

Creating a roadmap to better business results through perception mapping

Di Worrall interviews Dr Grant Donovan

Di	<p>Who is Dr Grant Donovan and Perception Mapping?</p> <p>Dr Grant Donovan is the Managing Partner of a firm called Perception Mapping. This organisation is based over in Western Australia and operates all around the world. It's been doing some really interesting and innovative things over the last few years in the organisation diagnostic space. Perception Mapping is highly skilled in diagnosing the thoughts, the behaviours, the structures and the processes that are blocking business performance.</p> <p>Grant has had some 25 years as a practising consultant in the area of culture, change and leadership development. He has addressed international management conferences on those subjects and is a published author. Grant has also been on the other side of the table as a publisher in the area of business management. Grant welcome.</p>
Grant	Thank you Di, how are you?
Di	<p>Creating a roadmap towards better business results through perception mapping</p> <p>I'm really good thanks Grant.</p> <p>Today, I wanted to speak with you about a topic that is on the mind of a lot of people in business who are really concerned about change and that is :</p> <p style="text-align: center;">➤ <i>How can business create a road map towards better business results?</i></p> <p>You and Perception Mapping have come up with some interesting and innovative approaches to this challenge in recent years. Before we get into some specific questions along those lines I just want to get your email address if I could and spell that out clearly for those people that are listening?</p>
Grant	If people want to contact me I'm at grant@perceptionmapping.com .
Di	<p>Organisations are defined by the quality of their conversations</p> <p>Grant, it's been said that organisations are defined not so much by their structures, processes and systems but by the quality of the conversations that occur inside them. If conversations are so important what can practitioners do to actually influence these conversations to produce better business results?</p>
Grant	<p>That's a good first question Di.</p> <p>Perception Mapping is a company that was established about eight (8) years ago in response to a lot of consulting work that we had been doing over the previous 18 – 19 years. In this work, we found organisations wanted to make culture changes and improve their overall business performance.</p> <p>These organisations were doing a lot of large, generic type surveys and getting general satisfaction information. Our work was indicating that a lot of what drove the culture and drove the performance inside of business was the quality of the conversations that managers were having with their staff. Following on from this, we've been working on some programs, piloting some conversation mapping programs for the last while and they're proving to be extremely successful in terms of diagnosing very clearly what the pattern of thought and what the pattern of conversation is within side an organisation.</p> <p>If an organisation has a very negative conversation pattern, you find a blame mode in</p>

	<p>which people are always blaming the resources, the leadership or the customer or somebody else or what's going well or poorly in the business. We found a specific correlation between this conversation of "blame" and overall poor performance and very poor cultural scores on any survey.</p> <p>If you can get the leaders in the organisation to change that conversation into a positive one, that organisation develops a new memetic pattern: that is a pattern which is self-taught and self-replicating. The positive memetic patterns are oriented towards a solutions-focussed conversation (instead of the negative "problem" conversation).</p> <p>The solutions-focussed conversation has a major impact in terms of developing more innovative thinking and certainly more innovative behaviours within the organisation. It's quite interesting just that simple process of changing the way people speak with each other has a massive impact over how people respond and behave and the energy that they will put into their performance.</p>
Di	<p>The science of "memetics" – the replication of ideas inside a group</p>
	<p>Can you clarify what you mean by the term "memetic"?</p>
Grant	<p>There is a well developed research area in memetics where we are able to identify that the thoughts and ideas of people and groups generally self-replicate in a pattern. So, if we are a very positive group of people and we talk very innovatively then we will start to behave that way and not only that new people coming into our culture will be inducted into that way of thinking and speaking and so therefore that way of behaving.</p> <p>Our research surveys have found that negative patterns of communication about the organisation or about customers will be quickly picked up by new people by the time they have spent as little as 2-3 weeks in their work team or business unit.</p> <p>The pattern of conversation is extremely powerful. Leaders often don't realise that by being very negative in the way they speak with people or even the way they communicate through their body language they actually start to develop a self-replicating pattern in the people who are actually working with them.</p>
Di	<p>How do we develop our habitual patterns of communication?</p>
	<p>Would you say this self-replicating pattern is primarily driven by the subconscious?</p>
Grant	<p>The behaviours driven by our subconscious are largely influenced by significant environment influences, for example, our parents...</p> <p>Take another example of how our environment affects our communication subconsciously. If you hear a song on the radio that you haven't heard for 25 years and then it comes on and you can immediately recognise the tune and even sing all the words even though you haven't heard it for 25 years. This is because that particular pattern is already mapped into your brain. Of course the reason it is mapped into your brain is because you've heard that song 20 times before.</p> <p>It's the same thing in a worksite.</p> <p>If I come to work in a team each day and the talk in the team is very negative then after awhile that becomes the pattern that gets imbedded in my brain and without me even really knowing that I'm repeating that pattern to other people. So just by purely recognising that pattern and being aware of it and the leaders and managers fundamentally changing that pattern then you start to get better performance outcomes.</p> <p>There is a gentleman who worked for Qantas and now works for Woolworths, Shane Garland. He is exceptional at coming into an organisation and working with large groups of people and going around and talking to all the staff and having a very positive conversation. His techniques can produce massive performance improvements without</p>

	<p>doing anything other than having a different conversation with his staff.</p> <p>Being able to create great performance is about being tuned into the power of words and conversations. If leaders are able to do that then they are able to get far better outcomes.</p> <p>What we're doing from a perception mapping perspective is we have developed a template where one of our consultants can sit in and listen to a staff meeting and be able to summarise the nematic pattern occurring in that particular group. From this analysis, we can recommend what organisations could do to change that particular pattern. It's really innovative and a very powerful tool that we've been able to develop.</p>
Di	<p>It's a very different and innovative approach.</p> <p>If people want to find out more about mapping conversations, how can people contact you?</p>
Grant	<p>If they wanted to talk to me about it they could contact me at grant@perceptionmapping.com.</p>
Di	<p>Can you really change culture?</p> <p>Conversations are one signal of what a culture looks like. There is an interesting debate about culture which has raged amongst highly respected practitioners in the field of change. Some are adamant that culture can't be changed and others argue that it can and in fact should be changed particularly if it means the survival of the organisation in a changing environment. Having worked with a lot of organisations around the world what was your experience of this debate, is it a realistic expectation that you can in fact change culture?</p>
Grant	<p>You can change culture.</p> <p>Certainly in our experience but there needs to be some sort of impetus to it. What I mean by that is, we've seen a number of organisations change their culture purely because they have had to, they're under economic stress, they're on the verge of going out of business and they just have to make a major change. Because they have no other alternative, that seems to be enough motivation for them to be able to make that change. Most organisations we work with that are running along doing okay find it very difficult to change their culture.</p> <p>We know from a lot of the work we have done that there are probably two ways to change the culture: one is by getting rid of everybody, getting rid of your whole workforce and starting again on Monday. The other way is to really change it one person at a time. In the case of the latter, the change process can take a long time. In fact, I would suggest it's not really a change so much as an evolution that takes your organisation to some point better than it is today.</p> <p>The longer path to change can be done, but under specific conditions. It requires concentrated effort. In our observations, many managers who are very technically focussed don't really have the time, the energy, the skills or the desire, for whatever reason, to really put in the necessary effort to get that culture change happening. Maybe it's because they don't have access to good information, maybe it's that the organisations' daily work requires that they attend to tasks so much that the people side of the business doesn't really get the focus that's required.</p> <p>I think to a large degree, cultures are a reflection of their leadership and often leaders are changing on a regular basis. You get somebody or an organisation going through a change program and then all of a sudden the leader moves on and the next thing you know there is a different person in charge and we go back to whatever that person sees as the culture we need. You don't get the continuity. It is a very difficult one. Some cultures continually evolve and others are very stagnant and very difficult to move. It does come down to the people in the organisation, how they're thinking and the information they have access to.</p>

Di	<p>The roles people play during change</p> <p>There are many different roles to play during change. Leaders have a role as do HR people and change agents. Recent research has also highlighted the importance of the line manager in making change happen... In your experience, what role can each have these groups play that will make the most difference to successful change?</p>
Grant	<p>The role of the line manager</p> <p>If we start with the line manager. All of our surveying over the last 8 – 9 years has shown that most teams and business units that are performing well have a very good relationship with their line manager. There is research out there that suggests that people don't in actual fact leave organisations so much as they leave their manager. If the manager is a poor manager then they will leave very quickly.</p> <p>If the quality of the conversation occurring between the line manager and the team is very good then you will get very good performance from that team. If the quality of that conversation and the relationship is poor then you will generally get very poor outcomes within that team.</p> <p>In terms of operationally executing and doing things differently and better within a business unit or work team the line manager is the most influential person.</p> <p>The roles of the CEO and HR team</p> <p>Change management operates like a system with many parts, For example, although an organisation can be typified by a dominant culture, each team and each business unit can contain sub-cultures. We know this from our work with many organisations around the world that do major culture surveys of the whole organisation. The CEO and the HR group have a key role to play in terms of big systemic issues like this in change management and making sure the structures, processes and other resources are all there for the change to occur effectively.</p>
Di	<p>Situational Leadership and Change</p> <p>The research on leadership talks about "situational leadership" and how the application of particular leadership styles ideally changes to suit the situation. How does situational leadership apply in change management?</p>
Grant	<p>As I mentioned earlier, an organisation's culture is a reflection of their leadership, particularly the senior leadership. In our work with 1,000+ organisations, some CEO's are very talented at working with people and others have no people skills whatsoever. Where a CEO has poor people skills, this inevitably has a major impact on how effective any change process is going to be, Before the consulting firm Andersons went out of business, they completed some studies which showed that 80-90% of change programs just don't work and most of that comes down to the energy and effort of the senior people, particularly the CEO.</p>
Di	<p>That's a big number.</p>
Grant	<p>Why do so many change programs fail?</p> <p>It is a big number. A big part of the reason for this number is that organisations often use the wrong measures to assess the effectiveness of their change program or business performance.</p> <p>Let me explain. People are homeostatic, that is they love a comfort zone and so once they get used to working in one environment and in one particular organisation, people</p>

	<p>can report good satisfaction levels. That is to say that they are happy working in that organisation and happy with their pay, happy with communication, happy with the leadership and so forth. Overall, the staff satisfaction survey is reported as very good.</p> <p>But herein lays a potential problem. If we dig a below the surface of satisfaction levels in some organisations, performance is poor and corruption is a problem. So people might ask themselves - 'why would I want to change if I'm happy in the workplace and I don't have to work any differently to maintain that?' This is also where you can find examples of corruption in that the organisation isn't getting to the core drivers of its own performance.</p> <p>So can you see the problem with measuring the wrong indicators?</p>
Grant	<p>Measuring the Wrong Indicators of Performance</p> <p>What you really want to do is diagnose down in terms of how well the group is performing, why it is performing that way, what other behaviours are likely to impact or are impacting that performance. This make the diagnostic process much more focussed on the performance outcome, rather than how happy people are.</p> <p>It's a much more complex science than just asking whether your staff member is happy or customer is happy.</p>
Di	<p>Cynicism and culture surveys</p> <p>If surveys that look at things like satisfaction, culture and attitudes can get be met with cynicism, what can you do about it?</p>
Grant	<p>Our experience with the cynicism of poorly administered surveys is one of the reasons why we developed perception mapping and all of its diagnostic tools in the first place... As practitioners/consultants, we would go into organisations and the organisation would give us a large culture survey that they had done. Generally staff satisfaction type surveys were very high level and there was no real diagnostics in there. Not only that, the organisation had done the survey six months before and hadn't thought to feed back the results to staff.</p> <p>What we say to our clients is: 'don't do a perception map, don't do any diagnostic, don't do any survey unless you are planning to feed it back immediately and then put some action into place if the people have identified some area that needs improving.' If you just survey to collect information or get a benchmark then you are really not listening to your staff. What that intimates to the staff in a non-verbal way is: 'we don't really care about you, and we will do whatever we want regardless of what you tell us'. I think that's the real key and we have on a couple of occasions not taken jobs because they weren't prepared to feed the information back in a timely manner.</p> <p>One approach that we know gets better data and a higher response rate is repeat mapping or trend mapping. This approach measures business units or organisations every six months over a period of some years. When you start off doing that you get quiet a low response rate but over time that picks up quite substantially as levels of trust grow. What also helps with the response rate is that we can turn the perception maps around within 24 – 48 hours from the time the person actually speaks or answers the survey to the time they actually get the analysis back.</p>
Di	<p>The secret to achieving timely turnaround in survey results</p> <p>How do you turn around your surveys so quickly?</p>
Grant	<p>Surveying today doesn't have to be expensive because of on-line algorithms, computer computations and templates. There is a whole range of electronic tools now which</p>

	<p>didn't exist 5 - 10 years ago so that you can produce this information very rapidly.</p> <p>Also, the speed of our business is influenced by our structure. We have a lot of very professional people working in partnership with us but not on wages. They are motivated to do the work rapidly so our culture has developed a strong performance paradigm. We pass onto our customers all the benefits of the way we've structured our business.</p>
Di	<p>Customising Surveys</p> <p>You have told us that measuring the right things in surveys are very important. How do you get the measures "right" for any one organisation?</p>
Grant	<p>A key aspect of our work is that everything is customised. We sit down with a client, we listen to what they think, to their issues and problems and we ask them a series of questions. The questions help us customise the diagnostics. We then apply a validation process to ensure that what we ask the staff and how they reply is in fact measuring what we purport to measure. That's a really big part, that up front setup process is really critical. It's that same old thing with garbage in garbage out. If you ask garbage questions then you get garbage responses and you are going to have garbage analysis.</p> <p>A number of people in our organisation have what you would term sports science, medical science type background and understand the whole analogy that if you went to a doctor and the doctor keeps prescribing you the same medicine without doing any proper diagnostics then they would be up for malpractice. Yet that happens every day in organisations where consultants and practitioners come in and say here is my program, this is going to be good for you, you better take it. Or they might say: here's my staff satisfaction survey, I've done it on 500 other organisations, you should do it too and it will be good for you and it will help you understand your business better and make some changes.</p> <p>It blatantly isn't true. It's old thinking and it's totally against any sensible way of in actual fact improving your business. Doing the diagnostic and making sure that diagnostic is customised is a really critical process in the whole perception mapping toolkit.</p>
Di	<p>Checklist for finding a supplier of diagnostic services</p> <p>If you were to advise an organisation how to find a good supplier of diagnostic services, what should they look for?</p>
Grant	<p>We would be happy to be a supplier to the organisations that are really trying to make change. We operate locally and internationally with offices in Russia and the United States and Singapore and have our unique suite of conversation pattern mapping diagnostics.</p> <p>Here are some key questions I would ask when selecting a diagnostic practitioner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do they customise surveys ➤ How fast is their turnaround technology? ➤ Are they value for money? ➤ Do their tools diagnose cause as well as symptoms?
Di	<p>Can cultures be labelled as either good or bad in the 21st century?</p> <p>Thanks for that Grant, there are some clear guidelines as to what we should be looking for in selecting a diagnostic partner.</p>

	<p>If I could slip back to one of your earlier comments on culture. Change management textbooks have described “good” and “bad” cultures for decades. Do you think there are good or bad cultures for organisations operating today as opposed to 10 years ago?</p>
Grant	<p>We make the assumption that there are no good or bad people or good or bad cultures. Rather, what we measure diagnostically is the diversity of the cultures. This means there are different cultures and you need a different culture for a different outcome.</p> <p>For example, a full customer service business which works with people on a daily basis to deliver the best outcomes may need a different type of culture to one which is a very technically focussed and values the high levels of accuracy required to build something.</p> <p>From a broader perspective, research by thought leaders such as John Kotter from Harvard tells us that high performance cultures tend to be very empowering. They have a strong capacity to engage the people within those cultures and the people working there tend to be very business literate. Business literacy produces a mindset of ‘what can I do to improve the business’.</p> <p>This mindset sits in stark contrast to, what you see in a lot of traditional type cultures (which you might put into that ‘bad’ category of organisations) where people have more of an ‘attendance culture’ or ‘attendance mindset’. In this organisation, you pay me to be here between 9 and 5 and work. Perhaps this organisation could be said to have a bad culture but in many instances it’s not “bad”, it’s just a different culture. For some organisations and the outcomes they are trying to achieve, just having people come along, do data entry and leave might be quiet effective.</p> <p>Although I can’t point to one “ideal” culture, I have to say that over a 10 year period I made some interesting observations during the course of hosting senior executives on study tours of high performing organisations around the world. Amongst the many different high performing cultures, I found an overriding similarity in the fact that people were empowered.</p> <p>What we do know and have been able to map for the last 25 years is that more and more organisations are moving towards more engaging types of cultures. Ultimately the person at the front line has to be able to make good business decisions to service the customer effectively. Where you see poor cultures you normally see a lot of what we would call system indicators. System indicators in poorly performing cultures tend to have lots of performance appraisals and lots of performance management systems put in place, very poor leadership, no empowerment, no engagement, no development of business literacy. The bottom line is that people do not have the tools they need to run their part of the business without having someone to watch them all the time.</p> <p>Different cultures perform better in different types of work environments When we do perception mapping surveys up in China or up in Russia they have some very different views of the world. A culture that might work effectively in Australia might not work that effectively in Russia purely because of the type of work or the historical nature of where people are coming from and the age group of that particular workforce. In Russia you have three really different cultures: you have the communist sort of people who have come out of that particular pattern of living and still hold to a lot of the values and work ethics and work cultures; you have the transition group who have been for the last 15 – 20 years trying to move from a more socialist environment to a more capitalist environment; and then you have the young kids that were born in the last 20 years who are politically generation Y type people</p> <p>In summary, good diagnostic surveys have a really good feel for the company and the the nuances of the different cultures.</p>
Di	The new “wave” of empowerment in 21st century organisations

	You mentioned the prevalence of an “empowered” workforces in more successful 21 st century organisations. Can you expand on how organisations can create the right conditions for this to occur?
Grant	<p>The more empowering cultures have really emerged over the last 30-40 years. We’ve known for a long period of time that children do much better if their learning is self-directed. We also know that individuals do much better if their lives are self-managed and the same applies in the workplace. Self-managed work teams perform better than anybody else and that literature has been well developed by Barry Massey out of Texas University over 4 decades. It’s well known and it’s taught in Harvard and all the other business schools they use all the self-managing empowered cultures as case studies for best performance.</p> <p>There is this common theme and it makes sense. People are always going to work better if they are involved and engaged in the whole process rather than being told what to do and we find a lot of our perception mapping surveys, as I said earlier in the conversation, the performance is very poor in those organisations where it has strong control and command.</p> <p>As you know the change that is going on in the world with competition, social expectations, the environment and such are pushing major adjustments in life and work. Changes are flowing on to the way that people work, the way organisations treat people, how they look at customers and the way they relate to the environment in which they work. These changes have been gaining momentum over the last 30 years and I expect there will be even more change over the next 20-30 years on a global level.</p>
Di	How can organisations use Perception Mapping services?
	I know that perception mapping has been working all over the world for some time now. Can you outline how these organisations have been using your services?
Grant	<p>We have a really interesting range of organisations that we work directly with across all continents, cultures, and industry groups ranging from banks, large I companies, government departments, logistics companies and small organisations. At the moment we are doing a survey for a small hairdressing group. So we work right across the board and we have done maps for Commonwealth Bank, CSC and a bank in Russia and just off the top of my head Tang’s Department store in Singapore.</p> <p>We also have the capacity to partner with other consultants around the world, acting as a back office “diagnostic team” for their client projects.</p>
Di	Yes I can vouch for your working with consultants. I’ve worked with you for a number of years on and off in my corporate roles and of course more recently with my consulting business where we effectively partnered up on some diagnostic work for my clients culture change program.
Di	Before we bring this to a close, here’s Grant’s email address once more: grant@perceptionmapping.com .
Grant	Yep, that’s it. So if anybody wants to contact us about our diagnostic tools or just have a conversation about the whole area of culture change or surveying or diagnostics we are always happy to do just that. There is no obligation at all to use our services and we are just quite happy to help people get started down the track.
Di	Fantastic. Thank you Grant.
Grant	Okay Di and thank you too, we will catch up soon.