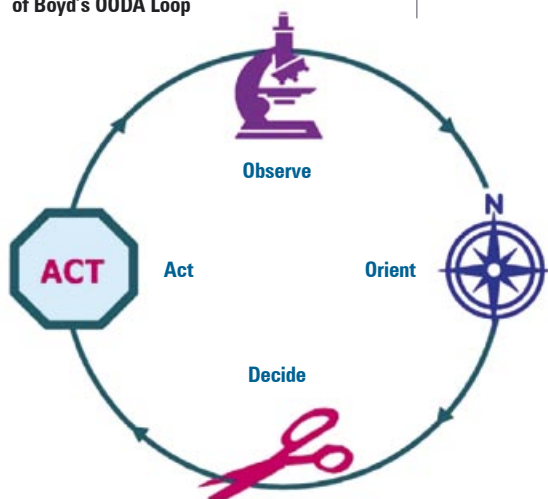


SUPER MODELS

In the first of a new series of articles examining well-known learning models, **Dr Mike Clayton** looks at Boyd's OODA Loop – the Fundamental Decision Cycle

Figure 1: Simplified depiction of Boyd's OODA Loop



Boyd's OODA Loop deserves to be better known than it is. It is a simple and powerful model of the decision-making cycle that trainers and coaches can apply in a broad range of situations. It is a useful model for time management, personal effectiveness, conflict, project management and is also effective in many other areas.

In the OODA Loop, the **Observation** step requires us to collect current information using all of our senses. We then **Orientate** ourselves by analysing and synthesising the data into a model of reality, and comparing it to whatever plan we already have. We must then make a **Decision**, determining how we will act. **Action** is the pursuit of our decision.

We cycle around the loop by Observing the outcomes from our Action, Orientating the outcomes to our intentions, revising our Decision, and making our next Action.

Boyd's assertion is that the faster we cycle around the loop, the greater our control over events. If we are competing against another person (conflict) or organisation (negotiation), or trying to overcome circumstances (personal success or project management), by cycling at a faster rate than they do, we gain an advantage.

Clearly, if you don't Observe and Orientate accurately, your Decision will be flawed. This is not about speed at any price, but about honing your acuity and analysis skills.

Perhaps the reason for the model's relative obscurity is its origin. John Boyd was a colonel in the US Air Force. As a military strategist, he applied what he learned in Korea to developing the OODA Loop. It is also a factor that Boyd's original formulation was more complex than the version presented here.

The core concept of the OODA Loop has been applied far beyond its origins. I have used the ideas widely, and have seen it applied to other areas too: sports, manufacturing and corporate strategy. I would offer two cautions. Firstly, this model may not translate well to every circumstance. Even Boyd said that the best response does not always require each step.

My second caution is to be sensitive in how you introduce and describe it. Boyd's goal was to understand how to win in combat. Some people will have legitimate concerns about the model's pedigree.

Boyd's OODA Loop has many close relations: trainers' plan-do-review cycle, Deming's plan-do-check-act (also called the Schewart Cycle) and, in the world of Six Sigma, define-measure-analyse-improve-control.

All of them recognise the fundamental truth that one intervention is rarely enough to effect the full change that you want. Repeating the intervention may not be sufficient either. The decision cycle makes us examine our world frequently and adjust our approach accordingly.

This brings me to a last insight on the OODA Loop – its place in coaching. The GROW Model (Goal-Reality-Options-Will) is probably the most widely adopted framework in this country, best described in John Whitmore's book, *Coaching for Performance*. Whitmore identifies awareness and responsibility as the foundations of coaching. The OODA Loop is another powerful way of articulating the message that, to grow, we must be constantly aware of our environment and understand it, and we must take responsibility for what we will do, and then do it. ■

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