



PURE POTENTIAL

A cross-sector group exploration of the source of potential

*Collective perceptions of an immersive experience
of transformation*

An unexpected journey

Over the course of the past three years, more than 140 leaders have engaged with Pure Potential's experiential approach to learning and development.

In September 2025, we launched our first Open Leadership Journey, inviting eight leaders from across education and industry settings, supported by eight sponsors, to begin a 12-week hybrid in-person and online programme. This was an opportunity for individuals to explore alongside each other with differing contextual career backgrounds.

A departure from traditional CPD, the carefully crafted programme invited curiosity, vulnerability and an invitation for profound personal reflection and enquiry, underpinned by a blend of psychology, flow science and insight-based learning.

While initially a little perplexing as an approach, this group of eight strangers, supported by two coaches and guides on the metaphorical journey, soon created an intimate and organic dynamic which cultivated trust, warmth and an undeniable connection. This set the conditions for a significant arc of 'unlearning' to remove layers of cognitive load and reveal their true potential.



*"Having a blend of industry and education brought different perspectives.
It's a great group."*

Andy Hill, National Skills & Safety Park Facilitator, Tarmac

Setting the scene and reviewing the terrain



The 'expedition' began with a research period to develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' respective challenges and key themes at the forefront of their work contexts, as well as their personal lives. The crossover between career and home lives became a pertinent theme for this group, which emerged with greater clarity over the lifespan of the programme.

The process captured rich qualitative data from 1-1 exploratory interviews, and a questionnaire, to reveal areas of interest to inform the programme content, including; *wellbeing, state of mind, clarity, relationships and workload*. These areas were explored to prompt reflection and revisited at the end of the programme through the lens of the new approach and a more profound understanding of the human design.

Cultivating a deeper understanding of the human design

Through a combination of in-person and online group workshops alongside 1-1 coaching in a trusted space, the cohort began to get curious about the nature of the human design, traversing the realms of insight and experience-based learning, neuroscience, and a fresh, practical definition of leadership to take into their daily lives.

Initially, the nature and style of learning felt like a marked change from traditional learning and development, which prompted some questions and uncertainty – such as the deliberate design of the programme to open up new ways of exploring self-development.

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“I thought that this was self-indulgent to begin with and asked myself – do I still need to be doing this at this stage in my career? I can say I have no doubt that it was right for me in the moment.”

**Ali Martin, Freelance Trainer,
Thrive**

The exploration was supported by the provision of a backpack for each explorer to help navigate their learning and provide useful 'tools' to cement their understanding. A simple shared language enabled participants to make sense of their inner and outer landscapes. This included metaphors to demonstrate the limitless nature of potential and the mind and body's natural capacity to settle, such as the 'blank canvas' and 'snow globe'.

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“The blank canvas was a huge one for me. I realised what I was bringing to the door every day in my role. This has showed me to allow the day to run its course, rather than imposing what I think is going to happen.”

Caroline Hughes, Co-Headteacher, Pennine Way Junior Academy

Loosening the cognitive load and shifting perceptions



The nature of the Pure Potential programme is to prompt deep enquiry by pointing participants to the heavy layers of cognition and mental load that we acquire as humans, which often occludes the space of creativity that is naturally within us. It also invites us to see that, rather than life 'coming at us', our lens of perception informs our experience of life, which gives a greater sense of autonomy.

By virtue of this, the programme can be challenging at times as it is at odds with typical approaches which ask us to 'do more' or add to our thinking. This is why we refer to it as an 'unlearning curve' - and the result is a greater sense of spaciousness and a marked shift in perspective. The impact of the approach was so significant across the cohort that each participant concluded they would recommend the programme to others without hesitation.

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“Pure Potential has been an epiphany for me. Through the programme I have been able to recognise that what I’m experiencing is from the inside, and once you see that and really understand it, you can’t un-see it.”

**Charlene Hudson,
School Business Manager,
Kilburn Junior School.**

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I’ve been a much calmer person over the last three months. If I take a difficult phone call at work from someone who is stressed, I now ask ‘what are they experiencing?’ which has changed the internal process for me. I don’t have to absorb their stress as it’s not personal. That’s been liberating.”

**Lucy-Ann Wood, Early Career
Teacher Entitlement Lead,
Potentia**

The capacity to look beyond the personal perspective was widely experienced by the group, with **100%** citing that they had taken things personally rarely or none of the time in the two-week period after programme completion.



An incredible bond

Without any overt orchestration, aside from the creation of a warm, supportive space of mutual trust, this group of eight initial strangers created a deep bond, which became quite palpable at times with the exchange of laughter, tears and heartfelt WhatsApp messages between sessions and beyond the conclusion of the programme.

This has reiterated that the relational dynamic is pivotal to the shared experience and correlates with the depth of transformation.

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“It almost feels like group therapy – we're all really close.”

**Jane Oldnall, Teacher and Forest School Lead,
Chaucer Junior School**

Bringing clarity to the human design

Participants translated their understanding of the programme content in their day-to-day contexts, including:

- Greater ease in dealing with colleagues and clients without taking it personally
- Being able to communicate with more clarity and impact
- The capacity to sit with uncertainty and transitional periods with greater ease
- The ability to focus on one activity at a time and give others their full attention
- A deeper knowing of their capacity to handle what life may offer
- Feeling more able to switch off and fully engage in their home lives

Reflections from participants and sponsors

The Closing Ceremony of the cohort in December 2025 was an inspiring, impactful and moving session as the culmination of the exploration. It offered space for participants to share their insights, reflections and intentions for how to ‘live it’, ‘lead it’ and ‘pay it forward’, as well as for sponsors to observe and reflect on the changes they had witnessed.

The programme gently challenged participants to look beyond assumptions about who they were, their perceived limitations and how they handle life’s adversities:

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“Given I’m in a period of real flux in my life, I’ve had a definite shift and am much more able to sit with uncertainty and not feel overwhelmed by it.”

**Kirsty Hughes, Researcher,
Novametrics**

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“When it comes to listening, I realised I would constantly be thinking in my head about what to say next. I’m better with silences now and I see that people don’t want solutions, they just want to be heard.”

**Jane Oldnall, Teacher and Forest
School Lead, Chaucer Junior
School**

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“I have put check-ins in place at work and we have been able to communicate and share in a much more meaningful way, as well as incorporating our shared language.”

**Charlene Hudson, Business
Manager, Kilburn Junior
School**

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“I drive to work in the morning and do my ‘inner climate barometer’ to ask myself how I’m feeling.”

**Caroline Hughes, Co-
Headteacher, Pennine Way
Junior Academy**

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“Going back to basics as a human being has helped me to see that leadership is a human capability and not a socially constructed title. Leadership is modelling ‘being’.”

**Lucy-Ann Wood, Early Career
Teacher Entitlement Lead,
Potentia**

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“I can offer my opinion and I don’t have to be right every time. For me that creates an inner calmness and it allows for open feedback.”

**Andy Hill, National Skills &
Safety Park Facilitator, Tarmac**



Some fundamental shifts were experienced over the course of the programme, from subtle realisations to extraordinary 'lightbulb moments' - particularly in reference to the relationship with the 'inner narrator' or the internal scripts playing out that are based on inherited conditioning and life experiences.



"The programme has caused a profound shift in my relationship with my thinking. I was highly sceptical to begin with, but I quickly began to realise that some deeply held views that I had about myself were simply not true.

Decades of conditioned thinking and my mind's critical inner narrative had been clouding my experience of the world and of myself. Realising this has been a huge relief and has enabled me to change my perspective on so many things and allow space for fresh thinking.

My only regret is that I didn't come to this realisation much earlier in life. What a difference that might have made."

**Stuart Ellis, Treasurer,
Derby Kids' Camp**

Looking towards the wider ripple effect of the programme, one reflection was:



"Having Pure Potential communities with multi-disciplinary sector teams that collaborate on projects that change future thinking would be really inspirational and impactful."

Ali Martin, Freelance Trainer, Thrive





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“Thank you for your support of Charlene through the programme as I know it has been hugely beneficial to her. We frequently discuss the techniques of 'noticing, and 'doing nothing' to move from reactivity to responsiveness and I know these techniques have helped her recently with the launch of new initiatives and workload challenges.”

Rob Hull, Headteacher, Kilburn Junior School (Sponsor)

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“The time I spent with the group showed me how powerful and valuable the journey has been for all participants. I was very moved to hear stories of how the Pure Potential approach has helped people navigate the storms and challenges, of not only their professional lives, but also (and perhaps more so) their personal lives and relationships.”

Andrea Nove, Technical Director, Novametrics (Sponsor)

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“It was such a privilege, and very moving, to hear first-hand the Pure Potential participants reflecting on their intense and often emotional experience; the impact on these leaders from industry, the third sector and education was powerful, transformational.

They reflected on deeply personal journeys of self-discovery. This experience was clearly very different from development programmes they had undertaken previously, unusual, even uncomfortable at times, but ultimately gave the time, space, focus and permission to consider themselves in a fundamental way and invest in their own well-being and the well-being of those in their personal and professional orbits.”

Lindsey Smethem, Vice Chair, Embark Federation Trust (Sponsor)

The programme straddled the **profound and practical** through the creation of a closely-knit trusted dynamic. This carefully crafted programme, backed by scientific research, wove in storytelling, reflection and supported the cultivation of peer relationships.

The individual and collective impact was palpable, translating into **clearer, more grounded leadership approaches**, a greater sense of **optimism for the future** and a **ripple effect beyond career contexts into the personal lives of the cohort**.

In their own words, the participants described the exploration as:



For more information visit
www.pure-potential.org