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f NHG Education

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On Sense-make and Making Sense

BY ADJUNCT ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PHUA DONG HAUR

It's important to distinguish when statements are assertions or assessments based on data, and judge the quality of the data the assessment was based.

Adj Assoc Prof Phua Dong Haur



(A Reflection on Civil Service College course - Sense-make and Empathise Through Powerful Conversation)

The four-day course certainly did not feel like another communication or self-improvement course.

When I stepped into the room, I noticed that the instructor was not wearing any shoes.

By the middle of the first day, the instructor had shared with us his heartfelt story filled with sadness and regrets, and I could see his eyes glistening.

By the last day morning, many participants had teared.

And at the end of the last day, I had my colleague Eugene from the NHG (National Healthcare Group) Education Office sitting on my lap (it's an activity) and we were chatting like friends although we only just met.

The course itself has a strange name, 'Sense-make and Empathise Through Powerful Conversations'. The trainer we had was the founder of The Thought Collective, Mr Tong Yee; an inspiring and insightful trainer with a solid grasp of human social fabric.

The course is designed to help individuals develop personal awareness, increase their own potential, and facilitate conversations. And it makes sense.

The material used was essentially ontological coaching that explained the human persona as a composition of somatic (body language), emotional and linguistic composition, and human interaction as linguistic constructs. It's not the only model, but it's a pragmatic and relatively simple one to understand.

During the course, we were schooled about the various range of human somatic, emotional response and linguistic construct. We were showed how to effectively enter a conversation and observe the corresponding body language of others.

There was a wall full of charts and models, certainly not enough word space here to share them all. For me, one of the more profound understanding was how this course deconstruct human language into five components:

1. Assertion (factual statement - 'Pi is an irrational number')
2. Assessment (value judgment we put on things - 'my day is lousy')

3. Offer and request (words that incite action – ‘please do your pre-reading’)
4. Declaration (statement of convictions – ‘I am not going to do this anymore’)
5. Promise (statement of commitments – ‘Sure, I will hand in the work tomorrow’)

All human language can be deconstructed into any of the five, and each of the five has its own characteristic and effects.

What struck me was how most statements people make were merely assessments passed off as factual assertion e.g. ‘her work is really sub-par’, and these can lead to actions that has no good basis. So it’s important to distinguish when statements are assertions or assessments based on data, and judge the quality of the data the assessment was based.

And what struck me even more was how much assessments my little voice make of myself in my head. Have you been listening to what you often say to yourself?

What’s Next for the User?

152 managers and senior management from the National Healthcare Group (NHG), were invited to reflect about how they can create a better working experience or the “magical experience” for their employees, at this year’s NHG Leadership Moments (LM) organised by NHG College, held on 6 April 2018.

Since 2012, the annual forum organised by NHG College, seeks to provide NHG managers and senior management with a platform to learn from thought leaders of different industries, engage with senior management and network across institutions.

This year’s topic “What Makes Google, Google? – Culture & Beyond” had guest speaker, Mr Eugene Ho the lead from Google People Services Operations (Asia Pacific) share the various Human Resources approaches and processes in recruitment, office culture and leadership from Google’s perspective.

Users’ Needs

Throughout his talk, Mr Ho kept emphasising the importance for an organisation to focus on the employees’ experience – the Google Experience. Continually ask “What’s next for the user? What else do they need (in order to grow)... and how can we anticipate and provide for that?”, he said.

Mr Ho elaborated that if employers or the organisation spend more time understanding the

No doubt, such powerful tools cannot be mastered in a four-day course, but an introduction was made, and ample material were provided for further reading. Certainly, when encountering a problem learner or trainer, these skills and understanding will be useful. Life itself with all the facets in family and work, provides ample classroom spaces for us to hone our new understanding of human behaviour and interaction.

Adjunct Associate Professor Phua Dong Haur is the programme director of NHG Emergency Medicine Residency programme. He is an Emergency Physician specialising in Clinical Toxicology and is interested in educational measurement.



NHG Leadership Moments guest speaker Mr Eugene Ho, Google People Services Operations Lead.

employees’ experience – what they need now and may need in the future, they would be able to uncover the ingredients required to create the “magical experience” for their employees.

Associate Professor Chua Hong Choon, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer (Clinical), NHG,



From left: Mr Eugene Ho and A/Prof Chua Hong Choon taking questions from the audience

who joined Mr Ho during the LM panel discussion concurred, adding that the focus should not only be on the current “users” (employees or patients) of the system and their immediate needs, but their future needs, and the future users who will be entering the system.

Growth

“Growth,” said A/Prof Chua, was constantly mentioned during Mr Ho’s sharing session. He then turned to the audience and asked, “What does growth mean for us (NHG)?”

“What are we growing anyway? Are we trying to grow more patients?” quipped A/Prof Chua, to the laughter of the room, “Exactly! We are not trying to grow more patients, so what are we trying to grow?”

He stressed that while NHG is continually working to build its staff’s capabilities and capacity, and improve its systems and processes, there is a need for the managers and senior management to constantly look at the big picture – what the organisation is trying to achieve, and cultivate a future-oriented and progressive workplace culture.

Potential

Another point that resonated with A/Prof Chua was Google’s belief that “everyone is a leader”.

“He (Eugene) said it almost as a matter-of-fact, as a given...” said A/Prof Chua. “It seems that Google has done a lot, to be able to have it roll off the tongue.”

A/Prof Chua shared that even though this belief is aligned with NHG’s ongoing efforts to develop leaders who possess collective and engaging leadership qualities, NHG still has a lot more to learn from Google. He encouraged both managers and senior management alike to reflect on what was shared, and work towards implementing it in their respective workplace.

“Google created a platform for high-performing individuals to thrive. NHG is also the same. We need to develop and grow the platform and framework for people to thrive. Allow people to grow to become the managers (or leaders) that they can be,” said A/Prof Chua.

First Psychiatry Pharmacy Resident Graduates

National Healthcare Group (NHG) welcomed four new Pharmacy Residency graduates into its pool of pharmacists in February this year, with Ms Amy Leo, Post-Graduate Year Two (PGY2) being the first to graduate from the National Pharmacy Residency Programme in Psychiatry.

“Now that I have completed my residency training, I can work towards serving my patients and better collaborate with the multidisciplinary teams at the level for which I had been up-skilled for,” said Ms Leo, who is a senior pharmacist at the Institute of Mental Health.

“I’ve grown so much through experiential clinical training and reflective practice over a wide range of mental conditions in general psychiatry, geriatric psychiatry, and the mood and anxiety disorders unit,” she said.

“The insightful exposure across the breadth and depth of pharmacotherapy within the sub-specialties truly inspired me to further develop my services and competence as a life-long pursuit, in refining my confidence and effectiveness as the specialist psychiatric pharmacist of tomorrow.”

Mr Ng Boon Tat, Programme Director, National Pharmacy Residency (Psychiatry), said that the inaugural run of the PGY2 Psychiatric Pharmacy Residency provided the opportunity to improve the

Pharmacy training programmes, “whilst adding value to our trainees and their clinical environment”.

“This humbling opportunity proved to be highly challenging but a rewarding learning experience for our residents and faculty alike.”

Ms Leo shared that embarking on the one-year Pharmacy Residency programme was a “priceless” opportunity to “polish” her clinical skills and knowledge. She added that although the programme was “fast-paced, intensive, and very tiring”, it was “immensely meaningful, exciting and fulfilling”.

“I would highly encourage any pharmacist interested in mental health to step forward and grow with this excellent programme.”

Ms Amy Leo is a Board-Certified Psychiatric Pharmacist (BCPP) who completed the MOH National Pharmacy Residency Programme in Psychiatry in 2017 and is currently pursuing her Masters in Clinical Pharmacy. She is an inpatient senior pharmacist serving in the Institute of Mental Health and her main interests include practice-based research and clinical teaching in psychiatric pharmacy.



From left: Ms Amy Leo, Mr Ng Boon Tat (Programme Director, National Pharmacy Residency Programme, Psychiatry) and Ms Emily Liew (Amy’s Residency preceptor)



From left: Ms Lim Siew Woon (NUHS, RPD of PGY1), Ms Wee Hui Ling (TTSH, PGY1), Mr Chan Zhi Yao (NUHS, PGY1), Ms Grace Hoo Si Ru (TTSH, PGY2 - Infectious Diseases), Ms Amy Leo Wen Ling (IMH, PGY2 - Psychiatry), Ms Chia Hui Shan (NHGPh, PGY2 - Geriatrics), Ms Lin Huimin (CGH, PGY2 - Geriatrics)

Demystifying Qualitative Research Methods: 1st Qualitative Research Interest Group MeetUp

Reading between the lines

More than 20 participants from different professions and disciplines in National Healthcare Group (NHG) became the pioneer members of the interest group when they took up the invitation to take part in the learning journey. The participants came from Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, Institute of Mental Health (IMH), Tan Tock Seng Hospital, NHG Polyclinics (NHGP) and NHG Education.

Led by Dr Mary Lee, Principal Research Analyst at NHG HOMER (Health Outcomes and Medical Education Research), the session opened with a recapitulation of the competing paradigms in social science research, which include positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, and critical approaches. She reminded participants how one's paradigm, which is a set of assumptions about the nature of reality, would influence the kinds of methodologies we adopt in our research.

Qualitative Description, dubbed the "starting point" of qualitative research, formed the focus of the 1st Qualitative Research Interest Group MeetUp. Participants were handed out a sample interview transcription that was centred on active ageing, and worked in pairs through the coding process. With the workshop kept spontaneous and upbeat, a storyline was quickly co-created to address the research question, "What is active ageing to you?"

It wasn't before long that the gears starting churning – interesting topics relating to qualitative research were brought up and discussed: when and how a codebook is developed, must there be two coders, as well as the fine line between keeping codes exhaustive and well, one's exhaustion.

"It was a very fruitful session that discussed challenges in areas that we often face in research," said Ms Lee Lee Sian, Senior Occupational Therapist/Clinical Educator Lead at IMH. "I am heartened to be part of the interest group, and inspired by the group of educators who are passionate in qualitative research in education. I look forward to the series of programme in 2018."

HOMER is set to organise a series of programmes all through 2018 such as guided seminars, skill-building workshops and exercises in qualitative research methodologies such as qualitative description, ethnography, discourse analysis and the theoretical thinking entailed in each. Members are free to shape agendas and propose topics. Participants are also welcomed to bring their projects to the table for discussion with fellow researchers.

To learn more, please visit their website <https://www.nhgeducation.nhg.com.sg/homer>



Dr Mary Lee (front row, third from left) and the pioneer members of the first qualitative research interest group.

A Grassroots Solution

The idea of an interest group was mooted by organisers of the inaugural Atelier Wilson Centre@HOMER meeting, which was held in March 2017. The alumni of the atelier wanted a platform where they could continue discussing qualitative methodologies and hone their research skills as they contribute to the NHG community and beyond – it was decided that a dedicated interest group will do just that.

"We think an interest group would provide the community resources to sustain skill development in qualitative research, as well as spread the practice of qualitative research," said Issac Lim, Head of HOMER.

"This interest group is a wonderful initiative that keeps us refreshed on research methods and brings together like-spirited individuals. It also forges a safe space where we can share our research experiences and uncover new insights together," said Dr Predeebha Kannan, Deputy Director of NHGP's Primary Care Academy. "I appreciate HOMER's efforts and I look forward to participating in the sessions ahead."