

ACT-cube® – instant organisational diagnosis

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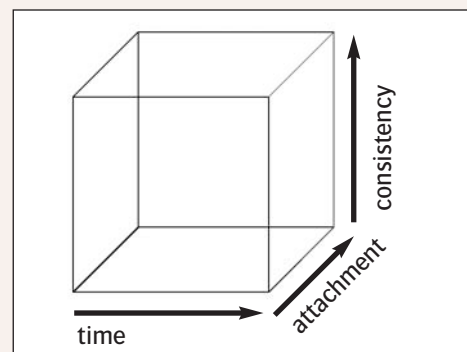
Three core dimensions

The acronym 'ACT' stands for Attachment, Consistency and Time. The 'Cube' in the name refers to the fact that these three dimensions can be projected in a three dimensional space (see picture below). The chosen three dimensions are embedded in the science of biology (evolution theory: ethology, attachment theory), complexity and cybernetics. Together these sciences define a higher order science called ecology and when applied to organisations, it is called organisational or business ecology. The core dimensions measure the organisation as a whole ecosystem and it meets the executive need to see at a glance whether or not the organisation is healthy and what needs or needs not to be done. The definitions of the three dimensions are given below.

Psychometrics

Research has been carried out on the psychometric quality of the instrument. The instrument was administered to a total sample of 1064 participants in two organisations. All three scales – 12 bipo-lar items each – show good reliabilities (alpha's > .9) and the latent structure as shown by principal component analysis conforms to expectations. Also, the discriminant validity (independence of scales) is satisfactory. In short, the instrument satisfies standard psychometric quality standards (EPPA, 2006).

The output of an ACT-cube® is shown as a cube:



Attachment

This dimension measures a basic human instinctive system that defines those relationships with the world that (if consistent) provide the feeling of a secure base. It is the foundation for loyalty, bonding, courage, passion and the like.

Consistency

This dimension measures the emergent strength of a system (like an organisation) that only can exist as a result of the dynamic interaction of the parts it is made off. This emergent strength is different from, and much stronger than each of its parts. If high, it is reflected in a wide variety of ways – through values, branding, identity, integrity, quality, reliability, trust, resilience and flexibility.

Time

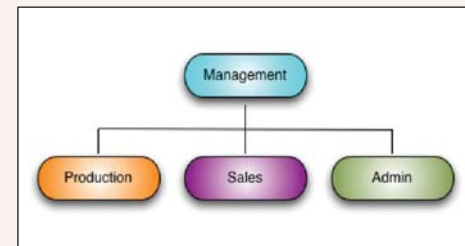
This dimension measures both the patterns and content of all decision processes in any organisational system. It describes the prevailing decision and information process, and their likely contribution to the organisation's growth curve. This dimension shows itself in terms of innovation, execution, control, renewal.

“ When the phenomena studies are 'other groups', it is interesting to see how such a group sees itself operating and how other groups see it. ”

How does it work?

The instrument works at group level (teams, departments, business units), and assumes that perceptions of different groups about the same phenomena are not necessarily similar. When the phenomena studied are 'other groups', it is interesting to see how such a group sees itself operating and how other groups see it.

Suppose an organisation consists of three departments and a management team, as shown in the figure below:



The management team consists of the three departmental managers plus a general manager. An ACT-cube® based intervention could show how the four groups see each other and themselves with regard to the three dimensions. When a rating design is set up as below, an interesting picture might appear.

Rates Rater	Mgt	Prod	Sales	Admin
Mgt	●			
Prod		●		
Sales			●	
Admin				●

All four groups rate themselves (the diagonal line above) as well as the other three groups. The results are shown as a Cube. In the pictures over four self-images are visible (with the globes on top), as well as four feedback images (pyramids). The feedback images in this case are the combined average (normed) scores of the other three groups.



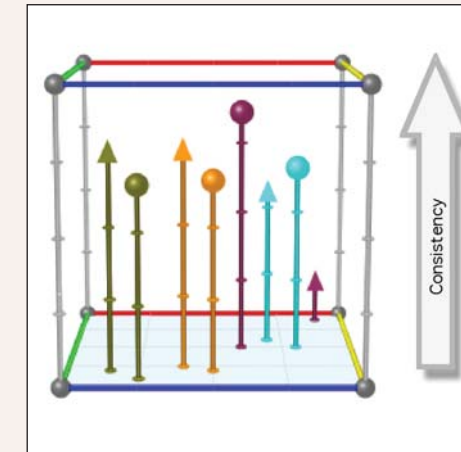
Prof. Peter Robertson, M.D.

Peter Robertson (1953) is a psychiatrist, specialised in leadership support and business transformation. He is one of the founders of Human Insight, and visiting professor at the Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, China.

Information about (the application of) this instrument can be obtained via the first author. Email: probertson@human-insight.com

The first picture shows a view from the front of the ACT-cube® and the second picture shows a top view. This front view of the ACT-cube® is best used for interpreting the consistency scale. This is a very healthy organisation but two problems surface regarding the perception of Sales. The first one is the large difference between the perceived Consistency by Sales itself and as seen by the other groups.

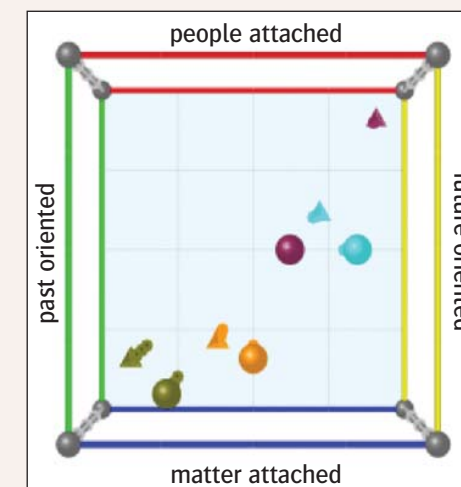
“ These departments/ groups are operating in the way you would expect – according to their role requirements. A second problem with Sales is the large discrepancy between the self-perception and feedback views on both the attachment and the time factors. ”



It might be that the others see Sales as being unreliable, promising too much to clients or too sloppy in their paper work. A first indication of where a problem might be present.

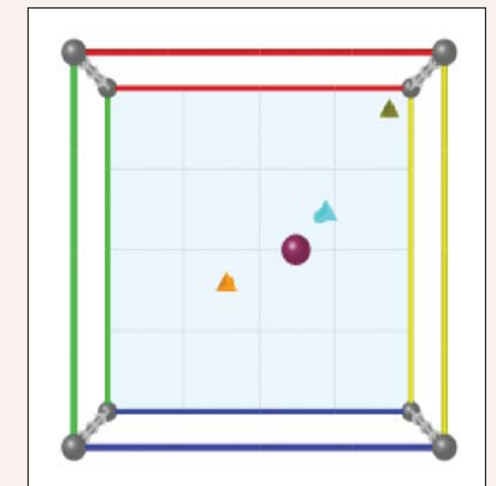
The top view below indicates a healthy strategic diversity across the organization, reflected in the spread of groups across $3/4$ of the ACT-cube® floor. So the combination of Attachment and Time orientations (the horizontal plan of the cube) suggest useful differences occurring. Administration is matter-attached, past oriented, Production is in between future-past and also matter attached. The Management is future oriented and in between people-matter attachment. These departments/ groups are operating in the way you would expect – according to their role requirements.

A second problem with Sales is the large discrepancy between the self-perception and feedback views on both the attachment and the time factors.



Prof. Dr. Wouter Schoonman

Wouter Schoonman (1956) is an industrial psychologist, specialised in assessment & psychometrics. Besides Psy Tech industrial psychology, he holds a part time professorship at Saxion Universities, Enschede, The Netherlands.



This is a second diagnosis of this organisation from the same data. The instrument also allows one to 'dig deeper' (again with the same data!). For instance, where do these discrepancies in perception stem from? Taking another slice of the data, we can focus on the self-perception of Sales and the average feedback views provided by other groups:

Here again we see the self-perception of Sales (the purple globe) and the separated (!) images of the other three groups' perceptions of Sales. The diagnosis is now more refined!

There seems a major problem between Sales and Admin. An intervention should be aimed at having these two departments talk with each other to see how more alignment can be established.

Conclusion

Real organisations are more complex than this simplified example. The ACT-cube® is ideal to surface the problem areas out of any very complex system and makes the issues easily accessible. The ACT-cube® is a new kind of instrument based on 'organisational ecology' and sound psychometrics. It offers organisations a quick way of diagnosing where problems between (images) of groups are located and these can be solved almost instantaneously. A timeframe from as little as two weeks can be achieved between collecting data (internet based) and reporting/ intervening. Once the data collection has been done the data 'start working': whatever question about perceptions between groups in organisations is posed, it can be answered in minutes! It is left to the imagination where this all can be used, but obvious examples are in matrix organisations, supply chains, outsourcing, pre M&A due diligence and post M&A integration.

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About the authors

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Continued from page 13

A more important dilemma is raised when coaching a person with antisocial or psychopathic disorder given that: on one hand – this is difficult to treat – on the other, they are capable of inflicting great damage on those around them.

As coaches, we could avoid challenging or confronting them and cash our cheques, knowing that we support someone who can potentially distress many. Or we could take a different ethical and moral stance and decline to continue that engagement. Personally I would not coach such people feeling that I am colluding with an unacceptable agenda. But this is something for each individual coach to decide.

To conclude, mental health needs to be considered as part of a broader wellness picture: personal and emotional development, a stable personal and socio-economic position, ability to overcome temporary set backs, a healthy life style, relationship to others, the presence of purpose and meaning, a good sense of humour, all contribute to one's good general and mental health. Organisations, just like society at large, have a mixed and diverse population, including individuals with psychological and psychiatric problems. This is something that the HR function and other professionals working in organisations – coaches, trainers, facilitators, consultants – need to be aware of. Being mindful of our duty of care, accepting and acknowledging our limitations as coaches and not – knowingly or unknowingly! – crossing the line, is the best service we can give our clients.

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