

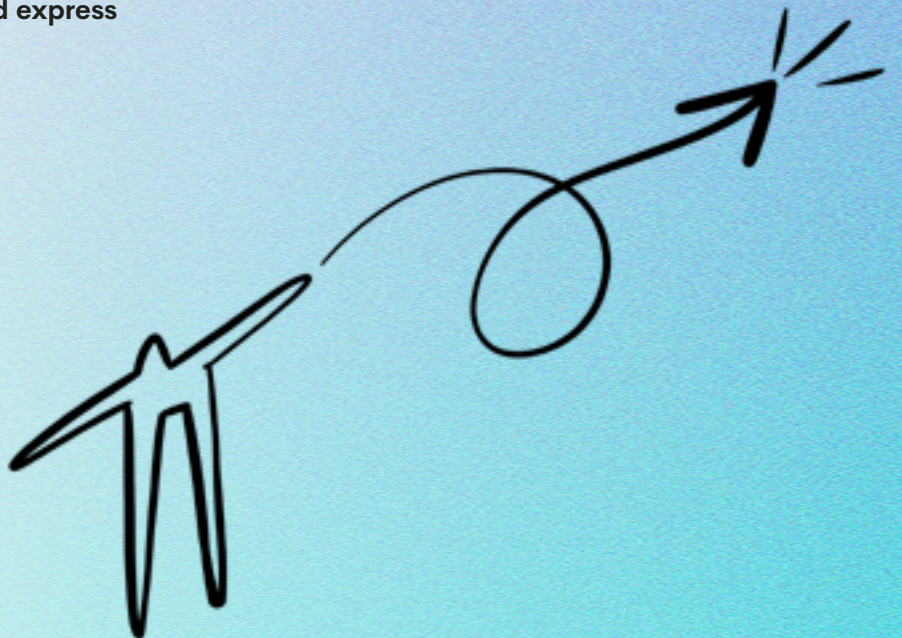
Imagination Activism in Camden

Insights from the First Phase



Camden imagines...

A programme of work to develop and unleash imaginative capacity at Camden Council. In Phase One, 32 Council officers were trained as imagination activists over a six month period, acquiring the skills to boldly envision and express how Camden could do things better.



2023

Phoebe Tickell, Matt Lloyd-Rose
www.moralimagnations.com

WHAT IF WE REIMAGINED CROSS-
ORGANISATIONAL COLLABORATION
AND WORKED ON PROJECTS
RATHER THAN IN ROLES?

WHAT IF THERE
WERE A SEVENTH
GENERATION VIEWPOINT
IN EVERY ROOM?

WHAT IF IMAGINATION
WERE PART OF
EVERYTHING WE DO?

WHAT IF THE COUNCIL
INTRODUCED A 4 DAY
WORKING WEEK?

WHAT IF STAFF HAD
DEDICATED SPACE TO
THINK OUTSIDE OF
THEIR DAY JOB?

WHAT IF COUNCIL STAFF
WERE ABLE TO BRING THEIR
WHOLE SELVES TO WORK?

WHAT IF WE BROUGHT
CREATIVITY
AND PLAY INTO
OUR WORK?

WHAT IF WE PUT
WELLBEING AT
THE HEART OF
BEING EMPLOYED
AT CAMDEN?

WHAT IF...

WHAT IF THE
WORKPLACE WERE
ALSO A PLACE TO
BE CREATIVE?

WHAT IF STAFF WENT ON
IMAGINATION SABBATICALS
TO DEVELOP IDEAS
FOR PROJECTS?

WHAT IF WE
INVITED THE
BOROUGH INTO
THE COUNCIL?

WHAT IF THERE
WAS LESS DIVISION
BETWEEN STAFF
AND COMMUNITY?

WHAT IF
COUNCILS
WERE SITES OF
GENUINE CIVIC
INNOVATION?

WHAT IF COUNCILS
WERE THE BEST
PLACES TO WORK
IN THE WORLD?

WHAT IF ALL STAFF
FOCUSED ON THE
FUTURE AS WELL
AS THE NOW?

Acknowledgements

Our work is the work of many people. We are grateful to everyone who has supported us along the way, including but not limited to:

Report designer: Heather Knight

Illustration: Reilly Dow

Our visionary **project sponsor** Jo Brown, and continued project sponsor Nick Kimber, thank you both for your relentless passion, support and vision to make this project possible. A special thank you also to the brilliant leaders of Camden Council, Georgia Gould and Jenny Rowlands for all your help, inspiration and backing.

The **32 Imagination Activists**, who took part in an unprecedented programme, throwing themselves into it with courage, openness and energy.

The Camden team: Jo Brown, Phil Davies, Kirsty Dutton, Ian Gilson, Flo Henry, Osian Jones, Caroline Kennedy, Nick Kimber, Alison Morris, Kat Myers, with thanks to the support from the Camden Management Team, Directorate Management Teams, People and Inclusion Team, Strategy and Design Team and Participation Team.

The Moral Imaginations team: Benedicta Asamoah-Russell, Emily Bazalgette, Sasha Care, Elisabeth Davies, Reilly Dow, Luke Flegg, Heather Knight, Nil Roda, James Street, our guest teachers: Daze Aghaji, Keri Facer, Rob Hopkins, Ashanti Kunene, and Andy Middleton, and our academic collaborators: Elena Antonova at Brunel University and Walter Osika at Karolinska Universitet.

Our Advisors: with a special thank you to Joanna Macy for her inspirational guidance, Daze Aghaji, Jon Alexander, Nora Bateson, Rob Hopkins, Christine Lai, Anthea Lawson, Alison Tickell.

All the friends of Moral Imaginations who continue to stretch and shape our thinking, including but not limited to: Raph Arar, Mel Bradley, Ruth Catlow, Ieva Cesnulaityte, Claudia Chwalicz, Jane Davidson, Gemma Drake, Alex Evans, Fiona Gatty, Penny Hay, Dougal Hine, Neil Johnston, Liam Kavanagh, Paul Kett, Tony Lai, Iona Lawrence, Juha Leppanen, Renee Lertzman, Polly Mackenzie, Ivan March, Iain McGilchrist, Geoff Mulgan, Farrah Nazir, Sam Nutt, Simon Parker, Paul Powlesland, Tarn Rogers, Katy Rubin, Sanjan Sabherwal, Alice Sachrajda, Anasuya Sengupta, Neha Sharma, Omid Shiraji, Divya Siddarth, Caroline Slocock, Will Somerville, Michael Stevenson, Ruth Taylor, Phil Tovey, Stacco Trancoso, Ann-Marie Utratel, Amelia Woods, Steve Wyler, Anthony Zacharewski.

And finally, to the **borough of Camden, Camden Council, Camden residents, more-than-human residents, and Camden future generations** - thanks for all the support and contributions, both seen and unseen.

ISBN Number - DOI - 10.6084/m9.figshare.23332100

Publisher - Moral Imaginations

Publication date - June 2023

Authors - Phoebe Tickell and Matt Lloyd-Rose

This report was published at moralimagination.com/camden-imagines

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Introduction



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cost-of-living crisis afford
to invest in imagination?**



Foreword:

Georgia Gould



Georgia Gould
Leader of Camden Council

Imagination is a word not often associated with local government.

But investing in the imagination and activism of our communities strengthens and renews our democracy. The current system isn't working – inequality is rising, our planet is under threat, and there is growing distrust in democratic institutions.

We have seen huge efforts in imagining new models of care and social support over the last four years responding to COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis. Councils and communities are opening warm banks, providing heat and solidarity for those hardest hit by the energy price increases. We can never normalise how our communities are struggling, and that in a nation as wealthy as ours no one should be relying on Council food banks for nappies for their children, or meals that don't require electricity to heat.

We need to stop putting sticking plasters over broken systems and instead reimagine something better, together, from ground up. With increasing pressures on Council staff to deliver the same quality services with less, the risk is that we get locked into narrow thinking focused only on immediate solutions. We need to work towards building greater visions of how things could be, as well as fixing things in the here and now.

We can't be stuck in fear and resource competition. We need to completely transform the system to create something better. When we invest in imagination, democratic renewal and collaboration, change happens at pace. It's critical that this is part of the toolkit of government. Imagine if we invested in all public sector staff, and gave them the tools to build relationships and solve problems alongside communities.

Through working with Moral Imaginations, we have launched Camden Imagines. The 8-week imagination programme has given tools and skills to Camden Council staff across the organisation from repairs to planners. Participants learnt how to include future generations in decision-making, future visioning and how to move from accepting what is to imagining *what if*. As you'll see in this report, we are seeing extraordinary results of this programme with small numbers of staff helping and we've already started to build a movement across Camden.

There is no lack of imagination in our communities, just a lack of hope that their ideas will be heard. Alongside new democratic forums, we need to foster and support a new era of municipal imagination. We need to give people the time and space and permission to exercise their imaginations and grow that capacity. The old structures are failing us; if we want to avoid recreating the same things as before, we have to unlock the imagination of our places.

This has unlocked new energy and optimism for our staff and residents. Imagination is being used to think about how we redesign our housing services, improve planning and how we tackle climate change. Across Camden there is real action taking place in estates and neighbourhoods because of this work and every day this coalition grows. Camden is a place full of energy, creativity and community spirit. Bringing imagination into how we make policy and deliver services is bringing this to life in new ways. I am excited to see where these ripples of change take us.

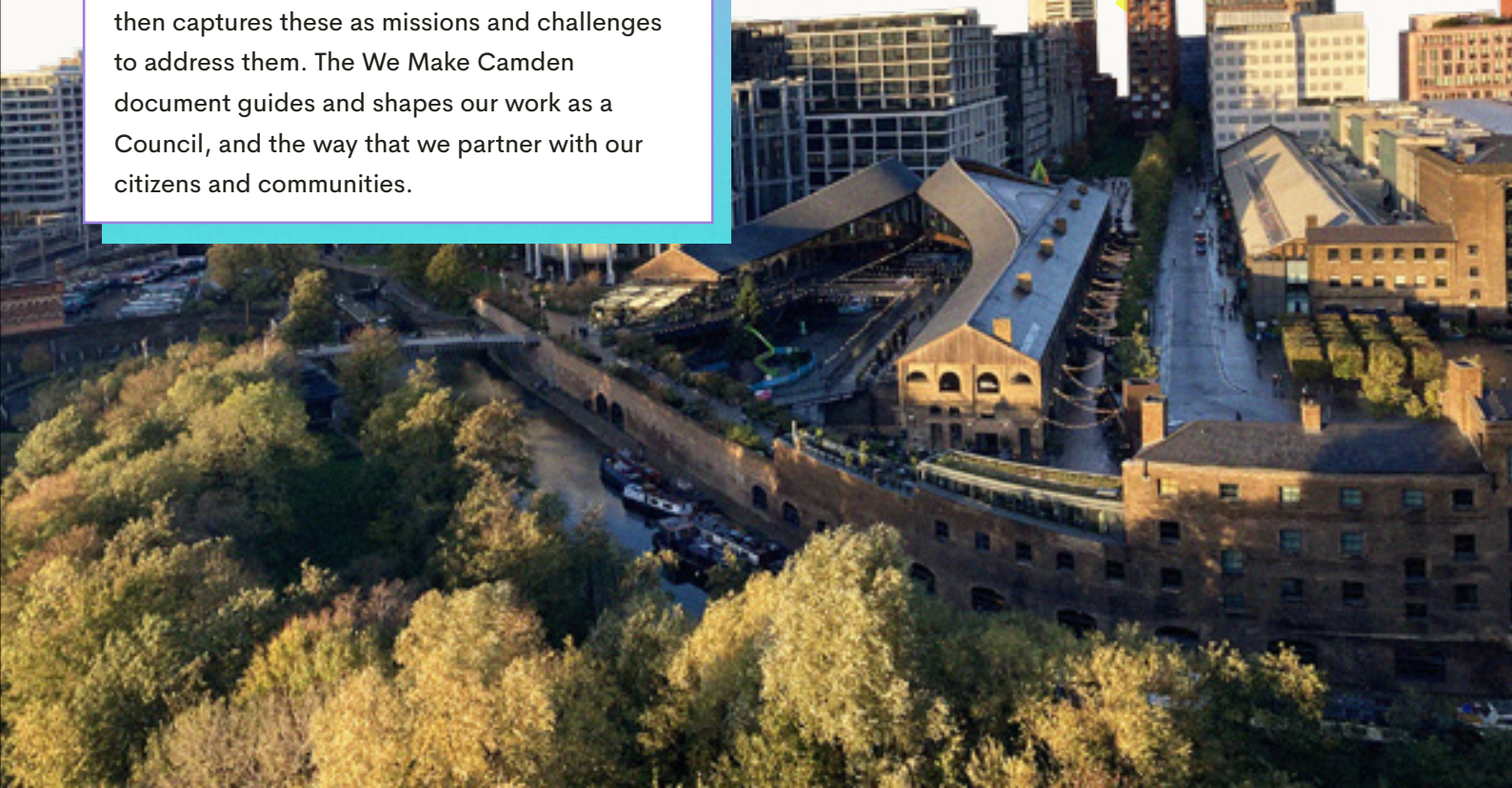
We Make Camden

In Camden we believe in the capacity and innovation of our staff and our communities to develop new ideas and new ways to tackle the complex challenges in our borough.

We Make Camden is our communities' vision for the future of our place – an act of shared imagination for a better and fairer Camden which takes a wide view of our shared ambitions and thinks boldly of what the future could look like, then captures these as missions and challenges to address them. The We Make Camden document guides and shapes our work as a Council, and the way that we partner with our citizens and communities.

“I look forward to a new era of *municipal imagination*, galvanised by love and *community power*.”

Georgia Gould
Leader of Camden Council



Foreword:

Phoebe Tickell



Phoebe Tickell
Founder and Director,
Moral Imaginations

When I tell people that Moral Imaginations is working with Camden Council often the reaction I get is: 'You're working with the local Council; aren't they really unimaginative?' And my response is: 'No, you're unimaginative about what local Councils are and can be.'

Local government has a particular role in this imagination revolution. It sits at the interface of the community and national government, and has the power to change the relationship to one of collective decision making, co-creation and co-imagination. This is imagination justice in action — it's not just what we imagine that matters, but who gets to imagine.

Prioritising imagination does not mean putting aside rigour or discipline about hard decisions or the need to consider evidence. But it does mean creating the conditions for more visionary and ambitious thinking – and that takes practice and a deliberate, strategic commitment to this work.

What would future generations say about each decision we make at work? What would nature vote for, if nature had a voice? What if we didn't just reduce homelessness, but created systems that made it obsolete? It's going to take a different kind of thinking to allow us to get to this place.

Imagination is not a frivolous thing, it leads directly to social changes, and it keeps us in touch with what matters to us, so we can translate it into policy, governance and practice.

The work of collective imagination is not new but it is now finding new ways to come into the world. I am the grateful recipient of a way of seeing the world, inspired by systems thinking and its deep roots across cultures and over centuries.

It has been a gift to do this work. We have learned a huge amount. Thank you to the leadership, to everyone who took part and everyone who made it possible. If what we have done through this process has brought into the borough a small but increased capacity for joy and hope for the future, then it has been worthwhile. If we have created the momentum for further change and growth, then that will be true success.



Executive Summary:

What did we do?

In late 2022, Camden Council in London commissioned Moral Imaginations to develop and deliver a new programme for local Council officers in the tools and practices of collective imagination, equipping 32 Camden employees as 'Imagination Activists'.

The course was designed to expand their imaginations and to make them ambassadors for the imagination within the organisation.

“What is *imagination*?
Strengthening that
muscle of being able
to see things other
than they are now.”

adrienne marie brown
writer, activist and facilitator

Although this is an ongoing project, this first phase has exceeded expectations and we're sharing our early insights because of the urgent need for proof points for collective and municipal imagination. Many working in civic society don't feel they have permission to create space for this kind of work. This report argues that they should.

Camden Imagines makes the case that we should:

- See imagination as an emerging competency of 21st century civic **leadership**;
- Prioritise building **imaginative capacity** in our teams and organisations;
- Embed imagination in our organisations at the level of **governance**;
- Equip employees with **horizontal leadership skills** to unleash cross-collaboration;
- And embark on collective imagining with **communities**.

This report tells the story so far and shares our emerging evidence of impact. emerging evidence of impact.

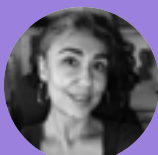
Camden's participation journey

Camden Council has a long history of investing in creating new ways of collaborating with communities and sharing power and resources.

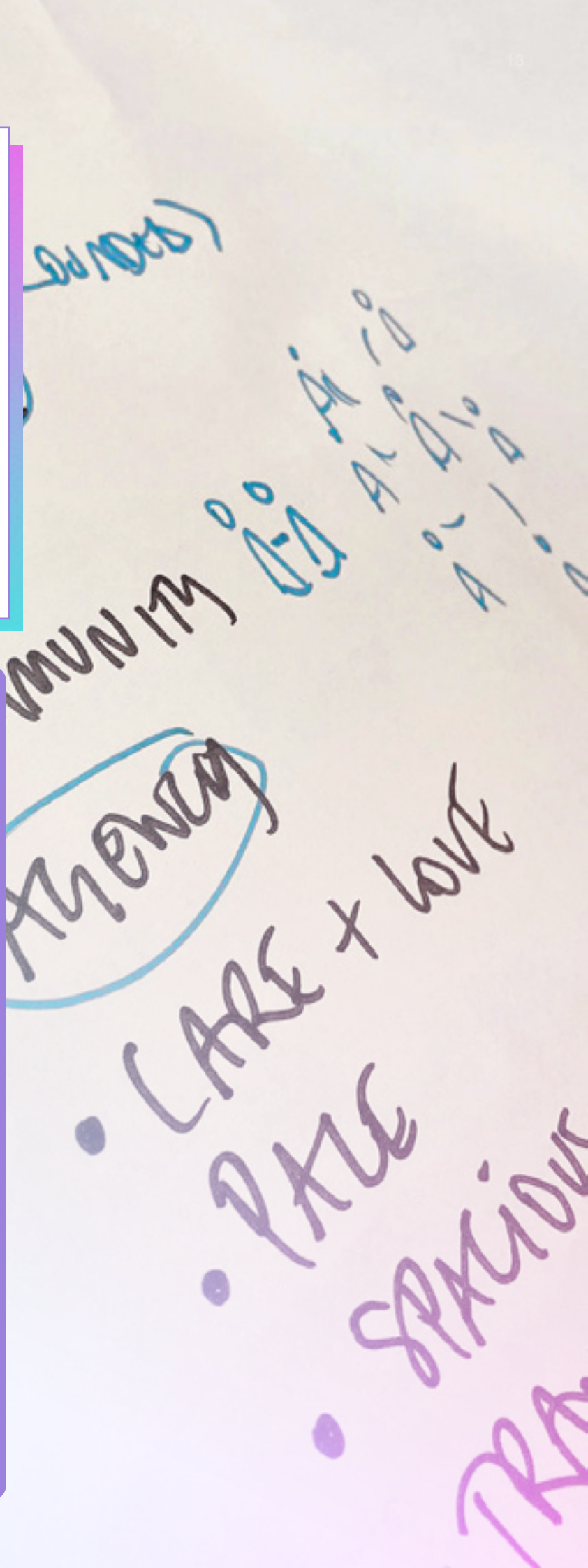
The participation journey started in 2017. Since then, Camden has run 10 citizens' assemblies so far, developed participatory grantmaking and community investment. Now, Camden are planning to embark on a new programme of collective imagining with their community, to continue developing ways of addressing complex challenges and shaping the future of Camden together.

PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

"I had been trying to improve on what we already have in place, but failing to ask if what we have in place is what we need or is best suited. When you think in this way, you are opening up your imagination and making changes that fit the current context. What surprised me? Something a bit more personal: the change I saw in myself just over the course of the whole 8 weeks. I started off cynical, coming into the course, thinking *I'm slightly introverted, I don't really have an imagination, I've got nothing to contribute.* So what surprised me was just how much I enjoyed it and took away from the course."



Dr Neelam Kumar
Educational Psychology
Service (EPS)



Executive Summary:

What did the programme involve?

Over eight weeks, 32 Council officers participated in a programme to become Imagination Activists.

Imagination Activism involves using our imaginations to inform, inspire and then implement the most bold, ambitious action. It uses a rigorous approach to imagining, informed by cognitive science and systems thinking. Imagination Activism is about seeing and thinking differently in order to act differently. It is a focused, action-oriented process.

Camden Imagines was designed to:

- Shift and expand **perspectives**.
- Provide creative **tools** and practices.
- Instil new habits and **ways of working**.
- Build commitment to imaginative **practices**.
- Lay the ground for deeper **policy** and **governance** change.

Camden Imagines is about deep organisational change, working at the intersection of the personal and the collective. The programme acts on mindsets, values and beliefs, which in turn become embedded in governance, policy and systems. The programme fosters and bridges inner and outer change, which is part of what makes it effective.

What is an Imagination Activist?

“An Imagination Activist is a new kind of activist and civic leader powered by imagination and the vision and tools to create new systems.”

Phoebe Tickell,
Founder and Director, Moral Imaginations





Imagination Activists in the future generations exercise

Executive Summary:

Who was involved?

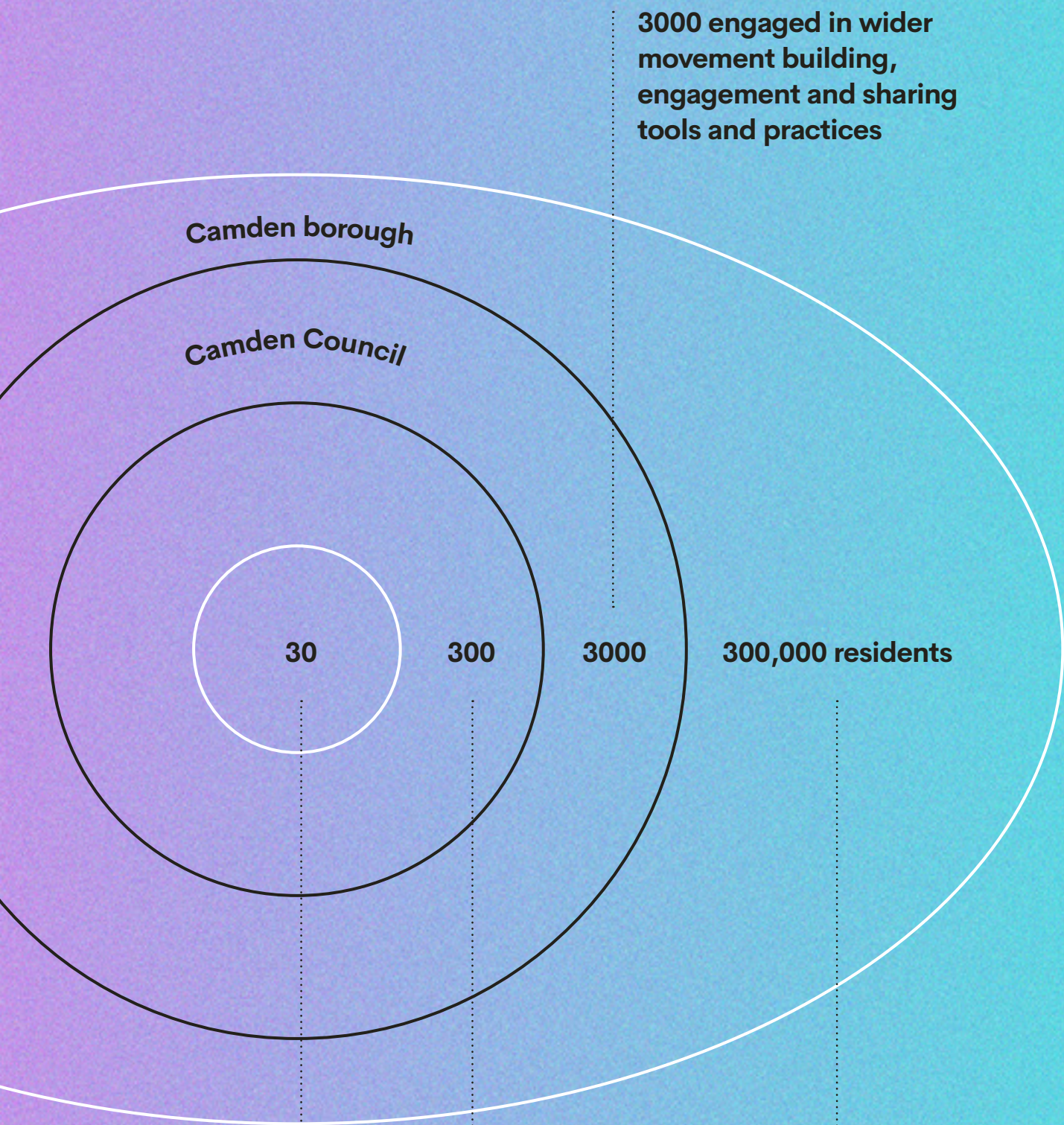
The participants came from all across the Council, from front line staff to senior leaders, from teams working on housing, to air quality, to transport, to children's services.

These 32 participants have been equipped to work with, develop and influence those around them, initiating a ripple effect throughout the organisation, spreading the programme's impact from 30 to 300 to 3000.

The 8-week programme was complemented by c.70 conversations, an internal weekly newsletter over 7 months and 11 staff and manager events across the Council to build awareness and understanding of imagination as an emerging competency of 21st century civic leadership.



How we spread
Imagination Activism
through the borough



3000 engaged in wider movement building, engagement and sharing tools and practices

30 programme participants

Each participant works with 10 others in the Council

Council officers supporting, scaffolding and platforming the imaginations of 300,000 residents

Executive Summary:

Why did we do it?

Few organisations face as much complexity and scrutiny, or hold as much risk and responsibility, as local Councils.

Few organisations face such extreme financial and resource pressures. To achieve amazing outcomes with and for their communities, local Councils have no choice but to be highly imaginative.

And yet the opportunity for imagination to thrive in modern, Western societies is declining. The challenges we face have never been bigger, but our capacity to think boldly, differently and ambitiously will reduce without the space, permission and practice. Some leading thinkers believe our ability to envision systems beyond those we live within is diminishing ([Mulgan, 2020](#)).

“It started off as a course and it turned into a movement.”

Jo Brown

Director of People and Inclusion,
Camden Council

Developing a group of Imagination Activists was an insightful strategic decision by Camden, recognising that established ways of working will not take them far enough or fast enough and that to achieve their ambitious targets they need to:

- Strengthen the imaginative capacity of employees.
- Build the psychological safety for employees to think big and share daring ideas.
- Radically expand who gets to imagine a future Camden.
- Partner with the community in a large-scale, ongoing process of collective imagining.
- Develop new ways of generating smart, connected solutions to the borough’s most pressing challenges.

The community and the Council alike are full of passionate individuals, who are experts in the challenges Camden faces and who have the potential to generate ingenious, interconnected solutions. Investing in imagination has the potential to reduce cost and complexity, to enable genuine partnership with the community, and to achieve outcomes that would never otherwise have been possible.

Imagination Activist

/iˌmædʒɪˈneɪʃ(ə)n/ /ˈæktɪvɪst/

an activist powered by imagination
and the vision and tools to make
the world better for everyone

ATIONS



Executive Summary:

What did we achieve?

The programme had a powerful impact on participants, which is now spreading outwards from that initial group. At the end of the eight weeks:



During the programme, we heard from many Camden colleagues that they were seeing the effects of the course rippling outwards. Within 2 weeks of beginning the course, participants were sharing imagination practices in team meetings, hosting small check-in and visioning exercises, and working to influence others in the organisation to make space for Imagination Activism, to attend events and to help with their initiatives.

Senior Leaders shared that they had been experiencing the exercises in meetings, away days and strategy sessions, with participants bringing the perspectives of nature and future generations into discussions. One Senior Leader said that the approach helps “get out of the robotic approach and business as usual” and instead “to step back and look at why and how we’re doing what we’re doing”.



Live drawing from the programme by Reilly Dow

Others talked about how to bring this work to residents and citizen assemblies and expressed enthusiasm about involving the Imagination Activists in larger pieces of work.

The programme was not without challenges, of course, the most prominent of which were:

- Supporting participants to make the **time** and **headspace** for the programme amid a busy workload.
- Tackling the **self-perception**, among some participants, that they are not imaginative.
- Providing the right balance of **structure** and **space**.
- Managing the initial discomfort at the difference in **tone** and **pace** of the programme, compared to traditional skill building courses.
- Preparing participants for the range of **attitudes** they encountered from colleagues and managers and for the different degrees of space and **support** they were given to apply learning back in their teams.
- Providing the right balance of **planned** and **emergent** outcomes.
- Encouraging the **inner changes** individual participants experienced while keeping a focus on the programme's aims for the Council and the community.

PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

“Over the last few years I have noticed how much more imaginatively the community thinks than we do in the Council. Council officers are constrained by budgets and demands on their time, but when communities come up with their own solutions they are often lower-cost solutions. If we can't imagine the future we want to see, how can we make it happen? It will require us to work in partnership with people, facilitating and enabling social action and handing over some power to enable them to lead, but we have that ambition as a Council already. Now we just need to use our imaginations to make it happen.



Sue Sheehan
Participation Team



Executive Summary:

What have we learnt?

***Camden Imagines* continues - and in many ways the most exciting work is yet to come, as we bring together Camden's participatory ethos and processes for working with citizens, with the imaginative capacity of its workforce and embed imagination into the design of the organisation.**

We are sharing this report now because the experience of *Camden Imagines* has already exceeded expectations. We don't have all the answers but we think we can already say with some confidence that:

- There are great reserves of imagination in Councils and communities if we nurture and unleash that capacity.
- Some scepticism is likely but can be overcome quickly once the value of investing in imagination becomes clear.
- Developing the imaginative capacity of employees can increase their psychological safety and their enthusiasm and sense of agency at work.
- Imagination can be developed and deployed rigorously as part of an organisational strategy and as a powerful lever for organisational change.

In *Camden Imagines*, there is a replicable blueprint that other Councils or purpose-driven organisations could follow.



Camden Imagination Activists working on future visions of the Council



“*Imagination* is not recognised for what it is – the star stuff of truly radical innovation that builds a *new world* into being.”

Jo and Phoebe in the ‘Imagination is not day dreaming’ blog

[Read more about why imagination is more than just daydreaming](#)

Can a Council in a cost-of-living crisis afford to invest in *imagination*?

Scepticism sometimes gets a bad name. But it's good to be sceptical – especially if you work in a local Council accountable to real people, with real and pressing needs. Scepticism can be a form of respect and care for communities: new ideas are scrutinised; whims, vanity projects and fads are rooted out.

In this spirit, it's fair to ask: can a Council in a cost-of-living crisis afford to invest in imagination?

Local Councils have so many services to deliver, so many risks to manage and so many challenges to address, that it's natural that in a period of austerity, imagination might be seen as a distraction.

Yet in challenging times, imagination is more important than ever. So many of the complex challenges Councils face are imagination problems more than just resource problems.

They present opportunities for symbiotic, contextual, community-driven solutions if we have the space to develop them – solutions that are not only more effective but may also cost less and build greater trust.

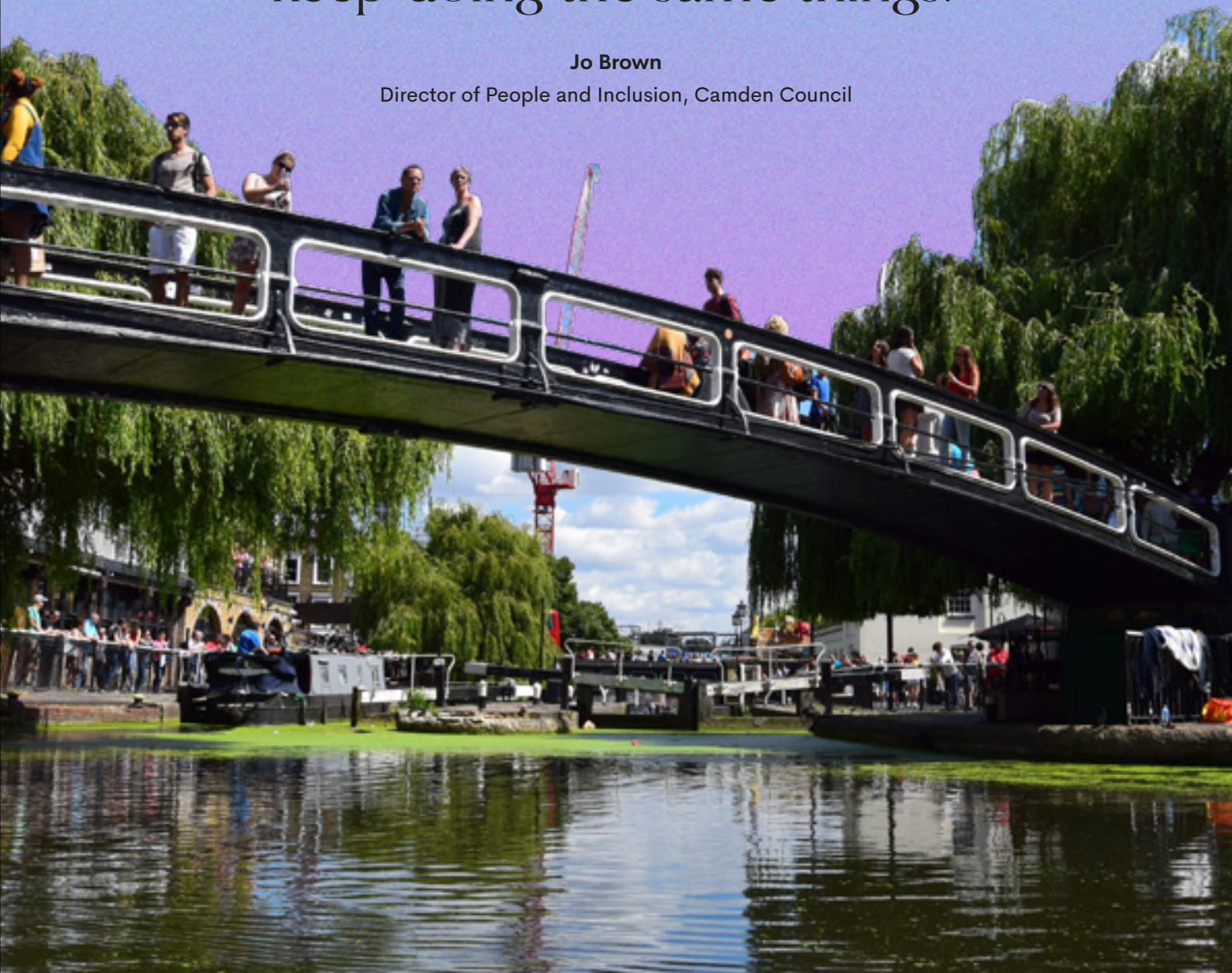
The de-funding of local government in recent years has left Councils on the backfoot when it comes to influencing policy and place-based innovation. This is changing. Many Councils are realising their potential to be civic incubators of creative problem-solving and radical re-imagining, working with communities to shape the solutions and infrastructure that meet their needs.

Can Councils in a cost-of-living crisis afford to invest in imagination? They can't afford not to.

“Imagination is a key capacity within local authorities like Camden; we do not need to be in ‘task and action’ mode all of the time. As a society, we are dealing with some *deep and knotty problems*, and we’re not going to have a different answer if we keep doing the same things.”

Jo Brown

Director of People and Inclusion, Camden Council



The Camden Imagines programme



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Why did Camden decide to develop its staff as *Imagination Activists*?

Camden's Bold Ambitions

When people hear the word Camden, many think of its remarkable market by the Regent's Canal: a warren of street food, art and live music and a countercultural haven for decades. Camden Market sits at the heart of an inner London borough that stretches from Holborn to Hampstead, itself a warren of remarkable sights and sounds and a living celebration of diversity and creativity. Camden's community is famed for its local pride and rebellious, creative spirit.

But for all its assets – including many of the greatest universities and museums in the world – Camden faces many seemingly intractable challenges: people struggling to make ends meet in a cost-of-living crisis, soaring house prices that are pushing families out of the borough, a falling birth rate, rising homelessness, and its share of the loneliness, mental ill health and serious youth violence that have become endemic in the capital. The challenges Camden faces can be situated within wider global challenges, not least deepening inequality and the existential threat to our environment posed by the climate crisis.

“We can't achieve these ambitions alone. Every resident and organisation that has their home in Camden is part of our community and has a role to play in achieving the real change that is needed.”

We Make Camden

Instead of tackling its problems piecemeal, and instead of turning inwards to focus on local concerns, Camden Council is taking a systemic approach to addressing its biggest challenges, focusing not just on the resilience and flourishing of its community now but on shaping a better future for the planet and for generations to come.

These are bold ambitions and 'We Make Camden' does not attempt to describe exactly how they can be achieved. Instead it acknowledges that solutions will be emergent and the product of many hearts and minds. 'To meet our ambitions,' the report states, 'we must call on the deep wells of insight and creativity in our community, forge new connections and find new allies outside of Camden.' This approach – not trying to be the experts with all the answers – creates space for others and puts collective imagining at the heart of Camden's strategy. The Council's Participation Team have already done pioneering work in this area, including launching [Think & Do Camden](#) as a vehicle for creative, grassroots social and climate action.

The Council's 'We Make Camden' report outlines a vision for a future Camden and sets out four missions to accomplish and six challenges to address:

The 4 Missions Camden wants to achieve over the coming years are:

Diversity: By 2030, those holding positions of power in Camden are as diverse as our community — and the next generation is ready to follow.

Young people: By 2025, every young person has access to economic opportunity that enables them to be safe and secure.

Food: By 2030, everyone eats well every day with nutritious, affordable and sustainable food.

Estates and neighbourhoods: By 2030, Camden's estates and their neighbourhoods are healthy, sustainable and unlock creativity.

The 6 Challenges Camden wants to achieve over the coming years are:

Safety: Everyone is safe at home and safe in our communities.

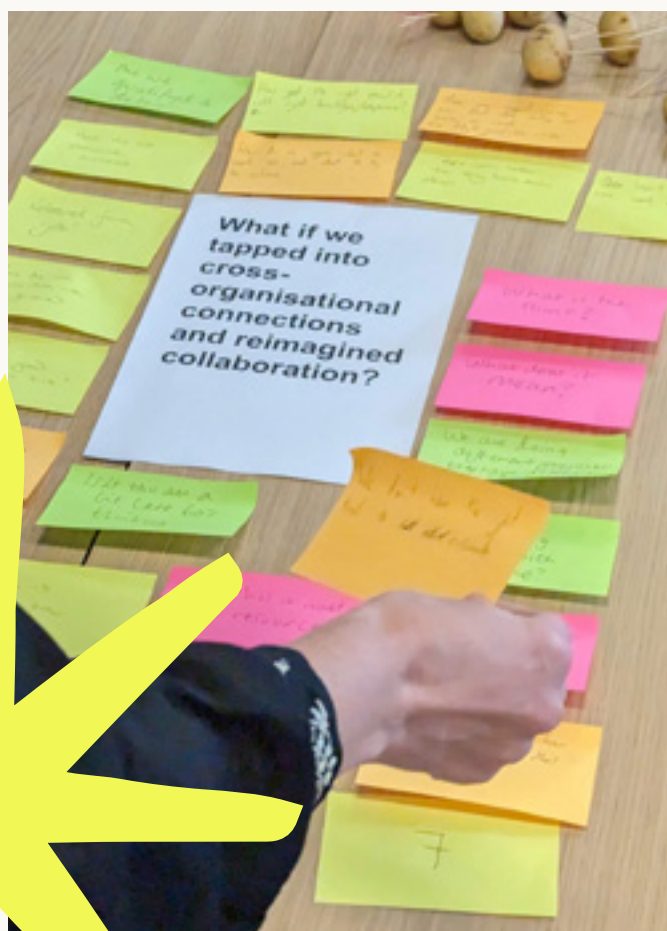
Debt: Everyone can get the support they need to avoid debt and be financially aware.

Digital: Everyone in Camden can access and be part of a digital strategy.

Loneliness: No one in Camden is socially isolated without the means to connect with their community.

Housing: Camden has enough decent, safe, warm and family-friendly housing to support our communities.

Climate emergency: Camden's local economy tackles the climate emergency.



Bringing Imagination Activism to Camden

Camden Council believe they can succeed in their missions and challenges by becoming a site of genuine civic innovation – but they know they need the imaginative culture, tools and processes to achieve that.

The questions they posed to Moral Imaginations were:

- How could imagination be used at scale to change how a borough, its residents and a local authority relate to each other and to collective change?
- How do we create the safe environment for imagination and creativity to flourish?

The decision to develop Council officers as Imagination Activists springs from a desire to ensure that everyone who works with and for the people of Camden – from the postie to the MP – has the imaginative capacity and practical tools to develop new approaches powered by imagination and the vision of a more just world, and is equipped and enthused to collaborate with the community in a process of collective imagining.

PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

“Having completed the Camden Imagines course, I feel able to hover above, below and all around my work; able to think more imaginatively about challenges and find creative solutions; and more able to find some much-needed mental space, whether that’s for my work or my personal life. With that space to think comes an improved capacity to include more perspectives in my work and consider the long term ramifications of my actions.”



Phil Barrett

Early Help Coordinator within the Children's Services

The aims for the Imagination Activism programme were:



An increase in imagination capacity, as an emerging competency of civic leadership.



An increase in agency and confidence and a growing sense of psychological safety at work.



The skills and tools to generate, prototype and iterate new ideas.



Strengthened cross-organisational relationships, breaking down silos.

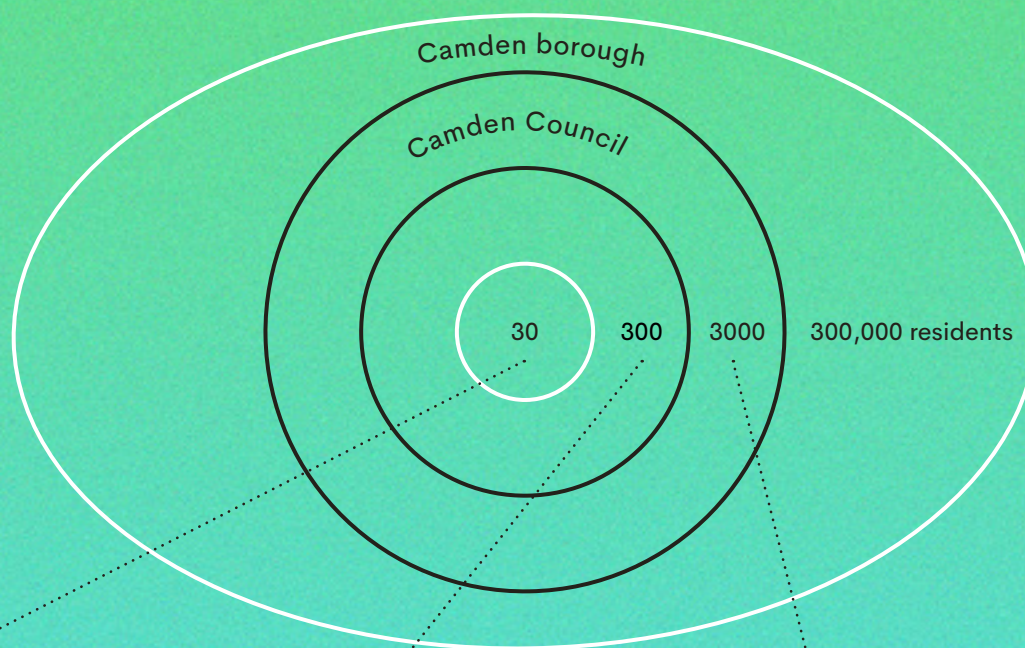
Camden Imagines strategy

The Imagination Activism programme would begin with around 30 participants, but would be designed to equip this core, cross-organisational group to diffuse imaginative practice throughout the Council and onwards through the community: from 30 to 300 to 3000 people.

Camden Imagines will soon make its way into communities to embark on collective imagining, but the work began in the Council building so that Council officers are ready to support the process and respond with imagination themselves, spreading this ethos of deep work with citizens far and wide across the organisation.

Municipal Imagination

Municipal imagination is a form of collective imagination. It's what happens when citizens, communities, Councils and other public bodies come together to collectively imagine the way things could be different in their particular locality. Communities have a particularly important role here. They are the experts in the challenges and opportunities in their environment. Their nuanced perspectives can lead to much more relevant, rigorous imagining than is possible for those remote from their situation. Municipal imagination recognises that the best solutions will come from bottom-up imagining paired with support by Council officers and policies that can help to make those imagined futures a reality.



Transform

Equip c.30 participants to be Imagination Activists, powered by vision and the practical tools to make Camden better for everyone.

Activate

Motivate c.300 stakeholders to actively support imagination within Camden.

Inspire

Cause c.3000 wider stakeholders to dream big for Camden and become curious about Imagination Activism.



Building Psychological Safety

A precondition for bold, imaginative thinking in organisations is psychological safety: 'the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes, and that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking' (Dr. Edmondson, Harvard University).

The Imagination Activism programme fostered psychological safety by:

- Bringing Council officers from across teams and levels together around a common purpose.
- Creating the time and space to deepen relationships.
- Embarking on a shared learning journey in which everyone is a beginner.
- Creating a space where saying 'I don't know' is actively encouraged.
- Encouraging participants to try new things and take risks in a safe environment.

PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

"If we brush our failures under the carpet and try to pretend they do not exist, our behaviours will remain the same. If we acknowledge and name our failures we have the ability to improve. As someone in the group observed a failure is a chance to do better next time",



Elita Johns

Digital IQ Development Officer
in Digital & Data Services

PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

"Moral Imaginations managed to build the most amazing sense of psychological safety, support and joy. It's something so special we want to build it across the organisation."

Kirsty Dutton

Organisational Designer in the
Organisation Design Team



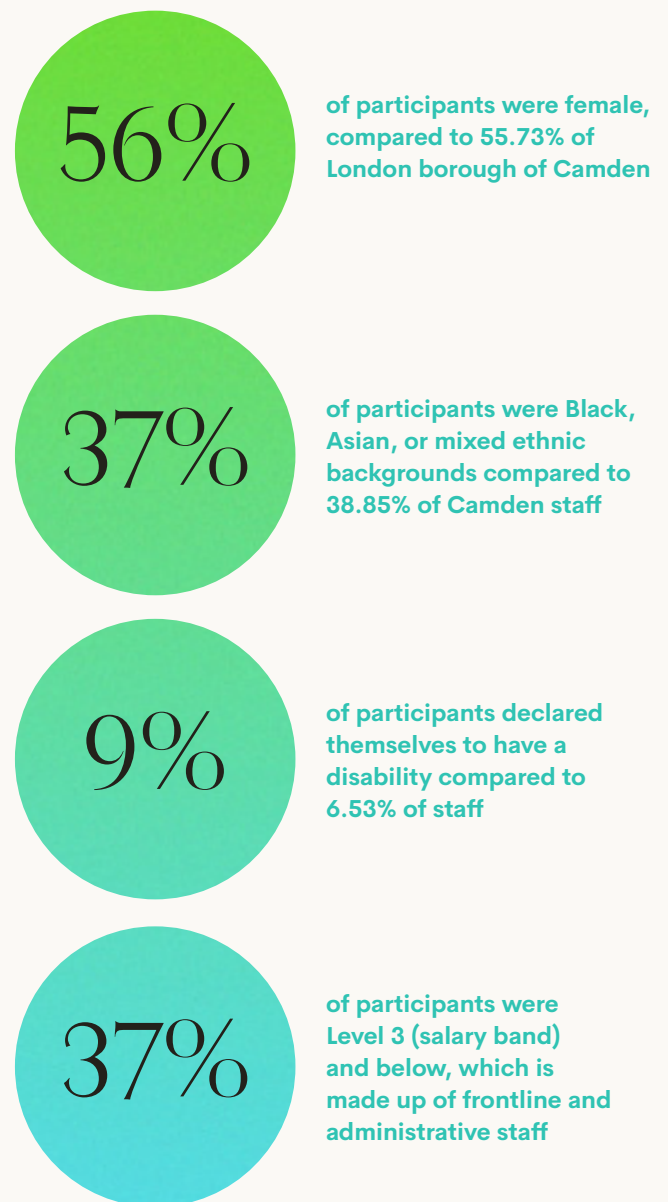
Who took part in the programme?

Camden invited applications for the Imagination Activism programme from across the Council and selected a highly diverse 'diagonal cross-section' of participants from across all levels and areas of the organisation.

The 32 officers come from the Equalities and Disproportionality team, Educational Psychology Service, Participation Team, Organisational Design Team, Children's Services, Sustainability, Air Quality and Energy Team, Inclusive Innovation Network, Camden Children's centres, Camden's Development division, Neighbourhood Housing, Digital & Data Services, Camden's Regeneration and Development scheme, Learning and Development Team, Adult Social Care Transformation, Public Health, Camden's Job Hub, Environment Services, Adult Social Care Commissioning, Regeneration and Planning team, Organisation Design Team and Sports.

They brought a vast spread of perspectives and experiences, including many voices from the front line.

These are the demographics of participants that took part in the programme:



PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

"It's not just about making sure our services are accessible, it's about going the extra mile and finding new and creative ways to engage with different communities."



Lioko Mabika
Senior Policy and Projects
Officer in the Equalities and
Disproportionality Team



Camden's *Imagination Activists*

Click the participant photo to read their blogpost...



Philip Davies
Organisation
Development



Charlotte Spindler
Project Manager in
Adult Social Care
Transformation Team



Elita Johns
Digital IQ Development
Officer in Digital
& Data Services



Frances Evans
Senior Environmental
Services Officer for
Environment Services



Ginni Smedley
Manager of Camden's
Community Researcher
team and part of Camden's
Participation Team



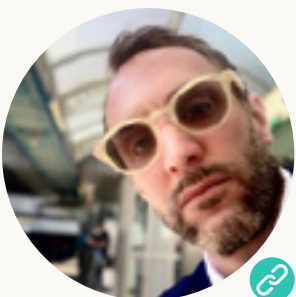
Hafid Ali
Community Partner



Ian Gilson
Organisational
Design Lead



Ali Alsaraf
Principal Strategy
and Project officer



Stephan von Schilling
Active Living
Manager in Sports



Sue Sheehan
Participation Team



**Martin Cuba
Cote-Riopo**
Repairs Neighbourhood
Coordination Officer



Lisa Tang
Planning officer in
the Regeneration
and Planning team



Jane Murphy
Prevent Duty



Liam Hall
Locality Leader working
within Camden
Children's centres



Lioko Mabika
Senior Policy and Projects
Officer in the Equalities and
Disproportionately team



Alison Morris
Diversity and Inclusion
Programme Officer



Maybel Houston
Apprentice in Human
Resource's Learning &
Development Team



Natalie Curd
Air Quality Projects Lead
in Sustainability, Air
Quality and Energy Team



Neelam Kumar
Educational
Psychology Service



Ododo Dafe
Head of Housing
Transformation



Philip Barrett
Early Help Coordinator
in Children's Services



Emma Le Blanc
Job Hub Adviser at
Good Work Camden



Rozita Leetham
Consultation and
Engagement Officer
for the Community
Investment Programme



Tracy Aware
Digital Marketing
Executive



Wahidur Rahman
Team Manager at
Contact Camden



Abdilatif Shidane
Neighbourhood Housing
Officer in Holborn
& Covent Garden

and...

Kirsty Dutton
Organisational Designer
in the Organisation
Design Team

Helen Long
ACL communities and
local interest tutors

Sofia Oliveira
Job Hub

Nicola Monks
Repairs Supervisor

Tim Rising
Strategic Commissioner
in Adult Social Care

Sue Hogarth
Public Health

What is *Imagination Activism?*

What's distinctive about Imagination Activism?

Imagination Activism is an approach and methodology based on a new kind of activism, powered by imagination and vision and translated into action.

It incorporates:

- The need to stretch the imagination and see things differently;
- The need to expand who gets to imagine;
- And the need to go beyond the limits of traditional forms of activism that fight the old and build capacity to imagine the new.

Imagination Activists stand out because they are:

- **Grounded** in the nuance and complexity of the challenges we face.
- **Radical** in their ambition and certain that things could be different.
- **Refreshing** to be around.
- **Contagiously hopeful** about the potential for change.
- **Able to articulate** how the world could look otherwise.
- **Comfortable saying no** if they do not believe something will deliver change.
- Willing to resist and **challenge the status quo**.



The Neuroscience of Imagination

Neuroscience shows us that there are different circuits in the brain. One enables linear, strategic, focused and results-driven thinking. It is highly rational and helps us to work with the world as it is. The other enables creative, visionary and imaginative thinking, helping us to imagine how things could be otherwise. The first circuit constrains the second, so we need to build the time and space into work to enable imagination to flourish.

This is not, however, our usual practice. Instead we have created a society and professional environment that favours the first circuit. We actively limit our brains' ability to engage in the kind of thinking that will enable us to solve the interlinked crises we face. The conditions of 21st century life – stress, overwork, digital dependency and burnout – compound the problem.

Creativity is non-linear and needs space to thrive. We need to create protected spaces where people can safely move out of linear, results-driven thinking and have permission to bring imagination into their work.

From Imagination to Action

Imagination Activism supports deep perspective shifts that translate into changed actions, practice, policy and even legal change. With imagination, all sorts of change becomes possible. Rather than recreating old systems, exercising imagination allows us to create the new and build a world more in line with our values.

Avoiding Imagination Atrophy

Imagination is like a muscle, and like a muscle it can be flexed, or it can atrophy. The same is true for collective imagination, the process of imagining with others.

Imagination Justice

The concept of imagination justice is central to the work of Imagination Activism. Just as important as *how we imagine* is *who gets to imagine*: whose imaginations shape policy, innovation and societal change. Diverse perspectives are at the heart of rich imagining and inclusive decision making and are essential to create a world fit for all.

Imagination justice is about redistributing imagination capital and transferring resources, time and permission to those who have not tended to have the space to engage in this kind of expansive thinking. Part of an Imagination Activist's training is how to take imagination practice out of the boardroom and into the borough.

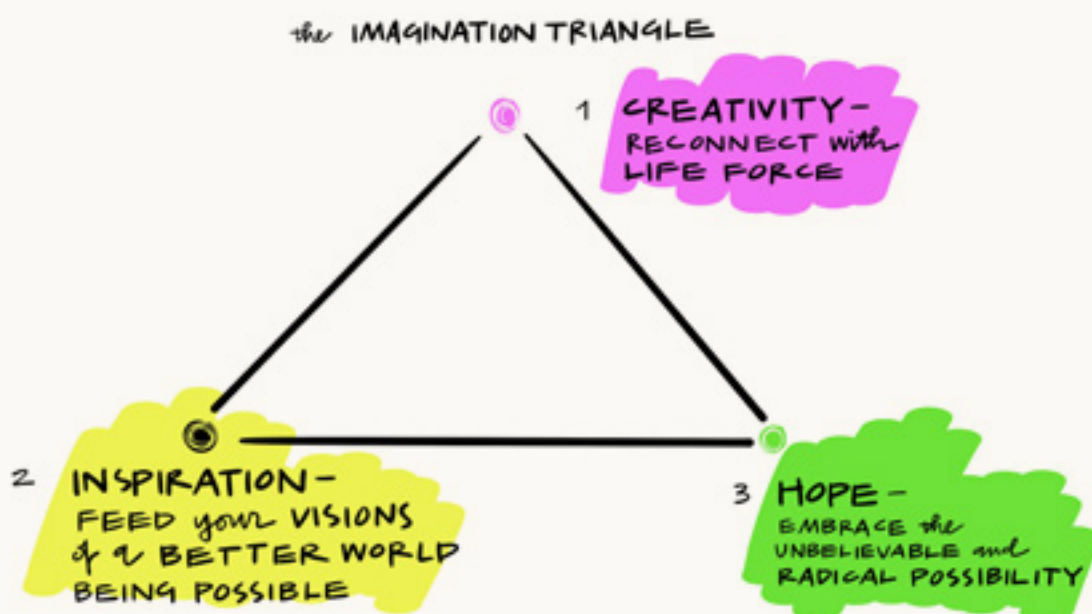
Opening Up Imagination Practice

“Imagination should not just be a practice for the elite. Imagination must not alienate the people who need to be involved and know what futures they imagine for themselves and the people around them. We’d be doing a great injustice (again) to marginalised folks everywhere.

Open up the practice to as many people as possible, in the most accessible way possible, and avoid simply going where the energy is. Because there are many reasons why the energy isn’t in some places. Some of us feel excluded and powerless.

But also recognise that so many people are turning what they imagine into reality already – and using their own tools and practices to do this.”

Benedicta Asamoah-Russell,
Moral Imaginations



Imagination Activism in Action: CommuniTrees

It normally costs about £700 for a Council to plant a tree.

How could a Council plant more trees, without busting the bank?

CommuniTrees is an initiative run by Camden's 'Think and Do' community space, where residents are invited to come and imagine and act together with Council officers. In this case, Camden residents get involved in choosing, planting and caring for trees in their housing areas.

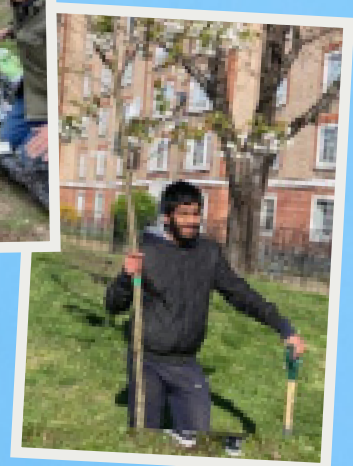
It is more affordable and sustainable than many initiatives of its kind because, as part of the project, local young people are developed to look after the trees, gaining employment and transferable skills in the process.

It now costs about £200 to plant a tree in Camden and there is a new cadre of Camden Foresters at large, tending to the wildlife in their borough.

CommuniTrees has made tree planting cheaper than before, it has expanded opportunities for young people, and it has brought the community into the planning and decision making about their environment. Local businesses have got on board to support the project.

In a time when some Councils are cutting down trees to cut costs, Camden is cutting costs while planting more trees. This is not the standard approach, it is Imagination Activism in action: not accepting the status quo as a given; thinking boldly and holistically across silos; co-creating solutions with the community; using one problem to solve another; putting the needs of nature and future residents at the heart of decision making.

Who would have imagined you could become a forester in a central London borough?





The Moral Imagining Framework

Imagination Activism involves Moral Imagining: looking beyond our own immediate needs and considering a wider set of consequences.

Moral Imagining invites leaders, policy makers and decision makers to imagine what decision making would look like if nature, future generations and ancestors had a voice and were considered to have rights.

These three stakeholders are invited into collective imagining to create a different way of thinking about the present. The framework offers a playful set of questions and a set of practices that involve looking beyond our own immediate needs, seeing with new eyes and considering a wider set of consequences when we imagine new possibilities. There are three pillars to the Moral Imagining Framework that underpin Imagination Activism:



FUTURE GENERATIONS

From **SHORT TERMISM**
(short-term decision making cycles)



to **DESIGNING AND DECIDING WITH FUTURE GENERATIONS**
(connecting to a sense of deep time)



MORE THAN HUMAN WORLD

From **ANTHROPOCENTRISM**
(human beings at the centre)



to **DESIGNING AND DECIDING WITH THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD**
(non-human beings have rights)



ANCESTORS

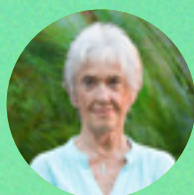
From **HISTORICAL AMNESIA**
(forgetting or denying the past)



to **HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY AND REPAIR**
(dealing with the past courageously)

What is moral imagination in the 21st century?

“I understand it to be the use of our incredible capacity to imagine something different from what is now and use this imagination for the welfare of the whole.”



Joanna Macy,
Environmental activist,
author, and Buddhist scholar

“For millennia, people across cultures have grappled with the question of how to live a life in right relationship with the world and create flourishing communities and societies.

Although the term ‘moral imagination’ only dates back to the late 18th century, the idea of using the imagination to shift consciousness and generate empathy with future generations and other species goes back much further. Indeed, a lot of ideas that can feel innovative in modern Western societies (long termism and regenerative design, for example) never went away in many cultures. At Moral Imaginations we have built on the work of my mentor, Buddhist and deep ecologist Joanna Macy to develop a set of practices that can help grow moral imagination - but her work is part of a deeply rooted tradition.

We think moral imagination in the 21st Century means imagining the perspectives and protecting the rights of future generations and Nature to exist, and repairing the actions of ancestors. Moral imagination is a core civic capacity and one that can help us bridge divides, build empathy, shift perception, and ultimately, create a world in line with our values.”



Phoebe Tickell,
Founder and Director,
Moral Imaginations

The three pillars in Camden



FUTURE GENERATIONS

FROM focusing on the short term



TO taking a long term missions-focused approach, planning for future generations of Camden residents.



MORE THAN HUMAN WORLD

FROM an understanding of place based on people and the built environment



TO a deep embrace of the borough's biodiversity and natural assets, from the trees that line our streets to the subterranean river Fleet which runs beneath our feet.



ANCESTORS

FROM historical amnesia



TO ensuring Camden's public realm - its streets, green spaces, commemorations, memorials, events, arts and culture - reflect the diversity of its communities and redress historic inequities.

Here are some of the questions Moral Imagining invites you to ask

What are the skills and capabilities needed in a world where rivers, future generations and ancestors are given a seat at the table, and their interests considered in policy making? How do we encourage the expansion of 'who' is considered a stakeholder in decision making? How do we encourage looking to the past, as well as the future, to encourage reparation and reconciliation? How do we begin to see nature as having rights and therefore requiring our respect and consideration?



Shifting worldviews

We are always already in relation to these dimensions; the question is whether or not we are aware of it.

These three pillars make the implicit explicit:

- Our choices have long term implications and will have outsized consequences for future generations.
- We exist within an interdependent natural ecosystem; every decision we make has an impact on the other living beings on whom we also depend.
- Our systems and hierarchies are the product of colonial histories and historical inequalities that continue to play out in the present.

Without holding these dimensions in mind we can inadvertently make decisions that solve the problem of the moment, but whose outcomes run counter to our values, the needs of the planet and of those who come after us. The Moral Imagination Framework is a tool for fostering responsibility, shifting perspective in the present, generating better ideas and making more responsible, rigorous and reality-based decisions.

Ultimately, the Moral Imagination Framework can help to adopt a different worldview, in which nature, future generations and ancestors have far greater rights than they do now and in which we have far greater responsibilities towards them. In turn, this shift in perspective creates the conditions for the legal and policy changes required to respect and protect those rights.

How do you train in the capabilities of Imagination Activism?

Participants went on an eight-week journey designed to shift perspectives, envision the future, and foster the practices and tools of collective imagination.

The Imagination Activism curriculum is not fixed and will keep evolving to equip people with the tools and practices to become Imagination Activists. This draws on Moral Imaginations' practices in: visioning the future, psychological safety, collaborative leadership, fearless ambition, befriending failure as a bedrock to then building Moral Imagination with future generations, the more-than-human world and ancestors.

Visioning

Where are we going, how to get there.

Befriending failure

Cultural change to owning mistakes and sharing failure with residents.

Collaborative leadership

How to share power and cultivate collective leadership.

Fearless ambition

Asking the question "what would we do if we knew we couldn't fail?".

Moral Imagination

To future generations, the more-than-human world, and ancestors.

Psychological safety

Underpinned by the courage and safety to speak authentically.

The programme is highly experiential and practice based and aims to:

Shift and expand perspectives

- Shifting perspective from the norms of an Industrial Growth Society to the norms of a Life Sustaining Society.
- Befriending failure: a reorientation to failure as a method by which we learn, grow and improve.

Introduce a different worldview

- Shift of perspective to see through the eyes of future generations and developing a long time view.
- Seeing oneself as not separate from nor above nature - but part of a web of relationships with the more-than-human world.

Provide creative tools and practices

- Collective visioning of the future (developing the ability to imagine different futures and possibilities).
- The Moral Imagining Framework to expand the moral circle of concern to include other beings and bring thinking about future generations and nature into day-to-day work.
- Creative check-in questions to build connection and spark creativity.
- Experiential, collective imagination practices to prepare for imagining alongside others.

Instil new habits and ways of working

- Horizontal leadership: unlocking capacity for ego-less, collective leadership that links across silos.
- Cross-organisational pods who share and develop ideas together.
- Fearless ambition: the willingness to challenge the status quo and ask 'what would I do if I knew I couldn't fail?'
- Creating radical flips of understanding from 'we can't' to 'how could we not'.

Build commitment to imaginative practices

- Committing to bringing these new perspectives, tools and habits into day-to-day work.

Lay the ground for deeper policy and governance change

- Equipping participants to apply imagination to complex problems and change policy.

“This course affected me personally. I have always pondered about my moral responsibilities and this course was the nudge I needed to start honouring them”

Programme Participant

From imagination to action - building organisational infrastructure

Over the 8 weeks, participants had time to brainstorm ideas for initiatives, projects and changes you want to bring to Camden.

Following the course, we established:

- An Imagination Activism Community of Practice hosted by Imagination Activists
- An internal collective fund of £15,000 for Imagination Activists to use for the community of practice and/or projects
- The opportunity to join events across the organisation and bring skills of collective imagination



Guest teachers on the programme

During the 8 weeks, Imagination Activists were joined by a series of inspiring guest teachers who taught different aspects of imagination activism.





Decolonising Imagination and White Supremacy

Ashanti Kunene

Ashanti took us on a journey of exploring how racism and white supremacy show up in our everyday lives and imaginations, introducing exercises to decolonise the imagination. Ashanti Kunene is a social justice activist, poet, decolonial dialogue facilitator, published writer and the founder of [Learning 2 Unlearn](#). She is also the Director of Pedagogy for [Culture Hack Labs](#), running their Rhizome Fellowship program and [online curriculum](#).



Activating Fearless Ambition

Andy Middleton

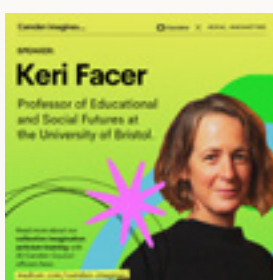
Andy gave the Imagination Activists a tour of projects and businesses that are solving problems in ambitious and radical ways, and asked everyone "what would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?". Andy Middleton is Founder Director of the [TYF Group](#), an innovative and visionary social enterprise based in St. Davids, Pembrokeshire. TYF's mission is to train revolutionaries – giving normal mums, dads & kids, business teams and community groups the confidence, skills and reason to revolutionise the way they play, think and connect with nature.



From What Is to What If

Rob Hopkins

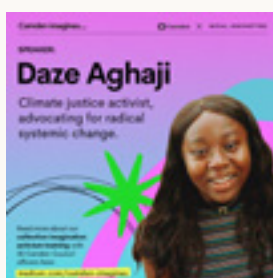
Rob took us through a tour of stories, real life examples and inspiring Imagination Activists through history to fire up our imaginations. This session helped see the movement of imagination happening around the world. Rob Hopkins is the author of 'From What Is to What If: unleashing the power of imagination to create the future we want', the co-founder of [Transition Network](#) and of [Transition Town Totnes](#). He hosts the podcast '[From What If to What Next](#)'. His website is [robhopkins.net](#).



Temporal Imagination: Working with Futures and Time

Keri Facer

Keri guided us through different ways of thinking about the future both in terms of how much agency we feel to make change, and how certain we feel about what is coming. We explored temporal imagination and reflected on the question "what shape is time?". Keri Facer is Professor of [Educational and Social Futures](#) at the University of Bristol. Her research focuses on how educational institutions and practices might best adapt to address technological, social and environmental change.



Ecological Imagination: Connecting to Nature

Daze Aghaji

Daze hosted the Imagination Activists in a session spent outdoors in Camley Street Nature Reserve, connecting to a nature hotspot right next to the Council building. She introduced the group to autobiographical tools and a guided walking exercise to build nature connection and the ecological imagination. Daze Aghaji is a climate justice activist. In 2019, she was the youngest candidate to stand in the EU Parliamentary elections, and she has strong ties with Extinction Rebellion as a founding member of their [youth movement](#).

Impact of the programme



- 52 What was the impact of the programme?
- 54 What did it feel like to be trained as an Imagination Activist?
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- 66 Get involved
- 67 What if...?



What was the *impact* of the programme?

Headlines

The programme had a powerful impact on participants and the organisation, which is now rippling outwards into different teams, processes and projects.

At the end of the eight weeks:



reported high imaginative capacity (with 92% reporting a significant increase).



reported a feeling of psychological safety at work (with 69% reporting a significant increase).



100% felt they had been equipped with practical tools to bring imagination to their teams and their day-to-day work.

- Two people (8%) felt they already had very active imaginations, but the course helped them learn how to translate them into action.
- Many noted that the biggest application was their shift in mindset - being able to break out of the mould of existing ways of thinking.
- Some participants already felt psychologically safe before the programme, so it didn't make a meaningful change.
- Some others felt that this course could not change the systemic factors or behaviour of others that create Psychological Safety in the organisation
- The programme equipped participants with a set of tools and exercises that they found immediately applicable and relevant to their day-to-day work.
- By the end of the programme, many participants were already putting the tools and exercises into practice.
- Participants listed team meetings, work with residents, strategic planning, organisational design, and governance as contexts for which the exercises and approach were most relevant for them.

Hierarchy

What if we held creative workshops involving nature, imagination and logic?
What if the workplace were also a place to be creative e.g. poetry, music, art classes, dance?

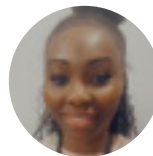
What if we brought creativity and play into our work?

PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

"Imagination had become something I had repressed, a behaviour that lived deep within and only burst out of me during play with my children.

Imagination Activism has taken me into a whole new space, a space I have never experienced in a workplace before. It's a space that allows my imagination to grow with joy, surrounded by people I probably wouldn't meet otherwise.

I now come to work with my whole creative self, ready to ask difficult questions when needed, share my imaginative thoughts and talk about and implement my imaginative ideas. This entails bringing my rebellious, challenging spirit that Camden Council looks for in their staff and empowers my contribution to Camden's vision where everyone contributes to achieving a safe, fair, creative and active borough."



Maybel Houston

Advanced Learning and Development Apprentice in the Human Resources, Learning and Development Team

of interviewing
+ job descriptions
practical induction

any level of staff
need in this
thinking

Imagination Activism
relates + activities
to the other meetings
help thinking

Visiting: 'what if'
meetings

More "fun" activities
to through various days
to social interaction

Open up people's
imagination + creativity
through exercises e.g.
check-ins

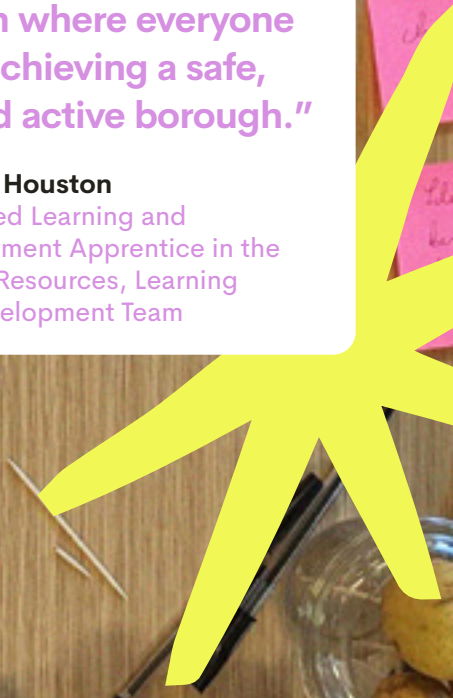
Taking people through
the exercises + making
space

Maximize learning
+ inspiration

Scheduling

Overcoming
scepticism

Marketing



Feedback from programme Participants

Feedback from participants – on the design, delivery and applicability of the programme – was resoundingly positive.

Here are some of their concluding comments:

I absolutely loved how interactive and practical it was and how much we got to connect with different people from across the organisation.

The tangible tools will be amazing to put into action – I can't wait to take people through them and see how thinking changes. They will help us to build a future we all want to be a part of.

I think the course is fundamental to how we should think and then act. I feel very grateful & lucky to be a part of it.

This needs time, space, permission, curiosity, patience – and yes cynicism. It must justify its existence. For me it has.

I really felt like I got to practise using my imagination muscle and immerse myself in it.

What we heard from Camden Council managers of staff on the programme

This [course] feels really transformational. It feels like we are unleashing capacity, unleashing different thought paths, we're reimagining what the future can look like. People on the programme have stopped me and said, "I want to talk to you about this", "I want to do this", "I feel like I've changed as a person by going through this". And, you know, I've never experienced that before on any other programme or course that we've run as a Council or at any time in my career.



Jo Brown
Director of People and Inclusion

One of my team members who is relatively junior took part in the course. She's a completely different person now. She's really confident, she's got a presence around her that's really different. She's exuding leadership.



Jess McGregor
Director of Adult Social Care

One of the imagination activists joined our Senior Management Team to share his experience. I have to be honest we did have sceptics in the room. Imagination Activism - what's that? He began to tell us about his journey into work through Camden's neighbourhoods. It was amazing, a narrative of possibilities for a future Camden. At the end of it, we were enthralled, lost in his imagination. The next step would be to work back and unravel what we could do to get closer to that future reality. At the end of the session scepticism was replaced by curiosity and how we could access the resources to work in this way.

Carole Stewart
Director of Community Services

What did it feel like to be trained as an *Imagination Activist*?

Each week participants completed a shared Learning Log. Here are some voices that bring to life how participants experienced the journey...



The Start of the programme

I am learning that I have suppressed a lot of what I used to love so much when young - my imagination...

Reconnection

I am feeling 'younger' - by adopting practices that help me connect with 'play' and my imaginative self...

It is freeing me to not be constrained by things like mindset, processes and what is construed as the norm. It's about thinking, seeing and doing things in different ways that are effective for the problem or issue that needs to be solved.

Scepticism

Lots of the suggested practices are things I wouldn't normally do and might even reject...

Some inner scepticism but openness to something new...

I am learning to think much more deeply about my impact on the planet.

A fresh perspective

I am discovering a capacity I thought I had lost.

I was so busy 'doing' and not questioning things before I attended the Imagination sessions...

The Middle of the programme

I find myself thinking of alternative ideas for solving problems or doing things...

Thinking differently

I've been thinking more and more about the vision I'd like to see in Camden. What's the change I'd like to see?

I am paying more attention to my surroundings and environment both outside and inside...

Heightened attention and alertness

It is freeing me not to be constrained by what is seen as the norm...

Questioning the status quo

I am more active in my mind, actively listening, actively observing...

I'm feeling less scared to think and act more like myself regardless of how that comes across...

Greater authenticity

I'm taking the time to explore other ways of doing things rather than defaulting to what is usual or expected...

I'm thinking about how to bring this side of me into the workplace. I've often felt this side of me didn't 'fit'...

Long term thinking

I am becoming less concerned with just day to day issues and thinking more longer term...

Engaging with the world seven generations in the future taught me that there is always space to take a step back from the present...

I've got more space to problem solve, to get perspective when anxiety sets in - and space to keep an eye on how my actions right now will affect future generations yet unborn...

I love the regularity of having a space to think innovatively and creatively about my work a couple of times a week - like a kind of "meaningful adult play-time" that is coherent with the goals of my job...

A sense of space

I think of myself less and less as a non-creative person...

Overcoming mental blocks

It feels as though I am breaking down the blockers to my imagination...

Difficulties Along the Way

Colleagues have a lot of questions around 'tangible outcomes' and how to measure the success of being an imagination activist...

Connecting imagination to tangible outcomes

The question for my team will always be: So what? What now?

Having time and space to imagine when workloads/ external pressures are demanding...

Time and space

Connecting imagination to evidence

I still feel conflicted between the use of the imagination, and the use of evidence-based approaches, and how the two should be best married together. How do we filter our imaginations as not everything will work?

I spoke to a couple of senior people about it this week and the response was: 'This is so not for me' and 'I'd struggle with this'...

Scepticism from colleagues

I recognise the responses in others that I would have had myself before the sessions...

The End of the programme

It's more than a programme, imagination is a way of thinking that is fundamental to us achieving the best lives for us, future generations and nature - keep imagining!

I've always had a sense that there's an expectation we should look at what's been done before and follow suit. But this programme blows that right out of the water!

I am thinking more imaginatively as a Jobs Hub Adviser. I consider the future generations in my work. For example, if I help a mum or dad into a good quality employment then I am benefiting their children too.

Satisfaction and wellbeing

I haven't felt as energised and enthusiastic about work for a while, I haven't taken so many notes since uni!

If creativity is squeezed out of day-to-day work, there is less opportunity for pleasure, less chance to contribute.

I see this as a clear enabler for our organisational design work.

Shifted Mindsets

I was never good at imagining but this has changed my perspective and thinking. I am not just wishful thinking anymore as I am now equipped with tools to make it more realistic.

Readiness for action

I want to do SO MUCH MORE in my work day-to-day. I'm so excited to implement more of this!

I led an imagination activity recently where I got my team to re-imagine their job descriptions to best serve the community and I really want to delve into this and make it a reality.

Specific intentions

I am interested in improving physical activity levels for those with a disability or long term condition; they are currently the least active groups in Camden and I would like to turn this on its head.

What is the trajectory of *Camden Imagines* now?

The Camden Imagines programme isn't just a programme for eight weeks. It continues throughout 2023 and we will report back on the coming phases. Next steps include the following:

Developing a programme of work with residents

To continue the movement building approach and build municipal imagination in the borough of Camden, we will take Imagination Activism out into the borough to work with residents, tapping into the strong, existing participatory practices of the Council. This could be done in the following ways:

- Making a version of the programme freely available to residents.
- Working with Camden's existing imagination ecology to create a more joined-up approach.
- Work closely together with frontline staff and the Participation Team to build on existing skills and work, and add these tools and approaches to the ways we work with residents
- Designing an engagement plan, together with Camden's Participation Team, to use scalable imagination approaches to engage residents in collective imagining alongside managers, frontline staff and leadership.

Engaging elected members in neighbourhoods

Engaging elected members to partner up with the collective imagining of residents, managers and frontline staff will be key to the approach. Members from across different political groups could support with movement building and making the case for municipal imagination.

Developing Imagination-led design, policy and strategy

Embedding the Moral Imagining Framework's Three Pillars model into the way Camden makes decisions, invests, and governs. This will involve working with the organisation and Imagination Activists on the development of the local plan, citizen assemblies and deliberative work, and cabinet and investment decisions.



Application of Imagination Activism to the 'We Make Camden' Missions and Challenges

Direct application of Imagination Activism to thinking and action around libraries, housing, homelessness and other issues. We will conduct a horizon scan of areas where this approach and these tools can unlock leverage points to achieve Camden's missions and challenges by 2030, building on the expertise and interest expressed by leaders and existing Imagination Activists.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank the Imagination Activists for their bravery, their tenacity, and of course for bringing their imagination to work to serve our residents."



Jenny Rowlands,
CEO, Camden Council

Continuing to build organisational capability

Building on the success of this pilot programme, we will continue building imaginative capacity in the following ways:

- Running a leadership programme for Senior Leaders of Camden Council (began April 2023).
- Integrating imagination and the Moral Imagining Framework into the leadership framework.
- Continued professional development for the existing Camden Imagination Activists and support within a Community of Practice.
- Developing wider organisational infrastructure to embed the principles of Imagination Activism.

PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

"I am proud to say that I am an Imagination Activist, which means that I am learning to develop and harness my imagination for social good and transform it into constructive, empowering, and effective action. I have generated some imaginative ideas about how the Good Work Camden service can be more innovative in its service delivery for the benefit of our residents."



Emma Le Blanc
Job Hub Adviser at
Good Work Camden

Lessons from *Camden Imagines* for broader civil society

We have learned some broader lessons from the Camden Imagines project so far:

Municipal imagination could be a core capability of 21st century civil service leadership

Imagination has a role to play in local government, policy-making and civic innovation, and we hope to build on this intervention to expand the field of municipal imagination with other Councils.

Imagination can fuel a new kind of activism that complements traditional activism

Imagination Activism is a new kind of activism that can speak to people in a way that traditional activism doesn't always. People felt empowered and liberated by the term and its focus on collectively imagining the new rather than combating the old.

Imagination can be integrated into a professional setting

One of the biggest achievements of the course was to provide tools and exercises that could be relevant and immediately applicable in a professional setting. There is much more that can be done to integrate it into professional settings and bring others on board.

Imagination can be relevant and useful for policy-making

The Moral Imagining Framework can support policymakers and designers to integrate the three perspectives of Future Generations, Nature and Ancestors into their work. The Framework can be used to catalyse the development of more policies that prioritise these three perspectives, as well as to build policy-makers' capability to exercise these three perspectives in their work.

We also learned some lessons about the barriers to unlocking imagination:

Time to practise

The key barrier to imagination was the challenge of allocating protected time within people's work hours to exercise imagination and practise using the tools to build this capacity.

"I think there are a lot of practical challenges to imagination – especially people's time and capacity and the financial resources that an organisation like the Council has."

Programme Participant

Capacity and headspace

Time alone is not enough. Participants reported that they also need psychological headspace and chunks of the week that are not overrun with meetings or delivery.

Manager and leadership support

Manager support and encouragement is key. Participants with managers who welcomed the approach were able to put tools directly into practice. Connected to this, leadership buy-in and leading by example are important for creating a safe space in the organisation to exercise this new kind of leadership and practice.

Scepticism

Imagination is sometimes seen as abstract, fluffy or irrelevant. It can also seem intimidating to people who believe they're not creative or imaginative enough. Demystifying imagination and giving people a chance to try out the practices is key.

Financial resources

Imagination needs financial resources to grow. It needs resourcing to support interventions, capacity-building and projects that can embed imagination further into the organisation. We know Council budgets are constrained, and so we need wider resourcing for this work.

"At first I must admit thinking: *is this for me?*"

Programme Participant

External critiques

Critiques of this approach are likely to centre on the mismanagement of resources in a time when public services are stretched and local authorities have experienced budget cuts. This report has set out to explain why imagination is more important now than ever, however more work is needed to build the case for this approach.

"I've always stood on the fringes of activism but I don't really know what place or what part I would play in it. I was drawn to Imagination Activism because it's more democratic and acknowledges that it's not just the loudest voices that should be heard. It's very inclusive!"

Programme Participant

Get Involved...

This work is still emerging and we'd love to hear from you if it resonates.

- If you're a **Camden-based organisation** and would like to support or get involved in Phase 2 of this work, we'd love to hear from you.
- If you're a **local council** and you'd like to do something similar, get in touch.
- If you're a **funder**, please fund this kind of work long term.
- If you're a **journalist**, let's talk.
- If you're interested in **working with Moral Imaginations** or learning from us, let us know.

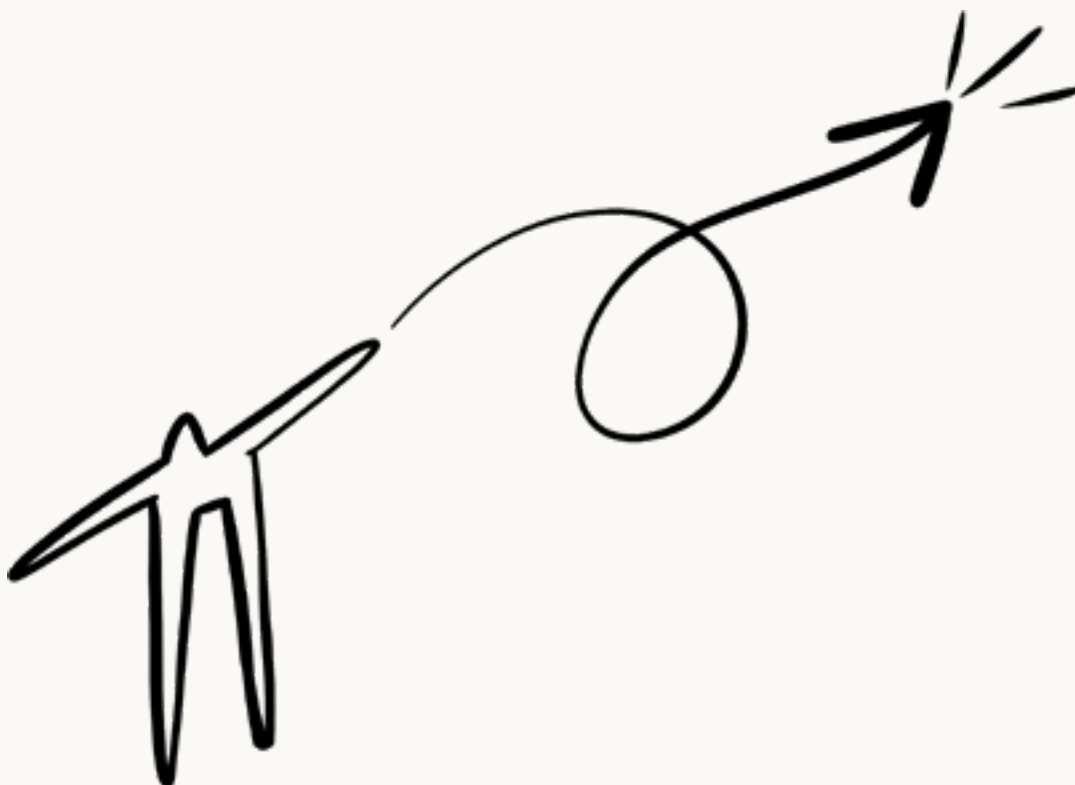
Contact us

To stay in the loop on further project updates, sign up.

Sign up for updates



Watch the Camden Imagines video:
vimeo.com/831045874/4cb6c01859



WHAT IF PEOPLE DIDN'T
EVER EXPERIENCE
HOMELESSNESS AND A
LIFE ON THE STREETS?

WHAT IF THE PERCENTAGE
OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS OR
A CUSTODIAL SENTENCE IN THEIR
ADULT LIFE WAS REDUCED TO NIL?

WHAT IF, ON THE DAYS WE WORKED OR
VOLUNTEERED IN OUR COMMUNITIES,
WE REGULARLY HAD A SMILE ON OUR
FACE AND WENT HOME BUZZING
WITH THE JOYS OF A GOOD DAY'S
ENDEAVOUR AMONG PEOPLE WE
LOVE AND CARE FOR DEEPLY?

WHAT IF CHILDREN REGULARLY
KNOCKED ON THEIR NEIGHBOURS
DOOR AND SAID "ARE YOU
COMING OUT TO PLAY?"

WHAT IF...

WHAT IF
PEOPLE FELT
SAFE AT HOME
AND OUTSIDE
THEIR HOME?

WHAT IF LONELINESS WAS NOT
SOMETHING THAT YOUNGER AND
OLDER PEOPLE, AND EVERYONE
IN BETWEEN EXPERIENCED
FOR PROLONGED PERIODS?

WHAT IF WE DIDN'T
HAVE A SINGLE
CHILD START THEIR
CLASSES HUNGRY,
OR GO TO BED
HUNGRY OR COLD?

WHAT IF SOMEONE FROM OUR
NEAR FUTURE TOLD US THAT,
FROM WHERE THEY ARE IN 2030
OR 2040, ALL THE ABOVE 'WHAT
IF...?'S HAVE COME TO PASS?

WHAT IF OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS
WERE BUZZING WITH LIFE OF ALL
FORMS AND PEOPLE FELT SAFE AND
CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER, THEIR
SURROUNDINGS AND THEIR PLANET?

WOW FOLKS, HOW
DID WE DO IT?



Ododo Dafé
Head of Housing Transformation

Appendix



**70 Common Questions
about Imagination**

71 Imagination Glossary



Common Questions about *Imagination*

Is it responsible to invest in growing imagination when we're already so stretched?

It's crucial to invest in the capacities that will develop truly effective solutions, otherwise organisations can get stuck in reactionary fire-fighting mode, applying sticking-plaster solutions.

Our programme budgets are squeezed and this isn't a core programme. Why should we invest over, say, leadership or design training?

Organisations need the tools and processes to generate ideas that can rise to the challenges they face. Skills like leadership and design thinking are important. But without the vision, energy and courage to do things differently, these skills won't create the new.

How does this connect to better outcomes for communities?

Imagination allows for a more rigorous and inclusive engagement with the challenges communities face and for the creation of suitable solutions. Collective imagining enables communities to envision and bring into being the changes they want to see.

Isn't this just zany workshops?

An element of fun and playfulness can be helpful in unlocking our imaginative capacity. But a serious commitment to embedding imagination in organisational processes and strategies involves a rigorous, structured approach. There is nothing frivolous about imagining how things could and should be different.

Can we measure the impact of this kind of work?

Because the aim of building imaginative capacity is to develop tangible new ideas and initiatives, its impact is observable and easy to track. Likewise, shifts in organisational culture, and increases in the boldness and psychological safety of staff, are observable and can be assessed.

Isn't this just a corporate management programme?

Without the moral dimension and a commitment to imagination justice – expanding who gets to imagine – it could be.

Is this relevant for organisations beyond local authorities?

Imagination Activism is being adopted by local authorities, not for profit organisations and purpose driven companies. It could be powerful for any purpose-driven organisation addressing complex goals.

Imagination *Glossary*

Collective Imagination	The act of engaging in an imagination process that involves others.
Ecological Imagination	The use of imagination to help recognise the living connections that exist between ourselves and all other forms of life, liberating distorted beliefs about our control over nature and our separation from the natural world.
Imagination Activism	The central concept of this training: using the imagination to change what is deemed possible and what action is taken.
Imagination Capital	The stock of imaginative capacity within a given site.
Imagination Justice	The equitable distribution of the opportunities, time, resources and energy to develop imaginative capacity and engage in imagination activism.
Moral Imagining	The use of imagination to expand the moral circle of concern to include future generations, more-than-human beings and ancestors', expanding rights and responsibilities in the process.
Life Centric Governance	Governance that recognises all living beings as equally deserving of respect and dignity, with inherent rights, sovereignty and personhood, and embeds this into legal, democratic and decision-making frameworks.
Municipal Imagination	A form of collective imagination that happens at the town, city or neighbourhood level.
Psychological Safety	The belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes, and that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking' (by Dr. Edmondson, Harvard University).
Temporal Imagination	The use of imagination to shape and shift the perception of time and move between temporal frames – changing who or what we value, and our relationship to the world.

About Moral Imaginations

Moral Imaginations is a not-for-profit organisation founded by Phoebe Tickell to drive a movement of imagination-powered change. We conduct research and work with strategic partners to help create a life-centric economy, politics and systems of governance. We help to catalyse futures that are rooted in values, an expanded sense of connection to nature, future generations and the past, and a connection to a moral sense of what is important. We develop frameworks and models to help people and organisations turn these principles into practical action.

Moral Imaginations works with local and national government, communities and organisations to build imagination capacity and embed imagination into ways of working, decision-making, policy and governance. Its Moral Imagining "Three Pillars" Framework helps policy-makers and designers to embed life-centric governance at the heart of policy and legislation. Its curriculum and programme of Imagination Activism trains people in the tools and practices of collective imagination and prepares them as agents of Life Centric Governance.

MORAL IMAGINATIONS

www.moralimagnations.com