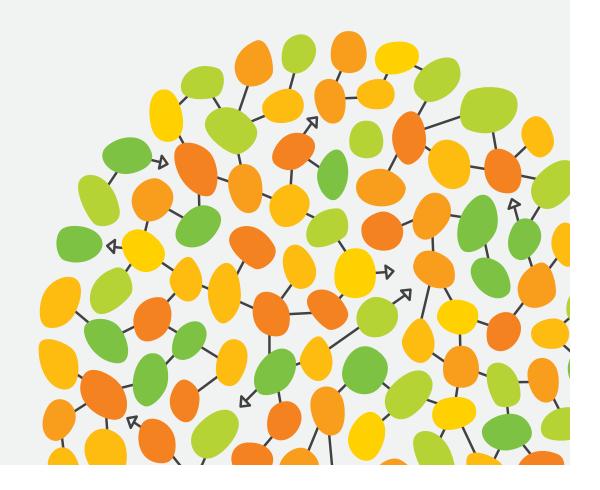


Rewiring How We Learn—and Lead—to Succeed in Our New World



Making the Case

This document explains the strategic imperative for evolving how our organizations collectively learn—and lead—in order to gain resilient competitive advantage in our increasingly complex times. To make this case, I'm taking a case study approach to this argument, in that you will be invited to examine and hopefully, re-examine, how our shared underlying assumptions and beliefs about what it means to be a good and effective leader is a root cause of many of our greatest organizational challenges. As such, it is also the greatest leverage point available to us for making meaningful change that will rewire the most important elements of our organizations to meet those complex challenges in new and much more effective ways.

A SUMMARY OF THE KEY POINTS IN THIS CASE:

- Our commonly shared assumptions and beliefs about what it means to be a good and effective leader were formed in the last century and are increasingly out of alignment with the realities and demands of our current business environment.
- The impact of using old-world "direct and correct" approaches to leadership on highly complex, continuously evolving new-world challenges is making them much worse.
- The complexity of new-world issues requires us to think and work in new ways that support collective creative learning and action that crosses traditional boundaries and borders of all kinds.
- Creating spaces that support this new kind of interaction requires a very different approach to leadership that fosters curiosity, "in the moment" learning, deepening of trust, and iterative approaches to change.
- Instilling this new-world approach to leadership establishes cultures were people feel safe, seen and supported to realize their potential, which is essential for people to risk learning and creating together.
- Organizations with Safe and Seen cultures will be able to learn faster, create faster, and respond faster to our increasingly unpredictable world.
- Wiring up Safe and Seen cultures will require organizations to use new-world approaches to successfully achieve behavior change at scale.
- Increasingly, competitive advantage will come from the organization's ability to orchestrate meaningful behavior change at scale, both within the organization and beyond traditional organizational boundaries.
- The first organizations who successfully master this capability will be able to ride waves of change to create competitive advantage, while those who continue to take an old-world approach to leadership will likely be overwhelmed by them.

Bottom-line: In our new world of complex change, the organizations that learn to learn—and lead—in ways that foster collective creativity will thrive by inspiring people to work together to address our greatest shared challenges.

THE IMPACT OF OLD ASSUMPTIONS IN A NEW WORLD

Take a moment to consider what you—and your organization—believe it means to be a good and effective leader. Don't list what says on the corporate website, though. Look closely at what leadership behaviors are praised and rewarded. Consider whether any of these assumptions and beliefs about leadership are widely held within your organization.

Good and Effective Leaders:

Are expected to have the right answers

Tell people what to do

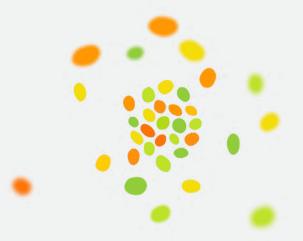
Use subtle or overt fear-based tactics to compel compliance

Keep their area under control

Don't make mistakes

View success as making their numbers

While other aspirational expectations of leadership, such as supporting others and collaborating, may well be espoused, notice if those behaviors are actually rewarded in meaningful ways. Consider the leadership traits of the last few significant promotions or awards in your company. Whatever the most commonly shared traits of those leaders are, those are the ones that your organization will assume are required to be successful as a leader.



WHERE DID THESE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LEADERSHIP COME FROM?

Our dominant assumptions and beliefs about what it means to be a good and effective leader can be traced back to the last century, and before, when the world was a much simpler place. Leaders needed to tell people what to do because there really were no other options. Our main forms of communications were speaking directly to people or writing a message down and sending it to someone.

Real carbon copies were still widely used in the '80s—the kind where sheets of carbon are placed between two or three sheets of paper to create duplicates, put into an envelope and distributed to another person's desk or physical mailbox. Faxing caught on in the early to mid-'90s, and many of us got our first personal email addresses around that time.

Back then, business strategies—which were neatly documented and stored in binders on the shelves of the highest-ranking leaders—were expected to remain constant for five- and sometimes ten-year time frames. Competitive

advantage generally came from becoming more efficient at whatever strategy an organization chose to pursue. The environment was stable enough that it made sense for organizations to stay with the same strategy for years and hone their efficiency. Even change was simpler back then. Consider the re-engineering projects that were so popular that that time. These projects sought to find and realize greater efficiency in systems by examining the current state, making changes and then measuring the results. These projects began with well-defined goals we guided by milestones and concluded with clearly measurable results.

This environment reinforced the widely held assumptions and beliefs that it was a leader's responsibility to control everyone and everything within their purview in order to make their numbers. That was what leaders were—and often are still—rewarded for. That made sense in the last century. Then things changed.



IT'S A NEW WORLD

You don't need me to tell you that the old familiar world that so many of us knew so well was washed away by wave after wave of profound change that continues to this day. Global hyper-connectivity, previously unimaginable technological inventions, a global pandemic, and so much more have wired up a whole new world. With this rapid evolution has come a new myriad of challenges and opportunities that often play out together, each in their own way. **How many of the following challenges is your organization currently facing?**

Difficulty hiring and retaining qualified people

Supply chain breakdowns and sourcing challenges

Unpredictable changes in costs associated with producing your products or services

Difficulties transitioning to digital or other virtual forms

Integrating one or more mergers or acquisitions

Responding to disruptive technology, or other, innovations

Community or consumer demands on the company made through social media

Shifting the culture to be more inclusive and responsive

Abrupt disruptions in operations due to geo-political or other events

OUR INCREASINGLY COMPLEX WORLD

A situation is complex when there are so many inputs that it is not possible to reasonably predict the outcome. That pretty much describes the environment that many, if not all, organizations are operating in at this time. Historically, change was viewed more as a project to be executed, or an environmental factor to be dealt with. Now, it is an unpredictable, ever-present force that pervades and influences everything we do. It's a whole new world that is continuously evolving all around us. Change is no longer something we can seek to control. It is a dominant, evolutionary force that we must content and move with. The most pressing challenge we face is learning how to learn in new ways to ride these waves of change to positive outcomes. Those who learn to do this well will most certainly realize competitive advantage over those who do not master this new-world capability.

WHEN OLD WORLD LEADERSHIP MEETS NEW WORLD REALITIES

It seems like the only things that haven't changed significantly are our old-world beliefs about what it means to be a good and effective leader. The misalignment between the complex challenges of our new world and the old beliefs we hold about what it means to be a good and effective leader are significant contributors to many of our greatest, most persistent and costly challenges.

Old-World Leaders Believe It's Their Sob To: **New World Realities:** Have the right answers ▶ Highly complex and interrelated issues ▶ Tell people what to do Many possible paths forward Use subtle or overt fear-based tactics Completely new challenges to compel compliance Iterative learning required Keep their area under control test options Don't make mistakes Priorities and expectations often conflict View success as making their numbers Multiple, different areas of expertise required Measuring outcomes can be difficult

It is likely that the most pressing, strategically important issues your organization faces now are complex. Trying to tackle complex issues with old-world approaches to leadership can be a source of frustration for everyone involved. Demanding that people come up with right answers, not make mistakes, deliver a predictable, measurable outcome on schedule in this kind of environment leads to behaviors that often make situations worse.

People avoid making commitments to avoid being wrong. They may blame others when expectations aren't met, causing fear and mistrust. Leaders feel burned out from the continuous pressure that they face to be right. People get busy doing what they feel comfortable doing, which is often not what most needs to be done. As people become more frustrated, they push harder in the same ways and all of this amplifies. Sometimes in desperation, organizations reorganize, and then reorganize again and again, trying to get back to what worked before. People are let go. And new initiatives to make people more accountable are rolled out. All of this amplifies the swirl of change even more. We need to break this cycle of frustration for everyone involved.

IT'S ALL NEW

Old-world leadership instincts to try to get situations under control as quickly as possible work against us in our new fluid world, where there are few right answers and many avenues to be explored. Increasingly, we need to stretch our thinking beyond the edge of our experiences and reimagine what's possible. That's hard to do alone, or in a silo of like-minded people, when so many factors and facets converge—and diverge—in a single challenge.

Take the current issue of restoring supply chains that broke down as a result of multiple factors during the pandemic. Many organizations are still having difficulty establishing consistent solutions at predictable prices because so many interrelated factors along their supply chains remain, have become, or may suddenly become, uncertain. The impacts of inflation, war, labor shortages, the next possible phase of the pandemic, geopolitical considerations, extreme weather, the possibilities of unrest, and other unforeseen circumstances all make finding reliable, predictable solutions a moving target. Yet production still needs to be scheduled, prices

need to be set, contracts have to be negotiated and orders fulfilled. There are a lot of people accountable for a lot of outcomes that are deeply interrelated. In many cases, no one, not even the most senior leaders of an organization, can control, influence, or even predict, what comes next. Yet often, they are expected to do just that.

It's time to collectively admit that we don't know how to effectively process the level of complexity we find ourselves having to contend with. No one in human history has lived in a time as the one we find ourselves in now. Many of the most significant challenges we are facing are new, and the old ones are becoming more challenging to resolve because we face so many issues at the same time.

Our old assumptions and beliefs about what it means to be a good and effective leader are not aligned with the needs of our new, highly complex world. It is time to stop pointing fingers and finding blame, grant ourselves some grace, and evolve our beliefs about what it means to be a good and effective leader in our new world.





A New Worldview of Leadership for Our New World

What is it going to take to unravel complexity together in our new world? That is the shared challenge of our current times. Like complexity itself, there will be many possible ways to do this. It will involve diverse collectives of people working together, and what works will continue to evolve as the kaleidoscope of change continues to turn our world in unexpected ways. Let's go back to the issue of reestablishing predictable, consistent supply chains to consider the dynamics of addressing highly complex challenges and what kind of leadership will be needed to support those kinds of efforts.

By exploring what it will take to thrive in complex times, we can envision the core assumptions and beliefs that will support the evolution of a new-world vision of leadership.

LEARNING HOW TO LEARN, TOGETHER

Regardless of what kind of supply chain an organization has, reconstituting it will require people with expertise and experience in a number of very different disciplines, such as transportation, production, sourcing, risk management, perhaps even sales and marketing areas, to discuss options and possible paths forward. They are going to have to share their ideas in ways that others can understand, consider the perspectives put forward by a diverse set of peers, possibly discern new, unique possibilities to try out, appreciatively test different options, and work together to turn their ideas into action. They will have to learn from their failures and their successes.

Unlike old-world problems that, even when they were complicated, still adhered to predictable pathways forward, this process will look and feel more like finding and untying a series of knots that are entangled together, solving immediate challenges as the gateway to what comes next. The shared intention to establish a reliable, resilient, cost-effective supply chain will act like a silver thread that guides the effort to find and untie the most relevant knots. It is unlikely there will be any definitively right answers, but rather new connections and possibilities will be revealed in the unraveling. It will take patience, curiosity, creativity and a willingness to keep learning together, even when the progress seems slow. That means that people are going to have to consistently learn with and from each other in the flow of

work as a way of life—and encourage others to stick with the iterative learning process, especially when a clear path forward is not immediately obvious. I call this kind of effort collective creativity.

Let's consider what might happen if the people working on the supply chain issue determined that they were not going to be able to secure a material on a consistent basis for some time. and they decide they need to consider sourcing alternative materials to use in a product. Even something as well-defined as replacing a component of a product would entail some complex actions, such as seeing if the new material works with their production process, determining if it can pass regulatory scrutiny, testing to see if consumers will accept the change, and assessing how vulnerable the new material will be to other supply chain challenges. What will happen if people throughout the effort are so afraid of being wrong, making a mistake, and being blamed if things don't work out that they aren't willing step outside the accepted norms and current thinking and try something new? Worse yet, what if the they don't have the skills to have the conversations needed to resolve these impasses in an appreciative and productive ways?

If that happens, the entire process will bog down as people move to protect themselves, their reputations and their areas, and no meaningful change will happen. Meanwhile, all kinds of opportunity will be lost.

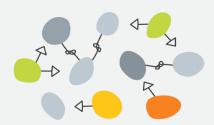
THE FEAR FACTOR

It is so easy to take an old-world approach to leadership and blame the people involved when change grinds to a halt as it so often does. It's tempting to label people as lazy, unmotivated, or worse. Rather than fall into that familiar rut, let's take a couple of steps back and ask ourselves: What is really going on here? If you listen carefully and look closely, you will see that people are simply frightened. You might even consider some of the choices that you've made, such as keeping an idea to yourself, avoiding an assignment that seems risky, or not saying something when you can see that something needs to be said, to be fear-driven behaviors. They happen at every level of the organization all of the time. So, where is all of that fear coming from?

Fear is so intertwined in our approaches to leadership—and so familiar—that we often don't even notice that it is there: Think of the sideways glance in the meeting that conveys disapproval, giving preferred assignments to the person who doesn't make waves, talking down to someone, or not talking to them at all. All of these subtle, yet

impactful approaches to leadership send a clear message that compliance means safety. This ever-present threat harkens back to old-world assumptions and beliefs that fear is the best way to keep people "in line." That's where leaders needed people to be in the last century—working in assembly lines, or focused, without question, on executing a well-defined corporate strategy from their desk in the hierarchy.

That worked when there were lines to follow. Now we have threads of possibilities that are tied up in multiple knots that require a lot of collective creativity to untie. Compliance will never cut through complexity. Therein lies the core issue with old-world, fear-based leadership: frightened brains can't learn and frightened people don't take risks, yet the central driver of old-world leadership is the belief that people need to be managed through fear. Holding on to this old assumption is making everything harder, slower and less effective for us all. The more we lean into fear-based tactics, the more people focus on protecting themselves, the worse everything gets. It's time to stop this.



ESTABLISHING A SAFE AND SEEN CULTURE

What is needed is a corporate culture where people feel safe, seen and supported to realize their potential. When people feel safe and appreciated for who they are, they are far more willing to share the best that they have to offer. That is the kind of space where people can engage in creative idea generation together and the kind of free-flowing conversations that ignite valuable insights. That is what is needed to co-create new approaches to new and old challenges. And that is what new-world leaders will need to co-create.

Notice that this creative exchange is reliant upon the ability to talk with people with very different perspectives with thoughtful appreciation. That will require skills that right now very few people have. Everyone will need to be comfortable asking insightful questions, listening to discern the underlying thought processes being shared, appreciating worldviews that are different than their own, and exchanging ideas to make unique connections. These are new-world leadership skills.

It's likely a few readers are having a mild—or major-meltdown at the thought of unleashing all of this creativity willy-nilly in the organization. Visions of an adult preschool may

Committed people hold themselves accountable to be of service.

Compliant people need to be held accountable to do what they are told.

be filling your imagination right now. You can set those images aside, and replace them with the notion that creativity loves nothing more than to serve a higher purpose. It's the draw to be of service in a meaningful way that inspires people to dig deep, work together, and resiliently return to the challenge when success is not initially met. That's why another important element of leadership in this new world is the ability to set clear intentions that inspire commitment.

This matters because in our new world. organizations are publicly scrutinized for the impact that they have on the world—for better or worse. Those that go beyond espousing a greater good to actually doing the work to bring their good intentions to life will attract the best and the brightest people to work with and for them. Establishing a culture where those people can work together on impactful initiatives will most certainly give an organization a competitive advantage in our new, highly complex world.

This is not to say that old-world leadership approach of problem-solving, measuring results and fixing issues isn't important. It is. The thing to notice is, increasingly, the problems

that this reductive approach are appropriate for are of less strategic value. Problem-solving will remain an essential element of leadership and will be applied to fixing technical, tactical things. The evolved expression of leadership that I am pointing towards will be in service of supporting people and their collective creative efforts to

resolve our most challenging issues. Problemsolving will become a tool that is used in service of attaining these greater good intentions. The true artistry of leadership that is needed now is the ability to bring these two approaches into balanced, fluid expression, moving seamlessly between them as needed.



A NEW VISION OF LEADERSHIP

Culture is what people choose to do, day-in and day-out, especially when no one is looking. To bring a Safe and Seen culture to life, leaders need to lead in a very new way that aligns with the realities of our new world. In order for leaders to choose to lead in new ways, we must instill a new vision of leadership that is founded on more evolved assumptions and beliefs about what it means to be a good and effective leader, such as, leaders:

- Foster learning from day-to-day challenges
- Create safe spaces for meaningful conversations to occur
- Encourage open-minded thinking and collaborative actions
- Set inspiring intentions for positive outcomes
- Provide coaching and feedback that encourage learning
- Problem-solve things and coach people

At Cylient, we call this new approach to leadership coaching-based leadership because it is based on the same principles that make impactful coaching work. That is, the igniting of insights that are translated into meaningful actions, with the purpose of realizing potential of any kind. When coaching-based leadership becomes a way of life in organizations, learning in the flow of work is woven into the fabric of the organization, enabling the organization to flow with the tides of change. This is what transforms change from a force to be feared into a source of creative possibility that inspires people to rise together to new heights of creative expression in service of addressing our most daunting shared challenges. That is the essence of new-world leadership. It is in service of creating our new shared world.



BEYOND SKILLS: WIRING UP A NEW WAY TO LEAD

So how do we bring this new vision of coachingbased leadership to life? The first thing we need to do is dispel an age-old belief that changing people is the same as changing things. Thingslike systems and processes—are changed by analyzing problems, applying fixes and measuring results. When this approach is used to try to change people, it does not go well, nor does it deliver the hoped-for results. That has not kept us from repeatedly giving people a few hours of training expecting that they will miraculously think and behave in completely new ways.

Let's step back for a moment and consider where behavior comes from. We've been examining the assumptions and beliefs that drive different behaviors. That's because our assumptions and beliefs inform the choices that we make. So, if we want leaders to lead in new ways, we will have to wire up new assumptions and beliefs about what constitutes successful leadership. Wiring up new assumptions and beliefs requires helping

leaders see how embracing this new approach to leadership will benefit them, their teams and the organization.

For people to choose to change, three things need to be true:

- **2** They believe they are capable of successfully making the change

When designing change management processes to instill a new leadership culture in an organization, all three of these elements needs to be cared for.



CONDITION 1: PEOPLE BELIEVE THEY WILL PERSONALLY BENEFIT FROM MAKING THE CHANGE

Before investing their precious time and attention to learning something new, leaders carefully consider: Is this going to help me in real and practical ways?

What does your organization believe about coaching?

The term "coaching" is used to mean many things. In some organizations, coaching is defined as a tool to address issues with people in very specific situations, such as providing feedback after a sales call. While other organizations hold that "in the moment" coaching is their go-to leadership style that can be integrated into any conversation, with anyone, at any time, in order to facilitate learning, establish connections, exchange ideas, and inspire action. There are many variations on these themes. The thing to keep in mind is that how coaching is defined—and more importantly, talked about—in your organization will greatly impact the potential value people perceive they will gain from deepening their coaching capabilities. The more narrowly coaching is defined in your organization, the fewer ways there are for it to deliver value.

Does your organization use an old-world or new-world model of coaching?

Another consideration when realizing value from coaching is the coaching model that is chosen. The engine that drives the value of coaching is igniting insights that motivate meaningful action. Consider the last time you had the "aha" experience of learning something new to appreciate what makes coaching work. When you had the "aha," it's likely that you wanted to

try out whatever you learned. Coaching models that focus on igniting insight foster learning, resilience and an orientation to action.

Unfortunately, there are many models of coaching that are based on the old-world principle of telling people what to do. Instead of using insights to motivate action, these models use leading questions that feel manipulative, usually because they are. These old-world coaching models only serve to exacerbate oldworld leadership problems because they are based on old-world assumptions and beliefs of leadership. You can learn more about this by reading this article, Why Choosing Real Coaching Really Matters.

"In the moment" coaching models that best equip people to effectively address complex new-world issues have the following qualities:

- Are easy to remember in the flow of work
- Can be used in any situation, with anyone, about anything
- Are based on the igniting of insight to foster learning
- Work universally, across any border or boundary
- Create a shared language that enables people with diverse perspective to discuss issues in appreciative ways

Sharing stories within the organization about the many ways that coaching adds value is a great way to build enthusiasm for taking a coaching-based approach to leadership.

CONDITION 2: PEOPLE BELIEVE THEY ARE CAPABLE OF SUCCESSFULLY MAKING THE CHANGE

No one wants to look foolish. This is especially true in cultures where mistakes are frowned upon or may even be considered a punishable offense. Before leaders put effort into learning a new approach to leadership, they want to know:

How does your organization support people throughout the learning process?

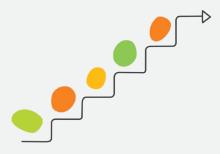
Will I be able to do this well?

Embracing a new approach to leadership means wiring up a whole new set of assumptions and beliefs about what it means to be a good and effective leader. And then it requires supporting people to learn the skills needed to turn those new beliefs into new ways of leading. Consider how much effort it takes to learn a new software program, or become proficient at a new sport. It will take at least that much effort and practice to build the network of neural connections our brains need to feel confident about using new leadership approaches in high-stakes settings.

To get to that level of accomplishment, people need to practice their new skills many times, in a variety of settings, and feel safe, supported and encouraged to do so. This is best accomplished by offering numerous ways for people to learn with and from, and support, each other to effectively use their new skills to deliver real value. There are many ways to build an ecosphere of support around learning initiatives. What is important is that learning to become a confident coaching-based leader is viewed as a learning journey and not just a learning event.

Does your organization perceive the strategic value of coaching-based leadership?

People will only put the kind of effort needed to lead in new ways if they believe that this new way of leading is a priority for your organization. One of my main intentions for writing this opinion paper is to provide you with the rationale to help others see why making this transition is a strategic imperative right now.



CONDITION 3: THEY BELIEVE THE EFFORT NEEDED TO MAKE THE CHANGE WILL BE WORTH THE REWARD

Perhaps the biggest, yet often the least discussed, question that learners ponder is: Is it safe for me to make this change?

How risky will this change be perceived to be in your organization?

Changing behavior takes a lot of effort and can feel very risky because it is public. The more significant the behavior change is, the greater the perceived risk. People will wonder: What if I am the only one to do this? Will that be good thing, or not? This is particularly true when we consider that old-world leadership cultures are founded on compliance and enforced with subtle, yet ever present, fear-based tactics. That's why it's so important to share the strategic important of making this change.

Convincing people to change at scale—which is what is needed to wire up a Safe and Seen culture—requires consideration of how to create a safe environment for the transition to that new culture. Damon Centola's research on behavior change at scale offers us some sound advice, such as focusing on getting 25 percent of a group to fully adopt a new behavior as the impetus for an entire group to change. Integrating this transition with other strategically-essential change efforts is another way to quickly and smoothly get people using coaching-based leadership at scale to accomplish valuable, tangible outcomes.

This will be a collective effort. It's important to note that leadership is a worldview that is expressed as a collection of assumptions and beliefs that are translated into behaviors.

The desired leadership behaviors are reinforced through systems that reward those behaviors and discourage unwanted behaviors. Take a step back and look at all of the systems in your organization that are designed to keep old-world leadership behaviors in place. It is likely you will find quite a few if you look carefully.

Ultimately, what we are talking about is rewiring what your enterprise believes it means to be a good and effective leader, building out the skills to bring this new worldview to life, and re-weaving the tapestry of systems needed to reinforce and reward those new ways of being. This is a big job, to be sure. One what will require support and participation from a collective of people throughout the organization. That may feel overwhelming given the constant churn that your organization seems to be stuck in. Hopefully by now, you can see that the churn is largely driven and perpetuated by our futile efforts to use old-world leadership approaches to try to get control of our new, highly complex world. That's not going to happen. The best way to stop the churn and put your organization on a positive path forward it to wire up coachingbased leadership as a way of life and as the foundation of a Safe and Seen culture.

Why This Matters Now

Increasingly, the world is looking to business to address the most complex and pressing challenges of our times.

Organizations that make it a priority to be of service to a greater good through the effective expression of their business will attract the best talent and receive greater levels of public support than those that choose a narrower, more self-serving definition of success. Learning how to learn and lead in new coaching-based ways will not only confer competitive advantage on these companies, it will lay the foundation of a new worldview of the world that will benefit us all.



ABOUT DIANNA ANDERSON, MCC FOUNDER AND CEO, CYLIENT

My journey began in 1990 when I graduated from an MBA program in Canada and joined an American consulting firm that specialized in re-engineering huge companies. I learned a highly structured process that enabled large numbers of people to work together to make the systems that drive businesses more efficient. After leaving consulting, I studied coaching and graduated from Coach U in 1995. I am a founding member of the International Coach Federation. When I started coaching, what I immediately discovered was I was coaching everyone I worked with—regardless of their position or seniority—to take a coaching approach to their day-to-day challenges. Through coaching, I encouraged people to get curious about how people saw situations, use coaching approaches to ignite insights and support others to learn and grow from their own everyday challenges. When people embraced this way of learning and leading, change of every kind happened more quickly, and effectively. That's when I saw the transformative power of "in the moment" coaching.

After years of work, I created Cylient's Untying the Knot® approach to "in the moment" coaching and feedback, so that anyone can learn to integrate coaching approaches into the flow of their work and lives. This approach has been used by thousands of people around the world to engage in meaningful, productive, everyday conversations that ignite learning, establish deeper connections and unleash creative thinking. Globally known brands have trained thousands of people using the Cylient System to wire up a Safe and Seen culture in their organizations.

