Workbook

Use the FOCUSED Framework to help you open up the alternatives to your toughest unsolved problems, issues and challenges

The FOCUSED Project

Brief background / context:

We live in a VUCA world where our environment is VOLATILE, UNCERTAIN, COMPLEX and AMBIGUOUS. As a result, the type of problems, issues and challenges we face are becoming more ill-defined, unstructured, non-routine, and highly complicated. If that is the case, we need new ways of thinking about them if we are to better deal with them. In fact, most of our toughest problems remain unsolved because we end up resorting to our past habitual attempts without being open to "otherness": other forms of reasoning, other forms of logics, other forms of explanations and to other ways of knowing. Because the world is complicated, we have designed this FOCUSED framework to help complicate your understanding of the real world (in positive ways) and in this process, help open up the alternatives and set you free from your current predicaments.

Why is it important?

The "Staying F.O.C.U.S.E.D." philosophy is a strategic thinking framework designed to help prepare the next generation of thought-leaders for a complicated world. It is a highly structured framework designed to help you open up the ALTERNATIVES to UNSOLVED problems, issues and challenges. The framework is not just about problem-solving but also problem-setting. It is more than just a thinking tool, but very much about your thinking, feeling and acting. And it is not just about creativity but a tool designed to open you to "otherness". By using this framework, you will be guided to learn *BETTER*, learn *FASTER* and learn *MORE* than you are currently used to. What started off as a simple and fun teaching innovation to help take students' learning to the next level, is now being used by mainstream researchers, doctoral students and senior executives across multiple disciplines and industries to help them open up the alternatives to unsolved problems, issues and challenges.

What does F.O.C.U.S.E.D. acronym stand for?

The "staying F.O.C.U.S.E.D." philosophy was based on an extensive survey of 400+ business students and faculty in 2009. It was grounded on a fundamental question: *"what is one thing our students need to do, and if they did that one thing, it would take their learning to a higher level?"* The key findings culminated in the importance of seven (7) core competencies much sought after in the real world of business and competitive advantage:

F – Bring **FRESH** perspective

O –Think, feel and act like an **OWNER** / manager

C – Show **CONNECTED**-thinking

U – Have a sense of **URGENCY**

S – Show team **SPIRIT**

E – Always **ENGAGE**

D – Exercise **DELIBERATE** practice

Over the course of 8-years since its inception, we have scientifically, systematically and rigorously tested, retested, validated and revalidated this framework with practitioners using surveys, card-sorting methodology, clinical psychological interviews and successfully conducted a longitudinal (T1/T2) experimental design to further confirm the usefulness of the framework.

Please scan this QR code to get access to the FOCUSED Project YouTube channel
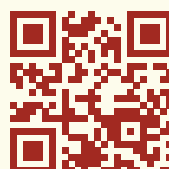
How to use this workbook

The purpose of this workbook is to guide you on how to record your discussions as you roll and apply the FOCUSED framework to your chosen unsolved problem, issue or challenge. This workbook will help you document in a systematic and structured way, your thoughts and ideas as you roll the seven (7) dice of the framework. This workbook can also be used as a standalone reflective exercise booklet without the aid of the seven (7) dice. If you have more than one unsolved problem, issue or challenge to solve, you may print out the pdf version of the booklet multiple times or you can simply use the "fill-in" e-version of this workbook and save your input as an e-document of your discussions. The beauty about the FOCUSED framework is that you may either use it individually and/or use it with your project team.

A few simple steps:

1. First, think about your unsolved problem, issue or challenge and then write it down in the space provided in **page3**.

2. If you have the physical dice or the App version, roll all seven (7) dice to see which sides land facing up.

3. Now pick up one dice, read it out aloud, pause to think about it, then begin the discussion process in relation to your chosen unsolved problem, issue or challenge. As you reflect upon and discuss each item of the dice, be sure to use this workbook to record / document SPECIFIC EXAMPLES that will help you open up the alternatives to your specific unsolved problem, issue or challenge.

   Note that you can pick up the dice and discuss them in sequence starting from the "F" dice all the way to the "D" dice. Alternatively, you can start by choosing a particular dice first depending on your circumstance or preference. For example if you are in an urgent situation and you really need the problem solved asap, then you should start with the red "U" dice (which stands for Sense of Urgency); or if you are in need of fresh new ideas, then you will pick up the yellow "F" dice (for a Fresh Perspective), and so on it goes. Of course you don't need to go through all the 42 items on the seven dice; however, it is advisable to go through as many of the items so you can gain peripheral vision of your predicament.

4. Once you feel you have exhausted the possibilities through multiple perspectives using the FOCUSED framework, take a moment to go through all your entries in this workbook. This review should give you some insights on the way forward. Now go to **page21** and fill in your top three (3) action plans accompanied by a realistic timeline.
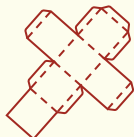
If you don't have your own set of FOCUSED dice, you can make your own paper dice by scanning this QR code

You can download a FREE early prototype App version of the "Focused dice" at Apple Store and Android Google Play Store. Enjoy!

The UNSOLVED problem, issue or challenge I want to solve is

(Be clear and specific when you write down your unsolved problem, issue or challenge. How you frame your words will have a determining factor in how you see your problem, issue or challenge.)

Briefly list three (3) approaches you are currently using to deal with this unsolved problem, issue or challenge:

First approach:

Second approach:

Third approach:

FOCUSED

"F" is the Yellow dice - it stands for a <u>Fresh Perspective</u> - bright and optimistic; creating new ways of thinking and new ways of doing

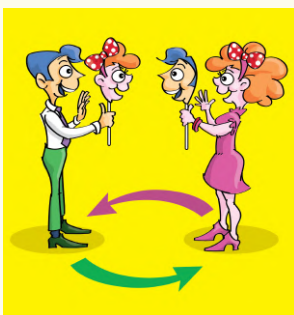| Dice	Item Meaning	Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
	Who are our new customers / competitors? This is not a common question to ask. Yet, by asking it, it forces us to think beyond the current situation and into anticipating possibilities. It will help extend our thinking in regards to the current unsolved problem / issue / challenge you are currently facing.	
	How does this advance what we already know, don't know and need to know? Is what you have in mind to solve the issue something we already know? If so, then it won't be a fresh perspective! The key here is to think about ways we have not thought about before; or to use existing ideas in new ways. How does your approach to solving the problem provide a fresh take on the issue?	
	When we see things differently, we see different things Try to look at the unsolved problem from a different angle / perspective. What do you see? A simple example is when two actors change roles and begin to act the character of the other; or when you are making an argument for a specific idea, force yourself to change your thinking and argue against your own idea. See what happens when you begin to see things differently; most likely you WILL see different things.	

F OCUSED

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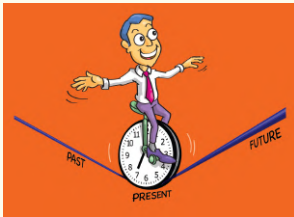| Dice	Item Meaning	Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
	What would happen if you did the opposite? As counter-intuitive as this may sound, it has the power to open up a very different take to the problem at hand. For example, if your habit is to always leave things to the last minute, what would happen if you started early?	
	Think value co-creation Instead of trying to create value by yourself or within your own work team, think about co-creating the value with key stakeholders to add more richness to the problem-solving.	
	Redefine / reinterpret / reconstruct / reframe / rethink Socrates once said: "*A life left unexamined is a life not worth living*". Hence it is important to always re-examine our views of the world. Similarly, "definitions" by their very nature are set by certain people in a certain period of time. Depending on how you see a situation, there can be more than one definition! What would happen if you re-define a situation or re-interpret or re-construct it? The key here is to see if you can reframe the unsolved problem / issue / challenge in ways that will help open up the alternatives. For example, one way of addressing an issue can be to answer it directly: "What is 5 + 5?" However, when we *reframe* it to "*what two numbers equal to 10?*" this opens up more alternatives about the issue!	

F**O**CUSED

"O" is the Orange dice - it stands for <u>Think, Feel and Act like an Owner / Manager</u> - it's about taking ownership and doing it for real

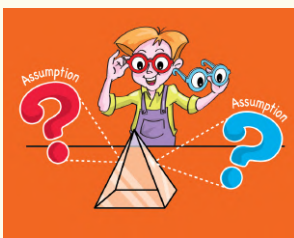|		Given what this item means on this dice, what **<u>specific example</u>** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
Dice	Item Meaning	
	Understand the context (situation, time, history, relations...) Given the challenge you are currently facing, think about what is the present situation / context telling us? At what point in time is this problem occurring? What can we learn from past (historical facts) about how this problem came about? How was it dealt with in the past? How is this unsolved problem connected to other issues in the past, present and in the future?	
	What are the current taken-for-granted assumptions? (and question your assumptions) Go deeper into what assumptions underpin the current unsolved problem / issue / challenge. A lot of the time, "assumptions" drive our thinking, feelings and actions - and so it is important to discuss what are these "*<u>current</u>*" taken-for-granted assumptions. Remember, assumptions can change over time - and so it is important to question our own assumptions about things you are currently facing.	
	Visualize your goals Before a painter put brush to canvas, s/he sees the picture mentally. If you think of what you want to achieve by dealing with your unsolved challenge (in terms of painting), what do you see? Is the picture you are thinking of worth painting? Just like an owner / manager, we need to "see" our goals in our mind so that we can put them into action. What is it you want to achieve by solving or better dealing with this unsolved problem?	

"O" is the Orange dice - it stands for <u>Think, Feel and Act like an Owner / Manager</u> - it's about taking ownership and doing it for real

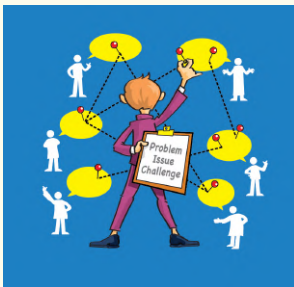| Dice	Item Meaning	Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
	Talk to more people in and outside your field for feedback One of the hallmarks of successfully getting deeper insights on an unsolved problem is to literally talk to more people in and outside of your field and at different levels to get feedback. Find out what they think about the issue and how they would solve / better deal with it.	
	Anticipate the future (what if...) What would happen "if" we solve the problem in a particular way? Life is all about "anticipation". Brainstorming the "what if" scenarios has the power to open up more alternatives in better dealing with our unsolved problems / issues / challenges.	
	Think like your competitor Imagine you are now on the "competitor's side"; how would they deal with the current issue you are facing. Would they do it in a better way? Put yourself in the competitor's shoes and THINK what they would be thinking when dealing with the problem.	

FO**C**USED

"C" is the Blue dice - it stands for <u>Connected-thinking</u> - creating Blue Oceans when ideas (e)merge

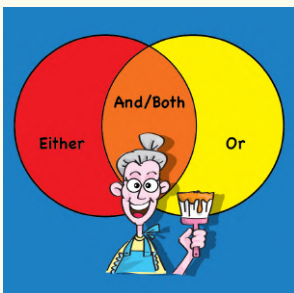| Dice	Item Meaning	Given what this item means on this dice, what **<u>specific example</u>** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
	What are the current conversations in the field? Given the type of phenomenon you are currently dealing with, find out how others in your field are currently dealing with it. What are they saying about this phenomenon? What are the different points of views about it? Once you become familiar with these current conversations, you will be in a better position to deal with the unsolved problem / issue / challenge you are currently facing.	
	What is in the foreground and background? Try to zoom-in and zoom-out from the problem you are currently facing. What is happening right in front of you? What is happening in the background? Look at them together and see the connection between them. A good example is when we are looking at a landscape painting; the artist has positioned certain things in front - yet to fully appreciate the awe of the painting you also need to look at what is happening in the background.	
	Every expert knows there are alternative explanations for a given phenomenon of interest This is a powerful insight. Be aware that there are always more than one explanation for why things happen. Limiting yourself to "one" explanation closes the possibilities of better dealing with unsolved problems. Look at a variety of (competing) explanations to get a deeper sense of why things work and why things don't work.	

FO**C**USED

"C" is the Blue dice - it stands for <u>Connected-thinking</u> - creating Blue Oceans when ideas (e)merge

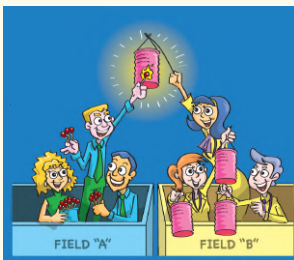| Dice	Item Meaning	Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
	Either / Or logic versus And / Both logic When faced with competing ideas, most managers are inclined to choose either option A or option B. This is called "Either / Or" logic. Yet, a much higher level thinking is to be able to look at opposing ideas and see if we can "integrate" them to generate deeper insights. This type of integrative / connected-thinking is based on "And / Both" logic. Roger Martin's work on the "Opposable Mind" (2007) and Albert Rothenberg's (1979) work on the "Emerging goddess..." look at how highly creative people bring opposing ideas together to create something new and compelling. Elite athletes for example experience both high adrenalin and relaxation at the same time during peak performance; Beethoven used both soft and hard music notes at the same time; and Picasso used both hard brush strokes as well as soft brush strokes to produces breathtaking masterpieces.	
	Think multi-discipline, multi-level, multi-method, multi-time, multi-space Solving complex problems cannot be done from one angle or approach. It literally requires a 360-degree strategy incorporating multiple perspectives! By looking at your challenges from different disciplines, from different levels, collecting information from different sources, and at different times and locations, can really give you a deeper sense of the current challenge you are facing and hence open up more alternatives to better dealing with them.	

"C" is the Blue dice - it stands for <u>Connected-thinking</u> - creating Blue Oceans when ideas (e)merge

Dice	Item Meaning	Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
	Best ideas come from outside of your field The solution to your unsolved problem could be "outside" of your field! This is very counter-intuitive but very true. Best ideas do come from outside of our field because they provide a different way of thinking about the issues we are dealing with within our own field. A simple yet powerful example is how the military looked into flying insects to come up with the idea of insect-spy-drones; or how the traditional toy industry eventually realized the power of the computer industry to reinvent themselves; or even how banks looked into hotel concierge to provide premium services to their clients... The key in all these is to look for "connections". Sometimes ideas appear totally unrelated to what we are dealing with; yet it is making the irrelevant relevant that is the compelling insight!	

FOC**U**SED

"U" is the Red dice - it stands for a <u>Sense of Urgency</u> - taking action now with clear purpose and energy

Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?

Dice	Item Meaning
	Set agenda and timelines (prioritize / write it down) This is important - especially when we are dealing with complex issues. You really need an agenda / a plan of action. Rank them from most important at the top to least important at the bottom. Give each item a time-frame so you know there is a start and an end point. WRITE THEM DOWN and cross them off as you complete them.
	Say more with less This is a skill-set in itself. Not many people know how to do this well so it is important to master it. We don't have all the time, money and resources in the world to deal with our unsolved problems / issues / challenges. So it is important to have a clear picture of what needs to be done to deal with it. The key, as in most things in life, is to literally "do more with less" / "say more with less"! Simple examples are TED Talks (see TED.com) - in 18 minutes you get to learn so much about a specific topic.
	Begin with the end in mind This is powerful. What is it that you must achieve at the end of the day? When you are clear on this, start with that vision in mind from the very beginning. This will keep you focused.

FOC**U**SED

"U" is the Red dice - it stands for a <u>Sense of Urgency</u> - taking action now with clear purpose and energy

Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?

Dice	Item Meaning	
	Sometimes we need to let go... No-one said this would be easy! Letting go of our old habits, our old ways of thinking are very hard to do. Yet, if we really want to solve / better deal with our unsolved problems / issues / challenges, we must be prepared to let go of our old solutions / our old ways of thinking and doing; only then will we begin to see new ways of thinking and doing.	
	Look for examples When matters are urgent and we need to deal with them now but don't know where to start - the best way is to look for examples of what others have done given the similar challenges you are currently facing.	
	What if tomorrow never comes? Imagine if tomorrow will not come; how will you solve your problems today? This frame of mind will spur you to give 200% to the challenge you are currently facing.	

FOCU**S**ED

"S" is the Purple dice - the psychology of this color means warm and togetherness - it stands for <u>Team Spirit</u> - we can achieve much more when we do things together - it's a team-sport!

Given what this item means on this dice, what **<u>specific example</u>** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
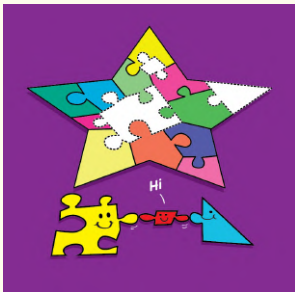
Dice	Item Meaning	
	If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together This is an African saying that has the power to move us to work together. Life is all about working together. Civilizations, organizations and leaders have risen and fallen grounded on this proverb! Indeed you can go fast by yourself, but to really go far and sustain, we need to go together. Solving complex problems / issues / challenges is a team-sport!	
	Respect each other's strengths and weaknesses We all have our own strengths and weaknesses. By understanding and respecting other people's strengths and weaknesses within our team, we are able to leverage off each other's contribution to better deal with the challenge in front of us.	
	Each of us has something meaningful to contribute Just like the five fingers in our hand - each finger is very different, yet each plays an important role in how the hand functions. Look for what each team member can do and let them excel in that to contribute to the team's overall goal.	

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Given what this item means on this dice, what **<u>specific example</u>** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?

Dice	Item Meaning	
	Imagine you are in a S.W.A.T. team *Special Weapons And Tactics* (S.W.A.T.) teams are "elite" groups of people working together to achieve a particular job. They train hard, understand each other, totally committed to looking after each other and they play to win! Compare this to a normal work team, and you find the bonding is not as great. When dealing with complex unsolved problems / issues / challenges, imagine you are members of an "elite" S.W.A.T. team!	
	Who has the most expertise on the issue? Sometimes the leader of the team is not always the most knowledgeable about an issue. All great teams learn to better manage the unexpected by understanding the importance of passing the decision-making power to the person who has the most expertise on the issue and this may be someone other than the leader.	
	Spend more time together to know ourselves When we spend more time together we understand each other better and there is less chance of misunderstandings and conflicts occurring. If you really want to work with high team spirit when dealing with unsolved problems / issues / challenges, spend more time together. This may appear to have absolutely nothing to do with the problem you are tasked to solve, yet it has everything to do with it!	

FOCUS**E**D

"E" is the Green dice - it stands for <u>Engage</u> - spending more time in the garden to create a beautiful garden

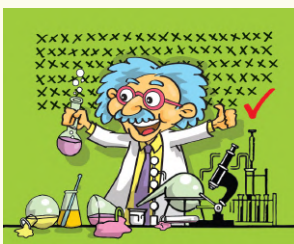| Dice	Item Meaning	Given what this item means on this dice, what **<u>specific example</u>** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
	It's all about the gardening If you want a beautiful garden, what must you do? You need to spend more time in the garden! Only then will you understand which parts of the garden are fertile for growing and which parts are not. When you spend more time in your garden, you begin to get a sense of when to feed it, water it, what tools are needed and what plants you would like in your garden, and so on... Someone once asked the famous Albert Einstein how he was able to solve some of the most complex problems around. He simply answered *"because I spend more time with my problems"*. So get engaged, get involved, get passionate about what it is you have to solve. Spend more time in the garden.	
	Don't be afraid to experiment If you want to fail less, you have to fail more! Experiments are the foundations of success. We need to take calculated risks to try things out through pilot-runs to see what results. Only through repeated trial and error will we really know when things work and when things don't work.	
	What story will you tell? How will you explain the problem to others? What story will you tell? The story you tell can tell you a lot about how you see the challenge. Change the words to your story telling and you end up telling a different story and possibly open up a part of the solution you had not thought about.	

"E" is the Green dice - it stands for <u>Engage</u> - spending more time in the garden to create a beautiful garden

Dice	Item Meaning	Given what this item means on this dice, what **<u>specific example</u>** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
	Look for similarities and differences / sameness and otherness / and their inter-relationships This may sound complex, but we've been doing this since primary school when our teachers asked us to "compare" and "contrast" things. Here, when you are engaging with your unsolved challenge, think about in what way is it similar / different to other problems of similar nature. What makes them similar and what makes them different? Look at problems that are the same and compare them to other issues that have been solved. What insights do you see? What relationships do you see?	
	You have to believe you can Most managers say *"when I see it, I'll believe it"*. But the opposite is just as compelling: "when I believe it, I will see it". You have to believe you can solve the problem: this is core to problem solving! If you don't believe, you cannot achieve anything. The core message from this item means: When you believe you can solve the problem, what comes into your mind? What specific actions will you take? Who will you talk to? What will you do?	

FOCUS**E**D

"E" is the Green dice - it stands for <u>Engage</u> - spending more time in the garden to create a beautiful garden

Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?

Dice	Item Meaning	
	Be positive Most problems remain UNSOLVED because people are always thinking "negative": it will never work; we've never done it that way before; we don't have the right people; we don't have enough budget; the problem is too difficult and will never be solved... Being POSITIVE on the other hand can turn all this around! With a can-do attitude, ordinary people have achieved extraordinary results! The core message from this item means: When you are positive about solving the problem, what comes into your mind? What specific actions will you take? Who will you talk to? What will you do?	

FOCUSE**D**

"D" is the Indigo dice - the psychology of this color means introspection / looking deep into ourselves - it stands for <u>Deliberate Practice</u> - thinking more deeply about what we do and don't do

Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?

Dice	Item Meaning	
	Are we measuring the right things? Just because we have measurements in place does not mean that we are measuring what we are supposed to. Think about the current measures you are using to determine the outcome. Most likely some measures may need to be dropped; others modified. There could also be measures we have overlooked and must be included.	
	What are the critical success factors? (what does success look like?) This is a good way of dealing with your unsolved problems / issues / challenges. How do you know you have solved or at the very least, better dealt with your problem? What are the critical success factors (CSF)? If we achieve these factors we know we have successfully dealt with our challenge. Ask yourselves, *"What does success look like?"* Discuss it to come to an agreement as to what the end results should look like. This will give you a deeper sense of how to better deal with your unsolved challenge.	
	What are we doing now that we should not be doing? This is a powerful strategic question - rarely asked by most managers! Have the courage to ask it and make a list in regards to the unsolved problem / issue / challenge you are facing. This list will tell you a lot about how best to move forward in solving / better dealing with your challenge.	

FOCUSE**D**

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Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?

Dice	Item Meaning	
	If you want to change the result, you need to change the process This is very counter-intuitive. Albert Einstein once said that *"the definition of insanity was doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."* So if you really want to change the result, look at how you are currently achieving it: look at the process - and change it - and you most likely will change the end result!	
	What are we NOT doing that we should be doing? This is the opposite to the earlier question posed in this "D" dice. Again, open up a discussion and make a list on what we are NOT doing (in regards to the unsolved problem) that we should be doing. Again, it's not a common question asked by most managers - yet answering this question has the power to bring deeper insights to why the problem remains unsolved!	

FOCUSE**D**

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Dice	Item Meaning	Given what this item means on this dice, what **specific example** comes to mind in helping you open up the alternative(s)?
	Take a quiet moment to stay calm, pause and reflect We always think better when we are CALM, when we stop to PAUSE for a moment, and really take a step back to REFLECT on what is going on in / around us. You may think you don't have time to do this, but counter-intuitively, in a fast-paced world, we really need to slow down. Only then do we get to see what is really happening. When dealing with complex unsolved problems / issues / challenges, it is imperative we do this. The core message from this item means: When you do take a quiet moment to stay calm, pause and reflect, what comes into your mind? What specific actions will you take? Who will you talk to? What will you do?	

Where to from here?

Now that you have gone through the FOCUSED framework and made notes along the way using this workbook (pp. 4-20), identify your top three (3) Action Plans to help you move forward regarding your unsolved problem, issue or challenge:

(You may wish to copy the original unsolved problem, issue or challenge you stated in page 3 here)

1. *Action plan 1*   *Timeline*   *Key person responsible*

2. *Action plan 2*   *Timeline*   *Key person responsible*

3. *Action plan 3*   *Timeline*   *Key person responsible*

Words of Thanks

Acknowledgement:
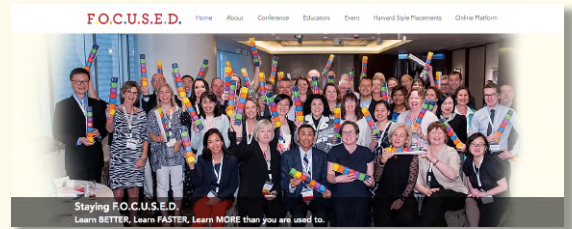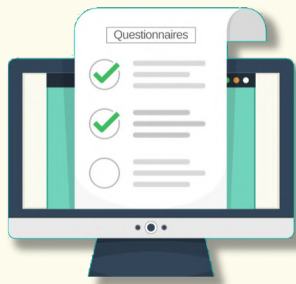
Please scan this QR code and take 2mins to share your experience using the FOCUSED framework.

Thank you.

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