



The Percept Field Guide

Building a fierce, wholehearted collective

2024



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To begin

Field guides help us pay closer attention to nature: we can walk through the world and see a bird, a tree, a flower, or we can walk through the world and see the curiosity of a Cape Robin, the abundance of an avocado tree, the medicine of a vygie. Paying attention is expansive and nourishing – it allows us to see more possibility.

This is a field guide for building an organisation: it is an invitation to notice the details that underpin ways of being and of working. To question the assumed ways. To find new possibilities.

It is based on our personal experiences of having built Percept. We offer our experiences and ongoing learning as a gift: perhaps it will help you to see something you haven't seen before, or inspire you to find new language, or save you learning something the long way. We also hope that you will take these ideas and build on them, so that we can continue to evolve. Together, we will create more possibilities, more definitions of success, more ways to build workplaces where people thrive.

Part the clouds of delusion

Organisational design doesn't exist in a vacuum: it is strongly influenced by history, societal values and economic forces. Capitalism, in its current form, has had a profound effect on organisational design. It has provided us with a dominant metaphor for success: unlimited growth. It thrives off a scarcity mindset, a sense of not-enoughness that feeds consumerism, greed and extraction but starves creativity. It has hardened our hearts against inequality. It has infiltrated our language: we live in an economy, not a society; we are human resources, not human beings.

Capitalism has come to us arm-in-arm with patriarchal systems and colonialism: systems built on fear, oppression, extraction and exclusion. Feminine ways of being and indigenous forms of knowledge are notably absent.

The historical systems that obliterated indigenous knowledge imposed hierarchical systems of classification onto nature: from apex predators to weeds. Our society now co-exists with hierarchy to the extent that we have difficulty imagining alternative models for collective work, decision-making and power. Hierarchical thinking where some beings are intrinsically better than or more than others, individualism and othering all serve to separate us from each other, from nature, from ourselves and from our wholeness.

Our disconnection from nature and from the feminine has also amplified linear ways of thinking about time, productivity and power dynamics. We have internalised ideas about our worth being linked to our productivity, and productivity being linked to time. In the process, we have lost a sense of the fullness of what it means to be human and desiccated our potential.

This combined systemic influence is so pervasive that it has even infiltrated the design of organisations where economic incentives are not at play: schools, universities, non-profit organisations, philanthropies. Systems of oppression are replicated and supported through organisational design, perpetuating intergenerational trauma.

Our starting point is knowing that we want to build organisations that produce different outcomes and that mirror dynamics we would like to see in society more broadly. The challenge is finding the design elements that will support those different outcomes. It's a challenge because the blueprint we have is flawed, and because we've internalised the blueprint. Seeing the design elements clearly, and the ways in which they contribute to extraction and oppression, requires a conscious "parting of the clouds of delusion".

Roar like a goddess

The creating of new ways of working is not a passive act – it requires conscious effort, and a willingness to do the hard work of creating new templates where the existing ones do not serve. There is a ferocity to be willing to be counter-cultural, and to run up against existing power structures. As Percept has evolved it has been increasingly clear to us how fierce and kind co-exist. Being deeply committed to compassionate ways of being



in the world requires tenacity and a willingness to “fight the good fight”.¹ So much of the ethos in this Field Guide is about choosing the path of Ahimsa or non-violence – but this doesn’t mean not standing up for those without a voice, and for the principles of love, inclusivity and compassion.

So many of the organisations around us are toxic, poisoning the people who work there, the people they are meant to serve and the more-than-human world around us. Noticing this toxicity isn’t enough – we need to actively build antidotes. **Love, compassion and inclusivity are the antidotes to oppression. Trust, abundance and interconnectedness are the antidotes to extractivism.**

Across mythologies, the sacred feminine² archetype is characterised by non-linearity, receptivity, comfort with ambiguity, turning inward, yin energy, rest and the unconscious. The sacred masculine is associated with action, structure, yang energy. The sacred masculine draws from the sacred feminine: revolution draws from rest, yin and yang exist in balance with each other. In our view, so-called toxic masculinity arises from an out-of-balance masculine energy that doesn’t draw from a strong, rooted feminine. Hence the need to soak the feminine back into the workplace.

The Percept team has been majority women. In a world that is characterised by an absence of the sacred feminine, it has been necessary for us to play and experiment with feminine models of leadership and work. Ideally, we want an integration of the masculine and feminine, energies and archetypes we all carry within us – a process that has been enabled through our deepening of familiarity with the feminine.

Being fierce, being willing to speak truth to power, standing powerfully in who we are is intrinsically linked to the time we’ve taken to get to know our feminine. We cannot, collectively, continue in a world that is stripped of the feminine or where the feminine is minimized and distorted. These new ways of being integrate the masculine and feminine – they honour relationships, they allow us to navigate uncertainty and they bring more compassion into the world.

YOU’D BETTER WATCH WHAT
YOU ARE SAYING. THE THINGS
THAT YOU ARE SAYING ARE
CHANGING YOUR LIFE. THE
THINGS THAT YOU ARE SAYING
ARE BIRTHING THINGS AND
RAISING THINGS, AND KILLING
THINGS DEAD. THEY MAKE
LARGE THINGS OUT OF SMALL
THINGS, DANGER OUT OF THE
UNKNOWN, MOVEMENT OUT
OF DORMANT, RESTING
POTENTIAL. THIS IS HOW YOU
BUILD YOUR HOUSE AND THIS
IS HOW THE HOUSE FORMS,
THRIVING OR STRUGGLING,
ACCORDING TO LANGUAGE.

YRSA DALEY-WARD

¹ This language comes from Paulo Coelho in his book “The Pilgrimage”.

² The word feminine here has nothing to do with biological sex or how people identify from a gender perspective, it refers to non-binary archetypal energies and characteristics



Find language large enough

Part of the work to create new blueprints is finding new language. The world that we have inherited is embedded in everyday business language, in a lexicon of violence and oppression. Language is extremely powerful and is one of the ways in which cultures and ways of being in the world perpetuate. Language shapes identity and relationships, it can create and destroy meaning, it humanises and de-humanises. The language we use has implications both internally (in terms of inclusivity) and externally – our engagements with partners and clients, our social media presence, our writing, our presentations, all present opportunities to disrupt the status quo, and to make the world a kinder, gentler place.

We need to find language that is consistent with who we are and with our vision for world characterised by compassion, curiosity and connectedness. As Shane Parrish says, “extraordinary results come from ordinary people with uncommon consistency.”

While metaphors have a powerful place in language, there are also areas where the language must mean what it means. When you use "fight" you mean fight: proactive and courageous defence of your values and people can require fight.

Language that no longer serves us:

Chief ... Officer.

Throw someone under the bus.

Sell someone down the river.

Armour up.

Divide and conquer.

In the trenches.

Guinea pig.

Multiple fronts.

Tar with the same brush.

Human resources.

Human capital.

Killing it.

Making a killing.

Go in guns blazing.

This guide is made up of two broad sections: the first is about the design of the organisation itself, the second about the practices, the ways of working and the people. The two are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing.



Intentional structures

In this first part of the guide, we draw your eye to the overall structure, the architecture. The ordering of the sections points to a potential methodology for building or rebuilding an organisation:

- Start with a clear articulation of your values. Use these values to shape your policies, processes and practices. If things are not working as they should, track back to your values and find mismatches between what you do and who you are.
- Craft a deep sense of clarity of what good looks like for your organisation. Check that there is resonance between what calls you, and your values. Use this calling reflexively – are you doing the right work? Working with the right partners? Getting distracted?
- Get good at saying no – realise that you have limited time and resources and begin to direct those with intentionality. Being clear about what success means for you should directly translate into a filtering of your actions.
- Pay close attention to your power structures and relational models – this means attending to roles, responsibilities, decision-making, governance – without confusing these with some people having power or an innate sense of superiority over others.

Build bones of values

A vision, mission and values have become a standard part of business strategy. We've found that our values (originally: curiosity, collaboration, inclusivity and right effort) have become a guiding light for our business. The problem with values is when they're abstracted from the day-to-day of working life, as is so often the case. We use our four values actively – to structure our website, when we recruit, to help us discern when to say yes and when to say no, when we're choosing partners. Choosing the right values (and being willing to go back and re-choose if necessary as we did in 2023) makes all the difference. The "right" values for your organisation are the ones that people recognise as part of your essence and will defend you on if you're accused of the opposite. It isn't necessary to include the words that you take as a given – your values should be what you're rising up toward, not your baseline. Sometimes it's only in working actively with your values that you realise that there is something missing, or something superfluous. As your organisation evolves, there needs to be space for your values to evolve too.

Your values aren't a full set of adjectives that describe you – **they're the small set of distinctive principles that set you apart**. Recruiting on the basis of your values won't mean that you end up with a set of humans who all think the same way – it will mean that the people you recruit have a set of overlapping values (a Venn diagram of sorts) that will help them to build a community. This is another useful check on your values – are they a non-negotiable for the people you hire?

Values chosen at the outset often reflect the values of the founders. And because founders often assume they are the organisation, they assume the values will persist. Values only persist if they become part of the supporting structures, processes and policies. They need to be deliberately and intentionally built into the bones of the organisation.

Here are four practical ways we have built our values into our organisation:

- We ensure that our interview questions cover our four core values, and that we make our values explicit in the interview process.
- We've linked our values to our growth & development process to give the people of the organisation a way to translate the values into behaviours.
- We've created physical and digital spaces to echo our values. For example, we have a weekly Collaborate & Listen knowledge-sharing session which reinforces our values of curiosity and collaboration.



- We have translated our values into ways of working – we call this the Percept manifesto. It forms part of our employment contract – in other words, there is explicit contracting on the basis of values. The lines from the manifesto, in turn, are used to name our digital spaces and projects – they are actively part of the day-to-day way in which we work.
- We practise our values together in collective spaces. For example, we practise inclusivity by structuring our meetings to equalise airtime, using Time to Think principles. We practise mindfulness together to support our value of right effort.

Bring your best self. Be present. Be kind. Be open. Collaborate and listen. Participate. Reflect. Trust your gut. Don't underestimate your ability or your creativity. Be humble. Challenge the isms head on. Don't confuse power and leadership. Hold each other accountable. Be brave. Be inclusive. Cherish our complex and multi-faceted identities. Celebrate our diversity. See our shared humanity. Live your social conscience. Follow your moral radar. Tread lightly on the earth. Speak truth to power. Hold our context and Constitution close to your heart. Work intentionally. Respect our clients, and remember that they know their reality better than we do. Make it as simple as it can possibly be, but no simpler. Value substance over form. But remember that form still matters. Under promise and over deliver. Always ask how what we're doing is making the world a better place. Step outside your comfort zone. Don't expect the women to take notes and make tea. Be a feminist. Be generous. Mentor, teach and support. Encourage positive conflict. Don't be afraid to be different, or fear those who are different from you. Engage authentically. Speak up. Breathe. There is much to be done, therefore you must go slowly. Be handcrafted in small batches. (Just checking whether you're paying attention). Don't eat at your desk. Don't ever stop learning. Think about all the possibilities. Do your research. Use spell check. Attach the attachment. Own your mistakes. Ask for help. Don't procrastinate. Don't answer emails on holiday. Know when to work all night and when to call it a day. Don't miss life's important moments. Learn how to differentiate between rigour and perfection. Know which boulders are yours. Have faith in the future. Don't think small. Be flexible and adaptable. Be resourceful. Be resilient. Resist bureaucracy, embrace governance. Take the risks that are worth taking. Dream. Show your passion. Remember that attitude beats aptitude. Hunger for understanding. Find inspiration everywhere. Be more curious than George. Be a good ancestor. Plant trees you'll never see. Put your soul into it. Take joy in exploring. Delight in discovering. Question everything. Stop taking yourself so damn seriously. Learn to take criticism. Laugh a lot. Be diligent. Be ingenious. Have fun.



Imagine your metaphors for success

An organism that settles on a single survival stratagem and ceases to seek and find others—ceases to adapt—is at high risk. And adaptability is our principle and most reliable gift. As a species we are almost endlessly, almost appallingly adaptable. Capitalism thinks it's adaptable, but if it only has one stratagem, endless growth, the limit of its adaptability is irrevocably set. And we have reached that limit. We are therefore at very high risk.

Ursula K. Le Guin

Ursula K. Le Guin, the science fiction writer, has a beautiful blog called “Clinging desperately to a metaphor”.³ It's about how definitions of success have largely narrowed to endless growth. This is in stark contrast to nature with its almost infinite array of strategies. She is writing about our broader economic and political structures, but the same applies to organisations (or organisms if one were to think more organically).

This thinking doesn't mean rejecting growth but allowing your thinking to expand beyond growth. And asking what optimal size might look like. At Percept, we have consciously chosen an optimal size that is small. We chose this because it allows us to minimise the organisational effort spent on training, management and administration. It also allows us the freedom to choose how we want to spend our time. Choosing to be deliberately small has been both freeing and challenging. We have come up against our limited ways of thinking about economies of scale and overhead costs. We have had to re-think how we place a value on the work we do, and how we fund that work.

This does not mean that the principles outlined in this guide cannot be applied at multiple scales. There is nothing wrong with growth per se, as long as it is intentional and with purpose, and not for its own sake.

Having a metaphor for success requires unencumbered and imaginative thinking about what good looks like for your organisation. Feeling your way into the texture of fulfilling your organisation's potential. Asking how this is coherent with your values. A vision for an organisation is often external (we will have achieved x). A metaphor for success takes this a bit further to think about what it will look and feel like internally as you manifest that vision.

For Percept, our vision is of a healthier and more resilient world. Our metaphor for success is an acupuncture needle – root-cause targeted interventions, that are cognisant of the context and system and have disproportionate ripple effects. Concentrated and targeted effort can rebalance a system and release transformational healing. We are discerning about the work we do, and fierce about the way we do that work.

Having a deep sense of what success looks and feels like acts as a “strong back” for our organisation. It enables us to make difficult decisions, to understand why something doesn't feel right and brings clarity and focus to everything that we do.

Face your finitude

The word finitude⁴ is a clarion call to recognise, without illusions, that we have limited time, and an encouragement to make decisions in full recognition of our lack of control and certainty. This applies as much at an organisational level as it does at an individual level.

³ <https://www.ursulakleuin.com/blog/33-clinging-desperately-to-a-metaphor>

⁴ The word finitude came into our awareness from the Oliver Burkeman book “Four Thousand Weeks” – a book that is presented as being about time management but is a subversive delight.



The critical question isn't how to differentiate between activities that matter and those that don't, but what to do when far too many things feel at least somewhat important... In a world of too many big rocks, it's the moderately appealing ones on which a finite life can come to grief. You need to learn how to start saying no to things you do want to do, with the recognition that you have only one life.

Oliver Burkeman

Shifting our thinking away from unlimited growth and really looking our limitations in the eye has introduced discipline around choices, priorities and trade-offs. How can we best direct limited resources, limited attention and limited energy? How do we want to work in service of our vision?

One of the ways in which we do this is by pausing to assess every opportunity that comes our way. We have a short survey that we send out to the team when a new opportunity presents itself. The questions we ask are ways of cross-checking against our values – we ask whether we will learn something, whether we will build a relationship worth building, whether this contributes to our vision, whether we will have fun, whether there are any ethical red flags, whether it is suited to teamwork and collaboration.

We also ask about the financial aspects (recognizing the need for sustainability). And critically, in light of the “big rocks”⁵ dilemma we ask about opportunity costs (if we say yes, what else will we have to say no to?). And then, at the end we ask for a gut response: despite your answers to all the other questions is this a hell yes, a yes, a no or a hell no? Jim Dethmer, conscious leadership coach, talks about a whole-body yes and a whole-body no. For most of us, it takes practice to learn how to recognise these sensations, and the murky area in between.

The responses to the survey don't just guide whether we say yes or no but also guide us on whether we need to renegotiate an aspect of the opportunity and on whether there are areas of disagreement or non-alignment in the team. We embrace these moments as opportunities to get clearer with each other.

Part of getting comfortable with saying no is learning how to say no. One of the approaches we've learned is the hamburger method: sandwiching the no between two yeses. The first yes is the yes to yourself. It's the reason you're saying no. And the second yes is the yes to the relationship. It's the reason it's hard to say no. Saying no becomes easier when we learn to communicate the reasons for saying no more clearly.

Saying yes when you mean no isn't good for relationships in the long run – it either means you won't be able to deliver on what you've promised, or that you will become resentful.

The practice of saying no at an organisational level helps to make it easier for individuals to say no too through five mechanisms:

- Deliberately pausing to check in before saying yes
- Applying a values filter
- Thinking about opportunity costs
- Doing a body check-in
- Learning how to say no

The mirroring of individual and collective practices strengthens awareness, power and love – ensuring that you can follow through wholeheartedly on the things you say yes to.

In some ways, saying no upfront is easier than trying to figure out what to do when faced with an excess of

⁵ This is a reference that Oliver Burkeman makes to a productivity idea that you can fit everything in by just prioritising the big rocks first, then the small rocks, then the sand. This doesn't work in a world with too many big rocks.



immediate commitments. Oliver Burkeman talks about the idea of strategic underachievement – acknowledging that there is an area of your life that you’re going to “fail” at, even if just for a period of time. This notion creates a sense of forgiveness for not being superhuman and is very powerful when combined with Jim Dethmer’s idea about impeccable agreements – more on this later.

Seek alternatives to hierarchy

Hierarchy as the only model for understanding organisational structures, power and governance is another example of our imagination being limited over time. As with metaphors for success, there are other models of reality, some of which sit outside the limits of perception. In *This Entangled Life*, Merlin Sheldrake describes mycelial co-ordination: “There is no main voice. There is no lead tune. There is no central planning. Nonetheless, a form emerges.” By hierarchy, we mean the inherent sense of ranking: that one person or being is somehow more-than, or less-than another. It is about intrinsic worth – and how this gets muddled with, amongst others, race, gender, titles and money.

The normalisation and internalisation of hierarchy are connected to the growth in scale of units of human organisation, and to the spreading of colonial ways of thinking. As Jay Griffiths describes in *Wild*: “The age of European exploration was also an age of classification by which wildness was conceptually tamed... We are perhaps so used to Linnaean classification that we hardly see the falsifications that his metaphors produce... In the Western tradition, for thousands of years, nature was made to seem hierarchical and hierarchy was made to seem natural.”

There are many reasons to resist hierarchies in organisations. By creating systems of “more-than” and “less-than” we create separation between ourselves, and systematically disempower almost everyone in an organisation. Hierarchies also lead to a confusion between power and leadership. The reliance on power structures for accountability leads to people not taking full responsibility. Hierarchies breed a lack of trust and compensate with bureaucracy. Masculine archetypes are more linked to linear ways of thinking, while feminine archetypes are more comfortable with relational models, non-linearity and ambiguity. The imbalance between masculine and feminine encoded by patriarchal systems leads to what David Whyte describes as “the overripe hierarchies of the world.”

“It seems that all the overripe hierarchies of the world, from corporations to nation-states, are in trouble and are calling, however reluctantly, on their people for more creativity, commitment and innovation. If these corporate bodies can demand those creative qualities that by long tradition belong so directly to our being, to our soul, they must naturally make room for the soul’s disturbing presence within their buildings and their borders. But the human ability to innovate and follow an individual vision depends also on a sure foundation of continuity and community.”

David Whyte

The alternative of the flat organisation is also not very helpful. Flat organisations can be amorphous, without a clear sense of boundaries, and overlapping roles. They are also very seldom genuinely flat with power being signalled in other ways: through pay, through titles, through identity power and through artefacts.

At Percept we’ve counteracted hierarchy through:

- Distributing authority
- Having a team structure that isn’t fixed
- By shifting from titles to roles – and allowing for a multiplicity of roles



- By not limiting leadership development to particular people
- Through transparency
- Through a strong collective orientation
- Through collaboration and inclusivity
- Through Time to Think practices (which include features such as equality of airtime) that signal continuously a belief in the capacity of all people to do beautiful thinking, and our valuing of a diversity of thought and lived experience in ideation

Figuring out how to be actively anti-hierarchical is ongoing work for all of us – requiring us to shed internalised hierarchy, internalised oppression and the internalised oppressor.

There are established alternatives to hierarchies, such as holacracy. We've incorporated some of these ideas into our flexible team structures. Inter-connected node-like structures allow for more organisational flexibility.⁶ If the nodes are well-defined, with clear boundaries and autonomy, this sort of structure also allows for innovation, adaptability and agility. At Percept, these nodes are our project teams. We put teams together according to the needs of particular projects, and within our capacity constraints. Roles are defined per project, de-emphasising titles. Having a node structure requires each node to have people tasked with resolving tensions between nodes and between the nodes and the whole.

Job titles create two types of rigidity. The first rigidity is a rigidity of an identity. I begin to identify with my title, which is limiting and stands in the way of dissolving my ego. The second rigidity is an organisational one – it means that I can't flex across roles in response to the needs of the organisation.

We use the same leadership framework to guide Growth & Development conversations for everyone in the organisation. This is based on the belief that we all have leadership capabilities that can be cultivated, regardless of our particular roles. The leadership model that we use has been adapted from the NHS.⁷

One of the beliefs that perpetuates the existence of hierarchies is that hierarchies are required for accountability. The alternative solution is creating a deeply embedded culture of accountability that doesn't require layers of management to be sustained. One of the cultural tools we've adopted is the practice of creating and honouring impeccable agreements, drawing on the work of Jim Dethmer.⁸

The extent to which we have internalised hierarchy as the only way to relate to each other is profound. When we pay closer attention and put aside our existing mental models, we see that **there are a multitude of possible relational models, of co-existence, of collaboration, of symbiosis.**

⁶ <https://www.holacracy.org/holacracyone/about>

⁷ <https://www.leadershipacademy.nhs.uk/resources/healthcare-leadership-model/>

⁸ <https://conscious.is/blogs/impeccable-agreements-tool-or-weapon-your-choice>



Generative ways of work

Human brains are designed for pattern recognition and optimised for learning from the past. The downside of this propensity for reactivity is that our ways of being in the world are strongly shaped by the systems we exist within. Designing organisations outside the dominant paradigm means embodying and inviting parts of ourselves that have been deactivated and discouraged. This requires feeling sufficiently safe to lay down new neural pathways, strong support for ongoing learning, and the intentional cultivation of the requisite skills and capacities.

The approach that is laid out here brings together kindness AND processes to support growth and learning AND accountability. These are often seen as being antithetical to each other. In our experience, they can be mutually supportive. As Brené Brown says, “clear is kind”.

Fractals

The approach laid out here emphasises repetition and coherence. We see this in nature, when we pay close attention. Fractals are shapes that repeat at every scale: the vein structure in a leaf, the wave structure of water, the crystalline structure of snowflakes. Fractals are the most efficient form of organisation and allow for impact to be amplified.

Behaviours and actions arise in context. If you want creativity, you need to cultivate a context that supports creativity. If you want collaboration, you need to provide the tools and trust for collaboration to take place. **The journey of building Percept has taught us over and over again about the need to be deliberate and to reinforce values and principles through processes and structures.** Because of the counter-cultural nature of building new kinds of organisations this is even more important – loose intentions will be swept away by the powerful force of the current dominant way of the world.

These are some of the ways that we have cultivated the Percept context:

Move things from being implicit to explicit: the process of making ideas explicit requires building them into policies, processes and structures. This isn’t done surreptitiously – it needs to be done in a way that makes clear what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. Our values are built into our parental leave policy, our transparent pay structure, our recruitment process. They are mirrored in our manifesto which appears on our website, and in our employment contracts. The manifesto in turn is mirrored in the names of our Slack channels. Our email signatures don’t contain job titles, and our employment contracts signal how we think about roles, and the people in our team are sorted alphabetically on our website (not by rank).

Have champions and role models: we have only been able to change certain habitual ways of working by having people champion new ways. We championed our use of Slack by deliberately shifting conversations from email to Slack, and from personal Slack messages onto the shared Slack channels. We also championed impeccable agreements, role modelling the process of making sure there were clear agreements at the end of every meeting. As leaders we role model mindfulness, and the importance of connection by turning up for sessions. We role model work-life boundaries by switching our phones off when we go on leave.

Create practices: changes in behaviour are supported by cultivating practices. Practices are deliberate actions, taken repeatedly, in order to build new habits. We’ve embedded Time to Think rounds into our meetings, giving our team opportunities to practice. This in turn has enabled them to take rounds into client meetings. We practise giving each other appreciation. We practise active listening through Thinking Pairs. We practise mindfulness together. We practise saying no, and renegotiating agreements.

We use our Monday workflow meetings to practice the behaviours that support a connected, safe and anti-hierarchical culture. We run the meeting in rounds, so that everyone has a protected and predictable chance to speak. We have a brag round, which encourages people to pause and notice the beautiful work they have accomplished (it is so easy to only see what remains to be done). We have a gratitude round which facilitates the expression of appreciation. We have a round on agreements, providing an opportunity to air agreements that are at risk of being broken, have been broken or need to be renegotiated. And we have a surfacing round,



where we allow for the possibility of asking for help, signalling pressures outside of work, communicating upcoming leave or raising work-related amber or red flags.

Tell stories: linking activities, policies and processes to a sense of meaning and purpose is essential for them to come to life. As human beings, we resonate with stories and narrative. It helps us to make sense and create meaning out of everyday life. Part of telling stories requires creating the necessary language to communicate new ways of being. Storytelling allows for reasoning, and learning from the past.

Nurture psychological safety

Doing beautiful work comes from a place of creativity, play and connecting to life force. It allows for the possibility of being present, bringing the best self that is possible in each moment. Not over-reaching for some mythical idea of “best” but finding the edge of possibility. This is so much easier to do in the presence of being appreciated.

What to practice: masterful appreciation.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF MASTERFUL APPRECIATION: a masterful appreciation must include these four elements: Sincerity. Appreciation must be real and true. If it's not genuine it's not appreciation. Insincere comments often create more harm than good because people come to doubt the intention (Are you trying to manipulate me?). Masterful appreciation doesn't only involve your head (what you think), it also involves your heart (what you feel) and your body (what sensations you are experiencing). Unarguable truth. Appreciation is most effective when it is unarguable. This prevents any judgments, comparisons, or conscious or unconscious challenges. In the context of “I appreciate you for the detailed appendices in this report; I noticed how at ease I felt having all the information at my fingertips” (unarguable). Specificity. Sometimes appreciation is expressed in vague terms, leaving the recipient guessing at its true meaning. “I like your shirt” can make the recipient wonder whether the statement referred to the color, fit, fabric, or some other attribute. Those practicing the art of appreciation use specificity and clarity. Succinct language. A masterful appreciation can be completed in a single out breath, meaning everything you can say in one exhale. It's like the best chocolate: a little goes a long way. And like chocolate, too much can spoil the experience. Additionally, once you go beyond one out breath, usually the appreciation becomes arguable.

Conscious Leadership Group

We can only thrive when we are free of fear, shame, blame and self-doubt. Part of the work as an organisation is to create the conditions that support psychological safety. A psychologically safe environment allows movement from being motivated by fear and competition, to being motivated by love, purpose and curiosity. And even then, long-standing habits of ego-driven motivation can be incredibly sticky. The switch from sources of motivation that are ultimately unsustainable (but highly effective in the short term) to more sustainable sources of motivation is not a once-off transition but rather an ongoing process of shifting layers of ego to get closer and closer to source, often with periods of low motivation accompanying the shifts.

Inclusivity is essential for psychological safety. For people to be fully present, the environment needs to be safe for them to be themselves. It means being respectful of the views of others. It means challenging the -isms



in a way that is oriented to learning. It also means differentiating between intention and impact, and acknowledging the importance of both. Inclusivity, compassion and kindness are intimately linked to each other.

***What to practice:** neuroscience research shows that the most powerful way to counteract discrimination and othering is to actively cultivate compassion. Examples of practices include metta and tonglen meditation.*

Having **respect for life outside of work** is intimately linked to kindness and safety. A healthy workplace holds deep recognition that people have rich lives outside of work. It also practices non-intrusive forms of communication and not having expectations of people being “always on”. For example, we use communication tools that separate personal communication (WhatsApp) from work communication (Slack) even when there is personal connection on the work communication platform.

The next level of psychological safety is trauma sensitivity. We carry an enormous burden of trauma, both through lived experienced and inter-generational dynamics. Trauma resides in the body and has demonstrable impacts on feelings of safety and the ability to learn. Collectively learning to recognise and release stress responses, creating the language to step out of unsafe conversations and allowing space for non-real time processing are all crucial to deepening safety.

Building a safe environment does not mean taking on the full responsibility for mental health. **The role of the workplace is to create supportive conditions, to de-stigmatise, to signal the importance of self-care, to not exacerbate, to create early warning systems and to provide language.** There is a careful line of not overstepping boundaries, of not taking responsibility in a way that is patriarchal, and of recognising that people (and their suffering) are more than their work. There are no rules for balancing between the needs of individuals and the collective – as circumstances arise, there needs to be careful consideration of collective resources and what it is possible to provide at a point in time.

Because of the extent of our conditioning with hierarchy and systems of oppression, people may crave the pseudo-containment of pre-determined career paths, the signalling of status, and the certainty that comes with micro-management. Agency, autonomy and comfort with ambiguity are all intimately connected with creative life force but can also be terrifying.

***What to practice:** mindfulness practices that cultivate presence with discomfort and build an internal locus of control.*

Build connection

Human beings, like giraffes, are naturally adept at forming temporal connections. Given the amount of time we spend at work, and the likelihood of being surrounded by like-minded people, it seems obvious that we would form strong connections at work. Our ability to form authentic, open, meaningful connections is negatively affected by many of the features of modern organisations: shame, blame, competitive dynamics, discrimination, individualism, low levels of trust and power plays. This isn't to say that meaningful relationships don't emerge in toxic environments – they do. But most often they emerge in pockets, and there isn't a **wide, cohesive web of connection**.

The sorts of meaningful relationships we refer to here are contextual connections. There is a recognition that they exist in the workplace, and may or may not extend outside of work. They don't require a complete baring of the soul. There are ways in which the creation of workplace community can be problematic⁹ – where it is

⁹ <https://www.guernicamag.com/carolyn-chen-buddhism-has-found-a-new-institutional-home-in-the-west-the-corporation/>



used by employers to exert dominion, and to squeeze out other forms of community. This re-affirmed for us the decision to stop referring to ourselves as a work family, using the term work community instead. Expecting a familial level of intimacy isn't necessarily healthy or desirable. In addition, not everyone has a positive association with the word family. Some organisations use the reference to work family to justify overwork, to create unquestioning loyalty and to encourage assimilation. Thinking of ourselves as a work community feels much healthier, and more in line with Percept's respect for work-life boundaries.

It is important to be explicit and clear that we view our work community as a form of community, but for many of us it is a puzzle piece alongside spiritual community, friendship community, neighbourhood community, learning community, activist community... and all the other forms of community that we create and nourish.

In 2022 we surveyed the Percept team on various aspects of workplace community and connection. The dimensions below are rated out of 4 (where a score of 4 can be interpreted as "deeply enriching"). The three most important reasons for a sense of community are: **a sense of belonging, enough trust for honest feedback and a sense of being seen and heard.** The other, less ranked but still meaningful, aspects are psychological safety, enabling of robust discussion on content, friendship and social contact.

Patrick Lencioni's "Five Dysfunctions of a Team" explains how trust is foundational to effective teamwork, in part because it enables a high level of constructive conflict. Trust in this context is defined as "the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group". **Great solutions come from vigorous debate and a diversity of perspectives – strong relationships make it safe to disagree with each other.**

It might sound obvious that trust is key, but the reality is that it is hard work and requires a willingness to be vulnerable about weaknesses, skill deficiencies, interpersonal shortcomings, mistakes and requests for help. But the payoff is not having to waste energy managing your behaviour and interactions within the group – it is ultimately easier to be authentic than not.

Here are some signals that there is an absence of trust. Use these as flags to address and engage:

- Concealing weaknesses or mistakes from each other
- Hesitating to ask for help or to provide constructive feedback
- Hesitating to get stuck in outside of your own area of responsibility
- Jumping to conclusions about the intention or aptitudes of others without attempting to clarify
- Holding grudges

Brené Brown talks about "avoiding tough conversations, including giving honest, productive feedback" as the greatest barrier to building a daring culture. She notes the following as problematic behaviours:

- Passive-aggressive behaviour
- Talking behind people's backs
- Pervasive backchannel communication (or "the meeting after the meeting")
- Gossip
- The "dirty yes" (when I say yes to your face and then don't follow through)

Intention and impact are not the same thing – someone may have done something that you find hurtful inadvertently. The impact is there, and they would probably want to know about it. But unless you raise the issue you won't understand the intention.

When we looked at what mechanisms support connection, we found that the diversity of approaches that Percept takes holds enormous value – whilst there are some that are broadly valued (more than 70% of respondents find Collaborate & Listen and occasional in-person socials deeply enriching), every mechanism had at least three people who found it deeply enriching. This points to the need for conscious effort to cultivate community:



building and sustaining multiple mechanisms, and recognising that different tools and practices work for different people.

The most widely valued connection mechanism is our weekly Collaborate & Listen meeting, where we share knowledge in a range of ways. There are a range of formats that these meetings take: debates, rapid sharing on a topic (five minutes for each person), bookclub (where you share something you've recently been exposed to in a book, podcast, documentary or other media), outside speakers, sharing learnings from recent projects, skills workshops, dry runs for conference presentations. We have found that in order for this to be sustainable, the meetings shouldn't require lots of preparation and we need to have a range of formats.

The creation of non-work-related asynchronous digital spaces has been surprisingly beneficial. In our case, those are Slack channels used for sharing jokes, pictures of our pets and kids, and music.

We also have a daily timeslot of practicing mindfulness collectively. This is completely voluntary, with a small group of regulars. In the same way that we don't expect work community to replace or supersede other forms of community, we hold workplace mindfulness lightly. It creates discipline and community for those want it, but it's also relatively short and can easily accompany a personal practice.

We have a form of short virtual meeting that we call a Fika meeting – it is named after the Swedish practice of having coffee and a cardamom bun. The intention in these meetings is to not talk about work but to get a sense of each other more broadly. People also set up one-on-one Fikas with each other. The deliberate signalling that connection is valued and accommodated in the workplace is powerful.

It was also clear from the qualitative responses that some mechanisms we hadn't mentioned (like Monday workflow meetings, attending events of interest together, one-on-one Fikas, in-person working sessions, the use of Slack for work purposes and cross-office socials) were also valued.

These collective spaces also support collective practice – the cultivation of the skills and capacities that underpin being able to express appreciation, to be aware of your embodied yes or no, to be able to listen generatively, to be able to collaborate effectively and so on.

The cultivation of community reflects our ongoing belief in the value of trust, collaboration, inclusivity, and belonging. Awareness of our inter-connectedness and our compassion for each other are both essential forces for change.

Feed forward

The blame and shame associated with making mistakes stands in the way of being oriented to learning. Curiosity exists at the other end of the energy spectrum of shame. It isn't easy to build a culture that doesn't blame and shame, and where people remain deeply accountable to each other. It requires rigorous commitment to giving each other feedback in a way that supports moving forward: **feed forward**.

Jim Dethmer provides this definition of feedback: "Everything that is happening in your world. *Everything*. Feedback includes the non-verbal expressions of people around you, losing a client, getting promoted, being late, your body sensations and feeling states. In short, all the results and occurrences of your life are feedback."

Feeding forward is not about placing blame or shaming someone – it is about entering into conversation about learning. The basic guidelines for Wise Speech are to say what's truthful and useful in a kind way so that your communication can be really received by others. Learning to speak from the heart, with kindness, and from your own experience is a practice, something that needs to be done over and over again so that it becomes reflexive.



DARING FEEDBACK

The Engaged Feedback Checklist

I know that I'm ready to give feedback when ...

- ___ I'm ready to sit next to you rather than across from you.
- ___ I'm willing to put the problem in front of us rather than between us (or sliding it toward you).
- ___ I'm ready to listen, ask questions, and accept that I may not fully understand the issue.
- ___ I'm ready to acknowledge what you do well instead of picking apart your mistakes.
- ___ I recognize your strengths and how you can use them to address your challenges.
- ___ I can hold you accountable without shaming or blaming.
- ___ I am open to owning my part.
- ___ I can genuinely thank someone for their efforts rather than criticize them for their failings.
- ___ I can talk about how resolving these challenges will lead to growth and opportunity.
- ___ I can model the vulnerability and openness that I expect to see from you.



Source: Brené Brown

Kind feedback is also about recognising all of the implicit and non-verbal ways feedback is provided. Avoiding tricky conversations adds to the weight of all that is unsaid and slowly erodes trust. There is a virtuous cycle between trust and feed forward – feedback that is free of blame, shame and guilt builds trust, and trust enables honest conversation.¹⁰

We hesitate to provide feedback for many reasons. Some of the ones we've explored are:

- Our personal experiences with feedback have been hurtful – so we fear that it isn't possible to be both clear and kind.
- We have only experienced one-directional feedback in a hierarchical context so we associate feedback with positional power, or systematic disempowerment.

¹⁰ <https://conscious.is/blogs/going-deeper-with-the-15-commitments-how-much-feedback-can-you-handle>



- We value being “nice” more than being authentic.
- We take too much responsibility (falling into the hero trap) – not realising that this robs others of the opportunity to learn and grow. This extends to assuming how the other person will receive the feedback.
- It takes energy and conscious effort to provide feedback.
- Because of our linear relationship with time we don’t think we have time for feedback - not realising how curiosity and learning create capacity.

Even then, the residue of internalised blame and shame remains. Jim Dethmer talks about “taking full responsibility, and no more.” This points to feeling overly responsible and having a strong inner critic that responds to mistakes. A true orientation to learning has often been drummed out of us through so-called institutions of learning. The work of letting go of this internalised response to not-enoughness is personal work – the institution can create the conditions for learning, but not everyone will be able to meet the institution having released their own demons.

***What to practice:** the balanced feed forward process combines a number of components to ensure a balance of listening and talking, a balance of positive feedback and learning-oriented feedback and a balance of power dynamics.*

The **balanced feed forward process** has the following components:

- **Permission and agreement:** there is agreement to enter into a feedforward conversation, and there is an explicit invitation (in steps 2 and 4 below) to provide feedback to another person. To fully enter into the conversation it may be necessary to renegotiate the timing of it (“not now”) and a slowing down to ask permission and to wait for the response.
- A **four-step** core which is outlined below.
- The person whose learning is being supported having **the last say**.
- The use of **Time to Think practices** to ensure that there is generative listening, the willingness to be changed by what is heard, compassionate curiosity and presence with each other. This requires paying attention to the environment, structured equality of airtime and invitational questions. The deep listening allows for space and openness, and the building of a safe container for the conversation.
- Closing with mutual **masterful appreciation**.

The four-step core has the following structure with Person P being the person providing feed forward and Person R being the person receiving feed forward:

1. Positive feedback from self: Person P asks Person R “R, what, if anything, do you feel worked and why was it effective? What are your thoughts, feelings and embodied sensations?”
2. Positive feedback from the other: Person R asks Person P “P, what, if anything, do you feel worked and why was it effective? What are your thoughts, feelings and embodied sensations?”
3. Corrective feedback from self: Person P asks Person R “R, what, if anything, do you feel could have been done differently and why do you think it would make a difference? What are your thoughts, feelings and embodied sensations?”
4. Corrective feedback from the other: Person R asks Person P “P, what, if anything, do you feel could have been done differently and why do you think it would make a difference? What are your thoughts, feelings and embodied sensations?”

After this Person P asks Person R “What more?”. And then the parties close with a round of appreciation.



Doing this in a bi-directional way is very powerful. This would take the form of doing the 4 core steps, switching the roles of Person P and Person R, and then checking “what more” for both people and doing the appreciation round.

It may be helpful to follow the conversation up with a collaboratively written document to ensure that each party was heard and understood.

Percept tips for feedback, with thanks to Brené:

- Invite feedback – explicitly let those around know that you want feedback
- Pay attention to ALL feedback (i.e. don't brush off appreciation and affirmation – you can learn from knowing what you've done well)
- Think of feedback as a two-way flow – making sure to listen and be willing to be changed by what you've heard
- Set up space/time for regular feedback – this makes the difficult conversations easier if you've already established a feedback-rich relationship
- Make sure feedback is sincere, specific, succinct
- Be willing to pause the conversation if it becomes overwhelming or if it is clear that some processing time is needed for sense making
- Both people can pause and take three deep breaths if the emotional temperature escalates
- Treat feedback as a practice – it gets easier the more of it that you do
- Don't let things fester – providing feedback timeously helps ensure that the unsaid doesn't accumulate until it feels too big and dangerous to say

Activate human potential

The expectation exists that career pathways are externally imposed as opposed to internally motivated. Organisations signal what is required in order to progress through an established hierarchy, with little regard for the quirks of individual evolution.

What other mechanisms are there for supporting individual thriving outside of pre-established measures and processes? What are the conditions that facilitate intellectual, emotional, spiritual and whole-body development?

The belief in human potential is in itself a condition for thriving. This is implicit in the creation of a “**thinking environment**”¹¹ – the idea being that if given the space, people are capable of doing their own remarkable thinking. The structural mechanisms of rounds, thinking pairs, councils and deep listening are all powerful tools to enable that thinking AND to create the reinforcement of being astounded by one's own thinking and encouraged to do more.

At Percept, we've replaced the idea of “performance management” with a process to support **growth and development**. This process is fundamentally about a growth mindset, with people taking personal responsibility, but with the support and input of the collective.

¹¹ This comes from Nancy Kline's work on Time to Think



Performance management in many organisations is perfunctory and bureaucratic, and linked to financial incentives, which in turn are constrained by budgeting processes (not too many people can excell!).

With an orientation to ongoing learning, it becomes clear that feedback should be part of day-to-day life. However, in a busy environment with short-term pressures it is also necessary to deliberately make time to consider the longer-term goals and trajectories of individuals, and to have the discipline of regular reflection. We make time every six months for a more comprehensive growth-oriented conversation. This conversation is embedded in an **expectation and culture of agency and responsibility for one's own learning and growth**.

These conversations require each person to prepare, with a leadership framework in place to guide their thinking. The conversations are facilitated with a “witness” mindset, listening carefully and asking clarifying questions to enable people to do their own best thinking about their own desires for their path.

The following components make up the conversation:

- Getting a sense of overall workplace **wellbeing** – intellectual stimulation, sense of purpose, sense of capability, any structural change required (e.g. change in work hours), work-life balance, stress levels
- Identifying the **dimensions of leadership and skill** that are important to the person to develop
- Reflecting on the **trajectory** (changes that have happened, current patterns, desire)
- Identifying the need for any **interventions** (for example, training, support structure, access to learning resources)
- Identifying overarching areas for **growth and development** (setting learning goals, reflecting on whether these goals have been met)

This reflection process sits outside of a mechanism for addressing sustained poor performance – recognising that poor performance shouldn't drive the central growth and development process as it is likely to be needed only in exceptional circumstances.

Human potential is often seen as fixed – there are people with high potential, and people with low potential. Having these personally-driven processes allows for greater recognition of ebbs and flows – it is legitimate for someone to expect to have a period of low growth – perhaps because of changes of stressors in their life outside of work (for example, looking after an ill parent). In **normalising part-time work**, there is also a recognition that growth objectives may lay outside of work. Part-time work is normalised through how employment contracts are structured (the standard contract allows for the percentage of time worked to be indicated), collectively agreed minimums and it being a widely used mechanism (the majority of Perceptors work part-time). A new parent may have growth objectives centred on their parenting capability, with the acquisition of new skills at work deprioritised. Similarly, someone may be completing graduate studies, or be acquiring new skills for their side hustle. It is healthier to surface these objectives and not assume the same growth intentions for everyone.

Practising consent and the whole-body yes

Impeccable agreements are clear agreements: who is going to do what by when. They're also agreements that are accompanied by a whole-body yes – which means taking time to ensure that people have a chance to surface areas of resistance, reticence and avoidance. Entering into impeccable agreements is a practice of clear communication, explicit renegotiation and taking full responsibility when agreements are broken. Realising that you're overcommitted creates an opportunity to be upfront and honest about that, and to renegotiate agreements. This allows us to work in a way that is less burdened by a sense of failure and shame.

We start by focussing on the process of asking permission for agreements. We notice that different people need to be asked in different ways. We recognise the importance of feeling the no, even if for practical or collective good reasons the answer needs to be yes.

We begin to explore our relationship with saying yes or no. Where do we feel the yes or no in our bodies? How quickly do we reach a reliable answer? Under what circumstances is it easier for us to hear our yes or no?

We learn to recognise that different people have different inner authorities. For example:



- Splenic: these are highly intuitive people who have an almost prescient sense of yes / no.
- Sacral: these are people who have a gut response.
- Solar plexus: these are people who need to feel through the full emotional cycle. Their first response may not be reliable.
- Throat: some people need to articulate their decision-making process before they make a decision (speak it out).

The remedying of broken agreements¹² is a key part of the practice to ensure learning, the building of trust and the surfacing and releasing of shame.

These are the suggested steps in remedying a broken agreement:

1. Each party has a chance to describe how they see the facts of the broken agreement
2. Each party has a chance to reflect on the impact of the broken agreement for them
3. The party who has broken the agreement has a chance to reflect on why the agreement was broken (for example, what did they choose to do instead of this?)
4. Each party has a chance to suggest learnings, or mitigations for the impact of the broken agreement
5. There is an opportunity to express appreciation for each other

What to practice: impeccable agreements are key for accountability that isn't driven by hierarchy.

Rest

Nature is characterised by cycles: night and day, seasonal cycles, lunar cycles, periods of hibernation, periods of recovery. Ebbs and flows of pace and energy. By contrast, the modern organisation systematically devalues the ebbs, in favour of ceaseless productivity. **Doing fierce work requires courage and resources – rest is a companion to revolution.**

“Waging revolution takes immense energy from you. If you are not renewing yourself abundantly, continuously, you will exhaust yourself to death. If you are going to climb a mountain, bring food. If you cross a desert, bring water. If you jump into a volcano, insulate your body. And if you endeavour this freedom work, be passionate about your rest and restoration. However much you give yourself to servitude, give yourself at least that much to your wellness. Stay at the watering hole as long as your thirst. Stay in the shade until you are cooled. Remain in the intimate embrace of silence until your true voice returns. Nurturing your inner condition is a non-negotiable condition of revolution.”

Jaiya John

¹² <https://conscious.is/exercises-guides/impeccable-agreements>



In the same way that there are cycles of different length in nature, there are different temporal forms of ebbing: moments of pausing in the workday, the end-of-day stepping away from work, the rhythm of weekdays and weekends, the more infrequent long holidays and, if we are fortunate, sabbaticals. Some of these are artificial and don't necessarily mirror our internal shifts in energy. In its most extreme form, the toxic organisation has rigid work hours, has an always-on culture that uses digital communication to extend outside of core hours, discourages leave and disallows sabbaticals. But even in organisations with healthier cultures, we may continue to oppress ourselves through the internalised belief that our worth as a human being is predicated on productivity. This is a fundamental tenet of capitalist society – the system works best when we unquestioningly participate in the labour market, responding to incentives, monetary and otherwise. There are subtle layers to how this plays out, the most striking of which is thinking of rest and play as being in service of being able to do better work later on (i.e. rest as a means to a productive end). In this thinking, at worst, rest is seen as weakness and at best, rest is seen as worthwhile only to enable productivity. **A countercultural view is that rest is essential, nourishing and nurturing: it has immense value in and of itself.**

There are a few lines in the Percept manifesto that reflect this. The first is: "There is much to be done, therefore you must go slowly." This seemingly paradoxical Buddhist expression is about the quality of what we do. There is a recognition that we often fill our lives with haste and busyness as a way of numbing to our experience. When we slow down, we can see things as they really are – allowing for wiser decisions. Slowing down is also about not being fragmented, about shifting from our stressed and reactive animal brain to a more conscious way of engagement, and ultimately connecting to creativity and flow to do our best thinking.

The paradox also points to our (misguided) attempts to relate linearly to time. The Harvard Business Review's conceptualisation of this idea may be more accessible: they advocate for managing energy (an unlimited resource) and not time (a limited resource).¹³ We move from working like a contracted fist to working like an open palm: receptive and generous.

The manifesto also contains the lines: "Don't eat at your desk. Don't answer emails on holiday. Know when to work all night and when to call it a day. Don't miss life's important moments."

A structuring of contracts with generous leave allocations allows for a counterbalancing strength of expectation to work well when at work. Thinking carefully about different types of leave is also important. We have replaced religious leave with Ikigai leave. Ikigai is a Japanese word, loosely translated as "life's purpose". It allows for a more inclusive definition of meaning and purpose. The definition of family underpinning family responsibility leave also needs to be sufficiently inclusive. Actively tracking leave allows for both the over- and under-utilisation of leave to be flagged early – both patterns reveal risks.

¹³ <https://hbr.org/2007/10/manage-your-energy-not-your-time>



No conclusions, just openings

Let go with grace

The single biggest lesson that we have learned in our time with Percept, and that we will no doubt continue to learn, is that we have to be open to evolving, changing and releasing. Some of this change comes from outside influences as we discover new ways of thinking about the world and our circumstances change. Some of this change comes from our own personal development and growth. As we shed layers of ego, internalised oppression, internalised privilege, limited perception of the nature of life and self-limiting beliefs, we see options that we didn't see before.

To do this work we need to be willing to change our minds, to be willing to listen deeply and be changed by what we hear. We also need to accept that a fierce, whole-hearted collective isn't for everyone. There have been people who have worked at Percept, or who have chosen not to work for or with Percept, because what Percept offers, and demands, is uncomfortable or simply doesn't work for them in some way. And that's OK. There is no single organisational design template that works for all people, for all organisations, at all points in time.

Buddhist notions of non-attachment are not characterised by indifference. It is a profoundly open-hearted way of being in the world, filled with kindness and compassion and deep care. The non-attachment comes from a comfort with the unknown and acceptance of a lack of control.

This isn't intended as the last word – we hope that you will find lots of fuel for debate and disagreement, and that you will find some moments of resonance and perhaps a whole-body yes or two.

Bowing out with gratitude

The authors of "Making Work Human" (Eric Mosley and Derek Irvine) say: "People want purpose, meaning and gratitude: purpose is shared, meaning is personal and gratitude is the great connector."

In that spirit we recognise that this writing is a collaboration with many wise teachers, poets and thinkers who continue to influence us: David Whyte, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Ocean Vuong, Tracee Stanley, Oliver Sacks, the NHS leadership academy, Brian Robertson, Brené Brown, Patrick Lencioni, Nancy Kline, Oliver Burkeman, Jim Dethmer, Rutger Bregman, Kim Krans, Ursula K. Le Guin and many many others who don't appear here.

Thank you to the people of Percept, past and present, who have collectively shaped a beautiful, soulful place of work, with an outsized impact on the world. This includes our clients, and their clients, who we are here to serve.

A thank you to the authors of the Percept manifesto: Dave Strugnell, Jodi Wishnia and Kelly Chennells. What magic you wove. Percept wouldn't have been the light and joyful place it was without the wild wooliness of Ursula Torr – a priceless gift.

We will always be grateful to Lele Mehlomakulu who facilitated the emergence of our values. Thank you to Sorina Oberholzer, our Keeper of Medicine Words and Daily Braveries, for the ongoing gifts of poetry. Thank you to Beth Vale for reminding us that the words society and economy are not synonyms. Thank you to Gretha van der Merwe for coaching so many of us, for teaching us the hamburger method and for helping us to grow into the best version of ourselves.

And because time is not linear, thank you to everyone who will read this and challenge and refine our thinking. We know that we will be enriched beyond our imagination.



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