

# Niche Update

**Special points of interest:**

- Diffusion of Responsibility
- The illusion of Confidence
- Spotlight on the SPQ
- Christmas hours
- Change to IQ age adjustment

## The Invisible Gorilla - How our Minds Deceive us

I would recommend a fascinating book called *The Invisible Gorilla* by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons. It explains many illusions humans are prone to experiencing that impact on what we see and perceive around us. While the book is full of interesting gems I want to share a couple of cases from the book which I think are relevant to businesses, and how people work together and perceive things.



The first case illustrates how imperfectly we take in information we see. The researchers made a video of two teams of students who were passing a ball to one another. One team was dressed in black and the other in white. Then they got other observers to view the video and count how many passes the white team made while ignoring the black team. If you want to count yourself go to [www.theinvisiblegorilla.com](http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com) before reading further.

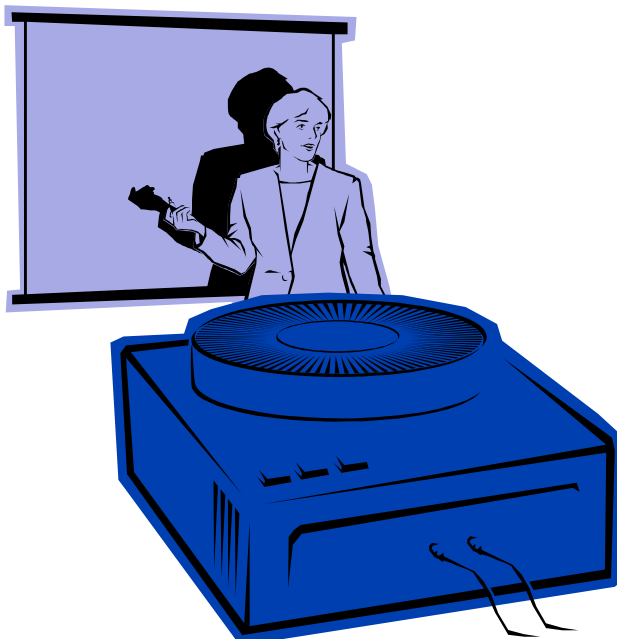
After viewing the video the observers wrote down the number of passes they counted and were asked if they noticed anything else unusual in the video. However, the study is not interested in pass counting ability it is really measuring how many subjects noticed an unexpected event about halfway through the video. This unexpected event was that a person dressed as gorilla walked between the players, thumped its chest and then walked off. Over many repeats of this experiment in different countries and diverse audiences, always around half the subjects did not notice the gorilla and when it was pointed out are very surprised at what they have missed.

This phenomena is termed *Inattention blindness*, meaning we miss a lot of what goes on around us especially when we have our attention tuned to some other aspect of the visual world. How could people miss something so unexpected? This book illustrates through a series of experiments and real life situations that humans are not good at spreading our attention over lots of things and we are not always able to see the unexpected.

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# Crowd Behaviour & The Diffusion of Responsibility

The recent tragic case where a 2 year old Chinese girl was run over by a van and 18 people walked past her bleeding body, illustrates a concept in psychology called the **diffusion of responsibility**, which is seen in crowd behaviour. The concept basically shows that when we see someone who needs assistance from us, we are more likely to assist the person when there are less people who see the problem. When more people see the problem, the responsibility felt in an individual is lessened by the knowledge others also saw the situation and share that responsibility, therefore the willingness to help seems to be diffused over the group.

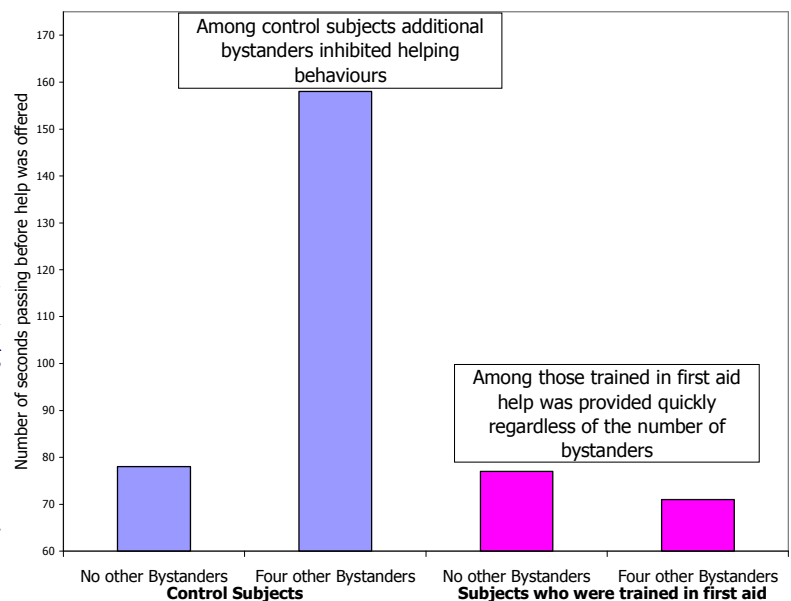
Almost always in groups of 3 or less, humans will jump in and assist someone in need, however when the group is larger than 10 then almost no one will quickly get involved. Therefore the best chance a person has of getting help when they are injured or hurt is that fewer people observe them rather than more. However, there is a way you can improve the likelihood of intervention by someone even in larger groups.

Psychologists believe some of the reasons people may not help others are that:

1. they may not feel competent to assist
2. they fear making a mistake when assisting

So an experiment was designed to measure this and researchers trained some students in first-aid procedures and then 3 weeks later the individuals were involved in an unrelated experiment where a stranger started choking and was unable to breath. What researchers found was that in the trained student group, even when there were four other bystanders, those who had received the training were as quick as those with only one bystander to offer assistance. The graph above shows this significant difference. Another interesting

outcome of the study was that if the emergency arose six weeks after training then the same effect was negligible, indicating people need repeated or recent exposure of what to do in an emergency, if you want them to assist when there are several bystanders who are present to intervene in the situation. (Baron & Byrne, 1984).



## Assessment Spotlight - About the SPQ\_GOLD

The SPQ\_GOLD is an assessment that is designed to measure something quite different from personality. Whereas personality assessments, such as the CPI, measure a person's preferences and is about who a person is, the SPQ measures fears and anxieties that influence how someone behaves. Fears and anxieties drive behaviour just as much as personality does, as fears make us feel uncomfortable and generally we avoid doing things that make us uncomfortable. Alongside a good personality tool, this can provide very valuable information about a candidate.

The SPQ is very useful for identifying training and development issues for people who need to influence, network, build relationships, manage people, or negotiate as part of their role. While on the surface this seems to be a sales oriented tool, most roles have competencies linked to some aspect of influencing, whether it be managing upwards, presenting to groups, managing conflicts, building relationships, selling ideas and communicating confidently. This is where the SPQ provides very valuable information about the likely behaviours that you will see in people and even when their personality profile may tell a somewhat different story.



## The Invisible Gorilla - Continued - The illusion of confidence

One other illusion we wanted to share is called the *Illusion of Confidence*, which shows we tend to believe, trust and follow people who are more confident. However, confidence is not related to ability, intelligence, nor competence. In fact, they did find incompetence is often related to over confidence, the person who does not know the complexities of a new subject or skill often seems to overrate their own confidence in how good they think they are doing in it.

Confidence levels also affect group behaviours, Chabris & Simons conducted an experiment where a group of 4 people had to solve mathematical problems, and they also had measured the individual's mathematical abilities. How do you think they would decide on an answer, would they discuss and/or work out the problem together letting the best mathematicians solve the problem? Unfortunately not, in 94% of the cases the final submitted answer was the answer of the person who spoke first. Those who spoke first tended to be the most confident and dominant (as measured by a personality inventory), yet when analysed, these people had no better than average in maths ability. Others believed their maths answer was correct due to the individual seeming so confident in their answer, and this confidence was assumed to be an indication of ability.

Surely in business our consultative approach of group discussions and consensus should lead to better decision making. However, in this book they make a convincing case that in some instances we make worse decisions. Take the simple task of guessing how many jellybeans are in a jar. If a group gets together to discuss this and then arrives at consensus agreement about the estimated number this strategy is completely outperformed by the following — ask each individual to guess without any prior consultation with others the number in the jar and write it down, then someone can tally up and average all independent guesses and you are mostly likely to be closest to the actual number in the jar.



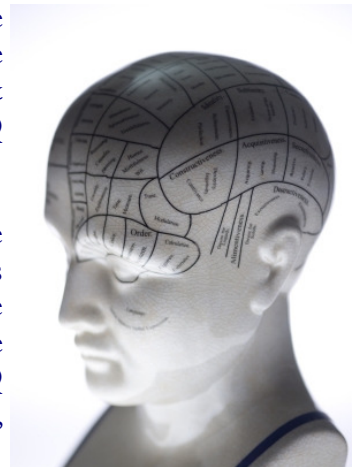
The reason this should be a concern to those in organisations is that in groups we will often follow the most confident individual's suggestion, and in doing so sometimes we can reach worse decisions than we would alone or independently. Of course in the above example there is not a jellybean counting expert in the group, however if you think of your group decision making processes, how often do the less confident (but often more expert) get their ideas listened to and adopted? It becomes even worse if the most confident person is the leader and they speak first, how often do you think a different perspective or option will be adopted — rarely at best. Perhaps all leaders out there should

hold back their views in meetings before others have had their say, and at the very least more information will get out on the table with which to make decisions.

## Wonderlic IQ Test – Change to Adjustment for Age

The IQ testing has been proven by Schmidt & Hunter (1998) to be one of the most predictive tests of job performance available, and it is even more predictive than job experience. The Wonderlic IQ test is one of the IQ tests Schmidt & Hunter studied and it has been proven over time to be a reliable and valid IQ measure.

Traditionally Wonderlic recommended a small age adjustment to the IQ raw score as people got older, however their recent research does not support this, and as such they are no longer recommending any age adjustment is done when using the tool. In line with these new findings, Niche Consulting has stopped using the age adjustment. The IQ raw score is used to convert a person's results into the IQ result and their percentiles. Should you have any further queries about this change, please do not hesitate to call Neisha to discuss.



## Christmas & New Year Hours

Christmas is just around the corner and as usual Niche Consulting will close for a few weeks. Our hours over the Christmas break are as follows:

Closing midday **23rd December**

Re-opening with Skeleton Staff from **9th January** & Fully Staffed **16th January 2012**

From the team at Niche we wish you and your families a happy and safe holiday session.

