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INTRODUCTION

Insight is a wonderful thing. There's nothing like that aha-feeling when you're confronted with a complex topic – and then suddenly get it. This book is your ahavenue, a visual rollercoaster ride to current business, technology, (self) leadership, and psychology insights.

What makes this mini encyclopedia of short answers different from existing ones is that it uses a systematic visual approach for clear explanations of complex topics.

This approach is called Visual Variation and can be used by anyone, regardless of your drawing or design abilities. It emphasizes the expansive nature of knowledge and stimulates viewers to go beyond the presented answers and iterate the presented image further. In this way, it encourages readers to apply the gained knowledge to their own situation and thus continue the variation with one's own insights.

This Visipedia (visual mini encyclopedia) covers sixty pertinent questions that most professionals need to address in their work or life. They are structured into four sections:

- I. Personal questions that can guide your reflection on your own learning style, your career, your creativity, or your life in general.
- II. Interpersonal questions that address issues when interacting with others, including trusting, communicating, leading, motivating, or delegating.

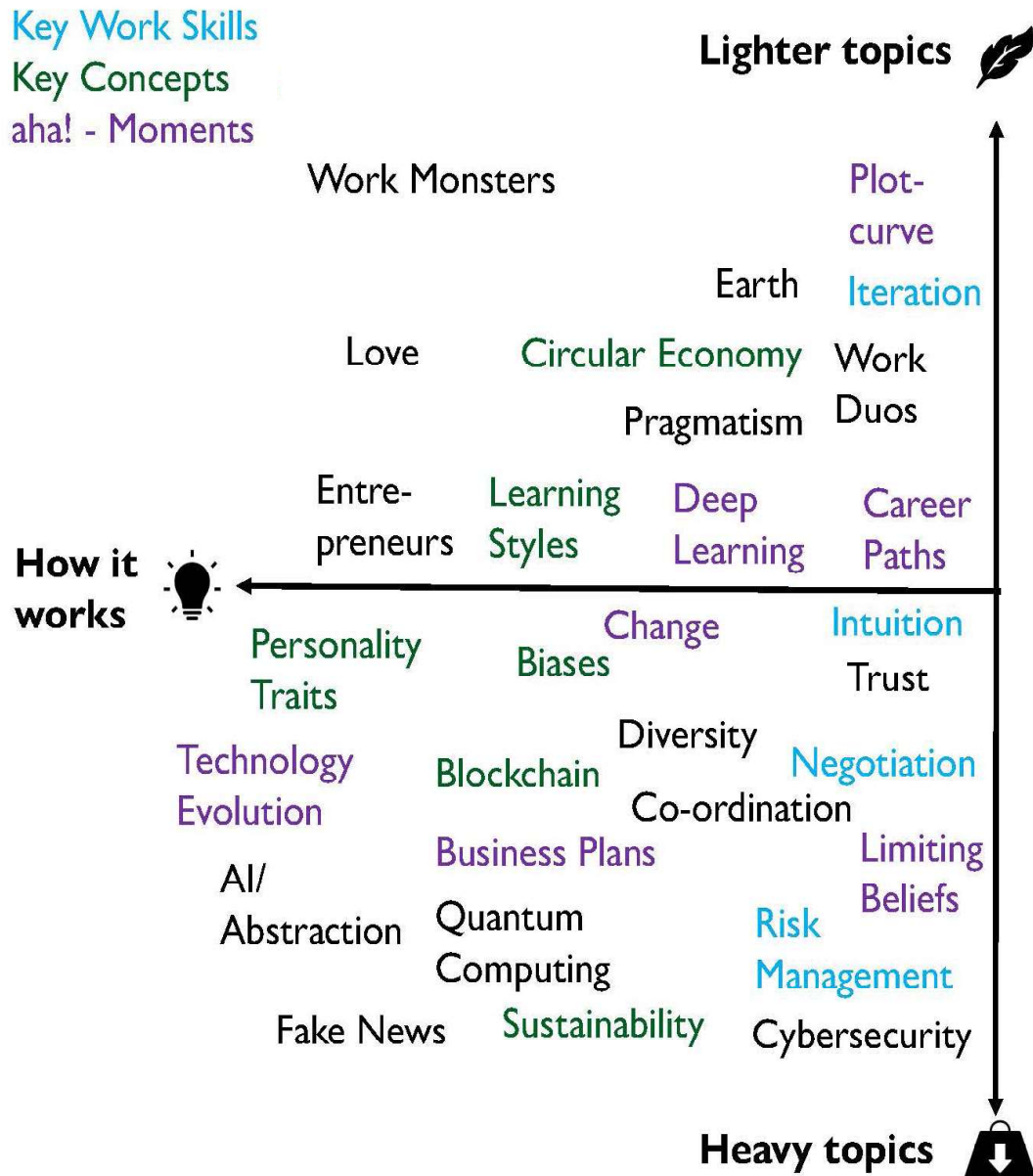
III. Institutional questions that regard organizational issues, such as co-ordination mechanisms, risk management approaches, sales approaches, or conflict resolution mechanisms.

IV. Technological and societal questions that concern new developments like quantum computing, cybersecurity, blockchain or the vision of a circular economy.

Remember that the answers given are mere invitations for you to go beyond them and reflect on your own experiences and insights. In this vein, each entry concludes with a stimulating question that you can use for reflection. Ideally you can add our visual iterations to the presented ones and thus enrich the visipedia entry with your own experience or insight. So, when it comes to complex questions don't worry, vary!

Happy discovery and reflection!

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SECTION 1

PERSONAL QUESTIONS



HOW DO YOU BEST LEARN?

Do you know your own learning and thinking style?

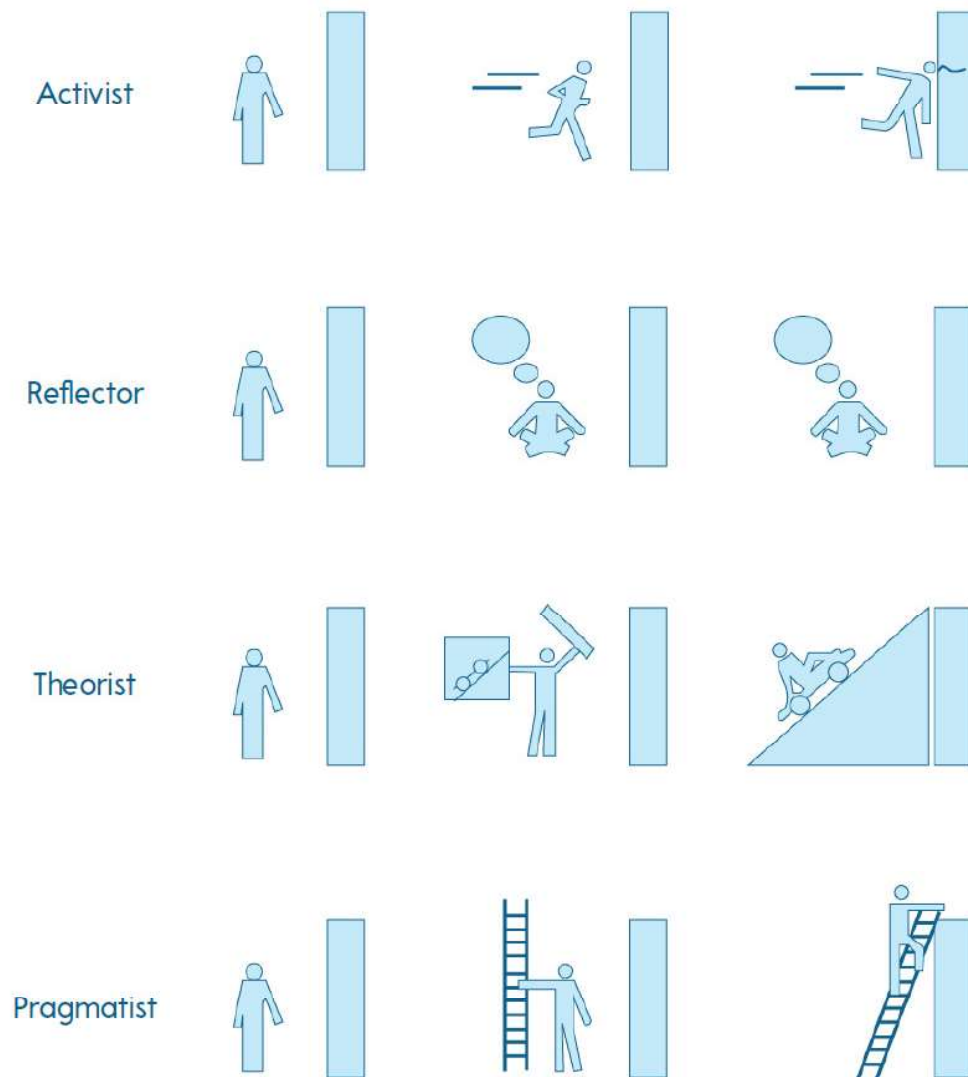
The image to the right shows four typical cognitive styles (based on Kolb and Honey & Mumford) in a memorable way to help us learn better and to tune messages to our target audience. So ask yourself:

- Do you learn best by trial & error and sometimes rush into things? Then you may be an Activist. Experiences are your way to learn.
- Do you tend to overthink issues and fall into paralysis by analysis? Do you usually consider risks and other perspectives first? Then you may be a Reflector. Reading is probably your favorite way to learn.
- Are you very systematic, evidence-based, or keen to learn and work with frameworks? Then you may be a Theorist.
- Is your curiosity mainly driven by how useful something is for the problems you face? Are you at times reluctant to try out new things and prefer to re-use old solutions? Then you may be a Pragmatist.

So know your own learning preferences (and use them to learn more effectively) and surround yourself with people who can complement and expand your own thinking style.

Under which conditions are you the most effective at learning, and how can you create them?

Four Learning Styles



HOW DO YOU REASON?

Do you know your favorite way of reasoning, and should you change it?

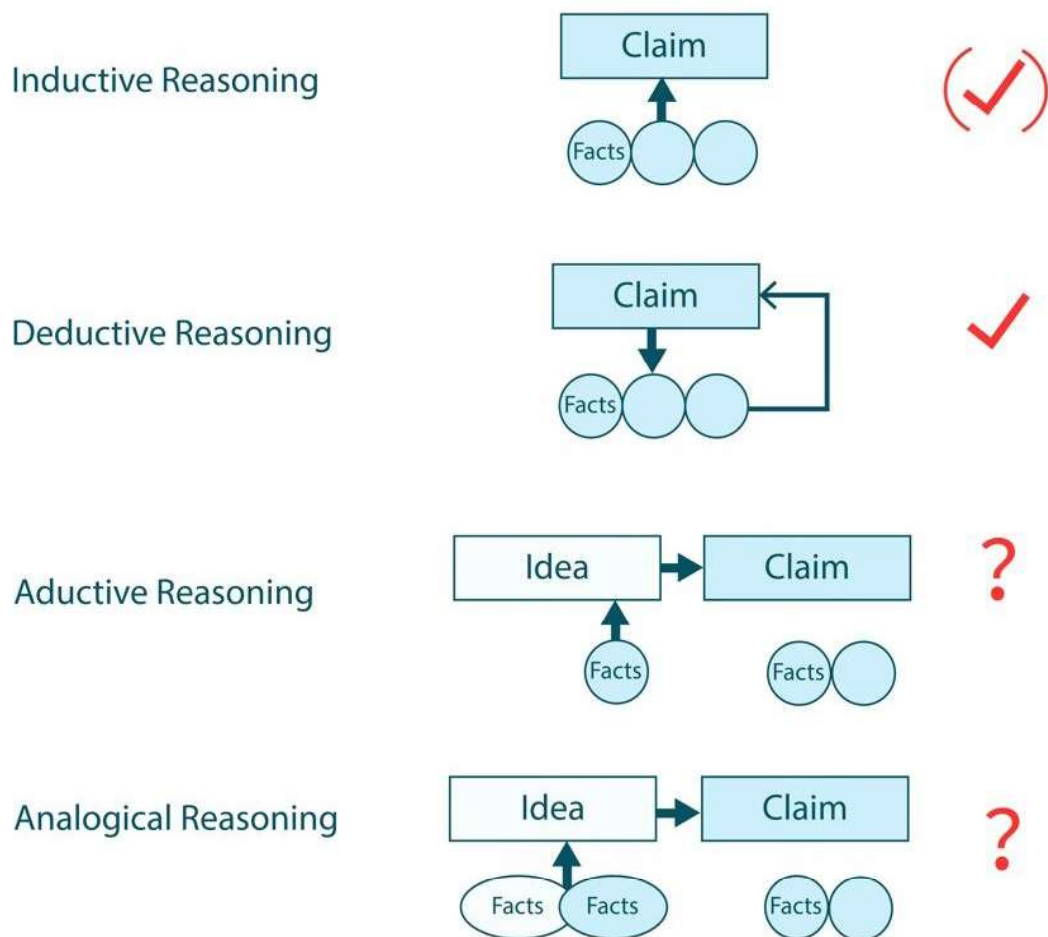
Here are four fundamentally different ways of thinking and illustrated with start-up examples. Which one do you rely on the most?

- Induction: Our natural way to come up with insights is to use our experience. Example: We see many start-ups fail because their customer base doesn't grow quickly enough, hence we infer that scalability must be a key trait of successful start-ups. Induction is prone to error though, as we tend to overgeneralize.
- Deduction: A more rigorous way is to setup a claim as a hypothesis and then search for evidence that contradicts or confirms this view. Example: I posit that all successful (=next funding round) B2C start-ups from the last two years have grown their customer base by at least 10 percent each quarter.
- Abduction: Relying more on our creative intuition and on serendipitous observations allows us to come up with new (unvalidated) claims. Example: It would be neat if there was a start-up growth formula that would tell you on which potential customers to focus at what stage.
- Analogy: Comparing seemingly unrelated phenomena and applying traits from one to the other allows us to generate new claims. Example: A startup should act like a rebel army trying to conquer a palace: create alliances, infiltrate the palace, and then attack it from all sides.

While other forms of thinking may be more creative, deductive reasoning is the only one that can give us relative certainty that our claim has merit.

What's your favorite mode of reasoning?

Types of Reasoning



HOW CAN YOU USE SYNERGIES?

What are synergies and can they enable you to achieve more with less?

A synergy is the net positive effect of cleverly combining previously separate things, such as activities, goals, organizations, resources, people, or technologies. Think $1+1>2$ or recall the idiom „killing two birds with one stone“ (friendlier: free two birds with one key).

There are at least five types of synergies that anyone can use to be more productive, impactful and effective at work; the first three can be used on your own, while the last two require cooperating with others.

•———— VISIPEDIA ————•

1. Leveraging one thing for another (e.g., using clients as investors).
2. Aligning one thing so that it now also supports others (like using your commute for learning or for fitness) .
3. Consolidating one thing into another to save time and effort (e.g., integrating training elements into meetings).
4. Pooling a resource for multiple people, activities, or goals (try pooling contacts, lessons learned, or books with friends).
5. Combining things or people so that respective weaknesses cancel out or strengths align (i.e., an entrepreneur teaming up with a designer).

On the next page, these five types of synergies are shown as visually.

To reap these synergies in your own work, ask yourself these questions regularly:

1. Leverage: What could I reuse so that it helps me with another thing? What goal of mine can support another one?
2. Alignment: How can I modify something so that it supports other things as well? How can I tweak an activity so that my other goals also benefit from it?

3. Consolidation: What could I stop doing by integrating it into something else?
4. Resource Pool: With whom can I share a resource to make better use of it?
5. Complementarity: With whom can I partner up so that their strength will compensate for my weakness and vice versa?

You can also combine these synergies: think of carpooling with a language buddy (alignment + pooling + complementarity).

Are you giving synergies a chance at work and in your life?

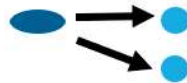
Five Types of Synergies

Leveraging



Use A for B.

Aligning



Tweak A so that it helps B and C.

Consolidating



Integrate A into B.

Pooling



Use a resource for both A and B.

Complementing



Combine A and B to eliminate weak points.

HOW CAN YOU HAVE BETTER IDEAS?

You will have heard the expression “thinking outside the box.”

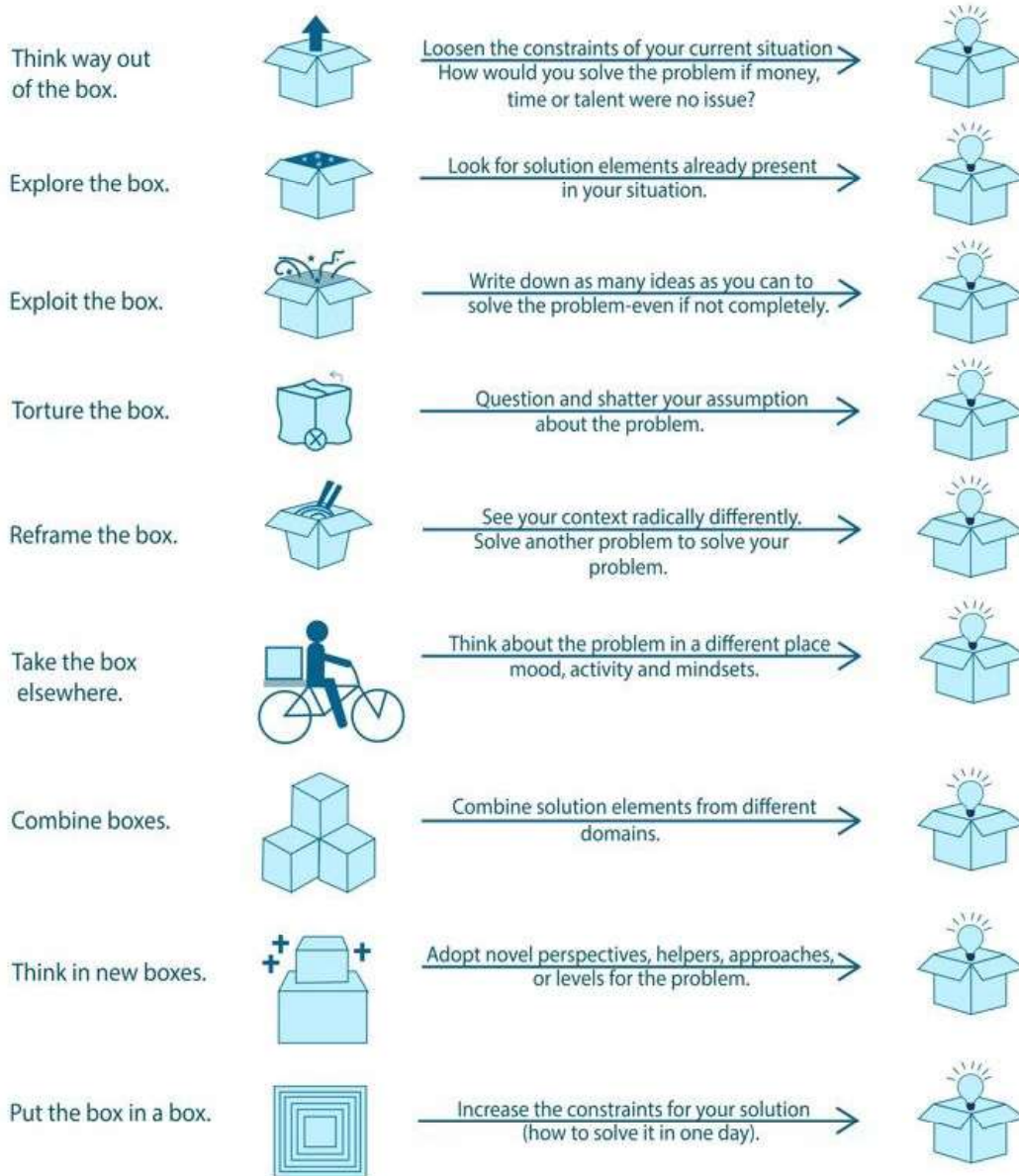
Taking this saying as a starting point for a visual variation, we can mutate this notion and not just think outside the box but also explore the box (work with existing solutions), exploit it (work with your existing resources), shake it up (question our assumptions about the problem), reframe it (use your tools in a different way to solve it), take it to another

place (to get inspiration), combine it with other boxes (learn from other contexts), think in new boxes (radically different solutions on another level), put the box (= constraint) in another box (= additional constraints), or give chance a chance by ‘shuffling’ it.

This image not only gives you ten different strategies for creative problem solving; it is in itself a generative mechanism to come up with other ways to solve a problem. It invites you to develop other ways to think outside the box or ‘unbox’ ideas further.

How would you visualize YOUR way to unbox ideas?

Unboxing your Thinking



HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND OURSELVES AND OTHERS BETTER?

Your dominant personality traits are a bit like your favorite shirts: you don't wear them all the time, but you prefer them and when unsure you'll put on one of those.

The most reliable, concise and influential classification of personality traits is the so-called OCEAN approach also known as the Big Five. The variation above gives a graphic summary of these five personality aspects with the help of a shirt mutation.

So ask yourself:

- Are you a very open person or rather reserved and conservative?
- Are you disciplined and consistent or more chaotic?
- Do you like to be the center of attention or are you a bit shy?
- Is it easy to get along with you or are you stubborn?
- Do you dwell on negative emotions or are you an optimist?

Of course, these five traits cannot fully describe us. They are, nonetheless, great differentiators among people and useful predictors for various personality-related topics.

So how would you design a t-shirt that reflects YOUR personality?

The Big Five Personality Traits



Open: being curious and adventurous



Disciplined (conscientious): being responsible and consistent



Extroverted: being outgoing and enjoying company



Nice (agreeableness): being cooperative and friendly to others



Neurotic: dwelling on negative emotions

HOW CAN YOU LET GO?

Just let it go.

You've probably heard this well intended piece of advice before when dealing with setbacks, frustrations, or disappointments. But this is so much easier said than done, right?

So what are useful practices, that can truly help you to let go of things that hang over you like a dark cloud? Here are nine ways to move on and let go of things from the past:

- **Growth Mindset:** See the setback as a learning opportunity and identify the lesson it has taught you.
- **Stoic Mindset:** Realize that you should only worry about things that are actually in your control and let the others go.
- **Mindfulness:** Focus on today and be present. Stop worrying about past mistakes.
- **Realism:** Burst your own bubble and let go of illusions, idealized versions of others, or unrealistic expectations.
- **Pragmatism:** Let go of a negative experience that was also the result of your excessive sense of perfectionism and accept that it was good enough.
- **Resilience:** Instead of worrying about the past, prepare yourself for future challenges and build coping resources, momentum and lasting energy.
- **Boundaries:** Learn to set healthy boundaries in your relationships. Clearly define (and respect) your limits and understand that you cannot control the actions or emotions

of others. If better for you, then cut some ties.

- **Gratitude:** Be thankful and happy about things that went well for you (and could have gone badly).
- **Reframing:** Making a balloon animal out of the balloon that you should let go means reframing a setback as something playful to laugh and joke about. Making fun of something is the first step to let it go.

When was the last time you consciously let something go and freed your mind this way?

Letting Go



Learn the Lesson & Move on



Focus on what you can control



Be in the Here and Now



Face the Facts



Reduce Perfectionism



Invest in Resilience



Set Boundaries



Cultivate Gratitude



Reframe

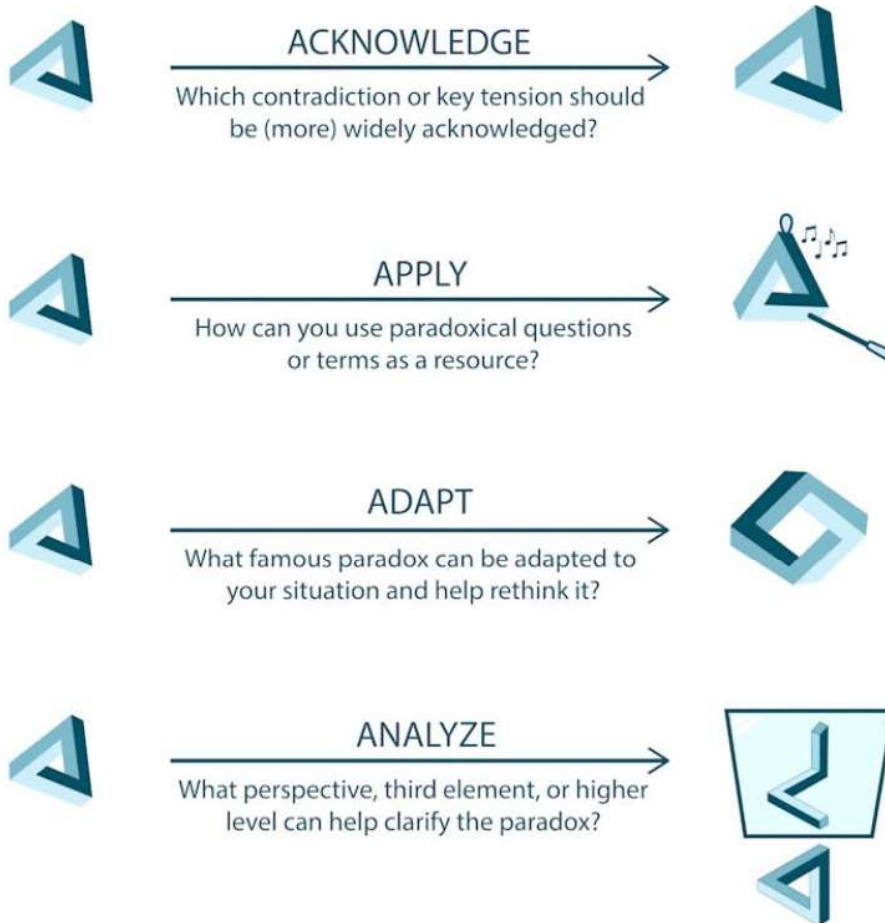
HOW CAN YOU USE PARADOXES?

What's a paradox and how can you use it to solve problems or innovate? A paradox is an apparent contradiction or an illogical conclusion from logical grounds. Paradoxical thinking overcomes trade-offs and invents new options. Here's an example of paradoxical advice: "You should never generalize statements when giving advice, as this leads to undifferentiated thinking." More seriously, though here are four ways to use paradoxes for your thinking:

- Acknowledge tensions and trade-offs in your work explicitly and give them informative, paradoxical labels (such as "flexistabilizing" or "metadetails"). This makes trade-offs tangible and discussable.
- Apply paradoxical questions to stimulate new ideas, for example: "How could we make our customer service the worst?" Then invert those ideas.
- Adapt influential paradoxes to your situation to find innovative solutions (such as the heap paradox or the raven paradox). For example: "What about our organizations's culture can we (and should we) change yet it still remains intact?"
- Analyze alleged paradoxes for explanations that can resolve the contradiction (through a third element or a higher level). For example explaining that the more you plan your training workshops, the worse they get by the lack of spontaneity that ensues from your overly meticulous workshop designs.
- So, don't get paralyzed by paradoxes, but put them to use to expand your thinking.

How could you use paradoxes to solve your next problem?

Ways to Use Paradoxes



HOW CAN YOU MAKE LEARNING A HABIT?

Are you agile and persistent in your own lifelong learning?

Continuous learning has become a priority for every job and every field, so we need to approach our own learning in a flexible and motivating way. The metaphor of putting on different shoes for different learning situations, needs, or topics can go a long way to integrate learning more seamlessly into our lives - as shown in this week's Visual Variation.

A few examples:

- **Sneakers:** Just as sneakers are versatile and comfortable, this approach involves going to different places to learn, but with the same open and flexible mindset. Make it easy and comfortable to learn everywhere.
Example: using a colleague as a mentor, watching instructive YouTube videos on the bus, enrolling in an evening class, and using an app to learn a new language.
- **Loafers:** Learning in the comfort of slippers symbolizes a relaxed and self-paced approach. Just as loafers provide a sense of ease, this method prioritizes taking your time, enjoying the process, and learning at your own pace.
Example: learning about resilience by reading books in the evening, having a discussion circle with colleagues over lunch, or journaling at the end of the day.
- **Hiking shoes:** Learning with the endurance of hiking shoes involves going the distance with ambitious learning objectives while keeping your pace. Hiking shoes

are built to withstand tough terrain, so build a system to keep your learning pace even among stress or distractions.

Example: learning about statistics by setting up your own data science pilot project and seeing it through with weekly reviews by an expert.

- **Boots:** Step into the cold water and go for an immersive, deep learning experience, for example by switching jobs for a week or signing up for a learning retreat to master coding, a new methodology, or a new leadership skill.

What is your approach to integrate learning into your life?

Approaches to Lifelong Learning

	Sneaky Learning	Create multiple easy learning opportunities.
	"Loafing it"	Create a comforting learning environment at your own pace.
	Go the Distance	Set an ambitious goal and learn to achieve it.
	Tiptoeing	Enable learning try-outs and get feedback from instructors (about your potential).
	Wading	Reserve time for intense and complete learning immersion.
	Catwalking	Setup deadlines where you need to show what you've learned.
	Chillin'	Create informal, social, and fun learning contexts without pressure.
	Rolling-through	Create accelerated learning experiences to preview mastery.

WHAT MAKES YOU A STRATEGIC THINKER?

From all the research, management literature, strategy courses, case studies and textbooks, as well as from practical experience, I would highlight the following nine thinking habits as essential for anyone who needs to think (and act) strategically. They are summarized in the image to the right and contain the following practices:

- **Alignment:** Check that your actions feed into your strategic goals.
- **Preparation:** Anticipate even unlikely obstacles or scenarios.
- **Options:** Devise multiple pathways to reach your goals.
- **Scope:** Be clear and consistent on what _not_ to do.
- **Focus:** Avoid distractions and declutter relentlessly.
- **Differentiation:** Build a momentum that makes you unique (and partner up for the rest).
- **Synergy:** Make goals (and tasks) reinforce each other cleverly.
- **Reframing:** Question, adapt and expand your viewpoints.
- **Ambidexterity:** cultivate improving as well as disrupting

What makes a great strategizer in your view?

9 Principles of Strategizing The ABC of Strategic Thinking

1. **A**lign all your actions to your goals.



2. **B**e prepared for Disruptions Change, and Crises.



3. **C**reate more Options.



4. **D**ecide what not to do.



5. **E**liminate Waste, Distractions and needless Complexity.



6. **F**ocus on high-yield, differentiating Activities and fitting Partners.



7. **G**ive Synergy a Chance.



8. **H**ave multiple Frames and Perspectives.



9. **I**ntest in Innovation and Efficiency Gains.



HOW CAN YOU DREAM MORE DELIBERATELY?

Do you cultivate deliberate dreaming? Deliberate dreaming means envisioning desirable futures. It is a crucial activity for all innovators. Dreams are the touchstones of characters, Thoreau wrote. And Huxley encouraged us to dream in a pragmatic way. How can we do that – dream from the core of our character and envision the future in an uplifting way?

Here are six ways to dream deliberately:

- Breathe and inhale the future – dream immersively: Develop a visceral vision of the future that you want with all the details that this entails.
- Connect futures – combine your dreams so that they reflect your range of talents and ambitions and show your unique outlook on the future.
- Roll into the future – dream dynamically: get going and experience your dreams in action and take it from there to build future momentum.
- Step up to the future – dream in levels: Set a realistic next step, but always keep looking beyond it.
- Kick the future – let go of dreaded or dragging dreams: You need to abandon some of your dreams to keep your energy and focus.
- But:
- Hold on to the future – keep the dream floating: Don't give up on your dearest dreams prematurely.

Can you diversify the way you day dream?