

Reflections on My Management Career (and Life):

*Thinking, Talking and Learning
Together*

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University of Manchester, 12th July 2022

Find a partner to work with
for a few minutes

Pairs Exercise #1

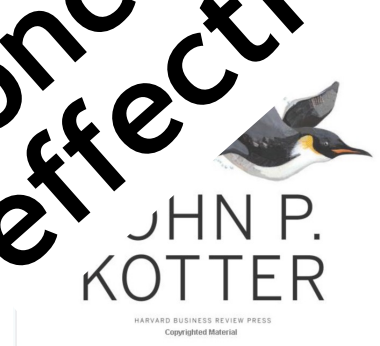
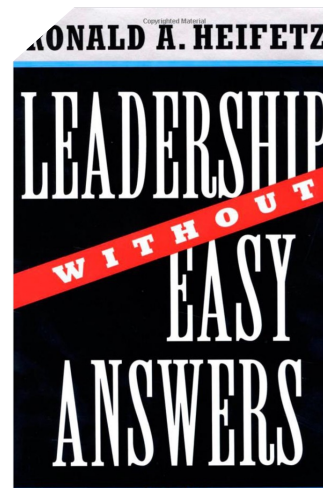
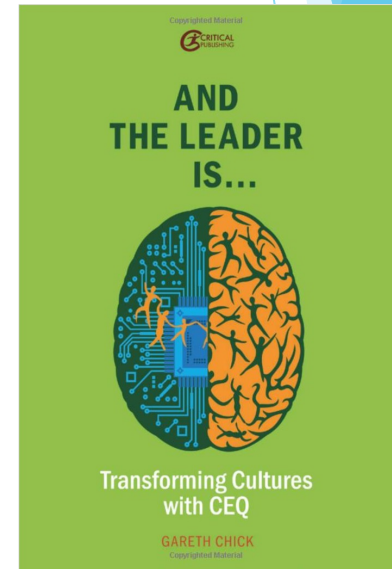
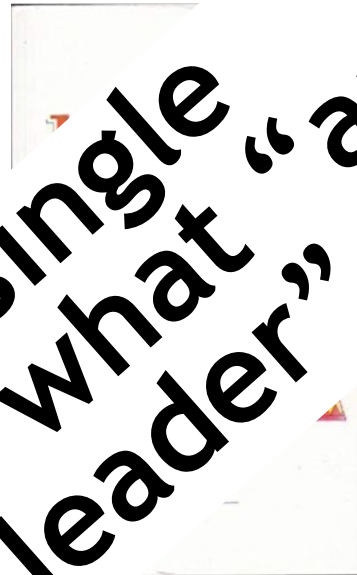
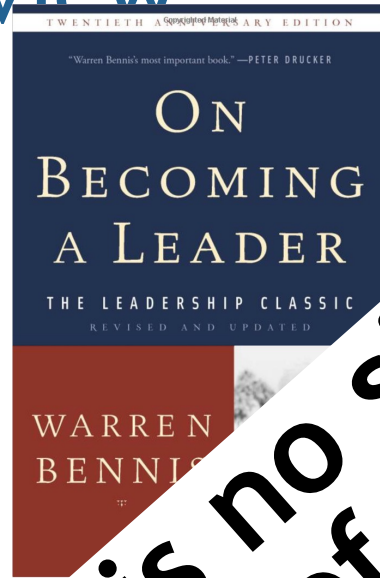
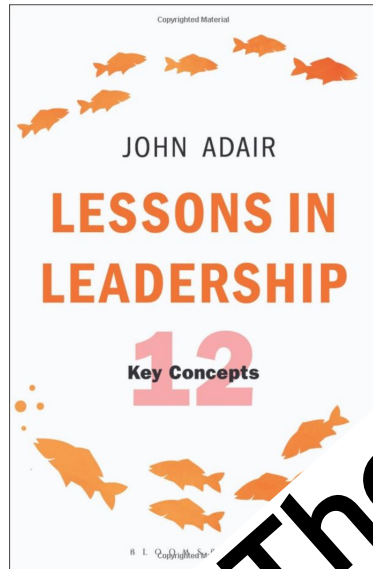
Imagine this conversation:

- Person A's view: *"An effective leader is someone who ..."*
- Person B's view: *"No, you're wrong, an effective leader is someone who ..."*

- Briefly, what could A's view be?
- Briefly, what could B's view be?

- Why are they both right?
- Why, however, is this not an appropriate conversation?

Quick Review



There is no single "an concept of what "an effective leader" is.



”When you think you are arguing with an idiot - so do they!”

Vincent Nolan



*"Life can only be understood
backwards, but it can only be lived
forwards"*

Søren Kierkegaard (1813 to 1855)

Session Outline

Setting the Scene

Group exercise
Introducing the Topic

Laying out the Agenda

What to expect from the session
Where and how I gained my experience.

Six Lessons I've learned

1. Different inquiry types
2. Human irrationality
3. Thinking together
4. "Them and Us"
5. Resistance to change
6. Four resources

Management Career Experiences

1968 -1979

1979

1980-2002

2002-2006

2006-2018

September 1968 – Founded Palaeos Reproductions Ltd. to make museum replicas

April 1972 – Managing Director, Merx Optical Ltd. Manufacturer of spectacle frames.

May 1974 – Letraset International: Director 'ArtistCare', then General Manager, Germany, Switzerland, Austria.

February 1979 – appointed 'Director, Development and Supply', Graphics Division of Letraset International Plc

April 1979 – hired Synectics UK Ltd to assist with new product development

May 1979 – personal appraisal results in my attending Coverdale Course

February 1985 – founded Human Systems Limited (initially networking with Synectics)

1988 to 1992 – facilitated both internal and dealer events for BMW (GB) & numerous events for BP Oil Europe

1993 – developed idea for Human Systems inter-company benchmarking of Organizational Project Management

1994 to 2013 – led the development of Human Systems with facilitation at the core of the business

August 2000 – awarded PhD for thesis that relied heavily on facilitation

2002 to 2006 – helped co-facilitate Rethinking Project Management (with Mark Winter and Charles Smith)

January 2006 – created Human Systems International with 3 colleagues

2008 to 2014 – directed Module 5 of the MSc Project and Programme Management (co-taught with Mark Winter)

September 2013 – Human Systems International acquired by the Project Management Institute (PMI)

2014 to 2016 – Facilitated PMI Global Executive Council workshops & paved way for "Brightline"

2016 to 2018 – Led PMI's contribution to 'Project X', a UK Government initiative to promote PM research

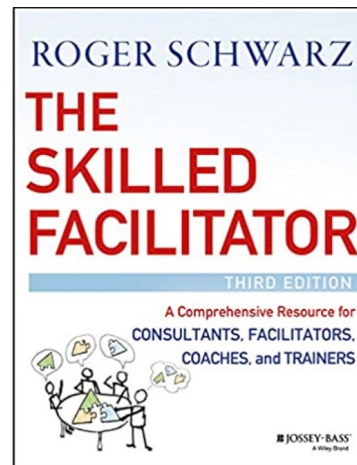
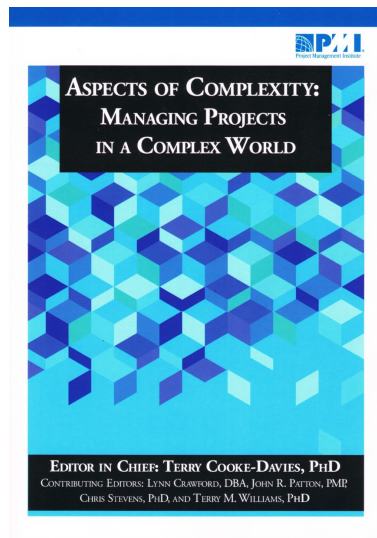
October 2019 – Presented with PMI's Scholar—Practitioner Award

Initial Career Reflections

1. People and processes are both important, but in most cases, people are the more so.
2. In Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous situations, new skills are called for to mobilize appropriate actions fast!
3. Faced with time and resource pressure, diverse groups frequently make sub-optimal decisions.



4. Facilitation skills can align 'hearts and minds', as well as increasing the effectiveness of group decision-making.



But There is More to Life than Business...

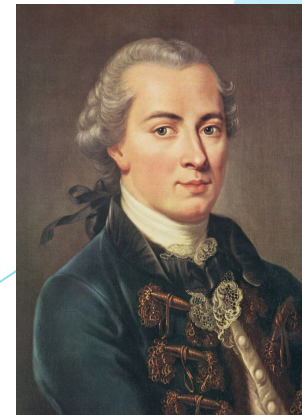
... we have many other roles and experiences from which we can learn.



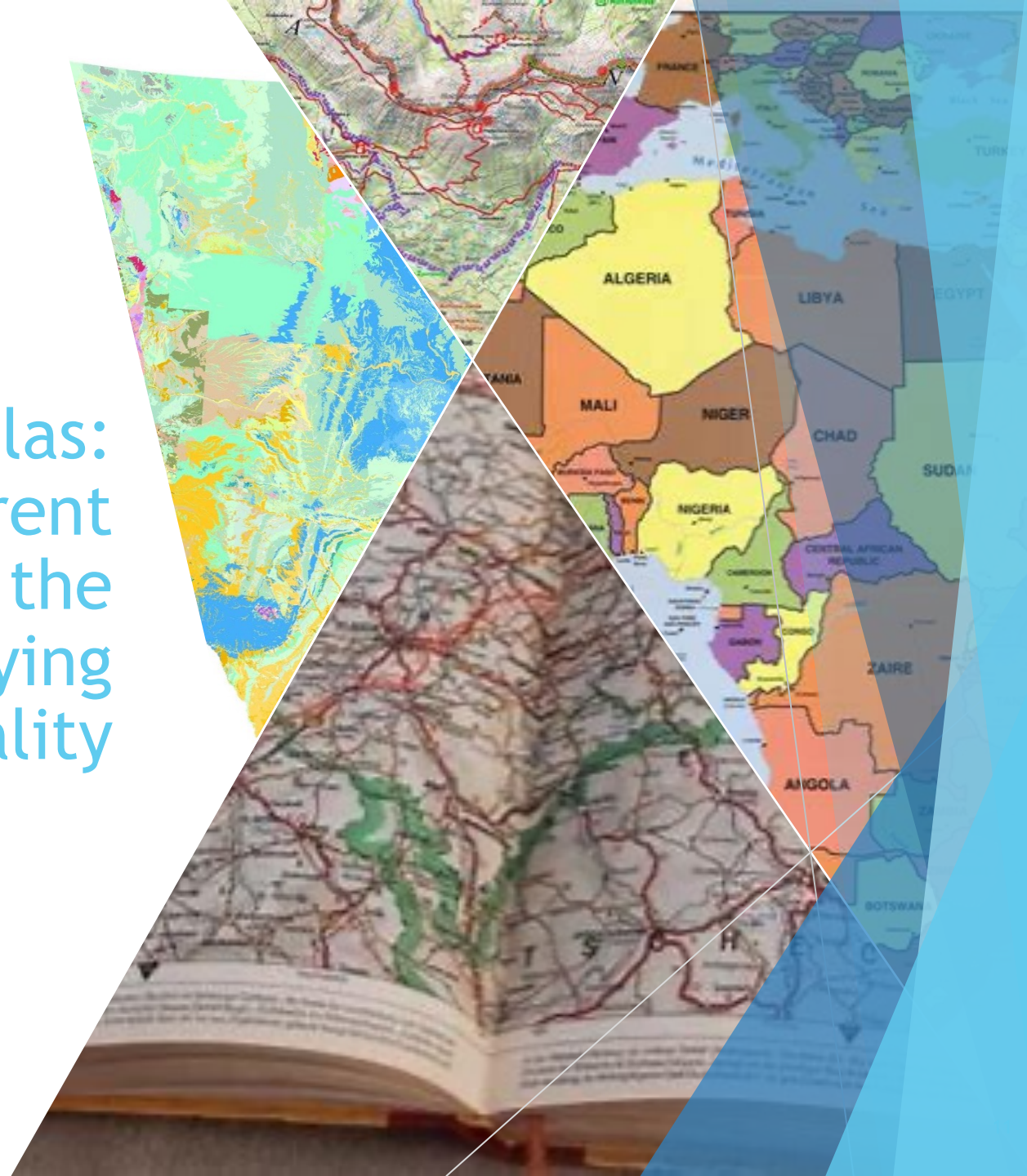
"Thought affords the sole method of escape from purely impulsive or purely routine action." (John Dewey, How We Think)

"No account of knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge can ignore the human propensity for belief and superstition, readily understood in psychological terms as the desire for explanatory closure in the face of uncertainty, and the fact that true enquirers constitute a minority of any population." (A. C. Grayling, The Frontiers of Knowledge).

Deeper Reflections and Career & Life: Human Nature



An Atlas:
Different
Aspects of the
same underlying
reality

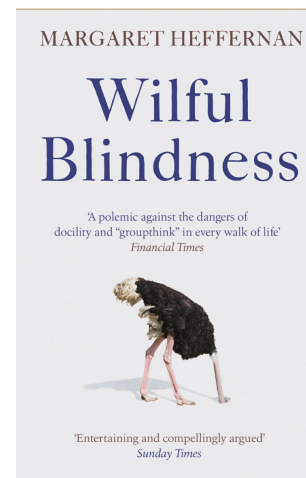
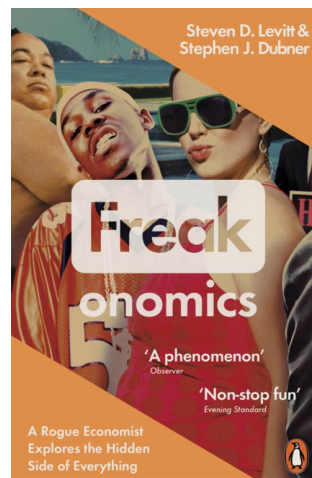
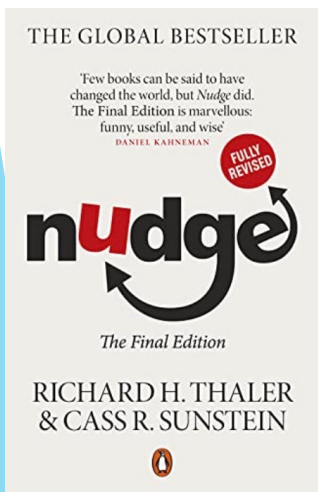
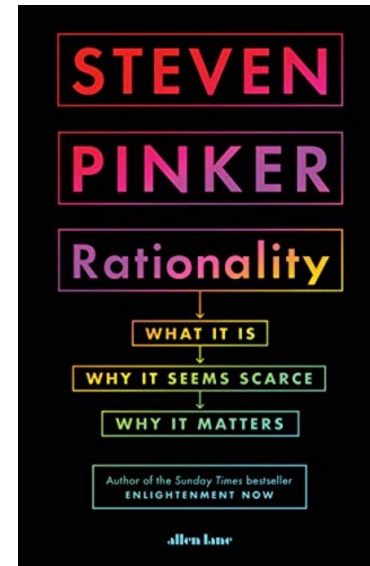


- ▶ Bench scientist
 - ▶ Repeatable experiment, vouched for by peer review.
- ▶ Olympic judge
 - ▶ Applying consensus-based rules, rigidly applied, to adjudge result.
- ▶ Great Detective
 - ▶ Drawing on evidence from multiple sources, to provide an account that convinces an external jury.

1. Three different ways of assessing evidence (determining validity of “truth claims”)

2. It's Hard to Trust Human Reason

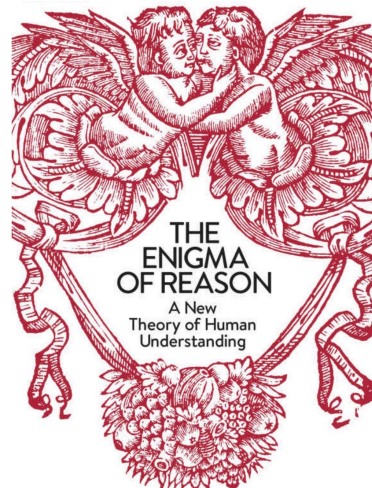
- ▶ No less than “five Nobel prizes have gone to researchers in cognitive science and behavioral economics who have discovered numerous ways in which people flout the axioms of rational choice.”



What if ‘Reason’ is social, not simply personal?

“When we listen to others, what we want is honest information. When we speak to others, it is often in our interest to mislead them, not necessarily through straightforward lies but by at least distorting, omitting or exaggerating information so as to better influence them in their opinions and in their actions.”

Mercier & Sperber

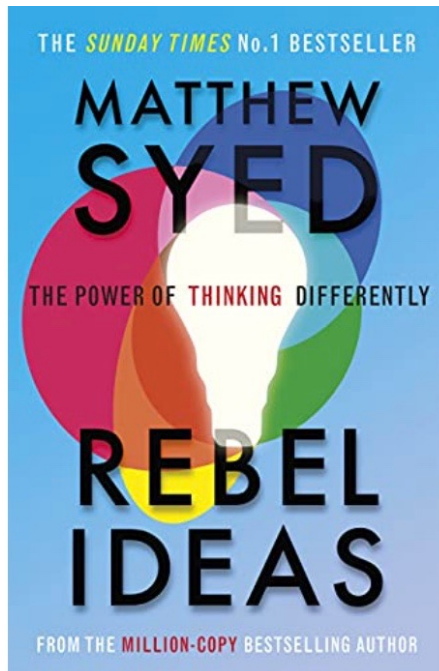


Hugo Mercier Dan Sperber

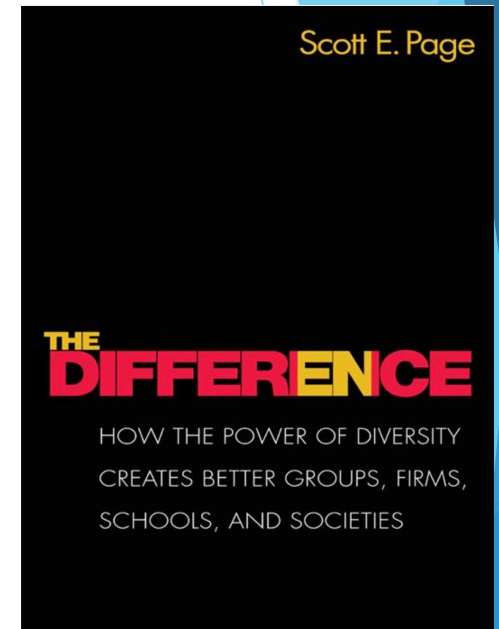


*“When people evaluate an idea in small groups **with the right chemistry** ... they catch on to each other’s fallacies and blind spots, and usually the truth wins.” (Steven Pinker, Rationality)*

3. Thinking Together ... can be powerful



- ▶ There is high-quality research that demonstrates the power of diverse viewpoints...
- ▶ ...as well as evidence from numerous case-studies.



Pairs Exercise #2

Work with the same partner.

Tell each other about a time when you had an 'Aha' moment *because of a conversation with someone* who saw the world differently from you

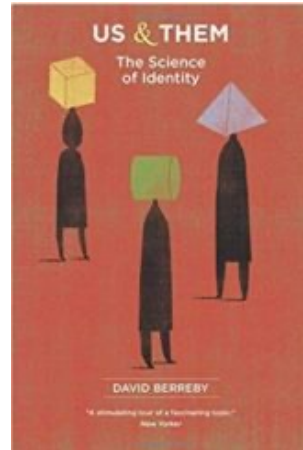
What was the experience like?

What positive difference did it make for you?

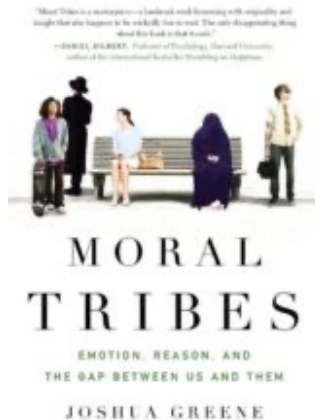
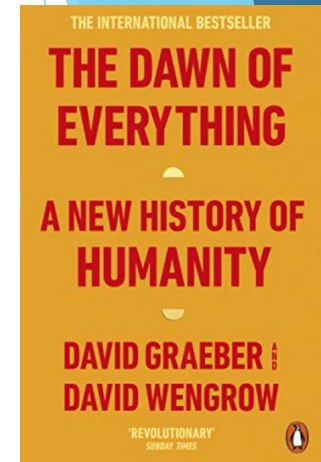
How did it affect your relationship with that person?

4. Thinking Together ... isn't easy.

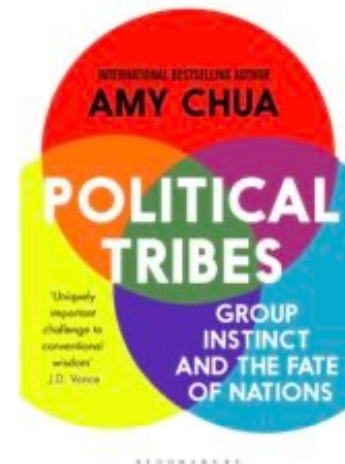
- ▶ Our sense of identity is fluid, but vital to our lives as social beings ...



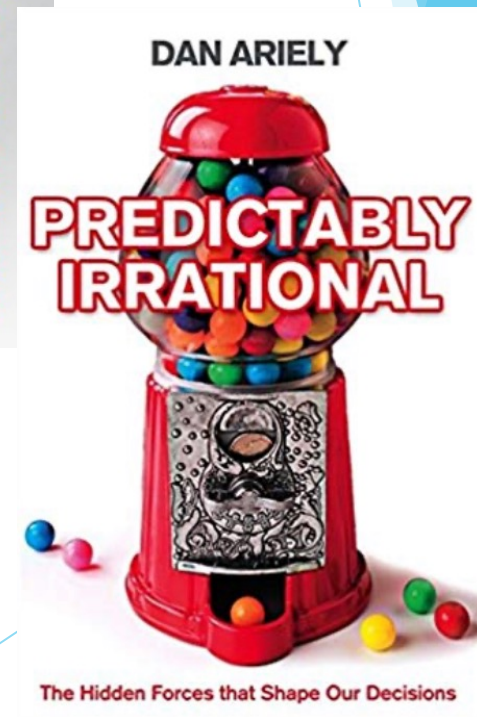
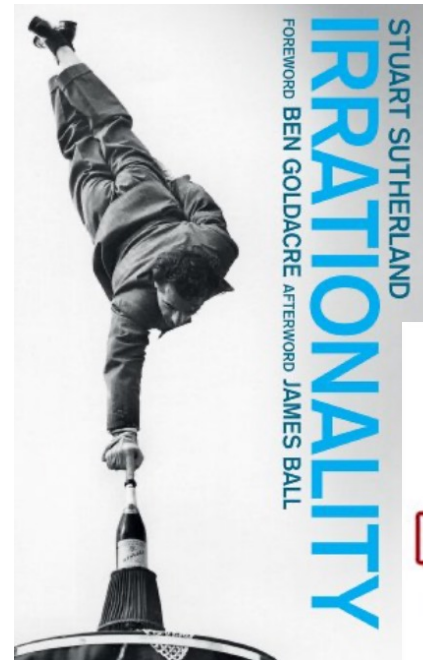
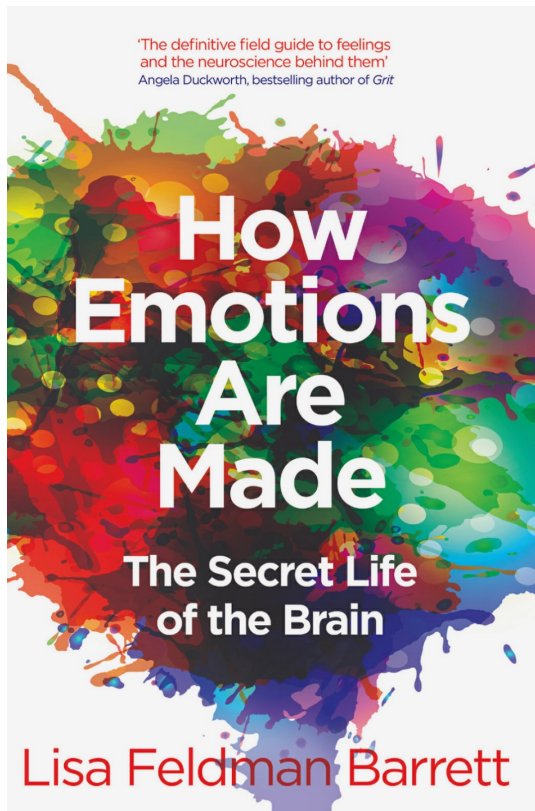
- ▶ ... which is reinforced by our many biases and filtering through the stories we believe ...



- ▶ ... and it helps promote 'tribalism' and unhelpful conflict.



5. Our Emotions Guide our Reasoning

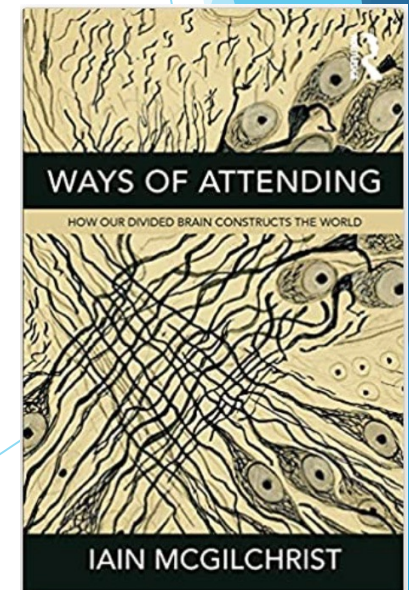
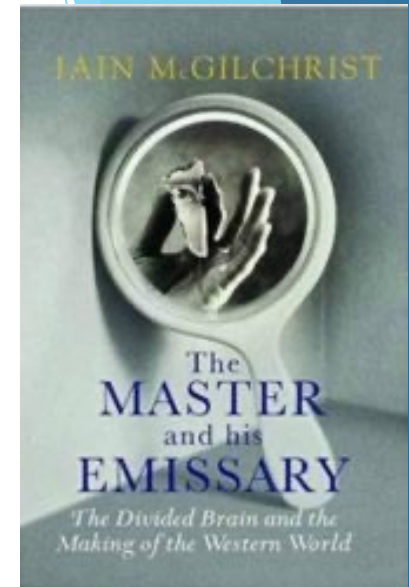
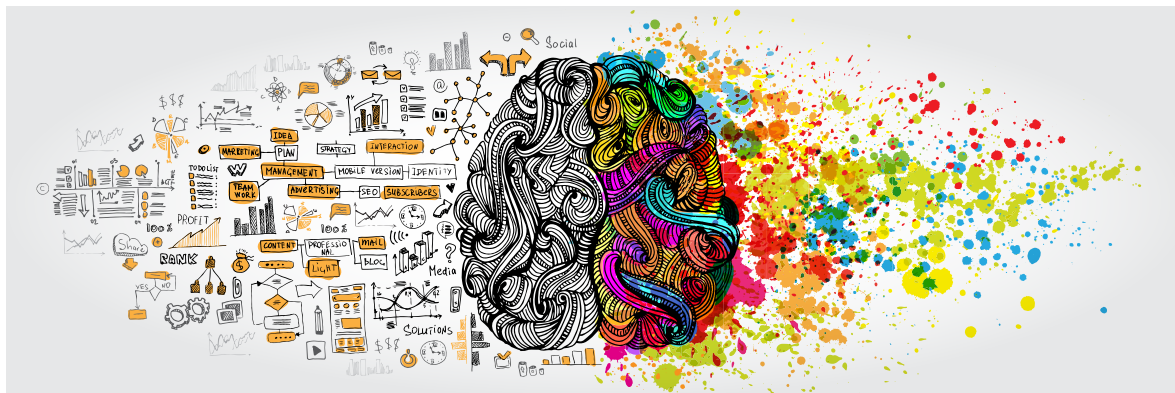


But Argyris Shows Why Executives are Bad at Learning

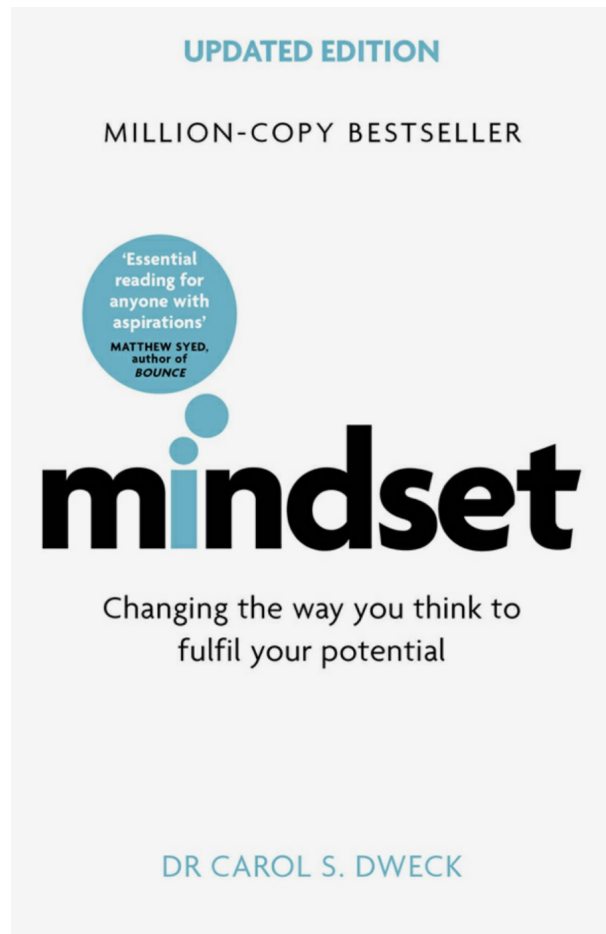
- ▶ “Teaching Smart People How to Learn”, HBR, May-June 1991.
- ▶ “Professionals embody the learning dilemma: they are enthusiastic about continuous improvement - and often the biggest obstacle to its success.”
- ▶ Executives strive
 - ▶ To remain in unilateral control;
 - ▶ To maximise “winning” and minimise “losing”;
 - ▶ To suppress negative feelings; and
 - ▶ To be as “rational” as possible.
- ▶ Use their intelligence to “reason defensively”, and avoid “doom loop”.
- ▶ Nowadays, we recognise ‘Motivated Reasoning’ as something we all do.



- ▶ The story so far ...
 - ▶ There are fundamentally different ways we can know what is what.
 - ▶ It is hard to trust human reason,
 - ▶ So we need to ‘think together’.
 - ▶ But ‘thinking together’ is hard,
 - ▶ Because of our ‘human nature’.
- ▶ Here are some resources that you may find useful. They may give you new ‘ways of attending’ ..
- ▶ And may help with the tasks of *““identifying the adaptive challenge [and] directing disciplined attention to the issues.”*



Resource #1: Develop a “Growth” Mindset



“The view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life”

“Fixed” mindset: Will I succeed or fail? Will I look smart or dumb? Will I be rejected or accepted? Will I feel like a winner or a loser?

“Growth” mindset: The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it’s not going well

Mindsets

Judger

Learner

Judgmental (of self and others)

Accepting (of self and others)

Reactive and automatic

Responsive and thoughtful

Knows it all already

Values not knowing

Places blame

Inflexible and rigid

Values learning

"This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience." (Carol Dweck, Mindset)

Fixed

Growth

Fixed

Growth

Fixed

Growth

Fixed

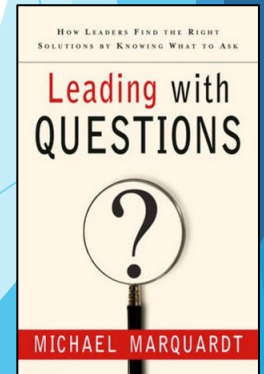
Growth

Sees possibilities as limited

Sees possibilities as unlimited

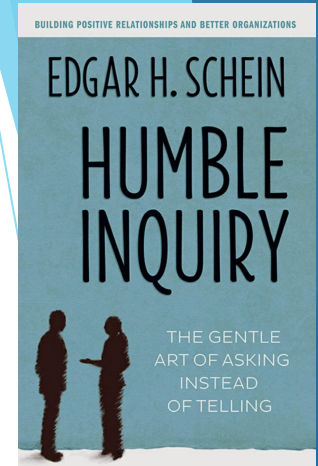
Primary mood: protective

Primary mood: curiosity

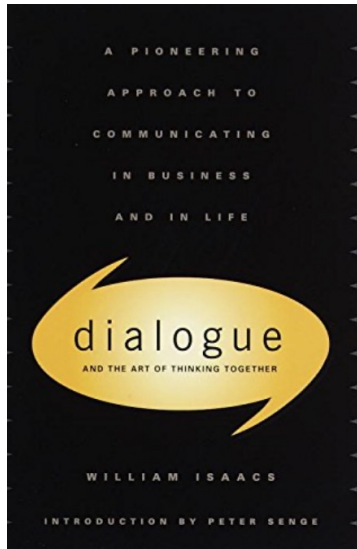


Leading with Questions
by Michael Marquardt

Resource #2: Adopt an Attitude of Humble Inquiry

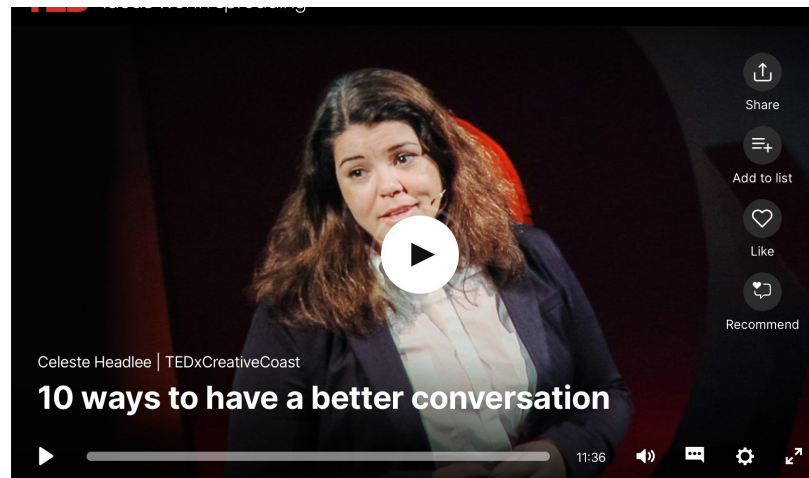


Resource #3: Master the Art of Conversation.

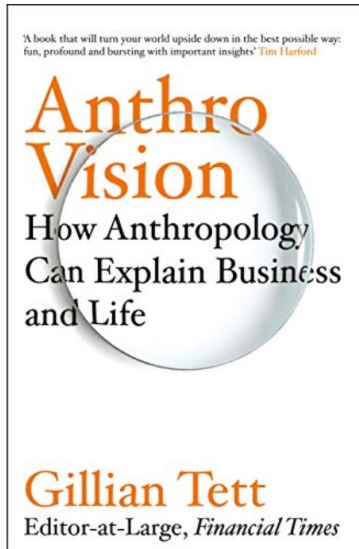


- ▶ Engaging with others
- ▶ Actively listening
- ▶ Perceiving, not judging
- ▶ Voicing, not telling
- ▶ Thinking together.

Recommended Video



Resource #4: Understand the “Landscape”.



- ▶ Context is crucial - both yours and all those involved. Anthro-vision and Facilitation can help reveal the context.
- ▶ “Anthropology is an intellectual framework that enables you to see around corners, spot what is hidden in plain sight, gain empathy for others, and fresh insight on problems.” (Gillian Tett, Anthro-Vision)
- ▶ “In even moderately challenging situations, virtually all leaders tend to use what I call a unilateral control mindset, despite the negative results it generates.”
 - Smart Leaders, Smarter Teams: How You and Your Team Get Unstuck to Get Results by Roger M. Schwarz

What will you do about what you have heard?

Take a few moments to record your intentions in your
EMIP workbook.

Recap

Setting the Scene

Introducing the Topic
Group exercise

Laying out the Agenda

What to expect from the session
Where and how I gained my experience.

Six Lessons I've learned

1. Different inquiry types
2. Human irrationality
3. Thinking together
4. "Them and Us"
5. Resistance to change
6. Four Resources

Thank
you for
listening.

terry@insearchofwisdom.online

