



## Trainers And Consultants, What Do You Want To Know?

## What's Your Burning Question?

## What Have You Done With Your Inner Researcher?

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### INTRODUCTION: A MANIFESTO

The time has come for applied behavioral science practitioners to more fully own and operate from their own curiosity, to appreciate the many ways we are creators of knowledge as well as consumers of knowledge in our daily practice, and finally to take more responsibility for generating useful knowledge from our experience.

We need to appreciate more how each day we are posing and answering important specific, general, and global questions related to the nature of group and organizational life. Each day we are learning more about how to intervene and improve the functioning of individual, family, group, and bigger systems. Each day we leave many of these lessons learned unarticulated, unexplored, unrefined, and unshared.

The reasons for this are complex. The incentives often aren't there; our temperaments tend toward action more than reflection, and we have competing priorities. Perhaps that is why we have surrendered the social role of documenting learning (and the responsibility for acting on our own curiosity) to our academic colleagues. Their incentives, temperaments, and priorities are often different from ours and support their reflective activities and resulting knowledge products. The price that we and society have paid for this is real however. *The voice and experience of the practitioner is under-represented in the published reports about the nature of social systems and the dynamics and methods of intervening.*

Once this awareness has penetrated more deeply in our consciousness as applied behavioral science practitioners, we can more actively and more confidently claim our place as generators of knowledge products that increase the general store of understanding. We can begin to break down the habits of thinking, the informal taboos,



and finally, the institutional constraints that have limited the professional practitioner as a knowledge generator and separated us from the academic and professional researchers who hold "the keys to the knowledge store room and to the means of production".

The goal of all this discussion is the acceptance within ourselves and by others that knowledge for use exists on a continuum of inquiry. Each point on that continuum is a valuable one, and we all, practitioners and academics alike, have ways of adding value. Those who see themselves as professional researchers and those who see themselves as professional change agents need to understand the production of knowledge about social systems and intervening in social systems as an inter-related, inter-connected, collaborative enterprise. When this happens, researchers, practitioners, and the organizations, groups, and individuals they study and work with will be better off.

The following few pages are presented as an initial discussion draft. The ideas need to be further developed in dialogue with others. However, it is a beginning way of showing how the curiosity of the practitioner and the curiosity of the researcher really exist along a continuum. The continuum has the goal of showing how practitioners answer questions along the way (i.e. learn), and have potential to generate a variety of knowledge products, beyond what we typically do now.



These products (papers, videos, courses, cases) could potentially increase our common store of knowledge, if we were more aware of how we generate or could generate knowledge as a by-product of what we do. By understanding this connection between our own on-going curiosity, learning, and knowledge production, hopefully we will become more active in documenting, analyzing, and generalizing our lessons learned and sharing them with others. When we do this we take responsibility for our curiosity and step into our roles as partners in the enterprise of knowledge generation.

#### A CONTINUUM OF INQUIRY FOR APPLIED BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE PRACTITIONERS

### 1. Posing and answering questions that arise out of professional practice of intervening with specific clients in real time.

*A. Knowledge for use by me, my immediate colleagues, and my current clients, e.g:*

#### Questions about what is going on with the client and the best way to proceed.

- What is the best way to assess this situation?
- Why is the client (system) behaving this way?
- What's the best way to start, continue, end this consultation?
- How do I turn this request into a well-funded contract that addresses the client's needs? How do I build on what I have done to extend this contract? How do I exit the system in a helpful way?
- How do I avoid the pitfalls that have befallen other consultants in this system?

#### How might you get the answer?

- Draw on what you already know about consulting, assessment, diagnosis, intervention
- Read books or articles on assessment, the relevant industry, the type of intervention you are contemplating, or in the middle of
- Consult someone who knows the history of the client
- Kick ideas around with colleagues
- Discuss with a question with focus groups within the client system
- Discuss the client situation with past consultants in the system
- Conduct interim evaluations with the client and discuss results

*B. Knowledge for me, my network of colleagues, my current clients, my future clients, e.g:*

#### How might you turn your answer into a "knowledge product"?

- Keep a private diary of interactions, observations and impressions; write up a narrative history
- Write a summary of what you have learned about

- the industry, the client system, its history
- Maintain records of consulting reports, memos to and from the client
- Members of the team share their interactions and impressions via list serve or some kind of private blog-like thread; then go back and do a group analysis based on the information
- Use the discussion and or interactions to help the consultant team continually refine and deepen its experience in terms of what is going on with the client
- If the consultant team gets together for staff meetings, make recordings or records of what is discussed
- Share selected assessments by the consultant team and keep records of the client's response
- Keep a log of key events in the system as the intervention proceeds

#### How might you refine the knowledge product so that it is re-useable within the system or for other clients or other practitioners?

- Use the experience in the system to write one or more case studies, have these case studies refined through discussion with colleagues, and validated by discussion within the system; use the cases in training programs in the system, or with other systems, or to train other consultants
- Through dialogue with others, refine your account of the intervention and how it went. Compare your experience with the experiences of other consultants; create a 'lessons learned' paper. Share this paper in an appropriate practitioner publication or other forum
- Look to see where your narrative fits with the published literature of other interventions. Refine your narrative and put it into a theoretical context. Describe how it confirms or challenges major ideas about what is the best way to intervene in a system, how to view systems, or how they work
- Present your paper at a professional meeting. Get discussion going. Refine the paper and submit it for publication in an appropriate peer-reviewed journal

### 2. Posing and answering questions that arise out of professional practice of intervening with clients over time, beyond the experience of any one client.

*A. Knowledge for use by me, my immediate colleagues, and my current clients, e.g:*

#### I see an intriguing pattern and I wonder if there is a way to better define it, validate it, and learn from it?

- Patterns in how interveners develop or mature or derail
- Patterns in how consultants succeed or fail in certain situations
- Patterns in what certain presenting client complaints are likely to really mean, and how to address them
- Patterns in the way organizations, groups, or



- individuals change, grow, and adapt
- Patterns in the way certain cultures, temperaments, styles impact change and leadership
- Patterns in the way certain theory-based ideas work or do not work under certain circumstances
- Patterns in the way certain interventions need to be carried out to be successful

#### How might you get the answer?

- Draw on what you already know about the pattern from your own education and experience
- Read books or articles on assessment, the relevant industry, the type of intervention you are contemplating, or in the middle of
- Consult someone who might also have an idea about this pattern
- Kick ideas around with colleagues
- Raise the question at a professional meeting or on a list serve; find out who else is interested in this question, or knows about it.
- Lead a discussion group on the topic with fellow practitioners

*“B. Knowledge for me, my network colleagues, my current clients, my future clients, eg:”*

#### How might you turn your answer into a “knowledge product”?

- Keep notes from all the activities listed in the section above
- Create a wiki or blog on this issue
- Write a newsletter, or an issue or an article in a newsletter, that reports on your investigations on an on-going basis
- Write a summary of what you have learned about the pattern
- Put that summary in the context of others' thinking about the issue. Undertake or commission a literature review
- Write a paper on the implications of the pattern for intervention
- Design an intervention that builds on what you have learned about the pattern; test that intervention with clients and write up the results for presentation etc (see previous section on documenting interventions)

#### How might you refine the knowledge product so that it is reuseable within the system or for other clients or other practitioners?

- Use the experience in the system to write one or more case studies; have these case studies refined through discussion with colleagues, and validated by discussion within the system; use the case studies in training programs in the system, or with other systems, or to train other consultants
- Through dialogue with others, refine your account of the intervention and how it went. Compare your experience with the experiences of other consultants; create a 'lessons learned' paper. Share this paper in an appropriate practitioner

- publication or other forum
- Look to see where your narrative fits with the published literature of other interventions. Refine your narrative and put it into a theoretical context. Describe how it confirms or challenges major ideas about what is the best way to intervene in a system, how to view systems, or how they work.
- Present your paper at a professional meeting. Get discussion going. Refine the paper and submit it for publication in an appropriate peer-reviewed journal.
- Write or edit a book or journal issue about the pattern

### **3. Posing and answering questions that arise out of a curiosity about the nature of social systems, interventions, or other related matters, not directly tied to immediate practice, but born out of a broader desire to know and to share thinking.**

#### *A. Knowledge for use by me and those who share my interests, eg questions about:*

- Do men and women differ in the way they co-operate and compete at work?
- Can education systems that are designed to provide broad credentials (e.g. MSW, MBA) really equip people for work in social change professions?
- Does organizational development work in medical centers?
- Can appreciative inquiry and problem-centered approaches be blended successfully in interventions?
- Are there patterns of 'checks and balances' in organizational structure that can be reliably called upon to prevent the kind of abuses we have recently seen in the management of our financial institutions?
- What do we really know about managing across cultures? What of all that has been written is really useful?
- Should coaching be a part of any program of organizational training? What are the pros and cons?

#### How might you get the answer?

- Draw on what you already know about the question from your own education and experience; write down your thoughts and explore your questions in a paper, or blog
- Discuss your ideas with others who might be interested
- Find an 'expert' on the question; have a discussion; get a reading list
- Read books or articles on assessment, the relevant industry, the type of intervention you are contemplating, or in the middle of
- Raise the question at a professional meeting or on a list serve; find out who else is interested in this question, or knows about it
- Lead a discussion group on the topic with other interested parties; write up the results



*B. Knowledge for me, my colleagues, other people interested in this question*

How might you turn your answer into a “knowledge product”?

- Keep notes from all the activities in the list
- Create a wiki or blog on this issue
- Write a newsletter, or an issue or article in a newsletter that reports on your investigations on an on-going basis
- Write a summary of what you have learned about the issue
- Put that summary in the context of others' thinking about the issue. Undertake or commission a literature review
- Write a paper on all you have discovered

How might you refine the knowledge product so that it genuinely adds new knowledge to our collective ‘store’ on this question?

- Based on what you have learned in the above steps, identify the key unanswered questions that are most important, and most amenable to further exploration
- With the help of colleagues and academics design an inquiry or exploration into those questions, e.g.
  - Systematically interview, individually or in groups, individuals who will provide information to clarify the central question
  - Scientifically survey those who could provide information to answer the central question
  - Professionally design and conduct a social psychology experiment
  - Do a meta-analysis of existing data sets (either data sets, or case studies)
- Analyze your results and write up your answers in conformance with scientific and academic norms
- Present your paper at a relevant professional meeting. Get discussion going. Refine the paper and submit it for publication in an appropriate peer-reviewed journal
- Publish your results on the web in some form
- Write or edit a book or journal article about the issue

BIOGRAPHY

David Kiel has been involved with the Life Business concept as a workshop leader, program designer, marketer, and writer since 1991. He is an organizational consultant whose projects focus on strategic planning, organizational design, team building, leadership development, and conflict resolution.

He has consulted with managers and management teams in IBM, GlaxoSmithKline, Westinghouse, and Nortel.

A former professor of Public Administration and Public Health, he has also worked with numerous government and non profit organizations including the National Governors Association, USEPA, the National Congress of Community Economic Development, UNC Health Care, and the Instrument Society of America.

His work in the last ten years has featured assistance to innovative economic development organizations like the NC Rural Center, the NC Indian Economic Development Initiative, NHS of Chicago. David is currently involved in forming a new program for faculty leadership development for the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at UNC Chapel Hill.

David studied organizational behavior at Yale University and received his doctorate from the UNC School of Public Health in 1974. His articles have been published in *The Public Administration Review*, *The Training and Development Journal*, and *Environmental Quality Management*. David is a member of NTL. He lives in Chapel Hill, NC with his wife Amey Miller and their daughter, Rachel.

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