

Unleashing the Power of Definitions

**A White Paper
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Unlocking the Potential within Definitions

A Process for Achieving Deliberate Improvements

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User Summary

This White Paper outlines a process for finding and then making the most of not-so-obvious improvement opportunities through changes to often commonplace definitions and their application.

Definitions have a latent potential to enrich lives, improve processes and impact individual habits, beliefs, business precedence and the very foundational concepts of all that we do. Leveraging the term definition broadly can truly deliver the unexpected.

Definitions: *The internet redefined how people communicate and connect. $E = mc^2$. Traffic stops on red and goes on green. The three point shot in basketball rules. China, unlike the rest of the world, has only one time zone. Most U.S. prescriptions expire after one year regardless. Science is any field in which progress is marked. Fashion is ever changing. An immigrant is either legal or illegal. Babies born February 29th celebrate birthdays on the 28th. $\pi = 3.14159$. The minimum wage is an exact figure.*

Like the above series of descriptive examples, the term definition will be applied in its broadest context. This framework for definitions will cover uses ranging from customs to behaviors to social norms and practices, descriptions to mathematical and scientific meanings, and rules to rituals to duties to values to relationships and beyond. This is admittedly an expansive view, but it is certainly neither a radical one nor one uncommon in everyday language (refer to the survey results on page 6).

The impact of definitions on work, commerce and life is great and yet often overlooked. Improvements can be achieved through the wiser, more thoughtful application of definitions. An example follows.

An Example: A definition, “secondhand smoke” (see page 13) was established by a group of concerned citizens. Its impact was far greater than that of a) the U.S. Surgeon General, who had declared smoking as unhealthy, b) laws that placed a warning label prominently on each cigarette pack and c) the billions of dollars spent on major anti-smoking public ad campaigns. A single definition both ostracized smoking and transformed the stop smoking effort. It shifted it from changing behaviors one person at a time to implementing a change to everyone’s behavior. This armed American society with the realization that “your smoking can harm me”. As a result smoking is now banned in most public places altogether.

There are five key tenets in this effort.

Key Tenets: In this author’s opinion, there is typically no true meaning in a definition; the best we can do is a sapient meaning (and sapient is described in more detail on page 12). Second, we should be pragmatic to arrive at what is sapient. Third, we can and should be very, very selective in the definitions that we choose to help others improve. Fourth, we will target those definitions with low resistance and the most favorable cost versus benefit potential. Fifth, it is all about deliberate improvement, period.

This undertaking is simply not about changing words, but rather the focus will be on increasing the positive impact of definitions and their application in a measurable, intentional and better way.

Improving definitions is a powerful and largely untapped arena for achieving incremental gains in both business performance and the quality of everyday life. Definitions and their application are a backbone to traverse both modern living and language. It is noteworthy how little attention we pay them. Remarkably, the first step to tackling definitions begins with forming and keeping an open mind to them.

Seeing the Bigger Picture

A process to identify and apply Sapient Definitions is needed now. Otherwise, improvements in definitions and their application will occur as they always have – haphazardly, and that creates problems. Our beliefs, concepts and systems reflect a world that is defined primarily based on precedent and habit. This is what we intend to remedy.

It is simple. We should not solve our problems using the same thinking and baseline definitions that created them in the first place. It often takes a dissimilar perspective to even realize when a problem exists. What is required is a different mindset. Indeed, we need to make over our basic approach to thinking about the role of definitions, and it could work like this:

Sapient definitions can create clarity and understanding; understanding leads to acceptance; acceptance enables reasoned change; reasoned change leads to improvement; improvement may also lead to transformation; and transformation can create renewal.

This is more than a chain of outcomes; sapient definitions (and we describe sapient in more detail on page 12) can provide a starting point from which to improve everyday life, work and commerce. The challenge is to leverage the process outlined in this White Paper for finding and

then making the most of not-so-obvious improvement opportunities through changes to often commonplace definitions and their applications. As individuals, and as communities, it is time to use the common tools of the past in new, novel ways to improve and renew our world.

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Of course, this chain of outcomes is the ideal and as such describes a cycle for creating transformational improvements. See the illustration. Examples include the following.

- The creation of the term secondhand smoke (see the Case Study, page 13).
- The redefinition of obesity in America that has evolved to describe a national crisis.
- The regulatory application of mark-to-market for mortgage securitized instruments and the dramatic results of this definition in the recent world financial market upheaval.

Another potential transformational example is the definition of health by the World Health Organization (WHO). “Health

is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Though this definition has powerful potential, it has clearly not resulted in a transformation. In fact, it is now sixty years old and has not significantly altered the delivery of health care around the world. Obviously for a definition to lead to a transformation a large-scale impact has to occur and then be maintained.

State occupational licensure laws have also had a big impact through the dual effect of controlling competition and altering the delivery of many services and some products ranging from insurance to optometry to teaching. These legal restrictions have in composite created a transformation, but not necessarily a positive one. What is equally interesting is that these definition changes remain almost invisible to both the average consumer and business buyer.

In contrast, most definition improvements will cause just that, incremental improvements not transformations, but that in no way diminishes the need to identify and then implement them. Like life, it is all a matter of scale.

The target audience for this White Paper is those either considering participating in the *Open4Definition* process or already doing so.

Leaping Ahead - Shorthand and Shortcuts

Definitions are the shorthand for life, work and commerce. They have a major bearing on everyday activities. Take an ordinary

activity like driving for example. Definitions ranging from a stop sign to which side of the road to drive on to pulling up to the right address are critical. Definitions simplify almost everything. Without definitions there would be chaos.

Definitions provide shortcuts for a broad range of situations and activities. They impart structure to the inner workings of our everyday environment and make business and trade possible. Definitions enable us to make our way through the day like a finger on Braille deftly handling the bumps along the way. That is because there is common agreement and a general consensus of understanding.

Even difficult and inconsistent definitions like love, freedom and reality are often bandished as if everyone agrees on their meaning.

Definitions are spawned from countless and repetitive human choices and refinements rather than from the laws of nature or Divine Providence.

This agreement is based on both usage and the limitations of language. Definitions are spawned from countless and repetitive human choices and refinements rather than from the laws of nature or Divine Providence. They often evolve over time. Definitions hold a space in our memory when they are both different enough from other words and useful to retain. Some definitions are full of nuance while others are very straightforward.

Survey finds that *“Definitions are everywhere and can come in many forms.”*

We asked respondents their opinion on the veracity and accuracy of twenty-four statements within one section of a ten part survey on definitions. 100% of the respondents agreed that definitions are everywhere and come in many forms. Each statement had five choices ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Following close behind were the following statements.

- Definitions are often used to control behaviors. **88%** (34% strongly agreed/54% agreed).
- Definitions are often used to allocate resources. **89%** (26% strongly agreed/63% agreed).

In different questions, 89% also believed that definitions provide a short hand (and/or shortcuts) for living everyday life, work and commerce while 91% felt that their field of work uses many unique or specific definitions. The latter referred to the broad fields (in descending rank order) of human services, technical, business, financial, professional, healthcare, artistic/creative, sales and general.

Equally revealing was the fact that respondents often used the term definition in a broader and nontraditional context. That is, beyond its customary dictionary meaning. More than one-half had used ‘definition’ to describe values, laws, behaviors, social norms, descriptions and scientific terms while about 45 percent have also applied it to cultural rituals, duties, legal, relationships, religion, rules, customs and mathematics. Indeed of the 38 choices for using the term definition 36 had a normal usage rate of more than twenty percent.

Again, the term definition is widely used and yes, it is undeniably applied almost everywhere and in many different forms.

This on-line survey was by invitation, anonymous and completed in 2008 with a 42 percent response rate. This was a well educated population with a college degree in common. It was not random. It was also a non-statistically tested small sample of under a hundred people, but very revealing none-the-less.

Definitions are currently managed by default. That is, the success of a definition is constantly moving between two extremes: functionality and differentiation. A definition will survive if it is carrying a message that is informative enough and also distinctive from other definitions.

Do we have to ask ourselves or others what to do when the traffic light finally turns “green” or if there is a line ahead or even when our name is spoken? That is because we and practically everyone we know follow almost identical pathways. We go on

green; we choose the shortest line; and if you want to get our rapt attention simply speak our name to others within our range of hearing. While these may not always be the most effective decisions possible they do as a rule strike an acceptable balance between simplicity and our needs of the moment.

A Sociologist might label the illustrations and examples used in this section as conventions, customs, mores or norms, but we know them more commonly and simply as definitions. Yes, these are group habits,

behavioral scripts or established practices that are commonplace. They differ from society to society. What is, however, constant is that definitions - though they may vary - are applied universally. This is the way people know how to act in public to conform. Definitions also often act eerily similar to a body's autonomous system. On the other hand, definitions are truly not a system. They are, nevertheless, interconnected. Collectively definitions matter a great deal more than one might first imagine.

Gauging Needs

Definitions are so ever-present that we rarely go to any extra effort to examine and then improve them. Their shortcomings are often noticeable, but the impact again seems limited. This is because we simply do not pause to think about the considerable influence definitions have over our daily lives and the business occurring around us. We are just busy getting through the intersection ahead and moving on to the next one.

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Is getting through the next intersection the heart of the matter? Possibly, but is this the type of definitions that we should tackle? Yes it is. So how would simply getting through the intersection with less effort, less skill and less danger transform our lives? It wouldn't. Occasionally, an

improvement in definitions will as we discussed be transformational, but most will simply be practical and incremental improvements.

We know that there are bad definitions and over time we usually just learn to live with them. We are seldom sure how to change them, so we habitually complain when a bad definition gets in our way and then we just go on. If the pain is at a low threshold why even bother? Even if we know how to change a definition, it is seldom worth the effort. They ordinarily disrupt things infrequently. After a while, they more often than not become just another definition and therefore require less and less thought. What once was disconcerting becomes commonplace.

However, there is a cumulative effect. Nature adheres to laws of economy, definitions don't. Water takes the easiest route to the ocean while we often drown in the unnecessary complexity of everyday life. Society's solution thus far has been to increase the quantity of definitions, not the quality. It almost seems that we want to redistribute the resulting pain and angst. This, by default, often further complicates everything. Unfortunately, even when we are far removed from life's aggravations, bad definitions may sometimes continue to haunt us.

There is currently no comprehensive process for identifying improvement opportunities for definitions and their varied applications.

There is currently no clearing house mechanism for remedying the impact of poorly performing definitions. Neither is

there a comprehensive process for identifying improvement opportunities for definitions and their varied applications. Nor is there any organized way to address these consistently under-recognized needs. Think tanks habitually focus on larger scale and more emotional issues. That makes fund-raising easier. It also makes it harder to be held accountable for results. Lobbyists are paid to influence legislators not produce improvements.

This inability to deliberately examine and evaluate definitions is, however, purely an artificial and self-imposed restriction. It should be and can be done. Not surprisingly, that is what this consortium, *Open4Definition*, is preparing to do. That is, hopefully, with your help.

Overcoming What is Often Ignored

Definitions are everywhere and come in many forms. We might not often think about it, but we share understandings with almost everyone we meet about what to do, how and when. This eliminates many of those awkward moments in life.

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For example when you don't know what to order at the fast food counter or it is time to decide who goes next at a four-way traffic stop sign. Stumbling on your order at

a restaurant or going through an intersection out of sequence only gets mild disapproval because it is fairly commonplace. It is neither a bad definition nor a barrier to a functioning society.

The issue is not about us blindly following definitions to just get approval or to avoid the disapproval of those around us. For these functional definitions it centers more on everyone just getting by without either being noticed or being forced to deal with the intricacies of our ever changing surroundings. Can you imagine the confusion if we had to use hand signals to reach an agreement each time on who goes next at a four-way traffic stop sign?

Jumping Beyond Dictionaries to Impact

Webster defines "definition" as a statement of the meaning of a word or phrase. This is a descriptive definition centered on language. The term definition as we have begun to describe it is also frequently used in a much broader context. This usage is wide-ranging from customs to behaviors to social norms and practices, descriptions to mathematical and scientific meanings, and rules to rituals to duties to values to relationships and well beyond. That is how definition will be used in this White Paper.

This expanded version of the term definition is becoming more commonplace every day. Our survey found that *"Definitions are everywhere and can come in many forms."* This is, however, based as much on anecdotal evidence as factual

proof. Still, the word, definition is becoming an interchangeable term for numerous long established definitions (see Survey, page 6 for several other examples).

This is not surprising. Meaning and usage are quite often in flux as is language. The dictionary has many words with precise definitions that we often can't agree on in actual usage. Simply log on to a social network or join a circle of friends and ask the question, "What does _____ mean?"

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Try filling in this blank with open-ended words like leadership, ethics, privacy, courage, creativity, compassion, integrity and literally hundreds of others. Disagreement is guaranteed and an argument is even possible. Is this because no one understands that this word has a precise and exact definition in the dictionary? Hardly, definitions can be stunningly personal and also are routinely used as mechanisms to fulfill individual desires. We often make words take on the meaning that best suits the situation immediately at hand.

It could also be argued that the differences in the usage of a word might be defined as distinctions. Another point of view is that it

is really just a matter of perception. Let's consider both. A distinction is all about differentiation. In theory, we often add and subtract freely to an existing definition to make it better fit a situation. That makes it a distinction, which is often and a bit confusingly, based on perceptions. A distinction is one way to fine tune a definition. A perception is ordinarily a baseline for understanding a definition.

Sometimes leaders are careful to choose words that people can create agreement around. That is, words for which there are many different and varied interpretations. For politicians, these include the vagueness of "change", "patriotism", "liberal" and more. For them sometimes the best words have open-ended meanings where their constituents get to fill in the blank space with whatever distinction suits them best. That way nobody really knows what was promised, yet everyone believes that they know what to expect.

We won't even venture into the cultural battle ground of contentious words like anger, fairness, conservative and relationship. That is because the focus of this effort is clearly on improving the impact and application of definitions not linguistics.

Defining the term "definition" broadly makes a common process workable. This also creates a much wider spectrum of improvement opportunities.

Defining the term “definition” broadly makes a common process for improving definitions and their application infinitely more workable. This also creates a much wider spectrum of likely improvement opportunities. Again, our main focal point is not definitions, but their impact.

Using the term definition broadly can also help produce unexpected and positive results. This directly demonstrates the potential and power of this effort itself. This is a not too subtle way of walking the talk. It’s also somewhat counterintuitive, so whatever you decide; don’t get hung up on all the words or even the definitions. We certainly don’t intend to let words get in the way of achieving worthwhile improvements in select definitions in work, commerce and everyday life. You shouldn’t either. Words are simply tools that can and should be used more wisely. That is what the *Open4Definition* approach is designed to systematically accomplish.

Creating Common Understanding

Improving the impact of definitions starts with a deliberate selection process to identify the most likely targets of opportunity. Our focus is two-fold. First, we wish to raise the impact of definitions themselves, and do so selectively. Second, we intend to put changes in motion that also positively enhances the impact that definitions can have by making subtle to significant changes in their application. Again, the initial plan is to do this very selectively. For convenience, these are

labeled as Type 1 and Type 2 Improvements.

An example of a Type 1 Improvement in a definition is ‘secondhand smoke’ (see Case Study on page 13). This is a definition that has and is serving society extremely well.

Another considerably less dramatic example is that both my children get two birthdays each year (see *Open4Definition* website article for more detail). Their second birthday each year is a bonus birthday. This is a Type 1 Improvement because it is both a new and enhanced definition. Of course, a bonus birthday has many of the same traits of a traditional birthday so there is some overlap. The bottom-line, nonetheless, is that by creating a unique definition there has been a long-term favorable impact on family life with minimal outside resistance. Of course, your family could also celebrate bonus birthdays. The only obstacles are tradition, habit and for some the uncertain acceptance of others.

Definitions are typically supposed to serve society, not the other way around. Somehow that is often lost in the avalanche of definitions facing us daily.

There is a select set of definitions among millions of definitions where a conscious change, adaptation or slight modification in application can result in positive and beneficial outcomes. Definitions are typically supposed to serve society, not the other way around. Somehow that is often lost in the avalanche of definitions facing us daily.

For example, let's look at a Type 2 Improvement - a better application of an existing definition. The World Health Organizations description of health is a good example (see WHO at the bottom of page 4 for more detail) of where this has been lacking. An inspiring definition does not necessarily mean that it will be applied.

A less global and much easier example to get our hands around could be as simple as changing Father's Day observance in the United States. That is, from the current third Sunday in June to a day in the early fall or some equally advantageous date on the calendar (visit the *Open4Definition* website under Resources – Articles for more detail). The definition would not change, but the observance could be enriched by a simple change of application (date), which would markedly expand the positive impact of Father's Day on fatherhood.

This straightforward application change would favorably influence the role of fathers in generations to come. This is also potentially a decision that would serve as a catalyst for achieving additional and incremental improvements within our society. It would set many other improvements in motion including the increased participation of fathers in our schools. This might be a simple or complex change in application, depending on your view point. An October Father's Day could be accomplished by a voice vote in Congress. It is merely a change on the Federal Holiday calendar. There, however, would be considerable effort in building support and getting legislators on board. It

would take a well thought out, persuasive campaign to succeed. For a further explanation of the benefits see the story board *First Definitions Prevail - Father's Day Observance in America* beginning on page 22.

Changing the date for Father's Day would not be easy. Still, it is doable. This also provides a further example of how the effort on definitions should concentrate on those improvements, at least initially, where the relationship between the costs of change versus the benefit gained is the most attractive.

What is equally significant about the two examples relating to bonus birthdays and a specific holiday celebration is that there would be only limited organized resistance. Not surprisingly, like the laws of nature there is also a counterbalance. That is, there will in all likelihood not be a significant ground swell of support either, for example to shift Father's Day. These two characteristics are critical factors included in the design of the overall improvement process.

It will take a committed cadre. There are numerous examples of where a "fervent few" can affect the course of action and ultimately the results. Three examples follow from *The Activation Point*, which will also be highlighted in the *Integrating Concepts* section of this paper (see page 17). It only took one soldier's mom to galvanize the public to start questioning President George W. Bush about the Iraq war. It took just nine parents to successfully petition a school board in Vista, California for abstinence-only education. Only ten families of victims pressed for the 9/11 commission, but it happened and in

fact riveted the nation's attention none-the-less.

Of course, neither the bonus birthday nor the Father's Day examples may even make the final target list in their respective *Open4Definition* examiner's efforts. They are used because of both their transparency and their ability to illustrate other concepts, much like widgets and the pizza delivery problem are used in a college classroom to make a larger point.

Flexing the Framework

Traditionally a definition is a statement of the meaning of a word or phrase. This is, as we discussed, a descriptive definition. A definition may also be described as a stipulative definition (imposed by the user; arbitrary), lexical definition (how it is used), persuasive definition (trying to influence opinion or feelings), intensive definition (a specific set; genus), extensional definition (a list of objects belonging within), genetic definition (how it is formed), recursive or inductive definition (using the word itself). These are all language centered. They provide a linguistic structure for creating definitions.

A *Sapient Definition* would on the other hand be defined based on its impact and/or the veracity of its application. This is not simply about language. The litmus test would be whether the improvements once achieved yield worthwhile outcomes and cost effective results.

For a better understanding of why sapient was selected *Thesaurus.com* is referenced. They use *Roget's* to provide the following synonyms for sapient.

acute, astucious, astute, canny, clear-sighted, clever, contemplative, discerning, discriminating, educated, enlightened, experienced, informed, insightful, intelligent, judicious, keen, knowing, knowledgeable, perceptive, reflective, sage, scholarly, sensible, sharp, shrewd, smart, thoughtful, and last, but not least, wise.

***Sapient Definitions* - a better label may emerge over time.
Open4Definition doesn't expect to get absolutely everything right the first time or two around.**

Sapient is also shown as a synonym itself for the additional words - brainy, learned, and philosophic. For more insight into the logic behind sapient visit the *Open4Definition* website Resources – Articles and read *Ben Thinkin'*. This is the label that we are choosing to describe this new, emerging field of work. A better label will hopefully emerge over time. We do not expect to get everything absolutely right the first time or two around.

What the term sapient isn't intended to create is a barrier to participation. Though it may stick in the average reader's mouth, one does not have to be sapient to use its principles.

A Case Example: “Secondhand Smoke” - Backburning the Fire

America spends billions upon billions of dollars to break bad habits or change beliefs one person at a time. This includes efforts focused on addictions, obesity, drinking, exercise and in this instance, smoking. What we commonly overlook is that an underlying definition like *Secondhand Smoke* impacted change much more readily than all the previous efforts centered on changing an individual’s addictive habit; and at an infinitely smaller fraction of the cost.

Beliefs, habits and definitions are rooted in our subconscious mind. Often we can better leverage improvement across a society by tackling definitions first. However, definitions rarely, if ever, make it up on either our billboards or airwaves.

The power of defining “secondhand smoke” as harmful to those in the vicinity of a smoker simply fired everyone up. Yes, the Surgeon General had declared smoking as unhealthy, a warning label was prominently placed on each cigarette pack, the tobacco companies under duress agreed to bankroll major anti-smoking public ad campaigns, and health insurers agreed to pay for stop smoking counseling. We tried to change a filthy and unhealthy habit and the many internal beliefs surrounding it, but with only moderate success. So we next tried to change opinions at an early age in our schools and that had even less effect.

Then the definition, “secondhand smoke” got pushed by a fervent group of Californians. The stop smoking effort shifted from changing behaviors one person at a time to implementing a change in everyone’s behavior. This enabled us to ostracize smoking to outside or contained areas. This shifted beliefs to “your smoking can harm me” and punished those with the habit by setting them conspicuously apart, which ultimately led to banning smoking in many public places altogether.

A brief history from American’s for Nonsmokers’ Rights (ANR) follows. People around the United States began to talk about the annoyance and potential health hazards of secondhand smoke. The smoke gave some people headaches, made some cough and gag, and in the worst case scenario kept those with respiratory illnesses from entering smoke-filled establishments. These concerned citizens banded together to form local organizations called Group Against Smoking Pollution (GASP) that initially engaged in educational work and eventually began to seek legislation to limit smoking in public places.

As of October 2, 2008, there are 2,960 municipalities with laws in effect that restrict where smoking is allowed. There are 760 municipalities; 29 states and 1 commonwealth; and at least 16 countries that have a 100% smoke free provision in effect in workplaces, and/or restaurants, and/or bars.

One can argue that America’s effort to stamp out smoking has been evolutionary. However, if we would have started this effort by leveraging one key definition - “secondhand smoke” - where would society be today and how many lives and dollars could have been saved? Yet, we remain hesitant to consider the potential of definitions.



Little Bird
ANR's Mascot
1976

*Little Bird Artwork
by Tim Mancusi*

Identifying Existing Shortcomings

Definitions are generally based on usage.

When we refer to language this would be called a lexical definition. Again, if you hear the phrase “four-way stop,” what comes to mind? Do you visualize a road intersection; think about the sequence of making it through or both? Then again, when you actually drive up to a four-way stop how much thought do you really give it; even when someone crosses the intersection out of sequence? Probably not too much more thought than when the traffic light in front of you turns green.

Where does a habit start and a definition end? Habits are deeply ingrained into the habitual mind. Definitions are as well. For a more in-depth discussion of the connection between habits and definitions visit the *Open4Definition* website White Paper section, *The illusive Obvious: Our Habits and Definitions are Interdependent*.

Examples of poor definitions locked in place include, for instance, in China, unlike the rest of the world only one time zone is used across the entire country. This was a political maneuver by the Communists when they took over in 1949. Prior to then they had five time zones. China has only a slightly smaller land mass than the United States. Petroleum is still sold by the barrel (42 gallons) while the world’s oil is stored in massive tanks and transported in bulk. The pills in a personal U.S. prescription are good for one year only from the fill date no matter their actual potency or the expiration date on the manufacturer’s bottle from which they were dispensed. The U.S. dropout rate is calculated

differently at High Schools not only from state to state, but within most states. That is, until 2013 when every High School is supposed to use the same formula, which is based on a series of definitions (unless the law is changed or the new definitions are not enforced by the newly elected U.S. administration).

These are a few examples of poorly structured or misapplied definitions. Some matter more than others. To illustrate these shortcomings, let’s examine two of the four previous examples in more detail.

Changing the unit for measuring petroleum from barrels in the United States would have minimal impact and garner considerable resistance from a wide range of vested interest. There would be considerable conflict with numerous industry standards. On the surface this change makes little sense, but below the surface that is not so certain. It is probably worth further examination.

Petroleum represents about a third of international cargo and is also measured in metric tons in Russia and much of the rest of the world. The measurement selected might, however, have more utility if oil were universally measured in liters, as in Japan. This is likely a case where the cost of making a change would outweigh the benefit. The reasons are many. Just because a definition is bad doesn’t mean it is a strong candidate for change. Nonetheless, with the impact petroleum costs and inventories have on the world economy there are likely other definitions (or the way they are applied) in this industry that would be worthwhile candidates. This is a tradition and definition bound industry for sure when they stick to

barrels since the mid-1800's as the key measure of petroleum. At some point definitions used in the field of energy probably should be explored further.

While your pharmacy sells you pills with an arbitrary lifespan of one year, they should remain potent for years beyond that. Pharmacies use a “false date” for several reasons including legal considerations.

While your pharmacy sells you pills with an arbitrary lifespan of one year, they should remain potent for years beyond that. Pharmacies use a “false date” for several reasons, including legal considerations. They want to make sure that no matter how a pill is stored it will remain potent. Prolonged exposure to high temperature or sunlight can break down a pill. It may change color, melt in its capsule form or simply crumble apart, but this won't happen overnight. After all, for a drug to be pressed into a pill it has to be a very stable compound. Many pills can remain potent for years beyond even the manufacturer's expiration date. Most drugs and ointments degrade very slowly especially if they are stored properly. There are exceptions, but whom better than a pharmacist to point that out. Expiration dates seem to be chosen more for marketing purposes than with efficacy or safety and this includes billions of dollars of emergency drugs in federal storehouses stockpiled in case of catastrophic events. This applies to non-prescription medicines as well. So would this be an easy change to implement? Would the benefits outweigh the cost? What is for certain is that with all the entrenched vested interests at play in the

medical arena this would be a difficult target. Still, it is a great example of how a definition (shelf life) can have a significant impact.

Definitions may be used to manage behaviors, allocate resources and exert control. Specific definitions can also be used to contribute to pain and suffering.

Shortcomings are all too common in definitions and their application. They may be used to manage behaviors, allocate resources and exert control. Specific definitions at times can even be used to cause pain and suffering. Extreme examples range from organ donor rules to ethnic cleansing by rouge nations. In these cases it is how definitions are applied both for the good and bad of mankind.

Some definitions represent long standing ideologies and entrenched beliefs. Let's list a few.

- Marriage versus civil union.
- The definition of when life starts is a key factor in the abortion debate between pro-life and pro-choice groups.
- The definition of patriotism.

If there was ever a need for sapient definitions these are it. They are issues where a change in definition would shift the tectonic plates of our society. It is ironic. These are also the type of definitions people most wish to argue and debate. They are for certain the ones for which improvement is most difficult.

It is illogical. Why does society debate the hardest-to-change definitions and all but ignore the more commonplace ones? What has been missing? We believe that a universal process for improving definitions and their application is a first step toward remedying this situation.

Targeting Improvement

The target of this effort will be consistent. That is, where a conscious change, adaptation or modification of a few select or new definitions can result in positive and beneficial outcomes and improvements. The plan is to initially hone in on those definitions and applications where, unlike the four examples in the prior section, only moderate to minimal built-in resistance exists.

The target will be where a conscious change, adaptation or modification of a few select or new definitions creates beneficial improvements.

That is easiest done either where a.) there is not a field of expertise involved or b.) heavy fragmentation and disorder exists within an established field. Of course, there are likely some select definitions even in a long established field where a change would be benignly opposed and the gain would be potentially significant.

A field consists of concepts such as knowledge and practices and describes disciplines and domains in which people specialize. A field requires formal education, certification, work experience, structured hobbies and interests, traditions or other life experiences.

In *The Medici Effect* the author, Frans Johansson, writes that in order for an area to be called a field, a person should conceivably be able to spend a lifetime involved within it. If you can spend a lifetime in a field then definitions truly do matter. Nine out of ten respondents in our survey felt that their field of work has many unique definitions. Definitions allow insiders to exert influence and talk the talk. That is because definitions are almost always specific to a field. Definitions are one mechanism by which insiders stay insiders. They form a barrier to entry for outsiders. This makes a great deal of sense for an electrician, airline traffic controller, structural engineer or physician where lives are at stake. However, lives are at stake in very few fields.

The emphasis, again, will center on Type 1 (a change that leads to a better impact) and Type 2 (a better application of an existing definition) improvements of definitions and we will do this very selectively. It is the low hanging fruit analogy.

Until now there has not been a reasoned way, common template, or practical process to readily achieve improvements in definitions. Of course, some definitions, because of their very nature like a four-way stop, simply defy additional incremental improvement. Possibly that is one reason that roundabouts are slowly beginning to replace four-way stop intersections in very high traffic areas. Traversing them is much more intuitive.

The absence of a definition can at times be a positive. Almost everything real that exists continues whether it is defined or not.

Truths are rarely defined. Definitions do provide structure, but not always the clearest or most beneficial meaning.

Truths are rarely defined. Definitions do provide structure, but not always the clearest or most beneficial meaning. Aristotle felt that a definition signifies the essence. Our focus, in keeping with this and other philosophical underpinnings, centers on making definitions ever more valuable. The goal is to accomplish this with both wisdom and foresight. The hurdle will be to persuade others to know, believe and care enough to want to act on the resulting and most promising sapient definition improvements and applications that evolve from a thorough and thoughtful examination.

Does sapient mean that we will end up with the truth? That is possible, but not all that probable. Indeed, a sapient definition should last just as long as it is working, and when that stops society should create a new one.

Integrating Concepts

In designing this Sapient Definition Process research was done across a wide range of topics. These ranged from the philosophical to the practical with the formative conceptual backdrop outlined as follows.

The design of the improvement process for *Open4Definition* will combine elements through the following conceptual backdrops (see *Open4Definition* website for more detail under Resources – Book Reviews).

- ***The Activation Point*** – Target the participants with the greatest influence over the decision makers. Persuade, create a will to act, overcome barriers and reinforce action.
- ***The Medici Effect*** – Use an intersection of ideas, concepts and cultural viewpoints to combine fields in a collaborative way to achieve unexpected improvements.
- ***Made To Stick*** – Though the six principles of Simplicity, Unexpectedness, Concreteness, Credibility, Emotions and Stories tap into making the resulting definitions surprising, stickier and of course memorable.
- ***The Wisdom of Crowds*** – By making the choices necessary to ensure that the working group is balanced with altruists and conditional consenters and that the outcomes reflect that.
- ***The Secret Pulse of Time*** – In spite of attention being in short supply getting everyone to stay focused on the tasks at hand.
- ***The Power of Story*** – Tying everything together in multi-media stories for publicizing, marketing change, and to reward participants, influencers and decision makers.
- All while staying true to Philosophical theories underpinning all this from work ranging from Marcus Aurelius to Aristotle, Karl Popper's theory of reality to The Thomas Theorem, and Postmodernism to Integral Thought.

This is the structure used in the design of the *Open4Definition* improvement process. However, don't lose sight of the basics. That is, our effort around definitions ultimately focuses on altering both habits and business precedent. At times we may also even succeed in shifting individual beliefs and clarifying business concepts, but those would be just welcomed by-products.

Designing a Process for Improvement

Our process has several unique elements. The key ingredient, however, will be getting participants willing to act and with influence. The plan is to bring great minds, practical problem solvers, radical geniuses and the talent of the truly unexpected together. We will also seek the participation of many others through the *Open4Definition* website and its wiki.

The key ingredient will be getting participants willing to act and with influence.

In the identification stage, examiners from a variety of fields will be enrolled targeted area by targeted area for this collaborative undertaking. In many instances they will also serve as recruiters to round out their group of examiners. Some target areas will be at the intersection of fields while others may conversely be in established, yet highly fragmented fields that are in disarray or simply where ideal opportunities abound.

Parts of this process are modeled on the salons, gathering places for formal and informal discussion centered on a specific

topic, of 17th and 18th century France. However, it will also be practical. The process consists of four major steps – Charter, Examiner, Implementation and Tracking. For more detail see the Process Abstract on the *Open4Definition* website.

Sponsors and donors will be sought - both for profit and not-for-profit. They may become subscribers as well to the body of work in process to create further funding. Foundations will also be selectively approached.

A non-standard, free flowing process will initially be used to select targets. The resulting candidates for change will be grouped into sets of five to fifteen targets. These will include both Type 1 Improvements for definitions and Type 2 Improvements in the application of existing definitions.

These targets will be chosen using techniques similar to those applied in quality management, emerging laboratories and other novel performance improvement and analysis efforts. The selections will be fully vetted. They will be packaged in a common form such as case studies or a project management format with common elements. This will include a cost benefit analysis with timelines clearly dictated.

Many of these initial efforts will parallel existing fields. This is probably unavoidable, but we will tread lightly, at least initially. Territorial fights are almost certain to break out if definitions and their applications are being proposed by an unknown outside body. We will definitely need some good luck and far sighted wisdom at this stage. One tactic that we

might use may be to select targets at the intersection of fields or, if you prefer, those definitions that lie within a “no man’s land”. Another tactic may be to target fragmented fields in disarray. Examples used thus far that fit the concept of “no man’s land” are secondhand smoke, bonus birthdays and changing the date for observing Father’s Day. Other examples might be found in a fast emerging field like Biomedical Engineering. As to fields in disarray, that would definitely be a judgment call, but a subfield, for example, within transportation with today’s widely fluctuating fuel prices might be a good candidate.

The analysis will be done on a case by case basis and at the discretion of each examiner group. Over time practical templates and best practices will naturally emerge. Collaborative software will be used as well as web conferencing, project management tools and various workgroup support systems. The answer, in spite of this, will not lie solely with technology. The will to prevail shall, not surprisingly, be critical.

Implementing Targeted Change

Once a family of sapient definitions is identified, justified and a plan is spelled out to achieve the objectives, a second follow up organization, guided by a Board of Improvement will be formed. This is the implementation stage.

A separate entity will get the changes in definitions implemented.

A separate entity will be chartered to get the changes in definitions implemented. This will mark a clear shift in the effort from

planning to doing. Ultimately, the participants involved at this stage will range from full-time and part-time employees to volunteers and from stewards to boards and influencers to the targeted decision makers themselves. Of course, some participants in the initial examiner analysis and selection stage would carry over into this effort since it will be all about getting their original recommendations implemented.

The conceptual framework for this implementation stage will combine a project management approach with a specific set of objectives, timetables and most importantly, have a planned date ranged operational disbandment timeline. These efforts will be established and organized in the form of corporations, phantom corporations, co-ops or not-for-profits and remain in existence only as long as mile markers are met. This will help ensure that resources are focused on accomplishing the specific goals at hand.

The father of quantum physics and 1918 Nobel Prize Laureate, Max Planck, is quoted as saying, “A scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.” We do not anticipate resistance or a timeline anywhere near this extreme; particularly since most of the targets selected will *not* be ultra-revolutionary though many will most likely be controversial.

This process will, conversely, have some similarity to how significant definitions are changed in fields such as science. In Thomas S. Kuhn’s book, *The Structure of*

Scientific Revolutions he points out that change occurs only after a period of paradigm testing. This relies upon whether the findings and resulting theory fits the facts better than what exists. Indeed, we tend to see as a science any field in which progress is marked over time. In contrast, social science research tends toward problems that urgently need solution, period. If you drew these two differing approaches as a two-set Venn diagram the area of overlap is an intersection. This highlighted area is one in which the Sapient Definition approach will also probably work well.

Admittedly, this is a bit of an abstract way to explain that we intend to target areas where the need for improved definitions and applications is significant and that these can also be analyzed in a factual, logical manner. Still, what is worth noting is that even though Sapient Definitions will be a new process we won't be starting totally from scratch. There are a variety of working models in successful use elsewhere to consult, modify and emulate.

We expect to take a second, third and possibly fourth stab at the course of action that was just outlined. Said simply, this is and will likely continue to be a work in process for the foreseeable future and we will just have to learn by doing.

Surviving Surprises

There will be both favorable and unfavorable surprises in the level of resistance. It will probably make sense to look at implementation like a batting average in baseball. No one gets a hit at every turn at bat nor will every target be implemented completely. We expect that

when opposition is considerably more daunting than anticipated a target or two for definition improvements may be sent down to the minors. Hopefully the remaining targets in an arena, say five, seven or nine will continue on successfully.

It will probably make sense to look at implementation like a batting average in baseball. No one gets a hit at every turn at bat...

The unexpected almost always happens. Poor performing targets may or may not be abandoned. Best case, these side-lined efforts will continue independently in a dotted line relationship with the general partner, *Open4Definition*. This third and occasional stage will operate in the form of self-directed organizations and probably one per improvement target. All such work will be done by volunteers over a much longer term horizon and with minimal support and funding.

The overall administrative funding will be similar to a 'long tail' type approach with associated funding coming from training, workshops and conferences. Possibly there will be additional value created by opening access to thought leaders and implementers. The attractiveness of this amalgamation of change agents would be clearly recognizable to search firm recruiters, employers, universities, governments and others. As the overall process matures we may even add an extra participation benefit and provide a unique outplacement service for key volunteer participants or, at a minimum, seek alliances with search firms. If patents or copyrights are created and are enforceable, additional cash flow would be added. An

annual summary of definition improvements should also be published in both innovative and multiple formats.

The organizational structure for *Open4Definition* will be evolutionary. Initially the focal point will be on building the process, general target identification, fundraising and volunteer personnel recruitment. As we better understand the overall operational needs a hub-and-spoke management-like model will likely evolve. The control will, however, rest with the individual entities chartered with either a.) identification and planning tasks or b.) implementation of recommendations. Again, what is envisioned is that the implementation organization whether in a corporate, not-for-profit or another form will ultimately disband on a planned timeline. It will simply be easier to attract participation and funding in the implementation stage when both the objectives are clear and the major parameters are firm. In short, each effort will succeed or fail on its own merits and on its own predetermined timeline.

Avoiding Pitfalls

Yes, we all resist change - good, bad or indifferent. How many years ago was America going to become all-metric? For further example, declaring January 17th, Benjamin Franklin's birthday, as an international improvement day would possibly make it an easier target to get on the U.S. Federal Holiday calendar than changing Father's Day to the fall. Then again, getting widespread citizen participation on this national improvement day observance would be a real bear of a task. Said simply, if a definition is created, modified or changed and the impact is

minor, why bother? It will not be a sapient one.

There is one overriding belief in this undertaking that must prove true for success to occur. It is that there will be numerous sapient definition improvement opportunities in a wide range of fields (and within the intersection of various fields) where the cost of implementation will be small and the resulting benefit gained significant in comparison.

Taking Action

There will also be the potential for accumulated credibility for this Junto-like (this refers to Benjamin Franklin's early history) modernized methodology for achieving improvements in definitions and their application. Like many other aspects of life, each success will increase credibility and breed additional success.

Everyone will gain. Participants will learn to better handle definitions. While the overriding aim is to improve the common good, let's not overlook another important advantage. **Business and civic leaders who better understand how to improve the creation and management of definitions within their own lives and organizations will gain a competitive advantage.** *Open4Definition* will, almost as an afterthought, enable its participants to engage the world more effectively.

Selectively improving definitions is a largely untapped arena for achieving incremental gains in the quality of everyday life, work and commerce.

Selectively improving definitions is more than just a powerful and largely untapped arena for achieving incremental gains in the quality of everyday life, work and commerce. Definitions and their application form the backbone of modern life and language. At their best they advance understanding and communications and at their worst the application of a definition can potentially result in disaster, death and decay. This can be a stark choice.

In retrospect, it seems remarkable how little attention we actually pay to definitions. Indeed, how many situations have we been in a thousand times, yet never seen? That could change. In fact, it should, but through a proven approach that can result in widespread improvements.

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First Definitions Prevail - Father's Day Observance in America

Father's Day came into prominence in the United States in reaction to the growing popularity of Mother's Day. Its origins go back to 1910.

June was selected simply because the father of a determined American woman by the name of Sonora Dodd happened to be born in that month. Father's Day was recognized by a Joint Resolution of Congress in 1956. In 1972, President Richard Nixon established a permanent national observance date. The third Sunday in June was selected to celebrate fatherhood.

A Sunday was chosen by the Federal Government it seems for three primary reasons. First, Mother's Day was already celebrated on a Sunday and that seemed to be working well. Second, the original celebrations were marked by sermons in church and third, that was just the way it had always been done. It is doubtful that any other day was even considered and besides, Ms. Dodd was a very Christian lady.

Father's Day is now celebrated around the world. Many countries including Canada, France, the United Kingdom, Argentina, India and Japan celebrate on the same Sunday as the United States. However, Spain and Portugal will observe Father's Day in 2009 on a Wednesday in March; the Scandinavia countries celebrate in November while Germany has no celebration at all though they do have a couple of holidays where men are recognized. Denmark and Korea chose different Thursdays in May and early June, 2009 respectively while in Taiwan the choice will be a Friday in August. It seems not everyone is still concerned about when Ms. Dodd's father just happened to be born.

Father's Day was begun in memory and gratitude by this Spokane, Washington daughter who thought that her father and all fathers should be honored with a special day just like we honor our mothers on Mother's Day. Contrary to urban myth, there is no evidence that Hallmark and the other greeting card companies played any role at all in the establishment of Father's Day. The fact that June is a poor performing retail sales month at the end of the second fiscal quarter was also not a factor. Like many decisions, it simply happened with little, if any, forethought, and then once done, precedent prevailed.

If we could take a “blank sheet” approach to the definition of Father’s Day what would be done differently? Many believe that a special observance is unnecessary. It is my contention, however, that a simple change in date would be an exceptional first step toward remedying several of the structural weaknesses in the institution of American fatherhood. Without exploring those gaps in detail, let’s instead focus on the advantages of shifting Father’s Day to the first Saturday in October or some similar date.

The most significant advantage to shifting Father’s Day in the United States to the fall would be that it would become a greater topic of interest, particularly in our elementary schools. It is not just that this would put Father’s Day on a more equal stature with Mother’s Day, which by happenstance is already celebrated during the normal school year. It would more importantly encourage fathers to become further involved in their children’s early education at the beginning of a school year through classroom events, projects and father-related homework assignments.

Saturdays are more ideal for fathers and particularly in October. What truly matters most is that children spend time with dad and the more memorable the better. Let’s face it, June also just doesn’t have as many opportunities for memorable days with dad nor do Sundays for that matter. Forgive my generalities and opinions, but for most mothers a Sunday without cooking, handmade gifts from school and a flower for those who attend church is quite a remarkable day. These are things that just don’t float a dad’s boat.

The best memories are when both parent and child have something unforgettable and positive to share. In contrast with late June, early October in North America has a multitude of additional and tantalizing choices. These range from outdoor activities like football to hunting to baseball playoffs; special cultural events at the beginning of the traditional performance seasons for music, dance and the arts; fall is also the peak season for festivals and public gatherings; and you simply can’t beat the weather for day trips or a weekend get away with the family. Moms like a day off, conversely, dads respond best to a day on with the kids. It is that simple.

One further advantage to shifting to a Saturday observance is that church going families would still have father’s recognized at Sunday services. They and their kids would get a double dip! It would also give many adult children two chances – Saturday or Sunday - to bring the extended family together to celebrate fatherhood.

A shift of Father’s Day into October would also favorably increase its economic impact as well as governmental tax revenues. It is really rather straightforward. The more enticing the choices of activities to do, the more money we will spend both incrementally and overall on Father’s Day.

So why do I believe that this simple change would be a first step toward improving fatherhood. Beyond the adage, timing is everything; it would raise America’s awareness of and increase formal education on the important role of fathers beginning at an early age. It would also result in many more opportunities for fatherhood to be recognized and more importantly to be improved upon by a multitude of others.

Change can create additional and often unpredictable consequences. Historically, we tend to focus on the unintentional, potentially negative ones. However, a straightforward shift of the date for celebrating Father’s Day would result in numerous additional positive consequences. An early October Father’s Day would, at least during the first year of adoption, also open up more discussion on the entire definition of fatherhood itself. In short, good things would indelibly flow from the inevitable increase in national awareness around the role of fathers.

America has changed holidays in the past. Most recently, in 1968, the U.S. 90th Congress decided to create a uniform system of federal Monday holidays, so they voted to shift three existing holidays to Mondays. The law took effect in 1971. As a result, Washington's Birthday holiday was changed from February 22nd to the third Monday in February. Congress adamantly did not want to call this President's Day, but that is what has occurred. Legally it is still on the Federal calendar as Washington's Birthday. This change, however, shifted the focus from Washington and Lincoln, who also had a February birthday, to all past Presidents. Memorial Day and Columbus Day were also shifted to Mondays and seemingly without a blip.

If Ms. Dodd's father had only been born in October we would already be celebrating Father's Day then and maybe Halloween would not be such a big deal. Just think about what goes on in elementary schools across America at the very end of October; doesn't fatherhood deserve at least equal footing?

Ms. Sonora Dodd was the undisputed "mother" of Father's Day and that will never change. It is, nevertheless, for me all about overcoming the power of the first decisions and the initial definitions that she laid down. Times change and this is one change in the application of a definition that would have very little downside. It is definitely worth a second look! Wouldn't it be interesting to see what other countries and governments decide to do in response to a change of date for America's Father's Day celebrations to early October?

Ultimately both fathers and their families the world over will benefit. This would be one logical and doable step toward improving the overall impact of fatherhood.

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