



ONION

A framework for improved
clarity, agency and action

Workbook

 **RWilliamsCoaching** 
change at work

Introduction to

ONION

What is ONION?

ONION is a coaching tool to help you to achieve improved **clarity, agency and action**. One of the joys of [my Business Coaching practice](#) is seeing clients go from a place of confusion, complexity and stuckness to one of improved **clarity, agency and action** in their work. ONION is a tool to help you on that journey.

Who can use ONION?

ONION was designed to help my Business Coaching clients – especially founders and business and organisational leaders - develop clarity on their professional outcomes, options and actions but ONION can be used by **anyone feeling stuck at work or facing a professional challenge**.

How do you use this ONION workbook?

Bring a professional issue, situation or challenge in which you'd like to make measurable progress and work through the framework. Each layer of ONION relates to the others and builds on the last, so make sure you note down your insights and outputs from each layer and use those notes to help you as you progress.



People: Although you can use ONION very effectively on your own, you will get added value from involving others in the three layers where you see this symbol - the second layer (**Now**), the third layer (**Ideas**) and the fifth layer (**Next Steps**).



Pen and Paper: You'll see that this workbook has spaces for you to write down your insight and outputs – I would highly recommend you do that. You may want to use your own notebook or additional pieces of paper.

Can we use ONION as a team?

Absolutely! I've used ONION to help teams gain shared clarity, commitment and progress on key challenges. It's a good idea to assign someone to lead/ facilitate.

How long does ONION take?

The short answer is as long as you want. I've seen participants get great value from a 20 minute demo. In my coaching practice, a typical coaching session tends to be 90 minutes

There's far more to say about ONION, including further tools and tips available to readers of [my free newsletter](#), but this workbook is a great way to start using, and getting value from, ONION.

Good luck on your journey to greater clarity, enhanced agency and more effective action at work!

R. A. Williams

rwilliamscoaching.co.uk



A framework for improved clarity, agency and action

 **O**utcome – where do you *want to be*?

 **N**ow – where are you *now*?

 **I**deas – what *could* you do?

 **O**ptions – what *should* you do?

 **N**ext Steps – what *will* you do?

Outcome

Where do you want to be?

Define a clear vision of where you'd like to be

*Destination defines direction, so start with the end in mind. What do you want? Get clear on a desired Outcome - a specific but flexible situation at which you would like to arrive. The key is **clarity and specificity**.*



Some questions:

- Where do I want to be in this area?
- What do I *really* want?
- What does it look like? (be specific)
- What's my timeframe?
- How does this fit with my overall aims?



Tips:

- Take your time here; defining your Outcome clearly is essential
- An Outcome (unlike a goal) takes into account the context, it is a desired situation rather than a discrete item to be ticked off a list
- An Outcome (unlike a vision) is specific enough that you should be able to describe it
- Don't get hung up on fixed solutions – an Outcome should be flexible enough that it can be achieved in a number of ways



My desired Outcome is:

Now

Where are you now?

Get a clear picture of where you are currently

Now you know where you're going; use that clarity to understand better where you are currently. The key is to be **realistic** and **objective**. When establishing clarity on your current situation, start with what you have available before moving on to what you need.



Some questions:

- Given my Outcome, where am I now on a scale of 0 to 10?
- What have I already done or got towards my Outcome?
- What resources/ support do I have to hand?
- What resources/ support do I have available?
- What's my budget?
- What's getting in the way?
- What resources/ support do I need?
- What still needs doing?



Tips:

- Use your Outcome to help you focus on what's relevant in your current situation
- Start with what you have and what you've already done before thinking about what you need and what you're lacking
- Think about what you have available as well as what you have to hand
- It can be useful to involve one or more other people at this stage who can help you to gain objectivity on your current situation. *People who already understand your professional situation well will generally be most helpful here.*



Given where I want to get to, this is my situation Now:

Ideas

What could you do?

Take time to consider what's possible

Clearly defining your Outcome and your Now enables you to more fully explore ways of achieving your Outcome. The key is **openness** and **exploration** – get all your Ideas on the table, ask others, approach from different angles.



Some questions:

- What would I do if *money* were no object?
- What would I do if *time* were no object?
- What would I do if *resources* were no object?
- What's the most obvious thing I could do? What's the least obvious?
- What would I do if I had two weeks/ 3 months/ a year to do this?
- What would I do if I were my mother?/ Walt Disney?/ eight years old? [substitute people who you are interested in/ admire/ different from you]
- What are some of the ways I could approach this?
- What's a creative way of doing this?
- What have I seen in other contexts that might work here?
- What if I did it this way?

And most importantly

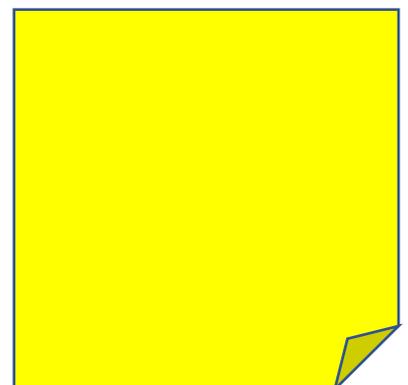
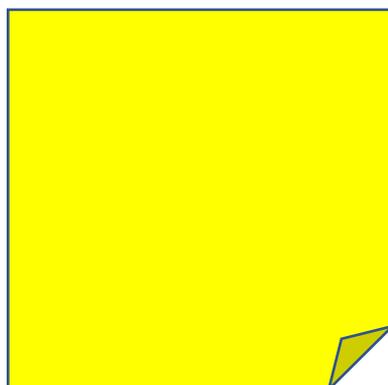
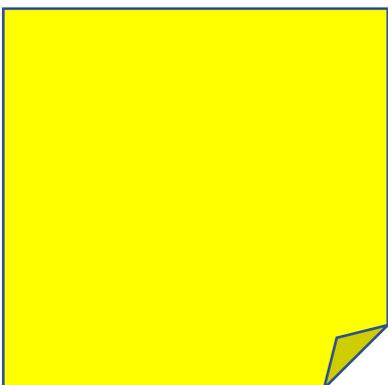
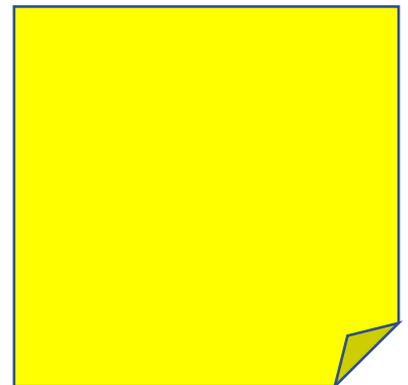
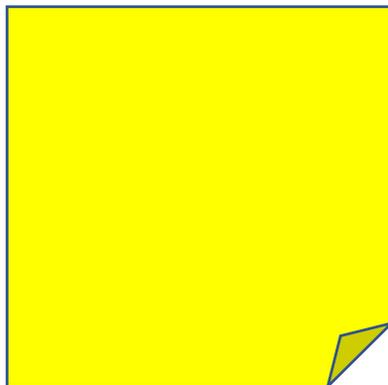
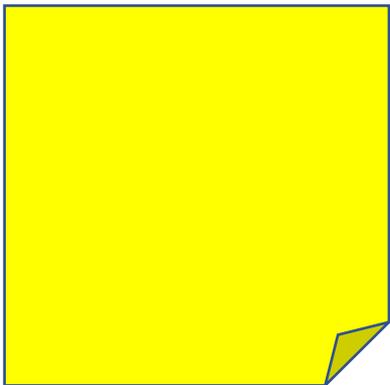
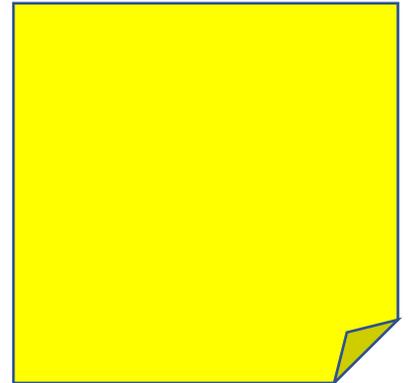
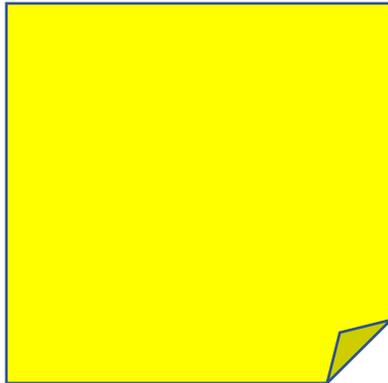
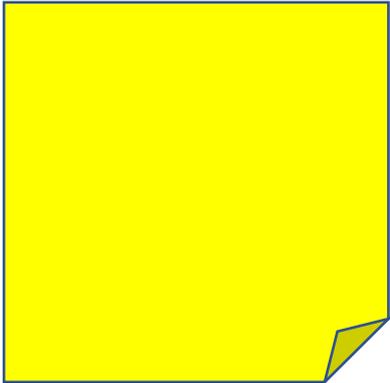
- **What else** could I do?



Tips:

- Avoid analysis at this stage – you need to **access** your Ideas **before you assess** them. Just get the Ideas out, without judgement
- This can feel like hard work and you may be tempted to settle for the first couple of ideas but push through and try to enjoy the process of exploration
- It can be very helpful to involve *others who are unfamiliar with your issue* in this layer as they can bring fresh perspectives and challenge your thinking. If you do, don't judge or analyse their ideas or questions, just write them down 
- If possible, take a break in the middle of this process and do something else – anything from a couple of minutes to make a cup of tea to a longer break depending on how long you're giving to the Ideas Layer
- Pin your list of ideas up where you can see and add to them
- Aim for at least 5-7 Ideas

What Could You Do? - Ideas



ptions

What *should* you do?

Filter for what looks most effective and feasible to pursue

*You can now assess your Ideas using your Outcome Layer and your Now Layer to determine what matters most (your priorities). Once you've worked out your priorities, you can apply them as a filter to your Ideas to help you work out your most effective Options. The key is **priority and focus**.*

Some questions:

- What are my key priorities when it comes to my Outcome (e.g. speed/ cost/ quality/ sustainability/ customer engagement)?
- Which are the three most relevant/ important?
- Of these three, which one matters most? (be ruthless)
- And then which one?
- How do the Ideas I've generated align with these priorities?
- How feasible are these Options?

Tips:

- Use your outputs from your Outcome Layer and Now Layer to help establish your priorities
- Be disciplined and ruthless in ranking your priorities - remember that not everything can be equally important and lower ranked priorities are still relevant
- Use your priorities as a primary filter to get to your Options
- Aim for 1-3 Options. If you have more, filter further
- You might find that you can tweak or even combine ideas as you filter them



My priorities are...

My top three priorities (in order) are...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Applying these priorities to my ideas, my best Options are...

Next Steps

What *will* you do?

Determine, design and pursue concrete actions

Now you've worked out your most promising Options, you can design some clear Next Steps to pursue. The key is **realistic, concrete, time-framed** actions to which you feel committed



Some questions:

- What will I do in the next week/month?
- How will this get me closer to my desired Outcome?
- By when?
- What will success look like?/ How will I measure success?
- Who else is involved in making this happen?
- How committed do I feel to this plan?
- What might get in the way?



Tips:

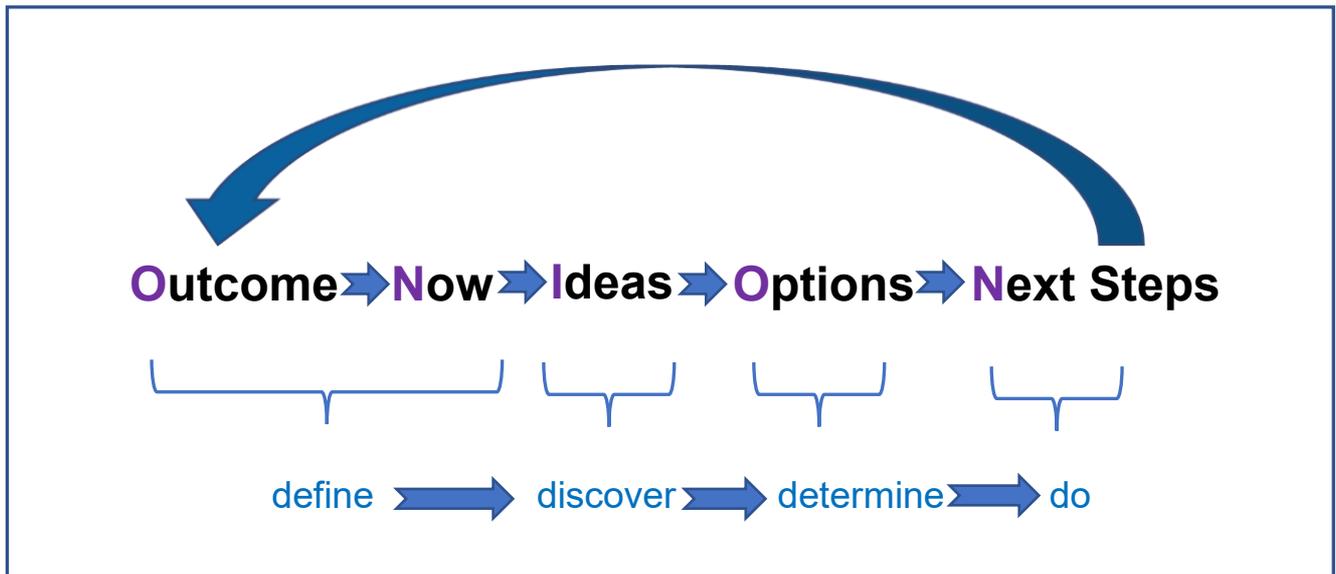
- Good Next Steps start as soon as possible
- Put a timeframe around your Next Steps (e.g. "I'll do X by Y")
- If you can, ask someone to provide positive accountability by checking in on your progress on Next Steps (and don't bite their head off when they do!) 
- Ensure that Next Steps are manageable - if a Next Step takes more than a couple of weeks, consider breaking it down further
- Don't map out more than a couple of steps ahead; once you've done those, you can plan and move on to further steps
- It helps to *write down and pin up* your Next Steps somewhere you can see them



My Next Steps are....

Action	By when?	Notes	Done?





“Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

Francis of Assisi

About the author: I’m a Business Coach who specialises in helping entrepreneurially-minded clients tackle key issues and obstacles at times of significant challenge and change. I created and developed the ONION framework as a tool to help clients gain clarity in their work. To read more on this and other topics or to get in touch, go to my website www.rwilliamscoaching.co.uk.

