



ANGER

AS

A

FORCE

FOR

GOOD

No. 1 in the series
Creative Research

Astrid Poot

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The creative and solution-focused skills of our students are highly valued in the work field. We believe this creativity could also be beneficial in research. In creative research meaningful insights are collected that will inspire truly relevant solutions later. Therefore, this series is about creative or designerly research methods for students as well as for educators and professionals.

This book is the first in this series. All authors of this series have presented their methods in the minor program 'Creative Research' of Communication and Multimedia Design at the Faculty Digital Media and Creative Industry of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

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Introduction

AS DESIGNERS WE HAVE POWERS OTHER PEOPLE MAY NOT POSSESS.

We can see what is happening
in the world around us.

Because we are trained observers
we notice both the good and the bad
around us.

We can envision and realise change.

As designers we are looking for solutions. To
get to a solution we acquire, process and create
knowledge that helps us understand what is
happening. We know what our observations mean;
we know why things are the way they are.

We can understand what it means.

Finally, as designers we have the skills to make it
different. We can transform our observations and
understanding of a situation into a solution.

Most designers I know are angry about something. It can be injustice
you or your loved ones encounter in your life, you may be angry
about climate change, or about inequality, the accessibility of a good
education for all or how mental diseases are still a taboo.

Most designers don't take this anger into their professional practice.
Especially when you are starting out as a junior, you may feel being
angry at work is unprofessional.

REMEMBER

*Anger is like water: no matter how hard
you try to dam it, it will find a way.
And as designers we have the power to
direct it towards change.*

In this little book, I'll explain why you shouldn't suppress your anger,
and how you can make your anger productive.

*'Anger has a bad rep, but is actually one of the most hopeful and
forward thinking of all our emotions. It begets transformation,
manifesting our passion and keeping us invested in the world. It is
a rational and emotional response to trespass, violation and moral
disorder. It bridges the divide between what 'is' and what 'ought' to
be, between a difficult past and improved possibility. Anger warns us
viscerally of violation, threat and insult.' (1.)*

About anger

What is anger?

We've all been there: in the middle of a conversation, or sitting on the couch watching the news, suddenly your anger flares up. Your heart rate is up, your face may flush, you need to move. The people around you are shocked, take a step back. Your anger is difficult and awkward for them. You try to control yourself to become socially acceptable again. You may apologise and offer an explanation. *'I've been a bit busy lately. I am sorry.'*

The value of anger and how to deal with it has been an important discussion among philosophers since the early days. Seneca believed anger to be worthless, even for war. The well-organised Roman army was clearly more effective than the furious and uncontrolled Germans.

In the Middle Ages the general belief was that women were passive, and incapable of anger. Passion was a man's job. An exception to this is the Benedictine abbess, multidisciplinary scientist, composer and tough lady Hildegard von Bingen, who believed women were fully capable of anger too.

Nowadays we see anger as a normal, natural and mature emotion we all have.



Fear, sadness and anger are closely related

Fear and sadness are primary emotions: you may have experienced loss or disappointment and felt worried, anxious or sad. You turn inwards, you are taking the situation in.

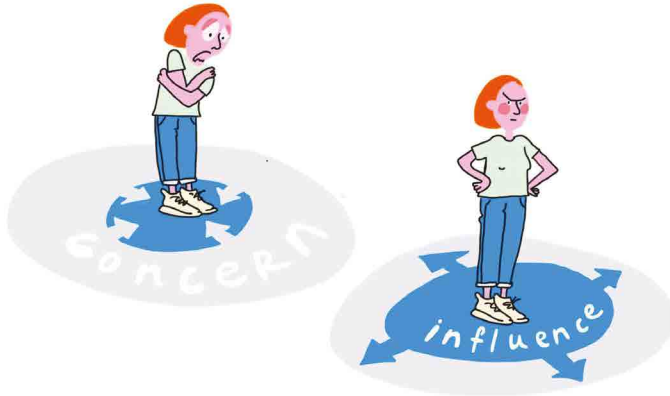
Anger is a secondary emotion that can follow: it is a coping strategy to take back control.

REMEMBER

So pay attention to anger, treat it with kindness. Anger is an emotional signal, it is about crossing a line. It is about what matters to you. Your anger makes it clear that you take yourself seriously. Being angry is a signal you shouldn't ignore.

Making your anger proactive

Author Stephen Covey (*7 habits of highly effective people*) came up with the concept of the circle of influence and the circle of concern. (2.) The circle of concern is about what worries you. Problems that are in your circle of concern feel beyond your control. Your circle of influence is about the power you have to change things.



Things that worry or scare you and make you sad as a result drain your energy and self-confidence. Sadness is paired with acceptance, you become *reactive*. Your **circle of concern grows** and will keep on growing as long as you remain sad.

By changing your sadness into anger you push back. You increase your **circle of influence** at the cost of your circle of concern: your power grows. Your attitude changes into proactive. Anger invokes the possibility of fighting back. It offers you perspective, it increases your influence, you become *proactive*.

REMEMBER

Anger is positive: 'Like happy people, angry people are more optimistic, feeling that change is possible and that they can influence outcomes. Sad and fearful people tend towards pessimism, feeling powerless to make change.' (1.)

There is even proof that anger sparks creativity: angry people are creative like happy people. Sad or scared people are less creative. Activating moods that are promotion focused (e.g., joy, anger) produce more creativity than mood neutral controls, whereas activating moods that are prevention focused (e.g., fear) impede creativity compared with mood neutral controls; deactivating promotion focused moods (e.g., sadness) and deactivating prevention focused moods (e.g., relaxed) are expected to have little effect on creativity. (4.) (M. Baas, 2010)

WARNING

Be careful with the shape your anger takes: not all types of anger are socially productive.

Different kinds of anger

Anger can be expressed in different ways.

Frustration

Frustration is strong.

But it is also repulsive. It scares us.

Frustrated people lash out: they behave aggressively. Their need is focused towards being seen and heard and not so much towards winning you over for their cause. It is easy to believe those frustrated people have nothing to do with you. It is easy to remain at a distance. They are just not likeable and rational enough. (It's easy to be cynical.)

STORY

An example of this is the farmers' riots in the Netherlands in 2020. The farmers believed their interests were being ignored by policymakers and people in cities. They felt unappreciated by society and felt that their profession was under pressure due to climate policy (in which they had no say).

They blocked main roads and took their tractors right into the heart of democracy. They forced their way into cities and buildings and were threatening citizens and policymakers.

Urgent anger

Anger is strong. But it is also intimidating.

Angry people are strong, often stronger than you. When someone asks you to do your bit in the situation they are angry about, that's not always easy.

Maybe you didn't give it much thought beforehand, maybe you didn't realise it was important, maybe you don't like the offer they ask you to make. Maybe you feel guilty, maybe powerless. (It's easier to remain indifferent.)



STORY

Greta Thunberg often shows anger as she communicates. In her famous speech at the U.N. Climate Action Summit she accused all grown-ups:

'This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!'

'You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!'

'You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.' (5.)

Greta Thunberg is right in everything she says, but it is not an easy message to hear. Her angry approach contributes to that feeling. Nobody likes to be accused, nobody likes to feel guilty and powerless at the same time. So does that mean she is not effective? Far from it. She is a big inspiration, especially to young people, because they are the innocent generation that will have to face climate change. Thunberg helps them vocalise their concern towards the (guilty) adults, thus forcing them to change. Yes, she is very effective.

Positive anger

When anger is positive it becomes a driver of change. It gets infectious!

We like to connect to a positive message, because people are comforted by happiness and optimism. Bad things can change! We love it when someone offers us a solution in which we can see our role and influence. We can do something! And I can become a part of this!

STORY

On 5 October 2017 a huge group of 60,000 teachers got together in The Hague to demonstrate for better working conditions and better pay. Schools were on strike throughout the Netherlands. It was the biggest uproar in decades and the movement started only a few months before. The strike was the starting point of a growing awareness about the problems that are threatening the Dutch education system. A (bottom up) new union was founded and the pressure on politics to invest in education had not eased since.

The movement was very serious from the start, and angry. Accusatory too. Still it was a huge success. How did it become so big so fast?

- *The enemy was not us. The actions were aimed at the Ministry of Education.*
- *An attainable goal: the demands were very clear and concrete. And - more important - they could be achieved. (Unlike the complicated climate goals?)*
- *A common interest: most people have or know children. We are all directly connected to schools in some way. Problems in schools affect us all directly and immediately.*
- *The movement: from the start the movement had been bottom up. More and more teachers joined. Involving all these teachers was a strategy from the start.*

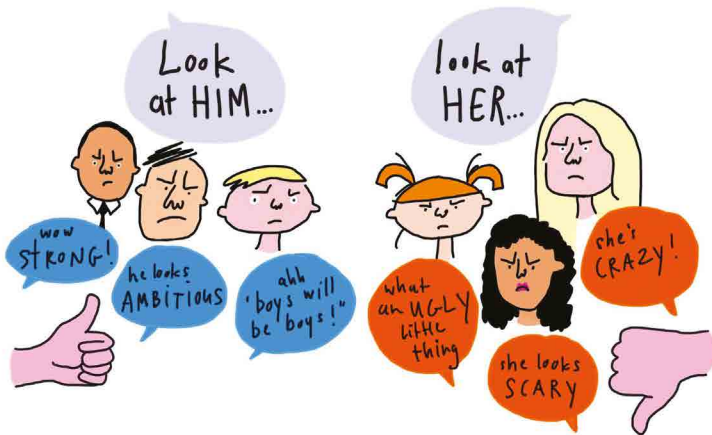
Thijs Roovers (l) and Jan van de Ven with the teachers on strike. (Fellow initiator Paul de Brouwer is not in the picture.)



Focusing anger

It's ok to be frustrated, that's often where it starts.

But to be able to have a positive impact, you need to turn your frustration into positive energy. If you scare, accuse or intimidate people, you'll win no one over. Your anger should inspire people, offer perspective, and invite them to get on board. It needs to be structured and it needs to communicate. How? I'll get to that.



ANGER IS A POWERFUL EMOTIONAL SIGNAL

It is a catalysing emotion that can spark your creativity. Not all types of anger are (socially) productive: frustration is negative, urgent anger can be intimidating. Positive anger is inspiring and contagious.

WARNING

Who is angry? Anger is perceived differently by different people. In Western society we tend to appreciate anger more in men than in women: an angry man shows determination and dedication, an angry woman is scary and irrational. It will take time to reset these subconscious views. Be aware of your own attitude when listening to angry people!

Your anger

STORY

Be My Eyes is an app that connects visually impaired people with sighted people, who can assist in everyday tasks (like 'I dropped my keys, can you help me find them?') by looking along through a video connection. Be my eyes was initiated by Hans Jørgen Wiberg, who is visually impaired himself.

'Through his work at 'The Danish Association of the Blind', he recognized that blind or low-vision people often needed a little assistance to solve everyday tasks. However, it wasn't until a blind friend told him that he used video calls to connect with family and friends, who could help him with these tasks, that Hans Jørgen got the idea for Be My Eyes. He believed that the technology of video calls could be used to visually assist blind or low-vision individuals, without them having to rely on friends and family, but using a network of volunteers.' (8.)



REMEMBER

When looking into your own anger, don't be afraid to choose a personal topic. It means a lot to you and you are probably an expert. That qualifies you to work with it.

STORY

The anger you feel can also be more abstract like 'the system', or society. Even those big topics can be addressed.

The Yes Men are a culture jamming activist duo and network of supporters created by Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos. They are focused on exposing the dehumanising ways the public is treated by governments and corporations and do so by copying their behaviour and contexts. They pose as experts from seemingly trustworthy organisations (NGOs, newspapers) or businesses (including fake business cards and websites) and present really extreme business ideas and oppositional research in boardrooms, at conferences or to the public.

One of their projects criticised the denial of climate change by republicans: the Ice Age Petition. The Yes Men posed as working as part of the Bush-Cheney campaign. They carried around a petition asking for signatures to support global warming because America's competing countries will suffer while America only bears minor side effects.' (7.)



The Yes Men posing as Exxon oil executives shortly after making the announcement of a human-flesh-derived fuel called "Vivoleum" at the Oil and Gas Expo (GO-Expo 2007) in Calgary, Alberta.

The method

Many problems that make people angry are big and complex and may seem unsolvable. We often believe big problems need big solutions. That leaves us feeling powerless, sad, without direction and even passive.

But taking your anger personally and thinking about the changes you could actually make that are within your reach will shift your perspective. Even small changes for good will make you feel more powerful and effective. Your circle of influence grows, and your circle of concern shrinks.

In this chapter you'll learn how to transform anger into positive change.

Anger is only effective when it is consciously used as a tool. Undirected anger may invoke sympathy, perhaps respect, but will not have too much impact because it offers no solution. We don't need anger as a result, we need it as energy. And to be able to use it as an energy we need direction, perspective and solutions.

STORY

Organise the rage

Shirley Chisholm was the first African American woman who was elected in the US congress and represented New York's 12th congressional district from 1969 to 1983, 'winning her seat in 1968 despite what she described as the "double drawback of being female and having skin darkened by melanin."

While in college Chisholm became increasingly aware of the racial discrimination in the United States. "In college, I became angry." Later, when she studied at Columbia University she decided to go into politics.

In 1969 she gave a speech at Howard University. It was a period of unrest: Martin Luther King Jr. had been killed a year before, there were protests against the war in Vietnam and the black power movement grew louder and more militant.

In her speech Chisholm challenged the audience by claiming that 'black power' would remain just a slogan unless African Americans would become active within the political system as well as on the streets.

The rage needed to become organised to have the desired impact. Concrete goals, thought- through plans and coordinated action. Only then could there be liberation.

(3.)



Shirley Chisholm by Roger Higgins, World Telegram staff photographer

REMEMBER

Activist and writer Brittany Packnett Cunningham translated this into concise and clear instructions:

WHAT are you angry about?

HOW do you want it to change?

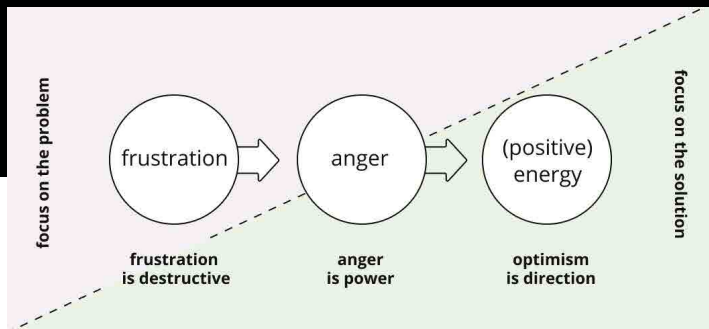
WHO are you, uniquely, to do something about it?

WHAT will be different because YOU took action?

SUMMARY

ORGANISING YOUR OWN RAGE

If you add knowledge and understanding to your anger, it becomes energy. The magic lies in shifting your focus from the problem towards the solution and to understand what lies within your power.



Getting to work

Is this method for me?

The method 'Anger as a force for good' can be a quick and productive start for a project, and is a great way to involve your audience. The method will provide you with insights and an effective kick-off. However: it will only work when you can tap into genuine anger. Avoid topics that people are not passionate about (*How can we make users more biased towards our brand of detergent?*) as these are ineffective when using this method.

- You can use your own anger about a topic as a starting point.
- You can also use this method in the context of a project or assignment and invite participants.

Goal

The goal of this method is to get an understanding of how you can approach a difficult topic that makes people angry and how to use the anger as a positive force.

From feeling and living the problem you move to analysing and understanding it and finding directions for positive change.

Participants

Two options:

- *Your own anger: you participate, along with another person who also reflects on your process and outcomes.*
- *A project or assignment: participants are people who feel genuinely connected to the topic you want to research. Work with a maximum of three people, to ensure there is time for in-depth discussions and sharing.*

Time

Sometimes it is challenging to really understand your anger and the motivation (and conviction) to work with it. But once you are aware, this method is rather easy to use. It's also flexible: you can go through a full process and exploration of a topic in one day, but taking more time will allow for better insights and a deeper understanding. Once the method feels familiar, you can use it quickly and easily in your own way. It will grow on you.

Place

A nice room with a table big enough for people to make notes and jot down ideas. The setup should invoke dialogue and exchange.

Materials

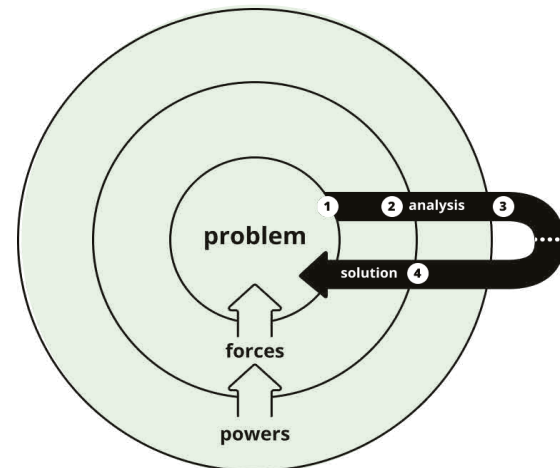
Pens, paper, post-its, tape, etc.
Coffee, tea, drinks, snacks.
Internet access for research.

Preparation

Invite the participants, explain what they can expect.
Plan the session(s) and space.
Read into the topic (if it is chosen beforehand).

Steps

To develop your anger into a tool for change, we need to first deconstruct your anger. What are the forces that feed the problem, and what are the powers that feed the forces?



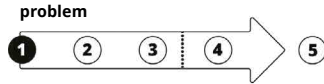
Step 1, 2 and 3

We start from the *inside out*: the problem you are angry about. We learn what forces influence your problem and what the underlying powers are that feed these forces.

Step 4

Then we change direction, we attack the problem from the outside in: what can we do about these powers and how will that influence the forces? And can this solve the problem?

Understand your anger



What are you angry about?

What is this problem you see, that somehow doesn't get solved?

Easy problems don't make you angry. You see it, you fix it, done. The difficult ones can really fire you up. Injustice, unfairness, something that makes you feel unsafe or insecure. It's the divide between what 'is' and what 'ought' to be. You feel it just *shouldn't be like that*. And that makes you angry. And that's where you should pay attention: because when it hurts, it matters.

WHAT are you angry about?

HOW do you want to change it?

I'll take you through some examples in the process, to help you see how you can transform your difficult problem into small chewable chunks.

Example

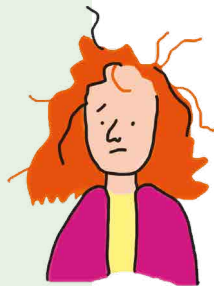
The hairdresser's

Angry about:

my hair is always a mess immediately after leaving the hairdresser's.

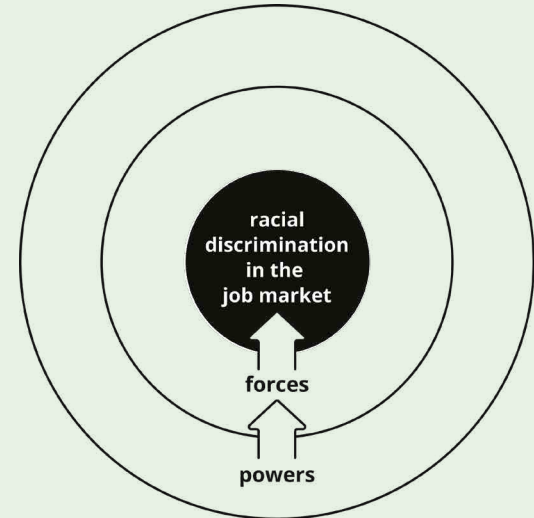
Desired change:

keep my pretty hair a little longer.



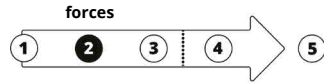
Equ4all, problem

Abdel el Hannaoui (student) is angry about racial discrimination in the job market. His talented sister was turned down 62 times before she got a position as an intern in a marketing company. Her Moroccan name appeared to be a deterrent. Even though discrimination is forbidden by law, it is still a widespread practice.



STEP 2

Analysis: the forces



Often problems that make you angry feel too big, overly complex or just seem elusive. We approach that by taking a small first step: we analyse what is actually happening.

A problem is kept in place by *forces* pushing it.

Forces are the influences that you notice. It's what you experience.

- *It can be in you: your knowledge and convictions, fear*
- *It can be around you: the social pressure you experience, the norm*
- *It can be circumstances: when and where you find yourself*

The forces are neutral: they are a given, they just are.

Beware:

That doesn't mean they are kind; often forces can feel dark and destructive. But they are *there*, not directly pointing at you personally but harming you nonetheless.



Example

The hairdresser's

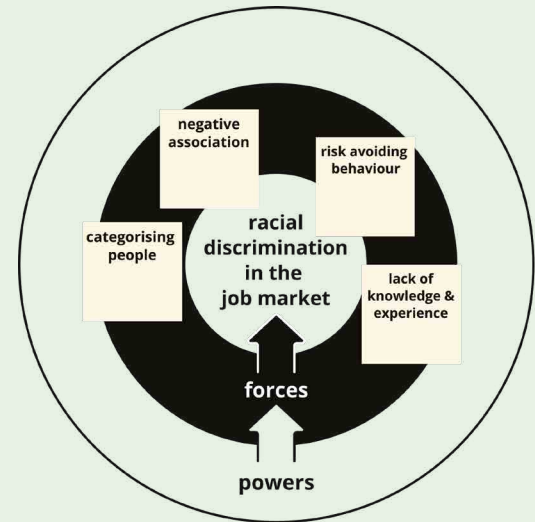
Force: there is always a furious wind blowing outside of the shop!

CASE

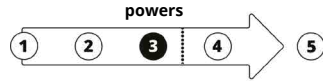
Equ4all, forces

Forces that cause the situation to exist:

- *Negative association with people with a Moroccan name (prejudice)*
- *The perception that hiring an employee with a Moroccan name is a risk (prejudice)*
- *Lack of knowledge about, and experience with, a multicultural team*
- *Categorising of people by name (laziness in thinking)*



Analysis: the power



Something causes the forces to exist. The forces are kept in place by a *power*. The power is a guilty antagonist that feeds the forces.

This antagonist can have two profiles:

Intentional

- Other people that act at your cost deliberately
- Influencers with an agenda
- Organisations that actively pursue a goal

Unintentional

- Other people that act at your cost, but are unaware
- Events taking place, causing collateral damage
- A system that causes collateral damage

Example

The hairdresser's



Force, intentional: someone in the hairdresser's team is causing this wind that messes up your hair.

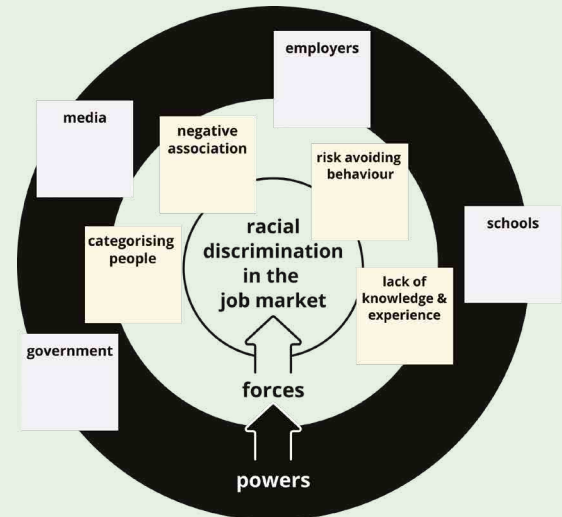


Force, unintentional: the poor design of the square where the shop is located causes a continuous draft, messing up everyone's hair.

Equ4all, powers

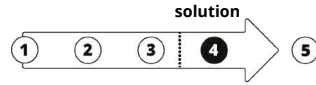
Powers that feed the forces:

- *Employers: letting this happen (allowing a small group to set the tone)*
- *Media: sharing one sided-stories*
- *Government: not enforcing the law*
- *Schools: should address this more*



STEP 4

Analysis: solution, redirecting the energy

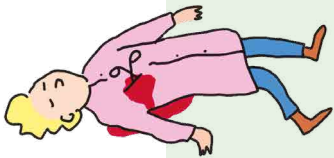


If you manage to remove the cause from your problem by making the powers powerless you are *en route* to change.

There are two strategies to choose from:

Strategy 1 — Remove or change the power

This is the hardest one. If removing or changing the powers would be easy, problems would not be so hard to solve. Still, in our example of the teachers' strike the initiators did just that: they founded a new union challenging traditional powers at the negotiation table.



Example

The hairdresser's

Remove the power: you can get rid of the evil hairdresser.

Strategy 2 — Dodge the power

You are more likely to choose to dodge the powers: choose a clever new direction or add a new power to the mix.



Example

The hairdresser's

Dodge the power: you can dodge the power by switching to another hairdresser.

CASE



Equ4all, forces

Equ4all is an online platform that is built for sharing vacancies (by companies) and applying for jobs (anonymously, by candidates). It is marketed explicitly as an initiative against discrimination. Applicants can share their stories, both good or bad. Companies that join can position themselves as anti-racist: Equ4all is a quality mark.

The powers

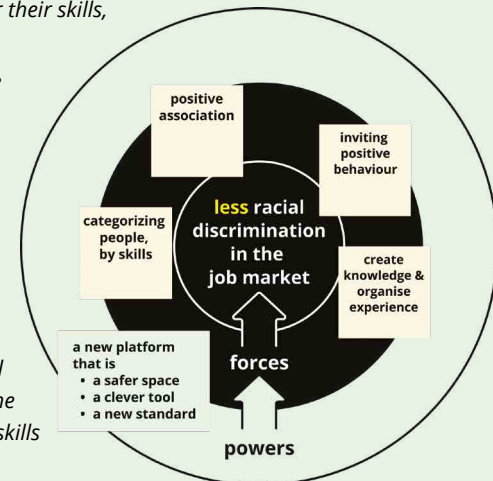
Equ4all dodges the existing powers by introducing a new one:

- Create an online platform that celebrates non-racist companies
- Provide a safe space for applicants
- Use speaking out against racism as a marketing strategy (elegantly shaming companies that don't join...)

That will result in a change in the forces:

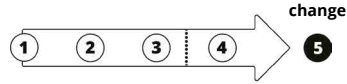
- Applicants are hired for their skills, removing the negative association with people with a Moroccan name
- The explicit mix in the employers' team will secure knowledge about, and experience with, a multicultural team

- Categorising people will no longer occur by name or background, but by skills



STEP 5

Analysis: vocalising your anger, making change



WHO are you uniquely, to do something about it?

Now that you fully understand your anger and how to improve the situation that made you so angry, you can take the first step towards change. Usually that's by bringing other people on board. Writing a manifesto is a great way to start.

Manifesto

A powerful manifesto is about a deep conviction, a great urgency that you feel. It is as clear as water, it doesn't cover anything up. It is a promise, it is real. Your ideals and plans manifest themselves in it. You can use the manifesto to clarify your thoughts to yourself, to your team, or to the outside world.

Manifestos come in many shapes and sizes: text, film, a speech or something else. Usually they contain these building blocks:

- *I see (what made you angry) and believe that needs to change, because (damage it does now).*
- *So I promise to take care to (a powerful, optimistic vision: how it will be perfect, think big)*
- *By (concrete promise: what you will actually do),*
- *So (how it will be different, concrete).*

You can use this literally as a template, or more loosely as a source of inspiration. It can be a single paragraph you share or a complete business plan you sell. It's up to you to decide how big your first step towards change will be.

CASE

Equ4all, manifesto

Abdel el Hannaoui:

I see discrimination on the job market; people being turned down because of ethnicity, belief, gender, or something else.

I see a struggle, but also perseverance.

I think racism is old-fashioned.

I think racism is a disease in our great country.

I know together we should make it stop.

I promise to:

- *Help people share their stories*
- *Create a fair application process*
- *Empower companies to do better*

So everyone has equal opportunities in finding the right job.

STORY

An example of an elaborate version of a manifesto is the Maker Movement Manifesto by Mark Hatch. It's a book that explains what the maker movement is about. It is very multidimensional: you can read it as a list, as a poster and as a full book. (11.)

The list:

- **MAKE**
- **SHARE**
- **GIVE**
- **LEARN**
- **TOOL UP**
- **PLAY**
- **PARTICIPATE**
- **SUPPORT**
- **CHANGE**

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

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2. *Rage becomes her* / Soraya Chemaly, 2018
3. *Howard University Speech* / Shirley Chisholm
<https://tinyurl.com/nfyphdv>
4. *The psychology of creativity: moods, minds, and motives* / M. Baas, 2010
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<https://tinyurl.com/rxynx2ej>
6. *Leraar, durf te claimen* / Thijs Roovers en Jan van de Ven, 2021
7. *The Yes Men*
theyesmen.org, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Yes_Men
8. *Be my eyes*
www.bemyeyes.com
9. *Students' work* / Abdel el Hannaoui, CMD/ HvA
10. *Maker Movement Manifesto* / Mark Hatch
<https://tinyurl.com/3tce8jme>

IMAGES

Illustrations:

Astrid Poot

Lerarenstaking:

Photograph by Jan van de Ven

Greta Thunberg:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greta_Thunberg_\(48882847963\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greta_Thunberg_(48882847963).jpg)

Be my eyes:

Photograph by Be my eyes

The Yes Men:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Yes_Men.jpg

Shirley Chisholm:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shirley_Chisholm_NYWTS.jpg

About the author

Astrid Poot is an independent thinker/ maker. She works with libraries, museums, schools and other educational institutions and friendly companies. She hopes to empower people to become happy, strong and autonomous through her work. Her current research is about finding ways to apply ethics in practice.

Poot has been involved as a guest lecturer and advisor at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and Communication and Multimedia Design for many years. (And proudly so.)

www.astridpoot.nl

Colophon

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**ANGER IS LIKE WATER:
NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY TO DAM IT,
IT WILL FIND A WAY
AND AS DESIGNERS WE HAVE THE POWERS
TO DIRECT IT TOWARDS CHANGE.**