

Questions from the BMT for Leaders Conference, May 1st, 2014

We received so many great questions at the BMT for Leaders conference that we didn't have time to answer them all on the day. Here are the remaining questions and our answers. Thanks to everyone who came along. All these discussions have been published on the [BMT LinkedIn](#) site, along with follow-up questions and comments.

Q: Allison, If we had no meetings at all how would we know what was going on in the business?

A: This is a pretty common response when I talk about meetings! It's not that meetings are a bad thing, after all they have a critical role to play in business, speeding up the decision making process and avoiding the need to keep revisiting the same issues. But badly run meetings are a bad thing. If meetings are taking up 15% of the entire wage bill and up to 80% of peoples time, then it makes sense that we invest our efforts in deliberately creating the environment to make them as effective as possible.

We wouldn't accept 50% effectiveness from our front line guys, yet most people are comfortable with 50% effectiveness of meetings which is where our managers spend most of their time.

- Allison Reynolds

Q: Graham, how do you deal with team members (perhaps technical specialists) who demonstrate negativity as, in their view, you 'do nothing'?

A: I guess my way of dealing with challenges to my 'doing nothing', is to demonstrate over time that this approach underpins my ability to be a strong and caring leader. This requires that I am not in the detail, aware of the environment and people's behaviour and aiming to stay emotionally stable. Over time, my staff appreciate that I am always available whenever they need to talk to me, need advice or support. 'Doing nothing' is only short hand for doing the 'right leader things and using my strengths appropriately'. By ensuring that I have a team who can compliment my strengths and cover my weaknesses, I can quickly create an environment where everybody is very happy for me to 'do nothing!'

- Graham Keegan

Q: Do you think behavioural assessments are really being used correctly, or are they being used to get rid of contractors they didn't really want in the first place (as the scoring system must be very subjective)?

A: Behavioural assessments are becoming increasingly popular with companies when they are putting big projects out for tender. We have run a number of preparation workshops recently to help prepare our clients for interviews with their clients.

The behavioural assessments come in different guises and can be one or two days mixing up competing bidders and sometimes includes traditional interview style exchanges.

They are designed to test how well the teams know their bid and how well they do when faced with ambiguity and uncertainty under pressure. Behaviour is what we say or do, and we respond to particular prompts put into the environment depending on the consequences



we perceive. So if the assessors are measuring behaviours, it is possible to do that objectively.

However, the environment is artificial and not the natural environment that the people in the room normally work in and so the behaviours on display will not necessarily be the ones that occur in a real situation.

How useful this is to the people setting the tests is therefore debatable.

- *Andrea Quinn*

Q: Graham, who is the best leader you have worked for and why?

I always find this question difficult to answer. I have seen many great leadership traits in many people I have worked for but can't easily identify a single nominee. However I can say that what I do appreciate from great leadership is :-

1. Somebody from whom I can learn.
2. Somebody who I can accurately 'second guess'.
3. Somebody who recognises how I am feeling.
4. Somebody who recognises my achievements.
5. Finally somebody who believes in me.

- *Graham Keegan*

Q: Can an introvert-based person make a good leader?

Absolutely, in fact the research and a number of popular books will attest that there are many more 'introvert' successful leaders of sustainable business than extrovert ones.

- *Howard Lees*

Q: Lisa, is there an optimal amount of stress?

A: Yes, there is. Short-lived stress isn't bad for us – in fact it's quite helpful. It gets us motivated, and preps our bodies and brains for quick thinking and action.

Too little stress can be equated to boredom, and we don't get our best performance when we are under NO stress. To use a sports example, think of this as practicing shooting a basketball in an empty gym with no one around. There are no consequences for making or missing the shot.

Too much stress is also not good for performance, and our performance will definitely suffer when we are under large amounts of stress. Think of this as trying to shoot the tournament winning shot that will cement your team's glory with 0.1 seconds left on the clock.

Optimum stress is somewhere in between these two extremes. It's making a shot with a few minutes left in a close game. Under optimum levels of stress our performance is greatly improved due to our body's stress response enabling us to think and behave faster. It's the Goldilocks zone.

The key is to go through periods where your stress response is allowed to return to baseline – without those periods you risk the damaging consequences of chronic stress.



- Lisa Kazbour

Q: Bob, a lot of people talk about intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Behaviourally speaking, how is it best to explain this?

A. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can be viewed as doing something because of a reinforcing consequence. However, intrinsic motivation is more about the reinforcement you get from the actual task itself and usually it is linked to a feeling, i.e. enjoyment. For example, if I were to play a musical instrument for the pleasure of the music and continue to play, I would be 'intrinsically motivated'. In simple terms, I am doing the activity for the enjoyment of the activity.

Extrinsic motivation is different in that there is an external purpose or outcome attached to the activity. For example, a child might do their homework or studies in order to get good grades or to avoid the nagging parent. The motivation/reinforcement is external rather than the activity being interesting or enjoyable. It does of course come back to the performer and what they find reinforcing.

At work, it is probably worth looking at the tasks that you expect those who work for you to do; ask yourself if the performer will receive enough intrinsic motivation from the task to carry on doing it. Or will you have to provide some extrinsic motivation as reinforcement in order to get the task completed?

- Bob Cummins

Q: John, do you think when personality profiling is completed on somebody, they try and behave in that way without 'fixing' their behaviours, ie if somebody is 'red' they think it's OK to be very driven and not worry about offending people? How do you stop this happening?

A: The creators of the MBTI said that all types are equal; and no one type is better than another. Colors are no different in this regard. I'm not crazy about these tests but even still there are at least two problems with the logic of the offender in the question above: 1) Seeing test results as a license to alienate your team surely would mean you are misrepresenting the results of the test. and, 2) alienating your team (or spouse or children) will cost you money (or a marriage, or relationship).

- John Austin

Q: Why are there so many BMT non-believers?

A: That's what I call a presumptive question. I do think there are a considerable number of people who have no idea regarding the available facts regarding behavioural science. It is science, its definition is based on scientific principles, it's not a question of belief. Belief is for things like religion.

I do however believe that if we taught our children the scientific principles of behaviour at school then the world would be a better educated, better informed place.

- Howard Lees



Q: I see lump sum contracts as a barrier to delivering R+ because there are mechanisms for delivering P and R- in the contract but not R+. So why are these so popular?

I have worked on many contracts and I suspect that I have personal experience of just about every contract type all the way from ICE 5, target cost reimbursable with various target formulae, lump sum, call off schedules, just about every rate/price/volume/ that a contracts writer with a penchant for the bizarre and complex can dream up. "Which one did you like best" I hear you cry? I most definitely liked target cost reimbursable contracts best & that's because as a contractor you know you are probably going to recover your costs, it's a sad reflection of UK contracting but we still focus on not making losses far more than we focus on what we have to do to create successful project delivery.

The UK clients & its contractors are 'loss averse', it's a historical fact, it feels like every time someone comes up with something enlightened that works like the contract arrangements for CTRL or 4Delivery there is a bean counter following behind desperate to spoil it for everyone on the next contract.

Having said that, I also believe that it doesn't matter what the contract type is if the contract strategy is good, if everyone on the contract believes it to be 'possible to succeed' at the outset then the contract has a chance of success. The prize won by CTRL contract 430 was achieved because the team rallied around a great leader and delivered the project early. It was running late, there were problems & it could have been another UK bad contract. Its problems were not contract related, they were strategy related with 5 parties operating out of their own selfish silos. The leader fixed the strategy, built one team of committed people & they delivered the project, people still talk about it 10 years later.

Great moments in construction are delivered by people, not contracts.

- Howard Lees

Q: Rachel, when talking about coaching people for behavioural assessments, you stated that "people know what they should say but they get a bit lost and revert back to their conditioned responses." Is this not the point of the assessment?

A: The point of behavioural assessments is to 'test' people under various conditions to see how they respond. Behavioural assessment days are an artificial situation; what happens there is not comparable to what happens at work every day, wherever we work. Its predictable that people attending assessments will try and show the very 'best' version of themselves; perhaps not what the assessments are designed for but what the environment creates none the less. Behaviour is contingent on the environment so we adapt accordingly when we go to a staged assessment.

- Rachel Edwards

Q: Where can I start learning about Mindfulness?

The essence of mindfulness is about living in the moment. From a behavioural perspective being able to do that is very valuable since it allows you to be present for the observations that lead to insights about the consequences driving the behaviour you are observing.

There are many paths that lead to Mindfulness such as engaging in activities that require



focused concentration (playing a musical instrument, cooking, intense exercise, painting, etc...) or setting out to create open awareness (spending time in nature, meditation).

To begin with I would recommend trying the following exercise:

- sit down and make your back nice and straight
- close your eyes, and
- focus on the sensation of breathing.

You will find that your mind has soon wandered off breathing and on to something else. Once you become aware that your concentration has drifted pull yourself back to focusing on your breathing. As simple as this sounds it turns out it takes daily practice to be able to hold your focus on breathing. Learning to hold your focus will allow you to interrupt yourself from providing your typical long standing conditioned responses and give you the space to think of something different to say.

For a bit of reading that is shorter than a book Goleman has written an article about what Mindfulness is and isn't (<http://linkd.in/1iAXzOB>)

- Bruce Faulkner

Q : Andrea, we're setting up a new team alongside our client. What are two or three key things that need to change to change behaviours for the better?

A: With two new teams being set up from scratch, it is a great opportunity to start out as you mean to go on. Set some clear expectations at the beginning on how you will communicate with one another - preferably face to face or by phone - and have a plan for managing your meetings could be a good place to start.

At the conference, Graham Keegan shared with us how his team ban emails between 6pm on a Friday and 6am on a Monday and Allison Reynolds described how to manage meetings when we are spending 15% of our time in them. So perhaps something along those lines?

Could you co-locate with the client to create the right positive environment together? Remember the science tells us that environment drives behaviour, so being in the same environment may be the first step to creating the right environment with the client, to get the behaviours you want.

- Andrea Quinn

Q: Rachel, if you deal with a person regularly and have a good working relationship, but any time you deal with them you end up in Parent and they end up in Child, how do you stop them always reverting to Child?

A: Over time we establish patterns of behaviour based on the consequences we experience - effectively we learn how to behave in certain situations based on what has happened to us before. We end up with 'conditioned responses' to people and events, as we have been shaped over time. In Transactional Analysis that's described by the ego states (Parent / Adult / Child); over time in our interactions with people, we each assume a role and if it's a 'stable' transaction, e.g. Parent - Child, then it can go on indefinitely.

So, if we are in a situation where it feels like we keep assuming the same role in response to someone else, and we're dissatisfied with the result, then we need to change our own behaviour in order to provoke something different. Dealing with 'Child' responses from



someone requires us to go to 'Adult'; seeing if we can press the reset button on our exchanges. How to do this will look different depending on the scenario. Some possibilities to experiment with are delivering feedback on what's happening and what you'd like to happen next; collect data on performance; try out different consequences - R+, R-, P and Ext as appropriate; end conversations that are going badly and try again later; take a breath before responding to give yourself a chance to say something different this time...

- *Rachel Edwards*

Q: John, you suggested that personality tests should not be used for selection. Don't personality tests at least give you a little insight into yourself?

A: Sure they can provide you with some insight, and perhaps even act as conversation starters for more pinpointed discussions. However, it's the pinpointed feedback about your behavior that helps you to gain insight, not a score on a test. It's a much better use of your time to understand people's reinforcers and punishers, and environments in which they thrive or struggle, than to understand their personality type.

- *John Austin*

Q: If everyone followed Howard's vision of a strong and caring leader, who would look after the money?

This is another presumptive question, in my view. I could be wrong but is the questioner insinuating that if you are strong and caring somehow it will effect financial results? If so then yes I would argue that the strong and caring leader will affect all results, jobs will finish under budget, ahead of schedule, people will go home unhurt every day, staff depletion will be low, the business will be sustainable, clients and the public will be delighted, people will be wanting to work for this leader.

The scorecard booklet recently published and available free on line explains in more detail that focusing on day to day behaviours delivers long term results. The diet strategy - eating the right food every day and exercising (behaviours) delivers weight loss over time (result). In this example standing on the scales is simply a confirmation that these behaviours deliver the desired result. People working in effective workplace environments don't look at the bank statement anywhere as often as people working in aversive environments.

Do you want loss aversion or wealth creation? - your call.

- *Howard Lees*

Q: Lisa, why do we choose to put ourselves in stressful situations?

A: Behaviorally speaking, when we continually choose to put ourselves in stressful situations there is some source of reinforcement for our behavior.

In some situations, it's a matter of lots of R-: we choose to do a behavior to avoid missing out on something, to avoid a bad consequence, etc. This can be as simple as wanting to avoid disappointing your boss, wanting to avoid letting your colleagues down, or even wanting to avoid people thinking that you're lazy. Remember, the threat we're avoiding can be real or imagined – as long as the person perceives it as a threat, it's enough to cause a stress response, and possibly motivate us to put ourselves into that situation.



The other reason we may continually choose to put ourselves in a stressful situation is for R+. I can think of many things I love to do that always involve a bit of stress and R-, but ultimately a lot of R+. Take for example, speaking at conferences. I love it, I enjoy it, but there's lots of stress and R- on the front end of preparing a talk, practicing it over and over, making sure I won't make a fool of myself in front of everyone. I even have a stress response before walking on stage, every time. But the R+ of delivering a talk well, the nods of agreement while I'm talking, the applause at the end, getting feedback from my peers and the audience – that's what motivates me to continually want to speak at conferences. The dose of R+ is big enough that it easily outweighs the stress and R- that happens beforehand.

I can also think of many people who look at “being stressed out” as a bit of a badge of honor – similar to the “too busy badge”. The sympathy, help, or conversations we have around being stressed out could be a kind of R+ for putting ourselves in stressful situations – we get attention that we like for doing it. There's also the case that being stressed out helps us to avoid more responsibilities or tasks, which would be an example of R-.

- Lisa Kazbour

Q: Howard, can you get sustainable stimulus control with people who are not within your consequence chain?

I am assuming you are talking about people in your company who are not directly part of your 'chain of command'. This situation is not dissimilar to a supplier/client situational set up of stimulus control - you have no apparent hold on this person. I like to see if I can provide something or say something that the 'target' might find useful or be interested in. I would send someone an interesting article, the link to an interesting YouTube video or a book and see if I get a response. If a response happens then I will enter in conversations and see if I can find out if they are interested in the subject I am attempting to network with them for.

Our situation usually has something to do with spreading BMT via book sales or courses. A workplace situation may simply be someone in another department doing things that are blocking what you want to do. A very easy solution to 'in company' problems is to simply go and talk to the other person and be frank as to why you need their help. Many of the improvement plans that have been successful over the years started as complex multi step plans and ended with two people having a conversation that provided a sustainable solution.

- Howard Lees

Q: Howard, you mentioned that a strong and caring leader's role was to mentor and coach those who work for them, yet it is inevitable that organisations will assign tasks to the leader to carry out, therefore changing priorities. What is the most effective way of changing this environment?

A: I agree that the leader will get tasks to carry out, the leader has all the people so they can delegate those tasks out. Ian and Graham talked about how they lead their organisations, neither of them said they were too busy to coach and mentor. Graham made a point to say that he makes sure he is always available to his people and his client. The great strong and caring leaders I worked for did not get consumed with tasks, ever.

- Howard Lees



Q: What do you mean by “speak truth to power?”

Q: Please explain “truth to power.”

Q: Are there techniques for telling the truth to power without getting sacked?

A: The cast of this situation usually consists of a boss and a worker, 'truth to power' is the term used for the worker saying something to the boss that might upset him/her. "Who smashed the window in the shed" shouts your dad, you get silence or someone 'fessing up, consequences follow depending on how forgiving and benevolent your dad is. History of 'dad responses' will come into play here and probably effect whether you or your siblings admit to breaking the window. The act of 'truth to power' is learned early on in life and its effects last a very long time, situations change, your behaviour is still very much predicated on the experiences in those early years.

Disagreeing with the boss in a meeting may be an example of truth to power. Disagreeing with a key client, even not telling the whole truth may be a 'truth to power' example. There is an obvious link to your own bravery but also an obvious link to the situation you find yourself in and how much you care about the balance of risks. If you work for a company where your bosses are trustworthy then you will observe plenty of 'truth to power'. If you are one of the 'helpless and distressed working for tyrannical boss' then you are unlikely to witness truth to power.

For sure the best technique for speaking truth to power is to draft a range of statements/answers and start at the 'safe end'. I have frequently said this to people who are being bullied "can you say good morning to him"? "Yes" is usually the answer. "OK, Can you tell him you think he's an idiot"? Absolutely not. OK, you have a continuum now, see if you can fill the gaps and rate them weak to strong. Keep experimenting with your responses, you will probably shape the relationship into a place where one day you are speaking truth to power.

If you are scared to speak truth to power, you got there somehow, you were part of that journey, be careful with your lazy responses, recognise that someone is marginalising you and nip it in the bud there and then before it shapes into WW3.

- Howard Lees

Q: Is self-reflection part of Behavioural Management Techniques?

A: The straight forward answer to that is yes.

When analysing the behaviour of others that you interact with, you observe the consequences in the environment to understand why a particular behaviour occurred. You are part of that environment and so by trying to understand why something occurred you will undoubtedly be analysing the role you played.

If people are late producing work you asked them for, then that's because you haven't put in place the right consequences to get what you want. Reflecting on what you said and did will help you to understand why you got the result you got.

When pulling together an improvement plan on the BMT courses, some people set out to fix someone else's behaviour and find to their horror that the current situation is completely down to their own behaviour. They have got what they've got because they have been reinforcing the dysfunctional behaviour to continue.



Think about someone who drives you mad because they talk too much. Have you ever said to them “Stop speaking!” or “Do you know you talk too much?” Or do you sit there, grimace and nod your head politely until they stop? I thought so..... you are reinforcing the talking!

- *Andrea Quinn*

Q: Do you have additional examples of unintended consequences?

I came across an article (<http://wrd.cm/1niCKux>) in Wired that talks about the original design of cubicles back in 1964. One of the designers went to visit the first installation of the cubicle walls, he walked in excited and left utterly depressed because of the disaster he had created. "We thought it was extremely flexible in the plan view, but we had never considered the vertical elevation."

I think when groups of people design a process or write a new policy they receive reinforcement from having completed the task. Sitting at a computer cutting, pasting and moving things around feels like critical thinking has been done. It is only when something is live and in front of us that we see the things we wish we had thought about earlier.

Our recommendation to avoid creating these problems is to add an iterative step by involving the people who will be using the process or policy. Bring them together and have them tell you the reasons why it won't work or how they would go about defeating your design. This approach will unlock new thinking and help uncover potential fatal flaws.

- *Bruce Faulkner*

