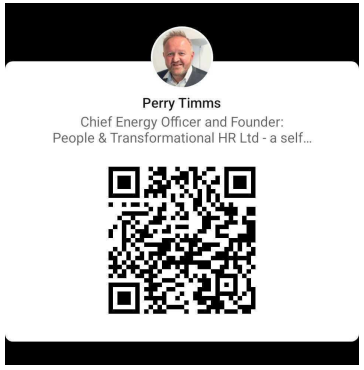
Distinction

OrgDev Live Conference 2026

7–8 July · Free · Online

POLYMORPHIC

The Polymorphic Organisation and the Practitioner of the Future



A global space for real OD practice

Perry Timms MCIPD & FRSA - Founder & Chief Energy Officer: PTHR

Author: Transformational HR (2017 + 2021); The Energized Workplace (2020) and The HR Operating Model (2025)
6x HR Most Influential Thinkers' List (4x Top 10 - Ranked Number 1 in 2022 - Hall of Fame inductee 2023):
Lifetime Achievement Award: Democracy and Self-Managed Systems - WorldBlu Freedom at Work™
Haier Model Institute - RDHY Certified - Top 50 Self-Managed Enterprises Globally 2024
Semco Style Institute - Certified Self Management Expert I 5x Engagement 101 Influencer
Thinkers 360 Top 100 HR Influencer 2025 I People & Culture Association.: Global Icon 2024 I 2x TEDx Speaker
4x Adjunct Professor/Visiting Fellow I LinkedIn Learning Instructor I BPS Accredited Psychometric Instruments

From Greek: 'poly' (many) + 'morphe' (form)

In nature and computing, it means something that changes form to fit its environment or function

POLYMORPHIC

The **Polymorphic Organisation**

Why Shape-Shifting is the New Strength

In biology, polymorphism describes how an organism can exist in more than one form — adapting based on context.

In computing, it's the ability of code to perform different actions depending on the data it receives.

And in Organisations?

It's what the future demands.

The Polymorphic Organisation and the Practitioner of the Future

A Journey of Learning, Unlearning and Designing Possibility

Reflections on a lifelong exploration of organisations, people and possibility

1990s

Justice

Technology enabled change projects

Early career in the Justice sector delivering technology enabled change and modernisation programmes.

2000s

NfP

Led OD & Talent; Discovered Agile and Self-Managed Organisations

Moved into the Non-profit sector leading OD & Talent. Discovered Agile ways of working and the power of Self-Managed Organisations.

2010s

Set up PTHR

Practiced self-management and Teal

Founded PTHR in 2012. Practiced self-management daily and explored Teal organisations in real-world contexts.

2020s

COVID, Conflict and self-management disillusionment

A decade of global disruption, COVID, conflict and crisis. A period of deep reflection, challenging assumptions about self-management and what comes next.

2025

Explored possibilities and Polymorphic Organisations was "born".

Exploring the edge of organisational possibility. Polymorphic Organisations emerged as a new paradigm. pthr.substack.com for "Chronicles" (now 36 of them) and Poly the Polymorphic Bot.

♡ Same purpose throughout: To help organisations and people create the conditions for **human flourishing**, **meaningful work** and **better futures.**

The **Polymorphic Organisation**

Why Shape-Shifting is the New Strength

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In computing, it's the ability of code to **perform different actions** depending on the data it receives.

And in Organisations? **It's what the future demands.**

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What is a Polymorphic Organisation?

A **Polymorphic Organisation** changes its **structure, logic**, and **leadership energy** depending on the challenge it faces.

It doesn't operate from one dominant model. It uses multiple logics – layered, adaptive and dynamic. It blends:

- Divisions where regulation or safety demands clarity

- Spaces for innovation, insight, and inclusion

- Stacks to mobilise talent across boundaries

- Flywheels to track performance and progress through purpose

- Leadership Energies that shift between optimisation, innovation, and belonging

"The basic managerial idea introduced by systems thinking is that to manage a system effectively, you must focus on the interactions of the parts, not the actions of the parts taken separately."
Russell L. Ackoff, Systems Thinker

POLYMORPHIC ORGANISATIONS

DESIGNING POSSIBILITY. ENABLING VARIETY. CREATING VALUE.

Polymorphic Organisations are not fixed structures. They are adaptive systems that take multiple forms to meet context, work and purpose.

MULTIPLE FORMS, ONE PURPOSE

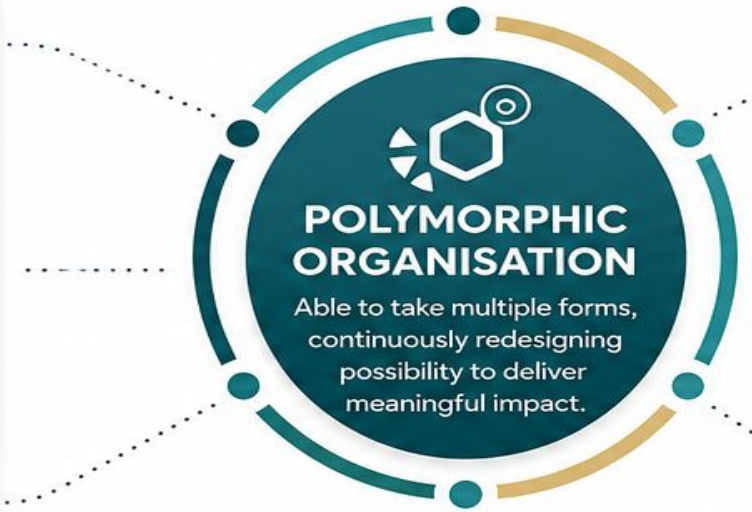
The organisation can take different shapes depending on context, work, people and need

DECENTRALISED BY DESIGN

Power, decision-making and ownership are distributed to where they add the most value.

DYNAMIC & ADAPTIVE

Continuously sensing, learning and adapting – the organisation evolves through feedback, not control.



BUILT FROM MODULAR BUILDING BLOCKS

Composed of small, empowered units (teams, stacks, spaces) that can combine, recombine and reconfigure.

CONNECTED ECOSYSTEM

Internal and external connections create value through ecosystems, platforms and partnerships.

HUMAN FLOURISHING AT THE CORE

Designed to unlock human potential, meaningful work and collective prosperity across six lenses of value.

ENABLERS OF POLYMORPHISM

CLARITY OF PURPOSE

A unifying "why" that guides decisions and alignment.

TRUST & PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

The foundation for autonomy, experimentation and honest conversations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES NOT RULES

Simple, shared principles that enable judgement and flexibility.

TRANSPARENT INFORMATION & FLOW

Open systems of information flow enable smarter decisions and faster adaptation.

DATA-INFORMED, HUMAN LED

Using data and insight to enable, not replace, human judgement.

CULTURE OF CARE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Caring deeply for people and outcomes with clear accountability.

NOT SOMETHING YOU IMPLEMENT. | SOMETHING YOU CATALYSE AND NOTICE. | DESIGN FOR POSSIBILITY. ENABLE WHAT MATTERS.

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The challenges facing organisations today increasingly sit in the spaces between things. So between:

- strategy and execution
- technology and humanity
- capability and performance
- culture and structure
- leadership and governance;
- adaptation and stability.

"The business that survives is one which has a system that anticipates the future."
W Edwards Deming

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Organisational Oscillation

An evolved form of Organisation Design, Development and Effectiveness (OD) working on the build, optimisation and sustainability of the legacy and future organisations in *oscillating waves.*

Key:

Human Capital in
Capability Pools
+
Resident Experts

Digital Capital in 3As
Automation
Augmentation
Additionality

The Polymorphic Organisation – In Iconographic Form

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Evolving organisations from legacy structures to adaptive, human-centred ecosystems.

Running two organisations at the same time: Legacy and Future

Honouring the past while building for the future. Managing the dual system with intention.

From Balance Sheets and KPIs to true Org Effectiveness and value creation

Moving beyond financial metrics to what truly matters – impact, value and sustainable performance.

From purely Divisional to Space-based

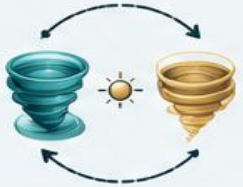
Shifting from rigid hierarchies to fluid spaces that connect people, ideas and resources.

Leaders from heroes to Incubators and Activators

Leaders enable others to grow, take initiative and create impact – not just follow.

From JDs to Proficiency Stacks

From static job descriptions to dynamic proficiency and capability architecture.



From Change Programmes to Organisational Oscillation

Moving between exploration and consolidation – expanding possibility, then embedding what works.

From KPIs to Org Effectiveness Flywheels

Continuous feedback loops that align purpose, people, performance and impact.

From Performance Appraisals to Personal Best 90-day cycles

Short, focused cycles for clarity, growth and meaningful conversations about progress.

From L&D Programmes to Learning Mosaics

Curated, connected learning experiences that adapt to people, work and context.

Polymorphic Organisations continually redesign how work gets done, by who, and for what purpose – creating **more possibilities** for people, performance and impact.

NOT SOMETHING YOU IMPLEMENT.
SOMETHING YOU CATALYSE AND NOTICE.

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A shift in Polymorphic Organisation Design: The concept of work as "spaces"

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Customers & Clients

People & Talent

Culture
Communication, Creativity, Commitment and Inclusion

Data & Intelligence

Assets & Materials

Products & Services

Suppliers & Partners

Leadership

Skills and Capabilities

Systems & Processes

Technology

Capital & Finance

People & Prosperity
Human, Social and Intellectual Capital

Production & Prosperity
Financial, Material and Natural Capital

Combined = Flourishing
People; Organisation and Planet

The shift for HR CoE - Organisation Design & Development

Organisation Design
brought into being by a significant change or transformation

Organisation Development
ongoing, iterative change, improvements and adaptations

Organisational Effectiveness
(the oft-forgotten third 'span')

Now all forms of OD **oscillate** more regularly between each other

OD has become OO – Organisational Oscillation

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It's as about evolving **it for a world in flux.**

Just as the Organisation is **oscillating** between **present and future modalities**

Organisational Oscillation

OO is about understanding and managing this rhythm.

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Expansion is the phase of creativity, emergence, innovation.

Evolution is the oscillating **combination** of both.

Consolidation is the phase of alignment, reflection, integration.

Where OD sees interventions, → **OO** senses rhythms.

Where OD sees a plan, → **OO** feels a pulse.

Where OD sees a change programme, → **OO** crafts a version release.

This isn't about replacing OD. It's about evolving it for a world in flux.

Organisation Design, Development and Effectiveness in the current Change Management Based “Version Control”

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3-Stage Org Operating System Release Cycle

Organisation Design, Development and Effectiveness as Oscillating Version Control

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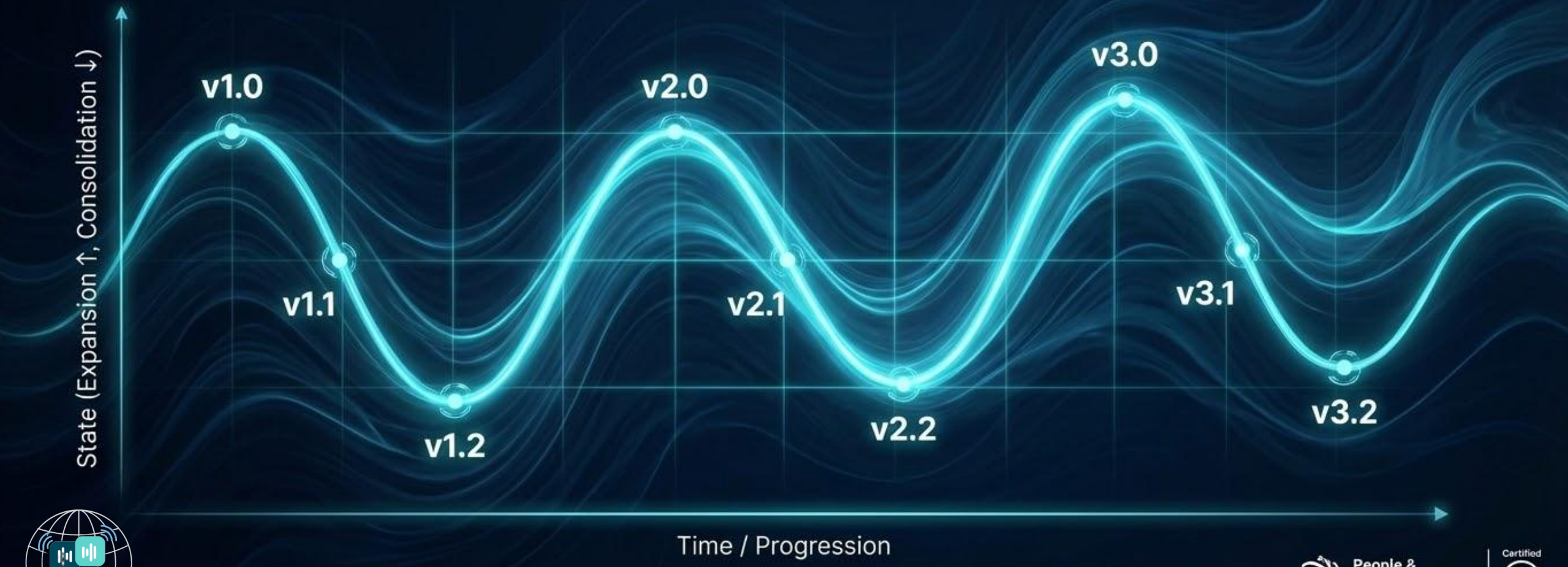
Oscillation Wave with Versioning Labels



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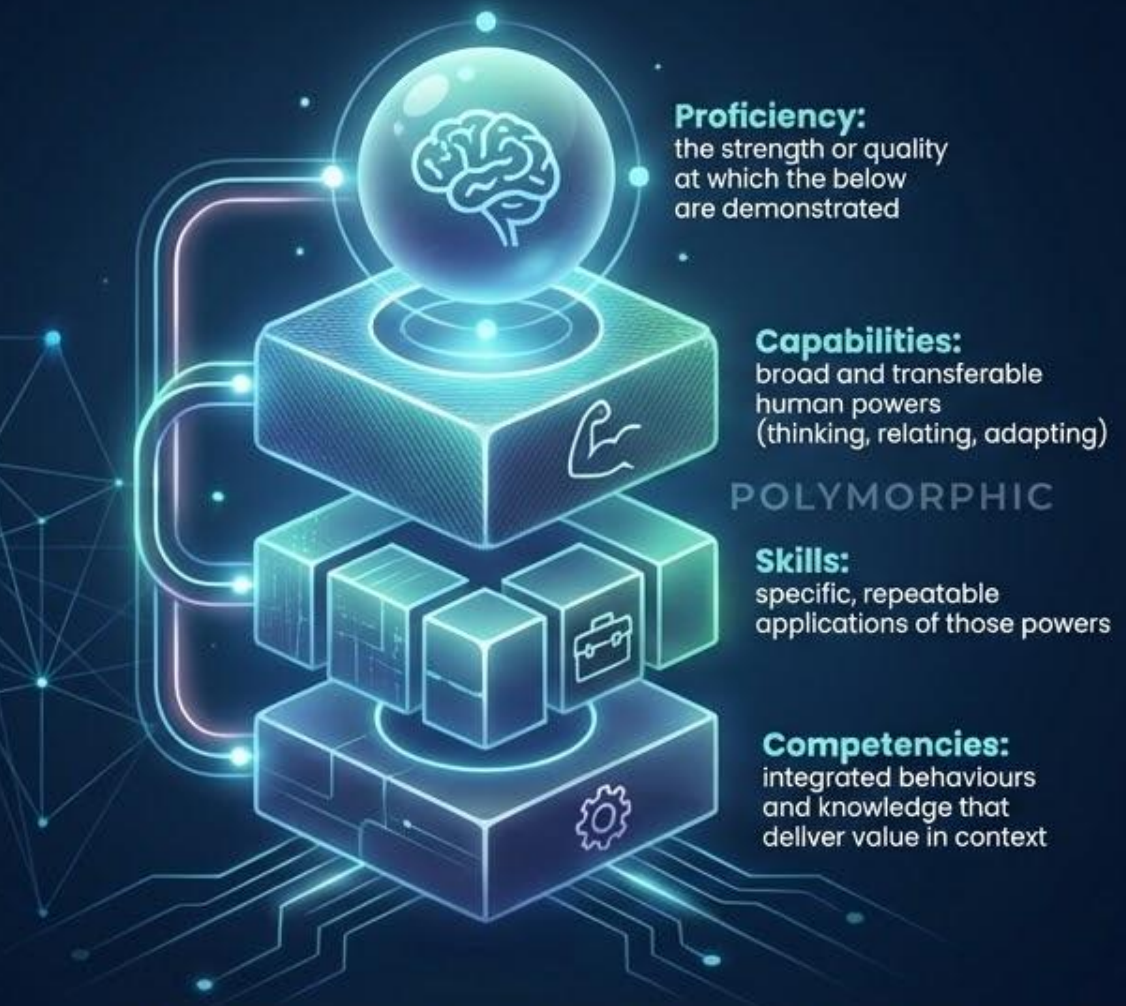
Talent and Skills in a Polymorphic Organisation



How It Will Be Used in the Future Flow of Work & The Paradigm Shift

Traditional Org Models	Proficiency Stack Models
Fixed roles	Fluid contributions
Top-down management	Distributed authority
Org-chart dependency	Ecosystem responsiveness
Promotion-based careers	Progression through stack building
Job-based hiring	Capability-based matching

Think of a Proficiency Stack as a personal Tetris set – some blocks are deep and solld, others are shaped for adaptability. The best organisations will no longer ask, "What's your job?" but ***"What's in your stack; and how can you apply it here?"***

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Leadership in a Polymorphic Organisation

Leaders aren't "up" the hierarchy. They move around it - incubating and activating:

- Innovation (Venture Catalyst **and** Capitalist)
- Optimisation (Operational Steward **and** Designer)
- Belonging (Culture Guardian **and** *Lightning Rod*)

They bring energy, not just oversight.

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Evolution + Energy + Entropy

WHO LEADS?

*Venture Capital / Operating System / QiGong <energy healing>

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Flywheels to measure performance and impact

Why Flywheels Matter in OD

Traditional HR operates in **discrete cycles** — recruitment campaigns, performance reviews — that restart from zero.

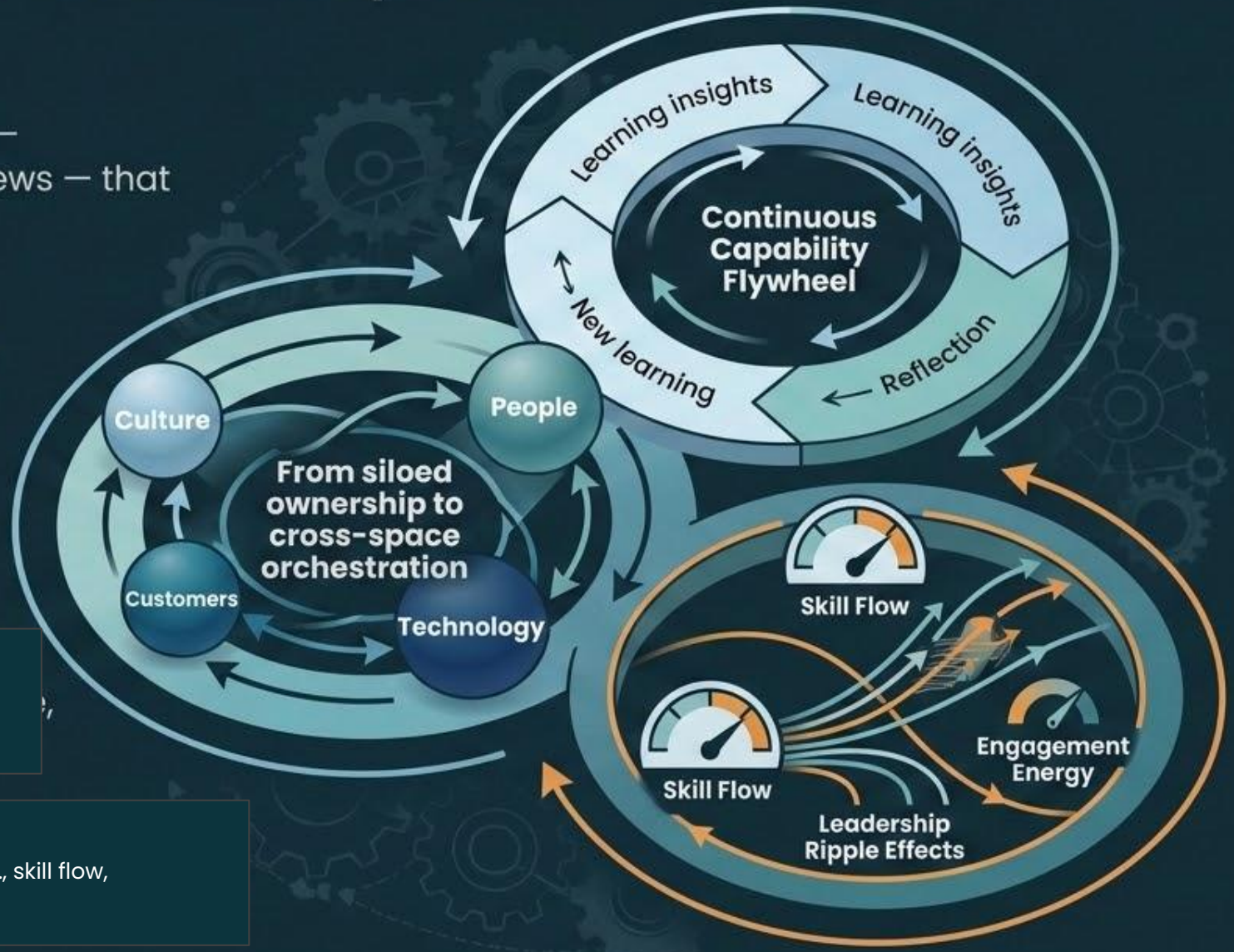
A **Flywheel mindset** makes these cycles **continuous, compounding**, and **adaptive**.

In an OD context:

- **From static programmes to living systems.**
  Example: Instead of "annual learning programmes," create a *Continuous Capability Flywheel* → learning insights → practice → reflection → new learning.

- **From siloed ownership to cross-space orchestration.**
  Flywheels cut across "spaces" (Culture, People, Customers, Technology), connecting effort to shared prosperity measures.

- **From output metrics to energy dynamics.**
  HR can measure the momentum of value creation (e.g., skill flow, engagement energy, leadership ripple effects).



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A Flywheel of Organisational Effectiveness

Clarity of Purpose & Strategy

Talent & Capability Supply & Readiness

Aligned Roles & Capabilities

Sustainable Business Performance

Continuous Improvement, Development & Innovation

Trust, Accountability & Culture

Workforce Agility and Value Creation

Empowered Teams & Decision Making

Data-informed Intelligence, Insights & Learning

"Polymorphic organisations don't rely on control. They rely on coherence. And coherence is maintained through Flywheels – shared rhythms that spin possibility into progress."

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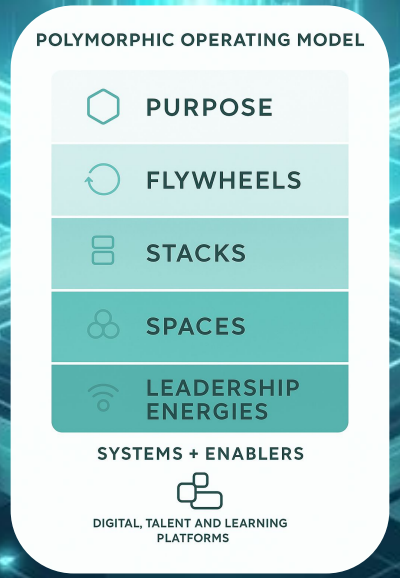
The Polymorphic Organisation

as a platform enterprise for sustainable value-creation



The Three Layers of Organisational Reality

Layer 3 is where OD normally works.

MEANING

Culture
Stories
Narratives
Mental Models
Beliefs
Language
Identity

ATTENTION

What gets noticed
What becomes visible
What signals matter
What becomes discussable
What becomes legitimate

POSSIBILITY

- Decision rights
- Information Flows
- Constraints
- Connections
- Feedback
- Time
- Technology
- Structure
- Power

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Polymorphism is what happens when organisations become capable of ***continually redesigning possibility.***

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The Future OD Practitioner

For decades we've designed organisations and developed people.

Increasingly, our work will be to design and develop possibilities.

1. Polymorphic Design

Current OD

Design structures. Design roles. Design programmes.

Future OD

Design conditions. Design possibilities. Design optionality.

Instead of asking *What structure should we have?*

We'll ask *What range of organisational forms should become possible?*

The Practitioner of the Future

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2. Organisational Physics

Instead of diagnosing behaviour we diagnose forces.

We ask: *What forces are acting on this organisation?*

Information, Power, Time, Technology, Trust, Incentives, Dependencies, Decision latency, Psychological safety, Feedback speed

We become field designers.

Organisational Physicists.

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3. Attention Architecture

If Possibility >> Attention >> Meaning

then OD practitioners become stewards of organisational attention. Not communication, **attention**. Every organisation already has an attention economy. Most just don't design it.

We ask: *What does the organisation notice? What becomes discussable? What remains invisible? Who gets heard? What becomes legitimate?*

The Practitioner of the Future

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4. Pattern Recognition

Current consulting often looks for problems.

Future practitioners notice patterns.

Small repeated signals. Tiny shifts. Weak signals. Emerging networks. Informal coalitions. Adaptive responses.

We become closer to **ecologists than engineers**.

The Practitioner of the Future

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5. Capability Choreography

Rather than designing jobs.

We orchestrate capabilities. Almost like conductors.

People, AI, partners, communities, customers, freelancers, automation

All becoming part of capability systems.

Not departments.

The Practitioner of the Future

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The Future OD Practitioner

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Increasingly, our work will be to design and develop possibilities.

6. Energy Stewardship

Instead of asking *How busy are people?*

We ask:

Where is organisational energy accumulating?

Where is it leaking?

Where is momentum?

Where is fatigue?

Talent and performance *thermodynamics.*

The Practitioner of the Future

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The Future OD Practitioner

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Increasingly, our work will be to design and develop possibilities.

7. Designing Possibilities

Instead of designing certainty, we design possibility.

Meaning multiple futures remain available.

Options increase. Fragility reduces. Adaptability proliferates.

Polymorphic organisations work across multiple temporal rhythms simultaneously.

Daily learning. 90-day Personal Best cycles. Oscillation rhythms. Long-term legacy. Future sensing.

The OD practitioner becomes someone who designs time, not just work.

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Bringing it all together

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LEGACY VS. FUTURE ORG (HR 3.0)

Emergent and beyond conceptualisation

PURPOSE + PROSPERITY

Future Org

Business Model
+
Operating Model
(Adaptive)

Org Effectiveness

as a series of Flywheels

HR 3.0

OD reimagined as Organisational Oscillation

Products
Systems
People
Science
Processes

LEGACY ORG

Business Model
+
Operating Model
(Fixed)

Legacy Org

Business Model
+
Operating Model
(Adaptive)

HR 3.0

POLYMORPHIC OPERATING MODEL

- PURPOSE
- FLYWHEELS
- STACKS
- SPACES
- LEADERSHIP ENERGIES

SYSTEMS + ENABLERS

DIGITAL, TALENT AND LEARNING PLATFORMS

LEADERSHIP & EXECUTION

Activate: Strategic

Activate: Tactical

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Polymorphism is the new strength.

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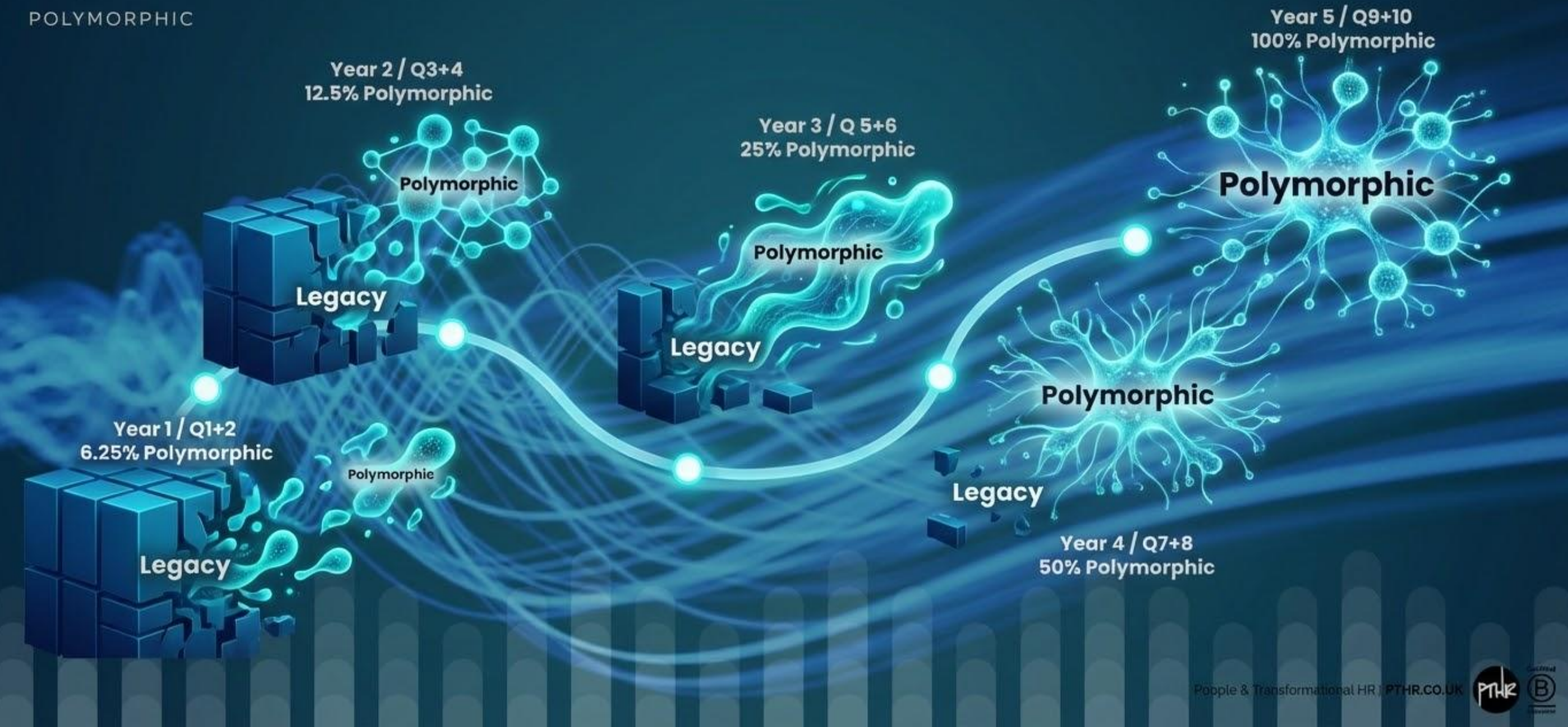
Achieving a Polymorphic State in Organisations:
Paced Transition Timeline (may be accelerated)



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We don't need to abandon structure. We need to transcend it.

The Polymorphic Organisation isn't stasis nor is it chaos. It's **intentional responsiveness.**

Frederic Laloux (Author: Reinventing Organizations):

"We need organizations that are not machines but living systems."

Peter J. Denning (Computer Scientist and author: The Innovator's Way):

"Polymorphism lets you program in the present, with an eye to the future."

We should ask ourselves:

- What work in your world needs clarity?
- What work needs flexibility?
- And how will you shape-shift accordingly?

How will you become Polymorphic?

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OD has spent **fifty years** trying to change people and organisations.

The future belongs to **practitioners who change possibility.**

Heraclitus:
The only constant is change

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Aristotle:

Eudaimonia is an activity of soul in accordance with excellence (virtue) in a complete life.

Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1

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Perry's Substack

Polymorphic Organisations

From Greek: 'poly' (many) + 'morphe' (form)

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