

# NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

GUIDING STARS

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THESE GUIDING STARS ARE ONE OF MANY FRAMEWORKS THAT WE USE IN OUR WIDE-RANGING WORK.

We're happy to share our thinking with you. Get in touch at [hello@theresearchagency.com](mailto:hello@theresearchagency.com) to talk more.

[theresearchagency.com](http://theresearchagency.com)

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## GUIDING STARS TRANSPARENCY

OFTEN EXPRESSED AS  
"Why is it taking so long to..."  
"What is this so hard..."

HUMAN INSIGHT  
People value things that appear to have taken effort – and they trust things they value.

### SOME TYPICAL SIGNALS OF SETTING EXPECTATIONS

SENSORY TRIGGERS: e.g. the sound of someone typing, a time bar progressing, a spinning ball.

INFORMATION TRIGGERS: e.g. we have searched 100 sites for you, we have two more steps to take, even open kitchens in restaurants.

Transparency counters all of the instinctive responses of fight/flight/freeze.

Transparency creates feelings of comfort and confidence.

## GUIDING STARS CONSISTENCY

OFTEN EXPRESSED AS  
"But last time..."  
"I never know what they'll say next time when..."

HUMAN INSIGHT  
People are hardwired to see patterns and to build up a set of priors so they can predict what is likely to happen. Inconsistency is a major trigger of uncertainty. Repetition is kind to the brain.

### SOME TYPICAL SIGNALS OF SETTING EXPECTATIONS

SENSORY TRIGGERS: e.g. the same visual or auditory signals wherever the experience turns up.

INFORMATION TRIGGERS: e.g. identical instructions everywhere, key points of impact e.g. three rules.

Consistency counters fight responses.

Consistency creates feelings of control.

## THE ROLE OF BRANDS AND ORGANISATIONS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Our brains are hardwired to keep us safe. We may no longer be roaming the savannah in search of prey, stalked by predators ourselves, but our instinct to be wary of new experiences still keeps us safe in the modern world.

Because of this, customer experience has a significant impact on people's lives – but at the brand level there is also role to play.

## GUIDING STARS SETTING EXPECTATIONS

OFTEN EXPRESSED AS  
"Will I have to..."  
"Should I be doing something..."

HUMAN INSIGHT  
The brain's left hemisphere likes detail, a plan and information to analyse (our right hemisphere takes a more conceptual view of the world). We don't like not knowing – it's the definition of uncertainty.

### SOME TYPICAL SIGNALS OF SETTING EXPECTATIONS

SENSORY TRIGGERS: e.g. dermatologist giving clear guidance when asking you to take off clothes for mole mapping.

INFORMATION TRIGGERS: e.g. chunk information, focus on emotionally high and low points, give people a heads up on upcoming steps across the wider process.

Setting expectations counters fight responses.

Setting expectations creates feelings of control and comfort.

## GUIDING STARS SOCIAL PROOF

OFTEN EXPRESSED AS  
"Do other people..."  
"Is this right..."

HUMAN INSIGHT  
People have an inbuilt need to belong. Belonging serves many purposes, specifically in relation to uncertainty it makes us feel safe ("safety in numbers"). Social proof helps speed up decision making and/or reinforce a positive decision.

### SOME TYPICAL SIGNALS OF SETTING EXPECTATIONS

SENSORY TRIGGERS: e.g. showing what other people are doing, most popular tags.

INFORMATION TRIGGERS: e.g. sharing information about other people's actions and behaviour, publishing reviews.

Social proof counters freeze responses.

Social proof creates feelings of comfort and confidence.

Organisations can send signals that create confidence, comfort and consistency as a counter to uncertainty. Being consistent in messaging, tone of voice, look and feel, and distinctive assets is one way that brands can create feelings of stability.

Another is to give people confidence by being clear about your vision or road map. People want to know there is a plan and that someone is in control.

The third is to connect with what matters to people – if they think you 'get them' they will also think they can trust you – an effective way to counter uncertainty.

FOLD OUT FOR THE WORKSHOP

GUIDING STARS

# NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

## ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

The one mainstay of recent times has been uncertainty.

Organisations that want to thrive need a stronger understanding of not only how to manage uncertainty, but how to harness the power of the unknown to boost their brand and better serve their customers.

This workshop is designed to equip you with the guiding stars you need to navigate times of uncertainty, build trust, and lead with confidence.

### C<sup>T</sup> COMFORT

Sometimes described as people feeling relaxed and at ease.

COMFORT RESULTS IN:

**Reduces:** flight response – people will steer away from or avoid things that make them feel uncomfortable.

**Lowers:** the chance of a fear spike – if in doubt our brain tells us to be wary of things that make us feel uncomfortable.

**Triggers:** normalised behaviour – if we are at ease, we go with the flow.

### C<sup>F</sup> CONFIDENCE

Sometimes described as people feeling ready to act or make a decision.

CONFIDENCE RESULTS IN:

**Reduces:** freeze response – people delay or procrastinate about decisions when they are not confident.

**Lowers:** levels of anxiety – if we are confident we worry less about consequences.

**Triggers:** appropriate responses – if we are confident we respond to what the experience requires of us.

### C<sup>L</sup> CONTROL

Sometimes described as people feeling they have agency or they can determine outcomes.

CONTROL RESULTS IN:

**Reduces:** fight response – when people feel out of control they become defensive and fight back.

**Lowers:** levels of anger – lack of control cause hormone spikes that prepare us to defend ourselves.

**Triggers:** action – if we feel we are controlling the situation we ready ourselves to act and will take appropriate action.

WHAT DO WE DO THAT TAKES A LOT OF EFFORT THAT PEOPLE WILL NOT BE AWARE OF?

*How could we let people see the effort?*

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WHAT DO WE DO THAT WE SHIELD PEOPLE FROM SEEING?

*How could we show them?*

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WHAT DO WE KNOW THAT PEOPLE INTERACTING WITH US WOULD NOT KNOW?

*How can we share that?*

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WHAT MIGHT SOMEONE E.G. A FIRST-TIME PERSON, NOT KNOW?

*How can we tell them what to expect about things they are unlikely to have considered?*

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HOW MIGHT SOMEONE NOT BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT?

*How can we present information, so expectations are clear across the main emotional peaks?*

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MIGHT SOMEONE THINK THEY KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT BUT BE INCORRECT?

*How can we confirm what they should expect to correct wrong assumptions?*

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## TRANSPARENCY

## CONSISTENCY

## SOCIAL PROOF

## EXPECTATIONS

WHAT DO PEOPLE EXPERIENCE DIFFERENTLY DEPENDING ON THE CONTEXT?

*How can we make it the same?*

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IS IT UNAVOIDABLE THAT THE EXPERIENCE WILL BE A BIT DIFFERENT DEPENDING ON CONTEXT?

*How can we make it look and feel the same?*

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WHAT IS ALWAYS THE SAME?

*How can we tell people that?*

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WHAT KEY PEOPLE OR GROUPS OF PEOPLE ARE THERE THAT CAN HELP NORMALISE THE EXPERIENCE?

*How can we identify what key person or group of people that others trust as a source of social proof?*

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WHAT SOCIAL PROOF POINTS DO WE KNOW ABOUT THAT PEOPLE WOULD NOT KNOW?

*How can we leave or create visual traces of other people's actions to inspire others?*

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WHO ARE OUR ADVOCATES, EARLY ADOPTERS AND PEOPLE WHO ARE ALREADY TAKING ACTION?

*How can we support our advocates and people who are taking action to prompt and inspire others?*

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