



Six Secrets to Designing for Ambition

A Tricordant Thought Paper

Nick Richmond

Six Secrets To Designing For Ambition

As a leader you have been asked to help reduce the size of the Civil Service by a fifth...while also delivering the levelling up agenda. However, with the change in Governments leadership is your organisation also able to rapidly adapt if a new direction is set?

Working in the Civil Service provides you with the opportunity to make a difference whether it's influencing policy decisions, transforming offenders' lives, or helping to make the UK a great place to do business. However, your organisation is under significant pressure to deliver HMG's ambitious agenda while also adapting to thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

So how do you design an organisation that can deliver what seem to be competing priorities, while being able to adapt for the next change?

From my experiences there are 6 secrets you need to pay attention to.

The 6 secrets to designing for ambition:

- Forging the Ambition
- Customer First
- Delivery Processes
- Every Level Counts
- Coordination and Alignment
- Building in Resilience

“Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.”

Joel A. Barker

1. Forging the ambition

I've found the departments, agencies and arms lengths bodies of HMG we've worked with are quite adept at create creating visions for their organisations. However too often these visions are created in isolation by one person or a small group of senior civil servants and are then passed to internal communications teams and line managers to deliver. “Telling and selling” is much less effective than engaging and building commitment amongst those affected to co-create the change together.

People own what they help create

Your ambitious vision needs to be based upon the deep appreciation of your complex and rapidly changing environment. To design a truly resilient organisation the brutal facts of reality need to be faced down. This means there needs to be a down-to-earth view of the environment and drivers on your organisation shared by all including the announcement to reduce the Civil Service by a fifth, the cost-of-living crisis and Government Departments needing to increasingly collaborate with others to develop truly transformational solutions at the local level across the UK.

The brutal facts of reality need to be faced down

The visionary outcomes and environmental constraints from this strategy work are then used to create a set of design criteria. The design criteria will be used to describe the organisational implications of your chosen strategy and provide an objective guide for design decisions to achieve your future ambitions.

If this strategic work has not been completed I've found mind mapping a helpful tool. By engaging a cross section of different perspectives from the organisation mind mapping helps to highlight the reality of the environment and creates a common understanding of the problems which need to be resolved. This in turn helped to build the energy for transformational change.



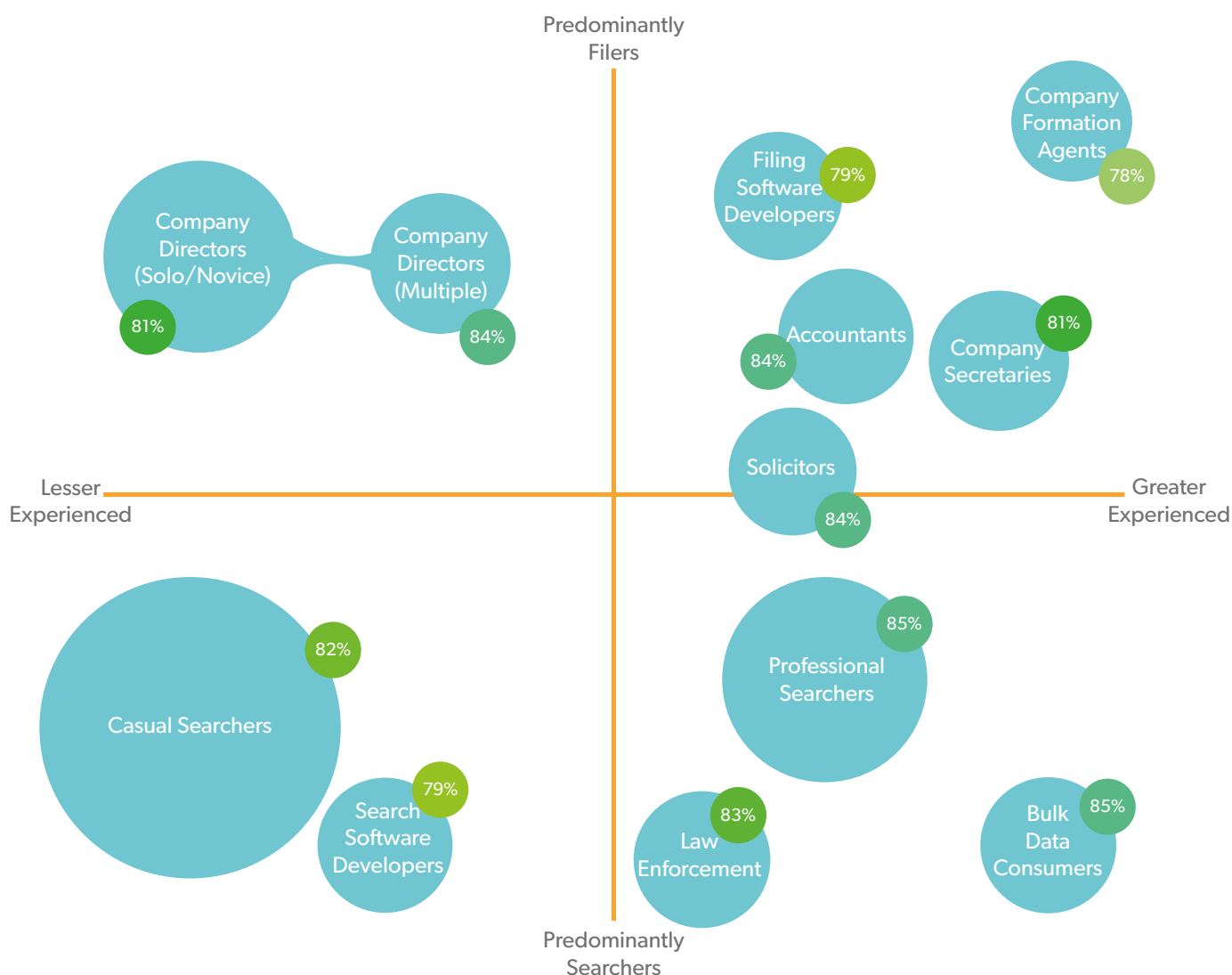
2. Customer First

One thing past crises teaches us is to focus on what is meaningful.

A powerful way to focus on what is meaningful is to map your customers journeys. But first you need to understand your customers.

To deliver your ambition, you must deeply understand what's meaningful to your customers

In one Government agency we supported, as part of their digital transformation programme, valuable time was spent on understanding who their main customers where, and how the main customer categories interacted with the organisation.



Personas per category were developed and mapped to their customer journey map. Each persona explored their goals, which organisational channels were used along their journey, what touchpoints the organisation had with the persona, what they were thinking and feeling at each point of the journey, and what insight the organisation had about the persona at each point of the journey including pains and gains. Combining this persona analysis with analysis of your organisations capabilities will help you make your strategic choices.

To understand what's meaningful to your customers here's a tool to get you going

Empathy Map Canvas

Designed for: _____ Designed by: _____ Date: _____ Version: _____

The Empathy Map Canvas is a tool for understanding customer needs and behaviors. It is structured as a large rectangle divided into seven sections, each representing a different aspect of customer experience. The sections are arranged around a central figure of a person's head and body. The sections are:

- 1 WHO are we empathizing with?**
Who is the person we want to understand?
What is the situation they are in?
What is their role in the situation?
- 2 What do they need to DO?**
What do they need to do differently?
What job(s) do they want or need to get done?
What decision(s) do they need to make?
How will we know they were successful?
- 3 What do they SEE?**
What do they see in the marketplace?
What do they see in their immediate environment?
What do they see others saying and doing?
What are they watching and reading?
- 4 What do they SAY?**
What have we heard them say?
What can we imagine them saying?
- 5 What do they DO?**
What do they do today?
What behavior have we observed?
What can we imagine them doing?
- 6 What do they HEAR?**
What are they hearing others say?
What are they hearing from friends?
What are they hearing from colleagues?
What are they hearing second-hand?
- 7 What do they THINK and FEEL?**
PAINS
What are their fears, frustrations, and anxieties?
GAINS
What are their wants, needs, hopes and dreams?
What other thoughts and feelings might motivate their behavior?

Last updated on 16 July 2017. Download a copy of this canvas at <http://gamestorming.com/empathy-map/> © 2017 Dave Gray, xplane.com

3. Delivery Processes

Once you have made your strategic choices, the associated value adding processes need to be mapped out to ensure your customers' needs are delivered. Map out these activities by bringing together the people who hold the knowledge, influence and interest in delivering the work. Use a roll of brown paper and post-its or a virtual white board to map the work through the organisation including interactions with customers, the value adding activities, interactions with other stakeholders, where the work goes to, authority and decisions, and the necessary evaluation activities to ensure the work delivers the organisations strategy.

It goes without saying that this is the moment to consider proven "invest to save" initiatives such as technologies to reduce the need for human capacity and / or even increase your people's productivity, developing self-managing teams to reduce the need for management roles or even banning emails which means people are more deliberate in their communications and shift to instant messaging which better replicate in person conversations thereby increasing productivity.

After mapping out your value adding delivery processes consider which of these activities need to be combined for efficiencies of scale, linked to coordinate work and information, kept separate but internal, or outsourced, as not strategically important, to an external supplier or Government shared service. A tool which may help you do this is Clustering Criteria.

Clustering Criteria

Clustering criteria are used in conjunction with the design criteria. Use the design criteria to identify which of the below are relevant. Then use these relevant clustering criteria with the design criteria to merge or cluster teams/functions together into larger organisational units.

- Economies of scale – teams could be merged to maximise economies of scale
- Geographic location – teams could be merged due to similar location
- Frequency of interaction – teams could be merged due to very high frequency of interaction
- Whole work teams could be merged as they share tasks contributing to the same objective(s) and or their work is substantially entwined
- Specialism of skills – teams could be merged to maximise the benefits from specialising skills
- Flow – teams could be merged to ensure customers receive the right support in the right place at the right time
- Type of work – teams could be merged due to same type of work
- Spans of control – teams could be merged or split if the spans of control are too small or too large
- Time horizon – teams could be merged due to the same time horizon focus

4. Every level Counts

It's obvious to say that flatter structures may have lower middle management costs, however, be aware there are always trade-offs including loss of specialisms, poorer decisions and poorer accountability due to larger teams.

Designing an efficient structure means every level and function needs to significantly add value to delivering the strategy

This is why mapping out the work is so important as you design your teams and the critical few levels needed to manage your organisation. My colleagues worked with a large Government Department a few years ago, they identified a level of managers who only checked on other people's work. This level of managers was not part of quality or audit. A couple of simple questions exploring the purpose they fulfilled (unclear), the work they planned (none), delivered (none) and evaluated (others) identified over £1m savings.

Our "Human Scaling" tool is a key tool which helps us create an efficient and effective structure. Four criteria need to be reflected on when deciding on teams spans of control:



- What is the technical complexity of the work – including process, range of equipment or services used, complexity of the control and regulatory systems
- What is the social complexity of the team – including the variety of roles, geographical spread, the diversity present and any working hour differences
- Rate of Change – including the stability of the teams: objectives, work activities, and membership
- Management capacity – Every manager is different and their respective capacity to lead people needs to be accounted for. In addition, management is increasingly moving from command and control toward more coaching, supporting and servant leadership in combination with self-managing teams. This leads to wider spans of control and more efficient structures.

We've translated these criteria into a scoring sheet and associated look up table. As with all our tools this is to support good discussions, ensuring good practice rather than dictating answers.

5. Coordination and Alignment

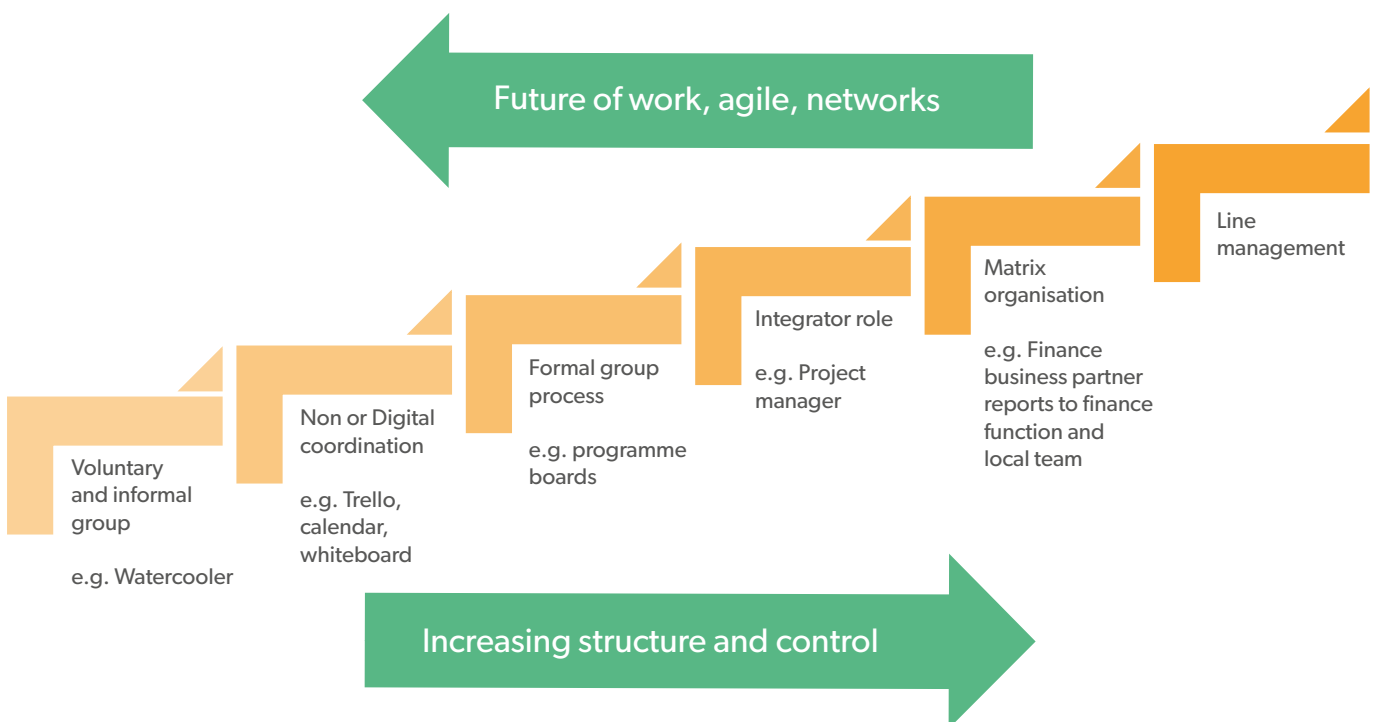
As mentioned in the prior section one of the major issues of creating flatter more efficient structures is poor coordination and alignment due to the loss of middle management levels. This means you need to enable the right relationships for the community to flourish as well as designing the critical few coordination mechanisms into the organisation. This will ensure the right information gets to decision makers at the right time, coordination of work across the organisation, translating strategy into action and communicating feedback from customers to senior managers.

However, there's a balance to be made to ensure the resulting coordination mechanisms don't overwhelm people's capacity nor paralyse the organisation.

Design the critical few coordination mechanisms

A great way to identify the right number of coordinating mechanisms is by walking through a set of scenarios using the future value adding delivery processes you created earlier. A continuum of example coordinating mechanisms is described below..

Coordinating Mechanisms



Adapted from Galbraith's Ladder

6. Building in Resilience

The world doesn't sit still while we redesign the organisation or deliver to their current needs. In a prior project, halfway through the design phase a sudden scandal hit the organisation my team and I were working with. This led to an immediate significant loss of income to this organisation. The result was £1.5m saving was added to the process as an additional design constraint.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but rather the one most adaptable to change." *Charles Darwin*

Our research into organisational health highlights that all organisations need to be able to adapt in response to changes. One of our core design practices is Resilience, which states "design in capabilities which allow your organisation to be both efficient in its delivery of today's business AND adaptable, actively sensing and rapidly responding to changing customer needs."

For an organisation to be resilient in delivering its ambition you will need to continually assess how quickly change is happening in your external environment. At times this can be dramatic such as during COVID. As a leader you need to design a capability or process to intentionally monitor the external environment to sense how quickly this is happening, what the implications of these changes are on your organisation and then adapt the organisation to continue fulfilling your customer's needs. For some organisations this may take the form of informal conversations with a cross section of your people, while for others a formalised group process or building it into governance meetings may be preferred. My preference is to involve the whole organisation or at least a cross section of people with different perspectives, thereby creating meaningful experiences and, when needed building a momentum for change around a core group.

Building on my resilience point above your organisation must have the capability to both efficiently deliver HMG's ambitious agenda and being able to adapt in a rapidly changing environment. This is not an "either or" choice but rather a "both and". Within HMG's agenda there are seemingly competing priorities of savings and levelling up. Building these tensions into your ambitious vision is necessary to design an organisation that will thrive in a rapidly changing environment while delivering HMG's agenda. A powerful by-product of managing these tensions well is that it releases the energy of your staff who may previously have been stuck defending one position to the detriment of the other.

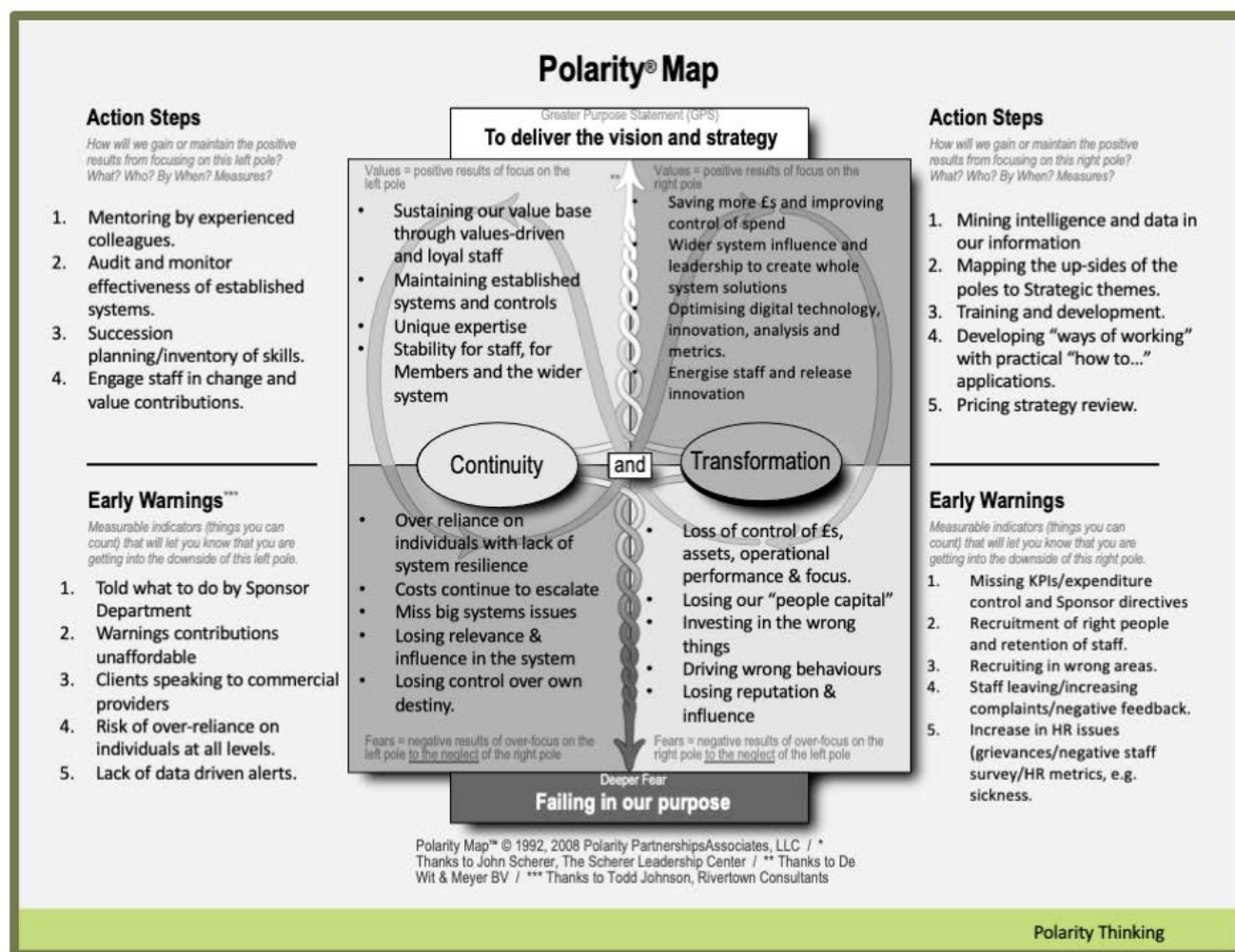
Effectively manage polarities and tensions

Polarity Thinking™ helps leaders and teams recognise that competing tensions exist within organisations. Polarity Thinking™ calls these competing tensions "polarities." Polarities are two equally attractive possibilities, which are also inter-dependent but contrary pairs where neither is intrinsically better or worse than the other. They exist in dynamic tension with one another in the organisation, such as:

Embracing the future	AND	Focussing on today
Economies of Scale	AND	Customer intimacy
Control	AND	Empowerment
Reduce Cost	AND	Improve Quality
Flexibility	AND	Regulation

‘Mapping’ out these polarities with those affected using a polarity map as in the example below helps to explore different viewpoints, recognise the interdependencies, and identify the upsides and downsides of each pole. The associated actions to maximise the upsides while minimising the downsides and identifying the warning signs to monitor any emerging downsides can then be agreed by the team or system to ensure the polarity is effectively managed. These actions and indicators can then be embedded within programmes of work or dashboards.

To get you started, we include a completed Polarity® Map to demonstrate how you get the best of both poles while minimising the downsides.



To Summarise

As a leader you have been asked to reduce the size of the Civil Service by a fifth...while also delivering the levelling up agenda to answer the plea of the forgotten people and the left-behind towns across Britain. However, your organisation is under significant pressure to deliver HMG's ambitious agenda while also adapting to thrive in a rapidly changing environment. So how do you deliver this agenda of what seem to be competing priorities?

There are 6 secrets to designing for ambition:

1. Forging the ambition – Engage your people in co-creating your ambitious vision, as people own what they help create
2. Customer first - To deliver your ambition while reducing costs, you must deeply understand what's meaningful to your customers.
3. Delivery processes – map your value adding delivery processes to ensure your customers' needs are fulfilled.
4. Every level counts - Designing an efficient structure means every level and function needs to significantly add value to delivering the strategy.
5. Coordination and Alignment - Design the critical few coordination mechanisms to enable agility and information flow
6. Building in resilience - Your organisation must have the capability to effectively manage its polarities, especially both efficiently delivering HMG's ambitious agenda and being able to adapt in a rapidly changing environment

How can we help

You may be grappling with how to square the circle of cost reduction while delivering HMG's ambitious agenda, we can help you with this challenge.

Get in contact for an informal conversation to give you some ideas.

Book an appointment [here](#)

Email: nick@tricordant.com

Telephone: 07979875233

Working with leaders to organise for lasting success