

Executive Intelligence, Intuition & Resilience: *Sherpa Sense*

by Mike Richardson

We know great executives when we see them. They somehow seem more able to cope with the dynamic complexity of our journey as a business on a shifting landscape. They are made of the right stuff,. . . But what stuff is that?

In his 2005 book, "Executive Intelligence – What All Great Leaders Have", Justin Menkes puts it well, saying:

"Many people tend to get lost of defocused when addressing a complex issue ... or navigating a complex situation. In today's workplace, an individual cannot become a star executive without possessing a unique type of business "smarts" that we call **Executive Intelligence**. Historically, business "smarts" has been a bit like the word "indecency". As Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart once said when asked to define the latter, "I can't tell you what it is, but I know it when I see it". We have all caught glimpses of this kind of intelligence – **an organic, adaptive, ever evolving set of cognitive skills applied in the business arena**. These people have what some would call an **uncanny sense of direction ... a highly developed intuition for the analytic path that will get them to their desired destination**. Could there be something more fundamental to performance than the theories taught in business schools and management books? As any experienced CEO will attest, merely graduating from a top business school does not guarantee that a person will become a skilled executive. **Executive Intelligence is a pervasive problem in the most senior ranks of corporate America, and it is responsible for some of its most catastrophic business failures."**

In my experience, those executives who are made of the right stuff have an innate "Sherpa Sense" – they have an uncanny sense of where, when and how to do the heavy lifting and/or to provide the load carrying support needed to keep things moving and on track. They combine their cognitive skills of executive intelligence, with their sensory skills of intuition, with their emotional intelligence skills and stamina of resilience, to execute a dynamic journey on a shifting landscape.

The key is in **understanding the anatomy of our journey** – to have that "uncanny sense of direction and highly developed intuition for the path that will get us to our desired destination".

Sherpa Alliance is dedicated to helping profit and growth responsible executives architect breakthrough journeys, by creating traction on a higher road of breakthrough leadership beliefs, behaviors and results. There are three higher order strengths of breakthrough leadership, requiring a journey oriented understanding of the anatomy of the challenge at three levels simultaneously:

Execution Excellenceunderstanding the anatomy of the **Vehicle**
+
Executive Intelligence, Intuition & Resilience understanding the anatomy of the **Journey**
+
Path-Findingunderstanding the anatomy of the **Road**

= Organizational Agility **Architecting Breakthrough Journeys**
the ability to deal with rapidly changing circumstances, while out-executing our competition and stake-holder expectations (of customers, employees, suppliers and shareholders).

Drawing upon real-world experiences, interpreting leading edge research and developing a concept-suite, model-set and tool-box, **In the Driving Seat®** is a **unifying architecture of execution for organizational agility**. We are **leading the way in recognizing and teaching this as a discipline and a system, of accumulating knowledge, tools and techniques**. It is a timely, timeless and open architecture of best practices, reflecting the integrated anatomy and DNA of the real-world execution challenge faced by CEOs, Executives and their teams.

The higher order strength of Executive Intelligence, Intuition & Resilience, demands an integrated understanding of the anatomy of our journey, embodied in the In the Driving Seat®: **Journey-ionics™** model.

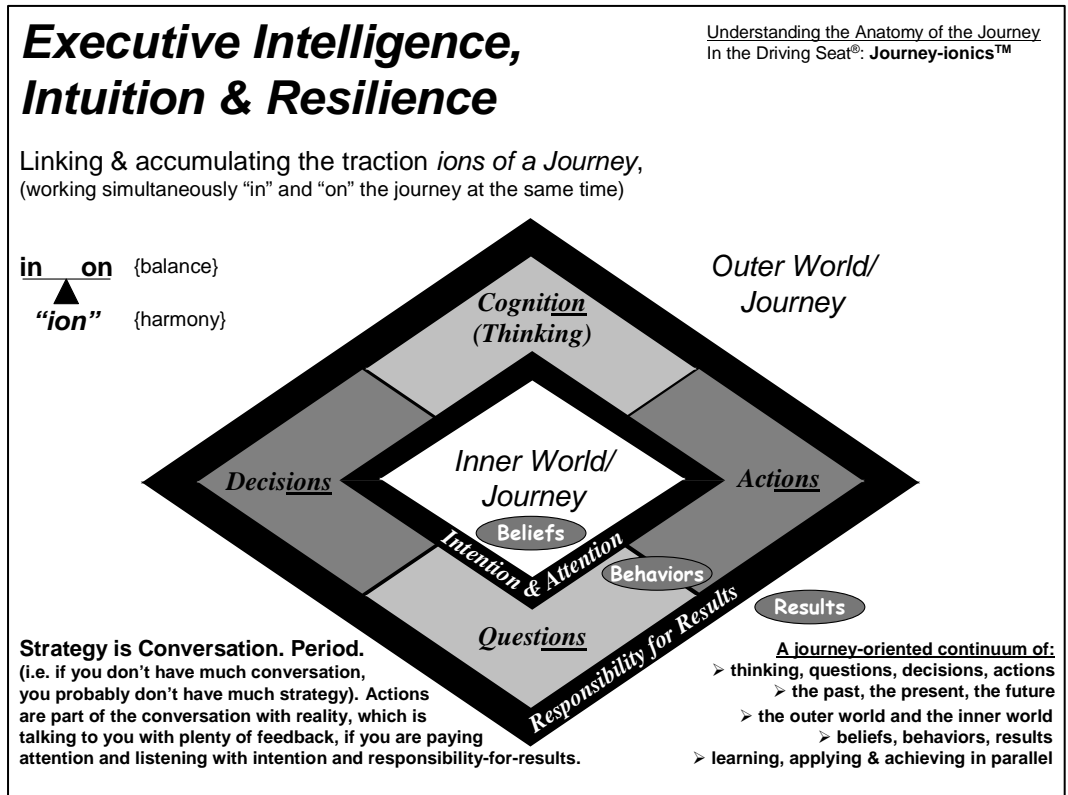
Consider any journey, of any type – it comprises an unfolding stream of thinking, questions, decisions and actions. Think of these as the traction “ions” of a journey - if we substitute the word “thinking” with “cognition” (which we touched upon in the discussion of Executive Intelligence above), then all four words end in “ion”, as does the word “traction” itself. The concept of an “ion” has several connotations: it’s a molecular thing, a data-point, a micro-step. It also integrates the words “in” and “on”, capturing our need for us to harmoniously be working “in” and “on” our journey at the same time. In the theory of capacitors in the field of electronics, an “ion” is a positive or negative charge, adding to or subtracting from the net charge stored in the capacitor - kind of like a balance sheet of positives and negatives. The concept of an “ion” captures all of these ideas.

Our challenge is to be linking and accumulating these traction “ions” (individual thoughts, questions, decisions and actions) into a journey, which has a balance sheet of promise (positives) or peril (negatives) associated with it.

Of course, as we unfold our journey, we are often somewhat unconscious of the net charge of promise or peril on the balance sheet. We have all had the experience of winding up in the wrong place and finding out about it at the last moment, often with a blinding flash of the obvious and 20/20 hindsight! Think of a failed product launch or lost relationship with a key customer or failed change initiative. How many times do we hear hindsight inspired comments like, “oh, we didn’t think of that,” or, “sure wish we had asked more questions about that ...” or “we should have generated more options before deciding about that ...”. Typically, it isn’t that we haven’t linked and accumulated lots of thoughts, questions, decisions and actions on journeys like this. Instead, it’s that there were just a few crucial ones missing and, as a result, we linked and accumulated to the wrong place and found out about it at the last moment.

These are all detours from our desired journey, and some can be very dangerous, with significant consequences. So how do we avoid these? By proactively driving different conversations. At its essence then, think of it like this - strategy is conversation, period. i.e. if you don’t have much conversation, you probably don’t have much strategy.

I encourage you to consider actions as part of that conversation – actions are a conversation with reality. If we are listening carefully enough, with sufficient intention, attention and



The granular stuff of business is critical thinking – the skilled, active interpretation and evaluation of observations, communications, information, and argumentation **as a guide to thought and action.** In other words, critical-thinking ability determines how skillfully someone gathers, processes, and applies information in order to **identify the best way to reach a particular goal or navigate a complex situation.** (Executive Intelligence, Justin Menkes, 2005)

responsibility-for-results, reality is talking to us with plenty of feedback. The only question is, are we confronting reality? Or do we have some level of organizational attention-deficit-disorder (ADD) or intention-deficit-disorder (IDD)?

So, it's a journey oriented continuum of our thinking, questions, decisions and actions, unfolding as a continuum of the past, the present and the future. Conversations that proactively drive these "ions" of a journey maximize learning from insight and foresight, not just hindsight. While I accept that we will always be learning from hindsight, it is preferable to learn as much as possible from insight and foresight, not least as they can be a lot less painful, expensive and demoralizing!

These "ions" (individual thoughts questions, decisions and actions) also exist in the continuum between the journey of our **outer world** and the journey of our **inner world**. In my experience of many businesses, the knowledge, tools and techniques of these two worlds often exist as disconnected domains. We talk about and invest in the "nuts and bolts" of the outer world/journey (such as markets, products and processes). We talk about and invest in the "touchy-feely" of the inner world/journey (such as personality traits, leadership and team-work). Yet we fail to fully realize the continuum between these. The reality is that our thoughts, questions, decisions and actions exist in the continuum between these two worlds - shaping both, being shaped by both, and being a transfer medium between one and the other.

Another way of saying that is that it's a continuum of our beliefs, behaviors and results. Our beliefs are driving our behaviors and our behaviors are driving our results. And there's a feedback loop from our results to our beliefs - strengthening or weakening those beliefs according to the results we are getting. This is a process occurring at multiple levels of consciousness, from fully conscious to fully unconscious, as part of a continuum of learning, applying and achieving in parallel.

Honed by the trials and triumphs of our outer world/journey (with the corresponding **demand** of thinking, questions, decisions and actions upon us), our Executive Intelligence, Intuition & Resilience resides in our inner world/journey (with the corresponding **supply** of thinking, questions, decisions and actions). **It's about supply and demand**, in increasingly challenging times. When demand exceeds supply we pay a higher price. The higher price we often pay is with stress, frustration and a sense of overwhelm.

A greater understanding of the anatomy of our journey offers us the opportunity to more consciously be working both the demand-side and the supply-side of the equation. The net affect is that we increase our Executive Intelligence, Intuition and Resilience for organizational agility. In my experience, many organizations are not as conscious as they need to be and are paying a price with some lack of agility as a organization.

See the booklet entitled [Organizational Agility & Architecting Breakthrough Journeys](#) to understand how this integrates with the rest of the In the Driving Seat[®] concept-suite, model-set and tool-box. Applying these concepts, models and tools will help you create more traction on a higher road of breakthrough leadership, beliefs, behaviors and results. You will become more agile as an organization and more able to be architecting breakthrough journeys, broadly and deeply throughout your organization. Travel well.

"Our organizations work the way they work, ultimately, because of how we think and how we interact. **Only by changing how we think** can we change deeply embedded policies and practices. **Only by changing how we interact** can shared visions, shared understandings and new capacities for coordinated action be established. **We have a deep tendency to see the changes we need to make as being in our outer world, not in our inner world.** It is challenging to think that while we redesign the manifest structures of our organizations, we must also **redesign the internal structures of our "mental models"**. **We do not "have" mental models. We "are" our mental models."**

(The Fifth Discipline, Peter Senge, 1990)