Updated Postcards from the Future

Exploring People Innovation in an AI-powered world

The only sustainable competitive advantage is a culture that learns faster than technology. You can out-learn, out-culture, and out-human your competitors.

Learning velocity = survival

By 2030. AI tools will be essential; by 2033˙ AI tools will be table stakes

Work like pirates – with AI copilots

Let teams build trust by shaping the tools they use

Open your mind, eyes, ears – your future depends on it

Deeply human data buills systems that let it reshape your organization

Challenge the status auo – or AI will automate it forever

AI learns your blases. If you don't create brave spaces to challenge assumptions, AI ossifies

Riff, jazz, improvise – that's where the human-AI magic happens

AI makes it technicality possible, only people make it meaningful

Dream bigger

AI makes it technicality possible, but only people make outcomes

Don't build lone AI heroes – build braver teams

Make AI tools the catalyst for braver teams

Make smart failures part of the culture

Embed Innovation in daily operations

AI is not the future – the system we build around it is!

From Brave Spaces to AI Frontiers: PurpleBeach Postcards from the Future Revisited

When we first created the **"Postcards from the Future"** at PurpleBeach, they were born out of something deeply personal: my frustration with how organisations were approaching innovation. Too often, innovation was little more than theatre — a sticky note workshop here, a shiny lab there — all without challenging the cultural and leadership habits that actually determine whether new ideas thrive or die.

So we decided to shake things up.

Each postcard was a snapshot from a possible future. They were playful, sometimes provocative, designed to get leaders to rethink how they worked with their people.

They championed:
- **Starting with undeniable problems** — not vanity projects.
- **Working like pirates** — democratically, with clear shared objectives, not rigid hierarchies.
- **Keeping eyes, ears and minds open**, building feedback loops from the frontline to the boardroom.
- **Challenging the status quo**, rewarding risk-taking and embracing smart failures.
- **Riffing, jazzing and improvising**, valuing messy collaboration over flawless plans.
- **Dreaming** beyond constraints, connecting individual purpose to collective missions.
- **Avoiding hero worship**, celebrating team wins over lone stars.
- **Communicating tirelessly**, treating language as a creative force.
- **Making the future part of the furniture**, so innovation became habit, not a one-off campaign.

These postcards were ultimately about **people**: their curiosity, intrinsic motivation, need for meaning, and untapped brilliance. They gave permission to explore, to challenge, to co-create.

But then everything changed — AGAIN

Fast forward to now, and the stakes are even higher. In the past year, I've spent countless hours with leaders trying to make sense of what AI means for their people. It's not just that AI is here — it's that it's **restructuring work at a molecular level**.

Automation, generative models and algorithms are dismantling old org charts and rewriting the rules of productivity. But the most important question isn't about efficiency or cost. It's whether your people systems can evolve as fast as your technology. Because frankly, **AI isn't going to erase your workforce — but poor leadership just might.**

That's why I felt **compelled to revisit the postcards**. To explore what People Innovation means in an AI-powered world. The core ideas haven't changed — they still centre on people, curiosity, meaning, and shared purpose. But now, they're reframed through the urgent lens of human–machine collaboration, accelerated learning, and cultural adaptability.

So I updated the postcards — here's what they mean now

In my recent writing, I've argued that the only sustainable competitive advantage left is a culture that learns faster than your tech stack. **You can't out-AI your competitors. But you can out-learn them, out-culture them, out-human them.**

Here's how **the updated Postcards now look in the age of AI:**

Learning velocity = survival. By 2030, AI tools will be table stakes. Your only undeniable problem is how quickly your people can learn and adapt together. I've seen fintechs gamify learning velocity, rewarding teams that cross-train and share, outperforming those obsessed with compliance alone.

Work like pirates — with AI copilots. Let teams build trust by shaping the very tools they'll use. At a global FMCG client, middle managers co-designed their AI, owning the transformation — not just surviving it.

Open your mind, eyes, ears — your future depends on it. Your richest data is still deeply human. Build systems that let it reshape your organisation. A media company used AI to spot hidden trends, but it was their editorial teams' audience empathy that turned them into viral hits.

Challenge the status quo — or AI will automate it forever. AI learns your biases. If you don't create brave spaces to challenge assumptions and test wilder ideas, you risk hard-coding yesterday's flaws into tomorrow's systems.

Riff, jazz, improvise — that's where the human–AI magic happens. I've seen the most exciting breakthroughs come not from decks or strategy papers, but from messy collisions where people and machines co-create in real time.

Dream bigger. AI makes it technically possible, but only people make it meaningful. I want teams to reach for outcomes that were once unimaginable — and feel personally connected to making them real.

Don't build lone AI heroes — build braver teams. Collective wins matter more than turf. I loved seeing a Fortune 500 reverse the usual model by giving AI tools to junior staff first — creating reverse mentoring that became a true competitive advantage.

Make smart failures part of the culture. **You should fear not experimenting more than you fear failing.** Fail small, learn fast, and be obsessively transparent.

Make the future part of the furniture. At the end of the day, innovation shouldn't just be an event — it should be embedded in meetings, feedback, metrics. Something that flexes daily, with or without leaders in the room.

If I could distil all this down to one idea, it's this:

AI is not the future — the system we build around it is!

People Innovation isn't about incremental upgrades. It's about making your people system unrecognisable to your past self, but indispensable to your future.

We don't need more compliance gatekeepers. We need leaders willing to be architects of brave, adaptive systems. Human systems that stagnate will be outpaced. Human systems that adapt will lead.

The real question isn't: Is your AI ready? It's: Are your people ready to evolve with it — or without you?