

LEADERS: Habits of Mind Explanation

 <p>Thinking About Your Thinking (Metacognition) <i>Know your Knowing!</i> Being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others.</p>	 <p>Persisting <i>Stick to it!</i> Persevering with a task through to completion; remaining focused. Searching for ways to reach your goal when stuck. Not giving up.</p>	 <p>Managing Impulsivity <i>Take your time!</i> Thinking before acting; remaining calm, thoughtful and deliberative.</p>	 <p>Striving for Accuracy <i>Check it again!</i> Doing your best. Setting high standards. Fact checking and finding ways to improve.</p>
 <p>Listening with Understanding and Empathy <i>Understand others!</i> Devoting mental energy to another person's thoughts and ideas. Making an effort to perceive another's point of view and emotions.</p>	 <p>Thinking Flexibly <i>Look at it another way!</i> Being able to change perspectives; generating alternatives; considering options.</p>	 <p>Questioning and Posing Problems <i>How do you know?</i> Having a questioning attitude; knowing what data are needed & developing questioning strategies to produce those data. Finding problems to solve.</p>	 <p>Thinking Interdependently <i>Work together!</i> Working with and learning from others in reciprocal situations. Teamwork.</p>
 <p>Thinking & Communicating with Clarity and Precision <i>Be clear!</i> Striving for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding over-generalizations, distortions, deletions and exaggerations.</p>	 <p>Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations <i>Use what you learn!</i> Accessing prior knowledge; transferring knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.</p>	 <p>Gathering Data Through All Senses <i>Use your natural pathways!</i> Paying attention to the world around you. Gathering data through all the senses: Sight, Sound, Smell, Taste, and Touch.</p>	 <p>Creating, Imagining, and Innovating <i>Try a different or new way!</i> Generating possibilities; playing with new ideas.</p>
 <p>Taking Responsible Risks <i>Venture out!</i> Being adventuresome; living on the edge of your competence.</p>	 <p>Finding Humor <i>Laugh a little!</i> Finding the whimsical, incongruous and unexpected. Being able to laugh at one's self.</p>	 <p>Responding with Wonderment and Awe <i>Become intrigued!</i> Finding the world awesome, mysterious and being intrigued with phenomena and beauty.</p>	 <p>Remaining Open to Continuous Learning <i>Learn throughout your lifetime!</i> Having humility and admitting when you don't know and are curious to find out. Resisting complacency.</p>

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By Art Costa, Bena Kallick, and Allison Zmuda

Habits of Mind provide the framework for developing dispositions leaders use when confronted with problems and situations to which the answer is not immediately apparent. When leaders draw upon these dispositions when working with their colleagues, they both model and invite interdependence and innovation.

A leader who cares for the well being of its members grows an efficacious culture by inviting their thinking, creativity, problem solving, and communication skills.

To read more about growing an efficacious learning culture, click [here](http://www.habitsofmindinstitute.org).



Thinking About Your Thinking (Metacognition)



Metacognition is the uniquely human capacity to monitor and control our cognitive processes and mental habits. It is our ability to know what we know and what we don't know, to plan a strategy for producing what information is needed, to be conscious of our own steps and strategies during the act of problem solving, and to reflect on and evaluate the productiveness of our own thinking.

Efficacious leaders are increasingly attentive to their own behaviors and actions and the effects of those actions on others and the organization's culture. Thoughtful leaders plan for and evaluate the quality of their own thinking skills and strategies.

Efficacious leaders use metacognitive practices, such as:

- ***Noticing, attending to, becoming aware of the talk going on inside their heads.*** Mentally rehearsing, inner-coaching, self-questioning, and reflecting on what they do as they critique themselves.
- ***Consciously checking the assumptions they are making about others.*** Leaders consistently examine how and why others behave the way they do, what biases they may have in how they perceive others' thinking, and how others' connections might uncover new thinking for them.
- ***Mentally working through a plan.*** Leaders identify a strategy, monitor and make appropriate adjustments to the plan over time, continue to evaluate results, and reflect on learning from the experience.



Persisting

Persisting is central to any problem-solving process. When faced with ambiguous situations or uncertain situations, efficacious leaders generate and test multiple solution paths. As they work through the frustration and confusion of finding a path for problem solving, they strengthen the capacity and confidence to know what to do when they don't know what to do.

However, Kenny Rogers wisely warned us in his song about poker, "You've got to know when to hold 'em, and know when to fold 'em." Although it's a mistake to give up prematurely, there are times when you have to make conscious decisions as to whether what you are doing is effective or whether you should move to something else that will lead to better results.

Efficacious leaders strategically use this habit by:

- ***Breaking the problem apart*** into steps and work to accomplish each step that leads to the final outcome.
- ***Reviewing ground rules, directions, or criteria for success.*** Find something missed along the way or an assumed understanding and discovering the misunderstanding.
- ***Posing questions***, such as: "Why is it so important that I work to complete this task? What are the consequences if I do or do not complete the task? Would my time and efforts be better applied elsewhere? Is this worth my persistence?"
- ***Seeking assistance and input from others.*** Sometimes others may have had experience with similar problems or can see a different array of solutions.
- ***Using positive self-talk to hang in and stick with the task.*** Envision what it will look like and feel like to be successful.

Managing Impulsivity



Leaders juggle many demands and feel the urgency to get the work done. This may lead to the impulsive behavior of taking the first suggestion given or operating on the most obvious and simple idea that comes to mind. Instead of responding from that emotional state, efficacious leaders have a sense of deliberativeness. They put the pressure of “getting it done” on hold while they consider alternative points of view and potential impact before taking action. They consider more complex alternatives and consequences of several possible directions.

As efficacious leaders work to manage their impulsivity, some strategies that may be helpful are:

- ***Testing out a strategy for approaching a problem.***
- ***Withholding immediate value judgments before fully understanding an idea.***
- ***Seeking assistance and input from others. Sometimes others may have had experience with similar problems or can see a different array of solutions.***
- ***Slowing down and attending to their emotions: “I’m feeling angry right now,” “I’m frustrated,” “I’m confused,” or “I’m tired.”***
- ***Investigating what is behind the emotions: “What is it about this situation that is producing these feelings?” “What are my options for dealing with this situation and what are the advantages and disadvantages of each of those options?” “Which of these possible solutions are the best?”***
- ***Making thinking visible so that the group recognizes the effort leaders take to manage their impulsivity.***

Striving for Accuracy



Efficacious leaders value accuracy, precision and craftsmanship. They take time to check over their products and the work of others by reviewing the rules, models, and visions they are to follow. They also review the criteria to assess where the work currently stands in relation to success criteria. Striving for accuracy does not mean that we must always be perfect. Rather, it means that we value the aspiration to always commit to our highest level of performance in a given situation.

When striving for accuracy, efficacious leaders can apply some of these strategies:

- ***Check work with someone else.*** When leaders see or hear their work from the lens of another, it helps to identify what changes are needed for clarity of meaning.
- ***Study criteria and related descriptors that explain what quality looks like.*** When something is unclear or the explanation needs further clarification, leaders can provide guidance so that the work can be recalibrated.
- ***Take time to step back.*** Fast-approaching deadlines or wanting to get a task done may limit the leader's willingness to strive for accuracy and precision. Consider how to plan time so that the work can be revisited with fresh eyes looking for exactness, correctness, precision, accuracy, and fidelity.
- ***Seek information on how to be more supportive for colleagues.*** For example, sometimes it is helpful to receive feedback. Other times it is helpful to provide quiet space so they can focus.
- ***Encourage colleagues to recognize progress.*** Leaders celebrate evidence of development of others' growth and stamina.
- ***Probe thinking.*** Ask questions of others such as: "How do you know that to be true?" "What evidence do you have?" "What are the facts here?"



Listening with Understanding and Empathy

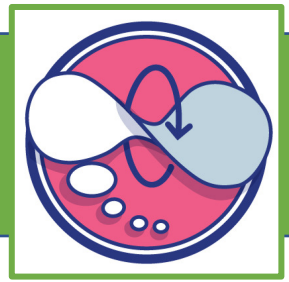


Leaders spend a significant amount of time and energy listening to others. However, the capacity to listen to another person is a complex, multi-layered skill. Efficacious leaders develop the ability to listen to another person, to empathize with, and to understand their point of view. They are adept at monitoring their own thoughts and simultaneously paying close attention to what is being said. They also observe what might be beneath the words so that they can form a picture of the other person's emotions and intentions. They employ this as a valued leadership behavior in building relationships and growing innovative practices.

Efficacious leaders focus on listening with understanding and empathy by engaging in such strategies as:

- ***Devoting mental energies to another person and investing in their ideas.*** Leaders provide space for others to share their thoughts without interruption, ask clarifying questions to better understand another's perspective, and paraphrase what they have heard to show commitment to better understanding.
- ***Allowing space for disagreement.*** A good listener tries to understand what the other person is saying. Leaders demonstrate understanding and empathy for the ideas or feelings of the other. In the end they may disagree sharply, but because they disagree they seek to be aware of exactly what they are disagreeing with.
- ***Looking for indicators of the feelings or emotional states of the other.*** By paying attention to their oral and body language they are able to detect cues. Leaders reflect back on what they are observing, for example: "You are feeling sad." "You are feeling angry."
- ***Building upon what was said.*** Leaders give possible examples and ask clarifying questions to show they value others' contributions.
- ***Holding one's own values, judgments, opinions, and prejudices in abeyance.*** Leaders practice silencing the voices within themselves so that the other is more generative and they can hear the meaning of another.

Thinking Flexibly



We are living through a rapidly changing environment and it is likely to continue to be the case for our organizations. Thinking flexibly is part *attitude* — our openness to new ideas — and part *action* — knowing how and when to expand our horizons and use new ideas and information. As leaders, we recognize the importance of adapting to new situations and building the capacity to change our minds when we receive new or additional data. Leaders determine when to think more broadly and when to focus on details. When confronted with problems or challenges, they encourage creative and novel thinking.

Efficacious leaders think flexibly by asking metacognitive questions as:

- ***In what other ways might I think about this? What is another perspective?***
- ***What else might I try when I get stuck?***
- ***How does stepping back and looking at the big picture (the whole) open my eyes to new ideas?***
- ***When and why should I change my thinking and my actions?***



Questioning and Posing Problems



Questions act as a catalyst for our brains to change and move forward with new insights, thoughts and wonderings. Efficacious leaders ask open-ended, insightful questions that can activate an individual or a group's curiosity to discover new solutions. Curiosity is a powerful motivator. When individuals feel curious, they engage in persistent information-seeking behavior asking questions to fill in the gaps between what they know and what they don't know.

Questions can vary in complexity, structure and purpose. Efficacious leaders consider posing the following types of questions to engage deeper thinking:

- ***Request data to support others' conclusions and assumptions.*** For example:
 - "What evidence do you have?"
 - "How do you know that's true?"
 - "How reliable is this data source?"
- ***Seek alternative points of view.*** For example:
 - "From whose viewpoint are we seeing, reading or hearing this?"
 - "From what angle or perspective are we viewing this situation?"
- ***Search for causal connections and relationships.*** For example:
 - "How are these people (events, situations, etc.) related to each other?"
 - "What produced this connection?"
- ***Suggest hypothetical problems or "What if" questions.*** For example:
 - "What do you think would happen if....?"
 - "IF that is true, then what might happen if....?"

Thinking Interdependently



Today, our most pressing problems are complex and multifaceted. They require a breadth of knowledge, insight, and creativity that can only be accessed when people come together and solve problems interdependently. When leaders think interdependently, they collaborate with a sense of purpose and mission. They encourage others to speak up, contribute to the discussion, and advocate for a particular position or plan. They also know when it is time to take their own plan off the table or to make accommodations for others' or the group's ideas, goals, or plans.

The power of collaborative thinking is increased exponentially by the dynamic interchanges in the group. They contribute to a common goal, seek collegiality, and draw on the resources of others.

Efficacious leaders ask themselves metacognitive questions such as:

- ***How can working together on this problem lead to a more innovative solution?***
- ***How can we work best together?***
- ***How can I best contribute to this group?***
- ***How am I affecting the group? How is the group affecting me?***
- ***How can we avoid “group think”?***
- ***How can I withhold my own agenda and work on behalf of the task of the group?***



Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision



Language and thinking are closely entwined. Like either side of a coin, they are inseparable. Fuzzy, vague language is a reflection of fuzzy, vague thinking. Efficacious leaders strive to communicate accurately in both written and oral form, taking care to use precise language, define terms, use correct names and universal labels and analogies. They strive to avoid over-generalizations, deletions and distortions. Instead, they support their statements with explanations, comparisons, quantification, facts and evidence. When leaders plan ahead, they are mentally rehearsing their messages. They think about what the main points are that they wish to convey and how they want to structure their presentation. This is equally true for both oral as well as written communications.

Efficacious leaders can employ some of the following strategies to develop clarity and precision:

- ***Mentally rehearse what they are going to say before saying it.*** Leaders engage in an internal dialogue, asking oneself questions and developing answers to help clarify and direct skills as a speaker and listener.
- ***Avoid over-generalizations, deletions, and distortions.*** Leaders avoid using terms such as “everyone” or “no one” when that isn’t really the case, or by simply stating that you don’t “like” something. Instead, they support statements with explanations, comparisons, quantifications, and evidence.
- ***Slow down when emotional.*** When angry or exasperated, the rational brain closes down and the emotional brain takes over. Leaders take a deep breath and give themselves a chance to think before they say something.
- ***Become spectators of others’ language as well as their own.*** Leaders notice the words that are expressed, the details provided to support an explanation or claim, and the emotions that are surfacing.
- ***Seek feedback from others.*** Leaders check understanding to continue to improve their communication as well as craftsmanship.

Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations



New learning can be challenging and we often forget what we already know. This can happen for members of an organization as well as for leaders, especially when faced with volatile and complex issues. When confronted with such perplexing issues, efficacious leaders often draw forth experience from their past. They pay attention to what they already know about the topic and strategies they used to solve past problems as they effectively tap into their memory bank of learnings.

Efficacious leaders strategically use this habit by developing metacognitive strategies such as:

- ***As they begin to learn something new***, they reflect on prior learning by asking themselves questions such as, *What do I already know? How does what I know apply here? What are some experiences that I relate this to?*
- ***As they are learning***, they actively make connections by asking themselves questions such as, *What will be the important ideas that I will take away? What can I do to remember the key ideas?*
- ***After the learning experience is over***, they extend their thinking by asking questions such as, *How might I transfer what I have learned to other situations?*

Gathering Data Through All Senses



The brain is the ultimate reductionist. All information gets into the brain through the sensory pathways: gustatory, olfactory, tactile, kinesthetic, auditory, and visual. Most linguistic, cultural, and physical learning is derived from the environment by observing or taking in through the senses. It reduces the world to its elementary parts — photons of light, molecules of smell, sound waves, vibrations of touch—which send electrochemical signals to individual brain cells that store information about lines, movements, colors, smells and other sensory inputs.

Multi-sensory storage provides better access to retrieve that information. This provides multiple brain pathways that can activate information to meet challenges. Leaders whose sensory pathways are more open, alert, and acute often absorb more information from the environment. They also can gather data from internal sources and like walking antennae, they receive and register the felt experience of those around them.

Efficacious leaders strategically draw on gathering data through all their senses by:

- **Engaging in a new topic or problem.** They ask themselves, “What sources of data should I consider? How is what I am experiencing impacting my thinking?”
- **Paying attention to the world around them.** “What am I noticing in my environment? What details capture my attention?”
- **Deliberately using one’s senses when trying to remember something.** For example, draw (or find) a picture that captures the idea. Act out a historical event to capture the feeling or mood.
- **Using descriptive language.** Leaders model using sensory images in their communications to model and inspire the writing of others in the organization.
- **Invite others to clarify their ideas.** Leaders probe their thinking by asking what it looks like, sounds like, feels like, etc.

Creating, Imagining, and Innovating



Many people assume that creativity is a rare commodity that someone is either born with or not and that it is reserved for the elite among us: artists, writers, and composers, or the likes of Miles Davis, Steve Jobs, or Frida Kahlo. Everyone has the capacity to generate novel, original, clever or ingenious products, solutions, and techniques—if that capacity is developed. Research shows us that we are all born with the capacity to push the boundaries of our thinking.

When leaders build the capacities in their culture for creating, imagining, and innovating, they are skillfully learning how to push the boundaries of everyone's thinking. *Imagining* is generating new ideas without concern for the possible. *Creating* is giving form to ideas with the goal of taking something that is possible and making it come to life. *Innovating* is taking an existing system or idea and making improvements — perhaps focusing on simplicity, improved effectiveness, or beautifying its form. Leaders also model that behavior as they take risks and push the boundaries of their perceived limits.

Efficacious leaders inspire themselves and others to:

- **Take risks.** If they try something and it doesn't turn out as they hoped, it isn't a failure. Rather, it provides a rich opportunity to analyze what went wrong, to learn, and to generate alternative strategies. When leaders are less afraid to make mistakes, they open up the environment for more play and experimentation.
- **Think by using analogies.** *In what ways is a school like an airport? In what ways is soccer like a highway? In what ways is gravity like a feather?* Comparing an idea or topic and a strange analogy can illuminate new and important attributes and deepen understanding.
- **Brainstorm absurd ideas.** Albert Einstein once said, "If at first an idea doesn't seem totally absurd there's no hope for it." Leaders move toward the absurd, the "seemingly" irrelevant, in order to create new insights rather than taking an "obvious" direction.
- **Use divergent and convergent thinking in harmony with each other.** When creating or innovating, there is a balance between converging ideas by following rules, becoming precise and drawing on factual information, and other times when divergent thinking suggests that you need to break away and generate new ideas. Leaders are alert to situational cues which signal when to use which type of thinking.

Taking Responsible Risks



Risk taking is an increasingly critical element of leadership and essential for an organization's capacity to innovate. Efficacious leaders inspire others to confront fears and challenges based on what they say and what they model in their own behavior. As *responsible* risk-takers, they do not behave impulsively.

Their risks are educated. They draw on past knowledge, are mindful of options, thoughtful about consequences and have a well-trained sense of what is appropriate.

When encouraging colleagues to take responsible risks, efficacious leaders consider:

- ***Developing the capacity to live with some uncertainty.*** Challenge the process of finding an answer rather than avoiding what is not known.
- ***Being patient.*** Sustain a process of problem solving, investigation, or creation over time.
- ***Live on the edge of their competence.*** Take a chance on working on problems and ideas that are challenging and/or outside of their area of expertise.

Finding Humor



A sense of humor is a desirable trait in leaders particularly in stressful situations to relieve tensions and open up the possibilities for fresh thinking. Humor has been shown to increase our ability to make decisions and solve complex problems—all of which can make for more productive and innovative organizations. Finding humor can liberate creativity and provoke such higher-level thinking skills as anticipation, finding novel relationships, visual imagery, and making analogies.

Having a whimsical frame of mind, leaders thrive on finding incongruity and perceiving absurdities, ironies and satire; they find discontinuities and are able to laugh at situations and themselves. When people are laughing *with* one another, they experience the pleasure of acceptance, an in-group feeling, and bond with one another.

Efficacious leaders can develop their own sense of humor through strategies such as:

- ***Being honest and authentic.*** It's not whether or not you're funny, it's what kind of funny you are. If you can't be "ha-ha" funny, at least be "aha!" funny. Cleverness may be good enough.
- ***Not being afraid to laugh at oneself.*** It conveys that everything is okay.
- ***Poking fun at the issues.*** Because laughter is disarming, it takes some of the stress away from what everyone is worried about.
- ***Keep practicing.*** Over time your humor skills will improve. Read joke books and watch improv.
- ***Appreciating the element of surprise.*** Whether you are finding humor or creating humor, every good joke disrupts expectations by changing the momentum of the story.

Responding with Wonderment and Awe



Awe is the feeling we have when we recognize that something is amazing. Wonderment fills us with a sense of fascination about mysteries yet unsolved or questions yet unanswered. It leaves us with renewed appreciation of the ordinary objects and events before us. Efficacious leaders find moments of magic and create a sense of open-endedness and revelation in others. They recognize and celebrate the beauty and wonder of the world we live in and let their minds be intrigued by the mystery of the things they cannot yet understand. Responding with wonderment and awe is the habit that makes us ask big questions and inspires fresh thinking.

Leadership strategies that trigger that sense of amazement and wonder by:

- ***Reading widely about amazing leaders*** such as Mahatma Gandhi, Howard Schultz, Sir Ken Robinson, Angela Merkel, Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, and Rosalind Brewer.
- ***Exploring new places.*** Invite others to take a noticing walk with you. Visit museums, listen to music, watch a TED talk. Remain open to observe, explore, ponder, and commune.
- ***Keeping a sketchbook or journal.*** Make a list, draw, photograph, or describe experiences or ideas that you have found to be delightful, magical, mysterious and/or wondrous.

Remaining Open to Continuous Learning



From an early age, many of us have been taught to value certainty rather than doubt, to give answers rather than to inquire, and to know which choice is correct rather than to explore alternatives. Efficacious leaders overcome that need for certainty and inspire others to be in a continuous learning mode. Their confidence, in combination with their inquisitiveness, allows them to constantly search for new and better ways. They are always striving for improvement, always growing, always learning, always modifying and improving themselves. They seize problems, situations, tensions, conflicts and circumstances as valuable opportunities to learn.

Efficacious leaders can develop this disposition through strategies such as:

- ***Having humility and pride when admitting they don't know.*** They reframe this as a launch for exploration, curiosity, and mystery rather than a limitation.
- ***Asking questions and seeking connections.*** Deep learning is fueled by an inquisitive mind, developing capabilities for effective and thoughtful action.
- ***Continue to discover who they are and how they see the world.*** Making their thinking transparent is an inspiration to others.
- ***Reflecting on myself as a learner.*** They ask themselves questions, such as:
 - What motivates me to keep learning?
 - What do I still wonder about?
 - How will I remain open to new ideas or new learning?