EMPOWERING TIMES

THINKING ALOUD
Better Results Through Critical Thinking - Jay

PODIUM
Interview with Dr. Mat-Thys Fourie - Chairman of Thinking Dimensions Global, Managing Director of Thinking Dimensions, USA

WE RECOMMEND
Thinking, Fast and Slow - Daniel Kahneman

STANDING OVATION
Samuha, Kanakagiri, Karnataka

Dear Reader,

Our daily lives consists of making key decisions pertaining to our personal and/or professional front which may be right or wrong. World over management gurus and psychologists have discussed and studied the ways, tools and techniques to make decisions and solve problems and have attempted to come up with a logical way to cope with a given situation. However, decision making is only a ripple in a stream of thoughts combined with uncertainty and risks that a given situation poses amid various alternatives. The right decision can save the day. On the other hand, bad decisions can often be traced back to the way the decisions were made - the alternatives were unclear, the right information was not collected, the costs and benefits were not accurately weighed, etc. Even if one has the experience to cope and come up with solutions to similar situations tackled in the past, this may not help when it comes to business situations; the same solution may not work given the dynamism of the environment in which we operate in today.

ET this month delves on the theme Problem Solving, Decision Making and its Impact. People have long preached the benefits of deploying modern techniques such as derivatives, scenario planning, business forecasting, and real options. But at a time when change and chaos so often triumphs over control in the business world, even these can do only so much. All is not lost. Faced with the imperfectability of decision making, theorists have sought ways to achieve, if not optimal outcomes, at least acceptable ones.

With the festival of lights just around the corner, here's wishing your family and you the very best of Diwali 2015!

In the **Thinking Aloud** section, Jay speaks of rational and critical thinking and is of the opinion that the latter helps in better decision making despite the many challenges to the term. Keeping in mind the various needs of stakeholders, there are tools and techniques that can enable one to tackle problems and arrive at better decisions in a collaborative manner.

On the **Podium**, Dr. Mat-Thys Fourie talks about how we can break the cycle of making mistakes and opines that when individuals are pushed further for more ideas
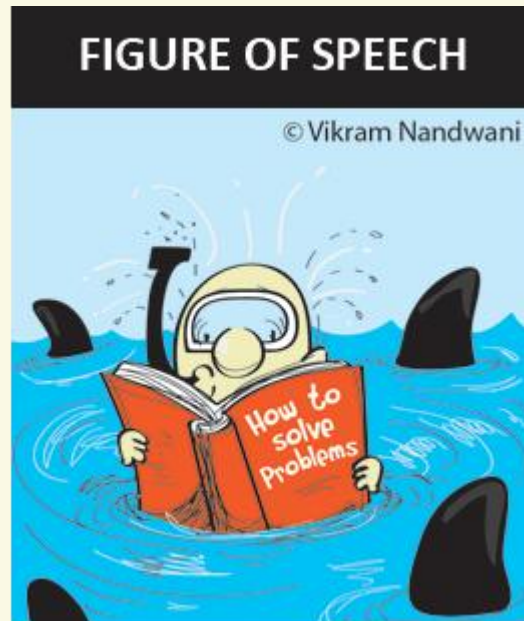
they produce more creative and innovative alternatives. He shares thoughts on Continuous IT Service Improvement, especially in the context of identifying Technical Cause & Root Cause Analysis.

In **We Recommend**, Prasad shares his thoughts on Daniel Kahneman's book 'Thinking, Fast and Slow.' The book summarizes research that Kahneman has conducted over the years in collaboration with Amos Tversky. The central theme being between two modes of thought: System 1 and System 2. He also offers explanations of why humans struggle to think statistically. Kahneman explains this phenomenon using the theory of heuristics.

In **Standing Ovation**, we feature Karnataka based NGO - Samuha. Since its inception in 1987, it has been working with disabled people through its Community Based Rehabilitation programmes. It also aims to improve the quality of life of agricultural and backward communities by running projects in education, health, poverty alleviation and water management.

In **Figures of Speech**, Vikram's toon tries to solve a problem at the right nick of time!

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Better Results Through Critical Thinking - Jay

In a world where emotions rule, strange as it may seem, there are still those who believe in rational thought.

Most of us would argue that rational thought is impossible when we are seized with multiple series of issues accosting us - sometimes minute to minute - in a jam packed day. Decision making under pressure can test the best of us & compel us into knee jerk reactions as the primitive brain inside us takes recourse to the easy way out when faced with the classic 'fight or flight' dilemma.

In the words of the radical Kupferberg, 'When patterns are broken, new worlds emerge.' And, we hardly need to be reminded that in today's VUCA world, patterns are changing much too rapidly to allow us to come to grips with situations. In a well-known Harvard Business Review article, the authors noted that 'not all leaders achieve the desired results when they face situations that require a variety of decisions and responses. All too often, managers rely on common leadership approaches that work well in one set of circumstances but fall short in others. Why do these approaches fail even when logic indicates they should prevail? The answer lies in a fundamental assumption of organizational theory and practice: that a certain level of predictability and order exists in the world.' The authors, Snowden & Boone, then went on to offer the Cynefin framework as a methodology to make sense of a fast changing environment where fluidity is normal, particularly in the socio-political fields.

The ability to think critically in the face of multiple challenges is much valued despite the definitional challenges of the term. 'You know it when you see it', said an academician explaining Critical Thinking. The definition that appeals to me the most is 'the ability to take information and make informed decisions without being influenced by your own opinions' (Pearson). This is feasible by first of all identifying & analyzing assumptions, and then evaluating information carefully, and, finally, by arriving at appropriate conclusions. Easy as it seems, it is not so, as our mind is a mine field of biases and fallacies aggregated through years of social conditioning & stimuli, besides the natural variation and deficiency in biological intelligence in any group of people.

In the world of business too, there are tools and techniques that can enable us to tackle problems and arrive at better decisions in a collaborative fashion, keeping in mind the needs of multiple stakeholders. An important one is the KEPNERandFOURIE® (K&F) framework. Complexity in today's world cannot be wished

away and only those who are well equipped with appropriate tools will be ready to manage successfully and achieve better results. The bedrock of this method is the interplay between Divergent & Convergent Thinking.

Doyle's Sherlock Holmes famously said that, 'The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes', and come to think of it, it is so true, isn't it? Therefore, we require simple tools to aid us to be rational in resolving vexatious problems. In the systematic approach of the K&F process you are asked to begin by identifying the objective of any exercise. Thereafter, there are clear steps for gathering information through critical questioning. Having accomplished this, the logical next step would be to organize, evaluate & analyse this information, leading to the final conclusion and appropriate action (be it setting priorities, making decisions, making further & deeper risk analysis, etc.).

Can we learn to be better decision makers? The cost of poor decisions is rising in today's competitive world, and this can be rectified. Yes, thinking is a muscle that can be developed through practice. Our ability to think critically can be shaped by becoming aware of techniques like the K&F approach outlined above. However, mastering this approach and making it intuitive to oneself requires repeated and dedicated practice. The fact is that investing and creating a community of expert problem solvers in your firm who can think critically and resolve issues with speed could be one of the best decisions that a leader can make!

PODIUM

Interview with Dr. Mat-thys Fourie - Chairman, Thinking Dimensions Global

Dr. Mat-thys Fourie

Dr. Mat-thys Fourie is currently Chairman of Thinking Dimensions Global and Managing Director of Thinking Dimensions, USA and Thinking Dimensions, Singapore and still works selectively with some of his clients. He is also co-author and co-designer of the KEPNERandFOURIE® methodologies. He has over 30 years of problem solving and decision making experience helping organizations across the world solve some of their most vexing and seemingly unsolvable problems. He has worked with companies such as Macquarie Group, SASOL, Unisys, SITA, Barclays, RBS, NCS, Singapore Stock Exchange,

BMW, VW, Cadbury Schweppes, Westpac, National Australia Bank, Kimberly Clark, Hollister, Stihl Inc. and the US Navy.

ET: Human beings are born problem solvers, it is said. Yet, we find that managers in organizations repeat the same mistakes again and again. What can we do to break the cycle of mistakes?

MF: Unfortunately human beings only learn from their mistakes and rarely improve their problem solving and decision making abilities proactively. Most successful people learn about how to solve problems through trial and error and some were lucky to be mentored by their parents and/or an official mentor. Over a period of 30 years in the problem solving business we've learned that most business people need to receive training in problem solving techniques to become more effective.

ET: The legendary problem solving expert Chuck Kepner has famously said that, 'Very often, the first alternative suggested is greeted with open arms. 'Hey, that's a good idea,', and the search is over. The best ideas usually come later, after people have had a chance to think about it.' What is the method to generate more ideas for problem solving & decision making so that we do not make better decisions?

MF: This is correct. The first ideas are always the obvious ideas or also known as the "same old, same old". Only when pushed for further ideas will individuals become more creative and produce innovative and exciting alternatives. The method to use is to break down the requirements for a decision and then to generate specific suggestions per requirement. This method allows the decision maker to generate specific innovative actions and when put together would produce an answer that they would not have thought of originally.

ET: Quality of information is the key input to problem solving. How does one gather information & ensure the authenticity of this critical input?

MF: By breaking down the problem into components and then to restate those components in as specific as possible terms. This would enable the problem solver to structure specifically worded questions that will cut through to the core issue and thus improve the date and information regarding a specific issue.

ET: The IT industry is committed to continuous process improvement. Please share with us your thoughts on Continuous IT Service Improvement, especially in the context of identifying Technical Cause & Root Cause Analysis?

MF: One of the components of Continual Service Improvement is to reduce recurring incidents on a consistent basis. This does not always happen because the average IT Professional does not understand that there are at least two answers to an incident. There is a technical cause, which would represent what happened technically. In

other words, what change or event in time caused the eventual deviation from the standard? Then there is also at least one root cause and this represents a condition that exists. This is the company environment condition, unless removed will produce technical causes and incidents in perpetuity. The bottom line is that you need to find the specific technical event first before you would even have a chance to find the root cause. Without this philosophy you cannot really cause an improvement in your IT environment.

ET: Please share with us the essential and core principles of the Kepner&Fourie® framework of problem solving & decision making.

MF: The core principles are the following:

- Use a framework to gather factual information about the incident or the solution needed.
- Ask the right question from the right person to get a right answer.
- Verify the validity of information or data offered.
- Test assumptions by testing SME inputs against your factual snapshot of the incident or solution needed.

ET: Tell us about the Institute of Professional Problem Solvers?

MF: The IPPS is an institute to raise the level of corporate awareness about the importance of good problem solving and decision making skills. This institute is trying to create a framework that would recognize the different proven skills levels of individual in problem solving in the work place. These levels could be attained through formal training and application or through experience. There are three levels:

- Level One - The Foundation Level - basically learning about decision making and proving that he/she can apply the principles and practices of sound problem solving and decision making.
- Practitioner Level - This is the level where the individual proves they have the ability to apply these skills in a normal working environment.
- Professional Level - This is the ultimate level and at this level the individual proved they can apply their professional problem solving skills with any team in any environment at any level in the organization.

WE RECOMMEND

Thinking, Fast and Slow - Daniel Kahnemann
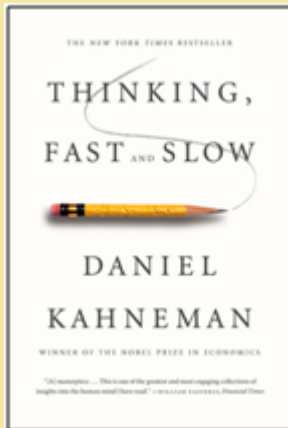
This is a brilliant book, a tour de force from one of the deepest thinkers and psychologists of our time. This is a book that explains clearly why we do what we do and why we make the choices we make. And how can we perhaps steer ourselves clear of some of the more obvious obstacles in our path by being more aware of our own biases and fallacies.

This is a book about understanding how the mind works and how this understanding, helps each one of us make better decisions by improving our ability to identify and understand errors of judgement and choice, in others and eventually in ourselves, by providing a richer and more precise language to discuss them. This is Daniel's biggest contribution. You cannot understand what you cannot articulate. In this book, Daniel introduces a language for thinking and talking about the mind.

Daniel and Amos worked for many years together to document the 'short cuts' or heuristics in our intuitive thinking that manifest as biases that skew the way we interpret the situation and take decisions. Heuristics such as the availability heuristic explains why some issues are very important in the public's mind and while others are neglected. People tend to assess the relative importance of issues by the ease with which they are retrieved from memory and this is largely determined by the extent of coverage in the media.

How does the mind work? The title is actually the dead giveaway. Daniel explains in fascinating detail, with lots of insightful examples how we use two types of thinking which he calls as System 1 and System 2 thinking. The intuitive System 1 or fast thinking which operates automatically, quickly with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control and System 2 is the slower more deliberative thinking which allocates attention to effortful mental activities. The interaction of the two systems is the recurrent theme of this book and simply understanding how these systems interact would be enormously beneficial to the reader.

This is not an easy book to read though it is extremely readable. The book moves on from the two systems approach to judgement and choice to the study of judgement heuristics. It answers the question 'why is it so difficult to think statistically?'The book then explores the puzzling aspect of our mind - our propensity to overestimate what we think we know and our inability to acknowledge the full extent of our ignorance.

At the close, one of the most fascinating distinctions drawn by Daniel in his book is

the distinction between our experiencing self and remembered self. The distinction is crucial to our measurement of well-being. What makes the experiencing self happy is not quite the same as what satisfies the remembering self. The decisions that we take and our overall happiness depends on how our two selves pursue happiness.

As Kahneman says 'Like medicine, the identification of judgement errors is a diagnostic task, which requires a precise vocabulary'. Labels such as 'anchoring effect', 'halo effect', 'narrow framing' bring together in memory everything we need to know about a bias.

Finally the book is really about providing a richer language so essential to the skill of constructive criticism. A remarkable book and a seminal work, this is a must read for every one as we all fight the same fight - how to make better decisions inspite of ourselves.

STANDING OVATION

Samuha, Kanakagiri, Karnataka

Samuha is a development organization which began work in January 1987. Its goal is to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people. The core of Samuha's operational areas are presently focused around 90,000 households in over 500 villages and hamlets in the Raichur and Koppal districts of North Karnataka.

The NGO primarily focuses on children, women, people with disabilities, people living in rain-fed, agricultural economies, people with distinct cultural identities, and the digitally disadvantaged. It conducts surveys and research on developmental issues. Apart from this, it also generates awareness building activities and encourages groups and institution building activities.

Mission/Vision:

To help vulnerable people improve their quality of life.

Till date, Samuha has incubated the following independent entities that continue to work in the society's developmental process:

- Mahiti, an internet resource group for NGOs.
- Suvidhya, an educational resource group.

- Jana Sahayog, an organization of people living in slums.
- Samraksha, an organization working in health and development with special focus on reproductive sexual health and HIV
- iSquareD, an organization focusing on social enterprise. iSquareD or i2D takes its name from the 3 words 'Innovation, Internet and Development'.
- Samarthya, an organization working with people with disabilities. It takes its name from 'Potential'.

Its international presence consists of Samuha International - Samuha Overseas Development Association (SODA), which was initiated by Hilary Crowley, a returned ActionHealth 2000 volunteer, in Prince George, British Columbia, Canada. Side by side, Samuha Germany e.V. is being initiated by a group of returned SCI Germany volunteers.

For more information on the activities undertaken by Samuha, please visit http://www.samuha.org/.

Samuha, for their noble contribution to the society, deserves a Standing Ovation!

Happy Diwali

We feature our in-house Photographer Rupesh Balsara's floral picture of daylilies in full bloom taken in mid-August on the Keylong-Manali-Leh route. Also known as the "perfect perennial" due to its brilliant colours, the ability to tolerate and thrive in different climate zones, these flowers typically last no more than 24 hours. The flowers of most species open in early morning and wither during the following night, possibly replaced by another one on the same scape (flower stalk) the next day.

Rupesh Balsara is a well-known naturalist, outdoor specialist and wildlife photographer.

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