



INNOVATE THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Oli Barrett: In this series we are tackling some of the biggest challenges facing organisations and how they can equip themselves to navigate through an increasingly uncertain time. I'm joined by Andy Young, Managing Director from Accenture's Talent and Organisation division, and Matt Kingdon, co-founder of ?WhatIf! Innovation. We'll discover how organisations and respond to everything that's been happening and how they can innovate through uncertainty. Andy can I start with you. Just tell us why you think innovation is so important right now.

Andy Young: Well Oli I think over the last few months we can all say that we've been a massive disruption – our lives and in business – but we don't want to make light of the personal consequences of that for people. But in business and in organisations that disruption's meant both lots of challenges to work through but also lots of opportunity. It's sort of been like a time machine where things that were not possible for many, many years were suddenly shot forwards three to five years in a matter of weeks. Things that were not possible before have suddenly become possible because we've got around them and we've solved them in a very intense situation. And I think as we kind of look forward into the future of how we go back to work or go forwards into work, we've got an aspect of choice. That question about how do we make the new normal better than the old normal was.

Oli Barrett: And Matt, you live and breathe innovation at ?WhatIf!. I just wonder whether the lockdown is rocket fuel for innovators or whether it really puts the hand break on. What's your view?

Matt Kingdon: Well going into lockdown I like a lot of people was concerned about how one could possibly innovate with a group of people, like isn't it all to do with collaboration and being close together and sort of that kind of – reading each other's faces and things like that. But I've been very pleasantly surprised because one of the keys to innovation is to be able to reach out into people's lives and understand the problems they face and really get under the skin of why they do or say what they do and in a funny way working remotely has allowed us to be actually more intimate with people and sometimes even turning a camera off can help. So, you know, we've been able to get really quite personal with people in their homes, as couples or as friendship pairs, talking about their lives and so far we haven't noticed a lot fidelity in terms of receiving those messages from the future as it were.

Oli Barrett: So it sounds like you're already saying this is a time for reflection and also the opportunity to have even better conversations.

Matt Kingdon: If I think about myself and my family, probably the same for lots of people who're listening, we have talked a lot about the future. We've talked much more about the future than we've ever talked before – like what do we want to stop doing and what new things do we want to start doing? And that has to be a very fertile ground for innovation everywhere.

Oli Barrett: So Andy, the scene is set, innovating matters more than ever. How do we begin to do that, what will we need to change? Is it our behaviours? Is it how were structured? Give us some first thoughts.



Andy Young: Well a lot of that's started already Oli. So in the response to having to leave the workplace, there was a lot of innovation happening very quickly and continues as people embrace new digital ways of working – you know, how we collaborate across large organisations or with customers in different ways. As we're going back into the new normal, let's try and make the new normal better than the old normal was, again there's a lot of opportunity for innovation within that. And I think that the challenge that most businesses find is not that there's a shortage of ideas, you know if they can get the ideas flying from their customers and from their people, there's not a shortage of ideas, it's actually how do we start to scale and make those a reality.

Oli Barrett: Yeah and Matt, say a bit more about this because we're talking here about how we create those conditions, how we make people feel safe, how we make work environments more inclusive. Just give us some practical tips on how to make those changes.

Matt Kingdon: It's a great leveler, the times at the moment, because were all sitting in our various rooms in our homes, we've got our cats and dogs jumping onto the table while we're talking to each other, we've got people interrupting offering us cups of teas and things like that, and I think this window into each other's home lives has brought a degree of humanity and possibly a degree of kindness I think to the whole process. So, I do feel that in a sense we're getting better at maybe prioritising what's important and what's not important and that is one of the key things for innovation. Too many things don't get done and most organisations have too many things going on. So a bit of kindness, the important things bubbling to the top, we'll never get everything done our end in tray, and let's just make things happen. I think they all come and go together as a wonderful virtual circle.

Oli Barrett: And rather wonderfully matt as you were making that point the door creaked in a very intriguing way, and a listener will wonder 'I wonder who that was peering into Matt's room'.

Andy, you were probably wondering that as Matt was giving that answer, but on a more serious note I think we're talking about being a bit more human aren't we?

Andy Young: We absolutely are. So that serendipitous moment like the creaking door or someone bringing in the cup of coffee, the human connection, that's been a thing we've been working on remotely or global teams for a long time. How do we make sure those human connections still happen? How do we make sure that those people at the end of the video conference or the end of the phone line – how do we make sure they feel as included as the people physically with you in the workplace. That's a very, very human thing to do, and that means a little bit of cadence and a little bit of rhythm to it as well to make sure those things that – especially as we turn back into some teams being physically together and some still being remote – how we make sure those human behaviours still happen. But also how we make sure the collaboration and the alignment of work around the priorities that we have, so that idea about aligned autonomy that was popularized by Netflix, the idea about how do you make sure the teams that we have stay focused on the right things. If they're physically not together, how do we do that not through super vision, but how do we do that through making sure that these teams operate in sync with each other and you know the right hand knows what the left hand is doing.

Oli Barrett: Right, and Andy you peaked my interest there. When you say aligned or autonomy, what's another way of saying that?

Andy Young: We know that autonomy in work drives performance. We know it drives motivation, we know it drives creativity because people feel more empowered to decide and act, obviously within reasonable and sensible boundaries. But this idea about autonomy is 'oh we all run off and do our own thing and don't focus on the things that matter right now' is obviously clearly really important



as we have been through the crisis and are now starting to emerge from that. So, we have to be focused on the right things as businesses for our customers, for the health of our organisations. So how do we operate in sync with each other, communicating with each other, being clear about who has the accountability who has the ball on a certain task or a certain priority. We could operate with more empowerment and more individual accountability as individuals and teams, but then we could still stay focused on the right things that need to be solved for right now.

Oli Barrett: Yeah, understood. Matt, can I go back to a word that Andy has used around 'serendipity'. You have quite literally written a book on this subject and many organisations will be thinking how do I recreate those corridor conversations, those accidental moments, now that my company is sometimes newly distanced, working from home much more even after lockdown. Give us some practical tips, how do we recreate that magic.

Matt Kingdon: Well I think within the you know very hard times for a lot of people that we're in at the moment, there are some positives for innovation. I think we're going to see a more hybrid way of working where some people are maybe at work for a couple of days a week and some people are at home for two, three, four days a week, something like that. So I think the opportunities to bump into people will still be there and in fact I think we'll value it even more. I think time together in the office won't be time where we're kind of hidden away in our dill-lit cubicles. They will be time where we're kind of almost embracing each other if we're allowed to do that in the future – like 'I haven't seen you for a while, what are you doing here, what are you working on, can I help with that, tell me about this it's got nothing to do with what I'm doing but you never know, we might make a connection.' I can see how we might kind of super concentrate that opportunity to be serendipitous and at the same time when we're not in the office, what we're doing is we're right in the kind of crucible of innovation because hopefully we're in the street,

we're talking to friends, we're in the pub, with our family, and this is where innovation is born from. It's born from generally idle conversations where somebody's frustrated about something, and somebody else has the good sense to listen into it and pick up on it. So, a potential recipe for innovation coming up in this sort of post-lockdown world sees super-concentrated serendipity and the ability to have our antennae more out there picking up those signals from the future.

Oli Barrett: So Andy, finally, it sounds like we have so many opportunities through this uncertainty, and actually for organisations and individuals we have some big choices to make.

Andy Young: Absolutely. We've got choices to make in our teams and as individuals about how we want to work, but also as a business about how we want to solve in waves for the unfolding nature of this crisis and the economic impacts of that on our different industries. And that's very much about us as leaders continuing to listen and be empathetic with our customers and with our people and responding to those concerns and the opportunities in a very human way. But I think also really importantly it's about how we build safety and trust with people, about how we help the person who maybe has a dissenting voice to speak up and speak about the concern, or the person who has the half-formed idea to bring that to the table. And that might be the idea that really you know makes or saves your company.

Oli Barrett: Fantastic well Andy, Matt, you both got us thinking about why it's such an important time and also how to create the conditions to be more innovative. Matt Kingdon, Andy Young thank you very much.

Matt Kingdon: Thanks Oli.

Andy Young: Thanks Oli.

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