

12.2020

ISSUE FOUR

The Learning Scientist

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Merry Christmas

From all at The Learning Scientist!!

Thank you to all of our amazing
contributors and readers we look forward
to continuing the conversation in
2021 !!!



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Editorial

Kurt Ewald Lindley

The Captain of this ship

Choosing where to sail this vessel based only on the gift of people's words; their stories of learning are wind in our sails.

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The
Learning Scientist

Please let us know your thoughts. Get in touch with us at thelearningscientistmag@gmail.com and share your 'it could be even better, if...' ideas. If you would like to contribute or subscribe, let us know here: <https://www.learningscientistmag.com> Find us on Twitter at @LscientistMag #StoriesOfLearning, #LearningScientistMag.

The bit we should say: We are not funded in any way and no money has crossed hands to make this happen, just the investment of people's time; we are powered by our own drive to get stories out there, showcasing the thoughts, research and results of theories and practice with independent contributions from across the education, learning and development, and performance sport environments.

It's a place to show up and celebrate each element of the magazine, from its contributors to our editor, designer and tech support, all of whom have gifted their time to allow this magazine to exist beyond an idea.

The opinions expressed in each story of the magazine are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of those at the Learning Scientist (editor, designer and production team). We accept no responsibility for the opinions expressed. So, Issue 4 of the #LearningScientistMag now appears in your Inbox. You are likely to be reading this in the midst of a lockdown as the COVID-19 pandemic is still with us. Not something any of us expected. So before you dive in and start reading, the magazine team would like to wish you love, care and affection.

The pandemic aside, it seems the situation hasn't stopped people writing and looking to share their stories. All fuelled by a desire to share freely, too. No money has crossed anyone's palm, no advertising or political agendas are being massaged or served, just the kindness of our community (which is ever growing).

Everything in the magazine is gifted, time and skills. Our team of Rebecca, Kelli and Aaron all put in the hours to turn people's narratives into accessible reads. I am so proud of what we have achieved and the trust writers have put in us.

What you will see here are the stories of good people, sharing what they wish to be heard. Honest, true and theirs. What we ask is that you skip through them and dive into ones you least expect to give you something - I know you will be happily surprised. This issue particularly brings a strong mix of views from performance sport, business and education (all connected to 'people development').

I also urge you all to touch base with our authors in this and previous issues. They are real people doing great work. They are accessible and open for conversation.

Our ultimate mission is to become a trusted source for all things learning and people development within Education, Corporate Learning, People Development and Performance Sport.

Your go to place for #StoriesOfLearning.

This magazine is created on the principles of a social enterprise, we are powered only by the investment of our growing community and the kindness of our contributing authors.

Serious Play Leads to Serious Learning

Take a moment. Close your eyes. Think back to when you were a child. A time when you played outside, splashed in puddles, climbed trees, did arts and crafts, laughed. And most importantly; learnt.

I'm not talking about at school, I'm talking about all the things you learnt through play and experimentation.

How did you learn to climb a tree? Through play.

How did you know the stream was too deep to paddle in? Through play.

How did you figure out how to do a cartwheel? Through play.

If play is this powerful to help us learn, why on earth do we stop playing when we grow up? Why do we end up sitting in rows or at tables listening to someone talk at us? Just thinking about it makes me feel a little queasy!

I believe it's time to bring play back, to make learning fun again and to allow adults to reconnect with their inner child.

I know this might sound scary and alien to some people, and as if having fun isn't going to get people anywhere, but I know that it can take people further than we ever imagined.

There's something magical that happens when you allow people to play. It allows them to lead the way, to take ownership and to make sense of things as they go. They don't need force-feeding with answers or spoon-feeding with overbearing support. They just need the time and space to play.

Giving ourselves (as learners) and our

participants this space allows some wonderful things to happen naturally...

Our curiosity is fired up

Curiosity is a key childhood attribute that's all too easy to leave behind. When we reconnect to our curiosity we open up to knowing more, to asking more, to playing with the ideas and what ifs in our minds.

Our minds open up to possibilities

With play, comes experimentation and adventure. People become open to seeing where things will lead, to not needing all the answers. They are able to imagine, dream and wonder.

We are more likely and comfortable to be vulnerable

It's not always easy to be vulnerable, less so if it's with people we don't want to look silly or weak in front of. But vulnerability is neither of these things; it's about being open, honest and unafraid to show the real you.

We are more inquisitive about ourselves and others

Play opens doors that allow us to explore. We can follow our streams of thought, the random questions and the lightbulb moments. We feel more open to dig deeper into ourselves and more open to inquiring about other people's differences and preferences. Doing these hand-in-hand makes the biggest impact of all.

Actually enjoy ourselves!

Just like those classes from school that you can still recall (for me it's when the science teacher dropped some sodium into a vat of water and it exploded!), enjoyment will enable the learning to live on long after the session ends. It encourages us to talk about our experience more, to continue the conversations and to embed what we learnt.



Creativity coach, **Cat Hase**, wants us to get serious about play and why we all need to reconnect with our inner child

Aren't these exactly what we are looking for when people are learning?

So, I've convinced you it's a good idea...but HOW do you add play to your learning interventions? Don't worry, it's actually pretty simple and you can scale it up and down to suit your topic and audience.

It's all about using exercises, activities and games that allow people to use the five things listed above. It could be as simple as a great question that allows them to explore. It could be as elaborate as a personalised board game. And it could be anything in between. In fact, you'll find that there are loads of exercises out there that fit the bill; maybe you're even using some already.

Take a look at one of the games that inspired me to design my Toybox- it's called Moving Motivators (<https://management30.com/practice/moving-motivators/>). It's simple, easy and leads to the most amazing conversations. And feel free to explore the activities I have since created - <https://imagineif.vipmembervault.com/>

If you want to assess if your exercise has the play factor, try using these questions:

- 1)** Will this allow my learners to explore what it means to them and to others?
- 2)** Will my learners be able to think differently as a result of this exercise (during or afterwards)?
- 3)** Do I think it sounds like fun? Would I enjoy it?
- 4)** Will it allow my learners to do something unusual, unexpected or surprising?

It's time we got serious about play and realised that serious play leads to serious learning.

If you'd like to continue the conversation around play, come find me on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/in/cathase), Instagram and Facebook ([@fromimagineif](https://www.facebook.com/fromimagineif)).

I'm Cat, a Creativity Coach who loves nothing more than being upside down or the question "have you got any ideas for..."

Upside down?? Yep - I love a handstand to raise my energy and bring a smile to my face. Almost as much as I love helping people come up with ideas. I specialise in designing games for learning, but any ideas question floats my boat. It flexes my creative thinking and allows me to dream. Oh and if I pass a playground that has no kids on it, I'll be straight in there!

I had the privilege to go and watch my son in his school football match and it was so inspiring to see the events that unfolded.

It was clear after five minutes of a 40 minute match that the opposition were going to lose the game heavily. BUT what I observed within this, no contest was where the real victory lived.

As the score increased, my son's headteacher started to make some changes. Ronnie and a few others were taken off and replaced by their teammates.

I stood and watched the game, and then my Dad stood beside me and said "look over there!"

Ronnie was standing upright, giving encouragement and instructions to his mates out on the pitch from the sideline. What he didn't realise was that his boot lace was undone.

We saw his mate kneel down, without hesitation, and tie up his lace, just in case they were to get the opportunity to go back on.

Myself, my Mum and Dad laughed with how he didn't even know his mate was helping him out. His mate simply wanted to help him, with no expectation of any recognition. He finished tying the lace and turned back to the game.

I said to my Dad:

"Isn't it incredible how an 11 year old boy can see a mate in need and be there for him, what a great young man."

My Dad replied:

"As you get older son, more people will want to undo your boot lace than will tie it, that's for sure, especially if the person with the lace that comes undone is doing well in life"

This got me thinking!

I observe children in schools giving their friends sweets at lunchtime, writing them cards for special events, sending teachers gifts and picking them up when they are down.

Giving to give.

I observe adults, especially in business, giving often to receive. Giving with conditions and giving with expectations.

Giving to get.

Imagine a world where organisations gave to give and the people within did the same. Zero expectations of receiving; just simply giving to feel the joy of raising another person.

I believe this is possible, I really do. Because I see it within many organisations and by the organisation itself. Anyone can do this; at first it's an awareness, then a desire to live this way.

Every person, or company I work with wants this. The reason I know this is that they wouldn't hire me if they didn't.

This doesn't mean it will happen overnight. That's not what's important. Once people see, feel and hear the message of kindness, love and warmth through the words and actions, they will start to believe for themselves that they are standing for something much greater than me, myself and I.

There's nothing more powerful than a group of people rowing the boat in sync with the same goal in mind, with a shared purpose as to why and a vision of something that's so inspiring they want to always be part of it.

The reason I feel we see it less in the corporate world than the playground is because money becomes the purpose, not the helping of another person or contributing to the greater good.

Emotion is taken out and replaced by the highs of items, not the depth of serving others.



We become conditioned. We are told; we watch others; we hear the common language; we get lost in the 'stuff'; we lose the kid inside who would always tie his mate's lace in the playground.

I challenge all of you reading this to ask yourself:

"Do I tie more laces than I undo?"

Taking the time to ask yourself how many laces you have tied this week will help you become consciously aware of encouraging, empowering and simply helping someone else. In time, this will just be part of your everyday life.

I'm yet to meet someone who hasn't felt good after tying someone else's lace...

Always be the one on the knee tying the lace. This is where the magic lives.

I am not here to just take up a space, I am here to make a difference. Once we find what we love, what our purpose is, what we are passionate about and a way to contribute, it is beautiful. I now dedicate my life to inspiring others to achieve their greatness.

Have a great day people. Be kind. Be you. And always Believe...

All my love, energy and inspiration...

Retired footballer and inspirational speaker, Luke Staton, challenges us to tie more laces than we undo in the name of encouraging, empowering and helping

Are You Tying The Boot Lace Of Another, Or Are You Undoing It



Continue the conversation: I'd love to hear your thoughts on how we can learn from our next generation about leadership. Please connect on:

Instagram - @lukestaton1
LinkedIn - Lukestaton
Facebook - Luke Staton
www.lukestaton.com

Secure Base Leadership - Not All Classrooms Have Four Walls

Coach, mentor and coach developer, Doug MacDonald, explains why we need our secure bases if we're to flourish, now more than ever.



I'm scared. I've been in this precarious position before - high up on a crag is often where I feel happiest, most like the real me. Here, I often find the part of me that is calm, focused, instinctive and brave. It is the part of me I know the best, but visit the least. But not today, today I am only a few moves from the top but it feels like another lifetime away. These are normally easy moves but something is wrong. My last piece of protection is a few metres below me and the top only a few metres above, but the friction is poor and I can't stop thinking 'what if'. What if I make a mistake and take a fall? If I do fall from here I'm likely to fall a long way, probably not hit the ground, but it's possible. I'm a husband, a father of one and about to become a father of two. This is really stupid. Why did I put myself in this position? Why can't I summon the energy to quieten down the voices and move calmly forwards...

I've always loved learning but hated classrooms. It took me a very long time to learn how to learn and I'm sure I drove many teachers to distraction with my ability to show potential but struggle to focus in a traditional learning environment. It was reliving this reflection in 2011 when I, now working with athletes and coaches, and struggling to get them to apply what I was teaching in terms of psychological concepts and skills began to wonder if there might be another way. I was looking across at some mountains and remembered that some of my most powerful learning experiences growing up had happened in less traditional learning environments - not all classrooms have four walls. What if we could find a way of creating powerful learning experiences outdoors that enable us to move from transactional to transformational experiences?

Like all good ideas, it needed time to incubate (Belsky, 2010) and so the idea grew with me, as I developed as a learning professional. The catalyst however, for moving a good idea to something usable required some social capital and investment from others. The first of these came along somewhat serendipitously when I asked Victoria Clark (of www.activeadvantage.org) to deliver some mentoring training for some triathlon coaches. Rather than delivering a 'standard' one-off mentoring course, she skilfully introduced the group to the concept of secure base leadership (Kohlrieser, 2012), recognising that this model might be more meaningful to the audience and I was captivated. The concept grew within me and when the Captain of this ship, Kurt Lindley, became curious about the idea he kindly invited me to the learning lab at his house in Doncaster, where we explored the concept at both a practical and academic level. By this stage the idea was moving but it needed an opportunity to deliver it. Enter climbing buddy and coach educator, Emma Brunning (of www.activeblu.co.uk) who invited me to run a workshop with her in the Lake District. She asked me what I wanted to do and with a big, deep breath I told her I had an idea...

So what is a secure base and secure base leadership? It's a concept developed by Clinical Psychologist and hostage negotiator, George Kohlrieser, and is based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) drawing heavily on Kohlrieser's applied experiences as a hostage negotiator.

A secure base is defined as a 'person, place, goal or object that provides a source of protectionsafety and caring and offers a source of inspiration and energy for daring, exploration, risk taking and seeking challenge' (Kohlrieser,

2012). It is this combination of providing a sense of safety and security, whilst also providing encouragement and inspiration for us to challenge ourselves and push ourselves beyond what we think we are capable of. While you're reading this article, try to think about people, places, goals or objects that have at some point in your life made you feel safe and secure and also encouraged you to push beyond your perceived limits. The beautiful thing about the model is that everybody will at some point have had at least one secure base.

Stays Calm
Accepts the individual for who they are
Sees the potential in others
Uses listening and enquiry
Delivers a powerful message
Focuses on positives
Encourages risk taking
Inspires through intrinsic motivation
Signals accessibility/availability

So blending my passion for learning outdoors with this model, we took it out into the real world - not to scare them, to create some sort of macho adrenaline junkie experience or a 'fun and fizz' day out, but to create a genuinely powerful transformational learning experience. By reflecting on who our secure bases are, who we are secure bases to, and applying the principles in a supportive but challenging rock climbing environment, participants strip back to who they really are in a way that I've never been able to achieve in a traditional classroom setting. Once we reach this space, we are then able to think more critically about the kind of leaders we would like to be and what might happen if the image of the 'leader' became more like a secure base - someone we can consistently rely on to support and challenge us in equal measure, at just the right times.

In the climbing environment, we use the metaphor of the climber and the belayer which has lots of great applications to all sorts of environments. Being a secure base leader is like belaying a rock climber. The climber is able to take safe risks because the belayer is providing a safe and secure environment for them - taking up the slack in the rope when they feel uncertain, giving them more slack when it's safe to take greater risks. In your own environments, how do you try to belay the people you support? How do you make them feel safe, knowing that you're always there if they need you and also confident enough to push on to discover new ground, to innovate and to flourish?

...the voices in my head are interrupted by a new voice. The voice is calm and confident. It tells me that he's here for me if I need him. He reminds me that I've done this before and that I can do this again. He delivers such a powerful message, asks me to take a deep breath and then commit. I finally move my feet

from the spot they've been welded to and find the small foot holds I need to reach the huge, positive hand holds and calmly make the moves to the top. The voice in question was my belayer and best mate, Will. He has been a secure base for me since we were teenagers, somebody who can always be relied upon to offer the security I needed and then show me that I'm capable of more than I realise.

Who are your secure bases - who inspires you to be more as a leader, as a friend, as a human? I have no idea how we move forward from this pandemic but I think we're going to need our secure bases...

Continue the conversation: Want to learn more about me and Secure Base Leadership? Twitter [@PosCoachDev](https://twitter.com/PosCoachDev) is where I can generally be found learning from others. Website is [here](http://www.poscoachdev.com) and the micro site for the Secure Base Leadership work is available [here](http://www.poscoachdev.com/micro).

Doug MacDonald is a coach, mentor and coach developer with a fascination for how people learn. Having had an eclectic upbringing and set of professional experiences including academic Psychology, briefly flying in the Royal Air Force, a moderately successful career as a rower, cyclist and triathlete, Doug now primarily works as a performance coach developer and coaching professional. When not getting soaked by the side of a river, lake, sea or swimming pool working with coaches, or looking after small children, Doug's deepest passion is for messing around in the outdoors, preferably up a mountain somewhere where everything is still and quiet.

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HR professional, business psychologist and founder of The People Deal, Louise Lennon, explores the science and psychology behind fairness at work.



What is ‘fairness at work’ and why does it matter?

LOUISE LENNON IS A HR PROFESSIONAL, BUSINESS PSYCHOLOGIST AND FOUNDER OF THE PEOPLE DEAL, A PEOPLE AND ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT START-UP BASED AT LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY’S BUSINESS INCUBATOR. SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT DESIGNING SIMPLE, PRAGMATIC, AND RESEARCH-BACKED INTERVENTIONS THAT RESULT IN DESIRABLE OUTCOMES FOR ORGANISATIONS AND HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON SOCIETY.

When I was young, I remember being in the back of the car with my two older sisters on our way to Cornwall for our annual summer holiday. Squabbling about something and nothing, it wouldn’t be long until one of us would shout “That’s not fair!” only to be met with “Well, life isn’t fair!”. I didn’t get it. Why couldn’t life be fair?

Unbeknownst to me, I wouldn’t understand what unfairness truly felt like until adulthood. My lovely Dad died when I was 21, very suddenly and I was with him. That day was so horrific I can hardly speak about it now. Several years later, life was cruel again. My husband and I rode the IVF rollercoaster for nearly a decade, and I ended up in counselling to cope. I struggled to get my head around the unfairness of it all as we watched those around us having children and creating new families.

Whilst this was all going on in my personal life, I was working in HR and making sure that others were treated fairly and that work was a force for good in people’s lives (especially when, like me, they probably had enough to contend with at home). But it was hard work. There was something about the workplace that was grinding people down. I became tired of working relentlessly to make a difference. I took advantage of the freedom that I had: I left my job and went back to university.

I finally had the time to really reflect on everything that I had experienced both at home and at work. One sunny spring day in 2019, whilst walking home after an afternoon learning about employee engagement and trust, I started to reflect on the decisions that I had made during my career and thought to myself, “**Maybe it’s all about fairness**”.

By the time I got home, I had decided that I would find out more to satisfy my curiosity. As soon as time allowed, I started to review theories from psychology and sociology. I soon realised that there was a lot to learn about fairness and why we care about it so much.

Fairness offers us a number of desirable things: It helps us to feel more in control, gives life more predictability, and provides us with a sense of trust and security. Beyond this, fairness improves the quality of our relationships, helping us to feel that we belong and are valued, and being fair to others gives us a sense of dignity and meaningful existence.

But what was ‘fairness at work’? To answer this question, I enlisted the support of an independent researcher to help me to plough through over a hundred research studies, create a fairness database of findings, and pull these together to reveal the truly transformational nature of fairness at work. We were able to prove that fairness has positive and system-wide impacts on individuals, relationships, and organisational culture. I wanted to make sure that we captured everything we had learnt in a way that was simple and easy to use, so the next challenge was to design a practical Fairness at Work Framework™. Within

this framework, there are four ‘solid foundations’ that build an environment for fairness, five ‘critical experiences’ that bring fairness to life and six ‘shared behaviours’ that reinforce fairness efforts and position it as a joint responsibility of the entire workforce.

We are proud of the knowledge that we have created. When we get asked about fairness at work, we confidently define it as **‘the quality of treating people in an ethical, impartial and morally right way, in line with merit, need, established rules and expectations, to ensure that everyone feels supported, included, trusted and safe.’**

When we consider the state of play in contemporary work, we can see that the importance of fairness is only increasing. Globalisation, competition, uncertainty, technological changes, reduced job security, flexible work and diverse, dispersed workforces all contribute to a melting pot of fairness issues.

HR professionals are juggling multiple priorities and working tirelessly to create a positive employee experience for everyone: launching employee health and wellbeing initiatives, leading diversity and inclusion programmes and providing high levels of support to leaders and managers so that they can respond to the increasingly complex needs of employees.

I’m not suggesting that they throw away everything that they have put their time and energy into so far. But when I reflect on what I did, my efforts were dealing with the symptoms and not the cause of the problems that I was trying to solve. What I have discovered since is that fairness can bring these efforts together, prevent the development of employee issues before they emerge, and create a sense of genuine care and social responsibility in the workplace.

But if you still need to be convinced, we have found research that proves that fairness increases satisfaction and well-being. It increases the connection between people and the commitment to each other and their work. It improves productivity, performance and engagement.

When so much in our lives feels unstable and unpredictable, I think that we need to focus on the present and put our faith into what we know; fairness matters to everyone and when it exists, we instantly feel and act better.

“Fairness is not about difference and what sets us apart, it is about similarity and what brings us together “

and it is for this reason that we need to make sure that it exists for everyone at work.

Continue the conversation: Connect with Louise on Twitter [@lou_tpd](#) Join the conversation [#fairnessfirst](#)
Sign up for more information and resources
www.thepeopledeal.co.uk

Who am I?

I have asked myself this question a lot over the last six months as I have navigated from being a school leader for 20 years, and lately a headteacher, to working independently. All this during a global pandemic and lockdown!

I am a straight, white, able-bodied cisgender woman who is passionate about diversity, equity and inclusion. I have a strong sense of social justice and want to be part of the solution to the problems we have in the school system. I am a pioneer and a connector in 5 Voices speak, and I am an ENTJ if you are familiar with Myers Briggs.

What do I do?

As the Co-Founder of **#WomenEd**, a gender equality community, and the Co-Founder of **#DiverseEd**, I have volunteered in the grassroots educational space for several years. I have given my time, my energy, my expertise and my experience freely, much to my friends and family's horror. But in the last 6 months, having tuned into my Ikigai, my passion project has now become my day job.

I am working independently as a Leadership Development Consultant, Coach, Trainer and Facilitator. I have somehow ended up with two brands and two websites – my own one: www.hannah-wilson.co.uk and the collective one for the community: www.diverseeducators.co.uk.

During lockdown I launched the **#DailyWritingChallenge** and I blogged every day for 100 days. Each day I threw a theme out there and we brought together a group of writers who reflected on each idea. As time, energy and capacity waned, we have now moved to the **#MonthlyWritingChallenge**. Disruption was one of our themes we unpacked in the autumn.

What is disruption?

noun. disturbance or problems which interrupt an event, activity, or process; an act or instance of the order of things being disturbed.

2020: the year the world stopped. The year everything we knew changed. The year our lives were disrupted. The year the 'order of things' was disturbed. The year that everything that was certain became uncertain overnight.

Synonyms for disruption include: disturbance... disorder... interference... upset... interruption... unsettling... confusion... disintegration... discord... breaking up... separation... alienation... hostility...

Antonyms for disruption: union... amalgamation... reconciliation... appease... organise... order... compose... soothe... calm...

As someone who loves change, is disruption always a bad thing? Is disruption a negative or a welcome occurrence? Is a disruption always a 'problem' or can it be a catalyst? The word seems to be very loaded.

What is positive disruption?

I have decided to embrace and own my disruptive nature. I am a positive disruptor as my friend Jaz Ampaw-Farr would call it. I challenge the status quo through my disruptive thinking, my disruptive questioning, my disruptive conversations. I am a disruptive leader. I don't cause chaos, although I have been compared to a whirlwind at times...

For me disruption is about challenging what we know to affect change, positive change. It is about innovating and challenging systems and processes to transform things as we know them. Disruption brings a cycle of change, it encourages things to evolve and iterate.

Thus, a positive disruption is when the equilibrium, when what we know or think we know, is disrupted intentionally and deliberately.

What is #DiverseEd?

A good example of positive disruption is the grassroots movement around diversity, equity and inclusion – educators over the last 5 years have taken things into their own hands. The rise of **#WomenEd**, **#BAMEed**, **#LGBTed**, **#DisabilityEd** and **#DiverseEd** is an act of disruption. The systems and structures have been challenged to affect change.

So, what are we intentionally and deliberately disrupting through our work with the **#DiverseEd** community?

- We are intentionally disrupting the lack of diversity in governance and trust boards.
- We are intentionally disrupting the lack of diversity in ITTE.

- We are intentionally disrupting the lack of diverse representation in the sector.

- We are intentionally disrupting the lack of diversity in thought leadership.

Please do check our website: www.diverseeducators.co.uk and join us for our free virtual events.

How am I a positive disruptor?

As a leader I am quite comfortable being disruptive. I am bold as I am values-led and have the conviction of my actions. I am confident in breaking the rules and in remaking the rules. I don't really have a comfort zone, and I don't really stay in the safe zone of equilibrium and I don't maintain the status quo.

For me a disruptive leader is someone who is outward-facing, someone who has a growth mindset, someone who focuses on the positives of change. A disruptive leader has a vision and is strategic in working towards that bigger picture. A disruptive leader influences and inspires others to go bigger and to go further. A disruptive leader breaks through barriers and shows a different journey.

So, if you want to cultivate a disruptive mindset here are some tips:

- 1. Be curious** - constantly ask why questions and open doors

Positive Disruption

Hannah Wilson explains why being disruptive isn't always a bad thing



to possibilities.

2. Be courageous - get visible, stand up and be counted.

3. Be agile - create new opportunities and bring others with you.

4. Be influential - exchange knowledge and understanding with others.

5. Be reflective - reflect on how diverse your circles are and how you can cross-fertilise your connections and skills.

6. Be innovative - get creative and see the solutions not the problems.

One of the ways I am a positive disruptor is by being an Inclusive Ally. I advocate for diverse representation. One strategy I use is to challenge non-inclusive events, as I am really sick of seeing educational events that are 'manels' (all male) 'wanels' (all white) or 'fanels' (all white women). I challenge event organisers and help them amplify diverse

voices through my network. I also leverage my privilege by sharing my microphone – this is a US pledge for white people, to share their platforms with people of colour. So, before I accept a speaking gig, I check the line up, and I accept based on if there is diversity in the speakers. If there is not, I offer to help curate a more representative range of voices and I suggest that I share my speaking time with a person of colour who can speak on the same theme as I, but who perhaps does not yet have the profile and the network I have.

We can all be positive disruptors. Consider what you care about. Think about how you can be a bit louder and a bit prouder about your passion projects. Lean in to your sphere of influence and raise your voice.

Continue the conversation:
I tweet and blog as **@Ethical_Leader**

The Castle & The Drawbridge

A tale about re-thinking redundancy

1066. The year of the Battle of Hastings and the Norman invasion of England. An era that marked the beginning of castle building in England. Strategically built to intimidate and defend conquered territories, with moats and drawbridges designed to control the flow of people and resources, while protecting a privileged few during times of attack.

A thousand years on, I wonder - have our beliefs, behaviours and societal norms changed that much, considering the knee jerk reaction of most organisations is to retract and downsize in an attempt to regain control of chaos when external factors threaten the status quo?

Having worked in the corporate world for nearly 20 years, I am no stranger to restructures or redundancy. I have survived dozens of restructures and **been made redundant a total of three times in the last 12 years.**

Each redundancy process and experience has been different from the last, as had my personal situation and transitions. Yet on reflection, each has shared a common similarity - I was left feeling like an outsider, on the wrong side of the castle walls. Castle walls that had once offered me protection, whose culture and inner workings I had been part of and were a strong part of my personal identity.

As we approach 2021, the acute outlook for many businesses looks tough financially. And more people than ever face life outside the castle walls, cast aside to fend for themselves in dangerous economic conditions. We must consider the chronic long-term impacts on organisational culture and society as a whole, as many organisational leaders pull up the proverbial drawbridge.

In the long run, is it really safer to be behind the castle walls?

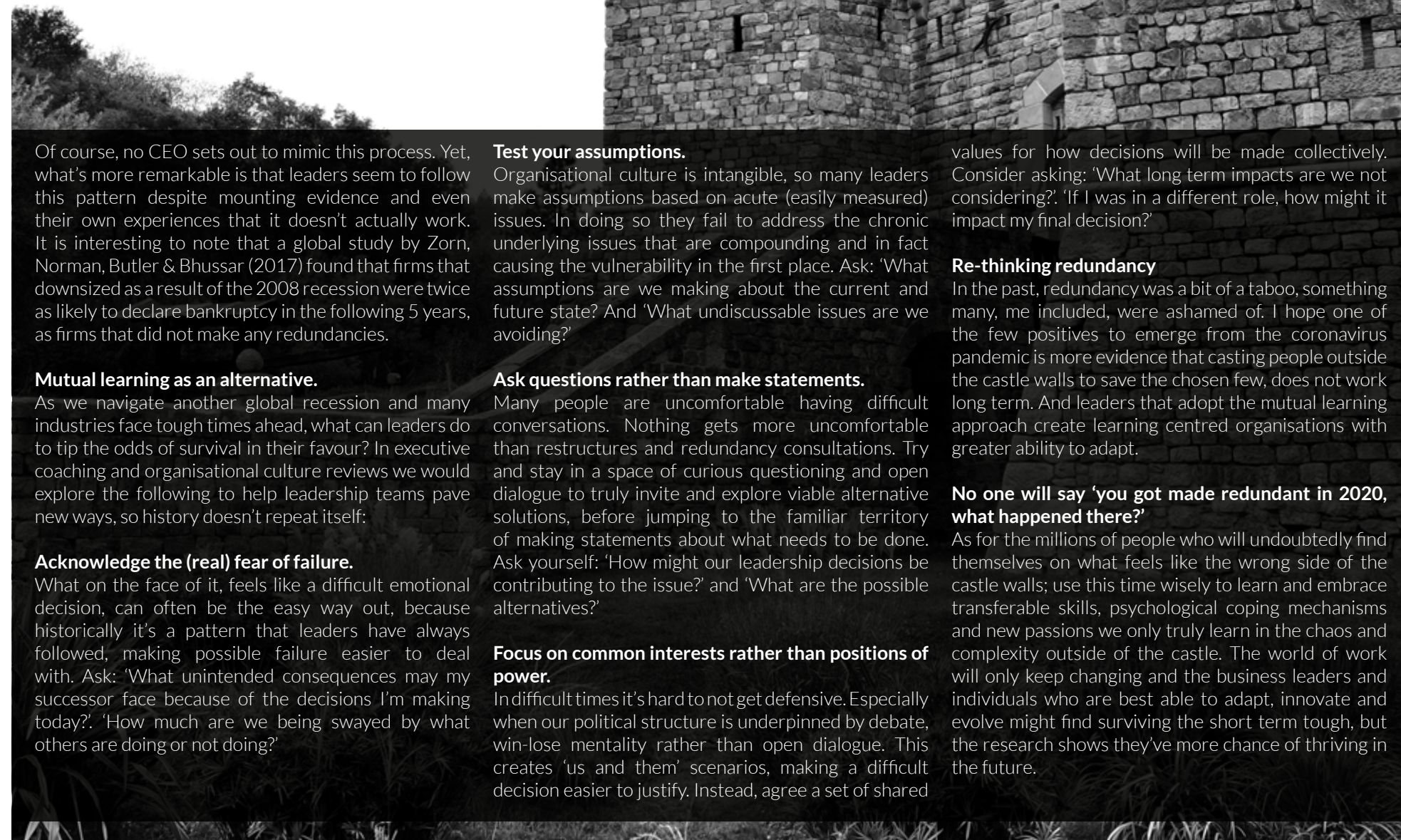
I've learned that being part of an organisation is not necessarily more secure than working for yourself; particularly if your organisation's first reaction to tough times is to let go of some of the people that it also celebrated with in times of abundance.

If you've worked in the corporate world, you might recognise the pattern below; it feels like an unspoken dummies guide to leading when times get tough.

1. **Renewed emphasis on annual planning.** Leaders predict the financial position this time next year and take the decision to protect themselves and shareholder returns.
2. **Restructure and re-build internal teams with new talent.** Leaders re-organise teams to create identifiable savings, often increasing the workload of its people.
3. **Reduction and redundancy.** In an attempt to protect profitability in economic downturns.
4. **Repeat.**

Rachael is a leadership coach, helping organisations to build better leaders. She specialises in organisational culture and systems theory with three values. Always questioning. Always learning. Always improving. A mindset she tries to apply daily to motherhood, marathon running and mindfulness.

Rachael has a MSc in Coaching Psychology and is the Founder of Scaffold Coaching - a leadership coaching, facilitation, organisational development consultancy. And co-host of the 'Building Better Leaders' Podcast.



Of course, no CEO sets out to mimic this process. Yet, what's more remarkable is that leaders seem to follow this pattern despite mounting evidence and even their own experiences that it doesn't actually work. It is interesting to note that a global study by Zorn, Norman, Butler & Bhussar (2017) found that firms that downsized as a result of the 2008 recession were twice as likely to declare bankruptcy in the following 5 years, as firms that did not make any redundancies.

Mutual learning as an alternative.

As we navigate another global recession and many industries face tough times ahead, what can leaders do to tip the odds of survival in their favour? In executive coaching and organisational culture reviews we would explore the following to help leadership teams pave new ways, so history doesn't repeat itself:

Acknowledge the (real) fear of failure.

What on the face of it, feels like a difficult emotional decision, can often be the easy way out, because historically it's a pattern that leaders have always followed, making possible failure easier to deal with. Ask: 'What unintended consequences may my successor face because of the decisions I'm making today?'. 'How much are we being swayed by what others are doing or not doing?'

Test your assumptions.

Organisational culture is intangible, so many leaders make assumptions based on acute (easily measured) issues. In doing so they fail to address the chronic underlying issues that are compounding and in fact causing the vulnerability in the first place. Ask: 'What assumptions are we making about the current and future state? And 'What undiscussable issues are we avoiding?'

Ask questions rather than make statements.

Many people are uncomfortable having difficult conversations. Nothing gets more uncomfortable than restructures and redundancy consultations. Try and stay in a space of curious questioning and open dialogue to truly invite and explore viable alternative solutions, before jumping to the familiar territory of making statements about what needs to be done. Ask yourself: 'How might our leadership decisions be contributing to the issue?' and 'What are the possible alternatives?'

Focus on common interests rather than positions of power.

In difficult times it's hard to not get defensive. Especially when our political structure is underpinned by debate, win-lose mentality rather than open dialogue. This creates 'us and them' scenarios, making a difficult decision easier to justify. Instead, agree a set of shared

values for how decisions will be made collectively. Consider asking: 'What long term impacts are we not considering?'. 'If I was in a different role, how might it impact my final decision?'

Re-thinking redundancy

In the past, redundancy was a bit of a taboo, something many, me included, were ashamed of. I hope one of the few positives to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic is more evidence that casting people outside the castle walls to save the chosen few, does not work long term. And leaders that adopt the mutual learning approach create learning centred organisations with greater ability to adapt.

No one will say 'you got made redundant in 2020, what happened there?'

As for the millions of people who will undoubtedly find themselves on what feels like the wrong side of the castle walls; use this time wisely to learn and embrace transferable skills, psychological coping mechanisms and new passions we only truly learn in the chaos and complexity outside of the castle. The world of work will only keep changing and the business leaders and individuals who are best able to adapt, innovate and evolve might find surviving the short term tough, but the research shows they've more chance of thriving in the future.

Continue the conversation: Rachael@scaffoldcoaching.com or check out '[Building Better Leader's on Audioboom](#)

Simply by knowing how we think, you can enhance your learning. Knowing *why* we **accept**, **adapt** or **reject** new information is as powerful as the learning itself (if not more so). Let's imagine that during any learning experience we might:

- Miss 10% of the information shared
- Reject 30% without deeper thought
- Accept 30% without question and
- Adapt 30% through internal questioning

By imagining this, we can begin to ask ourselves why...

- Why do we **miss** stuff – have we just drifted off?
- Why do we **reject** stuff – is it conflicting with our previous learning?
- Why do we **accept** stuff – is it something we already knew or did?
- Why do we **adapt** stuff – is it because it aligns with our beliefs – but needs some evolution?

Everyone brings with them past experiences, knowledge, beliefs and dispositions that influence what they accept, reject, skip, pick up and question. This is their unique biography and it acts as a filter or lens through which they view new material and make sense of new knowledge (a guiding or misguiding influence).

Using evidence on the process of professional learning from the world of sport coaching, we have developed ten principles to help practitioners and learners (regardless of context) be a bit more considerate and conscious in their approach to learning new stuff (accept, reject, adapt). Could you harness these ideas to help expand your personal learning filters?

1. The Individual Filter – Be aware of your personal learning bias

Gain clarity on your reasons for selection and deselection of new information. Improve your filter checks and balances by asking yourself some targeted questions:

- Why am I happy to accept this information without question?
- Why am I happy to reject this information without question?
- What lens am I using to question the stuff that I have picked up, or that doesn't quite fit?

To help change your filter for seeing things, it may help to entertain this idea –

“What if I was wrong in all that I thought and knew, what if I have been standing in the wrong place to view this material?”

2. Matching Concepts – Be aware of the Echo Chamber (and of self-fulfilling prophecies)

If you live and learn in an environment where you only encounter (and align with) beliefs and opinions that coincide with your own, you may be reinforcing ill-placed learning. Reach beyond your normal learning circle, activities, experiences and influences (people, books, social media etc.) to create a greater openness to challenging growth opportunities.

3. Mismatching Concepts – Be aware of rejecting without reason

Do not simply reject what we cannot comprehend, ideas that do not match, and contradict existing knowledge, practice and beliefs. These may wrongly be 'filtered out' and quite swiftly rejected. Slow your judgment process down and ask what underpins your decision.

4. Concepts that fit – Be aware of not making the effort to find the right fit

When it's not quite in or out, you're good to go on to the next step of applying this new idea. If you're unsure, make the effort to think about how it may fit or connect with your existing knowledge, practice and beliefs, and, even better – try to clarify why.

5. The Contextual Filter – Be aware of the naysayer

From time to time you may well hear yourself say 'that won't work for us'. This statement is often situated within the contextual reference point of our present working environment. And whilst it may not be right for 'now', environments can and do change. Be careful not to reject something that may be vital learning.

Anna Stodter, senior lecturer, researcher and practitioner in sport coaching, introduces ten principles created to encourage learners to adopt, adapt and reject their lessons

A Thinking Tool – 10 Principles to Enhance Learning

6. Rejection or Adaptation – Be aware of the closed mindset

If new ideas don't feel suitable for you or your context right now, consider your reasons. Remain open to adapting it, experimenting or banking it for later use. Be flexible, consider what it is that might work and why, as well as won't work and why. Then play with evolution of the original idea. Test and retest this in your environment a few times to judge if it works (or not). Trying it once and failing is a poor measure of validity.

7. Seeing is believing – Be aware absence of evidence is not evidence of absence

Don't reject stuff just because you haven't seen it in practice. And if you need to see it working before you agree with it, seek out these opportunities. But be careful - just because it worked for them, doesn't mean it will work for you. Seek to understand *why* it worked for them and how that aligns to your world.

8. From knowledge to practice – Be aware knowledge alone is not power

Go find places to play and practice the new things you 'know of'. Simply to know is not the whole story of learning. To know *how* and understand *why* things work in practice is to practice itself. Feel the experience as it happens. Perhaps even film it for reflection later.

9. Reflective feedback loop – Be aware of stopping if it doesn't work first time

There are so many reasons why new stuff doesn't work the first time or works to begin with then stops working. This could be because we live and work in continually changing, open-dynamic environments. The trick is to figure out why it is or isn't working. Ask yourself, how will you know?

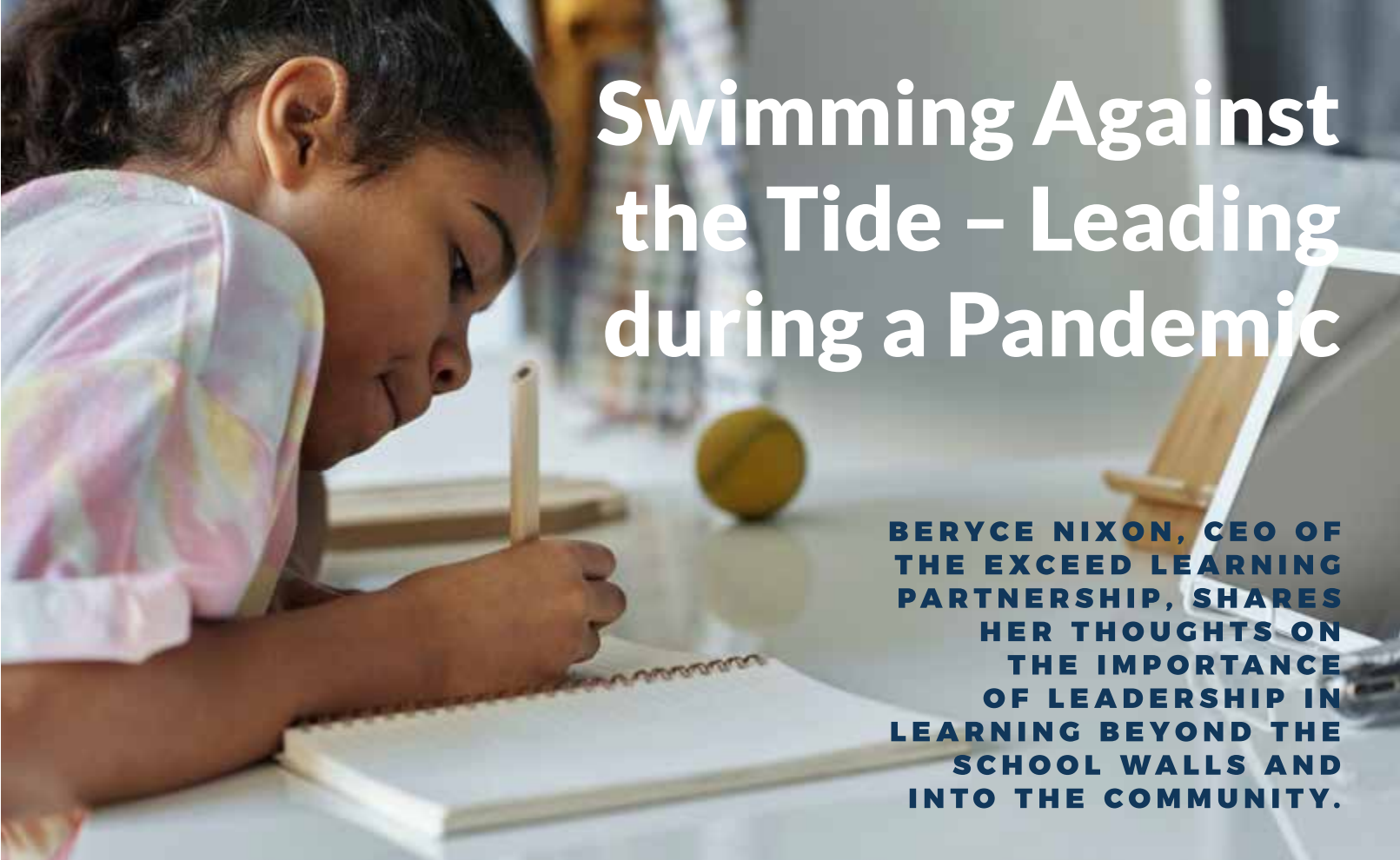
10. Moderating Factors – Be aware of what influences you

Your decision to accept, adapt or reject learning may well be influenced by your setting (work, team, home) and the context of your work (high risk, low risk). Consider here what or who is influencing you, and establish the positive or negative value of this.

These are the filters whereby individuals may adopt, adapt and reject the learning they engage with. Imagine if this was shared in advance of any learning experience, highlighting to learners their biases and the positive/negative effects of their learning history (biographies). Perhaps placing this as a conversation at the beginning of workshops, conferences (or any learning events/experiences) could shift the hypothetical percentages we mentioned at the beginning of this article. Be that to be more accepting of new/different material, more considered in rejecting new insights, or more adaptable to experimenting in different contexts.

Anna Stodter is a Senior Lecturer, researcher and practitioner in sport coaching based at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. She's worked for Archery GB, coached football and rugby, and played rugby union for Saracens and Scotland. She likes learning about learning, and spending time at live music events (bring them back soon please!) with a craft beer in hand. Learn more - continue the discussion on [Twitter @annastoDr](#)

Based on a Blog by [Kurt Ewald Lindley](#) and [Anna Stodter](#) (<https://link.medium.com/ROOC2JAvN9>) and a paper by: Anna Stodter & Christopher J. Cushion (2017). What works in coach learning, how, and for whom? A grounded process of soccer coaches' professional learning, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, DOI: 10.1080/2159676X.2017.1283358



Swimming Against the Tide – Leading during a Pandemic

BERYCE NIXON, CEO OF THE EXCEED LEARNING PARTNERSHIP, SHARES HER THOUGHTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP IN LEARNING BEYOND THE SCHOOL WALLS AND INTO THE COMMUNITY.

The Starting Point:

It was March 15th 2020, I had watched the Andrew Marr show, listening to politicians present their current evaluations about the increasing spread of Covid-19 cases across the country. On Twitter, there were an increasing number of articles, all expressing anxiety about the current situation. There was no mention of schools closing at this point, no mention of national lockdown but there was one significant article which I read that stated, **‘In times of crisis, take decisive action and lead,’**

This prompted my response and still continues to resonate with me. I immediately drafted a letter to all our employees, outlining what the current situation was and what I predicted may happen. I cited **‘moral purpose’** and outlined what our duty was as a public servant of this country, **‘servant leadership.’** I also identified, with clarity, what our strategy would be. This was sent out to all and within a week, all that I had predicted began to unfold.

The starting point for this article has to be my own personal reflections during Covid-19 and the importance of understanding learning, not just in the school buildings but wider learning within our communities. Instantly, we were faced with having to deliver learning

opportunities in a different way in order to meet the needs of our pupils. ‘One size did not fit all,’ was evident from the onset of this journey. Equity became a prominent feature in all our discussions as senior leaders within a multi-academy trust of five primary academies. Fault lines were emerging in our structures in order to ensure access for all and as a Trust we had to think creatively about our approaches to serving our communities. Our schools were playing a vital role beyond learning. Their custodial and community roles were central in providing packages of support and help that our families could draw upon, in this time of need.

To further the above, we reflected deeply on our learning culture. Some of our pupils had disengaged from learning really quickly and we had to question why this had happened? Some pupils were accelerating at pace with independence and some pupils were finding the learning at home very challenging. It was not clear-cut to say that the ‘disadvantaged’ pupils disengaged. Some of them did, but some pupils made a vast amount of progress. Learning at home, galvanised some pupils and they went above and beyond to demonstrate this, which at times even surprised their teachers when compared to the learning they had previously delivered in lessons.

In order to consider all these factors, we

explored the research of *Michael Fullen ‘Education Re-imagined – The Future of Learning,’* which made us reflect on all aspects of learning within the Trust.

Four Basic Messages:

On reflection of my personal leadership journey during this period, I adopted four basic principles and made these prominent in all my communication.

1. Focus on basic needs first

George Werner, Liberia’s Minister of

Education during the 2014-15 Ebola crisis, said:

“You have to think as a leader, what happens when the shadow of COVID-19 begins to fade. We need to take school health more seriously than ever before, and it needs to be part of our strategic planning.”

2. Focus on the most marginalised and at-risk children

Dr Praveen Kumar, the leader of the Telangana Social Welfare Residential Educational Institutions Society, a network of over 250 residential government schools for some of the most marginalised children in India, had this to say:

“The interest of those at-risk children must be at the core of the strategy for every school leader.”

When schools reopen, pupils will have different needs, and resources will need to be prioritised to match those needs. Initial focus should be on the needs of the most marginalised children so that the inequalities exposed by the COVID crisis are not exacerbated.

3. Focus on engaging the community through communication and collaboration

Dr Sara Ruto, the Chairperson of

based education. These (i.e., values-based education) are things children need to see, touch, and grow with. And home is the first place where this happens. School leaders should use this opportunity to engage parents to ensure such learning takes place.”

4. Embrace new opportunities to focus on learning

Dr Iwan Syahril, the recently appointed Director General for Teachers and Education Personnel in the Ministry of Education and Culture in Indonesia, captured this when he said:

“We are becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable. We’ve been talking about student-centred learning for ages. [COVID] is giving us the trust that this is okay. You don’t just teach your curriculum, but you look at your students and start there. This is an opportunity to reimagine the curriculum and ensure that each student is learning”

‘Finding a way through’ for every child

Through these challenging times, it was evident that we needed to take care of every child. This took the form of many different decisions and actions, working with community organisations to provide for all our families. On a strategic level, it was constant evaluation of daily guidance documents and the need to exercise a ‘common-sense’ approach to any measures that we needed to implement. It was also much more than this, as some of our pupils are living in extremely challenging situations. The safe zone of the school was not statutory and therefore we had to use all our approaches to ensure that they could access this place of safety again.

As a leader, it was important to set the example for this. During wider-opening, I taught the most vulnerable pupils in order to stabilise their social and emotional needs prior to re-integration. This was possibly the most rewarding and challenging part of my role. Rewarding because the power of being a Head Teacher for so long within a community, builds up trust over many years. Pupils know you well and so relationships are strong and secure, allowing you to adapt and be flexible to their individual needs in order to build-back confidence. The challenges during this period were getting the wider-system to listen to your concerns in order to provide safety. ‘Never giving up’ when your gut instinct pervades any threshold criteria!

Building back better!

Whilst the feedback on these approaches are showing a positive impact, it is important to continue to embed this practice within high quality teaching and leadership approaches and to evaluate longer-term outcomes. It is also important to reflect on the culture that is being created, with teachers and leaders showing deeper knowledge and ownership which is driving the learning of the pupils. The initial revision of the way teaching and learning is being planned, with increased frequency, smaller chunks and precision, identifies a shift in the right direction towards a deeper learning-led culture. Teacher and pupil relationships are vital to this development.

We argue that the solutions lie before us. We have the opportunity to creatively manage the immediate issues whilst building a bridge to a re-imagined education system. Re-imagining lays out a vision for an educational approach which draws from the best of traditional approaches, innovative practices and insights from remote learning to shape new, flexible, agile, hybrid learning models which create an ecosystem for learning in the future!

Continue the conversation on twitter @BeryceNixon

Beryce Nixon - CEO Exceed Learning Partnership

In April 2017, I became the CEO of Exceed Learning Partnership after 11 years of being the Head Teacher of Hill Top Academy. In 2011, the school achieved an outstanding judgement and I became a National Leader of Education, supporting a numbers of schools in very challenging circumstances. After becoming Executive Principal of Edlington Victoria in 2015, after a special measures judgement, we transformed the teaching and learning and it successfully achieved a good after only 4 terms. This was acknowledged nationally as one of only four schools in the country to do this.

In Exceed, we currently have five primary academies all serving communities within Doncaster. Our Motto is ‘Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day!’

WHY 'CULTURE CHANGE' NEEDS A RE-THINK

Recently, we asked a seemingly innocuous question on Twitter and LinkedIn: 'Can you 'create' a culture?'. It generated a large response. Most of the people in our network are involved in the world of high-performance sport, but the question is just as valid to leaders in organisations large and small, in any context.

Culture change management is a sizeable industry, but generates a lot of cynicism and criticism, too. Often the reason for 'culture change' management is to manage a crisis or address a problem. A top down measure to show funders, government and the public that the 'problem' is being addressed.

However, quick fix solutions to manage the problem lead organisations no closer to addressing the issue. More harmfully, it could be viewed as a PR/branding exercise by employees and customers. It is why American social scientist Robert Merton coined the term '*unintended consequences*'. The result or outcome of an action that was not intentional or foreseen.

Take elite sport. Did the 'no compromise' mantra lead to the behaviours we now hear about in high performance sport? Maybe. Maybe not.

The dial has shifted away from the romance of sport, success, and positive news stories to the negative side of sport, particularly in the media. High-profile athletes have come forward to share their personal journey about abuse, injustice, inequality, and the change needed within the system.

Clearly, these reports and stories are not acceptable and need to be heard. It just shows how something, with good intent, can unravel. You can never quite eliminate or remove the possibility of unintended consequences. But you can increase the probability of avoiding it happening.

In this article we are going to present that we need to re-consider how we approach culture change. Let us move away from asking how we 'create or change a culture' to asking the following:

'How do we understand it?'

And then:

'How do we cultivate a movement in a system around the behaviour we want to see, whilst reducing the probability of unintended consequences?'

Before we jump into how we might do this differently, we will consider culture as a manifestation of multiple factors. Robert Kohl defined culture as the "*total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does and makes — its systems, attitudes, and feelings*". As Eric Weiner says in his book *The Geography of Bliss - One Grump's Search for the Happiest Places in the World*:

"Culture is the sea we swim in - so pervasive, so all-consuming, that we fail to notice its existence until we step out of it."

If these definitions are sound, we need a re-think on how we see and cultivate culture. Given the complexities of culture and the many factors at play, you would be challenged to argue a culture can be created. A culture already exists.

Our work is not about fixing a culture, changing it, or creating a new one. This mindset feeds into a management style of command/control.

We like to think in terms of creating a movement. What movements can you think of that have stood the test of time?

Turning inertia into movement

What are we trying to understand when we want to make a shift in culture? We have taken an approach that involves understanding the vision of the future of the many, rather than the boardroom musings of the few.

Those that want to change are great allies, but it is those who perceive an alternative vision of the future, or a desire to maintain the status quo, that we really need to influence. A purpose is not really shared if it is only valued by the few

As General Stanley McChrystal wrote. "*An organisation should empower its people, but only after it has done the heavy lifting of creating shared consciousness*".

Creating a beautiful vision amongst the leadership is just the beginning. But it won't have momentum unless the leadership fully understands how things came to be, the emergence of unintended consequences in their context and what the community needs and desires.

It is through an explorative and collaborative approach with a clear emphasis upon understanding that movements are enabled. Movements remain in a state of inertia until one other individual or group demonstrates that "*we'd like to be a part of this change too*".

The first follower is what, as Derek Sivers famously shared in his 2010 TED talk, "*transforms a lone nut into a leader*" and that, "*the new followers emulate the followers and **not** the leader*". Leaders that do not see those it serves as equals will remain in a state of inertia.

Paul Hughes and Dean Leak on why we've been approaching culture change all wrong

Paul Hughes and Dean Leak have 20+ years' experience working in high performance sport. Their experience and expertise lie in culture development, leadership and learning environments. Co-founders of Co-Design Culture, they are driven by collaboratively working with organisations to understand how to create their own unique movements and healthy habits of winning. Paul has been found regularly asking, 'so how does that make you feel', since 2008. Beef jerky connoisseur and Klopp disciple. Dean prides himself on being an average CrossFit journeyman, avid coffee percolator in South East London and ridiculous scarf collector.

Shine a light

Have a think about times when you have launched or been a part of a change initiative. What happened and how were they done?

You will often find that *change projects* are performed when there is a problem and the leadership feels that 'they have tried everything'. Furthermore, an assessment is conducted (or whack-a-mole as we like to call it), an intervention is put into place that addresses the behaviours that leadership no longer want to see and, there we have it, a new culture, just like that. Easy.

Not quite. The game of whack-a-mole only persists because the 'moles' are *symptoms* and the intervention never looks deep enough to understand the *cause*. Addressing the observed symptom is a short-term win for consultants but over time those moles will appear again.

Framing the change before any kind of assessment is carried out is vital. You can look for problems and there will be problems as nobody calls in an external agent when all is well.

But you can also start from a position of strength.

Have a think about your organisation or the team you lead.

- What does your organisation do brilliantly?
- Where are the hidden pockets of talent that have not had the recognition they deserve?
- What is the potentially world-leading resources that exist right under your nose?

In elite sport we refer to the term 'super strengths' based upon the work of our colleague Dr Kate Ludlum. This concept can apply to any high-performing culture. It just needs to be searched out, collaboratively, and refined.

When we see examples of positive change, we want to shine a light upon it. Changing behaviour through powerful stories is a hugely effective change tool. Positive behaviour is rewarded, and a story is told around it.

Suddenly, the second or third follower has

- a) total clarity as to what the organisation values and rewards
- b) a massive incentive to commit to the vision that is being presented. Those that are apprehensive about the vision suddenly find the transition much easier as more followers get onboard.

Before you know it, you have a movement.

Continue the conversation: Contact Dean on twitter at @djlpsych for a chat.

12.2020

ISSUE FOUR

The Learning Scientist

