

## CHAPTER 1

### The Pathway for Producing breakthrough Results

*“We keep searching out there for answers and pointing out there for blame... all the while looking through the very lens that is itself the source of our greatest potential for designing something new.”*

– Chalmers Brothers

We begin with a basic premise: As a leader, you are interested in and committed to achieving sustainable, positive Results for your organization and yourself. At a foundational level, your effectiveness as a leader – regardless of what industry or type of organization you may be part of – is directly connected to your ability to enable the achievement of desired Results.

We continue with three basic questions:

- How do you, as a leader and as a human being, actually achieve Results?
- What options are available to you, given that you sometimes produce Results that you’d rather not produce?
- What options are available to you when you find yourself “stuck” – having seemingly exhausted all options and not knowing what to do next?

How each of us frames and understands this very basic process greatly influences what we even see as possibilities for improving whatever we say we want to improve. This chapter introduces our favorite model for showing how leaders (and everyone, for that matter) achieve what we achieve, how we actually produce the Results we produce, as individuals and as organizations.

This is the simplest and also the most powerful way we know of understanding ourselves, our Actions and our Results. From here and through the remainder of the book, this way of understanding will be the framework and reference point we use in the journey from where you are today to where you choose to be.

This model, called the Observer – Action – Results model, was initially developed by Chris Argyris and Robert Putnam. It has appeared in articles and books by both and is a very influential model, having been adopted and modified and used by a great many practitioners. Let’s take a look, as we build the model in stages:



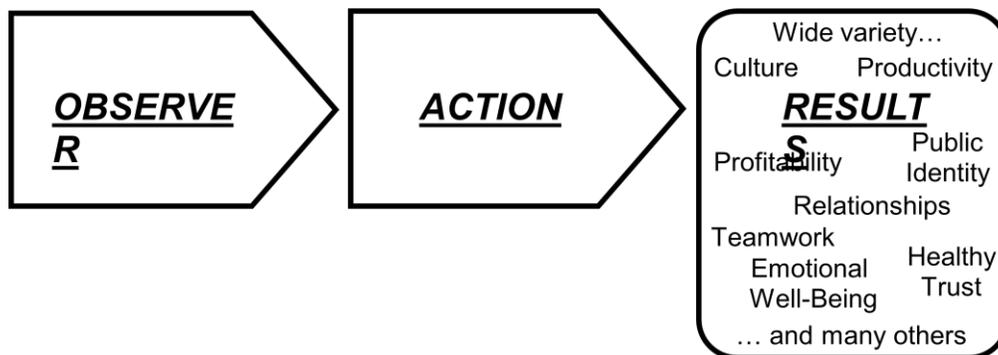
To start with, let’s ignore the Observer part of the model and concentrate on only the Actions and Results. Can we agree that the Results we produce have a great deal to do with

the Actions we do or do not take? Most of us would say, yes, our Results are strongly connected with our Actions or lack thereof.

Next, let's make sure we broaden what we mean when we use the term Results. For example, all of the following may be understood as valid, important types of Results that leaders seek to produce within themselves and/or their organizations:

- A healthier and more powerful corporate culture
- Desired levels of growth
- Improved productivity and/or profitability
- Higher degrees of shared understanding and shared commitment
- Fewer “silos” and improved teamwork, cooperation and collaboration within and across functional areas
- Better accountability, coupled with fewer misunderstandings and “drops of the ball”
- Improved clarity, communication and listening
- Stronger talent-development and coaching skills
- Enhanced ability to facilitate healthy, constructive disagreement
- Greater retention of high-quality employees – and quicker identification of those who are not a solid cultural “fit”
- Higher levels of trust, as well as the ability to rebuild trust once it's damaged
- Improvement in the way your organization handles mistakes and learns from them
- Improved innovation, agility and ability to thrive in an environment of relentless change
- Improvement in your public identity; the ways that you and your organization get perceived, or “show up” for others
- Healthier and more mutually-beneficial professional and personal relationships
- Better balance, reduced stress and less experience of “overwhelm”
- Higher levels of emotional intelligence and enhanced emotional well-being

So now our model may look like this:



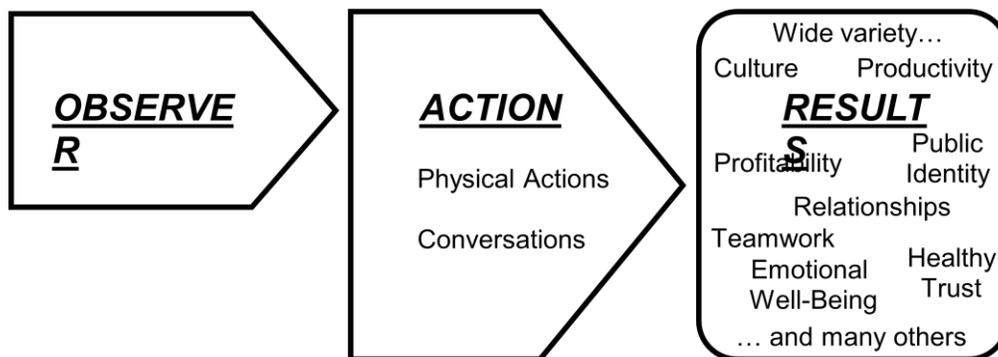
From here, we back up now to see that our Actions – or lack thereof – are always the influencers and drivers of our Results.

Depending on the type of job a person has – of course – the Actions he or she takes in order to produce desired Results may vary widely. For example, a backhoe operator may be seeking Results that include the successful, safe and timely loading of a certain pile of rubble into a waiting dump truck. And so the Actions he or she takes in order to achieve these Results would include operating the controls in such a way that the machine scoops and loads material safely and consistently till the load is complete within the allotted timeframe.

An underwater welder may be seeking Results that include the successful welding in a certain way of a certain joint on a bridge foundation, and so the Actions he or she takes include the appropriate use of scuba equipment, swimming and using the underwater navigation tools to locate the proper spot, followed by safe and proper use of the welding tools, and so on.

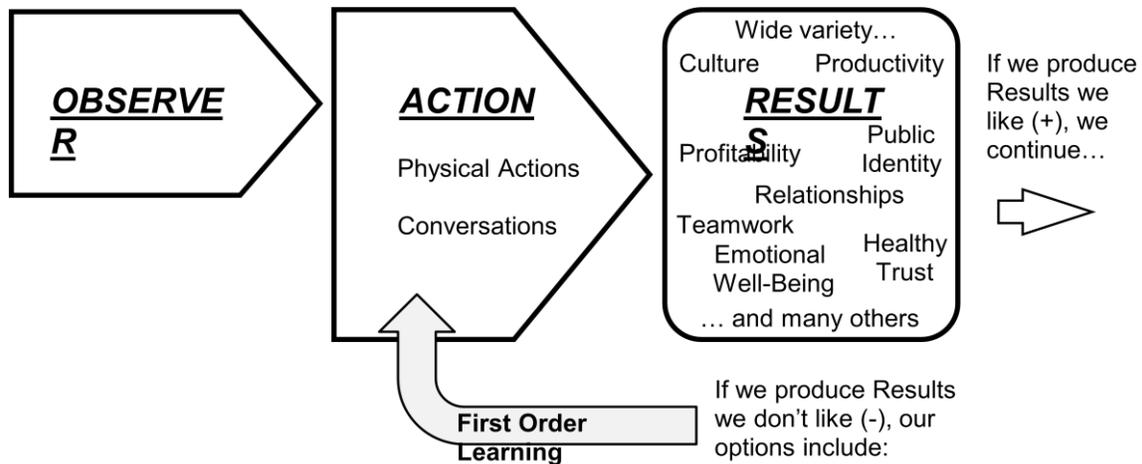
The Actions leaders take in order to produce the types of Results leaders are seeking are, in many ways, significantly different than those of the backhoe operator and the underwater welder. As we will see in the next chapter, the Actions of leaders are much less physically-oriented and much more rooted in their capacity to design and convene certain conversations.

So for now, we can say that both physical Actions and conversations are used by leaders to influence and drive Results:



Now, once we produce some Results, we may assess these Results as either positive (+) or negative (-). That is, sometimes out of our Actions we produce Results we want, and sometimes we produce Results that we don't want. Again, this is true for individuals as well as organizations.

If we produce positive (+) Results, then we feel confirmed in the Action we took, and we'll probably take it again (see the far right side of the model below). And if we don't produce the Results we want, we can take another Action, and try again. If this doesn't work, we take another Action, try again. And so on, until we (hopefully!) do produce the Result we say we want. Chris Argyris has called this First Order Learning, and it's represented by the arrow suggesting more or new or different Actions, as shown below:

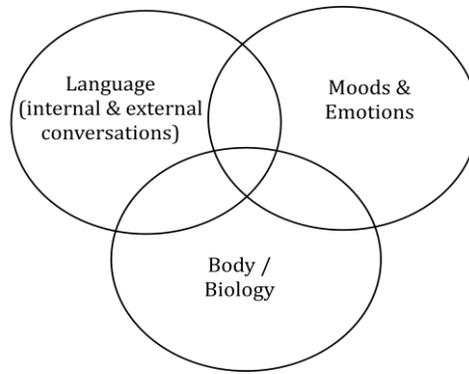


First Order Learning has to do with changing our Actions (which for leaders include changing our speaking, entering into new or different conversations) for the purpose of producing new Results. In some ways, First Order Learning represents our traditional approach to problem-solving. It implies that there is an objective problem “out there,” and in order to solve it we must take Actions which are effective in producing some desired Result. It has everything to do with cause and effect.

Let’s explore the Observer portion of the model now. Many of us have been in situations similar to this: You find yourself struggling with a problem, trying to figure out what to do, and it appears you’ve run out of options. You’ve tried several alternatives, none of which seemed to work, and you just don’t see any more good possibilities left. At some point another person comes into the room, and in 5 minutes of conversation with you they offer a fresh new alternative, and you say “Oh, I didn’t see it that way!”

Many of us have had this experience. We say that this occurs precisely because a new Observer has appeared – someone with a different view, a different perspective, a different way of looking at something. Notice how all the metaphors here are visual metaphors – they have a great deal to do with the Observer. They all point to a central claim of this model: ***Our Results have a great deal to do with our Actions or lack of Actions. This is well-known. What’s less clear is that our Actions themselves have a great deal to do with the Observer that we are, with how we “see things”.***

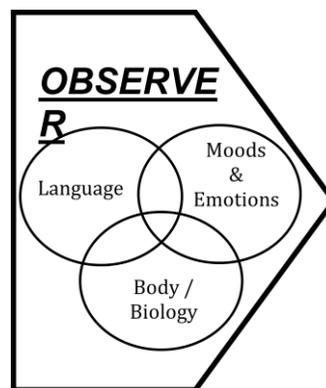
Now, when we use the term Observer, we aren’t referring to a dispassionate “camera” or “visual scanning device.” Instead, we are simply referring to each of us, as functioning human beings. The Observer that we are can be said to be composed of 3 separate but highly inter-dependent aspects or domains, as shown below:



That is, each of us is can be viewed as a walking, talking bundle of congruency among three separate but strongly inter-twined aspects:

- Our physical body (includes our biology as well as our posture, our breathing and how we move through time and space)
- Our language (includes all of our thinking, our internal conversations as well as our external conversations)
- Our mood/emotional states (we will make some basic distinctions later between moods and emotions)

So the Observer – each of us – may be understood with the graphic below:



Now back to the model: What we don't often notice is that the way we observe, interpret, listen – the way we see things – comes before we take any Action. That is, the way we frame a given situation tends to create a particular “starting point” set of possibilities. Now, we may not know exactly which Action we will ultimately take, but we do know that it will come from this set of initial possibilities! Others, who frame the situation differently, see other sets of possibilities, which lead to other Actions.

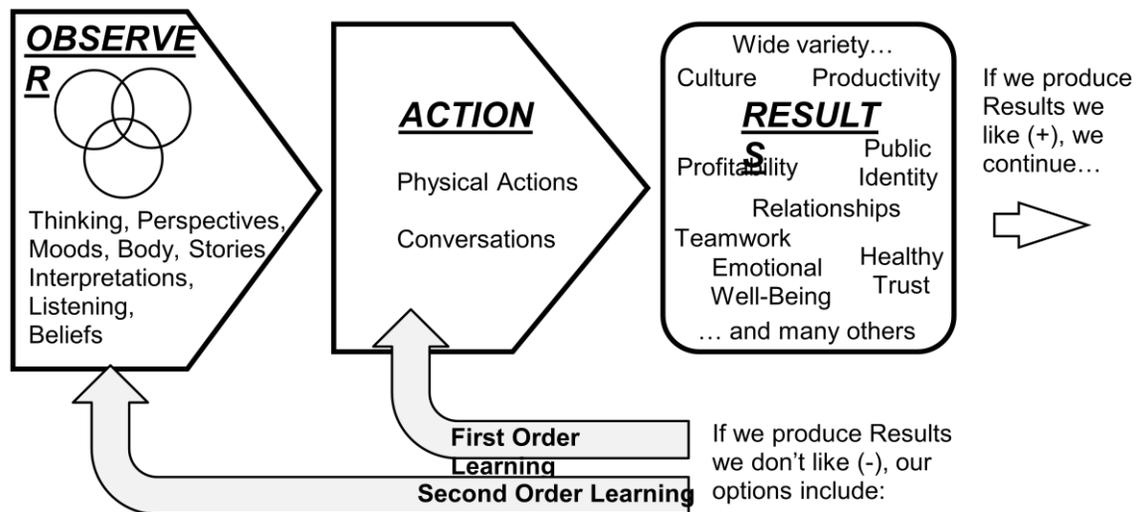
Just because you (or any of us) may have exhausted all the possibilities you see doesn't mean there are no possibilities or options left. It just means that from the way you see things, the way you're thinking, the way you've constructed the situation, the story that you've built,

from your perspective, through your beliefs, there are no possibilities. This is so for each and every one of us. No exceptions.

We claim here that we are each unique Observers. We are each unique thinkers, listeners, meaning-makers and interpreters of situations. We bring unique sets of beliefs, concerns and stories to the table... and so what we see, the way we observe, reveals more about us than about what's out there. ***What's important to notice is that many of us do not notice this!*** Back to the Big Eye, to our self-awareness. Many of us do not notice that we're observing in a particular way in the first place. We think we're seeing things objectively, "as they really are." And as we will demonstrate through the upcoming chapters, we offer that nothing could be further from the truth.

We live in an interpretive world. We are each "seeing things" through our own unique filters or lenses, which of course have nothing to do with wire mesh or polished glass. This is fundamental for leaders to notice and understand, and it will be a central theme within the chapters ahead.

The Grand Canyon looks different from the river than it does from the rim. Where you stand matters. The Observer portion of this model makes this explicit. If we don't like the Results we have produced or are producing, we can now take a look at how we look at things. We can become an Observer of the Observer that we are, and do so on purpose. If we don't like our current Results, we can bring our way of observing into the equation. We can flex the Big Eye muscle, and become conscious Observers of our particular way of observing. Chris Argyris has called this Second Order Learning, and it's represented by the arrow pointing back to the Observer, as shown below:



We agree with Chris Argyris that Second Order Learning holds the possibility for truly transformational learning, for making profound shifts in the Results we produce. It is here that we become conscious of the impact that our particular way of observing has on our Actions. From here, we are able to be much more conscious in designing new Actions that have historically been unavailable (unseen or viewed as impossible) to us. By bringing our own perspective, our own way of seeing things, into the mix, we open possibilities that

simply would not have existed under “the old way of seeing things.” It is this fundamental position of openness that serves as the foundation for new possibilities and breakthrough Results.

*Of course, the whole notion of Second Order Learning makes no sense at all if we think the way we see things now = the way things truly are! The whole idea of taking a look at how we look at things is of very little value if we’re convinced that we see things “objectively” and “realistically” already.*

It takes more courage to take a look at how we look at things than it does to simply try new Actions. We claim that in one sense, the Actions a given person takes are all more or less the same. They’re all coming from the same place, the same point of view, the same Observer, the same perspective. But if/when this person finally looks at how he looks at things, he then sees that he has, indeed, had a particular “point of view” all along. Not the way to see things, but simply a way of seeing things.

Moving forward here requires courage for most of us, we believe, because it involves fear for most of us. Not fear of being eaten by a tiger, but real fear nonetheless. This is because when we choose to look this way, at some level we know that we’ve expanded the playing field a bit, and that we’re getting closer to the real stuff – the actual stories, interpretations, meanings and beliefs – that are underneath a lot of our Actions. We know we’re getting closer to an area that has more to do with who we say we are and how we say we “be” – and far less to do with any of the particular things we may be doing.

Summarizing, we can say that if we do produce the Results we want (+), we usually continue taking those Actions that produced the effectiveness or the desired Result. However, if as an organization or as an individual we don’t produce the Results we want (-), we have three primary options:

1. Assume the negative Results were caused by factors outside our control. Do nothing. Obviously, this is not a very powerful orientation!
2. Change our Actions, including our speaking (called First Order Learning). This is usually included in our traditional problem-solving models and approaches.
3. Change the way we look at things. Call into question the Observer that we are (called Second Order Learning). For us, this is the place of truly transformational learning and of greatly expanding our possibilities for Actions that lead to unprecedented – breakthrough – Results.

This basic Observer – Action – Results model represents a profound shift in how we understand the role that each of us plays in producing what we produce for ourselves. We have found it to be an excellent foundation for leaders at all levels who are seeking a way to create and sustain significant improvements within their organizations.

Moving forward, everything else in this book will point you to the Observer that you are... or to the Actions you are taking... or to the Results you are producing... or to the processes of **First Order Learning or Second Order Learning**... as we seek to build a framework

and provide you with distinctions and tools that will improve your effectiveness as a leader, as well as the performance of your organization.

### **Summary of Key Points**

This book is all about supporting you, as a leader, in producing breakthrough Results. This chapter offers a simple yet powerful model for framing and understanding how each of us actually achieves Results in the world.

The Observer – Action – Results model supports leaders (and everyone) in understanding the factors impacting our ability to actually achieve breakthrough Results.

Think very broadly when using the term Results. Everything from your individual productivity to your public identity to a certain team's cohesiveness to the degree of shared understanding to the type of corporate culture you have to the nature of your most important relationships can be understood as different types of Results.

The Results we produce are a function of the Actions we do or don't take, and how we do or don't take them. This is well-known. In cases where we end up not producing desired Results, we can take another Action, and try again. And if this doesn't work, we can take yet another Action, and try again. Chris Argyris and others have called this First Order Learning.

As a leader, a great many of your most important Actions are not physical. They are conversational.

In some cases, we exhaust all the alternative Actions we see as possible and still haven't produced the desired Result. This doesn't mean that there are no more possibilities – it simply means that from our particular perspective, there are no more. Here we move into the Observer portion of the model.

Each of us is a unique Observer, seeing and interpreting and understanding the world in our particular way. Should we find ourselves not producing desired Results and exhausting all ready-at-hand alternative Actions, another type of learning is available. This is called Second Order Learning, and it occurs when we call the Observer we are into question. It involves taking a look at how we look at things, and it holds the possibility for transformational learning and the opening of unprecedented new possibilities.

Second Order Learning requires more courage and more emotional strength than does First Order Learning because you are now involved more with who you say you are than any particular thing you may or may not be doing.

The ability to achieve breakthrough Results is dependent on your ability to take a look at yourself in this way, to observe the way you observe and to open yourself to purposeful, conscious changes in these areas. breakthrough Results involve new choices at the level of how you are interpreting, how you are thinking and how you are seeing things; that is, at the level of the Observer that you are. *Once these changes are made, new options and new possible Actions simply appear – and once they do, they often appear to be obvious.*

We live in an interpretive world. When we can see our interpretations as interpretations, we can break free from them and then purposefully author more powerful interpretations – those that can open new possibilities for effective Action and the achievement of unprecedented – breakthrough – Results. And who we think we are, what we think is possible, and what we think we can do are all interpretations. This is crucial for leaders to notice and to understand, and it will be a central theme in the chapters ahead. The distinctions you will learn in this book will support you in seeing more choices for moving forward, organizationally and personally, as well as in achieving literally unprecedented Results.

### **Application**

1. As you began this book, you were invited to bring to mind and list 1 or 2 important Results that you are committed to bring about within the next 12 months. You were also encouraged to identify what you'd like to learn, or learn how to do better, moving forward. With these in the background, reflect on situations where you have hit a wall, you are feeling stuck, and you don't know what more to do to move forward. Capture as specifically as you can:
  - What you're seeking to produce
  - For the sake of what (why) you're seeking to produce it
  - What's at stake if you don't?
  - What you have tried so far
  - Where you seem to be stuck
2. Think of 3 people with whom you can share what you captured above. Ask them what they see and how they see it, and what they would do in order to move forward. As these individuals share, listen carefully. Ask probing questions to understand how they frame the situation, how they see it and what they would do. (What you're doing is bringing other Observers into the conversation). Notice what you notice and learn as you listen.

