Teaching Action Inquiry

Although I have described many aspects of my teaching process in my two most recent books (Managing the Corporate Dream [Dow Jones-Irwin, 1987] and The Power of Balance [Sage, 1991]), I have given comparatively little attention to the ways in which I attempt to help students to develop a much closer attention to their moment-to-moment managerial behavior and to experiment toward more effective action (a process I call action inquiry). I have also given virtually no attention to the way I work with part-time MBA students who work full-time and who take a regular semester-long course more like the courses most people teach than the year-long immersion in group work and consulting that our full-time MBAs face. This article attempts to redress this imbalance.

Since I frame my courses as intended to help students become more effective in action, and since I invite them to intervene whenever they experience the course activities as not contributing to this end, I would like to offer here some of the ways in which I attempt to implement this aim. (I will try to do so in a way that permits you to cut out and xerox any bits that you would like to use. Also, since Managing the Corporate Dream is already out of print and since I hold the copyright, I hereby authorize anyone reading this to copy any parts or all of the book for student use; I would appreciate it if you would sell it to students at no more than twice the copying cost and send half of the ‘profit’ to Peter Reason to support publication of this Newsletter and his other efforts on behalf of Collaborative Inquiry.)

At the outset of almost any course I teach, I ask students to write a short, one or two page paper describing a dilemma they have encountered at work. I ask them to reconstruct in dialogue form as carefully as possible the conversation at the core of the dilemma - the conversation that has not yielded the results they would like. (I tell them that the very best cases are ones that are ongoing [so that they can try different behavior next time and see if that makes a difference], but that even a long-past scenario is OK, if it continues to bother them and make them wonder whether there might have been any way to get a different outcome [even a childhood scenario in their family is OK, if no more recent event captures their imagination as strongly]).

I ask them to bring three copies of the paper to class - two to share with members of their new group for critique and discussion, one to add their own handwritten comments to after those in-class discussions and to hand in to me.

Before their in-class discussions in small sub-groups of three, I introduce them to one way of analyzing and constructing verbal behavior that is based on a normative theory of effective action (developed in part by Argyris & Schon in Theory in Practice [Jossey-Bass, 1974] and in part by me in Managing the Corporate Dream). This theory of interpersonal effectiveness holds that all verbal behavior exhibits one or more of four qualities shown in Box 1.

Empirical study shows that most people most of the time use only one or two of these elements of speech explicitly, and that explicit action framing and reframing is the rarest phenomenon. By contrast, the normative theory holds that interpersonal effectiveness increases as each party interweaves all four elements of speech and invites others to do the same.

Illustrating the Use of the ‘Four Parts of Speech’ Scheme

Rather than continuing the discussion of this theory on an abstract level, I invite students to try it out with me in various ways over the next weeks. In other words, I move on from framing and advocating to illustrating as quickly as possible. Before asking them to analyze one another’s short papers in the small groups of three, I usually share a single case, such as that shown in Box 2, with the whole class, and we analyze it together. I ask the students to categorize which elements of speech are represented in each of the author’s three statements in the dialogue portion.

I ask the students how they categorize the first statement (“Jack, the upload...”), asking how many see it as inquiry, how many as illustration, how many as advocacy, how many as framing; and I ask what elements of the statement lead people to categorize it as they do. This approach gets everybody to commit him or herself, gives contingent legitimacy to all answers, shows that no one will be alone in being wrong, and shows that the category system, as simple as it is conceptually, is not so easy to apply. Usually, nobody believes the statement is inquiry, but at least some people choose each of the other three categories.
**Box 1**

framing - naming the present purpose of speaking and/or
the assumptions at the outset of action (not an analytic frame characterizing some other time or place);
advocating - asserting an opinion, perception, or goal in relatively abstract terms;
illustrating - offering a relatively concrete example or story;
inquiring - inviting others to respond.

**Box 2**

**A Typical First Paper**

The work dilemma I would like to focus on is my sense of boredom and stickiness with regard to my overall responsibilities and my boss, in particular. I am plagued by problems in poorly designed systems that I did not write but now have responsibilities for. One of these systems is very large; it would take 6 months to a year to develop a new system; and it is slated to be replaced in two or three years. The second system, however, can be replaced with a development effort of 3 to 6 weeks.

From previous conversations with my boss, I know that he does not feel this is worth the effort either because the forecast process (of which this system is the last stage) has been scheduled for an overhaul for several years now. But I believe it would make sense to pursue this effort for several reasons. First, I have already spent at least 3 to 6 weeks in support of this system and expect to spend more time in the coming months. Second, the change that I would like to make is consistent with the strategic plan for our department. Finally, problems experienced in the last few weeks have crossed several department lines negatively affecting the credibility of our department and me. I know that the primary user of this system believes that the system should be replaced as well.

Given the recent problems and the client’s negative feelings about the system, I believe I should again approach my boss about changing this system. I also believe that if I approach him in the same way I have in the past, the results will not change. In the past, our conversation has gone something like this:

Me: Jack, the upload of the revised forecast to CBS is complete but again there were several problems.

Jack: Is Marketing Accounting satisfied with the numbers that are there now?

M: Yeah, JB has seen and approved the numbers and we expect to turn them live tomorrow. JB is really dissatisfied with the whole process and I agree with him. The system works ass backwards. As you know, the system is redundant. Jonathon has already done all the work on LOTUS to prepare for his meetings with G. All we have to do is upload that information to the VS and put something together to generate transactions.

J: The forecasting system is under review and to have you go ahead and develop this system could be a complete waste of time because the whole thing could change. We have plenty of work that needs to be done without that.

M: OK, you’re the boss.

I see that there are several assumptions on both sides that are left untested. I assume that Jack is aware of the exact nature of the problems because they have shown up on my weekly status sheet. Also, I assume that Jack would not be open to my pursuing the subject and that my pursuing the subject would be seen as critical or confrontational. I also see Jack making some assumptions that are incorrect and that I don’t attempt to correct. The first is that the process worked because Marketing Accounting is satisfied with the numbers. This not true because I’ve always had to use smoke and mirrors to get the process to completion. Finally, the assertion that the forecast process itself is being changed may itself be an assumption.

Developmentally, I see myself working primarily from the Diplomat stage. This limits me because I don’t attempt to clarify the issues directly for fear of confrontation with my boss. I would like to approach the issue in a way that minimizes potential confrontation but also allows me to express my concerns more completely.
I categorize the first phrase as illustration and the second phrase as advocacy. I point out that he does not explicitly frame the purpose of his speaking to Jack; the students who categorize it as framing are in fact inferring the frame because they have read the rest of the paper and because it is the first statement in the sequence. The normative claim of the theory is that explicit framing and explicit linkages between framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring will be more effective than implicit and unconnected parts of speech. This case supports this claim in the negative sense, in that the speaker does not frame explicitly and clearly does not achieve his purpose. I emphasize that I am not asking students to believe the normative claim; I am asking them to test it through their own observations and experiments with their own behavior.

Many other points can be made in discussing the categorizing of the protagonist’s three short statements. The second statement is a patchwork of illustrations and advocacies, but the strongest advocacy (“the system works ass backwards”) is about an interpersonal situation, not about what action the participants in the conversation can take. Hence, even when the protagonist advocates strongly it is not in an active, self-empowering way. The third statement is an advocacy (“OK”) and an illustration (“you’re the boss”). Here, obviously, the advocacy is submissive, and the illustration reinforces this submissiveness on the explicit level (some students argue that “you’re the boss” is an implicit criticism of the boss’ lack of substantive persuasiveness and that if the boss is attuned he will not let the matter drop there; I respond that (a) this depends a lot on the tone of voice, (b) it is self-defeating to make the effectiveness of our own action depend on the attuneness of the other, and (c) the main point for this exercise is to become aware of how much we depend on implication, how differently different people read a ‘given’ implication, and how much more effective it may be to explicate.

At this point, I ask the students to categorize the dialogues in one another’s papers in the subgroups of three, each working alone on the other two papers first, then comparing decisions and trying to reach consensus and a clearer sense of the meaning of each category.

**Introducing the Managerial Development Scheme**

After we reconvene and at the beginning of the following session, we begin discussing the different stages of managerial development characterized in *Managing the Corporate Dream* (we do not read the book sequentially - I usually start with chapters 13, 14, and Appendix B, then discuss the managerial development chapters, then the organizational chapters...). I relate this discussion to the previous one in several ways. First, I suggest that a person’s stage of development represents his or her overall frame, highlighting how difficult it is to become aware of and transform one’s actual frame (since it frames one’s awareness). Second, I highlight how inferential the identification of one’s own or another’s stage of development must be, therefore how tentatively such inferences need to be held, and how carefully they need to be distinguished from the more directly behavioral observations discussed the previous week. Third, I suggest that the appropriate purpose for making developmental inferences is not to ‘pigeonhole’ oneself or others, but to construct experimental actions for oneself intended to increase one’s own and others’ efficacy and to test the validity of the original inference. Here, we return to the paper examined the previous week and discuss: (a) how that brief dialogue supports the inference the writer makes that he himself is at the Diplomat stage of development, and (b) why this inference is properly held very tentatively (minimal evidence, alternative explanations).

Of course, students have many questions about the validity of the whole developmental schema. I try to clarify its claims and the evidence supporting those claims, but mainly I encourage them to test their questions with their colleagues in the groups against situations in their own experience. This week’s subgroup discussions focus on how each member initially would categorize his or her closest co-workers (peers, supervisor, subordinates) and what evidence is adduced for these inferences. The other group members are encouraged to test for further or disconfirming evidence and to offer alternative developmental hypotheses. I emphasize that since developmental theory holds that a person can think and behave in any of the modes up to his or her current stage of development, one needs to look for the latest stage regularly exhibited and for what isn’t there - for developmental patterns not present in a person’s action. Tables 1 and 2, slightly reorganised from *The Power of Balance*, provide an overview of the developmental theory.
### Table 1

**Governing Frames at Successive Developmental Stages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Governing Frame</th>
<th>Focus of Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Impulsive</td>
<td>Impulses rule reflexes</td>
<td>Outside world, effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Opportunist</td>
<td>Needs, interests rule impulses</td>
<td>Socially expected behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Diplomat</td>
<td>Expectations rule interests</td>
<td>Internal logic, thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Technician</td>
<td>Internal craft logic rules expectations</td>
<td>System success in environment rules craft logics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>System success in environment rules craft logics</td>
<td>Synthetic theory of system environment development over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Strategist</td>
<td>Principle rules system</td>
<td>Interplay of awareness, thought, action and outside world in Eternal Now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Magician</td>
<td>Process (interplay of principle/action) awareness rules principle</td>
<td>Interplay of self &amp; other systems in Kairatic History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ironist</td>
<td>Intersystem development awareness rules process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2

**Managerial Style Characteristics Associated with Six Stages of Development**

**Opportunist**
- Short term horizon; focus on concrete things; manipulative; deceptive; rejects feedback; externalizes blame; distrustful; fragile self-control; hostile humor; views luck as central; flouts power, sexuality; stereotypes; views, rules as loss of freedom; punishes according to 'eye for any eye' ethic; treats what can get away with as legal; positive ethic = even trade.

**Diplomat**
- Observes protocol; avoids inner and outer conflict; works to group standard; speaks in cliches, platitudes; conforms; feels shame if violates norm; sin = hurting others; punishment = disapproval; seeks membership, status; face-saving essential; loyalty to immediate group, not 'distant' organisation or principles; positive ethic = nice, cooperative.

**Technician**
- Interested in problem solving; seeks causes; critical of self, others based on craft logic; chooses efficiency over effectiveness; perfectionist; accepts feedback only from 'objective' craft masters; dogmatic; values decisions based on merit sees contingencies, exceptions; wants to stand out, be unique; positive ethic = sense of obligation to wider, internally consistent moral order.

**Achiever**
- Long-term goals; future is vivid, inspiring; welcomes behavioral feedback; effectiveness and results oriented; feels like initiator, not pawn; appreciates complexity, systems; seeks generalizable reasons for action; seeks mutuality, not hierarchy, in relationships; feels guilt if does not meet own standards; blind to own shadow, to the subjectivity behind objectivity; positive ethic: practical day-to-day improvements based on self-chosen (but not self-created) ethical system.

**Strategist**
- Creative at conflict resolution; recognizes importance of principle, contract, theory, and judgment - not just rules, customs, and exceptions - for making and maintaining good decisions; process oriented as well as goal oriented; aware of paradox and contradiction; relativistic, aware that what one sees depends upon one's worldview; high value on individuality, unique market niches, particular historical moments; enjoys playing a variety of roles; witty, existential humor (as contrasted to pre-fabricated jokes); aware of dark side, of profundity of evil, and tempted by its power.

**Magician**
- Disintegration of ego-identity, near-death experience; seeks participation in historical/spiritual transformations; creator of mythical events that reframe situations; anchoring in inclusive present, seeing light and dark, order and mess; blends opposites, creating 'positive-sum' games; exercises own attention, researches interplay of intuition, thought, action, and effects on outside world; treats time and events as symbolic, analogical, metaphorical (not merely linear, digital, literal).
I should mention here that I have by this time created groups of six (combining two subgroups of three from the first week) and handed out a group list with phone numbers. During the second and third weeks, one member shifts from each subgroup to the other, and for the fourth week the remaining pairs that have not yet been in the same subgroup meet together. Thereafter, the group of six as a whole begins to meet (and to break into subgroups at its own discretion). Each week 45 minutes to one hour of a two and one-half hour period is devoted to group meetings, with me circulating among the groups and serving as a consultant in response to specific requests.

During the third week of class, students bring in three copies of their developmental analyses of co-workers. These fuel a lot of good work in the subgroups, a lot of good questions about particular stages, the scheme as a whole, and about how to shape one’s own action given various hypotheses about co-workers. Some students are already able to offer examples of how thinking about work in this way has led to changes in behavior that have made them more effective, and such stories encourage others to begin experimenting.

**Whether Action Inquiry Is Manipulative**

One question students have is whether they are being manipulative of others if they experiment ‘on’ them, basing their action on developmental hypotheses (there are two distinct possibilities here: that they are ‘taking advantage’ of the person’s current position, or that they are ‘forcing’ the person to transform). This permits me to say (usually again) that these experiments are on oneself, not on others.

Or, I suggest that this category scheme does not make them more or less manipulative than they were before. Manipulation occurs when (a) we hide our intention, strategy, and control from others, and (b) we exploit them for our own advantage. Developmental theory holds that transformation cannot be unilaterally forced and that the later the stage the more inclusive the sense of self and the more mutual the sense of relatedness is (see *Power of Balance*, Chapter 3); also, the interpersonal theory of effective action favors explicit framing etc. Overall, then, the objective-for-action of developmental theory is to help one to imagine a variety of logics that others may hold and to listen more deeply into the others’ realities as one wonders how to act. Put still more ambitiously, the objective is to test how best the current social setting can move toward becoming a true community of inquiry in which all act as true peers - as scientists of their own actions - without assuming that all share this frame at the outset (see *The Power of Balance*, ch. 1-3 & 13). Then, in action, one seeks to test/inquire with others (as well as advocate and illustrate one’s own goals) as one travels some distance along the often long path toward creating a shared frame. More generally, I see students beginning to treat their total practice as managers as a field for self-observation and experiment.

In a given situation, one may ask, does the other respond well to the Diplomat logic that one initially diagnoses as dominant, or better to the Technician logic one hypothesizes as the logic of aspiration, or are initiatives in both these directions repulsed? One tests, at best, helping the other to discover what he or she wishes at the same time. For example see Box 3.

So, these theories tend away from manipulation. However they do represent a powerful, integrated organization of reality. Hence, in the short run, they may make a manipulative person more effectively manipulative. Put differently, they highlight the issue of power, and raise the question of how to exercise power in increasingly mutual ways that empower others as well as oneself. Learning how to do so may require long work and one or more developmental transformations on the part of the actor. That is one reason why it is terribly important to apply this theory not only to others but also to oneself.

This reasoning leads toward the next paper assignment - a developmental analysis on oneself (the example given just above occurred after the student/manager had diagnosed herself as moving from the Technician to the Achiever stage, a self-diagnosis which helped her let go of the technical oversight of projects she delegated to her subordinate). It also leads to the handout in Table 3 which shows the relationships among developmental theory, the Argyris/Schon (modified-by-Torbert) models of interpersonal behavior, and the four ‘parts of speech.’

**The Self-Analytic Paper**

It seems a very important step in helping student to know one another and to write and share a paper on their own development that they have previously written the paper on their work-colleagues' development and that the descriptive/prescriptive value of the developmental theory has been repeatedly highlighted as opposed to the evaluative/hierarchical quality (I use the more descriptive words ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ stages of
Box 3

One student, having diagnosed a subordinate as a Diplomat, took her to lunch away from the workplace and encouraged her to talk about herself. The subordinate seemed quite pleased by the special attention outside the formal setting and opened up, saying she would like to know more about the manager's responsibilities. The manager now read this sequence as indicating that her Diplomat-focused initiatives had worked and that the subordinate was now showing her Technician-aspirant side, so the manager said she would be glad to share responsibility if the subordinate would show that she could meet deadlines and keep the communication open between them. Now, the manager had created a mini-'liberating structure' (see The Power of Balance, ch. 5) for the subordinate and saw this structure not only as a test of the subordinate, but also as a test of her own hypothesis.

Later that very afternoon the subordinate checked back about several office issues and renegotiated several project deadlines. Before the end of the week, the subordinate had, for the first time, completed two projects early. Soon the manager began sharing tasks with the subordinate that the manager had previously done alone. Within the month, the manager offered the subordinate responsibility for a large and technical project involving the rollout of a new system. The subordinate eagerly accepted and handled it very well.

Only six weeks earlier, the manager had said of this subordinate "I have found myself frustrated with her for not communicating information about the day to day operations of the office. She also has a problem meeting deadlines. Although we have discussed my frustrations, we have made no progress in our relationship." The breakthrough appears to have occurred because the manager reframed the problem, bringing a heightened awareness to actual interactions with the subordinate, and capitalizing, for both their sakes, on each initiative that the subordinate took. The manager diagnosed herself as wishing to move from the Technician to the Achiever developmental frame. Instead of assuming that all workers should share her Technician logic, she became more interested in testing what frame this and other co-workers actually held. By actively testing the hypothesis that her subordinate held the Diplomat frame, she in effect showed herself in responding to her sister's possible divorce.

The final papers show that students by and large 'see' for the first time what (stage or transition) their organization and their work group is going through and how they can align their own needs, ambitions, and experiments with group and corporate objectives. Thus, by more explicit framing they gain greater support for their objectives. They also inquire into and 'see' others' different rationalities more clearly, listen more carefully and less threatenedly, and thus create fewer win-lose battles. They gain a sense of patience and persistence in taking multiple interweaving initiatives over time. Box 5 shows excerpts from one student's final paper, after she has analyzed her developmental evolution and her company's.

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development rather than 'lower' and 'higher' in this spirit).

Students in the first course are not asked to look at their life as a whole developmentally, just at their current work-related patterns. Nevertheless, Box 4 shows such a funny, playful, brief, and revealing review of the stages and of plausible transforming experiences that I have copied it for the other students after they hand in their papers (I don't want them to read it as a model). See Box 4.

After discussing the managerial stages, we discuss the organizational stages, and students are asked to write an action inquiry project proposal that describes their company's and work group's stages of development, that incorporates their earlier self & colleague managerial development analyses, and that proposes a six week project for experimenting with their own behavior to generate increased effectiveness at work. In the few cases where persons are not at work, they choose other areas of their lives (e.g. one student chose to experiment with next-stage behavior for herself in responding to her sister's possible divorce).

The Action Inquiry Project

In the following pages, I will offer summaries and excerpts from three students' final project papers.
Based on observations of senior executives in action, Argyris and Schon developed two models of interpersonal behavior in their book *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (Jossey Bass, 1974). They called them Model I and Model II. Model I was the theory-in-use of virtually all executives, but it was manipulative and led to decreasing organizational learning and effectiveness and to increasing mistrust over time. Model II was often the executives’ espoused theory, but rarely evident in their actions; yet the few examples of its practice seem to result more often in increased trust, learning and effectiveness.

I call my versions of these two models the 'Mystery-mastery' style (Model I) and the ‘Collaborative inquiry’ style (close to their Model II). The models can each be characterized by four governing variables which correspond primary aims of different developmental stages:

**Mystery-mastery**

1. maximize winning, minimize losing (Opportunist)
2. minimize eliciting negative emotions (Diplomat)
3. maximize rationality in presentation (Technician)
4. achieve own self-defined goals (Achiever)

**Collaborative inquiry**

1. maximize internal commitment to shared vision by explicit
2. maximize positive freedom of citizen advocacy & invitation to counter-advocacy
3. maximize enquiry and valid information about actual operations by explicit illustration and inquiry
4. maximize timely action by all the above (& Magicial-like awareness of present)

The reader familiar with developmental theory will note the strong Achiever tone suffusing this report, and the lack of any indication of reflecting on the underlying value of the goals that are being so assiduously achieved. Indeed, the writer identified herself as moving from the Technician to the Achiever stage. Since the writer tied evidence to theory carefully, I did not superimpose an academic meta-critique on this paper.

The second student whose paper is excerpted here also analyzed herself as at the Technician stage of development, wishing to experiment toward the Achiever stage and wishing to advocate herself for a promotion from the more technically oriented position of Market Research Manager to the more entrepreneurially and managerially oriented role of Marketing Director.

This student’s project gained definition both from her review of developmental theory and from a developing situation in her company. She summarized her extensive self-analysis and company analysis shown in Box 6.

The third student, see Box 7, describes himself as at the Achiever stage, but with a strong intellectual affinity for the Strategist stage. He describes a business situation, not nearly so encouraging on the surface as the prior one, which requires ongoing, risky strategizing-in-action. He has taken over a major account at his packaging company from a predecessor who maintained control over the customer, despite high price and low value added, through a long relationship and personal favors. With the predecessor’s departure, competitors are making service offers at much lower prices, in a business that frequently sees mini-price-wars.
When I was 15, I worked in my grandfather’s store and I evidenced some Opportunistic tendencies. I would do things that made me look good at the time, but had poor future consequences.

At 19, when I was in college, I worked for my father who had bought a large auto body repair franchise. My managerial behavior was Diplomatic; I wanted everyone to like me and I avoided confrontational situations. Due to the nature of the people who work in that industry I could not, and did not, remain a Diplomat for long. Our employees generally had alcohol, drug, emotional, behavioral, social, and/or legal problems. Many were in and out of court and jail and could not handle their finances from one week to the next. In retrospect, this put most of them clearly as Opportunists.

I remember the turning point from a Diplomat’s to a Technician’s mindset, though I had no name for it at the time. The incident was the first time I had to fire someone. After that, my focus was on driving the employees to do the job right. I was very organized, methodical, and procedural, instituting procedures in our shop that were recommended for use across the country. I hated anyone to try to tell me that there was a different way to do something other than the ‘perfect’ way I was already doing it, though I often would try new ideas after work when nobody was around. I also welcomed and enjoyed people asking me about problems they could not figure out.

I came to a brick wall using this strategy about 1983 when we could no longer find any new employees because of the low unemployment rate. I was not able to fire anyone for not following the rules because there was no one to replace them.

I find evidence subsequently of the Achiever style. Rather than adhering to the strict procedures, I decided to have the goal be to have the jobs done right and that there could be many ways to achieve that goal. I learned quickly the value of flexibility, working with an alcoholic who would often disappear for several days or weeks, a paranoid individual who put a mirror on his tool box so he could see if anyone was watching him, a person I would call hyper who would run through the shop jumping over cars, climb walls, swing from pipes, coming up behind people to startle them, and an employee who, when I asked how he did such a good job, replied that he would just get high and work. Previously, I could easily have fired any one of them, but I learned that each was useful in his own way. At this time, I also sought out critiques on what I did and if there were ways that I could do better. I watched others to see what I could learn from them and found that everyone had something I could learn from.

In 1984 I started doing arbitration, and I think this introduced me to the Strategist’s sense of multiple frameworks and the interaction of process and task. The first brief would seem so convincing, then the other brief would change my mind, and then the oral presentations would again change my view of the whole case. It was also interesting experimenting with different ways to resolve problems that leave each side feeling as if they had their say and accepting my decision as fair and reasonable. In dealing with customers and employees, I now use these same techniques.

The next precipitous event, which may be a glimpse of the Magician stage, happened when a customer was yelling about something to do with their car. It was also during the busy season. I had 15 employees, 75 cars, hundreds of inventory items, and customer inquiries to handle. I remember that while the person was yelling I felt that I was above the situation looking down. I figured out what I should do to correct the situation and then went back down. After this incident, I could do this as needed, separating myself from the circumstances and calmly determine what I should do to control the situation. After several times, I was both amazed and scared of being able to do this...
The past few months have been a time of significant personal growth for me. As I mentioned in the introduction I have developed a greater awareness. I am more fully aware of myself and my day to day interaction with others, and I am more aware of the changes occurring at X (a large hotel chain). I have found that my experiments with action inquiry fit in well with the Quality Process in the company that promotes increased interaction, reflection, and share resolution of paradoxes.

My fear recently has been that my experiments have been heavier on inquiry than on action. When I sat down to organize this paper though, I realized that I had been somewhat effective in enacting some changes in my workplace. Perhaps the greatest result of my experiments is that I have opened up channels of communication with several people I work with: my regional director, my boss, my fellow managers, and particularly my subordinates. The most obvious result is a change in others' perception of me. I have shed the image of being very independent and sometimes unapproachable and have become not only more productive at work but significantly more satisfied with my job.

(She goes on to describe three major change projects she embarked upon, with a total of twelve distinct experiments, chronicling her actions, the outcomes, and ideas for future experiments. For example, one of her projects was to "create a true sales atmosphere in the office." Here is what she reports.

1) I reorganized the office by creating the position of "group reservation sales coordinator." This relieved the other reservation sales agents from all of the administrative information processing associated with groups and made them more continuously available for telephone selling.

2) My second step was to conduct training on a more individual basis on the Sales Process. I began to 'ghost' the agents' phone calls by tapping them and then having them listen to their own calls. I used a 'shop form' and awarded them points based on how well they covered the points on the shop form. After a while I had them critique themselves.

3) I began to talk about new techniques that I had tried that enabled me to upsell. I encouraged open discussion in the office between phone calls for agents to talk about their successes.

4) I instituted a new incentive program based on highest average rate, best shop scores, and highest revenue per phone call. Each week I chose a 'Sale of the Week.' I also awarded points for locating leads to future bookings.

OUTCOMES: I found that I was spending at least 3 times as much time in the office talking to agents and discussing new techniques. I found that I had a lot to learn from the agents who were closer to the callers than I was. I also got to know my agents better and they have become more open with me. I spend more time socializing with them both inside the office and out, which makes my job all that much more rewarding. Our office has become much more relaxed and we enjoy playing practical jokes on one another. This may sound almost unproductive, but let me assure you it is not. In sum, in the past two months I have made more progress toward this goal than I had in the previous ten.

Box 6

My job as Market Research Manager requires that I be a problem solver and 'perfectionist.' It is part of my daily routine to delve into why things are the way they are - digging, analyzing, and presenting the results. Others in the company have always associated me with research and think of me as being 'smart' or 'the brains.' Comments that people make about me include, "You're really good with numbers," "I don't know how you can understand this stuff." These are comments that a Technician would love to have. Market Research requires the use of "accepted methods and rules to analyze tangible evidence and facts." I am finding this frame very constraining. I would prefer to be less detail conscious and be more involved with the overall picture, working towards long-term effectiveness rather than short-term efficiency.

...Steve, the Marketing Director, had confided in me that he was interviewing for a different position within the company and, if he were to accept, it would be fairly soon. It was vital that I display more of the characteristics of the Achiever stage of development in order to be seriously considered for the position of Marketing Director.

(After descriptions of the company's and her department's stages of development, of her initial plans for experimenting, of an initial conversation with the Publisher, and of Steve's actual reassignment a week after she began her experiments, this student continues.)

My first action upon hearing this news was to have a discussion with Steve and ask his advice on the best way to proceed. I made it known to him that I was very interested in eventually becoming the Marketing Director. Steve expressed confidence that I could do the job, but his response also confirmed what I already knew - I needed to become more visible to upper management:

"You need to start acting like a Marketing Director if you want them to start thinking of you as a Marketing Director."
He suggested that I write more memos about things that were going on in the department, make phone calls and let the Publisher, Ad Director, and the President know that I was involved in certain projects - in general, take a proactive role in increasing my communication with these people. The next major action that I took was to rewrite my job description. Jim, the Publisher, had asked me to send him our job descriptions so he could start thinking about the division of responsibility (now that the Marketing Director position was unfilled). On Steve's suggestion, I rewrote my job description and included responsibilities of the Marketing Director that I am interested in taking on. I clearly stated in my letter that "I'm not sure that I've adequately expressed my abilities and interest in the past and am taking this opportunity to do so." I also told him that one of my priorities was to continue to improve my written and oral communication skills.

By taking this action I was letting Jim know that I was making efforts to change my behavior. The letter itself was unprecedented for me. I also opened myself to some self-examination and opened the floor for criticism. My hope was that Jim would realize my level of commitment and assist my development (she has earlier analyzed him as operating at the Strategist stage).

While there was no direct response to my letter and rewritten job description, he has presented evidence that he read it carefully and took it seriously. Over the past few weeks, Jim and the National Sales Manager have sent me copies of presentations that they liked and have called to solicit my opinion on other presentations. Recently, Jim has asked me to take on the development of the general presentation. I adamantly expressed interest in this project in my letter.

An ongoing action as part of my Action Inquiry Project is to maintain daily contact with Jim, the Ad Director, and the National Sales Manager. While this is not always possible due to the nature of sales, I've hardly missed a day without touching base with these three people at least once. While this sounds like a small and trivial thing, it is actually one of the most effective experiments that I've implemented. Formerly, it was not uncommon for me to go an entire week or two without speaking to the Publisher (this is escalated by the fact that he is located in a different city). By taking this initiative, I've created a "chain reaction." My calls to them have started conversations that have prompted them to call me more often. During these conversations I've been able to convey my knowledge on different subjects - which in some cases has led to being given responsibility for certain projects or keeping track of certain matters. Another result is that my name comes up often in discussions between these people and other upper level managers in the company.

Another effective action that I took was to volunteer for a project with which I previously had no involvement. We needed to develop a new rate structure for buying advertising space in our magazine. ...The project had an almost impossible deadline, but I was able to meet it. It involved working several nights until 9pm and on two weekends. I felt it was important for this project to go as smoothly and quickly as possible. If there had been delays and mistakes, Jim might not have entrusted it to me again. This was an area he might not have thought I could help with. If I hadn't taken the initiative, he still wouldn't know it. By taking on this project, I displayed a results orientation, an appreciation for complexity, conscientiousness, and a desire for excellence - all characteristics of the Achiever stage of managerial development.

The next major action I took was to schedule a meeting with Jim to discuss my compensation. In essence I wanted to ask for a raise, but I also wanted to convey that I was confident in my abilities and that contributions that I make and have the right amount of aggressiveness to be successful in Marketing. This meeting was my best opportunity to properly apply framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring in my conversation. I had made many efforts to concentrate on using these conversational elements before and had some success, but I felt it was very important that I use these elements to my best ability in this conversation. I was at an advantage since it was I who scheduled the meeting and it was I who knew what the topic of conversation would be. This would allow me to begin the conversation by framing - the element I find most difficult and the one I am most likely to skip over. By thinking about these conversational elements, I was able to turn a potentially difficult and tense conversation into a positive and productive meeting. Jim was very open to listening and talking about my reasons for wanting an increase in pay. He did not just sit there and nod or give me a flat answer. We discussed my reasoning and his and were able to make each other see the other's view on a few issues. I left the meeting knowing that I would be getting an increase in salary within a few weeks, but that he wanted to sit down and talk about it again. He agreed that I was not adequately compensated for my contributions...

(In conclusion) I am very satisfied with the progress I've made through my Action Inquiry Project. While no decisions have been made to promote someone to the position of Marketing Director, I feel I've made significant progress towards the goal of being that person. In my conversation with Jim regarding my salary, he said, "Well, you're not a Market Research Manager; you're not a Marketing Director yet, you're a Marketing Manager." Jim does not make decisions hastily. I think he wants to be sure that I don't get in over my head. I'm appreciative of that. He seems to be genuine in his desire for me to become the Marketing Director, but wants to give me the time and chance necessary to progress naturally into the position.

Another measure of progress is that I was given a raise. In addition, I was given a laptop computer (which is clear evidence to me that (The impressive dedication to goal-attainment of the foregoing student paper is yet another indication of the new, "total-convert-to-Achiever-hood" status of that student. The Publisher's actions also seem consonant with her ascription of the Strategist stage to his approach, especially his awareness and willingness to be explicit about the issue of timing in her development and her promotion. One can see how the comments by Steve and Jim that she quoted confirmed and named her direction and her position in language that she could instantly appreciate and that additionally motivated her development (if, indeed, her motivation could be further accelerated).)
I knew that we’d have to do something different to maintain the account, but more importantly preserve its high profit contribution. My first investigations indicated that this was a business in which some differentiating was possible. There were several avenues which our selling effort had never addressed in the past which could become the key to success in the future.

After these thoughts in mind, I arranged an appointment with the buyer to discuss some new ideas for his consideration. My first suggestion seems simple yet was radical for this company: I proposed spending a day in their plant. Paraphrasing myself: “You know that I agree with what you said at our last meeting, about us being overpriced compared to the others in the market. Well, I’m still getting a grip on the levels of the account (my former colleague’s files read like pages of Urdu), but I can certainly start improving the value you get from us immediately. My problem is that I’m starting from scratch. I really don’t know how my predecessor used to work with you. In fact, no one at our place did as he personally handled all communications. However, here’s what I suggest. I am willing to spend a whole day in your plant as an observer, in order to understand your operation, problems, and requirements well enough so I can become an asset to you. It needn’t take any of your time: I’ll spend the day and afterwards report to you on what I see or hit you with questions.” The buyer responded well to this initiative. I later discovered that he was not so much intent on punishing us for “ripping him off” in the past as saving his own hide. He had been under some pressure from his bosses to justify the premiums he was paying to have us as his supplier. My petition was fortunate in that it pushed the right button with this individual. At least now he could report that there were some new positive initiatives underway under his auspices.

His internalizing of the initiative was also important in that it ensured his backing of me and my actions...

On the appointed day, I duly arrived at the start of the first shift and met with the manufacturing manager Manny. Manny struck me as a competent guy who had good ideas but was too intimidated by the company hierarchy to speak up about them. He was also rather direct in his criticisms about our quality levels, but conceded he’d never made an issue of them as he knew that our previous salesman was good friends with the president. I suspected that with my former colleague out of the picture we might now start hearing some legitimate criticism we should have heard before. I encouraged him to air his gripes and I listed each of them. I felt many were superficial in nature, but there was one which was genuine. Unknown to us, they had bought a high speed case sealer to replace a number of people who used to perform the packing function manually. They had failed to get the full benefit of their projected efficiency increases out of it, and Manny was being held responsible. He, meanwhile, contended that this was due to frequent jam-ups of the cartons which we supplied. This argument had always been quashed before because an inspection of the cartons always concluded that there was nothing wrong with them. But what they didn’t realize was that as manufacturers we would make specific changes (offset scores and sheared flaps) to the cartons when we were being run on automatic lines. I subsequently made these changes and the problem was solved. Incidentally, these changes actually require less material per box. Since our costs are sensitive to material costs, we not only solved their problem, but enhanced our margin at the same time.

This was a clear case of win-win facilitated by using more channels of communication than we’d done previously. It was also a success story that would perpetuate the whole enterprise.

(The student then goes on to describe a cascading number of discoveries, followed by a meeting attended by all the functional managers and the president which led to still more cost-cutting schemes such as reducing inventory, with his company responding to smaller orders faster. He summarizes the positive outcomes as follows:)

1. Communication is no longer confined to one person (the buyer). His departure or mine therefore won’t jeopardize the relationship as it had with my predecessor.
2. The opening of communication with other influential players in the company will provide a steady stream of ‘value projects’ for me to work on. It will also prevent the suppression of complaints, which I’d rather address than have lingering.
3. We firmly establish a new competitive standard which will hopefully create a barrier to price-cutting competitors. The customer has acknowledged that not all of us suppliers were the same.
4. Consequently, the buyer and I will not always end up haggling about price. Long term our margins should stay healthy.

(This paper did not include as careful and explicit a developmental analysis of self and others as did the foregoing papers. There is an analysis of the buyer’s Diplomat-like actions and of how to construct a structure which prevents the buyer from relapsing into conflict-avoiding and non-problem solving behaviour. At the same time, one can see a number of implicit confirmations that this student is taking a Strategist stage approach to his dilemma: he creates an organizational inquiry process with the customer that begins to craft a uniquely defined service that his company can offer.)