Cultivating the explorer's mindset to succeed in holistic teams

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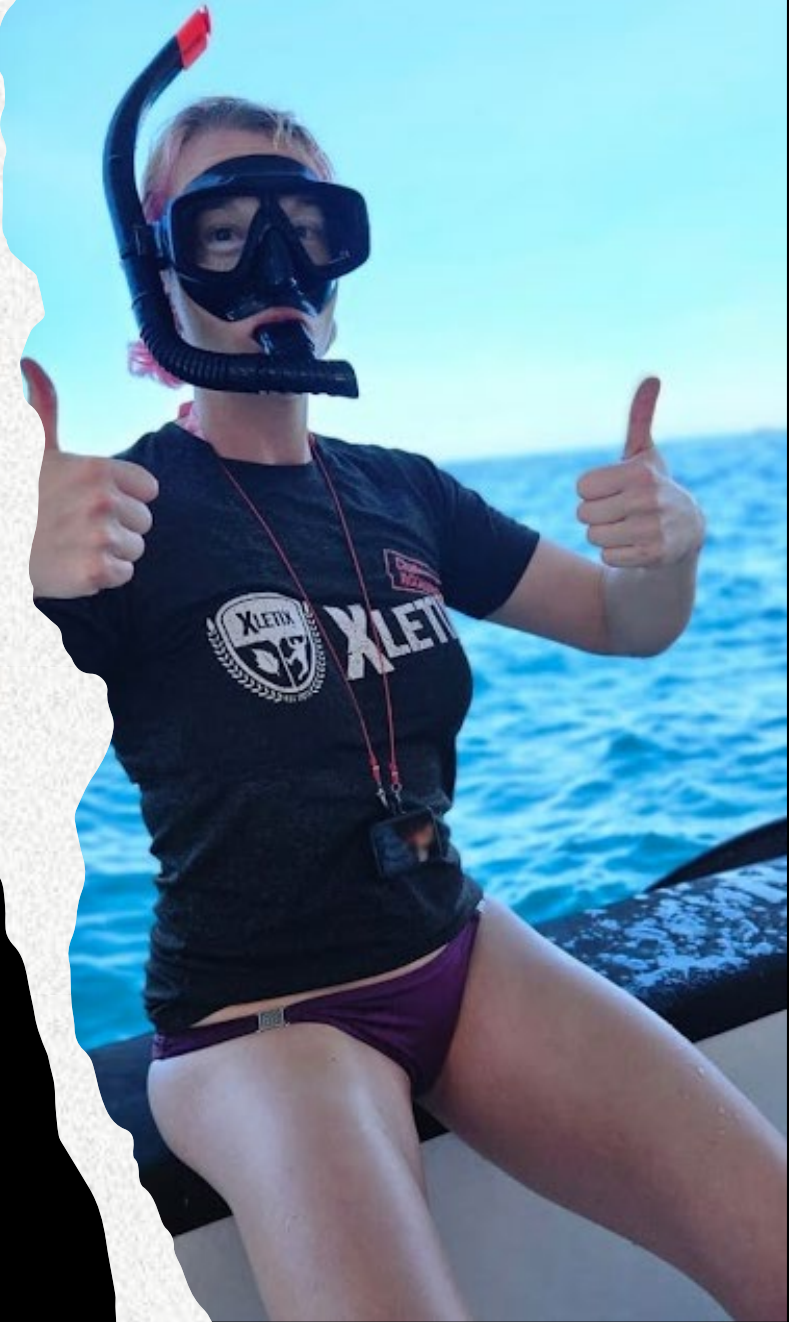
Hello!

I am a CEO

Still a tester at heart

Former PO

I work for BREDEX GmbH

A company excited about making customers happy with development and consulting

I am...

A musician, an athlete, a wife, a friend, an auntie...

And an explorer...

- Our journey today
  - Exploration as a concept
  - Exploring *everything*
  - Exploring in your teams
  - A little commitment

Exploring … in testing and in software

- Explore the software while simultaneously **designing** and **executing** tests, using feedback from the last test to **inform** the next (Elisabeth Hendrickson)

- Learning needs to **change** what you are doing. (Maaret Pyhäjärvi)

- When you can't define the steps you need in advance, and you need to find out more about a problem before you decide how to proceed with solving it, you're exploring. (Me)
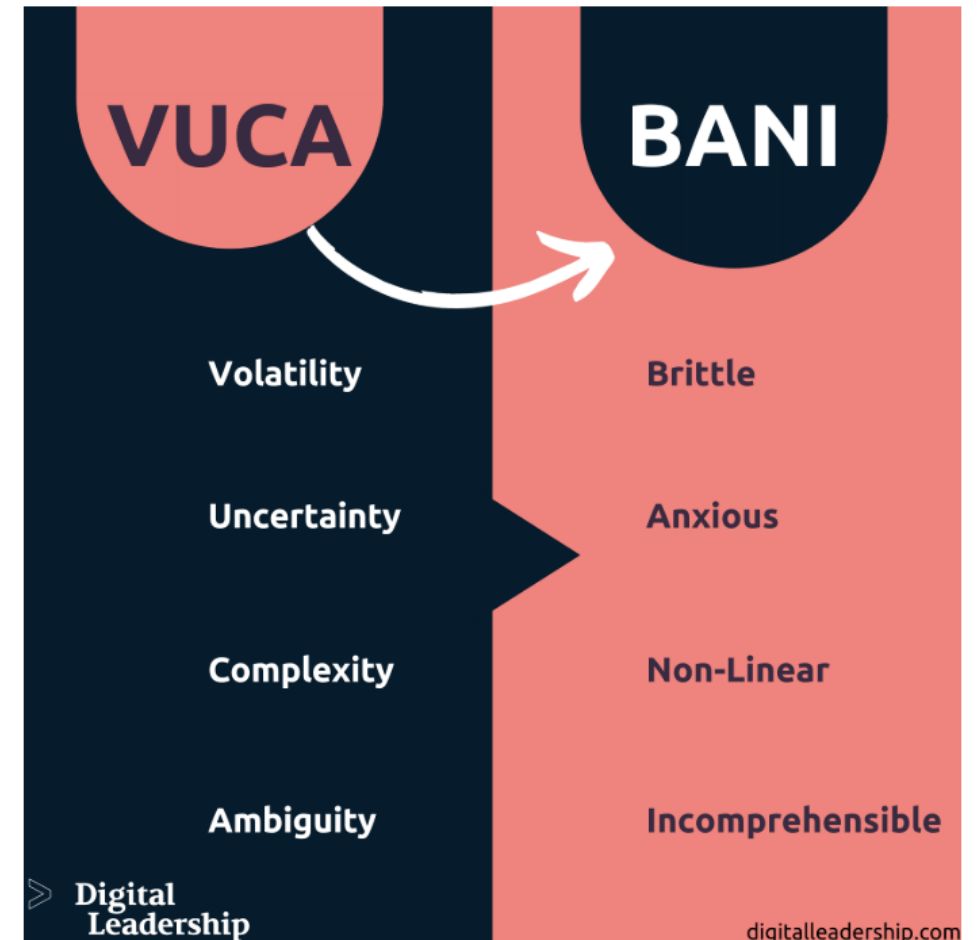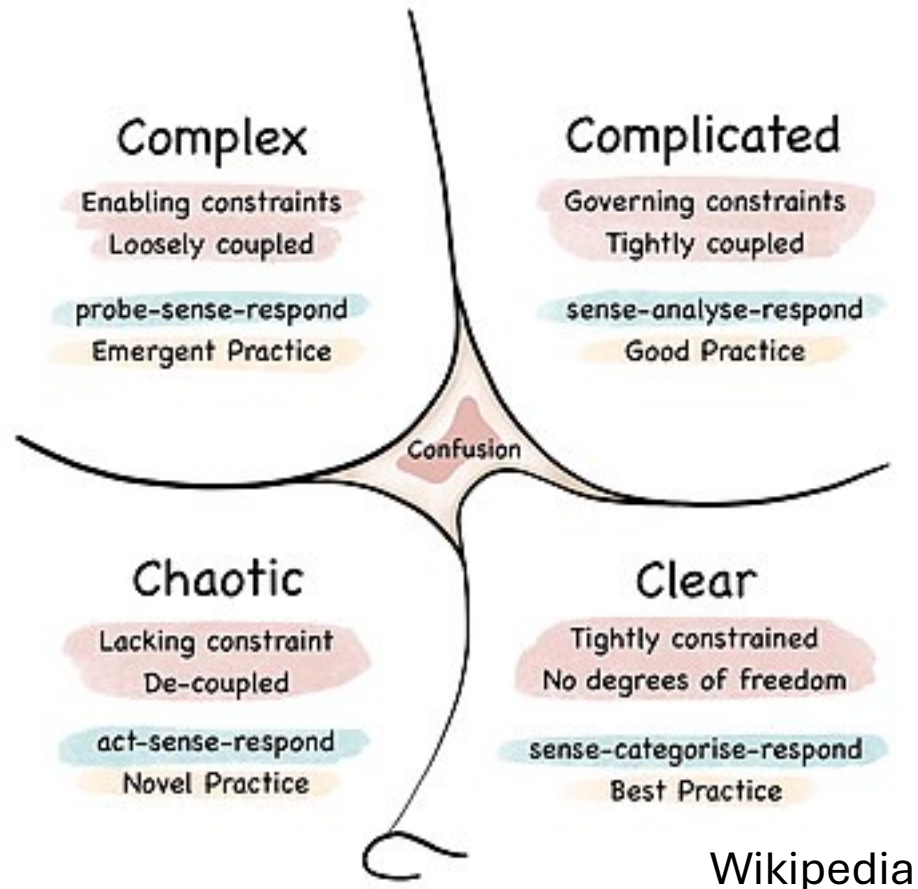
Exploring … more

Other clever people
have thought of this

Complexity, let me count the ways…

Wikipedia

Exploring...

"Exploration ... can be considered **travel** over **new** territory—undiscovered or new to the explorer—for adventure or discovery, or looking at something in a **careful** way to **learn** more about it."

Exploring...

Careful learning in order to (make) **change**

Exploring is driven by curiosity

Curiosity-drive theory:

Curiosity is developed from the desire to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity (both undesirable) by making sense of unfamiliar aspects through exploratory behaviours.

(Wikipedia)

Exploring *everything*

- Situations
- Ourselves and our patterns
- Other people
- More fun things

Why is this relevant for holistic work?

- Holistic: *relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts*

- Looking at the whole requires a wider perspective

- Added bonus: fewer or healthier conflicts

Exploring situations

Bob thinks testers are useless ☹

Separate observation from interpretation

- Guiding questions for explorers
    - What are the observable, incontestable facts?
    - What is my interpretation? What "stories" am I telling myself?

MIND THE GAP

EXPLORE

Amy pushed something straight to prod without a review ☹

None of my devs are doing unit testing ☹

Explore the other side

- Guiding questions for explorers
  - If I did this, what would be my reason?
  - What other interpretations or reasons can I find?
  - What context would have to be true for this behaviour to make sense?

Note: don't use this to excuse behaviour, but to understand it and create space for curiosity

This exploration makes you a better team member

Exploring ourselves and our patterns as systems

I had exactly the same test idea as someone else

Exploring your patterns…

- What is going on in my brain?

- Do others think similarly?

- I *suspect* we have shared *heuristics*
  - *When our brain closes that gap between event and interpretation so quickly that we don't even notice we've made a decision*

- Narration as a tool to find them out
  - *"What do I expect?", "Why do I feel surprised?"*

Poke it till it pops

If something seems problematic / acts oddly, interact with it directly and indirectly to evaluate it more closely, in different situations. The interaction can be editing, searching for, redoing steps…Keep poking until something comes out, or you're satisfied it won't.

| I observe	A field with interesting behaviour
I think	There may be more interesting behaviour here
My next step	Interact with the field by editing it, searching for data I've entered into it, viewing the same field in a different view / client / browser

Auto-observability

Treating **yourself as a system** to be explored, observed and analysed, and providing yourself with the means to ask new meaningful questions so that you can become **explainable** and **understandable** to yourself and others
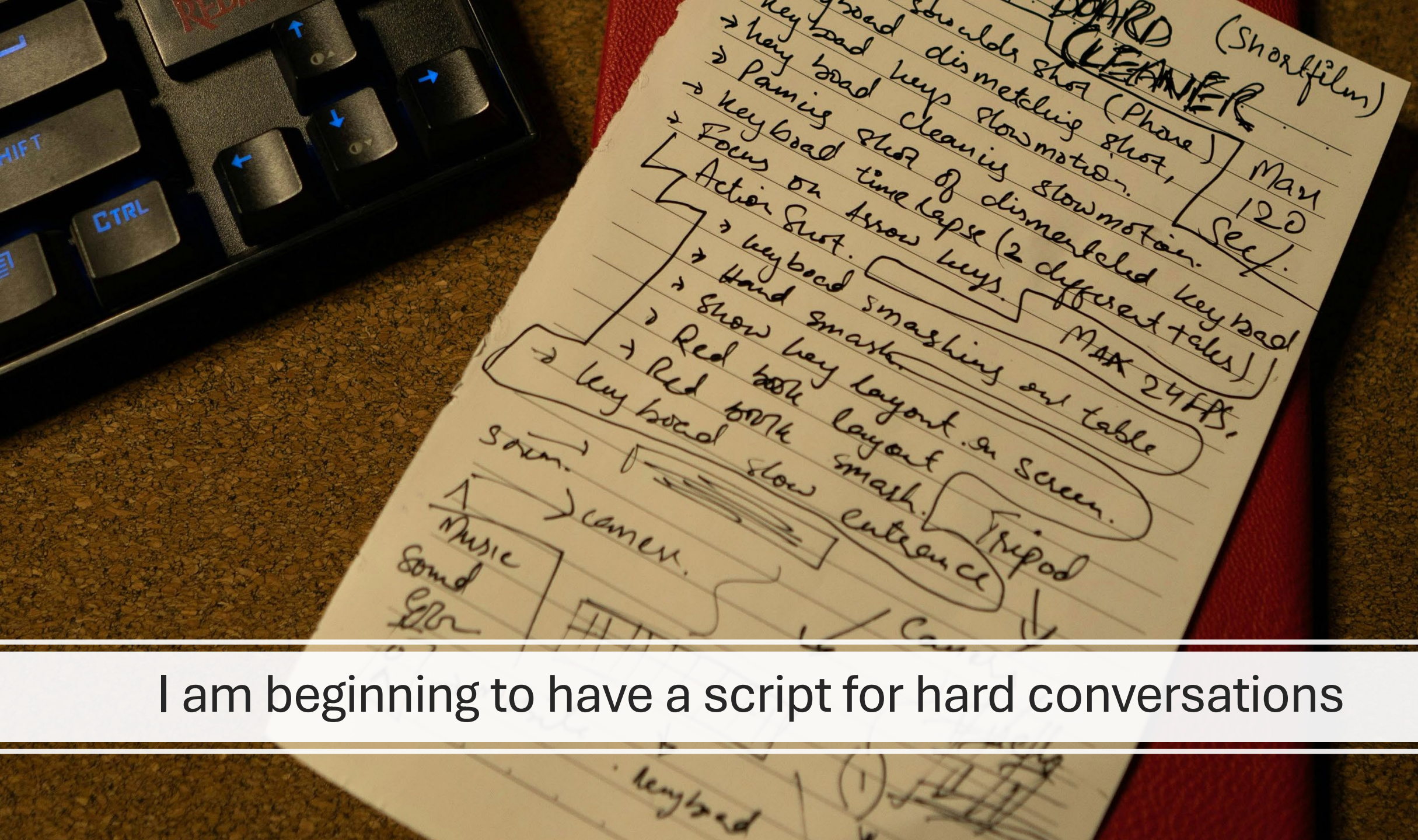
I am beginning to have a script for hard conversations

How do I disappoint you?
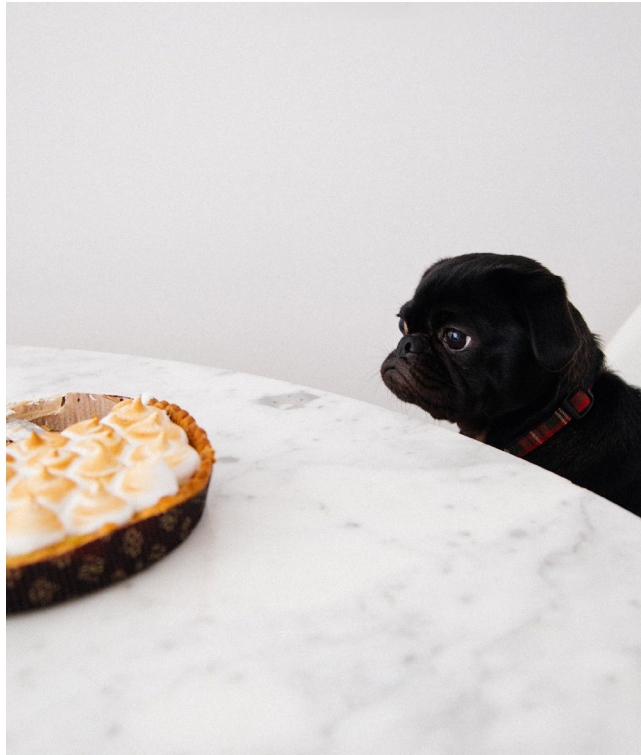
Your decisions won't make everyone happy and you will have to get used to disappointing people
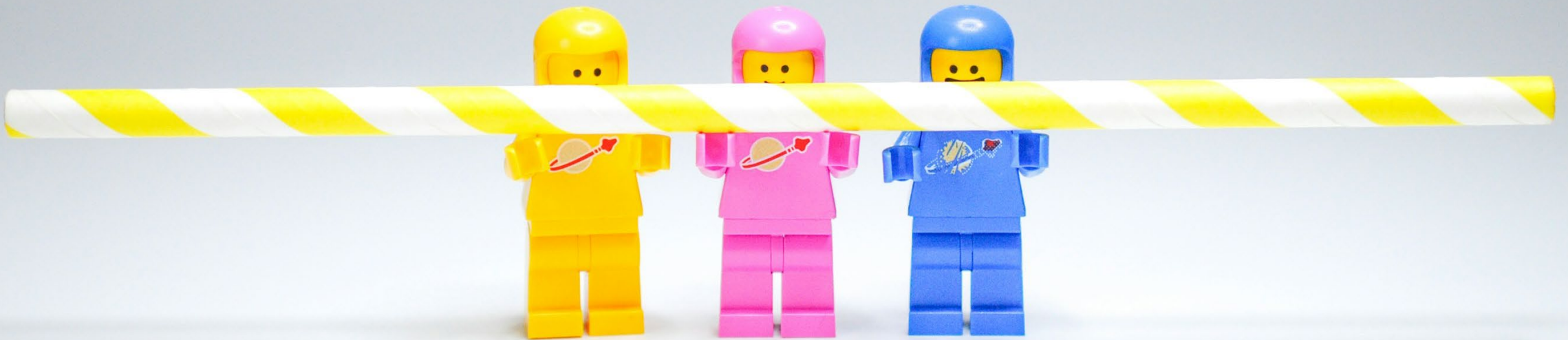
This happens	We need to communicate to people who are going to be disappointed
I reflect	Can I make them not disappointed? If not, I need to show acceptance and understanding of their emotion It won't be a fun conversation
I act	I do the conversation, speaking openly about the fact I know I'm disappointing them.

This exploration will make you a better tester and teacher, which makes the team better

Exploring other people's worlds and systems

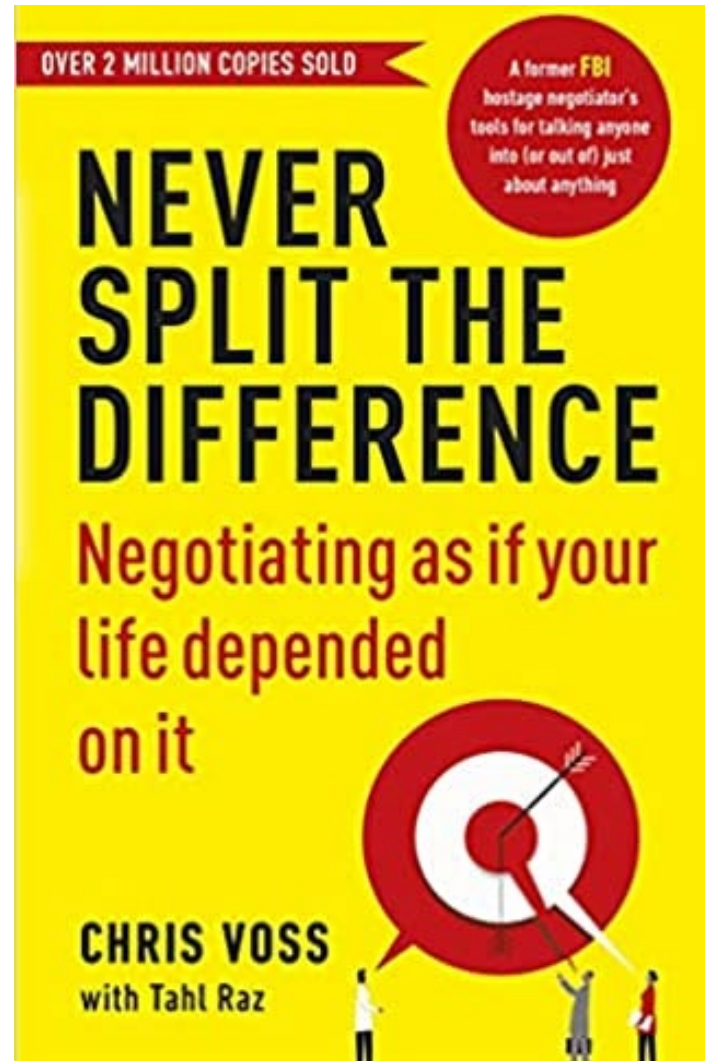Things got heated in the retro and James didn't react well when I said it wasn't that big of a deal

Have you ever calmed down because someone told you to?

Has "don't worry/stress about that" ever solved your worry?
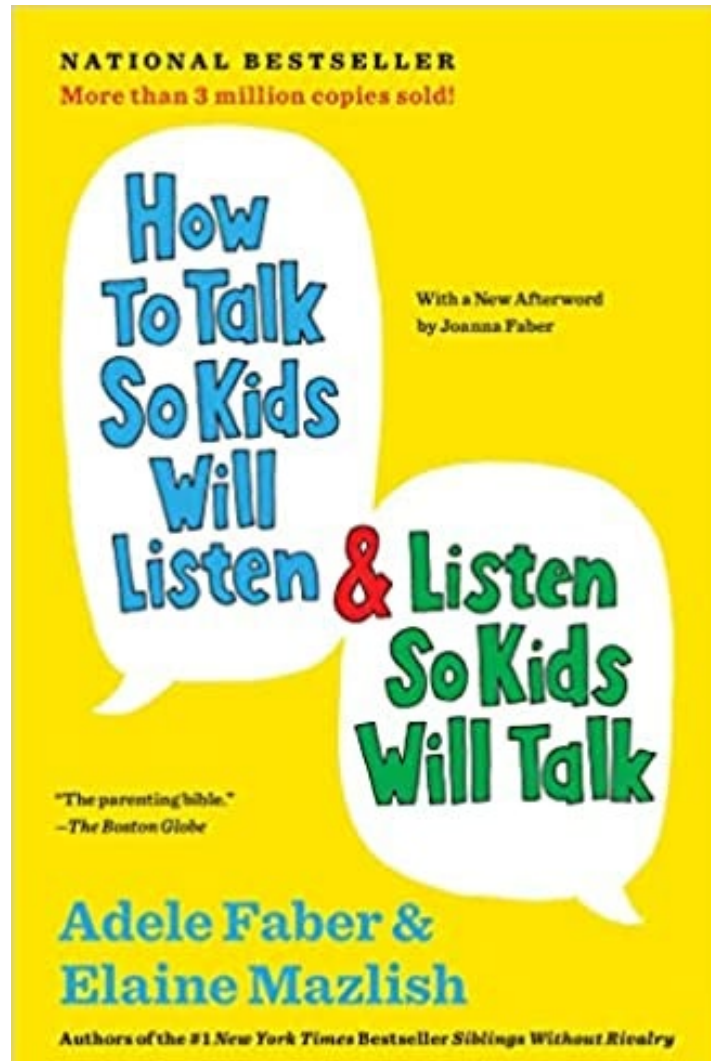
TWO VERY DIFFERENT BOOKS…

They don't need to have their feelings agreed with,
they need to have them acknowledged.
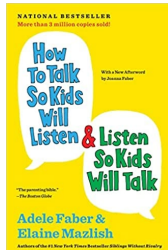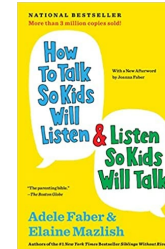
The more you try to push unhappy feelings away, the more they
become stuck in them. The more comfortably you can accept the bad
feelings, the easier it is for them to let go of them

We spotted their feelings, turned them into words, and then very calmly and
respectfully repeated their emotions back to them. That's called labeling.
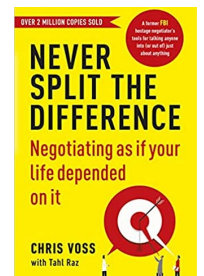
...they want to be understood and accepted. Listening is the cheapest, yet most effective concession we can make to get there.
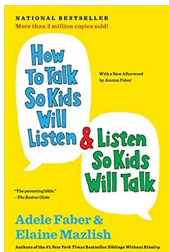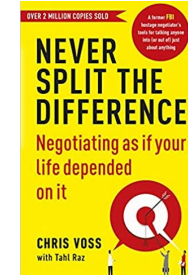
We fear that by giving a name to the feeling we'll make it worse. Just the opposite is true. The person who hears the words for what they are experiencing is deeply comforted. Someone has acknowledged their inner experience

Your aim is to extract and observe as much information as possible. ... smart people often have trouble with this ... they think they don't have anything to discover.
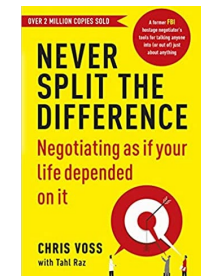
Exploring the inner world of others

- Guiding questions for explorers
  - What are they feeling?
  - What is true for the other person? Can I understand it even if I disagree?
  - Can multiple things be true?
  - Can we move forward without changing their feeling?

This exploration will make you a more empathetic communicator

Which doesn't mean accepting bad behaviour!

Other interesting things to explore…

Explore constraints

- Guiding questions for explorers
  - What implicit "rules" are in place here?
  - Are they really rules?

- Examples (weirdly all to do with food!)
  - Plate size at buffet
  - Chocolate fountains
  - Breakfast foods
  - Eating with your hands
  - Burping

The heart of
the explorer

Not all those who wander are lost
(JRR Tolkein)

I don't know which path I'm taking, but I know how I'm approaching the problem

I notice a thing, I get curious, I follow my curiosity

Exploring creates space for

- Unknowns
- Reflection
- Surprise
- Wonder
- Creation
- Growth

This is what gives us the wider perspective

- Seeing quality as a shared task

- Interest and helping in other roles

- Focus on the successful outcome, not individual outputs

A little commitment for your work

- Choose one!
  - Pair with someone from another discipline
  - Teach something
  - Narrate a thing you're doing
  - Take the lead on a thing you haven't led before
  - Ask a question about something you don't *need* to know
  - Be the holiday representative for a different role
  - Do some work for the support team
  - Document a feature
  - Go to a conference, get an idea, do an experiment ;)

A little commitment for your life

- Do something new and embrace the beginner's mindset
- Pay particular attention to your surroundings on a walk
- Look at a daily object and wonder how it works / was made
- Read the thing explainer by Randall Munroe
- Do an escape room
- Spend some time around tiny humans or foreigners
- Find out the etymology of a word (I recommend *aubergine*)
- Indulge a random thought (purple plants, processes, …)
- Listen to a popular science audiobook / podcast (Katie Mack's End of Everything is good)
- Follow people from a marginalised group on social media
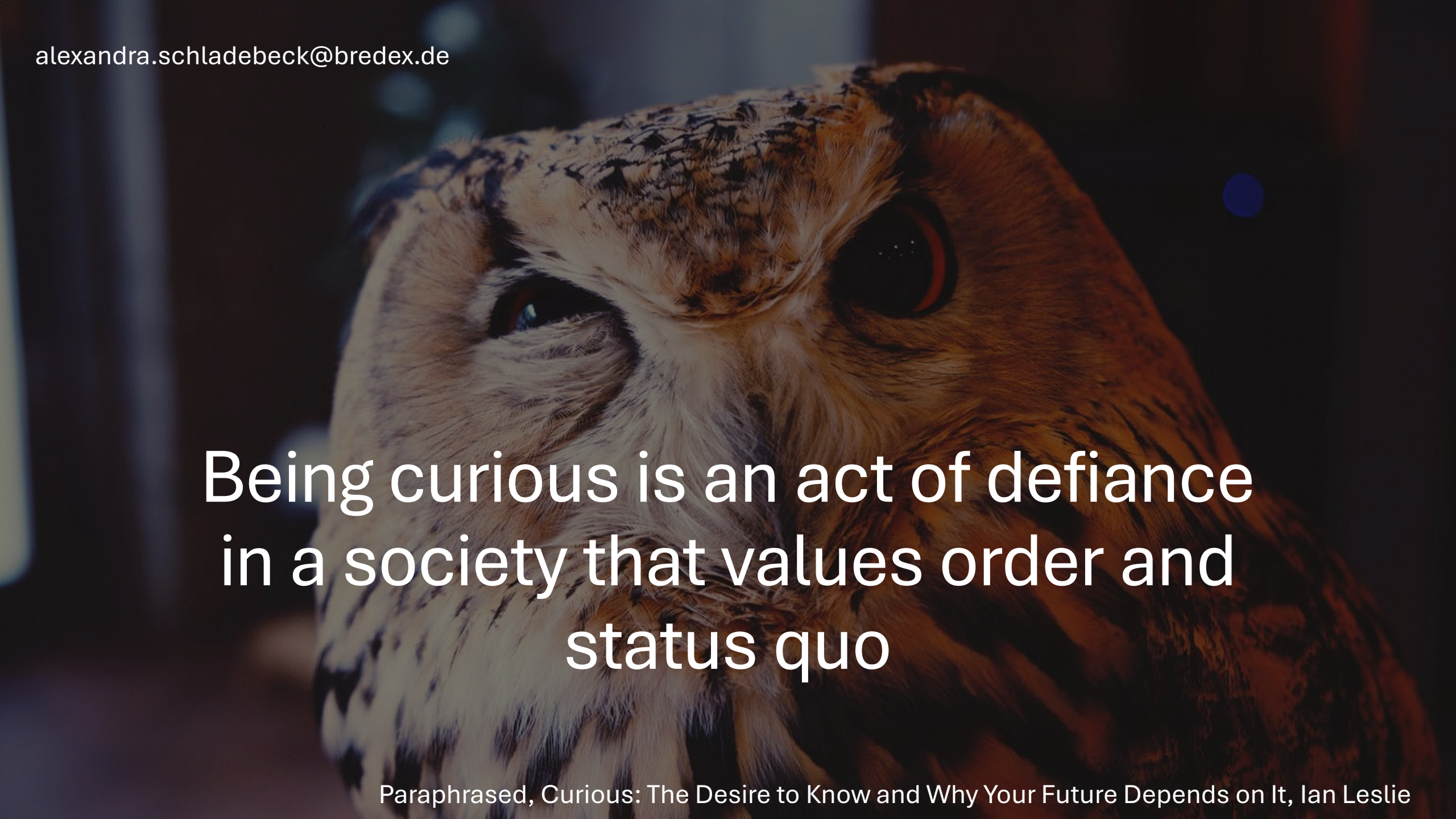
To explore, practice being curious

Little steps in curiosity have big effects

- Empathy (curious not furious)
- Learning
- Ability to see the big picture
- Using other people's language
- Whole team being responsible for the success

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Being curious is an act of defiance in a society that values order and status quo

Paraphrased, Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends on It, Ian Leslie

List of references

- www.thework.com
- www.schladebeck.de/microheuristics
- How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk, A Faber & E Mazlish
- Never split the difference, C Voss
- The thing explainer, R Munroe
- The end of everything, K Mack
- The simple sabotage field manual
- Managing complexity (and chaos) in times of crisis, A Rancati & D Snowden
- Anything by Pema Chödrön
- Curious, I Leslie