HUMANITY WORKS
CONSULTANCY

SAILING INTO
STORMY SEAS

How agility can help your
organisation to thrive

Introduction

S H A R O N   A N E J A

Welcome

to Humanity Works Consultancy's first annual human trends report. I'm Sharon Aneja, the founder of **HUMANITY WORKS CONSULTANCY**. At Humanity Works our mission is to help organisations and their people to **THRIVE.**

As a collective of Positive Psychology coaches and strategists we thought why not help our clients prepare for 2021 with a trends report on the future of work. That quickly fell apart when we spoke to an expert futurist.

"The focus shouldn't be on trying to work out what the future will look like, and then come up with a reasonable plan for that. But rather to build adaptability into our strategies and systems, our structures and processes, so that we can flex in the moment as we are hit with volatility and uncertainty."

G R A E M E   C O D R I N G T O N ,   F R O M   T O M O R R O W T O D A Y   G L O B A L

If there is one thing that we have learnt over this past year at Humanity Works is that it's OK to lean into the vulnerability of not having all the answers. We're sure other leaders identify with this. In this report our aim is to share reflections and tools so you can cultivate a more agile mindset that unlocks the **OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE, RESILIENCE, WELLBEING & TRANSFORMATION** of you organisation and people during 2021.

Let's dive-in…

Same Storm, Different Boats

In 2020 it felt like the world of work exploded as Covid-19 catapulted us into a new working paradigm. Some companies pivoted to survive, some pivoted to help the greater good. Some businesses positively thrived but others really suffered.

Overnight, most organisations had to develop new and virtual ways of working. Whilst these brought people together through purpose and community it also exposed the frailties in company cultures and strategies to adapt, not to mention the negative impact on our mental health and wellbeing. It also exposed inequalities that exist in our workplace and in our society, forcing everyone to look at themselves through a new lens.

So where do we go from here?

"Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less."

M A R I E   C U R I E

Well, if we can't predict the future,
we can at least reflect on our key learnings
and ask ourselves how prepared our
organisations are to continue sustaining rapid
change. We believe the answer lies in having an
AGILE yet STABILE mindset at the heart of the organisation.

Stability

Agility

We believe the answer lies in having an AGILE yet STABILE mindset at the heart of the organisation. It sounds paradoxical but by creating psychological safety, your workforce will feel safe to take risks, be more adaptive and innovative. For this to be sustainable, it needs to be applied systemically, woven into the fabric of your organisation so it organically feeds the culture, values, people, leadership and operations. This in turn will lead to greater workplace productivity, employee engagement and a workforce that can find opportunities in the challenges that lie ahead.

In this report we will walk you through how you can take some initial first steps to integrate this mindset into your organisation. Given our background in Appreciative Inquiry we suggest you build on what's already working in your organisation. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it is a starting point to help you reflect and take steps to build a thriving organisation in 2021.

Agile = > Tech

Back in 2001 Agile was born into the world of software development. At its heart it's about customers and end users. It uses self-organising cross-functional teams to make iterations and continual improvements, so they are flexible in the way they respond to change.

By 2016 Harvard Business Review and McKinsey recognised the potential of Agile outside technology and since then it's become a global phenomenon, supporting organisations and individuals to deal with turbulent times.

"The Agile trend is here to stay. Around half of all organisations have now been applying Agile practices for over three years as a methodology for change and transformation."

CONSULTANCY.EU

If your organisation is agile it can adapt and respond to outside changes. But it's not just about speed. It also means constantly connecting and re-connecting with your customers' changing needs.

The global pandemic accelerated trends that were already underway. But it has also been a catalyst for tremendous change.

*"Change has never been this fast. And change will never be this slow again."*

GORDON MOORE,
CO-FOUNDER OF INTEL

To succeed organisations therefore need to balance two forces – becoming more agile and nimble to address the turbulence, whilst also retaining stability so the workforce can stay focused.

So how do we provide this stable core? We need to invest in PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES, whilst also working on the processes and systems that support our people.

We developed this model to help you emphasise your efforts on leaders, the skills of your workforce, as well as your organisational culture. Where you start is up to you. We find some smaller nimble companies take a grass roots approach, lighting fires in different places around their workforce. Other larger, more process driven, organisations sometimes start at the top with the leadership population. However, if you focus on all three, you will encourage **CREATIVITY, INNOVATION** and a **FLEXIBLE MINDSET,** enabling your people and business to thrive.

CREATIVITY

INNOVATION

FLEXIBLE MINDSET

Leadership

Culture

Agility & Stability

Skills & Capabilities
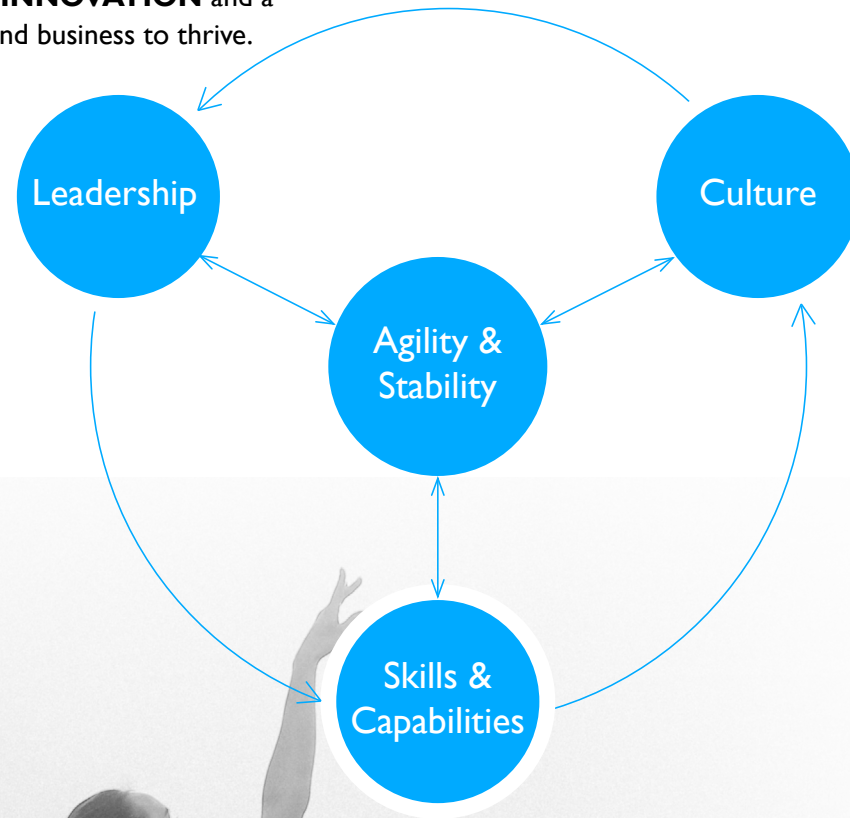
Leadership:
"I don't know it all, but I do know who to ask"

"Too many leaders think it's their job to have the answers. I think good leaders are the people with the best questions. It's about creating a culture of experimentation in the business."

GRAEME CODRINGTON

So, let's start with leaders and how they can create an agile organisation. It begins with role modelling since how a leader behaves can really encourage agility. In the past leaders had the luxury of time to get to know their organisation. They would work their way up the ladder and know their organisation inside out. Command and control, structure and rules – they all worked well in this world.

"The past decade has been marked by radical change, by a "newness" that has evolved at a pace that can only be described as exponential."

DELOITTE 2020

This model no longer works because of the pace of change. Technology, organisations, operating models, services and products are innovating so fast that leaders will never know all the constituent parts. It took 68 years for airlines to reach 50 million users but only 19 days for Pokémon Go to reach the same. Leaders now have to delegate and trust. They have to let go. They have to fess up and be vulnerable that they don't know all the answers. This can be a challenge for some.

We also live in a globally interconnected and VUCA world. It creates unpredictable outcomes. It creates more complexity. But some leaders' styles and thinking patterns haven't kept up. In our turbulent times leaders need to innovate. They need to encourage creativity and collaboration in their workforce. The quickest way to do this is to support a range of different perspectives and to encourage **DIVERSITY OF THINKING.**

"A prudent question is one half of wisdom."

FRANCIS BACON

Dr. Michelle King is the Director of inclusion at Netflix and author of "The Fix: Overcome the Invisible Barriers That Are Holding Women Back at Work." Her mantra is fix workplaces, not women. But she worries ideas of masculinity and leadership are still "deeply intertwined."

In
2020

Michelle King asked people working in professional services to identify skills that would be vital in the future. These were the top five:

01
ADAPTING TO CHANGE AND MANAGING AMBIGUITY

02
MANAGING PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE OUTCOMES

03
DEMONSTRATING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

04
DEMONSTRATING RESILIENCE

05
ACHIEVING RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

70%

IN APRIL 2020 DR. KING SURVEYED 735 MEN AND WOMEN IN A PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FIRM.

70% described success as "a white, middle-class, heterosexual male who is willing to commit most of his time to the organization, promote his own achievements, tell others what to do, dominate social situations, and be decisive — even if this means going it alone."

Looks like we've got a way to go before we fully embrace diversity of thinking in the workplace...

CASE STUDY

Roche is a 122-year-old Swiss biotechnology company with 94,000 employees in over 100 countries. To build an agile culture, Roche facilitated a deep, personal change process among senior leaders. More than 1,000 were invited to learn a new, more agile approach to leadership through a four-day immersive program that introduced them to the mindsets and capabilities needed to lead an agile organisation.

CONCLUSION

As the pace of change increases and as the world becomes more complex, leaders need to **ADAPT** and **CHANGE** their style. So how does this benefit the wider organisation? When a leader is more vulnerable it paves the way for greater honesty in their leadership teams. As the senior teams open up, they start to communicate better and share more knowledge with their own teams. This cascades throughout the organisation creating a more trusting and respectful culture.

"The courage to be vulnerable is not about winning or losing, it's about the courage to show up when you can't predict or control the outcome."

BRENÉ BROWN

Some Suggested Initial Steps

01
Use a **POSITIVE LEADERSHIP** framework to uncouple the idea of strength and leadership – encourage leaders to show vulnerability and humility and focus on building their actual strengths to bring out the best in themselves and others.

02
Encourage leaders to embrace **MINDFULNESS** so that they can make space for differing approaches, encourage open communication and role model positive behaviours.

03
Help leaders embrace **DIVERSITY IN THINKING** through encouraging disagreement and difference in their leaders and teams. Try Adam Kahane's approach of Stretch Collaboration to hold space for divergent views and encourage the conflicting parties to experiment with ways forward, without ceding on their beliefs and passions.
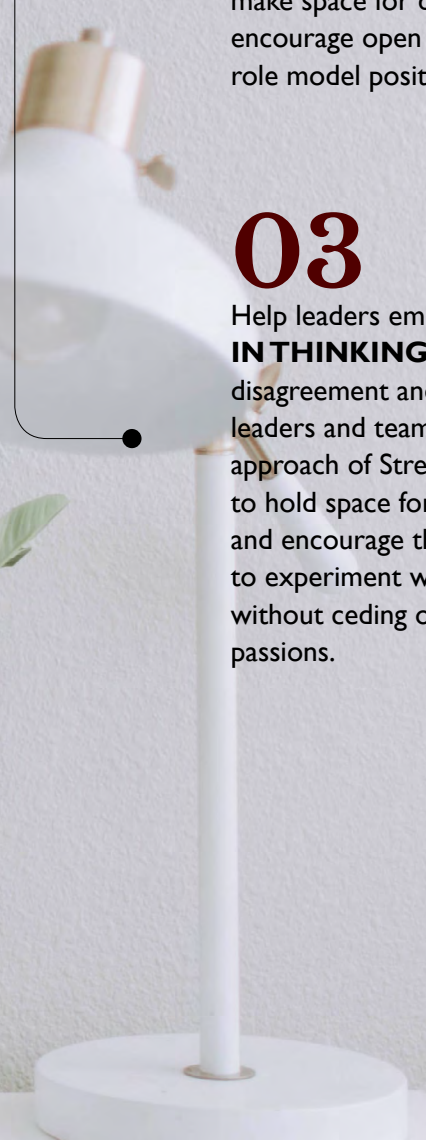
Culture eats strategy for lunch. In the future add breakfast and dinner.

*"To be fully present at work, to feel "**psychologically safe**", we must know that we can be free enough, sometimes, to share the things that scare us without fear of recriminations. We must be able to talk about what is messy or sad, to have hard conversations with colleagues who are driving us crazy. We can't be focused just on efficiency."*

GOOGLE,
NEW YORK TIMES 2016

When leaders role model the right behaviours, they develop the right culture. At the heart of agility is a culture of **PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND TRUST**. One way to promote agility is to delegate problem solving - but for this to work employees must feel safe to experiment, take risks and be able to innovate. If mistakes are punished through performance management, or are publicly admonished via corporate communications, then this will drive the workforce to become much more risk averse. They will no longer seek out opportunities to adapt or be creative.
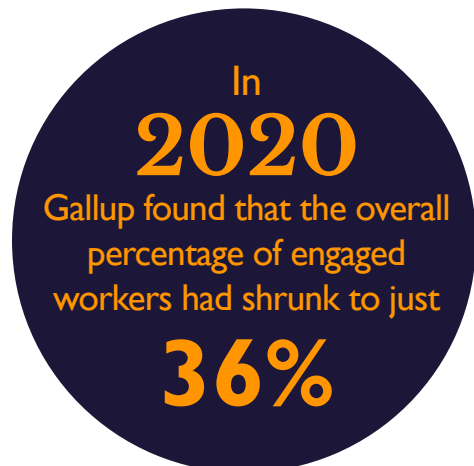
"To be fully present at work, to feel "psychologically safe", we must know that we can be free enough, sometimes, to share the things that scare us without fear of recriminations. We must be able to talk about what is messy or sad, to have hard conversations with colleagues who are driving us crazy. We can't be focused just on efficiency." Google, New York Times 2016

The animation studios Pixar use a number of strategies to encourage creativity in their culture. This includes banishing perfectionism, giving ideas enough time to grow before the fear of risk kills all possibilities and focusing on many ideas at the same time. They don't put all their efforts into instant money makers, since non money-making ventures can sometimes pave the way for new ideas with much greater payback. Pixar also advocate giving up as it's OK to stop on an idea if it isn't working out – possibly useful in the future, or possibly just be a dead end. Part of the point of innovation is that some ideas will totally fail.

Seeing "failure" as an opportunity for growth is central to an agile culture. No doubt you are familiar with Carol Dweck's "growth mindset" – that we are able to develop and change. Encouraging curiosity and healthy conflict can sometimes lead to mistakes, but they can also create innovation and real breakthroughs. Being able to try and fail and try again is at the heart of resilience and an

agile mindset. Organisations need to encourage innovation, support experimentation and promote new ways of thinking, otherwise they just won't keep up.

An agile culture is also one where the workforce is highly engaged. Involvement increases engagement and using principles such as Design Thinking enables employees to lead on practices, processes and ways of working. Design Thinking is all about putting people at the heart of the change and is iterative, agile and full of experimentation.

In **2020** Gallup found that the overall percentage of engaged workers had shrunk to just **36%**

Design Thinking is particularly important when changes will impact the workforce directly. When used with technology transformations it converts employees from passive to active and makes them front and centre for how the changes are designed.

So, how do organisations benefit from encouraging an agile culture? For years organisational surveys such as Gallup have been highlighting diminishing employee engagement levels. In 2020 they found that the overall percentage of engaged workers had shrunk to just 36%.

CASE STUDY
To build an agile culture telecommunications company Spark in New Zealand started with a Sounding Board, a diverse group of 70 volunteers from across the organization. These were opinion leaders, rather than hierarchical leaders and the Sounding Board's role was to create buy-in and

understanding about the new model and design enablers (behavioural shifts and new values) to help employees along the agile journey.

CONCLUSION
Now more than ever, we need to find new ways to support our workforce whilst we ask more of them. Tapping into the wisdom of employees, their knowledge and energy, can all bring great benefits. Creating the right cultures will support all of this.

Some suggested initial steps:

01
Co-create a **SOCIAL CONTRACT** that outlines the roles and behaviours of the multiple stakeholder groups. This will encourage trust to be established.

02
Reward failure through developing people's **PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL**, particularly their capacity for grounded optimism. Cultivate an inner dialogue of leniency for the past, appreciation for the present and opportunity-seeking for the future.

03
Encourage risk taking to enable **INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY**. Bring open curiosity to limiting beliefs of perfectionism/fear of failure e.g. what is the cost of needing my work to be perfect? What is the benefit of sharing work that is good enough?

If we just have a Hammer, then everything looks like a nail.

"The industrial economy mindsets and skills of senior leaders is arguably the greatest obstacle to becoming an agile organization."

MCKINSEY 2016

Back in 2016, McKinsey were already saying that agility was an urgent necessity. "Yet most companies have a deeply embedded command organization architecture and culture. This reflects the industrial economy mindsets and skills of their senior leaders, which is arguably the greatest obstacle to becoming an agile organization." McKinsey said that to create robust transformations "senior leaders must learn and practice a holistic and complete set of new mindsets and skills, and apply them to design a wholly new, agile organization architecture and culture."
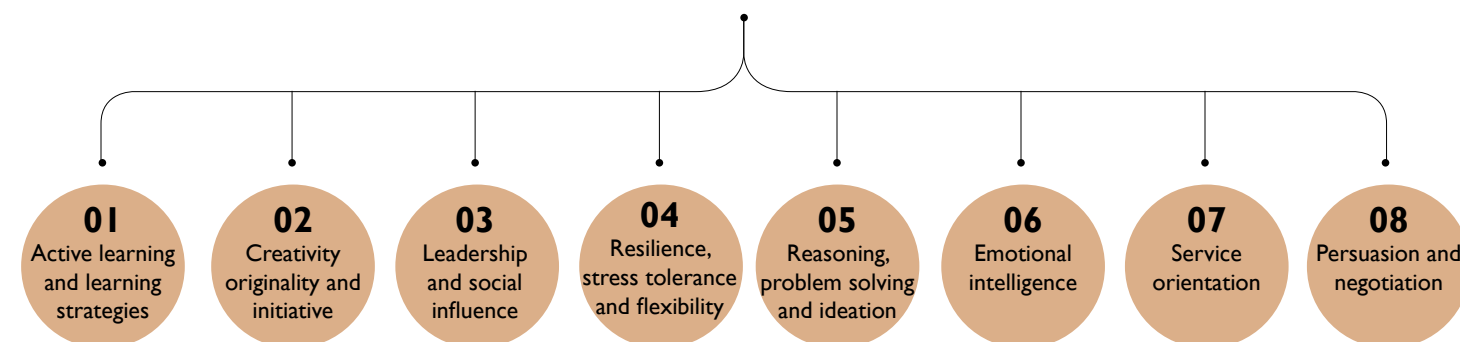
So what does agility look like in terms of skills and capabilities? And isn't it just innate – is it possible to learn it? Humanity Works believes that everyone can become more agile, especially if we focus on these four areas:

MINDSET

BEHAVIOURS

COMPETENCIES

SKILLS

Resilience is about reframing the stories we tell ourselves and the mindset we have about learning by making mistakes, not avoiding them. It's how we develop new skills. Mindset is how comfortable we are with the 80:20 rule, or as Gretchin Rubin says in her book The Happiness Project: "instead of pushing yourself to an impossible 'perfect,' and therefore getting nowhere, accept 'good.'" Mindset is also what we tell ourselves when we fail and how we pick ourselves up afterwards.

World Economic Forum Future of Work Survey 2020

identified the changing nature of competencies and their use in organisations. Here are some of the ones they identified.

| **01** Active learning and learning strategies | **02** Creativity originality and initiative | **03** Leadership and social influence | **04** Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility | **05** Reasoning, problem solving and ideation | **06** Emotional intelligence | **07** Service orientation | **08** Persuasion and negotiation |

It is also behavioural – how often we experiment and collaborate, how open we are to novelty. It is also how we treat others – encouraging curiosity, building trusting relationships, communicating clearly, and not judging when others fail.

It's also about competencies, such as learning to ignore distractions and focusing on what is important. It's chunking things down and taking small steps. It's learning how we can pivot when the facts and circumstances change.

CASE STUDY

For example, to make agile working a success, British pharmaceutical GSK prioritises

collaboration and autonomy over rigid planning, and speed over perfection. They start with the endpoint in mind, unite people around a challenge and build a team based on skills not seniority.
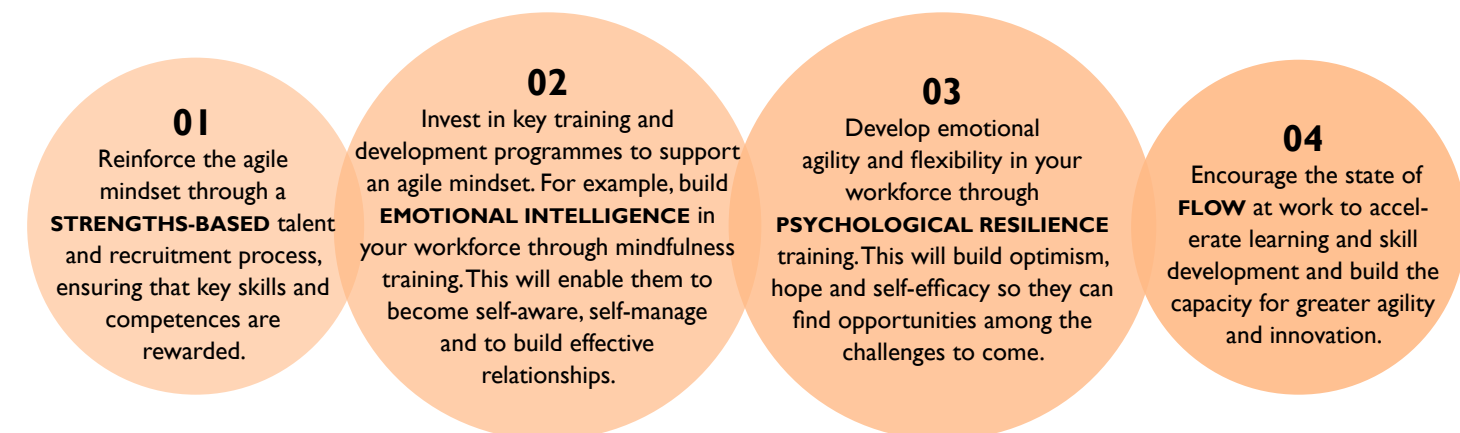
CONCLUSION

Sometimes we need to loosen the grip on our engineering approach. These worked in the past - logic, data, linear thinking, control. Sometimes we have to build bench-strength in other competencies such as creativity, systemic thinking, coaching, communication, design thinking. As Einstein once said, "we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

"Perfectionism is a way of thinking that says if I look perfect, live perfect, work perfect, I can avoid or minimise criticism blame or ridicule."

BRENÉ BROWN

Some suggested initial steps:

01 Reinforce the agile mindset through a **STRENGTHS-BASED** talent and recruitment process, ensuring that key skills and competences are rewarded.

02 Invest in key training and development programmes to support an agile mindset. For example, build **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE** in your workforce through mindfulness training. This will enable them to become self-aware, self-manage and to build effective relationships.

03 Develop emotional agility and flexibility in your workforce through **PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE** training. This will build optimism, hope and self-efficacy so they can find opportunities among the challenges to come.

04 Encourage the state of **FLOW** at work to accelerate learning and skill development and build the capacity for greater agility and innovation.

Readying The Ship
for The Storm

So, let's recap what we've covered in this report. While we may not be able to predict the future of work, we can adapt how we work so that it's sustainable among all the unpredictability to come.

At Humanity Works Consultancy we believe building an organisation rooted in an agile mindset will allow you the flexibility and adaptability to thrive even among the uncertainty. Using our agility model, we suggest initially focusing your efforts in three places:

Work with your leadership teams on their mindset and behaviours.

Develop your organisational culture to promote agility, resilience and psychological safety.

Support your workforce to build the right mindsets, behaviours, competencies and skills to withstand the turbulence.

We hope you have found this report useful. As Positive Psychology coaches our mission is to help organisations and their people to thrive.

We also love to ask coaching questions. So here goes….

What thoughts, ideas or questions has this report left you with?

What areas of your business are doing well when it comes to agility?

What can you build on to help you thrive?

What else might you want to implement to increase your agility?

How will you do this and what resources have you got in place?

Can Humanity Works help you with this work?

Our consultancy, coaching and training services support organisations to boost performance and deliver sustainable transformation.

So please do get in touch if you would like to talk to us about embedding agility in your organisation and how we can support the optimal performance and transformation of your organisation and people in 2021.
Humanity Works!

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