The Quarterly SCAN

Influences Hiding in Plain Sight

The Quarterly SCAN is a publication of Unstuck Minds. Each quarter, Unstuck Minds and our Network Partners pause to set aside our expertise and adopt a beginner's mind. This report highlights insightful and provocative ideas hiding in our turbulent and uncertain world.

About SCAN

S — Structures
C — Context
A — Assumptions
N — Needs
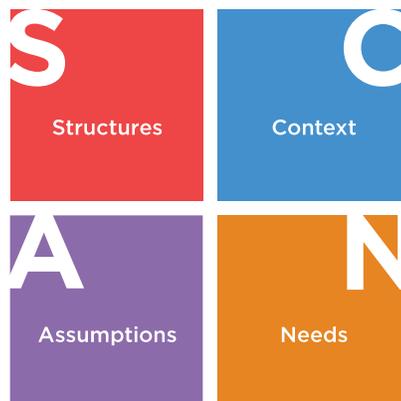
SCAN is an all-purpose thinking tool for reducing the risk of missing something important. SCAN helps us develop our attention agility.

Each element of SCAN is like a key that unlocks a wealth of insights and options to help us get unstuck. Each element provides a view into a different, and often overlooked aspect of our situations.

To learn more and get your FREE SCAN Profile, visit
www.unstuckminds.com/scan

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Structures

**Structural Influences
We're Paying Attention to**

- Chile has assembled a [constitutional convention](#) to create a new Magna Carta. 155 diverse delegates with significant representation of Chile's neglected indigenous communities.

- Adam Bryant and David Reimer, writing for [Strategy + Business](#) describe how reimagined leadership incentives focus on **how** results are achieved.

- Monarchies understand the importance of planning for succession. The institution is more important than the monarch. Ironically, American democracy, created as a reaction to a monarchy, is cultivating leaders who want a system that keeps them in power. *How do we help leaders recognize when it's time to hand over the reins?*

Structures—

Norms, habits, systems, and processes that create stability and consistency

Lately, at Unstuck Minds, we've been talking a lot about trees. It turns out that forests have a lot to teach us about mutually beneficial social networks. Books like [The Overstory](#) by Richard Powers and [The Hidden Life of Trees](#) by Peter Wohlleben, reframe how we think about plant life. Trees may appear to us as imperturbable monoliths, but it's more accurate to think of them as members of a socially intelligent community.

Did you know that trees in a forest communicate with one another through their root systems? In fact, researchers at the University of Bonn[1] believe that root tips contain brain-like structures. Check out Chris Kaundart's 2021 [blog post](#) about how to apply the lessons of trees to organizational teams.

Many of our clients want to break down organizational silos to improve communication, decision-making, and resource sharing. Learning how nature designs social intelligence into plant-life may help clarify the collaboration obstacles faced by organizations.

There is no CEO of a forest. For the forest, the credo is not "the cream will rise to the top." The credo is "all for one and one for all."

Talent review matrices, incentive structures, and compensation systems are all focused on individual behaviors, skills, and outcomes. By contrast, forests thrive because they are more than a collection of striving, competitive individuals.

1. František Baluška, et. al., "Neurobiological View or Plants and Their Body Plan," in Baluška, Mancuso, Volkmann, eds., Communication in Plants (New York: Springer, 2007).

What can a forest's root system teach us about designing organizations for cross-boundary collaboration?

Context—

Factors and trends in the external environment that signal disruptions and opportunities

Context

Ezra Klein, author, podcast host, and opinion columnist for the New York Times has been obsessing recently about social media platforms. He points out that as information becomes more abundant, attention becomes a scarcer and therefore more valuable commodity.

As evidence, Klein points to the recent purchase of Twitter by Elon Musk. Musk seems to believe that owning the attention exchange used by the world's most powerful people (celebrities, elected officials, journalists, etc.) is well worth $44 billion.

In a recent Op-ed entitled, *TiKTok May Be More Dangerous Than It Looks,* Klein reported that during a recent college visit he asked the students where they liked to get their news. The vast majority said TikTok.

If you think Klein is being an alarmist, consider TikTok's role in the campaign of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. to become the president of the Philippines. Ferdinand Marcos Sr. (Bongbong's father) ruled the Philippines from 1965 to 1986. During his authoritarian rule, Marcos Sr. committed well-documented human rights abuses and corruption.

Chad De Guzman, writing for Time magazine, described the use of Pro-Marcos TikTok creators during the son's campaign. De Guzman wrote:

> …through countless TikTok videos, and other social media posts, a false picture of stability and economic growth has been created that leaves many Filipino voters pining for the "better years" of the Marcos regime.

We've started to think of the most entertaining and easily digestible information as the most valid. Soon, we'll be choosing leaders based on who is the least boring. Oh…wait…

How might we help people recognize the difference between being entertained and being informed?

Contextual Influences We're Paying Attention to

- McKinsey's attempt to explain the business implications of "The Metaverse."

- Gallium is a liquid metal that might finally allow your phone to flex in your back pocket. What else might a bendable screen allow for?

- Alain Dehaze, CEO of The Adecco Group calls for a new social contract for gig workers and the "platform economy."

- When Adobe moved from packaged products to Software-as-a-service, it soon realized that it was sitting on valuable user insights. The Adobe Experience Platform raises two questions that are in tension with each other
  - How might technology help us understand how people use what we sell?
  - How might we constrain a company's ability to collect information on how we use what they sell?

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Assentions

Assumptions

Assumptions—

Beliefs, values, and worldviews that orient our attention, judgements, and priorities.

It feels heretical to question the values of efficiency and productivity in our work-lives. Producing more with fewer resources is the most direct path to higher profits. To be inefficient and unproductive is not just anti-capitalistic, it seems almost unpatriotic.

In an economy based on producing goods, the company that produces the most desireable things using the fewest resources wins. In an economy based on knowledge or relationship, productivity and efficiency are harder to evaluate.

The primacy of productivity and efficiency feels less obvious when you're working on leadership development or a new logo design. Arguably, in what has been called the attention economy, efficiency is the enemy. Social media platforms for example, want to captivate you. They are designed to prevent you from producing anything.

In her 2019 TED Talk, Margaret Heffernan makes the case that efficiency and productivity are useful when the future resembles the past. When the outputs of activity are predictable, it makes sense to strive for efficiency. When, however, the future is unpredictable, efficiency undermines the creativity and agility required to respond to the unexpected.

The author, Laetitia Vitaud has recently written a feminist critique of our obsession with productivity. Vitaud points out that productivity completely ignores unpaid labor. Working from home has underscored Vitaud's central argument. As the pandemic erased the artificial boundaries between workplace and home, it exposed the hidden inequities of productivity.

Influential Assumptions Worth challenging

- A high school teacher takes on the assumption that technology is inherently good for learning. Shane Trotter tells the story of his school district's "iPad Initiative."

- The New York Times' Future of Work issue described the current workplace zeitgeist as, "The Age of Anti-Ambition." What becomes of a meritocracy, when people don't want to be promoted?

- A new research study from UC Berkeley studied what happens when staunchly conservative Fox News viewers watched CNN for a month. Spoiler alert: Opinions changed, but the effect was temporary. Values did not change.

- Status quo thinking in organizations is stubbornly hard to change. As Jennifer Mueller, a professor of management at the University of San Diego puts it, "Novel ideas have almost no upside for a middle manager, the goal of a middle manager is meeting metrics of an existing paradigm."

How might we rehabilitate our relationship with goals so that creativity and kindness become as important as productivity and efficiency?

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Needs—

Desires, fears, preferences, and social processes that motivate behavior

Why do workplaces want to be sources of fulfillment for their employees? Generous answer: Because we spend a lot of time at work, so workplaces have a moral obligation not to suck. Cynical answer: Because people will work harder and invest their creative and emotional energies when they feel inspired and feel like they belong.

In her latest book, *Work Won't Love You Back; How Devotion to our Jobs Keeps us Exploited, Exhausted, and Alone*, Sarah Jaffe takes a hard look at the downsides of thinking of your work as your calling. Jaffe questions whether the employer-employee bargain can authentically meet our needs for autonomy, self-actualization, and affiliation.

UC Berkeley sociologist, Carolyn Chen conducted 102 in-depth interviews with tech industry professionals in Silicon Valley. The results of her study became a book published this year called, *Work, Pray, Code; When Work Becomes Religion in Silicon Valley*. Chen notes that while Silicon Valley is densely populated by people who claim no religious affiliation, many of her research subjects described "spiritual transformations" during the course of their worklives.

Jaffe, Chen, and others who've written about the so-called "Great Resignation," may very well be at the forefront of an attitude change about the role of work. Fewer and fewer of us are getting our higher-order needs met through our relationship with non-work institutions (places of worship, social clubs, NGOs, foundations, etc.).

What are the implications for society when work meets all our needs for autonomy, self-actualization, and affiliation?
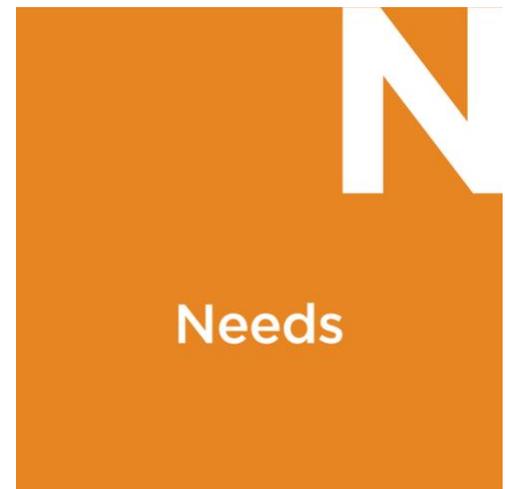
Needs

Influential Needs We're Paying Attention to

- Korn Ferry reports on a trend resulting from the labor shortage. Workers are more emboldened to say no.

- A video (5:22) on the science of forgiveness. Which do 5-year-olds prefer more, an outgroup transgressor who shows remorse or an ingroup transgressor who shows no remorse?

- A report described in a Fast Company article claimed that 54% of Black employees felt like they belonged at their companies for the first time while working from home.

- Take Greater Good Magazine's Bridging Differences Quiz.

- Kellogg Insight reported on research concluding that diversity produces better decisions. Diversity, according to the researchers, triggers more careful information processing that is absent in homogeneous groups.

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Embracing Uncertainty
Four keys to unlocking hidden opportunities

Unstuck Minds and the award-winning business simulation designers at Insight Experience introduce an immersive learning experience to help leaders and teams break free of status-quo thinking. For information: lisa@unstuckminds.com.

Community Spotlight

Each quarter we shine a light on a client, network partner, or organization doing inspiring work that helps the world become more creative and kind.

A Sticky Story

Our Network Partner, Mia Mbroh wants to help children feel prepared to handle hard things well.
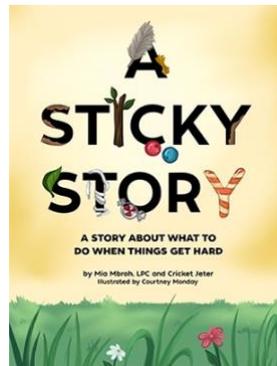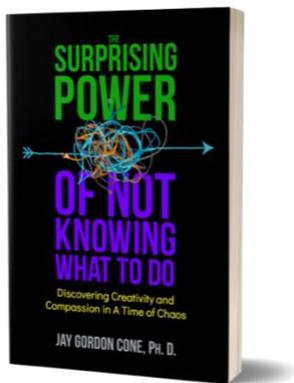

(Click on the cover to learn more)

Mia, and her co-author Cricket Jeter just released a children's book for kids ages 6-11. The book is a captivating read about a group of diverse kids who go on an amazing journey together. Along the way, they find their safe space — the porch — and learn vital social and emotional tools. Vivid, full-color illustrations bring the story to life.

Being at a loss for what to do is an opportunity, not a problem.

available at
amazon

We help people think better
and connect better
so the world becomes
more creative and kind

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