Rapid Improvement Delivery

**A toolkit for using coalitions to enable
rapid change**

What is this?

This toolkit can help anyone interested in rapid, impactful ground-up change:

- Understand how you can enable ground-up change using coalitions
- Understand how coalitions work and how you can use them
- Plan and deliver a coalition based project
- Predict the risks and opportunities
- Build capability and capacity as you work on a project
- Create agency and increase influence

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit explains what coalitions are and how they work.

It suggests a way of structuring coalitions and a coalition-based project.

It shares practical tools to support each project stage.

You can use it to help you run your own coalition-based project. Or you can borrow and adapt ideas and tools to support your own work in different ways

Contents

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Introducing Coalitions

What are coalitions?

Semi-formal collaborations between people who share a common interest and want to change something.

Coalitions:

- Participation is voluntary
- Do not agree on everything (and do on 'enough')
- Sufficient power is available (someone / somehow)
- Transient / temporary

They are often "sponsored" by a senior colleague and can be commissioned to address an issue (e.g. working groups are a form of coalition).

They can also form spontaneously, and without formal authority, and be an effective 'technology' to bring about change.

Building coalitions is one way to enable leadership agency in a distributed way. They can be complementary to traditional top-down leadership models

Hallmarks of good coalitions

Effective coalitions bring together people from different parts of an organisation who represent different job families, grades and backgrounds.

They make use of curiosity, listening and delving into values / needs / wants to

- Build trust
- Identify what is common and different
- Work with difference to inform their work towards a shared goal

They build and use networks to gather data, test ideas and build support to help them influence and create the leverage they need to influence when formal authority is not available.

Coalitions are good because they:

- Are an alternative to waiting for solutions from the 'top'
- Utilise the people who do the work and best understand the need
- Build leadership capability throughout an organisation
- Strengthen communication and key 'soft' skills
- Generate valuable outcomes as well as 'outputs':
  - Enable peer networks and create an enduring 'soft' infrastructure
  - Empower people and unlock agency
- Make use of small pilots to generate solutions and feedback quickly
- Don't need permission or formal authority to operate well

Considerations when planning coalitions

Build a group of people with different experiences, roles, and from different parts of the organisation.

A range of different perspectives is essential.

Regular short meetings help build relationships and build momentum.

People find it easier to schedule 60 minute meetings but 90 minutes allows to you to get work done in the meeting.

Harnessing tools to enable asynchronous working (like a teams channel supported by email) enable flexible participation when pressure on attendance becomes difficult and helps people feel included.

Scheduling a set of meetings in advance can make it easier to commit.

Being organised around sharing session agendas ahead of time, note taking and sharing updates in Teams and by email really helps.

Outputs vs Outcomes

We often focus on outputs - the artefacts and documents we create, without considering the wider outcomes, which are often as or more important. Coalitions are particularly good at delivering powerful outcomes, while working to deliver an output.
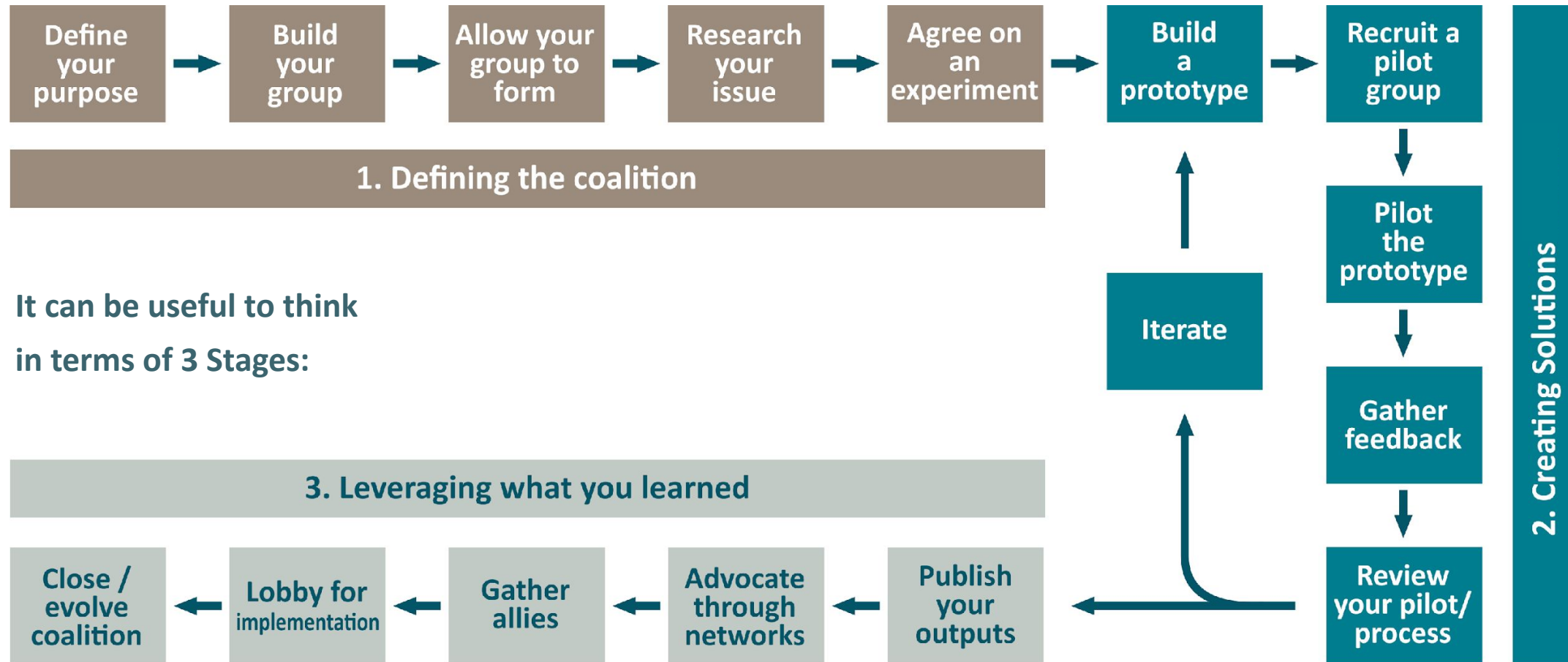
Outputs

- Publish something
- Create an artefact
- Communicate something
- Clarify something
- A first iteration or a step closer

Outcomes

- Work in a new way
- Access agency
- Form a team
- Feel and think differently
- Influence others
- Clear expectations
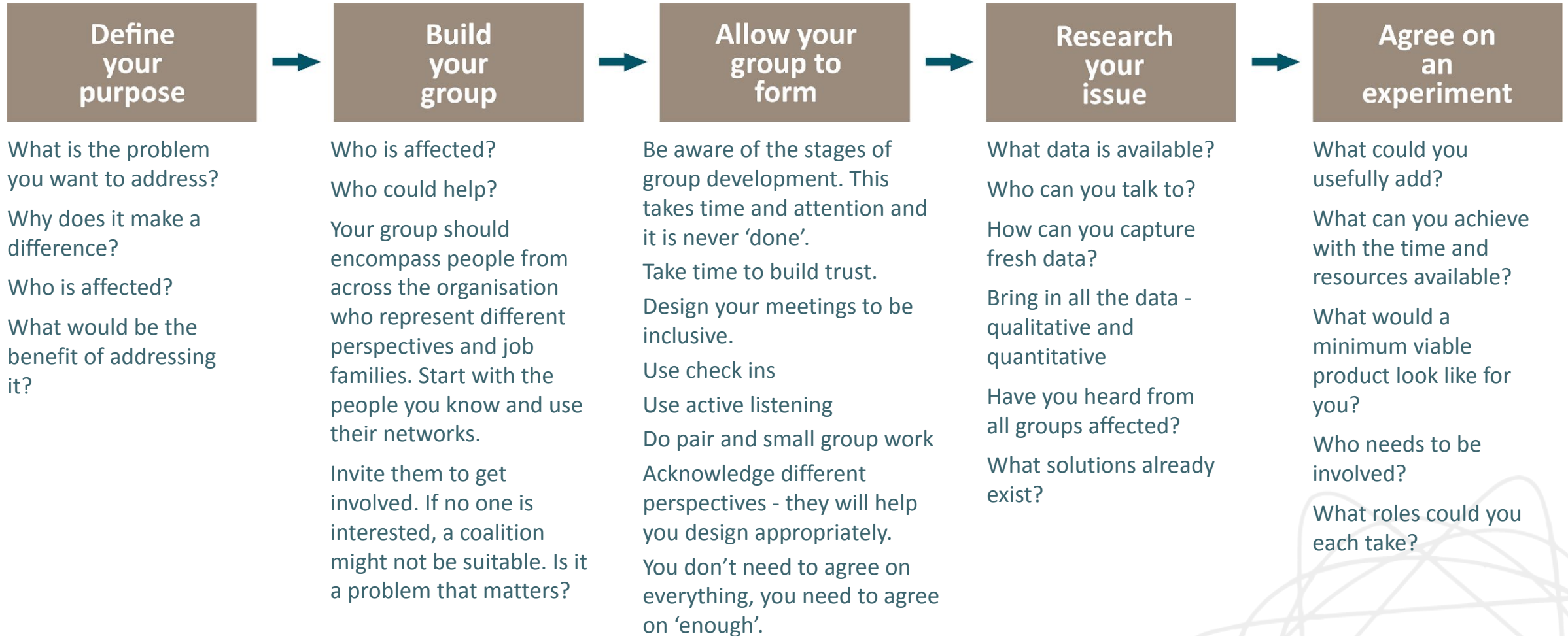- Change culture
- Establish strong networks

Stages of coalition work

then somehow

Define your purpose → **Build your group** → **Allow your group to form** → **Research your issue** → **Agree on an experiment** → **Build a prototype** → **Recruit a pilot group**

1. Defining the coalition

It can be useful to think

in terms of 3 Stages:

2. Creating Solutions

Recruit a pilot group → Pilot the prototype → Gather feedback → Review your pilot/ process

Iterate

3. Leveraging what you learned

Close / evolve coalition ← **Lobby for implementation** ← **Gather allies** ← **Advocate through networks** ← **Publish your outputs** ←

Stage 1 - Defining

Stage 1 - Defining your coalition

Define your purpose	Build your group	Allow your group to form	Research your issue	Agree on an experiment

Define your purpose

What is the problem you want to address?

Why does it make a difference?

Who is affected?

What would be the benefit of addressing it?

Build your group

Who is affected?

Who could help?

Your group should encompass people from across the organisation who represent different perspectives and job families. Start with the people you know and use their networks.

Invite them to get involved. If no one is interested, a coalition might not be suitable. Is it a problem that matters?

Allow your group to form

Be aware of the stages of group development. This takes time and attention and it is never 'done'.

Take time to build trust.

Design your meetings to be inclusive.

Use check ins

Use active listening

Do pair and small group work

Acknowledge different perspectives - they will help you design appropriately.

You don't need to agree on everything, you need to agree on 'enough'.

Research your issue

What data is available?

Who can you talk to?

How can you capture fresh data?

Bring in all the data - qualitative and quantitative

Have you heard from all groups affected?

What solutions already exist?

Agree on an experiment

What could you usefully add?

What can you achieve with the time and resources available?

What would a minimum viable product look like for you?

Who needs to be involved?

What roles could you each take?

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Stage 1 tools – Defining your purpose with SCIN

then somehow

This is based on a tool from the world of sales called SPIN. It's great for framing a conversation in a pair or a group to understand what is going on from different points of view, find common ground and build motivation to do something together.
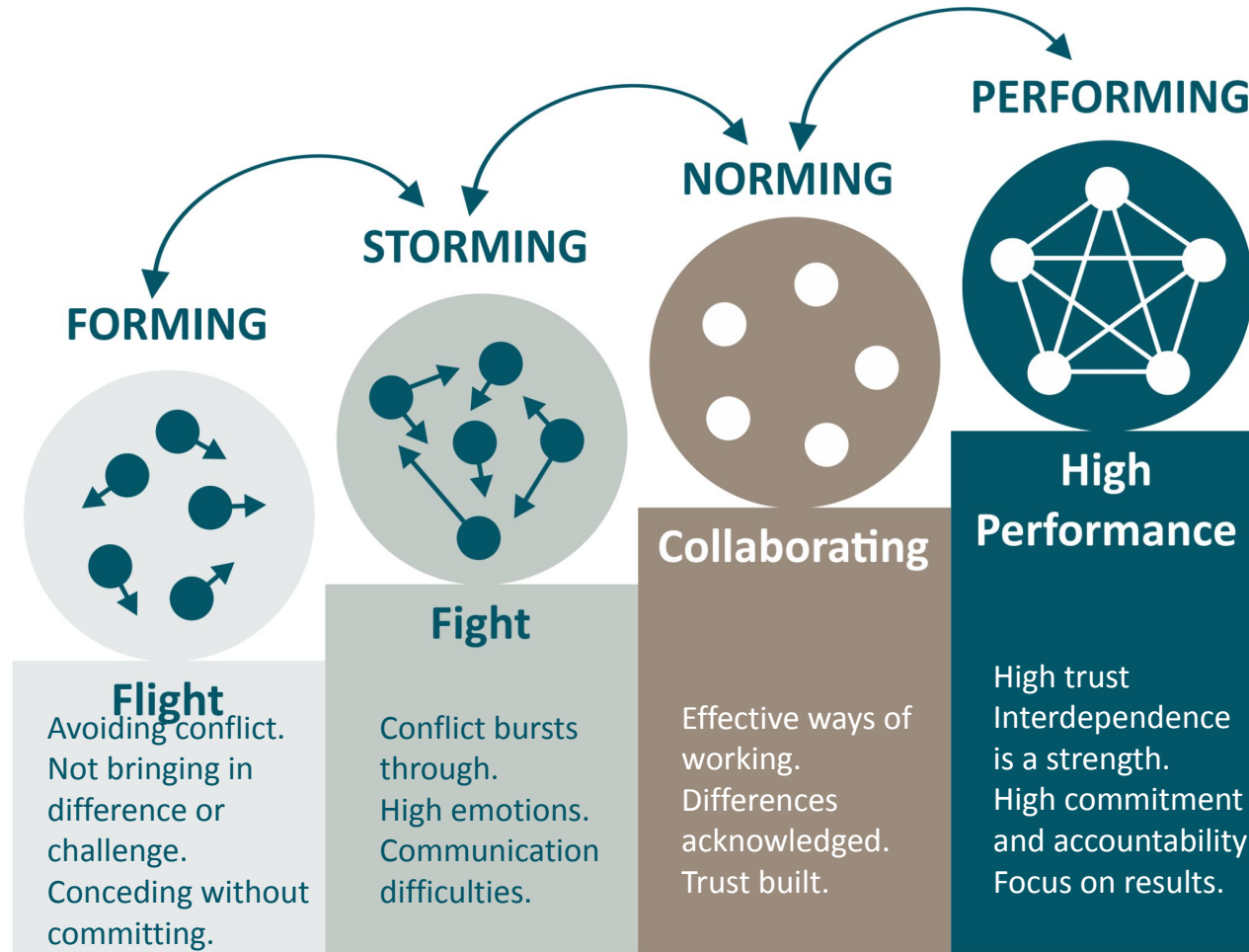
Situation - explore the context

Challenge - try to define the issues

Identify needs - try to capture all the differ

Needs met - what does it look like if all the needs are met (including good and bad implications)

A common way to address problems is to move straight to advice and solutions. It often goes wrong when your solution is a poor fit for some stakeholders. That's because you missed a step and rushed to a solution without considering needs or implications.

Exploring the underlying needs for all involved groups brings in valuable data that can inform next steps.
Articulating what meeting the needs looks like can be highly motivating and increase commitment to solving the problem together. Now you are ready to start proposing solutions.

Anyone could introduce SCIN to a conversation by asking the right questions.

SPIN (TM) - Huthwaite   14

Stage 1 tools - Stages of Group development

PERFORMING

NORMING

STORMING

FORMING

High Performance

High trust
Interdependence is a strength.
High commitment and accountability
Focus on results.

Collaborating

Effective ways of working.
Differences acknowledged.
Trust built.

Fight

Conflict bursts through.
High emotions.
Communication difficulties.

Flight

Avoiding conflict.
Not bringing in difference or challenge.
Conceding without committing.

Different models suggest several stages of group development. Higher performing teams succeed in spending most of their time interacting in the upper levels. Groups moving up and down this scale dynamically. Developing techniques to work well with FIGHT and COLLABORATING is well worth the effort.

When forming your group invest time in working through the FLIGHT and FIGHT stages, which are normal.

*Agarazian et al
Cf Tuckman et al*

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Stage 1 tools - Iceberg model

THE ICEBERG

After: Charles Hampden-Turner
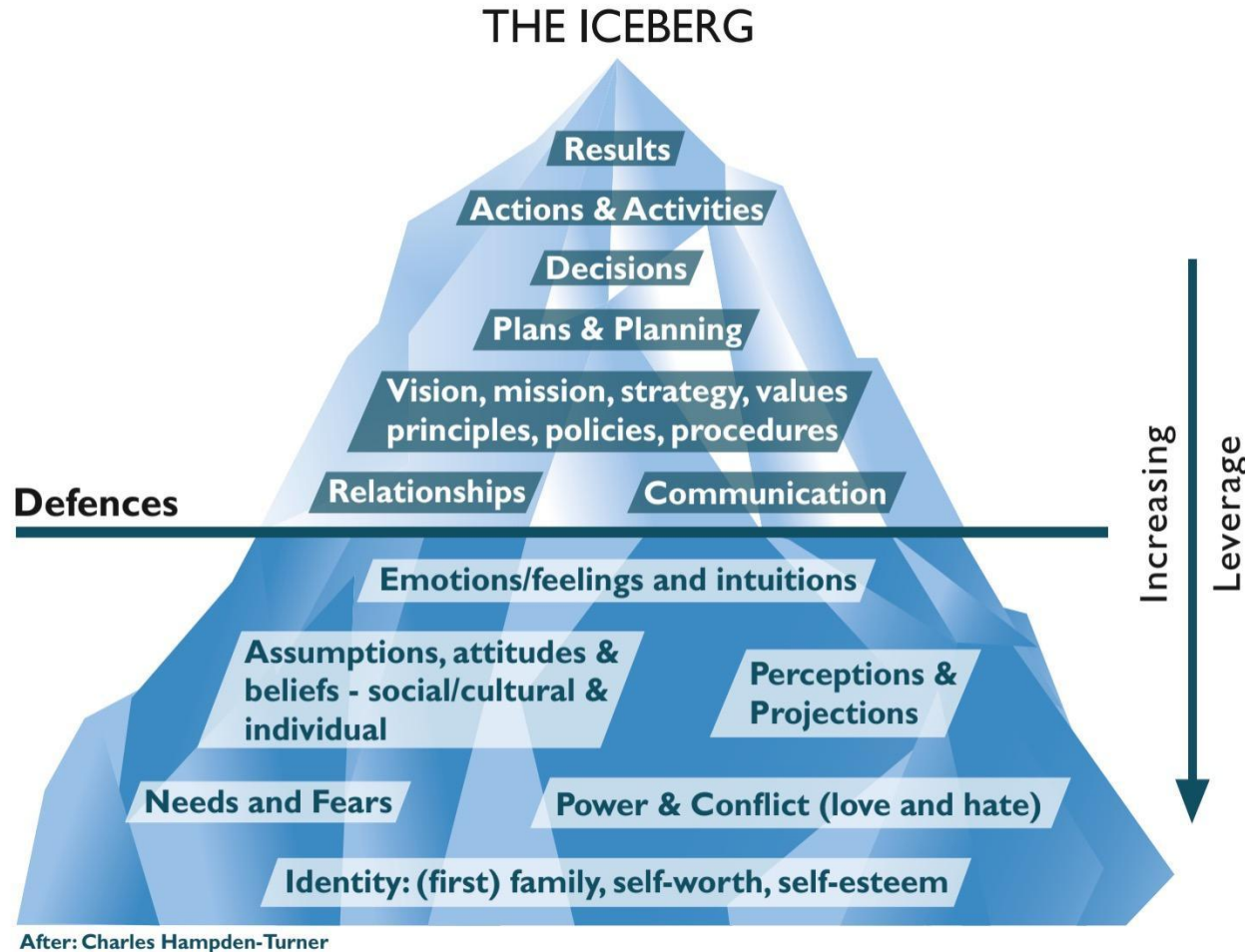
This model suggests that 90% of what's really affecting people happens below the waterline.

These things are often excluded from professional discourse.

At the waterline 'things happen' to discourage focusing on factors below the water.

However paying attention to these things increases leverage. People feel able to commit more, valued and that they belong.

Successful leaders often describe how they focus on factors below the waterline in favour of those above.

When working in groups, consciously acknowledging what is going on below the waterline can support group development.

Stage 1 tools - Check in and Check out

then somehow

10 CHECK-IN

At the start of a meeting take 10 minutes to CHECK-IN.

Ask everyone to share how they are feeling and what is happening for them.

It's surprising how something so simple can shift the tone of a meeting. Increasing trust, compassion, reflection, active listening and sense of belonging.

Understanding how people are feeling is valuable data. As well as acknowledging what is going on, it allows the group to accommodate any needs.

This is not about saying your name and describing your role, which are also very useful.

People can find this hard at first, which may be a sign they don't feel safe.

Keep trying: practice makes better

You could use a tool like "the blob tree" to help people practice check-ins

5 CHECK-OUT

At the end of a meeting take 5 minutes to CHECK- OUT.

Ask everyone to share how they are feeling after working together.

People value the acknowledgement.

It is good to appreciate when things have gone well

It is so valuable to know when people remain dissatisfied, unheard, or when differences remain unresolved.

Use this data to support people outside the meeting or to make improvements next time you meet.

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Stage 1 tools - Active Listening

This tool can help make people more aware of the value of listening well and acknowledge how hard we find it to do this. It also feel great to be 'heard'. This is a useful way to set a productive tone for a meeting. Pair work also feels safe and encourages quieter voices to participate.

It works like this:
1. Pair people together
    a. Give them a subject to discuss
    b. Give them a minute to think about it

2. Ask them to take a turn each (5-10 mins each) to:
    a. Describe their thoughts (subject)
    b. Ask opening questions - Tell me more / Why is that important? (Listener)
    c. Refrain from giving advice or hiding advice in questions (Listener)
    d. 'Play-back' a summary of what you heard (Listener)
    e. If they get it right (Subject confirms) swap round, if not - try again

3. Afterwards reflect as a group on:
    a. The experience
    b. Emerging themes - similarities and differences

Stage 1 tools - 1-2-4-all

This tool is beautifully described at the [liberating structures website](). In summary you can use all or some of the steps to include people and make sure every voice is heard, not just the loudest or most powerful.

For any given topic:

1. Ask people to think about and write down their thoughts. This helps people organise their thinking and gives time to reflect not just respond. (1-3 minutes)

2. Put people in pairs to share their thoughts. Pair work is the least intimidating way to contribute. Pairs can advocate for each other if helpful. (10 minutes)

4. Bring pairs together into fours to swap notes, build understanding of different perspectives and spot similarities and differences. (20 minutes)

All. Ask each group of four to contribute what they learned in plenary. (20 minutes)

Stage 1 tools - Rounds

Rounds is a fancy way of saying let's go round and ask everyone to say what they think. There are some things that can help make this work really well.

1. Be clear on the question or issue you want people to contribute to

2. Explain that you'd like to use a round

3. Say who will go first how long they will have and the mechanism for who will go next (eg go round clockwise and speak for 30 seconds)

4. Allow a minute for people to think and jot down their thoughts

5. Go round each person and ask them to share what they wrote down

   a. Don't get distracted by discussion - let everyone be heard first

   b. Stick to the time limit

6. When each person has contributed open the floor to discussion

Stage 2 - Creating Solutions

Stage 2 - Creating Solutions

Build a prototype → **Recruit a pilot group** → **Pilot the prototype** → **Gather feedback** → **Review your pilot/process**

Focus on a "Minimal Viable Product"
Make the most of limited time by working in "Agile sprints"
Use digital to collaborate "Asynchronously".

As soon as you have something "good enough for now, safe enough to try" test it with friends.

What is that fastest simplest experiment?

Feedback on a document?

Trying out your tool?

Collect data from people via email, conversations, a survey.

Use it to inform how the next iteration could improve.

Review your MVP
Run a retrospective to reflect on the experience of working together, how could you make it better?

Iterate Repeat the Cycle

Step 2 tools - The MVP

"Perfect is the enemy of good"

MVP = Minimum Viable Product

This is borrowed from the world of tech and it encourages you to get going with the most simple solution you can. The faster you test an idea, the faster you learn how to make it better and the faster you get to a fuller solution. MVP's are all about rapid iteration.

Plus if you never have time to make it better (or you never start because you don't have time to finish) - you'll at least have something that helps for now.

When you are considering an MVP remember it only has to be

"Good enough for now and safe enough to try"
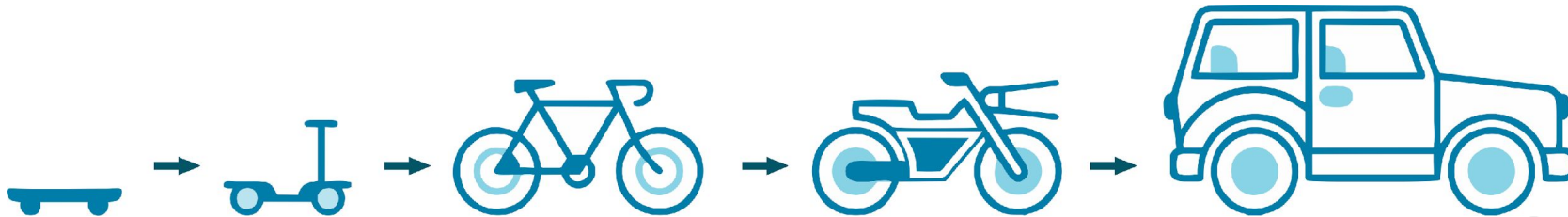
Step 2 tools - Piloting

then somehow

Change is Hard.
Experiments are **Fun**.
A Pilot is not forever.

1. Build
Turn your ideas into mini experiments and run them...

2. Measure
Assess how your experiment went

3. Learn
Pivot or Persevere

Iterate

1   2   3
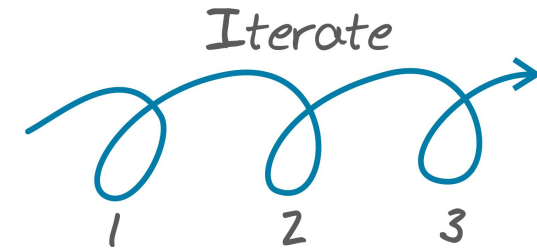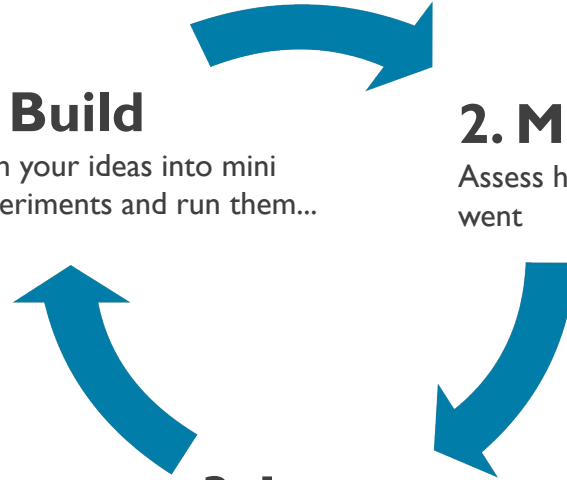
It's a loop you keep going around until you find the best fit!

Step 2 tools - A Mindset Shift

- Learning by doing

- Keep the end user in mind

- Keep outside perspective - who do you need to collaborate with?

- Team chooses what it works on

- Trust - no micro-management

- Report in regularly (little and often)

- Fix it as you go

Step 2 tools - Agile sprints

Project Management
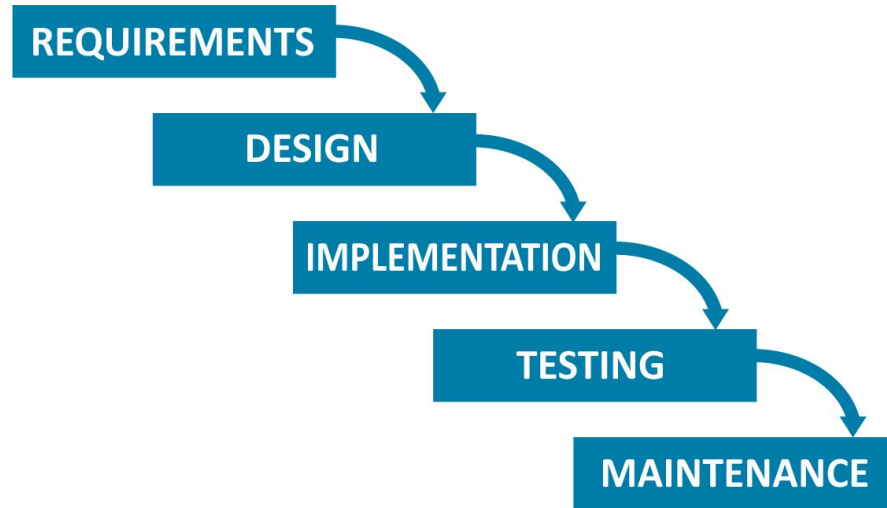
Waterfall   Vs   **Agile**

Fragile dependencies   Resilient
Controlled process   Emergent design
Fixed outcome   Flexible and responsive
"Change is hard"   "Experiments are fun"
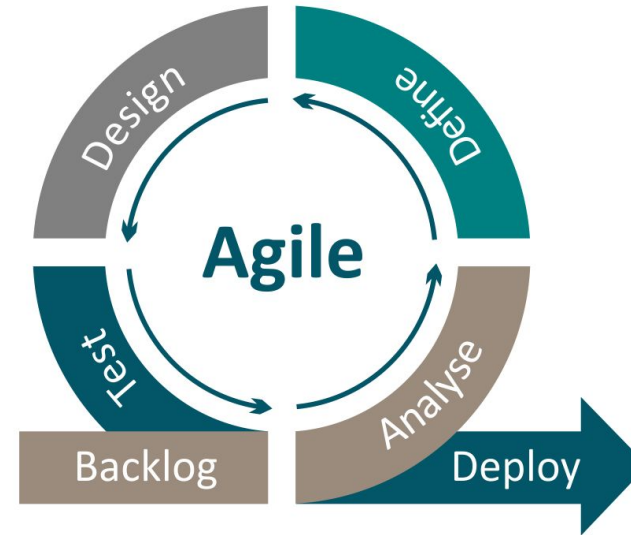
Step 2 tools - Agile sprints
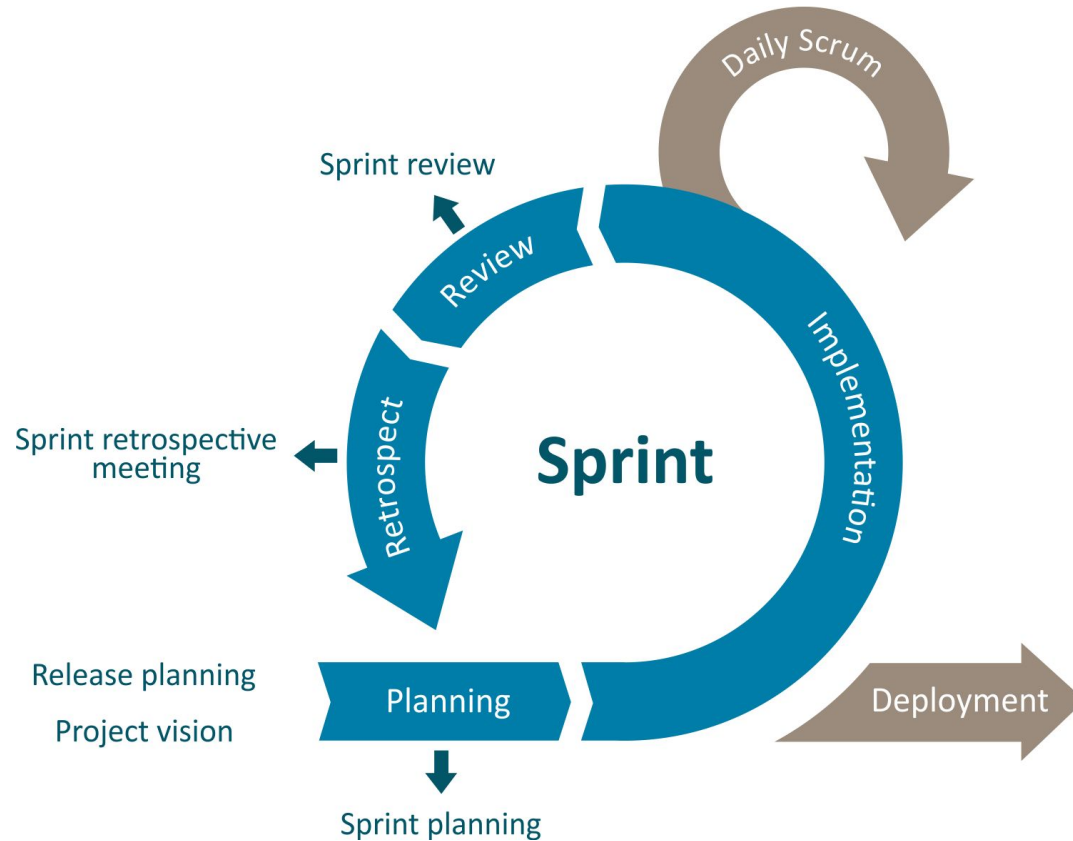
Anatomy of a sprint

1. Have an end goal
2. Plan a small step to get you closer that you think you could do in your sprint period.
3. Try it out - Analyse, define, design, test
4. Reflect on the process (review and retro)
5. Repeat

Step 2 tools - Agile sprints

Why being more AGILE can make a big difference

- Action focused = learning by doing

- Make swift meaningful progress on projects (you thought you didn't have time for)

- No more "Procrasti-planning"

- Quick, Adaptable, Engaging (Fun, even)

- Collaborative working

Stage 2 tools - Digital tools

Working in coalitions is hard in large part because people are busy and can't always meet at the same times or at the optimum frequency or for the full session.

To make sure people are included and can still participate make the most of digital tools to support 'asynchronous' work. Which is a fancy way of saying 'working-together-on-a-thing-but-not-at-the-same-time.

Teams - Create a channel where people can post questions, contributions, updates. Public meeting agendas and notes (or links to them here). Each channel also has an email address so you can direct feedback to the channel for all to see.

Sharepoint - This links to teams meaning you can share all types of Microsoft office files, work on them remotely at the same time, or review them with suggestions and comments for others to look at later.

Digital Whiteboards - Google Jamboards are a super-simple free whiteboard tool. Whiteboard tools are a useful way to allow everyone to contribute safely and capture ideas and outputs as a record for people who couldn't make a meeting - they can contribute afterwards too. You can use a Jamboard like a slide deck too structuring a meeting sand allowing people to create a record all at once.

Step 2 tools - KANBAN for collaboration

then somehow

To Do – Actions on stickies with names/colours to show who owns which action.

- Share excel template (MB)
- Guidance on granularity
- Share current Tableau (MJ)
- Update Tableau (Pete)

Doing – As soon as you start move all the stickies here - all the team knows who is doing what.

- Mark own Kanban – meet w/c 22/11, then after 2 weeks, and then before team meeting

Done – Completed actions.

- Update Data (Mark / Neil)

A simple tool for collaboration.
Can be physical in a shared space or digital (eg in teams, trello, jamboard)
Capture all the things you could do in To Do
Move the things you are working on to doing - show who, what, progress

Everyone updates as they go, anyone can see progress
Use it to plan your sprints
Log all completed in done - hurrah!

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Step 2 tools - KANBAN instructions
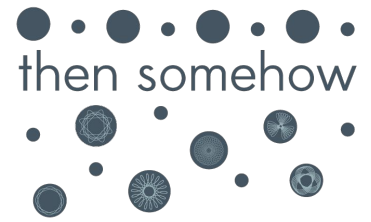
1. Put actions on to stickies and into the TO DO section on the left

2. Decide who will own the KANBAN (they do not have to do actions but must make sure the review takes place)

3. Decide who is going to do what make it clear, either by adding names or colour coding. Volunteering is best. Don't wait.

4. Decide on review times and dates   (KANBAN owner is in charge of this)

5. Meeting little and often is best. Can be done online in teams in 10 minutes.

6. At your review meeting - discuss what is going well and what the blockers are.

7. Together come up with ideas to undo the blocks

Link to example KanBan board
You will need to create your own version.

Step 2 - Gather feedback

There are many ways you can gather feedback on your prototype

1. Send emails asking for input (ask people to respond to your teams channel email so the whole team can see feedback).

2. Invite people to a focus group to start a discussion (you might recruit some allies). Take biscuits.

3. Interview people who tried it out - share your notes or record it so the team can learn too.

4. Set up a Microsoft form and share a link to get structured feedback. (You could get before and after scores as a way to demonstrate impact).

Step 2 tools - Reviews & Retro's

Why - these are learning conversations at the end of every sprint between everyone involved. Through reflection and discussion you can improve your outputs and the way you work. There are two distinct conversations:

1. Review (Task focused)

What was the sprint goal?
What progress did you make?
What blocks or opportunities did you uncover?
What did you learn?
What should you do next?

Use your Kanban board

2. Retro(spective) - Experience focused

How do you feel about the sprint?
What was it like to work together?
What worked well?
What could have been better?
Any surprises or learnings?
Any questions?
Any changes to the way you work together?

Use a tool like a feedback window (next slide)

Step 2 tools - Retro Feedback Window

What went well?

Could be better?

Any wow moments?

What next?

Quick Review - 30 minutes

NB
The aim is to make the next sprint better, and this could also include the way you review it. If it doesn't work, change it and try something new.

Stage 3 - Gaining Leverage

Stage 3 - Leveraging what you learned

Publish your outputs		Advocate through networks		Gather allies		Lobby for implementation		Close / evolve coalition

This can take many forms:
Sharing prototypes in testing.
Hosting a finished sharepoint.
Linking to a pdf in a newsletter.
Handing it over to another team to 'own'.

Use it with your team.
Share to your directorate / school / faculty.
Share it with other colleagues.
Invite people to help test.
Ask for feedback.
Host events to discuss.

Wherever there is interest:
Encourage them to share.
Offer to help them distribute it.
Invite them to your group if they share your passion / concern.
Go back and share improvements - you said we.

When you have something good enough seek formal sponsorship.
Start with managers, school / faculty / central leadership.
Write a case for support - use data you gathered to demonstrate impact.
Ask for specific support - marketing / further development / training design.

When you have got as far as you need / can, consider:
Has your coalition come to an end?
Can it evolve to look at another problem?
Do you have the energy to start another one?

Stage 3 - Leverage as you go

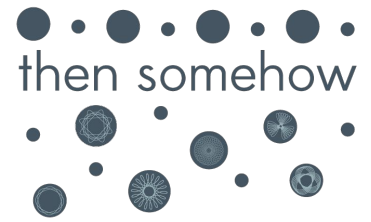The way you do the work is as important as what you do

Connect people

Involve them

Value them, make them feel they belong, lead them well using these tools

Publish often, advocate as you go, gather allies, lobby all the way, evolve as needed

Stage 3 - Reality check

Sometimes when you've been working in a coalition you make a thing and you are tired.

You want someone to swoop in and recognise your brilliance, take your thing away and use to make everything perfect.

Then they don't.

You might feel resentful, unvalued, angry and bitter. Even worse you might feel without hope.

Yet, maybe the issue is that finding a solution is just the start of the journey.

Making it stick, getting it out there - that's a whole other story.

And it's still work that needs to be done.

Turns out you aren't finished yet.

Stage 3 - Mindset - Tops Middles Bottoms

then somehow

Large organisations are complex systems with emergent patterns. A common pattern appears across tops, middles and bottoms. It's obvious how coalitions are a great tool for breaking these patterns. And having been brilliant in finding a solution, now is no time to fall into the traps.

Role	Feel	Traps	Behaviour Change
Tops (Senior Leaders)	Feel responsible for everyone and unsupported.	Don't ask for help and hold on to all the power.	Delegate authority stop trying to control it all. Trust people.
Middles (Middle Managers)	Feel stuck in the middle and stretched thin.	Try to mediate everything.	Get out of the way. Connect people. Trust them to fix things.
Bottoms (Do the work / create the value)	Feel powerless and resentful.	Blame everyone else and embrace victimhood.	Take responsibility for solving problems. Embrace agency. Seek forgiveness not permission.

From Barry Oshry - Power + Systems

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Stage 3 - Avoiding Collusion

"…people get the leaders they deserve." - Joseph de Maistre

So deserve better.

If we wait for the people at the top to fix things for us, we'll be waiting a long time. In doing that we abandon our agency, and deny our own responsibility to shape outcomes. When we do that we are colluding.

Stop colluding in mediocrity (which we all do). That takes:

- Bravery (but not much)
- Resolution (but less than you think)
- Doing something different (not as hard as you imagine)

Clear expectations

- How you behave together
- How you work together
- Time commitments
- Purpose, objectives, timescales

Good Behaviours

- Keeping confidences
- Being Open / Honest
- Being Clear
- Listening well
- Respecting each other
- Suspending judgement
- Voicing/Challenging
- Being open to vulnerability
- Staying Practical
- Being Kind
- Staying flexible

Stage 3 - Things that help: Solutions, not Problems

then somehow

Problem Focus:

- What's wrong
- What needs fixing
- Blame
- Control
- Causes in the past
- The expert knows best
- Deficits & weaknesses
- Complications

Solutions Focus:

- What's wanted
- What's working
- Progress
- Influence
- 'Counters' in the past
- Collaboration
- Resources & strengths
- Simplicity
- Actions
- Definitions

Next Steps

This toolkit aims to share a range of useful tools and ideas to give you confidence to access your agency and encourage you to practice using coalitions to make a difference.

The way you do things is as important as what you do.

- What is the solution you need to find?

- Who are the people who want to find one too?

- When will you ask them to help you?

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