The Dolphin Index

The Dolphin Index is a rigorously researched and validated questionnaire that assesses how far your culture and climate are nurturing creativity and innovation.

If your organisation's culture is innovative you will tend to score higher than the UK norm on most, if not all, of 12 out of the 13 dimensions and lower than most on just one dimension – 'Stress'. On the other hand if your organisation is an inappropriately slow moving, demotivating, idea-killing, non-innovative dinosaur, you will probably score lower than the UK norm on most, if not all, of the 13 dimensions, with the exception of 'Stress', where you may well score above the UK norm.

However an obvious and simple warning – you don't necessarily want a highly innovative culture everywhere, all the time. How creative and innovative do you want air traffic controllers to be? Therefore before you decide if your Dolphin Index profile results are appropriate you need to think about how you want different parts of your organisation to ideally score.

To help you do this our research shows that there are 2 groupings for the majority of the dimensions, one of which is about how 'Caring' is the culture, the other about how creative and 'Daring' is the culture. So before making sense of your Dolphin Index results decide the point (or points) on the Caring/Daring matrix where you want to score (*Figure i*).
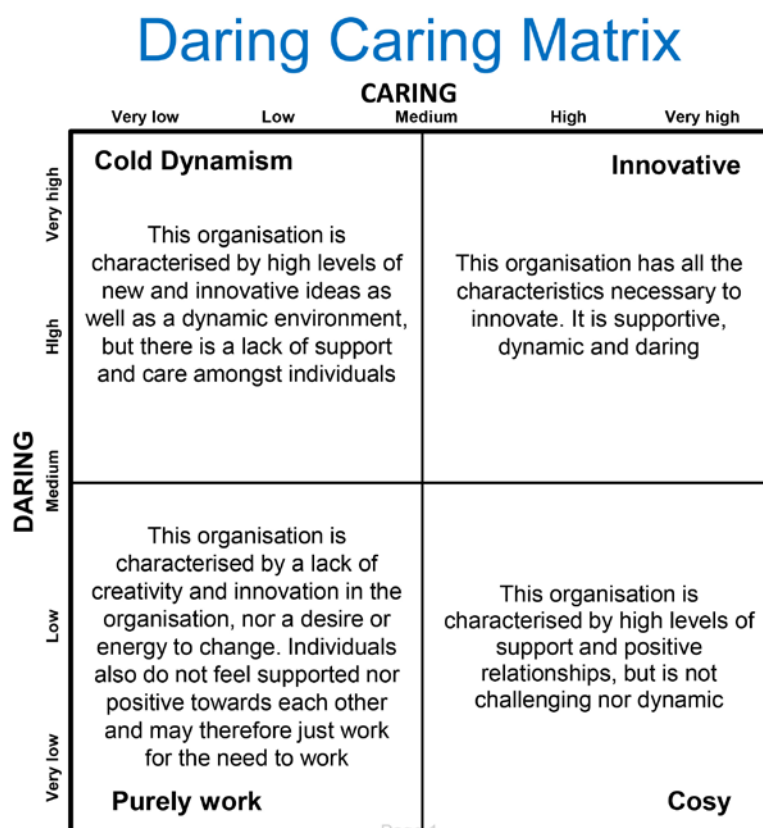

Daring Caring Matrix

CARING — Very low, Low, Medium, High, Very high

DARING — Very low, Low, Medium, High, Very high

Cold Dynamism
This organisation is characterised by high levels of new and innovative ideas as well as a dynamic environment, but there is a lack of support and care amongst individuals

Innovative
This organisation has all the characteristics necessary to innovate. It is supportive, dynamic and daring

This organisation is characterised by a lack of creativity and innovation in the organisation, nor a desire or energy to change. Individuals also do not feel supported nor positive towards each other and may therefore just work for the need to work

This organisation is characterised by high levels of support and positive relationships, but is not challenging nor dynamic

Purely work

Cosy

Figure i.

The Voice of the Customer (VOC)

If your score is above the mean things are looking good. If they are above the maximum scores (115%) you are doing very well. (Your results for the customer need to treated a little more tentatively than all the other scores as our sample size is comparatively small) (*Figure ii*).
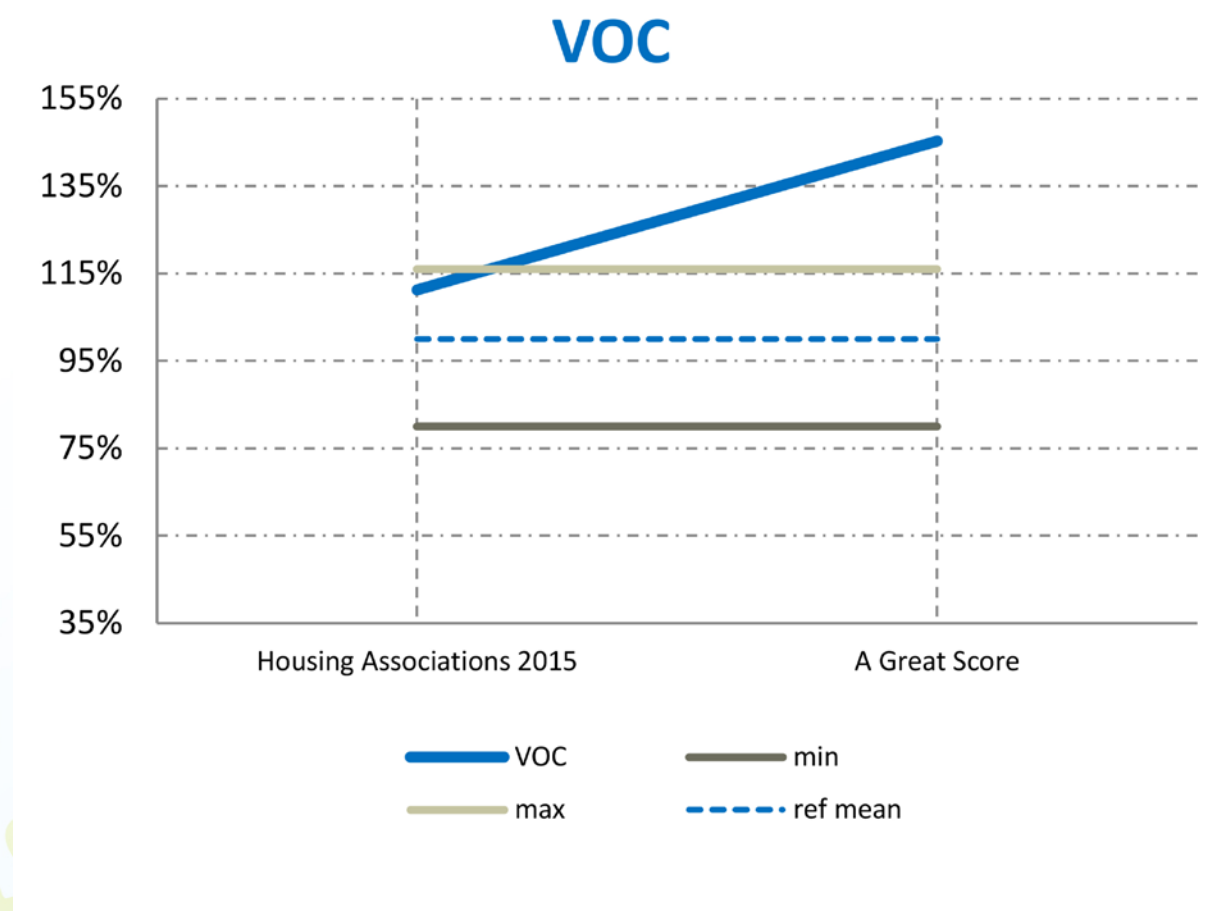
VOC

Figure ii

Strain of Innovation

On the left you have 'Idea-time'; on the right you have 'Stress'. If you are higher than the norm on 'Idea-time' and lower than the norm on 'Stress', you are comfortably jogging downhill. This a more relaxed profile. This may mean that your culture is more 'laid-back' than many – or that you are currently in an ideas/divergent stage of the innovation process.

On other hand if you are lower than the norm on 'Idea-time' and higher than the norm on 'Stress', you are having to 'graft' much harder as you are jogging uphill. This may mean that culture is less innovative – or that you are currently in a more convergent and applied stage of the innovation process (*Figure iii*).
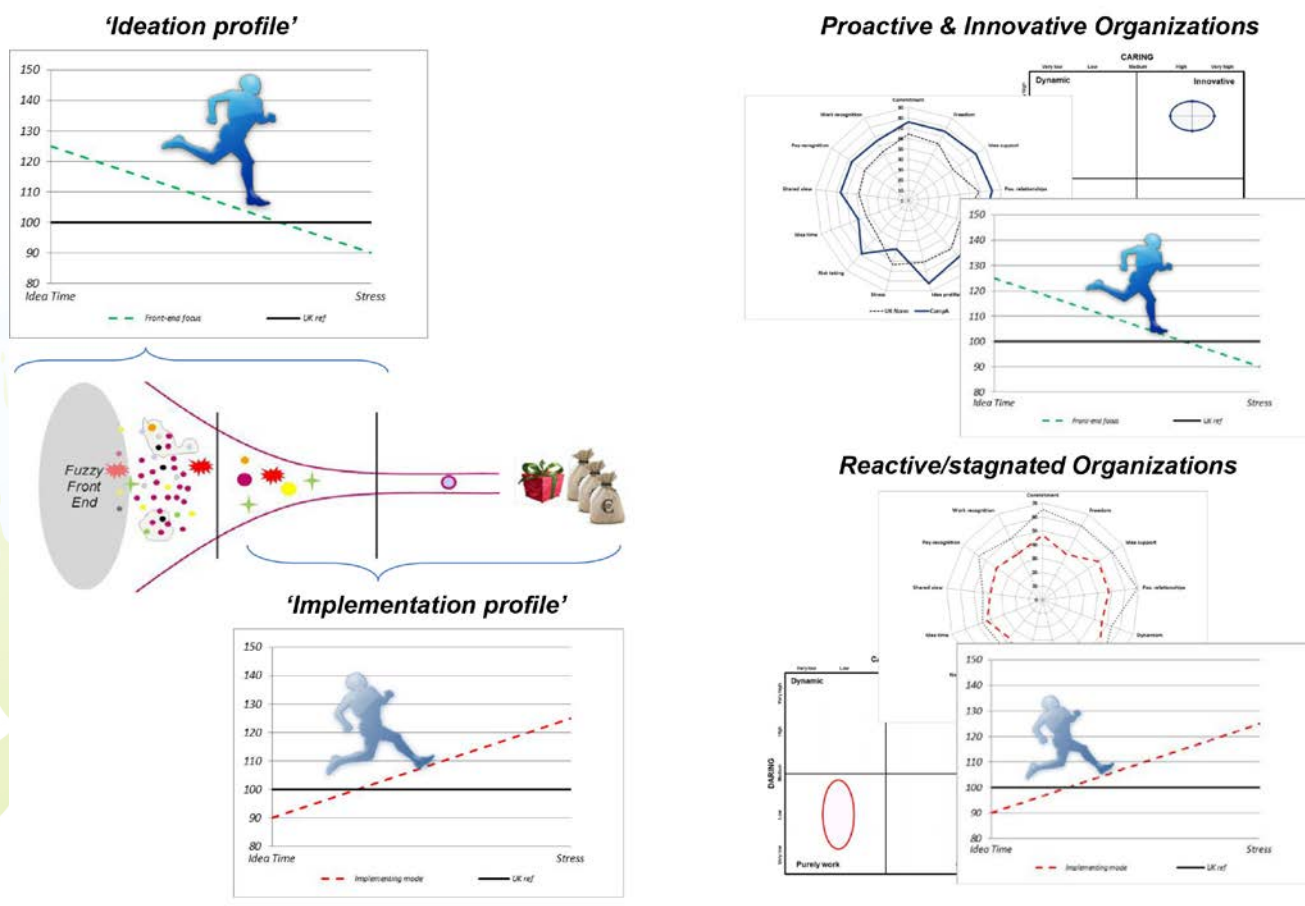

Figure iii

The Dolphin Shift

In his book 'What Matters Now', strategy expert Gary Hamel says this about the common attitude to innovation: *'Without relentless innovation, success is fleeting. Nevertheless there's not one company in a hundred that has made innovation everyone's job, every day. In most organisations innovation still happens 'despite the system' rather than because of it.'*

Some general suggestions to promote greater creativity

Live in the customer's world

Make creativity and innovation a core value

Make creativity and innovation part of everyone's day job

Communicate all creative and innovative stories

Praise all innovation

Create recognition awards

Engage everyone in Total Innovation Management goals, for example, to drive down costs, improve quality and service, smarten up and speed up all processes and systems. And encourage all ideas for new or better products, services and business models

Create learning opportunities for all – rotation between employees, levels, customers, suppliers and other organisations. Get learning from centres of excellence

Encourage 'constructive dissent'

Carry out entry and exit interviews

Select some applicants who have more colourful, 'zig-zag' CVs

Select and promote for creativity and leadership for creativity

Allow people 10% or more of their time for new thinking

Challenge all 'sacred cows', 'we've always done it this way'

Create 'Ideas into Action' teams – see page in http://www.dolphinindex.org/dinosaurstrain.pdf

Help everyone realize they are creative

Introduce 'fresh eyes' into creativity sessions

Create creative spaces

Create or buy a creativity, an 'Ideas into Action', intranet

Applaud glorious and sensible mistakes – fail fast, fail without harm, 'fail for free', learn fast

The 13 Dimensions of the Dolphin Index

1. Commitment

Select for a match between a person's values and those of your organisation

As far as possible enable people to do what they love

Commit to regular and open career and development discussions for all

If you can, pay well and then get the issue of money off the table

Wherever possible consign rewards and punishments to the past

Increase everyone's level of autonomy, provide continuing opportunities for new learning and mastery, and provide a larger sense of purpose

If a job has to be boring (consider rotation) carrots may help, explain how the task fits into the larger purpose, and allow people to do it their own way

Push decision-making down as far as possible, therefore you need to develop your people all the time

2. Freedom

Empower people within a framework – drive as much as possible into the 'Go, Let Know' and 'Go' boxes (*Figure iv*).

CAN-DO WITHIN A FRAMEWORK

Glorious Failure   Stupid Failure

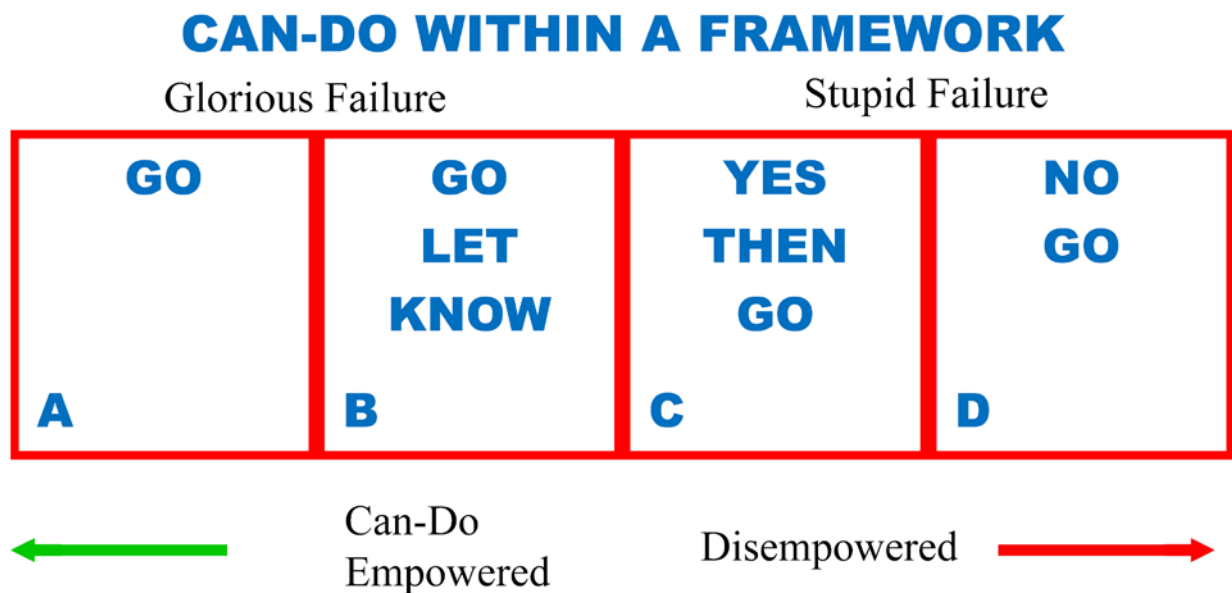| GO	GO LET KNOW	YES THEN GO	NO GO
A	B	C	D

← Can-Do Empowered   Disempowered →

Figure iv

Ensure objectives are big on the 'what' and leave the 'how' free wherever possible

Think about the language you use ('must, should' versus 'think about, consider, try')

3. Idea Support

Welcome all new ideas

Create a 'yes…and' culture, rather than a 'yes…but' culture

Discourage all forms of idea assassination when generating new ideas, 'we've tried it before', 'won't work here' etc.

Separate the 'generative' phase of thinking from the 'evaluative' phase of thinking – and only 'yes…but' in the 'evaluative' phase

4. Positive Relationships

Listen openly and creatively to people

Encourage all to meet and know each other on a regular basis

Be honest and open

Nurture trust and openness

5. Dynamism

Create stretch without stress (ensure people are at the optimal point on the performance/pressure curve)

Add job variety and enrichment

Make sure people have a meaningful development plan

Develop people within their jobs so their role isn't static

Allow people to redesign their own jobs, shedding routine elements for new challenges

Set occasional time-limited challenges ('FedEx days')

Suddenly take the brakes off once in a while. Give people Friday afternoon off

Create surprises for the team, relocate a meeting to somewhere more inspirational

Celebrate events and milestones, even low-key ones

Be yourself and encourage others to be themselves. Use your own brand of humility and humour

A little disclosure goes a long way

Be 'low status', get others to take on your role where they can (eg running sessions, deputising for you)

6. Playfulness

Encourage positive humour

Add some colour and vibrancy to where you work, paint some of the walls a brighter colour, convert a meeting room into an 'ideas' room with informal setting and a 'toy box' of objects to stimulate ideas

Let people wear informal clothes especially when working intensively on innovation

Break some rules (but make sure nobody gets harmed!)

Develop a good collection of ice-breaker exercises either to start meetings (perhaps as a way of getting people to know each other) or raise energy levels. The more aerobic they are the better

7. Idea Proliferation

Encourage new learning, work related or otherwise

Train people in creativity techniques – and during the divergent/creative phase encourage all to 'build on what's good about the idea', death to 'idea assassins'!

Build in incubation time – 'Time out is not time off'. Give notice of any planned idea generation session – provide this notice so as to allow for incubation of ideas

Keep a written or recorded note of all the ideas that pop into your own mind – often at times when you are relaxed and no longer thinking about the problem in question

Have a white board at hand where you can sketch and share thoughts

Create more stimulating work environments

Go for a walk to get new stimuli, fresh air will stimulate your thinking (and with mobile phones you can record any ideas you have)

When responding to a new idea, if initially you don't like it, use language that is creative and divergent:

Tell me more about that …

What does that make possible …

Try …

Consider …

What if …

If you had unlimited power, what would happen …

What if that wasn't the case …

What does that remind you of …

Where have you seen that kind of thing before …

How would somebody else describe that …

8. Stress

Create more time by spring-cleaning your world of work – take every process, system and procedure and ask if you can:

Abolish it altogether, and if not, can you

Block bust it, that is go back to why this exists and ask how to radically redesign it so it's faster, smarter, cheaper, and if not, can you

Change it, that is tweak or improve this so it's faster, smarter, cheaper

Promote fitness, good diet, balanced life-style

Achieve a state of 'flow', not clenched teeth with tears behind the eyes

Take breaks, proper lunch breaks, breaks during the working day

Allow people time off for creative sessions and pet projects

8. Stress (cont.)

Avoid the sense of work being in a state of permanent crisis. Chill

Realism and flexibility over deadlines

Allow as much discretion as possible over how people organise their work

Support people in acquiring relevant new skills to increase competence

Provide regular feedback on performance and include the opportunity to raise issues of stress

Ensure the organisation's goals are readily understood in ways that are meaningful to individuals

Establish a clear 'line of sight' between an individual's role and the organisation's goals

Communicate progress towards goals in ways that are meaningful to individuals and at reasonable frequency

At times of change engage with people early and even more frequently

Provide reasons for change that are relevant to individuals

If necessary set clear behavioural standards, particularly in respect of:

Bullying

Coercion

Unreasonableness

Inflexibility

Undue use of status

'Burying' stress issues

Check the environment for what are often practical sources of stress:

Excessive heat or cold

Noise

Ventilation

Lighting

Seating

Inadequate equipment

9. Risk-taking

'Think like an artist, test like an engineer' (after Gary Hamel)

Prototype your ideas so as to avoid unnecessary risk. Improve and improve the idea. Iterate the test-refine-test process until you have a sure-fire idea

Distinguish between glorious as opposed to catastrophic mistakes/failures

Celebrate glorious failure

Some glorious failures are inevitable and if you are not making any you are not driving creativity

Train people in risk analysis and decision-making techniques so as to reduce unnecessary risk

Bullet-proof you final solution – brainstorm for everything that can possibly go wrong – and then ensure it can't

10. Idea Time

Create time for creative thinking, encourage 'Ideas into Action' meetings

Provide resources to test new ideas

11. Shared View

Create an open style of management and communication

Provide full briefings

Do away with explicit and less obvious signs of rank

Go for as flat an organisational structure as possible

Bring light to the dark, make the 'grapevine' so visible that there is no grapevine

Tell it as it is, be honest, particularly when there is bad news

Encourage speaking up, positive challenge and feedback

12. Pay Recognition

Make creativity and innovation a core value and a 'must have' skill for everyone

As far as you can pay above the average and then let people get on without interference

Use incentive payments sparingly, and always on a surprise 'Now that you've achieved...' rather than a 'If you achieve this ...then' basis

Ensure pay is fair. Check internal and external comparisons

13. Work Recognition

Praise, praise and praise the creative

Ensure regular recognition for creativity and innovation, including glorious failures

Catch people doing things right