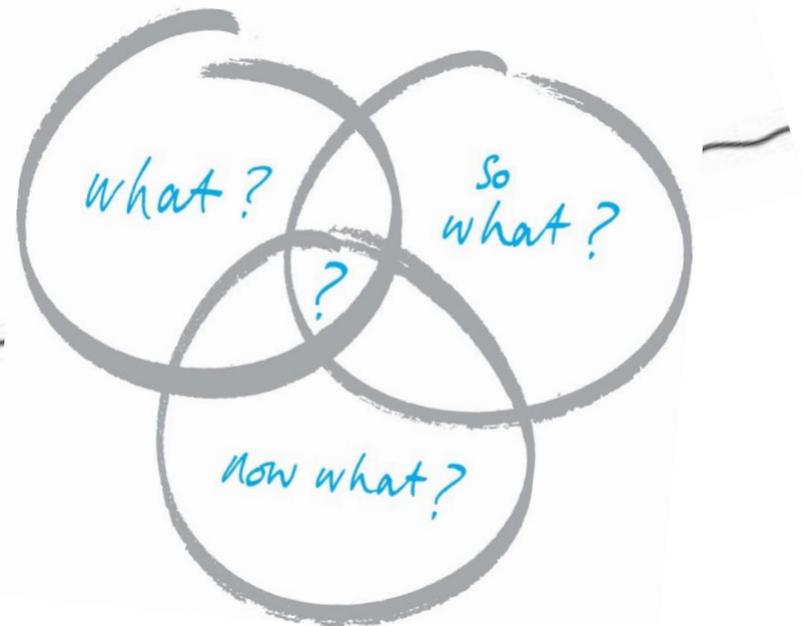
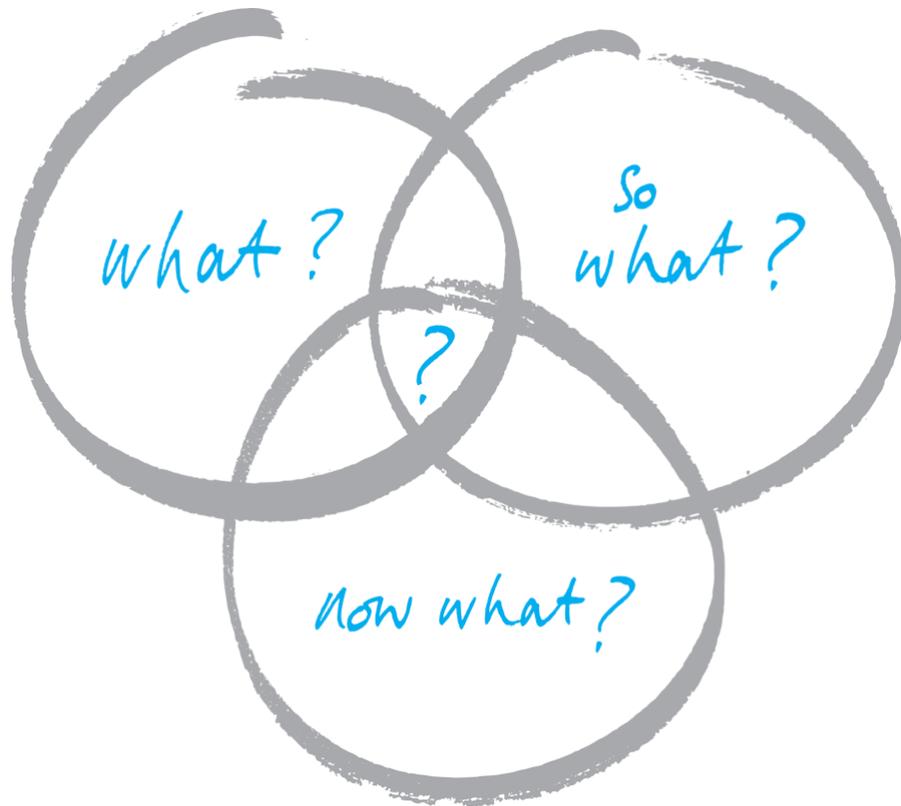


Our Method

The ThreeWhats Approach



ThreeWhats Playbooks



The Method

ThreeWhats



Simplicity is the final achievement. After one has played a vast quantity of notes and more notes, it is simplicity that emerges as the crowning reward of art.

Frederic Chopin

We write guidance for busy leaders, managers and decision-makers. We distil our years of experience into guidance which we produce as Playbooks. Each Playbook follows a theme, based on our work with, for, and around, high performers - individuals, teams and organisations.

Wrapped around our Playbooks we provide summaries called Sketchbooks. These are one-page posters which describe our thinking on the theme. We also do book reviews, called Snapshots, and video case studies, called Stories. That's the ThreeWhats package!

So, what makes us unique? Simplicity itself!

Our Method is always to ask the right question in the right way at the right time. All our guidance is framed around the same three questions – What? So What? Now What?

It can't be simplified further.

Our Method

Experience tells us where to go to ask the questions.

We go to three sources:

- our own and others' professional insights,
- reliable and proven evidence,
- authentic examples.

We filter out what's irrelevant, so you don't need to.

Our work with high performing individuals, teams and organisations throws up themes. The same themes recur. They cluster around leadership, management and decision-making. So, we organise and share our offer around these. We provide what you need in accessible formats.

Once we have a theme, we apply the first stage of our method. We examine the theme.

- Source it – can we curate what we know about the theme and why it matters?
- Slow it – if we take our time, can we look again and untangle the issues and what may lie behind?
- Simplify and Shorten it – is it possible, and desirable, to summarise and simplify the key messages?
- Share it – is it suitable to be made available in our ThreeWhats formats?

Then we're ready. We describe the theme – the What. We reflect on the challenges provided – the So What. We offer guidance on how you could proceed – the Now What. That's it – ThreeWhats.



What?

Start with What. Keep it simple. Ask the question. What is your challenge, your dilemma, your opportunity, your offer?

Our Method is to be direct. By asking 'what' you get to the nub of the issue straight away. The response to the question has to be sharpened to a single point – 'what is your challenge, your dilemma, your opportunity, your offer?' This directs you to the essentials and establishing questions such as these allow further questions to flow. If you start with 'why?' as Simon Sinek and others suggest, it leads to justification, then off the point explanations and anecdotes. In other words, licence to waffle!

As there are, in our experience, problems with problems - it's as though they're hidden in the middle of dense fog - you have to ask what questions to get to the problem. In order to solve a problem, you need to begin by defining the problem. By attempting to define the problem or have the other person define the problem, you often find there is no problem.



It's painstaking at first but eventually the fog lifts so that by the time the 'What' questions are asked and answered there's a clearer all-round picture of the problem and some possible solutions.

What questions are looseners. They loosen people up. They encourage whoever is being asked to take their time and gradually establish if it really is a problem or perhaps an issue of perception.

What questions are also agitators. They deliberately provoke. They force you to switch constantly between problem and solution. It's painstaking at first but eventually the fog lifts so that by the time the 'What' questions are asked and answered there's a clearer all-round picture of the problem and some possible solutions.

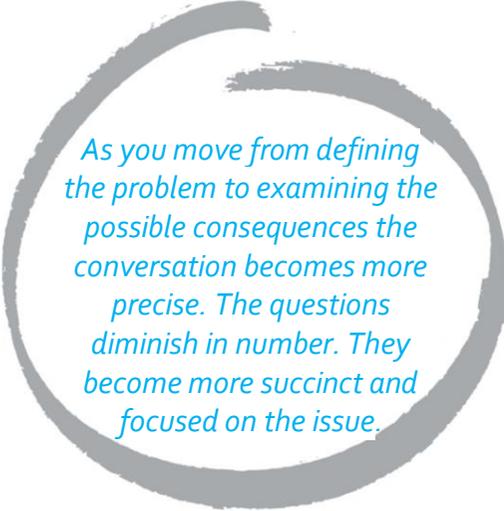
What questions declutter. They get to the real intent. By examining what the individual is prepared to sacrifice in order to resolve their issue we find out how significant it actually is. Projecting forward also helps at the 'What' stage - If it won't matter in three years' time how much does it matter now?

So What?

Ask So What? By following a definition of the problem with an examination of the consequence you create an agenda for action. These questions are intended to be reflective.

So what - is a great question. It can be seen in your mind's eye straight away. It comes with a slight sneer and a shrug of the shoulders. Its disdainful, potentially threatening. It's a question with attitude and it can be exactly the right question, asked in the right way at the right time. So, ask it, we do!

So What? As you move from defining the problem to examining the possible consequences the conversation becomes more precise. The questions diminish in number. They become more succinct and focused on the issue. It may be now that flaws in logic become more apparent. What at first seemed like an objective appraisal of a performance is in fact an emotional hijacking. It happens to most of us!



As you move from defining the problem to examining the possible consequences the conversation becomes more precise. The questions diminish in number. They become more succinct and focused on the issue.

So What questions interrogate consequences. They ask what might happen as a result of action and inaction. This has the effect of painting scenarios. It is useful to do it in a structured conversation because it is going to happen anyway! For some individuals it's a form of catastrophising, in other words imagining disasters. For others optimism bias kicks in and it's a rosy future.

A question like *'If your performance remains the same what is the consequence for you and others?'* is intended to frame the challenge from a different perspective. Similarly, *If your performance improves what are the benefits for you and others?* is a question intended to test the worth of the extra effort involved.

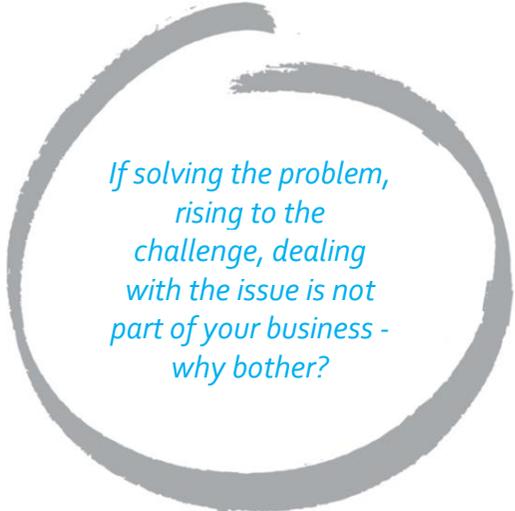
ThreeWhats

High Performance Insights
The Method Playbook

Another way of testing the worth of the extra effort involved is to project forward: *"In a years' time what would it look like if it were successful?"* Often this is done by scenario painting through *'if-then'* projections: 'if this happens then what does it mean for ...' On a more formal scale, the technique of 'future basing' where a 'base' in the future is agreed and time is then spent describing in detail what success looks and feels like for that agreed future, is used in organisational planning. It also works very well with individuals and teams.

So What questions identify who's affected. They track through to who it would involve. If you're stood by the river watching the debris float by don't spend your days wading in, pulling it all out and dragging it to the banks, go upstream and find out what's causing it. The right questions probe the likely impact downstream. It's a helpful consideration. it may change the upstream attitudes and behaviours.

So What questions test commitment. They ask what can be sacrificed. Meaningful things don't happen without some sort of sacrifice. By asking 'if you wish this to happen what would you be prepared to give up?' you are entering a point where engagement bites.



*If solving the problem,
rising to the
challenge, dealing
with the issue is not
part of your business -
why bother?*

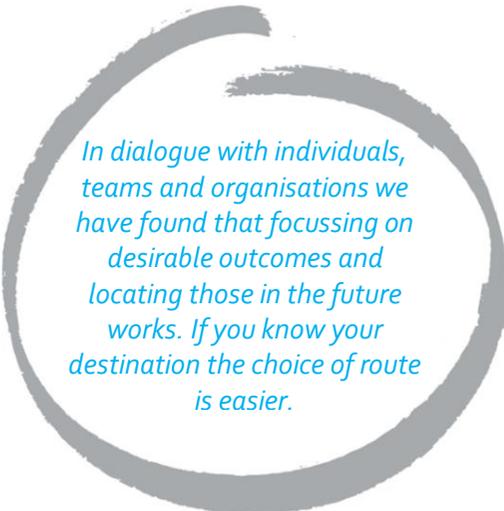
Now What?

Finish with Now What? You've defined the problem; you've examined the consequences and now you need to act going forward. These questions are intended to be speculative.

Now what questions are the sort of movie characters ask when they find themselves in a pickle. In movies they come at the point where all other obvious alternatives have been exhausted. Think Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid escaping by jumping off a cliff "Why won't you jump? I can't swim" or Chief Brody saying "You're gonna need a bigger boat" from Jaws or "Houston we have a problem" from Apollo 13. Now what signals the moment when decisive action begins. In dialogue with individuals, teams and organisations we have found that focussing on desirable outcomes and locating those in the future works. If you know your destination the choice of route is easier. Seems simple. It is. Starting with the clutter loses you in the clutter.

Now What questions engage with solutions. It's a piece of magic to suspend all the reasons for not doing what's needed in order to free thinking about what is actually needed. The envisaged solution needn't be perfect at this stage. It needs to a. exist, b. be a focal point for thinking, and c. come from whoever you are in dialogue with. Solution focused thinking clears the clutter and if you like the clutter you can have it back later!

Now What questions landmark the journey. If our agreed destination is a to have solution at some time in the future then dwelling on the solution – what it looks like, what it costs, who is involved, what resources are needed – helps define how you get to the solution.



In dialogue with individuals, teams and organisations we have found that focussing on desirable outcomes and locating those in the future works. If you know your destination the choice of route is easier.

Now What questions anticipate and position likely impediments. The key words here are 'anticipate' and 'position'. Anticipating a difficulty is part of planning to overcome it. Positioning a difficulty – 'we'll cross that bridge when we come to it' is keeping things in perspective and not allowing potential problems to overwhelm you. Finally, Now What questions initiate the journey. They ask about next steps.

Success Stories

We use our ThreeWhats model to summarise our knowledge and experience. We also use the model when working alongside our high performers. These are some of questions and the thinking behind them.

What

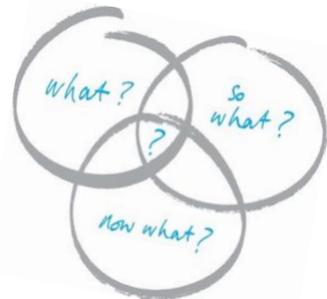
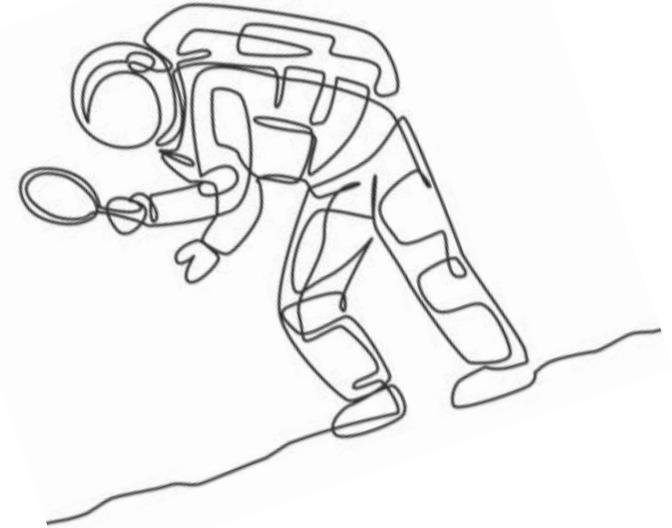
1. *Ask a question which directs you to the issue*
2. *Check the evidence for the belief that it's a real issue*
3. *Get specific comparisons of better 'performance' from their own experience*
4. *Mine their experience for examples of what would now be better and more desirable*
5. *Test if they are prepared to give something up to get it*

So What?

1. *Find out what would happen if we do nothing*
2. *Establish the likely consequences of an improvement, especially for others*
3. *Consider what might be missing in helping get the desired improvement*
4. *In the light of this what are they prepared to do to get it – push hard on this, words are easy!*

Now What?

1. *In order to work towards the overall improvement, what might be the next step*
2. *Nail down what must be done to make that next step– push hard on this too, words are easy!*
3. *End by agreeing specific strategies to overcome barriers and get moving*



Success Story One.

Helping the athlete who was disappointed about a performance. A professional tennis player needs help.

To recap. Our Method is always to ask the right question in the right way at the right time – the right question is usually the hard question. All our guidance is framed around the same three – What? So What? Now What?

"I'm really unhappy about my performance, I let myself down."

What

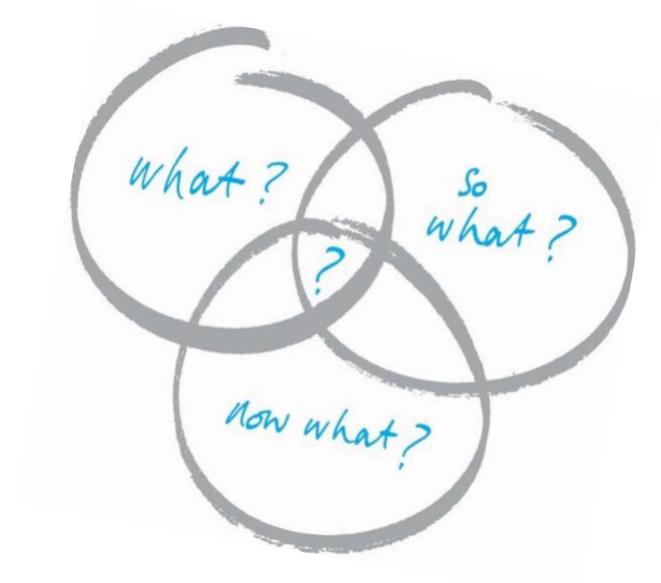
- What is it about your performance which is making you unhappy?
- What is the evidence for your judgement?
- What past performances of your own can you compare with?
- What for you would a really great performance look like?
- What would you give up to get this?

So What?

- If your performance remains the same what is the consequence for you and others?
- If your performance improves what are the benefits for you and others?
- What might you need to know more of, or do more of, to improve your performance?
- What are you prepared to do to achieve the performance you want?

Now What?

- What is the next step to achieve the performance you want?
- What might prevent the next step to achieve the performance you want?
- What are you prepared to do to overcome barriers towards the next step?

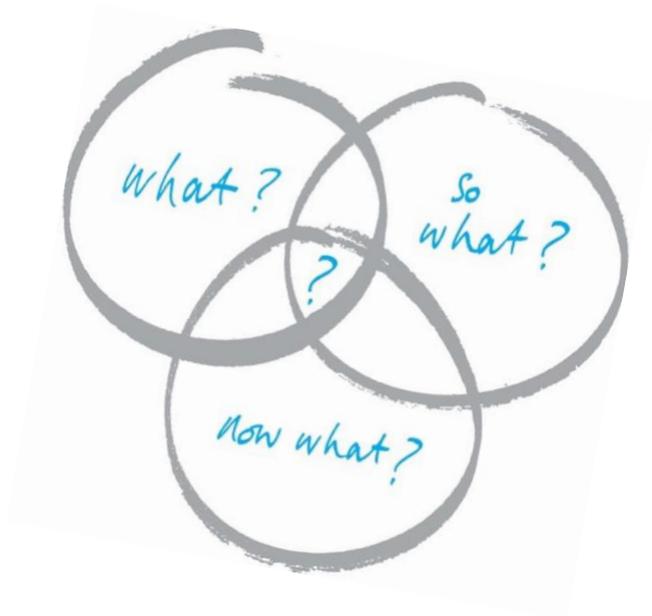


Success Story Two.

Helping the business team to build cohesion. A tech start-up has lost its mojo.

To recap. Our Method is always to ask the right question in the right way at the right time – the right question is usually the hard question. All our guidance is framed around the same three – What? So What? Now What?

"Our team don't get along. We bicker and fall out. Every meeting is a bun fight!"



What

- What for you are the characteristics of a cohesive team?
- What for you is important about team cohesion?
- What does your team do which frustrates you?
- What is the evidence for your judgement?
- What ought your team do to improve?

So What?

- If nothing changes what are the consequences?
- What do your team members say about cohesiveness?
- What might help the team become more cohesive?
- What would you and team members give up to be more cohesive?

Now What?

- What is the next step to becoming more cohesive?
- What barriers might prevent this next step?
- What would you and team members do to overcome these barriers?

Success Story Three.

Supporting the organisation whose workforce was demotivated and unproductive. A finance company lacks urgency.

To recap. Our Method is always to ask the right question in the right way at the right time – the right question is usually the hard question. All our guidance is framed around the same three – What? So What? Now What?

“Our workforce is demotivated. Our productivity figures frighten me.”

What

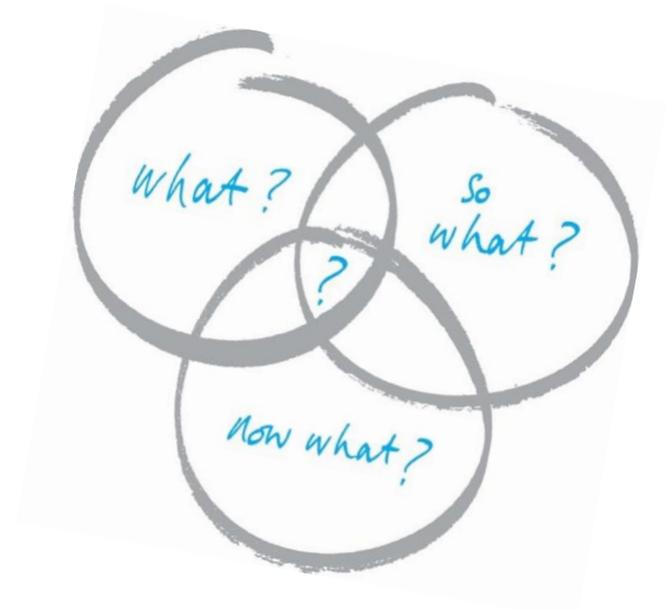
- What behaviours persuade you that your workforce is demotivated?
- What is the evidence for your judgement?
- What would your workforce be like if it were motivated?
- What is there about your workforce which suggest they can be motivated?
- What might have to change for your workforce to be motivated?

So What?

- If nothing changes what are the consequences?
- What do the workforce say about their motivation?
- If the workforce were more motivated what would that look like?
- What are you prepared to do more of, or less of, to achieve what you want?

Now What?

- What is the next step in helping your workforce to be motivated?
- What barriers might prevent this next step?
- What would you and your workforce do to overcome these barriers?



Finally,

All high performing individuals, teams and organisations have similarities in how they mobilise for success. The operational realities may differ, the systems and structures will differ, the contexts will always differ, but the intentions and sentiments remain clear. ThreeWhats is no different. We are driven by a very clear core purpose. Our intent drives our everyday behaviours. Our sentiments are embodied in our values, these values frame how we approach relationships – with each other, with others and with the content which we source. And so ...

Core purpose

To generate valuable insights and guidance by asking the only questions which matter. To bring knowledge and experience of high performers to leaders, managers and decision-makers.

Values

Our values are what we bring to our work how we build and sustain relationships and how we support our crew.

- Curiosity – curiosity allows to be open minded about ideas and opportunities
- Diversity – diversity, not only in people we support and value, but in how we think
- Simplicity – simplicity ensures accessibility which in turn drives inclusivity
- Trust – give in order to receive

Free for you online

We work with, for, and around, high performers - individuals, teams and organisations. We take our experiences and create guidance. To do so we follow a formula. We find a theme, knowledge and understanding of which will help busy leaders, managers and decision-makers.

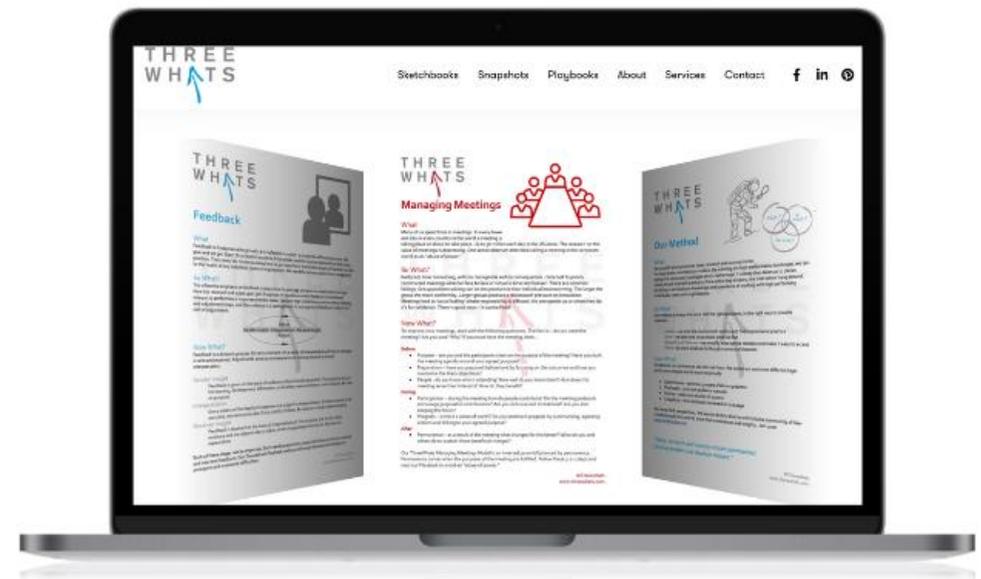
Our first themes included – Managing Difficult Conversations, Effective Meetings, Rejuvenating After Lockdown, Decision-Making, Effective Teams, Beating Bias, Applying Nudge Theory, Presentation Skills, Feedback, Motivation and Dealing with Conspiracy Theorists.

For each theme we source information, revisit and scrutinise it, simplify into key messages and put it into our ThreeWhats format. You can find them all along with our ThreeWhats Playbooks, Sketchbooks, Stories and Snapshot Book Reviews on our website [here](https://www.threewhats.com)

Join our Community

Enjoy our Sketchbooks, Playbooks, Snapshots Book Reviews and Success Stories.

Be part of our Community and join our Crew. Help us grow and share.



References

The following books have provoked our thinking as we developed the Model.

You can read the Snapshot Reviews of each book on our site.



Thanks for the Feedback, by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen, 2014

An Everyone Culture by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow, 2016

The Trust Factor: The Science of Creating High Performance Companies, Paul Zak, 2017

Seeing What Others Don't by Gary Klein, 2013

Nudge by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, 2008

Thinking, Fast and Slow, Daniel Kahneman, 2011

The Fearless Organisation, by Amy C Edmondson, 2018



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