



- Keeping the UK at the forefront of business innovation
- How to win against larger, better-resourced competitors
- Break with convention to be more contentious and productive
- Put yourself at risk for your beliefs – even when you're most scared to act

How to keep your friends and disrupt their lives

If you know things have to change in your organisation but feel stifled and unsure about exactly how, KHURSHED DEHNUGARA and CLAIRE GENKAI BREEZE offer six provocative steps to challenge the status quo.

A new advertising campaign from The Economist caught our attention over the summer. Designed by Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO, it encouraged commuters to debate this assertion: "Britain should give up trying to be a global superpower".

The provocative resonance of that argument seemed to chime with so many conversations we've had with UK business leaders at home and abroad. The tone can be one of resignation, doing the best with what we have, surrendering the right to innovation to others better equipped than we are.

In the face of this, what we want to say is a big "No!" On the contrary, the Challengers we've researched and worked with are making a stand for something different. They have a wholly more optimistic way of looking at the situation we're in now and what may come out of it. They use the constraints we face as a force propelling us to break out of the status quo. They're sure we can continue to lead in the UK, but it will just be in a different way to the past.

In our research, we were initially inspired by those organisations that developed a spirit to take on much larger and better-resourced competitors – and win. These Challengers consistently found a way to close the gap between their big ambitions and their traditional resources.

Our book, *Challenger Spirit – Organisations That Disrupt The Status Quo*, describes the traits we uncovered. At their heart, Challengers find ways of addressing the question: "Does it have to be like this?" This infects their leadership, culture and engagement. Their willingness to break with convention makes them more innovative, energetic, contentious and productive.

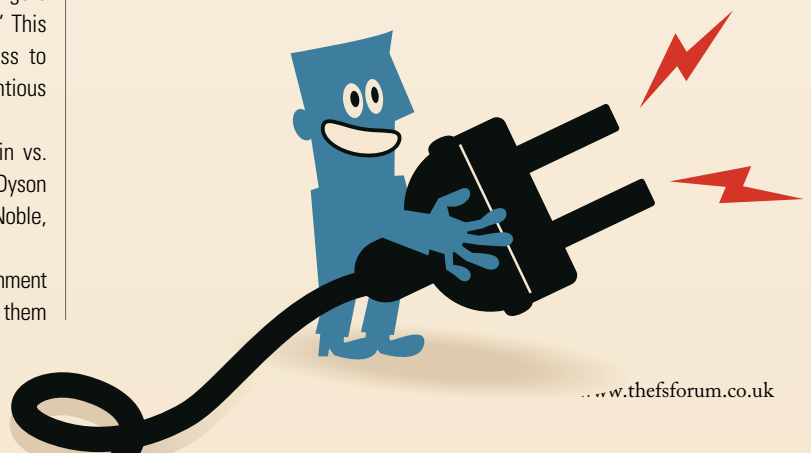
We investigated some of the classic Challenger stories – Virgin vs. British Airways, Apple vs. Microsoft, Prêt a Manger vs. Macdonalds, Dyson vs. Hoover, Diesel vs. Levi, Honda vs. Toyota, Amazon vs. Barnes and Noble, Netflix vs. Blockbuster, and many others.

And, in the process, we also found many leaders of dominant Establishment organisations who want to rediscover the Challenger spirit that made them

WAKE YOURSELF AND OTHERS UP. DON'T SLEEP-WALK, AVOID, COLLUDE OR GET STUCK IN REPETITIVE FIGHTS THAT MAINTAIN THE WAY THINGS CURRENTLY ARE.

successful, or create a spirit that will generate a new phase of growth. Many told us about businesses in crisis – not a commercial crisis, but certainly a crisis of confidence and leadership. Many had become successful in the first place through a spirit that was now waning or missing. Despite talented people with energy, will and technical competence, they had difficulty getting any traction on the big changes required to remain competitive. Here are some of their insights:

"We're in a period of unprecedented challenge. Of the big companies that exist today, one or two may emerge as truly world leading global companies.



The challenger spirit

TELLING TECHNIQUES

The choice is to try and lead the pack or to follow. . . . but we don't really know how to be at the forefront."

"Our culture is risk averse, bureaucratic, slow and overly analytical. . . . It perpetuates the status quo. There's a significant desire to challenge the market but a lack of creativity or courage to take the leap of faith to something different."

"I don't think we know how to change anymore. We're trying very hard to become a global, disciplined more structured organisation and at the same time empower our people and build more accountability. For many, these things appear at odds with each other."

PURPOSEFUL INSTABILITY: The organising principle of those who've challenged successfully is to cause a disturbance – to bring your edge to challenge the status quo so that it notices and has to react. We heard many stories of courage, of people putting themselves at risk for what they believe. Without a Challenger Spirit, the corporate narrative never changes. Challengers are protagonists driving towards something.

WITNESS THE ESTABLISHMENT: To bring this disturbance to bear, you first have to wake yourself and others up sufficiently so that you don't sleep-walk, avoid, collude or get stuck in repetitive fights that maintain the way things currently are. It means seeing what's conventional in your own thinking and the organisation around you. It's about understanding where a need for safety prevents the challenge of outdated habits, norms and routines. There are too many leaders in challenging situations without enough "Challenger" in their leadership.

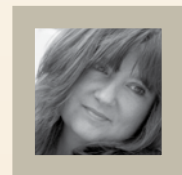
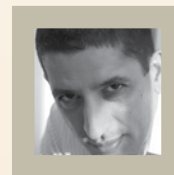
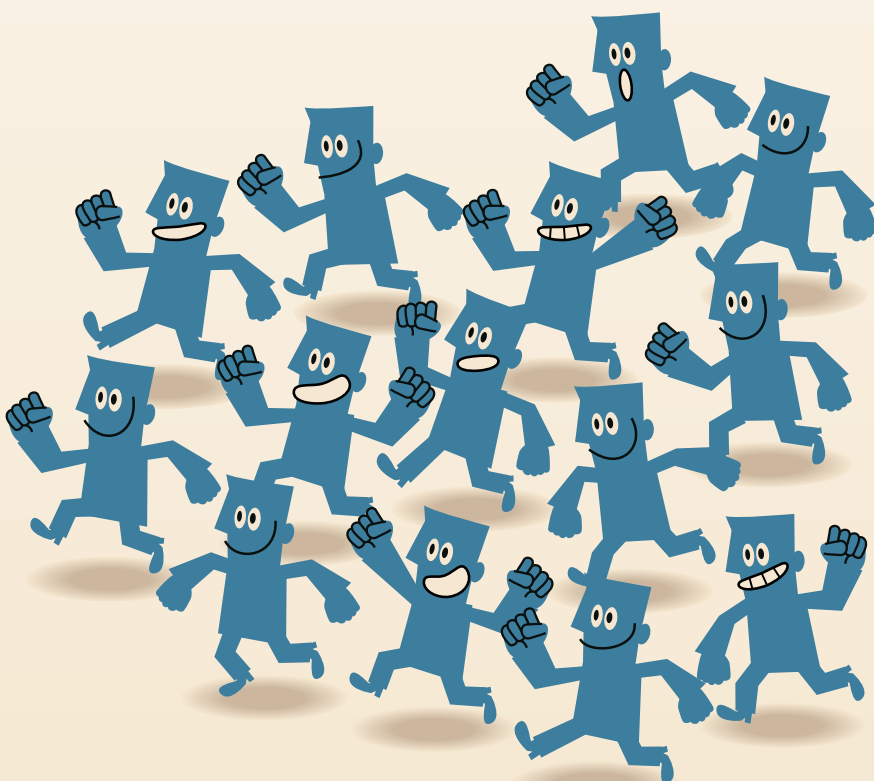
HOPE AND AMBITION: Now you've seen the status quo with new eyes, you're looking to be simultaneously in it and different enough to disturb it. This requires a containing story for all this instability. It's not the same as Vision and Strategy. It's a compelling version of what you stand for, or stand against – brimful with the intention behind the disturbance you're instigating. It's your definition of what you're taking personally. It's about investing time to create your ambition and enrol support for it not through control, but through context, connection, and conversation.

YOU'RE THE CHALLENGER. HAVE THE STRENGTH NOT TO BE COMPROMISED BY A DESIRE FOR PRAGMATISM, RECOGNITION AND REWARD.

DANCE, PROD AND SHUFFLE: Being on the edge means learning in a different improvisational way. It means welcoming the lessons of the twists, turns, difficulties and breakdowns along the way. It's taking what emerges from the instability you've caused, building on it and passing it on. It's about finding a way to do all of this together in an open and public way so that collective learning takes place.

BE THE FACE ON THE DARTBOARD: Living on the edge also means taking care and not exhausting yourself while you're challenging the status quo. You're the target of a range of emotions as those around you react to the disturbance you're causing. That means having the strength not to be compromised by a desire for pragmatism, recognition and reward. It means being comfortable doing things that will be unpopular – and managing your energy so that your passion and commitment don't exhaust you.

GROW OLD DISGRACEFULLY: The net result of all this is a creative dislocation of established structures, and a dissolution of a particular way of ordering things that had become out dated or ineffective. But it's too easy at this stage to sit back and end up creating a new Establishment – that's why the final behavioural essential is to continue to test yourself.



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