

Do you recognize your mental noise? Test yourself.

Introduction

This article follows our earlier articles about the [concept of developing mind power](#) in order to optimise performance in sports, business and education and an article about [personal leadership](#). Now we want to go a bit deeper into mental noise: how to recognize it and explore what is the impact of it on your performance and your learning. You can also take a test.

What is mental noise?

Mental noise includes all thoughts, self talk, and tension that can negatively influence your performance of a certain task. It keeps you from being fully concentrated on that task, especially those tasks that are not easy and that you can perform in auto pilot mode. They are tasks that are challenging either by difficulty of the task itself or by the impact of it's consequences. For instance putting from a comfortable distance is not per se a difficult task, but it becomes more difficult when there is a bet of 100 euro at stake or when it is the last deciding putt in the game as opposed to one early in the round. Another example is taking a penalty shot in soccer. It is a relatively simple task where you would score 80–90 % in a training situation but when it is in a real game the score sometimes drops dramatically. This has to do with handling perceived pressure.

Mental noise also makes you point your attention towards the future or the past but never in the here and now. It directs your attention to less relevant aspects of the situation. Very often it brings your attention towards the end result

instead of the process. When an ice hockey player faces the goalkeeper, one on one, and the player is thinking of the end result, it will interfere with what he is doing. His attention should be in the here and now so then concentration becomes optimal and his chances of scoring will rise.



Being occupied with the end result whilst still in the process often is about worrying about the outcome and making a link with negative outcomes from the past in certain situations. The result is that you start acting from fear. Fear of failing, fear of not being accepted, fear of being disliked or perceived as stupid (or even worse: a combination of all ...). This fear becomes your leading motive for action and it will make you play, sell or perform in the under performance mode. You will take less responsibility, you try to avoid risks and you step away from situations which you should deal with. Sometimes people even take irresponsible risk in order to flee from the situation and thereby feel released from the tension. In any case it means that your performance is far below your potential. Also your learning and satisfaction will be undermined.

As we put so much attention towards the concept of mental noise it might seem a negative approach. This is not the case, our starting point is that all the ability and talent is already there and just has to be developed, literally. Nothing extra has to be put in there. It is a matter of recognizing and handling the mental noise so the natural ability and talent can be revealed. It is a bit like an old lamp which has lots of dust on it: when it is polished it will shine much brighter. In our concept the polishing of the lamp will

stimulate and develop the power of the lamp. We will go deeper into that in a next article about focus.

To summarize our approach (just [click here](#) for a more extensive outline):

performance = potential power – mental noise

If the noise is limited towards zero you will perform at your very personal best at that time.

Where does your mental noise come from?

The mental noise you experience comes from all kind of situations you have been through during your life. Those experiences have led to the image you and others have of you. For instance some people think of themselves as not being able to get along in sports. They had some negative experiences and so the image is set. Were you most of the time the last one to be picked out for a team during PE class? Then you probably don't think much of yourself as an athlete. And you probably don't like sports as well and so you never tried to learn really.

We sometimes get participants into leadership and management training who had this experience with sports and they somehow do not perform, learn and enjoy for what they are worth. As they feel insecure and are afraid of the active sports part of the training in which we make people experience our concept of mind power. The beauty is that we especially help those people experience that they can enjoy, learn and perform much better than they (and even the other participants) would ever expect by using our alternative learning and performing approach. Participants experience and get to know that their self perception and each other often blurs the true picture.

So often our mental noise keeps us from performing, learning and enjoying ourselves but even more important is that it also diminishes the space we provide for others to do so.

The way of learning and dealing with difficult situations also can either provoke mental noise or prevent it. In time you develop certain strategies to handle high pressure situations, of course those strategies might have worked in certain situations but in a new situation we sometimes need to reset and clearly explore how we can handle them. The question is also, "have we really dealt with the problem or have we just developed ways to go around it"? For instance if you jump out of an airplane as it is on fire you use the parachute of course, but most people tend to drag the parachute with them for the rest of their life without considering if that is really needed. Even worse they even drag the parachute behind them when they enter a submarine or a rally car...



Now the question is whether you always have to eliminate the root cause of your mental noise. From our experience it seems that this is not always needed. Mental noise comes in different levels: 1) The surface level: actual, concrete self talk, tension and thoughts that come into our head, 2) An under stream level which is about the patterns that you consistently show and 3) The bottom level which has to do with basic fears and beliefs. If you really can make people aware of their first level of mental noise and build up the trust they can deal with that, most of the problems are tackled. Only when people experience that their life is not the way it should be and they have real issues to deal with do we go down to level 2 and especially 3 in order to clear the mental barriers on that level.

Mental noise and learning

As we have already pointed out, the foundation for mental noise starts with the learning process. Let's take a look at the learning process of a baby to walk. She learns walking by true perception of her self and the surroundings. She learns by feeling, seeing, hearing and doing. There is no technical instruction at stake and if her baby friend of a few months younger already walks she does not think: "– beep–he walks already and I am still only trying. I need better technical instructions. Or maybe I am just not very talented. Maybe I should stick with crawling on four legs as I do quite nicely..." Fortunately the baby has no such mental interference. It just does.

In the classical way of learning there is a defined system in which the pupil has to learn from an expert. The pupil has to fit into the system. Instead of the other way around. The pupil gets feedback on wrong and right behaviour, and it is here that the mental noise creeps in. Because the pupil wants so badly to perform well, mistakes need to be avoided. But in this approach the mistakes are needed to improve ... What a nasty dilemma! And all the instructions (and even worse the judgement therein) of the tennis teacher are still there when a backhand is hit 10 years later. That backhand is hit out of fear: it is hit from high to low giving backspin as a result. The instructions and the implicit judgement of "wrong") have not worked....they still interfere. Let's suppose you would be able to hit that backhand fearless, with no instructions and judgement in the background. What would that bring us? It sounds interesting but also unbelieveable doesn't it? To be honest it can be done: we help our participants to play a solid but relaxed oriented backhand in about 20 minutes. By focus learning: really discovering and developing the motor and mental skills that are needed it works faster, better and with more fun than the classic learning approach. In one of the future articles we will go deeper into the concept of focus learning. If you can not wait to find out yourself contact us for a demo session... Now you know everything about mental noise

you are probably very anxious to know what impact mental noise has on your performance. So take the test to get an idea and see for yourself .

Mental Noise Test

Score every statement with a 1,2,3 or a 4

(4=totally agree 3=agree a little 2=disagree a little 1=totally disagree)

- 1) I am quite easily distracted carrying out certain tasks
- 2) I sometimes worry about the outcome while carrying out the task
- 3) My striving for perfection sometimes inhibits my success
- 4) I feel the urge to live up to expectations of others or myself
- 5) I quite often experience fear of failure
- 6) I tend to under perform in high pressure situations
- 7) I often misjudge other people by filling in for myself what they feel and think without really checking
- 8) I get annoyed by people who do not fulfil my expectations
- 9) I tend to judge people too early
- 10) I get frustrated when things do not go as I want

Please add all the scores

10–17 points: you are hardly influenced by mental noise. Keep enjoying life. Do you want to become an EFFEQT partner?

18–25 points: you do fine but there is some room for improvement. Call us for a demo ☺

26–33 points: you do have a significant amount of mental noise. Think about it. We provide telephone coaching..

34–40 points: breaking down mental noise can change your life. Consider EFFEQT Portugal action coaching.

NB: of course you should take the results of this test not too seriously. The idea is that you consider your own situation or your team or your organisation be that in sports, business or education.

Now you know what mental noise is, where it originates from and what it has to do with your learning. You have an idea of how it impacts yourself. The next step is how to stop mental noise and prevent it. And how does focus learning work in practice. Those subjects will be addressed in future articles. For now on behalf of the EFFEQT team I wish you a merry Christmas and a happy 2009.

Geo van Dam

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