

Designing Effective and Efficient Action*
Draft by David Walden, 6/22/96 (slightly revised Spring '97)

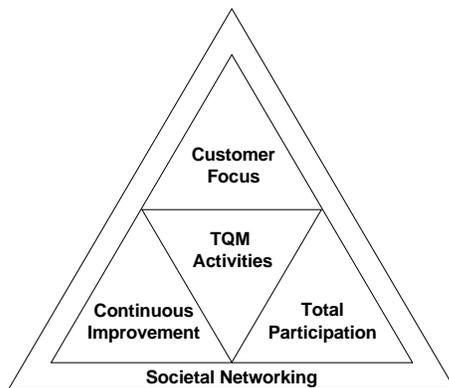
Introduction

The Center for the Quality of Management, or CQM, is a non-profit consortium of about 75 companies and 15 university affiliates working together to learn and apply the best management practices. By sharing ideas and real experiences everyone accelerates their speed of learning.

This note is an introduction to current activities within the CQM and its member companies to develop tangible methods for improving the way we interact with each other in our organizations. By improving the way we communicate, we can substantially improve the quality of our actions, the level of trust in our organizations, and our ability to achieve aggressive goals.

The need for improved management methods

We are all familiar with the relentless pace of change our companies must deal with today, and the havoc this causes with our products, services, and systems that provide customer satisfaction. Within the CQM, we realize that we need improved management methods to deal with the increasingly difficult challenge of providing customer satisfaction in a rapidly changing world.



We have found it useful to talk about four general areas with which we must be concerned, which we call the Four Revolutions in Management Thinking.

The first management revolution is continuous improvement. We must keep analyzing what we are doing in our organizations and modifying it to address the changing customer needs, changing competitive environment, and changing methods that are available to us.

**Acknowledgments*

We learned the concept of several types of conversations and about the atom of work from people who have studied with Fernando Flores and from the publications of Fernando Flores and his associates (an extensive list of references is available for the asking). After this paper was drafted, we heard about them for the first time from Flores himself. The cycle of reasoning is a synthesis created by Action Design, the CQM and Newfield Consulting.

The second management revolution is customer focus. We focus on what will satisfy customers to provide context for our continuous improvement efforts.

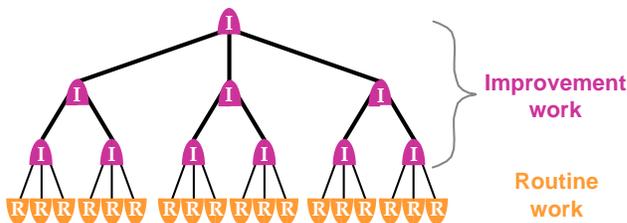
The third management revolution is total participation. We need to involve everyone in the organization in continuous improvement and customer focus. We need people's active, intelligent participation, not grudging or passive endurance.

The fourth management revolution is societal networking. This is the idea that we gain substantially more by sharing our insights and practices than we lose by not keeping them private. This note in which we introduce a set of ideas on conversation is an example of societal networking, and we hope others will share their ideas on this topic with us.

Dual Function of Work

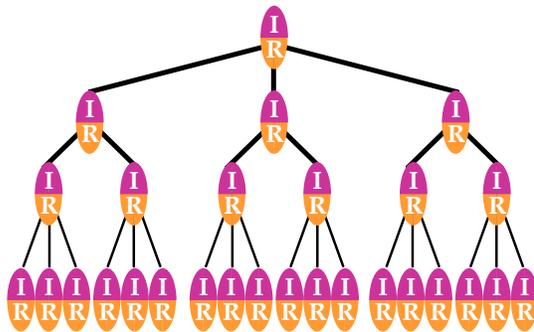
Under the category of total participation, I mentioned the need to obtain people's active, intelligent participation in satisfying customers and improving work processes.

This is in contrast to the command and control systems that most organizations implemented for most of this century in which people at the bottom of the organizational



hierarchy did the routine work, and only managers and specialists above the worker level were responsible for inspection and improvement of the way things were done.

Breaking with the idea that only some people would do routine work and other people would do improvement work is a concept we call the Dual Function of Work. The principle of the Dual Function of Work says that everyone everywhere in an organization must do both their routine work *and* spend time improving the way they do their routine work.



There are several reasons for involving everyone in both routine activities and improvement activities. First, unless routine work and improvement work are joined, the organization cannot improve fast

enough. It takes too long for the information to filter up from the worker level to another level that a certain way of doing routine work is no longer adequate and for the corrective process to filter back down. Also, the people doing the routine work often have the best data about what improvements are necessary. Second, the complex and creative products and services that so many companies deliver today are typically beyond the abilities of only one or two people to develop. Developing complex products and services tends to need the tacit knowledge of people throughout the organization. Third, we all know that

anyone in the organization can thwart efforts to achieve quality improvement and customer satisfaction. Unless we involve everyone, we risk having non-participants undo good work being done by others in the organization.

Processes and People

A simple way to think about improving our management methods is that we have to deal with a) the *processes* we tend to follow as we do our daily activities and, b) the *people* who are involved in these processes.

Over the past decades, many companies have made great productivity gains by concentrating on making their internal and customer-related processes tangible, analyzing them and improving them. Some people think of work in this area as the “hardside” of quality improvement.

However, this hasn’t always gotten us all the improvement we would have liked. In many cases, issues of human behavior have gotten in the way. People, for their own reasons, have not completely embraced the new methods. Furthermore, many of our interactions among people are seen as isolated or “one-shot”—not as being part of repetitive processes that can be explicitly improved.

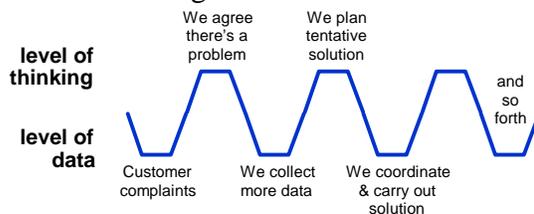
Thus, increasingly, there is convergence of thought among practitioners that we must begin to address issues of human behavior and interactions—what we call “softside issues.”

Importance of conversation

Perhaps the most important softside issue is how we talk with each other, because conversation is the primary way we find out what is happening and create action in our organizations.

In fact, for almost all complex problems (or opportunities) most of the data we have is language data and most of the thinking and planning we do is done through conversation or using language.

For instance, customers signal us that there is a problem using language. Using language we discuss and agree with each other within our organization that there indeed is a



problem. Probably through conversations, we collect some more data to help us understand the problem. We plan a tentative solution using conversation. We coordinate carrying out the solution using conversation. And so forth. Even attempts to resist the solution (which sometimes happen in our organizations) typically involve language.

We are often not very good with the way we use language and conversation, which is unfortunate, since we just made the point that we use language all time. Lack of skill with language can result in much wasted effort.

Effort = Useful Work + Waste

The formula shown is intended to indicate that the amount of effort we have to spend consists of effort spent on useful work—work we desire to have done—and effort spent on non-useful or wasted work.

If we ask the typical manager how much time he or she spends in meetings or other conversations, we typically get estimates of from 30% to 90% of their time. When we ask how much of the time spent in meetings or conversation is time spent on useful work, we typically get estimates ranging from 25% to 50%. In other words, of the 30% to 90% of the time we spend in meetings and conversations, 50% to 75% of the time is wasted. We are probably wasting between 30% and 40% of all our time, and maybe more. And the time we waste results in things not getting done or not getting done correctly, which results in more waste in the form of rework or rebuilding of relationships. Finally, through all this waste we often cause consequential damage and miss opportunities to be doing other productive things.

The point is that poor use of conversation and language can result in massive waste. It's hard to think of improving any single other activity that could have as much benefit as improving the way we use conversation and language.

In fact, if we think about what managers do, their primary tool is conversation. This is the way they find out what's happening and the way they create action. We sometimes think of managers as being powerful people. This power results directly from their ability to create (or prevent) specific actions of others; and the tool that managers use as leaders, coaches and initiators of action is conversation.

The CQM study group on conversation

Since its founding, the CQM approach to improving management methods has been to identify weaknesses in existing management systems, to find management methods to address these weaknesses and to integrate the new skills into the existing methods, making the new methods as operational as possible so that they can be widely disseminated. Skill in conversation is a critical void in the management methods that the CQM companies have been applying.

Having recognized the weakness in conversation, we could not find a single source for adequate tangible, operational methods that could be applied to improve the way we converse. Therefore, in 1995 the CQM initiated a study group to investigate available methods relating to language and conversation. Members of the study committee read widely, listened to expert presentations, and wrote analytic notes to each other summarizing the connections they saw between available methods. By the winter of

1996, a synthesis model had been created and the study group had recommended and undertaken three major initiatives:

1. The synthesis approach was taught and tested in practice in CQM's TQM courses for senior executives.
2. A study was initiated to see how the methodology could be used to redesign complex business processes, specifically the new product development process.
3. A new course was designed to teach managers how to use the methodology in their roles as coaches and leaders.

For now, I'll step back and tell you about the synthesis we developed.

The model we have created is a synthesis of ideas from the physicist David Bohm, the psychologist Chris Argyris, the business philosopher Fernando Flores, the biologist Humberto Maturana, the general semanticist S.I Hayakawa, and the anthropologist Jiro Kawakita. In particular, we have worked extensively with Bob Putnam who was a student of Chris Argyris and with Rafael Echeverria who was a student of Fernando Flores and Humberto Maturana. We have also brought to bear our many ideas from TQM.

The rest of this note sketches the integrated model that was developed. Remember that our purpose is to develop a model that can be made operational, that can be taught, and that can be improved based on experience. We have made a lot of progress in achieving this operationalization, and there is more to be done. This note only begins to sketch some of the techniques and the full power we believe we are cracking open with these methods.

Some types of conversations

In the model we have developed, we have found it useful to think about five basic types of conversations, although these are by no means the only types of conversations that we have.

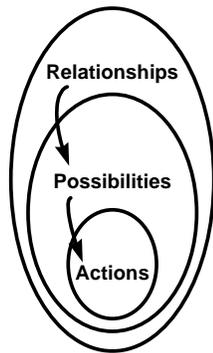
Conversations for conversations
Conversations for relationships
Conversations for possible actions
Conversations for coordinating action
Conversations about breakdowns

The first conversation we will mention is conversations for conversations, which are used to decide what type of conversation we should be having.

We have all had the experience of being in a situation with another person when we are having different conversations. For instance, if I am in development and you are in sales, you might come to me and ask me if some special option for the product was possible, and I might tell you that it is. Later, you might discover that I have not assigned anyone to work on this special feature. After an acrimonious discussion we might discover that, when we first talked, you thought we were having a conversation for action, and I thought we were having a conversation about possible actions. So, the first type of conversation we introduce is the conversation for conversations during which we decide what type of conversation we should be having. Taking the time to have a conversation for conversations can save a lot of trouble.

Before going on to talk about the other four conversations, I'd just like to mention that some types of conversations are often not very productive and are better avoided, for instance, conversations of judgments and stories about who did what to whom in the past are unproductive and best avoided.

Let's now talk about the other four types of conversation



We can think about conversations for relationships, conversations for possible actions and conversations for coordinating action as being related, as shown in the figure, where each oval and key word represents one of these three types of conversations.

We begin with conversations for relationships (the outside oval). When we meet each other for the first time, we usually start by beginning to build a tentative relationship. We introduce ourselves to each other, we say what a nice day it is, we mention something about some current event in the news that morning to see if we have any commonality of interest—"how about those Red Sox: they don't usually begin their annual collapse so early in the season." We are looking for early signs of what we may have in common. Basically, we are trying to determine if it's safe (physically or emotionally) to be near the other person. Think about what happens when someone you have never met comes up to you on the street and begins a conversation: we are very chary as we figure out if this person wants something we are willing to give (such as directions to a nearby location) or if it's better to try to get away from them before they try to take something we don't want to give.

Once we have decided that it's a good idea to have a tentative relationship with the other person, we may try to discover if there might be some actions we might usefully take together. In other words, we might begin a conversation for possible actions (the middle oval). This part of the model should feel very familiar to anyone in sales.

If we discover an action that we might usefully take together, then we need to move on to a conversation for coordinating action (the inner-most oval), which we'll return to in a minute.

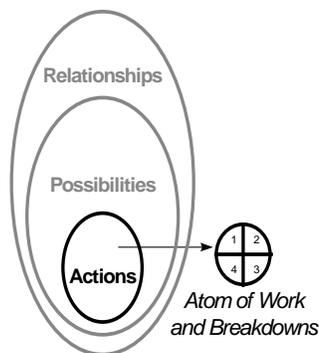
Notice that jumping straight to the conversation for coordinating action without having a conversation for possible actions or building a relationship can be counter-productive. We may not have sorted out enough about our relationship or individual concerns to be able to develop sufficiently matched expectations that would result in completed actions that both parties will be satisfied with.

Conversations for Action via the Atom of Work

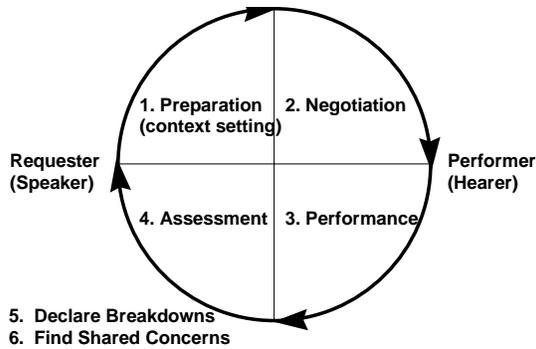
Once we begin to try to coordinate action, there are all sorts of problems that can happen that can defeat our intentions and often leave bad tastes in our mouths.

For instance, all of us have frequently made a request of someone else or had a request made of us, thought a commitment was made, and ended up with a result that left someone disappointed.

- Here is an example in which someone didn't perform as well as I expected. Recently I asked a clerical person to edit a document for me by a certain date and time, and the person said he would. However, the person's press of work was so great that he was unable to get to my work as promised. Therefore, I was unable for several days to do the next step in the process I was involved in.
- Here is an example in which I didn't perform as well as someone else expected. I recently was asked to produce a document by a certain date, and said I would. However, I had trouble figuring out how to do the project and didn't get it done by the expected time. Therefore, it was unavailable to the person who needed it for a trip he had to make.
- Here is an example where someone did more than I requested. I asked my secretary to ask the company library for any available information on a particular subject, hoping to get anything that was *easy* for the library to find. My secretary made the request of the library, and the library did an on-line search for which I eventually received a charge of many hundreds of dollars. Because I was not clear that my interest was only casual, I had to pay much more for the information than it was worth to me.
- Finally, which of us hasn't given someone advice only to have the person say "who asked you?" In other words, we sometimes respond to requests that haven't been made, and people resent this.



To provide a way to improve the quality of our conversations for action, let's explore a model or process called the Atom of Work, that we will use to hold conversations to coordinate action and that will enable us to make requests and commitments that will be more successful.



The atom of work is a schematic representation of the possible paths of making a request or offer, agreeing to a promise, and carrying out the promise, or renegeing or otherwise failing some where along the way.

The atom of work starts with a requestor or speaker who typically makes a request of a performer or listener.

The atom of work involves four stages which are numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4 around the circle and fifth and sixth elements called “breakdowns” and “shared concerns.” We’ll describe each element in turn.

Stage 1. The first stage of the atom of work is the preparation stage. During this stage, the requestor communicates context in which the request and promise are set. The stage ends with a request.

Unfortunately, while most of us are very facile with making requests, they often are not very clear.

Here are some of the things we need to think about to assure that things don’t go wrong when we make requests.*

Most simply, there needs to be a speaker and hearer. It is not sufficient to make a request to no one in particular: “Someone needs to fix the copier.” It’s also no good being disappointed or angry because the person we thought should carry out the action didn’t, if we never made an explicit request; who hasn’t done this one time or another? And, we must be careful not to assume a request when no one is making one.

We need to be clear about what is missing. For instance, if I say, “I’m out of touch with the situation with customer X,” am I worrying that I am *not in control* of the situation with customer X or am I concerned that I *don’t have information* about the situation with customer X. Let’s assume, that I mean the latter—I am missing information about the situation.

Then, we need to specify the future action to address what is missing. Do I want a report from our customer representative, a conversation in the hall next time you and I meet, or do I want a meeting with the customer to get back up-to-speed on the situation?

* Our initial understanding of these elements of a request came from the Newfield Group.

Next, we need to be clear about the conditions of satisfaction. What do I want and how.

And we need to be clear about the time frame. Time frame could be listed as part of the conditions of satisfaction. We list it separately because it is so important and because it is so often not specified. We just say we want something and don't specify the time.

We also need to be sure we have a shared background of obviousness. My background of obviousness is all the things that are so obvious to me that I don't think about whether I need them to be clear to you. For instance, I may hate reports that are more than one page long, or my concerns about customers may always be strategic and I leave the tactical issues to the people in day-to-day contact with the customer account.

And you need to know if you can trust me when I make a request. Am I sincere and really need this information, or I am in the habit of making casual requests and then not really caring about the answer?

In our course on this subject, we investigate the elements of a request more deeply, and we also role play making good requests to develop skill with requests that we currently lack.

Stage 2. The second stage of the atom of work is the negotiation phase. This stage should end with a promise (or it at least a clear statement of what will happen instead of a promise).

Unfortunately, just like we often make unclear requests, we also often make non-specific promises. You ask me to do something, and I say, "sure" or "as soon as I get a moment" or "why not?" It's not clear whether I'm making a serious commitment, and as time passes it may become more and more clear that I haven't made a serious commitment. Or, if I made a serious commitment and carry out what I thought you wanted, I may discover later that I did the wrong thing.

During the negotiation phase of the atom of work the potential performer needs to get straight exactly what the request is, and the requester and performer need to sort out any mismatches in expectations.

Depending on how well the performer carries out the commitment, the requester will form a judgment about the performer and whether or not to depend on this person at another time. This is why it's so important that we get clear requests and make good commitments and carry them out successfully. If we do not, we cast doubt on our capability for future opportunities.

Each of us is judging how much we trust each other every time we make a request. We can look at trust as consisting of three components: sincerity, competence, and reliability. If I make a request of you and you make a commitment to accomplish the request, based on past experience I may judge you as quite sincere, fairly competent, and usually reliable, and decide to take a chance on you, or I may judge you as very sincere,

very competent and always reliable in which case I won't be taking any chance at all, or I may judge you as very competent but not sincere or reliable in which case I may let you make the commitment but I certainly won't depend on it very much.

The judgments we make about each other make clear why seeming to make commitments that we can't or won't live up to is such a problem. Unfortunately, many of us don't feel we can decline a request, and as managers many of us make our people feel like they can't decline a request. The best time to hear that someone can't or won't be able to succeed in a commitment is at the time of the request, when there is a possibility of finding someone else who can or will be able to accomplish the request.

If we are to have people reliably live up to commitments, they need other options during the negotiation phase besides simple acceptance—people need to be able to negotiate, make counter-offers, commit to commit later, and even decline—and as managers we need our people to be able to do these alternative moves if we want to build a culture of making good requests and commitments.

Stage 3. The third stage of the atom of work is the performance phase. During the performance phase, the person who made the commitment carries it out. When done, the person declares the task complete.

Unfortunately, declaring performance complete is another thing that is often not done explicitly. Each of us has probably experienced a case when something we wanted had been completed but we didn't know about it. For instance, on Friday I left some work with the graphics department for a presentation I would be giving Tuesday, and they promised completion by Monday morning. However, on account of another job being canceled, they finished my work by the end of the day Friday, and then they put it in the inter-office mail to get to me Monday. Of course, had they called me Friday and told me it was already done, I could have picked it up on my way home, checked it over on the weekend, and found any errors which could have been easily corrected before I caught my plane to the presentation site on Monday evening. However, by not getting the material until Monday morning and having a very busy day Monday, I didn't get to look at it until I got on the airplane Monday evening, and by then it is too late when I found an error.

Another thing we often fail to do is to declare at the earliest possible moment that we will be unable to perform according to the promised conditions of satisfaction or time frame.

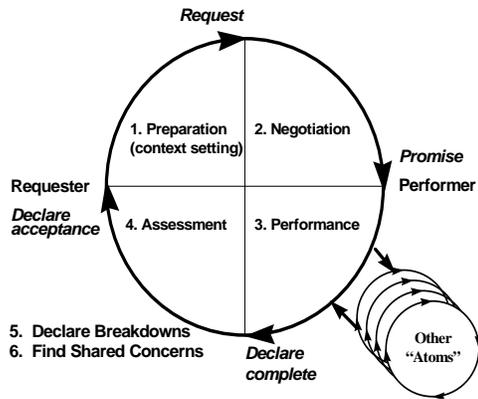
From the point of view of the customer, we would all like suppliers to tell us at the earliest possible moment when they think they may not be able to deliver as agreed, for instance, I'd like to hear before I take the subway to the garage where I left my car in the morning, rather than after I get there, that they won't finish the car that day.

Yet, when we are suppliers, we routinely don't give the earliest possible warning of a problem. This is the point of the fifth element of the atom of work—the declaration of breakdown. Part of the process is validation of the performer (or the requester in the

event of a change in need) declaring, at the earliest possible moment, that there is a problem, while there is still time to do something about it, and to allow us to avoid making consequent commitments based on the commitment we thought we had.

Some of the time, we can simply carry out alone a commitment we make. However, much of the time we need help.

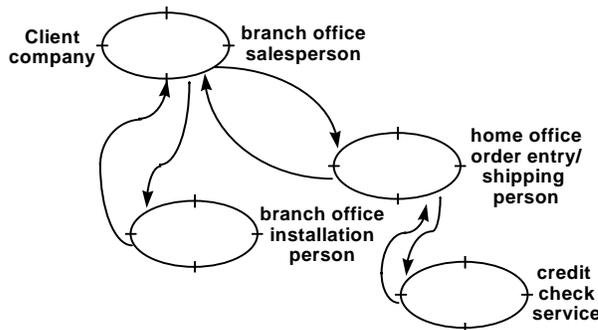
This figure shows how one atom of work can spin off consequent atoms of work. For



instance, if, as a sales person from my company, I promise to deliver a product to you, I will probably have to make requests of and get commitments from others in my company to actually get the product delivered to you.

In fact a whole network of atoms of work can be spun off of the first atom of work. In the figure, the branch office sales person makes a commitment to deliver a product to the client company. Then the branch office sales person makes a request of the home office order entry and shipping person to enter the order and ship the product. The order entry/shipping person, in turn makes a request of an outside credit-check service to be sure the customer's credit is good; and, finding that the customer's credit is good, ships the product. The branch office sales person then has to make a

request of the branch office installation person to install the product at the customer site. When this is done, the sales person is finally in a position to declare the delivery commitment complete to the customer.



Other atoms of work can be spun off of any stage of an atom of work. For instance, in the primary atom of work in the figure we just saw, the branch office sales person could have made a

request of the company contracts department to help with the negotiation phase of the atom of work.



The figures above illustrate that it is possible to think of the activities and processes we carry out in our organizations as being networks of requests and commitments. This is a

powerful and flexible way to look at many of the things we do—more powerful in many cases than more traditional flow-charting and input-process-output models.

Stage 4. The fourth stage of the atom of work is the stage during which the customer assesses satisfaction with the job done by the performer.

This is a stage that we don't typically carry out which means that we don't learn how to do things better in the future or even if things need to be improved in the future. In fact, many people complain that they seldom know if their supervisor is satisfied with what they do. In many other cases, a performer assumes satisfaction that isn't there.

Stage 4 ends with a declaration of acceptance by the customer, or a declaration of non-satisfaction which means that the atom of work may have to be rerun.

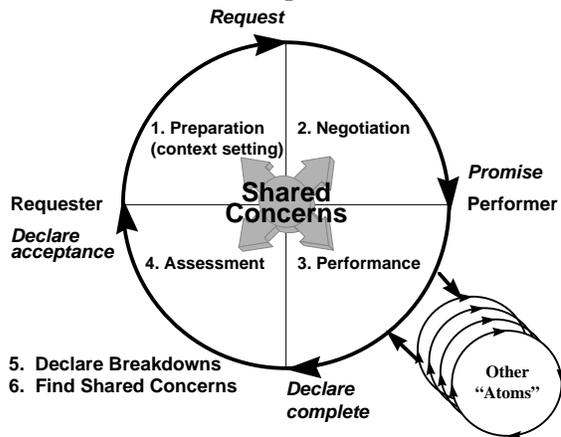
Conversations about breakdown. Let's now ask ourselves, "where in the atom of work can there be a problem?" The answer, clearly, is everywhere. Problems can and do arise in every stage. This brings us again to the issue of breakdowns.

We have already mentioned the importance of declaring breakdowns as soon as we know we cannot complete a commitment.

We would never ride along in our vehicle with a flat tire, blithely ignoring it, with smiles on our faces. However, we do this all the time in our organizations. We sit in meetings, smiling agreement with what the boss is saying, without stating that we know what is being proposed is a bad idea and won't work and that we may even not intend to follow through as requested. Then, perhaps, after the meeting, we whisper to each other in the hall something like, "what a terrible idea; we are wasting so much effort that could be spent more usefully."

It is terribly important to our organizations that we validate having conversations about breakdown. These can occur in any stage of the atom of work, or as part of any of the other conversations. We need to declare a breakdown, and decide which conversation to have next. Do we go back and clarify a portion of the atom of work? Do we need to have a conversation for possibilities? Do we need to have a conversation for relationships?

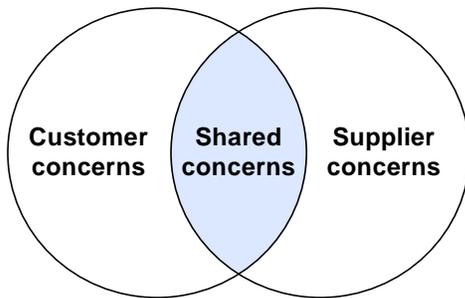
Shared Concerns. The figure completes our sketch of the atom of work. For the atom of work to work well, the parties to the atom of work need to understand what their underlying concerns are (their own and the other party's) and understand the compatibility between these concerns.



If your concern is reducing costs and my concern is that I think I may be the cost you intend to reduce, I probably won't do a great job of carrying out your request for me to see how my job might be done more efficiently. In fact, I once led an engineering group in a company that was doing significant downsizing, but where

our viability was critically dependent on our getting products to market faster, yet some members of the development staff deliberately did their work more slowly than necessary because they assumed that their jobs would be eliminated as soon as they finished their current project. However, if we can find compatibility of concerns—we called them shared concerns in the figure—then both requester and performer can be working toward compatible ends.

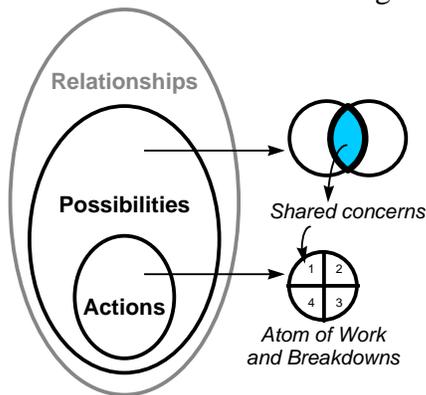
This figure illustrates the idea of shared concerns. The figure makes clear that our



mutual concerns don't have to be 100% overlapping. In fact, they don't exactly have to overlap at all. For instance, you may want a routine job done, and I may want an entry level opportunity, and this compatibility (if not sharedness) of concerns will be sufficient for us to succeed together.

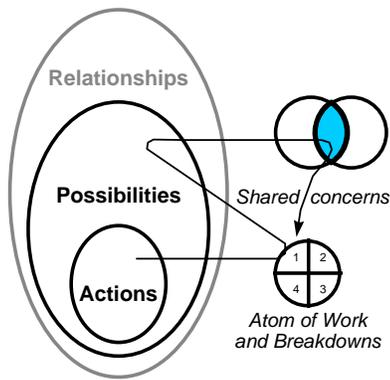
Conversations for possibilities are key to discovering shared concerns

The idea of shared concerns begs the question of how do we discover our shared



concerns, and this leads us back to our model of various types of conversations.

As shown in the figure, our conversation for possible actions may develop our shared concerns and these in turn will then be available when we operate the atom of work as our tool for holding conversations for coordination of action.

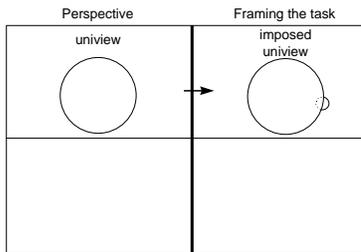


On the other hand, in some cases, we may have started the atom of work without developing a sufficient understanding of our shared concerns and then we may have to go back and have a conversation for possible actions to develop the shared concerns and then to feed these shared concerns into the atom of work.

However, our principle of trying to develop explicit methods that we can improve for softside functions requires us to understand where our feelings about a situation and concerns come from and to develop a model for developing those shared concerns, if it is at all possible to do so.

Viewpoints

For any situation with any material amount of complexity, many of us don't think about the possibility of, or aren't concerned with, any other viewpoint than our own viewpoint of the situation. We call this a uniview.

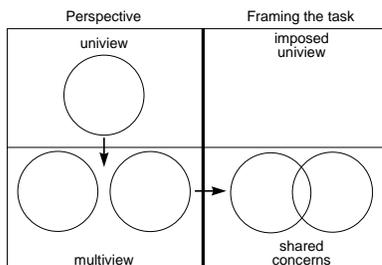


For instance, a circle indicating my uniview about a situation is shown in the top left corner of the figure.

There are a couple of ways one can move regarding one's uniview of a situation. One thing we frequently do is see the task ahead as trying to argue others into believing our uniview. We often do this in meetings

or conversations where we spend a lot of time talking past each other, even to the point that we may be downright rude in our statements about each other's viewpoints.

For instance, in the top right corner of the figure I show with the little circle the tiny value I give to your uniview, and I try to blot out your viewpoint with my own much more significant viewpoint. We call this the imposed uniview.



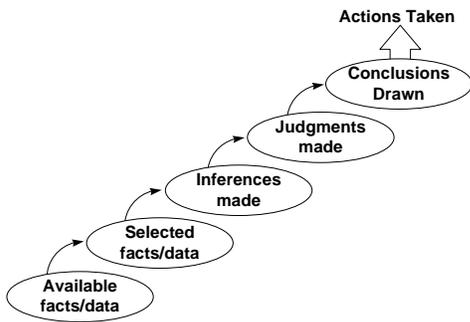
Another direction I can go from my own uniview is down. In the bottom left box I try to discover the multiview. This not only means recognizing that you have a uniview of your own, but also discovering the validity of your uniview from your point of view.

With this multiview—this understanding of my own uniview as well as yours, especially if you have been

doing the same thing with regard to my viewpoint—each of us may be in a position to try to see some overlap between the elements of the multiview, and we may be able to develop our shared concerns.

How we reason

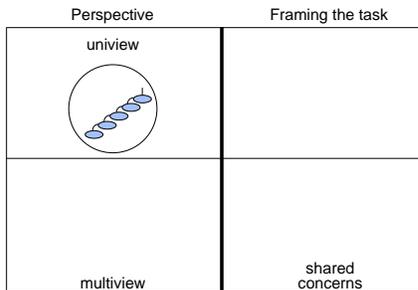
But where do our univiews about a given situation come from?



Let’s look at a model for how we reason about a situation. First we have some facts available to us. We select some of these facts. We may make some inferences based on the facts we select. We probably will make some judgments. Finally, we will draw some conclusions. And based on these conclusions we may take some actions.

However, typically, we don’t do these steps of reasoning slowly and thoughtfully.

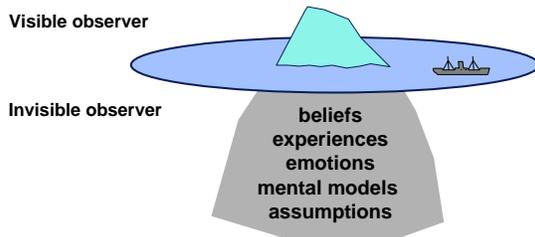
Rather, we zip through the steps almost unconsciously at the speed of neurons. Quicker than we can explicitly think we select some facts, make inferences, judgments and conclusions, and take actions. And this rapid reaction is necessary most of the time. When we see a cardboard box in the road while driving at high speed, we don’t have time to analyze whether the box is empty and we can safely drive over it or whether it contains something that is dangerous to hit. We see the cardboard box, and jerk the steering wheel to avoid it. If we reasoned everything out step-by-step in business, we’d never get anything done.



This rapid-fire reasoning with almost unconsciously drawn conclusions about the situation is where our uniview about a situation comes from.

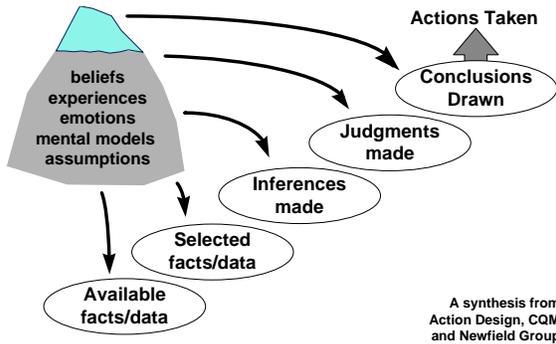
But there is something behind this reasoning—the observer that each of us is.

Each of us is able to see different things when we look at a situation, based on our individual beliefs, experiences, emotions, mental models and assumptions that are so natural to each of us that—not only do we often fail to explain them to someone else—we are often not even conscious of them ourselves.



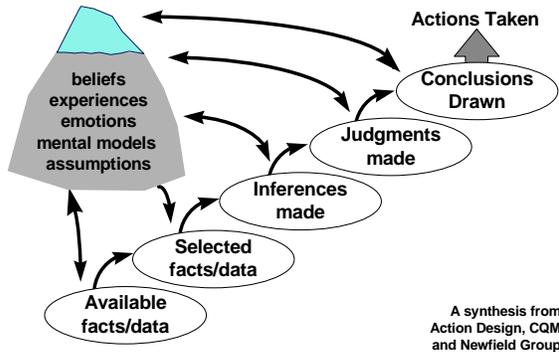
Some of the way we observe things is visible to others—above the tip of the iceberg. Another part may be visible to ourselves. However, much of the way we observe things is invisible to others and often part of it is invisible to ourselves as well.

However, what we don't see, we still get. The observer-that-one-is is with each of us all the time influencing how we reason.



The observers-that-we-are influence the very facts that we have available to us. A marketing person typically has different facts available to them than a financial person does. The observers-that-we-are influence which facts we select, the inferences we make, the judgments we make, the conclusions we draw and the actions we take.

But it works the other way, too. Not only do the observers-that-we-are influence each step in our reasoning, each step in our reasoning tends to confirm the observers-that-we-are.

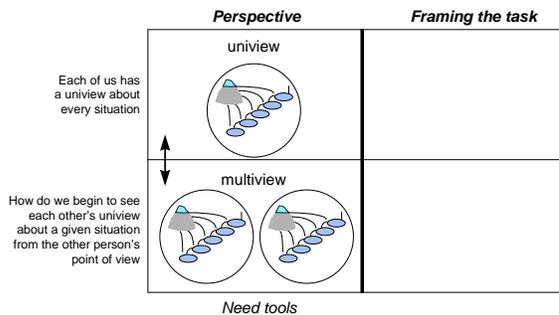


Humans have a wonderful capability to construct and reinforce internal coherence. We make a particular inference based on the way we look at things, and then the inference seems right to us and confirms to us that we really are thinking about things in the right way.

We call this entire combination of the reasoning steps and the observer-that-one-is the cycle of reasoning.

As already mentioned, the reasoning cycle operates at tremendous speed, almost without thinking.

How we can create a multiview



Based on our cycle of reasoning, each of us has a uniview about every situation. The problem we need to solve is how to figure out what the other person's reasoning cycle is (and make our own clear to ourselves) so we can discover the multiview. To do that, we ourselves need to change the observers-that-we-are—to become more open observers.

The solution is a set of tools that exist and that we are teaching in CQM courses or are being developed through research in our CQM member companies.

- i. Defer making judgments about the viewpoints of others
- ii. Create/collect tangible artifacts
- iii. Become aware of your inner dialog
- iv. Inquire broadly (listen/observe, don't advocate), e.g.:
 - concerns
 - distinctions
 - emotion
 - facts vs. judgments vs. declarations
 - commitments
- v. Reflect on how to do better next time

We organize into a few categories the tools for becoming a more open observer to enable discovery of the multiview.

A first important principle is to *defer assessments* about the viewpoints of others—to give ourselves a chance to understand their point of view rather than just trying to convince them of ours.

Second, it helps to write down what the other person says or the entire conversation. Give yourself a tangible artifact that you can study and learn from.

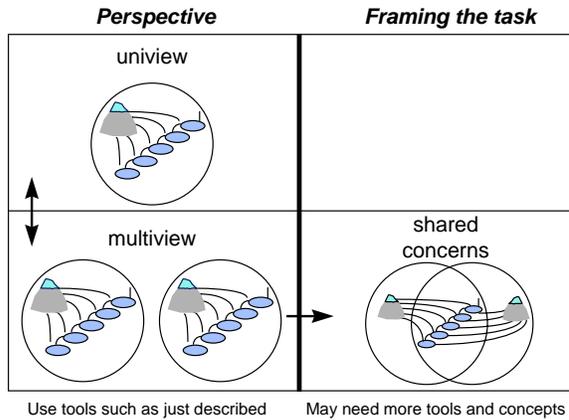
Third, it helps to become aware that you yourself are observing the situation from your own particular point of view—to become aware of the observer-that-you-are and your own inner dialog.

Fourth, an important distinction that helps us defer assessments is the distinction between *inquiry and advocacy*. Advocacy usually involves trying to get the other person to see our viewpoint. Inquiry usually has to do with trying to put ourselves in the other person's shoes and see their viewpoint.

A number of the tools that we use as part of TQM have built into them methods of deferring assessment and including a healthy dose of inquiry. For instance, during voice of the customer visits we ask open-ended questions, don't argue back, take verbatim notes, and use active listening to draw out and confirm that we understand what the customer is saying.

There are a number of other ideas that help one see the other's person point of view that we won't go into in this paper beyond the following mention: listening for the other person's concerns, listening for the particular distinctions that other person is making, observing and listening for the emotion in the situation, clarifying when the other person is making a declaration, judgment or statement of fact, and listening for what commitments the other person is making in what they are saying.

Last, as in all efforts to improve our skills, after a particular effort to be a more open observer and to discover the multiview, it is important to reflect on how effective our efforts were and how to do better next time.



How to find shared univiews

As seen, we can use a variety of tools to become a more open observer and to discover the multiview. We are left with the need for additional tools to find the shared concerns.

Once we have heard and understood what the other person is saying, we can move beyond finding the multiview and onto finding shared concerns.

- i. Become an open observer
- ii. Balance advocacy and inquiry
- iii. Use structured (explicit) process when possible
- iv. Take responsibility for what the other person hears and for you hearing what the other person says
- v. Reflect on how to do better next time

The first presumption, of course, is that we are already working at becoming a more open observer.

Second, it is now time to use both advocacy and inquiry and constantly maintain them in balance.

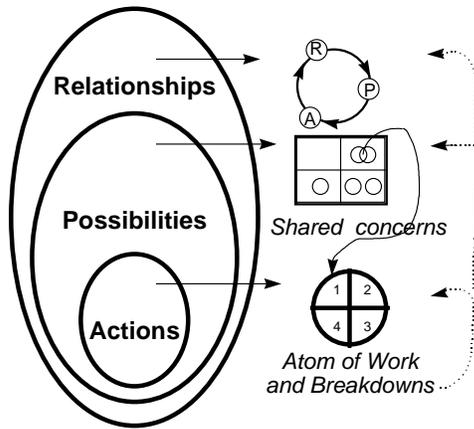
Third, where possible it is helpful to use structure discussion tools such as the LP Method, Dialog from David Bohm, Net-touching, and so on. In fact, the 7 Steps, Concept Engineering and other tools we use in various applications have built into them ways of structuring the “conversation” to help us move from the uniview to multiview to shared univiews.

Fourth, it also helps if each party takes full responsibility for understanding what the other person means and for making sure the other person understands what one means. There are many tools to help with this. For instance, important sets of tools for developing a multiview and finding shared concerns center around the pair of ideas of *making language concrete* and *making reasoning explicit* to each other. Unless we make language concrete, it’s hard to even know what we are saying and thinking, much less know it with any precision and have it conveyed from one person to another. Unless we make reasoning explicit, we will not begin to understand the way each other reason and our backgrounds of obviousness about particular situations. For instance, we can use Hayakawa’s principles of semantics to move from affective language to more concrete report language. We can make reasoning explicit by looking at the reasoning cycle and asking ourselves questions such as what facts are available and what facts weren’t available, what facts did we select and what facts didn’t we select, what inferences did we make, what judgments did we make, and what conclusions did we draw; we can also make various distinctions that let us better see our backgrounds of obviousness. In the one- to three-day courses on this subject that we are developing, we will introduce some of the relevant tools; and in some instances, we do substantial role playing with various tools.

Fifth, we once again emphasize the importance of reflecting on how we have practiced, if we are in fact going to improve our skills.

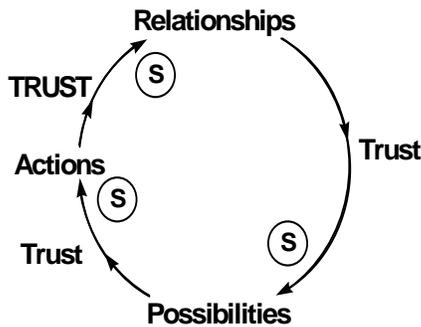
In summary, we can use these techniques above for moving around the uniview/multiview grid to hold conversations for possible actions and thus leave ourselves a proper context for conversations for coordinating action.

Conversations for relationships and building trusting relationships



We'll finish this brief introduction with a view of how conversations for relationships relate to conversations for possible actions and conversations for coordinating action.

As shown in the figure below, we start with a tentative relationship. This builds a little trust. With a bit of trust, we may be willing to share enough about our own situations to look for some possible actions. This sharing of possible actions may generate a bit more trust. The next step, in turn, could lead to coordination of action. If the action can be carried out successfully, this generates substantial trust, which leads to a stronger relationship because we see that we actually can accomplish things together through this relationship. With a stronger relationship, we may feel able to share with each other more about ourselves and the way we reason which could lead to more interesting possible actions. And if we can successfully coordinate and carry out these actions, our relationship will be further improved.



We now see the importance of setting up the proper context for action and carrying out the actions successfully. If we do so, we can get into an upward spiral of greater and greater power to perform together. However, if we cannot successfully coordinate action, either because we don't have tools like the atom of work or because we don't properly set the context using techniques such as those to move from univiews to shared univiews, then trust and relationships are damaged and we will be less likely to look for possible actions together. If, we fail again to carry out action successfully, our relationship may be completely fractured, and no further action may be possible.

CQM plan

This brings us to the end of our sketch of the model that the CQM has developed for improving the way we hold conversations.

We look forward to reporting on future steps in the use and improvement of this model and to sharing with you many of the specific programs we will have to disseminate the tools and methods that implement the model.

In particular,

- we have introduced this model about conversation in the context of teamwork into our basic 6-Day TQM course
- several companies are beginning to apply these conversational methods in the course of their normal business, e.g., at ADI, Keane
- we have developed a 2.5-day leadership workshop called Conversational Competence—the key to high performance organizations
- we are developing a 2-day course to be in support of existing teams within companies
- we are offering a 1-day introduction to Conversation in Action
- we have on-going a multi-company project to learn to use networks of atoms of work to map and reengineer development processes.

We ask you to join us in some of these activities.