

Mind and Management: The Other 90%

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Target Audience

The target audience for this article is managers and individuals concerned with the latest development within the field of personal development.

Purpose of this Article

The purpose of this article is to conduct a review of some of the best known literature on the subject of self development.

Executive Summary

This article is a review and comparison of Robert Cooper's book: "The Other 90%: How to unlock your vast untapped potential for leadership & life" with other literature in the personal development and management fields.

The conclusion of this article is that there is indeed a hidden potential in all people that goes beyond the conventional mind in our brain. We all have three brains; one in the gut, one in the heart and one in the head. By the use of different methodologies, so called "mind tools", we are able to tap into this potential that is hidden to most.

Cooper's book represents such a "mind tool", and it is recommended as a starter for everyone, even the more skeptical persons. The book is a comprehensive collection of medical and scientific findings which at least will allow any person to pose a curious "What if?" question. This question could be the first step on a path to personal development and use of one's higher potential.

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Introduction

This is the first article in an area which I have decided to call: "Mind and Management". In this area, I will be working in uncovering at least some of the ways managers can benefit from various "mind tools".

The idea that we can reach a higher potential by utilizing our mind is far from new, as cultures from east to west seem to have been following this challenge for hundreds of years; however in our western culture there seems to have been some stagnation in this area dating back to the "age of reason". Reason itself seems to have harnessed the logical and metaphysical aspects of our world at the cost of the more intangible aspects such as feelings and intuition. However, the recent development in neuroscience opens up a path that can lead to new acceptance and understanding of these aspects in order for us to utilize more of our potential. Ironically, it seems we need science to take us back into an area that has been considered nonscientific, based on the lack of tangible measurements.

Regardless of the irony, great inspiration can be found in Robert K. Cooper's book: "The Other 90%: How to unlock your vast untapped potential for leadership & life". The book gives the reader insight into some ways of accessing new human potential but, more importantly, it does so in a way which is comprehensible for a human being in the western hemisphere in the new millennium.

In this article, Robert Cooper's bestseller has been used as a guideline for comparing other literature; first a review is made of the book's statements and scientific references, secondly the book is compared to other management literature in order to establish differences and similarities.

The aim with the article is to create an easy reference and a starting point for people seeking to begin expanding their potential; it is hoped to do this by both pure references as well as the evaluation of these references in other literature.

Robert K. Cooper – National treasure and new age management Guru

Robert Cooper has been called a “national treasure” by Professor Michael Ray of Stanford Business School, and undoubtedly the experience of a man who has been a newspaper boy, housepainter, farm worker, martial artist, All-American athlete, U.S. Marine, rock climber, surveyor, university honor student, independent scholar, health and fitness instructor, newspaper columnist, co-developer of measurement systems on peak performance, chair of the board for a metrics firm specializing in leadership advancement and applied intelligence, consultant to the global technology consortium, advisor to organizational leaders and public speaker, will be applicable in a host of different areas in various walks of life.

The importance of his book “The Other 90%” has a certain impact in itself. Obviously it is a matter of Robert Cooper conveying a message of combined experience and science that will allow the reader to open his or her eyes to new ways of utilizing his or her potential, but another dimension is the fact that a number of people have read and will be reading this book over the next decade. So far the book has made it to Wall Street Journal's and Business Week's bestseller lists, and reviews have already entered the management journals.

This book will have an impact on the way many leaders think and act, simply from the attention it has received, and not necessarily because all will be adopting all aspects of the book. However, the curiosity that this book spurs could initiate a search for higher understanding from these leaders.

Regardless of the specific outcome, Robert Cooper has definitely earned himself a reputation as a management guru; even though his ideas might seem progressive to some, in the writer's opinion few will disagree that this is an interesting input for management in the knowledge age.

The Other 90%: How to unlock your vast untapped potential for leadership & life

Based on a challenge from his grandfather, Robert K. Cooper has written “The other 90%: How to unlock your vast untapped potential for leadership & life”. There is an old saying that we only use 10% of our brain; the challenge from his grandfather was to be capable of using the remaining 90% (Cooper, 2001, p. xvi) ¹. The book is about gaining access to that other 90% and benefiting from it in professional terms and in life in general. ²

Overall Robert Cooper’s work is a practical book about getting the most out of life³. The book is a combination of personal and other people’s experiences combined with scientific studies. The people Robert Cooper refers to are both world celebrities such as Johannes Kepler, Mother Teresa, Albert Schweitzer, Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln, but he also gives many anecdotes about the great achievements that are made every day by people with less fame; this methodology is used throughout the book, and it hints strongly that greatness and great achievements are in every one of us.

Overall the book is built around four major parts that are the four cornerstones in Robert Cooper’s framework for accessing the other 90%, namely: Trust, Energy, Farsightedness and Nerve⁴. But before getting into the ways to access the other 90%, Robert Cooper spends some pages on explaining the latest neuroscience findings with regards to how our brain or rather *brains* work. In essence the latest findings conclude that an input does not go through our five senses directly to the brain in the head to be thought through and thereby turned into some kind of action. The input rather travels through the intestinal tract to the heart, and from there to the brain in the head. In other words we have not one but three brains: one in the gut, one in the heart and one in the head.

Having acknowledged this, we can now start a process of becoming more aware of how to use these brains in combination to make more balanced choices in our lives.

The brain in the gut is an elaborate system of nerve cells and neurochemicals in the intestinal tract in which there are more neurons than in the entire spinal column – about 100 million of them (Cooper, 2001, p. 16). This system is capable of acting, learning, remembering and influencing our perceptions and behaviors independently. In non scientific terms, haven’t we all felt butterflies in our gut, or felt it tighten up in different situations?

¹ Define the problem or problems the author has tried to solve. (Adler & Van Doren, 1972: p163)

² The review should state what the whole book is about with the utmost brevity. (Adler & Van Doren, 1972: p163)

³ Classifying the book according to kind and subject matter is recommended as good practice. (Adler & Van Doren, 1972: p163)

⁴ The review should enumerate the major parts in their order and relation. (Adler & Van Doren, 1972: p163)

The brain in the heart is comprised of more than 40.000 nerve cells called baroreceptors. Along with a complex network of neurotransmitters, proteins and support cells, this heart brain is as large as many of the key areas in the brain (Cooper, 2001, p. 16). With each heartbeat a pressure wave travels through the whole body, much faster than the actual flood of blood. Each of our trillions of cells feels this pressure wave and is dependent on it in a number of ways. Another route the heart uses to communicate is by transmitting messages through chemicals in the hormonal system; one of these chemicals is atrial peptide, which is a primary driver for motivated behavior (Cooper, 2001, p. 17). We have to *feel* our values or goals; otherwise we can't *live* them – such feelings are the input from the heart brain.

The brain in the head is the one known to us for ages, interestingly enough it is also the one with the most potential for making us conservative. The information travels to the base of the brain known as the medulla, and from there it reaches the reticular activating system (RAS), which is its third stop. The RAS is a part of our brain that connects with major nerves in the spinal column and the brain in the head; this part of our brain is a result of millenniums of evolution, and it holds an inherent tendency to magnify the negative and minimize the positive impressions (Cooper, 2001, p. 18). So as Robert Cooper puts it: "Although human beings today live in a technology-driven world of galactic voyages and virtual realities, we still face everyday life with deeply embedded traits of Stone Age hunter-gatherers." (Cooper, 2001, p. 19)

The RAS has most likely been the key to survival in the jungle where any unfamiliar sound in the bushes could mean a prelude to an attack by an animal, but today it continuously signals "Danger! Danger!", at the same strength as it has done for eons, when we face a change in our modern environment.

The brain in the head certainly has an important role in terms of our thinking, but the potential of the other 90% appears to be lying behind a bypassing of the immediate signals from the RAS. So in summary we need to be aware of the functionality of the RAS as well as of our two other brains. If we pause a moment whenever we encounter a situation where our immediate systems says "Danger! Danger!", and compare this information with the inputs from our heart and gut feeling, we will be able to make sounder decisions by tapping into the vast resources of our intuition and feelings combined with our logical thinking.

After the scientific findings on information traveling through our bodies, one could argue that inspiration without a way to turn vision into reality is an empty vessel; Robert Cooper offers us a "mind tool" based on four cornerstones to make this vessel operational with *the additional 90% of power*. These four cornerstones are: Trust, Energy, Farsightedness and Nerve⁵.

⁵ It is good practice to come to terms with the author by interpreting his key words. (Adler & Van Doren, 1972: p163)

Trust

Since the RAS will be helpful in creating further distrust whenever insecurity is present, the ability to trust people is crucial in order to bypass this. According to Robert Cooper, we trust others when two crucial qualities are present: understanding and caring (Cooper, 2001, p. 47). We need to understand the motivation and values of people in our surroundings, as this will make us less likely to fantasize over what “plots” they might be making against us to threaten our position. Additionally we need to know that the other persons are caring about us and our best interests. A tool for reaching this is quite simple: get to know people, and it is most likely you will find that they are not out to get you.

In terms of getting to know and like other people, the elimination of zero sum competition is also important. The idea that someone has to lose for you to win is a burden that wears down many shoulders during a process of constant comparison with others (Cooper, 2001, p. 30). As opposed to constantly competing with others to win while they lose, one should rather be occupied in the process of excelling. Excelling, learning – even sharing information – while working and even competing in a friendly way is much healthier. It sparks the curiosity and fun needed to grow personally, and to review you personal progress rather than compare yourself to others.

Another issue around trust is the fact that in order to trust others, one needs to be trustworthy, “Be a lighthouse not a weathervane” as Robert Cooper puts it – stand up for the things you believe in (Cooper, 2001, p. 39). This will eliminate the distrust that others might have in you.

Energy

Managing the resource of energy is also a key to personal growth. In a very rough example, Robert Cooper describes an experience he had during survival training with the Marines. A Marine who had seemed constantly unhappy with being in the force pours lighter fluid over himself and sets himself at fire; as one of the first people on the scene Cooper hears him screaming “This is not me! This is not me!” (Cooper, 2001, p. 103). This example is obviously an extreme, but it calls for attention to the consequences if you are fighting against the odds of your own will – if your heart is not in the equation of what you do, why do it at the cost of yourself?

In everyday life, we find that some situations are more enjoyable than others; sometimes we do something that is hard physically or psychically, and yet we feel fun and enjoyment – even losing the sense of time while doing it. Such moments are called flow experiences (Cooper, 2001, p. 70), and they often occur in situations where we strive to excel, rather than compete with others. In such experiences we are able to tap into our own calm energy; this energy, as opposed to the stress energy, is a calm alert state in which we have the most capabilities. Whereas the stressed state wears us out psychically and creates tension in our bodies, the calm energy allows us to continue for long periods of time with much higher effectiveness.

Obviously we can not all experience the flow state of mind doing the same things. Research over more than four decades on nearly two million people has shown that each of us has one, two or three skills that we are more capable of than any of 100,000 others (Cooper, 2001, p. 98). Obvious such statistical knowledge should at least make a person look for those unique talents, but Robert Cooper motivates his readers to aim for even more than that: "Launch the rocket in your backyard" (Cooper, 2001, p. 99). This advice is based on the story of Homer Hickam, Jr. whose passion for space travel made him build a rocket and launch it during his youth, a passion that later made him a distinguished engineer at NASA. We should all find our deepest passion and talent and explore and excel in it.

Robert Cooper also offers some more pragmatic advice on how to manage personal energy: deepen and relax breathing, change your view and catch some light, re-balance your posture and loosen up, sip some ice water, enjoy a moment of humor, add some inspiration (Cooper, 2001, p. 78). All this advice will benefit people so they will feel more energy.

Farsightedness

Having addressed trust and energy, the time has come to make things happen. In this case Robert Cooper states that "We must be dreamers as well as doers" (Cooper, 2001, p. 140). In his rationale, only the dream that is so big that only the heart can hold it can mobilize the energy needed to make it real (Cooper, 2001, p. 139). With such statements, Cooper obviously refers to the motivational center in the heart as stated earlier.

But how do we deal with the gap between the dream and the present? Robert Cooper suggests. "The ideal time horizon centers on making the most of today's reality while also devoting some time and attention to remembering the past's teachings and glancing farther ahead – towards desired results five years or more into the future." (Cooper, 2001, p. 148) A useful tool to practice this is to learn "how to get gone"; according to Robert Cooper, one should spend a moment doing nothing without feeling guilty every day. Additionally, just before returning to the daily tasks, one should spend some time thinking of the big picture (Cooper, 2001, p. 194). Such a methodology will keep our focus on the goals ahead, yet help to mobilize the energy needed in the present.

A few words on the power of thought; since it is the focus and drive of the dreams we need to materialize, Robert Cooper states: "People have been known to survive for more than an hour without oxygen. Without water, humans have lived almost a week. Without food, a few have remained alive for nearly three months. Yet without hope, no one can survive." (Cooper, 2001, p. 165)

In summary, dream and hope for the future while keeping a perspective on where you are today compared to where you hope your dreams will take you.

Nerve

The remaining cornerstone is to have nerve. Robert Cooper urges us to dare to be in a state of adversity. There are multiple ways to test ourselves in “the laboratory”; doing things where we need to push ourselves psychically will allow us to familiarize ourselves with this statement. Some ways to reach this point could be through physical challenges such as sports. The ability to handle states of adversity during sports or other “playful” activity will improve our ability to face the adversities that arise from more external and uncontrolled sources. Additionally it will be fun to push our limits, as Robert Cooper reminds us: “Remember how much fun it was to discover things when you were a kid.” (Cooper, 2001, p. 250)

Robert Cooper provides a detailed explanation of how to handle a state of adversity based on three steps: calmness under pressure, analysis of evidence and alternatives, action to be taken. (Cooper, 2001, p. 215) The key to handling a state of adversity is to mobilize the calm energy. For this purpose Robert Cooper introduces the Instant Calming Sequence, ICS. (Cooper, 2001, p. 215), which is a series of steps: continue breathing, lighten your view by easing the tension in your face, release tension in the rest of the body, notice the uniqueness of the problem and finally shift your view of time. If this process is carried out as explained in detail in the book, a person will have the capability to face each challenge with calm energy (Cooper, 2001, p. 220)

The next step in handling adversity is to analyze the situation from the new calm perspective; Robert Cooper refers to the quote by Nietzsche: “A person with a strong enough *why* can bear almost any *how*.” (Cooper, 2001, p. 226) It is important to focus on the unique, because creative solutions can be derived from noticing the uniqueness in each challenge and person, thus bypassing the tendency for the brain to make it just another familiar situation. (Cooper, 2001, p. 229) Instead of assuming, ask and observe (Cooper, 2001, p. 231)

This process should now allow us to take action, even in new and unfamiliar areas. Robert Cooper gives the word of advice to be prepared for criticism when taking action and making decisions: “Don’t take things personally; someone is always going to be mad at you and that is okay.” (Cooper, 2001, p. 235) What other people think, say, or do is rarely about you, but almost always about them.

Basically nerve is about “Take[ing] the trail to where it ends, and then go on from there.” (Cooper, 2001, p. 262)

Consensus with other literature

Having reviewed Robert Cooper's book, let us now compare it with other literature to establish criticism⁶ and consensus.

In the July issue of the Harvard Business Review, the article by Roderick M. Kramer "When Paranoia Makes Sense" talks about people who have gained an upper hand on situations by being paranoid – in other words by completely distrusting others. This article introduces "Prudent Paranoia" as a healthy skeptical exercise to apply in the situations where we are presented with information or observe others. Compared to Cooper's book, this is somewhat different from the "trust" cornerstone as Roderick Kramer put it: "Two decades of research on trust and cooperation in organizations have convinced me that – despite its costs – distrust can be beneficial in the workplace." (Kramer, 2002, HBR July, p. 64)⁷

However, when we go deeper into the article we find there are still similarities:

First of all, paranoia in its purest form is not deemed healthy; it will wear you out. This is fairly analogous to Robert Cooper's advice to avoid the stressful energy and head for the calm energy. Additionally, Roderick Kramer mentions that prudent paranoia could be a sign of high emotional intelligence (Kramer, 2002, HBR July, p. 65), in other words, people in touch with their intuition. This could mean that the phrase "prudent paranoia" really applies when people are listening to more than their brain in human interaction, thus they are actually using at least some of the other 90%.

"To trust or not to trust?" could be the real difference here; since the article does not overrule the fact that the other 90% is real and it works. I personally believe that Kramer's article has some good points; we should not trust to the point of being naïve – some people truly want bad things to happen to us. Since Kramer's article was written after the September 11th terrorist attacks, one can hardly argue against it at a global level. However, in my opinion one needs to be very much aware of the balance of when to trust or distrust, and at least we should apply sound judgment by using the other 90% when we make our choices.

Another source with regards to the "energy" cornerstone is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi; in his book "Flow: The psychology of optimal experience" he describes a state of flow: "When the information that keeps coming into awareness is congruent with goals, psychic energy flows effortlessly." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 39) In general Csikszentmihalyi refers to the psychic energy as a prerequisite to finding the flow; this is analogous with Cooper's theory if we again consider the psychic energy as

⁶ It is good practice not to begin criticism until the outline and interpretation is completed. (Adler & Van Doren, 1972: p163)

⁷ In criticizing, one should show wherein the author's analysis or account is incomplete. (Adler & Van Doren, 1972: p163)

another way of describing the other 90%. If we do so, the optimal experience is equal to that when we are following our heart as well as keeping our mind in perspective and aiming for both our short and long term goals.

Although not written with the same overlap in words as Csikszentmihalyi, Saul Gellerman's describes a good job with the same key elements in his book "Motivation in the Real World: The art of getting extra effort from everyone – including yourself". "The best fit, for motivational purposes, is a job you can handle if you give it all of the time, wisdom, and ingenuity you've got" (Gellerman, 1993, p. 136) This is fairly equal to another description by Csikszentmihalyi on the flow experience, where he describes the flow as all the person's skills and psychic energy being absorbed into the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 53).

A more radical approach to eliminating the stressful energy is produced by Eckhart Tolle in his book: "The Power of Now: A guide to spiritual enlightenment". In this book, he suggests that an enhanced focus on "the now" – where we are right here and now – will eliminate many worries about the future. This might sound very radical to many managers, including myself. However, the message in Tolle's book could give a clue to the successful handling of stressful situations: by focusing on the now, thus eliminating the long term worries, more energy can be mobilized in the now with its current challenges (Tolle, 1999, p. 29). Eckhart Tolle also describes the mind as a force that is enslaving us and not allowing us to enjoy life; again this seems to be just another wording for the RAS as mentioned earlier in the description of our three brains. According to Tolle, we should release ourselves from this slavery, and start acting from the calmness of the now – not so far from Robert Cooper, although with somewhat different wording.

When discussing the cornerstone of "farsightedness", an interesting discovery can be found by reading Napoleon Hill's "Think & Grow Rich". This book describes how the power of thought can be applied using a practical model; additionally Hill seeks to eliminate fear which is really the reason for the somewhat provocative title of the book. In essence this means that Hill beat many other authors on mind tools by decades! Hill describes how to beat skepticism, which is the natural tendency when confronted with new ideas (Hill, 1960, p. 53). Hill supports the thinking that we should go beyond conventional "head thinking" to reach our long term goals, but he actually exceeds the thinking by Robert Cooper by including ancient almost "magical" methods such as the idea that, in addition to thinking and focusing, you should say out loud what you want as well as write it down in a manifesto.

Despite some few radical ideas, Hill covers many of the same aspects as Cooper, including issues of trust, the power of great dreams – he even talks about "Getting dreams off the launching-pad" much like Cooper's "Rocket in the backyard".

It is my opinion that Napoleon Hill's book adds some credibility to Cooper's work; whereas the other sources have confirmed detailed issues of energy and trust with a more scientific approach, Hill's book is a practical book with many of the same goals

as Cooper's book. The fact that the teachings of each book point in the same direction adds to the credibility of the potential of the other 90%; additionally it is interesting to note that Cooper is actually confirming some of the ideas of Napoleon Hill from a scientific standpoint.

Conclusion

Having read Robert Cooper's book and the other literature, there is no doubt in my mind that there is in fact such a thing as "the other 90%". In providing a practical book about how to access and get the most out of this other 90%, I believe that Cooper has not only given people an excellent personal opportunity, he has also solved his grandfather's challenge by providing a guided path to access it.⁸

In my opinion this is a great book, which I have already personally given to a number of other persons. The greatness comes in two shapes: first there are of course the people who take to the book straight away, but there are also a number of much more skeptical people who, from this book at least, would be able to pose the "what if it is possible?" question. For the latter group I believe this book is particularly good; people who are not "believers" in more than the brain in their head tend to need something like the rock-solid medical and scientific references to start at least wondering.

Of course there are will be varying opinions on how to reach new ground, from a practical point of view, but the importance of this book as an eye-opener for people to search for more than their mind is significant in itself. As long as we can get to where we recognize that there is more potential, we can start working with it. Being able to pose the "Why" will teach us the "How" that is right for each of us individually in terms of "mind tools".

The review of alternative literature confirms this hope. Obviously, there are varying opinions of how to reach new ground in the mind; but in my mind it is crucial that no one neglects the fact that there is an untapped potential that can be reached by everyone utilizing a particular "mind tool"; in other words in essence this study calls for us to test some tools and keep looking until we find what is right for ourselves.

At least one can conclude that there is much room for discovery and, as stated by Robert Cooper: "The most exciting breakthroughs will not come from technology but from a deeper realization of what it means to be most human and alive."

⁸ It is good practice to determine which problems the author has and has not solved, and which of the latter he knew did not solve. (Adler & Van Doren, 1972: p163)

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