

## 43. Thinking Directions Framework

*Which thinking methods can I use to explore issues and potential solutions?*

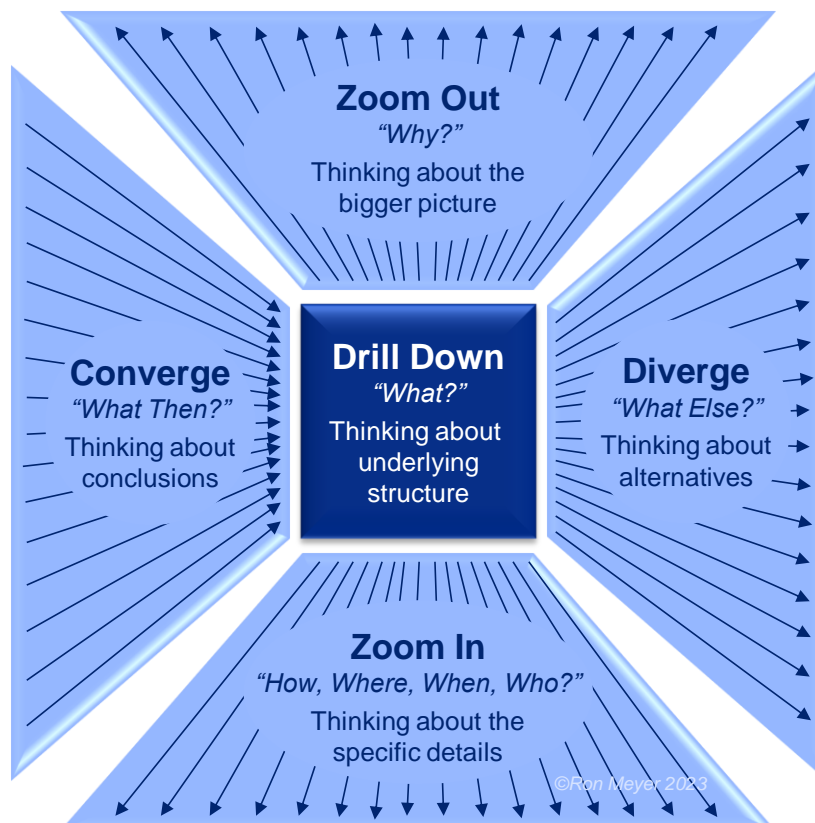
### Key Definitions

People think all day, but they seldom think about how they think. In practice, people follow certain thinking routines to which they have become accustomed, often taking mental shortcuts (called *cognitive heuristics*) to make life easier. Yet, such habits of the mind limit and color what people see. This makes everyone susceptible to *cognitive biases*.

As alternative to such “quick and dirty” judgement, you can also use more “slow and thorough” *thinking methods*. These structured approaches to thinking discipline you to follow a certain line of inquiry, aiding you to explore issues and potential solutions more meticulously.

### Conceptual Model

The *Thinking Directions* framework outlines five complementary thinking methods that are applicable to every challenging issue, in business or elsewhere. Each of the thinking methods points the exploration into a certain direction, to ensure that an issue and/or solution are looked at from all angles. No examination is complete until all five have been used.



### Key Elements

The five thinking directions are the following:

1. **Drill Down.** The best question to kick off the deeper examination of an issue is “what?” – what is going on, what is the issue, what are the parts of the issue and what is the issue

behind the issue? Drilling down starts with delineating the issue (what is the *scope*?), followed by mapping the variables involved and identifying their relationships (what is the *structure*?). The objective is to dig deep enough to understand the issue's complexity.

2. **Zoom Out.** A valuable follow-up question is “why?” – why is this happening, why is this an issue and/or why is the proposed solution fitting? Zooming out is about taking a step back to be able to see the bigger picture – to see the forest, not only the trees. The objective is to gain enough overview to understand in what way the issue is influenced by the broader context and how it in turn can/will have an impact on other issues.
3. **Zoom In.** Thinking in the opposite direction leads to the questions “who”, “how”, “where”, and “when” – who is involved, how does it work, where is it felt and when are actions expected? Zooming in is about taking a step forward to be able to see the detailed picture – to see the leaves on each of the trees. The objective is to gain a fine-grained insight into the situation and to thoroughly understand how any solution might play out in practice.
4. **Diverge.** A fourth thinking direction is to ask the question “what else?” – what else might be going on, what else can explain the situation and what else might be a solution? Diverging is about looking further than the likely suspects, by considering alternative explanations or paths forward. The objective is to avoid jumping to conclusions by always searching for a number of different ways of understanding and/or acting.
5. **Converge.** After asking all of the other questions, it is essential to also ask “what then?” – what then is the issue, what then is the advice, what then is the decision? Converging is about evaluating the various options and arriving at a conclusion. The objective is to avoid ongoing paralysis-by-analysis by weighing the alternatives already on the table with the intention of coming to a definitive result.

## Key Insights

---

- **Thinking is colored by cognitive biases.** Every person sees the world through their own lens. This mental map shapes what you observe and how you make sense of these observations. This biased view of reality can be reinforced if other group members share the same assumptions (called the *dominant logic* or in extreme cases *groupthink*).
- **Thinking is steered by cognitive heuristics.** People are not only biased but also tend to cut corners when thinking by using quick and dirty reasoning methods. Such cognitive heuristics include assuming that things are simple, that they can be understood in isolation and that old explanations and solutions can be used again.
- **Thinking can be enriched by thinking methods.** To circumvent cognitive biases and heuristics as best as possible, people can use more slow and thorough thinking methods that discipline the user to ask a number of questions and go through various thinking steps more consciously. Doing this with a diverse group of people is even better.
- **There are five universal thinking methods.** Under all circumstances people's reasoning can be improved by thinking in five directions: *Drilling down*, to understand the issue structure; *zooming out*, to understand the bigger picture; *zooming in*, to understand the specific details; *diverging*, to understand the potential alternatives; and *converging*, to understand what the conclusions could be.
- **Effective managers use all five thinking methods.** The five thinking directions are complementary and should be used by managers for all non-routine issues to ensure they don't “jump to solutions”. The five sets of questions can be seen as a type of checklist to help managers look at issues from all angles. However, while each thinking direction is conceptually easy to understand, having the discipline to consistently employ them is hard.

---

## **Meyer's Management Models**

### ***Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking***

#### **Publication Schedule**

<b><i>July 2019</i></b>	<b><i>Mind the Gap Model</i></b>	<b><i>Change Management</i></b>
<b><i>August 2019</i></b>	<b><i>Digital Platform Map</i></b>	<b><i>Digital Strategy</i></b>
<b><i>September 2019</i></b>	<b><i>Interaction Pressure Gauge</i></b>	<b><i>Interpersonal Interaction</i></b>
<b><i>October 2019</i></b>	<b><i>Revenue Model Framework</i></b>	<b><i>Revenue Model Typology</i></b>
<b><i>November 2019</i></b>	<b><i>House of Engagement</i></b>	<b><i>Organizational Engagement</i></b>
<b><i>December 2019</i></b>	<b><i>Confidence Quotient</i></b>	<b><i>Trust Building</i></b>
<b><i>January 2020</i></b>	<b><i>Competition Tornado</i></b>	<b><i>Competitive Strategy</i></b>
<b><i>February 2020</i></b>	<b><i>11C Synergy Model</i></b>	<b><i>Corporate Synergy Management</i></b>
<b><i>March 2020</i></b>	<b><i>Leadership Fairness Model</i></b>	<b><i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i></b>
<b><i>April 2020</i></b>	<b><i>Strategic Agility Model</i></b>	<b><i>Strategy Process Approach</i></b>
<b><i>May 2020</i></b>	<b><i>Control Panel</i></b>	<b><i>Corporate Control Dimensions</i></b>
<b><i>June 2020</i></b>	<b><i>Rising Star Framework</i></b>	<b><i>Talent Management</i></b>
<b><i>July 2020</i></b>	<b><i>Strategy Development Cycle</i></b>	<b><i>Strategy Process Steps</i></b>
<b><i>August 2020</i></b>	<b><i>7I Corporate Center Model</i></b>	<b><i>Corporate Organization</i></b>
<b><i>September 2020</i></b>	<b><i>Storytelling Scripts</i></b>	<b><i>Leadership Communication</i></b>
<b><i>October 2020</i></b>	<b><i>Strategic Bets Framework</i></b>	<b><i>Strategic Decision-Making</i></b>
<b><i>November 2020</i></b>	<b><i>Rebound Model of Resilience</i></b>	<b><i>Organizational Resilience</i></b>
<b><i>December 2020</i></b>	<b><i>4C Leadership Capabilities</i></b>	<b><i>Leadership Competences</i></b>
<b><i>January 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Digital Product Model Dial</i></b>	<b><i>Digital Strategy</i></b>
<b><i>February 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Digital Distribution Model Dial</i></b>	<b><i>Digital Strategy</i></b>
<b><i>March 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Empowerment Cycle</i></b>	<b><i>Employee Empowerment</i></b>
<b><i>April 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Innovation Box</i></b>	<b><i>Innovation Approaches</i></b>
<b><i>May 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Knowledge Sharing Bridges</i></b>	<b><i>Best Practice Sharing</i></b>
<b><i>June 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Followership Cycle</i></b>	<b><i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i></b>
<b><i>July 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Everest Model of Change</i></b>	<b><i>Change Management</i></b>
<b><i>August 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Fruits &amp; Nuts Matrix</i></b>	<b><i>Priority-Setting</i></b>
<b><i>September 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Powerhouse Framework</i></b>	<b><i>People &amp; Organization Strategy</i></b>
<b><i>October 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Strategy Hourglass</i></b>	<b><i>Strategy-Making Steps</i></b>
<b><i>November 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Disciplined Dialogue Model</i></b>	<b><i>Interpersonal Communication</i></b>
<b><i>December 2021</i></b>	<b><i>Team Building Cycle</i></b>	<b><i>Team Building Process</i></b>
<b><i>January 2022</i></b>	<b><i>Market System Map</i></b>	<b><i>External Analysis Framework</i></b>
<b><i>February 2022</i></b>	<b><i>Strategic Alignment Model</i></b>	<b><i>Business Level Strategy</i></b>
<b><i>March 2022</i></b>	<b><i>Creativity X-Factor</i></b>	<b><i>Creativity Enhancement</i></b>
<b><i>April 2022</i></b>	<b><i>Organizational System Map</i></b>	<b><i>Organizational Analysis</i></b>
<b><i>May 2022</i></b>	<b><i>Corporate Value Creation Model</i></b>	<b><i>Corporate Level Strategy</i></b>

<b>June 2022</b>	<b>Change Manager's Toolbox</b>	<b>Change Methodologies</b>
<b>July 2022</b>	<b>Sustainable You Model</b>	<b>Personal Sustainability</b>
<b>August 2022</b>	<b>Value Proposition Dial</b>	<b>Business Level Strategy</b>
<b>September 2022</b>	<b>The Tree of Power</b>	<b>Organizational Power</b>
<b>October 2022</b>	<b>Psychological Safety Compass</b>	<b>Team Dynamics</b>
<b>November 2022</b>	<b>Strategic Action Modes</b>	<b>Strategy Process</b>
<b>December 2022</b>	<b>Corporate Management Styles</b>	<b>HQ Management</b>
<b>January 2023</b>	<b>Thinking Directions Framework</b>	<b>Reasoning Skills</b>
February 2023	Innovation Pipeline	Innovation Process
March 2023	Best Practice Sharing Framework	Sharing Methods
April 2023	Interpersonal Interaction Levels	Communication Approaches
May 2023	Activity System Dial	Value Creation Analysis
June 2023	Customer-Centricity Circle	Organizational Design
July 2023	New Pyramid Principle	Presentation Approaches
August 2023	Stakeholder Heat Map	Stakeholder Management
September 2023	Embedded Identity Model	Personal Awareness
October 2023	New Learning Curve	Personal Learning
November 2023	Partnership Distance Model	Interorganizational Relations
December 2023	Needs Radar Screen	Motivation Analysis