



Curiosity is Our Silver Bullet



**Business
Agility**

2.6.18

Commerce and the brain co-evolved

The adult brain is built to largely rely on what it already 'knows'

For most of human history people lived and worked in small groups. They knew each other all their lives.

Those who made it to puberty were well-versed in the demands of their environment and secure in their role in sustaining the group's welfare.



At puberty, the brain shifts allocation of energy away from 'learning' – an energy-intensive process - and relies on neural networks proven up to that time.

Belonging is the brain's single most powerful driver

Social uncertainty is the most costly kind of stress

“There is much suffering in the world... from hunger, from homelessness, from all kinds of diseases. But the greatest suffering is being lonely, feeling unloved, having no one. I have come more and more to realize that it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience.”

-Mother Theresa

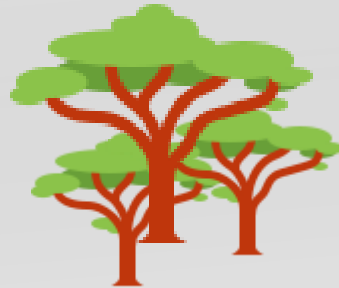
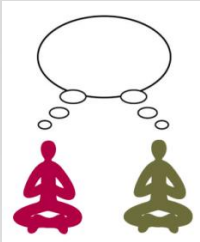


The demands of Business Agility are beyond what the brain developed to do

Designing ways to coordinate is the driver of human 'progress'

It started when the weather shifted and food became scarcer...

Running out of acorns, how can we make it to the next grove without losing our kids?



Around 299,999 generations later...

*What are people doing who don't want Alexa
In their homes?*



The value of our exchanges is experienced via brain chemicals

Co-regulation is rewarded with pleasure

The brain's primary function is regulation:
like an omniscient CFO, ensuring that the
right amount of energy is allocated to the
most important functions.

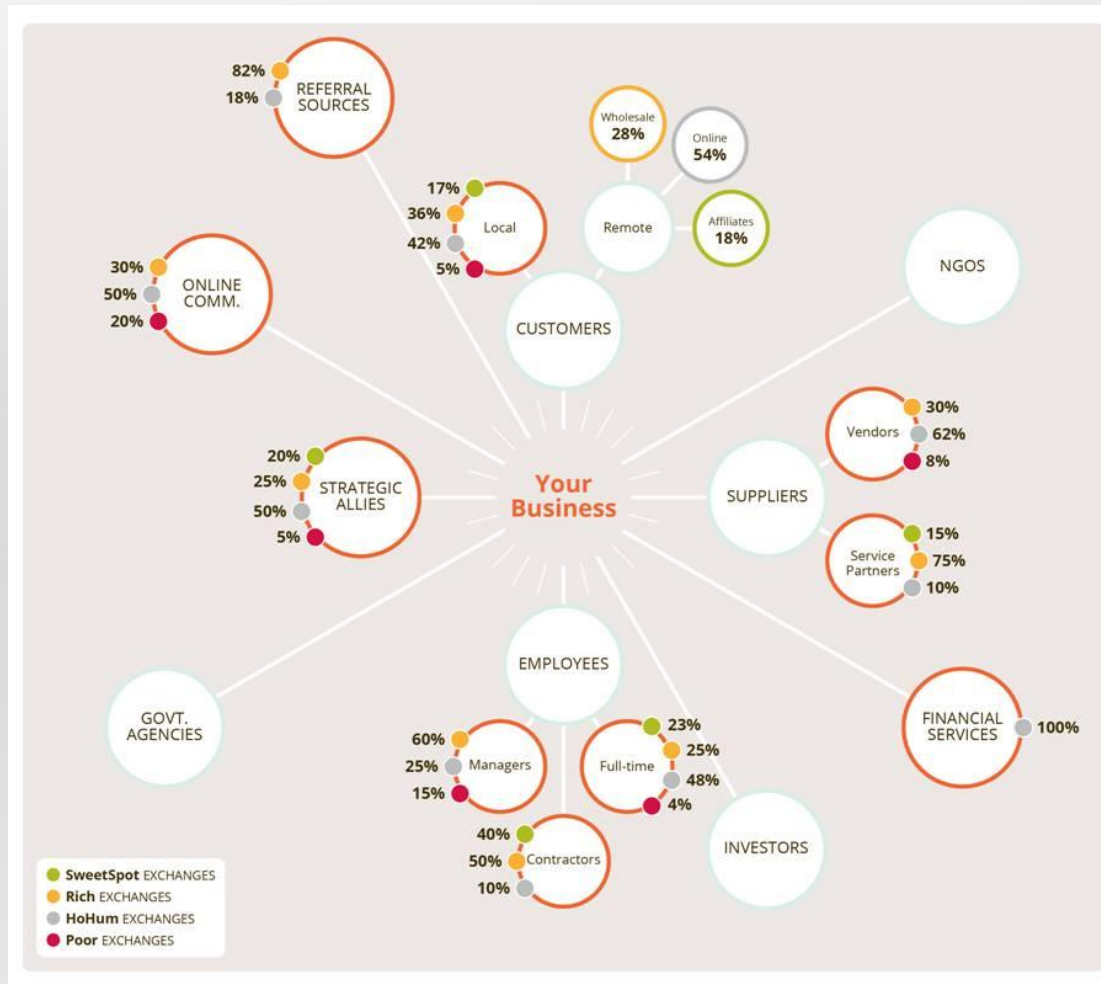
Our brains are exquisitely attuned to every
nuance of every exchange.

Although our entire physiology becomes
more rigid as we age, we can cultivate
plasticity.



A Business is a Network of Exchanges

The human brain evolved to keep us focused on this kind of cooperation



Societies have attempted various forms of certainty

Our world seldom evokes certainty

*The church speaks
the word of God*

*People will
buy anything we
sell on TV*

*Your mother-in-law gets
the left hind-quarter
of your kills*

*People are pairs
of hands*

*Design is for
Bohemians*

*Success is doing
the same thing cheaper
and cheaper*

Coal is free

*An MBA is your
ticket to security*

*Business is money: all
about transactions*

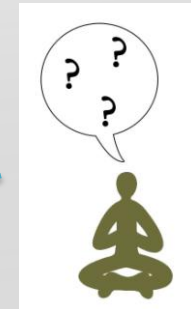
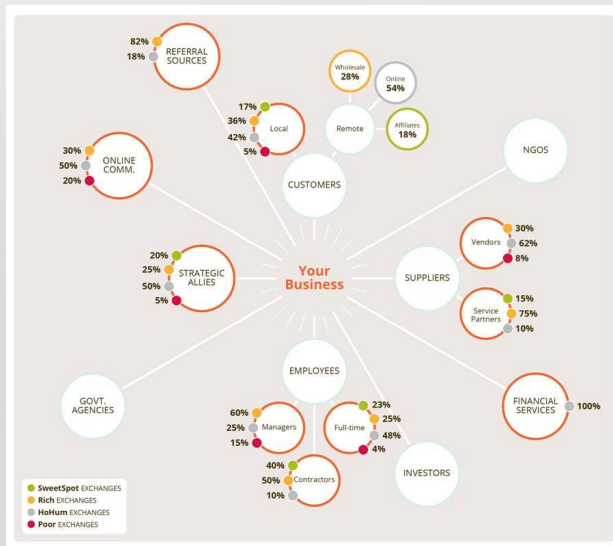
*You'll learn your
father's trade*

*You were born under a full
moon, your first born
will be a boy*

*You're third born son,
you'll be a priest*

Business Agility calls for sustaining curiosity

The concerns and desires of our trading partners – and the partners themselves – shift frequently. Agility begs for ingenuity.



The imperative to continually design new value provokes social uncertainty: kryptonite for our PreFrontal Cortex

Embracing the extreme social vulnerability of modern exchanges

*"Don't tell anyone I
said so, but all the
best teams have
single mothers."*

- Pharma exec



Our businesses are challenges to create conditions that provoke peoples' 'smarts'

Sincere inquiry proffers inclusion

Finesse social uncertainty and US/Them

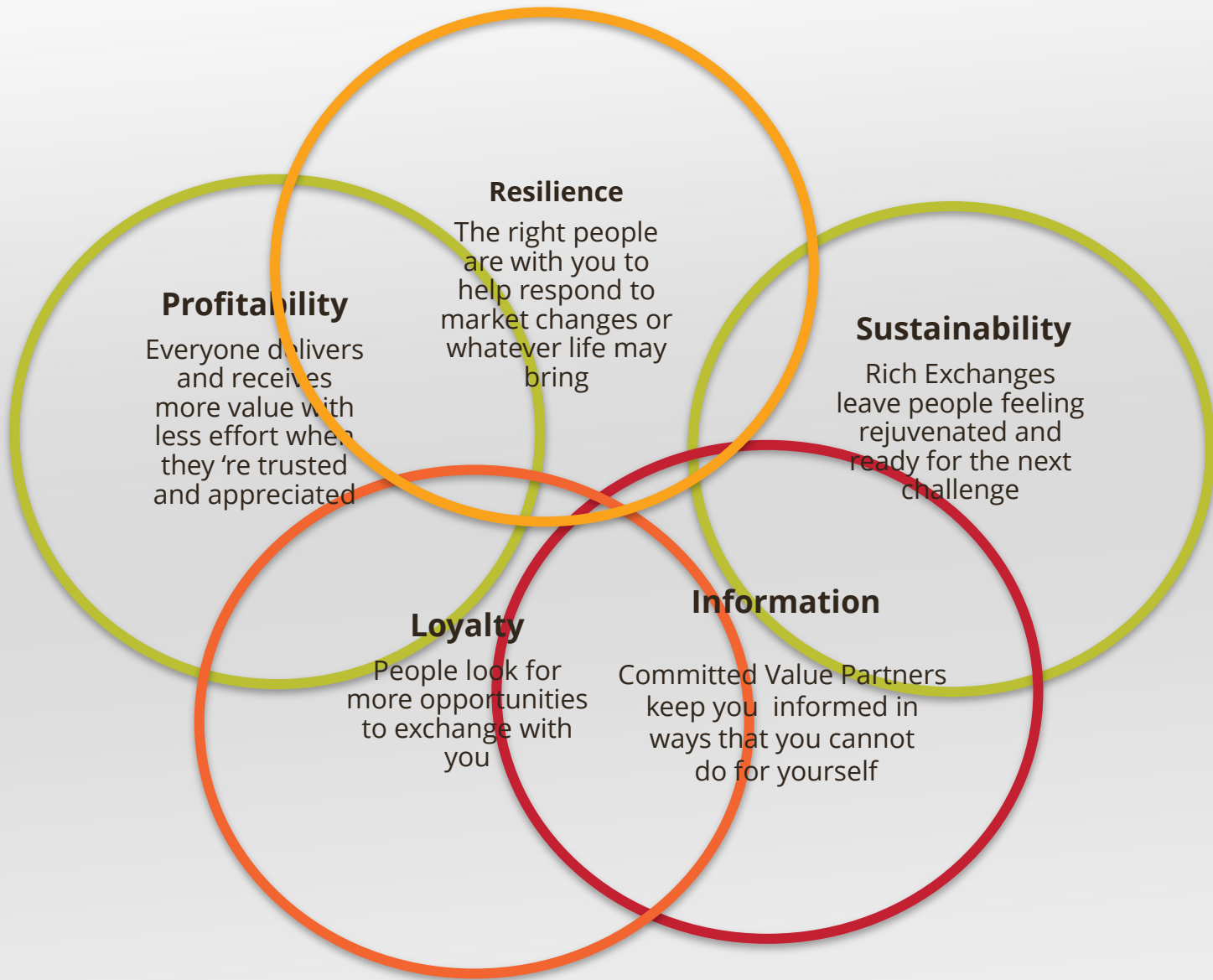
Cultural context

- Clear company core promise
 - everyone empowered to fulfill
- Branded rituals foster inclusion
 - employ all 5 senses
 - celebrate new questions
- Rest, recreation, play, fun, well-being, variety of learning, including conversational and social skills. Ensure slack time
- No multi-tasking; SLOW DOWN
- Regularly refreshed metrics with clear line of sight to strategy

Role model Leaders

- Conversational intelligence skills:
 - Inclusive questions with commitment to mutual satisfaction
 - Promises honored, built on clear specs
- Social intelligence skills:
 - Welcoming
 - Shared vulnerability
- Public learning via ongoing variety of models and tools
 - generate new questions
 - all value partners invited

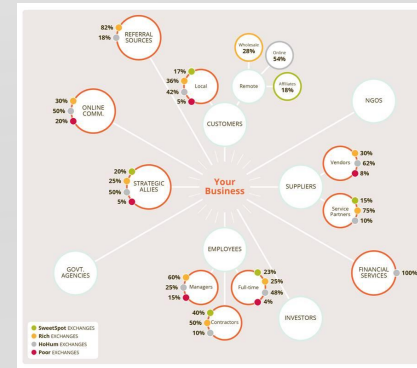
ROI for meeting the brain's social hunger



Lead your ecosystem with the gift of curiosity



And deliver on your promises



Help sustain your ecosystem with Social and Conversational fitness

Question sincerely; welcome potentially challenging information.

Ditch omnipotence fantasies; respect the restraints of physiology

With gratitude for the teachers, students, thinkers and researchers who illuminated the path



[Marsha Shenk](#) is a veteran consultant, a pioneer of Business Anthropology. Her syntheses of the cultural, biological, and historical influences that impact modern commerce have empowered business leaders for four decades.

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Curious? You might enjoy

A few accessible books about brain function

Social, Matt Lieberman

How Emotions are Made, Lisa Feldman Barrett

Brain Rules, John Medina

Stealing Fire, Jamie Wheal and Steven Kotler