

QUESTIONS HAVE POWER

Over centuries, the right, often deceptively simple but incredibly powerful questions have been key to advancing science and civilisation. In business today, many proven and reliable research methodologies are available to provide useful and reliable measures of and connections to historical reality. We also have available very powerful analytical tools. These have become available through the same forces that have defined today's IT-driven competitive environments. Could we have seen the huge changes we have experienced ahead of time? After all, these, our methodological and analytical tools have at their core the same disruptive power and ubiquity of relatively low-cost computers.

High-performance leadership requires the best possible understanding of the reality that describes and explains an organisation's intricate tasks, relationships, markets, routines, norms, and myths. Too often, most attention is given to a research project's methodology and analytical output. Between research methodology and data analysis lies a step that has too often been overlooked or given scant attention. The definition and formulation of research questions can make a big difference in survival and success. Questions like, "What business are we (really) in? Who are our most profitable customers today? Which customers we serve at great expense today should we move away from going forward? Who will be our customers in the future? How will we be impacted by new technology, much of which has not yet been invented?"

The training and experience of senior business executives have tended to reward finding operating environments and markets where complexity, change and competition are at a minimum. But a lack of complexity, change and competition are not characteristics of today's reality. For high-performance leaders, these forces are not necessarily to be feared if you can ask the right questions and get ahead of the curve.

Much of today's organisational structure and development is based on the command-and-control approach inherited from the military. This approach does not support questioning. Orders are given from the top.

The expectation of those giving the orders is that they will be followed without question. However, experience teaches that profound strategic and tactical forces can suddenly and drastically change reality making the original orders obsolete and often dangerous. Orders should then be questioned to preserve resources and support success.

Changing an approach within which questioning is not valued to one that supports, encourages and stimulates questioning requires a difficult shift in firmly entrenched management paradigms that used to be successful. Short-term approaches, common today, tend to drive out questioning from an organisation's strategies. This is especially true of the big and most fundamental questions that relate to corporate survival and prosperity, in both the short and long term. Too often, with market, environmental and socio-political uncertainty, organisations don't know what they don't know and need to know. They often don't question their need to question.

At the NSC Group, we believe that questions are the engines of intellect. That they are the cerebral machines that convert curiosity into manageable and effective inquiry and action. We emphasise the form, style and sequencing of the questions we ask. We use advanced questioning techniques to test the "truthfulness" of respondents. We question how to question - daily. And the results are remarkable. Call us to find out the value of this approach.

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