



Check it out!
www.mhainstitute.ca

Tapping Into the Power of Learning Part 3: Leveraging Human Potential

by Marilyn Herasymowych, MCE

“Expert learners recognize that it’s hard to tell what’s important as you start to study an area. They err on the side of assuming things are important, while nonexpert learners make subjective judgements of importance and ignore items that do not stand out. For another contrast, expert learners recognize that their initial understanding is likely to be simplistic and watch out for complications. Nonexpert learners quickly construct simplistic interpretations and retain them even when problems come up.”

— David Perkins, **Outsmarting IQ: The Emerging Science of Learnable Intelligence** (1995)

In Part 1 of this series (**InfoMine**, Vol. 3, No. 4), I discussed Perkins’

perspective on 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.

Perkins believes that people can *learn* to think and act much more intelligently. According to Perkins, *learnable intelligence* is the use of reflective intelligence in combination with experiential intelligence. Expert learners continuously develop learnable intelligence, while nonexpert learners give up when *the going gets tough*. Perkins has tied this concept of expert learners to a disposition

towards thinking that leads expert learners to see difficulties and problems as challenges to be overcome, rather than as insurmountable barriers. This does not in any way imply that individuals who do not have a natural disposition towards thinking have less ability to think and learn. On the contrary, **all** people experience difficulty with problems, yet **all** people are capable of solving problems. However, some people practice a way of thinking and learning that naturally moves them to discover ways to create the future that they want.

Perkins clearly states that thinking disposition has nothing to do with how intelligent people are; it has much more to do with a personal attitude towards thinking and learning, and a personal willingness to meet the challenge that thinking and learning present. According to Perkins, people who have a disposition towards

thinking would see a difficulty as a challenge to be met and mastered, whereas people who do not have a disposition towards thinking would see a difficulty as a barrier that would take too much time and effort to overcome.

Perkins' research has shown that people develop experiential intelligence throughout their lives. However, it is *reflective intelligence* that provides individuals with immense opportunities to increase their effectiveness by using specific thinking patterns, such as critical and creative thinking. When people tap into reflective intelligence, they are able to increase their capacity for solving complex problems, making informed decisions, generating new knowledge about a complex world, and creating their futures. However, too often, people are not aware of their ability to tap into this resource. As a result, they often make hasty decisions, take actions without considering the impact and consequences of those actions over time, jump to conclusions by neglecting important evidence that contradicts their judgement, and may actually create and/or worsen the problem through their current thinking patterns.

Even when people become aware of the flaws in their decision making abilities, they still find it **too difficult** to develop new thinking patterns that use reflective intelligence. This is because developing reflective intelligence requires discipline, commitment, and effort. Too often, I hear managers tell me that this is a great process and that it works, but that they don't have the time to commit to the discipline required. What I *hear* when managers say this is that

they choose *not* to have time to increase their intelligence, to make more informed decisions, and to learn from implementing their decisions. I strongly believe that managers **must** develop reflective intelligence, and that they can no longer **not** take the time needed to develop more effective patterns of thinking. Any manager who says that he or she has no time is in great need of developing reflective intelligence.

According to Perkins, in order to be effective, managers need dispositions to thinking that use reflective intelligence: clear, broad, deep, sound, curious, strategic, and aware. In much of the literature on management, it is clear that managers do not readily develop reflective intelligence through their experience on the job. The reason for this is that managers are rewarded for *what they do*, rather than for *how they think* about what they do. Therefore, it is crucial to help managers learn to develop reflective intelligence, so that they can make informed decisions and take informed actions, especially in times of crisis and change. The question is: Can managers be taught to go past their perceived limitations, and, in the process, become willing to commit to taking the time, and making the effort, to learn new thinking patterns and ways of doing things? Several researchers — Perkins, Argyris, Cooperrider, Barrett — believe that this can happen (**InfoMine**, Vol. 2, No. 11). These researchers have developed, tested, and evaluated specific strategies that enhance people's commitment to developing the thinking patterns that lead to a greater capacity for reflective intelligence. These strategies include action learning, appreciative inquiry, and the left-hand column. These strategies, among others, increase an

individual's capacity for reflective intelligence in a relatively short period of time, by leveraging human potential.

In the last three newsletters, I have examined *action learning*, which requires a group environment. In the next few newsletters, I will examine *appreciative inquiry* and the *left-hand column* strategies, both of which can be done either individually or in groups of two. All of these strategies can be used to explore problems, issues, concerns, and/or opportunities in any part of your work and personal life. Most importantly, all of these strategies are grounded in theory that has been researched extensively. Each strategy encourages people to bring their own complex problems to the table, to gain an in-depth understanding of their problems, to view their problems in a different light, and to discover ways to go beyond their problems, in order to create alternative futures.

“By the measure of the reflective theory, people can learn to think and act much more intelligently. Pilots are made and not born, at least to a considerable extent. Mindware [reflective intelligence] can be acquired.”

— David Perkins, **Outsmarting IQ: The Science of Learnable Intelligence** (1995)

MHA Institute Inc.
Unit 248, Suite 205
259 Midpark Way SE
Calgary, Alberta T2X 1M2 Canada

Phone: (403) 257-4597
Fax: (403) 257-4649
E-mail: info@mhainstitute.ca
Web: www.mhainstitute.ca