

AQ

Adaptive Intelligence

Leesexemplaar

AQ

ADAPTIVE INTELLIGENCE

UNLEASH YOUR PERSONAL ADAPTABILITY

Rudi Francken & Tim Vermeire

P E L C K M A N S

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	7
<i>A word of thanks</i>	13
Introduction: What the bleep is AQ?	17
Chapter 1 Energy	33
1 Do you recognise this?	33
2 What is energy?	35
3 What is happening here?	37
4 The foundations	42
5 Getting started	51
6 Conclusion: Life-long energy	73
Interview Dixie Dansercoer	74
Chapter 2 Essentialism	79
1 Do you recognise this?	79
2 What is essentialism?	82
3 What is happening here?	84
4 The foundations	90
5 Getting started	99
6 Conclusion: Essentialism leads to greater direction and deeper satisfaction	109
Interview Kris Feys and Michiel Deconinck (Atlas Copco)	112

Chapter 3 Focus	117
1 Do you recognise this?	117
2 What is focus?	119
3 What is happening here?	124
4 The foundations	130
5 Getting started	137
6 Conclusion: From distraction to traction	148
Interview Jos Vandael (Innovate)	150
Chapter 4 Balance	155
1 Do you recognise this?	155
2 What is balance?	157
3 What is happening here?	159
4 The foundations	163
5 Getting started	170
6 Conclusion: In balance at and away from your work	187
Interview Annelies Missotten (Galapagos)	190
Chapter 5 Growth mindset	197
1 Do you recognise this?	198
2 What is a growth mindset?	199
3 What is happening here?	205
4 The foundations	209
5 Getting started	218
6 Conclusion: A positive outlook on change and growth	232
Interview Marc Herremans (185 Coaching Center)	234
Chapter 6 Adaptability in organisations and networks	243
Conclusion	257

FOREWORD

- Saskia Van Uffelen (the Digital Champion Belgium, EU Governing Board Digital Skills and Jobs, former CEO of Inetum, Bull, Ericsson)

How long can you keep on going? How long can you continue to 'manage' your life without changing something fundamental? We live in a digital age that demands a new approach, a new model and, above all, lots of courage. The courage to help build a new kind of society through your personal life choices, a society that works for each and every one of us, but also for the coming generations.

For me, well-being and prosperity are not mutually exclusive, but can complement each other perfectly. Happy workers work with greater effort. Positive results are not only good for companies, but also contribute towards the economy, employment and the payment of salaries. Business profits do much more than bring a smile to the face of shareholders.

That being said, people, companies and governments are now increasingly confronted with the limits of well-being and prosperity. The solution to this problem is a transition: the structural change or transformation of all our existing models. This kind of structural change is all-embracing. It affects every element of society and needs to happen everywhere at the same time. In the years ahead, we will be faced with a tremendous challenge, the like of which we have not seen before.

People are the answer, but sometimes also part of the problem. Why? Point one: people are exhausted as a result of the constant stream of impulses, the amazing overload of information and the sheer high speed of the digital world. They need a new purpose. Point two: notwithstanding their exhaustion, people need to take their

life into their own hands. They must learn how to accept responsibility for their own life and career. An environment can create a framework and give people opportunities, but if people fail to seize those opportunities and do not to integrate them into their life plan, the chance for change will be lost.

I am a firm believer that everyone must be the CEO of his or her own life. If you do not take control of your future and neglect to think about your personal added value – the extra qualities you possess over and above your professional experience – you will soon have a serious problem. Without this added value, how can you ensure that you will remain relevant?

What are the competencies you need for the future? What are those digital skills? Of course, it is indisputable that we will always need experts: people with a technical profile who can programme, manage and protect our data and who know all there is to know about the technical aspects of artificial intelligence. But in addition to these technocrats, we will also need people who can communicate in the new world of tomorrow, people who can facilitate collaboration across different sectors and develop new and innovative business models with appropriate financial objectives.

At the same time, everyone will need to redefine and re-establish their own personal harmony between well-being and prosperity. This will involve developing the capacity to adjust to changing circumstances. AQ is the core competence of the 21st century and will help you to face life with the necessary resilience and sense of purpose. A strong AQ will allow you to become more efficient and more effective, whilst at the same time also giving you greater satisfaction, not only in your professional life but also beyond.

Tim and Rudi have summarised it perfectly: 'An agile, alert, ambitious and energetic way of living, with the right focus on the right things. A serene way of living, without overconsumption and without losing your personal harmony. A way of living that takes an open mind as the basis for both professional ambition and private happiness. A simpler life, but a life in which we achieve the things we really want to achieve. *Mens sana in corpore sano* in the 21st century.'

Less things, less pressure, less cortisol, less distraction, less wanting.

More balance, more energy, more focus, more leadership, more resilience, more growth. In short, a correct equilibrium between less and more. In this way, we can sharpen our ability to adjust and increase our adaptive intelligence (AQ).

AQ is an indicator of a person's capacity to adjust. It is a new concept and will be the most important differentiator for quality of life in the century ahead.

Being adaptively intelligent does not mean that you will adjust your behaviour at all times and in all places, but only when it is necessary and has purpose. In other words, it is as much about stability as it is about flexibility.

In the past, much attention was devoted to a person's IQ (intelligence quotient), which in a work context was more or less equivalent to their level of professional knowledge. With the advent of the industrial and technological revolutions, increasing attention came to be focused on EQ or the emotional intelligence quotient, which placed an emphasis on soft skills that could promote relational connection and collaboration. In our current age of digital revolution and continuous transformation, IQ and EQ alone are no longer sufficient. The pressure that we all experience in this new age forces us all to think about the next crucial step that needs to be taken: the step to AQ.

AQ is the core competence of our time. It is an important competitive advantage in the labour market: an agile profile that many of the newer organisational structures and cultures regard as an economically responsible investment. But adaptive intelligence will also allow you to play your private and social roles with greater strength, calm and satisfaction.'

Pure win-win.

“

Creating a sustainable future is not something you do alone. It is created through an ecosystem that binds people together in a responsible collaboration, based on partnerships that strengthen each other and shared knowledge that pushes everyone further forwards. As ECOO, this is how we take the lead in the circular economy.

With thinking and re-thinking as the foundation. From fact to possibility, from problem to solution. Product becomes resource becomes product becomes resource. In this way, the circle is complete.

Of course, a truly sustainable world is more than sustainable products alone: dealing with people and looking at organisations from the perspective of sustainability is also one of the cornerstones. I was pleasantly surprised how both authors seem to have applied this sustainable thinking in a refreshing and appropriate manner in their book.

*Koen Verhaert
CEO ECOO,
Rethinking Plastics.
More info: www.ecoo.eu*

A WORD OF THANKS

Writing is a lonely activity. During recent months, we have quite often sat alone, isolated in our AQ bubble. This was only possible thanks to the assistance and understanding of many other people.

First and foremost, our thanks go to our respective families: our wives Inge and Elisa and our wonderful children mean the world to us. Throughout this long trajectory, they have been there to help us every step of the way. But our close friends have also played an important role, by providing us with much needed feedback and constructive advice. Thank you, everyone. You are all fantastic!

At the same time, we would also like to thank the many people with whom we have worked and collaborated in the course of our careers; not only our colleagues, but also our many clients and customers. The countless conversations we had during advice trajectories, coaching sessions and workshops have helped each of us to follow our own paths more resolutely and strengthened our experiences.

We are likewise grateful to our colleagues at Pelckmans publishers. Right from the very start, Elisabeth Torfs supported the idea to develop our theories into a book and her knowledge and professionalism have been invaluable throughout.

We would also like to thank Dixie Dansercoer, Saskia Van Uffelen, Jos Vandael, Kris Feys, Michiel Deconinck, Benny Corvers, Annelies Missotten and Marc Herremans: our warm and friendly conversations were a source of great inspiration. As AQ ambassadors, they give this book an extra dimension.

Writing a book together requires a great many words but even greater respect, patience, willingness to listen and friendship. We have both grown as people during the past year, which means that for us this project is already a success. The rest will follow. Amor Fati.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT THE BLEEP IS AQ?

We are all becoming increasingly overwhelmed.

Overwhelmed by a multiplicity of different tasks and responsibilities, and an excess of information. What's more, this is all taking place in constantly changing circumstances, such as the major transformations that many people are experiencing at work. To make matters worse, at a societal level one crisis is quickly followed by another. What was normal today is no longer normal tomorrow.

Our poor brains often find it hard to keep track of all these changes and it is becoming increasingly difficult to order our thoughts. At the same time, we seem to lack the necessary energy to deal with this situation and to make clear choices. It is almost as if we have lost the ability to view things sensibly, to switch up through the gears and even to enjoy what we do.

For many people, work nowadays is an endless succession of (virtual) meetings, mails, news, requests, instructions, telephone calls, text messages, chat sessions, documents and files. The brain worker is drowning in a sea of data. The day starts with a full inbox and ends with an even fuller one. Each new mail demands instant action for which we simply do not have the time and even our private lives seem like one long to-do list. In the morning we plan activities for a full evening, only to find that when the evening arrives, we no longer have the energy to do anything. If you are an operational member of staff, you have probably lost sight of the big picture and no longer know how your work contributes to the greater whole. Tried

and trusted time management rules have been ditched, so that we are increasingly at a loss as to how we can better organise ourselves and improve (or even maintain) our well-being.

In an article in *Humo* (30 December 2019), psychiatrists Dirk De Wachter and Paul Verhaeghe sounded the alarm bell. 'People want to be like Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, but are unable to live up to their own high expectations. One out of every five young people in Belgium suffers from psychological problems of one kind or another. Belgium also scores badly when it comes to burn-outs, depressions and suicides.' Dirk De Wachter compares the ethos of our times with a speedboat named TINA: There Is No Alternative. 'This boat is travelling fast, and at the helm are flash boys in fancy suits, with champagne bottles in their hands and the wind blowing through their carefully coiffured hair, surrounded by beautiful women purring with delight. Meanwhile, at the back people are falling off the boat and into the dark and cold water, victims of the sheer speed and the lack of a safety rail. And behind the boat come we, the psychiatrists and psychologists, trying to rescue people in our rubber dinghies, picking up the survivors and giving them fresh clothes.'

“

Normal life has become madness, but we have simply failed to notice.

– Dirk De Wachter and Paul Verhaeghe

It is difficult enough as it is to keep your head above water in this stormy sea, but to make matters worse you are also expected to expand your boundaries, embrace innovation and master new technologies. The European Union speaks of 'new skills for new jobs' and the OECD refers to '21st century skills'. Other experts talk of the need for 'learnability', if you want to remain employable in the labour market. But behind the terminology, all three are preaching the same message: the ability to adapt to changing circumstances has now become an essential skill.

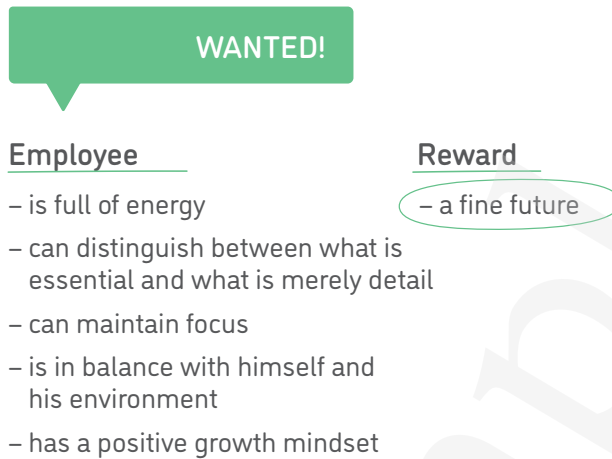


Figure 1 The search for an employee with a high AQ

Do you recognise the ‘busy brain’ syndrome?

You are not alone

Many people in society feel this pressure and experience its negative effects. We live in a highly prosperous society, but are setting new records year after year for sickness absence from work, burn-out, the use of sleeping pills and anti-depressants, and addiction to alcohol, drugs, smartphones and even Facebook. When we spend a cosy evening with the family in front of the television, we do so with one hand on our smartphone and the other hand on our laptop, so that we do not miss out on anything that is happening at work, in our circle of friends, in the world... There is a mismatch between the information being bombarded at our brain and the brain’s ability to process it all. This is what is known as the ‘busy brain’ syndrome: our brain cannot work at the speed we expect of it, which results in all kinds of medical complaints and conditions, ranging from restlessness, irritability and lack of focus to depression and insomnia. In order to understand this problem, we first need to know something about the evolution of the brain and our stress systems. In other words, it is time for a little bit of science. Not science for science’s sake, but to provide you with knowledge that is crucial for understanding the steps that we will explain in the rest of the book.

A hell of a journey!

In a relatively short space of time (in evolutionary terms), human beings have evolved from primitive hunter-gatherers on the steppes of Africa to become the most superior species on the planet. To make this possible, our brain has undergone a remarkable transformation. With ever increasing success, we have continually adapted to meet the changing circumstances with which we have been confronted over the millennia.

The evolution of our brain has had a far-reaching impact on our behaviour. Initially, our species was driven by instincts and emotions. In other words, we had an instinctive and emotional brain, which we refer to as our gorilla. Fortunately, over the past hundred thousand years or so we have developed a more civilised form of behaviour. This is the result of the most recent development in our brain: the formation of the prefrontal cortex. This is the part of the brain, just above the eyebrows, which is responsible for the most important aspects of our behaviour that make us human: logical thinking, planning, showing empathy, controlling instincts and emotions, etc. Welcome Homo sapiens, welcome wise owl! (See our whitepaper 'From gorilla to wise owl' in our magazine on www.adaptiveintelligence.eu.) However, you cannot regard this prefrontal cortex as the valhalla of our brain: it is simply a tool that we have at our disposal to plan and solve problems, and to adapt to new situations and circumstances. That is why this part of the brain is so important in the context of our book.

In the course of our evolution, we have also developed an emergency system that allows us to deal with danger. This is our stress response system. It is a system that warns us to prepare to run, hide or defend ourselves. This is the well-known fight, flight or freeze response. To ensure that we do not waste too much precious energy that we might need to escape from a dangerous situation, all of the body's other non-essential systems, such as the immune and digestive systems, are temporarily shut down. At that moment, you only

**BOOK TIP**

*The Chimp Paradox. The Mind Management Program to Help You Achieve Success, Confidence and Happiness*¹

Dr. Steve Peters

1 Peters, S. (2012). *The Chimp Paradox. The Mind Management Program to Help You Achieve Success, Confidence and Happiness*. London: Vermilion.

have one thought: survival. Who cares if you haven't yet digested your last meal? Your objective now is to avoid becoming someone else's!

And the journey goes on and on ...

From hunter-gatherers, human beings evolved into industrious and hardworking farmers. Ever since, we have been working harder and harder to earn a living. Today, we are working harder than ever before. Life gets busier and busier and we are surrounded by more and more stimuli. Our brain is no longer able to rest and recover, while our stress system is working non-stop overtime! It is almost as if our gas pedal had got stuck at full speed, so that danger – which was once an exceptional situation – now seems to be ever present. Professor Koen Stroeken (University of Ghent) says that we have once again become high-tech hunter-gatherers, who hunt ferociously (if the discounts are large enough) but never share anything with anyone, in stark contrast to our primeval ancestors.

To make matters worse, we are now also capable of imagining threatening situations. These thoughts alone are enough to activate our fight, flight or freeze response! In other words, the brain is no longer capable of making a distinction between imaginary danger and real danger. An angry look from your boss triggers the same chemical response as when you need to avoid a maniac driving at you down the wrong side of a motorway. As a result, the stress response system remains chronically over-active all the time, so that we are in a continually operating in survival mode. Our instinctive and emotional brain is in a constant state of confusion, while the prefrontal cortex, the seat of our human behaviour, is in an equally constant state of overload, eventually resulting in dysfunction or even shut-down. In response to this non-stop stress, the body not only produces adrenalin, but also cortisol. This cortisol keeps us going, but it has a paralysing effect on the prefrontal cortex. It is almost as if the body, faced with all this stress, says that this is not the right moment to reflect or think logically. This is a highly contradictory response: at precisely the moment when we need our capacity to adapt to the chaos surrounding us, the body decides to react instinctively and emotionally.



Long-term stress gives our gorilla power.

Our brain under pressure

During this long-lasting alarm phase, we keep going by the cortisol pumped into our system. A high dose of cortisol not only has a harmful effect on the body (it is the cause of many of the so-called prosperity illnesses), but also prevents the prefrontal cortex from doing its work. Our executive functions fade away, like snow melting in the sun: we are no longer able to focus, we take hasty decisions without considering all the options and we have a tendency to think only of ourselves, with no thought of empathy for others. We become irritable, difficult to deal with, critical, impatient... We find it hard to look on the bright side and can only see the crises that we think are heading our way. In short, we are the victims of the busy-brain syndrome. We are trapped in the worst possible versions of ourselves.

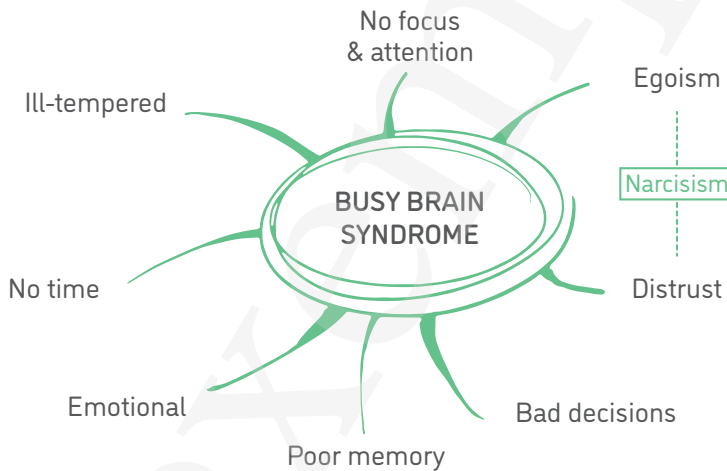


Figure 2 The busy brain syndrome: the mental consequences of stress as a result of the reduced performance of the prefrontal cortex. © After a model by Mind Your Brain

This catapults us back to our days as hunter-gatherers, when the most important question was whether you would get lunch or be lunch. Perhaps we no longer run the risk of being eaten, but we still run the risk of being consumed by algorithms, ‘likes’ and cortisol.

The future will tell whether or not the human race will continue to progress or stumble into decline. But one thing is certain: we are currently not making best use of the many opportunities that we have been given by our evolutionary development. Quite the reverse.

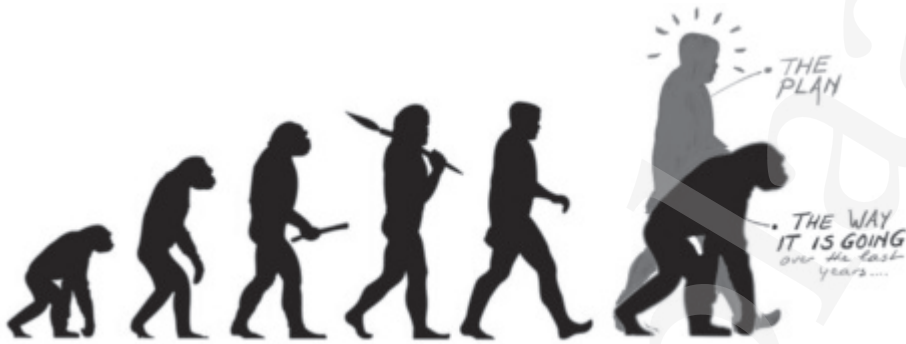


Figure 3 Are we going in the right direction? (© drawing: Mind Your Brain)

We can do better

What are you currently looking for? What would you welcome in your life? Mental calm? Improved concentration? Greater balance? Some peace and quiet? Better focus? Fewer distractions? A less hunted feeling? They probably all sound like attractive propositions, but can these pleasing benefits really be combined with the pressures of modern-day society?

This dilemma is nothing new. Ever since he first emerged, Homo sapiens has been under constant pressure and has always searched to find peace in his turbulent life. The Stoic philosophers referred to this as *apatheia*; the Buddha sought *Upekka*; the Muslims long for *aslama*; while in the Bhagavad Gita yearned for greater *samatvam*, a restful soul. The Greeks talked of *euthymia*, which for Hebrew scholars was the same as *hishtavut*. Early Christian books mentioned the desire to find *aequanimitas*, which is equated with imperturbability and even-temperedness. You would probably have to follow Thoreau's classic example and go and live in a hut in the woods to escape from all the modern world's many stimuli and find this kind of mental tranquillity. Or is there perhaps an alternative?

Stress management will not be enough. You will have to be prepared to simplify your life, to identify the things that are really important to you. You will need to protect your prefrontal cortex, your wise owl, and you must train your mind to find a balance between all the different roles you want to assume. You will have to develop an attitude that is open both for new experiences and for feedback.

AQ - adaptive intelligence - offers an answer to this dilemma

We refer to the skills and the mindset that we will propose in the following pages as adaptive intelligence. This term means the capacity to live your life in a manner that is both stable and flexible. An agile, alert, ambitious and energetic way of living with the right focus on the right things. A serene way of living without overconsumption and without losing your personal harmony. A way of living that takes an open mind as the basis for both our professional ambitions and our private happiness. A simpler life, but a life in which we achieve the things that we really want to achieve.

We will need to live lighter and work smarter

Less things, less pressure, less cortisol, less distraction, less wanting.

More balance, more energy, more focus, more leadership, more resilience, more growth. In short, the correct equilibrium between more and less.

Will this require change? Certainly! Will it be difficult! Certainly!

Will it be possible? Certainly!

Will it bring satisfaction? Certainly, 100 percent!

So what the bleep is AQ?

AQ is the abbreviation for Adaptive Quotient, which is a measure of *adaptive intelligence*. AQ therefore indicates a person's capacity to adjust. It is a new concept and will be the most important differentiator for quality of life in the 21st century.

Being adaptively intelligent does not mean that you will adjust your behaviour at all times and in all places, but only when it is necessary and has purpose. In other words, it is as much about stability as it is about flexibility. Flexibility not as an end in itself, but flexibility based on the solid foundations of stability. You can compare it with a judoka, who is agile and flexible from a stable foundation, with both feet firmly on the ground. In this way, you will be able to wrestle with the challenges you want to face. Flexibility from stability.

In our current age of digital revolution and continuous transformation, IQ and EQ alone are no longer sufficient. The pressure that we all experience in this new age forces us all to think about the next crucial step that needs to be taken: the step to

AQ. AQ at work, but also elsewhere. We like to use the metaphor of a three-legged stool. Of course, it is still possible to sit on just two legs: IQ and EQ. However, it takes considerable energy and muscle power to remain in balance. When circumstances are difficult or when you are lacking resilience and focus, there is a chance that you will overbalance and fall from the stool. That is why you need to develop a third leg: AQ. This leg provides stability, so that you will have time and space to look around you, to organise and prepare yourself to deal with change without losing your balance and crashing to the ground. This will allow you to adopt a proactive approach to yourself and your surroundings, so that you can mean something for others and for society. Viewed in these terms, AQ complements and strengthens IQ and EQ.

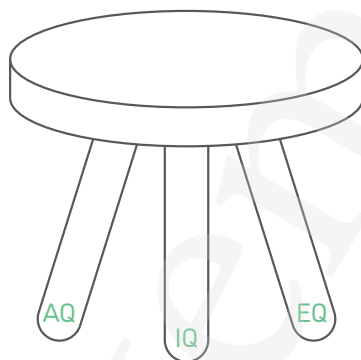


Figure 4 The complementary nature of IQ, EQ and AQ

In our opinion, AQ is the core competence of our time. It is an important competitive advantage in the labour market: an agile profile that many of the newer organisational structures and cultures regard as an economically responsible investment. But adaptive intelligence will also allow you to play your private and social roles with greater strength, calm and satisfaction. Whether you work in education, in the care sector, in a corporate structure or are self-employed, AQ is an added value for every profile, both in the labour market and beyond. How you apply AQ will differ from person to person and case to case. But the basis outlined in this book is broadly the same for everyone. It gives us all the opportunity to remain sustainably employable, whilst also providing us with the greatest possible amount of job satisfaction.

The five principles of AQ

The AQ canvas offers you clarity about the content and components of AQ. This canvas consists of five core principles. Each of these principles has different foundations and is made up of different elements that you can use to increase your adaptive intelligence.

The five principles of AQ are: Energy – Essentialism – Focus – Balance – Growth Mindset. These principles are all linked with each other. In other words, the AQ canvas is not a matter of exact science, but instead forms a systemic, dynamic and organic whole. Having said that, in the following pages we will separate the five components, so that their role and their uses can be simplified and more easily understood.



Figure 5 The AQ model and its five fundamental principles