

Hocus Pocus: Where Complexity Meets Clarity

The magic happens when you stop waving wands and start pulling real levers.

The Backstory

Why "Hocus Pocus"?

The phrase originally mocked fake magic, nonsense words used by charlatans to distract while they pulled tricks. Perfect metaphor for what's happening in business right now:

- **The AI hype cycle** is full of hocus pocus with dazzling demos that evaporate when you try to implement them
- **Complexity theatre** with consultants who make simple things complicated to justify their fees
- **The "transformation" industry** is full of big words, big budgets, questionable outcomes

Out counter positioning: We are the ones who call out the fake magic and show what actually works. No smoke machines. No mirrors. Just **practical sorcery** that changes how work gets done.

Tagline options:

- *"No wands. No BS. Just what works."*
 - *"The anti-magic show for people who need real results."*
 - *"Where complexity gets honest and AI gets practical."*
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Format: The Offline Podcast

This framing is gold. It immediately signals:

- Intimate, not performative
- Conversation, not presentation
- You're eavesdropping on something real

The Setup (Physical)

Stage arrangement:

- Two comfortable chairs angled toward each other (not facing audience)
- Small side table with water, maybe whisky glasses for aesthetic
- Subtle lighting that feels like a late-night conversation
- Audience in a semi-circle, close, no more than 3 rows deep
- One good mic visible (podcast aesthetic)

No slides. No projector. Maybe one flip chart for the discussion portion. (open for discussion here in case things to need to be shown)

The 35-Minute "Episode"

A scripted, but loose conversation with three acts:

Act 1: The Problem We're Both Seeing (10 min)

Opening question we ask each other:

"What's the most expensive mistake you've seen a leadership team make in the last year?"

This lets us both:

- Establish credibility through war stories (anonymised)
- Surface the **real pain** in the room without being salesy
- Set up the tension: complexity is real AND most solutions are bullshit

Complexity Angle: Teams treating complex problems as if they're complicated (Cynefin setup) – the time for 5 year plans is over and emergent is better than set in stone inflexible, perfect plans

Automation Angle: Teams buying AI tools like they're buying software, then wondering why nothing changes, teams limited to limited tools like individual chats and co-pilot – lots of paralysis by analysis and waiting for the big bang and the perfect 5 year plan

Act 2: The Uncomfortable Truth (12 min)

Transition question:

"So if most of what's being sold is hocus pocus... what's the actual magic?"

The Complexity insight: different problems need different approaches. The crime is applying "best practice" to situations that need "emergent practice." Make it visceral with a specific example. Emergence of new tech is a classic context.

The AI insight: the magic isn't the tool, it's the architecture change, one experiment at a time and lots of little bets to learn then scale. No silver bullets here.

The interplay: Challenge each other a bit.

Act 3: The Synthesis (13 min)

Where your two worlds collide:

"What if the Cynefin framework tells you WHEN to automate and Joanna's approach tells you HOW?"

Map it out together:

- **Simple domain:** Automate ruthlessly. These are your quick wins.
- **Complicated domain:** Build decision-support systems. AI as analyst, human as decider.
- **Complex domain:** Use AI for sensing and pattern detection, not prescription. Run small experiments.

- **Chaotic domain:** AI for rapid response and communication, humans for leadership.
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The 45-Minute Group Discussion

This is where the magic really happens, or dies. Structure it so it doesn't become a Q&A.

Opening Move: The Partition

Don't ask "any questions?" Instead:

"We're going to do something different. No Q&A, we've all been to those. Instead, let's surface what's actually going on in this room."

Quick exercise (5 min): Give everyone a card. One question:

"What's the one thing in your organisation right now that's being treated as 'just complicated' when you suspect it's actually complex?"

Collect cards, quickly scan and cluster. This becomes the discussion agenda.

The Discussion Format: Fishbowl-ish

- Start with 2 of the most provocative cards
- Invite the people who wrote them to join you briefly (2 extra chairs)
- 10-minute deep dive on each real situation
- Others can "tap in" by standing behind an empty chair
- You and partner facilitate, challenge, offer frameworks

Principles for This Section

1. **No advice given without diagnosis.** Ask "what have you tried?" before suggesting
2. **Make people feel smart.** "That's actually a Cynefin boundary problem you've identified, something most consultants miss."

3. **Be honest about limits.** "That one? I'd need to see more. That's too context-dependent for a quick take."
 4. **Create peer connections.** "You dealt with something similar — what worked?"
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Engagement Throughout

Before the Event

- Invitation should feel exclusive: "We're running an experiment. 20 seats. No recording. Real conversation."
- Personal outreach, not mass invite
- Ask one pre-question in the invite: "What's the one business problem keeping you up at night that you suspect has no clean answer?" (This primes them AND gives you intel)

During the Event

- **The card exercise** (described above)
- **The "temperature check":** At the 20-minute mark of discussion, ask everyone to hold up fingers 1–5: "How much of what we're discussing resonates with your reality?"
- **The uncomfortable question:** "Who in this room is currently implementing something they're not sure will work?" (Hands up = vulnerability = connection)

The Closing Ritual

Don't let it fizzle. Last 5 minutes:

"Before we close, one sentence each. What's the one thing you're going to look at differently tomorrow?"

Go around the room. Fast. This creates:

- Commitment (psychological)
- A memory anchor

- Quotes you can use later (with permission)
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The After: Connection Without Cringe

Immediate (Same Evening)

- Drinks/coffee after for those who want to stay
- **No pitch.** This is relationship time.

Within 48 Hours

Personal follow-up, not mass email.

"Thanks for being part of Hocus Pocus #1. Your comment about [specific thing] stuck with me , I keep thinking about it.

No 'ask' here. Just wanted to say the conversation was exactly what I hoped it would be. If anything we discussed is still rattling around, I'm always happy to think it through over coffee."

Optional value-add: A one-page "field notes" doc summarising the key themes that emerged. Not a sales piece but genuine insight from the room.

Longer Term

- **Monthly** "Hocus Pocus Dispatch", a short, cheeky email with one idea from complexity + one from AI automation. Build the audience for event #2.
- **Discord** channel-group
- **Direct outreach** to the 2–3 people who showed the most engagement: "Want to grab 30 minutes? Not to sell anything — I'm just curious about [their specific situation]."

Visual design for the event

file:///Users/joanna/Downloads/hocus-pocus-concept.html

