

Teaching an Anthill to Fetch

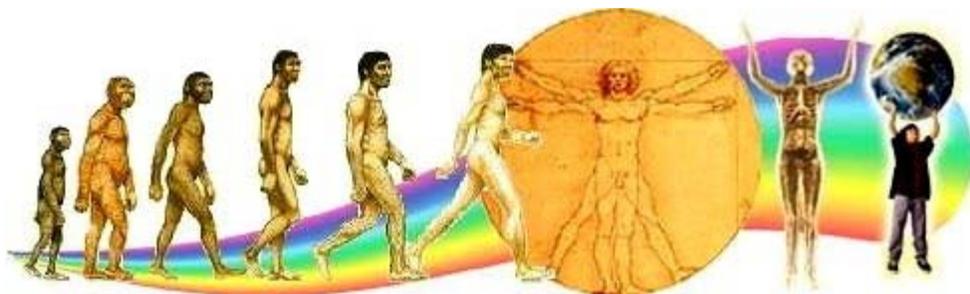
*Developing Collaborative
Intelligence @ Work*

STEPHEN JAMES JOYCE

Mighty
 **Small
Books**

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Why Do Personal Development?

Part of the nature of humans is to be constantly developing, growing and moving toward a balanced and mature way of being. Our present personality is determined by both who and what we have been and by the person we strive to become. The goal of personal development is to learn and apply that which enables us to attain emotional wellbeing, understanding and effectiveness, and to share this knowledge with others.

Personal development is the conscious evolution of human nature, and yet throughout history it has been sorely lacking! Although it is in our nature to learn and grow, we are held back by our culture, which is predominantly focused on survival needs, each of us in competition with others, and our spiritual inner nature is repressed. The animal rules. We make no room for unconditional love.

Even though the culture may have evolved with technological advancement and administrative complexity, human nature has not moved forward as it might. We are now paying the price for human selfishness and inconsideration. Going forward, the quality of our lives on this planet - even our survival - now depends on each of us taking responsibility for our personal growth.

The human being needs to awaken to the soul that inhabits each body and is our true self and source of inner knowing. Awaken through a process of self-discovery, leading to one's own, self-directed spirituality. We need to become mindfully conscious instead of ruled by the dictates of instincts, past habits and fixed beliefs. We need to throw away dogma, open our minds and reconsider. Instead of fear about our survival and competitive angst, we will then be motivated by compassionate understanding and creative love.

For those that do move forward, the next epoch - that is almost upon us as we move into 2012 - will be a celebration of human cooperation and shared love. It's our best hope for the future - and it's in our hands.

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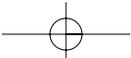
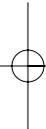
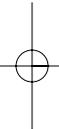
A Word or Two About this Book

Teaching an Anthill to Fetch: Developing Collaborative Intelligence @ Work has been designed to be a practical tool for developing CQ in the workplace. Toward that end, we have provided a number of navigational tools.



There are a number of places throughout the book where we provide a “Go Deeper” feature. These are opportunities to explore the ideas covered in more depth through the Web site *www.anthillsite.com*. Here you will find web links connected to various topics.

CQ Tool[®] Exercises, called “CQ Tools”, are placed at the end of each chapter. These are designed to develop deeper collaborative intelligence and will challenge and motivate you and your team.



An Introduction of Sorts

Ants, and all other insects that live in colonies, appear to be hard-wired to serve. By doing so, they ensure their survival. An anthill can survive and feed itself in some of the most hostile environments. No single ant knows how it all works — nor does it need to. Individually, ants are not that smart, but together they are very intelligent. The ant serves the anthill, which in turn serves the ant. The community the ants create and work to support is well equipped to cope with the challenge of change. In other words, the ant and the colony it belongs to is a good example of high level collaborative intelligence (CQ).

Collaborative Intelligence (CQ) is defined as the capacity to harness the intelligence in networks of relationships.

Jim Donehey was the CEO of Capital One, the credit card company, when he coined the phrase, “You can’t teach an anthill to fetch.” He was referring to the task of helping his organization of 1800 people adapt and respond to a very competitive and rapidly changing marketplace. The challenge facing Doheney was how to focus the attention of the entire organization around vital business objectives.

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Whether we are working inside a small team in a non-profit organization or in a large, multinational conglomerate, dealing with change is the ongoing challenge. Change forces us to adapt. Our adaptability defines how successful we are in dealing with change and how resilient we are.

Resilience is our ability to bounce back and recover from adverse conditions. It is the innate ability to respond resourcefully to challenges in our environment. Ray Kurzweil, author of *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, has calculated that the next century will be accompanied by 20,000 years of technological progress compared to today's rate of change. Therefore, our ability to adapt and respond to change is going to play a crucial role in the success of our species.

As the pressure to deal with change increases upon individuals, teams, and organizations, resilience will become more central to business. Tapping into individuals' and teams' natural resilience will become an essential element of business survival and success. As teams become increasingly virtual, productivity increases will be required; leadership skills will be demanded from more and more of the team's membership. Our capacity for resilience will be tested on a daily basis. However, when groups of people adapt and respond collectively incredible things happen. This is where collaborative intelligence becomes vital.

Nature is a vigorously adaptive system. The evolution of life is the history of adaptation. Ants have adapted to the challenge of building supportive colonies by applying some very simple rules. The argument of this book is that, for humans there are some simple "rules" that can enable us to work much more effectively together. These rules are much more like skills that we already have onboard and that we simply need to further enhance. Given the right circumstances, people and teams can embrace and develop these skills. By doing so, they are expanding their collaborative intelligence (CQ).

So What If You Could Teach an Anthill to Fetch?

This book takes a skill-building approach to the development of the CQ of teams. Each chapter ends with a skill-building exercise (CQ Tools™). The elements making up the development of CQ are:

1. Assumptions
2. Perception
3. Self-Mastery
4. Communication
5. Connection
6. Creativity / Flexibility
7. Meaningful Participation
8. “High C+Q” Teams

We must begin within ourselves and so we begin in chapter one by checking **assumptions**. Choosing those ideas that will serve us and our team has a fundamental impact on the success of all other activities. Those assumptions will determine what sort of **perceptions** we have. Our perception of situations and other people affects how we respond to what happens to us. To adjust assumptions and manage our perceptions requires **self-mastery**. Self-mastery enables us to make the most of our personal resources. However, with all the self-mastery in the world, if we are unable to communicate effectively with others, we will be unable to affect the world around us.

Now we can move beyond ourselves to the bigger world and others. With great **communication** skills, we are able to build deep connection with others. Through **connection**, we create personal and team alignment, focusing our individual and group energies more effectively. This action raises productivity and helps create a stable team with higher levels of CQ. A team with deep and effective connection will be able to tap into greater levels of **creativity** and

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flexibility. These can be further enhanced through skill-building exercises. Creative and flexible teams are able to adapt and respond to a rapidly changing environment.

When the going gets tough, people (and teams) need to know there is purpose to what they are trying to achieve. **Meaningful participation** provides a sense of purpose and direction.

The Chinese have a proverb, “May you live in interesting times.” There is no debate that this has become true for us. How to deal with these interesting times is a lively and important debate. One thing is true, only when we can bring more of our CQ into play, will we be able to manage the levels of change occurring within business and society today. By increasing our collaborative intelligence, we truly are “teaching an anthill to fetch”.

1

Assumptions



*To a worm in horseradish,
the whole world is horseradish.*

YIDDISH PROVERB

The sea squirt provides us a cautionary tale. When it is born, it floats through the open oceans seeking a place to make its home. Once the sea squirt finds a solid piece of ocean floor on which to attach itself, it does a peculiar thing. The sea squirt eats its brain. Having achieved its objective, a firm anchor within the ocean, it no longer needs its brain. You may know people like the sea squirt. They have a firm anchor in life or at work and, apparently, have long since consumed their brains. Zoologists say that the sea squirt shares 80% of our DNA. Some people probably share more than that. The sea squirt assumes that nothing is going to change in its environment and that it will no longer need to make significant adjustments. This may work for the sea squirt, but human beings can't afford to follow suit.

The Collective IQ Paradigm

Our society is changing rapidly. Intellectual intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ) are necessary but not sufficient in order to thrive in this world. Increasingly, we are expected to be able to harness the power of the group or network to achieve objectives. Collaborative intelligence, or CQ, has become increasingly important. The term “collaborative intelligence” was coined by William Isaacs in his book, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. He defines CQ as the ability to build, contribute to and manage the power found in networks of people.

The development of our collaborative intelligence requires us to embrace a new paradigm. This new paradigm involves viewing all living things as deeply connected — an idea called “entanglement” in quantum mechanics. It follows then that there exists a collective intelligence to which we all contribute and to which, potentially, we all have access. Here is an example of what I mean. A room with 30 people in it, whose average age is 35, represents over 1000 years of life experience. Imagine the level of this team’s CQ when processes that are designed to tap into the vast amount of collective life experience of this group are put into place.

Recently I worked with a group of mid-wives who had been experiencing some team challenges. In the past they had been a very resilient team, overcoming many significant challenges. More recently the team members had found themselves at odds with each other. Furthermore they had decided that a single individual was the source of all their problems. Rather than try to replace this person, the director decided to work with the team and attempt to resolve the issue. After the team had taken part in a facilitated dialog around some of the pressing issues, they began to realize that they had all played a part in the circumstances leading up to the problems. Once this fact surfaced, they were able to explore exercises

that enabled them to reconnect as a team. During a follow up session, it was reported that they had begun to function as a resilient team once more. We cannot begin to embrace a new paradigm unless we are willing to loosen our grip on the old one.

Acts of individual leadership are ineffective for changing a paradigm. It is a community-building process that must challenge and transform a collective worldview.

GOZDZ

Strengthening our CQ is more than simply learning to get along with each other. It requires that we begin to look at ourselves in a new way. It demands that we see ourselves as deeply interconnected with all of life and especially with all of humanity. Embracing this way of thinking will have noticeable effects on how management and teams operate. The significant challenges facing our societies can be overcome if we embrace our deep connection and then act accordingly.

The pressing issue is how do we tap into the CQ we all need as individuals and teams to meet the challenges of the future? At the most fundamental level, natural systems, of which we are a part, are cooperative rather than competitive. Competition takes place within the larger context of a highly cooperative system. In this way CQ is already a part of nature. As human beings, we express our collaborative intelligence in certain places, especially when we are placed in extremely challenging situations. Fire fighters, police officers and emergency response teams, for example report high levels of closely cooperative synchronized team behavior when things get tough. These are examples of CQ coming to the surface and enabling teams to behave resiliently. Throughout this book we will discover that CQ is a central tenet of all resilient systems, teams and individuals.

Assumptions and Behaviors

If you try to change your behavior without first changing the underlying structure causing that behavior, you will not succeed. This is because structure determines behavior, not the other way around.

ROBERT FRITZ

One of the most persistent assumptions about business is that we can only prosper with a strong sense of competitiveness. Other companies in the same industry are viewed as the enemy to be beaten, out-manuevered or destroyed. When we look closely at natural systems, however, we find a different story.

Fritjof Capra put it like this, “Detailed study of ecosystems over the past decades has shown quite clearly that *most relationships between living organisms are essentially cooperative ones*, (my emphasis) characterized by coexistence and interdependence, and symbiotic in various degrees. Although there is competition, it usually takes place within a wider context of cooperation, so that the larger system is kept in balance.” If natural systems hold the key to developing our own resilience, then we have to take a new look at the role competition and cooperation play in human systems (politics, business, etc.).



GO DEEPER

Natural Systems: www.anthillsite.com

Water — What Water?

Within the Zen tradition there is a story about two fish. One fish tells the other of a strange experience it had.

“I was swimming along and noticed a tasty morsel. I grabbed it, but a sharp, shiny, hard thing got stuck in my mouth. Suddenly, I was pulled from the water and the next thing I knew I was in a whole new world. A great big thing grabbed me and pulled the sharp, shiny, hard thing from my mouth and threw me back into the water.”

The other fish looks shocked and asks, “Water? What water?”

The last animal to discover water would be a fish, just as we are the last ones to discover our assumptions about reality because we are so immersed in them.

ANY assumption can be made, but not all assumptions are created equal, and from their deductions you will know them.

JOHN EIDSER, *GLOBAL BRAIN*

Assumption — Checking as a Skill

The first of the seven skills that develop CQ and build resilient teams is *checking and adjusting individual and team assumptions*. Assumptions play such a central role in day-to-day life that, for the vast majority of time, we never notice them. One of the most important things assumptions do, however, is act as building blocks for our beliefs. There are a number of ways to change beliefs. One of the most effective ways is *check and adjust the assumptions* that support the belief.

It would be impossible to make it through the day without relying on some assumptions. Without them, life becomes much too

complex. Doing the simplest things would become a series of complex decisions of nightmare proportions. Therefore, we have to make assumptions in order to get through each day.

How Did I Get Here?

We have all experienced the phenomenon of driving to work and wondering “How did I get here?” It is almost as if we were in a trance as we drove the well-known route. We were running on auto-pilot. Auto-pilot offers advantages and disadvantages. This highly-automated piece of our behavior may bring us predictable results, and some of those results may be highly desirable. Other results may be unwanted and problematic. For example, the auto-pilot you use to drive to your office enables you to plan the day ahead as you navigate the traffic. The downside is that when adjustments to the route are required — such as picking up a colleague on the way to work, it may not get done. Your auto-pilot wins over and your colleague loses out. Other times, you are the one who loses out. How many times have you found yourself driving to work when you had intended to make a trip to the store?

Individuals are not the only ones who can run on auto-pilot; teams can do it too. Supported by assumptions that go unchecked and unchallenged, teams can continue to run the same old routines for a long time before anyone notices what’s happening. If the same old routine is getting you and your team the results you need, then that’s a good thing. If not, then maybe it is time to lift the hood and have a peek into what’s driving the team’s behavior.

We all have experienced times when seemingly endless rounds of meetings produce no noticeable results. We find ourselves thinking that we’ve wandered into “Dilbert-land”. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result. Many times the problem lies with unstated and unchallenged assumptions.

Good Servants But Bad Masters

Everyone I meet professionally for the first time receives a piece of string (it's threaded through my business card). The piece of string acts as a reminder for the story I share when they ask me what the piece of string represents.

I grew up on a 22-acre farm in the County of Down, Northern Ireland. When I was ten, my Dad sent me down to one of the pastures with a portable electric fence. He told me to fence the cows into a corner of the field. A few days later he came back and told me to go and take the fence down. "Use it to section off the bulls in the lower pasture," he said. "But Dad," I said, "what about the cows?" He said, "Oh just put a piece of string around them." I said, "A little piece of string isn't going to hold in a whole herd of cows." "Just do as you're told," was his reply.

So — liking life — I did as I was told and replaced the electric fence with a piece of string.

A few days later I went to check on the cows. They were standing in an area of scruffy, beaten down grass — hardly anything worth eating. All around them grew lush, green grass, and the only thing separating them from it was that flimsy piece of string and their belief that that piece of string would "shock" them.

What shocks me is that as intelligent human beings we often behave exactly like those cows. We allow ourselves to be fenced in by a piece of string — our beliefs. Rather than enabling us to live our lives fully, our beliefs often dictate what we can and cannot do. This is why I say that beliefs make good servants but bad masters. One of the most common mistakes we make is holding our beliefs

What shocks me is that as intelligent human beings we often allow ourselves to be fenced in by a piece of string.

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to be true while refusing to accept all evidence to the contrary. This is the very definition of dogma.

Software of the Brain

Running in the background, beliefs (and the assumptions that help create them) act like the software of the brain. We don't notice them most of the time and usually only become aware of them when they begin to cause trouble, for example, when they prevent us from achieving things we really want. In presentations, I ask people to put their hands up if they like to be wrong. Understandably, there isn't much response to that request. The truth is, we all like to be right, and this is just as true when it comes to our beliefs. Like something to which we have habituated, we no longer notice them (water? What water?). We begin to treat those beliefs as if they were essential truths that really exist, rather than relative points of view that *we* adopted at some point in the past.

When your computer begins to cause trouble, once hardware issues have been ruled out, you *then* check the software running on the computer. So it is with your beliefs and assumptions. Just as there are typical things that cause software to malfunction, so there are certain types of beliefs that typically cause trouble.

Limitations of Our Beliefs

As remarkable as it is, even the human brain has its limitations. When we examine the types of beliefs that typically cause us trouble, we find they fall into three categories. We will briefly explore each of these now.

Hopelessness

In this case, the desired change is not possible, there is no hope. Take for example a physically handicapped man, who wishes to climb Mount Everest. Each time he thinks about the task, he also thinks no one who has his physical challenge has ever done it, so it's probably not possible — a wonderful dream, but hopeless. Another way of thinking about this type of belief is that the desired change is not possible for anyone; there is literally no hope.

Helplessness

In this instance, the desired change is possible for other people, just not for you. Our physically handicapped man may hear about someone else with a similar physical challenge who has climbed Everest. In this case, however, he might choose to believe that it was possible because someone else has achieved it, but he would not be capable. In other words, it's possible, but he feels personally helpless.

Worthlessness

Finally, in this situation the desired change is possible and you are capable of achieving it, but you are not worth it; you do not deserve the change. This is possibly the most tragic of the three types of limiting beliefs. In the case of the physically challenged person contemplating the ascent of Everest, he may have evidence that it is possible and that he does, indeed, have a chance at success. However, he doesn't think he is worthy or deserves to achieve it and so doesn't try (or try as hard as he should).

If you listen to people talk about their shattered hopes and unfulfilled desires, you will notice that most of the limiting beliefs in operation fall into one of these three categories. The point in

categorizing the beliefs is that if you can spot the type of limiting belief in operation, you can make the appropriate adjustments to overcome it.

Challenging These Limitations

A simple way to dislodge a hopelessness belief is to “act as if” it were possible. Roger Bannister acted as if it were possible to break the four-minute mile barrier. He also trained accordingly, rather than sitting around waiting to see what would happen. In this case actions really can change beliefs.

In the case of a limiting belief related to helplessness, one of the best ways to address it is by searching out a counter example. That is, look for those who have already achieved the thing — after all, they are living proof that the objective is attainable. Looking to our heroes (sporting or otherwise) can be useful for finding appropriate models.

Beliefs related to worthlessness require that we check the deeper reasons we feel unworthy of the desired goal and address that issue. Self-esteem is often underestimated in relation to the powerful effect it can have on our performance. Negative messages received when we were children often determine what we think we deserve and, until they have been checked and adjusted, will continue to do so.

The Santa Clause

If you grew up in North America, you probably believed in Santa Claus when you were a child. This is “beliefs stage one,” where you believe everything that you are told. As you grew older you discovered, usually from older kids, that Santa Claus didn’t exist. This is “beliefs stage two” where you realize that some things you are told are true and some are not, and it is your task to decide which is

which. As you got older and had children of your own, you probably told them about Santa Claus and helped them create that fantasy. This is “beliefs stage three” — you have now *become* Santa Claus (which is why I call it the Santa “Clause”). You realize at this point that some beliefs can be useful, even if they are created. At another level, you may even realize that all beliefs are created. Creating the belief in Santa Claus was a beneficial thing. The belief enables children and parents to take part in a centuries-old tradition involving ritual, mystery, and fantasy. However, holding onto the original kind of belief about Santa Claus (that he is a real person with a very unusual sleigh and so forth) into adulthood would not be very useful.

All beliefs are created and, therefore, can be changed.

Reality Is What We Notice

What we assume about life has a fundamental effect on the way we interact with it. Everyone knows at least one person who has a very negative view of life. Such people expect the worst and often they are not disappointed. Their success in predicting the worst is based in part on the connection between *intention* and *attention*. That is, our attention is directed by our intention. There is a portion of our nervous system that plays a role in connecting intention and attention. It is called the ascending reticular activating system (aRAS) and it is located in the brainstem. The aRAS acts as a pattern recognition system and strongly affects the brain’s arousal. The way this part of the brain works helps to explain how our thoughts manifest into reality.

Gary Zukav explains the process succinctly, as follows: “Reality is what we take to be true. What we take to be true is what we believe.”

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What we believe is based upon our perceptions. What we perceive depends upon what we look for. What we look for depends upon what we think. What we think depends upon what we perceive. What we perceive determines what we believe. What we believe determines what we take to be true. What we take to be true is our reality.”

In other words, the assumptions we make about reality play a large part in creating that reality. We make so many assumptions that we cease to be aware of them. Becoming aware of the basic assumptions we use can be a tricky process. Seeing through our assumptions about reality is an important part of becoming enlightened in many of the great spiritual traditions such as Sufi and Zen. There, stories and puzzles (known as koans in Zen) are used to enable students to break out of limiting assumptions about reality. The story line of the movie *The Matrix* (based on the very same ideas and the principles themselves) dates back thousands of years.

**GO DEEPER****Assumptions about Reality: www.antihillsite.com*****What Do Assumptions Have to Do with CQ?***

What we assume about ourselves, life and other people has a tremendous impact on how we operate as human beings. Consider the central assumption about resilience — *that we are all inherently resilient*. This assumes everyone has resilience as an onboard capacity. Making this assumption affects the attitude we take toward ourselves and the way we treat others. In turn this affects the level of CQ we can tap into.

Many organizations already operate on this assumption of resilience with regard to employee development. An example is

Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is an organizational development approach that assumes it is more effective to concentrate on what is working within an individual, team and company, rather than on what is not working. A core principle within the Appreciative Inquiry model is questioning assumptions. Practitioners of AI report that once the questioning process has begun, people become inspired to question other previously unquestioned assumptions. Such questioning is a crucial first step to any real change within organizations. The shared assumptions of a group or team have a very strong effect. Helping a team become aware of its shared assumptions can be the single most important source of positive change. Some organizational development programs bring in their own processes and assumptions. Rather than layering on another set, it makes more sense to discover what assumptions (useful or not-so-useful) have created the system that is in operation now.

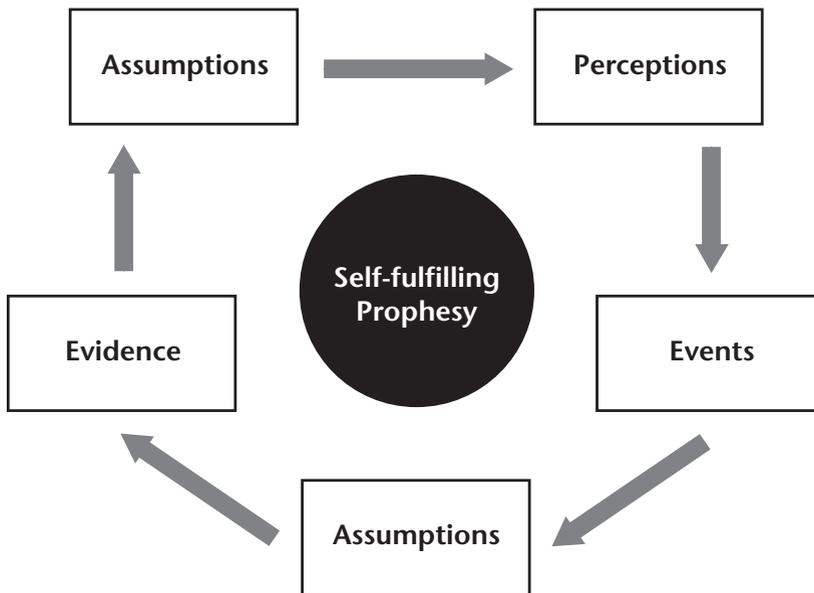
Self-Fulfilling Prophets and Losses

Assumptions easily become self-fulfilling prophecies (or profits and losses when they operate within a business). They act as filters on our perceptions, and we literally see what we have programmed ourselves to look for. In turn, our perceptions of events will determine our own responses. Our responses have specific effects and usually provide further evidence to support the original assumption.

For example, suppose you suspected someone (made an assumption about them) of being dishonest. This assumption would cause you to filter all your observations of that person for dishonest behaviors. This affects the other person, who may wish to reassure you that he is honest. The more the person tries to convince you of his trustworthiness, the more you become convinced that he has something to hide. The original assumption about his dishonesty

enabled you to redefine the meaning of his behavior. *Viola* — the power of self-fulfilling prophecies!

Figure 1.1
The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Cycle



What Do You Believe about the Problem?

It is very tempting, when faced with a problem, to stop and ask “What *do* I or we need to do to solve this problem?” This question addresses the challenge at the level of behavior and, although there is no harm in this question, it does not get at the deeper issues. A more fundamental and useful questions to ask is, “What do I need to *believe* in order to solve this problem?” Maybe we are having difficulty with someone who reports to us or with someone to whom we report. It is useful to ask, “What assumptions am I making about

this situation/person?” Often, we discover that something we are assuming is helping to create the problem in the first place.

It’s easy for us to develop assumptions that limit our resilience. For example: “this team won’t support me” (so you never ask for it); “that person hates me” (so we look for evidence to support that); “I can’t achieve this objective” (which affects how much effort we put in). I am sure you can think of many more you use with yourself and others.

Gary McPherson — A Testament to the Power of Assumptions

Gary McPherson’s life is a testament to the power of assumptions. Gary was a fun-loving, athletic nine-year-old boy when in 1955 he was struck down with Polio.

For the next 34 years of his life, Gary would live in hospital and would require the use of a ventilator that would allow him to breath. In the early days of his illness, many of the medical staff around him continued to believe that Gary would not survive. Yet over the years, Gary continued to defy the odds, even as he lost many of his friends from the ward in which he lived. He discovered that some people with his condition had learned to “frog breath”, a method of drawing air into the lungs without using the diaphragm. Gary identifies this as the single most important thing he did that enabled him to regain a certain amount of his independence. No longer dependent on a ventilator to breathe for 24 hours at a time, Gary had managed to wrestle more freedom for himself and he left the hospital at age 43 while continuing to use a wheelchair for mobility.

Gary explains that in the early stages of his hospitalization, he heard that life expectancy for someone with his condition was five years. He recalls living his life in five-year increments and being

surprised when he reached his fourteenth and nineteenth birthdays. By this time, he explains, he felt pretty good and began to think, “well I’m still alive, maybe I should think about doing some things”.

When talking to Gary, you quickly get a sense of someone who is focused on what he can do, as opposed to what he can’t. The *assumptions* Gary uses are based around possibility and persistence. He confesses that he negotiates with himself around what he can shoot for and then decides upon the increments for which he will aim.

Gary didn’t set out as a 19-year old, almost totally paralyzed by Polio, to become the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship. Nor did he envision himself playing a key role in shaping services for people with disabilities in Alberta. Serving eight years as the President of the Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association (CWSA) was not on his mind either. In the early years of his illness, Gary probably never imagined he would become an adjunct professor or guest lecturer with an Honorary Doctor of Law degree. However, *his assumptions* about his situation and the options open to him supported each small step toward an amazing career.

Gary is now married with two teenage children and talks about entering politics. He says that because his kids are older, he has more time on his hands. It is a truly humbling experience to sit and chat with Gary as he talks about plans for the future. Most of them are centered upon what he can help others achieve.

In conversation, Gary is quick to mention the powerful effect assumptions have had in his life. The assumption that by serving others we heal ourselves has helped Gary to make significant contributions to society. Along with that is the assumption that you can find humor in everything. It is difficult to sit very long with Gary without being drawn into his expansive sense of humor. His philosophy of life has a central assumption that has become a mantra for Gary — “You see what you look for — so choose carefully what you look for.”

Amid all the committees and commitments Gary undertook he still found time to write the story about his battle and eventual victory against tremendous odds. *With Every Breath I Take* sheds light on the heart and spirit of a remarkable man.



GO DEEPER

Gary McPherson: www.anthillsite.com

A great deal of anecdotal evidence demonstrates that people are able to sustain themselves in challenging conditions and situations. There are definable traits that can be identified, and we all have them. This book explores a specific set of skill-building exercises that make it possible for us to develop these traits further. In the process we expand our CQ.

Assumptions About Resilience

Since this chapter is devoted to an exploration of assumptions, it makes sense to state clearly some of the assumptions that underpin the approach taken in this book.

- Change is a constant process.
- Our ability to adapt to change is the central role of resiliency.
- Resiliency is the ability to adapt, bounce back, and recover in harsh or challenging conditions.
- Resiliency is an innate capacity that we all have.
- Certain definable traits make up our capacity for resilience.
- Traits of resilience have been identified and we are able to strengthen them further with specific exercises.
- Resilient teams are built from resilient individuals.

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- None of us are as smart as all of us — a resilient team further strengthens its individual members.
- Everyone wants to make a difference with their lives. Work is a great place for that to happen.

Exercises that challenge you to re-assess what you assume about certain things will enable you and your team to become aware of the dangers of auto-pilot thinking.

Just as limiting assumptions can cause all sorts of problems to the individual and team, a well thought-out and consciously chosen assumption can be equally liberating and empowering. Prior to May 6, 1954, it was assumed that the four-minute mile was impossible. Roger Banister forced everyone to revise that assumption. The revised assumption generated a new belief.

[Red Queen] “Let’s consider your age to begin with — how old are you?”

“I’m seven and a half, exactly.”

“You needn’t say ‘exactly,’” the Queen remarked.

“I can believe it without that. Now I’ll give you something to believe. I’m just one hundred and one, five months and a day.”

”I can’t believe that!” said Alice.

“Can’t you?” the Queen said in a pitying tone. “Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.”

Alice laughed. “There’s no use trying,” she said, “one can’t believe impossible things.”

“I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

LEWIS CARROLL, *THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS*

Joseph Campbell once stated that many people reach the top of the ladder only to find it leaning against the wrong wall. I would like to add that there are two other types of ladders: the ladder that was chosen too short for the desired effect (right wall, ladder not long enough) and the ladder lying on the ground (uncommitted to anything, it serves no one, and may actually trip someone.) Consciously choosing beliefs and assumptions that will serve you in your life is like choosing a ladder. It is important to lean it against the right wall and aim it in the right direction for you.

*You need to ask yourself,
"Is your ladder leaning
against the right wall
and is it long enough?"*

Once positioned, ask yourself if the ladder is long enough.

Is your belief strong enough to enable you to achieve your goal? Have you committed yourself to achieving the goal? Have you actually leaned your ladder against the wall? In other words, have you committed to do something about the belief you have chosen?

Good Questions Rather than Easy Answers

Asking questions is something few of us developed as a skill as we grew up. For most of us, our educational experience consisted of being told to remember the right answer. The focus was clearly on the production of answers to a relatively fixed set of questions (tests and exams). There was little attention given to the creation of good questions. Yet, throughout history, practically all of the major scientific breakthroughs came from people who were fascinated with a particular question and all the possible answers, rather than a search for one right answer. Einstein asking himself what it would be like to ride a beam of light brought him to

one of the greatest discoveries of the 20th century — the theory of relativity.

Using the right set of assumptions has a huge impact on our level of resilience. Asking good questions is an important step toward checking our assumptions about our own resilience. Testing what assumptions are presently running means asking the right questions. Meg Wheatley suggests that we should have “a little less certainty and a lot more curiosity”. Questions direct our curiosity and our energy.

Peter Block claims that “we define...our future through the questions we choose to address. Asking the wrong question puts us in the philosopher’s dilemma: we become the blind man looking in a dark room for a black cat that is not there.” In chapter 4 we will look at the topic of questions in much greater detail and more specifically how they can enrich our communication (and, therefore, connection) with our team.

Hitting a “Whole” in One

Increasingly, people are seeking fulfillment in the non-material, psychological, and spiritual aspects of life. This movement up Maslow’s hierarchy of needs applies to life in general, but also to work. More and more employees and team members wish to “transform themselves” personally as well as professionally.

There is an outstanding opportunity for companies who are willing to offer their employees training and development opportunities that help grow the whole person. It could also be viewed as a chance for the company to evolve their people from the inside out.

Many companies have already seized the opportunity to grow their people in this way. In Nancy and Kevin Freiburg’s book, *Guts*, John Mackey, CEO of the Whole Foods Company, is quoted as saying, “I don’t see any conflict between wearing our hearts on our

sleeves and running a company that is serious about profits. In fact we feel there is a profound synergy between the two. Both are about responsibility.” By walking their talk, Whole Foods have gained a place on *Fortune*’s list of the 100 best companies to work for in the U.S. six years running.



WHERE WE’VE BEEN

- The assumptions we make deeply affect our personal and professional lives.
- Our beliefs are created from our assumptions.
- Group assumptions are at play within teams at all times.
- To create sustainable, lasting change, we must identify the assumptions behind our behaviors.
- All beliefs are created, therefore all beliefs can be changed.
- Good questions are a great way to challenge and change limiting beliefs.
- Successful business operations and teams are based on useful assumptions/beliefs.



WHERE WE’RE GOING...

The assumptions we make and the beliefs that radiate out from them have a profound effect on the way we see the world. Our perceptions are colored by what we think. The next chapter will show how perception plays a central role in the unconscious processes of resilient individuals. We will also look at how important perception is in building resilient teams and how developing CQ relies on how we see just as much as what we see.

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Questions to consider are:

- What assumptions could you make that would transform your own resilience and that of your team?
- What shared assumptions would enable your team/place of work to become an adaptive, vibrant center for human and business growth?

The following exercises will enable you and your team to explore important questions such as these.

CQ Tool[®] 1

Checking Assumptions

Checking assumptions can be a very important first step before a team launches into a project together. In many cases it negates the need to stop later and discover that members' assumptions are working at odds with each other.

The following exercise enables team members to explore the assumptions that may be in operation as the team gathers (metaphorically speaking) around a task or project.

Note: for purposes of this exercise a context has been chosen. You may wish to use this as a "practice session" and move onto a more pertinent issue once you and your team feel they have mastered the stages and process.

STAGE ONE: The team is divided into groups of four to eight. Each group places a piece of flip chart paper upon the wall in landscape format. Divide the page into three equal columns. The heading "Assumptions" is written at the top of the middle column.

STAGE TWO: Give the project team the task of brainstorming a list of assumptions for planning a team retreat (e.g., that it must be out of town, it must be held during weekdays, etc.). A specific and short time period (five to ten minutes) is allowed for this stage.

STAGE THREE: The team is asked to choose between three and five of the most interesting or controversial assumptions and circle them (one minute for this task).

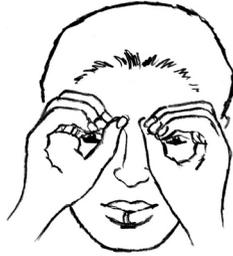
STAGE FOUR: Write the word “Valid” into the header of the right-hand column. They are now asked to use the chosen assumptions to explore whether the implications/consequences of these assumptions are valid. In short, answer the question “What if they were valid?” (five to seven minutes for this task.)

STAGE FIVE: The group is asked to place the word “invalid” as the heading for the final (left-hand) column. Exploring the same chosen assumptions, this time answering the question “What are the implications/consequences if these assumptions were invalid?” (five to seven minutes for this step.)

STAGE SIX: The group is asked to reflect upon the exercise and comment upon what they noticed. Some questions the facilitator can use at this point are:

- What did you notice about your own assumptions?
- Were you surprised by some of the assumptions other people had?
- If you had the opportunity to explore the invalid options of assumptions you agreed with what effect did that have?
- How could this process help teams form strategies around a project?

Perception



It's never enough just to tell people about some new insight... Instead of pouring knowledge into people's heads; you need to help them grind a new set of eyeglasses so they can see the world in a new way.

JOHN SEELY BROWN

In chapter one, we explored how assumptions affect the adaptability and resilience of you and your team. We also considered how relative perception really is. Our reality is based upon what we notice, which in turn is heavily based upon our assumptions. Our assumptions provide stability to the reality that we create on a moment-by-moment basis. The process is largely unconscious. However, even when we do change our assumptions about things, we retain our old *ways of looking at things*. We continue to wear our old prescription as it were.

This chapter is about how we look at things, about how our perception affects our resilience. We will also explore how our

perception and awareness affect our ability to collaborate with others. In other words, how we perceive others will determine whether we choose to collaborate or not. To this extent our perceptions determine our collaborative intelligence.

In this chapter we will examine five important elements of perception.

1. **Attention** can be harnessed and focused — our attention affects our experience of our life.
2. **Perception** as an active process — what we see depends on where we look.
3. **Filters** can be changed — they select the information that reaches the conscious mind.
4. **Perspectives** change our awareness — the perspective we take determines what we see.
5. **Frames** can help us become more flexible — how we frame our perceptions affects the meaning we form.

Difficulties strengthen the mind, as labour does the body.

SENECA

Changing perceptions has had a huge impact on my own life. In 1995, while living in Northern Ireland, I was involved in a road accident that almost cost me my life. I was standing beside my car on a narrow country road, when a speeding car skidded on black ice and rammed into my parked car. The force of the crash pushed my car over top of me. Miraculously I slid under my car as it glided over the road — I “came to” lying underneath it. It was still on its wheels and I had somehow slipped through the space between the car and the ground.

Months later the full impact of the accident was discovered. A disc in my back had been torn apart by the injury and a consultant

was explaining to me that I had Degenerative Disc Disease. I was told that the condition “will only get worse”. (Now, there is a nice belief system.) He offered to speed up the process for me to receive a handicapped sticker!

Maybe you can imagine what I felt like as I walked (painfully) out of his office. What the consultant had said was slowly sinking in. He had inadvertently helped me form a perception of myself as a “cripple”. I mentally formed a long list of things I could no longer do because of my injury. A number of years passed as I lived my life surrounded by things I couldn’t do because of my back.

I was living a “half life”, both personally and professionally. What I didn’t realize was that the assumptions I had created as a result of my conversations with medical staff had left me with very strong (and limiting) filters through which I perceived my life. There was no particular moment of “enlightenment”. Instead, an evolution of frustration brought me to a point where I realized I had to change.

I decided I needed to *do* something to prove to myself that I was capable of moving beyond my injury. If I threw my heart over the fence, I thought, the rest of me might well follow.

Then one day I heard of a group of people planning a hike in the Andes in Chile, South America. This had been a life-long ambition of mine. Images of the glaciers and watching condors sail over head occupied my mind.

The next day I went to see a personal trainer in the local gym. I asked him if he knew anyone with my sort of injury that still worked out. He said he had quite a few clients. I signed up and started with small exercises. At that time I could not stand up for longer than ten minutes without my right leg going numb and intense pain in my lower back. With great professional advice from Paul, my trainer, and lots of physical training on my behalf I was able to make the trip to Chile. The transition from “cripple to climber” was brought about by a change in how I perceived myself. Sounds simple!

However I had to *do* a number of things to help the change take place in my self-perception. I realized that wishing alone would not change anything.

1. Attention

Three pounds of tofu hidden inside a bone box; you could eat it with a spoon and it's the most important thing in your life. It's your brain

*Q: Three pounds of
tofu in a bone box?*

A: Your brain.

of course and its only connection with the outside world is a set of senses that feed it information. The human nervous system is amazing. Through our five senses we process approximately 11 million pieces of information every second. Our eyes send 10 million sig-

nals to the brain each second and together have more computing power than six Cray computers connected together.

So of what is our brain capable? Researchers in this field have attempted to calculate how much information we can process consciously, but by all estimates it is not much. The most optimistic figure is 40 pieces out of the 11 million pieces per second (Tor Norretranders, *The User Illusion*).

Up Periscope

One way of thinking about how this vast amount of information gets filtered to a small fraction is to think about our conscious mind as a periscope. Our lives are effectively made up of those 40 pieces multiplied by the number of seconds we live. Where we point the periscope determines our awareness. The auto-pilots mentioned in chapter one come into play here. They determine, to a large degree,

where we habitually direct our attention. In order to tap into greater depths of our own resilience, we will have to revisit these old patterns of perceiving; check the settings on the auto-pilots. Are they optimal for where we want to end up?

All great athletes know that their performance is highly dependent on where they place their attention. A good sports coach spends a lot of time working in this area, helping the athlete to harness his or her attention. The old eastern expression “energy flows where attention goes”, implies that our energy follows our attention. What we attend to grows and proliferates. Often we believe that it is the things we are not attending to that cause us trouble. Frequently it is the other way around. So when you or your team is faced with a particular challenge it may be useful to stop and ask, “What are we attending to that has helped us create this problem?”

“Rubber-necking” is a great example of this phenomenon. It is defined as the tendency to look at accidents to the extent that you become one. According to the American Automobile Association, between 25 and 55% of all road accidents are caused by distracted drivers. We have all seen other people do it and, in all probability, we have been guilty of doing it many times ourselves. We give our attention to an accident we are passing and don't attend properly to the road ahead. With only so much attention at our disposal, splitting our attention means we have less available to devote to driving our own car. This principle is also important when we are dealing with challenges either individually or in teams. Directing our attention is vital when we need to have our energy flow in a certain direction.

“What are we attending to that has helped us create this problem?”

Questions are a great way to focus your attention. You can help your team members direct their attention by asking the right

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questions. One of the differences between a good team leader and a great one is that a good team leader asks some good questions (rather than providing easy answers) and a great team leader asks great questions (and supports the team in forming their own answers).

Although there is a large unconscious component in how we organize our attention, we can, with conscious control, move our attention. Meditative practices are really attention-training systems. This is one of the reasons meditation can be so helpful in building emotional balance. You are effectively training yourself to control your own attention. Our society has become a noisy place to live in — with many distractions and advertisers clamoring to catch and hold our attention for as long as possible. Our attention is a precious resource that we must look after carefully otherwise it can be hijacked or dissipated by external forces.

Unless a person knows how to give order to his or her thoughts, attention will be attracted to whatever is most problematic at the moment: it will focus on some real or imaginary pain, on recent grudges or long-term frustrations. Entropy is the normal state of consciousness — a condition that is neither useful nor enjoyable.

MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *FLOW*

The quote from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi conveys the need to use our attention as a form of energy. By channeling attention toward something useful, we are doing two things: 1) Not allowing any of our valuable energy to be wasted on harmful or wasteful activities; and 2) we are bringing it all to bear upon the important task of creating what we do want to happen.

**GO DEEPER****Attention:** www.anthillsite.com

Team mission statements can serve the same function. They help the team members harness the collective attention around specific objectives, drawing people around a common purpose.

Many businesses go to a great deal of trouble to create visions for their company. One of the benefits of a business vision is that it focuses attention on what is important to the company. Ideally the business vision orchestrates the attention (and energy) of the whole organization.

Our resilience is dependent, in part, upon how we use our energy. Therefore how we organize attention will have a large impact on our resilience. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, goes so far to say that “attention is our most important tool in the task of improving the quality of experience.” When I think of directing attention what comes to my mind are images of cairns (piles of stones) that people build to show the path up a mountain. In a similar way the Inuit people have used special rock formations called “Inukshuk” for centuries as a way of pointing the traveler’s attention along a safe route.



This chapter is about building cairns to harness our own attention with the purpose of establishing a more optimal experience. By marshaling our attention we will be more resilient. Exploring this process as a team will enable your team to harness its *collective attention*. The result will be a more resilient team.

2. Perception Is Projection

How we see things has a great deal to do with how we feel about things. When we have strong emotions about something we often project these outward onto events that are occurring around us. For example, if I become angry about something in the morning, I may notice many other things during my day that also make me angry. Emotions have powerful affects on what we notice. It is a common misconception that perception is a passive process carried out by our senses. The scientific evidence points to perception being an *active* process closely tied to the flow of our emotions. Choosing how to view an event is one of the secrets of emotional mastery. (We will visit this topic in greater detail in chapter 3.)

Enlightenment is waking up to the illusions contained in the belief we have been fed since birth: the belief that whether or not we are at peace depends upon what we have or do in the material world. It is discovering for oneself, as a personal experience of life, that whether or not we are at peace depends on our perception and interpretation of events. (My emphasis)

PETER RUSSELL

When Christopher Columbus first arrived on the shores of what is now North America, the Arawak Indians were reported to be unable to see his ships. What they saw we will never know, however, the principle has modern examples much closer to home. A young woman who moved from the Philippines to North America did not recognize that some of the people she was meeting had red hair (she had never met someone with that color of hair in her home country). It was such an uncommon sight in her native land that she was literally unable to “see it”. Months later she began to notice that some people had a hair color that was new to her. She then began to notice that even people she was very close to in her new country had red hair. The distinction for red hair had not been important where she had grown up and it took some time for her perceptual system to rewire for its existence.

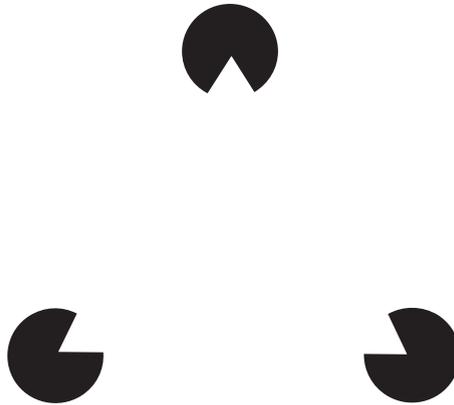
These are rather dramatic examples of a process that is going on inside each of us all the time. We see things when we are ready to see them. This has an impact on how resilient we are. For example, what might you not be seeing that is going on within your team or life, for that matter? Are some limiting assumptions “invisible” because we have not looked for them? Shifts in what we can see come with shifts in our awareness. The exercises at the end of this chapter are designed to cause shifts in your awareness. In doing so they will enable you to see things differently.

But what has the story of the invisible ships got to do with our resilience? Maturana and Varela are well-known researchers in the field of physiological psychology. They have demonstrated that our perceptions are heavily biased toward the use of already-on-board information. In other words our perceptions at any particular moment in time are based on 20% *new* information — fresh from the environment, so to speak — and a whooping 80% of *onboard* information. The 80% represents information our nervous system has stored about the environment. Our nervous system patches together the

20% new and 80% old to create an experience of *reality*. Such a recipe of sources leaves us very prone to errors.

Optical illusions are great examples of how easily our nervous system is fooled. Look at the illustration in Figure 2.1 and notice how easy it is to see a white triangle that is not there?

Figure 2.1
Can You See a White Triangle?



The white triangle in Figure 2.1 is caused by a combination of the 80% of onboard information and the 20% new information. Our brain is attempting to make sense of the image and completes it for us. This particular illusion also can be used to explain how our assumptions help build our reality.

Now in Figure 2.2, each of the little pies represents an assumption/belief that we have onboard. Our brains complete the picture for us and assure us that the space in the middle is reality. Within every team there is a “reality” being created by the shared assumptions of all its members. These in turn shape our perceptions that we then take to be our “reality”. If a team wishes to change its reality, then the assumptions and perceptions need to be examined first.

Figure 2.2 Is the White Triangle Clearer?

Assumption 1



'Reality'



Assumption 3

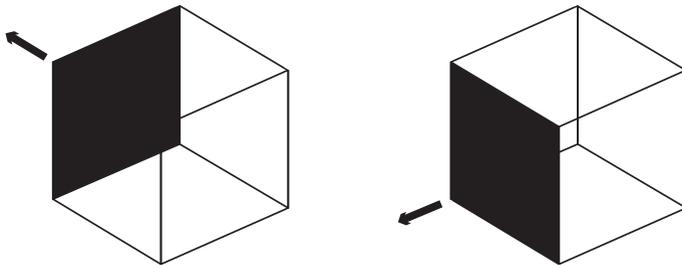


Assumption 2

What You See Is What You Choose to See

Being able to shift our attention from one perception to another is known as “perceptual flexibility”. Perceptual flexibility can be demonstrated using the nectar tube experiment.

Figure 2.3 Nectar Tube Experiment



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Look at Figure 2.3 and notice which plane seems to be the one closest to you. Now bring the other plane up into the foreground and allow the first plane you chose to fall into the background. Some of you may be struggling; others will find it a very simple task. With a little effort you will be able to switch the tube between the two perspectives. Typically once someone has done this they will be able to choose the kind of tube they see. This is an example of how we express our perceptual flexibility.

So far we've discovered that our reality is a construct. Physicists assure us that the concept of a solid physical world "out there" is, at best, a nice idea not supported by research. David Bohm often said, "Thought creates the world and then says, 'I didn't do it.'"

This can be unnerving and reassuring depending upon how you look at it (there's that perspective thing again). The world we live in was created and is continually being created, to a large extent, by what goes on in our own nervous system. This further emphasizes the ancient wisdom that if we wish to change the world we must first change ourselves.

And yet it is so tempting to point outward to all those things (including people) that are the cause of the problem. It's even more attractive when it is a team of people that is not performing well or an organization that is functioning poorly. The implications for anyone in a position of leadership are pretty obvious so I won't labor this point.

**GO DEEPER**Perceptions: www.anthillsite.com

3. Filtered or Instant?

With the massive amount of information arriving at our nervous system from the outside, it's not surprising that our brain has to filter it. Effectively our nervous system is tuned to notice some things and ignore a lot of others. The software running this process is informed by filters for dangerous things. Once our basic needs — things we can eat, drink or mate with — have been satisfied, or dangers safely avoided, a different set of filters become active. These are designed to search for ways that higher needs can be satisfied, for example those related to social belonging and self esteem. Maslow's hierarchy of needs shows one possible set of filters that our nervous system can sort with.



GO DEEPER

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: www.anthillsite.com

We could view filters as one of the reasons goal-setting is such a successful process. By setting goals we are setting intention. Setting intention is like programming our nervous system to filter for things that are important to our goals in the environment.

Perceptual filters are just as active in the workplace as they are outside it. They determine, to a great extent, how we perceive others. There are a wide range of personality profiling systems that provide insight into how people behave. When someone is profiled as an “INFJ” or a “strong blue”, that label is used to explain why they are the way they are. With this set of filters personality is very often conceived as a static thing that changes little. The concept of *character* and *building character* is often not factored into how companies manage their human resources. In real life we know people do change, either

through self-directed re-invention or as a result of events occurring in their lives (for example becoming a father or mother). Profiling systems, like all filters, can have liberating and restricting effects.

**GO DEEPER****Building Character:** www.anthillsite.com

For a long time psychologists have known about the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE). When interpreting other people's behavior FAE causes us to over-estimate the importance of basic personality traits and under-estimate the significance of situation and context. In this case the filter for personality traits is stronger than those for situation or context. Simply put, FAE causes us to form stereotypes and can lead to various forms of bias. Sexism, racism, and ageism are examples of biased perceptions. We tend to see what we want to see. Optical illusions are a great example of how unreliable our perceptions can be (see Figures 2.1 to 2.2).

We do not see the world as it is, we see it as we are.

MARCUS AURELIUS

If we wish to change the world (or another person or a team) we must first ask, "what changes do we need to make within ourselves?" Choosing to look at a person or situation from a more productive perspective will automatically enhance our CQ. By looking for places where collaboration is possible we will find more.

Being able to restructure our perceptions of reality is a fundamental aspect of our own innate resilience. Daniel Gilbert and Timothy Wilson suggest that we have our own "psychological immune system" that acts to protect us from threats to our (psychological) well-being. "When it comes to maintaining a sense of well-being,"

they say, “each of us is the ultimate spin doctor.” The ability to put a spin on our perceptions can just as easily hold us stuck as liberate us. This is where assumptions (especially about ourselves) have such an impact on perception.

4. Perspective — What We Find Depends on Where We Look

Within the Sufi tradition there are many stories about a mystic joker called Mulla Nasrudin. One such story relates how a good friend finds the Mulla on a dark night on his hands and knees underneath a street lamp crying. His friend enquires why he is crying. The Mulla explains he has just lost his gold coins; his life savings are gone. The friend immediately feels sorry for the Mulla and gets down on the ground to help look for the coins. After a period of fruitless searching the friend gets up and asks, “Mulla can you remember where you were standing when you dropped your coins?” “Oh yes,” replies the Mulla. “I was down there in that dark alleyway.” “Why in heavens name are you looking under the street lamp then?” his exasperated friend asks. “Because there is more light here,” the Mulla replies.

I find this story funny and tragic at the same time. The Mulla is doing exactly what we do so often. He is looking for the answer where there is the most light rather than where he really knows the answer lies. More specifically I have often attempted

to find the cause of some problem in the environment — out there — rather than looking where I knew the problem to lie — inside myself. The knack to optimal perception is not only how we look but also where.

*Optimal perception is
as much about where
you look as it is
about how you look*

It Looked Bigger in the Store

Colin Turnbull, in his book *The Forrest People*, relates a story about a Pygmy he had befriended while traveling through the African continent. This Pygmy had lived his entire life in the thick jungles of East Africa. Turnbull took the Pygmy to the Serengeti, the great open plains that border the jungle and showed him the wild life of the plains. The life-long forest dweller asked, "what insects are those?" referring to the water buffalo that were a long distance away. When he was informed that the "insects" were water buffalo he laughed out loud and called Turnbull a liar. The Pygmy's perceptual world was biased so heavily toward the short distances of tropical jungle life that he could not conceive that these buffalo were real.

The environment in which we live and work undoubtedly affects our capacity to see. We become accustomed to the perspectives available and don't even realize that we have been conditioned. Therefore anything that enables us to change our perspectives will inevitably change what we are able to see.

An Elephant by Any Other Name

This is not the only way that our perceptions can be restricted. I am sure you are familiar with the story of the six blind men around the elephant. This story originated in the eastern philosophical tradition and is a metaphor about reality and our own incomplete grasp of it. Each of the six blind men touch a different part of the elephant and the zoo keeper asks them what they think an elephant is. The blind man holding onto the trunk says that an elephant is a snake-like thing; the one holding onto the ear, a fan-like thing; and so it goes on. Each of the blind men defining the elephant by the part of its anatomy with which they are familiar.

From a psychological perspective we have at least three perspectives we can use to view our own reality. The *first position* is the perspective of us standing in our own physical space, looking out through our own eyes. This perspective is also associated with using words like “I”, “me” and “myself” when referring to our feelings. When we describe an experience from the first position we tend to re-experience the feelings of the event as if we were in our own body. Typically when we think of the event we do not see ourselves in images of the experience.

The *second position* is being able to assume someone else’s perspective in an experience. We take on the other’s perspective seeing and hearing what they see and hear. When we explore this perspective deeply we will also be able to imagine what they feel like. This perspective is the basis of empathy and can be a powerful tool in discovering what it is like to be another person. One of the greatest benefits of this perspective is that it enables us to understand the other person’s world better and to communicate more effectively with them. The experience is often described as “walking a mile in their shoes”.

The *third position* is characterized by the fact that we are not associating with anyone in the situation. We are not assuming the perspective of being inside our own body, nor are we imagining being in the body of anyone else. The perspective is that of “a fly on the wall” floating free from feelings and able to observe events and the behaviors of ourselves and others in a totally detached way. This is a very effective perspective to take when we wish to separate ourselves from our own individual feelings and the feelings of others.

None of the perspectives are any better than the other. They all serve a useful function. People who explore all three perspectives of an event are better informed than someone who explores only one (typically first position). Exploring all the perspectives is also described as using perceptual flexibility.

Once again the three perceptual positions are:

1. First Position — looking through our own eyes;
2. Second Position — stepping into someone else's shoes and looking through their eyes; and
3. Third Position — viewing the situation as if we were a disembodied eye witness or "fly on the wall".

Most of us have a preferred perceptual position. For example first position is, understandably, the most common position. The perspectives involved with each of these positions are simply perceiving habits. With them come habits of thought. The great news is that they can be changed and expanded with skill-building exercises.

The difference in the quality of the three perspectives is significant. First position obviously contains more information about the feelings we have associated with the event. You will have access to information about physical sensations, feelings, and even smells and tastes. If the event was positive, then first position enables us to access the positive feelings related to it. However if the event was negative, maybe first position is not the best place from which to process it. After all who wants to make themselves feel bad?

Choosing How to See

I ran a stress management clinic for almost ten years in Northern Ireland. Many clients would explain that events in their past were making them feel depressed, scared, or sick. When I asked them a few questions about how they thought about those events, I discovered that most of the time the client was re-living the events and running them in their mind from first position. It was not surprising that they had to seek professional help. When I taught them the

perceptual positions exercise, they discovered they had options in terms of where they processed a memory from (first, second or third position).

Asking our brain to change how it operates is a little like trying to write with our non-dominant hand. For most of us the process is messy at the start, but with practice it becomes easier. The pay-off for developing the ability to take different perspectives — an increased ability to understand a situation, to be able to look at it from two or three perspectives instead of just the same old one.

Asking our brain to change how it operates is like writing with our non-dominant hand.

The exercise at the end of this chapter will help you learn how to use the three basic perspectives more systematically.

My mother used to tell me that an ounce of skill is better than a pound of knowledge. And knowing about the perspectives and not using them is a lot like knowing CPR but being unwilling to administer it — tragic.

When exploring the three perspectives, we begin to realize there are three truths.

1. We have a choice about which perspective we use to process a thought from the past, present or future.
2. Each perspective provides advantages and disadvantages.
3. Exploring all the perspectives better informs us about the event.

Leonardo de Vinci considered the first way he looked at a problem to be too biased towards his usual perspective. To overcome this bias he would look at the problem from one perspective, then another, and then another. With each change, he said, his understanding would grow. A closer examination of de Vinci's anatomical

diagrams provides ample evidence that he never drew something from just one perspective. The effect of adding understanding by systematically using different perspectives may be why the different perspectives have been called “the three keys to wisdom”. Even a blind man having taken the time to explore an elephant from many perspectives is much closer to wisdom than someone vigorously — clutching just one part.

5. Frames — We’ve All Been Framed

Frames refer to the set of interpretations we choose to surround a particular event. If someone were to offer me a mint I could frame this gesture as an act of genuine friendliness and generosity. I could also frame it as a subtle way to suggest that I had bad breath. In most circumstances social etiquette prevents us from asking what the offer of the mint implied. We are left to perceive the event in a way that fits with our overall understanding of the situation. Our perceptions will determine how we operate in the situation as well. We could ask ourselves a useful question: “In what way can I choose to perceive this situation that will further enhance collaboration?” By answering this question we are developing our CQ.

Everyone has experienced interpreting someone’s behavior in one way, only to find out later that their perception had been flawed. If reality is such an undependable construct, should we not just choose the frame that best allows us to be the most resilient? In other words, if we assume (use a frame) that a statement someone makes to us is well-intended, the frame has a particular effect. By framing their statement in a positive way we are indirectly creating a situation that is cooperative and friendly.

If, on the other hand, we frame someone’s remarks as ill-intended, we will convey this in our tone of voice and body language. That may

set the scene for a situation that is defensive and non-friendly. The actual intention of the other person is almost immaterial.

We cannot control other people, as much as we would like to think we can. The bottom line is that we can only be responsible for how *we* feel. So frames can be exceptionally useful when we wish to change the way *we* feel about something such as a memory or another person's behavior. Changing the frame we use is called "reframing" and, along with perceptual positions, is another one of the tools that enables us to be more resilient. The secret is to choose a frame that enables us to respond most resourcefully. The end result is that we are able to take control of a situation rather than allow it to control us.

Let's look at an example. Greg has discovered his boss, Jeff, has plans to ask him to work the weekend. He presupposes that this is because, of all the people that work in his department, Jeff likes Greg the least. This assumption leaves Greg feeling resentful toward Jeff and anxious about how he will be able to say "no" to the request. An alternative perspective Greg could take is that Jeff has chosen to delegate the work to him because he is the most skilled and reliable person. This set of assumptions (making up a frame) leaves Greg feeling valued and honored to be asked. Whether he really wants to work the weekend is immaterial at present. What is most affected will be the interaction between himself and his boss. Whether Greg says yes or no does not really matter. The overall outcome was reframed by Greg. He could have displayed feelings of resentment and put Jeff on the defensive. Either way Jeff will either feel more comfortable with his refusal, or will have begun to appreciate Greg more for saying yes. By reframing the situation Greg did not have to lie to himself or pretend things that were untrue. What he did was change the frame he used long enough to see how the situation played out. In this situation the CQ of both parties probably rose simply from choosing a different frame.

Any event or situation can be a good thing or a bad thing depending on how it is perceived. Highly resilient people have perceptual flexibility, enabling them to choose how they view a set of circumstances.

Often they will reframe a situation several times to enable them to maintain a sense of autonomy or control. This is called multiple reframing. A great example of this process is found in the Zen tradition.

THE FARMER AND HIS STALLION

There is an old Zen story about a farmer who bought a fine stallion one Monday at market for a good price. His neighbors came to admire it and all said "How fortunate you are!" To which the farmer replied
"Maybe..."

On the Tuesday the stallion escaped through a gap in the fence and ran away to the hills. Now all the neighbors said "How awful — what a catastrophe." To which the farmer replied
"Maybe..."

Then on Wednesday the stallion returned to the farm with a small herd of wild mares behind him. This time the neighbors were ecstatic — crying, "What luck! How marvelous." To which the farmer replied
"Maybe..."

On the Thursday the farmer's only son was breaking in the wild mares when one of them threw him and

he broke his leg. In the evening the neighbors talked of “the tragedy and misfortune.”

*To which the farmer replied
“Maybe...”*

*On Friday the Emperor’s army came looking for able bodied recruits to fight and almost certainly die in a War in the North...the villagers said to the farmer —
“how fortunate for your son”, the farmer replied...*

The principle behind this story is that perception is a highly relative process. Maturana, the Chilean biologist, suggests that when we forget our relative view of reality, we lose our capacity to live together. He goes on to state that when one person or group insists that only they see “what is really going on”, they are actually making a “demand for obedience”. There are many examples of this process going on in the world today. Indeed most, if not all, international conflicts are caused by groups of people being certain about their own version of reality.

The demand for obedience worked successfully throughout the industrial era with organizations built upon power hierarchies. Now that we are entering the era of collective intelligence, where cooperation and CQ are premium skills, such demands are less effective and often very harmful to a team’s overall resilience.

Emotional Perceptions

*We’re not passive observers of an external world;
rather, we know our world through interacting
with it, and our emotions can limit or enrich that
interaction.*

HUMBERTO R. MATURANA

Maturana's observation leads us to the following question: "How are we choosing to interact with the world?" By looking for the bad or negative influences, we discover a limited and one-dimensional world. This emphasizes the power of perspective in building the CQ of groups and teams to which we belong.

Neuroscientists have discovered strong evidence that human intelligence, human memory, and human decisions are never completely rational but are always colored by emotions, as we all know from experience.

CAPRA, *WEB OF LIFE*

One factor that can not be ignored is the part our emotions play in our perceptions. In fact research in this area demonstrates a connection between our success and general sense of happiness.

After interviewing 100 of the most successful and happy people they could find... The research found that each and every one of the 100 people had a special capability — to look for and find what is good in him- or herself, in others, and in all situations of life.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF POSITIVE QUESTIONS

Emotions also play an important role in our level of self-mastery. The wisdom of this chapter can be encapsulated by the "Four Noble Truths" found in Buddhist philosophy.

- We all experience suffering in one way or another — mental, physical, emotional, spiritual.
- We create our own suffering. It is a consequence of our desiring things to be other than they are.

- It need not be this way. We have a choice as to how we perceive the world and live our lives.
- There are systematic ways to go about changing how we think and perceive.

There are many ways to change how we think and perceive. The methods offered at the end of this chapter have been very successful with tens of thousands of people. Of course, nothing will change unless you are willing to try them.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

How we perceive ourselves determines how we operate in this world. Our self-perception is part of our relationship with ourselves. The relationship we have with ourselves is the most fundamental and abiding relationship we will ever have. If we are highly judgmental with ourselves it will almost certainly be translated into a habit of being judgmental with others. The place where change starts is the self and nowhere is it more true than our perception of ourselves.

*Change starts
with the self.*

When I view myself as a time-sensitive product, valued for what I produce, then I have made depth, extended thought, and the inward journey marginal indulgences. Instead of doing what matters, I spend my life doing what works. It increases my market value and postpones the question of my human value.

BLOCK, THE ANSWER TO HOW IS YES

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The quote from Peter Block's book, *The Answer To How Is Yes*, defines the challenge we all face in a rapidly changing society. What is our human value? Does my personal journey have any impact upon my professional development? Without developing ourself as a human being (rather than a human "doing") we will fail to grow professionally in a sustainable fashion. Along with this is the task of developing our CQ, our capacity to tap into the energy of groups and networks, supporting others as they strive to achieve their outcomes and achieving our own, in the process.



WHERE WE'VE BEEN

So we've explored the topic of perception in connection with resilience and the development of CQ. From this chapter we learned that:

- Perceptions are relative and become habits of seeing;
- Our attention is an important asset and used carefully can strengthen resilience and raise CQ;
- We use filters to select what we attend to and what we ignore;
- We can change the way we operate with others by changing our filters;
- Perspectives are ways of looking at things and we need to practice using different perspectives to increase our perceptual flexibility; and
- Frames are ways we interpret perceptions and reframing can help us respond more resourcefully to challenges.



WHERE WE'RE GOING

Biographies and autobiographies of great people point clearly to a distinct connection between how they saw the world and how they behaved in it. In this chapter we explored one half of the equation. In the next, we explore the other half — self-mastery. We will also examine ways to expand our own self-mastery and the part that can play in developing resilience and raising CQ.

CQ Tools[®] 2

Developing Perceptual Flexibility

This exercise achieves a number of things. It enables participants to discover for themselves specific processing capacities of the mind. The realization that participants have a choice over which processing capacity they use to review past events and plan future ones.

STEP ONE: Close your eyes and think of a pleasant holiday you have experienced. Notice the pictures/images as you recall this event.

Note: There are two different perspectives from which you can run your memories. One is where you are watching yourself in the memory (fly on the wall). This is called the Director's Perspective. The other is when you are actually in the picture seeing things with your own eyes. This is the Actor's Perspective.

Director's Perspective: When you are running a memory from the director's perspective, you are taking a dissociated position. You are seeing and hearing things from a position removed from the scene. Typically, when you run memories from this position, your feelings about this memory tend to be diminished or absent altogether.

Actor's Perspective: When you are running a memory from the actor's perspective, the memory is running as if you were re-living the event within your own body. You do not see yourself in the pictures. Typically, you will have a heightened awareness of the feelings associated with that memory.

STEP TWO A: Notice the image you created. Are you in director's perspective where you see yourself in the picture? (If you cannot, then go to Step 2B.) In this case, to explore the actor's perspective, image stepping into your body in the event. Notice what it is like to be inside your own body. To help, you may like to imagine things like warmth or coolness or feelings of relaxation, etc.

STEP TWO B: Notice the image you created. Can you see things and hear things as if you were there. If so, you are running the memory from actor's perspective. In this case, imagine stepping out of your body and notice what it is like to be watching yourself in the event. You may notice the lessening of the feelings associated with this memory.

Note: Now you have had an opportunity to switch perspectives from where you normally run that memory. The advantage of being able to switch perspectives is that you can choose to have more or less feelings associated with the event.

STEP THREE: Practice switching from one perspective to the other. Doing this expands your perceptual flexibility. Try the exercise with other events. Notice by switching to the director's perspective, challenging or upsetting events become much more

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comfortable. They lack most (if not all) of the negative feelings that accompanied them originally. Likewise, if you had been running pleasant memories from the director's perspective, you will discover the memory has many more pleasant feelings to be enjoyed by switching to the actor's perspective.