

The Chief Question Officer[®] Advantage

Better thinking through better questions

BY DR. MARILEE ADAMS, Ph.D.

ORIGINATOR OF QUESTION THINKING™

MOST ORGANISATIONS HAVE CEOs, CFOs, CLOs, COOs and other such functions. We believe that an informal C-level designation, that of Chief Question Officer, can have an empowering impact throughout an entire organisation. Such individuals, deeply skilled in question-based tools and practices, might come from training and development, HR, or even be Chief Learning Officers. Effective questioning can be the difference that makes the advantageous difference for building a positive, innovative, and productive corporate culture.

Fostering Inquiring Cultures

Traditionally, we've thought of people in the C-suite as having all the answers. But in today's complex, fast-paced world, what's needed is better thinking and more questions. The smartest, most innovative and productive organisations, and the most talented leaders and managers, are successful not because they have quick answers but because they ask constructive questions of themselves and others, thereby creating inquiring cultures. These environments are highly thoughtful and strategic, fostering the most innovations and breakthroughs in products, services, and even operations.

Organisations with strong inquiring cultures are dynamic, agile, collaborative, and creative, qualities that have a positive influence on every individual, team, project, and goal. Question-driven cultures have the capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to problems inside the organisation while staying ahead of the curve in planning for external challenges and opportunities.

Asking questions is essential for opening new possibilities for virtually every goal and function, whether it's gathering information, building relationships, thinking objectively, or coordinating supply chain activities. Skilful questioning is also fundamental for resolving breakdowns, making tough decisions, innovating, and managing change.

Right Answers Through Right Questions

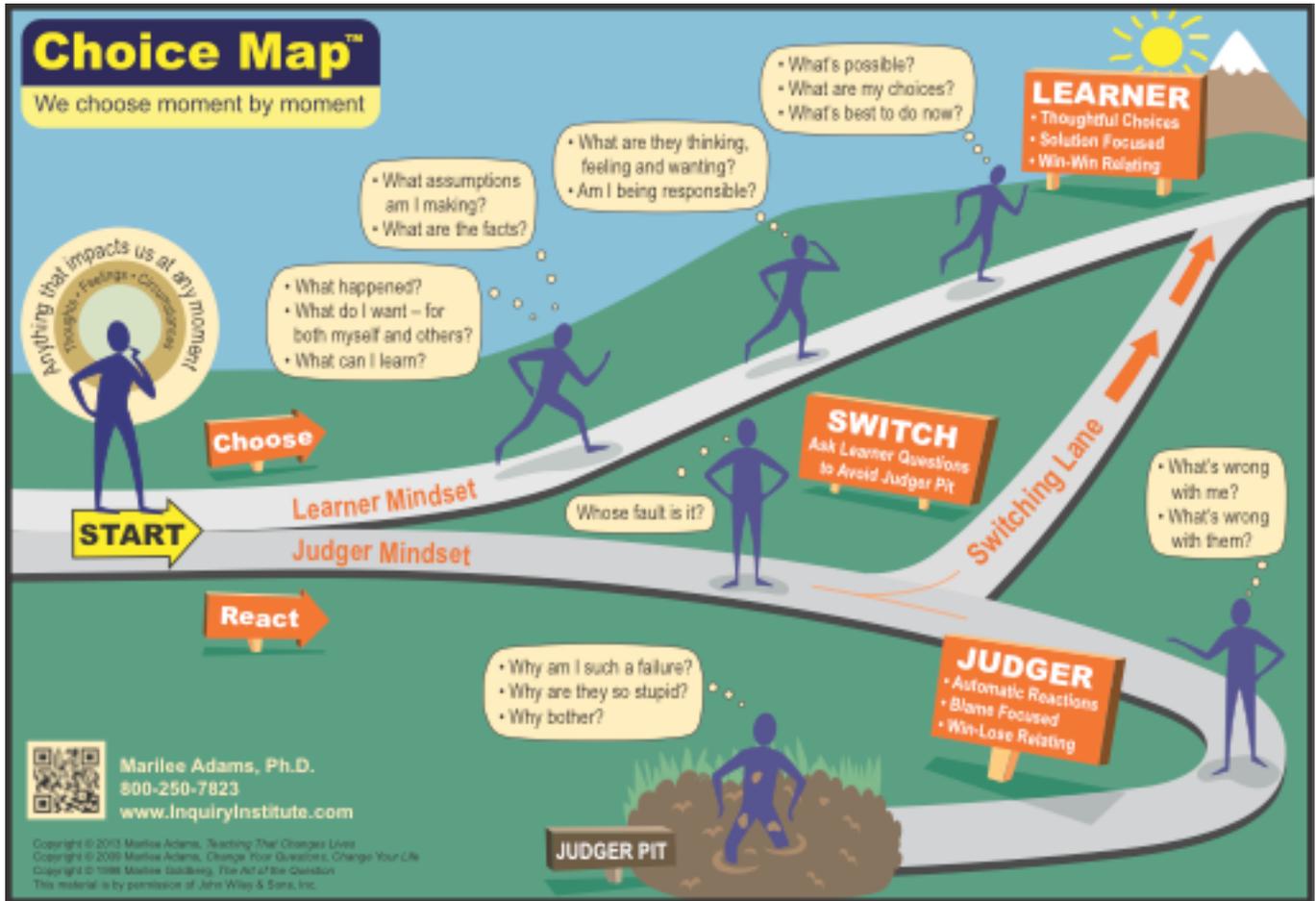
Getting the "right" answers means starting with the "right" questions. But how do we find the right questions? The first step is learning to distinguish between questions that lead to success and questions that can prevent success or even cause backsliding. Questions for success are generated from our Learner mindsets, not our Judger mindsets.

Learner questions predictably cause new openings for action. Breakthrough answers, after all, depend on provocative new questions. When we ask Learner questions, we are responsive to life's circumstances, leading to better critical, creative, and collaborative thinking, more positive and generative solutions, and relating in win-win ways. Learner questions typically presuppose fresh possibilities, a positive future, and abundant resources. They are never questions to which we already know the answer.

And then there are "Judger" questions. These questions close doors, resulting in detours, missed goals, and

costly errors. They can lead to low morale, staying stuck in “status quo” thinking, conflict, win-lose relating, and a diminished ability to innovate. They focus attention on problems rather than solutions, presupposing an orientation to the past, scarcity, and pessimistic consequences. Judger questions may be focused either internally or externally, aimed at others or at ourselves, often resulting in negative moods and in denying responsibility and searching for blame. The Judger mindset is reactive rather than proactive and leads to “surviving” rather than thriving.

The Choice Map illustrates Learner and Judger questions, the mindsets they characterise, and the predictable destinations and outcomes of each.



Winning Applications

Carmella Granado, a Senior Director of Organizational Effectiveness and Leadership at Flextronics, along with General Manager Matt Zimmer, used these ideas and practices to turn around a site whose performance was lowest among the 14 in their division. Utilising skills and tools that Carmella gained in our Chief Question Officer training programme and from my book *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life*, they instituted weekly group coaching sessions that helped leaders distinguish between Learner and Judger mindsets and questions. They also made extensive use of one of the most powerful Learner tools, Q-Storming®, which is an advanced form of brainstorming with questions. Soon line managers were asking more Learner questions and listening less judgmentally, which led to designing and implementing new business procedures that improved quality and customer satisfaction. Within three months, they created an inquiring “Learner culture” and an exemplary turnaround. The site moved into the #1 position in their division and their success was ultimately described in the Wharton Business School newsletter. ■

About the Author

Dr. Marilee Adams, Ph.D. is founder and president of the Inquiry Institute and author of the international bestselling book, *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 10 Powerful Tools for Life and Work*. Visit her website to access the Wharton Newsletter and to read a description of the Chief Question Officer Certificate Program: www.InquiryInstitute.com.

Thinking 2.0

Have you given thought to your thinking?

BY DR. BENA KALLICK AND DR. HENRY TOI

THINKING IS AS old as time. Indeed, it is so old, that we assume that we all do it naturally. Thinking is a situational activity. We think because we are faced with problems or situations that demand it. The outcomes of these problems or situations will depend on the skilfulness of our thinking. We also know that our situations and problems are always changing. Given all the changes that have taken place across the world, the type of thinking that is required to determine better outcomes has changed. Thinking 2.0 examines these changes.

A Brief History on Thinking

Approximately 10,000 years ago, the world was in an agrarian situation. Much of the wealth and well-being of the people were tied up with how much crop-yielding land people had and the number of cattle they owned. In that context, the focus of thinking was centred on small communities, animal care, water management and possibly having enough family members to manage the farm. As a new age of industrialisation dawned upon mankind some 200 years ago, the focus of thinking shifted towards transportation, marketing, use of capital and the training of workers. The industrial age was followed by the information age circa 50 years ago, precipitated by the invention of the computer. In the information age, thinking changed because we had more access to information beyond our direct experiences. We were able to think both locally and globally. The information age quickly shifted to a digital age in which we not only have access to more information, we have more access of acting upon the information we receive. The focus of thinking has become less about acquiring knowledge and more about producing and giving meaning to knowledge. This requires a *thinking upgrade*. How might we improve our performances and work toward the common good in this challenging and ever-changing environment? Let's examine an example we find ourselves in today and see how our thinking can be changed to adapt to it.

Social Thinking in Sight and Sound

A turning point started in 2004 when Facebook was launched. Based on a platform of high-speed connectivity and massive information flow, social thinking in sight and sound gave rise to a new form of interdependent thinking. In the past, interdependent thinking might have involved face-to-face meetings, emails and phone calls to people you know. Now interdependent thinking is facilitated by the ability to communicate not just with people you know, but with the people that know the people you know *ad infinitum*. Two key factors changed the game. First, the ability of the *ad infinitum* circle to respond to you directly. Second, the ability to communicate with sight and sound. Thinking is now done more quickly and in a highly visual and auditory setting. We are virtually face-to-face with others and, due to the technologies, our interactions are rapid and immediate. This form of thinking triggers emotions faster than logic. Social thinking has moved from the physical to the virtual environment, and from a "one to few" to a "one to many and to many more" relationship with a highly active and emotional consciousness.

As we consider the nature of this new social thinking, there is also the effect of creating a new democratisation of views. People thinking socially on the new technological platforms have democratic powers

hitherto unavailable to them. For the first time in human history, anyone who can spell and has access to the Internet can make his or her views heard without being subjected to class or social status barriers. In this situation, a 13-year-old student in a Third World country has as much voice as a senior politician in the First World – if he or she knows what to say and how to say it. The world is not globalised; it has become localised and censorship power has been passed from the hands of a few to the community's hands.

So what does all this have to do with our thinking? Plenty. First, we have to think interdependently. Thinking interdependently means that our actions and reactions have a wider and more powerful effect than we think we have. Knowing this allows us to leverage that to improve problem solving and product creation more intelligently. Second, localised thinking allows us to be more specific and narrow in our creative thinking than before. In the past, we might be thinking “how can we create something that is of value to a wide audience” but now we can create something that is of value to a narrow group of people, but that narrow group of people now number in the millions.

In order to become the productive innovators and problem solvers that this world requires, we will have to upgrade our thinking. We will have to sharpen our skills in communication, and become better at discerning fact from opinion. We will need to recognise credibility through evidential thinking. We will have to allow ourselves to become more flexible and open-minded if we want to leverage the social networks that are possible. We will have to upgrade to a new release on thinking! ■

About the Authors

Dr. Henry Toi is the Managing Director and Master Trainer of Brain Capital Group. He graduated with honours from the National University of Singapore and obtained his master's degree from the RMIT University in Melbourne. He received his Doctor of Business Administration Degree from the Australian Institute of Business.

Dr. Bena Kallick is an international consultant providing services to school districts, state departments of education, professional organisations, and public agencies throughout the United States and abroad. Kallick received her doctorate in educational evaluation at Union Graduate School.

Talk to Yourself

When talking to yourself pays off

BY DR. HENRY TOI

ON A DAY-TO-DAY basis, our talents and skills help us navigate the myriad decisions we're faced with. But in some situations, these gifts fail us and we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory. Metacognition, or awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes, is the answer. Whether you engage your thoughts on your own or with the help of another, thinking about your thinking has the potential to give you unexpected results.

According to Dr. Steve Fleming, a postdoctoral fellow at New York University, "We reflect on our thoughts, feelings, judgments, and decisions, assessing their accuracy and validity all day long." This reflection is critical to individual growth and development. We all use our metacognitive skills by paying attention to the chatter in our brains.

Thinking about one's own mental processes is especially valuable in several types of situations:

- Planning a meeting or corporate event
- Developing a strategic plan or annual performance plan
- Talking with a customer or client, implementing a project, or giving a presentation
- Reflecting on a past event, meeting, project, or challenging conversation
- Whenever your normal skills are falling short

In each scenario, as you talk to yourself, you have the opportunity to consider new ideas, increase your capacity, grab the "aha" moment, explore others' perceptions, and open the door to undiscovered possibilities.

Welcome *yourself* as your Inner Coach.

The Coach Within

In his theory of multiple intelligences, Dr. Howard Gardner describes Intrapersonal Intelligence as having an understanding of yourself: knowing what you can do and cannot do, what you want to do, and where to go for help. Your inner coach can take you there. Well, at least by talking to yourself, you're assured that someone is listening and most likely enjoying the conversation!

Try the following techniques to enhance your metacognition:

- 1) Paraphrase and/or reconsider the meaning, intention, and impact of your words.

Examples:

- This goal connects to my belief that . . .
- No response makes me question how much my boss values me as an employee.

- I wish all my clients would value detailed accuracy the way I do.

2) Ask yourself questions that engage untapped areas of your thinking.

Examples:

- If my boss were to suggest a resolution, what might that be?
- In an ideal world, what would I want . . . ?
- Why is this significant to me right now?
- Of all my choices, which might have the greatest impact?
- Which of my actions align with my beliefs and values?
- In spite of the tension, what might Mr. Smith and I have in common?

As you go through your own words and ask yourself questions, refine your internal dialogue by speaking aloud and/or putting it in writing.

All said, while talking to yourself is an exceptional tool, it has its own limits. The mélange of our experiences, history, education, and life choices expands but at the same time limits our view. That is why, when we find ourselves temporarily in unfamiliar territory, it is good to receive coaching from someone else. An external coach enhances self-talk by offering fresh perspectives, listening and acknowledging our reflections, and asking insightful questions. Coaching invigorates your thought process. It unveils new possibilities.

Open to Receiving

You are facilitating a strategic planning meeting. This is the third meeting this quarter; the team is struggling and so are you. You have excellent facilitation skills, but they're not working.

An external coach may be just what you need. Much like your internal coach, she listens carefully to what you're saying verbally and non-verbally. She organises your thoughts and presents them back to you. If you're thinking big picture, she'll ask about details. If you focused on alternatives you've tried, she'll ask what others might do. She helps you explore how your assumptions, personal rules, and beliefs might influence your thinking.

Effective coaches effortlessly navigate between coach, consultant, collaborator, and evaluator. The conversation begins and ends with the coach, who focuses on the thinker and avoids his own thoughts, opinions, and advice. Other roles include:

- The consultant who shares expertise
- The collaborator as an equal partner
- The evaluator who compares performance to accepted standards

Each function engages the thinker in a different way and all can enhance your metacognition. [Costa, A., & Garmston, B. (2002). *Cognitive coaching: A foundation for renaissance schools* (2nd ed.).]

The Gift of Giving

One of your sales managers is struggling to meet quarterly numbers. He has succeeded in the past so you know he is skilled, but his performance doesn't reflect his capabilities. How can you help in a way that acknowledges his temporary struggles while honouring his expertise?

Use the same inner coaching techniques you've learned and now as your manager's external coach, remember to:

- Listen carefully
- Avoid judgments and sharing your opinion
- Use silence
- Mirror his thoughts back to him

- Ask open-ended questions that invite an unexplored perspective

There was a time when talking to yourself meant you were crazy. Now we know that “a man speaking sense to himself is no madder than a man speaking nonsense not to himself” – a quote by author Tom Stoppard.

Metacognition turns the crazy part of self-talk into constructive thinking. Whether you are coaching yourself or someone else, or being coached, shine the spotlight into your brain to invite continued growth and high performance. ■

About the Author

Dr. Henry Toi is the Managing Director and Master Trainer of Brain Capital Group. He graduated with honours from the National University of Singapore and obtained his master’s degree from the RMIT University in Melbourne. He received his Doctor of Business Administration Degree from the Australian Institute of Business.

Think > Act

“Between stimulus and response,
there is a space.”

BY CHARLIE GARLAND

ABOUT FIVE YEARS ago, I decided to re-read one of my favourite books of all time, Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. It's a classic and inspiring story of how one man overcame unbelievable challenges by exercising his free will to choose hope, integrity, and resolve. In his case, the setting was a Nazi concentration camp. Frankl learned how to not react, especially to terrible events and people. He also provided us with one of the most powerful quotes I have ever heard:

This quote is so simple, yet so true and valuable. It is relevant to not just survival in the face of cruelty and death, but to all facets of life, and to each and every one of our lives.

Think Before We Act

But what is this “space” that Frankl is talking about? Simply put, it's the opportunity we have to think before we act. It's that moment we rarely seize – to reflect upon what our first inclination might be, and to consider whether that really is the right thing to do or say. Is your initial thought really in keeping with your values? What might be the consequences to what you're about to do? What would be the very best next step? What are all the alternative choices that are currently available to you?

When we ask ourselves these sorts of questions, we're bound to make different – and very often better – choices. These better choices will lead to better words and actions, and these will yield much better results. Thus, we need to learn to step back from, and navigate around, the constant stream of negativity and adversity that we constantly face. Rather than react to each and every assault on our life's growth and freedom, we need to instead respond mindfully to them. The difference between reacting to these, and responding effectively to them, is metacognition.

Metacognition: Think About Thinking

Metacognition is the process of thinking about our thinking, of having a conscious presence-of-mind to monitor and adjust our thinking in real time. Without it, we tend toward knee-jerk reactions and waste our energies fighting that which we could much more easily rise above. But metacognition does not happen automatically. We all have metacognitive abilities; we just don't always use them. Sometimes the urge to react overpowers us

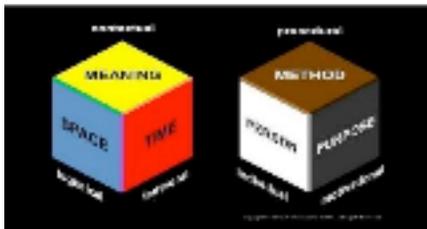
such that metacognition cannot take over and properly guide us in our choices of how to next think, what to say, or how to act. No, metacognition does not happen by itself. It needs something to trigger it in our mind. Metacognition needs a stimulus of its own.

This need gave birth to a logical, visual model that would provide such a stimulus. What was needed was something that could constantly remind us that any given moment might be a good time to exercise our metacognition. But we also need guidance in how and where to consciously think once that metacognition kicks into gear. That stimulus could come from simply seeing the image of this model. It could also come from having someone else remind you of it, perhaps by using it themselves. Either way, once the trigger is pulled, your response can be: To instantly recall what it is, how it's used, and why you should use it (i.e., because you've seen how valuable it can be).

Cubie™ Model

This logical, visual model takes the form of a cube-shaped object called (quite simply) Cubie™. Cubie™ has on each of its six sides distinct “dimensions of inquiry” or pathways along which you can explore new ideas. It literally helps you to “think outside the box” and do so in a variety of ways.

Cubie™ – Front & Rear Views



Each of the six faces of the cube represents a specific dimension: TIME, SPACE, MEANING, PERSON, METHOD, and PURPOSE (see table).

The Six Dimensional Questions

DIMENSION	UNIVERSAL QUESTION	DIMENSION TYPE
TIME	When?	Temporal
SPACE	Where?	Logistical
MEANING	What?	Contextual
PERSON	Who?	Individual
METHOD	How?	Procedural
PURPOSE	Why?	Motivational

Coincidentally, each of these dimensions corresponds to one of what are often called the “six universal questions”: When? Where? What? Who? How? Why?

As you can see, using such a visual model can be extremely powerful, in that it helps you to “cover all the bases” of inquiry. It helps to ensure that you do not forget to ask important questions that will reveal new information and insights, and help you develop answers, alternative choices, and ultimately solutions to problems.

Asking the questions or thinking outside the box within each dimension allows you to generate more ideas, as well as better ideas. Cubie™ provides a “framework” of ways to explore and seek out new insights. It helps you to identify and challenge assumptions that you (or others) might be holding onto, limiting your potential. It also helps you to avoid winding up with blind spots – areas of risk that occur because you never consider them

in the first place. No matter how smart or thorough you are, anyone can wind up with blind-spots from time to time.

Using Cubie™ in this way assumes that you have been previously introduced to it. You need to first learn how to use it and experience first-hand the value it can help create. This is how you are able to instantly recall and begin utilising it once its visual (or other) stimulus triggers your memory. Thus, Cubie™ not only stimulates your metacognition, it also gives you power to find and consider more (and more valuable) alternatives to choose from. Perhaps that better choice is simply to access another tool or model (e.g., various habits of mind). Either way, Cubie™ helps you to both become aware of and make mindful choices from different and better next steps.

So, with great respect to Mr. Frankl, Cubie™ is a stimulus that triggers a valuable type of metacognitive response – one that can actually utilise Cubie™ thereafter to achieve both new growth and freedom. ■

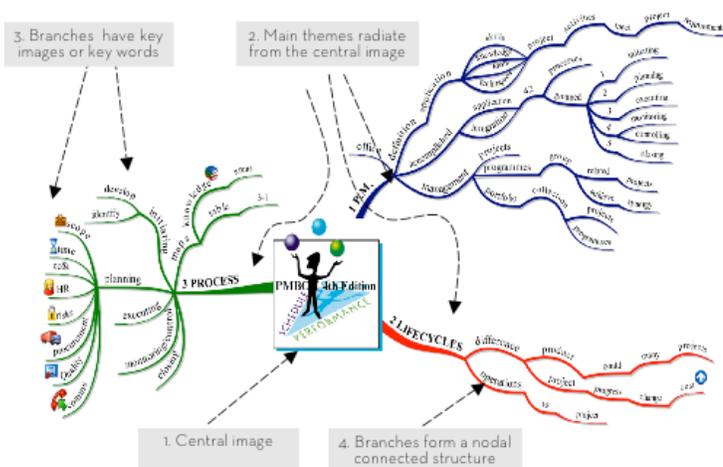
About the Author

Charlie Garland is a New York City-based consultant specialising in business strategy, innovation, creative problem-solving, and leadership development. He has utilised the Cubie™ Model, working with clients, in the form of various strategic tools. More information can be found about both Charlie and Cubie™ at www.TheInnovationCube.com.

Project Mind Maps

Applying mind mapping principles to project management

BY DR. HENRY TOI



INCREASINGLY, MORE companies and governments are turning to project management to deliver new products and transform internal processes. In turn, a mind map is a visual display of a person's thinking and a tool that can be used to improve thinking processes. How does mind mapping affect the way people think when they are working on a project? This question was researched in four small and medium-sized companies in Singapore. Some of the findings are discussed in this article.

Mind maps can be defined by four characteristics: a central image, main themes radiating from that central image, branches comprising one key image or key word, and these branches forming a connected nodal structure. An example with these four characteristics is provided in Figure 1.1. Almost all prior research on mind maps do not adhere closely to these four characteristics of mind maps, thus making this research even

more useful.

The research found that the project mind maps had a positive impact on the project team members. The effect of seeing parts and whole concurrently in one view helped to reduce project complexity. The ability to reduce complexity also resulted in better risk management.

Project teams also reported that using mind maps helped to increase creativity. They experienced improved flow of ideas. Moreover, some added that single words on the mind map triggered creative thoughts about the project, something that did not occur when mind maps were not used.

In terms of project processes, the biggest impact was felt in the planning process, which is a critical process as about half of the 42 sub-processes prescribed by the Project Management Institute's Project Management Body of Knowledge are dedicated to it. Therefore, mind maps impact the most critical aspect of project management – the planning process. Indeed, planning is the weakest aspect of project management for small and medium-sized companies.

In summary, this research studied the practices of selected small and medium-sized companies in their project management. It found that mind maps were a suitable tool for project management in small and medium-sized companies. Thinking processes were improved when mind maps were applied. These benefits were felt with just a few hours of training on the use of mind maps. The productivity gain was significant. ■

For the full research, you may send a request to the researcher at: henrytoi@braincapitalgroup.com

Wrong Jobs for the Right People?

Identifying the right people for the right job

BY SAM ROBERTS

WRONG JOBS FOR the right people or wrong people for the right jobs unquestionably impacts productivity. Imagine all the hours lost by people doing jobs they are not suited for or excited about.

As an employer, your workforce has a direct impact on productivity. Hence, having the right people with right skills at all levels of an organisation is one of the effective ways to improve productivity. Vitality, employee talent is a valuable asset for a company or organisation; it needs to be tapped to its fullest by keeping the employees motivated to perform and deliver the results they are qualified for and capable of.

Some of the points to consider asking yourself:

- Am I attracting and retaining the right people with the skills and attributes I need to achieve my goals? This would also include keeping the right people in any downsizing exercise.
- Are my people specifications effectively describing the skills and personal attributes required to achieve my ambitions?
- Do I have the right job and role definitions in order to make use of them more effectively?

Identifying skill gaps with regular skills audits can help organisations to target skills development programmes important to achieving improvement, such as leadership, change management, organisational development,

strategic commissioning, procurement, customer relations management, business process improvement, people and performance management, customer-focused services, etc. Psychometric Assessments help in identifying the right person with the right skills for the right job.

Key Benefits of Psychometric Testing

Psychometric tests – developed by psychologists and proven by scientific research – provide a powerful way of ensuring the best employees are selected by assessing their ability and preferred behavioural styles. Some key benefits of psychometric testing are mentioned below:

- Typically, they are much more reliable, consistent and free from error than other assessment methods.
- The results obtained from it are not influenced by the administrator's personal preferences, and by providing additional objective information about an employee, more informed selection decisions can be made
- Its administration is standardised and scored according to standard procedures, and the scores on the test are compared to known standards that help in identifying the strengths and developmental needs of a person.
- Statistical research suggests that many aspects of job performance can be predicted from test results and therefore improves the efficiency of identifying the most suitable candidates for specific roles and job definitions.

Get in touch with certified professionals in Occupational Testing to help your organisation improve productivity by identifying the right people that fit the right job. ■

About the Author

Sam Roberts is the Regional Human Resource Manager at IS Department Private Limited, and is a certified practitioner in Occupational Psychological Testing. Visit www.performanceandappraisal.com for more information.

Action Learning

Learning by doing through genuine inquiry and process

BY JAYAN WARRIER

I SAT THROUGH meetings with a packed agenda where the chair of the meeting rushed through them one by one, identifying actions quickly before hurrying out to join the next meeting. Being an analytical thinker, I found myself trying to catch up with the others. Sometimes I was asked to state my opinion before I could even understand the context of the issue at hand. Any response seemed to satisfy the folks as long as we moved on to actions quickly. I felt unsatisfied with my contributions and the time I spent in the room.

Indeed, as we chase deadlines and targets, and as we switch our attention from one topic to another, we depend a lot on our past experiences and jump too quickly to solutions. Do we spend enough time understanding the problem? Do we get others involved by asking their ideas? Do we challenge our assumptions? Do we see the same issue reappearing in our agenda? How involved is our team in the issue? How motivated are they in solving business issues?

Understanding the principles of Action Learning and thinking about how it can be used at our workplace might be helpful in this context, and may be a better way of working with teams.

What is Action Learning?

It is a tool or a process built on the principle of “learning by doing”, using questions as a medium for communication and reflection. As a problem is shared, the team members ask questions to one another to clarify the “real” problem and reach a common understanding across the members, before they jump into the strategy and solutions phase. An Action Learning coach facilitates the process and makes sure each team

member learns along the way and also develops certain leadership skills. In a nutshell, Action Learning is a multi-faceted tool that helps a team to be the best they can be, individually and collectively in solving complex organisational problems, through learning and doing. Incidentally, Action Review, Action Reflection Learning, Business-Driven Action Learning, Activity Debrief, etc., are some of the well-known processes that use questions for learning.

There are many schools of Action Learning practitioners around the world. World Institute for Action Learning has developed a methodology under the leadership of Dr. Michael Marquardt, which consists of a process with two ground rules and six components, with sessions led by an Action Learning coach. A group of four to eight people coming from diverse backgrounds and perspectives inquire about the problem at hand, develop solution strategies jointly and, at the same time, develop essential leadership skills. The process enables empowered teams – asking questions of each other to learn about the problem they need to solve while learning about the business, the team members and the team dynamics. The Action Learning coach asks the team questions so that the team reflects on the group interactions and learn from them in a safe and neutral environment, thus developing leaders in real time as they work on the problem at hand. The coach and the members give feedback to each other on how they contribute to the team. A number of theories like systems thinking, appreciative inquiry and learning styles are embedded in the process. Each session ends with an identified set of committed actions to be carried out by the team before the next session, which makes it result-oriented.

Why Action Learning Works?

Dr. Michael Marquardt, in his classic, *Optimizing the Power of Action Learning*, comments that the rapidly changing environment and unpredictable global challenges require organisations and individuals to both act and learn at the same time. Learning cannot be accomplished effectively in a classroom environment in isolation, it has to be interleaved with real-time work involving real issues and people responsible for finding sustainable solutions to solve them. Leaders and their team members are able to find little time and patience to sit in classrooms with lectures, case studies and simulations when there are pending issues to be handled urgently. If the issue at hand is not real, they would rather focus on a real issue that calls for their attention.

World Institute for Action Learning mandates that the problem identified should be real and urgent. It should be an issue that calls for urgent attention, strategically important to the business, and the solution should positively impact the business. The people who care about finding a solution should participate in the Action Learning sessions. They should be selected since they are committed to spending time to solving the problem and they bring diversity in their perspectives. In addition, they also understand the process of Action Learning and how it helps them develop their leadership skills while contributing positively to others' development. They are there because they want to grow themselves and they care about the business.

Action Learning methodology involves asking questions of each other rather than enforcing opinions and debating about solutions. The process facilitates the team members spending enough time inquiring about the issue at hand, rather than jumping to action items and target dates. The powerful questions asked create opportunities for the team to travel through uncharted waters, challenge assumptions and set aside their ranks in the spirit of collective inquiry.

The Action Learning coach plays the role of an empowering 21st century leader who believes in the team and their ability to identify strategies to address the issue. She takes on the role of a neutral authority who asks questions that cause the team to reflect on their behaviour and progress, and create a safe environment of trust and openness, where issues that matter can be brought up. The interventions of the coach create noticeable behavioural changes in the team, which is an indication of the application of their learning. The coach also provides specific feedback to the members on how they have contributed to the team by asking questions focused on their chosen leadership focus areas.

In summary, Action Learning leverages the collective wisdom of a committed group through inquiry-based

dialogue centred on a burning issue, and creates team learning facilitated by a coach. This creates an ideal environment for elevating performance in teams and developing leaders for the future.

So what is so unique?

A meeting becomes engaged when Action Learning is used as a process. The team members think through and ask relevant questions, challenge assumptions and support one another by responding to their questions. They also practise certain skills they have identified as their areas of development (an example is strategic thinking or creativity) and receive coach feedback. They learn about the business, the team, and themselves. The safe open learning environment created by the coach resembles a perfect learning environment, where performance matches learning.

Application of Action Learning

Action Learning creates change in individuals, groups and organisations that can be readily observed. Stakeholders interested in change should consider Action Learning as a potential tool for aligning an organisation to the dynamic environment. In the book *Action Learning for Developing Leaders and Organizations*, the authors Marquardt, Leonard, Freedman and Hill describe how Action Learning develops the leadership and organisational capacity to change through single, double and triple loop learning, which they identify as “enduring and enhanced capacity” for change.

Human resource teams (including HRD, OD and OE, etc.) tasked with the responsibility to create high performing teams, and develop and retain talent, can consider Action Learning as an alternative tool. Action Learning sessions help the team pause, reflect and challenge assumptions – thus creating space for innovation, collaboration and change in organisational culture. In a way, Action Learning sessions create an opportunity for the teams to slow down and re-evaluate before leaping forward.

Organisations like Microsoft and Hewlett Packard use Action Learning for developing their top talent or HiPos. Others use it for staff development, to develop next-level leadership, and as tools for problem solving.

Schools use Action Learning as a means of developing an inquiring mindset in teachers, thus creating a culture of curiosity, enabling everyone to seek understanding before offering solutions.

Inquiry in Action

Action Learning can be deployed in multiple ways in an organisation. One of the immediate steps you can take is to ask more questions from now on. Questions that demonstrate genuine curiosity will uncover a lot of hidden information that will lead to better understanding and clear solutions. Questions also help us build relationships and explore possibilities. ■

About the Author

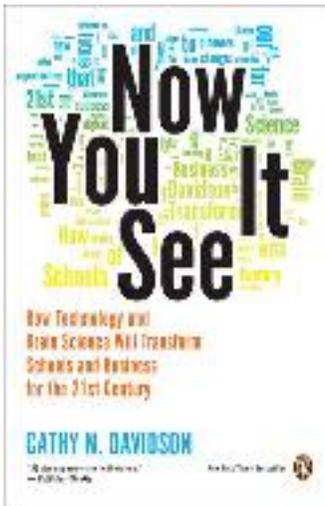
Jayan Warriar is the Director of World Institute for Action Learning (WIAL) Singapore. He has worked for more than 22 years in various corporations in Asia, both regional and multinational environments across industry segments. He has also worked as an adjunct faculty member in academic environments in Singapore.

Now You See It

How the Brain Science of attention will transform the way we live, work and learn

AUTHOR CATHY N. DAVIDSON

VIKING PRESS 2011



UNLIKE MANY neuroscientists who are proposing that technology, which has brought about information and opportunities that distract us from our focus, Cathy Davidson posits that the brain's need for focus (which she calls attention blindness) might be a real opportunity for expanding knowledge, creativity and innovation through collaboration. Her book leads us through a most positive perspective on the need for thinking interdependently. Since each of us focuses our attention on different aspects of a given situation, problem, issue, or invention, we each can bring what we have learned to the attention of others. Although no one of us can see it all, the collaborative engagement of sharing what we see brings us a richer picture of the whole.

She talks about the new literacy skills that are necessary in this constantly evolving and changing world – learning, unlearning, and relearning. We are all too familiar with unlearning – it is when the world has changed so dramatically that what we used to do no longer works. Relearning requires a change in old habits, which means being willing to “see again” (the true meaning of revision). She suggests that you must first see your present patterns, then recognise new patterns and finally, be willing to break through the old patterns, and do some relearning.

Here are the core questions this book engages us with:

- How can what we know about attention help us change how we teach and learn?
- How can the science of attention alter our ideas about how we test and what we measure?
- How can we work better with others with different skills and expertise in order to see what we're missing in a complicated and interdependent world?
- How does attention change as we age, and how can understanding the science of attention actually help us along the way?

Davidson tries to answer these questions with many practical examples that can easily serve as models for thinking in new ways. She starts with a business perspective in which she shows how corporations and small businesses are operating in this digital age. The power of these examples is that they show clearly how important it is to:

- Learn how to listen to a very diverse set of perspectives
- To be open-minded and willing to think flexibly about what is possible
- To realise the value of each person's strengths and ways of knowing

In fact, her illustrations show the significance of developing a culture in which the Habits of Mind (see 16 Habits) are essential to work, learning, and life in the digital age.

After she explores the business culture, she moves to the educational culture. Her examples here show how we must see each student as an intellectual force, each showing his or her strengths in different ways. The

curriculum, instructions, and assessments in her examples demonstrate clearly how we must relearn in education if we are to develop the workers, inventors, creative problem solvers for now and the future.

Finally, she makes the point that we are networked citizens of the world and we must meet the challenges and opportunities by being willing to shift our attention, thereby shifting how we work, learn, and value one another.

