Tapping Into the Power of Learning Part 1: Increasing Intelligence
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"Good thinking and good learning are as closely tied as the hydrogen and oxygen in a molecule of water, and they make up the drink that [individuals, teams, and organizations] need."
— David Perkins, **Outsmarting IQ: The Emerging Science of Learnable Intelligence** (1995)

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 that you can change these patterns. David Perkins, a senior research associate at Harvard, believes that "people can learn to think and act much more intelligently." Perkins calls this *learnable intelligence*, which is the use of reflective intelligence in combination with experiential intelligence.

According to Perkins, reflective intelligence 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. However, too often, we are not aware of our ability to tap into this resource. As a result, we often make hasty decisions that come back to haunt us, we take actions without considering the impact of

those actions over time, and we jump to conclusions by neglecting important evidence that contradicts our judgement. (See **InfoMine** series on *Building Learning Organizations*, Vol. 2, No. 11 and Vol. 3, Nos. 1-4).

In his book, **Outsmarting IQ**, Perkins builds a case for learnable intelligence by critically examining the debate over intelligence. Most intriguing is his assertion that, contrary to popular belief about intelligence, all human beings, including those who are mentally challenged, can increase their capacity for intelligence. Perkins cites studies in which mentally challenged individuals were taught to use specific strategies in order to increase the incidence of intelligent behaviour. The findings were impressive: the mentally challenged individuals not only learned the strategies, but also sustained their learning over time. In other words, they increased their capacity for intelligence.

Perkins discusses the two types of strategies that must function together in order to increase an individual's capacity for behaving intelligently: content strategies and self-monitoring strategies. *Training* is a good example of these two strategies working together. In typical training situations, participants are taught a variety of content and self-monitoring strategies. For example, in a training session on time management, participants are taught a series of strategies to set priorities (content strategies), and how to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies (self-monitoring strategies). As well, participants are usually given a variety of situations in order to practice their use of the strategies.

At first glance, it seems that training uses both strategies, and is therefore effective in tapping into reflective intelligence. However, experience shows us that most training is effective at a superficial level, but it is ineffective at a *transformative* level. Most people do not transfer what they have learned in training into the workplace. Generally, when people get back to the workplace, they do not practice the strategies that were taught in the training session. (See **InfoMine** series on *Building Learning Organizations*, Vol. 2, No. 11 and Vol. 3, Nos. 1-4).

To understand this apparent contradiction, we must examine training more closely. Participants generally walk away from training sessions believing that they have learned something, when, in fact, they have not even begun to tap into their reflective intelligence. The training session does teach the two strategies: content strategies and

self-monitoring strategies. However, in order for learning to occur and intelligence to be enhanced, **people must use both types of strategies in the real world in which they operate, over a period of time**. Training is most often ineffective because it cannot provide a crucial piece of the learning equation: the use of both content and self-monitoring strategies, in the real world, over a period of time.

To examine further the advantages of tapping into reflective intelligence, this **InfoMine** series, *Tapping Into the Power of Learning*, will explore practical applications of reflective intelligence. Each newsletter will feature an activity that increases the capacity for intelligence, such as learning styles, action learning, learning labs, learning meetings, learning teams, and Type 2 Learning. Here is one activity that demonstrates a practical application of reflective intelligence.

A Post-Course Assignment
In all of the courses that I deliver at the University of Alberta, I teach the students a variety of content and self-monitoring strategies. Since these are credit courses, students are required to complete an assignment for each course. In my assignments, I ask students to apply the content strategies that they have learned in the course to their workplace situations, and to analyze their experience in using the self-monitoring strategies in their workplace.

Many of the students tell me that this written assignment is extremely valuable. Some students describe what seems to be a transformational learning experience. They find that the assignment gives them an opportunity to reflect on what they

explored in the classroom. While completing the assignment, they share their learning process with colleagues and classmates. They describe feelings of being connected to, and able to share experiences with, others. As well, they describe elements that are found in informal learning. Often, their assignments reflect insights that came only after they were able to apply the course content to their specific situations.

What most surprises me is the permanence of this form of learning. Over the years, I have had opportunities to meet many of these former students. Most of these students talk about the insights that they have gained as a result of the courses and assignments. This leads me to believe that, for some people, a post-course assignment can be a powerful vehicle for opening the door to reflective intelligence. One note of caution: assignments can merely open the door; the development of reflective intelligence requires far more application and discipline than writing one assignment.

"Human beings, manifestly the most intelligent life form on the planet, can become even more so. ... Not individually, but in our collectivity we can perhaps learn to think and act more intelligently."
— David Perkins, **Outsmarting IQ: The Emerging Science of Learnable Intelligence** (1995)