

CRISTINA BIANCHI & MAUREEN STEELE



*HOW TO HARNESS THE WISDOM OF GROUPS
AND SHAPE A MORE FULFILLING WORKPLACE*

CRISTINA BIANCHI & MAUREEN STEELE

The Collective Intelligence Catalyst

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ABOUT the authors

Cristina and Maureen have collaborated as trainers, facilitators and coaches since 2008. They are the co-authors of “Coaching for Innovation: Tools and Techniques for Encouraging New Ideas in the Workplace” (2014, Palgrave McMillan), a book which has accompanied the training of hundreds of managers and team leaders around the world, encouraging them to step into a coaching role to foster creativity and innovation. Both share a strong belief in the wisdom of groups and a desire for those with whom they work to realise their own potential. They are dedicated to provoking a broader cultural change that makes the workplace more fulfilling and sustainable. In their work and writing, they aim to provide others with the kind of accessible tools, tips and methodologies that have the potential to make the aspirational workplace of the future a reality. Cristina (who is originally Italian) and Maureen (who is originally from the UK) met in Switzerland. Their partnership is founded on trust and thrives on their differences as well as their similarities. They write every single word together and discuss concepts and ideas until they are both satisfied with the final result. The output of these discussions, sometimes lengthy but always enjoyable and stimulating, is always better and stronger because they get to that result together. When it comes to Maureen and Cristina $1+1$ really does = 3.

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ZOOM IN

ON



Explore extra information and tips on our ZOOM IN pages

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FOREWORD

By Heather Cairns-Lee

*Professor of Leadership and Communication
IMD Business School, Lausanne*

It is a delight to introduce *The Collective Intelligence Catalyst* – a timely and practical guide for anyone who wants to unlock collective capacity to think, learn, and create together.

Steele and Bianchi remind us that collective intelligence is not a happy accident but something that can be deliberately nurtured. Their approach highlights the foundations to build collective intelligence: a growth mindset and psychological safety, and it introduces the practical LEAF Model that helps teams to **leverage** collective intelligence, **empower** people, **activate** contribution and **facilitate** better solutions. These elements sound simple but, as any team knows, they require awareness, and commitment to practice consistently. The good news is when you do this, you make an important contribution to creating a more inclusive and fulfilling workplace.

The book blends research and pragmatic

tools. It invites us to rethink how we show up with others and the different roles we can take. Sometimes as facilitators shaping the space to enable all voices to be heard, sometimes as coaches, encouraging people to reflect and grow and sometimes as leaders steering direction and outcomes.

The attractive visual layout brings the ideas to life vividly, offering both inspiration and practical steps for any team seeking to unlock its collective potential. This is a hands-on guide that helps people collaborate and grow as a team.

Knowing how much leaders grapple with the challenge of managing teams, *The Collective Intelligence Catalyst* offers a way forward by equipping people to ask better questions, harness diverse perspectives, and create spaces where everyone can contribute.

I encourage you to read, experiment, and above all put the ideas of *The Collective Intelligence Catalyst* into practice.

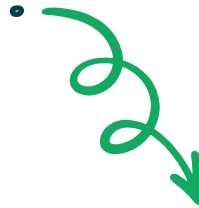
This book

AND HOW TO USE IT

We wrote this book for anyone who needs to bring people together and run meetings aimed at generating ideas and identifying and implementing viable solutions. You may just be getting started, or perhaps you already have experience and want to expand your skillset. Whatever your level of competence, this book will be valuable if you want to get the best out of a team or group that you are part of or which you have to lead in the search for new ideas and different ways to solve problems.

You may never have consciously thought about doing this in a way that enables you to capitalise upon the collective intelligence of the group and you may not have considered the possibility that when you become a Collective Intelligence Catalyst you also become a catalyst for cultural change by building a more collaborative and inclusive environment. Nonetheless, this is what you will find in these pages.

We recommend that you initially start at the beginning of the book and read through to the end in order to have a full picture of the journey ahead. You can then make your own mind up about where you need



to focus. The book is designed to accompany you and be by your side as you build your confidence and competencies by experimenting and trying things out.

Because the book is light on theory and high on practical tips you can dip in and out to find what you need while practicing. When it comes to using the LEAF Model (which you will come across very soon) we encourage you to literally take the book with you into your meeting and have it open at the page or pages you will find most helpful.

It's likely that with practice, you will become increasingly aware of those competencies where a deep dive, further reading or some training and coaching could be beneficial in order to fulfill your full potential as a Collective Intelligence Catalyst. Our bibliography at the back of the book will give you inspiration for your reading and our website (www.thecollectiveintelligencecatalyst.com) gives you ideas about the kind of training and coaching that might be useful to you.

“

Above all, we would love to think that with this book to support you, you will just jump in, learn by doing and that you and your groups will enjoy experimenting together and learning together.

”

- 16.** Workplace aspiration
- 18.** Workplace reality
- 20.** Change is not a lost cause
- 21.** If not me then who?
- 25.** Collective intelligence:
the missing link

INTRODUCTION

**Why
bother?**

*DRIVING CHANGE
IN THE WORKPLACE*



WORKPLACE ASPIRATION



**“What kind of place
would I want to work in?”**



IF WE COULD CREATE A BETTER WORKPLACE WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE?

Considering how much time we spend at work, it is not unreasonable to expect the workplace to do more than fulfill our most basic need to earn enough money to live. When asked, most of us say that we aspire to a workplace that makes us feel respected, validated and listened to as human beings. We aspire to work for an organisation that truly lives the values it espouses. We aspire to have a shared sense of purpose and feel we can make a positive contribution in alignment with our personal values. We aspire to thrive in an inclusive work culture that encourages us to learn, grow and collaborate. To work at our best and develop the sense of belonging we crave, we need trust and psychological safety. We also aspire to be motivated in what we do and to enjoy the constructive relationships that we build with colleagues. In this kind of environment, the need for high level performance and profit is recognised and is fulfilled **because** the way of doing things is mindful of the environment and the wellbeing of others.



WHAT IS THE REALITY IN THE WORKPLACE TODAY?

Even in the most forward-thinking of organisations where effort is being put into creating a positive environment, it can still be an uphill battle. A majority of us are quick to say that we are overworked, overwhelmed and suffering from some degree of fatigue. We work long hours to too little effect. Days are spent running from one meeting to the next or jumping straight from one call into another without the time to regroup and collect our thoughts in between. There are endless discussions on different subjects, with constant pressure for immediate answers and no time for real reflection and meaningful conversations. This often just leads to quick fixes that scrape the surface and fail to provide strong and sustainable solutions. We lack fulfillment and become frustrated and demotivated. We are also disillusioned by the mixed messages from the organisation and the lack of coherence between what is said and the way things are done. In short, many people in the workplace sense that things should be done differently but feel powerless when it comes to achieving change.

WORKPLACE REALITY



**“This is unfortunately not
what I had in mind!”**

Change is not A LOST CAUSE!

DEAR READER,

IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT IN SUCH A CONTEXT YOU MIGHT FEEL THAT CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO AND TRYING TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE IS A WASTE OF TIME AND EFFORT, ESPECIALLY IF YOU THINK YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE WHO RECOGNISES THE NEED FOR CHANGE. WE WANT TO REASSURE YOU THAT THERE ARE MANY MORE WHO THINK AND FEEL EXACTLY LIKE YOU. WE FEEL EXACTLY LIKE YOU DO AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WE SEE THIS REFLECTED IN THE MANY AND VARIED ORGANISATIONS WE WORK WITH. YOU ARE NOT ALONE AND THIS SHOULD ENCOURAGE YOU, AS IT ENCOURAGES US, TO COME OUT OF ISOLATION AND CONNECT WITH LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE TO BRING ABOUT THE KIND OF CHANGE THAT THE WORKPLACE DESERVES. WE ARE CONVINCED THAT THERE IS STRENGTH IN NUMBERS AND THAT IT IS WORTH INVESTING TIME AND EFFORT IN DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY, EVEN IF THIS LEVEL OF CHANGE CANNOT BE ACHIEVED OVERNIGHT.

THIS REALISATION FOR US WAS FUNDAMENTAL AND WRITING THIS BOOK IS OUR WAY TO BECOME PART OF THE SOLUTION. IN SHARING WITH YOU OUR APPROACH, WE AIM TO EMPOWER YOU TO JOIN US IN TAKING POSITIVE ACTION. IF YOU ARE UP FOR THE CHALLENGE, WE BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN MAKE YOUR OWN CONTRIBUTION TO CREATING A BETTER WORKPLACE, ONE STEP AT A TIME.

MAUREEN & CRISTINA

If not me

THEN WHO?

Passively waiting and wishing for change, or for others to change their behaviour, is an easy trap to fall into that leads to increasing frustration. We can't control others or their behaviour but we can take responsibility for ourselves, our own thoughts, our attitude, approach and reactions. Shifting our focus of attention from the things over which we have no direct control to the things which we can control, or over which we can exert some kind of influence, is an important way to become more proactive in bringing about change. This kind of shift is not always obvious or easy. However once done, it paves the way to the journey you are about to embark upon with this book.

There is a frame of mind that can support this shift AND the journey. It is important to be convinced that it is worth it; that small steps can lead to big changes; and that our example will be followed by others because they too can see the benefits of doing things differently for themselves. With this frame of mind in place, it will be easier to remain persistent and not be discouraged.



ZOOM IN

ON



Changing the hardwiring in the brain

“

It's not hard to change your brain. You just need to put in enough effort to focus your attention in new ways.

”

ROCK D, 2009

Before the late 1970's, scientists used to think that the brain was a finite and non-renewable organ that slowly and inevitably decayed with age. Then research, originally linked to the recovery of the brain from injuries and illness, began to provide evidence of the brain's neuroplasticity.

Essentially, the brain has the capacity to rewire itself by creating new connections. This is also true when it comes to breaking out of existing patterns of behaviour and adopting new habits.

What makes this awareness relevant for the Collective Intelligence Catalyst and the people they work with in developing a new frame of mind? For the Collective Intelligence Catalyst, doing things differently is both an aspiration and a means to success. Taking up a challenge like this implies developing new skills, new behaviors, new ways of thinking and new ways of interacting until they become second nature. Training the brain to form these new habits through new experiences is an integral and critical part of the process. The good news is that the neuroplastic ability of the brain will naturally support you in cementing in new habits in yourself and others.

The Collective Intelligence Catalyst

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This book shows how courageous action can unlock hidden potential in the workplace and transform ordinary groups into extraordinary forces for change.

MARGARITA ALEKSIEVA
HEAD OF BUSINESS UNIT WIND
AND SOLAR - BKW ENERGIE AG

Today's workplace is challenging and complex. When everything is expected to be leaner, faster and done with stretched resources, how do you create opportunities for more creative and innovative solutions in a way that has a positive impact on engagement, job satisfaction and real productivity? You become a Collective Intelligence Catalyst, an agent for change and meeting facilitator, who creates the right conditions so that the group, working together, comes up with better ideas and solutions than one person working on their own. This book shows you how to:

- Leverage collective wisdom with the LEAF Model to get the best out of any group.
- Empower meeting participants to express their full potential in a collaborative and inclusive environment.
- Activate contribution from each person to capitalise upon diverse perspectives and find alternative ways of doing things.
- Facilitate better solutions and smarter decisions by considering problems from different angles.

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