

# Knowledge Worker

## A Moment of Insight

(January 2020)

A while back I was working with a client who was trying to develop a national network of preferred partners for an emotional intelligence assessment and certification business. He gave me no clear-cut assignment but instead asked me to work with him on this and that. These loosely-defined tasks included strategy, a strategic plan, metrics and a rear-view mirror to go along with them, etc., etc.

One day he told me he knew what he wanted me to do. He said he had figured out that I am a good builder of “operational constructs,” which apparently means he thought I knew how to figure out how to get something done. One of his aims was to create and conduct monthly, online meetings with the network of preferred partners he is building, and he asked me to “operationalize” that, which I took to mean I should figure out what all is involved with such meetings and lay it out in a way that he can execute. So, I went to work. Enter here the moment of insight indicated in the title.

The first thing I did was to sit down with a pen and pad of paper and start jotting down the kinds of issues that would be involved in doing what my client wanted, specifically, issues related to online or virtual meetings. These included things like agenda, scheduling, meeting conduct, follow-up, invitations, meeting platform, etc., etc. The first cut had almost 30 items listed in mainly one or two words. The eventual list consists of almost 40 items in bullet point format, accompanied by elaborative comments. The list was generated in random order and remains so. Here’s the insight.

What I was doing has much in common with putting together a jigsaw puzzle. The items on my list were akin to the pieces of a puzzle. I knew they were all pieces of what I was trying to build and what I was trying to do was figure out how they all fit together and what, if any, pieces were missing. The picture on the box was emerging as I examined the various pieces and I was reasonably clear at that point what that picture looked like. In other words, I could create for my client an “operational framework” for his monthly, online meetings with the members of his network. In fact, I’ve already completed it and I’m comfortable with the way things look.

As mentioned above, I started out by brainstorming all the issues I could think of that would be associated with a monthly, online meeting. I do that kind of thing a lot and I used to worry that I was disorganized. What I am realizing is that I am in fact quite organized and I am bringing order to what is or was a very messy situation. What is worth noting is that I still haven’t sorted or ordered the pieces; they remain randomly-generated items on my original list. Where order eventually appeared is in how all those items fit into the operational framework I developed.

Here’s the bottom line: When you are confronted with a puzzle and are unsure regarding what to do or the end you should have in view, don’t be afraid to start out by simply listing all the relevant issues that come to mind. You can sort them out and piece them together later. The process looks like this:

Step 1 – Gather up all the pieces you can find

Step 2 – Start looking at how they fit together

Step 3 – Connect as many pieces as you can

Step 4 – Get a feel for the big picture

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Step 5 – Look for any missing pieces

Step 6 – Round up the missing pieces

Step 7 – Put them all together

### Afterword

Not long after I prepared the draft of this column, my client contacted me to let me know he was delighted with the framework and tools I prepared for him. He said the meetings were going really well and he had additional things in mind for me to do. I guess I put the pieces of the puzzle together.

### About the Author

Fred Nickols is a toolmaker, a knowledge worker, a solution engineer, a writer, a consultant, and a former executive who spent 20 years in the U.S. Navy, retiring as a decorated Chief Petty Officer. In the private sector, he worked as a consultant and then held executive positions with two former clients. Currently, Fred is *Chief Toolmaker* and *Lead Solution Engineer* at [Distance Consulting LLC](#). His web site is home to the award-winning [Knowledge Workers' Tool Room](#) and more than 200 free articles, book chapters and papers. Fred writes this column on a monthly basis. All previous Knowledge Worker columns are accessible by clicking [here](#).