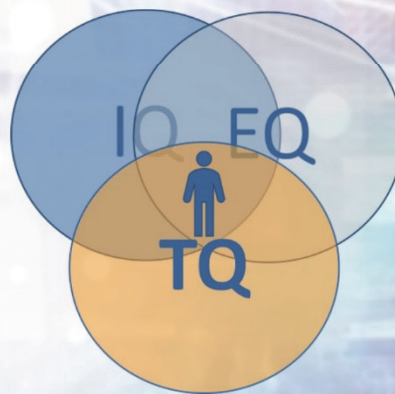


TQ: THE FUTURE OF WORK?

Overcoming the Digital Skills Gap via a
TQI™ (Tech Quotient Initiative)



A white paper for the L&D, IT, and OD leaders who
manage our world's 4 billion knowledge workers

MIKE SONG and BILL KIRWIN

Executive Summary: TQ is the Future of Work

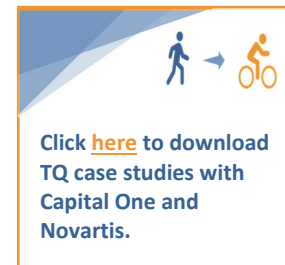
TQ is the ability to strategically learn, leverage, and share technology --Mike Song

Challenge: Facility with technology is a crucial success factor for knowledge workers because technology has permeated every facet of modern life. Today, employees work in a virtual world of software, devices, apps, and websites. We call this world the *Technosphere*. It is a place that consumes an average of 75% of the day as professionals perform the knowledge work functions of communicating, collaborating, and making decisions.

Most organizations report a critical problem: A Digital Skills Gap. Around the world, tech-driven careers are replacing non-tech jobs. Employees increasingly lack the skills required to compete in the Technosphere. 78%ⁱ of middle-skill positions now require expertise with everyday productivity tools such as Outlook and Excel. Furthermore, only 10% of all professionals feel proficient with these tools.ⁱⁱ

Our research confirms that the Digital Skills Gap is a looming crisis for most organizations. Our insight flows from projects conducted with 683 clients, including 20% of the Global 1000. We've collected over 81,311 knowledge worker surveys. Here are some of the findings.

- 72% waste too much time searching for email
- 91% want to upgrade their virtual meeting skills
- 92% struggle to organize their digital files
- 92% hope for more digital skills coaching at workⁱⁱⁱ



As the digital skills crisis widens, productivity, sales, and profits fall. Projects falter. Systems fail. The resulting turmoil directly impacts the engagement and morale of employees as they face growing pressure to produce results, in an often confusing, tech-driven environment.

Solution: In this paper, we explain how to conquer the digital skills crisis via a well-executed TQ Initiative (TQI™). We have spent the past decade perfecting a program that delivers measurable ROI while saving each participant fifteen days per year. We will provide:

- A comprehensive, new definition of TQ
- A TQ Assessment Tool (TQAT™) that measures tech expertise in a new way
- New ways to inspire widespread adoption of TQ insights
- Innovative strategies for implementing a successful TQI™

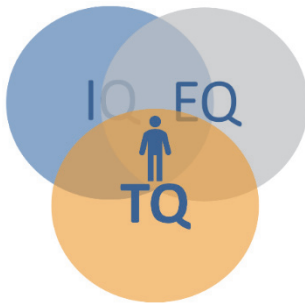
Clarification: TQ and TQM (Total Quality Management) are not directly related. However, TQ Initiatives are, at their core, CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement) programs. We have collaborated successfully with many LEAN, Kaizen, and Six Sigma project teams. So there is a tie between TQ and TQM.

The Power of Three: IQ, EQ, and TQ

Aptitude tests assess human potential. In 1904, Alfred Binet developed the first Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test. It is a standardized set of questions that differentiate human intelligence.

In 1995, Daniel Goleman, building on the work of other researchers, published his groundbreaking book, *Emotional Intelligence*. He observed that IQ alone often failed to be an accurate predictor of success. He argued that Emotional Intelligence, aka Emotional Quotient (EQ), was a far more critical driver of success.

A vast number of programs have been developed to measure and improve EQ. For example, many managers take personality tests like the mbti® (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) to gain insight. As a result, professionals become better at managing their emotions and working with colleagues.



In 2004, the GetControl.net team, led by founder Mike Song, pioneered a new methodology for boosting individual, group, and enterprise TQ. We developed a TQ course, assessment, and ROI measurement tool. These innovations evolved into a simple yet effective turnkey solution that can be implemented by any organization. Many of these ideas, along with a [Capital One case study](#), are documented in Mike's book, *The Hamster Revolution* (Berrett-Kohler, 2007).

IQ, EQ, and TQ are three interwoven talents essential for success. Knowledge workers must have brains and business acumen (IQ). They must be able to work well with others (EQ). Most importantly, they must be efficient and effective with technology (TQ). Of the three skills, TQ is by far the least measured.

Our research indicates that employees are keenly aware of the importance of digital skills. They have a thirst for TQ knowledge and training.

- 91% feel that technology has transformed the way they work
- 92% agree that tech skills can make or break a career
- 94% indicate that the smart use of technology will boost their performance^{iv}

As our reliance on technology grows, TQ skills will increasingly determine one's success or failure. For most employees, improving TQ is currently a *tactical option*. To thrive in the future, TQ must become a *strategic imperative* for all.

5 TQ Obstacles and What to Do About Them

Despite the general lack of incentives and measurement tools, some employees dramatically increase their TQ. They discover strategies, shortcuts, and time-saving tips that send their performance soaring. Oddly, these top tech performers rarely share their insight with others. Several obstacles stand in the way. Below, we summarize five roadblocks and provide effective workarounds for each.

1 The “Jobs are Different” Obstacle

Obstacle: Many organizations fail to roll out TQ programs because different jobs require different software. They believe that they can’t offer solutions because accountants use Oracle®, analysts use Tableau®, and salespeople use Salesforce.com®. Training content and ROI measurement are impossible in their eyes.

Solution: The remedy is simple. Focus on common ground. Currently, [4.2 billion knowledge workers](#)^v use either a Microsoft or Google platform. Most agree that they barely scratch the surface of the advanced productivity features packed into these products. The effective use of these universal tech tools is an excellent way to measure each employee’s TQ.

2 The Silo Effect

Obstacle: Almost every professional has met a “tech power user.” These professionals develop a deep appreciation of tools like OneNote, Slack, Excel, or Teams. Here is why they remain in a kind of productivity silo rather than sharing insights with colleagues.

- **The Geek Factor:** Co-workers often classify colleagues with advanced tech skills as Outlook Nerds or Excel Geeks. A glance at the negative synonyms for the word geek explains why tech-savvy professionals usually keep their superpowers under wraps.^{vi}
- **It’s All About Me:** When it comes to everyday technology, the mantra is *to each her own*. This approach leads to an environment where there are no poor, good, better, or best ways to work. As a result, tech-coaching seems intrusive and unnecessary.
- **It’s Thankless:** Managers rarely identify techspertise (tech expertise) as a valued characteristic in performance reviews. When given, praise is often brief and muted.



Solution: The Silo Effect can be overcome by an enterprise-wide campaign to reimagine what it means to be proficient with technology. Organizations must replace derogatory terms like Geek

with aspirational names like Power User or Tech Expert. Leaders must promote **techspertise** as a critical goal for all employees.

Praise for high TQ should extend beyond the individual performance review. According to Harvard Business Review^{vii}, when leaders explain that sharing insights helps the whole organization, knowledge sharing grows. Organizations must incentivize high TQ. We have developed a TQX™ (Tech Quotient Excellence) Awards program that rewards professionals who increase their TQ.

3 The Black Box Syndrome

Obstacle: When we watch the Olympics, we see athletic excellence. When competitors outjump, outrun, or outsmart their competition, it happens right in front of our eyes. By contrast, tech skills are mostly invisible because they occur inside our devices.

Solution: Top performers need to help colleagues see into their well-run Technospheres. We recommend live PC and mobile device demos. Tech experts can purchase inexpensive software and adaptors that project smartphones onto LCD and webinar screens. We've developed a handy app packed with easy-to-follow quick-hit TQ videos.

4 The Millennial Myth

Obstacle: “We don't need TQ. We have millennials!” The notion that millennials and Generation Z are all tech experts is a myth. While underestimated in many ways, we find that many millennials are not tech savants. One study found that just 14% of millennials consider themselves to be experts with everyday technology.^{viii}

Are you surprised? Here is a possible explanation. Once hired out of college, most grads switch from an Apple/Google tech set (standard technology issued) to a PC based, Office 365 platform. This transformation changes the *look and feel* of their Technosphere. Buttons are in different places. Features are triggered differently. Add in the rigors of a demanding new job, and we can see why achieving power user status is not a fait accompli.

In their defense, millennials and the Z Generation are quick learners who are confident that they can master their tech set. They're eager to find tech tips, tricks, hacks, and shortcuts. Many of them like to share tech insights. As a result, they rapidly progress when presented with opportunities to boost their TQ.

Solution: It is time to ditch generational stereotypes and push for an objective way to assess TQ. A standardized TQ test will help organizations identify power users, develop tech coaches, and help those who are tech-challenged – no matter what age they may be.

5 The Education Superstore Cop Out

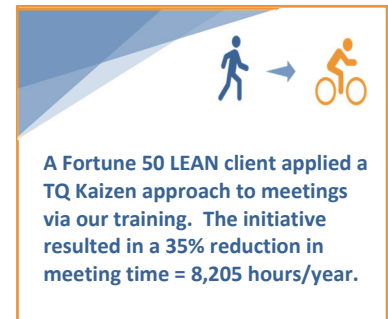
Obstacle: “We don’t need to focus on TQ because we offer 30,000 classes at our Learning University!” Many organizations provide a vast library of training on their server. Unfortunately, most professionals are reluctant to invest the time to find the right class. Perhaps, they feel overwhelmed. Virtually every client we interview reports difficulty in motivating employees to sign up for classes voluntarily.

Solution: The time has come to develop a clear, concise, and consistent TQ learning pathway. The pathway should have a set order and significant incentives for completing each phase. Each TQ Initiative should be well-marketed with emphasis on *sign-up* campaigns vs. *sign-in* sheets. Every program must explain the value gained for the time invested. It is critical to track performance gains at the individual and team level.

Our Vision

As TQ barriers fall, a golden age of training and collaboration will follow. In the TQ era, each organizational team will play a role:

- Executives will work to boost their TQ so that they can lead by example.
- HR will build TQ into the interview process, L&D, career pathways, and performance reviews.
- IT will perform a total cost of ownership (TCO) analysis that will quantify the benefits of high TQ. They will use business intelligence tools to create TQ dashboards to monitor the use of productivity tools.
- OD (Organizational Development) will apply change management and CQI tools like Kaizen and LEAN to core TQ processes like email and meetings.^{ix}



All divisions will collaborate to spur TQ growth via a TQX™ (Tech Quotient Excellence) Awards Program. These changes will inspire colleagues to learn, leverage, and share technology as never before. Organizations will evolve from the *tactical* digital present to the *strategic* TQ future.

The TQAT™: Tech Quotient Assessment Tool

Organizations desperately need a better way to measure TQ. The TQAT is a significant advance. It is an online tool that sorts professionals into four distinct TQ Profiles (TQPs™). Once an organization determines each colleague’s TQP, it can then provide targeted training.

The Missing Link: Technology Coaching Skills

Coaching matters! One distinct aspect of the TQAT is that it measures both tech skills and tech coaching skills. Organizations must determine which employees can motivate, teach, and inspire colleagues to make better use of technology. Tech coaches deserve recognition and rewards. After all, they help everyone get more done!

The TQAT is the first tool that gives equal weight to Tech Skills *and* Tech Coaching Skills. The image below shows how TQAT questions are weighted equally.



The TQAT also is unique in that it focuses on specificity and frequency. Rather than asking a vague question like “Do you use Excel?” The TQAT asks how frequently the participant uses a specific productivity feature.

- Here is a typical Tech Skill Statement: ***I use auto-text to type long phrases rapidly.***
- Here is a typical Tech Coaching Statement: ***I share tech tips with my team.***



Participants then choose the frequency with which they perform the best practice: Never, Sometimes, Regularly, or Almost Always. The TQAT combines the two scores on an XY chart. The nexus point between the two skill scores identifies the participant’s TQP™ (TQ Profile).

For the first time, colleagues see an objective representation of TQ. It is now possible to chart growth,

compare oneself to a team average, find a tech mentor, and explore the relationships between profiles. Best of all, each participant will understand the changes they must make to improve.

The TQAT yields four distinct TQ profiles.

1. **Emerging Techie™** | Low Tech Skills, Low Coaching Skills
2. **Silo Star™** | High Tech Skills, Low Coaching Skills
3. **Calm Coach™** | Low Tech Skills, High Coaching Skills
4. **Techspert™** | High Tech Skills, High Coaching Skills



TQ Profile Insights

Emerging Techie | Feels nervous around technology and often uses the factory presets. Has been burned by tech glitches in the past and is reluctant to explore the Technosphere. They may feel that other groups are more tech-savvy. They question the time investment needed to boost tech skills. They may hope to ride out the next few years without a significant shift in tech skills. Needs to employ a high degree of repetition in learning technology skills to create muscle memory. Tech skills should be mastered first, coaching second.

Silo Star | The classic power user who enjoys exploring the Technosphere. May hoard tech insight as a competitive advantage because they are rarely incentivized to share. May have gaps in some areas; for example, Excel power users may be only moderately proficient at Outlook. Silo Stars may be self-effacing about their high skill level due to being portrayed as a geek or nerd in the past. Others may be a bit condescending. Some wrongly believe that “everyone else knows this stuff.” Once these performers develop their tech coaching skills, they can have a profound impact on team and enterprise performance.

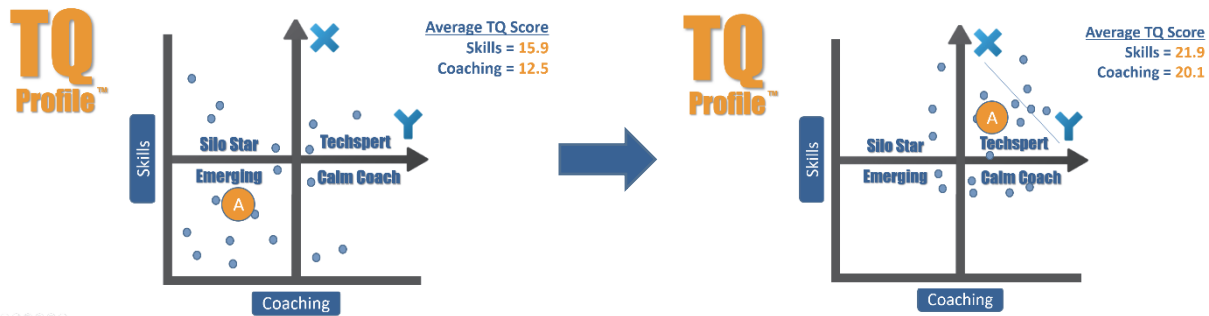
Calm Coach | Has limited tech skills but has high confidence in their ability to learn and share technology insights. Perhaps they have rolled out a successful technology initiative in the past. They are comfortable learning and sharing tech insights. A key growth recommendation would be to build a small repertoire of tech tips to demo in real-time with colleagues.

Techspert | Exhibits the rare combination of high tech and high-tech coaching skills. They are comfortable in communicating the benefits of technology. They can walk the walk and talk the talk. They are in a continuous tech insight investment loop because they have experienced the ROI in terms of productivity gains. They view TQ as a tool to drive their careers to the next level. They are passionate and able to get all profiles on board with a TQ rollout.

TQ for Teams and Organizations

When a group or organization take the TQAT, fascinating data emerges. The image below shows baseline TQ for a leadership team at a pharmaceutical company located in the Northeastern United States. The organization was able to assess TQ for individuals (blue dots) while providing a team average (orange A).

A scatter diagram displays the results before and after training. Most of the dots move upward and to the right signifying growth in TQ. The group average also changes position as team TQ rises.



In the post-analysis, we subdivide the Techspert quadrant to form two categories. Pushing oneself into the far, upper right area is much akin to earning a black belt in Karate or Six Sigma. These professionals are highly valued because they consistently learn, leverage, and most importantly, share tech insights.

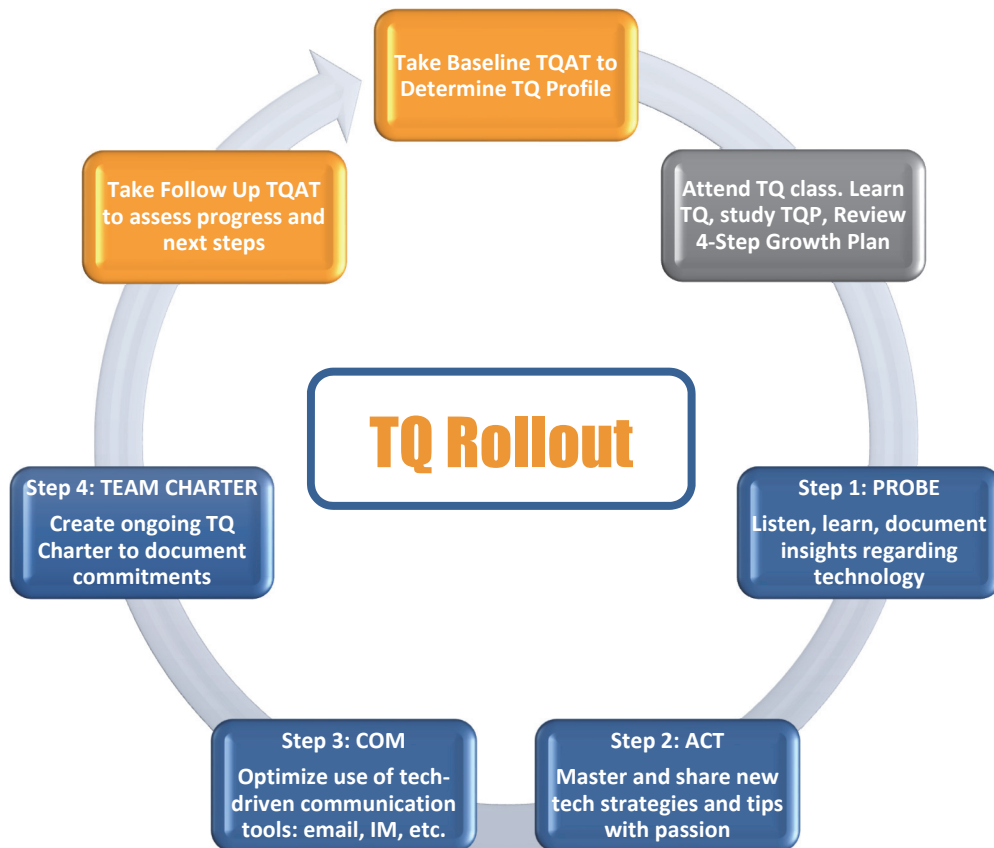
TQ Rollout Essentials

TQ must be rolled out with a long-term commitment to change. The TQ message should be endorsed by leadership over a period of at least two years. It is a new concept, so repetition is crucial. Change management best practices must be deployed. We recommend rolling out TQ as a series of exciting, engaging, immersive learning experiences.

Explanation of TQ Rollout Steps

1. **TQAT (Orange Boxes):** The TQAT assessment is taken before and after training. This allows us to create a baseline and measure progress.
2. **TQ Orientation Class (Grey Box):** Instructor provides an overview of TQ, each participant's TQ profile, and customized coaching.
3. **4-Step TQ Growth Plan (Blue Boxes):** Over the next four weeks, participants make technology a focus. They ask questions, learn, and demonstrate tech tips, share tech communication strategies, and document their team TQ commitments.

The chart below outlines the process we have developed.



Begin with the TQ3: Email, Meetings, and Digital Organization

TQ training must focus on high volume, universal tasks like email, meetings, and digital organization. We call these core activities the TQ3. The TQ3 intersect with crucial business functions, including communication, collaboration, and decision making.

Stellar Content and Support Tools are Critical

TQ initiatives are often hastily rolled out with dull presenters and predictable content. A commitment to excellence must permeate every facet of a TQI. Programs must be:

- Able to boost TQ by 25% while delivering *statistically significant* time-savings, stress reduction, and productivity gains
- Capable of *increasing* participant enthusiasm with each engagement
- Easily accessed via a convenient mobile app
- Focused on the tasks and technology that consume the most time (TQ3)
- Engaging, concise, and continuously upgraded
- Part of a recognizable brand family of TQ classes

- Delivered by an excellent presenter
- Available in live, webinar, video, and e-learning formats
- Supported by stellar measurement, internal marketing, and tracking tools

Conclusion

TQ is the future of work. As the Technosphere rapidly expands, organizations must pull their proverbial heads from the sand and tackle the digital skills crisis head-on. Leaders must strive to raise TQ across the organization. It will soon be the only way that they can compete in the age of TQ.

About *Get Control!*[®] University

GetControl.net is the world leader in TQ assessment and training. We currently work with 20% of the Global 1000. Please email us for more information on TQ, the TQAT, TQPs, and the *Get Control!* University Training Suite: info@getcontrol.net.

Mike Song is a noted TQ researcher, author, and speaker. He is the 15th most followed efficiency blogger in the world. Mike has written three best-selling Hamster Revolution books which have been published in 12 languages. Mike has provided interviews to CNN, ABC, FOX, CNBC, and NPR. www.getcontrol.net info@getcontrol.net

Bill Kirwin is a widely known expert on technical workforce productivity management. In his work at Gartner, he managed the Personal Computing Policies and Strategies practice and developed the first IT total cost of ownership research. He currently is the Managing Director of the International Institute of IT Economics. www.iiievalue.com

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Endnotes

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- ⁱⁱⁱ M. Song, B. Kirwin, *Get Control of Technology Research*, 2019, GetControl.net, n=81,311
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