Together, we are the architects.
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Welcome to the first issue of *Workforce Architecture*, a digital magazine and research exchange for the changemakers and trailblazers driving innovation in the world of work.

In today’s world of work, where both disruption and opportunity are unprecedented, a hyper-focus is being placed on the skills of the future. Governments and educational institutions are racing to define, support, transition, and educate current and future workforces with the skills they’ll need to succeed. Some are making predictions and investments in specific technical skills, such as coding for artificial intelligence and machine learning. Others are doubling down on the human skills, such as empathy and creativity, that can’t be automated and set people apart from machines.

In the business world, however, companies focus less on education and more on jobs and job titles. Human resources departments and leadership teams are tasked with equipping current workforce capacity for the needs emerging in the next quarter, in the next year, and into the future. The base unit in this calculation is full-time equivalent (FTE) or head count. Here, predictions and investments are also being made, with the priority on ensuring the right people are in the right positions for the company to develop, produce, distribute, and support its products and services.

We want to elevate the conversation and threshold for change by bridging the gaps between these two approaches to workforce innovation. Skills and people are integral building blocks, but assembling the pieces we can currently see may not be sufficient to creating a future that 1) advances the prosperity and well-being of individuals, organizations, and communities, and 2) ensures economic competitiveness and sustainability (as set out in the Future Skills Council’s vision for Canada as a learning nation).

*Workforce Architecture* provides a frame for engaging in purposeful thinking and discussion. It presents an opportunity to consider, with bold intention, how we want workforce innovation to unfold and function across the labour market ecosystem and in our communities. Our task, changemakers and trailblazers, is grand. Achieving it will require integrating disciplines and mandates, from policy to HR, from education to technology. It will require lifelong learning and continuous improvement, moving us beyond a restrictive “working aged Canadians” focus. And it will set our sights on generations to come while digging into what’s no longer serving workforces across sectors and industries.

It’s time to gather our many tools, embrace our collective ambition, and commit to making the future we want a reality. Let’s get started—together.

Lisa Taylor, President, Challenge Factory
The Talent Revolution Blueprint

The complex challenges facing today’s changing world of work call for innovative, integrated, and responsive solutions.

Since our founding in 2011, Challenge Factory has been using a proven approach, what we call the Talent Revolution Blueprint, for building workforce architecture solutions. Based on three lenses that drive human-centric and evidence-based learning, insight, and impact, the Talent Revolution Blueprint was designed long before the COVID-19 pandemic upended our lives and work—but it has only become more valuable as we all chart our way through disruption and recovery.

First, let’s take a look at the three lenses that form the pillars of the Talent Revolution Blueprint. Then, we’ll explore how they are used together and where the unique workforce architecture value of this approach is found. Lastly, we’ll turn to applying the Talent Revolution Blueprint to a real-world challenge that we’ve all had to grapple with: getting through the COVID-19 pandemic.
What is it: The three lenses

**Future of Work**
It’s time to toss out prescriptive, derivative approaches to the Future of Work. The ‘Five Trends’ or ‘Ten Tips’ for preparing for the Future of Work will not lead us where we need to go. They signal decisions and choices that other people would make about our future, work, and lives. Instead, we need to ask what we want the world of work to be for ourselves, our organizations and communities, and our children—and how we can go about building that future. This is about shaping the Future of Work, not preparing for it.

**Revolutionary Change**
Widescale or system-wide change offers opportunity even when it overwhelms us with uncertainty or disruption. Sometimes everything changes all at once. Sometimes radical, unstoppable shifts take place over time but still come to be experienced as shocks to our system. Both are revolution. We need to ask how we can learn from revolutionary change, how we can apply it to the world of work, what tools and methodologies we can use to embrace and foster drivers of change, and how we can adopt a resilient and open mindset so we are leading revolution rather than being swept away by it.

**Lifelong Career Development**
In Canada, careers education, planning, and learning are often associated narrowly with helping students navigate to post-secondary education. But career development is much more than this. It’s a lifelong process that everyone engages in, whether they know it or not, and includes paid and unpaid activities at all life and career stages. Career development is also a rich, professionalized field of practice, theory, service providers, and experts. While career ownership ultimately rests with the individual, managers and employers have roles to play as career enablers and supporters. This means we need to ask how individuals and their skillsets connect to labour market needs, how career expectations and aspirations (e.g., individuals’ interests, values, and goals) can align with organizational expectations and needs, and where opportunities exist to advance growth, success, and happiness.
The blueprint: How we use it

**Move into the overlaps**
On their own, each of the lenses enable strategies for tackling the changing world of work. However, the true workforce architecture power of the Talent Revolution Blueprint is found in the overlaps between them.

We look at where research needs to be advanced that better uses, advances, and integrates the knowledge of each. We look at where our consulting clients—industry associations, policymakers, post-secondary institutions, corporate teams—will benefit from adding lifelong career development and revolutionary change lenses to their succession planning, talent recruitment, or leadership development. Rather than only drawing on change management, we look at how our learning/training curricula can use a combination of revolutionary change, a proactive approach to shaping the Future of Work, and a lifelong approach to career development.

The goal and the value is found in cross-pollination, making better connections, and pulling threads together that lead to workforce architecture innovation and creativity in unexpected ways.

**Embrace continuous improvement**
The Talent Revolution Blueprint requires flexibility, adaptability, and collaboration so that it can be applied to the many different contexts in which workforce architecture is needed today. Essential to sustaining this capacity is committing to continuous improvement.

Each of the three lenses are evolving rapidly, with new research and tools being developed and their respective bodies of knowledge expanding every day. Building continuous improvement into both our internal strategies and the solutions we are innovating for clients ensures that Challenge Factory’s work remains forward-focused, resilient, and ahead of trends.

**Moving into the overlaps**
reinforces the value of embracing continuous improvement, while embracing continuous improvement pushes us more effectively and actively into those overlaps—where workforce architecture is at its most innovative and integrated.
Why we use it

There are several important benefits to using the Talent Revolution Blueprint. These give us the extra value—distinct from other human resources, career, and workforce strategists—that we need to tackle challenges about the world of work and create the best possible solutions for our clients.

The Talent Revolution Blueprint allows us to...

- Ask better questions.
- Be prepared for complexity (see it as an opportunity rather than an obstacle).
- Tell nuanced and engaging stories in accessible ways.
- Provoke transformation rather than artificial or stopgap measures.
- Operate in cross-sectoral spaces, with cross-sectoral partners.

Using the three lenses in combination gives us access to better data, research, tools, methodologies, insights, and perspectives to be able to productively decode the world of work around us. They anchor our workforce architecture by equipping us to consistently forecast what’s happening now, what’s likely to come next, how we know what we should be paying attention to (and what we shouldn’t), and what’s needed to succeed and thrive in short and long time horizons.
Putting the Blueprint to Work

Getting through COVID-19

Organizations, institutions, policymakers, leadership teams, and employees were all impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges and contexts shift, but in every case the Talent Revolution Blueprint can be used to chart a way through the ongoing workforce uncertainty and disruption.

Let’s compare how a challenge might be addressed with and without using the Talent Revolution Blueprint, and how its use can lead to valuable shifts in thinking and planning.
How is the challenge commonly tackled?
Without a Talent Revolution Blueprint, leadership teams are likely to address the challenge of workforce health and safety by activating only one lens—such as revolutionary change, given how radically COVID-19 affected us. It is also common to deploy multiple teams to address the challenge, each with their own unique perspectives, tools, and goals.

Of course, ensuring the health and safety of employees in the workplace is nothing new for employers. The primary focus of policies and practices before COVID-19, however, was to keep employees safe from occupational hazards, such as handling hazardous materials or working at heights. But in the context of COVID-19, all of a sudden employees also had to face risks introduced by other people (fellow employees, customers, delivery people, etc.), drastically changing how health and safety needs are conceived.

A singular revolutionary change approach would assign project teams to rewrite and implement new guidelines, standards, responsibilities, and actions. The result would be rapid changes to how employees operate in workplace spaces (including new work-from-home models) that are meant to accommodate the urgent needs of employees while ensuring business can continue. Communication between project teams might be limited, longer term impact assessments might be forgotten, and a sense of haste and stress might lead to a lack of confidence in the new measures.

What’s the challenge?
Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Future of Work discussions might have focused on succession planning and the demographic shift currently underway in society and the world of work. Or they might have been triggered by a concern about next-generation leadership cultivation and development. In some cases, the focus might have been on identifying how automation and shifting business models will impact the skills requirements for future staff.

Pre-COVID challenges have not disappeared. But many longer term priorities were upended in favour of more immediate COVID-related concerns.

In Challenge Factory’s discussions with leadership teams during the pandemic, we noticed a shift in both the focus and the questions being asked. Long term planning gave way to getting through the next few months. Teams continue to struggle with how to address current workforce needs without losing sight of future-focused goals. Unsurprisingly, a common short term challenge that clients expressed an intense focus on was how to maintain healthy and safe workplaces.
How can the Talent Revolution Blueprint help?
The issue of health and safety in a pandemic is weighty enough on its own. We understand the inclination to focus on “just getting through” such an unsettled period.

At the end of the summer of 2020, many of our clients and partners expressed how immensely proud they were of their organizations and teams for coming through this challenge more united, cohesive, and committed to working together. As we continued to check in and collaborate, we noted that by late fall, and then well into 2021, many of the teams that had rallied so strongly were showing signs and symptoms of burnout.

They were tired. The immense and relentless nature of the effort it takes to keep people safe amidst changing public health guidance and conditions, including the vaccine rollout, was proving unsustainable from a prolonged crisis response perspective. An entire cohort of leaders—those who the workforce looks to for cultural cues and signals—shifted into a period of ‘holding on’.

A two-lens approach would integrate lifelong career development into the revolutionary change discussion. Rather than only focusing on the physical occupational hazards, it would address the cultural impact of initiatives that serve to protect employees from each other. It would ask the following types of questions:

Who is advantaged and disadvantaged by the changes being implemented, and how might we consider immediate needs as well as longer term career implications?

How can changes be implemented to maximize workplace health and safety while also instilling a sense of agency and control among staff?
Using all three lenses does not prevent urgent decisions and rapid changes from being made. They allow for better questions to be asked on an ongoing basis, in turn promoting a different model of thinking and planning that emphasizes which actions need to be prioritized and in which order. This ensures leaders can have confidence in their decisions and actions, even when pressure is intense and disruption is overwhelming.

Groupings of three are stabilizing. They build supportive structures that can bear weight from multiple sides of an issue, contributing to stronger strategies, policies, and leaders. The three lenses allow for better collaboration, drawing in and making connections between project teams and their respective mandates so that goals aren’t being pursued in silos.

The ultimate results of the Talent Revolution Blueprint are workforce architecture solutions—tailored to an organization’s unique conditions—that place humans, their needs and values, and their futures at the centre of the world of work.

A three-lens approach would add the Future of Work perspective. It would establish forward-looking sensors to monitor when the time is right to move from reacting and responding to capitalizing and shaping how recovery happens. This approach might ask:

What will/did we learn about how leadership and change occurs in times of intense pressure? What do we want to build on from this experience? What behaviours and approaches might we want to leave behind?

How did we balance shifting between urgent (acute) actions that needed to be taken and long term (chronic) monitoring that maintains lasting stability?

What skills and traits did we value differently during this intense period of time, and what does that tell us about longer term Future of Work characteristics that we should be cultivating?
At Challenge Factory, we’ve been studying the dynamics of the changing world of work for many years. Out of our experience and exploration with a wide variety of organizations, we’ve found that both employers and employees are wrestling with the same five issues. These are the major influences—the key drivers—that are shaping the Future of Work. These are the major influences that are changing how humans work.

The strength of having tested this model over a number of years is that, in the face of so many complex challenges and circumstances, we can confidently rely on it to guide us to 1) asking the right questions, 2) ensuring we don’t miss important puzzle pieces, and 3) charting the best path forward through today’s evolving workplace realities, turbulence, and needs.
DEMOGRAPHICS & LONGEVITY
How are work, employment, and careers changing as our population ages and work-life expectancy lengthens?

- Immigration
- Ageism, racism, sexism, ableism
- Early, mid, late career stages
- Work, life, finances
- Shifting retirement models
- Intergenerational workforce

CAREER OWNERSHIP
How is the relationship between employer and employee changing, and who owns the career of the individual?

- Non-linear career paths
- Lifelong learning
- Career pivots and detours
- New Jobs / roles
- Self-direction

THE FREELANCE ECONOMY
What impacts are non-traditional or new work arrangements having on employment, labour markets, and careers?

- Portfolio careers
- Employment flexibility
- Gig economy
- Entrepreneurship
- Job insecurity
- Precarious work
- Contracts, casual workers, temporary work terms

THE RISE OF PLATFORMS
In the broadest sense, how can industries, organizations, and individuals leverage platforms and platform-based environments—both technological and human?

- Amazon
- Blockchain
- Airbnb
- Sharing economy
- Zoom
- Social media
- Uber
- Connectivity

AI & ROBOTICS
What’s the human impact of new and evolving technologies?

- Changing workplaces
- New talents, new skills
- Employees as equity (not assets)
- Algorithms
- Jobs lost, jobs gained
- Innovation
- Automation
- Creativity
The Question of Veteran Fit
How can asking better questions about military Veterans help advance Canada’s key priorities for building a learning nation?

Canada’s military Veterans are a skilled source of talent for workforces across sectors—public, private, non-profit, large, medium, small…and everything in between. Consider the added value their crisis and risk management, operational enhancement, and scenario planning skills and expertise could bring to COVID-19 recovery plans in businesses.

Yet employers and hiring managers are often uncertain or wary of hiring Veterans. Current workforce conditions are challenging, and determining whether a Veteran’s skills are applicable to the civilian workplace, supporting their civilian transition, and onboarding them can feel too taxing for busy employers.

However, these complex times are the exact right moment to take advantage of and capitalize on the skills and experiences that Veterans bring to their organizations. In many cases, only minor shifts in thinking are needed to gain a new understanding of the value of Veterans in civilian workforces.

Challenge Factory works hard to help employers meet their employment, leadership, and other workforce needs in an increasingly uncertain labour market.

Understanding and getting ahead in the talent revolution—those seismic shifts in human- and technological-driven innovation that are affecting workforce structures, relationships, and cultures everywhere—requires harnessing a competitive edge from talent pools that may be hidden, invisible, or undervalued.

Canada’s military Veterans are one such talent pool.
Hidden talent pools and the power of asking better questions

One way to make productive shifts in thinking is by learning to ask better questions. This can be a powerful tool in the hands of employers who are struggling to meet their hiring and labour needs. Check out the reframed questions below and consider how they might help employers think about Veterans in new ways.

Common hiring questions

Do we want someone who is very “command and control” to join our small team?

What jobs related to security or manual labour can we offer to Veterans?

Will we have time to help a Veteran learn what they need to know to get used to our organization, culture, and clients?

Better hiring questions

Who can I talk with to test if my assumptions about military experience are valid or based on pop culture?

What business skills, training, and competencies are learned in the military and needed in our organization?

How might our organization benefit from military-grade crisis/risk management as we navigate through COVID-19 recovery?
By recognizing Veterans as a valuable talent pool, we can also advance the key priorities that have been set out by the Future Skills Council for building Canada into a learning nation ready to thrive in the Future of Work. Let’s test how each priority can apply to improving Veteran participation in the civilian workforce.

**Priority 1: Helping Canadians make informed choices**

There are two sides to the labour market information and tools that allow Canadians to make informed workforce decisions: the supply and the demand. When it comes to filling labour and skills gaps, employers also need to be well-informed about Canadian workers and jobseekers, such as Veterans, and the value they bring to their organizations.

**Priority 2: Equality of opportunity for lifelong learning**

Veterans continue to face barriers to participation in the workforce due to misperceptions and lack of awareness about their military service, training, experience, skills, and fit in civilian workplaces. Myth-busting and raising employer awareness is a key step to increasing Veterans’ career and learning opportunities.

**Priority 3: Skills development to support Indigenous self-determination**

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people from coast to coast to coast serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. In 2019, approximately 2,750 servicemembers self-identified as Indigenous. Supporting Canada’s First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Veterans supports Indigenous self-determination.

**Priority 4: New and innovative approaches to skills development and validation**

Veterans bring a unique set of skills, training, and experience to their civilian work. These should be leveraged and valued, not viewed as something that needs to be downplayed or ignored. Drawing on Veterans’ military knowledge will only increase innovation in civilian environments.

**Priority 5: Skills development for sustainable futures**

Living in communities across the country, Veterans are versatile, adaptable, and resilient. They are an asset to developing a skilled workforce capable of adopting new technologies and business models while ensuring the well-being of Canada’s communities.
“We consider Veterans a valuable talent pool that’s often overlooked in the business community. They are highly trained and have highly developed characteristics, such as teamwork, leadership, and problem solving. When we hire Veterans, we tend to look beyond their specific technical skills unless they’re a match for a specific position that we’re filling.

Instead, we turn the thinking upside down. We want to know about the Veteran’s leadership capability, planning skills, and interpersonal ability. We want to start with these characteristics and then figure out what specific skills the new hire needs.”

Manager, Large Enterprise, Veterans Hiring Program

This excerpt is from The Canadian Guide to Hiring Veterans, created with the generous support of Veterans Affairs Canada’s Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund. Learn more about Challenge Factory’s work to demystify Canada’s Veterans as a highly skilled, hidden talent pool.
On this episode of Exponential: Intergenerational Workforces

As our population ages, we’re staying at work longer. But myths about older workers persist, and many are still struggling to embrace the power of intergenerational workforces. Join business journalist Amanda Lang and Challenge Factory’s president, Lisa Taylor, as they discuss workforce demographics, engagement, and the path forward through change. This podcast was recorded during the launch of Lisa’s latest book, *The Talent Revolution* (University of Toronto Press - Rotman Imprint).

“The single greatest predictor for how productive an older worker will be in a workplace is whether their manager believes they are going to be productive or not.”

Lisa Taylor, President, Challenge Factory
Why We Need a Career Lens in Public Policy

BY SAGE DUQUETTE

As workforce conditions become increasingly complex, careers need to be placed at the centre of policy—not jobs or skills.

Nearly thirty years ago, overfishing in the Grand Banks of Newfoundland forced the Canadian government to implement a moratorium on cod-fishing. This effectively terminated one of Newfoundland and Labrador’s principal economic activities and upended the cornerstone of many communities. In a province that has always struggled with high unemployment, 30,000 additional jobs were lost and, from 1992 to 2002, one fifth of its labour force was unemployed.

Justice Clyde Wells, Newfoundland’s premier from 1989 to 1996, recalls important messages of warning from fishers years before the cod stocks collapse: “The Newfoundland fishermen, for a decade or two prior to the closure in 1992, were complaining that the cod stocks were being fished out and they had to put in twice as much effort to catch half as many fish. And they blamed it on the deep-sea trawlers, sucking up all the fish on the Grand Banks.”
Companies capable of deep-sea operations were able to follow the shrinking cod stocks farther and farther out to sea, while the concerns of independent fishers keeping to the coast were ignored until the Harris Review Panel was finally formed in 1990. “Nobody listened to them and, in the end, they were right,” Wells acknowledges.

Efforts to help the displaced workers were significant, yet their shortcomings were rooted in an inability to conceive of the industry as anything more than just that—an industry. To those affected by the moratorium, however, fishing was more than an industry. It was and remains a way of life that has been integral to their culture for centuries.

And despite those efforts, the province was never quite the same. Although the economy eventually recovered, it is still one of the weakest in Canada. Moreover, while Canada’s population has increased by roughly 35 per cent since 1992, Newfoundland and Labrador’s population declined by nearly 10 per cent over the same period.

**Career development and public policy**

Employment policy too often focuses exclusively on jobs. Although social policy and supports can pick up the pieces related to identity and cultural loss, they are often disjointed in ways that instead undermine employment success. What’s missing is a holistic careers lens. Placing the agency of Canadians (rather than just job status) at the centre of employment policy development has the power to change how sector-focused and geographic-based jobs programs are designed, implemented, and measured.

In Canada, career development is often mistaken for services and interventions aimed at helping young people navigate to post-secondary education or teaching newcomers the job-search skills needed to find employment.

These are important parts of the work of career development professionals, but they also belong to a broader career development field that comprises a vibrant and mature global sector.

In countries throughout Europe and Asia, career development is understood to begin at age five and last a lifetime. It is found at the intersection of individual identity and needs, labour markets, and workforce trends. Career development professionals integrate information about technology, social issues and dynamics, economics, demographics, and workplace requirements to help clients find their place in both their local communities and the broader economy. As economic uncertainty and changes to the world of work continue to accelerate, this type of assistance and intervention is needed more than ever.

**Why skills and jobs aren’t enough**

In 1994, the federal government announced a $1.9 billion program, the Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS), designed to provide income support, labour market adjustment, and training options for those affected by the cod-fishing moratorium. Although the program did provide some career services, it was not conceived with a holistic careers lens. It did not take into account the fishers’ culture—including their interests, values, and identities—or how their culture would impact the program’s reception. As former premier Wells describes, “it was concerned primarily with retraining and encouraging workers to move out of the industry altogether.”

For centuries, fishing communities along the east coast sustained a relatively stable lifestyle. This involved the workday beginning before dawn, a single large midday meal, and a small crew that often consisted of close family. Any solution that treated workers only as individuals but not as families or communities could not adequately address the cataclysmic shift to their realities. Not only were they losing their livelihoods, but also their entire way of life. Jobs were an insufficient substitute.
Ottawa’s focus on retraining emphasized skills deficits rather than identifying workers’ transferable skills. This approach assumed they were uniformly unskilled rather than recognizing that their existing skills needed to evolve with the changing labour market. Whereas TAGS sought to fulfill market needs by equipping workers with skills predetermined as necessary by the government, a career development approach would have sought to connect workers’ existing interests, skills, and cultural needs to labour market opportunities.

Elayne Greeley, a career development practitioner and proud Newfoundlander, explains why the program missed its mark: “There were a ton of people who got flopped into a program [...] that asked ‘what job are you going to have’ instead of ‘what [skills] do you use every day?’” In particular, she recalls two fishers who received retraining in pottery, despite neither of them having any interest in it. The program’s logic was that they would be able to find pottery-related employment because they lived in a town near an archaeological site (which had a pottery component). “Neither one of them ever [went on to] work as potters,” says Greeley.

**Empowering local career solutions**

As Justice Wells correctly asserts, only the federal government has the resources to provide fulsome support during mass layoffs at the scale seen during the moratorium in Newfoundland and Labrador. Yet the federal government can never know the needs of local communities, particularly rural communities, as well as their members do.

By incorporating a careers lens into policy development, challenges can be brought to light before they become crises, and solutions are likely to be better suited to the communities they are intended to serve. The case of the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery demonstrates that shifting workforces into future-focused sectors is not simply a question of skills. It also demands individuals and communities be empowered and supported as they see to their own needs.

As debates continue about how to address massive workforce challenges in other sectors like oil and gas or trucking and transportation, we need to expand our curiosity from being fear-based (“But what jobs will replace trucking jobs?”) to capacity-building (“How might a better understanding of supply chains and local communities accelerate personal and economic growth?”). By gaining a deeper understanding of careers, interests, and community, policy considerations and development can become more innovative, holistic, and responsive to changing conditions. Ultimately, this stands to benefit all Canadians.

*Sage Duquette* is a research intern at Challenge Factory and a political science student at Concordia University in Montreal.
To Dread and to Dream

In today’s busy workplaces, many of us don’t often step back from our daily tasks to consider how we feel about what’s happening around us. Sometimes there’s simply no time; our workloads are always high and our resources are frequently limited. Other times this type of reflection simply feels futile when you’re only one person in a broader system or a leader with a mile-long list of duties and responsibilities.

Use this interactive activity to carve out a couple minutes for yourself. Take a step back and reflect on where you and your organization are today—and where you want to be. We can’t make change without first understanding the present.

Instructions

Step One: Click here to join the activity. You will be prompted to answer two questions, one about your fears and one about your dreams for the world of work. You may submit as many answers as you want.

Step Two: To receive the results of the activity in your email inbox, click "See voting results" on the last page of the activity. You will be prompted to enter your email address. If you are one of the first to participate, the results field may not be heavily populated. Check back at a later date.

Step Three: Subscribe to Workforce Architecture to make sure you don’t miss out on highlights and insights from interactive activities that we publish in future issues.

This activity has been modified from the second edition of Career Development and the Future of Work: A Conversation Guide, an easy-to-use resource for leaders and teams to set them on the path to shaping the Future of Work.
Have Your Say!
Workforce Architecture is for you.

Take our quick survey to let us know what you think about the first issue so we can tailor it to best meet your needs.