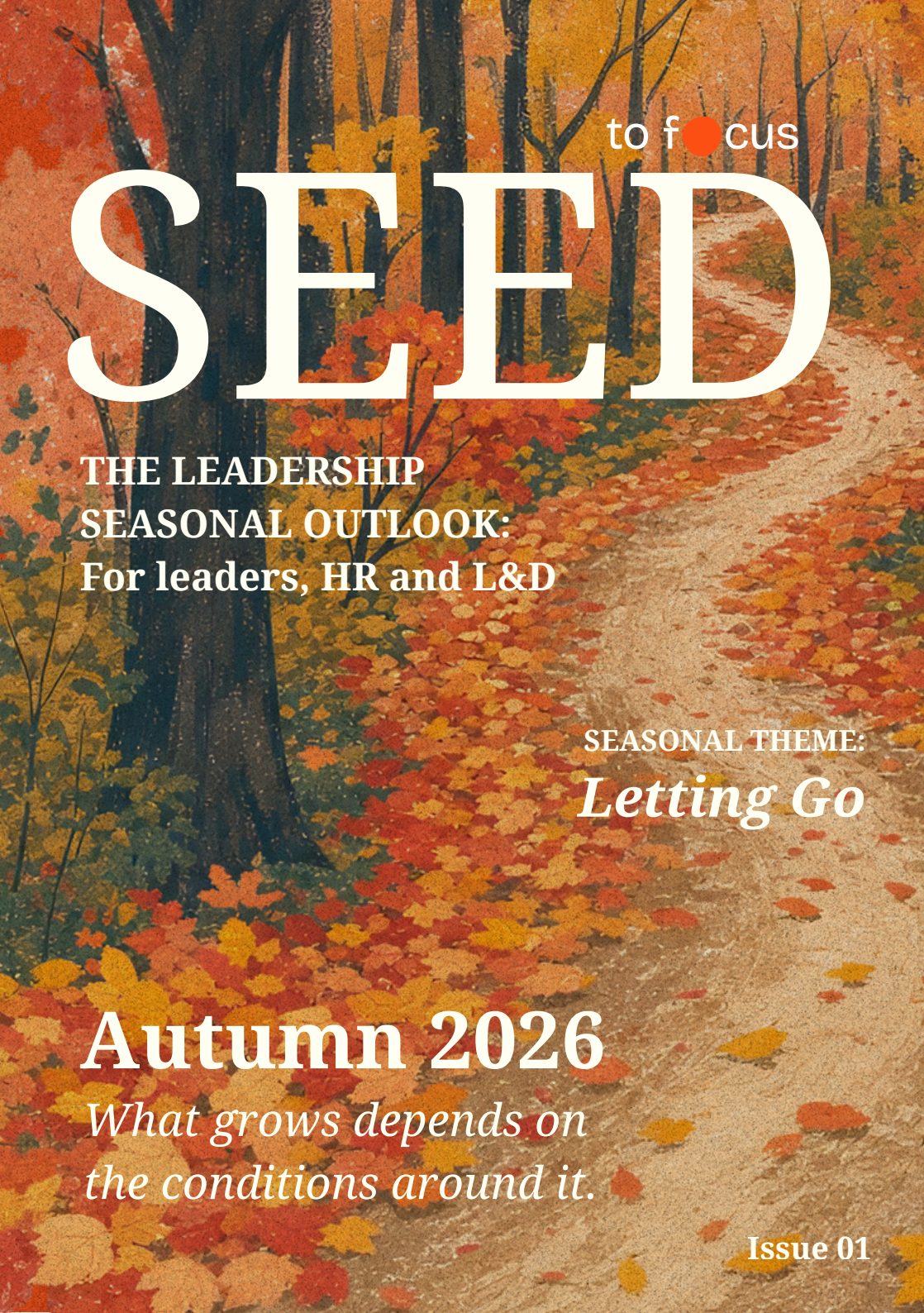




to focus

SEED

THE LEADERSHIP
SEASONAL OUTLOOK:
For leaders, HR and L&D

SEASONAL THEME:
Letting Go

Autumn 2026

*What grows depends on
the conditions around it.*

Issue 01

*Each season offers different wisdom
for business and leadership.*

Four Seasons. Four Questions.

AUTUMN LETTING GO

What do we need to let
go of to create space for
what matters?

WINTER RESTORING

What needs protecting
and restoring before we
grow again?

SUMMER ABUNDANCE

What is growing well, and
how do we help it to
flourish?

SPRING EMERGENCE

What is ready to emerge,
and where should we put
our energy?



Why a Seasonal Outlook?

Most outlooks try to predict what's coming next. This one starts somewhere different.

Four times a year, the Seasonal Outlook steps back from the noise of working life to ask three questions:

01

What is changing?

02

What conditions are those changes creating for us?

03

What might the natural season teach us about how to respond?

Each Seasonal Outlook brings together:

3 PATTERNS

Three changes we are noticing in the world of work and leadership.

3 PERSPECTIVES

Evidence and observations from researchers, practitioners and people inside organisations.

The seasons give us a rhythm.

Rather than treating leadership as a continuous demand for more growth, activity and output, they remind us that healthy systems move through different phases.

There are times to grow. And there are times to stop, restore, experiment and harvest.

We will return to the same questions and patterns each season so that, over time, we can notice not simply what is happening, but what is changing, intensifying or disappearing.

The purpose is not simply to predict the future. It is to notice what is changing, understand the conditions we are operating in, and make better decisions about what to do next.



Autumn

LETTING GO

Letting Go

Autumn is not primarily a season of growth. It is a season of letting go.

Trees withdraw resources from leaves they can no longer sustain. Energy is conserved. What is unnecessary is shed. Preparation begins for the harder conditions ahead.

There may be something useful here for organisations and the people leading them.

Working life has a strong bias towards addition. Another priority. Another meeting. Another initiative. Another piece of technology.

Autumn offers a different question:

What do we need to stop doing in order to create the conditions for better decisions?

A misty autumn landscape with a large white number 1 overlaid. The scene features a field of green and brown vegetation in the foreground, a line of trees in the middle ground, and a hazy sky. A tree with vibrant orange and yellow leaves is visible on the right side.

NOTICE THE SEASON

*What is happening
outside?*

The Seasonal Outlook



EDITORS FIELD NOTES

Looking through the window from where I write this, I can now see the windmill on the hill. As the trees shed their leaves more is revealed. You can see further, more clearly.

Yet for many of you this will feel like a busy period in the run up to Christmas. Intense, unrelenting. Rhythms and seasons are smoothed out as even a summer break is no longer a must. We squeeze in a few days here and there to take a break. Then we return with good intentions and get swarmed as soon as we open our inbox, attend the first meeting. We are all subject to this and equally we all cause this for others.

My seasonal reflection

Mark McCartney,
ToFocus

As you read this Outlook, jot down three things that you need to stop, shed that don't add but take away your energy and those around you.

One thing worth noticing:

How easy it is to add more at times of stress and reactivity and how are language and deeper assumptions drive this addiction to busyness.

What this might teach us

Leaders who succeed long-term learn to tell the difference between what's truly urgent and what just *feels* urgent (reactively). By cutting out the noise, they set both themselves and their teams up for lasting success. And swamped not swarmed.

A question to carry

What will you shed, stop doing that did feel important but is now an autopilot task or obligation?



Autumn is not a failure
of growth.

It is a *change in what
growth requires.*



THREE PATTERNS WE ARE NOTICING

*What is changing in
the world of work?*

The Seasonal Outlook

PATTERN #1

PRESSURE BECOMES THE DEFAULT

PATTERN #2

WHEN THE STORY GETS LOST

PATTERN #3

THE FUTURE GETS CROWDED OUT

EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS:

Matthew Fielding: Head of Communications, Learning and Impact – Stockholm Environment Institute

Reem AlGurg: Director, Strategy & Institutional Excellence, MBRU – Dubai Health

José Antonio Gordillo Camacho: Founder and director – Grupo Médica Yucatán (México)

PATTERN #1

PRESSURE BECOMES THE DEFAULT

What we're noticing

High stress is becoming less exceptional and more like the background condition of working life.

Evidence

In 2024/25, 964,000 UK workers experienced work-related stress, depression or anxiety, resulting in 22.1 million working days lost. The UK's Health and Safety Executive reports that rates remain above pre-pandemic levels and are consistent with an upward trend in recent years.

Why it matters

Stress changes the conditions in which we make decisions. Under sustained pressure, our capacity for attention, reflection and flexible thinking can deteriorate. Yet our response to disappointing productivity is often more: more meetings, more reporting, more checking, more activity. This risks creating a reinforcing cycle. More pressure. More activity. Less space to think. Poorer decisions. Poorer outcomes.

The challenge for leaders is not simply how to get people to do more. It is how to create the conditions in which people can think and decide well.

PATTERN #1

PRESSURE BECOMES THE DEFAULT

Creating the right conditions

A healthy soil system depends on many interacting conditions. So do people and organisations. Rather than prescribing six conditions, we invite people to discover for themselves what a healthy system needs to thrive.

We remember things better when we generate them ourselves than when we simply receive them. So we don't give leaders another model to memorise; we help them create a connection they can remember and use.

Memorability

We don't need another leadership model to memorise. We can all picture healthy soil. By making the connections ourselves, we give abstract ideas something tangible to attach to - and something we are more likely to remember and use.

We can also make ideas more powerful by imagining them. Vivid mental imagery can activate some of the same brain and bodily systems involved in actually experiencing an event, which is why it is used in performance training.

Question for Leaders:

*Are we increasing productivity,
or simply increasing activity?*

PATTERN #1: PRESSURE BECOMES THE DEFAULT

EXPERT VOICE · COMMS



Matthew Fielding

Head of Communications, Learning and Impact
– Stockholm Environment Institute



The pop band The Kinks wrote a song in 1971 that took 55 years to reach me:

*“Man made the buildings that reach for the sky
And man made the motorcar and learned how to drive
But he didn’t make the flowers and he didn’t make the
trees. And he didn’t make you and he didn’t make me
And he’s got no right to turn us into machines.”*

Our ability to build organisations and processes does not entitle those systems – or their leaders – to reduce people to machines. In disconnecting from ourselves, we lose sight of our boundaries, our limits and our emotional needs. Tending to our fundamental needs through things that ground us – nature, connection, food – rather than things that drive us towards consumption and temporary satisfaction gives us a greater ability to weather the ups, the downs, the stresses of modern life.

By seeing these moments as features on the road of a rich and rewarding life.

PATTERN #1: PRESSURE BECOMES THE DEFAULT

EXPERT VOICE · COMMS



Matthew Fielding

Head of Communications, Learning and Impact
– Stockholm Environment Institute



>> **One practical implication:**

The machines evoked by the song were automated to do one job – no questions and no complaints. Humans are not. Stress can be borne of frustration, lack of control and lack of self-determinism.

Leaders should value questions, pauses, changing course and recognition of human limits, because these are not obstacles to performance; they are engagement, ownership and precisely what distinguishes thoughtful human work from machine-like activity.

PATTERN #2

WHEN THE STORY GETS LOST

What we're noticing

As organisations focus on targets, metrics and BAU, something less measurable gets squeezed out: meaning. People can know what they need to deliver without understanding why it matters or where they are going.

Evidence

Decades of research into organisational sensemaking, particularly the work of Karl Weick, shows that people make sense of organisations not simply through data and instructions, but through interpretation, conversation and narrative. A systematic review of 402 studies found that cognition and emotion are intertwined in how people make sense of organisational events.

Why it matters

Metrics tell us whether we are hitting the target. Stories help us understand why the target is worth hitting. Creating that shared narrative takes time, attention, precisely the things increasingly busy workplaces struggle to provide.

Question for Leaders:

Targets tell us where we are. Stories tell us where we're going and why. Are your people working towards a shared story, or simply a set of targets?

PATTERN #2: WHEN THE STORY GETS LOST

EXPERT VOICE · HEALTHCARE



Reem AlGurg

Director, Strategy & Institutional Excellence,
MBRU – Dubai Health



In healthcare and higher education, we work with an enormous amount of data, targets and performance measures. These are essential, but they can become disconnected from the reason we are doing the work in the first place.

I have found that people engage differently when they can see how their individual contribution connects to a larger purpose and shared story.

In complex systems, the story is not an additional communication exercise; it is what helps people interpret change, make sense of competing priorities and stay connected to what matters.

>> **One practical implication:**

When introducing a new strategy, metric or initiative, leaders should ask: **“Can our people explain not only what we are trying to achieve, but why it matters?”**

THE FUTURE GETS CROWDED OUT

What we're noticing

As organisations deal with constant demands, uncertainty and short-term targets, attention is increasingly pulled towards what needs to happen now. The important can become crowded out by the urgent.

Evidence

The World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2026, drawing on more than 1,300 leaders and experts, reveals a striking difference between short and long-term thinking. Environmental risks rank relatively low when people consider the next two years. Look 10 years ahead, however, and environmental threats occupy the top three positions. The time horizon changes what we see.

Why it matters

Decisions made to optimise this quarter can inadvertently weaken the conditions needed for long-term resilience, adaptation and growth.

Seasonal thinking offers a different perspective. Autumn is not simply about what can be harvested now. It is also about creating the conditions for what can grow next year.

PATTERN #3

THE FUTURE GETS CROWDED OUT

Creating the right conditions

The urgent asks: *What needs doing now?*

The seasonal asks: *What are we creating the conditions for?*

Question for Leaders:

What are you doing this autumn that will matter next spring and how does this show up practically such as meeting agenda's or team away days?

PATTERN #3: THE FUTURE GETS CROWDED OUT

EXPERT VOICE · HEALTHCARE



José Antonio Gordillo Camacho

Founder and director – Grupo Médica Yucatán
(México)



“We are living through exceptional times that often feel as though we are all in a race, with days, weeks and months passing so quickly that we barely notice. Some stress, or eustress, can be positive because it gives us the energy and motivation to move forward.

But in healthcare, and in every other field, where urgent needs are part of our everyday reality, leaders need to be particularly aware of cycles and make time to step back and see where we are going.

Without a medium and long-term perspective, we can spend all our time achieving short-term goals and responding to immediate demands, while losing sight of the outcomes we want to create for the future.”

>> **One practical implication:**

As leaders, create regular moments to step back from immediate demands and ask: **“Are the decisions we are making today taking us closer to the outcomes and system we want for the future?”**



WHAT ARE WE SEEING

*Three patterns.
One bigger question.*

The Seasonal Outlook

Our industrial mindset is failing us.

It is failing our world, our organisations and, ultimately, performance itself.

Rather than another report full of smart words, graphics and step-by-step solutions, let's turn away from the screen and observe a tree.

In autumn, a tree sheds its leaves. It lets go of what has sustained it through one season and prepares for another. It does not see winter as failure. It is part of a cycle. As the conditions change, the tree changes too.

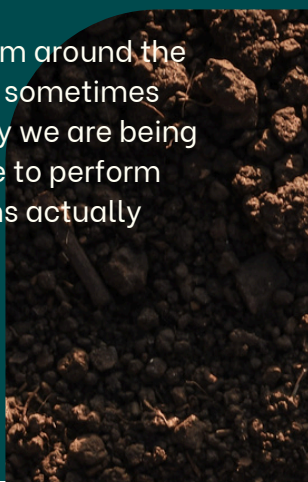
Perhaps we have something to learn from that.

Yet industrial thinking still has us in its grip. We look at work through the window of the factory: strategy, finance, efficiency, effectiveness, targets and performance. We measure the output and then try to make the output better.

But in our coaching conversations with leaders from around the world, we hear something different. Often quietly, sometimes almost as a confession, people tell us that the way we are being asked to work is not sustainable. That the pressure to perform can obscure what people, teams and organisations actually need.

They do not always say it out loud.

We think it is time to.





A tree does not grow because we tell it to grow harder.

Its growth depends on the conditions around it: the soil, water, light, space, relationships and seasons that sustain it.

What if performance is not the thing to fix, but the outcome of the conditions we create?

What if, instead of asking:

How do we get more from our people?

We asked:

What conditions are we creating for people, teams and organisations to flourish?

This is the bigger pattern.

We cannot see the whole forest, but act as if we do.

*There is a bigger pattern behind all of this.
We cannot see the pattern.*

We are living and working in complex systems, yet we continue to behave as though, with enough data, planning and control, we should be able to predict what happens next.

Imagine standing inside a vast forest and believing you can see every leaf, anticipate every gust of wind and predict where every squirrel will jump next.

You cannot. And recognising that is not a failure of leadership. It is one of its most important capabilities! What we can do as leaders, and in teams, and across organisations is review and set the conditions. In uncertain times, we need to protect some deeply human capacities: to make meaning, to think beyond the immediate, to feel connected to a purpose, to relate to one another and to create the conditions in which we can think well. Many leadership development practices focus on one area but as we know everything is related to everything else.

That's why we focus on conditions.





Perhaps we also need to let go of the idea of the organisation as a machine: predictable, controllable and optimisable. It's alluring. And it's dangerous. In his book "Images of Organisations", Gareth Morgan argues that each way of seeing an organisation brings advantages and disadvantages, yet some must be called upon in this precise, many would argue, pivotal moment, and the one we believe in most is nature. For anyone who doubts this, hold your breath and see what lack of clean air feels like.

A forest cannot be controlled into flourishing.

But the conditions for flourishing can be cultivated.

And perhaps that is increasingly the work of leadership.

One thing to remember

Design your life and work starting with the conditions you need to be happy and effective for you and those around you.



Looking ahead

Financial forecasts. Quarterly plans. Annual cycles...

...even the language of business recognises that conditions change over time. Yet we often manage human energy as though they don't.

One client told me after sitting through thousands of PowerPoint slides at meetings and conferences, he could only remember one presentation. The speaker used no slides. He simply showed an image of a tree and asked people to think about their networks differently.

Simple. Memorable.

Perhaps there is something here for all of us. Looking out and up, at the actual world outside our windows, can remind us that endless extraction has consequences.

There are times to grow and harvest, and times to let go.

***Autumn asks us what we can release.
Winter will ask us what needs restoring***



What we do

Better conditions.
Better decisions.
Better outcomes.

We help leaders, teams and organisations make better decisions by creating the conditions for people and organisations to thrive.

Our conditions are non-negotiable. 50 per cent of the time is outside. No slides apart from our one slide map summary.

We use soil as an organising lens to understand the nutrients and conditions needed for better performance and better business outcomes.

Change the conditions. Change what's possible.

Got a people or performance challenge? Let's talk.

[BOOK A CALL](#)

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