MHA Institute

Solving real problems in real time

*2011 Award for Excellence in Program Innovation
and Design for Lifelong Learning*

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1. Why Choose MHA?

We're a leading-edge research and development company that focuses on building your organization's capacity to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. We work with you to produce measurable results, so that you can learn at the speed of change. We research, field-test, and evaluate a variety of thinking and learning processes to identify which ones produce high performance. To do this, we focus on enhancing learnable intelligence in individuals, teams, and organizations. Because we're connected internationally to leading researchers in the field of thinking and learning, we have access to a wealth of knowledge and experience, including our own experience with a wide variety of private- and public-sector organizations.

"Living, learning companies stand a better chance of surviving and evolving in a world they do not control. They make sense, especially because now success depends on mobilizing as much of the intelligence at a company's disposal as possible." Arie de Geus, The Living Company, 1997 "Living, learning companies stand a better chance of surviving and evolving in a world they do not control. They make sense, especially because now success depends on mobilizing as much of the intelligence at a company's disposal as possible."

> — Arie de Geus, **The Living Company**, 1997

Why Customers Select Us

Customers select us to meet their needs because we deliver on our promises and we work in partnership with them. We're not afraid to experiment with new ways of dealing with problems, issues, and opportunities. That's because MHA consultants are expert learners always aware that there are no simple answers and that sometimes surprises happen. We're very comfortable dealing with surprises in ways that meet your needs, because we're comfortable with learning at the speed of change.

How We Can Help You

We don't have any magic solutions to your problems — what we do have are thinking and learning processes that help you to find the solutions that work for you in your specific situation. We believe that the only solutions that will work for you are the ones that you discover for yourself. When you discover your own solutions, you'll commit to implementing them in the workplace. What we do is help you to discover those solutions, and to develop plans to implement those solutions that are best for your organization and people. Are you wondering if we can help you? See the **Your Needs Inventory** selection from the homepage right-hand side menu to find out.

We Produce Measurable Results

We deliver on our promises because we work with you to meet your needs, and to produce outstanding results that are measureable. We're able to produce these results because we:

- Meet you where you're at, and build on this to help you to meet your needs
- Design learning and thinking processes that fit your needs, situation, and culture
- Expand your capacity for organizational, team, and individual thinking and learning
- Enable you to learn at the speed of change
- Evaluate the effect of the processes in producing measurable results

2. How We Work With You?

When you work with us, you get your needs met in a way that can be measured — and something more. You get a surprise that no one can anticipate. For example, many of the participants in our programs tell us that they experience increased effectiveness on a personal level in all aspects of their lives. One participant, who was laid off after taking our program, told us that he was far more resilient to change than he ever thought he would be. He takes one day at a time, and is able to manage the complex feelings that accompany uncertainty. The reason these surprises happen is because we design programs that tap into innovation, invention, creativity, and experimentation (the crucial elements of resilient behaviour.)

"This is the dream — that we can design and create organizations that are capable of adapting, changing, developing and transforming themselves in response to the needs, wishes and aspirations of people, inside and outside."

— Mike Pedler, John Burgoyne & Tom Boydell,
The Learning Company: A Strategy for Sustainable Development, 1991

Because we walk our talk, we practice the same models and tools that we share with our customers. As consultants, we use the Learning Cycle (See **Infomine** Vol. 5, No. 3 and Vol. 5, No. 4) to guide our work with you. The model below shows you how this cycle works.

Developing an enduring community of practice

1. We meet with you and others involved for a consultation to determine your needs. At this time, we also determine your investment level.

2. Based on this meeting, we recommend a number of options that you may wish to consider in meeting your needs.

3. We work with you to select the most appropriate option that leverages the existing skills and opportunities.

4. We help you to implement the selected option, and suggest modifications throughout the implementation.

5. We work with you to measure results continuously.

6. During this process, we work with you to develop an enduring community of practice by transferring ownership of these thinking and learning processes to your organization.

7. Then, your organization continues to develop and implement its own learning cycles.

"... human beings are designing beings. They create, store, and retrieve designs that advise them how to act if they are to achieve their intentions and act consistently with their governing values. These designs, or theories of action, are the key to understanding human action."

— Chris Argyris, **Knowledge for Action: A Guide to Overcoming Barriers to Organizational Change**, 1993

3. Research That Informs Our Work

We're a research and development company. We mine knowledge and information from a variety of disciplines, including science, social science, humanities, and fine arts. What makes us unique in the field of thinking and learning is that we take what we learn from the research, and synthesize it into new knowledge about how individuals, teams, and organizations learn. Then, we find ways to put it into practice to meet your needs. In other words, when we work with you, we're doing research. We're always learning why something works and why something else doesn't. And what we learn from working with you is added to our body of research and shared with others. We mine every experience for its learning potential.

You can think of the following list as our pay dirt. These are the golden nuggets of knowledge that we have mined and brought to the surface in the last twenty years. This research informs our work with our customers. In some way, all of these theories find their way into what we design with you, and how we work with you.

- Accelerated Learning
- Action Learning
- Action Research
- Action Science
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Brain Research, Cognitive Psychology, Evolutionary Psychology
- Change
- Complexity and Chaos Theories
- Disposition and Resistance to Change
- Individual Learning
- Learnable Intelligence
- Organizational Learning
- Systems Thinking
- Team Learning
- Thinking Strategies
- Transformative Learning
- Whole Brain Thinking

4. Underlying Research and Theory

Accelerated Learning

This is a set of strategies that accelerate the learning process. There are a number of these strategies, from how a facilitator conducts a session to how people within organizations can use these strategies to accelerate their learning in day-to-day work. For example, a facilitator who schedules breaks every hour increases the participants' ability to retain information. To translate this strategy to work, a team can schedule similar breaks during its meetings.

Action Learning

Action learning was developed by Reg Revans as a way to educate managers to deal effectively with organizational change. He believes that organizations and individuals cannot flourish unless their rate of learning is equal to, or greater than, the rate of change that they are experiencing. According to Revans (1996), we are currently experiencing a rate of change that is outstripping our ability to learn. Action learning differs from the traditional learning approach in the way in which it is practiced:

Action Research

Everyone who solves problems in an organization is doing action research. That's because action research is the process of gathering information about real work situations. However, there are more effective and less effective ways to do action research. The term action research refers to a more effective way of approaching problem solving — a cyclical process.

Action Science

Action science is the study of interpersonal action. Peter Senge has devoted a learning discipline to action science, which he calls **mental models**. A mental model is a frame through which you see the world. When information fits your frame, you make meaning and act on that meaning. When information doesn't fit your frame, you're likely to ignore that information and operate as if the information didn't exist. Action science helps people to understand how their actions affect others in the organizations. It's also the science of understanding why people are afraid to tell the truth to their superiors, and why people struggle to learn from mistakes.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry is based on the work of Suresh Srivastva and David Cooperrider, co-authors of **Appreciative Management and Leadership**. **Problem solving** in the traditional view focuses on detecting errors, causes, and faults, in order to create an action plan that will **fix** the problem. On the other hand, appreciative inquiry focuses on creating a vision of **what could be** by appreciating the leverage points that originate in the system and culture of the organization. Appreciative inquiry taps into people's aspirations, rather than their fears, because it focuses on what people can do and are inspired to do. This creates organizations that harness the potential resident in their people and teams, simply because these organizations focus on creating an environment that taps into the power of potential and possibilities.

Brain Research, Cognitive Psychology, Evolutionary Psychology

Brain research is the fastest growing field of research in science and learning. This field is also one of the broadest, encompassing areas such as cognitive psychology, neuroscience, psychology, and evolutionary psychology. This field is attempting to explain what causes humans to think and act in certain ways. The implications for learning are enormous. MHA Institute specializes in researching this area in depth. The major debate in this field is between nature and nurture. There are many

theories about which reigns: environment or genes. Most of the research points to a complex relationship between the two, which tells us that that we have to study both the genetic predispositions and the environment that either suppresses or expresses the genes.

Change

When something changes, it changes forever. There is no going back. This is true change. However, there are different ways to change. You can change a point of view, or you can change an entire way of thinking about something and end up changing your behaviour. For example, in a short course on how the brain works, we've seen people change their thinking about how they make decisions, but not change their behaviour. This is called a **surface** or **awareness** type of change. This type of change usually doesn't translate into a change in behaviour. The person still behaves the same way. A deeper form of change requires that both the thinking and the behaviour change forever. A person who knows how his or her brain affects decisions now makes decisions based on this new information. This person makes different decisions that produce different results. This person has changed his or her behaviour.

Complexity and Chaos Theories

What is chaos? Chaos is something that has always been with us. However, it wasn't until recently that scientists discovered chaos and formulated the new **Theory of Chaos**. Chaos can be defined in two ways.

- Chaos represents the changes over which we have no control.
- Chaos represents the confusion or disorder that occurs in events so that they appear erratic and unpredictable.

What is complexity? Complexity is defined as the edge of order and chaos. If you draw a line down the middle of a blank page, you can write the word order on one half of the page and chaos on the other. The line represents the edge or what is defined as complexity. It is on this edge that life on this planet exists, because everything that is alive is defined as a complex adaptive system.

Disposition and Resistance to Change

According to David Perkins, the most important part of reflective intelligence is disposition, because everything we think and do is shaped by our disposition towards what we do. Perkins draws on Professor Richard Paul's concept of **strong-sense** and **weak-sense** critical thinking to explain how dispositions work, arguing that "If you are a strong-sense critical thinker, you show a genuine commitment to broad-mindedness and thinking across multiple frames of reference. A weak-sense critical thinker displays high technical skill with the mechanics of reasoning, but lacks the commitment." A lack of commitment to think deeply about complex situations is a sign of a low disposition to thinking and learning. When faced with a complex problem, a weak-sense critical thinker will work on a problem only if it is easy to solve. If the problem is not easy to solve, the weak-sense critical thinker will make it

easy by looking at the problem in a superficial way, and not bothering to inquire into his or her thinking, thus being a nonexpert learner. The strong-sense critical thinker will see an easy solution as a possible problem, and will be committed to exploring what underlies his or her thinking.

Individual Learning

According to Peter Senge, knowledge is the capacity for effective action. This knowledge is generated by people who practice personal mastery. People who practice personal mastery continuously enhance their own capacity, as with as the capacity of the organization, for effective action. Personal mastery belongs to each individual. Only you can develop your own personal mastery. However, you can help others to develop personal mastery by providing an environment that encourages and supports people to learn, experiment, fail, grow, and develop. Personal mastery requires you to:

- Become committed to continuous learning and development
- Become committed to helping others to develop personal mastery
- Understand how people learn
- Develop your abilities to continuously learn and develop

Learnable Intelligence

There is a great debate raging in the cognitive psychology community about three distinct types of intelligence: **neural intelligence**, **experiential intelligence**, and **reflective intelligence**. You are born with **neural intelligence** (measured by IQ), and it never changes. You gain **experiential intelligence** through experience in a specific area, such as playing chess. You gain **reflective intelligence** by being aware of your thinking patterns and the way you can change these patterns. According to David Perkins, **learnable intelligence** is the combination of both experiential and reflective intelligence. Perkins, a senior research associate at Harvard, believes that "people can learn to think and act much more intelligently." It is reflective intelligence that provides individuals with immense opportunities to increase their effectiveness by using specific strategies. When we tap into reflective intelligence, we are able to increase our capacity for solving complex problems, making informed decisions, and generating new knowledge about the complicated world in which we live.

Organizational Learning

Organizational learning is probably the most elusive concept in the field of learning. There is a great deal of uncertainty about whether or not organizations can learn. John Burgoyne, a leading researcher in organizational learning, believes that organizations can learn. The question becomes how to help organizations to learn. This requires a fundamental change in the structure of organizations, from one of rigid boundaries to one of boundaries that are permeable to information and knowledge transfer. In other words, for organizations to learn, individual and team learning must be shared across the organization, and this sharing must be an acceptable cultural norm within the organization.

Systems Thinking

The concept of systems thinking requires us to change from thinking in mechanistic ways to thinking in systemic ways about organizations and learning. To Peter Senge, systems thinking is not just the fifth discipline, **it is the most important discipline**. Each of his books is titled **The Fifth Discipline**, and in each of these books, Senge talks first about systems thinking. You need to be able to think **systemically** in order to appreciate the interrelatedness of the other four disciplines.

Team Learning

Team learning is the most effective approach to increasing productivity and to producing measurable results. The reason is that, when teams learn, they produce collective intelligence. Collective intelligence is greater than the sum of the individual intelligences. As a result, teams that learn produce remarkable results. Teams that learn create cultures that respect individuals and team perspectives. They create shared understanding, joint decision-making, and coordinated action. Individual team members understand how they contribute to a greater whole, thus creating alignment to the team vision and, ultimately, the organization's vision.

Thinking Strategies

You think and then you act, and what you think becomes your action. That's why **the practice of thinking** is a critical practice to develop. It's a practice because that's what thinking requires — practice, practice, and more practice. It's more than learning a particular way to think. You need to know when to use a specific thinking strategy and what to do if it doesn't work. These strategies include critical reflection, creative thinking, systems thinking, strategic thinking, and action thinking.

Transformative Learning

Jack Mezirow is the leader in the field of transformative learning. At a recent talk, he described transformative learning. The defining characteristic of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. If we can't understand it, we'll resort to psychological projections and denials to make meaning of the experience we're having. Transformative learning happens when we can no longer rely on our projections or denials, when we're bombarded by information that does not fit the perspective that we have of ourselves, of others, and/or of the world in which we operate. When this happens, we have three options:

1. We can turn to what tradition, or an authority, says is true.
2. We can use force to make our perspective true.
3. We can participate in discourse, a specialized conversation in which we examine the operating assumptions to determine whether or not they are valid, and we assess the reasons for our beliefs.

If organizations are serious about building cultures in which people are resilient to change, they must select option 3. To do this means slowing down and integrating critical reflection into day-to-day work. The paradox is that if you slow down, you

actually speed up. This is a hard paradox for many people to grasp, because most people are under the illusion that if they speed up, they'll get more done, when, in fact, the opposite is true. The faster you go, the less you accomplish, and the less efficient and effective you are. This concept requires transformative learning to occur in order for people in organizations to change.

Whole Brain Thinking

For more than 20 years, Ned Herrmann has studied the human brain and how it functions. Herrmann took the concept of left-brain and right-brain and married it to his discovery that both the neo-cortex (the conceptual part of the brain) and the limbic system (the experiential part of the brain) have the capacity for thinking. As a result, he came up with a four-quadrant model. Through his research, he has discovered that we have the capacity to process information in four very distinct ways. One way of describing these four ways is to imagine that you have four different selves at your disposal:

- **Quadrant A: The Rational Self** is driven to analyze and solve problems by processing facts, figures, technical information, and financial information.
- **Quadrant B: The Safekeeping Self** is driven to take preventative action by organizing information, by paying attention to controls, and procedures, and to getting things done.
- **Quadrant C: The Feeling Self** is driven to recognize the interpersonal needs of the individuals involved in the situation by anticipating how others may feel, and by fostering enthusiasm.
- **Quadrant D: The Experimental Self** is driven to seek for possibilities by speculating and inferring what might occur.