

Lessons in leadership for pioneers

Executive summary

This report covers the findings, conclusions and potted histories from research I conducted in the second half of 2019 on pioneering leadership, after talking to and surveying 26 pioneers, who are a combination of organisation leaders and authors at the forefront of their fields.

It follows on from the research I conducted with Ashridge colleagues some years back on how leaders work with risk, which was covered in my book “Risky Strategy”, (MacAlister, 2016), which included a chapter on Strategic Pioneering – featured in the appendix of this report.

I believe pioneers are often key to innovation and positive change, and I wanted to understand more about them and their leadership challenges. The main aim of the research was to produce knowledge that could help design educational programs to help more people to become effective pioneers, particularly in the developing world. This was born of my own personal experience as a pioneer, while working in both Uganda and UAE, both countries which present real opportunities for innovation.

I developed a couple of theses that I wanted to test with the research: a) Pioneers are naturally so – it’s in their DNA, and b) Because of that nature, leadership has its own unique set of challenges. I wanted to learn from successful pioneers what other pioneers need to do to become more effective as leaders.

I had also developed a management development tool, the Blonay Profiler, which I have used over the last 15 years to highlight character attributes that might be more conducive to effective innovation – even pioneering. I wanted to use this research to help validate this tool, to assess whether effective pioneers did indeed demonstrate a different character profile from others. The tool, described in Appendix 1, rates character preference on three dimensions: Bold Creative, Empathic and Self-Disciplined. My thesis was that effective pioneers would have a higher than average preference on the Bold Creative dimension.

The research confirmed one of my theses, that pioneers are naturally that way, and cannot help themselves. The single most dominant theme in my interviews was that they have an insatiable desire to “challenge the status quo”. There is a marginally greater likelihood that they have a Bold Creative preference in their character, and this is most significantly true of my interviews conducted in Uganda, which made up almost half of my group.

However, my thesis was largely wrong in that pioneers would have particular difficulties with leadership, that because of their unique desire to challenge, they would not put as high a priority on people skills. People focus proved also to be a dominant theme among pioneers, both in terms of how to get the right people involved, how to engage them, and most specifically, the need for support from certain key individuals. Pioneers also have a higher than average Empathic

preference in the Blonay Profiler. The primary leadership challenge for pioneers is to be able to let go enough, to get others to step up to leadership roles.

By contrast, they have generally a lower preference on the Self-Disciplined dimension, which resonates with the idea that they have less need to have all the answers, caricatured as having a lower “Be Perfect” driver. This again is particularly the case among Ugandan pioneers. I believe this is an important finding as to encourage more effective pioneering in Uganda, there appears to be a need to help them unlearn a higher than average need to be right (a characteristic of the Self-Disciplined preference), which is probably a result of both the culture and the highly didactic education system.

Other aspects of effective pioneering leadership included the need for clear well communicated sense of purpose and values, the ability to adapt to achieve, balanced by the need for the tenacity and resilience to get things done.

Understanding what helped form the pioneering character, the main themes that I picked up were early life influences, particularly the influence of parents, and aspects of faith, expressed sometimes in religious or spiritual terms.

Pioneering leaders need to work with tensions. These include balancing the natural tendency for pioneers to challenge, while at the same time needing to work with others who don't have the same tendency; balancing the need for tenacity to get things done while at the same time being to adapt and learn; balancing the investment in the pioneer's own sense of purpose with the ability to let go to allow others to step up to leadership.

While I may not have been able to gather adequate data from the different cultures as was the original aim, in particular from the UAE, this research has nevertheless produced enormously rich insights into the world of effective pioneers. I have already started to produce more detailed case studies, which can be used as teaching aids for educational programs. A first case, based on a highly successful Dubai-based business, has already been produced, and others are in the pipeline. This will be the priority for further work emerging from this research.

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Background to the research

I first came across the concept of Pioneering Leadership in a booklet written by David Male (Male). It described pioneers as having characteristics that resonated with my own experience of being a pioneer.

What is a “pioneer”? Derived from the French word, “pionier” which means “foot soldier”, the connotation is of someone who is first, on the front line. Without the “pionier”, the army cannot advance. It is not the picture of a leader sitting at the back of the ranks, directing the campaign, but one who is leading by example. It is someone who is on the firing line, not a comfortable place to be. But without them, there is no progress.

So, I became intrigued by the concept of “pioneers”, what made them the way they are, bearing in mind what they are is not always comfortable. And I was particularly interested in what challenges they faced as potential leaders.

When I set out the project brief for this research, I wrote: “Organisations and national economies need effective innovation and positive change. My thesis is that pioneers are the key to effective innovation. However, these individuals are often outliers and as a result may struggle with leadership – both getting people to follow them, and more importantly, developing other pioneering leaders to *pick up the baton* “

Some of us have a character profile and spirit which is more conducive to pioneering, but this same profile may mitigate against our effectiveness as leaders. My thesis is that it is a combination of character attributes which makes for effective pioneering leadership, and hence innovation.

Ashridge research I was involved in on “How leaders work with risk” (2015) identified this dynamic, caricatured as “tigers” and “elephants” – natural risk takers (tigers) and those who are more methodical and able to build engagement (elephants). One of our conclusions was that organisations need both. This was further described in my book “Risky Strategy” (MacAlister, 2016), alongside an explanation of how a tool I developed for my strategy consulting work could support identification of these different character attributes, the Blonay Character Profiler (www.blonay.co.uk/profiler) . The Profiler is described in more detail in Appendix 1, using an extract from the book. Part of this research is about validating this tool, and thence developing this learning into an effective pioneering leadership development program.

National cultural factors

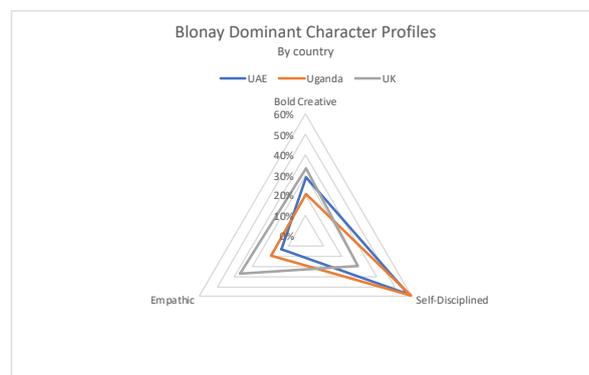
In my work in recent years, I have also been increasingly aware of how this dynamic varies in different national cultures. The ones that I have been involved in UK, UAE and Uganda present very different profiles, and conclusions which relate to this would be of particular value in those countries (and others with similar cultures) who are generally keen to improve their innovation capabilities.

I already have results from 430 completed character profiles over recent years in UK, UAE and Uganda, indicating significant cultural differences, which I believe would indicate a difference in

pioneering spirit, and would impact effectiveness in leading innovation. An indication of the differences can be seen in this chart:

Aims of the research

The overall aim of this project is to contribute knowledge to the development of more effective pioneering leaders, in different national cultures, to support more effective innovation in those cultures.



In my original project brief, I set out some of the possible outcomes from this research as follows:

- Organisations would have a fresh approach to encouraging effective innovation
- Individuals with a pioneering spirit would be supported in improving their leadership capability and therefore their effectiveness as innovators
- The Blonay Character Profiler provides another self-assessment tool, specifically focused on the area of pioneering and innovation, which improves engagement with participants / students in a “Pioneering Leadership” programme
- While there is extensive academic literature on self-assessment, innovation and on leadership, I believe there is relatively little that combines all three aspects. This will help bridge that gap.

The research questions and theses

How could an education program, potentially at an Executive level, supported by the Blonay Character Profiler, most usefully help prospective managers in different cultures (e.g. UK, Uganda, UAE) to be more effective pioneers and leaders of pioneering ventures?

To help answer this question, I set out to understand:

1. What makes an effective pioneer?
2. What are the implications for leadership?

On the back of this, and based on my own experience I developed two theses for the research to test:

1. **Pioneers have it in their DNA.** They don’t have to make themselves become pioneering. If anything, they need to rein themselves in.
2. **Leadership is a problem for pioneers.** Because of this uncommon character attribute, associated with challenge and generally disruptive thinking, pioneers will struggle with leadership. People skills will be an issue for them. Because of this, working well with people may not be a priority. And ultimately, enabling others to “step up” to “pick up the baton” of the change that they have initiated will be a major challenge.

Method

The research was a combination of qualitative, based on interviews with 26 “pioneers” and quantitative, using the Blonay Character Profiler (www.blonay.co.uk/profiler).

My interviewees have been found through personal contacts in UK, Uganda and UAE, and are made up of a combination of organisational leaders (often involved in the start-up of those organisations) and authors of non-fiction, and in some cases, individuals who were both. They are all to varying degrees “first” in their domain, and therefore I would consider to be on the frontier of change and innovation i.e. “pioneers” according to my definition.

In the qualitative research, my questions were few and open, encouraging my interviewees to speak openly and extensively about their experience. They covered discussions on:

1. To what extent did they consider they were pioneers, and in what sense?
2. What were the pioneering characteristics they saw in themselves?
3. What factors impacted these characteristics, past and present?
4. What factors helped them to be effective pioneers, and what hindered them?
5. What leadership challenges did they experience, and how did they deal with them?
6. What helped their ability to lead, and what hindered it?

I produced a series of transcripts based on these interviews and conducted thematic analysis of them using a software tool called Nvivo-12. This enabled me to code different texts within the transcripts, and to develop a hierarchy of themes. I was then able to analyse these themes based on frequency of occurrence and develop findings on what themes were most prevalent in the interviews. My findings in this report include a series of observations against the ten most popular themes, supported by a subset of the references (coded anonymously) from the interview transcripts.

I also analysed the profiles of the 22 interviewees who completed the Blonay Profiler (see Appendix 1 for details), and compared these to my database of 491 surveys from others not included in this research, completed over the past 15 years, all based on the same survey questions and using the same algorithm to determine profile scores on the three dimensions (Bold Creative, Empathic and Self Disciplined). This data included location and nationality of the respondent, as did the data from this research. I looked at the extent to which I could see a difference in profile between my pioneers and the others, and the extent to which this differed by location and nationality of the respondent. My findings of this analysis are also set out in this report.

My conclusions are drawn from these findings, looking specifically at where both the qualitative and quantitative analysis point in similar directions.

While I set out originally to draw conclusions about the difference between national cultures in UK, Uganda and UAE, I have not been able to conduct enough interviews in UAE to complete this analysis. I have some conclusions drawing on comparison of UK and Ugandan respondents but recognise these are based on a small sample. This is the main reason why the original proposed title for this research: “Pioneering Leadership: A National Cultural Perspective” has not been adopted. However, I believe the indicative conclusions are still of interest, and are a good basis for further work.

The real value of this research in my view is in the richness of the stories and quotes that I have been able to gather, spanning the different national cultures. As a result, I have set out brief biographies of each of my interviewees, and started a process of developing case studies, which could be used to support learning programmes in “Pioneering Leadership”. These case studies will be set out in a separate paper.

My interviewees



Endre Vestvik is the Founder and CEO of Wild Coffee, in Kampala, Uganda, a company on a mission to transform the way farmers and the local economy are supported in Uganda's leading export, by adding value in Uganda through high quality selection, packing and marketing direct to consumers in export markets. His view is that being based in the heart of Africa, Wild is able to find the best coffees in the world. He was previously a screen writer, editor and photographer



Nick Salter is Co-Founder and Partner of a niche consumer health products company called Aduna, enables the promotion of a wide range of ethically sourced health-oriented African products that deserve to be better known. It pairs commercial opportunity with the genuine ability to make a quantifiable difference to the communities whence the products are sourced and is a leading proponent of 'trade not aid' as the key to African prosperity.

Jon Richards lives in Dubai, where in 2011 he co-founded and continues to run a highly successful financial services comparison internet business, Yalla Compare, which has now expanded across the Middle East and North Africa and is the leading player in the regional online insurance market.



John Waterman is the Head of the Construction Division at Wilmott Dixon, the largest private construction business in the UK. He is leading a major change to the way construction businesses are managed, promoting a more collaborative and coaching style of leadership.



Megan Reitz is the co-author of a recently published book "*Speak Up*", and has been a leading voice, featuring at various conferences and on a TED talk on the issue of "Speaking truth to power". She is a Professor of Leadership and Dialogue at Ashridge and is on the Thinkers50 radar of global business thinkers, has featured articles in Harvard Business Review and Forbes magazine, and is ranked in HR Magazine's Most Influential Thinkers listing.

Rory Hendrikz set up and runs Ashridge's Executive Education business in the Middle East, based in Dubai. He has been successful in promoting Ashridge's programs to many clients across the Middle East and Africa, and is now championing Ashridge's programs embracing the lessons from Sports Leadership

Saf Minney is a British social entrepreneur and author. She is the founder of People Tree and former Global CEO of 24 years, a pioneering sustainable and Fair Trade fashion label with a mission to provide customers with Fair Trade lifestyle clothing, lifestyle accessories and organic and Fair Trade foods in Japan and Europe. Saf and People Tree have won many awards for ethical global business and in 2014 People Tree became the first company to be awarded the World Fair Trade Organisation Fair Trade product label. She is also a well noted spokesperson and campaigner on Fair Trade and ethical fashion



Teddy Ruge is the Founder and CEO of Raintree Farms, an agriculture export business and cofounder of Hive Colab, Uganda's first technology hub. Ruge, a recipient of a 2012 Champion of Change Award from the Obama White House, writes about Africa's technology and entrepreneurial development. His articles have appeared in major media outlets including the Guardian, New York Times, CNN, Medium, and Globe and Mail. He also Co-founded Project Diaspora, an online platform for mobilizing, engaging and motivating members of African Diaspora to engage in matters important to the continent's development.

Philippa Ngaju Makobore is the head of the instrumentation division at the Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI), where she has led to the development of the electronically controlled gravity feed infusion set (ECGF).[8] a new technological health solution for children in hospitals, which controls the flow rate of intravenous fluids, a life-critical process. In 2017, Makobore won the second prize (US\$25,000), at the annual Innovation Prize for Africa.[1]

Lucy Buck is the Founder and CEO of Child's i Foundation, in Uganda, where she built a team of 75 inspirational professionals and raised over £6m, supporting more than 2,000 children from 168 orphanages back into families. Having started her career as a TV producer in the UK, she has gone on to build a child protection system with the Ugandan government that now supports thousands of children to stay safely in families each year. Starting out as a TV producer and going on to create a highly successful charity in Uganda, my



Rebecca Stevens was the first British woman to climb the "Seven Summits" - Mount Everest and the highest mountain on every continent. Previously a presenter on BBC television's science series Tomorrow's World from 1994 to 1996, and a journalist, author and motivational speaker, in addition to her mountaineering exploits, she has sailed the Southern Seas to the South Magnetic Pole and Antarctica and crossed the South Atlantic island of South Georgia. With the polar explorers Ranulph Fiennes and Mike Stroud, she competed in an eight-day Eco-Challenge, which consisted of running, biking and canoeing across the Canadian Rockies.

Samuel Sejjaaka is the Founder and Country Team Leader at MAT ABACUS Business School, the first Ugandan specialist in Executive Education and Leadership Development, having previously been Deputy Principal at the Makerere University Business School, formerly part of Ugandan oldest tertiary institution. He has also founded and runs his own accountancy firm and is either Chair or Non-Executive Director in a number of leading organisations in Uganda.

Michael Niyitegeka leads the Refractory Program at Clarke International University, which is rapidly developing a reputation as a leader in using a highly practical approach to developing ICT and business skills, producing graduates within a year who are increasingly demanded by employers. The program has attracted the attention of IT managers in government, the private sector and specifically the World Bank. He was previously an ICT lecturer at Makerere University.



Ian Clarke is the Founder and Chair of the International Medical Group in Uganda, which makes up the lion's share of the private health sector in the country. He came to Uganda as a missionary thirty years ago, initially setting up a hospital in war-torn Luwero district. He has since set up a university with a health focus, a commercial farm, a restaurant and a hotel in Zanzibar. He has also engaged in politics, as mayor of Makindye Division, one of the five administrative units of the Kampala Capital City Authority, and writes a weekly column in Uganda's leading daily newspaper, New Vision.

of international education, healthcare, and mortgage, housing and lettings markets.

David Ball is the Founder and former CEO of Cambridge-based DB Group, a pioneer in the construction industry, originally established to provide specialist sands to industry for cement testing and fuse manufacturing, exporting these sands all over the world today. The company has innovated throughout its history, also in waterproofing and ultra-low carbon concrete.



Kevan Keegan is a consultant and investor /NED in African Emerging Markets, especially Education, Agribusiness, Timber Products & Healthcare. He is also the Chair of an acquisitive Education Trust which runs private schools in Belgium. He has been change manager in finance and operations.



Mark Greene is Executive Director and Author at the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, and Vice Principal of the London School of Theology. As a former advertising executive in London and New York, Mark has for many years been promoting the idea that the working week is the best opportunity for mission impact for the church, described in one of his books: “Thank God it’s Monday”

Henry Stewart is the Founder and Chief Happiness Officer of Happy, previously Happy Computers, listed as one of the top 20 workplaces in UK for five successive years (Financial Times/Great Place to Work Institute), was voted the best in the UK for customer service (by Management Today), the small business with the most positive impact on society (Business in the Community) and rated as one of the world's most democratic workplaces. His book, The Happy Manifesto, was published by Kogan Page in 2012 and short-listed for business book of the year

Gillian Nabbowa is the Founder and CEO of Pendo Care, an Early Years education specialist in Kampala, Uganda, offering a range of technical consultancy solutions, to help transform the provision of Early Years education for children in Uganda, with a focus in teacher development and effective continuous assessment, a pioneering approach with a knock-on impact to higher education delivery.

Tommie Hooft van Huysduynen is a Co-founder of Proteen, a 2019 Hult Prize New York finalist business, based in Uganda, having won the London regional finals. Proteen is an ambitious idea to provide “meaningful work” for over 10,000 young East Africans, by using the larvae of black soldier flies to transform organic waste into protein-rich feed for livestock. Their strategy for the future is on the one hand, selling 'Do It Yourself-kits' to farmers who can then grow larvae themselves and feed them to their animals. On the other hand, they will start 'city farms' where young people from the cities can work and where they can use the organic waste from the city as a source to feed the larvae. Providing a circular solution and making farming more profitable throughout Africa. Tommie previously came to Uganda having convinced JDE, the world's second largest coffee products company, to sponsor research and the making of a documentary on the coffee industry in Uganda. As a result, JDE, alongside the Dutch Good Growth Fund, is now one of the sponsors of Proteen.





Nick and Cheryl Dekoning are the Founders and Managers of Our Trees Our Future, a tree planting social venture in Uganda with a vision to plant a billion fruit, medicinal and timber trees in Sub-Saharan Africa. The venture is designed to provide sustainable income, education, for Africans primarily in villages, while promoting environmental stewardship. Nick originally set up and ran the YWAM organisation for 12 years in Kenya and Uganda, prior to switching to this venture.

Lyndsay Handler is a Co-Founder and former CEO of Fenix International Uganda, a venture-backed solar energy technology company, one of the fastest growing in the region, based in Uganda with teams in Zambia, Ivory Coast, Benin, Nigeria, Mozambique, China, Paris, and Silicon Valley. The flagship product, ReadyPay Power, is an expandable, lease-to-own home solar system financed through affordable payments over Mobile Money, a service achieved through a partnership with MTN, Africa's largest telecom brand. Fenix also introduced a successful share-ownership scheme to motivate employees, a first in Uganda. Fenix has delivered clean affordable solar power to over 3,000,000 people across Africa. In 2018, ENGIE, the world's largest independent electricity producer, acquired 100% of Fenix shares. Together, Fenix and ENGIE aim to bring decarbonized, decentralized, digital energy to over 20 million people and to be leaders in the effort to achieve universal access to clean energy.



Quintin Lake is the Founder and CEO of Just Good Work, a collaborative mobile platform providing migrant job-seekers, workers and companies with critical information to prevent modern slavery and worker exploitation. He has been a leading activist in addressing the global issue of Modern Slavery, as Director of his own consultancy 50eight and a Research Fellow at Ashridge Executive Education. He is Co-Author of Corporate Leadership on Modern Slavery - Full Report and Case Studies 2016, a report summarising research which won Most Impactful research at Hult International Business School two years running, not least due to its influence on Modern Slavery legislation in Australia.



Lucrezia Biteete set up and built the Ugandan arm of her Norwegian family financial technology business, Laboremus from zero to 28 employees. She has also been a key partner in the development of the Refactory ICT skills development program at Clarke International University, in Kampala, helping to gain grant support from NORAD, the Norwegian state aid organisation. Refactory is an IT training programme specially designed by industry partners, with the goal to make Ugandan tech graduates more ready for work.



Chris Bagnall is Co-Founder and former Chief Marketing Officer at Fenix, a venture-backed solar energy technology company, one of the fastest growing in the region, based in Uganda

with teams in Zambia, Ivory Coast, Benin, Nigeria, Mozambique, China, Paris, and Silicon Valley. The flagship product, ReadyPay Power, is an expandable, lease-to-own home solar system financed through affordable payments over Mobile Money, a service achieved through a partnership with MTN, Africa's largest telecom brand.

Cris Rogers as a church leader, was among the first to be ordained to the ordained pioneer ministry which was seen as a breakthrough in creative leadership within the Church of England. He has become known for his dynamic bible teaching and was recently quoted in [Christianity Magazine](#) speaking about the future of the art form. Rogers was quoted as saying that he is always coming up with new ways of teaching the Bible. appealing to the senses. In January 2004, Kevin Mayhew Publishing published Rogers' first book, *Naked Christianity: Helping young people grasp issues of faith*. In December 2004, Rogers was also involved with [Teachers TV](#) when he was interviewed about how to communicate effectively in the [RE](#) class room while using one of Teachers TV's discussion resources as an example.

Pete Moore is an author of books covering science, philosophy, theology and history including aspects of what it is to be human, and how the technological implementation of scientific discoveries affects us. He is also Founder and CEO of ThinkWrite which helps other writers through a tested and structured method for writing long or complex documents successfully. In its review of his book "*Blood and Justice*", The [Wellcome Trust](#) said "I am left craving more medical and scientific history to be delivered in such a lively manner". Popular Science said of "*Being Me*" Moore has managed to paint a superb picture of the human being, using a scientific perspective.

Findings - the top themes

Having, coded themes in the interview transcripts, I ranked them on the basis of the frequency of mention.

Rank	Theme category	References
1	Challenge status quo	65
2	People focus	50
3	Purpose & values orientation	46
4	Adapt to achieve	21
5	Early life impact	21
6	Faith connection	21
7	Tenacity	21
8	Letting go to step up	17
9	Parent influence	17
10	Fear of failure	14

Challenge status quo

The most dominant theme is the persistent need among pioneers to challenge the status quo. They tend to have an aversion to keeping things the way they are. When they see a problem, they want to be part of the solution – more than that, they want to solve it themselves.

“You like questioning everything, its built into you. I do that while I am driving home. You can lose all your friends as you are constantly challenging them. I hate the idea that people say, this is the way it will work. This is how it’s always been. They know I will change it” (IN1560)

“I get offended when people don’t want to try something new” (IN1149)

“ I don’t like the status quo. I am always thinking how this can be done better?” (IN1889)

“But as soon as its business as usual. Not for me. I am onto the next shiny thing?” (IN1308)

Pioneers not only want to see change – making a difference, but this need is apparently never satisfied... like an “itch you can’t reach”

“I have an insatiable desire to make a difference”.(IN1151)

“I got an itch I can’t reach. You have to keep moving your feet – You can’t stay long stagnant. The paralysis gets in. The whole thing of problem solving goes on all the time with the pioneer. Keep looking for things. Nothing becomes impossible, just have to find a way” (IN1629)

They are natural problem solvers. And often they will see the problems themselves in a new way, often combining inputs to develop a new creative approach.

“It came from hearing of a problem from 2 angles. Companies who couldn’t get enough info. And workers who couldn’t get info” (IN1614)

“It’s about connecting the seemingly disconnected” (IN1149)

“You have your view, and then the other view . but it’s **the third idea** that comes out of the exchange that makes the difference” (IN1756)

“It’s the ability to see something from outside the box. Background is the creative arts... being pushed constantly to look at a problem from outside it. So, when working with farmers, you realise they don’t have money. You have money but need that product. So how do you solve that problem? So, you pay the farmer a monthly fee. So why hasn’t anyone applied this to this problem. If you come at things from the perspective there has to be a solution, you will always find it” (IN1575)

This combination of an insatiable need to change things and ability to see problems differently from others is almost part of the DNA of the pioneer.

“It’s a natural thing, cannot help it, not because you want to be busy, it’s your temperament to get things done. You experience a problem, you think that if you created a solution, you would help others” (IN1375)

“It was something I couldn’t help being, ever since school selling magazines” (IN1313)

“Being a maverick , it’s a bit weird. You see things that others can’t see” (IN1300)

My research also noted that, because about half my interviewees are based in Sub-Saharan Africa, that this part of the world seems to attract people with this type of DNA. The attraction for pioneers is in being in a place where there are no rules, and comfortable in uncertainty.

“Pioneers go to places which are less regulated, where there is a lot of freedom, and Africa as a whole is a bit like that. People say to me: ‘Holland is too small for me. Denmark is too small’. You have to read the manuals of what you can or can’t do . that’s a nightmare for a pioneer. They would say: “Don’t tell us you can’t do it. Say you can if you do this”.” (IN1629)

“There was no right or wrong. There was no play book. There were no rules. We took reassurance from that. We were happy to make big mistakes, constantly put it up that and see what happens. Comfortable in that uncertainty, the grey area while other people wanted black or white. We were constantly iterating – does this work? It was only when you tried it that you could know what would happen” (IN1097)

And my thesis that this pioneering DNA presents its own particular challenges for leadership was turned on its head by the idea, that this instinctive, creative, problem-solving mindset is actually an essential ingredient of leadership.

“With a pioneering mindset, you are better equipped to solve problems. That is a quality that leaders should have”. (IN1265)

“Always been an explorer, always fascinated with this big exciting world that was out there. Looked up to those. we had come relatives that were doing more exciting things. Sailors, maybe they gave some inspiration. There were Norwegian heroes. Amundsen. I am so independent myself. I have been own boss for 20 years. Love that freedom. Want to do without supervision. I assume that everyone is like me. (IN1756)

“I have this sense of “outrage” that people in their daily lives are not aware of Jesus being with them, in their mission wherever they are” (IN1313)

“If somebody tells me this is a secure job, that makes me run away from that. I was a GP for 8 years and didn’t like it very much. So, farming. Uganda is fertile but no commercial farms. Can I prove the model? You see a problem – I want to solve that.: “:need to get out of my comfort zone”. (IN1129)

“From that, I like grappling with things I know little about. Nothing I did really existed, so had to make things up as I went along” (IN1528)

“There are things which are risky but have tremendous joy. There are not many things in life which

“The soft stuff is the new hard stuff. Looking after your people. Leadership is about serving your people. Its more than about a task. Lead with the heart, not just the head.” (IN1815)

“There is a tension between the drive of the pioneer and making sure everyone can get there. And if necessary, you put things on hold” (IN1500)

“I love inspiring people” (IN1308)

Some pioneers described the key to engagement is for people to feel like they are being listened to.

“When you leave, it’s interesting what people say to you about what was important. What I heard in my final office hours was: “they felt heard” and “they felt valued” by me. Don’t underestimate the time you spend making an individual person feel valued” (IN1248)”

“Allowing people to give feedback. They feel heard. Plus, they realise the trade-offs that we leaders have to go through. These are things they don’t think about when they complain. That motivates them more and makes them complain less” (IN1265)

“We had this guard. He was a non- person. He was cooking dinner for a call centre at night. We recognised him in a big meeting. We learned that he had skills in repairing, so he became a technician. We didn’t do it for the PR, he really did have the skills” (IN1248)

“Could the loneliness in leadership come from a need to retain control?” (IN1151)

“You have to get in sync with their talents” (IN1575)

Some of the pioneers recognise that a key ingredient in this people engagement process is empathy – sometimes described as being able to put yourself in the shoes of another.

“It’s about feeling what people are feeling. Love talking to people about why is that? I analyse how people are together, I look at how they are with others, what they say, don’t say. The advantage is that the people who work with me are motivated to work with me, and they tell me when they are not feeling well. People feel they can express concerns. “ (IN1149)

The pioneers recognised that a key aspect of engaging people is getting people to step up. It is one thing getting motivated followers, but the real challenge that the smart pioneers recognise is how to get others to “pick up the baton and run with it”

“Pioneering has always been about releasing others. It’s not about what we accomplish ourselves. But the issue is that people are still waiting to see what the pioneer is going to come up with next.” (IN1629)

“Yes, I want them to follow the overall goal. But I want them to build the solution to get to that goal” (IN1756)

Richard Branson has been recorded as saying that one he starts or acquires a new business, he already has the people ready whom he has set aside to run it.

“When he starts a business, he finds the best person that can build a team” (IN1629)

People focus – getting support

The other slightly surprising “people” factor around these supposedly self-motivated driven pioneers is that they need other people alongside them to support them.

Often these supporters are behind the scenes, engaged in confidential conversations, sometime challenging, often providing encouragement.

“Pioneers need coaching” (IN1802)

“People who are prepared to come along. As you share problems, people can help you, and encourage you” (IN1375)

The smarter pioneers recognise that they need help in a lot of areas, in areas of expertise that they don't have.

“Mentors. You can't have one person to help you figure out that uncertainty. You need more than one. So, you don't know how to work with that client, then get someone who knows how to deal with that client. Or you need some help with negotiation, get someone who is good at that” (IN1375)

“I have many people around me who are my trusted people, whenever there are issues, I will seek the right people around me. One of my skills is being able to attract and bring together. Rule No 1, find the expert”. (IN1265)

And this recognition requires a key characteristic of many pioneers - humility. In fact, this is borne out by a common feature of the research. When I introduced the subject and asked if it were valid that I do the interview with a pioneer, many felt it was a complement they didn't deserve. It was often after explaining how I defined a pioneer, and more specifically my observations of how it feels to be a pioneer, that many of my interviewees accepted that it sounded a bit like them.

“Usually in the beginning, you will be very driven. You want people to do things your way. What usually happens that your followers then stop contributing. Your team stops contributing. There is that tension. But then when you make mistakes, you realise the folly of not consulting people who maybe know a bit more than you. You begin to realise the value of being able to work with others” (IN1744)

“I'm not an individual – wouldn't work without others. Most people have thought of most things – so I'm not really original. And in that sense, don't really deserve the label of “pioneer”. I am not solely responsible – it's because I'm supported” (IN1151)

“You need one or two champions who believe in it, who invest in time and resources. Can't do it alone.” IN1794

“Having a business partner who shares the same vision and values” (IN1253)

Pioneers need the space to share ideas with confidential colleagues which they would not want to share with a wider audience

“Coach is working with me. I blue sky with the coach, because it is incredibly disruptive when I blue sky in the office” (IN1528)

“Interface with people who are very supportive. Support from family. Support from my workplace. Share ideas with them. Review grant proposals. Ask for advice on a direction that I want to take. I have a mentor who is a British Professor in biomedical engineering. Went to Italy – he and his wife flew to meet. Kind people who believe in me” (IN1483)

“Close network of supporters, who believe in what you are doing. For me, its family, small group of friends. And mentors. Others who can provide a balance or sounding board, and ground some of what you are doing.” (IN1614)

“Find a right and left hand that can walk with you that can fill the gaps of decision making and thinking. And carry the weight. Some leaders get a personal assistant and keep them for many years. They need someone who walks with them. That is someone you can call and say, “do we have this?” (IN1629)

“Would have benefited from a partner who contributed to decision making. Challenged more, helped more with complex commercial issues” (IN1300)

“The first thing – a group of people who are your core team or sounding board. They need to be invested in the idea one way or another. They all have different views and experiences. You can be in confidence with them. With management team, you have to be careful with what you say. There are some conversations you cannot have with them. They don’t have to be board members. That is crucial, to provide moral support to the leader, in good times and bad times” (IN1265)

“I have now realised that I need a Guardian. Ann is a Guardian. She questions everything. I realised I need people who will think about these things” (IN1802)

A high level of trust is an essential factor in this inner group.

“Doug Scott talked about when fell off the Eiger. He just knew he would be OK. He was with Chris Bonington, because of their trust for each other. Metaphor of the rope between climbers, two climbers are tied, they might die together. The person who is leading is key. If a second climber falls, it’s up to the first to hold” (IN1420)

People focus - recruiting well

For those pioneers running organisations, it becomes clear how critical the recruitment process is.

“Finding the right people is difficult, if you are doing something new. You need people who can figure things out for themselves” (IN1375)

“Recruiting, you are bringing people who are similar. Naturally resourceful, not just their job description. People who are prepared to operate in that pioneering context” (IN1889)

“Branson is overdone as a role model. Sugar also. Don’t think they do much. It’s the people around them that they gather. Their skill is in gathering key people” (IN1528)

““What do I look for? Not skills necessarily. More passion and drive.” (IN1528)

“A lot of effort on hiring – not just experience but also passions. Getting like-minded who could live in this grey area was critical. And customer centric was also a big factor” (IN1097)

“Challenge No 1: This is you getting others to believe. Finding people who believe in you” (IN1794)

Intuition has an important role to play in getting the right people.

“How do you choose team members? Do they share the dream? Do they buy into your ideas? Are they ready to work long hours? There is a lot of gut feeling. Maybe to do with loyalty. Maybe their skills and passions. But you still need that gut feeling that these guys will stick with the team” (IN1744)

And it appears that getting the right people is to some extent trial and error.

“Getting the right people around you. Took quite a few go’s to get the right team” (IN1308)

The question is do you therefore recruit in your own image, or bring in people whom you know will have different, even opposing views?

“Tension creates more exciting structures. Compression is solid, but not very flexible” (IN1528)

Purpose and values orientation - purpose

For pioneers leading organisations, the unique DNA of the pioneer becomes the beginning of the realisation of purpose and values for the organisation.

“When I am truly connected with this stuff, I feel like I’m flying ... its more an “Insatiable interest” which gives the sense of purpose. Perhaps some “outrage” or “compassion”” (IN1308)

“ I always said I would rather sell potatoes than work for someone else. The happiest I have ever been is starting. It’s a sense of purpose” (IN1560)

“Change a way a country cares for its children. Highlighting good, not giving oxygen to bad. Getting on the right side of history” (IN1308)

Connecting with purpose seems to be a primary motivating force for the organisation.

“It helps that we have a business with a clear mission, as opposed just want to get rich. Higher purpose. If you can find people who subscribe to that , they will go the extra mile to a fairly good degree” (IN1756)

“Making people believe that they are part of achieving something. There’s a team spirit. Need to explain the vision, and the empathy that builds the trust” (IN1129)

“Purpose is a key aspect of life. Must have that. So, when you are pushing the envelope – you have that drive and motivation. “Trade not aid” (IN1253)

“The why? Purpose. Business is an infinite game – if you play with a finite mindset. You lose trust, cooperation and innovation. Its why John Lewis and Apple are successful. It chimes with me. Why would you just be an ordinary business. Our customers tell us we are different but can’t say why. Why is it Apple is different – they have a higher purpose. Same with the All Blacks. Their win rate is 87% since changed cultural approach in 74. The story about the All Blacks is told in “Legacy”, a book by James Kerr. Got to know him after he wrote the story. It’s not about rugby. It’s about how you create purpose: in their case to leave the jersey in a better place. It’s not about playing together. It’s about connecting with the responsibility of the person who wears the jersey” (IN1815)

The purpose then in a sense, sets the ground rules for how you want others to make decisions and prioritise.

“Need to find the talent, and make sure people understand where you want to go. If you get that, you can let people go” (IN1560)

“You surround yourself with people who have different ideas, as long as the end goal is clear” (IN1560)

But it can take time to get to that organisation-wide identification with purpose.

“Launched it in 2016. Takes a while to get past the tipping point. 50 to 60% of people understand. Building on Better culture. “Building Lives Less Ordinary” (IN1815)

“Started having regular retreats every 6 months, to get everyone behind the vision. Thought it was a waste of time. But it was really effective. So now, I’m a big advocate. To rally around what the story is. Allowing them to be part of the improvements. Emphasising certain principles that are important. You can get stuck in your daily routine, sometimes you may not remember the long-term goal of the company. Re-telling the story of the company. Why are we so pioneering? What is the purpose. So, people can relate their daily activities to the bigger picture” (IN1265)

“I found what I was very passionate about. Improving healthcare in my country. It’s a calling. I see a bigger picture. Impacting lives, skills development. Infrastructure development. Eco system, Bigger picture. What can I give back to my country? I always wanted to do something that is meaningful. Not just earning an income” (IN1483)

Purpose and values orientation – values

And when it comes to ground rules, values are an important constituent.

“We spent a lot of time communicating values and vision. We put our values everywhere, on the walls, getting team to memorise it. Used that for investors and employees. Everyone would get on board with these. You would go back to decisions based on your values” (IN1097)

“We need to be aligned in how we want to win, not win at any cost. If we get the way we treat customers, we get more customers. Defining the company values. The how, the why, the where” (IN1560)

“Value system – don’t want to do things for the sake of doing it. If it’s not worth it, don’t want to do it. Rather not be in a structure that is not changing” (IN1794)

“We have a vein of true authenticity which runs through the business” (IN1253)

“I recently read “The Culture Code” where it is proven by research. They looked at organisations where things like “Collaborative Values” are reinforced, they succeed in getting people to work together” (IN1265)

Adapt to achieve

One of the notable attributes of pioneers appears to be their ability to get around obstacles by improvising and adapting.

“You think lack of resources. I laugh at that. You don’t need resources. They will work it out. I don’t start once I have all the pieces, I will start and find out what I need on the way. May have to have a new alternative” (IN1802)

“Product only had 1 light – we want 3 lights. Will take 18 months. What are you talking about? So, we cannibalise our stock to add lights. We make a new product, . So, the 3 light system was the number one product. 3% bought the original. 3 light kits become leader. Also wanted a radio. Went to the African market. Buy 2000 radios. Knew that 30% of them would fail. Then we changed it so we could turn it on or off remotely if people didn’t pay” (IN1248)

But sometimes, it can mean a more fundamental change of direction, which can be particularly challenging for the pioneer.

“Most pioneers struggle with the humility to say it’s time to do something else” (IN1794)

“Then again, if you are successful, you know that other people will imitate your ideas. How do you keep on having new ideas? How do you keep on pioneering? Challenge is how to stay ahead. Once you try out ideas, they tend to become obsolete. How do you re-invent yourself” (IN1744)

“Belief – mine’s evolved. Originally it was a health thing, social and a product no one knows about. But since that, it has evolved into a more strategic positioning, how certain parts of the world should be doing business. Need to introduce a more commercial approach. Belief that there are other ways of doing things that ought to be done that aren’t. There are a lot of closed doors, how can we open them.?” (IN1253)

“Core part is ability to keep adapting. It’s never been a linear. So, what you are doing is never what you started out doing what you thought you were doing” (IN1614)

And sometimes, pioneers who adapt well, can nevertheless create particular tensions with others.

“Developed the ability to quickly pivot if needed. That destroys people. But we are this far. We have to

get to the end goal. I am like water, go for path of least resistant” (IN1560)

Adapt to achieve - Hunger to learn

And part of the adapting story is the humility to recognise that you are continually learning.

“Can sometimes be a resistance to learn new things. Do things differently. New tasks. To have people who have that hunger to learn is very important” (IN1756)

“Requires self-leadership. Really have to pay attention to your internal gaps – energy and drive”(IN1794)

Early life impact

One of the most compelling and fascinating aspects of the research, was the importance of history in understanding the make-up and motivation of pioneers.

“ Grew up in a poor mining village. Grandad had a shed with wood and hammers, and he would collect wheels from shopping trollies. Watch the A Team together, and then would go and make something. Build a go-cart or a gun. I would make things very early on. Always an element of “make believe” (IN1802)

“Growing up in NZ, there is a culture of pioneering here, Kiwis are known for trying new things” (IN1614)

“Started in a publishing company and tried to do A level economics, but kept asking the question: “why aren’t planetary and social aspects part of economics? Makes no sense. The “Invisible hand” isn’t working, the capitalist system is dysfunctional” (IN1300)

“Worked at 15 for a local green grocer, a family grocery firm. Loved it, chopping the tops off carrots etc. He said to my mother that you will never starve while that guy has two arms. Would always say, well : “What’s next?”. (IN1838)

“Brought up on a farm, had to be more multi-skilled. I enjoy that. Now, I’m doing a business case with Iksha, arranging a conference, organising cranes to move the warehouse, checking the lay rate for chickens. All that stuff is easy for me.” (IN1129)

Pioneers cut their teeth in the school of hard knocks.

“Working in TV, come what may, you have to get the program out. You just do it. You find a way to do it. There would be a final deadline. My TV days have a lot to answer for. It's creativity, it's storytelling, it's creating a narrative. Its persuading people to do things.” (IN1308)

Sometimes, it is extreme events that help formulate the drive in the pioneer.

“Set up a Sunday Newspaper – raised £6.5 million and lost it all. Because we were the managers and hired journalists – and it was a horrible atmosphere. Should have done it the other way around. So, decided had to figure out how to create a positive workplace.” (IN1596)

“I was living in Kenya. In a village. Both neighbours lost their homes to kerosene fires. I was doing microfinance at the time. One lost a child” (IN1248)

And sometimes it’s the past experience of what is possible that can help create the pioneering mindset.

“There were significant men who I buddied with mainly at weekends, all had an inventive streak. One

had created the world's first concrete yacht. The other set up a valve making company. Like being around people who are prepared to step out and do something different" (IN1528)

"Africans who get out of Africa, come back and see opportunity, where others don't, just see endless challenge" (IN1248)

Faith connection

Another theme that kept coming up in the research was understanding the basis of belief and faith, that pioneers appear to have more than the average share of. In a few cases, this was expressed as a personal spiritual faith which the pioneer has.

"It has to be faith. Knowing that God was in control. He is sovereign. He knows what he is doing" (IN1838)

"So, faith is another big thing in pioneering. It's also being surrounded by others who are always pushing to pioneer. From the point of saying "I want to see you Kingdom come as it is in heaven" and what does that look like." (IN1614)

"It's the call of God on your life. The apostolic is the pioneer. Who goes out in front and the others come in.? The faith aspect comes in big. You believe the impossible. Have to be eternally optimistic" (IN1629)

"God. If you have a purpose, he gives you a reason to keep trying. If you are sure this is what he has called you to, you can keep going" (IN1375)

"The organisation is very pioneering in nature, very apostolic in a Christian sense. Always trying to hear what is God saying, what's is he up to, and how can we do what he is doing? Even with the ap, it was continually coming back to so "What's' next?" AND having to trust HIM , as there wasn't always a lot of evidence that it was not going very fast" (IN1614)

"Then there is the faith thing. My Dad would always say that was the Holy Spirit at work. Both brother and sister phoning at the same time. Sense of a higher order of things. There is something inside you, I was always sub consciously endowed with" (IN1500)

"We are multiplication oriented. Why waste time doing things that only we could do It all ties in with a Biblical worldview and "May your Kingdom come" Bonke just died – had big crusades and had a vision "All of Africa shall be saved" (IN1629)

And sometimes there is something in the background of the pioneer that somehow sows the seeds for optimism and belief.

"We had missionaries in the family who went to Africa. They sent slide shows and exotic gifts from Africa. That was more inspiring. I was a missionary – it was my adventurous more than my religious convictions." (IN1756)

"Come from a good family. My grandparents went to church. I went to Sunday School, but I am not a Sunday School boy" (IN1560)

" My great grandfather invented the Holley carburettor, worked with Henry Ford, was in many of the early cars. Became a very spiritual guy, dedicated to young people" (IN1248).

"Father, a Muslim from Mauritius, high integrity, didn't allow us to watch commercial tv, died when 7, was part of bonded slaves from India but became sugar farmers. Mother was a social worker, her mother set up school for delinquent boys, father was a minister, published the Bible" (IN1300)

And sometimes that sense of belief that things will work out is just there with no particular explanation.

“ I have a big self-belief” (IN1129)

“I like this quote from Goethe: “Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too” (IN1308)

Tenacity and resilience

The pioneers that I talked to were included as pioneers because they got things done. They didn't just have a desire to change things for the better, they made something happen to advance the cause. Often these changes don't come easily, so the ability to stay the course is an essential ingredient for effective pioneering leadership. This sometimes called tenacity, sometimes resilience – holding on, bouncing back.

“On the journey, you get some doubt. You may lose focus. Then you give up on the idea. I guess the thing is to stay the course. You have to be resilient to stay the course. You start off by being idealistic, but then to do things, you have to become pragmatic. You move from the idealism to a will do approach. It's not so perfect, but at least we are moving ahead. If you see progress, you are encouraged” (IN1744)

“People can think you are a bit of an irritation. People want to get rid of you. Need a personality that it's OK to have the door slammed in your face. You have to be resilient” (IN1838)

“If you grow quickly, people can start to doubt. They can start to put doubt in you. People started to say, these weekly meetings are now a waste of time. Executives from different cultures can pull you away. You need to regularly go back. Need to protect what you think is important. Everyone can want to do it differently. Everyone had advice for me. Felt I had to change who I was. Sometimes it was right. But every now, where should I change, Close out all the noise. What is core to me” (IN1248)

“You are close to being a lunatic in your own world” (IN1794)

“You are the one who refuses to quit in extreme difficulties. You are always ahead of the curve. Think of things before other people. Nobody believes. Gandhi: first they fight you, then ignore, then you win. Elon Musk: in first 5 to 7 years. People kept saying that you can't do this. Private person can't put a rocket into space. Using a drone to catch a re-usable booster in the ocean. Need strong shoulders to carry the weight of difficulties” (IN1575)

“Selling complex software to banks, no local provider had been able to use such software. It took 5 years to get a bank to take it. You need alternative sources of income” (IN1265)

“Need to be ready to fail and get up. If not, can't be a pioneer. Just don't sit back and wait for things to be done” (IN1375)

Tenacity and resilience - gets it done

In an athletics metaphor, it's about not just starting the race, but completing it. It reminds me of the Olympic marathon athlete who stumbled half way round the course and injured himself badly, but kept going, hobbling to the finish line, arriving hours after the previous athlete, to the cheers of the crowd. When interviewed about why he bothered to keep going, he was reputed to have replied: “My country didn't send me to start the race – they sent me to finish it.”

“I’m also a completer-finisher. I will not leave until its done. Role of pioneer is how to make it a reality” (IN1802)

“I like to get things done. I love the implementation. It’s not just about the ideas. Held of the battle of my being a pioneer is never giving up. Winston Churchill. Just the “Never never give up”.(IN1308)

“It’s easy to do 90% of a target. But if you are at sea and swim back 90% of the way, you still drown. The minimum should be 100” (IN1560)

“Discipline. You have an idea. Then it’s about doing it” (IN1248)

“In the choice to take action. Many will talk about it. Few will choose to act” (IN1794)

And there is something about not just getting things done, but getting them done right

“I don’t want to move too fast without quality. But that type of pioneer has a chance of making this work in Africa. If we can do this well, why can’t it be multiplied across Africa. So that is why I am demanding standards. In the 5 years we have been here, so many have copied what we have done” (IN1629)

Letting go to step up

I noted while doing the research that probably the greatest leadership challenge for the pioneer is getting others to step up, to pick up the baton, to take on leadership responsibility in lieu of the pioneer. I realised that part of this challenge was actually linked to the pioneer’s readiness to let go. Hence while “letting go” and “stepping up” were initially coded as separate themes, it made more sense to combine them.

“How do you allow people to step up when you feel you are right most of the time. Look at Steve Jobs. I have not perfected it. I have learned to let other people speak first, it could be scary to say something different. .Let people go first. Find me rocking in my chair, as I am desperate to say something. (IN1560)

“Not letting go was not an issue. Finding your why? My why was always so powerful. Stronger than anyone else, as it was my baby. I really could not have passed it on to someone. Cris’ “Why” was bigger than mine because it’s his country. I know he would brave the storm” (IN1308)

“So even now having to let go of things, which I think can be really difficult, to know when and how to do that, and maintain the quality of the organisation. Many start- ups fail after a while, probably for that reason. Don’t know if I have come across good training in making that transition. Wasn’t a core part of an MBA program” (IN1614)

“Don’t subscribe to a strict to a top down discipline model. Want them to be as free to define what they will do” (IN1756)

“You get so attached to something, and it’s hard to let it go. Limits your growth. Its mentorship and wisdom” (IN1375)

“I make no decisions. Taken 32 years to get to this point but now, I make no decisions” (IN1596)

“Tried to organise businesses to have different people running them” (IN1129)

“There’s actually a lot of people who want to join in. But clients think they want me, which is an issue. We may be losing a massive opportunity in the NHS because I’m not available enough. Absolutely fine in having others do more ; “train the trainers”. But, to be honest, there may be a limit. If there was a particularly charismatic speaker taking my messages out, I might have an issue with that. But don’t really want to keep hold of it. (IN1151)

“Picking up the baton. Not got to that level. Difficult to let go of some things – like certain customers. That was quite hard. I was asked to do that” (IN1889)

“Strong sense of belief in what you are doing can get in the way. Your determination can override and lead you to ignore all the signs that you shouldn’t pursue what you are doing. The balance has been in trying to step back when that could be happening, and saying “OK God, what are you saying?” If not that, we could easily get carried away” (IN1614)

And the issue becomes even clearer when developing others becomes part of the core purpose.

“Pioneering has always been about releasing others. It’s not about what we accomplish ourselves. But the issue is that people are still waiting to see what the pioneer is going to come up with next. We are multiplication oriented. Why waste time doing things that only we could do.” (IN1629)

Letting go to step up - stepping up

But once you are past the “letting go” dilemma, you need the right people who will actually step up.

“Passing on the baton – it’s about recruitment of people who people who believe what we do. It’s a stealth process. Slowly slowly catchy monkey” (IN1253).

“There is always a strong man feel with bosses here in Uganda, comes from a paternalistic education system. Yes, in line with your vision, but allow them to work. You should be building leaders. It’s hard to find leaders, people who want to be leaders. You want to give them responsibility, but they only function when you give them a to do list” (IN1575)

“If you try to hire, people are willing to follow but not to lead. Most people need support to lead” (IN1375)

“Getting followers and people to pick up the baton has been an issue” (IN1313)

“People not stepping up is not an issue in exploring. People who are there are not there for the money. So, you are there normally because you really want to be there. Most people would want to be doing the same” (IN1420)

Parental influence

Returning to our exploration of the background to pioneers, the influence of parents is such a regular point that I decided to highlight it as a theme on its own.

“From my Dad’s shed, I always had this feeling of wanting to make something” (IN1802)

“ Most of my life lessons come from my Mum, who used to put us in situations where we had to work out the solutions. Our parents made us develop the skills we need to survive. Fail and try again attitude” (IN1375)

“Mum was in public sector and stood for MP. Went to CND demos in a pram. Mum still delivering leaflets at 87 years old” (IN1596)

“My father put into me an amazing work ethic” (IN1815)

“Dad constantly reinvented himself. I was encouraged to follow the dream, but also to be very pragmatic” (IN1500)

“My father always wanted a boy, so I spent my whole life beating men at everything, pool shark, that

fire in your belly . I have an amazing Mum who was the best Mum in the world. I had the best upbringing. Before I could walk, she was doing things for helping” (IN1308)

“ Father and Grandfather gave me the gift of willingness and challenging the status quo. Not part of the education system. Great Grandfather, invented the Holley carburettor, worked with Henry Ford, was in many of the early cars” (IN1248)

“Parents always said: “You can always do more”, Both very Father was a geologist. He literally tutored the children. His expertise was the discovery of minerals. He did a science program. He worked in industry for a long. My siblings were naturally enterprising. Our parents did not hold us back at all. We would use any tools as a toy and create new things.” (IN1483)

“My Mum with children walked that path before me without me knowing it. My Dad was a cliff diver, and his family are scattered all over the world” (IN1420)

“I am the oldest brother of a family of 9, 7 surviving. Culturally I am someone who is supposed to be relied on. You automatically become a problem solver. Perhaps that is where the training is. Organise and solve issues for the family” (IN1575)

“My Dad was out exploring the country – mountains, and lakes and seaside. Can remember some of my favourite places were up where you could see for miles., a lot of my pioneering spirit came from always exploring and discovering new things” (IN1614)

“My Dad will always make me try first – never do the first step. Learning to drive – he gives me the keys, watch me do it, only when I struggle, he will still watch me. Trusted that I would do it” (IN1149)

“Comes down to my upbringing. My brother and Dad have this pioneering drive. Can we do something completely different from anyone else. Very often we have done things that have made us very unpopular. People don't like changes. My Dad has had that challenge his whole life. Also learned how much fun it is to do new things. Conditioned to do things outside the box. Who can think of something really new about this problem, around the dinner table” (IN1265)

“I think one of the things that I can look to is at an early age, we had to work with my mother. And do minor trades, and farming, to supplement our father's income. In Idi Amin's economic war and the economic collapse we experienced, working with my mother must have helped a lot. Growing in the garden, then some trading with my mother, go up country and buy some commodities e.g. rice, and bring it to Kampala to sell. Doing all those things must have had some impact” (IN1744)

Fear of failure

Most of these findings primarily relate to positive aspects which support effective pioneering leadership. In the research, I also asked what hindered pioneering leadership, and, not surprisingly, the single most common response was the fear of failure among those with whom pioneers come in contact.

“Surrounded by people who are guardians – defensive people. Surrounded by people with fear of failure. Pioneers see the risk. If people are scared of risk, that will slow you down” .(IN1802)

“But today risk is often associated with the word averse. The Health & Safety culture. I don't want people to get hurt. Shackleton put an advert in the Times, “Men wanted – dangerous mission, return not guaranteed. 9 months of darkness”. And had loads of people apply. Nobody today would do that today. It's all about stability and career development” (IN1420)

“Their reaction to uncertainty is different to yours. They react to this because it's risky. You are willing to take this risk, some are not. Ambiguity makes people uncomfortable. Not willing to go that mile. Don't see a reward in it as yet” (IN1375)

And this can manifest in resistance and opposition that pioneering leaders need to find ways of managing.

“Acceptance, not confronting is valued more highly than mould breaking. Successful pioneers have to go through being an outcast” (IN1500)

“Thinking out of the box means opposition from people who are not” (IN1629)

“What if you are wrong. But I am working on gut instinct. It is a bit dangerous. If you’re wrong where are you leading people” (IN1560)

“Need to be able to accept defeat and move onto something else. Letting people know that it’s time to go. People find it hard to come to terms with things that are not working. You have raised expectations, and now you’ve closed up shop. (IN1794)

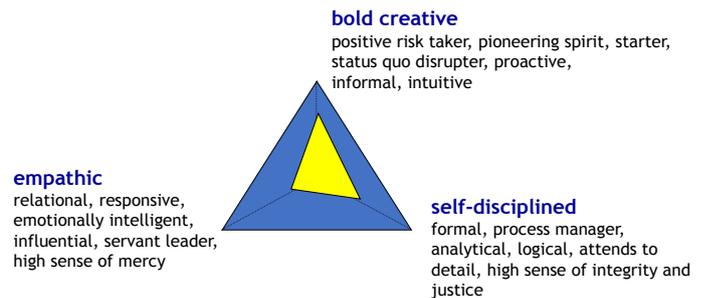
Findings: the Blonay Profiles

Part of the purpose of the research was to validate the Blonay Profiler (www.blonay.co.uk/profiler), an online character profiling tool that I have used in my practice, both leadership programs and consultancy, for many years. I use it primarily as a tool to demonstrate difference in teams, and the importance of being able to work with difference. Like most psychometric tools, it is designed to highlight difference of preference, not capability.

The research I have conducted in the past relating to the Profiler has indicated some correlation of profiler scores both with job roles, and with cultural background / nationality.

The three dimensions of the Profile are set out in the diagram below, and explained more in Appendix 1, using an extract from my book, “Risky Strategy”

In this research, I wanted to assess there is a link between the Blonay Profile and those in pioneering leadership roles. My expectation was that those in pioneering roles would have a stronger preference for the “Bold Creative” dimension.



My hypothesis that pioneers are naturally that way meant that this would present specific challenges for leadership, and that this would manifest in a lower than average “Empathic” preference.

While my background data for Blonay Profiler preferences has 491 completed surveys, this “Pioneering Leadership” research has only 21 completed surveys, at the stage of writing this. So, given the small size of the sample, any findings need to be treated with some degree of caution. Nevertheless, even with this sample size, I believe the findings can be taken to be indicative of the noted difference.

	Respondents	Profiler scores
Pioneers	27	21
Others		491

Initial findings

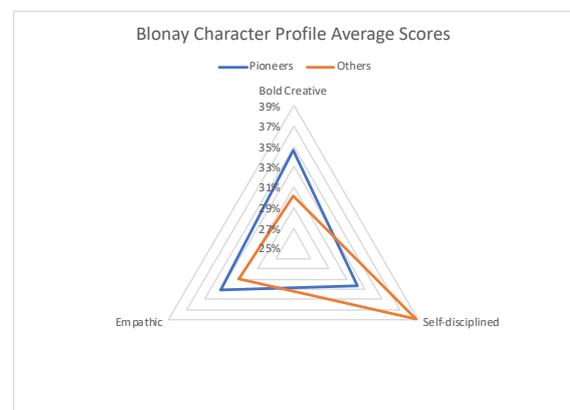
We see I believe a notable difference between the profile of pioneers and the general data pool.

As expected, we do see a marginally higher “Bold Creative” preference score among pioneers.

But as a challenge to my hypothesis, however, we also see a higher “Empathic” preference among our pioneer group. I noted that this is consistent with the findings from the thematic analysis, which showed that “People focus” was the second highest scoring theme.

In contrast, I note that pioneers have a lower preference in the “Self-Disciplined” dimension than our general population. This I would say is also consistent with the thematic analysis, where concepts such as the need to “have all the answers” is generally played down by pioneers.

	Bold Creative	Empathic	Self-disciplined
Pioneers	34.6%	33.2%	32.2%
Others	30.2%	31.1%	38.8%
DIFFERENCE	15%	7%	-17%



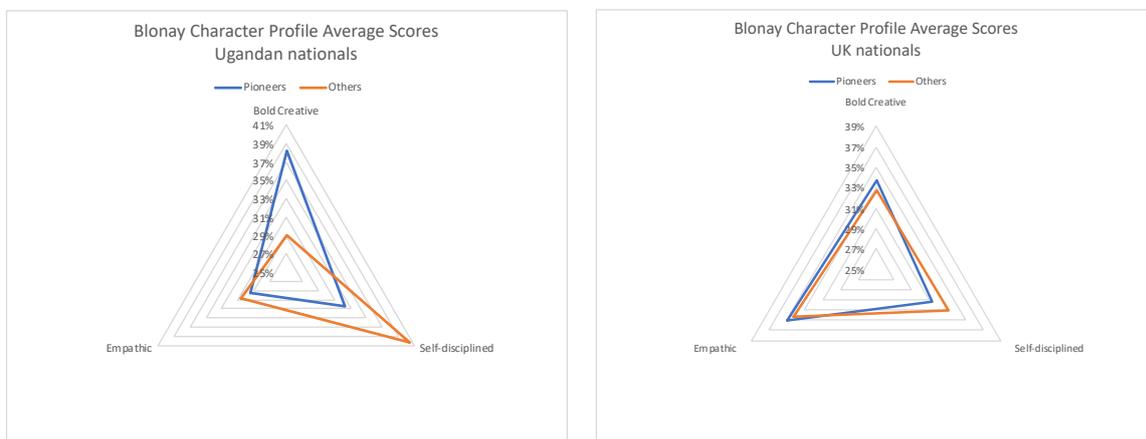
It is important to say at this point that this lower preference does not mean that pioneers are less self-disciplined than the general population, it just means that relative to the other two dimensions, it tends to be lower priority. As with psychometrics, this profiler is in no way a measure of capability on any of these dimensions.

Cultural differences

As indicated in our introduction, we have been keen to explore cultural difference in pioneering leadership, by drawing from a sample of respondents from the UK, Uganda and UAE, each of which forms a significant part of the base sample for the Blonay Profiler data. Unfortunately, I have not been able to get a large enough sample from UAE, but sample is fairly evenly distributed between research in the UK and Uganda.

In our research, 13 of our 26 respondents are located in Uganda, however only 6 of them are Ugandan nationals.

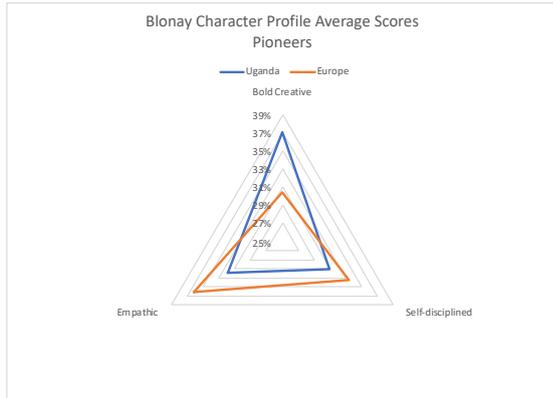
However, even though the sample is small, I believe the big difference between pioneers and our base sample among Ugandan nationals is significant, and in fact, has a clear influence on our overall findings for the research.



We see that Ugandan pioneers have a very different profile from Ugandans from the general sample – a much higher “Bold Creative” preference and a much lower “Self-Disciplined” preference. The difference in the “Empathic” is not significant.

This is important, because we know from our much larger base sample that Ugandans have a much higher “Self-disciplined” preference than what we see from UK respondents. Once again, this does not mean they are more self-disciplined, it just means they are more likely to operate in that mode. I think this is a strong cultural phenomenon, partly influenced by the highly didactic approach in general education – highly knowledge-based, limited interaction and limited opportunity to challenge what is being taught.

The implications of this are major, and for a separate exercise, but in essence, it suggests the need for a significant shift in educational approach, to prepare Ugandans to be effective pioneers.



Having said that, when we also look at the profile of those pioneers operating in Uganda, we see this strong “Bold Creative” preference, compared to those operating in Europe, who indicate much stronger “Empathic” and “Self-Disciplined” preferences.

This chimes with our qualitative analysis, which picked up on the significantly higher opportunity for real pioneering in Uganda compared to Europe.

Conclusions

Addressing the theses.

Thesis 1: Pioneers have it in their DNA. They don't have to make themselves become pioneering. If anything, they need to rein themselves in.

Conclusion: Big Yes. I believe the evidence of these interviews supports this view. The group I interviewed were pioneering to varying degrees, but all had experienced some aspects of being on the front line of change, being “firsts” in some aspects of their professional lives. And it is clear from the comments that this is an aspect of their character that they don't have to work at. Most talked about some aspect of a need to “challenge the status quo”, to solve the problems that they say rather than just talk about them, to both see and seize opportunities. And a relative inability to understand the fear of the unknown that colleagues exhibit.

Thesis 2: Leadership is a problem for pioneers. Because of this uncommon character attribute, associated with challenge and generally disruptive thinking, pioneers will struggle with leadership. People skills will be an issue for them. Because of this, working well with people may not be a priority. And ultimately, enabling others to “step up” to “pick up the baton” of the change that they have initiated will be a major challenge.

Conclusion: Surprising No. but. Pioneers, at least those that have been effective, prioritise people. They recognise the importance of engaging people, of bringing others with them on the journey, of getting others invested in shared purpose and values. Perhaps even more important, they have identified their need for significant individuals to support them, to encourage them, to fill gaps in their understanding, even to challenge them. Not only are pioneers bolder in character than others, they are also more empathic, as indicated by the results of the Blonay Profiler survey. However, the main challenge that pioneers recognise is the need to let go enough to allow others to step up - and pick up the baton. The issue some pioneers have with this relates to the need to stay in control, but this is often offset with the pioneer's comfort in working with uncertainty. The real issue is that the pioneer's natural style can be intimidating to others, inhibiting others to take on leadership roles and make decisions. The key is in recognising that part of the calling of the pioneer is to release others into pioneering leadership.

Top ten themes

Rank	Theme category	References
1	Challenge status quo	65
2	People focus	50
3	Purpose & values orientation	46
4	Adapt to achieve	21
5	Early life impact	21
6	Faith connection	21
7	Tenacity	21
8	Letting go to step up	17
9	Parent influence	17
10	Fear of failure	14

Our number one theme is “Challenge the status quo”. This is the signature tune of the pioneer. This may be about a social situation, a business mindset, or it may be about knowledge and understanding. Our pioneering organisational leaders are looking to solve new problems or find new solutions to old problems. Our pioneering authors seek to develop new knowledge and

understanding of the world around us. All are dissatisfied with the status quo and have an “itch” that cannot easily be scratched when it comes to changing things.

Our number two theme is “People focus”, which includes a combination of “Engaging people”, “Recruiting well” and “Getting support from key people”. While the role of a pioneer is often a lonely one, as it is somehow so personal to their DNA, nevertheless they realise that they cannot do it alone. Our effective pioneers have developed ways of engaging with the right people, and getting support from significant others (coaches, partners, boards).

Number three is “Purpose and values orientation”, effectively combining the first two themes. Pioneers generally have an answer to “Why” they are doing what they are doing, and what is important about “How” they do it. They recognise that the key is to get others to accept and embrace these things, and often this can be the single most important factor in how the pioneer engages others.

Number four is “Adapt to achieve”: the game changes, circumstances force a re-think, pioneers need to be able to and often are able to “pivot” while still keeping the main “Why” in their sights. The pioneer’s ability to do this readily is a particular trait but note that it can sometimes be disconcerting to others and therefore raises leadership challenges.

Number five is “Early life impact”. As we were exploring what it is to be a pioneer, it is clear that background is a factor in the moulded DNA of a pioneer. Events, family aspects, educational experiences all help to develop a pioneering mindset. This is encouraging for educators, as it means that while pioneers may be born with a certain amount of pioneering DNA, it can be developed, particularly the leadership aspects.

Number six is “Faith connection”. Many of our pioneers described some connection with faith, whether it be a religious or spiritual one, either personal to them, or somewhere in their background. This is interesting in understanding where the apparent self-belief that pioneers have, originates from. It is a development of my interest in the connection between risk and faith that I explored in my book: “Risky Strategy”

Number seven is “Tenacity”, also expressed as “resilience”, and meaning the ability to see things through and get things done. Effective pioneers have this. It is probably the main thing which differentiates them from people who have creative ideas, which remain unfulfilled. But there is an interesting tension between this and the need to adapt, which I highlight in the next section.

Number eight is “Letting go to step up”. There were a number of points about how hard it is for pioneers to let go, and a number on the challenge of getting others to “step up” to take on leadership and decision-making roles - and in a few cases, the connection was made between the two. So, I have connected the two in this theme. It probably represents the single biggest leadership challenge for pioneers.

Number nine is “Parent influence”. This is an extension to the “Early life impact” aspect of what makes people pioneers, but it came up so often that it deserves a separate recognition as a theme. Parents have a critical influence in the development of pioneers – often through positive experiences, sometimes not so positive. I suggest there is a learning from this for those of us who are parents.

Number ten is “Fear of failure”. This was probably the most common expression of what hinders pioneering leadership and was generally expressed as an issue for those with whom the pioneer come in contact. For some reason not fully explored in this research, pioneers have relatively little of this fear, while those around them can have plenty of it. Recognising this, and working with it, is a key ingredient in effective pioneering leadership.

Working with tensions

One of the main themes of my book “Risky Strategy” is the need for leaders to work effectively with tensions, aspects of leadership that can pull them in opposite directions. A related concept is working

with “polarities”, and the concept is perhaps most elaboratively described by Roger Martin in his book “The Opposable Mind”. This research has highlighted three tensions in particular:

Tension 1

Pioneers with extreme motivations that are not always conducive to developing harmony with other people:

- bias for action to solve problems rather than just talk about them,
- outrage with the status quo,
- uniquely peaked curiosity,
- insights others don't have,
- inability to see failure,
- joy in experiencing uncertainty...

But they need to work with other people to achieve anything significant.

Tension 2

Pioneers need to be tenacious and resilient to achieve, against the odds, thick skinned, deflecting nay-sayers.

But they need the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, to pivot, to let go of their “baby” with potentially high sunk costs to move onto a better way.

Tensions 3

Pioneers are totally invested in a life purpose and a set of heart-felt values, on an achievement track which has seen significant success.

But they need to be prepared to let go of opinions and even decision making to let others, often those with less investment and less leadership drive, step-up, make decisions and take responsibility.

Character attributes of pioneering leaders – cultural differences

The use of the Blonay Profiler survey has indicated that pioneering leaders tend to be not only marginally more Bold Creative (as expected), but also more Empathic (not as expected). The difference compared to our base data set of mostly non-pioneers is marginal, but I believe, big enough

We see the biggest difference in character profile when we look across our cultural split from the UK to Uganda. In Uganda, we see a very significant difference between the profile of our base data set, and the profile of our pioneers. The pioneers are much more Bold Creative, and much less Self-Disciplined, with the Empathic dimension largely unchanged.

This is important because the character preference for Self-Discipline in Uganda is much higher than for UK, which indicates a strong aversion for working with uncertainty and risk. Self-Disciplined preferers could be characterised as having a strong “Be Perfect” driver – they need to know they are right. We believe that this is a feature of the way our education system works generally worldwide, an aspect which is particularly acute in the highly didactic, knowledge-based Ugandan education system.

So, this leads to a conclusion that for Ugandans to become effective pioneering leaders, they need to unlearn the risk-averse behaviours they have been coached in through the education system.

There may also be other deeper cultural factors that inhibit this Bold Creative preference, but that is the subject of another exercise.

Appendix 1 – The Blonay Character Profiler

Extract from “Risky Strategy” Jamie MacAlister, Bloomsbury 2016

Introducing the Blonay Profiler

I found that when I worked with clients on the organisational factors which would help inform which strategic discipline they would be most likely to prosper in, there was one important question which was hard to answer. I could see fairly readily what types of processes they had in place, how much they spent in each, what performance metrics were most important, what they told the market they were about. All of these would give me some idea of whether or not this business would lean more readily to product leading, or being intimate with customers, or being operationally excellent.

The big question I couldn't easily answer, nor could the client's senior management, was: what personal attributes of the people in the business supported one discipline or the other? So, I developed a character profiling tool to help me do just that.

An important influence in developing this tool was a sentence I came across in the Apostle Paul's letter to a colleague called Timothy, for whom he was very much a mentor. Paul initially reminds him to “fan into flame the gift that God has given him”. He is talking about personal strengths in his character. I was moved by the picture that made me think of fanning the glowing embers of a campfire to the point where it bursts into flames – the idea that a little persistent encouragement to an apparently lifeless situation with signs of potential, can suddenly create so much energy and vitality. What a picture of leadership that is.

He then goes on to say, “For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline”. I remember thinking that this sounded like a complete set of virtues to which many probably aspire and are able to exhibit to varying degrees. “Power” spoke to me of the ability to create or inspire positive change; in other translations, it is “boldness”. There is the virtue most closely connected with courage. This spirit is the spirit of the pioneer, bold and creative at the same time.

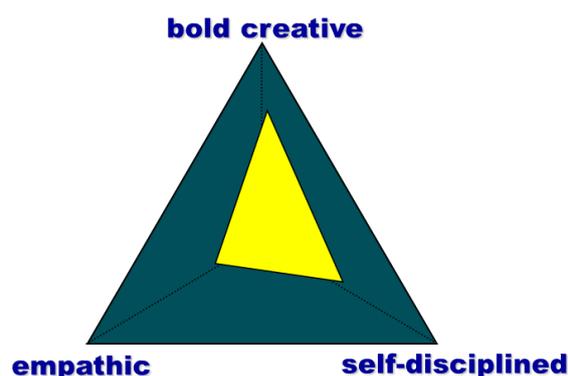
Then we have the spirit of love. The word “love” I believe is much abused in modern life to mean a plethora of things. For me the essence is about relationship with our fellow human beings, to be committed to positive relationship. The underlying ability is to be able to see or feel things from another person's perspective: to be able to empathise.

And finally, there is the spirit of self-discipline. In essence, for me, this is about a personal attention to getting and doing things right, to be ordered and organised, and to be passionately interested in truth.

These for me appear to be demanding personal attributes. Some of us I suspect are stronger in one of these virtues than we are in the other two. In fact, it is probably very difficult to be consistently strong in all three dimensions. Being strong in one doesn't help you to be strong in either of the other two. From a mathematical perspective, I would describe them as orthogonal – completely mutually independent of one another in terms of human character.

And it occurred to me that this was a similar story to that which Treacy tells. There are three organisational disciplines which can lead to a prosperous position in the marketplace. And it is very hard to be strong in all three because to some extent they conspire against one another. They create trade-offs. As do Paul's three virtues.

So, I borrowed this idea to develop the Blonay Character Profiler, which is about assessing personal character on three character dimensions. I have called these: Bold Creative, Empathic and Self-Disciplined.



The main similarities between these and the Treacy disciplines is the idea that these three dimensions create tensions, either within us as people as in the case of the Character Profiler, or within organisations, as in the case of the disciplines. This means there are trade-offs to be made – dilemmas to be addressed. I have already discussed this in the organisational context and will explain more about how this works in a personal context a bit later.

There is also some similarity in terms of what these three dimensions represent. So, in this sense, I chose to map one model onto the other. Bold Creative maps to the Product Leadership discipline. Empathic maps to the Customer Intimacy discipline. And Self-disciplined maps to the Organisational Excellence dimension.

At the time of writing, I have an as yet unsubstantiated hypothesis that Product Leadership organisations need more Bold Creative leaders, Customer Intimate organisations need more Empathic leaders, and Operational Excellent leaders need more Self-disciplined leaders. What I have discovered is that the Blonay model has a high level of resonance with managers considering these kinds of issues, more generally in connection with strategy. The model also works well in helping to understand the attitude and appetite that individuals have towards risk. Bold Creatives tend to have a greater appetite for risk than the other two character attributes.

Before developing the dynamics of this profiler further, I was further encouraged in my quest to focus on these three character attributes by the work of Jim Collins at Stanford, covered in his book, Good to Great. (Collins, 2001) Jim Collins in his research identified that the leadership characteristics which differentiated his high flying 11 organisations from the rest seem to fall into three buckets: discipline, humility and resolve. The Blonay Profiler mirrors these in a similar set of three character attributes.

Modelling character tensions

So, the Blonay Profiler provides a way of assessing character bias based on these three dimensions

BOLD CREATIVE – Those with a Bold Creative bias will have an above-average appetite for positive risk taking, with an interest in innovation and change. They prefer to be proactive and tend to have a preference for informal intuitive thinking over more formal analytical process. They can be seen as pioneers and will have a track record of starting things. They have antennae that look out from themselves and often from the organisation. Because they tend to challenge the status quo, they can find themselves isolated in organisations

EMPATHIC – Those with an Empathic bias place a priority on understanding and working with people, on building relationships. They prefer to respond to situations rather than take a proactive stance. They tend to be more tuned into emotions and can this be quite sensitive. They often have a keen sense of mercy and are most ready to forgive the shortcomings of others. They tend to look out from themselves to others.

SELF-DISCIPLINED – Those with a Self-Disciplined bias are more concerned than others about doing the right things and in the right way. They tend to prefer formal process and structure to informality. They are often analytical, logical, numerical, data driven, and have a high sense of truth, integrity and justice. They tend also to be more inward looking to themselves, and to understanding the world from their own perspective.

Those of you who are familiar with different psychometric tools will see similarities with these instruments, which are generally used to help build self-awareness. For example, the Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI) is a psychometric tool that is used extensively with programme participants at Ashridge to build self-awareness and help develop relational effectiveness. The main tool is based on a colour-coded triangular mapping approach, similar to the Blonay Profiler. The colours used are blue, red and green. Blue is defined as Altruistic-Nurturing and could be compared to the Empathic dimension on the Profiler. Green is Analytic-Autonomizing and could be compared to Blonay’s Self-Disciplined dimension. The least good fit, although there are some similarities, is the red dimension in the SDI tool, which is defined as Assertive – Directing, whereas the Character Profiler has a Bold Creative dimension.

The Profiler is based on a set of ‘character’ tensions that manifest themselves when faced with dilemmas as to how to behave in different situations. And it is designed to help individuals and groups work with dilemmas more effectively, by understanding better their own character biases, as well as those of others. These tensions are understood by looking in turn at each of the sides of the Blonay Profiler triangle, as shown in the diagram below. The tensions are represented by the differences between each of the triangle apexes on the side being explored. So, to illustrate, let us look at each of the sides in turn:

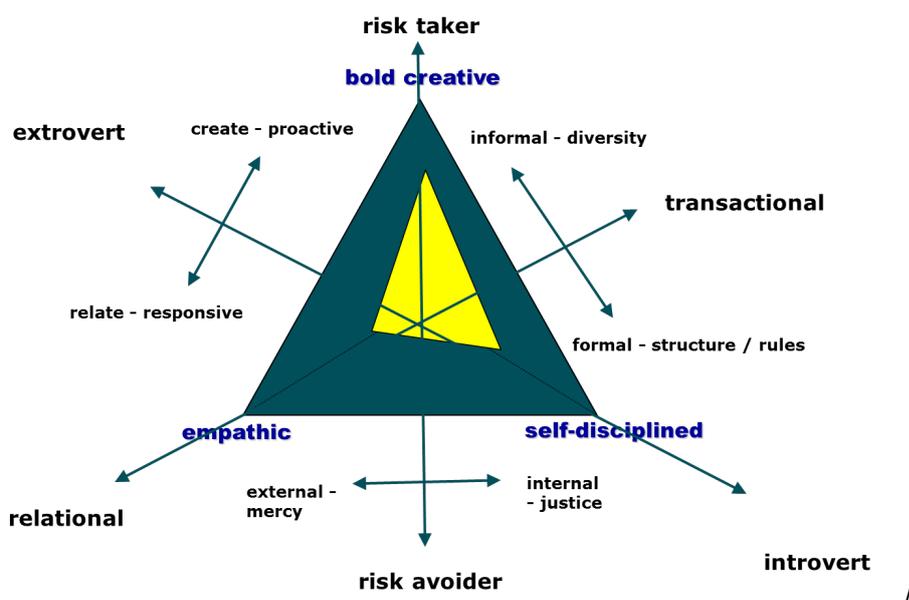


Figure – the tensions between the dimensions

“Bold creative” versus “self-disciplined”

The ‘bold creative’ versus ‘self-disciplined’ dimension reflects the tensions between informal and formal aspects of organisational life - the tensions between celebrating diversity and the need for some level of rules-based process for an organisation or community to be able to function.

As an example, leaders in creative and professional services firms regularly face this dilemma, often referred to as the challenge of ‘herding cats’. ‘Bold creative’ behaviour by professionals, shown as being prepared to challenge and bringing innovation, and having different individual ways of addressing issues, are important for the ongoing success of these firms. But these don’t necessarily lead to the most efficient way to run the organisation. Leaders who seek to impose a more self-

disciplined, process-oriented approach to drive greater efficiency will risk undermining the 'bold creative' attributes of the organisation.

'Empathic' versus 'self-disciplined'

On the 'empathic' versus 'self-disciplined' axis, we pick up the tension between an external people-oriented view and an internal data-driven view. This has resonance with one of the oldest dilemmas of all – that of mercy versus justice, mercy being the 'empathic' option and justice being the 'self-disciplined' one.

This relates to another typical dilemma faced by business leaders. You have collected and analysed cost and performance data which indicates that making certain people redundant is the right decision for the business. However, this would have severe consequences for the people and potentially the local community where they work. Do you proceed? The 'self-disciplined' approach suggests that you do; the 'empathic' approach suggests you think again.

'Bold creative' versus 'empathic'

Finally, the trade-off between 'bold creative' and 'empathic' can be characterised as a trade-off between taking a higher risk proactive approach or a more collaborative, listening, responsive approach. This links with classic theory on innovation: does it come from 'inspired' bold creative moves or more from being better at listening and responding to customers. Was the real drive behind innovation at organisations like Apple, Facebook and Google listening better to what customers said they wanted, or bold initiatives by entrepreneurs who were prepared to buck the trend and established wisdom?

A personal profile, on these three character dimensions, can be scored by completing an electronic self-completion questionnaire of 21 multiple choice questions, based on regular day-to-day situations requiring choices. The questions are based on selecting a likely preferred behaviour in a range of scenarios. Respondents choose from a range of four options for each scenario; but each scenario is effectively addressing one of the three sets of tensions described above.

Appendix 2 – Strategic Pioneering

Extract from “Risky Strategy” Jamie MacAlister, Bloomsbury 2016

Strategic pioneering – innovation and change

As well as a winning aspiration and an understanding of the key variables, the right risks are often those based on an opportunity to innovate or a need for change. As we deliberately step into new territory, we know less about that territory, so the variability of possible outcomes is that much bigger, i.e., it’s more risky. We know that innovation and risk are inextricably linked. Innovation means change and change inevitably feels risky.

Innovation and change are not optional. We may debate the level that is needed, but it is not just needed for progress, it’s needed for survival. We operate in a VUCA world: it is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. These things make it difficult to stand still, but also difficult to know which direction to head off in. At Ashridge, within our Strategy and Innovation practice, we are particularly intrigued by the concept of Dynamic Capabilities as set out by authors such as David Teece. (Teece, 2011). The capabilities we need involve having good sensors to the winds of change, the ability to make important decisions and commit resource to respond to those changes, and the ability to sustain the change momentum.

More specifically, I believe if we want to understand what’s behind effective innovation and positive change, we need to look at character. Leadership is directional and involves movement; it’s not static. It’s taking people from one place to another place, to a new outcome, to a new way of seeing the world and how it works. This is innovative change, and doing this well is what marks out effective innovators from those who are less successful. And character is at the heart of this process. Jim Collins outlined the attributes of the leaders in most successful businesses that he researched in Good to Great. He talked of character attributes such as fortitude, humility and discipline. In Chapter 3, I described a character journey that culminated in the Blonay Profiler: Bold Creative, Empathic and Self-Disciplined. Leaders of innovation change need a blend of all three, which is hard to achieve because of the tensions between the dimensions. Most of all, I believe the Bold Creative dimension is the one that is crucial.

I am calling those who have an extra dollop of the Bold Creative dimension ‘strategic pioneers’. They are proactive more than they are responsive, and they are intuitive more than they are analytical. They celebrate difference and diversity more than form and order and are more likely to be found on their own than in a pack. They are natural risk takers.

When I look at the character profiles of different job roles in businesses, the Bold Creatives (those with a higher Bold Creative score than any other dimension) are marginally the least populated group. The Self-Disciplined tend to be in roles that require a high degree of attention to detail, such as Finance and Administration. The Empathic tend to be in roles where relationship building is important, such as sales or professional roles. Bold Creatives tend to be in creative roles such as in advertising, or in leadership roles. Strategic pioneers generally need a strong suit on this dimension, but they also need to be attentive to the other two. For example, Napoleon was a bold risk taker, who had particularly strong sense of intuition that informed this boldness. It was also informed by an enormous repertoire of knowledge and attention to detail in areas like historical military decisions and artillery.

Our tigers and elephants were born in a story in our research about innovation. This was the race to a global launch of a new product in the fast growing computer games market. Elephants were needed to make sure all the right processes were in place, with the appropriate attention to detail, and to ask the difficult questions: “What if this doesn’t work as we expect? What if customers don’t like that?”. Meanwhile, tigers were cutting corners, firing before aiming and going with their intuition. Somehow the organisation managed to hold them together, and a successful launch was the result.

It is interesting that Gerstner’s book on the transformation of IBM (Gerstner) is called Who says elephants can’t dance. This is the story of IBM’s transformation over a decade from the early 1990s, from a computer products company to a business services firm, while Gerstner was CEO. In this

case, the elephant metaphor is clearly meant to symbolise a large organisation, which typically struggles to change very much because of the inertia of its existing expertise and culture. What helps the elephant to dance, I would argue, is the presence of tigers, and particularly a tiger at the helm of the business. He talks about taking two big bets: one to turn IBM into a fully integrated services business, not just the largest but the most influential. The second was to bet that the market would move away from standalone computers to network-based solutions. He talks about it as fraught with risk and suggests: “There is no such thing as a toe in the water. When you take the plunge, its full body immersion.” Moving to a sporting analogy, his view was that they decided they were going to play offense.

How did he address the problem of loss aversion? The jargon response for any change process is of course the need to articulate what the “burning platform” is. This is perhaps an unhappy business metaphor in that it relates to the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988, in which many died as a result of jumping from the burning North Sea oil platform into the sea. When asked why they jumped, the survivors’ answer was that the platform was burning, and they felt they had more chance of surviving by jumping than staying put. I think many probably use the jargon term now without realising what the origins are. The point is that for people to take on risky change, they need a problem they are trying to get away from. It’s not enough just to have a winning aspiration or something you are trying to gain.

For IBM, it was mainly that their heartland, computing, was being trampled on by very competent competitors, and in particular two very dominant competitors: Microsoft in software, and Intel in computer electronics. These firms dominated two areas of competitive advantage in computing and were known as the “Wintel” duopoly. The rest of computing, the PC makers like Dell and Compaq, had become heavily commoditised, and were moving more into IBM’s heartland of large servers. IBM was being squeezed and needed somewhere else to go, which meant needing to make radical changes to what it did.

I pick up more on the way Gerstner tackled this from an organisational point of view in the next chapter on Organisational Character. Suffice to say that a number of the messages in this book were played out in this particular IBM story.

I couldn’t have a chapter on innovation without also mentioning the Blue Ocean strategy idea, as promoted by Kim and Mauborgne (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005), and to consider how their thinking and case studies tie in with the risk story. Blue Ocean thinking proposes an alternative to Michael Porter’s framing of strategy based on achieving competitive advantage (Porter, 1980), based on a good understanding of the competitive dynamics of the marketplace. Kim & Mauborgne’s proposition is that radical innovation takes the competition out of the equation, at least for a season. At the heart of their proposal is that innovating a product, or a service based on a better understanding of what customers really value is the way to achieve this. One example of this is the Accor hotel chain, which re-designed the business hotel offer based on what customers were prepared to pay more for and eliminating features that added cost but no real customer value. So, they emphasised reasonable-sized, comfortable and functional rooms, efficient service for booking and check out, and a competitive price. They took cost out in terms of large foyers and dining areas, and reduced use of specialised staffing – staff could multi-task by operating reception and the bar. Accor developed hotels for a range of different levels of budget, to capture a range of business priorities – and set a new standard for the business-related hospitality sector. Competitors have tried to mimic the offer but have never fully caught up with Accor’s lead in business budget hotels.

The Blue Ocean approach involves higher risk in the short term than the alternative Red Ocean, which is more of the same. This is because there is more variability of possible outcome, compared to the relative comfort of a slowly declining but familiar business model. But we can mitigate this risk through the Inform strategy - gaining insights about what customers actually value as opposed to what can add cost without value.

In our research, we discovered managers talking about innovation and change as risky, but also acknowledging the risks of not changing. We called this phenomenon ‘Risk in change; risk of not changing’.

When it comes to change, we come across our old friend 'loss aversion', which I described in Chapter 7 (b) based on the work of Kahneman and Tversky. We are programmed to be disproportionately concerned about what may go wrong, and what we may lose, compared to what could go right and what we may gain. Perhaps it's because our experience tells us that the downside is typically more likely to happen than the upside. We've been promised great things before, and they haven't materialised. We may have been told "Be bold and go for it" and ended up with egg on our faces. But if we think of risk as negative, we are focused on the downside before we even start. We are loss averse. We don't want to leave our comfortable territory.

This is the innovator's dilemma as encapsulated by Clayton Christensen (Christensen, 2002). Organisations focus on the dark side of dynamic unfamiliarity and prefer to stay in the stagnant swamp of familiarity. The story of Kodak is a case in point. They preferred the chemical photographic film market that they knew so well— even though it was treating them badly. This was preferable to venturing wholeheartedly into a new market of digital photography, where of course there was always a risk that they would come badly unstuck, perhaps as an also-ran or late entrant who would struggle to catch up.

The essential point that Christensen makes about innovation is that it is often paradoxically destructive. If you are an incumbent in a market, your own 'new' has the potential to help destroy the 'old'. Being prepared to let go, in part at least, of the old is a fundamental challenge to leadership and organisational character.

I was at Procter & Gamble when liquid detergents were introduced. Liquid detergent technology was clearly superior in performance to powdered detergents. Unilever took the lead by introducing a new brand, Wisk, which immediately started to take market share from powdered detergents. The problem was that powdered detergents generated a huge proportion of P&G's profits, so introducing a new superior technology was only going to eat into those profits – referred to rather graphically as cannibalisation (i.e., eating your own profits!) Unilever doing it under a new brand name helped mitigate some of that cannibalisation, but it slowed the progress as consumers needed to become aware and learn to trust a new brand name that they had never seen before. P&G chose a different approach and launched Tide Liquid and Ariel Liquid as international brand extensions of their existing market leading detergents, Tide and Ariel. This was maximum cannibalisation impact – the new technology eating into its own brand franchise, as existing customers simply switched to the new technology. But also, maximum impact as P&G took a leading share in the new liquids sector, building on the existing brand franchises. This was an organisation that had the character to innovate destructively – the character was based on taking a significant risk, but believing it was the right risk because it was the right thing to do, to give the best technology available to their existing customers.

A similar idea, initially proposed by Joseph Schumpeter in 1942, is that organisations should embrace creative destruction, which was described as a "process of industrial mutation that incessantly revolutionises the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one". Buytendijk talks about this in the context of massive technology changes: cars replacing horse carriages, music downloads succeeding CDs, or email obsoleting fax (Buytendijk, 2010)

One of the issues is that standard processes and systems do not allow the innovation team to explore new ways of working. The ROI may be too low or may take too long. It may not seem very attractive, or the size of the potential market may not seem that high. In many cases, organisations decide to create new organisation around the innovation. IBM did this by setting up a new business to develop personal computers.

How financial markets value innovation is a key issue, where innovation can be about cash-generating opportunities that are hard to define at the outset. And how financial analysts see things can affect how managers respond to innovation investment. I touched on this in our exploration of the elephant world in Chapter 5 (g), and concluded that somewhere in the decision-making process, whether it be the analysts or managers, you need tigers – people prepared to trust a gut feel and stick with it, the type of tigers that promoted a Google or a Twitter in the early days.

Alternatively, businesses introduce new propositions into new geographies as the only effective way of launching in that market. Honda penetrated the US motorcycle market by re-inventing its target

customer segment as adventure bikes for off-roading, coming against the major players of BMW and Harley Davidson. This was very different from its target audience in its home market.

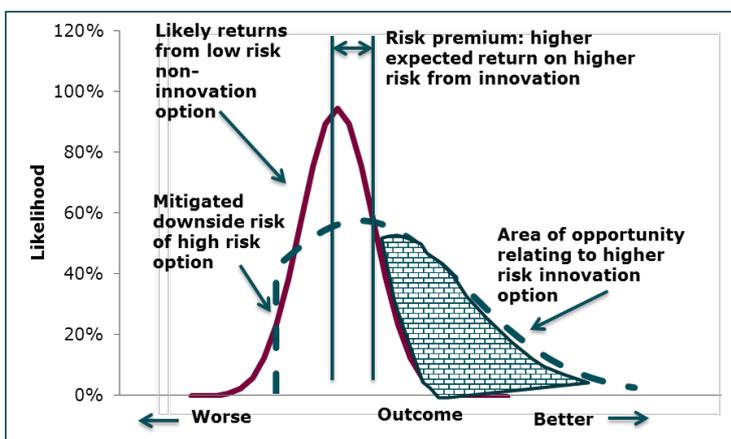
The common denominator in all these scenarios is that innovation is risky, not only because it is moving into unknown territory where the variability of possible outcomes is that much higher, but also because of the impact of destructive innovation has on stakeholders with an interest in the incumbent 'old' business.

Nevertheless, the other common point is that the risk of not innovating is often higher, certainly with the benefit of hindsight. So, one question is how can you mitigate the risk of innovation?

Mitigating risk in innovation

It makes sense to define the risk of innovation again around variability, and to revisit our normal curve as a way of representing this. By definition, our expected new return as a result of innovation is assumed to be higher than our current or non-innovation return. But the range of likely new innovation scenario returns is much higher than that of our current non-innovation returns – higher standard deviation indicates higher risk.

So, what if we use our 'inform'-based mitigation strategy and can reduce the likelihood of downside returns by effective research and market testing. The idea is that if testing reveals a lower than threshold level return, we stop further development. Then all of a sudden, our range of likely outcomes under the innovation scenario looks quite different. Our broader risky normal curve gets its left hand arm cut off. We stop the possibility of big losses arising from innovation that doesn't generate returns. Then when we examine our high risk innovation versus low risk status quo normal curves as shown below, we only see upside benefit from our higher risk option. That's the theory at least.



At Procter & Gamble this was referred to as 'minimising the cost of failure'. The idea is that we reduce cost, and therefore the risk of failed innovation, by having regular check points or gates at early stages in the process, which provide opportunities to check out of the innovation process before too much is invested. Our old friend 'loss aversion', and its close cousins 'cognitive inertia' and 'confirmation bias', are increasingly at work, seeking to trip this process up. At what point is too much invested in the process to feel comfortable to walk away with a guaranteed loss, while

there is always the chance that it could still be a successful gain? To what extent do we continue to look for reasons why the innovation may not be right, compared to our reasons for persevering?

The Silicon Valley phraseology for this kind of approach is 'failing fast'. The implication is that your expectation is managed because you expect to fail – the thing that's important is that it happens quickly, you learn quickly and move on. Speed is of the essence. It would appear that, not just because in a world where technology is supposedly changing fast and markets are changing swiftly, being ahead of your competition is a distinct advantage. But also, 'failing fast' means you have not got too fond of your pet project; it's not your baby to try and protect. As a result, cognitive inertia doesn't have a chance to set in. And 'failing fast' means you have not built up too much cost before it becomes sunk cost.

It takes a certain type of character (or deep pockets) to be able to walk away from a lot of sunk cost on an innovation project that is going nowhere. I was at Mars Confectionery as a management trainee, in my early career years, when I witnessed Forest Mars turn up to our offices in Slough and tell local management to start ripping up the Banjo line. Banjo was a chocolate wafer bar that was innovative because its main ingredient was a chocolate substitute, which was significantly lower cost than real chocolate. It had tested positively in research and test markets and gone to full production. The Banjo line was the biggest and most efficient in the factory, using latest technology, for packaging as well as product. However, it was not tracking to plan, and while it was achieving profit, it was not achieving the required level of return on assets that the Mars family set for all its businesses. As far as Mars was concerned, it was therefore taking up valuable space and management time which could be better employed on better ventures. So, it was stopped, and the investment written off. This type of risk mitigation is itself high risk for most business leaders.

To recap my proposition is that effective strategy and leadership takes the right risks, and this means mitigating them effectively too. Another mechanism behind taking the right types of innovative risks is a concept I have called Creative Juxtaposition.

Creative Juxtaposition

In the early pages of this book, I proposed that an effective risky strategy needed to find a place between the extreme errors of reckless risk-taking for its own sake, and cowardly risk-avoidance that avoids or postpones the making of tough choices. A strategy needs to be choiceful about risk.

Our research at Ashridge suggested that the optimal approach to risk was a combination of a formal analytical left-brain approach and an informal intuitive right-brain approach, a combination of System 1 and System 2 thinking, because either in isolation was fair game for organisational blind-siding or psychological illusions or traps. Both elephants and tigers are useful – the challenge is taking the right risk.

We understand that a passion for winning creates both an appetite and a need for some risk. But what happens when working in collaboration becomes a more useful paradigm for positive social change than beating competition? How do we bridge the tension between competition and collaboration, and what does it do for our readiness to make risky choices?

When we look at the exploits of apparently successful leaders, we notice a strange dichotomy between risk-taking and risk-avoidance, an ability to embrace both, keep both in tension, to be able to find those right risks to take and avoid the others. We enquire of those who appear to have risked all to achieve significant victories and hear that they are pre-occupied with avoiding risk wherever possible.

What is happening here?

I believe what is happening is a phenomenon I call Creative Juxtaposition. It's the idea that entities with apparently very different or even opposite polarities come together to bring creative and often positive results. Knowledge that comes from different sources, possibly referring to different subjects, combines to form great ideas – a breakthrough in new knowledge, a great strategy or even a new sense of victory. So much great new positive creative stuff seems to come to us in this way.

The origin of our tigers and elephants story set the scene for this idea. A fast and effective global launch of an electronic games product was achieved through the combination of methodical elephants and impetuous tigers somehow managing to work together to achieve business victory.

My favourite example of this comes from the world of mathematics – the heartland of formal risk theory. But the example is nothing to do with risk, or at least I have yet to see the connection! It is Pythagoras' theorem, which, if you remember from your school days, stated in rather cryptic fashion: 'The square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides'. It was the basis of much mathematical geometry, extended into other trigonometry, and thence into a wide range of practical science applications: wave theory in electrical engineering, or Newtonian physics as

applied to mechanical and structural engineering. So quite an important little foundation of knowledge of our world.

When I first learned about it, I remember enjoying working with it but never really appreciated the beauty of it, particularly as it relates initially to three consecutive whole numbers: 3, 4 and 5. Working Pythagoras backwards, you have the idea that if you construct a triangle with sides of length exactly 3 units, 4 units and 5 units, the angle between the shorter sides will be an exact right-angle. The beauty for me is that it should be exact – it's not an approximation, which is rare in interplay between numbers and physical objects. It seems like an extraordinary coincidence of nature – for me, it suggests deliberate design in the heart of our universe. By contrast, the number which defines a perfect circle, Pi, is a long way from being an exact whole number.

So where does Creative Juxtaposition come into this? It's in the discovery of the theorem. Pythagoras was a Greek philosopher and mathematician, who lived around 500 BC. The fact that he specialised in both disciplines already sets the scene for our 'coming together. We speculate that he learned about triangles and right angles in Egypt, where perfect right angles would have been important, for example, in the construction of the pyramids. It would have been impossible to have constructed them without perfectly right-angled corner stones, as the resulting structure would not have been based on a perfect square as we witness today. He would have learned in particular that something like a papyrus reed folded into 12 exact segments, could then be folded into a triangle of sides length 3 notches, 4 notches and 5 notches, and that this would form a perfect right-angle.

Quite separately, he learned of arithmetic from Phoenicia, in which he would have learned about the properties of numbers multiplied by themselves, squares. And the curious idea that the squares of three sequential whole numbers, 3, 4 and 5 are related by the equation: 3 squared added to 4 squared are equal in quantity to 5 squared. He would have recalled his lessons on papyrus and pyramid construction and noted that the numbers representing the sides of his right angled triangle could actually be related arithmetically. Who was it that then, I wonder, who asked: "I wonder if you would find the same numerical relationship of side dimensions in all triangles with right angles"? And through this process of combining different disciplines of knowledge, amazing new knowledge with wide reaching usefulness is born. We have the process of Creative Juxtaposition.

I see this idea of Creative Juxtaposition at the heart of all sorts of different forms of creativity. The atoms of hydrogen gas and oxygen gas combine to form the most unlikely and miraculous of molecules, the water molecule. Animals of different genders combine to create new life. Animal and plant combine in pollenisation to create new plant life and food for animals. There's Gilbert & Sullivan, Morecambe & Wise, Flanders & Swan, Marks & Spencer, Procter & Gamble. In Chinese tradition, there is the idea in Yin and Yang, that contrasting concepts, light and dark, sunny and shady, sun and moon, combine to create a whole picture. This book explores a number of yin and yangs that combine to create something bigger than the sum of its parts: risk and strategy, tiger and elephant, danger and opportunity.

Buytendijk picks up on this idea when he talks about working with dilemmas and combining contracts. (Buytendijk, 2010) He gives examples: Senseo is a one-touch button machine for espresso coffee based on collaboration between Philips and Douwe Egberts: Philips created the appliance; Douwe Egberts a special blend of coffee. Or there is the Nike+ system, a collaboration between Nike and Apple where a Bluetooth sensor that fits in your Nike shoe sends running statistics to your iPod. In fact, part of the innovation gifting of Steve Jobs was to bring ideas from different sources together: artful design and functional technology, extreme secrecy and an open market for applications.

Strategic Intuition

Creative Juxtaposition is the cousin of strategic intuition, a concept I learned about from a book of that subject by a professor at Columbia University, William Duggan. (Duggan, 2007). His idea, in part at least, is that in great strategic breakthroughs, left brain and right brain thinking combine to birth new thinking. The closest to the language that I have been using is that tigers and elephants get together. On top of that, you have elephants that are already great at synthesising different ideas, so you get a kind of double whammy. He takes his examples from the worlds of science, combat, business and religion.

In science, for example, he talks about Thomas Kuhn's "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" expose of how scientific achievement really happens and explains some of the origins of the scientific method. We see Creative Juxtaposition in the combination of the Greeks and the later work of Copernicus and Newton. Newton says as much that he could never have come up with his own breakthroughs in thinking, contributing to massive engineering innovation, without drawing from the ideas of those who came before. He writes: "If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants". Kuhn develops this idea of scientists standing in a bend in the road, looking backwards to where they have come from, and forwards to where they are going, and it's in this place that the new thinking occurs.

When Duggan turns then to examples of strategic intuition in combat, he draws on the strategic work of von Clausewitz, who had in turn been heavily influenced by the achievements of one Napoleon Bonaparte. Von Clausewitz in his book on strategy "On War", describes the concept of "Coup d'oeil" as the key to strategy, in explaining the success of Napoleon. He sets out to explain the flashes of insight for which Napoleon was known throughout his life, using this concept. He is able to combine different key pieces of information: his knowledge of artillery and what it is capable of; his understanding of recent battle encounters with the British fleet, and his knowledge of the geography around Toulon. These lead to an insight in which he predicts that when artillery achieve a position on a certain hill, the English fleet will leave. The rest is history – his victory at Toulon propelled Napoleon to high position in France and was the first of many famous victories.

Duggan then lists examples of strategic intuition in the business world. Steve Jobs combines the inventions of his Silicon Valley colleagues with understanding of great design, with understanding of market economics – and the Apple Mac is born. Bill Gates and Paul Allen combine the knowledge of machine programming code with the appearance of the new small computer, the Altair. And so, software programmed into microcomputers arrives – and a big player, IBM is looking for a partner to help tap into the micro market. His resolution in pursuing that opportunity was the pivotal moment for the success of Microsoft. A similarly intriguing story played out in the founding of Google – see the box

These leaders in science, combat and business all are able to take the right risks, leading to big steps forward in their particular fields. Those right risks come from both an analytical elephant approach, and an intuitive tiger approach. The appropriate analysis together with the insight leads both to the breakthrough and the resolve to take the risk to make it real.

I believe there is another key ingredient that paves the way for this Creative Juxtaposition to happen at all; one phrase for it is Intelligent Ignorance.

Intelligent Ignorance

I believe at the heart of effective innovation is a concept that I love the sound of: Intelligent Ignorance. This is connected to a phenomenon I have increasingly become aware of in the work we do at Ashridge, and particularly in my executive coaching. This idea is that the question is worth more than the answer. Very simply, I suppose, the recognition or acceptance that we don't know leads us to want to find out more, and it is this process that really leads to breakthrough insights.

Stuart Firestein gave a TED talk in 2012 and has written a book Ignorance: How it Drives Science (Firestein, 2012), which sets out the case for Intelligent Ignorance. His favourite proverb appears to be: "It is difficult to find a black cat in a dark room, especially when there is no cat". He tells us that while science is taught in schools and text books as what we know, this distorts the real world of science. Scientists generally spend most of their lives with what we don't know. It is indeed more about questions than answers. There is the lament that the more we know, the more we know that we don't know. He quotes two great scientists: a) Marie Curie, who said after obtaining her second graduate degree: "One never notices what has been done; only what remains to be done" and, b) James Clerk Maxwell, who said: "Thoroughly conscious ignorance is the prelude to every real advance in science".

The challenge with this, however, is that we still need to make decisions and take risks, even though we don't know. The irony is that the mindset of Intelligent Ignorance that got us to the breakthrough insight is the enemy of the mindset that would now take a risky decision. So, it is a relatively rare skill to be able to hold both in tension: the 'not knowing' and the 'decision to act'.

Commerce and public management are the pragmatic ends of science. Good science, as Firestein argues, needs to celebrate and work with ignorance, as this is the basis for new science and ultimately for innovation. Pure science doesn't need to make premature decisions about truth, nor about the application of that truth. It only needs to make decisions about methods for working with ignorance. Firestein talks about Faraday, whose amazing discoveries about electricity have led to a very different world. But he had no idea what electricity might be good for. When asked about possible uses of electromagnetic fields, he responded: "Of what use is a new-born baby?"

Another example Firestein gives us is the PET scanner; PET stands for Positron Emission Tomography. They are used in hospitals, often combined with other scanners, to give a more complete picture of the internal workings of the body. It is particularly used in diagnosing cancer and the progress of cancer treatment. In 1928, the physicist Paul Dirac was investigating electrons in quantum mechanical terms, and proposed there must be an anti-electron, a positron, to fit with a proposed quantum mechanics equation, But no one had ever observed a positron until an experiment by another physicist, Carl Andersen, using new technology called cloud chambers, discovered the existence of positrons. Neither Dirac nor Andersen had any idea of an application for this discovery, it was just work in aid of discovering more about the unknown. 40 years later, the knowledge about the positron was used in developing an important new piece of medical technology. Actually, we witnessed another example of creative juxtaposition, as the science of positrons was combined with knowledge of new tomographic imaging techniques and advances in computer technology.

At the pragmatic end of the spectrum, the crunch comes when a decision is needed to commit significant resources to the unknown. It's as if what is needed is an amazing cocktail of discipline in synthesising what is known, humility in accepting a level of ignorance, and the boldness to act regardless. This sounds remarkably like Jim Collins' recipe for effective business leadership in "Good to Great" (Collins, 2001) – the combination of humility, discipline and resolve. These resonate with the character attributes that we investigate with the Blonay Character Profiler: Bold Creative, Empathic and Self-Disciplined.

All of this links with the idea of creative failure, and the Silicon Valley 'fail fast' mindset that I referred to in Chapter 6 on tigers. Matthew Syed in his book Black Box Thinking (Syed, 2015) makes the case for why failure is essential to success and to creative breakthroughs. He outlines the process of interrogating errors as an integral part of a strategy for success - and he contrasts the different approach of the aviation industry and healthcare. The former rigorously declare and examine mistakes - including near mistakes - in order to reduce aviation accidents with incredible statistics to back up how aviation safety has improved over the last few decades. Sadly, there is no such culture in healthcare, and there has sadly been no such reduction in deaths through healthcare mistakes over the decades. There is clearly something different in the character of both types of organisation – a factor I will explore more in Chapter 12 on Organisational Character.

The creative juxtaposition of pulling together what we do know to address what is not known, the intuition that combines and believes we have something worth deciding on, and the resolve then to act on that and see it through are the marks of Duggan's Strategic Intuition (Duggan, 2007), and von Clausewitz' Coup. D'oeil (Clausewitz, 1976). It is the point where tiger and elephant meet.

Innovation often needs that breakthrough moment, followed by the resolve to see it through. In a sense a breakthrough is a Black Swan: no one really expects it to happen. Just as you are thinking, "Oh no, here we go, just a load more white swans", up pops a black one! You have a "Eureka" moment in the bath, or the gravity apple lands on your head. So, the point about Black Swans is that they can be good things. They can also be very bad things. In both counts, what's both glorious and frustrating about them is that they are hard to plan for.

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