

Jim Ewing



# Braving Uncertainty

*Maps for the Journey*

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# The Insight Cycle

People and their organisations come into existence, go through stages of growth, periods of good health and bad, times of relative calm and predictability and other times of intense turbulence, chaos and uncertainty. Every organisation and every person gets born, grows, gets stuck and lost and off path, learns, gains, loses, finds new ways, develops knowledge and wisdom and comes to an end. Such are the cycles of becoming on the paths we live out. Every day, as individuals or organisations, we create this journey. We are continually becoming.

Individuals want to have insight, live out stimulating intentions, find wisdom, compete successfully, work with interesting and dynamic people, be aware of where we are in our lives and work, and become valued, effective, whole people in valued and effective families and organisations. When we have to surrender and die to things, we want to be able to let go as easily as we can, suffer the least uncertainty and use the change creatively, to realise an even better situation than we left behind.

Organisations aspire to provide useful products and services, deliver increasing value for their share owners, manage efficient operations, enjoy competitive advantage and respect from their competitors, be timely innovators, offer a good and rewarding place to work, be humane and skilful in the endings, renewal and motivation of their people, and be good citizens wherever they are in the world.

We all want to play the game as engaged and empowered people. We don't want to waste unnecessary time, angst or resources. We want to show up well in the world and do good work. And we want to play with the big boys and hold our own.

How can we bring more of this about? What do we need

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to know and how can we discover it, sooner rather than later? What do we need to do and how do we best do it, and when? What must we learn and how do we go about that? What has to end, what has to be invented and how do we find the passion, the fire in the belly that will keep us going?

Every journey has a story which brings meaning to the flow of events. We might tell our story as an adventure, a mystery, a revelation, a transformation, a drama, a soap-opera, a discovery, a documentary, a love story, or a mythic-hero's journey. Underneath the framework which we give the story, there are essential dynamics, the core drivers in our journey, from which all our stories are drawn. It is from these domains of experience that we take the raw material which we fashion into our story. It is at the level of these domains where we can actually change our journeys.

My work is dedicated to gaining personal and organisational leadership at the level of the core domains, where we can have real power to bring about potent journeys for ourselves and our fellow travellers. We get to the core through our stories. If we labour and lead at the core with the courage to engage the new and unknown, the stories will be retold with a change for the better.

I've spent a career coaching others and their work groups right at their core. Over the years patterns of inquiry and procedure have emerged. I've attempted to make these accessible as maps of the territory and useful explorations for you to employ. What follows is an introduction to the maps and trails and some essential sightseeing. The Insight Cycle is a good entry point for the whole adventure. The Cycle reveals:

- Four related domains of experience, common to organisations, groups and individuals, the core, generative drivers of our journey
- The interaction of the four concepts which generates personal and organisational change, learning and transformation

- Linkages to experiential methods for understanding the interaction of the domains and enhancing the journey at every level of organisation.

### **Reading The Maps: Glyphs, Concepts and Key Words**

Each symbol and key word on any of the maps represents a concept. Each concept lives in a physical space on the map I call a 'domain', spaces where thoughts, feelings and experiences can be organised on the map. Each domain has a glyph associated with it, a graphic symbol which conveys a meaning. Glyphs visually stimulate our minds with the essence of the concept held in the domain. I've also chosen a word in English to provide a broad identity for each domain.

There has always been contention within myself and with others about which key words are the perfect words to use. Increasingly, picking just the right words to describe the domain has become impossible.

With this writing I've made the assumption that a glyph is a more important signifier of the meaning of the domain than the keywords. Domains become useful when we apply them in specific contexts with appropriate language. Given the myriad languages and cultures within which the Cycle and its derivative methods must be useful, a universal glyph and its concept can have a thesaurus of words behind it, any of which may be the perfect handle for the work being done. It is important for you to understand the concept of the domain and pick the right word based on what you are trying to accomplish. If the concept is understood and honoured, you will find good local language, and the map will do its work.

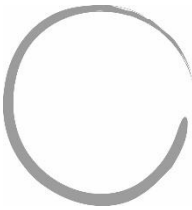
### **Stories**

We all have a story to tell. How we see the world and our place in it, and how we see ourselves challenged or stuck or succeeding will define the context and style of the story. Our

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job as coaches, leaders, managers, parents and people is to make a positive difference in how all of our stories work out. While it may be nice or nasty to hear the story, we need access to making a difference at the core, the place from where the story actually arises.

We don't want to be an audience, cheering or booing from the sidelines. We want the powers to get inside the story where the storyteller, be it an individual or an organisation, is enabled to re-invent his or her story in a desirable way. We make up all our descriptions of life and work, stories of our becoming, using a combination of four underlying elements, described below. Now to draw the cycle and then to understand the concepts, language and relationships of the four domains.



The Cycle is a simple drawing, in the effortless style of cave drawings and hieroglyphics. We begin with a simple circle which implies a path. I started drawing the path at the three o'clock position, or, as I prefer, the East. So far it doesn't tell us much except that whatever it is, it repeats. Over and over, the path brings us back to wherever we started. To gain the powers of the cycle we need to add some stops along the route.

## Situation



Our first core domain is 'Situation'. The glyph is a simple box shape. Our situation is the collection of physical conditions, outcomes, results, performance measures, money in the bank, cars in the garage and so on, which we use to define how things stand for us in the world. Organisations might describe their situation with performance measures, numbers of products, size of the customer base, total investment portfolio, number

of offices, market share and such. I might describe my situation by the number of credit cards I have, or my physical age, the number of grey hairs left, age of my children, the count of dinners with good friends, or number of rooms in my home.

Every measure, outcome, result, or condition in 'Situation' is treated as completely neutral. For example, if I have a €20 note in my pocket, it is just a €20 note. It isn't good, it isn't bad. It isn't a lot. It isn't a little. It is just the fact of twenty Euros. A company produces 11,364 widgets in the month of May. That score goes in 'Situation'. It is not good performance or bad performance in 'Situation'. It is just the score, just a number. This neutrality is essential to the workings of the Cycle. It is required to conduct useful inquiries and reveal potent access to making positive differences in our journey.

### Behaviour



For our next domain, we follow the path of the Cycle onward, travelling halfway around to the West. The glyph is a stylised arrowhead. It implies motion and action and represents the concept of what we do. Our

'Behaviour' for short.

Individually, 'Behaviour' is our doings and not doings, our actions, steps and moves. At the organisational level 'Behaviour' is our business processes, procedures and systems, in action. Not the system design, but how the system or procedure or team actually, measurably behaves. Behaviours are the physical, demonstrable expressions we make in the world. For example, we get in the car and drive to work. The order entry process loses three orders a month. Telephone sales people deliver the same friendly response whether the order is for a pair of €10 socks or a €500 coat.

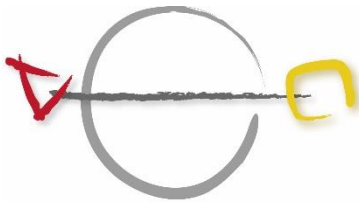
### The 'Doing' Axis

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If 'Situation' and 'Behaviour' were the only domains, we would have a very simple process to describe our journey around the Cycle. We find ourselves in a situation and we respond with behaviour designed to improve our conditions. Now, we can put an East-West 'Doing' axis on our cave drawing.

When we are operating exclusively on the 'Doing' axis, we behave, we get a result, we behave more to improve on a good result or recover a bad result, and a changed set of results may or may not ensue. And on and on.

I had a witty colleague years ago who said that her company was full of 'human doings.' I think she was talking about an organisation with a huge bias to being busy and putting points on the scoreboard, driven to hurry up and deliver results without a lot of so-called 'navel gazing,' which another colourful human doing I know likes to call the process of thinking.



For example, as a baby, the situation we perceive is pretty limited. Empty or full. Wet or dry. Alone or together. The behaviour available to improve our

conditions is equally limited. It is mostly noise. We can cry or coo. Mothers learn to read the subtleties quickly and know when food or a diaper change are required. We cry, we are fed. We cry, we get changed. We cry, nothing happens. We cry louder. People come running. Simple, extremely effective once upon a time. Most of us still use the same scheme!

Organisations define and manage themselves in the domains of 'Behaviour' and 'Situation'. Just read any shareholder document. They invested and reorganised and hired and fired and acquired – all 'Behaviour'. They are worth this much now, have this profit margin, and own some

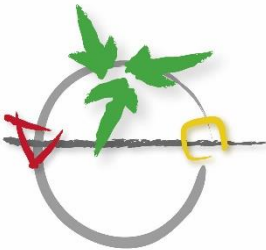




percentage of this or that market – all ‘Situation’. Most of us, for most of our lives, go on living on the ‘Doing’ line, expecting that our choices of action will largely fit the situation and produce decent results in our lives. It was a pretty good approximation for the best part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It’s not such a good bet anymore.

### Influence

Our behaviour is converted to a revised physical situation by the time we arrive at the East. How does this occur? We need a new domain, which I will draw halfway along the Cycle in the North. Whatever is in this domain, it is a transformer which takes our behaviour and acts on it in some way to convert it into a changed situation in the East.



For example, the baby cries and that noise becomes a full stomach. How does that happen? Mum, is the easy answer. Mother is the ultimate force in the baby’s life. The baby does not realise that. But, we know, from our perspective that it is true.

*Lao Tzu writes in the Tao Te Ching:*

*Tao produced the One.*

*The One produced the two.*

*The two produced the three.*

*And the three produced the ten thousand things.*

The glyph at the true north of the Cycle is a set of three arrows all impacting one another at a point of focus. These three produce the vast complexity of stuff in the world. The key word I’ve chosen for this concept is ‘Influence’. People and things and systems have the power to exert influence on ourselves and our organisations. Influence is a complex

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system of physical creation which runs constantly and which is way beyond anyone's comprehension, much less control. For example, the weather system produces rain and ice and sunny days. The force of technology, driven by the work of millions of people, moves us from wood fire to oil fire to hydrogen fire for our vehicles. As this occurs, it brings huge changes in organisational and individual situation.

The Behaviour in the West of the Cycle always occurs within this vast system of influence, placed here in the path. We behave and it immediately moves us to the North, where our behaviour shows up in interaction with the influences which surround us.

Influences are anyone and anything that takes our time up and asks something of us, whether to believe in them, serve them, feed them, answer their questions, pray to them, bow before them or make them feel important. Influences are also the systems, people or things which supply us with needed resources, whether spiritual, intellectual, emotional or physical. And, influences are the physical laws that govern the fundamental operation of all things. Throw the ball up, it comes down. Gravity is an absolute influence, a force of nature over which we have no say.

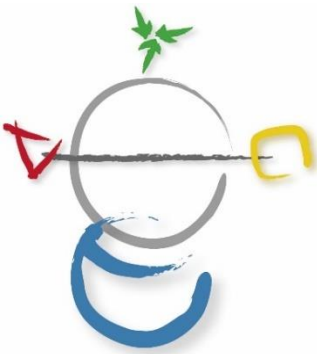
We may believe or assume that we have a say with some influences. I suggest that this is an illusion, brought about by their cooperation with us, rather than any direct control. I can't make you feel bad. Only you can do that. But I can intend to do that and say some pretty nasty stuff. If you choose then to feel bad, that is really you cooperating with my intent. Sad, but true. So, the Cycle works with influences as a one-way street – from them to us. The influences that count are always bigger than we are.

My most important influences are my wife and children, gurus of various sorts, a few very dear friends, the value of my social security payments, Apple's product introduction schedule, the cat, and a few compatriots who are gatekeepers to interesting work to be done.

Influences on an organisation could be trends in customer

preference, supplier relationships, tax laws, trends in technology, government laws and regulations, cultural orientations, falling confidence in corporate honesty and morality, and the cost of rental space in downtown London.

In a team, we see our immediate clients and suppliers as primary influences, along with the organisational pay scheme and the organisational strategy to which we must deliver. As in the domains of 'Behaviour' and 'Situation', 'Influence' is neutral.



### Mind

We have one last point on the compass to visit to complete the domains of the Cycle. Let's return to what I called the 'Doing' line. I act, the world of influences takes that and a new situation is established.

What must the domain at the South point of the Cycle hold, to convert the situation into a choice of behaviour? Another transformer, the reverse of influences, which processes situations into actions.

This is the human ability to perceive conditions, interpret them into good or ill, and invent and decide on actions which are designed to best enhance or recover the situation, given the influences. I've called this domain the 'Mind'. The glyph for 'Mind' is a bowl. Once again this idea springs from the ancient traditions of human observation where our consciousness is characterised as a container. A bowl is an ancient symbol, one that might appear on the cave wall to represent the domain of 'Mind'.

The domain of 'Mind' holds my beliefs, assumptions, mental models, experience, dreams and aspirations, intentions, passions and urges. Also my biases and prejudices and psychological patterning, the results of my inculturation

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at the hands of my parents and community and schools and bosses and religious scheme. My joy, my love, and my rage. All the filters through which I perceive the world.

For an organisation, the domain of 'Mind' holds strategy, mission, brand, policies, rules and regulations, both spoken and unspoken. The so-called glass ceiling, above which some classes of people may not be promoted, is a product of the unspoken, organisational 'Mind'. We have arrived at the domain where values are naturally placed on situation, influence and behaviour. Up to now I have been very careful to avoid any judgement in these domains.

Remember the €20 note I found in my pocket in the 'Situation' example? It was simply a €20 note. Not a good one or a bad one. No value judgements allowed. So it is in the domain of 'Behaviour'. I wave my hand at a passing taxi while I hold the €20 note. That is just an action. A behaviour. On its own, it means nothing. It has no value within the domain of 'Behaviour'. Likewise with the domain of 'Influence'. The influence called weather is neither good nor bad. The probability of a hurricane every year is a big influence on us if we live in the Caribbean islands. In and of itself, it is neither good nor bad, just a probability. Likewise a boss who never says good morning to me, is just a person who doesn't do good mornings. Not bad or good in the domain of 'Influence'. But, dammit, I sure experience the guy as a sour pickle before 10am. Which brings us to the seat of that 'dammit', the domain of 'Mind'.

In my 'Mind', if I make €500 a day, I will likely value the €20 note in my pocket as spare change. The price of a light lunch. If I make €5 an hour, I value the €20 as half a day's salary. The other guy's light lunch looks like a once-a-month, special night out to me. If I am a weather researcher, I may value the potential of a Caribbean hurricane as a swell adventure and opportunity. If I own a couple of beach hotels, I value it as a serious threat to my situation.

Everything depends on what is contained in my, or our collective, bowl of 'Mind'. Our mind holds models of how the

world is, our place in it and how to behave to keep our situation stable and continually improved. Our mind is also capable of imagining completely new situations and generating the passion which fuels us to act mightily in the world of influence to realise our intentions.

It appears that humans possess three minds.

- An emotional mind which speaks in physical sensations and moods we refer to as our ‘Heart’.
- A thinking mind which forms concepts and pictures and uses logic and language. We refer to this mind as the ‘Head’.
- A kinaesthetic, physical mind – the seat of our body memory, our urges to get into motion and action, from where we ultimately act out our physical existence – the mind of our ‘Hands and Feet’.

There is no guarantee that at any one moment these three minds are aligned with each other. When we have completely changed our mind, it will be accomplished in all three. Easier said than done. A dear friend of mine holds that changing one’s mind is easy. Happens in a snap of the finger. Bing. “There, I’ve changed my mind.” I think such finger-snap mind changes are typically handled with our head and only when there is no emotional attachment to the outcome.

Our emotions have deep memories and take lots of time and real experience to accomplish a true change of heart. When a business partner swipes all the money and heads for Mexico, how long will it take for the person left in Chicago with the empty bank account to conjure up anything like a warm feeling for that partnership, or any other, ever again?

And likewise our bodies. Our hands and feet learn through plenty of repetitions. Once learned, the reps are very hard to forget. Could you unlearn how to ride a bicycle? Anyone tried to unlearn a bad habit in a golf swing lately?

If I have grown up with a deeply held belief which is the foundation of a forty-year world view, and that belief is thrown into question by a world which no longer works as

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that belief demands, changing my mind to accommodate the new world may well be the hardest journey I will ever take.

The organisation which believed in video tape rental as their destiny never made the change.

Any one of the three minds can lead, but all three must get through the transition before we can really say we have actually 'Changed our Minds.'

### The 'Being' Axis

We can now draw a second axis on the Cycle, connecting 'Mind' with 'Influence'. I call this the 'Being' axis. Between them, the two poles of the 'Being' axis hold all the complexity and mysteries of the world beyond ourselves and the world within. Engaging this axis calls on our curiosity, patience, humility, and a willingness to endure uncertainty and ambiguity. On this axis be dragons. The unknown. Whether we are individuals wanting more of life, or an industry needing to re-invent itself, we must spend time on the 'Being' axis, acquiring insight and new perspectives just as we let go of the old.

On the 'Being' axis we find the primary drivers of change. The domain of 'Influence' is always stirring and shifting. If our principal influences are among those in flux, we will be forced to change our minds to adapt, cope or become new people in a new game. The domain of 'Mind' is also endlessly stirring. Whether individually, as we age and stage through life, or organisationally as we have new ideas and aspirations and insights and strategies. If either end of the axis moves, the other must play catch up.



If we walk over and stand on the 'Doing' axis, the domains of 'Influence' and 'Mind' appear as necessary transformers for choosing behaviour and getting results. If we return and stand on the 'Being' axis, the domains of 'Behaviour' and 'Situation' appear to supply us with useful experience which reveals what we really believe and how the world really

works. Engaging both 'Doing' and 'Being' in equal measure gets plenty done while we constantly learn, change and renew ourselves and our organisations.

### Riding the Cycle



Transition, change, learning, renewal, rebirth, invention started with somebody's change of mind. It may have been stimulated by an earthquake, an unalterable force of nature, but the resulting adaptation and becoming of the humans involved, occurred in the mind. What makes our story interesting is the progress and evolution and transformation of mind as it dances with the world.