



# The Learning Never Stops

Learning new skills to win in challenging times.

**ORGANISATIONS ARE** fundamentally created by an idea which is made real via a set of structures, processes and people. People are the important ingredient in any organisation and broadly fall into two categories:

1. Big picture – responsible for the holistic or ‘helicopter’, longer-term view. It is the ability to conceptualise, determine alternatives, spotting linkages etc. Going beyond these, it is also the ability to engage, inspire and empathise – to bring ‘meaning’ and relevance to people who make up the organization.
2. Details-oriented – responsible for the details, ‘drill down’ view of tasks or projects. It is the ability to analyse, solve problems, assess and evaluate data into meaningful information. The alternatives have been eliminated and the ‘solution’ or choice has been determined for implementation. Going beyond



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these, it is also the ability to follow through, remain persistent and driven

### The requirements for the future

We are living in challenging economic times. In a world where most functions can be outsourced, the greatest asset becomes your 'client-focused' employees. They are your 'brand' and they are 'you'. What you invest in them, is who you become in the market place.

The question is, 'What are the skills that will help employees remain relevant in the future?'

I believe the future is going to be more about the 'big picture' and less of the 'details-oriented' skill. The key strength of the 'details-oriented' person is their ability to follow a process and continually assess, evaluate and implement. Most roles within organisations are concerned with implementing structures, including policies, procedures and streamlining processes. Unfortunately, these very structures and processes are what can be outsourced or automated.

By virtue of 'doing' and perfecting a process, the 'details-oriented' person is focused on the process at hand, that they sometimes lose sight of or are unaware of the 'bigger picture'. The bigger picture gives us a broader view, provides alternatives and with that, once tuned in, our ability to engage, bring 'meaning' and relevance to ourselves and the organisation, as the path ahead usually has more than one option.

The good news is that we already have the faculties to learn these 'bigger picture' skills. It has always been with us. We just need to tune into these skills. This is done by going back to basics, ie, the basic way we function as humans.

### How we function

All key functions we perform in daily life use two key criteria:

1. Perception function, and
2. Action function.

### Perception function

The perception function is all about gathering information from the surroundings. Our ability to assess a situation, conceptualise, engage empathetically, inspire, understand the real needs of clients, suppliers, team members or employees sits within this functionality. This functionality is present in all of us. For some, it is very tuned in and for others it needs to be tuned in. The extent to which it is tuned in will depend on how you have used and developed this functionality over time.

### Action function

The action function is the 'execution' step to produce an outcome having processed the information we gathered from our surroundings. Based on the information we have gathered, our internal templates are applied to the information to provide us with an outcome. Our ability to analyse, solve problems, structure an idea to fruition, close deals sits within this functionality. Again, this function is very tuned in for some and for others, it needs to be tuned in. Its extent will depend on the usage and development of this functionality over time.

### Drawing parallels between the human function and the organisation

We are trained to be action-oriented. If a client is before us, we seek the best course of action, usually based on a process or procedure within the organisation, to complete our task

for the client. Then we move on to the next client and do the same. This is fine. However, these actions can be delivered without resorting to our 'perception' function. Any individual who demonstrates real success is working with the combination of the 'perception' and the 'action' function.


For instance, driving a car is an 'action' function, however, one has to have the 'bigger picture' to drive competently. Competent driving is about the ability to 'take in' the overall scene including looking ahead beyond the car in front of yours, judging the speed of approaching cars and reading signs and signals. Drivers who are tuned in to these multiple sources of information seem to drive with ease, whilst others who are less tuned in seem more anxious on the road. We can be trained to be less anxious drivers.

### Investment for the future

The key to the future is to shift our focus to the 'big picture' by nurturing the use of the 'perception' function. This function or skill can be developed through its use, just like any muscle or organ in the body is developed through use. There are simple tools and techniques to achieve this.

This is the investment that organisations should undertake to prepare its people for the future.

This is relevant to an employee, an organisation and a nation. In a recent statement, the Greek Prime Minister, George Papandreou, said, 'We need to give this country a dream of where we are going. It is difficult and there will be protests and people will feel bitter – but it will be one of the most creative times Greece has gone through'.

Without 'perception', we cannot navigate through difficult times or reap the full rewards in the good times. Investing in training your people to develop a high level of 'perception' is an investment for future success. I believe these skills are needed now. 

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