CREATING A THRIVING NEW NORMAL FOR NEW ZEALAND

Bringing a focus to *how* we co-create "what's next"

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INTRODUCTION

This feels like a significant moment in history.

A potential turning point.

Many people seem to be taking a step back, taking a look at the systems they've been embedded in and asking, "Why am I doing things this way? Is this way of operating actually aligned with what I want, value, and believe in?"

As New Zealander's voice their answers to the question, "What next for New Zealand?", many are calling for a more equitable, inclusive, healthy, and sustainable future.

Here at Spring, we support that noble vision for our society. And as leadership coaches and facilitators of behaviour change, we feel called to shine the light on the importance of not only *what* we decide but also *how* we decide and *how* we implement those decisions as that will significantly impact the outcomes we're able to generate.

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As the world and the challenges we face become increasingly complex, interconnected, and uncertain, we need a paradigm shift in the way we engage, make decisions, and lead.

Traditional, hierarchical, unilateral approaches to decision-making and change leadership just won't cut it (as the failure rate of typical change programmes demonstrates).

Here at Spring, our evolutionary purpose is to help people grow, to accelerate the deeply needed human development that will enable us to rise to the challenges of our times.

In true coaching style, we're not here to tell you what to do or what to decide but we would like to advocate quite strongly that it's time to rethink *how* we approach leading and creating change.

In our experience, there are six common leadership blindspots that can obstruct us from bringing our visions to life.

In this document, we hope to offer a few key considerations that will support us all on our journey to co-create a thriving new normal for New Zealand.

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LEADERSHIP BLINDSPOTS

BLINDSPOT #1:

Striving to be the heroic leader

We strive to be the heroic leader who has the answers, who single-handedly, or with a selected inner circle, creates an inspiring vision. We then launch this and expect everyone involved to enthusiastically embrace the task of implementing it.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

This blindspot may show up in different ways, for example:

- Lack of team consultation

- Unilateral decision-making

- In-fighting and sabotage as teams try to get voices heard and values met

- Engagement and retention issues

- Lack of creativity and adaptability

- Poor results and productivity

RISK:

We can resort to an overtly commanding or subtly controlling style of leadership that may get short-term results, but does not result in a scalable and sustainable impact.

We risk exhausting ourselves and burning out as we take on a lot of the pressure, decisions, and responsibility for success and failure.

UPGRADE OPPORTUNITY:

Be a role model for navigating complexity and ambiguity by developing your people so they can collaborate, co-create, and become more self-managing. People want to grow, have a voice and contribute if they have a safe space to do so.

Also recognise it's not just what you're *doing* but how you are *being* that influences the system. It is this quality of your presence that enables you to facilitate a transformational change.

USEFUL TOOL:

Self-managing teams

You can make your teams more self-managing by adopting approaches used by Teal Organisations, as described by Frederic Laloux in his book "Reinventing Organisations".

Some of the companies in Laloux's research use the holacracy approach to distributed management. These frameworks make all the essential norms in your organisation explicit, including the ones that are usually unspoken.

For example, Laloux noticed that successful organisations were clear on four things:

1. our organisation's evolutionary purpose

2. how we make decisions

3. how we hold each other accountable

4. how we deal with conflict.

SAMPLE PRACTICES:

It's a courageous leadership move to admit you don't have all the answers. In addition to this vulnerability, there's a need to give up a certain amount of control on your individual vision in service of the collective.

To support yourself in this, you could adopt a mindfulness practice. We think of mindfulness as present-moment awareness that allows you to slow down and be aware of what is going on both inside you and around you. Apps such as Headspace can guide you to develop this habit.

Another helpful practice is creating agreements with your team on how you can adopt a self-managing approach, for example getting clear on things such as the four items listed previously. Discuss these in a "How are we being?" section at your monthly team meetings. If you're struggling to let go of control, consider discussing with a mentor, a peer, or a leadership coach.

BLINDSPOT #2:

Not challenging our assumptions

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

This blindspot may show up in different ways, for example:

- Teams struggling with ambiguity, unpredictability and rapid change

- Lack of innovation and creativity

- Lack of ownership by team members

- Increasing overwhelm and stress

RISK:

We unwittingly bake the shortcomings and constraints of our current systems into our solutions for the future.

UPGRADE OPPORTUNITY:

Acknowledge the limitations of our mental processing and take deliberate steps to expand our capacities to take broader, systems-level perspectives.

While we often like to think of ourselves as rational decision-makers, researchers such as Daniel Kahneman have shown that humans' mental processing is often plagued with cognitive biases. For example, we tend to have excessive confidence in what we believe we know and struggle "to acknowledge the full extent of our ignorance and the uncertainty of the world we live in."

EXAMPLE:

A common refrain coming up as we begin to embark on our post-COVID journey is that "we need to create jobs". While it's no doubt a well-meaning call to help people recover from the financial impacts of the pandemic, baked into this proposed solution is the implicit assumption that our current fragile, inequitable, and unsustainable economic system – which ties productivity to livelihood – should remain in place.

Stepping back to question our assumptions and the broader system itself may help illuminate a wider range of potential opportunities for addressing the complex challenges we face.

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USEFUL TOOL:

Vertical development

Research from the field of adult development – also known as vertical development – has shown that humans have the potential to grow throughout life through stages of increasingly deeper understanding, wisdom and effectiveness in the world.

Our stage of development influences what we notice or can become aware of, and therefore, what we can describe, articulate, influence, and change. (In other words, you can only work on things you're aware of.)

While it's important to recognise that our knowledge and understanding at every stage is always partial and incomplete, investing in our development can help us to expand the depth, complexity, and scope of what we can see and work with.

SAMPLE PRACTICES:

To support yourself in challenging your implicit assumptions and expanding your ability to see broader systems, you can ask yourself questions like:

- What's my process for deciding?

- What might my ancestors say about this? What might I do to be a good ancestor?

- What are the patterns of questions I've tended to ask? What questions haven't I been asking?

- What do I believe? How could I be wrong?

- What assumptions about the world underpin my actions or opinions about this? The actions or opinions of those around me?

"No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it."

Albert Einstein

BLINDSPOT #3:

Applying the same approach we use to solve predictable problems to try to solve unpredictable ones

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

This blindspot may show up in different ways, for example:

- Focusing on finding right/wrong; all or nothing solutions

- Feeling stopped by opposing perspectives

- People finding ways to 'work-around' the system, under the radar, rather than tackling the hard parts

- Feeling absolutely certain that we have the solution, that it's a "no brainer"

RISK:

In complex contexts we fail to spot the early weak signals of new emergent possibilities and prematurely converge on a limited set of outcomes.

UPGRADE OPPORTUNITY:

Adopt a decision-making and analysis approach that's a fit for the level of complexity and uncertainty we face.

The realms of Complex Adaptive Systems and Complexity Theory guide us to distinguish between *predictable* and *unpredictable* contexts to help us choose an appropriate approach for addressing a challenge we face.

In predictable contexts, where the relationship between cause and effect can be known in advance (e.g. "If I do X, I'll get Y result"), we can choose a desired destination and be confident there are knowable-in-advance steps we can take to reach it.

In unpredictable contexts, where, by definition, the relationship between cause and effect cannot be known in advance (e.g. implementing a vision that involves significant change and groups of people), we are better served by choosing a general direction and experimenting and monitoring to discover what works.

USEFUL TOOL:

Complexity frameworks

Complexity frameworks such as the Stacey Matrix and the Cynefin Framework can help us evaluate the context we're in so we can choose an appropriate decision-making and analysis approach for addressing the challenges we face.

Examples of differences in the approaches we might want to take in predictable vs unpredictable contexts are outlined in the table below.

Context:	PREDICTABLE (eg Complicated)	UNPREDICTABLE (eg Complex)
Example problem:	Designing an aerodynamic airplane wing	Leading an organisational culture change
Approach to addressing challenges:	Narrow our focus and solve	Broaden our focus and experiment
Leadership mindset:	Confident a "right" answer exists	Curious, agile, and open to possibilities
Leader's role:	Making stuff happen	Nudging the system to self-organise in better ways
Useful to seek:	Relevant expertise to identify the "best" solution	Diversity of perspectives to uncover weak signals of emergent possibilities

SAMPLE PRACTICES:

To support yourself in adapting our approach to address the complex challenges you face, you can ask different questions, for example:

- Instead of "What should we decide?" -> "What's our process for deciding?"

- Instead of "Who's the expert on this topic?" -> "Who's affected by this topic?"

- Instead of "Who's speaking up on this topic (e.g. first or loudest)?" -> "Whose voices are we privileging and whose are missing?"

- Instead of "What's the 'right' or 'best' solution?" -> "What's a safe-to-fail experiment we could run and learn from?"

In complexity it can also be useful to watch out for instances of either/or thinking (e.g. "Our options are to *either* do this *or* do that"), which narrow our focus in unhelpful ways.

Polarity Management is an approach that can assist you in broadening your perspectives to encompass both/and (e.g. "How might we achieve *both* this *and* that?"), which can be very helpful for addressing complex challenges.

BLINDSPOT #4:

Our vision is a concept based on our own needs

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

This blindspot may show up in different ways, for example:

- Lack of team buy-in, or conflict or sabotage

- Unilateral decision-making

- Low engagement

RISK:

We don't involve a broad enough group of people in the creation of our vision and purpose. As a result, their diverse needs are unmet, and they disengage or actively undermine the process of making the vision a reality.

UPGRADE OPPORTUNITY:

Recognise that buy-in, support, and engagement come from *how* you engage with people in the process, starting with vision and purpose.

Practice different ways of engaging to achieve this.

"Slow down to go fast. While we can dance with abandon at the novelty as we move ... we must also hold space for people to move forward together when the moment calls."

Nancy White

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USEFUL TOOL:

Liberating Structures

Liberating Structures are a set of practical methods that help you include and unleash everyone — at all levels — in contributing their ideas in a safe, productive, and fun way.

Each Liberating Structure introduces tiny shifts in the way you meet, plan, decide and relate to one another – and these small shifts are deceptively easy-to-learn and straightforward.

SAMPLE PRACTICES:

Use the "Strategy Knotworking" Liberating Structure by involving everyone involved in implementing your vision in answering these questions:

- What is the deepest purpose of our work, and why?

- What is happening around us that demands change?

- What challenges and wicked questions do we face in achieving our purpose?

- Where are we starting, honestly?

- Based on what we have learned, what is now possible?

- What is our first step, and how will we know we are making progress towards our purpose?

Once you have completed this, you can involve a diverse range of parties in planning the implementation phase using the "Purpose to Practice" Liberating Structure to guide everyone in answering these questions.

- Purpose: "Why is the work important to you and the larger community?

- Principles: "What rules must we absolutely obey to succeed in achieving our purpose?"

- Participants: "Who can contribute to achieving our purpose and must be included?"

- Structure: "How must we organise (both macro- and microstructures) and distribute control to achieve our purpose?"

- Practices: "What are we going to do? What will we offer to our users/clients, and how will we do it?"

BLINDSPOT #5:

Unilaterally making decisions that affect others

We unilaterally make decisions that affect others then announce or seek consultation after the fact. Sometimes this can be because we assume people can't handle bad news or make tough decisions on things that affect them.

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

This blindspot may show up in different ways, for example:

- Holding back from courageous conversations

- Engagement, productivity, and employee retention problems

- Negative behaviours such as conflict, sabotage, passive aggression

- Lack of psychological safety - people don't feel safe to be honest or to try new things

RISK:

We make or implement decisions in a way that decreases people's motivation.

If people sense that you think they are not smart, strong, or capable, they can become unmotivated, resentful, or even actively resist change.

UPGRADE OPPORTUNITY:

Harness the power of motivation to implement your vision by adopting an autonomy-supportive approach to the way you lead, make decisions, and influence others.

People involved will be more committed, proactive, and have higher role satisfaction and wellbeing.

USEFUL TOOL:

Self-determination theory

To be intrinsically motivated, we have basic psychological needs that need to be satisfied. These are needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Autonomy is the basic need to be the author of your life — to have a sense of choice and self-endorsement over what you do and how you do it. You stand behind what you are doing. It feels congruent for you. Because of that, you can do things wholeheartedly. If everyone involved with implementing your vision does this, you will experience positive performance outcomes.

Autonomy isn't the same as freedom, so in situations where we have limited choice, understanding the rationale behind the decision can maintain and sustain motivation.

Relatedness is our basic need to feel we belong and "matter" to others. Each of us needs to feel connected in meaningful ways. We want to feel part of a team and a sense of connection - because you care for them as well as them caring for you.

Competence is our basic need to feel effective, to be successful, and to grow. People want to feel they have what they need to succeed in their daily tasks, including the resources, skills, and expertise. You can't be motivated to do something unless you feel you can do it. They also want to envision a path that includes new challenges and responsibilities and allows them to anticipate growth in their work.

SAMPLE PRACTICES:

Thinking:

Be aware of assumptions you are making about others' ability to be involved in decisions that affect them. Once you are aware of these assumptions, test them. The "What, So What, Now What" Liberating Structure is a simple process to help slow your thinking down so you can identify your assumptions.

Engaging:

Make your approach to implementing your vision as autonomy-supportive as possible. For example:

- Enable people to be involved in making decisions that affect them.

- Provide a rationale for decisions. If you want someone to engage in an activity willingly, they have to have a good reason for doing it.

- Set performance expectations by seeking input from those who are doing the performing.

Acting:

Let people have as much input as possible into their goals and activities. Seek their input. Find out from them what they think about how to go about their work.

Provide informational feedback, instead of negative feedback, that is specific to performance and makes people feel like they matter.

BLINDSPOT #6:

We treat language as an afterthought rather than a tool to help us construct the new reality we want to create

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

This blindspot may show up in different ways, for example:

- In-fighting as teams try to get voices heard and values met

- A sense of 'speaking different languages' or being on different pages

- Values, language, and behaviours not matching

- Confused and inconsistent messaging

- Resistance to collaborating with others in the same sector, industry, or movement

RISK:

We plant seeds of scarcity, competition, and aggression rather than abundance, collaboration, and peace.

UPGRADE OPPORTUNITY:

Recognise the impact of language in shaping peoples' perceptions, understanding, and responses and choose your words carefully.

Language, though not without its limitations, can be an incredibly powerful tool.

Our words are capable of conveying meaning both explicitly and implicitly, can galvanise action, and influence how we feel.

They can help us paint a picture of our visions for the future so that others can begin to glimpse what we're imagining before it's become reality.

The language we choose frames how we perceive and understand issues and can focus our attention on certain things while simultaneously blinding us to others.

USEFUL TOOL:

Non-violent metaphors

Metaphors, though by definition imprecise to a certain degree, can help people wrap their minds around phenomena they don't totally understand by making a link to another concept that's more familiar or easily understood.

When hoping to inspire collaboration, care, and collective action in a complex, uncertain environment, a mindful choice of non-violent metaphor can support us in crafting a vivid image and invoking our desired response.

Metaphors related to natural living systems – ecology, ecosystems, evolution, etc – have been shown to be particularly valuable in this regard.

SAMPLE PRACTICES:

To support yourself in mindfully choosing effective language, you can ask yourself questions like:

- Is this metaphor the only way to describe the issue at hand? Am I flattening the problem in ways that benefit some people over others, or that lead toward harmful conclusions?

- Is the framing of this issue compatible with the way I see the world?

- Rather than framing this issue in terms of us versus them, could my thinking be reframed to imagine the goal as finding balance in the wider system?

You can also seek to replace violent metaphors with non-violent alternatives when they crop up, for example:

- *Combat* could become *Construct*, *Create*, or *Cultivate*

- *Fight* could become *Promote*, *Propagate*, or *Plant seeds of*

- *Weapon* could become *Tool*, *Canvas*, or *Path*.

EXAMPLE:

In describing the pandemic and how to address it, war metaphors (eg "the war on COVID") have frequently been used. This framing implies that there will be things like fighting, winners and losers, collateral damage, and calls on people to operate as obedient, patriotic soldiers rather than caring and aware citizens who act in solidarity.

Alternative metaphors, such as orchestrating a symphony (which requires everyone involved to be equipped to play their part), or of embarking on a journey of healing (which emphasises the need for preparedness and anticipating obstacles), could very well invoke more caring, collaborative behaviour.

REFERENCES & FURTHER RESOURCES

FURTHER RESOURCES BLINDSPOT #1 (STRIVING TO BE THE HEROIC LEADER):

1. Reinventing Organizations by Frederic Laloux
2. Reinventing Organizations Wiki
3. Holacracy.org
4. Headspace app

FURTHER RESOURCES BLINDSPOT #2 (NOT CHALLENGING OUR ASSUMPTIONS):

1. Making the case for a developmental perspective by Susanne Cook Greuter
2. Evolve interview with Robert Kegan
3. What? So What? Now What? Liberating Structure
4. How to boost your intellectual humility by Dan Pink
5. Thinking fast and slow by Daniel Kahneman
6. Unlocking Leadership Mindtraps by Jennifer Garvey Berger
7. Presence-based Leadership by Doug Silsbee
8. Anti-fragile by Nassim Nicholas Taleb

FURTHER RESOURCES BLINDSPOT #3 (APPLYING THE SAME APPROACH WE USE TO SOLVE PREDICTABLE PROBLEMS TO TRY TO SOLVE UNPREDICTABLE ONES):

1. Polarity Partnerships
2. Simple habits for complex times by Jennifer Garvey Berger and Keith Johnston
3. Leading in complexity by Keith Johnston, Carolyn Coughlin, and Jennifer Garvey Berger
4. Cognitive Edge

FURTHER RESOURCES BLINDSPOT #4 (OUR VISION IS A CONCEPT BASED ON OUR OWN NEEDS):

1. Liberating Structures
2. Change Methods for Everybody Every Day by Keith McCandless
3. Liberating Motivation by David Bennett

FURTHER RESOURCES BLINDSPOT #5 (UNILATERALLY MAKING DECISIONS THAT AFFECT OTHERS):

1. Selfdeterminationtheory.org
2. What? So What? Now What? Liberating Structure

FURTHER RESOURCES BLINDSPOT #6 (WE TREAT LANGUAGE AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT RATHER THAN A TOOL TO HELP US CONSTRUCT THE NEW REALITY WE WANT TO CREATE):

1. War metaphors used for COVID-19 are compelling but also dangerous by Costanza Musu
2. Pandemics are not wars by Alissa Wilkinson
3. Reinventing Organizations by Frederic Laloux
4. Nonviolent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg

ABOUT SPRING LEADERSHIP

OUR EVOLUTIONARY PURPOSE:

We exist to help people grow, to accelerate the deeply needed human development that will enable us to rise to the challenges of our times.

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