

## Full Length Research Paper

# Must We Unlearn To Learn Well?

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**To unlearn is to learn. More often than not, before people can learn something new, they have to unlearn what they think they already know. In this paper, with the input of focus-groups, the practitioner-author examines various ways of unlearning such as in Zen Buddhism, being detached so as to learn in a good way. Some of the ways to unlearn include developing the un-trapped mind, avoiding groupthink; asking questions and listening to criticisms.**

**Keywords:** Unlearning, emptying, successful teaching, being detached, being creative, avoiding groupthink, questioning.

## INTRODUCTION

Ordinarily, we have resistance to attempt anything new and in this regard, we also resist change; we need to change and unlearn. Unlearning is learning. Before people can learn something new, they have to unlearn what they think they already know.

Merriam-Webster defines "unlearning" as "to put out of one's knowledge or memory" or to put it simply, to unlearn is to forget. To unlearn is also to "to undo the effect of" or "discard the habit of" (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Unlearning is dismantling and breaking down or away from the old ways, and (re)learning takes place after the dismantling. Hedberg (1981) refers to this process of discarding obsolete and misleading knowledge as unlearning. Newstrom (1983) defines unlearning as '...the process of reducing or eliminating preexisting knowledge or habits that would otherwise represent formidable barriers to new learning'. One respondent gave his input, "learning and relearning is a process in which one's idea or belief evolves over one's life, one then discards (adds on or modify) the old idea or belief to embrace the new (adapted) idea (belief) because one, on seeing afresh, has the reason(s) to believe so and what more, now, as one's experiences accumulate, one perceives the idea (belief) much more clearly while achieving a higher level of understanding."

Unlearning and learning is necessary and is in fact helpful to facilitate change for the individuals and it is

worthy to note that unlearning and learning is one of the critical issues for change management in organizations and businesses (Becker, 2010). Little study or not much research has been made on unlearning to adopt or encourage change. Besides, a few decades have passed since Janis's (1972) study, the said study on groupthink is indicative and clearly points to the need to break away from group-thinking, narrow or stuffy thinking habits, and it is from this platform that this exploratory study through the use of focus group meetings wishes to spring forth, and uncover more on unlearning and learning in organizations and businesses.

Unlearning and learning is the *Yin* and *Yang* of learning. The *Yin* must occur before the *Yang* can take place. There should be a marriage or a unity of the opposites (*Yin-Yang/Unlearning-learning*) for effective learning to take place.

## Paper's purpose and objectives

When the cup is full, it will overflow. In order to pour, say water, into the cup, the contents reduced or unfilled or may need to be emptied. To use an analogy, just as an empty cup is useful, the usefulness lies in the 'emptiness' of one's mind, so also when there is unlearning (the brain is 'unfilled' or more specifically, the mind is clear), the

human mind learns. By the same token, we need to unlearn in order to learn or relearn. The purpose and objectives of this paper are to examine various typical and non-typical ways of unlearning so as to learn well. Basically, people in organizations or businesses need to unlearn pre-set ideas or ways of doing things (habits) in order to learn new ways or perspectives so that things are not done in old ways, tried methods or to put it positively done in refreshing, if not, innovative ways.

It would certainly be helpful and to set its objectives modest, the research would have fulfilled its objectives even if the study can show as many ways as possible to generate ideas as well as pointing to the various (typical and non-typical) ways of unlearning (and learning) in organizations and businesses. As Matsushita Konosuke (1984, p. 64 - 66) once said, "Don't rest on your laurels" and look ahead; learning can help build a business's (one's) reputation and the future.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study, focus groups were relied on; they are essentially discussion groups. The focus groups generate output that tells businesses and other clients who use them what their target audience feels or thinks about certain concepts (Advameg, 2011).

Focus groups are useful when it comes to gathering qualitative data from target groups – and as in this case, to uncover how business people unlearn; their beliefs and attitudes on (un)learning were asked.

For this research, the researcher was also concerned or interested with idea generation, and this fits well as idea generation is another area in which focus groups are helpful to businesses. The focus group participants are encouraged to talk or express about their learning problems and unfulfilled needs (Advameg, 2011).

In this study, a focus group consisting of twenty-five (25) members was conducted in three (3) separate sessions. Here, three (3) focus groups were conducted with each session lasting no more than two (2) hours. They were done in an informal setting to make the focus group members comfortable, eliciting easy answers or making them more expressive. Interestingly, the major issues and questions for the three discussions were on the "on-goings of a trapped mind", "how or group think works"; "how to be detached"; "how to generate (more) ideas" as well as "how to be creative" and "how to see new perspectives" in organizations and businesses (focus group members' words used in the three discussions).

These twenty-five (25) group members are practitioner-respondents and working professionals – their ages range from 22 to 31 years old – were called upon for these three focus group meetings. They are or were tutors or have had some teaching experience

before (at least two years of teaching experience). Essentially, they are interested in teaching and (un)learning process or the fact that they are education or training enthusiasts. The fact that these respondents had high interest in teaching and learning; they were learning enthusiasts and they had the relevant background and experiences became the rationales for choosing these twenty-five participants in this study. The data were then analyzed qualitatively. And the words used and/or issues mentioned during the focus group meetings were recorded, taken note of and accordingly analyzed to identify the various ways of learning and unlearning in organizations and businesses.

With his experience as a trainer, this researcher served as the focus group moderator or as the facilitator. The researcher followed this key guideline (Advameg, 2011); he attempted to stimulate discussion but said as little as possible. He also ensured that the location in which the focus group meetings were held was one which encouraged relaxed participation and informal spontaneous comments, and here, the company's conference room provides a good setting for the focus groups; generally, the members were happy with the venue. This is crucial; since the focus group members were comfortable with the chosen venue, they were, in most ways, expressive.

It is worthy to highlight that there are some quarrels or arguments against the focus group; they are: one, the non-anonymity of the focus group members and two, that the data were often cherry picked to support a foregone conclusion (Rushkoff, 2005). Nonetheless, for this study, the focus groups' discussions did produce much data and valuable insights. And indeed these would have been less accessible without interaction found in a group setting – listening to others' verbalized experiences stimulates memories, ideas, and experiences in focus group members. This is also known as the group effect where group members engage in "a kind of 'chaining' or 'cascading' effect; talk links to, or tumbles out of, the topics and expressions preceding it" (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

## FINDINGS

Responses from the three focus group sessions were recorded, categorized and ranked according to their highest number of responses. Table 1 shows the focus group responses on "Must we unlearn to learn well?"

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Through the three focus-group or in-depth meetings/discussions among the twenty-five focus group members, the various strategies and ways of unlearning are dis-

**Table 1.** The Focus Groups Responses On “Must we unlearn to learn well?”

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
<p><b>Developing the Un-trapped Mind</b></p> <p>“To have an un-trapped mind is to basically empty one’s thoughts”; “One must operate with an open mind”; “ like brainstorming”; “anything goes” or “freewheeling” and “without any censorship”</p>	43
<p><b>Being Detached</b></p> <p>“Detachment may sound like the esoteric Zen, but let me assure you that it is not, and I have put it in a practical fashion”; “my daily workload is enormous and from time to time I have to prioritise my work and detached myself on some issues”</p>	40
<p><b>Being Creative, Using the Right Brain</b></p> <p>“Being creative is to come up with as many ideas as possible” and “the right-brain is utilized.” “One minuses, reduces or adds, combines to expand or comes up with various ideas”</p>	38
<p><b>Applying the What-ifs</b></p> <p>The respondents were experimental and expressive about the issue and usage of these what-if questions. They were jesting and pointing out these: “What-if we have suggestion boxes?”; “What-if my boss had to work for me for one day a week?”; “What-if employees could not wait to participate?”; “What-if employees begged for extra work?”; “What-if all the employees were demoted?”; “What-if all the employees were promoted?”; “What-if we give all the employees half-day time off every week?”; “What-if the salaries of all employees were increased?”; “What-if all the employees become business partners?”</p>	36
<p><b>Avoiding Groupthink</b></p> <p>“Small thinking”, “narrow assessments”</p>	34
<p><b>Moving Away From Negative Thinking</b></p> <p>“We must not be stuck; we need to move away from negative thinking”; “we should not accept negative opinions” “Don’t get attached to any negative thoughts.”</p>	32
<p><b>Meditating Helps Us to Unlearn</b></p> <p>“Meditation helps me in cutting down my thinking hence unlearn”; “ meditation helps me to freshen up”</p>	30
<p><b>Asking Questions</b></p> <p>“Ask”; “it is good to ask questions”</p>	29
<p><b>Listening to Criticisms</b></p> <p>Need to listen so as to get “the inputs of others for one’s change” as well as for one’s own growth and self-development; “accepting criticism and improve oneself to avoid same mistake next time”</p>	26
<p><b>Being Dissatisfied Or Searching for Perfection</b></p> <p>“ Continuous learning” and “ one cannot stop learning”</p>	25
<p><b>Turning Fears, Changing Them Into Something Positive</b></p> <p>“We must change our fears, be daring enough”</p>	23
<p><b>Searching And Looking Outside for Ideas [Keep on Reviewing]</b></p> <p>Need to “extend out; search for outside the organization for ideas” and “review and one unlearns and learns”</p>	21

cussed and uncovered. They, in order of priority, are as follows:

## 1 Developing the un-trapped mind

"To have an un-trapped mind is to basically empty one's thoughts". "One must operate with an open mind" (Inputs of all the members of the 3 focus groups; mentioned 43 times in total during all three focus group meetings). One needs to develop an un-trapped mind in order to learn, the un-trapped mind means one unlearns what was previously learnt. Here, one does not put borders to one's thinking. It is like brainstorming, "anything goes" or "freewheeling" and "without any censorship" (Several respondents' inputs). The un-trapped mind frees us from narrow, limited or insular thinking; it opens our mind. We also avoid being trapped in our own psychic prisons (Morgan, 1997).

One, for example, unlearns one's, say, menial job and gets to know other tasks, non-menial and thinking, the processes involved, and expands one's knowledge of doing things and getting things done.

In another example, to join the famous Korean pop stars/ show biz, Singaporeans K-pop stars Ferlyn Wong and Elaine Yuki Wong (in training) who would be rubbing shoulders with their once out-of-reach showbiz peers have to unlearn various things. And these include things such as, "they can't take off their sun glasses lest their tired peepers are caught on camera"; they are to strictly have "no boyfriends, no mobile phones and no unsupervised trips – even to the toilet". Also, they have to speak only in Korean and respond to their Korean stage names. They also have to address their Korean management as their family – the men they will call – "appa" (father in Korean) and women "umma" (mother in Korean). For most of their 14-hour days, the use of make-up is prohibited as the Koreans require a bare-faced, natural look (Chua, 2011). [This author is aware that critics may allude that "the training for the Korean pop stars may not be related to the issue of the un-trapped mind and, instead, it is developed from a traditional, highly disciplined Korean culture". To this, the author wishes to precisely point out that culture – whether national or corporate – can itself be an entrapment or sacred cows (leading to the trapped mind), and we can at times not question the ceremonies or rituals and instead accept them perfunctorily, religiously or as a matter of fact.]

Nonetheless, this author believes that one unlearns and learns not only for bread alone, but for the fact that unlearning and learning is intrinsically good. One should apply De Bono's (1999, 1991; 1985) thinking hats and action shoes; we are urged to wear as many hats and in fact, use as many action shoes as possible when looking at a particular issue – and be un-trapped.

Interestingly, the late Japanese business leader Matsushita (1991) speaks of keeping an open mind, as a leader, one should never shackle oneself to any single idea. From the business angle, leaders should be circumspect about old ideas, and always try to see things with fresh eyes, then creativity, innovation and progress as well as growth can be achieved.

## 2 Being detached

One of the ways to unlearn is to be detached; this is something unusual but was interestingly highlighted by the focus group members (mentioned overall 40 times).

"Detachment may sound like the esoteric Zen, but let me assure you that it is not, and I have put it in a practical fashion" and it is different from the un-trapped mind in the sense that there's no heart string. Trapped mind is the way one thinks, one thinks one-dimensionally" (Several focus group members' inputs). Some members added a person with a trapped mind may not be aware of his or her predicament or fix. Indeed when, for example, we say, "if it aren't broke why fix it?", "we have always done it this way" or "let us stick to what works", we are indeed sticking to the old ways. And we are illogically attached in a rigid fashion too; worse, we are emotional about it and get defensive. On the contrary, when one is detached, one is disinterested in the object, idea or person (or even any body of knowledge or thoughts); and one is not attached to, favoring or being bias against it. Being detached also means that one does not create any pre-conceived or stereotyping impressions of an idea or concept; thus, no emotions exist and one avoids having any halo or the horn effect.

Detachment, while it is a spiritual endeavor and a way of breaking away from desires and wants or put it in another way, getting desires and wants out of one's mind, can also be argued as a way of mental disciplining, a way of learning something new while weaning away (detaching and unlearning) from the familiar things (concepts, ideas or thoughts).

One thus does not have to own or possess any concepts, ideas or thoughts. And one unlearns and learns.

## 3 Being creative, using the right brain

"Being creative is to come up with as many ideas as possible" and "the right-brain is utilized." "One minuses, reduces or adds, combines to expand or comes up with various ideas" (Several members' input). The right brain has to do with music, visuals, spatial, arts, dancing; intuition and all things creative. The majority of the focus group members spoke of "being creative to unlearn" (mentioned 38 times in total).

When asked to solve a problem, there is a tendency for us to give the same old answer(s); we need to resist this, unlearn this, and unlearn we must. When we unlearn this 'giving the same old answer(s)', we can be creative, we think differently. We can be **MAD**: dare to Make A Difference. And when one is creative, one would use fresh ideas with new ideas being expanded and applied. I am sure that most of us would recall Nicholas Hayek who started Swatch, global name. His success then was founded on his daring sense of innovation and the courage to ruffle the feathers of convention. When his Swatches were launched in 1983, they were considered a disgrace by the austere Swiss watch industry. Interestingly then, not only were they made of plastic, they were also affordably-priced.

This is thinking out of the box and breaking away from the paradigm, things that one is familiar with and moving into things that are totally strange. So one disowns the familiar and gets to increasingly know the unfamiliar and the strange. We flexibly explore opportunities and open possibilities for (greater) solutions. And when comparing and doing competitive benchmarking to learn and improve ourselves, we can unlearn subscribing to mere "best practices", and instead apply "best-fit", customizing to meet our needs and special situation or better still, use both "best practices" and "best-fit" to get greater solution(s) to deal with our special issue(s) and/or problem(s).

#### 4 Applying the What-ifs

Some focus group members in the second meeting did raise the issue of asking hypothetical questions, and the "what-ifs" were discussed. Here it is taken that: One good creative way to be applied to promote unlearning is to use the *What-If* technique which is a very basic yet potentially powerful tool (mentioned 36 times by the focus-group members). This is particularly useful in training to provoke discussions; the trainer can also try out different ways of conveying the training message to the participants. (S)he can ask "what-if" questions, the more ridiculous the better it is (Low, 2005, p. 87).

*What-If* is directed towards some aspects of a problem; one then think of questions which one will like it to happen. Then, after listing the various questions, one uses these questions as stimuli for ideas. For example, suppose one's problem is "In what ways we can engage employees and increase employee participation?", some sample *What-If* statements might be:

What-if we have suggestion boxes?

What-if my boss had to work for me for one day a week?

What-if employees could not wait to participate?

What-if employees begged for extra work?

What-if all the employees were demoted?

What-if all the employees were promoted?

What-if we give all the employees half-day time off every week?

What-if the salaries of all employees were increased?

What-if all the employees become business partners?

As one would notice asking the *What-ifs* can really stimulate ideas for one to unlearn old ways, learn/think further on new ways and come up with solutions. When the first computer was out, Konrad Zuse, father of modern computer at 28 built his first computer covering 4 square meter of his parents' living room - is credited with building in 1941, the first fully functioning computer system. And over the years, when these were unlearned and what-if applied with the computer getting smaller and more efficient, we now get powerful palm-tops, i-pods and other small-sized computers.

#### 5 Avoiding groupthink

Throughout the three meetings, members spoke of "groupthink" and discussed it in terms of unlearning pre-dictated ideas imposed by teams in organizations and how to creatively deal with group-thinking.

Whether in organizations or societies, within the team situation too, it is good to unlearn to avoid groupthink (Janis, 1972). Why?

Groupthink can indeed lead to "small thinking", "narrow assessments" (focus group members' input; mentioned 34 times), inbreeding and crippling of ideas. Take the case in point of Copernicus and his heliocentric model/view of the Solar system during his time (<http://csep10.phys.utk.edu/astr161/lect/retrograde/copernican.html>). Years before or even during Copernicus' lifetime, it was believed that the planets revolve around the earth, and that was the groupthink that existed or things that needed to be unlearned for progress to be made. In a book called *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies* (that was published as Copernicus lay on his deathbed), Copernicus proposed that the Sun, not the Earth, was the center of the Solar System, and this was then not generally accepted until many years after his death. This essentially reflects that there is a need to unlearn, and that unlearning and/or continuous learning must really be done to learn well and make progress.

DuBrin (2007, p. 205) highlights that groupthink brings about "a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgment in the interest of group cohesiveness". What more, the group prefers or values more on getting along more than getting things done. It then believes it is strong or powerful and even impervious

to outside inputs or feedback and starts to have illusions about its own invincibility. As a result, the group even loses its power of critical analysis.

## 6 Moving away from negative thinking

“We must not be stuck; we need to move away from negative thinking”; “we should not accept negative opinion” (focus groups’ input= mentioned 32 times). We unlearn by moving away from negative thinking; we move to positive thinking. To use De Bono’s (1999, 1985) parlance, this implies breaking away from negative thinking, switching from the black hat thinking to the yellow hat (optimistic) thinking.

For example, we can unlearn stress. To avoid or minimize stress so “that we do not succumb to stress”, Low (2009, p. 126) urges that (we unlearn,) “we can jettison our black hat (gloomy and negative) thinking.” After all, to simply think negatively can add more to our worries, and even bog us.

True, critics may argue that “moving away from negative thinking... is an idea but not a feasible strategy”, pointing to the fact that “everyone knows negative thinking is fruitless but many people keep on thinking negatively”. Nonetheless, it is still “a worthwhile strategy”; “being aware of this is a good initial step to unlearn and learn” (focus group members’ input). Here, it is good to point out the additional comments of various focus group members; some even highlighted “the need to combine other strategies such as emptying the head of thoughts” (“developing the un-trapped mind”) and “emptying the heart” (being detached) to move away from negative thinking.

## 7 Meditating helps us to unlearn

Throughout the three meetings, group members spoke of meditation and some remarked that, “Meditation helps me in cutting down my thinking, hence unlearn” ; “meditation helps me to freshen up” and “I do meditation just to I de-stress myself” (focus group members’ input mentioned 30 times)

If we define unlearning as breaking free of limits and conditioning, then meditation helps us to unlearn. And that is why monks, nuns, the religious and the spiritual people often meditate to free or unlearn themselves from rituals and societal conditioning. It is good to meditate as it adds to the clarity of one’s mind. Let me explain.

There is a tendency that when one meditates, one generates openness in one’s mind and heart. When one meditates, one is also inclined to ‘see’ in totality or the bigger picture. Some focus-group members reported of “merging with the whole”. “There is oneness with the whole; there is oneness of the whole and parts”. One

would not see in terms of categories as categories merge. Note that categorization or groupings mean the act of distributing, arranging people or things into classes or categories of the same type (Low and Ang, 2011). In another words, if people or things are divided into categories, they are divided into groups in such a way that the members of each group are similar to each other in some way. Categorizing can lead to self(ishness) or enhancing of individual interests and creating unnecessary distinctions. Thus, as one meditates, one unlearns categories. And one thus aspires for the oneness with humanity, one and all and the Absolute Reality, God and/or the Creator.

In most religions – whether it is Sufi, or Hindu or Buddhism or Judeo-Christian, unlearning the conditioned or acquired behaviors and reaching for the higher truth, or Spirit, or God is the ultimate goal (Kaipa, 1999). And meditation helps an aspirant to unlearn and break away from the conditioned state, and evolve spiritually.

## 8 Asking questions

“Ask”; “it is good to ask questions” (Inputs from various members of the focus groups; mentioned 29 times). Such input matches with one of the powerful tips and pointers in unlearning, that is, “give up on answers. Stay on questions.”

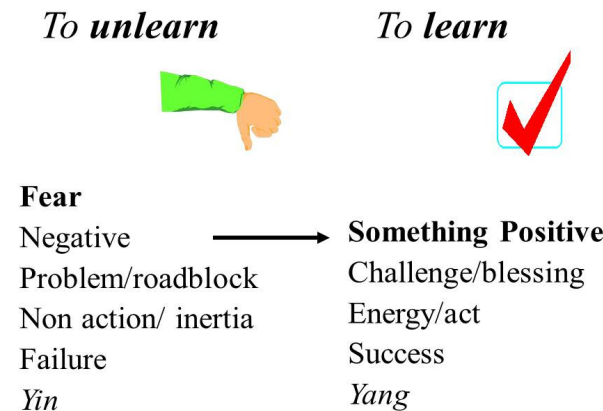
([http://www.unlearning101.com/fuhgetaboutit\\_the\\_art\\_of\\_2010/09/the-secret-to-unlearning-in-seven-words.html](http://www.unlearning101.com/fuhgetaboutit_the_art_of_2010/09/the-secret-to-unlearning-in-seven-words.html)).

Do inquire. Posing or asking a new question is a great way to unlearn (<http://fuhgetaboutit.typepad.com/>). It is good to ask questions, and more importantly, “ask questions, get answers and then question the answers” (unknown). Questioning can indeed spark creativity and help one sees the world from a new and different perspective.

Questions break away or knock down assumptions; good teachers also do not assume, but ask questions. They provoke their students to unlearn and think. Asking questions help. Successful teachers ask questions to know if their students are paying attention or that they are dozing off. Their lectures are not monologues, but are two-way flow. They interact with their students, asking the students questions and getting feedback from them. Indeed successful teachers too encourage their students to ask questions to unlearn and learn.

## 9 Listening to criticisms

Criticisms can be seen as either fault-finding or perhaps, in a better light, “the inputs of others for one’s change” as well as for one’s own growth and self-development. Some group members also remarked such as “accepting criticism and improve myself to avoid same mistake next time.” (Focus groups’ members mentioned 26 times).



**Figure 1.** illustrates changing fear to something positive in the unlearning process.

One forgets about one's bad ways, and unlearns them. One then learns by listening to feedback and criticisms; and this is true of good leaders (Matsushita, 1991) as well as good teachers too.

More often than not, the followers or students ordinarily shield leaders or teachers from bad news. They prefer to feed good news and make the leader or teacher happy; they avoid giving him bad news (feedback) so as to avoid making him angry or dissatisfied. A teacher should turn to his associates for opinions and information about the way things are going as a matter of course. He should always listen to the students' feedback or bad news more closely than the good. If the news is good and reports state that all is going well, then all he needs to do is listen. But when he hears about problems and proposed solutions, he must be ready to take action. If, as teacher, one never gets to hear about these things, or don't listen closely enough, then much needed action may never be taken, one would not learn.

**10 Being dissatisfied or searching for perfection**

Interestingly, being dissatisfied or searching for perfection can also help to foster unlearning. Some group members suggesting and making remarks such as "continuous learning" and "one cannot stop learning". (Group members' inputs; mentioned 25 times) And "being dissatisfied, we unlearn and then we would certainly go for change" (Focus group members' input). To put it positively, when we search for continuous improvement, we continue to update and upgrade. That's when we learn and unlearn, and thus building for ourselves the engine for self-growth and development. Low and Ang (2011a, p. 1120) highlight that everyone and more so,

"the teacher keeps on learning. Interestingly, a Chinese saying has it that, "learning is like rowing upstream; not to advance is to drop back."

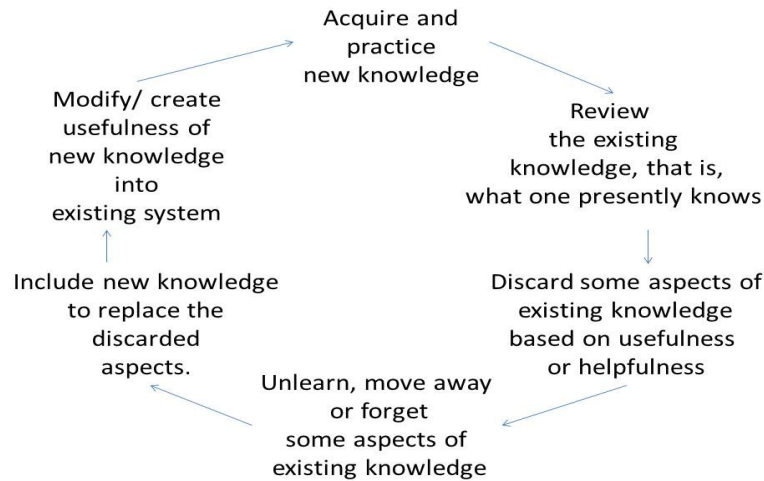
Starbuck (1996) highlights the beauty of "this isn't good enough" in us; dissatisfaction is perhaps the most common reason for doubting current beliefs and methods. But dissatisfaction can take a very long time produce results yet humans persist, determined to achieve or get results. And thus, mankind develops (new) technology and seeks to refine it further, making it better each time.

**11 Turning fears, changing them into something positive**

"We must change our fears, be daring enough" (focus-groups' inputs; mentioned 25 times). When we say, "we have tried that before, it won't work" or "you cannot teach an old dog new tricks", we are being negative and are afraid to unlearn the old ways and embrace new ways (Figure 1).

Fear is one of the greatest barriers to change, creativity and learning. Fear locks the mind, and it paralyzes the hands. Fear immobilizes us. Yet fear is also a sign of the creative mind. The person who becomes afraid of things that do not yet exist (and probably never will) is showing the power of one's imagination. A person's mind is surely very creative! The only problem is that the person's creative abilities are turned in the wrong direction, that is, negatively, into worries and not solutions. One needs to turn the negative images into positive ones and redirects one's thoughts in another direction.

All of us need to unlearn fear, if we do not unlearn or



**Figure 2.** illustrates acquiring new knowledge by reviewing (existing knowledge) and unlearning.

overcome fear, we'll be frozen or immobilized by it. (There is much inertia.) We need to forget about fear. We need to convert fear into learning and actions. And this we can do through positive thinking. Or change fear into something positive. For example, when we fail, we should not fear failure, we need to forget about failure, improve on things, and persist. Thus if fear (negative: non action/inertia) is Yin, then we convert it to Yang (positive: energy) and act.

So overall, as advised by *Life's Little Instruction Book*, tip # 188: "Become the most positive and enthusiastic person you know" (Brown, 1991, p. #188), and to that, the author would add: unlearn, convert your fears and converting them into something positive through positive thinking.

## 12 Searching and looking outside for ideas (keep on reviewing)

Low (2010) speaks on the need to keep on reviewing, more so when one is teaching. Learning without thought is an opportunity lost. A teacher should reflect on what (s)he has learned, and in that way, (s)he gains new insights. Confucius said, "A man who goes over what he has already learned and gains some new understanding from it is worthy to be a teacher." (Lin, 1994, cited in Low, 2010, p. 682). This can be taken that one reviews, (unlearns) and expands by learning.

So there is really a need to "extend out; search for outside the organization for ideas" and "review and one unlearns and learns" (focus-groups' inputs; mentioned 21 times).

In respect of groups within organizations, Dubrin

(2007, p. 205) pointed out the need of getting or "periodically inviting qualified outsiders to meet with the group and provide solutions". To review or unlearn, as individuals, one can also rely on the outside advantage, look outside for ideas. For example, Newton got his principles when an apple dropped (literally, outside in the garden and when he was not working or thinking about his work or theories). Most people are ordinarily inclined to look or search only at their own respective jobs or fields for ideas. However, often the best ideas come from cutting across disciplinary boundaries, benchmarking and smartly looking at other fields for new ideas.

It is worthy to note that often we would think that most of the great development comes from skilled people in their respective fields, but that is, at times, not the case. Interestingly, experts or professionals often get too close to a problem to see, understand or realize what the real issue or answer is. Each of us can instead get outside help. Outside people such as outside consultants or trainers or even non-experts can also be called to give talks, guest lectures and/or advices so as to widen the one's horizons and thinking.

Do realize that often something is going on right now in some other field(s) that could help one solve one's problem, that could give one a fresh insight, that could turn one's thinking in a new direction, that one could unlearn or combine with something one already know, that one could use to unlock one's 'mental mystery'.

Yes, keep one's eyes and ears out for it. And develop this good habit to review existing knowledge and in search of new one.

To explain further as well as to sum up (see Figure 2 above), when one keeps "one's head empty", having the untrapped mind and "one heart's empty", being detached,



one can review one's existing knowledge. Of open thinking and open heart, we can unlearn or move away from the negative or any fears, and we can thus listen well. We can also clearly understand things ("seeing the light" or "the bigger picture").

More so, we question things, find fault, not assuming or taking for granted, we brainstorm and discuss; we examine and relevantly see the crucial need to let go certain ideas and to move forward. For example, looking at the existing procedures of doing certain things, we can retain certain things based on its benefits, usefulness or helpfulness and remove or discard the useless ways. And dissatisfied, in its place, we can search for outside ideas, and we can add or combine these with other ways to create the usefulness of new knowledge (a hybrid) into the existing system. We "tweak, change here and change there", "improvising" and generally "improving on things" (focus group members' inputs).

## CONCLUSION

We should avoid having stuffy or narrow mind. Like unwinding to reduce stress, we should also unlearn in order to learn. When we unlearn, we learn, grow and improve ourselves.

Overall, in whatever we do, it is also good to promote brainstorming and discussions, and to paraphrase a Kenyan proverb, having a good discussion is like having riches. Discussions can lead to the riches of ideas, thinking and perspectives as well as breaking or redefining paradigms. We unlearn and learn.

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Learning English is important and people all over the world decide to study it as a second language. Many countries include English as a second language in their school syllabus and children start learning English at a young age. However, do you know why learning English is so important? Here are ten good reasons to take an English language course. 1. English is the most commonly spoken language in the world. One out of five people can speak or at least understand English! Japanese Proverb. We must learn to walk before we can run. ~ Traditional Proverb. Wealth diminishes with usage; learning increases with use. ~ A man only learns in two ways, one by reading, and the other by association with smarter people. ~ Will Rogers. One of the best ways to learn anything is to teach yourself. ~ Giles Sutherland Rich. Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. ~ Full Length Research Paper. Must We Unlearn To Learn Well? Patrick Kim Cheng Low. Ph.D. and Chartered Marketer, Certified MBTI Administrator, and Certified Behavioral Consultant/Universiti Brunei Darussalam; Associate, University of South Australia. E-mail: patrick\_low2003@yahoo.com. Accepted 07 December, 2011. To unlearn is to learn. More often than not, before people can learn something new, they have to unlearn what they think they already know. In this paper, with the input of focus-groups, the practitioner-author examines various ways of unlearning such as in Zen Buddhism, being detached