Leading a Hackathon

To come up with your own hack, invite your team to a daylong "management jam." If possible, have colleagues fill out the ten question bureaucratic mass index survey in advance. The results will provide a useful context.

Once together, ask your team to identify the bureaucratic ailments that are the most costly to your organization—the policies or systems that do most to undermine resilience, innovation, and engagement. Specifically, ask them to work through the following three questions:

QUESTION 1: PROBLEMS

> *Where do you feel we may be suffering from "bureausclerosis"— waste, friction, insularity, autocracy, conformity, timidity, politicking, or other related ailments? Pick one malady and be prepared to illustrate how it impairs effectiveness. (Be as concrete as possible.)*

Give individuals fifteen minutes to reflect privately on this question before asking them to share their thoughts with the rest of the group. Record everyone's answer on a whiteboard or capture them digitally and project them on a screen. Spend forty minutes exploring the thinking behind these views. Then, in the last five minutes of the hour, ask the team to pick one ailment to tackle.

Next, ask your team to think about the processes and policies that con tribute to that infirmity.

QUESTION 2: PROCESSES AND POLICIES

> *What management policies or processes—including planning, goal setting, budgeting, staffing, job design, product development, performance management, hiring, promotion, training, development, and compensation—are most to blame for this problem? Pick one process and be prepared to describe how it contributes to the malady.*

Again, give individuals fifteen minutes to form their own answer; then spend forty minutes sharing perspectives. Take the last few minutes to agree on a process or policy to hack.

Now move on to the third question.

QUESTION 3: PRINCIPLES

Which post-bureaucratic principle—ownership, markets, meritocracy, community, openness, or experimentation—would be the most helpful in overcoming this disorder? Pick one principle and describe how it could be applied in a way that would help counter the negative effects of bureaucracy.

Again, give individuals time to cogitate privately before going around the table. Once everyone's weighed in, try to converge on one or two principles that would be useful in redressing the bureaucratic shortcoming.

You can also tackle the questions in reverse order. Start by asking, "Which principle of humanocracy could be catalytic in helping us become a more resilient, creative, and empowering organization?" Then ask, "If we were serious about this principle, what processes or policies would we change?" And finally, "What would be the payoff—how, exactly, would this help reduce bureaucratic drag?"

Whatever route you take, the goal is to zero in on a problem, a pro cess, and a principle. For a team of eight to twelve individuals, this is a half-day's work. After lunch, move on to brainstorming solutions. By this point, most of your colleagues will have a potential hack in mind. Give them forty minutes to flesh out their individual ideas. How, exactly, would they operationalize the chosen principle?

When the team reconvenes, give everyone a few minutes to describe their hack and take questions from the group. Look for overlapping hacks, or hacks that might be pieces of a bigger solution. Once all the hacks are on the table, give everyone a short break. When they reconvene, ask them to select two to three hacks for further development and to then self-organize around their preferred hack. Once in groups, they should spend the next couple of hours working up an experimental design.

Important questions at this stage will include:

1. What's our proposed solution, in a single sentence?

2. What are the key components of our hack?

3. What hypotheses do we need to test?

4. Who will participate in the experiment?

5. What data will we collect?

6. How do we ensure we get meaningful results?

7. How much time will we need to run the experiment and what resources will be required?

Answers should be captured on a simple, shareable template like the one you'll find on pages 4-5 which summarizes the travel experiment we described earlier (we've also included a blank template on page 4).

Remember, the goal is to test your proposed solutions as efficiently as possible, not build something that's bomb proof. Nevertheless, you'll want to be thoughtful about minimizing risks. A few tips:

1. Keep it simple. Test one or two hypotheses at a time, starting with the most critical.

2. Use volunteers. Don't compel anyone to take part in your experiment.

3. Make it fun. Think of ways to gamify the experience.

4. Start in your own backyard. That will minimize the number of permissions you need and the risk that someone tells you to stop.

5. Run the new in parallel with the old. Don't blow up the existing process until you've validated the new one.

6. Refine and retest. Create an expectation that this will be the first of many experiments.

7. Stay loyal to the problem. Don't fall in love with your solution. If it doesn't pan out, search for other testable hacks.

With no more than a day's work, your team ought to be able to generate one or two promising hacks. You don't have to get a top-level sign-off, anticipate every pitfall, work out the entire solution in advance, or convince thousands of individuals to change the way they work. Remember the hacker ethos—start where you are, change what you can, rinse, repeat.

HACK TEMPLATE

Give your hack a title:

Describe your hack: what are the key components?

What hypotheses are you testing?

Who will participate in the experiment?	What are you going to ask them to do?
How will you measure impact?	What's the time frame and resources that will be needed?

EXAMPLE HACK

Give your hack a title:
Self-managed travel approvals

Describe your hack: what are the key components?

We envision a new process for managing expenses that relies on personal responsibility and peer control. The primary components of our solution are to:

- Give employees the ability to "self- authorize" business travel and decide on appropriate expense levels (autonomy)
- Share all travel expense data on an internal website (transparency)

What hypotheses are you testing?

1. Most employees will regard self-authorizing travel as simpler and more in line with our values.
2. Some employees will find the increased personal discretion and trust to be motivating.
3. Aggregate travel expenses won't substantially increase

Who will participate in the experiment?	What are you going to ask them to do?
A select group of employees from two locations: approximately 100 people per site.	In each location, we will evenly divide the group into a control group and treatment group: • The control group will see no change in travel policy. • The treatment group will be asked to participate in a low-key test of a new expense management process.
How will you measure impact? We will conduct a survey with the treatment groups at the beginning and end of the experiment. The questions will be focused on hypotheses 1 and 2. For hypothesis 3, we will track individual and overall expenses for the treatment and control groups throughout the test.	**What's the time frame and resources that will be needed?** We'll run the experiment over three months—August to October. We'll need support from: • Department managers willing to host the experiment. • Finance to access to expense data. • IT to set up an intranet page for sharing granular expense data.