

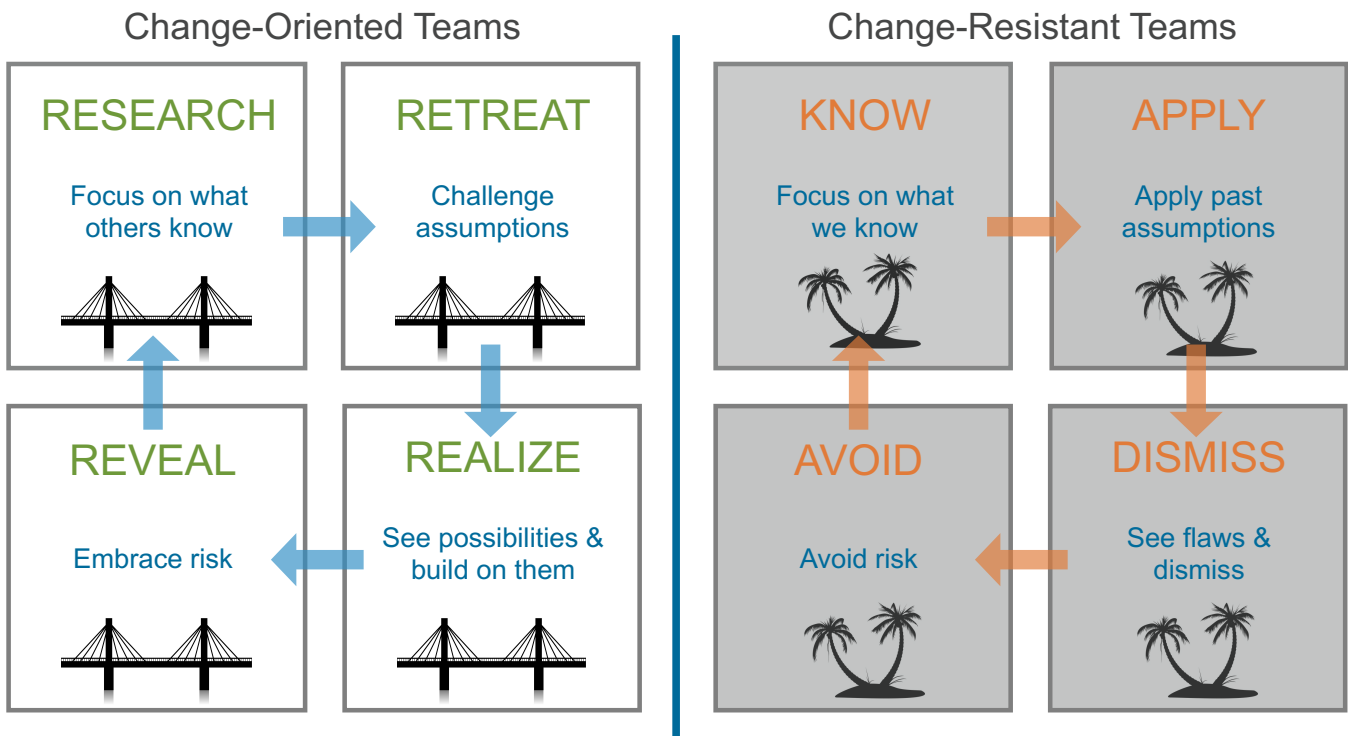


Building a Culture for Innovation

with Andy Zimney of Employee Strategies, Inc.

Today's Teams:

- Are dealing with more rapid change than ever before
- Are often tasked with building bridges across untested and ambiguous waters
- Need a CULTURE that supports the right practices and mindsets for change and innovation



**Strategy
is what
you think.**

**Culture is
what you
do.**



The 4 Stages of the Improviser’s Strategy

RESEARCH • LISTEN



The Research Stage is about deep listening with a mindset of responsibility to the people we serve (e.g. customers, colleagues, employees, etc.) This stage draws on what we have already experienced and couples it with a deep and present curiosity for what is not yet understood.

An improviser must be hyper-tuned to learning as much as possible about the world in which they operate so that they can respond as effectively as possible.

In a RESEARCH culture we:

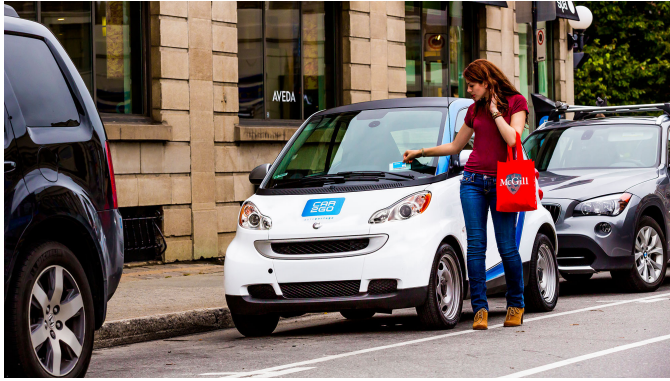
- Ask lots of curious questions
- Focus on those we serve
- Expect that we will constantly learn and grow

Key Questions

- What do you already know about the change you are working to navigate?
- What don’t you know or fully understand?
- What questions haven’t you asked yet?
- What sort of RESEARCH might help you see more completely? What people, companies, organizations, authors, etc. have experience solving even part of the problem you are working to solve?



RETREAT • REFRAME



The Retreat Stage involves using the mode of the brain that neuroscientists call the “default mode” or “mind-wandering mode”. While in “mind-wandering mode” the brain finds and maps connections between our bits of research.

An improviser is constantly looking for ways to reframe challenges or mundane details into strategic opportunities to create value. In this stage, we are looking to get past obvious assumptions, find new connections and “get outside of the box”.

In a RESEARCH culture we:

- Challenge “the way it’s always been done”
- Fill whiteboards with lots of ideas
- Build in time for “mind-wandering”

Key Questions

- Are there things that have seemed true about this challenge in the past that may not be true now?
 - What perspectives or habits from the past might be constraining your present thinking?
 - What options exist? Go for quantity—here are some prompts to get you started.
 - A bold option?
 - A simple option?
 - A quick option?
 - A ridiculous option?
 - A fun option?
 - An expensive option?
 - A frugal option?
 - A firm option?
 - A generous option?
 - BONUS: How could you build more “mind-wandering” into your workflow?
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REALIZE • YES, AND...



The Realize Stage takes new ideas and connections from the Retreat Stage and finds ways to expand and build on them. In this stage, we look to harness the value that comes from a flash of insight. Change resistant teams often dismiss new ideas by finding flaws—killing opportunity before it can be realized.

An improviser knows that a habit of “Yes, but...” tends to discourage contribution from team members and can quickly lead to a condition of status quo or “stuck-

ness”. By saying, “Yes, and...” the improviser defers judgement and instead makes their own contribution to push the team and the project forward.

In a RESEARCH culture we:

- Believe a solution always exists
- Design experiments to realize new possibilities, test them out, and build on them
- Call out “Yes, but...” when it gets in our way, and lean into “Yes, and...”

Key Questions

- Where does “Yes, but...” often show up in your work?
- Where has yes “Yes, but...” shown up in your team conversation today?
- Defer judgement. Try “Yes, and...” instead. See where it might lead you.
 - Take at least one of the options that occurred to you in the RETREAT exercise. Use it to start a “Yes, and...” exercise. Note what other insights show up when you extend your thinking on a possibility.
 - You may want to try “Yes, if...”, as well.



REVEAL • RISK



The Reveal Stage requires that we make something concrete and observable from our insights and ideas. Of course, with visibility comes the possibility of criticism or even failure. Most of us don't like criticism and failure, so we put off the Reveal Stage and revert to one of the first few stages where the perceived risk is lower. ("Let's do some more research before we let anyone see this...")

The improviser recognizes that productive risk-taking is essential to effectively and efficiently creating value. An improviser has a very different understanding of "failure." An improviser does not perceive failure as an ending. Instead, they understand it as a new piece of valuable research!

In a RESEARCH culture we:

- Create a sense of "tribe"
- Create clarity around risk
- Promote vulnerability

Key Questions

- How do we typically respond to mistakes or failures?
- What feels risky in the challenge we are trying to solve?
- How might the people we lead experience risk in this endeavor?
- What will our teams need from us as leaders to take the right kinds of risks?
- What specific risks should we consider taking next?



Want to see how your team ranks on the 4 Key Disciplines of Innovative Cultures?
Take our 4 R's Culture Assessment at www.esinc.mn/4Rs

About Employee Strategies

Why do we exist?

We are driven by a belief that that bad jobs and toxic cultures kill us slowly. To solve for that problem, we work tirelessly to create great places to work.

Who are we? What do we do?

Employee Strategies is a boutique management-consulting firm that has been creating great places to work for our clients since 2006. Our services include team retreat facilitation, culture assessment and consultation, leadership development, and strategic planning facilitation.

How do we work?



Responsive



Results Oriented



Fun



Andy Zimney is a Senior Advisor and Team Performance Coach at Employee Strategies, Inc., a boutique firm that partners with leaders to develop highly effective cultures that drive outstanding results.

Over the past two decades, Andy has developed a unique resume working as a business leader, chief operating officer, and as a professional stage improviser and performer.

Andy has led learning seminars, retreats, and strategic planning sessions across the country for organizations from a wide variety of industries drawing on his unique blend of experience to help teams clarify priorities, develop more innovative and productive practices, and ultimately deliver outstanding results.

Contact Andy

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