



8 Questions

8Qs Stories
from *the Way of nowhere*

releasing the creative potential of people and organisations

East: What is our unique purpose...?

Organisational PurposeQuests

by the CEO of a global technology company

Following a complex international merger in difficult external conditions, we had completed three years of successful restructuring and cost reduction and met our financial targets. It was becoming ever clearer, however, that the organisation needed to rediscover its spirit if it was to realise the many growth opportunities facing this technology-driven business.

Our people, and particularly our leadership, needed to find their belief in the possible. In general, everyone set about their daily tasks with enthusiasm; teamwork and trust were high. But there was an unspoken assumption that financial performance was the only metric that mattered. Resolving this paradox held the key to unleashing the organisation's full potential.

This led to a discussion with **nowhere**. What was it that motivated our people at the start of each day? Our diagnosis was that the overriding and collective purpose of our business provided the daily stimulus, but none of us could find the means to express it.

It took little to persuade me that finding our purpose would unlock the answer, but a little more persuasion was needed to undertake such a quest, given that it looked like an unconventional methodology.

Following several weeks' preparation with **nowhere**, a team of eight leaders from across the organisation, including myself, was guided through a reflective experience, alone and in groups, as we led a hermit-like existence for four days on a mountain in Crete.

Through a process that released unsuspected creativity and undiscovered beliefs, together we rediscovered our purpose. We also learned the power of simplicity of language to inspire others. We were surprised to find that heightened self-awareness and attention to our immediate surroundings enabled a creative but disciplined process to achieve a goal against a deadline.

What flowed from uncovering our purpose was the immediate expression of the values particular to us and a new leadership model uniquely in service of our strategy and ambition. Within weeks this was skillfully communicated to senior leaders around the world.

Four years later, the company has grown and flourished. Our purpose and values are the touchstone for the organisation worldwide. We have put the soul back into the organisation. There is no need for vision or mission statements. We know what motivates us all every day. It is close identification with our purpose.

East: What is my unique purpose...?

Personal PurposeQuests

by a leadership consultant

My PurposeQuest took place in Crete, but the process began earlier with a saturation into my history while holding the question 'Where have I come from?' and writing a short autobiography.

Important patterns emerged, the most persistent of which I chose to ignore. I'd imagined some ethereal insight into a deeply hidden self would emerge, but the important stuff was so obvious I could hardly see it.

Once on Crete, we undertook various ceremonies for letting go of our past before we walked onto the mountain, into the wilderness, alone to discover our purpose.

Before dawn I climbed up the valley, eager to see the sun rise. Sunrise had become an important symbol of my new beginning. As the sky grew lighter, although the sun had yet to appear, I figured I'd headed in the wrong direction. Walking on, disappointed, I felt my foot suddenly hurt. I stopped. A yellow butterfly led me to a rock. I adjusted my boot then looked up ... to see the sun rise behind the mountain.

I kept tripping over the blindingly obvious – being forced to stop and notice what was under my nose. Turning to look at a goat, I fell and hurt my back. Sitting up slowly, I discovered a curious chrysalis on a rock, which would have passed unnoticed without the fall. Through the quest the chrysalis became a metaphor for how I needed to be.

At times I pursued goals, like reaching the top of the mountain or finding a stream. These pursuits became difficult and stressful, whereas when meandering and exploring my energy was playful and light. I was enchanted by the surprise discovery of a yellow flower or being locked in eye contact with a mountain goat.

The next day, reflecting on these insights and preparing for the final ceremony, where we would embody and declare our purpose, it became clear to me that spontaneity was a vital source of my energy, and being present and open to whatever might emerge created surprise and excitement. No wonder the years I had spent in business planning had felt so arduous and unfulfilling.

Inspired by my purpose, I've now developed a consulting practice working with teams and individuals to help them unlock energy and passion in themselves and their organizations.

It's not always easy to be 'on purpose', but it's a guiding light that has helped me align who I am with what I do and to live an energised and adventurous life.

South-East: How are we releasing the magic of the moment...?

The creative-rollercoaster

by the head of a global R&D function

The task joined. Ideas shared. Prejudices common. Perfect teamwork. Like a polished machine. Perfect harmony. Faultless output. Job done. Smooth. That's the way to do it! Or is it?

In R&D especially, an outcome can't really be called innovative if it isn't also unexpected. Business and R&D often have set assumptions about what each other needs and can deliver, but new market segments can only come from resetting the envelope of possibility. The emotional feel of breakthrough is more turbulent but ultimately more satisfying. Views diverge. Assumptions are broken. There are different approaches. The objective keeps changing shape like Jekyll and Hyde. Spirits slide. Progress seems impossible. Despair. Sleepless nights, clinging to the question. Feeling like failures. Stumbling around. Crazy ideas. A half-formed thought. Clutched and expanded. Breakthrough. Relief and excitement. Vision and energy. Unconscious alignment. Wonder and amazement. Unimagined solutions. Exhilaration, exhaustion, commitment.

My experience, and the collective wisdom, is that smooth is predictable. But predictable cannot be innovative. Smooth inches forward. To leap forward means leaving the predictable behind. Innovation comes from an impossible challenge. Co-creation springs out of chaos. Innovation is the unknown.

Letting go into the unknown is hard; it feels wrong. It leads to disagreement as the team explores different perspectives. It can feel frightening, and even physically unpleasant, just like the sensation of plunging down to the bottom on a rollercoaster. But when things are that bad, prejudices are suppressed and there's a willingness to explore things which otherwise would have been considered too far out, maybe even stupid. But innovation can only come from the unexplored, so it is absolutely where you need to be for a breakthrough. And the sheer sensation of finding a new way and rediscovering agreement and harmony can be stunning and energizing.

Ride the rollercoaster, learn to enjoy it and surrender to it, because it's the only way you can get to places you'd barely imagined and cross-unbridgeable chasms. The smooth path stops at the edge.

South-East: How am I releasing the magic of the moment...?

The four realms of **nowhere**

by a nowhere catalyst

There were 13 of us. We had been working together for a year on the inspiring-innovation training programme. Now we were sitting in a circle in a room dating back to the thirteenth century in a retreat near Oxford. Focusing on a single breakthrough question, we were spending two days in creative dialogue and then a day making sense of the experience.

The first words seemed like a pebble being dropped into a still pond in the space between us. I noticed my immediate visceral response to the words and then my brain catching up, noticing what lay behind the words and what unfolded from them – so many possible lines of enquiry and yet none moved me. So, in between the words, we sat in the silence and waited for the next pebble.

And so it went on. Some pebbles created ripples and some sank without trace. And gradually a sense of the flow seemed to emerge. I felt as if I knew when the flow was with me. Each of us, at some point in the dialogue, knew we had the flow and, in that moment, we had to choose whether to give it our voice. Or not.

Patterns of flow started emerging. Some words were following the flow and others were seeking to describe and explain our shared experience. And so each thread would come to its natural energetic climax and then we would again be left in silence.

At one point I was overcome by a sense of both the intense joy and the deep sadness of life and felt my eyes filling with tears. At another point I felt I was seeing through what was being said to the elegant pattern that lay underneath. And emerging through this was the sense that I was held, that we were all being held, by something bigger than all of us.

After two days of exploring through dialogue we spent a day trying to understand what had happened. Time had a different quality. We were now working to a specific deadline. The listening was different. There was less silence and a growing sense of excitement that we were onto something. Slowly a shared sense of meaning emerged and crystallized into a model of our experience together.

This experience has stayed with me. At home it has slowed down the way I listen to my wife and my teenage children. I'm more aware of my assumptions. As a family we have had conversations about creating holidays that excite all of us – exploring our likes and dislikes until 'our' perfect holiday emerges. At work it has enabled me to be still and wait for breakthrough ideas to emerge and not to get triggered by disagreements but just probe underneath them. I'm more aware of when a line of enquiry feels right and I have the confidence to follow that instinct.

South: How are we venturing into uncertainty...?

Micro-skills

by a head of global operations

It has always amazed me how difficult it can be to get colleagues or team members to contribute freely and willingly without inhibition. This can arise from many pressures, real and imaginary, which include concerns such as hierarchy, competitiveness, rivalries, distrust, lack of confidence and even fear. At meetings and workshops we often used some form of facilitation to break the ice, with mixed success. More recently I have found micro-skills a much more effective way of stimulating creative contributions from all.

As an example, I remember talking with the leader of a large manufacturing plant in Brazil. He described how his relationship with his employees had improved since he had changed his method of communication. Previously he had used a regular newsletter to all employees as the principal means of informing them of business performance and changes and issues affecting the factory.

After attending a workshop where some micro-skills were being used and taught, he had the idea of replacing the newsletter with talking circles (see 'my' page 214). Now he meets each shift once a month under a large banyan tree, a lovely setting that takes advantage of the Brazilian climate. There they have a dialogue sitting in a circle under the tree.

As time has progressed he has found that discussion has become increasingly two way, with much greater participation by his employees. The conversations are positive and creative and have had the result of developing much greater understanding. It has not only been the employees who have learned.

Although I have not witnessed a meeting, the image of the talking circle under the tree has remained with me, as has the enthusiasm with which the leader spoke of the improvement in relationships and performance in the plant.

Having used micro-skills myself for the past few years, I believe they have contributed to a much more inclusive organisational culture. There is a great enthusiasm to participate and some truly amazing changes have occurred. Simple techniques, fantastic results!

South: How am I venturing into uncertainty...?

Congruence, authenticity, discipline

by a group facilitator

We had started that morning with some pretty standard processes for this type of meeting, about the importance of taking personal responsibility and limiting blame, justification, avoidance and denial. We had agreed that congruence, authenticity and discipline were to be key touchstones for our work together. Yet at that moment they were far from my mind. I was too busy looking at the group, smiling on the outside but inside losing confidence as my fear and anxiety grew. I was responsible for the session yet it was not going well. Several senior members were clearly uninterested and unhappy. Others were aware that things weren't right but were putting on a brave face – some smiling at me as if to try to make it OK. It wasn't! It wasn't a disaster zone, but it lacked the edge and power that I wanted to be a hallmark of this work.

The shift happened when I stopped focusing on my concerns and anxiety. Instead I just looked at the group and created a space for someone to speak, for something to happen.

'This is not working for me,' someone finally said.

'In what way?' I asked, instantly feeling better because I'd heard a real statement of what was happening.

'Well, it may just be me, but I am not feeling connected to what we are trying to achieve. Sorry to disrupt the process...'

'You have not disrupted the process,' I said. 'In fact you may have brought it back on track. What's not working?'

We then spent 40 minutes hearing from each person about where they were at, what was working and what was missing. In the process, the group created a new level of honesty and challenge.

We were also able to begin to discuss where the responsibility lay for each person's experience. In some cases it was in the way I was running the workshop – and mostly I felt freer to be able to change this. In other cases it lay in people's personal style and preconceptions – and they challenged each other to shift their mindset and involvement.

The meeting improved dramatically, as did the future workings of the group. I think this was because we had turned congruence, authenticity and discipline from a weak commitment to a strong action and a lived experience.

By being truthful, one person had created space for the others to explore what was really happening. This new level of trust made all the difference.

South-West: How are we focusing the power of our intent...?

Organisational backbone

by a COO of a global business division

One of the most remarkable experiences of my business life was how a company driving hard for market-share gain and cost-saving targets in a tough market became energised by a simple symbol and filled it with meaning in day-to-day operations.

Our backbone was conceived by a small group of leaders in an intense deep-dive. The starting point was the purpose and values, which were the extremely powerful products of an earlier creative exercise that was easy to place at the centre. Defining the top of the backbone was one of the hardest tasks. We wanted to steer clear of developing a vision in favour of something that we would definitely know we had achieved when we got there, and we settled on an ambition. The strategy, already well developed, naturally followed and flowed from our purpose and values. Next came the brand, which was defined as our reputation, fashioned by everybody. This demystified the notion of brand and distinguished it from the visual identity that many believed was what brands were all about. The final component was stories, which would illustrate everything and led to our Awards Programme, where the very best contributions were honoured at a regional and global level.

The real 'aha' moment, though, was the realisation that the components linked together coherently, balancing the familiar-sounding ambition and strategy with the softer behavioural concepts of the purpose and values, and bringing it all to life through brand and stories. It has been my experience that companies respond best when they are asked to take on something which is directionally clear, simple and congruent in content but leaves space for human beings to add their own meaning. This was the case with the backbone. The symbol itself was immediately recognizable and obviously associated with strength and cohesion. There was also an explicit opportunity for everybody to contribute, particularly through the brand and stories.

When we communicated the backbone to the leadership and subsequently to the broader organisation, no doubt was expressed about its significance or importance. The component parts needed explanation to bring them to life, but the notion of a backbone linking business components with softer skills was embraced almost instantly.

Evidence of this was that backbones started appearing on the front of conference agendas, on walls in meeting rooms and in offices around the world. We didn't ask anybody to do this. The backbone just became the very symbol of the change process we were embarking on. It captured our hearts and minds.

South-West: How am I focusing the power of my intent...?

Personal backbone

by a learning and development manager

My experience of the personal backbone was one of the most humbling and meaningful experiences in my life. It was the first time that I had ever focused on thinking about myself and my life story and it really took me on an emotional journey. Through this process, it became clear to me who had helped shape my strong religious, family, moral and ethical values, my drive and determination. I remember just sitting there after this exercise and visualising how each person had contributed to who I am today.

At that moment I paused and said a little prayer thanking each of them for their important contributions to my life. I had never done that before and it really felt good. This gave me a great insight into my purpose, which I believe is: 'To help people reach their full potential through learning and the application of that learning.'

As a result, I began thinking about where I wanted to go in my career. I realised that in about five years I would be reaching a crossroads in my life, transitioning from full-time work to retirement. I had really never thought about that much, so this really helped me focus on the future.

At that point I realised my ambition would need to encompass both my remaining professional years and my retirement. I thought, 'This is great, having my life plan ahead of me.' I was really on a rollercoaster high and then it hit me: 'How in the world am I going to do all of this?' Then my rollercoaster was headed straight down and it almost took my breath away. 'Where do I start? So much to do! Do I have enough time? Can I do it?'

That was when my personal drive and determination took over. I would not accept that it couldn't be done. I began identifying the initiatives and pathways that would help me move forward, and that gave me the confidence needed to change the direction of the rollercoaster.

The personal backbone exercise really helped me make meaning of my past, present and future. And my beliefs and values are now very closely mirrored in my work.

West: How are we supporting growth...?

Co-creative conferences

by a global head of HR

We have over the past four years engaged in a series of co-creative interventions with the company leadership and it is now an accustomed way of working. Our conferences have been pivotal moments in shifting the company leadership towards a more innovative culture.

There have been two main types of conference. The first type was more structured, building on self-awareness, personal presence and shared experience. The second type built upon this foundation and moved into less structured, self-managed interventions.

Phase 1: A conference with a difference

We first introduced co-creative working at the company's Global Leadership Conference of around 200 senior leaders. The impact on the delegates was immediate. We moved from the usual 'show and tell' format to one where we invited delegates to trust a process of self-discovery and individual networking to unlock creativity. We sat delegates in small 'home groups' of eight to ten people, equipping them with the disciplines and micro-skills to encourage openness and exchange on the conference topics at a personal level. This experience highly energised the group, as individuals felt valued in a way they had not experienced before. The new conference approach was coupled with the launch of the company purpose and values. Delegates were therefore not only experiencing personal development but also the feeling of being part of a new era in the company's development.

Phase 2: Self-managed co-creative experiences

Having established the backdrop of self-awareness, presence and skilful dialogue, we moved the group two years later into a more self-managed working environment. This concept necessitates individual delegates volunteering topics for discussion in front of the whole community in a market- place format driven by their passions, needs and interests. It takes courage for individuals to do this when they have no idea what the response will be, but the community took to the concept immediately. Realising that it was mature enough to shape its own agenda galvanised the group even further. People were working on the topics they wanted to talk about in small groups in an almost effortless and ad hoc way. A conference report captured our creative dialogues so we could take our insights back into the organisation. We had learned a new and accelerated way of working.

One of the most important factors in this co-creative journey has been that it has been leader led right from the very beginning. A colleague and I hosted the first conference and a federal team of about 20 senior leaders played important roles in facilitating the conference design. Senior leaders stepping outside their personal comfort zones and teaching new ways of working demonstrated a new level of commitment that others felt compelled to follow. It has been very impressive how leaders right across the company have since stepped up to be involved in leading such interventions, fuelled by their own experience and the confidence to try out the techniques locally in different cultures all over the world.

West: How am I supporting growth...?

Holding co-creative space

by a mother of two

As with our first child, we decided to have a naming ceremony for our son. Having many years' experience of *the Way of nowhere* we decided that a ceremony rooted in the medicine wheel would be a great thing to do. We felt it would capture, more appropriately than a traditional christening, the spirit of who we were as a family and who our son was as an individual (being only two years old).

We invited about 75 people – family and friends, adults and children – in late summer to a party at our house. We chose eight people to offer our son a wish from each of the eight directions of the medicine wheel.

We decided to have a marquee in the garden to hold the energy of the ceremony and to keep us dry if it rained. We planned to have 50 people seated on chairs in a circle around the edges of the marquee, while the children sat in the middle of the circle on the floor.

We opened the ceremony with the call of the drum. Everyone started to focus their intent and still themselves. My family and I then walked into the circle and found our space, seated on the floor amongst our guests. My husband and I started by welcoming everyone and thanking them for being in the circle. We then went on to explain the significance of the eight directions. As I sat there I could see the faces of people who had played significant roles in my and my family's lives. I felt their support and their love as the ceremony began to unfold.

The representatives of the eight directions then spoke one at a time, starting in the East and moving clockwise around the wheel. After each wish our son gave them a brightly coloured flower to show his and our appreciation of their wish for him.

As we started to come to the end of this simple ceremony we invited others to speak using a talking circle, so that anyone who wanted to could share a thought. This was a magical process, as some of the elder members of our families found the courage to share their wishes in front of everyone.

We completed the ceremony by honouring the ancestral line with the oldest living member of our family (my husband's 95-year-old grandmother) making a toast to her great-grandson on his beautiful naming day, which was followed by a hog-roast feast.

I came away with a sense of having hosted a very special and memorable day. The ceremony provided an opportunity for our family and friends to formally welcome our son into the world and to wish him well on his adventure through life. We also compiled a book of wishes and photographs from the day so that he could look back on and reconnect with the generosity and love that was bestowed on him whenever he chose.

A truly memorable experience for all.

North-West: How are we learning to see the invisible...?

The flywheel

by a head of global operations

The flywheel became a powerful metaphor in our company for aligning and exciting the organisation to drive forward the company strategy. From the outset, perhaps influenced by much contemporary management thinking, we saw the stimulation of innovation as the key to success: to out-innovate the competition in all that we do. The increase in pace and intensity of innovation was represented by the flywheel.

As leaders we felt that we had a compelling strategy but quickly learned that presentation of slick PowerPoint slides was a useless method of transferring our enthusiasm to employees. Rather we found it essential to communicate our vision through leaders at all levels who could enthuse their teams by demonstrating their own energy and enthusiasm for the strategy in a meaningful local context. Conversely, uncommitted leaders at any level became an enormous drain of energy as they took on the traditional blocker role. So we used the 'Flow of Leadership' as the first key driver of our flywheel in the East.

The obvious question for anyone to ask, once inspired by a strategy, is 'what can I do – what is my place?' We therefore tried to describe clear roles and a line of sight for each employee to the goals of the company. Also important was to set out rules of play, lines that should not be crossed. Aware of the disciplines, everyone was liberated to play their part as creatively as possible.

After that our customers and our connection to them were always seen as imperatives. While, like many companies, our objective was to delight our customers, we soon discovered that connecting more of our employees to our customers generated an amazing amount of energy. Those in most direct contact with customers were by far the most energised by our strategy. So the challenge became clear: how to spread this through the company, while recognising that direct contact for all was just not possible. We targeted our researchers. I was particularly struck by the observation I had at a workshop held for customers and researchers – that it was hard to tell which group was enjoying themselves more. 'Customer Connection' in the West was our third key driver.

Enhancing innovation, making it a way of life in all parts of the organisation, can only be possible through the creativity of employees. Communication of the strategy by our leaders, making contribution possible by all and transmitting the energy gained from delighted customers are great ways to start. But it is necessary to provide ways of releasing creative energy. We gained great benefit from holding a succession of events such as themed workshops, often called deep-dives, team meetings, trainings and recognition events, the latter being a very good way of sharing best practice. All were designed, using micro-skills, to catalyse co-creation, which we found to have a significant multiplier effect over individual endeavour. Releasing 'Creative Energy' was our key driver to the North.

We now use our annual employee survey to check how fast our flywheel is spinning in every part of the organisation and target action accordingly.

North-West: How am I learning to see the invisible...?

The four hidden orders

by the head teacher of a primary school

Seven daughters, seven mothers: all individually delightful people, but since joining the school as four-year-olds, the girls had been collectively very difficult. Often their behaviour, tears and misery had affected the whole class.

Five years later, the group became six as one mother withdrew her child from the school. The other mothers had started bickering, blaming each other and threatening to take their daughters away also.

From a recently acquired understanding of the four orders of change, Janet, our teaching assistant, and I sensed that the disharmony and conflict crossed the boundaries between school and home life.

We decided to involve the mothers in the process of finding some resolution. I invited them in one afternoon to sit in a circle with me in a quiet room. At the same time, Janet took the girls into another room and we each constellated using small markers with the girls' names written on (see 'my' page 170) to tease out some of the hidden dynamics.

The mothers were initially nervous, but soon they began to trust the process and me. What emerged was an overwhelming need on all their parts for their daughters to belong and be liked. Importantly, some mothers became aware that they had played too great a part in attempting to contrive this. They began to talk about their own situations and relationships and how these were impacting on the girls.

Then the girls rejoined us. Janet had been constellating with them and had rehearsed some sentences for them to say to each other and to their mothers. Each came in and sat at their mum's feet. They looked at the constellation of themselves that their mums had mapped out and set about 'putting it right', saying their sentences clearly.

Lucy moved her marker to the edge of the circle and told her mum, 'I don't need friends like you do. I'm happy on the outside, looking in'. Rachael moved her marker nearer Anna's and told her mum, 'I appreciate what you do for me, but please let me ask who I want for tea and not who you think I want.'

Anna cried and told her mum, 'I understand you have to work and Dad meets me from school, but I wish he'd let me join some clubs with the others and have them home to play. I feel left out.'

One year on both groups still talk about the afternoon and remember the messages they heard. Since then they have become much more considerate of each other. This intervention was an important learning and healing experience for the school and it confirmed for me that the two systems of home and school overlap at this age of a child's life and we need to find ways to deal with issues by involving members of the families themselves.

North: How are we returning our gift...?

The innovation wheel

by a head of global supply

How to liberate the creative potential of a group that had built its success and reputation on analytical rigour and reliable delivery to enable us to move from a strategy of rationalization to one of growth? This was the question I and my leadership team faced.

The Innovation wheel provided a rational framework that we could connect to as we played with a more intuitive approach. We could see the sequencing of the steps and the focus on delivery, but it also gave us a container in which we could comfortably experiment.

The key challenge was to let go of our pre-judgements. Everyone came in with a plan of what needed doing and just wanted to get on and do 'stuff'. That was what we were good at but also what got in the way! The crafting of a real breakthrough question was crucial. The first versions were always an objective dressed up as a question. It was uncomfortable for us to create a question that we did not know the answer to – that was not what was expected of leaders!

It was really only on the third project that we got close to understanding how to use the whole wheel effectively:

- how to create the right environment to allow people to slow down at the start and open their minds
- how to craft and deliver a brief that was challenging and inspiring but also specific and focused
- how to select the right leader and sponsor to deliver the brief with skill, energy and purpose
- how to balance deep intuitive insight with the right level of analytical rigour and testing
- how to ensure that the process did not dominate but simply enabled the answer to emerge
- how to use the sponsor to give guidance, steering and resources to the team to ensure that the leadership intent was delivered
- how to use the council to really test the insights and proposals and have the courage to stop the project when necessary

The Innovation wheel provided a vehicle to shift the dominant deterministic approach to a more innovative one. Its use on a few large, highly visible projects had an impact that went well beyond those projects through the people it involved or touched. It has now started to become simply part of how we do our work.

North: How am I returning my gift...?

The catalyst star

by a director of operations

We were halfway through a two-day conference where we had assembled 30 chief executives from some of England's leading local authorities, together with some of their central government counterparts. The challenge was how they would move from an emphasis on leading their authorities to an emphasis on leading and shaping the places those authorities represented.

We had promised an interactive, sparky and challenging event where people would not be able to simply sit and analyse the input they received but would be forced to internalise it and thus change their personal approach. Overnight, I'd felt we were in reach of this objective but also that we would need to change something in ourselves the next day if we were to achieve greater depth. The event was called a 'deep dive'; it risked becoming a 'shallow paddle'.

I felt I needed space to gather my thoughts, so before the conference started on the second day I went out for a walk.

Central London lacks inspiring countryside and with little time to spare I wasn't going to make it into the parks. I did, however, pause outside a map shop. I love maps – I see them as pictures of possibilities – and I was amused by the metaphor. By the time I came back in, I didn't really know any better what I was going to say or how to play the opening session, but I did feel a lot calmer, albeit with that element of restless insecurity that makes the adrenaline flow.

As I started talking to the conference I moved off the podium and out onto the floor. The podium had distanced me from the people there and I needed to make a connection. I wanted to be honest with this group, to name the position we were in as I saw it and to challenge them to move beyond the comfortable position of the previous day. I was very conscious of my position as probably the most junior of them all, yet felt that by simply speaking truthfully I would offer them the opportunity to take things forward differently. My agenda became theirs and how I worked with them, not me and what I felt they should achieve.

Did it work? Well, yes and no. Some found powerful insights and some undoubtedly chose to follow a different route. Leading is about people and how we relate to them, their history, their differences and their aspirations. To do that we need to understand ourselves and how we must change in order to see the change we seek in others. If we aren't brave enough to take a long hard look at ourselves, then inspiring bold change in others remains unreachable.

North-East: How are we keeping our energy clear and bright...?

Creative-consciousness mapping

by the CEO of a global corporation

If you have successfully arrived in the North-East, you will no doubt know a great deal more about yourself than when you began your journey. You feel more confident as a leader but also a more complete individual. If you are like me, you probably also feel as if you have barely scratched the surface and are eager to become more skilled so as 'to get to the bottom of the subject'. Your ability to sense and name your own energy, whether you are alone, leading a group or being led by another, is sharper than it has ever been. Increasing too is your ability to sense and name this energy in other individuals as well as a collective group. The benefits of this, but also the enjoyment it brings, can really be quite extraordinary.

Early on I found myself processing the **ccm** as a framework in leadership team meetings, which was a good discipline. Increasingly I am able to just sense it, to intuitively know when an intervention is needed, for example, and alternatively when a group is better off working things out, or not, for themselves.

I am beginning to discover the many nuances that underpin the power of the **ccm**. By tuning intently into those around me, I find they reveal clues about themselves and clues about me ... often in unexpected ways. By taking these clues in and really trusting yourself and your team, creative outcomes, shared ownership and commitment are commonplace. Open and honest debate reflecting differences of opinion but respect for others can become the norm.

I recently hired another executive to join our team. He was enormously surprised by the vitality of the leadership group upon his first meeting. Not surprisingly, the team was able to evoke contributions from this person from the outset. He later admitted to me that he learned things about himself and about teamwork that day that he never knew before. The team accomplished this.

For me, the early part of this journey was not easy. My first instincts were to rely on my analytical skills and my experiences alone. They had served me well throughout my career and had helped me achieve a great deal of business success. I intellectualised that these new tools might well be helpful to others, but not me. It was only after opening up some windows to myself, my routine use of allied and distorted robes and my tendency to avoid some of the energies while gravitating to those that were more natural to me that I came to realize that I was not achieving my own potential as an individual or as a leader. And of course, as a senior leader in the company, the implications of this were quite profound. I genuinely believe I am just getting underway.

'When I get to heaven, I mean to spend a considerable portion of the first million years in painting, and so to get to the bottom of the subject' – *Sir Winston Churchill*.

North-East: How am I keeping my energy clear and bright...?

nowhere circles

by two wisdom teachers

The founding partner of a venture capital company asked his people to attend a two-day retreat to look into their business practices and consider a deep issue that had remained unresolved for five years.

When the 12 partners and associates arrived at the five-star venue they were armed with golf clubs and cell phones for what they saw as a time for some fun on the golf course and some high-powered negotiating with potential investors. The founding partner, who had some experience with circle technology, asked us, 'How are we going to get this bunch to quiet their minds enough to come to grips with this issue?'

Our first step was to make the room our own by changing the space. We erected an 18'-diameter tipi in a large ballroom of the hotel, decorated it with beautiful blankets and created a simulated fire surrounded by stones and a circle of low chairs.

When the group entered the ballroom carrying their golf bags and cell phones, their reaction was a universal: 'What the hell is this?'

After entering the tipi, they were asked to listen as each one in turn spoke of where they were in relation to the two days ahead. This quickly set the tone and allowed them to drop into a very different space in themselves and with each other. Time seemed to slow down in this unusual atmosphere and they began to relax into the journey.

The founding partner set before them the issue that was confronting them. He asked each member of the group to sit quietly for a time reflecting inwardly on how that issue was affecting them. They were asked to share their thoughts and feelings honestly and to listen to each other openly without judging what they heard.

What followed was a deep and moving time that brought the group to a deep closeness they had never experienced before. They were able to listen more carefully and found themselves revealing deeper aspects of their thoughts and feelings. It was groundbreaking.

Then the group was asked to search for ways to bring this issue to a resolution. Different perspectives were offered as to how to look deeply into the issue and the group began to see ways to break through to a new level of understanding and decide on the necessary action.

After two days in this deep connection, interspersed with breaks for eating, sleeping and some recreation, they came to an ingenious collective decision about the issue and also had numerous insights about their future. The harmonious energy that had built between them then became an ongoing resource that sustained them going forward.

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