

Skill Up

Brings you snackable bites of a larger skill, you can quickly learn and put to use at work

Mental Tools to Master the Secret of Learning Faster

Picture this. It is the last day of the quarter and you are filling in data into statement formats that need to go by end of day. Not a job you look forward to. Your phone rings. It's your friend in the Information Technology team. She sounds excited "Say goodbye to



your prospecting and reporting worries ... Our company is buying a cool new CRM system that will help you do all that" "That's great" you respond "when do we get our hands on it?" "Easy, my friend" she responds "It is powered by an AI algorithm. You would have to learn how to make use of it. You will be trained, no worries"

What's the first thought that crosses your mind? If you are like most of us, it could be something like – "Oh no, where is the time for training and learning in the midst of all this deal chasing and pipeline filling work"

This is exactly the dilemma that Erika Andersen addresses in an evocatively titled article Learning to Learn published in Harvard Business Review in March 2016. This feeling of discomfort towards having to continuously learn something new is universal. Erika Andersen explains: "I'm talking about resisting the bias against doing new things, scanning the horizon for growth opportunities, and pushing yourself to acquire radically different capabilities—while still performing your job" That's the source of all our discomfiture. The operative words are "while still performing your job."

Isn't that a tall ask? It isn't really so as Erika goes on to demystify. Moreover, she says the struggle is well worth it. Erika quotes Arie de Geus, a business theorist to make her point. After all, "The ability to learn faster than your competitors may be the only sustainable competitive advantage."

So, how do we learn to learn? Erica zeroes in on 4 attributes of life long learners and suggests simple mental tools to acquire and boost those attributes in us

Aspiration,
Self-awareness,
Curiosity, and
Vulnerability

Besides successful learners with busy career interest also display the following common behaviours:

“They truly want to understand and master new skills;
they see themselves very clearly;
they constantly think of and ask good questions; and
they tolerate their own mistakes as they move up the learning curve”

Here are the mental tools Erica recommends for cultivating the learning to learn attributes:

1. Aspiration

Great learners aspire to learn. But what if you don't feel the urge to learn and the prospect of learning looks daunting? Fear not. As Erica points out it is possible to raise generate the aspiration to learn new skills or to acquire new knowledge

Mental Tools to Use

Shift your focus from negative to positive. For example gently dismiss the excuses our minds come up with when faced with having to learn something new. Erica's list includes “It will take too long. The old way works just fine for me. I bet it's just a flash in the pan” The excuses will unconsciously reinforce our lack of aspiration.

Instead turn the spotlight on the gains of learning. Imagine vividly the future rewards. “That propels us into action” Research has found that shifting the focus from challenges to benefits increases aspiration to do what Erica calls “Initially unappealing things”

2. Self Awareness

One blind spot even among leaders with stellar records is their lack of understanding regarding what they know and don't know and the skills they possess and don't possess. The roadblock here is the defensive responses our minds come up with when we are critiqued. If we perceive not knowing something as a flaw that we don't want to admit, then learning is not possible. But self awareness can be cultivated

Mental Tools to Use

Monitoring self talk can be a good starting point When someone points out our ignorance or lack of skill, encourage internal questions like “Is that accurate? What facts do I have to support it?” Striving for greater objectivity or a ‘fair witness’ within yourself helps expand self awareness and learn faster and more

3. Curiosity

Children are the best models to pick up curiosity from. They learn exponentially because they are unquenchably curious. “Curiosity” says Erica “is what makes us try something until we can do it, or think

about something until we understand it. Great learners retain this childhood drive, or regain it through another application of self-talk”

Mental Tools to Use

What if we feel bored and turned off about learning something that would be good for us to learn? How do we whip up the enthusiasm required for learning? Erica’s recommendation is to “ask curious questions”

She cites research by Carol Sansone, a psychology researcher, who found, for example, that people can increase their willingness to tackle necessary tasks by thinking about how they could do the work differently to make it more interesting.

Erica suggests that you switch to the language we use in thinking about things that already interest you—How...? Why...? I wonder...?—and drawing on it when you need to become curious. “Then take just one step to answer a question you’ve asked yourself: Read an article, query an expert, find a teacher, join a group—whatever feels easiest”

4. Vulnerability

Says Erica “Once we become good or even excellent at some things, we rarely want to go back to being not good at other things”. But life long learners allow themselves to be vulnerable enough to accept being an amateur or a novice by managing their self talk.

Mental Tools to Use

The best mindset to adopt would be to admit “I’m going to be bad at this to start with, because I’ve never done it before but I can certainly learn with practice”

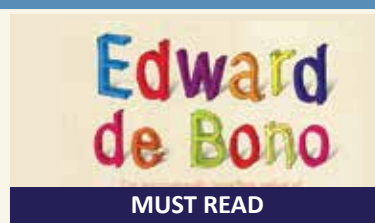
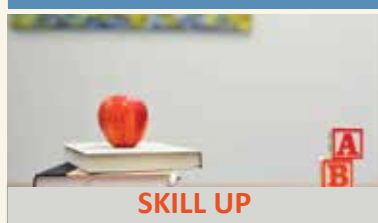
Research has established that “when people are encouraged to expect mistakes and learn from them early in the process of acquiring new skills, the result is “heightened interest, persistence, and better performance.”

Today a sales professional has to constantly learn new things to make a difference to Customers in markets marked by rapid change and continuous uncertainty. Learning to learn is to them the gift of a life time.

Read the HBR article [here](#)

“We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn.”

– Peter Drucker –



Spotlight

Shining a light on how sales works in emerging and new business models and across different industries

Does your Sales Training (or any training) recognise learning styles of all learners?

Sales is an ‘always on’ profession. One of the perpetual challenges for sales professionals is making time for renew themselves through learning. Then there is the challenge of getting training budgets approved. Clearly, there is no room for iterations or experi-

ments in ensuring that sales training works. And this is true of not just sales training but every kind of training or adult learning

So, is there way to get training instruction, whether sales or any other, right the first time, every time?

A typical group of adult learners is almost always made up individuals with uniquely different learning styles. Unless the trainer creates an instructional design that works for all of them, the training cannot accomplish its learning objectives.

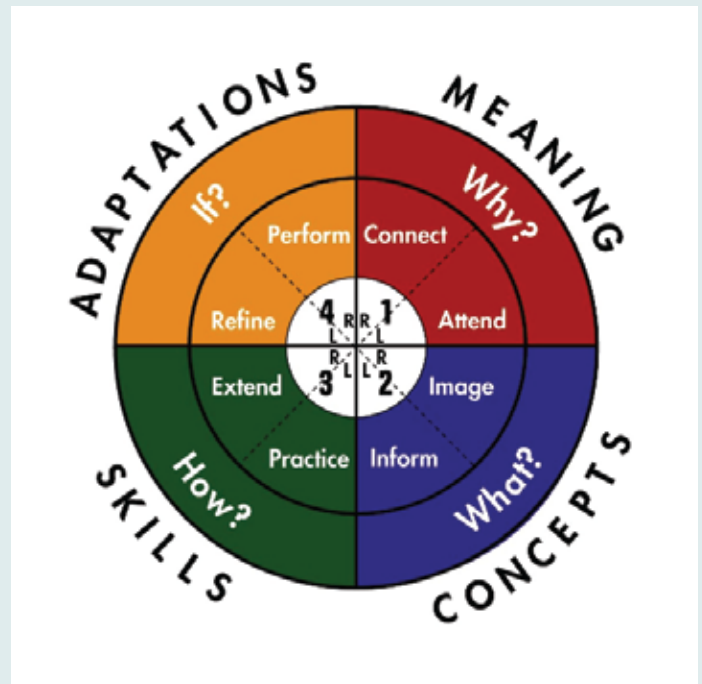
4MAT’s© Instruction Design shines a light on how the Natural Learning Cycle works differently for different individuals. 4MAT’s research shows that there are 4 distinctive learning styles that create varying learning needs.

The e-book “4MAT Pure and Simple: Learning About Learning” explains the learning styles this way:

We all travel the complete cycle, we feel, we reflect, we think, we act. But we have comfort spots, places where we feel more at home.

People who favour

i. Feeling and reflecting are Type One Learners – Preferring discussion and sharing



- ii. Thinking and reflecting are Type Two Learners – They enjoy information and analysis**
- iii. Thinking and acting are Type Three Learners – With a liking for problems and experimentation**
- iv. Acting and feeling are Type Four Learners – In favour of innovation and adaptations.**

The research is clear. Most of us favour one place on the cycle more than the other three.

The book summarises the heart of the challenge in designing effective trainings memorably: “The good news is that all four styles are equally first rate. The bad news is that many teachers don’t know that”

In this, could be the secret sauce of designing training that delivers learning which sticks in the workplace

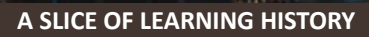
“Develop a passion for learning. If you do,
you will never cease to grow.”

– Anthony J. D’Angelo –

LEARNING ABOUT LEARNING. HOW LEARNING IS CHANGING. HOW TO MAKE IT WORK.



MUST READ



Have a Laugh



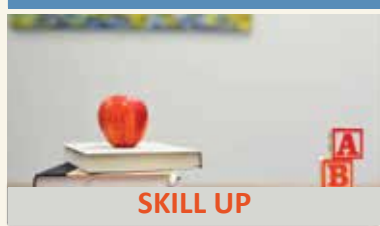
"Perhaps we encourage too much risk in our people."



"I need a list of specific unknown problems we will encounter."

One hour per day of study in your chosen field is all it takes. One hour per day of study will put you at the top of your field within three years. Within five years you'll be a national authority. In seven years, you can be one of the best people in the world at what you do.

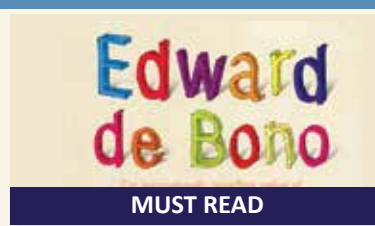
- Earl Nightingale -



SKILL UP



SPOTLIGHT



MUST READ



A SLICE OF LEARNING HISTORY

Must Read

Annotated ideas from insightful books

De Bono's Six Frames for Thinking About Information (And can also be about Learning)

Is information overload a real thing? That seems like a stupid question to ask. As of early April 2023, one estimate placed the data newly generated, captured, copied, or consumed at 328.77 million terabytes per day.

So, information overload is indeed frighteningly true. But at the level of the individual, overload happens when we let ourselves be

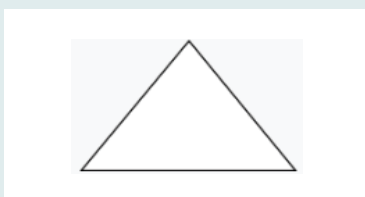
assailed by information flows without a clear understanding of what to do with the information we get.

In his book *Six Frames For Thinking about Information*, Edward De Bono often regarded as the father of lateral thinking proposes what looks like a sound solution to the problem

He puts forward a framework for pre-deciding what value we want to get out of the information before us. Such deliberate direction of our attention conserves it for issues where it is most needed. Attention after all is considered to be the currency of the new millennium

Extending it, we can apply this framework to what we intend to learn also

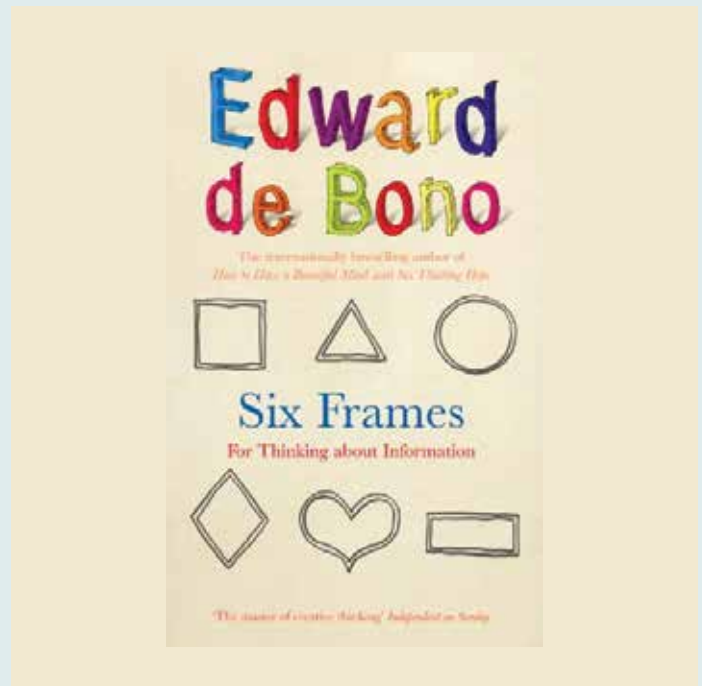
Below is a summary of the Six Frames for Thinking about Information (and by extension about learning as well)



1. Purpose, the triangle frame

Triangles are made up of three points and frequently resemble an arrow pointing in a particular direction. That direction is the purpose. With triangle frame, we can consider the purpose of looking at a piece of information

There are various ways in which information comes to us:



Notice – We ‘notice’ information (see a spelling error in a bill board)

Time filling distraction (Reading a magazine while waiting to see a doctor)

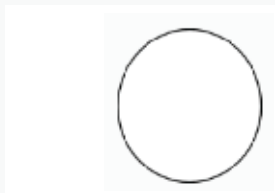
Awareness – We become aware because of an event or circumstances (We plan to travel and hence scan the weather bulletin)

Interest – This can be a general interest (in say, environment) or specific interest (Electric vehicles)

Need and search – Looking at job postings for example

Confirmation or specific questions – Example: Is it true that? Or “When do you get pain? Before or after the meal?”

The Triangle frame can be used for laying out clearly the purpose of looking at an information. We could extend that logic to clarify the purpose of what we learn before we start learning anything



2. Accuracy, the circle frame

Circle conjures up the image of a target or a bull’s eye and is therefore associated with accuracy

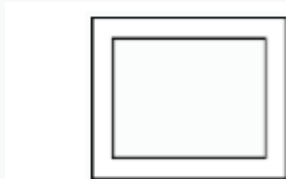
“Let’s use the circle frame to check these statistics compiled by front office”

Authority of the source is one way of checking for accuracy

Another method is to verify internal consistencies in the information or data provided

The circle frame can also be invoked for comparing accuracy, checking whether accuracy is adequate and voicing doubts

Applying this to learning we can decide beforehand how precise we want our learning to be. For instance, a general overview is different from precise knowledge. These distinctions are possible using the Circle frame



3. Point of View, the square frame

A square consists has 4 sides but all are equal. So too the square frame, represents multiple points of view all of which are given equal importance. This allows us to explore a problem more comprehensively, and reduces the risk of going by just one single view

“Before jumping to conclusions, let us do a square frame on this report to see if there are any perspectives we are missing”

The sweeper question in sales “Anything else we are missing?” is an example of square frame at work

In learning, particularly in social and economic sciences square frame is important so that different schools of thought are considered before a conclusion is arrived at



4. Interest the Heart Frame

Heart is regarded as the symbol of attraction. So, anything that attracts our attention and retains our interest belongs to the heart frame

Surprise, addition to existing body of knowledge, research, special interest and mining for new ideas are 5 sources of collecting information under the heart frame as all of them trigger interest

Studying a subject with passion driven curiosity belongs to the heart frame when applied to learning



5. Value the diamond frame

Diamonds are symbols of value and hence a diamond frame points to the value of the information being handled

Value could come from:

Satisfaction of informational need

Questions answered

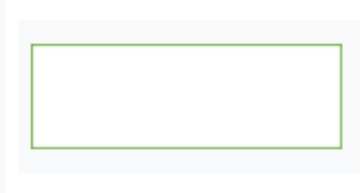
Interest value as the subject fascinates you

Confirmation or contradiction of conclusions you have formed

Opportunity hinting information

Enrichment of existing knowledge

Before investing in a particular domain or branch of learning, applying the diamond frame will facilitate an objective decision by matching value expected against time and money investments



6. Outcome the slab frame

Slab represents the platform on which something is to be placed and exhibited. Slab frame is used for laying out conclusions.

“Are we satisfied or not satisfied with the conclusions in the attached report?”

“What can be the next steps?”

“So what? Does this really matter?”

“Everyone, please use your slab frame. Then we can compare conclusions”

What are the conclusions we can derive from the learning we just now completed? Where does this take us? are questions that slab frame will raise regarding learning content

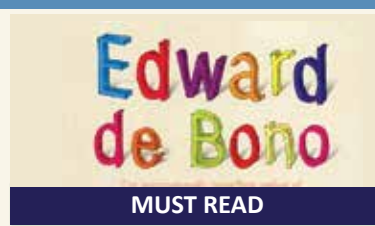
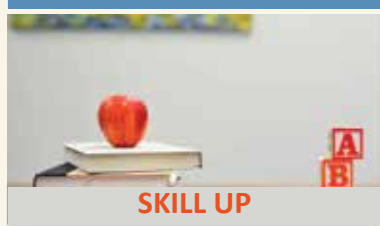
Six Frames written more than 3 decades ago has a message that rings so true in this era of ChatGPT and Generative AI:

“We are used to putting all our information into a computer and then letting the computer analyse that information. This is a growing danger. The matters covered by the Six Frames cannot be easily be done by a computer. A computer cannot assess accuracy, interest, neutrality or value. All these involve the human interface”

Isn't that true of learning as well, when many of our cognitive functions are being outsourced to computers?

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.”

– Henry Ford –



A Slice of Learning History

Insights from past for today and tomorrow

Fascinating Story of Human Learning - Journey from The Citadel to The Bazaar

By Mercurian Saswati Nayak

Bazaar and Citadel – Access makes the difference

Bazaar – A series of shops selling miscellaneous goods. In simple words, a place with open access.



*Photo credit: Unsplash

Citadel – A fortress typically on a high ground. A place with limited access.

History of learning is a series of swings from one to the other

If we rewind to the history of learning, it has been either a privilege for a limited few, or accessible to all, depending on which era you are looking at. Here's some flashback!

A Time line of milestones from Citadel to the Bazaar

Ancient age

In the ancient age when human civilization started writing. Egyptian hieroglyphs are considered the first formal writing system which was a gradual evolution of lot of different proto-writing systems. It was a highly matured civilization with great intellectuals and creators. Whoever had knowledge and knew writing used to share their thoughts on the walls of the caves and stone structures. This accumulation of knowledge was sporadic and scattered, similar to small disjointed Bazaars.

The Library of Alexandria – A Citadel of Excellence

When Alexander the Great sensed a dire need to bring together all this knowledge, he ideated The Library of Alexandria. He died before his dream took shape. The Library of Alexandria lived on, as a

citadel of excellence. Scholars from across the world were invited by the Pharos of Egypt to come and conduct their studies in Alexandria. The library grew with millions of papyrus scrolls holding the story of the prehistoric era and their inventions. Sadly, The Library of Alexandria was burnt down to ashes by Julius Cesar in 48 BC. It is believed that this single incident set back the human civilization by 1000 years.

Roman Era and Middle Ages – Wealthy Appropriated All Learning

Then came the Roman era followed by Middle Ages. This was a period of aristocracy but not without its share of excesses. All luxury was confined to only to the opulent segment of the society. So was learning. The acquisition of money through labour was seen as a strictly lower-class endeavour. The pursuit of knowledge which was only for its own sake, was commended and admired. This once more created a citadel of learning, meant for the wealthy who could afford it,

The Mid 1600s – Back to the Bazaar, Great Advances Pioneered by Amateurs

In 1646, the journey of learning took a sharp turn towards absolute obsolescence. The world was suffering from its worst pandemic and people needed respite from the continuous fear and scarcity. Inspired by Bacon's writing a group of philosophers, doctors and amateur astronomers and mathematicians formed an "Institution of Learning", they called the "Invisible college". It was a place for people to share their thoughts and ideas. Later in 1660, this went on to become the famous "Royal Society". For the next one hundred years Royal Society members, all amateurs from Bazaars, by our contemporary definition-were responsible for some of the greatest advances in human knowledge.

The word amateur comes from a Latin word amare, which means "to love". This was embodied in the human form of gentleman scholars. Most of these members pursued multiple interest areas. For example, Sir Isaac Newton was at once a Mathematician, Physicist, Astronomer, Alchemist, Theologian and writer, Michelangelo from an earlier era was an artist, sculptor, architect, Poet, Leonardo Da Vinci - An Engineer, Scientist, Theorist, Sculptor, Architect and a painter.

Renaissance and the Flowering of a New Bazaar of Ideas and Learning

This era was called Renaissance which meant renewal. It was an era of beautiful ideas, creativity and human ingenuity where a model citizen could wield the pen, the plough and the protractor with equal aptitude. It gave rise to interesting and interested individuals. But it was not to last.

Industrial Revolution and the Backward Swing towards the Citadel

The first phase of industrial revolution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries required increased specialization. This led to the reduction of every man's business to some "one simple operation". A citadel started building up with strong boundaries of processes, rigorous methodologies and rules. And a kind of animosity started developing towards the tradition of amateurism.

The Internet Age Sparks a New Renaissance all over Again

In the new millennium, post 2005 with the internet boom, there is a progressive return of the amateur to the centre of things as it was during Renaissance.

Learning for all and Learning Powered by all

For instance, a company called InnoCentive has figured out a way to tap the overflowing talents of some 140,000 self-made scientists, in over 170 countries, whose meaningful projects are sitting at the backyards of their home crafted and interest led labs. A Scientist of InnoCentive may live in a small town of India and after she prepares dinner and sends her kids to bed, she dons her old lab coat, puts away her cooking utensils and carefully starts her work with a lab flask in hand. InnoCentive's clients include Fortune 500 firms like Procter & Gamble(P&G), DuPont BASF etc. Most rewards for a successful solution can be between \$10,000 to \$100,000. However, money is not a primary motive for these scientists but recognition of their work.

There are hundreds of such organizations mushrooming in various fields. The Wikipedia, Linux and iStock

model is being replicated all across the world

All these just scratch the surface. Signs of an amateur renaissance are all around us. There are many platforms operating under the most optimistic assumption that, there is a Bazaar filled with amateur talents who have the answer for their question.

A Revolution of Self-Led Learning – Pendulum Swings to the Bazaar Again

We are at the cusp of an era of self-led learning, where people do not wait for a university to educate them on a particular skill. They will educate themselves through the digital bazaar. And the ones who are resistant to this idea will be left behind. The pendulum is again swinging from citadel to bazaar!

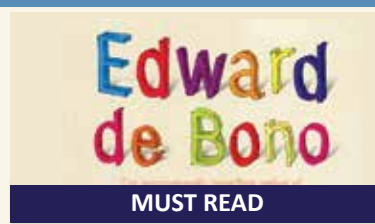
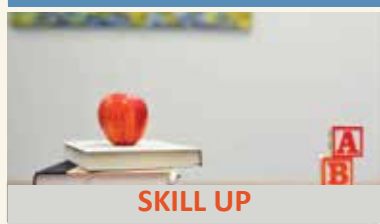
(Adapted from: Crowdsourcing – Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business by Jeff Howe and open source published content)



Mercurian Saswati Nayak

“The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and re-learn.”

– Alvin Toffler –



Around the Sales World

Keeping a watch on trends and developments relevant to the world of sales

Application is the heart of all sales learning

(Excerpt from Sales Management that Works – How to Sell in a World that Never Stops Changing by Frank V Cespedes, Harvard Business Review Press)

“People learn to handle unpredictable, changing environments through repeated practice. Adults learn best when they can apply new information or a skill and see the results. In the class room or seminar, this



*Photo credit: Unsplash

dissemination of learning typically involves what researchers call “spaced repetition” – for example, a series of quizzes aimed at measuring and reinforcing the application and consolidation of knowledge. In the field outside the classroom, application involves “deliberate practice” – identifying specific areas of improvement (versus holistic changes to one’s personality or temperament) and then practicing those skills with feedback on performance.

This is crucial in sales where learning involves behaviours, not only knowledge. Talking about selling is not the same as selling. Research indicates that to acquire a behavioural skill (versus a concept or new information), people must apply that behaviour multiple times (from three to twenty times, according to different studies) before it becomes practiced enough to be comfortable and effective ...”

Research on Training Fidelity Shows Why Simulations Work Magic in Transfer of Learning



Simulation great for learning ‘in-the-moment action’ skills

Flight training that earns pilots their wings is usually not complete without flying-hours in a flight simulator. The simulated cockpit replicates almost every possible scenario in the skies, including crises, often leaving the trainees with racing hearts and sweaty palms.

Besides aviation, health care also draws on simulation for training nursing, paramedical and physiotherapy professionals. In all professions requiring a high degree of 'in-the-moment' action, simulation is seen as an ideal methodology to transfer learning.

Training Fidelity: The Ingredient for Simulation Success

What accounts for the success of simulations in making learning stick?

It is universally accepted that to be effective, all training must simulate reality at some level. Research on learning categorises this as "training fidelity"

What is Training Fidelity?

Findings of researchers Jeanne M. Carey and Kelly Rossler published in the website of US National Institute of Health, discuss the concept "Fidelity" in the context of training. Among other things, they state that fidelity refers to the degree of exactness of real experience achieved by training. They add that fidelity corresponds to the believability of the experience and relates to several components of simulation activity.

Simulations Thrive on Training Fidelity

A 2019 research paper published by University of Pennsylvania examining whether "simulation fidelity affects training" frames fidelity in terms of how similar the training situation is, to the actual task situation. One of the possible reasons for effective in transfer of learning that is observed in simulations is because simulations create training fidelity at various levels, encompassing physical, task, behavioural, environmental, psychological and functional levels

Training fidelity also explains the popularity and success of board-based simulations in imparting business skills like appreciation of finance, market strategy and innovation mindset.

Research has also uncovered evidence that the degree of fidelity does not need to be high for learning transfer to happen. As Carey and Rossler conclude - all levels of fidelity are "beneficial when used appropriately"

"Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel."

- Socrates -