



## Individual Targeted Learning - a new way of learning

### Grafton Whyte

It has long been accepted that the best way to acquire new knowledge is to first identify what you know about the subject before engaging in learning. The work of Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman has now explained the thinking behind this phenomenon. He suggests that the human thought process is controlled by two systems. The first, System 1, operates automatically and intuitively, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control. It is the system that controls our fight or flight response or causes us to react in surprise or shock to a given stimuli. System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, for example solving a complex statistical problem. System 2 kicks in and takes over from System 1 when a situation requires subjective agency, choice and concentration. The important relationship between these systems is that System 1 will always offer solutions even when it is patently wrong, based on past models and experience. System 2 will only reluctantly take over the thinking process from System 1 when it is obviously wrong. In this regard, System 2 thinking tends to be lazy. This can be observed from the experience of learning something difficult and we keep re-reading the same section over and over again; here, System 2 is resist-



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ing the need to take over the thinking process and is lazily allowing System

1 to make the same cognitive recognition connection. Taking an audit of our subject knowledge before embarking on the new learning journey prepares us to make new associative activations (ideas). Preparing a set of questions we want answers to in this learning experience primes our mind to get the most from the learning experience.

This is the theory upon which Individual Targeted Learning (ITL) is based. Developed by the HP-GSB, ITL is a concept that recognises that learning is a unique and individual experience; this is due to individuals' unique life experiences, learning styles, absorptive capacity and personal preferences. For learning to be effective, it needs to be targeted or given context. Conversely, teaching in an academic institution is primarily a group practice biased towards the preferences of the teacher. Hence, in modern teaching methods the emphasis is on the student taking ownership of their learning experience, rather than relying on the teacher to be the fountain of all knowledge.

ITL takes the idea of the student taking ownership a step further; in management education the student is exposed to a range of theories and tools. But the largest unknown variable in the use of these tools is the manager. Tools in the hands of a master craftsman will produce a qualitatively different result than the

same tools in the hands of a novice. Similarly, managers need complex interpersonal skills to apply management tools and theories effectively. ITL recognises this complexity and suggests that the foundational skill needed by managers is self-awareness. The Insights Discovery (ID) tool, for which the HP-GSB is now the distributor for Namibia, provides this management self-awareness with incisiveness and clarity, and is the perfect foundation for the innovative ITL approach devised by the HP-GSB.

Eventually, all students attending HP-GSB programmes and courses will engage in ITL. The first step will be to undergo an ID assessment which will provide students with self-insight as people and managers. The next step will then be to use this knowledge to engage in proactive learning by creating associative activations in the courses offered by HP-GSB and priming their minds to be receptive to new ways of thinking and doing. The ITL approach will turn HP-GSB students from being passive recipients of education to proactive creators of new knowledge. What are the prospects for the Namibian economy of this new breed of individually targeted learners and managers hitting the market? In a word, exciting!

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