

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features a central lightbulb that is illuminated, with a bright yellow and white glow emanating from it. The lightbulb is surrounded by a chaotic and colorful array of paint splashes and brushstrokes in shades of blue, red, yellow, and purple. The overall effect is one of creative energy and artistic expression.

the
field

THE SMALL
Extraordinary
Handbook

The Four Principles for Leading an
EXTRAORDINARY WORKPLACE

Part 4:
Extraordinary Thinking

THE LOWDOWN



Why waste potential?



Push the boundaries of possibility



Build a love of diversity



See work as a catalyst



Develop 'Abundance Thinking' together



The Field: Organisational Development

EXTRAORDINARY THINKING

“The purpose of an organisation is to enable ordinary human beings to do extraordinary things”

Peter Drucker

Why waste potential?

Apparently... because it's kind of hard to ask and disconfirm this, we are the only animals that can envisage the future. This includes imagery about our immanent death, which makes human beings come up with all sorts of meaning that we superimpose over life that, quite frankly, giraffes don't seem to be doing. Not sure that even the apes are on to that one, even though they are only just behind us in brain development.

Psychologist Matt Killingsworth¹⁷ did a study on mind wandering which concluded that 48% of the time, our minds are not in the present moment. Unfortunately, that is not all good news as that isn't all futuristic, constructive thinking. We spend a lot of time trying to figure out the past (and feeling guilty or angry about it!), and feeling anxious about the future. Why? Because our brains have learned to be problem solving machines built from the neural connectivity designed to keep us alive. We are also habitual creatures, motivated by pain and pleasure, so Ground hog day is more than just a movie for a large proportion of the human race.

There have been some human beings who have walked the planet and really paved the way for thinking extraordinarily, and usually present themselves as artists or innovators of some kind. Einstein said he was not particularly talented, just endlessly curious, however he went down in history as one of the greatest minds ever explored. David Bowie had the world mourning his death because the world knew they would never hear his unique take on music again. J.K Rowling created a whole other world with her stories of Harry Potter which came to her after the hardest period of her life. Now perhaps we are not all going to be creative geniuses or artists in the world, however we would go so far as to say that MOST people, with fully functioning brains, have the capacity to generate ideas that add value.

If you were living your potential now, what would you be doing differently?

Push the boundaries of possibility

Whenever I want to get inspired in my work to go beyond what I am doing, one of the movies I love watching is 'Jobs' – Ashton Kutcher acting as Steve Jobs in the founding of Apple. Now, Steve Jobs apparently wasn't the easiest person to work with – in his earlier years at least. Ed Catmull¹⁸, who co-founded Pixar Animation Studios with Steve Jobs and John Lasseter, said that Steve Jobs really learned and evolved through his experiences in Apple, changing to be incredibly empathetic later on in his career. What I love about Jobs, from what I have heard and seen, is that he was always pushing the boundaries of what he thought was possible, which meant he was already one step ahead in surprising and delighting people with Apple products they had not even imagined needing.

Tony Robbins, a huge figure in the world of self development, talks about a willingness to be unreasonable in order to live your potential, which means not settling for less than we are capable. When it comes to extraordinary thinking, this means developing routine methods of questioning our limiting beliefs and going beyond what we know.

Working with clients in the corporate world, our job is to help leaders push beyond the boundaries of what they have experienced in the past and move their thinking to being remarkable rather than repetitive. This includes:



Thinking about their people differently.



Seeing cultural historical factors differently.



Stretching what they think they and their people are capable of doing.



Extending their thinking to that one idea beyond where they want to stop.

Here is the amazing thing about human beings: As soon as you stretch their thinking, their imagination kicks into new realms. How do you lead that kind of thinking? Easy. Master the art of asking quality questions.

Here are a few questions to get you started that you can try with your teams:

- ✓ If we could wave a magic wand and it would be exactly as we wanted it to be, what would it look like?
- ✓ If we could take this from good to outstanding, how would it be different?
- ✓ What might be blocking our thinking here that we can move past now?
- ✓ If there were no limits in money, time or resources, what would we be creating here? (Then: How can we create a similar outcome without those things?).
- ✓ Despite how it feels right now, what is great about this?
- ✓ How is this going to make us better?

Asking extraordinary questions is a skill of incredible thought leaders. They switch on brains, solve problems worth solving and create pathways to innovation.

Build a love of diversity

In a large energy organisation in South East Queensland, we created a program called 'Diversity of Thought': DOT (which is now a part of The Extraordinary Minds Program). This quickly became a very successful program, which over 1000 people (and at the time of writing this book – still counting) have attended. Part of this program helps leaders and teams understand the blocks we have to others who are different to us.

To our brains:

$$\text{Difference} + \text{Unpredictable} = \text{Non-trustworthy}$$

A really interesting study¹⁹ was published in 2009 called 'Do you feel my pain?' where Caucasian and Asian people's brains were scanned in response to seeing video clips of either a Caucasian or Asian person having their face touched. There was a non-painful touch (cotton bud) and a painful touch (needle injected into the cheek). Interestingly, empathic pain activity was less when the person being scanned saw someone from the ethnicity different to them, than for someone of the 'same-race people'. We actually process people who seem like us in the same part of the brain (Medial Pre Frontal Cortex – the front middle of your brain) as we process ourselves²⁰.

For people who are not like us, we process them still at the front of the brain however in a different location. For people who are like us, it is easier for us to process because we assume that they have similar belief, values and motives as us and therefore we can predict their future behaviour will be aligned with our goals too. For people who are not like us, we don't have the sense of certainty around this, hence processing them differently and generally not mixing with difference.

There is a significant challenge with this though: The chance of us working in an organisation filled with people just like us is unlikely. We all have this thing called unconscious bias - preferences that block us from being open and objective. If you are human, then you have them. We have blocks to learning from others who are different however we don't know we are blocking, we don't know what we are blocking and we don't know why we are blocking that learning. They are designed to keep us alive, but they get in the way nowadays when social safety is more of a problem than physical safety.

Therefore, in our work, we tend to see problems with inclusion and collaboration when it all just seems too hard, and it's simply easier to go with what we know. As fully functioning human beings who are striving to develop their potential through their work however, we need diversity and difference to achieve this. We need the 'left fielders' when it comes to feedback to shake us out of our ordinary selves. We need different ideas to challenge and stretch our thinking so that we can continuously expand our minds to bigger possibilities. And we also need diversity of ideas to ensure the organisation represents the diversity of the people it serves, and can innovate to stay relevant. So, what to do? Here are a couple of ideas:

- ✓ Call the elephant in the room. Share these ideas with people - that to our brains, same = safe.
- ✓ Normalise it. We all have blocks to learning from others. When we normalise it, it becomes safer to move beyond that. Rather than it being an individual flaw, it becomes a collective challenge!
- ✓ Engage in activities with your people that help them to find what they have in common – beyond the obvious. Get them together and ask them to find all of these things. In our Extraordinary Minds Program, we have an activity called Human Bingo, where they do just that!
- ✓ Then have activities with them where they explore how different they all are and how that will contribute to them being a more open and valuable team of people if they can harness that.

Where do you think people in your business need to be more open to difference?

Again, let them do the work. Humans are wildly creative and wired for connection. They have all the answers – you can lead them by providing the environment and context for bringing it out in them.

See work as the catalyst for creative expression

Why are you doing what you are doing in your career today? What led you there? Chances are that there was something you were creating or accomplishing through your work that felt good to do. For me, and the brilliant people around me, human beings are a complete grey area. There is nothing entirely predictable about them. Each human being's neural wiring in their brains is as unique as their finger prints, and therefore, even though we see similarity, there is always anomaly.

Our work is constantly pushing us to new levels of creativity and idea generating. Each new client has a unique situation and need, and it is normal for us to feel in creation mode. Now this can get tiring and we need a break from creating in our work, and in our personal lives. However, the result is our obligation, not our focus. Our obligation is that we meet the needs of what we are being engaged for: to build extraordinary workplaces. Our focus is on who we are becoming in the process for others.

The reality is, you are never going to get 'there'. Once you achieve one organisational goal, there will be the next one, and not only will you not feel ready for it, you will feel like you are already behind when it gets there. The goals and strategies are the motivation and momentum for the further unfolding of human beings. If there is one human being whose job in your organisation is not evolving over time, something is wrong. Therefore, people must be evolving too.

Extraordinary thinking is a muscle to be developed, not a talent to nurture. If people are not thinking in your organisation, it generally means one of two things:

- ✓ There is no need for them to think in extraordinary ways (there is no accountability for thinking in ordinary ways).
- ✓ Someone else is doing the thinking for them.

I remember a leader approaching me after a workshop once and saying: "You know Kym, when you see that team member walking toward you and you know they are going to ask exactly the same questions they asked last week and the week before?". I said "Well what do you do when that happens?". He said "I tell them the same thing I told them last week because nothing has changed!". I said "Well, they don't have to think then do they?". This leader looked shocked. I explained that there are many people at work who through 'economy of effort' have managed to get leaders to do all the thinking for them, and then blame them for the very same thing.

In the news in Australia in the last few years, there have been warnings about the potential loss of 5 million jobs due to automation – robots taking over jobs of every day human beings, reducing time and error in production. Not only that, platforms like Uber for ride share services can throw a whole industry into calamity as we have seen with the Taxi industry in Australia. I saw an article not so long ago of a 32-year old man who stumbled on an app idea that he developed, sold for millions and will never work again. The future is what we can do with our brains, not our hands.

So, for you in your work:



1. Where does the creative work for you and your people lie?



2. What value can you collectively and individually contribute due to how you think?



3. If organisations really are about enabling ordinary people to do Extraordinary things, what does that look like for you and the people you work with?

Develop abundance thinking together

When working with a client recently, there was so much eagerness on their part in doing something extraordinary with the great people they had. As we moved deeper into the conversation, there was a limit in money. Then there was a limitation in time. Everyone was already too busy and stressed to take on the notion of developing their culture. Then there was a limitation in where we could take the team to work with them outside of their office. Then there was a limitation in the resources we had available. This was not very far in. My conversations at that point had to start around the mindset of lack as a culture. There is a massive difference between a logical acknowledgement of what is not possible or feasible at any given point, and a mindset of lack. A mindset of lack is quite simply a habitual focus on what is perceived to be missing/roadblocks /resistance/wrong. It is interesting how quickly this can become an organisational culture default, and it generally starts because people want something in common to speak about. It might have stemmed from one incident and then become a legend, referred to often enough that the sense of lack spread. For some of us, our brains are trained to look for problems, risks and impending trouble. However, a culture of extraordinary thinking builds the habit of abundant thinking.

If we look for it, there is abundance all around us. There is food, water, safety, transport, roofs over our heads. In fact, look around yourself right now, where you are sitting or standing. Look at the abundance. Perhaps there is beauty around you now. If there are people, are there signs of goodness there? Are there things in your current environment that other people on this planet would be so grateful to have?

A mindset of lack can be like a virus. People pick it up and pass it on to the next person. Becoming abundant in our thinking feels better and moves us toward what we want rather than what we don't want. Now think about the 'problems' in your life right now. How many of them feel like a sense of lack or losing something? We get stressed because we feel like we will lose money, our jobs, rapport with our partners or children, friends, status, freedom, control... it is all about loss and lack.

We can become masters at abundant thinking and we need to be creating cultures where people have attuned their focus to see everything they already have, and the opportunities that are coming.

THERE IS ALWAYS GOING TO BE LACK IF WE LOOK FOR IT. AND THE SAME GOES FOR ABUNDANCE.

So, as some final ideas to share with you, here are some simple things you can do to build a culture of abundant thinkers:

- ✓ Start practices of gratitude in your area of the business and share the stories with as many people in the organisation as you can.
- ✓ In your dealings with others, simply say: "If we were thinking about what we have and what is possible right now, what would we focus on?"
- ✓ Reach for a deeper meaning that supersedes lack. An example would be that when working with this organisation on culture change where there was a lack mindset, I had to bring them back to the bigger purpose of doing the bigger work so that people were putting energy into what really mattered. This turned things around.
- ✓ Encourage people to demonstrate acts of gratitude to people in their personal lives and share the stories at work.

- ✓ Encourage people to demonstrate acts of gratitude to people in their personal lives and share the stories at work.
- ✓ Ensure that there is communication from the business as to what is working and how they are succeeding vs. always hearing about change or not meeting targets.
- ✓ Together, share examples of true lack to build compassion and gratitude in your workplace.

For you as an extraordinary human being, in which areas of your life could you be more abundant in your thinking?

***We already have everything we need.
We just need to move the clouds.***

THE WRAP UP!

"The world will become great when ordinary people do Small Extraordinary Things!"

Peter Drucker

The Field: Organisational Leadership Development

It is our mission to contribute to a world where workplaces are environments that advance human potential and happiness. We believe that work can and should support the unfolding of extraordinary human beings: People who are evolving with their work, not suffering because of it.

Shared in this small extraordinary handbook are the 4 focuses of extraordinary workplaces, with a bit of why, what and how. Extraordinary Leadership, Awareness, Connection and Thinking are the simple but powerful areas of focus which we guarantee will be the umbrella to all of your values and actions as an organisation. We hope you realise your small but significant part in being a catalyst for potential and happiness in your workplace. The fact that you have read this book would lead us to believe that you are a game changer.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

We strongly urge you to do the small activities in this book and to share them with others. Share this book with others too if you have found it helpful. Gather people together and ask them for their thoughts and for their ideas for what they would like their culture to be like. Share your thoughts with your leaders too...

There are some links at the end for some of the books or talks I have mentioned. Read, watch, share.

We also have a free questionnaire for you to fill out so that you can see where you think you are in relation to your organisation having an extraordinary workplace. You will find that on the home page of our website: www.thefield.com.au . We offer a free strategy session of 30 minutes when you do the questionnaire to look at your diagnosis of your organisation and offer some tips as to what you can do to make a small extraordinary impact on your culture.

We also have some “Small Extraordinary Actions” (SEA) cards which you can request from our website too - absolutely free that you can share around your organisation to give your culture a boost. These are a call to action for a small extraordinary action for ourselves and for someone else. We hope you love them.

There are also the brochures mentioned on our site for you to have a look further into what we do. You will find:

- ✓ The Extraordinary Minds Program
- ✓ EPIC Experience Brochure
- ✓ Diversity of Thought in the Workplace

Go forth and be EXTRAORDINARY...

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