



What are your Default Settings?

As human beings, we too have our default settings in terms of our unique personalities, values, beliefs, etc. Shouldn't we customise these features for maximum benefit?

WHEN you buy a new device such as a phone or computer, these products usually come with default or factory settings. To make them more personal, you have to customise respective features by changing their default settings. Some features are easier or intuitive to customise than others. Complex customisation requires the perusal of manuals, which sometimes requires more than one attempt to achieve the desired setting.

As human beings, we too have our default settings in terms of our unique personalities, values, beliefs, perceptions, preconceived ideas, likes and dislikes which makes us who we are. These settings usually are responsible for the choices we make everyday.

But how aware are we of our default settings and their impact on our decision-making? More importantly, should we want to customise some of the features, how easy is it?

DEFAULT SETTINGS AND DECISION-MAKING

As leaders or managers we make choices everyday. A lot of these choices are based on our natural preferences, which are the result of our default settings. However, there is a danger in allowing our preferences to dictate our decision making instead of going by what is best in a given situation. We default to our preferences sometimes

without really understanding what we are doing. What we prefer is sometimes the right choice but often it is not.

To understand the impact of our preferences on our daily decision-making, we need to understand who we are to avoid being at the mercy of our preferences. More importantly, making the right decision sometimes requires us to go against the grain.

Managing and leading effectively is being able to question if a certain decision is best for a given situation. By understanding our default settings, we have the ability to stop and reflect if a certain decision or action is the best in a given situation.

Two articles ago, I talked about my reaction to the movie *Avatar* after viewing it for the first time. I did not appreciate the movie, as there was conflict between the contents of the movie and my default settings. When watching it for the second time, I had to 'fine-tune' some of the features of my default settings to be 'open' to the movie.

DEFAULT SETTINGS AND CHANGE

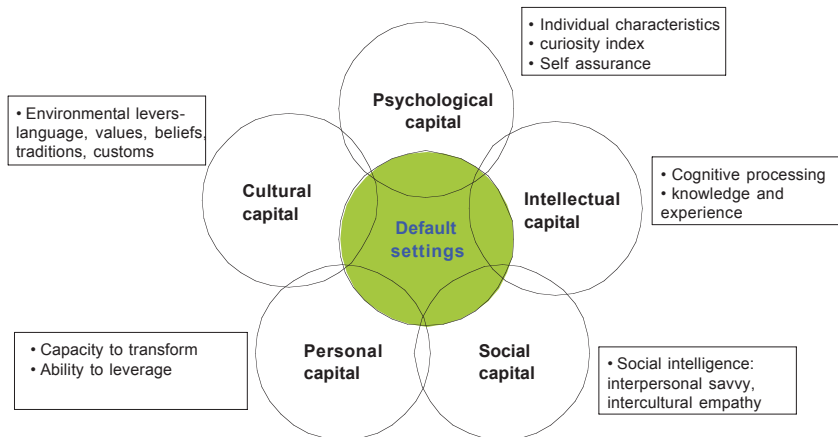
Because we all perceive differently based on our default settings, it is small wonder that interpersonal communications can be difficult. When I was working in Australia, a small group of people within



the organisation were convinced that their jobs would be at stake as a result of my work, which was not the case. I was sent to optimise or automise certain processes. I started noticing little acts of sabotage by this group of people.

As someone who is very much execution-oriented and focused on the now, I saw this as a bit of a setback. What I had to do then, on a daily basis, for a period of time, was to spend time interacting and investing in these people to allay some of their concerns. It was a slight detour but one that I chose to make. I say chose, because I could have turned to the bosses of the organisation to circumvent the problem. My 'responsibilities' did not include 'interferences'. At that time,

Components that make up our default settings



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however, I realised that would have made matters worse. In the end, I delivered on my objectives and became good friends with this group of people. The last I checked, some of them were still working at the same organisation, 20 years on!

Back then, I was a little fresh on the experience front especially being in a new environment, new culture and people. However, what I came to rely on was myself and understanding my default settings and using these 'tools' to overcome obstacles. Change, in this instance, was not to focus on my preferences of 'now' but to focus on what mattered 'now' in terms of the collective future.

Over time, I understood the impact of my default settings and when they were not optimal for given situations. As a result, I fine-tuned some features within my default settings. With a couple of features, I altered the settings deriving new default settings. Because these settings can become so ingrained in us, change becomes a challenge but it is possible!


DEFAULT SETTINGS AND THE GLOBAL MINDSET

Culture, especially multi-culture, has an impact on our perception capabilities. In his book, *The Brain that Changes Itself*, Norman Doidge states that multi-culture and multi-

language exposure increases the 'plasticity' of the brain. I attribute my being comfortable with the unfamiliar, building relationships and managing differing perceptions or conflict to my formative years in multi-cultural Malaysia. These are ingredients of the global mindset, and as Malaysians, we have an advantage over others who are exposed to only one culture, one language.

These are also features that form the components of our default settings. Culture is one component of our default settings and leveraging our diversity requires us to integrate all other components of our default settings (refer diagram). Culture becomes less of an advantage when we start getting comfortable with the familiar and lose our sense of curiosity and intrigue.

By getting comfortable, we limit ourselves to one option (no choice). Curiosity and intrigue increases the options available to us, giving us a choice in interactions and decision-making. It 'opens' up other options that we may not have thought of before. This is the essence of a global mindset. You don't need to spend years abroad to increase these options.

So, do you know your default settings, its impact on your decision-making and outlook? 

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