Innovating our way out of lockdown with Zak Moore & Keith Burnett

2020 involved a whole lot more rapid innovation than anyone was expecting, with almost every team in every organisation having to find ways to do more work 'virtually' through digital networking.

Temps de lecture : minute

20 November 2020

By popular consensus, what follows will be a 'new normal'; in this different environment, the ability to solve problems creatively will distinguish teams that can innovate their way to success from those that struggle to thrive.

Big organisations and governments are involved too, of course – but for most of us, the workplace team is where we can make real change happen. For starters, the climate within which the team operates is more open to influence than the culture of the whole organisation. The Creative Climate Change concept was developed to enable that change. Creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability and time management are the World Economic Forum's top five in-demand soft skills, and you can use this to reinforce them.

Structures

Brains are ultimately more important than any digital network; the little grey cells are where creativity happens. But our brains work best when able to communicate with others at least occasionally: we are directly affected by the team climate - the psychological space - we work in. The

good news is that this climate is easy to improve; it's much quicker to implement small changes where you can than it is to try and make culture change across a whole organisation or country.

As individuals and teams continue to change the way they work over the coming years, which they certainly will, it will be helpful to have a tool to measure team climate and then enable change driven by the team members. From those small changes come big gains.

Connectome

Climate
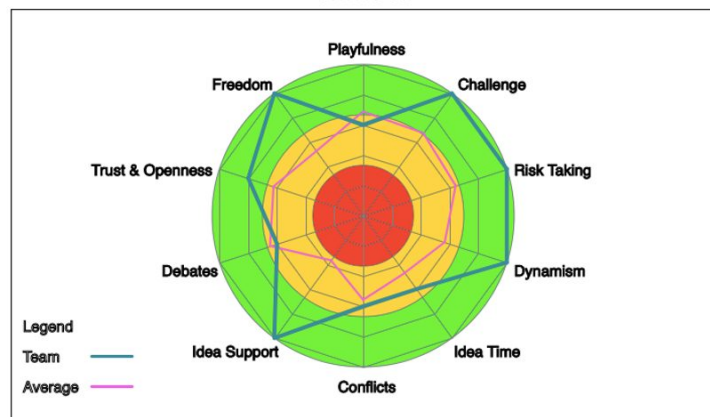
Our own climate

A little bit of context before we get to the 'how'. We're working on a new book right now (more to follow next year) which took a little more time to surface after some pretty big bumps in the road. Zak had bacterial meningitis. He was out for the count, and then took an initial six months to be able to concentrate for more than 20 minutes, a year to drive again, and another couple of years to get up to full working speed.

As well as generating what film people call 'development hell' in the book-writing process, that's the sort of experience which can change anyone's

view of the world. The big worries many people had at work just didn't look all that life-threatening any more, and it was harder to appreciate and empathise with people whose egos were, sometimes, greater than their talents. You might experience a few similar changes of perspective as the economy recovers post-COVID.
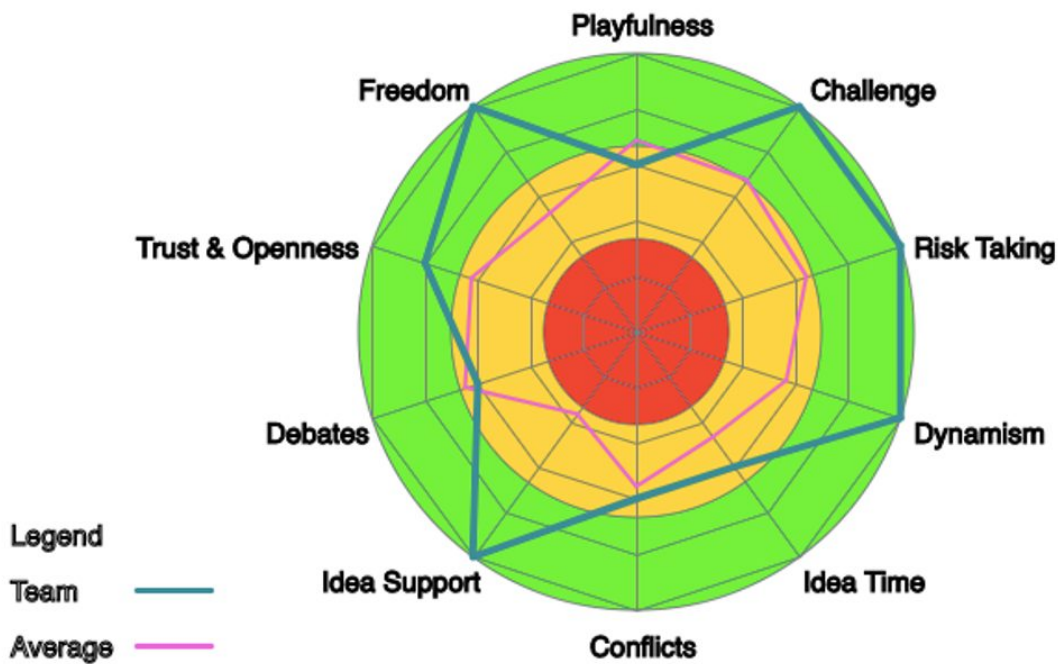
Keith originally trained as a social worker, so wasn't going to give up on a fruitful writing partnership easily, even when - initially - his fellow brain seemed to be thinking in riddles.

Between us, as a result, we have been remote working as a writing team for several years now, so we can testify to the effectiveness of getting a team climate right – however big or small the team. Team working will continue for all of us, whatever happens to the old nine-to-five concrete office. New norms will arise. We'd like to help you shape those norms to your advantage.

Psychological space – the final frontier

Our story starts with the observation that some teams seem to be better at finding creative solutions to problems than others. Swedish researcher Göran Ekvall set out to discover why. Was it about the quality of leadership, the attractiveness of the office base, or the salaries paid? Observation showed that the defining factor was really more about the overall climate in which a team operates; how it feels to work within it, and how it encourages, captures and develops creative inspiration.

We took that bedrock of research and built a self-assessment tool upon it. Using the tool, any team can get a rapid idea of how its climate looks right now, reflecting ten key dimensions of lived experience. The tool can gauge the type of psychological space your employees are operating within, even if it's tricky to put absolute integers on it. Following our assessment, you'll see clearly where you need to improve.

Radar chart with axes: Playfulness, Challenge, Risk Taking, Dynamism, Idea Time, Conflicts, Idea Support, Debates, Trust & Openness, Freedom.

Legend
Team — (blue)
Average — (pink)

Proof in the pudding

Time and Emotion have used the model since 2012 on a variety of clients ranging from boutique graphic-design, sales agencies, through SMEs, large corporates and central government departments.

Teams seem to particularly enjoy being able to start in a 'self-managed' way. They can assess their own position on the 'spider's web', and then decide what action needs to follow – including whether or not any external expertise or remote coaching will be helpful.

The 'target' model shows whether you are in the green, amber or red. The pink line is the average of eight years of previous results and the blue line denotes your reading, be it personal or for the whole team. Measuring is done anonymously in order to achieve honest answers. Making the chart is a quick and painless process; each member of the team answers ten questions, and the tool aggregates responses.

Climate repair

It's fair to say that this is easier when it comes to team climate than is the case for its meteorological equivalent – although some good team innovation might just turn out to be a benefit there too. Looking at the chart, it's clear where problems may reside at present, and the book (Creative Climate Change) then provides some tried and tested pointers for kickstarting positive adjustments.

To give a familiar example, many teams experience difficulty in finding the opportunity to generate creative solutions to problems, assailed as they are by competing management priorities and delivery deadlines. We call this Idea Time, and when it's scoring low on the chart there is plenty that can be done about it, from whole team 'bootlegging' days to simple exercises to generate and elevate ideas in team meetings. Using such tricks of the trade, a team can rapidly identify its own ways of working to allow fresh ideas to come to the surface, and grab them before they drift off to another sea.

Making the chart is anonymous, free of charge – and at present allows users to click straight through to Creative Climate Change for more ways forward.

There is an eight-step process that provides categories to open, explore, assess and close down problems into action plans. The techniques are presented in colours associated with the eight steps. Clicking on any technique will present a set of instructions, list of resources, and the modes that it can be used in: intuitive, social and rational.

The light and dark grey boxes at the bottom of the chart show the end-to-end creative processes in light and the current mainstream Agile methods below. The approach has been approved and endorsed by LeSS, DaD, SAFe and DSDM.

When you are working creatively by yourself it is easier and faster to work *intuitively*. Once your idea is ready to share you can use the *social* mode to bring in others to help. Ultimately to present it as a business case you can then apply *rational* modes so that you report to KPIs or OKRs, or any other metric that you care to use.Thousands of people are already using this way to complement and augment their way of work.

Who uses it?

The range of companies that use Creative Climate to assess and support their teams range from fintech and legaltech startups to large government departments.

How do they use it?

Depending on the climate score and the needs of the team, the managers (and sometimes owners) initiate six-12 week periods to bring about meaningful change. The change can be evidenced through tangible, quantitative metrics such as the organisation's own KPIs or OKRs.
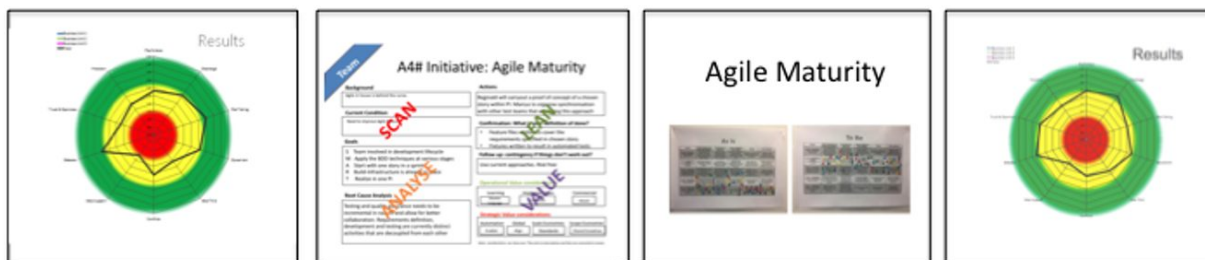
We round out with a re-measure of the climate to show how the teamwork has changed.

Here are a selection of examples showing how the techniques improve productivity, process maturity and sales within three-month periods.
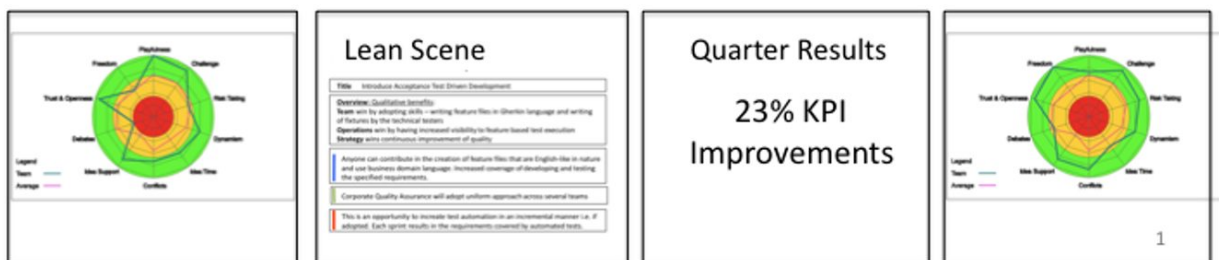
FinTech
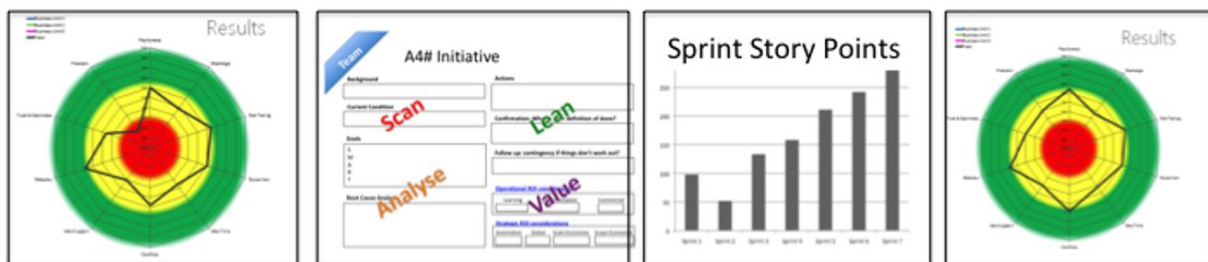
High-end Ecommerce

Recruitment

Where can I get it?

You can get it at timeandemotion.com. All we ask in return is that you use the self-assessment tool first. Follow the big red arrow to get started.

Here's the deal, then. You carry out a climate assessment for yourself, and see what it throws up. If the insights look worthwhile and you are a natural leader (or even an officially appointed one!), you then invite your team as a whole to use the tool – and then work together to respond to what it brings to light.

We'd be delighted to hear how you get on, and you can contact us directly (zak@timeandemotion.com) if you have any further questions. Over to you.

Discover Time and Emotion

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