

“Instead of greeting technology from a position of confidence and declaring a new age of creativity, too often we have declared an age of never ending disruption, in which the only certainty is that relentless and unpredictable ways of change will bedevil us, mocking our efforts to think in any stable way about anything.”

Giles Hedger, CSO Leo Burnett, London



Curiosity, digital transformation and future-proofing your business

By, Nadine Parkington founder of Think Nimble.

I recognise the look on the face of practically every person who attends my digital training sessions: it's a combination of fear and denial, and translated, it says: "I am worried that it will be discovered that I am not up-to-the-minute on technology, and so I am just going to pretend that it has nothing to do with my work/role."

While your executive team is busy transforming your business and how people interact with it, your staff is getting left behind.

For many, transforming to a digital business is causing more issues than improvements. While they are focusing on getting the executive team on board and delivering the physical technology solutions, what's getting over-looked is the people.

Many leaders are so preoccupied with teaching people new processes that they have totally missed the fact that at the most basic level, their people are really uncomfortable with the stuff.

And it only gets worse over time. The more the leaders and executive get enveloped in the transformation, the greater the divide between those engaged and those not becomes.

What they don't realise is that transforming into a digital business and future proofing your company, is less about signing your people up for a course in coding and more about something we all have and have in abundance: curiosity.

A lot of us are discovering that the problem of moving an established brand through a digital transformation is bigger than we first thought. The reason for this is that most of us didn't



anticipate the fact that this new way of being requires a completely different mindset, a new approach to culture and learning.

One common reaction I see to this realisation is to disengage from the topic of technology and try to ignore how it is changing their lives and businesses.

In my digital training sessions I tell people that the first thing they need to learn is how to say: "I don't know". On the surface it sounds pretty easy, after all, it is impossible to know everything. Yet so much of our corporate culture applauds knowledge, and frowns upon lack of knowledge. We need to be shifting this behaviour in order to create a company that will maintain its relevancy in the future.

The second thing you need to learn, I tell my trainees, is that when you are talking tech, people may not know what you are talking about. Or you may be talking at cross-purposes. Technology is full of jargon and complexity. It means people need to listen hard *and differently* and be prepared to accept that someone else's contribution may be adding value.

When we don't know something, we are left feeling vulnerable – even more so when we sense there is even more we don't know. This fear often translates to negative behaviours such as defensiveness, disengagement and bloody mindedness. Our desired outcome needs to be the creation of a culture of continuous learning, problem solving and innovation.

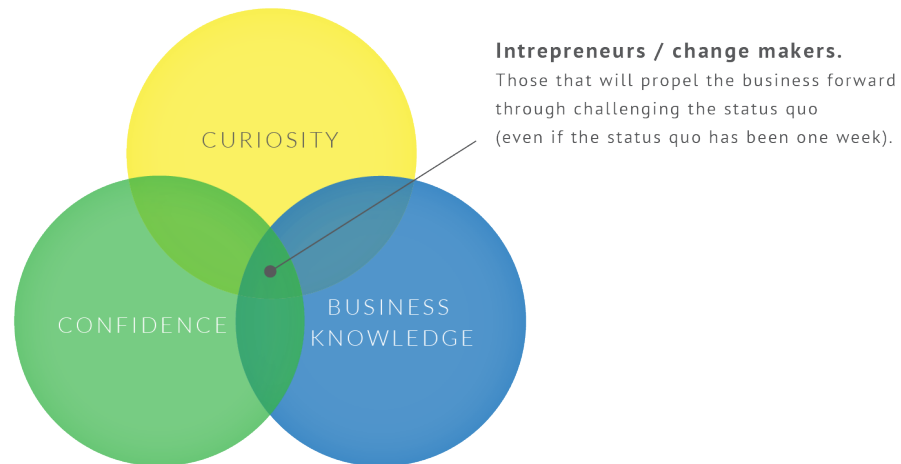
We need to remove the fear, to increase positive engagement. Then we can teach a new way of learning and build a supportive culture. At the heart of the solution is curiosity.

Curiosity will provide the antidote to fear. Curiosity at work, it turns out, not only stops people from feeling vulnerable but it gets them hungry for more information.

Our Digital Mindset Model shows the mix required for a culture of continuous learning, problem solving and innovation.



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION MINDSET MODEL



The model shows us that we need our curiosity for technology to over-power the fear of technology. This can be achieved by building CQ (curiosity quotient) into our wider cultural structure.

If previously we have been focussed on what people know and how they operate we now need to focus on stimulating curiosity.

Technology Curiosity Quotient (TCQ) > Fear = ENGAGEMENT

A recent Gallup study shows that only 13 per cent of employees are engaged in their job¹.

Curiosity drives engagement and encourages active minds and positive lines of inquiry delivering:

1. **A spirit of continuous learning.** Taking a leaf out of the educators' book for our future generations:

¹ [Gallup 2014](#)

“Teachers are now faced with the challenge that “former conceptions of knowledge, minds and learning no longer serve a world where what we know is less important than what we are able to do with knowledge in different contexts.” Doctor Sharon Friesen².

The power of an inquiry-based approach to learning is its potential to increase intellectual engagement and build deep understanding through hands-on experiences, minds-on and ‘research-based disposition’ towards teaching and learning.

2. **Innovative minds:** Hungry minds drive both leaders and teams to learn about their environment inside and out and never stop looking for ways to improve and innovate. Inquiry-based learning is founded on the complex, interconnected nature of knowledge construction, and provides opportunities to collaboratively build, test and reflect on learning.
3. **Problem solving:** Technology is creating complex environments, and we need people throughout the business who can face complexity and see the way through it. *“There’s some evidence to suggest it (CQ) is as important (as IQ) when it comes to managing complexity...CQ is the ultimate tool to produce simple solutions for complex problems.”³*

At a high level we need everyone in the organisation tuned into what is going on - what the customers expect, what the business needs to deliver, technology and behavioural trends.

“Companies in which understanding technology trends is a priority realize an actual dollars-and-cents payoff.” HBR⁴

Research shows that only 25 per cent of people feel they have the right mindset to survive in the digital age.⁵ So what do they do? They sit back and merely observe the transformation instead of partaking.

² [Teach inquiry](#)

³ [HBR Curiosity is as important as Intelligence](#)

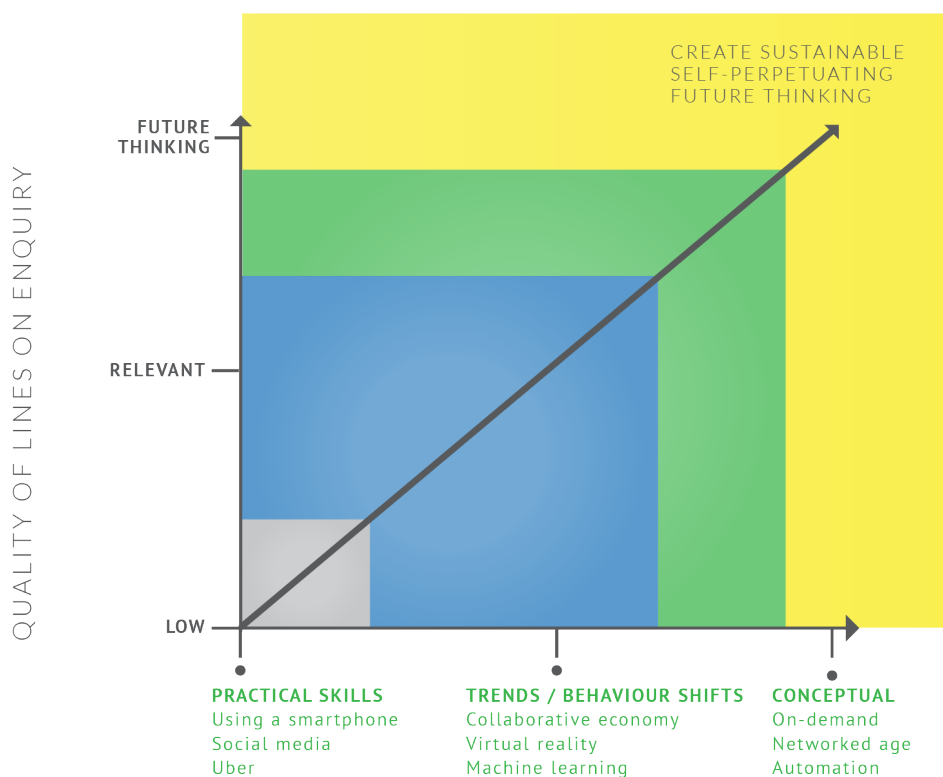
⁴ [HBR and Red Hat Digital Transformation Report](#)

⁵ PA Consulting [Digital Barometer](#)



And their managers do too. There is a spectrum of understanding that spans from practical knowledge to conceptual understanding. Conceptual understanding drives better questions, problem solving and innovation. When we assume our people understand technology we grossly overstate their ability to engage this conceptual understanding.

SPECTRUM OF UNDERSTANDING VS QUALITY OF LINES OF ENQUIRY



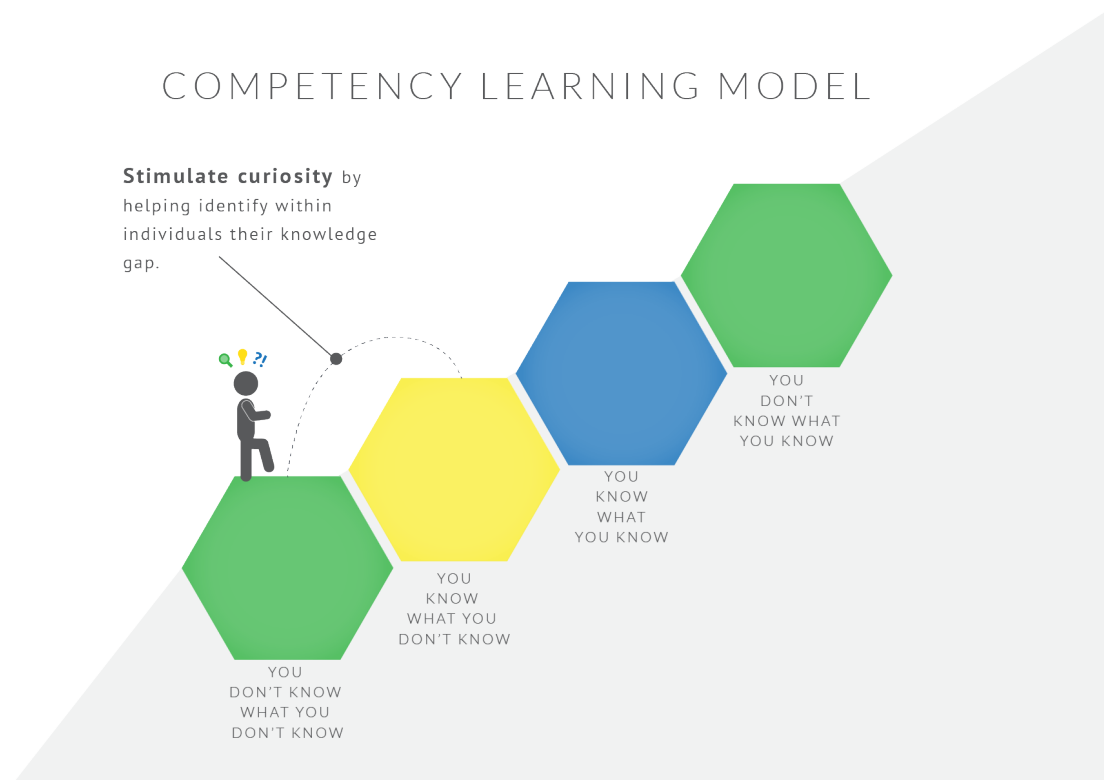
SPECTRUM OF UNDERSTANDING

By helping people identify their knowledge gaps in a safe collaborative (and fun) environment, they will start to wonder more and aim to fill in the gaps. This will create a more confident mindset and avoid a disconnection between the new world strategies and processes and the wider company mindset. But most importantly, it will prevent uninformed decision-making.



How to stimulate curiosity.

According to Lowenstein's Information Gap Theory, the best way to stimulate curiosity is to help individuals see their knowledge gap. Realising their knowledge gaps triggers the intrigue that drives curiosity. The key is to ensure that this gap is big enough to create curiosity but small enough to be accessible. Lowenstein's knowledge gap directly talks to the second stage of the competency model as outlined below.



Curiosity starts with deep listening. The question is what are they listening to?

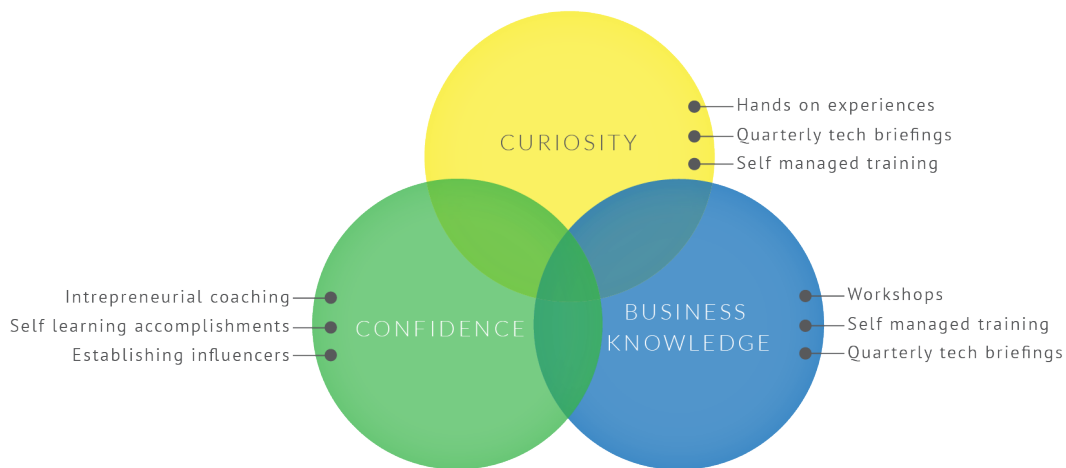
As leaders we need to shape, lead and steer these conversations. One hurdle when talking about technology is the misinterpretation of the conversation – too much jargon and inappropriate use of terminology can leave people talking at cross purposes. This is exaggerated within a corporate environment where each person has their own filter (HR/Marketing/IT). We need to create accessible discussions where people 'practice' talking to each other and asking 'dumb' questions to clarify.



Creating the right listening posts

To help people recognise their knowledge gaps we need to set the context and get them hungry for more information. This requires a multi-faceted programme focused on participation.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION MINDSET MODEL



This model has led to the development of our programmes, which are designed to involve everyone and get some common language and conversation going. It is the combination of approaches that helps with stimulating curiosity but also delivering hard outcomes. All components are designed to be fun and non-threatening to alleviate the feeling of disruption and shift to a new age of creativity.

Key components of our programmes are:

- Hands on experiences (constructivism)
- Emerging technology (discussion-based)
- Core digital skills (practical applications)
- Self-learning (online gamification app)

This holistic approach to learning will drive staff engagement, a metric that frequently plummets in the face of transformation.



For leaders it is important for their participation and interest in these topics to be communicated throughout the organisation. Every day I see people who are skeptical in the about their leaders' understanding of technology.

These formats will highlight and build confidence in what people know and help them identify their knowledge gaps which in turn will generate curiosity. Once initiated curiosity will build a momentum of its own. So long as the organisation embraces a culture of curiosity this can be nurtured by the most curious individuals and permeate the company.

How to create a culture of curiosity?

“Our instinct to explore is tempered by our desire to conform. We stop asking questions, because we learn that it makes us look stupid. We stop putting ourselves in positions where we are open to uncertainty — and therefore vulnerable.” Professor Todd Kashdan of George Mason University in Fairfax, US.⁶

To build a culture of curiosity we need to stop validating and emphasising people's intelligence based on what they know, rather by what questions they are asking. Knowledge recall is a thing of the past as we move forward. It will be the ability to ask the right questions and the skills to explore the answers within the correct context that will take you forward. These skills will be largely based on generating and accessing your network of thinkers and resources to then connect concepts and experience to drive insight relevancy.

So let's start rethinking the way in which we evaluate performance, start looking for curious minds and providing them with the right environment for them to flourish. Let them facilitate and drive a culture of curiosity. Let's rethink our training, especially in our technology approach, to embrace questioning and exploring through doing.

It may surprise you to know that in workshops participants often have not read the paper online, have not booked tickets online and do not understand what the cloud is. What's more, the longer they put off learning about it, the more they opt out of the conversation and thinking altogether. They become disengaged.

⁶ Tom Kashdan, author of [Curious?](#)



So, should those people just leave, move on to somewhere less progressive? These same people are often the ones that have the deepest business knowledge; we can't afford to lose them. In a competition between established brands and start-ups, the advantage for established brands is the category and brand knowledge.



About Nadine Parkington.

Nadine Parkington is one of Australia's most experienced digital strategists working with some of the world's most famous brands. She is passionate about maintaining staff engagement to channel digital power into business growth and transformation. Nadine is the founder of consultancy Think Nimble, Chief Editor at savingdinosaurs.com and Co-founder of Maker Minds.

