#) / [UCB](#) / [Funny or Die](#)

Indie Status: 5+ years



Creating Space For Mistakes & Improv At Work

In order to create space for truth to emerge at work, we need to shift from thinking about workers in a narrow scope to people that are “geniuses, poets & artists” as long-time improv performer Del Close has shared.

Follow your fear

*“Improvisation is the art of being completely O.K. with not knowing what the f*** you’re doing” — Mick Napier*

#10: Unlock Shadow Assets & Opportunities



In most marketplaces there are opportunities. In a crisis, other companies and entrepreneurs are going to be more aggressive in identifying and quickly taking actions to capture the opportunity.

As Kevin Kwok [has written](#), "it's very hard to find a successful marketplace that wasn't built on an underutilized fixed asset." The famous example is AirBnB or Uber using software to unlock two underutilized assets — houses and cars.

However, in this crisis, companies need to extend this thinking to ***all assets*** — physical, intellectual know-how, intangible. The two key questions:

- If you have excess supply, what markets can you move into to leverage your existing capabilities?
- Who might be trying to move into your market in new and creative ways?

Deploy Expertise & Infrastructure for Healthcare



AMP, an event infrastructure and lighting company, reached out to the New York government to offer its equipment and expertise for the construction of field hospitals at reduced cost. It is also leveraging its connections in the art space to offer art to decorate the temporary hospitals to improve morale.

Entrepreneurs Entering Into New Markets



Within five days, Avital Tours leveraged OODA-loop decision making to "enact a full digital pivot" and was able to re-purpose or create digital offerings of its culinary experiences. ([link](#))



Sachin Benny

[Marketing strategy and positioning](#)

Previously: lead growth for a DTC furniture brand, [online video editor](#)

Indie Status: 1+ year

The background of the image features a detailed marbled pattern with a variety of organic shapes. It is composed of several colors: a light pink hue that forms large, irregular patches; a pale blue or lavender color that creates smaller, more defined shapes and veins; and white, which serves as a base color and highlights certain edges and areas of the design. The overall effect is one of depth and texture, resembling a microscopic view of biological tissue or a complex liquid crystal.

*Reboot
Mental Models*

#11: Thinking in Three Horizons

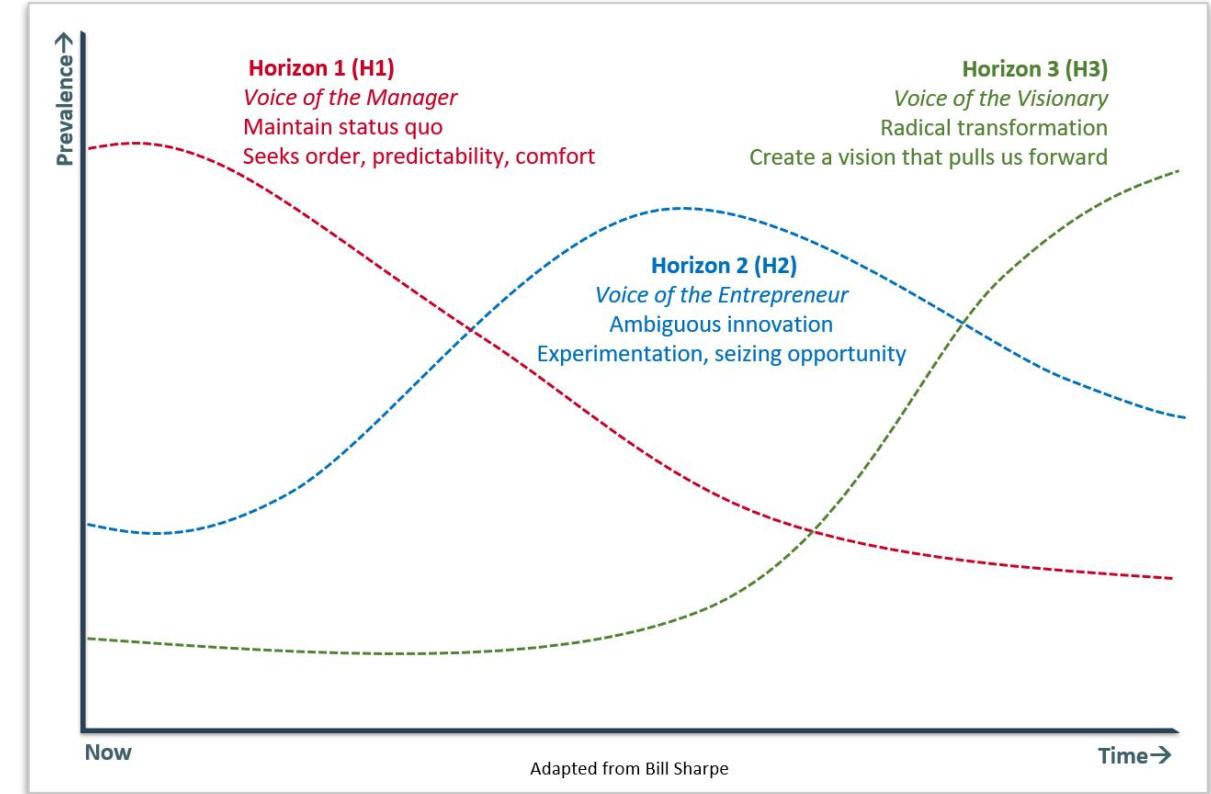


In times of great uncertainty, disagreement about what should be done can stem from perspectives focused on different time horizons.

Horizon 1 prioritises action to **maintain the status quo**, seeking to prevent or delay the current system's gradual decline as it loses fit for purpose.

Horizon 3 focuses on visions of the **desired future**, driven to act in ways that pull us forward towards a new system that better serves emerging needs.

Horizon 2 is an entrepreneurial **in-between space** where waves of innovations are tested. Many will fail, some will be captured to extend Horizon 1, while others are harnessed as a bridge towards Horizon 3.



Amanda Reeves
[Wabi Sabi Futures / Ahoyhoy](#)
Indie Status: 1+ year

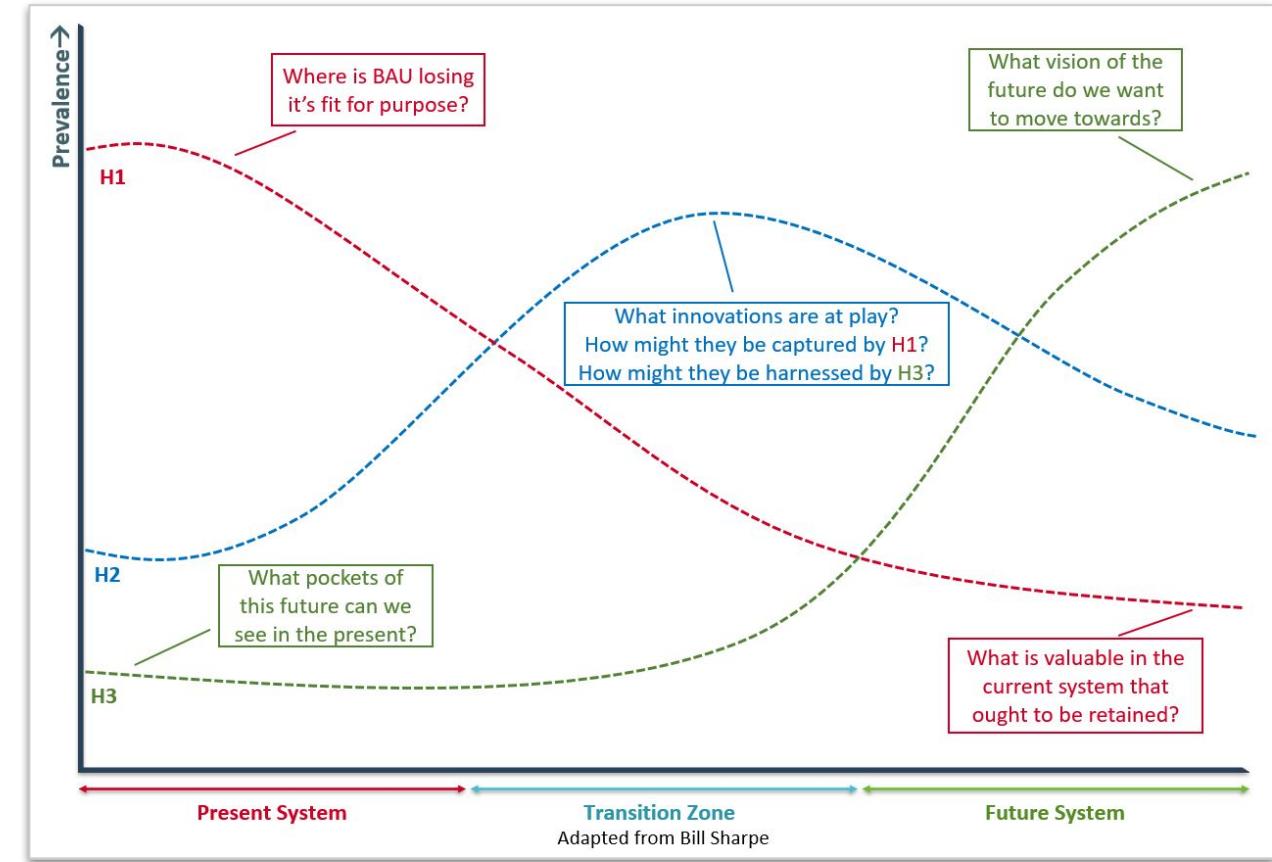
#11: Thinking in Three Horizons



Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons model is a simple framework for integrating multiple perspectives to make sense of complex situations as they emerge. It can break the dichotomy of needing to choose between keeping the lights on and moving towards compelling visions, and invites us to be explicit about how new innovations might be captured to extend Horizon 1 or harnessed to bring about Horizon 3.

Thinking across the three horizons, consider:

- Where is business as usual losing its fit?
- What is valuable here and should be retained?
- What is the future we want to move towards?
- What seeds of this future are visible in the present?
- What innovations are at play that could be captured or harnessed?



Amanda Reeves
[Wabi Sabi Futures / Ahoyhoy](#)
Indie Status: 1+ year

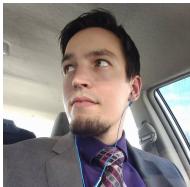
#12: Steering Between Charybdis & Scylla



Many clients fall into the trap of accepting the default framing of a problem. Having framed the problem as a specific type, they are halfway down the path they see as leading to a solution before you are even brought on board.

However, *you* do not have the luxury of borrowing their efforts uncritically.

The first failure is that of insufficient conservatism. Chesterton's Fence draws attention to the fact that things are as they are for reasons, and your lack of knowing those reasons in no way makes them inert.



Jordan Peacock

CEO, Becoming Machinic; Founder, Sortilege

Previously: U.S. Bank, HelpSystems

Indie Status: 3+ years

Chesterton's Fence

"If you don't see the use of it, I certainly won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it."

— G.K. Chesterton





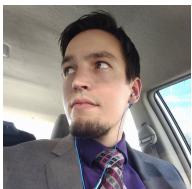
#12: Steering Between Charybdis & Scylla



Live and Dead Beliefs

"Let us speak of any hypothesis as either live or dead. A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed ... deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act."

— William James
The Will to Believe



Jordan Peacock

CEO, Becoming Machinic; Founder, Sortilege
Previously: U.S. Bank, HelpSystems
Indie Status: 3+ years

The second failure is that of insufficient imagination.

The status quo, by definition, has been worked around. People have made do; or, they've decided on a particular solution before critically engaging with the problem.

A (perceived) technical problem may in fact be a budgetary or political problem at its root. An insurmountable obstacle may simply disappear when resources are rearranged.

Your role as a consultant is to guide your clients away from crashing into Charybdis or Scylla; by getting at the full context of the problem, and by not prematurely closing off the space of potential solutions.

#13: Mind Frames and Learning Loops



This unprecedented situation has left people lost, confused, scared—and the door open for dubious experts to claim knowing they know what to do. But nobody knows what to do.

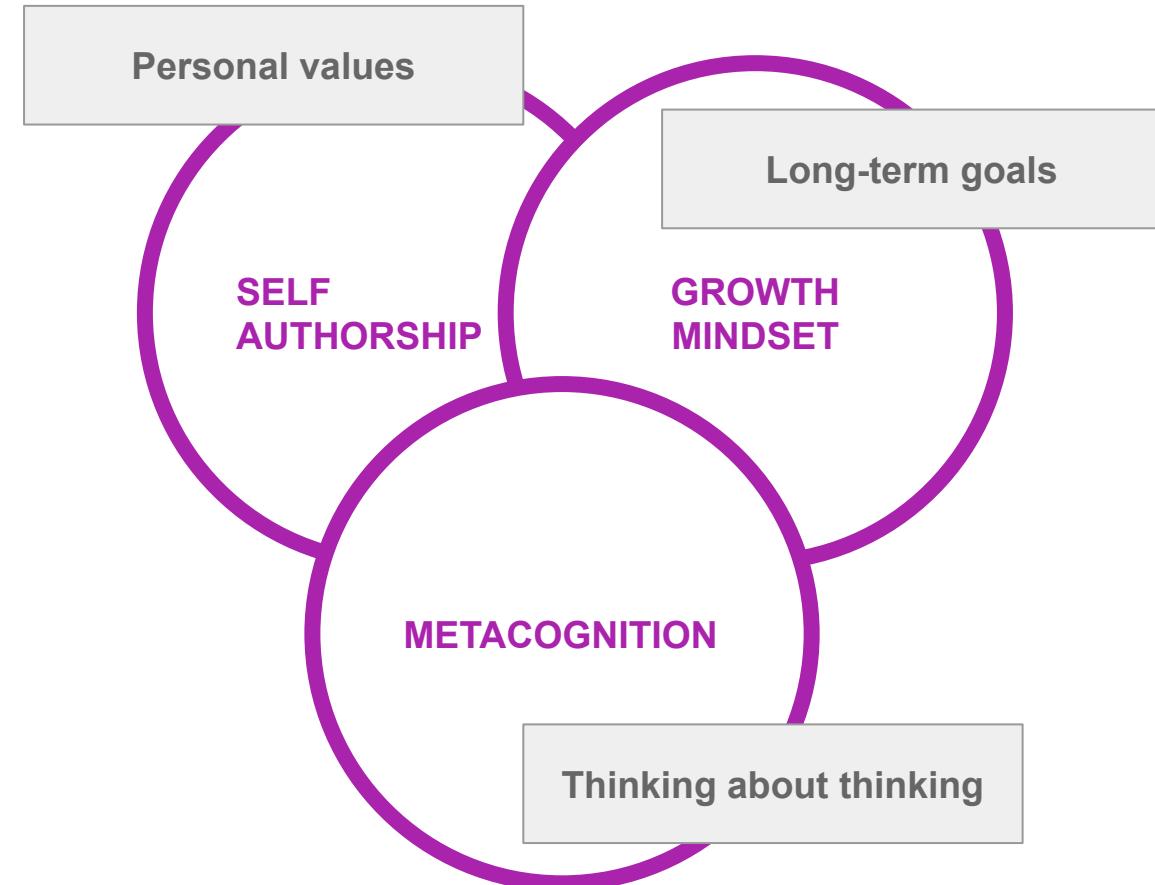
The very nature of this crisis means only an iterative approach can work. Grand plans and static strategies are brittle in the midst of chaos. While team “now” (the frontline) is focused on finding solutions to the current crisis, team “next” (everyone else) can contribute by shaping what a post-Covid world looks like.

Mindframing is an applied and iterative learning framework. It's designed for tinkerers and explorers; people with questions looking for solutions, rather than people with solutions looking for a problem. It relies on metacognition, self-authorship, and growth mindset.



Anne-Laure Le Cunff
Founder, Ness Labs

Formerly: Google, Entrepreneur First
Indie Status: 2+ years



#13: Mind Frames and Learning Loops



Mindframing uses four steps (PARI) to create a sustainable learning loop.

1. PACT

Rather than goal-setting based on the desired outcome, the first stage of mindframing consists in creating a private or public pact on a specific course of action.

Non-predictive, adaptive approaches are more efficient, this stage focuses on identifying a few constructive actions that will, if consistently acted upon, progressively reduce uncertainty.

2. ACT

Resting on the theory of active learning, which posits that the only way we can learn is through practice, the second stage consists in performing repeatable and incremental actions. Actions can result in an outcome of learning skills or factual knowledge.

3. REACT

This stage allows to both generate one's own feedback through content creation, and feedback from peers through content publication, helping fill the gap between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood.

4. IMPACT

This stage consists of larger experiential or creative activities that represent a significant challenge and requires higher levels of preparation, commitment, and completion. One steps further out of the comfort zone to improve personal growth and performance, for effective self-directed learning.



Anne-Laure Le Cunff
Founder, Ness Labs

Formerly: Google, Entrepreneur First
Indie Status: 2+ years

#14: Developing the Uncertainty Mindset



Businesses often treat unknowns as *risky* (they assume future world-states and their respective probabilities are known). Covid-19 shows that some unknowns aren't risky—instead, they are ***truly uncertain*** (future world-states aren't fully understood, their probabilities are unknown). **In situations of true uncertainty, acting with a risk mindset is potentially fatal.**

Instead, businesses and leaders should develop **the uncertainty mindset**: Assuming the presence of true uncertainty and intentionally building uncertainty into organization design, rather than simply trying to reduce risk. This changes how organizations hire, set goals, and motivate team members, and leads organizations to work in ways that are appropriate for high-uncertainty situations.

Risk mindset	Uncertainty mindset
Assumes future world-states and probabilities are knowable and known.	Assumes future world-states and probabilities are partly unknowable.
Believes that uncertainty is always bad.	Believes that uncertainty can be productive (by driving innovation and adaptation).
Acts to eliminate external uncertainty (business environment) wherever possible.	Acts to understand external uncertainty and build appropriate adaptation strategies.
Acts to eliminate uncertainty from internal operations wherever possible.	Acts to introduce carefully-designed uncertainty into operations (especially in goal-setting, hiring, motivation).



Vaughn TAN

Strategy and organization design for uncertainty; [bio](#) | [book](#) | [newsletter](#).

Previously: Google Inc. (And currently: University College London School of Management)

Indie Status: 5+ years

The background of the image features a complex, organic pattern resembling marbled paper or a microscopic view of a biological tissue. It consists of large, irregularly shaped cells or clusters of cells in shades of pink, light blue, and white, separated by thin, winding veins of a darker shade. The overall effect is one of natural complexity and interconnectedness.

*Complexity &
Resilience*

#15: Surfing on the “Edge Of Chaos”



Since the early 1980s the field of “chaos theory” has pushed our thinking on how systems emerge and evolve to many fields such as finance, biology, economics and more recently, organizations.

Instead of seeing an organization as a fixed body, chaos theory posits that organizations are “complex adaptive systems” and small changes can be the ones that have the largest impact on evolution and survival.

The default view of the corporate world is one of a fixed entity that can be shifted on the whims of top-down central planning by high-paid knowledge workers. This view is self-reinforcing because the ideas and frameworks that can easily be packaged into a “playbook” are the fuel of business schools, business book publishers and consulting firms.

This caricature of the business world blinds executives from the emergent “chaos” existing in modern organizations. A fuller embrace of chaos theory and its implications can help transcend the false view of organizations as outdated, “broken” institutions and give more tools to the modern leader (or forward-thinking consultant) who wants to tap into the existing energy and creativity within their organization.



Paul Millerd
[Boundless & StrategyU](#)

Previous: McKinsey, BCG, GE, Russell Reynolds
Indie Status: 3+ years

“

Complexity theory suggests that organizational managers promote bringing their organizations to the **“edge of chaos”** rather than troubleshooting, to trust workers to self-organize to solve problems, to encourage rather than banish informal communication networks, to “go with the flow” rather than script procedures, to build in some redundancy and slack resources and to induce a healthy level of tension and anxiety in the organization to promote creativity and maximize organizational effectiveness.”

— *Gary Grobman, “Complexity Theory: A New Way to Look at Organizational Change”*

#15: Surfing on the “Edge Of Chaos”



Tangential schools of complexity thinking, such as self-organization, holacracy, teal organizations or even “human workplaces” undermine their arguments by painting a straw man of current organizations as rigid command and control hierarchies. In reality, most organizations operate with complexity and a better approach is to understand, measure & reinforce those existing behaviors.

	Chaos Theory Says	Gut Reaction	Go Deeper
Innovation & Change	Big evolutions happen from small changes. There needs to be a continuous injection of new energy into the system to keep it alive.	<i>“We can’t just let people do whatever they want!”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Create internal incubators & programs to unleash experiments & small investments without approval with recognition that the “business cases” may be unclear
Leadership & Roles	Create opportunities for self-organization and elevation of people with a lot of respect. Move people around to different areas of the organization to see new perspectives.	<i>“I put in my time to be promoted, we just can’t start promoting 27-year olds to VP”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Identify “reality gaps” between informal credibility & formal authority. Consider firing senior execs with large gaps→ Identify & elevate important “nodes” from informal networks→ Create mechanisms for small cross-functional teams to emerge around new problems
Process & Control	Continuous feedback from all levels of the organization. Organization develops a good pattern-recognition capability for feedback and emerging information.	<i>“The people with the most experience should make the decisions”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Have senior people spend more time with front-line workers than seems normal→ Push down decision making to lower levels in the organization when possible
Mission	Success is ensuring survival of the company and making it robust to shocks.	<i>“The only thing people are driven by is money, that’s the point of business”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Regular assessments of fragility of the organization through lens of complexity theory <i>in addition to</i> financials, strategy, plans



Paul Millerd
[Boundless](#) & [StrategyU](#)

Previous: McKinsey, BCG, GE, Russell Reynolds
Indie Status: 3+ years

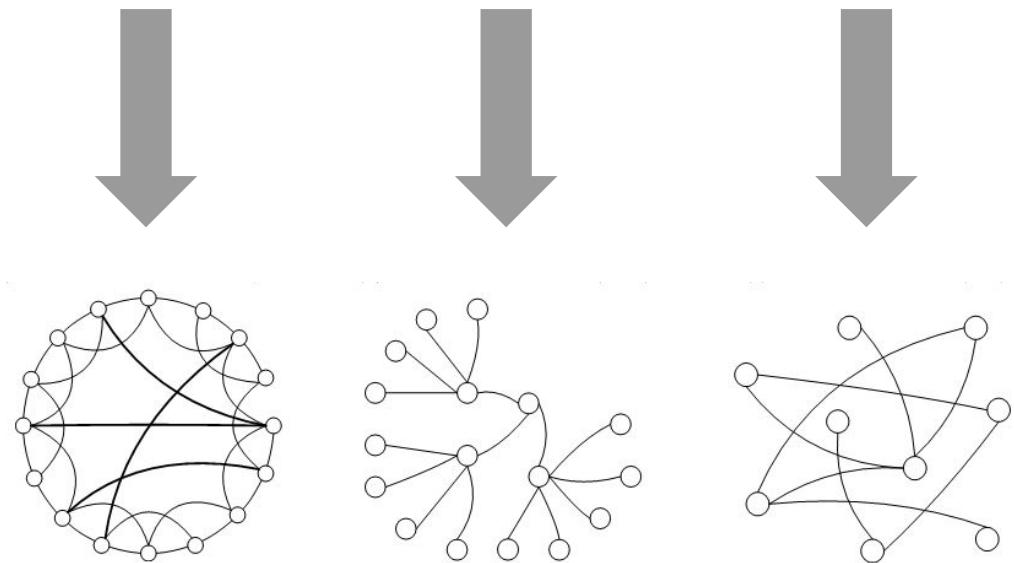
#16: Restructure as a Small-World Network



Most corporate organizations use a strict hierarchy structure that heavily prioritizes **efficiency over robustness** by knowingly or unknowingly adopting a scale-free network (SFN) structure. SFNs have **high clustering but not enough robustness to shocks**.

However, a Small-World Network (SWN) has **enough clustering AND enough shock-robustness due to multiple cross-cluster links**. That's why evolution adopts this structure in many socio-cultural systems like social networks and epidemics. SWN structure is inherently resilient to unpredictable breaks and shocks—such as those businesses are witnessing in this crisis within supply-chain, internal operations, product innovation, and brand management.

Small-World Multiple cross-cluster links, <i>many eggs in few baskets</i>	Scale-Free Single cross-cluster link, <i>many eggs in one basket</i>	Random No clusters, <i>very few eggs in many baskets</i>
enough efficiency + enough resilience	high efficiency + low resilience	low efficiency + high resilience



Vinay Débrou

[Consultant, Data & Brand Strategy / Substack](#)

Previously: Data Analyst at a Fintech SaaS company

Indie Status: 2+ years

#16: Restructure as a Small-World Network



System Case Study : Bacteria winning against Antibiotics

Horizontal Gene Transfer (HGT) is used to transfer antibiotic-resistance enabling genes horizontally across bacteria species. The small-world network of these bacteria species is **more resilient** to shocks as they survive the destruction of one species without losing critical mutational insight—*keeping eggs in many baskets*. This way, antibiotic-resistant bacteria have stayed ahead of pharmaceutical R&D on new antibiotics.

Business Case Study: Mondragon Corporation (Spain)

Mondragon Corporation (Spain) federation of cooperatives survived resiliently in 2012 european crisis via inter-cooperative collaboration across domains. Fast response to changing market landscape was enabled by cross-cluster flow of ideas, resources & people.

Scale-Free Network Structure	Small-World Network Structure
Strict hierarchy	Radical interdisciplinarity
Highly specialized divisions	Cross-disciplinary task forces
Maximum optimization w/ economy-of-scale	Fast-regeneration w/ economy-of-scope
Plays catch-up due to slow top-down information flow	First-mover advantage gives exponential returns



Vinay Débrou

[Consultant, Data & Brand Strategy / Substack](#)

Previously: Data Analyst at a Fintech SaaS company

Indie Status: 2+ years

#17: Organise for Human Needs



As this dark winter thaws, human dynamics will be heightened. And so will the value of attending to them.

We humans have six basic needs that can only be met in community, network, or organisation. Organisations traditionally fail to meet these. But when they do, there is mutual thriving.

On the right, the first four human needs—meeting them creates a viable, robust organisation capable of achieving request agility to survive and thrive in its environment.

Creating such a context meets the final two human needs—growth, and contribution, to value in the world.

Our need for	Is met by and contributes to the organisation's need to
<i>Certainty and comfort</i>	Homogenise and create stability
<i>Uncertainty and variety</i>	Differentiate and increase ability to adapt
<i>Love, connection, belonging</i>	Integrate, feed and support each other, moderate behaviours
<i>Significance, uniqueness</i>	Individuate and maximise autonomy

To achieve this, we need to put five practices into play in our organisations, practices which create shared meaning, agreed intent, and the context to deliver ...



[Benjamin Taylor](#)

[RedQuadrant / Systems Practice](#)

Previously: PwC, Capita, Adviser to Mayor in a London Borough

Indie status: 11 years

#17: Organise for Human Needs



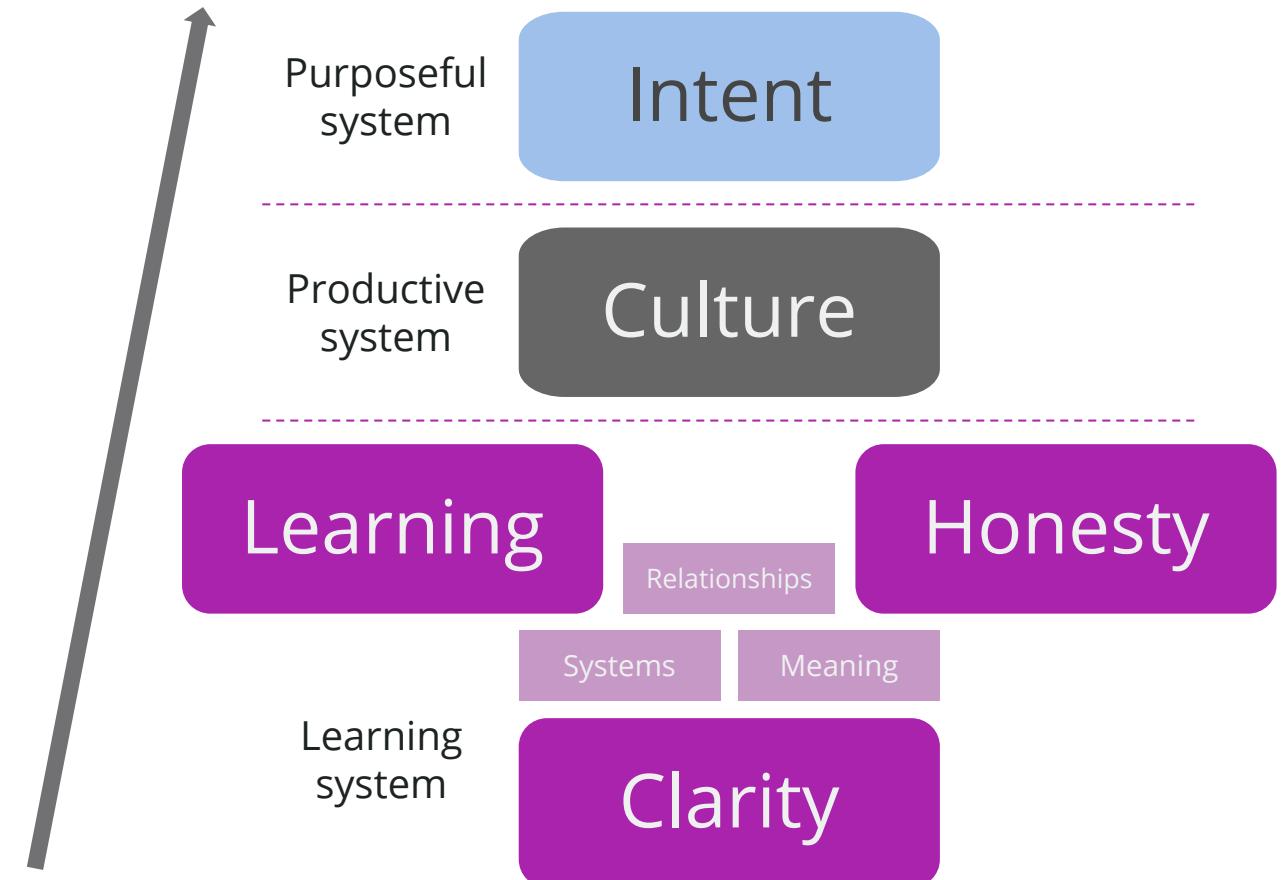
Three **practices** generate shared relationships, systems, and meaning:

- **Honest conversations** – constructive challenge of reasoning, psychological safety, surfacing of emotions and ‘the undiscussible’
- **Clarity** – of roles, tasks, decision-making, projects
- **Learning** – planning, prediction, and reflective practices

This is a **learning system**.

Link this to practices working with the complex emergence of culture to create a **productive system**.

Connect to practices that truly identify and measure **what matters** to create a **purposeful system**.



[Benjamin Taylor](#)

[RedQuadrant](#) / [Systems Practice](#)

Previously: PwC, Capita, Adviser to Mayor in a London Borough

Indie status: 11 years

The work needs to be done in a robust, safe way where it is possible to address danger / confusion / conflict / deficit / development as they arise

#18: The Collective Nervous System



While businesses often think about individual development, there is strong evidence that we have a *collective nervous system*. Research from ESADE Business School found that transformational leaders not only regulated their own nervous systems better, they also helped to regulate others.

Polyvagal Theory can help organizations design environments to tap into the adaptive capacities of this *collective nervous system* in safety, crisis and trauma.

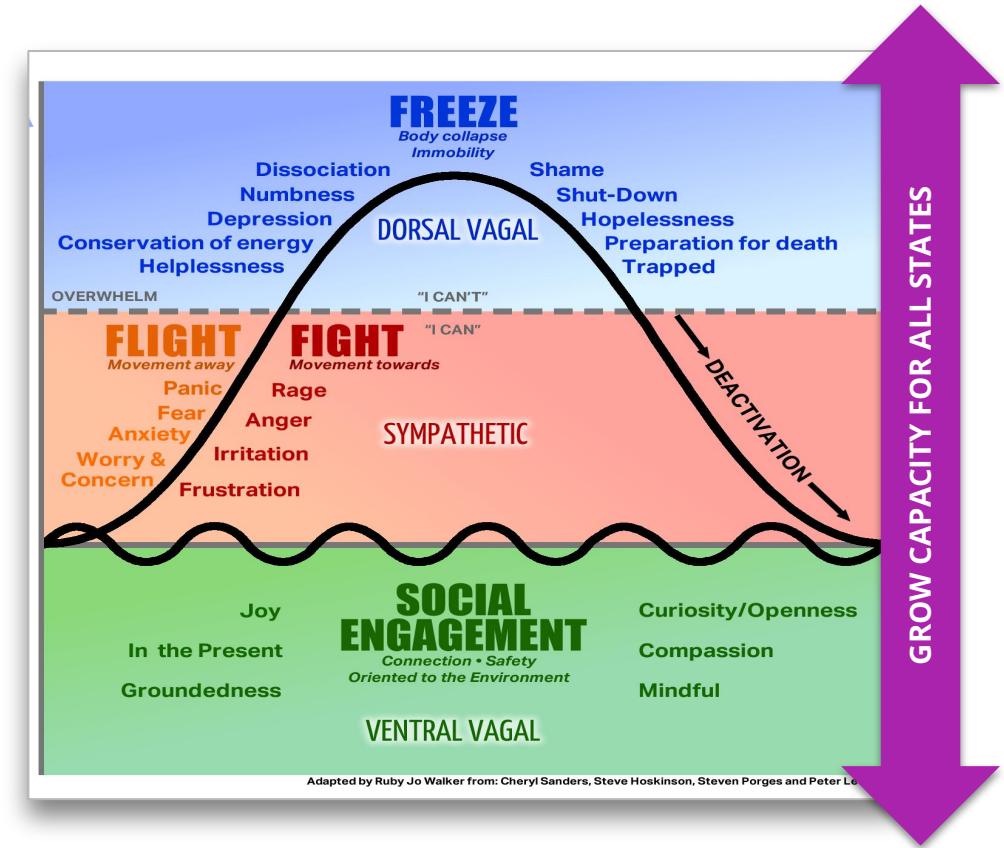
- When **socially engaged**, we feel safe and have capacity for communication, lateral, divergent thinking and decision-making, and relating with trust
- While activation of **fight or flight** responses improve reactive decision-making it can also limit feelings of trust, and cooperative, complex decision-making
- When we **freeze** we dissociate, have less awareness and may even faint. This arises when there are no options to react appropriately to a fight or flight state

A deeper understanding of these states can grow individual and organizational capacity to not merely manage away the discomforts of crisis, complexity, and trauma, but to work with them as integral and generative conditions to unleash adaptive leadership, sense-making, learning, resilience and innovation.

Companies should actively look for ways to support and learn from self-regulating leaders and “positive deviants” who demonstrate the capacity to create psychological safety, work generatively with conflict and fight-or-flight behaviors in their teams and move toward chaos, crisis, and complexity with ease.



Nita Baum
[b*free](#) & [Solar Responders](#)
Indie Status: 13 years



All 3 states serve a purpose. Adaptive leaders and organizations have greater capacity to be in all states, self-regulate in all states, and support regulation of others' nervous systems in all states.

Sensemaking & Storytelling

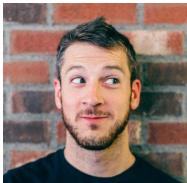
#19: Collective Narratives



The great weirding is defined by narratives—from cancel culture to MAGA. Companies used to operating in “strategy cultures” will increasingly find it hard to keep up—media flows faster than their OODA loop can keep up.

Narrative strategy helps, and as marketing begins to reboot, the only narratives that are going to become accepted are those of collectivism.

Too many are out of work, too many are dead. You’re only allowed to be self promotional if you can demonstrate that your campaign helps some wider group or network. (*meta alert: this Yak Collective!*)



Tom Critchlow
Digital Strategy & Media Design
Indie Status: 5+ years

Case Study: Bandcamp

Bandcamp waived their fees for a day in support of indie musicians for a COVID-19 fundraiser.

Result: “\$4.3 million worth of music and merch. That’s more than 15 times our normal Friday, and at the peak, fans were buying 11 items per second.” — bandcamp.com



#20: A New Order



A pandemic this drastic will leave scars in many levels of modern society. The call for change is inescapable.

There are principles we can no longer afford to ignore.

Urgency: it is evident how fragile we are, and how quick we can collapse. Change is imperative.

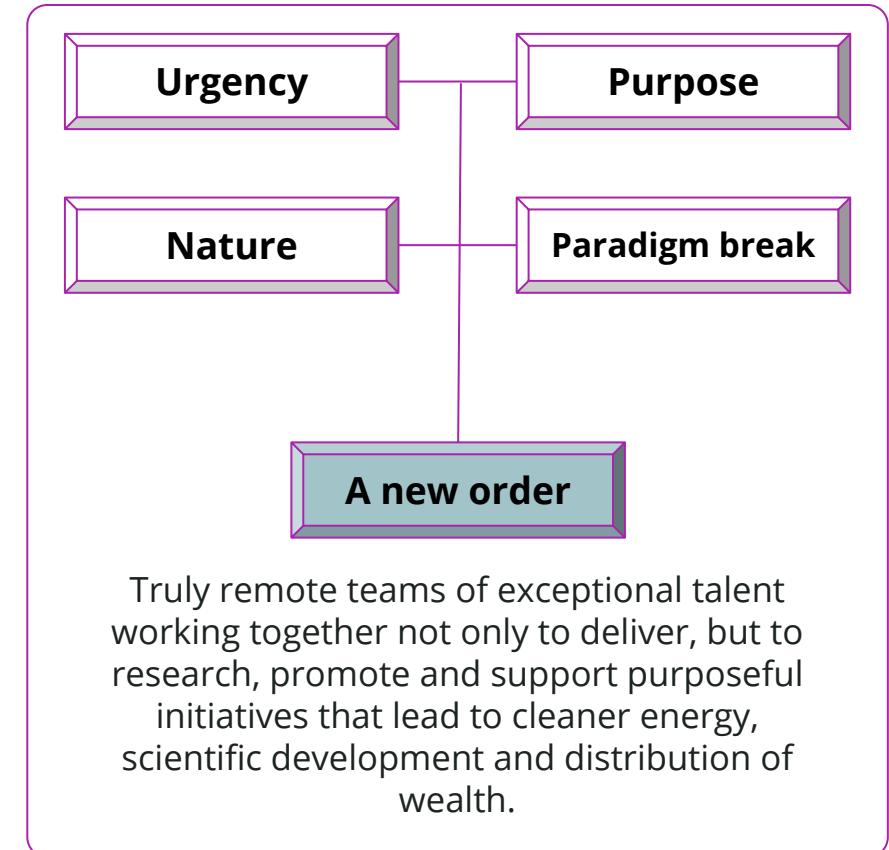
Purpose: the economy relies on jobs without purpose. In the face of death, pointless jobs become evident. Purpose comes from helping others. This is what people should be paid for.

Nature: our pollution is killing us faster than anticipated. We may not have the time to wait to replace energy matrices. We need to do more.

Paradigm break: social distance comes to stay. Organizations that know how to function remotely efficiently while allowing family time and self improvement of its members will thrive. The technology for this already exists. It is time to harvest the power of distributed talent.



Rodrigo Pinto
[Project management and software development](#)
Indie Status: 3+ years



#21: Foresight as Anxiety Containment



In an extended crisis, expect to have difficulty differentiating lions from kittens. (Kittens have lion-like qualities, after all — lots of pointy bits, the sensibilities of a predator, and a nearly insatiable hunger for flesh.)

When we think we might encounter a lion, acting prematurely wastes our scarcest resource — our limited attention. But if we miss the signals altogether, we run the very real risk of becoming a meal (incrementally explaining away the warning signs until we are finally eaten).

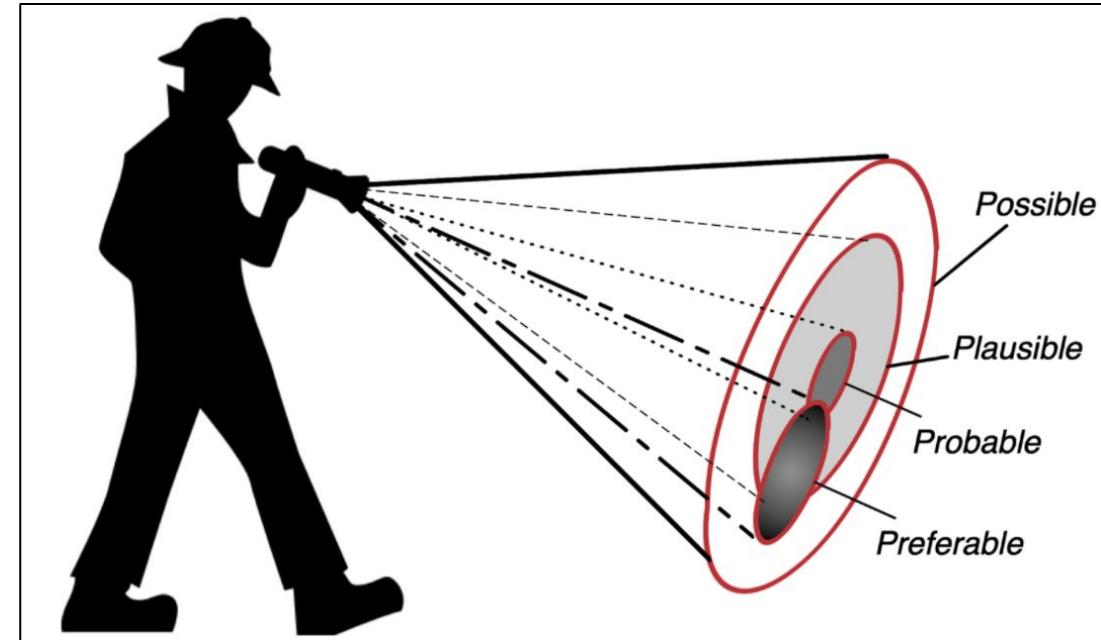
While we cannot reasonably plan for every single possible scenario where we might run into a lion, we *can* develop a personal and organizational sensing capability that appropriately activates our anxiety response (scenario planning) only when the lion truly begins to appear.



Ben Mosior
[Methodology Whisperer](#)
Not a medical professional
Indie Status: 6+ years



possibly a lion



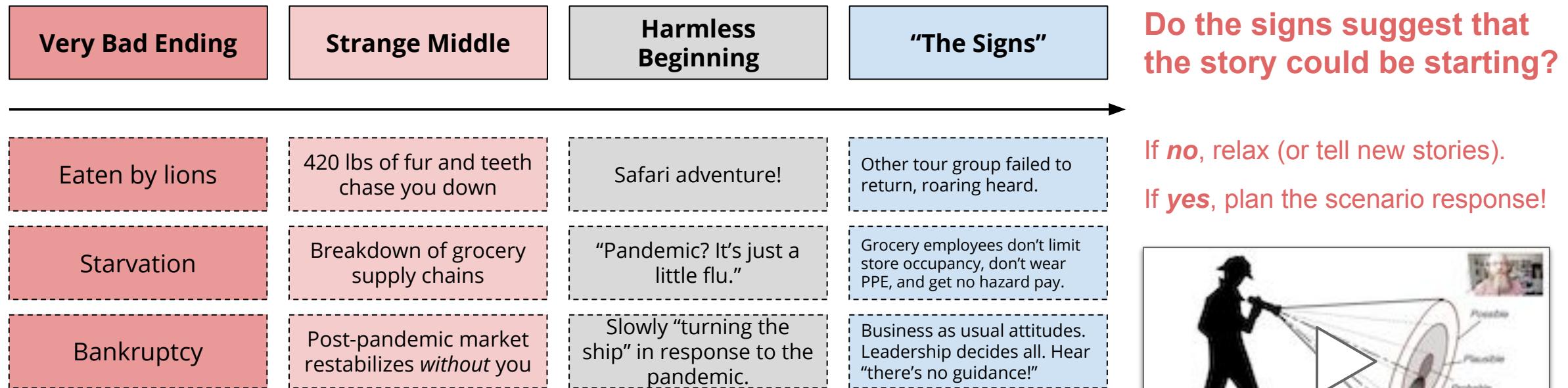
*Image courtesy of [Joshua Bloom](#) (reproduced by permission), based on: Voros J 2003, 'A generic foresight process framework', *Foresight*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 10-21. doi:10.1108/14636680310698379*

Here's how it works. If you can **tell imaginative new stories** about existentially risky futures that *might* happen (in order to take them from mere *possibilities* to believable *plausibilities*), then you'll be sensitized enough to regularly scan the environment and **discern whether they are actually starting**.

#21: Foresight as Anxiety Containment



Start from the ending — as bad an ending as you can imagine — and work your way backwards to the present moment. Tell the story to others to make sure it makes sense. Then identify the signs you'd need to notice *right now* to know whether the story was *starting* to happen. **To contain organizational anxiety, know and evaluate the signs.**



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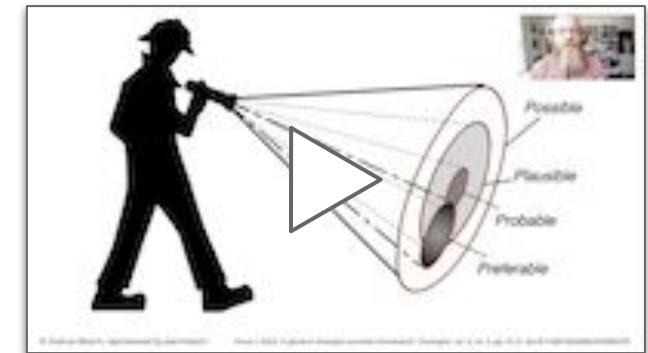


Ben Mosior
[Methodology Whisperer](#)
Not a medical professional
Indie Status: 6+ years



plausibly a lion

Give your organization the chance to tell these stories and unlock a built-in **sensing and self-regulation** capability!



Link => ["It might get worse"](#)

#22: The Unknown Disrupts Your Intuitive Model



Successful Businesses learn how to do before they learn what they are doing in context, and before they can clearly express what they do as part of their business process.

Components (such as Markets, Employes, Machines, or Laws) have value to a business which is intuitively grasped long before those components are objectively understood or measured.

The intuitively understood value of a component, whether negative or positive, controls businesses response, and rightly so.

The Unknown is a fundamental component of all businesses, and its intuitively understood value by the business is always some mixture of risk aversion and enthusiastic curiosity.

Narrative is the core tool for top down updates to the business process in the face of radical changes that are not fully understood.



Harry Pottash
Philosopher & Investor
Previously: Engineer, Founder
Indie Status: 5+ years



#22: The Unknown Disrupts Your Intuitive Model



Frequent and intentional encounters with the unknown are the only way to keep your organization robust and supple in the face of crisis.

When the Unyielding Unknown appears, it disrupts several layers of the intuitive model at once. This can be addressed either by engaging the unknown more deeply, which will lead to further disruption or by working around the disruption.

Working around the disruption will cause the Unyielding Unknown to manifest again in even more destructive forms.

In the face of intuitive model disruption, Narrative is the fastest effective tool. If your business narrative was not part of what was disrupted by Covid-19, great it's time to lean into it, and let it rebuild the rest of your model.

If your business narrative no longer makes sense in the face of the pandemic, it's time to formulate a new one, and we can help.



Harry Pottash
Philosopher & Investor
Previously: Engineer, Founder
Indie Status: 5+ years



#23: Mythology, Archetypes & Uncertainty



Many similar character archetypes exist in mythological stories around the world. Since ancient times humans have been drawn to the idea of using archetypes to make sense of how different people behave, especially when faced with great challenges. Archetypes are a valuable framework for thinking about how to approach the unknown.

Mythology may seem like a fairy tale or distant history, yet emperors, merchants and farmers throughout history consulted mythology when facing unfamiliar situations. Our ancestors saw uncertainty as part of life and rather than fighting change, the mythological wisdom helped them navigate through the chaos of life.

When faced with the unknown the inauthentic and unsustainable falls away and we are left to discover the essence of who we are. In mythology this is when the hero finds their voice, their strength and clarity in their purpose.



Martha Balaile
Illustrator
Indie Status: 1+ year



What's your archetype?

Deploying Indies



#24: Reverse Anthropology

An anthropologist's role is as an observer in a foreign and alien culture. Their purpose is to collect the stories and rituals of a culture **without** the intent to improve, affect or otherwise interfere.

Bringing an indie consultant into your organization flips this approach—the outsider is the one with the foreign and alien outlook. That outlook is typically not prevalent in the organization and inevitably has a shift on the stories, rituals and thinking with an organization.

The indie consultant is brought in **with** the intent that the person will help shape strategy, leadership and culture throughout the organization's lifespan in a new and interesting direction.



Jordan Allen

Business Development & Revenue Generation

Historical Examples

Squanto's Knowledge and Network Avert Catastrophe

Old World knowledge was irrelevant in solving New World problems. The settlers prevented catastrophic loss by utilizing Squanto as a resource to help win quickly in a new environment.

Navajo Code Talkers Create Competitive Advantage in WWII

As a cultural technology, Navajo accelerated time to value on the U.S. Army's WWII cryptology initiatives. The U.S. gained a unique competitive advantage entirely non-replicable by the competition.

#25: Indies as Secret Weapon

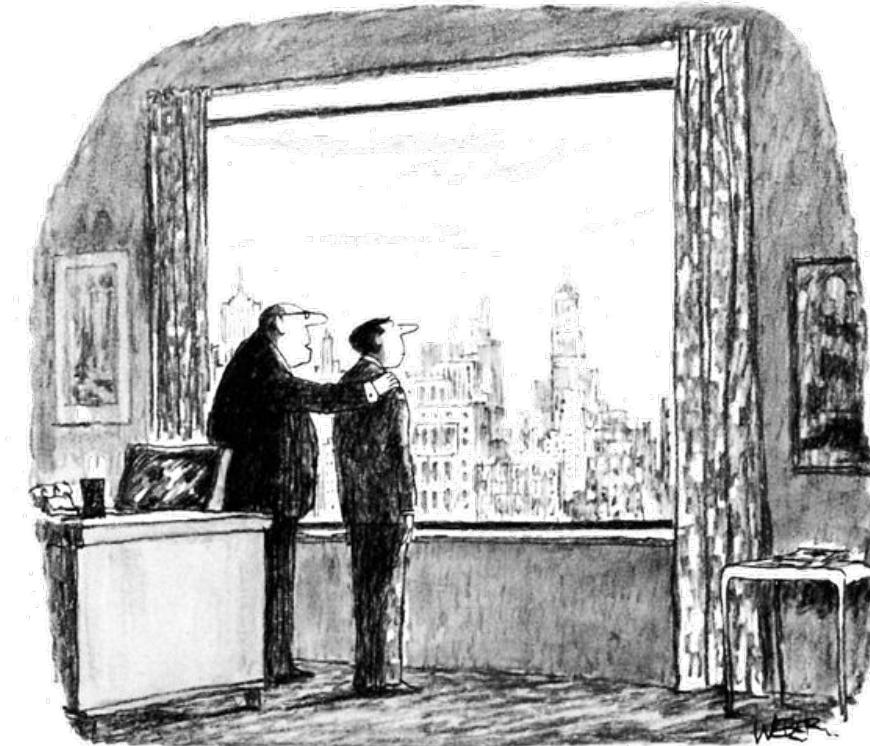


Long before there were big consulting firms
peddling pablum ...

Long before there was the noise and fury of
PowerPoint decks and analyst reports signifying
nothing ...

There were wizards and viziers, itinerant monks and
crazy seers ...

**It is from this proud, ancient tradition of
heterodox wisdom that the modern
independent consultant is descended.**



*"Let's just call it the 'next new normal'.
That should buy us another five years."*



The Yak Collective

Ancient order of independent consultants
Indie Status: 3000 years

The Yak Wisdom Project



This deck is just the first of what we hope will be a series of studies the Yak Collective will be undertaking over the coming months. We aim to generate a body of Covid-19 reboot intelligence that is fundamentally different from anything you might see anywhere else, not just in terms of content, but in terms of the process of getting to it.

Let the Yak Collective help guide your reboot

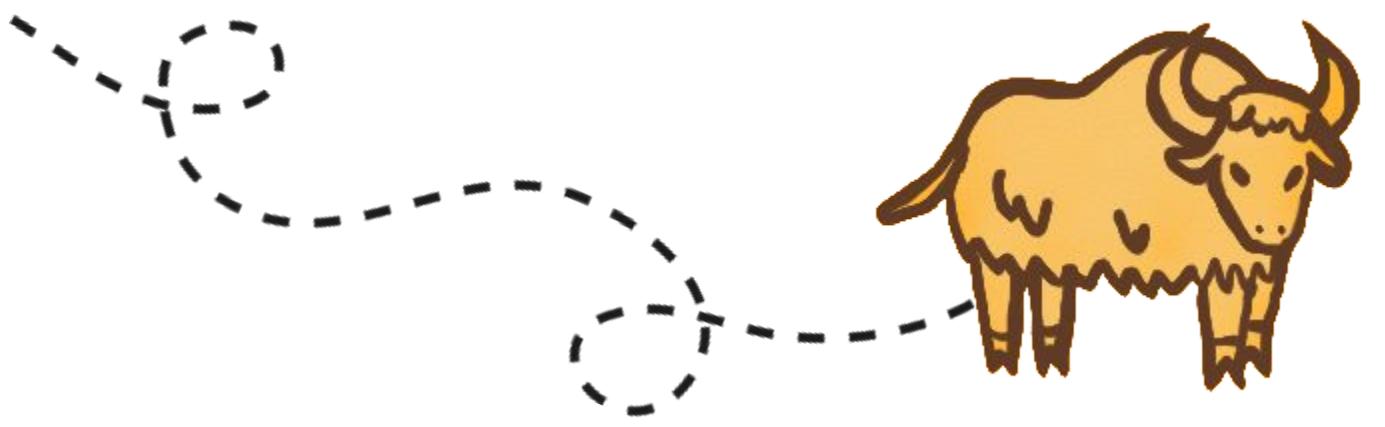
Want to keep up with our efforts? Follow us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Facebook](#).

Like bits and pieces of what you saw in this deck? Feel free to contact one or more individual contributors directly! *The Yak Collective is not an agency or intermediary.* Our members collaborate because they want to, and each of us maintains their own independent consulting practice. We offer you a catalog of ideas and people to choose from, not a bundle.

Like a lot of what you see? Contact [Paul Millerd](#) to loop The Yak Collective into your reboot efforts. We will assemble the right small team and set of ideas to work with you, in whatever way is most effective. It might be a study or report. It might be facilitating a workshop or series of conversations for your executive team. Or it might just be an ongoing conversation with one or more of us.

Want to hang out with us LIVE as we work these problems? [Join our Discord server](#). Our working process is *literally* open. Any independent consultant from anywhere in the world who has ideas is welcome to join our efforts, contribute to and lead collaborative projects. Any prospective client is welcome to hang out as well.

Still have questions? [Read more about us here](#)





You must pay us millions for
warmed-over, recycled, repackaged,
Covid-washed pablum! Nobody ever got
fired for hiring McKinsey! You can't just
hire some rando off the internet just
because they seem to actually know what
they're talking about, NOOOOO!



twitter-sourced collective
intelligence go brrrrr

