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A Compassionate Approach to Change & Transformation

An actionable and adaptive way of thinking

Jeffrey SY Ong



AI Generated Image




























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A Compassionate Approach to Change & Transformation



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What is the current state of affairs	Now What does it mean for individuals and organisations	So What Can I do?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The hidden tax on organisations 2. Complication 3. A better OS 4. E.g. of organisations that thrive with a compassionate approach 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Looking closer at Compassion & suffering 6. Three causes of suffering during change & transformation – what you can do 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Skills Practice 8. 30 – Day Challenge

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The Hidden Tax on most organisations



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Psychological Drag

The human cost of

- fear,
- uncertainty, and
- disconnection


is silently “killing” our most ambitious and critical projects


- up to 70% of transformations fail to meet their goals (McKinsey)
- £ 28.4 billion lost annually in UK to poor mental health and burnout (Deloitte UK, 2022)
- 6 in 10 employees in Singapore feel disengaged (Gallup 2023)

Can your organisation afford not to address this?

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Businesses are leaving money on the table






Nearly *two in five* workers say their mental health is adversely impacting work productivity.

March 2025

Mental health risk			
March 2025	36%	45%	19%
April 2022	39%	46%	14%

■ High risk
 ■ Moderate risk
 ■ Low risk

- 36 per cent of workers have a high mental health risk,
- 45 per cent have a moderate mental health risk, and
- 19 per cent have a low mental health risk
- 37 per cent of workers say their mental health is adversely impacting their work productivity
- 33 per cent feel anxious
- 32 per cent feel isolated
- 32 per cent feel depressed



About *one-quarter* say their mental health is adversely impacting work productivity.

June 2025

Mental health risk			
June 2025	33%	41%	26%
April 2020	39%	41%	20%

■ High risk
 ■ Moderate risk
 ■ Low risk

- 33 per cent of workers have a high mental health risk,
- 41 per cent have a moderate mental health risk, and
- 26 per cent have a low mental health risk
- 26 per cent say their mental health is negatively impacting work productivity
- 34 per cent of workers feel anxious
- 31 per cent feel isolated
- 28 per cent feel depressed

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Source: Telus Health Mental Index
<https://go.telushealth.com/en/archives-telus-mental-health-index>

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Lost productivity due to depression and anxiety may cost Singapore nearly S\$16b a year



Source: Chodavadia, P., Teo, I., Poremski, D. et al. Prevalence and economic burden of depression and anxiety symptoms among Singaporean adults: results from a 2022 web panel. BMC Psychiatry 23, 104 (2023) in <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/depression-anxiety-lost-productivity-cost-singapore-billions-4632271>

The affected respondents:



- Reported missing an extra **17.7 days of work** a year, which translates to S\$4,980 a worker
- Were **40 per cent less productive** while at work, which is equivalent to S\$28,720 in economic losses yearly
- As a result, this brought the total value of lost productivity attributable to anxiety and depression in Singapore to **S\$15.7 billion a year**.
- Duke-NUS said that the S\$15.7 billion figure is consistent with global findings
- Other estimates put the global economic burden of mental health conditions at **US\$1 trillion** (S\$1.3 trillion) a year

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Examples of suffering in the workplace



Quotes adapted from the National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work, Compassion at Work Toolkit.

I need someone to listen to what I am going through, and then help me figure out how to proceed

How can we help people who are experiencing fears; fear of losing jobs and fear of returning to a workplace that may not feel safe?

Positive messages are nice, but I need support and help a lot more – not just empty words.

Responses like "we are all busy" or "it's going to be ok" aren't helpful. Our managers expect us to do the things we were always doing AND all the new things related to the transformation. This just isn't realistic!

Credit: The Straits Times. <https://youtu.be/ACn6EcAFKGw?si=ohwLAyv7QOMpc99d>



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The Complication

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Stakeholders expect a quick execution for change & transformation

F/A18 Hornet jet breaking the sound barrier

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- The faster a leader or organisation tries to force change, the more “shock waves” of resistance compact together
- Instead of a sound barrier, organisations face a “brain barrier” composed of pre-existing and successful mental maps
- The more massive or complex the organisation, the bigger the resistance can be

Adapted from Leading Strategic Change: Breaking through the Brain Barrier
J. Stewart Black & Hal Gregersen (2002)

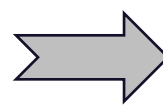
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Stakeholders expect a quick execution for change & transformation



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**Amplifies
Suffering**

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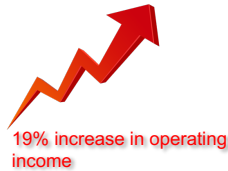
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**A Different Way to
View Change &
Transformation**

**Use a better
Operating System**

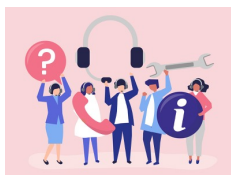
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Our Focus – the other side of the proverbial “coin”



Improve Employee Engagement

Employee engagement often mediates change management practices and organisational performance. Engaged employees are more productive, innovative, and committed to the organisation's goals, directly impacting performance outcomes (Akdere & Egan, 2020). A study by Ahmed et al. (2020) found that **companies with highly engaged employees saw a 19% increase in operating income compared to companies with low engagement levels.**



Reduce Resistance to Change

Resistance to change is one of the most significant barriers to improving organisational performance during transitions (Akpa et al., 2021). Resistance can manifest in various forms, such as decreased productivity, increased turnover, and lower morale. Research suggests that organisations that address resistance through effective change management practices, such as **clear communication** and **employee involvement**, are more likely to achieve positive performance outcomes (Al Aina & Atan, 2021).

Reference: Friday Iyaji, Isah & Agbana, John & Bakare, Akeem. (2023). The Influence of Change Management Practices on Employee Engagement and Organizational Performance in A Competitive Business Environment: A Conceptual Review. Educational Administration Theory and Practice journal. 29. 3638-3645.

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Organisations have had success using a compassionate approach



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LinkedIn CEO, Jeff Weiner on Compassionate Leadership



I commit to building a workplace where all staff are **trusted, respected and supported**; where bullying and harassment is tackled, not tolerated; where positive behaviours are encouraged and modelled, and where staff are supported to respectfully challenge negative behaviour.

What Compassionate Leadership Means to Me
Isle of Wight NHS



Michael West: Compassionate and inclusive leadership



Research study: How to lead with compassion




Compassionate Leadership: Jacqueline Carter
Rotman School of Management


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Making Banking Joyful - DBS







Safest Bank in Asia
16 consecutive years
2009 - 2024




World's Best Bank
2022




World's Best Bank
2021




Global Bank of the Year
2021




Best Bank in the World
2020




World's Best Bank
2019




Global Bank of the Year
2018




Best Bank in the World
2018




World's Best Bank 2025
Euromoney



World's Best Bank for
Sustainable Finance 2025
Global Finance




World's Best for HNW 2025
Euromoney



World's Best for RE 2024
Euromoney

AR 2024

41,000 employees



SGD 22.3 billion

Total income
Total income grew 10% to SGD 22.3 billion from broad-based growth.

SGD 11.4 billion

Net profit
Net profit rose 11% to an all-time high of SGD 11.4 billion.


18.0%

Return on equity
Return on equity was sustained at the previous year's record of 18.0%, and ROE is one of the highest among developed market banks.

SGD 2.22

Dividend
The Board proposed a final dividend of 60 cents per share, bringing the full year ordinary dividend to SGD 2.22 per share, an increase of 25% from the previous year.

Employee engagement score



For DBS, the guiding purpose was not merely technical (to be digital) but deeply human: to "Make Banking Joyful".

- identified more than 8,000 employees for upskilling in 2020 so they could master new skills and have new career opportunities
- in 2024 40% of job vacancies were filled by internal candidates, up from 30% in 2023.

Enabling employees to balance their personal needs against the demands of work

- a permanent hybrid work model allows employees to work from home 40% of the time
- provision for 100% remote working has been developed for new parents or primary caregivers for a maximum of six months.

References:
<https://www.dbs.com/wwp-resources/images/investors/annual-report/dbs-annual-report-2024.pdf?pid=splitter-home-annual-report-2024>
<https://www.dbs.com/about-us/who-we-are/awards-accolades/default.page>
<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/leading-from-the-front-how-dbs-embraces-change-and-empowers-employees#/>

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B. Grimm Group



Doing Business with Compassion in Harmony with Nature

"B.Grimm is a multi business corporation ... with an aim to increase effectiveness, efficiency, wellbeing and cultural progress of every societies which we live in."



Energy



Industrial Business



Healthcare



Lifestyle



Real Estate



Digital Division



Dr. Harald Link
B. Grimm Chairman

"... ask yourself, what good you can offer to people, your organisation & society ... if you can't provide good to people, your organisation and society, don't be a leader".

Reference:
<https://bgrimmgroup.com>



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https://youtu.be/6c_XNCYqIO4?si=J6wBBdDLR39VWLE

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A closer look at

Compassion



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“What is the cause of suffering?”

the Dalai lama asks.

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Responses from the learned audience included:-

- Injustice, poverty, war, alienation, racism, etc.

“No”, Dalai Lama Responded:-

“The cause of suffering is
When good people begin their work together
and then fail to notice
what is arising between them”



Source: Margaret J. Wheatley (2017). Who Do We Choose To Be? Facing Reality Claiming Leadership Restoring Sanity. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, California. Chapter 6, Interconnectedness.

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Compassion is



“...a sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it.”

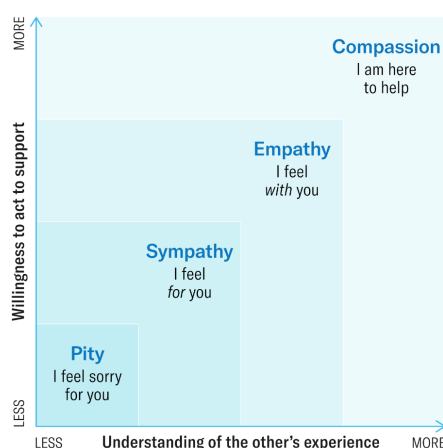
Professor Paul Gilbert, OBE

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Emotional responses to others' suffering



Source: Potential Project

HBR

- **Pity** - we have little willingness to act and little understanding of another's experience. We simply feel sorry for them.
- **Sympathy** - There is a small increase in our willingness to help and our understanding of the other. We feel for the other person.
- **Empathy** - we have a close, visceral understanding of the other person's experience. We feel with the person.
- **Compassion** - we have a good understanding of what the other person is experiencing and a willingness to act. Compassion occurs when we take a step away from empathy and ask ourselves what we can do to support the person who is suffering.

Source: <https://www.potentialproject.com/insights/connect-with-empathy-but-lead-with-compassion>

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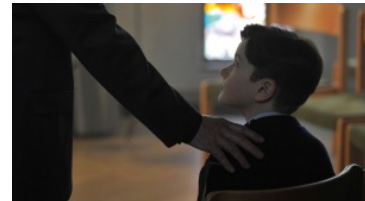
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Compassion = Empathy + Action



- With empathy, you can connect with another person
- With compassion, you can help that person



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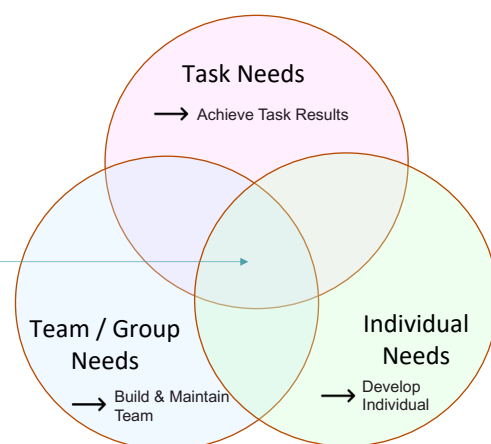
Leading with compassion



Allows us to cater to the

- Task (performance outcomes), and
- People (individuals & team)

By acting with compassion, leaders can expect & demand performance while connecting with team members and enabling them to be at their best, through helping them with their suffering.



Graphic adapted from John Adair

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Leaders are required to do tough things in a way that is very human, for internal and external stakeholders.



- Make unpopular decisions
- “Let go” a team member(s)
- Deal with conflicts
- Call out poor performance
- Admit the path is unclear
- Talk to people you disagree with
- Etc.



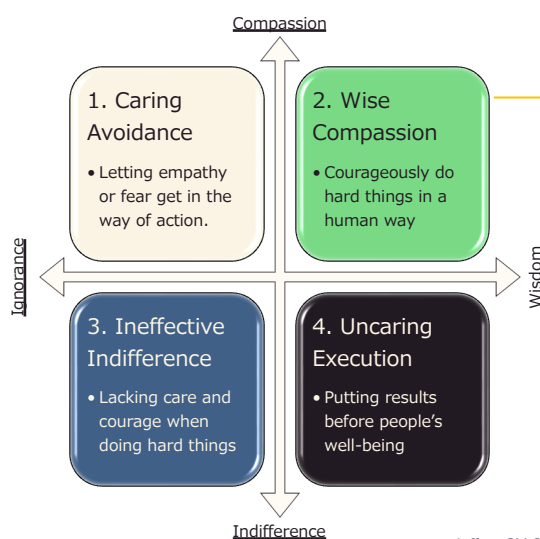
Build connections /
relationships in a very
human way

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How can we allow people to be their best selves and to thrive at work?



Getting into Wise Compassion quadrant

1. Be fully Present
 - Mindful awareness
 - Its not about you
 - Be Curious
2. Courage over comfort
 - Understand our fears
 - Vulnerability – comfort in own skin
 - Accept the discomfort of confrontation
3. Clarity
 - Caring candour, not brutal honesty
 - Zoom in & zoom out
 - Join the dots and articulate the narrative concisely

Adapted from: Hougaard, R & Carter, J. (2022). Compassionate Leadership: How to Do Hard Things in a Human Way. Harvard Business Review Press. Massachusetts.

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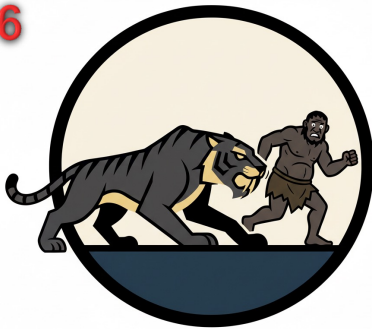
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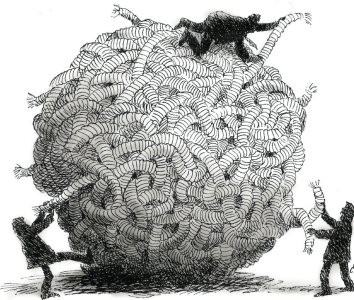
Three causes of Suffering during Organisational Change and Transformation



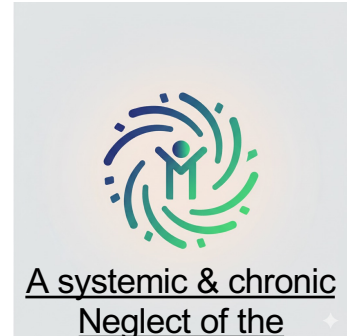
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Perceived Threats



Using Problem Solving methods for Wicked Challenges



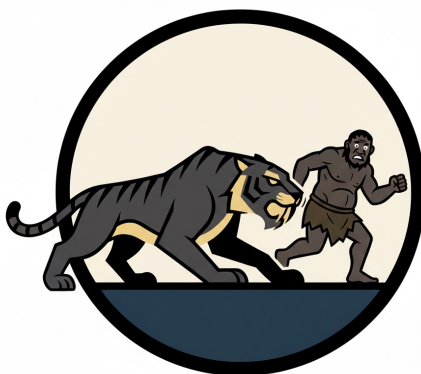
A systemic & chronic Neglect of the Human Dimensions of Change & Transformation

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Understanding Perceived Threats



Drive, Excite, Vitality

Incentive & resource focused
Wanting, pursuing, achieving, consuming
Activating

Content, Safe, Soothed

Non-wanting & Affiliative focused
Safeness-kindness
Soothing, Calming & Resting

Threat-focused

Protection & Safety-seeking
Activating & Inhibiting

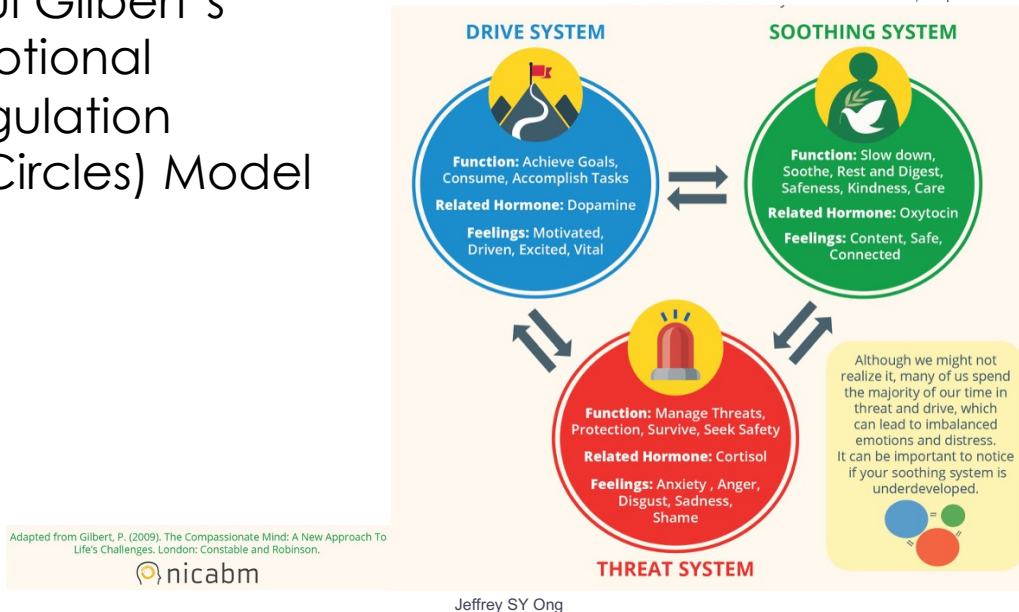
Anger, Anxiety, Disgust

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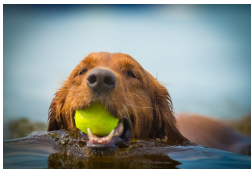
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Paul Gilbert's Emotional Regulation (3 Circles) Model



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Reward Response



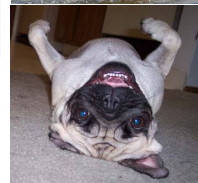
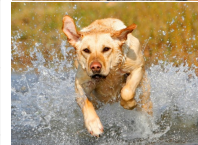
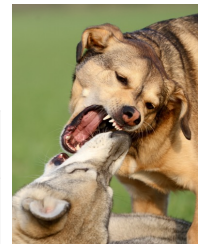
SCARF Model

David Rock



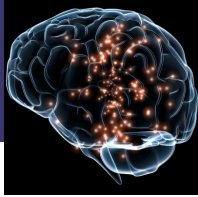
Status	The relative importance to others
Certainty	The affinity for familiarity
Autonomy	A sense of control over events
Relatedness	A sense of safety with others – friend rather than foe
Fairness	A perception of fair exchanges between people

Threat Response



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Reward the Brain

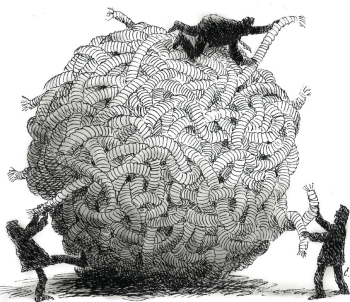
What might Create Threat		E.g. of how to reduce threat / increase reward
Giving advice, offer feedback	Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow people to give feedback on their own performance Acknowledge what people are learning/improving
Unclear vision, expectations	Certainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaking complex projects into small steps Be explicit on objective and process in even small meetings
Micro-management	Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask people to generate or choose from options instead of telling what to do 'Point of need' decision making instead of big meetings
Meetings with unknown people without proper introductions	Relatedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share personal aspects in the group (stories, photos) Peer Dialogue Groups / buddy systems to share, reflect, practice
Lack of ground rules, lack of transparency on sensitive issues	Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involvement in business issues Allow groups/teams to set their own rules

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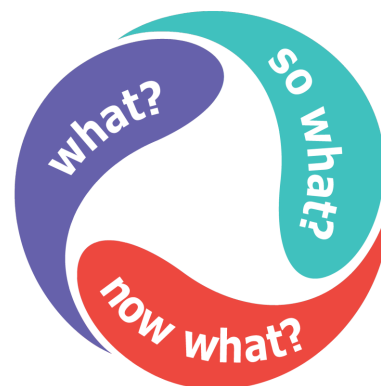
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Problem Solving vs Adaptive Action



Using Problem Solving
methods for
Wicked Challenges



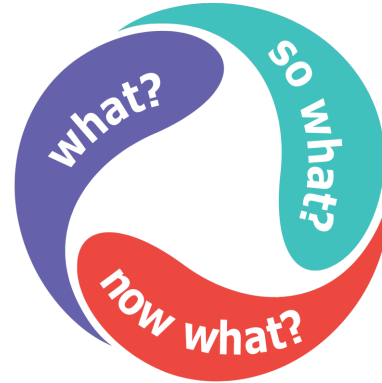
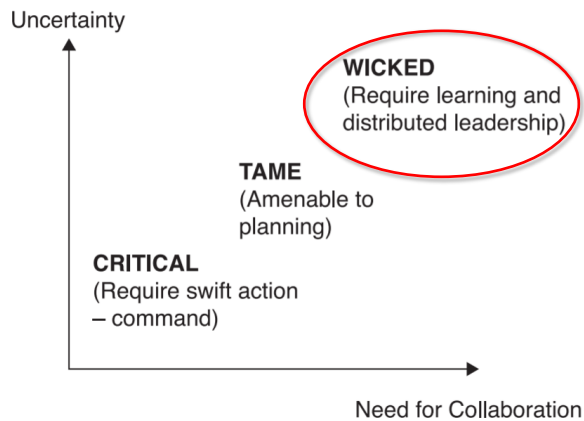
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Adaptive Action is more appropriate for Wicked Challenges



Source: Grint (2008) in Pedler, M. & Abbott, C. (2013). Facilitating Action Learning: A practitioner's Guide. Open University Press, Berkshire.

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Challenge / Problem Types



Tame Challenges

Known problems with known solutions.
Linear and solution focussed.



Problem Solving

Wicked Challenges

Complex problems, information is missing, or scant and known "solutions" might not be useful in your context.
Non-linear and inquiry driven.



Adaptive Action

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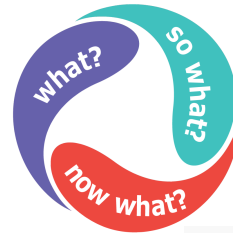
Discerning Challenges with Adaptive Action



- A process that enables people to respond to their environments in coherent and productive ways.
- An intentional and iterative reflective process based on these three questions:

Describe & explain the pattern

What? helps you see patterns of interaction and decision making that shape success.



Interpret the pattern to generate options for action

So what? helps you make sense of those patterns.

Develop a plan for taking action

Now what? helps you inform action to influence yourself and your team toward greater fit, success, and sustainability.

Credit: Human Systems Dynamics

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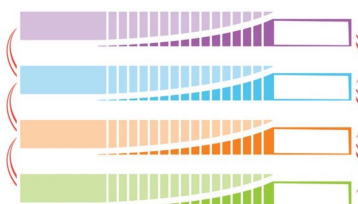
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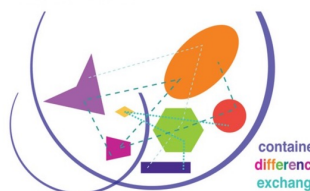
Some other tools that might be useful in complex, uncertain, and constantly evolving situations



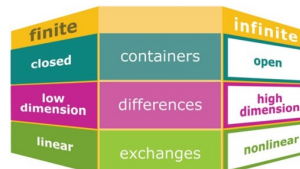
Pattern Spotting



Interdependent Pairs



CDE Model



Finite & Infinite Games (James Carse)



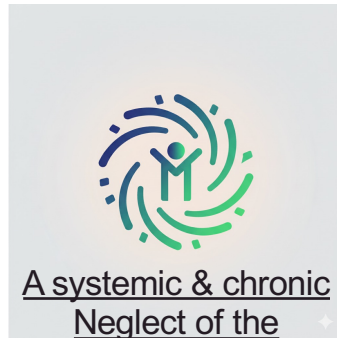
Credit: Human Systems Dynamics

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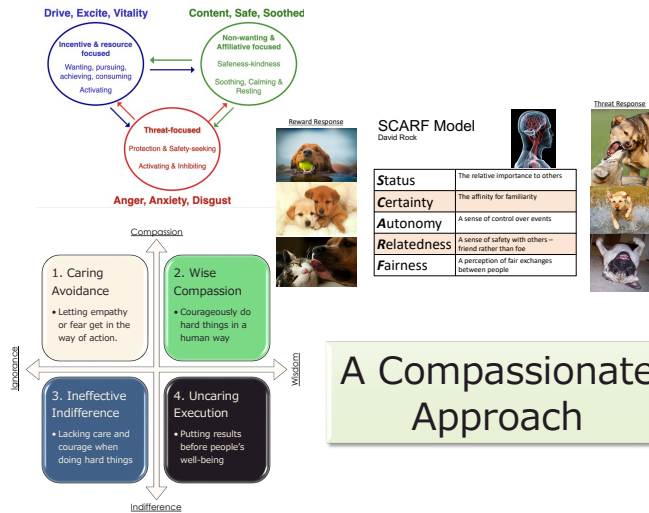
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Address the Human Dimensions of Change & Transformation



**A systemic & chronic
Neglect of the
Human Dimensions
of Change &
Transformation**



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How can we allow people to be their best selves and to thrive at work so that your organisations can do the same?



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To transform your organisation for a
purpose-led future,
you must first **connect** with the **humanity**
within it.

Compassion is the **strategic imperative**
that unlocks
performance, resilience, and discretionary effort.

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30-day challenge

Everyday, for the next 30 days

1. notice and name one aspect where you might be suffering
 - identify / name it
 - find a way to minimise, alleviate, or prevent the suffering you have
 - act on it
2. 3-minute connection exercise – ask one person on your team “what is the biggest challenge on your mind right now?” then just listen, without judgement, or providing a solution, for 3 full minutes.
 - minimise, alleviate, or prevent suffering for that person

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I'm looking forward to continue this
conversation with you. Please scan to connect.

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