

A summary of direct quotes from change management and organisational learning articles

A sample of the 23 pages and over 10,000 words summarised by Andrew Gibbons

From: “The business case for curiosity” Francesca Gino. *Harvard Business Review* September/October 2018 Pages 48-57.

P 48 “Most of the breakthrough discoveries and remarkable inventions throughout history from flints for starting a fire, to self-driving cars, have something in common: They are the result of curiosity”.

“The impulse to seek new information and experiences and explore novel possibilities is a basic human attribute”.

“New research points to three important insights about curiosity as it relates to business”.

1. First, curiosity is much more important to enterprises’ performance than was previously thought
2. Second, by making small changes to the design of their organisations and the ways they manage their employees, leaders can encourage curiosity – and improve their companies.
3. Third, although leaders say they treasure inquisitive minds, in fact most stifle curiosity, fearing it will increase risk and inefficiency”.

P 50 “When we are curious we view tough situations more creatively”.

“Despite the well-established benefits of curiosity, organisations often discourage it...two tendencies restrain leaders from encouraging curiosity:

1. They have the wrong mindset about exploration
2. They seek efficiency to the detriment of exploration”.

P 52 “Leaders often think that letting employees follow their curiosity will lead to a costly mess. They also believe that disagreements would arise and making and executing decisions would slow down, raising the cost of doing business”.

“Exploration often involves questioning the status quo, and doesn’t always produce useful information. But it also means not settling for the first possible solution – and so it often yields better remedies”.

“Five ways to bolster curiosity:

1. Hire curious people
2. Model inquisitiveness
3. Emphasise learning goals
4. Let employees explore and broaden their interests
5. Have ‘why?’, ‘what if?’ and ‘how might we?’ days”.

P 53 “To assess curiosity employers can ask candidates about their interests outside of work. Reading books unrelated to one’s own field and exploring questions just for the sake of knowing the answers are indications of curiosity”.

“Leaders can encourage curiosity throughout their organisations by being inquisitive themselves”.

“In 2000 when Greg Dyke had been named Director General of the BBC but hadn’t yet assumed the position, he spent five months visiting the BBC’s major locations, assembling the staff at each stop. Employees expected a long presentation but instead got a simple question: ‘What is the one thing I should do to make things better for you?’. Dyke would listen carefully and then ask ‘what is the one thing I should do to make things better for our viewers and listeners?’ “.

“By asking questions and genuinely listening to the responses, Dyke modelled the importance of those behaviours. He also highlighted the fact that when we are exploring new terrain, listening is as important as talking: It helps us fill in gaps in our knowledge and identify other questions to investigate”.

“Management books commonly encourage leaders to communicate their vision from the start rather than ask employees how they can be most helpful. It’s bad advice”.

“Why do we refrain from asking questions? Because we fear we’ll be judged incompetent, indecisive, or unintelligent. Plus, time is precious, and we don’t want to bother people”.

“As people climb the organisational ladder, they think they have less to learn”.

“When we demonstrate curiosity about others by asking questions, people like us *more* and view us as *more* competent, and the heightened trust makes our relationships more interesting and intimate”.

“Another way leaders can model curiosity is by acknowledging when they don’t know the answer, that makes it clear that it’s ok to be guided by curiosity”.

P 54 “Tenelle Porter, a postdoctoral scholar in psychology at the University of California, Davis, describes intellectual humility as the ability to acknowledge that what we know is sharply limited. As her research demonstrates, higher levels of intellectual humility are associated with a greater willingness to consider views other than our own”.

“People with more intellectual humility also do better in school and at work. Why? When we accept that our own knowledge is finite, we are more apt to see that the world is always changing and that the future will diverge from the present. By embracing this insight, leaders and employers can begin to recognise the power of exploration”.

P 55 “Especially when under pressure, we narrow in on what immediately seems the best course of action. But those who are passionate about continuous learning contemplate a wide range of options and perspectives”.

“A body of research demonstrates that framing work around learning goals (developing competence, acquiring skills, mastering new situations and so on) rather than performance goals (hitting targets, proving our competence, impressing others) boosts motivation”.

“When motivated by learning goals we acquire more-diverse skills, do better at work, get higher grades in college, do better on problem-solving tasks, and receive higher ratings after training. Unfortunately organisations often prioritise performance goals”.

“Organisations can foster curiosity by giving employees time and resources to explore their interests”.

“Leaders often don’t want to invest in training employees for fear that they will jump to a competitor and take their expensively acquired skills with them”.

“Employees can also broaden their interests by broadening their networks. Curious people often end up being star performers thanks to their diverse networks”.

“The organisation benefits when employees are connected to people who can help them with challenges and motivate them to go the extra mile”.

“Deliberate thinking about workspaces can broaden networks and encourage the cross-pollenisation of ideas”.

P 57 “The inspiration for the Polaroid instant camera was a three year old’s question. Inventor Edwin Land’s daughter was impatient to see a photo her father had just snapped. When he explained that the film had to be processed, she wondered aloud ‘why do we have to wait for the picture?’ “.

“As children grow older, self-consciousness creeps in, along with the desire to appear confident and demonstrate expertise. By the time we’re adults, we often suppress our curiosity”.

“To encourage curiosity, leaders should also teach employees how to ask good questions. Bob Langer (holder of over 1,000 patents at Massachusetts Institute of Technology) has said he wants to help people make the transition from giving good answers to asking good questions”.

“Organisation ‘why?’ days, when employees are encouraged to ask that question if facing a challenge, can go a long way toward fostering curiosity”.

“In most organisations, leaders and employees alike receive the implicit message that asking questions is an unwanted challenge to authority”.

“Maintaining a sense of wonder is crucial to creativity and innovation. The most effective leaders look for ways to nurture their employees’ curiosity to fuel learning and discovery”.

Additional sources used

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January 2008 Pages 78-93.

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Andrew Gibbons

www.andrewgibbons.co.uk

07904 201474

andrew@andrewgibbons.co.uk