



LEADERSHIP ACUMEN Issue 14

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YOU LEAD THE WAY YOU THINK

“I think therefore I am”- Rene Descartes

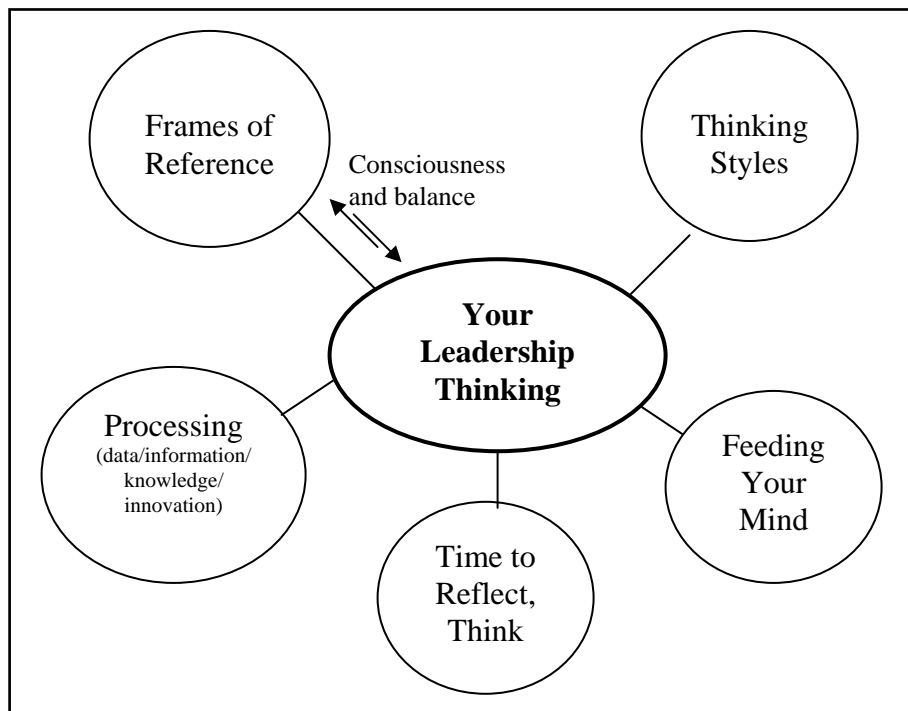
Few can argue the power our mind has over our actions. Gurus have pointed to the power of positive thinking, karmic return, and meditative healing. Centuries ago, Leonardo da Vinci observed that our perceptions were what informed our view/knowledge of reality. Einstein suggested that imagination is more important than knowledge. Ancient philosophers told us to understand that all things are one, and to connect our environment, body, mind and spirit. Many have encouraged us to realize that concentration and focus lead to success. Even Governor Schwarzenegger identified several years ago that you could achieve anything if you believed 100%!

In day-to-day practice, our ability to interact successfully with others and tolerate/embrace diversity has a lot to do with how open-minded we are.

Clearly much of the work done by Boards and Senior Executives are driven by conversation; co-created by mental constructs such as strategic/business plans, codes of conduct, accountability mechanisms; and carried out through facilitated changes in orientation and focus, mobilizing and motivating the minds of others around us.

With so much of our success as senior leaders dependent on the way we think, then perhaps there is value in taking a regular time-out to reflect upon the way we think and to consider any adjustments that might lead to enhance performance. This month's article will hopefully provide that reflection.

5 Areas of Consideration for reflecting on you leadership thinking could include:



Thinking Styles

In several of our development programs with Board Members and Executives we dedicate time to a “know thyself” element including an assessment of their Thinking Styles. Using an instrument called the InQ ® individuals can inventory their preferences in styles of thinking:

Synthesist - representing only about 3-5% of population, individuals with this style display:

- Challenging, multi-perspective conversation, looking at the many points of view, their assumptions and multiple options.
- Integration of various perspectives through debate or confrontation
- Creative speculation, restlessness for status quo, expression of opposite view points
- Dislike for simplistic, superficial and mundane conversation

Idealist – the most common thinking style found in almost 40% of the population is characterized by:

- Pursuit of a holistic, ideal solution.
- Focus on ‘good’ processes, positive relationships, expression of values
- Articulation of a commonly held goal
- Delayed decision-making from consideration of too many choices or fashioning of the ideal.

Pragmatist – this approach is preferred by about 1 in 5 adults and exemplified by:

- Adaptability to achieve “results”
- Focusing on the “payoff” and discussing tactics and strategies together
- Experimentation and open, eclectic approach in order to move forward
- Compromise and restlessness with delay

Analyst - the data shows about 35% of the population relies on approaches such as:

- Deductive analysis to determine the “one best way”
- Scientific studies and methods
- Proof statements, data to back-up/prove recommendations and models
- Long discussions and examination of issues/details

Realist – this is obvious in about a quarter of the population and focused on:

- Solutions to meet current needs/ challenges
- Personal experience and knowledge to assess correctness of other ideas and suggestions
- Achievement of concrete results and consensus
- Drive forward, preferably in their direction

Of course there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ style. Being aware of how we tend to think compared to styles of others, can however enhance team work, leader communication impact, and appreciation of diverse approaches to more comprehensive solutions. This awareness can also remind us to loosen-up a bit if we tend to over-use one style, and be more flexible depending on the situation to match our style to the needs of the situation.

Frames of Reference

Banff Executive Leadership’s own research into Executive and Board competency has clearly shown that day to day practices are guided by the frame-of-reference and values for leadership that individuals hold in their minds. The way they view the world and their place in it drives very different leadership actions.

Frame A	Frame B	Frame C	Frame D
<p>In this first frame leadership thinking is driven by an individual’s personal experience.</p> <p>They tap into personal networks, their own skill sets, espouse their own values, and rely on their own interpretation of technical information, reading and conversations.</p> <p>Leadership thinking and action results in strong personal contributions to the organization.</p>	<p>A second frame-of-reference focuses on a team approach.</p> <p>As the leader, this style of thinking and action seeks to support other team members in being effective, listening and learning from input and ideas of other members.</p> <p>You also take an analytical approach, seeking to lever strength, insight, and decision-making greater than the sum of the parts.</p>	<p>This reference for leadership thinking and action comes from a systems-thinking base.</p> <p>You are likely to institute organization-wide processes that bring forward key information from all parts and levels. And, these same mechanisms ensure that policies and decisions/communications successfully flow back throughout the organization to the front-line staff and to suppliers.</p>	<p>This network-referenced style considers and acts within a larger community/ global context.</p> <p>You look simultaneously inside and with a broad world view.</p> <p>You hold yourself and organization accountable to community, and use their input for continued innovation and strategic adjustment so as to be sustainable long-term, and successful near-term.</p>

In addition to these frames of reference above, one needs to be aware of the ethics (the balance between individual benefit vs. community benefit) you embrace, and the assumptions regarding global/ environmental sustainability that drives your decision-making and actions. These frames of reference for our ‘being’ provide the basis for our consciousness and balance in life and leadership.

How Do You ‘Process’ Information?

Our brains are marvellous organs, and they can function on a variety of levels in processing stimulus from our surroundings. In today’s high tech world, we are awash in data. We can access reams of statistics through the internet, company databases, reports of events and transactions by the media.

As a senior leader the way we work with this is important. Data by itself can be somewhat valuable; however, to turn this into useful information requires some discernment and selection. This requires a clear understanding of what is important and our priorities.

Turning data and information into useful knowledge requires us to further apply our experience, and the experience of others, and establish meaning by relating to the goals we are pursuing. Often we talk about the

world becoming a knowledge economy. So, do you as a leader share knowledge – or information – or data? Sharing of knowledge requires shared goals, shared experience, shared priorities.

Or, do you seek wisdom? This requires you to take your ‘processing’ even further. Wisdom is the application of knowledge through judgment and practice – the use of the right knowledge, in the right way, at the right time. This requires some time for careful thought, an ability to read patterns of the current environment, and to relate to the patterns experienced before.

Finally, an aspiration towards Innovation requires an even higher, active integration of knowledge and wisdom, along with a willingness to ‘play’ with new pattern combinations. This demands of the leader the willingness to try new things, and seek feedback on the new concepts.

More application of wisdom or innovation processing by a leader requires time and space to do so. Often in our complex, fast-paced world, many leaders capable of applying wisdom or innovative thinking fail to actually do so. This is because the busy pace of their lives and the enormous volume of information they are expected to process prevents them from careful consideration or play with patterns.

Pause to Reflect

How do you find the time and space to lift yourself up to these higher levels of mental processing – wisdom and innovation? Some of the most famous leaders over the ages have kept regular journals. This daily discipline causes them to be observant of what is happening around them, see the patterns, and provide ‘break-through’ wisdom and/or innovations.

Some well known leaders of our time admit to regular meditation and/or yoga exercises. They have created reflective environments in their offices or homes to support this routine. Still others engage in regular running or walking to provide the rhythm and mental space for this reflective process.

Of course, regular vacations can also contribute to the consolidation, integration and playful thinking. Some of the best new ideas in business and governance has occurred while the leader was on vacation and/or retreat environments that encourage time, reflection, and play.

Feeding Your Mind

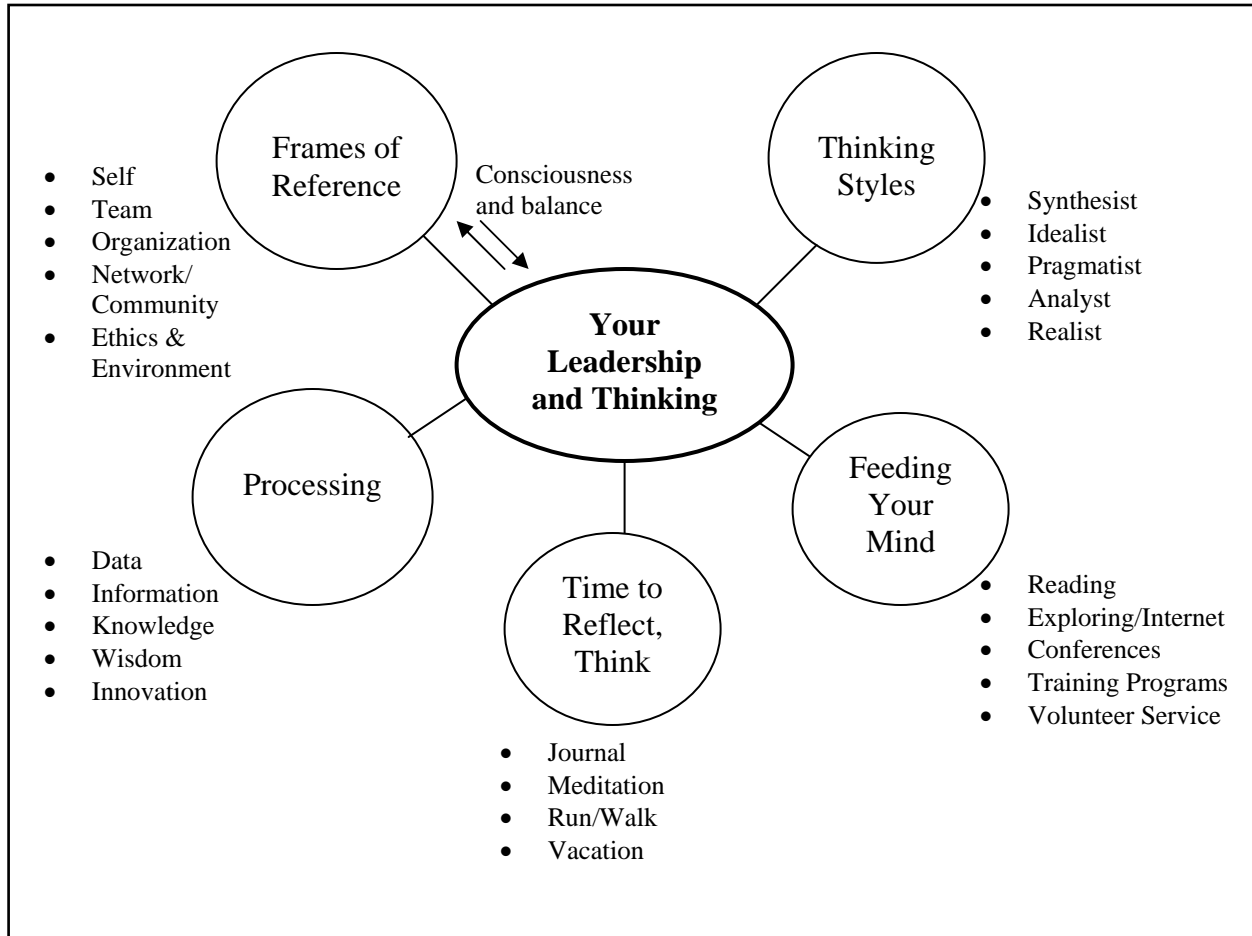
Often as you work your way up an organization and progress in your career, you and the employer invest in training, learning experiences, and so on. Many executives have told me that when they hit the V.P. level, or were appointed to a Board, this dynamic swings to the opposite – that their experience and knowledge now gets drawn down.

Of course, continuous drawing down of knowledge, wisdom etc, without re-filling the ‘well’ can be quite debilitating. Also, if we are regularly moving into new markets, new conditions, new roles that we have never experienced before – how do we gain the new perspectives, skill sets etc. required to be successful?

One approach can include the reading of *different* types of books/magazine, exploring new relationships, trying out new internet applications, attending new-style conferences/ programs, engaging in volunteer initiatives, etc. There are many sources of new insights and ways to feed your mind. We would hope that every senior person regularly takes an opportunity ‘fill the well’ and rejuvenate their spark.

Leading, Thinking, Growing

If you concur that so much of your leadership effectiveness relies upon keeping your mind sharp, plus building an awareness of your personal tendencies, preferences and frames-of-reference; then you can start to find ways to continuously develop your abilities for the future. Our success in this rapidly advancing, fast changing world really does depend on our regular reflection and investment in the way we think - about how we think and lead!



Exploring The Web!

This month, the connections take you to sites with more perspectives on the issues surrounding Leadership Thinking.

http://books.google.ca/books?id=W_HHQB9pyJwC&pg=PA147&lpg=PA147&dq=Rethinking+our+Leadership+Thinking&source=bl&ots=D1iSP1if8y&sig=Fe9sO3EHJujDjik95wenOPLwYOY&hl=en&ei=FIGYS7WVBYKUNcKRiXo&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAsQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Rethinking%20our%20Leadership%20Thinking&f=false

“Rethinking our Leadership Thinking: Choosing a More Authentic Path” A 2003 article from the Center for New Futures.

<http://yourthinkingprofile.com/index.html>

InQ Your Thinking Profile

<http://www.fi.edu/brain/index.htm>

The Human Brain website – a great collection of information on how to better nourish, protect and renew your brain & thinking! The Franklin Institute

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Executive-Thinking---5-Major-Flaws&id=3461076>

Executive Thinking – 5 Major Flaws

<http://www.cog-tech.com/papers/CriticalThinking/Cohen%20Leadership%20and%20Critical%20Thinking%20revised.pdf>

“Leadership, Critical Thinking, and Dialogue” A paper by Marvin Cohen. (pdf)

<http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/cogsys/infoproc.html>

“The Information Processing Approach” – An overview article on memory and how your brain processes information!

Banff Executive Leadership Inc. offers public and customized programming to improve Board Governance and Executive Leadership Practices. We also provide coaching and consulting services to Boards and Executives to help enhance their leadership practices. Please contact us if we can be of further assistance.

If you found this article useful, please forward the article’s web link to a friend!

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